

# Wrath of Grapes



BY H. D. INGLES

**Wrath of Grapes**

**by**

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## Forward

I have put in my time in Uncle Sam's Military. So have a lot of other fellows. I was pretty lucky, I reckon. I enlisted in peacetime and was out before Vietnam got going. When I had about a year left in my four-year hitch, the Berlin Wall was built. We thought for a while that the Wall may start a ruckus, but that didn't pan out. As I said, I was pretty lucky.

To this day, I believe that enlisting at the age of nineteen was one of the smartest things that I ever did in my life. Now, don't get me wrong. I never was a really good soldier and I could have never made it a career, but those four years were good for me. I learned how to be a man. I also learned the basics of the career which I only recently retired from.

Oh, yes. One more thing. While I was in the Air Force, I did manage to have a little fun, too.

These short stories were written individually during the last decade of the Twentieth Century. This book merely brings the stories together under one cover, along with any editing which was required.

The few little stories that I have put together in this book are true. All of this stuff really did happen just about the way I told it. I will have to admit, though, that some of the conversations may make me look just a bit smarter than I really am. Of course, if you think about it, you're pretty darned smart when you're about twenty or so. Don't you remember? Anyway, except for some amount of exaggeration as to my brilliance, the stories are true. In the stories, I made it a point to not use extremely foul language. In most of the conversations in the stories, the language is much "cleaner" than as it really happened. So, if you've been in the Service, feel free to translate the "damns" and "hells" to what you probably really would have said. It's not that I'm a prude. It's just the fact that the omission of really foul language

flat-out didn't hurt anything. And, to be honest about it, tap dancing around the foul language sometimes made situations a bit funnier.

One last thing. Some of the stuff that I'm telling you here makes me look like a pretty stupid, devil-may-care jerk. I reckon that, at times, I was. But just remember that you are reading only a few pages of incidents covering a span of four years. I did my job while I was in the Air Force. I believe that I did it pretty well. I am still proud of the fact that I spent four years in the service of my country. (That may sound corny, but it's true.) The point is, though, if you can't be stupid a few times when you're single and twenty (or so), when can you be stupid?

One more last thing. In these stories, I used my middle name. Don't ask why. It's a long story.

## Wrath of Grapes

I used to know this Irishman when I was a GI. I called him Irish. That's because he was an Irishman. Maybe I should mention that he was a drunken Irishman. Now that I think on it, maybe that last phrase was redundant but, anyway, I'll tell you something else. That boy can thank his lucky stars that he ran into me. God only knows what kind of trouble he would have gotten into without me to help him. Hell, he even got into trouble with me to help him. Let's face it, without me, the boy would have probably ended up in the gutter.

Now that I think on it, I did see him in the gutter a couple of times.

Oh yes, while I'm on the subject, Irish also has a silver tongue. So, if you ever talk to him, watch out. He has a perverse way of twisting stories to his own advantage.

Anyway, my last year in the Air Force, Irish and I did some stuff together. We had a few good trips to New Orleans. Let me tell you about a couple of those trips.

Wait a minute, I want to tell you something else first.

By the way, you may or may not know it, but I'm not one to start a story one way and then go off somewhere else before I finish. But I really need to give you a little insight about Irish. After this, you will understand why the boy needed someone stable around.

Anyway, Irish walked into my room one day; he lived in the room across from mine. We lived in old, wooden, beat up, open bay barracks, which also had four rooms. Irish and I both had three stripes. That meant two things.

We each got one of the four rooms in the barracks. And we could get into the NCO Club. I think you can pretty much understand the importance of that last one.

Anyway, Irish walked into my room one day. "Dave, great news!"

"What?" Irish was always bothering me with crazy ideas. I don't know why I put up with it. I reckon it's because I'm just naturally soft-hearted and the boy really did need help.

"Tomorrow is it! Tomorrow is the day!"

"What the hell are you talking about? This is Friday, so tonight's the night. Who the hell cares about tomorrow?" I think that you can see right there how I was trying to maintain a stabilizing influence over the boy.

Anyway, Irish said, "Boy, Dave, are you stupid. Tomorrow is nickel beer at the NCO Club."

