

The New Orphic Review

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Nelson

Canada

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ISSN 1480-5243

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

EDITORIAL AND BUSINESS OFFICE:

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

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

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SUBSCRIPTIONS PER YEAR (2 ISSUES)

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

Individual issues \$17.50 CAD or USD as applicable.

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

706 Mill Street Nelson, British Columbia V1L 4S5 Canada

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ERNEST HEKKANEN is the author of 47 books. The most recent are *False Memories and Other Likely Tales* and *I'm Not You*. His novel, *Of a Fire Beyond the Hills*, was a finalist for the George Ryga Award for Social Awareness. He is listed in the *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada* and *Contemporary Authors* in the United States. He is the subject of Margrith Schraner's study, *The Reluctant Author: The Life and Literature of Ernest Hekkanen* (New Orphic Publishers, 2006).

Final Year

Ernest Hekkanen

2017 is the final year we'll be publishing *The New Orphic Review*. When Margrith and I started our literary journal back in 1998, we had just turned fifty-one. We were living in Vancouver, at Napier and Victoria Drive, and we were full of irrepressible—dare I say youthful—optimism. Literature, for me, had become a matter of defying the odds. To create a product of no obvious practical value, and for which there would be an extremely limited market, if any at all, seemed to me an act of defiance worth pouring some hard-earned cash into.

I've always been susceptible to romantic notions of this sort.

I'd like to provide a brief history of the magazine. By the mid-1990s, I had come to realize that the literary community wasn't favorably disposed toward the tales I liked to tell. In 1984, Stoddart Publishing issued me a contract for my first novel, *Chasing After Carnivals*. It got all the way to the bound galley proof stage, and was even reviewed by several book publishing organs, but then it failed to come out. In 1987 and '88, Thistledown Press published two of my short story collections, *Medieval Hour in the Author's Mind* and *The Violent Lavender Beast*, neither of which sold particularly well,

despite receiving some excellent reviews. From that time on, I found it increasingly difficult to sell my work to magazines and book-publishing houses. Literary fashions had changed, and I was left behind in the dust.

By 1995 I had written three novels and enough short stories to flesh out at least two more collections. I had a decision to make. Either I would have to give up writing or find an alternative way to succeed. My friend, Jurgen Hesse (1924-2008), a print and radio journalist, had just finished self-publishing his book, *Voices in Exile: Refugees Speak Out*, in which my history of resistance had been included. As a writer, Jurgen was far more seasoned than I. We had met at International PEN and Writers' Union meetings. When Jurgen purchased a new computer, he gave me his old one. His old one had to be booted up from a 5.5 inch floppy disk each time it was used. In other words, it was already obsolete. However, it did introduce me to how easy it was to edit a manuscript, and how much less typing was involved.

Jurgen had run up against the same difficulties I was having in the world of Canadian literature and had decided to self-publish his books. "The trick is to cost things to the bone," he advised me. "Don't print more books than you can possibly sell. Assume that you'll never become a best-selling author."

Jurgen familiarized me with his approach to designing and printing books. I adopted his methods, but with some modifications of my own. Back then, there was an even greater stigma attached to self-publishing than there is now. Only the dredges of the literary world would resort to such a practice. One reason I had difficulty getting published by legitimate houses revolved around the fact that I didn't stick to the same style or approach. I enjoyed a great range of writing and would flip from grueling realism to fantasy to magic realism to satire, and back again. I wrote what pleased me rather than what was necessarily marketable. Also, my modus operandi left something to be desired. I wanted to disturb my readers' existential comfort, and that approach doesn't endear one to marketing departments, which now

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determine what is “worth” being published. As one reviewer remarked: “[his] work frequently points to dark but universal recesses of the mind,” and as a second reviewer noted, “[his stories are] often flavored with dark humor, bizarre characters and incidents.”

I self-published my first book in 1995, a novel entitled *From a Town Now Dreaming*, and by 1998, I had gained enough confidence to start publishing *The New Orphic Review*. I convinced myself that it was a wise literary move to become the editor-in-chief of my own magazine. As you can probably guess, the crucible of my imagination couldn't be expected to produce an alloy all that different from my nature. I enjoy a great range of writing, some of it quite experimental. Also, I had no desire to subscribe to Canada Council mandates dictating the size of a print run, the country of origin of my contributors or what constitutes good literature. I was egomaniacal enough to think such rules didn't apply to me.

Financially, our journal has nearly always been a losing venture, but as long as I could afford to publish it, and had enough energy to do so, I got a kick out of defying the odds. For the first nine years, each issue was photocopied and then bound by me in the basement of our house—using a drill, thread and glue. In the year 2000, we moved to our present location in Nelson, where I continued to use my rather primitive methods. In the spring of 2007 (with some help from Linda Hunter), I started using Pagemaker and Photoshop to create our journal, and sent the electronic files off to Blitzprint in Calgary to be printed. The cost of producing an issue of the *NOR* nearly always exceeded the amount of money it brought in, one exception being when Tyler Keevil, a contributor of ours, won the Journey Prize Award in 2014, and our magazine received a two thousand dollar stipend.

On the title page of every *New Orphic Review* is a small icon identifiable as Pythagoras. Back in the annals of time, Pythagoras was a prominent figure in the Orphic Tradition. One of the highly touted disciplines in Orphism revolved around ‘theory,’ which, according to

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an explanation in Bertrand Russell's *History of Western Philosophy*, meant something closer to "passionate sympathetic contemplation," a practice that can be quite useful for writers who are trying to get inside a character's heart and mind. The idea was to enter into one's subject and thereby know its essence. It could be compared to a form of meditation, I guess. In the early 20th century, Guillaume Apollinaire referred to certain artists as Orphists. Many of those artists took exception to the label being applied to them, and so he coined the term 'surrealist,' which came to have a great deal more currency. Back in the mid-1990s, I decided to adopt the word 'Orphic' for our publishing house and literary review. I did it out of a sense of playfulness, and because it suggested that we were part of a lineage.

In the spring of 2016, *The New Orphic Review* suffered a cryptolocker cyberattack. I chose not to be held to ransom, despite the fact that it meant losing all of my active files. I purchased a refurbished computer and learned how to use Scribus and Gimp well enough to produce the fall issue of our journal. That increased our expenses, which were already fairly considerable. Now each issue of the *NOR* costs up to nine-hundred dollars to produce and subsequently ship to subscribers. Indeed, mailing costs have become quite onerous for small publishers like me. Getting a distributor isn't an option, unless your publication is being subsidized by federal and provincial grants, because distributors eat up most of the profits. How about Amazon, you might ask. Sorry. Amazon is little more than a glorified extortionist.

Throughout my life, I've had a soft spot for people I refer to as "magnificent failures". Wilhelm Reich is one such individual, and Mrs. Marva Drew is another. Reich, born in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, began his career as a psychoanalyst in Vienna. Later in life, he moved to the U.S. of A., where he invented the orgone energy accumulator, promoted as a cure-all for one's sagging sex life, ennui and any number of ailments. He started shipping them across state lines, and that resulted in him being tried and sent to prison, where he

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died in 1957. Mrs. Drew, a 51-year-old housewife, spent five years and wasted 2,473 sheets of typing paper to count from one to a million. Why? Because her son's teacher told her it couldn't be done. I admired her tenacity and her willingness to engage in such a futile enterprise. Indeed, her endeavor wasn't terribly unlike mine, although mine might be marginally more profitable, I suspect.

With such people in my pantheon of heroes and heroines, how could I be expected to achieve any more or less than what I have with New Orphic Publishers? My publishing adventures, if nothing else, are a testament to my willingness to engage in the absurd, and that's the story I'm going to stick to, no matter what anyone might say.

The New Orphic Review, affectionately referred to among friends as our love child, is the product of twenty years of literary engagement. We have published an amazing number of talented writers who have since gone on to make careers for themselves in the literary world. It will be with some sadness that we step back from publishing it. Better to leave on a high note than a low one, though.

Hang on for our last issue of *The New Orphic Review*, which will be published late in 2017, hopefully to the sort of silent applause worthy of a Samuel Beckett play.

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Susan L. Ferraro's fiction has appeared in *The New Orphic Review*, *The New England Review* and *The Dalhousie Review*, and her non-fiction in *The New York Times Magazine* and *The New York Daily News*. She lives in California's Mother Lode, not far from where Mark Twain wrote *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*. She is absolutely determined, this year, to finish her novel, *Getting Over*, that's been on her mind for about 15 years.

Cell Phone

Susan L. Ferraro

Ana calls Michael on his cell and he answers on the first ring.

“Yeah? Who’s this? Ana? Ana! How are you? What’s up? How’s the family?”

Ana says “Fine” because she is and also because what else do people say, even if all hell is breaking loose, the radiators are broken, or there’s a flood in the basement: it’s safe, neutral, a single syllable of space and time, a tiny ante-room of connection that allows a person to identify voice and person. “Just want to check in,” she says. “See how you are. It’s been a while.”

It’s her day to call friends who are ailing (which she tries to do every month or so), usually her old lady friends, women who are as old as her mother would be if she were still alive, and a woman she used to swim with who has rheumatoid arthritis. Michael had prostate cancer even though he isn’t even fifty, way young for that to happen but it did, and the prognosis is not so good really, too late for surgery, but he had radiation. He says he’s okay and she wants to believe him, but there are issues. “Ah, Jeez, Ana, what those docs put you through,” he says. “But I’m still here, right? And a fuckin’ good thing too, pardon my French.” So he’s on the list of people she calls, especially the ones

she's known for years, a lot of them friends who made New York less scary when she first got here: call it a debt of affection and honor. Michael was twenty-one then, three years younger, skinny, all angles and slicked-back hair, a jump in his step, a wise guy on the outside but polite too. He'd come early to a class she was auditing at city college, Urban Realities—he had one more class to finish before he could graduate—and they'd talk. Later he worked as a security guard at a bank, then took the test for the NYPD and passed with top marks. Now he's a detective. Still a lot of energy, too much maybe: he keeps himself busy moonlighting as a security guard again. They have lunch maybe once a year when she's in Manhattan. He's heavier these days, a big block of a guy. But the hair is still dark and thick, even after treatment. Married, divorced, kids in high school. And his voice—still the same.

“Big news,” he says. “I'm done with Galina.”

“Galina? But you've been seeing her for years.”

“Yeah, I know, but she's crazy. I mean, I knew it all along, she's Russian, they're wild, but you reach a point, enough is enough. Like the other night, I'm driving? We're coming home from a party, me and her, she's screaming about something, and out of the blue she hits me! Galina! Punches me in the ear while I'm driving! I couldn't believe it. I'm a cop, I could've crashed into a car, into the guardrail, and I can't believe this.”

“She hit you?” Ana says, wondering if she heard right because she can't believe it either. Galina is five feet tall, weighs a hundred pounds soaking wet.

“Yeah. She's telling me—you know how my sister Bets is getting remarried to her dumb ass husband, Peter? Because she still loves him? There's a big family dinner coming up, to celebrate, at Brian's Pub, that place we went to, you and me and your husband when I was still married to Gina. And tonight, at another party of mostly the same people, I run into Kathleen, a nice woman, important in the community. And, well, what I can tell you, Ana, there was a while

there, when I was married to Gina—or as she likes to call herself, the former Mrs. Michael Pulask—and okay, I admit it, I wasn't a very good boy. And me and Kathleen, she used to babysit for us, because she and Gina were friends, and I'd walk her home, and I admit it, we went at it like you wouldn't believe. Intense. Everybody knew, the neighborhood, her father, which wasn't so good because he's a cop too, a very influential guy if you know what I mean. He was one of the detectives who broke that big illegal arms case, the one with Jimmy diCanzio, a small-time crook who got fitted with cement shoes—and I don't mean what you call a figure of speech here, Ana, but real cement shoes, which is what he deserved—and dumped in the East River. But then something chewed his feet off and he floated to the top. And her dad, he tracked the body to the gun gang and got a promotion. It really made his career.”

“The party, Michael. Kathleen spoke to you?”

“Yeah, she did. An interesting woman, as I said, and having a tough time now. Going through a divorce. Not easy, but all that is over between us, has been for years, and I have to say, she has a hard face now, you could strike a match on it. But Galina, she sees us say hello, and on the way home she's cooking up a storm, talking to herself, making growly sounds, and finally she says to me, 'I don't want Kathleen coming to Bets' party,' and she starts the screaming.”

“But Kathleen was long before Galina.”

“Yeah. But I told you: the woman is nuts. Say we go to a restaurant, want to have a nice time like normal people, and the waitress smiles at me. It's not because she wants to jump me, she just wants a nice tip, it's her job. And Galina will start up, make a scene, so bad sometimes we have to leave. This has happened more than once. So I say to her, 'Why shouldn't Kathleen come to the party, she's known my sister her whole life,' but Galina won't listen and by then we're almost at the Verrazano Bridge and that's when she hits me, and what I don't realize, because I'm yelling back, keeping the car on the road, is that when my head smacks the window, it knocks my earpiece off.”

“Your earpiece? When did you start wearing a hearing aid?” Ana is worried: she’s read that radiation treatment sometimes affects the senses, maybe even the hearing.

“No, no, my earpiece for my phone, my Bluetooth. But how was I to know—she’s screaming, I’m trying to keep the car from swerving, and my phone rings. I grab the hand-held, can’t hear anything, and close it up, which is fine except the thing is, Ana, if the earpiece picks up, you can close the phone, but it’s still on. But I’m not thinking, Galina’s on a four-alarm tear, ripping into Kathleen isn’t enough for her, she has to say how stupid it is my sister is marrying the same loser again, how he’s no good, his family’s no good, he even made a pass at her, at Galina, and when I laugh—between you and me, Galina’s a wreck, I mean no disrespect, but it’s true—she yells even louder, switches gears, says what a pig my ex, Gina, is and why Bets wants her in the wedding she does not understand because Gina is even fatter than she used to be, what a huge matron-of-honor Gina will be, looks more like a hippo or a whale maybe—she’s really going, Galina is, and, of course, long story short, my sister Bets hears the whole thing.”

“It was Bets on the phone, the one who called?”

“Right. And while she was at it, she conferenced in her best friend, Gina, the aforementioned hippo whale matron-of-honor. Which is just great, but what can you do?”

“Mary Mother of God, what happened?” (She may not be a New Yorker, but Ana is Irish, once upon a time Catholic, and Michael is one of the few who knows it.)

