The New Orphic Review

Editor-in-Chief
Ernest Hekkanen

Copy & Associate Editor
Margrith Schraner

Managing Editor
Michael Connor

Nelson Canada

Contents Copyright © *THE NEW ORPHIC REVIEW* for the authors
First North American Serial Rights Reserved

ISSN 1480-5243

The New Orphic Review, a journal devoted to publishing fiction, poetry, reviews and essays, is published two times per year by New Orphic Publishers. The review accepts no financial assistance from government sources, but will accept advertising.

EDITORIAL AND BUSINESS OFFICE:
The New Orphic Review, 706 Mill Street, Nelson, British Columbia, Canada, V1L 4S5. Tel: (250) 354-0494. Please make sure all inquires and manuscripts are accompanied by an SASE and that the return postage is Canadian. Manuscripts with insufficient return postage will be held for one month and then discarded.

Payment to contributors is one copy of the issue in which the author's work appears. *The New Orphic Review* purchases First North American Serial Rights only.

Opinions expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of *The New Orphic Review*.

SUBSCRIPTIONS PER YEAR (2 ISSUES)

Individuals		Institutions	
Canada	$30 (CAD)	Canada	$35 (CAD)
USA	$30 (USD)	USA	$35 (USD)

Individual issues $17.50 CAD or USD as applicable.

ADVERTISEMENTS (BLACK & WHITE CAMERA-READY ONLY):

Full pages:	Half pages:
$150 CAD, $150 USD	$75 CAD, $75 USD

Subscriptions and advertisements should be sent to the above address. Make cheques payable to *The New Orphic Review*.

706 Mill Street   Nelson, British Columbia   V1L 4S5   Canada

Contents

Volume 17 Number 1 Spring 2014

Author	Page	Title
Ernest Hekkanen	4	*e-Hobbyists in the Land of e-Literature*
Ross Klatte	7	*Spirit Island*
Barbara Curry Mulcahy	25	*Four Poems*
Michael Washburn	31	*In the Flyover State*
Jill Mandrake	44	*What to Major In*
Tom Wayman	46	*Green Hell*
Robert Cooperman	56	*Four Poems*
Brian d'Eon	60	*Every Dog*
Jane Stuart	69	*Four Poems*
Diana Morita Cole	73	*Sideways*
Crystal Hurdle	79	*Four Poems*
Paul J. Healy	87	*Four Poems*
Ernest Hekkanen	91	*Deadly Family Matters*

Cover art: *Kirsten's Window, Copenhagen* by Niels Petersen is a 14" X 18" oil on panel from 2001. Painting commissions are welcome at his email address: niels.mark@yahoo.ca

Visit Our Website

www3.telus.net/neworphicpublishers-hekkanen

ERNEST HEKKANEN is the author of 45 books. The most recent are *Heretic Hill, Flesh and Spirit: The Rasputin Meditations, All Night Gas Bar* and *Wintering Over: Poems Strewn on Snow.* His novel, *Of a Fire Beyond the Hills,* was a finalist for the George Ryga Award for Social Awareness. Hekkanen is listed in the *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada* and *Contemporary Authors* in the United States. He is the subject of Margrith Schraner's critical study, *The Reluctant Author: The Life and Literature of Ernest Hekkanen.*

e-Hobbyists in the Land of e-Literature

Ernest Hekkanen

LATE LAST YEAR I attended an e-publishing presentation. It drew an extremely large crowd by small-town Nelson standards. I would guess eighty percent of the audience was made up of individuals over sixty years of age, many of whom have turned their attention to writing books now that they are retired or on the verge of becoming retired. I was reminded of a remark uttered by Margaret Atwood, when a medical doctor suggested that he was going to become a writer after retiring from his profession. Her reply was something to the effect that she was going to become a brain surgeon after retiring from the writing profession.

Don't get me wrong. I have nothing against individuals developing a late interest in life, in particular writing books. Frank McCourt managed to produce some fine literary works in his later years, namely, *Angela's Ashes, Teacher Man* and *'Tis*, each of which became a bestseller. Certainly, by the time an individual reaches the age of retirement, he should have acquired some experience worth rendering in words and phrases. However, the late-blooming desire to write a book does indicate a little something about how much contempt the average person has for writing—if not for literature, in general. Anyone who's able to successfully jot down a list of shopping items seems to think he has sufficient skills to become an author. On a few occasions, when I taught creative writing to adults, I was amazed at the number of people who felt they should be able to successfully write a book without ever having read one. They were just born with a tale to tell, apparently.

This brings me back to the e-publishing presentation. The literary agent who gave the talk tried to persuade us that electronic publishing was the way of the future. The industry is heading in that direction, due to the high cost of producing books that reside between covers. The marketplace isn't prepared to absorb all the literature being produced in

the old-fashioned manner and, in all likelihood, publishers will only "jacket" the most popular books by the most popular writers. E-publishing is a stepping stone in that direction. A book that proves its worth as an e-title is more likely to be selected for jacketing later on. Apparently, for a fraction of what it costs a librarian to purchase an old-fashioned title, she can scroll down a list of e-titles, merrily ticking off the ones she intends to stock on her e-shelves and—presto—they're delivered, without any nasty shipping or receiving costs. And, let's not forget, library space is limited, our presenter told us. Very limited. An e-librarian in the virtual world of e-literature doesn't have to worry about actual shelf space. It's all stored electronically, in the up-and-coming e-world of e-libraries.

At this point, I was given cause to reflect upon the sale of my books, which are produced in the old-fashioned manner, between actual jacket covers. The number of sales to libraries has steadily declined over the past four to five years, probably due to librarians ordering e-titles from e-jobbers in the virtual world of e-literature. The intermeshing gears of e-commerce work extremely well, at a fraction of the cost, it would seem.

So, our agent concluded, e-books are the way to go, the way to break into the writing trade in the burgeoning world of e-literature. The notion was met with murmurs of enthusiastic agreement by hobbyists in the audience, many of whom were laboring on books and some of whom had already taken the e-publishing route. The important rule to remember is that you don't want to deny yourself the services of a good agent who will make sure your book is in top form before being presented to an e-publisher, and nowadays agents provide all the necessary services a would-be author might require, we were informed.

One man (a former school teacher, and possibly a plant) had already gone this route. His book had appeared not only as an e-title but as a jacketed book as well and, as we eventually came to learn, it had only cost him $10,000. Instantly I thought, "This man has more money than brains." The costs accruing to our sixty-something wordsmith covered editing, page layout and cover design, because, even in the e-publishing world, it pays to have a great cover, apparently. The costs did not include marketing, of course; that was left up to the writer, as usual.

No wonder so many boomers had shown up for the presentation! The publishing industry is in such dire straits, the focus has shifted from publishing and selling literature to finding easy marks who can be relieved of their cash, and boomers are the preferred targets in the new e-literature world. Remember the old adage, *A sucker is born every minute*? E-publishing is the way of the future because the focus is now on relieving boomers of their retirement income, by appealing to their vanity, to their need to leave behind an artifact that will testify to the fact that they once existed on the face of the earth. In the publishing industry, the big money is now being made by people who offer services to would-be writers of

my generation, individuals who were squeamish about pursuing a writing career early in life, because it wasn't likely to provide a sound financial future. A lucrative job was more important. Now they have too much time and money on their hands, and they're fishing for something to do. Writing (and publishing) has become a popular pastime—like golf or fishing or lawn bowling.

Let me make a prediction: for the next ten to fifteen years, while the boomer generation is being swallowed up by old age and eventual death, e-hobbyists will attain preferred customer status in the post-literature e-world of e-publishing. The industry's health will be determined by the number of customers fleeced of their hard-earned cash. Remember Bernie Madoff, the Ponzi scam artist of Wall Street? He's the sort of individual who will be offering services in the brave new world of publishing—for a price, a considerable price.

Meanwhile, here at New Orphic Publishers, we will continue to defy the odds by putting text between jacket covers, and we will do it independently, without sucking down grant money from government agencies.

ROSS KLATTE is the author of *Leaving the Farm: Memories of Another Life* (2007) and of short stories that have appeared in magazines in Canada and the United States. He is a 1990 winner of the CBC Literary Competition for what became the opening chapter of his memoir, and in 2011 was shortlisted for Canada's *Journey Prize Anthology*. He has written a novel about back-to-the-land dissidents, circa 1970 in British Columbia, and is now looking for a publisher.

SPIRIT ISLAND

Ross Klatte

GILBERT LARSEN stood at the wheel of the *Mary Ann*, his converted fishing boat, balancing to her pitch and roll on this bright, blustery spring day with whitecaps on the lake. Ahead rose the bulk of Spirit Island, where he was taking his passengers.

His passengers sat behind him, snug now in the after cabin that extended from the wheelhouse. Earlier they'd stood outside, on the starboard deck beside the wheelhouse, the woman's long tawny hair streaming in the wind. She was obviously much younger than her husband, a pipe-smoking teacher and poet, tall and graying, whom Larsen knew from the previous summer when he'd lived alone on the island. His young wife now was so comely Larsen had trouble taking his eyes off her. She was a former student of the professor's, according to Larsen's gossipy, sardonic friend Elizabeth, owner of the Dockside bar in Copper River.

The island stood some twenty miles offshore, hardly visible from the town except in the clearest weather. Before the war, Larsen and his father had often fished around Spirit Island, setting their gill nets and pulling in lake trout or whitefish, sometimes lake herring. Figures appeared occasionally on the cliffs in those days, and tied up to the wooden dock in the island's cove, past the large KEEP OFF sign at the entrance, there was often a sleek cabin cruiser, longer by several feet than their sturdy work boat. "Summer people," Larsen's father commented. "*Rich bugs.*"

The rich bugs were old MacIntyre, the retired lumber baron, and visiting members of his extended family. The old man, alert and fit into his eighties, had served as the island's lighthouse keeper as a kind of hobby, until the fall storms drove him ashore. Then Larsen's father looked after the light until the seasonal end of shipping on the lake.

What still marked the island was the old stone lighthouse on its highest point, solar-powered now, no longer in need of a keeper, and a windmill still used for pumping water up from the lake.

Larsen was in the wartime Pacific, on a navy destroyer, when a letter from his mother told him his father had died of a heart attack on his boat. Home after the war, he accepted ownership of the *Mary Ann* and, until the sea lamprey helped to ruin the industry, made a living, as his father had, as a commercial fisherman.

Winters now he lived in the weathered old house he'd shared with his mother until her death, the house he'd grown up in. Summers he mostly lived on his boat. His boat was his freedom, and still provided his living. It took him where he wanted to go, and one late fall day soon after his return from the war, when he knew it would be deserted, his boat took him out to the island.

Excited, he nosed past the KEEP OFF sign and entered the cove. He tied up at the wooden dock, then climbed the steep path to the level, wooded top of the island. The path led through the woods to the cabin overlooking the outer lake that he used to study, with binoculars, from the deck of their boat while his father yelled at him to mind the nets. It was locked and shuttered now for the winter, a sprawling one-story, log and shake-roofed affair with a covered veranda and a large bay window in front and the bulge of a stone fireplace in back. In back too, was a brace of propane cylinders with tubes into the cabin, and in the woods some distance away was a small shed from which a powerline had been strung to the cabin. Larsen could guess that inside was a gas-powered generator and storage batteries.

He walked to the windmill, below which was a rectangular cement reservoir for storing the water drawn from the lake. He looked around, admiring the engineering. Here, he thought, were all the facilities, efficient and contained, like on a good boat. The island itself was its own, self-contained world, a world he wished could be his own while knowing that a place like this could only belong to the kind of people his father used to scoff at—with mixed feelings, obviously: respect, envy, contempt—and that he himself had wound up working for: rich bugs, summer people, people like this middle-aged poet and his beautiful young bride.

* * *

As they neared the island, Rose cried excitedly, "Oh Charlie, your island is so beautiful! Thank you for bringing me here!"

Charles MacIntyre smiled behind his pipe. The island was indeed his now, inherited from his grandparents; it was his refuge from Detroit, where he taught English at the university and wrote his small poems. He wrote a poem about Rose when he began to notice her in his classroom. It went in part:

She has a kind of indoor beauty
like those flowers one sees
in the windows of foul tenements
in a city. He would take her away

from cities.

Alone last summer on the island he'd filled his days with reading and writing, with exploring the small extent of the island, its woods and cliffs and stony shores; with gazing out at the great lake and absorbing its expanse, its calm lap on the island's shores, its sometimes stormy surge against the island's cliffs. He loved the island's containment, its solitude, its loneliness.

He himself wasn't lonely. Yet he committed the lonely act: standing naked in the wind on a wild cliff, aroused by the wildness, he engaged in a kind of coupling with the elements. That inspired a few Whitmanesque lines he feared might be only comic.

Oh wind!
Teasing my limbs
My loins
Accept me!

The island could be invaded, however. On calm days in late summer, and especially on weekends, pleasure boats from Copper River might venture this far offshore and make for the island. Charlie would stand hidden in the trees, waiting for the KEEP OFF sign to serve its warning. Once a sleek runabout filled with laughing, drunken youths pulled brazenly into the cove and Charlie had to show himself to wave them off. The punks stared at him, as if he were some wild man of the island. Charlie played to their impression by doing a crazy dance.

It became an interruption, an annoyance, for Gilbert Larsen to appear every second Saturday with mail and supplies, and a relief to see his boat pull away and to be left alone again, for another glorious two weeks.

Now Rose would share this with him. She would know the purity, the perfect isolation, of his island.

* * *

Larsen said, "I start back now, Mister MacIntyre."

After docking his boat he'd helped haul, in several trips, the couple's luggage and supplies—including two cylinders of propane, a five-gallon can of gasoline, a large box of books—up the path to the cabin. The sky was clouding over, he'd noticed, the waves building on the lake.

"Stay for lunch, Gilly."

The girl had rushed about the clearing, exclaiming over the rustic cabin and the incredible view while her husband opened the cabin's shutters and Larsen, going round to the back, replaced the empty propane cylinder with a full one. Now she stood on the cabin's veranda beside her husband and smiled down at him.

"No thanks, Missus. Got to go."

He had white, unruly eyebrows, and a weathered, handsome face. His smile revealed a missing tooth.

"Then stay for coffee," she said. "Please, Gilly."

MacIntyre said, “He has to make for shore now, Rose. We’re in for a blow, isn’t that right, Gilly.”

“Yah,” Larsen said. “Be back in a coupla weeks, Missus. So long, Mister MacIntyre. Missus?”

He lifted the empty propane cylinder to his shoulder and disappeared down the path to the dock. Presently Rose heard the growl of his diesel engine and walked to the lighthouse to watch Larsen’s boat leave the shelter of the cove and enter the lake. She looked across the miles of open water to the low, obscure outline of the mainland and the thought quietly occurred to her: *We’re marooned*. It was a little frightening—thrilling, she told herself, as Larsen’s boat, rising on the swells and then sinking into the troughs, moved steadily away, rising and sinking, like Rose’s uneasiness. Then his boat and the distant mainland shaded off into the gathering haze.

The cabin was like a cave.

“My God, it’s a little scary out there.”

“Scary but rather marvellous,” Charles MacIntyre said. “Don’t you think?” He was crouched in front of the fireplace. “This old cabin gets pretty damp and chilly over the winter, but a fire’ll warm it up. Soon as the fire’s going I’ll go out and release the windmill to fill the reservoir, then start the generator for electricity. You’ll hate the sound of the generator, I do, but I’ll run it just long enough to give us power for tonight. Solar power for the cabin. That’s what I’d like to have eventually.”

“Charlie . . . “

“What, dear?”

“You think we’re in any . . . *danger* out here?”

“Danger? Not at all,” her husband assured Rose. “This island’s a bastion, a refuge!”

“What about Gilly, out on the lake in this storm?”

Charles MacIntyre stood up. The flames were beginning to crackle in the fireplace. “Don’t worry about an old sailor like Larsen.” He walked over and embraced her. “Your first storm on Lake Superior! They’re wonderful, just wait and see. And just wait until the storm passes. You won’t want to be anywhere else than on my island.”

* * *

In the morning it was dark and rainy, with a moaning wind around the cabin. Rose stood at the cabin’s bay window and felt the chill outside, seeping through the glass.

“I’m going out,” she said. “Wanna come?”

“No, thanks.” Her husband looked up over his glasses from where he sat reading by the fire. “I have to finish this crap novel I’m reviewing.”

“Okay,” she said. “But if I run into the Great Spirit out there and he’s this beautiful, naked man with a hard-on, don’t blame *me* for falling under the island’s spell.”

“Ha!” Charles MacIntyre reached for his pipe. “You sound a little horny, my love. We’ll have to deal with it later.”

“Wanna deal with it right now?”

Her husband sucked at his pipe. “Really, Rose. I’ve got to wade through some more of this bloody book and then start my review. Have a nice walk.”

Charles MacIntyre had a faint English accent (after a year at Cambridge on a Fulbright) that Rose, as his student, had been charmed by. Now she heard it as an affectation as she got into gumboots and a hooded slicker.

“Good luck with your review!” she called, and stepped outside into a gale of wind and stinging rain. Below her gray, white-tipped waves beat against the island, sending spray up the sides of the cliffs. She was driven inland, through dark stands of spruce and balsam, to the comparative shelter of the island’s center.

Here she stood listening to the whispering roar of the wind through the treetops, the muted hiss and roar of the waves. At intervals the wind shook volleys of raindrops from the trees. Otherwise it was almost still here, as if she stood in the quiet eye of the storm, surrounded by its force, its wildness. She felt a wild excitement, and shouted into the storm to have her voice swallowed up.

* * *

The next day the lake was quiet and fog-gripped, the island as if suspended in clouds. Foghorns sounded from out on the water. Their distant warnings were incessant, like a complaint. And yet the warmth of the cabin and the enclosing whiteness outside, the enclosure of the island, was only cozy now. Looking out, Rose imagined herself in some misty, timeless other world.

Charlie wrote at his book review. Rose sat reading by the fire: *Wuthering Heights*, which seemed appropriate. At noon she made them sandwiches. Charlie ate at his desk. In the afternoon Rose drank a sherry, then snuggled into a quilt on the window seat and took a nap. By suppertime Charlie had finished his review and was relaxed and talkative. They walked around the island, listened to classical music coming from Canada on their radio, retired early. The bed was icy, but they warmed it; warmed each other. They made love. Sinking into sleep afterwards, Rose felt the fog and the empty lake like a blanket wrapped around her.

And then the weather cleared. The island was at once soft and hard, all soft with vegetation, all hard with primitive rock. The air grew soft, the cliffs lifted out of the lake encrusted with lichen, gleaming red and black and brown and yellow. They stood in upright slabs, fractured, fissured, worn by the seasons, by the endless action of the lake. The lake, far out, was of palest blue and seemed to rise to meet the sky. Out there were long ore boats, high freighters, plodding along the shipping lanes, while inshore the wake of motorboats made white creases on the water

and flocks of sailboats skimmed back and forth like birds with outstretched wings. The mainland was a low blue slope on the horizon and just faintly, strewn against it, was the litter of the distant town.

On the island gulls flew along the cliffs or floated below them on the water. Cormorants clustered on the rocks below and ravens croaked and clucked their secret language in the woods. The island's resident ospreys, a nesting pair, peeped at each other as they sailed out over the lake. At times a floatplane droned by overhead, the border patrol, Charlie told her. Rose took to waving at it, and was thrilled when the pilot dipped his plane's wings in response.

These perfect mornings they left the cabin together, Charlie with a lined pad and ballpoint, Rose with her journal or sketchbook and watercolors. They strolled the cliffs to a warm place in the sun overlooking the lake, then sat quietly at their separate work like Elizabeth and Robert Browning, Rose imagined, eloped to the Mediterranean. Charlie scratched away with his pen and when Rose was moved to speak, he'd say sharply, only half self-mockingly, "No talking, please! Can't you see I'm creating literature?"

Afterwards they might walk to the old lighthouse, on its high, exposed point. The light keeper's attached little house, once used as a guest cabin by Charlie's grandfather, stood derelict now but might be restored, Charlie said, for use as his study. "Or as a guest cabin again," Rose suggested. Inside the stone tower, the creaking spiral staircase took them through a trapdoor to the round, dusty room at the top where the beacon turned on automatically at dusk and began rotating to beam its light through the circle of windows. It was all wonderfully operated by solar power, Charlie informed her, then showed her the solar panel above the balcony that ringed the tower. From the balcony one had a matchless view of the entire island and the surrounding lake.

When the weather turned chilly, as it often did, Charlie wrote in the cabin and Rose went out by herself. She'd walk to the lighthouse, or down to the rocky beach just below it and gather driftwood to carry up to the cabin in a sling thrown across her back like one of her peasant forebears, she imagined, in Lithuania.

The island, she found, was about a quarter mile long and roughly half as wide—she could walk around it in twenty minutes—and rose some fifty to a hundred feet out of the lake. She noticed the lake's small tides, an ebb and flow of only a couple of inches, and its more dramatic fluctuations, called seiches, which Charlie said were the lake's sensitive response, like sighs, to the rise and fall of barometric pressure.

She found tiny nooks where frail flowers grew; cliff faces with windswept, beautifully stunted trees like Japanese bonsai; shaded ravines where there were banks of spongy moss, like shaggy pelts, that invited her to stretch out on them. Once she found a bird's nest, within reach of

her hand, full of naked, gape-mouthed fledglings. They were probably thrushes, Charlie told her; thrushes, hermit thrushes, were the elusive little birds that sang so sweetly every evening but that she seldom saw.

She loved watching the nesting pair of osprey—their circling, soaring, crook-winged flight over the island's submerged shelf that she could see extending out into the lake until it dropped off into the depths; she'd wait to see one of the birds dive spectacularly into the lake and at once emerge, shaking the water from its body like a feathered dog, to struggle into the air with, almost always, it seemed, a fish in its talons, carried lengthwise—for streamlining, she guessed—to a favorite bare tree to pull at with its hooked beak.

A bald eagle sometimes appeared, unmistakable with its white head and tail, to be harried by the ospreys when it approached their nest, the ospreys in turn harried by the eagle when they had a fish. Once she saw the eagle suddenly crook its long wings and, in a surprising aerobatic display for so large a bird, dive like the falcon she'd once seen through a flight of ducks. The ducks scattered, then tightened their formation, and the eagle, its talons empty as far as Rose could see, flapped heavily away toward the mainland. *This isolated little world, its non-human inhabitants, going about their business, so perfectly separate from* us, she noted in her journal, then wanted to cross it out for being so obvious, so banal. She wouldn't show her journal to Charlie, though he'd once asked—only politely, she thought—to see it.