"Hell, Irish, I don't mind saving a little, but beer is only fifteen cents anyway." (I think that I've already told you that this was a few years back. If I didn't, it was.)

"You don't understand, Dave, you bloody twit. If we drink enough nickel beer, we can save a bundle. We can have beer for breakfast and then have more money for Saturday night."

The logic was perverse, but it did make sense.

We went out that Friday evening. I don't remember what we did. We probably went to Rosie's Cantina to find some shuffleboard players to contribute to our bar bill.

We may have even tried to pick up some broads.

As you have probably guessed already, Rosie's was a pretty classy place.

There was this one nice-looking babe who came in all the time. She said she was an Indian princess, a Choctaw, I think. But that's another story.

Anyway, we got up pretty early on Saturday. I think that we were in the NCO Club by about eleven in the morning.

We decided to drink our breakfast in the main bar of the club and I said, "Irish, you get us a couple of beers and I'll get a table."

The nickel beer was in the stag bar. I was sort of glad that Irish was getting the beer. He had to fight his way in. I don't much like crowds.

It took Irish quite a while to get back to our table.

"Irish, where the hell have you been? I'm thirsty."

"Holy mackerel, Dave, it's a damned mob in there." A little note here. I don't remember exactly, but I greatly doubt that Irish actually said, "Holy mackerel." My guess is that it was put a little more strongly. But I think you get the idea.

I noticed the tray of beer in his hand. It was sort of hard to miss.

"Damn, Irish! How the hell much beer did you buy?"

"Dave, I'm not going back in there. It ain't worth it. Damned guys are pushing and shoving. I almost got into a fight, for cryin' out loud. So I bought a buck and a quarter's worth of beer. That's all that would fit on the tray."

So there we sat, with twenty-five beers on our table.

In a way, it worked out right well. And I will have to give the boy a little credit for pure financial genius. Let's face it, we had enough beer to cover both breakfast and lunch. I ask you, where can two young, healthy, growing

boys get both breakfast and lunch for a buck and two bits?

The only disadvantage was that the last couple of lunch beers were a little warm.

It was starting to get on into the afternoon.

I said, "Irish, you know that we drank a little last night." I didn't exactly remember how much we drank. That's probably because I didn't exactly remember last night.

"So what?"

"We've also had a few beers today."

"So what? Damn, Dave, get to the point."

"Well, maybe it wouldn't hurt to eat a bite."

"Damn, Dave. Beer is good for you."

"Irish, I'm trying to be sensible here, and you're giving me a ration of garbage. Look at it this way, I don't want to pass out before eight tonight."

"Hell, Dave, if we eat, it will take some of our drinkin' money for tonight."

The Irishman was making sense again.

"You have a good point there, Irish."

We pondered the problem over our last beer.

As usual, I came up with a first-class idea. "Damn, Irish, I've got it."

"What?"



"Hell, it's easy. We'll get a five dollar chit book on credit."

"Good thinkin', Dave. Damned good thinkin'." Actually, when Irish said "thinkin'," it didn't quite sound like it's spelled. It sounded more like "tinkin" or something like that. I already told you that he was an Irishman. They talk sort of funny.

Anyway, I knew that I had to be real quick on this next one. "Irish, do you have any credit left?"

"Why should I buy the goddamned thing? Holy mackerel, Dave, you do this to me all the time."

"Now calm down, Irish. Look at it this way. It was my idea wasn't it?"

"Yes, damn you. But it didn't take no damned genius."

It made a lot of sense to ignore him. "An idea has to be worth something."

"Damn, Dave."

Irish started whining a little. The boy had a tendency towards whining.

He mumbled and whined for a while, but he finally left to get the five-dollar chit book. I don't know why he was always making big deals out of stuff. God, I didn't think he was ever going to get the damned chit book. The way he was whining, you'd think I was cheap or something.

When Irish returned, he said something else stupid. I really had to watch him. Irish actually said, "Want to spend the whole thing and have a big lunch?"

"Irish, boy, you need help. Look at it this way, we can get a pretty good

lunch for about a buck each. Right?"

