

HERE COMES HERODOTUS,
AGAIN!
(and other micro-histories)

WAYNE CRESSER



O:JA&L 2021 CHAPBOOK SERIES



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Made available online and/or printed in the USA as a novelty and commemorative document
celebrating the publication of Wayne Cresser's chapbook *Here Comes Herodotus, Again*.

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AGAIN!

(AND OTHER MICRO-HISTORIES)

by

WAYNE CRESSER

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"Legendary Berries" was originally published as "Burning Frost, Happy Day!" in the Hurricane Press anthology, *Four Seasons*.

"Here Comes Herodotus Again!" was originally published in *Gravel Magazine*.

"HVAC" appeared in the *Ocean State Review*.

"At the End of the Millennium" was released in *OPEN: Journal of Arts & Letters (O:JA&L)*.

"She Knows More Than I Know" was previously published in *SLAB*.

"Present" was first published in *Spank the Carp*.

"The Night It All Got Going" first appeared in *Story*.

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LEGENDARY BERRIES

After the bay iced over from Providence to Newport, and the people had walked that distance and back, he got a notion he could beat them.

Hadn't they told him he could handle anything with sails, anywhere, anytime?

So, when a thaw set in and open water began to pock the floating ice fields, he put on waders and fished out a paddle. He was nearly shoulder deep in winter water when he boarded an ice slab roughly the shape of a valentine and size of a floatplane. After paddling it to shore, he sunk a mast into the ice, rigged a sail, and set off across the west passage between the island and the mainland.

His heart fluttered as he cast off, and he recalled old Eliot saying he had a shine upon him whenever he took the helm. "Must be the Irish red," he said.

But when the wind shifted and the ice proved unruly, he turned himself around and beat the berg back to shore, the oversized heart reduced to the size of a charm by the time he landed.

At home, his mother told him someone had called the local radio to report seeing a boy sailing an iceberg, heading for Bell Point or maybe Randall Cove.

"Did you see anybody else when you were down at the beach, dear?" his mother asked.

"No mom, no one."

When his father returned from the fire station, he said he got a call about boy in the bay, sailing a chunk of ice halfway to Randall Cove.

“The guy called from the bridge, see? And from where he was, he thought he could see a flame of red hair on a little guy around your size.”

Halfway to the Cove? He thought. Me? Wow, that would be the berries.

I’m asking you now, son, was there nothing at all to see down there?”

“What?”

“On the beach, in the water. Was there nothing to see?” his father persisted.

“No,” he said while he imagined people coming from every corner of the island, skittering across the ice, raising torches, raising glasses, raising him high and carrying him back to shore ___ the path before them catching fire, flaming out and freezing over again.

HERE COMES HERODOTUS, AGAIN!

Now and then my father would get mad and throw a book. Just heave it. I caught one off the ear once. It stung like a hard-packed snowball, and for a while after it hit me, I couldn't breathe. I think father took it harder than I did, however, because staying in control was important to him. He ran a tight ship, as he liked to say, and this action was a breach.

"I'm so sorry, son," he said as he stabbed his cigarette into an ashtray and raced across the room.

Mother came running from the kitchen. She'd seen the whole thing through the open half of the Dutch door separating the rooms. She looked at me and then at him. Her brown eyes narrowed into dark beads and her chin grew stiff and defiant.

Father's hands shook, "I'm so sorry," he repeated to her more than to me, "Just breathe, son."

He stroked my hair while he explained that he'd lost his cool and it wouldn't happen again. But I didn't know about that. Father had a lot of books.

Around dinnertime, sometimes before, sometimes after, he would find his chair, loosen his belt, slip his right hand behind the buckle, and plunge into military history. Where did he go? Waterloo? Gettysburg? Ancient Greece?

His favorite book was by the historian Herodotus, who wrote about hostilities between Greeks and non-Greeks. That was eggshell time. You didn't want to step on that. Don't belch, giggle, stomp or make any funny noises. Father had a good left arm.

