

The New Orphic Review

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ERNEST HEKKANEN is the author of twenty-four books. The most recent are *The Well*, *The Lambing*, *Man's Sadness*, *Sometimes I Have These Incendiary Dreams*, *The Island of Winged Wonders*, *Dementia Island* and *The Last Thing My Father Gave Me*.

Surrealism and the Environment

Ernest Hekkanen

AS YOU HAVE probably noticed, *The New Orphic Review* now hails from Nelson, British Columbia. From my office window, I am able to view rolling mountains to the west, a meandering stretch of Kootenay Lake down near the town flats, the trunk of Elephant Mountain resting on the water, and a plethora of conifers and deciduous trees – the latter now beginning to decorate the hills like flags of yellow and crimson. If I permit my eye to spot them, I can identify some far-off clearcuts, but they are unobtrusive, really, having been filled in by various shades of green. In the Slocan Valley, about a half-hour drive from here, the usual War for the Woods is raging, but that is rather distant and, for the most part, a dim realization.

I have fled to this place – from the noisy, dirty, pollution-rich, people-congested, siren-howling streets of East End Vancouver, which had begun to strike me as increasingly surrealistic. Perpetually robbed of sleep by one nightly disturbance after another, the city that never rests had come to resemble a kind of waking nightmare. Well, okay, I'm stretching a point – I'm fictionalizing – things weren't actually that bad. They were just annoying. I was in a hyper-tense state of distraction, which isn't such a bad state for a writer to be in, except that it is rather exhausting. In Vancouver, I found what I craved most was to insulate myself – you know, to grow a thick skin, put cotton batting in the ears, and drink a tonic to soothe the nerves.

The environment we create for ourselves, or that which is created for us by an outside agent, is bound to have an effect not only on our behavior but on our psyches as well. In my essay, "An Exploration into the Viability of the Global Economic Design" (Vol. 1, No. 1 of *NOR*), I wrote: "Intentionally, or perhaps unintentionally, we have created an economic system that is, to use an analogy, attempting to feed the world's population (increasingly located in metropolitan areas) out of backyard gardens in the countryside.

So far, by abusing the earth with chemicals, stripping it in a fashion that is unsustainable and enslaving others for our own economic gains, we have managed to perform the feat of keeping up with the demand for resources in these densely populated centers.” In the current issue of the *NOR*, Greg Spendjian, an international development consultant with expertise in the environment, expands on this notion in a more thorough, studied fashion, but with the implied warning that we can’t continue to retreat from the problems we have created for ourselves and the world as a whole. It gives credence to Chekhov’s observation that life in the country is no solution to the problem of living. Everywhere we bring our baggage and our appetites with us; we are little more than upright, rapacious caterpillars bent upon denuding the tree of life, if you will.

But why? How has this come to be?

Human beings come equipped with a myriad of talents, but one of the most awesome is the ability to actualize concepts. We see evidence of this all around us in our man-made environment. From the smallest microchip to the largest building, we have created an environment that testifies to the fact that we are an ingenious species. The accumulation of human artifacts is weighty and impressive. We can’t fail to notice our genius because evidence of it surrounds us day and night. Man stands in his tower in the business district, overlooking everything he has built, and he mutters to himself: “This is good. This is the way life should be.” But then, that man in the tower comes equipped with an ego that needs constant reassuring. What is good for that particular man, the one who is so impressed with everything he has helped to create, alienates many others down in the street – in particular, the downtrodden, the disaffected, the disenfranchised, and the impotent, but, hey, what the hell, those people are externalities, waste products of our times, so why care about them or their opinions, huh?

Many city dwellers, upon repairing to the wilderness, find themselves disturbed by the darkness, the lack of familiar noises and the foreignness of the situation. They have been so conditioned by the artificial, man-made environment, they find themselves threatened by nature, especially if they are alone and do not have a cellular phone to call friends and so assure themselves that they exist. The poor, delicate ego – the fatal flaw in every Shakespearean hero – craves constant reassurance. It reaches for what is familiar and spurns what is unfamiliar. Above all, it dislikes being disoriented. After all, the brain is a vertexing mechanism; it coordinates us in the general flux of existence, and, hey, we do pride ourselves on being a brainy, clever, ingenious species. With our minds, we think, we can solve every problem. Unfortunately, our solutions often result in speeded-up ruin. The dissipative structure that is mankind dissipates randomness in order to create its own version of order, but simultaneously creates even more chaos. Not a very successful invention, now, are we? If one were to step way, way back and look at us from afar, one would have to admit, I think, that we are one of the world’s most successful, but deluded species – due, of course, to that overweening ego of ours.

Some of us, rather than fearing nature, retreat to it to be healed. We find getting away from our man-made environment to be a boon for the soul. Would this be called a strategic retreat or a venturing forth? To recover from

alcoholism about ten years ago, I went on long hikes in the backwoods. The exertion, combined with the beauty of nature, was exactly what I needed in order to reacquaint myself with my inner nature and its priorities. That is, I didn't have to numb myself in order to survive. If I had been better attuned to my inner nature, I might not have wasted as many years as I did pursuing the wrong course of action.

In Michael Bullock's surrealistic story, *A Walk By the River*, the protagonist "slink[s] furtively off into the darkness of the wood." Michael Bullock's characters often take these sort of journeys into the forest of self-discovery. The motif is repeated so frequently in his stories, I have come to believe that he contains a wooded landscape within himself where his psyche must out of necessity go in order to bring back the boon of existence – to paraphrase a notion made popular by Joseph Campbell. But why does he find it necessary to go on these inner journeys, and what connection might they have to a man-made as opposed to a natural environment?

I suspect that the need to retreat from what passes for civilization has something to do with giving the ego the slip. When civilization no longer sustains the ego, and the ego no longer serves our inner nature, what are we left with? We are left with either confusion or the need to escape confusion, I strongly suspect. But if we find civilization confusing, it is because we find the construct of the ego confusing. If we find civilization noisy, frenzied, malodorous, violent, and so on, it is because we find what the ego has wrought for us noisy, frenzied, malodorous and violent, and we have only ourselves to blame.

In the present issue of the *NOR*, what our egos have wrought for us runs the gamut from the naturalistic to the surrealistic, but nonetheless is tenuously connected to environment or, should I say, to what our egos conceive of as environment.

MICHAEL BULLOCK taught for many years in the Creative Writing Department at UBC. He is the author of more than fifty volumes of poetry and fiction and two plays. His *Selected Works 1936-1996* were published in 1998. His most recent book to appear is a Bengali translation of his surreal novella *Through the Veil of Maya* in the Contemporary World Classics in Indian Languages Series (2000). His work is the subject of a 340-page critical study by Jack Stewart, *The Incandescent Word: the Poetic Vision of Michael Bullock* (1990).

A Walk by the River

Michael Bullock

WITH A HEAVY-HEADED HEART I slink furtively off into the darkness of the wood. There I sit at the foot of a tree and wait for someone to pass and say a kind word to me. No one comes by. I rise to my feet and walk off along a path which, I believe, leads to oblivion. Instead of reaching oblivion, however, I come to a large garden in the center of which stands a small castle. As I approach, the castle grows smaller and smaller until it attains the size of a doll's house.

Anxious to escape the danger of being sucked into this Alicean wonderland, I hurry past the shrunken castle and walk away along a path running alongside a river flowing in the depths of a valley.

No sooner have I left the shrinking castle behind me than I feel I have crossed a Rubicon and that now events will take a turn for the worse. Rendered careless by my preoccupation with this anxiety, I stumble and fall headlong into a cave beside the path. Here, as soon as my eyes become accustomed to the semi-darkness, I perceive three dream figures, each holding a bag woven of rushes.

The first figure comes towards me and opens her bag. I peer inside and see what I at first believe to be a seething mass of earthworms; but closer scrutiny reveals that it is a palpitating human brain. With a shudder I avert my eyes.

The second figure approaches and opens her bag. It contains a knife with something on it that looks like dried blood. Again I turn away.

The third figure steps forward and opens her bag in her turn. Looking inside I see a miniature tombstone engraved with a pierced heart and beneath it the inscription: Rest in Peace, and my name.

Filled with anxiety, I hurry out of the cave and back onto the path and walk quickly away, convinced that I have escaped from a situation of extreme danger.

As I proceed along the path by the river I suddenly notice that I am being accompanied by a walking spinning-wheel, on which some invisible presence is spinning a long green thread that is trailing behind it. I address either the spinning-wheel or the invisible presence, but neither answers. Nevertheless I have the impression that the spinning-wheel is smiling at me, though what exactly is smiling I cannot say, since it possesses nothing that could conceivably be regarded as a face.

After a while I suddenly realized that the spinning-wheel was no longer at my side. It had vanished as mysteriously as it had appeared. Its place had, in a sense, been taken by a small wren on the branch of a tree beside the path. But this new arrival, far from smiling at me in a friendly manner, was pouring out a stream of invective and opprobrium that caused me to scurry past and get out of earshot as quickly as possible.

What was the reason for this vituperation? The wren appeared to be accusing me of something, but it was not clear what. I felt no reason to have a guilty conscience in respect of wrens – or any other bird for that matter. It was true that as a boy I had shot at birds with an air gun, but I had never succeeded in hitting one – least of all a wren, one of the smallest of all birds and hence very difficult to hit.

Once out of earshot, I was certain another encounter of some bizarre kind could not be far away, and indeed it was not. After only a few steps I observed another bird, of some exotic species, in the hedge by the path. There was something strange about it, something not quite real – until I realized with surprise that indeed it was not real, but only a picture of a bird painted in the Chinese manner on a scroll hanging on the hedge, strange only because so out of place. It made no move – how could it? So, after looking at it carefully with some admiration, I walked on along the path, stopping only when I was accosted by a daffodil growing at the foot of the hedge. Since it is not a wild flower, but had obviously strayed from some garden, I suspected she wished me to return her to her place of origin. But this was not her purpose in attracting my attention. What she wanted was for me to pick her and carry her along with me.

I was somewhat reluctant since I did not really wish to be burdened with a talking daffodil. She was so persuasive, however, that I did as she wished.

Ahead of us I saw a rope of mist stretched across the path. As I approached it I considered whether to step over it or walk through it. I decided in favor of the latter and strode through it as though it was simply not there. The moment I was on the other side, a radical change took place in Daffodil: she grew enormously and at the same time changed into a fair-haired woman, who walked along beside me holding my hand.

I felt that we ought to be striding off into the sunset; but in fact it is still daylight and the sun is high in the sky. We continue on our way along the riverbank with no clear idea of our destination. But somewhere at the back of my mind lies the conviction that we shall end up at a house in which we have lived before.

The Cottage in the Wood

Michael Bullock

FOR MONTHS I HAVE been passing the small wood or copse on one of the banks bordering the hollow way along which I walk almost daily on my rambles across the rolling downland where I am now living. All this time I have paid no attention to this wood, except to register that there was something sinister, something eerie about it. Today, however, I felt for some reason compelled to enter it and make my way to the center, where I felt that there was something of importance to me, something I needed to see.

As soon as I set foot inside the wood I realized that this was going to be no easy task: it consisted almost entirely of thorn bushes which were so thickset that it was impossible to force my way through without severely scratching my face, hands and sandalled feet, which were soon quite bloody. However, such was my compulsion to penetrate to the center of the wood that I persevered despite the difficulty.

When I reached the center I did indeed find something waiting for me: an old cottage that showed every sign of having been abandoned years ago. I went in through the rickety front door that was barely attached to its hinges. The room I entered was entirely devoid of furniture, but its walls were covered in graffiti: aphorisms, statements of dubious fact, brief poems. I was particularly struck by the gnomic utterance: "A whip awaits the writer on these walls." Was this a threat designed to deter any visitor tempted to add to the existing graffiti? Or was the writer, who seemed from the handwriting to be the author of all the inscriptions covering the walls, merely indicating his own fate? I noted that he evidently had a predilection for the letter W, and I could not help recalling that this was the first letter of my mother's maiden name, an observation that I quickly dismissed as pure coincidence, until, on the way out later, I discovered above the door the name Rossetti, the name of the house in which I was born, chosen by my mother because of her passion for the art of the Anglo-Italian Pre-Raphaelite poet and painter

Dante Gabriel Rossetti. This discovery gave me the eerie feelings that perhaps after all the appearance of the letter W on the wall was no coincidence.

A second piece of writing, a brief poem, read: "The white body / nailed to the cross / glows in the violet dark." This was typical of the mass of graffiti in its description of suffering couched in terms of a decadent aestheticism.

A further study of the graffiti revealed that all of them related to guilt and punishment, though guilt and punishment for what remained completely obscure.

To escape from this depressing atmosphere I climbed the stairs to the room above. This room too was devoid of furniture, except that in one corner stood an iron bedstead complete with a battered mattress and tattered bedclothes. Although these gave the impression of having been left there years before, I could not escape the unexplained conviction that someone was still sleeping in this bed – some outcast of society or perhaps the ghost of some former occupant of the cottage? This thought caused me to look quickly over my shoulder, as though I expected someone to appear at the head of the stairs, having followed me up. Of course there was no one, although I imagined I could hear a faint creaking from the stairs.

The walls, too, were covered in graffiti, but here the graffiti were all of an obscenely erotic nature. Were these writings themselves perhaps the source of the guilt expressed on the walls of the room below?

After registering all these facts and suppositions, and absorbing the disturbing atmosphere of the cottage, I was anxious to return to the light-filled world outside the wood. But I was deterred by the prospect of having once more to brave the assault of the thorn bushes. After some hesitation, however, and aware that I could not possibly remain where I was, I took my courage in both hands and embarked on the difficult and painful passage to the outside world. When I reached the edge of the wood my face, hands and feet were once more covered in fresh blood.

I breathed a sigh of relief at having escaped this ominous environment. But glad though I was to be out of it I knew that I should inevitably return, not once but many times.

HERBERT MEIER is probably the best-known Swiss dramatist of today, following in the footsteps of the late Max Frisch and Friedrich Duerrenmat. He is also the author of a number of surreal short stories, of which *The Lost Kneecap* is a typical example.

MICHAEL BULLOCK translated Meier's play, *Mythenspiel*, for the Swiss Government publication to celebrate the 700th Anniversary of the founding of the *Eidgenossenschaft*. He has translated over 200 books.

The Lost Kneecap

Herbert Meier

[translated by Michael Bullock]

IT BEGAN WITH an intense fear.

He was afraid that one day he would lose his kneecap or patella out in the street. To be sure, the extensor muscle at the front of his thigh had four heads, as it was supposed to, and it was strong. There were no signs of incipient atrophy. Nor was abnormality found in the attachment of the tendon to the shinbone, so there was no reason to fear the loss of a patella.

In any case, he would have been the first person to ever lose a kneecap. Kneecaps don't get lost.

But the tendon was weakened, and that worried him. The doctors told him this was a typical injury caused by chronic falling to the knees or doing knee bends. This might well be true in his case. He had been taught to fall to his knees from early childhood.

He remembered a Sunday in June.

Stewed beef was steaming on the table. Then his grandfather appeared wearing a tail coat, his right arm on his hip, with a cross on his lapel. The grandson mistook it for a bear's paw. But he was soon taught better. "Can't you see it looks nothing like an animal's paw?" they said. "A bear's paw indeed." The wearer of the medal had been infuriated by this barbaric phrase.

In a ringing voice he declared: "This is the Iron Cross from the year 1914."

Indeed, the date could be read on the lower part of the vertical bar, while the upper part was decorated with a small imperial crown. In the center, where the bars crossed, stood a large W.

The grandson didn't know what this solitary letter stood for. It was probably the initial of some exalted name, the name of an emperor perhaps, who could tell. Because in grandfather's day there were still emperors on the throne all over the place. In any case, the grandson had to go down on his knees to honor the World War hero.

He honored him; not without dignity, as his mother remarked.

Thereupon they devoured the beef stew and drank to the battle of Tannenberg, in the district of Osterode, far away in East Prussia.

Years later the father was decorated with similar crosses. In 1939 with a Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross, in 1940 with the same medal again, only this time the oak leaves were added, and in 1941, after he had distinguished himself once again, two crossed swords were attached.

Each time the son honored his forebears by falling to his knees, when they began the little feast in memory of their heroic deeds. In time he honored them involuntarily: the muscles of his legs automatically brought him to his knees as soon as he saw the heroes' crosses. He simply fell to his knees.

And this was a phenomenon.

In scientific circles they talked about the Iron Cross reflex and investigated the causes. It quickly became clear that the origin of this phenomenon was not to be sought solely in the fortuitous appearance of the grandfather at Sunday dinner. There must also be a genetically determined predisposition. Medical historians recalled the proskinesis of antiquity. Proskinesis was not a disease, but the practice of honoring the gods by throwing oneself on the ground and kissing it. In the Roman church, it was stated, proskinesis was practiced on Good Friday, Easter Monday and during consecration ceremonies. In the Eastern Church, it was above all the ikons that were honored proskinetically. In the face of thousands of years of such exercise the ligamentous apparatus might well have undergone some degeneration. Hence cases such as the one before them were entirely conceivable.

His case was not merely conceivable, it was there in front of them.

With time, of course, his natural patellar reflex had changed. This is a familiar phenomenon observed in medical examinations: with the knee slightly bent the tendon below the kneecap is tapped, producing an involuntarily twitch in the extensor of the thigh, and the lower leg jerks up. In his case it no longer jerked up. This pointed to a disease of the nerves. He was not told what kind of disease.

He continued to suffer from his specific disorder of the knee.

To be sure, he had long outgrown the family medal celebrations. His grandfather had taken his Iron Cross to the grave with him. The thing had been thrust between his cold, praying fingers before he was placed in the coffin. His father had put his three Iron Crosses to one side; they now lay on a velvet cushion in the linen cupboard, behind a pile of fustian blankets. Because in the meantime everyone had learned that such crosses had also been handed out for shooting people in the back of the neck in front of open

graves the victims had first had to dig themselves. And his father didn't want to lay himself open to the suspicion that this was how he had earned his cross.

However, another symbol continued to exist: the flag. It too had gathered a lot of baggage from the time when the saying "war is war" had been a justification for murder on command. People had sworn oaths on the flag, defended flags, given their lives for flags. Anyone who captured a flag became famous. Naturally, flags were also ecclesiastical sacred relics. There were flags bearing the figure of Christ and a Latin text in gold letters; they had been through many crusades. And there were flags depicting the Mother of God or local saints, and papal flags. Other flags were carried, mostly without a thought, at the head of larger or smaller secular processions.

One such procession took place on a fine spring day.

It was a merry festival involving local brass bands and, as may be imagined, it brought many brightly colored flags into the banner-hung streets of the capital.

This was his downfall. He was standing among the rest of the crowd watching the parade, and when the brass band passed he involuntarily fell to his knees before every flag. The people standing near him wondered what was going on. First they thought he had fainted from the heat of the early sun and helped him to his feet.

He said: "Excuse me," and "Thank you very much."

He brushed the dust from his trousers and stood like everyone else. The din of the brass instruments and the pounding of the big drums filled him with enthusiasm, his diaphragm thrilled with joy. But as soon as a flag-bearer came round the corner, it was all up for him: he fell to his knees.

Someone must have denounced him, because as soon as the procession had passed and everyone was leaving, he was arrested in the most friendly manner in the open street. First he asked the policeman what they had done with their trumpets and cornets; because he mistook them for musicians. This was a forgivable error, since the uniforms of the bands frequently resembled those of the police, and there had been police bands marching in the procession. Those who regulate the traffic and chase criminals also like to blast out marches, overtures, novelty items or blues every now and then. And so in many countries the police not only keep order, but also time, as they blow their own trumpets, so to speak.

However that may be, his habit of involuntarily falling to his knees was a suspicious phenomenon, so he was taken into provisional custody. The arrest was followed by his delivery to a distant medical establishment for observation.

There the case was thoroughly investigated and observed and eventually declared to be incurable.

It happened like this:

They had started by putting him on medication, while leaving him free to move about at will. But one day they received a call from the nearby town saying there was a man kneeling in the marketplace and no one could get him to stand up. He was kneeling on the cobblestones as though rooted to the spot. When asked who he was, his only answer was: "I'm a patient." He wouldn't give his name. He merely smiled and said: "Well, well. So it's come to this."

Two attendants drove to the marketplace in a box car, accompanied by a nurse. The man was given an injection right out in the open, but it didn't help. It was impossible to get him to his feet.

Then he asked them to remove the badge he was wearing on his jacket. He didn't dare touch it himself.

One of the male nurses removed the badge and the patient stood up. He told the doctors how, as every winter, school children had been selling badges for a relief organization and he had bought one and pinned it on his jacket. Then he was forced to his knees.

Peaceful as the symbolism of such badges might be, they reminded him of medals and military decorations. In the words of the doctors, it had triggered the return to consciousness of a childhood memory and he had once more fallen victim to his compulsion. Thereafter he lived in a bright, cheerful room whose windows were barred. Under no circumstances could he be subjected again to the risk of catching sight of a flag or a badge. He fully appreciated that.

The problem was that with the passage of time his knee reflex became internalized. He had only to come across certain images in newspapers and magazines: an old oak, a golden eagle, the sword of a peasant on his way to the local militia, laurel bushes in the southern garden of a TV star, medals on the jacket of a member of the Supreme Soviet or the Politburo, decorations on the uniform of American generals, ribbons over the princely belly of a Habsburg, a Grimaldi.

All these forced him involuntarily to his knees. Even simple wayside crosses, any crosses, had power over him. And anyone seeing him on his knees might have thought he was honoring a statue, a deity, a fetish. But that wasn't it. He wasn't honoring anything. He simply fell to his knees, quite mechanically. And it was precisely this mechanism that was incurable.

He got used to his situation.

He never rebelled. The attendants who discovered him on his knees just let him be. In their eyes, kneeling was just part of his pathology. And it never occurred to anyone to deprive him of newspapers and magazines, so that he could live in a void completely free of images. This void would undoubtedly have cured him, but he asked for newspapers and magazines, so they gave them to him. It couldn't be dangerous, the diagnosis was unequivocal: non-violent psychosis.

And when he wore out his trousers, since he had now been living in the institution for years, remaining quiet and peaceful in his cell, they sewed round pieces of leather over the knees, so the clothing question was solved.

