

Adventures in McCloudland

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Chapter 39

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Margo and I had endured another Chamber of Commerce meeting. It was one of those warm muggy spring nights and we had all sat in the small building with the door standing open trying to catch a bit of a breeze as we reviewed plans for the annual events. Fewer people attended than had the year before; usually no more than 8 or 9. Margo and I left as soon as it was winding down, around 8 pm, and she drove me the four blocks to the hotel. As we approached the back of the hotel coming up California Street we were amazed to see a dozen cars parked nosed-in from the street in such a way that their front ends were elevated and their lights were on. I couldn't imagine why. As we pulled up behind them, my eye followed the lights to the roof of the hotel. The whole crew was up on the roof working.

I saw Dan, the roofing contractor, and hollered up, "What are you guys doing so late?" "It's going to rain," he shouted down. "We have to close up this section"

As the first giant rain drop plopped on my face I saw the huge open area on the roof. It was wide open from the fascia board to the spine and about 50' wide.

The roofing had been going well. Despite the roofers' reluctance to take on such a big job, his crew had been working hard and accomplishing more than we had expected. They had assured us they would never open a section so large that they could not get it closed by dark. It was past dark.

The single big plopping rain drop began a torrent. It was the kind of spring rain that smelled wonderful and came on suddenly. The rain was pelting hard and lightning flashes began illuminating the gaping, vulnerable backside of the roof. I hollered at Dan, "Do you need anything? Is there anything I can do?" "Beer," he hollered, cupping his hands over his mouth to be better heard.

Dumbfounded, I hollered back up, "How about coffee?"

“No,” he responded, “the guys would love some beer when they get done.”

“Anything else?”

“Do you have any flood lights? We need more light up here.”

Margo said she had some strong floods in her shop and left to get them as I began searching with a flashlight for enough extension cords to reach from the central lobby where the only power boxes were located. I came scrambling back to the office area just about the time Margo returned with a light unit. It had two huge lights mounted on a 6' stand. I started connecting cords as Margo pulled the unit out into the yard. By the time she got back inside she was drenched, but the light shone brightly on the roof. We watched the rain sheeting down then left to pick up a couple of six packs.

We pulled back into the yard and found huge puddles were forming around the yard but the workers were making good progress closing the opening with plywood. As I glanced from one quickly expanding puddle to the next my heart sank. Snaking its way out of the water was one of the cords. I looked at the other side of the water, and there was a different cord. The connection was under water.

Instantly I imagined fire. Fire traveling the length of our makeshift power supply until it reached our hotel. The hotel in flames. Lee scowling at me, accusing me with “What were you thinkingyou can't string ordinary extension cords through water?” “My God, everything is burned.”

In the next few frightening seconds I couldn't decide if I should run and grab the cord or just hope it shorted out. If I grabbed it, would I get electrocuted? Then would Margo get hurt grabbing me? I screamed at Margo, “The cord's in the water.”

It really didn't take much more thought. If it was a choice of the building or me, I chose the building and grabbed hold of the cord and gave it a mighty yank. Just like a kid's jump rope, it arched out of the puddle and landed on the grass. I froze and watched. Nothing happened. The lights stayed on. And it rained. Hard.

Margo and I positioned ourselves in the office and watched the cord for any signs of sparking or fire; ready to pull a plug. Nothing happened.

The roofers finished within the next half hour. They came down soaked to the skin and enjoyed the beer. Only the unfinished third floor was damp from the incoming rain. The building didn't burn. And I never told Lee about the plug in the water.