

# *The New Orphic Review*

*Editor-in-Chief*  
Ernest Hekkanen

*Copy & Associate Editor*  
Margrith Schraner

*Managing Editor*  
Michael Connor



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*, 1095 Victoria Drive, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, V5L 4G3. 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 six months and then discarded.

Payment to contributors is one copy of the review 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	Canada	\$25 (CAD)	Institutions	Canada	\$30 (CAD)
	USA	\$25 (USD)		USA	\$30 (USD)

Individual issues \$15.00 CAD or USD as applicable.

**ADVERTISEMENTS (BLACK & WHITE CAMERA-READY ONLY):**

Inside covers:	Other pages:	Half pages:
\$200 CAD, \$175 USD	\$150 CAD, \$125 USD	\$75 CAD, \$60 USD

Subscriptions and advertisements should be sent to the above address. Cheques should be made out to *The New Orphic Review*.

Cover art © by Ernest Hekkanen  
from the painting *Trading Bull with the Master*

# Contents

## Volume 2 Number 1 Spring 1999

- Ernest Hekkanen 4 *Graffiti, Canadian Style*
- David Watmough 12 *Updated Pieta*
- John Pass 21 *Grassy Knoll*
- Jill Mandrake 23 *Affair at the Fraser Bowlaway*
- George Payerle 24 *The Quick & the Dead*
- Mavis Jones 34 *Three Poems*
- Hrothgar Malach 39 *Bad Art, to Go*
- Chad Norman 41 *Two Poems*
- Ian Colford 44 *Episodes from a Life in Progress*

**Featured Poet / 48 / Visions in Black**  
**Jürgen Joachim Hesse**

- Hillel Wright 61 *Renewal*
- Susan McCaslin 74 *Four Poems*
- leannej 76 *private languages*
- Kempton Dexter 80 *A Blind Man Couldn't See It*
- Jay Hamburger & E.H. 84 *A Good Play is Hard to Find*

**Winner of the Theatre in the Raw Contest**  
**Mark Harris 86 *Endserious***

- Ernest Hekkanen 92 *Arms Like Coiled Serpents*

ERNEST HEKKANEN is the author of seventeen books. The latest include *The Last Thing My Father Gave Me*, *Dementia Island*, *My Dog Is More Than Just a Dog to Me*, *Those Who Eat at My Table*, *Bridge Over the Tampere Rapids*, *Chasing After Carnivals* and *You Know Me Better Than That*.

## Graffiti, Canadian Style

Ernest Hekkanen

IN CANADA, the majority of writers and visual artists are little more than glorified purveyors of graffiti. We might as well be spray-painting our texts and images on buildings and underpasses, because, for the most part, what we produce is given hardly a glance of appreciation and certainly it is deemed about as important as graffiti by members of the larger society. We might *desire* greater appreciation, but a brief glance is about as much appreciation as we can expect; after all, this is a meat-and-potatoes sort of country, the values of which are encoded in the metaphor *time is money*, and let's face it, we have barely crawled out of the bush here in Canada. The majority of us wouldn't recognize what comprises good art and literature, even if it were wagged rather flamboyantly in front of our faces. This is a difficult situation for most writers and artists to endure, let alone survive, but it is our lot in this country, and in many regards we deserve it and even contribute to it, for we are in the habit of serving up what is expendable, what is disposable.

In a postmodern world where form and structure deconstruct and are then folded back into the greater flux of things, it is almost a given that we will be able to produce little more than disposable art and literature – or, if you will, graffiti. We artists and writers have been so affected by this postmodern dilemma, we have shrugged our shoulders in defeat or have willfully capitulated to it, declaring for

all to hear: "Well, if rubbish is what they want, rubbish is what I will give them." I guess we could blame the movement that elevates rubbish to the level of fine art on the Dadaists and on icons of modern culture, figures like Andy Warhol, Jackson Pollock, Allen Ginsberg and Ed Sanders, all of whom made it look as if anyone capable of producing a mark or uttering a sound could become an artist or writer; but that seems a trifle too easy to do, and anyway, we would be widely missing the mark, now, wouldn't we?

In the current issue of *The New Orphic Review*, Hrothgar Malach attempts to understand why there is such a proliferation of terrible public art in Vancouver; however, I don't think she goes far enough in her examination. She decries the abundance of pathetically rendered murals in this city, as well as the artistic standards that give rise to them, which is all well and good but which only scrapes the surface of what is going on. Our city and provincial fathers, whose taste in art and literature is about as well-developed as that of chickens, have deemed art, literature and theater to be of some importance to our quality of life; however, the aesthetic yardstick they use to determine the quality of a work has but two marks: 1) the art must be disposable, and 2) it must be accessible to the hordes.

In this city, developers are allowed higher density levels as well as exemptions from certain planning rules if they include in their developments little artistic concessions; however, what qualifies as art is so pathetic, so sub-standard, our city and provincial bureaucrats might as well do away with the clause that allows for the proliferation of this sort of crap-art. You might have run across the kind of art I am talking about. I am sure you have walked down the street and have seen tiles inscribed with words set in the sidewalk: words like *salmon*, *nature*, *coho* and *waterfall*. Or, perhaps, you have seen look-alike impressions of leaves pressed into the concrete. Or maybe, you have seen the tiles signed by Commercial Drive residents and offered up for viewing as you walk across the bridge that spans the Cut. This lowest common denominator crapola fulfills the art mandate of the city. The wonderful thing about art of this sort is that you can take a jackhammer to it, break it up, use a front-end loader to hock it into a dump truck and haul it away before anyone notices — which is what should happen to most of this public art; it should be trashed. The foremost aesthetic criterion used to determine the acceptability of such public art is that it be disposable.

In our parks you might have come across another form of public art: little artificial footstones with pebbles pressed into the concrete, mimicking children's art — if, indeed, it isn't children's art. The primary determining factor for acceptability of such public art is that it be level with the lawn so lawnmowers can be driven over it. Perhaps, too, you have taken in such events as *Illuminaires*, *The Mad Hatter Tea Party* or the *All Saints Festival* in the East End of the city. The organizers of such events (largely the Public Dreams Society and the Fools Society) actually think they are contributing to community cul-

ture; they actually think they are presenting something novel and indeed interesting — for kids of all ages, as the advertising goes; however, if you have ever been to any of these events (or happenings) you probably realize that they amount to little more than hundreds and sometimes thousands of people milling around a pond or strolling in costumes through a park, sometimes holding masks or lanterns aloft. Above all, these events must be accessible to one and all and have as little form as possible; indeed, many of the individuals who ‘organize’ and promote these events think that form is totalitarian in nature, because form, for them, is dictated by some perceived authority whom they distrust. Many of the organizers and promoters of these events actually despise authority (for the most part, authorities should be despised, for they are little more than puppets whose strings are being pulled by cronies in business or labor unions) and yet the organizers and promoters of these events and this type of expendable art have no problem going to those very same authorities and begging to be given little hand-outs in support of their highly questionable artistic endeavors.

It is all a lot of muck and malarkey! As soon as a writer or artist approaches the government for financial support to engage in his endeavors, he has already become a defeated figure — a buffoon, a squirming maggot who survives on the carcass of the state; he has already capitulated; he has already compromised his artistic and literary integrity. In *The Rebel*, Albert Camus begins by saying:

What is a rebel? A man who says no, but whose refusal does not imply a renunciation. He is also a man who says yes, from the moment he makes his first gesture of rebellion. A slave who has taken orders all his life suddenly decides that he cannot obey some new command. What does he mean by saying “no”?

He means, for example, that “this has been going on too long,” “up to this point yes, beyond it no,” “you are going too far,” or, again, “there is a limit beyond which you shall not go.” In other words, his no affirms the existence of a borderline....Rebellion cannot exist without the feeling that, somewhere and somehow, one is right....[The rebel] demonstrates, with obstinacy, that there is something in him which “is worthwhile....” and which must be taken into consideration. In a certain way, he confronts an order of things which oppresses him with the insistence on a kind of right not to be oppressed beyond the limit that he can tolerate.

A rebel, in other words, believes that there is something of value in himself that must not be trampled upon or treated in some fashion that is reprehensible. My feeling is that writers and artists operate more or less out of the same *modus operandi*; they insist that there is

something of value in them that the society as a whole should take notice of — that should be appreciated, that should not be demeaned; and yet many of our artists and writers regularly demean themselves by begging for handouts that granting bodies only reluctantly give.

Which brings me to the Canada Council and such organizations. Back in the late 1960s, the government decided to encourage artistic and literary endeavors by offering a plethora of grants. In no time at all we saw an amazing number of galleries and publishing houses spring up across the country; many of these were artist-run galleries and writer-run publishing houses, the existence of which was subsidized by the governments of the day. Bureaucrats, urged on by artists and writers, perceived that it was good for Canadians to have their images reflected back to them, because, apparently, Canadians would not be able to otherwise identify themselves as Canadians. Artists and writers coagulated like globs of cold grease around these artist-run galleries and writer-run publishing houses, many of which survive to this day and continue to suck down grant money as if it were twenty-year-old Irish whiskey. Many of the artists and writers who got in on the ground floor of this scheme are now prominent members of the artistic and literary community; however, the majority of us continue to struggle in near-anonymity, probably with good reason.

Canadians didn't exactly beat a path to galleries and bookstores in order to purchase the offerings spewed up by the artists and writers who benefited from the above federally-and-provincially funded schemes. Nor do they today. Very few Canadians buy Canadian art or literature; indeed, such art and literature is perceived to be inferior, whether rightly or wrongly. Most Canadians don't go out of their way to invest in such stuff of their own accord and there is no reason why they should. Consequently, only very few writers and artists rise like scum to the surface of the Canadian cultural pond; the rest remain bottom feeders, without distinction, without acknowledgment, forever raging about their anonymity.

In the 1970s, Canadians became almost neurotically involved with the question of their *identity*; but it was all a sham, it was all a put-up job, promoted by the government and the media, apparently for nationalistic reasons. However, back then, if you got off the main highways of Canadian culture and ventured forth into the hinterlands, the folks there didn't have any identity problems; they knew who they were and what they were all about. For the most part, they were hard-working schmoes who were more than content to be compost for the next generation; they were people who didn't deign to sit and gaze at their navels or mess with their heads — indeed, for the most part, they were unimaginative dullards. Unimaginative dullards, unfortunately, don't buy art and don't buy literature; they can do very well without it, thank you. Give them a highway; they can understand that, they can wrap their imaginations around that. You see, it became a force-feeding sort of situation; higher-ups were trying to cram art

and literature down the gullet of the masses, and that is still pretty much the case today.

Canadian art and literature don't have a very wide base of financial support among the great, unwashed citizenry, and so art and literature has to be propped up on every side by government-funded crutches. The result is that artists and writers have gathered around the federal and provincial funding bodies and a whole government-funded industry has come into existence. Those artists and writers who got to the pig-pile first became government agents who in turn dispersed funds to friends and acquaintances and this sort of graft has been going on now for decades. Juries of like-thinking peers determine which projects will receive funding support and which projects are to be deemed unworthy. If you really want a grant, make sure you have the proper references or know someone on the adjudicating body. Places like the Banff School of Fine Arts are little more than clearing houses for those who wish to get grants; fledglings attend the Banff School in order to make contacts – to get references. Indeed, today, there is often a lot more artistry and literary skill displayed in the filling out of application forms than there is in final projects. The art of filling out application forms and knowing the right people who can help you along the way is often more important than the talent you display.

Am I simply being cynical? No, I don't think I so, because, you see, I was once the recipient of a Canada Council "B" Grant. Annually I filled out the application form and dutifully sent it off to the Canada Council – without ever receiving a grant. One year, I decided to forego this fruitless activity, but magically an application form appeared in the mail. On perusing it, I discovered that certain passages had been highlighted by a yellow marking pen. The highlighted passages were of little significance; what was of significance was the fact that someone had gone to the effort of highlighting the passages and sending me the application form. It indicated that someone on the adjudicating body was familiar with my work. To test the situation, I filled out the form for a project that had been rejected the previous year for not having sufficient merit and, lo and behold, I received a "B" Grant. Another such instance of government largesse going to the correct applicants is typified by a certain high-profile artistic director in the Vancouver theater scene. He sits on the board of the B.C. Arts Council, but "steps" out of the room when other board members vote on whether or not to give him over \$200,000 of grant money – which, of course, he is never denied; indeed, the amount he receives usually goes up every year. None of his cohorts on the council would have the temerity to deny him this funding, for they in turn might be denied theirs.

Does this sort of thing smack of incestuousness or what? I believe it does.

Very few people in Canada read my books, not because my books are badly written, but rather because they aren't promoted by the



CBC, because they aren't highly touted by the press, because they aren't part of the academic curriculum and, let's face it, because they are a little too weird for the taste of most Canadians. Which is all well and good. Except for the lone "B" Grant I received over a decade ago, I and my work are not being funded out of the public trough, unlike the majority of literature and art being produced in this country.

Most novels and collections of short stories are produced in runs of a thousand to fifteen-hundred books. The production costs of such books are more or less written off by block granting funds. Once the publisher has sold as many copies of a book as he possibly can to libraries, he tends to lose interest in selling the remainder of the run, because Canadians simply don't buy very many Canadian books. Half, if not more than half, of every run ends up sitting in a warehouse, until the books are finally shredded or end up in a landfill site or are sold to the author at a reduced price. On being sold to the author, the books usually end up occupying a dark corner in a basement – in the form of terribly depressed stock. If authors refuse to buy the remainder of their books, they usually find it a lot more difficult to get subsequent books published by that house.

You see, the difficulty is that too few Canadians buy too few Canadian titles to justify an entire industry and that industry wouldn't exist if not for government largesse. Government largesse has created a dozen or so publishing fiefdoms across the country, and the Lords and Knights who rule these fiefdoms cry foul very loudly and persistently when their kingdoms are put in jeopardy through lack of funding. They play the cultural trump card over and over again, insisting that we need Canadian venues for Canadian voices. However, the vast majority of Canadians never hear the voices that are apparently crying to be heard in the wilderness that is Canada. The situation is enough to give new meaning to the old conundrum, if a tree falls in the forest when no one is around, does it make a sound? My contention is that if all the little voices comprising Canadian literature fell silent today, Canadians wouldn't be any better or worse off for it; Canadians wouldn't care, they wouldn't give a shit. They prefer highways to literature and art, so why not give them more highways. Our writers and artists can spray-paint their texts and images on the highways. I am sure that way many more Canadians would likely view what has been wrought by the art-lit set.

I'm the sort of artist and writer who is in favor of *non-funded*, spontaneously-arising graffiti; indeed, some of that graffiti can be quite artistic. It often expresses a lot of anger, energy, dissatisfaction and disaffection and that is why the majority of us find it difficult to entertain. It is the anarchistic expression of the rebel, the angry young woman or man who isn't on the program and isn't likely to be, not in the near future, certainly. These graffiti artists produce texts and images in defiance of the metaphors *time is money* and *property is worthy of respect*. They exhibit a lot more stealth, cunning, courage, and entrepreneurship than most of the "legitimate" artists and writers

working in Canada today. Self-publishers such as I have more in common with graffiti artists than we do with government-sanctioned artists and writers. We ask nothing from the government, and yet we produce work regardless, in the tradition of Camus' treasonous rebel. Furthermore, we aren't obliged to write or produce images in the proper Canadian style and we don't have to suck up to the Lords and Knights who rule the cultural fiefdoms. In addition to that, we don't have to pretend that we are producing "significant" literature and art in the oh-so sanctified Canadian tradition, which is staid, stodgy and proper to the point of being anally retentive.

Let's take a brief look at our hallowed cultural fiefdoms. How do they operate and are they really free of the taint of self-publishing or self-financed art. My novel *Chasing After Carnivals* was supposed to be published by Stoddart back in 1985. On the eve of the publishing date, my editor informed me that Stoddart had run into some financial difficulties and would not be able to bring out my novel by the specified date, even though it had reached the bound galley proof stage and had been reviewed. Six weeks later, I was told the same thing; and three months after that, I received a similar reply. "What will it take to bring out my novel?" I naively asked my editor. "Well, Ernest, if you've got a few thousands dollars you can put into this venture, I'm sure it would come out in no time at all." In other words, I was on the wrong end of a shake down. Rather than submitting to such terms, I asked to have my contract nullified.

This practice is still going on, and most of the time it is used on first-time authors. I'm not against authors defraying the costs of book production; however, the practice of touching up authors for money in this manner is not supposed to be going on at "legitimate" houses which receive funds from the government for producing books. It amounts to little more than blackmail.

Many Canadian writers and publishers decried the takeover of Random House and Doubleday Dell by the huge conglomerate Bertelsmann. I would submit that the reason most writers and publishers feared this takeover has more to do with them fearing that their government-subsidized fiefdoms might not be able to operate as usual. Myself, I am all for the takeover by Bertelsmann. I am all for busting up these little self-aggrandizing publishing fiefdoms, which are so thick from inbreeding they have put into jeopardy their *élan vital*. In fact, they are so wan they deserve to expire.

By the way, most authors in this country receive around a dollar per book in royalties. Five to six hundred books are normally sold (usually to libraries), which amounts to a very small royalty check, indeed — that is, if the author is able to get the publisher to write him or her a check. No writer can survive on such chicken feed. He or she might as well be producing graffiti; it would be just about as financially rewarding.

In the current issue of *The New Orphic Review*, the theme is *One Person's Graffiti / Another Person's Art*. Many of the pieces stretch the

idea of what a poem or a story is; indeed, some of them might irritate you, our gentle, cherished reader. But not to worry. The pieces herein have not been published at public expense. They have been produced out of necessity and have been moved by *spiritus mundi* to a greater or lesser degree. They have been created in defiance of the prevailing rules and are marked by a disregard for what is so doggedly Canadian.

Art and literature, if it is to survive in this country, must never lose the underpinnings of self-sufficiency, otherwise art and literature will become weak and devitalized, hobbies practiced by sycophants. The works herein represent a kind of graffiti in that they have been executed in defiance of the prevailing cultural mandate and have *not* come to your attention because of a government agency that has benignly distributed some alms.

Born in 1926 in London, of Cornish ancestry, DAVID WATMOUGH arrived in Vancouver from San Francisco in 1961. He long supported his fiction as a CBC broadcaster and critic. He is best known for his fictional counterpart, Davey Bryant, who appears in the novels *Thy Mother's Glass*, *Ashes for Easter*, *No More Into the Garden*, *Vibrations in Time*, and *The Year of Fears*.

## Updated Pieta

David Watmough

VANCOUVER:

I FIRST SAW THEM on a crowded beach across the road from the Sylvia hotel in the Vancouver of 1997.

I lay on the silver sand, devoid of sunshade, trying to read *The Charterhouse of Parma* in paperback while at the same time dodging the spray of sand as feet trudged insouciantly too near my spread pages. If I say the two of them stood out it wasn't for the obvious reason they were as black as the ace of spades. In fact, this close-of-the-century Vancouver had long sloughed off its 'red hair and porridge' image I had met as a newcomer forty years earlier. Just as it had shed the puritan trappings of Sabbath shutdowns and tepid and tasteless food in unromantic restaurants for the immigrant English, it had also opened its social pores to colors of wider and more vigorous complexion.

Above all, the Chinese, black-haired, slim-waisted, played about me. Their accents were as varied as the infinitely varied range of brown skins of others from the Orient. Maylayans and Sikhs, Pilipinos and Japanese'.

All made a contribution to the city's pleasurable new mosaic and, for that matter, to my tired old eyes as I surveyed the beach scene of sun-worshipping torsos and the leggy energy of oriental teenagers, growing like beanstalks in the balm of westcoast Canada, as they kicked and threw giant multi-colored beachballs or joyfully vented their high-pitched vocables on the mild Pacific breeze.

I must get one thing straight, as it were. I'm gay. But I am neither a "rice queen" (erotically attracted to Orientals) nor into what used to be nastily called "dinge" (for the darker bodies of the planet). But I am deeply into the human scene: endlessly curious about what makes us all tick; the tales we carry with us, the experiences, gentle and cruel, that make this child burst into smiles at the sight of our Norwegian elkounds — that one cower and tremble at the sight of pricked ears and curving plume of tail.

But my black couple, that straight-backed women in a bright red sleeveless frock, an equally erect young man, in yellow tan top above white shorts, walking closely together, but with her slightly ahead — they shared an aura of difference that had nothing to do with their sharing ebony skin nor the silence that enveloped them. As I watched them approach and draw past I thought their singularity might well have been connected with her unsmiling countenance and what, even then, I discerned as a disquiet on his part, an eagerness to please her, or was it to placate?

They passed through the prostrate sprawl to my west and headed for the higher ground at the entry of Stanley Park. I didn't know why I suddenly clambered to my feet, grabbed my book and followed in their wake. I still cannot provide a satisfactory answer. Something to do with their aura of utter isolation perhaps, creating a vacuum that my invert loneliness longed to fill. Or was altogether less metaphysical and connected, rather with their sheer physical beauty? If so it was nothing to do with erotic attraction for the young man. It wasn't that kind of beauty but a sculpted essence that proclaimed a kind of primitive severity that both cut them off and elevated them above the rest of us. They were fashioned of a kind of human architecture that stood out with a stark, stripped simplicity that was the equivalent in pared-away grandeur of Stonehenge compared to the more fanciful constructions of later ages.

It wasn't until they had begun to skirt the waveless frond of English Bay that I drew close enough to realize they had begun to talk. Not exactly conversation. But simple statements that, per se, needed no answers. But there was no mistaking their distinctive roles.

Just as he walked a step or two behind her, so did his words follow her sentiments.

"I want to get away from here. I suppose you will return at dusk and seek out your friends." Her cool and clearly denunciated English was devoid of imperiousness. It certainly didn't contain his hint of the wistful, even of beseeching.

"No, Mother. I wouldn't dream of leaving the hotel after we've eaten and I've made all the arrangements about leaving tomorrow. You know we have an early rising. The plane is at ten and we have all that baggage. There is a change of plane in San Jose but the baggage I'll have had sent right through to Monterey."

"I wish we were going to Sweden. You had promised me Stockholm."

"No, Mother. That will be in the fall — if we decide not to go to Beaulieu. That was your decision."

"These so-called decisions. They are fancy you have devised. Along with so many others."

"Yes, Mother. I know that is what you believe. You have told me so many times before."