Once while slicing up a roast, a big butchering kind of knife in his hand, white sleeves rolled up to the elbow, tie dangling almost into the gravy, glasses askew, and grunting under the sheer futility of trying to cut meat

that had warmed too long because *The Histories* had kept everybody waiting, father got mad at me when I asked to be excused from the table.

“For god’s sake, Norman, why?” he said. “You just sat down.”

“B-because I g-got gas.” And I meant it. I guess I was nervous about spilling the news that I’d been accepted to a college out-of-state when my father counted on me going to the local U, where he had gone and where my older brother Dwight was going. But I’d been offered a scholarship and it was burning me up.

To distract myself, I complained about gas or talked about crapping while the rest of them were trying to eat. I knew it wasn’t mature. I took a risk in saying it every time, and this time I guess I’d pushed him too far.

Father threw the knife aside and striking out for anything else to toss my way, set off for the living room.

“You’d better scoot now, honey,” my mother said softly, as she left to head him off.

Dwight was more emphatic, “Clear out now, doofus,” he shouted, “cause here comes Herodotus again.”

And sure enough, whizzing by him and hurtling toward me through the open half of the Dutch door, five hundred pages of conflict, the wars between freedom-loving Athenians and subjugation-happy Persians.

To avoid being brained, I ducked while the weight of history, yesterday’s, today’s, and tomorrow’s, flew over me and crashed against the wall.

ALL AQUIVER

Just as I woke from a dream in which the pretty colorist from the hardware store was ducking into the stockroom, doing her best to avoid me, she popped back out to say, “Want to get a drink before I leave?”

Then we were gone.

Shortly before that, I dreamed of my sad island neighbor Richard from across the street. I dreamed that he had finally removed the Discount Disposal dumpster, the one which had lived in his driveway since late in the last millennium, having settled in like a Trojan horse that would never unfold its contents. No big surprise coming. No epic reckoning. Only a tow truck, the scunch of metal parts straining and a departure.

Anyway, in the dream, I walked my dog past Richard’s long and now vacant lane. I looked in, of course, and found a clear aperture to his backyard, a sun speckled vista where an apple tree blossomed. His wife sat under it, a shadow in the shade, reading and drinking tea. I could smell mint in the air as clusters of pale buds rustled in the sweet, spring breeze. All aquiver, as the poet might have said.

Now, Miss Monahan, I’m thinking, if I brought you a bouquet of apple blossoms standing in a cut-glass vase and placed it on your desk or asked you out for a drink after a long day of me worrying briefs and you holding me to deadlines, meetings, and memoranda, you might be surprised.

You might say yes because I’d brought you a wish you’d made in a dream. And it would be a good day ___ or at least that would be my hope.

NEW SKIN (FOR AN OLD BOY)

The spring suits from my late uncle sure came in handy. Auntie couldn't have been nicer. Imagine the old gal handing me a closet full of finely tailored clothes just for crossing a few t's and dotting a few i's on Henry's homemade will.

"Just look this over, will you, Norman dear?" she had said. "You know your uncle Henry."

I knew my uncle very well. I liked him and knew he was a man who preferred to do most things himself.

"What's hard already?" he'd ask me when I'd stop by his workshop to borrow a tool or make sure he wasn't trying to defy death in a thousand different ways.

"It's just an engine block," he might say of something large, metal, and murderous hanging on a hoist over the open chest of a car. "Hold it steady while I tighten...No look, you have to get underneath..." Then he'd put a hand on it, freeze it in mid-spin. "See? Like that, steady."

Maybe it was because his life as an insurance man was so buttoned-down that he pushed the limits of human strength when he wasn't calculating other people's risk or examining actuary tables. He was thorough too, so I hadn't worried about his paperwork.

But Auntie was nervous about it. What could I say to her but, "Of course? I'll look."

"Just between you and me," she had added in a whisper. "Hush, hush."

"Sure, sure," I said.