“Nothing, not then,” he says. “We go on fighting, I get to her house on Staten Island, she gets out, slams the door and runs in, and I go home to Brooklyn and grab a stiff one. By which I mean a drink.”

“Right.”

“Then, because this is real life, a couple of days later I get a call from Kathleen, and she’s yelling. Not at me personally, you understand. At the situation.”

“What situation?”

“Seems she comes home to find an anonymous letter in the mailbox. A letter that says, *Do not go to Bets’ party or you will be sorry*. The worse part? Kathleen’s father gets the note first, because he gets home earlier, and *he’s* all upset, wants to fingerprint the paper, find out who it is, take them in. He’s retired, but like I said, he’s connected. Believe me, you don’t want to know what shit he could bring down. So I tell Kathleen, who knows this is from Galina because all these girls were in school together and Galina makes these dopey loops and dots her i’s with little circles. And I tell her, ‘Of course you’re coming to the party, Kathleen, I’ll take care of it.’ And she says, ‘I’ll be there, and I will wipe up the floor with that Galina.’”

“Michael, Michael, all these years and women are still fighting over you.”

“Yeah,” he says. He laughs his wild, happy cackle, pure joy, worth the price of admission any day.

“Long story short,” he says, “two minutes later Galina calls. I’m not surprised. She calls, I am not kidding, eighty-five times a day. Don’t even ask about texts—I told you, she’s crazy. So I ask her, ‘Where are you?’ She says, ‘At the beauty parlor, having my hair done, my mani and pedi.’ I say, ‘What’s all that for?’ And she says, ‘For Bets’ party, which is tomorrow as if you didn’t know.’ And I say, ‘You’re not going. You are not to be there. We do not want to see you.’

“So we’re done, Galina and me. I mean even her girlfriends, they call me—this is her *girlfriends*—and they say she’s crazy. They say, ‘What is she, yammering at you because of Kathleen all that time ago?’ Like I said, everybody knew about us, right? Her husband, her father who looked the other way, thank God, the former Mrs. Michael Pulaski I’m not so sure, but probably. I’m not saying I’m proud of it, but it wasn’t a secret. Everybody, I find out later, saw how we’d disappear in the same direction a lot of times. So the girlfriends say, ‘What is it with this Galina, the same girl who, when her own husband is dead in the box’—you remember, Ana, I told you the Russian mob

got him? Now that guy, Galina's husband, he was a real wise ass, nobody liked him—and the girlfriends are jabbering, back and forth around the phone, saying, 'He's in the box and *the same day* she buries him, she's banging you?' By which, of course, they mean me. And I admit, it's true. I make no excuse, we did it then and the day before and the day after, and the girlfriends, besides being right, are really nice girls, some more than others if you catch my meaning. Even now."

"Michael, am I the only woman in New York you haven't slept with?"

He cackles again, pleased as hell.

"Not to worry Ana, we've got something special, you and me. Personal regard. What they call platonic affection. Like the stars in the sky. And I got to say—you ever hear of this?—that arginine stuff, it's an amino acid, all natural? As good as Viagra, maybe better, and it's over the counter. It's not like before the radiation, but, hey, I'm forty-seven. There comes a time."

"You're so bad, Michael."

"I know, I know," he says.

And Ana laughs too, just to hear him laugh.

Tom Wayman's recent poetry titles include *Built to Take it: Selected Poems 1996-2013* from Spokane's Lynx House Press and *The Order in Which We Do Things: The Poetry of Tom Wayman*, from Wilfrid Laurier University Press, both published in 2014. His newest book of poems is *Helpless Angels* (Thistledown Press, 2017). Wayman's most recent short fiction title, *The Shadows We Mistake for Love* (Douglas & McIntyre, 2015) includes three stories first published in *The New Orphic Review*. In June 2016, *The Shadows* won the Diamond Foundation Prize for fiction (Western Canada Jewish Book Awards). For more information: www.tomwayman.com

Five Poems / Tom Wayman

Thirteen Ways of Looking at Robert Zimmerman

Bob Dylan

1

*How far in, he said
do you want to go?*

2

At the edge of adulthood, we believed him alongside us
as we doubted the chanted admonishments
of church, school, the men with guns
keeping us, they declared, free *The words that are used*
he strummed *for to get the ship confused*
will not be understood as they're spoken
And Your sons and your daughters
are beyond your command

3

He jeered, though
as we wouldn't
at who hurt us in love *You just kinda wasted
my precious time* Pain
when one we wanted we couldn't have
he transformed to a gloat
as we applauded: the formerly desired
now a loser *How does it feel?*
He hammered those who didn't love us
or love us enough
with the revenge of the future *time
will tell just who fell
And who's been left behind*

4

Forever oppositional
he aligned with no faction, no tendency
beyond evasion or mockery of
behavior, beliefs expected
even of him: an electric folk song
the duet with that redneck pro-war
Johnny Cash

5

*If she wakes up now, she'll just want me to talk
I got nothin' to say, 'specially about whatever was*

6

He never had an 8:30 history class
away across campus
all winter He never punched-in
morning after morning
through spring and summer
But he could sing clockwatching
X-ing the days, the wish for retribution
for the choices we were compelled
to make *I remember every face
of every man who put me here*

7

On his knees
back bent to stare eye to eye
at a chicken
on *Self Portrait*, standing bent forward from the waist
to peer out along the sidewalk
from the bottom of an ascending stairwell on
Street Legal

8

Consistently apocalyptic about floods
like Noah or any other ark survivor
with PTSD *Water pourin' into Vicksburg*
Don't know what I'm going to do
"Don't reach out for me," she said

“Can’t you see I’m drownin’ too?”
High water everywhere In the dream
he goes down
or under *If it keeps on rainin’*
the levee gonna break
Some of these people gonna strip you of all they can take

9

The Ohio, the Cumberland, the Tennessee
...them rebel rivers

10

Jesus shows up on stage
—in that *creation where one’s nature*
neither honors nor forgives
another Jewish contrarian
like Lucifer, determined neither to serve
in Hell or Heaven

Lots of sex in fundamentalist churches
according to Bob Garrison Every so often
Garrison would flip out, check himself
into a psych ward for a few weeks When he was released
he’d join a congregation, enjoy
lots of fucking *Oh, sister*
when I come to knock on your door
then quit, be again standing on asphalt
He looked into her eyes when she stopped him to ask

18

if he wanted to dance; he had a face like a mask

11

Country pie tasted of
the all-night café beside the river
before the freeway starts to lift
into foothills *where the trucks are rollin' slow*

Tired horses graze in the sunny pasture
Moon over barren fields, frost on the window
Behind the wheel of the Silverado, late for afternoon shift
at the mill

12

The empty table on the beach
at which cross-eared surrealists sit
to reload shotguns

or manipulate marionettes to throw stones
at the train of fools
caught in a nearby energy field

L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E
= *call me any name*
you like

“Floater” the perfect American ghazal
And the lyrics altered
in every live performance

His notes, his rhythms permeate the journey
—pistons, tires, the wind over the hood
fenders *I'm taking you with me, honey baby*
Sheets of rain falling
that Wednesday lost in Chihuahua, Mexico
after the “Before the Flood” tour, *señor*

Or a mile outside Amarillo
Texas, at Henry Porter’s wrecking yard
Ruby describes a rigged swap meet
If she and Henry are married
did Henry on the licence use his real name?
The singer tells her he and his companion
plan to drive *'Til the sun peels the paint*
and the seat covers fade
'Til the wheels fall off and burn
But that’s just snake talk

He’s going, we’re going in
where the music coming from

Lupines

“The lupines are stretching themselves
upwards as if wishing to glimpse the ocean.”
—Tomas Tranströmer, “Golden Wasp”
(trans. John F. Deane)

In my mountains, the blue-beaded stalks of lupines
might be taken, in a certain mood,
for bubbles streaming from a dolphin’s blowhole.
But along our hillsides and roadsides
the flowers can also be pale pink, yellow or white.
To me, in any shade they explode
up from a leafy burst of green smoke
as exclamation points—a vehement assertion
of the spring’s, the early summer’s return:
a complex and insistent b!e!a!u!t!y! constrained by time
yet filling the air from subalpine to valley bottom
with a colored thunder that echoes
off peaks and ridges to declare the reawakening
into which an iris will bloom next.

Highway 1 Illumination

1

One summer I encountered
above a vast plain east of the Rockies

innumerable cumuli
—enormous puffy structures

ballooning up from a flattened base
suspended over me in rows

extending to the edges of the world.
The shadows of each floating construction

travelled as I did
across flax, canola, hay fields

that undulated in a fierce wind
tugging at fences, utility poles,

sloughs still flooded
long after June.

2

This same prairie, though,
was where I steered once through a winter twilight

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in a cold so deep that both frozen air and earth
were stained with a blue darkness

such that the landscape about me
was a pathogen

beautiful in its stark menace:
its purpose, after millennia,

solely to infect,
to kill,

to persevere.

Three For The Southern Selkirks

1. Mountain

The mountain groans and sweats
under the overwhelming weight of water

That presses on it. Granite's raised arms
vibrate with the effort—

Feet abruptly shift for better leverage—
to push back against

the dense mass that drives it down.

What could be more gossamer

than a raindrop, a snowflake? Yet such lightness
fractures this rock, shatters the ranges,

forces the high country
at last to lie flat and slow as sand.

2. Cows in the Pines

Black Angus graze under the pines
While at the edge of the wood

Small patches of snow

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Cover the flattened russet tangles of bracken

Killed weeks ago by frost. Stink of the cows
Pulling at cold fescue

On which two calves lie
Waiting for the end of the afternoon,

Waiting to discover the winter
—A season the calves

Have never seen. The transient small herd
Populate a hillside

Of evergreens that have now stepped free
From the foliage of aspen and birch

To sing in the small wind
The carols of the border times:

Those hours, the lyrics declare,
Everything animate inhabits

Where light ambles away,
Water transmutes to stone

And stone to mist,
When emptied branches

Bend to bless
Whatever moves in the icy air.

3. Storm

Clumps of fog

float in the upper branches of the evergreens
in steady rain

Fog that hovers above the wet lawn

between the house and the forest
and in tattered clots

halfway up the mountains

—that bleaches to vagueness
dripping benches and draws

Higher yet over the valley floor

air becomes a white scrim
of suspended flakes

driven sideways by wind gusts

while on the summit ridges
in the dim whiteness of blizzard

limbs of pine and spruce

bow down beneath the snow
that also mounds in the openings between the trees

This storm is the beautiful terror

that surrounds me
—a cloud or mist

I try to peer through,

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to traverse toward what I hope is
safety, constantly anxious

amid the harsh splendor
to discern what I encounter, what
approaches

The Rage of the Snowplow

The harsh growl the plow truck releases
as it is forced down the evening highway east of the river
reverberates across the valley.

Whether the machine blames
the still-falling snow
for causing men to disturb its sleep,

or whether the vehicle is angry at its operator
is not evident. But an hour ago
the truck was safely pastured with its peers

in the works yard, all the vehicles huddled close
against the freezing night. Abruptly
the shouts and clanging of men

woke it, and now
it is being steered alone through the darkness
along the treacherous road

—invisible ditch on one side of the two-lane,
drop-off to black water on the other,
the cold air having become more icy

because of the wind caused by the truck's passage.
So a cry of rage, of protest,
marks the route

the plow is being driven: *I'm not stopping*
it snarls steadily to warn the descending white
or to threaten whoever

sits in the cab peering forward
into the onrushing maze of flakes
I'm going to smash you aside

given the chance
Out of my way
or I'll power right over you

My Stuff

I've read some of your stuff.

—local hitchhiker

Are words stuff? Are poems?
Stories?

I don't think so. Stuff of mine
I consider capable of being read
includes behaviors. I might tell a friend
or enemy. "My response to what you just did
is *my* stuff—nothing you have to deal with
unless you choose to." Ownership acknowledged,
both of us can interpret my reaction—comprehend
what it says: that I'm hurt,
angry, joyful, or confused, the emotion
perhaps arising from an earlier experience
of mine.

My readable stuff also encompasses
tangible things: foods, knickknacks,
household cleaning supplies
meaningful to me, even if these objects are
a closed book—no pun intended—
to somebody else. The selection of and how I arrange
furniture, tools on my workbench, firewood
are translatable. Do these signify a need for
lack of clutter? A wish to be prepared for emergencies?
Maybe they denote a problem with complexity,

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or anxiousness about the future and hence
about the present. “You’re the kind of guy,”
a long-time friend once declared,
“who’ll always have a full tank of gas, spare printer cartridge,
and trouble with women.”

So when, once in a while,
a complete stranger tells me: “I’ve read stuff of yours,”
only courtesy keeps me from replying:
“You don’t even know me.”

Miriam Clavir has published a mystery novel, *Insinuendo: Murder in the Museum*, a scholarly book, *Preserving What is Valued: Museums, Conservation and First Nations*, and short stories and personal essays in literary magazines.

Gardening

Miriam Clavir

She ignored us and we took her for granted. No one spoke her nicknames aloud; the whole Vancouver neighbourhood avoided any talk. Her thin figure paced the sidewalks, always in white, often in a long dress and old-fashioned white gloves, a broad-brimmed summer hat, and even occasionally carrying a sort of parasol, as if today were a hundred years ago. The hat and umbrella hid her face, she never said hello, she sidestepped anyone on the sidewalks, including slow dog-walkers with appealing animals, and kids—she avoided, to my knowledge, all contact. Until this morning when I saw her traipsing down the flagstones towards my door, head ducked, nodding at my garden flowers. And there on the sidewalk stood my unshaven, slovenly neighbour, Benny, holding out his cellphone, ready to frame a photo of her in my garden.

White Clothes turned her back to my house, flounced into a curtsy and planted one heel in the specialty rose bed begun by my late mum. In an instant her gauzy clothes caught on the bushes. She struggled like a trapped moth. A half dozen blooms of my mum's favourite, the hybrid Love 'n Peace, all luscious pinks and yellows, tore and drifted. White Clothes just struck a pose, one hand brushing back wisps of long blondish hair, the mimic of an offended movie star.

I grabbed my denim jacket and scooted out the door. "One sec!" The Flouncer's whole weight was compacting soil and crushing plants.

Why did Benny and her want this picture in the first place?

Benny refused to erase the photo. “I need it for Celeste here. She asked.” The woman’s hat nodded.

“Why? What in God’s name for?” I softened my voice. “Not some dating site, pretending you live here?”