He was left as he was, quiet and peaceful. But one winter day he opened the heavy park gate and stepped out into the open, snow-covered landscape. He plodded through the snow to a hill, having left the cleared road after a few steps. Up there stood fir trees heavily laden with snow; that's what he was heading for. Since the wind swept away his footprints behind him, he vanished without a trace.

Then in March, when the snow melted, a hiker came across a kneecap in the grass in the area. And as he assumed the nearby building to be a prison or a hospital, he took his find there.

The doctors realized at a glance that it was an ordinary patella.

“But you don't lose a thing like that,” they said.

BRIAN GRAHAM lives in Vancouver. He has two sons. He hopes one day to write a book on the work of Franz Kafka. Intending soon to be “on foot” in Prague and many other parts of Europe, he thinks of Paul Klee, who said: “I want to be as though new-born, knowing nothing, absolutely nothing about Europe.” The following poem was written after receiving “Dance me to the end of love” by L. Cohen, with paintings by H. Matisse.

Immer Weiter For K.S.

Brian Graham

Every day
I want you.
Ford Motor Co.
Owns Mazda
General Motors is buying
Korea
Every day
Base angel
As before
The world is being bought and sold
Only the pace is quickening
Every day

The ‘spiritual world’
Lies before us
We’ll breathe on it
Breathe in it and leave
A little path
The way our bare feet
Feel the sand
On the beach at Kitsilano.

If only the poem
Could say what we say
Mean what we only
“Know the limits of
To the end of Love.”
[My apologies to the great,
long-suffering lyric-maker]

I want to dance you
 Further into the heart
 Of the world abandoned
 By progress

We are there now
 When you are near
 I feel the pulse
 Of the Universe
 Around us

This is not hyperbole

These lines the poet wrote
 Hurt me not (only) in
 Their beauty
 But the reminder
 Of the difficulty
 Of living
 In the place
 One knows the truth of

Waiting there hurts
 Receiving messages
 That remind one
 Of this terrible waiting
 Hurts more

The words escape me
 Flutter around your absent body
 With powerful wings

Sometimes they become heavy
 Like hands on the piano keys
 Stuck, unmoving

Music rises all around
 But not your voice
 Or mine

Someone else's voice
 No one is writing poetry
 For us.

Glenn Gould's Beethoven
 Sometimes the notes
 Carry me away
 Momentarily

You carried me away
Wholly
I am gone

When I'm not looking for you
I can't find myself
On the phone
You say 'Hello'
It isn't even your language
I'm embarrassed as hell
Just to think of it

Music rises around me
As the tides
Flow in and out
On the beach
Where I catch the bus

The voice of a pretty girl
Rises to greet me each morning
Her face turns to mine
I don't linger long there
The way one would linger
In a woman
Her scent
The way I lingered in you
Slow and long

Did I leave traces
Or was I just blown
Like a wind
Through paradise?

Perhaps paradise
Is only for one...
When I touched you
I was on the earth
But also gone
Somewhere else
Your body music
Vibrating in all my senses
I was the musician
Beyond genius
Who had found the sublime key
—And still I had a body!
Breathing, walking as before
But this body
A song

Paradise is only for one
 Body turned into song
 The other
 Can't feel the weight
 Only lightness
 The tenderness of the touch
 But not the heart of tenderness
 Only one believer
 Only one
 Whose body rolls like
 Cascading waves
 Through the ocean of the other
 To the shore of paradise

Your orange flesh
 Shimmered and trembled
 Inside me
 Invisible suns long hidden
 Rose triumphantly
 Gave the dawn back
 To the purchased earth
 ...If the people could have
 Seen, could have risen
 With me, at that moment...

Seeing is the most impossible
 And wondrous act

When you rose
 From the pavement
 At the bus depot
 First time
 A life and life
 Hovered before me
 Space opened and closed
 My eyes sewed you
 Into the body of time

Since then
 Time and life have not
 Been the same

Even now
 These horrible distances
 These howling flights
 Of metallic mechanical terror
 Apart
 From each other
 Words

Your words, sounds, murmurings
Through the cable strung between us

If I listen in...
To the low murmuring
Of your voice
It begins to sing
In me again
Not a violin
But a low low cello
A dark wind
Stirring a vast field
Of damp grain in a great prairie
Oh!
Even in this reduction
This grrr...ing
Over the phone line
This smirmrgmnch...
I feel a life

But to dissolve
This reduction...

The real living moment
Is always greater
In its actual potentiality
Than the greatest thought
Than any poem
–To give voice
To the livingness
Of the moment

What actually is it
When a line, in a book
Carries, carries
Us into the heart
The inner livingness
When we follow the line
When we are carried
Magic of the living spirit!
When a character, a person
Is opening – in – Dostoevsky?
It is because
We are opening

We follow the line
Begin to catch up to it
It catches up to us
We are opening

Our insides
 Are coming out
 We are being revealed
 As a world is being revealed
 To us
 The revelation of the living word
 Plays on our senses
 Begins to make us murmur
 Like your voice
 On the phone

It is this mur mur mur
 In you that I love
 This you I love
 Beyond language
 Your tongue
 Helplessly rolling
 Around your mouth
 Sounds emit themselves
 From somewhere
 Inside
 I lie on you
 Following an unwritten line
 Oh BEAUTY!
 Your face
 Twisted
 Contorted
 Entangled
 In the web of unwritten space

I bow low
 To the gods then
 Low, low
 I bow here
 To enter this stream
 I ask to be taken
 To be fully born
 Into this low life

History
 Cannot be 'cleansed'
 Goya's mutilated bodies
 From the disasters of war
 Hang in the trees
 But singly
 We can take our leave
 Of war, take our leave
 Of the mutilation
 Of our bodies

In the progress
Of the domination
Of nature

This selfish act
Of love
This desire to listen to the low
Murmur in you
You call me
To obliterate your beauty
To fuck you

In Helen's Troy
Mangled bodies piled up
Outside the gates
Of the walled city

Now ten thousand Helens
Lie strewn over the pages
Of magazines
Computer screens
The rush to sacrifice personal vision
To the given ideal of beauty
Frenzies on...

If you call me
To this Other place
This '...unweeded low
garden of the heart...'
I will ever come

There the trees spread branches
Like ropes under the sky
There I dance
Am born every day

There is no orgy
Of the senses
That the real or imagined
World could offer
That can compare with
The real and imagined
Road that we stand together on
Now that the threshold
Of this low world
Has been crossed
I don't ask to be transported

The corporate churches

Will go on being built
 But what I will remember
 Is the trace your body left
 In the cool sand
 Under the moon
 Next to the Pacific Ocean

To be on the road with you
 Without expectation
 Of gain
 Of a rise in my value
 In the world's eyes
 To be spared participation
 In the puppet-drama
 Of the history
 Of almost everything

The stars were never
 More real for me
 Than on this road

We must take a path
 This road or any road
 The commitment of the
 Novelist
 Is the best
 And perhaps only
 Example we can learn from
 The novel isn't written
 Can't go on
 Without commitment
 Not to me, to you
 To the living changing
 Vision
 The path that doesn't end up
 In a palace someone else
 Built
 That no doubt branches
 Into many roads
 Some blind, illusory
 But go on
 Because something has been
 Touched
 The opening up
 Of a world
 Nothing more...
 Nothing less

 In the morning

When the water of Kitsilano
 Is calm
 Touching the shore delicately
 Like cream and
 Ribbons of sunlight
 Undress the trees
 I stand patiently
 Gazing
 Waiting for the bus
 All is not calm
 Inside
 Experiments, it seems
 Are being conducted
 On my heart
 All the images
 Attached to you
 Are being strained
 Pulled apart
 By this distance

I dreamt
 I walked in a stranger's yard
 Two dogs attacked me
 Attached their teeth
 Sharp as the claws of cats
 Or talons of birds
 Into my eyebrows
 Tugged and tugged
 And wouldn't let go
 These dogs
 Once part of the song
 I sang for you
 Now chewing on my eyes
 My mind
 My heart my chest
 Being torn open
 Stretched across space
 You used to occupy

I called you
 A piece of the sun
 Sitting in the chair
 At the top of the stairs
 In my mother's house
 Looking at a book
 Me looking at you

The vision of you there
 Began slowly to burn

Through me
 This inner constellation
 Of experiences half forgotten
 Lines began to join up
 Like dots on a child's drawing

I sensed the depth
 Of my own vision
 Connecting up with some other
 I imagine greater vision
 A little like god
 Before he got involved in politics
 Not to mention history
 –Vision

It is magic
 To know that the girl
 Sitting beside you
 Propped up against a log
 On the beach
 Whose foot is in your hand
 As she reads...

–As if the foot
 In itself
 Cool flesh
 Precipitous arch
 Round childlike toes
 Hadn't already conquered
 The man's heart
 Turned him into a beggar
 Transfixed
 As before only the finest
 Work of sculpture—

That this woman
 Is also somewhere in the sky
 Blazing
 Invisible in the blue day
 But certainly there
 A beacon. A light. A star.
 A fire.
 How else can one explain
 The sudden connection
 Of all these dots...

That the beholder
 He with the foot
 In his hand

Conclusively knows
 The world really exists
 The one we wake up to
 The one nobody owns!

Not the pathetic
 Reduced
 Plundered
 World that is bought and sold
 No marketplace of the feelings

He is not 'happy'
 Rather glad to be born
 Life has meaning
 When seeing touches the soul

Vision is born again
 When his eyes leave the foot
 Knee torso face
 The sky crackles
 With energy
 Wind is a guest
 Everything in nature
 Belongs
 He too is not alien
 He is 'a nature'
 The invisible invitation
 Is what blazes in the sky
 The invitation to the dance

Suddenly being drunk
 Has meaning too
 One wants to be drunk
 The sacred and the profane
 Are dancing
 Everyone's invited
 Will you take my hand
 Dance my heart in this world
 Will you find this hand again
 If the circle of this dance
 Of love widens
 As you burn through the arms
 Of others
 Will the strength exist
 To treat other men
 As my brothers?

Self doesn't exist
 Without giving oneself away

To find the other
 Not self
 This is the world
 Living moving dancing
 The hands stretch out
 A body a chain
 As Matisse saw

Without this giving away
 There is no dance
 Without love
 But one cannot give oneself
 To 'humanity'
 Lawrence saw
 The chain through which
 We enter the dance
 Of living life
 Begins by passing into
 The flame
 Of one other

There are two
 "Ends of Love"
 One where "Every thread is torn"
 Because we haven't learned
 To take that part of memory
 Which belonged to pure experience
 To create a living world
 And memory sinks
 Into the general social amnesia

The other "the tent of shelter"
 "On the other side of the curtain"
 Is the tent that moves
 The temporary shelter
 Built on a floor of sand, earth
 The shelter that doesn't overwhelm
 Or erase the delicate footprints
 Of each tiny, fragile, but real
 Gesture of our dance

The house that can remain
 Even in a time
 When companies buy countries
 Because it moves
 Is built of nothing
 Other than these threads
 That would have been torn

The shelter that weathers storms
 Distances
 Not with permanent
 Stones and bricks
 But through footprints

Your foot
 That is in my heart
 The stones
 On the beaches where we walked
 In rivers, pools, banks of streams
 I am a stone
 Who falls asleep at your side
 Your flesh so many stones
 Infinity in a finite universe
 Warm to the touch
 Cool hot or wet
 A pool of stones
 That can open
 Before one's very eyes
 Life cannot come closer
 Infinity reveals its boundaries
 And one marvels at one's own
 Vision

Two forces in the universe:
 One is gravity
 The other is called
 'Gravity in reverse'
 In vision one can see
 The heart of the stone
 Lying open
 But one cannot see
 Inside creation

The act of sex
 The eternal pulsing
 Of the universe
 This struggle and dance
 Cannot be held or tamed
 By the individual vision

I feel I've touched
 The very heart of you
 You are dancing
 Your waist is still and naked
 My eyes are open
 May I
 Take this hand?

'I' is that which loves you
The poems follow your feet
And call this place home
In the world.

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Towards a sustainable future: Yes, but only if we confront the causes of environmental problems

Greg Spendjian

FIRST THE GOOD NEWS. A Canadian Broadcasting Corporation news-cast noted that on Earth Day, 21 April 2000, over 500 million people around the world would participate in an Earth Day related activity. How this figure was arrived at was not detailed but it is still extremely heartening to see the wide-spread support which exists around the world for celebrating the natural environment. On the other hand, 30 years after the first Earth Day at the time of the Stockholm Environmental Conference, 38 years after Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring* sensitizing us to the effects of indiscriminate pesticide use, and close to 15 years after the World Commission on Environment and Development published its report, *Our Common Future*, and put the terms “sustainability” and “sustainable development” into common usage, it is difficult not to be extremely perturbed with the state of the environment. The concerns run from the global – around issues such as the accumulation of greenhouse gases, ozone depletion, and species extinction, to more regional and local issues such as air and water pollution, habitat loss, deforestation, or loss of soil fertility and integrity.

The reason that the good will of so many – as manifested by the participation in Earth Day activities – has yet to have a major beneficial impact on the global or local commons is that the fundamental causes of environmental problems have yet to be acknowledged and debated openly, let alone addressed. The reason for that, in turn, is that these fundamental causes go to the very essence of our economic, social, and political structures – our production and consumption systems, how and why goods are produced, how wealth is distributed, how policy and personal decisions are made, and what values we hold dear.

At its most basic, environmental impact is a function of (1) size of population, (2) extent of demand for goods and services, and (3) the nature of the

technologies and production systems used to meet the demand. The resources used can be either energy or materials, including air and water, and can be consumed either directly or in production processes. Direct consumption can be for purposes such as transportation, heating/cooling, and communications. Production can be either agricultural or industrial. The “throughput” of natural resources in all these processes invariably throws off unwanted side-effects, euphemistically called “externalities”. The extent of such externalities (pollution, or destruction of the resource base) depends in part on the characteristics of the technologies and production processes being used, be they farming or industrial systems. The extent of overall resource use on the other hand is affected in part by the efficiencies of the technologies and processes being used as well as by sheer size of population exerting demands.

Coming back to our economic structures, the generation of economic wealth and welfare in modern economies has by and large been dependent on the production of an ever-expanding cornucopia of goods and services for consumption. For the machinery to keep rolling, there has to be created an ongoing insatiable demand for these goods and services. Without continuous and growing demand, modern industrial economies falter and go into recession. Every effort is therefore made to convince us that the promotion and maintenance of “growth” should be the main objective of policy. Growth is also seen as the only way to satisfy the needs of the majority since it is believed that it is only through an ever-growing economic pie that sufficient surplus can be created to allow for the non-subsistence needs – material, social, educational, health – of the majority of the population to be met. Tie into this the fact that in recent times, wealth has had a tendency to be concentrated in fewer and fewer hands and it makes the political necessity for “growing the economy” even greater: a bigger economy is required to keep those at the bottom of the economic ladder from having their standard of living decline even further in both absolute and relative terms.

In poorer and subsistence economies, environmental destruction can be even more pronounced since the urgency is to meet very basic needs for food and shelter and there is frequently little surplus to devote to meeting the costs of environmental protection or sustainable resource use.

The problem is that when you multiply growing population with the unquenchable thirst for consumption of goods and services, along with their inevitable externalities, it is very difficult to envisage how you can have a “sustainable” society. This then is the complex double bind our economic and social structures present us with: No environmental destruction – no goodies. Examples of this are all around us, be it the harvesting of forests in every last watershed of old growth timber for the jobs, incomes, taxes, and profits it generates, the fouling of air quality in every major urban center, or the unsustainable use of soil, water and genetic resources for agricultural production.

The currently dominant market-oriented-global-free-trade enterprise system is clearly highly effective in the use of financial, human, and natural resources for productive purposes. The unbelievable quantity of goods and services available in modern industrial growth economies, along with the extent of aggregate wealth generated, is proof of this. Where this system

fails, if left to its own devices, is predominantly in two areas: in its ecological/environmental impacts and in the fact that it does not automatically promote just distribution of its benefits. The abysmal lack of success of centrally planned economies to either provide goods and services or to protect the environment is evidence that that approach is not the direction in which viable alternatives should be sought. However, strong arguments could be made for having market-oriented production systems overlaid with policy and regulatory environments containing legal and fiscal components which firmly deal with the two failures of the market system. It is rather regrettable therefore that as market-oriented ideologies are promoted as *the* way modern economies should be run, there has been a concurrent (and predictable) push by the corporate sector towards a *lessening* of governments' role in general, thereby lowering governments' capacity to promote both environmental and social well-being.

There is only one solution to the environmental calamity we are undoubtedly headed towards and that is to confront and deal with the three factors influencing environmental impact outlined previously. What is needed both as a starting point for discussion and as an end-goal for action is an overall drastic reduction in throughput of materials and energy in our economic systems and the replacement of destructive technologies or production systems with ones which have minimal externalities. But there's the rub. Even the relatively mild Kyoto Protocol of 1997, which was cobbled together following very difficult negotiations, is now being resisted actively in many countries, especially by the corporate sector. It now appears that the Protocol's call for developed countries to reduce their overall greenhouse gas emissions by at least 5% below 1990 levels by the year 2012 is unlikely to be achieved. The extent of reduction in greenhouse gas emissions required to avoid major climatic change and other environmental impacts befalling future generations cannot be known with any exactness at present, but it will certainly be *significantly* more than what Kyoto called for. Contrast this with the fact that the total human population's energy consumption globally is projected to grow, using current trajectories, from 10 terawatts (trillion watts) annually to 30-40 terawatts this century and it underscores the challenges ahead. Reducing the use of other materials by large margins will also be necessary to avoid destruction of habitat and preservation of a productive resource base.

It has been argued by some that we can have both economic growth *and* reduction in environmental problems via increasing production efficiencies and replacing "dirty" technologies and destructive processes with "clean" technologies and more benign production systems. Certainly, attempts to replace fossil fuels with renewable resources such as wind, solar, and biomass are laudable and should be strongly encouraged by every means possible (even though their use is not as problem-free as some claim). As well, policies favoring the use of more efficient and non-polluting technologies and processes should be put in place without delay. But renewable energy sources will never be able to meet projected demand. The expansion of nuclear energy, also offered as a solution, has its own associated problems. Beyond a certain point, the necessary reductions in throughput of materials and energy required to achieve what economist Herman Daly has called

“steady-state economy” can only come about through a wholesale restructuring of how we live, where we live, where we work, what we consume, what we produce, where we produce it, how we transport ourselves, and how we spend our leisure time.

Since it is quite likely that such a reduction in overall resource use would result in lowering the aggregate of income and wealth generated, then the more equitable distribution of this wealth becomes an absolute imperative if we are not to develop terrible social problems and a grossly unjust society. This again goes against the grain of current socio-economic thinking and would in turn require widespread value changes to become politically acceptable.

The motivation for moving towards a more ecologically oriented society must emerge from a conviction that, whereas the total of goods and services produced and consumed will be lower than at present, there will be benefits to the overall quality of life – once the inevitable difficulties associated with a transformation of such magnitude are dealt with. The persistent question of HOW? HOW? HOW? can all this possibly come about when all forces are currently pushing in the opposite direction is difficult to avoid. Each answer leads to more questions.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, it is useful to speculate about what the preconditions for change would be. Transforming conventional economic theory and practice would seem to be a self-evident requirement. For example, current economic thinking conveniently places an economic value of “zero” on “free” goods such as clean air, water, non-productive species or natural habitats, aesthetically pleasing landscapes, etc. Since these are given no value, they do not feature in any economic calculus and their destruction is not considered of any significance or importance, with predictable consequences. Compensate for this glaring omission, and commonly heard arguments which indiscriminately push for growth lose much of their validity.

Some excellent academic attempts have been made to establish “natural resource accounting” approaches to factor resource use and depletion into economic calculations. But these, along with other suggestions to include economic “bads” (e.g. the costs of cleaning up an oil spill, the costs of added health care caused by air pollution) on the negative side of the economic ledger have not been adopted. A revamping of the way Gross National Product is calculated to include such adjustments is eminently sensible. However valuable such suggestions are, they have not affected decision-making in any significant way. The ideas do not have the support of corporate or political leadership because they might throw into question the aura of sanctity surrounding economic growth on which so much depends, threatening both their power base and the benefits they derive from the growth model.

Another highly sensible proposal which deserves attention is to move gradually towards a total replacement of personal and corporate income taxes as the principal source of national revenue with a system which generates most, if not all, government revenue from taxing resource use. This useful idea is also nowhere on the political agenda, even though it could provide a market-oriented impetus for minimizing resource use and for maximizing efficiency of production systems.

One could also argue that if environmental protection is to become a priority, a wholesale shift in values will be required. For example, we currently value individual greed, the desire for accumulation-at-any-cost, quite highly. It is considered not just an acceptable personal characteristic, but we have become convinced that it is even a virtue which leads to generalized social good. In ecologically-oriented societies quite different values would be encouraged, ones which seek to complement individual welfare with the common good.

Our sources of satisfaction – the ways we derive our sense of value as individuals and as a society – will have to broaden beyond their present concentration on the consumption of material goods. One can envision societies, for example, where the celebration of other aspects of life – developing our full potential as humans, building a sense of place and community, using our artistic talents, exploring the spiritual and aesthetic dimensions of our existence, to name a few avenues – take on more importance than at present. But HOW?

None of the difficult social and political decisions are in turn likely to be made, unless our attitudes towards nature change dramatically. Notwithstanding recent increases in environmental awareness and some changes in individual behavior, there has not been any significant change in overall societal behavior as far as nature is concerned. The reality is that as far as our economic processes are concerned, we continue acting as though nature is simply an endless reservoir from which resources can be extracted and an unfillable sink into which our garbage can be dumped. Some have proposed that what is needed is to change this attitude of “exploitation” of nature to one of “stewardship”. This is admittedly an important step forward. But it still places humans at the apex of the evolutionary ladder with the rest of nature subservient to us. It is therefore unlikely to provide sufficient motivation for the radical changes required, especially when those changes will be in many ways quite wrenching.

What will be necessary will be for us as humans to begin to see ourselves as an integral part or component of nature. The appreciation of the absolute totality of the connectedness of everything in nature – even if we cannot always see the patterns that bind – will have to go beyond talk about the metaphorical butterfly in Brazil whose wing-flapping causes storms in Indonesia. The evidence for such connectedness is all around us and increases with every ecological study conducted. The conservation of resources and the preservation of nature would thus not only have a utilitarian motivation but would also be undertaken for the intrinsic value within nature itself. The wanton destruction of nature would be unthinkable because it would mean we are harming ourselves. Yes, but HOW?