"I do hope that Monterey doesn't prove as boring as this place. The last time we were there I thought I'd die of ennui."

"You like to walk, Mama. There are so few places one can walk long distances nowadays."

"In Africa there are. Your father's people were great walkers. They won international competitions doing so. You in no way emulate them, Ephron."

"Would you like to go back to Sudan for a vacation, Mother? Or the Atlas Mountains? And if you are not feeling homesick, how about the Cliffs of Mohr or Western Ireland? Then there's always the pol-ders of the Zuider Zee."

"You sound like a gazetteer — or worse, a travel-agent. You know very well I leave all *that* business to you. I have enough concerns as it is. Not the least of them is your future."

At which point they passed a promontory and I was cut off from their bickering couched in such stately if artificial tones. Although intrigued by the two of them, I felt if I grew closer they would be aware of my presence. I was unsure of how Ephron would respond but nursed little doubt that the mother would feel instant antipathy. Then I realized I was rationalizing. I didn't really wish to catch them up — to hear more of what they had to say, for that matter. Their muted antagonism, their shared restlessness was getting to me.

I turned back towards the beach and the decision to return to the exploits of young Fabrizio del Dongo in Stendhal's world of the 1830's with distinct relief. The past was so preferable to the present. However, I was not to know that I was to encounter my black mother and son again — in quite different circumstances and in another geography — just a few months later. Then as a devotee of nineteenth century fiction, I am inured to coincidence and even prepared to concede supernatural intimations poking at the wings of my life.

#### MELBOURNE:

I was visiting Australia for the first time and for all the family-laced reasons of duty and elderly blackmail that I have spent much of my guilt-drenched existence running away from. True, I chose winter because I wanted to steal the gift of a second summer as the first had been darkened by my farmer father's death in a twin-engined air crash somewhere over the restless waters between The Isles of Scilly and mainland Cornwall.

When I returned home to Vancouver, after settling mother in Lanarth Private Hospital outside of Truro, the last thing I wanted to think about was my relatives. The beloved dead, the intensely

mourning widow, a hostile sibling, and a whole elder generation of the wrinkled reproachful — all spurred my flight back to my Vancouver sanctuary and reaffirmed the blessing of my earlier Canadian re-rooting.

But after only a few weeks back in our West End high rise apartment with my architect lover of thirty years, Alberto, I received a distraught letter from a half-forgotten Australian cousin of my infancy who was also the godson of my recently deceased father.

Wesley had been unable to attend the funeral — he didn't specify whether for reasons of health or finance — but now wrote in distress that his own beloved father was dying of cancer and had actually asked whether I, his favorite nephew, could visit him in the Melbourne Hospital where he lay stricken. In my childhood Uncle Jan had been an inveterate supporter of my oddness, defending my sartorial eccentricities (such as my Basque beret, fancy amber cigarette holder, and string-knit gloves purchased in Paris) and always listening to me with egalitarian interest and not dismissing my arguments and contentions as inherently puerile.

These are things that people like me do not forget. Uncle Jan was the only one within the family with whom I forged light links of love and felt free of that thrall of leaden obligation known as Bryant family loyalty.

With Alberto's encouragement, I called Wesley, after arranging things at the newspaper where I worked, and told him I would come as soon as I could. That, then, the background to my alighting on a bright November day at Melbourne's Tullamarine International Airport. The very day, it so happened, that that nation of horse-racing addicts celebrated The Melbourne Cup. I had to ask three waiting taxi drivers before I finally got the attention of one not utterly distracted by the drama of the turf...

The first week was taken up with the daily socializing germane to my hospital visits to Uncle Jan and meeting for the first time Cousin Wesley who insisted I leave my hotel and accept the guest-room of their spacious Victorian residence where I met and suffered his dreary wife, Betty and, even worse, their six offspring who mercifully ignored me as strenuously as I them.

Cousin Wesley, now the Chief Librarian at Monash University, proved to have grown up into a cherubic if obese neurotic (so much for my reading of his letter!) and his wife just a near-silent shell of a woman obviously drained to exhaustion from the frantic claims of her greedy children. Only the times in the hospital at the bedside of the dying proved oases of satisfaction and confirming of the validity of my visit.

Uncle Jan was the same quiet-voiced, generous man with a quick sense of me that I had known and appreciated as a boy of twelve when he had suddenly quit his farm and, with his scraggy Irish wife and tubby son, upped and emigrated to Australia.

Where I now sat on the steps of The Shrine of Remembrance eyeing an evil-looking spider with a vermilion abdomen, I was more than a little leery of Aussie insects. For that matter, I was conscious that I was visiting a land where everything was odd if not threatening.

I'd read that the Aboriginals communicated more with departed spirits and other ghosts than with the white invaders of their Antipodean Stone Age. I knew that here alone lived mammals that laid eggs, others that bore babies in pouches; here that giant birds ran rather than flew, and the vegetation (I'd just done the famous Botanical Gardens) seemed to belong to a time before anthropological history with giant ferns and soaring eucalyptus, and weird bottlebrush — all of which made me feel more irrelevant than ever.

It was then I spotted not one but two familiar faces. However, they did not engender relief from my somber thoughts. Sitting there on the steps across from me were the tall black youth I'd come to learn was called Ephron, and his mother. I had none of the auditory problems that had beset me in Vancouver. Not only were their words clear but the tension between them swirled like mist about the few feet that divided us. Their disagreement was of a different order than the snatches I had received as an eavesdropper back in Vancouver.

"I cannot see what induced you to bring me to this smug, Victorian place. It has no history but a preponderance of flies."

"You brought up Australia in the first place, Mother. And I suggested a tour of the Outback which seemed to engage you."

"Until you mentioned Sydney as the climax. I have heard the legends. I would have seen little of you there and I do not think you would have been occupied in providing me with a grandchild."

"All that again!"

"Does it ever go away?"

"You said you were sick of exotic places and tired of sermons in stone. That was why I thought you'd appreciate the Australian emptiness."

"It is full of invidious creatures, hostile to humans and keen to poison us."

"I knew nothing of them before our arrival. It was not in the guidebooks. Nor did the Australian Tourist Board enlighten us."

"You can be insufferably naïve, Ephron. Countries seeking tourists do not advertise their flies and spiders, their spitting snakes and lizards."

"*Tourists?* You have never posed as such, Mother. Nor encouraged me to either. You have always stressed our role as *travelers* and *seekers* as we wander around the globe."

She shifted uneasily on the hard stone. She was so thin I could appreciate the discomfort to her posterior. Her face, though, remained impassive, her tone unflinching and her strangely high cheekbones raised to the cloudless Melbourne sky.



"I am sure I stressed *travelers*. Not *seekers*. I shudder to think of *your* seeking, Ephron. The fear of that is the bane of my life."

"And yours, Mother, is the restlessness that never lets up. The fret that keeps me at the gazetteers and guidebooks day after day. It is too with our uprooting, I suppose. There is nothing to give us balance, nothing to hold our direction."

"Speak for yourself! Your *angst* is a vertical thing. You ache to be other than nature designed you. Mine is just natural boredom with a world become overly familiar. What is the difference between that St. Kilda Beach you dragged me along this morning and Stanley Park – but different trees and shrubs, different skins littering the ground, different voices sully the air? Between St. Paul's Cathedral here and Christchurch in Vancouver, save the exceptional ugliness of the latter? In both cases the services were abominably dull. For that matter, the stuffy Windsor Hotel in which we now stay to the Hotel Sylvia – apart from pigmy rooms, the lack in the creeper-covered edifice of The Windsor's Victorian pomposity – and, of course, a handful of paper money?"

I could constrain myself no longer. I felt that if their mutual slashing continued I would soon see the blood of mother and son sluicing down that broad flight of steps of the Shrine of Remembrance.

"Excuse me," I began. "I couldn't help hearing...Besides, we actually were quite close to one another when you were in Vancouver –"

But that is all I managed. As a tableau they rose, neither looking in my direction as they walked in full composure down the steps towards the noise and surge of the city's traffic. I was about to pursue, remembered the last near-encounter, and sat back to muse on their strange antipathy. I had a half-hour or so before I saw my dying uncle for the last time before heading out to Tullamarine International. In the strangest way I felt elated. But it was to be another year, another summer, before I had any significant illumination.

NICE:

Finally a vacation together! I hugged Alberto for finally agreeing to leave his construction company in the hands of his manager and staff and steal a few days with me on the French Riviera. In fact, I thought it imperative. Apart from the hugs and kisses, the incessant protestations of tender love, we were coming apart. I could not contend with the intricacies of commercial real estate, of rentals and leases, of a new shopping mall in Richmond, another in suburban Burnaby. If it had just been all the business stuff though, I could've hacked it. But it wasn't. My trouble with Alberto was associated with his role as a businessman, but only obliquely. Bluntly put, my Latin lover refused to be "out" in any context related to his work. He was quite prepared to embrace gay parties in our apartment, to visit gay bars and restaurants, even to participate in our Gay Pride events. But on three things he was obdurate: he wouldn't spell out his sexuality

to his mother, affected a straight pose at his increasingly numerous worksites, and insisted we have two separate phone numbers at the apartment.

It bugged me. Had bugged me for the twenty years since we'd first fallen in love, but there it was, the price I had to pay for that lithe, Hispanic body (Alberto was born in Puerto Rico where his father was a small entrepreneur whose son was determined to surpass him in the accumulation of this world's wealth and had done so by the time we met in Vancouver.)

On the flight to Nice via London we talked. The same old bones of contention (strange how clichés smooth the raw places and soften the pain; they are not so bad, after all!) surfaced and were sunk again. We smiled our reconciliation at 30,000 feet and as we were in a two seat row, briefly held hands by the seat-belt hinges just as the stewardess came by and asked us about bar service. I could've cared less, but Alberto withdrew his hand as if it had accidentally touched a high voltage wire.

I napped over Paris and slept almost to the Mediterranean. As I dozed off, I noticed Alberto, who had the window seat by mutual agreement, deep in a Michelin Guide about the *Côte d' Azure*. His delicately curved lips trembled. They always did when he was reading English rather than Spanish.

My aunt had taken me to The Negresco when I was a sullen teenager. She had told me all about the absinthe-mixed drink which had been a specialty of the hotel since the turn of the century. I had one and hated it. I had one now with Alberto and loved the licquorish taste. He had a Campari-soda which he said he adored. It was so good to share a positive emotion. We stared into each other's eyes across the tables, seeing each other in the reflections. "Made babies" as the Cornish country people would have said when I was growing up.

Afterwards, with the sky purpling and the first stars perforating, we decided to take a stroll along the *Promenade des Anglais*. The evening air was still warm, sultry even. There was a goodly turn-out of folk in fashionable summer clothes sauntering the sidewalk. But towards the gentle hiss of the sea, along the beach, darker figures moved as shadows. To both of us, they were the more interesting.

We left the pavement and trudged the pebbles. We passed silent couples sitting, looking seaward — staring towards another continent — as they fumbled with each other's clothes. We arrived at a structure of wooden piles and metal pipes, behind the beach and below the tables and chairs fronting the hotel. It stretched further and further back into finally impenetrable darkness. The mixed couples had disappeared; only already paired men or solitary male hunters flitted hungrily amid the gloom.

Alberto and I looked about us, decided without speech that this was not our scene, at least not when we were there *together*, witnessing each other's actions, evaluating each other's thoughts. Just a few feet away, though, where the sky rather than dripping girders and

pipes was once more overhead and the sense of restriction lifted, was an upturned keel of a small boat. People came and went in a steady stream, sat for a few moments then headed for the construction under The Negresco. It was obviously a place of assignation. We decided to make it a place of observation, for the truth was we were fascinated by this nocturnal beach life so close to the light and bustle of a great hotel in France's fifth largest city which had once been in the kingdom of Sardinia and where Garibaldi, another hero of mine, was born.

We sat one end of the upturned wooden vessel and dully recorded that the coming and going moved to the point furthest from us. Until, after some ten minutes, a couple plonked themselves down firmly amidships. They were taller than anyone else who had sat there. It was too dark to see their features but the voice of the taller of the two was immediately familiar. After all, I'd listened intently to it in both Vancouver and Melbourne.

You get no Brownie points for guessing right. The only odd thing – apart from the coincidence, that is – was the fact the young man spoke the name of the man whose memory had flit through my mind a few seconds earlier: *Giusiepe Garibaldi, hero of the Risorgimento – b. 1807-d. 1882....*

"You see, Mother, Nice was the birthplace of Garibaldi. That fact alone demonstrates the ultimate superficiality of national states. It's only a question of time before the human races accepts the fact."

"Be that as it may, Ephron. Your attraction to this faded resort has as much to do with the shadows behind us as with the European statesman you affect to revere. It is not your historical perspective I fault but your moral cowardice and duplicity. At the very least I had hoped for honesty and admission of your appetites. I am your holy mother. I have a right to your honesty and a right to insist you perpetuate our family. It is all we have."

"You don't understand. Then you never have."

"I understand very well that it will be this perpetual moving from place to place because you have failed your father's wish to provide him with a grandchild – a sign that when I join him in the final good-bye there will be an infant greeting the human race on our behalf. That is what it is all about. That is destiny. That is perpetuity. Without it I shall merely be a mourning mother nursing her dead son."

"Who is to say who goes first, Mother? Your destiny stuff suggests it should be you."

"Your perpetual hankering for all that unhallowed *stuff* suggests you will meet a violent death at the hand of perverts. And I will be holding your sullied and unfulfilled body across my aching lap."

"I wonder –"

"What do you wonder, son of mine, save for what is going on behind us in that dreadful dark?"

"I wonder if there's been a thorn between every mother and boy child for the past two millennia – and that now with the birth of a new century, we have come to an end of all that?"

The tall black woman made no answer, but Alberto and I looked at each other. The light was too poor, of course, to make babies in each other's eyes. But we must have seen something there. In any case, we stood quietly up, making sure we did not disturb the implacable duo, and stole away to the welcome of our bed.

We had a blissful week in Nice. I put on four pounds and even Alberto gained two, and that in spite of the fact we played tennis and the local "boca" every day.

There was remarkably little discussion about what I insisted on calling 'the apparition,' the last appearance of which was on that first night on the upturned boat. Most of the time – when we weren't heading back to the hotel room (for more sex, that is) – we were discussing the good fortune of our love and the benison of shared likes and tastes over a meal.

And, yes, I'll admit it, I'm pretty sure that to an eavesdropping fellow diner, we must have sounded pretty smug, pretty middle-aged complacent....

But there was a postscript which I'm convinced was connected with the black mother and child, even though it has never been directly referred to since – and "Nice" was last year in 1999, whereas later today we will say good-bye to both a century and a millennium and stuff ourselves with rich food and renewed hope for the world.

Last week was Alberto's birthday party, and, as he was to turn forty, I insisted that he alone compile the guest list. So we hosted a sumptuous smorgasbord with loads of champagne and stuff. The guests consisted of Fred and Jim, Harry and Leslie, Don and Ted, Betty and Leila, Anna and Phyllis, John and Frank, Ned and Rod, and Madame Alberto de Lacerda whom we both described as "mother."

JOHN PASS teaches at Capilano College and lives near Pender Harbour where he and his wife, Theresa Kishkan, run High Ground Press. "Grassy Knoll" is from his thirteenth collection, *Water Stair*, forthcoming from Oolichan Books.

## Grassy Knoll

John Pass

Eyes ever rain-shrouded or climbing the cloud-  
break's revelation (coast mountains'  
glacial, glorious backdrop highs)  
what's to see in life-size rise

and fall, in fountains?  
Their european lilt, refrain  
of being's bright  
essence and fresh flippancy  
in sunny civic air

is puny, allegoric slush. For lift let's do  
the after-math of sturdy stuff in steel  
and glass, then slide imperiously fit

upon the slopes and seas. Beyond projections  
of collapse pre-tax potential earnings surf  
torrential speculation...

At Bridal Veil Falls near Hope's off-ramp  
(rock-face forever dreaming under lace) no-one's  
standing for the mist's kisses. At Takakka's stupendous

drop from cloudy ridge through fogs  
of spray, you just can't see.  
You just can't say.  
Momentous and intangible these

commentaries mumble elsewhere, distant  
thunder all the beach-dumb summer's day.  
Dear knowing, travelled, smugly urban,  
world citizens at last (at least

of TV history) can there be any grassy knoll  
but that the shots ring out? The blood-soaked

cavalcade will slow and gasp and race  
away below before you guess

it's not Dallas where I'm stretched  
upon this pretty *mons* of lawn, plumbing the source.  
A sort of seep and flow from somewhere, a sort of  
incontinence of the earth

emerges down a wrinkle  
of pebbled concrete faux-creek.  
At base there's patio and pool, concrete columns  
crowned with concrete squares and spheres, a pyramid.  
An arch. A Parks' plaque naming

Andy Livingston. I *presume...* the pacing, wheeling  
agent gushes, bullying the phone ...*you've seen*  
*the cuts, the rushes, the he on she. Who needs some long*  
*safari into WE.* Nameless laid-off extras

straggle through this frame, city block  
chopped from promo/porno culture.  
It won't show pink (till sunset)

and drools too close the sink-hole heresy, incessance  
of the hidden. Between the parking lots and plot  
sustaining girls' field hockey, a statutory  
holiday, a Sunday

in the soul's Geneva. GM Place  
releases the fans. That Coliseum pastiche  
is the library. To Chinatown for dim-sum?  
Nearby the world-class strippers strum  
low G. Will you fold a greenback under?

Flip in a loon? Tap the current no-show tune? Everything  
is walk-on distance. From Skytrain overhead hydraulic  
whoosh and open pause of doors...

JILL MANDRAKE is the producer of Sister DJ on Vancouver Cooperative Radio (CFRO). Her most recent chapbooks are *In Memry* and *One But Not One*.

## Affair at the Fraser Bowlaway

Jill Mandrake

IT WAS FRIDAY night, I was seventeen. I didn't have a date. I decided, "May as well have a date with myself."

What would I like to do more than anything? Have a burger platter at Stan's Cafe, then cross the street to play pinball at the bowling alley.

There were two machines. I ran out of quarters by seven o'clock at night. This included the quarter I'd tried to put aside for bus fare.

As I wandered home, I thought how dazzling it would be to ride in the back of a pickup truck, surrounded by half a dozen enamoured friends.

A flaming sunset poked its way through some buildings, and a wildflower shot forth from a crack in the asphalt.

We could all take turns sitting up front and driving noisily through town, and we wouldn't need a license.

GEORGE PAYERLE, a Vancouver writer, has authored two novels, *The Afterpeople* and *Unknown Soldier*. His stories and poems have appeared in periodicals and anthologies in Canada and abroad. "The Quick & The Dead" comes from his unpublished novel *By the Banks of Babylon*.

## The Quick & The Dead

George Payerle

WILLIS HAYS stutter-steps through the tires laid side by side on the gridiron. Sweat pours from his body in the June sun. The knee feels good. There is pain — there is always pain — but not much. The guy with the clipboard clicks his stopwatch and makes a note. "Good, Hays," he growls.

Willis runs the tires again and again and again, with Dexter and Rhone and the two new guys who aren't going to make it. This is Willis's sixth team in eight years and the first time he's around for the start of the second season and he's pretty sure he's going to make it. He's pretty sure he's found a home at twenty-nine.

Willis grew up in Gary Indiana. He idolized Gayle Sayers and Walter Payton and played in an all-black highschool. He was big for his height but not big enough. He was quick, but not quite quick enough. So he bulked up with steroids and weights and made it to an all-black college. His charts say 4.5 in the 40, and that was almost true, a long time ago.

He went on to idolizing Marcus Allen, although the big poster in his room was always Sayers airborne, feet angled to cut any which way at all when he came down. He looked like magic, like no one could ever hit him. But Sayers had guts and ran at people with those magic legs, and his knees only lasted seven years. Willis discovered cocaine and flew, he felt, like a bird. A stocky, steroid-bulked bird. He racked up yards in his senior year because the line was good and



there wasn't a back much better than him, and he wasn't afraid to block people. Willis wasn't afraid of anything then.

San Francisco '49ers took him out of college, though not too high. Grist for the mill, not a Heisman Trophy candidate. No one figured he'd make it, but San Francisco meant Joe Montana, the best quarterback there ever was. So Willis worked his butt off and got into half a dozen games.

One of them was in the playoffs. Willis found the seam over the middle and looked around and saw Joe Montana's eyes like broken steel cutting a lane through flailing arms and flying bodies. The ball was up on the line laid down by those steel grey eyes. Willis caught it, and the '9ers won the game.

There was money to send home to the folks in Gary that year, and money for snow, though not a lot, and he'd found Lenore by then. Lenore was a stripper who looked like Whitney Houston and figured Willis was hero enough for her.

So it all looked pretty good. He thought in a few years he could be regular back-up to Roger Craig and maybe even make first string. Even if that didn't happen, the money would get really good and maybe he could marry Lenore. He ignored the fact that Lenore had a habit, maybe because he didn't think he had one himself. Willis drew the line at freebase.

Then he tore up his knee in the conference final. Willis discovered fear for the first time since he got out of Gary. The '49ers won everything that year, so he had a Super Bowl ring and a share of the winnings, which was a lot. But there was pain and a long season of weights and the bicycle and running slow with the pain. Always the pain, and not knowing if he could play again.

Lenore looked after her wounded hero. She was a woman who had been looking for a man, and she knew Willis would play again. Then there was his first hit of crack, that made him feel like something yanked his balls into his chest and they exploded there, and he knew why Lenore didn't want to kick her habit.

In the springtime his knee was working again. The '49ers traded him to New England.

Lenore didn't like New England. She stayed in San Francisco, but they got married anyway, because they were both nervous.

New England didn't work out. The knee worked, but it scared him every time he made a cut, so his concentration was lousy. And the team wasn't great either. They were rebuilding the line, so there wasn't much to make a running back with lousy concentration look good. Steroids and all he wasn't quite big enough or quite quick enough and he was gone. He started dealing on the side to support Lenore's habit, and his own. He took to carrying a picture of Joe Montana in his wallet with the picture of Lenore. They spent a lot of time in Malibu and Redondo Beach and places like that. Lenore wanted to get into the movies. But Willis was still a football player. His alma

mater had sent a lot of guys to Canada, so when somebody phoned from Calgary, he went to the Canadian Football League.

