

The Taddle Creek Trilogy



Written and Illustrated by Brian Wilson Baetz

The Essence of the Taddle Creek Trilogy

This is a three part work comprised of connected novellas, inspired in part by the Salterton and Deptford trilogies of Robertson Davies. They are centered around the rhythms of university life, as a backdrop to an evolving coming-of-age story set in the temporal context of the late 1970s. The work is fiction, based loosely on some events that actually happened and many other events that did not happen. Characters are based in part on real-world people, but names have been changed to reflect the fictional nature of the writing.

The novellas roll out in chronological order, and contain vignettes that capture the life of a young man trying to find his way to a career and an understanding of himself. This maturation period is steeped in self-doubt, a fixation on members of the opposite sex, immersion in university life and an incremental appreciation of the complexity and diversity of the broader world. The story line is focused on seeing life from the perspective of this young man, and is largely autobiographical.

This trilogy is named for the long-buried Taddle Creek, which used to flow through an earlier version of the University of Toronto with solidity and mystery. The illustrations at the frontispiece of each chapter were put in to break up the sea of text, to provide some greater sense of a subset of the characters, and because they were simply fun to create.

BWB, Dundas, Ontario

May, 2019

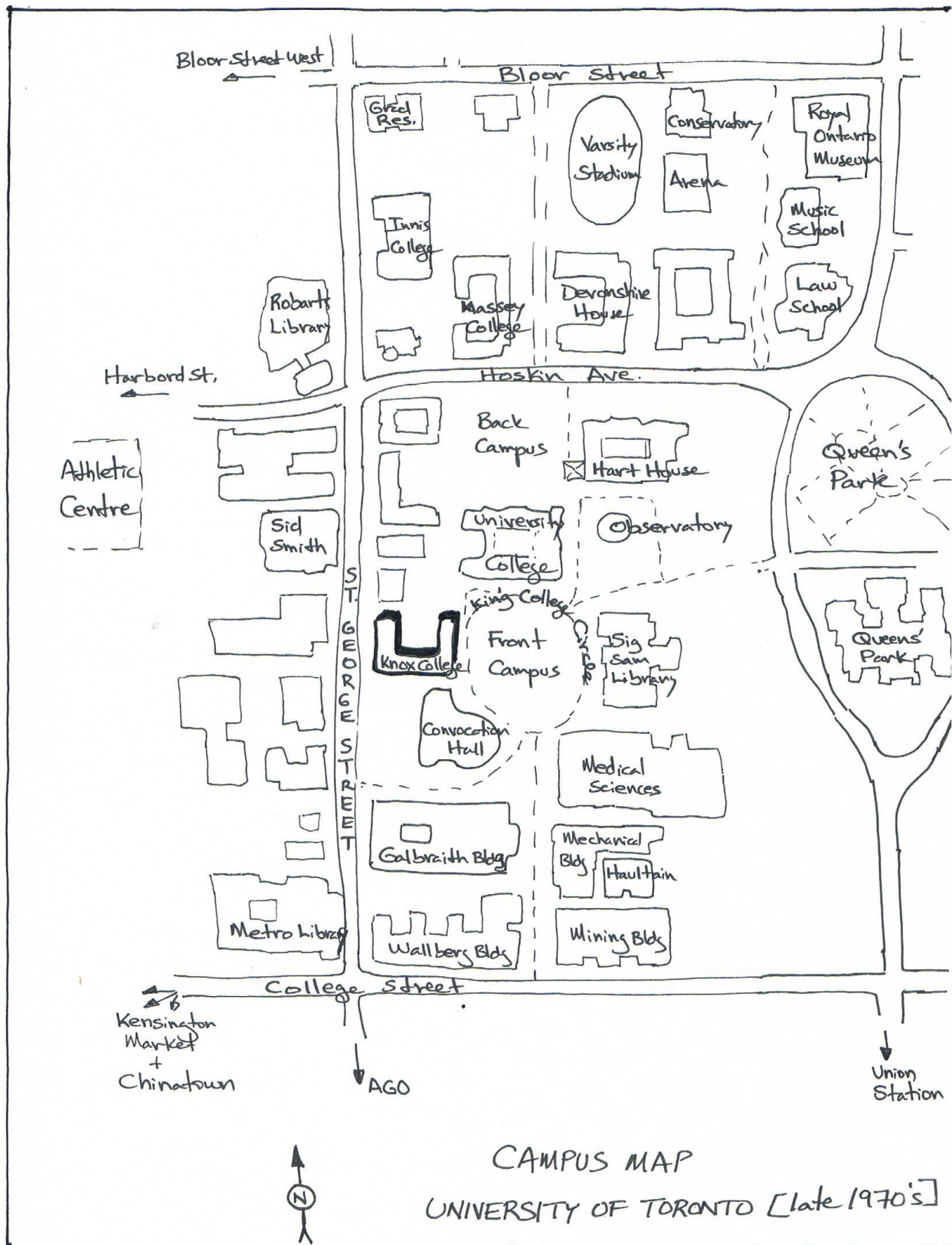
Macro Table of Contents

The Reinvention of Oneself-pages 5 -78

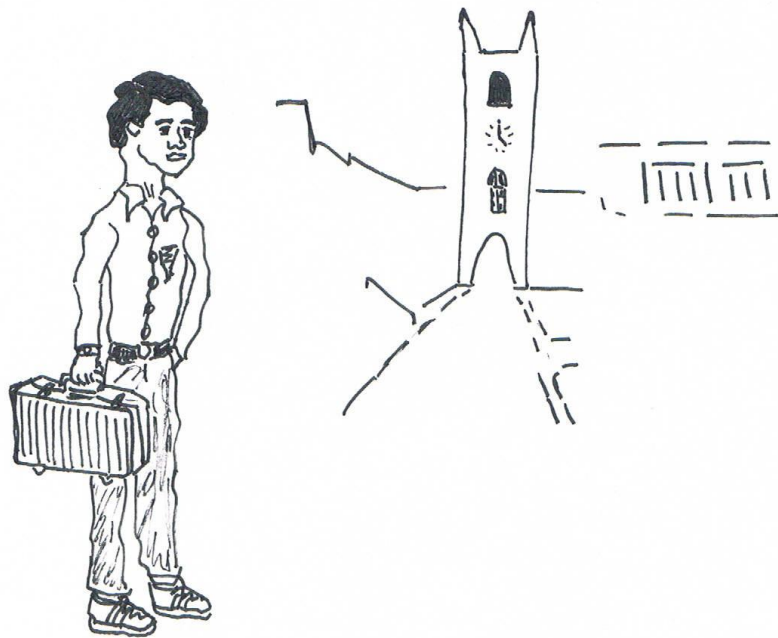
Finding a Rhythm-pages 79-154

Nearing an End-pages 155-232

Author Profile – page 233



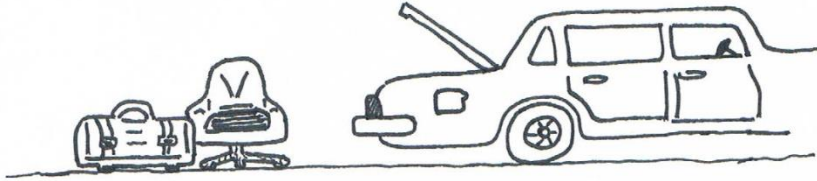
The Reinvention of Oneself



Written and Illustrated by Brian Wilson Baetz

September 1977

Moving to HogTown



The two and a half hour trip to Toronto was uneventful, with traffic being light as it was the Sunday of the Labour Day weekend. His Mom sat in the back, stony-faced save a few forced smiles, not quite believing she would actually be empty nest in just a few hours. His Dad drove in a confident and practiced manner, with a non-stop litany of stories and anecdotes about the towns and their people along the route. He had driven a truck every day for fifteen years on this very route, filled to the top with butter, eggs and chicken. The last stops were the stores of Kensington market, where the old man could practice his Bavarian dialect that was largely understandable to the Yiddish-speaking Jewish merchants.

Their destination today was perhaps a half a mile or so northeast of Kensington, and they located the residence on St. George Street with little fuss or fanfare. He had been slated to live his first year in a triple at New College, but a call from the Registrar of Knox College in the last week of the Summer had informed him of a senior student cancelling a single room reservation. He had jumped at this unexpected stroke of good luck, and they now found themselves at the small parking lot of the Knox College library.

His worldly possessions amounted to two small suitcases of clothes and shoes, and a yellow vinyl swivel chair that had been purchased as a going-away-to-university gift by his folks at Schmitt's Furniture in Hanover. He manhandled the chair along the sidewalk beside manicured flower beds, and a doddering older janitor pointed bemusedly towards the second floor of West House.

The substantial wooden door opened to their tentative push, and the interior hallways were pin-drop quiet. His Mom looked around with big eyes, half-excited and half-frightened. His Dad had the air of a truck driver who needed to make his delivery and get moving on down the road, so they scaled the stairs and made their way to the room on the second floor.

Its door was open, with gleaming white pine floors welcoming its new occupant. Spartan would be the best way to describe the appointments of the room, with its single bed, a small desk and a wooden chair. The yellow swivel chair almost looked ostentatious in this monastery-like setting. But the old

woodwork was beautiful, and the leaded glass of the bay window was non-uniform and mysterious. This seemed like something out of Oxford or Cambridge, a perfect place to reside for a young scholar.

His Mom made a feeble and half-hearted attempt to unpack the two suitcases and arrange things in an old chest of drawers wedged in to a closet on the left. But the amount of unpacking was so modest, and they stood a good chance of getting back home in good light if they left soon, so he gently waved her off her duties. Ten minutes later, after a tight and teary hug from his Mom and a firm but hurried handshake from his Dad, he found himself wending his way back through the quad to his room. The place was so quiet that he began to wonder if he was the only person in the College on that late Sunday afternoon. He looked around at the weathered stone building and soaked up its architectural grandeur. Copper downspouts with a green patina gave some friction to a pair of climbing black squirrels. He looked up and over to the chapel tower, and started to realize this would be his home for a while, perhaps for his whole undergraduate degree. He suddenly felt a twinge of loneliness, almost an ill-formed regret that he had left behind the comforts and confines of home.

But to burst him out of his downward spiral, the door to West House popped open and out stepped a tall young man with an impressive array of curly brown hair.

"Newbie? Welcome to West House! This place will grow on you...Stu Rickard's the name, PoliSci is my game. Third year." He shook hands a bit awkwardly with the smooth political scientist, who peeled off quickly to meet a waiting girlfriend. He had liked the energy of young Mr. Rickard, and it was a good omen for life under this old roof.

He peeked into the common room on his right, full of vinyl leather couches and having a black dial phone on the far wall. Not a soul in sight. He walked up to the second floor slowly, taking in the sights of mid-town Toronto from the stairway window well, and thoroughly absorbing the pungent smell of floor wax and bathroom disinfectant. As he walked down to his room, he noticed an open door that had been closed just fifteen minutes back. At a desk sat a muscular and husky Asian chap, glasses perched on the end of his nose and a textbook open under a study lamp.

"Hi...just moving in today. Looks like we might be neighbours?" He stood at the entrance to the room, leaning up against the door jamb.

"Yup, busy couple of days coming up." The guy went back to his textbook.

"Jayson." He smiled in a brittle way, clearing his throat.

"What?" The big guy cocked an eyebrow in his direction.

"Jayson, my name's Jayson. What's yours?" He stepped into the room, extending his hand.

"Henry.....nice to meet you." This guy was certainly not a chatterbox, that was for sure.

"What do you study, Henry?" He nodded towards the textbook.

"Economics. The dismal science. Second year. Getting a head start." He went back to his book.

The new arrival stepped away to his unpacking. It would take a bit of time to hit his stride in this new environment, that much was clear.

The Sons of Bricklayers



The next thirty-six hours went by in a tumble, with seemingly the whole residence moving back in and plenty of street traffic out on St. George Street to stimulate the senses when he stood outside the front entrance of the College taking it all in. The dining room was not open until the Tuesday morning after the long weekend, so he subsisted on some provisions thoughtfully packed by his Mom, and one foray up to Bloor Street to a sandwich shop. It would be some time before he came across the delights of Chinese and Indian cuisine, so for the time being the tried and true would be his mainstay.

For the most part he spent this time puttering around in his room, shifting and rearranging his clothing in the closet and moving his desk to several positions to gauge ambient light levels from the windows and the limits of the cord of his study lamp. He heard the odd person moving in their stuff, but whenever he slipped out to use the facilities the hallways were dark and quiet. He napped off and on, resting up for what would assuredly be a busy week, but also to avoid bumping in to people. He was feeling a bit homesick already, missing Vince and Lou and even admitting to himself that he also missed his Mom and Dad.

Tuesday morning dawned big and bright, and he arrived at the dining room just after it had opened its doors at 7:30. Friendly-enough waitresses in tired blue uniforms took his order for brown toast and fried eggs. Three young chaps joined him at his end of a dark wooden table, chattering away amiably to each other and effectively ignoring anybody outside their trio. He shifted uneasily in his seat, grinning

awkwardly from time to time in their direction, hoping for some kind of conversational seam to parachute through.

“So you’re new here?” One of them picked up on a nervous grin.

“Uh, yeah, just moved in on Sunday.” He stammered this out.

“Which house?” Another one of the fellows chimed in.

“West House, second floor, beside Ted. The House Don?” He knew immediately he would face repercussions from too much information being offered up.

“Oooh, the nice big room with the gorgeous bay window?” The third boy came on line. “That was the top pick in the room lottery last March. Patrick, who was supposed to be going into final year Philosophy had secured that one, but had a girlfriend-dumping-him meltdown just last week and bailed out on school at the last moment. So we heard they just gave his room out to the next guy on the waiting list rather than redo the room lottery. You are not going to be too popular with the guys in those little hell-holes beside the freight elevator. Can you imagine a first year getting a plum room!?” The three lads cackled as if he wasn’t even at the table.

His cheeks burned and he inhaled his greasy eggs and cardboard-stiff toast. He gave them a tight-lipped smile and slipped back to his room for a quick brush of his teeth and a slow perusal of the first day itinerary that had been furnished by the office of the Faculty of Applied Science.

There was a 10:00 welcome rally at Convocation Hall, followed by a seemingly endless parade of events to show off labs and the issuance of various cards and documentation. He had well over an hour before the first event, timed to allow for far-flung suburban students to comfortably get to campus on the TTC. He decided to stroll around the campus, as it was turning into an absolutely lovely and sunny morning. A quick deke through the academic offices side of the College led him to the west side of King’s College Circle, where it seemed half of the forty thousand students at the University were all walking purposefully to some appointment. He was a bit thrown off by the scale of the human parade, but was intrigued by the diversity and energy of the crowd. This was what he had signed up for in effect, by coming from a small one-horse county town to the largest university in the country. He flowed along northward, admiring the simply beautiful architecture of University College and the cute figures of a number of girls who were wearing smart sweater sets on their first day of school.

The crowd thinned a bit and he bore right across the southern edge of the back playing field, the tower of Hart House at the end of the trail. He reached the tower and looked up, straining his neck to see the hands of the clock moving ever so slowly on its hourly circumnavigation.

Ten minutes later, after crisscrossing the King’s College Circle quad twice to kill time, he found himself in a lineup of engineering students waiting to be issued their requisite yellow hard hat. There had to be a hundred people or more in front of him, and the line moved painfully slowly. The folks in front of him were indifferent at best, and a couple of shy Middle Eastern gals behind him smiled fleetingly in his direction but then turned inward for a private conversation. He had that feeling one gets at crowded

parties, where there are scores of people in the room but no one really to talk to. But before despair set in fully, five swarthy young men ambled in his direction, already wearing their hard hats and sporting big grins.

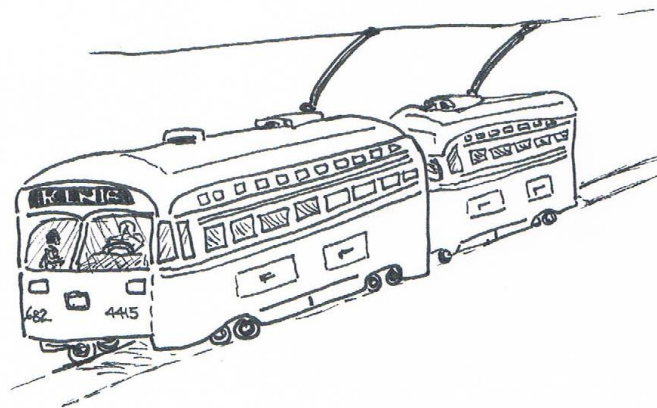
“Hey, why so glum, chum? The work doesn’t start until tomorrow!” The leader, a good looking guy with muscular arms, came up with his hand extended.

“Just trying to stay focused, and figure out where I have to go after I get my hard hat.” He was momentarily nervous, but excited at the prospect of some new friends.

“Well, come hang out with us after. These four goofballs are dead weight, but we’ll be checking out the girls in a big way. We’re all going to be civil engineers, *capisce*, but we’re going to have some fun along the way!”

He had just met a subset of The Italians, all young men who were the offspring of bricklayers and ditch diggers, and as first-generation citizens of this wonderful country of Canada, were going to get an education and work with their heads rather than their hands. He liked their friendliness and earthiness immediately, and felt that the first day at university was going to be alright after all.

A Sentimental Journey



The first week had gone by in a bit of a blur, from first classes with just course outlines being handed out by brusque teaching assistants to figuring out the best seating arrangements in the dining hall. Little irritations such as long queues in the morning for showers meant some adjustments were needed on timing and sequencing, and even more lineups at the campus bookstore for pencils and paper and at Hart House for a gym locker and towel service. It was indeed a big city and it seemed as if half of its population was trying to do the same thing he was doing at the same time.

But then Saturday came and things shifted into a slightly lower gear, with the commuter students staying home in Willowdale or Etobicoke, and the in-residence students catching their breath on a few days without classes. He hadn’t established yet in his own mind what a weekend schedule would or should look like. He didn’t know that once term started in earnest, the weekend would be largely

reserved for school work and catching up on aspects of his studies that had been set aside in the pell-mell of a week with lectures, tutorials and labs. But for now he thought it should mean rest and some kind of entertainment. So he turned to his one true love for whiling away time, the reading of a good book. He had brought a couple of favourites from home, and propped his feet up on his desk and enjoyed the re-reading of a somewhat familiar story line, made more interesting in the second-reading of the author's nuances.

The day went by like this, with intermittent birdsong from the Chapel tower and two more trips to the dining room for lunch and dinner sustenance. Beyond a few pleasant conversational snippets from some lads he was slowly starting to get to know, that was the extent of human interaction for the day. He couldn't bring himself to ask them if they had any plans for the evening, or if they wanted to go out and see a movie together, for fear of them saying they were busy or weren't interested. So it was back to his room after an early dinner. A shift in the reflected sunshine brought lower light levels to his room, giving him a muted signal that he needed to get out, needed to do something.

In the pile of printed material he had received over the week, there was a bright green sheet that had details of a Welcome Back Engineering Pub event. It was to be held in the Great Hall of Hart House, a beautiful dark wood paneled room with heraldic crests all around its perimeter, which he had ogled while on a tour during the past week. He wasn't exactly sure what would go on at an Engineering Pub, but he was in Engineering and it was a free event in a nice space, so he took himself across campus to Hart House.

The night porter gave him a solemn nod as he went by the entrance desk and he made his way down polished stone corridors to the zone of the Great Hall. With each step he could hear music, and the odd titter of laughter. A quiet dread started to fill up within him. He started to tell himself that he didn't know anyone there, that the girls would all be sophisticated and unapproachable, and that the music would be so loud that he wouldn't be able to hear anybody's conversation---this all came to him as a swirl of suppressive thoughts that descended on him like a deluge.

He turned a corner and saw the entrance to the Great Hall, with two beefy security guys in red shirts kibitzing by the door and flirting with a petite gal selling drink tickets from a wooden trestle table. He realized at that point he could not go into the hall, past the folks at the door and into the swirl of humanity and music and chatter flowing through its cavernous interior. So he simply gave the two guards a perfunctory nod as if he was doing a quick building inspection, shot a brief smile to the ticket gal and noted that she had kind eyes, and rolled right past them all to the south exit door. He emerged out into the cool air, which was welcome for the flushed cheeks that arose from his disappointment in himself for not being sufficiently brave to dive into uncharted social dimensions.

His first thought after the disappointment wave had rolled over him was that he needed to see someone familiar. Someone from back home. He quickly thought of Vince, good ol' Vince, who had come to the city for art school after a gap year. He had Vince's new address on a ratty slip of paper in his wallet. It was down in an area of the city called Parkdale. And so he started walking. Without the benefit of a

map, no access to a phone, he walked through Chinatown and the garment district, wide-eyed at the sights and sounds of Toronto on a nice early-autumn Saturday night.

Being from a small town he had no problem asking for directions, so he took a tip from a kindly Salvation Army colonel that Parkdale was a long way off and that he should ride the King streetcar at least as far as Lamport Stadium. Upon alighting, he recognized the neighbourhood was a bit rougher than his Mom would have liked but he trudged on, excited to see Vince and share stories of their first week at school. A few more requests for directions put him on the quiet side street he had been looking for, and a few more minutes brought him to Vince's number. He knocked on the front door, waited, and then knocked a little harder.

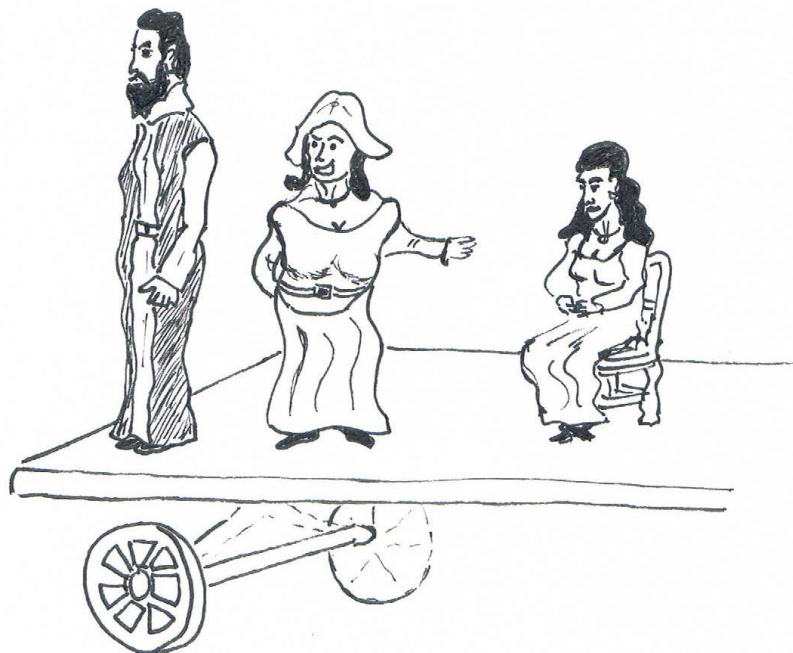
A window was raised on the second floor and a wizened older woman with curlers in her hair stuck her head out. "Who are you lookin' for?"

"Vince. He goes to OCAD. Hails from Walkerton." He tried to sound hopeful.

"Vince, Vince...oh yeah, he's Bob's new tenant. He's gone home for the weekend, sonny. Sorry." The window was closed abruptly.

He walked slowly back to the King Street. It was a big city, full of people. But he was going to have to work harder to make some new friends.

The Circle Game



To save streetcar fare he had walked back to the residence, past a mix of urban blight and shuttered shops. Foot traffic was fairly light, and as he went under train track overpasses and past seedy watering

holes he realized that the shroud of twilight enveloping the city made it a bit less safe and more than a bit less welcoming. He wondered how Vince lived in this kind of neighbourhood, and if he would ever make it back this way to see his friend when the pace of the term picked up. And he certainly wasn't alone in his homesickness, if the cool ladies' man Vince had hightailed it back to Bruce County on the very first weekend of term. He thought this all through, and it made him feel a bit better. A streetcar clanged past him and he started to regret his frugal disposition, as the wind picked up a bit and he got a decent-sized mouthful of urban dust. 'You need the exercise and it's good to see a different part of the city', he told himself over and over until he hit Spadina Avenue. From there up to the university, it seemed the lights got brighter and the street traffic got livelier. The garment district buildings flowed into the hodgepodge of Chinatown and before he knew it he was outside the college residence on St. George Street. He stood outside looking up at the street side of West House, and was surprised at how many lights were on in his housemates' rooms. A few people sat at desks, one room looked as if it had a dozen or more people sardined into it in some facsimile of a social gathering, and at one window a young Asian man stood playing a violin.

He stood there, taking it all in and realizing that he was far away from home, in both literal and symbolic terms. And he felt much less socially awkward, with the realization that a large number of his peers were not out at sophisticated events or rambunctious campus pubs, but were simply in their rooms on a Saturday night.

He woke up the next morning, with bright sunlight streaming in at an unfamiliar angle. He rolled over to check his clock radio and realized through bleary eyes that it was just past 10:00. He had slept almost eleven hours, in that way late adolescents can do when there are no demands on their time or alarms to bring them out of their dreamy reveries. He groaned softly as this meant he had missed breakfast in the cafeteria which ended at 9:30 on weekends, and his stomach emitted a low rumble. He still had some fig newtons and one apple left over from his Mom's provisions, with the apple looking decidedly the worse for wear after a week of mouldering on his desk. He got up for a mouth rinse and a voluminous bladder emptying, and came back in and sat on the edge of his bed to eat his simple breakfast. The ambient sunlight seemed to bounce around the room like illuminated balls on a celestial snooker table, and he sat and chewed slowly and looked around the room. So this would be home for at least a year, maybe even four. The lines of the room were elegant, with its high baseboards and beautiful moulding around the leaded glass windows. The white pine flooring had been buffed to within an inch of its life, and the old desk and side chair were made of heavy dark wood with a substantial and prolific grain. He loved the simplicity, almost monastic in nature. It would indeed be a good place to learn, and to mature.

After his makeshift breakfast, he took himself off for a quick hot shower and a tooth brushing with Pepsodent, and he was then ready to do a bit of exploring around campus. Coming out of the West House door onto the interior quad, his eye was drawn to the east side of the college that housed the chapel. He wondered internally if a church service might be running as it was close to the standard start time for a Sunday service, but when he stepped into the chapel area he could see its interior was dark and its doors were closed. He continued on and popped out the exit door onto King's College Circle, where in an instant he felt as if he had been transported back in place and time.

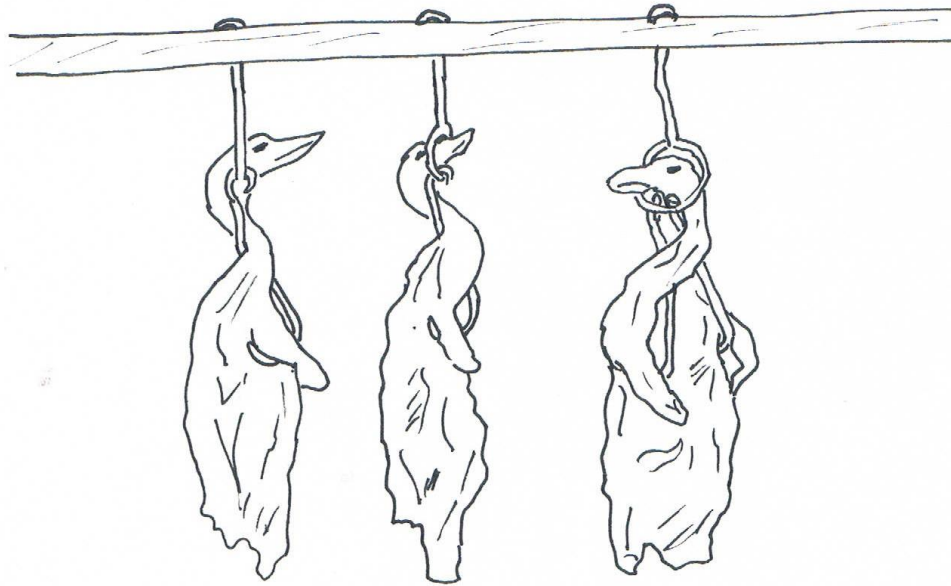
The air was alive with music, coming from trumpets played by travelling minstrels who were dressed in colourful, medieval garb. Gymnasts, jugglers, flame-throwers, plate-spinners...the range of spectacle was diverse and bursting with fun. Hundreds of spectators lined King's College Circle, clapping for the entertainers and egging them on in outrageous ways.

He was amused and perplexed, as the contrast between the reception zone near the chapel and the sunny outdoor festival was stark. He looked around and saw no familiar faces, even though this was transpiring right outside his residence. A nubile young woman wearing the face paint of a cat came running up to him, mimed out a formal curtsy, and then grabbed his arms and spun him around in a chaotic polka. Her perfume and long auburn hair entranced him, and just at the point he was hoping this might go on forever, she spun free of him and started dancing with a lanky professorial type with wire-rimmed spectacles and a wispy grey beard. The people around him clapped him on his back, congratulating him for being a good sport and tut-tutting their condolences on having the good time come to an end.

A horn blasted three staccato bursts, and up rolled a flat wagon pulled by draft horses in full regalia. There were three actors on the flat bed, dressed in rich medieval costumes and immediately jumping off into a dialogue that had the two women actors pining for the attention of an aloof male actor. The wording was in Olde English dialect and the acting was superb. One of the women was short and just a tad stout, with a red velvet gown that was sufficiently low-cut to display her substantial breasts. She had the character of a bawdy barmaid, and the dialogue to match. Her competitor was a willowy brunette with absolutely stunning features, dressed in a classy but conservative outfit, with very proper dialogue and an evident shock being shown when the barmaid would suggest an earthy dalliance with the gentleman. The audience roared its approval of the most naughty lines, and jeered when the nobleman took the high road and the arm of the elegant beauty.

This was one of a series of one-act medieval plays, transported around King's College Circle by horse power and the laughter of the viewing assemblage. He stood back at one point and watched the crowd hiss and boo a medieval villain, sort of a play within a play of humanity. And while he chuckled at the ongoing antics, part of him contemplated his role in the human drama unfolding in the university and his newly adopted city.

Dead as a Duck



The medieval play and the carnival-like atmosphere around it had transfixed him, even transported him into a different time zone where snuff boxes and lace blouses for gentlemen were the norm. He did not wear a watch and had an uneasy feeling from the angle of the sun that it was perhaps later than he had counted on. At that point his stomach rumbled and did two mini-flips, signaling him that some kind of refueling was in order. He wove his way through the merry-makers back to the chapel entrance door and found it locked from the outside. He grimaced a bit and loped back down the stairs, then ran along the edge of the library to the U of T Bookstore, and went around it to the College's parking lot where his parents had parked just a scant week ago for the unloading of his worldly possessions.

He dashed through the north quad and down the cloistered central archway to the main entrance foyer. As he mounted the steps to the dining hall, he saw an old clock on the wall displaying its hands at just after 1:30. He hadn't thought to check the weekend schedule for the dining hall, but thought for sure lunch would have to run to at least 2:00. Halfway up the stairs he heard a door slam shut and a muscular young man in medical scrubs quickstepped down the stairs.

"Hope you're not counting on lunch! They just locked up, tighter than a drum. I was the last person to be served, and they were none too happy that I had come in at 1:20. A guy's got to eat, what the hell?!" The chap was short but powerfully built, and extended a big meat hook of a hand. "I'm Peter, first floor of West House. Studying biology, going to be a doctor."

He shook hands eagerly, but pulled away with a wince after his right hand was partially mangled by the sweaty tissue of the biologist-power wrestler. He looked up wistfully at the heavy wooden door, now firmly shut.

“So no chance of a sandwich to go?” He knew he was grasping at straws.

“Nah, the ladies want a few hours off before they have to be back and suit up for dinner. I’ve lived here for three years, so believe me, they stick to the schedule.” The newly introduced neighbor started to further descend the stairs.

“Hmm, I have to think if I can get to dinner on a skimpy breakfast and no lunch, or do I go out somewhere and get something to tide me over?” He said this while descending, two steps behind.

“Hey, for me, I need three squares a day. No fasting for this guy, pal. But why not roll into the common room and see if anybody else is in the same predicament, so you can have some company potentially?” The older lad gave a forward-on wave with his right hand.

The West House common room was on the right as you entered the first floor. He hadn’t spent any time here as it had always been empty, but he didn’t know this would be a hub of activity after every dinner once the new House residents gelled together a bit more. There was one lone person in there, a guy with curly blonde hair wearing a blue U of T sweatshirt. He spoke furtively on the phone, with one hand over the receiver, either to his parents or some faraway girlfriend.

“He’ll just be a minute or so. He has the stance of wrapping things up. He lives at the far end of the first floor here. He told me he calls his parents every Sunday. Cheaper rates.” Peter rolled his eyes, and signaled him to sit down on the sticky black pleather couches.

The phone was placed on its hook. “Klaus, have you met this guy yet? Jayson, right?” Hands were shaken, smiles exchanged.

“Jay-Boy missed lunch, what about you?” Pete seemed to know the answer already.

“Was just going to run up now. Slept in big-time, had a shower, called my folks.” He checked his watch. “We still got fifteen minutes, right?”

“No sireee, you newbies will have to learn the ropes. On Sundays they close half an hour earlier than normal, for both lunch and dinner. You two are in the same boat, on dry land so to speak. I’ll leave you to your misery, as I have a big lab to prep for that kicks off tomorrow morning.

The two boys sat there awkwardly.

“Are you going to hang in until dinner, or go out somewhere for food?” He said this neutrally, still unsure if he wanted to spend any money.

“Man, I haven’t eaten anything since last night at dinner. And it was mystery meat, remember? I just loaded up on toast. So I need some food bad. Do you want to go out and find something together?”

They walked down St. George and across College, telling each other of their hometowns and their hopes and aspirations for university. It sounded as if they had come from similar hard-working blue-collar

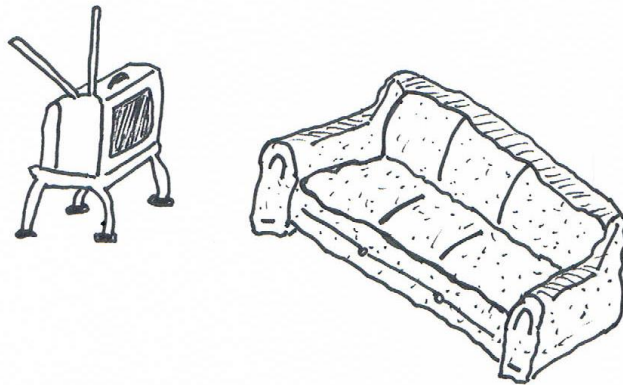
backgrounds, and started to groove on each other's sarcasm and humour. Maybe making new friends might not be so hard after all, he thought.

"So where can we get some decent food?" Klaus waved his hands left and right when they were at the corner of Spadina and College.

"Unnnh, not sure, never eaten outside the dining hall yet." He stammered this out. "I've walked up this street, it's pretty lively and has lots of places to choose from food-wise."

"Okay, okay, let's go where our nose takes us. But none of this ethnic shit, OK?" Klaus pointed to a Chinese storefront that had ten to fifteen roasted ducks hanging from hooks in its front window. Perhaps finding a meat-and potatoes joint could be quite the challenge in this part of town.

The Making of a Renaissance Engineer



He was lost in a series of maze-like hallways in the old Metro Library at St. George and College. There had been a fire in the Sir Sanford Fleming building a year ago, and temporary classrooms and offices had been set up in the under-utilized municipal library building. Direction signs had been placed initially, but these had been either removed or switched around by gently malicious upperclassmen, so it took a bit of effort to successfully navigate to a desired location.

This afternoon was the second meeting of a first year English literature course, one of only three broadening courses put into a four year engineering curriculum. He wasn't particularly adept at English, or analysis of novels and short stories, but its scheduling had fit into his timetable well enough and it was a pleasant end to a hectic day of technical lectures. When he finally arrived at the classroom at the rear of the building, seven or eight other students had arrived ahead of him and were sitting awkwardly in that artificially expectant way of a group that hadn't quite gelled yet. Or maybe never would.

He loped to the back of the room and saw a chap that he had connected well with at an Orientation event up at Hart House Farm. They had both been gourmands that day, snarfing back multiple hamburgers and hot dogs, and it had turned into a pleasantly competitive eating contest that had no losers.

“Hey, Jayson, almost didn’t recognize you without mustard on your face!” The guy’s eyes danced.

“Hey, good to see you, Ian! Yeah, it’s been slimmer pickings of late, but the food in the residence is not half bad overall.” He tapped his stomach.

“Dude, I’m living at home to save money and so as not to miss my Mom’s great home cooking. Riding the Red Rocket can be kind of a drag, but it gets balanced out by a lot of other things.”

“Hey, I’d be living at home too, if it wasn’t three hours away! I miss my Mom’s pies and cakes, but maybe in the end I’ll be better off. Always had multiple desserts, and it was starting to show. In my last season of basketball I tipped the scales at just over 200 pounds. I liked to say it was all muscle, but in reality it was not. So I girded up this past Summer and shaved off forty pounds with a five miles a day run and no lunch regimen.” He shook his two fists in the air.

“Crap, that’s amazing! What spurred you on to do that?” His new friend was genuinely curious.

“Just one thing, man. I heard Toronto had lots of fine women in it, and a few reconnaissance trips verified this. So I figured I’d have a much better shot at extracurriculars if I didn’t look like the Pillsbury Dough Boy!” He mock-grimaced and leaned in to say this at a lower volume.

“On alert, my friend, the scenery just picked up.” Ian raised his eyebrows and nodded in the direction of the door.

The course instructor came in, wearing high leather boots and a floral gypsy skirt with a clingy black top. She had introduced herself at the first class as a PhD candidate from the English department, specializing in Renaissance literature. She wasn’t particularly pretty, with her strong features and tousled dark hair. But she had the most amazing eyes, dark limpid pools that seemed to spark and flash light when she spoke. And her voice had a bassiness to it, with a hint of an European accent, that was extremely distinctive. And saving what was her best feature for last, her breasts, with all of their expansive mystery and elastic agility that attracted the attention of every male in the room. She seemed to go out of her way to make them rise and fall, project and expand, entice and intrigue.

“Holy crap, the fun I could have with those things...” Ian hissed this out under his breath.

“Yeah, for sure, man. We have similar tastes to things other than food.” He scrunched his cheeks and offered up a wry smile.

Ian leaned over across the aisle, to avoid detection while the sessional instructor was setting her things down on the desk up front. “Imagine her having you over to her place to discuss the finer points of Renaissance literature. She steps away to make tea but then returns quickly, having slyly pulled off her top. In subdued lighting, she starts walking slowly over to you on the couch. They swing and bounce ever so slightly...”

“Cut it out man, you’re killing me! She’s our prof, for God’s sake!” He spluttered this out and sat up in his chair while the lecture started. Some of it was interesting, but mostly he kept seeing Ian’s cinematic description of the lecturer half-clothed and walking slowly towards him.

x-----x-----x-----x-----x

After class and before the dining room opened up, he took himself down to the bowels of the residence below Centre House and East House. He hadn’t been down there yet and someone had mentioned there were laundry facilities available. So he walked past a custodial supply room, a boiler room and a run of storage rooms. He came to two broad doors and gently pushed in, revealing an old gymnasium with boxes of books at one end and a basketball hoop and a large backboard at the other end. Making a mental note to return to shoot hoops at some point, he turned and made his way down a side hall that seemed to have some activity. The first room on the right had two washing machines that were humming along at some point in their multiple cycle sequence, and one dryer tumbling along with a wheezy demeanour. Next door to this was a cozy little TV room, where two guys from West House had their feet up on a coffee table watching some show on a flickering TV set.

“ Hey newbie, are you queuing up to do some laundry?” Steve was a scrappy little French Canadian from Northern Ontario with John Lennon glasses.

“Nope. Still making things stretch. Might go home for a weekend and do my laundry then. How much does it cost to use a machine?” He said this earnestly.

“Two bits, dude, and a dime for the washer. Why don’t you have your Mom come over and beat your clothes on a rock for you?” This was spat out by Dirk, a tall cool guy who was in third year Engineering Physics.

“Leave the kid alone, Dirk. We all started out once upon a time. Christ, I can’t believe how late it is! My old lady’s coming over and I have to tap the wife before dinner!” Steve lithely sprang up and quickly exited the room.

Dirk checked his watch. “Yep, got to run as well. One of the nurses I met at a pub last week is coming by and I get to lay some pipe before dinner.” The older student sped off.

He sat there in front of the flickering TV, with the image of the seductive lecturer returning to his mind. And for a brief second, he wondered what the heck did ‘laying pipe’ mean?

Erotic Equestrienne



He made it to dinner for the early seating that evening, and tried to sit at a different table to meet some new people and expand his horizons a bit. He had taken to sitting at the same table and at the same chair for a number of meals running, with a bunch of folks from West House he was starting to vibe with. But for tonight he felt like a breath of different air, so he forced himself to sit on the opposite side of the dining hall.

The Don of West House, Ted, was sitting alone when he asked him if he wanted company. Fast on his heels was Dale, an amiable American with quick speech and a ready smile. They were both theology students at the college, doing an MDiv in that particular brand of Christianity that the institution had been founded on. He remembered the Presbyterian church in his hometown as a place his Mom always loved to visit, mainly because of its friendly people and events that had copious quantities of very good desserts. But down here the Presbys seemed much more serious, and discussed the finer points of sermons and the intricacies of something called 'exegesis'. When he first heard this term he thought they were saying 'Ex-of-Jesus', and had wondered how Christ being married and divorced fit in with traditional church teachings.

Dinner was pleasant enough, with both Ted and Dale talking a lot about their girlfriends who seemingly lived very far away. Ted seemed comfortable with this, shrugging his shoulders affably and hinting that he had more time to study and to sleep in this scenario than if he had a girlfriend in town to keep happy. Dale was the opposite. He spent half of the main course and all of dessert chatting nervously about his girlfriend back in Michigan, and how much of a looker she was, how much she liked to go out dancing, and how she had joined a sorority that had regular parties with big, loutish fraternity boys with bad teeth and voracious sexual appetites. The last point wasn't said explicitly, but hinted at in coy terms, with plentiful raising of eyebrows and nose snorting.

At the end of the meal they walked together down the stone staircase and lingered around outside the West House door. "Almost too nice of an evening to go in and sit at a desk right away." Ted looked up at the sky appreciatively. "You boys want to give me some company and stroll over to the Old

Observatory beside Hart House? I hear the Engineers' Band will be playing , to accompany an old tradition." He said this mysteriously, with just the hint of a grin.

"Sure, I can call Melinda later to see how her day went." Dale's eyes looked nervous.

"Why not? I can call it homework if it's engineers playing the music." He smiled at his own feeble joke.

They walked across King's College Circle, looking left to the architectural beauty of University College and then right to the CN Tower-dominated skyline.

The lawn of the Old Observatory was mobbed with hundreds of leather jacket wearing engineers, and in the middle was a motley crew of musicians wearing wild hats and mis-matched uniforms. The mood was jolly and light, with the crowd roaring its approval after the completion of every number. There was a lot of dialogue between songs from the band leader to the crowd, most of it off-colour and all of it stimulating loud guffaws from the spectators.

"These guys are called the LGMB." Ted spoke this over his shoulder to his two housemates.

"L-G-M-B....what does that stand for?" Dale looked inquisitive at most times.

"Lady Godiva Memorial Band." Ted spoke this out slowly. "And here she comes now." His eyes bulged a bit as he nodded towards the back of the band.

A large white horse moved slowly through the crowd. Its rider was a woman in her late twenties, with pretty but hard features. Her long blonde hair was arranged strategically down her chest, covering up its essential features. The crowd roared and she smiled broadly, lightening up her demeanour. For half a second he thought she was wearing a flesh-coloured bodysuit, but then she turned the horse sideways and he could clearly see that she was riding the horse without a saddle in her birthday suit. She shifted a wee bit and her muscular buttocks flexed in a very appealing way just above the horse's strong back haunches. The band struck up a tune and most of the assemblage started to sing a bawdy tune. The female rider starting waving her hands like a conductor, her hair rearranging itself ever so slightly to reveal glimpses of her ample breasts.

"Oh man, oh man! The lady's not wearing any clothes! Ted, I'm not feeling very comfortable being here. How am I going to explain this to Melinda?" Dale got a touch pink and started to stammer.

"Now, Dale, this is simply theological field research. How are you going to minister to a flock if you don't know what the flock has been up to? We're simply listening to the music, off to the side, and merely observing...observing...things." The Don's eyes seemed to be locked onto Lady Godiva's chest as she put her hands up in the air and started to sway from side to side on her white steed.

Ten minutes later he was at his desk, attempting to lock into some material relating to a tough chemistry lab writeup. He kept taking his mind back to the Old Observatory lawn. He loved horses, but the sight of a well-built and obviously worldly woman riding an athletic horse buck-naked had shocked

him more than a bit. Was that even legal? Would he have been in trouble if the cops had shown up? How would Dale explain this to Melinda? And why was Ted so inordinately interested in Lady Godiva?

These thoughts swirled around in his head for the better part of three hours. And just after nine, Klaus stuck his head into his room. "Dude, I'm feeling hungry. Supper was so-so. Want to go get a pizza?"

"Sure, I guess. Where do we find a pizza parlour?" He looked up from his chemistry notes.

"Already ahead of you. Pizza GiGi on Harbord, near Bathurst. Fifteen minute walk, tops. Double cheese and mushroom, five bucks. Best pizza in the city. Eat it right there, walk back. We'll return in under an hour. And you will sleep like a baby with five slices of golden delight in your tummy."

"I'm in. Let me get my wallet." He had a feeling he would be telling Klaus a few stories about women and horses.

Scavengers Subdued



Orientation activities had pretty much settled down from the frenetic pace of multiple events per day in that crazy startup week, but the odd event was sprinkled throughout the Fall calendar to keep spirits up and allow people new to campus to have a bit of fun and get to know one another.

The following Saturday had one such event, a scavenger hunt with teams made up of Engineering students and Nursing students. There had been a long tradition of connection between these two Faculties at the University, both with professional programs, with one being predominantly male and the other predominantly female. He had a preconceived notion of nurses from his hometown, wide-hipped matrons smelling of antiseptic, prepping some needle or medicine that would cause him pain or discomfort. The fresh-faced, cute-figured gals he saw streaming toward the scavenger hunt rendezvous point did not square with his mental image, so he looked around to admire the campus trees and architecture.

The meetup point was the south lawn of Queen's Park, within easy eyeshot of the pink sandstone building that housed the provincial legislature. The structure was both imposing and beautiful, with many small details that invited the eye to rove and linger on its stonework and architectural ornaments. He looked around and couldn't see anybody he knew. He had met perhaps a dozen or so folks in Engineering, and he had met no nurses. That familiar feeling of dread threatened to encompass him,

but he looked back at the building with its gargoyles and copper roof flashing and this settled him down considerably. 'Be calm' he told himself, this was supposed to be fun. That jogged him into a different zone and he actually smiled at a few girls who were walking by. They tittered a bit after a few seconds had passed but he decided to take that as a good omen, an expression of possible interest.

The organizer was a beefy, balding senior level engineering student, who quickly and efficiently assembled people into groups of five and handed out the list of items for retrieval. All of this happened lickety-split, and he soon found himself in a group that stood off under a beautiful chestnut tree. One of the group members was a petite brunette nurse, with a lithe and curvy figure under her nursing overalls. She was spunky and down-to-earth, and an obvious leader.

"OK, folks, my name is Sue. Nursing, year three. This is a fun event, but we play to win. From past experience, we need to divide and conquer." She paused for a second and raised her eyebrows devilishly. "There are items on-campus, and items off-campus. The points are not equal, so I suggest we go for the big-ticket items first. These are the most difficult ones, natch, but a tricky high-point item will weigh off against many low-point items. The majority are on-campus so let's do a group of three working together there, and a duo working together off-campus. Let's meet in ninety minutes over at Huron and College, and that will give us thirty minutes to get our act together and present to the judges at the reviewing stand outside the old Metro Library."

His pairing was with a young lady by the name of Marcy, who actually happened to be in his Civil

Engineering class. She was very plain of feature, but she seemed friendly enough and had a ready smile. They were the off-campus duo, and put their heads together before setting off eastward along College Street towards Yonge Street. They wrote down requested details such as the number of parking spots outside a Grosvenor Street bar and the colour of a moose statue in front of a financial services office on Bay Street. Things got a bit testy when they tried to steal a menu from the Fran's Restaurant near Yonge Street, but they explained to the intervening manager that they were on a scavenger hunt and would return all items after the judging was completed.

They found themselves outside the back door of Sick Kids Hospital on College. He felt a pit in his stomach, as he knew this was the place his brother had been taken for treatment many times over his short life. The search card said 'some kind of infrastructure from Sick Kids, the value assigned to it being at the discretion of the reviewing judge'. He and Marcy went in nervously, and found eerily quiet hallways. Just ten yards in from the door stood a portable gurney bed, fitted up with a pillow and a grey blanket. He stopped beside it and gave it a sideways look.

"Do you think we can trundle this contraption five blocks over to St. George Street without getting into trouble?" He whispered this through clenched teeth, feeling sure an orderly would appear any minute.

"I'm game if you are." Marcy giggled, perhaps a bit too loudly. "The toughest part will be getting it out the door and clearing the parking lot. I'll slide under the blanket and you can roll me out to a fictitious waiting car."

Twenty minutes later he rolled the gurney bed up to Liz and the other two teammates, with Marcy camping it up by folding her arms behind her head and whistling an off-key tune.

“Cripes, where did you get that?” Liz was smiling broadly.

“Infrastructure from Sick Kids. And we got a lot of comments and stares as we rolled along College.” He grinned right back.

“OK folks, let’s put a cherry on top for the sure win. You see that last item on the list? The Wild Card? ‘Something wild, off-limits, possibly illegal?’? Any ideas?” Liz waved her hands around, savouring the moment.

“Yeah, that.” A dour young man with a sallow complexion pointed at a Silverstein’s Bakery van parked in a service station parking lot.

“That van? How are we going to get inside?” Liz sounded skeptical.

“By jimmying the lock with this coat hanger.” Mr. Dour was matter-of-fact.

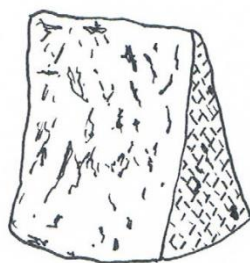
“And how do we get it moving?” Liz sounded less skeptical.

“Simple. Pop the tranny into neutral and we all push. Up Huron, across one block and then down St. George to the adoring judges at the reviewing stand. And we can put all our stuff in the back to be counted up. Even the gurney will fit.” Mr. Dour was way ahead of everybody.

“OK, but we’ll need a driver and four pushers. Who has a driver’s license with them in case we get stopped?”

He gulped hard as it became evident he was the only person who had a license on them. But he gulped even harder, realizing that if they did get stopped, not having a valid license would be the least of their worries.

A Cheesy Proposition



The excitement of winning the scavenger hunt had been almost too much, plus all of the major items had to be returned which took them until well past midnight. They had received quite the scolding from

the judges on the hijacking of the bagel truck, but not enough to keep them from scoring big in the Wild Card category and edging past a few other over-achieving groups. Returning the truck was easy, with a relatively flat roll back to the parking lot on Huron Street. The hospital gurney was more problematic, as one of its wheels turned wonky and it became increasingly difficult to steer as they made their way back to the hospital. Marcy needed to catch one of the last subways home and she peeled off at the Queen's Park subway station. So it was up to him to randomly steer the gurney across the wide expanse of University Avenue and into the Sick Kids parking lot. He almost lost his nerve and was tempted to just leave it in one of the parking spaces, but his small-town roots told him this wouldn't be right. He went through the automatic entrance doors tentatively, and saw a completely empty corridor. He left the portable bed approximately where it had been picked up, and then hightailed out of there before he faced detection.

He slid into his college bed just after two, and went into a deep state that was populated with periodic dream segments. In one of them he lay on a portable hospital gurney. The petite nursing student Liz came down a hallway, dressed in a full professional uniform. She seemed friendly enough, but then told him to roll over so she could take his temperature with a rectal thermometer. His dream persona resisted this and muttered out some kind of indistinct objection, so she softly massaged his buttocks and whispered naughty little encouragements into his ear. He could feel her breasts pushed up tight against his back as she leaned in to do her work. He turned to kiss her and saw that the dream Liz had morphed into a short and well-endowed blonde girl, who was also dressed as a nurse but whose uniform top was unbuttoned to her waist. She moved away and then came closer, spanking his buttocks and wagging a finger at him.

All night he kept returning to variations of this same dream, and it was so pleasant he hung like a stone to his bed through the shifting light patterns of the morning. When he eventually woke up and rose to shower he realized that it was once again past the Sunday lunch dining hours, and his rumbling tummy told him he would have to forage for some food to tide him over to supper. He walked down St. George, and in the bright sunshine he could hardly recall the shadowy and frenetic hijinks of the previous evening. A short stroll across College past Spadina, and he bent into the Kensington Market district. This is where his dad had delivered product five days a week, and he strolled along imagining he could see the old man and his truck, open with boxes of butter on a skid.

A lot of places were closed, but it appeared a butcher on one corner was open as well as a cheese shop mid-block. He did a mental gauge and thought cheese would be a better breakfast than cold cuts, so he popped in the door and was pleasantly assaulted by the aromas emanating from more than a hundred cheeses. After a lot of humming and hawing, and sampling of a range of cheeses from a sleepy-eyed florid-faced man in his forties, he settled on a chunk of sharp blue cheese and a small package of crackers. Even to his frugal sensibilities he thought the \$1.63 price for the cheese was too low, so he asked for a small can of tomato juice to round out the meal and give the merchant a bit more trade.

The only dilemma he faced was where to eat his gourmet lunch, and he looked around in vain for a bench to sit in the sun. Then the idea came to him that he might stroll back to campus and explore a zone that he hadn't seen yet. He went up Huron in the direction of New College, where he had been

slated to live in a crowded triple room. He stood outside the edifice looking up at the residence windows, imagining that one of them would have been his domicile for the year. Then he walked east towards Sid Smith, the social sciences building that he had heard had a nice interior sitting space. The sun had popped in behind some clouds, so the bench he found inside a light-filled atrium was just perfect for his lunch and some people-watching.

The blue cheese had warmed up nicely on his walk up to the campus, and he laid out the slab on a serviette beside him and popped open the crackers and his tomato juice. Halfway through the crackers, he saw a young lady sitting on a bench across the way, reading a textbook. And every now and then she looked over at him in a concentrated way. Her direct gaze rattled him to some degree. She had curly, sandy-blond hair that was shoulder length. She was cute in a bland sort of way, but wore a tight white top that nicely displayed a pair of very large breasts. He shifted on his bench a bit, fussing with his cheese. And then he came to the realization that she looked a lot like the gal Liz had morphed into in his nocturnal dreamscape. The thought of this caused him to scrunch up his eyes and look down, and when he looked up she was standing right in front of him with a sly smile on her face.

"Whatcha eating?" She pointed down at the bench.

"Uh, cheese. Want a piece?" He didn't know what else to say.

"Nah, thanks, though. Not much for cheese. Too much fat content. With my height and my build, one has to be careful." He noticed she couldn't be more than five feet zero in height.

"Yeah, good point. I trimmed down a lot this Summer, but should be careful as well."

"What do you study?" She said this benignly, but with a subtle hint of flirtatiousness.

"Engineering. You?" He kept trying to untie his tongue.

"Nursing. Typical, right? And my boyfriend's in Engineering." She put one hand on her hip and used the other to fluff her hair.

"Oh, boyfriend, right." His eyes shifted back to his cheese.

"Yeah, but he's always busy. Not as much time for the girlfriend as she would like, or needs." She rolled her shoulders ever so slightly.

"Hmm, that's too bad. But it is a demanding program." He nodded to himself.

"Yes, but sometimes I wonder if he's looking at other girls, more than his books." She pouted a bit.

"Oh, I would doubt that. Given, uh, y'know..." He extended his hand in her direction.

"Do you live in residence?" She looked sideways in each direction as she said this.

"Yeah, at Knox. West House. Second floor." He always gave out too much information.

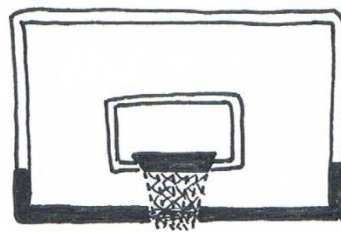
"I live at home, up in Forest Hill. But maybe sometime I could pop by Knox sometime, y'know, for a little visit." She said this slowly and softly.

"Uh, yeah, sure. That might be nice, uh, would be nice." He blinked and then went to his dream image.

"Oh, it would be more than just nice. You could show me that trimmed down body of yours, and I could pop off my top and show you these..." She wrapped her arms under her breasts and lifted them up in a seductive manner.

And at that point three young women came around the corner, with knapsacks full of books on their shoulders. "Kira, sorry we're late! Let's go study for our quiz!" And with that the blonde seductress was swept up in a flurry of femininity, but not before she shot a meaningful glance over her shoulder at a baleful cheese consumer.

Early Coding



A week flew by in his busy new academic schedule, and he found himself sitting in his room after supper on a Friday night looking at his FORTRAN coding class notes. He had not taken computers in high school, thinking they would be a passing fad, and now he was paying the price. The class seemed to be made up of two groups—whiz kids who thought in structured ways and had their code working in under an hour, and duffers like himself who plodded along and eventually found some kind of resolution. Friday afternoons had a long tutorial where an exasperated and sweaty TA tried to explain the essence of the weekly coding assignment, in a draughty hall in the old Metro Library. He would take his notes back to Knox, have an early dinner, and then get to work on the problem assignment.

He had never been great at languages, ever since the public school debacle with his irritating French teacher. He couldn't even remember her name, he had blocked the situation out so completely. But FORTRAN was a language, with syntax and flow, and he was determined to master it to at least a functional level. So he sat and puzzled out what was needed in terms of output, and worked backward through the process to the inputs that were required. He had an old-school IBM flowcharting symbol template, and he used this to block out the required steps with the relevant template shapes to create a reasonable program flowchart. This was not done in one fell swoop, but iteratively, with plenty of head scratching and eraser usage. But over the hour he developed a decent process, and from that he painstakingly wrote out the associated code lines on a sheet of perforated computer printer paper.

Another hour later, with dusk falling on the campus, he was ready to take himself off to the computer centre south of the Galbraith Building.

As he entered the terminal room he was taken aback at how hot and muggy the room was. It was packed with students, largely Chinese, and they worked feverishly in groups and only gave him the briefest of nods. His only real exposure to Chinese people had been the family of four that operated the Chinese-Canadian restaurant back in his hometown. They had been very quiet, very much keeping to themselves. These Toronto Chinese were quite different, some sporting colourful eyeglass frames and trendy clothing, and he couldn't help but notice that a lot of the girls were quite flirtatious to their study-buddy male partners. And that the girls seemed quite spunky and cute, while most of the young men seemed a bit nerdy and withdrawn. He was intrigued by their language, often punctuated by loud bursts of laughter, and he tried to plug into the collective zone of focus and hard work to get his program done and working.

The first step was to type up a bunch of punch cards, which he did while cursing himself that he didn't take keyboarding in high school. Two index fingers and a thumb plunked away, compared to the rapid ten digits of his neighbours. He finally got his first set of cards done, and ran up to join the line to feed them into the computer hopper. The cards were placed in order, a weighted press was put on top of them, and they were read in with lightning speed. A few seconds later the printer to the right started to do its itchy dance, pushing out a summary output of the code listing and any errors identified. He had become used to experiencing a lot of errors at the start, going back to mull over the output and doing up revised cards, and repeating the process. But tonight was different. Only one modest syntax error popped out on the first round, and he had a new card in place within five minutes, and another ten minutes later he was walking out into the cool night air with a clean and successful printout under his arm.

To celebrate his good luck and the found time of more than an hour, he decided to take a small stroll across campus and see what was going on at Hart House on a late Friday evening. He ran up the front steps and nodded to the night porter, an Eastern European gent he had seen more than once. He walked down the hallways, looking into various rooms and finding them largely empty. He got a brain wave that he might roll over to the gym, and see if a pickup basketball game might be in progress, or if there would be an opportunity to shoot some hoops solo.

The Hart House gym had two black guys playing a very serious game of one-on-one at the far end, with plenty of machismo and numerous blocked shots and bouts of trash talk. The near end had a dozen or more Chinese students playing a frenzied game of half-court, with no attention being paid to out-of-bounds or travelling violations. He stood and watched both ends in a bemused fashion, and then some action up on the indoor track caught his attention.

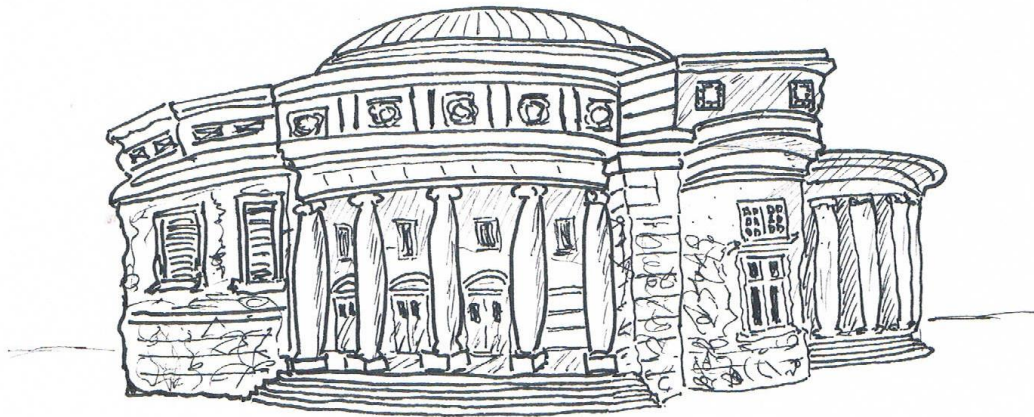
A couple was jogging along, the woman wearing a tight purple spandex bodysuit that showed off her lithe figure. She was a petite young woman, and he realized it was the secretary from the Engineering Society office in the old Metro Library. He had stopped in a couple of times for information on events, and she was friendly in a detached sort of way and had a quirky sense of humour. The guy running along

with her caught his attention even more, as it was a chap from his general design class who was in mechanical engineering. The fellow was good looking and muscular, and carried himself with a measured swagger. But what was most interesting was that he had seen this very dude walking along St. George Street on Wednesday, with the curvy nurse Kira on his arm. He had thought about looking away at the time as if he hadn't recognized her, but then shot her a glance at the last second and noticed she gave him a faint, knowing smile. So was this guy her fabled boyfriend, the one who might be looking at other girls more than his textbooks? If so, running on the indoor track at Hart House on a Friday night with the streamlined and cute Society Office secretary maybe made some sense.

He looked up and saw the guy touch the young woman on her arm just so, and this was a signal that it was more than a friendly exercise outing. He wondered where Kira might be right now, and if she might actually be standing outside his West House door in a tight white dress with not much on underneath. How she might knock the second or third time, just to bring him out of his coding reverie zone. How she might press her ear to the door, her breasts pushing up against its wooden firmness. How she might go down to the common room, peeking her head inside in an earnest and winsome way.

He wheeled away, thinking he should get home quickly. Just in case.

Saturday Rhythms



Nobody had been waiting for him on his return, even though he had checked all three floors and the common room. He went to bed with a funny kind of emotion buzzing around in his head, but the satisfaction of finishing his coding in record time and verifying that Kira's boyfriend was indeed a bit of a rogue, all wove together to send him into a deep sleep until the image of a late breakfast caused him to spring from his bed.

After some gluey bran flakes and slippery industrially-farmed eggs, he decided to go over to the bookstore to pick up a mechanical pencil he needed for drafting class. There was a small desk set up on the plaza outside the bookstore, that had a banner apron that said 'Campus Crusade for Christ'. He grimaced a bit at this and tried to scurry past, but then realized one of the people manning the desk was from a few of his classes. He was a tall, sober kind of fellow, with sharp green eyes and strawberry

blonde beard. They locked eyes and just for a second he thought he might still be able to get away, but this feeble hope was soon dashed.

“Jayson, right?” The classmate extended his hand.

“Yeah, not sure if I caught yours?” He shook hands, felling a cool clamminess.

“Paul. Nice to formally meet you. We’re on crusade today.” The fellow sounded as if he was about to embark on a long and arduous journey.

“Crusade?” He didn’t have the foggiest idea what that meant.

“Yes. A crusade for Christ. Looking for people who feel Him in their hearts, that knock on the door. He just wants to come in. To save your soul.”

“OK, right. Got ‘ya. I’m just heading into the bookstore, for drafting supplies.”

“Do you know Christ?” The green, earnest eyes burned just a little brighter.

“Um, I know who he is. I was raised Lutheran. Missouri Synod.” He blinked his eyes hard.

“All good. But do you know Christ personally? Jesus as your closest friend? Do you feel Him in your heart at all times? Does he guide your actions?” The chap was reading from a mental script.

“Uhh, probably not on all counts. Haven’t been much of a church-goer of late, y’know, organized religion and I have fallen out a bit. Still believe in God, and doing the right thing.” He smiled wanly.

“Great candidate. We meet every Wednesday and Sunday over on Huron Street. This card has all the info. Would be happy to see you out, and will introduce you to some amazing people. Life-changing, y’know what I mean?” The guy leaned in, saying this conspiratorially.

“Great, thanks. Happy to take the card. Not sure if my schedule will permit, y’know, busy with classes and all that.” It wasn’t lost on him that Mr. Zealous here was in the same program that he was.

He quickly found his mechanical pencil and scurried off towards the University College quad to avoid another brush with the Crusade desk folks. He circled around and out onto St. George Street, and five minutes later he was at his desk doing homework and laying out his schedule for his upcoming week of work. This occupied him for the rest of the day, save a half hour break for a cold salads lunch in the dining hall. In the back of his mind he contemplated the somewhat awkward encounter with his classmate. On one hand he envied the chap’s resolute faith and his commitment to some kind of religious community. But on the other hand he recoiled. Images of sweaty ministers in dusty old offices, parishioners singing tired hymns, and the wagging tongues of elderly churchgoers all tumbling past his mental landscape. Nope, he told himself---nope, nope, nope. University was a new experience, an opportunity to try new things, meet new people, entertain new ideas. He was not going to do something that his childhood minister would approve of. In fact, he wanted to do things that the old bugger would disapprove of.

So he worked and mulled, mulled and worked. And sometime just before five o'clock he heard a knock on his door. It was Henry, the husky Asian of few words.

"Jay, proposition for you. " Henry smiled half-heartedly, and unconvincingly.

"Tell me, what's up?" His head was still back in his work.

"I'm the head usher for the Royal Society of Canada lectures over at Convocation Hall. Once a month they get some bigwig to give a talk and a few of us serve as ushers. Paid gig, fifteen bucks for three hours work. My normal second usher just cancelled on me, due to girlfriend troubles. So I'm wondering if you're free this evening?" Henry's lips were set in a tight line.

"Yeah, well, no real plans. Just work. But fifteen bucks sounds good. And I've never been to Con Hall at night, bet it looks great in soft light. Sure, count me in." He smiled broadly.

"Just one thing. Needs a jacket and tie, no jeans. I'll roll by at 6:45."

