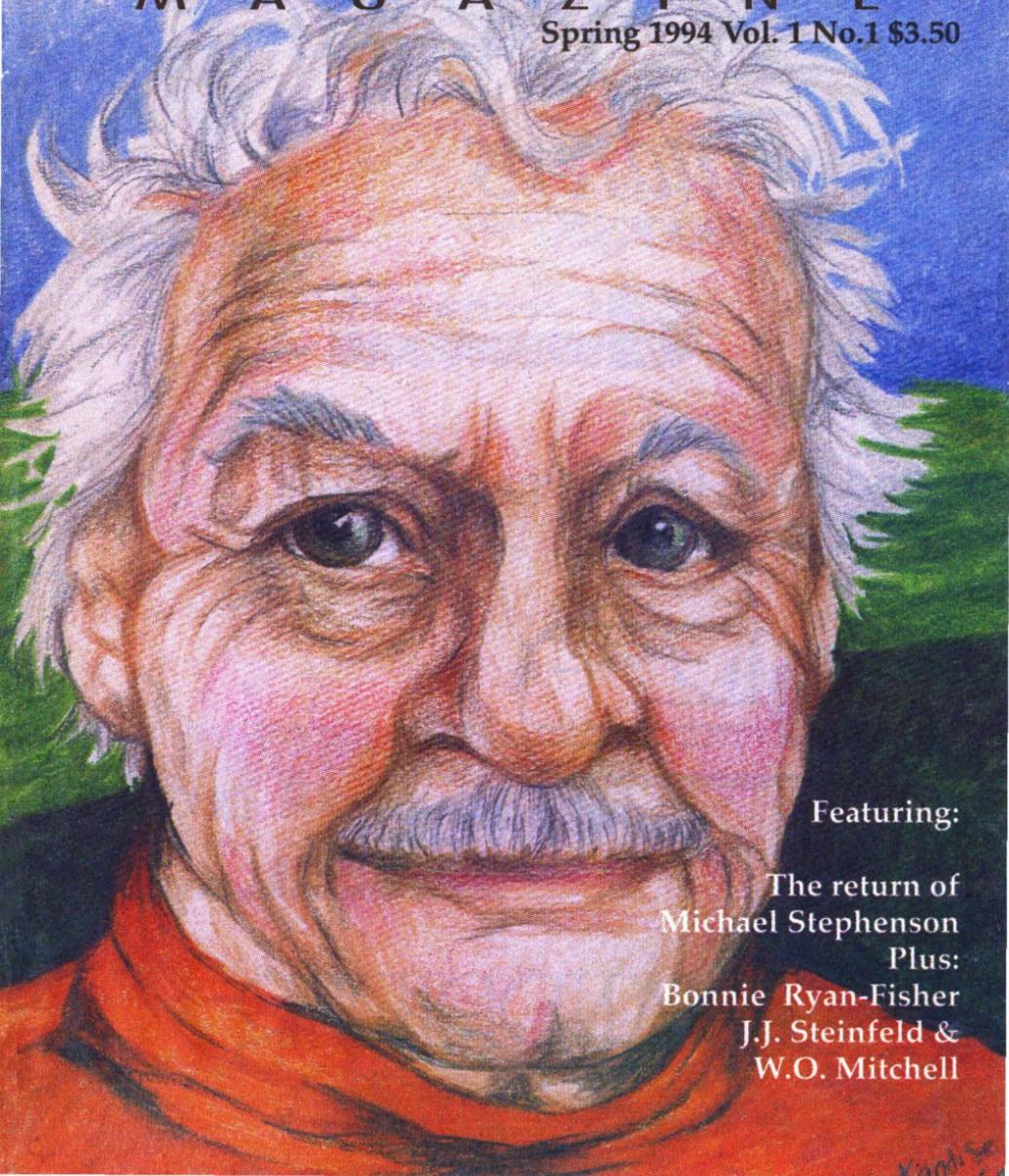


WRITER'S BLOCK

M A G A Z I N E

Spring 1994 Vol. 1 No.1 \$3.50



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The return of
Michael Stephenson

Plus:

Bonnie Ryan-Fisher

J.J. Steinfeld &

W.O. Mitchell

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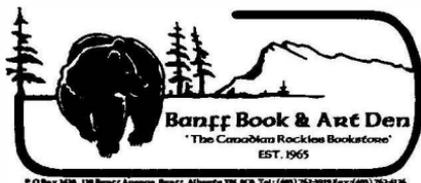
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WRITER'S BLOCK

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EDITOR'S NOTE...

Welcome to the first issue of Writer's Block Magazine! Inside you'll find a collection of accomplished authors and promising new-comers alike. You'll also find a rather assorted bag of stories and poems; every popular genre is represented, from fantasy to romance!

Of course, in producing this magazine, we had to draw on the talent and support of dozens of groups and individuals. It's only fitting we take a moment to thank them here. The bookstores, of course, deserve a standing ovation - the magazine you're about to read wouldn't have been possible without them. Our thanks to Kim Borle, Kerry Longpre, Liz Owens, Gail and Laurie Greenwood, Barbara Steiner, Barbara Muso, Jo Steffans and all the people who make these bookstores such great places to visit. Special thanks is owed to Sharon Budnarchuk and the staff of Audrey's Books for services above and beyond the call of duty.

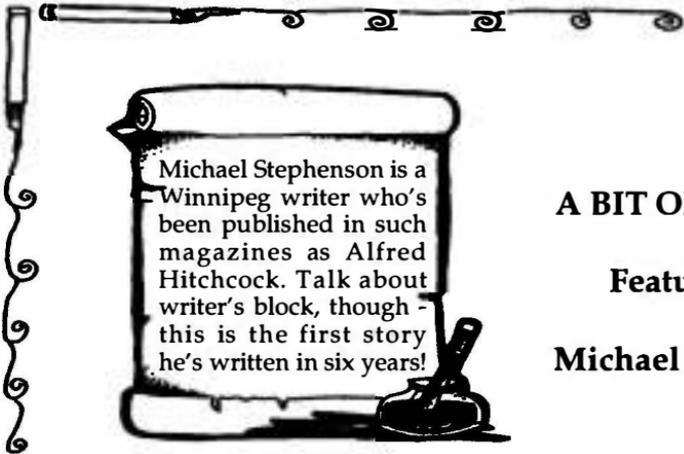
We'd also like to thank the talented people at two of the province's top advertising agencies; Derek Coke-Kerr & Associates and Inhouse Advertising

Group. Thanks to Wojtek Wojcicki for his early guidance, Jeff Brown for picking up the slack when Writer's Block took over my office (and my life), Lori Billey for consistently good advice and Dale Spychka for his timely intervention (he saved us from producing the world's first 65 column, roughly circular-shaped magazine). Extra special thanks are due to Derek Coke-Kerr for inviting us into his office.

Thanks also to; Jane Bisbee, Dennis Pasula, Jackie Woods, Gail Unger and Nancy Kilpatrick. And, of course, thanks to our advertisers - without their willingness to support the literary and graphic arts in our community, we couldn't have produced this magazine nor paid our contributors the rates we pride ourselves on.

Now, we invite you to sit back and enjoy the results. There's something for everyone here and we sincerely hope we can introduce you to some of tomorrow's best-known writers, artists and poets... today.

Shaun Donnelly
Publisher/Editor



Michael Stephenson is a Winnipeg writer who's been published in such magazines as Alfred Hitchcock. Talk about writer's block, though - this is the first story he's written in six years!

A BIT OF A HURRY

Feature Story
by
Michael Stephenson

"There is no easy answer," said the doctor. "Psychotic disorders encompass endless divisions and subdivisions. Schizophrenia as a class, for example, is subdivided inteminably, from the plain schizophrenic down through hebephrenic, catatonic, paranoid, and separated again laterally to a cute - u n d i f f e r e n t i a t e d , chronic-undifferentiated and residual schizophrenia. Then there are psychoses, that broad encompassing term, which further expand to include the manic-elated, manic-depressive and manic-circular reactions. Any - and I repeat, any - of these psychotic disorders may tend toward severe personality disfunction..."

Malcolm left early and he drove all day. He intended to stay over at the motel, but, anxious to be with his family and observing how traffic diminished as the sun went down, he drove on into the coming night. At four in the morning, feeling light-headed, the darkness all around the speeding car and the broken highway lines flying steadily into his eyes, he pulled up to the only open restaurant on the highway.

Inside, the blast of white fluorescent light pinched his eyes. When they had adjusted, he took a table near the window. From the counter the waitress came sleepily across the empty restaurant, pad and pencil at the ready. She rested on one hip looking vacantly down at him.

Malcolm was a small man, thin-framed with a red face and neatly trimmed graying hair. His brown suit was rumpled from the driving but the brown, matching necktie was still done up at his neck in a smooth precise knot. He ordered bacon and eggs and when the waitress left, went to the pay phone and placed a call. The phone rang three hundred miles away and he let it go until a tired voice answered.

"Eleanor?" he said. "It's me, dear."

"Malcolm!" his wife cried. "Is something wrong? Why are you calling at this hour? Are You...?"

"No, no, nothing's wrong," he assured her quickly. "I'm sorry to wake you. I just wanted to let you know that I'll be home this afternoon."

"We weren't expecting you until tomorrow," she said, pleased.

The genuine pleasure in her voice warmed Malcolm. "Yes, I know. But I decided to travel all night."

"Dear, are you all right? Are you tired? Where are - ?"

"Whoa, slow down," he laughed. "I'm fine. I'm just having a bite to eat. Should be home by noon. How are the kids?"

"They missed you these past two weeks. We all missed you," she said honestly. Malcolm pictured her standing by the phone in their kitchen, petite and trim and sleepy. He felt like rushing out to the car and not stopping until he was home. ☺

Instead he said, "I got the company accounts all straightened out. Plus a five hundred dollar bonus from Mr. Henderson."

"Oh, Malcolm, that's great!"

"Well, the money will come in handy all right," Malcolm agreed. "But I think next year they can send Foster. He's single. Anyway, we'll talk about that later."

They sent kisses over the telephone line and Malcolm waited for her to hang up. When he heard the click he hung up too, and was alone again in the stark, bright restaurant.

Looking at his car out in the dark, he ate what he could of the breakfast, then left some bills on the table and stepped out into the dewey early morning. Along the eastern horizon a thin, faint glow showed above the trees. The sky was dark as yet, but it could be dawn soon. Malcolm rubbed his neck. The constant sitting had put a stiffness in his back, and he found that the meal made him dangerously comfortable. He stretched to shake it off, pulling in a deep breath of the sweet pine-scented air, then slid into the car and wheeled onto the silent highway.

Rolling smoothly along between the towering trees, past an occasional darkened restaurant or gas station, he crested a low rise and saw the traffic light ahead. It was red, and a tan Buick sat at the intersection waiting for it to change. Malcolm pulled up behind the Buick. Drumming his fingers on the wheel he watched the light suspended above the gray morning sky. *Going to be a hot one today*, he mused. *Have to try and be alert. Wednesday, though - traffic shouldn't be too bad.*

The light turned green. Malcolm slipped his foot off the brake and as he did the car drifted, but the Buick did not move and he slapped the brake. The action rattled him and, annoyed, he gave the horn several sharp blasts. The driver of the Buick did not move. In the hazy pre-dawn light, Malcolm could discern only that the man wore a wide-brimmed hat. His head lay slightly forward resting on his arms on the wheel, his shoulders

hunched. Malcolm honked his horn again. The man jerked, looked back for a moment, then turned away.

Malcolm rolled down his window and leaned out. "Hey! Hey, the light is green! C'mon, let's get moving," and leaned on the horn.

He saw the man look back. Then the Buick jerked suddenly and sharply backed and slammed into Malcolm's grille.

"Hey!" Malcolm cried out. "What the hell...!"

The tan car rolled ahead a few feet, stopped, then leaped backward and rammed him again. The impact threw Malcolm hard into the steering column.

"Are you crazy?" he shouted. "What are you doing?"

"...perhaps," the doctor said, "the individual is dealing with an inordinate amount of stress over a long period of time, and is unable to cope with it. If that is the case, extreme defense mechanisms begin to come into play, resulting in erratic patterns of thought, behaviour, and feelings. There may also be intermittent loss of contact with reality. The individual grows moody, detached from his surroundings, highly confused, and perhaps even taken to self-conversation. Often there will be complete disorganization as to time and place..."

The tan Buick rolled through the intersection and stopped. Malcolm watched the car. The driver draped an arm over the seat and looked back.

My God, Malcolm realized, *he's going to do it again.*

The Buick's tires screamed out as it came swerving wildly backwards. Malcolm let out a bellow. He floored the gas peddle and wheeled his car into a wailing U-turn. The Buick skidded narrowly by as Malcolm raced off down the highway. In his rear view mirror he saw the Buick reel to the gravel shoulder and settle in a swirl of dust.

A lunatic! he thought, speeding away. *The man is insane!* Perspiration ran freely under Malcolm's arms and there was a dull pain where his chest had hit the steering column. Why would he do that?

The man must have been drunk. Yes. Bloody drunkard! On the road! Goddamn all-night partymaker!

Malcolm wiped at his face, conscious now of driving 100 km in a 90 km zone, and that home was in the opposite direction. Checking his mirror he saw that the road behind him lay empty, and he turned into a darkened gas station. Shaking badly, he got out and examined the damage. One broken headlight, he noted; the grille punched in and the bumper dented. Okay. That's not so bad. The insurance will cover that. Make up some story. Just have to get going, that's all; get out of here and get home.