One afternoon, climbing down to a still inlet in the lee of a jutting cliff, Rose found a ledge, hidden by bushes, and at once felt its secretiveness, its power. In the inlet a pair of loon-like birds, mergansers, she knew by now, quietly dove and surfaced in the limpid water. Suddenly a raven, like a black umbrella flaring open in her face, flew up from just below and circled overhead, croaking at her intrusion.

Then Rose saw the paintings.

They were in a recess below a granite outcrop, faded red lines not yet obliterated by time and the weather: stick-like, anthropomorphic figures, antlered heads, strange, geometric designs.

"Indian rock paintings—pictographs," Charlie informed her that evening. "I didn't know we had any on the island, but I'm not surprised."

Then he told her about the vision quest. How Native American young men, before the arrival of Europeans and after, must have come alone to this island and, in their isolation and after a time of fasting and exposure, hallucinated—"like hippies on LSD," Charlie said. "Only their hallucinations, their visions, gave the young man his Manitou, his guardian spirit. The paintings you've found no doubt relate to various visions."

"Oh Charlie," Rose cried. "You know so much, and I . . ."

Smiling fondly at her, Charles MacIntyre told her, "I'm so much older than you, darling, and I've read a lot of books—far too many." He beamed

his affection. "*You*," he said, "you're youth and beauty, everything a guy like me tries to celebrate in language."

He struck a pose, intoning, "The force that through the green fuse drives the flower, drives *your* green age . . ."

"And that blasts the roots of trees is our destroyer, right?" Rose countered.

"Who are we paraphrasing?"

"Dylan Thomas!"

"Right!"

It was a literary game they played, always initiated by Charlie—a test, an extension of his classroom.

* * *

But then the weather was so moody, so unpredictable. One hour might be shining blue, expansive as the lake and sky, "smiling," Rose told herself; and the next might be glowering with overcast or ghostly with fog, claustrophobic. Fog often shrouded the island until noon; or, after a clear morning, swept in, a bank of whiteness, from the outer lake. It was lovely to watch until the fog reached you, swallowed you up on this rock in this inland sea where the waves broke coldly on the glacial beach and the trees stood silent and the cliffs loomed in the mist, in the clammy stillness.

At times the wind carried a chemical smell, one familiar to Rose, reminding her of Detroit. "The stink of pulp mills on the Canadian side," Charlie told her. "There's no escape!"

On cloud-covered nights Rose looked for the glow in the sky, the reflection of the lights of Copper River against the overcast. And on clear nights, under the cold stars, she could see the lights of the town themselves. But they were so distant, so like other stars, that she might have been out in space and looking back at her own, far galaxy.

* * *

Saturday morning. Rose left the cabin and walked to the lighthouse. It was one of those perfect, fragile days she had learned to cherish. She climbed to the top of the tower, stepped out onto the balcony and looked toward the mainland. Soon a speck appeared on the water that gradually enlarged into the oval wheelhouse, the high prow of Larsen's boat.

Charlie was at his desk in a corner of the living room. He didn't look up when Rose burst into the cabin.

"Gilly's coming!"

"Oh?" He studied the calendar above his desk. "Is it the second Saturday already?"

"At last! Come on, let's go down and meet him."

"I'm still working, darling."

"Oh," Rose said. "Sorry."

"It's okay," Charlie said. "By the time you and Gilly reach the cabin, I'll be sociable."

Rose stood on the dock as Gilly's boat entered the cove and moved toward her. He blew the boat horn and grinned at her through the wheelhouse window. She watched his oblique approach to the dock, knew the procedure of pulling back the throttle to reduce the boat's speed, disengaging the prop to allow the boat to drift, finally reversing the prop to brake the boat's advance, then disengaging it once more and with the rudder cause the boat to come neatly alongside the dock.

Larsen stepped out of the wheelhouse and threw the bow line to Rose. "Grab that, will you?"

Rose took the line and dropped the loop at the end of it over a mooring post, after which Larsen pulled the bow in close to the dock and cross-looped his end of the line to the starboard bow cleat. Then he shut down the engine while Rose stood by to receive the stern line.

Gilly stepped onto the dock and said, "You know how to tie up a boat, Missus. You an old sailor like me?"

"Kind of. My father had a boat, on Lake St. Clair."

"Want to join my crew?"

She couldn't stop smiling at him. He was an interesting man: one of your North Country bachelors, Charlie called him, too shy or independent ever to marry. He seemed relaxed, though, with Rose. She studied his boat.

"You have an eye for her, don't you, Missus."

"Yes. She's your pride, isn't she?"

"My dad built her. She's lapstraked, clinker-built, you see? With overlapped planks? Double-ended, like an old Viking ship. Thirty-two and a half feet overall." That was maybe too technical for her, but she seemed to know what he was talking about.

"When I converted for charters, I added on to the wheelhouse to make a cabin. Makes the boat more comterble for passengers and gives me living space."

"You live on her?"

"Yah. Until freeze-up."

"She named after somebody?"

"My mother."

"What did your mother think of her?"

"She was no sailor, my ma. She got seasick whenever she went out on the *Mary Ann*. Which wasn't often," he added.

Loaded with the groceries Larsen had brought, they started up the path to the cabin. On impulse, Larsen asked, "Are you all right out here, Missus? Stuck out here on this island?"

"I'm fine," she said quickly. "I love it! I love this island. I'm going to be sorry to leave it."

"Well," Larsen said, "you still got a good half of the summer."

Her husband rose from his desk. "One moment." He stuffed papers

into a drawer, replaced a book on the shelf beside him, covered his typewriter. "Now," he said, "how *are* you, Gilly?"

"Fine, Mister MacIntyre."

"Any news from shore?"

"Not much."

"No fresh sit-ins?" MacIntyre asked. "No new demonstrations against the Vietnam War? No more assassinations?"

"Couple murders in Minneapolis," Larsen mentioned. "Little girl missing in Duluth."

"Only man is vile!" Charles MacIntyre proclaimed, as if from his lectern. "As the old hymn tells us. We prey on our own kind like sick animals. And now the earth itself is sick, sick because of us."

Larsen stood uneasily near the door, still holding a box of groceries. Rose said, "You can bring those into the kitchen, Gilly."

He set the box on the counter. She offered him coffee.

"Thanks, Missus."

Her husband followed them. "Any mail?" he asked.

"Yah." Gilly drew the bundle of letters from the box of groceries. MacIntyre thumbed through them as Rose sat down at the table and motioned for Larsen to join her.

"What do *you* think, Gilly?" she asked. "I mean about the war, about all the *shit* that's going down these days. Or doesn't it bother you up here?"

Larsen stared into his coffee. One thing that bothered him for sure was the way nice girls talked rough these days, like a man.

"Yah," he said, his face turned grim, staring first at Rose and then at her husband before lowering his eyes and speaking as if to the floor. "The fact there's more boats and people on the lake now than fish in it—that bothers me. The fact you have to worry now about drinking the got-damn water."

His bitterness seemed out of character, Rose thought. "But the lake is still so beautiful, Gilly, and so big! What can spoil it really?"

"Yah," he said, "I used to think that. Whatever else happened, there'd always be the lake, and islands like this one, and wild places along the shore. Now though . . . "

MacIntyre, who'd been sitting at the table with his head down and his hands folded before him as if in prayer, said, "And yet the earth abides. Isn't that right, Gilly? In one form or another, with or without us, *the earth will abide*. One has to believe that."

Having declared his position, he turned to his mail, tore open a letter and started reading it as if the others weren't there. Gilly sipped uncomfortably at his coffee. Rose agonized for something to say.

MacIntyre looked up. "What's it like out here in the winter, Gilly?"

"Oh, you wouldn't want to be out on this island in the winter, Mister

MacIntyre."

"Why not?"

"You'd be stranded."

"But surely the lake is free of ice this far out."

"Yah," Larsen said. "But it's iced up all along the shore and in the bays and even out to some of the islands, if they're close in enough. They use air sleds some places. Run with airplane propellers like those rigs down in the Florida Everglades. Skim over ice or water slick as can be. But I ain't seen any in Copper River. You'd be marooned out here."

He stood up from the table.

"Time to go?" Charlie asked pleasantly.

"Have lunch with us," Rose said. "Please, Gilly. Just this once?"

He smiled at Rose, showing his missing tooth. "Can't, Missus. Weather's changing, and I got to run up the shore a ways."

Her husband pushed his chair back and stood up. "Just a minute." He went to his desk in the living room and returned with a manila envelope. It contained, Rose knew, a well-written but somewhat self-congratulatory essay about Charlie's solitary stay on the island the previous summer. He was submitting it to *The New Yorker.*

"Oh! Almost forgot." And Rose went for the long, newsy, falsely "positive" letter she'd written to her parents.

MacIntyre pulled a bill out of his wallet. "Mail these for us then, will you, Gilly? This should cover the postage."

"Yah, Mister MacIntyre." Larsen turned to Rose. "So long, Missus."

"Goodbye, Gilly," she said. "Don't forget to come back."

"Oh sure. Be back in another coupla weeks, unless the weather's bad."

Her husband said, "I'll walk you to your boat."

The men went out. Rose started lunch. She opened a can of soup, then reached for a pot. The pot fell on the wood floor causing Rose, with an abrupt fury that came out of nowhere, to grab it and *bang*, *bang* it against the counter as if punishing it. The cabin rang with the clang of the metal, with the rush of blood to her head. Presently she heard footsteps on the veranda, then Charlie walked in.

"Well, that's that," he said brightly.

"What's *that*?" Rose asked.

"Oh, just the end of another of Gilly's little visits. Now we'll be wonderfully alone again for another two weeks."

"I happen to look forward to his visits," Rose said. "And by the way, were you actually thinking of spending the winter out here?"

"I was," Charlie said. "I still am. Despite what old Gilly says. Not this winter, perhaps. But maybe next. I'm due for a sabbatical, remember, and I have been imagining what it would be like to spend it on the island. Think about it! A whole year out here. It would be an adventure!"

"Yeah," said Rose, "like a stretch on Alcatraz."

"That's funny," Charlie told her.

* * *

The fine weather continued, warm and brilliant, with no fog or rain and only a moderate wind. Rose went out every morning, to walk the cliff path around the island or go down to the dock and along the cove or the stretch of rocky beach beyond it. Every afternoon she took a book and found a protected place above the lake where she could read or sunbathe, maybe take a nap.

She found it bracing to swim naked in the cove. One day she ventured out into the open lake and found the water much colder, numbing, even deadly, when a wave washed over her and she swallowed water and momentarily panicked. She might have drowned!

Charlie spent his days writing in the cabin. The essay he'd submitted to *The New Yorker* come back, rejected, but to hell with them, he told Rose. He was expanding it now into a book. It would go deep into his stay alone on the island and his commune with nature and what it had meant to him. He was having difficulty with the writing, though. It was like a wall, like the wall of nature, and he felt like Ahab in his determination to break through it. "I have to *work*," he told Rose. "Please, look after yourself. Time's running out for me here. I have to *concentrate*."

So Rose didn't bother him. By now she knew every foot of the island, every tree, every stone, it seemed. She looked for more pictographs, but there were only those above the secret inlet. She made drawings of them in her journal. She thought of the native people who had painted them, alone on their vision quests. She imagined the first white men to reach the island, French voyageurs, canoeing into what they called the Savage Country.

Then the weather broke. In the morning, it was sultry, breathless. Clouds built up and gradually darkened. In the afternoon the sky lowered toward the water, lightning shot spectacularly across the sky, and there were sharp, tearing claps of thunder, as if the sky were breaking open. Then a wind sprang up from the northeast and the lake was covered with whitecaps. Waves began to heave against the island. It started to rain, a hard sleeting downpour with the breath of winter in it. Lake and sky closed over the island.

Rose stood at the cabin's bay window looking out at the storm. It seemed to reach inside her, blow achingly around in there. Charlie appeared, his eyes glittering.

"Gilly's due tomorrow," Rose said. "Think he'll make it?"

Without speaking, Charlie gripped her shoulders and pushed her to the floor. Then they were at each other, pulling at each other's clothes, and then frantically coupling, gasping and laughing. It was what Rose had been wanting, and she wanted more, *more*, but Charlie soon spent himself and collapsed on top of her. "God," he breathed into her ear, "we

should do this more often."

In bed, they made love this time, "as opposed to lust," as Charlie put it, and afterwards he slept while Rose lay awake beside him. She listened to the lake, beating against the island; to the trees, thrashing in the wind. To feel the force of nature! That's what a vision quest might be about. She understood that suddenly. To sense the immensity of the universe. To hear the sound of time and the silence of space. To perceive the connection, the integration, of waves crashing against the shore with one's thumping heart and the pulsating stars.

* * *

In the morning Rose climbed to the lighthouse balcony and stood for an hour, looking toward the shore. The shore was lost in haze. She grew cold and walked back to the cabin.

"He's not coming."

"Did you think he was?"

"I thought he might. I was hoping . . . "

"You won't see old Larsen again until the lake calms down," Charlie told her. "Maybe not then. He might not show up for another two weeks."

"No. Would he just . . . *forget* about us?"

"For the time being. Why not? We have enough food, and he knows we can signal a border plane if we're in trouble."

"He has a two-way radio on his boat! How come *we* don't have one? Why don't we have a boat? I suppose that would be too practical. But what if we were *really* in trouble? What if neither of us could crawl outside to run up the distress flag?"

"What if the radio didn't work? What if nobody could *see* our distress flag?"

"Anyway, I wish he'd come—just to see how we are," Rose said.

"How *are* we, anyhow?" Charlie asked. "Do we need Gilbert Larsen to look after us? 'Yah, you people need the help of an old Scandahoovian like me, I tink,'" Charlie said, grossly imitating Gilly's accent.

"You're an asshole."

"What, you have a crush on old Gilly now? My God, he stinks of sweat and diesel fuel. He has bad teeth!"

"He's a lovely man."

"He's an ignorant old rube who laughs up his sleeve at us city folk. And who, incidentally, has the hots for you, too, my dear."

"How old is he?" Rose asked. "Is he that much older than you are?"

* * *

The following days were so cold and dark they drove Rose to stay mostly in bed. She'd wake to the groan of the wind outside, then sink back into sleep. When she couldn't sleep anymore, she remained in bed, listening to the wind and the occasional, dreary sound from the living room, where Charlie was working—the rustle of paper, the creak of his chair, the

intermittent, explosive burst from his typewriter.

When she did get up, it was lunchtime. And then there would be another long, gray afternoon to get through, and another quiet, candlelit evening (they'd run out of gas for the generator, the storage batteries had died; candlelight was romantic at first) when Charlie read by the fire and Rose sat at the dining room table, having failed to interest him in cards.

She took to drinking at night, sipping brandy at the table while reading and half-listening to their portable radio, either Canadian or American broadcasts, whichever was offering music, until the words blurred on the page before her, and the sounds faded from the radio, and she'd be startled by Charlie sharply telling her, "You're falling asleep! Go to bed, why don't you?"

"Come *with* me," she'd say.

"In a while."

She'd wake in the night with Charlie just a lump beside her. She'd get up and go out to the living room, light some candles and read, often until the gray dawn. Then she'd go back to bed as Charlie was getting up.

Finally up herself again, and having forced herself to eat, she'd go outside. But the outside, the limited extent of the island, was almost as confining now as the cabin. Even the lake was confining, enveloped in fog, enclosing the island. She got Charlie to come out with her once or twice, but then he'd turn sulky, resentful, for having been taken from his work.

One day she heard the ravens talking to her. What were they saying? She couldn't decipher their clucks and squawks, their *almost* intelligible calls, but they seemed to be speaking to her, trying to tell her something.

* * *

A week passed, and Larsen didn't come. But he was due again this Saturday, when they could leave the island, Rose thought. It was September now, the start of fall and the approach of winter. Fall and winter brought the excitement of their life in the city. Charlie would be teaching again, there'd be pleasant gatherings of his students and colleagues. There'd be plays and parties and movies to go to, concerts, cozy evenings together in their apartment. Rose loved their apartment. And she loved winter—in the city. Here, she felt, winter must indeed be long and hard: nature's long, dark sleep before the bright awakening of spring. Here everything was so stark, undiluted, that a sunny day was pure sunlight but a dreary day pure dreariness. Her emotions were like the weather. She was ecstatic or she was desolate.

One night Charlie said excitedly, "Why don't we stay for another two weeks, darling? Classes don't start until the twenty-fifth. There's no real need for us to go back before then."

His face was alight. "Tell you what. We'll go ashore with Gilly this time, have a weekend in Copper River—eat in restaurants, see a couple

movies, stay at the inn. And then come back. For two more weeks, darling! We'll see the fall colours!"

"No," Rose said. She began to tremble. "No! Let's just go back. Please, Charlie. It's been a wonderful summer. I'll never forget it. But please, *please*. I want to go back now."

Surprise, dismay, annoyance crossed her husband's face. Then hurt.

"You haven't liked it," he said dully. "It's been just a show. You never liked it here—not really."

"But I *did*," Rose cried. "I loved it at first, couldn't you tell? But now it's so gloomy. I miss the city," she confessed.

"You never liked it," he insisted. "I can see that now."

"Oh, you're so stupid!" Rose shouted. The hurt on his face infuriated her. "You don't know anything about *any*thing! How can you be a poet when you don't *know* anything?"

"I know this," he said, striking his chest, "and *that*," he said, pointing out the window. "Apparently, that's all I know."

"Do you?" she said. "Do you know even that?"

"Okay, we'll go then," Charlie said. "I *have* been stupid. I've been thinking only of myself."

Rose felt a hopeless rush of feeling. "No. No, honey. We'll stay," she said.

"We can't now," Charlie said. "We have to go. You've . . ."

"*Spoiled* it for you?"

"No, now please. Let's not quarrel."

"Who's quarrelling? We'll stay."

"No," said Charlie. "We're going. We'll leave this Saturday. You can start packing."

She wanted to cry. She wanted to pound on his thick head. But she was so weary suddenly, so empty of feeling. She didn't care anymore. She didn't care about *them*, about *him.* Something had broken in her. She felt nothing now, *nothing* for this man almost old enough to be her father. Her *father*. He'd failed her too.

As if to mock her, the weather was glorious their last morning on the island. After packing, Rose left Charlie at his desk and stepped outside for a final walk along the cliffs. The day was filled with an aching clarity. It was like a distillation of beauty, pure, absolute beauty that made Rose acutely aware of her eyes, of the gift of her eyes. To see such beauty! Yet it was only there. She could only look at it.

Something was happening to her. She felt it, she felt the vastness of the lake that was like the vastness of space, cold and profound, lifeless and scary, and yet where the origins of life, it was said, existed—in the dust of exploding stars, in rocky meteors, in frozen comets. Out there is where we came from, Rose told herself with wild, hopeless elation—where we're going.

She felt herself embraced by the ever greater, ever widening expanse of things. Was this her vision? She saw the planet, and then the universe, crawling with life: all the stars, the spiralling galaxies, everything only particles, cells in some stupendous entity, some infinite complexity, some marvellous and terrible completion that one could never fathom, that overwhelmed and consumed, and yet gave solace. The wonder of it, the awfulness, the ecstasy. She felt its pull, like vertigo, carrying her up and over and all out of herself; and in a swoon, as in a dream, she fell into it.

* * *

Gilbert Larsen, approaching the island in the *Mary Ann*, saw the woman on the cliffs beyond the lighthouse. He sounded his boat horn, but she didn't wave, didn't appear to hear it. She was walking along the edge of the cliffs in one of those skimpy new bathing suits, he guessed, and he raised his binoculars for a better look. Her startling nakedness—full breasts, the blond bush between her legs—leaped at him through the lenses. "Yah," he told himself. He watched her, enthralled, a little guiltily, until she passed out of view.

The man stood pacing the dock as Larsen's boat drifted toward it, his face contorted with what Larsen soon learned was concern.

"*Have you seen my wife?*" he shouted. "You see her on the other side of the island?"

"Yah," Larsen called, remembering his recent image of her. "I seen her on the cliffs."

"Where?" The man looked wildly around. Then they both saw Rose appear on a cliff above the outer lake. They saw her walk deliberately off its edge and fall, as if slowly, out of sight.

The man leaped onto Larsen's boat. "Let's go!" he cried.

Gilly backed his boat away from the dock, then swung her around and pushed the throttle full forward. They churned out of the cove and around to the spot where Rose had fallen.

"I tink she hit clear!" Larsen hollered above the engine's rumble. "The cliffs there go straight down to the water."

The fall might have stunned her, though, he thought, depending on how she hit. She might have drowned. He saw again her deliberate stepping off into space, her slow turning over before disappearing.

They came on Rose treading calmly in the frigid water. She looked past her husband to smile at Larsen. Her husband called, "I'm coming, darling!" and jumped stupidly overboard to immediately call, "Help! Help us!"

Gilly threw the man a line and pulled him alongside. Rose swam to the boat. He reached over the rail and lifted her onto the deck.

"Look away, *damn* you!" The man had struggled aboard and moved between Larsen and his naked wife. Gilly stifled his rage, said, "The boat locker. There's blankets in there."

Back at the dock, he stayed on his boat and watched the couple climb the path to the cabin. The woman walked barefoot, wrapped in a blanket. When the man put his arm around her, she threw it off.

Gilly stepped down into the forward cabin, boiled water on the propane stove and made a cup of coffee. Up on deck again, he stood sipping at it. Then he walked up to the cabin.

Rose sat at the kitchen table, clothed now in jeans and a sweater and drinking brandy from the bottle. She gave Gilly a radiant smile.

"Did you see me fall?"

The man, in dry clothes himself now, was quietly boxing up his books. Piles of luggage already stood by the door. Without comment, Gilly went back outside and closed and locked the shutters on the windows. He drained the water system, shut off the propane, disconnected the tanks. He walked to the generator shed and disconnected the batteries; locked the shed. Then he helped the man carry his books and the couple's luggage to the boat. Rose sat in the cabin until it was time to leave.

On board the *Mary Ann*, Charlie said, "Dammit. I forgot to lock up."

Gilly went back with the keys. He locked the cabin and took a last look around. Already the cabin, the island, had returned to itself, reinstated its ghosts. It was an eeriness he had often felt after leaving a place, then going back because he'd forgotten something. The place is haunted already, alive in itself, spooky.