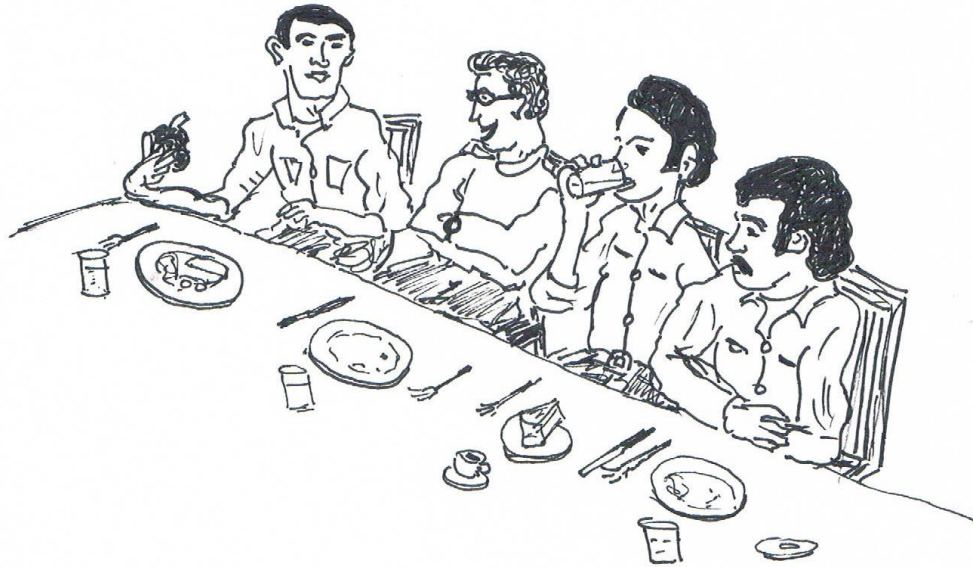
Convocation Hall did indeed look great in the twilight, with its handsome wooden doors and carved stone facades. His job was to stand by the side door and hand out half-sheet programs to any attendees who had parked out between the Forestry Building and Knox College. The folks coming in were generally quite old and distinguished looking, nodding to him in an affable way and taking the program in a grateful and appreciative manner. They were dressed to the hilt in dark suits and evening dresses, well shod and sporting that air of affluence and privilege that came from being a respected academic or community leader. A few couples were younger, in their forties or fifties perhaps, and he couldn't help but notice that the ladies were well put together and quite attractive. One woman had beautiful auburn tresses piled up high on her head, and shot him a vivacious smile. He reciprocated with a roguish grin that drew a sharp look from her husband, a heavysset lawyer type. Henry saw this interchange and came over quickly.

"Hand out the programs to the patrons, and offer up a professional nod. No flirting, no matter how beautiful the lady is." The older boy hissed this out, *sotto-voce*. "This is the Royal Society of Canada for goodness sake, and everything needs to be proper. Even the ushers handing out the programs. Understand?"

"Got it." His cheeks burned a bit.

"Great. And now we get to go in and sit at the back and hear a lecture on the mating habits of baboons in deepest Africa, by Professor Sawchuck of Biology. I wonder what the lawyer's wife you flirted with will be thinking of during the lecture." Henry allowed himself a half-smile.

A Cathedral of Materialism



The week went by in a semi-recognizable pattern, rhythms slowly becoming habitual and with just enough variety and change to make things interesting and keep him on his toes. He came back after a lab on Thursday afternoon, to grab a quick dinner before heading back in for a rare twilight hour tutorial.

He stood outside the dining hall doors, waiting for them to open up to the early-birds who had either missed lunch and were famished or to folks like him who had to wolf something down before heading off for an evening commitment. A rather funny-looking little chap stood off in the shadowy area of the coat rack, nervously adjusting his glasses and intermittently hitching up his belted trousers. He wore formal dress shoes and dark socks, but his pleated corduroy pants were too short and barely concealed the top of his socks. Coming from a river town, these were rudely known as ‘flood pants’, and he hadn’t seen such a fine specimen of these paired with dress shoes and socks. The fellow lived in West House, and was already famous for bringing two mint-green towels neatly folded on a hanger into the shower area, where he would head to after taking a massive dump in the adjoining toilet stalls. Not too many things went unnoticed in campus residence life, and it was quickly becoming a House joke that the poor fellow always took a shower immediately after any bowel discharge. Loose plans were being hatched to spirit away the hanger and towels while he was steamily scrubbing away any residues off his lower decks.

But all of this was quickly forgotten as they settled into a table by the door, after being let in by a cute slip of a waitress wearing the requisite green uniform of the College.

“How are things going with your studies, being your first year and all?” The house mate was not overly sociable, but it was just the two of them in the entire dining room.

“Good, or fair enough, anyways. I feel deep in over my head in more than a few courses, but alright in the others. Everything is interesting, and I’m starting to get to know some people from class.” He smiled tightly.

“Excellent, excellent. I did my undergraduate degree in philosophy, then a few years in government service. I hail from Ottawa, so all very familiar. But I then decided that law school would be my next destination, so here I am. Almost like a first year neophyte, all over again.” The fellow pushed his black glasses back onto his nose.

“Do you like law?” He could see the dreamy Penelope in his mind’s eye, the amorous paralegal in Lawyer Barr’s office back home.

“Oh yes, I suppose. I think I would like to practice law, but the study of it is less appealing. Reading law is what they call it. And so much reading there is! A lot of fine points, precedents, limiting conditions. I sit in my room with a stack of course reading, but all I seem to want to do is read Gothic romance novels or Chinese poetry texts. Anything but my work! I’m just hoping things will get better.” He started to saw his knife through a chicken breast, which had just arrived with its mashed potato and boiled broccoli companions.

“Yeah, things always get better. At least that is what my Mom used to say when I was a kid. I’m a big believer in that philosophy. I don’t know much about real philosophy, but as a motto for living, I’ll work with that. Much better than the alternative.” He dug into his meal and the next fifteen minutes flew by.

He ran down St. George Street after a quick brushing of his teeth, in a foiled attempt to get to the tutorial room by 5:30. The clock outside the Civil Engineering office showed its hands at just past 5:30, but he had developed a healthy suspicion in the accuracy of any clock on campus.

As he went up the stairwell, people in his class were coming down from the third floor, chattering amiably and looking as if they had just been let off one collective hook. He saw his Hart House Farm buddy, Ian, loping down two steps at a time with his trademark heavy *attache* case swinging wildly from his left hand.

“School’s out, dude! The TA cancelled the tutorial, on the condition we all go over to Yonge and Dundas for the official opening of the big new downtown mall, the Eaton Centre. Said there would be door prizes, music and cake! I’m tempted to jump on the Red Rocket and make an early exit home, but if you go, I’ll go!” Ian’s eyes danced.

“You mean no class, no work, if we all walk over for a piece of cake? Hell ‘ya! It’s a beautiful night, and who knows what might happen?” He raised his eyebrows in the direction of a cute girl in his class, a brunette with short hair and an up-turned button nose. She had pretty eyes, and a petite frame, which made her large pendulous breasts stand out all the more.

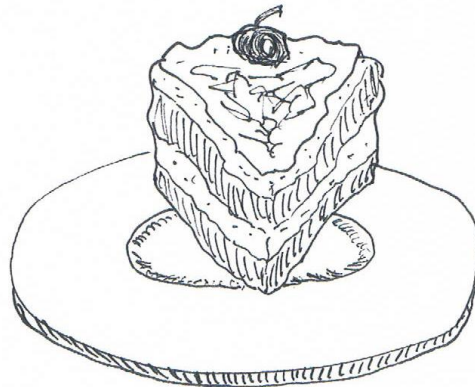
“Ah, the lovely Ingrid! I just so happened to have gone to the same high school as her in Etobicoke. She is super-stacked and that’s a fact! But I think she has a boyfriend in third year?” Ian frowned a bit.

“Whoa, don’t ruin the effect! Let’s just stroll along at a comfortable pace behind her, and see if she shoots us a look. Boyfriend, be damned!” He whispered this conspiratorially to his buddy.

“Oh, I can visualize her in the living room at my place. Late afternoon, shades drawn, muted light. She peels off her sweater slowly, ever so slowly. And those puppies pop free, unconstrained by any bra. She giggles a bit, and then slowly walks toward me. Slowly, slowly, in an agonizing but appealing manner. They bounce, oscillate, in just the best way. And then...”

A slightly heavy-set blonde chap popped out of a laneway up ahead, giving Ingrid a quick kiss and throwing his arm around her shoulders. He scrunched up his nose at Ian. At least there would be cake at the Eaton Centre.

The Power of the Pout



The grand mall opening had been one of those forgettable events, where far too many people had crowded into much too small a space to witness a very underwhelming set of events. There had been some music which was jaunty and appealing in a banal sort of way, a short speech by an overstuffed dignitary in a handsome three-piece suit, and then the cutting of a very large cake. The logistics of passing this out were less than ideal, and by the time he and Ian made it to the front of the cake line there was very little recognizable cake remaining. Always practical around food, Ian picked up a stray spatula and scraped up a reasonable pile of white icing and blue icing rosebuds to create a mini-brick of glucose that he ceremoniously shared with his gourmand buddy.

As they wolfed this down, chuckling to themselves at the size of their sugary mouthfuls and the propensity for the backslash to foam a bit onto the tips of their noses and edges of their moustaches, they both spied Ingrid and her erstwhile boyfriend standing off to one side, chatting with three young ladies. All four of the girls were in first year Engineering. Beyond Ingrid, who appeared to be domestically tied down, the other three shot glances over at the cake-snarfing lads. One was a slightly heavier-set blonde, with a cute face and a ready smile. The second gal was an olive-skinned young woman, with striking eyes and a heavily lipsticked smile. She was light of frame, but had one of the

most voluminous and sculpted derrieres he had seen in his time in Toronto. The third young woman held the attention of the two boys to the greatest degree. She had lovely shoulder-length brunette hair, with attractive features set onto a bone-china face. Taller than most, lithe and long of leg. But she had on a tight ribbed sweater, and from this it was clear she was the kind of person who would attract a parade of members of the opposite sex like bees to a honey pot.

“Christ, look at those tits!” Ian hissed this out between sugar-crusted teeth.

“You mean Ingrid?” He wanted to hear the resolution of Ian’s living room fantasy.

“Naah, we’ll leave her to Mr. Love Handles. I mean the beauty with the amazing display of sweater meat.” Ian looked across the room hungrily.

“Oh, yeh, right. She’s pretty to boot.” He emitted a tight-lipped smile.

“Oh, she’s pretty alright. And interesting as hell. My sources tell me she lives with her boyfriend, some older guy who’s a big-time photographer. They run with the beautiful people, and have a high-flying lifestyle. You know what that means in this city? Lots of drugs, and kinky sex.” Ian’s mouth foamed a bit at this.

“Good God, man. Be real. She has the face of an angel, and probably lives with her widowed aunt in a basement apartment in Rexdale.” He raised his eyebrows hopefully.

“Maybe, or maybe somewhere in the middle of the two stories. But I like my version better. Some of the guys I ride down with on the TTC, they call her The Pout. She gets on at Ossington and the car is full. She just puts on a big pout and somebody or the other jumps up and offers her their seat. She’ll go a long way on that pout!” Ian dropped the last of the cake slurry into his mouth.

“Well, we only have six girls in our class, and she’s probably the most interesting! But way out of our league...” He nodded his head vigourously.

“Oh, speak for yourself, dude. You won’t get ahead in the world with limited thinking!” Ian cocked his eyebrows and put his hand up, signaling over to the gaggle of girls.

“What are you doing, man?” He said this nervously.

“I’m done my cake. I’m going to flirt with The Pout, and see if she wants to ride the Red Rocket together. And if her boyfriend is out on assignment, who knows what might happen?” Ian donned a killer smile, and locked eyes with the lithe brunette who had smirked a bit at his hand signal, and then started walking over.

“So what are you two talking about?” She had the air of a model strutting a runway, flicking her hair and settling an attache bag on one shoulder.

“Oh, you know. Girls. What else? What are you ladies talking about over there?” Ian hitched up his jeans.

“Oh, let’s see. Shopping. School. Maybe a little about boys. We’re a bit more diversified in our interests.” She said this in a flirty way, softly rolling her shoulders.

“Heading home soon? I could give you company out to Ossington?” Ian sounded hopeful.

“That would have been fun, but I am going back to the university with the ladies for a lab writeup. Rain cheque, dude. But you guys look cute with icing on your faces...” She reached out to him and with a slender index finger wiped a smear of icing off his cheek. He felt a pulse of energy from her hand touching him, and she had the most glorious scent on that he had ever experienced. He blinked as if he might fall over from the double effect, and the next thing he knew he saw her walking away, her toned gluteus muscles flexing beautifully in their designer jeans sheathing.

He would see Ian off at the Dundas subway station, and walk the seedy stretch of Yonge Street to College and then over to his residence. He would pop his head into the main common room off the dining hall area and watch the earnest discussions of the Ways and Means Committee as they figured out important things like the price of doing laundry or the table settings for the Christmas banquet. But he was walking and listening as if in a dream, where his reality world was a series of light touches by a silken fingertip and the enveloping of his senses with a delightful and intoxicating perfume.

Meet Me at the Chapel



He took a peek into the lecture hall on the second floor of the Galbraith Building, trying to decide whether to go in early and get settled or wait around in the hallway and re-read the dusty announcements on the tattered bulletin board. There were a few students already in there, mainly or all Chinese. He had found these folks would say hi or issue a faint smile, but that was about it. He would have liked to talk to them in detail, about life on the other side of the world, but he realized

language was an issue that caused his innate shyness to rise to the fore. So he stood outside, waiting for Ian or one of The Italians to show up and banter a bit before class.

A chap came down the hallway, carrying a heavy brown briefcase full of notes and books. He wore out-of-fashion glasses, and his hair was wet-plastered to his head. Maybe it was BrylCreem to keep it in check, or maybe just copious quantities of water slathered in place with a straight comb. He was pasty-faced with a bit of acne, and a touch on the nervous side as he walked up to within five yards and delicately set down his briefcase.

"Lecture hall still occupied from the previous class?" The other boy nodded in the direction of the room.

"No, it's cleared out. Very few of our class in there, just thought I'd stand outside for a bit and get some air." He nodded reassuringly.

"Uh, air. Good. Gets stuffy in there. Y'know, body odour." The guy looked down at his briefcase.

"Are you from Toronto?" His standard opening line was often geographical.

"No, no. Not me. I'm from a farm down Delhi way. Tobacco. Mixed farming. Going to be a County Engineer." The lad shifted his eyes nervously, then smiled shyly.

"No kidding, that's what I am hoping for as well. I used to walk to school every day through the County buildings, and would see the engineer working at his desk. He went to my church, actually. Nice guy." He smiled at the reminiscence.

"Oh yeah, important work. Roads, drainage, snow ploughing. Keeps the rural areas connected and moving along. Just have to survive up here in the big city for four years. I miss my girlfriend terribly, she's in a medical technician program at Fanshawe. London's a party town, so I worry a lot. Go home most weekends. By the way, Jake's my name. And I think the prof just went in the other door."

He went to his customary back row and noticed Jake took a seat in the second row on the left aisle, to optimize viewing of the board and picking up on the energy of the instructor. The next two hours went by in a blur, punctuated by a short break to change instructors and subjects, but the mass of the class stayed put for the rest of the morning, ensconced in the ebb and flow of traditional lecturer-speaking-to-students pedagogy.

The last class of the morning ended inexplicably early, either for the reason the professor had run out of material or he simply wanted to get a jump on the queue at the faculty Club. He bust out the back door of Galbraith and rounded the curve of Convocation Hall, taking in the bright sunlight of the Fall day and the mob of activity across and around King's College Circle. He popped into the Circle-side entrance to Knox College, immediately feeling the quiet hushed tones that emanated from the College's Library on the north side and the College's chapel on the south side.

He looked up the steps towards the Chapel and saw its doors open, a rare occurrence. He had never actually been inside, so he mounted the steps two at a time and stood at the edge of a beautiful worship

space. The woodwork was lush and dark, yet the light coming in the beautiful stained glass windows above the altar suffused the entire space in a light that would be minimally described as celestial. An organ was playing in a very subdued and subtle way, and there seemed to be some kind of activity going on up at the altar. He took a seat in one of the back pews, closed his eyes, and drifted off into a deep meditative space.

"She's a real looker, isn't she?" The voice was at his right ear.

"What the...?" He turned to the right and looked back, seeing that one of the fellows from East House had come up and sat right behind him. He was an upperclassman, in the applied chemistry program.

"Patsy, up there on the right." The fellow pushed his glasses up on his nose and nodded towards the front.

"Yeah, what about her?" He had seen this young woman at dinner several times. Quiet, a bit mousy, but pretty enough features. All the women theology students lived in East House, on a dedicated floor.

"Quite the little creampuff, that Patsy." The guy sucked on his teeth.

"Creampuff?" He looked backward, and then forward to the altar.

"Or creampuffs might be more accurate. When she whips off her sweater and her bra, she wants me to give those things a horrific tongue lashing!" A semi-audible snort waved over the quiet space.

"Good God, man, we're in a church!" He said this earnestly.

"Oh, you don't know the half of it, man! I've even given her the big fellow in the back pew of the Chapel here on more than one occasion. These theology gals are real goers, I tell ya! Yep, Patsy just loves my..." The guy was waggling his eyebrows, truly warming to his task.

"Why...the...hell...are...you...telling...me...this? He turned and glowered at the older boy.

"Dude, dude, chill out. You're not in PunkeyDoodle Corners any more. Wild shit goes down in Toronto! And Patsy gets super horny if I tell her I've spilled the beans to someone right here in the chapel! Why, I tell 'ya..." The titillated whispering became inaudible as he stepped away and down the stairs, off to a light lunch and some tormented musings.

A Study in Contrasts



A fair portion of a week spilled by, with the hum of life in the big city being experienced alongside the rhythms of a busy academic program. It was late Thursday afternoon, and he found himself sitting in the grungy café of the Old Metro Library on College, waiting for Ian to get out of class before they went off to do something of a social nature. He looked around and saw a few people he knew, in particular one blonde gal from class who was super nice and equally attractive. She was talking to a tall, lanky guy from class with spiky hair and a goofball demeanour, so he pretended not to notice either of them and continued to eye-scan the place.

Over at a single table, sipping tea from a thermos, sat a muscular young Asian chap. His eyes were bright and alert, and he sat quietly and self-assuredly. He had just the faintest whiff of a smile on his placid countenance, and his posture and body cast exuded a quiet but substantial confidence. He observed this all perhaps a bit too thoroughly, and the observed caught the observer in a straightforward manner.

“Do you care to join me?” The muscular lad extended a sweeping hand towards an empty chair at this table.

“Uh, sure. Why not? We haven’t met formally. Jayson....” He had seen this guy in a few of his classes.

“RJ.” They shook hands in a formal way.

“RJ?” He had a guy in his high school who went by his initials, but it had always confused him why he didn’t go by his given name.

“RJ. R.J. My Chinese name is rather hard for Canadians to say correctly. And I don’t feel like adopting a name like Fred or Winston. So RJ it is.” He gave out a shy smile.

"RJ is easy enough. Where are you from?" He wondered at the last second if he had made a misassumption. Might the guy actually be from Mississauga?

"Hong Kong. But I speak both Mandarin and Cantonese. My parents sent me to a special high school in Beijing, where I could learn more about ancient Chinese traditions and knowledge. And I have come here now to U of T, and have the privilege of studying to become a civil engineer." The young man said this in nearly-flawless English, with only the slightest hint of an accent.

"Wow, Hong Kong! I have only seen pictures. Tall buildings, crowded sidewalks, and colourful signs everywhere. My only loose connection with this place is through a chicken factory where I used to work. One of my jobs was to fork hundreds of chicken feet into boxes, that were then stamped 'To Be Shipped to Hong Kong'. Do folks actually eat chicken feet?" He said this in an incredulous tone.

"Indeed. It is a great delicacy in our dim sum restaurants. Chinese people eat every part of an animal or bird or fish. If nature puts it there, it has some purpose. If the animal has given its life, every part of its body has value." This was said patiently and thoughtfully.

"Well, not much meat on those suckers! But if you say they're tasty, I won't disagree with you." He warmed to the subject, having eaten chicken as a main staple for his entire life.

"It's all in the sauce. Chinese people can take food and turn it into a hundred different dishes, by pairing it with different ingredients to make up its sauce. Spicy, sweet, sour, savoury, astringent...the tongue must be a gymnast to fully enjoy Chinese cuisine." The Asian lad's eyes danced.

"Wow, big differences there. I was raised on over-cooked meat or fish, with salt and pepper to garnish. Everything tasted pretty much the same. No wonder I always looked forward to desert!" He grinned broadly and patted the ghost image of his previously expansive waist line.

"Hey, big boys, what's going on?" Ian had come out of his class smiling broadly. He must have ditched his ubiquitous briefcase in a locker somewhere, as it was nowhere to be seen.

"Learning about the finer points of Chinese dining, sir. It should make my next foray down Spadina into Chinatown more informed and more rewarding. Say, have you met RJ?" He waved his hand between the two other boys.

"Can't say as I have. But I think I've seen you in the odd class." Ian vigorously pumped the hand of the jacked Chinese, who quietly applied considerable pressure on the Canadian's fingers, causing a quick end to the proceedings.

"Say, RJ, want to tag along with us? We're going to have a bite to eat and then head over to the pub at Victoria College. Who knows what might happen?" Ian put on a rakish grin.

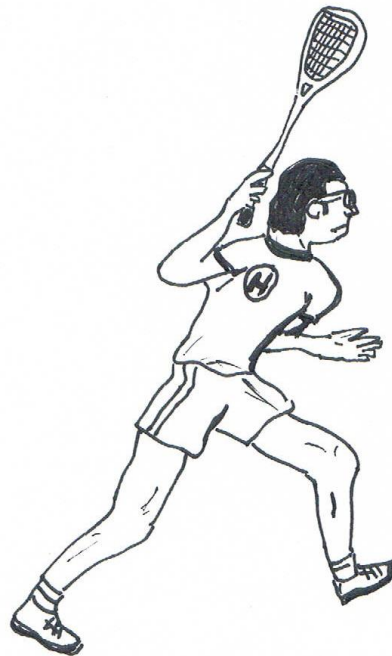
"Thank you for the kind invitation, but no. I will finish my tea, then meditate for half an hour. Then some fish soup for a light dinner which I have in this other thermos, and then some note review until my

martial arts training at 9:00 over at Hart House. From rigid structure comes great dividends.” This was all said gently and matter-of-factly.

“Holy crap, man, that’s not my idea of a fun Thursday night! But whatever turns your crank, dude!” Ian slapped RJ on the shoulder as the two Canadian young men shoved off.

A couple of hours later, after a delicious and surprisingly cheap roast beef dinner at a restaurant in the bowels of Hydro Place, they found themselves standing in a crowd at the Vic Pub. The music was loud, so loud that he couldn’t fully hear what Ian was yelling intermittently in his ear. They seemed to be the only engineers there, at least frosh engineers. People stood around in clumps and knots of people, nursing their drinks and loudly talking to one another. As he stood there observing, there seemed to be a lot of frenetic guffawing going on, and everyone seemed to know one another. There were lots of young women there, smartly dressed and well put together. Ian kept trying to connect with a number of them, but to his bemusement the connection lines seemed frayed or non-operative. So he stood there, detached from the scene around him. He visualized RJ going through a series of orchestrated martial arts moves, with eyes closed and rhythmic breathing. He couldn’t help but think that this scene had a lot more appeal than the one he was physically in, and resolved on the spot that he would start to integrate more structure in his life.

Squash in a Box



He hadn’t slept well that night, with images of a crowded student pub with revelers wearing absolutely nothing and himself standing in the middle, wearing a poorly-fitting suit and a mismatched tie. Another dreamscape wove in and out, with him sitting at the top of a mountain with RJ, meditating and playing Buddhist singing bowls. The two scenarios interchanged frequently, with the end of the night’s sleep being a frenetic switching of themes and locales. He woke up in a sweat, feeling spent but oddly

focused. An inner voice told him it was time to make decisions, and change things that needed changing.

With a basic and forgettable breakfast in the dining hall behind him, he ambled down St. George Street towards the Galbraith Building. A bustling street scape in Toronto never failed to fascinate him, with a bevy of unknown but important -looking people making their way to a set of perceived serious tasks. This was not a small town, and people did not nod or say good morning to passersby. The odd cool nod from an older gentleman might be the closest he would receive to the human recognition he was accustomed to, but he held out hope this might change over time as he got to know more people.

He stepped into an administrative office, hoping to pick up a scholarship application form that he had read about on a bulletin board. The office was just starting up its daily rhythms, and a woman sat at a typewriter with scholarly black half-glasses perched on the end of her pert nose.

"Can I help you?" She said this in his approximate direction, but kept her focus on the typewriter.

"Uh, yes, I'm looking for an application form for an ACI Scholarship." His voice came out quavery, and he hemmed and hawed a bit.

"Sure thing, just give me a second." She punched two more keys, and popped the piece of paper out of the typewriter with a practiced flourish. "There's a stack of them on the counter, to your right." She pushed her glasses up on top of her head and stroked her shoulder-length dark hair behind her ears, showing off a funky pair of silver earrings.

"Thanks, appreciate the help." He stammered this out, and felt a rush of sweat forming at his armpits. He couldn't tell what ethnicity this woman was, but it was something SouthEast Asian, and she was certainly attractive and confident. He noticed she had on a snug dress of some kind of woven material that did not do a good job of hiding a lithe but curvy figure.

"This is what you want..." She stood with a one page form in her hand, and he realized he had been caught staring.

"Yes, ma'am." She frowned at this so he quickly offered a second salutation. "Yes, miss." He grinned in a hopefully disarming way and she smiled back in a slightly world-weary manner.

"Good luck on the scholarship. Deadline is noon this Friday."

He only had two lectures that morning, to balance off the FORTRAN coding tutorial that was lurking in its ominous Friday afternoon time slot. Paul, the erstwhile Christian, had asked him a couple of times to go play squash at Hart House. He had capitulated after a bit and today after the morning classes was the booked squash date.

They walked over to Hart House together, chatting amiably about not much at all, and before he knew it they were changed into their gym gear. Rented racquets in hand, they stood out in front of a squash court in a narrow alleyway that looked positively medieval.

He had played tons of tennis throughout high school and at times had played at a relatively high level. But anger had got the best of him, and he had started to throw his racquet after narrowly-missed points. So he had cooled it on tennis to give himself time to reflect on why he was so driven and why so much anger could spurt out so quickly. He had made some progress on this front but it was still incomplete healing, so he was cautious as he stepped into the box after the previous combatants had vacated.

Paul was tall and lanky and quick on his feet, but seemed to be somewhat lacking in hand-eye coordination. He himself was the opposite, finding himself hitting sure shots when he could get to the ball, but discovering several times that his lack of quickness was bringing him to the ball zone well after it had bounced twice. So they were well matched, having fun and working hard to get into some kind of fluid rhythm. Paul ran hard and crashed into a wall on more than one occasion, and several times swung wildly and narrowly missed connecting with his opponent's head.

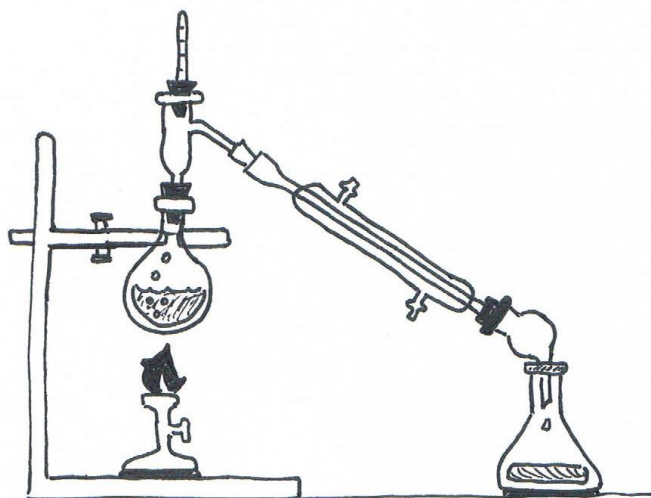
"Whew, felt the wind whizzing by on that one! Maybe let's take a breather for a second and get re-focused." He was trying to be diplomatic, and perhaps save his own skin.

"Sure, good idea." Paul's face was almost as red as his beard. "It'll give me a chance to invite you to our Crusade event this weekend out in High Park. Get out of the U of T bubble a bit, and see a beautiful and natural part of Toronto. Lots of good speakers telling us about The Word, and musicians to help us sing fun hymns. Lots of pretty girls too! We would love to have you as our guest!" His green eyes danced as he twirled his racquet.

He wanted to be kind, as he liked this fellow. But a High Park tent revival meeting was something his Mom would go to. He blinked a drop of sweat out of his eyes, and saw a mental image of himself walking arm in arm with the nubile secretary from the office this morning at some kind of Filipino or Singaporean fair, as she slowly and sensuously licked a mango ice. This was an alternate and much more appealing possibility, no matter how improbable. But high enough of a probability to motivate him to gently decline the offer in hand.

"With regret, I anticipate coding for most of the weekend. My FORTRAN fluency is about as strong as my squash playing."

Not Quite the Right Chemistry



It was a Tuesday afternoon, and Tuesday afternoons meant enduring a long chemistry lab. He had never cottoned on to chemistry, as it seemed too abstract for something that appeared so practical with all of its bench-scale apparatus and recipe-like protocols. His high school chemistry teacher had been a weird duck, quasi-military in his style, and prone to leering a bit at the young ladies in class. So his initial inclination to the subject was far short of strong, and the required chemistry course in first year engineering had done little to alter that. The professor was decent enough, a thin nervous man with horn-rimmed glasses and a manicured moustache. He was fastidious in his explanations and was in fact a very capable teacher, calling on all students by name with the formal salutation of “Mr.” or “Miss”. But things went sour every week in the laboratory period, where incomplete and fuzzy instructions had to be translated into a set of steps to produce the desired results.

He had never been particularly good with tools and setting up apparatus, and there were many pieces of piping and meters to connect before any measurements could be taken. The required lab coat, practical for keeping jeans free of holes from spilled acid, rankled him and seemed stiff and hot in the stale-air lab that had a musty chemical smell permeating throughout. But the least enjoyable aspect of the lab was dealing with the TA, a kind-enough PhD candidate who seemed to get increasingly agitated as the lab wore on and progress was slow for the under-performing groups. The fellow’s English was less than strong, and delivered in an accent that he couldn’t put his finger on. Chinese? No. Indian? No. Maybe Burmese? In any case, it was clear the chap knew his stuff but was deficient in terms of communication. And on this day, it looked as if it would be a particularly trying lab session.

“Setup wrong. This valve open. Must be open for ‘mfeer’.” The TA pushed his glasses back on his nose and bent in to his group’s apparatus.

“OK. I think I got you...” One of the guys in his group, a big strapping fellow with ruddy cheeks, started to turn some valves.

"No. Open to 'mfeer'." The lab instructor wagged his finger excitedly and pointed at a particular valve.

"OK, but what the hell is 'mfeer'?" The blonde kid said this under his breath, smirking a bit.

"'Mfeer'...'mfeer'...'mfeer'!!" The TA waved his hands wildly around his head, raising the volume of his voice noticeably.

"What the fuck...learn some English before you step in to teach!" The blonde boy muttered this audibly, his cheeks getting redder.

From across the way glided a young Chinese man, calm of demeanour and exuding quiet confidence. It was RJ, the meditator from the Old Metro Library.

"The system needs to be open to the atmosphere. We ensure this by turning this valve half a turn, and equally so with this valve. 'Mfeer' is an accented representation of 'atmosphere'. My accent makes some words I say in English hard to understand. Perhaps you have to be English as a second language to fully understand the difficulties in communicating in something other than your native tongue." He smiled a tight-lipped smile and made the valve adjustments, and then did a distinct head bow to the TA.

"Thanks so much, RJ, that was a big help!" He said this as the TA drifted off towards another group, crisis averted.

"My group is a bunch of chemistry nerds, and they're almost finished with the experiment. Perhaps I can stay and help you guys with any troubleshooting?" The Chinese boy said this affably.

An hour later he exited the Wallberg Building by one of its back doors, a sheaf of lab measurements under his arm, all obtained efficiently through the generosity of RJ. He decided to walk up King's College Circle Road past Convocation hall, and take the rear door into Knox College while admiring the athleticism of some soccer players on the Circle's open space. As he mounted the steps to the college, Klaus popped out the door in a boisterous manner.

"Don't even think about it, dude! The supper menu is the pits! Curried chicken or some similar shit, I tried it a few weeks ago and it sucked big-time! I'm tired of eating toast and peanut butter for supper, and was just going over to the Hart House Cafeteria for a smoked-meat-on-rye sandwich. Care to join me?"

Hart House had many nooks and crannies and one place he had not yet been to was its cafeteria on the south side of the building. The two lads went inside and picked up their sandwiches and soup, placing everything on a tray that they slid down to the cashier at the end of the line. The Knox meal plan was all included in one cheque at the start of the year, so the idea of paying for a dinner on top of this was not particularly appealing to his frugal sensibilities.

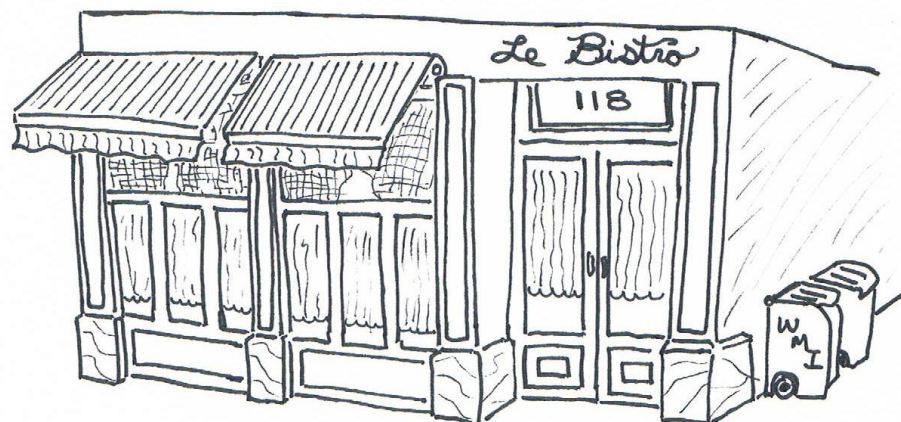
"It's such a beautiful day, and there's plenty of light still, so let's eat outside on the patio." Klaus picked up his tray and nodded in the direction of an outdoor space with a dozen or so tables.

The patio was well populated, with one empty table over by the south parapet. There seemed to his eye to be far more young ladies than young men, having a coffee or eating a bite while reading a book or studying from notes. A number of the girls looked promising, and he rethought his hesitation towards spending money for a light supper.

This was before public space smoking legislation was in place, and a couple of girls at an adjoining table sat there with their coffees and lit cigarettes. He wrinkled his nose a bit as he had always hated cigarette smoke, from the time he was a kid and his Dad was a heavy smoker. Klaus saw his displeasure and muttered under his breath.

“Hey, don’t knock it man! Girls who smoke cigarettes will also smoke dicks! Y’know what I mean?” Klaus snickered at his own innuendo, but it had been perhaps too audible. The two young ladies quickly packed up their things, and he realized he might have to get a better wingman than Klaus if he wanted success on the romance front.

Walk and Talk



The sun was bright in the sky and the day was unseasonably warm. You could almost smell Spring, that delightful mix of greenery aromas and buoyant air that came from an Indian Summer afternoon, but all savvy city residents knew there was a long and cold winter coming before the true birth of Spring. A tutorial had been inexplicably cancelled and he had scuttled back to the College anticipating a mid-afternoon nap, but he had met Henry on the front steps who gently nudged him to come along on his afternoon stroll.

“C’mon dude, ninety minutes tops. Slow walking is great for lipid reduction.” Henry pressed his lips together firmly.

“What’s a lipid?” He wasn’t exactly sure.

"Fats. Belly fat. Love handles. I need to keep some of my weight on during football season, but also need to keep it in check. Offensive linemen guard the temple of the quarterback, so we need to be strong and quick to respond to anybody rushing in for the sack." Henry flexed his biceps and lats.

"OK, where are you walking to?" He realized napping indoors would be a real shame on such a beautiful afternoon.

"Oh, I was thinking of getting out of the campus bubble a bit. Up St. George to Harbord, over on Harbord to at least Bathurst, maybe even to Palmerston. Great homes on that street, plus vintage streetlamps. Then back on Harbord. Down one side, back on the other. Soak up the vibe of all that Harbord offers—restaurants, bookstores, bakeries, pizza palaces, Mom-and-Pop stores. You'll like it." Henry was typically a man of few words, so this torrent was certainly atypical.

They sauntered along, enjoying the sunshine and the street life of the campus. When they went past Spadina it got a bit quieter, but certainly had some bustle and all of the amenities that Henry had described.

"Nice, eh? It's important to get out and see what the city is like, where people live and work. I walk out Bloor West once a month, all the way to High Park. Take the subway home, and I've gotten some good exercise and understand better how things fit together. Economics can be pretty abstract, so this makes things a bit more real." Henry puckered his lips and looked off-handedly down an alleyway.

"Yeah, I see what you are saying. I knew every nook and cranny of my hometown. And pretty much all the people by name. And their dogs and cats! But it is a one-horse town of 5000 people, tops, so this place blows my mind on a relative basis." He waved his hands around from side to side.

"Sure, but go in baby steps. Get out on the major arterials, east and west. The city is laid out on an old rural road network, so the major streets are a mile and a quarter apart. Walk into the ethnic areas, there's more and more to see every year now after Trudeau's multiculturalism policies. Buy some food, stop into a store that has neat things, that's how you get to know a place." Henry pointed to an antiquarian bookstore that had trundle carts of books out on the adjoining sidewalk.

"How do you do it all? You play varsity football, right?" He had inferred this from a dining hall conversation of a week back.

"Yup, but I keep it low-key. Go to practice every day, lift a few weights afterwards. Go to class. Study in between. Get a good night's sleep. Balance, man, it's all about balance. We can all do a lot more than we are currently doing. Balance and focus. When I have a game day, it's all about the game. Focus the mind on the competition. And when the game's over, focus on the next thing." Henry pointed with his index finger, off into the distance.

"Do you have a girlfriend?" As soon as he said this he wished he could retract the questions, as Henry's face clouded immediately.

"I don't discuss personal things. Sorry, blanket policy." The frown had passed quickly, replaced with a resolute impassivity.

"Ooooooh, sorry, didn't mean to go into forbidden territory. I was just curious how you might balance that amongst all the other things. Have just been thinking myself, as I don't have a girlfriend either, and how it might affect my studies." He smiled just a bit too enthusiastically.

"I didn't say I do not have a girlfriend. What I said was I don't talk about it. I'm an athlete, a normal red-blooded guy. I admire the female form. Like..." Conversation paused while a lovely young woman in a beautiful blue dress walked down the sidewalk towards them. She had her longish hair swept off to one side, and was wearing a stunning pair of earrings. The gal gave them a wide and infectious smile, and both young men turned to admire the view after she had passed them.

"Like I was saying. I enjoyed seeing that young woman, appreciating her figure and her beauty, as much as the next guy. But I don't want people to know if I have a girlfriend or not. I'm a Christian, I go to church. People ask a lot of questions. It's better to be a bit mysterious, y'know what I mean?" Henry pushed his glasses up onto his nose, turning directly to his walking partner.

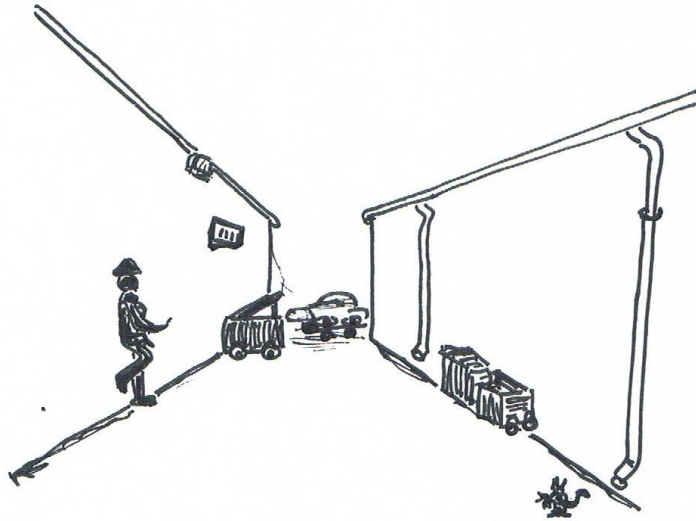
"Yeah, I get it. I'll try not to tread into any dangerous territory from here on in. Let's just enjoy our walk." He waggled his eyebrows and smiled in an off-handed way.

The two young men came up to a trendy little Italian bistro just east of Lippincott. A tall woman came out, stepping elegantly from bistro steps to a waiting car. She was well shod, and had on a white silk blouse that was just snug enough to reveal her eye-popping breasts. The lady was in her mid-thirties, and she looked at the two male pedestrians in what might be described as a suggestive and hungry manner. His own cheeks burned at the sensuality of the encounter, and then he realized he had seen her before. She was some kind of manager at the Royal Bank above the joint in Hydro Place where he and Ian had gone for a roast beef dinner. One day a while back he had been standing in a long queue at the bank with the nerdy law student from Knox, making small talk and waiting for their turn at the teller's wicket. This woman had come out of her cubicle office and rolled her hips as she walked past them, and had been wearing the same form-fitting silk blouse that she had on today. The budding lawyer had made some snickering comment then, and as he looked over at Henry now he realized that perhaps it was his turn to break the tension.

"Now that's a female form worth admiring, Henry." He scrunched his nose devilishly.

"Indeed, and with the price of entrees at that bistro, she is way out of our snack bracket! But wishful thinking can sometimes offer tangible rewards."

Seamy Underbelly



The walk in the fresh air had certainly been some form of mild exercise, and when he returned back to the residence he saw on his clock radio that he had a good hour before the dining hall opened its doors. So in that established tradition of using found time to its fullest extent, he rolled back the orange wool comforter and slid between the crisp institutional bedsheets for a quick nap. West House was quiet, and he quickly dove into a dreamscape where he kept seeing the statuesque thirtysomething banker lurking behind trees and the corners of buildings and street poles. It was a tormented dream, but a good kind of torment. The dream woman took on the energy of Lia, the dentist's wife from his hometown who had been his love interest in the town play. Some kind of dream logic was being applied here, as they were close in age, figure and sensuality. He almost woke up as he heard some kind of commotion in the hall, but the prospects of a few more encounters with the shadowy dream diva pulled him back down for another round of slumber.

He woke up in a bit of a cold sweat, the stiff and starched sheets clammy against his chest. He rolled over and looked at his clock radio and panicked just a bit, as he only had ten minutes left before the dining hall would close its doors. A quick splash of the face and a change of shirt and he soon found himself settling into a table up near the front where the staff were taking care of half-a-dozen last-minute stragglers. It wasn't his normal gang from the West House table, so he nodded and grinned at a few folks but most seemed standoffish and more focused on ensuring they would be served a plate of hot food.

Stu Rickard, the confident political scientist from West House, floated in and pulled up a chair beside him. He nodded curtly to all and sundry, and then made an intensive effort at heavily buttering a bunch of saltine crackers.

"Jayson, my man, how goes life in the Big Smoke?" Stu popped a cracker with a large dollop of butter into his mouth.

"Oh, great. Got out along Harbord today with Henry. Saw some different sights. School's going along OK, I guess." He nodded his thanks to the waitress bearing a plate of meatloaf, mashed potatoes and green beans.

"Excellent, excellent. Taking time to do some social things?" A second cracker bit the dust.

"Uh, yeah, kind of. Anything that comes across the radar. I have a lot of work, though. More focused on that." He cut his meatloaf up into a bunch of slices.

"OK, so no girlfriend yet. Need to get out to some pubs. It may sound old-fashioned, but part of the reason you're at university is to meet a gal. Not just study the books. More to life than work. There's a pub tonight at UC. Suck up that meatloaf and we'll head over after we freshen up." Stu was halfway through his meal.

University College was directly north of Knox College, and was the one original college in the University of Toronto system that didn't have a direct link to some denomination of a Christian church. As a result it had more ethnic students and certainly a large Jewish student complement. It had great buildings with amazing architectural details, and perhaps the nicest quad anywhere in the university.

He and Stu went down some stairs at the back of UC, and into the pub that already had music pumping at a significant volume. Knots of people stood around, drinks in hand, chatting amiably with occasional interruptions of forced hilarity. Stu muttered something in his ear that he couldn't quite catch, and dashed off towards a gaggle of tall and elegant young women who linked arms with Stu and took him off to a corner of the pub. He realized he was now on his own, and envied the fact that Stu took most of his classes through UC and would know lots of people as a third year student.

So he took himself off to the lineup for the bar. He thought he might get a drink, chat up a few young ladies and maybe even screw up the courage to ask one to dance. But in the lineup ahead of him there were three or four gals, and he tried to engage them in small talk as they moved along in line. They were nice looking, seemed pleasant enough, but would just sort of look through him whenever he made a pathetic attempt to connect with them. The nearest one, a petite brunette with lovely eyes and an enviable figure, just gave him a tight little smile and turned away to her peers when he muttered a comment to her how loud the music was.

He felt that familiar feeling of social awkwardness and unfathomable isolation, when he was in a crowd but felt totally alone. He looked over to Stu, who was bending his tall frame over so a strawberry blonde could whisper into his ear while she hung onto his arm. At that point he knew he had to make a graceful but decisive exit. He stepped out of line and made his way toward the washrooms, but just kept going, and the cool night air quenched the heat from his cheeks as he walked across King's College Circle.

As luck would have it, he crossed paths with Ian, coming out of the Mechanical Building with his trademark briefcase in tow.

"Say Jay, what's happening?" This was fairly sung out.

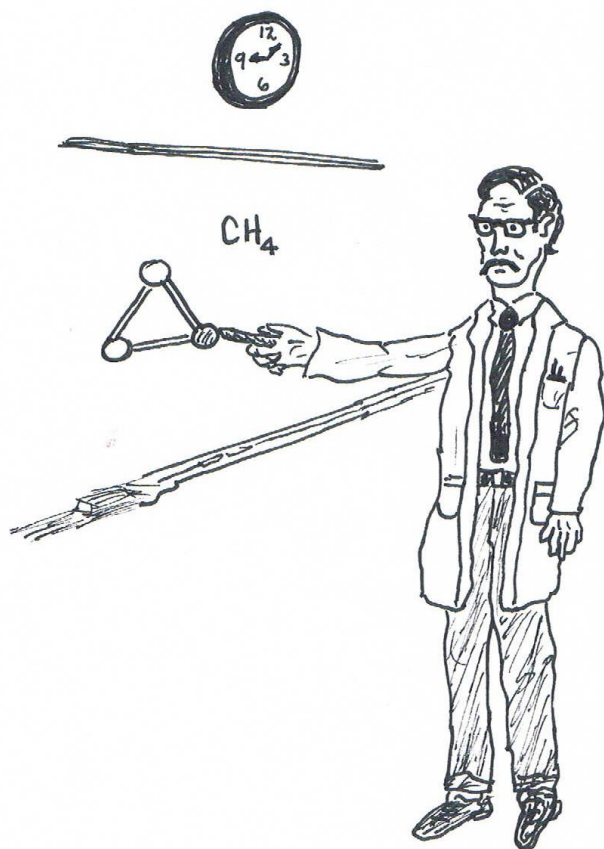
"Uh, tried to go to a pub but it was awful. Want to do something?" He grimaced at his friend.

"I was heading home, but the night's still young. Want to walk over to Yonge Street and catch the freak show? I can grab the Red Rocket from there and you can shoot back on College on foot. What do you say?"

Yonge Street in the '70s was a tawdry, mixed bag of humanity and the shadowy side of human activity. The city had reeled a short while back from the murder of Emmanuel Jacques, a sweet kid who had been kidnapped and assaulted by a couple of criminal low-life characters who hung around the back alleys off Yonge Street. Drugs, prostitutes, gay bathhouses, strip bars---all of this co-existed cheek by jowl along the Yonge Street corridor. The two boys walked along, not sure which of the beer joints with flashing lights would be the best place to go into. Just south of Gerrard they were accosted by a hooker who looked higher than a kite. A block later two young toughs tumbled out of a bar and started punching each other. When one of them pulled out a knife and started circling menacingly, Ian grabbed him by the arm and pulled him across to the other side of the street.

"Fuck having a beer! We're going to hightail it to the College station and get on a subway. You can ride with me to St. George and walk the ten minutes home to Knox. There's no bloody way we're going to end up as statistics in a knife fight stabbing!" The two boys rode homeward, having had an educational experience that you can't find in a classroom.

An Emporium of Schlock



He was sitting in his chemistry lecture, trying to take in all the pertinent points as the midterm was not far away and he knew he was in a bit of trouble in this course. He had convinced himself it was more the laboratory component that befuddled him, but in actual fact it was both the theory and the practice. Civil engineering was practiced at a large scale, and you could visualize what was going on as a beam bent or a streetcar was delayed. But as for chemistry, it seemed more like magic, or maybe even voodoo. Shake this, mix that, and this will happen. Unless such and such creates some unseen and complicated process, then all bets were off. But he decided to give it his best shot, and put even more time into this most challenging of the courses in his timetable.

He went up to the front of the class, in the time-honoured tradition of having face-time with the instructor in the hope that familiarity would breed a better grade. The three or four folks hanging around seemed to be really into chemistry, asking picky little questions and tut-tutting to each other on the nuances of the responses. The instructor was right out of central casting, with his horn-rimmed glasses and white lab coat. Today he had applied some kind of slickum to his hair, and he spoke nervously with strange bird-like motions. The young man observed all of this carefully, more interested in the human drama than the chemistry details. The eyes of the instructor seemed a bit strange, with significantly dilated pupils. He snorted regularly, and smoothed his moustache in a nervous way. The boy wondered if the professor might be high, and quickly fashioned a back story of the bespectacled

wizard fashioning a potion in his lab and drinking the mixture right before lecture. How else to explain his ability to remember hundreds of names, and recall details of questions posed in past lectures as if he was reading it all off some mentally-accessed papyrus scroll?

He bust out the rear doors of the Wallberg Building and found himself back in his room in West House in less than five minutes. His room was a bit of a haven, a refuge, with its simple furnishings and traditional woodwork and plaster. He had been a bit spooked after the near-incident on Yonge Street, and had stayed pretty close to home ever since. His plans were for this to continue, but then a tall presence loomed at his open door.

“Saddle up for a walk, partner.” It was Ted, the Don of Hall, wearing his trademark cross necklace and a spiffy polo shirt.

“What’s going on?” He looked down at his desk, trying to see if he had sufficient reasons to formulate an excuse to stay put.

“Need some shoelaces. Can’t get practical things like that anywhere but Honest Ed’s. I’ve convinced Klaus to come with us, as I’ve realized I’ve been negligent in my House Don duties to take you newbies under my wing a bit more. A walk and talk, and we’ll be back in time for a late dinner.” This was said as if no debate would be tolerated.

They walked up St. George, with Ted pointing out various buildings and the attendant details behind each one. The guy was a story teller, with an easy patter that mixed in a bit of history and a smattering of philosophy and sociology. The turn onto Bloor brought them onto a street teeming with people making their way home after a day of work or school.

“Lordy, lordy, lordy...I have to get up here at the afternoon rush hour more often. There’s got to be a hundred good-looking chicks per block.” Klaus burst this out, looking forward and backward.

“Yes, indeed, plenty of inspiration for the eye. A beautiful woman is a gift from God.” Ted’s eyes danced saucily.

“Uh, you theologs! I’m taking a more earthy perspective here. Can you imagine if I could touch base somehow with a few of these office foxes, and get them to stop by Knox on their way home from work? Appetizers before dinner indeed!” Klaus projected this out loudly to one cute gal walking past him, who promptly shot him a scowl.

“Be subtle, gentlemen, remember we are ambassadors of the College. Look, but don’t mutter.” Ted spun this out quietly, and his eyes popped a bit as a gal in a tight red silk blouse brushed past them, her high heels clacking on the sidewalk in an appealing way.

“You mentioned you have a girlfriend, right, Ted?” He said this coyly.

“Yup, she’s out at Bible College in the Prairies. Clean-living girl, we write regularly. But she keeps mentioning a bachelor preacher man who covers the Old Testament class. Kind of wondering if she’s

got eyes for him.” Ted’s neck craned hard while a tall blonde in a business suit breezed by them. “So here I am in Toronto. A big city, full of temptations. So it’s a good test of my character. Yes, a good test. The Spirit is strong, but the flesh is weak...” Ted’s glasses seemed to steam a bit as a trio of pretty Asian women came out of a jewelry store just west of Brunswick Avenue.

A few moments later they came up to the monolith of Honest Ed’s, at the southwest corner of Bathurst and Bloor. It had more flashing lights than a Vegas casino, and hundreds of people were streaming in and out of its doors. They went in and rode a short escalator up to the second floor, being immediately engulfed in a sea of humanity. The contrast from the Bloor Street sidewalks was shocking. Instead of sophisticated and urbane commuters, it seemed like most people in the store were elderly folks from his hometown. Plenty of blue rinse for the ladies and corn caps for the gentlemen. It was perhaps even beyond his hometown, as there was a city hardness to these folks yet they seemed like they were on their way to a monster truck pull. As far as the eye could see were displays of tawdry and tacky goods—cocktail glasses, lawn flamingoes, whoopee cushions.

“OK, gentlemen, I know. I know. Let me find a pair of thirty inch brown shoelaces and we’ll be out of this joint, quick as a jiffy.” Ted pointed towards the back of the store.

Running Off the Ruse



He still hadn’t quite worked out his morning schedule. Typically a creature of habit, he found himself often falling back to sleep after his clock radio alarm had gone off at 7:30, and then it was a pell-mell obstacle course to squeeze in a shower and wolf some breakfast down. Then a fast brush of the teeth and a hurried quickstep down St. George to get to either the Mechanical Building or the Galbraith Building for the 9:00 sharp first lecture of the morning.

But today was different. He had woken up before the alarm, and got in for a shave and shower with absolutely no one else in the second floor washroom. He went up to the dining hall at 7:45, and took his eggs and toast with a few well-meaning theology professors who had meal privileges as part of their academic appointment. They smiled warmly and then studiously applied themselves to the contents of their plates. Part of him wanted to proffer up a racy vicars-and-tarts joke, or swear a blue streak about the hardness of the butter, but prudence restrained this and he was back in his room by 8:10. A thorough brushing of teeth through the steamy mirror left by late-breaking bathers and a ponderous walk down St. George saw him in the lobby of the Galbraith Building a full thirty minutes before the lecture.

He decided to hang out in the spacious front lobby of the building so he could idly review the names on the plaques for such honorifics as the 2T3 Second Mile Award or the 5T6 Civil Engineering Scholarship. Traffic was light, save for a few leggy secretaries mincing their way to work over in the Electrical wing of the building. He could see that they were no more than a couple of years older than himself, graduates of high school or with a quick business college certificate. And here they were, dressed up in good jewelry and designer shoes and looking particularly good to his eye. Another office young lady crossed the lobby, and his insistent stare and goofy grin elicited a faint smile from her as she breezed past.

"They'll be here for forty years, pushing paper in some back office. Waiting for their pension and benefits." This came from his rear left. He turned and saw Marcy sitting on a padded banquette, the girl in his class who had done the orientation scavenger hunt with him. She had thin wire frame glasses on, with what looked like some kind of eyeliner on underneath them.

"Yeah, maybe so, but they will certainly be helping us and all the students coming after us to get their degrees." He turned up his palm in a sort of pathetic, apologetic manner.

"Sure, I'll give them that. But they flounce around here in their fancy heels and flimsy frocks, knowing they are eye candy for all the boys in the building. And it's not fair, for gals like me who are going to get a degree and go places! I have to wear jeans and dusty work boots, as I have a concrete lab running this afternoon." She pointed down to her work boots, which were just shy of being pontoon-sized.

"Hey, Marcy, you look great." His tone was unconvincing. He looked over and re-confirmed what he had determined during the scavenger hunt. The girl had a thin frame and a plain face, yet was pleasant enough to chat with.

"You think so? If that's true, do you want to hang out some time?" Her tone bordered on the seductive.

"Uh, that might be fun...but, uh, y'see, I have a girlfriend. A lady friend. She might not appreciate me hanging out, y'know, with you." His eyes grew wider as he ventured deeper into his lie.

"Oooh, OK. No worries. I just thought I'd take the initiative. So is your little gal pal a student here?" Her eyebrows arched.

"Um, yes, yes, yes she is." He had a mental image of the stacked nurse standing opposite him in Sid Smith while he munched on cheese.

“Nursing?” This could be best described as being delivered with a meowing sound.

“Unnh, no, no. More on the finance end of things.” He switched to the tall and voluptuous banker stepping down from the bistro steps on Harbord.

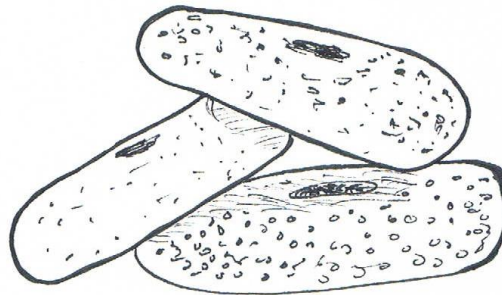
“Hmmm, Commerce. Not many girls in Commerce. One of my high school chum’s in Commerce. I’ll have to ask her who her classmates are!” The girl wrinkled her nose.

“Well, there you go, it’s five of nine. We had better get up to the second floor so we can get a good seat for the lecture. Great, uh, nice to chat with you, Marcy.” He turned and zoomed up the stairwell before she could collect up her stuff.

His cheeks burned all morning and early afternoon because of the white lie he had fabricated. Maybe he should have gone for a coffee with her, but there was no attraction and he could see that once he stepped into that swamp there may not be a clean way out. But the thought of her trolling the class lists and hallways of the Commerce program, looking for his imaginary girlfriend, made him simply nauseous. He even thought of going down to Hydro Place and asking the banker out for a drink, but that didn’t make a lot of sense and he felt even more nausea.

So when his lab was over, he realized he had a ninety minute gap before a late dinner. So just like he had done in the past when he was feeling emotionally whipped, he put on his running shoes and started to put one foot in front of the other. Up through Yorkville, across to Rosedale Valley Road and then up through Rosedale. Past beautiful mansions and carriage houses, with their fine-trimmed lawns and polished inhabitants returning from work. He ran by the University President’s House and admired its spacious grounds and amazing architectural features. When he arrived back, endorphins flooding through his body, he realized he needed to be truthful from here on in. If he didn’t want to do something, he would say so. But no more pretense, no more façade. He headed to the shower feeling no sense of nausea.

Hearing a Pin Drop



Dinner had been uneventful, one of those nights where a slab of protein termed 'mystery meat' was anchored down onto a plate with a large splash of mashed potatoes and a messy assemblage of green beans. A lively debate ensued around the table every time this dish was served, with roughly half the table thinking it was re-constituted beef and the other half of the table thinking it was rejigged pork products. This caused a look of alarm to cross the faces of two Jewish students, which was dissipated to a considerable degree by one lone dissenter who calmly and confidently stated that it was not meat at all, but texturized vegetable protein. This caused howls of derisive laughter from the rabid carnivores at the table, but the young man stood firm and cut off a big wallop and chewed it reflectively.

As much as it flew against his upbringing and dinner table protocols of his original family, he let about half of this meal go uneaten, to be taken back to a big vat whose contents were picked up twice a week by a pig farmer out Georgetown way. He left the table early, satisfied for now but having a small niggling feeling that he wouldn't be able to make it all the way through until breakfast.

Coming to the quadrangle, he saw that the sky was brilliant and that it was an absolutely lovely early evening. Even though his desk beckoned, he thought that he would be well served by taking a perambulation of King's College Circle. He popped out through the Library door and found the Circle to be alive with all manner of activity. Folks playing baseball, Frisbee, soccer and one game of croquet being unspooled over by Sig Sam Library. The air was balmy and sun-kissed, and just about everyone looked as if they needed to be studying but the night was simply too fine for books. He stood on the Knox College side, and had a wide angle lens view of the hundred or so people enjoying the outdoors and great views of the Toronto sky line.

At roughly one o'clock on his perspective lens, running down the steps of the Medical Sciences Building, was the roguishly good-looking boyfriend of the flirty nurse Kira. He hadn't seen this fellow since he was jogging at the Hart House track, and he had wondered in the interim how things were going between this chap and his frisky girlfriend. The guy was walking with the air of someone who had an appointment, as he checked his watch several times as he walked across the grass.

Then, at approximately four o'clock on the visual lens, popping out of a door at Convocation Hall was The Pout. She wore a low-slung model's bag on her right shoulder, and she floated along between two

parked cars and up onto the grassy surface. Her profile certainly caught his attention and he saw her wave to someone off in the distance. She smiled that million dollar smile of hers, and tucked her hair behind her left ear. He was so focused on watching her that he almost fell over when she came up to Kira's boyfriend and gave him a wispy little hug. The two had obviously planned to rendezvous near the centre of the Circle, and then sauntered along in and through knots of sports enthusiasts in the direction of University College. Something mischievous flickered in the back of his brain, and he decided to follow the duo at a discreet distance.

The couple mounted the old stone steps of UC and went in through the heavy iron doors. He ran up the same steps and quickly entered the main foyer, looking left and right until he spotted them going up a stairwell to the second floor on the east side of the College. Now at this point he felt a little stupid about what he was doing, in essence stalking two people who were just minding their own business. But the girl was super appealing, and a bit mysterious, and the guy was doing something his little girlfriend wouldn't approve of. So he ran down the hall and dashed up the steps, arriving on the second floor just as they furtively stepped into a classroom halfway down the corridor.

The room was darkened, and was one of those old classrooms that had both a front entrance door and a rear exit door. When he came abreast of the rear door, he saw that it was slightly ajar. He put his ear to the crack and realized he could hear the conversation going on at the front of the classroom, despite the loud pounding of his heart.

"Oh, baby, let's just do it right here on the desks!" The young man's tone had a considerable sense of urgency.

"No way, dude, a janitor could barge in on us at any minute!" The young woman's voice was louder than it should have been, but this worked to the advantage of the eavesdropper. "And besides, we said we were just going to meet and talk, remember? So hold your horses, big boy!"

"But I'm being watched like a hawk these days by the girlfriend. She's in class for a couple of hours, but she's caught me a few times recently with my hand in the cookie jar. So right now would be a perfect time for a quickie..." The sound got a bit muffled at this point.

"Persistence is not always your best trait! No means no, at least for tonight. But let's set a time for the weekend at my place, when the little nurse is doing some group work. I promise, with the right conditions, I'll definitely make it worth your while!" The stalker wanted desperately to shift the door a crack to determine if he had any chance to see what was going on, but thought better of it.

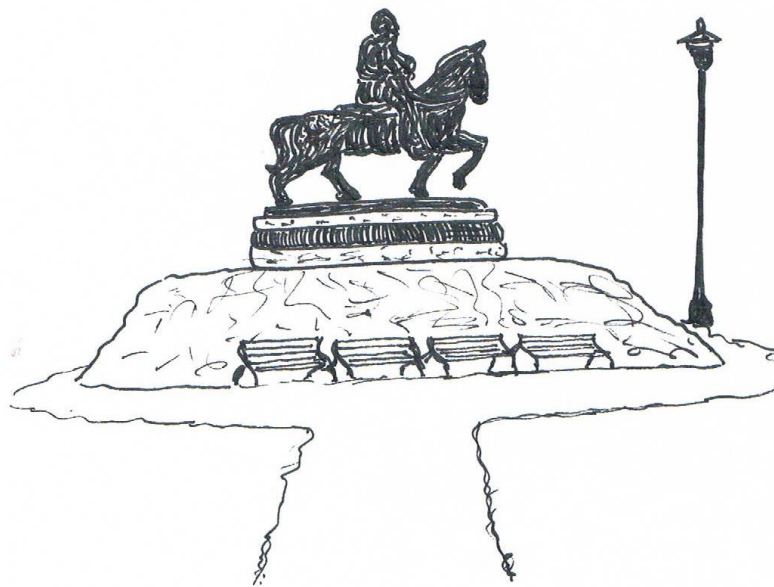
"At your place! But didn't you say you had a boyfriend?" The young fellow's voice was muted.

"Oh, but he's cool. He may be out for a shoot. But if he's not, he likes to hide in the closet and take photos of me entertaining anybody I bring home. We have, let's say, an unusual relationship." All of this echoed off the front of the room and its hard furniture and came back through the rear door.

At this point he had had enough. It was clear the boyfriend was playing many cards while dating the petite Kira. And it was also clear the pouty gal was not living with an aged relative in a basement flat, and that she was as kinky as hell.

He tiptoed away stealthily, coming out of the College by the Old Observatory. His stomach rumbled and he realized he should take another twenty minute diversion, down to Silverstein's Bakery on McCaul Street, for a bag of still-warm bagels. As he popped out of its rear service door, he munched on his first bagel and contemplated the photo opportunities emanating from The Pout in her boudoir, through a slit in a closet door.

That Side of Campus



A few days passed, and the edgy thrill of being a private eye for Nurse Kira wore off a bit, to the point he started to wonder if the salacious details he thought he had heard might actually have been his imagination. But the classroom had been isolated and quiet, and he had stood stock still and listened acutely, so he convinced himself the conversation had happened but he had no clue what to do with the details.

Lunch that day was not going to be held in the dining hall, as there was some big Presbyterian meeting at the College which would host the delegates for all meals. This then required the bumping off of the residence students to a cold lunch served in one of the lecture halls underneath the College Library.

He showed up late to avoid the queue for white buns, tuna salad, green salad, potato salad and chocolate chip cookies. Someone from the dining hall staff was even scooping ice cream, to appease folks who felt the disruption to the normal schedule a bit more keenly. He filled his plate and went off to one of the sides of the room, admiring the leaded glass windows that faced out onto King's College

Circle. A few boys stood around, eating off their plates while standing, and offering up bits of conversation while the food was being snarfed down with a minimal amount of chewing.

One of the lads was Steve, the French Canadian from Northern Ontario, who he had only chatted with once before down in the TV room near the laundry.

“Hey, young engineer, finding your way these days? Still making that laundry stretch out over a few months?” The guy was pleasant enough, but had a world weariness that was unusual.

“Uh, hmm..., kind of an embarrassing story. I saved up a whap of laundry to take home for my Mom to wash. Stuffed it all in a green garbage bag and rode the TTC up to my sister’s to get a lift home. And as I was walking up the stairs of the Bathurst station to catch a bus, the bag broke and out tumbled all of my laundry! Afternoon rush hour commuters stepping on and around my boxer shorts and undershirts! Felt like crawling into a hole as I scooped everything up. Then and there, I vowed that was the start of me doing my own laundry.” He smiled grimly and shook his head slowly.

“OK, laundry, check. How about on the romance side of things? Got a girlfriend yet?” Steve said this pleasantly enough.

“Uh, not really. Exploring my options. Got a few irons in the fire.” His mind went in turn to Kira, The Pout and the slinky banker but then landed inexplicably on a mental picture of Marcy mixing concrete in a dusty lab.

“So that would be a no. How about if I ask my girlfriend if she has met any cute frosh girls who left their boyfriends back at home? She’s got good taste and knows a lot of people over at St. Mike’s” The older boy fussed with his glasses.

“St. Mike’s? They’re all Catholics over there, aren’t they?” He said this a bit too forcefully.

“Yeah, most of them. But what of it? I’m Catholic, my girlfriend’s Catholic. We don’t have horns, dude!” The chap took a big bite out of his cookie.

“Yeah, well it’s just, y’know. I don’t have a great track record with Catholics. We used to play basketball against the separate school boys. Mean, nasty guys. Ugly, ugly games. And then the priests, y’know, my Dad used to say they did bad things to the altar boys.” He himself leaned in to a cookie to cover his embarrassment at saying such things. But he had just noticed it was only he and Steve standing off in one corner.

“Hey, I’m not going to defend those fuckers in cassocks! Maybe it’s true, maybe it’s not. But there are a lot of Catholics, and most of them are very nice people. And lots of those are beautiful young women. Who are as frisky as hell, because they are Catholics!” Steve spat out a bit of cookie as this was chortled out.