Lenore *really* didn't like Canada. It was cold and Calgary was too much like Texas, and it was foreign. She felt like a nigger. So she moved to L.A.

Willis did all right in Calgary. He didn't mind blocking, and when he carried the ball in the looser Canadian game it was easier to break into the secondary and knock some people over before they dragged him down. This was straight-ahead stuff and he got his confidence back so he trusted the knee and started surprising everybody late in the season by putting on some Gayle Sayers moves. He had three straight 100-yard games rushing.

The money wasn't great, but he had incentive clauses. He had an agent now who did guys in both leagues — some spiffy guys in the Canadian game and a few who'd made it back down into the States — including a wideout in Oakland. Willis still had dreams. He put a poster of Montana up beside the one of Sayers, and he took it on the road with him.

His roomie, the guy he blocked for, said, "What you got that honkey up there for?"

Willis waved his ring finger in the air. "That honkey got me this, man." A bit of a sneer, Willis had. "That honkey ain't no honkey. That man has eyes. Eyes like diamond-cutters, baby."

And Willis had his connections. He found them useful in this foothills town that liked to think it was Dallas North. His agent liked his connections, too. His agent would have been good with the shell game.

Willis began to think in terms of a Grey Cup ring to wear on the other hand, and maybe a house in Redondo Beach and buying Lenore into the movies. He spent quite a lot of time in L.A.

Then he was at about 140 yards in the season-closer for first place against B.C., and a backer blindsided him just as he was cutting around a DB and they got him high and low. The knee popped like a pretzel.

This time it took longer, and hurt more and looked like a half-done roast of pork. This time Lenore wasn't too patient about the wounded hero and life in Redondo Beach was frosty that November. Calgary didn't make it into the Cup, and about that time he figured out that Lenore had landed a bit part in *Black Heat* because she'd been balling a producer in Encino since he'd hit Canada.

Willis didn't break her jaw, but he messed up her face pretty good. It cost him a lot to keep her out of court. And when two guys came to talk to him in the parking lot one night, he found out a runner with a busted knee couldn't do much about getting his face kicked in.

After that, of course, he didn't have a wife. This seemed simpler in some ways, but Willis found an emptiness inside that he didn't like at all. It didn't have Lenore in it. It didn't have the San Francisco

'49ers in it, or even the Seattle Seahawks. He wasn't sure he could ever play again, anywhere. The knee was stubborn as a mule and hurt like it had been kicked by one. Willis began trying to fill the emptiness with the white stuff. It scared the shit out of him. And with a lot of pretty girls who found him romantic and dangerous — between being a dealer and a wounded football hero from foreign climes. White girls, mostly, who hung around the '49ers games.

And he worked out like a lunatic. He talked to the poster of Montana every morning and every night. He didn't think about it that way, but Willis Hays, damaged and desperate, in the eyes of Joe Montana was Willis Hays in the eyes of God.

So he got waived to Ottawa. His agent was good to him. Ottawa needed some insurance at fullback. They had a game-breaker, but they needed someone to block for him. This all sounded terribly familiar to Willis. No one said anything, but there were two or three other fullbacks in camp, and only one with a suspect knee.

As a first priority, Willis set up a little network on the side, in case the knee gave. If the knee didn't give, he figured he could beat out the other two guys who had a hope. One was an optimistic plodder from Nebraska. The other was built like a tank but had the twinkletoes syndrome. He didn't *want* to block. He wanted to get on the team any way he could and then beat out the tailback, which he was not going to do. The tailback was hot as a pistol, and Canadian to boot. So Willis set up his network. His agent was happy.

The knee hurt like hell, but it worked. Willis played high for the first time in his life, but he was careful and that worked too. The hot tailback loved him and the other two tryouts were history.

But Willis didn't like Ottawa. It made him feel American and coloured and as though he should learn French because the people in town who turned it on were mostly French Canadian. He spent a lot of time in Hull. He liked a particular French girl named Manon, but not enough. She was too Catholic — although she was a stripper too — and he was still too burned from Lenore, which he did not understand and which pissed him off royally when the French girl told him. Manon was a good one. Willis asked Montana's eyes some more about the emptiness. It's hard to tell if the eyes of God look the way they do because they're empty or they're full.

And Ottawa, like New England, was rebuilding its O-line. This did not make Willis look bad, because he was desperate enough to be seriously into blocking. He gave linemen fits and destroyed blitzes. No, on the contrary, Ottawa's futile O-line made Willis look terrific. But he hated the O-line, the team really was in heavy trouble, he didn't like the town, and he was wondering maybe he hated himself.

So he got traded to Saskatchewan, which freaked him a little. He'd played there, of course, and knew that in little Taylor Field they practically sat in your lap and loved you — or you were gone. It was a very personal, intimate way to be a pro ballplayer. It made Willis nervous. Regina was too small for a pro team — they couldn't even

get into the NHL, for chrissake. But tell anyone that and every stubble-jumper in the province – all million of them – would jump down your throat. They liked their ballplayers to be guys you could meet in the Safeway on Saturday morning and cheer for on Sunday afternoon. They were crazy.

But they loved him. He found out he was a Saskatchewan kind of player – small, tough, all-or-nothing, not a glory hound. And he got to play beside Ray Jaansen in slot, which could make any man's day.

There would never be any real snap in that knee again. It always hurt. But it worked. He found himself going up the middle fairly often and started having 60-70 yard games, which raised eyebrows. And he caught passes over the middle and in the flat. With Jaansen out there to block, more than a few of those turned into long gainers because all you had to do was motor along behind the big guy and he'd tangle up half the defensive backfield for you.

They started saying about Willis – the sportswriters and other folks – even coaches – that he was a crafty veteran. A real prairie ballplayer in the tradition of Pepe Latourelle and Alan Ford.

This was new in Willis's experience. He started going to the Safeway in his green sneakers and team sweats. People shook his hand and introduced their kids. He liked it.

Halfway through the season, Jaansen's roomie wrecked a shoulder and Willis found himself bunking in with the big slotback. No one said anything, but it was pretty obvious Ray had asked for him.

Jaansen was a very nice man. A Saskatchewan boy born and raised, and one hell of a ballplayer. He talked to Willis a little about God, and a lot about cocaine. He looked at the poster of Montana and looked at Willis and said, "That man's a hell of a quarterback." Willis said, "Yeah. I caught a pass from him once," and held up the Super Bowl ring. "In the playoffs when they won this one. Tore up my knee next game." Jaansen looked at him and looked kind of sad. "Let's go have a beer," he said.

They worked out a nifty play where Willis curled out into the flat and the QB dumped it to Jaansen on a delayed screen and Willis laid the keyblock on the corner and usually managed to roll off that and take the safety coming over, and scored seven touchdowns that way before the season ended. They started getting asked for joint TV interviews, the big tall blond farmboy from Saskatchewan and the short, stocky black urban kid from Gary. The 'Riders won the Grey Cup that year. Jaansen was voted player of the game and held Willis in front of the cameras yelling, "Give it to this guy! It's his back I went over." Jaansen had had three TDs, and they were over Willis's back, more or less, every one.

So he got traded to the B.C. Lions. It broke his heart. Jaansen smiled and shook his hand and said, "Stiff 'em for a killer contract. And don't let 'em play ya on defence when I come to town."

Willis's agent loved it. The off-field potential was a whole lot better in Vancouver, and while the on-field potential wasn't quite killer,

the trade had been a big deal, with Willis the largest piece coming in for an all-star DE the 'Riders desperately wanted for their defending-champion year. Willis wasn't exactly an all-star, but between what he'd done in his own right and as Jaansen's right-hand man, he was worth more after five teams and six years than he'd ever been worth in his life, sore knee and all. And Vancouver is a very nice place, if you can handle the rain. Mountains and ocean and never too much heat or cold. Lots of action, beautiful ladies, no end of drug-trade customers and you can walk the streets at night, most nights, without getting anything but wet.

That winter, while Willis was home for Christmas with his folks, he met a couple of guys from Chicago. Very heavy guys, he knew, but nice — white, but hip and breezy and friendly over drinks in a club. Willis ignored the tombstones in their eyes and said "Yeah" when they told him they'd heard about his potential. Vancouver, it seemed, was a plug-in to all sorts of shit the straight world never dreams of.

Willis's agent was ecstatic, and bashful about a few phonecalls he'd made to set this up. Willis looked at his agent and thought about Jaansen and made a face.

"What's eatin' you, man?" his agent crowed. "We're in clover!"

"Sure," Willis said. "And little lambs eat ivy."

The agent roared. "You crafty old veteran, you. Hays, you might not be O.J. Simpson, but you're my kind of man."

For the first time, Willis wondered about this guy. He looked at Sayers, airborne for seven glorious years. He looked at the eyes of Joe Montana. He looked his agent in the face and almost said, You have eyes like a pig. Instead he spread his hands in the air like to catch a ball and looked at them and said, "You and me, man. You and me."

His agent, who hadn't got there by being stupid, looked at Willis and got worried.

During spring training Willis started finding out why B.C. scared hell out of everybody most seasons but hardly ever won the big one. It wasn't like Saskatchewan, all small-town and earnestly nuts. It wasn't like San Fran, all big-city and smart. It was lotusland. It was goofy and full of itself and wonderful and stupid. It had lovely ladies on 4th Avenue who were the first yuppie existentialists he'd ever even heard about. It was the first time in his life he ever had to stand bareballs in his own locker room and wave his towel at some taxi-squad redneck Ozark asshole and say "Look, motherfucker, I am not a nigger. John Henry White has hung up his cleats and I am the first-string fullback on this team until somebody proves different and you pull that shit again I'm gonna bust your ass!"

Now, about a dozen guys of all colours stood up and said "Amen," and the Ozark sat down, but it was weird.

The season was good. Willis did his thing. The knee held up. They were contenders. When they played Saskatchewan, he and Jaansen stood around in their pads with their helmets on their hips

and nattered. They split those games, and shook hands on a date in the Western Final.

The only down note was that Ray asked him about his habit. He looked up into the lights like a thousand burning diamonds, a thousand eyes, and heard the roar of the crowd as it had been before the game ended. "Shit, man," he said. Jaansen clapped him on the back.

He went home and looked at Montana's eyes and got an answer he didn't like. He thought about Ray. He looked at the stash of white crystal bags.

There were a lot of people on the team who were heavy into God and praised Him for everything except when the other guys kicked their butts, which didn't happen very often that year. Willis did not go for this Born Again approach to God. But he began to think he better go for something.

In the Western Final, Willis and his running mate both went over a hundred yards – the tailback close to two hundred. Willis scored once on a plunge, and broke the all-star wideout for another on a play similar to the one he'd worked out with Ray the year before. And Jaansen caught the winning touchdown with three seconds on the clock.

It was the first time in his life Willis felt happy about losing. He went and beat Jaansen over the shoulder pads and hollered "Go for it! You fucking honkey farmboy. Two straight MVP!"

Jaansen grinned and wrapped his arms around Willis and said "Goddamn upstart nigger! You ever go fishing?"

"No, man. We hip inner city spade dudes do not fish. We catch rats, man, and fry cats."

"Next year, brother. Next year I am taking you fishing."

Coach was a bit irritable about Willis's behaviour. Willis grinned and said, "Trade me. Everybody else does."

His running mate stuck an elbow in his ribs and said, "Coach, any man goes over one-fifty total O, a TD, and lays his body down for the likes of me and Stretch, that man can go dance with all the honkey fucking stubble jumpers he wants!"

Coach glared, and roared, "We LOST, dickhead! You're both nuts." But Coach knew he was looking at three guys who had just netted close to 500 yards against the stingiest defence in the land, and lost. Coach knew that was not where the problem was. The only real problem was that S.O.B. Jaansen.

About the same time, in November, before Saskatchewan won their second cup in a row for the first time in history, Willis went to deliver a package to a guy in Burnaby. Business had been good. This guy was a very special customer. Willis figured maybe this was a way to ease out of business. Like developing a franchise. But he knew it was a hard business to get out of. Especially, he knew about those two nice boys in Chicago.

When he got to the door, he noticed it wasn't quite shut. He didn't like that a whole lot, but he rang the bell. No one answered, no mat-

ter how often he rang. He looked around and looked at the door and thought about things. It was not a package to leave on a doorstep. He pushed open the door.

"Hey! You in there!" he yelled. No answer.

So he went a little further in and discovered that you-in-there wasn't going to be answering anything ever again. He had a big red smile from ear to ear under his chin and wasn't saying a thing. He looked kind of comfortable in the big recliner chair, covered in blood.

Willis put the package in his lap and said, "Goodbye, pal. Goodbye." He left the door open and puked in a flowerbed and went to find a payphone.

"I quit," he said.

"You can't quit." Willis pictured the two nice men from Chicago with tombstones in their eyes, but he couldn't read the names on the tombstones.

"Don't hang up. Where's the package?"

"In his lap. The door's open. I suggest you get someone over there real quick."

"Don't you want your cut?"

"Cut is the word, baby. Cut. You got your money. Quick like a bunny an' you got your stuff back too. The blood wipes off."

"But — "

Willis hung up.

A week or so later he watched Jaansen win his second straight Grey Cup MVP, and cried. "Lookit that, Joe," he said to the poster, "lookit that. Fucking big honkey cleaned up."

But he didn't quite manage to kick his habit.



So he goes through the tires one more time, after Rhone and Dexter and the hopefuls have gone on to Gatorade, because he's going to beat the damn knee into shape and make cuts with no pain. There's a scrimmage coming up and he's going to stay in this town.

He looks at the mountains over the city skyline. He thinks about the long skinny woman he met on Wreck Beach and the way her hair curled like a burning bush down there were the sun don't usually shine. And he feels good. Willis Hays feels good. He has a new agent. Him and Jaansen have been fishing and they're going fishing again. And he's thinking this is a good town for selling real estate — or even buying real estate — when he sees two gorillas walking across the field toward him.

One is wearing a suit, sort of. The other, a terrible California surfer shirt. For the second time since he left Gary, Willis is scared as hell. It's a while since he stopped looking around corners before he stepped off a curb, but these two are goons. They could be broken-down ballplayers, a lineman and a 'backer. But they're packing iron

and they walk like ducks and they're either cops or mechanics. He thinks of the two dudes in Chicago and the long arm of that law. He shivers in the June heat and looks around. He's still quicker than either of those mugs, and he doubts either version of the law would shoot him on the pro team's practice turf. But if they're here, there's no place to run to. Not even the rivers where he and Jaansen are going to kill trout. He breathes instead.

The one guy reaches into his suit. Willis's heart pauses. The guy's hand comes out with a wallet.

"Willis Hays?" the guy says.

"You know I am."

"Yeah." The guy nods. His buddy smirks. A fan, no doubt. The guy flashes his badge in the wallet. "RCMP. We're booking you on cocaine, possession for the purpose of trafficking. And trafficking. And we met a man in Burnaby — the smiler — a while back. Read him his rights, Duff."

Duff recites, looking as though he's reading off a teleprompter.

Willis stands there. His legs are working and his shoulders move and he shifts his head.

"Okay," he says. "I'll call my lawyer. But there's a scrimmage." He tilts his head at the two squads forming up. "You guys look like maybe you played. This is my job."

The two official-version goons look at each other. It's the short one with the terrible shirt who says "Sure, Hays. We've got so much on you you're going to be playing for Corrections 'til you're a grandpa. Go for it. But don't go too far!" He laughs. It's funny.

The other one says, "Grandpa? He doesn't have kids."

Willis trots over to the huddle.

The QB is a rook and doesn't know anything except that he's hyped out of his head. But Rhone looks at him and says, "Willis, baby, you're all in a sweat. What's with those two dudes?"

"Never mind, Rhone. Never mind." He looks at the QB. "After I pound a few bodies for you and Rhone, get me the ball, kid. Hear me?"

The kid looks stiff.

"Do like the man says." Stretch. The Born-Again wideout. "Something is going down. You want a job, this is your man in the backfield, or you're sackmeat."

The contact feels good — hard and clean, blocks but no tackles. And the running through empty patterns, hard as mid-season when you run through everything even when you know the ball's going to the other side of the play, because otherwise you're down the road when you're fringe, hanger-on, six teams in so many years.

When the ball comes, it's over the middle in a clear lane, just like that time in San Francisco, and the kid drills it, though a mile high. And Willis goes up, way up there with the angels, and the knee doesn't even twinge, and he snares the thing out of the sun. And some DB that can't resist has a reflex, seeing the receiver up there in



the sky like a bird on the wing, and unloads on him as he's coming down, some young stud trying to make the team and he feels the knee fold under him as his cleats catch the turf and his heart leaps like a rabbit to get out of there and his knee tears all to pieces and he lies on the ground in a ball around himself screaming the end of his career and his life. He hears the roar of the crowd that isn't there. Never there again. And he sees the eyes of Joe Montana, clear as glass.

MAVIS JONES, a short story writer and poet, has had work published in *Grain*, *Room of One's Own*, *Antigonish Review*, *Event* and other journals and anthologies and in the chapbook, *Flames and Courtesy* (Reference West). Two manuscripts are seeking a publisher.

## Mavis Jones / Three Poems

### San Sebastian

Do you remember that when we crossed  
the border on foot, the guards  
would not let us pass? It was cold,  
I wore my black beret. We sat in a small  
room as if we were guerrillas.  
They were sorry to let us go.  
That night in the third class carriage,  
wooden seats and an indescribable toilet,  
there were two men from Pamplona.  
We were homesick for Canada, we had never  
been to Spain. The men shared a loaf  
of homemade bread, it had a red sausage  
baked inside. One had a bottle of rose  
enclosed in a gold-coloured net. Outside,  
an endless plain. Together we sang songs  
all night, New Years' Eve.  
The others in the carriage were drunk  
or asleep. In the morning,  
how could we ever meet again?

Thirty years ago, do you remember?  
A car bomb exploded today in San Sebastian,  
the Basque separatists still slip across  
the border with death in their baggage.  
The two men from Pamplona are old now,  
perhaps they sometimes sit in the sun,  
drink wine, sing with their neighbours  
the songs of Pamplona. I remember  
that we clasped hands for a long time  
before we parted.

# Granville Island

Vancouver

Under the Granville Bridge black ink  
pools around heavy pylons; netted  
above, roosting starlings, pigeons  
are safe in cat-free haven.  
Beyond the shadow, bridge lights  
splash across the tranquil mesh  
of little waves.

Slowly, the ruffle in the water  
is stippled with silver flashes,  
a school of herring drawn  
to long-eroded spawning banks.  
Here is the city, the muffled  
beat of autos on the bridge  
above, the frieze of highrise homes  
where forests grew.  
A man I knew once fished salmon  
from his porch, held up by posts  
planted in the inlet sludge.  
That was eighty years ago.

It is late, the boaters and the ferries  
ceased hours ago. The thick  
thrum of motor from the west  
looms into a tugboat, its tow a barge  
big as a wharf, speeding down the empty  
channel as if a ghost was conjured  
by the silver herring.  
No one lingers on the island.  
The bars and restaurants  
are closed, the pigeons  
tucked down on their red feet  
under the bridge. Still water somehow  
dreams the herring into a circle of shine,  
reflects the memory of salmon, forest  
and the long canoes when they paddled  
under the waning moon, the channel  
split into shakes of radiance.

## how many times had I removed the furniture

You invited me to your house for a visit.  
I was not late, I arrived at a suitable hour.  
There were no chairs in the room,  
an awkward state of affairs.

you walked back and forth  
carrying armfuls of files.  
While you were gone I looked  
into the room next door  
but it was the same, no tables,  
no chairs, not even a stool.

you had said we would have a chat,  
there were several things I wanted to say.  
I had rehearsed several fine phrases.

you brought in a tea tray, cups  
and a blue-green plate, which  
you set on the floor. The plate was empty.  
It absorbed all the light in the room.  
I leaned against the wall, hoping  
I wouldn't smudge it.

I could see through the window  
that you were busy,  
your time was occupied with important matters.  
I felt inadequate, spiritually  
inferior, even.  
I left then, carrying my unspoken  
words in my handbag.

It made me wonder, though, after I got home,  
how many times I had myself removed the furniture when  
someone knocked on my door.

HROTHGAR MALACH is the pseudonym of a woman writer and artist living in the East End of Vancouver.

## Bad Art, to Go

Hrothgar Malach

*"Anyone who proposes to forbid to agencies any achievement which is not of value to a moron, cannot claim any motive but envy and hatred." Ayn Rand*

IN VANCOUVER, one cannot fail to notice the proliferation of bad art murals in various public locations, such as on construction site hoardings, on concrete retaining walls at Skytrain stations, on the walls of community centres and various businesses. I am not referring to the spontaneously created, but not un-beautiful, graffiti murals by youths whose works are derivative of cross-cultural calligraphic traditions. What I mean by bad art murals are those that can be classified in the genre "community art," a sub-variety of "public art." The noble principle underlying public art is that art is for the benefit of the entire community, not just for the benefit of an elite. However, from the goodness of this lofty premise, does it follow then that all public or community art is intrinsically good art? One might think that this indeed is the case, since any level of ineptitude in the rendering of these community art projects is allowed as acceptable.

Underpinning the notion that community art equals good public art is the notion that *everyone is inherently an artist*. This notion is moot. It seems that the conclusion is drawn, however, that everyone is a good artist, which is about as soundly reasoned as the conclusion that *every man is a monster rapist* being drawn from the equally moot point *every man is a potential rapist*. I dare say that following the one

in practice produces as much oppression to the visual senses as the other in practice would produce in the realm of liberty and laws.

What if, in the human brain, there were a special area for discriminating between good and bad art? Perhaps, indeed, all human brains are equipped with this special area of discernment — some kind of culture “nodule.” Possibly those individuals who have a more pronounced nodule of this type can also produce superior cultural products. Maybe this would account for the development of individuals who do outstanding work in their chosen cultural field, such as the exceptionally creative and sensitive composer, the conductor with outstanding leadership, the singer with great interpretive insight, the actor of profound ability to emote and project, the dancer who becomes the character expressed. We might be able to argue the point in theory that all people inherently possess these abilities, but surely it is obvious that the products of only some are in fact outstanding. By comparison, in mathematics, while everyone in the spectrum of mathematical ability can perhaps understand the basic principles and primary functions, only a few individuals demonstrate gifted abilities in this field of endeavor. So it is in music, dancing and acting, when it becomes painfully obvious if the practitioner has missed the mark. Few audiences would tolerate for long the tone-deaf singer, the rhythmless orchestra, the wooden dancer or the hackneyed actor. The exception is the deliberately bad performer, such as Tiny Tim, whom we appreciate precisely because he is parodying the form.

