

Stanley Park

TIMOTHY TAYLOR



VINTAGE CANADA

STANLEY PARK

“[This] intelligent and leisurely ... novel serves up chi-chi restaurants, Blood and Crip sous chefs and exotic culinary dishes, but it is also a pointed comment on the act of creation—whether someone is working toward a soufflé, a movie, a work of art or a romp in the sack ... One thing is clear: the talented Timothy Taylor ... is very good at writing about food, on par with Jim Harrison or Sara Suleri.”

The Globe and Mail

“*Stanley Park* is both feat and feast: a smart and enthralling narrative that urgently binds together its twin obsessions with place and food and culminates in a pièce de résistance that proves a triumph both for Chef Jeremy Papier and his creator, Timothy Taylor.”

Catherine Bush

“*[Stanley Park]* is a modern morality play [and] an assured debut that stands well above many first novels. Taylor is a writer of undeniable talent who has proven himself adept at both the long and short form, and whose wave will no doubt reach the shores.”

The Toronto Star

“Vancouver breathes in *Stanley Park*, from its architecture and granola culture to its status as an American TV-show haven. It is a cosmopolitan, big city pushing to become an international, economic hub. It is also a natural wonder, with an ocean and a mountain range within spitting distance, a rainforest, and enough red tendencies to elect quite a few NDP governments. Jeremy is at once an élitist and a man of the people. Bravo to Timothy Taylor for capturing this tension so well.... This is a powerful début; expect to hear a lot from him.

The Edmonton Journal

“Nothing short of superb ... A novel to savour [and] a page-turning story. [Taylor is] a gifted writer whose next book will be eagerly awaited by fans of *Stanley Park*.”

The London Free Press

“[Taylor’s] exploration of the opposing forces, which motivate the idealists, the opportunist and the materialists, is an extraordinarily creative metaphor for life in the modern age.... Taylor may be on his way to becoming the head chef of Canadian letters.”

Winnipeg Free Press

S T A N L E Y
P A R K

T i m o t h y
T a y l o r



Vintage Canada

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For Jane and for my parents,

Richard and Ursula

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Acknowledgments

 Timothy Taylor is a recipient of a National Magazine Award, winner of the Journey Prize and the only writer ever to have three stories published in a single edition of the *Journey Prize Anthology*, as he did in the fall of 2000. He is the author of *The International Handbook for Canadian Lawyers*; his short fiction has appeared in Canada's leading literary magazines and has been anthologized in such publications as *Best Canadian Stories* and *Coming Attractions*. His travel, humour, arts and business pieces have been published in various magazines and periodicals, including *Saturday Night*. He was born in Venezuela and now lives in Vancouver.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

❧ One strand of this novel is based on fact. In January of 1953 the skeletal remains of two children were found in Vancouver's Stanley Park. A hatchet was found with the bodies, which was determined to be the murder weapon. From the time the bodies were discovered until 1998, police believed the bodies to be those of a boy and a girl, ages between seven and ten years. DNA tests subsequently proved that the children were brothers. They have never been identified, no charges have ever been laid, and the case remains open.

ONE

THE CANVASBACK

They arranged to meet at Lost Lagoon. It was an in-between place, the city on one side, Stanley Park on the other. Ten years of rare contact, and they had sought each other out. Surprised each other, created expectations.

Now the Professor was late.

Jeremy Papier found a bench up the hill from the lagoon and opened a section of newspaper across the wet boards. The bench was between two cherry trees, the pink blossoms of which met high over his head forming an arch, a doorway. It wasn't precisely the spot they'd discussed—the Professor had suggested the boathouse—but it was within eyesight, within shouting distance. It was close enough. If he had to wait, Jeremy thought, settling onto the paper and blowing out a long breath, he was going to sit. He crossed one long, aching leg over the other. He fingered the tooling on a favourite pair of cowboy boots. He ran long fingers through tangled black hair.

He sat because he was tired, certainly. Jeremy accepted that being a chef, even a young chef, meant being exhausted most of the time. But there had also been a family portrait taken here, on this bench, years before. Also early spring, he remembered; the three of them had sat here under the cherry blossoms. Jeremy on the one side, seven years old. His mother, Hélène, on the other. The Professor had his arms around them both, feet flat on the grass. He looked extremely pleased. Jeremy's mother was less obviously so, her expression typically guarded, although she made dozens of copies of the photo and sent these off to relatives spread across Europe from Ireland to Spain, from the Czech Republic to as far east as Bulgaria. Documenting settlement. He wondered if his father, who had no relations other than those in the photo, would remember this detail.

Now Jeremy lit a cigarette and watched an erratic stream of homeless people making their way into the forest for the night. When he arrived there had been seawall walkers and hotdog eaters, birdwatchers, rollerbladers, chess players returning from the picnic tables over to the bowling greens. Then lagoon traffic changed direction like a freak tide. The flow of those heading back to their warm apartments in the West End tapered to nothing, and the paths were filled with the delusional, the alcoholic, the paranoid, the bipolar. The Professor's subjects, his obsession. The inbound. Four hundred hectares of Stanley Park offering its bleak, anonymous shelter to those without other options.

Of course, Jeremy didn't have to remind himself, the Professor had other options.

They had discussed meeting on the phone earlier in the week. When Jeremy picked up—expecting a late reservation, maybe his black-cod supplier, who was due into Vancouver the next morning—he heard wind and trees rustling at the other end of the line. Normally reticent, the Professor was animated about his most recent research.