“Why the heck is that?” His mind raced back to all of the Catholic girls he had peripherally known. The list was short, but a few of the candidates did fit Steve’s description.

“Simple, man, it all comes down to theology. Say there’s a Presbyterian gal here in the College. She looks at you sideways, but then tightens up, as her John Calvin roots are telling her that anything fun is sinful. And if she sins, she is doomed to Eternal Hell. So she lives like a Girl Guide, no fun, but at least no sin.” The older boy took the last bite of his cookie before continuing. “But a Catholic girl, she can drop her knickers at the first blush. This is because she knows she can do what nature is calling her to do, and then she can go off to confessional and wipe the slate clean. ‘Father, forgive me’, and the priest lets her off the hook. She needs to think about birth control so she doesn’t get pregnant, which the Church frowns upon, but she doesn’t have to confess everything to the priest. Just the sex part, and away she goes. Feeling unburdened and ready to go for another round. I tell ‘ya, I just love being Catholic!” The guy chuckled, almost surprising himself with his own enthusiasm.

“Hmm, have never heard it put that way before. I still don’t think my folks would be happy if I had a Catholic girlfriend.” He said this softly.

“Forget the folks. They’re up in Two-Horse Corners or wherever. Listen, come with me to the St. Mike’s pub tonight. We’ll introduce you to a few folks and you can take it from there. We’ll walk over together at 8:00.”

The sky was almost dark as the two young men walked across campus, through Queen’s Park and on to the campus of St. Michael’s College. They met up with Steve’s girlfriend outside one of the residences, and she was a pleasant gal who filled out her tight blue jeans most admirably. They went into the pub area within the student centre building, and the sound of loud music hit them like a blast. There had to be several hundred folks crammed into a very tight space, with a central core of people dancing with the air of occupants of a congested subway train. Steve and his girlfriend got separated from himself after a mere minute, and he dispiritedly found himself standing off beside one of the speakers, which was causing his breast plate to vibrate wildly. He looked this way and that, and couldn’t seem to find a candidate to ask for a dance, let alone envision her in a confessional box the next morning.

Sororities and Steam Punk



The St. Mike's pub had been pretty much like the pub experiences at Victoria College and University College. Lots of people standing around, at subway-at-rush-hour densities. Most people seemed to know each other, there was a lot of forced hilarity, and it all seemed somewhat pointless. Steve had indirectly suggested there would be a queue of Catholic beauties lined up in the St. Mike's quad, literally begging for casual sex. That had certainly not been the case, even though the easy access to the confessional booth to assuage any guilt and immediately eliminate carnal sin had seemed somewhat plausible. So he had stood around on the sidelines, smiling at folks and simply observing. There was certainly a different energy to that side of campus, something that reminded him in a more magnified way of the experience of going in to the Sacred Heart High School for a cross-town rival basketball game. He had muttered his thanks and apologies to Steve, ensconced in an admiring circle of girls, and puttered his way homeward through Queen's Park.

The next day at lunch he sat at a table with Henry, the muscular football player and Dale, the hyperactive American theolog. Soup and tuna sandwiches were on the menu, with some energetic conversation followed by long pauses filled with awkward silence.

"How's it going, dude, getting out much?" Dale's eyes twinkled under his glasses.

"I'm getting out here and there, but not really meeting any girls who are my type." He muttered this through a spoonful of soup.

"Oh sure, totally get it. Took me until I was a junior to meet up with Melinda. The right girl is hard to find. Melinda's a looker, I tell 'ya, and sweet as pie. I call her every night at 7:00 to find out about her day. The long distance charges are killing me! But it's worth it to keep in touch. I'm up here and she's down in Michigan, and some guy could easily scoop her away!" Dale smiled ruefully.

"How do you know she's staying true?" Henry put this out there in a deadpan manner.

"Oh well, I would know. I think she'd drop me some big hints if she was tempted to stray. We tell each other everything. And if she was hiding something, I'd pick it up in other ways. The mentioning of some

guy more than once, unexplained gaps in the day, a catch in her voice. I'm pretty perceptive. I'm no detective, but I'd know. For sure..." Dale's voice trailed off.

"Does she ever talk about going out dancing? Just with the girls from the sorority?" Henry said this softly.

"Uh, yeah, the odd time. She's a great little dancer! Trim figure, and cute as a button!" Dale gushed out his admiration.

"Well, you might want to keep a closer eye on Melinda. In my experience, sorority gals go out dancing at fraternity houses. And those frat houses have lots of boys in them, who will be drinking, and will most certainly be asking a cute girl to dance. And you know what dancing leads to?!" Henry wagged his index finger suggestively.

"Oh, no! Never! Melinda would never go to a frat house, or any place with alcohol flowing! She's a clean living Christian gal. Nope, very sorry, you're barking down the wrong path there, mister! No Sireee..." Dale himself seemed unconvinced.

Lunch ended up on this tense and uncertain note. At this point none of these three young men knew that Dale would be a Christmas Graduate, leaving the College abruptly with a broken heart as his dear Melinda had taken up the affections of a varsity lacrosse player at Central Michigan University. For now they went forward in their respective comfort zones, although the lunch conversation may have been a subtle foreshadowing and motivation for extra vigilance on the romance front for the young American.

He packed up his briefcase for the FORTRAN coding tutorial to be held down on the second floor of the Mechanical Building. He was a few minutes early for the start of class, and went in through the rear door so he could browse bulletin boards and peek in to a few labs. Each building on campus had its own flavor, character and smells. The Mech Building was old, with classic tiled floors and heavy glass doors. The offices were styled from the 1940s, with heavy furniture and detective-office door blinds. The bulletin boards carried faculty position ads with buzzwords such as 'thermal systems', 'two-phase fluid flow' and 'machine cutting', none of which seemed comprehensible to him. The labs were older, filled with massive ducting and blowers and hydraulic flumes. Tired, older technicians in gleaming white lab coats fussed around the machinery with clipboards, taking measurements and observing pressure gauges. It looked like more of a movie set than a university lab to his eye, but big enough and certainly mysterious enough to hold the interest of any budding engineer.

The tutorial content was relatively straightforward, explained by a suave Egyptian TA with luxuriant hair swept back and held in place by more than a dab of BrylCreem. He took his notes and toodled off to the Computer Centre south of the Galbraith Building. With a bit of luck and some quick access to the card punching machine, he might be able to get a stack of cards run through before supper time. And with even more luck, a successful run would ensue, with the output spewing out relentlessly on the central printer with nary an error to spoil the day.

Foxy Lady



He was ecstatic about finishing up the coding assignment early, as so many in the past had gone late or even spilled into the weekend. He felt light in spirit and wended his way back to the College with a definite spring in his step. West House was quiet, pin-drop quiet. It was Friday night, and many of the young men would be out doing something social. But generally there was always someone around who might be talked into stepping out for a burger or a slice of pizza. But tonight, the place was quieter than a morgue.

He unpacked his briefcase and started to entertain the idea of hitting the sack early and making a rested and fresh start to the weekend. But that light spirit feeling returned, and he thought he just couldn't simply go to bed. He was a bit shy about going out alone. There would be pubs going on, even though Thursday night was the prime pub night on campus. But the very idea of stepping into a student pub put more than a wee damper on his buoyant spirit.

The idea of going to a movie fluttered across his thought screen. This was something that could be done easily with a minimum of fuss on a solo basis. But what to see, and where? Then he remembered spotting a poster for the Bloor Cinema on a telephone pole outside Roberts Library. And twenty minutes later he was standing in a short queue for the 9:00 showing of the Blaxploitation classic, Foxy Brown.

This was his first time at 'The Bloor', and he had heard they ran art films and other features that were popular favourites. He had no real idea what Foxy Brown was about, except that it had an attractive black actress on the poster under glass beside the box office. He paid his \$2 and shuffled into the marginally threadbare theatre lobby. He thought about buying popcorn, but decided against it on the grounds of economy and his perception that most theatre popcorn was often freshness-challenged. Puttering into the theatre and squinting down the back rows for a seat, he found one on the far left aisle that had one spring in its seat slightly unhinged.

A few trailers came up momentarily, one for a spaghetti western and one for a Romanian art film that seemed heavy and complicated. These were followed by some cute cartoon announcements admonishing people not to talk during the film, and then the feature film started with a bang.

He had always been fascinated by black culture, drinking in all the details of the 70s NBA stars and listening to MoTown stations from Detroit that easily drifted up the waters of Lake Huron to his hometown. But his town was very white, and his only exposure to real black people had been a few boys on the Owen Sound basketball teams that were descendants of Underground Railroad passengers coming in to the lake port from the United States. The film was raw and raucous, and he heard words he knew were vulgar and he heard slang terms he wasn't really sure what they meant. But he certainly liked the look of Foxy Brown, played by a very attractive Pam Grier who had a range of lovely hairstyles throughout the film and a stream of tight and revealing tops that showed off her voluminous breasts. Foxy seemed real and Foxy was angry, and he found he got swept away by the story. His favourite part of the film was where Foxy and one of her equally luscious friends impersonated high-class prostitutes and tricked an old white guy, leaving him in the corridor of a hotel in his boxer shorts with red valentine hearts on them. He realized that he was pretty naïve, as he had never thought of a white person being romantically inclined to a black person. He shook his head internally, thinking he was more like his Mom than he cared to admit.

He spilled onto the Bloor Street sidewalk, knowing no one but getting swept up into the group energy that comes from a number of theatre viewers leaving a cinema at the same time. He strolled along, taking in the lights and the storefronts, and seeing the odd shady character lurking down an alleyway or a slightly quieter street. His stomach started to rumble and he thought he might walk over to the sub shop just opposite the Bedford entrance of the St. George subway station. While he was musing on what toppings he might ask for on his sub, he came abreast of the OISE Building on Bloor, in that dead-quiet zone north of Bloor between St. George and Bedford. Standing five steps above street level was a black woman in high leather boots and a trench coat, and sporting a tight Afro hairstyle. She was handsome-featured, maybe even looking a little like Foxy Brown, but her eyes were hard.

"Hey, white boy! Want to go for a roll!?" The woman cocked her head and arched one painted eyebrow.

"Uh, nope, uh, sorry." He scuttled along, hurrying his pace towards the brightly lit sub shop.

He wasn't exactly sure what she meant by 'a roll', but he had seen enough at the Bloor Cinema to connect the dots.

Dodging Gravestones



One foot in front of the other. Keep up a certain pace. Feel the earth, push off the earth. Take wind up into one's lungs, savour it, then a slow release in some kind of coordinated rhythm with his footfalls. One foot down, roll through, the other foot down. Move alternate arms in lock step. The ancient practice of running, adapted into the urban environment. No prey here, no wildebeest on the savannah. But the same rhythms, the same engagement with form to achieve the same function of movement along a line on the earth's surface.

He had used running to lose weight before university. The modality had achieved its intended goal, but the practice had not become habitual. He preferred some kind of sport to get his exercise, but had learnt that sometimes a run was the most efficient way of obtaining all of the benefits of hard exercise. Not just weight loss, but stress reduction and the enjoyment of endorphins flooding through his body and mind at the end of a shower after a long run. So at least a couple of times a week he laced up and got in an hour or more of running. One foot in front of the other, stride after stride. And he used these outings to explore his newly adopted city, getting out to further places than he could with a long walk.

This Saturday afternoon he took himself up through Yorkville, and ran Yonge Street up the hill to St. Clair Avenue. He had seen a map showing a large cemetery running horizontally east-west from Yonge, and he eventually found its entrance gates in a leafy hollow and bent east. He had always been intrigued by cemeteries, the one in his hometown and the one over in Hanover where his brother rested. They were quiet places, often with beautiful trees, and had interesting headstones to read and imagine what kinds of lives had been lived.

This old Toronto cemetery held the remains of bankers and lawyers and captains of industry that had grown Toronto over its not-so-long life. The stone-clad mausoleums were almost shocking in their size

and substance, and a quick peek inside a few of them saw many names commemorated and honoured. He couldn't quite visualize his own gravestone, or imagine laying in cold soil under a heavy stone. But these people had been vibrant once, had bustled around this very city, eating dinner and sleeping in their beds. And now they were here, or at least their earthly remains. He pondered this as he ran along, getting over to the more modest gravestones on the eastern side of the park, split into two pieces by Mount Pleasant Road. He ran along, not wanting to get lost in the rabbit warren of inside one-lane roads. He had a good sense of direction, and a knowing that if he kept hugging the perimeter of the cemetery he eventually would make his way back to the entrance gate out on Yonge Street.

The long run had altered him, in the way that significant exercise and a substantial period of quiet reflection will have on a person's psyche. He had supper at a table off to one side of the dining hall, staying consciously away from the rambunctiousness of the West House table. Halfway through dinner Henry came in, sat down opposite him and immediately started to saw his way through a substantial serving of roast beef, horse radish, potatoes and boiled carrots. He almost started up a conversation twice, then thought better of it. Henry looked at him a couple of times through his scholarly glasses, chewing slowly in a somewhat bemused fashion.

"There, that's better. I don't like to talk when I am eating, particularly when I'm really hungry. Have to honour the food. I was famished after our big game this afternoon. It was a squeaker, but we eked out the win. I expended a lot of energy protecting our quarterback, particularly towards the end of the game. Someone's got to win, someone's got to lose. But it does feel good when you win." The big guy had suddenly gotten very talkative.

"What's up for this evening? Studying a little economics?" He was just trying to keep the conversation going.

"Naah, I'll leave that for after church tomorrow. No Royal Society lecture this week, but I was thinking of going over to the MedSci Building for the campus cinema screening. Want to come along?" The football player pushed his glasses up his nose.

"Um, maybe. I took myself out to the movies last night, so I thought I might stay in and work a bit tonight. I'm pretty much caught up, but thought it might be good to get ahead on a few of my tougher courses." He said this unconvincingly.

"Dude, you're at university. It's Saturday night. Get out of your room and live a bit. In four years you can go out into the rat race and work non-stop. And I can guarantee you'll like this movie." Henry's voice had a certain tone that he couldn't quite put his finger on.

So in half an hour he was sitting in a darkened room over in the medical complex, with a few hundred students. The mood was light and the audience was animated. The movie started as a bit of an action flick, with a few car chase scenes and a lot of running from police cars by vaguely defined characters. Then a campy violence scene followed, with spouting blood and a lot of roaring from the audience. But then it got even more interesting, with the female lead sashaying around an apartment in a skin-tight white jumpsuit. She was a raven-haired beauty, with sparkling eyes and a radiant smile. And before the

audience could anticipate what was coming next, she appeared at a doorway fully nude and ran across the room and jumped on top of one of the male characters, landing hard on him and pinning him to a bed. The sight of her nude, curvy buttocks flexing wildly with all of this activity sent the audience into a paroxysm of laughter and lust. He looked around the room, watching this unfold in real time, and was horrifically happy he wasn't sitting at home with an engineering textbook.

Pumping Iron and a Merry Widow



He slept in that next morning, far past breakfast time. The long run to the cemetery had certainly fatigued him, but the combination of two racy films on back-to-back nights had assuredly roiled his psyche. He dreamt feverishly, even with the morning light gently filtering into his room. A long line of Foxy Brown-like characters walked slowly past him while he was sitting on a hard wooden chair, each of them wearing nothing but thigh-high leather boots. Some smiled mischievously at him, and some put a finger up to their lips to suggest they wouldn't tell a soul about what was transpiring. A few taunted him, and some gave him a beatific smile.

He heard a noise out in the hallway, and he half-awoke, opening one eye towards his clock radio. The noise abated, and he slipped back into a second dream where he lay on a bed wearing a pair of silk boxer shorts. Then a door opened, and out came the stacked little nurse wearing nothing but a broad smile. She jumped onto him with a running leap similar to the scene in the previous night's film, but when he attempted to hug her she was inexplicably gone. Then the banker from Hydro Place stood at the door, wearing only an expensive pair of Italian heels. She launched her long, voluptuous frame into

the air and he could feel her land on him, soft and pliant and perfumed. His phone rang on his nearby desk, jarring him out of his very pleasant reverie. He leaned over and took it after the second ring.

“Thay, big boy! How’s it hanging?” Ian’s voice sounded like he had been up for hours.

“Oh, man, just sleeping in. Was having a very pleasant dream, and then the phone rang.” He closed his eyes, trying to summon back the dream images.

“Cripes man, it’s almost 9:30! Listen, my folks are going downtown to the AGO for some art exhibit. I hate art, but thought I might catch a lift downtown with them, and go to the Hart House gym and do some lifting. Nothing too long, as I’ll need to be back on the curb by noon to catch a lift back home. Care to join me?”

Thirty minutes later he was hanging around the entrance of the Hart House gym, having had a quick shower to revive a bit but running on an empty stomach. Ian arrived momentarily and they set to establishing a routine of lifting some free weights and waiting in line for the bench press and a squat machine. The crowd was older, alumni perhaps or simply folks from the community. Virtually all were men, and most were heavily muscled. Even though Ian and he looked like spindly neophytes, a number of the other patrons good-naturedly gave them tips on proper form along with considerable encouragement. A few powerlifters worked off in one corner, taking turns with a clean and jerk technique with ridiculously heavy weights.

His walk back across a quiet campus was a light-headed affair due to the exertions of the morning and the absence of food in his stomach. He mounted the stairs to the dining hall and was delighted to see the door open and at least three tables already full of post-church service diners.

He got the last empty seat at the West House table, sitting on the table’s edge opposite Dirk, the Engineering Physics student. He nodded to the suave and lanky chap, and noticed that Dirk’s attention was diverted elsewhere. Across the way at an adjoining table sat an attractive young woman with reddish brunette hair that was beautifully coiffed. She had on a grey ribbed-knit dress, which nicely hugged a pair of eye-popping breasts, along with some expensive jewelry and a pair of top-drawer magenta high heeled shoes. The gal was a bit older, maybe twenty-five or so, and exuded an elegance and sophistication that was not normally seen in the Knox College dining hall. She looked over at the two young men with a faint smile, but let her eyes linger a bit too long for proper decorum.

“Cripes, did you see that? She wants me so bad, she’s starting to salivate! I’ve been sitting here just five minutes and have a hard-on the size of Texas, because of those looks she’s been shooting me.” Dirk muttered this out in a stage whisper to no one in particular. The rest of the table was swept up in bantering back and forth and seemed unaware of the sexually-tinged drama going on at one end.

“Yeah, you’d have to be blind not to see the looks she’s giving out. But I think she’s got eyes for me, dude! Who the heck is she, anyways?” He put his hand up to block his mouth, like a baseball pitcher discussing strategy with his catcher through his glove.

“Christ, man, you are dreaming in technicolour! A hottie like that needs a real man, not a kid who doesn’t even do his own laundry.” Dirk smirked before carrying on. “I hear she’s the daughter of the building manager. Was married, and then widowed last year at age 26. Comes down on the weekends to Toronto to visit her parents as she’s lonely and needs support. Can you flipping believe it? Someone that gorgeous who hasn’t got it in over a year? God, my head swims just thinking about how horny she must be!” Dirk groaned, and mock-wiped his brow.

“Oh man, she just shot me another sultry look! I think you’re right, Dirk old boy, she does want it bad!” He himself was feeling flushed.

“So listen to me, fucker. I’m in third year, and I get first dibs on the merry widow! Cut it out on shooting her back the steam, and get out of my way!” Dirk hissed this out menacingly.

“Well, what’s your game plan, dude?” He felt a bit offended, and shot another appreciative look in the beauty’s direction.

“Oh, just sit back and watch, PeeWee. I’m going to simply ask her if she wants to see our chapel, and when I get her there in a private corner, I’ll ask her if she wants to see the EngPhys textbooks back in my room. We can walk underground to West House through the basement, outside of eyeshot from her doting parents. And within two minutes that tight little knit dress will be on the floor. I bet she’s got some great lingerie on underneath it...” Dirk rose decisively, and marched directly over to the attractive young lady’s table. He was the epitome of swashbuckling panache, putting out his hand for an extended handshake with her and then warmly greeting the building manager and his wife who sat beside their daughter. Dirk leaned over and made small talk, eliciting appreciative titters of laughter from the small family group. In less than two minutes the young woman stood up, smoothed her dress and picked up her purse, mincing her way towards the exit. Dirk walked angularly at her side, leaning in to make witty comments and appearing to be a gracious young gentleman on his way to a chapel tour.

The brashness of Dirk’s advances had been a bit of a tutorial for the younger fellow, and he sat ruminating over a second plate of food and two dessert servings. He hoped the chapel visit might end abruptly, with Dirk getting a good and hearty slap across the face for his daring suggestion. But he knew Dirk was a confident and good-looking guy, and that a young woman like that would be hard-pressed to resist after twelve months of abstinence. So he went back and forth in his mind, thinking of one outcome and then another.

He went back to his room, exhausted by the mental gymnastics and very full of food. He thought he might just lie down in his bed, with his door open, so that he would be able to hear the young widow going up or down the central stairs. He emitted a big sigh, falling quickly into a deep nap state. Once again he lay on a bed wearing silk boxer shorts. The sexy widow stood at the door, fully dressed and with her hands on her hips. Wearing a sly smile, she unsheathed a fine leather belt and let it drop to the floor. She undid two or three buttons on the front of her tight knit dress, enough for him to see that she had on a beautiful purple lace bra underneath. She pulled the knit dress up, exposing matching purple panties and a svelte torso. The dress landed softly on the floor and she reached around to slowly unhook her lacy bra. She then thought better of it, and started to slowly walk toward him, her Italian

heels beating out a deliciously slow pattern as she walked towards him on the bed. The sound of clicking heels intensified and he awoke abruptly, quickly realizing the real-life widow was actually walking down the central stairs at that very moment. He jumped out of bed and flew down the hallway, coming abreast of her as she turned from descending one flight of stairs and was traversing the landing before she went down the second flight of stairs leading to the ground floor. Her cheeks were flushed and her auburn hair was marginally disheveled. She offered him a knowing smile and turned, giving him a very nice view of her sculpted buttocks.

“Hi...” That was all he could come up with.

“Hi, sweetie.” She turned her head and smiled warmly toward him.

“Did you enjoy your chapel tour?” This came out unexpectedly, his brashness shocking him.

“Oh, very much. Very much, indeed. But let’s just keep that our little secret, shall we?” She turned and went down the steps, one heel click after another. She turned and blew a kiss at him, suggestively and teasingly, as she looked back one last time.

It All Comes Out In The Wash



After all of that he retreated to his room and lay down, his mind racing for a time and then eventually calming down to the point where he drifted off into a half-slumber state. No dream images came to him, thankfully, but he could sense his body twitching from time to time and he would roll over and groan and drift off into the next sleep stanza.

He woke up a bit later, washed his face and resolved to make something of the day. Coming down the hall was Henry, a sheaf of papers under his arm along with his favourite economics textbook, a well-worn copy of Lipsey, Sparks and Steiner.

“What’s going on?” The guy was dour, but well-meaning.

“Was just going to ask you the same thing. Where are you headed to?” He responded brightly, with a sideways grin.

“Off to Sig Sam Library to get some focused studying in. Too much foot traffic and noise here on the weekends to be able to bear down on theory. Why don’t you bring some notes and come along with me, it will do you good to see another important corner of campus.”

They walked straight across King’s College Circle, making a direct beeline for Sig Sam on the opposite side of the perimeter. It was a quiet study library, with the signage and resident librarians to make sure this was the reality. He and Henry found their way up to the second floor, spreading out their materials on an old, wooden study table situated beside a number of long stacks full of obscure books. Henry went directly to his task, pulling out key points from his economics textbook and writing them down on note paper in a meticulous manner.

For his part, he turned to review some chemistry and physics notes, but every minute or so it seemed like a young lady would come up the line of book stacks and break his concentration. He saw Henry give him a stern look, so he redoubled his efforts at beaming down on the formulae in front of him. But then a lovely girl with reams of dark hair and a flowered skirt floated past, and his concentration was once again fractured.

“Dude, stop being so obvious.” Henry whispered this out tersely.

“What do you mean? A pretty girl walks by and I admire the view. What’s wrong with that?” He troweled on the mock indignation.

“Listen. This place is crawling with good-looking girls. A lot of them are Jewish, and a lot are Indian. Nice girls from nice families. Probably came to the library to study. So they don’t need the distraction of a goofy guy like you dropping his jaw on the floor when they walk by. Girls pick up on energy, dude. Be a bit more inscrutable, wear a poker face. More fish come to the fisherman who appears relaxed. Now get back to your notes.” Henry pushed up his glasses on his nose.

After ninety minutes of tortured study, interspersed with sideways glances at the posteriors of studious young women, he realized he needed to do his laundry. He had not yet reached a steady rhythm in the laundry department, after the embarrassing subway stairs laundry bag breakage situation, so he kept an eye on basket buildup and went down to the basement facilities when overflow conditions arose. He muttered a brief explanation to a studious Henry, who had closed his eyes during the last five minutes for a vertical catnap. A quick deke across the lawn of King’s College Circle, and a few minutes later he was descending the steps with his laundry basket, detergent and change purse.

You never knew how busy the laundry room might be, with its two washing machines and two dryers to service more than a hundred residents. But today he was in luck, as only one machine was busy and the other lay empty, emitting enough humidity to indicate it had recently washed a load. He tumbled his own basket contents into the waiting unit, adding copious laundry detergent and the required coinage to make it hum through its cycles. He dashed up the West House stairs for a bit of study while his

clothes were being laundered, and saw Klaus sitting in the lounge talking to his parents for their typical Sunday conversation when long-distance rates were low.

Thirty minutes later he was back in the laundry room, eager to pull out the contents of the completed washer so he could get the drying done and over with before suppertime. As he pulled out the first bits of laundry something seemed off, as there seemed to be a gritty feel to the wet materials. When he pulled out a white dress shirt the problem was confirmed in spades---the shirt looked like it had been dropped in a sandbox and there was caked grey residue on its white collar.

Fuming to himself and unsure of what to do, he stomped up to the West House lounge. Klaus was still there, with his parental call finished, reading the newspaper in a relaxed fashion.

“Cripes, dude, you look fit to kill. What’s going on?” Klaus folded his paper.

“My laundry is full of grit and crap. Any idea how that might’ve happened?” He was feeling perplexed.

“Ah, maybe I know the answer. John from the third floor came down about an hour ago with his brown fuzzy door mat folded up under his arm. Half an hour later he came up with it, holding it away from himself as if it were damp. Maybe he ran it through the washing machine, rather than hosing it down in the mud sink?”

“Yeah, but don’t you think he’d wipe the machine down after washing a door mat?” He appealed to Klaus’ sense of reason.

“That would be the neighbourly thing to do, yes. But I think his girlfriend’s over. Maybe he needed to get back to more fun things than wiping down a washing machine! Have you seen her? Cute as a button! And feisty, given the sounds I’ve heard coming out of his room!”

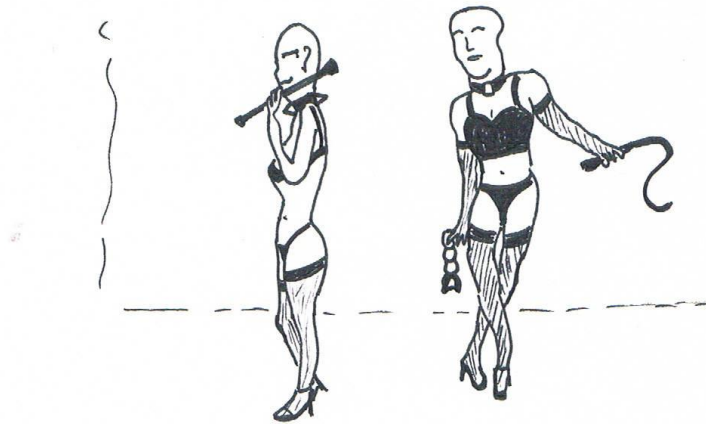
“I’m going up there right now and ask him where he gets off leaving a load of sand in the washer, which is now all over my dress shirt!” He spun away indignantly and was knocking on John’s door in under a minute. The young lad with a tight blonde curly hairdo came to the door wearing only a towel. His facial expression was a mix of annoyance and embarrassment.

“Hey John, did you just wash your fucking door mat in the machine down downstairs?” He spouted this out.

“Calm down, man. So what if I did?” John turned red and looked nervously behind his shoulder. Both boys saw the girlfriend shift under a sheet, bare-shouldered and beautiful. Her brown doe eyes looked a bit frightened and more than a bit sultry. This was enough to sap the heat from the interrogation.

“Just saying...best to wipe the drum clean next time you wash your mat. Have a...ahem, good night.”

Of Human Bondage



"I'm telling you, man, we have got to get out more! Look at this city, teeming with chicks! If we keep cooped up back on campus we'll get good grades for sure, but no degree from the School of Life! Let's get out like this at least once a week, whether we can afford the time or not!" Klaus walked along beside him, talking animatedly and waving his hands around for effect. The German-Canadian lad sported a spiffy black leather aviator jacket, which didn't quite align with his unkempt blue jeans.

It was a Thursday evening, and it was their intent to walk across Wellesley Street to Yonge, and then down one side of the major street to the waterfront and back up again on the other side. Stores were open until 9:00 on a Thursday, and the street was quite busy with pedestrian traffic. Both boys were notoriously frugal, so it was doubtful they would stop in anywhere to buy anything, but the buzz created by the open commercial establishments certainly made their walk more interesting.

They turned down Yonge Street at Wellesley, walking on the west side. They chatted flippantly in the way of late teenagers, who think they are adults but still have a lot of maturation ahead of them. They walked through zones where restaurants dominated the street, taking in scenes of people laughing and eating in groups, along with solo diners catching a bite after a long day at work. At a few different places there were stretches of a block or more where mobs of good-looking young men hung around on the sidewalk outside of bars. Most were well dressed and impeccably groomed, and they all seemed to be very engaged in their conversations. One or two gave a lingering look to the two young men as they walked by, causing Klaus to emit a derisive snort.

"Christ, this town is getting overrun by faggots! Keep up a brisk pace and we'll get out of this zone quickly. Why in the hell did I wear my leather jacket!?" Klaus groaned this out and they picked up their walking pace.

About a block up ahead he thought he saw a young lady that he knew. It was indeed Ingrid from his class, and the lushness of her figure made recognition of her possible even from the considerable distance. And lingering at her side was the lovely secretary from the Engineering Society office, initially

hidden from view by Ingrid's profile. The two young women were window-shopping, and pointing at something in a display window and having a good chuckle at its expense.

"Hold up dude, let's just stand here and pretend we have an abiding interest in the details of these parking restriction signs." He held up one hand and pointed to a telephone pole with the other.

"What's up, man?" Klaus swung his head around wildly.

"A goddess from my program is twenty yards up on the right. She's with a cute little staffer who flirts heavily with most of the guys who drop by her office. They're doing some kind of window shopping, and I'm kind of curious what they're in the market for. Didn't know that they were friends, so let's just loiter a bit and see what we can see." He kept his head low and tucked in behind the pole. The two women gesticulated again towards the window display, looked at one another, and then stepped into the store.

"OK, visually mark where they entered and we can see what caught their interest. Shoes, clothes or perfume, I bet." He was halfway there with Klaus hot on his heels.

"Well, I'll be damned! Those cuties are no Girl Guides! Knock me over with a feather!" Klaus panted this out.

They stood before a large plate glass window exhibiting a rather tasteful display of domination and bondage gear. Mannequins wore leather bustiers, spiked collars and masks, while brandishing whips and feather dusters.

"Christ, man, I thought you said these were nice girls! If they are into buying that kind of gear I think we should ask them for an appointment some Friday evening! I'll be wearing my aviator jacket for sure that night!" Klaus snorted wildly as they walked on.

Two hours later they were back at West House, full of stories but none quite surpassing the one about the two university gals shopping at the dominatrix store. As he walked up to his room on the second floor he bumped into a dining hall waitress coming down from the third floor. She was the younger sister of the merry widow who had succumbed to Dirk's manly charms. Her Mom and Dad both worked at the College. She had a superb figure, perhaps even more salient than her older sister, and had always been shyly friendly to him as she served him food.

"Hey." He didn't know what else to say.

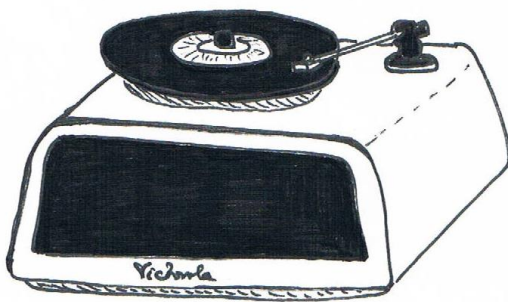
"Hey." She blushed a bit, and did up a button on her plaid shirt that had been immodestly undone, affording a lovely view of her deep cleavage. He watched her walk down the flight of stairs, in her skin-tight blue jeans. And then a thought came to him, and he became enraged. He flew up the stairs to Dirk's room, where he found the door open.

"Did you just entertain the young waitress, the kid sister of the widow?" He snarled this out.

“So what if I did, dipshit? She’s of legal age. I take care of her during the week, and her older sister on the weekends. Sisters talk y’know, and the charms of ol’ Dirk are legendary across the land!” The older boy grinned slyly.

“She’s a nice kid. And cute as hell. Can’t you leave any fruit on the tree for the next guy, you greedy bastard?!” He turned on his heel and went back to his room, sulking.

Life is a System of Equations



It was close to the end of the lecture, at the end of the day, at the end of the week. He sat beside Ian in the lecture hall on the second floor of the Mechanical Engineering Building. The material on the board was a chalky puzzle of algebraic equations, being ruled into a logical order by the instructor at the front of the room. The Math courses were taught to engineers by engineers, and this particular fellow was a chap from Civil Engineering who looked at the world as a structural designer. He was very good at his teaching craft, pausing to make sardonic asides and cutting through a lot of theory to the nubbin of the particular problem he was analyzing. The fellow was old-school, with a yardstick yielded like a combat sword and a flair for lifting his chalk dramatically at the end of an equation. He looked sideways and saw that Ian’s eyes were heavily lidded. A moment later, after absorbing a few key tips for the week’s problem set, he looked back to see that Ian’s eyes were now shut.

“Best nap I’ve had in weeks!” Ian smiled broadly as they strolled north across King’s College Circle after the lecture. “Why do they make us take so much theoretical shit? I just want my degree and get out there and start building things!”

“The guy is actually a very good teacher. And you need theory so you can understand why things behave in certain ways. The program has to be tough to weed out posers and weak links in the chain. We’re going to be professional engineers, y’know ?!” He smacked his friend across the shoulder of his trademark blue leather engineering jacket.

“Alright, I’m heading up to the Museum stop to catch my rocket home. What are you up to?” Ian pointed northward.

“Uh, I’ve got some time to kill before dinner. Maybe I’ll head over to the Music Room in Hart House. Play one of the funk albums they have there to juice me up for the weekend. It’s a great place and if no one else is in there you can crank it up and not use any headphones. Want to join me?” He raised his eyebrows expectantly.

“Naaah, another time, slugger. Besides, my Dad owns two Sam the Record Man stores. I have music, the latest music, coming out of my ears. But have fun, y’hear?”

He went up to the second floor and peeked into the cozy Music Room. There were already half a dozen people in there, listening to music with headphones on. Some had their eyes closed, all moved their heads to the beat of the sounds piping into them. He was a little disappointed, and waited around in the corridor, hoping for one of them to free up a stereo unit. But ten minutes later no one had come out, so he wistfully walked back to Knox College, anticipating a short nap before dinner.

He must have fallen quickly into a dreamless sleep state, as the knock on the door caused him to sit up straight in bed, not entirely sure where he was. The knock came again, this time a little bit more insistent and with a slight playfulness to its pattern. He turned on the light switch and opened the door.

“Well, helloooo there...” It was Kira, the petite nurse, dressed in a white halter dress and white dress sandals. It was attire more appropriate for late July than late October, but he wasn’t about to complain.

“Uh, hi, how’s it going?” He seemed to have developed a large lump in his throat during his short-lived nap.

“Oh, I’ll be much better soon. Very soon. Mind if I come in?” She closed the door behind her and shut off the light in one fluid motion.

“Ah, heh heh, trying to save energy I see! So what’s happening with you on a Friday night?” His mouth was dry, painfully dry.

“Well, I was supposed to go out for dinner with my boyfriend. That was the plan at least. But he’s been seeing other girls, like that pouty bitch in your class. And the oh-so-sweet secretary down in the Engineering Society office, who moonlights as one of Toronto’s most highly sought after dominatrices! So it all came to a head about an hour ago, and I told him he had a choice to make. Me or the other girls.” Kira paused for effect and started to tear up slightly. “Long story short, he dumped me.”

“Oh, I’m really sorry. Really.” He nodded his head vigorously.

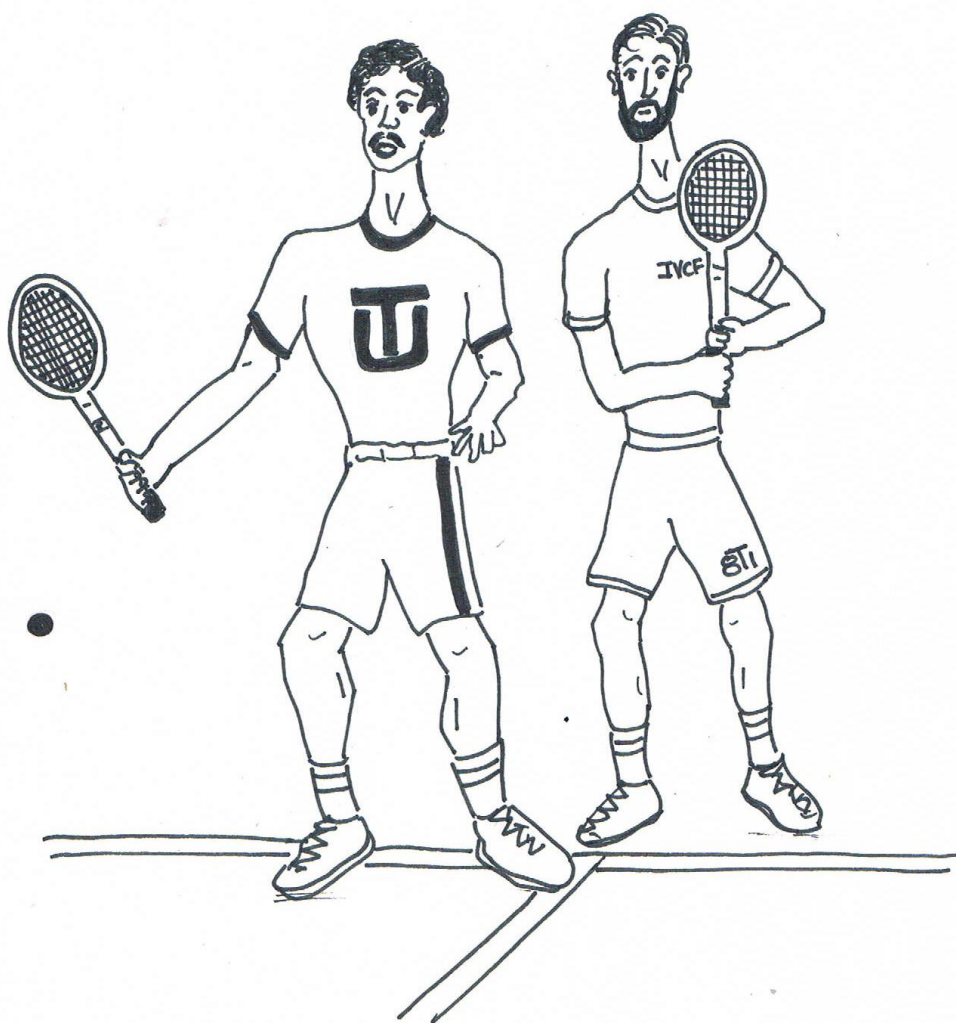
“Oh no you’re not. Or at least, you won’t be. Because you see, I have certain needs. And that big blowout shouting match has left me very excited. Aroused, if you know what I mean. And so I decided to come pay you a visit, to pick up where we left off that day over in Sid Smith.” She came up to him and lightly rested her hands on his shoulders.

“Uh, wow, don’t know quite what to say.” She was close enough for him to see her runny mascara, and to smell her perfume. For the record, she smelled very good.

“Don’t say a thing. But know that all I have on under my dress is a tiny pair of pink cotton panties. And those panties have a big, slippery wet spot in the middle of them, that’s growing wider and juicier by the moment.” She smiled coquettishly and ran a fingernail down one of his biceps. “For the sake of decorum, let me pull those drapes.” She slowly slinked in the direction of the bay window, teasingly and tauntingly pulling the halter dress over her head as she walked. It was going to be a weekend to remember, that was for sure.

~The End~

Finding a Rhythm



Written and Illustrated by Brian Wilson Baetz

March 1979

A Reluctant Politician



The Winter term of a Canadian university has a considerably different character than its Fall term. Autumns were generally happy times, with foot travel to classrooms being done through warm or mild temperatures and end of days having reasonable light. But Canadian winters are not friendly, even in the relatively tropical belt of southern Ontario. Travel to lectures meant trudging through snow and ice, wind chills kept sidewalk conversations to a bare minimum, and sunlight was fast waning towards the end of afternoon laboratories. And March seemed particularly trying, with the crush of wrapping up an academic year's work and the stalled arrival of a Spring that only existed on the calendar page.

The second year of university had been considerably more enjoyable than the first, largely because academic rhythms and workload expectations had become more familiar and the introduction of a "silver bullet" coping-with-life modality. This had all come about in the interstitial Summer period after year one, where he had returned to his hometown to take up a summer job doing tile drainage surveying out of the local agricultural office. It was pleasant enough work, but not in an intellectual or experiential way, so he had stayed open for something to arrive to define that Summer. It came in the form of a sweetly goofy stoner kid from high school, who pointed out a poster on a telephone pole advertising an information session on Transcendental Meditation. Over the next month he signed up and did the training, and sat for twice-daily meditations for the remainder of the Summer and well into the Fall term. Most of these were sojourns into some deeper internal space that left him feeling as if he had journeyed to Pluto and back over the 30 minute meditation interval. But the practical collateral benefit was a newly developed capacity to focus on the task that was at hand. A focus so sharp and so deep, it gave him the ability to concentrate on problem sets and lab writeups and complete them in half the time that he had taken in his pre-meditation days. The meditation practice also translated into deeper and uninterrupted sleep patterns, so over time he had become well rested and healthier in the bargain. So the daily investment of an hour in meditation had paid itself back threefold or more on a continuing basis, and had freed up a lot of time that he had previously spent on working or worrying about how much work he had to do. Of course this was a very positive situation, but left him with a dilemma of sorts. He needed to figure out what to do outside of his courses to make his university experience more enjoyable and memorable. He liked to play sports but wasn't quite good enough to compete for a varsity team. There

were lots of clubs operating out of Hart House but nothing seemed to stand out for him and he also knew he wasn't a natural joiner. And after almost two years of university he did not yet have a steady girlfriend, despite numerous people trying to set him up with their roommate's cousin or someone or the other who was doing a program over at George Brown. Romance wasn't working the way he thought it might, and he was starting to realize he might need to change his perspective on the opposite sex. The hormone-fuelled high school way of thinking had not served him particularly well, and he was noticing that he was looking beyond physical attributes and seeing the charm of young ladies that crossed his path in terms of the brightness of their smile or a good-hearted approach to life.

One thing he had started to put more time into was the cultivation of friendships with certain lads in West house who he felt attuned to. One of these was Henry, the muscular football player who lived his life simply and elementally. They would go out to see events in the city, or grab a movie on a Saturday night, or just hang out in the Knox College library and do some studying together. It was more like an intermittent conversation, as he dabbled at some notes while Henry read a dense economics textbook. So on a waning-light late afternoon in March, he found himself sitting across from Henry at one of the old oak tables with a great view out to King's College Circle.

"What do you guys do in the off-season?" He was genuinely interested, even though he wasn't wildly interested in football.

"Lifting, man, lifting. The stronger you are for the Fall, the better. Reaction drills, to get the footwork sharp. And we watch a lot of tape with the coaches, to review pros and cons." Henry's eyes were hooded, and darted between his friend and the textbook.

"I got asked to sit on a slate for the Engineering Society election, bottom of the totem pole, running for Secretary." He said this nervously.

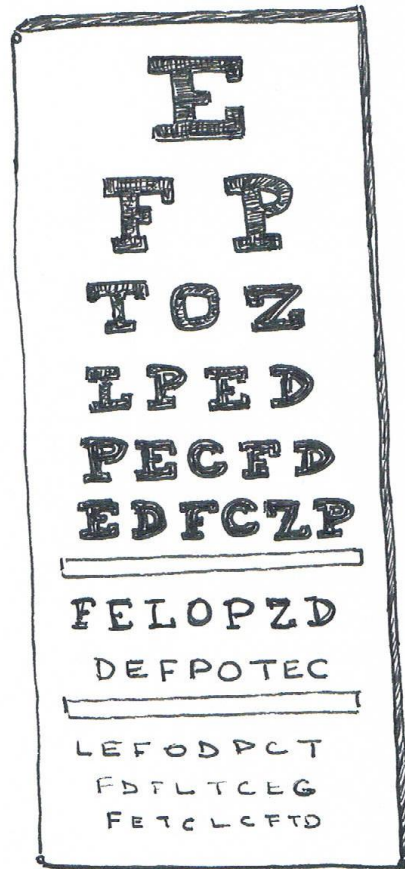
"Yeah, saw the posters here and there. Being Secretary sounds kinda weird, for a guy?" This was said kindly enough.

"Well, I thought the same thing. But the role is to attend council meetings and take minutes, and post things on bulletin boards. More organizational. Wasn't completely sure if I should try for it, but in the end I decided to give it a shot." As he explained this he saw Paul, his erstwhile classmate, walking briskly across the circle in the direction of Hart House. "Hey, if the slate loses, I might have to start going with that guy to his Campus Crusade for Christ events. He keeps asking me to come along, and keeps dropping hints about all the nice girls that come out. The way I'm going, I might need this kind of set up for a girlfriend." He grinned wryly.

"Stay the course, man. If you want to go to a Crusade, go, but don't go for the girls. And if you become Secretary, surely that will be a chick magnet." Henry raised his eyebrows and dryly chuckled at his own joke.

As he went back to his room for supper, he noticed a bright yellow election poster had been taped to his door. In the recognizable scrawl of the candidate for president, who lived up on the third floor of West House, was the one line "We Won.... "

Approaching 2020 Vision



Some days he just needed to get out of the U of T bubble. This was one of those days, where he had a couple of hours before dinner as a lab had been canceled, and the weather was the best Toronto could offer for early March. Sunshine and warmish temperatures, with a light breeze to bring in the excitement of another Spring with its flowering tree blossoms and longer days. He thought about poking his head into one of his West House buddies' rooms to see if anyone might be available and up for a stroll, but thought better of it. Today he felt like no agenda, and minimal conversation. Just walking and observing, strolling without purpose, like the Parisian *flâneurs* of old.

He took himself out the King's College Circle door of Knox, glancing up quickly in the direction of the library on one side and the chapel on the other. Both seemed quiet and dimly lit, perfect metaphors for this ecclesiastical institution that seemed happily stuck about fifty years or more in the past. Popping the door yielded daylight and sounds from a perpetually interesting King's College Circle. He thought twice about getting in on a pickup game of soccer or hanging by the sidelines and watching the frenetic action, but looked away and saw the pink sandstone of Queen's Park as a beckoning presence.

He had never been inside the actual legislative building, but had certainly visited its grounds several times and on separate occasions had hung out in the expanse of Queen's Park to the north of the Provincial Legislature. In fact, this space connected to one of his earliest and fondest memories of Toronto. He had

come to the city on a field trip to visit the Royal Ontario Museum. It had all been terribly exciting for a busload of kids coming in from his rural hometown. Even more exciting was getting a fully loaded sausage from a food truck outside the ROM, and taking it over to Queen's Park for slow consumption while soaking up the unfamiliar sights and bustle of the increasingly cosmopolitan city. He could still see in his mind's eye a lovely young office worker sitting on one of the park benches, wearing a short miniskirt and what seemed to him a pair of impossibly high heels. When she took out a portable aluminum tanning tray and positioned it at neck level to maximize the ultraviolet rays bouncing upwards onto her pretty visage, he knew immediately that this city was full of strange sights and interesting experiences.

So he ambled towards the tunnel that separates the campus from Queen's Park, and started to walk towards the central zone of the park with its large equestrian statue. Government workers were out in full force enjoying the fine weather, and a good number of student types were sprinkled here and there on benches and seated on the grass. He thought he wouldn't know a soul this far away from his normal haunts, but up ahead on a bench he saw two gals from his class. They were deep in conversation, and just for a second he wondered if he could marginally alter his course and glide behind them without detection. But one of them looked up, recognized him, and gave him a sultry smile with her mouth quickly converting this into a mildly lascivious smirk. It was The Pout, and he could have recognized her energy and almost feline allure from a thousand paces. She was leaning over, conferring with Marcy, the gal who had tried to initiate something with him back in first year.

"Hey, you can always count on seeing pretty girls when you come over to Queen's Park." He surprised even himself with the syrupy smoothness that had adhered to his voice.

"What's good for the goose is good for the gander, and we've been enjoying the scenery and the beautiful sunshine!" The Pout flipped back her auburn hair over one shoulder in a practiced sweep, and rolled her eyebrows theatrically.

"Yeah, fair enough, but you two seemed to be in a deep and important conversation. So much so, Paul Newman might have walked by and I daresay you wouldn't have noticed." He grinned sideways when both young women laughed at his joke.

"Guilty as charged. I've been having a rocky end to a fledgling romantic relationship, and needed some sage advice." Marcy said this briefly, adjusting her glasses at the end to camouflage any glint in her eyes.

"Uh, sorry, I'll just keep moseying along. Didn't mean to interrupt." He realized he should have altered his walking trajectory.

"Moseying... how cute is that? I tell you, Marcy, if I didn't have my man I might just try to make some sparks fly with this cute dude here from Haystack Hamlet. But you're free now, Marcy, what do you think?" The attractive brunette said this in a sly stage whisper, perfectly audible to all three actors.

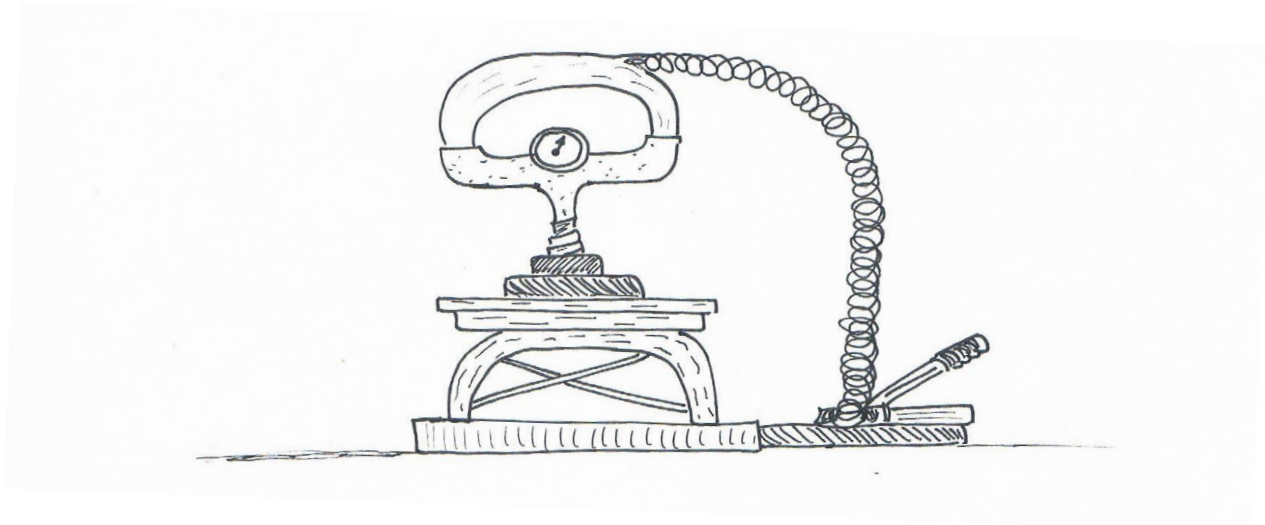
Well, uh, I believe Jayson is attached..." The young woman cleared her throat as she said this, and it awkwardly brought back the fabricated story he had spun back in first year to avoid getting into a situation that might be sticky to backpedal out of.

"Hey, I love the ladies, and the ladies love me..." Again he shocked himself a bit with the *bon vivant* nature of his voice.

"Oh well, keep the lines open, sweet ones. And if you ever need a good optician, Marcy's Dad is the top one in the city, working out of a clinic out on Dovercourt. He can clear up any vision problems you might have, like not seeing a lovely gem right under your nose?" The Pout said this emphatically and suggestively.

As it turned out, he had already visited some eye doctor after exams were over just the past Christmas. He had been studying hard, and had accumulated a lot of eye fatigue, so his visual exam results were less than heartening. The doctor had given him a prescription for glasses, which he took home and promptly discarded due to vanity. Deeper meditation and more sleep had cleared up his vision issues, and he was determined to look clearly ahead without the benefit of eyeglasses.

The Master Builder...Not



Ian sat across from him in the Knox College Common Room, directly adjacent to the dining room. They were waiting for the door to open, so they could grab an early dinner. It was unusual for Ian to be on campus after 4:30, as he was usually on a subway bound for his suburban home in Etobicoke. But tonight was the testing competition for the balsa wood bridges they had constructed as part of a course in structural mechanics, and the event was set to kick off in under an hour. It was already a few minutes past 5 o'clock, yet the door remained inexplicably closed. He paced the room across a weathered Persian carpet, while Ian lounged in an overstuffed leather easy chair and read a day-old copy of the Toronto Star.

"Damn, when will the Leafs put a good team on the ice? When I was a little kid, they were always in the Stanley Cup final, or so it seemed. Nowadays, year in and year out, they are always coming close, but never nailing things down." The lad spilled this over the top of the sports section, with his eyes back on the conference standings.

"I've never liked hockey much. Maybe because I wasn't allowed to play it when I was a kid. My Mom had already lost one son to a bad heart, she didn't want to lose another who might get dashed into the boards.

At least now they wear helmets. But basketball, now that's a real game. I'm hoping the Buffalo Braves might move a bit further north and become the Toronto Braves. I'd get season tickets for sure!" He smiled excitedly.

At that point the heavy dining room door creaked open noisily, pulled back by the little whisper of a waitress with big, soulful eyes and a David Bowie androgynous coif. Twenty minutes later, after quickly ingesting two plates of roast chicken, mashed potatoes and string beans, the two lads were chirpily making their way down St. George to the Galbraith Building.

"Man, I'm kind of nervous about this bridge testing thing." He said this in a low voice, not sure if Ian might poke fun at him.

"Why, man, you're aceing the course! Just put theory into practice and everything flows easily." Ian had the confidence of a person who falls fast asleep in 10 seconds, never rehashing the day's events over and over in his mind.

"It's just I've never been much of a lab person. You remember how much I despised first-year chemistry for that reason. And back in high school I got all the theory down in five minutes but was all thumbs in making stuff in the shop. Don't want to count how many times I had near-misses in really dangerous situations." He scrunched up his face pathetically.

"But the flipping bridge is built, right? It's sitting down there, right now, in the structural testing lab in the basement of Galbraith. And any fretting you do will not help one little bit." Ian rolled his eyes.

"Yeah, you're right. I just wish we could have chosen partners, so we could have worked together. The little guy that got assigned to me is pleasant enough, but didn't seem to know any of the theory and was even more of a klutz than I was with the saw and the glue gun." He felt bad as soon as he said this, as it sounded like he was shifting downstream blame to his lab partner.

"Anyway, dude, suck it up if you fail miserably and don't gloat if you win the damn thing!" Ian moved away into a mob of classmates, looking for his partner, a heavyset Italian kid.

He looked around for his partner, a short Chinese man with big black glasses and a shy but ready smile. It appeared as if he wasn't there yet, so he shifted around to the back of the dusty lab, taking in all of the heavy pieces of structural testing equipment.

An imperious older man came out, wearing a white lab coat and a white hard hat with "Civil" in black letters on the front. "Okay ladies, we are here tonight to crush your bridges. We will go by assigned numbers, and will record the maximum compressive loading your bridge structures are able to sustain. Let's not stay here all night, so be ready in the on-deck circle with your bridge on a tray if your position is next in line. Good luck to you all."

There were over fifty bridges to be tested, and the first few were done in record speed and held weight up to the 300 pound level. The overall winner would not be directly evident, as it depended on the weight of the bridge. If a lot of balsa wood and glue had been used to make a heavier bridge, it should hold more weight. So the technician weighed each one on a mass balance and a grad student recorded the weights and the held loadings before a resultant ratio could be calculated.

One muscular bridge held an eye-popping 1500 pounds, and a critical mass of The Italians started hooting and hollering as a couple of their gang had fabricated this amazing specimen. His bridge would soon be up for testing, and his partner had joined him quietly at his side. The lab door opened and in poured a gaggle of West House mates, coming in to cheer him on. This made him nervous and happy in equal measure, and he handed the bridge over for measurement with slightly trembling hands.

"Oh, a light one, under 3 pounds." The graduate student sounded more skeptical than complimentary.

"Let's load it up, see what these twigs can hold." A clamp plate was applied and compressive force was administered for all of five seconds, with the balsa wood bridge popping one of its lateral members and failing quickly.

"47 pounds, maybe 48... We'll be charitable and round it to 50." The technician smiled grimly. "Not as if it will make much difference, unless we're vying for last place."

One of the West House lads, a smirky law school type, leaned in and said "Ah, the Master Builder." He had read Ibsen's play in high school, but the recognition of the Nordic title was cold comfort to his burning cheeks.

Ennui Exploded



It was a Friday evening in early March and he had no plans. He had been laying low after the bridge testing embarrassment, and had dealt with a few barbs and cutting comments at the West House table in the interim. But he decided to just smile, and not offer any kind of reply or explanation. He had plenty of reasons to pathetically offer in light of the situation, but he simply went inward. Inward to an interior landscape where he knew he was valued, where he was on the right path. An inner space where sticks and stones couldn't hurt him, and where things moved on and a prematurely exploding balsa wood bridge would be old news soon enough.

So he sat in his room with darkness falling outside, the shadows lengthening sharply in the picturesque interior quad of Knox College. He lay on his bed for a while, luxuriating in the wealth of having time where not much had to be accomplished. But he jumped up after a time, fearing he would just go to sleep and wake up only at breakfast the next day. He sat on his wooden chair, projecting inward. Not with his customary mantra, but more with an inward direction of his mental energy. He settled in on some plateau,

drinking from inward springs and eyeing luscious fruits growing on unknown trees. It all felt quite real in some sense, akin to a lucid dream where things are experienced a microsecond past where your imagination hid the foreshadowed sense of their being-ness. Time stood still in this deep-plumbed geography, but after about thirty minutes on his clock radio he heard voices downstairs around the West House common room. He thought better of sitting on a hard wooden chair in his room on a Friday night, with drapes drawn. But when he got down to the first floor, the area was morgue quiet, so he decided to drop down another level and saunter over to the TV room under East House to perhaps watch some Bonanza reruns.

The TV room was intermittently loud and quiet, with bluish light from the old black and white set casting outwards into the hallway and the nearby laundry room. One lone person was there, fussing with the bunny-ears antenna perched precariously on the top of the television. It was Stu Rickard, the tall and smooth Poli Sci student who would be graduating in all of six weeks.

"Hey, Stu, what's up?" He had always liked this guy, even though he hardly knew him.

"Hey, buckaroo, not much! Just trying to mold these bunny ears to bring in CBS from Buffalo. There's a Friday night basketball game being televised and I thought I'd catch a few minutes before heading out on the town." The older boy grimaced as he fidgeted.

"I didn't know you were a basketball fan?" He flung himself down on the couch.

"Oh, big time, Lil' Bro. Grew up in Sarnia and everyone there is absolutely gonzo nuts about Michigan State. I caught the fever last year when Goose Givens of Kentucky ripped Duke for 41 points in the NCAA final! I believe Kentucky is playing tonight against one of their SEC opponents, but I can't seem to bring it in or I got the time wrong..." Stu's voice trailed off as he tinkered even more seriously.

"So you switched allegiances from Michigan State to Kentucky?" He said this playfully.

"Oh no, *au contraire*. State is going to do very, very well this year. Earvin Johnson is the man. But one has to keep abreast of your top competitors, you know..." Stu cast the bunny ears over the top of the TV set. "Argggh, that's it. Forget about the damn game! I'm headed out to Bloor West, want to come along?" Stu's eyes danced.

"Uh, well, I was going to watch a little TV." He shifted nervously on the sticky fabric of the chesterfield.

"Balls to that boring shit, man! It's Friday night, the feeling is right, there's nightlife a mere six blocks away from this staid ol' Presbyterian seminary." Stu stood up tall and nodded his head excitedly.

"Where are you going, actually?" He wasn't dead set on Bonanza.

"Walk the street, smile at the ladies, maybe drop in for a beer at the Brunnie." Stu smiled widely.

Twenty minutes later they were walking along the south side of Bloor West, just west of Spadina. He had been up here a couple of times over his two years, and the 7-8 blocks from Spadina over to Bathurst were arguably the most interesting and lively section of commercial street you could find in an increasingly

cosmopolitan Toronto. Bookshops, cafés, ethnic restaurants, record stores, macrobiotic health food shops and pubs intermixed up and down the street. Classic commercial design with stores on the bottom up tight to the sidewalk, with two stories of apartments above that. The sidewalks were filled with people, due to its proximity to the university and the Annex neighborhood.

He had learned over his two years at Knox that Stu never went anywhere socially without the presence of his attractive girlfriend and a posse of equally well put together friends. So outside of the Brunswick Tavern, Stu stopped, and gestured welcomingly towards the door.

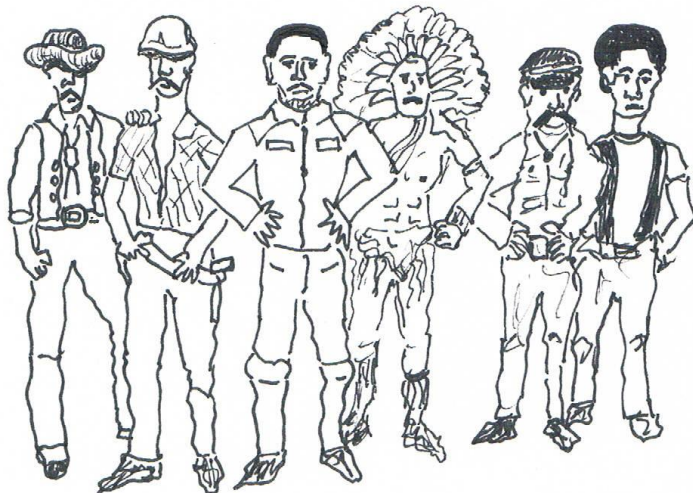
"Meeting some friends in here for a sudsy. You are most welcome to join our party." Stu tipped the brim of an imaginary fedora.

"Oh no, if you had plans to meet up with folks, I'll just toodle up the street and wend around and find my way back home. No worries, honestly." He said this unconvincingly.

Stu grabbed him by the arm and in less than five minutes he was sitting in a booth of the Brunnie with a glass of foamy watered down beer in his hand. The music was loud, and the booth was sized for considerably fewer people than Stu and him and six young ladies from University College, but he felt no reason to complain about anything.

"Beats the hell out of Bonanza." Stu said this in a gap between blasts of music.

Working at the YMCA



He had many weekends where not much was happening on the social front, and then the odd one had a few things unexpectedly coalesce. He had slept in a bit after staying too long at the Brunswick Tavern, missing breakfast and waking with a touch of woolly mouth. He hadn't drunk a lot, and the draft beer had certainly been watered down, but three or four slender glasses and a lot of yelling-talking over the loud

music had kind of worn him down. He lay in bed until lunchtime, watching light patterns shift on the plaster walls and ceiling of his second floor West House room.

A quiet lunch meal followed by a bit of tidyup homework and a forgettable dinner of mystery meat and scalloped potatoes saw him sitting in his room with no real or concrete plans for the Saturday evening. He heard the padding of slippered footsteps in the corridor, followed by a knock on his door.

"What's happening?" Klaus had weathered the winter poorly, with too much classwork and too many desserts.

"Not much, you?" He motioned for the housemate to sit down in his wooden chair.

"Don't mind if I do, take a load off. Say, wondering if you would like to go over to Med Sci and catch the Saturday night movie? Read a review in the Varsity, something with Madeline Kahn in it, got four stars. She's a looker, so what do you think?" Klaus wagged his head from side to side.

"Yeah, sure, why not? Beats sitting around here... What's it cost, two bucks to get in?" He rummaged around in his drawer for change.

Twenty minutes later they were outside the Med Sci auditorium, but the lineup snaked down the stairs and around the corner, halfway to the Mechanical Engineering building. He saw Jake from his class, standing in line beside a prim and petite blonde-haired gal. He got a friendly enough nod and a roll of the eyes that communicated the length of the line, but a subtle knowing that his classmate didn't want to introduce him to the lab technician from his tobacco belt hometown. He could see in his mind's eye the wisdom in not having a girlfriend from back home, anchoring him to the past and a rhythm of life that he appreciated but wanted distance from.

He and Klaus shuffled in to the end of the line, amid copious muttering that many adjacent would-be moviegoers felt that the queue numbers were well beyond the capacity of the auditorium. The line started to move and it surged ahead quickly. But when they were halfway up the stairs it ground suddenly to a full stop. The muttering picked up with a frenzy, and turned into howling when a short, bespectacled young man walked the remainder of the line and told all and sundry that the theater was full and the next showing would be at seven o'clock the following evening.

"Man that sucks! I was really looking forward to seeing Madeline Kahn in her birthday suit on a bed of flower petals." Klaus' eyes danced.

"Yup, misjudged how early you need to get here for a film that has good reviews in the campus paper. Let's take it as a sign that we need to get ahead on our work?" He motioned back across the circle towards Knox College.

"Noooh, I got my aviator aviator jacket on, man! Let's go do something!" Klaus stood firm.

"Yeah, okay, but what? I want nothing to do with a place that has beer in it..." He scrunched up his face, and looked across the plaza to see Henry confidently striding across it with his Varsity Blues jacket on.

"Hey Henry, where are you off to?" He waved over to his friend, hoping he would hold up.

"Gentlemen... I'm off to Maple Leaf Gardens to catch a concert. Our quarterback, Bobby, works as an usher there. We have an arrangement that he pops a side door off one of the alleys a few minutes after the show has started, and the two of us migrate up to a few of the cheaper seats that are empty. Usually a fun night, and at no cost. I study economics, you know." Henry offered up a tight-lipped smile.

"Maple Leaf Gardens, wow! I've always wanted to see the Leafs play, let's go!" Klaus was already heading towards College Street.

"No, the Leafs are out of town. And their games are always sold out, even the grey seats up top. I have no idea what is on at the Gardens tonight. And Bobby needs to stay below the radar, so he typically only wants me at the door.... sorry." Henry was somber, with no smile evident.

"What if we walked you over, stood by the alley door, and you can ask Bobby if there are four seats in a corner? If he so much as blinks, Klaus and I stroll back for an early night. Might that work for you, Henry?" He said this softly, with copious respect in his body language.

Twenty minutes later they were furtively standing in an alley off Wood Street, at the rear of Maple Leaf Gardens. Piles of garbage were strewn here and there, and he swore he saw a rat scurrying away in the shadows. It looked like a venue for a drug deal to go down and neither of the three young men felt particularly comfortable. Henry gave two soft knocks on the metal door, followed by two more. The door cracked open and Bobby stood there with his finger on his lips.

"My manager just went by, so keep the volume down..." Bobby whispered this firmly.

"Bob, a couple of clingers-on on who couldn't get into the campus movie. Any space for them or do we cut them away now?" Henry jerked his thumb towards the two lads.

