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# Jailhouse Sketches

Mr. Edward H. Campbell



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# Jailhouse Sketches

Stories

By Edward H. Campbell

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Campbell's Commentraies

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This book is a work of fiction. Any references to historical events, real people, or real places are used fictitiously. Other names, characters, places, and events are products of the author's imagination, and any resemblance to actual events or places or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

In the first case it was necessary to renounce the consciousness of an unreal immobility in space to recognize a motion we did not feel. In the present case it is similarly necessary to renounce a freedom that does not exist, and to recognize a dependence of which we are not conscious.

--Leo Tolstoy



Now we find it necessary to renounce a freedom we do not have in order to embrace a despotism we do not perceive.

--M. M. Albion

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## (I). The Amherst Caper

A short story is like a quick kiss in the dark from a stranger. That is not, of course, the same thing as an affair or a marriage, but kisses can be sweet, and their very brevity forms their own attraction.

--Stephen King

I Paul-David Michael Williams the Third, a white man, with neither noose around my neck, nor gun to my head, do hereby solemnly promise and swear that I am not the author of what you are about to read. But I nevertheless, a shadow of my former self, having at death's door arrived, do hereby confess to the most horrid crime of grave robbery, that the wisdom found in this here manuscript be not forgotten.

At the time I was in the employ of a shadowy figure by the name of "Nigger John," also known as "Dirty," who promised to pay me to aid and abet him in the theft of a pair of giant bronze doors from a sepulcher in a cemetery off Beer Can Rd. in Amherst, MA. Now Dirty and I, having struck a bargain, in the wee hours of the morning, disguised as city workers, under the cover of darkness, on a gloomy night, in full suspense, during a consummate blizzard, involving much labor, using hammers and chisels, and powerful bolt cutters, quietly and carefully removed the security from the great doors guarding the tomb, in preparation for a brazen robbery.

A long awaited snowstorm which covered our tracks at the scene, as we expected, both to and away. Then, for a time, having lain low, maintaining surveillance on the area, we became convinced that no one had discovered our purpose. And upon the arrival of yet another long awaited snowstorm, which covered our tracks at the scene, as we expected, both to and away—as before.



Now John drove his pickup truck up the driveway of the cemetery, backing it up in front to the great doors before the crypt. Then the two of us, Dirty and I, having struck a bargain, as before, in the wee hours of the morning, disguised as city workers, under the cover of darkness, on a gloomy night, in full suspense, during a consummate blizzard, involving much labor, using heavy straps, and powerful wenchers, quietly and carefully loaded the great doors onto a trailer affixed to the rear of John's truck in a notorious brazen theft.

Now fool that I am, permitted Dirty to be alone in the cab of the truck while I attended to the details of the security of the load. And while I was preoccupied with the aforementioned tasks, John put the truck in gear, stepped on the accelerator, and sped away—there being no honor among thieves. But I, nevertheless, not to be by him outdone, resolved to search the gravesite for anything of value. And, finding nothing, went home.

[The End]

## (II). The Trivium

The Trivium

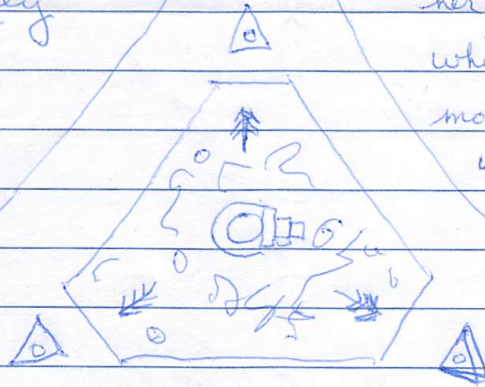
Hecate's Corner



The Castle Blarney

The Trivium

As she approached  
her destination, she  
whistled, and, for a  
moment, thought her  
whistle answered.



Fame is something that must be won, honor only something which must not be lost.

--Arthur Schopenhauer

I'd no more play with a man that sighted his ill fortune than I'd make love to a woman who undervalued the loss of her reputation.

