

# The New Orphic Review

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# Taking Risks

## Part of the New Orphic Adventure

Ernest Hekkanen

I WAS TRYING to establish a focus for the present issue of *The New Orphic Review*, when I received in the mail W.P. Kinsella's story "Risk Takers." Back in the early 1980s, shortly after some stories of mine had appeared in the anthology *Second Impressions*, Kinsella had invited me up to Calgary to give a reading. He was teaching at the university there. He gave me some advice on how to survive the experience if ever I found myself in the same position. His advice was to wear a shirt that blended in with the wall and to not volunteer to be on any committees. Only by observing those tactics could a writer assure himself of having enough time to write.

At that juncture in my life, I was little more than a fledgling writer. In order to get out of the foundry I was working in, I decided to take an M.F.A. in Creative Writing at The University of British Columbia. Until my bursary and scholarship moneys kicked in, I continued to work from 5 a.m. to 9 a.m. as the early morning potman. One morning, in my usual sleep-deprived state, I did something that was very foolish. I stuck some barnacle-encrusted aluminum housing into the feeder pot without first cooling the molten metal by adding an ingot. The pot of molten aluminum exploded, sending a geyser up into the air. I ducked back out of the way in just enough time to avoid having the molten metal cascade down my frontside. My right leg didn't fare quite as well. Some of the molten aluminum coursed down my lower leg and discovered a route into my boot, where it

proceeded to burn a hole into my foot. Let me tell you, you've never seen anybody remove a boot as fast as I did that morning.

At that early hour, I was the only one working in the foundry. I hobbled to the bathroom and stuck my right foot in the greasy, filthy sink, turned on the cold water tap and stood there on my left foot for two and a half hours until the next person arrived at seven-thirty. Spike had a key to the office and was able to phone for an ambulance. For the next three weeks, I hobbled on crutches to the Creative Writing Department. In a way the accident proved to be beneficial. I was able to devote more time to my novel *Chasing After Carnivals*, while goldbricking on Workmen's Compensation. That novel became my M.F.A. thesis. A couple of chapters appeared as stories in *Second Impressions* and later the book manuscript was picked up by Stoddart Publishing. Although the bound galley proofs were reviewed in *Quill & Quire*, *Chasing After Carnivals* never actually got published. Stoddart aborted it from its list. That was in 1985. In 1997, it appeared under my own imprint, New Orphic Publishers.

The arrival of Kinsella's story "Risk Takers" brought back these recollections. What sort of risks are we willing to take to become writers or artists? What sort of danger are we willing to put ourselves in?

After the first issue of *The New Orphic Review* appeared in April of 1998, I solicited a number of better-known Canadian writers to submit work for possible inclusion. Kinsella was the only one who responded. He was the only one who was willing to take the risk. He wasn't afraid to affiliate his name with a magazine still in its infancy – one that doesn't pay, at least not in monetary terms. I'm sure some of the better-known writers whom I tried to solicit material from were afraid to be associated with a magazine that has yet to prove itself, a magazine that might not contribute to the exalted image they have of themselves, especially here in Canada where we are so godawful concerned about being proper, about reflecting well. Here in Canada we don't take risks if there is the slightest chance of committing an error in judgment, one that might put us in a bad light. This attitude pervades the literary scene as well. It is an attitude that makes the whole of Canada stodgy, provincial, unadventurous, timorous and cautious in the extreme. We are so mortally afraid of risking our good names we have been rendered ineffectual and passive. We are acquiescent to the point of letting outsiders run our economy for us. It's called the branch-plant mentality. Once Big Daddy, usually in the guise of a foreign company, has created a factory, warehouse or industry, we Canadians queue at the door, hoping for job handouts – in our own country! That's the attitude of a subjected people; it runs very deeply in Canadian society and also in the literary community.

How many Canadian writers have you heard complain about such matters as royalties, publishers who don't live up to signed contracts, the lack of publicity given to books, never being able to get Canada Council Grants for masterpieces they most likely only dream of creating, et cetera, et cetera? Back in the late 1980s, I belonged to the Writers' Union of Canada, an organization that has been of considerable benefit to writers in this country. It is in large part responsible for the creation of the PLR Commission and Cancopy. However, after attending quite a few meetings at our local chapter in Vancouver, I began to notice certain tendencies displayed by members of that august association. I was struck by their insecurity, the need to puff up their egos and the propensity to whine about this or that or the other thing. These writers had herded together out of weakness and insecurity — in an attempt to improve their lot in life. They hoped to remove some of the financial risks inherent in their profession. I guess that's admirable enough. But it also became pretty clear to me that they attained to what was middle-class and secure and, in my opinion, the quest for security has become a rarefied sickness in North America.

I have a further opinion which some people might find discomfoting, namely that creative writing departments are bogus institutions. They are places where writers attempt to teach a craft that can't be taught. At best they are places where writers are able to earn a decent, middle-class living by dispensing questionable advice to students who will more than likely never become writers. A foot-high warning should be displayed above the entrance of every creative writing department — **Enter At Your Own Risk!** There are no jobs waiting for the graduates churned out by these departments. Writers make their own jobs. That applies to university creative writing programs as well. Writers have simply banded together to create niches for themselves, niches where they can earn a regular pay cheque.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not trying to suggest that we get rid of creative writing programs. On the contrary. I have a fondness for the absurd. I regularly encourage people to stake their lives on dreams as insubstantial as hallucinations. There is adventure in this. There is risk. And, after all, there are many other worthless professions in this society. Take, for instance, politics, certified accounting, televangelism, marketing, manufacturing, mail sorting, you name it. Professions are little more than glorified shelves on which to put people with largely redundant skills. That tends to occur in overpopulated countries — otherwise, those countries would suffer from massive unemployment, a condition that no sane society is willing to risk, as there would be too many angry people roaming around looking for victims whom they could relieve of capital or capital investment.

I have gone somewhat astray. Let me get back to risk taking, the theme of this editorial. Back when I was in the Writers' Union of Canada, there was an attempt to persuade us that we shouldn't give

readings for less than two-hundred bucks a shot. It seemed to me that this would work out well for writers who were household names, but for us near-anonymous types it would be a matter of cutting our throats. The Writers' Union, as well as the League of Canadian Poets and other such associations, are basically old gal and old boy clubs. The name of the game is: *You pat my back and I'll pat yours, you sponsor me for a reading and I'll sponsor you, and in this manner we can continue to feed at the public trough.* The idea is to form an invincible circle of graft around the granting body and, like a flock of elderly women at a Zellers' basement sale table, elbow newcomers out of the way.

If I were King Shit of the World, I would dispense with granting bodies. I would dispense with grants to cultural institutions. I would dispense with grants to artists, composers, filmmakers, writers and publishers. I would completely level the playing field. Artists wouldn't disappear, writers wouldn't disappear and over-subsidized publishers wouldn't disappear. They would simply relearn how to take care of business. I was talking to a small Saskatchewan publisher not long ago. He told me pointblank, "If block grants dried up today, I would be out of business tomorrow." If that is indeed the case, there is something badly out of whack with the publishing industry in this country. I have been acting as a small independent publisher since 1995. I operate in the black and, in addition to that, make a small profit, nearly enough to live on. Plus, I now publish a magazine that is breaking even. Possibly, just possibly, "recognized" trade publishers are going about their business in the wrong manner.

Of course, when I suggest that we level the playing field by getting rid of grants to cultural institutions, I'm not suggesting that this be done in isolation. We should withdraw subsidies to other industries as well. We should level the playing field for every business. Every business should pay the full cost of doing business. We should not subsidize lumber companies by letting them cut trees that are public property, we should not subsidize politicians whose main purpose it is to divert funds to cronies in industry and we should not subsidize professional sports by building community ice rinks or baseball fields that help develop talent for professional teams. We should not subsidize industries by building lines of transportation or letting them ignore the externalities involved in doing business (i.e. degradation of the environment and/or human populations). We should not subsidize the wealthy by creating legal loopholes that allow them to avoid taxation by headquartering companies offshore in tax-free zones, we should not bail out resource-based companies that have gone belly-up in resource-based communities and we should not subsidize workers who have plundered resources to levels of virtual non-existence. We should not bail out or give tax relief to sports conglomerates, we should not bail out condo owners who have

bought into leaky buildings and, most definitely, we should not bail out citizens, corporations or banks that have sustained heavy losses by gambling away fortunes on the commodity exchange market, as we are currently doing in Japan and Southeast Asia. In other words, I wouldn't simply single out artists, writers, publishers, filmmakers, composers, opera companies, ballet outfits, et cetera, et cetera. That is too easy, too convenient. It also smacks of scapegoating.

Subsidization goes very deep in this country. It also goes very deep in the good ol' USA. Nearly every region in the United States is subsidized by military dollars. (To verify this, simply take a close look at the Fortune 500 group of companies.) That is the reason why free trade will never work to the advantage of Canadians. The Americans have a system in place for stimulating the economy. During times of economic distress, they simply increase military expenditures to assure that the economy remains relatively buoyant. But, of course, the United States then has to sell the resulting military hardware or start a war in order to move old military equipment off the shelves. Let me pose a question: — Will military subsidization to entire regions in the U.S. be put on the chopping block in further free trade negotiations, the way our Canadian cultural industries will be put on the block? I rather doubt it. Having been born and raised in the good ol' USA, I know that that country does not subscribe to the idea of fair play. It subscribes to the idea of financial, political and military leverage. When I was playing football in high school, I was told by the coach: "If you think you can get away with hitting somebody after the whistle has been blown, do it. Just don't make it obvious." This attitude pervades American culture. Canadians ignore it — at their peril!

When I started New Orphic Publishers I didn't have any working capital. Jurgen Hesse showed me the ropes of self-publishing and convinced me that it could be done on a shoestring. The cost of printing my first book, a novel entitled *From a Town Now Dreaming*, was put on my VISA card for the tune of about five hundred bucks. I made that amount back within the first few months and then started to make a profit — more than I have ever received in royalties from Thistle-down Press or as an advance from Stoddart Publishing. Since that time I have published eleven more titles and now the second issue of *The New Orphic Review*. Subsidization simply isn't necessary. Nor do writers have to depend on the vagaries of the industry or on publishers who are often unreliable, disreputable and slow in the extreme. Plus, there are advantages to self-publishing. The writer maintains full control over his creation. Also, self-publishing offers a writer greater literary license. Even a book of poetry or a play can turn a profit. Indeed, I don't think there is a book in existence that can't turn a small profit, provided one doesn't go the route of estab-



lished vanity presses, pay interest on enormous amounts of overheard or support a salaried staff.

Of course, if you choose to self-publish your next masterpiece you are going to have to take a few risks. You will have to invest in your words. You will have to put your money where your mouth is. Personally, I feel writers and poets should have to invest in their work. They should have to assume some of the financial risk. This practice would keep them honest.

What prevents writers and poets from doing this? The answer is simple – fear! Fear that they might be ostracized, fear that they might be seen as not quite making the grade, fear that they might reflect poorly, fear that they might lose their shirts, fear that they might put themselves out of the running for the Governor General’s Award, et cetera, et cetera. Here I should issue a warning. Writers who self-publish their books *will* put themselves out of the running for the Governor General’s Award, since self-published books aren’t eligible. Only books published by “recognized” trade publishers are eligible. I suspect very strongly that this is a form of discrimination that contravenes the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and might even be a matter of collusion on the part of government and “recognized” publishers in Canada. But to put a new spin on an old adage, those who make the rules get to practice discrimination. This maxim also applies to the Writers’ Union of Canada. Only authors who have had books published by recognized publishers are eligible for membership. Despite all of the grand words about freedom of speech and opposition to censorship, the Writers’ Union practices its own form of discrimination.

Do you see how we are lockstepped into the same regiment? Take off down your own path and you incur certain risks. You are seen as illegitimate. You are viewed with stiff-nosed contempt. This contempt is very widespread. For instance, it is almost impossible to get a self-published book reviewed. Self-published authors aren’t taken seriously. They are thought of a dilettantes, as rank amateurs. Literary periodicals like *Canadian Literature* won’t touch them, because of certain elitist standards that have to be maintained. The popular press, including rags like *Quill & Quire* and *Books in Canada*, don’t review self-published tomes because, in general, self-publishers don’t take out expensive advertisements. By taking out expensive advertisements, publishers make certain that books get reviewed. You see, money determines which books get attention. It is a matter of one hand washing the other.



Had I not become a self-published writer, I wouldn’t now have the means to publish *The New Orphic Review*. The New Orphic Adven-

ture is based on crazy hopes, crazy dreams and a large amount of risk taking. For the most part, writers in this country prefer being sycophants and complainers to being risk takers.

I applaud the writers who have risked their good names by being published in *The New Orphic Review*. In particular, I am indebted to Jack Cady, Irene Wanner, Zoë Landale, Jurgen Hesse and George Payerle, established writers who were willing to risk their literary reputations by being published in the first issue of a magazine they were only given a vague description of. I want to thank W.P. Kinsella and Jana Harris for their submissions, for they have considerable reputations to put at stake. Of course, taking risks isn't anything new to Kinsella. Kinsella has taken enormous risks in his personal and literary career. When offered tenure at the University of Calgary, he declined it in favor of going his own way. He adopted (some would say appropriated) the voice of an imaginary First Nations person, namely Silas Ermineskin, for which he has received both praise and condemnation. (My own attitude on this subject can best be summed up in this manner: — I appropriate voices each and every time I sit down to write a story or a novel.) In his story "Risk Takers" Kinsella employs the voice of a pubescent girl and ventures forth into the arena of aberrant sexual conduct, a subject I don't normally associate with Kinsella's work.

In tone and feeling Kinsella's story is not terribly dissimilar to the stories by Jana Harris. I frequently laughed out loud while reading Harris' stories. She has caught so perfectly the lives of middle-class Americans: the petty concerns, the overactive libidos and the dysfunction that passes for normalcy. She locates her *Summer of the Stepmonster* stories in the shadow of the Boeing aircraft plant in Everett, Washington. While quite funny, her *Stepmonster* stories have a sardonic edge to them. Middle-class Americans have gone White Trash with a vengeance. Having grown up in that particular area of Washington State, I am familiar with the sort of people she is portraying. Their heads are as empty as tin cans. The few thoughts that rattle around inside have been formed by television and life at the mall. Harris reports that people either love or hate her *Summer of the Stepmonster* stories. It isn't difficult to understand why. The pubescent narrator understands one thing very clearly, namely that the adults of this world are trapped in a prolonged adolescence of their own. Children are blindly leading children toward a questionable maturity. Adults don't live noble lives. They live sordid, petty little lives.

As Editor-in-Chief of *The New Orphic Review*, I have decided to take another kind of risk. I have encouraged Hillel Wright to serialize a novella which began with his short story *Barbaric, Mystical, Bored*, published in the first issue of *NOR*. I have known Hillel for about eight years. Once an inhabitant of Denman Island, where he began

publishing the magazine *Minus Tides*, he has flitted from job to job, never quite settling down. A year ago he pulled up stakes and went to teach in Japan, a new adventure for him. I asked him to expand his story into a novella and he eagerly took up the challenge. By serializing his novella in *The New Orphic Review*, I am hoping to revive a tradition that has almost expired: the novel written on demand and serialized in subsequent issues of a magazine. It will be interesting to see if Hillel can pull off this feat. The review invites reader response.

Starting with this issue of *NOR*, I am reducing the number of poets in each issue. To compensate for this, I am going to now include a Featured Poet section. Our first Featured Poet is Steven Michael Berzensky (Mick Burrs) from Yorkton, Saskatchewan. I first met Berzensky about a year ago. Chad Norman (see Vol. 1, No. 1 of *NOR*) asked me to billet Berzensky when the latter passed through Vancouver to flog his latest book of poems *Variations on the Birth of Jacob*. Chad's **Royal City Poetry Centre** sponsored him to give a reading at the **Myles of Beans Cafe**. I should explain to the reader that I'm not terribly impressed by most poets. I'm not a fan of prosaic poetry and I have come to actively dislike poets who deliver poems with a Black Mountain lilt or cadence. I was prepared to have my patience tested. However, I soon found myself listening rather attentively to Berzensky's poetry. I found it powerful, passionate, full of song, thought-provoking and replete with luminous imagery. Later, in conversation with him, I came to understand why his poems are imbued with these qualities. Berzensky lives, breathes, talks and dreams poetry. He has honed his rather considerable skill to razor sharpness and it has allowed him to survive, if only marginally. He has risked everything to become a great poet and I admire that sort of spirit. For him, even the smallest things in life are possible sources of poetic inspiration. Take for instance, his poem "I know a good poem when I smell one." This poem was left hanging on our dining room wall. The inspiration for it was our compost bucket, and the dogs he saw portrayed in many of my paintings, now more or less on permanent display in our home-based **New Orphic Gallery**. In his poem Berzensky divined the fact that I am known by close friends as The Dog. This is how deeply and imaginatively his poetic pen is capable of dowsing.

*Variations on the Birth of Jacob* involved a great deal of personal risk taking by Berzensky. It was such a pivotal undertaking in his life, he decided to resurrect his old family name, the one brought to the New World by his ancestors but subsequently changed to Burrs in an attempt to be rendered down in the melting pot of America. (Berzensky was a draft dodger from the States.) However, he modified the family name of Berzinsky so it would read Berzensky – to bring out certain Zen-like qualities in his nature, he informed me. In other words, he adopted an old but new identity. Changing his name involved a certain amount of risk. Editors and publishers might not

recognize the author of *Variations on the Birth of Jacob*. Personally, I feel Berzensky is one of the best, most prolific poets operating in Canada today. In addition to five books of poetry published by various "recognized" houses, he has self-published countless chapbooks under his own imprint, Waking Image Press. I'm surprised he isn't better known. I'm not the only one who feels this way. Judith Fitzgerald remarked in a column in *The Globe and Mail*:

*Variations* offers readers language that seems always to be revivifying itself. In its opening sequence, *Undeclared Articles*, Berzensky successfully appropriates the voice of Nadezhada, author and wife of the much-worshipped Russian poet Osip Mandelstam....

In a subsequent entry, *The Poet's Apology*, Berzensky fleshes out his artfully crafted meditation on literary fascism with taut phrases and flexible rhythms....

It's a well-measured sigh woven through the tightly controlled middle series, *Illuminations* (which presents uncommon lyrical examinations of heightened "domestic" themes), before opening out into *Variations*, a moving exploration pivoting on *The Slow Decay of Metaphor* before finding resolution in *Knowing My Poems Cannot Save Me*.

In the Featured Poet section, Berzensky sets a high standard. It will be interesting to see if any other poet will be capable of equaling it.

This issue brings back a poet whose work first appeared in Vol. 1, No. 1 of *The New Orphic Review* — Jay Hamburger. The amount of risk taking I have done pales next to that of Jay Hamburger. Jay is Artistic Director of **Theatre in the Raw**. He has mounted productions of *Uncle Vanya*, *Waiting for Godot*, and of my play *Beyond the Call*, in addition to producing a regular one-act series which promotes new talent. Jay nearly lost his life when a fishing boat he was working on went down in a storm. That incident has resulted in him making every moment of his life count for something. At fifty-one years of age, he is a veritable human dynamo. Lyrics from one of his poems became part of *Godspell*. He could live a safe, comfortable, unchallenged life if he wanted to; however, that isn't his style. He chooses to gamble, to take new and unusual risks with **Theatre in the Raw**. **Theatre in the Raw**, in cooperation with *The New Orphic Review*, will now be sponsoring an annual one-act play writing contest, the deadline of which is January 1st of each year. (For details, please consult the advertisement at the front of the review.)

This issue of *NOR* introduces readers to Alejandro Mujica Olea, born in Santiago, Chile in 1947. A political activist at the time of the coup that brought down the Allende government in 1973, he was arrested, tortured, imprisoned and sentenced to eight years in jail. If

anyone is aware of the risks of free speech, it is Alejandro. In prison he wrote a short story entitled "Catrileum" and a book of poems entitled *My Only Love*. His biography reports that "In a search of the jail, carried out by the special secret police, his writings were ordered to be burned, and as a result of this Alejandro and many other political prisoners lost a piece of themselves." Alejandro is one of the founders of **The World Poetry Cafe**, which operates out of the venue **Myles of Beans**. Dave Myles, the proprietor of that cafe, is a longshoreman who has a soft spot for literature. On poetry nights he keeps his establishment open after hours and usually sustains a loss in the process. Without risk takers like Dave Myles, there would be no patrons of the arts; there would be no audience, period.

Last, but not least, I would like to acknowledge one more risk taker, namely Jurgen Joachim Hesse. Jurgen is a former staff writer with *The Daily Colonist*, *The Globe and Mail* and *The Vancouver Sun*. He has also prepared dozens of documentaries as an award-winning broadcast journalist for the CBC. Jurgen has never taken the safe road; he has never gone with the herd down the path to slaughter. At seventy-four, he continues to present himself with plenty of challenges. His life gives credence to the idea that if one provides oneself with new risks, one will remain flexible, vital and ornery well into advanced years. Jurgen knows very well the dangers inherent in taking risks. His largely autobiographical novel *Waiting for Zero Hour* documents how he managed to stay out of the army in Nazi Germany – by inducing psychosomatic illnesses, by malingering, by offering passive resistance. In this manner he avoided contributing to what we most deplore about that era in Germany. He did so at tremendous risk to his life, in a society full to the brim with informants.

This issue of *The New Orphic Review* includes two remembrances of Bill Reid, by sculptors who should be better recognized than they are – George Rammel and George Norris. Their personal and professional recollections were delivered at Bill Reid's Memorial Tribute held at the U.B.C. Museum of Anthropology. I feel these pieces should be preserved, not because they are great literature but rather because they offer insights into a difficult artist's life. In our rush to mythologize a great artist, we often turn him into an icon and thereby overlook his all too human side. These pieces capture some of the contradictions inherent in Bill Reid's personality. They allow us to glimpse some of the risks taken by Reid and anyone associated with him.

I think I have probably gone on too long about risk taking in art and literature. It is time for me to become silent, to let you, the reader, enjoy or maybe even get enraged over what you come across in this issue of the review.

W.P. Kinsella has published over twenty-five books. He is best known for his baseball writing and for the 115 stories told in the voice of Silas Ermineskin. His novel *Shoeless Joe* was turned into the movie *Field of Dreams*. *Dance me Outside* was also made into a feature-length movie. A story in *Red Wolf, Red Wolf*, "Lieberman in Love," won the Academy Award as best Short Feature in 1996. His most recent books are *The Winter Helen Dropped By*, *Magic Time* and *If Wishes Were Horses*. He has three grown daughters and four grandsons and lives in Chilliwack, B.C. with his partner Barbara Turner. He is currently working on a novel of magic realism, *Butterfly Winter*.

## Risk Takers

W.P. Kinsella

1969. Jee was not her real name. And I never knew her last name, though it was Van de something, or Vander something, for she was from a Dutch immigrant family. "Never mind," she used to say, "you couldn't pronounce it anyway."

The valley east of us was farmed by established Dutch immigrants who came to Canada after WW II; the fertile delta land was used for dairy farming and for market gardening. However, Jee told me she had come to Canada only five years ago, when she was twelve. She said her father had been in some kind of trouble in Holland and that relatives had paid the family passage to Canada so they could make a new start.

"Ha," Jee said derisively at that point in her story. Her father had worked on a dairy farm, but apparently lacked whatever skills were required for such work, and was fired.

"He was lazy and stupid," Jee said.

He then stole a cultivator, but was not even a good thief, for the RCMP caught him towing the cultivator behind his ragged pick-up truck, only a mile from his former employer's farm.

"Now, the asshole's in jail," Jee said.

We were both new arrivals in a community of tiny, rundown cottages and shacks about a mile outside a small city east of Vancouver. It was a rural slum occupied by the poor and the shiftless, designations that were not interchangeable, my mother insisted.