"Ahh, come on in. Lots of seats up in my section of the greys. People are moving around and dancing, so we can re-adjust and move if needed. Sure, the more, the merrier!" Bobby smiled broadly and clapped his guests on the shoulder, but motioned again to keep their voices low.

They worked their way upstairs through ancient stairwells that smelled of beer, urine and sweat. The music was very loud and upbeat and the crowd was cheering vociferously.

"What's the act for tonight?" Klaus blurted this out a bit too loudly.

"The Village People." Bobby said this calmly and quietly, barely audible over the music.

"The Village People?! Fuck, that's a faggot band!" Klaus' eyes bulged.

"Well, keep your pants zipped up tight then, little friend. Because 15,278 of the nicest gay men in Toronto are here to have fun. And you'll be partying right along with them, in your cute little leather aviator jacket." Bobby scrunched up his face mischievously.

They snuck into the grey seat zone at a break between songs with the lights out. Bobby's flashlight helped them locate four seats in a row, virtually up at the roofline. The lights came up quickly, the music jumped in, and thousands of young men started to dance and do the hand signals for the signature tune of 'YMCA'. He jumped up and joined in with Bobby and Henry, while Klaus sat in his seat, stewing in his own juices.

Submissive by Nature



A week flew by quickly after the excitement of the weekend, and a week in March nearing the end of an academic term had more packed into it than a standard calendar week. He was standing around the lobby of the Galbraith building, reading award plaques and notices of endowed lectures, and generally trying to avoid going back to the college on a late Friday afternoon. He had some work to do, but it wasn't particularly exciting material so he was procrastinating and essentially loitering to fritter the remnant of time away before an early dinner.

He looked through the double glass vestibule doors and could see Becca, the Engineering Society secretary, stepping out of the Metro Library which housed the Society office after the Sir Sanford Fleming Building fire. She had on sharp-looking knee-length leather boots with a pretty stylish heel on them, and had a gray trench coat on with a purplish floral scarf as an attractive accent. She was wheeling a carry-on suitcase, looking much sharper than the average gal on campus, and had the air of someone traveling somewhere.

He stopped to get a better look, and his mind cast back to the time he had seen Ingrid and her shopping on Young Street for dominatrix gear. He had no real clue what a dominatrix did, but it seemed to have some

kind of mysterious appeal. He had asked Stu about it once, and he had simply chuckled and muttered something about 'beating the shit out of wimpy submissive guys with their limp dicks in their hands'. That didn't sound very appealing, and seemed incongruous for the mental image he had of Becca and her petite frame. He had pondered if he had got it all wrong, and the two gals had gone instead to a boot store that adjoined the dominatrix/fetish emporium on Young Street. As he thought all of this through, he went off into a daydream state and hadn't realized she had come up to the entrance plaza of the Galbraith and had strong-armed the doors and was a half second away from walking right into him as he stood in the lobby.

"Jayson, what are you doing?" She pulled up pertly with her rolling luggage.

"Dunno, just hanging out. Too darn early to go home and start working on a lab write up." He scrunched up his face, feeling colour rising to it.

"Ah, my lucky day. I'm heading over to the Greyhound station to go out up to Meaford for the weekend. Have to see the folks from time to time! But there's some slush out there on the sidewalks, and this bag isn't tracking all that well. And a bit heavier than I like to heft! So I decided to cut through the dry hallways of the Galbraith and who do I bump into? A Bruce County boy with big muscles, who might just want to give me company and pack my bag over to Bay and Elm? Pretty please, with sugar on top?" She leaned into him and grabbed his right bicep.

"Phsawh, why not? I can always use the exercise and it'll give me a good excuse not to get down to brass tacks. Let's go!" He ported the surprisingly heavy bag up on his right shoulder and they went up the stairway near the Dean's office.

They walked along, chatting amiably and taking quieter side streets to weave their way over to the bus station. Becca was cute enough in a disaffected kind of way, and seemed full of contradictions. Her eyes were glazed most of the time, yet she seemed witty and even a bit flirtatious. But all he knew was that she was from Meaford, and had come to the city to go to university and had stayed on. He couldn't really tell her age, but he would have guessed at mid twenties, late twenties tops. So he just kept subtly peppering questions to her, trying to round out his understanding of her and her life.

"So we're going to be working together again next year, with this Executive election result in hand?" He smiled thinly.

"Yes indeed, Mr. Secretary! Hilarious, my position is executive secretary to the Engineering Society president, and you were elected as Secretary on the Engineering Society Executive! Confusing as heck, and someone might think you're taking over my job. But don't worry, I'll keep it all straight and keep you and the others in line!" She wagged her index finger at him, encased in a fine leather glove.

"Oh, I'll be good, I promise! I wouldn't want to get on your bad side, and have you... discipline me." This last piece dribbled out unexpectedly, and caused him to wince a bit.

"Oh, if you are a bad boy, Jayson, Miss Becca will be the first to tell you and apply a correction." The

young woman said this slyly, walking through an intersection and looking sideways at him with a subtle shift of her eyes.

"Oh, no, everything is going to be just hunky-dory, I promise." His voice caught, and rose in timbre.

"Excellent, I like men who are inherently submissive." She said this looking straight forward.

"Like your boyfriend?" He said this in a mildly taunting tone.

"Boyfriend?" She turned her head sharply.

"Yeah, boyfriend, or your man, or whatever you refer to him as." His eyebrows arched sharply.

"Oh, no boyfriend for me..." Becca turned soft and compliant.

"No big lumberjack waiting for you at the bus station up in Meaford?" He puffed up his chest in a campy pantomime.

"Ha, that's a good one! Nothing but drunken apple farmers and Mama's-boy stoners up in Meaford." She accompanied all of this with a mocking laugh.

"What about down here in the Big Smoke? Surely some good-looking alum has come by your office and you've batted your eyelashes at him? You're a classy dresser, mademoiselle, and that goes a long way with a lot of fellas." He was enjoying this interrogation, and felt he had turned the tide on the mental tug-of-war between them.

"Oh, here we are, nothing like the diesel fumes of a bus station to make one nostalgic for home. I can't tell you how much I appreciated you hoisting that bag all this way! And for all the playful banter – we're going to have good times next year, us two secretaries!" She even giggled a bit at this.

"Signed, sealed, delivered..." He put the bag down on the sidewalk.

"I'm yours!" The young woman leaned in for a quick hug, and he turned his head and smelled a glorious scent drifting off of her shiny bangs. She spun and dashed for the waiting Greyhound, heels clicking on the damp station floor tilework.

Reflections on a Sleety Afternoon



He stood behind a pole, watching the lineup for the Meaford bus. There was a higgledy-piggledy crowd going up towards Georgian Bay-the usual guys with big beards and toques and plaid shirts, the odd guy looking furtively left and right who might be taking the bus due to a DUI infraction, and a few cute working gals going home to see the folks. He kept his eye on the floral scarf of the most familiar representative of his last category, and watched it disappear into the murky darkness of the vintage Greyhound bus. He saw the door close and the long vehicle pull out of its bay, before meandering slowly through the traffic-clogged streets until it hit its stride on the snow-slicked highways north of the city. He even managed a feeble wave, half-hoping that Becca might be looking out the window at just the right time.

He walked slowly up Bay Street, peeking into several Asian restaurants that offered dumplings or buns with pork, well away from the more familiar streets of Chinatown directly south of the university. The pervading sauce smells almost lured him into one particular joint, but the sticky look of the floor and the quick recalling that he had a prepaid hot meal waiting just a few blocks away caused him to regretfully move on.

He turned left at College and made his way along the ancillary clinics and actual physical plant associated with Sick Kids Hospital, and had more than a twinge of sadness relating to his lost brother who had spent so many nights there over twenty five years back. He had always wondered what it would have been like if the little fellow had survived. Would the avoided grieving have changed the mental landscape of his parents, such that life would have been so much different? But as he mulled this over in his mind, forwards and backwards, he always came to the same show-stopping question. What if the doctors had been able to do something, what if present day technology had been available, and his wee brother had lived? Had grown past his emaciated and thin frame, and turned into a robust young adult? But would his parents have then had a third child, a second son who would grow up to adore his older brother? In his mind there was no guarantee of this, given his parents were depression-era folks and just might have fallen back on horse sense and decided replication numbers were just fine and another mouth to feed would be impractical across many dimensions. So if Sick Kids had saved his brother, would he be standing outside the very hospital in the driven sleet contemplating these questions? Would he be in some primordial spiritual zone, waiting for just the right place to land? Or would have he decided the Bardo was a good place for the next thousand years of Earth time, until humans figured out the lyrics to John

Lennon's Imagine?

He snapped himself out of this existential reverie, leaning in to the pebbly precipitation and admiring a few of the Hydro Place secretaries squinting their pretty eyelashes to ward off the sleet as they made their way to a homeward-bound subway rolling imminently through the Queen's Park station. He liked to look at a person and make up a story about their life right down to the gritty details. How the petite Italian stenographer would be taking the subway to Spadina, then grabbing the Dupont bus as far as Annette, stopping at a greengrocers to pick up rapini and a roll of polenta that would go with leftovers for a quick dinner with her Old Country parents. How they would greet her with a big embrace, and ask her if she had met any nice boys that day at work. How she might blush and say "no, not today", then remember that Vinnie had lingered a bit after dropping off mail at her desk, his stocky build and droopy eyelids being assessed against his ready smile and a warmth she hadn't seen in most guys. At how she would see parallel future scenarios, where a nice big wedding at St. Michael's downtown would lead to two *bambini* and a busy life of parent/teacher meetings and getting back to Vinnie's village every five years, or where she held out for a slender and smoldering husband and was still typing memos 25 years later while looking after her failing parents. He seemed to see all of this in the few seconds that she walked past him, a half-smile acknowledging his connection, and then she was down the slippery stairwell and gone into the mists of an early Friday evening in the big city.

He crossed at the Mining Building and looked up in awe at its massive black stone façade. His engineering geology class had its labs here, its musty hallways and lovely woodwork telling stories of students who had inhabited this space for over a century. There were points on the campus where he would almost pinch himself, to make sure he wasn't dreaming that he was at this old historic university and enjoying all of its traditional and hallowed spaces. He walked up King's College Road, on very familiar turf now, admiring the ivy on the Mechanical Engineering Building and its minimalist Art Deco features. He wasn't entirely sure they were Art Deco, but they seemed to be and the label appealed to him so that's what he used to describe the structure. The front campus opened up at the top of King's College Circle Road, where it ran into King's College Circle. It seemed like a broad pool to him, the grass of the front lawn being so expansive and lining up to match the sky. University College directly ahead of him was brooding and mysterious in the continuing precipitation and failing light. He took it all in appreciatively, and felt his stomach rumble. He thought once again of those steamed dumplings back on Bay Street and turned into the wind towards the direction of his more traditional meat and potatoes supper.

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Five days later he sat at his first Engineering Society Society Executive meeting in one of the council rooms in the interior of the Galbraith Building. It was a passing-of-the-baton meeting, where the new executive slate would be introduced, and then the old executive would wrap up its business for the year. He sat nervously off to the side, while a number of the new Executive muscled their way into prominent seats at the table. One benefit to his strategy was that Becca sat in the same row of side chairs, taking notes on a big pad and generally keeping the meeting going with a full knowledge of Roberts' Rules of Order. He loathed the minute and detailed aspects of committee work and started to wonder if he made the right call in agreeing to sit on the election slate. He looked over at Becca, trying to make some kind of

meaningful connection. She gave him a terse and tight-lipped smile and that was the extent of it. He mentally projected an image of him hoisting her heavy bag down to the Greyhound station, but the telegraph lines appeared to be frayed. One of the gals from last year's executive seemed to be particularly ornery and contested several points of order as a final hurrah, and he started to feel drowsy and nodded off to the sound of her shrill voice and sight of her hunched shoulders.

Meditation as Refuge



His reverie was snapped when a strong presence crunched down noisily on the side chair between himself and Miss Becca. The guy smelled good, with some kind of cologne modestly applied or a hair pomade rubbed in to a good-looking shock of dark hair. He wore a sharp blue pea coat, cut sharply to his muscular physique. It was the Lothario who he had known since first year, who seemed to have designs on The Pout and Miss Becca and another half-dozen or so lovelies in and around the Engineering zone. He had tried to keep a safe distance to protect himself from getting his ass kicked, as he had enjoyed a steamy and instructive Friday evening with the petite and stacked Kira back in the Fall term of first year. It hadn't gone anywhere after that, and she had quickly returned to girlfriend status for the guy within a week or less. So he had taken it all as a learning experience, but kept his distance just in case Kira murmured to her boyfriend that she had visited Knox one late afternoon on the heels of being temporarily dumped. On one hand it seemed ironic to be cautious as he had first-hand knowledge that the guy was shopping around, but he still didn't want to meet his knuckles in a late afternoon encounter in a quiet corner of the Wallberg Building. Yes, instructive on so many levels, and another evidence point that Toronto girls seemed a bit irrational and difficult to understand. Why Kira would go back to him after being unceremoniously dumped was a mystery, but certainly made him think he better start looking at small town gals or even somebody from another country who wasn't about to play silly or coy.

The young stud leaned over towards him and whispered conspiratorially behind a big ham hock of a hand.

"Sorry I'm late, but had a few people I needed to see... Congratulations to us on getting elected... I'm not all that excited about working with the next president, who is a sawed-off little ass in my view, but he

might surprise... This kind of thing looks good on our resumes, at least... I'm going to hit the books hard next year so I can go to grad school, but we'll have to get something done as an Executive if we want to run for a higher position the next year after that... Will she ever stop talking? As if the only thing that matters in life are rules and procedures... Isn't Becca the cutest little thing! I just love when she shuts the train down on a point of procedure... Yup, cute as hell and naughty to boot! Not that I would know, but I hear some crazy wicked stories!"

The guy prattled on, leaning back halfway to shimmy out of his pea coat, exposing an enviable upper body physique. He had seen him at the Hart House gym more than once, and it was clear he was in very good shape and buffed. Maybe it made sense that Kira went back to him, it was clear he was a young man who was going places and had confidence to burn.

The aside comments and the odd snort from Becca made the rest of the meeting pass quickly, and he was soon strolling down a quiet Galbraith hallway to the St. George exit doors mulling all that he had heard that filled in many gaps of a narrative that would undoubtedly unfold further over the next year.

He landed back in at his room about 45 minutes before supper, and thought he would sit immediately for an afternoon meditation. He had been as regular as rain with his twice a day mantra sessions over last Summer and the Fall term of his second year, but he had fallen off a bit lately. He still knew he benefited greatly from the practice of sitting quietly and repeating his mantra over and over and over. But his Mom had not been keen on him learning TM, calling it un-Christian-like. His teacher Blaine coming to his home for his final initiation dressed in long white robes hadn't helped this perception. And one of his theolog buddies had ominously warned him of the "addictive" nature of TM, where priests in Montréal who practiced regularly developed migraine headaches when they temporarily stopped. He didn't think to question this, or even his Mom's resistance, so he had quietly let the dedication to the practice ebb a bit. But every now and then, when he needed to recalibrate, he would sit quietly and focus. Eventually the holding of the mantra would slip away, and he would go deep, deep into a space where time seemed to have no sway. A quiet, blissful place, where big ideas might float in and out of his consciousness, but generally it was like being in a big vat of honey. Non-viscous, buoyant honey. Immersion in this gave him time away from the hurley-burley of life, a furlough from worrying about work or being anxious about the day-to-day details that make up an active student life.

And when it was time to come back, he felt like an undersea explorer burbling up from the depths of sweet consciousness. At times he wasn't exactly sure where he was, or even more significantly, who he was. He would look around his room and the knowing of his existence slowly seeped back into his conscious mind. He often felt like the forty minutes or so was equivalent to a full night's sleep, and he was laser-focused on details of the space around him. Often the front of his shirt was wet with his pooled saliva, dripping without awareness from his open mouth as he plunged into the sweet inner depths. Today was one of those days, so he rose to pull off his shirt and reached into his dresser for a fresh one to wear to dinner. The minute aspects of the day had disappeared, and he puttered around his room for a few minutes, seeing the solutions in his mind's eye to problem sets sitting on his desk, and visualizing completed lab writeups from the rough data notes spilling out of his briefcase. Feeling calm about the conclusion of his second year, seeing himself in exams downstream by a few weeks with a smile on his face as he reviewed his exam paper well before the final bell. He sighed, and made a mental note to come back to the practice more often, even if it was done quietly and without fanfare. The benefits of sitting in

this interior refuge were obvious and multi-dimensional, and he smiled quietly to himself as he closed his door and walked towards the pre-dinner banter of the West House Common Room.

East Meets West



A structural mechanics lab had just finished up in the testing room, directly adjacent to the large structural lab where his ill-formed balsa wood bridge had met its early demise. He had been responsible for the recordkeeping, and made a last few entries in his lab book while the rest of his group tidied up the bench space under the watchful eye of a grizzled technician in a soiled white lab coat.

"There you go, so fucking clean you could eat off of it!" Ian wiped the surface of the lab bench with a flourish.

"You Canadians seem to be overly concerned with tidiness." RJ, the inscrutable young man from Hong Kong, walked by with a dustpan full of metal shavings.

"You got that right, pal. They say Toronto is like New York, but run by the Swiss. Our trains run on time, our streets are clean, and our restaurant washrooms are spic and span. " Ian paused for a second, before going on. "Unlike most of the loos down in those Chinatown joints."

"Some of these things are cultural, some are caused by practical considerations. There are too many people in Hong Kong, and this is equally true for mainland Chinese cities. If you fixate on clean washrooms, they will get soiled quickly enough anyways. So once a day or so is considered fine, and more time can be spent on what's really important, the food." RJ gave a broad smile, totally disarming Ian.

"Yeah, I get it. Our food is shit. Really, what is Canadian food, anyways? My folks are British, and British food is equally bad. Mushy peas and roast beef! We eat it so we can get a slice of pie at the end of the meal to make up for the main course." Ian grinned roguishly.

"Oh, amen brother." He shut his log book tight." Bless my mom, love her to bits, but regular meals were boiled chicken, boiled potatoes and boiled broccoli. Salt and pepper for flavoring. Brutal. But her cakes, her pies, her chocolate eclairs-all out of this world! No small wonder I was packing an extra forty all through high school." He grasped at the airspace beside his belt line.

"We Chinese know how to eat healthy. Rice every meal, easy to digest. Lots of vegetables. Some meat or fish. Spicy or not, but always a nice sauce to make it very tasty. Never dessert! Maybe a little treat with tea on a special day, but nothing after a meal. Eat like that every day, do some regular training, and you two will start looking like Bruce Lee!" RJ rolled up his left sleeve and flexed a huge bicep.

He walked with Ian as far as the front steps of Knox College, where his friend hightailed it northward to the St. George subway station. He went in and checked an antiquated wooden mail box in the front foyer, riffling through a few promotional envelopes until he came to a letter with the familiar handwriting of his Mom on the front of the envelope. Rather than head back to his room, he decided to mount the stairs towards the dining room and sit in one of the easy chairs in the lounge where the Ways and Means Committee met. It was a great space, albeit a little old-fashioned in terms of decor and furniture, and had a door that opened up onto the parapet walkway that joined this area of the College with the administrative and library wing.

Sitting off in one corner beside a dormant fireplace was Peter, the edgy and gruff pre-med student. He looked a little bit wrung out, and had binders and books piled up on the floor at his feet.

"Cramming for something? " He said this good-naturedly enough to the older boy.

"Yeah, big organic chem midterm tomorrow afternoon. I've been pounding on the material hard for the last two days. I've got most of it down pat, but there's a few tricky concepts that for sure are going to be on it, and I need to get these puppies anchored down." The guy bleated this out, never taking his eyes off his binder.

"Well, if you don't mind me saying, you look like death warmed over. Have you been sleeping enough? And did you ever even shower today?" He said this softly but directly.

"Negative on both counts, dude. No time for sleep, and certainly no time for soap on a rope! If I ace this thing, I get into med school. If I get into med school, I'm set for life. So quit bugging me and be quiet."

He flipped a page with glazed eyes.

"I hear 'ya, but there's always a middle way. If you're rested, the stuff will sink in. Having a shower will make you feel way better, and that will ripple out to get the results you want. And have you got any kind of exercise lately?" He was pushing perhaps a bit too hard.

"Exercise, good Christ no! I have no time for exercise, smart ass..." The older boy looked at him with bleary eyes.

"Listen, you'll be a great doctor someday, but you got to model a healthy lifestyle for your patients. Tell you what, it's 45 minutes to dinner. Leave all this crap here, it won't go anywhere. Go slip on some shoes and shorts and meet me down in the gym. We'll play best of three for one-on-one to eleven points, with the loser buying a Pizza GiGi pizza after your exam is over! What do you say?"

They were both on the old court under the chapel in under ten minutes, it's ancient backboard and tattered mesh indicating its age. He had played intramural basketball with this guy for two years and he was very good but also very much a hothead. The challenge to play one-on-one was like a red flag to a bull, no matter how much study fatigue the other boy was carrying.

The first game went 11-8 to the budding doctor. The second game had a different energy, and he backed in for several dipsy-doodle lay-ins over his shorter competitor, and he took it 13-11 in extra points. The rubber match was a battle, with Peter baring his teeth at times and taunting his younger competitor on almost every play. But he knew he had the mental advantage. He was rested, he was taller and he could play great defence. Things were knotted up at 10-10 and he closely guarded his frenetic opponent. When the shorter boy pivoted and did a fadeaway jumper, he leaned in and got a finger on it and was easily able to corral the loose ball. This infuriated his opponent, who literally reached down and grabbed him by the crotch. He shifted off this and went up for a mid-range jumper that buried itself with a satisfying swishing sound. Scorers keep the ball, so he dribbled and backed in, his check virtually climbing all over his back. He pivot-dribbled quickly, evading his opponent and finding the reverse layup to walk away with a 12-10 victory. Double mozzarella and mushrooms would taste sublime when he collected his prize.

A Quiet Place



He used to sleep in on Sunday mornings, but recently he had gotten up for breakfast and then tagged along with a group of theologs as they made their rounds to a variety of Presbyterian churches throughout the city. The services themselves were varied, sometimes with excellent sermons and sometimes with dishwater served up to a dozing congregation. It was always a continuing confirmation that he had made the right decision to run from being a minister. The stilted rituals, the earnest-but-hollow intonation of prayers and creeds, the ageing congregations—it all added up to a mosaic of experience that he wanted distance from. He still felt the presence of God, a divine, strong and loving energy in his life. Particularly when he sat in meditation, he had that oceanic feeling that he was immersed in Love. But organized religion had lost its allure for some time. But now he went off to church on Sundays for some socialization, some camaraderie, some kind of community interaction. A few of the theologs were windbags or stuffed shirts, but most of them were decent folks with a strong moral compass and a desire to make the world just a little bit better.

He finished his toast and eggs and a side of oatmeal heavily flavored with faux maple syrup, and looked around the dining room. The usual theology gang had gone on or perhaps had never come in, and attendance was quite sparse in general. He looked across at the next table, and saw Henry sitting alone,

ingesting a plate of eggs and reading an economics textbook. He sauntered over, hoping to make something of the morning.

"Rarely see you here on a Sunday, aren't you normally off to church somewhere with the girlfriend?" He said this a bit teasingly.

"You know my policy, Jay, never talk about the girlfriend." Henry glowered at him.

"Sorry, just saying. I have this knack for picking up on habitual cycles. Sundays, normally, the chickens can rest a little easier." He pointed downwards to the large platter that had been holding a considerable number of poached eggs. Henry lightened a bit in the face and a shy smile creased his lips. "Yeah, she's away this week. I'm a Sunday bachelor today."

"I was looking for the usual suspects for the Presbyterian church run, but maybe they're away with your girlfriend? Kidding, kidding... listen, if we brush our teeth relatively quickly and mosey on over to Spadina we can comfortably catch the midmorning service at Knox Presbyterian. I've been there twice and the head minister actually gives a very good sermon." He said this matter-of-factly, knowing Henry would be just as favorably disposed to go back to his room and read a textbook.

"Ah... why not? I'm staying at Knox College, I might as well sample Knox Presbyterian. Let's meet in the West House Common Room in ten minutes." The big guy wiped his mouth with a serviette and picked up his book.

They ambled out the front doors of the college and turned right up St. George St. They waited outside the University College dorm building, waiting for the light to turn at Willcocks.

"You're at UC, right, Henry?" He asked this, and looked over his shoulder at the handsome yellow brick dorm building.

"Yep. Academically, a very strong place. I like that. Have to balance things out as a varsity athlete or you hear a lot of the 'brawn, but no brains' jokes. And secular as well. No early church affiliation. So I'm in there with a lot of Chinese people, Jewish people, Indian folks, all trying to stay away from Trinity or Victoria or Saint Mike's. Don't get me wrong, I am a Christian, but I just like to keep my studies separate from my faith. It works better that way, at least for me." Henry pointed forward as the light turned green.

"Do you ever go to the UC Pub?" He asked this innocently enough.

"No. I don't go to pubs. I don't drink. And I have a girlfriend. Pubs are places to drink beer and meet members of the opposite sex." Henry pursed his lips.

"Yeah, that's a pretty accurate description. I still drink the odd beer, and I don't have a girlfriend. So I

guess they are in my acceptable zone. So every now and then I go to the pub in the bottom of the UC refectory. Usually with Stu, he knows everyone at UC. Generally I have a terrible time, and I wonder why I keep going. But every now and then I see something that's interesting. Human interest kind of stuff." He was deliberately being mysterious.

"What do you mean by that?" Henry was taciturn, but his eyebrows twitched up and down.

"Well, last time I was there, it was packed. And I saw a couple of the ladies who work in the offices in Engineering out for what seemed like a night on the town or maybe even a bachelorette kind of thing. They're a touch older than us, nice-looking young ladies, so I'm just keeping my eye on what they were doing. Some were getting up on the floor to dance with each other, and a few were up with the odd guy at the pub. And then I saw one of the guys who lives over in East House, up dancing with one of them, a cute little Asian gal. He looked like he was having a ball, and kept her up on the floor until a slow tune came on. Then he was in like Flynn, holding her tight and it seemed to me he was checking her rear jean pockets for smuggled items." He stopped for emphasis.

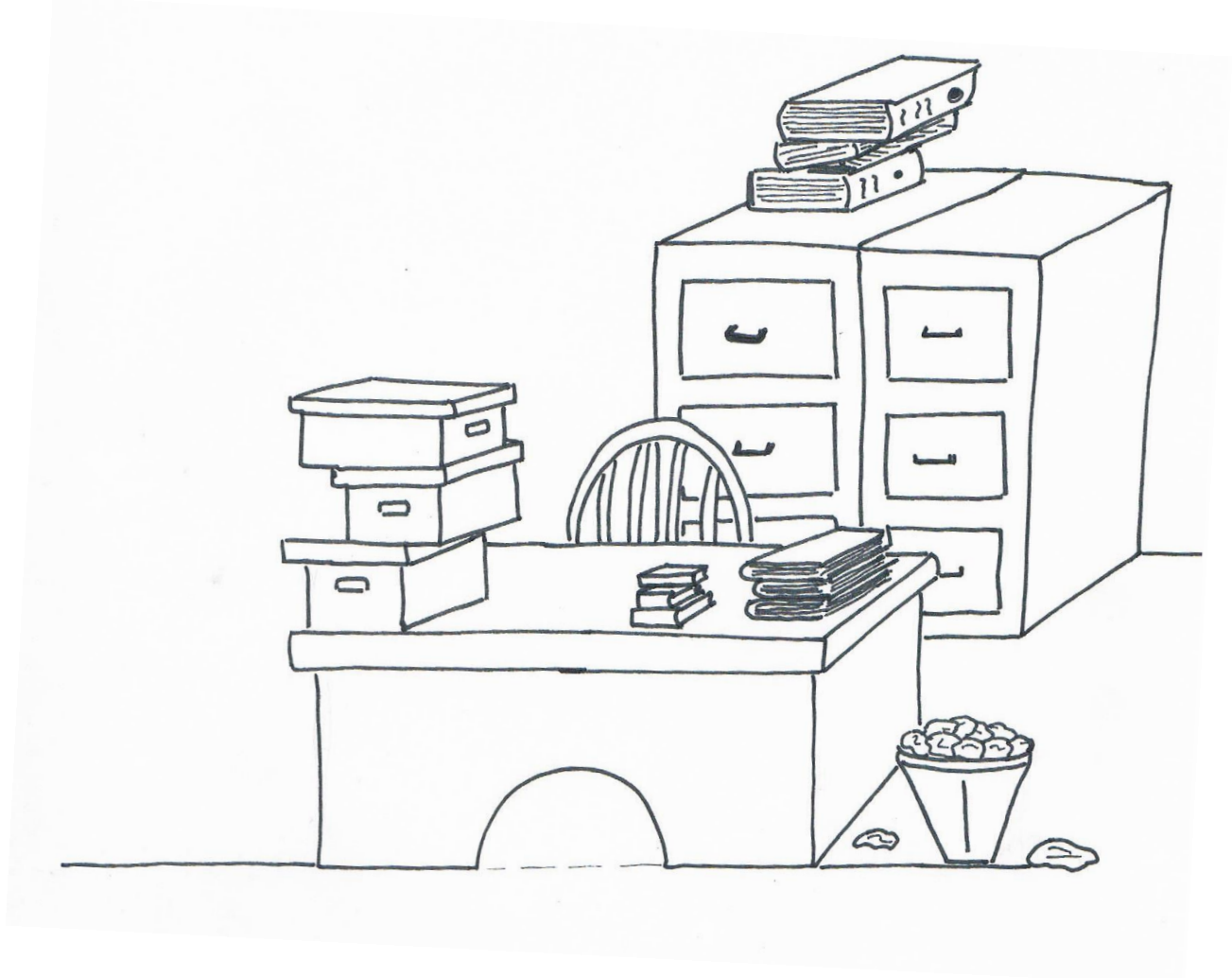
"Yeah, so? Guy slow dancing at a pub. Feels his partner's ass. Give me a nickel for every time this happens on the U of T campus and I'd be a millionaire." Henry kept his gaze forward.

"Okay, but... this guy has a theolog girlfriend. So he's already partnered. And a while back he cornered me in the Knox Chapel and was bragging on about how frisky she is. Doesn't quite seem right, on a whole bunch of counts, does it? A theology student having sex before marriage, and then her boyfriend frisking office staff on a muggy dance floor? Or is it just me?" His voice took on a mock offended tone.

"Listen dude, we live in a big city. Some people live right, and others live loose. Maybe that guy is tapping his girlfriend, or maybe he's not and just saying he is. Maybe he's frustrated and out at the pub looking for what he can find. Maybe the older gal is wondering when she herself will settle down, but wouldn't mind a fling with a little boy toy that she crosses paths with on a girls' night out. Maybe she teases him a bit and then gives them a hug and goes home with the ladies. Maybe Romeo goes home and jerks the chicken. I don't know and I don't care. I live my life by some higher principles, keep my nose clean, and minimize what I say. Now I suggest we go up these steps and open our minds and hearts and learn something." Henry nodded resolutely and started to mount the steps of the church.

The sacred space was lovely and calming, and the eloquent minister did not disappoint. But he felt he had learned his life lesson that day on the walk over to church.

Auditory Voyeur



"Well, well, well, it's my lucky day..." The young man's voice was smooth and self-assured. He knew in an instant that it was Dirk, the cocky Lothario from West House, who seemed to have a roster of lady friends that changed on a weekly basis. The nubile young widow had come and gone, having gotten remarried to a hot-blooded plumber up Stayner way, near where she and her first husband had lived. Her cute and perky sister had also dropped off Dirk's list, having been liberated from her server duties at the college when she got admission into a tourism management program at Georgian College in Barrie. That was the detail that bugged him the most about Dirk, his lack of an honor code to prevent him from staying away from the widow's sister.

All this went through his head in a second, and he quickly realized he might have the opportunity to eavesdrop on his older residence mate. He was on his knees digging through old correspondence files in the Metro Library, in a small anteroom that opened onto Becca's Engineering Society office. The main room that housed her desk had a constant stream of visitors and hangers-on. He had come in an hour ago, told Becca that he wanted to cull old paperwork before he formally took over his executive secretary duties, and had been at it ever since. With some luck she might just forget he was still within earshot, and

if he kept quiet he could avoid a path-crossing with Dirk.

"Goes both ways there, sugar, maybe I'm the lucky one?" Becca's voice was kittenish, alluring.

"Keeping busy?" Dirk became more matter of fact.

"Oh, you know. Always something going on..." The young lady's voice drifted off, and he pondered whether or not she had just realized the anteroom was indeed occupied.

"You haven't given me a call lately." Dirk sounded uncharacteristically pleading.

"Oh, Dirkee, I thought we had an understanding." He could imagine Becca sticking out her lower lip, not unattractively.

"Yeah, sure, but y'know. I've got a lot of energy in that way, and I need regular, uh, exercise." The guy's voice had gotten lower, and he had to strain a bit to hear from the adjoining room.

"Well, my practice has picked up. I am often booked six nights a week. And with working all day here in the Old Salt Mine, some weeks I am feeling a bit ragged." The diminutive office assistant fairly whimpered this out.

"Well how about the odd happy hour pick-me-up, just before the dinner hour? Forty-five minutes with old Dirk, and you'd be on your way to whatever you have on for the evening. Or even a little fun-zone activity over the lunch hour, and you could be back at your desk before anybody had missed you." Dirk had most of his swagger back.

"Nice try, mister. But my clients can be very demanding, and I don't want the edge taken off my game. One rises quickly in this city offering a quality experience, and you can tumble just as fast if things erode even a little smidge." Becca explained this patiently, while a freshman student dropped off a scholarship application.

"I know we're in an open office here, so don't make me beg for it!" Dirk hissed this last bit out.

"But Dirkums, surely a big boy like you is satisfied with his stable of little fillies. I mean, really." The young woman giggled a bit.

"Things are a little more quiet than I like, my squeeze list is dwindling. It appears that the young ladies are talking to each other, and have figured out I am not willing to commit to anyone. I'm in my last year for Chrissake! A guy just wants to have fun. So that's why I'm here." Glum would have been an accurate description for the young man's tone. The other young man in the correspondence room was enjoying this turn of events, but had just realized his knees were killing him, having been frozen in a deep knee-bend to avoid detection.

"Ah, itty-bitty-ooty-booty." Becca clucked this out and smacked her lips at the end.

"You may recall I introduced you to a couple of my Dad's friends when you were first looking for clients. Surely that's worth a few favors." Dirk was playing his final card, one lined with guilt.

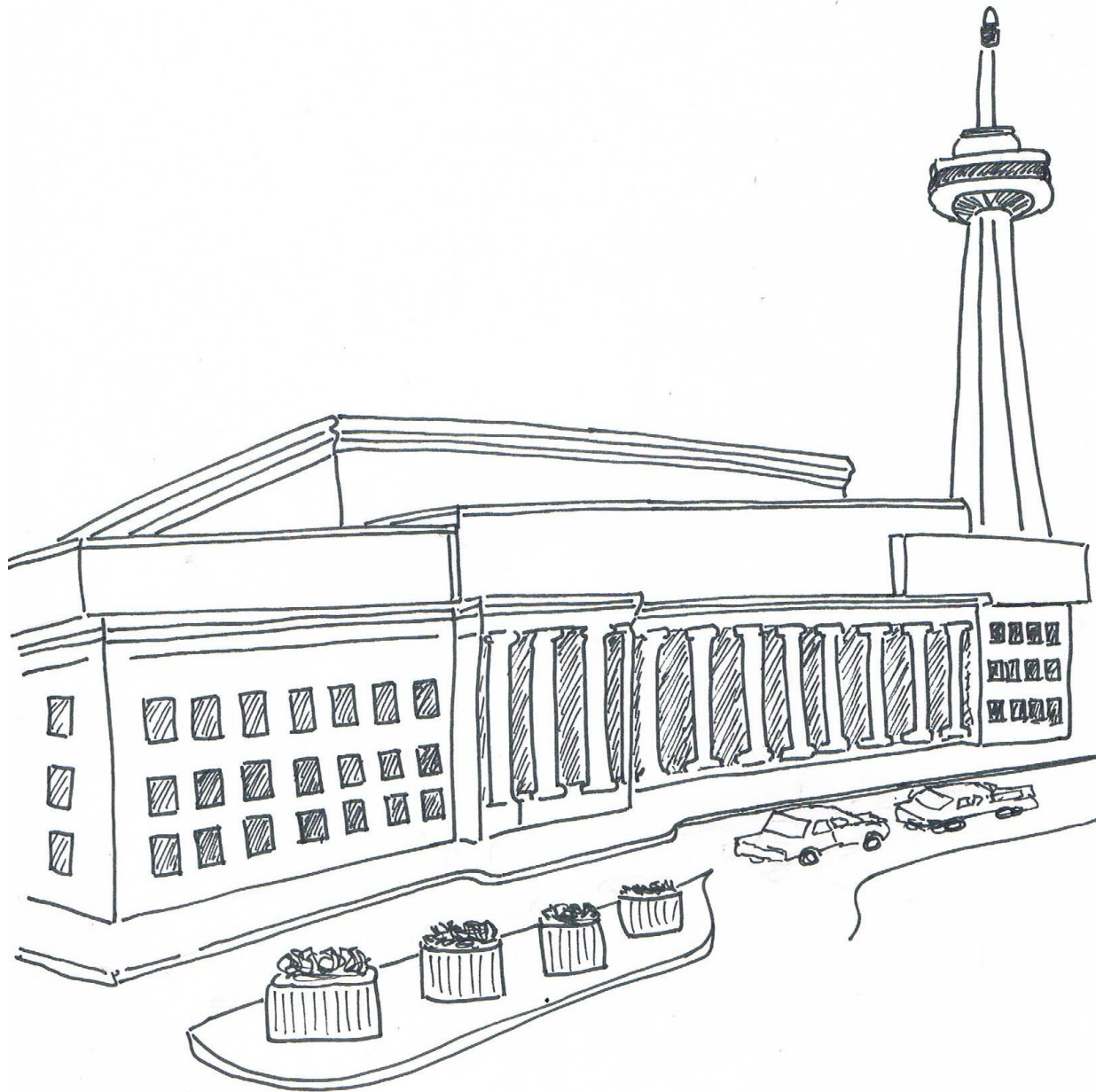
"Appreciated at the time, and I certainly thanked you more than once in the way you are suggesting now. But in the big picture, Dirk old boy, our accounts are more than balanced. Let's just say you can look at me as just another little filly that's dropped off your dance card. Now if you'll excuse me, I have got a crap load of work to do." The young woman's tone turned all business.

The angular young stud stepped away quickly from the outer office, his face flushed crimson and his arm swings tormented and jerky. The eavesdropper broke out of his crouch but stayed in place, letting blood flow into his hamstrings and feeling the relief of changing position.

But he was trapped in a way. If he made paper shuffling noises, Becca would be sure to infer that he had heard her conversation with Dirk. If he stayed quiet and waited for her to jump up and step away from her desk, he ran the risk of her coming into the anteroom and making the same undesirable conclusion. After a tad of tormented reflection, he opted to stay quiet. And within five minutes Becca took a call that had the result of her being summoned across the street to the Dean's office, and he stepped out of the anteroom in the near wake of her welcome departure.

He walked down a musty Metro Library corridor, feeling like he had dodged a bullet and unsure of where he was going. Back to West House seemed imprudent as it risked crossing paths with a fuming housemate, so he bent towards King's College Circle in the direction of Hart House. Ten minutes later he was sitting in a leather chair in the Music Room on the second floor, headphones on and listening to some wild rock recommended by Ian's Dad, the Sam the Man music store owner. The thumping bass helped settle him down in a counterintuitive way, and he rehashed the overheard conversation in his mind several times, enjoying the humiliation of an arrogant housemate and contemplating the intriguing mysteries of the nocturnally active Miss Becca.

Midnight Train to Georgia



As soon as he walked down the hallway of the second floor, he could hear sobbing sounds and the incoherent and plaintive mutterings of the sobber. He had stayed a bit too long at the Music Room in Hart House, and had gotten to the dining room with only a few minutes before its doors would be closed. An enjoyable meal with a bunch of other tardy stragglers, followed by the leisurely reading of the newspaper in an already-emptied common room, and here he was at just after 7:30 PM. He had been procrastinating a bit, enjoying the luxury of a few extra moments on unimportant tasks. But now he did have some work to do that needed doing, but the on-again, off-again sobbing threatened any consistent concentration for the foreseeable future.

He loved his room, and even more so since he got it as a first-year student and he had grown to realize that by rights it might have come to him in third or fourth year and even then only with considerable luck in the room lottery. But the one downside was that it was plunk next door to the Don's room, and every now and then Ted would have counseling support to administer to one of the West House lads. Sometimes this was given out quietly, sometimes with a sharp word from the Don, and sometimes with tears on the part of the counselled party. This evening was one of those latter cases and he grimaced to himself as he laid out his textbook, his lab manual and the lab data notes. He sat down and attempted to mentally focus on the work at hand through the use of his meditation mantra.

A few minutes went by with relative quiet. He picked up his pen and started to scan over the collected lab data. But then a bout of whimpering spilled through the plaster and lath of the common wall between the two rooms. He stretched out his neck and leaned into the mantra, mentally willing the noise to subside. But it increased instead, with a sporadic meter that drilled through the wall and deep between his ears. He leaned over and knocked with the cadence of a woodpecker, quickly and shrilly. He was rewarded with silence, humphed to himself in a job-well-done sort of way, and then went back to his notes.

When the sobbing restarted, he resolutely pushed back his wooden chair and popped out angrily into the hallway. He gave two sharp knocks on the Don's door that was ajar by a couple of inches.

"Who is it?" Reg's voice sounded relieved to be able to shift focus from the unfolding drama.

"Just me from next door... listen, I'm trying to get some work done that needs doing, and all of this commotion is putting a real crink in the process..." He pushed the door open, uninvited, and stopped short of finishing his sentence. Sitting in a low-slung chair was Peter, the muscular and cocky premed student who he had recently humbled in some one-on-one in the musty Knox gym. The guy had been a sore loser that evening, even though he did honor the bet of pizza to the eventual winner. But now he looked like a shell of his normal *braggadocio* self. He glanced up, embarrassed, with red-rimmed eyes and a sallow complexion.

"Sorry about the disturbance. But sometimes it goes with the real estate. Pete here has had a rough day. Sometimes a brother just needs to unload, and this is often done with anger and tears as lubricants. We'll try to muzzle it a bit from here on in." Ted soberly looked out over his wire-rimmed spectacles.

"Oh, dreadfully sorry. Really I am. What happened, Pete?" He angled his head apologetically.

"I got my organic chemistry results back. Bombed it, out of the fucking water. There goes my dream of med school in a flash. I called my girlfriend at home to relay the bad news and cry on her shoulder, and some guy picks up the phone. After a lot of swearing and carrying on, I finally get clarity on what has been happening over the last six months. She has been seeing this prick regularly, and coming down to Toronto once a month to see me. I blew up at this, and she dumped me on the spot. Cold as ice, like a corpse beside a rail siding in the dead of winter." His eyes reddened and moistened. "So quite the fucking day, career flushed and future wife gone, all in under an hour." Peter started sniffing heavily and wiping his eyes furtively.

"Now, don't go jumping to conclusions. You get more than one crack at med school, and the young lady might be open to mending fences over time. I've had my share of rocky patches with my own girlfriend, out there on the Prairies in Bible College. And me here in the Big Smoke with all kinds of... temptations." Ted cleared his throat and shifted his eyes nervously.

"Hell yeah, man. If she was wife material, you got to fight her to get her back. Go on up to the Big Nickel and smack that other guy around a bit." He wasn't sure why he had said this so emphatically.

"Not a bad idea, without the violence of course. Perhaps catch the late train up north and you can be by her side for breakfast. Tell her you need her, especially when you've had this other setback." Reg was back on comfortable ground.

"Pete, pack a bag with your books and clothes for a week. Ted and I will get you down to Union and onto a northbound Via. We'll even go halvesies on the fare."

Forty-five minutes later, after a quick zip southward on the University line, the three men popped out into the jaw-dropping beauty of the concourse at Union Station. The tile-stenciled names of all the major Canadian cities caught their eye, and they saw from the adjustable overhead schedule that the train rolled out in twenty minutes. They bought Pete a one-way ticket and walked him to the platform, each of them giving him a bear hug and a big slap on the back. They walked home up University Avenue, mainly to save the TTC fare.

The Pursuit of Love



As the younger lad walked home with the Don of West House, he had asked a few coy questions to the older and savvier fellow about his girlfriend back at the Prairie Bible School. It had always intrigued him that people would attempt to hold and nurture a long distance relationship, especially when they were at university themselves and surrounded by interesting romantic prospects. So he tried to penetrate Ted's mask, to see what he was thinking and if he had ever re-evaluated his position over time. The guy was good, giving him only slippery footholds and always being able to skillfully deflect a train of questioning with a reference to an interesting store sign or a lit streetcar rattling past. He even brought up the memory of Dale, the earnest theologian from Michigan who so steadfastly believed his Lucinda would wait for him, all the time going on a steady round of fraternity house dances until her burly lacrosse player emerged into her life. The parallels between Dale and the Sudbury-bound Pete were considerable, except that Dale was a pious Boy Scout who might just stay shattered for a long number of years, while the

rascally Pete would be chatting up the cute Via Rail ticket agent on his return home if reconciliation with the girlfriend did not go smoothly.

So he got to bed late without doing the assigned work that needed to be done for the following afternoon. He slept fitfully, seeing himself on a train platform, looking for a train to his hometown to no avail. Brightly lit train cars would roll through, full of young women looking out at him as they sped through the station. Some would wave shyly, others would smile at him and look away, and the odd one would fix him with a sultry gaze. He fell through that dreamscape into a lower zone, where all was quiet and calm, and a few hours occupying that space left him feeling refreshed as he came out of his slumber. As much as he hated to miss a class, he grabbed a quick breakfast and then got down to brass tacks on his looming assignment. The only noises were Hazel dusting the baseboards in the hallway, and John wet-mopping the second floor bathrooms, all familiar and domestically reassuring sounds. His burgeoning meditation practice allowed him to focus deeply on the work at hand and almost before he knew it he was stapling the work and dashing down St. George to make it on time to the second class of the morning.

The day went by quickly with a full slate of classes, and even moreso as he had been invited to a crosstown event at Ryerson. It had come from one of his high school classmates, a rather winsome gal who was studying nursing. He previously had some minor attraction to her back home, but always felt confused when he was around her. She was certainly pretty, and had a delightful figure that would almost be described as lush in places and athletically angular in others. But whenever he tried to get close to her, to put a hand on her lower back or lean in for a half-stolen kiss, she would whirl and twirl out of range and look back at him with a smile that bordered on mocking. The air would go out of him after a few rounds of this, and then she would arch her eyebrows in a suggestive way and make her sparkly eyes dance, and he would be intrigued enough to revive the on-again off-again choreography.

So with all of that in hand, he did not maintain contact with her throughout all of first year and most of second year. And then just last week she had called him, with an awkward voice at first, to see if he might like to watch a basketball game with her on the Ryerson campus. He hardly knew anything about Ryerson, almost as if it didn't exist from his comfortable space in the U of T bubble. But her voice became warm and familiar, so he had agreed, and found himself walking across College on a warmish March evening.

He stood outside the gymnasium building, a full twenty minutes ahead of the appointed rendezvous time. Knots of students walked by, chatting excitedly and going through the entrance doors. She showed up just a few minutes later, dressed in a dark blue blazer that complemented her brunette hair wondrously. Her hug after almost two years' absence was stiff at best, and he felt his armpits releasing a drench load of nervous perspiration on cue.

They sat in some rough old bleacher seating, amidst groups of people that seemed to know each other well and may even have had some pre-game lubrication. The game itself was well-played and intense, with a couple of sharpshooters on both sides dueling it out to a close and grinding finale. But the conversation was nothing to write home about, and he felt that same coming-close-quick-withdrawal sensation as in the past. She was kind, perhaps even more pretty than he remembered, and had a lovely smile. But some kind of barrier existed. Not one he could easily put his finger on, but tangible

nonetheless.

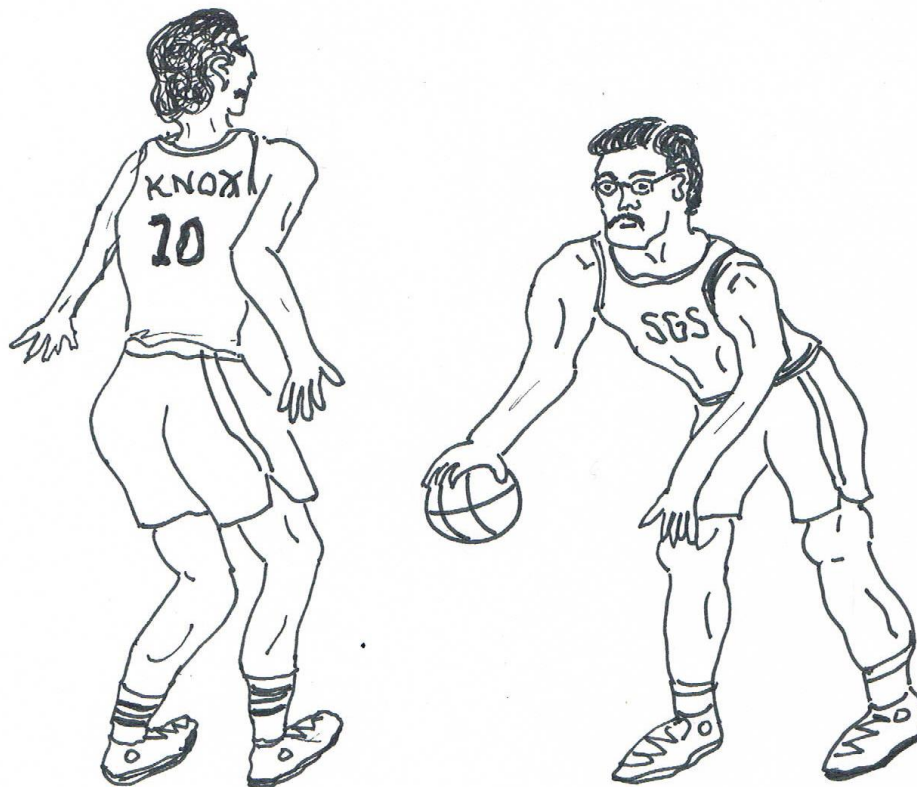
"There's a Nursing formal coming up in a few weeks' time. You like dancing, right?" They were walking away from the gym building, to no destination in particular.

"Whew, not so much. Two left feet, y'know. But..." He grimaced a bit, considering how he must have sounded and mentally picturing her in a low-cut evening gown.

"Oh, okay, I was just wondering if you might...." Her eyes flashed her disappointment.

"Lots of exams coming up, and a lot of work. But maybe we can see if the timing will work out...." He knew it would never be arranged. He had had a brief window of opportunity, but it had closed. If he wanted a girlfriend in Nursing, he would have to frequent the Hart House cafeteria more often, where the petite Sue from the first year scavenger hunt seemed to always be studying at a table by the window. She was a bit older, but always gave him a beamer smile whenever he saw her on campus. He figured she would be up for a hug if he leaned in close, he was pretty certain of that. He walked across a windswept Gerrard Street, his mind deep in pleasant possibilities.

The Love of the Game



The Ryerson experience had made him a little melancholy, mainly because of a lingering regret that he had perhaps not done the right thing or uttered the perfect phrase at exactly the right moment. And if he

had done all that, it would have tipped the balance and the pretty, fine-boned nurse with the voluptuous figure assets would have been his permanent and enduring girlfriend. But that hadn't been the case, and he gradually let himself off a hook of perpetual analysis by telling himself firmly that things sometimes don't work out. And when it came to romance, there had to be a spark or the flame of love wouldn't stand more than a bleak chance of getting ignited.

But what had roared up in the hearth of his consciousness was the love of basketball. All through late elementary school and high school this appreciation for the game of Doctor Naismith had been nurtured and sustained. The simplicity of it, the sheer athleticism of jumping and running and then the need for body control and hand-eye integration when one shot the ball or defended a shot—all of this gave the game a raw grace that eclipsed most other sports. He was never fitter than during basketball season, and he was equally mentally sharp as he did his work around practices and game days.

Coming to university had dampened this down a bit, as the rigors of an accredited professional program didn't leave as much time as he would have liked for recreation and sports. But his meditation practice had certainly allowed him greater efficiencies with respect to his work completion, and he had made a concerted effort to pour a goodly portion of the saved time into practicing and games for the Knox College intramural basketball team. The trip over to Ryerson, observing the higher level at the intervarsity level, had reminded him that the Knox team had a game at Hart House gym on the following night.

The College team was quite good, with a number of players that could almost play varsity if they applied themselves to the conditioning and practice needed to break through to that level. They played a loose game, with no real set plays. Rebounding capabilities were strong, which often led to a quick outlet pass and a following setup for a layup or a transition shot before the defense could get established.

Pete was their point guard, and his absence due to his relationship difficulties would be significant for the upcoming game. In high school he had always counted on Lou to run the offense, akin in importance to a football quarterback. Pete was a more muscular Lou, with a great dribble and a sniper-like pull-up jumper. The other problem was that the team did not have a coach. Pete often took on that role in a player-coach capacity, but in tight games it often seemed that the team needed a dispassionate advocate on the sidelines who could see the big picture and what was needed to nail down a victory. But tonight they would have to muddle through without a point guard or a coach.

He always loved the warm-up routines before a game, settling into a groove on passing, layups and jump shots. This period of time also allowed a few quick and nervous peeks the length of the floor to check out the opposition team. Tonight's matchup was against the School of Graduate Studies team, and these guys looked older and considerably taller than the Knox team. One in particular looked very strong, a tall guy in his mid-20s with a big mane of silvery blond hair and a compactly muscular frame. This chap didn't seem to miss, and had a confidence and a court sense that sent a wave of foreboding through his body. He used to feel that same way when they played in The Matchbox up at OSCVI in Owen Sound, and the resulting game almost always ended in a drubbing. He shook himself off, nailed his next three shots, and told himself to step up and play an inspired game.

The tipoff went well, and the Knox team drew first blood with a quick pass down-court for an even quicker lay-in. The silver fox shook his head in a desultory way and brought the ball up with an efficient and heavily protected dribbling style, and then launched a thirty-footer from the top of the key that went

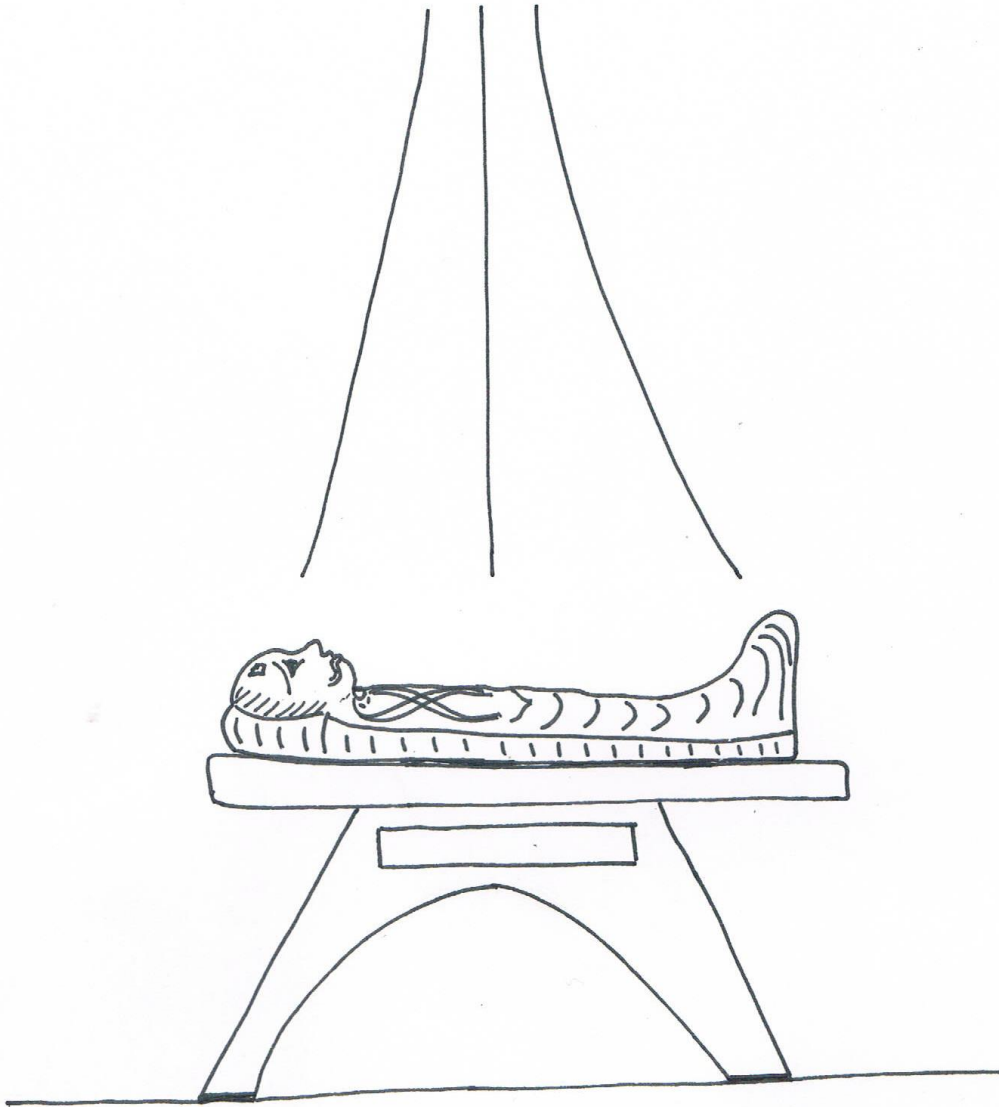
through the net hitting nothing but mesh. The game went back-and-forth in a nicely synchronized flow of defensive effort and offensive rhythm but it became clear to all on the Knox team that they were desperately missing the ball control normally offered by Pete.

He looked upwards and saw Ingrid standing on the indoor track, watching the game. She had on running shorts and a tight white top, which showed off her enviable figure to all of the players below. She gave him a smile and a cute little wave, and he nodded back perfunctorily with just a hint of a sideways grin. He had seen her most recently up at the career center on Bloor St. West, where they and scores of other classmates had lined up for lottery numbers for summer job interviews with the MTO. She was only a few places ahead of him in line, and they received their lottery numbers much more quickly than anticipated. She had smiled at him so warmly that morning he had been within a hair's length of asking her to join him for breakfast at one of the greasy spoons along Bloor. But she had a steady boyfriend, that much he knew, and he thought it would be simply torture to have a girl that sweet and cute as your friend and nothing more. So he had nodded back in a friendly enough way, and took himself out for a \$2 breakfast, and that was that.

"Cutie- pie upstairs seems to like you." One of his sweaty teammates nudged him on the bench, bringing him back from his reverie.

"Ah, Ingrid. What a nice girl. But she's virtually married, and a bit out of my league, dude." He shifted his gaze back to the court where his team was steadily taking on water.

Buried in Burnished Gold



"I need a real meal for dinner, not crappy sandwiches!" Klaus threw a half-eaten egg salad wedge onto his plate, and a celery stick fell to the floor as collateral damage.

"Tut, tut, now, young hothead. The good ladies have tried to put out a pretty good spread, given the circumstances." The bespectacled Steve wagged a finger at the younger lad, and went quickly back to a mound of sandwiches piled high on his plate. "C'mon...egg salad, salmon, some kind of liver pate, watercress---this is pretty high end in my view."

"And some crazy-amazing chocolate chip cookies for dessert! And Yvonne said there could even be ice cream..." He snarfed back a sandwich, barely containing his zeal for his favorite part of any meal.

"Yeah, okay, it's not half bad. But why do we have to eat standing up in a dusty classroom? With biblical scripture still written out on the board?" Klaus fumed and waved his hand at something from the Beatitudes.

"Listen to me, kid. Take it from the Maestro. Once a year a bunch of Presbyterian muckety-mucks come in from all over Ontario. They commandeer the dining room for a few fancy meals. And the great mass of unwashed residents get the temporary boot for their three squares a day, and we're usually allocated one of these old classrooms under the library. And it's a theological college, dipshit, so they write stuff from the Bible onto the blackboard. Let me tell you, it's even worse over at Saint Mike's." Steve pointed in an off-hand way towards the college past Queen's Park.

"And my last selling point for today, we have the lovely Yvonne serving up the victuals to us ne'er-dowells. Good call on that one by the College, because if she served in the dining hall all of those ol' Presby vicars would be sporting big chubs under the table by the end of the soup course!" Steve snorted and pushed his glasses up on his nose while balancing his plate of food. This last point settled the debate, as the pixie little vixen named Yvonne had a rough-edged sensuality that had caught the attention of most of the young men at Knox. Most definitely her attributes would have been wasted on a bunch of earnest men with silver hair and florid complexions.

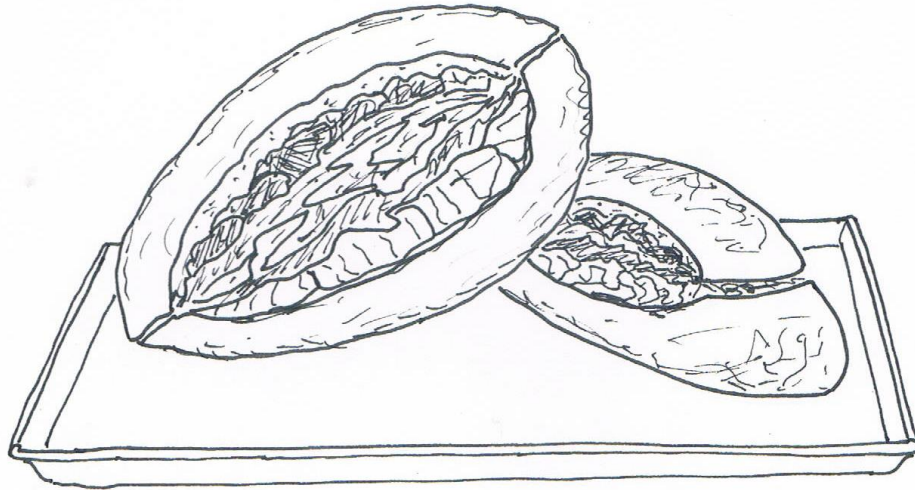
He finished up his cold plate meal and took two large cookies and a dollop of maple walnut ice cream on a plate back to his room. He had not felt his normal downslide of emotions after last night's fair shellacking at the hands of the graduate student team, mainly because he knew in his heart of hearts they were a far superior squad who would outmatch the Knox boys even if Pete had been running things as point guard. But he also had something special and significant to look forward to all day. Just a half week back, Ian, a friendly medical student had asked him out of the blue if he had plans for Friday night. The answer back was a mildly embarrassed 'no', and then he had been kindly offered a ticket to the King Tut exhibit at the Art Gallery of Ontario.

He didn't know much about Egypt, beyond a Sunday School tale of somebody being hidden in the bulrushes, but he had read in the Star about this exhibit and had concluded that it was a very big deal. Tickets were expensive, and had sold out in under two hours. But Ian had to go back home for an unexpected social event with his girlfriend, and wouldn't be able to use his ticket. But his initial response was to decline, as he immediately thought he couldn't afford the ticket price. The older boy astutely read the situation and quickly assured him that it was a gift, and no money would be changing hands. With that clarification he quietly but happily seized the opportunity, and had held the prize ticket with its embossed printing on a special place on his desk for repeated viewing.

He put on a pair of dress pants and a slightly rumpled jacket to go over a white long sleeve shirt. Ambling down Beverly, he was shocked to see a long lineup outside the gallery on Dundas Street. It had the air of a high society event, with men in sharp suits and silk ties, and some ladies in evening gown attire with mink stoles. Even with his attempt at dressing up he most certainly felt a bit down-market. Being alone also didn't do a lot for his confidence, so he nervously felt for the ticket in his jacket pocket to make sure he wouldn't face an embarrassing turn-back at the door. People chatted gaily about seemingly very important and complex topics, so he just kept his head down and shuffled forward in the queue. This went on for the better part of an hour, and then he found himself inside a large hall. Most voices were subdued, as people looked with saucer-like eyes at the raised display in the middle of the room. The sarcophagus of

King Tut was very large and made of deeply burnished gold. Who knows what remained inside the mysterious interior, but the exterior had an auric energy that was palpable and deep. He stared and stared, coming close to a transcendent experience. And he looked around and saw all the beautiful people having a similar reaction, and then gave thanks for being in this amazing city so very different from his small-town hometown.

The Earl of Sandwich



“Oh man, I could eat a dozen of these things, if they didn't cost two bucks a pop!” Ian leaned over the booth table of the Mr. Sub off Bloor Street, sensually inhaling a thick Dagwood-like submarine sandwich that had been piled high with cold cuts by an affable Pakistani counter attendant.

"Hmmm, me too, with one arm tied behind my back! You know I would bury you in a sub eating contest, if such a thing existed. But I've only got a limited amount of money until some Summer work so I can't rush through this like you seem to be doing!" He went back for another bite, trimming away some hot peppers and mayonnaise ooze that had leaked out on the far side of his sandwich.

They were making the best of a Saturday night that had seen Ian and Tony come down to campus to work on a big project due the following week. The two lads from Etobicoke rarely left the suburbs on the weekend, preferring to hang with their families and get caught up on work at a leisurely pace before another busy week. But duty had called, or at least they had responded admirably when he had suggested the amount of project work needed a block of time allocated to it. Tony had taken off early, in a mysterious and muttering way, suggesting that he had somebody waiting for him that looked much more appealing than the tables and figures strewn out on the library table. So he and Ian had tidied up most of the dangling bits, and then took themselves northward past Devonshire House and Varsity Stadium to the Mr. Sub opposite the back entrance of the St. George subway station.

“We should hear soon about those summer inspection jobs with the MTO. If we're both lucky and get assigned to the Highway 69 extension job, my folks have said that we can stay up at our family cottage all summer! It'll mean a bit of driving each day down to the jobsite, but the upside is we can barbecue on the

deck every night and go for a swim beforehand in the lake to wash off all that construction dust. Fucking-A, eh?" The dark-haired boy's eyes danced.

"Wow that would be amazing! I've never been to cottage country. Just Sauble Beach and Port Elgin, but that's Great Lakes and really different with a biker vibe and lots of partying. Perhaps too much partying..." His voice trailed off, as he mentally remembered the too many times at Vince's cottage at the beach that had been dominated by drinking across many generational levels.

"Oh yeah, we're a bit tamer up on Six Mile Lake. Lots of families, and well-off ones from the city. But they can howl at the moon from time to time, and razz around in their motorboats. I've only really been there on weekends, so living there all week will be a bloody treat if those jobs come through." Ian muffled this through his sandwich.

Across the street he saw a couple walking northward from Bloor, stepping quickly in the direction of the subway entrance doors. The young man had on a sharp dark blue dress jacket and gray trousers and seemed vaguely disconnected from his date. The young lady had on a form-fitting three-quarter Spring coat in a nice pastel color, with snappy-looking, white high-heeled shoes. She held onto her paramour's arm, but had her head inclined towards the interior of the illuminated sub shop across the street.

"Hey, isn't that the little nurse you were sweet on a while back?" Ian cocked his head slyly across the street and took another big bite of his sandwich.

"Yup, that's the divine Miss Kira. With her stud boyfriend ferrying her home." He said this in a defeated tone, and deliberately kept his eyes on Ian, not wanting to make direct eye contact with the young woman.

"Oh dude, did that ever go anywhere? The gal is plush, plush, plush. Kinda has the whiff of money wafting about her, intermingled with more than a bit of the bad girl! She must've been bloody amazing, just the rack on her makes steam come out of my ears!" Ian was looking longingly westward, giving Kira his best smirky smile, with the constraints of a full mouth providing some challenges to this.