"... following on from everything that I have done," he said, "culminating with this work." From his end, standing at a pay phone on the far side of the lagoon, the Professor could hear the dishwasher hammering away in the background behind his son's tired response.

"*Participatory* anthropology. Is that what you call it now?" Jeremy was saying. "I thought it was *immersive*."

“Like everything,” the Professor answered, “my work has evolved.”

He needed help with something, the Professor said. He wanted to meet.

“How unusual,” Jeremy said.

“And what advice can I give on running a restaurant?” the Professor shot back.

“None,” Jeremy answered. “I just said there was something I wanted to talk to you about.”

Something that had to do with the restaurant.”

“Strange times,” the Professor said, looking into the darkness around the pay phone. Checking instinctively.

Very strange. The stream of those inbound had slowed to a trickle. A trio of men passed, behind shopping carts that were draped and hung with plastic, heaped to the height of pack horses, bags full of other bags. Jeremy could only wonder at the purpose of them all, although the Professor could have told him that the bag itself captured the imagination. It held emblematic power. For its ability to hold, certainly. To secure contents, to carry belongings from place to place. But even the smell of the plastic, its oily permanence suggested the resilience of things discarded.

Jeremy watched the three men make their way around the lagoon and disappear into the trails. He glanced at his watch, sighed. Lifted his chin and breathed in the saline breeze. It brought to mind the ocean beyond the park, sockeye salmon schooling in the deep, waiting for the DNA-encoded signal to turn in their millions and rush the mouth of the Fraser, the tributary offshoot, the rivulet of water and the gravel-bed spawning grounds beyond. Mat complete the cycle, die. And then, punctuating this thought, the rhododendron bushes across the lawn boiled briefly and disgorged Caruzo, the Professor’s manic vanguard.

“Hey, hey,” Caruzo said, approaching the bench. “Chef Papier.” He exhaled the words in a blast.

He dressed for the mobile outdoor life, Caruzo. Three or four sweaters, a torn corduroy jacket, a heavy coat, then a raincoat over all of that. It made the big man even bigger, the size of a lineman, six foot five, although stooped a little with the years. Those being of an indeterminate number; Jeremy imagined only that it must be between fifty and ninety. Caruzo had a white garbage bag tied on over one shoe, although it was only threatening rain, and pants wrapped at the knees in electrical tape. His ageless, wind-beaten face was protected by a blunt beard that fell to his chest. Exposed skin had darkened, blackened as a chameleon might against the same forest backdrop.

“The Professor,” Caruzo announced, “is waiting.”

Jeremy followed Caruzo between the cherry trees and around the lagoon. They passed down an alley of oak trees that stirred another memory of his mother. When they were alone—the Professor was often in the field on other projects, never explained—Jeremy and his mother would spend weekends here, feeding the animals. Bread for the swans, nuts for the squirrels. The racoons would take eggs from your hand and climb up into these same beech trees, crack their prize gingerly and suck clean the interior. Once a racoon bobbed its head in silent thanks before eating. His mother laughed for a long time at that. It was as happy as he remembered her being, ever. From his earliest memories right up to the day in October 1981 when H el ene Papier died, not long after his twentieth birthday. His father was again in the field. Jeremy had been seeking his own petulant distance, living on campus, playing in a ball

rockabilly band called The Decoders and failing economics. When Jeremy thought of it now—ten years separating him from the events that had so tragically, so quickly, unfolded—sometimes felt as if she had given up on both of them, all at once. In the middle of a dream turned left, not right. Taken her leave. The suddenness of it sent Jeremy and his father flying across the world in different directions.

Caruzo marched ahead. He was chanting, as he would from time to time.

October 5, 1947,
The date of their demise,
When the things I saw in the trees and the sky
Made me finally realize,
It's the fir and the arbutus
Whose leaves will fall to meet ye,
And touching the soil mark the morning of toil
When the light it fails to greet ye.

“And now I singe, any food, any feeding,
Feeding, drink or clothing,
Come dame or maid,
Be not afraid, poor Tom will injure nothing.”

When he reached the end of the chorus, Caruzo stopped on the path, held his hands out as if soliciting critical commentary.

“Food, drink or clothing?” Jeremy asked.

“How about a toonie?” Caruzo said.

Jeremy produced the two-dollar coin and they walked another fifty yards, over a small arched bridge and up to a trail mouth that entered the forest proper. A pay phone stood there. And since the Professor was still nowhere to be seen, Jeremy phoned Jules at the restaurant.

“How are you making out?” she asked him. She had the cordless phone tucked under her chin while she walked across the kitchen of The Monkey’s Paw Bistro.

“It’s all extremely strange,” he said by way of an answer.

“Strange itself is not bad,” Jules said. “All my father ever talks about are husbands and mutual funds. Turns out the evaluation criteria are similar.”

She was trying to cheer him up, which he appreciated as always. “What are the numbers tonight?” he asked her.

“Twenty-six covers early. We have a six-top late. A few tentatives.”

“Thursday,” he said, exasperated.

“Walk-in Thursday,” Jules said. Jeremy deduced from the steady scraping sound he heard that she was stirring the roasted carrot-ginger soup he had prepped earlier.

“I was going to use a bit of cinnamon in that soup,” he said. “Is Zeena in?”

“Zeena, of course, is in,” Jules said, and then, knowing he was trying to think about work as an alternative to what lay before him, she prodded, “Talk to me, sugar. How’s he doing?”

Well, he’s living in a park, for one. But Jeremy knew what she was really asking. “I can’t be sure,” he said to Jules. “He’s not here yet.”