On the boat again, Gilly offered the man his keys. "Keep them for us," Charlie said. "Who knows when we'll be back?"

Out on the lake, Gilly stood at the wheel and the couple sat behind him in the after cabin, just as three months ago they'd sat there, the older man with his pipe smugly in his mouth, his young wife not knowing what she was in for: the isolation, the weather. The season was over, anyhow. It was cold on the lake now. But it was always warm in the wheelhouse, and into the after cabin, from the exhaust pipe that came through from the engine.

"We're going home now," Charles MacIntyre said.

"Are we?"

"We'll be home by tomorrow night," he told her. "We'll be back in the city, darling."

"Will we?"

Larsen kept his thoughts to himself. *Summer people*. They came up here with some romantic notion about getting away from it all, getting back to nature, just as people up here, himself and Elizabeth, for instance, went down to the cities once in a while, Minneapolis or Detroit, for the shows and restaurants, the crowds and bright lights, though they were always glad to get back here. Always knew then why they lived up here. Yet people could go strange up here, just as they did in the cities. The Indians, when they were sick of the settlements, *because* of the settlements,

took to the bush. But the bush, too, could make you strange if you stayed out in it long enough. Alone. He thought of these two, left alone on the island. Alone with each other. Only, he guessed, she'd been mostly alone with herself. Alone with nature. It wasn't just scenery. You were in it and of it. It could be a comfort or a terror. It could kill you. It could drive you crazy. That's all you could know about it finally. That's all Larsen knew, after a lifetime of exposure.

The woman now, her odd detachment. He kept seeing that lovely image of her stepping naked out over the lake.

"You should go below and lie down," the man said.

"No."

"We stayed too long, darling. That's it, isn't it? That and the lousy weather. You weren't used to it, darling. In the city we're more or less protected from the weather—from nature, in fact."

"No," she said. "It's so much more than that."

Larsen, at the wheel and staring straight ahead, felt Rose behind him. He turned as she slid the wheelhouse door open and stepped outside. The wind caught her long hair.

The man followed as she moved along the narrow deck to the boat's fantail and stood looking back at the island. The man followed her there and put his arm around her. She didn't throw it off this time, instead stood stiffly as if he and his arm weren't there until, respectfully, it seemed, he dropped his arm and stepped back from her.

Watching them from the wheelhouse, all Gilly knew was he had this boat and the lake and now the island too maybe—for a while, anyhow. *If I was twenty years younger…..*

The island receded behind them. The mainland shore, at first a hazy line, slowly sharpened into forested hills, rocky headlands, shadowed clefts marking the mouths of creeks. Then you saw the brick buildings, the wooden houses of Copper River and the shore highway with vehicles moving back and forth along its length above the shore.

By then the island was just a smudge on the horizon, a dark element in the turquoise purity of the lake.

Born in Trinidad and raised in India, Greece, the US and Israel, BARBARA CURRY MULCAHY lived in northern Alberta for most of her adult life. She moved to the Kootenays in 2012. Her book of poetry *The Man with the Dancing Monkey* was shortlisted for the Pat Lowther and Gerald Lampert awards. The poems published here are from an unpublished collection, tentatively titled *The Pancreas Replies*. *Bird on a Branch*, a winner of the Alberta Write for Radio Competition, was broadcast on CBC Stereo.

Four Poems / Barbara Curry Mulcahy

Winter

I must remind myself that the snow that has crawled up
to the house and lies there in a heap,
the knife's edge of snow on the fence,
the snow snared in every branch
of every tree,
the snow falling down,
and the snow swirled up—
is all the same, the same.

I must remind myself that the ice—
the congealed overflow plugging and encasing the gutters,
the daggers protruding from the edge of the roof,
the slick sheet on the sidewalk I so carefully tread,
and the rime clotting my eyelashes—is all
the same, the same.

What flowed, now gathers.
With weight, intensity, it forms. Sharp,
scabrous, smooth, soft—but still
conceived and composed the same,
the same as rain.

Body Fluids

Because water is the first and only home,
containing each cell, filling each cell—
even bones flex with it. Because
water is fluid; it seeps and pools,
seeps and pools.

The body, a marsh filled with reeds and mire.
Flooding and subsiding. Organic,
the give-and-take.

Because lymph, gathered and squeezed
by the movements of the body doing its other jobs,
is an accessory, gets a free ride
through one-way valves back to the blood
(tributary, highway to the heart). Lymph, water
without force, so passive. Limp
lymph.

Existence, a delta, last stop before the ocean—
the great ocean, moving—and its weight pressing down.

Because blood is a river in a flexible channel
and it surges forth—joyous, exultant—
carrying its load of supplies and debris, dissolved
or suspended. Because blood is freed in the capillaries, is freed
to whatever it is
that the body needs.

And the mind, meant to merge and dissolve, is borne
out. Relinquishing control, freed of need,
the body doing its thing, and the mind its partner.
Like a cloud spreading. To disperse, disperse.

Because the heart, four caves caged by the ribs and the spine,
buttressed spiritually by the white diaphanous
wings of the lungs,

is separated
from the rest of the torso
by that vacuum pump, the diaphragm.
Because the heart squeezes and releases ceaselessly, like the ocean
never stopping, always reaching and returning;
because the heart is perched high
in the torso, above the gurgling intestines, the edgy adrenals,
all the busyness
of the body—
and there—
is surrounded
by the meditative
movement of the lungs.

We are borne—through madness and delight,
through sorrow and despair, toward waves
working that ocean. Pattern, rhythm—both outside and in. Fluid,
our passage. The heart—our constant relentless redoubt
to which we ever return.

Things to Remember

The spine is engineered to bend.
The bones—most anyway, not fused but pieced
together, small and knobby.
Unpuzzled
puzzle of movement.
Or of not:
relaxed, alert—the patience, the power, in readiness.

And steadiness…
the whole double curve of the spine. The sinuous
shape of it. Yesss. Your skull balanced a-top;
its weight not bobbing but
balanced—with grace to sustain it.

                                        The skull held out
from the body, peering forward, needing knowledge—
and the spine providing launch and
            foundation
           flexible enough
       to withstand such inquiry.

And for counterweight—
the tailbone, tucked
under the cleft of the buttocks,
the tailbone,
actually bones. The only fused
bones in the spine. Remember this tail,
how it is hidden, embedded
beneath the largest of your muscles,
the gluteus maximae,
which give power to any stride you take.
Remember what lies within
when you see a cat, its tail held high, or a dog
slinking, its tail curved under.

That the spine arises near the anus
is nothing to be ashamed of. To get rid of what you don't

need, don't want, can't use, or can't
abide—
is a necessary skill, a skill we ply in lots of ways:
with breath, mucus, wax, urine, sweat,
so what's wrong with shit? Take pride:
the spine finds initiative, even
inspiration, from this proximity.
Remember this,

but forget, how, when seen from above,
the skull is egg-shaped, and the shoulder blades protrude,
those stubs
of what once might have been,
or nubs
of what still could be
                                        your wings.
They're not and never were;
if anything were wings, it'd be your arms
but they've evolved to end with digits…
(to grasp,
and count,
and fidget.)

Forget dead-end thinking—of wings and holy things.
Forget, too, that the spine ends with the brain,
those seven to nine pounds of logic and tomfoolery.
To concentrate on that—is to go astray.

The spine is engineered to bend.
For humility or heavy loads, take note:
to bend.
For weight, for sorrow,
for shame, for pain,
for loads of any sort, for balance,
the spine is built to bear, made
to sway—and carry on.

Protection

Your tears—laced
with an antibacterial agent:
What good can that possibly do?

Blurred world and the tears themselves—
trying so hard, keeping busy, concentrating
on what's do-able—
as if vanquishing bacteria, those tiny, tiny microbes
will make a difference.

Tears tracking down your face and your hands
wipe them away; one of those gestures
that somehow works. Someone
looking after you.

Like milk and cookies, a cup of hot tea—
tender attentions.

How the body is constructed—
when repairing itself,
love counts.

MICHAEL WASHBURN is a novelist, short story writer, journalist, and editor based in Brooklyn, New York. He has found inspiration in the short stories of Raymond Carver, Charles Bukowski, Gary Indiana, Ian MacMillian, John Hawkes, Raymond Chandler and many other writers. He firmly believes that e-books are, at best, a passing craze and that printed books and journals can and must endure. He has previously contributed stories to *The New Orphic Review*.

In the Flyover State

Michael Washburn

THE SMALL CESSNA jet began its descent above a gently sloping field in a vast canyon. Forbidding mountains loomed to the north and east. To the south were tributaries of a powerful river, and to the west lay the distant shapes of trailers on the perimeters of coal mines. At this hour, the trailers were empty. The workers had gone home to enjoy cooked meals and episodes of their favorite melodramas. Save for the plane, it was deathly still in the canyon. The plane banked, swerved, evened its course gracefully as the pilot mentally charted a route across the field.

Besides the pilot, 44-year-old Harry Van Zant, the plane contained two young executives of a tech company on their way home to San Luis Obispo from a meeting in Denver. Natasha Pruitt and James Fletcher were both in their early 30s, and were both moving quickly up the ladder within their firm. Natasha wore her blonde hair short and had a sharp, at times shrill, voice. James was tall but gangly and meek, with a pair of rectangle-rimmed glasses and Clark Kent cheekbones. Friends and co-workers occasionally noted the irony of this resemblance, because they knew James was never going to morph into Superman, no matter what test might come before him. He was a talker and a thinker. Colleagues who had worked with James throughout his four years with the firm could not recall him cursing, raising his voice, or speaking ill of anybody.

They were quite lucky that there was still a bit of light left. Harry skillfully guided the plane to a course roughly through the middle of the field as he deployed the landing gear, grateful that there were hardly any rocks out here. Neither of his passengers voiced alarm as the plane touched down, roared onward for a couple of hundred feet, and came to rest. Harry slumped back in his seat, sighed with relief. When he turned his head around, they were sitting calmly, on either side of the aisle, looking at him.

"It's the left turbofan. Might just be a bird but it's totally jammed. We didn't have a choice here," Harry told the pair of executives.

All three climbed out of the plane. The canyon appeared almost as barren as the moon. From here, the trailers way off in the distance looked like Legos. A winking light atop one of them did not reassure anybody. The barrenness had a forbidding quality and enhanced the sense that precious time was ebbing away and they were completely stuck. As a cool breeze swept over the field and caressed their hair, James began fishing in his pockets for his cell phone. Before he could begin to use it, Natasha swept her hair back, away from her cheeks, and turned to confront the pilot.

"Harry! Do you have the faintest clue how much this screws things up? I have a meeting with the corporate VP in the morning—"

Harry took a step back, putting the flats of his palms forward.

"Ms. Pruitt, I'm very sorry, but like I said—"

"God damn it, Harry, are you so incompetent that a stupid bird can turn our lives upside down?" she wailed.

"Ms. Pruitt, please understand—"

James turned toward them, started to say something, but thought better of it. Before Harry could finish, Natasha turned, walked over, and stood by James ten yards from the plane, reaching for her own cell phone inside a front pocket of her black slacks.

"Oh hell, I left it in my briefcase," she said and started back toward the plane.

"Wait, never mind, I've gotten through," said James.

Now James was speaking to a local dispatcher.

"No, no, it's not really an emergency, but we had to land and we're stuck out here. In a canyon somewhere. I don't know—I think I see some trailers about a mile west of us."

At the other end someone was recording, processing all of this. Natasha was fuming but James didn't find the situation so dreadful, all things considered. Who knew what might have happened with a less experienced pilot.

"Three of us," James said, and then, because Natasha was nudging him, added, "and we *really* need to get back to California."

Again James paused, listening, then he said: "What do we tell them about the engine, Harry?"

"It's not the engine, Mr. Fletcher, it's one of the turbofans. I'm not sure what the problem is and it's going to take hours to do a proper inspection," he began.

"—which obviously you can't do in the dark," Natasha finished for him.

Harry nodded.

"So, we shouldn't even think about departing until some time tomorrow

at the very soonest."

"Once again, Ms. Pruitt, I'm very sorry—"

"Oh, shut up!" Natasha nearly screamed.

Sliding the cell phone into a pocket, James moved ever so slightly closer to her and talked in a low voice, trying to soothe and conciliate. For the next half hour, the three stood shivering in the breeze caressing the grass across the floor of the canyon. Finally, with the light almost totally gone, they were just barely able to make out a plume of exhaust rising behind a battered station wagon. When it pulled up in front of them, they saw that the driver was not a cop but a woman in her late 40s or early 50s in jeans and a brown flannel shirt. She had ruddy, weathered skin and an ingenuous grin.

"Bob's over on the other side of town, and his deputy's not on duty, so they sent me," said this lady, who went on to introduce herself as Linda.

The two young executives looked at each other. It was just their luck to get stranded in Pin Point, Nevada, with exactly one sheriff and one deputy, plus Linda, at its disposal.

"Thanks for coming to the rescue, Linda. We don't know exactly how long we're going to be here. Is there, uh, like, a motel somewhere?" James ventured.

"Well aren't you in luck, honey. There's a place about 30 minutes from here, and it's the sweetest little hotel you ever saw. Why don't y'all hop right in?" Linda beamed.

Natasha went back to the plane to collect her briefcase, which had her laptop and cell phone in it, and then she and James climbed into the station wagon.

"Coming, Harry?" James asked through a window.

"If it's all the same to you, I think I'd like to stay here with the plane," Harry said.

"All right. We can reach you on your cell, correct?"

"Of course you can, Mr. Fletcher."

James spoke in a comradely tone to Harry, but Natasha gazed stolidly ahead from her position on the rear seat. Harry must be wondering about what would happen when they made it home, and no man would want to be in his shoes right now, James thought. Seconds later, the station wagon was plowing ahead through the silent field, dodging the mountains as it veered off to the northwest. James could tell that this whole experience was an unthinkable imposition for Natasha. They were many miles from any train route or, he could hardly bear to think of it, Greyhound bus route, but she'd been slow to accept the inevitability of passing the night here. In the current age, when forming or dissolving corporate empires was a matter of seconds, the thought of having trouble getting oneself to an office park in time for a meeting dared hardly rear its head.

They rode on in the gathering dark. At length, ramshackle structures

began to flit past the station wagon on either side, split-second apparitions amid the vast loneliness of fields. The car made a turn onto the main street of what passed for a town. In reality, James saw now, the town was two rows of buildings mostly fashioned from weathered boards with crude thatch roofs. It wasn't a town to speak of, but it would do for one night. It had to. He wanted to try to assuage Natasha a bit, to tell her that they could very well have landed in the midst of jagged mountains with nothing and nobody around for miles, and perhaps Harry did deserve a smidgen of credit here, but James saw this wasn't the time to try to persuade Natasha of anything. Just let her annoyance run its course, as it must eventually. That approach had worked well enough when she'd yelled at an intern not long ago. Then again that was an episode James would really rather not recall. *You really mustn't take it personally. She's like that with the interns,* he'd told the quivering 21-year-old, who somehow didn't seem to find that reassuring.

They had barely pulled onto the main street when Linda brought the station wagon to a halt. They were parked before the hotel, one of the few buildings here with more than one floor. At the sight of this building, its porch and plain wooden banisters and plaque between two upper-floor windows bearing the numerals 1875, a barely perceptible relaxing of Natasha's tension and anger registered on James. Here was, at the very least, the thrill of something she didn't encounter every day. Here was an honest-to-goodness Old West hotel at the mouth of a dusty, neglected street. Linda turned her head back toward the two executives. She was smiling ingenuously. If driving all the way out there to pick them up and bring them here had messed up Linda's evening, you wouldn't know from her face.

"So I'll leave you folks here, and hope you've got things sorted out by mornin'. If you need me, just holler," she said, pressing a card into James's hand. The card had information for an amateur florist business on it, along with her cell number.

"Thanks, Linda," James said in his nice Clark Kent voice.

"If you get bored up at the hotel, you might saunter on over to Zeke's place," Linda said.

"Where's that?"

"Four clicks up the street here on your left. You can see it from here," Linda replied.

Natasha tilted her head toward James, nodded slightly.

"Thanks again," he said to Linda.

The two executives climbed out of the battered vehicle and proceeded up the steps and into the lobby of the dingy hotel. At the desk they found an elderly couple who looked as if they had walked out of that famous painting, *American Gothic*. Natasha fished out the corporate card and got them two rooms on the second floor. When they climbed the stairs

and broke apart into the two rooms at the front of the hotel, James found to his dismay that the dingy walls, which had a blue background imprinted with images of daisies, were as thin as props hastily hammered together for a high school play. He found it more than a bit unseemly that he and Natasha would be lying down just inches from each other, even if a wall divided them. Well, they didn't have to think about that now. Before going out, he really must freshen up a bit. He moved in front of the sink and the mirror surmounted with a decal of a cowboy on a horse. The horse was rearing back on its hind legs at about a 45-degree angle as the cowboy swung a lasso with his right arm. James took off his glasses, rinsed his face, stood studying his dripping visage as the awkwardness of the scenario really hit home. *I'm going out on the town with Natasha Pruitt. Doing something, you know, social with her.* In the past, he'd had his share of drinks and laughs in Natasha's presence, but in the company of many other employees, at an officially sanctioned event marking a colleague's promotion or moving on from the firm. This was different and he wasn't sure how to feel about it. But the alternative was climbing the walls in this dingy room with the thin walls and the peeling decal of a cowboy in action. Besides, in a vague way, James felt protective of Natasha, though she might vocally object if he said so.

But something complicated that protective impulse, oh yes. Sometimes James couldn't help thinking about Vince, the guy James had had to fire. Vince was a young guy the firm had hired to write and edit copy for brochures and press releases. Technically he was supposed to report to both James and Natasha, but Vince's cubicle adjoined Natasha's, so it was Natasha who more or less managed Vince from day to day. And she did more than that, far more. Natasha was in close contact with her boyfriend throughout much of the day, some would say too close, for it was fairly common for workers passing by her cubicle to hear her exclaim "I love you!" with the phone pressed tightly to her ear. She also dashed off e-mail to the boyfriend regularly, and here is where the trouble developed. It seemed Vince could not refrain from peering over her torso at times and looking at what she was writing, and the content of some of the e-mail explicitly mocked Vince and his work. Vince clearly did not understand all the intricacies of the C-130 and C-140 software systems, as evidenced by the errors that kept turning up in his copy. Nevertheless, the notion of an employer or supervisor who made fun of her subordinates during business hours was a new one on Vince. After five weeks of abuse, to his face and through the electronic method, Vince burst out, "Natasha, if you do not speak to me more professionally, I am going to get up and walk out of this building and you won't see me again!"

Poor Vince. But Vince was wrong about Natasha, James figured. She was as flamboyant about her likes and dislikes as about her professional goals. Power to her. In any event, the phone sex with her boyfriend had

ceased lately and there was speculation that Natasha had gone through a break-up.

Minutes later, they set out up the road in the dark, still in their work clothes except that they had shed their sports jackets and James had taken off his tie. It was chilly out but the walk was 90 seconds door to door. Soon they were standing before Zeke's, a saloon in a rectangular brick and cement building with a Budweiser sign in one window and a pair of swing doors, just like in those old Westerns, James thought. Contrary to one of Natasha's remarks on the way over here, they had built some things in this town since the 1800s. Natasha's look said, *I don't know about this.* They stepped into a smoky space where the first thing you saw was a jukebox, followed by a bar running the length of the west wall. A dozen tables with three or four chairs apiece separated the bar from a raised platform with a microphone on a pole. About 20 people were seated at the tables, miners, ranchers, and other blue-collar folk unwinding after work, and a handful of cowboys sat at the bar. Behind the bar, a 45-year-old lady with stringy brownish hair that might have been ravishing before the gray set in was serving draft beers and whiskies. James and Natasha made their way to a table equidistant from the bar and the stage. James was a bit worried but he saw now that Natasha's look had mellowed just a bit, as if part of her might be willing to give this place a chance.

Though James had no idea what they served here, he asked Natasha what she wanted to drink. In her cutting manner, she said that to save them both some time, she'd better accompany him to the bar. When they got there, they quickly drew the attention of one of the fellows on a stool, a man in his early 40s with black hair and a physique that was full without quite being fat. He wore dungarees and a white long-sleeved shirt made of coarse fibers.

"Well what're you two Fortune 500 folks doin' in these parts?" the man inquired.

James grinned.

"We had a bit of a transport malfunction, sir. Our plane had to land unexpectedly."

The man laughed.

"You don't have to call me sir. You can call me Merle, or good 'ol boy, or hayseed, or redneck, or you can call me asshole if you like."

James laughed. To his surprise, Natasha joined in the laughter.

"Hey Sally," Merle called to the bartender, who looked over from the other end of the bar.

"This MBA type here just called me 'sir'!"

Now it was Sally's turn to chuckle.

"Get these two here a round on my tab, would you?" Merle called to Sally.

"Oh, you don't have to—" James began.

"No. No, I insist. One for you and one for the missus—excuse me, for the young lady here," Merle said in a decisive tone.

James thought Natasha might erupt, but she laughed again. When Sally slid down the bar in their direction, James ordered a Woodpecker for Natasha and a Bud draft for himself. When they had their drinks in hand, Merle raised his glass of beer in a toast.

"Welcome!"

Now to the guests' amazement, Sally reached under the bar and produced a big hat, a Stetson, James thought that was what they called it. She held it out to Natasha.

"Come on, hon, I know this'll just look swell on you," Sally urged.

With another laugh, Natasha put on the big hat.

"When in Rome," she said.

James and Natasha made their way back to their table. But they weren't about to settle down with their drinks just yet, because Natasha had discovered the jukebox. Leaving James to guard her drink, she walked over to the space near the entrance while fishing dollar bills out of her wallet. When she reached that side of the room, James saw her engage in conversation and even flirt a bit with a burly man, about 35, in overalls and boots, and a younger guy in jeans and a red and black checkered flannel shirt. Natasha found four dollar bills in her wallet. Soon she had programmed the juke to play "Born on a Bayou," "Rolling on a River," "Bad Moon Rising," and "Fortunate Son." Then she retreated to the table where James sat grinning and sipping his beer. By the time John Fogarty's voice came from the speakers, wishing he were back on the bayou, rolling with some Cajun queen, Natasha had drained her Woodpecker and was ready for another. More patrons were arriving so it made sense to get over to the bar now. Natasha nodded at Merle as she stood waiting for Sally's attentions. She did not want to use the company card for this purpose, so she started a tab on her personal credit card, which she handed over to Sally, not without reluctance. How Natasha loved that credit card. As a platinum member, she enjoyed all kinds of perks and privileges.