"There is nothing wrong with being poor," she said, "it can happen to anyone, Cathy," by which she meant us. Until a few months before, our family, my mother and father, myself and a younger brother, lived in a small rented house in a quiet neighborhood in East Vancouver. Then one Sunday afternoon in March my father died of a heart attack, after which Mother explained that while we had lived comfortably, we had lived month to month.

There wasn't enough money to pay the next month's rent. There was an insurance policy with my father's union, but the company and union were stalling, the union rep said it could take another year before Mother saw a dime.

Mother got a part-time job with a janitor service in this small city and we moved into a basementless, mildew-smelling cottage, amidst a cluster of shacks and cabins outside the city limits. The rent was twenty dollars a month. We had no indoor plumbing, a wood burning stove, and we carried water from a community spigot two blocks away.

"Her name is Markje," a market gardener's daughter told me on the school bus one morning. "She's stuck up. Thinks she's too good for the rest of us," the girl hissed into my ear. "And her living out in Darktown." She stopped, embarrassed, realizing that I, too, lived in Darktown.

I was surprised the market gardener's daughter even talked to me. The area we lived in *was* called Darktown, because the original inhabitants had been a few black people who came to the coast from an all-black town in Alberta and set up their own community in the 1920s. Over the years most of the blacks and their descendants found employment with the railways and integrated into Vancouver. It is said some of them are the landlords who collect rent on these dilapidated buildings, occupied now by the really poor and truly shiftless.

Jee's long, lemon-colored hair touched the back pockets of her jeans, which were faded to an existential blue and held to her wide hips by an expensive black belt with a heavy buckle sporting an embossed marijuana leaf. The principal spoke to Jee about the marijuana leaf, saying it was unacceptable, just as it was unacceptable for her to carry her cigarettes in the front pocket of her jean jacket, the top of the red cigarette pack peeking out like a pocket handkerchief.

"Fuck him and his creepy rules," said Jee. "He's from the valley, everybody from the valley is Dutch Reformed Church, like Christian Fundamentalists, only stricter and creepier. My mother reads her Dutch Bible as if it's going to put food on the table, and my old man, when he's home, and when he isn't using one of the family as a

punching bag, puts on a suit every Sunday and acts so pious shit wouldn't melt in his mouth."

Jee was everything I was not. She was pretty and sexy, with almond-colored eyes and full lips. I have plain black hair and a very dark complexion with a few seed-like freckles on my cheeks and nose.

"There were black Russians in your daddy's family," Mother said. "Your grandfather had the blackest eyes I've ever seen."

It doesn't matter how little I eat I'm still plump. I'd look better if I could afford to dress like everyone else, but I won't ask Mom for clothes money. I take whatever she scrounges at the Goodwill store. I've tried for an after school job, but there aren't many, and I live so far from civilization.

Jee had arrived in Darktown only a few weeks before I did.

"Second day I got on the school bus, that big bastard Cory DeJong sat down beside me. First he grabbed my tits and I told him to fuck off. He sat back and looked surprised like these little Christian girls in their skirts and sweaters let him twist their nipples every morning. Then the son of a bitch leaned across me, pinning me to the wall of the bus, and shoved his hand down the front of my jeans, pushed my panties aside and had a finger inside me all in one motion. I shrieked, but nobody paid any attention except his friends who were all staring.

"Maybe these plain-looking Christian girls do let him fuck with them, I thought. I wiggled like I was getting off on it. 'You don't need to hold me down,' I said. 'Move your arm and I'll do you, too.' He did.

"I reached over and unzipped his fly, his erection was just dying to escape his jeans. His buddies across the aisle were drooling, their eyes glazed with lust. I took hold of his cock, nice and gentle until I got a good grip on it, then I bent and squeezed and pulled and he screamed like he was being fucking murdered. He leapt into the aisle, screeching and tears running down his cheeks, trying to stuff himself back into his pants. 'Anybody else want a turn?' I said to the boys across the aisle. That was the first and last time any of them fucked with me."

That story was true; it was confirmed to me by several other students. I wondered, though, about some of the other things Jee told me.

"I steal," she said, "five finger bargains, all my clothes." We were walking the back roads after school on a sunny, lazy spring day, there was calm water in the ditches while crocuses and daffodils spangled the right of way and the smell of warm tree sap filled the air. Jee took a deep drag on her cigarette.

"You know you don't have to stop and give yourself up just because some security creep tells you to. Like the day I grabbed this



belt." She fingered the heavy buckle with the marijuana leaf. "Just as I stepped out the door of the store, this old lady lays a hand on my arm and says, 'You better come with me, young lady.'

"Well, I gave her a push and beat it across the parking lot. For an old lady she could move right along, but I got away with no sweat. Unless the security staff catches and holds you, the police don't put a high priority on shoplifting calls. You don't see a police car, siren wailing, on the way to chase down a kid who snatched a lipstick and ran. You ought to come with me sometime," Jee said. "You need some cool clothes."

She was right. I wore a plastic belt that was cracked and falling apart, and my jeans were the *on sale* kind, with plain pockets and no rivets or sexy inseams.

"There's nothing I ain't seen," Jee said on another occasion. "On that fucking dairy farm, the five of us lived in one room with a bathroom tacked on as an afterthought. It came furnished with a few sticks and a picture of Jesus on each wall. Living in a place like that you learn about sex quickly, not that I didn't know before. Our place in Holland wasn't much larger. They'd wait to have sex until they were sure us kids were asleep. But I'd out wait them. For all her Bible reading and all she said about Papa being lazy and stupid, when he'd go down on her she'd fucking freak. I felt sorry for her because she couldn't scream out the way she wanted to. She'd take a mouthful of pillow to keep from yelling. Then she'd go down on him, for like hours, and he'd sigh and groan and say the sweetest, sexiest things to her. Seeing them like that made me realize what kept them together."

I had little idea of what she was talking about, sex education in the school was only a rumor, and there were no red-hot videos to watch on a VCR after school. While my parents, when my father was alive, were civil with each other, they did not show affection in public, my presence, or my brother's, being considered public, and it had never occurred to me that they might actually engage in sex at their advanced ages. What went on in the night behind their closed bedroom door was never a subject of speculation for me.

Many of the things Jee said shocked me, though I tried not to let on, though I felt my face blush furiously. I was not quite able to picture the sex acts she described, they were just out of my vision like animals hidden in a thicket.

But there were apparently some things Jee didn't share with me. A girl at school told me that Jee's father had been out of jail for some time, had not come back to his family, was rumored to have returned to Holland, perhaps had been deported because of his imprisonment. The girl said she thought that Jee and her family, as non-citizens, would be scheduled for deportation, too. And maybe the authorities didn't know where they were.

In the washroom at school I commented on Jee's new lipstick, on the fact she always had cigarettes. "I got to fend for myself," she said. "The old lady doesn't have a dime. The church pays the rent, gives her a few dollars for food. Everybody else in Darktown is on welfare but she's afraid, and maybe with good reason, to get involved with the government in any way."

I'd seen Jee in the hall at school talking animatedly with a boy, one of the hoody types with a car that he drove at high speed up and down in front of the school at noon hour, wheels churning dust. Jee had her fingers on his bicep, leaning in, allowing her knee to rub his leg. When she left him she had a pack of cigarettes three-quarters full. We went to the washroom, locked ourselves in a booth and lit up. "Those creepy types are the easiest to con," Jee said. "They're not shy, they think they're God's gift to horny girls. 'Come for a ride,' he said to me. 'Give me your cigarettes,' I said, and rubbed my tits against him, just one touch to let him know I was serious. Easier than taking candy from a baby. I got bus fare from him, too. We'll go into Vancouver after school. You need some clothes and I need some makeup. The great thing is I can con him again tomorrow, and the next day, these creeps who think they're irresistible, who think every chick who makes eye contact with them is dying to suck their cock, are the easiest to rip off."

"Don't they catch on and become dangerous after you rip them off a few times?"

"Not likely," she said. "They're marks. Their egos are too big, they consider being ripped off foreplay. Steve, the guy I was talking to today, is cute in a James Dean kind of way. I'd trade him a blow job some noon hour, for a carton of cigarettes and bus fare for a week."

We strolled through a department store while she pocketed a lipstick that I'd admired, stashed some perfume for herself and eye shadow for both of us. She was brazen about stealing, never skulking or looking suspicious. She never glanced around to see if someone might be watching her.

"This is something you'd look really good in," she said in the clothing department, a few minutes later. She took a bomber jacket of soft brown leather off its hanger and held it up in front of me; it had silver buckles on the sleeves and shoulders. The price on the tag was astronomical.

"Go wait at the bus stop two blocks over," Jee said as we rode an escalator toward the first floor. Outside, she handed me the cosmetics.

"That jacket's got an electronic gadget on it, it'll shriek like a dying rabbit when I hit the street, but I'll be running full out when I activate the detector. I'll see you about the time the bus is due."

"Jee, you don't have to...." I began, but she was swallowed up by the lights of the store.

I paced around the bus stop for what seemed like forever. Just as the bus was pulling up and as I was trying to decide whether to catch it or wait for Jee — the bus only ran every two hours — she came bounding out of the park across the street and pushed into line in front of me.

"Everything's cool," she said. "I think I lost them. There was a young guy chasing me, but I hid under a parked car." She pointed to an oil stain from the thigh to the knee of her jeans. When we were settled at the back of the bus she produced the bomber jacket from under the bulky sweater she was wearing.

"We'll take a rock and smash that tag off it," she said.

"I can't take it home," she said. "How would I explain it?"

"Say I gave it to you. Something I've outgrown. I'll come by if you want and show your mother how much taller and broader across the shoulders I am now. I'll tell her I've grown six inches in the last year."

Jee had an answer for everything. The explanation worked. My mother was on her way to work and wasn't really interested in what kind of jacket Jee was giving me, just one less item for her to worry about.

It was after school let out for the summer that we met Frank and Angie. We were hanging out at the local cafe, spinning around on the counter stools, nursing Cokes and smoking, when they came in. They got out of a telephone company truck, one of those big white ones with blue lettering, with a hydraulic ladder on the back, a cherry picker I later heard Frank call it.

"I'm on call twenty-four hours," Frank explained later. "If there's a storm I have to get up at 3:00 A.M. and repair the lines after trees fall on them or the wind blows them down."

Frank and Angie walked into the Drop Inn Cafe and took one of the two tables in the center of the room. There were four booths down the outside wall and ten counter stools. They ordered large Cokes with ice. We could feel Frank staring at us. He was stocky with a red complexion, heavy red hair to his collar and a walrus mustache the same color. His eyes were a deep-set green-brown. Angie was very slim, wearing tight jeans, ankle-high black motorcycle boots and a well-worn denim jacket. Her hair was a shining bay color, worn very short in a pixie cut. Her features were delicate, her skin clear and pink, she had blue eyes and a pinprick of a dimple to the left of her mouth.

Jee glanced over her shoulder a couple of times. Once she spun slowly on her stool, boldly returning Frank's stare. As they were lighting cigarettes she stepped off her stool, her long hair swishing side to side making a quiet sensuous sound, and moved toward them.

"Got a cigarette?" she asked.

"Sure," said Frank, taking the pack from his shirt pocket and holding it out to her. As Jee took a cigarette, Frank said to her, "Why don't you and your friend join us?"

We did.

"I see you're a collector," Frank said, staring at Jee. She shrugged her shoulders, not understanding. "You've got cigarettes right in your pocket there," he pointed at her jean jacket, "yet you're smoking mine."

"Yeah," said Jee, smiling easily. "OP's taste better. I like to stock up. One of my great fears is that I'll run out of cigarettes."

"Used to be mine, too," said Angie, "then I met Frank, and now he takes care of me."

I realized when Angie spoke — she had a breathy, child-like voice — that she was barely older than us, maybe eighteen. Frank was twenty-five at least, maybe closer to thirty.

"How long have you two been together?" Jee asked.

"Couple of years," said Frank. "I found her hitching on a back road out near Aggasiz Prison; she looked to me like a dangerous escaped prisoner so I picked her up, took her captive and we've been together ever since. We got married three months ago, the day she turned eighteen. We got ourselves an A-frame way back in the foothills, no neighbors for two miles. We're renting but we've got an option to buy if it stays private. Privacy's very important to us."

I didn't really like Frank, though Jee seemed to, and Angie did little but smoke and smile her little tic of a smile when someone said something that interested her. I didn't like the way Frank looked at Jee, or at me for that matter, there was something commanding about his stare, something vaguely frightening, yet I wondered if I could resist it if it were turned full on me. I also didn't like the way he treated Angie, as if she were his personal property, something bought and paid for.

"I do most of Angie's thinking for her," he said at one point, while Angie nodded agreement. "She pretty well does as I tell her."

I kicked Jee's foot under the table but she scarcely glanced at me, her eyes were locked on Frank's face, as she pulled smoke deep into her lungs.

"You should come visit us some time," Frank said as we were leaving.

"I thought you liked privacy?" I said.

He scowled at me, and I felt my heart rate increase.

"We make exceptions." He gave us directions, drew a little map on a napkin. "Or you could visit Angie during the day. She gets a little lonely up there sometimes, and she's got all the latest records. I set up a charge for her," and he pointed across the street at the blinking sign of the record store, The Platinum Disc.

"There's something creepy about them," I said to Jee, as we walked out of town. "I didn't like the way he stared at us, at you."

"I think he's sexy," Jee said.

"Well, I do, too, in a kind of dangerous way."

"And imagine being like Angie, having your own house, getting to stay home all day and play records, being looked after, not have to rip people off for bus fare, or bum cigarettes."

"Everything has a price," I said, but let it go at that, not adding that I wondered what price Angie was paying.

We did visit though, a couple of afternoons later. It was nearly a five mile walk. As we traveled along the bush got denser, the sky more sheltered, the public road turned into a trail which ended when a private road began, the only visible tracks were of Frank's telephone company truck. The private road was heavily posted. NO TRESPASSING. NO HUNTING. PRIVATE PROPERTY. SECURITY BY SMITH AND WESSON.

The private road was damp and mossy, willows grasped at our hair as we walked. Ferns plucked at the legs of our jeans; the road narrowed. Ropes of moss dangled from cypress branches. Cheeky columbines, Indian paintbrush, and some waxy yellow flowers grew in the center of the road. We came round a sharp bend into a clearing and there was the A-frame, brown as sand. The windows, running from the floor to the pointed peak of the building, gave off a bluish light; a cloud reflected in the topmost triangle of glass.

We were at the back of the building. There was a large deck, newly stained, furnished with white wooden chairs and a white picnic table. We walked up the four stairs to the deck, crossed it and peered into the living room through the sliding glass doors. We had to put our hands on either side of our faces to deflect the light. An expensive black leather sofa faced us. There was a stone fireplace in the background. The deck narrowed and continued around the front of the house where a new red Datsun was parked, and the spot where the telephone company truck usually rested was clearly defined. In front, a heavily forested hillside rose at a harsh angle. The front was also glass panels with a large cedar door in the middle, the kitchen was to the right of the door. We found Angie at the sink doing dishes and listening to music at high volume from a new hi-fi set in the living room.

She started when we tapped on the glass, until we attracted her attention, but she seemed happy to see us. Inside, the smell of cedar prickled my nose. Angie offered us coffee, or a choice from an assortment of soft drinks in a startlingly large refrigerator, but before we could make a choice she interrupted to say, "No, why don't I make us drinks? There's this drink Frank taught me, a daiquiri, it has lime in it. I'd never seen a lime until Frank came home with them. It's delicious."

Angie got out three small glasses and a glass pitcher into which she measured white rum, lime juice, stirred in sugar, then took the pitcher to the fridge, which on command dispensed crushed ice into the pitcher. A minor miracle to us. In Darktown a apple box nailed to the wall outside a north window served as ice box, fridge and food storage unit.

"Take it easy," Angie said, after Jee drained half her glass in a swallow. "It tastes like fruit juice but it's got a kick to it." It was my first taste of liquor and maybe Jee's, too, though she would never admit it if it was. The three of us smoked and sipped daiquiris.

"Do you get lonely out here, so far from everything?" Jee asked.

"No. Frank takes good care of me. We need to be off by ourselves. Sometimes we get...pretty noisy."

She smiled her tic of a smile indicating with an upward movement of her head, the upstairs bedroom. Earlier we had been given a tour of the house which had stopped at the foot of the stairs.

"I haven't cleaned up there yet," Angie said, "besides, there are things up there you guys shouldn't see," and she smiled mysteriously. "At least until we get to know each other better."

We had two daiquiris each and listened to Angie's records. The drinks seemed to make Angie more talkative. Jee's cheeks flushed and she laughed more loudly than usual. For me, the room seemed occasionally to fall off its axis. Instead of feeling happy, I felt anxious and a little depressed.

"You're welcome to stay until Frank gets home," Angie said. "He'll be here about five."

"No. I have to get home," I said, before Jee could argue, though it was a lie, my mother would be at work until midnight.

"I should start dinner," Angie said. "Frank's teaching me to cook." She laughed. "I've had some real disasters. Frank gets... annoyed when that happens, and," she smiled her little smile again, and bent to pull an orange mesh sack of potatoes from a cupboard drawer.

Jee dawdled on the walk home, hoping I'm sure that we'd meet Frank. I walked fast, breathing in the ferny air, often getting a half block ahead of Jee.

"There's something eerie about both of them," I said to Jee later in the evening. We were sitting on the rickety steps outside the cottage where I lived. My mouth was furry-feeling and I had a slight headache.

"I think they're great," Jee said. "Imagine having a sexy guy like Frank to take care of you. It would be like heaven."

"There's something mean about him," I said.

"Guys are like that," Jee said. "I wonder what's upstairs that she wouldn't show us? Fuck movies? Sex toys? There's this whole store in Vancouver sells crotchless panties, oils, creams, and fucking dildos big as your arm. One of the DeJong twins brought a catalog to school

full of pictures of vibrators, leather panties and bras, and photographs of naked girls with their hands tied, giving blow jobs. I wonder if..." but Jee's voice trailed off.

"Whatever it is I wouldn't want to see it," I said, which wasn't really true, but I felt somehow obligated to argue.

"You're sure a spoilsport, Cathy. You'll never take a risk, you'll live in a slum like this for the rest of your life. You're not a leader, you're a follower, actually you're not even a good follower."

"Thanks a lot. But what's any of that got to do with whether I like Frank and Angie?"

"It's your attitude. You go with me when I steal smokes, make-up, clothes. When do you ever risk anything? Frank's a risk. All guys are risks. Angie took a risk and now she taken care of for life."

I couldn't articulate my fear, and I told myself that maybe that was all it was, fear. So I said nothing more.

At Jee's insistence we visited Angie again a few days later.

"Frank was real pissed off I didn't insist you guys stay for dinner," Angie said. "He must have just missed you. He even drove back to look for you, and we went into town that evening hoping to see you guys at the cafe."

Jee and Angie had daiquiris again. I drank Orange Crush over a full tumbler of ice cubes. It was while I watched them laughing, chattering, smoking, or rather when Angie went to the fridge for the pitcher of daiquiris that I noticed what it was about her that made me uneasy. It was the way she walked with an exaggeratedly correct posture, like an old person with fused discs. She moved carefully as if she was in pain, something that thrilled me as much as it frightened me. However, Angie showed no signs of pain when she threw herself into Frank's arms when he came through the door. She had been barefoot, but after a while, in preparation for Frank's arrival, she put on her black boots and a creamy satin blouse that tucked into her jeans, showing off her tiny breasts. I noticed that she made a point of not inviting us up to the bedroom while she changed.

"Frank likes me to look a certain way when he gets home," she said, "and he doesn't ask that much for all he does in return."

After leaping into his arms, Angie kissed him passionately, wrapping her legs around his waist. Frank gripped her denimed ass with his stubby-fingered hands that had little tufts of red hair at each knuckle. Frank did most of the cooking. He was mildly impatient with Angie's ineptness in the kitchen.

"Can you cook?" he asked Jee at one point, after Angie had sliced a tomato up and down instead of crossways.

"Try me," said Jee ambiguously, a little drunk, as was Angie.

We ate on the deck. Frank had changed into Bermuda shorts and as I watched, the red hair on his legs was turned golden by the sun. Afterwards, we sat around drinking coffee and smoking. Frank

brought out a bottle of Southern Comfort, along with thimble-sized glasses. I refused because I didn't like the aftermath of the daiquiris on the previous visit, plus I knew liquor made me lose some control, and I didn't feel this was a situation when I could afford any loss of control.

Later, as the sun was setting into the forest, as Angie returned from the washroom, Frank pulled her onto his lap in the big, white deck chair. He kissed her for a long time, arranging her body, his left hand gripping a breast, not fondling but clutching, his right caressing her satin blouse, the belly of her jeans, before settling into the crotch of her jeans, his big hand spreading her already open legs.

I felt terribly uncomfortable. Like a spy. I glanced at Jee, who, a forgotten cigarette burning uncomfortably close to her fingers, stared at them as if conjured. I could see that Angie was responding; she had one of her small hands down the front of Frank's shorts. They were kissing ferociously now, Angie thrusting her pelvis against Frank's big hand.

I scraped back my chair and stood up. Frank broke the kiss, smiled at us past Angie's head as she melted into his neck.

"I was going to offer to drive you ladies back," he said, "but it appears we have a situation here."

He stared boldly at us while continuing to rub Angie's crotch. Jee took a deep drag on her cigarette. "How about if we see you early evening tomorrow at the cafe? Unless, of course, one or both of you would like to join us upstairs?"

He heaved himself up out of the chair. Angie nestled in his arms, licking his neck. He stared searchingly at us as he walked into the house. I took Jee's hand and pulled her away.

"No thank you," I said, speaking for both of us. Jee frowned at me as I led her down the steps to the grass and in the direction of the road.

Jee was sullen on the walk home.

"You could have gone if you wanted to," I said.

"And leave you sitting, or to walk home by yourself?"

"Would you have if I wasn't there?"

"I think so. The idea's so scary. And Frank's so sexy."

"I don't think so."

"Different strokes," said Jee.

"What would three people do?"

"If you have to ask you've got no business being there."

"You're so experienced," I said nastily. "Seriously?"

"Instinct," said Jee. "Instinct, and willingness to take risks."

Frank and Angie were at the cafe next evening.

"Sorry about last night," Frank said, "but a call from nature always takes top priority."



Angie smiled her little tic of a smile. Frank treated us to sundaes, pineapple for me, chocolate for everyone else. Then we walked around the small shopping district.

"Let me buy you each a little present of apology," Frank said. He seemed to know exactly what pleased us, a carton of cigarettes for Jee, eight packs of twenty-five, an expensive lipstick for me. I almost went for a shade called White Peach that would have set off my dark complexion, but at the last moment I remained traditional and chose Ripe Raspberry.

A few nights later, the Saturday of the Labor Day weekend – we'd begin our final year of high school on Tuesday – Jee and I hung around the cafe until closing, both hoping that Frank and Angie would show up; at the same time I was scared that they would. We walked off into the night, breathing the cool, damp air, hearing the gravel crackle under our shoes, the occasional scuttle of an animal in the underbrush. An almost full moon illuminated our way. We giggled, smoked, walked, drawn it seemed to Frank and Angie.

As we neared the clearing the glow was like a sunrise, a forest fire.

"Do you think it's a fire?" Jee asked.

This was not our first night visit, but on the two previous occasions the building had been dark, the moon reflected off the topmost triangle of window. We walked around the building. The Datsun and the telephone company truck were cold and dewy. Once, a raccoon had clacked across the deck while we stood statue-like on the lawn, staring. We watched the house for a long time, imaging we heard things, groaning, crying, the more violent sounds of love.

Tonight, the house was totally illuminated, and the sounds were not like anything we'd heard, or imagined. We stopped just out of view of the house. I thought the sounds were of a bird, or birds, clattering, flopping, crying out to escape. Jee gripped my hand. We advanced across the lawn to the edge of the deck. The night was yellow and black. Every light in the A-frame was on. Music was playing on the hi-fi, Donovan, Rite Coolidge, The Beatles, loud enough to carry to the edge of the deck but not overpowering.

