

Wattle and Daub - 3

by J. Mykell Collinz

Walter met Danial at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. They didn't have much in common at first, other than AA, with Walter on the recovery side of treatment and Danial reluctantly just beginning.

"I don't wanna quit drinking," Danial said to Walter during their first conversation: "If the cops would just leave me alone, there wouldn't even be a problem."

"With a guy your size," Walter replied, "who's drinking openly in public, especially over by the university, accosting students and faculty alike with poetry and song, the cops are forced to do something. If you can't learn to control your drinking, you should stop drinking completely."

After a long silence, Danial said: "Hey, did you notice? Our names fit together. Wattle and Daub, Walter Tuttle and Danial Robb."

"So?"

"Maybe it means something."

"Maybe it means you have an active imagination even when you're sober. You are sober now, aren't you?"

"Listen to this. A woven lattice of wooden strips, called wattle, is daubed with a sticky material. It's an ancient technique used for making walls."

"You're reading that from your cell phone?"

"It's a smart phone. You should get one. Here, take a look at mine."

"No thanks, I don't carry a phone around with me. I have one at my house and I have one at the store I recently put together in a space downtown. That one has an answering machine so I'm not missing anything important."

"What kinda store?"

"Custom furniture, home accessories, depending on what customer's are looking for. I'm working with local sourcing, not the globalized, multinational, mass market manufactures with a standardized selection."

"If you need a bouncer, I'm available."

"I could use a bouncer, yes, but I need a bookkeeper even more, and I can't afford both at this time."

"I can do both."

"But can you stay sober."

"It would give me a good reason to try."

A single door at street level allows entrance to the stairway leading up to the store on the third, top floor. The door is located between two big windows displaying furniture at street level but the windows belong to another, much larger, furniture store. Walter attracts customers at night when the other furniture store is closed. Night owls patronizing the many bars and restaurants downtown become adventurous when they see an open sign in the door window and a brightly lit stairway leading upward, especially if they've had a few drinks.

On the second floor landing, where the stairway turns and continues upward in the opposite direction, doors on either side are marked, No Entrance: the second floor belongs to the other furniture store.

At the top of the stairs, the third floor landing is empty except for a single door with a small open sign by the door knob. Dark curtains cover the door's window. Many new customers are confused by the abrupt change in decor from the featureless, brightly lit stairway to the soft, indirect lighting inside, where space is lavishly decorated to resemble a large, open, tri-level apartment with a skylight atrium in the back leading to an outside terrace through sliding glass doors.

"Am I in the right place?" the customer will say: "I expected to find a commercial enterprise, a furniture store."

"You're in the right place," Walter will reply: "Come in, look around, make yourself comfortable. If you have any questions, I'm here to help you. What type of furniture are you looking for? Have you searched the web yet?"

He prefers dealing with knowledgeable customers, and since many have not effectively searched the web for furniture, he attempts to sit them down at a computer dedicated to searching the

global market for price and quality comparisons. Some will back away, saying: "I just wanna look around, thanks." And Walter doesn't pressure them. He knows, the longer they look, the more likely they'll become interested in searching further to find answers to a variety of questions.

He also knows, with the store's small local network of handcrafted furniture shops, he can top the price and quality of other sources while offering more choices, quicker delivery, and superior service, both during and after the sale. A volume sales rate isn't an absolute necessity for the store's survival, allowing for a relaxed approach with attention to detail, which customers are unlikely to find at other furniture stores.

Even when the store becomes crowded with demanding customers on a Friday or Saturday night, Walter seldom loses his temper. Many customers, however, will walk out in a huff. Some return during the week when they're in a better mood, hoping to have the store to themselves and his full attention.

Danial keeps the books and enforces security. He's big and mean looking and, when he steps from the office onto the sales floor, rowdy customers usually get the message. If not, they will later wish they had.