It didn't take long for the saloon to fill up. People noticed the white-collar interlopers but generally refrained from staring. James and Natasha talked shop for a bit, then they talked about Harry Van Zant, and their exquisite misfortune in ending up here, James taking the position that it wasn't Harry's fault at all, Natasha insisting it was. At the back of James's mind were questions he would like to ask. He had a nibbling curiosity about her. Was Natasha single? If so, did she want to stay that way? But he had lived in the corporate world too long to commit elementary mistakes of the kind that had proved fatal to others. He enjoyed himself without reservation until she said, quite abruptly, "Why don't you go get me another." Even in his slightly altered state, James was taken aback that she'd spoken to her colleague as if he were a waiter. But he picked himself

up and sauntered over to the bar.

They had a couple more rounds before someone turned off the juke. Having heard all of her requests, Natasha didn't mind. But both of the executives were surprised at the appearance of a woman, on the cusp of 30, with luscious dark hair that Cézanne might have painted and skin so supple and luminescent that it looked eager to nurture life and produce new life. She wore a purple shirt with sleeves down to her elbows, and, like most people in here, a pair of jeans. Most eyes in the place were on her as she passed amid respectful silence from the entrance to the platform with the mike on it. A bass guitar player and a drummer followed her onto the platform and took a few minutes preparing. Then the young woman's lovely voice filled the smoky space. It was a voice that married clarity, perfect enunciation, with a caressing softness and effulgence that could transport the listener back to the womb. James and Natasha sat in something close to a trance as the singer outdid the Cowboy Junkies in her cover of "Blue Moon," "To Love Is To Bury," "200 More Miles," "Dreaming My Dreams With You," and "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry." During the last number, in particular, the singer emulated and surpassed the languid cadences of the vocals of that band's lead singer, Margo Timmins. The singer in this remote smoky place allowed the instrumental rhythms to lull the listeners for so long that when her voice resumed, it was like the return of the caressing hand of a lover who knows exactly what her partner longs for. "Have you ever seen a robin weep . . ."

"Beautiful," Natasha murmured. The Stetson had slid a bit toward her right ear, so that the humor of her wearing it was even more pronounced. But she was oblivious to this. Here, James thought, was a side of Natasha, open, innocent, admiring, that he could never have suspected. Though she had often declared her love for her boyfriend over the phone, you had to be on the receiving end of that love to have any appreciation for it. Otherwise it was a distant, flimsy bridge over torrents of nastiness. James and Natasha would gladly have paid to extend this experience well into the evening, but the singer on the stage went through a few more numbers before she ceased, thanked the audience and the tavern's owners, and made her way down and around the audience toward the bar. Patrons began to leave.

Minutes later, the woman who had filled the space with her lovely voice was seated over a drink at one of the tables closest to the juke. James thought he recognized the two men at her table as the fellows he'd spotted Natasha flirting with earlier. Now Natasha's look seemed to ask, *What do you think? Feeling brave?* A voice in James's head pleaded vainly that it was unseemly for Natasha or himself to drink any more. From a certain point of view, they were still on a corporate outing together. But it was clear that Natasha wanted to invite the singer over to their table for a drink. Well, why not, he figured. He had a bit of a buzz at this

point, but it wasn't like he was plastered. James picked himself up, ambled over to the other table, and broke into the conversation with all the politeness he could muster. He was pleasantly surprised when the singer agreed to join him and Natasha. The two fellows seemed mildly resentful but they didn't challenge James or follow him and the singer. At the executives' table, the singer introduced herself as Bethany.

Natasha sent James back to the bar where he got a Woodpecker for her, another draft beer for himself, and a Jack-and-diet for the singer. As he returned to the table, James saw that the crowd had really thinned out. There were maybe 15 people in the place, the bartender included. As James sat down, he found Natasha in animated discussion with Bethany. He soon suspected envy on Natasha's part, mingled with another element.

"That was, bar none, the best cover of 'Blue Moon' I've heard. Believe me when I say it leaves others in the dust."

"Why thank you."

"You have a lovely voice. I wish I could sing like that."

"Have you ever taken any lessons?" Bethany asked.

"Oh, no. But I just might. You've shown me what a voice can do."

"Again, thank you, Natasha."

"You're quite welcome."

"You and James here seem like real nice folk."

"You will stay here and enjoy this one on us," Natasha said, pushing the Jack-and-diet across the table. It wasn't really a question.

James noticed that the two men from Bethany's former table, the 35-year-old fellow in overalls and the kid in a flannel shirt, had maneuvered themselves over to one of the immediately adjoining tables. They were not participating in the conversation at the executives' table, but they were not exactly absent from it either. He heard the younger of them address the older as Gary. For her part, Bethany seemed mildly astonished at the generosity of the white-collar strangers. Who were they, and why were they so taken with her? Natasha, who appeared obsessed with Bethany, wanted to keep drinking. By this point, Natasha must have lost count of the number of Woodpeckers she'd put away. They'd been here for ages now. She'd flirted with the man in overalls and his young pal, she'd mingled on the way to and from the restroom, she'd sat there in rapt attention during the performance, slamming her glass down at the end of a number. Modesty was never a hallmark of hers in the first place.

"So tell me, Bethany."

"Yes, ma'am," said Bethany, a faint, shy glimmer in her easy blue eyes.

"Tell me what it is you do when you're not singing."

Bethany chuckled.

"Oh, well, that's most of the time. I'm here once a week at the most, you know."

"Right, so tell me how you fill up the rest of your life, Ms. Laura Ingalls Wilder," Natasha pressed.

"Ms. who? What? I don't get it," Bethany stumbled.

"I asked you a simple question. What do you do when you're not here?"

"Well what do you imagine, now?"

"I asked you a simple question."

"I said I don't get it."

Natasha stared. This was not how one spoke to Ms. Natasha Pruitt.

"I asked you a very simple question. Why don't you give me a straight answer?"

"I take care of my six- and four-year old boys."

Natasha tilted her head back and laughed a raw, rasping laugh.

"Oh, now that figures. While professional women go to work, Miss Bethany here yanks up her shirt and offers her titties for the brood to come and suck on!"

"Natasha," James heard himself murmur.

"You dumb fucking country bitch. You don't have any function except to please the men in your life, do you, you stupid cow," Natasha exclaimed, and tossed the remainder of her drink in Bethany's face.

"Natasha!" James shouted, leaping to his feet, attempting to wipe the stunned singer's face with his bare hands, apologizing profusely. Gary and the young guy were on their feet and everyone was looking toward the executives' table in astonishment.

"Guys, guys, please, I'm so sorry, she's been under tremendous stress lately. You know what, she's in shock from the emergency landing," James blurted, forgetting that two lies are less convincing than one.

Gary and his sidekick were briefly too incredulous to move. If James had done this thing, they'd know exactly how to react, but this was a lady here.

"Guys, I'm so deeply sorry. Here, the next round's on us," James put in, thrusting a heap of bills into Bethany's left hand. Bethany herself was the calmest person in the place.

"Come *on!*" James hissed in Natasha's ear, pulling her to her feet. He began half-coaxing, half-shoving her in the direction of the exit. But before he could get them both to the exit, she whispered that she felt sick and couldn't leave now. Everyone was staring and the scene could erupt into violence at any second. But James led Natasha to the restroom, between the end of the bar and the wall supporting the juke, and he stood guard at the door while she was inside, presumably vomiting. Gary and the younger guy, whom somebody had addressed as Chris, looked coldly at James. In a quick movement, James drew up to the bar and asked Sally as politely as he could for the credit card she'd been holding. Though naturally Sally showed none of her former warmth, she handed it across the counter.

Sally had a big heart and she both liked and pitied James. But when he moved back in front of the restroom, Gary and Chris looked ready to jump him. To his surprise, he heard faint noises suggesting that Natasha was doing something with her iPhone. Then she emerged and he led her swiftly out into the cool air.

"What on earth were you thinking? I know you're drunk, but—" he began.

"Just shut up. Those hayseeds were feeling me up with their eyes all night."

"No they weren't."

"Yes, they were, James. And I refuse to pay them."

"You already have."

"No, I just took care of that," she said.

So Natasha had cancelled the payment. James supposed this made them thieves. But James had long ago lapsed into a mode of thought where he did not consider himself to have done right or wrong. There were things he did right and things he would right later, in the pleasant surroundings of a well-run modern office. But the reality of the offense hit home and for the briefest of moments, as he considered what a shitty thing they'd done and other aspects of their experience that night, James's mind lingered in a flyover state, a rarely glimpsed and long neglected place between the assumptions that guided his interactions with men and women, with colleagues, superiors, and diversity trainers, from day to day.

Though he had his right arm slung around Natasha, it was only to keep her upright, there was no romance in it. Just another minute and they'd be back in the hotel. Soon enough, they climbed the rickety wooden steps and passed into the lobby, where only the grandfatherly member of the couple they'd met before was on duty. James asked the elderly gentleman how far away the police station was. He asked if the old man knew anyone who could provide a ride in the morning down to the field in the canyon where the jet was. No sooner had James begun to shepherd Natasha up the dusty stairs when noises on the street outside distracted him. He turned to peer through the tall rectangular windows in the double doors. A small crowd had followed the executives here from the tavern. He saw Gary, Chris, Merle, and six or seven others.

James turned back to the stairs. Natasha had retreated up to her room. He whipped out his cell phone and tried the dispatcher he'd spoken to a matter of hours ago. The ringing and ringing seemed to mock him. For all he knew, the dispatcher might have been in the tavern during that whole scene. Yes, that was probably the case. He thought of asking the old man for help but this was just too ludicrous. James decided to bite the bullet. He walked out onto the porch.

"Thief!" "Cheat!" "Scumbag!" called some of the people in the crowd.

James looked Merle in the eye.

"What do you good fellows want?" he said in an acid voice.

"I think Gary here would like a word with you, sir," said Merle.

Gary got to the point.

"You brought the situation about and you have to face up," the man said.

"Sir, I am very deeply sorry for how my colleague behaved. As I said before, we have both been under extreme stress—"

"Excuses are like assholes," Chris broke in now.

"You brought the situation about and you have to face up to it like a man now. Whyn't you stand up and be a man? We ain't goin' home and you'll never sleep a wink with the ten of us under your window," Gary pressed.

Face up to it like a man. When had anyone ever spoken to James Fletcher this way?

He thought about the distance between his room and the street, about Natasha hiding away in a room with flimsy walls, about the theft they'd committed that night. He studied the faces on the street before him.

"You know it's her we're mad at," Gary said.

"You'll have to go through me," James answered.

They stared in fury at the prim executive on the porch.

"All right, then."

James removed his glasses and stepped down from the porch. He'd heard about fights where the opponents circled each other endlessly, but Gary was too enraged to let that happen. Gary moved in fast. James swung wildly, and his fist grazed Gary's chin before the man in overalls slammed James in the gut so hard that James made only a quick hoarse sound like a reaction to an on-screen event in a hushed theater. When James swung his right arm with all his force, he actually got the pleasure of hearing something crack, of a faint acknowledgment of the blow within Gary's jaw. Gary kneed James in the groin and followed up with a punch so hard James thought his head would snap right off. Instead he staggered back a few paces, teetered in desperate fear, then dropped to his knees. Gary stepped up and kicked his opponent so hard in the face that he split James's left cheek. As James lay writhing on the ground, Gary gave him three hard kicks to the ribcage.

As Gary and the others wandered back toward the tavern, Merle approached the executive lying on his back in the dust. He helped James into a sitting position on the steps of the hotel's porch, disappeared into the hotel for a minute, returned with some napkins and ice, and spoke gently to James for about 15 minutes about the way things were, here in the flyover state. Merle could not go very far toward easing the pain, but at the very least, James felt he himself had not totally failed tonight.

* * *

A little more than two months later, the offices in San Luis Obispo had undergone something of a reconfiguration. The higher-ups in the company had seen fit to open a new annex on the far side of the vast parking lot abutting the complex containing James Fletcher's office, and they had also handed out a few promotions. So James had a bit of a walk in store for him when he received a call one sunny afternoon summoning him to the new annex, which he had barely glimpsed. When he had finally traversed the parking lot, he saw that they'd really spared no expense. The annex was something, all right. Here was a gleaming, ultramodern complex of vast black and silver cubes and cylinders. You entered the annex through a lobby flanked by two stern-faced guards hired from an elite security company. Marveling at the ambition that had inspired this place, James strolled through the lobby and into an elevator that took him to the third floor. James walked down a corridor, made a left, and pursued another corridor to a corner office. He went inside.

"Hello, Natasha."

"Hi James, how are you?"

"Not so very bad."

"James, you have been a dedicated employee for more than four years. But as you know, we're in a highly competitive industry, and sometimes we have to make very tough decisions," Natasha began.

Ten minutes later, James walked back out into the parking lot, fuming. He spun around a couple of times, his face buried in his hands. He couldn't begin to accept the decision. There were points he badly wanted to make, objections he urgently needed to raise. But accept the decision he must. The looks of the men guarding the entrance were hard, intimidating.

JILL MANDRAKE'S interests include music (mostly jugband) and literature (mostly poetry). Her musical group, Sister DJ's Radio Band, has a sampling of songs at the following site, if you care to listen in: http://music.cbc.ca/#/artists/Sister-DJs-Radio-Band. She has been previous published in *The New Orphic Review*.

What To Major In

Jill Mandrake

When Trudy B was killed by a car
walking home from Funland Skate-A-Way
down 80th Avenue, one fall night
then the older kids bravely shoveled a path beside the asphalt
so we might walk home from skating in relative safety
away from where the kingpin vehicles
could knock us down, like bowlers from Broadway Lanes
I expressed my grief in a couple of ways
but didn't know it was "grief" then; didn't know it was anything
1) I drew maps, and
2) I upped the volume on my transistor radio
you see, newcomers always were losing their way
in around 80th Avenue, because of all the cul-de-sacs
so I drew a map in my lined notebook
the lines presenting a ready-made grid
and handed a copy to anyone who'd ask
though nobody did
then decided I'd study Cartography –
Cartography
Urban Planning
maybe even Ariel Photographic Interpretation
helping people get around on a grander scale
all the while my blaring transistor
keeping me
and everyone within earshot
company
as I trundled the uncertain road
of roller rink finale

then decided I'd carry on
spreading a joyful sound
across 80th Avenue and beyond
ten years later, I found Geography
too challenging to excel in
time to try something new
I was lousy at Music, too.

TOM WAYMAN is currently enjoying Canada Council for the Arts grant support to complete a book of short stories about the Slocan Valley; "Green Hell" is one of these. The editor of the present journal, Mr. Hekkanen, remains an inspiration to Wayman to dig ever deeper into the local. Meantime, 2013 was the 40th anniversary of Wayman's first book publication, the poetry collection *Waiting For Wayman* (McClelland & Stewart, 1973); to mark the occasion, Wilfrid Laurier University Press will publish this year a selected poems, *The Order in Which We Do Things*, edited and with an introduction by Owen Percy.

Green Hell

Tom Wayman

WOULD YOU TWO like to join me? This place gets jammed. It's the only decent restaurant for seventy clicks in either direction. Well, the Crossroads Café just up the highway isn't too bad. There's also a couple of coffee-plus-sandwiches joints farther down the valley, but I wouldn't recommend them. I'm Billy. If you can put up with me, you're welcome.

Good to meet you both. You're from...? Hey, I've been to Regina. Stayed a couple of weeks once. No, born and raised in Ontario. Windsor. I was making my way west. Actually, I was *drinking* my way west. I was a drunk. Five years clean and sober now.

Thanks, but you're never too young to be a drunk. I'm forty. If you look close, you'll see the wrinkles that prove it. What do you do in Regina?

You seem too young yourselves, to be retired. I suppose if you were still on the farm, though, you couldn't take time off in July. What kind of crops did you—

Thanks, Janine. I *will* have more coffee. And these good folks probably will have menus, right? Yeah, they're friends of mine. We've known each other since, oh, a minute and a half.

Isn't she something? She's Al Craddock's daughter, the younger one. A very nice person. Not like her sister. If I can make a suggestion, have the Kootenay Special: best breakfast on the menu. If you like French toast, that is. I've never eaten ones so thick. Airy, yet rich. The cook, Marcel, he's French-Canadian. From St. Boniface, out your way. Okay, it's in Manitoba, but I mean the Prairies. I josh him, tell him his ethnic origin is why his French toast is so good. Seriously, he's terrific in the kitchen. Makes the Dog what it is.

Sorry. That's what we call this fine establishment. For years it was just the River Restaurant. Then Dave Verigin and his wife bought it. Fixed it up. They renamed it the Lone Coyote.

Definitely: you can hear packs of them up and down the valley most nights. But you'll see single ones loping along the highway. The locals didn't much approve of the name change, so they started to refer to the place as the Solitary Dog. Or the Lonely Hound. To me, the name is—

No, fine for now, Janine. These folks are ready to order, I think. They probably want, ahem, the Dog's breakfast.

Alright, alright, bad joke. I'll shut up. But tell Marcel he better work his magic. Our visitors are from his old stomping ground, the Prairies, and—

He's not? Who's in the kitchen?

Never heard of him. When did he get hired? Folks, forget what I said. This new guy couldn't possibly have the same knack. Is he even using Marcel's recipe?

Janine, if he used to cook in the thriving metropolis of Castlegar...I better explain to our friends: Castlegar is seventy-five clicks south, with, oh, about six thousand inhabitants...he's certain to be a gourmet chef. Entitled to inscribe all the culinary initials of distinction after his name: KFC...DQ...A & W. No, no, don't pour any of that on my head. I just don't want these good people to blame me, after I've given the Dog's cuisine such a build-up that— Yes, ma'am.

She's wonderful, isn't she? Even her boyfriend is a great kid. Drives a logging truck for his dad, John Poznikoff. To me, Janine is better looking than her sister, though the official valley verdict is that Natasha, who's three years older, is the gorgeous one. Good-looking on the outside, maybe. Janine is beautiful clear through.

Yeah, lots of spirit, like you say. Their mom is pretty fiery herself. She's a Grainger. You crossed Grainger Creek ten clicks to the north: old pioneer family. Wild, the lot of 'em. But never destructive. Except for Natasha, who—

I wouldn't say I know *everybody* in the neighborhood. But quite a few. You must be acquainted with most of the folks where you used to farm in...Grenfell, wasn't it?

We're not exactly a huge population, either: about four hundred. I'm counting permanent residents, not—

You saw the houses along the highway? Across the river, there's a back road that runs parallel, with more homes along there. People also live down side roads both sides of the river. One starts just north of here, by Perepolkin's store: Paradise Valley Road. It goes pretty far up the ridge you can see out those windows.

Good name for the road? People drive through in summer, and the valley seems so peaceful. Clear blue sky on a day like today, green woods, the river sparkling in the sunshine, mountains covered with evergreens, snow not yet gone from the peaks. Idyllic. People say: "Green heaven." I say: "Green—"

In the Dog right now? Let me look: I guess I know maybe a quarter. Summertime, there's always transients.

Six years. I've been here six years this fall. A year disgracing myself as a drunk, and five since clean and sober. I ran my car into a tree the first month I was here. A few fights: in the bar at Slocan up the highway, and one time outside the Civic pub in Nelson. I'm most famous in these parts for burning down Al Craddock's barn that first year. I—

No harm done, really. He had horses he'd bought for Janine and Natasha when they were kids. And a bunch of sheep. Also a stupid donkey that was supposed to scare off the coyotes when the sheep were in the field. I was hired to muck out the barn in April, so all the critters were in the pasture. I had to shovel and wheelbarrow the goop out. Manure is such lovely stuff, as you know. I took along a mickey to console and inspire me. Mid-afternoon, I sit down in the shade of the barn for a smoke break...and of course a rye break. It was a warm day, and I wasn't much used to hand labor. I decide I'll rest my eyes for a minute.

Yeah, woke up and my cig had caught the straw. I tried this and tried that to put the fire out. Wasn't thinking too clear. Nobody was home, either: Janine at high school, Natasha was living someplace else. Al works at a hardware store in Nelson, and his wife had gone shopping at the Co-op in Slocan Park. Eventually I dash over to a neighbor's and phone the fire department. Fire crews in the valley are volunteer. By the time—

Really? You were a fire guy at Grenfell?

Good for you. I've thought about joining, but haven't. At least, not yet. Anyhow by the time the fire crew show at Craddock's, the barn is a goner. It was done. Only thing they could do was keep the blaze from spreading to the house. But I'd left my jacket inside the barn on a hook. My wallet was in my jacket, with all the money I had in the world, plus my ID. I'm standing outside, thirty-five years old, with everything I own on my back. Except my beater Toyota, which I still owed for. I had to phone Al at work and say, "Uh, Al, remember the barn you wanted me to clean?"

I couldn't agree more. Never hire a drunk because you feel sorry for him. You'll end up feeling sorrier. Al was calmer than I would have been, though his wife, Sharon, she cussed me out good. But Al's house insurance paid for a new barn. I figure he came out ahead. It was incredibly dumb of me, just the same. One of the low points of my life. I thought I was down when I was rolling around in a few gutters in Sudbury, Winnipeg, and Calgary. Or when I did a little time in the joint at Bowden in Alberta. But burning down Al's barn was the bottom for me. By the time he started to rebuild in the fall, I had joined AA. I went to visit him one Saturday morning. Offered to work for nothing, to pay him back for all the trouble I caused. He says to me—

Jeez, that was fast, Janine. I hope the new guy in the kitchen hasn't

sacrificed quality for speed. Now these folks will be needing...Did you see that? How she whipped out that maple syrup jug from her apron? She's a pro, I tell you. Not much slips past her when she's...Sure, I'll have a refill. Maybe these two also want a top-up, to go with their...She's way ahead of me, way ahead. Ouch. Why did you do that? You're not supposed to hit the paying customers. What if I complain to the boss? I'll bet Dave takes a dim view of such...What?