We glanced at each other, inched up the steps to the deck, straining forward, trying to make out what was happening. The glass doors were wide open. Frank had his back to us. Angie was bent over the arm of the black leather sofa. She was naked from the waist up, her face against the leather seat cushion.

Her arms were tied behind her. Frank was wielding a belt or a length of leather strap, bringing it down hard across Angie's ass, the backs of her legs. Her ankles were tied with a leather thong. It became clear as we watched that this was not a punishment inflicted in anger, for the strokes of the strap were often a half minute even a minute apart.

Frank was talking to her, constantly, though we couldn't quite make out what he was saying, for he was speaking in a measured, almost conversational voice. There was the sound of the strap striking Angie's denimed ass, her cries and whimpering, the soothing music, the unintelligible words Frank spoke, then the strap again.

After we'd watched five or six strokes, Frank talked for a longer time, as if he were making a serious argument, as if Angie was in a position to do something, anything. He bent close to Angie to hear something she said. He nodded. He set the strap down and, reaching under her, undid the zipper on Angie's jeans. He pulled them down a few inches at a time until they were bunched about her knees.

Still talking to her, he picked up the strap, and at that moment the record ended and suddenly we could hear Frank's voice clearly, even though he was speaking toward the interior of the building.

"Let me hear it, baby. Tell me how much you want it. Show me how much you want it."

Angie was crying, whimpering, babbling, but I know I saw her raise her ass an inch or two in response to Frank's words.

"That's it, baby, that's it," he crooned, then brought the strap down twice in succession, once across her bare ass, the second across the backs of her legs.

Angie screamed, and we could make out, "No more. No more," as Frank began talking to her again.

Jee let go of my hand and strode across the deck toward the open door. I followed, my heart hammering. They were so involved they didn't see or hear us until Jee tapped loudly on the glass pane beside the door.

"What's going on?" she said, her voice ragged.

When Frank turned I expected the worst. I thought he might begin flailing at us with the belt. If he was surprised he didn't show it. He gave us a sly, knowing half-smile.

"Everything's cool. We play a lot of games. We get off on it."

It was Angie's reaction to our arrival that stunned us. Eyes wild and swollen from crying, her face pushed into the leather of the sofa cushion, she screamed, "Get away from us!"

Her voice was shrill and full of tears, like a child throwing a tantrum.

"Get away!" she shrieked again. "You've spoiled everything. This is why we live so far from people. You've spied on us. Get away, leave us alone."

We retreated to the deck. Frank followed us to the door.

"It's cool," he said, the strap still dangling at the end of his arm. "You best go now. Everything will be cool tomorrow. She'll be okay. I'll have a talk with her. Maybe we'll see you at the cafe."

As we walked into the darkness, the music came on again. Donovan singing about San Francisco and flowers. For a long ways we

heard the strap like a car backfiring. We heard it until we were so far away it must have been only memory.

"Wow!" said Jee.

"It's sick," I said.

"I've never seen anything so incredible," Jee said. Her breath was shallow and I'm sure I could hear her heart beating. Her step slowed as she lit a cigarette, and even over the sound of our footsteps I could hear the force with which she pulled the hot smoke into her lungs.

Later, as I recalled the scene on the deck, I wondered what if Jee had been alone, would her purposeful stride toward Frank and Angie have been to intercede or to join them?

"I don't want to see them again," I said to Jee the next afternoon. "Surely they won't have the nerve to show up at the cafe."

But, as we walked toward the cafe after school, Frank's truck was parked at the curb.

"Wait here," Jee said. I did, though I should have gone with her. She straightened her back, walked to the window of the truck, she was wearing a raspberry-colored sweater, leaned in, her breasts on the window ledge. A moment later she stepped back, opened the door and got in. The truck eased away from the curb. She didn't even wave.



"I said to him, 'Whatever you do with her I want you to do with me.'"

We were in a cubicle in the school washroom. Jee lit cigarettes for each of us.

"You didn't."

She smiled. She unbuckled her jeans and moving cautiously, sat down. I saw all that I needed to. I thought my heart would burst from my chest.

"I stayed overnight," Jee said. "I'm gonna like work for them."

"Work?" I echoed stupidly.

"Like housekeeping. That's what I told my old lady. What she don't know won't hurt her."

There were so many questions I couldn't bring myself to ask. I refused to go with Jee to the cafe in case we ran into them. I was the outsider now, they couldn't be themselves around me. They had too many secrets.

Jee relayed an invitation to dinner from Frank and Angie.

I couldn't make myself say the words. I just kept shaking my head.



Jee was spending at least three nights a week with Frank and Angie and often missing class. Frank dropped her off at school on the mornings she did attend.

Then they were gone. She didn't come to school on Friday or again on Monday. Monday night I walked the lonely miles to the A-frame, only to find it scary and silent. Leaves crunched under my shoes as I walked across the deck and peered into the vacant living room. The empty house creaked ominously in the night. In a light wind, tree branches dragging against the eaves frightened me.

"Acht, gone nord. Work. Work housekeep," said Jee's mother, shrugging her shoulders.

A few days later I saw a telephone company truck parked by a house under construction. I leaned in the passenger window, the way Jee had done with Frank.

"Do you know what's become of Frank?" I asked, "stocky guy with red hair, big mustache," I added. The driver was dark and thin, eating a lunch of fish and chips, wrapped in newspaper.

"Took a transfer way up north, place called Hundred Mile House, way out in the wilderness."

I hoped Jee might write, or even Frank. I'd visit if they asked.

Last week I took the bus into Vancouver. In a clothing store on Robson Street I stole a pair of Levis. From our darkest closet I took a worn out black shoulder bag of my mother's, one she would never use again. I filled it with empty cartons, newspapers, junk. Leaving my old unstylish jeans and my purse behind in the changing booth, I admired the fit of the new ones in the mirror. "I want to see how they look in daylight," I said. No one stopped me as I stepped into the street and kept going. Jee would have been proud of me.

ZOÉ LANDALE lives in Courtenay, B.C. Her work has been published in numerous magazines and anthologies. She is the author of three books, *Harvest of Salmon*, *Colour of Winter Air* and the widely acclaimed *Burning Stone*. She teaches writing at North Island Community College and by e-mail. She also designs gardens.

## Skeena River

Zoë Landale

Half a lifetime  
of letting the Skeena flow  
in & out my eyes  
might still not be enough  
to assimilate  
its chill green language.

Along the banks,  
ice is the colour of greyed sky.  
Division  
of slowed waters  
around islands. Flood plains  
which curve & curve  
into hieroglyphs.  
Cedars, cottonwoods with root balls  
like scrotums, shrivelled & dried,  
tweaked  
from the turning, muddy  
banks.  
Rush of air as the planet revolves.  
Black on sandbars, the trees  
lie tiny in the distance, beached  
marine mammals.

Magic winter,  
the water alight with white  
poured from wandering clouds.  
Snuggled into the hill,  
a house with a tin roof waits;  
plume of smoke, cleared driveway.

I want to stop,  
go down,  
be home.

The Skeena faces  
the house.

Surely, from its small warm rooms  
the runes of water  
would seep  
clearly  
through my moving years.

JANA HARRIS hails from Sultan, Washington. Two books of poetry *Manhattan as a Second Language* and *Oh How Can I Keep on Singing?* were Pulitzer Prize nominees. The latter was a Washington State Governor's Writers Award winner and is now being adapted for educational television. Her novel *Alaska* was a Book-of-the Month Club alternate selection. Her seventh book of poems, *The Dust of Everyday Life*, was recently published by Sasquatch Press. Her second novel, *The Pearl of Ruby City*, is forthcoming from St. Martin's in 1998. She teaches creative writing at the University of Washington and writes reviews for the Seattle Times. The following stories come from the unpublished collection, *Summer of the Stepmonster*.

## A Skyqualamie County 4th of July

Jana Harris

I have a headache *this* big and I'd like to send it to my father and my stepmonster.

You probably think that I'm hungover from the 4th. But if the truth were told, I didn't get to light one sparkler or see one Roman candle bursting in air.

Both my father and stepmonster work at the same airplane factory and because they get paid double-time for working half a day on the Fourth and, because I had to work all day for Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show leading ponies around the carousel at the mall, we decided to celebrate the 4th on the third, which started out with a bang.

When I came downstairs to breakfast, my father put his fist in my face because the phone rang before eight in the morning. It was someone from Buffalo Bill's calling to see if I wanted to work, which I did. All the same my father put me on restriction, it always upsets him when he wakes up to the phone ringing. The day before the same thing happened, only that time he grabbed the collar of my Wild West Show shirt and threw me upstairs. He was still mad about the awards ceremony. It was the day after school let out and I'd gotten a placard for Student Most Improved. I went from getting minus F's at the beginning of the year to getting almost B's. I would have

gotten some solid B's if I had learned my nine's. My eight's were a cinch; every time someone learned their 8's multiplication table, Mrs. Wilson gave them a Mars Bar. But by the time I got to my nines, Mr. Neff had taken over my remedial math class and I didn't get along with Mr. Neff. He would never think of giving anyone a candy bar, not even if you learned your times tables up to 20.

When I showed him the award, my father wrinkled his brow into his balding crew cut and said that no one ever gave him a placard for bringing up his F's. Nobody gave him a candy bar when he learned what eight-times-six equaled. What really riled him was that I didn't pass my sophomore year. Not that I flunked, I just didn't have enough credits to be a Junior, so next fall they've made a special category for me called a ju-more. My father said, "Ju-more? What kind of a communist school are my taxes paying for?"



So at my dad's house we had our 4th on the third. He worked the barbecue while my stepmonster served strawberry shortcake and then let off all the fireworks. "Kids back behind the chainlink fence," she said to her nine-year-old twins, Simeon and Desiree. She bleaches her hair lighter than mine, pulling it back in a French roll and I always joke about how I can see the roots growing out behind her ears which is why she hates me. That and the fact that I can't eat her strawberry shortcake. She doesn't believe me when I say it makes me nauseous. Every time I put a fork full of it to my mouth, I gag and then she calls to my father that I'm sick to my stomach which could mean that I'm pregnant. This is followed by a lot of shouting after which I usually get sent to my room. My father says, "Forget the placard." According to him, the fact that I haven't gotten pregnant is my greatest achievement.

When I shoved Simmy and Desiree back behind the cyclone fence which surrounds the plastic above-ground pool so that we could get on with the fireworks, my stepmonster glared at me so hard her seafoam-green eye shadow crinkled: "I said *kids* behind the fence. That means *you*." I told her that since I was fifteen, I sort of thought of myself as an adult, and she said, well, you're not, and I said, well I disagree, and she said if you don't like it, leave. So I did.

I walked down the block and sat on the sidewalk which has all this white flowering alyssum growing up through the cracks. Even though my dad's neighborhood isn't considered a subdivision and even though the streets aren't paved, the Skyqualamie County planning commission decreed that since the local government had paid for the sewer, the neighborhood had to pay for the sidewalks. After everyone put a do-it-yourself sidewalk in front of their house, there was a big fight about who should maintain it. In the meantime, some



of the concrete cracked and in other places it buckled so badly that some slabs have crawled up on top of others. And where the sewer maintenance crew had to dig from the street to a house to repair a break in the line, there were big gaps in the sidewalk. I sat out in front of Mrs. Wilson's, because her sidewalk has buckled up so much it's almost as high as a chair. And there's always the hope that my ex-math teacher might come out of the house so that I can tell her about my award and get a Mars Bar.

It was times like these that, if I were still living at my mom's, I would go out to the detached garage and talk to my angora rabbit who's black and white and marked like a soccer ball. I would take him out of his cage and hold him in my lap and stroke him like a cat. He even has claws like a cat. Instead, I watched these really little kids who were in the same grade as Simeon and Desiree blowing up mailboxes with M-80's that they bought at the fireworks hut on the Skyqualamie Indian Reservation. After they exploded all the mailboxes near the Wilson's, I got this weird sensation that every mailbox on our street had a crying need to be turned to smithereens. I even got used to the noise, which wasn't as loud as the dynamite my sometimes boyfriend Eldon stole. And dynamite doesn't hold a candle to the noise of the mortar simulation demonstrators someone got from the U.S. Army base at Fort Lewis and sold as firecrackers last year, though dynamite does make a good-sized hole and creates a lot more smoke than an M-80 which can barely tear a mailbox from its post.

When I finally did go back to my dad's, all the family fireworks were used up and my stepmonster started yelling at me all over again: "Where have you been? Your father's worried sick about you. You can't upset him on account of his chronic cough caused by getting Agent-Oranged during the war, he could get cancer," blah, blah. She told me I had her on stress pills. I told her I considered that no small accomplishment.

The next day I worked at Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show for eight hours straight in the mall parking lot under the hot sun leading Mr. Toad around and around while the little kids who'd had the M-80's took turns riding him. It's an okay job, but not as glamorous as my best friend Iona Hink's. She's studying to be a model. Iona was real thin even before she started taking her mom's diet pills. And because she's so much taller than everybody else, she can pass herself off as someone who's old enough to drive a car.

Mr. Toad is one of the show's more temperamental ponies. He's a pinto with one blue eye. The skin around both eyes is pink with black dots, so it looks like he's wearing mascara. The blue eye and the pink skin make him ultra sensitive to the sun which causes him to have these ornery streaks where he stops dead. If you get on him and try to make him go in a circle again he rears over backwards. I was assigned to Mr. Toad, because he never pulls that kind of behav-

ior when I'm leading him. My boss gives me praise because of it. I told him I'd had a lot of experience with difficult animals, not the least of which were my father and stepmonster to say nothing of my mom's new husband, Carlton.

When I got home, my stepmonster had just finished touching up her and Desiree's hair with Summer Blond by Miss Clairol. She came storming out of the bathroom and announced that I was grounded from the front porch where the grownups were going to watch the municipal fireworks and had to go to my room which only has one window facing north, away from the fair grounds. I was scared I was never going to see any fireworks, so I called up my mom, who lives on the other side of Skyqualamie (just a few doors from Iona in one direction and Eldon in another) and asked if I could come over and spend the night. She told me, "Considering what's just happened, it would be a relief to have you."

My mom would come to get me more often if she had gas money. Sometimes Carlton lends it to her, but then I have to be nice to him. An hour later when she arrived in her gold Camaro with "Baby Too" written in red script on the front fender, she didn't say one word about the problem of gas money or having to be nice to Carlton because he was my meal ticket. He and my mom were secretly married on Valentine's Day. I wasn't invited on account of the secret, only my sister-the-pig got to go to the ceremony. She was my mom's witness while some guy who works with Carlton at the new gravel quarry stood up for him.

We drove past the huge science fiction buildings of the airplane factory and then passed the miles and miles of landing strips which make the valley look like God's graph paper. First I asked my mom how the soccer ball rabbit was and then I asked about fireworks and could I maybe invite Iona to come over. She groaned and said she'd already seen enough explosions for one day.

What happened was this: my mom and Carlton were going to go for a morning swim at the old rock quarry (the use of it is one of the benefits of Carlton's job), but before they even drove out of the driveway they got into an argument about my sister-the-pig. Carlton said that he wasn't going to pay her to baby-sit my little brother while my mom went for a swim, and my mom said that it was only fair that she get paid. Since Carlton (who's got a square head like a pit bull, no neck, and a beer gut) was doing the paying, he thought he should have a louder say in the matter and his vote was "no." That made my mom so mad she got out of the car and ran back into the house. Of course Carlton followed. When she asked him to leave, he said, "You leave." She said, "Certainly not, it's my house." That's when he broke the Shaker chair and threw her against the refrigerator. You should see the bruise on her knee cap, it's this deep color of

Dutch iris and when she fell, she broke her baby toe which was too small to put in a cast.

My mom doesn't truck with violence, not since her encounter with the boyfriend she had before Carlton, so she called the police. When you heard the sirens just before noon, you probably thought: there's the first kid of the day to blast off his hand. Quite the contrary. It was eight sheriff's officers in two Ford Broncos. They handcuffed Carlton, then gave my mom a pamphlet on domestic violence which they strongly advised her to read. "Read it?" she told them, "I could have written it!"

I'll never forget the fight that broke my mom up with the boyfriend she had before Carlton. I remember it every time we have strawberry shortcake. I don't recall a thing about what he looked like, just that he had my mom pinned on the linoleum floor by sitting on her chest. He tried to choke her and it was all my mom — she's tiny compared to him — could do to scream, "Come on kids, help me!" I started biting and scratching him and even drew blood, but he didn't feel a thing. So I grabbed a fork out of my strawberry shortcake and stabbed him. To this day he has marks on the back of his shoulder blade. Sometimes my mom still jokes about it. When she's in a good mood, she says, "Nice fork action, kid," and plays a little tune with her silverware. She does that every time she eats strawberry shortcake as sort of a bittersweet memory.



The bottom line is that I didn't have any fireworks on account of my mom's nerves. She said that since Carlton had picked each firecracker out himself, the sight of them could only bring her bad memories. Instead of celebrating, she laid on the couch with a cold towel on her head, and her broken toe and bruised knee raised up on the new decorator pillows my sister-the-pig gave her as a wedding present. We don't know who bailed Carlton out, probably someone at the quarry where he works. Now it's rumored that he's living in his Bahama blue gravel truck, which has a sleeper cab.

The next day Iona could see that I was down in the dumps about not having a Fourth of July, so she invited me to come to her interview at the Talent Modeling Agency. They asked a lot of questions and took her picture and then told her what her potential was. The agency started a portfolio for her. Even I couldn't believe how beautiful she looked in those proofs. Eldon used to call her a long-stemmed rose, and she is. Those legs. He calls me *dumpling*. Iona says that behind my back the story got changed around a little and that what he really called me was the Pillsbury dough-boy. I think she just said that because she's jealous that Eldon asked me out after he broke up with her. When we got home we decided to celebrate Iona's potential

and Carlton's departure, so we went into Iona's basement and opened a Mason jar of the raspberry wine her father makes from his share of Gramma Hink's berry crop and then hides behind the loose cinder blocks near the well pump.

Iona's mother is never in a good mood, because she's always on a diet. Her latest excuse as to why I can't come over is that I'm having an affair with Iona's father who is our school bus driver. He's shaped like a green bean — Iona says that's where she got her tallness. When Mrs. Hink came home from the Diet Center, we snuck out the basement door and went over to my house, but my mom wasn't up to company. I could tell she was depressed when she asked: "Did I tell you that after the cops jumped Carlton and dragged him out of the house, he looked just like a puppy who'd been spanked? Did I tell you that?" My mom has a soft spot for give-away puppies and kittens. That's how I got my rabbit, someone abandoned him in the lettuce bin at Safeway and my mom brought him home. She's always nursing some stray, until it defiles the carpet one too many times. Then she takes it on a one-way ride to the Fort Lewis military training grounds.

My mom said I could visit with Iona, but only if we went outside. And another thing, that rabbit of mine hadn't been out of his cage since the last time I was home and it was time I gave him some air. I put this little leash on him, the one I'd made of bailing twine which I got from a bale of Mr. Toad's hay. Iona and I tried to walk him down the road while we talked first about her potential and then about how I'd had to move out of my mother's house because Carlton didn't like me. Iona said that now that they were probably going to get a divorce, maybe I could move back and we could be *best best* friends again. Iona's advice was: every time I came to my mom's, I should bring some clothes from my dad's place. When the perfect day came, I could just not go back to my stepmonster's house. All my belongings would be at my mom's, so my father couldn't confiscate any of my valuables and hold them for ransom to make me return. I said I'd like to leave one thing at my stepmother's: the headache I'd gotten from drinking all the raspberry wine.

The Soccer Ball wasn't leash-trained and didn't walk very fast. He was always wanting to stop and eat grass or hop under a rhododendron. We wrapped him in an old blue towel and took turns holding him and walking, which was a real chore because all the post-4th of July noises frightened him and he dug his claws into our bare skin, scratching our arms. My little brother still had a bunch of M-80's he hadn't let off on the 4th and Eldon was somewhere on the other side of Gramma Hink's raspberry farm exploding the blasting caps he'd stolen from Iona's Uncle who's a logger.

Walking up and down the street and having our visit that way was kind of interesting. People such as Gramma Hink who hadn't

seen me in a while would slow down and wave as they drove past. You can guess what they thought I had in that old towel. When I first moved out of my mom's, it was rumored that I was pregnant and since my father doesn't believe in abortions, everyone suspected that I'd gone away to have my baby. And now here I was with my rabbit covered up in a blue towel which to them was living proof! Iona laughed and said that if anyone at the Fast Gas Mini Mart asked her about it, she'd be sure and tell them it was Eldon's.

Now that she's becoming a model, Iona has to practice posing. As we walked, she twisted that long rubber-band body of hers into exaggerated stances, pretending that a cedar fence post was a camera man. As cars drove by, it was a toss-up as to who they would stare at first, Iona who was posing like an Egyptian or me with my soccer ball baby.

Then Iona had an inspiration. It was the perfect way for me to get even with everyone and it only hinged on two variables. One was Eldon and the other was her income as a model. Her plan was that after I moved back into my mom's I shouldn't go see my dad and stepmonster for a long time, not until Iona got her driver's license. Then with her modeling money we'd buy a fancy little baby blue receiving blanket. I would call up my dad and say, "There's someone I'd like you to meet." Then she would drive me and Eldon over there with the soccer ball rabbit. She and Eldon would sit in the front and I would sit in the back, because Eldon was allergic to fur-bearing animals. Eldon and I would walk up to their front porch with the Soccer Ball wrapped in the baby blue blanket and we would watch their faces. Iona said to forget the Student Most Improved Award, this would be my finest hour.

Behind us, we heard a diesel engine with brakes that squealed like pigs. It was Carlton's Bahama blue gravel truck. We knew he was living in his rig; what we didn't know was where he was going to park it. As he turned into my mom's driveway, I watched him through the just-cleaned windshield. My mother was right; he looked exactly like a spanked puppy. Even Iona could see the resemblance, especially in the dark pouches under his eyes. As I said, my mom really has a soft spot for homeless animals. I told Iona: my only hope was that it wouldn't be too long before she got fed-up and took Carlton on a one-way ride.

"What are the chances of that?" Iona wanted to know. She was posing again and rolled her eyes skyward.

"Not too good," I told her, bouncing my soccer ball rabbit. My mom had one set of rules for canine puppies and another for boyfriend puppies. With boyfriend puppies, she was the one who usually got taken on a one-way ride.

**“Second drawer from the left of the sink,” Iona reminded me as we walked into the house. In times like these, even she knew where the forks were kept.**

JANA HARRIS. (See biographical entry on page 33.)

## In Love And Spandex

Jana Harris

I'll tell you one thing, my marriage isn't going to be like my father's and my stepmonster's. Or like any of my mom's marriages. And certainly not like my sister-the-pig's. But that's not what I tell people when they ask, how am I? How do I like living at my mother-in-law's? I tell them that I don't live with my mother-in-law. I live with my mother-in-law *to be*.

Iona says people only did that kind of thing in ancient China and has been telling everyone I'm getting bound feet. The idea that her first trip down the aisle will be as my bridesmaid and not as the bride has come as quite a jolt. Now she walks around school with her lips puckered as if she's been sucking a lemon wedge. I don't care what Iona says, I'm a lot better off than I used to be. My almost mother-in-law said she'd adopt me, but it would take two years minimum to go through the courts and by then I'd be eighteen. So an engagement was the perfect solution.