--William Congreve

On a soggy night, by the light of the Moon, along a desolate road, beside forgotten fields, dotted with abandoned houses and dilapidated barns, ringed by brambles treacherous, weeds ferocious, and spider grasses wet with dew, from the southeast to the Trivium northwest of town I walked rapidly. As if the place were held by some bold bewitching power, there was the odor of soil seldom upturned, and no sound disrupted the nighttime tranquility, save the rustle of small animals in the underbrush—contributing to an overall creep in the air. Once there I mounted the low steps before the column by a watery moat surrounded, knelt at the altar there. In tears of remembrance for Atalanta, I lit a candle and clipped the knot carelessly placed in my hair at the back of head. And to Diana this woeful lament wrote.

“I having demon deeds come to know, which over my life have cast a mournful pall, mine chastity desecrated, I not long a maiden, am now ever a nymph. Once upon a time a handsome young lady, the mirror now reflects a woman of ghoulis countenance—haggard and old. But it was not the passing of years, or the natural process of decline which has left me a wreck of my former self—robbed of my bloom, stolen of my hopes, shattered of my dreams. The damnable carnal knowledge of a dissolute life has destroyed me. I am strong and patient, but my burden is heavy—for in my womb an unborn child likely awaits. And so I unburden myself to enlighten you, dear reader, to the facts of a hard life. Mark thee well as I take up this stylus, my hand quakes not from age, but out of fear for my

future. It happened on St. George's Eve. Had I known! When the clock struck twelve all the world's evil had full sway. As they say, 'time waits for no man,' Oh! How speeds along for a foolish girl, and for he mistakes, wrongs cannot be righted.

"Forgive! Forgive!

Dear Goddess mine,

For weak I am

For love so fine."

And having thus lamented, she dropped he book and pen, and hurried across the Trivium to the scene of the crime, where many would be parents became, for which Blarney's Castle get its name. But as she approached her destination, she whistled, and for a moment thought her whistle answered. But in her repeated calling our for her Narcissus, she only Echo found.

[The End]

### (III). One for the Gaffer

Happy families are all alike, every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.

--Leo Tolstoy

I mistrust all frank and simple people, especially when their stories hold together.

--Ernest Hemingway

Schmoo-el felt fine until he realized that his brother was not the son of his father, but rather that of his mother and her brother. Now he felt even better. "That explains a lot," he told himself. "I only wish I had understood that fact much sooner," he soliloquized as he paced back and forth twisting his

side curls to perfection, stroking his long gray beard, gesticulating at the walls, and mumbling to himself with indistinct syllables. Admiring himself, he stopped now and again before the long mirror on the wall and adjusted his fedora—first pulling it down over his low sloping forehead, and then, with his forefinger, tipping it slightly upward, centering it between his beady little eyes—somehow forgetting that every little action either masks or unmasks character. And yet, there standing in his white shirt and black pants, it was evident, in terms of proportion, that his legs were far too short for his body. But rest assured, concealing this deformity with a black ulster, he could narrowly escape ugliness.

Up and down, back and forth, to and fro, adjusting his appearance and talking to himself, he wondered if this new found knowledge might somehow be written all over his face. Unabashed however, he reassured himself that he could launch a new career confessing these facts to others. After all, television is filled with such characters—he could even write a book about it. In fact, over the years he had made a rational account of the events of his childhood for himself. And he was satisfied with its push-pull, click click, turnkey simplicity. It all made perfect sense once certain presuppositions had been embraced.

His brother was on drugs. He fell in with the wrong crowd. He joined a satanic cult. He murdered a man during a ritual. And he, along with the others, ate the man's heart and committed other acts of cannibalism. Then, on account of his all consuming guilt, he committed suicide in order to expiate his sins. All appeared to be historical necessities based on cause and effect. And now all of those past horrid events were predicated against an even more original sin, all justifying the extreme aspects of his religion. As it turns out, it was not only the amorous relationship between his mother and his brother, let alone the drugs, or even the people that he knew, that confounded the logic that made for the house that jack built. But not only that, as it turns out, his mother was at once the mother of his

half-a-brother, and his half-a-cousin, but was also the mother of a complete and full-of-a-Jew—see that her brother was the son of the same father, but of a different mother. Suddenly his whole life made more sense than it ever had before, and he was happier than ever.