At the political level, a major transition will also be required. We will need to move away from finding acceptable, and even humorous, pithy statements like “it’s the economy ... stupid”. Instead, support will need to shift to those leaders who are searching for a more complex understanding of social goals, one which states that “it’s the economy, *and* the protection of nature, *and* the sustainability of the resource base, *and* the overall quality of life, *and* social equity ... partner.” Rigid adherence to policies which promote growth-at-any-cost will have to become both socially and political-

ly unacceptable. In addition, the more equitable distribution of the benefits of economic activity will have to be a social and political goal, thereby allowing all to have the means to what Fritz Schumacher (author of *Small is Beautiful*) called a “becoming existence.” What this effectively means is that awareness of the importance of connectedness in nature will need to be complemented with an appreciation of the importance of social ecology – connectedness of *people*, both within and between countries.

A major component of any political process is the development of a shared appreciation within a society of what problems it faces and how they might be addressed, what its goals are and how they can be achieved. Generating that shared vision of an ecologically-oriented society is thus also a precondition for moving in a positive direction. The growing concentration of economic and political power – and especially of the means of mass exchange of ideas (newspapers, radio, television) – in the hands of those who benefit most from current structures poses a particular challenge to finding ways to generate the new social consensus required.

In conclusion, the environmental problematique will not be resolved until its fundamental causes are acknowledged and addressed. It will require radical changes in many aspects of our individual lives and in our economic, political, and social structures. Unless these changes come about, it is very likely that we will have much less to celebrate on Earth Day, thirty years from now. Turning that rather negative view on its head, however, it can also be said that if we have more to celebrate on Earth Day thirty years from now, it will likely be because we have moved in a more desirable direction not just ecologically, but socially and ethically as well. This is the true promise of moving towards a sustainable future.

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Under the Pyramids

Sandra Filippelli

MY MOTHER, my aunt, my women, all my female ancestors, they come, they always come when I call. Grandmother, you cried all your life, confined. It was your lot, your life, you grabbed hold of that life. You held onto it for it was all you had. Yes, my grandmother, you made something of that life. I rejoice, I respect, I accept. I accept. The walls of your asylum closed in around you, the cries and screams of others around you wrapped in layers of antiseptic white, their tears streaming down the concrete, brick, wood, iron walls. One day you awoke, the screaming was so loud, you awoke from a dream in which you were buried alive in the red earth for an eon, your coffin rising out of the topsoil, and looking around, alarmed, you saw that it was you screaming. You. Only you. Not another. Your screams tore the skin off your gaunt and shriveled body, layers of tissue, their epidermis peeling off in fine strips, dropping off onto the dust lining the stenciled linen in which you lay. Your bones, they fell apart, sinews dissolving into words unexpressed, words, syllables without links that fly off the walls dropping seeds into the tears. Seeds that will not ripen in this lifetime. Seeds that will fall into the cracks of the hard concrete floor and sink down into the earth where they will remain without a touch like a *terma*¹ in a field of morning glories until they are ready to creep up to the surface of the finely tilled earth and spring up to the sky into the fully grown body, the heart and soul that you wanted to be but couldn't, not now, not in this lifetime, not in this mind, not in this mind filled with insanity, filled with the sanity of knowing, of all too knowing. Yes, that was always it, wasn't it, the knowing, the eye, the knowing eye that saw but couldn't speak because of the white gown of

¹*Terma*: a sacred discovered teaching or visionary treasure left in the earth, water or mind and revealed through a *terton*.

chains that bound your mind's eye, dear grandmother. Your silver hair shines streaks of luminescence in the light of the summer sun and the seed, the seed of what could very well be awaits that perfect moment when it will climb out of that *terma* vase into the sight that lies ahead.

Then your daughter, my beloved mother, the heart of my eye, the willow of my soul, what became of her after you left for those antiseptic, deranged walls. After the gate clanked behind you without a shred of mercy. You left her all alone in her bloodstream while the cells slowly turned to cancer, ever so slowly, grains of sand slipping through the hourglass of her entire life, the lifeglass of tiny bruised red droplets that dripped through the estuaries of her decaying body to their final resting place, clay, baked dry, fragmenting her hollow bones into a trillion shards of needle fibers that sunk into the earth to the space where you once lay, your words unexpressed, her words trapped in the cancer of her mildewed vocal chords, the words, "Go daughter," were all I could hear. Go. Daughter. What did she mean? I thought. Where should I go? Where have I gone? Go here? I have gone all over the world in all my lifetimes. Once I even found myself under the pyramids. Deep in the core of the earth under glass, under crystal, hexagonal glass, looking up, looking out through the islets of crystal, gleaming. Once under the pyramids, I peered out from where I lay curled up, the earthworms inching up my spine to the apex of my cervical chord, the worms happy in the flow, the spacious liquid flow of *qi* up my spine to the apex of my cervical chord, I rejoiced the worms in their progress up the wheels of life that spun from my secret heart out my crown to that transpersonal point, the tip of my soul's arrow shooting out to the sun, the stars, the continents, the planets. The worms, they passed all the way up and out to the hereafter while I lay under the pyramids, lightly dozing, gently breathing, the air from my nostrils tipping out into the crystal eyes, the beads of crystal, the glass under the pyramids where I lay, I looked out at the blood oozing out of my mother's marrow, the loss of cells, the brittle bones snapping the dust they crumbled to. But all the time my poor mother, her eyes, her eyes so bright, so alive, the will, sheer determination, not a glint of hesitation in those eyes, only a will, an indomitable will to carry on with her journey, to carry that pure white soul of mercy and love and the honor, oh, the honor, out to the next plane, out of that rotting corpse not yet gone beyond. I ask her, I say, mother, come with me and rest under the pyramids, rest in that space of power, that immutable third eye of bricks piled up, bricks through which all the truths of the world can be gleaned and the universe, the planets, the atoms, the eons. Come, Mother, I will show you, will you follow me? I see my dear mother rise, a ray of radiant light, rise out of that dried mass of marrow and shards of bone. She rises high, the eons flashing by her like waves of light on a celestial sea. Get up, dear daughter, the white light says. Get up and we will ride the eagle through the heavens to the land where all is free and glorious. I say, no, Mother, not now while I am under the pyramids seeking truth here. For here where I lie I can see the path to the center of the earth, the core of the heart of the ages, my own heart that grasps and cries and throws a rage at why the dawn of day and the dusk of night. My heart, is it a true heart? I ask. Is it true or do I imagine? My mother, she beams, her eyes shining, they seem to say, stay, my child, under that crystal glass, your eyes

upward feasting on the chambers of kings and queens, their jewels and bones rich with the secrets of the ages. Look down, see the core. The eyelid lining, the eyes, thousands of eyes, they see the history of mankind and celestial beings. If you look inside that heart you will find yourself in the center. Yourself, your true self. And while you inch your way down the hollow bamboo to your heart I will watch you, my dear daughter, so do not fear. Let my crumbled bones dissolve to dust. Then blow them down the valley to the sea. Once I fell under the pyramids and my mother came to me, her soul ablaze with love. She guided me along my way and then, satisfied, she floated away to the shores of the tranquil jewel sea beyond.

Under glass, clear diamond crystal, my eyes peek out through water so pure. I see my lifeline unfold in front of me. The brothers, the burial, the one who never made it, the other who thought it should have been him. His life, a stream of heart chaos afterward, the other looking on from beyond, looking on curiously, the curiosity turning to grave concern too powerless to change what was to come. The beyond brother gone I hear him say, I wish, I wish, I wish you would do, and then it stops, my ears ring like the sea, no message, the meaning flows away, I grope but I touch formless space. The beyond brother smiles, then I see him no more. I look at the one left, watch his eye reflected heart, the mirror betraying nothing. The mirror faces inward, that is why. Oh, brother I want you to be this, I want you to be that. Our mother, she's not here to see this, thank God, our father says. Her bones, they crumbled gratefully before the little one swallowed liquid and nearly drowned in her own starvation. The left one, if only he understood, but his ears, his eyes, his heart brim with the salt of his slender body blocking out the message, our mother gone beyond returns with our brother. Together they watch, one with lips sealed, the other speaking without sound. Still I hear the message, the little one hears it too, but the sound of the salt dripping from her father's eyes drowns her and she follows great grandmother into the antiseptic sterile walls bound by the voices that un-nourish her. I peer out from under glass, through pure water. I speak to her, but she can't hear the bubbles streaming out of her mind's eyes. She lies there on white sheets, the electric eye probing, watching from sunrise to sunrise through the moon cycles, the eye controls. Immobile she lies, her foot shaking, the echo from the walls, the foot shakes, her mind races, fragments of past, present, the dead grandmother who absorbed into the earth a month before she was born, too late for a passing of consciousness from one to another, one leaves, another comes, two ships pass in the dark of night and failing to meet, to acknowledge the lifeblood of one another, the lifeblood, mind blood, the marrow connected by ancestry, the lines of time, mind upon mind, that passed through this earth, ancestral landfill, tombs upon the mountain top, the child, her eyes open, perceives the rows upon rows of implanted lineage holders of the lifeblood, the child sees herself at the end of this passage of eons and finds herself enclosed in a shroud of madness, for it is the perceiving, the mere act of perceiving that drives her over the edge into the sterile hospital room with the eye peering down at her, transfixing her, she lies, her foot shaking under the neon lights, her mind a sea in the center of a squall, the air rushing through her nightmares. She stops eating: the goal, starvation. She un-nourishes. Death watches through the

camera eye and waits to take her to the grandmother. Her father, the left one, he cries, he begs the shroud not to cover her. Outside, under the garden, the *terma* vase illuminates, the squall spins into a clear light ocean, the waters silent, waveless, the child sleeps, her foot rests and the eye closes for the night. Resting upon her hospital bed, the child's marrow feasts on the illumination of the *terma* vase, replenishing its brittle shards of bone, the blood flows red, the blue black blood droplets flow into a red river of life, opening the child's mindstream to a myriad of possibilities, the dreams of an early death, uncle's wish come true, slip away into the garden, the *terma* vase gently taking them to a place where they can never again harm. The years of being strapped to the sterile hospital bed under the piercing camera eye subside and the child spills out into the brilliant yellow sunlight, her marrow alive with the wisdom of the lifeblood lineage holders. She shines, grandmother and uncle looking up at her from behind the earth while I, under the crystal clear diamond pyramids, witness the healing of the maternal line.

NOEL KING is a full-time writer and storyteller, born and living in County Kerry, Ireland. He leads Creative Writing and Public Speaking classes and workshops for adults and children and administers the Tralee Scribblers Writers Group. His forthcoming first poetry collection is entitled, *Counterparts*. The following poems are the first accepted for publication in North America.

Noel King / **Two Poems**

Music is the Memory of a Child

We are death clearing
our parents' home.

In the garage one white key
off our piano
turns up.
My sister goes white:
Why did he break it up?

A black key emerges in the garden
corroded and chewed
by his dog, or something.
She shivers and a carved
leg props a garage worktop:
He told us he'd sold it off!

Da'd hated the piano,
wanted me to football
not have Mommy have us learn.

Now I cry.
My sister too.
We hold each other.
The pain is more
the second loss.

The Queen of Tarts

My granny made apple tarts
 my auntie too
 now I eat the ones *she* makes
 rich
 thick with cream
 almost sickening,
 as we lie on her double bed,
 biscuit tin cover for a tray
 on the patchwork quilt
 she says her mother gave her.
 I eat my fill, trying to give
 culture - favorite poems from a collection by
 Paul Durcan. I try to do his accent,
 to explain how he admired nudes in galleries
 and wrote about each. Then I give her
 my favorite of favorites
 - The 1000th man, by Rudyard Kipling,
 but she's still not interested,
 tells me what characters are doing
 in the 'soaps' she watches,
 makes me watch one now on the portable
 set at the end of her bed.
 I call all the 'soaps' 'eye bubble gum'.
 It maddens her. We plop on more cream, finish the tart,
 light cigarettes to while away the remains
 of the tea, and she tells me the rice pudding
 she makes 'is nice too.' She only has it on Fridays
 and I can come some Friday if I'm free.
 I roll onto her again and later still she pastes the cream
 on me and licks, licks, licks.
 As I dress she covers herself with a light St. Bernard nightie
 nibbles the chocolates I brought
 lights another cigarette.
 I bid farewell, tell her I'll see her next week.
 On the stairs, I pass another gentleman
 - older than me.
 I wonder if he likes apple tarts too.

DON McLELLAN has worked as a newspaper and magazine journalist in Canada (*Vancouver Sun*), South Korea (the *Herald*) and Hong Kong (the *Standard*). He publishes the *Killarney Times*, a community news and information quarterly.

Memory Sandwich

Don McLellan

THE MONROES MIGRATED from nobody-knows-where just as the swallows were turning up famished at our backyard feeder. A van with liling shocks and unfamiliar license plates deposited their things on the lawn of a neglected two-bedroom the color of melted chocolate. By the time the leaves on the poplars in Falaise Park had begun to coil, just as the flimsy wings of the leatherjackets started to sag, the family up and moved away, a memory.

Afterwards, a succession of temporary tenants occupied the bungalow. There were couples with children and couples without. There were lessees, owners, renters and loners, none of whom were able to lift the air of dependency that clung to the sullen cedar structure.

Fresh paint, a garden – nothing worked. For years it sat empty, victim to vandals, rodents and mold, roof shingles scattered, windows lost to target practice. The day it was bulldozed that house looked much as it did the day the Monroes moved in: unloved.

Besides the parents, Nelson and Connie, there were three Monroe offspring: Gus, the eldest at sixteen, had a birthmark splashed across one eye, a blueberry pirate's patch; Lana, a year younger, was a shy thing whose attempts to conceal sprouting mammary glands intensified curiosity.

Shortly after their arrival, the youngest Monroe crossed the street to where I was fanning my collection of baseball cards. I had been aware of Freddy observing me from a bedroom window. He introduced himself with the assurance of someone accustomed to the role of stranger. There seemed a precocious gypsy savvy in those squinting, mahogany eyes.

"Wanna be friends?" he asked.

To facilitate camaraderie Freddy faked an interest in baseball. Misused terms like line drives and pop-up fouls, eschewed debates about runs-batted-in and earned-run averages. But he was a quick study and within weeks was

an expert in the lingo of the diamond. He financed the beginnings of his own card collection with scrounged change and discarded bottles, cataloguing them in an Export tobacco tin.

Gossip trailed the newcomers like an obstinate bill collector. Truth and rumor and total bullshit leap-frogged backyard fences and flowed freely along phone lines. It was whispered in the line-ups at the supermarket, mumbled discretely during those smoky lulls between bingo cards, persistent as mosquito buzz.

Nelson was wanted for bank robbery, went one story. The kids, according to another, were adopted. Mrs. Monroe rarely came outside because she suffered from some incurable ailment. All her hair would soon fall out. There would be this agonizing death.

I picked up the phone one night to hear Mrs. Peters on our party line, telling Peggy Miller that the Monroes were not legally hitched, always a concern to those who were. Mrs. Miller replied that she figured as much, having recently circulated a petition urging City Hall to blacktop the alleys.

“Both of ’em signed it,” she reported gleefully. “*With different surnames!*”

Anyone knowing anything about Peggy Miller – as we all did, having listened in on so many of *her* calls – knew that she would have been disappointed had such a delicious rumor been untrue.

Undoubtedly fueling speculation was Nelson Monroe’s unwillingness to meet a visitor’s gaze. He would study a cloud scudding across the sky or a termite burrowing into the floor, but never the face of the person in his presence – proof, claimed our neighborhood sleuths, of guilt.

I remember nothing of the Mrs. and little of Nelson Monroe. Only that his fingers were stained orange with nicotine and that the T-shirts he favored showed a neat border where the sun had glazed the back of his neck. Freddy claimed Nelson had a clipper ship tattooed across his chest – another fabrication, I supposed.

I once passed the foundry where he worked just as the day shift was ending. A whistle sounded, its massive steel doors swung open, workers surged forward like a colony of marauding ants. Mr. Monroe was the first out, a wily escapee distancing himself from the pack. His was one of the few heads unturbanned.

That Nelson Monroe drank heavily was not cause for concern. In those days, in that neighborhood, who didn’t? That he beat his kids when he did so, was.

“You fellas should do somethin’,” my mother pestered my father at breakfast. The events of the previous evening had been especially troublesome. Shrieks coming from the Monroe home throughout the night had made sleep impossible. A policewoman went inside to check on Connie and the kids. Constable McManus called Nelson out to his cruiser but eventually let him go. His release, which should have squelched the bank robbery theory, only served to spread it.

“Do something?” asked my dad. “Like what?”

“Yeah,” my brother Burt butted in. “Whattaya want him to do?”

“Talk to Nelson,” she said.

But my father was an unsuitable choice to offer marital advice, as were many of the men wakened by the fracas that night. All remained mute.

And now to the event that earned the family a permanent berth in my memory, the vivid sandwiched between the forgotten. Freddy and I were trading baseball cards. I was vaguely aware of his parents bickering again. Lana was on the back porch hanging laundry. The radio was on in the kitchen. She sang along with a Gene Pitney ballad, humming in spots where she forgot the words. The slant of sunlight on her flowered blouse made visible the bobbing of those exquisite boobs. Her unclad arms and plump cheeks were pink with beach burn. A lick of hair unfurled from a braid and curled around an ear, followed the sweep of her throat, waterfalled to a shoulder. An erection came alive in my jeans.

Freddy agreed to part with a Jose Valdivielso for two of mine. Already my new friend had blossomed into a cunning, unsentimental trader, never telling me the cards he coveted, like a cagey poker player taking note of those I did.

Jose Valdivielso was a slick-fielding shortstop formerly with the Minnesota Twins. He had been demoted to their Vancouver Mounties farm team. I followed the club's fortunes on the radio broadcasts and had seen him play at Capilano Stadium. Though nearing the end of his career, this spry Cuban sportsman could still skip across the infield turf with the economy of a gazelle. I was hoping to enhance the value of his card with an autograph.

But I didn't want the card because of the player's talents. I wanted it for the faraway lyric of the name: *Val-di-vi-el-so*. There was an enchantment to such bouncing syllables, something musical as they tumbled off the lips. The card, with its scented statistical listings, made me dream of places I might one day visit. We did not have people named Valdivielso in our neighborhood. There weren't any residents with skin the color of butterscotch pudding. In those years after the war we were a Little Rhodesia.

"Deal?" I asked Freddy, reaching for the card.

The trade would never be consummated. The Monroe scuffle escalated. We could hear the shuffling of frightened feet, of body involuntarily meeting wall. I was familiar with the significance of upended furniture, the unpredictability that could follow. There was a scream – Mrs. Monroe – followed by a curse, Nelson's.

Moments later, Gus ejected out the back door. He was wearing only underwear. Nelson Monroe, naked above the waist, was in pursuit. A three-masted schooner, as Freddy had boasted, was tattooed across his hairless chest.

Nelson grabbed Gus by his ducktail and shoved him face-first to the ground.

Mrs. Monroe pushed open the kitchen window.

"Please, Nellie!" she whimpered. "No!"

Mr. Monroe buried a knee between Gus's shoulder blades and forced the boy's arms behind his back. He unhooked his belt and slid it free of his waist, a sword liberated from its sheath. Using the buckle as a handle, he began whipping Gus like an obstreperous dog.

The leather bit into skin – *thwack! thwack! thwack!* The muscles in Gus’s arms and shoulders rolled in protest.

“Four! Five! Six!” Nelson Monroe chanted. He exhaled in short, evenly paced bursts like someone performing calisthenics.

“Seven! Eight! Nine!”

Freddy tried to intervene. Nelson tossed him aside, a wet towel. The lashing continued.

“Ten! Eleven! Twelve!”

“Help us!” Freddy pleaded with Mrs. Sanderson, on her knees next door, bedding geraniums. “He’s not our real Dad!”

Mr. Whitley silenced his mower. Ed Tyson watched from a stepladder. When Freddy appealed to them, Mr. Whitley disappeared inside his basement. Mr. Tyson looked away.

Gus wriggled free and crawled to the back of the yard, wounded game. Prey subdued, a wrong judiciously righted, Mr. Monroe threaded the belt back through the loops of his trousers. His forehead glistened with perspiration. Heavy breathing made the schooner heave: rough seas.

Next in my recollection was a shoeless, shirtless Gus Monroe marching along Mons Drive, Freddy and myself following on bicycles with his things. The pavement sizzled under the noon glare. Tar seams bubbled.

Neighbors abandoned their chores as Gus filed by, tears welling in his eyes, blood still oozing from his wounds, a Jesus.

“Hang in there, Gus,” someone said.

“You’ll feel better in a few days,” exhorted another.

“It’ll all blow over, life goes on, these things happen...”

Mrs. Sanderson, a pirogi with legs, left the curb to squeeze an orange into the boy’s hand, a guilt libation.

We ditched our bikes in my yard and ran to catch up as he crossed the park and descended into a tangle of brush. We jaywalked a perilous Grandview Highway.

Gus disappeared inside the mouth of a culvert under the freeway. Freddy and I removed our shoes and socks, rolled up our pantlegs. We heard Gus’s determined footsteps slapping the water. Traffic rumbled overhead. Something furry nudged my ankle in the lukewarm runoff.

We emerged into blinding sunshine, followed his muddy prints along a well-worn trail, navigated a bog. Discarded pop bottles and junk food wrappers encircled a clearing. These low-lying meadows – blanketed that day in a riot of wildflowers and illegally dumped trash – served as an unsupervised playground for a generation of bored teens, a hideout for the habitually truant. Entire villages could be populated with the illegitimate numbers that could trace their beginnings to these shady glens.

The trail led to Still Creek. Skeletal remains of a vacated factory rose behind NO TRESPASSING signs on the opposite shore. We shinnied across a fallen elm, ducked under a willow’s chiming leaves, ignored an admonition etched ominously in red – DANGER.