Benny gave me a salacious smile. “You’re close,” and swayed his hips. “We trade skills.” And added, “Look, Ellen, it’s only Celeste, and your rosebush is beautiful.”

I shrugged towards the dropped blossoms. The woman, as if apologizing, bent to pick up her bag, straightened, and, head bowed, took off her hat and placed it over her heart. I glimpsed her face in the instant it took her to duck behind a magazine that had been in the white cloth bag. There was nothing wrong with The Flouncer’s face except for a sort of pale, expressionless look.

“Look,” I said, “basically, the plants stay more beautiful when everyone keeps to the sidewalk.” I waited, and they departed, but not before taking a few more quick shots.

A decade ago I moved back here as mum and dad aged. They’ve both passed away now, and through all their illnesses my relaxation was the garden. As Benny and White Clothes walked away, I stayed beside the roses thinking of mum and dad, and my aunt who had lived in the basement suite for a while, and how over so many years we had all come to understand why a garden was chosen to be Eden.

When I was a young child in the first years of grade school, Auntie Lil played endlessly with me out here. She made the garden a magic place while I learned how small plants grew into big ones, planted sunflowers right from seed, and took seriously my chosen role while she weeded, carrying earthworms to safety away from the plunging trowel. Auntie Lil was no good at walking me to school, though; we’d invariably arrive late because she would talk to the flowers we passed en route, and mum didn’t like that.

I do love this garden, whether I’m puttering outside or just gazing out a rainy window with my morning coffee. Only yesterday at work I

joked to another librarian that even when I get to retire in twenty years, in a funny way it'll still be like helping the public, answering their questions, making sure they get what they want. But instead of a library full of readers needing books or the right web site, the crowds I'll see daily will be iris, daffs, tulips and lilies, and I'll be answering to them. And of course the neighbours enjoying the flowers as they walk by. My colleague agreed that people really appreciate a beautiful garden, the same as they do a good library. "But you and I know there's lots to do to make it work. Otherwise it'd just be chaos."

* * *

Two weeks later The Flouncer showed up at my house again.

It was my usual busy Saturday. Weekends I balance the chore load—it always piles up when you're single and working full-time—with a rewarding indulgence in the kind of intimate, down-on-my-knees gardening where I've stuck my face almost against the earth as well as in the blossoms. Today was sunny, I'd accomplished the shopping in good time and now had three grocery bags hoisted onto the front stoop. Two of them I dragged in, and while I was making more room on the kitchen counter, White Clothes materialized in the doorway. She must have been hiding outside, waiting. The woman walked right into my kitchen, head bent under her hat, one gloved hand depositing my last bag of groceries. The other thrust out her worn, white bag.

The creased bag swung rhythmically as if to tempt me to accept it. "For you. As a thank-you," she whispered.

"How unexpected. That's very nice. Please, sit down." My librarian voice had surfaced, the one for 'situations'.

I pointed to a kitchen stool by my phone. "I'll look at it in the light just as soon as I put these things in the fridge," I smiled. "I'm Ellen. It's Celeste, right?" and scrambled to get the ice cream in the freezer.

"Let's go back outside. Much better light." I hustled her out the door onto the front steps. My fingers carefully opened the dirty pale bag.

Unbelievable! Inside were my roses, as a watercolour. Extraor-

dinary, the red-pink-yellows, the thorny green stalks, the leaves, all captured as if at the height of their perfection. Alive and gorgeous, exactly what I grow them for.

Staring at the woman, I could hear myself stuttering, “I love this. So the photo was to paint my garden, whatever else?” I held up the watercolour to capture the light better. “You’re a real artist.”

Celeste fidgeted with her hat.

“It’s all I do, now.”

“But you left yourself out.”

“I knew you didn’t want me.”

We both paused.

Well, it was her not wanting it, too. The whitewashed face she was always hiding, in a gift to a stranger?

“You couldn’t have captured my roses better...” and then I caught her wiping at wet eyes and heard a whispered, “Thanks.” Celeste wouldn’t look at me, but I saw in the way her neck was angled she was staring past me into the front room with the couch and rocking chair.

“Coffee, Celeste?”

Going back to the kitchen I closed a few doors so she couldn’t explore the other rooms, made up a plate of the pastries I’d bought for myself as well as tomorrow’s book club, and we sat in the big-windowed living room. She politely removed her hat.

Celeste started to eat with gusto, and talk. I sat more nervously as she told me where she lived (an illegal suite down the street with three other people in the small rooms, but at least the toilet was separate from the washbasin and shower), how her bully landlord had wanted sex for rent one month (she said she found the money . . . but how?) and the medication she took (her reason for always keeping her face out of the sun, but she needed to walk, the light outside made her feel so good after the basement). When we finished, I gave her a bouquet of the garden periwinkle—she liked the blue against the deep green—along with some of the roses, and more thanks. She grinned

and grabbed my hand, and shook it more than necessary.

In the days after, I looked for Celeste in the neighbourhood, and half expected her to drop by. Admittedly, I was glad we didn't run into each other.

* * *

A new month had started when an over-bright voice on my landline asked if I would join her at the corner store.

"I'm at the one with the payphone outside."

"Could we do this another time? I'm filthy dirty from the garden. Just going to shower."

"I'll wait."

"Oh, Celeste, I'm running late. For a meeting. The book club. It's important I'm on time, I chose the novel. Can we do this another day?"

"You don't want to see me, do you?"

My breath caught. "Look, is this an emergency?"

"I want to show you something in the store here. It's got the periwinkle colours."

I looked at the clock, "I'm really sorry, Celeste, I'm supposed to leave shortly. Call me . . . tomorrow won't work . . . how about Friday?"

"You don't even want to talk to me now."

Could I half lie, tell her she's right, only it's the "now" that's the problem?

In the background a man shouted, "Gimme!" A gravelly voice explained Celeste had been caught shoplifting. If I'd pay, he'd forget it. This wasn't the first time. I grabbed my purse, clean shoes, and my notes on the story up for discussion. Arguing with myself the whole one-minute drive to the store, I knew I owed White Clothes nothing. I sure hadn't asked for this connection, but like at the library, all sorts showed up. I was good at my work, and dammit all, I was good in my neighbourhood, too. Even when it was down-coat-cold, people would stop on the sidewalk to admire the soft pussy willows or an early

flood of snowdrops.

* * *

“Ellen, you know her?” Henry Leung’s hands halted their corralling of a small heap of groceries on his counter.

“Henry, I’ll pay for these. This once.” What should I say to a man in whose small store I’d been buying milk and quick necessities for years? “What’s the total? I’ll double it, for your time and trouble.” This was my cue to turn to Celeste. “Please,” I said, my librarian voice rising to the occasion, “don’t ever steal from this store again. Or one of us has to call the police.”

“Good luck,” said Henry. “Join the monthly drama. Before the welfare cheques come in, certain people do, too.”

I could hear Celeste crying under her hat. I wanted to rip off that straw with its straggle of ribbons and have her face Henry, a good neighbourly shopkeeper, and apologize. But a muffled, mousy voice was whispering, “Thought you were my friend. You liked me. You called me a real artist.”

I’m a librarian and a gardener, not a social worker. I stared at White Clothes. Her sniffles got louder.

“You gave me a beautiful gift, Celeste, and I really appreciate it. That’s what this is all about,” I explained to Henry. “I found out Celeste is a talented painter. She painted my roses.” He was looking right past my shoulder, his face immobile.

“Celeste,” I said, and paused, my mouth dry, my decision forming. “Celeste, if it’s something really urgent, I’m here for you. But you’ve got to respect the neighbourhood. Do you want to say you’re sorry to Mr. Leung?”

A low voice said with determination, “It’s you who wants to say you’re sorry. To yourself. For ever giving me coffee.”

My throat clamped shut. Celeste knew perfectly what life was about in this neighbourhood. She had guessed feelings I had been trying to hide even from myself. Auntie Lil, as well, had once read my mind perfectly, one summer when the family had rented a holiday place by

a lake, and now that same sense of dumbfounded shame at discovery engulfed me. My aunt and I had been outside, watching a very small reptile—“Dinosaurs were reptiles, weren’t they, Auntie Lil?”—a lizard basking on a sunny rock. Nearby a plant quickly bent; a water snake was slithering, tongue darting, towards the lizard. My heart stopped. Auntie Lil had saved us all by taking two steps, scattering the creatures while saying to me, “Don’t judge the snake. Think, my darling, how you would do without arms or legs. The snake, the lizard, they aren’t bad. They’re both reptiles, and they just are what they are.” Right now in the store I was that reptile on a sunny rock, equally rooted in my own neighbourhood. How would I have done in life without the arms and legs I’d taken for granted?

I quickly paid as Celeste turned to flee. I stopped her with, “You said you’d show me those periwinkle colours!”

The hat shadow lifted enough for me to see a pallid face and a small grin. Henry folded his arms and watched. Celeste pulled a package of crackers out of her bag.

Her colour sense was garden-perfect. The printed, loose foil covering of the crackers reflected light and shadow in the same dark greens and blues as my plants have after a rain.

“You are so right!” I turned, shook Henry’s hand to say good-bye, and when I twisted around, Celeste was already out the door. Afterwards, driving fast across town, a new discomfort surged. I might hear from Celeste when her rent was due. Hadn’t I just confirmed I had money to spare?

* * *

Sure enough, a different man called almost a month later. The voice told me to come right away to where Celeste lived. A podgy, scowling guy was waiting out on the lawn. An ambulance had just pulled away.

The landlord said garbage day was two days from now and I could take Celeste’s stuff or else. He’d had enough with the drugs and the tenants’ complaints about her weirdness, gabbing a mile a minute one day and the next hiding or hardly saying hello. Today she’d been

found passed out with an empty pill bottle.

“How did you know to call me?” My voice was back under control.

“She gave me the number weeks ago. Said you could take care of anything.”

* * *

I packed up her paintings, wrapping them in the white clothes I found, stuck them in my basement and waited. Nothing. I didn't know Celeste's last name, and certainly did not want to confront her slimy ex-landlord for information, or talk to my neighbour Benny and hear why he missed her. I repeated to myself I was no social worker.

It was four months before a low, scratchy voice on the phone said, “Remember me? Guess where I live now!” Ms. Impeccable Timing had caught me again right before book club, but this time they would have to start without me.

She chatted on as if nothing had happened since I'd seen her. The bad food at the place, the doctor she liked, the roommate she didn't, the routine, the nurses. Then, “Did you save my paintings? I told them my best friend would come because she said I was a real artist. I'm going to decorate the walls.” Celeste giggled. “You can visit any day except Thursdays. My appointments are then. You can't be late if you've got to be somewhere. You and your book club taught me that.”

One day of posing in front of a rosebush, one painting, one visit, one good deed, one gift that never stops giving. Obligations. Expectations. ‘Thursdays’ in the plural. ‘Best friend’. The landlord months ago repeating, “Said you could take care of anything.”

Hah! Like a garden, dammit, you think you're in control, but things go haywire. The weather, the soil, the weeds that show up. The burgeoning greenery that all of a sudden needs more tending than the rest. The flowers that aren't quite perfect but still lovely, like my mum had said about Auntie Lil when she went to live in a home. Well, in any garden this is normal.

My neighbour who took those photos and got me into this, I'd better see if he'll go visit with me. Staff would supervise if Benny tried to

grope her. He can pay for the coffee and pastries. We could each take a painting. I'll print out a few shots of the fall garden, make up a bouquet of sedum and asters. I can find out from the nurses if she's ever going to get out, and the name of some real social worker Celeste could keep seeing.

Wait. Benny is definitely not my favourite. And what if I could bring five, six paintings? An image bounced up in my mind of people coming to see them, even a busy doctor, and admiring Celeste's work. She'd respond with such zest.

These paintings, I'd better make the right choices. And ask if Celeste has the chance to paint now. Maybe when they see her pictures they'll realize she's got something really going for her. But then, if there are new paintings, I'll probably have to go up and see them. Whenever Celeste decides to call again. Well, whatever. Her chaos blooms and fades.

I might get my librarian colleague at work to go. No—maybe when there are new paintings. First I'll organize my book club to see her art, and let the nurses and doctors know about the visit, take that bouquet and pot some periwinkle, too, for her and the roommates . . . wait! I'll clean the white clothes the paintings are wrapped in and she'll have her choice of outfits, and it'll be like a real exhibit opening. She won't hide from that light. I saw on the very first day she knows what limelight means. She'll flounce around as much as she wants. I'll dress up, too.

Hillel Wright is the author of three novels, a short story collection, two books of poetry, editor of five literary anthologies and publisher of *MINUS TIDES international* magazine. He has been special Features Writer for *The Japan Times* and Pacific Rim Correspondent for *Fishing News International*, a European-based journal for the commercial industry. He lives in Sointula, B.C., and Naha, Okinawa Japan with wife and Muse Shiori Tsuchiya.

Tsunami

Hillel Wright

1. Recovery (September 11, 2011)

The harbor is clean
immaculate
silent

There is no damage to be seen
except some cracks
in the concrete
of the breakwater
across the bay

But that could have come
from anywhere—
a coastal freighter
dragging its mooring
in a summer typhoon.

Where is the debris—
the garbage & wreckage

of the earthquake
the flotsam & jetsam
of the killer wave?

I know the answer—
I've seen the trash mountain
rising out of a rice field
from the railway platform
the last stop before the end of the line
here in Oarai.

The huge Kubota traxcavators
climbing the refuse mountain
shoving, shoveling
dozing, compressing
look like Tonka Toys
in a little boy's backyard.

This mountain is the harbor
and the waterfront
of Oarai—forty fishing boats
bent & twisted car doors
fractured windshields
houses deconstructed into muddy junk.

But the harbor now is clean
immaculate
silent...

The work of hundreds—
volunteers, patriots of Oarai
fishermen, City Hall clerks
heavy equipment operators

construction contractors
high school athletes
teachers, parents, visitors
from Tokyo & Kobe & Kathmandu

And now the harbor is clean
immaculate
silent.

Then the silence cracks
breaks like a wooden house
in the jaws of the *jisshin*
as the Japanese call “earthquake”
as two fishing boats round the point
and enter the clean silent harbor
from the Pacific
and the muffled rumble of their engines
brings the silent immaculate harbor to life.

They are not big boats—
mid-water trawlers
4.9 ton registry
to avoid paying the higher fees
of the 5 to 10 ton fleet

They’ve been dragging for whitebait
baby sardines
which the Japanese call *shirasu*

They eat them raw or steamed
as topping for bowls of rice
garnished with thin yellow strips
of omelet

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with pickled daikon radish
and miso *shiru* on the side.