He could feel his cheeks burn, and the recollection of her visit to his room catalyzed this even more. "Never kiss and tell, bro, that's my policy. But regardless of what did or did not happen, it appears she is back with her old boyfriend, handsome and gallant as he is." He smiled tightly, and stole a look to see Kira swishing through the TTC doors.

"I have seen that guy with so many girls here and there on campus, it's like he's on a pussy scavenger hunt! Big guy, be patient, it will all go bad not so far down the road and you might just be there for her on the rebound!?" Ian wrapped up his juicy wax paper and made motions towards the door.

He walked down St. George Street, admiring the impressive tower of the Newman Center and grimacing at the brutalist features of Roberts Library. Right in front of University College, a beat-up blue car slowed down and a window was rolled down.

"Jay, hungry?" Henry was sitting in the passenger seat, his quarterback buddy Bobby behind the wheel.

"Hmmm, not really. Just polished off a sub at Mr. Sub." He nodded his head apologetically.

“Get in, kid. We’re going out to Grace Street to get some real sandwiches, from a little hole in the wall in Little Italy. To die for....” Bobby brought his fingers to his lips.

“Sounds good, but I’m flat busted. Spent my last two bucks up on Bedford.” He made a glum face and leaned in the direction of home.

“Our treat. Best veal in the city. Best veal sandwiches in the Western World. It’s all in the sauce, and the Calabrese bread. And don’t tell me you have to go home and study, it’s Saturday night. Now get in.” Bobby was friendly and persuasive.

Less than twenty minutes later he was tucking into a breaded veal sandwich that was hot, tasty and sublime. He closed his eyes and savored the assemblage of flavors, proving that a young man of twenty has essentially an unlimited appetite.

Not So Heavy Lifting



So now that Spring was on the immediate horizon, he felt that urge to get in a bit better shape for the upcoming Summer months where he might even doff his shirt and expose his pasty white skin. He visualized getting good news on the highway construction job front, and sitting down on Ian's dock wearing a bathing suit, watching all those fine girls from Toronto going by in their motorboats and cutting the throttle to catch a better look at his muscles. Or lack of muscles, he thought defeatedly, and decided

then and there he would go over to the weight room in Hart House and lift a bit before his afternoon municipal hydraulics tutorial.

He ate a bit more lightly at lunch, thinking that lifting on a full stomach may not be the best idea. He had evolved the knowledge over time that running and swimming were definite no-goes after a full meal, but that cycling could be done on top of a full buffet. But weightlifting was relatively new to him, and his instincts told him it would lie somewhere between running and cycling on the digestive constraint front. He had a Hart House gym membership over the last two years, but if truth be told it was largely underutilized. Some basketball, a few squash games, and the odd bit of indoor track running. He had even signed up for a full apparel and towel provision, old-school jockstrap included. He had worn the stiff pelvic belt for some time until Henry turned up his nose at it when they were changing one day.

"Jay, that's Jerry's jock. Or he wore it last, at least. And you don't know where Jerry's unmentionables have been. And that's putting a lot of faith in the laundry folks at Hart House. In my view, leave Jerry's jock for Jerry!" This horse-sense folk wisdom hit a nerve, and he unwrapped the apparel at the counter ever since, handing back the unused jockstrap to a less-than-impressed towel boy.

So he went into the weight room, its interior fairly quiet due to the early afternoon hour. There were an impressive array of free weights, and a number of machines to work exclusively on chest, arm and leg muscle systems. The back wall was all done in a high quality mirror, so the room looked cavernous, and the lifters could admire the incremental results of their strenuous efforts.

He walked up to some dumbbells and decided that his arms needed major work. He gingerly hoisted some ten pounders, starting slow with bicep curls and picking up speed after a few repetitions.

"Slow down there, boy." A distinctive looking fortysomething black man with a shaved head uttered this in a deep bass voice. "Do each rep as if it's your only one. Methodically and thoughtfully. Your bell might be a bit light, if you're able to crank it like a metronome." The gentleman smiled broadly.

"Yeah, thanks. Just getting started, and ten pounds sounded about right. My biceps are not that strong, but I'm trying to build them up for the Summer." He grinned back and broke a sweat on his forehead.

"So if you trying to impress the ladies with your big pipes, don't forget your triceps out back. They're way bigger than the bicep and give a well-built arm that sculpted look. Here's how you do a good tricep curl." The guy hosted hoisted a twenty-five pound dumbbell above his head, and then proceeded to do a slow tricep curl that made his big bruiser muscles stand out.

He worked away for the next thirty minutes, applying himself diligently and getting the odd piece of wisdom thrown his way by his newfound mentor. He looked at the clock and realized he had just twenty minutes before the start of his 2:30 tutorial, so he packed up and headed downstairs for a quick shower before walking across campus.

His tutorial was up on the second floor of the old Metro Library, in a familiar room where he had tutorials for Fortran coding in the Fall term of his second year and his first year design course. The space had an odd dog-leg configuration, but this allowed groups of students to work in the space nearer the entrance door and more active instruction to be rolled out in the upstream space past the bend in the room. He walked in and saw four or five groups of classmates huddled over tables, completing some project for

another course. When he walked into the main space, there were two other students there, and the professor sitting up at the front wore a slightly bemused look on his face.

"Sit down, we'll start momentarily. It would appear that attendance will be modest today, due to the looming deadline for the soils project." The professor wore a suit and tie, and distinctive scholarly glasses. He was relatively young, but carried an air of confidence and gravitas that stood out from the crowd. He had heard that he would be one of the faculty for Survey Camp up at Dorset, and that he had a reputation for being firm on the rules but fair.

"Gentlemen, it seems that the four of us will form a quartet this afternoon to explore the intricacies and mystery of the Hazen-Williams equation. This is a tutorial and there'll be no formal lecture. I'm simply at your beck and call to answer any questions you may have collectively, or posed individually. Who will be first?" The academic cocked one eyebrow and sucked in his lips. Stony silence filled the room.

"Questions? On the theory? On applications? On relevance to actual engineering practice?" The instructor cocked his head sideways, in a friendly enough way but with just the slightest leaven of malice.

"Uh, I'm working on the soils project." A hairy student in a plaid shirt offered this up apologetically.

"Me too.." The second kid barely looked up, writing feverishly.

"Nobody has questions. Then I can retire to my office, put on some classical music, and read the financial section of the Globe and Mail." The professor rolled both palms skywards, as if manna from heaven were about to pour down on him.

"Uh, I have a few things to ask." His voice cracked a bit.

A full sixty minutes later he was still posing questions to the brilliant and entertaining scholar. He had come with a yellow exam sheet full of points he was vague about, and they went down the list, one by one. As he sat at his worktable with his mentor at his side, learning the nuances of design nomographs and wetted perimeters, he couldn't help but reflect how fortunate he was to be on the receiving end of this individual attention and instruction. Thank goodness he had ignored the advice of his high school guidance counselor and had decided to go to school in the big city at this large and impersonal university. Not.

Sicilian Bricklayer DNA



He almost always sat in the back row of any lecture hall, surrounded by the same cast of characters who liked the anonymity of the rear seating. He realized he was missing out on some of the nuances of each lecture, the energy of the instructor, and getting to know a broader range of classmates by not mixing it up a little. So today, as he was a few minutes early for class in the Mechanical Engineering Building, he decided to sit about a third up from the front, on the left-hand side of the classroom. He knew what he was doing, he was infiltrating the territory of The Italians.

He had met and liked these guys from Day One of Orientation. They were certainly clannish, generally hanging out with the huge bunch of folks that had gone to one of three or four high schools throughout the City and South Etobicoke. They largely spoke English, with the odd muttered swear word or phrase in Italian that would make them all roar in laughter while the rest of the class stayed in a zone of frozen smiles and general bafflement. They were good-looking boys, and not a single Italian-Canadian girl was studying civil engineering that year or perhaps any year in that decade. The young men generally wore the uniform of jeans and the blue leather U of T engineering jacket. But their shirts had flair, in terms of colour and styling, complemented by chains at the neck that dripped down into copious chest hair. Almost all the young men brought sizable, home-packed lunches, with large chunks of buttered bread and slices

of prosciutto and mozzarella and provolone, accented with hot peppers and olives and marinated eggplant. All this was eaten with gusto and plenty of sharing, in a boisterous choreography of food elements between groups of individuals.

So on this day he plunked himself down on a seat about a third of the way into the massive leather jackets, smiling warmly and hoisting his briefcase up on the writing stand to pull out his notes.

"So look who's decided to come down into the high-rent district?" A florid-faced wisecracker with a lovely mane of hair smiled a toothy grin sideways at him.

"Yep, the content's getting pretty deep for me, so I figured I should get out of the thin air up there and come down where I can actually hear what the prof is saying." He grinned back and opened a duotang folder of notes.

"And here I thought you wanted to eavesdrop on the best ways to romance the ladies?" Enzo was a delicately featured lad with a striking pencil mustache.

"I'll overhear what I can, but even better, perhaps you guys can set me up with one of your sisters? You know, one with dark eyes and a pretty face, who knows how to make that great Italian food you guys are always bringing for lunch!" He puckered his lips and sucked in his cheeks as if he was sampling some fine antipasto.

"*Mangiacake*, watch what you say! In our code of honor, no one looks at our sister, *capisce*? With the wrong guy you could lose your nuts even mentioning that! "A big guy named Frank said this with more than a hint of seriousness.

"Sorry, sorry, sorry. I was just speaking hypothetically, nothing personal Frankie, believe me." He held up his hands apologetically.

"But I hear you man, about this material getting tough! I'm starting to wonder if I'm cut out for engineering after my midterm results." Enzo's face took on a baleful cast.

"But what would you study if you left engineering?" He said this softly over the general banter.

"Law, maybe? My *nonno* was an *avvocato* back in Italy. Good money being a lawyer, might even specialize in construction law to use what I learned from engineering?" Enzo's eyebrows arched sharply.

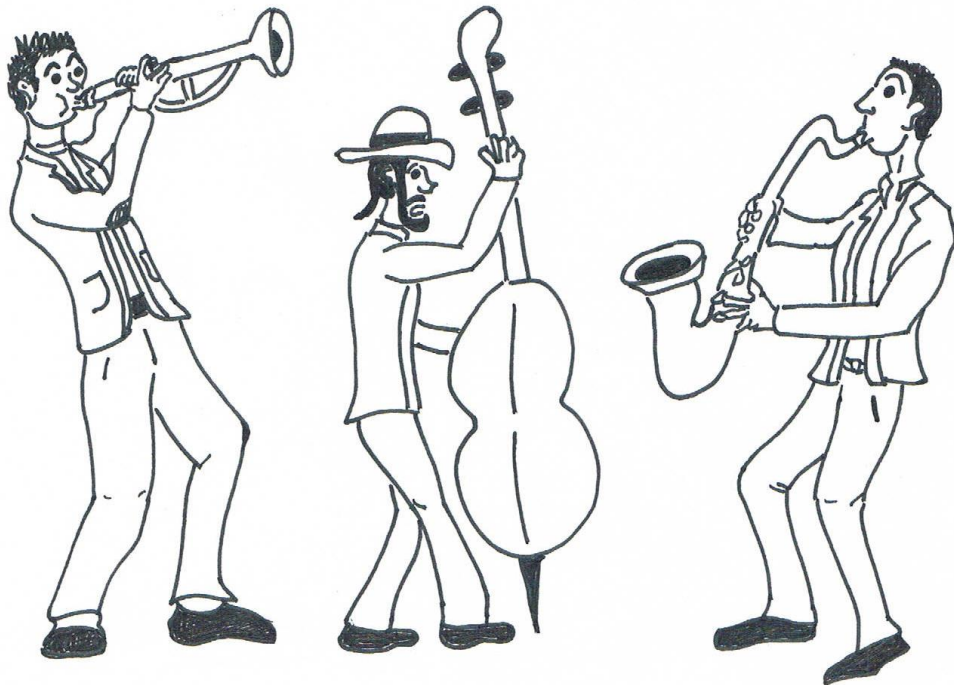
"A lawyer? You're too soft for that, you need the teeth of a shark to survive in a legal practice!" Frank said this unequivocally.

"I used to live across the hall from a law student last year. Quirky guy, but a nice fellow. He complained all the time about how much reading there was in law. Hundreds and hundreds of pages each week, of dry and dusty detail. It broke him down, even though he was a mature student. Had to drop out after first year." He had offered this up as a helpful bit of information, but quickly saw its effect on a crestfallen Enzo. Luckily, the lecturer started speaking right at that point, and he had a solid rationale to stop talking and avoid any further pitfalls in conversation.

He got out of class and realized he had ninety minutes or more before he could grab the last seating for dinner. Building upon the recent weightlifting, he thought he might take himself off for a longish run and

build some cardio conditioning alongside the muscle strengthening. Then he remembered that Pete had lent him a weighted vest before he had taken off to Sudbury, one that went on like a heavy suit jacket and tied at the waist to minimize oscillation of the weights while running. He went back to his room and got dressed for a run, then hoisted up the vest and was chink-chinking down St. George in a matter of minutes. He ran down Beverly to the AGO, finding the running extra-strenuous and somewhat off-putting due to the different center of mass from the vest. He turned on Dundas and ran eastward all the way to Parliament Street, enjoying the ebb and flow of an interesting city in the midst of afternoon rush hour. The idea of running into the trails of the Don River was contemplated and then abandoned, as he was getting fatigued with the extra weight. He turned homeward on Wellesley and slug-footed it over Yonge Street and the Queen's Park zone back to Knox College. As he took off the vest soaked in perspiration, he realized the twenty pounds of weight was only half of what he had lost during his running regimen the Summer before First Year. He lay back on the bed, almost drifting off to sleep from fatigue, but stomach rumbling brought him back for a quick shower before two plates of hot food.

Dancing the Night Away



He had felt somewhat better after his sizable dinner, but that vacuumed-out feeling persisted even after three slices of coconut cream pie. And at that point he realized he was dehydrated, that the running with the weighted vest had pulled out ions and electrolytes from deep within his body. The food would go a long way to restoring his energy levels but he needed more fluids and he needed them quickly. So instead of going back to West House and jawing away in the common room, he went over to the beverage counter and poured himself three glasses of semi-sweetened iced tea. He put these on a little orange tray and contemplated where he might best sit to ingest them.

Over at a corner table sat Henry, head down, and seriously tucking into his first plate of food. He often lifted weights right before the supper hour, and would migrate into the dining hall when most of the

people had finished and gone back to their rooms. It was now getting close to door closing time, and Henry was working quickly through his food so he could summon another plate of food before it was too late to do so.

"Dude, do you mind if I join you? I just need to sip these glasses of tea. Went on a long run with Pete's weighted vest and got completely dehydrated. I won't demand anything of you conversationally...." He put his tray down without waiting for a reply.

"Be my guest. I'll just ask Theresa for a second plate right now and you can talk all you want from that point on. I still may just largely listen, as I'm awfully hungry." Henry's eyebrows waved up and down apologetically.

"All good. Maybe that's what I need. To just talk, on and on. Like you're my shrink, and I'm lying down on the couch in your consultation room." He grinned ruefully.

"The good doctor is in. Say what's on your mind. But you might not like my advice. I don't sugarcoat things, you know that, right?" The older boy pushed his glasses up on his nose.

"Ever since move-in day 18 months ago, I have always found you to be a man of few words, with every word uttered having a lot of meaning." The first glass of iced tea got drained after this.

"Okay, so here I am, in a few weeks' time I'll be halfway through my undergraduate degree. It's been largely good, and it appears it will get even more interesting during the second half as the fundamental stuff will actually be over and going forward it will be more design related and applications focused." He paused to take another sip of tea.

"You're lucky. The deeper I go in my degree, the heavier the theory. But that's why I play football, to break up the tedium." Henry murmured his thanks to the server who had borne out a second plate of steaming food.

"School is getting easier and less stressful due to learning how to meditate, no question. Not easy, but much easier. So more time to do other things." He waved his hands in the air.

"Hmmm...I might have to learn how to do that stuff. Especially during season. Sometimes I feel like a one-armed wallpaper hanger. Particularly if we go deep in the playoffs, and the work starts piling up." Henry's face soured.

"Just let me know. So the question is, what other stuff do I focus on? How can I get the most out of my university experience? I hate going to pubs. And I'm not even much for drinking beer these days. It seems like high school is a long ways back! But what to do in its place?" He scrunched up his face.

"You need a girlfriend, man. Plain and simple. That will suck up all of your free time and then some." Henry waved his knife and fork around emphatically.

"Oh, great. That's just great. I'll just go down to the post office and pick one out of the lineup of girls waiting to buy stamps. As if it were that easy." He said this in a miffed tone, one he regretted immediately.

"It's basic problem-solving, friend. You state your objective. Then hold it clearly in mind. The solutions will arise from that place." Henry explained this patiently, as if he were reading from an econometrics text.

"Okay, but I've had that in mind ever since I moved to Toronto. Before, even. I lost a fair bit of weight so I might be noticed by all the young ladies of Toronto. But so far, *nada*." He held his hands up in the air.

"Maybe she's not in Toronto. What if she's one of your high school friends? Surely an athlete like you had a lineup outside the gym, back in the day?" Henry cracked a half smile.

"Not really. A few, but they have gone on to other things. And I'm not sure I would want a long-distance girlfriend. You remember Dale, the poor sod from Michigan? Worrying all the time about his girlfriend out dancing in those big ol' frat houses?" He suppressed a snicker at the memory of the earnest theolog, agonizing over his gal-pal's faithfulness.

"Yeah, I believe I was the first one to call that. Sad, but maybe he's better off. Better to lose her now and have her as a preacher's wife looking at every handsome man in Dale's congregation. Everything happens for a reason." Henry pursed his lips reflectively.

"So I need to find a girlfriend who is either a student here or who is working in Toronto. Someone nice, someone pretty. That's the objective. I'll hold it in mind. But I really hope the solution arises before two more years go by!" He started in on his last glass of tea.

"A solution will arise my friend. Trust in God for that. But you may need to rethink how you look at a girl, dude. Look inside, see the depth within. A great girlfriend is more than someone who is cute and with a nice figure. I'm not knocking those attributes, but visualize deeper aspects, and the solution arising will be a jewel. This I know, from experience." The older boy said this quietly as they got up from the table.

He went back to West House, energized from the heart-to-heart talk. A few days back he had seen a poster for a dance event at Hart House, sponsored by the French Club. Putting on a good shirt and a pair of dress trousers, he found himself in the Great Hall twenty minutes later. The room was full of young women, none of which he knew. He forced himself to walk around the room, saying hello in his very broken French. When the music started, he got a number of gals up for a spin and a twirl on the floor, feeling as high as a kite from the company and the residual effects of being dehydrated. He wasn't sure what the solution would be in the end, but he would have fun trying to birth it into existence.

A Glimpse Into the Corporate World



He was back into the same good shirt and dress trousers the following afternoon, after an airing of the shirt on a hanger after his exertions in the Great Hall. He still hadn't heard back about the job with the Ministry of Transportation, so he had called a contact number he had obtained from an old boss of his Dad's up at the headquarters for Canada Packers. His dad had toiled for the meatpacking company for decades, first as a trucker delivering chicken, eggs and butter down into Kensington Market, and then as a security guard in the shack in front of the plant. The old man had a magic touch with the cooling reefers, and often would be called in to jumpstart a tricky unit to get the insides of a trailer cooled down sufficiently to house and transport product. He himself had worked part-time in the plant back in high school for one agonizing winter, icing tanks and loading boxes of frozen poultry into tractor-trailers. Not great work, but it paid well, and provided him a tremendous incentive to work hard in school and bust out of his hometown.

The headquarters was up on St. Clair West, near Dufferin, in a part of the old-industry Toronto that still housed rendering plants, abattoirs, chemical distillation factories and the odd sauce and lasagna maker. He had consulted his TTC schedule and determined that it would be quicker to walk over to Bathurst and head north and transfer to a St. Clair streetcar going west, than taking two subways to get up to St. Clair on the Yonge line for a longer streetcar segment. He got dressed, deciding on a tie with no jacket, but grumped at himself for not having a pair of dress shoes that went well with the pants he had selected. Taking himself away from the college in a bit of haste, he bore westward down Harbord in the direction

of Bathurst. He ogled the windows of several bakeries, thinking of his Mom's dream to open a little place on the Main Street back home and have them lined up for her trademark chocolate chip cookies. A few of the Italian restaurants looked fancy with a lot of statuary inside and out, and he soon found himself standing on Bathurst waiting for his northbound chariot.

The ride up was uneventful, the built environment quickly turning into the lovely tree-lined streets with family homes that defined Toronto. Once up on St. Clair he hung around at the transfer stop for close to twenty minutes, as it appeared there was a problem somewhere along the line and the car was delayed. He shifted from foot to foot, checking his watch several times, and then berating himself that he hadn't started out earlier for the 4:00 appointment.

He jumped out in front of the Canada Packers office with still ten minutes to spare, and the kind receptionist directed him to a men's room just down the hall from the entrance area. He was soon back in front of her desk, stating his name and asking for the head of the engineering department. An interoffice call was made, and he was directed to sit down and someone would be with him momentarily.

The boss of his Dad had moved up in the organization, and had passed along the name of the company engineer as a favor for all of the years of loyal service. The last name sounded Greek to his ear, and he was expecting a swarthy, hairy man with his sleeves rolled up to come down the hallway any second. But a tall and striking woman swished up to the reception area, picked up a file folder and a bundle of mail, and cocked her head toward him and purred out 'Jayson?' This way..." He stutter-stepped his way half a pace behind her, luxuriating in her fine perfume and the appealing sway of her physique, as she led him into a very nicely appointed suite of offices. Just for a moment he wondered if he had misinterpreted the name, and perhaps it was a woman's name, and this imposing lady might be his potential summer employment supervisor. While he was warming to this unexpected idea, she pulled up in front of an office door and extended a hand towards a suave gentleman wearing a beautiful suit, sitting at a desk with no papers on it. The entire space was polished and spotless, pretty much the diametric opposite of the kill floor of the poultry plant in his hometown.

"Jayson? Georgios Astrastrakis... please have a seat." Mr. Smooth extended a well-manicured hand towards an overstuffed leather chair.

"My pleasure...sir." He had developed a large hockey puck feeling in his throat.

"I understand you are studying civil engineering at the university. This is my area of study as well, many years ago. But these days I tend to worry more about balance sheets." The older man smiled grimly and nimbly sat back down behind his power desk.

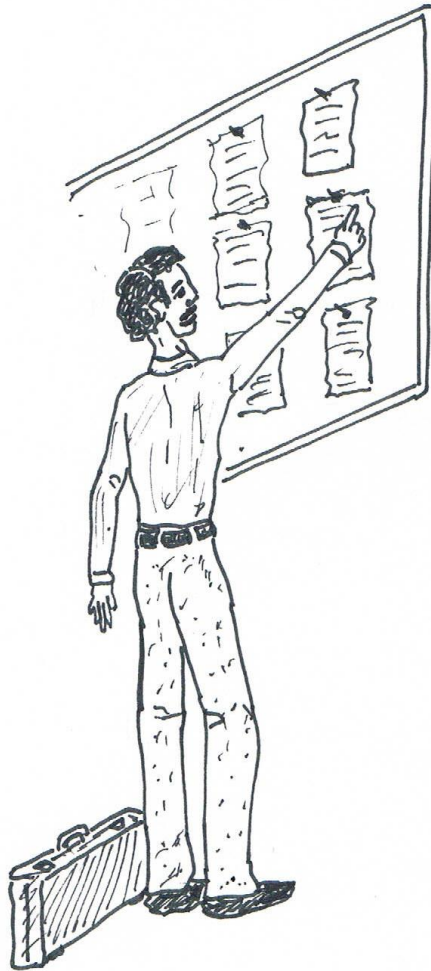
"So tell me what you know about plastic deformation of structures?" The executive smiled warmly, but a steely glint surfaced in his eyes.

"Uh, plastic deformation? Uh, not a lot actually, we seem to be focusing more on elastic response. Not too much coverage of, errh, plastic behavior." He smiled perhaps a bit too broadly, and nervously looked out to the hallway as Ms. Swish minced by.

The conversation went on for another fifteen minutes, long enough for respectability but short enough for a clear message to be communicated. The interview had been a token gesture, so that all parties could feel

that some reasonable attempt was made to consider employment for the kid of a long-term employee in one of the more distant plants in the business empire. But the long transit ride had been worth it, as it had sealed and confirmed in his mind that he absolutely wanted nothing to do with corporate world now or in the future. This thudded home sharply, in spite of the sleekness of the office furniture and the olfactory appeal of the lingering perfume aromas.

Swirling Realities



His trip back to campus seemed much quicker than the outbound journey, despite rush-hour being in its full pulse. The streetcar clanged along St. Clair West, through Corzo Italia and its warren of restaurants, cafés, espresso machine sales centers and Italian pastry shops. His sharp eye would see a raven-haired beauty sitting behind the counter in a family-owned shop, selling pasta or sauce or cannoli to short, heavysset women trundling rear-pull shopping carts. He couldn't seem to reconcile what an Italian young woman looked like in her 20s with what the typical *nonna* looked like in her 70s. He recalled seeing La Dolce Vita one winter afternoon on a snow day, and the thought of Sophia Loren in lingerie had melted him into a heavy puddle of hormones ever since. So he made up stories in his head about each young lady he saw along the route, a bit like Somerset Maugham sitting in a café in Antibes and concocting storylines about every interesting passerby.

He crossed paths with Klaus at Harbord and St. George, as his residence mate was coming out of an accounting tutorial in one of the older classrooms within University College.

"Look at you, all dressed up!" The stocky lad waved his hands aflutter.

"Yeah, had an interview this afternoon, up in the northwest section of the city. Saw a lot of paint factories and abattoirs, and got to see inside a pretty fancy business headquarters." He soft-pedaled this, as he knew his friend was looking for a Summer job, rather than going back home and repairing fence posts on his Dad's farm.

"Did you nail it down?" Klaus cut right to the chase.

"Doubt it. Well, not entirely sure. I was told that they would be evaluating their needs, and potentially getting back to me. I think those are cute words for 'Kiss off, Charlie'. It wasn't really engineering, more like troubleshooting and fixing problems as they arise in the factories. I guess that's engineering of a sort, but not the kind of stuff I would do for a municipality." His voice was low, almost apologetic in tone.

"Aw, hell, it's all experience, dude. And I bet they would've paid you through the nose, big company and all. Any lookers in the office?" Klaus leered out this last bit of questioning.

"Yeah, the head engineer had this administrative assistant who was crazy gorgeous, long and leggy. Not exactly friendly though." He pursed his lips.

"Dude, that's half the allure. Why do you think I want to be an accountant? So I can do audits, corporate audits. The auditor goes in for a week or so, gives the books a good going-over. And everybody in the office is scared of the auditor, because he's got all the power. Even the ice maiden admin assistant is scared of him, but she stays cool and indifferent. But deep down she wants him, because he holds the power. Just imagine me as a corporate auditor, servicing all of these appreciative women!" Klaus nodded emphatically.

"Well, quite the motivation to study hard, I suppose." He sniffled hard, trying to dilute his own sarcasm.

"Speaking of good-looking women, check out the beauty coming up the street. What an incredible rack she's packing!" Klaus' eyebrows danced up and down as he fought to hold his composure.

Coming up the street was Ingrid, his lovely classmate. She was wearing a pair of heavy-framed scholarly glasses, but her fine features and porcelain skin were only emphasized more by the contrast. She had a huge smile on her face, and was clutching an envelope stuffed full of official looking correspondence.

"Jayson, I got a posting with the highways department! I'm so excited..." The striking girl ran up to him and wrapped her arms around him in a tight embrace. He leaned into her neck and was swept away by her scent, something akin to orange blossoms and the earthy smell of feminine perspiration. Klaus had inexplicably disappeared, and the sounds of traffic on St. George had diminished to only a background whisper.

"The postings are up in the lobby of the Mechanical Engineering Building. I just got my full documentation package from an MTO rep who's sitting there at a desk handing them out to all the successful candidates." The young lady paused for emphasis, and the traffic noise went to zero decibels.

"You and I and Ian are assigned to the Coldwater office for the Highway 69 extension. I'm going to stay with you two lucky lads in Ian's cottage for the summer. We'll all drive down together in the morning, and back again in the evening. We'll take turns cooking dinner, and when I'm not cooking I'll be out on the deck in my little green string bikini. I don't like wearing a lot of clothes when it's hot, but I suspect you boys won't mind that one little bit. I guess my boyfriend will be a bit jealous as he will be stuck in the city with his job, but if he's suspicious I guess the three of us will just have to have a bit of fun to justify how he's feeling. But what goes on in Coldwater, stays in Coldwater!" The young woman leaned in, this time pressing her impressive chest into his for a good long while. The traffic noise thudded back to its normal levels, because Klaus suddenly appeared on his left, his chest all puffed up while he waited to be introduced to the nubile classmate.

"So I'll be working on the Scarlet Road improvements, which will allow me to live at home and save money on rent. And my boyfriend is working at a lab in the West End, so it will be great to have us both in the city all summer. You should hustle over to Mech, you got a nice surprise waiting for you! I peeked at the list and you and Ian are both assigned for something up north. You lucky ducks! Living at the cottage all Summer, which most people only get for weekends or not at all. You'll have to watch out for all those Toronto girls in their bikinis, they can be a pretty wild lot when they get up north!" She smiled naughtily, and turned to shake hands with Klaus.

He would hustle over to the Mechanical building before having his supper, happy to receive the news of the Summer job. But he would shake his head several times along the way, unsure of the different potential realities that had presented themselves out on a busy St. George Street at rush hour.

The Unveiling of Lady Godiva



"Thay, big fella! The tutorial today is going to be pure bullshit, man. We've gone over the calcs twice already in class, and this is just another run-through of the same old stuff. Let's split this pop stand and head for the coast." Ian sat at a table in the lobby of the old Metro Library, nervously tapping a pen against his broad, black briefcase.

"Drill is what makes an engineer, man. Over and over, until the process is automatic. It should all become second nature so that you don't even need notes or a textbook to do what you need to do. I hate these cheat sheets they allow us to bring in for exams. They take forever to organize and create, and one generally stuffs the kitchen sink into one piece of yellow paper, front and back. I would rather just go into an exam and ride bareback, relying upon nothing but my wits!" He spat this out playfully at his friend.

"Wits? Christ, half the people in our class don't have two of those things to rub together! Not everybody is as crazy prepared as you are dude, some of us need a little helping hand." Ian said this almost pleadingly.

"Now that's bullshit. You're flipping brilliant, dude, you simply don't know it. Or if you do know it, you start to doubt it. And that goes for our whole class, a big bunch of smart kids. But they worry too much, and do dumb shit, and that's what's holding them back." He said this with quiet conviction.

"Whatever. Thanks for the compliment, I think. But I'm still blowing off the next tutorial. And not just so I can get home for an early supper. Noooooh, there's something special going on over at Mech 102 that we need to check out." His friend's voice was mysterious.

"If I'm going to skip a tutorial, I'm going to need a good reason to do so. What's going on that's so darn intriguing?" He bore down on his buddy.

Ian looked sideways, and lowered his voice a tad as two young ladies were chatting at a nearby table. "Okay, it's still March and the temps haven't really improved that much lately. But the heat in the ol' lecture hall two buildings over will more than make up for what's going on outside!" Ian paused for a second and then went on. "A trio of Toronto's best erotic dancers will come out as Lady Godiva, and at the end they'll be wearing nothing but their shoes, I bet! And the LGMB will be playing the background music and telling jokes and stories between performers!" Ian wiggled his eyebrows suggestively.

"Hmmm, I went one time to the lawn outside of the Old Observatory. A horse trotted out, with a gal riding it. She had long blonde hair, and I thought she was wearing one of those leotard things that gymnasts wear. But the horse jostled a bit, and I could see she was actually wearing only her birthday suit. I'm still not sure if that was legal." His voice trailed off at the memory of the event.

"Same kind of thing, but I hear the Lady Godivas will start out with some kind of clothes on, slinky but still clothed, and eventually these will get doffed. And the LGMB takes some risks, as they ask the gals to forget about the G-string bylaw. So the guys in the front row will get an eye-full, that's for sure. That's why we need to get over there now, and get a good seat near the front. The guys in the back of the room might as well stay home, for all intents and purposes." Ian started to pick up his briefcase and head for the door.

They got over to the Mech Building in under five minutes, and there was a real crowd outside of the entrance to Room 102. Sassy music filled the air, everyone seemed to be laughing and having an uproariously good time. He even saw a couple of girls in engineering leather jackets, and secretly wondered why they would be at such an event. There was no entrance fee, but someone at a desk was stamping hands and recording numbers, perhaps for fire safety restrictions. He and Ian pushed past a big crowd on the left side, and deftly wiggled their way forward to a few open spots on the floor within a few yards of the raised lecture stage upfront.

The band played a fast and zippy tune, and then a master of ceremonies came out wearing a big top hat and a garish red jacket. "Ladies and gentlemen....Our Godiva event for the Ides of March is about to get underway. Put your hands together for the lovely.....Ruby!" He waved theatrically to the first entertainer standing behind an audiovisual projection unit.

The crowd roared and the band played a jaunty vaudeville number. The young woman wore a saloon girl costume, replete with frilly crinolines and a low-cut décolletage. She was certainly lithe and curvy in all the right places, but her visage had a hardness to it that was off-putting to say the least. She rolled her shoulders and one of her breasts popped out over top of her dress, and the crowd roared its approval in a raucous way. But her eyes stayed hard and vacuous, responding only minimally to the swirl of testosterone-driven humanity in front of her. He realized then she was probably high on some drugs, and he felt simply terrible by being there and being a part of this demeaning exercise.

"I just realized I need to be somewhere else." He yelled this into Ian's ear.

"What the fuck, the show's hardly started." Ian kept his eyes riveted to the stage.

"Yeah, sorry." His cheeks burned as he stepped gingerly towards the exit door.

The cool air of King's College Circle was a welcome dispersant for the range of emotions he felt as he trudged across the lawn homewards. Coming from the direction of St. Michael's, a pensive-looking Steve intercepted him in the middle of the Circle.

"You look lost in thought, man. Kind of like how Pierre Trudeau must feel these days. I just watched the news and it looks as if he could lose to Joe Clark. We might have a new prime minister. I kind of like the current one as he's a Catholic, and he has flair. This guy from Alberta looks solid, but he might be boring." Steve chuckled morosely.

"Kind of like me." His thoughts went back to Mech 102, and he trudged onwards to home.

Game of the Century



A few days rolled by, and he found himself on a squash court down in the deep dungeon of Hart House. He hadn't played with Paul for a while, as his classmate took his studies very seriously, and he was also heavily involved with those Campus Crusade folks. They had kept their relations amicable, but there was a slight *frisson* of disappointment between the two lads. He knew that his meditation practice was off-limits conversationally, as the Christian types found this kind of thing too 'Eastern' and 'nonconforming'. He had heard similar perspectives from his own Mom, and he had gotten used to simply avoiding the topic. Even though he felt in his heart that good ol' Jesus himself probably had a robust meditation practice, or how else would he have been able to hear so clearly what God was saying to him? But he couldn't prove this, so better to stick to some chatter about a tough lab writeup or the upcoming exams.

The only free court time was an awkward slot just after dinner. He had eaten only one plate of food, and had reluctantly foregone the lemon meringue pie, but even with that discretion he was feeling his gut contents after one game down in the box. Paul still suffered some hand-eye coordination challenges, but if anything he had gotten even fitter and rangier, so that the matchup was turning more even and incredibly heavy on exertion. After a particularly brisk sequence midway into the second game, he felt a distinct wave of nausea sweep upwards from his gut to his throat, and just for a second he prepared to violently and unceremoniously throw up his dinner on the squash court floor. It reminded him of the after-dinner track meets at the Ontario Athletic Leadership Camp up at Lake Couchiching in high school, where more than half the boys would upchuck after running a bunch of 400s and 800s under team competition after dinner. But this memory sobered him, and he gulped hard and kept his gastric upset at bay.

"Whew, you have gotten into very good shape over the winter! If we play every point like that, we won't be able to get in more than one game in our allotted time." He sucked in air and huffed it out noisily.

"Yeah, well you're not so bad yourself! I can get to the ball easily because of my height and my wingspan, but then I seem to have a 50-50 chance of returning the blessed thing!" Paul wiped a patch of perspiration from his brow.

"Are you ready for the exams coming up?" He was simply buying more recuperation time.

"Yes, I think it'll be alright. I know the stuff fairly well. Would like to spend more time on doing old exams, just to see how the prof thinks. But I am very busy with Crusade, and with my church. Easter is smack dab in the middle of the exam period this year. Unfortunate timing. I'll have to balance out a lot of responsibilities between Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday. It's even a bigger holiday than Christmas, but all we get off here at the University is the Good Friday. So it will remain to be seen how things go with the exams." Paul said this quietly, palming the squash ball.

"Hmm, hadn't given Easter much thought...." This started out with an apologetic tone which he flattened down quickly.

"Will you be going home for Easter?" Paul stated this question as if it was a certainty.

"Nah, I'm past the chocolate bunny thing. I would love to have one of my Mom's home-cooked holiday meals, but it's a long way to go up and back on the bus. And crowded on a holiday weekend. No, I'll just hang in the city and study. I want to do really well on my exams this year. Hopefully, a big change from last year." He grinned and motioned to Paul to serve.

The match ended on a draw of two games apiece, before a brusque pounding on the door signaled that their time was up. He invited Paul to come back to his residence to watch the US college basketball game on TV down in the basement of East House, but the classmate declined with a muttering about some lab writeup and needing to call his girlfriend. So he showered quickly and high-stepped it across campus, going directly down the stairs below the chapel without dropping his racket and bag back to his room.

He had been a huge basketball fan since Grade 7, when he had first seen Vince lay down a sweet bounce pass to set up an uncontested layup. High school games and entire seasons were hardwired into his memory, and the training and practice and associated rigours had changed his life. Consequently, he had become a reasonably rabid fan of the NBA, following key games and star players in the weekly subscription of the Sporting News he would get as a Christmas present from Grade 11 onwards. He knew there was a US college basketball scene, but beyond UCLA's championship winning streak he had largely kept unplugged from the NCAA games. In Canada, one would rarely see a US college matchup, except perhaps on a shadowy ghost image of a CBS broadcast on an early Saturday afternoon.

But this year was different. There seem to be more awareness of the college game through greater advertising, and people north of the border were talking about the college playoff games more than ever before. This was largely due to two players---Larry Bird of Indiana State and Magic Johnson of Michigan State. Two bordering states, and not so far removed from Ontario. Bird was a white almost-redneck, from French Lick, Indiana. He played rough and tough, and could shoot the lights out on any given night and would make behind-the-back passes as if he had eyes in the back of his head. Magic Johnson was a black kid from urban Lansing, Michigan, who could play any position on the court and literally moved in a magical and exciting way. He admired both of these stars, and realized that Larry Bird was the kind of guy who could've grown up in his own hometown, and that Magic Johnson was the kind of cool dude he would hear talking on those Motown radio stations that sent their airwaves north over Lake Huron to his radio on high school Summer nights.

So tonight was the final game, the NCAA championship. As luck would have it, Bird's ISU team was lining up against Magic and MSU. It was being billed as the Game of the Century, and in a way it was like a coming-out party for the NCAA. The TV room was absolutely congested, with over twenty young men stuffed into the sofas and easy chairs and sitting on the floor. The reception on the old black-and-white set was less than stellar, but good enough to generate a buzz in the room as the teams traded baskets. Larry Bird looked good, but Magic Johnson looked even better. In the end, his 24 points and many assists to his teammates won the day, and the game was decided with a healthy enough margin.

He went back to his room, riding on the wave of excitement from the game. Unpacking his squash bag, he decided to fumble around on his clock radio and find a Motown station, perhaps playing some O'Jays hits to celebrate the victory of the kid from Lansing with the million-dollar smile.

Voices in the Sky



A few days later, after the excitement of the big basketball game, he put the finishing touches on a problem set for his structural analysis course and cast an eye towards the clock radio on his night stand. He had eaten an early supper, and the problem set calculations had gone very smoothly, so he was surprised to see it was only 6:45. Mentally casting his mind over his to-do list and turning towards a paper list of tasks he had on his desk, he assured himself that he didn't have anything overly pressing in terms of schoolwork and he might just slide on a windbreaker and take a little toodle down St. George Street and from there wherever his nose took him.

The street was relatively quiet and he pulled up outside the Old Metro Library. Lights were burning brightly in most of the rooms for night classes, and he thought he might cut through its rabbit-warren system of corridors to see if anybody interesting was hanging out in the front lobby study area. Halfway

down an unkempt corridor, he almost banged fully in to Klaus, as the West House mate stepped away from a classroom.

"What are you doing out and about? Shouldn't you be riding your desk, becoming an even better engineer?" Klaus said this brightly enough, with only the slightest hint of sarcasm.

"All work and no play, makes Jack a dull boy. Or something along those lines. I got my problem set done and I thought I might stroll a bit see what the city has to offer on a late Spring evening." He motioned forward with his left hand.

"Hmm, I missed supper because of my late tutorial, and no real reason to rush back as I heard it was going to be mystery meat again. Mind if I tag along? Maybe we could head west along College and I could get a quick plate of cheap pasta somewhere in Little Italy." The young man's taste buds were legendary white-bread in nature.

"Sure, always happy for the company. As long as you behave yourself when we walk past any young ladies!" There had been more than one occasion when this had not been the case in the past.

The two lads walked past the Clark Institute building near Spadina, taking a wide berth past two bearded patients that were calling each other a litany of obscene names. Then the zone of College west of Bathurst shifted away from university and institutional activities into a swirl of low-rent ethnic commercial outlets selling thread, shoes, hardware goods and used tuxedos. Going past Bathurst it shifted a bit again, back towards a slightly more affluent customer base with nice fruit stores, cafés, Italian restaurants, gelato places and kitchen goods stores. This was Little Italy, the first home for the initial wave of Italian immigrants to Toronto. Families lived above their stores, hung out on the street corners, and sent their kids to the Catholic school embedded a few blocks into the neighborhood.

Klaus looked into half a dozen restaurant fronts and consulted glass-plated menus where they were available. "Jeepers, this place has gone through the roof. A plate of flipping spaghetti for \$7? I was hoping to get dinner and a drink for under five. Let's keep walking." And so on they trudged, westward, looking for more affordable nutrition. Out past Grace Street they came up to a building with a marquee on it, the lettering looking a little worse for the wear. 'Spiritualist Church--Services Sunday at 11, Wednesday evening at 7:30'. The two boys looked up at it, trying to make sense of what it meant.

"Just in time for some crazy shit!" Klaus looked at his watch. "Nigh onto 7:30, and it is Wednesday."

"I don't know of any church with a Wednesday service." His voice took on a perplexed tone.

"Dude, I was kidding. I'm not going into a freak joint like this! In fact, I'm going across the street to get a big fat submarine sandwich for \$2!" Klaus pointed to a hole-in-the-wall place with a big board out front.

"OK, you go eat. I'll see you back at Knox. I'm going in here." And in the stunned silence emanating from Klaus, he pulled at the creaky front door and stepped inside a musty vestibule.

The space was dimly lit, and had that non-distinct aroma of mung bean salad or heavily worn tennis shoes. A short wiry man with a pencil-thin mustache stood by the door to the sanctuary, holding some kind of bulletins.

"Good evening, young man. You're not too late, they're just getting going with the preliminaries. Take a program, and sit anywhere you like. Assuming it's your first time here, might suggest sitting at the back. You'll have a good view of everything, and minimize neck strain." He had some kind of accent, reminding him of his pastor back home.

He went into the rear of the sanctuary, and sidled into a pew that was empty and marginally in need of a good varnishing. A woman was leading the proceedings, and she was speaking loudly and theatrically from the get-go.

"Fine folks, we are here tonight to praise Holy Spirit. We know that we are surrounded by Love, and all that we do is immersed in an Ocean of Love." Her auburn hair was substantive and lustrous, and she wore a lot of heavy jewelry. Her gown was made of some kind of sparkly material, and for her age she looked in pretty good nick. She was a cross between one of his high school lady Phys Ed teachers and a past-her-prime Vegas showgirl. And the show was just getting started.

"But for those of us who are plugged in, we can see the unseen, and hear the unheard. Things that give you chills or make the hair stand up on your neck, we can see and hear and feel their influence. Voices come to us, mysterious things materialize right in front of us. Spiritualists the world over, and across the domain of time, can hear the messages from loved ones who have crossed over, and want to help us with their wise communication."

About twenty people were in the dimly-lit hall, mostly older and well dressed in a Queen Street Goodwill clearance rack sort of way. A few of them muttered amongst themselves but all quickly came to silence with the leader's next outburst.

"Someone is coming through. It's a wee child, not even going to school yet. They are not long in Spirit, but they have learned the rhythms and ways of Eternity quickly. It is the voice of a little boy. He tells me he was ill, and it was one of his potential exit points that he took to escape the wracking pain of his body and the uncertainty that things might get a lot worse. Can you feel the energy of this lovely lad?" The woman walked around, eyes bulging and eyebrows arched.

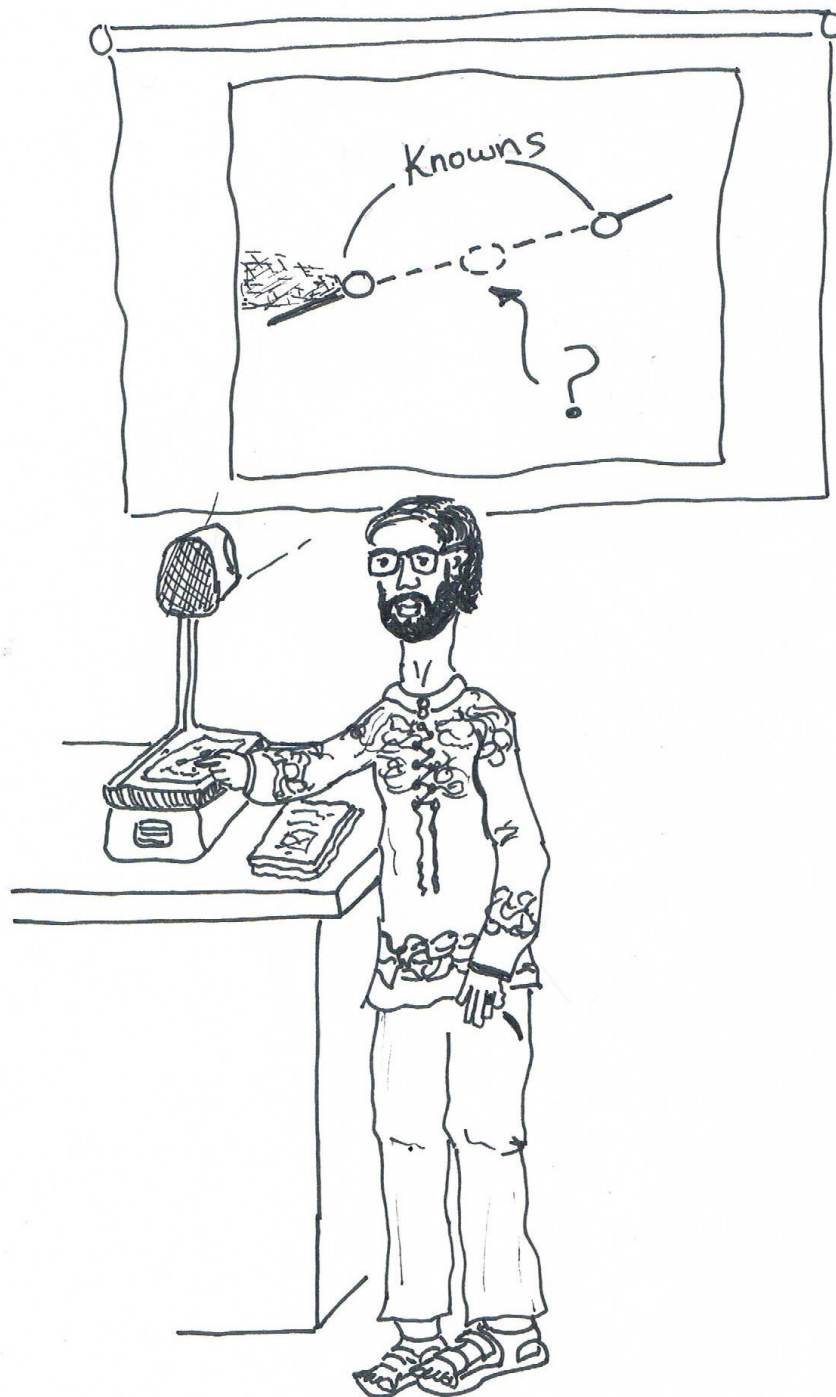
"He tells me one of his parents is in attendance tonight. He wants you to know he loves you, and that he will be an angel and guide you as you walk further down the path of life. Is there someone here who feels this ring of truth?" The woman swung her hand slowly and purposefully.

"Yes. My son passed two weeks back. We have been simply devastated. "A thirtysomething Portuguese woman dabbed a handkerchief at her eyes.

"He understands your pain. This he tells me. But he also wants you to be light of heart. Enjoy each day. And another baby will bless your household soon." Both women looked at each other with moist eyes, smiling and nodding.

He sat there for another hour, hearing a half-dozen communications from the other side. He had always believed in God, and that Heaven was for real. But on this Wednesday night he was getting a tutorial on the mysteries of Life that he would never experience at the University a scant country mile to the east.

Waiting, Listening



He sat in the drafty expanse of the Sid Smith Building lobby, his brown briefcase shut tightly against the compressive force of several note folders and two thick engineering textbooks. He had just had his lunch and brushed his teeth, and was poised to plunge off into an afternoon of classes when he realized that his normal 1:30 lecture had been canceled due to the prof attending a conference in Montréal. So rather than sit in his room and reread notes that he had already memorized, he decided to take himself up the street a

block and hang out in a space he didn't normally spend much time in. This lobby had been where he had first encountered the winsome and distinctly nubile Kira, back in first year when he was polishing off a big wedge of Kensington Market cheese. But he had not been back since, and its close proximity and association with pleasant memories pulled him back for this brief gap in time.

Sid Smith had a different flavor to it than his side of campus. Not as artsy as Trinity or Victoria, not as liberal or dramatic as UC, it seemed to dominate a space in between. The people floating through the lobby look more like economists or geographers, and they seemed to look right through him as he sat there on a soft bench doing his anthropological fieldwork. He started out ignoring the young men who walked by, fixating instead on the young ladies who floated through singly or in groups. He worked hard to avoid his conventional focus on their facial attractiveness or lushness of figure, and instead attempted to zero in on some aspect that defined their uniqueness and specialness. The vibrancy of a scarf, the nature of their walking cadence, a crest on a jacket that noted a school or sport or both, the ability to make even fleeting eye contact. This became a form of meditation, to look deeper to the aspects of the person you would normally not see or consciously register. After ten minutes of this he started to look even deeper, seeing each of the passing young women as something complex and deep and mysterious. He tried to fingerprint their essence, but at this level it wasn't so much an individual impression, but something more general in nature that linked all of the participants in the passing parade. He observed this without judgment, feeling it more than thinking it through.

Forty-five minutes passed before he realized he had entered some form of open-eyed meditation space. This could have gone on much longer, but one of the passing gals snapped him out of his reverie. She was a petite little thing, with a huge mane of wavy brunette hair atop an expressive face dominated by large green eyes. She was dressed quite formally, right down to her expensive taupe heels, but carried a student's knapsack. Force of habit caused him to smile a lopsided and roguish grin,, and she actually looked right back at him and offered up a perfunctory smile with no exposure of teeth. He dipped back into that meditation space and time stood still. But then the wheels of the physical world re-engaged themselves and he saw her pleated skirt swish attractively towards the exit door onto St. George Street. This was enough of a signal to him to check the lobby clock, and he realized he only had five minutes to get to class in the Galbraith Building.

The class was a second-year coding course, taught by two instructors who seemed to be polar opposites of each other. The instructor for the first half of the class had been a tall, imperious fellow who carried himself with a no-nonsense military bearing. He was actually a very good lecturer and teacher, due to his commanding presence, and had a knack for honing in on practical aspects they would need to consider to develop a functioning computer program. His assignments were a tad vague, and this was done with conscious intention. So the development time was consumed with considerable head-scratching, and the posing of lots of questions to the instructor during the tutorial had become standard operating procedure to achieve the desired results with a reasonable allocation of time resources.

The second instructor had come in at the midpoint of the semester, and the tone changed considerably. This fellow gave off a cool hippie vibe, or so it seemed to the majority of the class. He was not as well prepared as the first instructor, and seemed to be finding his way a bit in front of the large classroom, but his example problems were interesting and he worked hard to be clear on his expectations rather than waving his hands vaguely.

So after a quick high-step past Knox College and the Forestry Building, and a dash up the stairs to the second floor of the Galbraith, he settled into his customary seat at the back wall of the lecture hall.

"Cool shirt, dude!" One of the Italians yelled this out animatedly, and a ripple of laughter waved through the front half of the class. This has been prompted by the youngish instructor coming into class with a sheaf of assignments under his arm, wearing a bright orange shirt with unusual Indian art and red stitching over its surface.

"I'm glad you noticed! Thank you. My wife and I were at a music festival on Toronto Island last Summer and I couldn't resist buying this. Haven't been brave enough to wear it to the university up to this point, but I saw it in the closet this morning and decided today was the day." The instructor smiled and plopped the assignments down on the front desk.

"Very Jerry Garcia of you, sir!" This was bellowed by Howie, a madcap student who seemed to have no filters.

"Not much of a Grateful Dead fan, I'm afraid. But play me some Pete Seeger and I'll be a happy camper...now let's get down to business. We need to talk today about data interpolation, and how we can code this quickly and efficiently..." The class settled back into an absorption mode, setting aside wardrobe choices and musical preferences.

No Talking in the Library, Please



He normally studied in his room, as did most of the folks living at Knox College. The rooms were comfortable enough, the hallways were generally quiet, and one had only to take a few steps away from their desk to have a short and well-deserved nap. Washrooms were across the hallway, sunlight poured in the beautiful old windows, and people-viewing in the quad was always available when a non-napping

break was deemed necessary. But every now and then he got the urge to study in the library, to go old-school and pile up some books and notes and bear down, surrounded by stacks of books.

So it was a lovely late afternoon, with a light breeze of early Spring and warm-enough temperatures to make a person contemplate leaving their jacket behind and striding out in shirtsleeves. He popped out the King's College Circle door after nodding to the matronly college receptionist, and headed straight across the circle towards Sigmund Samuel Library. Sig Sam rose south of Hart House and the Old Observatory, and was a beautiful building in its own right. He had not yet become familiar with all of its holdings, a blend of social sciences and physical sciences, but there were some tremendous study rooms up on its second floor that had considerable daylight spilling down the gaps in the book stacks to create fingers of natural illumination for the old oak study tables. He got himself set up at one end of a long table, with a gaggle of big-haired Jewish girls at the other end.

After about five minutes of focused studying, he looked up to observe the girls, a number of which were quite pretty and who had shot him a tight-lipped little smile on his earlier arrival. But what he saw in between one of the stacks interested him even more. It was Kira's roguish boyfriend, looking at the spines of books in an offhand way and checking his watch more than infrequently. The lad turned and saw him at the study table, nodded and smiled, and then ambled over in a hip but disaffected manner.

"What's up, dude?" The young man rolled his eyes and swaggered a bit with his upper body. "Checking out the talent from Forest Hill?" The young man nodded in the direction of the far end of the table.

"Well, yeah, but no, not really. They look like nice girls, but I think they're hitting the books pretty hard. And I've never really thought about having a Jewish girlfriend. My mom used to be a maid in a fancy Jewish home up in Rosedale. She bungled up the details of keeping things kosher and was let go. Kinda left a bad taste in her mouth, but I've tried not to let this affect me." He said this quietly, under his breath.

"Oh, my girlfriend went to a fancy private school where half the girls were Jewish. Most of them were built like brick shit houses, man. Stacked, you know what I mean? Not saying I tapped any of those gals, but it would have been fun if I did!" The young man snickered at his own innuendo.

"Your girlfriend is certainly well endowed in that department." This slipped out before he knew it.

"Really, dude. How would you know the size of my girlfriend's breasts?" The other boy's eyes hardened and his voice took on a steely tone.

"Listen, just randomly observed, my friend. Consider it a compliment, she seems like a nice young lady." His cheeks burned while he backpedaled from the abyss, looking for a pathway out of a potential morass. "What brings you to the library tonight?"

"Oh, um, I'm just meeting up with someone. She's a bit late...but when she comes we'll head up to the third floor stacks. There's a zone overlooking Queen's Park that's ultra-quiet. A fun place for a quick splash of fellatio." The cooler lad primped up his lips and emitted a catbird smile. "Listen, maybe I got the wires crossed. I'm just going to dash upstairs in case she went there directly."

He sat there watching the hasty retreat of the well-dressed lad, and the admiring glances offered up by the study group at the other end of the table. He wasn't exactly sure what fellatio was, but he could reasonably

fill in the blanks, and wished he could have been a bit bolder when the subject of the girlfriend had arisen. He then got the idea to steal up to the third floor, to see who might be rendezvousing with this bold fellow as the daylight streamed through the library windows at a low angle. He went up the back stairs, towards the zone that would overlook Queen's Park, and stepped down a line of stacks as stealthily as a puma on the prowl.

He heard soft mewling sounds and rhythmic little grunts coming from a few stacks away. He thought it might be Kira's boyfriend and his paramour locked in a tryst that was staying under the radar of the library noise police. He stepped ultra-quietly, pretending he was looking up some dusty monograph on evapotranspiration. But through the gaps in the books he could see a male figure and the profile of the amorous theology student from Knox College. It appeared that the young man was sitting on a slightly creaky wooden library chair with his trousers down at his ankles, and his lusty damsel sat astride him with her skirt hitched up to her waist. As the voyeur bent over to look through a lower-level sight line, he could see Patsy's not-unattractive pink buttocks rise up and glide down with a slow and focused tempo. He took one last lingering look and stepped backwards to the exit door, then dashed down the steps two at a time with his heart pounding. He gave a sly grin to the Jewish girls, randomly wondering if they would ever partake of gymnastics of a certain kind on the third floor, and sprinted out of the library as if he had just robbed a bank.

It was still just a bit early for dinner time, so he took himself over to Queen's Park for a perambulation around the military equestrian statue. A lens of light rolled across a bench and he sat down, enjoying the air and the sight of office girls walking to the subway. In a matter of a minute, he felt the presence of someone sitting next to him, perhaps a bit closer than conventional space protocols would allow. He turned sideways and saw a handsome young Middle Eastern man, well-dressed and smiling.

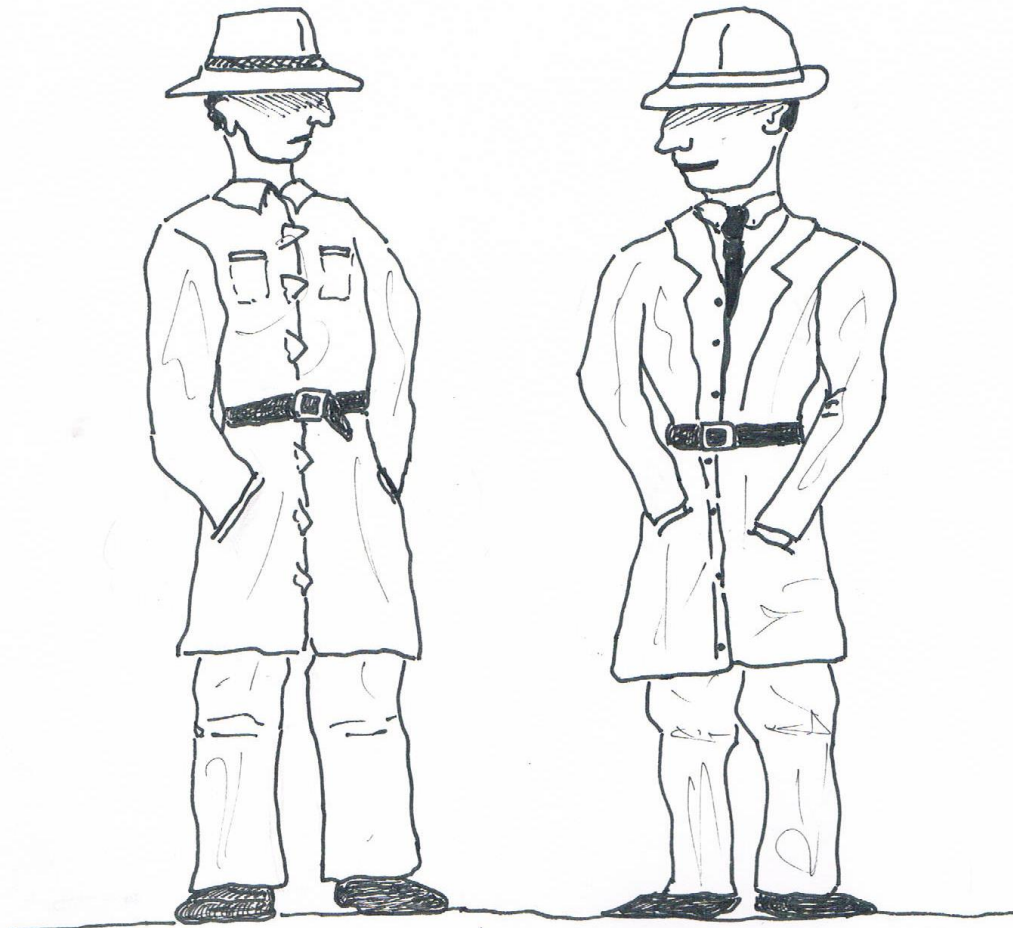
"Do you want to come back to my place?" This was said with a thick accent.

He grimaced and jumped up. "Fuck off, dude. I'm straight!"

"That's what they all say, at first." The chap wore a bemused grin and stepped away for another possibility.

He walked home quickly, looking over his shoulder several times. He had certainly got more education than he had expected from a simple study session in the library.

Nyet, Nyet, Soviet



He came out of the computing center late on a Friday night, having spent more than a few hours after supper coaxing his Fortran program to perform the delicate dance that the interpolation requirement algorithm required. As with most things in engineering that he encountered so far, the mathematics was not all that daunting, but when he tried to code it all up something or the other reared its ugly head. He kept getting a ‘floating-point error’, and it took a substantial amount of head scratching and consultation with a few of the Asian whiz kids to set it all straight. So with a sheaf of successful output tucked under his arm, he decided to walk home the long way via King’s College Circle Road. Turning north he marveled at the subdued beauty of a floodlit University College, and then he turned his gaze northwest towards Convocation Hall. This storied building was arguably the most beautiful on the drop-dead-gorgeous St. George campus, and even moreso at night. The curved dome, elegant stonework and beautifully appointed columns were all enhanced by night lighting, and a walk around its circular perimeter never ceased to amaze an attentive flaneur (a stroller practicing gastronomy of the eye on an awaiting cityscape). So tonight, with not much else to do, he simply stood outside and soaked up the building’s majestic beauty.

While he was doing this, a number of the exterior doors popped open and out poured scores of people. He knew at least a dozen of them, a subset of The Italians from his class. Over the two years of school so far

he had grown particularly fond of these fellows, who almost always had a smile on their face and were quick to crack a joke at the expense of one or more members of their contingent.

Tonight they were dressed to the nines, with jackets and ties and expensive footwear. Some of them wore the trademark black shirt and white tie, and all or most of them would have caused heads to turn on any street in Toronto.

"Hey Jay-boy, doing some surveying out in the middle of the street?" Gino called this out saucily, followed by titters of laughter from the gang.

"Yeah, exactly. Have to get in shape for Survey Camp that's coming up at the end of the Summer. Not sure if you pretty boys in your fancy suits will survive the two weeks of hard work and hot temperatures we'll face up north..." He rolled his eyes and mugged this out with the use of his hands in a theatrical way.

"Oh, so *Signor Mangia-Cake* is learning how to talk with his hands like the rest of us.....nice!" Big Frank smiled broadly while nodding his head vigorously.

"You know what they say, Frankie, imitation is the highest form of flattery?" He grinned back and took two steps closer to the mob. "So what are you all doing here on a Friday night?"

"The Sons of Italy were sponsoring a lecture tonight at Con Hall. A Professora from Milano, giving a talk on the Italian fashion industry. Lots of slides of beautiful Italian women wearing pretty skimpy evening gowns. And the lady professor was not too shabby herself, so it was a pretty good evening!" Luigi, a tall young man with a manicured mustache, shared this with a lot of vigorous nodding from the group.

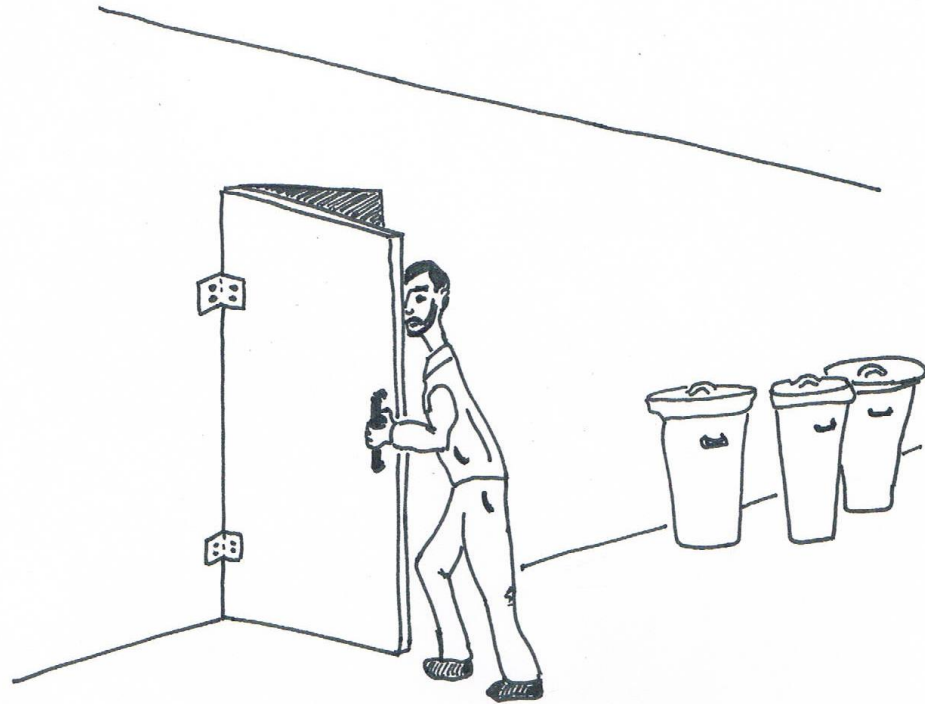
"And now we're all going down to the House of Lancaster on Wellington Street, to see some equally lovely French Canadian women show how they look without their evening gowns! Want to come along, the more the merrier?!" John, a well-built hipster guy, beckoned him with a friendly wave of his hand.

He was conflicted, but knew he would be better off taking a pass on this questionable form of entertainment, given his recent shift in perspectives. "Thanks, but no thanks. Too much work to do, and if I come along it may cause those Quebecois fillies to go crazy! Wouldn't want that to happen." He yelled this out with the hint of a leer, and a crowd of Italian engineers floated down the steps of Con Hall towards their cars parked behind Simcoe Hall. He hung around, half-hoping for a second invitation, but none was forthcoming.