But now, in the gloaming, before night came, and darkness fell on, the wind rose, and howling down the alleyways, it roared through the treetops. Yet as suddenly as it arose, the wind ceased. And the trees soughing right and left grew still, and all became strangely quiet. Just then on the gaffolding gable of the rambling roof, a hissing, and spitting, and growling tremolo of two cats caterwauling caught him unawares—piquing his latent ailurophobia, for dogs and cats are known anti-Semites. And then, as suddenly as they started, they stopped, bounding off together—one after another. In the silent flashes of the lightning's light, he began, on the rooftops, Nazis to suppose—and became intensely afraid. For his novel knowledge, like a lantern's light, his heart darkness, fully illuminated. And he, in his closet cowering, in a puddle of piss pothering, began to cry, and then to wonder why, Maariv was even necessary.

[The End]

## (IV). Another Busy Day

Death is a dignitary who when he comes announced is to be received with formal manifestation of respect, even by those most familiar with him.

--Ambrose Bierce

In a late afternoon fog, as twilight ensued, John briskly walk up the street towards home when an elderly woman passing by him on the sidewalk and acknowledged him with a smile. Had he at all cared he might have done the same, but since he did not, he did not. And so, ignoring her, he continued

walking without slowing down, as quickly as before. It wasn't just her, he hated everyone equally.

"Same, same, same," he thought. "Everyone wants something, and its all the same. A smile here, a little chit-chat there, 'spare a nickle, spare a quarter, spare a dime.' It's always the same. And it all takes time. They ain't making no more land? Well they ain't making no more time neither. And time is money. And I ain't got the time, the money, or the land."

And so he cruised along down the sidewalk entertaining himself with his own wit, when all the sudden the tap-tap-tap of a blind man with a cane finding his way down the street returned him from his reverie. Looking up, he beheld an elderly man in a bathrobe, wearing dark glasses, shuffling down the street, was headed straight for him. So as to avoid a collision with the man, it seemed he would need to step aside, and acknowledge the man by voice, when it occurred to him that it might be just as easy to cross the street, and to recross it again after the man had passed by him, so as to avoid acknowledging the man at all. And he resolved to take that action when, by a sudden on rush of traffic in the street, he became distracted. And stumbling into a fire hydrant in his confusion, he became aware the blind man was fully upon him. "Pardon me," the blind man said. "Do you know the way to Duncan St.?" he asked.

John, giving the man a wide berth, replied: "Not from around here, pal." And hardly missing a stride, kept on going. The encounter was so abrupt, however, that the blind man became disoriented and lost his balance. And tripping over his own feet as it were, stumbled off the curb in front of a speeding car—its horn loudly blaring added to the overall confusion of the scene. As the car struck the man, the victim slid backwards up the hood of the vehicle, smacking his head on the windshield—shattering it—and, doing a somersault, flew upwards into the air, and landed face down in the street. The automobile without delay sped onward, and a light rain began to fall.



More than a little angry at these turns of events, John's first impulse was to simply turn around and walk away. "What was that man doing here? Where was he going? Why didn't he have a ride? Where was his minder?" were all questions that flashed through his mind. He remembered that he once heard that helping accident victims could lead to lawsuits. It was best not to get involved, he concluded. Yet the man's futile attempts to raise himself from the pavement panged his conscience. And it occurred to him that he should at the very least confirm that the man laying there in the street was no faking his injuries. Therefore, leaning over him, yet maintaining a safe social distance, he carefully asked the man, "Are you okay?"

"No," came the scarcely audible reply. For a moment it appeared that the man was going to say something intelligible, but then suddenly exasperated and collapsed face first onto the pavement without making a sound, his arms unmoving, outstretched in front of him. In the meantime, John, while searching his pockets for a surgical face mask, caught sight of the elderly woman he had encountered just moments before. "Oh my!" she gasped, covering her mouth and nose with her hand. "Is he okay?" she asked.

"I don't think so," John replied, as he produced a surgical mask from his pocket and handed it to the woman while he secured one over his own nose and mouth. Then, in a flash of lightening, he observed her face more clearly. There was a soft peal of thunder in the distance as her eyes gleamed at him over the top of her face mask. And at once he understood that he would find it necessary to acknowledge the woman in the future, should they ever meet again. It was an uncomfortable thought for him, one that he did not find it fair, and he sincerely hoped that they would never meet again. He even feared that she might be in love with him, and he shuddered.

