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## Games with Will and Mallory

**Frank Zahn**

Will Vinton and his wife Mallory attended the wedding of billionaire Ronald Crump and New York model Marlana Van Ness only because a couple of months earlier, Ronald had contributed a half million dollars to the Vinton Literacy Foundation.

They said their goodbyes after the lavish wedding reception at the Crump Continental Plaza Hotel and drove home to their high-rise condominium on the upper east side of Manhattan. When they arrived, Mallory kicked off her heels in the foyer and headed for their bedroom to get into something more comfortable.

“Sometimes, I can’t believe what I’m willing to do for the Foundation and to get elected mayor,” she said, raising her voice so Will could hear. “I can put up with Republican bravado and ignorance, but if I ever have to associate with one as bad as Ronald Crump again, I’ll shoot myself. And trust me. I’m only half kidding. What a pompous ass that man is!”

“Now, now, Honey,” Will called out to her in reply. “We have to keep in mind that sacrifices must be made for the Foundation and your election campaign. We need Crump’s money just as he will probably need political favors from us in the future. Like it or not, it’s the way the good old American political system works. Besides, I have a better reason for wanting him to think his contribution makes us friends. Guys like him can be manipulated into doing all sorts of things if treated with gratitude, respect, and admiration, however superficial. And as a good old boy from the South, I know just how to play the game.”

During the two weeks that followed the wedding and reception, both candidates for the Republican Party’s nomination were gaining on Mallory in the polls. And even the liberal press was speculating that she might lose her shoe-in status for winning the Democrat Party nomination and the election. The primary reason was that the press, especially Fox News, was having a field day reporting allegations of corruption in Will and Mallory’s management of their Foundation.

It was alleged that they were using Foundation funds to not only alleviate the literacy problem in the State but also for personal use. The personal items most often mentioned were frequent trips abroad in a private jet, expensive hotels and resorts, entertainment of guests, and household expenses, all of which Will and Mallory insisted were legitimate expense items for promoting the goals of the Foundation.

In addition, the press was hounding Mallory about her refusal to turn over emails requested by the State legislative committee that was investigating allegations that she had granted political favors as State Treasurer to wealthy businessmen who had made large contributions to the Vinton Foundation.

“What in the hell am I going to do?” she asked Will rhetorically after returning from a speaking engagement one evening. “Those damned emails could be construed as incriminating. If I turn them over, the press will crucify me. I’ll lose the nomination, and if not that, the election for sure.”

“What we need is something that will draw attention away from the emails and focus attention on the Republicans,” Will said. “I have something in mind that might just do the trick.”

“What?”

“I’m not ready to say just yet. But I’ve been in politics a long time, and I’ve gotten damned good at fixing things that need fixing, even if I do say so myself.”

“Okay, but don’t make things worse,” Mallory said. “The last time you tried fixing something, a couple of your rumored sweeties were discovered by the members of the press.”

“I never had sex with those women, dammit! How many times must I say it?”

“Yeah sure, Mallory said. “You’ve managed to get the press and the public to believe that, but I’m still not convinced. That uncontrollable pecker of yours will be the downfall of us yet.”

The next morning, Will got a call from Ronald Crump, who had just returned with his bride from their honeymoon in the Bahamas where he owned an upscale resort that only the very wealthy could afford. Each suite in the hotel rented for ten thousand dollars per night, and each cottage rented for twenty thousand dollars per night.

“Ronald!” Will said, almost shouting with surprise. “I was just going to call and thank you for the wonderful time Mallory and I had at your wedding and reception. You’re a lucky man. Marlana is as charming as she is beautiful. And the two of you really know how to, as we say down home, put on a shindig.”

“Thanks, Will. I appreciate that.”

“So what’s up?”

“I want to talk with you about something. Are you free for lunch tomorrow?”

“Yeah, sure. Sounds great. Where?”

“How about the Crump International at eleven-thirty. As you probably know, it’s one of my best hotels. The food’s great and we’ll be in a private dining room so we can talk without anyone bothering us.”

“See you then, Ronald. I’m glad you called. I have something I want to talk to you about as well.”

The next day, Will dressed to impress, drove to the hotel, and surrendered his car keys to the valet attendant. It was his first time in the opulent dining room with its colors of red and purple; plush carpets; gilded trimmings; antique furnishings; crystal chandeliers; white linen; and huge bouquets of yellow roses, white lilies, and greenery.

Ronald greeted Will with a handshake when the maître d’ ushered him into a small dining room with an equally opulent decor.

When they had ordered, Ronald said, “Let me get straight to the point, Will. I plan to announce tomorrow at a press conference that I’m a candidate for mayor on the Republican ticket. What do you think?”

“Well, let me say that I’m not surprised. I’ve heard rumors that you might.”

“So what do you think?”

“I believe Carson and Baker, the two Republican candidates who have already announced, are good men. I know both of them. But they lack charisma. To be honest, I think you could win the nomination.”

“If that happened, I’d be running against Mallory. And I would hope that would not create ill will between us. You were one of the best mayors the City has had. I respect you and would hate to lose your friendship. I assume, of course, that we are friends.”

