

Excerpt from *Elvis, Me, and the Lemonade Stand Summer*
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Chapter 1

The summer Elvis came into my life he drove right up to my lemonade stand in a Volkswagen — a gold-coloured Sun Bug Super Beetle. And nothing was ever the same after that.

Okay, so it might not have been the real Elvis. After all, it had been widely reported that he had been dead for almost a year. But then, you never really know for sure, right? A lot of magazines and newspapers at the Food Mart checkout claimed that he was still alive, and every once in a while he was photographed hanging out in places like laundromats. So it was entirely possible that he had pulled up to my lemonade stand in a gold Sun Bug.

And this guy sure looked like Elvis. Sounded like him. And acted like him. Or how I imagined Elvis would act, if he got to live like a normal person and showed up for a glass of lemonade at a stand in front of a run-down trailer park on an Indian reserve.

So here's how the summer started. Andy El insisted that I set up a lemonade stand on the side of the road in front of our trailer park. She hauled out an old piece of plywood and set it up on some rickety old sawhorses that she'd found lying out in the junk pile behind the shed beside her trailer. It looked pretty bad, even to Andy El, who is always so darned positive about everything, so she covered it with an old tablecloth she didn't mind me using outdoors.

Which is how I ended up with a Christmas tablecloth with dancing snowmen on it to cover my lemonade stand. Years before, someone had embroidered "Have a Cool Yule Y'all!" in green thread along the frayed edges. And while it was festive, it did not exactly scream "lemonade stand."

Andy El had even invested in six cans of lemonade to get me started, let me borrow her blue plastic juice jug and some mis-

matched plastic glasses, and provided ice cubes from the metal tray in the old fridge she kept out on her back porch. So I really didn't have much choice in the end. I tried to tell her that at eleven years old I was way too old for running a lemonade stand, but she just smiled, ignored my complaints, and kept setting it up.

Her name is really Ella Charlie, and she owns the trailer park. When I was little, just learning to walk around on the uneven ground in the trailer park, I heard all her relatives calling her Auntie Ella. I thought they were saying "Andy El." Somehow the name caught on, and now everyone, even her family, calls her that. Even her grown nephew Raymond and her daughter Esther, although sometimes they call her Mama.

Andy El is Coast Salish. Clarice is white, but I know that my dad is an Indian. Clarice has never bothered to tell me anything about him, so this is just guesswork on my part. As a natural blonde, Clarice sunburns easily and has "fine, delicate features," as she likes to say. I have darker skin and hair, am short and a bit stocky. So I figure I must take after my dad, and the only thing I know about him is that he must be Native.

Anyways. Andy El is the nicest, kindest person I've ever met, and is always cheerful. She sees the best in people. She also keeps an eye out for me, and she's always been someone I could count on ever since my mom and I moved in to the trailer park. Which is a good thing, because one thing Clarice cannot be called is maternal.

So, Day One of the lemonade stand, and there I was, miserable, bored, sitting in the hot sun at my stand, watching the ice melt in the jug of lemonade on the rickety makeshift table in front of me.

No one will stop. No one ever drives down this road, I told myself.

Just then, to prove me wrong, that Volkswagen Sun Bug turned at the four-way stop and headed toward me. That stretch of road ran flat and straight, so I sat and watched its progress as it made its

way down toward Eagle Shores. I held my breath and watched as the gold car approached, slowed, and stopped in front of my table.

Now I'll never hear the end of it from Andy El, I thought. I had tried to tell her that it wouldn't work out, because one thing I knew about life for sure — nothing ever worked out for me. But she'd cheerfully insisted and had finally worn me down.

"You need something to do this summer. It'll be fun, you'll see," she'd said as she kept setting things up. "You can earn some money for yourself. Save up for something special, maybe."

And here I was, with my first customer driving up in a Volkswagen Beetle.

The car stopped, the driver's door opened, and out he stepped. It was the King. Elvis Presley. With aviator sunglasses, black hair, big sideburns, and all.

He stretched as though he'd been stuck behind the wheel of that Bug for hours, then looked down at me and smiled.

"How much?" he asked in a quiet drawl.

I just sat there and stared stupidly at him. He took off his sunglasses and smiled at me with the bluest eyes I have ever seen.

"How much? For a glass of lemonade?" he asked again. Polite, like all the magazines said he was.

I just pointed to the sign, which read: *Lemonaid 10 cents*. I had half-heartedly made the sign that morning. It was only after I'd opened the can of lemonade and read the label that I discovered that I'd spelled it wrong. Up until now I hadn't cared. I didn't think that anyone would stop at my stand, much less notice my misspelled sign. Not this far off the beaten track, down an unpaved road that led past a couple of ramshackle fruit farms and ended at the Eagle Shores Trailer Park. On the edge of the Eagle Shores Indian Reserve.

I was pretty sure I knew why Andy El had insisted I set up the

stand. It was to give me something to do through this whole long, hot, boring summer, since she knew I had nothing to look forward to at the trailer park.

My family was just me and my mom. Clarice and I rented a trailer from Andy El, and had done ever since I could remember. Andy El has a small patch of ground that was part of the Eagle Shores Indian Reserve on southern Vancouver Island, and years ago she and her husband had set up a small trailer park of fifteen trailers. After her husband died, Andy El just kept it going. Some of the trailers were owned outright by people who paid her a monthly fee to keep their trailer there, and a few were owned by Andy El. Those ones she rents out.