In the car he clicked on the seat belt, snugging the harness across his chest. *Fool, he swore, to drive without being strapped in.*

He pulled out. Between the trees the road lay black and vacant. Driving at the posted limit, Malcolm kept a guarded watch in his mirror and as far ahead as he could. He approached the place on the shoulder where the Buick had halted. It was gone now. Ahead the traffic light had flickered red and he drew cautiously up to it. With the car idling softly under him, Malcolm gazed at the black tire stains left on the pavement. It seemed like a dream; like it never happened at all. Or it happened to someone else.

Malcolm avoided the skid marks and watched the traffic light.

Abruptly a movement, a flash of light, snagged his eye off to the right, far down the road that intersected the one he was on. Malcolm watched the Buick returning, coming fast out of the gray dawn.

"...first, " the doctor went on, "will come a collapse of the adaptive functioning process. The individual becomes disoriented, perhaps withdrawing into a world of his own. It is possible he will entertain beliefs contrary to reality. These are accompanied by demonstrations of overdepression, or overexcitement, or a total misinterpretation of surrounding occurrences. External events could be acted upon either with no emotion at all, or with excessive and very inappropriate emotional responses. Cortical controls - the

normal regulators and sifters of decent/indecet behavior - are lowered, releasing primitive emotions in the form of indiscriminate and almost uncontrolled verbal or physical onslaughts..."

Malcolm froze at the wheel. Blood pounded in his ears. He watched the tan car drift across the divider line and continue at breakneck speed down the left side of the highway, coursing directly for him.

At last he snapped to, wrenched the gearshift and wheeled back onto the shoulder. The Buick rocketed around the corner in a sweeping, squealing turn deliberately calculated to ram without loss of power. But Malcolm was tight to the ditch and the Buick spun out and came to a heavy, leaning halt facing the traffic light. Before Malcolm could react, the Buick peeled back and rammed his rear door. His head snapped against the window. He felt the skin open at his temple. *Am I crazy? he thought frantically. Is this happening? That man is trying to kill me. Then: Oh Jesus, someone is trying to kill me!* Bile rose sourly in his throat. He felt his stomach turning and swallowed rapidly to keep it down. Then as the Buick's engine roared again, Malcolm hit the accelerator and plunged onto the highway.

In his rear view mirror he saw the Buick swing savagely in a spray of gravel and start after him.

Sobbing, Malcolm pressed on the gas pedal. The speedometer climbed... eighty... ninety... making the wind sing past the windows, the Buick in dogged pursuit. Leaving the car in the wide curve, Malcolm momentarily lost the Buick in his mirror; then coming out of the curve it was back again, and gaining. His arms trembled on the wheel. In an attempt to control them he tensed them but the muscles beneath continued to flutter.

The gifts! he remembered suddenly, panicky. Turning quickly he saw them on the back seat. Wrapped in colourful paper he had purchased, they were bunched in a tumbled pile on the floor. *Eleanor and the kids will get them somehow,*

he thought. *Oh God, am I losing my mind?*

His car was doing a wild 150 kilometres an hour down a stretch with the Buick bearing in steadily. Malcolm pressed further on the gas. *Please stay behind*, he begged silently. *He must be doing a hundred and sixty. I can't do that! Let him run out of gas. Oh God, let him have a blowout.*

The Buick loomed in his mirror. Both cars shot through a curve as if connected by an ever-shortening line. Out of the curve the highway flattened like a broad black ribbon flung through the forest, and for a brief moment Malcolm thought he glimpsed a police car mounting the distant horizon. Police lights? he moaned, or a roof rack? The car rolled down the hill, bending into the road and he couldn't say. His arms began trembling uncontrollably again and the car swayed sickeningly in the high speed. Now he could see the car ahead with the bubble on its roof. *A patrol car*, he told himself. *It is a police car! Thank you, God, thank you!*

Just then a firm jolt snapped his head back. He glanced in the mirror. It looked like the tan car was coming in his back window. Malcolm could see the driver clearly now: his head thrown back in laughter, a strangely good-looking face partially shadowed by the felt hat, thick silver mustache, both hands properly gripping the wheel at the ten-to-two position. The driver allowed his car to fall back, then leaped ahead and hit violently once again. Malcolm's car sliced out across the white lines. Terrified, he pumped the brakes to regain control again and in slowing received a succession of hammering blows.

The cars sped on bumper to bumper. Waiting, barely breathing, Malcolm watched the patrol car coming and he held tight. Another crash rocked him from behind. The patrol car drew nearer.

"Now!" Malcolm screamed aloud. He pressed on the horn and clamping the brake, wheeled across the road in front of the police car almost spinning out with the final shove from the Buick, his horn wailing down the still, morning air.

To avoid Malcolm the police car sheered sharply out and in and the Buick, speeding by, clipped its rear fender and sent it fishtailing turbulently down the road.

Malcolm brought his car to rest on the paved lot of a closed restaurant. Sitting in a cold sweat, gulping air, he stopped the engine. Further back he saw the police car turn and come plunging into the lot, ploughing up parallel to Malcolm. Instantly the officer was out with his gun drawn.

"Don't move!" he cried across the roof. "Don't you move a muscle!"

Malcolm grinned foolishly at him. He was a young man, tall and handsome in his uniform, and Malcolm could see he was furious.

"What the hell kind of drag race is going on here!" the officer demanded. "Put your hands on the wheel where I can see them!"

"Thank goodness you're here," said Malcolm. "Please don't point that at me." The officer held the pistol in both hands braced on the roof of his car, the muzzle aimed at Malcolm's face. "Please. Put the gun away. You don't need it."

The officer's expression did not change. "Out of that car, mister. C'mon, get out. Now!"

"Officer," Malcolm said tearfully, not moving, "that man in the other car tried to kill me. He chased me down the highway and kept ramming me. He's crazy," murmured Malcolm. "I only wanted to get home."

"What?" the officer said.

"I only wanted to get home," Malcolm repeated, his voice a broken whisper.

The officer looked warily at Malcolm's pale, fear-drained face. He started around the car, then stopped, standing very still looking off, and Malcolm followed his gaze.

"He's coming back!" Malcolm cried.

They watched the lone car rushing down the road.

"He's coming to get me!" Malcolm cried hysterically. "I told you! I told you! Oh my God."

"Get down!" the officer ordered, confused. Fixing the gun solidly on the

roof in both hands, he followed the charging car in his gunsight. At first it seemed that the car would race past, but in the last moment it made a shrill, hairpin turn into the lot and rammed Malcolm's car full across the length of the bumper. Sunk in his seat, Malcolm felt the impact empty his lungs in a rush. The force of the collision threw his car into the restaurant window. Plate glass showered down on the hood.

"Goddamn," the officer muttered. He cocked his pistol. "You! Get out of that car!"

The man in the Buick, seat-belted across the chest, stared back blankly. A shard of glass dropped with a clatter on the pavement. No one moved.

"...manic reactions," the doctor said, "may become evident through something as simple as a sudden - though incoherent - shout; or in obvious hallucinations. Acute manic reactions are generally accompanied by a complete break in reality. And hyperacute manic reactions commonly entail intense excitement, disorientation, and frenzied, unchecked activity to the point of serious injury to the individual or, indeed, to others. As this is yet an imprecise science, paranoid reactions, that delusion of continual harassment, of being 'put upon', or the final sense of being incontrovertibly cornered, remain effectively undetectable up to the moment of eruption..."

The tan car began to drift back, slowly, slowly. The officer's finger curled into the trigger.

"Stop that car or I'll shoot!" he warned.

With the driver looking idly, disinterestedly, at the gun, the car continued to creep away and the officer squeezed a single echoing shot over its roof. Instantly the car lunged, tires digging smoke out of the asphalt in a wailing scream. Its steel bulk poured down on the police car. The officer fired one more round which drilled a hole in the windshield left of the center before the Buick slammed into his car and pitched him floppily into the air. Malcolm, crouched and trembling in his own car, saw the officer hit the ground heavily.

He watched the tan car back out, drive a ways down the road, and turn. Then, water trailing from his radiator, gathering speed, it started back.

Malcolm fumbled with his seat belt. *He is going to kill me*, he wept watching the car coming, struggling with the buckle. *I'm going to die here in this strange place and never see my family again. I'm going to die here!* The catch snapped open. Malcolm broke across the lot, his legs pumping, head bent, as the Buick smashed his car, grinding it along the brick restaurant wall. He crouched behind the police car gasping. The tan car wheeled immediately in a full screaming circle and rammed the police car. Malcolm was slapped to the ground. A fiery pain shot up his right arm. He felt dizzy, nauseated. Lying on his back he watched dreamlike, almost detached from the scene, as the Buick swung out and rumbled off in a trail of oil and water.

In the silence, Malcolm heard the officer moan. Helplessly, he looked over. There was a narrow stream of congealing blood trickling from the officer's nostrils and his breathing was shallow. Nearby lay his gun where the impact had ripped it from his hand. Malcolm stretched and picked it up. It felt bigger and heavier than he had imagined a pistol would feel, and he held it away carefully.

In the distance he heard the Buick's engine revving again.

He rose painfully to set the gun on the car roof as he had seen the officer do, and only realized that his arm was broken when he attempted to lift it and was reeled by the shock. With the gun in one hand, the other limp and burning at his side, he aimed as best he could at the tan car roaring in and jerked the trigger. Each round tipped the gun away but he kept bringing it back and firing again and again, the cracks ripping the morning air apart, deafening him, until it went clicking past empty chambers. Then, closing his tear-filled eyes he fell away as the Buick slammed headlong into the police car in a grinding explosion of metal.

The world went quiet around him. In

the still of the after-collision Malcolm lay motionless for a long, peaceful time. But he was not dead, for he heard the Buick sputtering again. The motor coughed, then throttled loudly, and it began to back away.

Malcolm looked over at the white face of the unconscious officer. There's nothing more I can do, he apologized silently. I'm sorry, there's just no more to do. Turning his glazed eyes under the police car he watched the Buick's wheels backing away, whipsawing crazily. In a moment he felt the blood leave his face and he relaxed into the pavement to await the car's return.

Following the doctor's instructions, a hospital orderly had rummaged through Malcolm's wallet. Then the doctor had phoned Eleanor. He had been very gentle and managed to calm her, even over the phone. In a room down the hall, the young constable, Brian Henderson, lay with minor contusions and three broken, chest-wrapped ribs. Upon admission he had become a nuisance, wild with rage and demanding he be permitted to see the Malcolm Harris who had saved his life. In the end he submitted to the sedatives and fell into a deep sleep.

The driver of the Buick, Francis Carl Woodgate, had died in his car with two bullets in his upper body.

"...in effect," said the doctor, "we are at an impasse until such time as Woodgate's life - his actions and recent behavior - have undergone a more intensive investigation and analysis."

"That's psychiatrist talk, doctor. I don't understand any of that," said Malcolm. The pressure of the cast on his arm made his hand feel swollen. He looked at the doctor, then at the two uniformed officers at the foot of his bed. "I don't understand any of it," he said. "Who was he? Was he a madman? What!"

Both officers turned to the doctor, who nodded his head. The tall officer, a Sergeant, took a notebook from his pocket and flipped it open.

"You didn't know, Woodgate, Mr. Harris?" he asked.

"No, no, I told you yesterday I didn't."

The Sergeant glanced at his notes. "He was a former executive with CanVex Corporation, here in the city. Fifty-seven years old. No previous criminal record. Apparently he was let go in a company cutback about a year ago, and was unemployed since then." The Sergeant coughed. "Age factor, it appears. Six months ago he was forced to sell his home. And just recently his marriage broke up." He closed the notebook.

Malcolm squeezed his eyes shut hard, his chest heaving under the blankets.

"Mr. Harris," the Sergeant said gently, "from what you and Constable Henderson told us, and from our short investigation, you obviously had no choice."

"Was he hired to kill me? Was it something like that? I'd feel better if it were something like that," Malcolm said desperately, knowing the hopelessness of it before he even asked.

"I'm certain it wasn't," the Sergeant said solemnly.

"Then why?" Malcolm moaned from the bed.

The officers said nothing. They looked at the doctor.

"Mr. Harris," the doctor said at last, "you blew your horn at him?"

"Yes," Malcolm whispered. "I told you I did."

"Several times." It was not a question.

"He didn't move when the light turned green." Malcolm cleared his throat. "So I blew my horn again and shouted out the window. Yes."

The doctor pursed his lips and shifted uneasily on his feet. "It... it appears that may have been the reason."

"No!" Malcolm cried out, weeping suddenly. He hit the blanket fiercely with his good arm. "Don't you tell me that. I've done that a thousand times at a thousand traffic lights. Everyone has. Drivers have done it to *me* and no one has ended up dead. That's not enough!"

A silence fell over the room.

"Mr. Harris," the Sergeant murmured, "the investigation is not yet complete, but the doctor may be correct. It may have been the last straw for Woodgate."

In the quiet, white room Malcolm could hear his heart beat. "I only wanted him to hurry a little," he said in a low and urgent voice.

"Of course."

"I only wanted to get home." He drew a tearful breath and turned his face into the pillow. The doctor stepped up and placed a hand on his heaving shoulder.

"Mr. Harris, you just happened to be there. But it could have been anyone. It could easily have been me, or my wife, or my son," he said, soothingly. "Mr. Harris, it could have happened to anyone."

But Malcolm, breathing heavily into the pillow, was not listening.

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NO IMMUNITY

by

Heather Tisdale-Nisbet

Red and white neon tubes
flowed faster into rushing the ruins;
the vertigo-free urban planners
stacked overpasses
to make blood pour faster;
mutated cells cancelled each other out;
planners backed the freeway
against tenements,
expected no stress;
the planners died out in the country
got buried under sod blankets;
the city lingered
on the terminal ward.