At first, wearing his neat pinstripes, seersuckers, and shark skins, all crisp and pleated, got me noticed. Tastemakers down at the Firm

applauded all around. You know, nothing makes a suit stand up and take notice like another suit. So, it was probably unwise to mention to Stevens, or anyone else at the office, that the clothes had been made for another man.

My admission, if one could call it that, just slipped out. Water cooler talk. Just a couple of boys killing time. I don't know why really, but I was feeling full of myself, hearty, robust. I was wearing an ice blue sharkskin suit, no vest, circa 1966, when Stevens said he liked the jacket.

"That's a nice cut, Norm," he said. "A little retro, but right."

"Thank you," I said, easing into the conversation. "You know, it's remarkable, Sam."

"What's that?" he said.

And then I let it slip. I wasn't thinking about anything but the phenomenon of coincidence.

"Why," I said, "the notion that one man's clothes, that is, clothes specifically designed to fit another man, could fit me so well. What do you think? That's Kismet, right?"

Kismet to me, but not to Sam Stevens, apparently, who turned frosty, "I see," he huffed, and walked away.

Then I made a remark. It started as a pulse really. I felt it undulate from the knot end of my tie to my vocal cords.

"Don't go away mad," I said after him.

"What was that?" he said.

"I say don't go away mad, Sam. You can figure out the rest."

I probably don't have to tell you that he kept right on walking, to his office.

In the time it takes to power up and fire off an e-mail, what had been viewed by the partners as a stab at refinement, a touch of class, and good old American "go for it" spirit, was now *under review* as recycling. And while that may be considered politically correct in some circles, it did not sit well with the movers and shakers at Upton, Frank, and Stern.

So, I traded them away. That's right, I gave them up to various gristle-faced and needy persons I met on the street. One by one I swapped my things for theirs. Then I began to wear the things I got in exchange to work. Why not? If they could stand a washing, I could stand to wear them.

Well, upon seeing me in polyester jackets and ripped denims, my colleagues thought I must be doing detective work for one of my clients. You know, undercover stuff.

Stevens, now the boldest among them, took me aside one day and said, "Look here, I don't mean to tell you your business."

"Then tell me what you mean to tell me," I parried.

He blinked once and started up again, "As I was saying, I don't mean to tell you your business, but you ought to get a P.I. for whatever it is you're on. You're embarrassing the firm."

In one of my street transactions, I acquired a straw hat, a sporty little chapeau that featured at the top, a patch of artificial turf with a plastic golf ball nestled right in the middle, like a little bird in a nest. Beautiful. The whole business, the hat, the coffee-stained and grease-blotted leisure suits, the white belts, and motley tennis shoes, earned me the kind of recognition I never could have imagined.

Instead of corporations, I went to work for the guy who sold me my newspaper in the morning and the other people I saw every day. It felt good. It was like being handed a map of the human heart. The map was a puzzle that held some secret that everybody needed to hear, but I was the one with the three-day head start. I was the one tumbling to the clues. Everybody trusted me. They bought me coffee and donuts.

Eventually I quit the Firm, started my own practice, and signed a television contract for a free legal advice call-in show. And it kept feeling good. All of it, like being reborn. You know, like an old boy putting on a brand-new skin.

HVAC

There was a heated discussion regarding the location of a Blackstone river-level fan. This was about ventilation, every square inch of the property needing to breathe. Every molecular structure needing to vent. This was about contented air flow and the engineering of that flow through the entire unit, for which there was a reasonable offer on the table. Things were moving and once in motion, nothing ignites like, well, “in motion”.

Friction. Sparks. Light pulsing within the organism. And just as you did with the fellows who helped you remove that awful bay window in the other place, you let them run with it. Go, spark it up boys and make it happen.

Your job is to step back now, into a vision of her and you standing on the verandah, with a view to the river. Your cupped hands are a kiln, sparks squeeze through your fingers.

At the railing, overhanging the twilight river, you tip the cup, release the light that flits away like fireflies, their flight set on the water-bugging life winding down the lazy river.