"Right."

"Now, if we use our heads today, we can use the rest of the book for breakfast tomorrow."

"Good thinkin', Dave."

We had lunch and left a good tip (in chits). Neither of us really wanted to leave a tip, but the waitress did have good legs.

Anyway, after we ate, I said, "How much left in the book, Irish?"

"Almost three bucks."

"It's still early. If we go into Biloxi now, we'll just spend all of our money and get drunk. We can get good hooch here for only thirty-five cents. What the hell? Let's just have a few drinks here and finish off the book."

"Good thinkin', Dave. Damned good thinkin'."

We spent all of his chit book.

I don't know if I've already told you or not, but Irish had a bit of a silver tongue. Well, sometimes, he would try to pull that garbage on me.

You've probably already figured out that I'm pretty smart but, sometimes, I would let my guard down. What I'm trying to tell you is that the no good silver-tongued rat talked me into getting a five-dollar chit book. That's how cheap he was.

We spent all of my chit book on hooch.

I'm pretty sure that we took a taxi to Rosie's that night. We weren't in real

good condition to walk. Besides, we had saved so much by drinking at the Club that we could afford to throw six bits into the fan.

We didn't win at shuffleboard that night. Irish wasn't worth a whole lot. I did the best that I could, but it just wasn't enough. I tried to carry him in every game, but he let me down. I made a note, something about gambling and being on the same team as a drunk Irishman.

We didn't eat breakfast at the Club on Sunday morning. Irish's lousy shuffleboard playing had lost us most of our money. And, like I already told you, he had managed to spend the rest of his five-dollar chit book and all of mine.

Now, I know that you'll believe me when I say that Irish needed someone stable around.

Anyway, like I was saying when the story started, Irish and I went to New Orleans a lot.

One of the trips was over a Labor Day weekend. Somehow, I remember that it was Labor Day.

We went to Pat O'Brien's on Saturday night. I don't know what time we got there, but the joint was crowded. It cost us a couple of bucks to get a seat. That was the only way the waiter would find us a table.

It was a pretty good table. That's mainly because sitting at the next table, there were these two babes. These two were definitely not little girls. (I had become right sensitive on that issue, but that's another story.) These two babes had ten or fifteen years on us. But not being the type of guy who believes in age discrimination, I struck up a conversation with them. It was sort of loud in the place and, before you knew it, the two babes had asked us to sit at their table.

The waiter wouldn't give us our two bucks back.

Anyway, I don't know how much time passed but, after a while, the four of us decided to leave. The girls were from Mobile and wanted to have a good time in New Orleans over the weekend.

I certainly didn't want to be accused of keeping them from having a good time.

The babe I had latched onto tossed me her car keys and away we went.

We stopped at some quieter joint, not in the Quarter, and the girls excused themselves. They mumbled something about nose powdering.

When the babes returned to the table, there was a great look of relief on both their faces.

One of them said, "We were in there talking and it suddenly hit me that we had left our car keys with two men who we barely know."

Irish and I made about as much out of that one that we could come up with. I've always figured that if you get caught being honest, you should make the most out of it.

We went to a couple more places for a drink or two.

Then came the tricky part. Irish and I had cleverly decided to save money by drinking all night. In short, we didn't have a place to stay. On the other hand, these two babes had a nice, comfortable, air conditioned motel room.

About that time, one of them said, "We'll take you to our motel and you can get a room there."

That wasn't exactly what I had in mind. "We could save some money if we used your room."

"Not on your life, we hardly know you two. Besides, we don't do things like that."

I figured they just needed a little shove.

"What? I'm really hurt. We're old buddies now. Especially after I drove you all around town."

"In my car."

"But I didn't steal it."

"Thanks."

"So we can go on in your room?"

"No! Get a room."

Now I figured they just needed sort of a moderate shove. So I cleverly said, "Look at it this way, you have two big beds. And there's only one of you for each of those big beds. It just doesn't seem right. With Irish and me in there, you wouldn't be so lonely. You don't want to be lonely on your first night in New Orleans. Do you?"

"Look at it this way, get a room."