Do I dare eat a serving for lunch?

I dare.

I'm served a bowl of rice with topping
the Japanese call this *donburi*
the topping is steamed *shirasu*
freshly caught
the Japanese call this dish
shirasu don.

It's delicious.

The Japanese say "*Umai!*"

After lunch I visit the Fisheries Office
with the Town Clerk.

They apologize—they can't give me
any data—all their records
their computers—washed away

They tell me there were 105 boats
in the fishery
29 were damaged or destroyed
or washed away

Most were fishing, out to sea
but most of those in the harbor
were damaged or destroyed
or washed away

Today, six months on
80 boats are able to fish
but most are not fishing
they sit in the immaculate harbor
silent.

2. Fear & Rumor (June 11, 2011)

We've been waiting for three days
here on Tokashiki Island
in the Ryukyus

Finally, a tuna boat comes in—
the *Mayu Maru*, Captain Fujiwara

He's got three yellowfin tuna—
two juveniles—Okinawans
call them *shibi*—
and one adult
kihada maguro

It's 35 kilos, sashimi grade
a beautiful fish if truth be told
it gleams in the sun
when Fujiwara-san
lifts it from the hold.

Captain Tamaki, of the Fishing Co-op
on the cell phone
looking for a buyer.

They used to sell to Taipei & Shanghai
but no more—Taiwan & China
refuse all seafood from Japan.

“We’re in the East China Sea, for God’s sake,”
says Captain Tamaki, “over a thousand miles
from Fukushima—and still
they won’t buy our fish”

An hour passes
we wait
finally, a buyer in Manila

In Shanghai this fish is worth
a thousand dollars
Manila offers seven-fifty
Captain Fujiwara accepts

“Shipping costs will be higher too,”
he says.

3. Recourse (March 11, 2011)

March 11, 2011 and three fishermen
are out at sea
off the northeast coast of Japan.

Let’s call them Kikuchi, Sasaki
& Suzuki—common family names
of the region.

At 1440 hours
they hear the earthquake warning
and 15 minutes later
the tsunami warning.

They hear the *jisshin* was 9.2
on the Japanese scale
but how can that be?
The scale goes only
up to 7.

Kikuchi, the leader, tells
Sasaki & Suzuki
to head out to sea

“We must meet the wave head-on,”
he tells them.
“It’s our only recourse—
there’s nowhere else to go.”

Half an hour later
they see the wave
a rolling mountain
on the far horizon
or rather, obliterating
the horizon altogether.

All together they head for the wave.
“90 degrees,” Kikuchi warns them.
“Make sure to take it head-on—
90 degrees.”

The boats and the wave move

inexorably toward each other
steadily, no hurry
like two old lovers
meeting by chance
on a lonely city sidewalk
at dusk.

“Keep your eyes on the wave”
Kikuchi tells them
“Head-on, head-on, 90 degrees—
don’t be afraid.”

Head-on, head-on, Kikuchi meets the wave
and climbs, the boat
bends over backward
rises like a rocket
to the celestial crest
then—over the top—
and the long slide down
the back of this brontosaurus
of the sea.

Out the starboard window
he spots Sasaki
“Good job, Sasaki-san” he spouts
in the radio mike
“*Yoku dekimashita!*
Well done!”

Out the port side window
he sees the roiling sea.

“Can you see Suzuki?” he calls.

Sasaki doesn't answer.

“Sasaki,” he calls again

“Where's Suzuki?”

Silence.

“Sasaki—can you hear me?

Where's Suzuki?”

“Sasaki!” he cries

“Can you hear me?”

“I hear you.”

Hillel Wright's short stories have won awards from CBC Radio, among others. (See page 41 for further information.)

Breakfast with Jack Kerouac

Hillel Wright

Of course Jack Kerouac is eating bacon and eggs...why not—he wrote a poem about it, didn't he...“dem bacon and dem eggs....” But let's imagine Jack at age 74. After all, he dies at age 47, so by the same reasoning George Orwell employed when choosing the title “1984” for a novel written in 1948, it's 1996 and Jack Kerouac is sitting at the counter of the Pitlamp Island General Store's Café and he's having a late Sunday morning cuppa coffee and a tofu burger.

After nearly dying in 1969 from internal bleeding caused by alcoholism, Jack, in desperation, joined AA and resolved to quit drinking. Altho repeatedly falling off and climbing back on the wagon all thru the '70s, Jack has now been sober for 12 years—yes indeed—since 1984. Was there a literary component to this fact...? Well, rest assured, this is not what Jack is thinking about now. Rather, he's thinking about what to do next about the single Mom, literally mathematically half his age, sitting on the stool next to him, but not nearly as close as they were to each other in her aging waterbed at several moments during the night...last night.

This type of situation is not to be unexpected...Even tho he's not published anything since he began his battle to stay sober and has dropped off the “A-List” for literary personalities and has fallen to the point where he headlines minor literary festivals such as this one...the Pitlamp Island International Poetry Festival...he's still a magnet for

women like Loretta Morrison, the single Mom sharing this late Sunday Morning breakfast with him.

It's Loretta who's having "Dem bacon and dem eggs". Jack, in the struggle to rebuild his body and health after decades suffering the ravages of alcohol, has become a Vegan—sometimes—or at least a Vegetarian. And he's reverted to his old habits, the ones he had back in the late '40's and early '50's when he was writing, among other things, *On the Road*...that is—coffee and a joint.

Well, Jack is thinking as he forgoes dwelling on the whole-egg mayonnaise that moistens the multigrain hamburger bun on which his square of fried tofu, leaf of Romaine lettuce and slice of locally grown tomato are nestling, I'm pretty sure I can sneak a toke in the gazebo next to the back hall of the Community Centre...and good thing this babe—Loretta—yeah, like Loretta Lynn, Coal Miner's Daughter, or that Beatles song, what was it...“Get Back”—Sweet Loretta something thought she was a woman...yeah, Loretta...she has some dynamite homegrown.

“Well, how're dem eggs?” asks Jack.

“Eggs are eggs... I guess maybe the free range ones have more taste...but this bacon tastes like salmon...I hope it's ok...”

“The bacon's fine,” says the short order cook. “It's local—we bought it from Will Trees—you know, the guy who raises pigs and works part time at the fish farm—I heard he feeds the morts to his pigs and that's about all they eat.”

“What the hell are morts?” asks Jack.

“Dead salmon,” says Loretta, “just great—but I guess it's no worse than anything else pigs eat.”

“That's why I became a Vegan,” bullshits Jack, purposefully not thinking about the whole-egg mayonnaise on his tofu burger. And hopefully, by way of a hint, “And I hear the best agricultural products of the island are in the vegetable category—specifically herbal.”

Loretta, already a bit regretful of her groupie-esque behavior of the night before is on the verge of falling into morning-after cynicism, but

resigns herself to doling out a few more grams of her homegrown Purple Indica to the once-famous novelist. She can always use it in conversation—"I sucked a few joints with Jack Kerouac, eh..." wink wink!

Loretta knows Jack's leaving on the next ferry, that he's reading tonight with Gregory Corso—who still drinks like a fish—at the Italian Cultural Centre in Vancouver. She knows she'll likely never see or hear from him again—well, maybe once, something vapid and insincere. So she crunches another bite of dead salmon-flavored bacon while Jack mops up the puddle of tomato pulp mixed with mayonnaise that lingers on the surface of his plate with the remains of his multigrain hamburger bun.

"My treat," says Loretta, relishing in the subtle irony. Jack will pay for his treats one way or another. They trip the light fantastic down the steps of the Pitlamp Island General Store and turn right toward the Hall. They sit in the empty gazebo and gaze out at the soccer pitch—once the baseball diamond—and suck on a fat joint of homegrown Purple Indica. Loretta rolls two more and hands them to Jack. "Three's a charm," she says. Jack, having sucked in a huge toke, explodes in a fit of coughing.

"That oughtta hold ya," she says, smiling. Jack is still coughing too hard to speak.

Jack passes the joint to Loretta. She takes a moderate toke, inhales as if it were a cigarette and blows three perfect smoke rings, each one passing thru the larger one which went before it.

"Pretty cool," says Jack, finally able to talk.

"Sayonara," says Loretta.

Barbara Curry Mulcahy was born in Trinidad and raised in India, Greece, the US, and Israel. She lives in Slocan, B.C., where she is revising a manuscript of poetry with the help of editor Ron Smith. A broadside of Section 8 of *Dragoman* was recently published by The North Press in Port Townsend, Washington and is available in the US at <http://thenorthpress.net/> or in Canada at <http://www.barbaracurrymulcahy.ca/>

Dragoman¹

Barbara Curry Mulcahy

1.

Atop the great fault of the Rift Valley,
Europe Asia Africa shears
past itself.

Voices: imprecating, denouncing, exhorting...

Homer, Abraham, Herodotus, Julius

Caesar, Jesus, Judas, Mohammed. Gamel Abdel Nasser, King
Hussein,

Golda Meir, Moshe Dayan, LBJ, Robert MacNamara.

Ho Chi Minh, Alexei Kosygin, and even the Beatles, John,

Paul, George, and Ringo. And yes, Yoko Ono. Cacophony of past and
present.

Future: mirage.

I lived by a border,
a border hidden by hill.

I, by territory, landmark, and custom—undefined.

Kaleidoscope of outside perception turning:

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guest, interloper, enemy... When I say *us, we*,
I want you to know
I, too, longed to belong.

2.

At the top of every hour,
we turned on the radio

to hear: incidents, skirmishes,
injuries, damage, retaliation, and

who was massing what
on each border. But mainly,

the numbers of injuries
and the names of the dead.

We looked in each newspaper
for a black box,

a list of names. Our dead,
were the only ones listed.

3.

What *would* have been the point
in telling? I would have made you

misunderstand. I didn't know I didn't know;
I didn't see I didn't see.

4.

*Every nation, with its myth
of origin.*

Adam, the first man, from *adom*, meaning red
as in the red earth. Man come from the land,
belonging to the land. The land
belonging to *him*, given to *him*.

The gift of the promised land.

Even if someone else already lived on the land

equals.

There are no Palestinians.

O devil-may-care language.

Devil-may-care logic.

How you are fashioned into a prophet's tool.

A tool for a single-minded, hard-hearted prophet.

5.

When you are little, you look up. When big,
down. Inside, out. Outside, in. Everywhere
the apartheid of perspective.

But we are not allowed
to say that word. We are
not allowed.

6.

Who were they—the men
fenced on a faraway hill?
The men I traveled past when I took the bus.

Their heads shaved, they wore striped
pajamas in the heat of afternoon. Or, at least then
I thought they wore pajamas. One of them

squatted by the fence, flat on his heels,
clenching his arms around his folded legs,
perfectly balanced,

head bent down,
a swirl of barbed wire
high overhead.

I didn't know
that they were prisoners, had to
have that explained.

7.

Auschwitz, Buchenwald.
Striped clothes, shaved heads,

barbed wire fences.

The specter behind us as we sang

We are strong, strong,

victorious and free!

We're not your victims,

we don't flee!

We don't take flack!

Push us—we push right back!

But looking at the prisoners, wasn't it
like looking in a mirror?

Ourselves, and

back, back

to the who

we were

and are.

8.

Water flows always down,
effortlessly. And we reach

into aquifers, fields stretching
beneath borders, feeding wells

apolitically. In darkness, we drill,
and in light, drain,

pipng to our desert, making it
Babylon green.

9.

Harp-shaped Kinneret embedded
in the Galilean hills, under the parapets
of the Golan Heights, Kinneret, blue jewel. Alias,

Lake Kinneret, Sea of Galilee
in the flint-shaped land, Israel. Kinneret,
from the word meaning harp, shaped like a biblical

harp. When the light wind blows
against the water, against the grasses
against the leaves of the trees on the hills

surrounding the shore,
the harp sings.

10.

Our irrigated fields, our sheltered lives.

Stones, the land
an endless crop of stones
and stories.

David and Goliath. King David his migraines
and depression. The harp
soothing him.

King Solomon, sex addict.
Wisdom adulterated
by desire.

Archeology.

Pot handles and coins, shards, iridescent amphorae,
all the pieces patched and displayed, corroborating.

This stream
meandering from rubble,
skirting our hill, entering our fields—"our" water.

11.

I never saw
where the river came from,
never thought,
never asked.

Until I swam
where it pooled, so icy.

Where did it come from?
From across the border,
from snow, high in the mountain
of the forbidden.

12.

You can see the wind, if you look at leaves or petals
or grass where it's long enough to bend.
Their undulation, its rhythm.

You can see if you look.
Everywhere a pattern, a pattern of patterns.
Shelter of our hill. Safe from...
Who were they? And why did they come?

You can see if you look, but look hard—the mind
builds its own Maginot Line.

13.

Incursion—reprisal. There, mountain out of reach.
Geography, climate, culture
out of reach.

In reach: How far to push,
how many homes to bulldoze, how many
ancient deep-rooted olives...

Here, a willow, rare and draping
its tender tassels
down to meltwater.

14.

That biblical skill, birthright of Jacob,
where Esau² was hungry and
Jacob got what he wanted.

And now Esau, uneducated *fellah*, didn't

know how to triangulate, couldn't
reach what was hidden, couldn't reach

behind a hill, couldn't reach with rockets,
had to cross the border between us exposed,
infiltrator; marauder; the words we used

before *terrorist* came into vogue.

15.

I did see that other land twice,
Arriving and leaving. The river,
from that angle hidden, and I saw
only the difference, over there
the crop so sparse.

And when I left, I looked down from a bus
at a rickety fence, posts burdened with barbed wire,
leaning, unable to hold anything back
or anything in. Anything but green to this side,
brown to the other.

Beyond the fence, an ox
pulled a plough. A man
grasped its handles. He was stooped
toward the furrow...
He didn't look over; he didn't
look up; all he did
was follow the furrow,
and the bus drove away.

I didn't tell you, couldn't.
People who hide, don't see
that is our misery.

Now I speak.
Call me dragoman
if you dare.

¹An interpreter in the Middle East—of language, history, terrain, and custom.

²Jacob and Esau were the twin sons of Rebekah and Isaac. Esau, first-born, was a hunter. Jacob, the favorite of Rebekah, was a herdsman. Esau, back empty-handed from the hunt and hungry, sold his birthright to Jacob for a meal.