The building’s floors were littered with slivers of glass and the ash of fires nurtured by rail bums. We climbed a wobbly ladder to a tarpapered roof. Gusts of wind slammed into rattling sheets of aluminum siding. An

eerie whisper whistled through crack and crevice. Freddy distributed Nelson's cigarettes. Sticky fingers shared slices of Mrs. Sanderson's orange.

Gus wandered off. We heard him cursing as he tried reaching a cable dangling loose from a nearby crane.

"What did your brother do to deserve that?" I asked Freddy of the thrashing. "Must have been somethin' awful."

"Didn't deserve nothin'!" Freddy said angrily. "'Cept maybe a medal for tryin' to protect our Mom."

He rolled up his sleeves and displayed arms previously claimed bruised by a skin condition.

"What did I do to deserve these?"

He exposed a rack of discolored ribs.

"And this?"

Gus towed the cable to a rusted girder covered in clucking pigeons. He kicked a scrap of lumber from his path; the birds dispersed obediently. We could hear the block of wood crashing through the floors below, a distant echo as it bounced on the concrete foundation – our fate if we slipped.

Gus pulled back with the cable and pushed off the edge of the roof. He sailed out over the junk-strewn factory yard, soaring beyond the overgrown railway tracks, the meadow, the bog. His cheeks were puffed out. The wind flattened his hair. His toes brushed the tips of the highest branches, frightening a gaggle of disbelieving crows.

When the pendulum returned he dropped onto the roof with the thud of a pheasant crippled by buckshot.

"Think I'm goin' home now, Fred," I said. "Unless you tell me what's goin' on."

That's when Freddy said it. Words that resonate through the years, the meat of the memory sandwich. I remember the beams creaking, the building swaying beneath us, my friend Freddy Monroe leaning in close and saying:

"It's who we are, it's what we do."

Gus led us out of the forest and across the highway, through overgrown lots, past a string of second-hand outfits selling used mattresses, copper tubing, window frames. Along unfamiliar streets, forging shortcuts through the yards of bewildered strangers. We marched into a convenience store by the front door, exited via the rear, our shirts stuffed with boosted merchandise. We stopped to divvy up our take under the rear window of Mario's Bakery on Commercial Drive.

We were dangling our weary feet over the side of a dumpster when a bell sounded from inside.

Gus knuckled the window. A man with powdered hands and the sinewed shoulders of a bull emerged. He extended an unintelligible salutation and distributed samples of still-scalding bread. The sweet smell of the freshly risen dough filled the alley. Mario tossed a trayful of crumbs into the air. Waiting sparrows swooped.

"Where ya been all day?" Mom asked when I returned home for dinner.

"Out."

"Chew your food! You know what happened to your uncle."

"Am." (Stomach cancer.)

“Where ya goin’ in such a hurry?”

“Out.”

I rejoined the Monroes as they were striding purposefully up Rupert Street. Their actions no longer puzzled me. Those boys were doing what we all do when we must: seeking out the good to negate the bad, swallowing honey to help digest the bitter. This day-long trek was a Monroe pilgrimage. That’s what they did. It’s who they were.

“One last place,” Freddy said, a flare in his eyes. “The grand finale.”

Gus led us to an empty house on East 29th Avenue. We squatted in the tall grass beside the garage until it was dark. Then Gus climbed onto the roof of the deck. Freddy pulled himself up onto a wooden lattice, its fragile frame trembling under his sneakers. A few minutes later a light came on in the bathroom window of the house next door. Someone was running bath water. Freddy waved me up beside him.

“Arlene Simpson,” he whispered. “In 12A. Gus’s in love with her.”

We inched higher. The bathroom filled with steam, the window began to fog up. Freddy elbowed me excitedly. I could make out a girl pushing her way through the mist, a downy-limbed nymphet parting the clouds, a bewitching triangle of strawberry lint. Arlene Simpson’s boobs sloped in contrary directions, ready-to-pick pears dripping from the same branch. Her nipples flashed like copper pennies.

Just as the steam engulfed her, the lattice gave way. We survived the fall with only skinned knees.

I do not recall a moving van pulling up to the Monroe home that autumn and hauling their possessions away, although it certainly happened. Nor do I remember saying goodbye to Freddy, but, of course, I must have.

Over the years news of the family filtered back through others. Lana married a forklift driver in a carpet warehouse; they had a couple of kids. I still think of her sometimes when a certain Gene Pitney song is played on one of those golden oldie radio stations.

Mrs. Monroe, if reports are accurate, remarried. A millionaire from California. Gus apparently did well. Real estate, they said. Nelson was never heard from again.

Long after the family had moved away, while taking in a movie at the Orpheum Theater on Granville Street, I recognized Freddy. He was with his friends, a rough-looking bunch; I was with mine. We brushed shoulders, made eye contact, but we did not acknowledge our history, which I have always regretted. At nineteen he was killed in a brawl. The news item in the paper consumed a paragraph of ink.

Recently I was in the neighborhood doing yard work for my folks. Just before sunset a Mercedes convertible stopped up the street. The couple in the front seat crossed the road to admire the view of the mountains. A pair of adolescents jumped out of the back seat. The boy dribbled a basketball between the legs of make-believe opponents. The girl leaned against the car and gyrated hypnotically to headphones.

I moved to the edge of the property for a better look. House hunters, I presumed; the area was crawling with them. But when returning to the car,

the man glanced my way for just an instant. There was no mistaking the blueberry stain. It ran down one side of his face, a splotch of paint. He met my gaze and seemed to recognize me, although I can't be certain. He appeared to nod, but that also is interpretation.

I could have made some calls and verified his identity, but I didn't. I preferred to believe it was him. Returning to a place that had meant something once. Because it's what I did. It's who I had become.

CARL-GUSTAF LILIUS, born in 1928 in Helsingfors, Finland, was a sculptor, painter, draughtsman, graphic artist and writer. In the words of professor and critic Esa Saarinen, Lilius was “a visionary, a pioneer ... an inimitable force of synthesis merging unyielding strength with soft, lucid gentleness.” He died at the age of seventy, in 1998.

HENRY LAHTI is a translator, writer, actor, folk-dancer and the inspiration behind Finland Canada Connected.

Burgundian Dance Tune

Carl-Gustaf Lilius

[translation by Henry Lahti]

FOR A MOMENT, I wondered how the whole orchestra moved towards me, and how, even as it moved, it was able to play a Mahler symphony, but my thoughts were quickly turned in another direction.

I noticed, you see, that at the center of the orchestra traveled a small group of people who not only played their own instruments but also walked a tightrope.

I saw that their movements were the adroit movements of tightrope walkers, as they, near-to-the-clouds, elegantly and without stumbling moved along an invisible rope tied tightly between the tall trees.

Before I could express my dismay – I wanted, you see, to say that two such difficult procedures should not be performed at the same time – I noticed that they only wished to demonstrate the level they had achieved, with the hope that they could thus coax everyone else also to do their best at their own level.

Really, the subject touched me personally; it was a challenge directed at me. I should at last develop my skills to where I also could demonstrate how easy it was to move between tall trees on an invisible rope, dance there, and at the same time play my own instrument.

Now they had reached the old city gates, beside which I was standing, and I saw every traveler close-up. They were dressed in period costumes which we might call of the Late Medieval Age. They tripped along in the evening sunshine, and the voices and the colors seemed to melt into each other.

Mahler’s symphony had ended. Now, instead, I heard them playing a playful Burgundian dance tune. The small group that had simultaneously danced on the rope and played instruments had now begun to sing. The

words were difficult to understand, Burgundian belonging to languages which in their passing have become more complex, so that, finally, when they are not spoken at all, they have reached a degree of complexity which is incredibly higher than the complexity was at the time when they were in daily use. The phenomena is commonly referred to as a form of reversal, where the said and that which is impossible to say are in reverse relationship to a situation which prevails at a known historical moment in time. Now it must, however, be noted that all those people who could have precisely reported on that moment have long since vanished.

The song was beautiful; that was enough for me. Long after the orchestra had disappeared, it happened that I turned and saw everything again, saw it all, as it were, once more.

Featured Poet

Chad Norman



Squall:
The Shelleys' Last Voyage

CHAD NORMAN thrives on Leaning Lane, East Vancouver. Between raising funds for charities and hosting literary events, he continues to write *Squall: The Shelleys' Last Voyage*, his latest manuscript. In 1997 his first collection of poetry, *The Breath of One*, was published by Ekstasis Editions. Each month he hosts the Stone Room Series, held at the El Cocal, featuring poets, both local and national, musicians and dancers. Norman's next poetry collection, *These Are My Elders*, is due out 2001, by Broken Jaw Press.

CATHERINE OWEN, who interviewed him, is a Vancouver poet. She lives with her husband, Chad Norman, their cats, Luke & Lucy, and many mutual or individual hauntings.

Under One Roof: Living with the Shelleys

A Conversation, Catherine Owen & Chad Norman

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The first Poem you wrote for Mary Shelley, Chad, I recalled both of us being a little high and challenging each other to compose a poem on the spur of the moment ... (laughter). But it must have all begun before this evening. How? What was it about Mary Shelley that fascinated you initially and eventually compelled you to write?

CN

(laughter) A little high, yes, I recall that evening. In June of 1999 we [had] recently moved to the Leaning Lane address in East Vancouver. I had been experimenting for several months by that time, writing under the influence of marijuana. A fascinating and beneficial practice. I certainly wouldn't be the first poet to approach the composition of a poem this way! As for our "spur of the moment" evening, it's clear to me now, that poem, the first, entitled "Last Night of the Elopement," was waiting for the page – it appeared quickly! For once I wasn't afraid of such anxiousness. The poem felt good right away. There have been slight reworkings since. Cath, you're correct when you say it must have all begun before ... when was that? ... it was in the bathtub early one morning – remember when we had a tub! (laughter) I believe I had begun researching, then. It was Percy's irresistible death, the disputing stories of how the boat capsized – or was it the details of the cremation of his body? Yes, that's it! But I don't want to get into that any further. I became fascinated with Mary instantly; how she was able to go on after Percy's drowning, writing and raising their only child, and tolerating the demands of Sir Timothy Shelley, her paranoid father-in-law. It was the amount of grief she lived with that opened the early vision to tackle a collection of poems, which would teach me more about how she dealt with

it. Soon after, the title came in my sleep. I'm going with *Squall: The Shelleys' Last Voyage*, and, as I call it, the book Mary never wrote. A collection of poems where Mary is on the beach at Via Reggio, Italy, the site of Percy's cremation – though she never actually visited it – remembering back through their life to the day they met in 1812, during a dinner held at the William Godwin residence, who, of course, was Mary's father. The poems will end there as far as I know at the moment.

CO

What gives you the audacity to think, Mr. Norman, that you can channel any approximation of a dead woman's grief?

CN

Well, suddenly I've become "Mr. Norman!" (laughter) There I go again... how would you say ... far too ambitious? (laughter) Me, channeling? Me, audacious? Sorry, I say nay to both! The permission came in a dream. From Mary herself. Channeling is one thing, but visitation is quite another. Yes, I did say "visitation." You see, each book of poems I tackle is sent as a learning experience. There are different realms you're taken into, led by different visiting forces. Let me tell you about the night Mary first came.

As I look back on the dream I still realize much is forgotten; however, it's what I remember that led to my decision – writing about a woman's grief. As for Mary being dead, I'm afraid she isn't! In fact, through the first dream and those since, Mary often lives in my body and imagination. Mary is very much alive! The dream fragment is made up of me, or Mary, looking into a lap, covered by a long white dress, which is soiled and damp, like it's been worn for days. In the dream it does feel like my body in this dress, I feel the dampness and the sense of having not washed, but as the fragment fades, I look up and see a woman now wearing this dress, walking by some sea with a black kerchief over her head, gradually vanishing. That's the dream! (laughter) My permission to an intimate and honest account of the grief Mary withstood throughout her life with Percy. I have the permission! (laughter) No audacity. No channeling. How else can I learn? Through studying the Shelleys I realize there's more I must know about women.

CO

I have found this transformation fascinating, if at times slightly eerie. Some Modernist poets, for instance, HD and Robert Duncan were obsessed with how the occult is implicated in the creation of literature. When you speak of "visitation," is this a sense of what you're referring to? Or are your visions of Mary merely inspiration or permission to you?

CN

That's a very good question. I believe I am far enough into this manuscript to answer it. When I speak of "visitation" the presence of Mary grows very intense. I can feel her, even now, within my body, which produces activity in my imagination, the visions. They are at times clear and abundant, leading me out of the moment, out of the Present, I mean. A state I have known during the composition of other manuscripts, but with the Shelley poems

there is definitely an obsession with, as you put it, “how the occult is implicated in the creation of literature,” only I must also bring in the “permission” aspect, too. Both seem to work together, overwhelming, especially when a poem begins! I find if I go and sit in the same spot at a local café the writing begins quickly, and often I’ll see Mary easier in the scene I’ve chosen to open the poem [with]. I can talk about this later, if you like? To get back to the occult ... I mentioned writing under the influence of marijuana ... well, I believe [in] its assistance to prepare the occult, an opening up of sorts to receive Mary, a state whereby I fill up with her presence, and I am convinced it is her. One thing that has helped with bringing on this state is the constant reading or, as I prefer to call it, study of writings by, on, and about the Shelleys. For the past year or so I have read almost exclusively this way. Again, very intentional. To fill up with one’s subject. To be overtaken. To be prepared for transport! (laughter) In fact, my last two books have been written in this manner. Not the marijuana, but the reading! I don’t believe in writing a bunch of random poems, then trying to find a thread to bring them together as a book. I loathe this process. Concentration and total focus on a vision through to the end! I now know such a process works, sets up the possibility for the occult to be implicated, therefore enlarging the Unknown, the place in my body where I believe the poem begins. I know Mary stays close to this place.

CO

The form of these poems interests me too: their overall brevity, their blank verse lyricality and the near-mantric repetitions of Mary situated by or in the ocean to begin each piece, with the box containing Percy’s unburnt heart and her own body parts continually changing positionality. And the diction. Its brave lapses into the archaic...was this also envisioned beforehand? How did these prosodic regularities emerge?

CN

No, the “brave lapses into the archaic” as you put it, certainly were not envisioned. However, before I began any of the poems there was worry; I didn’t know what tones, rhythms, language would set up inside them. This worry hasn’t gone away. I still have fear sweep through me before, during, and after each poem. My main stabilizer is the belief that Mary provides these brave lapses. Now that I’m a number of poems into the manuscript, there is little doubt she guides me, so I’m able to capture a language which I feel is really hers. At times I try to rework things but usually fail, coming back to what she’s sent with slight changes now and then. Fortunately, the presence of the archaic was brought to my attention, commentary from a wise friend I appreciate very much. She says the language is both fascinating and affective. One needs this type of encouragement early on in a manuscript. The worry I mentioned also has a lot to do with slipping too far into the archaic, becoming overly Romantic. I feel the poems have avoided the slip, which certainly pleases me. The other thing about this new language is how it takes a place beside my other books. The Shelley work is definitely another discovery! (laughter) You had another question...I’m afraid I don’t entirely agree with your description, “prosodic regularities,” but I see what you’re

getting at. As for emergence, the poems appear through a slow, patient composition, even when I wrote the sequence on the dead children, which came quick and anxious. I work very hard on practically each line, always reaching for the ambitious line. It is in the line I place my trust. Perhaps this is where you notice the regularities. I read aloud as I write, this definitely helps to establish and control any metre. What emerges simply delights in using my body, first to build the lines within it, then to find a way to the page to become the poem. Now that you have brought this to my attention, perhaps there is some sort of style of versification bearing itself. A tangible language.

CO

Speaking of bearing, have you imagined the actual birth of this book? The length, the direction and perhaps even, the reception? – if such an event ever occurs in Canadian literary circles anymore, that is...

CN

I have! The “birth of this book” is a long way off. The length? I would like one hundred or more pages. Who knows now? When I’m out there near the end I’ll know – a feeling always arrives! The direction? More of it appears after each poem. At the moment I’m beginning to fill out the different years, in an 1814 phase, so I’ll proceed and remain confident.

As for reception ... (laughter) ... I don’t think about it much. When I do, usually what happens is I shake my head and tell myself, “It will be a wonderful book. Many publishers will want to bring it out. And, of course, there’s that world tour – which I won’t have to set up! (laughter) I expect reception! Just like I expect rejection. And to close ... as for literary circles in Canada ... don’t get me started, please, please, not here! (laughter) Look, Mary stayed alive through her writing! I finally don’t give a damn about them. Why write in a circle?”

LAST NIGHT OF THE ELOPEMENT. 1822

*Mary facing the land;
a small sealed box at the sea's edge:*

Hands tilled the rose's place of escape!
World, streaking your colors
through star-tacked galaxies;
What of the dark plain orbits?

Above in the sun a flame dies,
folding back the dust alight
over any hour brought by clocks.

Trees go dry straight across the day.
Nearer the moon pries the hills,
grows from a branch where
 night broods ... stills.

Leaning Lane
Vancouver, BC
June 8, 1999

THE LAWS OF ITALY. 1822

*Mary at the sea's edge;
a small sealed box in her hands.*

By the guilty sea I hold the heart of Shelley
as my body moves to view the hated distance
the way weather

 chars the flower's new petal
under the window he loved to be in or behind;
the pyres, long after the laws, shadows of fires
built for the bodies

 the squall knew a short night,
pools where the sun leads my eyes back into his,
the stare, I, Mary, fell into gladly by Bracknell.

We, decisive & damned, began what led this beach
to be the first reality our lives must relinquish,
a drowning now between us, no guesses were necessary;
the thievish waves attempt to console my conference
as the heart prepares to serve another extraction.

Percy! Percy! My knees on this innocent shore,
my tears on the sand moving like cries in a crowd
the mind meanders
 far off where the past was pure
when the poems & children made the days a haven.

The insects, shadows the clouds share, dive in heat
the day decisions
 mean you live bodiless in my body,
gone under forever, as this loud hour brings a dusk
willing to save our farewell, afloat in the orange foam.

Leaning Lane
Vancouver, BC
August 17, 1999

THE PROSPEROUS FRICTION

*Mary seated against a boulder;
a small sealed box in her lap:*

Testimony waits behind the tongue in thoughts
– such a sudden return to insight – anxious,
for the air, the unpredictable destiny of speech,
my brittle senses' version of their little bond
witnessed, I hear, the day Byron's lip quivered.

A trembling finger rests on the undeniable log;
others were chosen to burn my Percy's body,
gathered by our close fold, relieved, able
to move both selves & stove to this salty grove,
as of yet unstricken with the yarns of his exit.

Testimony? Should I tell? Yes. I was present then.

When the candles snuffed themselves I sought sleep;
listening in the midst of the poets' verbal duel,
Byron, on the Deity's side, & Shelley, the Skeptic's.
I looked back once, then the lamp bore a new hour
meant for the porous time in such endless minds
beyond the creeping futile line of morning's arrival.

Leaning Lane
Vancouver, BC
September 20, 1999

DEDICATION 1817, REVISITED

*Mary studying the sky;
a small sealed box left behind on a boulder*

And now *my* heart has no home,
the Summer tasks meant for two Percy,
unended, left for the new widow I'll be.

Islam still Islam in our last house,
Casa Magni, where the mind's beauty boded
how to love in the live circle we were.

Each cloud like each wave clings to the moon.
I knew the stars with him – what a thought,
what a truth – not a twinkle grieves our gaze.

Between my toes the sea brings a brief reunion,
the brother Laon, the sister Cythna, the Lovers
– we laughed as the rumors toured England!

“A League of Incest!” How ridiculous, how wrong.
The memory no less a lit thing of distant space,
becomes the sight, the Future's view too soon.

Where is the Past? *My* murderous act?
Finally it feels ready to confess,
coldly rising in my dress, this sea, in need.

Café Deux Soleils
Vancouver, BC
September 16, 1999

DICK BIRD says his life is a blur between sweet dream and harsh reality. He wields pen and paddle around Vancouver; he kayaks surf and rivers both here and south to Mexico and beyond.

Copper Knickers

Dick Bird

RIVER ROAD WAS plugged with traffic fouling the air with fumes and blasphemy. As soon as I stopped, it was too late to turn, the road clogged up behind. So the bridge was open: to boats that is: I'd only seen this happen twice in – what? – eleven years? For what kind of boat? Only small craft use the river, freighters and navy have to anchor out in the bay.

Well, I'm not waiting. Getting my bike down off the front rack, I glance at the river between rusty roofs. Well, not the river itself. An upright piano passes the houses, a coop full of chickens on top, bundles tied on all over it. A woman in headscarf standing to steady it, her other hand on children's heads: just their heads, the boat so slow. Last to show in the long river skiff comes the bony brown skipper resting his arse on the outboard.

Chugging upstream. The same river I left this morning, though much changed in looks and in name: here it's the Belize River, dividing the wooden town in half and stinking up the sea. It's clear and fast where we ran it yesterday, down a gorge in the Maya mountains. They call it the Cayo up there. My son's in charge of the camp at the falls. He's leading them down the lower run without me – some of these clients have got up my nose.

I weave through a swarm of bikes to the gate. After the piano-laden skiff, a peeling cruiser chugs upstream with its wheelhouse skewed. It must have blown the whistle for the bridge. My stomach tightens when I catch a policeman staring, picking me out from a dozen dark heads: "Where your license for that bike?"

He smiles, a husky belligerent football player exuding colonial British fair play: not like those guys in T-shirts hanging around the pool hall – wearing the looks of Hollywood cops.

"What license? I'm a visitor, why do I need one?"

“Make no difference, every bike have a license. Look at all them, suh.”
 Every bike at both the gates with a river between us wears its engraved official disk on the front wheel hub. “Don’t tell me you never see one? You ride a bike in Belize you need a license: where you from, suh?”

“From Canada.”

“Riding a bike all the way from up there?”

“No, driving a van.”

“Where the vehicle now, suh?”

“Back there in traffic. I just took the bike to get here quicker.”

“You with a club, suh?”

“No, why do you say that?”

“No bicycle club, no sport touring club?”

He’s looking at my singlet logo, a cut-out cyclist bent over handlebars, pumping legs.

“No club, man, just me – on a visit.”

“You know where’s the police station?” He points across the river. “You go the station, ask for license: I give you twenty-four hours, you hear?”

The smile’s gone but his frown’s a bluff, for surely he knows I’ll skip it and just keep out of his way. That’s why I’m staring, imprinting his face to avoid it next time. He wouldn’t have caught me now if the bridge hadn’t opened.