It all happened the weekend I went to visit my mom who was moving. When she asked how it was going, living with my dad, I said that my stepmonster had threatened to throw me out if I didn't shape up, but who listened to her? My mom was moving because her new husband, Carlton, borrowed a whole lot of money against her house

in order to buy a gravel truck with a tag-along trailer. When he got his new Bahama blue Peterbilt, he lost interest in the marriage as well as in fixing up my mom's house. After staying out all night setting his truck's points and getting the timing just right, he didn't have the energy to paint the downstairs like he'd promised. You would think my mom would have at least gotten the truck in the divorce settlement, but all she won was custody of Carlton's horse. In my opinion, the added mouth to feed – compounded by the difficulty of making payments on the second mortgage Carlton signed her name to – is what caused her to grow those mail pouches under her eyes.

Because nobody would buy Ranger – who had a sore back due to Carlton's beer gut and his heavy Western saddle – my mom ended up having to sell her house and giving away the horse. The weekend Ranger was supposed to be taken to his new owner was the weekend I went to see her and I helped put him in the horse trailer.

It was as if he knew our home was being broken up. He didn't want to go up the ramp, so I had to push his huge brown rump from behind while my sister-the-pig pulled on his lead rope and my little brother stood to one side cracking a long black buggy whip Carlton had left behind. My sister's husband was in L.A. and she was too depressed about him being gone to pull very hard on Ranger's lead rope. My little brother would rather have been riding his dirt bike than getting his new motorcycle boots covered with horse pucky, so I wasn't getting much help. All complicated by the fact that Ranger's a pretty smart horse. Each time we got him to the top of the ramp with one hoof inside the trailer, he would rear up and fall backwards, clobbering me. First his muzzle hit me above the eye, making my face swell up like I'd been in a fight – which very well might have been the case, if I'd spent the weekend with my father and stepmonster. Then he struck out with his front leg, raking his hoof down the front of me.

While all this was happening, my mom came to the door and said, "Telephone, Mariah." I thought it was Sven. You remember him, he's the guy I met in summer school English. I said, "Like, could you take a message? I'm tied up at the moment." My mom came back to the door a minute later and said it was my father on the line and that he had a message for me: "Get your butt to the receiver." I thought: wow, he has a lot of nerve. I was really pissed at him because not only wouldn't he sign the release so that I could get my driver's license, but he said that if I went over his head and got my mom to sign, he'd throw me out of the house.

I told my sister to keep trying to load Ranger into the trailer while I went to the phone. My dad told me he'd had it with me, because I'd left without cleaning up my room: "You're not ever coming back here!" When I told him, "But I have school tomorrow," he said that



wasn't his problem. Then my mom got on the phone and pleaded, "But D-a-aryl, I'm moving to a motel, where's she supposed to go?" My mom was so fagged-out from splitting up with Carlton and having to sell her house and losing out on getting possession of the gravel truck, that she didn't have the energy to fight with him which would have been a losing proposition anyway. To make matters worse, while we were on the phone, Carlton cruised by the house, screeching his truck's brakes, rubbing in the divorce settlement.

I don't remember how we got Ranger into the trailer and to his new home at Rent-A-Horse Ranch, I was too busy wondering where I was going to live until school was over and whether or not I'd be able to finish my junior year without having to change schools a second time. Somehow my mom found the energy to help me check around and we eventually decided on Iona's house which was just down the street.

Iona's father had finally committed himself to a detox program and was taking *An-abuse* so if he took even the tiniest swig of home-made raspberry wine, he'd throw up. He even had to be careful about using shaving cream and mouthwash, because of the alcohol content. As long as Iona's father wasn't ducking into the basement for one of those Mason jars he hides behind the well pump, I felt pretty good about being there. Even taking into account Iona's moods. She had just broken off with her boyfriend for the umpteenth time and was on another diet. I never knew when she would lash out at me because she didn't like the way I made up my eyes. She hated the way I swept my eye-liner and if she got the jitters from not eating and was somewhere where she couldn't sneak a cigarette, the arches on my lids made her crazy.

Staying at Iona's had the added advantage of it not being a toll call to Sven's house. Sven has curly pale hair like mine, baby fat on his cheeks and these ice-cube blue eyes which are indescribable. Sven's mother says we look like twins. That would upset most guys — being told they looked like a girl — but Sven's a pretty level-headed kind of person. We both roll our eyes the same way which Iona thinks is creepy.



When my mom took me back to my dad's house to get my stuff, I couldn't believe the clutter on the front lawn. At first I thought Elvis and the neighbor dogs had gotten into the garbage again and wondered why someone didn't feed that dog a Drain-o burger. Then I recognized my hot pink Spandex shorts from half a block away. The orange Day-glo shirt I wear over them was still dangling from the window sill of my room. I knew exactly what had happened: my dad got into another argument with my stepmonster about moving to

Australia where their problems wouldn't follow them, then stomped up to my room, gathered everything in one giant armful and heaved it.

My mom — who'd been packing stuff all day in order to be out of her house so that the sale could close — somehow found the umph to help fold and sort my school clothes from my play clothes. While we were picking grass clippings out of my belongings, we caught glimpses of my stepmonster inside the house watching us from behind the living room drapes. I always know when she's nervous: she starts fiddling with her hair-do. She must have run out of prescription stress pills, because she was frosting her bangs for the second time in a week. Per usual, she had swatches of blond hair wrapped in aluminum foil which is how we spotted her. The aluminum caught the light from the kitchen like tinsel on a pacing-up-and-down Christmas tree.

"You'd think that Tasmanian fruitcake would come out here and give us a hand!" Those were the only words my mom uttered the entire time. Even my stepmonster's parents, who lived in the mobile home across the street, would have come over to help if they hadn't been away on vacation. They're not my true grandparents, but they're the only grandparents I've ever known. My father doesn't speak to his side of the family and my mom's mother lives a long way away. When she does come to visit, us kids are not to take the Lord's name in vain or use the word "grandfather" in her presence.

My mom and I piled all my stuff into the trunk of her Camaro which burped while it idled in the driveway, because she couldn't afford to feed it 92 octane super unleaded. We had to leave the car running — the starter motor was broken and at the moment a repair bill was out of the question.

My Mom dropped me off at Iona's. When Iona had to drive her dad to his AA meeting — she only had her learner's permit, but her father got his license suspended due to too many DWI's, so it was Iona's role to drive him wherever he wanted to go — I called Sven and had a long talk with him about my dad's madness cycles.



By the time I got home from school the next day, Iona had already stopped speaking to me. We'd had a fight about which one of us was going to the dry cleaners to apply for the job. On weekends the cleaners employed a clown to stand on the traffic island in front of One Hour Martinizing to help draw in customers. It was only minimum wage, but easy work and Iona and I were both qualified. Iona said — to no one in particular — that a body ought to at least have the courtesy to let her hostess apply first, especially if a body was a non-paying, live-in guest. I said okay, okay. (Who wanted to be a stupid

clown, wearing a red nose and waving their arms six hours a day for a measly four dollars and thirty-five cents an hour?) Just then the phone rang.

It was my mom. I thought she called to cry on my shoulder because Carlton had buzzed past her house, screeching the brakes of his new gravel truck, but no. She said when she got home from her job at the WorseThanJehovah's Witnesses Church convalescent home — which was supplement work to her part-time job driving the Meals on Wheels bus to and from the Senior Center — there was this really “with-it” looking lady sitting on her front steps waiting to talk to her.

Right away I recognized Sven's mother. You remember her. Every time Sven was over at my house and my dad started knocking me around for getting a phone call when I wasn't even supposed to know our unlisted number let alone give it out to anyone, Sven would go home and tell his mom who usually called the cops. By the time my stepmonster got home from work at the airplane factory there'd be a police car in her space out in our driveway. Of course she blamed me. She told everyone I had itchy fingers when it came to dialing 9-1-1.

When I lived at my dad's, I spent most of my time in Sven's mother's kitchen trying to figure out my father's madness patterns. Or I helped her study for her esthetician's license at the Sky-qualamie Beauty School while looking through catalogs of new lines of fall make-up. The big color this year, by the way, is “brick.” Brick lips, brick cheeks, brick shadow. Sven's mom calls them the building blocks of beauty. She gives me all her used make-up plus a lot of free samples.

If she wasn't home when my dad went on one of his rampages, me and Sven would sit in his room and make each other up. He's real good with lid liner, you should see how steady his hand is, better than my sister-the-pig who went to Beauty School, but had to quit when her husband went to L.A. Not even she can sweep my lids like Sven does. He gets his talent from his mother.

Sven's father makes a lot of money in construction building fast-food restaurants, so Sven's mother doesn't have to work — unlike most of her girlfriends. She says there's so much pressure on women these days to bring in a little extra so that each kid can have his own set of wheels. When all her friends got jobs, she was at a loss as to how to spend the extra time she used to use up talking on the phone. She started devoting the a.m. hours to fixing her face and working on her hands and nails after lunch. That's when she decided, what the heck, and went back to Beauty School even though she's almost forty.



So when my mom described a really “with-it” looking lady, I knew just who she was talking about. According to her, Mrs. Jorgenson

came right to the point: She'd never had a daughter and none of her sons let her put dresses on them. Since Sven and I were so tight, and I needed a place to stay, it would be just fine with her if I went to live at his house where she could keep an eye on things. Then there was this dead silence after which my mom cleared her throat and asked me, "Why didn't you tell me you two were getting married?"

How could I? I didn't know myself. I don't think Sven knew. But his mother has second sight and sees things before they happen, so I guess it must be the case.

Everyone was real happy except my dad who said he didn't like being talked down to. That's because Sven's mom went over to his house and told him under no uncertain terms exactly what she thought of him and exactly where he could mail his child support payments if he had any kind of social conscience whatsoever. I didn't think she and my stepmonster exchanged a single word. Not "hello," "good-bye," or "kiss my feet."

Just before I moved out of Iona's and in with Sven, my mom got all gushy and asked me, "Well, are you having sex?" I told her no, Sven didn't believe in sex before marriage. That's what he wrote on a Health Class questionnaire – I'd snuck a peek at it over his shoulder. My mom said, "Oh?" adding: well, if there was sex, I knew how to find the Planned Parenthood office. Then her face went stiff and she laid down the law: I had to graduate from high school before she'd sign any papers to let me get married. I should just remember this if I had in mind getting a baby any time soon.

Since my sister-the-pig had a baby before she finished high school, I wasn't about to go through that again. She had a real cute little dark-haired girl. Even though the nuns wouldn't let her hold the baby, they did let her look at her and have a picture taken with the nurse-nun holding the newborn, standing next to my sister's bed. When she got home from the hospital, she gave me the photos for safe keeping. I take the snap shots out every now and then and look at the tiny squinched up face which reminds me of a kitten before its eyes open. It's a good thing those pictures didn't get lost when my dad threw all my stuff out the window – I never know when my sister might ask to see them. Even though she let the baby be adopted out and the adopted parents gave her their own name, my sister named her Glynda after the good witch of the West in the WIZARD OF OZ with Judy Garland which she'd been watching on TV when she went into labor. Whenever I look at the photos of Glynda I think: that's what I'm going to name my first baby girl.

Even though my sister went on to finish high school and marry her boyfriend and get another baby all within a year of having Glynda, she said it was a terrible experience, because her second child developed all these problems. He had allergies and asthma and skin rashes and was prone to every kind of bad behavior you could

think of. There were times when she wished she'd never had him and then, of course, she hated herself for having those thoughts. My sister finally got so fed up she took him to the doctor and the doctor asked if she smoked and my sister said, no, not at the moment, but that her husband did. The doctor nodded and said "secondary smoke" was the root of all the little boy's problems. The long and short of it was that my sister and her husband talked it out and decided he would do his smoking outdoors or in the garage. He'd like to quit, but had never been able to. He says he has friends who've been on heroin and who also smoked and that kicking heroin was a piece of cake compared to quitting cigarettes. So from then on he smoked outside the house and my little nephew got better. But my sister always wondered if her husband didn't hold the inconvenience against the little guy, because it was right after that my brother-in-law started being unreliable.



When Sven's mom came to pick me and my things up at Iona's house, she said I could sleep in her sewing room — since she was going to Beauty School she didn't use it any more. Sven's family has this really neat ranch-style house which rambles on and on. Every time Sven's dad makes some extra money, he adds a wing or hallway or pool room. He used a lot of the left-over materials from whatever fast-food restaurant he was building, so each addition has a different flavor. The flavor of my bedroom-sewing room is Roy Rogers on one wall and Dairy Queen on the other three.

The neat thing is that, unlike Iona who is taller than I am and wears a size four, Sven and I are both the same size, so we wear each other's clothes. He especially likes to wear my Spandex pants, even though, like me, he could lose a little weight off his thighs and rear. Sven gets a big allowance, so he gives me clothes money which is why I have such a large Spandex pants and shorts collection in all the "now" fluorescent colors. We play "theater." He puts on my clothes and I put on his. When I zip him up in back, he says the touch of my fingers gives him the quivers. I love the way his flesh feels, soft and squeezy — unlike most men, he hardly has any hairy-ape hair on his arms and legs.

Once we almost got caught. Sven was hopping out of a new pair of my lime green Spandex pedal pushers and a leopard stretch top when his mother poked her head in the door. Her moon-pie face had just been done according to the Clinique make-up computer so that it looked longer and less flat: wrinkle stick around her eyes and mouth, concealing stick over that little pock mark on her cheek, continuous coverage over all, mascara, eye emphasizer, brow shaper, and "brick"

lipstick. She either didn't see what was going on or thought it best to let it pass. All she said was, "Telephone, Mariah. It's your mom."

I had to stop and think: Mom? By now I called Sven's mother "mom." Then there was my stepmonster whom my dad had ordered me to call "mom" and last, but not least, there was my real "mom."

It was my real mother who wanted to know if I could come home to the motel and help her out for the weekend, she'd just gotten out of the hospital. When I heard the word "hospital" my knees went to jelly. She said she had blood clots in her lungs and the doctor had told her to take it easy for a while.

Of course I went. Her living room-bedroom with kitchenette was filled with packing boxes which I went through one by one while she explained that she'd been under a lot of stress and that's what caused the clots to clog in her chest. After not getting possession of Carlton's truck and having to sell her house, complicated by the fact that my sister-the-pig had had an emergency right in the middle of moving, she said she felt like someone had taken a sewing scissors to her innards. Sven drove me over to the Weekly Rates Motel in the black Trans Am his dad had just bought him for turning sixteen, and which Sven says he's going to sign over to me when I get my license. He was wearing a pair of my neon blue Spandex shorts, so he couldn't get out of the car to say "hi" to my mother, which was probably a good thing.

My mom was all upset about my sister-the-pig when she should have been concentrating on giving up drinking like her doctor ordered. But without a beer now and then, she said she just couldn't cope. The doctor had also ordered her to quit one of her part-time jobs, but then how would she make ends meet? And now there was the hospital to pay off. She said she would like nothing better than to have her clots treated, but part of the problem was that in order to really diagnose them, the doctors had to feed her this blue dye which might cause more clots. The other part of the problem was that she only worked half-time at each of her jobs and didn't qualify for health insurance. A beer a little before noon and another before the game shows started was the only thing that kept her blood pressure down.

As I unpacked the boxes, my mom kept rehashing my sister-the-pig's emergency: her husband got up one morning, got dressed, kissed my sister and nephew good-bye, saying he'd be a little late coming home from work, because he had to swing by the airport and pick up one of his boss's relatives. Instead he went to the airport and got on a plane for L.A. He called my sister up and said he still loved her, but wasn't sure when he'd be back. She got so upset she started smoking again and then her little boy's asthma kicked up. On the day Ranger was supposed to be taken to his new owner, she came over to cry on my mom's shoulder. She said she still had dreams about Glynda: anyone could look at those baby pictures and know that lit-

tle girl wouldn't have given her mother a day of trouble. She told my mom she felt life wasn't worth living and wanted to do herself in. My mom said, half jokingly, "Well, you can't do it here! I'm moving." So my sister went home and took too many lithiums.

As I said, my mother's been under a lot of stress and now there's the fear that one of those clots might get into her brain. My sister has stopped speaking to her and my mom says that's what caused the clots. To make matters worse, she's afraid my little brother will get into the wrong dirt bike gang in her new neighborhood. All because of Carlton's gravel truck. My mom said the last straw came when he discovered her whereabouts. Now Carlton buzzes through the motel parking lot at least twice a week.



My marriage isn't going to be like that. And Sven's certainly not the kind of guy to kiss me good-bye, tell me he'll be home from work a little late, then get on a plane for L.A. We've got too close of a relationship. Take yesterday for example. He's always surprising me with little presents: a pair of black and silver Spandex Capri pants with 175 metallic stitches to the square inch. As usual they fit both of us. And when I wear them with that leopard stretch top he bought me last month and my zebra-striped bra, I look like I'm from hell — or so he says, he's always giving me compliments. And as I said, Sven's real good with lid liner. Even Iona likes the way he sweeps my eyes. When he graduates, his father says he's either going into diesel mechanics or refrigeration. In refrigeration you make mega bucks, so I'm sure that's what he'll do because he wants to buy me my own beauty shop. We're going to name it Mariah's Derma Clinic with Nails by Mariah. He spoils me. He even wants to help out with the little things on his days off. When I get to be my mom's age, I'm not going to be juggling part-time jobs or lying on a couch worrying about my clots.

I don't care what Iona says about ancient China and bound feet, I like living with my almost mother-in-law. Even if I weren't make-up and Spandex rich, I'm a lot better off than I used to be. Although if you asked my dad and my stepmonster, they'd probably assure you I'm still the same rotten person underneath.

# Featured Poet

**Steven Michael Berzensky**  
(Mick Burrs)

Photo Missing

## Shutters

a painting by



STEVEN MICHAEL BERZENSKY (Mick Burrs) hails from Yorkton, Saskatchewan. He is the author of five books of poetry, *Moving In from Paradise*, *Children on the Edge of Space*, *The Blue Pools of Paradise*, *Dark Halo* and *Variations on the Birth of Jacob*. Also, he estimates that he has sold over 4,000 copies of his 22 self-published chapbooks. From 1988-90 he served as editor of *Grain*. He is also a playwright and painter.

## Notes in Favour of Poetry and Against Poetics

Steven Michael Berzensky

I was not a poet when I moved to Vancouver, Canada, at the age of twenty-five, in November, 1965. I was a draft dodger, one of the pioneering protesters against the Vietnam War. A few months after landing here, I wrote "To Kent – Practicing Chords – One Block from Stanley Park."

You, playing the night guitar  
plucking the strings,  
running your fingers through them

do you hear  
Leda in the park  
being raped by swans,  
by ducks berserk?

You continue...in the dark.

No, in actuality, those lines wrote me. This was my breakthrough poem and the first of mine published in this country, in *Talon* magazine, September, 1966. I learned then that I liked to be surprised by words: the way they nestle against each other murmuring among themselves; the way they glitter when they combine, producing sparks of radiance; the way they build images of a deeper and more

unfathomable reality than I usually encounter every day; the way they engage my soul with their notes of felicity, their spells of ferocity.

Poetics is the reflecting on an event (the poem) only after that event has been concluded. Poetics in the discourse about the meal after the meal is over. It is not the food itself. Poetics tell us nothing about how to prepare the next meal, how to make the next poem. This is why poetry is not poetics. It is secondary to the poem and never primary.

I liked writing Poet's Notes for the back pages of my latest two books, talking about certain poems, providing some background for the reader, some additional information about what inspired me to write them or what the poems are connected to, the kind of stuff a poet might refer to when introducing a poem at a public reading. But I liked writing the poems more. Perhaps this is why I am only secondarily a critic or scholar and primarily a poet. The frame of mind that I must be in to write notes about poems is not the same frame I am in when writing the poems. This is why poetics is ultimately not satisfying to me either as a poet or as a reader. Yet here in these notes, I am dealing in poetics. If they also mutate into poetry at times, then I will feel somewhat better about them.

The poem is the breathing gift of light and sound that I pluck sometimes from the vast net of surrounding darkness.

For the poet, imagination has no built-in limitations, whereas poetics can only be, at best, intellectual guesswork for the scholar. Poetics cannot create any of the poems it admires. It can enjoy the producing of its theories, but its theories cannot reproduce the joy of making poems.

As a poet, the poetics I could never accept are those that attempt to write precise prescriptions for the "approved" poem. I have not yet found the poetics that can explain exactly how I have written any of my poems.

Some poetics treat their subject as if the author possesses knowledge superior to poetry itself. Aristotle, for instance, who formulated the first "Poetics," was not a poet, yet he wrote about poetry (including epics and verse dramas) as if his mind encompassed the poet's. A poetician — if I may coin a word here — who is someone similar to a politician — likes to take something refined and perfected, and in the guise of admiring it, pretend it is really a raw rough beast, one to be corralled, tamed, trained, broken in. Or worse, the poetician likes to go forth and hunt it down, shoot it, then perform an autopsy on the once vital galloping body. Poetics may recognize a champion horse but it will never breed one.

POETICS, CONCEPTIONS OF. P(oetics) is traditionally a systematic theory or doctrine of poetry. It defines poetry

and its various branches and subdivisions, its forms and technical resources, and discusses the principles that govern it and that distinguish it from other creative activities.<sup>1</sup>

Whoa! Let's stop right there. No need to read this entry any further. As someone dedicated to the art of poetry, a practitioner, I am shocked by many of these dominant terms: SYSTEMATIC! DOCTRINE! DEFINES! VARIOUS BRANCHES AND SUBDIVISIONS! TECHNICAL RESOURCES! PRINCIPLES THAT GOVERN! None of this has anything to do with the poetry I write. When someone talks about "doctrine" and "subdivisions" and "principles that govern" — I, for one, do not feel I am being treated as an authentic resident of the liberating realm of poetry. Instead, I feel I am being forced inside the barbed wire territory of a concentration camp, manned by armed guards who only pretend to be the supporters and friends of poetry.

I am wary of the power some poeticians try to wield over my imagination. I am wary of the silver keys they carry, ringing on invisible chains in their pockets, reverberating against the walls of these darkened barracks, where poets are simply trying to survive against the sometimes terrible odds, as the "benign guardians" patrol the shadows of the poetic grounds they believe they preside over.

Writing the first raw draft of a poem is not a cold deliberate act: it is a *fevered spontaneous expression*. It's the exact opposite of what Wordsworth described as "emotion recollected in tranquillity." I never feel tranquil when I begin writing a poem, nor do I feel serene at any stage when rewriting it. If anything, "composing" a poem cannot be done when one is fully "composed." Putting a poem together has less to do with relaxation than it does with coming to articulate grips with some inarticulate complex cause of tension in the mind, body, and spirit of the poet. Poetry can be a compressed word-oriented means of reconciling irreconcilable opposites, whether they are ideas, emotions, facts, attitudes, values, viewpoints, images, characters, memories — whatever. Even the compact three-line haiku serves as an expression of a sudden release from tension: that moment of revelation when One equals Zero, when foreground melds with background, when microcosm and macrocosm are perceived to be in a state of unity, or when any pair of contraries synthesize into one startling harmonious whole.

What Wordsworth the poetician, not the poet, was talking about was his peaceful pastoral ideal, his personal poetics. Fine. How then did it become yet another prescription for other poets? Poetry as "emotion recollected in tranquillity" is an academic truism that came into existence as both a substitute for and a barrier to further plumb-

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<sup>1</sup> Alex Preminger, Ed., *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, Princeton University Press, 1974, p. 636, entry on POETICS

ing the realm of poetic creation. When I was a student of literature in university, I was only supposed to read and critique poems, not also write them.

Now a fevered spontaneous expression is something quite difficult to sustain through ten or twenty drafts, let alone the thirty or forty versions I sometimes write. As the initial period of inspiration never takes place within the confines of poetics, it also does not get lost completely in any long follow-through. While re-visioning is not often spontaneous, it is never systematic either. The hard work I do on a poem to make it seem effortless and focused and under control is the other part of my job as a poet, taking me beyond the fevered beginning state. In fact, this is why I am a poet in the present tense. I'm still discovering how to write poems. And how to re-vision them.