THE ZEN MASTER ON LOGAN AVENUE

by

Rosemary Aubert

Around him sit his students
like so many leaves shaking
in the breeze.

Above him, flickering fluorescent lights
too-busy sun.

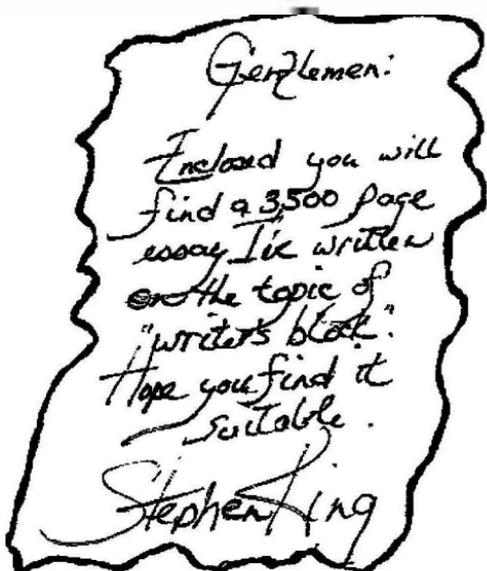
Outside, cars swoosh and honk
birds rushing into and out of migration.

The Master, though he speaks
is perfectly still, balancing his stick on
his knee.

"No mind," he says
"no trouble."

ON THE SUBJECT OF WRITER'S BLOCK...

To celebrate our first issue, we asked two famous writers to comment on Writer's Block. Here's what they had to say...



Dear Editors,

Sincerely,
Norman Mailer



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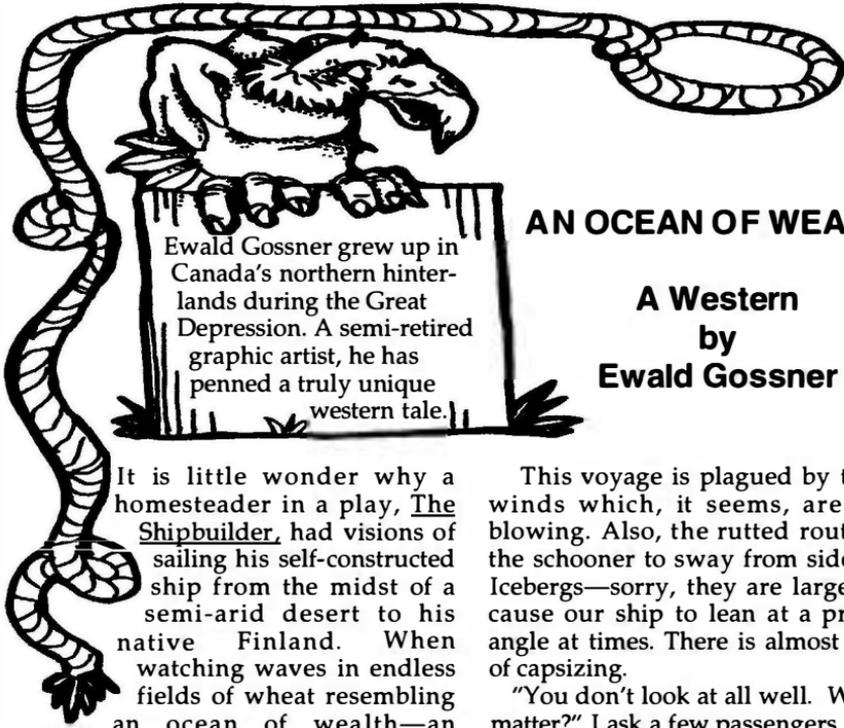


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Ewald Gossner grew up in Canada's northern hinterlands during the Great Depression. A semi-retired graphic artist, he has penned a truly unique western tale.

AN OCEAN OF WEALTH

A Western
by
Ewald Gossner

It is little wonder why a homesteader in a play, The Shipbuilder, had visions of sailing his self-constructed ship from the midst of a semi-arid desert to his native Finland. When watching waves in endless fields of wheat resembling an ocean of wealth—an obscure dream these days!—I, too, am lured to embark on a voyage over these often drought-stricken plains, known as The Prairies. But I question whether it's the bumper crop, or wave-like motions of wheat, or just sheer adventure that makes me want to take my legendary schooner for a cruise.

"All aboard!" I invite everyone—especially you, the reader—to join me aboard my schooner.

Oh, by the way—my schooner is not the common mode for sailing. It is well adapted to our prairie regions and has crossed this mythical ocean many times. It's called a prairie schooner. This mode of transportation helped settle our west with pioneers from distant places, sailing along prairie trails in caravans. Its construction is simple: four wheels, a wooden box to hold freight and passengers, and an elevated bench where the captain directs a team of two to four horses. A canvas cover shelters passengers from the cruel elements of prairie storms.

This voyage is plagued by turbulent winds which, it seems, are forever blowing. Also, the rutted route causes the schooner to sway from side to side. Icebergs—sorry, they are large rocks—cause our ship to lean at a precarious angle at times. There is almost a feeling of capsizing.

"You don't look at all well. What's the matter?" I ask a few passengers.

"We feel nauseated. Those waves and the rolling, bumpy motion of the vessel churn our stomachs."

"Here! This will settle things." I fumble through my medicine chest and pull out a jug of homemade potion; this brew is a must on a voyage such as this.

In the distant horizon dark, rolling clouds warn us of a storm. The waves increase as sprays of salt—whoops, that's a typo: it should have read *silt*—from a prairie storm filter through all our belongings. It is best to drop anchor and wait this one out. Meanwhile, thunder rolls in the distance. Initially, drops of rain splatter our dusty schooner, but within minutes torrents of water gush from a ferocious sky, drenching the canvas-covered schooner and causing havoc among passengers.

By mid-afternoon we are scorched by heat. We become disillusioned by weltering heat waves resembling an infinite ocean of water along a horizon of flat, open plains. But by evening a cool breeze swells my schooner's canvas,

hastening our journey to port.

"When is supper? We're starved," complain my passengers.

"We're pulling into harbour where there's a unique western delicatessen. It serves traditional prairie oysters." Here I drop anchor in the port—a ranch—where cowboys are gathered around a campfire.

"We can't afford oysters," a few passengers grumble.

"Don't worry. This is courtesy of Double-D Ranch." They had just got through castrating their new herd of bull calves; now they are feasting on "prairie oysters" to end their day. That's what I call "eating in style," particularly western cowboy style.

Now where could you find such an ocean of wealth without leaving land?



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If you write fantasy, horror, mystery, romance, science fiction, western, or whatever, *Writer's Block Magazine* has a contest just for you! Stories to a maximum of 5,000 words will be considered in any genre. There will be cash prizes for the winners, book prizes for the runners-up and you could see your story in an upcoming issue of *Writer's Block Magazine*. To enter, simply mail your best story to Box 32, 9944 - 33 Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta, T6N 1E8. Entries must be accompanied by a \$5 entry fee and an SASE and reach the magazine no later than July 31, 1994. Good luck!



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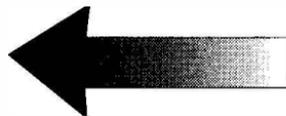
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If you write poetry, there's no need to feel left out. The *Writer's Block Contest* is also open to poets! Send as many as five of your best poems (any topic or style) along with a \$5 entry fee and SASE. Outstanding poems will be featured in upcoming issues and we'll pay the poet \$175.





A DANGEROUS COURSE

It's difficult to begin this without feeling depressed, and even a little bit outnumbered and overwhelmed. This year, in Alberta, we have already faced at least one public attempt to ban books (*Of Mice and Men*). In addition to that, many bookstores are involved in an ongoing struggle with customs censorship, where customs officials decide, haphazardly, which books are or are not allowed to enter Canada. And recently we observed the fifth anniversary of Salman Rushdie being forced into hiding. The thread linking these events is, of course, action taken by governments to suppress writing, with the supposed aim of protecting society.

The governments couldn't be further from the truth. In fact, free and open access to books is one of the greatest strengths any society can have. In simple business terms, which politicians should understand, it is a competitive advantage. Having educated people absorb and debate new ideas in turn leads to more innovation. Worrying about the number of "God Damns" in a book, without considering the underlying message, or even admiring the power of the writing, does exactly the opposite. It is a recipe for mediocrity, a guarantee that we will stagnate as the rest of the world passes by. It's hard to move into the twenty-first century burdened by a "morality" that wasn't even fitting in the nineteenth.

So what can we do about it? For starters, read. And continue to read whatever you want, whenever you want. And protest.

Whenever some self-styled judge of the public good tries to impose standards, protest. Book banners and book burners are never going to disappear, no matter how much we might wish it. However, their impact can only be lessened by a chorus of people who believe in the freedom to read, and who are willing to be vocal about it. Above all, continue to support books and writers, especially those under attack for what they believe.

Ian Hawkins, Partner, Sandpiper Books

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To draw attention to the importance of the censorship issue that has once again made headlines in Alberta, SANDPIPER BOOKS' FIRST ANNUAL JOHN STEINBECK EVENING will be held at our Eau Claire Market store on Wednesday, June 1 from 7pm to 9pm. Guest authors, including Cheryl Foggo, Claire Harris, George Melnyk, Sarah Murphy, Darlene Quaife and Fred Stenson will be on hand to read from *Of Mice and Men* and their own work. Ken McGoogan, book editor for the *Herald*, will be in attendance as may the Hon. Ron Gitter (if his schedule allows). Also present will be our special guest, W.O. Mitchell. Everyone is invited to this important evening and we are excited to announce the establishment of an award for the author who has most courageously exercised his freedom to write.

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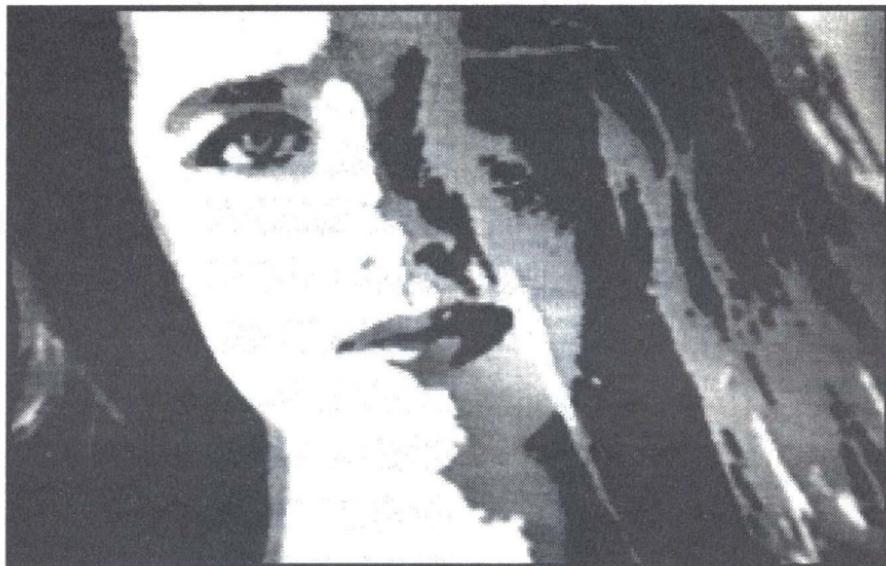
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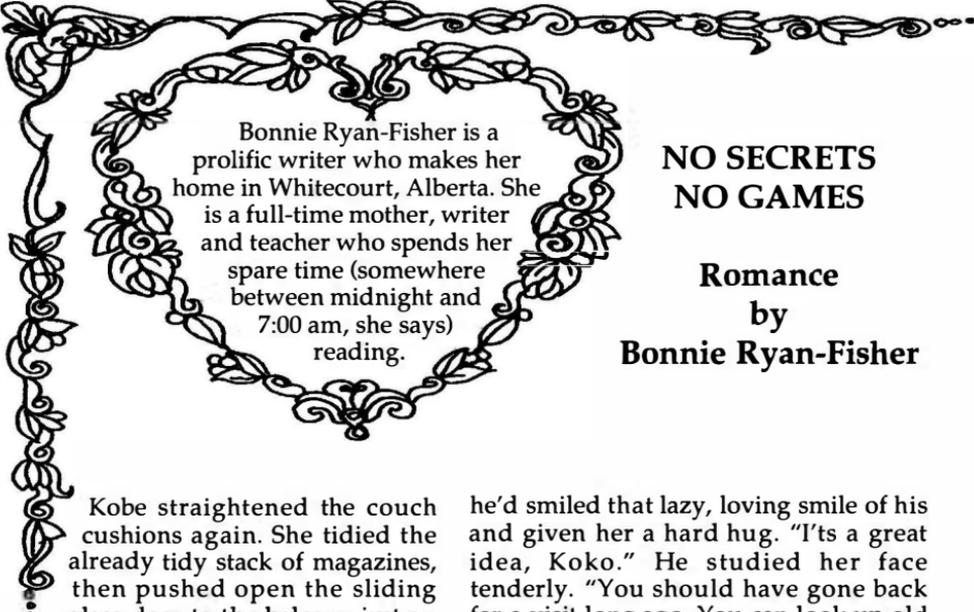
A graphic artist by trade, Ole makes his home in Kelowna, B.C. His recent work has combined photography and video. (The images were first videotaped and then photographed off the screen.)



Darcy J. Rogusky

From Regina originally, Darcy holds a visual arts diploma from GMCC and was a Visual Arts Major at the University of Lethbridge. His work has shown in Edmonton, Calgary and Lethbridge.