Pivoting on its midstream pier, it’s closing after the boats. As the gates lift, the bikes surge forward, jangling bells right across the road athwart fuming cars, to weave and dodge among riders charging the opposite way.

It feels good to pedal in such an attack. He didn’t scare me: not like these, in swollen jeans and T-shirts, lounging around the snooker hall in the triangle fronting Mom’s Café.

With unmistakable coppers’ eyes they watch me pedal, swerving away too late to fool anyone.

“You there! Yes, you, Sir! Just step over here!”

A cop leans in the upper window where a woman once yelled down: “Hey, whitey, want some milk? Try some chocolate milk!” – squeezing her big black tit through the shutters. No woman today, just a copper with bulging shoulders like those tits.

“You coming to visit Cammy Waters?”

“Is she one of them that live up there?”

“You know very well. I see you plenty times.”

Behind them the pool hall’s empty. Blinds down, cues on tables, balls scattered in mid-game. None of the usual punters, just these cops.

“Sir, you don’t mind, just upstairs.”

He’s so hard to refuse. Breathing down my neck, he pushes me to the bottom step. “Go on, sir, up you go.”

There’s violent noise, whacking and crunching, from the corner of the landing. Plain clothes propping up the wall, one looking out of her door. They’re smacking wood with hammers and yanking nails with wrecking bars. Among other things the lid is being wrenched off Cammy’s trunk.

Bright and breezy, keeping my voice cool – “Can I help you gentlemen in some way?”

The one in charge, breathing hard although there's no tool in his hand, says: "Yes, suh, a light. You got a match on you, suh?"

He aims a loaded cigarette in my face.

The one behind me says, "This is him."

"I know, I know. Well, suh, what you business here?"

Where is she? They've made such a wreck of the room, what have they done with her?

"No business, man. I'm going by, these officers called me in."

"You not come here for Camellia Waters?"

"No, I am not."

Waters, is it. Cammy's the only name she told me besides her mother's aunties', uncles', cousins'--

"Some other woman if she not here?"

"I wasn't even coming in--"

Lying to these guys feels worse than useless, dangerous. The one with the cigarette gets a light from his subordinate, throwing flame on his face. He puffs smoke from golden cheeks, making me look to see how the sun is getting through the shutters. Light and shade stripe the treasure that Cammy collected all these years.

He's reading my face between the lines, so I'm trying to keep it blank. "How long you been seeing her?"

"Maybe ten years."

"How old she be then?"

"A teenager, I guess."

"Before she born her child?"

"She had no child when I first met her."

The boy was here last week, tugging me out through the snooker players, letting the young white guy go first and telling me to wait.

Her child. Already hustling for his mum. When the guy insisted I come up, comrades in arms to the stronghold of love, the boy watched me like a dog while I sat in the busted cane chair hearing her with him behind the curtain. To pass the time without stressing how the time was passing, I said: "What's your name, sonny?"

"Copper knickers," he speaks up. I'm so flummoxed I just suck air. Later, it took his mum to explain: "You know him, he discover the universe--"

"Ah, Copernicus--" fanning the inquisition fires --

"That what I say, *coppuh nickuhs*." Those roving eyes, alert for insult, by which she means any criticism of accent, schooling, family, her chosen (if she chose it) profession...

Where's Copernicus hiding now? And where is she?

My knees are jelly: but if I sit without being told they'll know I'm hiding something.

Some hand holds a photo to my face. She's a woman here, it must be recent.

In Surrey, when the sheriff served me a writ of divorce, he had a picture of me with the girl. Me in a swimsuit, propped on crutches, leg in a cast from toe to crotch: she with her frock held up in her fingers showing her *nickuhs* by the muddy mangrove shore. Me with a death-defying grin, a

cripple pushing forty: she with the saucy roving eye that snared battalions of British troops sent here for jungle training.

“You been putting ideas in her head, suh?”

“Suh” to put me in my place, whitey singled out for questions from so many blacks with their answers ready.

“What ideas do you mean?”

“Going back to Canada with you.”

“Wasn’t my idea.”

“It come from her?” says the man with a golden face, making his cigarette glow.

“She said something along those lines. But I said it wasn’t practical.”

“I agree with you. But she seem to think it is.”

The battering ceased. The lid’s off, trunk upended, clothes on floor. A police foot in a tennis shoe kicks the pile towards me. Am I supposed to get down on my knees and sort it? They stand in judgment of my style, lowering my butt to the sticky mattress.

Crimped and folded, garish but dingy, gauzy scarves and blouses, knickers. Additional smells in the pungent room: wholesome whore sweat, discharged semen.

“Gifts from you, suh?”

“Souvenirs of many men –” thinking of army, navy, air force, police. She told me she had “done all the police.” I was on the dock when a launch came ashore from a frigate: I couldn’t see her face but when she laughed I knew it was her among those red-skin necks and knees.

When I asked what her favorite color was, she said: “White in day time, black skin at night!”

Rare in this land of slippery-hipped tough-titty women, she’s bonny for being so lanky and thin.

“We go home to put the sausage in the bun,” she said about an hour after we met. With her teenaged friend she rented a shack on stilts, like the shithouses over the turgid river. Later she moved up here with the girls over the pool hall behind Mom’s Triangle Café.

You don’t see the old slag squeezing her tit through the shutters any more. Too growly, too heavy. Back then she dandled the men with a hand that could tickle or smite on demand. It was she that taught Cammy what a girl needs to know.

Putting the sausage in the bun. That and other hot Caribbean cookery.

Was this, where I sit, the seedbed that sprouted Copernicus?

The boy must know where she is. He’ll be hiding, too – if the cops haven’t got him.

“Have you any idea, suh, of the whereabouts of her son?”

His gold face flashes, lighting my mind. I’ve got to be more careful what I think.

“He was here last week, but I’ve been away.”

“Outside Belize?”

“Up in the mountains, kayaking rivers.”

“You got a license for that?”

“For kayaking?”

“For running a business. It seem to me you running a business without proper license.”

“What business?”

“They pay you, these people. But never mind that now. I’m more interested to find the boy.”

“What’s he done?”

“Done nothing yet. He should be in school. Here, he learn the wrong things, grow up a bad man. We get too many boys like him. We going to put him in school.”

“Take him away from his mum?”

“She a bad influence.”

“Put him in reform school?”

“Reform school – that a British word. We going to put him in boarding school.”

“That’s another British word.”

“Never mind, this is no British Honduras now. We in charge, do everything our way, keep the country straight. And everyone in it, you hear? No more this running away, Jamaica, the States. Or Canada, you hear?”

“I told you it wasn’t my idea.”

“Just being here put ideas in her head. You keep come back year after year? What the matter? Got no woman at home?”

“I have a woman.”

“And children? A daughter? Same age as this Cammy?”

“Don’t you try to make me guilty, sir. You’re no better. She told me all about you.”

Hey, where does this bravery come from, this foolishness?

He’s lapping it up, his smile is more golden than ever.

“So – what she say about me?”

“Not just you, sir: all the police.” I smile round the ring of grinning faces. “No names, no packdrill. But she knows...”

Luckily they don’t ask me what.

He’s fishing for something in the bag at his feet.

“Does she tell you what I got here?”

It’s sort of a handgun like an electric drill. From the wicked four-inch needle I deduce it’s a hypodermic syringe for cattle or dangerous big game. “Right,” he says, “a hypo-gun. I can knock down ten men with one fill.” He playfully jabs at the groins of his agile subordinates.

“Crowd control? Riot control?” I’m trying to paste a cooperative smile on an uncooperative face.

“That the general idea –” Head down, he leers across Cammy’s clothes, letting me feel the lack of *sir* and all its implications.

He jabs the needle to capitalize his words: “I’m doing EVERYthing I CAN...to KEEP this COUNTRY STRAIGHT...kids like CoPERnicus in SCHOOL...girls like CAMMY...learning a DECENT TRADE...RESPECT ... to be a CREDIT to her COUNTRY...HERE in BELIZE where she BELONG ...not RUNNING OFF –”

The man behind the bed is shoving: I brace my feet on the floor, but they slide: I don’t want to slip any nearer the needle. As long as he’s talking, it keeps jabbing the air. When he runs out of words? He’ll need something

solid to puncture, like me. The sequence reads out logically in my mind: till I realize I'm reading his.

As if the bridge between us is closing and I'd rather keep it open – I grab ideas from anywhere. “Would it make a difference if he had a father?”

“Depends on who.”

“I believe it's me.”

That hit the target. The needle points at the ceiling where the flies are sitting still.

“Why you think so?”

Why? I should have my head examined. “As likely me as any man eleven years ago.”

“A lot of men had her then. *Me* – that don't make me his Dad. What makes you so special?” He's squinting through the glass to check the level of fluid.

“Something she said to me.” What the hell am I saying? I'm making this up. I can't stop, though I've no idea what she said or what I'm saying next. I have no memory to help: no special night or morning after: he's right, I'm nothing special.

“Something she say?” He holds the syringe in a golden beam of sun.

“Something clicked ... she was just a girl ... she became a woman.”

He guffaws: “In bed with you? You got something we haven't got?” He flicks the needle at my crotch, which experiences a tightening. His men bunch closer, making sure I stay on the bed.

I should have stayed with my group on the river. The waterfall scared me, but not like this. I hit the water flat on my face, rolling up to the laugh of birds and the puzzled look of my son. A lousy landing, but a good recovery. There wasn't much water going over the edge, it was more like pushing over rock: the spongy coral limestone of these parts. A little further on the river dived down a chimney. The plan was to put in again below where it flowed out of a cave. The kayakers from up north were ecstatic: the clowning birds and blossoming forest persuaded them this is paradise: which is what they're buying and what I sell.

Better that kayak over the edge than sitting on this bed.

“Suh!” There's a shout from below.

“See what's happening,” says the man with the golden face, his yellow eyes on me.

“They got the boy,” says the man at the door.

“Wonderful. Fetch him up to meet his daddy.”

I'm numb: what's Copernicus going to think about me and his mum?

That's him screeching in Garafuna or some other Carib tongue, thumping walls with fists and head, biting and spitting at coppers.

“Ma-am!” he yells headfirst through the door, squeezed under biceps in a T-shirt.

I start up, but sweaty hands push me down.

“Give him his daddy.”

His eyes dilate to take in the room: a herd of ogres with hammers and crowbars, the demolished bed, clothes on floor, photos scattered, busted trunk, his yellow dump truck on its back. He reaches out, not to grab but to fend me off as he hurtles over to land on my lap.

“Where’s my mam?” The words howl past me into the world of men.

“Tell him, where is she?” It’s my last throw. I bounce it across to the chief on his chair, pointing the hypo at the floor.

“Better you tell him what you just tell us. See if he believes you!” He roars at his men who roar back at me:

“Tell him!”

He raises a hand for silence, smiling.

“Copernicus, sonny: I knew your mum before you were born. You know I come from a long way away and I keep coming back. You want to know why?” I look at the ring of faces for pardon, but they’re nodding and licking their lips: mine are so dry I couldn’t spit for love or money.

“Because I’m your daddy!”

His eyes were brimful of beating and stealing and running. For an instant his body goes slack: then he’s seized and stiffened, shoves his fist up against my nose – when I grab the tendons of his wrist – hard as bone – he pulls my arm to his teeth and bites. Blood splashes, mainly on him: he must be drinking it to breathe: but Christ! the bite’s a relief after all the anticipation!

Coppers are laughing, rubbing their eyes. Arms encircle and tear him away, yank his shorts off his shining buttocks and stretch him over the chief’s bent knee. The man sights on me over his needle, exuding one slow drop like sperm:

“If you his daddy like you say, where this black arse come from?”

JACK CADY lives in Port Townsend, Washington. He is the author of fourteen books. The most recent are *The Night We Buried Road Dog*, *The Off Season*, *The Sons of Noah & Other Stories* and *Inagehi*. He has won the Washington State Governor's Award, the Nebula Award, the Atlantic "First" Award and the World Fantasy Award.

Tearing Up The Pasture

Jack Cady

GRANDMA'S SPIRIT tsks at my shoulder as I stroke cleanly with my cue. A cone of light clasps the rectangle of green felt. Invisible geometric lines connect brightly colored balls. Rails of the table are brown, the cue chalk is blue, and my left hand glows white with perfumed talc designed to be spread on baby bottoms. Grandma's spirit shudders – she's been tsking over my soul for a good many years – because the game of pool layers up sin like avalanche snow on mountains. Sooner or later that avalanche will fall, and zip, another loafer is headed for perdition.

Grandma has her point. Half of the game of pool amounts to loafing. It is a terrible waste of time. It's even worse in our small town bar, because there's only one pool table. The bar top glows with polish. Our bartender, Heidi, is young and lovely. She used to be talkative, but these days she plays cowboy laments on the jukebox while loggers drink and loafers loaf.

Grandma also believes that pool players hang around with bums, awful influences. Yep.

I arrived late in life to the game of pool. The early years were wasted in dreams, ambition, hope and work. From my age fifteen, to age sixty, pool tables sat at the back of bars while I sometimes sat at the front. Reverent murmurs occasionally spread from the rear of the joint as some miscreant dropped an impossible shot. When I turned sixty, the murmurs started to make sense.

When you turn sixty, retirement is not all that far away. Mine was basically a career decision. In these uncertain times it is always best to have a second occupation, and age sixty is a little late to master art or medicine. Hope stirred in my soul as I watched pool hustlers. It might still be possible to do some good for this world. It might still be possible to be exactly like them. Grandma didn't have all the facts.

My first and greatest teacher, a retired party-goer from North Carolina, went on the wagon for only one reason: the sauce messed up his game. His name is Hen. He retains a fondness for near-beer, Snickers bars, and high-right English on his rail shots. Deep dispute (theological antinomianism, at times) continues about high versus low English along the rail. I have actually seen first year physics textbooks spread on pool tables as one believer or another illustrated faith in his version of rotational forces.

Hen is of the pragmatic school: "Hell, boy, the shot went down. Don't talk to me about college."

He stands above the table, face round as a Carolina moon, wrinkles across forehead and down earlobes. His touch can be gentle as a puppy's tongue, or precise as a rifle shot. His stroke is fluid as a Southern stream. His wisdom comes from hustling sailors, tourists, punks, Makahs, fishermen, loggers, plus other hustlers.

Hen is a small town hustler. He bets on few trick shots, and nothing slick. He plays a steady, psychological game that wears opponents down to despair or rage. Either is just fine. "It don't pay to get emotional." He confronts complex shots with a phrase learned during childhood on a farm. "Hold 'er, Newt, she's rarin'."

My second teacher, Jake, was also once a farm boy. Now he runs with city slickers, mostly ladies. His lies are fabulous. Even finer; I have never before known a sixty-eight year old who so deeply loves a bar fight. When he's without companionship, and when his eyes are not bruised shut, Jake is a master of trick shots and razzle-dazzle. "Three rails in the spittoon," he says, and drives a side-pocket, end-pocket shot, that curls across and nails the other side pocket. Shadows lie in wrinkled hands, and light glows on heavily muscled arms. His cue becomes a magic wand waving rack after rack of balls solidly into the chutes. His bald head glows beneath the cone of light. Green felt brings back his boyhood, and he sees the table as "forty acres of pasture".

"Jake could-of made a name for himself," Hen says, "if he cut out the fightin' and the floozies."

We generally play eight-ball until a live one comes along. Then the game goes to nine-ball, and if it's a good hustle finally to three-ball. There's fame and fortune to be made here, but I'm not making them yet.

It's only a matter of time and practice. My instructors make me lag the cueball for hours. ("No other way to get the touch.") They draw diagrams on cocktail napkins. "We ain't playing pocket billiards, here, boy. We're playing *pool*."

I learn the subtleties of English, carrom, jump-shots, masse'. I drive twenty miles to play on the worst pool table in the county. If you're hot on a bad table you can really show off on a good one. I know the names of good pool bars all across the state – the Artic Tavern in Artic, or the Chilled Alaskan over on Gun Club Road – because pool without a bar somehow loses luster. Largely, I suppose, because bars are places for loafers.

What grandma missed is that there are times when only loafers may serve our common cause of humanity. Everyone else is too busy.

Like the time when Heidi, the daytime bartender, went home and stabbed her boyfriend John, the nighttime bartender; we did not play pool

for three weeks. Heidi figured that John was “fooling around”, and probably John was. At any rate she missed his heart, but it was still a nasty wound, and deep. Had it not been for barroom loafers, we might have had cops.

Instead, Jake practiced medicine and art. He went over to John’s place and bound up the wound. Then he called a veterinary friend, claiming his dog needed a prescription for penicillin. Jake and Heidi sat with John, and pilled him while he healed. They fought his pain, and theirs, with cowboy songs and innumerable cans of suds.

“They’re young,” Hen said. “Stuff happens when you’re young.” I helped Hen run the bar. The police knew something was going on, but small town cops are generally smart enough to let things take their course.

Meanwhile, grandma’s spirit tsks. Grandma knew a lot about life, and about the higher forms of behavior. But, she did not understand that pool is an intricate, always changing game that is only about fifteen percent luck. Pool, like poker, is a metaphor for life.

When young we are members of the ‘slam and be damned’ school, and the cueball jumps the table on the breaks. In our middle years we begin to catch onto the system as we perfect our follow-through and learn the value of greed. “*Snap* the wrist, don’t *turn* it.”

It is only in our twilight that we grow subtle with our game – “Make a deliberate scratch on this shot, if you scratch you’ve got him buried” – for we have perhaps earned the right to be compassionate with youth; even as we chuckle and take youth to the cleaners.

ERNEST HEKKANEN is currently at work on a novel entitled *The Longest Running Poet*.

The Merry Voyager

Ernest Hekkanen

MY ASSIGNMENT WAS to locate and interview the survivors of the downed, cross-Atlantic balloon, *Merry Voyager*, which had taken off from Sydney, Nova Scotia earlier in the week. The balloon was presumed to have landed on one of several small islands off the coast of Iceland, having strayed in that direction because of an unexpected thermal draft that the pilot said had gripped them like the talons of a monstrous bird. His last, anguished cries, crackling like cellophane over the telecommunicator, went like so: "We are being borne away at great velocity. Our ship is trembling. Guides are snapping. Eleanor is now securing the emergency signal. Where this draft will take us I don't wish to contemplate. All we can do..." and at that juncture, all transmissions ceased.

Because of a game of chance, one that was perfectly random in design, it fell upon me to undertake the assignment. "We want something that will grip both the hearts and minds of the public," said my august superior, Hugh Campbell. "A human interest story of vast implications. Let it gush, and don't come back until you've wrung your pen dry. Understand?" At this, he let go one of his great belly-laughs, so full of mirth and arbitrary menace I couldn't prevent myself from shuddering in my boots.

For the expedition, I was given the latest in electronic gadgetry: a Fonyo tape-recorder the size of a crush-proof cigarette pack, a Mitron 2000 digital camera, an Atakki signal-finder, a Lydel on-board computer and a Blügelheist TeleCommunicator, the latter of which promised unailing transmissions from anywhere on earth, because of a beam that was bounced back from an orbiting satellite. Of this I was somewhat skeptical, seeing that the pilot of the *Merry Voyager* had also placed his faith in such an instrument and what it had gotten him was a depth of isolation.

The night before I sailed, there was an uproarious farewell party held in my honor at the Davy Jones, an Inn only a stone's throw from the pier where my boat lay moored. The party I shall not belabor, other than to say that

gaiety was rife and more than a few of my companions disappeared up the dark stairway to rendezvous in the rooms above the tavern. By morning, we were all a little blurry-eyed or else hung-over; indeed, the lady I found sharing my bed was still reeling quite badly and exclaimed if she were to see me off at the pier, the sight of the water would do something dreadful to her equilibrium.

“But I’ll see you off in spirit,” she said, rolling over to watch me shove my legs into trousers. “Bon voyage, and don’t forget to keep in touch.”

“Damn it,” I exploded. “Look at what those sophomoric twits have done to my trousers. They’ve tied knots in the legs.”

“You poor, poor dear. How unfair.” However, her voice betrayed a certain lack of sympathy. Indeed, I thought her tongue a good deal too jovial for someone who claimed to be sick to the marrow.

On untying the knots and struggling into my trousers (no small feat, as I was still bobbing at sea from last night’s revelry), on removing the staples driven through the neck of my turtleneck sweater and on dumping the fish out of my boots, I took up my valise and headed toward the door, only to hear my companion chortle from the bedclothes. Turning to look at her, I saw that while I held the valise by the handle, all the gear inside had remained behind on the floor, as the valise’s bottom had been cut away from the sides.

“Those lousy jerks,” I growled, the words painfully echoing in my head.

“Tsk, tsk,” my companion crooned, wagging her lovely, long finger at me. “Nothing must interfere with the course of history. You have a voyage to make.”

I shoved my gear into a plastic garbage bag, flung it over my shoulder and staggered from the Inn. By daylight, the Davy Jones had come to assume the air of a stalwart old church on the waterfront of a medieval township. Stone. Too much stone, thought I. Banners were flying from every lamppost along the quay. Many of the pedestrians who moved and swirled around me were dressed in fanciful, courtly attire from the age of Henry the VIIIth. Had the revelry of the previous night – all the madcap drinking and bouts of singing – spilled into the street? I was entertaining the likelihood of that, when along came a lady, bearing buns and cheese in a tray strapped around her neck. I purchased some of what she had to offer, and then let myself be carried away by the crowd that was flowing ever faster toward the pier where my boat lay moored. By now, I had begun to notice that the occasion – for I could think of no excuse for such widespread frivolity other than an occasion of some sort – had forced many townspeople into costumes of birds. Around me, brushing up on every side, were magpies, hawks, pigeons, starlings, cockatoos – in other words, a veritable throng of feathered-kind, strutting along the harbor front, holding onto handbags and parasols, crowned with floppy hats, adorned in handsome coats and cocky little shoes. Indeed, the attire was so elaborate, so well-made-out, I felt rather foolish in my ordinary garb: that of jeans and an old army jacket. But the orange garbage bag that rode my right shoulder, bouncing on my back like a distended cul-de-sac, did suggest, I thought, an attempt at costuming, and this helped ease some of the self-conscious discomfort I was feeling.