“He’ll show,” Jules said. “Take the evening. I’ll manage.”

“Everything else prepped up?”

“Puh-lease.”

“I made a demi from those duck bones. I was going to use that in the sauce for the duck breast with an apricot preserve....”

Sous-chef Jules Capelli met these instructions with long-suffering silence.

“Sorry.”

“I got the notes,” Jules said. “Now take the night and I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Caruzo had become the messenger. He could still cover great distances quickly on his long legs, and so he had been sent to set up this meeting, loping all the way across town to The Monkey’s Paw to secure Jeremy’s commitment in person. He returned with the good news and a complimentary plate of lamb sausage and new-potato ragout inside him, retracing his steps through favourite back alleys, forest paths and finally to the Professor’s camp.

“Yo hey,” Caruzo called from the darkness, adhering to the protocol they had developed. Call from a short, respectful distance away. If there is no answer, come back later. “Hi Professor,” he called.

The Professor cracked the fly with two fingertips. He was sitting cross-legged in the middle of the little tent, sorting through piles of yellow foolscap pages. Each legal-sized sheet was covered on both sides with handwritten notes, scrawled in pencil.

“Yo hey,” Caruzo said. “Chef says yes. Jay-Jay is coming.”

The Professor leaned out of the tent a little ways to catch the words. He was pleased.

“Five o’clock tomorrow,” Caruzo said, nodding vigorously. “But hey,” he continued, then stalled. The Professor waited while the big man squinted and relaxed his eyes repeatedly, milking out the thought.

“It’s good,” Caruzo said. “Jay-Jay coming.”

“Jeremy coming is good,” the Professor said, nodding reassurance.

“I’ll meet him at the boathouse,” Caruzo said. “Meet him, bring him in?”

“Fine,” the Professor agreed. “I’ll meet you both at the bulrushes.”

“Right,” Caruzo nodded. “Right.” But he made no move to disappear into the dark, nor move to find his way through the blackness to his own camp, so skilfully hidden for all these years. Instead he waited, a little nervously. “Do you want to talk?” the Professor asked, sensing Caruzo’s mood. He quickly confirmed the presence of a pencil behind his ear, then felt around himself for one of his yellow legal pads.

He made a small fire. Then, as he had done so many nights since he discovered this place and the people in it, the Professor leaned back in the grass around the fire and only listened.

Caruzo spoke in the tongues of angels, although the fire of his words licked around the ideas he worked to express and often consumed them. Tonight again, he spoke of the children. “Their death pulled,” Caruzo said, rocking. “The boy, the girl. Killed as they were. It pulled me and it sent me. Pulled others too. We were like the dry leaves, and their death was a puff of black air. For years I searched for them, and when I found them it all began.” He gestured around himself at the park, the darkness. “From a leaf to a lifer,” he went on. “That’s me. A lifer to a leaf.”

He burned himself out eventually and left as he typically did: without offering fire.

solutions to his riddles and without saying goodnight. He rose from his haunches, turned the soft grass and vanished into the shadows.

The Professor read over his notes, then put the yellow legal pad back in the tent. He returned to the fire to watch it as the flames died. Since their last series of meetings, Caruzo had not untangled. So their deaths had drawn him here, the Professor thought, trying to work it through. The leaf blown by the evil event, the black wind. The leaf becoming a life permanent. The lifer anticipating how he would one day, again, become a leaf. Was that it?

The Professor put his hands behind his head and stared up through the canopy of trees to find those pieces of the night sky that were visible. The fragments of constellations that, for those who could believe such things, would provide direction. He remembered how H el ene had disdained astrology, indeed most forms of the mystical. There was a certain clich e about the gypsy fortune teller with which she could not bear association. He learned this quickly after they first met. Nineteen fifty-six, Lyon. H el ene was living with her father and uncles, aunts and cousins, trying out city life after generations on the road. The Professor (not yet a professor) was over from Canada with his yellow pads and sharp pencils, observing. The first case study of a professional lifetime underway. His thesis named with some of the romance by which it had been electrified: *Romani Alighted: Remembering the Vardo*. Work from which all else had grown, the Professor thought now, branches sifting air above him. The marriage, certainly. H el ene had been drawn to his interest in her. To his own unknowable history too, perhaps. Before his own father, now dead, there was only an expanse of the unknown. A book of blank pages.

But the work with H el ene's family had also given birth to all his other work. Launched him across the anthropological landscape. Squatters in the Delta. Russian stowaways. The earlier Vancouver panhandlers who had peopled his successful book, *Will Work For Food*. H el ene might not always have appreciated her role at the root of things. And neither of them could have known how Stanley Park itself lay sleeping in their future.

The fire was out. The Professor climbed into his tent to sleep. He didn't dream of Caruzo. Didn't lie unconscious under images of H el ene's beauty, the unfolding of their years or even the October morning when he had awoken in the field with a very particular hollow feeling. The morning he had called H el ene, and the phone had rung and rung.

A welcome relief, this dreamless sleep.

In the morning he climbed down from the forest to the men's room by Second Beach. Familiar steps. He removed the pane of glass at the back of the locked building, as Caruzo had shown him long ago. He climbed in, washed, shaved. Then he spent the day on his favourite cliff, high above the sea in a salty breeze, thinking of how it might all be finally finished. Ten years later than expected, but one could not schedule tragedy or the irregular dawn of understanding.