My artistry as a poet is always being tested and challenged anew by the problems of structure and details, phrasing and cadence, image and metaphor that I have to resolve in any particular poem and in an *unusual, unprescribed, and unprecedented manner*. Unless I achieve such a resolution, I try not to deceive myself that "this poem is ready for the world."

My personal poetics is being developed and expanded within the liberating zone of the re-visioning process. But it would be wrong for me or anyone else to presume that I operate under some deliberate system, following a rigid doctrine of principles, applying a pre-programmed set of technical resources, while governed through it all by cold reason and "brute force." I am not a computer. I am a flawed poet with a conscience. And I am conscious of what I am doing, writing poems, and of what I am using, my own techniques, but I am *not too conscious*. There remains some magic and mystery in all this creating. I like it that way. To even begin to forge a formal poetics would be to systematize a process that remains formative, still evolving, partly conscious but primarily subconscious.

I feel much closer to the unmapped and unexplained creative powers of many of my peers, those poets who are still living and those who preceded me, than I do to the theories of doctrinaire poeticians.

I live and work and play in the final wilderness. I enter it every day. I take it with me wherever I go. And it does not belong to me alone, this world of dreams. The spirits of humans and animals and other divine beings reside within us here. Old message, new images always await our attention.

Yorkton – July, 1998

## Changing Dimensions in the Backyard of the Donners

a half hour ago I woke from a desolate dream  
enclosed in darkness  
my face a few inches from the ceiling  
catching my breath  
thinking the bunk bed had become a tomb

now I am seated outdoors  
beside the goldfish pond where the bees and dragonflies  
flit above the landscaped bed of yellow flowers  
and reeds flicker where they are reflected  
as quivering water

nothing is more real than anything else  
when in the depths I see small stones  
lit by the sun  
when I felt the breeze  
stroking the thousand hairs on my arms

whatever frightens cannot last forever  
so it must be beauty  
that always returns  
in some form or other  
to clear the sludge from drowning visions

[June 27, 1997, Woodenville, Washington –  
June 20-24, 1998, July 18, 1998,  
Yorkton, Saskatchewan]

# I Know a Good Poem When I Smell One

this one is made of orange blossoms  
an orchard glowing with the sweetest juiciest words

and this one is made of steaming porridge  
hot cinnamon oatmeal filling your nostrils  
as you awake in the next room

and this one carries its overwhelming stench  
into the back alleys of your brain  
a versatile compost pile  
of warm earthy scents  
that would push away  
the most sensitive visitor  
to this wild eden/  
perfumed garden/  
image-strewn backyard

come and sniff these recycled lines  
you curious dog,  
your tail  
wagging the aromatic wind –

Oct. 9/97 – June 9/98

# Dreamjunk Variations

(a poetry sequence: eight poems)

## parade

What you keep returning to:  
 that multiple parade of images  
 marching through the intersection  
 of wakefulness and sleep.

The dreams you are showered with  
 are the confetti of your soul.  
 Gather them for safekeeping –  
 these dreambits, dreamscrap –

just before your daylight obligations  
 start to sweep up  
 all the refuse of night,  
 the latest secrets of self.

## collision

In the last scene of today's dream I found myself arriving late at a huge auditorium. When I opened the door, there was an explosion of applause. The audience had just heard an inspired reading by one of our most admired poets.

I regretted my own absence from this special event. As if to compensate for the poetry I had missed, I abruptly awoke.

Images were floating in the light escaping from my eyes. Debris let loose from the silent but severe collision of wakefulness and sleep.

## pillowed

Every day you wake drowsy with images  
that belong only to your blanketed body.

Sometimes in the night your eyes  
brush a passing bird's wing.

Sometimes you find feathers  
beneath your pillowed skull.

## inner

I let my dreamgiver lead me  
down the aisle into my reserved seat.  
I do not resist this mysterious entity  
who remains the usher in my ribcage,  
the guide inside my skin. I yield  
to this shadow who projects and screens  
flickering and fascinating visions  
in the theatre only I can visit.

Here earth and hell and heaven  
intermingle in the dustless beams  
of an immeasurable inner light.  
Wake to poems, curled up, still  
sleeping in my hands: deep-rooted images  
that will sprout into words, grow into worlds.



## duty

The dreamgiver's truth leaves a hangover.

Your body wants to shake it off upon waking  
so you can feel normal again and join  
the other prisoners who lope through  
their scheduled routines.

You believe only your daily de-liberation matters:  
this fitting-in / this living by numbers /  
this zombie existence.

But I am a poet and I tell you  
my duty begins  
where the dreamgiver's  
unchained offering ends.

## definitions

Anti-poetic: The mass-produced mundane.  
Polluted materials, conglomerate poisons.

This is the otherness we walk through every day,  
persuading us to forget, step by step,  
our own spark of light, other god-immersed spirits,  
and the life-bearing, word-brimming reality.

Poetic: Liberating visions through dreamlike imagery.  
Neglected antidote, healing elixir.

## **dreamjunk**

Treasure your personal goods,  
 those deemed worthless  
 by the practical managers  
 of matter and time.

(We are blinded by cost-effectiveness.)

“Dreamjunk!” some say.  
 “Not meant to be marketable.  
 Dreamjunk! Dismissable as doomsaying  
 – and forgettable as heaven!”

## **retrieval**

On certain nights I fall asleep beneath the heavy shadows that strictly belong to the body politic, its brutalities and stupidities, its agonies and lies. It is these shadows I must acknowledge and subdue.

Upon waking, I occasionally capture the residue of dreams. When I am fortunate, I re-view these fragments. They help me grasp some forgotten timeless wisdom. For the sake of my rumpled spirit. In the glow of my discoloured soul.

HILLEL WRIGHT is the author of *Single Dad* and *Welcome to the Below Tide Motel*. His stories have been published in *Big Valley*, *Black Cat*, *Event*, *Expression*, *Island Life*, *Minus Tides*, *Tongue Tide*, *Westcoast Fisherman* and *Wordworks*. His manuscript *Zen Coyote Stories* is seeking a publisher. "Never an Ill Wind Blows" is the second installment of a novella entitled *All Worldly Pursuits*, begun in Vol. 1, No. 1 of *The New Orphic Review*.

## Never an Ill Wind Blows

Hillel Wright

1979

A Southeast gale had struck. The wind was screaming outside the disheveled cabin of the thirty-seven foot West Coast salmon troller *Sassy Mary*. Inside, the cabin floor was strewn with empty beer cans, bottles, cigarette butts and roaches. The boat strained against her spring lines at the dock as a 50 knot gust struck the harbour. Outside on the ocean, it was blowing a steady 40 knots, gusting to 60, rain pelting — a normal late summer gale on the west coast of Vancouver Island.

Inside the cabin a small group of fishermen sat or stretched, enjoying their day off. Days off in this job were granted by Fisheries bureaucrats, weather, or schools of salmon. Today the weather was the boss. The group included Eddie Charlie, the *Sassy Mary's* skipper; Marvin Charlie, his older brother, skiffman on the seiner *Hesquiat Producer*; Erik Halversen, the skipper of the little troller *Storm Bird*; Eddie's cousin Joe Cook, who was in town from the village to go to the clinic for his liver problem; Rene Lisotte, skipper of the troller *Denise*; Abraham Pielle, chief of the Manhousats, whose big forty-five foot troller *Cape Rage* was tied up across the wharf; Wiley Moon, deckhand on the troller *Vagabond*; and LuciAnne Buffa-

lo Child, Eddie's girlfriend, who was deckhand on Charlie Peter's troller, *Native Hunter*.

LuciAnne had just come in off the rainswept wharf. She shook off some raindrops, shed her new Helly Hanson raingear, sat for a moment at the top of the companionway ladder and lit a cigarette. Her thick black hair hung in long braids poking out the side of her new blue baseball cap, *Deckhand* proudly emblazoned in yellow on a patch, surrounded by crossed anchors and surmounted by "scrambled eggs." LuciAnne was a Blackfoot from Southern Alberta who had come west with a group of young A.I.M. activists to support the west coast Native fishing rights protests and promptly fell in love with a fisherman and the fishing life. She pushed the hatch open a crack and flipped out the wooden match. All fourteen eyes were on her as she climbed down the ladder and moved across the cabin floor to the bench and slid in alongside Eddie Charlie. He popped open a can of Kokanee beer and handed it to her.

Joe Cook got up and left for his appointment at the clinic. For a while no one said much, just drank beer, or smoked, or looked out a window at the gale, maybe glimpsing the raised poles of a boat just running in, someone who'd weathered the gale through the night and ran half the day to get into the harbour to rest. Soon they began telling jokes. Marvin Charlie told a *Newfie* joke about moose hunting, but the *Newfies* had become *tourists*. LuciAnne told a dirty joke about a new machine at the mall that can analyze your urine and diagnose your disease. Wiley Moon told one about a hippie and an old lady in New York City, which only Eddie Charlie laughed at, so now it was Eddie's turn to tell a joke.

"This guy is drivin' down the road in his car. Next thing, the engine starts to thump and he smells smoke, so he pulls over, jumps out and opens the hood. There's black smoke and oil all over the place. 'Ah shit!' he says, slams down the hood and starts walkin' down the road with his thumb out." Eddie Charlie gestured with his long, calloused thumb.

"A car goes by, just the driver inside. Then another one goes by, same damn thing. This goes on for a while. It's gettin' hot, but he keeps on hikin' and hitchin'. Now an older beater comes roarin' up, loaded to the gills with people. It swerves, just misses him, roars on by. Next...brakes screech, car stops in the middle of the road, and a girl's head sticks out the window and yells, 'What's wrong!?!'

"Piston broke!' he hollers back.

'So're we!' she yells. 'Get in!'"

They all laughed at that one.

Soon after that, the party broke up. Wiley lit a joint and shared it with LuciAnne, no one else wanting to smoke any more. Marvin wanted to go to the hotel bar to shoot some pool, and Wiley agreed to go with him. The others drifted back to their boats and into town in

order to give Eddie and LuciAnne some time alone. The gale would likely blow itself out by tomorrow morning and then they'd all be gone long before daybreak, each boat tracking its own course across the grey sloppy ocean.



1984

For some reason Wiley Moon was thinking of that pool game with Marvin Charlie as he sat in the office with the two mediators and his ex-wife Colleen. He hadn't been much of a pool player in those days. He remembered that he'd fluked in a shot, a fairly obvious fluke, and then gone ahead and shot again. Not exactly cheating, but not exactly fair and honest. Exactly cheating. Marvin Charlie had shot him a single hard look. He missed the next shot badly. Marvin Charlie ran three balls before missing, leaving just one of his balls and the eight ball. Wiley missed again, close, an honest miss. But Marvin Charlie didn't miss again and Wiley, who wasn't much of a drinker either, left the pub soon after and returned to the boat. He was wondering whether Marvin Charlie ever gave the incident a second thought, when he realized that one of the mediators was speaking to him.

"...and what was it that made Colleen unhappy when you'd come back from a trip?"

"Oh...yeah...well, there was never enough money for her...."

"There was never any money," Colleen broke in.

"There was enough money to build the addition to the house on Pitlamp Island," Wiley responded, "and what about that driveway you had built after the last trip to...."

There must have been a response, but Wiley Moon failed to hear it. He'd lapsed into memory again and suddenly he was back on the deck of the *Mama Cass*, where five years earlier, after an indifferent salmon season on the *Vagabond*, he'd signed on for Fall fishing for black cod on the Alaska border. Here the weather was always intense, either icy cold or gusty and rough, or pouring rain if the sea was relatively calm. The boat, at sixty-five feet, was bigger than a West Coast troller, but it was still small for the job and the jobsite. But of course there were a lot of fish. You'd have to be crazy to stay on a ground like that if there weren't plenty of fish.

There were literally tons of black cod, the money fish, a few red snappers and grey cod, the odd rockfish and a lot of halibut. The halibut were a big problem. They were out of season and besides, the *Mama Cass* didn't have the right licence to keep them or even the right gear to catch them. But catch them they did. Wiley was always amazed at the way those hundred pound soakers could squeeze in-

side the traps which were meant for fish no bigger than twenty pounds.

They could get in the traps alright, but they couldn't get out. In the daytime this wasn't so bad. The gear was pulled every two or three hours and any halibut in the traps would be released to the sea alive and unharmed. It was always a challenge to get them out of the traps and over the rail without feeling a thump from that powerful tail. And it was with one stroke of that legendary tail that the enormous halibut propelled herself back down to the four-hundred fathom depth from which the crew had winched her up, from the bottom deep.

It was at night that the cause of the dilemma occurred. Sea lice would attack the gills of the halibut and kill them. The black cod, swimming round and round through the long overnight set, would remain alive until they gasped their last in the checkers or deck pens of the *Mama Cass*. But for the halibut lying on the bottom, even the thick, wild, thrusting tail was unable to propel them through the polypropylene mesh of the trap, or to bend the steel re-bar of the trap's frame, or even to break the inexpert welds, made in winter in a backyard shed in a soggy Vancouver Island fishing port. So they died like sheep, not whales. They lay on the bottom, stubborn, unmoving, inert, while the lice, translucent sea-breathing sow bugs, or so they seemed, drained the huge holy fish of blood, sea, oxygen and life.

"Do you think of Wiley as a dishonest person?" the mediator was asking Colleen.

"Not exactly dishonest," she answered. "It's just that he said a lot of things that he had no intention of following through on."

"Can you give us an example?" the mediator asked.

"He would always agree with me in an argument — just so he wouldn't have to argue any more, I suppose — and then just go out and do whatever he liked."

There was a brief silence in the room.

"I was always having to explain what he did to other people," Colleen continued, "you know, to come between him and other people. He always just went ahead and did something, just assuming — without letting other people know about it — with things that he thought were OK...."

"Can you be more specific, perhaps?" the mediator prompted.

"Like one time he let the goat into the neighbor's field without asking, just assuming...."

But Wiley was no longer really in the room, or in the neighbor's field with a goat. He was back on the working deck of the *Mama Cass* with a hundred pound halibut lying on the deck before his feet, stone cold dead, its gills eaten out by sea lice. It was a frigid early morning, the first haulback of the day. The crew wore their blue wool toques, woolen coats over grey Stanfields, extra woolen socks in their gum-

boots, and woolen gloves, some with the fingertips cut off. Wiley's breath crystallized in the salty air above him as he called to Bob Everett, the skipper.

"Do we chuck this or what?"

Everett crossed the deck from the roller and jog switch station from where he controlled the vessel while on deck. He looked down, shaking his head slowly from side to side. "Chuck it...in the hold," he answered.

"A lot of people we know don't want to deal with him anymore," Colleen said, apparently talking about Wiley to the mediator.

But Wiley was now in the galley of the *Mama Cass* with the rest of the crew. It was after supper, nothing left to do but glaze and stack the fish from the last set down in the freezer hold. Bob Everett lit a cigarette and poured a shot of Canadian Club into his coffee. Tommy Henry, the other deckhand, and Wiley, sipped their coffees and waited for the skipper to begin. Carolyn Manchester, the cook, sat at the table, too.

"You all know the, uh, consequences, right?" Everett asked them.

"If we get caught we lose the catch and we all go to jail," Wiley replied.

"That's the worst that could happen," Everett reassured him. Carolyn sat frowning, slightly.

Tommy sat wooden-faced. Suddenly he broke into a full-faced smile and contributed his thoughts on the matter.

"Listen, we're gonna get lots of halibut on this ground."

Everett's nod confirmed this.

"But we're gettin' lots of black cod, too."

Wiley and Bob nodded. Carolyn had at least stopped frowning.

"What we need is a safe way to keep them," Tommy concluded... "so we don't get caught."

"I've got that figured out already," Everett informed them. "We cut up the halibut into strips — 'flenses' we used to call them in the old days. Then we pack 'em in the empty herring bait boxes and stow them under the full bait boxes down in the hold."

"They'd find 'em easily enough if we were boarded for a search," Wiley said.

"We got to take that chance," Everett responded. "At least if they're all cut up like that they can't prove we were gonna try an' sell 'em."

But this shaky rationale fell flat with the crew.

Finally, however, they'd all agreed. It was a dead waste to feed big dead halibut to the crabs. Immoral vs. illegal. The daytime halibut catch would be released alive, no matter how tempting. But the lice-killed nighttime fish, still in excellent shape, would be headed, gutted, flensed and stowed. The crew would split them up after the end of the trip.

"All I can say is I was under a lot of stress in those days," Wiley was telling the mediator. "I was under the stress of a marriage going on the rocks. I didn't like or respect myself much, and so I didn't like or respect other people much either. I was a snarling, unhappy guy who looked at the world with his eyes half covered by a toque. Things are different now. We've been separated for five years. I'm a different person and so is Colleen."

"So maybe we can get this discussion onto a positive and productive level," the other mediator suggested. "No more attacks on each other's character. Just a commitment to work on the children's behalf."

And so it went. Surprisingly successful after the first hour of bitching, griping and wrangling. Wiley didn't envy the two mediators their jobs. But half an hour later they were calmly arranging the schedule of visits for the children for the year. He would have custody of his son George after all, as both he and the boy wished, and Colleen would have the girls for the school year, and Wiley would have them for half the summer since he wasn't fishing much any more.

As he walked down the stairs from the mediator's office to the street, Wiley found himself descending the ladder into the freezer hold of the *Mama Cass*. The hold was lit by bare forty watt, twelve volt light bulbs, and the roar of the freezer compressor motor penetrated the Styrofoam and fiberglass insulation and disturbed the tranquillity of the North Pacific Ocean night. Wiley began glazing the black cod, dipping them into the bucket of brine and then stacking them like pieces of cordwood onto the freezer racks, trying to keep track of the number of pieces in the poor light and unnerving noise and vibration. There were a few grey cod, red snapper and other rockfish; they all went into separate compartments. At the bottom of the pile of fish were the bags of halibut flenses. Wiley pulled several empty waxed cardboard bait boxes out of the cod compartment and began filling them with the bags of halibut meat. When he was done, he was sweating despite the minus forty degree temperature of the hold. He threw a number of herring filled boxes onto the floor of the slaughter pen and replaced them with the boxes of contraband. Then the bait boxes went carefully back into place.



1989

Wiley Moon sat in the dimly lit downtown bar. Since he no longer smoked and hardly ever drank, the atmosphere was somewhat oppressive to him, something like the dim noisy freezer hold of the old *Mama Cass*. But a job was a job, and today he was here to watch Ma-



genta, a belly dancer turned stripper. She had applied to the agency as a freelancer on the advice of one of his — the agency's — girls, Lolita Lobo, the Mexican Firecracker, who was really a Blackfoot Indian girl from Southern Alberta. *Foxy Lady* burst over the second rate speakers of the Houston Hotel pub and a small, dark-haired wiry girl dressed in gauzy black with black spike heels and black fishnet stockings slithered onto the smoky stage. She began her dance. Probably an old hippie, Wiley was thinking. She looked like she'd danced to a lot of Jimi Hendrix as a teenager. She was probably forty or close to it. Good bod, but stretch marks. A single mother, likely. Good. She'd need the money and be more reliable than a lot of the younger girls. She'd be best for the downtown and waterfront bars, not for the countless small town bars on the road.

*Delta Dawn* was the next tune. This was the number for the stripper to show her tits. Magenta's were smallish, but firm and well-shaped. Nice skin tones even in this awful light. She'd probably be alright, so why bother to stick around for the floor show — the last, slow song where the stripper would lie on the floor and simulate sex and orgasm. But something, be it inertia, curiosity or animal magnetism, kept Wiley in his seat as *True Colors* blared through the faulty speakers from the well-used tape. Magenta had laid out a bearskin rug. She wasn't going to lie on the gritty floor of this dingy bar stage without some protection. And class. He and Colleen, he recalled, used to have a bearskin rug.

Magenta was completely naked for the floor show. She was actually quite beautiful. She had a slim waist in spite of the stretch marks and small but extremely curvaceous hips. He could almost see her in a belly dancing costume. Suddenly the music stopped. Magenta gathered up her bearskin and costume. She tossed on a black satin robe, stepped into her heels, sauntered over to Wiley's table, sat down and lit a cigarette.

"Drink?" Wiley asked her.

"Thanks," she said. "Scotch and water, please. Lots of ice."

In the tentative silence that followed the ordering of the drinks, Wiley drifted back to the deck of the *Mama Cass*. The long trip on the Alaska border was finally over and they were on their way to Vancouver to deliver the catch. The trip down the Inside Passage had been long and rough. Southeasters blew for days on end and traveling was slow and stressful. At last they reached Georgia Strait and were tied up at the government dock on Pitlamp Island, waiting for Colleen to show up to collect his share of the incidental fish.

Skipper Bob Everett had already unloaded his cod and halibut at a freezer locker in Campbell River, where he lived, and Tommy Henry had left his many days earlier with his aunt in Prince Rupert. Wiley wished he could get off the boat, have dinner with Colleen and the kids at home and spend the night in bed with Colleen. But Van-

couver was still half a day's running and the skipper and crew were impatient to get going now that they'd come so far and were so close to port.

The sound of tinkling ice brought Wiley out of his memories, as the waitress placed their drinks before them on the table. He and Magenta talked for nearly an hour. He agreed to act as her manager through the agency and they worked out a schedule. He was right about her being a single mom. He thought about asking her out to dinner, but either his business sense or his cynical experience with strippers told him to forget it. For a while, anyway. Wiley was often lonely nowadays, what with Colleen just a bittersweet memory and George, at sixteen, practically on his own, spending most of his time at friends' houses and making his own meals. They only talked over an occasional pool or crib game or when George was hitting him up for money. Still, he thought, watching Magenta sashay across the bar-room floor toward the dressing room, loneliness was better, or at least more tolerable, than a bad relationship.

The trip down to Vancouver from Pitlamp Island had been pleasantly uneventful, with calm winds and sea and Indian summer sunny and warm. They arrived on a Sunday and the fish brokers' offices were closed, so Everett sailed the *Mama Cass* up the South Arm of the Fraser River to Steveston, where they hoped to sell their surplus snapper, rockfish and cod at the public fish market, held weekends on the Steveston government wharf. Shrimp and prawn sales were hopping, and a couple of big freezer trollers came in with tuna, which was a hot item, too. And crabs moved quickly, as always. But cod sales were slow and despite the fine weather the day proved tedious and boring. More than ever Wiley wished he could have stayed with Colleen, but what the hell, he thought, a job's a job.

When the brokers opened for business on Monday morning, Everett received the bad news that most of the larger boats had already delivered and in fact there was a surplus of black cod on the Vancouver market. For another thing, their fish were cut wrong. Japanese buyers in Vancouver wanted a different cut than the Prince Rupert fish plants. The Rupert cut called for the pectoral fins to be removed in the dressing process, while the Vancouver buyers wanted those fins left intact. Too late to do anything about that now. Back on board the compressor motor roared, keeping the twenty-five tons of black cod frozen for another day while the skipper chased around town trying to sell their load of fish.

The last meeting of the crew of the *Mama Cass* took place around a beer-stained table at the stripper bar of the Mallard Hotel down on Powell Street near the Campbell Avenue fisherman's docks. A deal had been arranged at a reduced price and once again Wiley faced returning home with less money than hoped for. Everett ordered another pitcher of beer. Just great, Wiley was thinking, as Everett est-

plained the circumstances, what a way to come home, horny, pissed and broke.

"Well," the skipper said, trying to rationalize some consolation for this sour turn of events, "at least we've all got a freezer full of holybut stashed away for the winter."

But halibut was the last thing on Wiley's mind as he drained his mug of beer and watched another Hustler Centerfold show her large brown tits to the bored group of fishermen, longshoremen, dope dealers and welfare recipients unhurriedly slopping up suds in the beer parlour of the Mallard Hotel.