Quite the character, isn't she? I like the whole family. Other than Natasha, and I don't know where that comes from. Both her parents are salt of the earth. They've been great to me, considering their barn, and everything. They probably could have pressed charges and—

You're right. People are basically good everywhere you go. Of course, we've got our share of screwloosers around this place, same as anywhere. When the Dog reopened, after Dave and his wife had upscaled it, some doofus phoned in a bomb threat. The Mounties raced out from Nelson, and we had fire and ambulance crews from as far as Nakusp. Dave gave a great quote to the paper: "I didn't think our cooking was *that* bad." They never did find who to blame.

Cops? Nearest cop shops are in Nelson, seventy clicks away, and New Denver, same distance the other direction. You drove through New Denver to get here. No cops in sight means some people imagine the law doesn't apply to them. But when anybody believes they only have to think about themselves, that causes trouble for the rest of us. I've been there, done that, got the T-shirt. B and E's mostly. In the old days in Calgary. Never here. Why mince words: I'm ashamed of what I did.

That's exactly right. Some people think if they're in the country, they can behave however they please. You'll hear them: "That's why I bought here. So nobody can tell me what to do." We have this new guy on our waterline. From Calgary. He's choked at needing a building permit from the regional district for an addition to his house. I point out to him he hasn't completely left civilization behind. He drives on the right side of the highway. He isn't exempt from the criminal code: he can't murder his wife or shoot me, even if he feels like it. His place is connected to the power grid and the phone network and he—

Good question. Jobs *are* scarce. Biggest employer in the whole valley was the sawmill up at Slocan. It's closed at the moment. But that was a couple of hundred paycheques, plus all the work that fed the mill: logging contractors, truckers. Another couple of hundred. Most people have to commute to jobs in Nelson or Castlegar. Young people mainly leave for the Coast, or Calgary. Or they head north to the oil patch: Fort St. John, or Fort McMurray. And we've got our share of folks on welfare. Lots of young single moms, but not just them. If I look around the Dog on your typical weekday like this—

Me? I'm gainfully unemployed. You might say my reputation has

suffered since Al's barn went up in smoke. A few other things, too, haven't done me any good when it comes to picking up work. I had six weeks this spring building a park in Slocan. The village had scuffled up some sort of federal or provincial grant to employ us layabouts. I apply for anything I'd be suited for, though. I've got an interview Friday for a job caretaking the elderly at the Castlegar Lodge. Having been a drunk, I know I can handle old folks. Some of them may be several sandwiches short of a picnic, but so were loads of people I hung with when I was drinking. I've seen plenty of puke, blood, and worse. And I'm a quick study when it comes to the ins and outs of a job. I made good grades in school, before I fell among evil companions. I'm talking about my buddies: rye, rum, plonk, and certain contraband herbs and chemicals. All behind me now. I'm clean and sober. Five years.

Today? When I'm between jobs , my girlfriend Joan has a list of chores for me to do while she's at work. She's the receptionist for a doc in Nelson. Today I promised to mow the lawn. Joan has a fair amount of lawn: takes me about four hours. This summer, if the weather holds, I'm supposed to re-stain the siding. Fine with me. She pays the mortgage, so the least I can do is contribute my share by putting my shoulder to the wheel. I have my own little projects, too. I'm seeing how many consecutive afternoons since the first of May I can swim in the river. Coffee at the Dog, mid-morning and mid-afternoon, that's another of my—

Ah, the fair Janine. Sure, everything's hunky-dory. At least I think so. Isn't that right, folks? I mean, aside from me talking their ear off. More coffee from the lovely lady? What's this? A bill? You're charging me? When I'm entertaining your customers? You should be *paying* me. Just put it on my tab, and I'll—

Jeez, just kidding, just kidding. I'll pay on my way out. And your service has been so fantastic, you can look forward to a significant tip from me. And I do mean "look forward": you'll get it someday. Someday soon. Soon as I win the lottery. No, don't do that!

Isn't she too much? She wouldn't really scald me with that thing. Janine is smart as can be. Shouldn't be waitressing. But, like I said, not many jobs hereabouts, especially for young people. And when you got no jobs, no cops and a remote location, you get growers.

I mean pot. Marijuana. Acreages in this area are at best hobby farms. But dope is huge. I've heard people claim one out of three houses in the valley grows. Though I'm not sure how anybody would prove such a number. Still, growing is a real temptation. Every once in a while they bust a person whose age would surprise you. Old fogies, like me. Even the occasional Doukhobor grows smoke, and they're usually straight arrows. More likely to be selling garlic than funny lettuce. They—

Doukhobors? That's why there's so many Russian names in the Kootenays, why you'll hear people speaking Russian. A pacifist sect.

Burned their guns back in Russia before the turn of the last century. The Tsar was plenty annoyed, but between Tolstoy and Queen Victoria they emigrated to Canada. They homesteaded in Saskatchewan first. I'm surprised you never heard of them. Their motto is: "Toil and a peaceful life." Seems perfect for this valley, eh? Except around here they took to fussing with each other. Some felt others were backsliding. In order to show material things aren't of value, a few of them started taking off all their clothes and burning down their houses. You know: *we come into this world naked, with nothing. That's how we leave.* Trouble was, a bunch of them got the idea that they should take off their clothes and burn down *other* people's houses. You bet that plan wasn't well received. By now we're in the 1920s. A train was dynamited, killing the group's Big Cheese. These battles went on right into the Fifties. A power cable across Kootenay Lake running juice to the mines at Kimberley was blown up. The Mounties—

Yes, *pacifists*.

Okay, but from their point of view they had nothing but trouble from the law for their beliefs, whether in Russia or this country. I figure the constant hassles by the powers-that-be are what caused one bunch of them to go overboard. Why is it a crime not to want to kill somebody? In Saskatchewan, a law said that, after so many years, to gain title to your homestead you had to swear allegiance to the king. The Doukhobors said they only swore allegiance to God. Yet some of them didn't want to lose all their hard work creating a farm from nothing. That law led to a split in the community, which is why a group ended up in the Koots. Not that the B.C. authorities knew how to handle the situation, once the different factions here began to battle each other. In the 1950s the Mounties raided Doukhobor farms in the valley and seized any kids who weren't being sent to school. Some parents thought the schools taught patriotism and glorified war, which you have to admit in part is true. The children were interned in New Denver, same place where the Japanese were interned a few years before during the war. Meanwhile, the province built a special Doukhobor prison down on the Coast for troublesome adults. Families of the prisoners marched from here all the way to—

Not today, no. Everything's quiet. Most of them weren't like the extremists: just ordinary folks leading ordinary lives. Except they don't trust governments at any level. Can't blame them for that. But they're pretty conservative, otherwise. That's why it's a hoot that some of them have been popped for growing. Whether you're religious or not, a grow show has the lure of easy money. A friend of mine has a rug-cleaning business: one of those truck-mounted systems? He got into the hole financially. Big mortgage, then he had to replace his home septic and the contractor hit bedrock. My friend figured the only solution was a greenhouse of bud. Four days before he planned to harvest, some kids

ripped him off. You can't phone the cops to complain. Instead—

There *isn't* always jobs. Not here. Unemployment is—

Sure, okay, people could move where the jobs are. But why should you have to leave where you enjoy living? I'll tell you: the worst effect of growing dope isn't that it's still illegal despite how harmless it is compared to, say, booze. The worst isn't the cops patrolling overhead every fall up and down the valley, either, with their choppers and infrared scanners and spectroscopes. The worst of dope growing is that growers lie. If you're raising weed for a living and you have kids, you either have to keep secret from your kids how the family puts food on the table, or lie to them, or teach them to lie about what you do. You're also teaching kids a person doesn't have to work to make money.

You bet such behavior affects kids. As well as their parents, and not for the better. Remember, I'm a non-drinking drunk: I know what it's like to connive and pretend and lie and hide your true self. Imagine a community meeting, trying to deal with some issue involving land use or water use, and a chunk of those present can't tell the truth about what they use the land or the water for. Imagine two neighbors on a waterline trying to solve a water shortage problem, if one of them has a secret patch up in the woods, or a greenhouse, or a basement full of—

I'm not in favor of ratting anybody out. Basically, we should be able to settle problems among ourselves. The question is how? A lot of the population here are love-peace-good-vibes-organic-granola types. But they can be narrow-minded, too: talk to a logger whose job is being blockaded. How do we work out our differences without bringing in Johnny Law? At Passmore, fifteen minutes drive south, two guys started running a gravel pit and crusher smack in the middle of a bunch of homes on the back road. More of that attitude: "It's my property, and I can do as I please." The neighbors are being driven nuts because of the dust and racket. Heavy trucks are arriving and leaving, front-end loaders revving and beeping, plus the crusher is churning away. Early morning, late at night, any old time. No bylaws. The neighbors try to reason with the guys. The pit operators say they have the right to run their business, and, by God, they're going to. So the neighbors hire a lawyer.

Yeah. Not good. The pit owners find a lawyer, too. From Nelson: guy called Duncan Locke. You'll see him in the Dog once in a while for lunch. He has a reputation for taking the simplest disagreements and inflating them. Naturally, his meter is ticking while he pumps up a simple matter into a complicated one. To make a long sad tale short, Locke manages to inflame the gravel pit situation even more. In court, he calls witness after witness to stretch the trial out, at who knows what expense for both sides. The neighbors' lawyer tells them at one point: "For the money this case is costing you, one of you could have put yourself through law school and acted as your own lawyer." Took them two years to get to court, trial goes

for six days spread over six months, and a month after the trial, the judge releases his decision. He says *he* wouldn't want to live with this pit next door. But he rules that the neighbors have failed to prove they've suffered enough for the court to intervene.

'Disappointed' is putting it mildly. I was talking to one of them, and he tells me, "Billy, *never* go to law. It's not worth it, financially or emotionally. Your choice is: eat shit, or shotguns."

I apologize for the language. But I understand the sentiment. The trick is to find that balance between the law on one hand, and solving our own messes on the—

I'm not advocating taking the law into your own hands. That isn't balance, either. It's—

I see you're not convinced. You haven't run into anything like this back in Grenfell?

Pig farms. They can be bad. So what happened?

There you go: an attitude of 'me-first' sucks, but calling in the law doesn't solve anything either. Remember I mentioned Janine's sister, Natasha? A guy around here got involved with Nate. He'd known her a while, but in March a couple of years ago they hooked up, start getting it on. He's renting a house up Pedro Creek Road, more like a cabin, and after a bit she's always over there. Between you and me, the connection was mostly physical, if you know what I mean. I'd been laid off from the sign shop in Nelson at that point. Time on my hands, and Nate on my hands, too.

No, it *was* me. I don't know why I first talked about some 'guy.' I think I—

Sorry to be confusing. Anyhow, the relationship with Nate was stormy: lots of big blow-ups, lots of making up, you probably know the tune. You don't? Take it from me, it wasn't pretty. Nate didn't even have a job. She'd been hanging out at the Civic in Nelson: they call that pub The Zoo, for good reasons. Maybe she was dealing. She had been going out with a biker before who drank at The Zoo, but she dumped him. Why she quit him doesn't do Nate any credit, but that's another story. Anyway, after a month I come to my senses, and decide the relationship with Natasha is plain crazy, and we should split up. She didn't want to. We continue a few more weeks, spatting and arguing and carrying on. She was boozing up a storm and, I'll admit it, when I couldn't stand what was happening, now and then I'd grab a bottle of rye and just start drinking.

Hey, I didn't mean to backslide. That's just how bad it was. Except sometimes when two people are fighting, making love is the very best. Have you ever noticed that?

Okay, maybe not. One night, though, I finally decide: enough. Natasha had been drinking for hours, and I'd had one or maybe two. I tell her we're going to break up that very evening, immediately. I'm firm about

this. We're done.

Hoo-boy is right. She throws a kitchen chair at me. I grab her, try to settle her down. I manage to sort of push her outside the house, toss her coat after her, and lock the door. I thought that was that. But she steams around the back, climbs onto the deck, opens the door there and a moment later she's inside again. I was upset. I explain again that we're finished, that's it, we're done. She smacks me. I try to convince her to stop punching, that she needs to leave, and while we're tussling she lands one right here on my nose. It starts to bleed, and I freak. I guess I twisted her arm behind her back, so she'll quit slugging me. She's kicking and hollering. I succeed in dragging her outside. This time, once she's locked out, I dash over and lock the other door. She spends the next half hour shrieking and hammering on the doors and windows, calling me every name in the book. I tell her she should eff off, and that if she doesn't, I'm going to call the police.

Bad idea, actually. Trouble is, Nate's got street smarts. I don't understand how she got them growing up here, where there aren't streets. But she has them. She eventually leaves. Bright and early next morning, the Mounties phone and ask me to drive into Nelson for a chat. They tell me Natasha has been in touch. I had a bit of a hangover, but decide I'll correct this little misunderstanding. I drive into town to meet with the bulls, and proceed at their invitation to blab who did what to whom.

I see you shaking your head. You can imagine what comes next. They type up my statement and I sign it. With a flourish. Then, on the basis of what they're suddenly calling my confession, they charge me with assault. "What do you mean?" I tell them. "If you're going to charge me, charge *her*. She hit *me*." "Doesn't work that way," the Mountie breaks the news. So I had to borrow money from some friends, significant bucks, for a lawyer. And wait in limbo for months. I didn't know what would happen in court, or how much this was going to cost. Of course gossip has me as the villain: people in the valley are mighty quick to assume the worst about anybody. Luckily Al, Sharon and Janine believed in me. They've had their own troubles with Nate. Finally last fall, October, I wound up before a judge. Natasha is all outraged innocence. A few people testify to my good character. Amazing, really, but they were mostly people I'd borrowed money from. I thought of asking Al to say something positive about me, since the barn thing came up in court, but that was impossible because he's Nate's dad. My lawyer was useless, and given my record, bang! my sentence was a hundred hours community service, I had mandatory anger management counselling and mandatory addiction group therapy. Now I've got a record for assault.

Hey, I didn't handle things well, I accept that. But the judge's ruling wasn't justice, either. In the eyes of the court, I'm completely guilty, and Natasha walks out smirking. That's why the law doesn't always—

I understand. I've been on the road myself: I know you have to get

going. I shouldn't have been washing our valley dirty linen in front of you, especially on such a gorgeous day. Wait until you catch the view of Frog Peak, which you'll see ahead of you in just a few minutes down the valley.

This *is* a beautiful part of the world. Did you stop at that lookout at the top of where the highway climbs up from Silverton? Impressive, eh? But you can tell from what I've been blabbing that appearances around here can be deceiving. It may look like wonderland, but—

Yeah, I better motor, too. I need to start cutting Joan's lawn. If she gets home from work and her grass isn't mowed, there'll be consequences for me you don't want to hear about. I'm off. Janine will take care of you. If you want to attract her attention, all you need to do is put two fingers in your mouth and whistle. Or bang your coffee cup on the table. Oops, you don't think she overheard me, do you? *Ouch*.

No tip for you, Janny, just for that. Nice talking to you folks. I'm glad you like our little bit of paradise.

ROBERT COOPERMAN'S latest collection is *Just Drive* (Brick Road Press, 2013). Cooperman is a past contributor to *The New Orphic Review*. His work has appeared in *The Fiddlehead, The Antigonish Review* and *Queen's Quarterly*. He lives in Denver, Colorado.

Four Poems / Robert Cooperman

How It All Started

Even before that hike last August,
probably for years of my not noticing,
or forcing myself not to notice
and adding stretches and exercises,
to combat the aching current
that surged, ebbed, and surged—
the joint was grinding stiffer.

But on that uphill slog to Ouzel Falls,
the hip gave way in a rage of pain
and weakness that I tried to fight off,
like that great Japanese Olympic gymnast
nailing a dismount despite a broken foot,
if you'll pardon my hubris.
But there was the tell-tale sign
my brother had warned me about:

"It'll feel like a groin pull."

I tried to hide my limp from Beth
and my in-laws, as I fell farther behind,
to view the Falls that lovely morning.
"You okay?" they asked, waiting
while I teetered to the log where they sat:
mesmerized by plummeting water,
by peanut butter sandwiches, apples,
by forehead plow-lines of worry.

"Sure," I smiled, "never better,"
but dreaded the steep downhill jarring;
more, having to tell Beth; and worst,
the call to my doctor, the orthopedic
referral, the months before surgery,
the hip's pitiless, wolverine gnawing.

Blood Thinner Injections:
After the Hip Replacement Operation

My darling Beth, who proudly
proclaims herself a doctor's daughter,
assures me it won't be a problem

to inject me with blood thinner:
the shots necessary to prevent clots
from their sometimes lethal blockages.

She's watched the nurse,
who instructed her to swab near my navel
with an alcohol rub, then grab a raised

handful of fatty tissue and press
the plunger in; the syringe will do the rest;
and over again for a week of shots.

I'm less aware of the needle going in
than if I'd pared my fingernails;
even more, I've seen too much

of my blood on the wrong side
of my skin, so I don't want to look;
but I did peek the first time,

through squeezed-shut eyes,
as Beth flinched, afraid she'd hurt me,
though she knew how much

I'd been hurt already, by this gnawing
cannibal of a bone-grating-on-bone hip,
and how much better I feel now:

home, healing, and with my darling.

What They Did To Me in Surgery

Continuing to heal and feeling stronger,
I still don't like to think about it:
the incision, the shifting aside
of muscles and ligaments,
the medical euphemism of "sculpting
the bone," which means sawing
and buffing the parts that won't allow
a perfect fit with my new titanium
and ceramic prosthetic hip;

surgeons, as they'll often joke,
a fancy term for carpenters or car
mechanics, as my father-in-law
used to chuckle over, while darning
socks, partly to practice suturing,
partly to use it up, wear it out:
raised during the Great Depression.

Then they closed me up with stitches
stronger than the ones in the seams
of baseballs, and slapped on a dressing
heavier than the ankle weights
I've been using to regain my strength,
while I walk with less pain than before
they got me horizontal and helpless.

Walking the Neighborhood

In the month since my hip surgery,
this is the first time I've walked
without my wife: a fledgling's
first solo flight; the first time, too,
without leaning on a cane:
to see if I can tread without teetering
like those boulder-balanced rocks
in desert national parks.

For sometimes, as that asshole,
John Wayne, observed, "A man's
gotta do what a man's gotta do."
And this is one of those times:
to see how far I've progressed,
how ready I am to be left alone
for longer than a long morning:

to wave to the bicyclist running
his tongue-lolling, leg-pistoning mutt;
the young mothers jogging, pushing
baby carriages; the guy who looks
like he's training for the Olympics,
impossible to believe his stamina
can last much longer, but as I crane
my neck, there he is, blocks away,
still setting a world record pace.

And here I am, careful of
every crack and root-raised slab
of sidewalk, but striding, almost pain
free: baby steps maybe, but even
Roger Bannister had to learn to crawl,
before he broke the four minute mile.

BRIAN d'EON lives in Nelson, British Columbia. His short stories and poetry can be found in a variety of publications: *Winners' Circle* 8 & 9, *Open Window IV*, *Oval Victory, Horsefly* and *The Elephant Mountain Review*. He has submitted winning stories to the Okanagan short story contest and the Kootenay Literary Competition. In 1998 his radio script, *407 Arachne*, won the Mark Time award. His novella, *Eta Carinae*, is available through Amazon, Barnes & Noble, etc. To learn more, check his website: www.briandeon.com.

Every Dog

Brian d'Eon

Everyone knew that Luke Scribbs sucked: his coaches, his teammates, and especially the fans. Even among his own family (who regularly declined his offer of free home tickets), it was well understood that Luke Scribbs was the worst pitcher ever to play for the Coeur d'Alene Golden Eagles.

"Trade the bum!" fans would shout from the stands, when Luke made a rare, and generally short-lived, appearance on the playing field.

"Oh man!" the Golden Eagles catcher would yell, kicking the dust around home plate, "That's all we've got left?" Then Mark Sweetwater would spit, mutter a Nez Perce curse, and violently clap his catcher's mask back over his face.

To his credit, Luke never let the negativity rattle him. He seemed immune to the chants and rain of paper projectiles which followed him as he strode, clean-cut as a Jehovah's Witness, confidently to the pitcher's mound.

Luke had not a single tattoo or piercing on his body.

"I'm allergic," he explained one day in the locker room.

His teammates surrounded him, unconvinced.

"My ears'll just get infected," Luke said, grinning, as they pinned him to the floor, piercing tool at the ready. The plan had been to dangle little copper feathers from his ears, courtesy of Mark Sweetwater's dad who had a jewellery business on the reservation.

Mark held up a hand, making his teammates pause while he took one last look into Luke's unwavering eyes. There was no fear.

"Ah, forget it," Mark said, spitting into a nearby urinal, "he ain't worth it." His teammates grumbled and began to walk away.

"Hey, guys?" Luke said, brushing the dirt off his uniform, "did I ever tell you what they used to call me in high school?"

Sweetwater lifted his eyes from the shoe he was lacing.

"They used to call me Lucky. Lucky Luke! You can call me that too if you want!"

Luke's special strength was his unflappability. He could pitch with a man on first, with the bases loaded, with his team behind, with his team narrowly ahead, or even with scouts in the crowd. No matter what the circumstances, Luke's pitching was consistently and equally bad.

"Can't we trade him?" Jimmy, the first base coach, asked.

"Nah," the manager replied, "nobody wants him."

"Nobody?"

"Would *you* want him?"

The only role manager Lanny Crow could devise for Scribbs was that of "hopeless relief". That is, when a ball game was totally out-of-hand, when there was no hope of victory, when it was late in the game and the Golden Eagles were behind by ten runs or more, then Luke would get the call.

Lanny Crow was no fool. He endured the boos, knowing full well that putting Scribbs into the game was not likely to solve anything. More often than not, Luke's appearance added fuel to an already nasty fire. A ten run deficit quickly became a twelve run deficit, fourteen, seventeen. Once, the Golden Eagles had actually lost a game 26-1 (a Little League score). And twelve of those runs were credited to Luke. But you had to save your pitchers, right? Lanny wasn't going to ask his starters to come in and finish a game that was impossible to win.

"Jesus," thought Lanny, "no wonder I'm bald ...."

***

By early September Coeur d'Alene was well out of post-season contention. Knowing that no mistake could now be crucial to their final place in the standings, the Golden Eagles began to play better. They relaxed, they played intuitively. One particular night, the Golden Eagles even managed to hold the Yakima Uraniums to just two runs and forced the game into extra innings.

Lanny, jolted to attention by his digital watch beeping on midnight, turned to his first base coach, "Is it really the fourteenth inning?"

Jimmy nodded.

"Whadda we got left in the pen?"