When it was time to meet his son, the Professor pulled the fly-fishing net from his pack and walked down through the forest to the lagoon. At the trail mouth he stood in the shelter of the salal bush, eyes on the path. It was just before five. Caruzo appeared when he promised, leading Jeremy over the arched stone bridge and towards him. The Professor watched, but did not step from the bushes immediately, and the boy did as he would. He grew exasperated. His eyes found a pay phone nearby, a distraction. He stabbed the keypad with his finger, his back to Caruzo. Wishing, no doubt, to be anywhere but here. When he hung up

the Professor stepped from his hiding place, and Caruzo disappeared into the trees as agreed. The Professor enjoyed noting how the densely overlapping branches did not move as he entered the green face of the forest. Caruzo was merely absorbed.

“I can’t stay long.” These were the first words his son found.

“I thought maybe dinner.”

“It’s Thursday. I can’t leave Jules alone.”

His restaurant did not come up without mention of this name. “Oh, I’ll bet you can,” the Professor said.

They stood face to face in the falling light, the Professor’s head just a degree to one side. The boy wasn’t sleeping well, he thought. There were dark circles under his eyes. Black hair straying this way and that. Was I wiry back then, like he is now? A little pale? They were still around the same six-foot height, the Professor observed, looking steadily into his son’s eyes and thinking: I have not yet begun to shrink.

Jeremy thought only that his father looked better than he might under the circumstances. His eyes were bright, his brows pranced upward with good humour. True, his hair was dirty and his fingernails were black, and he was carrying an old wooden fly-fishing net pinched under one elbow for no evident reason.

“Perhaps you’ll stay long enough to see me catch my dinner then,” the Professor said. Or, needed darkness, he went on to explain. And so they sat on the bench and talked, circling but not meeting the matter at hand. Demand nothing, the Professor thought. And so they talked about the Stanley Park game-bird population instead. A point of mutual interest, the Professor imagined.

“You eat duck?” Jeremy asked. A passer-by might have assumed he was about to provide cooking tips. Sear off the breast on a medium grill, skin side down. Render the fat. Finish skin side up, just a couple minutes. Sauce it and you’re good to go.

But to which the Professor answered: “I’ve been here quite a few months and I didn’t bring groceries. Have you eaten starlings?” He was aware that it sounded like a challenge. “Delicious, although you’ll need two or three per person.”

“I’ve eaten ortolan” Jeremy said, and then was irritable with himself for being drawn into the conversation on that level.

“Now, the mallard is a fantastically light sleeper,” the Professor informed him.

Jeremy looked away.

“The canvasback even more so, fiendishly difficult to catch. The important thing is to learn a little each day here. Just a little. I spent a week trying to catch my first bird. A week. Do you know what I mean?”

“I have no idea what you mean,” Jeremy answered. “I buy my ducks direct from a guy named Bertrand who lives on a farm up the valley.”

“Although presumably someone catches them for Bertrand. Say though, I’ve been reading about you. Earlier this year. Anya Dickie’s review of *The Monkey’s Foot*. Brilliant job.”

“*The Monkey’s Paw Bistro*.”

“Purple prose but a nice conclusion. How did the Dickie woman say it again?”

Jeremy sighed and looked out over the lagoon. The dynamic between them, he thought, didn’t change much with the years, the location, or their relative mental health.

“‘Crosstown Celebrates Local Beverages and Bounty,’ ” Jeremy finally said, reciting the

headline, which was also the lead line and the closing line of a typically enthusiastic Dick restaurant review. She had been quite taken with the way Jules and he shared a passion for local meat, produce, cheese and wine.

“I could use that,” the Professor said. “ ‘Local bounty’ is rather good. I think we share the passion, you and I.”

Jeremy considered a retort along the lines of: “You and I share nothing but blood.” But he imagined this approach would end the conversation. He would get no advice and have who knows what other effect on his father, and so he sat there and listened as the Professor elaborated on their supposed professional overlap, describing what he called “the stories of the residents.” There was great deference in his voice. There had always been people here, the Professor said, solemn. There had been a First Nation, of course. Squatters later. Men who lived in trees. But this generation was the homeless, the new Stanley Park people. That was the story—collected lives and anecdotes, assorted obsessions and misfortunes—the Professor would now stitch together. The great Work-In-Progress.

“Is Sopwith Hill taking it?” Jeremy asked. A prestigious if aging textbook house, Sopwith had done the Professor’s other books, some of these approaching mainstream popularity. Jeremy actually read one before the disastrous fall of 1987, before he fled to the culinary institute in Dijon. He couldn’t remember the title, but he thought the Professor had spent three months in the downtown east side, interviewing panhandlers. Panhandling himself and living in a range of unsafe outdoor places, including under parked cars left overnight in the downtown parkade. Jeremy heard this story after the fact, his mother’s bitter version. At one point (she had fumed) somebody had returned early to retrieve their car and had nearly run him over. He moved into an unused culvert behind the SeaBus Terminal at that point. “To be run over, that would maybe be the best to understand these people. These ‘no-homes,’ ” she had said to Jeremy. “Only in dying like them, you can no longer write about them.”

The Professor looked briefly away before answering the question. His son’s tone registered doubt, incredulity. “They’ll take it eventually.” But his voice was a little tight.

So Jeremy sat back on the bench they had found, ran his fingers through his hair, which was in worse disarray than usual, a manic bristle. It was only appropriate that it started to rain lightly just then, fine drops hissing into the foliage around them.

“Fires,” said the Professor, attempting to illustrate his point about learning a little each day. “Now there’s something I knew nothing about. Thank God for Caruzo.”