Down on the pier – and here the crowd was jostling, in rhythm, to pavans played by musicians on the bow of a three-master – I found my small outboard with the Evinrude engine attached to the stern. Between the seats I tossed my cargo. On landing, the orange bag burst at the seams and spilled forth my clothing, all knotted together like intestines. My outboard, it turned out, was not the only small craft moored at the pier. No, there were at least three dozen such boats, and in each there was an individual, dressed casually like me, going through the motions of stowing gear and inspecting equipment.

I said to my neighbor in the boat on my starboard, more out of levity than anything else, “Surely, we’re not headed in the same direction.”

The man I spoke to wore a ring of red, curly hair around a freckled dome, which shone like a well-polished burl. He disengaged himself from his labors long enough to reply rather curtly, “Depends on where you’re headed, mate.”

“I’m off to interview the survivors of the *Merry Voyager*,” I told him, perhaps a little too proudly, for sometime during the night the weight of my assignment had settled quite firmly on my shoulders.

“A noble undertaking,” he said, and returned to what he was doing, apparently checking upon the level of fuel in his tanks, which, like my tanks, resided under the seats. Thinking this a good idea, I also checked upon the level of my fuel, noticing as I did so that other men and women in their small crafts were doing the same thing.

I said to my neighbor on my port, “Anyone would think we were preparing to enter a race of some sort?”

My remark seemed to prove quite hilarious, for the woman, who was wearing a bright red cravat tucked into a jump-suit, broke out in shrill laughter. “I guess one could say that, alright, if that’s what you’re here for.”

“I’m heading out to sea in order to interview the survivors of the *Merry Voyager*,” I told her.

“I guess that’s as good a reason as any,” she said, stuffing her long hair into a leather helmet on her head.

At that moment, a large penguin approached the bow of my boat and proceeded to remove its own head. Underneath the large bird’s noggin was the noggin of Hugh Campbell, looking very jovial, indeed, if not a little flush around the gills.

He put the penguin head under his right arm and roundly bellowed, “So, how is it going, Jason?”

“Well enough,” I told him. “However, I was under the impression that I was being sent to interview the survivors of the *Merry Voyager*, and instead I seem to be entering a race of some sort.”

“That certainly appears to be the case,” he said, letting go one of those monstrous belly-laughs that I found so disarming. “I hope you’ve got your pad and pen. I want some sizzling byline, don’t forget.”

I felt my breast pocket. Yes, there was my notepad and pen.

“Yep, I’m loaded and ready to go,” I said.

Just then, a lovely toucan came up and stationed itself beside my employer. This toucan was dressed in a Panama hat and frilly tutu. Presently someone spoke inside the head, in a muffled voice I could not put a face to,

“I decided to come down to the dock and see you off, after all. Isn’t that grand of me?”

“Very grand,” I said.

“I figured it was the least I could do – the very least.”

I would have exchanged a few more words with this individual, perhaps enough of them to discover the identity of the person inside the toucan; however, our conversation was cut short by the fellow on my starboard; he suddenly started the engine of his craft, drowning our voices. Another, and then another engine ignited. It seemed hopeless, in the midst of so much noise, to try to chat with the toucan, so I, too, started my engine and, like those on either side of me, cast off my lines.

Campbell cupped his hands to his mouth. “Got your sextant, laddie?”

“Got it,” I yelled back, “even though I don’t know how to use it.”

“How about your signal-finder?”

“All secured.”

“And your navigational charts?”

“Damn it,” I hollered, suddenly annoyed with myself. “I left them on the dresser at the Inn. I’ll have to go back to get them.”

“No, there isn’t time for that,” Campbell yelled, his face straining with exertion to be heard, as every boat was now rumbling and spewing blue exhaust. “Just remember, you’re headed toward Iceland, and you must get that interview, and it must be a scoop!”

At that moment – a moment I remain uncertain of, for there was no raised flag nor report of gunfire – the boats on either side of me shoved off from the pier and, not wishing to seem the odd fellow out, I shoved off, too, swinging my boat away from land and bumping off across the frothy waves at full speed, my bow directed toward the mouth of the harbor, which, at a distance, looked as if it were going to be too small to swallow all three dozen craft at once. But as we drew nearer, each of us jockeying for position, so as not to eat anyone else’s salty spray, the mouth opened as if by magic and we were taken out into the shining, blue expanse of the Atlantic Ocean.

Here I am forced to summarize, for to recount moment by moment what became a seeming eternity would be a lengthy and, in the end, thankless task. Let it be said quite simply that after three days spent battling salt water, overheated engines, leaky crafts, brief but occasional storms, night and day, blazing heat and freezing cold, most of the three dozen boats had pulled up lame somewhere out in the greater brine. My boat, which after many hours I began to refer to as Sweet Betsy this and Sweet Betsy that, was one of those boats that did not wheeze or idle or spring a leak; it kept on its course as though it had an intelligence of its own, and I kept my hand firmly on the vibrating tiller of the Evinrude, determined that I would be the first one to reach the survivors of the *Merry Voyager* and, thus, get what would in all likelihood be the most noteworthy story of the decade, if not the century.

However, by the end of the week, my fuel having been drained, my rations having run precariously low, just like my drinking water, which had been negligible to begin with, I found myself rowing, hour after endless hour, toward a destination that was no more than a vague notion on the horizon. I had long since left behind the other boats – at least, I assumed that I had, because all around me was the sea, the eternally shifting, endless

sea, without so much as a shadow upon its face. But, of course, this may not have been so; one of the other boats, rowed with as much determination as I was rowing mine, might have slipped past me in the dark of night, in which case I would not be the first one to interview the survivors of the *Merry Voyager*. However, I put this possibility aside and kept on rowing with the invincible belief that I was ahead of everyone else, and would soon scoop the story.

After a week and a half, I was no longer so certain. My provisions had run out. I was adrift on the ocean, being swayed this way and that way by currents, my hands swollen and bleeding at the palms, hopelessly astray on what, in my thirsty delirium, seemed to be a vast mirror – a mirror that reflected the perfect emptiness of the sky. Having set out to interview the survivors of an ill-fated, downed balloon, I had now become a survivor myself, a survivor whose destination had become a confused impression which lingered in a mind that now swam, swirled and shifted with the tides.

I had begun to think that perhaps a joke had been played on me. My instruments had all faltered or seized up from exposure to salt. Even my Blügelheist TeleCommunicator, which had buzzed and spluttered through two earlier reports to Campbell, had become as silent as the sky. At first, I thought it might be due to the batteries having been jarred out of place; however, upon removing the back panel, I found there were no batteries, but rather a solar cell grimed with blue corrosion. A band across the black box containing the Blügelheist's electronic innards issued me the stern warning: Do Not Remove. Return to Manufacturer for Repairs. Violation Incurs Loss of Warranty.

“Sure, as soon as I locate a mailbox out here in the ocean, I'll send it on to you,” I said, and proceeded to open the box with my penknife. Upon removing the final screw, the box ejected its components, rather like a jack-in-the-box would do, and a little flag began to wave amidst the ruin, proclaiming that my warranty had now expired.

“Foul, demonic thing,” I swore, and roughly pitched the communicator into the sea.

Sometime later – perhaps hours, perhaps days – I spotted in the sky a violet balloon, small at first, like a mere bubble, then vaster, like a glorious vision meandering toward me across the sea. On the balloon – in great, white letters – were the words: *Merry Voyager*. By now, I was horribly low, both in body and spirit, but upon seeing the balloon, I was able to muster enough strength to wave my arms and shout. The shout erupted like a dry, worthless croak from my mouth, hardly audible even to my own ears, but my arms were winged; my arms flapped like those of a frantic harpy.

However, what should I see, in the basket hanging from the violet balloon, but three crew members, all quite jovial and in good health, waving back at me. They waved and blew kisses and, lastly, as a parting gesture, threw me a wreath of flowers. The wreath, having missed me in my boat, floated in the water for the briefest while, before breaking apart into the various blossoms that composed it, each flower heading off on its own intrepid journey, directionless and wandering, swayed by currents that, in turn, were swayed by time.

Tommy Frank O'Connor is a native of County Kerry, Ireland. His first novel *The Poacher's Apprentice* was published in 1997. Works for the stage include the pageant *Breanainn*, at Siamsa Tire, the National Folk Theatre of Ireland.

Tommy Frank O'Connor / **Two Poems**

Weather Permitting

*We regret
that due to unfavorable
weather conditions
today's sailing has been canceled.*

Questions
bounce off Customer Services
faces flustered eyes
across the counter.
Answers
in smiling alternatives,
Weather permitting.

Technology, Man's Ingenuity
recognize their inadequacy
in the face of
turbulent Nature,

as an errant husband
stills his tongue in his wife's fury.

Questions.
Where, why are we going?
And,
is this the way,
the best way there?

Sundays

Apart from the cows that we milked,
 When they had to be milked,
Our young Sundays stretched
 While we played in their slumber.

Sometimes, in those barefooted
 Summers of football,
 And swimming, hurling,
 And hunting of game,

We'd half-look at the girls who played
 On the edge of our world.
We'd notice their knowing
 We noticed them there.

Our football might wander their way
 And we'd chase it to see
 What would follow
 When we followed it there.

They might scramble and gather
 Around it and ground it
Amongst them, then ask if we knew
 What game they were playing.

I knew we'd be better off hunting,
A boy from the river
 Would mutter, and glare at the girl
 Who bounced on whatever she sat on

Beneath the flowered spread of her skirt.
A new game would develop
 Without goalposts or umpire,
About our invisible ball.

Months later our teams reduced
 To pairs of a boy and a girl.
Still we'd always leave home as if
 Only intent on football,
 Or hurling, or hunting of game.

P.W. BRIDGMAN'S short stories have appeared in various Canadian literary magazines. "De Mortuis Nil Nisi Bonum," which appeared in *Grain*, was short-listed for the National Magazine Award for fiction in 1994 and "Young Love in the Brayburn Road" earned an honorable mention in *Grain*'s postcard story contest for 1996. "Ceann Dubh Dilish" was awarded first prize in the *Pottersfield Portfolio* short story competition for 1998.

The Meaning of Life According to Fred W. Kane

P.W. Bridgman

Fred W. Kane wasn't what you'd call a visionary, or a mystic, or even a "health food nut" – the compendious, all-purpose epithet that was used in our house to describe most oddballs like me, at least those given to metaphysics, poetry, yoga and other like pursuits. He probably wouldn't even have heard of "karma" and he certainly would not have taken up an evening drinking jasmine tea, listening to reel-to-reel tapes of Alan Watts and talking about the Upanishads (the way my friends and I were wont to do in 1969, poised like pearl-divers on the brink of adulthood). But he'd often say, "Remember, Jack. What goes around, comes around. Remember that and you'll be all right." Of course, in that sense he knew precisely what "karma" was and, to all appearances, while my friends and I were flitting like fickle butterflies from one seductive ideology to the next, Fred W. Kane consistently tailored his life to that simple credo.

Fred W. Kane and I have been acquainted since 1964, the year we M'Guinns put 3,000 miles between us and the pinched and frost-bitten, small-town world of Marathon, Ontario to come west to what my father called (with much irony) "Lotusville."

"Lotusland," I'd say, correcting him. It was futile.

"I'm talking about a town, not a country or a region. The Comox Valley may be Lotusland. The Lower Mainland may be Lotusland. But Courtenay is Lotusville."

My father was good at this. My mother called it "backfilling" – creating an instant and bogus rationale to give a mistaken usage the appearance of being a matter of intention. The mistaken usage would then become a permanent fixture of our household parlance, just as the retaining wall, nicely backfilled, completed after many sweaty summer afternoons, came to mark the east boundary of our backyard. The vocabulary in our house was fully

criss-crossed with these idiosyncrasies – retaining walls and ramparts running everywhere, hazards easily tripped over, impregnable and unyielding.

The first time I met Fred W. Kane was soon after we arrived in Courtenay. I was dispatched to return a six-pack of Canada Dry tonic water bottles to Barker's Red and White, up the street. He looked after all the produce there and was generally second in command. He spoke to me rather formally, though I was only eleven. I found him on that first occasion to be a little alarming.

"I'm Fred W. Kane. And who might you be?"

"Jack M'Guinn. No 'c.'"

"I'm sorry?"

"Jack M'Guinn. Sounds like McGuinn, but there's no little 'c' between the 'M' and the 'G.'" It was a well-rehearsed catechism.

"Well, now. Isn't that interesting." I didn't think so. It was actually a lot of trouble. People always got it wrong. "I'll call you Jack," he said, as he handed me my 12 cents. Well, that was settled.

"Why does your family hold onto the historical spelling?" he asked as I was about to leave. "Of M'Guinn, I mean."

"Oh, it's my grandfather. He's Scottish."

"I see." Fred W. Kane was undaunted by a *non sequitur*.

Over the years we settled into the town. It wasn't always smooth going. The job at the sawmill that brought us west disappeared with the first autumn leaves and my father had to scramble for work. Eventually, he and a couple of friends who had also come out from back east were able to open their own custom millwork shop (all three were first-rate carpenters and joiners) and things went well enough after that. My mother got involved in the church and with the hospital.

I found, without much surprise, that they liked kids with glasses who can't kick a ball about as much in British Columbia as they did in Ontario. But I had my books and at that age you can generally recognize your soul-mates quickly enough. Mine were generally found scuffing their feet on the sidelines of the soccer field, and raising their hands high in class. Kevin Rand and I soon fell together and we remained great friends for years after that. In our teens we had deep discussions about Joyce and Ferlinghetti and we were quietly scornful of those blockheads on the playing field. We, and a few other like-minded types, were even known, once and a while, to have a good chuckle at our own expense. I have found that those occasional out-of-body experiences, where you mentally disengage and see yourself in the third person, are essential for maintaining perspective. In fact, I can still remember one I had while I was holding forth on e.e. cummings during one of our jasmine tea sessions. All I can say is that it's a good thing the others had a sense of humor.

When I turned 15, the Speaker of the House decreed that since I was not involved in any organized sports and had not otherwise mapped out my summer timetable with physically demanding or otherwise worthwhile Kiplingesque pursuits, I should take back my idle hands from the devil and press them into paid service. Barker's Red and White was an obvious prospect and, with some reluctance, I filed with Mrs. Barker a resumé, nicely laid out on my mother's best Eaton's onionskin paper in my own rather

distinguished, and not at all loopy, hand. Not two days later I was summoned for an interview by the remote, and badly overupholstered, Mr. Barker. It was nothing if not perfunctory.

“Kane says you’re all right. When can you start?”

So began my career as a grocer’s boy and with it my friendship with Fred W. Kane moved to a new level. He was a patient teacher, a kindly man. He did his work carefully and he taught me to do the same. I learned to trim lettuce with a minimum of waste, and to tell which of the cauliflower should be cut into florets and which should not. I learned from him that his late wife had been born to missionaries in Formosa, and that he had fought in the infantry during the last war and had been imprisoned by the Japanese in Hong Kong. I also learned (from one of the checkout girls) that he had raised a son almost to adulthood, only to have him commit suicide, and that he was paid only \$2.35 per hour more than I was, though he’d been at Barker’s since shortly after the War.

We got on well together – amazingly well, given the difference in our ages. He spoke lucidly and, what’s more, he listened attentively to me. At first I taunted him, tried to get his goat by showing him that I was clever, a sure sign that I saw something in him I could respect.

“Why do you call yourself ‘Fred W. Kane?’” I asked, looking at his name tag, neatly stamped out by the store’s dymo-labeller. “It’s all wrong. If you give the middle initial, you’re aiming to be formal. But the effect is spoiled by the ‘Fred.’ It should be Frederick or Alfred or something. ‘Frederick W. Kane.’ You see? Or just ‘Fred Kane.’ But ‘Fred W. Kane’ is all wrong.”

Today I cringe as I remember myself saying these things.

“Well, Jack. It’s not quite that simple. My father called me ‘Fred W. Kane.’ Not Frederick W. Kane, or Alfred W. Kane. In fact, he didn’t even give me a true middle name. The first ‘Fred W.’ was Fred W. Sawyer. He sold farm equipment in the little town in Saskatchewan where my father grew up. Sawyer was very successful and he left a strong impression. Years later, when I came along, my father named me ‘Fred W.’ even though he didn’t know what the ‘W’ stood for, because ‘Fred W.’ was the sort of fellow he hoped I’d be. You see, my father was a simple soul. He wasn’t an especially clever man, but he was an especially good one, which probably matters more in the end.”

I was, needless to say, wholly disarmed.

During my second year at Barker’s (Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays after school and every second Saturday, \$1.70 per hour), I ventured to ask about his paltry income.

“How can you let Barker get away with paying you so little, after all you’ve done for him, over all these years?” The injustice of it seemed to me so raw and unvarnished.

“What goes around, comes around, Jack. Whatever rewards I deserve, and that I don’t receive in my pay envelope, I’ll see some way or the other, some day.” I found this passive, naïve, accepting stance of his to be maddening, notwithstanding that his words formed an almost perfect paraphrase of what my friends and I were incanting to each other as we picked, with the blunt instruments of our unlettered minds, at the glistening coal seam of

eastern mystical thought. It just didn't seem right that the nearest thing to Siddhartha in my own experience should be a balding fifty-five year-old man in a tan apron standing next to me at Barker's Red and White, sorting the bruised discount bananas from the full-priced ones, patiently waiting for Godot.

As the months passed and my school friends and I drifted uncertainly through the late 1960s toward high school graduation and the uncharted waters of university and beyond, my generation was confronted with a whole new spectrum of temptations and challenges to the will, including all of the pharmaceuticals that were said to unlock the doors of the mind to wonders yet unknown. Oddly, these particular temptations were of especial concern to the parents of that loose jumble of high-achieving kids that I counted as my friends – the ones with two left feet and thick glasses. By growing our hair, we showed the world that we were more than just brains on sticks and, for a fleeting few moments at least, we knew the sweet taste of “cool.” It was at this time that my first and best friend Kevin Rand became truly “wiggled out” as my father chose, infuriatingly, to describe it and he embarked, without a passport, upon some rather disturbing psychedelic journeys guided by the then-current illicit pharmacopoeia. I stood by on the sidelines, scuffing my feet, feeling fearful and helpless, anxious not to judge, useless – far less a friend to him (I now know) than he needed me to be.

It was a confused and confusing time. I was a boy in a man's body. I was terrified and excited by the prospect of leaving home and beginning my university studies in Vancouver. I was both embarrassed by, and fearful of losing daily contact with, all of the annoying and zany idiosyncrasies of life with my parents.

Into this maelstrom there then dropped the defining crisis – the contest of loyalties between, on the one hand, my father and his frustrating mixture of prejudices and generosity, and on the other, Kevin, my first and best friend who was both a great and close ally and a boy spiraling dizzily downward into danger.

“I don't want to see you hanging around with that wiggled-out freak again. And he may as well know he's not welcome here. Next thing, you'll be turning into a drug addict yourself.”

Not one to raise my voice, I shouted back. Not one to slam doors, I slammed the kitchen door hard enough to bring my mother's collection of silver spoons from the provincial capitals crashing down onto the dining room floor. “This can't be happening,” she said quietly, in anguish and bewilderment, as I said “fuck” for the first time within our house and, almost, for the first time ever.

“So what's got you all in a lather, Jack?”

Fred W. Kane misses little and he could see that my stomach was roiling when I arrived at Barker's to start my Saturday shift. Right away he added, “You don't need to say a word if you don't want to.” And, you know, it wasn't really that I didn't *want* to so much as I didn't *need* to, because, as he stood there before me, shucking the leaves and tassels off new Chilliwack sweet corn, I joined him and, in silence and in a slowly spreading calm, I thought about these things and gradually regained my balance:

1. Fred W. Kane lost his wife when his son Austin was only nine.

2. On a sultry August day in 1961, when he was just 16, Austin hanged himself from a tree in his back yard. Fred W. Kane had had to stand on the tire swing that he had built for Austin, all those years ago, to cut him down.

3. Fred W. Kane earns \$4.05 per hour, is just beginning his twenty-third year at Barker's Red and White and knows with a settled certainty that Godot could be just around the corner.

ERNEST HEKKANEN is now flying high above Elephant Mountain in Nelson, British Columbia – metaphorically-speaking, anyway.

View of the Hinterlands

Ernest Hekkanen

The pre-dawn hours between four and six
have become sacred to me. That is when
I go wandering in the landscape of my psyche.
That is when I head out along parapets
overlooking dark, steaming hinterlands
arrayed like backdrops in ancient paintings.

I find a place in myself to sit and watch
the sun rise over the distant, foaming sea.
I am alone on this promontory,
in this utterly speechless landscape,
a chill crawling up my spine,
accessible to the first morning rays,
and there I wait for the remarkable to come.

“Night Passage” is the sixth installment of Hillel Wright’s novella, *All Worldly Pursuits*, begun in Vol. 1. No. 1 of *The New Orphic Review*. Hillel is the author of *Single Dad* and *Welcome to the Below Tide Motel*. His stories have been published in *Big Valley*, *Black Cat*, *Event*, *Expression*, *Island Life*, *Minus Tides*, *Tongue Tide*, *Westcoast Fisherman* and *Wordworks*. He lives and teaches in Japan.

Night Passage

Hillel Wright

“In death alone there is no betrayal and no loss.” Anais Nin

“GODDAMN,” said Holgar Larsen under his breath, looking at the water temperature gauge which now read 190° F. Larsen prided himself on his mechanical skill and care, and any irregularity in his boat’s engine gauges gave him immediate cause for concern. The water temperature should have read 180° and a ten degree discrepancy meant that close monitoring was now in order.

Larsen glanced out the wheelhouse window, then at the barometer, then at his navigational chart for Johnstone Strait. Finally, he looked carefully at the Tide and Current Tables for Seymour Narrows, still, figuring the time running against a two knot ebb, about six or seven hours away, depending on the wind. The barometer was steadily falling, confirming the Coast Guard weather station’s prediction of gale force southeast winds later in the day. And while the wind in Georgia Strait often died down at night, you couldn’t count on that for the treacherous narrow passages between the two straits, where the rapids and whirlpools were found. Worst of all, a strong southeast wind against a flood tide with a southeasterly set could mean real trouble, especially in a hellhole like Seymour Narrows.

