
**THE MAN WITH THE
GREEN SUITCASE**

A Novel

By Dee Doanes

Prologue

DO YOU SEE HIM?

Do you see him? Do you see him?
There he is walking down the street
on trembling legs, with a green suitcase.

I wonder what's inside.
I wonder where he is going.

He's not walking fast. He's not walking slow.
He's just walking. Just walking.

Look at his face, a map of places he's been.
It tells of the journey to Hell and back.

Each gray in his hair has a story all its own,
of children that died and loves that were lost.

He's not walking fast. He's not walking slow.
He's just walking. Just walking.

His face filled with sweat. His eyes filled with
fire.
He's waiting to be reborn.

Until then, he's just walking. Just walking.
Not walking fast, not walking slow.

Just walking. Just walking.

Chapter 1 THE MAN

Peachtree Street in the Buckhead section of Atlanta is a great place to people watch; the stylish socialites and well-heeled businessmen fill the sidewalks. It's the mini Beverly Hills of the South with its expensive boutiques and chic restaurants on every corner. Giacomo's restaurant is one such place and this night it's filled with the usual crowd of beautiful people. Fingers are swirling forks of delicately prepared Lasagna Matta, while Barolo wine is being sipped enthusiastically. Silk wrap dresses and two-piece suits clad the hungry diners. The maitre d' tells a walk-in couple that they can't be seated since they have no reservations. The unlucky couple leaves and waits for the valet to bring their car. As they get into their car and drive off, the valet goes to the front of the alley behind Giacomo's to steal a quick smoke. Further down the alley near a dumpster are empty boxes of Pellegrino water, Barolo wine, and tomatoes. Next to the dumpster crates are stacked against the wall like a pyramid. This is *not a* fine place to be for an old, disheveled man wearing a soiled green jacket, torn white shirt, holey dark blue pants, and dirty high top white tennis shoes, sitting on top of this throne of crates. His finger is poking in an empty can of crushed tomatoes. His stomach grumbles in discontent. He tosses the can to the side and with a deep sigh says aloud, "A fancy place like this should only use fresh tomatoes."

The man climbs down, bones popping and creaking a little, and leans against the building, eyes closed. His eyes open and he moves the

boxes and unzips his pants. He crouches, winces as he fingers a thick scar on the side of his hip. His legs tremble a little and he leans against the building for support. “Uhhn.” He strains to relieve himself.

A door to his left slams and some people walk out. A female voice says, “Tony, we need to make sure we have enough staff for the Bradley private party on Wednesday.”

“Jeremy has that covered. You just need to confirm the final head count,” the brisk voice of Tony Vitrelli, the owner of Giacomo’s, replies.

That voice sounded like authority, like the manager or something, thought the man. As they continue talking the old man squeezes his butt tight to not attract attention. Plop! Too late, some hits the side of the can he had thrown away, and it rolls in the direction of the voices. Conversation pauses as footsteps come to within a few feet of the man.

Tony yells angrily, “Get the hell out of here, you bum! Go take a dump on another block.”

The woman frowns, giving Tony a disapproving look. The old man quickly pulls up his pants, crouching with his back to them. Quietly he says, “I’m sorry. I thought no one would be back here.”

“Get going before I call the cops! And don’t ever come back again.”

Tony takes a few more steps toward the man, squinting to see him in the dark as the man rises from the side of the boxes and turns toward him. There is a hint of dignity in his upright stance as he steps into the street light. Criss-crossed all over his face are so many deep wrinkles they look like lines on a state map. Tony’s stare meet with the

hazel eyes of one not so old, yet his face is very old. Tony's eyes widen with surprise and confusion and his jaw drops, mesmerized and a little scared at the same time. The man's wrinkles are pulsating and seem to stretch out and curve at the edges. There is faint sound of rushing water as the wrinkles move. The old man steps toward the crates and motions as if he is going to climb on top, but instead, reaches up to a crate next to the top crate, and picks up a frayed, old green leather suitcase. The street light flickers and the man's face once again has the normal drooping lines one would see on any old face. Tony blinks rapidly for few seconds, thinking it was a trick of the light. The man turns and walks away. "Have a good night," he says.

The green suitcase is swinging slightly in his hand. It looks circa 1950's, leather peeling, but sturdy, with pieces of red and white fabric poking out. Tony watches until he can no longer hear the footsteps retreating into the far end of the alley.

Chapter 2

ON THE RUN

Just before sunrise, the old man cuts across the Carter Center, through the apartments on the right side to get to Ponce de Leon Avenue more quickly. He stretches his tall frame, yawns and runs crooked fingers through his thick nest of dark and gray hair, then brushes dirt off his dingy clothes. After a night of sleeping on the grassy area in front of the #6 bus stop, his hunger hasn't abated. He sucks his teeth thoughtfully, tasting the enamel, but that does nothing for the gurgling in his belly. But everything will be okay...it always is. Thirsty, he stoops to pick blades of grass that can quench the thirst a little if you suck them before the hot sun's rays takes the dewy moistness back into the sky. A sparkle in the grass catches his attention. He walks toward a little patch of grass near an old pipe next to the sewer and sees a silver and diamond wedding ring. He notices money stuffed inside the pipe and pulls it out to find several twenty-dollar bills. To the side of the pipe is a Blackberry cell phone still in the AT&T box. He nods, eyes wide, quickly snatching up everything and stuffing it into his green suitcase. The man takes off running for a few blocks, constantly looking over his shoulder to make sure no one is following him, clutching the suitcase close to his chest. He slows down to a fast walk for several more blocks, breathing heavily. A cop car drives by slowly. Damn, he doesn't want them to see him. The man ducks behind a tree, peeking around the corner to see if the coast is clear. He runs to the fence at the corner, quickly opens his

suitcase and dumps the stolen items on the sidewalk just as a cop car pulls up to the fence.

“Hey, what’re you doing?” the cop asks, leaning out of the window and looking curiously at the stuff on the ground.

The man quickly shuts his suitcase and runs, breathlessly saying over his shoulder, “I found that stuff near the apartments. Figured someone stole em’.”

The cop begins to pull into the fenced back entrance of City Hall East police station, where all the cops gas up their cars.

“Hey, wait a minute, wait a minute! I want to ask you a few questions.” Too late. Surprisingly, the old man picks up speed like an Olympic sprinter, ducks behind a house and runs in the opposite direction, going away from Ponce de Leon toward the back of a windshield repair shop on Glen Iris. They wouldn’t know which direction he ran. Good, since he didn’t like talking to people anyway. He had privacy to maintain.

Chapter 3

TIME TO SEE

After a few hours of walking around and looking for things in trash cans and dumpsters outside various shopping centers, the man with the green suitcase arrives at a house he hadn't been to in a while. They passed out tickets for turkey and cheese sandwiches. If he was lucky, maybe he could get on the list for a shower and a change of clothes too, which normally happens on Wednesday. But the old man isn't sure what day it is since he has no watch and lost his pocket calendar.

He heads for the courtyard to wait until it's time to eat. The old brick house is already filled with men and women, all there for food and clothing. He goes to the corner on the far side of the house, away from the water spout where people lined up to wash their hands or drink from when the kitchen is closed or it isn't shower day. He likes to have quiet, which is hard to do when on the move in the street, and that corner is what is needed. He sits on the ground, loosens his shoes and massages his sore, cracked feet. The man smiles as savory smells from the kitchen drift in his direction.

"Hey, I haven't seen you in a while. How have you been, man?" a voice asks. The old man looks up and smiles.