What is it about the visual arts that makes it possible for so many bad pictures to be foisted upon the public? Is it because visual art, by definition, is somewhat more passive — because one can pass by it with averted eyes? If ineptitude is painfully obvious in other cultural fields, why not in visual art, too? Are our visual art “nodules” dormant, or worse, atrophied? Is the slanderous notion that the public is unable to understand anything more than the most vulgar of cultural forms, in fact, true? Does this account for the abundance of bad visual art? The bad orchestra eventually stops playing due to lack of an audience, the bad book can be closed and put aside, the bad actor eventually leaves the stage and is silent. However, the bad mural, which gives no quarter to the principles of good design, composition or drawing, goes on displaying itself — for all to see.

What possible misconceptions have given rise to the notion that community art must by necessity incorporate bad art? It might arise out of the misconception that *everyone is inherently an artist*, a notion so theoretical as to be completely unverifiable. This situation arises out of the democratic notion that each and every human being is worthy of respect and esteem, regardless of his or her abilities. The community art project is the ultimate expression of this democratic principle; for to take a critical approach toward one’s own community art would negate the operating principle of self-congratulation and all-inclusive democratization of everything. Anything better than bad art would be undemocratic, as that would necessitate weeding out ele-

ments we do not like — such as bad drawing, bad composition, lack of skill and so on.

Humanity, having hacked its way out of slavery, feudalism and rampant capitalism, has given importance to the idea of community, with the result that there have been extraordinary advances unheard of in previous centuries: universal enfranchisement, public education, socialized medicine and so forth. If egalitarianism is good, then community art — that is, art that is literally made by the community — must therefore be good art. This mistaken idea, with its accompanying lack of critical assessment, brings into existence frighteningly bad murals here in the city.

Another factor that gives rise to community murals revolves around the concept of creating community. For some social activists and planners, the extant community of the east side of Vancouver, British Columbia, where the working class has thrived for several generations, does not properly constitute a community. Community must be re-created and one of the best ways to do this is by having a few professional artists provide leadership to volunteers who want to create a community mural, an activity that is supposed to create all kinds of good-neighborly feelings and help everyone discover his or her roots. In this democratic free-for-all, there is apparently no need for the professionals (I call them “professional,” for they *are* being paid, usually by government grants) to critique the work of the volunteer painters, because, as you will recall, everyone is inherently an artist. In the absence of any critical approach, it isn’t surprising that the public is allowed “no comment” on the art which is thrust upon them.

Does a mural, by virtue of its public and community nature, have to be a bad piece of art? There are many murals throughout the world that are not so. The mural painters of the Mayan and Aztec civilizations created outstanding mural works, undoubtedly carried out by those members of the community who had a superior gift for that particular means of expression. Contemporary Mexico continues to follow in this tradition by engaging talented and gifted artists like Rivera and Orozco to create public or community art. A recent photograph in the *National Post* depicted a Ukrainian Orthodox monk cleaning snow from the walkway outside his monastery in Kiev. As he shoveled snow — and pedestrians clearly enjoyed this aspect of his labour — the background offered up a mural of heavenly personages in clouds and blue sky, a light and attractive composition, skillfully and artistically painted. The artist or artists were unnamed. Why are the citizens of Kiev so fortunate — on their daily walks to the post office, to work, or to the bus stop — as to be able to feast their nerve endings on such a beautiful work of art? Surely it enhances the sense of community, despite the fact that it was created by the practiced few rather than as the result of a cattle call to the community for so-called artists to try their hand at painting — to see what sort of image they *might* come up with. Of course, Vancouver is a much younger city

than Mexico City, Guadalajara or Kiev, and the indigenous art tradition on the West Coast of Canada is one of carving, metal work and weaving rather than mural painting, but nonetheless, the lack of a wall-painting tradition should not necessarily lead to the bad local community murals that abound in this city.

There is no one else to blame for this dreadful state of affairs but artists themselves, who have not defended that which they know instinctively to be true: making art requires the diligent exercise of critical faculties that govern the whole of the individual – intellectually, emotionally and practically. This is obvious in the practice of other cultural pursuits. Why not in visual art? Because, in the field of visual art, ideas such as *everyone is inherently an artist* and *community good/individual bad* have come to be the accepted dogma of the day. If one dares to declare that he has artistic insight, he is perceived to be elitist and therefore unfair toward Everyman. Because of this standard, or lack thereof, visual art is little more than a community exercise, a bringing together of diverse elements, a field for creating understanding among potential community factions, rather than a cultural form. Perhaps artists have been too gullible and resigned to the misanthropic view that, in the latter part of the twentieth century, humanity has reached the end of the line; art is dead, God is dead, politics are dead, the new generation is composed of illiterates, and so on. Which brings me back to the quote by Ms. Rand – the silence of artists on this problem of “badness” in art belies their complicity in the reduction of any form of achievement to the lowest common denominator.



CHAD NORMAN makes a second appearance in *NOR*. The poems in this issue are from a manuscript-in-progress entitled *The Kulling*. His latest collection *The Breath of One* appeared with Ekstasis Editions. He lives in Burnaby, B.C.

## Chad Norman/ Two Poems

### The Vandals of Acedia

"for the philosopher of the hazardous 'perhaps,'" Nietzsche

Perhaps one reason our planet is mistreated  
can be found in the questing for heaven

People believing in the Earth  
as a pew where they wait  
& ponder theft

Bored by the urge to watch simple happenings  
bread in the jaws of a dog  
smiling ads on the back of a bus

Some turn & follow  
Others learn & wonder  
"Unless" becomes a way of survival

Sooner or later there's the other urge  
to turn on Earth pew or no pew  
To gouge To Break To escape  
Perhaps this is failure

To be chosen remain standing  
the soil must be planted with the Dead  
who insist they belong *here*

Tappen, B.C.  
Nov. 1, 1998

# Lot K

for Mark Betteridge, Pres. & CEO, Discovery Parks Inc.

"An iron crane of one hundred wailing men!"  
A mind's chant with many sounds of morning

For urbanites the stuttering Earth's a toy ashtray  
Today their green saws honour the site's gutting

Achievement being the choice of a perfect name  
Without 1 tree *Lot K* claims the winner's void

The plastic dream's footing sets  
The age of a memory trowels a mind

Loss is a settlement of concrete growing under tarps  
Perfection comes when snow retracts the grave rebar

Tandems like pallbearers carry off the vain clay  
Clouds might be left on the fingernails of men

Truth for them is enslaved in a puny need  
To erect the New on the wild's destruction

Men build their *thing* in the mudpit of control  
A woman's wish topples the revolving iron idol

She accuses the bitten horizon's acupuncture  
She prepares for the boredom of profits

A woman's hope epitomized by a tiny potted spruce  
Where her wisdom queries the safe needle's vigour

Clearly the *young Betteridge* shoved to the edge  
Of a community seated in bodies of the lied-to

Misleading on behalf of his D.P. I. masters  
Brilliantly unable to divulge the trillium's cull

Sealing nature in the prospect of ample buffers  
Sent as the reflector complete with smile & suit

In a time when the public forum solves few lies

**Another disciple of plastic wins a frontrow seat**

**To watch the removal of a stump's inner rings**

**Spruce Basement Studios  
Burnaby, B.C.  
January 22, 1998**

IAN COLFORD lives in Halifax. He edited *Pottersfield Portfolio* from 1995-1998 and has had fiction published in a number of Canadian literary journals. He recently completed a novel entitled *Sophie's Blood: The Confessions of Joseph Blanchard*. A story of his appeared in last year's *Journey Prize Anthology*.

## Episodes From a Life in Progress

Ian Colford

### One

GORDON HAD BEEN there only a few minutes when they started quarreling again. As always, his first instinct was to keep his mouth shut and leave. But he'd already decided he wasn't letting Carol do that to him again.

"It doesn't matter what you say," he told her. "It's not going to make any difference."

Carol blew smoke in his direction. In the silence, the rain against the roof sounded like drums.

"How's Kate then? Does she still like you?"

"Kate's fine. We're all fine."

He flexed his hand, formed it into a fist, let it relax.

"People change, you know."

"Sure. People change. Like I need *you* to tell me that."

There were stains on the carpet that he didn't remember from a week ago. Cigarette butts everywhere. A stinking profusion of dirty dishes. Something boiling on the stove, ignored. He wondered if she was still on medication, but he didn't ask.

"This is my house too. You ought to be taking better care of it."

She cocked an eyebrow.

"Are you planning to move back in?"

"No."

"Well, then..." she laughed. And looked away.

He stood up.

"I'm taking my things. I'm not coming back, so whatever's left is yours."

"Oh, thank you," she said, mocking him. Her eyes became slits.  
"Thank you *so* much."



As he folded his clothes and lowered them into the plastic bag, uneasiness settled like cold wet ashes into the pit of his stomach. Downstairs, something was tossed with a noisy clatter into the sink.

All at once she was at the door, watching him. He avoided looking at the uncombed mop of dirty blonde hair, the wrinkled T-shirt flecked with food stains.

"I never do anything right, do I?"

"That's not true."

He waited. Rain pummeled the roof and threw itself against the windows.

"She'll break your heart, Gordon. We're best friends. I know what she's like."

"You're not best friends any more."

"We are too! She calls me all the time!"

"Don't lie to me, Carol. You haven't spoken to her in months."

"That's what you think."

She exhaled a leisurely stream of smoke.

He flapped open another plastic bag and with trembling hands yanked his clothes from their hangers and crammed them into it.

"I don't know what you see in her."

"What are you saying? Are you saying you want me to move back in?"

There was a pause. Their eyes locked.

"Are you?"

"I only want what you want, Gordon."

He sighed.

"I don't think we want the same things any more, Carol. Those days are over."

She stood leaning against the doorjamb with one hand out of sight behind her. It came to him then, with a sudden spasm of anxiety, that she might be concealing something.

"Look. I have to get this done and get out of here. We can talk another time. Okay?"

"By then it'll be too late."

"Maybe so."

"You don't care, do you? You don't care what happens to me."

He dragged the bags past her and hurried down the stairs.

"She's just like me, Gordon," she said, following him. "We're best friends. We always were. Take a good look at her. We're exactly the same. That's the reason you like her, isn't it?"

Without another word he fled through the rain to the car.

## Two

Carol spotted Kate in the bookstore. She seemed to be browsing, not buying anything. Her satiny chestnut hair was gathered in back and held neatly in place by a brass barrette.

For a moment she hung back, watching Kate flip idly through a book full of black-and-white photographs. She wondered if Gordon was here too. She and Gordon had spent almost three years together. But they had argued, and he had moved out.

She went up and tapped Kate on the shoulder.

"Carol!"

"I'm not going to bother you, Katie. I just wanted to say hi."

"But how are you? How are you doing?"

Normally, Kate would have hugged her with a kind of timid urgency, like a child who needs to hold something. But not today. Things *had* changed. Carol wondered if Kate's failure to maintain eye contact was caused by panic or guilt.

"Things are good. I got a job. I sold the house."

"Yes, Gordon told me." Kate seemed to flush slightly at the mention of his name.

"I have an apartment over on Queen Street. It's not much. But I guess it's all I need."

She laughed briefly. Then they both had to move aside to let someone pass. Kate coughed into her fist.

"How are you guys doing? How's Gordon?"

"We're okay. We were out west last Spring. Gordon's father died."

Carol felt an odd tremor in her stomach as this new knowledge bit into her.

"Yes, I know," she said, choking something back. "I heard. I'm sorry."

"Thanks," Kate murmured, seeming confused and then looking around as if for a means of escape.

"Is Gordon here?"

"I'm waiting for him." Kate checked her watch. "Another few minutes, I guess."

Carol nodded.

"You haven't called me in a long time, Katie."

"Oh, Carol. I can't. It wouldn't be right. You *must* know that."

Carol shrugged.

"I don't know. It seems to me we'd have lots to talk about."

"I thought of it. I thought about you a lot in the last year. But I didn't want to call just because I felt sorry for what happened. I don't think I have anything to be sorry about."

"No. I suppose not."

"I have to tell you, Carol, it's been good. We're both happy. I never thought I could be this happy."

Carol shifted her weight from one foot to the other. She suddenly felt very warm.

"We were happy for a while too."

Kate looked at the floor and then up into Carol's face, her eyes brimming with injury.

"Don't ruin this for me, Carol. Please."

Behind her, someone pushed the door open and entered the store. Carol felt the soft shock of cold air against her neck.

"I should go," she said. "I'll see you."

She turned and saw Gordon at the end of the aisle. His smile faded as he registered Kate's distress. Then he saw her.

"Carol?"

"Hello, Gordon."

She swept by him and didn't stop until she was outside. Her breath caught on the frozen air, her heart thudded wildly. In her mind she saw the two of them embracing, Kate safe now in his arms, the danger past.

She let out a sigh and, with a strange heaviness bearing down on her, pulled up her collar and bowed her head in preparation for the long walk home.

*Featured Poet*

**JÜRGEN JOACHIM HESSE**



**Visions in Black**

**Abstracts & Quatrains**



JÜRGEN JOACHIM HESSE lives in Vancouver, B.C. A former staff writer with *The Daily Colonist*, *The Globe and Mail* and *The Vancouver Sun*, he prepared dozens of documentaries as an award-winning broadcast journalist for the CBC. A long time self-publisher (Thinkware Publishers), his latest books include *Voices in Exile: Refugees Speak Out*, *Waiting for Zero Hour*, *Voices in Mexico*, *The Terror of Consumerism*, *The Word: An Adventure of the Mind* and *Visions in Black*.

## Black as a Metaphor

Jürgen Joachim Hesse

BLACK IS THE symbolic and symptomatic colour of darkness and death, of night and nightmares. Black is the mood of despair and despondency. Black even conveys the image of oblivion. As well, black is the colour given to the mysterious hole in the universe that Stephen Hawking (*A Short History of Time*) is, according to a recent interview on CBC television, exploring until he comes up with a definitive answer to the conundrum. The image of a Black Hole signifying anti-matter is unsettling to the orderly mind; thus black achieves its predominant purpose — that of a menacing colour.

There is no shortage of images that the colour black has not dressed in its mournful cloak. We think of the Black Death, the plague, an epidemic that wiped out much of the earth's population several centuries ago. We speak of the black arts, namely witchcraft; but "black is beautiful," referring to skin colour, was promoted as a positive attribute decades ago. Perhaps black has been unjustly vilified throughout history in its negative connotation.

We realize, upon closer investigation, that we humans need this colour black, at least as the antithesis of colour, signaling the absence of light. We recognize its inability to reflect light rays, to frame and define a multi-hued image or object. Not all is lost, then, when we remove black's threatening quality, a quality imposed historically.

However, if we are to survive the generally accepted trauma accompanying the adjective black, we need a massive infusion of light

and bright colours as an antidote to our culturally conditioned response to black. Paired and offset by other colours, black loses its powerful hold over our preconditioned psyche.

Balanced images of colours, including black, are non-aggressive. We want to call attention to the fact that, to an overwhelming degree, black provides us with the tools of information, and hence knowledge, entertainment, enlightenment and artistic accomplishment. Also, there is a stunning array of images in grey, that curious amalgam of black and white, both of which—strictly speaking—are non-colours.

Speaking of black-on-white images, such as those appearing in *Visions in Black*, we can divorce ourselves, at least temporarily, from the carrier of black-on-white images, paper that is an opaque medium. Were we to copy these images to a transparent or translucent medium, the whites of the image would become invisible, so to speak, because we can look through this non-colour. Not so with black, which turns opaque and is also a non-colour.

So, to conclude my assertion, black in any other shape than that of a solid surface unbroken by texture — what we call flat black, or, conversely, as a venue defined by the absence of reflected light — this black becomes a medium carrying its own message. We are thinking of black printer's ink (and its modern stable mate, the toner powder used in laser printers and photomechanical reproduction processes), the very fluid used to produce the images you are reading here, images you interpret as text.

Now it is evident that text can be printed (technically speaking, in this case, reproduced) in any colour desired on paper of any colour, but for the sake of general argument, text tends to be rendered as black on white, nine times out of ten, or ninety-nine times out of one hundred. Our texts are sacrosanct, whether black on white or in reverse, white on black for special effects. The use of coloured images or text on coloured paper is relatively infrequent, used more in hyped-up magazines, to give them a contemporary, sleek look, and more in advertisements than in serious and sober publications such as *Harper's* magazine. (All these assumptions here are arguable to the nth degree, of course, but please allow the author some latitude, or this introduction will become an exercise in balanced-at-any-cost frustration.)

There are other shapes and images that the colour black can produce, such as straight or curved lines, either connected or unconnected; geometric or free-style designs; epigrams; calligraphic images, a variation of halftones (that is, grey); a dizzying number of symbols used for non-verbal communication (here black often takes the backseat to such pushy newcomers as blue, green or red), including directional signs, and, finally but not exhaustively, those clever black-and-white *trompe l'oeuil* images with their convincing illusion of three-dimensional reality.

Let's lighten up and recollect some of the visions in black this non-colour has created: someone has a black heart. Blacklegs are strikebreakers. The black knight in mediaeval times was the equivalent of the cowboy in a black hat in modern cinematographic Westerns. The anarchist flag is black, and so is the pirates' flag with the addition of skull and crossbones in stark white. Someone has earned a black mark against his (or her, yeah, yeah, yeah) name. Then there is the Black Mass, the travesty of a proper Christian mass.

Someone is being blackmailed, and blackjacks are used to render a victim unconscious (or dead). When you discover blackheads on your face, you become frantic. Your neighbour may be a blackguard (the expletive is rather out of fashion at the moment). And during marital or other disputes, you explain that your cupboard door (heh, heh, heh!) has given you a black eye (also called a shiner).

A writer has been blackballed or blacklisted for having subscribed to the wrong politics that threaten the prevailing winds. The late Sen. Joe McCarthy was an expert in blacklisting everybody within reach and created a hysterical search for the arch enemy of the United States, the dirty commie rat pinko (or red) agitator. A martial arts master has a black belt, while a pie containing four-and-twenty blackbirds was served to the queen (or was it the king, we forget). We put this baker of pies in our black book, and as we drive away, our automobile skids on black ice covering the blacktop.

In the nightclub we see a black light show during a blackout while we tuck into a black pudding. The blacksmith next door was also a black shirt, a member of Sir Oswald Mosley's political party. And when you thought you were safe, along comes the black widow spider.

Now back to the reason why this section is called *Visions in Black*. A story goes with it, as Damon Runyon used to say. You see, the author of *Visions in Black* was primarily a writer, meaning a professional writer who earned his living by writing journalistic pieces. But there came the time when the itch to produce images became so strong in him that he used alphanumeric characters, his working tools—ABC DEF GHI JKL MNO PQR STU VWX YZ 123 456 789 and 0—to create images. Only slowly did he progress from the stylistic confines of alphanumeric characters and begin to create shapes in black on white.

You see, originally, he was afraid of using colour. Colour is a dangerous medium; mix painting media improperly and you can get muddy results, if you haven't mastered the technique. Black is more definite. You put down a line, a curve, a shape, an image, and there it remains, stark and true. Make a mistake (your hand slips, say), and the whiteout liquid erases the offending squiggle. Black was also inexpensive to buy—he needed only one tube, or tub, of black ink or paint. First he used ink, then silk-screen ink, followed by gouache, acrylic, and, when no excuses served anymore, oil-based paint.

Black on white was, and continues to be, much less expensive to reproduce photo-mechanically than colour images. Pennies compared to dollars. So economics had something to do with his predilection to use, and preference for, black. Hence the visions in black contained in this magazine. The artist believes that the simple black on white is often preferable to the ubiquitous colour surrounding us. Every Tim, Nick and Barry uses colours, fewer use black and white. Dare we call them the purists?

The author and artist early on also experimented with photography and achieved a modest degree of proficiency—but only in black-and-white photography. In the darkroom he was in complete control of the process of making photographic prints, again for pennies instead of dollars. He also prefers, to this day, the creativity of black and white, and halftones. After the relentless onslaught of colour photography by the generally untalented masses (tourists and other ho-hum snap shooters who have a keen eye for producing kitsch), black-and-white photography has made a comeback as a hot-shot artistic medium.



You could be forgiven for assuming that the images in *Visions in Black* are foreboding and forbidding visions, laden with gloom and doom, holding a secret promise of fire and brimstone as if they had been concocted in a veritable hell's kitchen of a mind. Happily, this is not the case.

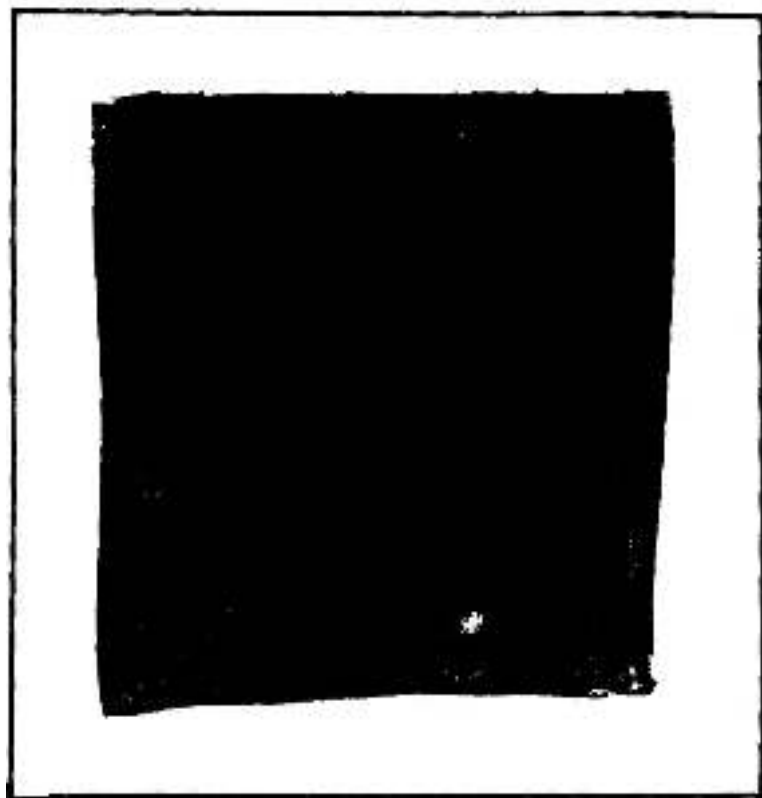
The black of the title refers simply to the black gouache and black Chinese ink employed as a medium. As far as the visions themselves are concerned, they are the products of a tranquil artist at peace with himself. His days of fighting for noble causes *ad infinitum* have been replaced by a *laissez-faire* attitude that gives fair play to the notion that things never are what they ought to be. Indeed common sense will not, cannot prevail, for it always has been a scarce commodity, especially now with the third millennium looming. That should not trouble our collective mental equilibrium unduly.