It was, for a moment, the single most unexpected revelation of the evening: The Professor could light fires.

They talked for over an hour this way, holding one another at a familiar arm’s-length, both in their own way reflecting that H el ene was all the distance between them. Alive, she provided the bridge. Gone, she was the chasm itself. They might not yet have filled any of that emptiness, but a silver distance opened between them and the city. They sat, at the very least, in the same descending darkness, looking across the lagoon to the now gleaming towers of the West End, a parallel universe separated from them by the surface of the water on which slept hundreds of ducks.

“You stand watch,” the Professor instructed quietly, when he deemed the time was right.

“For what?”

It was only his first visit. "Others."

Jeremy looked distinctly concerned.

"Not militant vegetarians precisely. More like the police."

"Oh, just that," the chef said. "Well, then: Charge."

Jeremy took shelter under a cedar. The Professor got down on his knees and began to creep across the walkway. He held the old fly-fishing net in front of himself as he approached the clutch of rushes on the far side of the path. He rose to his knees and parted the paper stalks silently, the net aloft. Jeremy could make out several ducks within range. As he watched, all movement ceased.

And then the Professor merely fell forward, arm outstretched, pitching across the water. It was like a silent movie until a quarter second before his impact, when every duck within sixty yards burst from sleep and the lagoon simultaneously, and all previous tranquility, a silver thoughtfulness and reflection, drained out of the water in a spray of violent splashing. The air filled with black thudding shapes. Several birds left the water in a confused tang and collided with one another, falling back into the lagoon. One fell onto the path in front of Jeremy, where it skidded, spun, seemed to glance at him in reproach before launching in flight again.

The one snared in the net, meanwhile, flew briefly in desperation, powerful wings holding it above water despite the Professor's full weight. Fighting. Flailing. Sinking suddenly. His father's head and upper body disappeared into the lagoon. He lay there, half-submerged, like he'd been shot. And then there was a gasping re-emergence, the duck now held by its neck, quivering, nearly drowned. The Professor breathing heavily. Water plastering down his hair, running down his face, his body blackened with it. He set the net aside, took the duck firmly in both his hands. He snapped his wrists sharply, cracking the neck. The bird was instant still.

The Professor raised a finger to his lips. They waited. No celebration was permitted yet. The circling survivors re-flocked above them, then homed in stupidly on another not distant part of the lagoon. As they swished to their new sleeping place the stillness slowly returned to the water.

Still no movement from the Professor, except a slight cocking of his head to the breeze. Listening to some small sound, measuring an intangible indicator that he knew from experience must either dissipate or return before he dared move. And when the Professor's variable fell (or rose) into the green zone, only then did they quietly scramble away from the lagoon, up through the grassy passageway to the Park Drive. Pausing just seconds at the edge of the new blacktop with its bright yellow markings for the angle parkers, then across the surface and into the cool forest. Even here they walked a distance without speaking.

When the city was almost inaudible, replaced with the sound of clacking cedars and moaning wind, the Professor stopped. "Ha ha," he said. Beaming again. He held his hands apart, in one the duck dangling by the neck, dripping water, beak and eyes serenely closed. "Look at that, would you? It never stops pleasing me to pluck from this forest the things that I need. Carefully and craftily I make my way."

He looked from his son to the bird and back again.

"And you are off to work now, I suppose," the Professor said, hoping he had stirred something. Guilt might do for now, although curiosity would be better.

“It’s a nice bird,” Jeremy heard himself say calmly, although his heart was pounding. Against his own better judgment he reached for the duck, thinking of cooking school and France, of the ducks he himself had been taught to kill. Here, as the trees rattled against one another above them, Jeremy reached across his father to touch this duck, wanting to hold it while he knew it was still warm.

“Look at that. A nice redhead.”

“Canvasback,” the Professor corrected.

“Redhead,” he said again, more emphatically.

“Oh no,” the Professor said. “Definitely a canvasback.”

“This duck,” Jeremy said, irritated at their disagreement during this brief moment he had been enjoying, “is a redhead.”

“This duck,” answered the Professor, wincing now at the error, “is no redhead. With all due respect to your culinary education, Chef, I fear it has failed you here. There are pheasants, there are guinea hens and ortolans. Then there are park ducks. If you want to know about park ducks, I am, as they say, your man.”

“Chestnut head—” Jeremy began.

“Cripes, Jeremy, shut the yawp just for a minute. Your red has a pronounced high forehead, a grey body and a much blacker tail. They are also a good deal less common around here, rare even. You see, my boy, I wouldn’t have taken a redhead had there been a redhead to take. Which there wasn’t, *ergo* this duck isn’t.”

At which point he took the bird back and slid it into a plastic shopping bag he produced from under his sweater. And without warning to Jeremy, he peeled off to the left and disappeared into the black forest between a towering stump and a half-fallen maple.

“This is ludicrous,” Jeremy said, stopping and speaking emphatically to the empty pine needle path. “I mean, ... shit,” he said. Here they were again, firing at each other in the blackness.

He looked up the path, down it, into the still darker forest, listening to the Professor moving away from him through the underbrush, the soft sound floating back. This moment would be the time to come to one’s senses, Jeremy thought. To get the hell back into the city to The Monkey’s Paw, where twenty-six covers would be seated, conversation rising. Julia was probably now riding a wave of incoming appetizer orders, beginning to slam, the soundtrack urging everything and everybody onward into the night.