Just then a man in a brown suit, wearing a surgical mask, with a fashionable tie, holding a cell phone to his ear, approached him from the other side of the street, and a gaggle of gawkers gathered

around the man lying in the street. An expectant silence ensure, followed by hushed murmurs, the turning of heads, the craning of necks, and the jockeying for voyeuristic position.

“What happened?”

“A man stepped in front of a car and got hit.”

“Why was he in the street?”

“I don’t know.”

“Who is he?”

“I don’t know.”

“Why didn’t you help him?”

“I did.”

John answered some routine questions for a police officer as an ambulance with its emergency lights flashing quietly rolled onto the scene, parting the gathering crowd of gawkers, as paramedics loaded up the dead man like a load of firewood onto a gurney, and departed. “There’s a good Samaritan law out there,” the officer told John. “You might want to give them a call and put your name in,” he suggested as he handed John a business card. John thanked the officer, and, studying the card as he walked away, wondered if there was any money in it. “Another busy day at the office,” he thought as he slid the card into his wallet and marched off home.

[The End]

## (V). Old Jed

Every village has its simpleton and if one does not exist they invent one to pass time.

--Nikos Kazantzakis

Humiliation has a way of turning love into rancor.

--King Edward XVI of Quasiland

“Is this even legal?” Bob asked Jack.

“Ain’t fuck all legal as near as I can tell,” Jack replied “Lookie here,” he continued. “Them right there is the Snowy Mountains. Some of the purest water in the world comes from them mountains right there. Now this here beer comes from clear across the country. That’s why it gets ya drunk. Now if I can’t get drunk right here in front of the purest water in the world, then what’s left to legal?” he concluded. One perceived that this man’s jovial bombast projecting from the hole in the lower center of his face did not emanate from his physical prowess—although the man’s overall heft no doubt contributed to its shock wave inertia. Not only did the man eat well, but he was obviously not accustomed to being contradicted. The strength of his voice, and the import of his meaning, his Bob in the face like a powder puff hurled by a harmless character who took greater pleasure in speaking nonsense than he did in winning arguments. As pushy as the man was, he was at the very least fun to be around. A conversation with him could be compared to splashing fresh paint on otherwise drab discourse.

“Beats the shit outta me,” Bob answered as he noiselessly permitted gas to escape from his mouth as a cowboy wind cast a skiff of fresh snow into his long drawn farmer’s face, giving a sparkle to his deep blue eyes as he squinted under the fine lines of his dark brows, and a smile spread across his face. It was evident that the man was capable of intense concentration, and fine subtle thoughts—quite the opposite of his foolish companion.

Recovering his composure, he looked up and noticed Jack’s widely spaced eyes fixated on his own narrow focus as if to see if the significance of his remarks had landed squarely in Bob’s mind and was seeking recognition there—as they stood opposite one another, left-right, across the bed of Jack’s truck. Bob barely crunched his empty can and left it drop from his firm hands into the bed of the truck before Jack instantly supplied him with another as he polished off his own. In the hiatus that ensued, Bob broke away from Jack’s uncomfortable stare, but Jack followed his shifting gaze with his own and a grin spread across his face as he raised his beer can in a salute to a newcomer.

“Here he comes! Here he comes! Here comes Old Jed,” Jack bellowed as if he couldn’t already be heard from a mile away. “A more dreadful, disheveled, hopeless old man I ain’t never seen before in my whole entire life,” Jack declared. It began to snow heavily. The large flakes slowly drifting down lowered and changed the quality of light, creating a somber mood and making it more difficult to see. Yet both men recognized Old Jed from a distance at once on account of the fact that his orange hunter’s bonnet pulled down snugly over his ears and tightly buckled under his chin contrasted sharply with his black jacket, pants and boots.

“How ya doin’ Jed?” Jack asked him as he lumbered up to them clutching his camera close to his chest.

“Top-o-the-morning Jed,” Bob greeted him.

“What cha been up to?” Jack asked, immediately cutting Bob off. “Been out takin’ some pitchers?” He continued, overstating the obvious, and mocking him. “Come on, lemme see um,” he demanded, laying hold of Jed’s camera and hauling the camera strap off over his head. Of course Jed loathed to see another man handle his camera in that or any manner. But Jack lay hold of it and firmly held on to it at arms length and began paging through Jed’s photographs in reverse order, looking at each one on the screen on the back of the device. “Wa, wa ja do Jed, push the wrong button?” he chided him. “Oh there ya go...I think you might be right. I think that might be a three point,” he remarked as he held the camera over so that Bob might see.