Let them go, let them spark it up and make it happen.

Everything is cool.

THE NIGHT IT ALL GOT GOING

First there is the suffocation dream, which starts with jump cuts, then whole sequences lit low with dark figures looming over me, hulking shadows. It's as if I'm trying to sleep while Fritz Lang is in my bedroom shooting some expressionist nightmare. He doesn't care about me or my wife. He barks instructions at Bruno, the titanic actor, "Go over zere, nearer zee bed," he says.

Bruno stops near the bedside window, strikes a pose.

"No! Keep going __where zee guy is schleeping. Yah, that's right. Now hover, Bruno. Can you hover?"

The big lug leans over the bed and frightens my cat. The cat squeals like it's being strangled, and that's when I gasp for air and snap awake. The cat leaps off my face. Then I notice my upstairs hallway is flooded with light. I get up, walk to the end, and look out the window. I don't know when or why, but the neighbors have installed prison security lighting over their driveway. Well, I've got news for them. If anybody's breaking out of here, it's me.

With sturdy resolve, I crawl back into bed, prepared to soar in my dreams, but my feet start to itch. Actually, my toes are on fire and my butt itches and my wife is telling me to quit snoring and she thinks the cat needs to go out, and could I please quit snoring, and then there's my erection, which just won't quit, no matter how many unsexy things I think up.

I'm counting Bing Crosby movies, recalling church sermons from my childhood, reviewing all the parts of our solar system, and trying to imagine what the world would sound like if we really could teach it to sing in perfect harmony. Oh! the humanity. I'm tossing and turning and Bruno's coming for me again, and the startled cat's clawing my face. I can't breathe. I turn over, onto my side, and that's when my delinquent dink pokes my wife. She cuffs me hard on the shoulder, I mean really

hard, and says, “Oh Jesus you, not tonight. Can’t you see I’m trying to sleep?”

“But honey,” I say. “I’m being chased by a monster.”

“How do you think I feel?” she says.

I’m thinking, “That’s the nicest thing you’ve ever said to me,” but before I can open my mouth, she’s pointing at the window on my side of the bed. Light from the moon spills over the sill and bounces onto the adjacent wall in overwrought shadows. I shudder. She’s turned pale.

“You left the shade up?”

We’ve been in the house for six months and I’m not sure I ever noticed a shade. “No, I don’t know. I don’t remember. Why?”

She’s out of the bed, at the window, yanking on the thing. “This--- needs—to—be---,” then one more violent pull and, “---There! All the way down, got it?” she says.

I smile at this eruption. “Okay,”

“I’m not kidding around here,” she says.

“What is it?”

“I don’t know but as you’ve found out, it’s not funny. It’s a trick of the light, something other...., I don’t know, but it can really get you going.”

She’s back under the covers. “You’ll be all right now,” she says.

Of course, I believed her, then I slipped into that giant tree falling in the forest dream again.

SHE KNOWS MORE THAN I KNOW

Maybe it's like stepping off a curb when a bus is bearing down. You feel an agitation of molecules, the air contracts, you know a monster is coming and you jump. Then you find your skin again, deposited safely on the curb. The pulse races and there's sweat. The girl's language, her actual words, that is, were not monstrous. You dripped sweat on the telephone when you heard them, sure, but now they only trigger memory. The punch to the heart is the imprint, the thing you've carried away. She said, "*Sweating horses are chasing me in my dreams. They all have your face. I think I cannot go on with this.*" See what I mean? It may be like the sad prince said, "Words, words, just words." But once you have them, well, there they are ___ you're not nearly as important as you thought. And there you are, standing on the curb again, watching the connubial bus roll on, hoping the next one doesn't kill you dead.

LEARNING TO LIVE ON YOUR OWN

At the end of the day, I could be angry, feeling blind-sided, tousled, and turned, scattered like a bag of marbles, rolling hither and ho, banking into byzantine crevices, impossible to gather.