This was getting to be bad business. Those two were serious about the other room bit. Damn! A motel room would seriously cut into our available cash supply. And it had crossed my mind that it would be sort of nice to wake up and see something staring me in the face who looked a hell of a lot better than Irish.

Damn women anyway. They just wouldn't give in. Even with my brains and Irish's silver tongue, they wouldn't give in.

We drove around to the damned office to get a damned room.

I was quite relieved to learn that the motel was full. I was further relieved when the clerk told me that, being the Labor Day weekend, I had about a zero chance of getting a room anywhere.

When I got back in the car, I was all smiles. "No rooms anywhere. So I reckon we'll have to bunk in with you all now."

"Why don't you sleep in the car?"

"No! Not that. I hate to sleep in cars. It's uncivilized."

"I guess you'll just have to be uncivilized. You can't sleep with us."

I started getting desperate. I hate to sleep in damned cars.

I decided to sort of tap dance a little. "Darlin', I reckon I made a bad choice of words a few minutes ago. Neither Irish nor I had any intention of bothering you two. It never even crossed our minds. I'm just not much good with words. What I meant to say was that Irish and I could sleep in one bed and you two in the other."

After they finished laughing, one of them responded, "No!"

"I can't stand to sleep in a car. I won't rest at all. Please, please let us in the room."

I hate it when I have to plead and beg.

"Sleep in the car."

Then I decided to pull out all the stops. I went to my never miss when all else fails routine. But hell's bells. They wouldn't even go for the poor, lonely, pathetic GI line. Ain't that somethin'. Almost heartless.

Irish and I went to bed in the damned car. The rat grabbed the back seat so the damned steering wheel wouldn't bother him.

We weren't in the car very long before the sun started coming up. It can get real hot real fast in New Orleans around Labor Day. Especially in a damned car. Irish went out like a light, before it got really hot. I just sort of half sat and half laid there, bumping my damned head on the damned steering wheel, and getting hotter. Hotter and hotter and hotter. I had damned well had it. Trying to sleep in that car was ridiculous. That motel room was air conditioned.

I got out of the car and knocked on their door. They opened the door. There was a discussion. (If you really have to know, I begged and pleaded.) Anyway, they let me in. I slept on the couch. It was a big couch and I could stretch out. I was nice and cool. I lacked the desired companionship, but I could sleep.

Now, here comes the part that Irish never could seem to recover from. I never really did understand why.

Anyway, Irish woke up about noon. It wasn't real hot by then. It probably wasn't much more than a hundred degrees or so. I doubt if it was more than a hundred and twenty in the car.

Well, when Irish woke up he sort of had a hangover and he didn't seem to be in a real good mood. I never could figure out why Irish was always so touchy.

Anyway, Irish knocked on the door. The babe he had been with opened the door. He came in. His hair was hanging down over his face. I don't believe that there was a square inch on his pathetic little body that wasn't covered in sweat. He had a funny look on his face. He was as white as a ghost. He was a damned mess. The phrase "death warmed over" comes to mind.

I reckon that a man should have a little sympathy for something as pathetic as

Irish looked then. He was standing in the doorway. He just looked around for a few minutes. Sort of like he was trying to get a grip on reality. He looked pretty damned bad. Irish sort of put me in mind of one of those B-movie science fiction creatures after he'd been shot. You know what I mean. Glazed-over eyes. Just looking around sort of lost like. With his sweaty hair hanging down. And the sweat dripping off of his chin.

Of course, there is also a pretty damned good case for saying that he looked like a lost sheep dog that had slobbered all over himself.

If you can picture that scene in your mind, you can see that it was pretty damned funny. No, it was hilarious.

I laughed like hell.

Irish looked over at me. For some reason he seemed to be a little bit irritated with me. I never did figure out why.

Hell, I wasn't doing anything. I was just laying on the couch. Well, I did have my head in the blonde's lap. And she didn't have a whole lot of clothes on. And I had my shirt off. And she had her hand on my chest. And she was feeding me grapes. But that's all. Honest.