“Nice one Jed, real nice,” Bob complimented as Jack paused on a photograph of an American bald eagle perched atop a pine tree before handing the camera back to its rightful owner.

“Gimmie that,” Jed demanded as he lay hold of the camera and seized it back from Jack’s hands.

“Awe, come on Jed. Be nice. I’m just givin’ ya some shit,” Jack retorted.

“If I wanted any shit off of you Jack, I’d scrape it off your teeth, he parried.

“Sure you would,” Jack responded, a shit eat grin spread widely across his face.

Bob let out a hearty laugh as he began search his wallet for some money, but Jack was quicker at producing a \$20 bill from his front pocket, handing it to Jed.

“Thanks Jack,” Jed said as he graciously received the cash.

“Here ya go Jed,” Bob addressed him as he extended a wad of small bills towards him.

Jed hesitated momentarily, for there is something humiliating in accepting, but something offensive in refusing at the same time. “Come on Jed. Take the money,” Bob urged him. “We’ve been waiting for you all morning,” he added.

“Thanks you guys. I really appreciate it. But I got to get going. It’s colder than shit out here,” he remarked.

“Now, now,” Jack admonished him. “Two and ten degrees ain’t exactly cold in these parts.”

“Headin’ up to Yuks?” Bob asked him.

“Yeah, I’ve got to process some photographs and get some writing done,” Jed replied.

“Damn them ‘puters!” Jack exclaimed. “All that fuckin’ around for nothing.”

“Hate ‘em too. But you can’t do nothing without them. Not no more,” Jed flatly declared.

“And that’s all yer doin’, Jed. A whole lotta nuthin’, and getting’ nowhere to boot,” Jack baldly asserted in a manner that removed all doubt that his mouth worked faster than his brain. “Why don’t ya get yerself a real job, Jed. You know the Heap-n-Pile is hiring?” he concluded.

An expression of profound humiliation followed by a flash of intense anger waxed across Jed’s beleaguered face, not knowing quite how to respond. “I’m really not in to all that Heap-n-Pile shit,” he finally answered shaking his head. “I’ve got a lot of work to do, anyway. Thanks for the help,” he added as he waved goodbye and started across the parking lot and up the hill towards Yuks coffeehouse internet cafe when just as he stepped off a large black cat—skinny, collarless, and dirty—crossed his path from right to left. Suddenly darting up, it stopped directly in front of him. And just when he raised his camera to take a photograph, it turned its head and let forth a ferocious hiss—stopping Jed dead in his tracks. And then, without further ado, raced off into the snowstorm flurry—quick, low, and flat. Old Jed pondered this prodigy the livelong day.

\* \* \*

“Does anyone do what they can’t do?” Bob asked Jack.

“No they don’t,” Jack answered.

“But they only do what they can?”

“Agreed.”

“But never do what they can’t?”

“Nope, never.”

So it would be safe to say then: If they could, they would. But they can’t, so they don’t?”

“Stands to reason,” Jack returned as he moved towards the cab of the truck, opened the door, and stepped inside. “Come on, Bob,” he ordered, changing the subject. “To hell with Yuks, and the internet. We can get our coffee at the truckstop, on our way to work!” he howled. “That’s what we can do.”

[The End]

## (VI). The Priest of Lasvioslar: A Doggerel

I hope you have not been leading a double life, pretending to be wicked and really being good all the time. That would be hypocrisy.

--Oscar Wilde

Whereas he was a priest,

Precepted he was in Latin and Greek,

Learned his eyes lowered to keep,  
And towards the ground to speak.  
To don a hermit's frock and cowl,  
And to tie a knotted cord about his waist,  
A habit to wear, a frown to keep,  
To shave his pate,  
To the Bible refer,  
The boys to love, the girls to hate.

In the late afternoon,  
On the fifth of June,  
Father punk "Little John,"  
Made his prayer in Pitner Square,  
In Braunskins ghetto,  
At the chapel in the gazebo,  
Hidden by hedges,  
Opposite the drawbridge,  
Over the moat,  
Before the gate,



Of St. Lawrence the Late.