“We are that for sure, and that won’t change no matter what happens. Friends run against each other in politics all the time. And we talk sometimes like we hate each other. But that’s just part of the game that turns on the media and the electorate. They love a good squabble. It’s like reality TV. They eat it up.”

“I’m glad to hear you say that. I want to run. And I think I can win the election if nominated. Our current mayor is an idiot—a real disaster. He couldn’t lead a horse to water let alone get it to drink. Business friends of mine have encouraged me to run. They say we need someone like me, someone who tells it like it is and gets things done for someone other than the Jews and the Puerto Ricans.”

“You should run. Even if you don’t win the nomination or the election, your experience, your voice, your point of view, your straightforwardness will make for a much needed discussion of the issues the City currently faces.”

“Then it’s settled,” Ronald said with a big smile. “Your encouragement, which I won’t mention in public for obvious reasons, removes the last reservation I had about getting into the race.”

“Somehow I think that you had made up your mind to run for the nomination, regardless of what I might have said, Ronald,” Will said with a chuckle.

Ronald smiled. “Maybe, but I needed to get your input anyway,” he said. “Hey, here comes our lunch. What do you say we stop talking politics, relax, and enjoy it?”

After lunch, which was dominated during and after by Ronald bloviating about his successes in business and his certainty of winning the Republican nomination, Will said goodbye and headed home where Malloy waited anxiously to hear why Crump had invited him to lunch.

When he entered the living room, she jumped up from the couch and embraced him with a kiss on the cheek. “So?” she asked.

“What?”

“You know. What did that asshole want?”

“He wanted to set us up with a couple of hot women,” Will said with a grin.

“That wouldn’t surprise me a bit. Like everyone else, I’m sure he’s heard the rumors about your extra-marital sweeties.”

“I’m teasing,” Will said. “He wanted advice on whether he should seek the Republican nomination.”

“For mayor?”

“What else?”

“What did you tell him?”

“I strongly advised him to run. I had no idea he was thinking about it, at least not seriously. I had planned to bring up the idea and encourage him to run at lunch. But as luck would have it, he beat me to the punch.”

“Why is God’s name would you want him of all people to run? He might appeal to the Republican bigot base, but I doubt if he could win the Party’s nomination, let alone the election.”

“I don’t know if he can win the nomination, and I don’t care,” Will said. “I just want that big bravado, bigoted, anti-woman, anti-gay, anti-Semitic, and anti-Puerto Rican mouth of his wagging during the run-up to the Republican nomination. I want him to continue to confuse telling-it-like-it-is with being an obnoxious asshole, and to build up animosity toward the Republican Party, whoever in the hell they nominate.”

Mallory's eyes lit up. "Sounds like you've been thinking overtime."

Will smiled at Mallory sheepishly.

"You're just terrible. But oh my God do I love it," Mallory said, giving him a peck on the lips. "You've been a pain in my side at times, but once in a while you come through for me big time."

"Well, we'll see how it works out. We'll see if Crump behaves as I strongly expect he will during his announcement and the Republican debates."

The next day, Ronald called a press conference at his Crump Continental Plaza Hotel and announced he was seeking the nomination of the Republican Party for mayor. He said his primary reason for entering the race was to take back the City from the Democrats who were robbing the majority of New Yorkers so as to payoff a couple of the minority groups that had helped them win the last election.

Will and Mallory watched the announcement on television and listened in amazement to Ronald's bravado and tell-it-like-it-is remarks. They roared with laughter each time he accused the Democrats of catering more to the Jewish vote and the Puerto Rican vote than they did to the vote of the majority of New Yorkers. And they continued to laugh and joke about Ronald's often outrageous remarks as Will drove them to a Democrat Party fundraiser at the Hilton in midtown Manhattan.

"After Crump's announcement and remarks, I can hardly wait for the debates," Will said as he pulled into the Hilton parking garage. "I'm sure now that he will open his big fatmouth even wider with ethnic and racial slurs and innuendos during the debates. And that will create all kinds of support for you as the better alternative during the election campaign, regardless of who wins the Republican nomination."

"It's difficult to believe that he has deluded himself into believing he can win anything from New Yorkers with all that off-the-cuff and obnoxious garbage he puts out, especially the anti-Semitic remarks. The only thing worse would be anti-Italian or anti-Irish remarks," Mallory said. "I notice, however, that he didn't make any derogatory remarks during his announcement about women. I've heard he refers to women as pigs."

Will chuckled. "Yeah well, maybe he's saving those remarks for the debates."

As Will and Mallory took the elevator up to the lobby, she said, "We've had many blessings in our lives, Will, but I never thought Ronald Crump would be one of them."

"Yeah well, let's get on with the blessings of this fundraiser as a means of helping you win the nomination and the election. It just might give us the additional exposure we need for better things, like maybe the Governor's mansion. And who knows, maybe even the

White House,” Will said and then added with a grin, “Of course, I would insist on becoming Governor and President first.”

“While we’re at it, just remember to keep your pecker in your pants so you don’t screw up our chances,” Mallory said in a final remark before the two of them plastered on their happy-to-see-you faces and stepped up onto the speakers platform to the applause and cheers of their supporters and the press in the Grand Ballroom.