

WILD TURKEY INTRODUCTION

by

ROGER L. SIMON

After the publication of *The Big Fix*, it felt as if half the human race had a quarrel with me. Not all women, mind you, but that substantial and growing subset called the Women's Movement. According to them, Moses Wine may have been a cool, anti-war activist longhair, but, at heart, he was the same old macho bastard as his predecessors Spade, Marlowe, and Hammer. He may have been able to roll a decent joint or identify a Jimi Hendrix solo, but he never did the dishes or the laundry and, disgraceful as it may sound, frequently looked at women as sex objects.

I didn't dare utter a peep in my defense. I was actually embarrassed. This was 1973, after all, and every woman I knew from my then-wife to the clerk at the neighborhood stationery store was engaged in consciousness raising. I didn't want to be accused of being a reactionary. So I wrote *Wild Turkey* as a form of belated self-criticism (especially belated because I was about eight-months tardy in delivering the book and had to be locked in a room to complete it). I deliberately began with Moses' ex-wife abroad, finding herself, so he would have to take care of their little children himself. I hoped readers would find amusing the idea of a supposedly hard-boiled dick having to change diapers. I also wanted to deal with issues of free love and open-marriage that were flying around at the time and put in some hours (in the name of research only, please) at Sandstone, the same Topanga, California sanctuary of sexual liberation described by Gay Talese in *Thy Neighbor's Wife*.

I ended up being locked in a room to write the book not only for the obvious reason that it was overdue but because I was envious of Dr. Hunter S. Thompson. Hunter and I were then the best-selling authors on the Straight Arrow Books list (although I was, admittedly, a distant second) and I wanted the same treatment he got. When I heard from our mutual editor Alan Rinzler that he had put up Hunter gratis in a room in San Francisco's hip rock star haven the Seal Rock Inn so he could concentrate, I wanted that, too. So I got it and was ensconced in the very same room the notorious doctor had been only weeks before. We even shared the same chamber maid who would shake her head in amazement at the extraordinary number of pill bottles, prescription and otherwise, the doctor kept in the bathroom medicine cabinet, not to mention the empty bottles of bourbon under the bed. I was definitely a clean liver by comparison, although I was certainly jealous of the celebrity gained

for him by his excessive habits. It was not by accident that Hunter turned up in my novel under the not-too-subtle pseudonym of Dr. Gunther Thomas, trying to interview Moses Wine for *Rolling Stone* while swilling the Wild Turkey that gave the book its title.

Partly out of guilt, I worked hard in the Seal Rock Inn and every evening Rinzler would show up to read the pages much like a Hollywood producer in the old days. Then he would ask me about what was going to happen next and I was forced to figure it out with some specificity before I got dinner. To this day I think the book has the most elegant and consistent plot of any of my novels and I attribute it to this work method. I know the plot truly meshes because when I came to adapt it for the movies, it took almost no alteration. (Film scripts are like the skeletal outlines of novels and reveal a book's inconsistencies with almost painful precision.) *Wild Turkey*, in fact, almost became a movie before *The Big Fix*. I wrote an adaptation for Warner Brothers in 1974 and they seemed to quite like it. They asked me who should play Moses Wine and I suggested this young actor Richard Dreyfuss, who had just appeared in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*. They liked that idea too, and were about to make a substantial offer to Dreyfuss (who I had heard via the grapevine was poised to accept) when the head of the studio changed his mind at the last minute and never made the offer. It was my initiation into the vicissitudes of the film business.

As for the withering criticisms from the Women's Movement, I never heard them again after the publication of the book.

Roger L. Simon
Los Angeles, CA