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Bruno Schwegler taught German, French and History until his retirement in 2009. He lives in Wohlen, Switzerland, a small town of 15,000 inhabitants, and has a penchant for the macabre. His watercolor sketches depict a world that is often beautiful, yet open to darker surprises, while refraining from apocalyptic scenarios. He writes pocket fiction in his spare time.

Margrith Schraner is the Associate Editor of the NOR. Her literary translations from the German include a short story by Marie Luise Kaschnitz (1901-1974), printed by Mother Tongue Press, Ganges, B.C., as well as selected chapters of novels by contemporary authors Eveline Hasler and Asta Scheib, which were featured in *The New Orphic Review* in 2002 and 2014, respectively.

Trust

Bruno Schwegler
(transl. Margrith Schraner)

A father and his seven-year-old daughter have arrived at the top of a mountain.

The girl is jubilant. “What a gorgeous view, Papa!”

“My opinion, exactly,” agrees the father.

“Papa,” the child inquires soon after, “may I take a small jump—down that way?”

“By all means, jump,” replies the father.

The daughter jumps. One hundred meters down, her body hits the ground. Hard.

The father is blind.

Dead Crow

Sean Arthur Joyce

Dead Crow's Alter Ego

Sean Arthur Joyce, better known in the Kootenays as Art Joyce, has published two books of regional history and in 2014 published *Laying the Children's Ghosts to Rest: Canada's Home Children in the West* (Hagios Press) on the little-known historical phenomenon of the 100,000 poor children exported from the UK to work as indentured child labourers on Canadian farms.

Joyce's poems and essays on poetics have appeared in Canadian, American and British literary journals. In 2016 his poetics thesis, *A New Romanticism for the 21st Century*, appeared in the journal *Canadian Poetry* from the University of Western Ontario.

New Orphic Publishers has published three collections of his poetry, *The Charlatans of Paradise*, *Star Seeds*, and *The Price of Transcendence*, the latter edited by renowned Canadian poet Tom Wayman, who calls it "a first class collection."

In 2016 he produced his second poetry video, *Dead Crow: Prologue*, with music composed by Noel Fudge and video production by Isaac Carter of ICandy Films.

Joyce Ponders Dead Crow

To some extent *Dead Crow* is a walking satire of life at the end of empire, though of course he is a *bona fide* character in his own right. That became pointedly apparent to me while performing the *Prologue* last year for audiences. It's as the actors often say: a really good character just grabs you by the shirt collar and drags you along with it. You really have no choice. And despite the fact that most editors of literary journals simply don't seem to get it, that suggests to me that *Dead Crow* is a success on his own terms, not just in literary terms. His voice comes alive more *off* the page than on it. It's a voice that begs to be spoken aloud to hear what a delightful yet maddening curmudgeon he really is.

The new poems are naturally prompted by the fact of living in the world as a sentient, sensitive being, painfully aware of where we are in the stream of history. Thus, real-world events are filtered through *Dead Crow's* irascible, astute intelligence and character. Two poems could be drawn directly from the Trump phenomenon: *Dead Crow Contemplates Murder*, in which *Dead Crow* demonstrates that, unlike Trump, he actually has a sense of remorse for how he uses language to attack others; and *Dead Crow on the Campaign Trail*, which revisits the age-old conundrum of why it is humans are continually fooled by politicians. *Dead Crow: The Flood II* is a climate change update of the Noachian Flood story, which I wrote about earlier in the series. *Nightmare II* and *Dead Crow Has a Vision of His Death* are more personal poems, the latter a tad ironic for a character who is supposedly a demigod. But really, *Dead Crow's* status as an immortal is a reflection of human arrogance, this idea that we somehow deserve to live forever.

Dead Crow Contemplates Murder

Once, I murdered an entire village
with nothing but my tongue. Could easily
have done it with a thought tsunami,

but language was new to me and,
after all, I am a curious bird.
Translation obviously wasn't an issue.

My wit a caustic osmosis soaking the moss
under their feet. Couldn't stop 'til the ruin of bodies
shocked me awake. For an entire

decade afterward, I said nothing,
not even a dry hinge creaking in my throat.
Genocide is no way to learn compassion,

slaughter a poor substitute
for the realization words have power.
Use them at your peril—jagged outlines

ghosting a block of obsidian.

Dead Crow on the Campaign Trail

Vote for me—yeah. Cough.
Wild guess—you've heard that one
before. How many times, exactly,

does it take Humans to learn?
If evolution were a car,
it would be a lemon—zero

to sixty in five seconds but
dying on a frozen highway
hours from any help.

Social evolution—hell!
Nothing more than Fate
on a lost weekend, staggering

forward and backwards,
the occasional quantum leap.
Vote for me and I promise—

all the cures in the world,
right here in this blue glass vial.
Hey, you're such nice cats,

I'll give it to you half-price.
I'll even throw in all the scrap metal
you can melt down and pretzel back to life.

Sorry about the stagnant, poisoned

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marshes, the slightly—uh, depleted
stock of wildlife. You know how it is—

expenses. A guy's gotta right
to make a profit, doesn't he?
Business is business, after all.

Good luck, by the way, with that—
what did you call it? Revolution?
You want fries with that?

A little swag, maybe? Trust me,
I've seen them all. I get hungry just *thinking*
about an insurrection.

Can't say I blame you—a little
pruning never hurt the forest,
if you know what I mean.

Fire the only guaranteed way
to green up the deadwood.
I can sniff out the inbreeding,

the gilded pubic hairs of the One Percent
from a half century away.
You want evolution?

Give me somebody
Who can think *before* they act.
You want me to start coughing up the secrets?

Fine. Everything has its price.

Dead Crow: The Flood II

Skies dragged over us, pencil lead light
wet yet somehow drained. Summer fields bloomed
mildew instead of daisies. Beans rotted

on the vine, squash dissolved in leaf-limp beds.
Water pushing up through sippy soles—
an insinuating fear, incriminating doubt.

Listen, I've seen a world drowned. I know
the nose-peeling stench of death. I've been here
long enough to smell it coming.

Tried to tell you, didn't I?
Piss her off, and Earth slaps back
so hard your ears ping. You humans.

Think you're so clever. Sticking monkey wrenches
in spokes at a hundred clicks an hour,
so damn sure you'll ride the whirlwind unscathed.

Republic of Kiribati, kingdom of names
that smell of orchids, sentinel of global coastlines
invaded—a watery coup, a million in Fiji alone—

gone, sinking sisters of Maldives, Mumbai

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Miami, New Orleans and New York,
not an ark in sight. What can I say?

Darwin's ghost never rests. Two steps forward,
three back. Don't worry. Humans always manage
to bounce back, minus a few million creatures—

the ultimate invasive species, white-hot spark
at the heart of a proton. Careful. You might find yourself
returning as a slug, a dandelion seed,

gravel in the gullet of a hawk in its deadly languid spiral.

Dead Crow: Nightmare II

Damned if it didn't happen to me again.
Dreamt I was cut up in pieces scattered
in different rooms of the house. Not the bloody

body parts kind of nightmare. Hell, far worse
than that. Emptiness so deep
you feel yourself falling down a canyon

from one step to the next. A shadow
of Brechtian depths. Breath itself a risk
in the stillness. Me with my human self—strewn

across the grass like a blown-out window,
shed reptilian skin oddly formal in black tie
and tux. A sartorial epigraph in the crabgrass,

all my elegance and power a softly blown fuse.
Again and again, my wings clipped, wandering
streets hunched and hectored, 'til the inevitable

dead end. Hell, I'm the King of Dead Ends.
See, my eyeholes are in the brick there,
by the dumpsters and cardboard sleeping bags.

Waking at the instant of a stuck breath
to recall my own power to refuse, step outside

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the game. No reality is virtual if we hold it

as an article of faith. Lucidity the night vision
that holds the wheel, morning just
a wingtip away—the dream

a drainspout washed clean.

Dead Crow Has a Vision of His Death

Gods, look at me. Sickening, some days,
what age does to a body. Downed in one
shot that elixir promising this would never

happen. Dreamed of it plenty, though—begged
thunderheads to hammer me down,
shower blessed dark, still the acid voices.

But every time, she split the gloom,
a single feather lambent in sunlight enough
to chase off the wraiths of last light.

Cruised me out over the gasp of canyons—
the two of us one eye, one thought hung
open-mouthed at it all. Nightmare crouches,

its jaws full of teeth. Before I let it take her,
I'll let *my* soul go cheap. Barter with whatever cosmic
bastards rigged this game. I see it coming—

black curl of cloud above the treetops, breathless
crack of frozen spruce grain, wingtips numb,
sleep's unwanted injection spreading. The mind's

candle a moth impaled and beating

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on a shrinking door, enraged at the body's betrayal.
Lit like a flare searing its arc across the slow

collapse of night. Gone? Gone? Never. Only gone
to the deaf, the grounded with no hope
of jiggling a squall or surfing a mistral.

Not gone but particles in the Jetstream,
a glint of silver ore, cushion of moss relaxing
beneath your feet, a thought entering unbidden and

O! freefalling and alive

Bobbie Ogletree mostly writes poetry and creative non-fiction. She has had poems published in the Canadian literary journal *Other Voices* and in two Canadian anthologies, namely, *Rocksalt*, an anthology of contemporary B.C. Poetry, and *This New World*. She occasionally attempts fiction, and one of her pieces of fiction appeared in The Federation of BC Writers' magazine, *Wordworks*. She lives in Nelson, British Columbia with her partner and teaches academic and business writing skills online. She also works as a volunteer ESL tutor.

O Mother I Went to Germany

Bobbie Ogletree

The shades arrived as soon as I bought the ticket to Berlin. As an American Jew born in 1946 and raised in an area of New York's Catskill Mountains so heavily populated with Jews that it was called the *Borscht Belt*, I anticipated finding a remnant darkness in Deutschland, but it did not overly concern me. Much more pressing while I was still in Canada were the voices of my ancestral dead, who when alive had warned me repeatedly never to set foot in Germany, never to buy anything German-made, and for whom my travel plans seemed to have set off a rolling motion in their graves. I did, however, receive a begrudging blessing from my very elderly Aunt Rachel. Ever since I could remember, she had insisted that never in a million years would she go to Germany, where she would wonder every minute if she was looking at a Nazi. But hearing the reasons for my journey, she sadly conceded, "Well, if I had grandchildren there like you do, I would go, too. It's a *shanda* though that you have to visit such a place."

Naively, I thought it was seeing those very grandchildren that would haunt me more than the ancestors' tumult or the spectres of the Third Reich. I did not know how to reconcile my fierce love for my

grandchildren with the facts: My son and his wife's marriage was over, and fifteen months earlier she and the grandchildren had left Vancouver to live indefinitely in her birthplace, Berlin. I worried that I would become a true ghost of a grandmother, visiting my grandchildren for two weeks every year, connecting mostly by phone or Skype, living on crumbs of disembodied touching. Such fear of abandonment was my lifelong *dybbuk* who never tired of demanding allegiance from me. The ocean and culture between me and my grandchildren now kept me utterly loyal to this demon, but most frighteningly, the separation was almost enough to reactivate what I seemed to have cured years ago: breathlessness, dizziness, distortion of space and light, fight that led to flight out of hairdressing salons, stores and banks; a perverse plethora of terror commonly called panic attacks.

In the debilitating years that I had endured such panic attacks, a wise friend offered me this line about life, "Make all of it ordinary." I tried to apply her words to my trip. But between ancestral conditioning about Germany, the *dybbuk*, the possibility of sickness and a panic attack in the plane, retaining my close relationship with my daughter-in-law who was now an ex, and the normal trepidation about flying to someplace completely foreign, I left Vancouver in a fog of fear. Yet the KLM plane stayed aloft. I didn't get a blood clot in either leg from the long flight. No one took me away for questioning in spite of my degenerate-looking passport photo; the customs officer in Amsterdam looked at my empty passport pages and welcomed me to Europe. And finally when the sliding doors at Berlin's Tegel Airport's baggage claim opened, there they were: Soleil, my seven-year old granddaughter, Shakur, my four-year-old grandson and their mother, Ina. They had not forgotten me.

Initially and partly because I had not slept in twenty-four hours, it was as if they had picked me up at the Vancouver Airport. The children still sat and squirmed in their car seats as they talked non-stop. Ina still drove too fast. On the way to their apartment, we passed

a huge triple X Exotica store that looked much like its equivalent in Canada. Their spacious apartment in the Wilmersdorf District had some of the same Vancouver furniture and the same huge wall hanging of a conquered Indian chief who gazed upon us in sorrowful dignity. Ina still burned candles and incense to cleanse and clarify. Her squash soup, which I had eaten numerous times while they lived in B.C., awaited me.

Ina graciously became my tour guide and clearly wanted me to embrace Berlin and their new life. On my first full day there, she took us on a cardiac-arrest hike through woody terrain that ended atop a hill with a panoramic view of the city. Families flew kites; my grandson threw a fit because he didn't have one. Ordinary. But I was getting unexpectedly tense amongst all these sons and daughters, grandsons and granddaughters of God-knows who. A lot of them were blonde. The ones in earshot were definitely speaking German which didn't sound as close to Yiddish as I had claimed it did when trying to bond with Ina in the hopeful days of Vancouver. Amidst the happiness of kite-flying and snuggly families, it hit me: I was really in Germany.

O mother, your daughter who had shrugged off your Jewish travel advisory about Nazis and anti-Semites as hopelessly outdated went to Germany.

My shrugging was over. They had insistent voices, these ghosts. But they chose their moments as if they had learned that the living have their limits. Inside the apartment, I was just Oma. I did housework, read stories to my grandchildren, delighted in their antics and growth. In fine hippie tradition, I took care of the kids so that Ina could date her new boyfriend and spend the night with him. I fretted about the woes of those that were still embodied: my son's absence, my granddaughter's dread of sleeping, my grandson's susceptibility to asthma. I stood each day at the dining room window and admired the wide clean street, the solid buildings. As soon as I walked or drove with Ina on those streets, though, solidity ceased.

On my fourth day in Berlin, I met the other grandmother, the

German Oma. She rushed into my arms to greet me. Even without such a greeting, I would have acquitted her. During the war, she was a child traumatized by bombs and hunger. She had also been a Holocaust educator and had bid on designing the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin. The indicting and acquitting were the trouble, though. I, who posited that anyone and anything can and should be forgiven, continued to be busy with the scales of justice everywhere I went in this sparkly green Berlin with its spiffy Kudamm stores, and its Turkish immigrants in the Kreuzberg District.