"Phil," Jimmy replied, not bothering to look up. He was concentrating on folding one of the team schedules into a paper airplane.

"Just Phil?"

Jimmy nodded. His plane was almost complete.

"That's it?"

Jimmy bet this baby could fly all the way out to second base. "Well, there's Scribbs..."

Lanny grunted and spat. The two seemed to go together.

But Phil Barker would have to wait. Coeur d'Alene's right-handed

reliever, Nigel Simpson, got his second wind and exceeded expectations, completing three innings of shut-out baseball against the league-leading Uraniums. There were handshakes all around as, half an hour later, Nigel entered the dugout, his night's work done.

"Nice work, bud," his manager said, who, thanks to two decades of managerial experience, managed to swat Nigel on the bum without needing to even look up from his clipboard.

Phil too performed admirably, pitching two more innings, giving up only one hit and one walk. And, to sweeten the deal, Sweetwater finished the top of the eighteenth with an RBI single.

Of course, even *mentioning* the possibility that Coeur d'Alene was now in a position to actually *win* would jinx the whole thing, so it stayed very quiet in the dugout.

Then came disaster. "Ow!" Phil screamed from the mound, "my arm!" Just about the most feared words in baseball. The catcher ran out. The manager ran out. Soon Phil was surrounded by an assembly of tired and concerned onlookers. Whether it was a simple strain, or a career-ending injury, they were all a little too tired to consider deeply. They just had to, somehow, get through this interminable game.

Phil was helped off the field, clutching his arm, and the manager was left staring at the grass, wondering how long he could avoid the inevitable.

A pissed-off umpire began walking towards the mound.

Time for hopeless relief.

The jeering began at once, even before the announcer's voice finished echoing through the largely empty stands, "and now pitching for the Coeur d'Alene Golden Eagles, left-hander Luke Scribbs!" The booing was extraordinary, especially considering its origin, coming from not more than twenty visiting diehard college kids. It was two A.M., and they wouldn't get back to Idaho before dawn, but at least an end of some sort was now in sight.

As Luke trotted towards the mound, the rising chorus of boos was music to his ears. Possibly what he heard was "Luke! Luke! Luke!" not "Boo! Boo! Boo!" The sounds were not dissimilar but, when he finally arrived at the mound, Luke topped off the bizarre jollity by doffing his cap. The crowd seemed equally divided between outrage and hilarity. One thing they all agreed upon, however, was that the game would now take a different turn. For that they were grateful.

Behind the plate, Mark Sweetwater felt the weight of three-hundred years of White Man oppression upon his shoulders. He flashed finger signals unconsciously to the mound, knowing it was an exercise in futility because Luke had only one pitch. A straight-as-an-arrow fastball. And not all that fast. A big, juicy, straight fastball which made hitters' eyes light up as it approached.

Luke's saving grace lay in the fact that his fastballs never arrived at

home plate at the same speed. Even if he had wished them to, he could never repeat the sequence of necessary actions accurately enough to accomplish the feat.

"Come on, Lukey, baby, give me your best stuff." The voice came from behind the plate, from the lips of the player catching for the Coeur d'Alene, but Mark Sweetwater would declare later it was Raven, the Trickster, not him, who was speaking.

"Come on, Lukey, baby," the voice said, "give us your best stuff!"

Straight as an arrow, travelling at 85 mph, the ball whizzed towards the plate, clearly above the strike zone. The game was now almost six hours old so, in spite of the ball's location, the umpire called it a strike.

Hearing the umpire's decision, Luke pumped his fist into the air. He did a little dance. He cocked his head and heaved a smile towards the star-filled firmament, thank you, Lord.

"Strike?"

"Look, pal," the umpire explained, "if you want to get out of here any time soon, you're going to have to swing the bat."

"Hmph," the radioactive athlete grunted, "no problem." He spat on the ground. "This pitcher's a piece of shit."

Luke looked at Yakima Stadium's glaring lights. He loved the moths that flew around them. He loved the noises from the stands: the hotdog vendors, the heckling, the sound of pigeons' wings, the cries of "get your beer!" and the hubbub of a thousand conversations which, as far as Luke was concerned, could have been the voices of angels.

Luke wound up for his next fastball, though at what velocity it would arrive at the plate, neither he nor the catcher knew. From high in the stands a paper airplane began a long, looping, graceful flight towards field level. Luke caught sight of it out of the corner of his eye, and as he thought of it, and considered how beautiful its trajectory must be, his arm action wobbled just enough so that, when the ball arrived at the plate, it was moving at about 70 mph, and the batter swung over it.

"Shit!" the batter yelled. "What the hell was that?"

"Straight as an arrow," the catcher replied, smiling at the confused Uranium. "He's got no curve ball, man. I don't see what your problem is."

"Shit!" the batter repeated, "just throw me another one of those pieces of shit!"

Again from the mound, Luke did his little dance, was momentarily confused by what sounded to him like a smatter of applause, and then pumped *two* fists into the air. The kids from Idaho cheered even louder.

"Pump your goddamn fist at me, will you, you little fart?" the batter snarled as he glared out at the mound. "Pitch the goddamn ball!"

Sweetwater rolled his eyes and flashed signals out to his pitcher.

Again, Luke wound up, that big irritating grin ever present, just as a

late flight from the Spokane airport came into view overhead. Luke loved jets. He'd love to make it to the big leagues where teams flew everywhere. Flying was magic. Oh, he'd heard about "lift", and knew enough about propulsion to understand, on some very simple level, why airplanes worked, but in his soul, it would always be about magic. And as his arm moved forward towards the plate, the flashing lights of the San Francisco-bound jetliner, siren-like, called out to Luke. Oh, how he'd love to be on that jet! Just think!

Finally the strangely torqued ball departed Luke's fingertips.

"Oh man!" thought the batter, "look at that big fat son-of-a ..."

Now Luke could give the jet his full attention.

"Yaaa!" the batter yelled out as his bat destroyed the empty air and Luke continued looking upward. The bat swung all the way through its arc, stopping only as it whipped against the batter's back. "Shit!" the batter cried out.

A split second later, Luke Scribb's 55 mph changeup plopped pleasantly into Mark Sweetwater's mitt.

"Strike three!"

"Shit!" the batter screamed, hopping, hurting, and kicking dirt outside the batter box. "What the hell kind of shit is that?"

"Straight as an arrow," Sweetwater reminded him.

From the beer-induced quantum foam of the stands a new chant emerged. It was late and the students were drunk, so the best they could manage was: "Luke! Luke! Luke!" but, in this time and in this place, it represented the pinnacle of eloquence. Like a wildfire it spread through the crowd. The homies, many of whom had forgotten the relief pitcher's name, simply resorted to "Oo! Oo! Oo!" which fit in perfectly well.

The next player to the plate was also a Native American, but from the southwest so he didn't know shit. As he stepped into the batter's box, he said to Sweetwater, "So what's he got?"

"Fastball," Sweetwater replied.

The Apache was sceptical. "Yeah, right! What else?"

"That's it," the catcher assured him.

Luke threw a fastball right down the centre of the plate which the batter, hardly believing a ball could follow such a straight path, fouled back.

"I told you," Sweetwater said, "straight as an arrow."

The batter dug in, mentally daring the white fella to try that again.

"Get ready for another fastball."

The batter said nothing.

"You mean you're not even going to believe your Indian brother?"

The batter spat twice on the ground, cleared his throat and did his best to ignore his pierced-nosed "brother".

The crowd continued to chant, homies and visitors alike, "Luke! Luke!

Oo! Oo!" and the pitcher could feel the blood pumping through his veins. He reached back to hurl as hard as he could. Right down the middle, straight as an arrow, and 90 mph!

"Strike two!" the umpire shouted as the ball smacked into Sweetwater's mitt, so hard that Sweetwater had to stand for a minute and call for time. As he flexed his fingers and walked in small circles, he muttered to himself, "Man, this has gotta be the frigging twilight zone..."

Sweetwater's Apache brother was also talking to himself. He shook his head repeatedly and squatted close to the ground, grabbing a fistful of dirt and studying it, as if trying to unravel a trail gone cold. Finally, he returned to the batter's box, glaring warrior-like, back at Sweetwater.

The chanting from the stands continued, and more paper airplanes were sailing down onto the grass. "Last chance for beer!" a voice yelled from the stands. What a great idea, thought Luke, savouring the bubbly vision as he tossed in his next pitch at a leisurely 83 mph.

This time the batter hit the ball square. It rocketed straight back to the mound. Luke had no time to move, but simply wondered where in his body the projectile was going to imbed itself. He was in the middle of arcing his back to avoid contact when suddenly the ball was there. It was in his glove, arriving with such force that it tore the leather right out of his hand. The ball and glove came to rest ten feet behind the pitcher's mound, lying there like a wounded gopher.

"Out!" the umpire called.

"Out?" the batter protested as he stepped on first base. "The ball's on the ground! How can I be out?"

"The ball's *in the glove*, on the ground. It never touched the ground," the umpire explained.

"How can I be bloody out when the bloody glove is not even on the bloody pitcher's hand?" By this time the batter had taken the argument to close quarters as he and the umpire met between first and home plate.

"You want to know what out is?" the umpire asked, "here's what out is!" The umpire went into his own little windup and thrust his thumb in the direction of the clubhouse. "You, asshole! You're out! Out of the frigging game!"

As the batter was dragged to the clubhouse by his teammates, the crowd upped the level of its chant, "Luke! Luke! Luke!" Everyone was saying it, and this time there was no ambiguity about their enthusiasm. When the pitcher retrieved his glove and again doffed his cap, the crowd went nuts.

Luke hit the next batter, sending him to first base.

"Sorry!" he called out from the mound.

"What?" the batter yelled back, massaging his elbow. "What the hell is that asshole talking about?"

"Just take your base," the umpire suggested.

"He's *sorry*?" the batter continued, for some reason infuriated by this show of concern, "he's frigging sorry!"

Sweetwater put his hand on the batter's shoulder as a sign of solidarity. "I think he was dropped on his head when he was little."

It bothered Luke deeply to hit a batter, and he had to take several deep breaths before he was ready to pitch again. Not that it helped much; his next four pitches were well outside the strike zone.

There were now runners on first and second and the game was beginning to unwind as a hundred before them had. There were comments from the stands like "Hey Scribbs, hit *me*!" and "How do you spell RELIEF?" and the ever popular "Scribbs, you suck!"

It had been a long, long, night. Sweetwater groaned as he rose from his squat and went out to talk to his sensitive didn't-want-to-hurt-anybody pitcher. "Hey, white boy," Sweetwater said, mustering up all his tribal wisdom, "throw strikes, okay?"

"Okay," Luke replied.

But Luke walked the next batter too, this time mixing his outside pitches with a couple of bouncers to the plate.

"Oh man!" Sweetwater cried, "now we've got frigging bowling for dollars!"

The bases were now loaded and chaos tottered on the thin edge of a quarter which Lanny Crow nervously handled between his fingertips in the dugout.

For half a minute, the Coeur d'Alene manager thought seriously about doing something. He thought about coming out to the mound, putting his arm around the pitcher's shoulder and saying, "Look, son, we only need one more out and we can all go home. Just get the ball over the plate and let your teammates field the ball. Go on, son. We know you can do it."

Lanny looked out into the darkness, yawned, thought about all the wise words he'd ever said or had been said to him and then decided, "Ah, to hell with it," instead leaning back to have a closer look at Jimmy's paper airplane.

The loudspeaker came to life once more, though now the words were noticeably slurred, "And now batting for the Yakima Uraniums, the Centre Fielder, Davey Yerkes!"

There was no place to put Yerkes. Everyone at the stadium knew this truth. If he was walked, a run scored. If he was hit by a pitch, a run scored. A wild pitch would score a run. A hit would score two runs and the game would be over. There was no alternative but to "pitch" to Yerkes.

Mustering a strength which surprised even it, the crowd came to life one last time, the College kids, as usual, starting it with, what to them, was the ultimate in kitsch, the "wave". A wave so uncoordinated that, to an outside observer, it would simply look like people randomly falling out of their seats. Then began their chant, "Luke! Luke! Luke!" which,

finally they collectively figured out, was more suitably rendered as "Puke! Puke! Puke!"

The Golden Eagles were one out away from a nineteenth inning victory and defeating the league leading smart-asses from Yakima on their home turf. They needed three strikes.

"Come on, Lukey baby," came the voice from behind the plate which was not Sweetwater's. "Give it all you've got!"

Luke's first pitch crossed the middle of the plate and was smacked hard down the first base line, but foul.

A Uraniums runner had already touched home plate and another was close behind him when the umpire rendered his decision and sent them back.

"That's it, baby! Right down the pipe! Just like that!"

Yerkes wondered if all Indians blabbed as much as this one.

"Whadda ya looking at, white man?"

Yerkes just smiled, returned his gaze to the mound. Then he stretched out his arm, his bat forming an extension of it, and pointed to deep left field like Jim Thome about to hit a home run.

"Come on, Lukey. Let's blow this white man away."

Luke's next fastball came roaring in at the same speed as his first, something which hardly ever happened. Yerkes took a tremendous cut at it and fouled it straight back just over the shoulder of catcher and umpire.

The students revised their chant to "Jerk! Jerk! Jerk!" the sounds mixing and muddying with earlier versions still circling the stands: "Luke! Luke! Luke!" and "Puke! Puke! Puke!"

The next pitch was low and outside. Yerkes let it go.

The pitch after was identical. Yerkes moved hardly a muscle and likewise let it pass.

"Come on, Lukey. Right down the pipe! Scalp him, baby!"

Yerkes took a quick look at Sweetwater whose mask and helmet couldn't completely hide his cleanly shaven head. In some kind of inverted Old Testament logic, Sweetwater believed his shiny head gave him "power".

Right down the middle, Yerkes intoned to himself.

"Right down the middle," Sweetwater repeated, as if reading the batter's thoughts, and Raven, listening to them both, delivered.

Luke's final pitch of the night was a straight-as-an-arrow fastball, right down the middle travelling at 80 mph. For Yerkes it was manna. His bat impacted the sphere of leather and cork with a terrible force. In a brief millisecond, the ball distorted into an unlikely egg shape, then rebounded like the core of a massive star, exploding into the night air and soaring far and high into the outfield. Spectators stared, mouths agape, at what must be the best hit ball in many seasons. The crack initiating its launch still echoed in the stadium as everyone watched the projectile go deeper and

deeper and then suddenly, inexplicably, stop.

There was a soft thud, and it was seconds before the true nature of the event became clear but, in the interim, out in left field, a very surprised Manuel Gonzalez watched the baseball drop nearly straight down into his outstretched glove.

Yerkes stood frozen, half-way between home plate and first. He had expected to be in the middle of a Jim Thome-type home run trot, only ... what the hell had happened?

In the dugout Lanny and Jimmy were slapping each other on the back and each threw a paper airplane out onto the field.

"Luke! Luke! Luke!" The twenty students sounded like two hundred as the chanting swelled to new heights.

Luke was all smiles as he received hugs from a growing huddle of delirious teammates. It was Luke's first ever professional "save".

"What happened?" Luke asked.

"You won, man! You beat the frigging Uraniums!"

The left-fielder finally joined the main group and took Sweetwater aside, "Hey *hermano*," he whispered, "you ever see anything like that?"

Sweetwater took a long time in answering. "Once."

Manuel shook his head. "Not me, man. The pigeon exploded, man. You saw it, eh? The ball was going, going …. out the stadium for sure! And then this bird just comes from nowhere and—boom—bird, ball, and a whole bunch of feathers."

Both men gazed out into left field where a partial carcass rested on the ground, a few feathers still descending above it.

"Does Scribbs know?"

Sweetwater picked a feather off the left fielder's shoulder, "Don't tell him."

"Don't tell him?"

"You know … what is it white people say?"

The Mexican shrugged.

"Every dog has his day… Something like that. Anyway," said Sweetwater, giving the feather back to Manuel, "it's not like it was a frigging eagle."

JANE STUART has had poems published in *Shemom, California Quarterly, Terra Mia* (in English with Italian translation), *Bard, Eucalypt* and *Pegasus*. She lives in a book-filled, 10-room house in the middle of a nature preserve in Greenup, Kentucky.

Four Poems / Jane Stuart

The Ring

There was no rain in Delphi
but mist rose—
it seemed to rise—
out of a gorge
and spread itself across rocky fields.
An oracle spoke
but not many words were said—
and there was no echo.
I was a tourist,
never lost, not found,
somehow part of an ancient mystery
that was not part of yesterday
but now—
the misty future seemed forever free.
I went to my hotel.
The ring was there,
a green enamel fish
with blue-bead eyes.
It leapt out of the case and wrapped around
my finger—a souvenir
with twinkling, magic eyes.
This, then was Delphi—
all age, and sage
but with a bold tomorrow.

On the Same Page

I'm not so sure why it was important
to have something to share (give back)
instead of simple, easy conversation
going nowhwere? It didn't have to—
just hello, goodbye
with maybe something in-between
but no important loophole
and no shattering disaster.
This led someway to the idiotic
let-me-walk-you-through
what anyone can see (or see through)
and understand
without the drum roll, laughter
and canned heat
or whatever comes after
just-blue sarcasm and the unholy stuff
"you know" that predetermines sentences
and lays out mind skills
like some user-friendly
robot said to do
when the world crashed
and whatever-it-was took over
me and you,
just vanished,
left behind in a computer graveyard—
anything that was, isn't anymore.

Rustling Memory

What now, my sweetest son? I found your name
inside the mirror—then I saw your heart
chasing the speeding deer in a meadow;
and listened when moonlight fell on your door,
moonlight as golden as your long soft hair
that fell across the wind on summer days
when time is sweet and we hear memory
singing a song we had not heard before—
but it was part of all we ever were,
even our dreams, an easy melody
that brings to mind the flow of distant words
and every painting that was wild and free
in Monet's garden, an outside museum,
the waterfall we made at Sparkling Creek.
That time remembers stars that still don't shine
and love, found love, that wasn't really there—
but yes, it was, a part of every hour
and mist that moves inside the oracle
before it rises to release "before"
that goes with what comes after, comes again,
then dives once more into Poseidon's sea—
But Sounion was many years ago.
Sunlight in shadows fell upon your face
and freedom was a mark we had not made.
There was tomorrow, there were days of grace
—and what I promised never came to pass
because, you said, love was a Litany—
I find you now inside the Angelus
and understand, because you are not me.
Yet time that gives can also take away.
I see the moon. The night was full of stars.

World of Light

Light fills the tops
of everygreen,
light makes the river dance;
light sweeps over the meadow grass
and summer's small fireflies

Light crosses birds
in sudden flight
through skies now full of rain.
A golden moon shines through the clouds,
upon our windowpane

All this world seems to glow
with golden summer light
that shadows our evening dreams,
illuminates tonight
and then is gone,
lost in the wind,
and earth is very dark.

"Sideways" is the first chapter of a longer memoir. DIANA MORITA COLE is a human rights and enviromental activist, who has worked as a computer consultant, researcher, university international student advisor, and music teacher in Canada. Her work, "Two Human Rights Complaints," is required reading for the graduate social work course, *Ethnic and Cultural Concepts and Principles*, at San Francisco State University, and is also part of the Japanese American National Library permanent collection in San Francisco.

Sideways

Diana Morita Cole

SIDEWAYS WAS THE conclusion of my mother's attending physician. "Your baby's sideways." Dr. Sugihara, a captive like us, spoke to my father as he pulled the stethoscope from his ears with one hand, his other resting on my mother's swollen belly. "And I don't know if your wife will live. After all, she's no longer young." The doctor's words frightened my father's youngest child, Betty, who was grasping Papa's large calloused hand as she listened to the news.

Fortunately I had big ears, so I turned a somersault *in utero*—one of my rare moments of grace—and my forty-four year old mother survived.

The risk of my mother dying in childbirth wasn't the only time our family unity was threatened. There had been another threat just prior to our imprisonment.

My sister, who was eight, was aroused from sleep by voices the night after Pearl Harbour was attacked. In her half-sleep, Betty heard Mama and Papa discussing the possibility of their deportation to Japan. "They were whispering, Diana, so we, younger ones, wouldn't hear what they were saying. But I did hear Papa telling Ruth and Paul they'd have to look after us if Mama and he were sent away by the authorities. I was so happy when I found out we were leaving Hood River together."

* * *

After the Japanese government surrendered to the Allied Forces in the fall of 1945, my family was finally released from Camp Minidoka. They packed their few belongings and traveled from Idaho to be reunited with my eldest sister and third eldest sister, who were already living in Chicago.

Moving to the city made sense to Papa since none of his children wanted to return to Oregon. They'd heard about the full-page weekly ads published in the *Hood River News* warning the Japanese émigrés, "So Sorry. Please. Japs Not Wanted Here." Papa, now fifty-three, had to once

more pack his bags and abandon, this time forever, his dream to return to the rural life he loved, as he set out to begin again in a strange urban environment.

Carrying two cardboard suitcases, Papa led the way, and we boarded a train headed east, over the Rockies, away from the badlands where I was born. He sat with my four older siblings in the coach section while *ojiichan* (my grandfather), my mother, Betty, who was twelve, and I were seated in a separate compartment because the War Relocation Authority considered the four of us in greater need of privacy and comfort than the rest of my family.

The compartment, though, like the cramped living conditions my family had endured at three different detention centers, didn't provide sufficient room. Betty reported that I'd had to sleep next to Mama on the top berth. "*Ojiichan* and I were expected to share the lower one. But he ended up having to sleep in one of the passenger seats."

Surprised, Betty was forced to respond to the porter's repeated knocks on the door, asking after our needs. "Finally, I realized it was *you*, Diana. You were pushing the button to call him when our backs were turned."

It seemed I was always causing a disturbance of one kind or another in my family's life: first, by appearing at the worst possible time and then by turning out to be a pesky nuisance throughout my childhood. At family gatherings, I could depend on hearing the harsh rebukes of my sister Ruth rising above the din. "Diana! Stop jiggling your legs. Sit up straight. And don't bite your nails!" her voice echoing the pattern of rejections she'd faced in her own life.

Years later, when I was an adolescent and in the throes of one of my many nervous conditions, Ruth and I would sometimes chat, I having to bear the brunt of her hurtful revelations.

"When Mom was pregnant with you, she didn't have any of her own teeth left. I thought you were going to kill her, like all those baby shoots hanging off a mother spider plant."