Or he could wait here. Thirty seconds from now the Professor would be gone. He might still be able to hear him, but he’d never find him. Not in that. In the darkness and the trees and the bramble. And the Professor wouldn’t even notice, or he’d notice, maybe, but not be particularly surprised. He would forge ahead through this forest to his hidden spot. (Perhaps he doesn’t want me to see his spot, thought Jeremy.) Either way, he’d be fine. Just listen for him.

Somewhere up in the woods, the Professor was reciting a poem quietly. Jeremy had to hold himself very still to pick out the words.

“With an hoste of furious fancies,
Whereof I am commander,
With a burning speare, and a horse of air,
To the wildernesse I wander.”

A challenge, of course, and it didn't get any quieter; the poem now came floating out of the swaying blackness from a single spot where the Professor stood, smiling and reciting, leaning his head back and looking towards the crack of black sky visible at the tops of the trees.

Jeremy crashed into the forest towards him. And when he found his father, they stood for a moment and looked at each other. Jeremy's favourite cowboy boots were past wet, the branches now reaching to soak his back and neck.

"Is this it?" he said. Through the trees Jeremy could make out campfires spread in the darkness around them.

"Not quite yet," the Professor said, motioning with his head that they should continue. He turned and hoisted a leg up to a foothold on a large root-covered rock, gripped the gnarled wood with his fingertips and disappeared over the top.

It was the root end of a gigantic tree, Jeremy realized. Torn from the soil by a gust of wind, torn up along with the huge boulder to which the roots had been clinging. Jeremy clambered inexpertly after his father and stood at the base of the broad trunk. It stretched out in front of them like a bridge, 150 feet long, silver in the moonlight. As they walked it bowed slightly beneath them. It surprised Jeremy, this slight bending of the massive trunk. He would have thought their weight was not enough to move such a great thing, a thing that vaulted them through the brush to a completely different part of the park. A denser part. A place that had no relation to anything that he had previously known.

"What we want is a fire," the Professor said from ahead of him, as they descended a slope.

And he lit good fires too, Jeremy discovered. After half an hour tramping through the darkness and the dark, the Professor made a small hot fire in just a few minutes. Built with few words spoken, in a trench at the centre of his camp.

While the Professor changed into dry clothes, Jeremy squatted back-assed to the heat and considered that if he were abandoned here, he would be lost until morning. Perhaps even then. So busy a park, thousands of visitors a day. Never once had he felt lost in it, as he was now.

A map and a global positioning system would have revealed to him that he was not far from things that he knew. Just a couple of hundred yards off the Park Drive, near Prospect Point, in fact. Here a densely forested slope fell from the road, down to the top of a cliff that towered a hundred feet above the seawall and the ocean below. The Professor had found a clearing between the trees at the very edge of this cliff. There were tamped-down ferns and a tent built against the trunk of a cedar, a space big enough for one very still, very accomplished sleeper. And through the branches of this tree, and the others that umbrella-ed over the small clearing, one had a view of the harbour, freighters silent at their moorings, well lit. At the bottom of the cliffs and to the left stood Siwash Rock, which pillared fifty feet out of the water near the shore. A rock that was once a bather, legend had it, a bathos honoured by the gods with this permanent place at the lip of forest that had been his home.

The Professor plucked the canvasback and drew it smoothly. He buried the entrails some distance away. He washed his hands and the bird with water from a plastic juice container. "Did you bring salt by any chance?" he asked, returning to the fire. "No matter, I have a packet left."

"How about string?" Jeremy asked. You might as well do it right, he thought. And when

the Professor produced his string, Jeremy trussed the bird, tying it into the fork of a blackened Y-shaped stick. He buried the other end of the stick in the soft earth, supported across a large stone and cantilevered the bird above the flames. By sliding the stone back and forth, the bird's height and roasting temperature could be very roughly adjusted. He sat back in the dry area of fern nearest the flames and folded his arms across his knees.

There was silence for some time. The bird began to glisten, then hiss gently. Finally the aroma was released: smoky, fatty, rich with oil. He twisted the stick a quarter turn.

"This is all quite illegal, of course," Jeremy said finally, aware that the comment was softened by his own complicity. But the Professor only looked at him as if he were a little slow for just getting this point. "All right," Jeremy went on, failing to resist a small smile. The duck smelled good. "How do you catch a starling?"

"Caruzo showed me," the Professor said, re-energized. "Peanut butter spread on top of good strong epoxy from any hardware store. On a stick or a low branch in a relatively clear area, not too far into the forest. You can watch from quite close by; they are not a shy bird. Or scarce, for that matter. It works nicely, although you'll want to remove the feet before you cook them."

Jeremy rocked gently back and forth. Shook his head as if to clear it. "You clean them up like that?" he asked, nodding towards the juice container full of water.

"I take the starlings down to the men's room by the beach," the Professor said, "where they can spread out and do a good job." Now he was rummaging through his leather case, which he had slung up in the low branches of the nearby cedar. He re-emerged from the branches carrying a bottle of wine. "I bought this wine for you. A Rioja. You like Spain, don't you?"

"Never been."

"Right. France, was it?"

"France," Jeremy said.

The Professor uncorked the wine. Then he unsnapped a collapsible field cup from inside his pouch, telescoped it out, poured some of the red wine and handed it across the fire to Jeremy. He had a plastic cup for himself.

When they both had wine, Jeremy still did not sip. The Professor felt the pause and looked at his son.

"Participatory anthropology ...," Jeremy began.

"Quite beyond immersion," the Professor said. "The next step, really."

Jeremy chose his words carefully. "I thought you had given this up."

"I had," the Professor said. "But I left something unfinished. Something I thought should be put to rest."