As to the Jewish Question, even Aunt Rachel would have to admit that some serious owning-up had occurred. A burgeoning Jewish population could now go to *shul* in the rebuilt New Synagogue that still has its Eastern Moorish style. Jews and non-Jews alike could grieve every day with Holocaust pain if desired at the Jewish Museum Berlin and at the Holocaust Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe; the latter is just hundreds of yards away from where Hitler's chancellery building stood and is near his bunker, which now lies underneath a parking lot. The Memorial partly consists of 2711 concrete slabs designed and arranged to be disorienting, profoundly disquieting. Some see it as an undulating cemetery. Such an undeniably open bow to history and groundlessness in the heart of the city did not appease the voices, however.

On that same fourth day of my visit, we walked with the other Oma in Grünewald, the Green Woods. I admired the kilometers of forest that stood beside a lake, but a persistent shadow vibration had me visualizing Jews hiding or being chased by Nazis to the edge of the water where now wild boars grazed, unaware they were soon to be culled because of their numbers. At the end of the walk was a picturesque white castle. I imagined holidaying SS officers fouling its air with *Heil Hitler*, drinking stein after stein of beer as they envisioned the glory of a world without Jews.

There was nothing imaginary about the *Stolpersteine* (Stumble Stones), collections of brass-plated, hand-engraved stones that

commemorate victims of the Holocaust who perished or survived Nazi terror. The stones are placed in front of buildings where Jews and other enemies of the Third Reich last lived, or sometimes where they had worked. Each stone displays the person's name, birth year, and destiny (murdered or escaped by emigration or suicide). On a sunny day en route to a nearby mall with my family, I aptly stumbled over my first stones. Ina translated the unthinkable words, such as: Here lived Hannah Kaufmann 1892—deported 1942. Murdered in Auschwitz 10.9. 1942. Here it was in plain sight. The phantom voices awaited my response. I sought to revivify Hannah Kaufmann, to unburden her somehow by sharing her terror, but I felt nothing. I did what I thought I should; I mumbled a Tibetan mantra for evoking compassion, touched my hand to my heart and then let it fall loosely in a numb salute to Hannah and the others. Onward we went to the mall. There, Aunt Rachel's weary, predictable question arose again and again as I torpidly looked at the shoppers: Was he a Nazi? Was someone in their family a Nazi? Had she been born to collaborators?

Shoa breath did eventually thaw me. We were going to the Olympic Stadium in Charlottenburg District, the same stadium where Hitler almost had an aneurism over the black American man, Jessie Owens, winning gold. Now my grandchildren took swimming lessons there. En route, we passed an intersection with a pole laden with signs. One said Spandau. The name dizzied me; a panic attack loomed. "Spandau," I whispered to myself in the back seat. Unbidden tears burned my eyes and nose. I had goose bumps. My body or a new inhabitant of it knew Spandau. "What is Spandau?" I quietly asked Ina as I tried to breathe deeply from my constricted belly. "Just a district," she responded, unaware of my distress.

And at the multi-purpose Olympic Stadium complex, it was just a swimming pool, where parents yelled in German and kids most likely peed in the pool, where my grandson cried because Ina had forgotten to dry his almost-too-tight suit from the last lesson, where his Jewish American/Canadian Oma took out some Euros and bought him

another one. It was just a gigantic field on the forgiving land from which Hitler and his thugs welcomed the oblivious world in 1936. And “Just a remnant iron eagle that the Third Reich had co-opted,” said Ina patiently, when I pointed in outrage to the menacing symbol on the cornice of one of the stadium buildings.

On the way home from the Olympic Stadium, I averted my eyes from signage. I thought offhandedly about how often I saw smokers on the Berlin streets. On the spot, I invented a game for the kids called Let’s Count the Smokers. The kids were instantly in. “Oma”, they yelled joyously, “there’s one and there’s one, and over there, Oma.” Not interested in my escapist game or the happiness of children, the voices clamored: *You want to consider smoke? How about the alchemy of a once-incarnate Hannah Kaufmann becoming Auschwitz vapor?* They had me. Like a Talmudic study in which one question leads exhaustedly to another, I was stuck pondering what and whose disquietude these many smokers inhaled and exhaled as they went about living in cleansed, humbled Berlin.

Ernest Hekkanen is editor-in-chief of *The New Orphic Review*. For more information, see page 4.

The Little Constable

Ernest Hekkanen

When your work history is as checkered as mine, you are often called upon to do things that might strike other people as ridiculous, asinine or beyond the pale, and when you're being paid to do them by somebody who is impossibly wealthy—by your own standards, anyway—you shouldn't forget to throw in the word 'gratuitous'. I have found that life is often like this for writers living on the financial fringes of society, and I'm thankful it is, because, by hiring myself out to such people, I've been offered glimpses into lifestyles far beyond my own means.

Richard Waugh was one such man. I met him by answering a want ad for a Wordsmith in the Vancouver Sun. I don't like being called a 'wordsmith'. I find it patronizing. It seems to devalue the work of writers. It implies that little or no talent is needed to string words together, that it is strictly a mechanical process. However, I swallowed my objections, if not my pride, because my bank account had just about hit rock bottom, and except for some gigs as a handyman, jobs had been few and far between. Working as a 'wordsmith' was at least a lot closer to what I envisioned myself doing, much closer than, say, wielding a monkey wrench.

The want ad asked for CVs to be sent to an office on Granville Street, and it indicated that the chosen applicant would write a novel based on research material having to do with a county sheriff in

Florida. “Make yourself sound interesting,” the ad challenged aspiring applicants. In the mid-1990s, when these events took place, Margrith Schraner and I were living in a townhouse located at Victoria and Napier on the Eastside of Vancouver, an area generally referred to as Little Italy. To make the rent each month, we sublet two of the bedrooms, thus keeping our living expenses to a minimum. My office-bedroom was located in the basement of the townhouse, half of which I had converted to studio space where I also spent a fair bit of time applying oil paint to canvas. Back then, in my late forties, I felt I could succeed at anything I set my mind to, although my lack of disposable income belied that notion.

I brought the want ad to Margrith’s attention. “What do you think of this job? Should I apply?”

She glanced at the ad I had highlighted with a yellow marking pen. “It sounds perfect for you. You work well on your own, and you’re imaginative.”

“But am I interesting?”

“I’m sure you can make yourself sound interesting, Mr. Wordsmith.”

I had only very recently switched from using an electric typewriter to using a computer, thanks to my good friend Jurgen Hesse, a former newspaperman who had sold me his old computer for a nominal sum. He had also given me the name and phone number of a techie who could install for cheap whatever operating system I might desire. I sat down at the keyboard and pounded out a CV, mentioning that I had been wanted by the FBI for my anti-war activities, back in mid-1960s America, and furthermore, since coming to Canada, had worked at over twenty-five jobs, from ranch hand to self-employed renovator, while simultaneously publishing five books, all of them fiction, two under Thistle-down’s imprint and three under my own imprint.

Oh, yes, I should mention that my name is Ernest Hekkanen, and that this story is taken from life, although some of the names have been changed, to save embarrassment and prevent possible litigation.

After typing up my résumé, I asked Margrith to proofread it.

Margrith has edited nearly every book I've ever written, and because English is one of her adopted languages, one she acquired in an academic setting, her practical understanding of its mechanics is superior to my more sloppy, native way of speaking English.

"Why did you devote so much space to making yourself sound like an outlaw?" she asked me.

I had included in my résumé the fact that I had spent thirty days under house arrest for blockading a logging road in Clayquot Sound.

"Because of some suspicions I have."

"Suspicions? What sort of suspicions?"

"I think Mr. Waugh might be a transplanted American, and that the book he wants to write might have something to do with a perceived injustice."

"What makes you think that?"

"The subject matter. It's about a sheriff, down in Florida."

I sent my résumé off on Wednesday, along with two photocopied chapters of my novel, *Chasing After Carnivals*, and received a letter from Richard Waugh on Friday of the following week. He had enclosed an article about a sheriff who ran Lake County, Florida like a police state from 1945 to '72. Waugh's letter suggested that he had been forced to leave the county because of research he was conducting into the man's past. The last line of the letter read: "Please review this letter and contact me when (and if) you want to proceed further."

The letterhead bore the name of a research company. It included a downtown address on Granville Street, as well as a telephone number. After reading the article, which dealt with the shooting death of two black men in the sheriff's custody, I dialed Mr. Waugh's number.

"I'm the fellow who responded to your want ad. Ernest Hekkanen, to be exact. I'd like to discuss your project with you, and I'd like to get some idea as to the terms."

"You're competing with two other authors. Can you drop by my office on Monday—around one-fifteen?"

"I've jotted it down in my agenda."

“Good. I’ll see you then, Mr. Hekkanen.”

Only after hanging up did it occur to me that Mr. Waugh had answered the phone himself. That seemed to suggest that he didn’t have a receptionist. Again, I glanced at the letterhead of his hastily written letter. I decided to look up his research company in the telephone directory, but couldn’t find a listing. The letterhead—in green, black and red—wasn’t anything a quality printer couldn’t spit out. It caused me to ponder whether Mr. Waugh’s research firm might in fact be a company in name only. That is, a front. On Monday, when I went down to Waugh’s office to be interviewed for the job, I discovered that he did, indeed, have a receptionist, a woman who looked as though she might be a retired librarian.

“I’m here to see Mr. Waugh.”

“About....”

“About a ghostwriting job. My name’s Ernest Hekkanen.”

“Right now, he’s busy with somebody else, Mr. Hekkanen.” She glanced at the closed door to the right of her desk. “Please have a seat. He shouldn’t be too long.”

I took one of three seats against the wall. The reception area was rather spare: a couple of filing cabinets, a printer that sat on a low table and a water cooler. No pictures hung on the walls, only a calendar. A wastebasket sat in one corner, with some crumpled cellophane in the bottom. If necessary, the business could be dismantled in a matter of minutes, which heightened my curiosity. The receptionist was now typing at a keyboard. There were no magazines to read, so I just sat there, my right hand resting on top of my left, trying not to feel like a dental patient.

At last, the door to Mr. Waugh’s inner office opened, and out stepped a writer I had known back when I was a member of the Writers’ Union of Canada. George Denson was an old acquaintance. He claimed to be of Hungarian ancestry and may very well have been, judging by his dark hair and swarthy complexion. Once or twice he had joked that as Finns and Hungarians we were practically second

cousins, due to the Finno-Ugric language group we both belonged to.

“I suspect you’re here for the same reason I am,” he said, shifting his leather briefcase to the opposite hand.

“I strongly suspect that’s the case, all right.”

The man who followed him out through the door was approximately the same height as me—about five-foot nine-inches. I guessed he was in his mid-fifties. “You two know each other?” he remarked.

“Yes, George is a decent-enough writer. A solid candidate. I’d look no further—if you’re short of applicants, that is.”

“Hekkanen’s not a bad writer either. Very workman-like.”

“Thanks for the effusive praise, George.”

“I feel like I should break out some cookies and tea,” Mr. Waugh remarked. “We could sit down and have a nice, little chat about literature. That’s literature with a capital L. Unfortunately, I’ve got a business to run, so, if you wouldn’t mind too much, Mr. Hekkanen, please step into my office.”

Mr. Waugh’s inner office was as sparsely furnished as the reception area—that is, with nothing that couldn’t be disposed of in a matter of minutes. It made me think even more strongly that his business was little more than a front.

“We’re just getting set up,” he explained, noticing the summary inspection I gave his office.

“So, what exactly do you do for a living?” I asked.

“I bump up the profile of firms that are trying to get registered as publicly traded companies.”

“And you’re able to make a living at this?”

“A fairly handsome living, as a matter of fact.”

“Enough to pay someone to write a book, I presume?”

“Yes, more than enough for that.”

Waugh’s pronunciation seemed to suggest that he hailed from the East Coast of the United States, perhaps Massachusetts. His accent was faintly reminiscent of the late Kennedys. He gestured to the chair in front of his desk, and we both sat down. Immediately my gaze was

drawn to his hairline. I had to look twice to ensure I wasn't seeing things incorrectly, that he did, in fact, have hair plugs implanted in his scalp. I found it difficult to keep my gaze from wandering up to where they nestled along his hairline.

He rifled through several files on his desk. Selected one, opened it on top of a green blotter. Scanned my résumé. "I see you're from the States," he said, looking up at me.

"Yes, I came up here during the Vietnam War."

"Because you were a draft dodger?"

"I prefer to be called an anti-war activist."

"You're a pacifist?"

"No, I'm not. I objected to going to Vietnam, as a soldier, because I didn't want to participate in the atrocities we were committing overseas."

"Were you very active—as an anti-war activist?"

"Active enough to attract the attention of the FBI."

"How do you know they were watching you?"

"The FBI have this curious way of making themselves annoying to everyone in your neighborhood. They question everyone else about you before they get around to knocking on your door. Their goal is to isolate you—to poison everyone's attitude toward you. It's an old, proven method, and it works rather well."

"You must've had a fairly high profile, then?"

"Not really. I simply associated with the wrong people. Also, I was a member of the SDS."

"The SDS?"

"Students for a Democratic Society."

"I see." He relaxed against the back of his swivel chair, and laced his fingers together just below his sternum. "So what attracts you to my project?"

"All I know about your precious Sheriff Willis V. McCall is what I've read in the article you sent me. I've never been to Florida, although my brother lives down there. However, to be quite honest,

I'd like to see if I can write to order. Also, I could use the job—depending on your terms of employment, of course.”

“I think you might be putting the cart before the horse—” he glanced at my resumé “—Ernest. May I call you Ernest?”

“Please do. May I call you Richard?”

“Richard or Rick. My close friends call me Rick.”

“I'll call you Rick, then.”

He opened one of the desk drawers. Tossed me a sheaf of papers with a couple of rubber bands around it. Some of the pages were bound with a black cerlox spine. “This is some of the research material I've amassed on Sheriff McCall. It includes his so-called autobiography. I'd like to see it turned into a historical novel. Take a close look at the articles. Get back to me in a week—that is, if you still want to pursue this opportunity. I'd like to see an overall plan that explains how you would tackle the job. Maybe an introductory chapter or two. We can talk terms, after that.”

“May I ask you a couple of questions?”

“Shoot.”

“Florida is quite a distance from Vancouver. Why are you interested in this Sheriff McCall?”

“I used to live in Florida. Mount Dora, to be exact. That's in Lake County. Willis was the sheriff of Lake County. He and his henchmen ran me out of the country, when they discovered I was digging into his past.”