At the curfew siren's sound,

He awakened on the ground,

At the base of the Virgin,

Mother of God,

Where he lay unshod.

His wine flask empty,

His sack lunch consumed,

His sea legs gained,

A habit for jeans he exchanged.

A lad he once coached,

He saw loitering by the toilet near,

And approached.

Men of these races,

Mistake right from left in such cases,

For men who act on impulses,

Meet in these places.

And do in darkness,  
What they would scarcely even think in the light,  
Where the lingua franca,  
Is for the persona non grata.  
Where a wink and a nod suggest,  
What place for the encounter might be best.  
And where one takes a fool for a guide,  
Is not said in jest.

And so his heart leapt,  
When he saw the silhouette,  
Spark a cigarette,  
Sending the message intended,  
As a familiar face was now illuminated.

“Yasīn, Yasīn.  
Long time no seeum here,”  
Benyamin in a whisper spoke.  
And without delay,

Little John's sermon,

For Yasīn the young,

In a restroom stall had begun.

And after the service,

Little John for home,

Rapidly departed.

But before the bridge,

That crosses the river,

And goes through the woods,

In a basket by the tulips,

He a swaddling baby found.

And so as he be not perplexed,

He under the blankets peeked,

To determine the child's sexed.

And was happy to say,

Little John, Jr. was christened the next day,

And to the cloister given,

Fulfilling a long standing tradition.

As a school of room and board,  
Harbinger College adhered,  
To the Black Book of thirteen thirty-four,  
Where the prospect child is to be admitted,  
At the tender age of four.  
In good health,  
And properly circumcised,  
He by his parents was utterly obliged,  
By binding contract,  
And ominous oath,  
There to remain,  
Until the age of eightain.

But foundling boys,  
In might be worthy to note,  
That the foundling father,  
Of the Harbinger school,  
Roger Bacon Rasketts,  
Successfully argued,

In the Battle of the Baskets,  
That since Moses was found floating in a basket,  
And became the Living God,  
To the Chosen People,  
Any foundling son,  
Could the Harbinger become,  
Even the Messiah himself—  
You say the first,  
We'll say the second.  
And any child so acquired,  
So a "basket case" becomes.

Not long after this,  
The foundling finder,  
Of the foundling boy,  
Of natural causes died.  
Some people say he died from AIDS,  
But whereas he *was* a priest,  
There were those on the one hand,

Who would not have,

Yet those on the other,

Who would have it no other way.

[The End]

## (VII). Matilda

Proximity begat intimacy which brought forth trust—the enemy of tyranny.

--Oscar Ormish

Ostensibly to facilitate cleaning up after meals, the scheme for removing and storing tables from the commons had the added benefit of precluding intimacy among inmates by obviating gatherings—for gatherings are intimate, and intimacy begets trust. Intimacy and trust among and between clients<sup>1</sup> leads to opposition to policy in the form of complaints—complaints about food, complaints about treatment, complaints about freedom. Ducking complaints is standard operating procedure at institutions that specialize in the micromanagement of the lives of senior sojourners, and Nidering House was no exception to the rule.

Therefore, every day after the late afternoon meal, the dining room tables were stowed away at the earliest opportunity so that the geriatrics might be kept preoccupied with something else besides gathering, becoming intimate, and building trust. In the earlier parts of the day the common area was off limits on the grounds that preparations for the next meal were underway. This entire artifice was in fact intended to prevent gatherings for the aforementioned reasons. Seeing that obviating gatherings, therefore intimacy and trust, is paramount to the totalization of power, preoccupation through mindless

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<sup>1</sup> Lat. cliens, -entis, dependent.

repetition is also endemic to social control. On account of the aforementioned observations, the slogan: “Idle hands are the Devil’s workshop,” became an important watchword for the institution. Needless to say, the residents of Nidering House were kept as busy as possible.

Steadfast in her own mindless routine, after the afternoon meal, the froward monomaniac loner Matilda, an ugly, evil-looking, old woman, took up her usual spot on the parquet floor after the late afternoon meal in the now vacant commons. Cross-legged on the floor, she sat, as usual, spinning a dreidel and maundering English rhymes over and over again until the tintinnabulation—signifying her bedtime.