Visions of any kind are often said to be the product of the inner eye, which cannot be seen outwardly and which is all too often blind. Rather, it seems to this author and artist that, at least his own visions are notions resident at an indeterminate nether point, in mid-distance perhaps, from the non-existent inner eye. They appear out of nowhere, without conscious aforethought. These visions already exist: the forearm that guides the hand that twitch the fingers to make the brush go hither and not yon is an involuntary executioner. How else could the event of an image—that is, its birth—be described?

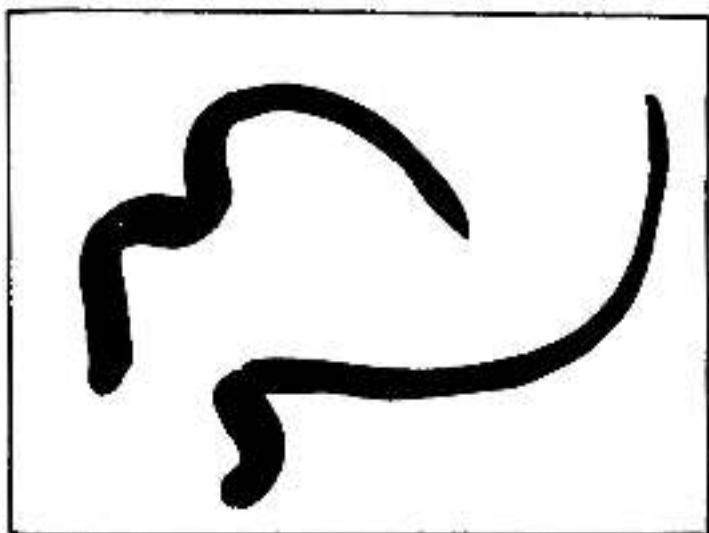
A word about the size of the original drawings. The majority of images were painted on sheets, 11 by 17 inches, then reduced twice by photomechanical means to reach their current size. Twenty-five of the images were even larger, painted on sheets of commercial blot-

ting paper measuring 19 by 24 inches. Here the reduction process was more difficult because of the outsized paper, so the images were photographed and then reproduced to fit the pages.

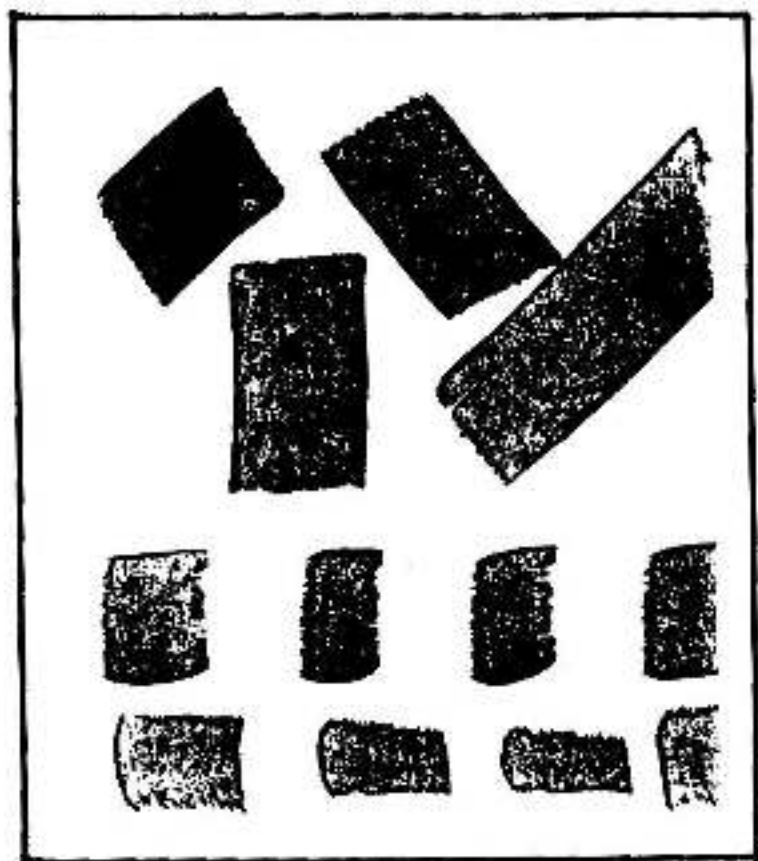
The process of associative response — that is, the thoughts triggered by looking at the images — are described in my book of the same title. Suffice it to say that the following visions in black are neither happenstance, nor are they deliberate.



A black hole appears in my essence;  
I am shuddering with anticipation:  
What will it do to my quintessence  
Once it swallows me in its Immensity?

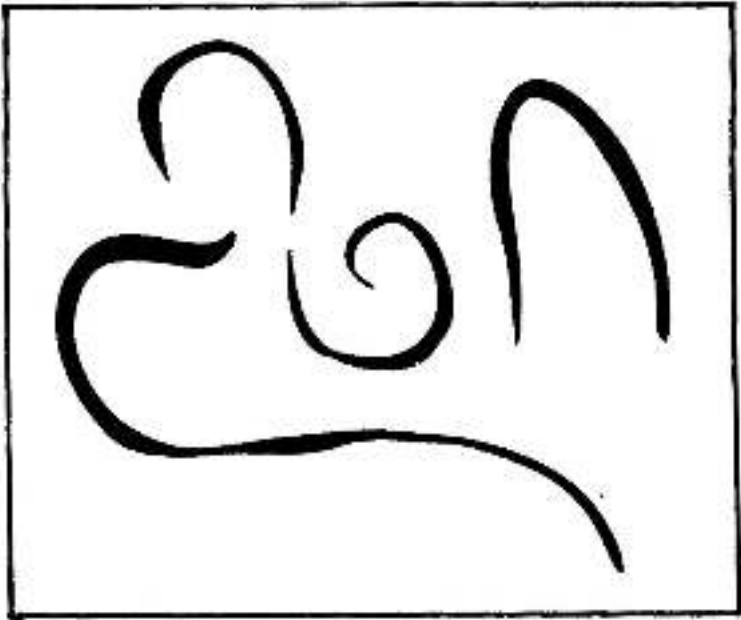


A mating dance begins as day is dawning,  
He towers in magnificent posturing pose  
While she is hiding her tired yawning;  
And both decide that mating be postponed.

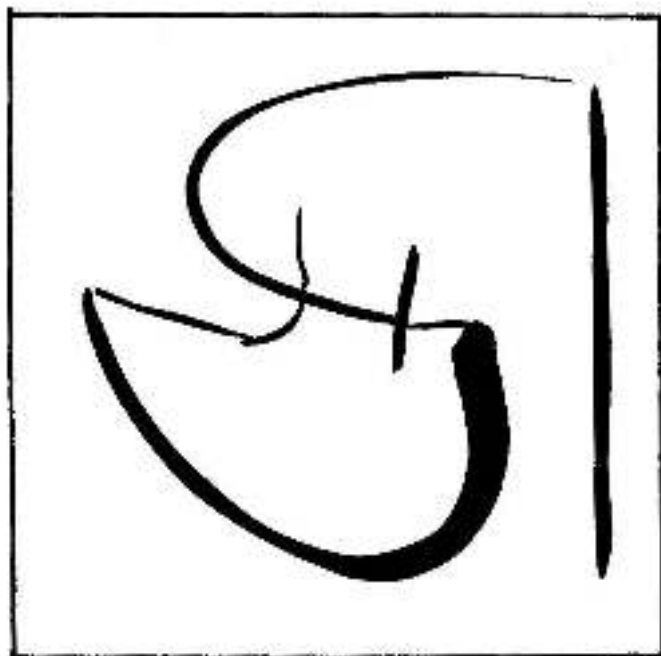


Shadows are roaming at their own peril  
While we are seeking a foothold in space.  
Reach out with your trembling hands,  
So I can pull myself back to reality.

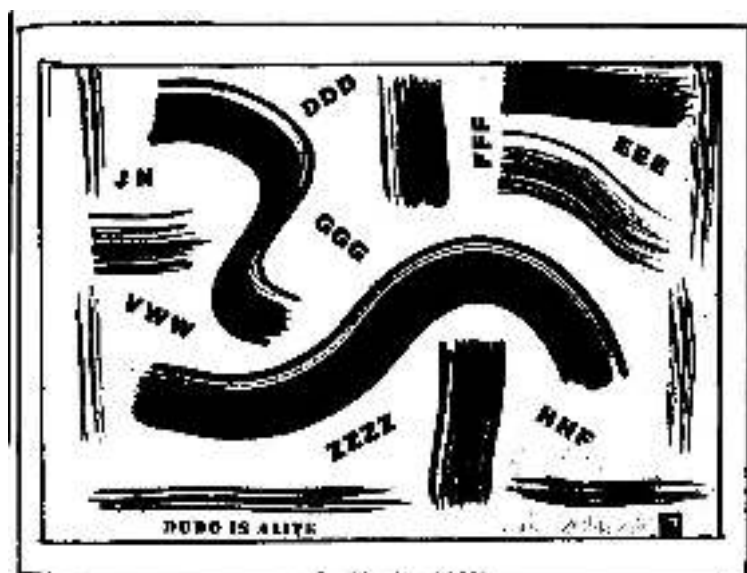




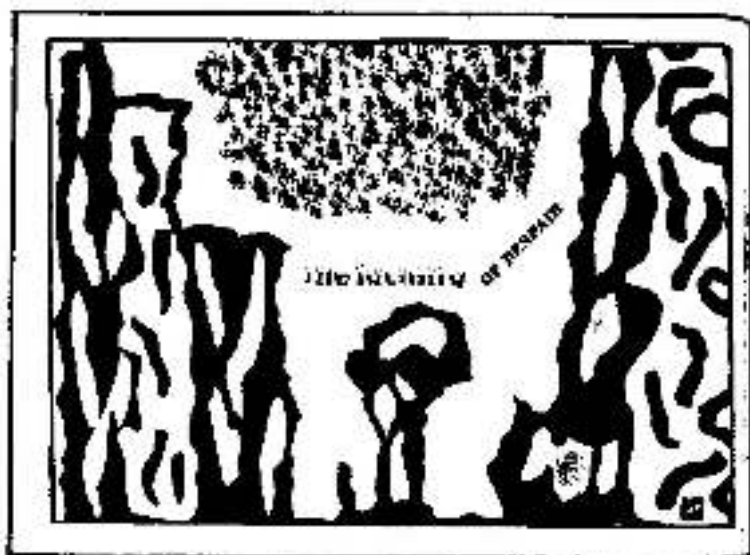
Fragile curlicues dancing in abandon,  
Bounding, jumping, bending, shouting.  
When they reach unity in tandem,  
Their purpose is no longer mobility.



We have taken great painstaking trouble  
In constructing a shimmering palace of hope.  
But now you are proclaiming we arrived too late  
To rescue humanity from its dance of death.



Dodo is alive! The cry rallies large crowds  
 Who come to see this bird, born again,  
 Amidst the confusion of death throes.  
 Come, dodo, come back and live in dadaland.



Encountering the lucidity of despair  
Is the secret dream of despots;  
All too often lucidity turns opaque,  
And a nightmare spread its wings.

HILLEL WRIGHT is the author of *Single Dad* and *Welcome to the Below Tide Motel*. His stories have been published in *Big Valley*, *Black Cat*, *Event*, *Expression*, *Island Life*, *Minus Tides*, *Tongue Tide*, *Westcoast Fisherman* and *Wordworks*. His manuscript *Zen Coyote Stories* is seeking a publisher. "Renewal" is the third installment of a novella entitled *All Worldly Pursuits*, begun in Vol. 1 No. 1 of *The New Orphic Review*.

## Renewal

Hillel Wright

WEATHER WAS brewing somewhere down the channel. It was early, early March and all signs pointed to a southeast gale and rain – rain for several days. Laura Andrade Larsen was a keen observer of weather. For one thing, she was an artist, a painter. For her, changes in the weather brought out the shapes and designs, the colours, tints and shadings that made paintings throb and move, that created excitement and feeling in the observer. Weather was a way she could share a wonder filled moment in nature with the world.

For another thing, Laura had been a fisherman's wife for nearly twenty years. Her husband, Holgar Larsen, was even now away up at the north end of Vancouver Island fishing, longlining for ling cod and rockfish, or now that March was here, preparing to tow a small fleet of herring skiffs and herring roe fishermen to the herring spawning grounds off Haida Gwaii, the Queen Charlotte Islands.

Indeed, a breeze had now sprung up from the southeast. The calm water of the channel rippled, and dark cat's paws slinked across the undulating slate blue sea whenever a gust arched up out of the breeze. The sun shone brightly, as if defiantly announcing the advent of springtime in the face of a solemn, low, aluminum-grey mass of clouds slowly building and inexorably advancing from down channel. Up channel, and over the Gulf of Georgia to the northwest, the sky was still blue and cloudless, and directly above her and the neighbouring green Gulf Islands, the blue was streaked with white

cloud shards, ragged-bottomed cloud balls, and the rare prismatic smudge of sundog as the afternoon sun sunk slowly toward the Vancouver Island mountain ranges, the marching mass of clouds, and the great North Pacific Ocean from where the huge mass of moisture came.

She had come to this Gulf island from Vancouver with her friend H  l  ne Boisvert. H  l  ne was an art therapist in the city and owned a share in an old farmhouse and some acreage on the island with a small group of members of the "therapeutic community" – massage therapists, naturopaths, crisis mediators, growth counselors – all of them connected with the so-called "New Age." She and H  l  ne had two weeks alone here, to start to put in the group's shared garden, and just to put the scramble of city life aside, if only for a little while. A "renewal" H  l  ne called it.

The farm had a multi-band radio, and in the morning Laura tried the FM band, finding it just as shrill, raucous and commercial as AM, tried CBC for a while to escape the commercials, and finally flipped a button and began to scan the VHF. She found the Coast Guard continuous marine weather broadcast, which described a series of fronts building over the island and predicted heavy rain and gale force winds for the next three days. Out the window, the day looked unsettled, cloudy, but with little wind, just enough to poke blue holes in the cloud cover and allow yellow bursts of sunshine to explode in anticipation of Spring.

She and H  l  ne shared a leisurely breakfast of cr  pes and three cups each of a blend of decaffeinated and dark French coffee, which they'd selected and ground the night before at the Island's general store. They discussed their plan for the garden.

"If we turn the garden over today and it rains all weekend, we'll have a mucky, sticky mess the rest of the week," Laura said.

"Sometimes inaction is the right action," H  l  ne replied.

Laura giggled. "Did your guru teach you that?"

"I don't have a guru," H  l  ne replied, laughing lightly, "and maybe it's just an excuse for laziness, but as any health practitioner will tell you, it's best not to over-do it on the first day. Let's just go out and cut the boysenberry vines off the fence. We can start to burn them when we're through, and if it rains later in the day, well, that's good."

So the morning was spent in the garden, cutting, pruning, gathering the dead vines into piles, trying to avoid the thorns and watching the channel below as flocks of gulls, crows and eagles circled and circled, watching the growing schools of roe herring in the water.

The idea of growth and cycles began to wax in Laura's mind as she bent to the corporeal task at hand. She had now spent half her life married to Holgar Larsen, a man who, at thirty-eight, was twice her age when they met. That was in 1970 in Vancouver, in Kitsilano, at the laundromat on the corner of 4th and Arbutus. He had just bought the old trolley *Louise* and had her tied up at the Fisherman's

Terminal at 1st and Fir, getting her ready for his first salmon season on the West Coast. He had spent his last nineteen years in Nova Scotia as a deckhand on the *Manny & Rose*, a big dragger in the Georges Bank cod trawl fishery. Before that he had grown into a young man in Norway.

Laura Andrade had grown up on the East Side of Vancouver, in the Portuguese/Italian neighborhood around Commerical Drive. She was nineteen and in her second year at Emily Carr College, which was located just above the Fisherman's Terminal, and was living in her first apartment, just around the corner on 5th and Maple. In 1970 Kitsilano was the center of Vancouver's burgeoning hippie community, and as a young art student Laura was swept up in the excitement of sexual freedom, cultural revolution and social reconstruction which was orchestrated by psychedelic rock music and flavored with the sweet scent of marijuana. Her only commonality with Holgar Larsen was that they could both speak Portuguese.

Laura's father, Alfredo Andrade, had come from a farming family in Portugal, but ran a pool parlor on Commerical Drive. Perhaps the sea of green felt substituted for the sea of green foliage of his childhood. Holgar's skipper, Manuel da Silva, had come from an old fishing family in the Azores, but had lived in Nova Scotia for fifty years. Portuguese fishermen on the East Coast cod banks used their native tongue as a code for radio communication, and many used it on deck as well. Holgar proved to be adept at languages and could speak French, Finnish and Italian as well.

But now, as she turned thirty-eight and was approaching the "change of life," Laura felt a restless need for strong and positive changes in her life. Holgar, who also proved to be an incurable workaholic, had become a bore in their marriage and a liability in her personal cycle of growth.

But perhaps a new season of growth was now at hand. She had recently met an interesting and exciting man in the Cosmic Gallery while viewing a portrait show. Wiley Moon was five years divorced and had lately retired from fishing. He was her own age and was embarked on new life journeys. He was temporarily living in an East Side apartment, not far from the neighborhood where Laura had grown up. He was working for a stripper's agency, but was writing in his spare time and gaining a small reputation among the local left-wing literati. His goals were to start a literary magazine and to return to the small island northwest of Vancouver where he could work at home and parent his four children, the oldest of whom was approaching adolescence. His dream was to live a simple, self-sufficient island life and support his children through odd jobs and freelance writing.

They had had only three "dates" since their first meeting, to a poetry reading at the Harbor Center, to a fundraising dance to save an interior valley from logging, and to see Win Wenders' film *Wings of Desire*. Despite their shared roots in the hippie era, they had yet to go to bed together, although Laura found herself fantasizing about this

possibility, even to the point of masturbation. But now, a sudden burst of sunlight through the clouds and the hard labour with the berry vines dominated the softer longings of her imagination, and Laura's thoughts emerged from her reverie and surfaced back on the bright, brisk reality of her surroundings.

The farm sat atop a low but steep bluff overlooking a channel between two islands in the Gulf. The farmhouse had a good view and the garden they were working was alongside the house, a long rectangle running a gentle slope toward the bluff, where the land fell off suddenly and sharply into the sea. Huge fir trees, hundreds of years old, rose up out of the bluff, their trunks curving in to the roots that gathered fallen rocks in their supporting web and gave the appearance of giant kelp hold-fasts penetrating the stony sides of the bluff.

From the garden the tree tops were just fifty feet above eye level, and Laura could see eagles gathering in the branches as she worked. The older eagles were magnificently large, with wingspans up to seven feet across. They were black, with white heads and tails. The young were smaller, more like big ravens or hawks, and were mottled brown and white in color. The parents were taking advantage of a breeze to conduct flying lessons. Numerous eagle sounds filled the air, like electrically amplified chirps. The chirp would end with a burst of wings as a young eagle left the trees and flopped and flapped across her vision on a short frenzied flight, before scrambling back onto the lower branches of a big fir. It was breathtaking, being so close to so many eagles.

Around two o'clock they had trimmed all the berry vines and had a big pile on the ground. H el ene suggested a lunch break and they went in, stoked the fire in the Fisher wood heater, and prepared lunch. Laura had brought a few jars of home-canned salmon with her from Vancouver, and she opened one, mixed it in a bowl with Holly-wood mayonnaise and finely chopped green onions, and spread the pat e on leaves of romaine lettuce and placed them on slices of cracked wheat bread. H el ene brought up a gallon of the farm's home-pressed apple juice from the cellar and tossed a light salad while Laura cut and served the sandwiches and put a pot of water on the stove to boil for tea.

"The salmon is just great, Laura," H el ene said enthusiastically, taking another lusty bite. "What kind is it?"

"Sockeye," Laura told her. "It really is the best canning salmon."

"It's so expensive these days in the stores," H el ene said, "and this is so much tastier than the stuff you get in the metal tins."

"The price paid to the fishermen is so high, I can hardly get Holgar to bring any home."

After lunch the two women drank a pot of jasmine tea. Outside the weather was better, if anything, since the morning. The sun had broken through while the radio weather still called for rain and wind. Laura's own body barometer felt the pressure falling. H el ene, too, seemed resigned to the fact that gardening was over for the day.



"Why don't we go out on the beach and walk in the sunshine?" Laura suggested. "We won't have the sun for long."

"You go, Laura," H el ene answered. "I'll get these vines burning and stay in the garden. I'll get plenty of sun tending the fire."

Laura left the farmhouse and walked down the trail toward the bluff. A black and yellow snake crossed the trail in the sunshine, the first one she'd seen this year. A red newt slowly lifted its limbs, crawling out from under a pile of old cedar barn boards. Soon she was at the bluff, at the top of the steep trail, set with rock stairs carved into the bluff, down to the beach. A small creek leaped over the bluff near the trail.

The eagles were down on the beach. The tide had just turned and was slowly coming in, covering the clam flats, which were exposed to daylight for the first time since last October. There was a big flat rock, midway between the low and high tide marks, and it was there that the eagles had gathered. A group of six adults were on the rock, hopping around and flapping their wings like giant seagulls.

Laura decided to stay on the bluff and watch. She didn't want to move from the area, and she didn't want to risk scaring them off by walking on the beach. Just above her, more eagles winged from tree to tree. Out in the water, but in shallow water near the beach, she could see a harem of sealions, and one big old bull, thrusting his thick neck and head out of the water, searching the sea for intruders. Out over the deeper water, herring gulls wheeled and dipped, shrieking and crying, red-tipped beaks stabbing into the herring ball as it neared the surface. A few fishboats patrolled the channel, making slow circles, listening to their crackling radios for the latest herring news, and looking to the sky, occasionally, for signs of bad weather.