I'd have to reach a redoubt, a place removed, where I could reflect____
Eureka! I might say when it finally bit me. I should have seen that coming.

If only, the truth is every day finds me dumbstruck, and not in the good way people mean____ with life a quiver, every arrow a shot at wonder.

No, I *was* born yesterday. And I came into the world kicking and screaming, birth juice and blood plugging my ears, ringing my nose, damming the tip of my tongue. A thing made on the cheap from crepe and neon, a thing passing for structure ---cracked, glued, and taped.

I'm not surprised that I can breathe. No, I'm staggered, a dumb witness to my body taking in air and with intent, pushing it out again, as if it knew the drill all along.

Now, I ask you, what chance does a thought in my head have when breathing is enough to take my breath away?

AT THE END OF THE MILLENNIUM

I should have taken more care with our sacred texts, yours, and mine, which after months of brooding on the matter, I recorded as a list of promises.

When the floods came, pages of these promises were tossed into different boxes and shuffled through a chain of slippery relations until by accident, some of them reached you.

And off to the island they went. Which ones, I do not know.

Surely, they are castaways now and although I cannot see them, I hear them chattering when I put my ear to the sea.

And surely, I investigated, sounding the racket for parts that went a missing.

I took extraordinary steps too. I talked to experts on late night talk radio--- third eye seers, tea leaf readers, cosmic Betties. From them, I learned many things. For instance, saying Abracadabra can cure hay fever. George Bernard Shaw did not care for the work of William Shakespeare. And at any given time, there are about 200 religious causes in these United States.

Now 201.

Later, in a dream, your mother came to me. She kissed me on the forehead and brought me to the place where some of the words were drowned, but she was short on time.

"I am just the compass, my dear. I can point you in the direction, but you're the one who must get wet."

On the ferry crossing the sound that separates island from mainland, I sit in the early winter cabin. I consider the gear I'll need to fathom the

depths to which all those blameless mysteries have tumbled, and I shiver.

Tears followed them; I'm guessing. I can't imagine they did not leave a trail.

DANNY BOY VS. DEAD END STREET

When you turn down Gallant Avenue, you must remind yourself it's a dead end before your momentum carries you into the woods. Given its nomenclature, you might think that's not a very courteous arrangement, but there it is. Besides, the first time I visited her there, with the promise of homemade souffle hanging in the air, I was giddy with courage. Virtue, chivalry and such were very much on my mind because to my way of thinking, Loretta is an impressive name, a name that had been in the ether since my childhood. I remember staying home from school and watching on television a beautiful woman with raven tresses as she swept down a staircase and opened palatial front doors to let the viewer into her home. Even in black and white, she was majestic. In fact, she was the only Loretta I had ever known until this one.

I thought I might be swept away by her, my Loretta, that is, because her name suggested exotic places to me. Maybe to Spain, maybe to the foot of the Pyrenees, where water trickles down the side of a craggy black and white mountainside. Gilbert Roland *and* Tyrone Power are there, huddled together, planning their next attack on the stinking Nationalistas. Behind them, lusty Ava Gardner begs Tyrone Power not to go, for he will surely be "keeled," which breaks poor Gilbert Roland's heart because she used to be his girl, the little spitfire.

In the bedroom of Loretta's house, there was a crack up in the ceiling, but I wasn't thinking of London songs then because she was Irish and early into our warm summer evenings together, she showed me home movies of freckle-faced little girls on Christmas mornings, unwrapping presents and modeling new bathrobes and slippers. She had about a hundred sisters and they all had names that belonged to nuns, and there was a brother, a boy named Terry.

From Loretta I gathered that Terry was a sorry so-and-so who hid in his room, trying learn blues guitar and lusting after motherhonkin' motorcycles. I never met him, but I have to believe he was trying to make a point.