As he walked out of the Houston Hotel alone, Wiley Moon flashed momentarily on walking out of another stripper bar years ago, on his way home to his wife and children, a young fisherman, still full of hopes and dreams, plans and expectations. Now he was on his way to nowhere. He'd have to stop in at the agency before five o'clock, but maybe he could find something to do before then. It was only three-thirty now. He drove to the West End where the agency was located, entered a parking garage, paid the machine, parked, placed his stub on the windshield and walked out onto the street. He found himself walking through the door of the roughly built, still unfinished cabin on Pitlamp Island.

Colleen wasn't home nor were the kids. A stack of dishes, unwashed, were piled in the sink. A closer look indicated that there were three or four days' worth of dishes. Thirty-five days at sea, Wiley was thinking, and come home to dirty dishes. Oh well... Colleen's got a lot to do with the kids and all the chores, but why not get the older kids to do the dishes?

Wiley filled a canner with cold water from the kitchen tap — they hadn't bought a hot water heater yet — put it on the propane stove and lit the element. While the wash water heated up he smoked a joint of homegrown. After the third or fourth toke he began to relax. That's what is so great about living in the country, Wiley thought to himself. Grow your own food, your own smoke.... He walked out to the garden. There were some weeds, but they weren't too bad, and lots of pole beans, squash, cabbage, tomatoes, mustard greens and big orange pumpkins getting ready for Halloween. A rooster crowed from the chicken yard. A dozen well-fed hens scurried around the yard, scratching and pecking. Wiley looked into the henhouse and found half a dozen eggs. He brought them into the house.

The water in the canner was hot now and Wiley filled the two big stainless steel sinks with wash and rinse water and began to do the dishes. He liked washing dishes, especially when stoned on pot. The job was relaxing; it allowed the mind to wander or empty — it was almost a meditation. His anger at finding so many dishes undone began to ebb away, like a spring tide on a clam bed. It was very quiet, a still, sunny Indian summer late afternoon. Suddenly, he heard a car

come off the gravel road and pull into the driveway. He heard car doors slam and the shrill voices of the children as they piled out. He could hear their voices getting closer and louder as they ran down the trail from the parking spot at the end of the drive.

"Dad! Dad!" they were shouting as they burst through the door and saw Wiley standing by the sink. All in a knot they ran to him and he lifted them up one by one in his strong wiry arms and held them each over his head, kissed them and put them back down on the hardwood floor. Colleen came through the door last and kicked it shut, a brown paper bag of groceries in each arm. Wiley dried his hands on a dish towel and crossed the room to help her. When the bags were on the kitchen table, he hugged her. She felt a little stiff, a little distant, a little cold.

"Welcome home," she said, a touch of weariness in her voice.

"It's been a long trip," he said. "I love you." He bent to kiss her but she had already slipped out of his arms and started for the grocery bags.

"There's three more bags in the car," she said. "Take George with you; he should be able to carry one."

He was a little stunned at this reception, but figured Colleen must be as tired as he was. Thirty-five days alone with four kids is a long time, like thirty-five days at sea in a crowded boat. Ah, well, he thought, "C'mon Cap'n," he said to George. "Let's haul back those groceries."

Wiley was back on the street in front of the parking garage, still wondering where to kill an hour or so before returning to the agency. He walked aimlessly for ten minutes or so, people pushing purposefully along all around him, businessmen in suits and ties, office workers in the latest styles and fashions, featuring high heels, black patterned stockings, printed blouses and short dark skirts, jangling bracelets and dangling earrings. Traffic flowed, making breathing a chore with all the fumes from gas engines in need of tune-ups, diesel trucks and busses, even the sharp smell of propane added to the modern urban/industrial melange. He turned into a building, the Cosmic Art Gallery, after noticing a poster for a portrait show by a painter from Hornby Island, a painter whom he knew, as Hornby was just a short ferry ride from Pitlamp Island, and he had often visited there for concerts, dances, or just to escape his home island for a few hours once in a while.

It was cool inside the gallery. Cool and quiet and peaceful, like a small island itself, on an Indian summer afternoon. He examined three or four paintings before he realized he wasn't alone. He glanced briefly at the woman across the room, and then turned back to the paintings. He recognized most of the subjects as Hornby Islanders, and smiled in appreciation of the sense of humor imparted by the

artist. His mind drifted back to Pitlamp Island, carried there like a stick of driftwood on the tide.

Colleen was not happy when she saw the cheque. "That's all, for six weeks of fishing?" she said.

"Thirty-five days," Wiley replied.

"Well, that's almost six weeks, isn't it?"

"It's five weeks," he answered.

"So....looks like no hot water heater again this year."

"Water heats up fast on the gas range."

"You're not the one washing the diapers."

"I'm the one washing the dishes."

Colleen shot him an angry look. "I've got to go milk the goat," she said.

Wiley wound up leaving home again, soon after, for a month of clam digging on the West Coast of Vancouver Island. He lived in a tent and worked at night, as the fall and winter low tides always occurred after dark. The prices were good and there were still a lot of clams on the isolated beaches, but the southeasters soon set in and the days were cold, wet and stormy, and loneliness and depression started to set in, too, cutting into his incentive and production. Finally, he'd had enough.

He loaded the clams into the back of his '62 Chevy half-ton and headed for the East Coast of the island to sell them, and then go home. The Chevy climbed the mountains in fine form, and in a couple of hours he was on the Island Highway at Qualicum, heading north. He stopped at one of the oyster shucking sheds along the highway and sold his manila clams, keeping the sack of little necks to bring home for the freezer. He made the last pre-dinner break ferry to Pitlamp Island and soon found himself heading up the ferry landing hill, just a few miles from home. It was a chilly night, as most were this time of year when the days were short and the nights long. Sometimes a day went by without his seeing daylight at all.

Wiley pulled off the gravel surface of Lake Road into the drive. He didn't bother to turn the truck around as usual, but just grabbed the sack of clams and headed down the dirt trail toward the cabin. A few years ago this was all logging slash. When they bought the land, there was a small uninsulated cabin, which they fixed up, insulated and one year, after a good tuna fishing trip to Cape St. James, they built a new addition. Sure, there was still lots to do. A hot water heater, rugs for the hardwood floors, landscaping, slash burning, cutting down and rooting out the alders that grew like weeds over the logged-out, second growth fir and hemlock forest floor, even a bigger woodshed. The clam sack was starting to feel cold and heavy on his shoulder when he saw the cabin lights through the bush. What a warm inviting sight it was. It made the fifty yard trail seem romantic, emerging from the trees on a cold dark night and seeing that come-

hither glow. He noticed some signs of recent landscaping as he came into the clearing, but didn't pay much attention to it, just wanting to be inside the warm glow and out of the chill, damp winter black.

Colleen and the kids were having supper when Wiley came in. He could smell the spicy spaghetti sauce simmering on the gas range as he walked through the door. "Dad! Dad!" the kids shouted, jumping up from the table and running to him.

"Come and have some supper before it gets cold," Colleen said.

Wiley was planning to ask about the landscaping after the kids were in bed and the chores were done. But, as so often happened in their life together, weariness overcame them, and with very few words between them, they collapsed into bed and each other's arms.

There was a crisp northwest wind blowing when Wiley woke up. The sun was shining, just starting to melt the frost on the south side of the clearing. The ice on the surface of the puddles on the north side of the clearing would remain all day. He got out of bed and looked out the window at the clearing. Something was funny out there. Soil was windrowed in the shape of a keyhole coming up the grade from Lake Road. Gravel was gleaming in the bright late morning sun, gravel so recently laid that it fairly reflected the blue of the winter sky and the white of the cumulus clouds. Wiley actually pinched himself to see if he was dreaming.

There was a circular driveway, something you'd expect to see in an upper-class urban neighborhood — at a mansion perhaps — leading to within thirty feet of the front door. There was even a turnaround and a parking spot off the circle of the keyhole, big enough to turn and park a Winnebago. Wiley stared out the window a long time trying to find a response, or even a reaction to all of this. He was having a hard time even absorbing its reality. No, it's real, he was thinking when he heard the back door slam and Colleen shake off her gumboots and rustle around in the cupboard for egg cartons.

"So you're up," Colleen said, after Wiley climbed down the stairs and walked through to the kitchen.

"Yeah, I'm up. Still getting a few eggs, eh?"

"A few," Colleen answered. "Don't eat more than two."

"Sure. Is there coffee?"

"You'll have to make a fresh pot."

Colleen came in from milking the goat as Wiley was finishing his second cup of coffee.

"These eggs taste great."

"Uh huh."

There was a brief, strained silence.

"Where did this new, uh, driveway come from?" Wiley ventured, breaking the heavy silence.

"What do you mean, where?"

"Well, I mean, who built it?"

"James and Marie had a bulldozer over clearing their land. It was in the neighborhood all week. It just took a couple of days here."

Yeah, at seventy-five dollars an hour, Wiley was thinking.

"Well, why did you decide to do it?" he asked instead.

"I just got tired of lugging groceries half a mile through the woods."

"Half a mile!? Fifty yards is more like it."

"It doesn't matter. It's a long way."

"But a driveway like this. It costs a small fortune. Where the hell did you get the money?"

Colleen hesitated. Finally, after a tense silence, she spoke. "I sold some fish."

"Some fish!?"

"The halibut."

"How much halibut?"

"All the halibut. I got a good price. I sold it to people on the island, piece by piece."

Wiley sat stunned and silent for a moment. He wanted to get up and look in the freezer and make sure this wasn't all a bad dream. Finally he responded. "You're saying you sold our family's year's supply of fish in order to build a driveway?"

"A circular drive. Right to the door."

"So you wouldn't have to lug the groceries?"

"There's still fish out there."

"Out there...? In the freezer?"

"Yeah."

"What? Three snappers and half a dozen cod?"

"Whatever."



In the cool recesses of the Cosmic Art Gallery, Wiley Moon was removing his glance from the portrait of Peter Leary, a Hornby Island farmer whom he knew quite well, having bought potatoes from him every autumn for many years. Leary was staring down at him, eye twinkling mischievously in canvas and acrylic, from the white wall of the gallery. He shifted his glance to the as yet unknown woman, smartly dressed in a tailored black woolen suit, who was studying the portrait of the West Coast fisherman hanging on an adjoining wall.

JAY HAMBURGER is a poet, playwright, environmentalist, human rights activist and Artistic Director of the Vancouver-based *Theatre in the Raw*. He authored the chapbook *Faith Rescue*.

## Jay Hamburger/ Two Poems

### For Those Who Don't Get Over the Border

shacks! with some large painted numbers  
 for i.d. purposes...  
 but shack after shack – in this shacktown

lopsided leaning structures of plywood;  
 even using old political signs  
 as sides, built for their homes

and habitants: those who have fled  
 from Central America and poorer Mexico;  
 some children playing in the dirt –  
 women holding babies, in the shade,  
 from the hot February sun

...village – looking bare burnt spent wispy  
 resting on-top-of a landfill; a summit!  
 on what was once a garbage heap...

and again sidings of: rusted tin plywood  
 and cardboard tacked up  
 for house construction,  
 with some small outhouses near many  
 of the rectangular backyards

this last stop: *Las Cumbres*  
 within the Mexican border town of Reynosa  
 ...the poor, displaced got the Rio Grande to cross  
 then into The Valley of Texas  
 border guards desert where to settle? ahead...  
 or remain in *Las Cumbres*...

clean laundry on the line outside  
 some shacks; families adults children



situated in a large bare-like area  
 ...there are few few trees

roundish fellow on crutches  
 with "hanging" leg  
 goes to lie on the ground  
 to fix, a part, under one of the used bus/vans  
 used as public Mexican transport  
 to the Cumbres neighborhood

day day  
 hot sun rooster crowing child crying  
 abandoned car, side of a dweller's fence;  
 dry dry dirt in the front yards

12-14 lanes across of windowed shacks;  
 long lanes — long streets of shacks into distance  
 local bodega at the corner;  
 smell of sewage  
 smell of shit  
 where — what is the Mexican government doing  
 thru all of this...??

small pop shop sells eggs  
*Disfrute Coca Cola* says a sign  
 lively mexican music with guitar  
 and accordion — heard thru  
 a screen door of a hut;

this neighborhood of *Las Cumbres*  
 "2p" — dirt bumpy streets to go thru  
 "2p" for a van ride/public transport...  
 "2p" for a drive to  
*Las Cumbres* in Reynosa, Mexico;  
 a last stop town  
 before crossing that muddy Rio Grande.

Reynosa, Mexico/  
 Denver, Colo.  
 March/June 1987  
 For Jim McCloud & Rev. Shute  
 & "Witness For Peace" groups

## George West, Texas

old fellow, white haired  
 in tattered worn brown tweed-like coat  
 needs a shave...missing some teeth  
 minding the all-night open-sided fruit store  
 – midst the flatlands of oil, cotton, cabbage and cattle –  
 in small town called: George West, Texas;

George West, Texas – named after a Texas rancher  
 lived in the local area;  
 musta owned lots and lots of land  
 to get the little plains town  
 named such and ho – after himself;  
 (wonder who was first on this land – anyway;  
 what their names were...?)

The old fellow and I talk  
 about the price of bananas;  
 4 lbs. for a dollar – a deal!  
 bananas on display  
 and by the near treeless oil fields  
 on the Texas plains...

I buy a couple of pieces of fruit  
 my funds low at the moment;  
 I tell him such...then I say  
 – sos as to help make up for it –  
 I'll give him a poem sheet  
 for to read while sitting, minding  
 the fruitstand, into the long night  
 at the rural crossroads;  
 something to be occupied with  
 when there is no business.

he's got a small white puppy,  
 "...last left of a litter of four..."  
 that suddenly comes out underneath  
 the center fruitstand table, to greet me,  
 then circles back near to the fellow's legs  
 shaky on its new paws

I give the man a poem about

Alaska seas & fishermen catching the noble salmon;  
 ..he looks a touch lost / panicky  
 and there's a pause in breath  
 then: "I can't read," he says,  
 "I can't read at all."  
 Well, sometime have someone  
 read it for you  
 it's yours, yours to keep.

he takes a clear plastic bag  
 and begins to put some  
 big apples, bananas, pears and oranges in it,  
 "this is for you — for you on the road — no charge."  
 and holds out the fruit to me...

I give him what change  
 I have left in my pockets;  
 not much, but at least something...something at least.  
 I walk over to my car and start up the motor.

with the Gulf of Mexico & Corpus Christi ahead of me;  
 Denver & Amarillo behind  
 I'm left to thinking: there are folks who can read  
 and folks in this big old world who can't,  
 but generosity is universal  
 to those who can / can't  
 do this and that  
 particular mental matter, so well;  
 the heart is a seeker  
 and something — very tiny, warm moved  
 in George West, Texas  
 as the February night came on strong.

Feb. / Aug. 1987  
 George West, Texas/  
 Salt Spring Island, B.C.

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## Throwing Caution to the Winds of Change

Jurgen Hesse

The concept of job security is so deeply anchored in the North American psyche that anyone ignoring its central dictum is considered either a raving right-winger or an irresponsible nut case. This statement is, of course, nothing but a ventured opinion by someone who throughout his life has opted for the opposite of job security, i.e. taking risks in that splendid but dangerous adventure of what we call life.

What does it mean, taking risks? True to its rather undefined specifics, taking risks can mean being foolish, to the majority of job-security-obsessed blue or white-collar workers; or it can signify a free spirit who relishes challenging fate, well-being, a guaranteed income, and a rather dull life where nothing happens but forty-nine weeks of work in a year, three weeks of beach-lying and beer-swilling holidays, year in, year out, until retirement looms. Then, as the blue or white-collar worker retires, all that's left is boredom and cultivating a modest garden. (Forgive the generalization.) But this garden will be the antithesis of the let-us-cultivate-our-garden pronounced as the ultimate paradise for life on earth by Voltaire in his splendid fable *Candide*.

Imagine, by contrast, the non-retirement sunset years enjoyed by the risk-taking free spirit who has scorned job security, stumbling along—financially speaking—from crisis to crisis, but with a mind shaped and honed to a razor-sharp edge by the daily battle of wits against all odds. But let us pause, for the sunset years are not the object of this attempt to promote the unthinkable, a life without job (hence financial) security. Why would anyone opt for insecurity?

The question is skewed. Taking risks is not equal to insecurity; quite the opposite, in fact.

Taking risks, let us recapitulate, is a wild ride into the unknown where rounding corners into uncharted territory is frequent and accompanied by roller-coaster emotions. Taking risks can be a daunting exploration that may bring us close to despair — or destitution — and, the next moment, after the co-sine curve has ascended into its above-the-line sine curve, back to our usual equilibrium liberally doused with confidence and — success.

This very state of roller-coaster existence is what keeps us sharp and concentrated on what lies ahead. None of us risk-takers who have rejected a salaried work life is ever tempted to rejoin the great unwashed wage earners — pardon the insult, all ye who suffer as wage slaves — for the simple reason that having job security is dullsville incarnate, to belabor a folksy term. Risk takers, to be sure, sometimes abandon their insecure life and rejoin the salaried work force when they discover that deep down they're shallow in their determination to shun security. These backsliders ought not to be scorned, nor pitied for not having the mental muscle to survive in the marketplace of survival: they deserve our sympathy and our support.

Not all of us are risk takers, nor should we be. Consider the risk takers in our society. Who are they?

First let us rid ourselves of the notion that risk-takers in that cut-throat (aka dog-eat-dog) world of business are what this essay is all about. High-rolling risk takers in the world of finance, futures, money-trading and other criminal pursuits are not so much risk takers as they are avaricious poker players in a make-believe world whose moral credo is lopsided. Since when, may one ask, is making pots of money by manipulating figures an honourable profession? These slick operators are permanently located on the moral low ground, often earning grossly indecent sums of money without producing anything except unwarranted profits.

You may well not agree with this analysis. It is the distillation of thought after a long life spent taking a myriad of risks and observing with displeasure the antics of the rise of the money ethic, a *faux* ethic that not only permits but encourages and defends unethical behaviour as the *ne plus ultra* of life. If you disagree, it follows necessarily that you have delivered the *coup de grace* to your own existence, and

we can all agree that you are either one slick operator, or your ethics need to be taken to the repair shop for an overhaul.

The risk takers we consider to be the true warriors against a phantom (financially speaking) secure existence are those among us who reject, sooner or later, the alleged comfortable life of those with guaranteed job security. How many times, since the 1960's counter-revolution turned our perception of what life is all about topsy-turvy, have secure people chucked their well-salaried (or wage-earning) jobs and have gone to ground? Statistics do not exist as to their numbers, but we keep reading about this executive vice-president, or that well-heeled lawyer, or this green chain operator, or that bank teller, throwing down their tools and taking up pottery, opening a B&B place, making fine art, writing books, or turning a clever idea into a product and throwing caution to the winds of change.

And high time, too, that they be praised by us fellow risk takers who have gone this road before being joined by others.

Yet we keep reading that this labour union, or that trade union, has resolved every issue in its current contract negotiations except for job security. Negotiating for job security, in this world where the concept of working has undergone a fundamental re-evaluation and change, is a retro work philosophy. It is a desperate attempt to stop the accelerating downhill slide of the Protestant work ethic. After all, Max Weber is long dead, and with him the notion that to work hard is the ultimate goal in life.

Yet we read every day in an obituary that this chairman or that honest worker worked hard all his or her life. Working hard within the confines of job security is still clinging to an illusory work ethic. Yet modern reality has confronted us with a spectre that work as we know it (and wish to preserve at all costs) is disappearing. Savants such as Jeremy Rifkin (*The End of Work*) are being ignored despite the evidence.

So now, rather than later, when events have overtaken the job-secure wage earners among us, we need to consider that leaving our "secure" job is not all that devastating as we imagined. Leaving voluntarily and stepping into the dazzling, admittedly scary world of true free enterprise (as opposed to commonplace free enterprise which is neither free nor an enterprise) is preferential to hanging on until the fateful day when the permanent layoff notice is slipped under our collective doors. Nay, leaving now is essential, so we can pace ourselves, make plans, and prepare our departure without haste or panic.

This is our reality today. Let us face this uncomfortable truth sooner rather than too late. Job security, no matter how entrenched in legal labour-management contracts, is illusory. It exists on paper, but when a major economic shift occurs — for instance, should General Motors relocate its entire operation to a low-wage country in the

Third World – the iron-clad, cherished labour contracts become null and void. If the plaintiff, trying to enforce the job-security clause, launches a class-action suit against the contract partner, and this partner is no longer physically extant, well, you can imagine the outcome. It will be a mess.

So, faced with layoff notices sooner or later, should you be ahead of the panic-stricken and deeply offended work force to which you belong, and plan your defection? Perhaps you have been nurturing secret dreams of a free-lance, true-free-enterprise life for some time. Perhaps your hobby could be turned into something with modest returns in hard cash? Or will you be tempted to consult all those articles and nonfiction books that would help you along the road to an insecure but not necessarily destitute existence?

Taking risks cannot be accomplished without a quintessential ingredient, that of courage. Courage to shear out of the rank-and-file job force and become an individual who relies on his or her own wits. Courage to face a future without those non-essential attributes of a secure existence commonly and erroneously considered essential to our well being, i.e. the single detached house, the sport utility monster vehicle, the fishing boat, the skidoo, the skis, the golf clubs, the mountain bikes, and so on, et cetera.

Learn to make do without all these materialistic encumbrances, at least in principle, and become a risk taker who finds fulfillment in doing something you have always wanted to do but were too afraid to tackle because everyone said you were a hopeless dreamer. The secret to becoming a risk taker, my friends, is *voluntary poverty*. What ho! What a stupid notion, you say. Who the hell would want to exchange a comfortable existence with all the physical trimmings (see above) for this thing, what's it called, VOLUNTARY POVERTY?

Yep. Exactly. Should you find it hard to contemplate this radical reversal of the sacrosanct North American capitalist credo, property and profit, consult the many books (novels and nonfiction) that have been written on voluntary poverty as a way of life, superbly superior to what you secretly have always called the rat race in this dog-eat-dog society.

Voluntary poverty is, of course, not poverty per se but cheerful containment, making do with less, but gaining a freedom of mind unequalled in the straitjacket of a salaried life. One of the high priests of such a voluntarily poor life style was the late Italian filmmaker, radical essayist, and communist, Pier-Paolo Pasolini. He posited that "we were better off when we were poor," and he makes a compelling case for this outrageous statement in his last book before his death in 1975, a collection of essays written for a Milan paper.

Perhaps, you argue, you were not made to take risks and descend into the uncertain but frightening purgatory of voluntary poverty. But how can you be certain you are not cut out for such a life unless

you try? Ask your partner, if you have one, to engage with you in this adventure. Turn the concept of *poverty* with its spectre of deprivation (nothing to eat, kids dressed in rags and barefoot, yadda, yadda, yadda) around and call it something else, something more cheerful. But do not escape from yourself by denying yourself the chance of taking the ultimate risk in life – to jettison this albatross-around-your-neck *faux* security.

Employing the right attitude paired with courage and determination, the albatross may soon be converted into a life preserver that keeps you from drowning. Yeah, you may say, it is easy for you to preach taking risks and its companion, voluntary poverty – but have you, the dispenser of such an outrageous notion, tried the concept yourself, or are you a salaried, tenured academic who justifies his existence by trumpeting concepts while living a life of luxury yourself?

Taking risks was easy. It was never a decision that had to be made under duress. Salaried positions as a print journalist were easy to obtain forty years ago, even thirty years ago. Rejecting the strictures and the confinement these jobs constituted became essential when the writer's ethics collided head-on with those practised by the publishers who had only the profits of the shareholders in mind. Moral principles cannot be sacrificed with impunity on the altar of fear – i.e. losing the job. Sooner or later we look in the mirror and see a self-serving monster. Some choose alcohol as an escape, others justify their duplicity by saying, "Hey, I gotta eat!"

No need to become exasperated at the writer who has indeed been a life-long risk taker. There were times when it seemed dry bread and water would be the future fare, and a tent in the woods the shelter of need, but of course it never came to that. Of course not. The mind, attuned to taking risk and making do with what was available, became inventive and flexible, and ideas kept growing in this fertile free-lance life. The wolf never entered the door.