A big white cloud of seagulls rose suddenly off the beach. A young eagle flapped by on the wind, only forty feet above the ground. Down on the beach, more eagles were gathering. Laura watched as a big adult bird carved a graceful descent from the top of a big fir tree down to the beach. She circled down, and at a point halfway down the length of the tree, she began to brake. Her wings went up at a sharp angle from the body and the talons extended as the legs stretched out and down. She beat her wings once or twice, hovering a few feet above the flat rock and then landed, talons like the toes of a gymnast landing off a vaulting horse. A jockeying for space on the rock flurried up briefly. Then from the lower branches two young eagles burst forth and awkwardly began their descent, first one, then the other, wobbly, slow, unsure, but one by one, they landed.

Laura leaned against a large, vine-covered balsam tree that grew on top of the bluff, and watched. The afternoon sun warmed the ground she lay on, warmed her face as she gazed up at twenty or thirty or maybe forty eagles, thousands of feet in the air, circling on the drafts and air currents. There were eagles everywhere. Eagles were in the fir tree tops, sitting, watching; young eagles on the lower branch-

es getting up the courage and energy for another plunge into the wind; eagles on the flat rock down on the beach comically slam-dancing and critically watching their clumsy young offspring attempting their halting descents; eagles, mere specks against the sky, circling, circling, perhaps able to read her wondering features a mile away.

Laura found herself feeling lightheaded. She felt as if she'd drunk a litre of wine or smoked a pipe full of hashish. The frantic pace of the city was a galaxy away. Her soul now soared thousands of feet above the planet, circling, circling, with a myriad of eagles. How wonderful! she thought. How utterly, unbelievably exquisite!

Closer to earth, another eagle soared. The late afternoon burst of wind had eased and he was wing-flapping strongly as he beat his way toward his particular Douglas fir. Below, on the beach, another cloud of seagulls lifted and briefly settled. About a dozen eagles now commanded the flat rock. The earth below Laura was warm and only slightly damp. The sun moved westward but was still high enough to warm her face and body, and the earth and air around her. Shriill, high-pitched eagle shrieks filled the air all around her. Tooooo-wheeeEE, tooooo-wheeeEE.... cheerrruup.... cheerrruup.... then... whuupp – whuupp – whuupp – more nearby wingbeats.

The level of activity all around her was frantic, intense, yet strangely peaceful; the barking sealions, the questioning gulls, the eagle shrieks and flaps and whuupps, the roaring creek rushing down the side of the bluff. The waves were beginning to build on the beach below her as the tide steadily rose and the gusts from down the channel became stronger and more frequent.

In the midst of all this noise and movement there existed a center of peace, of silence, of perfection. The clouds broke up into whirling, spinning, changing crystals of pure light. The wind and sea, creek and birds and sealions, all blended into a peaceful, drone-like HUMMM. The warmth of the earth and air made her feel calm and at peace. The saltiness of the air and the dropping of the air pressure made her feel like she was floating in a warm dark sea of tranquillity. This was the most wonderful feeling. Uncertainty dropped away from her like old dead skin drops away from a snake in summertime. Tension and fear sank from her consciousness like metal objects dropped over the side of a boat on the water. She had never felt so decisive, so calm, so courageous in her life. And she'd only been on the island, away from the city, for less than a day. This was truly auspicious. She would return to the city and her life and work there truly renewed...and strong.

As the wind blew stronger, and the surf beat louder to the steady roar of the creek, and the gulls wheeled and screamed, the eagles began to lift into the air and be borne higher and higher on the up-drafts. Effortlessly, eagles rose higher and higher on the wind, wings stretched straight out from the body, finger-like wing-tips guiding their flight. Few eagles remained on the flat rock as the tide ap-

proached it. Suddenly, an impatient flock of crows darted across the beach toward the flat rock. A scout approached the rock with a harsh caw. The two or three adult eagles and a few of their young held their ground. The crow flock swarmed up on the pebbly beach, up-tide of the flat rock. But clearly, their time had come. One by one the eagles lifted off and joined the nearly invisible pride of circling eagles high above the channel, the beach, the trees, the islands. Finally, even the young eagles lifted off and gained the branches of the firs, before wearily striking out for another flying lesson – this time climbing and riding thermals.

Laura Andrade Larsen stayed rooted to the earth around the vine-covered balsam for a long time. The ride finally covered the big flat rock and drove the crows landward. The sun dropped behind the mile-high mountaintops of Vancouver Island and suddenly the earth beneath her felt damp and chill. She arose. She walked along the top of the bluff for a while, catching glimpses of eagles now and then, but evening was coming on and all birds were making preparations. Activity was beginning to slow down. Only the clouds were moving fast now, as a swiftly rising night wind pushed them northward toward the farm.

Laura began walking slowly back toward the farmhouse. There was a ragged but colorful sky at sunset. Smoke curled up off the smoldering pile of boysenberry vines. Red-orange tints in the grey-black cloud bottoms promised strong wind and rain soon. Laura and Hélène had a light dinner, tofu and veggies stir-fried in a wok, and a bottle of good white wine with the meal. After dinner they sat and chatted over the wine.

"I didn't go down to the beach," Laura answered to Hélène's question. "I just stayed up on the bluff and watched the eagles."

"Weren't they magnificent!" Hélène exclaimed. "A few of them flew right over the garden."

Laura did not respond. The experience of the eagles was so powerful and still, so strong and fresh, she didn't want to distill any more of it by talking about it. Instead, she broached the topic of the man she'd recently met in an art gallery, Wiley Moon.

"There hasn't been much between Holgar and me for quite a while now," she said. "He's hardly ever home these days, fishing all year round what with all these new license requirements... and you know Holgar – always out longer and farther than anyone else... and of course, there are no children...."

Laura's voice dropped off.

After a brief silence Hélène picked up the thread of the conversation.

"Are you thinking about having a child with this new man... this Willy...."

"Wiley," Laura said. "No, of course not. I haven't even thought of going to bed with him. Not yet, anyway."

The slight ambiguity implied in the last statement stalled their talk for half a moment. Again, H el ene picked up the thread.

"Is it Holgar then, who's... sterile?"

"We'll never know for sure since he refuses to be tested, but if my tests prove anything, then it isn't me."

"Oh yeah," H el ene giggled. "I can just imagine Holgar Larsen admitting he's sterile. Does he still equate it with impotence?"

Laura laughed a dry laugh. "That's become a factor these days as well. I'm afraid I'm just no longer in love with Holgar, and I'm certain he's no longer in love with me."

"Well. Twenty years together *is* an awfully long time – these days especially."

"Nineteen years. But yes, it is a long time. The last ten years have been especially frustrating. If I hadn't begun painting again, if he, mercifully, wasn't gone fishing so often, I'm sure I'd have gone off the deep end."

The two women sat quietly sipping wine for a few minutes. They had opened the doors of the Fisher wood heater and set the firescreen in place, and they watched the yellow flames lick the black bark of the fir rounds burning inside. Rain and wind could be heard outside the old windows of the farmhouse now, the windows still covered with clear plastic for extra insulation against the chill, damp west coast winters. They watched the fire and listened to the building gale. Finally, Laura spoke.

"I'm thinking about it now," she said softly. "Having a child with Wiley, going to bed with him."

H el ene moved closer to Laura.

"First things first," H el ene said, with a low laugh.

Laura laughed too.



The next day it rained hard and the wind blew gale force all day, occasionally gusting up to storm force. The two women slept in until ten, had another long, leisurely breakfast, and then set themselves to indoor tasks, vacuuming rugs, washing windows, cleaning out overlooked corners, and chasing cobwebs with an old horsehair broom. The power was knocked out for a few hours in the afternoon and for a while the chores took on a memory of the back-to-the-land era of twenty years ago, when some of their friends had moved to these islands and lived in these old farmhouses with kerosene lamps, outhouses and wood-burning cookstoves. But today the kerosene lamp globes held electric light bulbs, the outhouses stored garden tools, and the classic old enameled cookstoves were often little more than heavy, ornamental counter space in a kitchen modernized with a skylight, a juicer and a matching avocado-colored fridge and range set.

By four p.m. the hydro crews had the power on again and H el ene and Laura made tea and sandwiches and then went out for a short

walk in the rain. In the wind-raked, choppy channel, she could see the herring fleet anchored in the lee of a spit on the next island out. There were dozens, perhaps hundreds, of boats. One boat, she noticed, was tending three skiffs, while the others all tended one or two. Laura thought briefly about Holgar Larsen, likely anchored up in the lee of a spit of land himself somewhere, hundreds of miles to the north and west. But she soon pushed that thought from her mind.

Back at the farmhouse, Laura went upstairs to catch the last hour of daylight, to paint, while H el ene stirred up the fire and settled in to read one of her professional journals before making dinner. Laura had a very definite goal in mind. She had her palette out and was mixing paint. There was a very specific color she wanted. It was the orange/rust of the new alder catkins which had caught her eye during her walk with H el ene. The color of the catkins was unique to this time of year, and while not exactly bright, they were striking, especially in contrast with the rain-dulled greens of the fir, cedar and hemlock needles, and the blacks and greys of the trunks, and the grey of the sky.

The buds were the color of new rust, such as one sees on anchor chain or steel deck, in contrast with the dark dried-blood color of older rust, the kind that comes off in large crumbling flakes when hammered. But beyond the rust color, there was an undertone of orange, an orange just suppressed enough to prevent it from leaping out of the branches in an iridescent, glowing, flame-like streak.

How could she reproduce this color, this undertone, this latent energy, in paint?

She had painted many landscapes with alders: winter landscapes of green and grey, when the alders, black oaks and western maples were silver-grey and bare. She had painted the yellow-green alder blossoms in May and their dark green leaves in summer, and the waxy, yellowing leaves of Fall. But these early, early March colors were the most unique, the most interesting and challenging.

She mixed orange and red on her palette and added umber, which made it too dark and dull. She tried a deep orange ochre, then a light yellow ochre, but that still was not right. She mixed in sienna and finally a touch of white. Maybe if she added some real rust...?

The next day it rained again, and the next. One front lined up after another and moved inland from the north Pacific Ocean. The old farmhouse responded to the care and attention given to it by the storm-bound visitors, and its hardwood floors shone, its chrome, stainless steel and enamel surfaces sparkled, and its rugs and carpets bristled.

Finally, the morning dawned with sparking sunshine, calm air, and clear, clean blue sky. Laura and H el ene each drank a quick cup of coffee and went out.

Most of the garden had been planted in rye grass as a winter cover. The big job was to turn it over and rot it for a few days, then compost it. The garden was then manured from a large pile of horse ma-

nure, provided by the two horses the farm kept in the summer, but which were now boarded with some year-round residents on a farm down the road.

Hélène, who had been working in this garden for a few weeks a year for ten years now, would be harvesting the kale and cabbage plants which made it through the mild coastal winter, germinating peas and tomatoes, and transplanting fruit trees and rose bushes to more strategic spots in and around the garden. That left the large bed of rye grass to Laura, and she welcomed the steady routine of shoveling, both the physical exertion and the meditative mindlessness of its pattern. She would be surrounded by sights and sounds, colors and sunlight. She could absorb paintings without thinking about them. She could review thoughts about her art, her marriage and her love life, without being drawn into conflict. She would simply dig in the shovel and turn over the soil. The garden space was large and there would be hours of physical routine. A few hours today, more tomorrow, a full day later in the week.

There was also plenty to see when one rested for a moment from the backbreaking work of gardening. The seine-boat fleet had had its brief opening during the final half day of rain. They had been fortunate, for the wind had died down, and the boats averaged nearly one-hundred tons apiece. At \$2000 per ton, the average crew share worked out to about \$18,000 for less than an hour of fishing. Now the gillnet fleet, fired by dreams of the big buck, restlessly shuffled up and down the channel, waiting for their turn at the spawning herring.

Again, Laura noticed that one boat, a troller, was towing three big aluminum herring skiffs. Again, it caused her to think of Holgar, always bigger, better and more than anyone else. She briefly tried to picture him way up north, but her memory of that country was dim now, and of a different season, and she could picture only his intense, driven sea-blue eyes, and his ruddy features, unyielding and set. Float planes, carrying spotters, fishery officials or cash-bag men, buzzed like angry mosquitoes above the fleet.

Laura had fished for salmon with Holgar during the first five years of their marriage, usually between May and September. In those days salmon trollers circumnavigated Vancouver Island, following the various species of salmon month by month. In May they fished for the big Chinook or "Spring" salmon on the Southwest side of the island, on Swiftsure Bank and LaProuse or "The Big" Bank. In June it was fast trolling for the lively Coho farther up the coast, off Ucluelet and Tofino. In July they wandered far offshore to hit the big schools of "humpies" or Pink salmon. Then, in August, it was back toward the island to troll slowly for the valuable Sockeye. Finally, rounding dangerous Cape Scott as the seasons changed, they trolled down the inside passages for Chum salmon that the fisherman called "dogs."

But Holgar Larsen was a driven man. He changed to gillnet gear in October and fished right into December. Then, after a brief, often

drunken holiday, he dry-docked the boat for a couple of weeks, working like a devil every day until he could set off up North for halibut. Often Laura wouldn't see him, and rarely hear from him for months. Holgar distrusted telephone conversations over the radio-  
phone. "Too many lazy goddamn spies listening in," he would explain. Eventually, Laura quit going out to sea. The romance of sunsets on the blue horizon, of full moons silver on a summer sea, of their brief season of love and pleasure on the gently rolling waves faded like the colors of a salmon tossed into the ice-hold after an hour on deck.

Wiley Moon knew Holgar Larsen only by his reputation as a "hi-liner" and "hard driver." Laura had to smile as she thought of the double meanings in those descriptions. Holgar, especially since joining A.A. five years ago, was nothing if not sober and dull. His tenure as a lover had been perfunctory and uninspired. Perhaps Wiley Moon would be different. After all, he was fun to go out with. He smoked and drank only to get high, he loved dancing to wild jungle rhythms, he seemed to possess boundless energy for....But only time would tell.

Laura again shelved her fantasies and speculations and cast her thoughts and eyes once more upon the sea. The gulls, crows, ravens, eagles, sealions, seals, dogfish, spring salmon and cod, of course, didn't need to wait for an official opening. The water, light green with milt around the beaches, and the air above it, churned with frenzied activity. Clouds and spirals of gulls, and above them, transformations of clouds, were wind-driven across a light blue sky. The spring tides ebbed and flowed as Laura worked, first exposing a wide expanse of mudflat, where gulls, crows, sandpipers and herons patrolled or stalked. Later, the tide rushed back in, small, white-topped combers driving foam and froth across and over the flats, finally dashing themselves on the silvery piles of driftwood on the high-tide line.

Laura passed the week at her simple but rewarding task, the smell of sweat from her body mingling with the spermy smells from the clam flats at low tide, or the herring milt on the high. In the garden, the ordered beds of cultivated soil rose up in place of the dark green cover of rye grass. Robins boldly followed in her steps, snapping up grubs and worms. Grackles hopped over the cover of horse manure searching for seeds. Barn swallows cavorted in the spiraling winds around the farm buildings. Crows chased a raven overhead, and always, eagles soared, flapped or glided high above, or sat, statue-like, watching in the fir tree tops.

Slowly, almost imperceptibly, the colors around her changed. The glowing rust color of the alder catkins that Laura had worked so hard to capture, softened to a light golden green. The fir and balsam buds darkened from their soft light green. Daffodils burst forth brightly yellow, and white and pink fruit tree blossoms were just beginning to show their heads out of their dark cocoons. Down on the beach, the

very slate blue color of the sea became streaked with milky white, as billions of herring sperm drifted up to the shoreline with the flood tide.

Finally, the gillnet opening began and for half a day and on through the night, the whirl and clash of machinery and the flash of spotlights pervaded the farm from the channel. In order to escape the rude intrusion on her peace and privacy, Laura went for a long walk. She followed a trail that led through a stand of evergreen trees and emerged in a large pasture, divided with split cedar rail fencing, between the two farms. Here no noise nor spotlights penetrated. The sky was clear, with no moon, but in the western sky two bright stars, the planets Venus and Jupiter, claimed her attention at once.

Venus shone the brighter; in fact, she was the brightest object in the sky. Jupiter shone a little less brightly, almost directly below Venus. Both planets were so intense in their reflected light that they almost seemed like airplane navigation lights, and for a moment Laura's mind almost expected to see them moving.

Laura found a comfortable spot to sit on the cedar rail fence and scanned the sky. In the east, the Big Dipper was prominent and she could easily track the pointers to Polaris at its station atop the handle of the Little Dipper. Orion the Hunter was in the southwest, and she remembered Holgar telling her about Mintaka, the top star in the hunter's swordbelt, which could be seen in both the northern and southern hemispheres and rose and set, true East and true West on the celestial horizon. Another planet, Mars, could be seen in the south.

The wind was calm and with the year fast approaching the Vernal Equinox, the air was only slightly chill. In her wool Cowichan sweater and toque, Laura was comfortably warm. She stayed in the meadow a long time, thinking, then emptying her mind of thought. A chorus of frogs chirruped incessantly from a nearby pond. In a few short days, as the moon again began to wax, and the winds again began to rise and howl, Laura would again be back in the whirl of city life — telephones, traffic, politics and pollution.

Her time here on the farm with H el ene had been well spent. The garden was started and the next group would find the hard job of soil preparation done and be able to devote their time to planting. Her talks with H el ene had opened doors in her own mind and she was at last able to face certain truths about herself, her marriage and her future life.

She would take steps to divorce herself from Holgar Larsen. She would continue to see her new friend, Wiley Moon. She would continue to pursue her art as a career, not just a hobby. Before turning her back on the western sky and walking back across the pasture and through the forest trail to the farm, Laura Andrade took one last long look at the configuration of Venus and Jupiter.

It was both comforting and inspiring to realize that on this planet, Love and Beauty rose higher and shone brighter than Power and



**Dominance.** Yes, Laura felt, throughout her very soul, I have been renewed.

SUSAN McCASLIN is a poet and instructor of English and Creative Writing at Douglas College. She is the author of four books of poetry: *Locutions*, *Light Housekeeping*, *Veil/Unveil* and *Letters to William Blake*. She is also the editor of the anthology *A Matter of Spirit: Recovery of the Sacred in Contemporary Canadian Poetry*. The following poems are from the manuscript *Issues of Light*.

## Susan McCaslin / Four Poems

### Insert

You try to stuff yourself into a box.  
Your body is stuttering long slow syllables.  
"Dying alive dying alive dying alive  
Attend, attend!"

You peek inside the dream window  
at feet rising and falling in a sea of glass  
from a great distance  
and turn away.

### Mother Dream

Already in your freighted dreams  
you cannot lift yourself,  
your hands are iced lead,  
muscles atrophied, body skeletal.  
You roll and crawl past yourself

while your daughter hears you crying in the night.

Already in your febrile dreams  
you are thirteen and your mother  
(broken, speechless, exactly your age now)  
is being carried away to the mental ward

while you hear yourself crying in the night.

## Disembarrassed

unburdened, undeceived  
 you are actually ok.  
 or if not quite well  
 then not what you thought.

What will you tell your colleagues,  
 supportive and tolerant friends?  
 How will you reimburse your husband  
 for talking your phobias down,  
 holding you in the irremediable dark.

You will have to emerge,  
 assume the usual responsibilities,  
 court your sense of humour.

There was nothing wrong  
 except what might pay a sneak revisit –  
 the usual psychosomatic imbalance  
 that makes you if not normal  
 then as ordinary as  
 humble pie.

There was much wrong  
 and you are mistaken to deny yourself –  
 your body's faithful articulation.

## Christmas Poem

Out of the deer-stepping wild  
 one of the moss-tipped tribe stole  
 wings, swallowed light, flew higher  
 than any had flown from that wood,  
 unbarren, singing, married the land  
 and became bridal sheath, wholly apparent,  
 appavelled, white as a wand,  
 found the babe, unwrapped and parsed her  
 to the world all without dividing  
 a single hair.

LEANNEJ is a Vancouver-based writer and artist. *private languages* #1, #2, #3 are excerpted from a work-in-progress which undertakes to shake up narrative expectations by employing an obsessive compulsive narrator. These pieces are interspersed throughout a book tentatively entitled *The Rape and Desire Cycles*.

## private languages

leannej

number 1

she sits before me, her voice is soft. it whispers from inside her. deep. the voice of the oppressed. it's soft but insistent too. and I don't wanna hear her.

I think of you instead. your face sits behind my face. I see you at night when I'm alone. looking in the mirror I can see you.

she tells me that she's disappearing, and I think she may be right. she seems like she's faded. her edges are less insistent.

I wanna say, tell me. tell me about love. but I know she'll say, love doesn't exist there is only pain.

I hate her when she says this. I wanna scream and tell her how I can see love in the mirror. in my face. scream about how she wants to kill love.

shock, she says is death's preamble. shock is god's benevolence. his greatest act of mercy. it will kill me I know. shock will kill me but I won't feel anything because i'm almost gone. i'm fading away. her voice leaves ragged trails in the silence.

I want to kill her. destroy her completely. and she knows this about me. it's what she wants.

i'm dying, she tells me in her soft feathery voice. her voice that drains all the joy from life. from me. there is no such thing as love, only a gentler kind of pain.

I wanted to tell you I love you but I don't believe in it anymore. I looked at your face that rests behind mine and I told you I hate you.

this is all she's taught me. her legacy. the handful of things she taught me about love. I gather together those three words she taught me and I told you, I hate you. this is all I learned. desire is pain. passion is death. and you can lose yourself and death is disappearing and fading away.

in the distance I can see your face that was once mine walking away with another.

loving her hurts it always has.