Anyway, there was a crack up in the ceiling, in the bathroom, actually. And there was music behind the home movies. Loretta told me her parents had taken all their ancient super 8s to a guy who could transfer them to video and even lay a soundtrack under it all. Well, the Connellys wanted the music to be Irish and sure enough, the video unwound to the strains of *The Blackbird of Mullamore*, *Carrickfergus*, and under a beautifully held long take of her father, Big Mike Connelly, un-boxing a pipe and slippers, John Gary wailed *Danny Boy* as Dan himself had done over many a pint.

It's over a pint I am at this moment, ruminating on my salad days with Loretta for it wasn't long before she and I were rolling around and making up our own songs. There was music and wonderful roses, they tell me, in sweet fragrant meadows of dawn and however the hell the rest of that goes.

But as I may have been saying before, 7 Gallant Avenue is an address that insists on courteous behavior, and the dark-eyed Loretta lived there behind white lace curtains and had kids at elite colleges and what was I thinking? Do you have any idea how hard a man will try to be virtuous when he thinks a woman wants a knight? It's inevitable, a *fait accompli*, that he's going to come up short. I can't explain what happened, the insides of the thing, how it worked or how it didn't. Sometimes a woman just wants you to be the scoundrel that you are, and then when you are, it's over.

Bet on it, as soon as he takes care of that Franco business, and even if he doesn't get "keeled," Ava Gardner will forget all about valiant Tyrone Power and go running back to Gilbert Roland. How could she not with a moustache like his?

So, here I am now, on St. Patrick's Day of all days, squeezing tears out of a bar rag while I swear to all the saints of musicians and travelers alike, a spontaneous battle of the bands splits my head in opposite directions.

On the restaurant jukebox, the Kinks are looking in the mirror at their second-class lives and asking what in the world they are living for. While

under the party tent, where I nurse another pint, a trio of geezers tells
me the pipes, the pipes, they are calling me, from glen to glen.

I ask you, what can I do but answer the call and go looking for another
Loretta? I wipe the beer foam from the ends of my moustache and get
to thinking I might take me a little trip to Spain.

COVER LETTER

Norman Winters
22 Sparrow Lane
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May 1, 2019

Sally Amen
Director of Advancement
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Passaic, New Jersey 07055

Dear Selection Committee,

I know it's an unconventional opening gambit, but I'd like to start by asking *you* a question. How is this day different from any other? In truth, I wish I could take credit for that line of inquiry. It is the creation of a famous clown, which I can assure you I am not nor do I aspire to be____ I just want to be your chief events coordinator.

Returning to the question, however, we might ask ourselves to deal with it impartially. We could start by doing a quick inventory of what we've been up to since the moment we decided to get out of bed today. Maybe some of us never slept. Maybe some of us were awakened from a happy dream and thought that was unfair. Maybe some of us were up to no good. Since then, however, what have we done to brighten the corner where we are?

Let me list a few things that occupied me in the beginning hours before I sat down to write this, my opening salvo to you, dear committee.

First there was Costa Rican coffee, some gentle exercise, and the jotting down of what I call throwaway scenarios, a discipline. Here's an example.

A husband gets impatient with his wife and makes a remark. She's familiar with the pattern and won't buy in. No sale.

She says, "If you're looking for a fight, there's the mirror. Go fight with yourself if you want to fight somebody. I'm not going to have this fight with you right now. Now look, you've made the dog unhappy."

In this scenario, I like her. I'm even betting on her. She's her own kind of situation.

Much of my morning is passed this way, cooking up sketches, dramas, vignettes, all of an instructional nature, I hope. I like to think of them as events that might trigger some discovery about myself or if shared, benefit someone else.

I had the radio on at one point, and the song playing was an oldie called, "Did You Ever Have to Make up Your Mind?" Good song. Only a sampling was used, because the sports guys on the radio wanted to talk about a potential trade and was the team with the tradable player ever going to make up its mind and such.

Anyway, the host of the show interrupted his partner before he could explain the particulars. He was nearly apoplectic, "What was that music? Who picked that music?" he wanted to know.

Then the producer chimed in to throw the partner under the bus. "Just wanted to show you not everything from the 60s was a classic, Mikey! They had their share of schlocky music alright."