I figured I'd just ignore the way Irish was looking at me. Hell, being grouchy just ain't in my nature. Being of a friendly nature, I said, "Hey, Irish, did you have a nice sleep? Have a grape."

"Dave, I'm going to kill you."

"Shut the door, for cryin' out loud. It's hot out there."

"Dave, I'm going to kill you."

"These are good grapes." I stopped talking for a few seconds. Blondie wanted to feed me another grape. Then I looked at Irish again and said,



"Have a grape."

"Dave, if I ever get better, I'm going to kill you."

I looked up at my new friend. "I don't think he wants a grape."

Irish just wouldn't let up. "Why in the hell didn't you wake me up? I'm about to die, for cryin' out loud. Damn, Dave! I'm about to die."

The pathetic looking Irishman kept staring around the room (the nice, cool room) and mumbling for a while. He kept repeating himself. I was getting a little fed up with the "about to die" bit. I think you can understand that.

But I will have to admit, though, that the phrase "about to die" looked pretty close to the truth. The boy did look a little shaky.

I decided to humor him. It's in my nature. "Irish, you were sleeping like a baby. I didn't have the heart to wake you. Besides, I was pretty sure that they wouldn't let both of us in."

"Damn, Dave! I thought we were friends. I'm about to die."

He just wouldn't lay off of "about to die." The man just refused to listen to logic. I decided to ignore him and change the subject.

"Irish, boy, grapes are good for you. Are you sure you don't want a grape?"

After the look I got from him, I decided that, for some unknown reason, Irish just didn't like grapes.

Irish recovered. He was a strong, young lad. And I was pretty sure that he wouldn't die. I would have gone so far as to bet on it.

I also knew for sure that Irish wouldn't stay mad. Both of us knew damned well that he would have done the same to me. I just had enough sense not to

fall asleep in a car on an early September morning in New Orleans.

Anyway, Irish whined about that grape business most of the day. It pretty much got on my nerves. You know how it is when whiners get started. Stuff like, "Damn, I almost died in that damned car." Then he would stop for a while and then start all over again. "You were nice and cool. She was feeding you grapes. Damn, I almost died." If you know a whiner, you know what I'm talking about.

Before the afternoon was over, I was right tired of all the complaining. After all, I had problems, too. The grapes had seeds.

I forget exactly what we did on Sunday afternoon. Tourist stuff, I think. I had never actually done any real tourist stuff in New Orleans before. I especially liked the part where the babes bought lunch.

When we got back to the motel, the girls started talking about getting another motel room.

I started getting a little upset. Irish wasn't real crazy about it, either.

The babe I was with called about getting another room. A room had freed up. But I became a little less upset when she told the clerk to put it on her credit card.

Of course, I was still a bit bothered. I mean, I didn't object to free eats and drinks, and a free motel room. But Irish and I had invested almost twenty-four hours in these babes and things still weren't as friendly as we had planned. I think you can understand that.

The four of us showered and such in the same motel room, and things had become a little friendly, but there is being a little friendly and there is being real friendly. I think you get the picture here.

Anyway we went out to eat that evening. The babes insisted on paying for dinner and, you know me, I never argue with a lady.

After dinner, I figured the babes wanted to go out and have a few more drinks. But Blondie whispered in my ear that she would rather go back to the motel with me. She told me that she was a little shy and that she really didn't want all four of us in the same room.

When I told Irish of the plans, he went along with it. Irish can be right hard-headed at times but, for some reason, he decided not to argue this time. Maybe it was because he was finally learning some manners from me, and decided that he shouldn't argue with a lady. Besides, Irish wasn't real bright, but was he sure as hell wasn't an idiot.

Anyway, on Sunday night the sleeping arrangements were much more to my liking. But, you know, for some reason, I couldn't get to sleep until real late that night.

On Monday evening, the girls drove us back to Biloxi. We spent a couple of pleasant hours on the beach after it was dark. I forget what we did.

Late that night, the girls got back in their car and headed back on over to Mobile.

Irish and I had a drink and then headed back to the Base. At least it would be a short week. Only four days till Friday.

After that weekend, Irish and I went to Mobile quite a bit. We had some pretty good times in Mobile. But that's another story.