It was now 3 PM. The weather was still moderate here in Johnstone Strait, a breeze from the Northwest pushing *Albatross* smartly along with the flood tide at about ten or eleven knots. Port Neville was about half an hour away at this point, and slack tide would be in about an hour. Larsen decided to watch the engine water gauge closely and if the temperature continued to rise, to pull in at Port Neville and make repairs.

The turn of the tide from ebb to flood at Seymour Narrows would be at 10:40 PM. The best strategy was to enter the rapids against the last of the ebb, when the adverse current was weakest, carry on through the ten-minute slack water and emerge into Discovery Passage an hour north of Campbell

River with the building flood. The flood tide built up quickly in the Narrows, precipitating whirlpools, overfalls and riptides, all of which would be intensified if a strong southeast gale pushed wind waves up against the current. The current, during spring tides, ran as fast as fifteen knots.

The water temperature, according to the gauge, continued to rise. Possibilities started to filter through Holgar Larsen's mind. Possibly, but not likely, the gauge itself was faulty. Also, possibly, especially in these waters at this time of year, seaweed was clogging the saltwater intake, a thru-hull fitting which led to the heat exchanger, where the seawater circulated through copper tubing, cooling fresh water in a steel tank which then circulated through the engine. He would need to go over the side to investigate.

A more likely possibility was the thermostat which, being bi-metallic and thus subject to electrolytic corrosion, could be frozen shut, preventing water from passing through the valve to the engine. Another chance was the pump that drew the water up from the seacock – broken seals, loose belt, broken impeller blade – there were several possibilities there.

About halfway to Port Neville the temperature reached 200°. 210° was the danger zone. Larsen throttled back the diesel to half speed. The push from the flood tide was weak now, in the last hour before slack, but the wind continued fresh from the Northwest. At this rate, Port Neville was still more than half an hour away.

Although he hated to turn his engine off during a passage, Holgar Larsen suddenly pulled the kill-switch and the big Hundestadt diesel gasped once and promptly fell deathly silent. Holgar went out on deck to adjust the little steadying sail that flew from the cargo boom, and *Albatross* ghosted along with the remains of the tidal current and the wind, in the desired direction.

The unaccustomed silence caused Holgar Larsen's mind to wander, briefly. The engine was cooling, the boat was, however slowly, approaching Port Neville, and there was nothing more he could do for the moment but keep the ship's stern to the current and the wind. He wondered, briefly, about Laura, his estranged wife, gone nearly three years now, off with that no-good, goddamn hippie from Pitlamp Island, and who had the goddamn gall to call himself a fisherman.

Holgar Larsen knew what real fishermen were about. They were hard-working, hard-drinking men, not dope-smoking goddamn lazy bastards who anchored up at every gust of wind, who quit the industry when they couldn't make it on the salmon trolling alone, fat fishing five miles off-shore in the summer. Afraid to set longlines for halibut on the Goose Bank in early March. Afraid to drag off the Northwest Coast in winter for gray and sole. Too goddamn lazy to go off-shore for the big schools of humpies in the summer. Rather, scratching along the beach, hoping for the odd smiley to pay for the fuel and grub. And now, in September, all finished for the year, never a thought to put on a gillnet and work the inside channels through the lengthening nights. Setting a course for the Unemployment Office, instead.

"Manny Silva was a real fisherman, goddammit," Holgar Larsen muttered. Manny had been his skipper back in St. John, New Brunswick – on the *Manny & Rose*. Larsen had worked his way up to deck boss on the big dragger, nineteen years on the cod banks of the cold Atlantic. George's

Bank, the Grand Banks of Newfoundland, the Sou'westers, the icebergs every spring, the hurricanes nearly every fall.

Just a kid when he began, in 1951, he had jumped ship off a Norwegian freighter in New York City and hitchhiked up to Canada, pockets empty, but a head full of plans. Plans, mind you, not dreams. Plans to save money and have his own boat once again. Plans that came true twenty years ago, when he arrived in Vancouver and bought the old wooden salmon troller *Louise*. And after seven years of hard driving, he had his own boat, built out of steel to his own specifications, the *Albatross*, fifty-four feet, thirty tons, the pride of the fleet.

How many millions of fish, how many thousands of tons had crossed the hard steel deck and plunged into the cavernous hold of the *Albatross*? Salmon, tuna, halibut, herring, gray cod, rock cod, black cod, ling cod, sole. How many green seas had broken over the bow and washed out through the scuppers, back to the sea?

How many miles had he sailed, on the two great oceans of the world, on how many of their gulfs, straits, inlets, bays and channels had he wandered?

Perhaps unwillingly, but pressed on by the great silence, Holgar Larsen's mind wandered back to the Norwegian village where it all began. And as slowly, but inexorably *Albatross* coursed toward her final destination, so quickly and inevitably did Holgar Larsen's memory ebb back toward its source.

Meanwhile, another fishboat, the West Coast troller *Sassy Mary*, was also heading toward Seymour Narrows with the last of the flood tide, but from the opposite direction. She, together with her skipper Eddie Charlie, his common-law wife Luci-Anne Buffalo Child, and two technically illegal passengers, were in Georgia Strait, and having just dropped False Bay on Lasqueti Island astern, were heading west-northwest. Behind them, the sky was lowering, the clouds were darkening and gusts from the southeast were beginning to blow.

The passengers, technically illegal because they had no commercial fishing licenses and the salmon season was still open, were an AIM activist from South Dakota named Richard Standing Buffalo Bull, and a former fisherman and hippie, a sympathizer named Wiley Moon. They were all en route to the Kwagiulth village of Alert Bay, some sixty miles from the north end of Vancouver Island to attend a meeting of West Coast Native activists planning an intervention in the crisis taking place around the Quebec town of Oka and the bordering Mohawk community of Kanesatake, near Montreal.

On Thursday, August 30th, Quebec Premier Robert Bourassa had broken off peace talks with the leaders of the Mohawk blockade in Oka, and the threat of an invasion of the village of Kanesatake by the Canadian Armed Forces intensified. All over North America, Native peacekeepers and activists and non-native sympathizers were mobilizing for a media blitz and solidarity assault in order to prevent a modern Wounded Knee type massacre.

Scores of protesters, Wiley Moon among them, had gathered on the front lawn of the Vancouver Art Gallery in downtown Vancouver on the morning of Friday, August 31st and marched down Granville Street, past the

Hudson Bay Company's department store, and then down Hastings Street to Main, the heart of "Canada's Biggest Indian Reserve," the Downtown Eastside. Working quietly, from a canvas tent, was the Native organizer, Richard Standing Buffalo Bull, also known as Buffalo.

Sassy Mary was on her heading with a favorable tide because the tidal flow directions are opposite on the southeast and northeast coasts of Vancouver Island. From Queen Charlotte Strait, through Johnstone Strait, Seymour Narrows and Discovery Passage, the tide floods generally from northwest to southeast and ebbs back into the Pacific Ocean in the opposite direction. But from Victoria on Vancouver Island, through the Gulf Islands and Georgia Strait, the flood direction is southeast to northwest, the opposing tides meeting at the north end of the Gulf of Georgia near Oyster River, about twenty miles south of Seymour Narrows.

Wiley Moon had met Eddie and Luci-Anne a dozen years ago, when he was still a salmon fisherman, decking for Frank Bean on the troller *Vagabond*. He had met Richard – then known as Buffalo, as much for his size and shaggy hair as for his actual surname – in the late Sixties in Colorado, when they had been hippies and together with their future ex-wives, Colleen and Lorraine, had engaged in a series of cosmic adventures, in the historical, geographical and mythological heartlands of the American West. The Oka protest rally in Vancouver three days ago had brought them all together and united them in a common cause.

Holgar Larsen had little memory of the Great Depression years from his birth in 1933 through his early childhood in the Norwegian West Coast village of Brekkstad, Northwest of Trondheim near Frøya Island, in Fro Sound. Although the latitude was high, 63°, 41' N, the warm Gulf Stream moderated the climate but also produced frequent gales and abrupt weather changes.

The Norwegian Sea, Fro Sound and Trondheim Fjord teemed with many varieties of fish – herring, whiting, capelin and cod – as well as vast populations of prawn and shrimp. Although life was hard in the thirties, with one-third of the men unemployed, one could still live without fear of starvation as long as one could fish, and of course most did. One learned early to read the clouds, the winds and the ocean waves and ripples, long before learning to read a book, or a chart, or a tide table.

Holgar remembered catching herring as a small boy from the village wharf with his constant companion, Ragnavald Olafsen, a slight, strange, dark young boy who always seemed to know where hungry fish could be found. As they grew older, Ragnavald's little sister Sigrid would follow them, but they always chased her off the wharf when they were fishing, shouting "No girls allowed on the ship!"

Girls were allowed berry-picking, however. In fact, Sigrid, also dark, but plump and round like a berry herself, was to berries what her brother was to fish, always finding the best patches of luscious blueberries and yellow cloudberries hidden in the far meadows, and tart red cranberries in the salty bogs and marshes of the peninsula.

In the year of his seventh birthday, life changed abruptly, with the coming of the German soldiers. But as the years went by and the war raged on

the distant European mainland and the British Isles, life in Brekkstad returned, almost, to normal. True, the German language was made compulsory in the schools, and many fishermen disappeared, either to fight in the underground or with the German forces.

Holgar found he had an affinity for languages. He learned German quickly and easily in school, which earned him the enmity of many of his classmates. He learned Finnish, too, from a strange hermit who built himself a driftwood shack under a cliff on the windward beach, and who was full of the lore of the sea ... strange tales of ghost ships and mermaids and monsters of the deep, made more weird and wonderful to his audience of young village boys by his outlandish language, flowing with vowels and liquid consonants, but punctuated by sharp, rock-like coughs and explosive pops.

One day, the stories stopped. The mean shack was empty and the hermit gone. Years later, Holgar learned that the hermit was a Finnish communist, finally sniffed out by the Nazis and sent to a slave labor camp where, of course, he died.

By the time Holgar reached high school, the war was long over and prosperity of a kind he had never known or imagined reached Norway, and not only in cities like Trondheim, but also in the outlying areas like Brekkstad and Fro Sound. By 1949 it reached the Larsen family in the form of a single cylinder, five horse-powered gas engine, fitted to a bronze shaft and propeller for Holgar's handmade five meter lapstrake fishing skiff, truly a maritime teenager's pride and joy.

Holgar, a good student in science, math and languages, was now pulled between his studies and his love of fishing, and the more time he spent on the sea, the less his studies interested him. He quickly enlisted Ragnavald Olafsen, a somewhat dreamy boy and indifferent student, as his fishing partner, and they began to make real money fishing mornings, evenings, and on weekends and holidays.

Herring, the silver darlings of the sea, were their mainstay. Many fishermen used "the herring's telephone," long steel wires held in the hand and dropped into the sea, which sent signals to the fishermen when the herring touched them, vibrating the wires. But Ragnavald Olafsen always knew where the biggest shoals would be found, whether by his keen observation of birds, bait and currents, or by some uncanny, mystical awareness acquired, like his black hair and deep brooding brown eyes, at birth.

Holgar's strength was his mechanical ability, in its own way no less magical than Ragnavald's fish-finding. His engine was cleaned with fresh water and wiped with oil nightly, the last chore before returning home to bed. The spark plug was filed and gapped every week or after every rain, whichever came first. The stuffing box, where the shaft ran through to the propeller, was examined and repacked every three months, and no water leaked into the boat from the fitting.

But now, with the weather deteriorating and the dangerous rapids growing ever nearer, he had suffered a frustrating mechanical breakdown. Well, there was the entrance marker to Port Neville. Holgar Larsen breathed easier as he started his engine and heard the confident rumble beneath the floorboards. He let the diesel run briefly in neutral then, slowly, engaged forward

gear at half throttle and nosed the *Albatross* into the narrow inlet which contained Port Neville at its head.

With his diesel running and gauges to read, Holgar's mind abruptly left off remembering the past and turned with great focus and concentration to the here and now. Soon, when Port Neville's red-painted government wharves hove into sight through his high-powered binoculars, he pushed the control lever to full throttle and watched the needle on the engine's water temperature gauge push, inexorably, toward 200° F. When the needle hit 200°, he throttled back and once inside the harbor entrance, he pulled the kill-switch and let the thirty-ton vessel's momentum carry her to the nearest berth.

On the *Sassy Mary*, the AM radio was tuned to CBC for up-to-the-minute news of the Oka Standoff. The news was alarming. 3500 Canadian Army troops were sent to Kanasatake, supported by APC's, helicopters and jet bombers to remove thirty Mohawk Warrior Society members who were holed up in the alcohol de-tox center. Among the Warriors, Ronald Cross, aka Lasagna, and Gordon Lazore, aka Noriega, who, with their face masks and camouflage fatigues had come to symbolize the Mohawks in the media, were gaining the status of folk heroes among young natives and Generation X white sympathizers.

Negotiators from the Assembly of First Nations and the more mainstream Mohawk leadership were desperately trying to avoid a bloodbath. A young Native law student from British Columbia named Jenny Jack had physically stepped between a Warrior and a Canadian soldier and then dragged a man screaming for the soldiers to shoot out of the bush and prevented a firefight.

The tension felt on board *Sassy Mary* as she cruised along the west coast of Texada Island was heightened by the prospect of the forty miles of open Gulf which faced them before Campbell River, the next safe harbor, and especially the shoals off Cape Mudge at the south end of Quadra Island, a particularly nasty bit of navigation in a southeast gale.

The wind wasn't up to gale strength yet, however, and Eddie Charlie was pushing his troller at full throttle, with a fifteen to twenty knot following wind and at least a knot and a half of flood tide aiding her along. He, too, wanted to make slack tide at Seymour Narrows at 22:30 hours.

Holgar Larsen, having decided to start at the beginning, climbed into his dry suit and strapped on his weight belt, diving mask and snorkel. There was no need for scuba gear for a fast inspection and possible cleaning of the seacock which let in salt water to the heat exchanger. If it was clogged with seaweed or plastic bags, the problem of the overheating engine would probably be solved.

The tide was slack now and would remain so for the next half hour. Holgar set up a ladder on the starboard side and quickly climbed down into the cold green sea. The exposed skin of his ruddy face felt the cold for a moment, but the new dry suit kept him warm as well as dry. He maneuvered along the *Albatross's* hull directly to the seacock, but it was clean – com-

pletely free of any flotsam or jetsam. So the problem was further along in the system, and that would have to be tackled inside the boat.

Once aboard, Holgar shucked himself out of the black neoprene suit and hung it up in the little shower stall behind the boot locker. He then pulled on a set of blue coveralls and, grabbing a handful of wrenches and screwdrivers, descended into the engine compartment.

He first tested the belt for slackness, but found it perfectly taut. Next, he unscrewed the thermostat housing and removed the thermostat. He climbed up the ladder back into the wheelhouse, went back to the galley, pumped water into an aluminum pot and lit the little propane camp stove he used for making coffee. He took down a yogurt thermometer from a cupboard above the sink and placed it in the pot along with the thermostat and set the pot on the burner. He lit the burner and a cigarette with a wooden match and settled back to watch.

Soon the thermostat opened with a sharp pop, which displaced a small amount of steaming water. The thermometer read exactly 180° F. Nothing was wrong with the thermostat.

Holgar tossed the cigarette butt into the pot, turned off the gas and drained the water into the sink. "Back to the engine room," he muttered, this time to dismantle the pump.

At first inspection the pump seals looked okay, so he moved on to the impeller, and there was the answer. A broken blade. "Goddamn cheap materials they use today," he grumbled, while removing the small black hard plastic paddle wheel with one missing paddle, and fished out the broken piece.

He had two extra impellers in his box of spare parts under the helmsman's set, so the repair would just take a few minutes. But he had lost precious time, more than an hour already, and with wind and tide setting against him, he was unlikely to make slack tide in the Narrows.

Just as he had suspected, the wind direction changed with the tide and the sky darkened, as the lowering clouds scudded toward him from the Southeast.

Wiley Moon and Richard Standing Buffalo Bull parted company in September 1970 in a motel parking lot in Tacoma, Washington. They had been traveling on a credit card which one of the major oil companies had sent unsolicited to Wiley when he received his Master of Arts degree from Colorado State University in 1967.

He had faithfully paid his bills for over two years, but by the summer of 1969, while still at the university working on a Ph.D., he began to be caught up in the whirlwind of social protest around the war in Viet Nam and also around the occupation of Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay by a group of Native activists, including members of a recently formed group called the American Indian Movement and popularly known as AIM.

His friend, Buffalo, formerly a star pitcher on the University of Wyoming baseball team and now a graduate student at CSU in the History Department, was an early member of AIM.

Wiley, not one for joining groups like CORE or SDS, resorted to not paying his credit card bills as a means of protest. After all, wasn't the Viet

Nam war being fought over access to oil reserves, wasn't it powered by the support of Big Oil?

To his amazement, month after month of non-payment went by and still the credit card was good. After dropping out of the Ph.D. program and embarking on a psychedelic journey of discovery across the Western United States in 1970, Wiley had at first used the card to buy gas for drivers who picked him up hitchhiking.

Soon he discovered that many small town stations would also sell him beer and groceries on the credit card and write them up as tires or oil.

Emboldened by the knowledge picked up in an underground newspaper, that one could not be held legally responsible for bills rung up on unsolicited credit cards, he soon began to test the card at motels, hotels and finally rent-a-car agencies to finance his trip with Buffalo, Colleen and Lorraine.

Which led to the motel parking lot in Tacoma, where they learned that their free ride on the credit card had finally been revoked. The desk clerk had taken the card into his office to call for confirmation, returning with big scissors which he used to cut the card in two. But while he might have gained a dramatic impact by this gesture, he lost an important logistical moment as Wiley, Colleen, Buffalo and Lorraine all bolted in different directions.

While the desk clerk was desperately calling the manager, Buffalo was raiding the unopened cocktail lounge, grabbing several bottles of liquor from behind the bar. Lorraine, meanwhile, ran to their rented Ford Mustang and started the engine. Wiley and Colleen, struggling with their backpacks, carved circuitous routes to the parking lot, just in time to see Buffalo disappear into the passenger seat of the Mustang and Lorraine gun the engine, burn rubber and, like Moses parting the Red Sea, divide the ineffectual human roadblock set up by the motel manager and the desk clerk.

Wiley and Colleen took advantage of the distraction to scramble up the embankment and onto the Interstate and, their luck still not quite run out, flag down a psychedelically painted VW microbus, and with their last burst of adrenaline, throw themselves and their belongings onto the floor of the vehicle.

The next time he saw Buffalo was three days ago, in Vancouver. He'd never seen Lorraine again. He hadn't seen his ex-wife, Colleen, for five years. Between listening to CBC news reports on the radio, he and Buffalo had been catching up on private news all afternoon.

"Things started off really well," Buffalo was saying. "I went up Mount Rushmore with John Lame Deer and that bunch. I smoked a joint on Tom Jefferson's nose. I figured there was the right kind of historical irony there, seeing as how both Washington and Jefferson were big hemp growers.

"But the Feds and the Goons got really tough on us after that, many Oglalas were killed around Rosebud and Pine Ridge and in Seventy-three, things really got heavy up at Wounded Knee. Talk about historical irony, eh?"

"You're starting to sound like a Canadian now, eh?" said Wiley Moon.

Buffalo snorted a short hard laugh. "Then came the big crunch in Seventy-five, the fight with the FBI at Pine Ridge. After Leonard Pelletier was convicted of murdering those two agents in seventy-seven and got sent to

Leavenworth, I took my first hit of smack. I just wanted to make everything go away, it was all such a lie and a crime anyway. In the eighties things got worse and worse for me, and finally Lorraine walked out and went back to Crow Agency with the kids. The Crows always seem to get through, somehow.”

“The eighties were pretty tough for me, too,” Wiley offered. “Being a single Dad, watching the fishing industry go down, ending up on welfare with my kids...”

“But Leonard Crow Dog pulled me out of it at last,” Buffalo said. “I went to a Sun Dance in eighty-seven and I haven’t had a drink or a hit since then.”

With the wind and tide against him, Holgar Larsen was losing his race with the current at Seymour Narrows. Although his engine gauges all read normal, Larsen had no time for anything but his desired course, trying to make up for lost time and avoiding the peak flow of the current in the rapids. It was unlikely that he noticed the *Sassy Mary* as they passed in the night, *Albatross* at full throttle, still bucking the southeast wind, slapping her bow against the steep chop, now that the tide had turned to flood.

Eddie Charlie guided *Sassy Mary* into Seymour Narrows at 10:10 PM, twenty minutes before slack water and thirty minutes ahead of the turn of the tide, favored both by the wind and the last of the ebb tide, but risking being pushed back into the rapids if he failed to emerge before the tide turned against him. Keeping a sharp eye out for flotsam, deadheads and floating logs, Eddie steered his troller deftly around the edges of whirlpools and lost no precious time fighting tide rips or being pushed off course.

All on board breathed audible expressions of relief as the little ship safely exited the Narrows, and by 11 PM they were far enough from the influence of the now adverse current to switch on the radio and listen to the 11 o’clock news.

At the same time Holgar Larsen was charging past Brown’s Bay on Vancouver Island, still a good half hour from the Narrows. “Well, it’ll be bad, but it could be worse,” he snarled. He would likely enter Seymour Narrows at around eleven-thirty, about an hour after the beginning of slack water and at least fifty minutes after the turn of the tide, giving the current plenty of time to build up speed. On the plus side, the tide would be with him, speeding his flight through the rapids, probably spitting him out just at midnight, nearly an hour and a half before the current speed peaked.

And tonight’s peak, eight-and-a-half knots, was fast, but certainly not as awesome as the fourteen point nine knot current six weeks ago, which had set an American king crab boat coming down from Alaska on the rocks.

But on the minus side, the southeast wind showed no sign of letting up and, in fact, after a brief lull, had picked up and was now blowing near gale force speed.

Such were Holgar Larsen’s thoughts as *Sassy Mary* glided by, unnoticed, heading North.

Eddie Charlie decided to tie up in Brown's Bay for the night. It was already September 4th in Kanesatake, and the Mohawk Warriors were enduring the Canadian Army's psychological warfare assault – searchlights, low-flying helicopters, loud rock music. Buffalo wondered if Gordon Lazore – Noriega – was aware of the historical irony.

