



IMPERSONATING ELVIS

This isn't a story about Elvis Presley. This is a story about Chuckie Walaach and me and Chuck's wife, Carol. Carol should have been my wife but sometimes things don't work out the way they should and so she became Chuck's wife instead.

Carol got pregnant right after our senior year at Stimson High. It's true that Carol and I hadn't actually had a date since eighth grade but I would have married her anyway, even though I had plans for accounting school and I knew it couldn't really be my baby. Even in junior high I'd been too much of a gentleman for something like that to happen. But not Chuckie Walaach. Carol admitted it was Chuck's baby so he was the one got to marry her.

That's pretty much Chuck Walaach in a nutshell. Unfortunate luck, I call it. During sophomore year the senior quarterback pulled a groin muscle coming over the console in Tamara Newsome's father's mustang and knocked himself out of four games. Chuck wound up getting the credit for the whole winning season. When it came time to cast for the year end Stimson High Musical, they needed a beefy type lead and because Petey Boyd Beasley had laryngitis, who do you suppose got the part over yours truly? Chuckie Walaach.

Don't get me wrong, I have to admit that even then he had an unusual voice. Deep, sort of croony and slurred like he'd just had a mouthful of something the rest of us would never be lucky enough to taste. Chuck always got the babes, even Carol.

I rest my case. Girls are the reason he got to be class president, too. Brawn for brains should have been his platform. Tight jeans and duck ass hair.

But all that happened about twenty years ago. I'm a mature man, forgive and forget. Except. Because of Carol's indelicacy right out of high school, Chuck's father took him immediately into the family business and made him a junior executive. Meantime, I went off to college where I was doing fine until my father shredded his foot with the wheat combine and my mother took ill with a rare type of swine breeder's syndrome and I had to come home to help out. There's only one place off a farm in Stimson to work: the Walaach School Bus Body Manufacturing Plant.

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Now I don't want to come off like I'm some kind of a certified public accountant, because I'm not, but I do have a talent with numbers. Chuck knew about that from my days on the scoreboards at the Stimson High games, plus which I completed better than four community college classes. Walaach Bus moved me right in to head up their inventory department.

The general public would be surprised at all that goes into making a school bus body. It's more than just kid-sized padded metal seats, metaline yellow paint and oversized amber/red flashers, I can tell you. There's an engineering trick to opening that folded front door from the outside that – But this isn't about the inventory, design and construction of school bus bodies, either.

It's about Chuck and his Elvis impersonation. I don't know, maybe it's because Chuck's been here longer than I have, but since he became company president, he doesn't seem to be all that interested in the bus body business anymore. In fact, for this last year I've practically been running the whole shebang for him. Partly that's because I'm better at it than he is but mostly it's because Chuckie Walaach thinks he can be Elvis.

He's grown sideburns and instead of letting the gray come naturally, as I do, he's started dying all his hair black. It's disgusting. I'm not talking just about the puffed up pompadour or the cheap cheek hair. I'm talking about those little tufts that come out through the vee in his shirt front. Oh yes, Chuckie stopped wearing a tie to the office when his father stepped down out of the bus body business two years ago. If Chuck weren't in the driver's seat now, he'd never get away with the stuff he does.

At this year's company picnic, Chuck came in a white and gold lame skin suit with three back-up singers and a full rhythm band. Myself, I think he was assisted by some spandex body support, too. The men who work the line cheered for him. Gave him a standing ovation, in fact, but what does that mean? They gotta work for the guy two hundred sixty-one and a half days of the year (less three weeks vacation if they've been here over five years).

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And Carol! Well, she came to that company function in a short flared skirt with some kind of net stuff swirling out the sides that didn't belong up on a stage above eye level, what with all that open strut-work underneath. She cheered him on, too. But of course she has to, she's gotta live with the guy a full three-hundred sixty-five days of the year, no planned vacation. And she's still a good looking woman. Not every woman over forty could wear a poodle skirt and that flip platinum hair with the class she does. She's got too much style for Chuckie Walaach and when she leaned down under the stage to ask if I'd like to crawl out and eat lunch at her private table, I could tell that she'd finally gotten bored with the shallow excuse for a man that Chuck really is. I also realized how much fulfillment she and I could bring into each other's aching, empty lives.

This induced me to work out a plan. I already knew that come March, Chuck had paid the application fees to perform in an

Elvis Look-Alike Contest. Chuckie Walaach is certainly not the only man in the world who thinks he could pass for Elvis. Apparently a hundred and thirty-six other mousse haired fools think the same thing. This was to be a battle of the Elvises. Elvii's? Whatever.

So. Since I've accumulated over eighteen weeks of back vacation time in my years with the company, I asked for two of them at the time of the Elvis contest. I bought myself some temporary black dye and a snub nose Saturday Night Special like the ones Elvis favored towards the end and I booked a room at the Elvis Contest Hotel. I did not, however, give my real name, nor did I enroll myself in the contest proper.

It was a good plan. Almost foolproof, I've got to say. Just picture the police putting out an all points bulletin on an Elvis assassin who looks like Elvis in a town with one hundred-thirty-seven Elvis's walking around. Who could give a description? I didn't even have to hide, I just walked into the Elvis Grand Ball Room, pulled my gun, shot my Elvis, dropped the gun and walked back out before any of those other Elvii's could swivel a hip.

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Then I immediately got on a plane back to Stimson, rinsed out my midnight-blue pomp and reported for work the next morning. And who was there? Chuckie Walaach, third runner up in the Battle of the Elvis Look-Alikes. I needn't have worried that someone would ask me how was my vacation in Kenosha; all eyes were glazed on Chuckie as per usual.

He was full of news about this contest and the killing. Seems that the number two Elvis – the one who was killed – was wanted for serial murders in three entirely different states. The bullet which killed him just grazed lucky Chuckie and now Chuck is being treated like some kind of hero in the whole affair. Pictures in all the papers, national news coverage. Even people who should know better have started treating him

like he had superstar status, especially Carol. She even had the nerve to ask me if I'd like to drive them back to the airport. Seems the Elvis Contest Hotel has gotten so much publicity, they've decided to give the hero and his adoring wife a week long vacation in their hearts-bouquet honeymoon suite.