He sauntered forward, rounding the curve of Con Hall and coming abreast of the dark green doors of Simcoe Hall, the University's main administration building. He turned left at the southeast corner of Knox College, walking along the imposing stonework of his residence. No one was ahead of him on the pathway and no one was behind him. But he had an eerie feeling nonetheless. And then he realized his subconscious was still affected by a story from first year about this very sidewalk. The mature but disaffected law student from Ottawa across the hall from him on the second floor of West House, had been coming home from a movie at the Med Sci Auditorium. Behind him were two heavysset men in trenchcoats, walking along and speaking in muttered Russian. The law student had previously been in the federal government service largely due to his fluency in the Soviet language, and he had slowed his walking pace and even lingered a bit to allow a small bit of eavesdropping on the two men and their

conversation. It was long enough to determine that they were talking about sensitive matters of a diplomatic nature. In a scene right out of a Cold War film, the clandestine listener unlocked the basement door to Knox, turned to the duo and bade them good evening in Russian just before the door clicked shut behind him. The pensive engineer now paused outside the door and could almost hear the quickened footsteps of Russian agents, leaning in to catch the door before the locking hardware engaged itself. But the pathway remained quiet, and his journey through the College's subterranean passages was uneventful.

Candle Lit Dining Leads To... Not



The last week of class loomed ahead, significant not for the wrap-up of lectures and handing in of large lab reports, but more for the winner-take-all exam period that came after it. For those who loved to write exams, the 60% finals that were endemic to engineering studies at Toronto were a godsend. If you handed in most or all of your term work and did relatively well on the midterm, you were poised for a home-run grade if you aced or nearly aced the final exam. These were three hour slugfests in some large room or the other in the engineering zone of campus, and he always stayed for the full three hours, reading over his answers and touching up minor flaws to achieve the desired end result. So to achieve this he needed to start focusing his mind well in advance of the exam period, and he did this with slightly longer meditation periods and even deeper plumbing of the oceanic expanse of his subconscious while meditating.

He was in the middle of one of his late afternoon meditations, so thick into it that he was drooling a copious amount of saliva onto his T-shirt from his open mouth, while he carried on meditating oblivious to this fact. At one point he thought he heard some noise at his door, but he shifted in his seat and carried on with the deep undercurrent surveying. Coming out of his reverie thirty minutes later, he re-emerged feeling refreshed and energized. Feeling the goop on his chest and the fullness of his bladder, he rose

quickly and rushed across the corridor to the second floor washroom. Returning a few moments later, he saw a white slip of paper pinned to his door. Intrigued, he squinted at it to read 'Dinner tonight is my treat. Meet me at 6 o'clock in the Hart House Dining Room. Wear a jacket and tie, I'll make it worth your while....Kira'.

His pulse raced and he leaned into the wedge of paper, picking up the scent of orange perfume. The noise he had partially heard at the door must have been the sultry Kira, but he couldn't believe her footsteps and trademark knock would not have been enough to disengage him from his contemplative pose.

Thirty minutes later he found himself at the foot of a curling stairway that led to the cozy dining room on the second floor above the Great Hall. He had tried on and rejected three tie options, trying to get the best look for his brownish twill jacket. This covered up a clean white shirt that he hadn't taken the time to iron, but he felt he looked presentable or maybe even more than that.

The room was quite full, with a largely older crowd looking over menus and wine lists. Across the way, beside the entrance to the servers' door, sat a beguiling young woman. She had her hair piled up on her head, with a fancy pearl necklace drawing attention to the plunging neckline of a sleeveless white dress. Kira smiled and beckoned him, and he self-consciously picked his path through a bevy of doting waiters.

"Jay-boy, so glad you got my note! I was beginning to wonder if I would have to eat alone?" She extended her hand theatrically for a kiss, which he bestowed awkwardly, as this was the first time he had ever kissed someone's hand.

"Sit down, pour yourself some wine, I ordered a half-litre carafe of white. Tell me how you have been?" Her eyes were shining, and she spoke as if she were getting just a little tipsy.

"I'm, uh, fine. I've had a good year, but was kind of surprised to get your note. Haven't seen you around at all, and had been wondering how you are?" He sipped a bit of wine to stem the awkwardness.

"Oh, I saw you looking at me from the Sub Shop up near the Bedford subway entrance. Longingly, the way a girl likes to be looked at. Do you like my hair? I put it up just for you. Do you like my dress? I wore it just for you." This was all said slowly and teasingly.

"Yes, you look amazing. Absolutely lovely." The rawness of the conversation made him feel as if he were in an alternative meditation-inspired universe.

"We need to order, so as not to get behind all of these old folks who are still fussing over the menu options. I recommend the duck, with carrot soup as the starter. Okay?" She smiled gushingly at the summoned waiter, who came towards them with pen and pad in hand.

The meal went by too quickly, with delicious food and the mesmerizing presence of the young lady and all of her charms. Near the end of mint tea and crème brûlée, she sat up in her chair in a business-like manner.

"Dude, let me be square with you. You might be thinking a nice dinner will lead to something even nicer, but I'm going to be jumping into a taxi in the next fifteen minutes and heading home. You see, I had a big blowup argument with The Boyfriend on the weekend. Like, terminal. But I knew his parents' anniversary was this evening, and they habitually celebrate it here at Hart House where they first met.

They were that good-looking couple four tables over, the one where the lady was boring into us with her eyeballs all dinner? I ignored her and you were blithely unaware of it all, but it had the right effect.” Kira paused and sipped some mint tea.

“Which is...?” He started to feel like he had been sucker punched.

"That she will call The Boyfriend as soon as she gets home, to tell him I was all dressed up and dining with a handsome fellow in the Hart House dining room. Knowing him he'll drive over to my place, mad as hell and jealous as a hound dog, to intercept us as you drive me home. But I'll be getting out of a taxi alone, and will have to tell him our date went off the rails. And he'll sweep me up in his arms, and we'll be an item once again." The young lady scrunched up her nose. "Do you think I'm awful? I could try and make it up to you with some steamy *soixante neuf* before I hail my taxi, up on the Persian rug in the Music Room? No one's ever in there at this time of night, but I could wedge the doorstep from the inside if it would make things more comfortable. It's the least I can do, considering, and it would make The Boyfriend cool his heels a bit outside my place..."

He walked back to Knox College, with a swirl of thoughts and emotions running through his mind, not the least of which was a nagging regret that he had not accepted her invitation to mount the stairs to the Music Room. Trudging up the residence stairs to the second floor, he almost ran into the Don of Hall as he turned the corner to the corridor.

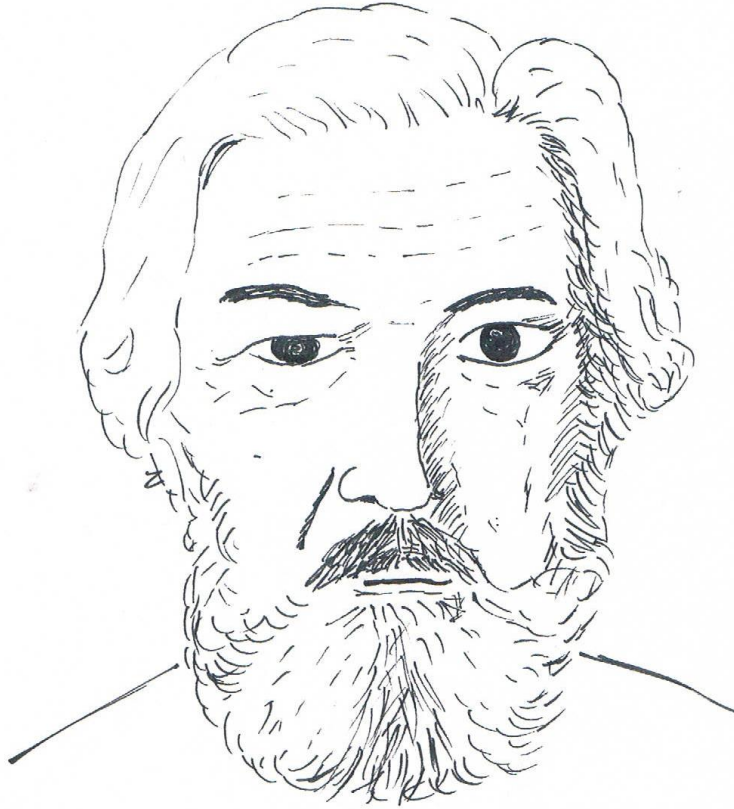
"Sorry dude, I'm just hustling down to watch the news!" Ted's eyes were widely dilated.

"What's happening?" He was still lost in his thoughts, but wanted to appear sociable.

“Big raids going down at the gay bathhouses off of Yonge Street. Cops are playing rough. If I was a betting man, I would wager more than a few senior professors will be swept up in the raid. The pleasures of the flesh have a strong allure to the academic set." Ted smiled wryly.

"Indeed." He went back into his thoughts and opened the door to his empty room, a white piece of paper still dangling from its pin on the door's exterior.

The Master Is In



Kick-off classes at the start of the semester were generally fun, as they were light on content and big on the promise of learning all kinds of neat things. Windup lectures were nearly the opposite, kitchen sink affairs where the prof tried to wedge together disparate bits of content that would be needed for the upcoming final exam. All semester he had enjoyed his Canadian Literature course, one of three non-technical electives shoehorned into a too-busy and overly quantitative engineering curriculum. The Can Lit course had been very capably taught by a senior PhD candidate, a rather tweedy fellow who looked as if Central Casting had sent over their best offering of an actor to play a young Ivy League academic. He had horn-rimmed glasses with some interesting design features, spoke quickly but authoritatively, and certainly knew his material backwards and sideways. The gals in the class all seemed to have a crush on him, and he handled this well by basically ignoring the attention or looking at them and responding as if he were addressing a pod of friendly space aliens.

So he walked into the last class for the course, having sped-read the related book over the last two days. It had been a tremendous piece of literature, set in southern Ontario and full of Jungian archetypes and quirky characters. In some ways he identified with the protagonist, who hailed from a small town but who had lived in Toronto for most of his life. Some of the vocabulary was a bit outside of his domain, but he reckoned that was just part of an engineer taking an English literature course.

"Fifth Business. The starting point for the Deptford trilogy and certainly the trilogy's star offering. Some argue that this is Robertson Davies' best book, and many also argue that he is the undisputed lion of Canadian literature. So with that as a starting point, who would like to pose questions around the book we have just read and what we will end the course with. Saving the best for last, as they say!?" The young academic laughed just a little too forcefully at his own joke, causing two of his female admirers in the front row to roll their eyes.

"Yes, kind sir, thank you. I read this book with great interest, and with a dictionary close by my side." RJ, the calm meditator from Hong Kong, spoke precisely and looked down intermittently at his notes. "My question is simple. For such a tremendous example of Ontario Gothic writing, are there themes to this book that would be of interest to readers from an international audience?"

"Very good question, and particularly *apropos* given the burgeoning multiculturalism thrust under our current federal government. Yes indeed, themes relating to family, loyalty to friends, to living a devout life, the potent impact of music and arts and letters to create a well-lived life, to recognizing we all have light and shadow elements to our psyche. These are recognizable to us all, as they reflect a shared human experience. Davies set this in small-town Ontario as that is where he grew up, but he could have set it in a village in Austria or a city in China and largely played through the same songbook. Different characters perhaps, different geographies and histories, but the human side of the ledger has more commonalities than we sometimes care to admit to." The instructor's eyes sparkled as he released a tight smile. The fawning girls had him back in their good books once again.

"I was walking up Devonshire the other day to catch the subway, and I'm pretty sure I saw Professor Davies strolling down the sidewalk on the other side I was on, right around Saint Hilda's residence?" The Pout smiled in an ingratiating way, and rolled her shoulders sinuously in the direction of the erstwhile lecturer. He hadn't noticed up until now that she was in this course, but it was just like her to show up for the last lecture and pose a notable question.

"Ah, good eye, young lady! Indeed, RD is the sitting Master of Massey College, due south of Saint Hilda's. He wears a wide range of unusual and dignified headwear, and usually sports a green felt cape at this time of year over a formal Edwardian suit. Did he smile and nod over to you, perhaps doffing his hat at the same time? Davies goes out of his way to engage with students, particularly if they are fetching young women. His wife Brenda is a statuesque stunner, a former stage actress, who you will also see perambulating Devonshire Place. Alright then, on to what you might expect for the exam?!" The class hunkered down and took word-by-word notes of the professor's utterances for the next twenty minutes.

He sauntered home slowly, soaking up the now-familiar sites of the beautiful St. George campus. A barrage of exams and then off for the Summer, road crew surveying up north and then Survey Camp to round out the season before returning to school in the Fall. He knew he would miss the campus over that period, and grew wistful when he realized he would soon be halfway through his degree. Where the time had flown he did not fully know, but he correctly anticipated that the next two years might indeed fly by even faster.

He mounted the short staircase into the administrative wing of the college, and stood inside looking up at the amazing stonework on the lobby ceiling. He saw that the chapel doors were open, so he mounted the longer stairway to enter the golden-hued worship space. Not a soul was inside, and it was pin-drop quiet.

He went to the mid-zone and plopped down into a firm but comfortable pew. The stained-glass artistry of the windows around him was stunning, and the stone carving on the chapel's columns and arches was so beautiful it was as if he was seeing it for the first time. As he sat there he felt more and more at peace, the thousands of prayers having been said in that space reverberating still into his consciousness. The trivial worries of the day melted away, the petty insecurities, held grievances and ill-formed boasts that make up a young person's life all dissolved in an amalgam of release and letting go. Time ticked by slowly on some unobserved clock, until the shortening light and early stages of stomach rumbling nudged him to step back into the world of life on the campus that housed him and a celebrated writer who wore capes and Edwardian silk ties.

Solid Like a Rock



The Mining Building at the University of Toronto was a stone fortress, perched at the top of McCaul Street like a sumo wrestler guarding the gates of a monastery. It was built of dark stone, made all the darker by years of exhaust from passing cars on College Street, and had a steep and massive set of stairs at the entrance of the building. He took these one at a time, as he was a bit early for his afternoon lab and had just finished lunch and was feeling disinclined towards any form of heavy exertion. Looking up and down College Street, admiring the parade of pedestrians and the odd old-school streetcar clanging its way, he eventually made his way into a musty and once-grand lobby. Bulletin boards on the western wall had a range of academic notices upon them, including some announcements for open faculty positions. Phrases such as 'proficiency in post-secondary teaching', 'rigorous and vigorous publication of research results' and 'commitment to serving the administrative needs of the department' all swam before his eyes, and were marginally understandable but not completely so. He really didn't have a clue about what it would take to become a professor in an amazing school such as this, and on some reflection it seemed as if the search committees were looking for some kind of academic superhuman. Perhaps more like an overachieving decathlete, who could throw a javelin far, win the hundred metre sprint and do a

commendable job on the pole-vault. He admired all or most of his professors, and some of them did seem superhuman in terms of their knowledge and abilities to solve just about any problem that could come their way. So he read the ads once again, killing a bit more time, and inwardly marveled at what these folks were expected to accomplish in their vocation.

The lab was the last one for his geology course, which had been a somewhat less-than-stellar experience. There had been tons of information to memorize on rock formation processes, geochemistry, tectonic plates, sedimentation and so on, along with some practical aspects related to foundation construction and mineral extraction. The afternoon's lab was to run in a dusty old laboratory on the first floor, that was both drafty and musty at the same time. The lab leader was an earnest redheaded PhD student, with wire-rimmed specs and a large and bristly beard.

"Okay folks, we'll be done in under an hour. Last day, can't overwork you before your exams." Mr. Red Beard's eyes sparkled under his glasses. "Simple enough requirements. You have a list of 30 rock types. Labeled rock samples are out on the benches. Go down the list and find each of the types, observe them, feel them, sniff them. In the case of a tough example, you may even want to drag your tongue over them." The grad student wiggled his eyebrows for effect.

"Yep, we're all just cavemen and cavewomen. Lots of info can come to us through our tongues. Once you've tasted feldspar, you won't be quick to forget it! Okay, let's get going. Go down the practice list, and then once you've done that, hie off the adjoining room where you will pick one of four test boxes to identify the five samples contained in each box. Fill in the quiz form and hand it back to me before you leave."

The next thirty minutes were a chaotic rumble-tumble of students picking up labeled samples and observing various physical characteristics and then checking off the respective box on the list. Some of the samples were easy to identify, but some were downright difficult due to their similarities to other rock types. The mood was buoyant and jovial, with the students moving around and bumping into one another in a lighthearted way. He saw a few of the girls licking a few of the rock samples, with extended pink tongues, followed by a bit of giggling and scrunching up their noses. The idea of licking rocks, particularly at the end of cold and flu season, had very limited appeal to his sensibilities. So he honed in on color, brightness, and texture to develop a reasonable chance of identifying the test rocks.

People started to migrate over to the test room, and the filling in of the quiz sheets for the various test boxes. He went around the room, observing the scrum of people and deciding that he may as well simply pick a lineup and get the test over with. He stood at the back of a line of perhaps eight people, shuffling forward to peer into the box. When he was one away from the samples, he saw the big guy ahead of him pick up each rock type and give it a good, long lick before he scribbled his answers on the quiz sheet. When it was his turn, he found that all five of the rock types inside the box were slippery, wet masses of material from a wide range of tongues slipping over their surfaces. He was not a germaphobe, but this was off-putting enough. He felt that he knew three of the five samples for sure, but was stuck on the last two. He turned them over and over in his hand, holding each up to the light and looking for any telltale subcomponents. He knew in his heart that he would have to do a heavy hand sterilization at the end of this exercise.

"Yep, those two are the toughies. Suggest doing the taste test, almost guaranteed to give you the info you need." Mr. Red Beard nodded reassuringly.

He held the samples up to his face, but he knew he couldn't bear the application of his tongue to their moist and gooey surfaces. But the proximity to his nose gave him an olfactory clue, enough to get the fourth sample correct. The fifth sample did not yield a scent clue, but he put it down discreetly and mentally concluded that a four out of five on the lab quiz would be a more than reasonable trade-off to staying healthy for his exams.

Three bouts of heavy soap washing with hot water left him feeling like a surgeon going into the OR. He bust out onto the steps of the Mining Building and felt an exhilaration impulse travel up through his body. Hitting College Street, he knew he couldn't go straight home so he headed east, past Sick Kids towards Bay Street and Yonge Street. Just west of Yonge he came across Fran's Restaurant, and decided to take himself in for a chocolate milkshake. He did this to celebrate the absence of ore particles on his tongue, and to commemorate the role chocolate milkshakes played in his recovery from rheumatic fever when he was in Grade 3. He decided to order a plate of fries as well, with plenty of salt and vinegar, to remember those fries his Mom would serve him as she worked at the concession booth of the skating arena back home.

He looked around the restaurant and saw across the way an odd couple at a booth table. The man was Pete, the frustrated premed student who had left in a hurry to rescue his romance with his back-home sweetheart. He had heard he was back in an attempt to salvage his year, but that the romance rescue attempt had been unsuccessful. The woman was the lovely Asian secretary in one of the engineering offices that had helped him once with a scholarship application. There was some age difference between the two, but the way they sat with their heads together he realized that perhaps there was something of interest going on here. He also had the impression that they had seen him come in, and had gone out of their way to avoid his gaze.

He ate his fries and slowly slurped the milkshake, luxuriating in the feeling of a year coming to its end, and the mysteries that played themselves out in the city around him. He settled the bill at the cashier, taking one last look over to the booth, and realized he would have a thing or two to discuss with the folks at the West House table over dinner.

~The End~

Nearing an End



Written and Illustrated by Brian Wilson Baetz

November 1980

Old Habits Die Hard



Eighteen months had rolled by, with a lot of textbook learning and an even greater amount of education from The School of Life curriculum. He had weathered the most intensive and academically demanding year of his program with flying colours, and the third year of undergrad had also offered him some tutelage in the art of relationships. This had been fleeting at best, and the young stenographer from Quebec that he had met on a Caribbean reading week holiday had not turned out to be his long-time girlfriend. But he had learned a lot from this *affaire de la couer*, and he couldn't help but smile fondly when he reflected back on her innate warmth and unbridled affection. But here he was now, in the middle of his last Fall semester, cruising towards grad school and still without a date on a Friday night. When he thought about this in any concerted way he could feel a glumness and a palpable frustration descend from the leaden skies of a grey November. So he taught himself to skip along quickly to another thought, and leave this for some downstream point where introspection of this kind would hopefully be less defeating.

He was standing awkwardly in the lobby of the Galbraith Building, waiting for Ian to show up for a rare Friday evening commitment downtown. If anything, his buddy showed an even greater interest in spending his non-class time out in suburban Etobicoke. He wasn't sure if it was his Mom's legendary cooking, or the potential of something romantic in the neat bungalows and manicured front lawns off of Royal York Road. His buddy was keeping his cards close to his chest on this issue, but he had kindly agreed to dinner out on the Friday night after a week of a few late mid-terms.

He spun on his heel, nodding amicably to a few office staffers that were making their way to a streetcar after a long week of work. He closed his eyes and fell into a slow walking meditation, until a soft hand on his chest brought the contemplative perambulation to an abrupt halt.

“Careful where you’re walking, Mister!” Becca’s hands moved slowly from his pectorals to his deltoids. He grinned widely and reached up to softly hold each of her wrists.

“I might have been very happy to crash into someone like you, *mademoiselle*!” He softly chuffed her on the chin with his right index finger. They had worked quite closely on Engineering Society business over his third year, but he had never quite penetrated the considerable mystique of the comely Miss Becca.

“What’s a hunky guy like you doing on a Friday night? Trying to find a date in the ol’ Galbraith lobby?” She faked a punch to his shoulder.

“Waiting for a buddy to go out for some kind of kind of boys’ night out. How about you? A long list of suitors to vanquish, one by one?” He had grown comfortable in making oblique references to her apparent moonlighting gig, but she had never fully taken the bait or dropped her guard on this matter.

“Nope, very domestic evening on the rolls. Have a great new boyfriend, and he’s coming over for pasta and a movie night. Sounds like an old married couple, right?” The young lady’s face glowed.

“Sounds really good, actually. And for the record, this new *beau* is a lucky dude!” He said this earnestly with a bit of a head nod, as she smiled discreetly and headed for the St. George exit doors.

Ian came along momentarily, and they chattered away on a number of topics as they walked quickly to the roast beef buffet place under Hydro Place. This was an annual Fall tradition of sorts, where the blue cheese dressing on the salad bar was legendary and the sliced roast beef was well done and seemingly unlimited. As dedicated gourmands, they attacked their first plates with gusto and didn’t really slow down for meaningful conversation until their third plate of beef, gravy, potatoes and salad. By the time they got to a second round of chocolate cheesecake, it was time to plan the rest of their evening.

“OK, big guy, what shall we do? A movie, hit the arcades, go shoot some pool? Lots of things to do in The Big Smoke!” He waxed enthusiastically, but then quickly realized that his friend had grown up in the city.

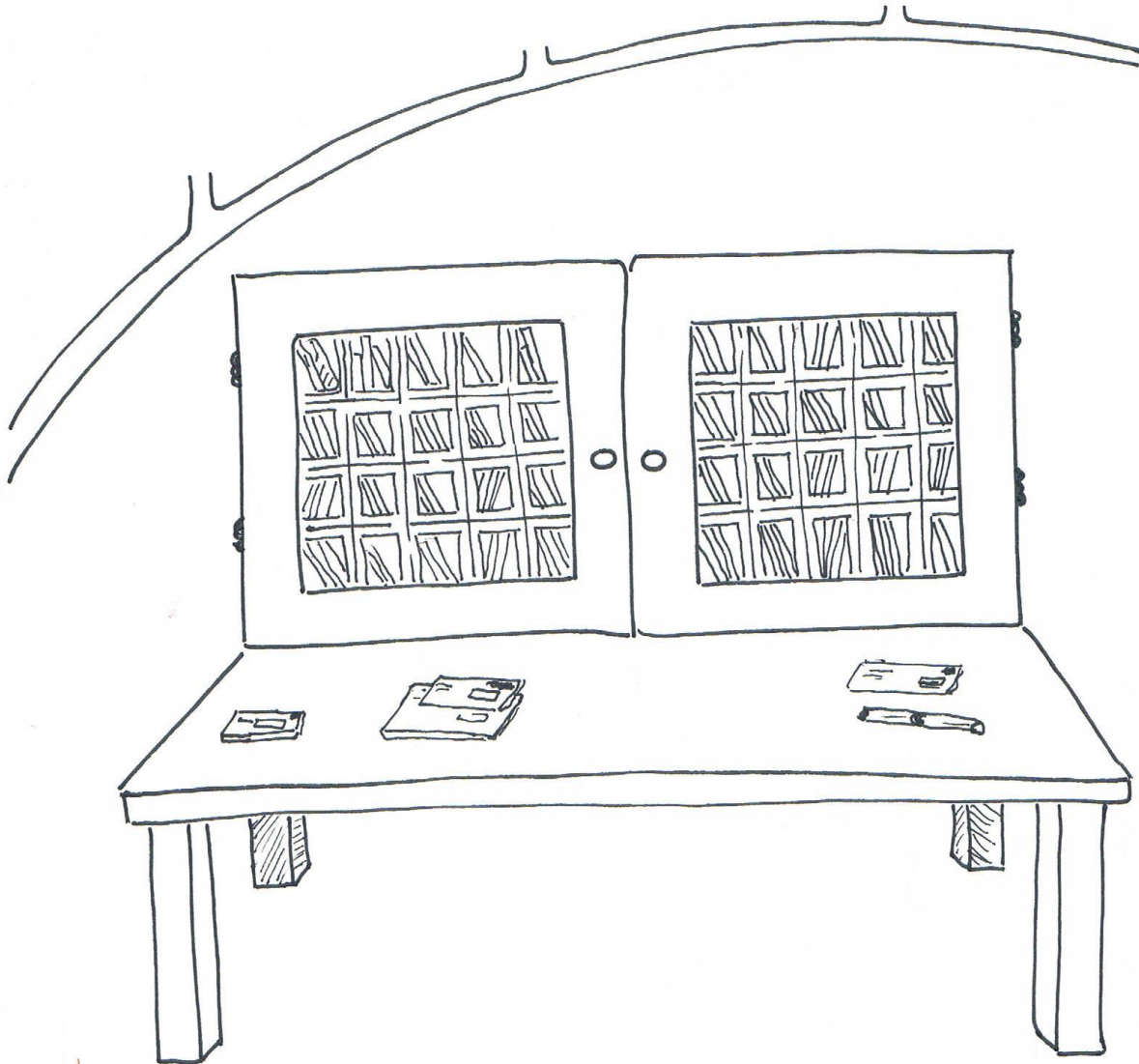
“Got it all planned out, dude. Twenty minutes of fast walking through campus and down Bloor will put us outside the Brunswick Tavern. Could be a lineup, but we’ll get inside for a very special event.” His friend’s voice took on a mysterious tone.

They got to the tavern well ahead of the crowd and encountered a lineup of perhaps five parties who were getting their hands stamped. Close to an hour of drinking watered-down draft beer from elegant glasses amidst a swirl of raucous rock music from the PA system left him feeling more than a bit dizzy-headed. He realized acutely that his beer drinking days were a tradition that he didn’t particularly want to sustain. An emcee came out to introduce the event of the evening, a wet T-shirt competition where twenty or more full-chested young women wearing white tops were to be soaked with pitchers of ice water.

“Fucking great, eh?!” Ian’s eyes danced as the assemblage of breasts and nipples became more and more visible with each repeated water soaking of their thin white T-shirt material.

“On one level, yeah. But on another level, dude, this is kind of disgusting.” Ian rolled his eyes at him, and he internally vowed he would have to vet entertainment options more thoroughly next time.

Meeting in the Mailroom



He was on his way over to dinner a few days later, and realized it was the annual gathering of Presbyterian vicars once again, which meant that dinner was going to be served picnic style in one of the musty classrooms under the College Library. He didn't particularly like to eat standing up, but it was a change in routine and that was often a very good thing. But before he went to eat he realized that he hadn't stopped to check his mail for a few days, and he was anticipating his Mom's weekly letter with news from the home front and bib and bobs of quaint sentimentalism that sustained him in unspoken ways.

The mail room at Knox was in a little alcove under the main stairs leading to the Dining Room. It was under a stone archway, and had an ancient wooden mailbox which contained alphabetic slots for all the

mail that came in for the College's residential students. There was a lock on the box's door, and everyone was issued a key, but no one ever used their key. A simple upwards tap on the bottom of the right door opened the box easily, and then you could pull out your alphabetic letter's contents and sort through the mail of the day for everyone whose last name started with the same letter that started your last name. He had four or five folks in his pigeon hole, and he had learned all kinds of things about them by riffling through their mail while looking for his own mail.

So as he went through the entrance foyer on the way to the mailbox, he could hear the earnest murmuring of a hundred or more practicing theologians, along with the clinking of their utensils on chinaware. He also heard a jaunty bit of whistling, bordering on sauciness, echoing through the foyer's stone-lined space. He looked up, but saw no one, so he stepped into the mail room alcove and popped the box and started to sort through a stack of mail.

"Christ, man, don't tell me it's old fuckers day again!" Dirk entered the alcove with his characteristic swagger.

"Man, how long did you live here? You should have figured out the drill by now!" He tried to inject a pleasant-enough tone in his voice, but he had never really cottoned on to this fellow.

"Just my luck! I thought I'd drop by for a quick hot meal as my grad residence up at St. George and Bloor doesn't have a meal plan. There's a kitchen, but I'm more of a can-opener cook! Gets old eating Chef Boyardee, so I was hoping for some roast chicken and mashed potatoes if I dropped by and talked someone into signing me in as a guest." The guy seemed a bit more human than usual.

"Well, egg salad sandwiches and peanut butter cookies are available over in one of the classrooms, but I doubt if they're worth the five bucks they will ding you for dinner!" He rolled his eyes with a hint of sympathy.

"Yeah, you're probably right. Although it might be worth it to see some of the old gang, or to see if any of the new waitresses are worth writing home about!" The tall young man leered a bit as he rolled this out.

"Lots of new folks in West House since you left for grad school. And the serving gals are older and less noteworthy, with the turnover of last year." He said this neutrally, but it still rankled him that Dirk had been squiring the merry widow and her cute younger sister a few years back.

"OK, so maybe I'll just check to see if I still get any mail flowing in here, then I'll take myself up to Harvey's for a few burgers." The older boy leaned in and pulled out a pile of mail from his alphabetic box.

"So how's grad school, anyways?" He was just making small talk, but it was something he was considering, yet knew precious little about the particulars of a masters degree.

"Oh, completely different from undergrad, man. Very few courses, but the material in them is as hard as hell. And you've got to be self-disciplined, to get started on your research and keep things humming along on that front. I want to start my own business when I get out, so it's good practice for being independent and calling your own shots. My supervisor looks over my shoulder from time to time, but

I'm generally on my own." The guy was actually having a normal conversation for once, which didn't escape the younger lad.

"And do you still have a long lineup of fillies standing outside your door?" He said this neutrally, but perhaps a bit too neutrally.

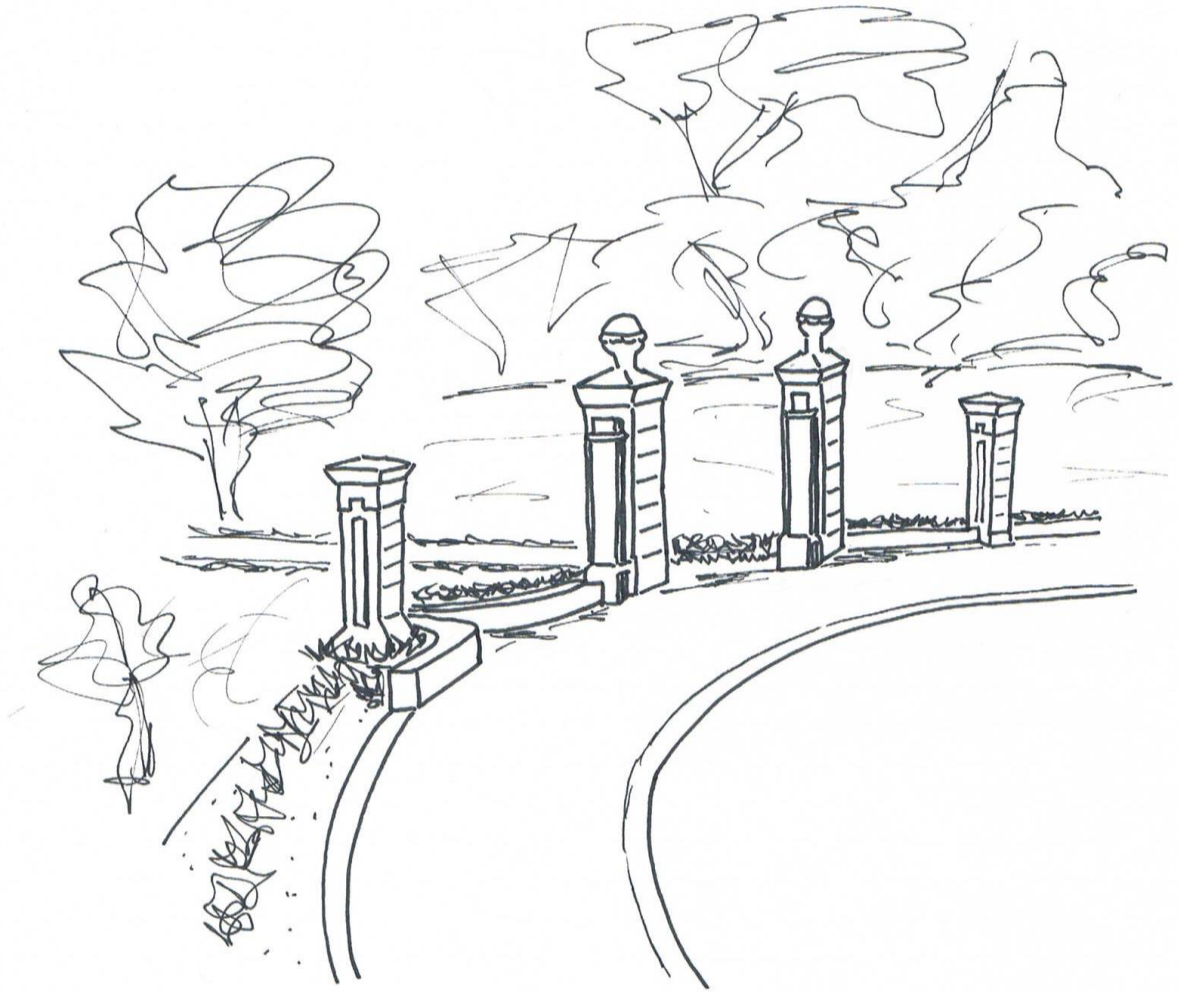
"Oh Christ, the gals in my department are all way too serious for my liking. All work and no play, or so it seems. But that's OK, as I've lucked out a bit and met somebody who was on the rebound. I wouldn't call her a girlfriend, but she's a friend with benefits, if you catch my drift!" The smooth chap chuckled while he flipped through a sheaf of envelopes.

"Grad student?" He knew he was asking too many questions.

"Nope, works in one of the offices here on campus. Exotic in her own way, and she's into crazy shit like Kama Sutra positions. And she's as randy as a rabbit, so she pops by at lunch hour at least three days a week. Probably the best thing that's happened to me in grad school, and I can focus on my work without worrying about keeping a girlfriend entertained!"

He went back to his own mail pile, making a mental note to look up what Kama Sutra meant.

Walking It Off



“C’mon, dude, it’s Saturday night! We’re university students, not flippin’ cave hermits! What’s a couple of hours going to do in the grand scheme of things?” Klaus leaned in to him while he sat at his desk, surrounded by piles of paper.

“It’s all pacing, man. I was out last night and got to this transportation project writeup later in the morning than I had hoped for. We have reams of streetcar observation data that we have to beat into some kind of coherent form, and then use this to make some recommendations for improving service on the Queen Street line. It’s tedious and heavy work, and it doesn’t just get done by itself, y’know?!” He grimaced ruefully and took his attention back to a sheet of field notes.

“C’mon, man, they’re actually running Raging Bull over at the MedSci Cinema. It’s hardly out of the theatres and we can watch it right here on campus for half the price that you’d pay over at the Carlton.” Klaus was always looking at life from a dollars and cents perspective.

“Then take the wife out for a few hours of blood and gore and she’ll hold on tight to you all night! Way better than me sitting beside you, stealing your popcorn.” He said this without looking up, using a red pencil to circle data outliers.

“Uh, she’s gone back to Shelburne for some kind of bridal shower for one of her high school friends, so I’m a *bona fide* bachelor for the weekend.” Klaus said this with a bit of an apologetic tone, as the emergence of a steady girlfriend over the last six months had made him largely unavailable for random social interactions with his West House buddies.

“Okay, so that explains the pressure to go out! You’re at loose ends, and you’re missing your squeeze. I get it, I get it. Okay, let’s go over and see what Scorsese has to say about life in New York back in the day. And Bobby DeNiro is a believable boxing champ, according to the reviews I have read. And who knows, you may have your own stag and doe soon enough and from that point on you won’t be available for anything on a weekend night. Just give me fifteen minutes to organize these numbers a bit so I can plunge right into some heavy swimming tomorrow morning.” He waved both of his hands above his desk, as if he had psychokinetic powers to move sheets of paper without the slightest touch.

Thirty minutes later they were outside the MedSci Auditorium, where a sizable queue had already formed.

“Crap, not again! We need to get into this movie! Klaus waved his hand excitedly.

“Relax. Stand at the back of the line and I’ll go in and buy the tickets. When I am back you will be somewhere in the middle of the line, and you’ll be singing praises on my logistical brilliance. Cough up your two bucks.” He held out his hand and wiggled his fingers.

Inside there was a fair line even to buy the tickets, snaking backwards and forwards several times. He realized he knew at least a couple of people lining up to buy their tickets, and would have the opportunity to say hello more than once as the line twisted and turned.

“Hey Stu, what’s up with you?” First up was the suave young Mr. Rickard, who was arm-in-arm with a drop-dead gorgeous strawberry blonde with a peaches-and-cream complexion.

“Hey Jay-Boy, I’m living the dream in law school. Allow me...meet Caroline, who’s a year ahead of me in the program.” A delicate hand was offered, and upon its shaking the young woman had the air of someone who would soon be soaping up under a blast of hot water from the washroom sinks.

A few more folks shuffled by, and then his squash partner lankily walked up with a tall young lady in tow. She looked Dutch to his eye, and pretty enough in an understated way. Her eyes burned bright as she shook hands in a firm but genuinely connecting way, and he quickly concluded that this young woman was perfect for his sincere classmate.

The line moved along, with awkward and pursed smiles to both of these couples on the second passing. He was soon at the ticket booth, buying paper tickets from a frazzled and perspiring young man wearing a *yarmulke*. He walked back outside and looked for Klaus in the predicted longer lineup.

“Right here, smartass, you were right. But most of these are couples, and no self-respecting guy is going to leave his girl by herself out in the line while he goes in to buy tickets.” Klaus grumped this out.

“But at least we’ll get in to see Raging Bull! And Klausy, maybe these folks will think we’re a couple, and that I left my little *fraulein* standing out in the wind while I went in for the transaction.” He said this in a primpy voice, as he knew how homophobic his buddy was.

The movie was a masterpiece, full of raw emotion and great acting. Lots of blood and perspiration, and a vivid capturing of life in New York in the 40s and 50s. He had always liked boxing as a sport, with all of the hype around Muhammad Ali while he was growing up, but this movie gave an unsparing glimpse of the brutality of the ring. It was not an easy movie to take in, and the majority of the audience looked spent as they left the theatre.

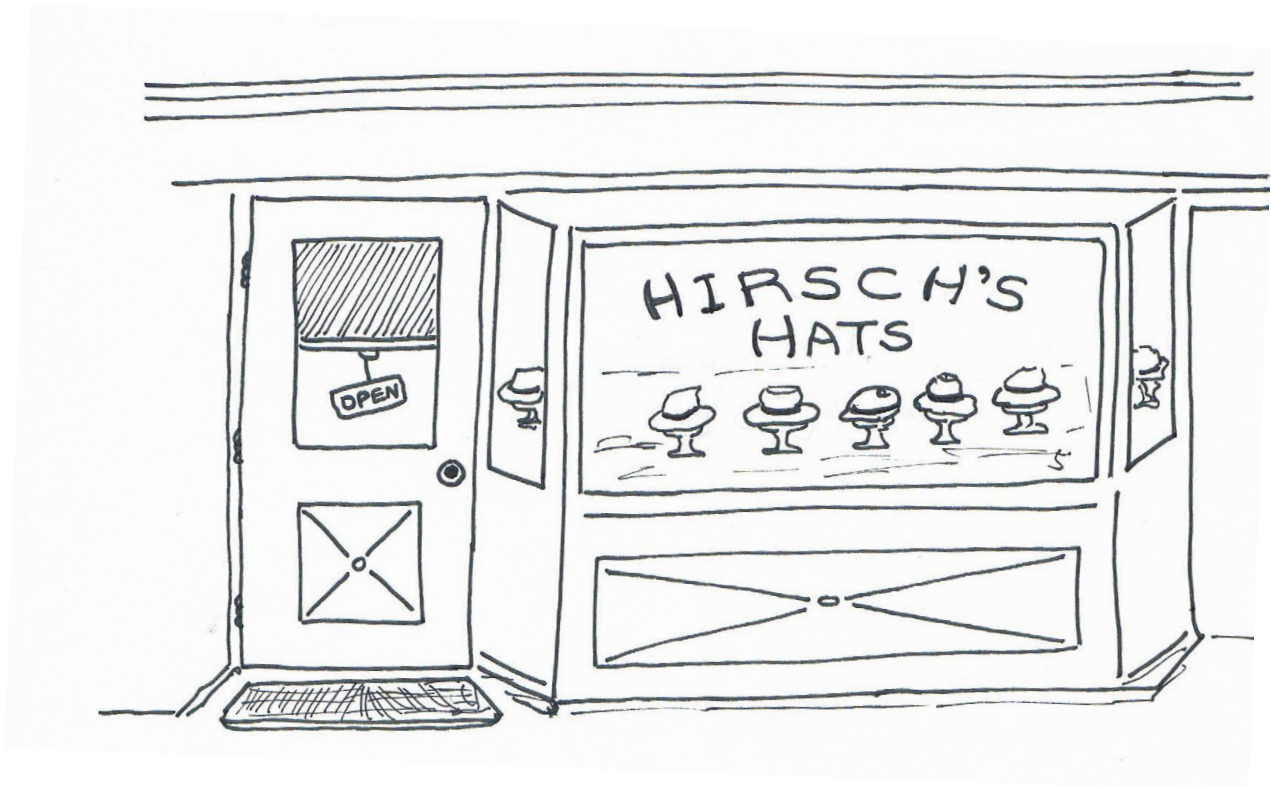
“My God, what a great movie! My heart was racing at sixty miles per hour throughout!” Klaus still had some beads of perspiration on his forehead.

“Agree on all counts, friend. I’m afraid I can’t go home and just go to bed after that experience.” He staggered a bit, as if he was punch drunk.

“Oh, say no more. A little stroll through the Hart House arch over towards Trinity, and then a slow sashay up and down Philosopher’s Walk will cool us down. Probably the best strolling path in the city, and a chance of some real lookers coming out of the Law School Library.”

They walked along for the next thirty minutes, taking in the greenery and subdued lighting of the campus, and feeling happy about not having to make a living as a middleweight prize fighter.

A Fedora for Fred



It was early on a Friday afternoon, his tutorial had finished early and he came out of the back door of Galbraith, directly facing the magnificence of Convocation Hall. Music from a distant source beckoned, and streams of people were walking up King's College Circle Road and across the Circle in the direction of Hart House. The day had turned absolutely brilliant, with bright sunshine and warming temperatures that belied the fact they were into November. Folks were walking along in a casual way, hands jammed into pant pockets, in groups of three, five or more. Like a lemming to the sea, he naturally gravitated to following along behind them, even though he had no idea where they were all going. But it was a fine day, so he poked along on his own, listening to the saucy music get just a wee bit louder with each step.

About halfway across the Circle he saw Jake from his class, cutting orthogonally across the northward flow of people, jerkily carrying his briefcase in the direction of Sig Sam Library. The guy had always been a little awkward, but he was super-kind at heart and a brilliant student to boot. Their common rural roots connected them in numerous ways, and he had always admired the chap's independent take on things.

"You're going against the grain here, want to join me and come along to wherever and whatever this mob is heading to?" He called this out just loud enough to make himself heard above the din.

"Hehheh, just heading to the library. Got some work to write up, then some studying of notes. Sorry." The fellow looked down shyly and pushed his glasses up on his nose.

"Can't knock the focus, man, that's my way of being, generally. But it's turned into such a fine day, and I'm kind of intrigued to find out where these folks are running off to. Sure you don't want to join me?" He said this in an affable tone, hoping for some meaningful company. "We could chat about material from our classes if that would help?"

The other young man put down his briefcase, and scratched his head nervously. "No, but thank you. I would love to sit and talk about challenging bits in the material, but not where these guys are going. You see, uh, how do I best put it? They are under the influence of the Devil, The Enemy. I choose not to participate in that, as a practicing Christian." The lad squinted a bit with his left eye, but looked at the other boy dead straight in his eyes.

"The Devil? I'm sorry, I don't understand. I'm not even sure where they're all headed to?" He felt nervous perspiration start to flow to his armpits.

"Don't you read the student newspaper? Lady Godiva rides at 3:00, near the Old Observatory. She will ride buck naked, as a fleshly temptation to all of these young men. The Enemy takes many forms, some of them alluring, to divert men from God. So that is why I'll be soon at a study table in Sig Sam, overlooking the Queen's Park Legislature. I'll bid you good day, and ask that you reconsider your participation in all of this." Jake waved his hands randomly, picked up his briefcase, and awkwardly steamed off towards the entrance doors of the library.

He stood there on the grass of King's College Circle, with people weaving past him and the band playing their music just a bit more intensely. A blur of memories came to him from the time he had been at a previous Lady Godiva event, standing near enough to the horse to admire its formidable musculature. It had been fun on some kind of sophomoric level, but he knew it was wrong on so many other levels. Paying a beautiful Toronto woman a hundred bucks to doff her clothes and mount a steed seemed

inocuous and humourous to the majority of the people in the crowd, but he wondered if Jake just might be right. Was this driven by some shadow side in all of the participants, and might it truly have negative impacts on the morals and psyche of all those involved?

The sunshine answered his question and he turned towards its source, away from the direction of Hart House. He started to jog, a little irregularly due to having to dodge groups of people as they advanced across the grass. He ran straight down to College, turned right, and kept running until he hit Spadina. He was out of breath but he felt great, as if he had stared down something deep inside himself. He felt light of heart and light of body. And to celebrate this feeling, he knew he had to do something significant to mark the event.

He turned south on Spadina, walking on the East side and looking into all the storefronts at the wide range of goods and service offered within. About three blocks down he came across a classic men's hat shop, featuring a number of tweedy numbers that were similar to what the doctors and lawyers in his hometown would wear with a winter dress coat. He was intrigued enough to pop inside, a jangly bell announcing his arrival to a grizzled Jewish man wearing old-fashioned spectacles on the end of his nose.

"Good afternoon, young man. *Shabhat Shalom*. Try on anything you like." The haberdasher gave him a smile that showed a few glints of silver.

One hat seemed to jump out at him immediately, a blueish tweed fedora with a dark blue band and a red feather tucked into the band. It was the kind of hat a man in his 50s would wear, but he thought it looked pretty good when he saw it on his head through a mottled old mirror.

"I'll take it." He tipped the brim of the fedora to the merchant.

"Twenty bucks. Tax in. It would be a bargain at twice the price!" The old man chuckled at his own joke.

He walked down Spadina towards Chinatown, wearing his new purchase. He knew he looked a bit ridiculous, but he held his head high and soaked in the rays of sunshine.

Rubber Chicken and a Cheque



“So what’s up for the weekend? Hunkering down with a bunch of work? Or early prep for the Christmas exams?” Henry said this through sustained slurps of chicken noodle soup. It was Saturday lunch time, and they were currently sitting as a duo at one end of the West House table.

“That’s an apt description for last evening and this morning, and for most of tomorrow if I don’t sleep in too late. But after I finish up this grub I’m going back to my room for some quick tidyups, and then wardrobe selection before I head out for the evening. Big event out near the airport.” He turned his attention back to his soup and saltine crackers.

“Uh, Jay, not to be nosy, but does this involve a girl?” Henry’s eyes danced just a bit.

“Oh, I wish! But no, I’m going to be trapped in a banquet room with a posse of middle-aged engineers. It’s a graduating class from back in the 50s, and they get together once a year and have dinner together.” He projected this in an off-hand way.

“And what are you? The after-dinner illusionist?” Henry cracked a wry smile.

“Well, if you really want to know, they give out a scholarship every year so I’m heading up there to pick up a cheque. And eat dinner with a bunch of working professionals. Who knows, it might even lead to some work opportunities down the road.” He shrugged his shoulders laconically.

“Hey, congrats, so you’re the scholarship winner? Nicely done, and money’s money. If you don’t mind me asking, how large a cheque?” Henry was in economics, after all.

“Five hundred clams. Not bad, two-thirds of a year’s tuition, and I’m paying my own freight to get through school. Funny story behind how it got awarded.” He popped the last of the saltine crackers in his mouth.

“Pray tell?” Henry smiled broadly at the waitress as she carried out his plate of steaming food.

“Well, I make it my business to read the scholarship descriptions in the Faculty calendar. A place like Toronto has a lot of alumni who have done well, and there are a lot of scholarships available. Fussy and very specific for some, and very broad for others. So I saw this one from this class in Civil Engineering for general academic proficiency, and I applied before the stated due date. Then about a month later, the Department Chair comes in to class, after the due date, and announces the scholarship. Mutters something under his breath about having only one applicant.” He paused for effect.

“But you made the deadline! That’s not fair play!” Henry waved his fork in the air.

“Exactly what I thought, sir. But I held my powder. A bunch of people got excited and said they would apply. But then a month later I got a letter stating that I was this year’s recipient. So further evidence there is a God...” He deadpanned this and tucked into his plate of food.

He ironed up a white dress shirt and a pair of grey dress pants to go with the navy blazer he had picked up at the GoodWill on Queen Street in early September. He still hadn’t mastered the tying of a necktie, but after three attempts he got a reasonable knot and length and was good to go.

He took himself through campus, heading in the direction of Bathurst. He had received a call late Thursday from one of the class alumni, informing that he would be picked up at 4:30 at the intersection of Sheppard and Bathurst near where the guy lived, and then they would drive together to the hotel located on the Airport Strip. He walked down Harbord and stopped in at the Harbord Bakery to pick up a Nanaimo bar as a bit of an early celebration and to have something to fortify himself on the long ride up Bathurst on the TTC.

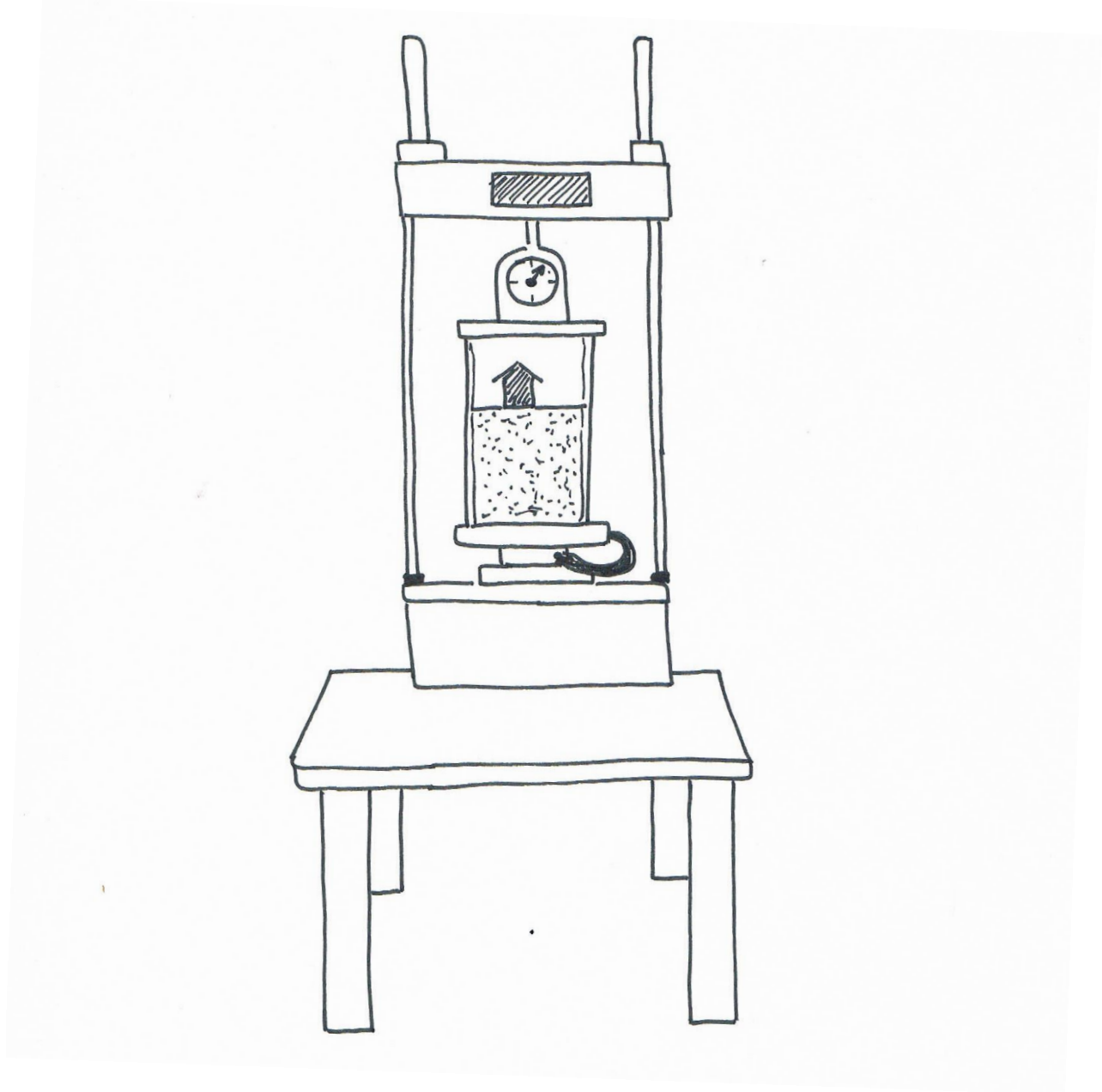
He stood out at the bus shelter near the assigned pickup corner, shivering a bit in the wind and wishing he had worn an overcoat. A late model sedan pulled up and the driver motioned for him to jump in.

“Jayson...Leonardo Manelli. It’s my great pleasure to meet you, and to be the first to congratulate you.” This was said with a twinkle of the eye and considerable warmth.

The next few hours were spent in the company of perhaps fifty working engineers, who all seemed to know each other well and who went out of their way to make him feel welcome. Slightly under-done chicken was the served dish, but the chocolate cheesecake more than made up for the main meal. He was presented with an envelope containing a cheque, and a certificate suitable for framing. The class president asked him to make some remarks, which he did in an initially nervous manner, but then he warmed to his task as the audience kindly laughed at his proffered humorous bits.

The evening wrapped up almost too quickly, and he looked down at his certificate to realize the class president had placed his hotel coffee cup down on it and there was a brown ring off-centre on the high rag content paper. It meant the certificate would never be framed, but he felt the coffee stamp was a fitting reminder of an event filled with warmth and inspiration.

Standing on Quicksand



He ambled out of the front doors of the Mechanical Building, with no real pace in his step as he had a full hour before his soils lab started in the basement of Galbraith. The day was promising, with moderate temperatures and abundant sunshine, so he decided to sit down on the benches outside the entrance and see what might transpire.

A few folks walked by from his class, nodding politely or giving him a broad grin. He saw Klaus coming along King's College Circle Road, with no books or briefcase in tow.

“Hey, lazy-bones, I hear that Engineering is all work and no play, and I come upon you and you’re sitting on a park bench in the sunshine! So are you doing field reconnaissance for that girlfriend prospecting thing?” Klaus diverted a bit and came up to him on the bench.

“And what are you doing, ambling along without a care in the world? And way outside your normal haunts of University College or Victoria College?” He motioned for his friend to sit.

“Got things to do, dude. Going over to the Royal Bank at Hydro Place, to tot up my shekels and see what new tellers they have projecting their beauty out to regular customers like me. But listen, if you hang out like this more often, no real agenda going on, Miss Right will happen along without you knowing it. Then it’s up to you to act. But sitting and waiting is the key, that’s how I came to cross paths with the girlfriend.” Klaus dispensed his sage advice, and then pattered along towards College Street.

He sat there in the sunshine, trying to enjoy the time to relax and not thinking about anything in particular. But Klaus’ advice rolled back into his mind like a wave, and he felt that maybe he should take it to heart. Sit and be open. Be open.

A pretty Indian gal walked out of the laneway to the Haultain Building, and turned north in his direction. He angled his body a bit on the bench to square up with the sidewalk, and kept a bead on her in case she looked his way. Just for an instant she looked towards him and he gave her a dazzling smile. Perhaps too dazzling, as she immediately looked down at her footwear and stepped quickly past his line of sight.

“Fancy meeting you here!” The voice was warm, flirtatious and welcoming. He had been looking at the retreating posterior of the young Indian woman, and it took him a second to refocus in front of the bench to see Sue, the petite nursing student from the first year scavenger hunt.

“Hey kid, don’t mind me, my head was in the clouds or somewhere else. How’s it going with you?” He jumped up a bit awkwardly and reached out to touch her on her upper arms. She came in for a firm and somewhat lingering embrace, which caused him to rock back on his heels a bit unsteadily.

“Wow, I need to bump into you a bit more often! Some sustained hugging practice could help you with your balance!” The girl’s dark eyes danced mischievously.

“Sign me up!” He held onto her right arm as she stepped back marginally. “Haven’t seen you in a dog’s age, and was wondering if you had graduated.”

“Convocated a while back, but now I’m in grad school. Want to be a nursing administrator so that extra credential will come in handy. But it’s not as much fun as undergrad. We have, like, no guys in any of our graduate courses.” The young lady scrunched her nose and brought her lower lip into a pout configuration.

“Sounds like the inverse of my situation. About a hundred guys and only six girls. What kind of a ratio is that? I suppose I should have gone into Nursing? But I can’t stand the smells in a hospital!” He grinned goofily.

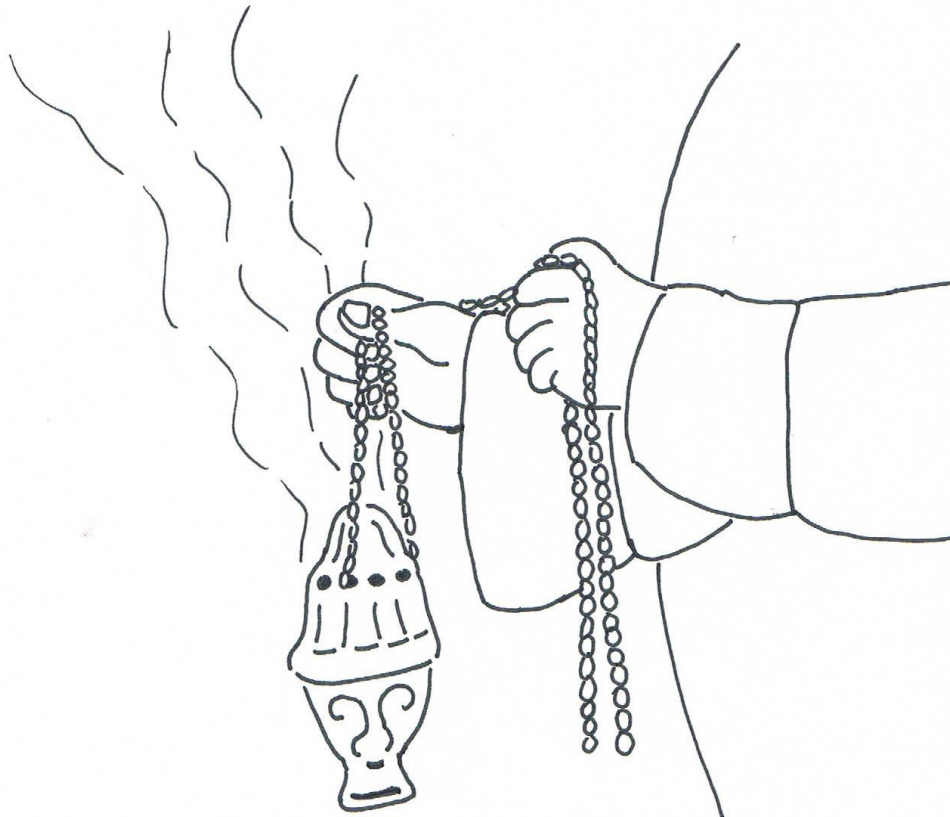
“Yeah, or maybe I should have studied Engineering? But I’m not that much in love with math. Oh well, everything’s perfect on a sunshiny day.” She smiled broadly and looked down at her watch. “Yikes, have to be in a seminar across campus. Remember now, be sure to call me...” The young lady pulled a wee

slip of paper from her bag, ostensibly containing her phone number. She leaned in for another hug, this time sideswiping him a bit with her copious chest, and then dashed away towards Lash Miller.

He stood there a bit dumbstruck, his mind swirling in a pleasant tizzy. Maybe Klaus was right, but was he pre-cogging the petite and amorous nurse or the shy and mysterious Indian gal with the interesting footwear?

Fifteen minutes later he was in the geotechnical laboratory, watching a demonstration where hydraulic pressure was increased to the point where the soil column had no bearing capacity, the so-called “quick” condition. Time and again this was simulated by the technician, with the experiment’s toy house sinking abruptly into the depths of the sand. He watched this with a high degree of fascination, inwardly contemplating if his romantic life was akin to walking unbalanced on a bed of quicksand.

A Swinging Thurible



As he had noted over the three plus years of university, weekend days were distinctly different than weekdays. The lack of hustle and bustle, even in the centre of a large city, signaled a quietening of mind and spirit that was much needed for students and non-students alike. And Saturdays had a different timbre than Sundays, in a number of indistinct ways. It may have been the many years of attending Lutheran services as a kid, or the on-again off-again consumption of Presbyterian services throughout the city. But on Sunday mornings he still felt the pull to be in some large space, with a decent number of people seeking some path led by a force higher than themselves.

But today was a Saturday, and Saturdays held out the hope that unstructured time and unfolding possibilities bring to the mind of a young person. He had no plans beyond a mid-morning squash game at Hart House with Ian, the kind medical student who had given him a ticket a while back to see the mysterious sarcophagus that housed King Tut. The guy was not so much athletic than enthusiastic, and bounded around the court with such zest that it made the match a really fun experience. Sometimes the other fellow crashed hard and clumsily into the court walls, and sometimes he hit shots with such ferocity that the point was won without debate or question. But the odd time he would swing at the ball and miss, with the racquet carrying through and nearly smacking his opponent hard in the back of the head. When this near-miss occurred a few times in a matter of minutes, he recalibrated geometries a bit and gave his med student opponent a bit more space to hit or miss his shot without accident or incident.

The match concluded with an even split of two games apiece, as the dreaded knock on the door came from the following players. An amicable walk home followed by a long, hot shower led to an unmemorable lunch of soup and sandwiches. He found himself back in his room by 1:30 with nothing on the agenda between now and his Monday morning classes. He poked around on his desk, looking into files and arranging some notes, and quickly came to the realization that nothing on the homework front was pressing and that he had no zest for diving into note review for his Fall exams. They were a full month or so away, and he had an inner knowing that studying now would be inefficient at best.

So he opened up his drapes a bit more, letting in as much afternoon light as possible, and cracked one of the leaded glass windows to let in some fresh air as well. He retreated back to his swivel study chair, and settled in for an unconstrained period of meditation. His mantra arose within his consciousness, and he repeated it over and over while he settled into his chair. He rolled the mantra like a marble in a Spring ditch, sideways and backwards, spinning and still. The mantra was like a key to a door, an interior portal that he desired to float through and experience the mental landscape contained within. He went through and downwards, floating like a particle within some kind of viscous fluid. As his body settled in and his mind stepped away from the day-to-day digestion and processing, he came to a place of deep quiet and stillness. And from this silence and stillness he could feel a deep sustenance, a recharging of internal spaces that he didn't know existed. In this space time stood still, but after an hour had passed on his clock radio he felt the pull that a diver senses when his tanks are perilously close to being depleted of oxygen. So he came up and out quickly, landing back into a mid-Saturday afternoon in a college residence in Canada's largest city. But for thirty seconds or so he looked around and wasn't entirely sure of where he was or who he was, if the truth be known. But a visual scanning of the files on his desk reminded him of his work, and a half-second later he amusedly re-determined who he was and what he had just been doing.

And within another thirty seconds he had a strong knowing of what he needed to do. As he had come out of his meditation he had felt a strong, pre-cognitive feeling that he needed to be in a church. Not tomorrow, which would be logical enough, but today. As he slowly thought this through, he questioned internally what churches would be running a service on a Saturday afternoon or evening. His eye fell on a copy of The Varsity on his desk, and he flipped open its pages to the announcements section. Some of these were secular in nature, but a sub-section contained info on churches in the campus community. Going down the list, he came to 'St. Thomas' Mass at 4:00 on Saturdays'.

Half an hour later he was walking up Huron Street behind Robarts Library. He had thrown on an un-ironed dress shirt and a brown twill jacket, no tie, and a pair of baggy dress trousers that had been left in

the West House Common Room by a moving-out resident. He hadn't ever been to an Anglican service before. His hometown church had been considered High Lutheran by church standards, but he knew an Anglican church would be even more formal. Some memory from his high school history class reminded him that they considered themselves a Catholic church. Not Roman Catholic, but still Catholic. He wasn't sure why, but this sent a wee wave of fear up his spine. But he strode on, finding the church about halfway up the long block on the right hand side.

He went through the doors and was immediately struck by how dark it was inside, and how different it smelled than any other church he had been in. Almost like a pool hall, or the basement where his pipe-smoking uncle would hang out in all day. He went in and found a pew at the back, narrowly avoiding tripping over an unfamiliar kneeling rail. The sanctuary was quite full, but dead quiet, with most people kneeling in silent prayer.

And then the organ started up, melodious and magnificent. His feelings of fear were replaced with a rush of adrenalin up his spine, flowing higher and higher with the music. And a bevy of priests came down the central aisle, bedecked in magnificent robes and one of them swinging an ornate thurible, wafting incense smoke upwards to an observant Higher Presence. As the entourage passed him, the incense smell became quite unbearable, and he realized he had solved the olfactory puzzle that had posed itself at the entrance doors.

Just Stand Firm



The swirl of conversation was a bit unsteady, and he twisted in his seat a bit in an attempt to ground himself and come back to his centre. Somebody off to the left guffawed loudly, and this was followed by a high-pitched twitter that went on a second or two beyond acceptable norms. He reached for his glass of ice water, sucking a considerable quaff of cool water through his teeth and puckered lips. This ingestion helped considerably, and he popped a brussels sprout from his plate directly into his mouth to buy a bit more time before he jumped back into the conversational scrum.

He was at an alumni lunch in the Great Hall of Hart House, organized on a regular basis to bring graduates back to the University as an additional touch in the development and fundraising processes within the Faculty of Applied Science. He couldn't help but compare this to the great evening he had spent out on the Airport Strip, where he had been the centre of attention. For today's event he had been a last-minute invitee, probably because someone had sent late-breaking regrets, and he was one of twenty or so current students mixed in with a hundred alumni from a wide range of engineering disciplines.

These sorts of events often hinge on table pairings, and he had been regrettably placed in the midst of a pod of over-confident and non-engaging chemical engineers. They seemed to somewhat know each other, even though the age spread was considerable, and prattled on about their cars and their cottages in the Muskokas and cost of private school tuition for their kids. He nodded along to most of it, a frozen half-smile being replaced by a mask of disaffection while he looked around the hall and admired the heraldic crests on its perimeter.