Anyways, Andy El knew that I wouldn't have a summer like the other kids at my school, who all had plans to go to summer camp, swimming and sailing lessons, sleepovers, and all sorts of fun-filled days and nights.

All the great-sounding stuff the other kids chattered excitedly about on the last day of school and on the long bus ride home. I just sat, staring out the window, glumly listening as they all made plans with their friends to meet at the local lake to go swimming, or share a cabin at summer camp, or some other great time. I'm not gonna lie: I felt sorry for myself, and maybe even a little bit jealous.

And I knew that Andy El wanted me to have something to do, since she knew that Clarice had a new boyfriend, and that meant that I was even less important than before to my mom. They were in what Clarice called the "honeymoon stage of a relationship," which meant that I would have to "keep a low profile" till she broke it to the new guy that she had a kid. A kid my age, eleven. Turning twelve in August.

"It's nothin' personal, kiddo, but it cramps my style, ya know? It

can turn a guy off to know that there's a kid in the picture," she'd explained. "I just need to work my charms for a while, till I hook him in, and then ..."

She laughed and pretended to cast an imaginary fishing rod in the air, and mimed reeling in the next unsuspecting guy like he was a big catch in a fishing derby.

She took a big drink of her rum and Diet Coke, and then she squinted into the mirror and went back to adding more mascara onto her fake eyelashes.

Another sip of her drink, and another piece of advice: "Yep, a couple more weeks, and he'll be putty in my hands!" She laughed delightedly.

Then Clarice wriggled herself into the latest tight jumpsuit with extra wide bell-bottoms that she'd sewn for herself, shoved her feet into a pair of platform shoes, grabbed her cigarettes and her tiny little clutch — covered in sequins and sparkles that she'd sewn onto a cheap bag she'd bought herself at Robertson's Department Store — and then she headed off in our old beater — a black 1962 Impala, with the tailpipe tied up with a bent-out coat hanger.

She gave a little wave out the window and yelled, "See ya later, Truly! Stay outta trouble now!"

That's my name, Truly Clarice Bateman. Apparently, my name was supposed to be Trudy, but when my birth certificate arrived it was discovered that my name had accidentally been recorded as Truly, and Clarice decided it was easier to just call me Truly than to go through all the hassle of the paperwork involved in getting it changed. So Truly it was. And that pretty much summed up Clarice's parenting style.

Don't get me wrong, I actually like it when Clarice is all excited about a new guy and is out every night trying to impress him. It's way better than when things don't work out for her. That's when she gets depressed, and even gets mean to me. She sleeps all day,

and then gets up and moons around the trailer. She drinks a lot more on those days, calls in sick to work, and cries a lot, so I try to keep out of sight.

When things get really bad, I slip over to Andy El's trailer, and I know that I can sleep on the old green plaid couch on her covered back porch. She always seems to know when things are extra rough for me, and on those nights, she leaves a pillow and blanket out for me.

Andy El's nephew Raymond built the covered-in porch onto her trailer one fall. He showed up on a Friday after work with his old pickup truck loaded with some scrap plywood and two-by-fours from a construction site he was working on, and he spent a whole weekend hammering and sawing and made that porch a really nice place for Andy El. She moved an old fridge out there for extra storage.

A couple of months later, Raymond even came home with a salvaged window and an old door and added them. That's when Andy El dragged an old kitchen table and chairs and a green plaid couch out there. So now it stays pretty warm, even in the winter. It's nice and snug, and Andy El claims her trailer is even warmer than before.

Anyways, back to my lemonade stand. And my first ever customer, Elvis Presley. I just poured him a glass, trying to control my nervous hand, and then stood there and stared stupidly at him as he drank it down.

"Thanks," he said, dropping a dime onto the table. "Say, can you tell me where the office is?"

"Office?" I asked.

"The trailer park office," he said patiently.

"Oh, right," I said quickly. I pointed to Andy El's trailer. "There's no real office. You just need to talk to Andy El. You just go over to

that blue and white trailer over there and knock on the door. Andy El's in the kitchen, or out in the yard doing some laundry, so just give a knock and then yell if she doesn't come right away."

He smiled at me, put the glass on the table, and said, I kid you not, "Thank you. Thank you very much."

He got back in that gold Sun Bug and drove over the bouncy ground to Andy El's. I just sat there, kind of stunned, and watched as he got out, knocked on the trailer door, and then chatted with Andy El. She handed him a set of keys and gestured to me to come over.

I left the stand and headed over to them, and she asked me to show Elvis the way to the empty green and white trailer with the "For Rent" sign in the little window beside the door.

"This way," I said, and pointed to the trailer. It's all I could choke out. I mean, this was Elvis. Just what do you say to the King of Rock and Roll?

He followed me in his Sun Bug, bumping slowly over the rough ground.

I stood and gaped as he parked, got out and unlocked the trailer door, and started to unload his belongings from the car. I watched, mesmerized, as he unloaded two suitcases and a guitar case and took them into the trailer. Then he came back for three garment bags, carefully unhooking them from the hook behind the driver's seat. One was a clear plastic dry-cleaning bag, and inside was a white jumpsuit with a large high collar and wide bell-bottoms. It was covered in sequins and looked just like an outfit Elvis Presley would have worn.

He draped it over his arm, and before he stepped inside the trailer, he turned to me, smiled, and said again, "Well, thank you. Thank you very much," and then closed the door.

I stumbled back to the stand and sat down in stunned silence,

realizing what this meant. Elvis Presley was renting the empty trailer at Eagle Shores. Ladies and gentlemen, Elvis was in the trailer park.