Bonnie Ryan-Fisher is a prolific writer who makes her home in Whitecourt, Alberta. She is a full-time mother, writer and teacher who spends her spare time (somewhere between midnight and 7:00 am, she says) reading.

NO SECRETS NO GAMES

Romance
by
Bonnie Ryan-Fisher

Kobe straightened the couch cushions again. She tidied the already tidy stack of magazines, then pushed open the sliding glass door to the balcony just an inch more. Her long fingers drummed nervously against the glass. She sighed and cupped her left hand against the back of her neck, a habitual and unconscious response to stress.

A car pulled up below. Kobe held her breath, waited and checked her watch, releasing the breath in another sigh. Too early. Sliding back the glass and screen, she stepped out onto the balcony. The view of the city was comforting in its familiarity, yet frightening in its strangeness. Had she been away too long? Things had changed in the skyline. Things had changed in her life.

When she left her secure teaching job here two years ago for one in a northern town, she had been scared and excited. Even as she was now. Smiling a wry and private smile, Kobe reached out to grip the railing. A last beam of the setting sun caught in the stone of the ring on her left hand. A single, solitary diamond, sitting high in a simple setting. Simple. Solid. Honest and real. Like Willy.

This reminder of him stirred her heart and she shut her eyes. Why had she come back here for this shopping trip? Any city would do, wouldn't it?

When she'd proposed the trip to Willy,

he'd smiled that lazy, loving smile of his and given her a hard hug. "It's a great idea, Koko." He studied her face tenderly. "You should have gone back for a visit long ago. You can look up old friends, see your sister's new apartment, and still come back with a pretty wedding dress."

"Yes. I'd like to see some people. I just wish Jeanna were going to be there. It's been months since her last visit. I guess it will be good for her to know someone's looking after her new place while she's at this conference, though."

"Stay awhile, sweetheart," Willy'd said. "She'll only be gone a week."

"I believe you're going to enjoy your freedom, Willy Roper," she'd answered playfully, and Willy's blue eyes had sparkled. A weather roughened finger had tipped her face up to his.

"You bet. Why, I've got half the women in this town waiting for me to just nod their way." But his tanned face had become serious then and he had touched her cheek as gently as rain. "You may have forgotten what the big city is like, Koko, and you may miss it someday. I don't want you regretting anything."

She has started to protest but Willy gave her that stubborn, stern look she'd come to know. It meant "don't you argue with me when you know I'm right. We're honest with each other. No secrets.

No games.”

No secrets. No games. Those were the theme words of their romance. Months of talk and walks...long horseback rides and fishing from the canoe. The bushtown boy had taught the city girl a thing or two about peace, and she had fit into his life, and into small town life, like a familiar hand into a well-worn glove.

No secrets. No games. Kobe winced. Would she be able to go home and tell him about this? Willy knew why she'd left a coveted city teaching position for one in an obscure little town. He knew about Lance. But Willy didn't know she was going to see this old love again. Or did he? Maybe all that talk about missing the city and old friends had been his way of granting permission. That'd be like Willy. Let her feel her way, decide for herself.

Kobe looked at her watch again and reached her arms to the sky in an exuberant stretch that didn't ease the growing tension in her shoulders and neck. Why had she called Lance? *It must be the city air*, she thought now. *It clouds my thinking.*

Going back into the apartment, Kobe crossed to the stereo. A little music might pass the time. Thumbing through Jeanna's records, she smiled fondly. No order, no rhyme, no reason, neither to the selection nor to the filing system. So like her sister.

There was a family photo on the wall above the record shelves. Jeanna with her punky haircut and trendy clothes, eyes twinkling with mischief and laughter. Her side of their shared bedroom had always been strewn with clothes, the bed unmade, the dust piling up and the homework assignments lost or forgotten, as likely to be under shoes or washed in the pocket of discarded jeans as anywhere. Yet, where it mattered, Jeanna was steady as a rock. She may be disorganized and careless with things, but she was as faithful in love as an old dog. She'd been going with the same boy since junior high, without a glance to left or right. And, when he'd finished law school, they'd marry. This was Jeanna's first move

away from home, to a job in the same city where her older sister had attended university and eventually worked. But there the similarities ended.

In the same photo, Kobe stood, in her tailored suit, holding a nervous, formal pose. "Neat Freak," her younger sister had called her. Kobe was the trusted family record keeper. Her diaries served as records of family events, and were stuffed full of clippings, letters and even maps of family trips, the routes traced out in yellow felt tip marker. She never lost an assignment or missed a deadline. She was dependable. Yet her love life was a schmozzle.

Kobe shook her head at the memories. Thomas, the university football star. Gerald, the too-serious, often pompous accountant. Johnny, fifteen years her senior but still living with his mother. Rick, who'd lived in the same apartment building, their only common ground. She'd been ripe for the picking. Eager for someone interested in her. Someone who knew what he wanted from life and set out to get it. No more confused boys. No more insecure men. That's when she'd met Lance Donnelly.

What a bulldozer! She had to smile remembering that was exactly how she'd described him to her sister then. A bulldozer. He had literally bowled her over. Not given her time to think or hesitate or question.

Kobe ran her fingers along the record jacket spines again and pulled one from the row. Her hands trembled as she placed the disk on the turntable and cued the needle. When the song began, she walked to the balcony doors and leaned her hot forehead against the cool glass as she listened.

He had been able to read her, and he had wooed her, from day one. She could see him leaning casually against the post at the tennis court, watching her. This was still her favorite memory of him. Pure and untouched by the guilt or pain that was yet to come. He was there, it seemed, four out of five times that she played—still breathing a bit fast from his run, a towel around his neck, beads of sweat in his hair catching the sun.

She had just finished a month of tennis lessons and was still self-conscious about her style. So each evening she'd go down to the public courts a few blocks from where she lived and she'd practice, forehand and backhand, against the board behind the courts. And this tall, handsome man, with strength and health radiating from every inch of his body, this man would appear and watch her.

It was weeks before they spoke, though smiles had been exchanged. Then, one day, she'd practiced for the longest time and he'd not appeared. Preoccupied, she missed a tough backhand and, turning to run after the ball, had nearly run right into him. He caught her arms in his hands to balance her.

"I'm sorry," she'd mumbled, but he laughed.

"I'm not."

She looked down, suddenly shy, and he'd let go her arms.

"You must be ready for a break," he had said. "Could I buy you a coke?"

Kobe lifted her eyes to the city skyline and pondered. It had been their third date when, over drinks in a quiet bar, he had casually mentioned his daughters. And she, naive beyond measure, had asked, "How long were you married, Lance?"

He had hesitated only a moment before answering, "I still am, kid. Six years now."

Refusing to understand, Kobe had touched his hand. "But you're not living with her anymore. Your wife, I mean. How long were you together?"

He seemed to consider, but then he had pushed his chair back. "Let's go for a drive, OK? I want to talk to you."

Lance had explained that he was still living with his wife. She was a wonderful mother, he said. They both loved their daughters too much for him to ever leave.

"But you, Kobe. I don't know how this happened, but I can't give you up. Just be there for me and I'll be there for you. I promise."

When he had pulled her into his arms, she had known she was lost. Against the longing of her own body and soul,

stirred by his strength, the feel and the smell of him, she was helpless. He'd just carried her away. Like a river, a tornado, a bulldozer. She was already in love with him.

For almost two years Kobe had given in to his strength and her love. She had lived blindly from day to day, from meeting to meeting. Not asking for more and not hoping for more. Oblivious to the advice of friends, the tears and fears of her family.

Noticing the sifting sound of the needle in the silence, Kobe returned to the stereo and started the record again. The tender love melody brought tears to her eyes and she thought of her sister.

The night Lance's wife called, Kobe had been devastated. Filled with disgust and self-loathing, verging on hysteria, she had phoned her sister. Jeanna had just listened and cried with her. By evening of the next day, after a four hour bus ride, her sister had been there to hold her hand and cry some more while they listened to soft love songs on the radio.

It was Jeanna who had fielded the phone calls from Lance, kept visitors away and helped her through the process of "withdrawal." And it was Jeanna who had helped her pack, and had gone with her to house hunt in the northern town where she was so readily hired for the next school year. And she'd never come back. The first year she'd been afraid to. By the second it just seemed unimportant, less urgent.

Then she was here. In this old city again. And Jeanna wasn't here. And the meetings with old friends had aired memories long stored away. The places she met them for drinks or dinner were like long lost friends themselves, and every memory was colored a shade of Lance. So, on impulse, this morning, from a phone booth downtown, she'd called his office. Just dialed the number, her voice and fingers as nervous as they'd been in those early days.

"Donnelly here."

Her heart hammered. She had tried to keep her tone light. "Still know this voice?"

Kobe had been caught off guard by the tenderness in his tone when he answered, "Kobe? That is you, isn't it?"

"Yes, Lance. How are you?"

"How am I?" he laughed softly. "I'm fine, I guess. Where are you? How are you?" Another disbelieving laugh. "I never expected to hear your voice again, kid."

She giggled a little nervously. "Me either. I'm in town, Lance. Visiting. Shopping. I'm getting..." Kobe still didn't know what had made her hesitate—but she had—and then she had rushed on. "I'm getting married. I'm shopping for a wedding dress and things..." Her voice had wandered off.

Silence answered her.

"Lance?"

"I'm here. Congratulations are in order I guess. I'm happy for you, Kobe." He had paused, then brightened. "Listen, this calls for a celebration. Could I see you?"

Get out of this, Kobe, her heart warned her. Tell him about Willy. But instead, she heard herself as if from some great distance. "I don't know. I just wanted to know what is happening in your life. Coffee, maybe?"

In the end she had agreed to dinner. He'd pick her up. She'd given him Jeanna's address.

Kobe checked the time again and walked aimlessly about the room seeking distraction. Her hand trailed along book covers on the shelves. She stopped to look at ornaments and knick knacks. She crossed to the writing desk, switched on the reading light and absent-mindedly fiddled with the scattered papers, straightening, ordering, fondly falling into this comforting big sister role.

She lifted the telephone from where it sat on the floor beside the desk and used it to pin a small stack of bills in place on the desk top, then she stooped to pick up the phone book. An envelope protruded from between the pages, and she let the book fall open there. Her name was written on the envelope in a familiar hand and it was filed, deliberately, under "D."

Kobe was still sitting with the

unopened envelope in her hand when the door buzzer rang. She carried it as she crossed to the intercom.

"Yes?"

"Hi, Kobe. You ready?"

"Coming." Kobe steadied herself with a deep breath. In the bedroom she picked up her purse and then, pausing only a moment, slid the still-sealed envelope in beside her wallet. She gave the mirror a quick glance and hurried out of the apartment and down the hall to the elevator.

Lance was waiting on the other side of the locked doors at the entrance way. He was leaning casually against the wall beside the intercom panel, and she sucked in her breath at the sight of him. He grinned and tapped the glass. She felt her cheeks flush, feeling foolish and juvenile for the pretense of keeping him waiting down here.

The drive to the restaurant was strained; conversation sparse. Kobe was conscious of his glances in her direction. For her part, she tried to keep her eyes on something, on anything, but him. When the car stopped, she looked up with a start and he must have seen the dismay on her face.

"You used to like this place," he said gently.

Kobe answered too eagerly, "Yes, I did." Then she smiled.

Lance smiled too, confidence returning. "The best pasta in town!"

He ordered for both of them and Kobe watched him for the first time. He hadn't changed that she could see. Still fit. Still so strong and young looking. His red-brown hair thick and heavy. With incredible clarity she recalled twisting those damp strands lazily around her fingers as he talked, in the peace after the stormy passion that began each of their meetings. The memory was tactile, a sensation in her fingertips even now. How she'd loved to listen to his rambling talk of the world he always claimed he wished he could share with her.

"So," he turned from the waiter and grinned at her. "Tell me about your new life, this fella you're going to run off with and marry, and how you've managed to

live without me?"

Catching the teasing tone of his last comment, Kobe relaxed a little. "Oh, it took me a few hours to get over it." She looked away from his searching eyes. "You start, Lance. Tell me about the girls and what you've been doing."

He took the cue without argument, leaning back a bit in his chair with an elaborate display of thought. "The girls are growing. Laurie's in grade two now and Toni will start kindergarten in the fall. Patty's pregnant again. We're hoping for a son this time."

"A boy would be wonderful," Kobe whispered.

"Yes," Lance sighed. "And I'm still working at the same place. And I'm still missing you."

Kobe tried to look stern. Her mouth was dry. She shook her head.

"Your turn then," Lance said. "Tell me why you left."

"You must know that," Kobe looked down at her hands, the old hurt throbbing in her throat. That desperate voice on the telephone ringing again in her ears. She looked across at Lance and tried to smile. "I'll tell you what I've found where I went."

She tried to tell him about the bush town that was her home, and about the children she taught, and about Willy and the wedding they had planned for next Christmas. All through dinner she tried to tell him, but Lance had a disconcerting way of looking through her. She felt she was babbling since he so seldom responded to what she said. His comments were random arrows. Non-sequiturs. Each one leaving her fumbling for words for a moment:

"Remember that soccer game, kid. When I hurt my knee and you had to carry me to the car..."

"Kobe, that big gorilla at the zoo. The one that threw the peanuts at us? He's not there anymore..."

"You always were sentimental. Do you remember the Valentine chocolates you gave me? And you insisted that I eat them all since I couldn't take them home? I was so sick..."