Some of the serving staff were cute enough behind their hair nets and bulky uniforms, and he went out of his way to thank them for the delivered plates of steaming food and hot cups of tea. He was always fascinated by young people in their late teens or early twenties who were doing menial jobs. Might these girls be doing an undergraduate degree in literature or economics, and doing this servile work to pay their tuition? Something about their disposition and confidence level suggested to him that this wasn't so, that they had perhaps finished high school and were happy enough to get a job at the University in the food services division. But would this be it for the next forty years, a few of them perhaps rising to manage the next wave of young servers? It was akin to some of the young girls he remembered from the poultry eviscerating plant back home. They were a bit rougher and had perhaps not even finished high school. But would that be the next forty years for them, cutting chicken necks or packing chicken livers and gizzards back into the cavities of the poultry going by on the assembly line? Maybe they would meet someone at work, who they would marry and have children with. He sat there and mulled over these possibilities, while the conversation of the entitled upper middle class engineers floated past him to the wooden rafters of the magnificent meeting space.

He felt someone's eyes on him, and he looked across and down the table to his left and saw Marcy, the young lady from his class sitting three spots away from him. She had cleaned up nicely for the event, wearing a lovely red dress and even sporting some eye makeup and cherry-red lipstick.

"Oh, yoo-hoo, Jayson! I think we're the only Civils at this luncheon. Nice to see you!" She smiled broadly and batted her eyelids in his direction.

"Hey, Marcy. Yep, maybe so. Gives me a portal into what chemical engineers do, I guess." He waved his hands left and right, and shrugged his shoulders apologetically.

"We're getting close to wrapping up, I suppose. Might lose you in the exiting crowd, so let me ask you if you have any plans for the evening?" She smiled even more invitingly, and brought a high-end blue silk shawl up and around her shoulders.

"Um, not quite sure of my schedule, but I think I'm busy..." He drifted off unconvincingly.

“Oh, that sounds like something that could be rearranged! A few of us are going to the UC Pub and it would be absolutely great if you could come along?” She leaned in his direction and extended a well-manicured hand along the white tablecloth.

“Very kind of you, but I just remembered my girlfriend has tickets for the...uh, opera this evening.” He started to feel colour rise in his cheeks.

“Opera, I thought the company was out of town this week.” The young woman furrowed her brow.

“Nope, uh, don’t think so. Tosca, I believe.” His mind raced back to something he had read in the weekend paper.

He caught Henry coming down the main steps of University College, as he walked back home from the alumni event.

“Jay, why are your cheeks so red?” Henry squinted his eyes in his direction.

“Because I just lied through my teeth to some gal in my class, who wanted me to go with her to the UC Pub tonight.” His face took on a baleful cast.

“Guy with no girlfriend gets asked out somewhere, and he says no. Hmmm, what’s wrong with this picture?” Henry smacked his lips professorially.

“Because there is no chemistry with this girl, and I don’t want to waste our collective time.” He said this bluntly.

“No chemistry, no interest. Makes perfect sense to me. Better to stay home and study, so you’ll have your exam prep done when you meet Miss Right. But be confident in your decision, and lose the lobster colour from your cheeks!” Henry slapped him on his back.

He took off his jacket to air his shirt, and slung it over his shoulder while they walked back to the College in silence.

If Music Be the Food of Love, Play On



Time seemed to play itself out in very different ways in this last year of his degree. Some afternoons, ensconced in a tedious lab or tutorial, time seemed to tick by painfully slowly. Other times, an entire week seemed to flash by in an action-packed manner, with more events and experiences squeezed into it than seemed humanly possible. He had stopped analyzing these time non-linearities, and was trying his best just to enjoy the flow as he knew this much fun wouldn't last forever.

His year as Secretary of the Engineering Society Executive had been largely uneventful, but it had allowed him to parlay the experience into enough support for him to get elected as Fourth Year Chairman. This sounded a little more grand than it really was, but in essence he was in charge of planning and logistics for the Kipling iron ring ceremony and for the Grad Ball. The latter event had a lot more required elements to sort out, and he had been working on and off on these for the past six months. One of these was the finding and selection of a suitable band for the after-dinner dancing component of the ball, and he and his committee had narrowed the choices down to three Toronto bands that played a range of popular tunes in an entertaining way. All three of these had to be auditioned, which meant a field trip out to a lounge or a club to see the group in action. Tonight was one of those club dates, and he had finagled Ian to come downtown and join him for drinks at the Downtown Holiday Inn while they took in a set or two of music.

He waited in the West House Common Room for Ian to show up, but it appeared there might be a delay on the TTC as he was already fifteen minutes past the appointed time. He dashed up to his room to pen a note that could be pinned onto the Common Room door, informing his buddy that he would be waiting downstairs in the College's TV Room.

The black and white set flickered a bluish glow on the undecorated walls, and Ted the West House Don sat slouched on the chesterfield watching an old John Wayne movie.

"Hey Ted, what's going on? Another exciting Saturday night with you and Elwy Yost?" The host of Saturday Night at the Movies on TV Ontario was practically a household name.

"Just trying to entertain myself these days on a low or no-cost basis. And these old movies are great, with archetypal characters and pretty good acting." Ted said this unconvincingly.

"Sounds boring, man. You can watch TV on a Saturday night when you're married and middle-aged, dude! Come out with me and my buddy—we're going to listen to some music!" He said this as enthusiastically as possible.

"Oh, I don't know. I've pretty much given up drinking, doesn't really fit with the theology job description!" Ted pursed his lips.

"They serve ginger ale in these joints. C'mon man, with some good music playing, there's always some nice women around, shaking their booties to the rhythms of the band!" He swayed his hips, in an exaggerated fashion, knowing full well how ridiculous he looked.

"Um, nope, have to stay away from that temptation more than the drinking thing. Have been a bit of a bad boy over the last year, and my Prairie gal has laid down the law and I have to stay away from any situation that might even mildly upset her. We're starting to talk about getting engaged, so y'know, it's serious." Ted was sounding less than excited about his pending commitment.

"Listen, she's out there in Moose Jaw and you're here in Toronto. Come listen to some tunes, have a sasarilla, and maybe sneak in a dance or two with someone lithe and leggy! Disco fever! I'm not going to rat on you, and who would be the wiser?" He was having fun tempting the older theological student, for a number of reasons. But Ian's sudden arrival broke the train of the conversation, and Ted stayed rooted resolutely to the sofa.

Thirty minutes later after a brisk walk through the hospital district, the two young men found themselves in a short lineup for the Holiday Inn's penthouse lounge. People seemed to be dressed up beyond the norm, with the men in velvety leisure suits and the women in slinky evening gowns and high heeled pumps.

"Cripes, dude, why haven't we done this before? It feels like we're light years away from the university. The chicks here are smoking!" Ian's eyes roved down the lineup and into the club, where the band was just about to get underway.

"Good evening ladies and gentlemen, we are Sound Style and are your entertainment for the evening. Give it up for the beguiling Sandra, who will kick us off with a sultry little Linda Ronstadt number!" A

beefy guy with a manicured beard leaned over a keyboard and extended his arm towards a willowy strawberry-blonde singer, dressed alluringly in a skintight black body leotard.

The music started up and the *chanteuse* quickly showed her singing was as strong as her visual charms. The band had a great sound, and an equally strong on-stage chemistry. Given the comparisons to the previous two bands that he had auditioned, this was the clear winner.

The music picked up in tempo and the dance floor filled immediately with a sequence of songs drawing from the playlists of The BeeGees and Kool and the Gang. Ian and he were certainly enjoying the sights of twenty or more nice-looking women up dancing with their male partners or in pods of lady dancers. Through the melee he thought he saw Kira, dressed in a low-cut peach-coloured dress, dancing with a few of her high school classmates. He looked again, just to make sure, and then pretended not to notice.

“Hey flash, there’s that cute little number who you seem to have a thing for! Don’t mind if I do, but I’m going to move on in and see how well those girls dance! Join me if you dare!” And with that, Ian floated through the crowd and injected himself into the group of dancers that included the buxom Kira.

He stood immobilized, but after a few war whoops from Ian and some encouraging hand signals from Kira, he soon found himself in a frenzied swirl of undulating dance energy, desperately hoping that the band’s song might just last forever.

Dull Skates and No Zamboni



He had only drank one beer, but the three hours of frenzied dancing and associate hormone-infused hijinks on the dance floor had completely tired him out. The young women had tippy-tipped out the door to a waiting taxi just past midnight, and he and Ian had reluctantly pulled on their ski jackets over their sweaty dress shirts and headed up University Avenue to the Queen's Park subway stairs. Waving Ian off to one of the last subways running up to the Bloor line with a transfer to the last Red Rocket bound for Etobicoke, he slowly picked his steps along an isolated College Street and St. George Street back to a largely slumbering residence.

He pulled off his still-sticky shirt and got into a pair of cotton fleece pajamas, and went across the hall for a brisk face wash and a thorough brushing of his teeth. He came back and dove into bed, fluffing the sheets and the orange industrial-grade blanket high over his body and letting it all settle down over his body. In an instant he was asleep, and started his foray into a frenetic dream landscape. He hadn't hydrated enough, for all the exertion of the evening, and he found himself in a desert landscape being grilled by a parching sun high in the sky. Ahead of him on the desert trail was Sandra, the *ingénue* singer from the hotel band. Instead of a black bodysuit she was wrapped in a series of whirling and diaphanous silks, that would flap in the desert wind and give him fleeting glimpses of her toned and bare buttocks. This was tantalizing enough for him to try to get closer for more than a distant glimpse of her considerable charms, but every time he tried to pick up the tempo he seemed to fall a step or two even

further behind. After this continued for a number of attempts, the dreamscape sun seemed to burn even hotter and he stopped to mop his brow with the back of his hand. He rolled over in his residence bed and fluffed the sheets to allow some cooler air to penetrate his damp cotton pyjama top, and he willed himself back to the evolving dream dimension.

Up ahead he saw the beguiling singer stop outside a tented structure set up near an oasis, and she mysteriously stepped under a folded canvas flap into a dark and murky interior. His legs seemed stronger, and he sprinted over the hot sand to the tent's entrance, feeling the coolness of the air from the oasis' trees. He peeked inside and saw Sandra dancing in a whirling dervish fashion, surrounded on all sides by a *coterie* of young women in harem costume. He thought he saw someone resembling a frowning Kira, who evolved over several rotations into a smiling Sue, and then back again to the more disagreeable Kira. Ian appeared from a dark corner of the tent complex, dressed as a sultan with an elaborate headdress. He whirled and twirled with the women, reaching in from time to time to pull a silky scarf from one of the dancers. Ian wrapped these around his neck one at a time, until he had a huge mass of silk flowing down and around his chest and the harem dancers were down to necklaces, bracelets and sandals. The observer leaned in to the tent's interior, eyes bulging with the visual overload. Ian beckoned over to him, encouraging him to join the circle of winsome dancing partners. When he started to move towards him, they all vanished in an instant, blowing away with the desert winds that gusted through the tent entrance.

He woke to intermittent birdsong and an achingly full bladder. Stumbling back from the water closet, he slid under the sheets and blanket again for a quiet dreamless sleep of another ninety minutes. Upon this second waking, he realized he felt a bit wrung out, from the night's dancing and the exertions of the dreamscape. He also realized with a bit of shock that he had slept to almost noon, so instead of showering and going up to breakfast he landed in the Dining Room well-scrubbed and ready for lunch.

Coming back from ingesting a bowl of tomato soup and a plate of beef liver and onions with blanched cabbage on the side, he realized he still didn't quite feel himself. He looked around his room and marveled at its simplicity and its elemental beauty. The hardwood floor, the dark paneling of the window frames and wainscoting, the leaded glass windows and the lovely geometries of the bay window. He had grown to love this space, and he simply sat there in appreciative silence. Not quite a meditation, but close enough.

He came out of that reverie with a knowing that it would be unproductive to attempt work for the remainder of the day. What he needed was fresh air and some exercise, and a strong notion had popped in to his head just as he was resurfacing. He needed to skate, to glide across an ice surface in the company of others. He had heard that outdoor skating had started recently down at Nathan Phillips Square, and that skate rentals were also available. He had loved to go skating as a kid at the local rink on a Friday night or at after-school hours on certain days. Hockey had not been an option due to his protective Mom irrationally fearing the loss of another son from some kind of concussion or hockey violence. But skating was deemed acceptable, and even though he could only cross over to the left, his counter-clockwise movements had more than satisfied him as a Canadian ice-connected kid.

So an hour later he was gliding along on his rented skates with a few score of people to peppy music in the muted sunshine of a November afternoon. He saw Dirk through the crowd, skating awkwardly with his secretary paramour. Dirk looked like he could handle himself well on skates, but not so for his better

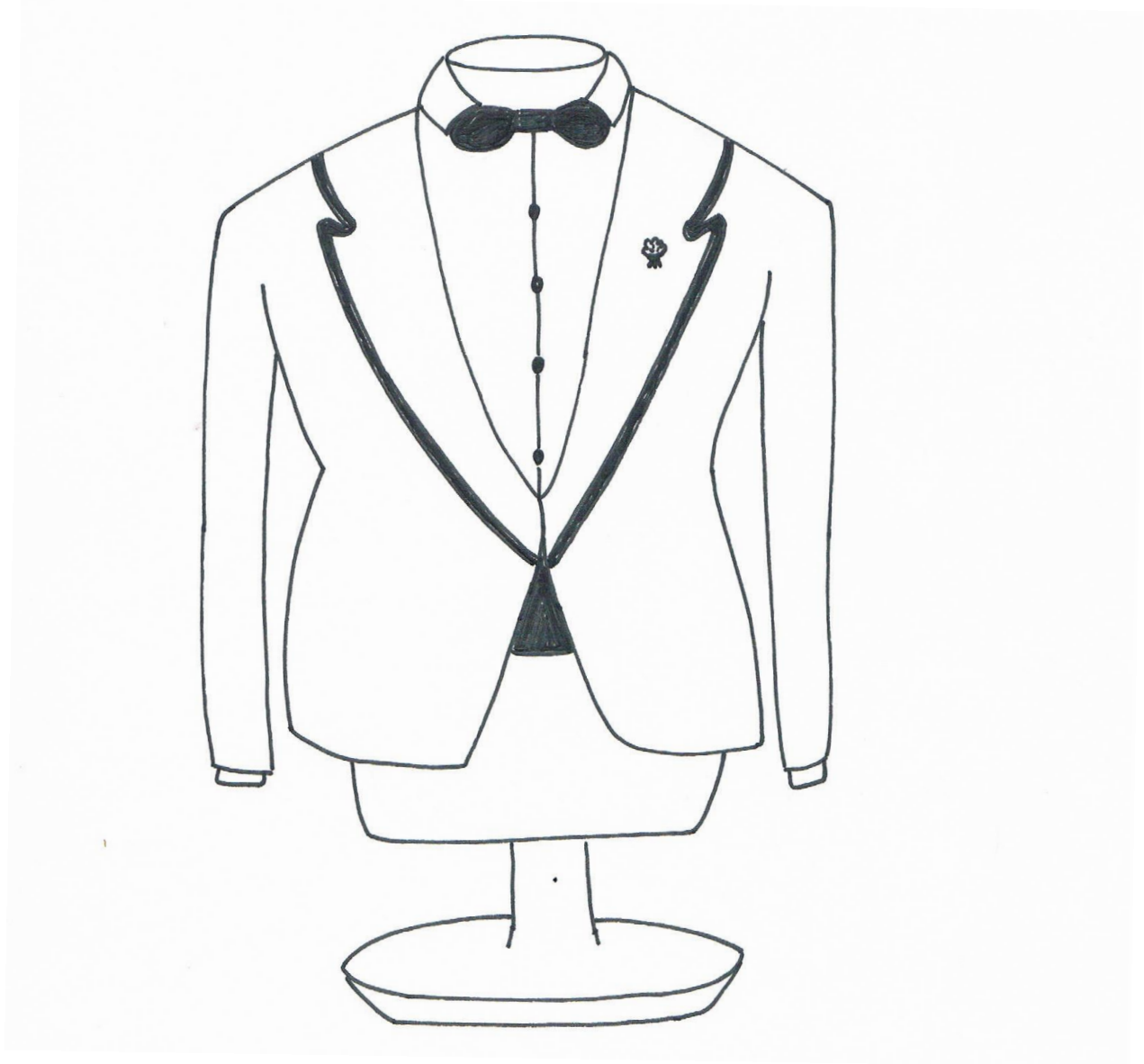
half. The couple looked cute and almost domestic, and he chuckled to himself as he wove in and around them without being noticed.

“Nice to see you auditioning for Stars on Ice, big guy!” He sidled up beside Dirk after a few more rotations had been completed.

“Yeah, well, we’re giving it our best shot...” Dirk looked over at him nervously. His sometime girlfriend glanced up from looking at her skates and wobbled precipitously, just before jamming the saw-tooth toe of her skate into one of Dirk’s blades, taking them both down in a jumbled pile of thrashing legs and ice foam.

He skated away guiltily, wishing he had never stopped to say hello. He looked back to assess the damage, and then promptly piled into the back of a slowing male skater, prompting them both to crash down unceremoniously.

Tux or Tails?



About mid-week he realized he needed to knock off a few more items of his Grad Ball to-do list before the Christmas exams, or else everything would log-jam into a flurry of tasks in January and February. There was one relatively straightforward thing to do, and that was go down to one of the mom-and-pop tuxedo stores on College Street and negotiate a standard price for any graduating engineer who wanted to show up to the Ball in formal wear. He himself had never worn a tuxedo, and would probably wear one of his second-hand suits and a good tie if it was up to him, but the Eng Soc Executive had met and decided they would all set an example and don formal wear for the special evening.

He had a few hours before dinner on a Wednesday mid-afternoon, and popped down to see if Klaus was in and willing to tag along as he might be useful on the price negotiations. As luck would have it, Klaus was sitting in his easy chair with his feet up, reading the Globe and Mail from the Common Room.

“Say, big fellow, want to give me company while I go try on a tuxedo?” He stuck his head around the door frame of Klaus’ room.

“Uh, let me check the time...” Klaus rolled up his left sleeve and consulted his wrist watch. “The wife’s in a lab until 5:30, and we’re getting together to make burritos at her place for dinner. So yeah, if we can be back here in around two hours, this should be good for a laugh!” Klaus rocketed out of his chair and pulled his leather aviator jacket off its hook.

The two young men walked briskly down College Street, westward towards Bathurst. The day had warmed considerably, and there was still plenty of sunlight streaming down the sidewalk as they proceeded towards the formal wear haberdasher.

“Man, I’ve never slid into a tuxedo, but I guess that will happen soon enough after I pop the question.” The blond-haired chap said this matter-of-factly.

“Oh, me neither. My old man was a truck driver and then a security guard at a chicken plant, so not much call for satiny lapels or cummerbunds in those jobs. And I don’t have the first clue on how to tie a bow tie, so this year is going to have a lot of firsts!” He chuckled sardonically and loosened his jacket a smidge.

“Oh man, a Grad Ball at a downtown hotel! The gentlemen in their tuxes and the ladies in their low-cut evening gowns---sounds sexier than hell! I hope you rent a room and sneak up before the dancing begins to get in a bit of horizontal mambo, if you know what I mean?!” Klaus snickered rudely and leered at a cute gal scurrying past.

“Well, who knows? One can always dream! But I’ll have to find a date well ahead of time if that’s going to happen! But your suggestion reminds me of something I saw back in the early Fall that I had pretty well forgotten about until now...” His voice drifted off as he squinted away in to the distance.

“Pray tell, I think this could be juicy!” Klaus wiped his chin.

“Well, maybe, but only if you fill in the punch line with a mind like yours! OK, so I was over at Hart House, studying in one of the reading rooms on the first floor. There was some kind of formal event going on in the Great Hall, and you could hear band music drifting down the hallways. So I look up and see what I think is a gal from my class. Hair swept up, fancy gown, heels and pearls. But I’m not so sure it’s her, as I only saw her in profile, and she’s all dolled up with makeup. Some guy in a tux is on her heels, an older guy, just half a step behind the gal.” He paused to check the street numbers for the tuxedo shop location.

“Oh, man, go on!” Klaus pleaded dramatically.

“OK, so this caught my attention for sure. We call her The Pout, and she is a fine looking young woman at the worst of times. But in ravishing evening finery, being chased down a hallway by some middle-aged stud, wow! And then to make matters even more interesting, Becca, one of the secretaries in the Metro Library Building, steams past with stilettos clicking and equally all dolled up. No one chasing her, no sir, as she already has her mid-life crisis chap on her arm and walking alongside her like a compliant puppy dog.” He mugged a bit for Klaus.

“Yeah, yeah, I can see where this is all going.” Klaus fairly cackled.

“So I jumped away from my sofa and dashed out to the hallway, but no one was in sight! I could hear heels on granite as they mounted the stairs to the second floor, so I sprinted to the stairwell and then went up stealthily on tippy-toe. At the top stair I paused and peeked one eye around a stone column, and saw the four partygoers turn and enter the Music Room. I went down the hallway quietly, prepared to quickly reverse course if I heard any of them pop out into the hall. I got to the Music Room door and listened attentively, and then could suddenly hear ‘Smoke on the Water’. I was a bit naughty and slowly turned the door handle, but the door was locked!” He huffed this out emphatically.

“Holy Jehosaphat, a blowjob with your tux trousers down around your ankles, while listening to Deep Purple. I could die a happy man after that!” Klaus closed his eyes and swung his head from side to side.

After that recounting, the trying-on of tuxedo pants and a jacket with tails seemed like an anti-climax. The aged proprietor gave him a quick lesson on bow-tie tying, and he was soon standing in front of a full-length mirror, with Klaus grinning off to one side.

“You look good, dude. That outfit will be a chick magnet!” Klaus reached over to flick off a piece of lint off of his right shoulder.

“The fabric’s a little thin, almost threadbare.” He said this uneasily, checking to see if the owner was still on the phone.

“Yeah, but c’mon, twenty for a tux or thirty for tails is roughly half what you will pay in the fancy formal shops. It’s only for one night, and you’ll hopefully be out of the tux soon enough for some after-dinner nookie.” This was whispered tersely.

“So young man, do we have a deal? You send me your fellow engineers and they get my lowest bulk rate. And your tails will be free of charge.” This last piece of information sealed the formalities.

On Grenadier Pond



It was a blindingly beautiful day. Bright sunshine, a light breeze and an energy to the air that seemed more like early September than mid-November. He had grown up north of the snow belt, where his Dad and other veterans often marched on Remembrance Day in a few inches of early snow. So a day like this was a gift, and as he started to sit down at his desk to do some work on a Saturday morning, he realized that it was a gift that needed to be fully unwrapped or significant regret would be felt a few weeks down the road when the Winter winds would inevitably howl.

He had seen a poster for the Hart House Orienteering Club, which was organizing a beginner's orientation day out in the leafy zones of High Park. He had never gone out to this major greenspace in the west end of the city in all his four years at the university, and this looked like an ideal opportunity to do so. Bus transport was being provided free of charge by the club, in an attempt to attract more campus members to their activities. He figured he could get a free lift out to the park, wander around the sylvan paradise ostensibly doing some orienteering, and then figure out the best way to get home if he decided not to stick around to the bitter end of the organized activity.

The massing point was at the Hart House Tower, right beside the entrance to the UC Pub. When he walked down the east side of University College he could see a standard-issue yellow school bus waiting by the Tower's arch, and twenty or so lithe jock types milling about outside the bus.

He felt the slightest pang of shyness, and quickly wondered if this had been the best idea for whiling away a beautiful sunny November day. So he deked up the stone stairs on UC's east side, opening up a heavy wooden entrance door and entering a quiet and slightly musty corridor. This building had always been impressive, both inside and out. Even the little interior details such as antique fire code signs and the marble trim around the wide door frames intrigued him, and he slowly soaked it all in as he walked down the subdued space. By the time he got to the stairwell dropping down to the pub he realized he had been thinking like he did back in first year. Of course he would go out to High Park, and open up to any thing or experience that might even be mildly interesting.

He popped outside and fell in behind a queue of five or so people who were the last to board. He nodded amicably to the portly bus driver, and decided to sit near the back as he had always done for high school basketball road trips. He smiled in a tight-lipped way to a few folks who seemed to largely know one another, and swung his frame into the second last seat, behind two gals who looked like they would have been tomboys growing up.

"OK, sports fans, I'll be giving you the lay of the land for today's proceedings during the half hour or so of driving time. Jake's my name, orienteering is my game." A tall, rangy kid with round-rimmed specs grinned out to the bus patrons, and zipped up an Adidas vest a little tighter to his prominent Adam's apple.

"Everybody gets a map, with a list of stations that you need to visit. Each station has been set up by the advance team, with a three digit numeric code that you write down when you find it. Figure out the best sequence and route to obtain all of the code numbers, and then head back to the starting point. A fully correct list and your clocked course completion time determines your place in the field. We have prizes for the top three finishers. Count on a minimum of two hours of effort. And there is some strategy to this nonsense, as the fastest runner is not always the overall winner." A good-natured murmur went throughout the crowd.

The bus rolled through the stone gates of High Park and chug-chugged up to one of the hillside parking lots. The participants got out and stretched, and Mr. Adidas handed out black and white maps that contained a lot of detail. "Sixty seconds to the horn, and we'll then be off!"

He took the map that had been handed to him, and stood with a few stragglers that were obvious novices and were getting their coordinates squared up before heading out. Within another minute, he was the last person standing in the empty parking lot.

"Going to guess the numbers and hope for the best?" The bus driver reminded him of someone from his hometown, and flashed a broad smile while he lit a cigarette.

"Yeah, heheh, they're all out there! Just have to dial them up in my mind's eye!" He waved affably and jogged over a crest of a hill, making at least a modest pretense of participating.

What he immediately saw took his breath away. Grenadier Pond was a large waterbody, silver-blue in colour, beautifully reflecting a thousand or more of the sun's rays. It was notably naturalized at its edges, home to beaver and fox and all manner of birds. He slowed down and took it all in for a moment, and then followed a narrow trail to the top of a ridge for a beautiful view of Grenadier Pond as it widened a bit as it opened up to its approach to Lake Ontario.

He would spend the next two hours not dashing about for numeric codes, but taking in the energy of this amazing natural feature. And when he rose, he headed north, away from the parking lot in the direction of Bloor Street. He paused for a moment at the top of the subway station steps, and then headed east on Bloor, walking briskly. He would spend his diverted subway fare on a pastry or two from one of the Asian bakeries ensconced within an emerging Korea Town, and happily window-shop his way back to the University. No prize for orienteering was garnered that day, but he saw a lot of Toronto he had not yet seen, and got some exercise in the bargain.

Don't Let School Get In the Way of Your Education



Life is a series of interconnected circles. Each evening you go to bed, get up, and then go about your day with the inherent knowing that you will find your way back to slumber later that next evening. Years have their circular rhythms, with traditions and pattern being experienced again and again over an annualized schedule. And in between these on the time continuum, weeks have their own cyclical rhythms, particularly for a university student. Monday mornings see you in the same class, directly after weekend habitual patterns, directly after end-of-the-week wrapups.

So they entered the start of another week, this one close enough to the end of the Fall semester that you could start to anticipate the jarring interjection of the Christmas exams and the associated strains of preparing for these scholastic rituals. But the weather had been more favourable than that for the average

November, so even with the gradual loss of daylight the spirits of the university community remained buoyant.

The transportation planning course had a Monday afternoon tutorial, and this particular Monday they had a guest speaker coming in from the TTC offices up on Davisville Avenue. Everyone had shuffled in to the drafting classroom up on the fourth floor of Galbraith and had got settled into their seats when the TA for the course rushed into the room in a puffy-chested way.

“People, we have a wee problem. The deputy commissioner has just called in to the departmental office to say he has been waylaid by an urgent call from the Mayor’s office.” A substantial amount of muttering ensued, as many students were anticipating that the development may lead to an early afternoon home.

“Ah, quiet please....keep your powder dry! Our guest speaker is on his way now, and we’ll start in a projected forty-five minutes or so. You can sit here and do some work, chat, or go get a coffee. But just make sure your bums are back here in your seats in three quarters of an hour! Professor Hurdle will be introducing the deputy commissioner and he wants a full house in attendance.” The TA waggled his finger at the crowd and ambled out the door.

“Well, ain’t that a turd! The fucker will start late, prattle on, and we’ll finish up just in time for me to be a sardine on one of the very nice subway trains that His Majesty will be speaking about!” Ian rolled his eyes and leaned forward over his drafting desk, splaying out his arms and letting out a low groan.

“Your Mom will have a three course meal waiting for you on your arrival, dude. You have nothing to complain about!” He stated this matter-of-factly, having sampled his buddy’s Mom’s cooking many times during the Summer at the cottage up on Six Mile Lake. “Let’s pull out our field notes and get some work done in the interim.”

“Oh, screw that! I need more than forty-five minutes to get my groove on and get down to work...and I pretty much need a stereo playing something good to even get mildly motivated to work!” Ian muttered this out and fake-snoozed at his desk.

“Hey boys, roll with us out to the Circle for some Frisbee throwing and chick watching. The sun’s shining, and we all know that’s not going to last for long!” A no-nonsense member of The Italians walked by and clapped Ian and him on their backs, while about twenty or so chaps in blue leather engineering jackets migrated quickly out the door and towards the northeast stairwell.

“This is way better than dry-grinding away on some project writeup while we wait.” Ian appeared fully awake as he tromped down the stairs two steps at a time. “And I wouldn’t mind picking up a few more Italian phrases.”

“Why in the heck would you want to learn Italian?” He said this a bit under his breath, as a knot of old-country descendants were mere steps in front of the two stragglers.

“Uh, I’ve been meaning to tell you. I’ve been seeing someone. Maybe not quite a steady girlfriend, but close enough, if you catch my drift.” Ian blushed slightly.

“OK, congratulations! But is she a languages major, and you’re trying to impress her?” He wiggled his eyebrows bemusedly.

“No, dumbass. She’s Italian. Cute as a button, and hot as hell. And she thinks I’m the bomb!” Modesty wasn’t his buddy’s strongest suit.

“Alright, got it! So when do I get to meet her, as it seems like you’ve been keeping her under wraps? Are you afraid she’ll take one look at me and fall over swooning?” He smoothed his hair in a false, fussy way.

“No, get real, knave. I’m just going slow, being careful.” Ian fairly whispered this out. “You see, her Dad would go apeshit if he knew she was seeing someone who’s not Italian. And she’s like a third cousin or whatever with two of the guys throwing Frisbee over there. Those pricks would spill the beans in a second, Pops would know, and it would be all over before you could say *asiago*. So I’ve got to be careful, friend. And you’ve got to stay mum if asked, *capisce?*” Ian grinned broadly, but his eyes took on a jumpy-deer cast.

Across the way, walking briskly from the direction of the Mechanical Engineering Building, was a short, bespectacled older gentleman in a dark blue trench coat. It was Professor Emeritus L.E. Jones, who was the faculty mentor for all things relating to the Grad Ball. His Dress and Deportment Lecture was an annual tradition, where graduating engineers were coached on the proper sequence of dining utensil employment and how to cover a sauce stain with white chalk. The senior professor was equal parts leprechaun, event planner and patron saint of common sense and innate goodness. He realized he had caught the professor’s eye, and raised his hand in a warm salute.

“A fine good afternoon, young gentlemen.” The older man shifted his walking trajectory and came up to the two boys with his hand extended.

“Professor Jones, may I present my good friend and classmate, Ian.” Handshakes were shared, followed by the briefest of awkward silences.

“Ian has helped me recently to nail down our music for the Grad Ball.” He stumbled over his words a bit in an attempt to fill the gap in conversation.

“Excellent, excellent. I have the date circled in red on my March calendar. Engineers are always good company, but the most civil of all are the Civil Engineers.” The white-haired gent clapped them both on the arm and left in a swish of blue trench coat.

A Mercantile Emporium



His exam schedule had been released by the Faculty Office, and much to his chagrin he determined that he would have one of his exams on December 22nd, the last day of the exam period. Factoring in a day to taper down and tidy up his affairs after a busy semester, and a day to travel up to Bruce County by bus, he realized he would have no opportunity to shop for Christmas presents for his folks and his sister. The holiday was not a lavish gift-giving affair in their household, but his Mom went out of her way to decorate a tree and have a good number of presents under it for everyone in the family. Practical gifts repeated themselves every year—packages of socks, underwear and soap, along with special consumables such as a large box of cashews and an equally large box of mixed nuts. A shirt or two, perhaps a book, and always an envelope with cash from Santa. So even though he loathed shopping and was notoriously frugal, he felt the need to reciprocate and get one decent and meaningful gift for everyone in his family.

A few weeks before, he had been up in North York to visit a family friend. They lived within a fifteen minute brisk walk of Yorkdale Shopping Centre, and he had taken himself over there to briefly check it out on his way back home on the subway. It had still been very early in the holiday shopping season, but he had been blown away by the number of cars stretching out as far as the eye could see in the mall's perimeter parking lots. He had gone in one of the main entrances, and was a touch overwhelmed by the beehive of activity inside. Swarms of shoppers walked along with their purchases in tow, storefronts

were ablaze with lights and fancy displays, and jaunty seasonal music filled the air. He had no clue where any particular store was, so he simply merged into the flow of shoppers and found himself riding up a crowded escalator. He took himself off into a bit of an eddy current zone beside a potted plant, and hung over a glass railing to survey the scene below. He spied a sporting goods store and a Coles Book Store off in the distance that looked interesting, but it was simply too crowded to wend his way there comfortably, so he girded up for another escalator ride and soon found himself hurtling south on a TTC subway car.

Sitting in his residence room and trying to determine where he might best go for his Christmas shopping, he reflected back on the Yorkdale experience and quickly concluded that he needed to stay away from malls. But where to go? And with that question posed, a section of Yonge Street popped into his head as a much more desirable shopping destination. One Summer in high school his sister had lived off of Yonge on a leafy street with beautiful homes, about halfway between Eglinton and Lawrence. It had been a great location to spend the better part of a week getting used to the city where he had been contemplating going to university in. The old house on Albertus had great cheekbones, and his sister had a nice self-contained flat at the rear of the second floor. But what had really made the location desirable was its proximity to Yonge Street. A mere two blocks of walking would bring him out to a bustling, livable stretch of Yonge that was chock-a-block with an intriguing mix of Mom-and-Pop stores, restaurants, and key buildings such as a beautiful old Post Office. He would while away the hours, looking into storefronts, and smelling the fragrant aromas from fruit stands. He would nod to a mix of retired folks and attractive Moms with their baby strollers, who might offer up a second glance if he gave them a broad smile.

He walked through Queen's Park and across to the Wellesley subway station, and jumped on a northbound train to Eglinton. He used the transition time to muse on what he might look for in terms of suitable gifts. His Mom was pretty easy to shop for in fact, as anything frilly or cute would appeal to her sensibilities. His sister was also reasonable to buy for, perhaps some decorative piece or kitchen gadget for her apartment. But his Dad was the toughest, almost impossible to buy anything meaningful for. He had duplicates of every tool under the sun, didn't drink, didn't read books. The old man loved horses, and talking about his service in the war. So he closed his eyes, and thought and thought, as the subway car rocked gently sideways.

He popped out onto the street and headed north on Yonge. It was a mile and a quarter up to Lawrence, where commerce then started to thin out in 1970s Toronto. He reckoned he would walk up the east side and down the west side until he had three gifts in hand. If two and a half miles of interesting shops didn't yield this kind of reasonable gift harvest, then he would have to go back to Yorkdale.

Within a block he found a lovely kitchen store, where he saw a melon baller and a cheese grater in an attractive gift set. The kind, middle-aged woman proprietress even wrapped it in shiny silver paper with a pink ribbon, much to his delight. Then after ten blocks or so he spotted a small stationery store with a lovely display. He went in and scrunched up his nose at the potpourri aroma, but after ten minutes of patient searching he found a large boxed set of Vera the Mouse cards, partitioned for all occasions. The burly proprietor grumbled a bit when asked about gift wrapping, but did a decent job with an English floral design that was exactly the kind of thing his Mom would love.

So, as projected, he was down to his old man. He made the turn at Lawrence and the wind picked up. For many blocks nothing appealed to him and he started to lose heart. He wondered if he should just put both his Mom and Dad's names on the greeting card package. But then he saw a tiny little bookshop that had a sign saying 'specializing in antiquarian and military history books'. He went in, sniffled a bit at the musty air, and then his eye fell on a book on the Royal Canadian Air Force and their contributions to WW II. At its rear it had a sheaf of maps, that showed the village of Bény-Sur-Mer in France, near where his Dad had landed on D-Day. It was all priced at a bit more than he had figured on, but he quickly took the book up to the counter, pleased as punch that he had found a perfect gift for everyone on his list.

Inspiration From Above



He had worked hard for most of the weekend, falling back into a tried-and-true pattern of getting ahead of things in terms of projects and lab write-ups and touching back to class notes to repetitively anchor key concepts deep into his sub-conscious. He would pick apart key equations, doing dimensional analysis and subbing in ranges of numbers to get an intuitive feel which variables packed the most weight in terms of the resultant value. He also liked to do calculations in his head on the back of a proverbial envelope, and found that his late elementary school training in multiplication tables and long division were coming in handy at this late stage of his undergraduate career. And he often fondly thought of Mr. Parker, one of his

high school physics teachers who specialized in ill-kempt neckties, whenever he had to multiply two big numbers together and his suggestion of boiling them down to their exponent values to arrive at a reasonable estimated value in a matter of seconds. The deeper he went into university, the more he realized he had been well-taught by a large number of teachers in his small-town Ontario hometown.

But it was Sunday morning, and there was still something lurking deep within him that it was not right and perhaps a setup for eternal damnation if a person worked on the Lord's Day. He remembered his Dad getting upset if a young upstart neighbor cut his grass early on a Sunday morning, but he had his suspicions it was based more on hearing lawnmower commotion than a violation of religious tenets. But old patterns die hard, and he told himself after he finished breakfast he should step out for a church service. A quick brush of the teeth, followed by the slipping on of a dress shirt, and he found himself knocking lightly on Henry's slightly-ajar door.

"Hey, big guy! Wondering if you're a weekend bachelor again?" He said this in an off-hand way, knowing his friend's sensitivity to discuss anything relating to his girlfriend.

"Uh, yeah, as luck would have it. My girlfriend has gone up to Kingston for some kind of Bible conference. Had some work to do, so didn't tag along." Henry waved his hands over a sheaf of note folders and two thick economics textbooks.

"Clean living guy like you can't do work on a Sunday morning! That would upset the little lady up in Kingston!" He immediately regretted his familiarity.

"Listen, I call how I roll. But what did you have in mind?" The football player's voice was a bit coy.

"I was hoping to go up to Bloor Street United to hear Dr. Clifford Elliott speak. He gives a great sermon and always has something relevant and interesting to say. Big congregation too, with great energy. Intriguing enough to leave the books for a few hours?" He smiled in a hopefully convincing manner.

"Give me ten minutes to get some duds on. Meet you down in the Common Room."

The two young men walked up St. George to Harbord, then walked west one block to Huron and turned northward for the three block stretch up to Bloor. About halfway up, they saw a car slow down, and his classmate Paul jumped out and dashed off into one of the Victorian houses that lined that part of Huron Street.

"Hey, I know that guy! He's in my class, and he's a big shot in the IVCF here on campus. Shouldn't he be going to church?" He said this honestly enough.

"That's where the IVCF folks have their services, in some seminar room of one of the admin units. Low rent, and a central location." Henry said this matter-of-factly.

"Hunh, here I thought they would have their own church?" He looked up at the building where Paul had disappeared into.

"Listen, they were all raised in some church, and probably go back there with their family for holiday services and the like. But these earnest born-again, they like to hang out with people who interpret the Bible just like they do. Good folks, but they have a pretty narrow take on what the Bible says. They

wouldn't be caught dead at a service where we are headed! The United Church has lady ministers, and welcomes gays! The traditional types think these kinds of things are forbidden, so they stick to themselves." Henry pursed his lips and shrugged his shoulders.

They covered the last block in reflective silence, and went into the United Church in the middle of a swarm of young and older parishioners. Electing to sit up in the balcony to get a full view of the proceedings, they were shocked to see the church nearly full to its capacity. Music filled the air, and people chatted freely.

"Wow, glad to get a good seat!" He was wedged between the end of the pew and Henry's bulk.

"Yep, happy I tagged along." Henry emitted the briefest of smiles.

"What are you going to do next year?" He hoped this topic wasn't off-limits.

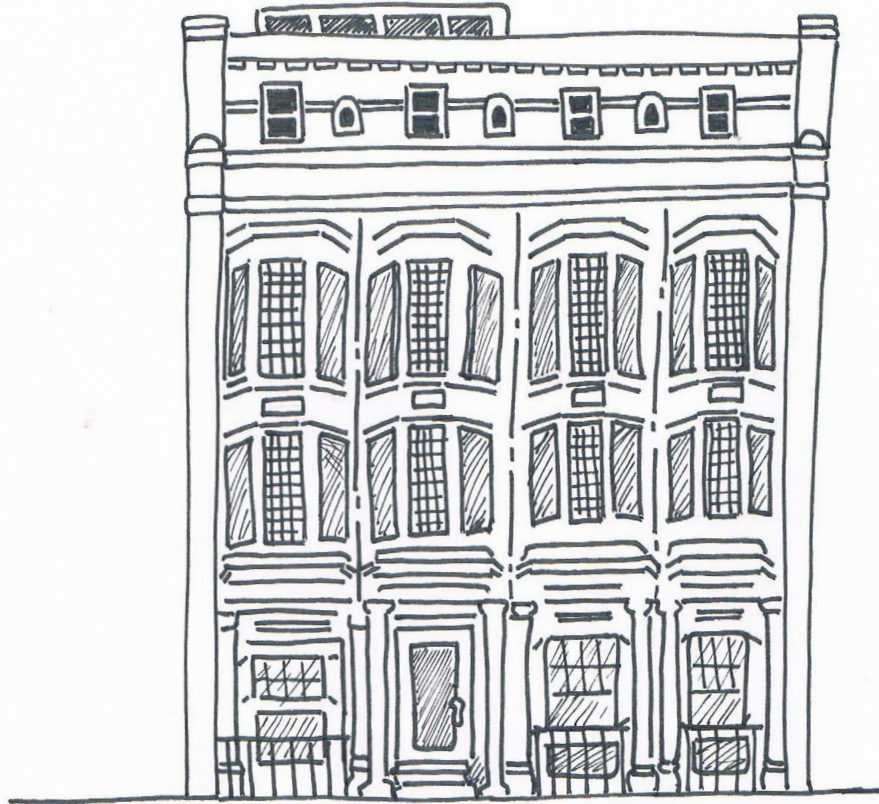
"Hopefully an MA, if I can get my grades up in this year's courses. Doing an extra year of undergrad to boost the ol' average." Henry looked straight ahead.

"And then what?" He was genuinely curious.

"Hopefully a job with the federal service. Prime Minister Trudeau knocking off Mr. Clark and returning to power in February was a good thing for the country. He's shut down the separatists in Quebec, and will hopefully do better things for the economy. But he'll need help, and that's where I hope to contribute." Henry pushed up his glasses on his nose, and signaled that was the end of conversation relating to him.

The organ came in as if on cue, and the congregation rose in song.

I'll Be at My Club



They strolled down St. George Street in a languid sort of way, as the day had opened up even more and bright sunshine splashed over the roofline of Robarts Library. The service had been worthwhile, mainly because of the sermon. The patrician preacher never disappointed, encouraging the congregants to dream God-sized dreams and to go out and do good in the world. This had seemed to have a significant impact on the normally taciturn Henry, who ambled along with a big smile creasing his face.

“I’ve got to tell you, I am very glad you pushed me to get out of my room this morning! I was planning on hunkering down and wading through some meaty chapters on econometrics theory. But this stuff is big-time sleep inducing, so I would probably have rolled away to my bed and had a nap. Might still be lying there at the noon bells! And I wouldn’t have heard that pep talk back there! I am definitely pumped to go to Ottawa and do some big things.” The benevolent jock smacked his right fist into his open left hand.

“Yeah, I love that kind of message. Stirs you up, y’know, in a good way. I know it’s a bit old-fashioned to go to church these days, but if the minister is good, it’s always worth the time.” He smiled across the street at a few folks who were wending their way towards Robarts.

“Listen, we got ninety minutes before the dining hall closes its doors, and I haven’t got any exercise yet this weekend. If we go eat now, I’ll probably be dormant for the rest of the day. What do you say we

change up quick and go over and get in some lifting at Hart House? Forty-five minutes in the weight room and then a quick scoot back will give us enough time to ingest two plates of Sunday's cuisine. What do you say?" Henry said all of this as a statement rather than a question.

Fifteen minutes later they were taking some dumbbells off their racks for warmup curls, twenty pounders for himself and fifty pounders for the bulky Henry.

"It's all about form, man. Slow, steady, and with correct form. That's how you build a strong muscle. You see guys in here, rocketing a curl up and down, with the momentum provided by other muscles in their bodies. Bad! You need to isolate the muscle, put it under a spotlight. Let it sing its tune *a capella*! And if twenty pounds doesn't allow that focus, dial it down to fifteen, or even ten. No one here cares." Henry grimaced and demonstrated a very methodical bicep curl.

"Yeah, good point! Something to keep in mind. I get in a rush and think I need to use a certain weight or I'll look stupid to all these jacked guys in here..." He tilted his head in the direction of two particularly ripped young men who were spotting one another on a free weight bench press.

"Those boys got their pipes because of good form, and patience. You'll be curling fifty pounds soon enough." Henry said this softly under his breath.

"You're right, you're right. I've got to stop worrying about the invisible audience, because man, it's not there. I think somebody is looking at me, judging me, and they're just walking down the street and not even seeing me." He scrunched up his nose and continued with the methodical unfolding of his bicep curls.

"I thought you were the Ice Man, that nothing ever rattled you. That meditation thing, y'know, keeping you in focus for whatever is going on?" Henry had switched over to tricep curls.

"Yeah, most of the time, or a lot of the time anyways. But certain things can still throw me off kilter and I can lose my confidence like water running down a sink. Maybe it's childhood stuff, or maybe it's that my old man was a truck driver and I'm here with all these kids whose Dads are lawyers, engineers and doctors. Who knows?" He bit his lip a bit, and kept his emotions in check.

"You've got nothing on me, man. My parents are immigrants. They slaved away in a restaurant kitchen, putting chop suey on plates for condescending white folks! But they worked hard, and I learned from that. And this is Canada, and if you're smart and work hard, you can become pretty much anything." Henry dropped his dumbbells and came over to make a slight adjustment to his lifting partner's form.

"You're right, you're right. I've got to keep that in mind. Especially in tricky situations where I know I'm going to get my buttons pushed. Like last week, the Engineering Society Executive was asked to all come down to the Toronto Club on Bay Street to meet the Camp Wardens for our Kipling iron ring ceremony in the Spring. Swanky, swanky, swanky. Red plush carpets that sink down about six inches when you step on them. Gilded surfaces everywhere. Beautiful young waitresses with lovely figures serving champagne in fancy glasses." He rolled his eyes a bit on this.

"And what happened?" Henry pursed his lips.

“Nothing of substance. But I had under-dressed a bit, as everyone else had on dark blue power suits, and I had my Grade 9 confirmation blazer on with some patchy corduroy trousers. And then I had a nervous perspiration attack, with my sweat rings pretty much going down to my belt under my jacket. And everyone else seemed so suave and comfortable. Especially this one guy, whose girlfriend I kinda have a crush on. He was so smooth with the wardens, and flirted heavily with the serving beauties. I looked like a country bumpkin relative to this guy, but I guess that’s the actual truth.” He clenched his teeth and finished his curl.

“Dude, two suggestions. Never covet someone else’s girlfriend. That’s one of the Ten Commandments. And next time, wear a cotton T-shirt under your dress shirt to soak up your sweat. Now let’s head back for some well-deserved lunch.” Henry headed for the exit door.

The Passing Human Parade



Lunch was a subdued affair, with the focus on food ingestion rather than conversation. The two lads sat opposite each other at one end of the West House table, content to chew thoughtfully and look about the sun-filled room without feeling pressure to break out small packets of chatter for the mere sake of it. Going to church together, lifting weights and sharing interior feelings had created a bond that was subtle

yet tangible. They ordered two plates each of the kitchen's lemon meringue pie with their second serving of roast chicken and mashed potatoes, as the kitchen door was soon to close. The tartness of the lemon filling and the airy sweetness of the meringue was the perfect capoff to what had initially seemed to be just another Sunday morning.

Going back to his room, he resisted the urge to lie down on his bed and drift off into a post-lifting, post-lunch dream state. Instead, he wheeled his yellow swivel chair over to the bay window and plunked down on it into a deep and quiet meditation space. The light streaming into the windows seemed to lift him to some higher internal realm, aided by lovely birdsong from the quadrangle. He heard the birds twittering for a few minutes or less, and then he was off into that space that lay beyond the mental repetitions of his mantra. He went to the bottom of that ocean and plunged into the sweet sediment of its floor, reveling in the absence of time and space and all of their associated constraints and resultant worries. A noise emanated briefly from the hallway and he rolled over in that zone, and plunged even a little bit deeper.

He came back up from his oceanic plumbing, summoned back by a sparrow singing sweetly right at his window ledge. He looked around and had the recurring feeling of not knowing where he was. Today he held the knowing of who he was, but the particulars of where he was remained elusive for the better part of a minute. He looked through the window, eastward, and saw the building towers around Bay and Bloor in the distance and the Knox Library in the near foreground. Nodding to himself after the resetting of coordinates, he got up to cross the hallway for a face splash and was soon back at his desk.

An hour went by and he completed his lab writeup. He had left it half-completed the previous afternoon as a few gnarly bits had appeared in the data analysis portion, but the calming focus from today's meditation had steam-ironed those out in short order. A quick scan of his to-do list revealed nothing particularly pressing, so he contemplated stepping out before the earlier Sunday supper hour.

A bit of walking down St. George made him rethink his goal of perambulating down Beverly to Chinatown, as the wind had picked up considerably and caused him to shove his chin down into his chest hair. He saw the old Metro Library building rise up on his right, and he thought he might just amble through its musty corridors and contemplate if he really wanted to be out for an hour's walk without the benefit of a hat or scarf. Small groups of students worked here and there with books and notes spread out on the tiled floors or stacked up on stairways. He realized how fortunate he was to have a room on campus, with a solid desk and a comfortable chair to sit in to do his work. He was not a big fan of doing work in libraries, particularly when one had to sit on the floor.

Wending his way out to the front lobby of the building, he stopped to inspect a new meeting space that had been recently set up with a number of tables and wooden chairs, and also a few soft chairs and a sofa to recline in. Not quite a café vibe, but close enough, and a coin-operated coffee and tea maker completed the effect. He was happy to see that a water cooler had been installed with its companion sleeve holder of conical paper cups, so he poured himself a serving of cooled water, and migrated over to one of the easy chairs placed in front of a large plate glass window looking out onto College Street. The sofa next to him held someone stretched out on its length, in full slumber and covered up with a large ski jacket. He couldn't tell if it was a student or one of the winos who hung out in the space between the Metro Library and the architecture building, but if the latter he could see the logic of getting out of that raw wind.

He sat and sipped from his thin cup, surveying the passing scene on College Street. The sun was still out but temperatures were dropping, and people walked along briskly. A trio of older Portuguese men walked along, wearing dark suits and dress coats, with their hands tucked behind their backs. A number of young ladies walked by as singletons or in duos and trios, of all shapes and sizes, skin colours and fashion styles. A few duos of older Chinese men walked by, with their Mao jackets and their shopping carts full of produce. A quartet of Hare Krishna adherents meandered along with their shaved heads and strange skull paintings, shivering in their thin orange robes. He took it all in, never failing to be fascinated by the interesting and stimulating mosaic on display in a Toronto street scene.

“Penny for your thoughts?” Steve from his residence had come up to him quickly and squatted beside his easy chair.

“Oh, you know. Just hanging out. Watching the parade of humanity.” He pointed out to College Street.

“Yeah, us small town folks never tire of this craziness! Hey, I haven’t had a chance to check in with you. How did things go with that lab technician gal?” Steve winked conspiratorially.

“Oh, definitely a one-date wonder.” Steve’s girlfriend had kindly set him up on a blind date a few weeks back with one of her friends, a student at the Toronto Institute of Medical Technology off of McCaul Street. “She was a truly beautiful girl, and had a sleek figure to boot. But perhaps too classy or precious for me, and she didn’t seem to be interested in anything I tried to engage her in conversation in.” He shrugged his shoulders.

“Oh, too bad. But you gotta keep kicking those tires!” Steve pounded a fist into his palm.

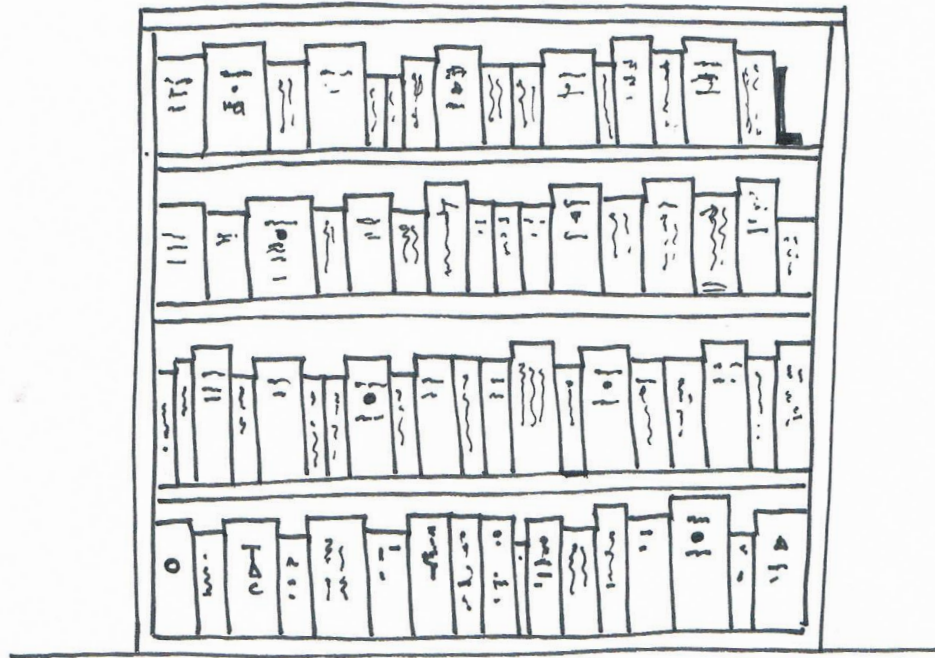
“It was a strange night, an engineering dinner-dance event. One of the young pros came with his wife, and sat with us and a few others at our table. But the prof kept asking my date to get up to dance! My sleek little number seemed smitten by him, and the bugger never once got his wife up to dance. Queer, eh?!” He shook his head softly at the remembrance of it all.

“What was the wife like?” Steve never missed a beat.

“That’s the craziest part, dude. She was drop-dead gorgeous. Tall, leggy, and curvy in all the right places. Had her hair swept up beautifully, great tan, English accent. Right off of a movie set.” He gulped hard. “She was being ignored by her hubby, so she asked me to dance to a fast tune. I swung her around pretty well, and she seemed to appreciate it. Then a slow tune came up, and she pulled me in tight before I could say boo. I had one hand on her lovely hips, and leaned in to her neck and could smell her perfume. Orange blossoms. It also made me swoon.”

He closed his eyes and realized what he had experienced when he was deepest into his meditation that afternoon---the unmistakable scent of orange blossoms.

Between the Stacks



A few days drifted by, and he found himself wrapping up a construction engineering tutorial a full hour before the expected completion time. The instructor was an affable fellow with a broad smile that creased his leathery skin, tanned into a perpetual swarthinness by many seasons in a construction trailer. The tutorials were relatively straightforward affairs, with earnest graduate students sporting scraggly beards running the calculations for critical paths and resource allocation scenarios.

He walked down the rear stairwell of the Galbraith Building, looking through the staircase windows to the curve of Convocation Hall and an ivy-covered rear wall of Simcoe Hall. Going home at this early hour seemed unpalatable on many levels, so he decided to bend right and meander across King's College Circle. The sky had been sunny for most of the day, but a few ominous clouds had rolled across the skyline over the duration of his tutorial. He stood in the middle of the Circle, looking southward to the CN Tower and the bank buildings of Bay Street, and then eastward to the roofline of the Queen's Park legislative building. This was arguably the most beautiful spot on a truly beautiful university campus, and he drank it all in until large rain drops started an irregular assault pattern on the top of his head.

Looking around, the shelter spots of Knox College, Con Hall, University College and Sig Sam Library were all equidistant, so he randomly ran due east to the beckoning doors of the library. He had been musing about grad school for a few months now, after getting the good news about his third year grades read over the phone by his Dad, as the grade report summaries were sent out to home addresses by the Faculty Office. Good grades gave him options, and if a scholarship application bore fruit he might just be tempted to stay around this amazing place for a few more years.

He wasn't really sure what grad school would be like, and particularly murky and mystifying was the research side of the equation. Research wasn't a skill developed in an undergraduate engineering degree in the 1970s, and the uncertainty of what it entailed filled him with equal parts of jangly excitement and quiet dread. He reckoned it would mean spending lots of time in libraries, so he thought he might just while away an hour or so poking around the holdings of Sig Sam. The place was large, and held books and periodicals covering both social sciences and physical sciences. He went down to the lowest level and simply prowled around, walking the perimeter of the stacks and peeking into the windows of garret-like offices. He would see the odd person in these, surrounded by a pile of books and journals. He nodded apologetically at a few individuals who nervously looked up, and kept on walking.

He did this over three floors, marveling at the range of holdings and the book titles that ran a broad gamut of subjects. Wending his way through a large section of books that related to hydrology, water resources and ecology, he almost stumbled over a crouching Marcy, who was kneeling down and perusing books on a dusty bottom shelf.

"Whoopsie, sorry for almost running you over there, Marcy!" He stuttered this out, stopping on a dime.

"Hey, Jay, no worries. I was just trying to locate a text on dewatering for our subsurface exploration course. Can't find the darn thing, so I guess someone's beaten me to it!" Marcy stood up. Wobbled imperceptibly, and grabbed his forearm for balance.

"I knew you were a keener, but now I have further evidence." He smiled thinly, waiting for the young lady to release her grip.

"Oh, I'm trying to get things done in advance as I'm going up to Montreal next weekend with my boyfriend..." The classmate glowed a bit at this sharing, and he noticed she wasn't wearing glasses and had a stylish new haircut.

"Uh, great. *La Belle Montreal!* Went up there myself a few times this past Spring and Summer, to visit someone who I met in Jamaica during Reading Week. Great city." He realized he had said too much.

"Oh my, that sounds appealing. *Une petite mademoiselle de Montreal*, how enchanting! But I thought you had a girlfriend here in Toronto, you know the one studying commerce?" Marcy's voice took on a suspicious tone, and her eyes narrowed a smidge.

"Oh, yes, right, haha, good old Patsy from Commerce. Yes, she, um, graduated and got a job with the bank. Royal Bank. Got transferred out to, uh, uh, Moose jaw. Y'know, those long distance relationships just don't last." His voice trailed off while considerable colour rushed to his cheeks.

"Interesting. Well, it sounds like you're on the market, unless you like taking the Via to Montreal on a regular basis. For affairs of the heart, it's all about timing. I just met my guy, who's an industrial engineering masters student, at a concert last month." Marcy said this in an off-hand manner, but looked at him intently.

"Oh, you are so right. Timing's everything. Relationships, job possibilities, you name it. It's all about timing. Speaking of time, I've got to run. I just remembered the LGMB is going to be on parade up on the lawn of Devonshire House. Some good music and some bad jokes, delivered loud enough to irritate

all those tightass grad students living across the street at Massey College!” He smiled inanely and nodded his head as if he were a bobblehead dog in the rear window of a sedan.

“Careful. My gentleman’s a Junior Fellow at Massey.” Marcy dripped this out in icicle-tinged shards.

He scurried to the exit stairwell, feeling every cell in his body squirm.

A Titillating Tutor



A day later he sat on a padded bench in the Sid Smith lobby area, waiting for Ian to return after a pit stop in the men’s washroom on the main floor. They had a rare spare hour between classes, and instead of mouldering around the lobby of the Galbraith Building or the Ways and means Committee Room near Knox College’s Dining Hall, they had collectively decided to drift a block northward to a less-frequented hangout spot. As he sat there he couldn’t get the memory of his first sighting of Kira out of his head, and the recalled taste of sharp blue cheese from Kensington Market completed the memory.

“Christ, it’s a good thing I don’t hang out in places like this on a regular basis! Look at the chicks parading by, they’re gorgeous as hell and are almost to a person looking at me and shooting me a smile. Cripes, I’ll soon be sporting a chub that’s going to make walking out of here a difficult task!” Ian sat down in a breathless way, waving his hands from side to side.

“This is why I hang out with you, man. Free rent at a cottage all Summer, and a chick magnet to boot. I will do well just mopping up whatever you spill!” He grinned broadly and slapped his buddy on his shoulder.

“But I should be more discreet, and not inflame the passions of these lovely ladies. Because if the truth be told, I am fully off the market...” Ian’s eyes darted nervously.

“Things going well with that little Italian number?” He had been so busy of late that he hadn’t touched base with his buddy for some time.

“Understatement city, man! She is both perky and pretty, and loves Mr. Johnson to bits. I’ve even been over to her place for supper. Old Country parents, lots of siblings, and amazing food!” Ian wiped a bit of saliva from the edge of his mouth.

“Cripes, that’s crazy good! I thought Mr. Sicily would run you out of town on a handcar if a guy like you touched his daughter. They are more liberal than I would have thought, given the comments over the years from The Italians in class.” He wiggled his eyebrows for emphasis.

“It’s more complicated than I’ve been letting on. I wasn’t introduced as The Boyfriend, but as the math tutor who’s going to help their beautiful little *bambina* get out of her college program and into something at the university. So a false premise will have to do for the time being. The parents work shifts and so we work around these for a bit of instruction in algebra and a whole lot more. Her sisters have figured things out, but they think I’m irresistible so they won’t spill the beans to Mama or Papa. Perfect situation, don’t you think?” Ian puffed up his chest and grinned at a pretty brunette gal walking by.

“I’m a touch envious, I have to admit. Almost makes me want to be the math tutor for one of those sisters!” He laughed perhaps a bit too hard at this.

“Nice try, dude, but no deal. Things are complicated enough, and I’m staying under the radar by a feather as it is. Throw you in the mix and the house of cards will come tumbling down jack-split, with you and me facing down an irate *padre* with smoke coming out of his fucking ears!” Ian twisted his face into a mask of rage.

“Yeah, you’re right. I need to get off my duff and manufacture my own romantic opportunities, not rely on squiffy linkups with barely-of-age siblings or random blind dates. I tell myself to get assertive and get going on finding a real girlfriend before I graduate, but something keeps holding me back. Like there’s an inner voice saying, ‘wait a bit, you’ll cross paths with her soon enough!’. So it calls for patience, patience. But then I sit here for fifteen minutes or less, and see maybe twenty girls float by who drive me bananas! I feel the opposite of being patient!” He folded his arms across his chest in a huff.

“Christ, dude, I hear ‘ya. I remember being as horny as hell for three years of undergrad, and felt even more constrained as I still live at home. But then one day on the Royal York bus, there she was, sitting across from me. Eyes burning bright, and cute as a button. No pretense, said yes right away when I suggested we go for a coffee. This will happen soon enough for you, my friend.” Ian leaned in to him and put his hand on his forearm.

“Yeah, you’re right. I just have to read the situation right. I go to church sometimes with a bunch of Knox theologs. Last winter we went up to a Presbyterian church on Davisville, on a snowy day, for a beautiful service. Sat near this absolutely lovely gal, and chatted her up at the coffee hour afterwards. Was almost there in terms of asking her out, and then some tall, hunky guy comes into the hall and gives her a big hug right in front of me. She introduces him as her fiancé, who just got off work as an intern

down at St. Mike's Hospital. I was like a deflated bike tire, and went out and drilled snowballs at the heads of my Knox buddies for the better part of an hour. Steamed as hell." He felt his cheeks burn.

"Yeah, but at least you were open to getting into the game. What if she had been unattached? You'd be an item right now because you had your eyes open for opportunities." Ian's voice took on a conciliatory tone.

"Fair enough, but I'm tone deaf most of the time. I waste energy on thinking about Ingrid in our class, even though she's practically married. And I can't seem to pick up the phone and call Sue, the grad student in nursing, even though she almost falls all over herself when she sees me. And I can't get Miss Kira out of my mind, even though she always rebounds to her roving-eye boyfriend. It's like I'm chasing something elusive, my idea of the iconic girlfriend, an archetype of beauty and sensuality and mystery." He muttered softly, as a knot of attractive girls were passing by.

"Dude, don't overanalyze things. You're a normal, red-blooded male. When Ingrid ditches her boyfriend, I'm first in line for the rebound!" Ian chuckled heartily and stood up, signaling class time was fast approaching.

Girls Go Crazy for a Sharp Dressed Man



He sat in the Hart House cafeteria, the odd bit of crust and gravy residue staring up at him from the consumption of a more-than-passable meat pie. If it had been his Mom's award-winning pastry crust

there would certainly be no crumbs remaining, but this offering had been stamped out yesterday in some industrial kitchen in the northeast corner of Leaside and delivered to the university in the wee hours of the morning. He pushed the plate away to make room for his foundations textbook, through which he despondently flipped the pages from time to time while keeping one eye on the entrance door. After his talk with Ian, he had felt more motivated to take some kind of action on the dating front. A tortured review of his best options led to the conclusion that he should call Sue, the nursing graduate student. She reminded him a bit of the nursing gal over at Ryerson, or a more petite version, and had always given him a big smile and an encouraging vibe even though they were a few years apart in school. He had ransacked his room looking for the little slice of paper that had her number on it, but for love or money he couldn't locate the tattered note from that day outside the Mechanical Building. He kept a fairly clean and tidy room, and could have sworn he had left it on one of the side shelves of his old wooden desk, but it could have easily been swept up by Hazel as she gave his room its weekly thorough cleaning.

So Plan B was to hang out at Hart House, in the space where he had seen the nursing hopeful hang out the most in. The weather was too cool now for pleasant studying on the patio, so he took himself into the warm cafeteria where aromas of brewing coffee and French fry grease filled the air. He knew it was a bit of a wild goose chase, in that she could have a class or have elected to study at home or be walking down St. George with some other guy. But the idea of patience came back to his consciousness, and he slowly scanned the text outlining the design procedures for large raft foundations. A familiar figure came in and stood quietly in the service line, quizzically looking up at the menu board options.

"RJ, it's good to see you! Are you here for dinner?" He waved over to his classmate from Hong Kong.

"The pleasure is mine, Mr. Jayson! I just finished meditating and my martial arts class starts in thirty minutes over in the gym. I felt a small pang of hunger and have come for something light to eat. Tonight we spar, and I cannot afford to be light-headed or heavy on my feet. So something in the middle, soup perhaps?" He looked back up at the board.

Five minutes later, bearing a tray holding a steaming bowl of tomato soup and several packages of saltine crackers, RJ pulled up a chair opposite his classmate's study position.

"I hope I do not interfere with your perusal of your textbook?" The powerfully built young man gracefully extended a hand towards his tome.

"Not in the least. Delighted, in fact, to take a break from the ol' grind. In actual fact, this is a smokescreen, as I'm sitting here in wait for a person of interest." He nodded briskly and pushed his own tray to the side to make room.

"Person of interest? I do not know what this means. Someone who is interesting?" RJ cocked his head to one side.

"Sorry, it's a funny term. I'm waiting for a girl I sort of like, to see if I can chat with her. Maybe see if she wants to go on a date with me?" He said this slowly in an elongated fashion, not quite patronizing but close enough.