Jeremy wasn't sure he understood.

"My own celebration of 'local bounty,' " the Professor said, nodding towards the duck and smiling.

"Not funny," Jeremy answered.

"You don't like that we might be working on parallel projects."

Jeremy sighed and lifted the silver cup in the orange light that flickered around them. "Santé," he said. "To your health."

"*A la vôtre*," said the Professor, before drinking. "To yours too."

They charred the bird a bit on the back and the legs. It was tough to cook directly over

such a low flame. Still, it wasn't badly done. The breast was crispy, the meat the texture of medium steak. The Professor cut them off pieces in turn, which they ate with their hands sitting cross-legged next to one another in the dry ferns near the fire.

"It's not really cooking, I realize," said the Professor. "Perhaps with a salal-berry cream sauce we could tart it up to your customer's level of sophistication."

"Sure." Although: salal-berry cream sauce. Not bad.

"Salt?" The Professor dangled the packet at eye level.

Jeremy took the paper envelope of precious salt and sprinkled some across the piece of canvasback breast in his fingers. He chewed and swallowed. He took a breath.

"I'm just a cook."

The Professor glanced up. "Oh yes?"

"That's all," Jeremy said. "So I like local produce. So I like local rabbits. Whatever."

"Whatever? Meaning: no reason for this preference? No larger significance?"

"Of course it has significance. There just isn't any big—"

"Any big reason for it?" the Professor said.

Maybe not, Jeremy thought. He swallowed another mouthful of duck and held a great finger up in front of himself. "If somebody asked me, 'What are you trying to accomplish?' he started, "I would answer that I was trying to remind people of something. Of what the soil under their feet has to offer. Of a time when they would have known only the food that the own soil could offer."

"Sort of a nostalgia thing," the Professor said.

"Make fun," Jeremy said, "but how would you answer the same question?"

"I would say," the Professor answered, "that I am here allowing the words of the wilderness to penetrate me, to understand what is being said by these people. Because I believe it is something that concerns us all, some more than most. You and I, for example. Or perhaps we are just ready to hear these words. You and I."

Jeremy looked away. Part of this answer was pleasing, the inclusion. The remainder was exasperating. "And what are those words exactly?"

"In aggregate, something along these lines:

With an hoste of furious fancies,
Whereof I am commander,
With a burning speare, and a horse of air,
To the wilderness I wander."

Jeremy shook his head and sat back. "And to think Sopwith Hill won't commit to that."

"The stories don't come all at once, shrink-wrapped with a complimentary bookmark."

"Give me one. Just one to get a sense...."

"Well, there is this Siwash character," the Professor said. "He sits in the forest—a few hundred yards that way, near Siwash Rock—counting." Counting people, the Professor went on to explain. Nobody knew why, and the Professor had only spoken with him twice since arriving. Siwash made him tea both times, their dialogue polite, cagey. He had arrived, he explained, like so many others had arrived. "I am blown here," Siwash had said, running his hand over a waxy scalp, then pulling on an ear that appeared to have two lobes. "I was washed up on the beach like all the others. Crawled free from the wreckage of an imperfe

landscape onto these perfect shores. I will never leave.”

He liked maps. The Professor described how dozens had been Scotch-taped to the walls of the concrete bunker that the man called home. National Geographic maps of the earth's polar regions. A black starlight globe. Various cylindrical and conical projections. All these hung in the relative darkness of the concrete room, glowering obscurely from the shadows in the bunker that had once been a pillbox, an armed outpost on a rock outcropping above Siwash Rock. A vantage point from which the authorities once thought they could repel Japanese invaders during the dark and paranoid days of Vancouver's World War II.

But what about this counting? “Is there a number?” At their second meeting, the Professor tried to press down on this issue. He had decided the tea was China Black. “Is it a number you're waiting to reach? Like a thousand, or ten thousand?”

“No number,” Siwash told him, and became elusive.

“Maybe a head count of some kind,” Jeremy offered, intrigued by the idea. The map-lined pillbox in a public park was richly eccentric, certainly, but it sounded cosier than his father's set-up.

“Caruzo thinks it is a tally, yes. But even he doesn't know,” the Professor said, nodding. In fact, Caruzo did not speak of Siwash often, and the Professor had never seen them together. He imagined it would be like having two evangelists in the same room. They could talk, but they already had views on everything, and their words were better directed at others.

“Caruzo,” Jeremy said. “I suppose he is another story.”

“I would think so, perhaps even the first chapter of a longer story. I understand you see him from time to time at the restaurant around breakfast.”

“Yes, thank you. He's been a Friday regular for the past month. If you have any more people living around here who want free coffee and cigarettes and maybe a snack in the morning, you send them along.”

“Those volumes you couldn't handle,” the Professor pointed out.

“I suppose you sent him to see how I was doing?” Jeremy said.

“And you also sent him back with word that you wanted to see me,” the Professor responded. “So we have both used him as a messenger, haven't we?”

They drifted into silence for a moment, the fire dropped to coals.

“I remember a photograph. The three of us at the lagoon,” the Professor said eventually.

Jeremy looked up sharply at the mention of it. “Under the cherry trees.”

“That's the one,” the Professor said, smiling. He cut off some more duck. “You see how there is also a great deal of us held in this wilderness.”

Jeremy didn't know what to think of that comment. They were silent for a few minutes.

“You wanted to see me. To ask me something, I suspect,” the Professor said finally. “But sense you are suddenly shy. Perhaps I can balance the scale by asking my favour of you first.”

