

Carrying On With Ruth and Ellis

¶Note: For the early adventures see WR: 102, pp. 53-68; WR: 114/115, pp. 49-96; WR: 130, pp. 49-104.

THE OFFER

A break-up of black thunderclouds allowed a laser-like beam of unimpeded sunlight to burn down onto the Leahy back yard where Ruth stood (sunscreened and straw-hatted to stave off the emergence of new skin cancers) in her husband's garden, knee-deep in a small forest of pest-ridden pepper and tomato plants, shaking her head at the out-of-control weeds and spreading devil grass and at the general lack of order and neatness of Ellis' modest adventure in agriculture. She said aloud to herself, "That lazy slob," and then she bent over to pluck a snail off a jalapeno. She straightened back up and threw the little gastropod into the lagoon before she sank down to her hands and knees to give the weeds the attention they deserved.

Inside, Ellis and neighbor Clete had the football game on the tube. They watched a no-neck halfback run into a brick wall of defensive lineman flesh as the doorbell rang. "What a hit," Clete observed, as a polite but insistent knocking started on Ellis's front door. "COME ON IN!" Ellis bellowed, and through the door stepped Eugene Pengelly, representative in a three-piece suit of Royalty Resorts, with an offer for the Leahys.

As the game unfolded — that halfback bursting through the line for twelve hard yards and then a twenty-three-yard touchdown — Mr. Pengelly (call me Gene, Ellis, please) pulled from his briefcase the artist renditions of the planned resort to be located on the southern shore of the new Loma Alta Lagoon, that would occupy the lot on which the current Leahy house sat, as well as the four east/west adjacent lots — a hotel highrise with a shark-netted swimming beach, a small pier and two glass-bottomed boats for the observation of underwater life, and two fishing boats for the catching of the same.

Until halftime, Gene Pengelly had had to compete with the game for the attention of Ellis and Clete (it turned out that Clete lived right next door, his lot was included in

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this plan, and an offer had been drawn up for him too), but at the sound of the gun, Clete grabbed three more beers from the fridge and Ellis hit the remote control and turned to the Royalty Resorts rep and said, "Look, Gene, let's cut the crap; I been through all this shit before." He was referring to the original rise in sea level, when the real estate roaches were out with predictions of imminent flooding of the higher ground, offering pitiful prices for waterside property. "I got just two words for ya: How much?"

The offer was ridiculously low; it had Ellis and Clete slapping their thighs and giggling through Gene's explanation of a potential second surge in worldwide sea level — he cited two gloom-and-doom oceanographers from one of the universities — that would wash them out of their homes, that would leave them penniless, because: "And don't tell me, Ellis, that you're covered by insurance; I know for a fact that those bastards have cancelled everybody who's not living on top of a fucking mountain."

"If it's gonna wash us away," Clete asked, "wouldn't it do the same to your resort?" Eugene Pengelly rolled into a technical explanation of the new 'Pontoon Technology,' but Ellis, his eyes gleaming with a barely suppressed devilishness, drained his beer and cut off the resort representative by saying, "Tell ya what, Gene-o, I'll consider it, but first I want you to go on out and run it by my wife, jus' the offer I mean, no need to bore her with the details of the resort or anything. Jus' give her your forecast and the offer, and see what she says. She's been talkin' about movin' anyway, maybe pulling up and goin' to Idaho."

Ellis and Clete steered Gene-o out the sliding glass door and pointed him toward the garden, and they watched through the glass as Ruth rose unsteadily, mud caked on her knees, to put her hands on her hips to listen to this stranger's spiel. She apparently didn't like what he had to say, because she scowled fiercely then pushed his chest, then kicked the briefcase she'd made him drop. Clete and Ellis guffawed and high-fived, until Eugene Pengelly dug his heels into the grass and threw a punch. Ellis slid the door open with the intention of intervention in the dispute, unnecessarily, it turned out. Sandra, Ruth's pet pig, did it for him. Up from a nap on the far side of the tool shed, she rounded the aluminum corner at a full gallop — drawn by the outraged scream of her mistress — and bowled Ruth's attacker over and trampled him down and, as he rose to his hands and knees in an attempt to crawl away from her attack, she darted in and went for his throat, missing, biting off his left ear, sending him into a four-legged scurry out into the lagoon, where he — aware of the danger of the sharks, especially in view of his blood-spewing ear nub — swam east

and clambered ashore next door, where a small Chihuahua yipped and pranced in front of him like a little line-backer to keep him from further invading her territory. His hard kick in her direction that clipped her shoulder (not normally a cruel man, was Eugene, but he was in intense pain, and this made him react uncharacteristically) brought Juanita charging out the sliding glass door to chase the wet trespasser back into the water from which he had come.

MY FUNNY VALENTINE: RUTH AND ELLIS

Ellis took Ruth's car down to the Zippy Lube and Tune and had the radiator flushed, cut the pink carbon customer's receipt into the shape of a heart and placed this inside a Valentine's Day card, signed it, Love Ya, Babe. Ruth crumpled the heart up in her fist and punched Ellis in the eye, then chased him out the front door and up the block before she gave up the chase.

Ellis slunk back into the neighborhood after a prudent amount of time had elapsed, holed up at Clete and Juanita's place with an ice pack and a beer out on the patio. Clete laughed at his pal's stupidity, and Juanita said, "If you've got any brains, Ellis, you'll run right out and buy that woman an expensive bottle of perfume." Ellis lifted the ice pack and blinked his swelling eye and whined, "But I already shelled out forty bucks for the flush." Juanita threw her hands up and slipped back into the house, muttering a Men-Are-Idiots lament.

Down at the department store at the mall, Ellis flinched when the woman at the cosmetics counter — a small light brown woman so pretty and perfectly coiffed that it hurt — said, "Sixty-five dollars, sir," in reference to his timid and apprehensive question as to the price of a very tiny bottle of amber fluid. He grabbed his chest and staggered backwards; Clete caught him as he began his tilt to the floor. The cosmetic lady's face pinched itself up into a subtle expression of disgust as she said, "Maybe you should consider Woolworth's, a cheap box of chocolates."

He and Clete considered, instead, the Disabled American Veterans' Thrift Store down on the coast route, where for fifty cents they were able to purchase a tiny and ornate glass bottle very similar to the one that had held the expensive amber fluid back at the mall; then they considered the discount drug store out on Loma Alta Boulevard, and a bottle of plain-label after-shave.

Ruth was satisfied; she kissed her husband, applied some more just before bed, then enticed Ellis into an amorous adventure.