I didn't know about Mama's lack of teeth when I was a fetus any more than I recall turning a somersault in her womb or pushing the button for the porter on the train. But I do remember being sent to Sunday School in Chicago when I was very young. My father decided I should attend the Elm-LaSalle Bible School, after two missionaries-in-training came to call. Papa spoke English, unlike my mother who only spoke *nihongo*. He told me, "A young man and a woman with a Bible in her hand stood at our door. They said it would be good for you to attend Sunday School. So I let you go."

He was unconcerned that Mama was raised an adherent of the Shinto faith, what had been the official religion of Japan, and that his own upbringing was Buddhist. "You should be American, like everyone else," was his stated resolve.

Betty, who was fifteen, walked me to a pretty sandstone church on the corner of Elm and LaSalle streets, before I was old enough to attend kindergarten. “Be good,” she warned, “so they don’t change their minds and put us back in camp.”

The image of an immense figure with long blond hair, holding a staff in front of a flock of sheep, glared down from above the double oak doors where I entered, a stark reminder that I was on trial. I scurried over the shiny hardwood floor of the entryway, his penetrating stare following me all the way down the wooden staircase to the area reserved for children’s classes.

An eager student, I quickly memorized the pious lyrics of *The Wordless Song Book*. Every Sunday, along with the other children in my Sunday School class, I opened the song book to the first page, which was entirely black, and sang *My heart was black with sin until the Savior came in.* I would turn to the next blank page, which was red, symbolizing the redemption through the blood of the Savior, who I figured out later was the big guy in the entranceway holding a staff. Turning to the third page, white this time, I ardently declared that I would be washed as *white as snow.* At long last, my small fingers reached for the final page which when opened revealed a sheet of golden foil, symbolizing my admission into paradise.

When I was entering the third grade a few years later, my sister took me to shop for school clothes at Montgomery Ward, *Monkey’s* as it was called by most Chicagoans. Standing at the rack in the girls’ section, I searched for a new dress. Anything but the color red, I told myself. I was tired of wearing the one color my parent’s generation, the *Issei*, thought customary for young Japanese girls to wear. But when I selected a green dress with white ruffles from the rack, Betty said, “Don’t buy anything green.”

“But I like it,” I argued.

“Stand over there, in front of the mirror.”

I followed her instructions and observed the thin reflection of a knock-kneed kid with black hair, biting her lip.

My sister shoved the green dress up to my face. “See, it makes you look too yellow. Go find something else.”

That’s how I learned that color—yellow and black especially—was something for me to worry about.

As well as singing songs and reciting Bible verses on Sundays, at school I stared up at Old Glory hanging in the corner above our teacher’s desk every morning and recited the *Pledge of Allegiance*—with my sneaky yellow hand placed over my nasty black heart.

Trying to become a first-class, number one, Grade A, all-American kid, like I imagined my white classmates to be, I made a point of being the first in my class to read *Fun with Dick and Jane*. And with each top

grade I earned at Ogden school, I began to understand I was leaving the disgraceful world where my parents slurped *udon*, flopped barefoot in *zori*, a world where *ojiichan* engulfed by smoke from burning joss sticks, chanted before a small wooden altar in his bedroom.

Fun with Dick and Jane taught me that if you want to wear pretty clothes and live in a house with a white picket fence, you'd better adapt, pay close attention to all the cues or you're gonna miss out. So I quickly learned to be on the prowl, trying to catch the subtle nuances of what everyone was saying and doing, so I could become a *bone fide* all-American kid. I was a very busy child—my big ears, like radar dishes, scanning the environment for signals.

At school, I never talked about my family's forced removal from Oregon or that my parents and grandfather, who were immigrants, were prevented from becoming citizens until almost a decade after the war in the Pacific had ended. Why let your classmates know your family lived outside the norm? Wasn't it hard enough trying to fit in, hide your color, and make friends?

And at home we practiced cultural apartheid.

"Oh, look. See Diana reading *Little Lulu*. Oh, look. See Mama studying *Bungeishunjû*, a Japanese literary magazine."

I never showed Mama my comic books, and she never read aloud to me the stories she enjoyed in her native tongue.

Unlike my mother, Papa not only spoke English but was able to read it as well. He'd studied English with the help of a German immigrant lady in the years prior to my mother's arrival in America. Papa was a handsome man with a high forehead, long nose—a dignified face that often broke into a congenial smile. So it wasn't difficult for me to imagine his German friend, her head encircled in a halo of a braid, and my father shoulder to shoulder bent over a newspaper lit by a kerosene lantern, while he waited eight years for Mama's arrival aboard the *Arabyamaru*, the ship that brought her to America.

* * *

Papa told me that he had once read the Bible.

"I threw it in the garbage."

Surprised, I asked why.

He shook his head. "It's *kitanai*."

"Dirty? Why do you think that?

"Men sleep with their daughters."

I wanted to laugh at Papa's surprising observation, and wondered why my pastor failed to mention these serious flaws, but quickly tossed away my concern. As young as I was, I knew that my father's censure of the Book stood in the way of my acculturation.

* * *

Despite the strict accommodations I made during the day to white society,

part of my consciousness remained with my parents. Each night, before bed, Mama and I would leave our apartment and enter the bathroom we shared with the tenant across the hall. Behind the white door, shiny and lumpy from many applications of thick oil paint, I would watch her scrub the bathtub with her deeply veined hands and turn the taps to fill the large, white iron tub for our nightly soak.

The water ran, releasing my confusions.

I would get into the tub first and watch Mama step over me. From my vantage point, I could see every aspect of her physical being from her feet, all the way up to her hairy, dark pudendum. As she immersed herself, I was transfixed by the translucent quality of her unblemished skin and the roundness of her breasts and stomach. And though she was well past her prime, to me, she was beautiful, sensual, and extraordinary. But I couldn't tell her because I was too engrossed in the ritual.

Mama's stomach was never totally submersed by the water that rose over my bony chest. Her stomach stood out like a mountain, a living monument to the nine of us that had started life deep within its mystery. I would try to push it down with my small hand, but it shot back up refusing to obey, the utter antithesis of who she was. Her stomach was like an iceberg: what I saw above the water line wasn't half of what lay beneath the steaming liquid of the bath. Sometimes it seemed a more robust replica of Japan, the island nation where she was born.

And because Mama seldom spoke, and never during our baths, her body appeared to have a life independent of who she was. She was mythic, and to me she represented a landscape of bliss.

She would place a hot washcloth across her chest, and when I was older, she'd place one across mine. Much like Mama's flesh, the heat of the washcloth gave silent comfort. After resting for a few minutes, she would sweep the washrag slowly across her flesh, beginning at her small forehead, then down over her gracefully arched nose, temporarily covering the mole under her left eye. She would wipe her neck, and then down across her breasts, the cloth swept over the great round mountain like a squall and disappeared in the valley between her legs.

The water was always hot, so hot that it was painful to step into at first. And Mama kept the water steamy, dutifully opening the hot water faucet again and again as we relaxed. And the pipes would knock in protest each time she opened the valve, disturbing the silence of our sanctuary.

Mama was a quiet woman; and if I had asked her my most pressing question—by which path we had left her body—I would have broken the mood, disturbing her rare moments of tranquility.

Mama's *oheso*, her navel, wasn't big enough, I reasoned. So how did the doctor reach in and get us out? He must have carved a circle around her navel, my eyes following the water's edge that encircled her protruding belly. With a burst of insight, I lifted her skin as utility workers raised

manhole covers to climb below the streets of Chicago.

Such was my childish solution—I, both isolated and stranded by language and by culture from her, yet engulfed by her affection.

Author of *After Ted & Sylvia: Poems*, CRYSTAL HURDLE teaches English and Creative Writing at Capilano University in North Vancouver. In October 2007, as Guest Poet at the International Sylvia Plath Symposium at the University of Oxford, Crystal read from the text there and at Blackwell's Bookstore. Her poetry and prose have been published in many journals, including *Canadian Literature, Literary Review of Canada, Event, Bogg, Fireweed* and *The Dalhousie Review*. Crystal was Fiction Editor of *The Capilano Review* in the late eighties and currently sits on its board of directors. She has a teen novel in verse forthcoming from Tightrope Books.

Four Poems / Crystal Hurdle

Excerpts from "The Eternal Lolita:
signposts and tombstones,"
final section of *The Hunted Enchanters*

Lolita Speaks

He hurt me
again and yet again
He said I seduced him

Bulky pads absorbed blood
but my heart was rent
as swiftly as this paper

He said he missed
my voice in the throng
a lump in the throat
plangent

but he gave me no voice
a sound less than a whimperwhisper

fricative fricative fricative
vibrating voiceless vibrating

voiceless

Lolita's Handmaids and Rosegirls

Sylvia Plath

Sylvia's Daddy watches her dance
a select performance
after his port
before her bath

His wife a generation younger
his student
then breezy, boyish
now fusty with motherhood

He watches his daughter dance

Dorothy of Oz

Dorolita

your braids and seersucker
the bib of your pinafore
binding the sweet eruptions
entrancing as you
follow the yellow brick road
to my crooked house and heart

The falsetto voices of the Munchkins
are freakish
not I

I have the Straw Man's persistence
the Tin Man's tears
more strokable fur than the Lion

Please wear only your sunglasses
those fetching ankle socks
and the ruby red slippers

If you're good,
I'll tell you a bedtime story:
There's no place like home
There's no place like home

There's no place

and you will believe it

Priscilla Presley

in her blue suede Mary Janes
she is loved so tenderly
crooningly delicious as his deep-fried
peanut butter sandwiches
and not so fattening
without guile
virtually guiltless
the soft strumming strokes

Alice Liddell

Even better enticement than a candy bar
a story with the listener
all the better to hear you with, my dear
as the central character
all the better to see you with, my dear
your slave girl legs, your cunning frock

A gentle persuasion
to sit on his lap
to sit more closely
to better become one with the story

He brushes her hair
away from her enraptured eyes
behind her little ears
such intricate chambered nautiluses
surely a tale in those
and with his big teeth
all the better to to to

Annette Funicello

Your laugh so hearty and open
the gambol and guffaw:
all lips, teeth, tongue
tunnel of love
Your mouse ears like breasts

wee optical illusion
in black and white
I imagine the peachy flesh tones
a fun mouseketeer ride

Saturdays and Sundays are hard

Every weekday at four o'clock
I tune in just for you

Twelve

Know Your Daughter
says be ready with the pads the belt the deodorant
Adolescence comes on rank little feet
Lolita with her too fecund hair
monkey feet and toe jam

give her Ban roll-on
its phallic shape a microphone
she could croon to during morning ablutions
in the mirror loving up to the Humbert
she has as yet to know

Ban her
Ban that preposterous girl
all the ripe rottenness of puberty

allergic to this Lolita
can't stand the constant itch and craving
its sprouting coarse hair
fear the fatal scratch

Teaching *Lolita*

The Teacher's Notes

image patterns
trace them
roses
sun shade
spider butterfly
color?

enchanted hunters?
hunted enchanters?

prostitution and pedophilia

Blackboard Notes

Tonight:
"Signs and Symbols"
quiz on *Lolita*
poem on model
plot puzzle and chronology
prototypes to Lolita
allusions
double entendres and amphiboly

I did not have sexual relations with that woman

Hurricane Lolita

playful mayhem, cunning debauchery
censorship duplicity banning
a vicious toll
wide swathe of disaster

too big to bandage or to kiss better

why the fiercest assigned
a girl's name?

Scribbly Annotations to the Text

Humbert says of his childhood,
"I had nobody to complain to,
nobody to consult"

poor poor man

Humbert says of Charlotte,
his wife of fifty days,
"She was my Lolita's big sister"

some sister!

even spinny Rita has a brother
did Lolita ever know hers?
The book riddled in siblings

one of the many tragedies is
Lolita's being without a sister
a crying shame
no one to wipe away her tears
to conspire with against Humbert

Lolita: "You know, what's so dreadful
about dying is that you are completely
on your own"

pose question to the class? discuss

The Critic's Advice

Be mindful

alliteration puns names images roses the calendar
any word on any page

this way madness lies

The Students

Why must we read this?
Why did you choose it?
Don't other books

have beguiling points of view too?
Isn’t it child pornography?
Didn’t Robin Sharpe claim to be literary?
Wasn’t it you who taught us
the value of the rhetorical question?

Notes

Quotations are from Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita*, Vintage International edition, 1989, © 1955.

The subtitle of the section name, “signposts and tombstones,” comes from p. 3.

The title “Lolita’s Handmaids and Rosegirls” comes from p. 257.
“Scribbly Annotations” in “Teaching Lolita” contains quotations from pages 11, 72, and 284.

PAUL J. HEALY'S poems have appeared in previous issues of *The New Orphic Review, JAMA (The Journal of the American Medical Association), The Deronda Review, Plainsongs, The GSU Review, Bellowing Ark, Lullwater Review* and *Horsefly*. The following poems come from a work in progress entitled *The Beauty of the Partially Occluded View*.

Four Poems / Paul J. Healy

Poem of the Infinite Sea

Where the small white houses
cluster upon the sea cliffs like staccato gulls,

and the jellyfish blooms undulate languidly
in the emerald sun-illumined swells.

Where honeybees hum warmly among
grape arbors. And carnivorous

wasps pierce the grape's purple skin
regurgitating yeast. There

oblivion beyond forgetfulness
awaits them. The sun goes down

in crimson beatitude. Our ancestors
slipped through the bottleneck.

The sun sinks and the shades arise.
We make our logic according to

our likes.

Aziscohos

It came like a secret light to us.
The broad gleaming valleys
bathed in a late summer radiance.
Brilliant and un-peopled,
full of green shadowy places.
Bright pools,
dark turquoise waters.
Yet the appearance of a feral dog,
mangy, its mottled coat a rat-like grey,
awakened a shared uneasiness
we couldn’t put a finger on,
a vague dismay.

Guided by faultless instinct
the parade of images
stays close to the marrow.
Like some astral body
afraid to take leave entirely
from the supine corporeal form.
Flickering like a translucent flame,
a stretched tendon snapping
back to the bone.

DNA

There was a big black ant
on my motel room rug,
that I picked up in a paper napkin
and tossed in the toilet.
Later I came back and that black
ant was squirming and twisting in the bowl,
and I marveled at his will to live. I felt
sorry for him. I thought of reaching in
and rescuing the swimmer who had been in the water
as long as Odysseus. I tried drowning him
with piss. A fucking Niagara of micturition raining its yellow hell
upon his miserable six-legged self!
Then I became afraid.
Afraid of the terrible tenacity
and sheer determination
of the living, of life
how it never quits,
how it appeared when the earth
was still so young,
how no amount
of suffering
outweighs it.

Then I was delighted!

Galatea

Her face
Was like a road
That led into the fabled interior
To whispering Asia
To bamboo groves
And hidden grottoes
Where emerald-eyed dragonflies
Dart amidst limpid pools
And mist-veiled waterfalls
Are music between worlds

But if her beauty was a road
It could not be traveled by him
For always when he was ready
To depart to her distant highlands
To renounce all else and wander
Into that exquisite madness
She would look away
With lifeless gaze

The light eclipsed
He would lose sight
Of those imagined gardens
The Eros delights
Her marble indifference
Denied she breathed
The air of paradise
The blood-stirring
Animal aromas of
Closely exhaled breath
And the amazingly lush
And tangled foliage
Of her unyielding lips

ERNEST HEKKANEN has decided to try his hand at writing a murder mystery, *Deadly Family Matters*, a cross-border novel that begins in Vancouver, B.C. and quickly moves to Brackett's Landing, Washington, a fictional treatment of his hometown of Edmonds. His novella, *I'm Not You*, will appear in the fall of 2014, and is a fictional tribute to nihilism.

Deadly Family Matters

Ernest Hekkanen

1

EVER SINCE RETIRING as a professor of Contemporary Literature at the University of British Columbia in the spring of this year, I haven't cracked open a single book. I haven't even suffered the urge to do so. The weekly issues of *The New Yorker,* which arrive in the mail on Tuesdays or Wednesdays, provide me with more than enough reading material. My main interest has become staying in shape—by jogging, kayaking, boxing, lifting weights, skipping rope and so on. You name the exercise, and I'll try it, at least once. No, I don't want to live to be a hundred years old. I simply want to die a healthy man, so I set these little goals for myself. At five this morning, when I was awakened by some starlings arguing in my backyard cherry tree, I decided to "do" the Grouse Grind. Four times! One starts the trek in the parking lot not far from the gondola at the base of Grouse Mountain and hikes to the top where the gondola performs a one-eighty before heading downhill. I don't race to the top, I hike at a determined pace. But because the trail spans a vertical rise of 2800 feet, over a distance of 1.8 miles, it's a damn good workout for someone who has recently turned sixty-five.

I'm not encumbered by wife or children, and I live in a single-family dwelling in Dunbar Heights—mortgage-free, by the way—so I have all the time in the world. When I got home at around three in the afternoon, there were four phone messages on my answering machine. I declined to listen to them; after all, that's the prerogative of someone who is retired. Very little seems all that urgent anymore. I took a shower, put on clean clothes and made myself a Black Forest ham, cheese, cucumber and tomato sandwich, and that's when the telephone rang. Call display informed me it was from my younger brother, Derrick, down in Brackett's Landing in Washington State. I nearly let the answering machine pick up the call. My younger brother can be a terrible pain in the ass, sometimes. However,

it occurred to me that the other messages might also be from him and that it would save me having to phone down to Brackett's Landing, so I picked up the call. My parsimony might have been a factor, too. Why call him on my dime, when it could be on his?

"Hello?"

"Andy, it's me, Derrick. Don't you ever check your damn messages?"

"I just got home from doing the Grouse Grind—a total of four times! I was about to sit down to listen to my messages, when the telephone rang."

"Then you still don't know—"

"Know what?"

"George is dead. Somebody shot him."

"During a police incident?"

"No, out of the blue."

George is—or *was*—my older brother. He has—I mean, he *had* the distinction of being the only one-armed chief of police in all of North America.

"How did it happen?"

"The police are still investigating. All we know right now is that he was driving up the hill to 196th Street, about 2 A.M. last night. Somebody took a shot at him."

"You mean, they shot him while he was driving up the hill?"

"Right. But it's beginning to look like he might have died from swerving off the road and tumbling down the bank through the trees. Apparently he was only grazed by the bullet. Across the back of the head."

"How is Mom taking this?"

"Badly, of course. What would you expect?"

I glanced at my sandwich. My stomach wanted to consume it post-haste, and was making all of these grumbling noises.

"I guess it would be appropriate for me to drive down your way—to show some solidarity?"

Derrick's voice adopted a snarling tone. "I like the way you said that—*appropriate*! My God, you make it sound like such a duty-bound thing to do."

"It's just my way of expressing myself, Derrick…."

"Yeah, like you're standing on a ten-foot tall pedestal, looking down on the rest of us poor plebeians."

Derrick's pain-in-the-ass qualities were beginning to show. I tried to ignore him. "I'll head down your way tomorrow morning."

"Why not this afternoon? You could be here by six or seven."

"I'm not prepared to take off, right now. That's why."

"Nor was George prepared to get killed. Jesus, Andy, he's your brother. Your brother."

"Jesus, Derrick, he's dead. I'm not going to be able to resurrect him,

no matter what I do."

There was a pause.

"Your attitude sucks, Andy. Really, it does."

And he hung up.

Derrick's phone call left me feeling rather miserable, but to be quite honest, it wasn't due to the fact that George had been killed. It was due to what Derrick had said about my attitude. I set the receiver down in the recharger and took my sandwich over to the armchair by the front-room windows, where I stared past the leafy foliage of the rhododendron bushes, out at the sidewalk. There, I saw a neighbor woman pushing a stroller while holding on to a small boy's hand. I have never introduced myself to her; indeed, the few neighbors I have come to know over the years have either died or moved away.

Only my immediate friends and family down in Washington State refer to me as Andy. In Vancouver I have trained everybody to call me Drew—short for Andrew. My full name is Andrew Augustine March. That's the sort of handle that can give anyone illusions of grandeur, and perhaps that was the case with me. Admittedly, there is something false, something pretentious, about my full name. The blame for that can be laid at my mother's feet, because she's the one who insisted on the middle name of Augustine. I think she might have wanted me to become a saint, or some such nonsense. From the sixth grade onward, I was treated with a lot of contempt by my fellow classmates, probably because they picked up on my contempt for them and simply mirrored it back. It didn't help to hear my mother refer to me as her 'sensitive son,' in front of teachers and the other mothers. Although the second oldest son and middle sibling of a cohort of five children, I was treated as mother's little pet, a fact that I have often been reminded of by my oldest sister Charlotte and my youngest sister Emily. My mother was a lifelong devotee of the Brontë sisters, and I think she was hoping my sisters would follow in their literary footsteps. I'm the only sibling in our family who grew up with an interest in literature, which curried a lot of favor with dear old Mom, but which earned me the irritation of my brothers and sisters. By the way, just to complete the picture, my mother's first name is Anne, the youngest of the Brontë sisters. Throughout her long life, she's been a youthful, breezy person with a spirited personality, until recently, anyway. Now she's entering her dotage, at ninety-three.

The telephone started to ring again. This time it was Charlotte on the other end of the line. "I just heard from Derrick that you're not coming down until tomorrow."

"That's right. I can't rearrange my life that quickly."

"The last time I spoke to you, you bragged to me that you were a newly-minted retiree and were free to do anything you damn well felt like doing."

"Being retired isn't synonymous with not having a life, sis. It simply means I don't have to show up for work every day, or grade papers anymore."

"So what's preventing you from coming down this afternoon—a surprise, guest lecture?"

"No, a date."

"With that woman you introduced us to, last fall?"

"One and the same."

"I see." Charlotte had taken an MBA at college, back in her youthful twenties. She's the financial force behind the family business. Her sudden, thoughtful pause gave me the impression that she was sitting at a desk, adding up pros and cons before saying anything further. "Surely, your girlfriend would understand the gravity of our family situation, and that you—mother's favorite—would be of some comfort to her at this time?"

"Please, don't play that old card. It's become so boring. I'll be down tomorrow. Right now I have to go to the post office to put a hold on my mail. I also have to pay some bills. Things like that. I can't just drop everything."

Her voice was full of irony. "Looking after that mountain of stuff should take you a monstrously long time, no doubt."

"That's enough, Charlotte. Quite enough. I'll head down your way tomorrow morning. Thanks for the call."