Tring, Wing, and Ivanhoe,

For striking a blow,

Hampden did forego,

And glad he could escape so.

And,

Norman saw on English oak,

On English neck a Norman yoke;

Norman spoon in English dish,

And England ruled a Norman’s wish;

Blithe world to England never will be more,

Till England’s rid of all the four.

As she was reciting these verses, Linda Laxfit approached her unnoticed. Squatting on her heels before the splenetic hag she introduced herself. “Hi, I’m Linda Laxfit from Uptown Magazine,” she said.

“I know who you are!” the dyspeptic shrew-a-trix exclaimed. “I’ve read your books. You’re Linda Laxfit. You’re a reporter. You’re here to grind my bones to make your bread. You’re worse than a lawyer as far as I’m concerned. Well little miss Linda Laxfit, I’m Matilda Mobowra,” she jeered as she launched into a coughing paroxysmal and projected a glob of sputum from her mouth onto the floor in front of her.

With a gesture, Linda kept institution staff at abeyance, then she continued. “I’m here to ask you about the *Foreshadowing*. If you would like to talk?” she asked. The volume of Matilda’s voice, and the belligerence of her tone, declined as the gravity of the topic lay hold of her mind, and she fidgeted. “The *Foreshadowing*,” she repeated as she glanced upward at the lovely lady with a jealous and malignant scowl. With a little coaxing, and staff’s helpful direction, Matilda was persuaded to follow Linda’s froufrou sashay to a cozy little room in the corner where they could speak privately.

[The End]

## (VIII). A Home for the Houseless

The rain, which had long threatened, began now to descend with great violence.

--Walter Scott

On parole for armed carjacking and strong armed robbery for rolling some roasters at a gas station a few years back, the five eight 165 pound enervate thirty-six year old plumber, Franklin



Fontaine—a regular at Team Total’s mobile harm reduction unit downtown—where they give away *matériel* enabling the use of crack, smack, and speed—was tattooed from head to toe. Known for his reckless cowardice, his fearless barbarity, and his insolent avarice, he was dirty mean and nasty, yet he was not strong, tough, or smart. In today’s peculiar patter, “shot-out” would be an appropriate sobriquet for a man so soft, sapped, and spent.

Everything he did he did with extravagant hyperbole. For instance, when he drank he ostentatiously flexed the muscles of his mouth and throat, while at the same time making audible swallowing sounds. After that, he would set his cup down as deliberately and quietly as possible while exerting what appeared to be an enormous amount of isometric strength while doing so. He ate in like manner. Taking forceful bites, he noisily masticated his food. Flexing his neck and chest in obvious ways, he would swallow hard and follow it up with a loud and forceful exhale from an expanded corpus. Thereafter he would pound on his chest with a closed fist, snort loudly through his nose as he gathered up a wad of phlegm in his mouth, and project that wad forward into some distant weeds. Otherwise, standing over them, he would permit the blob to drop slowly from his mouth—ogling it as it fell.

It was clear to even a casual observer that the man ate, drank, and was nourished. Brazenly narcissistic, he would hazard a fart here and there, if ought be due. And troubled himself not to defecate in the company of others, should nature call. Clearly this man had taken some lessons in life, now he was giving them.

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It was a blistering day on a hot summer afternoon, yet the shade of the concrete rendered the large square tunnel comfortably cool. The atmosphere was calm and quiet. There was not the scent of flowers, the twitter of birds, the creep and fly of insects, the palaver of pedestrians, nor the drone of

automobiles motoring past. Balanced on his left foot, his right propped perpendicular to the culvert wall, his back resting against it, Franklin scrolled through his social media on his smart phone, under a newly built road, with fresh asphalt blacktop—with a sparkling double yellow line down its middle—in a newly constructed dead end *cul-de-sac*, in the center of a future housing development, out on the edge of town. The barren hills around it, carefully sculpted by machines, were gently shaped. A luxurious loam in which no plants grew, save a weed here and there which willy-nilly had taken root, was sloughed off down the sides of the drainage, and up along the road on both sides. Being outdoors in the vicinity of a major city, the locale was, nevertheless, private.

As I stood there looking out upon it, I felt not the despair caused by a void of social inclusion, but the relief caused by a void of social engagement. The new world order was still out there, indeed not it was not very far away—not in time, nor in distance. But the fact that it was not present in the here and now somehow made the frustrations of homelessness, for the moment, well worth it—scalding heat of the Sun be damned.