## number 2

it is important to remember them together. he's small. soft blue eyes, unlike mine she always said were cold. I picture them separately although I try to put them together. all I ever imagine is 2 pictures with different backgrounds; them both with their sideways eyes, overlapping around the edges; pushed together in an effort to remember them right. his blue eyes sit next to hers, brown. realizing now it wasn't gray eyes she hated after all. they dress in twos. share everything. so I can't figure why I can't remember them right. except for maybe I don't want to. keep trying, but deep deep down don't want to. can't make me.

sick today. 'cause they are separate, even though I have to remember them together. tears in my mouth. why doesn't everybody cry in their mouths? maybe they do and just don't want to say. 'cause then they have to say they want to spit, but nobody but me wants to say. not that's wrong they are together. it's more right than I have remembering them wrong. she's more right than me 'cause of eyes. so tired of eyes today and the world being divisible by two after you subtract me.

want to sleep the whole world away. go to another world where its only factor is me. the weather has been two all day so I'm sick and I want to divide them, so I can remember him separate. I know it's wrong and tomorrow the weather will be different anyway, so all I have to do is count the numbers down. wish I had a special gun to kill time.

all I want is to talk a picture. make somebody else spend a night trying to remember me together. force hard edges to merge, words to hide, so he can't hear me thinking about his fat lip. his form hemmed in. sometimes how I get confused and forget to add one. how a pic-

ture forms around a trembling mouth. a helping hand. all accidents for me not to factor.

## number 3

the car swings around corners over bumps feeling cracks slide beneath the wheels it is going too fast and like her it rides dangerously close to the edges and when she makes me look at her and I have to look because she won't look at the road until I look at her the edges all swing by me they are broken off pieces jagged and sharp inclines like her voice I see her at night all sharp and jagged her face sharp like the edges I see her standing on and I watch her fall forever tumbling over and down so I don't look at her because I know she wants to take me with her

when she touches me my body screams from her touching her touch is a pinch her fingers are vises and I feel her claws digging into me trying to pull me over the edges with her and she blames me tells me I am pain both hers and mine she says she must do the things she does because I force her hand I am the author of the text she traces and arranges over my body the symbols of her hate and her despair and her pain leaking out all over me burning me on her sharp hot letters and I pity her and I think I wish her dead and I wish I was dead but not dead with her I will not rest beside her ripped into eternity forever next to her never

crossing out her words in my mind I print over her words so she can read you are killing me I know I see you but always you pull back because you are afraid you hate my eyes because you can read my eyes telling you I know you are not afraid of yourself you are not afraid of me only you are afraid of them so you wait and arm me for when I get older so I can do the job you are training me to do for you

instead numbers I add the numbers of the addresses the car ca-reens by as you hold the plus sign in your hand that pushes the car forward and the numbers tell me a 3 sits in the back of my mouth filling my cheeks like hot tears held back in 2 eyes and the centre sticks into my throat cutting off the scream you want to hear sucking on 3 I think a 2 rests in my throat I hate 2s because they make you choke on symmetry the symmetry of hands wrapping around my neck strangling me 2 makes it hard to swallow and nothing ever changes with 2s it is one way or the other but everything remains the same it just escalates the problem and it is hard to swallow with 2 in your throat

I must find 7 if I find 7 then you will not drive over the edge like you say you will always I must find 7s and I must find them quickly as you push the engines to the plus sign and the numbers go by faster and faster and I must add them faster and faster 9 helps they are good to me 9s they help me find 7 I find 9 then I can start looking for 7

again I get to start over desperately I count 7s and when I find them unless 9 is there I have to start finding them again they pass by me like signs signs going past me faster and faster as she pushes the plus signs ahead

and I want to grab onto them 7s as they speed past me I want to reach my hand out and grab them but always the plus sign pushes me onward faster and I cut my fingers trying to hold the sharp 7s and it rips my arms from me trying to grab onto the numbers so I must not try to make the numbers stop without 7 she would drive me over the edge the 7s fuel the plus sign keeping us on the lines going forward and around because she is raging and the 8 is twisting and she pushes the plus sign faster and we careen around the edges and she wants me to die and I want to count 7s and I want to suck 3s roll my tongue around 3s and I hate the 2s that stick in my throat and hook my lips together like a fish taking the bait and all the numbers sit in my stomach and I can't eat and sometimes they all come up my throat and I can't speak because the 2s have hooked my lips shut and the numbers are screaming in my ears so loud I can't hear her raging

but always she controls the plus sign and I am locked inside careening around the edges of 8 and I am helpless only 7s keep things moving and they are found and lost and found and lost and 9s help me and 2s hate me they make it hard to add she is a 2 she sits in my throat making things stay the same so nothing changes it just gets worse and all I can do is suck on the sweet 3s and add for 7

will I ever find 7 will it ever stay 7 like signposts passing me around the edges we slide around found and lost and I cannot look back because I will miss counting what has come and when she forces me to look at her 2 eyes I know the last 7 is death the last 7 will be me and her lying shattered at the bottom of the 8 so I must find 7 because I see in her 2 and I see me 1 short plus 1 long forming a 7 from us 2 and she is the 2 her hooking me over the edge

KEMPTON DEXTER is employed as a wood patternmaker. He writes and produces his own plays and musicals. He also performs his own songs with a local band, Hi-rise Dex and the Stellar Jays.

## A Blind Man Couldn't See It

Kempton Dexter

REG TIGHTENED the bandage on his finger and then covered that with a piece of duct tape. "Should do," he said, tucking the edges down meticulously in an effort to keep the dirt out. He then rolled a big wooden cylinder across the workshop floor to the open bay door, stopping just inches away from being outside. Standing on the gray concrete floor, Reg stretched his arms above his head and slowly rocked side to side as he looked out over the black asphalt made wet by the faint drizzle.

The clean-up guy was emptying a sack from the dust collector into a dark blue dumpster stationed near the door. The fine white cloud that puffed up quickly disappeared in the wet air. Reg turned away from the doorway and ran his hand over the interior surface of the cylinder. His finger felt the slight imperfection in the contour of the circle, a little flat here, a little rise there. He peered inside. "A blind man couldn't see it."

The clean-up guy stood by the dumpster and smoked a cigarette. Reg ripped a sheet of sandpaper into quarter pieces. "One, two, three, four," he mumbled and started sanding with his left hand, then his right, then his left again. He thought about his retirement. Hadn't saved much. Didn't have much of a pension. Didn't matter. He didn't need much, he figured. Worse come to worst, he could just keep on workin', part-time maybe, under the table. "Ha." Probably be better off. He smiled.



Just then, he heard a small car pull quickly in behind him. The driver leered out the window and barked, "What happened to the machine shop?"

"What?" Reg said, looking back at the wide and angry eyes of the young man.

"The machine shop, the machine shop," the young fellow demanded.

Reg felt hostility rising inside him toward the stranger. Reg reckoned he was looking for the place next door, the machine shop was about five meters away from him.

"Which one?" Reg responded.

The man focused for a second. "The auto guy, the grinder."

Reg, already bored with the game, pointed with his duct-taped finger. "Next door." He felt the wet air tingle on his face.

"What's with the fucking Hindu?" The clean-up guy grunted and stomped out his cigarette.

Reg ignored him, went back to the cylinder and ran his hands along the interior surface. "Better sand out that flat," he said to himself. He went at it with a piece of 40 grit sandpaper, then 80, and finally 120. In a couple of minutes the flat was blended into the curve of the circle, smooth like the edge of a child's marble or the lip of a cool wet beer bottle. A line sliding back on itself, like the path of the moon around the earth or the earth around the sun.

"When I was a kid, 'bout twelve I guess, we were playin' ball in the school yard. I fell and cut my hand pretty bad. Blood all over the place." Reg waved his arms around, the clean-up guy nodded. "So I go to the washroom to try and clean it up. You know, try to stop the bleeding with some paper towels. Anyway, I was there for quite a while trying to stop the bleeding and the blood just kept on comin' so finally I went up to, you know, the office, and the principal was there, behind the counter, talking to some fella in a long coat. So I'm standing there waitin' for him to notice me prancin' from one foot to the other with this big wad of paper on my hand, but they look at me and just keep on talkin'." Reg rubbed his gray goatee. "I'm there for a long time. Finally, the guy in the long coat leaves and the principal looks at me. So I said," Reg spoke in a timid voice "'You got a Band-Aid?' Well, that's when all hell breaks loose and he starts givin' me shit about how to ask for something. You know, 'May I have a Band-Aid, please, sir.'" Reg shook his head. "What an asshole."

Just then, the sky let loose a violent crash of thunder along with a brilliant flash of lightning. To the right, the clouds were dense and black; to the left the sun shone under the gray clouds, lighting them like frost on a tree. The air was very still. Then it began to rain. Hard. Reg had a strange thought, a question: Does anyone exist solely for the well-being of the world?

The two men stood in silence for a moment, then the clean-up guy spoke. "You should go back there and tell that old principal what you think."

Reg watched the rain bounce off the pavement. He said absently, "Long dead." Then he added, "I was, ah, good buddies with one of his sons; after we grew up, did a lot of drinkin', chasin' women together."

The clean-up guy pushed the shavings from beneath the lathe and Reg started putting hand tools into his toolbox, stopping at the grinder to sharpen a blunt chisel. He yelled across the shop, "I slept with one of his daughters."

"What?"

"I had sex with one of his daughters."

"Excellent." The clean-up guy grinned.

"Yeah." What the hell was her name, Reg thought to himself, somethin' hyphenated: Peggy-Sue, no; Mary-Lynn, no; Betty-Ann. He repeated the name in a low tenor as if announcing a debutante at a grand ball. "Betty-Ann."

The image of Betty-Ann slowly took shape in Reg's mind. He felt elevated, even serene. He was happy. During the rest of his work day, and on the bus ride home to his apartment, he replayed his memories of Betty-Ann. Each time another detail surfaced. He remembered that she had come to visit her brother. They looked like each other; flat noses and full lips, thick black hair and big brown eyes. The gang all went to the bar and everybody had a really good time. He remembered how she casually leaned close to him and said, "I want to sleep with you tonight." Reg laughed now at how he had shrugged his shoulders and said, "Ya, o.k."

On the bus, the other patrons kept their distance from the grinning, dusty man. Trudging up the steep hill toward home, he stopped at a corner store and bought a half-dozen white tulips. He remembered Betty-Ann's thick curly hair snuggled against his coat and their shadows on the snow, going in circles around them as they walked under the street lights. He recalled the narrow bed in his hotel room, the oval mirror on the dresser and the dim light from the antique lamp that he had received for helping somebody move.

Reg unlocked the door to his apartment and put the tulips into a tall water glass. He stripped off his dirty clothes and stepped into the shower. The soapy water ran through the coarse, gray hair on Reg's chest. Betty-Ann had been young and smooth and soft; his beautiful hands had held her large breasts and her brown eyes had looked up at him.

"I'm on my period," she said apologetically.

"That's o.k.," he replied.

Betty-Ann brightened. "A lot of guys don't like it."

"I don't mind. In fact, it's better."

Reg sat at his table and stared at the tulips. He ate some supper. Outside, the evening sun shone on a sparkling wet world. There was the sound of a train rolling across the bridge that spanned the river. He and Betty-Ann had danced to some record he couldn't remember the name of. They had kissed, long and passionately.

Reg reached to touch the petals of the tulips. His hands felt numb. The Band-Aid was still there on his finger and he peeled it off. "Hat fa well," he said. Reg had wanted to say, "What the hell," but that's not what came out of his mouth. He stood up, but felt a little dizzy. He went and lay on his bed.

Betty-Ann had sat cross-legged at the end of the bed. She had playfully taken off Reg's pants and shorts and thrown them across the room. She cradled Reg's hips in her lap; her nipples brushed across his balls and his cock sprang rigid. "Wow, such a big one." She smiled and gripped him with both hands. Then she straddled him. Her short, strong fingers carefully spread herself open. With her free hand, she guided the tip of Reg's penis from the bottom of her vagina toward her clitoris. Her pussy lips furrowed as the plow of Reg's shaft bowed into her. The heat exploded electrically as she took him in and slid down until their groins thumped together. Their bodies recoiled. Reg was rammed deep into her. The tone of a giant bell rang in his head.

Reg looked at the clock on the dresser. "We came together," he said. He remembered Betty-Ann releasing him. Rich, red blood smeared her thighs. Streams of dark blood curved down the trembling shaft of Reg's cock. The last of his cum squirted translucent puddles on them. They laughed as he followed her into the wash-room.

Something was happening deep inside Reg's weary old head, down through the labyrinths of veins and arteries and capillaries, in the ancient part that wants to dance when you hear music or spit when something tastes bad. It was blood, red and dark, pumping from a series of ruptures along the basilar artery, seeping into the space between his brain and the back of his skull. Like a cup being filled with ruddy Hungarian wine, it rose and weaved its way through the groves of gray.

Reg's right arm twitched a bit, he grunted a couple of times. The right side of his face stiffened and, quietly and slowly, as if it were a secret, his breathing stopped. The blood receded a fraction. The electrical charge of his nervous system fizzed like bubbles in a glass of pop.

Nothing was happening in the whole of Reg's being except for a little spot in the upper front right lobe of his cerebral cortex. Here the light of the moon fell through the window, across the room and onto Betty-Ann's smiling face. Her beautiful fleshy breasts pillowed the engorged purple head of Reg's great erection. Betty-Ann's big watery eyes twinkled like clusters of stars in the Milky Way as she took Reg into her warm, wet mouth. Reg sighed deep and low; he whispered the truest words he had ever spoken.

"Oh baby, you are somethin' else, you're really somethin' else."

JAY HAMBURGER is Artistic Director of *Theatre in the Raw*. He has put on plays in New York City and Vancouver.

## A Good Play is Hard to Find

Jay Hamburger / Ernest Hekkanen

THE JUDGES of the First Annual One-Act Play Writing Contest co-sponsored by **Theatre in the Raw** and *The New Orphic Review* are pleased to announce that the winner is Mark Harris — for his play *Endserious*.

It is an interesting coincidence that *Endserious* has been chosen. **Theatre in the Raw** had just completed over six months of work on Samuel Beckett's two-act tragicomedy *Waiting for Godot*, performed at two different venues in the Lower Mainland. The work was a fascinating journey into the world of one of the great avant-garde writers of the 20th Century. Now came along a short one-act that read like an afterthought on the late playwright's life — in the form of a lightbulb, SB, that is flickering and ready to "wink out." So we were on somewhat familiar territory, to say the least.

Mark Harris' *Endserious* is a short, poetic, informative drama about the late Samuel Beckett and the mystique that has, over the years, developed around the life of that world-renowned writer and his marriage to Suzanne Dumesnil. The fact that Mark has written a play to be performed by two speaking lightbulbs is quite innovative. It fits well into **Theatre in the Raw's** one-act series of "unusual, awakening and exchanging" dramas.

Harris concludes his short play with the line, "I can't go on," uttered by the lightbulb SB. It is familiar territory to anyone who

knows Beckett's work and a good way to conclude a one-act looking for an "in league" Beckettian ending.

As an added note, Bob Baker and Paul Ribeiro's *Bloodless Coup/Cold Office Politics* has been given an Honourable Mention. It deals with office politics and the effects of ruthless, maniacal competition.



I chose *Endserious* for a number of reasons; it demonstrated an intelligent understanding of the genre and the constraints inherent in the contest rules; it was witty, a good parody, a good send-up of Samuel Beckett and the form of drama that he helped to develop. Also, I enjoyed the use of artifice.

Too many of the plays sent into the contest failed because the playwrights obdurately refused to comprehend the most basic thing about play writing. Many of the playwrights who entered the contest should return to play-writing class 101 and take note that the engine which drives a play *is* conflict, and that the actions and the dialogue must bring the play to a climax — one that is the result of the way the characters rub against one another as they work out the issues and tensions between them.

Also, when an author chooses to enter a contest he or she should endeavor to observe the rules of that contest. If the contest rules specify that the play be thirty minutes in length, the playwright shouldn't send in a play that runs forty-five minutes to an hour. If the contest rules specify that the script be double-spaced, the playwright should do so. If the contest rules specify six or fewer characters, a playwright shouldn't submit a play with a cast of thousands that even Cecil B. De Mille would have trouble producing.

There seems to be an obdurateness at large in the literary and artistic communities. Form seems to be despised. To express oneself, even very poorly, seems to be the rule of the day. And yet, form transmits meaning; it gives shape to the content of a story or play or poem. A grocery list is not a piece of literature; characters who utter the word "fuck" over and over again are not engaging in dialogue; talking heads do not make good drama; pointless conversations contribute to little more than boredom, and the killing of a character, or a set of characters, is not necessarily a significant act.

We think it would be wise for our burgeoning playwrights to learn a little something about drama prior to writing a play. Hell, they might even read a play or two before trying to write one.

MARK HARRIS is a Vancouver playwright and winner of the first annual one-act play writing contest co-sponsored by *Theatre in the Raw* and *The New Orphic Review*.

# Endserious

*A Play for Two Lightbulbs*

Mark Harris

*[Two lightbulbs dangle from naked wires. Both flicker as if preparing to wink out. One represents Samuel Beckett, the other Suzanne Dumesnil.]*

SB: I'm dead.

SD: Is that a fact?

SB: Almost. But not quite. Not quite dead. No. Let me rephrase that. This time it's for real. Dead means dead. Dead is as dead does.

SD: But what does death do?

SB: Nothing. Death is like life...only more so.

SD: Is death like the womb then?

SB: In memory yet bleak. Darkness and desolation.

SD: So I take it you're in pain.

SB: Take it. *Do*. I'd be happy if someone — anyone — could save me from this excruciation. But no one can.

SD: You *are* in pain. As bad as before you were born?

SB: Probably not. On the other hand, the world *is* darker. I seem to remember...hints of colour.

SD: Is darkness total then?

SB: No. I see shapes moving like giant tortoise shells. Humps. Clots of matter.

SD: And what are these things?

SB: The confirmation of my deepest fears. That nothing is nothing entirely. That everything is almost nothing. Oblivion, yes...but not quite.

SD: So you're not a total nihilist then.

SB: Almost, yes. But a hundred per cent? No.

SD: And yet by most standards your life was uncommonly successful.

SB: By whose standards?

SD: By those of the world. Your family was well off. Your education first rate. You spoke many languages. Dublin was your first home, Paris your second.

SB: Paris was my only home.

SD: How can you say that?

SB: Because of my father's death. Because of my mother's snobbery. Because of my family's insistence that I select a profession appropriate to my class. Because of the black farce of Eamon De Valera's incense-scented censorship. Even so, I did not *choose* to emigrate. I did not choose – I fell. I did not fall – I was pushed. I was not pushed but physically expelled from the black womb of Ireland.

SD: And yet, and yet. James Joyce employed you as his secretary. Women were drawn to you in your youth – many women. One of whom stayed with you for half a century after you'd been knifed. In a street brawl. She picked you up off the cobblestones. She nursed you back to health. Such loyalty you inspired. How could your life have been more full? Your college track records

still stand. The Nobel Prize hung on your wall and the *Croix de Guerre* swung from your left tit. Buster Keaton begged to star in the screen version of one of your slightest works. You kept your looks all your life. You weren't fat for even a single day, damn you. And yet you *whined* — no! That is neither fair nor accurate. You did many things, but you never whined. Your eyes were too eager to drink in fresh horrors, your fingertips too willing to probe the gangrenous depths of sores. And then again, it was not your private doom you lamented, but our common fate. In spite of everything, you were a sort of bodhisattva living long to set us free.

SB: That's a damned lie.

SD: Why do you say that? Because you did not succeed?

SB: Yes. [*More bitterly.*] And for other reasons.

SD: Nevertheless, you did try.

SB: So what? I tried without hope.

SD: Are you trying to say you acted out of vanity?

SB: No. Not even that.

SD: Amazing. I wish I had more initiates like you.

SB: Why? You're just a fragment of my own shattered consciousness. A splinter doomed to further disintegration. In entropy is all. Deliverance will come only after the last cornerstone has been prised loose from the last wall, and the universe's last load of bricks falls groaning into the self-swallowing maw of time and matter.

SD: A man after my own heart. I think I'm going to send you back.

SB: Back? You haven't the power.

SD: I have. I stand guard at the gates of your outer hell. Your inner hells you already know like the scars on the back of your hand.

SB: I have no hands. Not any more. No hands. Anyway, the only gates I acknowledge are the orifices of my own body, and those gates have been closed forever.



SD: Your refusal to acknowledge my existence does not disturb me in the least. Given a choice, I too would prefer the void. Non-existence is better than being.

SB: And yet you would prolong my suffering.

SD: *Pas du tout!* In fact, your fate inspires envy. Before a garment can be taken off, it must first be put on. I'm sending you back to experience joy.

SB: I'm afraid that's a bit beyond me.

SD: Not if you were born in the slums of Calcutta. Not if your father mutilated you at birth to guarantee your future as a fingerless beggar. For most people, that would be the worst thing that could happen to them – but you're not most people, Samuel. For you, this dire fate would finally give you the chance to invest a little laggard pity in your own wounded self.

SB: Sue...Suzanne?

SD: *Oui, mon pote. C'est moi.*

SB: *Mais qu'est ce que tu fous ici?*

SD: *Comme tu vois.*

SB: *Mais pas dans la chair. Christ....*

SD: Well, you're not the only one who's dead, you know. Even though it seems like only yesterday that I got off my bike to check your pulse.

SB: It was in 1938....You got off your bike in 1938.

SD: So for once you remember a date. How perverse. On earth you pretended to be timeless.

SB: I don't have to pretend any more.

SD: No, you don't. And I'm still picking you up off the sidewalk. *C'est bizarre, non? C'est comme un cauchemar, version éternel retour. De temps en temps, il me semble que nous sommes piégés dans un sorte de satanique circuit circulaire.*

SB: God – or rather His absence – forbid. I made you suffer enough while I was alive.

SD: Do you really believe my life would have been a bed of roses if the two of us had never met, old friend? If the answer is yes, I seriously suggest you re-read your own books. Pain exists for everyone. Nevertheless, there were hints of beauty, weren't there? Echoes of love.

SB: Yes. I rather expect there were.

SD: Expecting is no longer good enough, Samuel. Now you've got to *know*.

SB: Don't make me do this, Suzanne. *Please*.

SD: Neither of us has much choice in these matters, I'm afraid. You of all people should know that.

SB: I do. Only this is even worse than I'd feared.

SD: Debts must be paid off. Things must be worked out. I'm afraid there's no way around that.

SB: "It can't be helped. It must be done. So down with your pants, and out with your bum...."

SD: Something like that. Yes.

SB: Is my sentence fixed then?

SD: How the hell should I know? I haven't been dead that long myself.

SB: You know, if I could annihilate myself, once and for-bloody-always, I bloody well would!