At 24:00 hours, *Albatross* was approaching the mouth of Seymour Narrows, close to the spot where, in 1958, Ripple Rock, an extreme hazard to navigation, was blown up by 1,375 tons of dynamite in the world's largest non-nuclear explosion, supposedly taming what Captain George Vancouver had called "one of the vilest stretches of water in the world."

Just as he allowed himself a second of relaxation, with Discovery Passage in sight ahead, Holgar Larsen felt the shudder of a violent collision beneath his feet. The sound and feel of the shock told him that *Albatross*, rising on a choppy wave, had come down hard on a half-submerged log, likely a black, silent hemlock, and he listened in horror as the log continued to assault the solid steel keel of his ship.

Fearing for his propeller, Larsen pulled the gear lever into neutral and froze for half a second until the hollow thump and horrid vibrations stopped, as suddenly as they had begun and, rushing aft to the stern cockpit, watched the malfasant battering ram crash into an oncoming whitecap, rise for a moment in an explosion of phosphorescence and then slide once more below the black surface of the midnight sea.

Larsen ran back to the wheelhouse, but by now hell had started to break loose. The compass needle was spinning madly, and Larsen could feel the grip of a whirlpool pulling and shaking keel and hull. Anger, first at himself for leaving his station at the helm, then at the god of the sea himself, coursed through his veins like poison, and for the first time in forty years at sea, Holgar Larsen felt the panic of losing control.

Deep inside himself, Larsen knew that inaction was his best course, simply to let things alone and likely as not the ship would be spat out of the whirlpool after three or four vertiginous turns. But, inexplicably, or perhaps totally comprehensible for a man so used to action, Larsen shoved the propeller shaft into gear and, with the same motion, pushed the engine control up to full speed, thus giving the grasping fingers of the maelstrom the purchase it needed to pull the vessel down by the stern.

Does one's entire life flash before one's eyes at the moment of death? Perhaps, but for Holgar Larsen that life-view was condensed to the day forty years ago when Ragnavald Olafsen tangled a cod line in the propeller of his five meter skiff. There was a tide rip there, too, as they were fishing in a narrow passage among the rocks of Fro Sound. Holgar, who at that moment was gaffing a large cog aboard but knowing instantly what must be done, shouted to Olafsen, "Put her out of gear!" but Ragnavald, never at ease with machinery, had jammed the shaft into reverse, further snarling the cod-line and stopped the engine dead. With the tide sweeping them toward the barnacle covered rocks, Holgar panicked and lost control.

The sound of the hemlock under the keel rang with the same dull, hollow thud as the gaff handle on Ragnavald Olafsen's skull.

As the *Albatross* spun wildly in the dervish of the Narrows, Holgar Larsen, trapped in the wheelhouse by his lifeboat, which had broken loose from its moorings and was now wedged between the mast and the wheelhouse door, saw in quick succession, Ragnavald, recovered from his head wound, but struck blind; Sigrid, crying mournfully, immediately breaking their engagement; the village constable warning him to flee Brekkstad at once or face arrest and assault charges; the flight to Oslo, the freighter to New York, the years on the cod banks of the Western Ocean, the...

Time had run out for Holgar Larsen. Just minutes before, he might have beaten the rapids of Seymour Narrows; however, he knew now he had once and forever lost the race. Filled with water, a steel vessel does not float. As *Albatross* ended her dizzying descent to the ocean floor, her master, Holgar Larsen, was already dead. The proud steel hull, so strong and swift on the surface, was now a secure coffin and crypt. Holgar Larsen would never be seen in this world again.

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The Lost Boy

Ernest Hekkanen

I WOKE FROM a long, exhausting dream which seemed to take me days, if not weeks to bring to a successful conclusion, only to find myself sitting in my favorite, old armchair, gazing past French windows that had been swung open onto the patio in the garden. I recalled that an afternoon thunderstorm had rolled across the sky. I had dragged the armchair over to the French windows and had settled down to watch the fireworks. I have always enjoyed the sight of lightning forking down from the turbulent, gray firmament. I love the excitement, the feeling of tension in the air, followed by hail or heavy rain pummeling the green foliage of the garden. I take full advantage of such occurrences by drinking in large quantities of the ozone-laden air, which rejuvenates me no small amount.

The air was tangy from the electrical storm. I was feeling quite relaxed, if not outright lethargic, so I let my eyes shut again. Seconds later my repose was disturbed by somebody's presence. Alarmed, I opened my eyes and looked around. To my amazement, a boy was standing about four feet away from me, staring with a blank expression directly into my eyes.

"Excuse me," I said. "Are you lost? Is there something I can do for you?"

He didn't respond, but then again, I didn't expect him to, for, on studying his expression, I realized that he was sound asleep. Not at first knowing what to do, I just watched him, curious as to what he might do next. I determined he was about nine years old. He had black hair, features that were softly angelic and, on his belly, a stigma in the rough shape of a bird. This latter feature seemed to recall something from my dream, but I couldn't remember exactly what. I wondered whether the boy might have fallen asleep under a tree, only to be jolted half-awake by the thunderstorm. He was wearing blue cut-offs. His torso was covered with fine dust, leading me

to suspect that he might have taken cover somewhere, for, if he hadn't, the dust would have surely been streaked by the rain.

By now the boy had become animated. He moved his arms and legs in a mechanical fashion, suggesting that he might be performing a mime of sorts. By paying close attention, I realized that he was trying to depict the dream — dare I say nightmare — that continued to hold him in its grip. At one point he seemed to toss a ball up into the air and to catch it on its downward plunge, followed by what seemed to be a juggling act. Despite the beauty and grace of his movements, I was unable to appreciate exactly what he was trying to convey and, upon detecting my bafflement, he seemed to give up with a shrug, holding his hands out to either side, fingers spread so I could see what appeared to be fairly large webs extending up to the distal phalanges. This detail also recalled something from my dream, but I couldn't remember exactly what. Out of curiosity, I leaned forward in my armchair and glanced down at his feet and, sure enough, his toes also had webs between them, too.

Now somewhat alarmed, I got to my feet, intending to direct the boy back to where he had come from. However, he gave me such a look of terror I decided not to follow through. Detecting my change of mind, the boy walked across the room and through the doorway into the hall. I followed to see where he was going. At the foot of the stairs he looked back to make sure I was following him, then he headed up the stairs, still soundly asleep it seemed to me, but obviously cognizant of his surroundings. At the top of the stairs, he headed around the end of the guardrail and down the hallway to my bedroom. Upon entering the room, he walked over to the foot of my bed and curled up on the floor, for all intents and purposes going back to sleep.

I put my hand on his shoulder and very gently shook him, thinking it would now be all right to wake him. My gesture was not responded to, so I shook him more vigorously. Again, he failed to respond. It seemed to me that he was determined to stay asleep. At least that's the impression I got. I withdrew my hand from his shoulder, realizing how unnaturally cold my palm had become in contact with his skin. At that point I covered him with a quilt and decided to go look for his parents, for I was certain they would be searching for him.

The rain had become a fine drizzle. Pulling on a jacket and removing an umbrella from the stand beside the door, I decided to begin my search by trying to pick up the boy's footprints around the patio. Outside, I was greeted by a guttural cry and, looking up, I saw a raven fly from the roof of the house. It glided as if in slow-motion over my head, dropping something from its beak. The object bounced off the fabric of the umbrella and landed on the flagstones of the patio. It seemed to be an irregularly shaped gold coin. I stooped to pick it up, discovering it was worn quite smooth around the edges. Only one side was embossed, with the impression of an eye around which a snake had looped itself by biting its tail.

By now the raven had landed in a nearby birch tree and was squawking at me with some insistence, obviously encouraging me to follow him. I pressed through the wet foliage composed of laurels, photinia and rhododendrons, which grow rather profusely around the patio. The foliage damp-

ened my trousers to mid-thigh. The raven flew off through the trees toward the lake. Because of the tree line, one can't immediately view the water. One must go quite a distance through the woods. Halfway there, one comes to a clearing in the middle of which stands a derelict gazebo. The roof of the gazebo is covered with moss. To reach the structure one has to wade through a patch of stinging nettles which stand waist high. Pushing through them resulted in a pungent, green aroma being given off. Something about the aroma recalled the boy who lay curled up at the foot of my bed. I saw in my mind's eye that he was now standing with the quilt wrapped around his shoulders, his eyes registering trepidation or perhaps anguish.

This impression hit me with the force of something quite real, as if I had seen it right in front of me. I was torn between going to his aid and pushing on with my journey. The raven, as if sensing my indecision, came flapping back to my vicinity. He perched on the mossy roof of the gazebo and began to natter at me. I pressed through the stinging nettles, being careful to hold my hands above the blooming, white tops. The raven took wing; he flew ahead of me, eventually alighting on an alder tree and glancing back to make sure I was following him. Under the canopy of the alders, the rain didn't reach me directly; rather, it came down in large splats that drummed on the fabric of the umbrella.

Near the lake, the alders bunch together rather thickly. I had to collapse the umbrella in order to push my way through the branches that overlap one another. The tops of the trees swayed, hurling drops down at me. Some of the drops splashed chill against my nape. I hadn't been down to the lake in a long time. When I saw it, I was struck by how much the opposite shore had changed. Where formerly only a few cottages could be seen on the forested hillside, there was now an expanse of concrete and glass dwellings that resembled a tremendous cliff terraced at different elevations.

I didn't know quite what to do. I looked around for the raven, hoping he would inform me as to my next move; however, I couldn't spot him, neither in the trees nor along the shore. I was standing beside a well-trodden footpath, judging from the way the grass had been beaten down. I glanced down the path in one direction, and then the other. Going left would eventually take me to a gate, one that hadn't been opened in a long time, for a considerable amount of grass was growing up around it. Heading right would take me along the shoreline to a dock that jutted out into the lake. Spotting a couple standing at the very end of the dock, I found myself drawn in that direction. The man and woman were dressed in gray slickers, with hoods pulled up over their heads. The man was standing slightly to one side behind the woman, and they were looking across the lake at the concrete and glass dwellings that glinted in the sunshine.

The fine drizzle was still falling. I opened the umbrella and headed down the footpath to the right, certain the couple at the end of the dock would be able to tell me something about the boy who had disturbed my repose. So far, they hadn't moved. Not wanting to startle them, and possibly cause them to topple into the lake, I called to them in a tone that sounded apologetic for intruding on their privacy. I'm sure my voice must have carried to where they were standing; however, they didn't give any sign of having heard me. As a result, I hailed to them in an even louder voice. My se-

cond attempt to get their attention was also ignored. I walked out onto the dock, trying to make my heels clatter on the planks so they would know I was coming up behind them. When I was nearly on top of them, I realized what I thought must be the reason for their extreme absorption. As I said, the man was standing behind the woman. He had stuck his left hand in his companion's coat pocket and seemed to be engaged in a moment of extreme intimacy.

"Oh, I'm sorry for intruding," I said, intending to head back the way I had come.

Suddenly, the air seemed to shatter. Their arms flew up at their sides, turning into wings that unfurled in great, wafting surges. The flurry of activity made me duck out of the way. I stumbled on something and went crashing backwards onto the dock. The impact loosened my grip on the gold coin. It rolled in an arc, falling in a crevice between two planks. By that time the man and woman had launched themselves from the dock and were soaring in a wide circle over the lake. I could tell by their trajectory that they weren't going to fly very far away. In fact, a short while later, as I was picking myself up off the dock, they skid-landed on the lake, instantly metamorphosing into swans of rather considerable size.

Two of the umbrella's spokes had broken during my fall. Rather than abusing it any further, I collapsed it and fastened the strap around the black nylon. Just then, the raven appeared as if out of nowhere. Landing on the dock, he strutted over to where the gold coin had fallen in the crevice between the planks, eyed the spot briefly and began to dig with his beak. Shortly, he produced the coin. He gave me a look meant to chastise me; then, with a little hop, he hurled himself into the air, flying off in the direction of my house.

Exactly where I had emerged from the alders, I now saw the boy standing with the quilt pulled around his shoulders. His gaze followed the flight of the raven to a spot above his head. He pointed his hand like a toy gun and the raven toppled out of the sky into the alder trees behind him. Then he turned around and headed back into the woods. Obviously, the boy and the raven shared some sort of link. Intending to find out precisely what that link was, I hurried back along the footpath and pushed my way into the alder thicket.

When I finally located the boy I found him kneeling in the stinging nettle patch near the gazebo, using a stick to dig a hole in the rich, dark earth. The raven lay beside what would ultimately become his grave, and the gold coin resided on the black, glistening feathers of the bird's breast. The boy stopped digging long enough to look up at me and, for the first time, he seemed to register my presence. Immediately, a shudder went down my spine. For a moment or two we shared an invisible tether, one that got tighter with time. Afterward he resumed his digging. When the grave was sufficiently large, he plucked the coin from the raven's breast. Then he very carefully and tenderly put the bird in the hole, filled the hole with dirt and patted the dirt until it was quite firm. The dirt, being rather moist, clung to his hands. Between thumb and index finger of his right hand, he tightly squeezed the coin.

When, at last, the boy had finished burying the raven, he got to his feet and stared into my eyes with such earnest intensity I felt another shudder go down my spine. Finally he averted his gaze, looking down at the coin in his dirty palm. He indicated with a glance for me to take the coin and so I did. He pulled the quilt firmly around his shoulders and headed off through the stinging nettles, back toward the house. I followed him, curious to find out where he was going. Pressing his way through the foliage around the patio and entering the house by the French windows, he ascended the stairs to my bedroom where, once more, he curled up at the foot of my bed and fell soundly asleep.

The next morning, when I awoke in my favorite, old armchair, I discovered with a start that a darkly-clad crone was standing near the hassock on which I had crossed my legs. In her right hand she held a lighted candle that she was making circles with. The circles hovered as luminous after-images that became inter-connected. She smiled benignly, then bowed her head and retreated through the open French windows.

Standing outside on the patio, the crone gestured for me to follow her. Pushing the hassock aside with my feet, I rose rather stiffly due to the awkward position I had fallen asleep in and stepped through the doorway after her, feeling as if I had done something irrevocable. The crone responded by nodding with approval and, cupping the candle so the flame wouldn't be blown out, she pressed her way through the foliage around the patio. Although dawn was beginning to wash the sky, it was still fairly dark in the alder grove. Approaching the gazebo through the nettle patch, I saw it was illuminated by a myriad of candles that were all wagging about an inch of flame. The crone looked back to make sure I was following, and from her kindly expression I could tell she was trying to put me at my ease.

I followed her through the patch of stinging nettles to the gazebo and sat down across from her at a table set with a tea pot and two ancient-looking cups coated with a crackled glaze. The crone poured each of us a cup of tea. The tea had a sweet, almost cloying aroma that instantly induced a sense of well-being. We sat there in utter silence for ten or fifteen minutes, as if awaiting a signal of some kind. Finally, when the first signs of dawn began to gather in the thicket around us, the crone rose from the table and gestured for me to follow her. She led me through the alder grove to the lakeshore and along the footpath to the dock. By now dawn had made the sky quite pallid, but because of a dense fog hovering over the lake, it still seemed fairly early.

Tied to a metal cleat at the end of the dock was a small wooden rowboat. The oars were secured in the oak locks, but the flat tips lay on the seat in the stern. The crone gestured for me to get into the boat. I pulled on the rope connected to the bow, drew the boat alongside the dock and climbed in, sitting down on the middle seat. The old woman was staring in the direction from where we had come. Moments later, the boy emerged from the alder grove. He was gliding as if on a cushion of air along the footpath, the hem of the quilt dragging on the ground. When he got close enough for me to observe him I realized, even though his eyes were wide open, that he was nonetheless in a state of sleep, one so deep he appeared to be more dead

than alive. His right hand was extended rigidly in front of him. In it he was gripping the gold coin between thumb and index finger, offering it to me. I realized then that I had left it on the table near the armchair and that he was making sure I had it on my person. The old woman indicated for me to take it. Holding onto the metal cleat on the dock, I stood up in the rowboat and reached to take the coin, which I then slipped into my vest pocket.

By that time, the crone had untied the rope and had thrown it into the bow of the boat. She was now engaged in the act of shooing me away with her hands. Sitting down on the seat, I swung the oar tips into the water, brought the boat around and headed out into the mist on the lake. I rowed with trepidation, as if sent by force from the bosom of the world. Soon the mist became so thick I couldn't see the crone standing on the dock. I rowed with uncertainty, unable to fathom which direction to take. A little while later two swans glided into view, taking up positions on either side of the bow. I understood by the way they craned their necks when to veer port or starboard.

Soon a sheet of sunshine slid in under the blanket of fog. For all intents and purposes, I seemed to be rowing the boat through a tepid, steaming stew. How the swans managed to guide me I do not know. They seemed to concentrate on a distant point only their stark eyes were permitted to see. I trusted them to take me where I had to go, and in this manner I arrived at the opposite shore where the concrete and glass dwellings dropped like a sheer cliff to the lake.

The architect responsible for designing the building had made it inaccessible from the water. Although I rowed several minutes in either direction, I could find no way to access it. By now, the swans had glided back into the fog. I was alone, abandoned. However, I knew what I had to do. I had to find the architect who had designed the building and inform him of the drastic error he had made by not making it accessible from the lake.

But how was I supposed to find him?

The sun rose to a point about forty-five degrees above the lake. The fog lifted, permitting me to see more of my surroundings. At that point, I received quite a shock; for the shore I had come from was no longer the picturesque shore it had once been. While hidden from sight by the fog, it had seamlessly amalgamated with the concrete and glass cliff. I was trapped in a watery arena with no exit. But I was not alone. The swans were gliding in wide arcs, their heads held high, their stark eyes examining their environs. Even from a distance, I could tell that they were at peace, that they were utterly comfortable with their lot, unlike me...

“Dr. Koski...”

I awoke with a start. My face felt numb, deathly cold. For a moment I sat there in my armchair, feeling extremely disoriented. Obviously, I had fallen asleep during the thunderstorm. The French windows were wide open. The rain had ceased. Irregular patches of blue sky had ripped holes in the clouds.

“Dr. Koski, do you realize what time it is?”

The housekeeper had come in by the hall door. In her left hand she was carrying the tools of her trade in a yellow plastic bucket.

"No, I don't. What time is it?"

"Nearly ten o'clock in the morning."

"No, it can't be," I said, recalling that the thunderstorm had started in the afternoon. Certainly I couldn't have slept through the night, not sitting in my armchair. "You must be joking, Margarita."

"I'm not joking, Dr. Koski. It's nearly ten o'clock. You should have left for work over an hour ago."

"My goodness, I'll be late for my first class," I said, dragging my legs off the hassock and pulling myself up straight. If my body was any indication, I had slept like a dead man, for the stiffness suggested a kind of rigor mortis.

"Yes, and with the doors wide open, too. Don't you realize what sort of harm you can let yourself in for, being so careless?"

"I doubt if there are any criminals lurking in the immediate vicinity, Margarita."

"They lurk anywhere there are shadows, Dr. Koski, and there are plenty of shadows around here, especially out in those shrubs."

Her remark reminded me of the boy who had intruded on my solitude the previous afternoon. I was uncertain now whether the event had actually occurred. I excused myself and went upstairs. Butterflies fluttered in my stomach as I approached the door to my bedroom. My hand trembled when I turned the knob and pushed the door back against the wall.

The boy was nowhere to be seen. However, a quilt was lying on the floor where I recalled seeing the youngster in my dream. When I touched the fabric I found it was damp, as if from a heavy dew. This caused me some alarm, for the balcony door was shut and the room was quite warm.

I showered, changed into clean clothes and went back downstairs, still consumed by thoughts about the boy. My mood must have conveyed itself to Margarita, for she gave me a curious expression.

"Are you feeling unwell, professor?"

"No, I'm feeling just fine," I said, patting my vest pocket. "But I think I've lost something. Maybe I left it down by the lake. I took a walk down there last night."

"What is it — just in case I come across it?"

"It was a token. A small, irregularly-shaped token. Gold. A colleague gave it to me, hoping I would be able to identify it for him."

"I'll keep an eye out for it, Dr. Koski. I'm sure I'll run across it, if it's anywhere around here."

"I think I know where I might have left it," I said.

I unbolted the French windows and stepped outside onto the patio. I pushed my way past the shrubbery, relieved to see that my yard bore no resemblance to the unruly one in my dream. The laurels, photinia and rhododendrons were nicely trimmed. The lawn was well-behaved, except in the clearing where I noticed some stinging nettles pushing up through the grass.

I surmised that the quilt's dampness had been due to me leaving it outside on the balcony during the thunderstorm and not recalling that I had brought it back inside. However, when I reached the gazebo and looked

around inside, I had cause to doubt my theory. My gaze fell on a token resembling the one that the raven had dropped at my feet. Beside it, burned down to within an inch of the wood, was a candle that had spread its wax.

I picked up the token and examined it. It was embossed with an eye around which a snake had looped itself by biting its tail. My hand commenced to shake so terribly, I dropped the token on the ground and had to stoop to pick it up.

How had I come by it? The story I had told Margarita about a colleague giving it to me was a fabrication. Nor had I ever had such a token in my possession.

I put the token in my vest pocket and headed down to the lake. There is an alder grove in that vicinity, but it isn't nearly as unruly as the one in my dream, nor does it put the lake out of sight. I followed the footpath down to the shore of Lake Washington, thrilled at the sight of the floating bridge that bears traffic north and south.

I was standing there, feeling vastly relieved, when two swans glided into view from around the point where cattails grow so tall and jungle-like they seem other-worldly. The swans plowed through the water and heaved themselves up onto shore not six feet away from me. They craned their necks threateningly, hissing through their open beaks, advancing in my direction and driving me back from the spot where I stood.

I retreated toward the alder grove. The swans kept advancing, craning their necks, peering at me with their stark eyes. Suddenly, it occurred to me what they were after. I took the token out of my vest pocket and held it up for them to see. Instantly, they stopped their menacing advance. I gestured as if to throw the token into the lake. The swans responded by arcing their long necks, as if to follow the token's trajectory.

"You want this," I said. "What on earth for?"

Hissing in unison, they began to walk toward me again. I responded by pulling back my arm and flinging the token into the lake. The swans craned their necks, their stark eyes watching for the splash.

Satisfied that I had thrown the token into the lake, they swung their bodies awkwardly around and waddled off in the direction whence they had come.