Launching into a time waster tirade, Franklin suddenly began. “My peeps are so fuckin’ stupid. First there’s my stupid dad. Then there my dumb ass fuckin’ brother—who still owes me for the starter I put in *his* truck before he wrecked the fuckin’ thing. Before I went to prison my Chevy was runnin’ like a raped ape. Now they got the whole fuckin’ thing all tore up,” he spoke precipitately while his companions ignored him. “I mean, I know I’m hurtin’ myself by doin’ what I’ve been doin’. And I know that affects them, and all that. But look, I told my brother he could use my truck to drive to work and back while I was in the joint, and his shit’s all fucked up. Now him and my stupid dad have got my shit all tore up, with his hobo wife puttin’ her feet on the dash and shit. I mean show some fuckin’ respect, that’s all. And I paid for everything that’s up there, up there at the house—all them cars and shit, all them tools. And they just keep fuckin’ shit up. It’s like I told my dad if we just cooperate, we

could get a lot done. But they won't listen..." his voice trailed off as he slipped his cell phone into his rear pocket and sauntered over to where Brenda was cooking dinner for the bunch on a propane stove balanced on top of a milk crate. A measure of nonverbal communication seemed to pass between them as Brenda bent down low over her work, pressed her thighs together, and turned her ass away. Looking up with a wry smile, she in a small voice simpered: "Dinner will be ready in just a minute."

Meanwhile Mitch, seated on the concrete, kicked back against the wall, was reading from a paperback novel. "This place is a sewer," he unexpectedly remarked.

"It's not a sewer," Dingo retorted. "It's a culvert," he asserted, tossing a dictionary from where he sat on the ground Indian-style. "A culvert is a drain crossing under a road. Look it up," he directed as the book skidded to a stop in the sandy grit on the concrete floor.

"It's not a sewer," Brenda interjected as she tasted with a spoon from a simmering pot. "Anybody who calls it a sewer isn't going to eat tonight," she added.

"A culvert is a sewer," Mitch answering them said, ignoring the dictionary, and adjusting his glasses. "A sewer is a pipe or a channel that carries off waste water. A culvert carries waste water under a road. So does a sewer. Look it up," he riposted, picking up the dictionary and tossing it back towards Dingo.

"It's not a sewer!" Brenda exclaimed as she approached the men—handing each a bowl of her sacred succotash. "It's where we live. And we don't live in a sewer. It's a home for the houseless," she concluded as she passed out the viands and the utensils to her guests.

"Okay, it's not a sewer," Mitch continued to argue between bites. "And I'm not homeless either. This is not a can of beer. And I'm not drinking it. I'm just another houseless guy sitting at home sipping on an exquisite beverage. And if the cops show up, I'm going to tell them that they can't arrest me

because I'm just a houseless guy drinking a beer in his own home, which just so happens to be a sewer," Mitch concluded his repartee, leaving his companions both exasperated and amused. He returned to his book and began to read aloud. "The history of men is reflected in the history of sewers...The sewer in Paris has been an ancient and formidable thing. It has served as an asylum. Crime, intelligence, social protest, liberty of conscience, thought, theft, all that human laws persecute or have persecuted, is hidden in that hole."

"You mean they find bodies down here? Man that's some heavy shit," Franklin remarked as he glanced at his phone, stepped around the corner, and disappeared up the embankment.

"In Pronto, California," Mitch continued, "a sewer is a home for the houseless. And so is a culvert, as long as it doesn't rain. Because if it does, this houseless-home will not only be a culvert-sewer, but will also be a raging river with a bunch of houseless-homeless drowned like rats." Having finished his harangue, Mitch snapped his book closed. And rising up, quaffed the remainder of his beverage, and placed the empty can into a trash bag with some others. And proceeding to secure his personal property, slipped a backpack onto his shoulders. But as he stepped blindly around the corner, he nearly tripped over "Angel"—a feral cat who had come to beg from the troop of tramps. And hopping from one foot onto the other, with a swaggering stumble he disappeared up the embankment, departing to the dreadful knell of a thunderclap storm. And from a williwaw's wisp, dust was cast in his face.

[The End]