"Schlock! That's being kind," the host shouted.

Everyone laughed, including Mikey. What else could he do?

I share the story because sometimes I don't know how to feel about this gang---the crowd that mocks and mocks.

I know people don't read him much anymore, but Socrates said a mouthful when he said, "the unexamined life is not worth living."

I say this knowing full well that if talking about the meaning of life was all one ever got up to nowadays, then they probably wouldn't *make* much of a living. And don't think I don't realize the ironies here. But *mocking*, in my book, is not talking.

In this scenario, you can be sure I'm betting on Socrates. He knew what he was doing. I'm not the first to say it, but I feel I must add that the man had gravitas.

My employment history (including my years in law), education, list of the major events I've coordinated and the names of movies, TV specials and commercials for which I have done background work are attached. If requested, I can provide several personal references and recommendations.

Thanks so much,

Norman Winters

P.S. I realize I really didn't get past midday with my inventory of self, but I believe I have answered the question regarding how today is different from yesterday and the day before and so on__ can *You!* say as much?

STORY BOARD

They brought me to the break room at the back of the store. The employees' room, I guessed. The light was harsh. Butchers' aprons hung on pegs. A rack of timecards made a column next to a timeclock that emitted a low hum.

"You'll keep an eye on him, then? I've got to get back out on the floor," said a green smock disappearing through a swinging door.

I was aware that I was the subject of discussion, and except for feeling out of place in the breakroom, I did not feel certain about anything.

My friend Roger, whom I thought looked very pale, sat next to me at a table. I knew him from the community band and the library.

"We're waiting," he said.

As he said this, he removed the remnants of various homemade flyers from each of my hands. They were sticking out of the tops of clenched fists, like paper airplanes that had been snatched from mid-air.

"Ah, we're waiting," I said.

My hands uncoiled and I flexed my fingers. Then, an exhalation. I felt that it had been a while since I could breathe.

"I guess I lost it," I said. "Did they call the police?"

"No, of course not," he said. "They know you're a regular. A stand-up citizen. Your ex-wife is on her way."

Roger, the percussionist, was ten years older than I, and from the time I met him, he seemed scattered, frail and aging rapidly. Now sitting next to him under the flickering fluorescents of the break room, the

crumpled ruins of my outburst littering the table before me, I knew he'd outlast me. I knew too that by now, I looked like his older brother.

The previous winter, I told the band I was ill and had to dial things back. Now I was forever ducking the phrase "palliative care" because it was difficult for me to say and it didn't sound like a real thing. Even though I was on hand for my mother-in-law's experience with it and know it's real, I ignored my diagnosis through the jaundice and weight loss.

Roger, always reed thin, a twig, willowy, now looked positively robust next to me.

"We're waiting," I said. "I don't remember running into you in the store, Rog. You know, I come here a lot, to look at food I no longer desire. I just want to look at it, that's all."

"That's okay," he said.

"Also, Julia used to make lists. She had a lot of good reasons for sending me here and I guess the habit stuck."

I stopped, aware suddenly that I was spilling.

"Don't stop," Roger said. "You want to talk. That's good."

"I don't remember what happened," I said. "Where you come in."

"I came to the rescue," he said. "You were tearing up the community bulletin board in the front lobby when I walked in."

"Yeah?"

"At first, I watched you remove some pushpins, and you know, somebody's ad for a boat dropped to the floor, then the poster for *Our Town* at the Baptist church, then you started pawing the board, like a hamster working a treadmill, taking down anything you can get your hands on. You looked furious. Nobody coming or going wanted to get near you. Somebody alerted the management though."

He paused.

“I’m guessing you’re feeling a lot of stress these days. I get that, but dismantling the community bulletin board, do you know what that was about?”

“I guess I do know, yeah,” I said.

“Well?”

I didn't want to say. It was stupid and selfish.

"Well?" He repeated.