A strange swelling in her throat, Kobe



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felt some unseen wall stood between them on the table. They were looking at one another, but each carried out a private pantomime. Like poor actors they uttered their lines, never taking their cue from the other.

When he mentioned the soccer game, Kobe thought of Willy teaching her to snowshoe, and him massaging her aching legs and shoulders at the end of the day.

The gorilla Lance recalled so sadly brought to her mind the horseback rides in the mountains and the animals roaming free there that Willy would point out to her.

And when Lance laughed over the Valentine chocolates, she remembered the cake Willy had taken such pains to bake for her birthday. How dismayed he had been when it wouldn't rise.

Coffee came, and through the invisible barrier, she smiled at Lance and pushed her chair back from the table. "Dinner was lovely, Lance. I'll take a cab home, I think. It's been a long day and I've got packing to do."

Kobe stood. She touched his hand, grateful for her own release and a little sorry for him now. "I hope you and Patty have a son."

In the back seat of the cab, by the flickering light of the street lamps, Kobe took the envelope from her purse and read her sister's brief message: "Please don't call him, Kobe."

Sweet Jeanna, she thought, smiling. It's only Neat Freak house-cleaning again. No more secrets. No more games. I promise.



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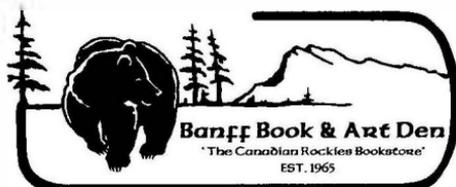
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Once again the Book and Art Den is pleased to welcome renowned author and translator Alberto Manguel back to Banff. While working at the Banff Centre, Mr. Manguel will offer a public lecture tentatively scheduled for Monday, May 30. Though the date has not been finalized, the Book and Art Den plans to have Mr. Manguel signing copies of his new anthology "Meanwhile In Another Part of the Forest". Call us for details at 762-3919.

Hikers and backpackers will be happy to see the release of the sixth edition of

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

"The Canadian Rockies Trail Guide" by Brian Patton and Bart Robinson. With over 185,000 copies sold since the first edition in 1971, the guide has been an essential companion to many people who have trudged these Mountain's trails.

Among the other nocturnal creatures that inhabit the Rockies be sure to keep an eye out for vampires! Canadian writer Nancy Baker's new book "Blood and Chrysanthemums" is a vampire thriller set in Banff! Watch for an author reading and autographing in August.

LINSEED OIL

Poetry by Nancy Bullis

It's been
seventeen moves in fifteen years,
few consistencies, except maybe a lot of
time spent
buying things and throwing them out,
something I had to go through to find out
what's important,
a knife, a fork and my old school desk
from days of ink wells

One of my first acquisitions and I still
haven't refinished it,
simple, solid oak,
it would be easy to do,
a little linseed oil and a few
Saturday afternoons

It's amazing what time can do when you
polish the same spot,
that's what he was trying to tell me eight
years ago

Delayed reaction,
there is no refund for time spent on
foolhardy purposes,
no other way it could be,
it was necessary to the process,
something I never put any value in,
process,
always wanting the latest color,
the newest song,
I thought it uninteresting to watch
something grow.

I had my first fire in the fireplace last night,
stocking the embers I ran out of wood,
I could only poke for so long before all I
had left
were dinosaurs,
extinction hasn't stopped scientists from
searching
for what went wrong,
I've been blaming myself for my own
conservation

The pictures aren't on the walls yet,
each time the choice changes except for a few,
the dog, the boy with the wine, and Churchill

Picked Winnie up for the price of the frame,
I was into eyebrows at the time,
the essence of the man,
understanding failure,

didn't capture me until after my days dating
in a cartoon land

We created storyboard characters thinking
reality took care of itself,
I thought some guy in the sky was going
to save the world

Books are easy to unpack
not much thought to know where they go
except if it's alphabetical, chronological or
by genre

My dream was to live in a science fiction
theme park,
being the alien from another planet,
I was always planning my escape to the
time of teleports
or the place John Lennon wrote about

Imagination isn't always a good thing,
he'd say asking,
when's dinner? only mortals eat, I'd say,
a fundamental difference in our lifestyles

I know how to cook simple meals now,
what it's like counting vitamins,
I didn't know how satisfying limitations
could be

I like to eat goat,
something I didn't have the patience for
as a child,
always lifting the lid,
how long will it take?
is it done yet?
can I go now?

As an adult I leave when I please,
not always understanding that time
is the greatest reasoner

Not to say,
that I left too soon,
or I shouldn't have at all,
or it took too long to remember,
no one can say when is right

Acceptance begins with yielding to what
can't be forgotten
about myself,
just like that old school desk

On Saturday I am going shopping for a
little linseed oil and a chamois

HOW I SPENT MY SUMMER HOLIDAYS

by
W.O. MITCHELL

That summer of 1924 we dug two caves, or rather, *started* one and finished one. Lobbidy Lon Cavanaugh and the Liar and Angus Hannah and Peter Deane-Cooper and Austin Musgrave and I began one in Austin's back yard. Just Peter Deane-Cooper and I dug the second one in Muhlbier's sheep pasture between the Mental hole and Brokenshell Grove, our own secret one.

The summer of 1924 was unusually hot and dry with no rain through most of May and June so that we spent a great deal of time swimming out at the Mental hole or the CPR hole in the Little Souris, or lying under somebody's caragana. The day we began the first cave, we had all been in the shade of Musgraves' hedge, wondering whether we should go out to the Mental hole to swim, or to the building site of the new Co-op Creamery to find tar, or north of town to drown out gophers, or over to the sash-and-door factory for scrap lumber to build stilts or to build kites or to build arrow guns, or to the blacksmith shop for horseshoe nails. Someone said it would be fun to dig a cave which would be lovely cool. Austin said we could do it in his back yard and Lobbidy said he had boards so we ought to build it in his yard so we wouldn't have to haul the boards over to Musgraves' yard, and Musgrave said he couldn't leave because his grampa might wake up from his afternoon nap and go out and get lost and he had promised his mother he wouldn't let that happen again, so we'd better dig the cave in his back yard, and

if we pitched in right away we'd have the cave finished before his grampa woke up. We agreed to that.

Musgrave's house was four blocks south of our house on Sixth Street; the Liar and Angus Hannah lived closer to me, but I suppose I saw more of Musgrave than I did of them or any other boy in town. This was not my choice. I can still see Musgrave's very freckled face snarling into the sun in birthday-party and school-class photos, though not in my Sunday-school picnic pictures, for the Musgraves were Baptist. We were Presbyterian. Peter Deane-Cooper was Anglican. Lobbidy Lon was Catholic. I think the Liar was Methodist.

Musgrave could make me feel warm and liked. He did this by skillfully creating confidentiality, then bonding me by revealing to me how dirty and mean all the other fellows really were, by telling me what they were saying about me behind my back and what they planned to do to me. Ho once told me, for instance, that Peter Deane-Cooper had got a four-foot length of half-inch galvanized pipe from behind Nickerson's Plumbing and Heating, and that Peter intended to hide in Hannah's caragana, then stick the pipe into the spokes of my bike's front wheel when I rode by. Musgrave would then fill the sick void within me with protestations of unyielding friendship and promises that from now on he would never play with anybody but me and that I must play with nobody else but him and that he would help me get even with the others. He would not make all that strong an ally, because he couldn't put anybody down and must have known that, for he never *tried* to put anyone down. Male. He ran. He must have been the fastest runner in town or in Saskatchewan or in

Canada or in North America. For his age. Musgrave's totem would have to be the wildebeest. Even more fitting, the coyote.

He had a grampa, his mother's father, a tall, rosy octogenarian with buttermilk-blue eyes and the sad and equine face of William S. Hart. I do not know of any film cowboys who came before William S. Hart; he actually pre-dated the cowboy hat itself, later to be worn by Ken Maynard and Hoot Gibson and Tom Mix. William S. Hart's hat was either Boy Scout or RCMP issue, with leather thongs knotted under his chin. We never were given a close shot of William S. Hart's face next to his horse's; you could not have told it from his horse's. Same with Austin's grampa, if he were near a horse.

Musgrave's after-fours and Saturdays were often ruined by his grampa; Sundays had already been damaged for all of us by adults. Musgrave's grampa was always getting lost. He would get out of the house and the yard and wander down the street in his Boy Scout hat, with his cane and with a lumpy knapsack between his shoulder-blades, and Musgrave would have to go all over town, knocking on strange doors and asking people if they'd seen anything of his grampa who had got lost again. That did not work if the old man had made it out onto the prairie beyond the town limits.

Musgrave's grampa seemed to have led a most interesting life; he said he had been imprisoned in Fort Garry by Louis Riel when the Red River Rebellion started, that he was a close friend of Scott, whom Riel executed in 1869. In the Saskatchewan Rebellion, when Louis came back from Montana to lead the half-breeds again, Musgrave's grampa

was the first man out of Colonel Boulton's Rangers to set foot in Batoche after it fell. He sat on the jury that condemned Louis Riel to hang in 1885. By using simple arithmetic and his age, you know he could have done all these things, and I believed him till Musgrave said his grampa was an historical liar. I still thought he was interesting.

No one was ever able to get behind the old man; he always sat in a corner with the two walls meeting behind his back; this was so in the Musgrave house or anywhere else. Musgrave's mother had to cut her father's hair and shave him because he refused to sit in Leon's barber chair, his back unprotected in the Royal Pool Hall. If he met someone on the street and stopped to talk, he must have felt vulnerable, for he would always circle uneasily until he had a building wall or a hedge or a fence at his back. Sometimes he would have to settle just for a telephone pole.

He had a very sensible reason for this: "They're comin' to get me one day!" It was never quite clear to me *who* was coming to get him one day, though I had my suspicions. Whoever it was pretty nearly had to be a half-breed and a close relative or friend of Louis Riel.

I sincerely believed that someone was after him; nobody would have spent as much time as he did out in the Musgrave privy, if someone weren't coming to get him one day. From the May meadowlark when the sun had got high and strong to fall harvest he spent more time out there, with four walls closing safe around him, than he did in the house. I can hardly recall a visit to Musgraves' that there wasn't blue smoke breathing from the diamond cut-out in their backhouse door. We had inside plumbing.

Another thing about Musgrave's grampa: he had saliva trouble. It was as though his glands manufactured it perpetually so that he had to keep gathering it and gathering it until his mouth had a full cargo of it, then he would shake his head violently from side to side and spit. He did this about every thirty seconds. In the house there were spittoons for him, which Musgrave had to empty every other day. Whenever you saw Austin's grampa going down Sixth Street his expectoration rate was about once to every hundred paces and always on alternating sides. Whoever was coming to get him one day would simply have to follow the saliva trail he left.

The summer of 1924 was a year after Peter Deane-Cooper had migrated to Canada with his family from England. Like me he was an only child. His father was an engineer with the company doing coal strip-mining along the Montana border. All through his first Canadian winter, even in forty-below weather, Peter's mother kept him wearing short English stove-pipe pants, with knee socks that had a length of ribbon hanging down from them just like bookmarkers. Peter had blue knees all that winter.

To make our cave we all carried boards over from Lobbidy's, went home for our own round-nosed shovel or spade or pick or garden fork or bar. Like the gopher and the coyote, the badger and the weasel, we were all digging animals; with the prairie tree situation we pretty well had no choice. Our cave-digging technique never varied: first the sod squares had to be cut out with a spade, then carefully laid aside so that they could be placed back over the cave roof later in exactly the same relationship they'd initially had to each other. After the cave had been dug deep enough,

boards would be laid across the excavation, the spoil spread out over the boards and tramped down, the sods replaced. The result would be only a slight earth swelling. We hoped. As well we would dig a narrow trench, cover it with short boards, and camouflage the resulting tunnel in the same way we had done the cave itself. Nowhere in *A Thousand Things a Boy Can Do* is this cave-digging method mentioned.

Shovel and spade and fork plunged easily through the eighteen inches of topsoil in Musgraves' back yard, but when we got down to the hardpan the clay was heart-and-back-breaking. Rock hard, in this dry year, it loosened under pick and bar in reluctant sugar-lumps. Stinging with sweat, we rested often, reclining at the edge of our shallow excavation.

"If a fellow only had a fresno and a team, he could really scoop her out." That was Lobbidy.

"If a fellow could soak her good," the Liar said, "run her full of water—soften her up..."

"Easy digging then," Angus said.

"Yeah!" I said.

"If a fellow could only blow her out," the Liar said.

"How?" I said.

"Search me," Lobbidy said.

"Stumping-powder—dynamite." That was the Liar again.

"It's our yard."

"Oh yes—indeed—dynamite." Peter always spoke with that polite English accent that English people always have. In southern Saskatchewan they certainly do.

"Whump an' she'd blow our cave for us," the Liar said.

"It's not your yard!"

"She sure would," Lobbidy said.

"Only place I know—where they got dynamite—CPR sheds," the Liar said.

"We can't go swiping dynamite," Angus said.

"I tell you—it's our back yard!"

"I can get you dynamite." Up until Peter said that I had been thinking how stupid Musgrave was to keep right on saying it was his back yard. He ought to know that dynamite simply did not belong in our world, that it was quite *imaginary* dynamite we had been tossing around in conversation. But now I knew that Deane-Cooper meant *real* dynamite, and I felt sick.

"We can't go swiping dynamite." Angus must have felt sick too; he knew just as well as I did that if Peter Deane-Cooper said he could get you dynamite, he not only *could* get you dynamite, you could not *stop* him from getting you dynamite.

"We don't know a thing about handling dynamite," I said.

"I do."