And then *I* hung up….

Because I was standing beside the answering machine, I decided to listen to my phone messages. Two were from Derrick, one was from Charlotte and the last one was from someone I had spoken to around nine years ago, back when I had attended my father's funeral and memorial service. No, wait, that's wrong. I'd spoken to him more recently, at a high school reunion, in 2005. Also, a couple of years ago, when I had bumped into him on the street. A howdy, how-are-you-doing sort of exchange.

"Hello, Andy, we haven't spoken in many a moon. I guess I should identify myself. This is Stuart Jackson of *The Brackett's Landing Dispatch*. I'd like to get your response to recent events, knowing how diametrically opposed you were to your big brother's political beliefs back in the '60s…."

I deleted Stuart's message before it had come to an end, and reprogramed the answering machine so it wouldn't accept any more messages.

* * *

That afternoon, I went to the local post office outlet to put a hold on my mail for three weeks, prepaid my telephone and hydro bills at the Royal Bank and padded my Visa card by putting two-thousands bucks on it. By then I was feeling so frayed, so lethargic, I ducked into the Starbucks at Alma and Broadway, where I ordered an oat-fudge bar and a large caffè

latte. Of all the messages left on my answering machine, Stuart Jackson's was definitely the most irritating. You see, Stuart and I shared some history. We had wrestled on the same high-school team. Because he'd been a much better wrestler, I was forced to move down to the 138 pound class, where I had bumped out the guy in that weight division. Stuart loved grinding my face into the mat to demonstrate his superior wrestling skills, although he had never won by pinning me, only by a margin of four or five points. Immediately after finishing his BA at the University of Washington, he had been drafted into the army and shipped off to Vietnam. Upon completing his military service, he had taken a journalism degree and worked as a reporter for the *Seattle Times,* before taking command of *The Brackett's Landing Dispatch*. Some people might consider that move a self-appointed demotion, but not Stuart. He relished the slower pace, or so he had informed me.

"I didn't approve of us getting involved in Vietnam," he once explained to me over a beer, "but I didn't approve of running off to Canada, either—with my tail between my legs."

"If I understand you correctly, you think that's a character fault of mine."

He gave me a sarcastic smile. "Personally, I'm of Kennedy's persuasion. 'Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.'"

"Even if it means murdering two and a half million Vietnamese civilians?"

"I think the jury is still out on that figure, Andy."

"The hell it is," I told him. "A massacre is a massacre, no matter how much you dress it up in patriotic clothing." And I had smiled back at him.

My oldest brother George was another individual who had done his patriotic duty as a young man. He had come back from Vietnam a wounded, decorated soldier who had had his legs shot out from under him upon jumping from the belly of a helicopter.

* * *

At 5:30, I drove my seventeen-year-old Volvo down to Mill Road not far from Granville Island to pick up my long-standing lady friend. Marian Feinstein is a fifty-eight year old ReMax Real Estate agent who lives in a condominium on the southern shore of False Creek, an area that invariably brings back memories. Upon coming to Canada as a draft dodger in 1969, I had lived on 6th Avenue on the Fairview Slopes, in a rooming house that overlooked the Sigurdson Sash and Frame Mill across the street, on what had been the industrial flatlands of downtown Vancouver. Except for the LaFarge concrete operation, which stubbornly refused to be relocated, anything industrial had been replaced by high-density dwellings designed to keep the downtown core from becoming a dead zone. Indeed, my first job in Canada had been at the Hudson Bay Sawmill located on the northern

shore of False Creek, where I had worked beside a drop-sorter. The mill had been one of the first industries to disappear from the downtown area. Log booms hauled by tugboats under the Granville Street Bridge had been deemed less than aesthetically pleasing by city planners who were "revisioning" the downtown core. Expo '86 had more or less completed the revamping of the False Creek area. Now the inlet is flanked by high-density housing and urban parklands.

I parked my car in a guest parking spot and knocked on the door of Marian's two-bedroom condo. Her son had lived with her until ten years before, and now his bedroom served as her studio, where, in her spare time, she worked on linocut prints, some of which were quite good. Indeed, she had had several exhibits of her work at commercial galleries. We went out on the town two or three nights a week and were even known to have sleepovers. Her place or mine. Now and then she joked that I was sitting on a gold mine up in Dunbar Heights, if ever I were tempted to sell my house and move in with her, a suggestion that was teasingly facetious, because we both knew such an arrangement would kill our relationship. We were too stubbornly and insistently ourselves—confirmed bachelor and bachelorette.

Over dinner at O'Donoghue's Restaurant on Granville Island, Marian remarked that I seemed a bit morose. "Family matters," I said. "My oldest brother George was shot this morning. At 2 A.M."

"Shot!"

"Yes, shot dead. Somebody targeted him, apparently. He was driving up that somewhat winding road to 196th when it happened. His SUV veered off the road and tumbled down the hill through the trees."

"My God, why didn't you tell me? We could have cancelled this evening."

"Marian, there's nothing I could've done to change the course of events." And then, seeing the shocked look in her eyes, I followed up by saying, "however, tomorrow I'll be heading down that way, bright and early, for a few days, possibly a week or two, however long it takes to get things squared away."

"I'm so sorry. You must be devastated."

I didn't want to admit to feeling less than devastated, so I said: "It *did* come as a big shock, all right. I got the message after coming home from doing the Grouse Grind. At around three this afternoon. My brother and sister urged me to drive down today, but I had to get my personal affairs straightened out first, bills paid and so on."

"You Americans and your guns," she said, giving a tsk.

"Hey, whoa, wait a minute. I took out Canadian citizenship a long time ago!"

"Well, you know what they say about Americans, don't you?"

"No, what do they say?"

"You can take the American out of his country, but you can't take the gun out of his soul."

"Believe me, Marian, I didn't have anything to do with my big brother's death. I swear it."

Then we both laughed.

After dinner we walked over to the Arts Club Theatre to take in a new stage production of Tennessee Williams' play, *The Night of the Iguana*, my favorite play by him. It has aged rather well, as they say, despite the fact that our society has become increasingly secular, and anything that smacks of the Freudian, such as an iguana, is likely to result in unintentional laughter.

2

The following morning, I packed my bags and headed down the freeway to the border. No matter how much I try to be casual about crossing the border, I inevitably feel an enormous amount of apprehension. I have felt this way ever since I initially crossed the border in a friend's car, back in the spring of 1969. My friend (who shall remain anonymous, at his insistence) was fifteen years older than I. He was a pet-food salesman who claimed he was going up to Vancouver to attend a pet-show convention, and that I was his assistant. The story reeked of fabrication; however, cross-border relations were so casual back then, we were waved through by the official, with little more than a wink and a nod.

My first trip down to the States in 1977 was an altogether different matter. I had just come back to the West Coast after completing a doctorate at the University of Toronto. My father, at my mother's urging, had become a lay member of the American Civil Liberties Union. He had pursued the case against me right to the halls of the Department of Justice and had managed to get the judgment against me quashed. In the whirling-dervish years of the late '60s and early '70s, I'd been wanted by the FBI, not only for refusing to be inducted into the army but because of the company I had kept in anti-war circles, in particular the Students for a Democratic Society. I had also done some liaising with members of the Black Panther Party, after the shooting of Martin Luther King Jr. The banks in Seattle had called in the loans of nearly every business in the Central Area, a largely black community, and a bunch of us had met with the mayor in hopes of getting the situation reversed. About fifty of us occupied the mayor's office. The whites in our group were simply there as a buffer, in case the riot police in the stairwell and the hallway started bashing skulls, or even worse. My activities had brought me to the attention of law enforcement agents. Not long after occupying the mayor's office, the FBI started questioning my parents' neighbors about my political

proclivities. This was a favorite tactic employed by the FBI. The idea was to poison the attitude of one's neighbors in order to isolate the person they were investigating. Because I was living in a house of like-minded social activists in the University District of Seattle at the time, the FBI decided to make things uncomfortable for my parents, hoping they in turn would pressure me in some manner, I suppose.

By the late summer of 1977, I had been outside the U.S. for a little over eight years. When the U.S. border guard punched my vehicle license number into the electronic surveillance system, my name was flagged. An armed guard with a rifle directed me to pull my used Toyota Corolla over to a parking spot beside the main building, where I was told to get out of my vehicle with my hands up. My keys, my ID, my belt and my shoes were confiscated. This little law-enforcement action required three armed border guards, all of whom seemed pretty pleased with themselves for having caught such a dangerous, left-leaning dissident.

"This will be your home for the next little while," one of them told me, when he led me to the cell. He had been about my age—quite possibly, a Vietnam vet.

"So can I ask you what this is all about?" I said in my most innocent-sounding voice. "I have a letter from the Department of Justice stating I'm no longer a wanted man, if you'd care to take a look at it."

"No thanks. Letters can be forged," was his reply as he closed the door with the wire-reinforced window in it.

Confiscating my belt and shoes had been strictly for effect. After all, what did they expect me to try to do, hang myself out of desperation or kick my way out through the door? I sat in the cell for forty-five minutes, slumped in one corner on a bench, eyes closed, snoozing. When the border guards let me go, their wide, jubilant grins had been turned upside-down. They had gone from capturing a "wanted" dissident to having to let go an innocent man. Back then, it was fortunate that I still had Landed Immigrant status in Canada. After I became a Canadian citizen a couple of years later, border officials had the option of refusing me entry to the U.S.—on grounds that I was an undesirable alien.

Given my history at the border, I always approached it with feelings of trepidation, and this occasion was no different. During the last four years or so, I had been allowed entry without any hassles. This time, I was waved over to the main building and told to go inside. My keys and my wallet weren't confiscated upon getting out of my car—a good sign—although a border guard with a pistol *did* hand-deliver my passport to a uniformed official in the main building.

The official at the counter put on a dour, I've-seen-it-all expression. "May I see your driver's license, Mr. March?"

I dug it out of my wallet. "My pleasure."

"We're not here to please you, Mr. March. We're here to make sure

you deserve to enter the United States."

He scanned both my passport and my driver's license and scrutinized what came up on the computer monitor. I refrained from drumming my fingers on the counter.

"I see 'March' isn't your real last name," he said, giving me that stare, like I might be a man with a forged identity.

"It's been my last name ever since I was born. It's even on my birth certificate, if you'd care to inspect that, as well."

"It was changed by your father. From Markkanen to March."

"I believe it was done legitimately, officer. That's what my father's Social Security card seems to indicate, anyway."

"Yes, but it looks to me like it was done because your father's father was an old Commie. Could that be the reason, Mr. March?"

"It happened a long time before my birth, officer. I can't really say for sure."

"You're probably right about that." Again he consulted the monitor's screen. "However, the shooting death of your brother is quite another matter. That took place yesterday… Correct?"

He gave me that look again: like he might be dealing with a possible Derringer or Capone.

"Correct," I said.

"So, why are you hoping to enter the U.S. today?"

"To be with my family during a time of grief. And to attend my brother's funeral."

"Your brother was a cop, right?"

"The only one-armed chief of police in all of America. And a decorated soldier, to boot."

"I guess we'll let you go this time, Mr. March. Have a safe trip."

"I'm free to travel down to Brackett's Landing?"

"Yes, you are—unless you've changed your mind, of course. Have you changed your mind?"

"No, I haven't. Thanks for giving me a passing grade."

"Our pleasure, Mr. March. Our pleasure."

My reception at the border left me feeling damned annoyed. The fact that so much was known about my family's distant past seemed to suggest an all-pervasive surveillance of anyone born in the States and, technically, I was a dual citizen, although I never played that card, not since becoming a Canadian. The incident reminded me of the tribunal I had been asked to attend at my draft board in 1967, after the government's first failed attempt to draft me. A middle-aged man who looked as though he might be Old Navy through and through had also brought up the fact that my grandfather had been a card-carrying member of the Industrial Workers of the World. "It's my understanding that the IWW was full of Communists," he said. "Are you a Communist? A Red?"

"Not that I'm aware of," I told him.

"Are you sure of that, Mr. March? A little bird whispered in my ear that you're a member of the SDS. Isn't that a communist organization?"

I had smiled at him, benignly. "I think you might be the sort of person who checks to see if there are Communists under his bed before going to sleep at night. Am I right?"

"We're here to question you, Mr. March. You're not here to question us."

"Ask me an intelligent question then, and I'll be more than pleased to answer it. For instance, you could ask me whether I'm a pacifist."

"Are you a pacifist?"

"No, I'm not. There are certain people who deserve to be killed, in particular people who manufacture reasons for going to war, like those responsible for fabricating the Gulf of Tongking Incident."

The Old Navy guy had reared up from his chair, which had slammed backwards onto the floor.

"That statement could very well earn you a nice, long prison term, Mr. March. I think you deserve one, too."

"I guess it's lucky for me that you're just an insignificant little sycophant," I had told him. "Thanks for letting me air my views. Goodbye."

And then I took my leave.

* * *

In Bellingham, I pulled into a service station to gas up my Volvo. I'm one of those drivers who is in the habit of glancing in his rearview mirror to check on what is happening behind him. Not long after getting back on the I-5, I noticed a highway patrolman following pretty close on my bumper. I'm no longer inclined to drive over the speed limit, not even as much as five miles an hour. In fact, I don't like driving all that much, and never have, to tell you the truth. In particular, I don't like driving fast. Back in high school, my older brother and sister had referred to me as a "teenage fuddy-duddy." Perhaps that explains why I drive a Volvo, the ultimate fuddy-duddy vehicle. The highway patrolman followed me for almost fifteen minutes, nearly all the way down to Burlington. He may have been taking a leisurely drive, with no particular destination in mind, but I don't think so, because, when I decreased my speed to ten miles below the speed limit through the coastal mountain range south of Bellingham, he didn't pull out to pass me.

The closer I got to Brackett's Landing, the less eager I became to reach my destination. At Everett, I pulled off the freeway and headed down Broadway to Highway 99, continuing south at an even slower pace, trying to hit every red light between me and 196th Street. I hadn't had much in the way of breakfast and so, in Lynnwood, I pulled into the parking lot of an Arby's Restaurant. It was only around 9:40 in the morning,

as I had gotten a very early start.

I sat in a booth near the windows. A little while later, some elderly patrons got up to leave. A copy of the *Brackett's Landing Dispatch* was left behind on their table. When the waitress came to take my order, I asked her permission to claim the newspaper.

"Oh, sure, take it. They're free anyway."

"They're free now? When did that happen?"

"A couple of years ago, I think."

After placing my order, I got up to grab the newspaper. The headline read: *Popular Cop Killed*. It was accompanied by a close-up picture of my brother wearing his trademark white Stetson. The picture had been cropped so the horse on his left was sliced off right between its eyes. The article immediately below the picture bore the byline of my old wrestling nemesis, Stuart Jackson:

> Police Chief George March, a decorated cop and soldier, was killed in the wee hours of Tuesday morning while driving up the hill to 196th Street.
>
> Police have divulged very little about the case other than to say that a high-powered rifle was used, and that Chief March was deliberately targeted.
>
> It couldn't be determined whether Chief March was on official business at roughly 2 A.M. A police dog brought in from Seattle tracked the assailant up the hill and through the trees to where he must have driven away in a vehicle.
>
> Police Chief George March is survived by his wife, Gloria, and their three children. He was a popular personality in our town. Every Fourth of July, he mounted his palomino, Independence, to lead the annual parade through the downtown streets of Brackett's Landing.
>
> Al MacNeil, head of our local Legion, said, "He's going to be missed. Sorely missed. How could anyone do such a thing? Our hearts go out to his family."
>
> Police Chief March was the oldest son of Anne and Michael March. March Fishing Lures and Accessories is a major employer in Brackett's Landing. The Chief hadn't worked at the family business since the middle 1960s, when he volunteered to go into the army and was shipped off to Vietnam, only to return a decorated soldier.
>
> In 2006, he survived a near-fatal confrontation with a veteran of the Iraq War, a man suffering from PTSD. During the encounter, Chief March's left arm was blown

> off by a shotgun blast. At his assailant's trial nearly a year later, he asked the court to give the man a reduced sentence, owing to the Iraq War veteran's ongoing mental and emotional problems.
>
> He was later quoted in a *Time* magazine article as saying, "Sure, I lost my left arm, no doubt about that, but as Chief of Police, I have a lot of other arms to deploy, so it shouldn't negatively impact my performance."
>
> Chief March's funeral and memorial service are expected to draw a large crowd. The *Dispatch* will keep its readers advised as to the preparations.

By the time I finished reading the article, the waitress arrived with my breakfast. I figured she was probably in her late twenties.

"So what do you think of this?" I said, tapping the newspaper with the back of my fingers.

She glanced at my brother's photo. "It's too bad, isn't it? He wasn't such a nice guy, though, behind the scenes, not from what I've heard, anyway."

"Why do you say that?"

"He was so old-school about things. Like marijuana, for instance. I remember him getting up at an Edmonds High School Assembly and telling us how we should all keep our noses clean so we wouldn't have to deal with him in the future. He was so non-cool, you know."

Thirty years ago, I suspect I might have been recognized as a member of the March family, and she might not have spoken quite so freely.

"Nonetheless, it's too bad," she went on. "People shouldn't go around shooting other people. That's not cool, either."

I reread the article. When I got to the paragraph about my brother riding Independence at the head of the July 4th parade, I couldn't help chuckling. The palomino in the picture should have been called Independence the Third. Independence One and Two had been put down upon entering their old age. "The glue factory gets us all, sooner or later," my brother was quoted as saying in the *Time* magazine article written about him. Rather than "glue factory," he should have said "pet-food factory," because that's what had become of Independence One and Two, they'd been turned into pet food. I searched my memory for the title of the article that had been published in *Time* magazine, something along the lines of *Swashbuckling Chief of Police Asks for Lenience for Shotgun-toting Assailant*. After the article appeared, there was a movement afoot in Snohomish County to send my brother to the state legislature in Olympia. He responded by saying, "I'm not the sort of person who likes to sit around voting on things. I like doing stuff that matters."

There's a back story to my brother's request for lenience for his

assailant. The fellow's name was James Furlough, known to his friends as Jimmy. His father, Howard, was a decorated Vietnam veteran just like my brother; however, Howard's injuries had confined him to a wheelchair. My brother had found him a job in the assembly room at March Fishing Lures, and there he had lived out his working life—as a taskmaster and trusted employee of the firm. His son, Jimmy, had been born between his second and third tour of duty in Vietnam. When Jimmy reached the age of twenty, he became a career soldier himself. However, after a lengthy tour of duty in Iraq, where he had seen quite a lot of action, of every conceivable kind, he returned to the U.S. with a bad case of PTSD. During an argument with his wife, over whether their son should be made to finish his supper, a stand-off with the police had occurred.

My brother, as a friend of the family, thought he could talk Jimmy down out of the state he was in and thus save the situation. The reason he thought he'd be able to accomplish a non-violent end to the stand-off had to do with an episode in his own life, back when he had coached a local Little League baseball team. A young Vietnamese boy showing up at the playground to try out for the team had caused my brother to experience some very vivid flashbacks related to his stint in Vietnam. The flashbacks were so devastating to his mental health, he had checked himself into a VA hospital, for psychiatric care. Two months later, he was back on the street—in good, psychological shape, although he declined to coach baseball ever again.

During the confrontation with Jimmy in the younger man's bungalow, my brother succeeded in getting him to release his hostages, namely, Jimmy's wife and son. Their daughter was at a friend's house at the time. Later my brother testified that things seemed to be winding down rather well—toward a peaceful conclusion. Jimmy was relaxing in a wooden chair tipped back against the kitchen counter, the shotgun gripped in his right hand. He was going on about everything he had seen and done in Iraq, in particular a certain midnight raid in which an entire Iraqi family had been killed. "That did it to me, Chief. That really did it to me. Somebody gave us the complete, wrong information about the guy who was living there, probably a Shiite on Sunni thing, you know. Anyway, it was just carnage. Carnage. The only person to survive the raid was a baby girl, and the only reason she survived is because her mother fell on top of her, dead."

"I know what it's like, Jimmy. I've been there."

"You've been there, huh?"

"Yes. It's seeing the kids get killed, that's the worst part. I still have nightmares about it."

"I know, I know. I've seen it all. I've done it all, too. All of it."

Jimmy had begun to weep and was wiping tears from his eyes with his free hand. My brother figured he had calmed Jimmy down to the point

that he could approach him. He was reaching very slowly for the barrel of the shotgun, when Jimmy seemed to jerk back to reality. The rear legs of the chair flipped out from under him, and the gun went off, instantly turning my brother's upper left arm into shredded pulp.

"I don't think he intended to do it," George said at Jimmy's trial. "I think the chair just went out from under him. He's a good man. Really, he is. It's the goddamn war that screwed him up."

Heretic Hill

a novel by Ernest Hekkanen
254 pages
New Orphic Publishers
ISBN 978-1-894842-23-5
$22.00

In a Middle East country as harsh and uncompromising as its rocky, arid terrain, Aki Kyosolamaki, special correspondent to the *The New York Times*, attempts to keep his friend, Dr. Sadhar Badhar, from being executed in a primitive, brutal fashion.

From the first page to the last, the threat to Aki's life becomes increasingly more substantial, in an Islamic nation where everyone is armed to the teeth. In an old walled city known in ancient times as The Brilliant Shield That Blinds, medieval thinking clashes with modernity in a dystopian tale reminiscent of "The Renegade" in Albert Camus' *Exile and the Kingdom*.

Order your copy today!

Heretic Hill	$22.00
postage and handling	4.00
Total payable to New Orphic Publishers	$26.00

706 Mill Street
Nelson, B.C.
Canada V1L 4S5

Be part of the New Orphic adventure!

Subscribe to
The New Orphic Review

706 Mill Street
Nelson, British Columbia
Canada V1L 4S5
Tel: 250-354-0494

SUBSCRIPTION RATES:

ONE YEAR:

Individuals	Canada	$30 (CAD)	Institutions	Canada	$35 (CAD)
	USA	$35 (USD)		USA	$40 (USD)

TWO YEARS:

Individuals	Canada	$60 (CAD)	Insitutions	Canada	$70 (CAD)
	USA	$70 (USD)		USA	$80 (USD)

Yes, please sign me up for a subscription to ***The New Orphic Review***. I have enclosed a cheque of:

$____________ for a one year subscription

$____________ for a two year subscription

Name ____

Adress ____

City____________________ Province/State________________

Country_______________ Postal Code __________________