“I wasn’t angry about any of this until now. All of you, you know, you’ll go on. The plays at the church, the community band, boats sailing in and out of the harbor, lighting the Christmas tree down at the ferry landing---everything else will, I don’t know, blithely sally forth without me.”

He laughed. “And you thought you could change that by taking down the story board?”

“I doubt if I was thinking of anything at all,” I said. “I was reading it as usual and then I just felt myself getting pissed off and then, more and more pissed off until I just kind of went for it.”

Roger glanced at the flyers on the table. “Let’s do something while we’re waiting. This room can't be helping, and you seem yourself again. Are you?”

“Sure, yeah,” I said. “I’m in your custody until the missus gets here.”

He pointed to the flyers. “Then let's gather those up. Can you keep it together?”

“Sure, and if at any time I appear to be losing it, you have my permission to beat me like a drum.”

“Will do,” he said, knowing full well he lacked the will to do it and I the will to take it.

THE COOL BREEZE ON FOUR LEGS

In moments such as these, when I am adrift in the dream of a broken island, time slithers like a dangerous thing on the path in front of me. Crabs skitter into my trouser pocketss, pinch my legs. I am immobile, piled on a plastic chair, awaiting more treatment.

This is when I imagine being him, the Cool Breeze on Four Legs. The boy who had jump from the get-go, who had wings like Noah's dove. Even when he crashed and the doggie doc said surgery, some power within him said "no thanks, let's go another way."

The doc, you see, couldn't guarantee full mobility after the pins or ball and socket or whatever mechanics were inserted. There was a chance too of arthritis in the joints, and you get the picture, too many doctorly disclaimers, which is like the current business with me and the unpredictable side effects.

The point is, he flew, he crashed, he hung in there.

A second doc said take this, an electro-magnetic ring. Put it on the foreleg, right here, 15 minutes, twice a day. Take these too, a series of braces increasing in flexibility as they decrease in size. Well, over time, no brace, no limp, winged dog again. Voila!

In the three minutes it takes to run this movie back in my head, I decide. Today, I will say no. I will say either we devise another plan, or I skip. I get in the car and drive home. There I collect the Cool Breeze and we flee this sinking dream of an island for yonder healing hills, the pitch and pattern, the longitude and latitude of which, to be determined as we go.

PRESENT

Looking westward from the front porch, he'd noticed something at sunset. Rocking gently and smoking a short cigar, he caught a glint, a kind of shimmering in his eye.

It was just beyond the empty double lot across the street, in the breadth of a small forest. Leafy oaks and maples swayed and shivered whenever a breeze passed through their heights and here and there, something else, something flickering through, as if moths had been at the verdant coats that hung on those woody posts. There were chinks in the fabric of the twilight trees, little sparks of fire, like the tip of a match when a flame is sparked---Whoosh! Pop! Fizz!

At first, the phenomenon threw him, as unaccustomed things will do. But the gold in the light gave the game away and the answer was simple, even for him.

It was the sun lowering behind the forest, of course, setting the spaces between the clumps of foliage alight. And a conspiring breeze made the light dance when it shook the lush, green branches.

What a sight. What a boon. What a show.

He was not young. He had watched countless sunsets. He had watched them alone and with others. He had watched them feeling hungry and feeling satiated. He had watched them when crying and when laughing. And the sun had doubtless worked such sweet pyrotechnics before, on countless occasions, for countless others, but he had not been present then. Maybe he'd even been around for some of it, but not present and that was the thing, as the poet once said, and that was the thing that had made all the difference.

ABOUT THE WRITER:

[Wayne Cresser](#) lives with his wife and dog on an island in Narragansett Bay. His fiction has been published in seven print anthologies, the most recent, *Spank the Carp 2018*, online at *Jerry Jazz Musician*, *Gravel*, *OPEN: Journal of Arts & Letters (O:JA&L)*, *Review Americana*, and *Story*, and in such print journals as *The Ocean State Review* and *SLAB*. For the latest news and blogs related to his literary life, please visit *Just Between You and Me* (a literary confidence).

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