"I think it's a great idea!" The Liar would think that! "Why not?"

"We might wake up Musgrave's grampa." Somehow, even as I said that, I knew there must be a better reason for us not to set off dynamite in Musgraves' back yard.

"Had most of his nap by now—hasn't he?" Peter got up. He said to Austin, "Are you frightened?"

"Uh—no." Musgrave was lying. "Won't it be dangerous?"

"No."

"Why won't it be?" I said.

"In the first place—our cave location. There's nothing dangerously near it at all. Over sixty yards from the back porch." That was true. Our cave sight was about halfway between the

Musgrave house and the Musgrave back-house, beyond which there was open prairie. To the right and a good hundred feet away was a pile of wood chunks, perhaps four cords of them. Not stacked. Just in a heap. Almost the same distance on the other side were two clothes-line poles. "In the second place," Peter was saying, "I'm very good with dynamite. I helped my father—in the old country."

"We can't go swiping dynamite," Angus said.

"My father has a whole case of sixty percent in the garage. You—Lobbidy—have them do the hole."

"I'll come with you," the Liar said, the son of a bitch!

"What hole?" Lobbidy said.

"For the dynamite—with the bar—straight down about four foot, I should say."

"I'll come with you."

"Whole goddam case?" Lobbidy said.

"Dead centre—the hole." Peter and the Liar were already heading for the Deane-Cooper garage.

"Is he bringing back a whole case?" Angus's face was worried.

"Goddam the Liar!" Lobbidy said.

I agreed with him. If the Liar hadn't been so enthusiastic about the dynamite, maybe Peter wouldn't have insisted we blow our cave.

"Anything happens it's his fault just as much as Peter's," Musgrave always knew whose fault everything was.

We never called Russell Matheson the Liar to his face. He lied a great deal. There was nothing *useful* about his lies; he was a pure liar. Strangler Lewis, he said, was his uncle. On his mother's side. The Minister of Agriculture, Federal, was his uncle too. Also by marriage. Another uncle had invented the Eskimo Pie. He had an older sister,

much older, who had grown up and left the Matheson family to be a missionary in India. Her name was Vera and she seemed quite important to the Liar, for the way he always said her name made me think of Roger's Golden Syrup pouring. Vera was brilliant. Vera possessed a brain three times larger than your average human brain, and indeed scientists in Germany had already made arrangements to get her brain for study purposes. After she died. I never saw the Liar's sister, Vera, but if she ever did come home of sabbatical from the mission fields of India, I know I'd sure as hell recognize her even at a long distance, with that great big, puffed-up head three times larger than normal.

I preferred the Liar to Musgrave; if the Liar said something mean about you, it didn't damage you, because everybody know that nine times out of ten he was lying. He always smelled like sheep because he had eczema and the ointment for it must have had a lanolin base. The very fact that he never said his eczema ointment was made out of sheep would lead a person to believe that was a true explanation of why he always smelled like a sheep.

With the Liar it was hard to tell whether he even had an older sister named Vera.

The hole went down rather slowly until Peter and the Liar returned with the dynamite. Three sticks. Peter just tossed them on the ground and took over authority. He did twice his share of punching down the dynamite hole, stopping only to estimate how much further we had left to go down. When it suited him, he dropped two of the sticks down, one on top of the other. There was no tenderness in the way he handled that dynamite. Besides the three sticks

he had brought back a length of fuse and a copper tube, which he explained was a detonator; then he crimped it with his teeth. He used a spike to work a hole in the third stick of dynamite to receive the cap and fuse. He sure as hell told the truth when he said he was very good with dynamite.

We watched him shove the loose clay in around the sticks, then tramp it firm with the bar. With his jack-knife he split the free end of the fuse protruding from the ground. He took a match from his pocket.

"Hold on a minute!" Musgrave said. "Where do we—what do we—how long do we..."

"Once it's going there should be three minutes. Plenty of time to take cover."

"What cover!" I said.

"Round the corner of the house, I suggest. You may go there now if you wish. I shall come when the fuse is ignited. They're rather difficult to start, you know—it might take several matches."

We all stayed. The fuse took only three matches. Then we ran and we threw ourselves round the corner of the Musgrave house and looked back. Peter had not run with us; he was still coming. He did it by strolling—with his hands in those sissy-looking English pants of his.

The way it told you how in *A Thousand Things a Boy Can Do*, I had begun to count to myself so that I would have a rough notion of when the three minutes would be up. I had reached fifty-and-nine when we heard the Musgrave screen door slap the afternoon stillness.

Lobbidy said, "Judas priest!"

Angus said, "He's headed for the backhouse!"

"He's got his knapsack and his Boy Scout hat and his cane on," I said.

"Maybe he's just going out to get lost!"

Musgrave started round the corner of the house, but Lobbidy grabbed him back. "Let him keep going, Musgrave. Let him keep going so he'll get into the clear!"

"He's my grampa!"

"I shall get him!"

"There ain't even one minute left!" Lobbidy said. That stopped Peter.

I had no way of telling if Lobbidy was right, for I had stopped counting as soon as the Musgrave screen door had slapped.

"He's stopped!" Angus yelled.

He had—right between the clothes-line poles and the woodpile, on our side of the project, which meant he was no more than twelve feet from the sputtering fuse. I don't think he stopped because of our digging, but to gather spit. He shook his head and spit.

Peter launched himself round the corner of the house, and belly to the ground he ran up behind Austin's grampa. *Behind* the old man. Musgrave's grampa heard the running footsteps coming from *behind* him. They *had* finally come to get him!

He did not even look back to see who it was. After all these years I suppose he still had a pretty clear idea of who it would be. With Peter close behind him, he set a new octogenarian thirty-yard-dash record, and not the one for level ground, either: both for them hurdled the pile of sods, into and then across, and up and out of our excavation, then on to the privy. The old man jumped to safety inside and pulled the door shut. Without missing a stride, Peter pounded past and out to the prairie beyond. Out there he was still running with his head back, chin out, arms pumping, knees high, when the three sticks of sixty-

percent dynamite let go.

The first effect was not sound at all. Initially the Musgrave yard was taken by one giant and subterranean hiccup; an earth fountain spouted; the four cords of wood took flight; the two clothes-line posts javelined into the air, their wires still stretched between them in an incredible aerial cat's cradle. And the privy. And Musgrave's grampa. They leapt. Straight up. I think the bottom of the backhouse must have lifted six feet from ground level.

The privy was the first thing to return to earth, and when it fell its descent obeyed Newton's Law of Falling Backhouses, which says: "A falling privy shall always come to rest upon the door side." The corollary: "A loved one trapped within cannot be taken out on the vertical, only through the hole and upon the horizontal."

After the lambasting explosion we looked at each other wildly; we swallowed to unbung our ears, heard the lovely Japanese chiming of glass shards dropping from every Musgrave house window, the thud of wood chunks returning to earth. I saw Musgrave lick with the tip of his tongue at a twin blood yarn unravelling from his nostrils. No one said anything; we simply moved as a confused body in the direction of the backhouse. And Musgrave's grampa.

We had to go out and around the great, shallow saucer the dynamite had blown in Musgraves' back year, and I remember thinking, "They're never going to ever fill that in." How could they? To get the thousands of cubic feet of dirt to fill that crater, they would have to dig another hole to get an equal quantity of dirt to fill in the new hole. And another—and another—

It was not all that deep, possibly four

feet at the centre, but it was wide; if we had completed the project it would have taken all the lumber from a grain elevator to roof it in. I'm certain it would have been the biggest cave dug in southern Saskatchewan that summer.

It took all of us to upright the privy and Musgrave's grampa. When we opened the door to let the poor old man out, he was not grateful. He swung at us with his cane a couple of times before he would let Musgrave and Lobbidy help him to the house and into his room off the kitchen. Seated there on a Winnipeg couch, he stared straight ahead as Musgrave removed his Boy Scout hat, slipped off his knapsack, then with an arm around the old man's shoulders eased him down on the pillow. He motioned us out of the room.

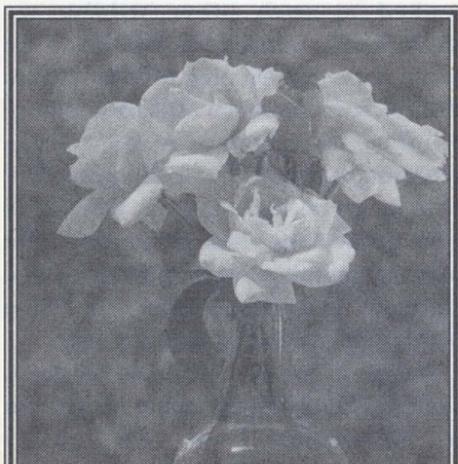
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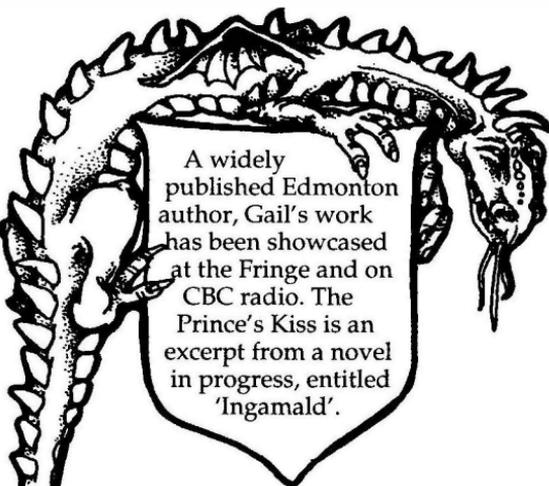
PETALS
on second

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At a recent meeting, the editorial team brainstormed a list of writers they'd like to showcase in upcoming issues:

- 1). Stephen King
- 2). Robertson Davies
- 3). Anne Rice
- 4). Charles Bukowski
- 5). Jeffrey Archer

Who would you pick if you could have any writer in the world? Let us know by dropping us a line at Box 32, 9944 - 33 Ave. Edmonton, Alberta, T6N 1E8.



A widely published Edmonton author, Gail's work has been showcased at the Fringe and on CBC radio. The Prince's Kiss is an excerpt from a novel in progress, entitled 'Ingamald'.

THE PRINCE'S KISS

Fantasy
by

Gail Sidonie Sobat

Heavy oak doors swung slowly open, allowing Ingamald and the merchants and peasants who waited impatiently to enter the walled city. Much commotion attended their bustling as each hastened to his business and to the market square. Bewildered amongst the thrusting goodwives and their cackling poultry, the carts of noisy hucksters, the running, laughing children, Ingamald thought to herself how easily the Musica would find their place within this crowd. Out of the corner of her eye she spotted Beezle's cat-tail disappearing into the shadow of an alley and, quite suddenly, the witch stood alone, not far within the gates, and considered her bearings.

Dwellings, with strong wooden beams and thick straw thatches, were fine and grand, spreading out in a fan from the main road. Shops and smithies lined streets opposite the houses. Somewhere off to the right the train of people had headed for the market square. Ingamald followed the dust they rose, looking for the spires of the Ruheplatz palace. Along the way she espied several of the notices she had penned announcing the arrival of the Musica. She smiled at this thought as streets opened up into a large central square where waresellers were already setting up tables and stands. Ingamald approached a knife grinder and inquired of the whereabouts of the palace. Her

request met a gruff dismissal. She wandered away seeking a friendlier face, but paused, fascinated, before a theatrical wagon where actors, tumblers, and jugglers practiced for that afternoon's performance.

A burst of flame just to her left made her gasp in surprise. A wiry young man in motley raised a burning torch to his gaping mouth. Ingamald reached forth a hand too late to stop him as he seemed to swallow the torch. Pulling the smoking instrument from his mouth, he smiled at her. Then lifting his chin to the sky, his open lips flamed forth a pillar of fire.

"You might want to close *your* mouth, then," his first words greeted her.

"I'm quite all right, y'see. Jus' a bit o' soot from me flame." He wiped his blackened cheeks with the back of his hand. "Me name's Ingo. What's yours, lass?"

"Ingamald. Th-this is your living?" Ingamald stood incredulous.

"Aye. This an' a bit o' that. I'm with me troupe 'ere. But mostly I'm a fire eater. Me specialty. And tell me, 'ow do you make your living?" He eyed her leather pouches.

"I don't. Well, at least not yet. I must speak with the wizard Jygaard. I would... like to be his apprentice."

Ingo whistled softly. "Apprentice to the great wizard, you say? One so mighty will look to you?"

"Aye. And I would greatly thank you

to point out the road to the castle, as my time is pressed, and I would be on my way."

Something in her tone made him consider her seriously. "Aye. We ourselves go there this very night. The young prince lies ill in a deep sleep, and the boys and me—for a pretty price, mind you—will do all that can be done t'ease the poor king's mind. And that o' his daughter's." He chuckled. "Now the way." He rambled off a series of directions which Ingamald noted carefully.

"My thanks, Fire eater Ingo."

"A pleasure, wizard's apprentice Ingamald." Turning on her heel to the left, she sought the beginning of her path, and left him puzzling behind her.

"I will speak with Jygaard," Ingamald crossly told the guard who barred her entrance to the great castle before her. "Send a message. Tell him Ingamald of Hören wood is here."

"Admit the girl, guard," commanded a bass voice. From the shadows stepped a tall, pale man, grey-bearded and dressed in a rich, blue robe dotted with silver stars.

"I am the wizard Jygaard."

"I am the witch Ingamald."