Jeremy nodded in agreement.

“I need someone in the city. Someone to do some research.”

It surprised him. “Why not Caruzo?” he heard himself say.

“Well, Caruzo can't read, for one.”

“Why not you?”

“Fine then.”

“Sorry. Tell me.”

The Professor took a moment before continuing. "Babes in the Wood," he said finally.

Jeremy waited for more, and when nothing came said: "Who are ..."

"Who *were* murdered in Stanley Park, not far from here. Two children, conventional understood to be brothers, although there have been different views on this over the years. In any case, two children, unsolved murder. Still, this story is not a murder mystery to understand. I am interested in the myths surrounding their death, about their bodies still being buried here in the park. About related matters."

"And when exactly?" Jeremy said, growing faintly nervous.

"Oh," the Professor said. "A long time ago. Fifty years. It was in all the papers at the time. Two little kids, murdered with a small hatchet in the park. Not half a mile from where we're sitting, in fact. The killer, never found. The reason, inexplicable. The repercussions." And here the Professor leaned forward and looked at his son very closely. "The repercussions still spilling down through the years."

There was a second of silence.

"All right," Jeremy said. "What can I do?"

"I need details," the Professor said. "You could try the library."

Jeremy thought for a second.

"Yes?" the Professor pressed, canting a bit forward.

"Sure," Jeremy said. "I promise."

"There are stories, you understand?" The Professor was again looking directly at his son. "There is Siwash and there are others. There are individual stories written in code. Some mental illness, say what you like. But I have come to understand recently, very recently, that in these stories there are threads that weave together into a single chord. A single story lives at the centre of it all, and by this story the others might be interpreted."

"These kids," Jeremy said, voice flat.

"Their death. Perhaps."

Jeremy nodded, feeling helpless. A promise to do some research didn't sound like a life coming out. Released into the dark air between them, it gained volume and weight, instantly.

"Well then?" the Professor said, thinking they should move on before the boy reconsidered. "Do tell." And with this comment, he laid back in the ferns, his head outside of the pool of firelight, supported in his two interlocked hands, elbows flaring out and framing his darkened face. A coal sparked and threw an instant of reflection into his black pupils.

"The Monkey's Paw is everything I want to do," said Jeremy, by way of introduction. "Jules and I work exceptionally well together. We understand each other precisely."

"Jules Capelli, yes. Plus, the alliterative Anya Dickie likes you," the Professor said.

Jeremy nodded. "That review helped us, I can tell you. We were in deep trouble there for a while," he said. Even thinking about it made him nervous.

The Professor waited.

"Money trouble," Jeremy explained.

"Ah, yes," his father said. He was not overly familiar with this kind of trouble.

"No matter how good people say we are, the downtown east side makes some people uncomfortable. That is, some of the foodies we would otherwise be attracting won't go there. Plus, what we do is not always cheap to begin with. A prawn raised in a vat in the basement of a factory in Singapore is about half the price of a fresh prawn from the Queen Charlotte

Islands. Not as good, clearly, but cheaper.”

“Fascinating,” said the Professor, who was enjoying the ideological drama captured in the story. “It is inefficient, perhaps, to have your passion for local ingredients.”

“Maybe that’s it,” Jeremy said. “In any case, I almost crashed the whole thing. It was close. Debts, credit cards, cheques. I’m bad with that stuff. And even now, it would be misleading to say we’re hugely profitable.”

“I see,” the Professor said. “Now you feel pressure from the moneylenders, and it’s distracting you from what you love to do, is that it?”

“Sure. Partly.”

“And despite these pressures, you have little control over increasing your own business. So you simply cook well, remain devoted to your culinary principles, and hope that a lot of people will eventually come to appreciate your efforts and come to your restaurant and spend money, etc., etc.”

Jeremy nodded wearily. “Basically. The strain of which brings me to the question.”

The Professor sat up and poked the coals. “I’m listening.”

“Dante Beale.”

His father stopped poking the coals and looked at him. “What about Dante?”

“He’s offered to invest. He likes the restaurant. He knows I’m struggling. He believes in what I’m doing.”

“That barista boy,” the Professor said.

“He *employs* baristas,” Jeremy said. “Thousands of them too. Inferno International Coffee is huge—you have to give him credit for that.”

“Credit,” said the Professor, thinking back. “Isn’t that what he gave you?”

“He guaranteed my bank loan. This arrangement would be quite different.”

“I’m sure.”

“This would be an opportunity to let someone else worry about the money for a change. The Professor was skeptical.

“I know this is unusual,” Jeremy said, “but I’m asking for advice here. You know him.”

“I don’t trust him.”

“And you’ve been neighbours, friends, for what ... twenty years?”

“I didn’t say, ‘I don’t like him.’ I said, ‘I don’t trust him.’ ”

“Explain.”

“He’s wrong for you,” the Professor said, not quite explaining.

“It’s a bad situation. Did I mention the bank is not happy?”

“You didn’t, no.”

“And Inferno is powerful. Big and getting bigger.”

“I’ve heard. How many of those awful coffee shops are there now?”

“Hundreds. All over North America. He could really help.”

“Dante will not help you do what you want to do,” the Professor stated bluntly. “Dante does only one thing. He has always been the same thing in the many years I have known him. At one time I admired his focus, but now I see the man for what he is and what his worldview implies. Dante is a price. Dante is a sale. Dante abhors anything that is not a commodity. You, on the other hand ... well, ‘local bounty.’ That’s pretty good, actually. That’s a pretty good idea.”

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