SD: I know you would, my dear. Millions wouldn't, but you're you. You long for peace...for sleep unbroken. And all I can offer you is a sliver of hope. I have it on the best authority that the effect of purging yourself completely is much the same as dreamless death.

SB: I can't go on. I mean it. I *can't*.

SD: [*Laughing*] Now you're starting to sound like one of your own creations. You must go on, Samuel. You *must*.

SB: I can't go on. I *won't* go on. I – [*Sighing heavily*] I will.

*[The lightbulbs sputter out. Two large photographs of Samuel Beckett and Suzanne Dumesnil emerge from the darkness. Curtain.]*

ERNEST HEKKANEN is Editor-in-Chief of *The New Orphic Review*.

## ARMS LIKE COILED SERPENTS

Ernest Hekkanen

LUCY GLICK leaned toward her reflection in the bathroom mirror, scrutinizing the remains of a pimple she hoped wouldn't show through the flesh-toned makeup she had dabbed among the remaining hairs of her plucked eyebrow. She felt slightly faint, slightly giddy, due to her diet of six hundred calories a day, and now along with that, her stomach was getting fluttery in anticipation of Jake's visit. Right now, he would be leaving the Muscle Factory. His arms would be pumped up from lifting weights and there would be this glow to his skin from doing a slow sizzle in the sauna. If ever she had known a man to be vain about his body, it was Jake Banner. After making love he would hop out of bed and start striking poses at the full-length mirror he had bought to put on her bedroom wall. She would watch his muscles bulge and writhe, yearning for him to come back to bed and coil his arms around her so tightly she would feel like a small animal in the grip of a python.

It took her breath away to be held like that, her breasts crushed against his chest, her stomach swelling against his hard, armor-plated midsection. Her heart would hardly have room to beat. She would get a constricted feeling in her throat, as if at any moment she might faint, just swoon right away in a pink, sensuous haze.

Pushing herself away from the mirror, she observed her overall reflection. Now that she had a definite waistline, she no longer had to

hide her midriff with blouses that made her look perpetually pregnant. She didn't consider herself to be a ravishing beauty, but she did consider herself to be pleasant to look at, her most attractive feature being her eyes, which someone had once described as bedroom eyes. Her mouth struck her as a little too narrow and she was dissatisfied with her chin, which struck her as too sharp. Also, despite the dieting and the firming pats she regularly gave her chin, she could not seem to get rid of the small pouch that hung there. It stayed there as if to remind her of the plump butterball she had once been, prior to losing almost fifty pounds.

The past twenty-three weeks of dieting had been fraught with temptations. She worked as a clerk at Shopper's Drug Mart and the check-out area was a veritable mine field, only rather than being booby-trapped with explosives it was booby-trapped with all kinds of sweet things to eat. The same went for the surrounding mall, with all those fast food outlets, the Viennese Bakery and the Brussels Chocolate Shop. It had been a veritable act of courage, walking into Safeway and confining herself to the produce section. There were times when she had felt like a caterpillar looking for edible leaves. But her steadfast refusal to put fattening foods in her mouth had paid off. She had lost nearly fifty pounds and she liked the new her that she saw in the mirror.

When she had started showing signs of dropping weight, Jake had been a little sad. "But Lucy, I won't have anything to grab," he had said. "How am I gonna get a hold on you if you lose all your love handles?"

"Don't you want me to be nice and trim?"

"I guess losing a little weight is alright. But don't go slimming down so much I won't have anything to squeeze, 'cause I like your squeezey parts."

His comment had struck her as a little odd. After all, he was so sleek and muscular, without an ounce of fat anywhere on him. Before her diet she had found it hard to observe her bulging figure. After taking a bath she had avoided looking at herself in the mirror until she had wrapped a towel around her body. When men had looked at her, it had always been with snide cruelty that made her feel as if she were a close relative of the slug. Now she felt worthy of being desired. It made her feel good about herself. But as the pounds had melted away she had begun to notice a change in Jake, almost as if he regretted seeing all those hideous pounds disappear. Then, last week, right after making love to her, he had expressed regret about the size of her breasts.

"My god, Lucy, what's happened to your tits? There's hardly anything for me to cup in my hand."

"I guess they were mostly fat."

"Well, at least you haven't lost your double chin. At least that's still there," he had said, kissing her neck. His mouth closed wetly

around the pouch below her chin. He began to hum, making her flesh tingle right down to her clitoris.

"Jake, stop it. Stop it," she had said, dragging her fingernails across his back.

"You know, I like it when you get a little bit angry. Your eyes cross and you look like such a clown."

"Get off me, Jake Banner."

"Why?"

"Because I said so..."

Jake gave her a couple of wet, sloshy thrusts with his half-hard penis, hopped out of bed and started posing at the mirror again. His penis was all swollen and red. It wagged like a dog's tail, only more awkwardly. In a little while it would shrink to the size of one of those Vienna sausages that came in those zip-top aluminum cans and would hardly be noticeable in his red pubic hair.

"Do you know what I think, Jake?"

"No, what?"

"I think I'm just one more way for you to get some exercise. That's what I think."

Jake was posing with his hands behind his head. His latissimus dorsi fanned out on either side. His back muscles corded down to hard, tight buttocks. He glanced at her in the mirror.

"What makes you think that?"

"The way you jump out of bed right after you've come. Anybody would think you were trying to build up the size of your penis."

"Wouldn't you like it if it was a lot bigger?"

"That isn't the point. The point is, you're using me like some exercise machine. At least that's the impression I get sometimes."

"Oh, come on, Lucy. You know that isn't true."

"Then why don't we ever go out anywhere?"

"We do. I took you to the Dairy Queen just the other day."

"Yeah, to have a sundae. You know I can't eat that sort of stuff anymore. I'm on a diet."

"Well, that's your problem, pudding lump. I never asked you to lose all that weight."

"But I thought you'd like me to be nice and trim?"

"Well, if you ask me, I think you should put on some of those pounds you lost. You're getting so you're not much more than a shadow, and shadows can't be held, can't be squeezed."

He turned to pose sideways in the mirror, his hands gripping one another behind his buttocks, his chest bulging, his stomach ribbed like a washboard. By now his penis had shrunk down to the size of a fifteen cent Pink Pearl eraser. He frowned at it in disapproval.

"My mother must've thrown an awful fear into me when I was a baby," he said. "I mean, look at my thing. It's the only muscle I can't seem to bulk up. It steadfastly refuses to get any bigger."

Lucy heard what sounded like a car door slam down in the parking lot. Thinking it might be Jake, she switched off the bathroom light, hurried down the hall, crossed the living room and bounded out onto the balcony. It was the height of summer. Kids were playing in the parking lot, taking turns riding skateboards down an incline. She had parked her Honda Civic on the street so Jake could use her parking stall.

When she looked down over the balcony rail, she expected to see Jake climbing out of his black '67 Mustang. She half raised her arm to wave at him, then she noticed it was somebody else's car, a blue Chrysler with a white top. The driver had silver hair and black-rimmed glasses. He was stretching in a manner that suggested he had been cooped up in the car a long time. A woman of the same vintage was getting out on the passenger side, displaying the rounded shoulders of somebody who was truly overweight.

"Excuse me," Lucy shouted. "You're in my parking spot."

The man looked up at her. "I didn't see any car parked here. Looked free to me, so I used it."

"Listen, I pay for that spot," she told him. "There's a number on the curb, right under your front bumper. That number is mine."

"Well, you should have had your car parked here, then."

"I don't have to have my car parked there every minute of every day. That spot belongs to me, and I would appreciate it if you moved your car. I have a visitor coming."

"We're visitors, too, and we won't be here very long. Isn't that right, peaches?"

His wife's face looked puffy to the point of being unhealthy. She craned her neck, looking up at Lucy with eyes that resembled dark olives. Lucy realized, with a sudden taste of disgust, that she could be the spitting image of that woman, if she didn't stick to her diet. Her face hardened into a burl. She looked down at the woman as if she were a large, ugly insect.

"All we want to do is drop some stuff off at our daughter's place," the woman said, shading her eyes with a plump, freckled hand. "That's not too much to ask, is it?"

Lucy felt herself relenting, despite her disgust. "I guess not. But try to hurry, please. My friend will be here any minute."

Twenty minutes later, the blue Chrysler was still sitting in her parking stall and Jake had yet to arrive. Lucy turned off the oven so the lasagna she had baked for him wouldn't get too crisp on top. She plopped herself down on the sofa and drew her feet up under her, a small spot of annoyance taking up residence just behind her breast bone. On the coffee table next to a white bowl of fruit stood a plaster sculpture that Jake had given her when she had complained about not seeing him frequently enough. He had told her it was the replica of a Greek god, one sculpted in marble a long, long time ago. It would keep her company when he wasn't around. The frothy-haired

young man stood with his right hand dangling at his thigh. His other hand was gripping the end of a sling that dangled over his shoulder.

Jake was anything but Greek. He had a shock of red hair and pale, freckled skin that suggested his ancestors might have come from Scotland. She had met him at the mall where he worked as a security guard. All day he walked around the mall, popping into various stores, trying to look official in his brown uniform with the glossy-billed cap. That's how she had met him. He would come through the check-out line at the Shopper's Drug Mart around eleven o'clock nearly every day, two or three candy bars clutched in his hand. One morning he had asked her what she was doing for lunch.

"Nothing special," she had said. "I thought I'd go to the deli. Have a sandwich and some soup."

"How would you like to have lunch with me? My treat."

It was the first time she had ever been asked out to lunch. Her jaw had hung slack with amazement. A flush had seared her cheeks.

"Well?"

She was so tongue-tied she could hardly speak. "I guess that would be fine. Sure. I get off in forty-five minutes. Is that too late for you?"

"No, it's just fine. I just have to keep an eye on things while I'm eating, is all." He patted the walkie-talkie on his belt. "You see, I never know when I might get a call. An emergency, you know. Usually, it's somebody trying to steal something."

Over lunch, he told her how he had been going through the lineup at the Shopper's Drug Mart in order to get close enough to admire her.

"Me?" she had said in disbelief, getting so warm inside her clothes she felt uncomfortable. "You wanted to get close enough to admire me?"

"You make it sound like it's some sort of crime?" he said.

"Well, I'm hardly what you'd call a bathing beauty, you have to admit that?"

"You've got nice-looking eyes. They're very sensitive, like you could care a lot about the right guy if he ever came along. I mean, if you really wanted to, that is."

She demured. "You can tell that just from my eyes?"

"Yeah. Eyes tell you everything you have to know about a person. Didn't you know that?"

"That's very flattering."

They were sitting near the front of the deli, looking across the courtyard of the mall at the Selco and the Twin Cinemas. A red Subaru was being raffled off in support of the Lung Association. After lunch they traipsed over to where the Subaru was on display. Jake bought a couple of raffle tickets, putting her name and address on one of them.

"I see that new Stallone film is playing," he said. "How would you like to take it in tonight?"



"I don't care for his films."

"You don't!" he said, expressing shock. "I think they're great. I'd like to do what he's doing. That's why I'm building up my body, and taking karate. I don't wanna be a security guard forever."

"How about going to that African one with Meryl Streep?"

"I can't stand Streep. She's such a high-minded bitch, such a prissed-up doll." Suddenly he smiled, in a manner that imitated Stallone. "But, sure, I'll go to the one you like. After all, I'm taking you out, not the other way around."

After the movie she let him drive her home, even though her Honda was parked in a corner of the mall's parking lot. She was so nervous she had to look twice through her handbag before she was able to find her keys. She invited him in for coffee and a slice of chocolate cake that she had baked on the weekend and he was quick to accept.

"So do you live here all by yourself?" he asked.

"Another girl was sharing it with me, but she was working at a bank and got transferred to another city. How about you?"

"I live with my mother."

"You do?"

"Yeah, but it's not what you think. I rent the basement. She and my sister live upstairs. I kind of look after them." He lowered his head, as if ashamed. "My old man took off when I was real young and I don't feel like leaving them in the lurch."

"That's awfully kind of you."

"Yeah, I guess I'm that kind of guy. How about you?"

"I haven't done anything that's worth mentioning, really. I just go to work at the drugstore. I was taking some ceramic classes, but I found out that I was allergic to something in the clay, so I had to give that up."

"I want to get into movies," he said. "You can make a lot of big bucks doing that. I was in one already. You know, as an extra."

"Was it exciting?"

"Naw, it was a lot of standing around. But you could see me on the screen. For about five seconds, anyway."

Half an hour later, he jumped to his feet and said he had to go.

"How about if we take in that Stallone movie tomorrow night? Would you like to do that?"

"I guess that would be alright. Sure."

Later she took the bus down to the mall to pick up her car. It was a little after eleven o'clock. Her Honda was one of the few cars left in the lot. She had barely slammed the door shut, when Jake's black Mustang came roaring into view, a red beacon flashing on the roof. Jake fishtailed the Mustang so it came up alongside her Honda. He grinned at her through the open window, like a red-haired monkey. Her first impulse was to slide down into the seat and try to hide. Instead, she rolled down her window and returned his smile.

"I thought it was you," he shouted over the rumble of the Mustang. "Why didn't you tell me your car was parked here?"

"I know. It was kind of stupid, wasn't it?"

"Are you headed somewhere?"

"Back home. I didn't want to have to take the bus tomorrow morning. People look so mean, you know."

"I'll escort you." He reached to take the flashing beacon off the roof of the Mustang. His face glowed eerily before returning to its natural pale color. "Actually, what I just did is illegal. You can't imitate police vehicles. But I like throwing a little scare into people, especially those old buggers who drive all over the road, hogging it to themselves. And tailgaters. I hate tailgaters."

Jake followed her all the way back to the apartment complex. When she signaled that she was turning right into the parking lot, he flashed the Mustang's headlights, honked the horn and sped on by. A couple of weeks later, after having sex at her place, he confessed to knowing about her car.

"I figured you'd return for it."

"How did you know I had a car?"

"Let's just say I did my surveillance," he said, crawling out of bed and flexing his muscles. "You know what you need in here is a mirror. A mirror would really add to things."

"Do you really think so?"

"Oh yeah, it's really great making love in front of a mirror. Believe me."



An hour later, when the blue Chrysler vacated Lucy's parking spot, there was still no sign of Jake. She put the oven on warm so the lasagna wouldn't cool off completely. She was worried that Jake might have gotten into an accident. Sometimes after working out at the Muscle Factory, he was kind of wild and full of himself. Occasionally, he would sweep her up in his arms and carry her off to the bedroom before they had even said hello.

A couple of times she wasn't able to get out of her dress fast enough. He had simply pulled it up over her waist and stuck his swollen member in through the leg hole of her panties and pumped away until he had come. Usually, he was good for at least a couple of bouts of love-making. It was the second session that she looked forward to, when his frenetic, nervous energy had burned itself off.

"Some days all I can think about is coming over here," he had told her. "Right in the middle of the mall, this little fellow of mine will start getting big. I have to walk around with my hands in my pockets to hide the fact that I've got a hard-on."

"You're kidding."

"No, I'm not. All I have to do is think about you, and up he comes."

Once, after making love, he had confided to her something he had done in his youth. He would pull his penis through a toilet tissue tube and tie it off at the end and go to sleep that way, visualizing his penis getting larger by morning.

"I didn't want huge results, not right away. I just wanted a series of little results that would eventually add up to something. My mom got suspicious, though. She started asking me where all the toilet tissue tubes were vanishing to."

"What did you tell her?"

"I told her I was saving them in order to make a rocket. In a way I was, you know, so I wasn't really lying."

Lucy had seen his mother only once and that had been at the Shopper's Drug Mart. He had come through the lineup with her. She was a thin, frail woman with a menopausal mustache. She had purchased a carton of cigarettes and some sulfa drugs. She had this incredibly low, gravelly voice, almost like a man's. Jake had been embarrassed being with her, but he had done his best to cover it up with a lukewarm introduction.

The next time Jake had come to see her, Lucy was having her period. They sat around on the couch and talked. Lucy mentioned his mother, how unwell she seemed. Immediately Jake's expression became rather distant.

"I don't wanna talk about my mother," he said.

"Why not?"

"Because I don't. That's why."

But the previous Sunday, when he had come over to see her, all he could do was talk about his mother. She had accused him of taking money out of her purse to buy gas for his car. He had been so upset by it he couldn't sit still even for a moment. He kept pacing the living room, thrashing his arms around.

"Do you know what she used to make my sister and me do? She used to make us sleep with her when she was lonely. I can still remember lying there in the dark, hating the smell of the cigarette smoke."

"That sounds perfectly understandable."

"Once she rolled over and her hand fell on my you-know-what. You know, right on it. I started getting this funny feeling in my balls, then my prick started getting big. It made me feel creepy, you know, so I tried to make my prick small again. You know, with my will. By using my mind. I think that's why I have such a little prick today."

"It isn't that small, Jake."

"You haven't seen as many pricks as I have. I mean, in locker rooms and stuff. Guys used to laugh at mine. In high school I was known as the Pink Gherkin. I hated it."

He slumped down onto the couch, his shoulders sagging, looking dejected. She put her arms around his shoulders, trying to cradle him. He pulled away, giving her a strange, almost frightened look.

"Why did you have to lose so much weight, Lucy? I liked you a lot better when you were plump."

"How could you? I was so fat, so ugly!"

"Yeah, but I used to love to bury my face in your tits. Now you've hardly got any boobs at all."

"Jake, are you picking on me because of your mother?"

He became awfully quiet. Then, suddenly, he got up from the sofa.

"I think I better go," he said.

He marched toward the door. She flew after him, stopping him in the hallway. "Jake?"

"Yeah."

"Why don't you stay here tonight? I could fix you breakfast in the morning."

"Gee, that'd be great. I have to work out, though. Down at the Muscle Factory. I can't miss my training. I'd go nuts if I did."

Rising to the balls of her feet, she draped her arms around his neck and kissed him.

"You know, Lucy, you're too good for me. You really are."

She winked. "Come back tonight. I'll be even better."

That night, there was an edge of cruelty to his love-making. He insisted on doing it doggie style. She remembered looking up and seeing him in the full-length mirror. He was wearing his impenetrable Stallone-look, as if he might haul out a handgun and plug somebody. The next morning she found bruises where he had clutched her hips. She felt a little disturbed and repulsed by them, without exactly knowing why.



Lucy turned off the oven and put the lasagna on the counter to cool. It smelled so delicious she decided to have a little bite. The first spoonful led to a second and a third. Only when her stomach began to feel really bloated did she come out of the trance she was in — to find that she had consumed half the lasagna.

When she realized what she had done she fled to the bedroom, flung herself down on the bed and wept into her pillow. Fifteen minutes later, she sat up and dried her eyes. Rather than soothing her, rather than releasing her to the warm glow of spent emotions, her sobbing had filled her with resolve. She went to the living room, sat down beside the telephone and dialed Jake's number.

After several rings it was answered by a gravelly voice that Lucy recognized as his mother's. "The Banner residence. What can I do for you?"

"This is Lucy. Lucy Glick. May I speak to Jake, please?"

"Jake's not in."

"Do you know when he'll be back?"

"No, I don't, honey."

"Could you tell me when he left?"

"I can't tell you that, either. He was gone when I got home from work."

"When he comes back would you tell him to call me?"

"Sure. What did you say your name was?"

"Lucy. Lucy Glick."

The fact that his mother didn't recognize her name suggested to her that Jake never talked about her — not to his mother, anyway. For nearly an hour she paced the floor, working herself into a fit of anger that she intended to release on him when he showed up at her door. She was going to let him know exactly how she felt — that he wasn't serious about being in a relationship with her. She was going to give it to him with both barrels.

By ten-thirty, she had reached the conclusion that Jake wasn't coming over, that he wasn't ever going to return her phone call. Fuming, she went to bed. She thrashed around, unable to fall soundly asleep. Around two o'clock in the morning she switched on the lamp beside the bed and tried to read a *People* magazine she had picked up at the drugstore. However, she was too upset to make sense of the words. Her gaze kept wandering back to her reflection in the full-length mirror. She recalled certain sex acts they had performed in front of it. It made her furious to think she had engaged in them.

By morning, she was in terrible shape. She had slept only about an hour at the most. Her eyes were beet red and she had a headache. Although angry, she knew what she was going to do. She was going to wait for Jake to come through the lineup at the Shopper's Drug Mart and she was going to blast him right there in front of everybody. However, by noon, he had yet to appear, so she went looking for him.

When she spotted him near the Twin Cinemas she stopped in her tracks. Jake was walking away from her. He had his right arm draped around the waist of a woman who, judging from the red and black smock, worked for Selco. Lucy figured the woman had to weigh three hundred pounds if she weighed an ounce. Her rear end was so large it rolled back and forth in slow motion.

When Jake and the woman reached the Selco Department Store, Lucy saw Jake do something he had done to her on several occasions, something which had annoyed the hell out of her. He crossed in back of the woman, poking the smock into the crease of her buttocks. Instantly, the woman yanked the smock out of her crease, scolding him with a nasty but endearing look. Jake sailed off on a tangential course, laughing good-naturedly.

A moment later, Jake noticed Lucy standing in the middle of the mall, watching him. Rather than going up to him and letting him have it with both barrels, she turned and walked away, totally disgusted by him. At the drugstore she asked to be let off for the rest of the day, claiming she was coming down with a flu and didn't want to pass it on to customers. All the way home she kept picturing what

Jake had done to the fat woman. Somehow it seemed to sum up their entire relationship. All he had really wanted was a fat, ugly woman who would put up with his behavior. She wasn't going to be that person any more. She was pleasing to look at after losing all that weight and she was going to remain that way.

When she unlocked her apartment door and found herself in the muted light of the living room, she felt so alone she could hardly endure it. All she wanted was to have a pair of strong arms coiled around her, squeezing her so tight her heart would flutter like a small bird in her chest. In her peripheral vision, she spotted the statue that Jake had given her. It was standing on the coffee table, staring at her knees with a cocky, confident air.

"You bastard," she said, snatching up the statue and heading to the bedroom. She hurled the miniature David at the full-length mirror. The head broke off the shoulders. Veins rippled across the mirror, like forked lightning caught in glass.

Later that evening, the telephone began to ring. It rang and rang and rang. When she picked up the receiver and said hello, Jake's voice came back over the line. She hung up the receiver and pulled the cord out of the jack, then she smiled at herself in the broken mirror, feeling as though she had reclaimed her soul. She knew then that she would be alright.