"I have prepared a room for you in the castle, student of Hana. Come." Jygaard passed stately through the corridors, and led Ingamald through a maze of passages and flights of steps before pausing at a chamber door. "Your room. Inside is your maidservant who will attend to your comforts. I must return to the king. His son lies very ill. I trust you can find your way to the royal antechamber once you are settled."

"Aye."

He turned abruptly from her and rushed down the corridor.

Ingamald lifted the latch of the door and entered the room. Her eyes were greeted by a large, bright chamber with latticed windows thrown open to catch the morning breeze. A four-poster bed—capable of sleeping four people, it seemed to Ingamald—stood against one tapestried wall. The other walls were

similarly covered, and she admired these for a few moments before a soft-spoken girl appeared at her side.

"Be there anything the mistress wants?"

"I am no mistress. I am Ingamald. What are you called?"

With lowered gaze the maid replied "Gært."

"Well, Gært, as you can see I have little with me to unpack and what I have I will do myself. So you are free to go."

"I mayn't go, mistr...Ingamald. My duty is here."

Ingamald frowned, then acquiesced. "Show me what else there is to see of this room."

Gært brightened and led the witch about the chamber, commenting on the story of a piece of furniture here, a particular scene in a tapestry there. Behind a curtain was another door leading to Gært's own small room, and a basin of steaming water. Ingamald took a moment to wash and dry her face, and then wandered over to Gært's side at the window. A lovely courtyard garden full of trees laden with ripening fruit lay below. Songbirds darted about and several paths invited casual strollers. Ingamald was delighted. Gært then took her to the small desk set before the fireplace hearth, where parchment, ink and quills were available for her mistress' use.

Her tour finished, Ingamald prepared to meet Jygaard and the King of Ruheplatz. She pulled her green cloak from her pouch, but found it wrinkled and of no use to her. Gært took it in her capable hands, promising it would be good as new when she had done.

In solitude, Ingamald sat upon the great bed, pondering the way to the antechamber. True, she could use a spell of revealing to unravel the maze of corridors, but she did not appreciate this game Jygaard had set before her. Or she could use another's wits.

"Gært," she beckoned, and the young woman appeared from behind the curtain. "How does one reach the royal antechamber?"

"Oh, aye!" exclaimed Gært, eager to be

of assistance. She gave detailed directions, and satisfied, the witch quit her chamber and brought herself before the great apartment of the king.

Jygaard strode out to meet and accompany her into the throne room.

"Majesty, the girl I spoke of...Ingamald, pupil to Hana of Hören wood," he pronounced, with a slight bow to his superior.

The king surveyed the rough, common attire, the wild red hair, the bold green gaze. Then he smiled. "Greetings, Ingamald. Come closer, child. Be not afraid."

"I am neither child nor afraid, king."

Both he and Jygaard started. "Ingamald," warned Jygaard sternly, "you will address his Highness appropriately or you do yourself dishonor and..."

The king waved the wizard's words. "She spoke no insolence, Jygaard. I would more men were as forthright in their dealings with me." Then turning his attention back to her: "Ingamald, if you please, a little closer."

She approached the raised platform, where King Rote of Ruheplatz sat upon his gilt throne.

"We are pleased with your arrival. Indeed, we have expected you these several weeks. Jygaard himself is very eager to begin your lessons. However, you arrive at a time of deep anxiety." His face relaxed its formality to reveal a sad weariness. "My only son, who fell from his steed ten days past, lies in impenetrable sleep. We have tried everything, everything, and I fear..."

"Majesty," Jygaard interjected, "today I have concocted another medicine draught. Do not lose hope."

A young woman stepped into the room. "Ah, my daughter Gretchen. Come hither, my dear, and meet Ingamald, who has come to study with Jygaard."

Ingamald greeted the young woman dressed in a velvet gown the color of sky. Her face was downcast, her beautiful eyes sorrowful. The witch had never seen anyone so delicately lovely and so disheartened.

"Papa, he worsens," Gretchen half-sobbed.

Ingamald stepped forward and, raising her voice, announced, "Perhaps there is something I can do to help?"

Jygaard laughed gently. "We appreciate your offer, Ingamald. However, this is an illness immune to even my best arts, thus far."

Ingamald lifted her green eyes to the king and his daughter. "We will take you to him, Ingamald," said the king. "Perhaps your witchery may work some good."

Together the small party left the grand throne room through a small door to enter the young prince's sickroom. A brazier heaped with coals was near the bed, and the stifling air hung heavy with the smell of medicinal herbs. Beneath thick robes lay a pale, fair young man whose skin glistened with perspiration. Ingamald saw movement behind the closed eyes and moved to lift an eyelid, but Jygaard's deep voice invaded her thoughts.

"You know naught of this illness. You are but an apprentice, witch. Know your place! Do not imperil the prince!"

Ingamald snapped a bold retort, "You forget who I am, Jygaard!" and shot him a cold emerald spark. Neither king nor princess knew anything of what passed between wizard and witch.

Aloud, Ingamald spoke, "The prince is in the realm of dream. I must cross the threshold and bring him back.. But first I must know his name."

"Randulfr," Gretchen blurted, her hopeful eyes upon the witch. Ingamald smiled at her and, without warning, placed her lips to the prince's.

She slipped from the sick chamber, from her body, through the prince's body and into his thoughts. A long, spiralling walk brought her to a deep, dark chasm: the one she sensed Jygaard the Wizard had feared to cross. But Ingamald would challenge the dark place.

She jumped the chasm. And saw what waking mortals never see: the stuff of dreams. Ingamald meandered past a carnival where mythical beasts performed to strange music. She wandered a cavern of weirdish colors and

stranger sounds bounced off its walls. Above her soared a flying machine, noiseless and graceful. A stream crossed her path, and so she swam, emerging dry on the opposite bank. Strangers greeted her at random. Pungent tastes and aromas touched her senses. And all the while she called out for Randulfr.

Quite suddenly she came to a desert. No sound, no one in sight.

Puffs of dust rose from her softly treading feet. Ahead, upon this nightscape was a cliff-face and within it a cave, a whirling, shadowy void. Across the hollow mouth, strands of moonlit spider's web, fluid with motion in the dry wind. Ingamald paused, shuddered. She had seen this place before. Her feet took a few faltering steps forward. But this moment was neither her time, nor her quest. She sought to help another. Ingamald turned on her heel sharply to the left.

Some paces further, she found the prince, leaning against a willow tree, a self-indulgent smile upon his face.

"Randulfr, I have looked long for you."

"Who are you?"

She told him.

"Charming. Sit awhile under this willow tree and all we wish for will come to pass.

"No, I will not sit. You must return with me at once."

"No. I will not," he countered.

Ingamald studied the young man's expression, glazed with ecstasy.

"You see, I wish for a sweet. Now I have a sweet," he laughed, munching.

"Aye, you have a sweet. But it is no real sweet, but an illusion. Neither this sweet nor any other food here gives your living body sustenance."

"What care I for my living body?"

"But to stay here, Randulfr, is a kind of death," she persisted reasonably.

"It is a death I choose."

"Why, when you have an anxious father who longs to see you healed, a kingdom that you will one day rule, a life in the sunshine rather than shadow, a loving sister who grieves for you?"

His brow furrowed as he absorbed her words. "You are no beauty."

Ingamald met his gaze. "No, I have not the fine, sweet features of your sister, who is

indeed very lovely."

"Ah, Gretchen."

Ingamald sensed her advantage. "I have spoken of her grief. She misses you. Do you not long to see her again?"

"I may see her when I wish. I may have any conversation with her I choose. You see, here she comes now." He stood to embrace the image of Gretchen who smiled lovingly into his face.

"But this is not Gretchen with whom you speak. This is but a reflection of your memories, a reflection of yourself. You do not truly see or touch her. The living Gretchen takes no comfort from your embrace. She weeps still on the other side of dreaming."

The prince gazed languidly at the shadow-Gretchen, unheeding of the witch's words. There was nought to do but frighten him back to waking. "Besides," continued Ingamald, centering her energy, "betimes what we dream is not so pleasant."

"Whatever do you mean?"

The witch raised her arms. "Look to the princess now, Prince! Behold!"

Randulfr was willed to obey. He turned to survey a scene on a rocky, windswept shore. A single, barren tree clung to the cliff edge. Bound to this tree, his beloved sister wept and cried out in terror. Toward her, mighty with green scale and firebreath, swung a fire Drake. Sparks flew from clawed, grotesque feet as it landed next to Gretchen. A belch of flame engulfed the terrified princess. The prince tried to block the death-scream from his ears, but there was no refuge in this place of dream. Merciless, the beast poised a twisted talon, ripped a gash from chin to stomach, disembowelled Gretchen's writhing body. Hungrily it feasted as the prince watched on, pale and aghast.

The scene changed instantly to a funeral bier. Upon it lay a shrouded figure. Randulfr felt his feet drawn toward the raised platform, his shaking hands lift the shroud.... Screaming, he shrank away from the mangled, rotting corpse of his sister, wormsmeat.

"Take me back! Oh, let me awake from this vision! This horror! Take me, take me back!"

The nightmare ended. Ingamald smiled and took his hand. "Just as you wish, my prince."

She led him as though he were a child across a now serene mindscape, the visions of

his dreams having dissolved away once he resolved to wake. Slowly his fear gave way to trust, and Randulfr held fast to his guide's hand. Composed and reassured, he jumped into the chasm without hesitation. Together they wended back. At threshold, Ingamald left him, reentered her body, returned to her room.

The prince's eyes fluttered open and he breathed a deep sigh of relief. He smiled up at Ingamald. In an instant of real

time, all that the onlookers beheld was the witch wake the prince with a single kiss. And so ever after the legends told it.



EYES OF LOVE

by

Joy Mc N. Walker

I found Him in the woods,
In lillies white,
And in the stars at night;
I sought Him in the words

Of mighty men;
I lost him for a time - and then -
Him, deep in my true love's eyes
I found again.

THE DANCER

by

Ann Baker Antignano

I turn the music louder
As I twirl
My skirt billows
As I twirl
My feet fly
As I twirl
A handsome young man holds me
As I twirl

From a mirror watches
An old, old woman
Wrinkles line her face like gridwork
An old, old woman
Stares out at me
An old, old woman
Scowls her displeasure that I'm not
An old, old woman

As I twirl
I turn the music louder
An old, old woman
Watches, watches from her mirror
As I twirl.

ABSENCE

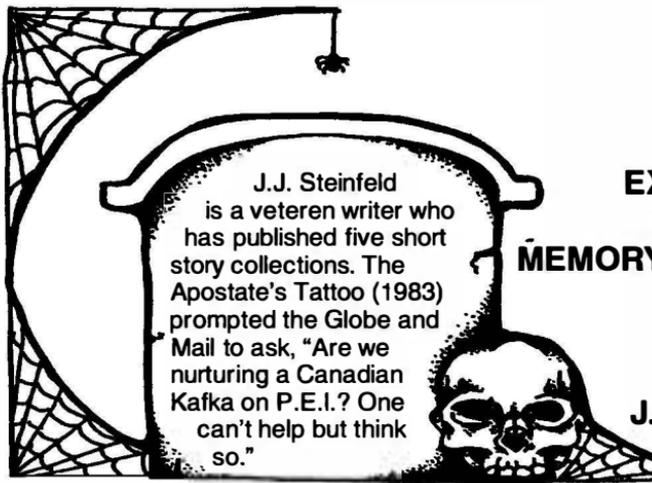
by

Bernice Lever

What catches in the throat
is not the breath
but its absence.

Something is stuck
in your system;
your mouth opens
but words refuse birth
trying to share awkward sounds
as the unseen family hovers
memories fill your eyes
that are lost in the darkening silence.





J.J. Steinfeld is a veteran writer who has published five short story collections. The *Apostate's Tattoo* (1983) prompted the *Globe and Mail* to ask, "Are we nurturing a Canadian Kafka on P.E.I.? One can't help but think so."

EXECUTIONS AND THE MEMORY OF EXECUTIONS

Horror
by
J.J. Steinfeld

"He used to be a junkie," I hear one of the three voices in the room say, but I keep my eyes shut and don't move. It is a soft voice. The smoke in the room is coming from his chain-smoking. I don't want them—the three voices standing around me—to know I'm listening. I'm alert, hearing their every word, feeling their presence the way a deep-sea diver feels the water to the lowest level. I'm only pretending to be asleep or dead or numb; my actor's imitative skills can simulate any of the three postures.

"How does a body survive that kind of life?" a high-pitched voice says, little curiosity in his tone. He is standing the closest to me of the three; as he speaks he is also eating something. Before and after his words, biting and hard chewing. Nuts or crackers, something solid, but I don't want to open my eyes to find out. Vile, despicable torturers, I think, but with only the least loathing and not even a nudge of fear. Nothing in this commonplace confinement distresses me.

Before being brought to this room, I was riding a bicycle, an expensive racing bicycle of the lightest modern alloy. Riding fast, breathing in unison with the wind. It was near a cliff along the sea, the dark analgesic water inches away, but I did not fear a fall into the sea. Death by drowning used to be one of my boyhood

fears, the frequent landscape of my nightmares. I used to be covered by fears; fears of death, of losing control, of being tortured by pitiless adults. As I grew older and matured I passed from fearing death to imagining ways of dying and eventually to an indifference to death, my death, the deaths of others—strangers, friends, lovers - I ceased to make distinctions. I remember what my first supervisor showed me when I originally came to work under his jurisdiction, something he had written as a young man and was still most proud of as he approached retirement: "I have stood in front of countless firing squads; I have felt around my neck a hundred slip-nooses tied by a hundred hands; I have bitten into capsules containing the strongest poisons...." It took me years to understand what he meant, the feelings behind the words, his complete lack of cynicism or unease with life.