“One more question....”

“Shoot.”

“Your accent suggests you weren't born in Florida. Where do you hail from?”

“Boston. Anything else you'd like to know?”

“No. That'll *do* for now. It gives me some idea as to why you might've run up against the wrong people, down there.”

“Meaning what, exactly?”

“Meaning you're a Boston boy, probably one with a university

degree. You've got the notion that we should live in a rules-based society, and that those rules should apply to everyone, equally. You didn't find that to be the case down in Florida."

He smiled. "You aren't a law enforcement agent, I hope."

"No, but I *do* profile people. It's one of the hazards of being a writer. We're always trying to figure out why people do the things they do."

Later that evening, I received a phone call from George Denson. "Do you think this guy is for real?" he asked me.

"You mean, Richard Waugh?"

"Both him and the sheriff he wants to base the novel on."

"Did Waugh give you a batch of photocopied newspaper clippings to peruse?"

"He did. I've been skimming them for the past hour or so. McCall sounds like a real redneck."

"I like the article about how he got down off his horse, during a parade. His horse gave him a friendly nip in the ass, and he responded by slamming his fist right between the horse's eyes, causing the horse to fall to its knees."

"He must've been one tough *hombre*."

"A colourful character, that's for sure." There was a lull in our conversation. "Are you still there, George?"

"Yeah. From what I can tell, some of the principle characters are still alive—his nemesis, Mabel Norris Reese, for instance. I wonder what the chances are of being sued by any of them."

"I guess that's always a possibility."

"I think I'll pass on Waugh's project. I don't need to have my house scooped out from under me, due to a lawsuit. Lisa wouldn't like it."

Lisa was his wife.

"Unlike you, I don't have much to lose. All I'm worried about is how to create a good read based on Waugh's so-called research material."

"Well, good luck, old friend of mine."

"I haven't got a contract, yet. It's the terms that interest me. They'll

have to be good if Waugh expects me to go gunning for Sheriff McCall.”

“Spoken like a hired gun.”

“That’s me. Mr. Wyatt Earp.”

While reading the newspaper and magazine clippings, and McCall’s attempt at autobiography, I scribbled pertinent events on strips of paper and pinned them to a time line on the wall above my computer. I was beginning to think I would have to create a fictional character, an investigative reporter who would knit the disparate details together for the reader. I’d give him a name with some resonance—Michael Sohl, perhaps. Michael for “Who is like God?” and Sohl because it sounded like “soul”. My fictional character would be a shallow stand-in for Richard Waugh: the same height, the same age, a guy who’d been run out of Florida and was now working as a newspaper reporter in Seattle. I would make him a vaguely heroic figure. That was sure to appeal to Waugh’s vanity. After all, he did have those hair plugs in his scalp.

* * *

To make a long story short, I *did* get the job. I suggested \$2000.00 a month. He came back with \$1500.00 a month and 40% of the royalties. He told me to write up the contract and submit it to him in two days’ time, when he would fork over my first pay cheque. I was to be paid at the beginning of each month, in return for approximately 15,000 finished words, not to exceed twelve months. He gave me a further sheaf of research material and a copy of John Grisham’s novel, *The Client*.

“That’s how I’d like our novel to be written. Nothing fancy, nothing literary. Something gripping like *The Client*.”

“I’ll read the Grisham.”

“Do that. When we next meet, I’d like to see a detailed plan, not just a time line. I’d also like to see the opening paragraphs, so I’ll know how we’re going to proceed with our book.”

“What do you want your novel to be called? Any ideas?”

“How about *Redneck Sheriff*?”

“Sounds great. I’ll be back in a couple of days, with my hand out and my mouth full of gimme.”

Two days later, back in his office, I sat twiddling my thumbs while he perused the opening paragraphs of our historical novel. I kept trying not to look at the hair plugs in his scalp. When he had finished reading the script, he tossed it on the green blotter on his desk.

“So, who is this Michael Sohl? I don’t remember reading anything about him in any of the newspaper clippings?”

“He’s a device.”

“A device. What do you mean by that?”

“The novel about McCall is going to be a huge, sprawling affair. We need somebody who’s familiar with all the players and their relationship to each other, someone who can sum up pertinent facts—in the form of flashbacks, if necessary.”

“Your Michael Sohl reminds me of me, except you’ve turned me into a Jew.”

“We need somebody with a liberal bent, somebody who can be counted on to understand why Alex Akerman, Horace Hill and Franklin Williams took on the case of the two black prisoners. A lot of Jews were sympathetic to the civil rights movement, back then.”

“Okay, turn me into a Jew. That’s fine. I hope you’re not going to diverge too much from the actual details, though.”

“The difference between the research material you gave me and what will become our historical novel is this: I have to turn the details into scenes, so the text will read like a piece of fiction. That’s all invented stuff. For the most part, we aren’t privy to how the actual events unfolded, or what was said at the time. That has to be extrapolated. That has to be reconstructed.”

He looked confused. “So?”

“So there will be some deviations from what you think of as the details. The way I imagine things unfolding might not always coincide with the way you see them unfolding. Since you have firsthand

knowledge of Lake County, I'll have to rely on you to be my eyes and ears—unless, of course, you want to fly me down there, so I can see things firsthand.”

“You’re a real schemer, Ernest. I hadn’t figured on that.”

“Well, it was worth a try, wasn’t it?”

Two weeks later, when I presented him with the next installment of the novel, he said, “You’re turning McCall into a big, fat hero, for godsake! This is a man who’d kill you for jaywalking, if he didn’t like your politics.”

“The taller the tree, the greater the sound of the crash when you fell it.”

“This is a principle in fiction writing?”

“McCall is a man who could have been an Othello, albeit a white one. We have to give him his due. We have to let him assume his true size. His true, legendary stature. We have to allow him his human dimensions, too, as well as all of his foibles. That way, when he’s undercut by the fatal flaw inherent in his personality, it will seem that much more tragic.”

“What’s his fatal flaw?”

“He’s a racist. He’s a redneck who turned himself into a convenient instrument that could be used by the orange-growing crackers of Lake County, Florida. Remember Judge Futch, the so-called whittling judge? He was a grove owner, and just as culpable as McCall, if you ask me. The novel will be much more poignant if we refuse to turn the sheriff into a cartoon villain. Remember what Hannah Arendt said of Eichmann, at his trial in Jerusalem, how banal the face of evil was?”

“Are you a Jew, by any chance?”

“There are some Herlevis in my family tree. The gene pool was so small up in Lohtaja, Finland, the Herlevis ended up having to marry fellow Herlevis—arm’s length relatives, of course.”

“And I’m looking at the result of all that inbreeding?”

“You are.”

“God,” he sighed, “what have I gotten myself into?”

* * *

Producing 15,000 words of fiction each month was a daunting task. I had to learn how to get out of my own way, to forge on without listening to my doubts. On top of that, I had to do a fair bit of reading to familiarize myself with Florida in general and Lake County in particular. I went down to the Vancouver Law Library to research a case in which Sheriff Willis McCall was called upon to defend his conduct after killing Samuel Shepherd and Walter Irvin, two young black men accused of raping a young white woman. U.S. Supreme Court Justices Jackson and Frankfort claimed, in summary 341 US 50-55, that it was one of “the best examples of one of the worst menaces to American justice.” Equally difficult, for me as a writer, was having to absorb McCall’s violent, loutish, racist character. I had to not only absorb it, but to get inside his skin and live there for an entire year, in order to produce a novel that grew to over 180,000 words.

By the time I finished writing *Redneck Sheriff*, I had a bad case of what I refer to as ‘writer’s psychosis,’ the feeling that I could no longer relate to the world. This was due to having spent so many hours a day attempting to turn the world into words—which, of course, is an impossible task. I could no longer hold printed text still on the page. Words strobed, jitterbugged around like self-animated squiggles. I was depressed. Anxious. Mentally fatigued to the point where it was painful to apply my will. For nearly a month, I sat in the alcove of our townhouse and stared out the window at cars and pedestrians passing by on Victoria Drive. I drank gallons of skullcap and valerian tea to deal with my nervous condition, and went for long, meandering walks around the city. I had spent so much time living Willis V. McCall’s life, I had lost the thread connecting me to my own life. I couldn’t conceive of what to work on next. To round out the hours of the day, I started carving walking sticks. Carving walking sticks has always been a fallback activity for me. An activity of last resort, you might say. I didn’t have to think while I was busy carving

them, and yet I had to devote sufficient attention to keep from cutting into my own flesh. The figures I carved were often quite comical: Italian-looking gigolos, Franciscan-looking monks, and once a bearded Rasputin. For me, it was a meditative, almost Zen-like practice. When I finished my first batch of six sticks, I trotted them over to a little gallery gift shop on Commercial Drive, where the proprietor sold them for \$60.00 a piece. I took home half that amount, which meant that I was paid about twenty-five cents an hour for my efforts. Such is life for someone trying to stay afloat in the arts. It's difficult to profit by one's labor.

I know what you're thinking. What became of *Redneck Sheriff*? Because my co-author was so proficient at bumping up the profile of companies and getting them listed on the stock market, the task of selling our manuscript became his part of the job. After all, he was the proven businessman, the guy who knew how to ink a deal. I suggested he start by trying to find an agent—not in Canada, but in the United States. One agent responded by saying, "I read your 'historical novel' with interest, but I'm afraid I will have to pass on it. Publishers will think it was written by a couple of cranky expatriates with an ax to grind. In this business, we don't relish opening ourselves up to lawsuits. It detracts from the bottom line."

Four months later, Waugh gave me an unexpected phone call. I was in the basement of our townhouse, applying paint to canvas. Margrith called me upstairs to take the call. "It's Waugh," she mouthed at me. I took the receiver. "Ernest speaking."

"I haven't heard from you in over a month," he said. "What's up?"

"Right now, I'm painting."

"House painting?"

"No, the kind you do when you apply paint to canvas. What's up?"

"I no longer have a downtown office, for one thing."

"How come?"

"I had the basement of our house renovated, and moved my office in there."

To me, that sounded like a fallback measure, as though playing the stock market might not be bringing in sufficient cash.

“Any bites on the novel?” I asked him.

“None. *Nada.*”

“How many agents have you sent it to, so far?”

“A half-dozen. Two have yet to get back to me.”

None of this surprised me. Given the content of *Redneck Sheriff*, and the fact that many of the principle characters were still alive, I figured it would be a hard sell.

“Listen,” he said, “the reason I’m calling you has to do with something you once told me, namely, that you were a renovator.”

“That’s right. I no longer have a truck, though.”

“You won’t need one, not for the job I have in mind.”

“What job is that?”

“Detailing my yacht. I’m going to sell it, so I want it to look really smart.”

Thus began the next phase of my relationship with Richard Waugh. I would step off the city bus at the Gleneagles Golf Course, not far from Horseshoe Bay, and walk down a forested path bordering the fairways to his house in the woods, uphill from Larsen Bay, a rather exclusive neighborhood, even by tony West Vancouver standards. His house had been built in the 1940s, in the Tudorbethan style. On the first day of my new employment, he drove me in his SUV down to a nearby shipyard on Marine Drive, and there I set to work patching up a dent in the fiberglass hull of his yacht.

“So how did you manage to dent the hull?”

“By sailing too close to an island, during a heavy windstorm.”

I made a note of the incident in the mental file I was keeping on Waugh. It was a metaphor for the way he led his life, it seemed to me.

“So, are you going to stop sailing, for good?”

“Not exactly. I bought a cruiser. A fine boat it is, too. It’s moored in the marina, over in Horseshoe Bay.”

“Have you always been a boat-fancier?”

“I enjoy the water. I love being out on it. It has a way of taking me away from my cares and tribulations.”

The deal we had come to was this: I would work for Waugh on Wednesdays and Thursdays, at a hundred dollars a day, at whatever asinine task he assigned me. From what I came to learn, Waugh had a long history with boats—from the time he was a youth in Massachusetts, throughout his turbulent years in Florida, when the boat he owned mysteriously burned down to the water line (probably with some help), to his present circumstances on the Inner West Coast of Canada. I found it intriguing that someone like Waugh would hire a landlubber like me to work on his boats. Soon I discovered why: he was paying me not only to make repairs, but to be his pal—his companion and crewman, actually. Indeed, there were days when I spent more time listening to him lecture on economics, relationships and Southern politics than I did repairing his toys.

After detailing his yacht, Waugh paid me to do some renovations on his twenty-foot cruiser. It was a fine-looking craft he seemed willing to sink a small fortune into. Given my lack of shipbuilding skills, I often felt I was doing the boat a disservice rather than enhancing its seaworthiness. The only time I actually witnessed Waugh use the cruiser was when he insisted on taking me out for a quick spin, ostensibly to show off how well the boat handled. It seemed to handle just fine to me. The engine produced a plethora of power that could be felt rumbling up through the timbers to the deck. When we were well out into Howe Sound, he cut the engine and let the boat rock on waves produced by an incoming ferry.

“So, what do you think?” he said, a broad smile on his face, the bill of his captain’s cap shading his eyes.

“What should I think? I don’t know the first thing about boats. They’ve never been a passion of mine.”

“I thought you grew up on the eastern shore of Puget Sound?”

“I did, but my old man didn’t have a boat, other than a dinghy, that is.”

Suddenly, he squared his shoulders as though ready to box with me. “Can I ask you a question?” he said.

“Go right ahead. Ask away.”

“Have you been talking up our book to anyone down in Florida? I remember you told me you had a brother down there. You haven’t told him anything about our novel, I hope?”

I suddenly understood the motive behind our jaunt out into Howe Sound. “No, why?”

“Last Friday, I was arrested. Provisionally arrested. Do you know what that means?”

“Not exactly; no.”

“It means I’m now being held for possible deportation. My passport has been confiscated, and I can’t leave the Province of British Columbia.”

“What would have inspired that?”

“As I tried to explain to my lawyer, it’s a case of long-distance harassment, probably at the behest of the current sheriff down in Lake County. I don’t think he believes me, though. He hasn’t experienced, firsthand, the corrupt political climate of the antebellum South. I’m pretty sure the authorities down there have gotten wind of the book we’ve written, and they want to discourage us from seeking publication.”

“Have you spoken to anybody connected to the actual story?” I asked him.

“The only people I’ve spoken to are literary agents.”

I adopted a facetious tone. “Maybe we should write a second novel, about the long arm of the law down in Florida?”