Is it right and proper, and morally defensible, to advocate taking risks and abandoning a salaried job that may, after all, disappear anyway? Does it make sense to plan for a life of voluntary poverty, i.e. cutting down on our exaggerated expectations and utilizing our hidden resources? Will those among us who become adventurers without safety nets be the new *élite* in the economy?

You can answer according to your own limitations.

Retirement, meanwhile – what is that? Nine years into compulsory retirement age, the future is busy with projects, and ideas blossom overnight, in conversation with the life partner, in discussions among friends, walking on the street or in the park, or reading a book. Then the daily work at the computer keyboard, or at the drafting table, wielding pen and ink, or a paint brush, or tools to make a sculpture from found objects, attending meetings in a creative visual



art society, producing books, producing visual art, always on the move, exploring new concepts, and reading, reading, reading – about philosophy, spirituality, working, literature, visual arts, and this whole wonderful existence of ours.

An existence rendered highly palatable and exciting by the simple act of rejecting job security.

ALEJANDRO MUJICA OLEA was born in Santiago, Chile in 1947. At the age of twelve he started writing for the Catholic paper *Valiant Hearts*. Later he became a union leader, political advisor and public employee of the Ministry of Public Works. The coup in 1973 resulted in him being arrested, tortured, imprisoned and sentenced to eight years in jail. With the help of Amnesty, he came to Canada in 1975. In 1980, he became a Canadian citizen.

SHARON DANARD, his translator, earned a B.A. at the University of Victoria, where she studied French and Spanish. Later she took a secondary teaching certificate at the Université de Montréal. An instructor at Camosun College, she writes poetry and essays. She has translated more than 100 poems from Spanish into English.

## Alejandro Mujica Olea / **Four Poems**

(translated by Sharon Danard)

### **The Tattooed Man**

The hours pass and will not return,  
and go on marking the passing of a moment  
when blood wrote history.

On his right arm  
is tattooed a flower and  
the name CARLOS PEDRO ZAPATA MORALES.

On the frozen slab of concrete  
his blue body is opposite me  
full of purple freckles  
without the spring of life.

My heart marks the tattoo  
of a drum that says good-bye  
to the man and to his illusion of freedom.

The hours pass and will not return,  
and go on making the passing of a moment  
when blood wrote history.

The hours pass with a tic tac  
of anguish, of solitude,  
the wilted desert of a night

when I was afraid of the ghost of death.

From his chest flows  
a red thread of blood,  
which runs like a stream  
and loses itself in the corner of the cell.

Outside, the black sky  
cries the cold rain of betrayal  
by a tyrant who brought horror.

The hours pass and will not return,  
and go on marking the passing of a moment  
when blood wrote history.

Damned generals, admirals,  
cowardly commandants, thirsty  
for dollars, for power, hungry vampires  
of blood of my beloved country.

**WE WILL NOT PARDON THEM  
ALTHOUGH THE CENTURIES PASS!**

I sink into the world of sleep, and  
am awakened by the alarm of black boots  
sinking into my ribs.

They withdraw the body of the man,  
of the comrade I did not know in life,  
but whom I respect in death.

The hours pass and will not return,  
and go on marking the passing of a moment  
when blood wrote history.

The bars of the cell  
clang shut;  
the bolt in the door sings  
like a sad violin.

The hours, days and months pass.  
One morning in the corner of the cell  
a small, white flower is born like  
the purity of the snows of the high mountain ranges.

My tears suffuse me with emotion

because I know that it is the soul of God,  
the soul of the country, the soul of Carlos.

The hours pass and will not return,  
and go on marking the passing of a moment  
when blood wrote history.

Carlos, you are born again; your soul is a flower  
like a lighthouse of white light which illuminates  
this cell of concrete with an iron door.  
You, comrade, have brought me a little freedom.

## Compañera, You Are A Lily

(Dedicated to the tortured women of this world.)

Compañera, wild white lily,  
we learned in prison  
that the soldiers with faces  
of rock and eyes of iron  
came to your home and destroyed it.  
They beat you, threw you into the street  
and tore your clothes.

The Army,  
roaring with laughter,  
with lips stained with wine,  
shouted at you, offended you  
humiliated you, hated you.  
They called you Communist,  
they called you Liberal,  
they called you Democrat,

they called you Socialist,  
they called you Compañera.

With belts of leather  
they whipped your naked body,  
your fragile body of a fairy,  
your fragile body of a lily,  
your fragile body of a compañera,  
until your white skin  
was covered in pure and red blood.

Your blood spattered the walls,  
your blood spattered the concrete,  
your blood spattered the earth,  
your blood spattered the flowers,  
dying them with red honey.  
The army took you  
by your braided hair,  
decorated with stars and planets,  
and dragged you unconscious  
along a floor stained with pain.

Afterwards they tied you as an X  
in the back part  
of a Jeep Eagle,  
on one side the national emblem,  
on the other side the letters U.N.  
In the center blood flowed  
like a river of hot lava.

Naked,  
bleeding,  
they drove you through the streets  
to humiliate you.  
But the people blessed you  
like the Saint Virgin Mary.  
You appeared in the eyes of everyone  
as a flower of the people,  
as a white, pure and fresh flower,  
as a flower of crystalline diamond.

Compañera, we in the jail  
cried like children.  
God felt our pain,  
the pain of the people, your pain.  
The black eyes of heaven

shed tears of pure water  
that cleansed your bleeding body.

You were born again  
as a fresh lily of the wild.  
Now you live  
in our souls.  
You live  
as an immortal statue.  
You live  
in the soul of our beloved people.  
Golden, pure and sweet compañera,  
you are our fresh lily of the wild!

## April Flowers

*In Victoria*  
when the lukewarm  
rays of the April sun  
announce spring,  
the seeds that we sowed  
cause an explosion  
of flowers, of fragrances,  
of peace, of love,  
of beautiful old ladies,  
of playful boys and happy girls.

*In Oklahoma*  
a soldier, a white man,  
an American fascist,  
a veteran  
from the Persian Gulf  
uses his fertilizer of hate  
to set off an explosion  
of thistle, nettle and hemlock,  
assassinating more than 167 victims.

**NINETEEN BOYS AND GIRLS!**  
of all races,

tiny bodies,  
 bodies in pain,  
 eradicated bodies,  
 agony of wounded boys,  
 agony of bloody girls,  
 blood which gushes forth  
 in a thousand places  
 in a pit of iron and concrete.

Blood of girls,  
 blood of boys  
 in the dawn of their lives.

Hot blood  
 trickles slowly,  
 leaving a river  
 of red  
 tulips.

Where are the April flowers?  
 Where the dawn of lost lives?  
 Fascist, enemy of dreams and love,  
 enemy

of light and happiness.  
 Soldier, I despise you,  
 despise your human misery.  
 Military man, death springs forth  
 from your white hands.

Voice of death,  
 rain of blood,  
 puddle of agony,  
 blood shed of innocents  
 washes to the sea.

**BLOOD OF DEAD CHILDREN**  
**DEATHS WE WILL NOT FORGET!**  
**MOTHERS, I ACCOMPANY YOU IN YOUR PAIN!**  
 Today your sons are fleeting little stars!  
 Today your daughters are the Angels of Oklahoma!

I,  
 a Latin-American poet,  
 I write my poem  
 with the green ink of hope.  
 It is my call,  
 it is my melody,  
 pure as ivory,  
 pure as the souls of your children.  
 I, a poet, I promise

I will take each drop of their blood,  
 blood of your assassinated young ones,  
 blood which I will convert  
 into flowers, into fragrances,  
 into diamonds, into stars,  
 into light, into rainbows  
 into butterflies, into doves,  
 into delicate bubbles of love.  
 Children of Oklahoma,  
 your blood will become April flowers.

## The Door

I have left open my door  
 to let you enter, my beloved;  
 I have waited in silence,  
 full of tenderness and love.

The hours pass,  
 and you do not come.  
 The day turns into night,  
 and you do not come.

The hours break my heart;  
 my soul explodes from pain and falls  
 as the day falls with its different happy colors  
 on this evening dark with pain.

The insects have entered:  
 the fireflies, the spiders,  
 the crickets with their sad songs,  
 the mosquitoes with their hungry lances.

But you have not arrived.  
 The spider weaves its net of death;  
 the fireflies kiss the light and die;  
 the hungry mosquitoes crash into me and die.

They die because I don't have blood.



I have bitterness, I have poison,  
I have ice floes;  
I have a river of lava and fire.

They keep coming in my door:  
the cockroaches,  
the wandering ants,  
the cold night.

You do not come.  
The red wine stains my table;  
my tears strike the floor  
like a hundred salty pearls.

The wine does not make me drunk;  
I cannot silence my pain,  
my suffering, my anguish.  
My desire calls to you.

The door lets in  
so many beings I do not wish to see.  
And still you do not come.  
Come, come, my door is open to you.

It is only a poet in love, waiting for you!

GEORGE RAMMEL was born in Cranbrook, B.C. in 1952 and studied art at the Vancouver School of Art [Emily Carr College of Art and Design] from 1971-75. He has been active as a sculptor and teacher since 1979. Since 1989, he has been a faculty member of the Studio Art Program at Capilano College.

## I Heard That Beach is on the Other Side of the World

George Rammel

We all knew Bill would be leaving us soon. But when the event finally takes place it still takes you off guard. It's so final, there's no opportunity to visit him one last time to tell him how much you loved his determination, his wit, his tenacity, and his love of culture and craftsmanship. There's no more time to discard any hatchets left unburied.

How wonderful it is that Martine enriched Bill's life. They came together through a common passion for northwest coast culture; they became soul partners through Bill's most famous and most difficult years. Their work and play together was the keel Bill needed to weather the storms.

Everyone's memory of Bill is so different, according to the context and time of their friendship with him. He had the confidence in his own position to hire and work with the most skilled people he could find, regardless of their race; it didn't matter who the slaves were, as long as they were genuine *bricoleurs*.

I never could have imagined that anyone could arouse such a huge range of feelings in such a mass of people. I saw and felt awe, anger, envy, jealousy, compassion, rage, and exhaustion.

And I never could have imagined that one figure could create such a torrent of controversy in adulation and anger. Bill was called a trickster, a wizard, a cultural saviour, a mentor, a liberal, a plaintiff, a defendant, a critic, an activist, a modernist, a maestro, an honorary doctor, a shaman, a wolf, and a Haida.

Over the eleven-year-span and fifteen projects I worked on for Bill, there were many times he was furious with me and I was fed up with him, but I was determined to continue, knowing his universal goal was greater than the tension in the studio, which was as real as the tension he strove for on the surfaces of his work.

Regardless of how pressing the deadlines were and how serious the legal and technical problems might be, he would rarely reveal his next move. Like the raven reassembling stolen silver in his nest, he would play with the follies of human nature, its quest for power, and with Murphy's Law – the principle that materials possess their own uncooperative nature.

He was a compulsive manipulator of materials, an alchemist of culture, an advocate of visceral work as a means of communication – a view of the world which he felt was on the edge of extinction.

I remember when two large commissions were backed up in the studio. He was spending his time inventing a "bilateral-axis-symmetrizing machine" with the guts of electric grinders, coffee machines, telephones, copper wire, cedar, steel, and leather.

"Charlie could have used a tool like that." Bill had to get it working because Uncle Charlie was watching, "and he's going to think I'm a fool."

When he finally got it working, shortly before dinner, he handed it to me to execute the job, satisfied that he had dealt with the fundamental essence of the task. The rest was just banal work, the root principle had been established.

Bill's "deep carving," which Doris writes of, evolved towards carving right through. He carved so deep, he went right through to the other side, with no concern for product. He was the compulsive alchemist, excavating towards an existential void, searching for meaning beyond the limits of physical space.

When Bill and Martine first came to my studio in 1979 and asked me to carve on the Raven piece, I was so excited to be able to contribute to this legacy. Bill was at the peak of his mastery. His only instruction was to not look at the model, make it feel like a clam shell and oh, by the way, if the balls are in the wrong place, feel free to change them. An interpretation meant to carve the anatomy but to keep it Haida. Then, for three days, he disappeared while I contemplated how Canada would treat me if I were to destroy something. You can't get the job done by being reverent, so I began chopping. Later, Bill arrived like a movie star in a grey Rolls Royce, wearing a

white shirt and sunglasses and complaining bitterly about all his social obligations.

He was like nothing I had ever encountered before, a true mentor with the conviction of the priests from my Catholic childhood. He would ridicule the church while praising the raven's cunning skill in bringing light to the world. He was humored by people who were searching for their inner self, knowing that you construct your self by what you do and make.

He needed his art, writing, and storytelling to survive, to keep his mind off his Parkinson's. His enthusiasm for his work — despite his daily, hourly, minute-by-minute pain — is his greatest achievement. We younger people complained about our aches and pains, but we could only image, from the pain on Bill's face, what he went through in his later years, for the joy of creating.

Bill will live on in history, a mythic figure of overwhelming magnitude, like Emily Carr, whom he categorized as an overrated but competent regional painter. The momentum of Bill Reid's legacy will build with time, as time creates mythic value and legendary status — a position he was long destined to fulfill. His being was a vehicle for the energy of Haida mannerism.

But I will always remember the Bill who liked *Dangerous Pear Flambé* Pancakes and one-hundred dollar spiked milkshakes made in the studio with a five gallon pail, an electric drill and a welding rod mixer. I will remember the man who was ecstatic about inventiveness in the shop, all-purpose knives, templates, adzes, skew chisels and hatchets.

I remember the time he and I went to New York together to check up on the bronze casting of the Whale for the Aquarium. After our arrival, he left his wallet in a gypsy taxicab. There we were in New York with no money — no credit cards — nothing. I had sixty-five dollars — not even enough for a room for one night, and no one in the area cared who Bill Reid was. Then Bill remembered he had lent a friend eight-thousand dollars fifteen years ago. So, we started walking. We went about a mile. Miraculously, Bill found the house of his friend in the downtown sprawl. He was a Jewish writer who even more miraculously had eighteen-hundred dollars cash in his house. He gave it to Bill. So life went on as usual.

Then there was another time. Bill directed me to make the ancient, reluctant conscript, the lowly human paddler on his last large project — any way I wanted to! This was the only non-deity on board, the slave. In the Renaissance tradition of maestro and tradesman, I was being given the clear mandate to do my best to resolve this minor support figure. When I sculpted it into an obvious Haida portrait of Bill, he was furious with me and chopped the face up with his small adz, but the inertia of the form persisted. When repaired, it still felt like Bill, and appropriately so, for he was a slave to his own

visions, the consummate practitioner of the well-made object. Charlie<sup>2</sup> would have wanted it that way.

Somehow, Bill, I feel you and Charlie are carving slate together on the beach. I heard that beach is on the other side of the world. I doubt you two agree on everything, but I can imagine you chuckling together about what happened.

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<sup>2</sup> Charlie was Bill Reid's great granduncle Charlie Edenshaw

GEORGE NORRIS is a West Coast sculptor who lives in Shawnigan Lake. He worked on many of Bill Reid's projects.

## A Bridge Between Two Worlds

George Norris

### Elders of the Musqueam, Elders of the Haida.

First of all, Phyllis and I wish to convey our sincere condolences to Martine Reid, to Peggy Kennedy and to all other members of Bill Reid's family.

Martine has asked me to say a few words and I am honoured to do so.

Bill's life and works are the stuff of myths and legends.

Many others who have already spoken have a gift for words and are better able to tell of his renown, of his superb work and of his contribution to the revival of the West Coast's great First Nation's culture. I will confine my remarks to an image of him that has been with me since I heard of his death.

I first met Bill over forty years ago. I was, I think, twenty-seven; he was thirty-five years old. We were both teaching night extension classes in one of the old army huts in the Fort Camp at U.B.C. For the next twenty years we were good friends. He and Bill Koochin and I were in and out of each other's studios and had mutual friends. Bill Reid and I often talked to each other about our problems and our pleasures. He and Tony Cavelti made the engagement ring I designed for Phyllis and he was the godfather of our firstborn.

In 1963, he invited me to accompany him and his brother-in-law, Stu Kennedy (his sister Peggy's husband), up to Haida Gwaii, or, as it was called on maps, the Queen Charlotte Islands. Under Dr. Walter Koerner's patronage, he was to search out salvageable totem pole fragments in several abandoned villages.

I think I was asked in case they needed a strong back and because Bill knew I was interested to see the original geographic context of works that I admired.

The idea was to drive to Prince Rupert and then fly to Sandspit. On our drive in his Mercedes-Benz, we made a slight detour at Hazelton. We crossed the Skeena over the bridge north of that town and continued down river to Kitwanoocool to view the famed *Hole-in-the-Sky* pole, and then continued to Kitwanga where we had to cross the Skeena again to get back on the highway to Rupert.

There was no bridge in those days, but rather a cable ferry, driven by the current – not much more than a barge on a clothesline.

And this is the image I mentioned earlier: Bill driving a Mercedes-Benz, one of the most sophisticated vehicles that could be produced by the technology of the day, across two planks onto a virtual raft to get to the other side.

Bill was born into two worlds and he crossed back and forth between those worlds as conditions required, by whatever means were at hand.

The route was uncharted. Sometimes he determined the route, often the route presented itself. And many times others helped him find his way.

It may be hard to believe, looking around this great hall today, but early in his career he was not fully accepted by either of his worlds.

Today each world would claim him as its own.

A modern-day Homer of either world could make Bill an epic hero of this Odyssey. I see it happening tonight.

As for me, I prefer to remember a brief moment in our lives when Bill and Stu and I – each with his own all-too-human weaknesses, complexities and contradictions – stood on a raft in the middle of the mighty Skeena River, being propelled by its current, yet held on course by a cable linking both shores.

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## Journeys That Bring Us Here

Ernest Hekkanen

It was getting dark. An unremitting drizzle had started coming down around two o'clock in the afternoon, making it difficult to keep the fires burning. Reino Sisunen had been steadily raking garbage all day long, pushing it a little bit at a time into the various fires, working at a steady pace without hurrying. His arms and legs wearied a lot faster now. By the end of the day his back felt like a rusty hinge that hadn't been oiled in a long time. It was one of the complications of getting old, he told himself. One had to live with it. That was just the way things were.

A breeze bent tails of smoke low across the ground. The drizzle made the smoke smell acrid. A tinny residue clung to the back of his throat. Through the smoke he caught the occasional glimpse of a boy — now here, now there — peering at him from the periphery of the shadow-bitten evergreen trees. Reino wondered what the boy was up to, why he was skulking around like a spy.

In another hour, it was so dark Reino could no longer spot the boy off in the trees. But he could sense the boy's presence lurking beyond the smoldering orange glow of the dump fires that he had kept burning for over twenty years. He pulled at the chain looping down to his trouser pocket, popped open the metal lid of his pocketwatch and,



tilting the lens toward the fire, squinted to see what time it was. Five forty-eight. In twelve minutes he would close the gate to the dump. He would retire to the corrugated metal shack near the entrance, surrounded by things he had salvaged over the years: tires, chairs, bicycles, appliances of every description and, most recently, a gasoline lawnmower he was repairing in his spare time. It was incredible what people threw away.

Reino shoved the pocketwatch back into his trouser pocket. A few minutes later he traipsed across the dump to the gate. A pair of headlights swung up the gravel road and came bouncing down the narrow lane between the trees. At such times, Reino found it difficult to be civil. He stood under the overhanging roof of his shack, leaning his thick arms on the handle-end of the rake, waiting for the late-comers to unload their garbage and drive back to the gate, where he would flag them down for the dumping fee.

The vehicle passed under the lamp shining down from the tall pole in the yard. Reino noticed that it was an older model Volvo station wagon, with a rusted-out front fender on the driver's side. The Volvo swung around and backed up to one of the fires. Two men began to unload what looked like heavy plastic bags from the back. Their voices were loud, boisterous, as if they'd had something to drink.

"Did you see Duncan's face when I slit open the first one? I thought for sure he was gonna faint."

"Useless bimbo..."

A little while later, the men got back into the Volvo and swung it around to the gate. Reino waved for them to stop. He recognized the bearded driver who rolled down the window and stuck his arm out with a twenty dollar bill clutched in his hand.

"So how's it going, old-timer?"

"As usual..."

Reino cursed the twenty-dollar bill. He went into the shack to make change from the steel box and headed back out to the station wagon. "Next time, at a late hour like this, maybe a smaller bill, huh?"

"Don't get your hackles up, old fella."

"Hackles aren't up. Hackles are laid back. But I'm no bank either. Okay?"

"Okay."

The Volvo roared down the narrow lane between the trees. Reino swung the gate shut and stuck a metal pin through the bracket. A new smell had drifted across the dump — that of burning flesh! He walked over to where the men had dumped the plastic bags. The ones nearest the flames had burst wide open, spilling entrails and a deer's head. The eyes of the deer seemed to look into Reino's soul; he grimaced, not liking the sight.

“Shit!”

There were eight bags. What they contained would attract all kinds of vermin if he didn't do something about it soon. He went back to the shack to get a spade. Working by the firelight, he dug a trench in the hot dirt and ashes. His face and hands flushed in the near proximity of the fire. His brow dripped sweat that ran down into his eyes, stinging them.

Rearing back from the fire to cool off, his gaze inadvertently swung toward the shack. He had forgotten about the boy. Now he saw him dart like a shadow across the lane near the gate.

“Hey, you. Boy!”

The boy did not respond. Reino watched him scamper around the far side of the shack, causing something to crash. Reino wondered if he should go over to investigate what the boy was up to. It meant walking there and walking back — extra energy he didn't want to put out at the end of a very long day. Instead, he went back to work with the shovel. He kept one eye partly on his shack. He didn't want the steel box with the cash to be stolen. It contained a couple of hundred dollars.

Finally, the trench was deep enough. He pushed the bags into it, scraping stray bones and entrails in on top of the bags and covering them with hot dirt and ashes. That would keep the vermin away. Their paws wouldn't tolerate the heat. Walking back to the shack, he went around to the far side to see if he could spot the boy hiding in the shadows. Though Reino couldn't see him, he could feel the youngster's presence in the dark, no more than fifteen feet away. He knew from the itchy feeling he got that the boy must be watching him.

“I know you're there,” Reino said. “Maybe you're hungry, maybe some food you'd like? I've got some beans on the stove. You come to my door if you want something to eat. Okay?”

He listened carefully. All he heard was the drizzle on the corrugated roof of his shack. Also, the breeze that swayed the trees.

“Okay, you have it your way,” Reino said. “But my offer stands. Just come to the door if you want something to eat. I got plenty for an extra mouth.”

Reino let himself in by the door. The smell of pork and beans pervaded the interior. It was a welcome, friendly smell compared to the acrid stench outside. He removed his rain gear and hung it from a hook. He sat down on a stool to remove his boots, the stiffness in his lower back making it difficult to untie the leather laces. He pried the boots off his feet and set them on a piece of tin by the door. Padding over to the pot-bellied stove, he picked up the cast-iron lever, secured it on the end of the rod sticking out of the side and agitated the grate. He opened the little metal door in front, glanced at the fire inside and added a couple of coal chunks.

The interior of the shack exhibited a refined sort of clutter. The walls were lined with shelves containing electrical motors, knick-knacks, books, lamps, toys — just about anything that could be imagined! Ever so often Reino would load the items into the bed of his truck and take them into town to sell to junk dealers.

The shack had only one window. A crack ran diagonally across the lower, right-hand corner. Bars secured it against breaking and entering. Reino sat down at the table by the window. Switching on the radio, he glimpsed the boy's face in the dark beyond the glass pane. It seemed to surface like a pallid blob. Their gazes met. The boy reared back from the window. Rising from the chair, Reino hurried to the door, pulling it back and sticking out his head, hoping to catch sight of the youngster.