In one of the nearby barracks back at the Base, there was this other guy that Irish and I knew. I called him Lover Boy. (Don't ask. It's a whole nother story.)

Well, one Saturday morning, Irish and I drove to New Orleans with old Lover Boy. After we got there, we ditched him. We had made that decision in some bar somewhere between Biloxi and New Orleans.

It had to be. Lover Boy just didn't know how to have a really good time.

Besides, he was cheap. Since it was his car, he expected free beer at the bar. That's a crock. To hell with him.

On top of that, old Lover Boy liked to hold hands with high school girls. He wasn't exactly a whole lot of fun. He always wanted to find a cute little virgin and fall in love and get married. Pretty stupid if you ask me. And you heard me right, I said virgin.

Anyway, when we got to New Orleans, Irish and I explained how things were.

I was pretty diplomatic. I said, "Beat it, kid! I don't want no high school girl. I've got enough problems already."

Lover Boy begged a little. "Come on, you guys, stick with me. I have a really good date tonight and I'm sure that she has some friends."

"Sounds like a lot of fun, Lover Boy, but no thanks. Are they twelve years old or are you going for older women now? Maybe fourteen or so?"

"I'm not kidding. I've got some really swell stuff lined up for tonight."

"Sure. We can go to a damned movie and hold hands."

We gave Lover Boy a couple of bucks for gas and headed for a bar. Maybe we only gave him a buck.

Well, it didn't turn out to be a real good weekend. Irish got me drunk and he spent all of our money.

Absolutely no babes of any age to be found. Like I told you, I've had better weekends.

When we got back to the Base on Sunday night, there was Lover Boy. He had a big grin on his face.

He had come over to our barracks just to see Irish and me. I couldn't figure out what the hell for. I didn't want to see him.

I decided to bug him. I wasn't in a real good mood. And the little twerp was grinning like a damned fool. I figured I'd razz him a little. "Well, well, if it isn't Lover Boy. Did you see a really good movie last night?"

"I didn't go to a movie. I told you to stick with me. I had a great time and it was all free."

"You mean you walked down lover's lane with a sixteen-year-old and held hands? Sounds like a really swell Saturday night."

"You missed it, stupid. You guys think you're so smart."

"Okay, you're dying to tell us. So what did you do with your fifteen-year-old love?"

"She wasn't fifteen, wise guy. She was twenty or twenty-one. So were her two girlfriends."

I couldn't be outdone by that little twerp. I remained very calm and cool, and said, "Don't worry about us, Lover Boy. Irish and I found a couple of lookers and we had one hell of a good time."

I'm not usually one to lie about things like that, but it was all getting out of hand. Lover Boy had also said something else that bothered me. He had mumbled something about "free."

Then Lover Boy said something that really bothered me. He said, "We went to the Playboy Club."

"In a pig's eye!"

"I don't care if you believe me or not."

Damn! The little jerk may be telling the truth. But, as usual, I remained very calm. I came back with another clever remark. "You lie like a damned rug."

"I told you two to come with me, but you were too smart. Tough!"

"Bull!"

"Don't believe me, I don't care. Her daddy gave me the keys to his Lincoln and his Playboy Club key. We didn't get in until about three in the morning. I sure could have used some help with those other two girls." Lover Boy smiled.

Damn! The little twerp was telling the truth. He wasn't smart enough to tell that good a lie. Damn!

Probably the only time in his life that the little jerk had ever hit pay dirt. Damn! Damn! Damn!

And I had let that drunken Irishman talk me into ditching the little twerp. As smart as I am, why did I always let that silver-tongued Irishman talk me into things? I reckon you pay a price for being good-hearted.

Damn! A Lincoln.

Damn! The Playboy Club.

Damn! Free.

Damn! Damn! Damn!

So you can see why I didn't much like Lover Boy. He just couldn't be trusted. I made a note.

Anyway, like I was telling you earlier, beware the wrath of grapes.

Thank you for reading. This is one story from the collection of short stories, [“Wrath of Grapes & Other Stories”](#), available on Amazon Kindle and paperback.