"The ways to kill a person are innumerable; the ways to die are all the same." I wrote that five years ago, during one of my imprisonments — an imprisonment of deprivation and total isolation on the other side of the world.

"I knew a woman who slept with him," the animal voice in the room says — a voice suffused by a peculiar, difficult breathing. A sickly man, perhaps with a heart condition. He lights a cigarette,

takes an audible drag, and coughs. The smoke in the room increases, but I've been confined in rooms with ten times as much smoke.

I will not open my eyes. I trust my senses more when my eyes are closed. Pretending to be asleep. Or dead. Or numb. Sometimes I really am numb. I have come upon corpses and thought about nothing out of the ordinary; observed lifelessness with the detachment of a tired battlefield surgeon or a jaded artist painting cadavers. Corpses, the stench of stale decay and even staler mystery, but my thoughts were unrippled, protected. I even stopped staring at the corpses, stopped wondering about the deaths, about their last thoughts before lifelessness. It was the image I was concerned with, nothing but the surface image. A corpse, I came to realize, has no history, no artistry, no compelling mystery.

A finger touches me lightly on my left buttock. Without any shock I suddenly realize that I'm naked. I don't feel cold or unclothed, but I am naked. Naked and lying face down on a large table covered by a coarse cloth, perhaps an old woollen blanket once used for picnics in the countryside. The finger moves over my left buttock, making a careful design, an outline of a distant star not yet discovered by powerful telescopes, and then the finger goes down the back of my leg to the top of my heel; next a hand slaps the heel as if to discipline someone unruly, maybe a soldier who refuses to obey. I do not stir; my control is strong. I have endured torture before and uttered nothing. I have a lifetime of training to withstand pain. I have never revealed secrets.

"His file states he has a birthmark here," the animal voice says and pinches the skin on the back of my right calf. From bicycling I have well-developed, muscular calves.

"It was surgically removed," the soft voice confidently tells the animal voice.

"His face has been modified many times. Look at the photographs and medical reports in his file," the high-pitched voice, continuing to bite and

chew and swallow, adds like a schoolboy answering a simple question in class.

"Of course it is him," the high-pitched voice shouts.

Do they know I'm conscious? Are they pretending not to know? I'm shrewd enough not to be tricked or deceived. The finger returns to touching my left buttock, new designs, more distant stars. Let the finger do more, let it transform into a hypodermic needle, I will not move a fraction of an inch, will breathe only enough to remain alive; I know the science of breathing. Now there is the smell of pipe smoke. The soft voice has switched from his foul cigarettes to a sickly-smelling pipe tobacco.

"The woman said he would take two pills, then start to make love immediately," the animal voice says in a lewd way. The voice's lewdness became stronger: "This one could go on indefinitely. She stayed with him three days. The report is interesting, charmingly obscene, but she wasn't reliable."

"You sleep with her too?" the soft voice asks, also lewdly.

"That would be unprofessional, against regulations," the animal voice answers, and laughs wildly, as if being ordered to laugh. The finger touches my upper leg, a light scratch seeming to want to ease an itch; without warning the finger is withdrawn.

"I personally know half a dozen men who have enjoyed her. None of the others took pills to perform. It's in her file, all the names, the places, transcripts of everything that went on," the soft voice says, his lewdness becoming an antiseptic officialness. "She was infected with ideas we could not tolerate..."

I don't know who they're talking about. I don't recall taking pills...or recent lovemaking. A finger presses hard into the small of my back. I am certain it is not the same finger as before. More of a claw than a finger.

"His skin feels hard, pebbly. Maybe they did something chemically to strengthen the skin," the soft voice says.

"A knife will still go through," the

high-pitched voice declares. It is a cold statement, yet without threat. He is no longer eating.

"You'd have to push down hard," the animal voice says; his words are an emotionless challenge.

"So I would push down hard," the high-pitched voice whispers solemnly, and claps his hands twice for emphasis.

After the second clap, the animal voice orders, "Roll him over...."

I feel a powerful set of hands turn me onto my back, but I give no indication that I sense anything. My darkness has been changed through my eyelids; probably a strong overhead light. Yet it is still darkness. How long have my eyes been shut? I closed them while I was riding my bicycle along the sea, expecting the crash, anticipating the explosion of skin and concrete. But how did these three find me? Going near the sea is unlike their usual behavior. They took my cyanide capsule along with my clothes. Better to act dead than to be dead. I would kill myself in an instant if I believed in an afterlife the way they believe. Then I could ponder the consequences of my act without end. Commit suicide again and again, like jumping rope. Jump death jump death jump death...

More smoke in the room. All three are smoking now. One a pipe and the other two cigarettes. I used to be able to distinguish different brands of cigarettes by their smells. My senses have lost a portion of their acuity. At parties, in those days when I still cared to socialize, I could impress people, draw them around me. I'd close my eyes and ask someone at the party to blow smoke in my face. Hardly a second of thought and I'd recognize the brand. People couldn't resist trying the test—those who didn't smoke would borrow cigarettes from others—and I'd get it correct nearly every attempt, nine times out of ten. I could entertain at parties with my amusing talent.

The three voices keep smoking. Smoke is everywhere, tiny clouds, foul stinging storm clouds over the sea. Maybe I'll cough as I did at parties while

I was correctly guessing the brands of cigarettes. One of the voices coughs particularly hard, not the animal voice this time though; the soft, pipe-smoking voice. Coughing as language, linguistically impure, fierce, an animal in pain, but not too much pain. An image of a slaughterhouse strikes me; laughter and coughing coming from the slaughterhouse. Expensive foreign paintings hang along the walls, both the walls and the paintings splattered with blood. In the slaughterhouse the besplattered walls are art too.

In my youthful exuberance, when I first started making my reputation, I could withstand any type of pain, what would be unbearable to others. What a prodigy I was then. I reached the highest classification in my unit earlier than any person had before. The faultless sense of smell. The imitative talents. The endurance. The ability to concentrate under all conditions, pure concentration; the three fools around me would call it mysticism or spiritual, but it was solely a total effort of the mind over the body. I used to look forward to being apprehended and interrogated, even though I never admitted this to my superiors—who in their right mind would? You would be considered a danger, a liability worse than the enemy, and summarily tossed into the sea.

"Kill him now," the high-pitched voice says, stabbing me in the chest with his finger.

I'm not frightened. I know that the high-pitched voice said what he did only to scare me. They won't kill me, not these three, not now. They do not have the voices of executioners.... I've heard the voices of executioners. Once you hear such a voice you never forget it. Corpses you can forget or grow hardened to, but not the voice of an executioner.

I've dreamed of these three, years ago. The most vivid of dreams. I know exactly how they look without seeing them: the soft voice, the high-pitched voice, the animal voice with his difficulty breathing. I know how they dress and move and act, their smallest mannerisms, their least consequential gestures... If I

painted them, I could include the tiniest details: a thread dangling on a uniform; a sleeve too long, food stained; shoes tied tight and polished to the colour of the night sky. All three are uniformed, I know this indisputably. The uniform is the enemy.

My mind puts me back on the bicycle—my favorite physical activity. Fast as I can pedal. Exertion, yet never fast enough, never close enough to the sea. I remember crashing my small bicycle when I was a boy: horrid scraping of both my knees, complications, the stay in hospital, operations, the anesthetic-scented dreams of recovery. I lived abroad when that happened. What was done with my racing bicycle? Its light weight was a marvel of technology.

I was never a junkie, why do they keep repeating that? Now three sets of hands are touching me, my face, my body, twisting, poking, scratching. What do they think they're doing, performing an autopsy? They're minor officials: dirty uniforms, languid expressions, ugly as file cabinets.

Almost pain. Almost ready to scream. But I won't.

Rub my face in silk, rub my face in silk, that's what I'll think, that's what will keep me in control, block out the pain. I should chant the words out loud and confuse the three voices. There was a time when, as I was being tortured, I thought of cradlesongs and reading the skywriting of artful gods and picnicing on coarse woollen blankets under a sky of brilliant colour, that did the trick. It will be time to speak soon. To baffle them. They'll assume I'm mad or delirious or maybe they'll think I'm cunningly feigning madness, trained to behave this way. They think they know all the pertinent facts of my life—my lives. "Rub my face in silk..."

"We don't want you to say anything yet, friend," the animal voice says.

"We're not ready," the soft voice quickly adds.

Why do they say "we"—all three voices? We. A three-headed ugly file-cabinet monster. I need to keep speaking.

"...Rub my face in silk..."

"That's what he was saying when we found him," one of the voices says.

But I don't remember saying that before, not around these three voices. Perhaps in dreams years ago. Once I had the most wonderful ability to recall my dreams.

"Shut up!" the animal voice commands.

"Speak later!" the high-pitched voice says with equal force.

The pain. That's not a finger. A lit cigarette being pressed down like a finger into my face. I must concentrate on being silent again. Silence is the real weapon against them.

I've seen others tortured, tortured into corpses, indistinguishable forms left far from the sea. I've choked on the smoke from fires set by the enemy. I've known secrets. I know secrets. I've never talked under torture or under pleasure. Cradlesongs, skywriting, picnicing...

"He has a fever," the animal voice says.

The high-pitched voice laughingly shrieks, "Junkie's fever..."

I hear a briefcase being clicked open. My senses are still alive, even if they have lost past sharpness. Another cigarette being lit. A piece of paper being ripped.

"Why are we keeping him alive so long?" the soft voice asks, the breath from the voice pushing against my closed eyelids, not as a lover, but as a curious animal finding another animal in the undergrowth.

"He may know something," the high-pitched voice says.

"The woman he slept with claimed in her report that he did not shut his eyes for three days. He paced around her bed when they weren't making love. She watched for hours."

"Was she with us?"

"For a few months at the start."

"Where is she now?"

"She has fled the country because of him... fled for her life..."

That can't be true. Who are these three voices talking about? I can no longer differentiate who's speaking, one

voice turning into another. The smoke has replaced all the air in the room.

I hear a door being pushed open. It is a big heavy door, like the door of a slaughterhouse. A fourth voice enters. Another cigarette. I know this brand. A woman I loved years ago smoked the same brand, in a room on another continent, a room that felt as confining as a diving bell.

I sense the fear in the other three. The executioner is here. At last the executioner. If there is an afterlife, I can watch the execution over again. This execution will be better than the last. Strange how one gets used to being executed. When I was young and the sight of a corpse still made me tremble, and I feared death by drowning more than anything else, I never thought I would get used to being executed.

Book Reviews

THE SECRET LANGUAGE OF SYMBOLS: A VISUAL KEY TO SYMBOLS AND THEIR MEANINGS

Review by Shaun Donnelly

Have you ever wondered why the dove is the symbol of peace? Or why the number seven is considered magical? Or why the medical profession's emblem depicts two serpents entwined around a sword?

In his guidebook, *The Secret Language of Symbols: A Visual Key to Symbols and Their Meanings*, chartered psychologist Dr. David Fontana answers these questions and thousands more. In this beautifully illustrated book, Fontana makes his point that symbols pervade every aspect of our lives. Our art and literature. Our architecture and language. Even our dreams and nightmares.

This book is full of interesting kernels of information. For instance, did you know that pine cones, with their flame-like shape and erect appearance in the tree, are a Greek symbol for masculinity? Or that the symbol of the scarab, or dung beetle, represents the endurance of the human soul because it was thought (incorrectly) to lay its eggs in excrement?

David Fontana's *The Secret Language of Symbols* is an engrossing read and an excellent conversation piece. Published by Chronicle and distributed in Canada by Raincoast Books, *Symbols* is available at most independent bookstores for \$24.95 paperback or \$39.95 hardcover.

THE PERFECTION OF THE MORNING

by Sharon Butala

Harper Collins Publishers Ltd.

Review by Wes Bellmore

“What is my place in the world; where do I fit in?” Daunting questions for most of us, if we dare consider them at all. Sharon Butala needed to know her place—not only in the world, but in the new and vastly different society of her rancher husband.

Butala gave up city life, her academic career and her circle of close friends to move with her husband onto his cattle ranch in southern Saskatchewan. The culture she found there was almost completely alien to the one she left behind; the people were distant—both geographically and emotionally—and the social fabric all but impenetrable. Her new neighbors, though not unkind, made her, a newcomer from the big city, feel inadequate. The ranch women’s rugged self-assurance and independence was entirely unlike the intimate companionship she had shared with her city friends.

The *Perfection of the Morning* recounts Butala’s long, difficult search to find her place in the world. She shares with us the agony of her spiritual and intellectual isolation, yet she exults in their very elements—the wind, soil, plants and animals of the prairies:

“The Great Plains are a land for visionaries, they induce visions, they are themselves visions, the line between fact and dream is so blurred. What other landscape around the world produces the mystic psyche so powerfully? Sky and land, that is all, and grass, and what Nature leaves bare, the human psyche fills.”

Prairie farm life changed Butala; it made her realize that her rural experiences had separated her from the friends she knew in the city. On trips back to the city, she realized that her friends no longer knew her. They were unable, however eager they were, to understand her new life.

Butala’s spiritual journey—a journey at times almost desperate—is set amid the seemingly routine existence of satisfied farmers and ranchers. But an urgent, sensitive quest for the true substance of an individual’s soul, and its place in the perpetual cycle of life, leads the reader to understand that the work is anything but routine.



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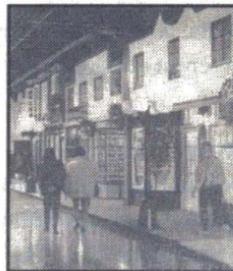
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