"Boy! I know you are out there. Reino doesn't bite. Just come to the door. Dinner's almost ready."

There was no reply.

Reino closed the door, bolted it and got ready to take a shower in the bathroom built like an afterthought onto the shack. The radio played some nondescript chamber music. He scolded it for not playing something better.

"Please, some Sibelius or Tchaikovsky. I have no tolerance for chicken-scratch composers."

After taking a shower, he put on a clean pair of bib overalls. By that time the radio was playing a piece by Kodály. The gypsy flavor of the music appealed to him. He congratulated the radio for improving its taste.

Suddenly, outside, there was a crash. He visualized where it had come from. Among the bicycles, near the washing machine he was restoring.

"Go ahead," he said, chuckling to himself. "Steal a bike from old Reino. Make sure it's one with brakes."

Reino turned off the interior light so he could see what was happening outside. He saw the boy swerve the bicycle around the end of the gate. Reino expected him to keep going. Instead, the boy swung his leg over the rear fender of the bicycle, preparing to get off.

"Ah, so there's something else you want to steal. There's something else you need."

Reino switched on the interior light. He took the steel cash box off the table, put it under the bed and went to stir the pork and beans on the pot-bellied stove. He would play cat and mouse with the boy. He would make it difficult for the boy to run away a second time. He went to the door, unbolted it and swung it wide open. A little while later he heard the boy knock into something near the southwest corner of the shack.

"So what have you come to steal this time?" Reino muttered. "Make it something good. Make it something that will get you to where you're going."

He ladled pork and beans onto two tin plates. He put spoons on each plate. One plate he put on the table. The other he put on an up-turned wooden box in the doorway.

"Boy. I know you're out there. Come and eat. There's pork and beans on this box here. All you have to do is come and get it."

He buttered four slices of rye bread. He put one slice on the plate in the doorway and took the other three over to the table. The radio was now playing Mozart's Opus 21. Reino sat without eating, bothered by memories of when he had first heard the piece played in Helsinki over forty years ago — not long before he had gone abroad to seek a better life.

His reflection loomed in the dark of the window. He saw a grizzled hunk of face with watery eyes and wiry eyebrows. He didn't often look at himself. He preferred to avoid such contact, even when he shaved.

"Foolish old man," he told his reflection. "Foolish Reino."

He dug into the homemade pork and beans, lifting the spoon to his mouth. Right away, he realized the beans needed more garlic. He got up from the table and squeezed more garlic into the pot of beans. He took a plastic container of sour cream out of the refrigerator. He spooned some sour cream onto the boy's plate in the doorway and went to sit down at the table where he mixed some sour cream into his own beans.

For several minutes the only sound, other than the radio, was rain drumming on the corrugated roof. The boy hadn't made a noise. However, Reino could feel his presence just around the corner from the door.

"Good, you're being lured by the food," he muttered. "Eat. I know how it is when you're so hungry you think your stomach will eat your insides."

Reino sat very still, listening for stealthy movements outside. The boy thought he was being a sneaky fellow, but Reino could sense him like a spider sensing vibrations in the strands of a web. He dug into the pork and beans, waiting patiently. The tin on the ground outside the door suddenly buckled under the boy's weight. Reino chuckled to himself.

"Do not be afraid, boy. Reino doesn't bite. He's a very kind old man."

A shadow fell on the door jamb. The boy was crouching just outside the door.

"Ummm, very good beans, Reino. You make the best beans in the whole wide world, if I don't mind saying so myself."

A hand reached inside to take the tin plate. Again, Reino chuckled. A broadcaster came on the radio, dispensing information about a piece of music composed by Rachmaninoff.

"Okay, now we get some music that isn't neutered," Reino muttered to himself. "Boy? I say, boy? Do you like Rachmaninoff?"

There was no reply. Rain drummed harder on the corrugated roof. Reino spooned more beans into his mouth. He turned up the radio to better hear the Rachmaninoff. The desire to wave his arms now seized him.

"Reino, the magnificent conductor, undiscovered in the garbage dump," he said, laughing. "Boy, do you like this kind of music? This is very good Rachmaninoff. Sweet but sorrowful. Listen to that cello. It sounds like a woman crying for her lover, don't you think?"

The hand shot back inside, depositing the tin plate on the up-turned wooden box. The plate was empty.

"Pretty good beans, don't you think, boy? I didn't know how big your hunger was so I didn't give you too much. Maybe you'd like some more? Just say so. Reino will put some more on your plate."

The boy did not reply.

"You'll have to speak up if you want more beans, boy. Otherwise Reino will think you're full."

Still there was no reply.

"I guess that means you must be full," he said, pushing himself to his feet. He lumbered over to the door, picked up the plate and shoved the wooden box aside with his foot.

"My shack can't keep the heat in with the door wide open like this. Hope you like the rain. Of course, if you'd like to come in and get dry, Reino wouldn't mind. You can stay all night if you want to. It's up to you."

"I'd like some more beans." The voice came from around the corner.

"Sure, more beans coming up. You want to eat them out there or in here?"

"Out here."

"You must really like the rain that's coming down." Reino chortled. "But maybe you're part duck. Are you part duck, boy?"

Reino ladled more beans onto the boy's plate. He added another slice of buttered bread. He set the wooden box outside the door and put the plate down on top of it.

"I'll leave the light on so you can see your food, but I'm going to close the door now to keep in the heat. Just knock if you'd like somewhere dry to sleep tonight. But maybe your pride is too big, huh? Maybe you're gonna run away to some foreign land far away from home? Either that, or maybe you're not so mad at the person you fought with anymore and are thinking of going home?"

"I ain't never going home!"

"That's your perfect right. Just the same, I have to close this door now – to keep in the heat. Have a nice night out there in the rain."

Reino closed the door. He sat at the table, chuckling to himself. He finished eating the beans on his tin plate, mopping up the sauce with bread. A mirror hung from the eaves outside the window. It was twisted at an angle that allowed Reino to scrutinize the door. He saw the boy sitting on the up-turned wooden box, the plate on his knees, eating like a starved animal. He was thirteen or fourteen, clad in a thin jacket and jeans. A baseball cap was pulled down on his brown hair.

Reino shook his head.

"How far do you expect to get like that – no rain gear, only runners on your feet? Are your feet wet, boy? Is the cold creeping up your legs?"

Reino washed his plate under the tap in the bathroom. He put a kettle of water on the pot-bellied stove. The Rachmaninoff had gone off the radio. Now there was a program devoted to art and literature. The breathy, refined tones of the broadcaster annoyed him. He rolled the tuning knob between thumb and forefinger, stopping when he heard a grumpy Scottish voice haranguing a caller for being a fuzzy-minded socialist whose bleeding-heart idealism would drive everybody into the poorhouse.

"Listen, caller, anybody with half a brain should know the dangers inherent in making life too easy for people. Give a man a good mattress to lie on, and it makes it difficult for him to get up in the morning. It robs him of the will to survive. It's as simple as that. Good-bye."

Reino glanced through the window at the mirror. The boy had finished eating. He was holding the plate in his hands, staring at the wet darkness in front of him.

"Pondering the rain, boy? That's what a hot meal will do for you. You should've kept going on that bicycle you stole from me."

The water in the kettle was beginning to boil. Reino dropped two bags of Red Rose tea in a hen-shaped pot he had rescued from destruction in the dump. He filled it with hot water, then he glanced at the mirror to see if the boy was sitting outside the door. He was gone.

Reino opened the door. He reached to pick up the tin plate. He sensed the boy's presence not far away.

"I'm making some tea, boy. Would you like a cup?"

"My name isn't boy. It's Doug."

"Well, would you like a cup of tea, Doug?"

"Sure, I'll have a cup of tea."

"Out here in the rain? Or inside where it's warm?"

There was no reply.

"I can tell by your silence that you want to stay outside," Reino said.

"You can't tell dick all, old man."

"Reino is my name. I'll call you Doug if you'll call me Reino."

"Reino? What the hell kind of name is that?"

"Finnish. I came from Finland — many, many long years ago."

The boy stepped into the light. His pimply face tried to look tough.

"I'll leave the door open if you'd like to come in," Reino told him. "If you want to come in and get yourself warm with your cup of tea, just do so."

Reino went to get two cups off the shelf beside the pot-bellied stove. When he turned around he saw the boy standing inside the door.

"Close the door, please. It's hard enough to keep this place warm."

The boy closed the door.

"Why would anybody want to live in a fucking garbage dump?" he said, almost adamantly.

"It doesn't meet with your approval, Doug?"

"Well, you gotta admit it ain't a very nice place to live."

"Who says so? If I wasn't living here I wouldn't have been able to rescue that bicycle you stole off me. You wouldn't be having tea right now — in a nice warm place! You think everything is trash just because it's in a dump. You don't see the silver lining."

The Scottish broadcaster was babbling loudly on the radio. Reino switched him off. He poured the tea.

"What a stupid-looking tea pot," the boy said.

Reino held the hen-shaped pot up in front of him, examining the profile.

"Reino likes it," he said. "Mainly because it was free. So to him it is very handsome, even with the broken knob on the top."

Reino regarded the boy.

"Would you like anything in your tea, Doug? Milk? Sugar? Honey?"

"Milk."

"Milk it is." Reino took the carton out of the refrigerator and poured milk into each of the cups. To his own tea he added honey.

"Here's your cup, Doug."

He held it out for the boy to take. The boy lifted his lip in a sneer. "How come you're being so nice to somebody who just stole a bike off you?"

Reino shrugged. "The bike is one of many. Should I worry? Everything you see here comes from out there. If it gets stolen it's replaced by something else. Reino doesn't hang onto things. It's no use."

He nodded at the extra chair beside the table.

"How about sitting down, Doug? Reino is old. He's been on his feet all day. He's going to sit down."

"How come you talk like that?" the boy said.

"Like what?"

"Like you're somebody else...."

Reino snorted laughter. "When you're old you get certain habits. By yourself, you get more habits. It is the way I speak, is all. People might think it's funny, but me, I think other people are funny. For instance, I think what people throw away is very funny. Sometimes it is perfectly good stuff. So who is funnier, I ask you? Them or me?"

The boy sat in the other chair. Reino looked at him over the rim of his cup.

"Reino's going to have some dessert now. You want some dessert?"

"What is it?"

"*Viili*. It gives you long life. You never get sick."

"What is it?"

"You know yogurt? It's like that, only better."

"I hate yogurt."

"Suit yourself."

Reino got up from the table. On a shelf stacked high with plates and cups, there were five bowls with inverted saucers covering them. He removed the bowl on the left and returned to the table. He slid the saucer off the top, revealing a moldy crust of cream.

"It looks like it died," the boy said.

"But it hasn't," Reino told him. "It is very much alive."

Reino spooned the crust off the top. Long, white filaments trailed from his spoon. He stuck the *viili* into his mouth with an air of deep satisfaction, his face crinkling in a wide grin. The boy winced.

"That's the best part," Reino said. "Better than candy."

"It looks like vomit."

"But it tastes good. It gives you much health."

Reino spooned off the remaining crust and ate it.

"I brought this *viili* from the old country many, many years ago. Dried out in a cloth. It can survive almost anything — just like old Reino can." He looked at the boy's steel-blue eyes. "How are you at surviving, Doug?"

"I'm alive, ain't I?"

"That tells me nothing. That's like saying you breathe air. What I want to know is what you're running away from? And why?"

"I think I'm gonna go."

"Go. The door is unlocked. You can leave any time you want. But remember, it isn't Reino chasing you away."

Reino stirred the *viili*. Ate.

"You don't like your tea, Doug?"

"I'm letting it cool."



"You look wet. Why don't you hang your coat over by the stove? Take off your shoes and put them on the drying rack. That way when you leave you'll be starting dry."

"I don't feel like it."

"Suit yourself. I can't make you do what is smart. Survival will teach you that soon enough."

Reino ate some more *viili*. Belched.

"You know, I once ran away, too. My old man was a real bad one. He would get drunk in the village. The next morning when he woke up he was always in a foul mood. Something would warp the way he saw things. Probably the pain in his head. He would suspect my brother and me of slacking off. He would tell us to get a willow stick to beat us with. The stick had to be a good one, otherwise he would throw it away and tell us to get another one. He often did that. Over and over again. We would search for a good stick to be beaten with. When we finally found one that met with his approval he would say: 'At last! My idiot sons found a good stick. Congratulations!' Then he'd beat us with it."

"Why are you telling me this?" Doug said, narrowing his eyes, frowning.

"For your edification. One day I decided I had had enough. I ran away. It was winter. I knew how to ski. I knew how to trap animals, how to live out in the forest. I had good clothes, good boots — not like what you're wearing now. And I was big. All the hard work had made me strong. I could pass for much older. The first night, it was raining like tonight. I was maybe eleven kilometers from our farm. I was passing by a neighbor's house. The householder said: 'Reino, where are you going on such a terrible night? Come in and have some supper with us.' The door was wide open. The smell of the woman's cooking called to me, but, you see, I knew if I sat down at the table with them I would eventually get up and go home. Then I would get another beating. So I said no. I was on a mission. I had to keep going. A year later, I was working in a shipyard in Hanko. Two years later, I was on a boat to the new world. That was a very long time ago. In 1952."

Reino smiled at the boy.

"Do you know why I told you that story?" he asked.

"I guess you're telling me I should be prepared," the boy said.

"Not only that. Your mind should be fixed on the journey ahead of you. You should be able to see yourself a long ways down the road." Reino paused. "You come from around here, don't you, Doug?"

The boy shrugged.

"Of course, you do. That's how you knew about the bicycles. When you ran way you thought, *I need a bicycle. I know what I'll do. I'll steal one from that old man at the dump.* But where do you see

yourself going on that bicycle? Into town? That's not so far. I know a few places where I could get out of the rain. But then, where will you go? Also, how will you stay dry? How will you feed your belly?"

Reino sipped at the tea in his cup.

"You know, I have an idea," he told the boy. "Let Reino show you the ropes. He will show you how to get ready to run away. Everything you need, I have right here. No cost. You already have the bike, but you'll need much more."

"How long would that take?" asked the boy.

"Not long. A week or two. I'll make sure you know how to run away."

"Where would I stay?"

"Here, if you like. But I don't think that's a good idea. It reveals your cards too much. Part of learning to survive is not showing your cards all at once."

"You're telling me I should go back home, aren't you?"

"I can see you have some intelligence in your head, Doug. Yes, I'm saying you should go back home. But it will be different this time. You will know in your head that you're going to run away soon. That will be a secret that will warm your heart. Meanwhile, we will get everything together that you will need to run away for good. I will show you how to snare animals. I will show you how to live off the land. I will show you how to survive on your own."

"I can't wait that long," the boy said.

Reino shrugged. "Suit yourself. You will learn the hard way. But maybe I can give you some stuff that will help you along the way."

"Like what?"

"Have some tea while I get them..."

Reino unfastened an infantry belt from a hook on the wall. He rummaged around in his footlocker for some pockets to put on the belt. Next he took a fishing tackle box down from a shelf and set it on the table. He opened it with a show of reverence.

"This box contains all of my treasures," he said, smiling at Doug. "Some found here in the dump, some brought from Finland."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah. I doubt if you'll need this gold ring," Reino said, holding up a wedding band. "Or this diamond one. Somebody was so rich they could afford to toss these out. But you might need this pocket-knife. Do you have a pocketknife, Doug?"

"Nope."

"Then this one is yours," he said, handing it to the boy. "I honed the blade so it's sharp like a thistle. A corkscrew, it has. Also, a can opener. How about fishing line? Do you have any fishing line?"

"What for?"

"To fish with. Also, to make snares to catch small animals. It will serve you well in the wilderness. Believe me." He looked at the boy. "Do you have a waterproof container for your matches?"

"I don't have any matches."

"You'll need some matches."

Reino put the plastic container on the table. Shoving the fishing tackle box to one side, he got up and went to the shelf by the potbellied stove. He reached for the box of wooden matches and turned around. The boy was staring at the fishing tackle box; the rings were no doubt tempting him.

Reino went back to the table. Sat down. "Here are some matches. Fill up the plastic container with them. You will need them to stay warm."

The boy opened the match box. He started stuffing wooden matches into the plastic container.

"On nights like this, when there's so much rain coming down, you will find it hard to start a fire. Here are some candles. Use them sparingly. Make your fire under a bridge or someplace like that. Start small. Be patient. Build your fire twig by twig – never all at once! I will give you a poncho, too. Also, some boots that will keep your feet dry. But first and foremost you will need this..."

Reino held up a piece of walrus tusk that had a crude figure carved on it.

"What's that?" said the boy.

"It's a lucky charm."

The boy gave him a skeptical look.

"Have you never heard of the sampo?" Reino asked him.

"Nope. Never."

"The sampo was a magic mill. It made sure my people always had enough to survive. A very powerful woman by the name of Louhi stole it for her own use. Old Väinämöinen set out to North Farm to get it back. He and Louhi fought like cats and dogs – probably like your mother and father do. The sampo fell on some rocks near the sea. One piece tumbled into the ocean. A raven swooped down to get the second piece. The third piece got lodged in a crevice, and the fourth simply vanished. The fifth piece I have in my hand here. It came all the way from Finland. If thieves knew how much it was worth, they would steal it in a flash. Here, hold it in your hand, Doug. Feel how it vibrates?"

The boy took the piece of walrus tusk. "I don't feel anything."

"In time, you will. I'm not going to give you all of it. I'm going to cut it in half. That way some of the magic will be with me, some with you."

Reino unsheathed his *puukko* – a knife with an eight inch blade. He whacked the charm. The piece of walrus tusk split in half.

"Here is your half, Doug. Keep it on you at all times. At night when you're worried, take it out and rub it. Try to picture what you have to do the next day and, sure enough, it will get done."

"That's stupid," the boy said. "There's no such thing as magic charms."

Reino arched his right eyebrow. "Stupid, is it? How smart do you think it was to go out in the rain in those clothes you have on? Now tell me what stupid is."

"Magic is stupid. It's for dupes."

"Running away without proper gear is stupid. That's what is stupid – not the magic of the sampo! Here, watch this..."

Reino stroked the walrus tusk with his thumb. He passed it across the blade of his knife. Then he drew the blade across his palm. A thin ribbon of blood appeared.

"See that," Reino said.

"You cut yourself. Big deal."

"I'm not through. Watch this." Reino clutched the piece of walrus tusk in his bleeding hand. He closed his eyes very tightly. "Right now I am telling the sampo to heal my hand. I'm asking it to stop the bleeding."

"Good luck."

"There is no luck to this, Doug. This is a sure thing. Now be quiet, please."

Reino kept his eyes closed for several minutes. The knuckles of his hand turned white.

"Well, would you like to place a bet?" he said, opening his eyes.

"I don't have any money," the boy said.

"That is just as well, because you would lose it." Reino unclenched his fingers. He held his hand so the boy could take a good look. The wound had stopped bleeding. "So what do you think, Doug?"

Doug was trying hard not to be impressed. "A good trick. That's what I think it was."

"It was no trick. It was the power of the sampo. That and nothing else. If you focus all of your attention on it – just the way I did – it will look after you. It will protect you."

"Bullshit. Nothing looks after anything."

"That's where you are wrong, Doug. Your dreams will look after you. Have good dreams, and they will be what you get. Have bad dreams, and they will be what you get. Dream hard with the sampo in your hand. It will look after you."

"Just like it did with you," the boy said, forcing a laugh. "You live in a fucking garbage dump."

"No, there you are wrong," Reino told him. "This is not a garbage dump. This is a garden of discarded treasures. You see, it is all in how you see things."

The boy drummed his hands on his thighs, trying to disguise the tremors that suddenly seized his limbs. Reino glanced at the clock on the wall.

"Enough of Reino's foolishness," he said. "There's a TV over in the corner. Usually it makes half a screen, but sometimes if you hit it just right it will make a full screen. You can watch it if you want to. Make yourself at home. Take off your shoes and put them on the drying rack. Dry your coat, too. Meanwhile, I will get everything ready for you to run away successfully."

While the boy was watching television, Reino put the khaki pockets on the infantry belt and filled them with survival gear. He was seized by the sad inevitability of life, a feeling that used to drive him to drink, but not anymore. He made some herbal tea and offered it to the boy who sat staring at the television screen, as if willing himself to disappear into it. Into one of the khaki pockets on the infantry belt, Reino slipped fifty dollars.

"Doug," he said, "do you know how to play cribbage?"

"Of course. Everybody knows how to play cribbage."

"Good. Let's have a game, shall we?"

By eleven o'clock, they had played five games. Reino stretched his arms, and yawned.

"It's time for Reino to sleep," he said. "If you want to stay here for the night, you are welcome. I have a foamie and some extra blankets. In the morning you can get a fresh start. Maybe by then it won't be raining."

During the night, Reino dreamed that his lifeless, torn body floated down a long river from the north. His mother discovered his body entangled in the boughs of a tree being swept along by the water. She hauled him out of the river, mended him with needle and thread, sang magic tunes into him and eventually he came back to life.

"Avoid that woman," she scolded him. "Next time I might not be around to save you."

Firelight flickered on her features. He pushed himself up on weakened arms, the better to look at her from the cot. "But she's got the sampo," he said. "I have to get it back."

"Forget the sampo," his mother said. "Live here. In peace. Without trouble."

"Without life, you mean..."

A spasm rent his body. Reino awakened to find gray light spilling through the window. It was a little after seven-thirty in the morning. The boy was still asleep on the foamie. Reino struggled to remember the youngster's name. It started with the letter D. What was it? Oh, yes. Doug.

Reino sat up on the edge of the bed. He pulled on his sweater, then his bib overalls. He rekindled the fire in the stove and ran some water into a pot in order to make mush.

The boy woke up with a groan. He rolled over onto his side, his body curled in the fetal position. Opera was playing on the radio.

"Do you like almonds and raisins in your mush?" Reino asked him.

"I hate mush."

"Well, mush is what I have for breakfast. You can take it or leave it, but I advise you to take it. You have a long journey ahead of you."

Doug ate the mush. He looked like he was reluctant to leave. Reino gave him a waterproof poncho and some rubber boots that would keep his feet dry. "And don't forget to use the sampo," he said. "Hold onto it like so. Let it guide you when everything else fails."

"I'll give it a try."

"Good." Reino clapped him on the shoulder. "Have a good journey to wherever you are going."

Reino watched the boy ride away on the bicycle. He got to work rekindling the fires in the dump. Several cars were lined up at the gate. Reino ignored them until the proper opening time at ten o'clock.

Late in the afternoon, a brown LTD pulled into the garbage dump. A man got out on the driver's side. He pulled a bicycle out of the trunk and shoved it in the direction of the shack. The bicycle rolled about ten feet and fell over on its side. The man hurled an infantry belt after it.

"That kid in the front seat is my son," the man said, pointing through the windshield. He was a large man with a drooping mustache. "I want you to know that I don't appreciate what you did for him. In fact, I'm going to report you to the proper authorities. Do you understand me?"

"I understand that Doug needed a place to stay last night. We played some cribbage. I gave him some things I thought he would need on his trip. I hope everything is all right between you now."

"Everything's fine."

"Good. Maybe the two of you have learned something. Let's hope, anyway."

The man looked in the direction of the bicycle lying on the ground. "That stuff is yours. I had to wring it out of him where he got it from."

"I gave it to him," Reino said. "I thought he might need it."

"He doesn't need stuff like that. I can buy him anything he wants."

"Good. You do that."

The man folded himself back into the front seat of the car and slammed the door. Reino looked through the windshield at the boy, giving him a friendly wink. The LTD backed up in a wide arc and roared down the narrow lane toward the highway. Reino picked up the bicycle and infantry belt. He leaned the bicycle against a rain barrel and took the infantry belt into the shack. He sat at the table, emp-

tying the khaki pockets of everything they contained. The piece of walrus tusk wasn't among the items.

"Good," he said to himself. "You keep it, boy. Dream about where you have to go. Dream until it comes true."