“Oh, now I understand. A maybe girlfriend! It seems like you Canadians are always thinking about romance. Us Chinese, we study hard, work hard, and then romance comes because of our success! Big difference!” RJ slurped his soup loudly.

“Yes, I suppose we do. Most Canadian young men meet someone special while at university, and some girls come to school for the sole purpose of meeting their future husband.” He explained this slowly.

“Oh, oh, yes, this I know! The so-called MRS degree! I have heard about this, and think it’s funny. No Chinese girl would do this, they want to get a degree so they can be the boss in the firm! Gentlemen think the same way. But perhaps Chinese people are too ambitious.” RJ stated this in a matter-of-fact way.

“Well, we are what we are. And some guys get bummed out big-time when they are at risk of losing their long-time girlfriends.” His mind flitted to Pete, who had dropped out of school last year and moved permanently back to Sudbury in an attempt to woo back his gal from some amorous nickel miner she had met in a grocery store lineup. And then there was Ted, the Don of West House, who had taken a leave of absence from his duties just last week so he could take the train out west to see why his Bible College sweetheart had left him for one of her Old Testament instructors.

“One thing I will suggest. If one is looking for a romantic partner, one should go out of their way to improve their outward appearance. Look at what male birds do in nature, they have the most attractive plumage!” RJ nodded apologetically and picked up his tray, realizing he may be a few minutes late for the start of his sparring class.

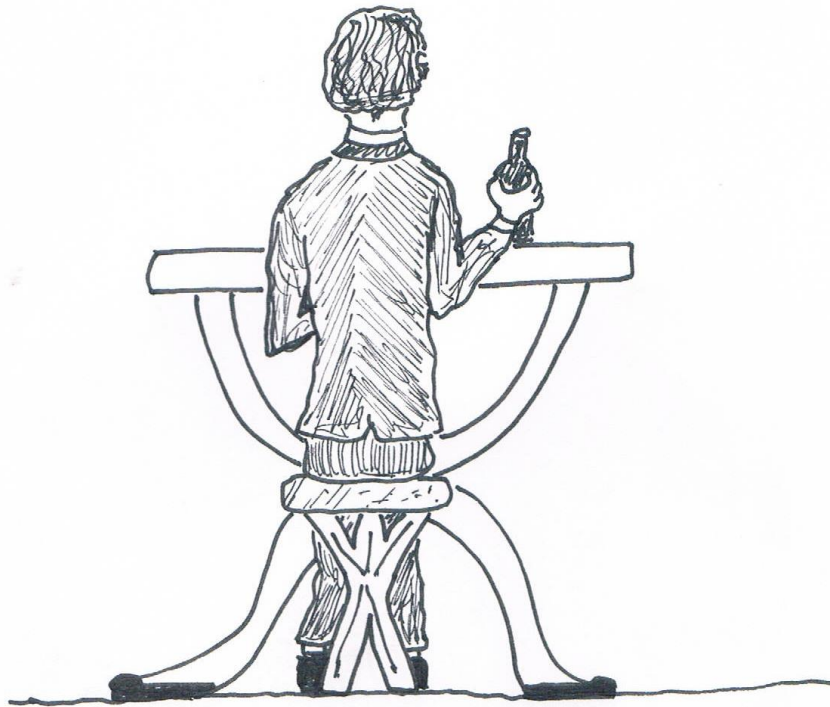
He took RJ’s last comment to heart, and looked down at the threadbare trench coat he had picked up at GoodWill on Queen Street two years back. He thought he looked cool in it, but if the truth be told, he looked more ragged than cool. So he jumped up from his table, packed up his things and headed for the door. No more stakeouts until he looked like a preening male cardinal. He slung his knapsack over his shoulder and started the brisk twenty five minute walk down Beverley to Queen West. He wasn’t flush with cash, so he hoped the GoodWill would have some sharp-looking options for a good price. He steamed into the store and went breathlessly to the men’s dress coat rack, flipping through a motley assortment of options in all shapes and sizes. He came at the end to a sharp grey wool winter overcoat, with a black silk lining. It looked like it had been recently dry-cleaned by its previous owner, and was a trim cut with a 36 inch chest. Just his size, and it looked great in a dusty mirror hanging on a back wall.

“How much for this beauty?” He held it out to the counter attendant.

“Hmmm, no tag on this one. Five bucks OK?” The guy showed him a glint of a gold tooth.

“A bargain at twice the price!” He threw down a fiver and slipped on his new acquisition for the walk home up Spadina.

You Can Ring My Bell



He caught the tail end of the post-dinner crowd hanging out in the West House Common Room, bursting into the space with cold-flushed cheeks and the air of a peacock showing off its feathers. He kept his new overcoat on, cinched up tight, and sat down beside Klaus who was deep into the latest edition of the *Globe and Mail*.

“Cripes, man, you smell like mothballs! Where have you been, we missed you at supper? Shepherd’s pie and some God-forsaken excuse for vegetables.” Klaus said this with his eyes riveted on the paper.

“Decided to upgrade the wardrobe, and meandered down to Queen Street to pick up this fancy rag! Previous owner wore it five times max, and probably kept mothballs in the pockets like my Dad would. Old school.” He fished around in a silk-lined interior pocket and plucked out two lint-covered mothballs.

“How much did that set you back?” Klaus was always interested in the bottom line.

“Five clams, can you believe it?” He crowed this out in an unseemly way, as Canadians always brag hard when they snare a good deal.

“Jeez, man, big-time score! That’s a two hundred buck overcoat up at the fancy shops of Hazelton Lanes in Yorkville!” Klaus looked at him with a dewy-eyed envy.

“But it found its way down to GoodWill, and nobody tagged it, so the counter clerk gave me a deal bordering on highway robbery!” He sucked some air through his teeth.

“Speaking of Yorkville, Stu Rickard was in here fifteen minutes back. He’s recruiting any willing participants to go up to a fancy new disco on Hazelton Avenue. Stu knows that a passel of his girlfriend’s

friends will be there to celebrate something or the other, and he's looking for an army of dancing partners. He headed over to Centre House to see who he can rustle up, and then we're all walking over together. Are you game?" Klaus flipped the paper to the next page.

"Won't that be expensive to get in? He was mentally trying to remember what homework deadlines were coming up.

"Nah, you know Stu. He's good buds with the maitre'd at the new club. Stu's going to stand there and chat him up, and we all walk in without paying the cover. All pre-arranged, my man. And if you stay up on the dance floor, the waitresses won't even ask if you want a drink. Could be a zero-cost night." Klaus waggled his eyebrows and momentarily set down the paper.

After a quick change into a shirt and trouser combination that aligned well with his new wool overcoat, he found himself walking through Queen's Park and Victoria College with Stu and Klaus and three lads from Centre House. Stu led them along like some kind of social Pied Piper, regaling the group with front-end reconnaissance stories about his girlfriend and her young lady pals. They found the address of the disco club and excitedly climbed an elegant staircase to the second floor to the beat of a Kool and the Gang tune. The entrance was guarded by two very large bouncers in dark suits, but Stu's friend appeared out of thin air and they all bypassed the check-in line exactly as anticipated.

The place was more brightly lit than normal, particularly the glossy dance floor that was already heavily congested with a mob of beautiful people gyrating freely to the heavily amplified music. He was a bit overwhelmed, and huddled off to one side with Klaus and the other lads.

"Boys, a quick perusal of the joint suggests to me that the ladies are not yet here. When they come, Rico has reserved a table for twelve over in the far corner. In the meantime, I release you on your own recognizance, to get a drink or to get up and shake a leg, whatever moves you!" Stu clapped them all on the back and slowly migrated in the direction of the bar. He stood there awkwardly with Klaus, who then muttered something about finding the men's room. Standing alone was even more daunting, and he started to question the wisdom of coming along on this particular expedition.

"My, my, who says Toronto is a big place? Fancy meeting you here?" Out of the blue, Ingrid from his class had materialized on his left side. She was wearing a tight, sparkly dress that was jaw-dropping gorgeous, and grabbed him by his left arm that was hanging on to his new overcoat. Brazenly, he moved in for a hug that was awkward at first and then turned into a lingering embrace.

"I didn't know you hung out in discos?" He said this in a light way, trying to project over the music.

"Oh, it's a new club and I wanted to check it out. It's my birthday today! I'm here with Ron, my boyfriend. But the little bugger refuses to get up to dance! C'mon over and say hi, and then let's get up on the floor...you don't mind humouring the birthday gal with a few dances, do you?" Ingrid flushed broadly under her makeup, and then he realized she may be just a little tipsy.

They walked over to the boyfriend sitting at a small round table, the guy wearing a formal suit and nursing a beer. Ingrid had circled her arm around his while they walked, and this hadn't escaped the sharp eye of her chap.

“Ronnie, this is Jay from my class. You’ve probably seen him around the Engineering zone of campus. Now Ronnie, last chance for you for the dance floor. I’ve asked you several times to get up, but I’m not going to beg! And if you don’t want to dance, then Jay here will be forced to fill your shoes. I love to dance, and it’s my birthday! What do you say, Ronnie?” The beautiful young woman was shifting left and right on her dressy heels.

“Nope. Afraid to say that I don’t dance. On birthdays, or any other days.” The taciturn fellow took a large swig of his beer and glowered across the table.

In mere seconds he was up on the dance floor, swirling and twirling with the lovely young classmate. She may have been more under the influence than he first thought, as she went out of her way to slide a delightfully cool palm across his face or come in close to press her copious chest up against his and then playfully jump back and spin around. Five or more classic disco hits were pumped out by the DJ, and the flirtation seemed to ramp up with every tune. A slow song then arrived to break the tempo, and she quickly came up close, with both of her hands around his perspiring neck.

“Oh my God, this has been the best birthday ever! I’m so glad you came here to dance tonight.” He realized she had eyes you could literally drown in.

“Happy to be of service, *mademoiselle*.” He hugged her a little tighter, and realized his poor choice of words.

““Oh, if Ronnie wasn’t sitting over there moping, I’d certainly let you service me, if you know what I mean!” The young woman put her head back and wildly arched her back. “But no, Ron and I are engaged, so he gets to be the birthday nookie provider. I suppose I’m just teasing you, but I so love to dance! Am I being bad to you?” Her tone turned soft as she leaned into his ear.

“No, it’s been a lot of fun. And you are simply gorgeous.” He sighed this out.

“But I am an even bigger teaser. At the start of my degree, I used to tease older guys for fun. And then it went a bit further, and I did it for money.” She looked at him unabashedly, and his mind raced back to the evening on Yonge Street when he had seen Ingrid and the elusive Becca outside the dominatrix gear shop.

“But things got a bit heavy and rough. So that’s all over now for me. My slots got taken over by somebody you know, but I won’t spill the beans. All I do now for shopping money is a bit of phone sex. Don’t tell Ronnie, as he won’t understand. Boy, a few drinks and all of this dancing have made me light-headed and far too talkative! I hope you still think I’m a good girl.” She withdrew a hand from his neck and tweaked his cheek.

“Oh, pssshaw, for sure. No judgment. But what’s phone sex?” He was from a small town.

“Well, some things are better experienced than explained. I promise to give you a call sometime, to make up for all of tonight’s teasing. But it’ll be our little secret, OK?” Ingrid’s eyes darted nervously in the direction of Ronnie, who was still sitting morosely at his table and looking balefully off into the distance.

No Such Thing as a Free Lunch



He swung in through the east doors of Knox College, having finished up a jam-packed tutorial in record time and intent on getting back to his room for meditation before the supper hour. Whenever he was in this part of the College he would always fondly remember his first visit here back in the Winter of Grade 13. The high school guidance secretary had kindly arranged for her daughter to give him an insider's look at the University, and they had walked down the walkway to the administrative wing in lightly blowing snow. When they opened the heavy metal and glass door to the porter's area, the angelic sounds of the practicing Knox College Choir rolled down to them from the Chapel area. That had sealed the deal on coming to the University of Toronto, and had germinated a strong hankering for living in the Knox residence.

So he stopped in his tracks and looked up towards the Chapel. No choir was singing today, but he saw the back of the head of what looked like one of his classmates, sitting alone in the rear-most pew. He quietly walked up the steps, two at a time, and tiptoed up to the young man who had his head bowed and his eyes closed tight.

"Jake, how's it going?" He whispered this throatily, realizing only then that his classmate was deep in prayer.

"Uh, hmmm, sorry Jay, I was very far away just now. Hmmm, I'm okay, thanks for asking. How are you?" The young fellow was inherently good-natured.

"Whoops, really sorry. I should have realized you were deep into the reeds by the cast of your body and your closed eyes. I just saw you from down below, and thought I'd come up to say hi. I don't normally see you around the College..." Truth be told, he felt more than a bit sheepish.

“Not to worry. I can dial in to where I was in a matter of seconds. My upbringing has hard-wired into me the need to pray on a regular basis, and the ability to connect with our Higher Power quickly and efficiently. So it’s all good.” The other young lad flashed a hearty grin.

“That’s great. I’m not much into prayer, I have to admit. I bang out the Lord’s Prayer semi-regularly, but that’s about it. But I do meditate, and some say that is God talking to us. So that side of the communication seems OK, it’s just the me talking to God piece that needs more practice.” He bumbled this out, and realized his classmate had started to frown about midway through his sharing.

“Well, we all have our own way of doing things. But what we do in our church is pray, and prayer takes many forms. Living life is a form of prayer, to ask to be guided to the right path with each step. But meditation, no, not for me. Our minister says that meditation is actually quite dangerous, because people who meditate often think they don’t need to come to church and start questioning things in the Bible. You can’t cherry pick out the bits that appeal to you, and leave the rest of the Bible on the side of the road. No siree, the Bible’s the Bible mister, and you have to accept the whole thing. And if you choose not to do this, it will be at your own peril, as you will start lining up your reservations for an after-life of eternal damnation. I tell you...”

The young gentleman’s voice rose a bit with each sentence, and it was clear that all of this would not end well. So he took a quick look at his watch, feigned surprise at the projected hour, and muttered something under his breath about being late for an appointment. He backpedaled quickly, almost to the point where he might fall backwards down the Chapel stairs, but he then pivoted quickly and dashed away to freedom. He sucked in a big breath of liberation, specifically from the uncomfortable experience, and generally from the confines of organized religion. He still very much liked and respected his earnest classmate, but mentally resolved that this would be the last time he engaged in any conversation with him that was remotely related to religion or spirituality.

At the end of the covered walkway, he almost bumped headlong into Klaus, who was steaming along from the direction of West House.

“Throw your briefcase in your room, you’re coming with me.” The fellow was a bit dressed up and looked as if he had an actual appointment.

“What’s going on? I was going to meditate, and then go on up to supper.” He nodded in the direction of the dining hall.

“Fuck that! Mystery meat, again! I just saw Stacey the server by the mailbox, and she verified it. I could smell it in the air, and I won’t eat that stuff one more bloody time. C’mon, shake a leg, and we’ll have a decent supper for thirty minutes of walking. But we’re on the clock, as they close the doors at a certain hour.” The wiry-haired lad tapped his watch.

They walked straight up St. George, past the subway station and the Christian Science church and into a lovely neighborhood of stately homes and the odd fraternity house.

“So where are we going?” He had thrown his briefcase into his room, and had stopped into the second floor washroom to splash some water on his face and pat down his hair.

“The Hare Krishna Temple up on Avenue Road. We’ll head up to Dupont, jig-jog a bit, and come out to it right near the railway crossing. They throw a community dinner every evening, but it gets packed and they close the doors at some point.” Klaus said this a bit breathlessly and kept on walking briskly.

“The Hare Krishnas! Those guys in the orange robes and shaved heads? And the strange head paint? Wow, you’ve changed man. And you’ll eat their food? Cripes, I remember the days when you wouldn’t even eat an egg roll, for God’s sake! But if you are truly game, then count me in!” He guffawed a bit too heartily.

“I’ve already been twice, man. My girlfriend has opened me up a bit on a lot of fronts. The food is vegetarian, looks weird, but actually tastes pretty good. And they don’t charge a red cent! Tons of people are into this, so it’s great for people watching. Some nice looking chicks every time, so what’s not to like?! And afterwards they do some drumming stuff, and then some chanting and dancing shit, but we don’t have to stay for that. Dine and dash, that’s my motto. Unless you want to hang around for the crazy part?” Klaus pointed to the right as they came up to a busy Dupont Street.

“Well, we can eat, and then stay for a bit. I have some work to do but I wouldn’t mind a bit of anthropological field work!” He grinned sideways at his buddy.

“Yeah, but let’s stick together in there. There will be a lot of people, and it can get pretty wild. You know they are a cult, or damn close to it. I don’t want them snafuing us into a backroom for brainwashing or whatever!” Klaus raised his eyebrows expressively.

“Dude, you’d look flipping amazing in one of those orange robes. And with a shaved head you’d be a veritable chick magnet!” They looked ahead to the temple, where a lineup of fifty or more people snaked out of the front entrance door and down the sidewalk of Avenue Road.

The Shape of Water



The days spun by, some faster than others, but in total he could feel the underlying rhythm of a semester wrapping itself up. And it was even more poignant, as it was the final year of his undergraduate program and there was a second level of wrapping up that imposed its influence on the passing days. He knew internally that it had been a very special time in his life. And even if he did stay for grad school, it would be sufficiently different that he would feel nostalgic for these years spent learning the fundamentals of engineering and the building blocks of an independent and fulfilling life.

So as part of this overall process, he decided to make as many memories as possible by experiencing as many different things the university and its surrounding community would offer. These would need to be wedged into the interstitial spaces between classes and basketball practice and the range of other things that made up his daily life, but with that intention he kept his eye out for events of interest in *The Varsity*, the campus newspaper. He saw that a new exhibit had opened at the Royal Ontario Museum, this one of fossils of birds of prey from the Jurassic Era. Since the ROM had been one of his first high school field trip destinations, he couldn't walk past the hot dog stands lining the sidewalk outside the museum without feeling a *frisson* of nostalgia and excitement. So after dinner one evening, without any truly pressing homework, he slipped on a jacket and checked the paper again for the institution's evening hours' schedule.

He walked across King's College Circle, and decided to take a more circuitous route through Queen's Park to get a bit more of a walk and to enjoy its lovely trees. As he went downhill towards the Wellesley Street underpass on the east side of campus, he felt something incrementally shift. He could now sense

running water, not through pipes or conduits, but water gurgling and babbling across rocks and reeds in a naturalized creek setting. As he cocked his head one way he could see only manicured lawns leading up to the edge of Sig Sam Library. But when he turned his head to the other side and squinted his eyes a bit, he could see and hear a natural stream meandering its way through campus down to College Street. He blinked a couple of times and it came more clearly into focus. And as he looked with his peripheral vision, the campus and its surroundings seemed different. A bit simpler, with fewer buildings and a quieter essence. Then he blinked again, harder this time, to bring more resolution to the vision. But it disappeared instead, and he was back to hearing cars whiz over his head on Queen's Park Crescent, with no running water in sight.

As he came out the other side of the underpass and angled towards the more natural component of Queen's Park, he shook his head a few times to make sense of what he had just experienced. And then a memory came to him, of looking at an old book in the Sig Sam Library, showing drawings and photographs of an earlier campus. And in the area south of Hart House there had been a creek, Taddle Creek. This watercourse had woven its way through the lower campus, its water molecules feeling the inexorable gravity pull to their destiny to reunite with kindred entities in the vastness of Lake Ontario. The beauty of Taddle Creek had stirred him from these drawings and photographs, just as the mystery and energy of the Saugeen River coursing through his hometown had sustained and intrigued him as he was growing up. But his heart had fallen as he read on, as some efficient and heartless campus planner had decided to bury Taddle Creek, and discharge its waters into an engineered piping system rather than allow the natural watercourse to continue to flow through the St. George campus. What he had just experienced was some kind of representation of the creek in its former glory, held in a matrix of geomancy and collective memory. He closed his eyes and walked along, trying to reconnect with this framework but knowing in his heart that he would fail. Some gifts are the sweetest when enjoyed fleetingly, and this appeared to be a veritable *cadeau d'esprit*.

He climbed the steps of the ROM, marveling at the beauty of its classical entrance and feeling like he was back in Grade 7 again. He went in directly to the special exhibit space, and immediately marveled at the winged creatures which had been suspended in mid-air in their fossilized grandeur with a network of guy wires and support struts. These creatures had been huge, and he looked up through their chest plates and expanded wings, trying to imagine how a smaller creature on the ground would feel if they had attracted the attention of one of these winged predators a few million years ago. He looked up several times, and could almost see the skeleton take on life, flesh covering its bones and eyes bulging at the anticipation of landing on a tasty catch of prey. He could almost see this play out in his mind's eye, and shook himself a bit internally, realizing he needed to tour the room quickly and go back to his desk for some practical work after this evening of altered perceptions.

The Life of a Gourmand



The tutorial for their subsurface exploration had been cancelled yet again, with the affable adjunct instructor from one of the ministries ensconced in the Queen's Park complex being called into some important meeting with his deputy minister. The academic day wasn't yet over, but this unexpected two hour reprieve gave the class a bit of time to explore the campus and its environs. Ian had brought peanut butter sandwiches that day for lunch, and he himself had ingested an underwhelming *repas* of cream of mushroom soup and grilled cheese Wonder Bread sandwiches. So the two boys had quickly agreed that a substantial mid-afternoon snack was in order, and migrated purposefully through University College towards their favourite sub shop on Bedford north of Bloor.

"Ham, pastrami, bacon, mortadella, mozzarella, mushrooms, lettuce, green peppers, onion...no olives, mayo, special sauce, salt and pepper..." Ian gave out his preferences for his sub to a fortysomething Pakistani counter attendant. He had already given his preferences, which amounted to asking for every item and condiment in the serving tray, and plucked out a wad of serviettes in anticipation of what would most certainly be a less-than-neat consumption of the stacked and overflowing sandwiches.

"Let's sit by the window so we can watch the world go by. I remember the last time we were here, the little nurse was walking to the subway with her manly boyfriend. You wouldn't look over at her, but I more than made up for that!" Ian chuckled loudly and slid into a bright orange banquette seat.

"Yeah, a little people watching on this bright sunny day sounds great." He purposefully ignored his buddy's attempt to tease him about the nubile Kira.

“Man, I see that TTC sign and it makes me feel like I have to run for a train! Whew, the hours I have spent on the Red Rocket to earn this flipping degree! Sometimes I think I should have moved into residence, and been able to leisurely walk to class.” Ian’s eyes danced as the attendant brought out the sandwiches on orange trays.

“But think of the money you’ve saved! And all the good food you’ve eaten, as your Mom is a crazy-amazing cook. And having family around to support you, you folks are a pretty tight unit, y’know.” He looked down at his towering sandwich, trying to figure out the best line of attack.

“Fair enough, but it came with some sacrifices. I’ve always had a curfew, and a lot of questions about any girl even dimly on the radar. So I was basically a celibate monk for my first three years, and have to really work out the logistics to be with my little gal pal these days. But if I had stayed in residence it would have been open season from Day One! Might have been like a deli counter, take a number please and stand in line!” Ian took a first huge bite out of his sub, with a large whap of mozzarella sliding off the other side.

“Yeah, but that’s an urban myth, man. Most guys have steady girlfriends, and a few like me are still kicking tires. But it’s not exactly wild and crazy times at Knox College!” He wiped his chin with his serviette.

“Oh, c’mon, there has to be some juicy stories to tell...” Ian was already more than halfway through his sandwich.

“Well, there’s always the exception to the rule, but this story doesn’t end well.” He mysteriously hesitated, and took a large mouthful of meat and cheese.

“Pray tell?” Ian’s eyes flickered.

“Well, there was this pain-in-the-butt guy who would always corner me and tell me how frisky his girlfriend was. Lots of salacious details, and plenty of nudge-nudge-wink-wink snorting. And she was a theolog, for goodness sake! Call me square, but I expect some higher standard to be followed if you’re going to be a person of the cloth.” He said this a bit too piously, and doubled down on his submarine.

“So that’s it, some guy and his horny girlfriend? What’s not to like?” Ian tamped down some errant shredded lettuce from the last bite of his loaf.

“Well, lots of little details, but to make a long story short it appeared that they were both playing the field. I myself saw a crazy scene over at Sig Sam one afternoon, and it may have involved this young lady and the manly boyfriend of the little nurse that you recalled a few minutes back. Couldn’t be sure, but two people were certainly going at it in the stacks, and circumstantial evidence points to these two.” He paused for effect.

“Makes no sense. Why wouldn’t she have the stud over to her residence room and have it off in comfort?” Ian wiped down his fingers.

“Dude, the boyfriend lived in the same House. Certain things you can’t put under wraps. And some people are thrill seekers.” He scrunched up his serving paper into a tight ball.

“OK, so she had some fun, and didn’t get caught. Maybe she was paying back the boyfriend for one of his indiscretions.” Ian shrugged lightly.

“Not quite so smooth, I’m afraid. I wasn’t in on all the details, but apparently things went ballistic, with lots of collateral damage. The guy dropped out of his applied chemistry program, telling everyone he was an emotional wreck and had to go away and get his head straight. And then a few weeks later, the young lady theolog stepped away from her program. Not sure where either of them went, but they are no longer in residence and no longer in school. Sad, don’t you think?” He winced and tilted his head sideways.

“Hmm, that is definitely a buzz-kill story. Two folks who are an item, keeping it all balanced, and then they start dancing too close to the flame. Some folks might get just a bit singed, but these guys fell into the furnace big-time. OK, lesson learned, I’ll stay true to my girlfriend and look away if any temptation crosses my path.” Ian became uncharacteristically sober-faced. “With that said, are you game for another sub?”

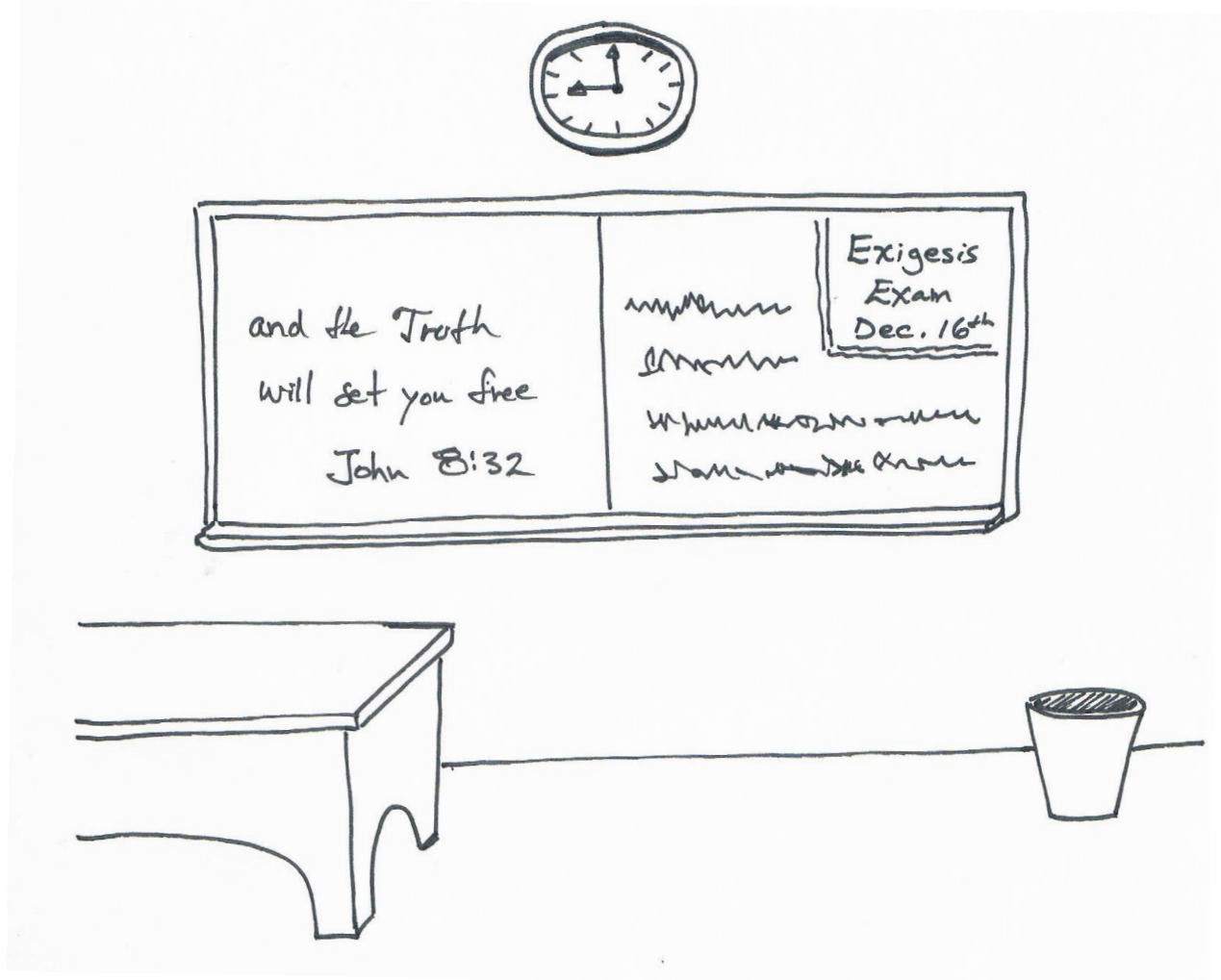
While he was contemplating the additional expenditure and the amount of digestion time remaining before dinner, the large presence of Henry loomed large at the window of the sub shop. He rapped on the glass and beckoned for the two boys to join him on the sidewalk.

“Guys, what are you doing eating that over-priced junk food?” Henry said this taciturnly, with a wee twinkle in his eye.

“Hey, I like subs. I was just going to get a second one. I could probably eat half a dozen.” Ian shook hands with Henry as introductions were muttered out.

“Nope, you’re coming with me down to Yung Sing’s on Baldwin. Best Chinese pastries in the city. Real food inside—red bean paste, taro, peanuts, curried chicken. And great value. Chinese people demand freshness and a good price. So if you go to an authentic Chinese bakery, everything tastes great and is dirt cheap.” Henry grabbed the two lads by their arms and ferried them southwards. Twenty minutes later, they each had a bag of amazing and fresh baked goods that were twice the experience in their eating relative to a Mr. Sub submarine, at half the cost.

A Fleeting Glimpse



Two days later, he sat in his room with two textbooks open on his desk, along with the disheveled components of a design assignment arranged in a chaotically ordered ensemble. He was trying to crack the back of the work before he met RJRJ later to share perspectives and then pull it all together into a coherent whole. It hadn't been going particularly well, so he had knocked off for a quick bout of meditation, but even with the resulting focus bump he still felt like he was spinning his wheels a bit. A soft knock came on the door as a welcome interruption, and he looked over to see the sizable head of Henry angling through the door opening.

"Big Jay, do you want to go over to Sig Sam for some intensive study time? The four walls of my room are closing in on me, and I need to change the air a bit..." Henry's eyes were hooded and he cracked a sardonic smile.

"Well, in about fifteen minutes I have to rendezvous with one of the guys in my class. Study space on campus is at a premium these days with the November crunch, so we've found a quiet classroom over in the academic wing of Knox. The guy's a cool dude, from Hong Kong. We'll be doing a lot of intensive work to wrap up our design project, but you can crack those ol' economic texts right beside us and we can

all vibe off of our legendary concentration!” He grinned over at his housemate and started to coalesce a mass of notes.

“Sounds fair, as long as you don’t make the assumption that this guy and I are second cousins just because I’m of Chinese heritage. People do this to me all the time---‘hey, I just met some guy from Hong Kong, his name is Wong, you probably know him, right?’ Dude, HK is a very big place with a gazillion people. And my parents were born here in Canada, so that makes me a true banana Canadian!” Henry said this wryly, as he leaned on the door jamb.

“Banana? My favourite fruit, which got me through high school basketball games without cramping out. But what do you mean?” He threw the notes and textbooks into a carry satchel.

“Yellow on the outside, white on the inside. I’m as Canadian as you, man. I played high school football, and now for the Blues. I cheer for the Leafs, eat Canadian back bacon and pork n’ beans. So look beyond the outward appearances, my friend.” Henry appeared a bit wounded.

“Dude, I hear you. And I was already on that wavelength. But RJ is a cool guy, you will enjoy his company as a study buddy, that I will guarantee.” He clapped his friend on his broad shoulder, and they turned to go to Henry’s room to pick up any notes or texts that were needed for the study session.

The classroom was cool, as the parsimonious Scots who ran the college had probably turned off the heating radiators for the weekend. The air was moderately musty, perhaps from chalk dust or the lack of consistent ventilation. Biblical passages had once again been left on the front blackboards, perhaps imbuing the space with a subtle energy from the spiritual messages contained within them.

“Henry, pick your real estate. We’ll work around you, as we’ll probably need a larger space to spread out our calcs and drawings, so the table over at the window might be ideal for the two of us.” He started to unpack his materials while Henry migrated to a heavy wooden desk near the front of the classroom.

“Gentlemen, I bid you a good afternoon. I apologize for my modest tardiness. My rice cooker needed a bit of coaxing to turn on, and this was resolved successfully but at a certain cost.” RJ came one step into the classroom, and formally bowed to the two boys.

“No sweat, partner. I’ve got everything set up and we can get right down to business momentarily. But allow me to introduce Henry to you, my friend from West House and a star football player.” The two young men moved in for a lingering handshake. “RJ is a martial arts star, and a great student. And a real inspiration to me on the meditation front.” He smiled broadly at the two young men, and awkwardly waved his hand around.

“I hear you’re from Hong Kong.” Henry’s strength was not small talk.

“Yes, and how many generations has your family been in Canada for?” RJ smiled thinly.

“I’m second-generation Canadian, parents were born here. Grandparents were born in HK.” Henry’s eyes tightened, and his lips were pursed.

“It is a great honour to meet you, and share this study space with you. Perhaps my grandchildren will follow in your footsteps, and star for the Blues?” RJ bowed his head formally and then turned towards the window table to get down to work.

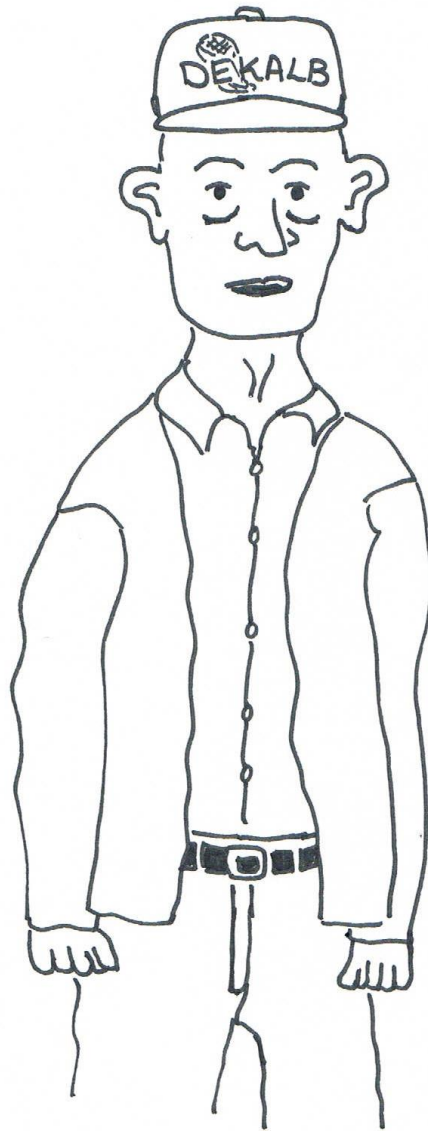
Thirty minutes later they had resolved all of the major sticking points of the assignment, and were making great progress on assembling a convincing final product. RJ had a streamlined way of working, and he tried to connect to this energy and emulate it in his assigned tasks. All was going swimmingly until he looked out the leaded glass windows to King’s College Circle. Crossing on an angle in the direction of University College was the unmistakable figure of Sue, petite yet strong in a pair of blue overalls. She was walking with purpose, as if she had a meeting she was late for. He had not seen her on campus for weeks, and his cheeks burned at the recollection of even going so far as sit in a stakeout for her at the Hart House Cafeteria. He knew he had to act fast.

“Dreadfully sorry, RJ, have to step away monetarily. Be back soon...” He flew out of the room, and almost fell flat on his face as his toe stubbed one of the classroom desk legs. He ran down a quiet corridor, through a darkened chapel foyer, and loudly punched through the east doors of the College. He skipped down the stone steps and looked across the Circle for the profile of the attractive nursing student. There were a score of people on the north end of the Circle, kicking soccer balls and flinging Frisbees. He couldn’t see Sue in the melee, so he slowed down and carefully scanned the horizon for her receding images. Seeing nothing and feeling a sense of quickening panic, he surmised that she must have cut due north and entered the main doors of University College. He ran hard up its stairs, and went into dimly lit hallways with beautiful wood detailing. He ran down one hallway and an intersecting hallway, with no luck. He ascended to the second floor and peeked into a dozen classrooms, with the same result. He breathed out a pathetic release of held air, realizing she was gone. He trudged back across the Circle, feeling moody and glum.

“Anything wrong?” Henry looked up from his textbook.

“Nope, just needed to pee.” His cheeks flushed red as he sat back down to his work.

Blue Collar Background



Twenty four hours later, he sat amidst the frayed opulence of the Ways and Means Committee Room directly opposite the dining hall. The furniture was probably the original from the College's inception, and had perhaps been reupholstered twenty or more years back. Young folks can be hard on soft surfaces, so he had searched out his favourite chair near the fireplace that had the least amount of textile fissures and errant springs popping out of it, and had kerplunked himself down with a sheaf of notes. He had been finding it hard to study in his West House room, and this was a quiet haven that rarely saw foot traffic even around the lunch and dinner hours.

He had been mentally kicking himself over the missed opportunity of catching up with the fleet-footed Liz, agonizing over his slowness of getting out onto King's College Circle, and even contemplating if had just imagined her diminutive profile cutting across the greenspace amidst the recreational revelry. He mulled this over and over in his mind, to the point that he realized that he was hardly conscious of the

material on the notes directly in front of him. So he shut his eyes and repeated his mantra softly, over and over, until he slipped into the zone where time stood still and mental handwringing ground to a welcome halt.

“Are you in La-La Land, or can you hear me?” Henry’s voice was soft but abrupt enough.

“Hunh, hey, I just slipped into a bit of meditation so I could focus on these equations. What’s up with you?” He wasn’t exactly sure how long he had been away, but felt completely refreshed.

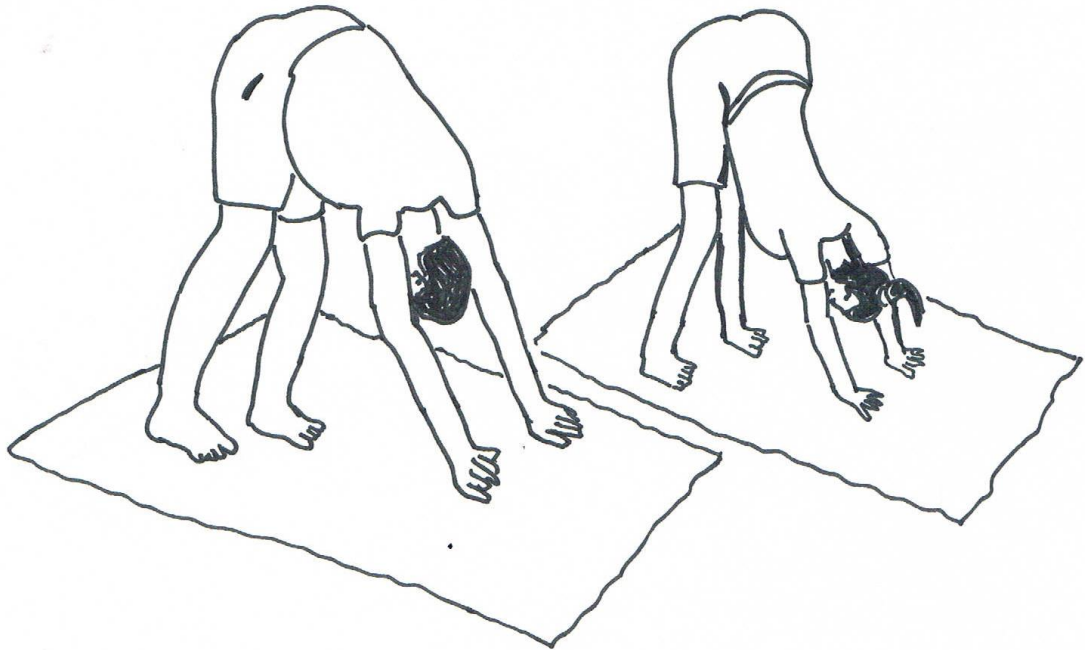
“I’m on my annual pilgrimage to buy black shoe polish for my Sunday dress shoes. The only place I can seem to find something practical like that is at Honest Ed’s on Bloor Street. I wouldn’t mind the company for the stroll up and back, probably not much more than an hour if the cashier lineups are modest. What do you say? We can walk a different route and cut through some nice neighbourhoods. And Honest Ed’s itself is worth the price of admission, as a slice of life you don’t see much in Toronto!” Henry was abnormally enthusiastic as he made his pitch.

Thirty five minutes later they were entering the glittering doors of the emporium of schlock at Bloor and Bathurst. The store had a Vegas type of feel to it, as if a carnie hustler at the CNE was soon to come out and do a promotional sell for a food blender. But inside it was all practical goods, all arranged with gaudy signage in a format that would be copied by future dollar stores. The two young men rode up slow escalators to the second floor, going directly to the known location for shoe polish. But along the way they saw a full range of products—shoe stretchers, liquid embroidery sets, jars of mothballs, furry boot insoles---that seemed to speak to an earlier time. It was a blending of I Love Lucy and rural Ontario ploughing matches, with a dash of big city flair and hucksterism. But the best part was the people. No one was younger than middle-aged, and most folks were seniors. As he looked around at his fellow shoppers, he realized that they reminded him of his own Mom and Dad. Hard working, Depression-era folks, who wanted a bargain and who didn’t really care about aesthetics or where something was made. A number of the men nodded to him or tipped their corn caps in a perfunctory way, and the ladies smiled that prim smile that they knew was friendly enough but not too friendly. He absorbed all of this, and he realized he still missed elements of his hometown. A place where people said hello to strangers, did not put on airs and looked out for one another. He realized he had changed over the years of his degree, but he was still at heart a small town boy who relied on the blue collar values that had been woven into him by his parents. He might end up living in a city, and working as a professional, but that early training would certainly shape how he carried out his roles in life.

“Ready to roll? I found a large jar of Kiwi that’s 50% off.” Henry was a second generation Canadian, and Canadians love a deal.

“Yeah, for sure. I thought I just saw my Mom and Dad go by on the down escalator. Or a couple who looks just like them. Thanks for suggesting this sentimental journey, Henry.” The two lads headed downstairs to the cashier.

Reviewing the Options



It was a bright, sun-filled Sunday afternoon, and he had made last-minute arrangements to meet Ian at the Hart House weight room for a bit of lifting. His friend's folks came downtown intermittently for a bit of cultural enjoyment, and would drop the suburban lad off to the campus before tootling onwards to the AGO or the ROM. Time was always a bit tight as Ian had to be ready for his lift home at a prescribed hour underneath the Hart House clock, but the two boys had developed a routine and it worked well for all parties involved.

"Christ, how can you curl thirty pound dumbbells without breaking a sweat?" Ian puffed this out as he swung his twenty pounders with some difficulty.

"I've studied at the feet of the master, Henry of the Varsity Blues. He's taught me about form, and tempo. Throw in a bit of patience and you'll be binging up thirty pounds before you know it." He curled his bells slowly and methodically, and emitted a faint smile.

"Patience is not my forte, man. There's a lot of things I want to do, and lots of things I want to buy. But they all take money, and I need this degree to get a decent-paying job so I can budget things in a solid way. But I'm so done with school, I wish we could graduate tomorrow!" Ian dropped his dumbbells noisily.

"Yeah, I hear you. But when I sit back and really think about things, this has been an incredible experience. Getting to live in a great city like Toronto, and go to an amazing school like U of T? Crap, man, we've got horseshoes up our behinds, we're so lucky!" He put his own dumbbells down and wiped some sweat from his brow.

“Dude, I grew up in The Big Smoke. Know most of the city like the back of my hand. It’s nice, but almost too familiar. And the university is fine, but all we do in engineering is stagger from one problem set to the other, and one lab writeup to another. It’s a flippin’ treadmill, man, and I’m so anxious to get off it and smell the roses!” Ian sat down on a weight bench and massaged his biceps gingerly.

“Check, check and check, but who says it’s going to get any better out there as a working engineer? We’ll run from one project to the next, staying late at the office, bringing work home at nights. All so we can keep our clients happy, and get ahead in the game. Move up the ladder, become a project manager, help grow a consulting business. I bet we’ll look back on these days as the best part of our lives.” He looked over at couple of jacked guys who were deadlifting some very heavy weights.

“Maybe, but I doubt it. Because being broke all the time is painful, man. I have no money for clothes, no money to go out, no money to impress the girlfriend. When I’m out working, the cash will flow, and the good times will roll!” Ian smiled his trademark devilish grin.

“All in good time, my man. We’ll get our undergraduate degrees soon enough. And I’m thinking seriously about staying on here for grad school, so I can’t get too impatient about getting out to the workaday grind.” He pursed his lips and arched his eyebrows.

“Ugh, crum, that sounds like a prison sentence to me! Here I am, counting down the weeks for this term to end, and then one more term, and you’re contemplating on signing up for another two years? I told my old man about this and he thinks you’re nuts!” Ian leaned back on the bench with an exasperated tone in his voice.

“Hey, he might be right! But my inner voice tells me to do it now while I can. Life will get in the way down the road, with work and maybe a wife and kids? If I get a scholarship, then I think it’s a done deal.” He rubbed his right thumb and index finger together.

“Now look who’s finally talking about money! But you can make a pantload more out there in the working world.” Ian rolled his eyes for emphasis.

“Listen, maybe I’ve got something to prove. My old man didn’t even want me to go to university. But there was no way I was going to be a federal meat inspector, walking around in a white coat and poking at chicken carcasses. And my Mom’s idea for me to become a preacher man didn’t seem much better, so engineering it was. But no one in my family has a university degree, so if I can snag a second piece of sheepskin, why the hell not?” His voice was starting to sound a little brittle.

“Hey, my folks don’t have any degrees either! But they run successful businesses, and they certainly encouraged me to go further in school beyond high school. But enough is enough, at least for this cowboy. And we might be picking up stakes...” Ian said this in an off-hand way.

“You mean move, from Toronto?” He almost spluttered this out.

“Yeah, maybe. The folks are getting ready to retire. They don’t see growing old in Toronto. Some place nice, with fresh air. Still looking at the options.” Ian shrugged his shoulders.

“And you’re moving with them, away from your friends?” He realized he was saying this with some level of guilt inducement.

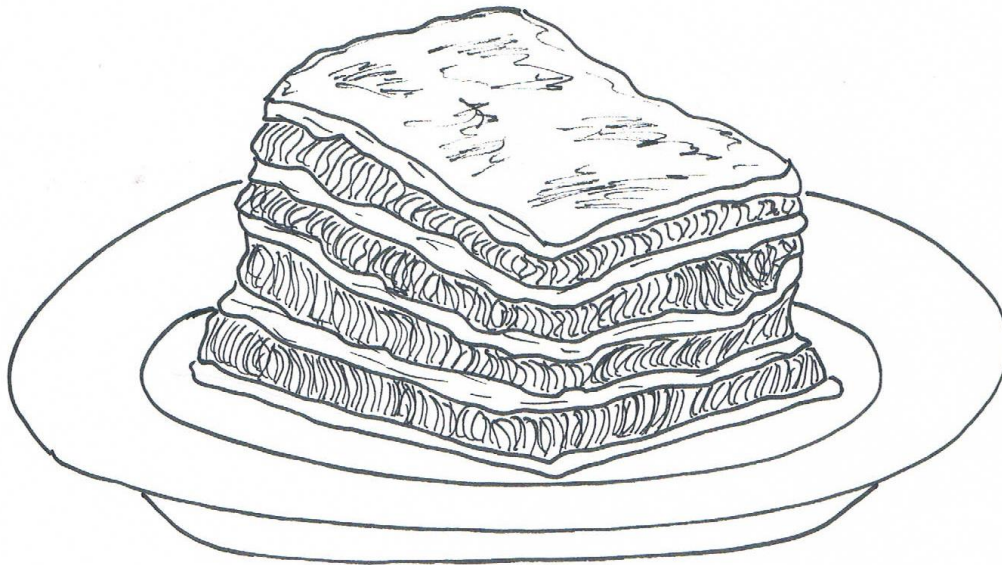
“Hey Kojak, blood’s thicker than water! I like fresh air too, y’know, and I can be there to take care of the old folks as they age. We’re pretty tight as a family, y’know?” Ian said this softly, but matter-of-factly.

“Yeah, I admire that. Maybe even envy that, if truth be told.” He emitted a tight smile.

“Fuck, enough of the weights. Let’s go upstairs and burn up the track.” Ian was already halfway out the door.

Upstairs, while warming up on the oval track, he could look down to the gym and see a yoga class in progress. He gawked a bit as he saw Dirk and his pretty Asian girlfriend doing warrior poses on their yoga mats. He hadn’t seen old Dirk for quite a while, the last time being an impromptu bump-in in the Robarts stacks as both young men looked for reference materials. Their relationship had changed over the years, from enmity to a neutral form of acceptance. Life was certainly all about change. And with that, he accelerated sharply and left Ian panting in his dust.

If You Snooze, You Lose



It was just another day, but something about it felt momentous, as if something big would be launched or some substantive issue would be resolved. He had some time to kill before his next class started, so he took himself for a slow perambulation of King’s College Circle. The beautiful buildings on its perimeter seemed to beckon to him in all their architectural glory—Knox College, University College, Sigmund Samuel Library, Sir Sandford Fleming Building and Convocation Hall. His eye lingered longest on Convocation Hall as he walked along, as it was arguably the most salient building of this amazing set of campus buildings. Con Hall is where he would soon be graduating from, and as he looked over to its storied columns and lovely wooden entrance doors he could almost see the precognitive images of robe-wearing graduands and their families spilling down the stairs of this iconic structure on a bright and sun-filled June day.

But for today the November sky retained its gun-metal dark lustre, and a light wind picked up speed in pulses to foreshadow the winter days that loomed ominously ahead. He tightened the zipper to his coat and leaned in a bit to the wind, closing his eyes momentarily as he mentally willed it to subside and to have it replaced with a few rays of sunshine.

“Fancy meeting you in these parts?!” The warm voice had both substance and flirtiness, and it shocked him out of his reverie.

“Yeah, hey, hi! I guess it’s been a while since we crossed paths. I had been hoping to have the good luck to bump into you one of these days.” He smiled sheepishly at Sue, and leaned in for an awkward sideways hug. At the second of being closest to her, he looked down and admired a distinctive set of dangly green earrings that nicely complimented her short auburn hair.

“Yeah, understatement of the century there, mister! I thought I slipped you my number the last time we ships passed in the night. Down by the Mechanical Building, if memory serves.” Her eyes danced when she said this, but there was an underlying emotion that he couldn’t quite put his finger on.

“Uh, yep, you most certainly did. And I guarded that little slip of paper on my study desk for quite a number of days, but then it just seemed to disappear into thin air! Hazel, the sweet little maid over at Knox, is always tidying up. I kind of think that little scrap of papyrus went out in the trash. But...” He realized he had explained this far too quickly, and had perhaps been too apologetic in his tone.

“”OK, that explains things, I guess. Makes me feel a little better, I suppose. A girl starts to wonder if she was perhaps being a bit too bold to push her number to a fella...” Sue smiled broadly, but her eyes were a little wounded.

“No, not at all. Bold is good these days. But I did try to make amends for Hazel’s tidiness. I hung out for a bit at Hart House Cafeteria, hoping you might be studying at the same time. And once I saw you cutting across the Circle, but I lost you as I ran out of the College. Close, but no cigar that day. But...” He was back on slightly firmer ground, but felt nervous about what might now transpire.

“Sorry. Very sorry. Who knows...”The petite nurse drifted off and looked away momentarily.

“But it’s all good now. You’re here, I’m here. Same place, same time. Wondering if you would like to grab dinner together sometime, or go see a movie?” He looked at her intently, and was struck by the depth in her eyes.

“Ohhh...” This was sighed out slowly.

“Or a coffee, even? I don’t really drink coffee, but I could make an exception in these circumstances. Happy to do just about anything, you say the word.” He said this quietly and softly.

“Oh boy, this is tough. A month ago, I would have been doing jumping jacks right now. But when you didn’t call right away, I started to wonder. And when a few weeks went by I kind of gave up. So I was invited to a house party, and ...I met a wonderful chap.” The nurse’s eyes started to glisten imperceptibly.

“Oh, I see.” He felt a sharp pain rising in his gut.

“And it’s only been a few weeks, but we’ve been seeing each other a lot, and it’s going really well. So as much as I hate to disappoint you, I’m sorry, I’m taken.” She stuck out her lower lip.

“But hey, we could still go to a movie, or grab some food. Not really a date, y’know, more like friends. Just to talk, to get to know one another?” He knew he was grasping at straws.

“That sounds reasonable on the surface, but it wouldn’t be fair to any of the parties involved. Certainly not fair to my new beau, and not fair to you. I’m a one-guy gal, and that’s a fact. And frankly, it wouldn’t be fair to me either. If I started doing coffee dates with you I might want more than a hot drink, and that road would only lead to heartbreak. So as much as I hate to say it, the fates have decided that it’s not meant to be. Take care of yourself, kiddo. You’re going to be a great guy for some lucky gal.” She leaned in for a last hug and then spun sharply, walking away quickly.

He stood there in a quagmire of shock and stupefaction, watching her short profile getting smaller with each passing second. He leaned up against a light pole, dimly hoping for a lightning strike reconsideration that would see her running back into his outstretched arms. But this didn’t happen, and the wind blew just a bit more sharply.

He felt glum and defeated. He knew he needed an emotional tonic, some kind of restorative to even out his perturbed equilibrium. It came to his mind that he needed comfort food, so he resolved to go back to the College and call his sister’s friend Rose, to invite himself to a hearty Italian supper. A big slice of her celebrated lasagna, thicker than a Toronto phone book, would go a long way to setting things right in his stomach and his heart.

Hotel Food Always Disappoints



In the penultimate week of the Fall term, when everything seems to be due or nigh on due, inevitably something appears that wasn't on your radar. He had minimized the amount of extracurricular and committee work over the last year, focusing instead on academics as a lead-in to grad school and athletics as fitness maintenance and stress relief all rolled into one. But the Grad Ball would run in a short four months' time, and there were still a few key things to resolve in a timely fashion so that ticket prices could be set and event advertising could get underway. He had received a late-night phone call mid-week from the boyfriend of Kira, and squire to countless other young ladies on the U of T campus. Raspy-voiced but directly to the point, the other lad had suggested they get together post-haste to go over a checklist of outstanding Grad Ball items before the holiday break. They had worked together on various committees over the last two years, but had never really grown close for obvious reasons. He quickly suggested they meet on the late Friday afternoon of that week, in the spacious and airy Knox Library.

"Cripes, this is a beautiful space! I've walked by this building a million times but I've never been inside." The guest to the College looked upward at a network of timbered beams.

“Yeah, it’s been a great place to live for the last three and a half years. A bit stodgy, but you can’t expect perfection, and it’s just steps away from the Engineering zone of campus.” He smiled tightly and pulled back a chair beside an oak study table.

“Oh, I don’t know, I’ve heard a few stories about girls in Bible College. They’re forbidden to go out dancing, but they seem particularly inclined towards having it off when they get the chance!” The guy snorted loudly at his own joke, and sat down heavily in his own chair.

“Well, we might just have a few frisky ones living here, but I can’t say from my own experience.” He paused coolly, and watched for a reaction from across the table. Receiving none, he went on with a salvo of small talk. “So you’re from Toronto, right?”

“Yessir, born and raised. Still live with my family up in Moore Park.” This was said with a mix of emotions, not directly discernible.

“Yeah, sometimes I envy you guys who can go home to a nice meal when they’re serving up mystery meat again in the Dining Hall! But I’m from up Bruce County way, and it would be a three hour commute one-way!” He scrunched up his cheeks and continued to take the measure of his colleague.

“Yeah, I come and go from home when it’s convenient for me. Pops pays for a little bachelor pad down on Cecil Street. I crash there a lot if I study late, or if I have a special guest that needs entertaining.” The young lad smirked in a lascivious manner.

“Good for you, man. Our little rooms here are basically study carrels that can be quickly converted to a bachelor pad if the need arises.” This was said in a puffy-chested way, in a poor attempt at one-upmanship.

“Okay, to business. We have a sit-down dinner in late March for up to 500 people down at the HarbourFront Hilton. Speeches to start, and you’ve nailed down a killer band for dancing at the end. The only big remaining thing to tie down is what will be served for dinner.” The other lad rolled this out in a crisp, business-like fashion.

“Right, let’s break it down into components and make a collective decision on each piece. Appetizer, main course and dessert?” He took out a sheet of paper and a pen.

“Great. OK, appetizer. I looked at the options and it really boils down to soup or salad, or both. What do you think?” The other lad seemed uninterested in anything relating to appetizers.

“Each element adds cost, so I wouldn’t do both. And it will be a long evening anyways, and the serving and eating of each course will take twenty to twenty five minutes, minimum. It will still be cold in March, so I suggest the soup. They have a turkey *consommé, avec petits legumes*. So carrots and celery in a hot broth, in which they basically got a turkey to run through.” He borrowed one of his Dad’s favourite jokes.

“Fine by me. OK, main course. This is where it gets interesting.” The suave young man cracked his knuckles.

“Several options here---chicken *cordon bleu*, arctic char, roast beef or prime rib. But all come with different price tags.” He jotted some information on his sheet of paper.

“I hate fish, and I loathe rubber chicken. Roast beef is so yesterday, so prime rib it is.” All of this was said authoritatively.

“But prime rib is ten bucks more per plate than the chicken dish. That will mean ticket prices will be higher than thirty dollars, which some people think is already too high. And the *cordon bleu* will be rich with cream and bacon, and not everybody eats red meat. But pretty much everyone will eat chicken.” He knew he was leaving out one or two vegetarian friends from his class, but they would have to make do with a vegetable *au gratin* dish.

“Ugh, it’s so much work to feed the masses! You’re right, we do need to hold the ducat price at thirty clams. Aw hell, hotel food is always sub-standard, so why not do things on the cheap?! I’ll just have to drink more wine than usual!” The rogue released a sideways grin.

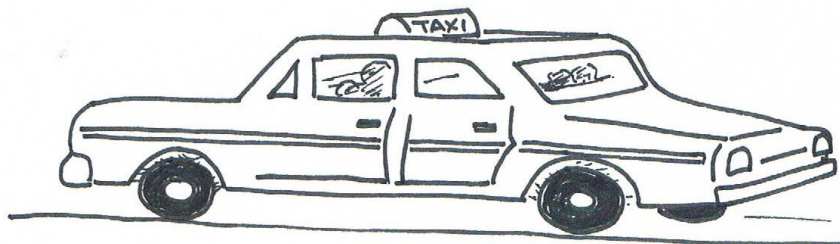
“Bottle of house red, bottle of house white, in the centre of each round of eight.” He pursed his lips and said this in a mock English accent.

“Chocolate eclairs with whipped cream to finish things off? With tea and coffee served at the table?” The other young man stated this more as a fact than a question.

“It’s unanimous! I almost feel my mouth watering!” He grinned broadly.

“Dude, you’re alright for a hick from the country. We’re going to have a great night in March and a hell of a party to celebrate our graduation! And I think we’ll look pretty good in our white tie and tails outfits. Let’s hope the ladies reciprocate with some smashing low-cut evening gowns!” The two lads stood and shook hands amicably, any traces of past animosity or suspicion being erased, at least temporarily.

Mistletoe and Mischief



He had turned in a bit earlier than usual, anticipating a very busy end to the last week of term. Exams were coming up soon, and he wanted to be rested and at the top of his game. So he had entered a deep slumber state very quickly, exploring some inner landscape that was full of colour and brimming with delights that seemed tantalizingly close yet somehow elusive. He heard some kind of alarm, going on and off at regular intervals, and his dream persona ran hard to evade detection. The aural landscape went quiet for a time, but then the alarm came back more incessantly. He groaned and rolled over in bed, and

then came to the realization that his phone had been ringing loudly for some unknown quantity of physical time.

“Hullo...” He was groggy, and if truth be told, still half asleep.

“Well helloooo, big fellow! Were you hard at work, poor baby, and trying to decide if you should pick up the phone?” Kira’s voice was syrupy, smooth and sexy.

“No...I was just tied up a bit, with my head in another world.” This was not totally inaccurate.

“Okay, that sounds mysterious. I like mysterious. Listen, I know I’ve been out of touch. But I have a big favour to ask of you.” The young lady got right down to business.

“Uh, sure, anything. Tell me how I can help.” His small-town roots ran deep.

“Well, OK, here goes. The Nursing Christmas Party runs tomorrow night over at the Great Hall in Hart House. Cocktails at six, dinner for seven, dancing to follow. I need a date for this *soiree*, and I think you’d be just perfect for the job! Are you free tomorrow night?” Her voice was warm, expectant.

“I’m never free, but I’m always reasonable...” He let this rural joke waft over the phone line, hoping she would get the humour.

“Yeah, yeah, haha. But are you available tomorrow night?” The girl certainly had a firm edge to her voluptuous exterior.

“Why wouldn’t you be going to this kind of event with your gallant suitor?” He was now fully awake.

“Uh, I was hoping not to fill in every detail on my reasons for asking you...” She said this a bit huffily and perhaps too breezily for his tastes.

“Well, it’s a fair question. And if you don’t want to answer, perhaps you should work your way further down your list of date possibilities.” His own voice took on a measure of hard edge.

“OK, full disclosure. I just went to see him unannounced, down at his little *pied à terre* near Kensington Market, to ask him about a few details relating to the party. Could’ve knocked me over with a feather, because when I was half a block away, he pulls up in a cab and pops out with two slinky floozies on his arm. They looked like high-end working girls, if you know what I mean? I ducked behind a pole and watched them go into his building, all tittering away as if they’ve been drinking champagne. So I spilled a few tears on the side of the curb, and then came straight home, realizing that he has truly crossed a big line this time! I have two tickets to the party tomorrow, and no one to go with. That’s why I’m calling you, big boy. I know I was a mean little teaser last time at Hart House, but I promise you I’ll more than make up for it tomorrow night. Pretty please?” Her tone was so inviting and suggestive that he knew he couldn’t refuse the offer.

The Great Hall was decked out with beautiful holiday decorations, and had candles glowing warmly on each of the white tablecloth-bedecked tables. He stood awkwardly at the entrance, wearing a flashy blue suit and a spiffy tie that had been kindly loaned to him by a dentistry student in Centre House with a similar lanky build. Dozens of lovely nursing students floated past him, dressed to the nines in striking

evening wear and with their tresses piled up fetchingly on their heads. He checked his watch more than once, and then he saw his date strutting towards him with a big smile on her face. She had on a form-fitting cream-coloured dress that fairly hugged her curvaceous figure, accented by some elegant jewelry, and sported a pair of gold-coloured high heel shoes that added several inches to her perceived height.

“My handsome knight awaits...” She rushed up to him and dispensed a lingering hug.

“Holy smokes, those shoes are real show-stoppers!” He took a half-step back and spun his date around in a slow twirl.

“I picked them up this afternoon in a little boutique up on Hazelton Avenue, just for you!” She completed her twirl and leaned back in for another hug. It was a promising start to a memorable evening.

The meal portion went by in a blur, with very good food and decent wine being served to the tables by hard-working and efficient serving ladies. A few heartfelt speeches by the Faculty Dean and the Class President followed the dinner, and within minutes of their completion the dance floor was full of nursing students and their dates grooving to the beat emanating from a five piece band.

“Oooh, I just love these guys! They played at last year’s events and I danced all night until my feet hurt!” Kira swayed her shoulders to the music.

“They do sound good. I wish I was more of a dancer than I am.” He raised his eyebrows and flashed a lopsided grin.

“Oh, I’ve crossed paths with guys like you before! We’ll wait until they slow things down a bit, and then I’ll get you up for a little TLC on the dance floor. After that, you’ll be putty in my hands.” Kira leaned into him and slyly ran her hand up his thigh.

Within minutes the tempo slowed, and he clumsily wove his way through tables and chairs while holding her hand on the way to the dance floor. He put his arm around her waist and held her right hand with his left hand, but she shook this off and tightly wrapped both of her arms around his neck. She mashed her considerable breasts up against his chest, and brazenly reached around to position his hands on the upper swell of her buttocks. They rocked back and forth like this for several numbers, oblivious to the other dancers around them, fully immersed in a zone of unbridled sensuality.

“Hey sweetheart, I know the night’s still young, but I think we should get out of here. You’ve made me extremely randy, and I think we need to go somewhere where I can drive you wild!” She pulled down on his neck and planted a lingering kiss on the shocked but appreciative young man.

“Shall we go back to Knox College?” He had developed a large lump in his throat, and his voice was thick with lust.

“Oh, I’ve got an even better idea. My parents are travelling this week, so we can go up to my place. Just a ten minute cab ride up the hill, and you know I’ll certainly make it worth your while when we get there. The folks have a hot tub in their ensuite that we can slide into, and things will get steamy on a number of fronts!” The gal flashed her eyebrows appealingly.

They took a cab from the south door of Hart House, and jumped right into a zone of hanky-panky in the back seat that didn't seem to faze the middle-aged Pakistani cab driver. As they rolled past a sweep of grand homes with finely manicured lawns, Kira surfaced for a brief second to give stopping directions to the cabbie. The car stopped outside of a Tudor mansion on Russell Hill Road, with a bright orange Corvette parked in the circular driveway.

"Crap, my big brother's home. He said he was going to Montreal to see his girlfriend. This might be a bit trickier than I thought. Wait out here for five minutes, tops, so I can go in and get the lay of the land. If he's down on the main level, I'll flick the front light a couple of times and you can go around back by the pool and I'll pop you in the kitchen door. We can go upstairs by the servants' stairs and head to the master bedroom. If he's already upstairs, the light will stay as it is and you will simply breeze up to the front door. I'll let you in and we can tiptoe downstairs to the comfort and privacy of the rec room. Got that? I'll see you in a jiff..." She squeezed his hand and stepped out of the cab, heels clicking provocatively towards her front door.

He sat in the back of the cab, slumped over, with blood coursing through his veins after the excitement of the ride up. It had been a fun night, but something in the back of his head told him he was playing a tawdry game. She was certainly attractive, and blazingly enticing. But she was way out of his league, and would most certainly be back in the arms of her boyfriend by Christmas time. He looked over at the porch light, and checked his watch in the dim light.

"Sir, the young lady's safely inside. Take me to 59 St. George Street, just south of Willcocks."

As the car pulled away, he couldn't help but offer up a soft wave towards Kira's front door. He let out a soft, anguished groan and leaned back into the car seat's upholstery, comfortable in the knowing that he had made the right decision. Perhaps not the most enjoyable decision, but the right decision.

~The End~

About the Author and Illustrator



Brian Wilson Baetz is a proud son of Walkerton, Ontario, a small town that is the seat of Bruce County and a willing host to the mighty Saugeen River. He has earned civil engineering degrees from the University of Toronto and Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. Previously he served as Professor and Chair of the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at Tulane University in New Orleans, Louisiana, and has also served as Professor and Chair of the Department of Civil Engineering at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. Brian is a registered Professional Engineer in the Province of Ontario and is a Fellow of the Canadian Society of Civil Engineers.

He lives with his family in Dundas, Ontario, a town of considerable charm and historical significance, not to mention its enviable amounts of green space.