“This isn’t a laughing matter, Ernest. I’m now confined to living in this damn province. Plus, I have to check in with a police officer once a week. It’s totally ruined my lifestyle.”

“So, what are you going to do about it?”

“There’s nothing much I can do, except ride it out.”

“Could one of the agents you sent the book to have a direct line to

the authorities down in Florida?”

“I’m beginning to wonder if that might not be the case.”

“So, do they have any grounds on which they can extradite you?”

“No, but they can always trump some up. That’s why I had to leave Florida in the first place. Someone on the inside tipped me off that the current sheriff was going to seed my property with drugs and then have me arrested. That’s how Lake County justice works. It’s very incestuous, very ingrown and very corrupt.”

* * *

My habit is to let people reveal themselves to me little by little, with a well-placed question every now and then to keep the narrative flowing, so to speak. Experience has taught me that very few people can flee the United States in order to take refuge in Canada, particularly if they are fleeing the lawful authorities of the state. Mind you, I did just that, back when I was an anti-war activist in the late 1960s; however, that was possible only because the Prime Minister of Canada, namely Pierre Elliot Trudeau, thought the Vietnam War a wrong-headed adventure. He allowed people like me to enter the country, to the tune of 50,000 strong, some say 100,000. Richard Waugh’s case was completely different. The reason he was allowed to immigrate to Canada was due to the fact that he had married a Canadian woman and had moved up here prior to becoming a wanted man down in the States.

Waugh’s wife, Daniela, was a high-rent-district type of woman, fifteen years his junior and taller by an inch or two. A coffee-blonde, with combed-in highlights, she had borne him a daughter. My feeling was that she had never gotten over being a debutante. From what I could tell, her role was to decorate the house and to gain admittance to all the right country clubs, although I’m probably being a little unfair when I say that. The front room of Waugh’s house featured a grand piano that their young daughter was being taught to play. Sometimes when I was working around the house I would hear the tinkling of the ivories.

I later discovered that Daniela sat on the board of a small West Vancouver gallery, and that's where she had acquired the art-buying habit. She purchased a couple of paintings that she now wanted me to hang in the dining room. They were the work of a young artist she claimed to have "discovered," a painter who had formerly displayed her work in coffee houses and restaurants. Mind you, there's nothing wrong with displaying one's art in such establishments; I've done the same thing myself, on Commercial Drive. However, I didn't think too much of the young lady's paintings; they seemed rather amateurish.

I was holding one of the paintings up against the dining room wall. Daniela was instructing me to move it a little this way or that, then she would stand beside the dining table, a troubled crease between her eyebrows, the tip of her right thumbnail between her front teeth.

"So what do you think of Daniela's taste in art?" Waugh asked me, with a supercilious grin on his face.

Waugh had once dropped by the townhouse where Margrith and I were living—unannounced, to provide me with some additional research material. I had shown him my studio and office space in the basement. He knew the sort of artwork I was interested in, which was on the expressionistic end of the spectrum. On this occasion, I thought it best to avoid criticizing the paintings his wife had purchased.

"There's a lot of burnt sienna and burnt umber in them," I said. "It seems to me she's attempting to mimic the Old Masters."

"Don't the figures look kind of ghostly to you?" he asked me.

Unrealized would have been my word, but I wasn't about to say anything like that, not in front of Daniela.

"Yes, but that might be the painter's objective," I said.

"Well, I like them. I like them very much," Daniela stated quite firmly. "I think they look old but new. I think she has a terrific future ahead of her."

"Daniela is betting the painter will become a big-name artist," Waugh put in, his voice none too sincere. "Isn't that right, my dear?"

"I think talent should be nurtured, not wasted."

Waugh had informed me, in an earlier aside, that the paintings had cost him two thousand dollars.

“Ernest is also an artist,” Waugh remarked. “You should see his paintings. They’re very colorful, very thought-provoking.”

“I don’t think colorful, thought-provoking paintings would go very well with the ambience I’m trying to create in the dining room,” Daniela told him. “I want it to be soothing, not nerve-racking.”

I hung Daniela's paintings. The following week Waugh asked me to do some electrical work, due to the fact that the overhead lights in the dining room weren't showing the paintings off to their best advantage. The walls had been painted in a tone approaching burnt umber, and the paintings tended to disappear into the dimness of the walls. My job was to run an electrical cable from a junction box in the basement up to what would become an outlet box in the dining room and then to run two 14/2 cables up to where two small light fixtures would sit, inconspicuously, above the paintings. The job wasn't as simple as it sounds. I had to cut holes into the wall and drill through several two-by-fours in order to run the cables.

“Oh, my gosh,” Daniela exclaimed upon seeing the holes in the wall. “I didn’t realize you’d have to go to so much trouble.”

“I’m sorry about these holes. I couldn’t avoid it, though. You see, there are some fire stops in the wall, and...”

“Oh, please, don’t fill me in on all the details. I haven’t the vaguest idea what you’re talking about.”

I had to suppress the urge to chuckle.

It took me three days to complete the job, because it necessitated doing some plastering and painting as well. My next job was to replace the window in the master bedroom with a new, double-glazed window replete with a side window that could be opened and closed by cranking a handle.

“So if you’re a writer, a real writer,” Daniela inquired of me, “how is it that you know how to do all of these other jobs, as well?”

They had invited me to sit down to homemade soup, with some

crackers and cheese on the side.

“Because even real writers need to eat,” I told her.

“Ernest *is* a real writer,” Waugh advised her. “I’ve seen his books. He’s just not a very *popular* writer.”

Daniela dipped a silver spoon into her bowl of soup. “If you aren’t popular—if you don’t make it into the big time, I mean—don’t you just give up, after a while?” she inquired, lifting the spoon to her mouth.

“It’s a disease,” I informed her. “Once you’ve got it, it’s almost impossible to get rid of it.”

“That won’t be Richard’s fate,” Daniela said. “I’m pretty sure *Redneck Sheriff* will be his first and last novel. Wouldn’t you agree with me, my dear?”

Waugh’s face seemed to sour. “One never knows.”

“I mean, why would you want to write a second book, or pay to have it written for you, if it’s only going to get you into more hot water? That seems rather unwise to me.”

“Wisdom is often a very harsh mistress,” he told her.

Daniela gave him a smug-looking smile. “Is it now?”

Waugh, I should mention, had been married more than once. He had lurched from relationship to relationship.

* * *

On the literary front, I had started working on a novel entitled *The Last Thing My Father Gave Me*, in which I was taking advantage of what I had begun to glean from working in West Vancouver. I was also compiling a collection of stories tentatively called *What the Handyman Saw*. I had begun to feel like a domestic spy sent to gather information on his subjects. To some extent, I reveled in this new source material. After all, Waugh was the wealthiest man I had ever known. There wasn’t a problem too large that he wasn’t willing to throw money at in order to solve it, or to make it go away, and I’d never run into anybody quite like that ever before.

By now, I was not only being asked to fix Waugh’s toys, but his

wife's as well. One such toy happened to be an antique writing desk, probably manufactured in France during the reign of Louis the XIV. It was elaborately ornate, and very finely crafted, too. Given my personal writing habits, such a desk wouldn't have withstood the pounding I gave my keyboard. No, Daniela's desk was to be *seen* writing at. I'm sure she had a clear mental picture of herself sitting at the desk, jotting down elegant phrases on gift cards. The desk came with one small problem, though. It wobbled whenever you sat down to write at it. The remedy that Daniela wanted me to apply consisted of four ornate brass shoes that could be attached to the feet of the elegantly turned legs. The brass shoes made the desk look like it might be capable of performing a Ginger Rogers-Fred Astaire dance number, if the appropriate sort of music were being played on the grand piano. Again, my electrical skills had to be employed to install a light fixture above the desk and, of course, more holes had to be plastered and painted, as a result.

By the way, I'm awfully good at making such repairs look seamless.

It was around this time that the little Constable made its appearance in Waugh's house. John Constable (1776-1837) was a landscape painter for whom weather was every bit as important as the pastoral scenes he was trying to capture on canvas. Now, his paintings strike one as quaint, charming and oh so English. Waugh mentioned to me that he had acquired the painting at an estate auction, held by Christie's at the Rockefeller Plaza in New York City. His was a long-distance bid made without ever having glimpsed the painting first-hand, for what must have been a substantial sum.

The painting hung on a wall facing the elegant, ornate stairway that descended from the second floor of the house. "So, what do you think of my latest acquisition?" he asked.

"It certainly is a period piece," I told him. "Is it by Turner, Constable, Bingham or David?"

"You recognize it?"

"No, I simply recognize the era. The era, and the geography."

“It’s a Constable,” he advised me.

I raised my eyebrows. “Impressive. How much did it set you back?”

“I’m not going to reveal that to you, other than to say I’m going to have to beef up my security system—for insurance reasons. Would you be capable of doing something like that?”

“Afraid not, although I once worked for somebody who was in the trade.”

“Would you care to give it a try?”

“No thanks. Go with somebody who’s in the business.”

Waugh was a peculiar man—wealthy, but casual about his wealth—almost careless with it, it seemed to me. I found it curious that he would invest such a large amount of money to buy a painting by someone who bore the name ‘Constable’. Constables seemed to be a theme in his life. For instance, there was Willis V. McCall and, more recently, the current sheriff down in Lake County, the one who was attempting to extradite him—on spurious grounds, apparently. The facetious side of my personality urged me to blurt out something smart like: “Don’t you have enough Constables in your life? Do you have to hang them on the wall, too?” However, I bit my tongue, knowing my humor wouldn’t be appreciated.

Waugh’s Constable came with a small defect—a bulge in the canvas at the very bottom, just above the very handsome frame. “You know, I really like this painting,” he informed me several weeks later, “but each time I come down the stairs and see that bulge in it, I nearly go ballistic, especially when I consider how much I paid for it. I keep thinking: Did I pay for the Constable, or did I pay for the bulge?”

“It’s a historical bulge,” I told him. “Just leave it there. After a while, you won’t even notice it.”

“Not me. I’ll never stop noticing it. Is there anything you can do about it? Can you re-stretch the canvas or something like that?”

“Let’s have a look.” I took the painting off the wall and examined the backside, where a certificate of authenticity was affixed and some information was stamped in ink on the raw canvas. “I don’t think

there's much that can be done," I told him. "Look at the age of the canvas, and all of those little nails that attach it to the stretcher. I think you should learn to live with the bulge. Tell people you got the bulge for free."

"I'm not prepared to do that. It ruins the whole painting for me. In another week or two, I'll kick a hole in it."

"I guess I could gently remove the canvas from the stretcher, glue it to some pegboard and put it back in the frame. That would mean removing, or covering up, all of the authentication material, and that might affect the resale value."

"That's not important to me. What's important is to get rid of the bulge. Daniela keeps referring to it as my Bulging Folly."

And so, I was given the job of repairing the little Constable, which was only about fourteen by eighteen inches in size. We clad the painting in several layers of bubble wrap and slipped it into a large plastic shopping bag so I could take it home on the bus, as casual as can be. This was a piece of artwork that must have cost him nearly a hundred-thousand dollars, if not more.

"I bet you'll never guess what I've got inside this shopping bag?" I told Margrith, as soon as I stepped through the door.

"I hope it's not a big box of chocolates. I'm getting too fat as it is."

"Come downstairs, and have a look."

I showed her the Constable. "My God, that must be expensive. I hope you didn't steal it."

"No, I've been given the job of taking the bulge out of it."

"What bulge?"

"This little bulge right here. Along the lower edge."

"But it's hardly noticeable."

"I know."

The next day, before setting to work on the Constable, I rode the bus down to the Vancouver Public Library and tried to locate the painting in art books devoted to John Constable. I couldn't spot Waugh's painting in any of them, so, doubtlessly, the little Constable was one

of the artist's lesser paintings.

This is what I did in order to make the bulge vanish: I removed the painting from the stretcher—very delicately, since the canvas was quite fragile. I cut a piece of pegboard to match the size of the stretcher, glued the little Constable to the pegboard, with linoleum paste, and weighed it down with my metal tool case. By the following day the glue had hardened. I trimmed off the excess canvas, popped the painting back into the frame and, voilà—the bulge was no more! The painting went back on Waugh's wall, and he seemed quite pleased with it.

“What a relief! I was on the verge of burning it in the fireplace. You saved it from certain destruction,” he said.

This isn't the end of the story—not quite, anyway. Waugh and his wife broke up following a domestic quarrel that ended with him pitching her ornate desk out the French windows onto the back patio. He moved into a high-rise condominium apartment not far from the Bayshore Inn in downtown Vancouver, near Coal Harbour. He took the little Constable with him, but stacked it with other, similar possessions against the wall of the utility room.

“She got the police to arrest me,” he confided, “for throwing her beloved desk outside. I was simply trying to make a point: that things aren't worth that much to me. She took it personally, though. Mind you, I was feeling a bit angry at the time.”

Waugh hired me to do a job in his new digs. It involved attaching a strongbox to the concrete floor of the utility room.

“Any bites on the novel?” I inquired.

“None. Everyone's too afraid to touch it.”

“That's unfortunate.”

“I was wondering if your little press would consider publishing it?”

“New Orphic?”

“Yeah. What would it cost?”

“First, I think the novel needs a final edit. I'd like to enlist Margrith to do that. It would take a couple of months, no more. I'll put the

printing job on my credit card, and you can repay me when the job is done.”

“How much will Margrith’s services cost me?”

“Twenty dollars an hour.” I noticed his jaw drop. “It’ll be well worth the price, getting some fresh eyes to take a look at the text—for grammatical reasons, solely.”

* * *

A dozen years went by. Margrith and I moved to Nelson, situated among the peaks of the Selkirk mountains of British Columbia. One day I came home to find a delivery notice hanging from the doorknob of our house, to the effect that Purolator had left a package for me at the post office outlet in the mall, down by Kootenay Lake. I went down to pick it up. Inside the cardboard packaging lined with bubble wrap, I discovered the little Constable. It was accompanied by a short note from Waugh: “I remember you once told me that getting rid of the bulge would wipe out the authentication material on the back of the painting, which might lower the resale price. It did. My Constable’s nearly worthless, now. I’ve gotten rather tired of it, so I’m passing it on to you. Would you courier me the remaining copies of *Redneck Sheriff*? Send them COD to my old address in West Vancouver. Use United Parcel Service. I’ve attached my account number. Do it ASAP, if you can. Best Regards, Richard Waugh.”

That was the last time I heard from him.

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