

Rich Ives

## HORSERADISH

I put down the little house that I found at an antique store, inside the house I helped build on my island. The door to the big house came all the way from a Spanish Mission and was more than a hundred years old and didn't keep out burglars very well, but I brought home a little baby house and kept them both on the island called Camano, which is an island instead of a peninsula because of a channel of salt water a couple of feet wide with a bit of marsh around it called the Davis Slough. There's a bridge nearby, over the mouth of the Stillaguamish River, which leaves the ocean on one side of the bridge, climbs under the bridge, and never returns to the ocean. Every time someone asks me about the ferries when I tell them I live on an island, I think about crossing those two little feet of salt marsh in a boat with my car on it.

So no, I never have to wait for the ferry, but there's a bit of a hill up from the marsh that gets very slippery in the winter and sometimes keeps you from getting up it, and there's only the two-lane blacktop to get you off and on the island, which is large and takes about twenty-five minutes away from me every time I leave or return home.

This morning I think the flowers in my garden had too much to drink. They're sagging and closed and look like something you'd meet on some planet not yet ours. I don't have much to say on such a cold day, but I watch sadly a warm one go storming blithely away, its ocean as undiscovered as the new land it carries us to.

"Fine, stuff it in the archives then," I think to myself and turn inside. I can't seem to remember if a thought of me was inside the ridiculous theme I was having when I woke.

I enter my little art studio with poetry books lining one end of it and put down newspaper to catch the mess I'm going to make. The newspaper is merely a whole lot of people speaking at once and so, it's confusing, and full of lies, with only a little bit of truth at the bottom, where hardly anyone notices. It's good

to wipe your ass with it when you're in the woods. The truth doesn't care what it does for you.

The wind starts up and distracts me out the studio window. It tears off a tree limb and flaps it down on the driveway. Nice going, Wind, I think, but the truth is I could watch a long time without anything happening.

Red is the word for beautiful and provocative, and it's what we are saying when we say blue or green or golden and don't mean exactly what we say but say it anyway. We do it when the song goes, Time to enjoy leaving, and you're not leaving, but enjoying something else, like I am right now. Perhaps that thing you're enjoying is even the same thing I am enjoying, and we go out camping and then camping on top of the camping, and I confuse what that is with what I really think it is, a memory with a tank inside it and the tank with something essential to forgetting inside it. I forget and start creating something else that's probably related, in the studio where I lose myself. And as I get to work, I'm thinking the way you finish an argument is to offer an apostrophe gift that doesn't linger.

There's some gluppy snail-glue climbing the back porch handrail as if the front door were meant for the kind of friend with more to give, so I go in the back door.

The next day I seem to be shoveling green snow, but what I'm actually doing is dreaming of dragons, reluctantly, because they're merely an aberration of prolonged adolescence. Somewhere past that, what I'm doing is shoveling green moss and detritus spun off from all the trees along the driveway. It's gotten so slippery with all the wet fall leaves that the propane delivery truck slid into the little mini-ditch along the driveway. It's so shallow the truck climbed right back out, but it pissed off the driver, and I have to clean up before I can get another delivery.

And now I'm shoveling corndogs and the dragon is roasting them for the children who forgive him for the singed experience of their boundaries. Little rolls of moss like green corndogs go sliding and sliding along the edge of the driveway.



Early this morning, my older sister, Patricia, turned up as a Gray Owl. She does that to make up for all the days she missed by dying the same day she was born. She puffed herself up and clacked like a crow, meaning, Don't fuck with me this beautiful cold morning, and I step widely around the beauty bark, where she has declared herself queen and perched on its little mountain.

I admit I have had problems with Patricia, especially during the five years before I entered the world, when she should have been in charge of childhood, and kept reminding me indirectly through the behavior of our parents, who hadn't told me about her, that she had managed to live only two hours before her heart collapsed. Talk about sensitive, talk about proving how important you are and leaving a big hole . . . I was quite a bit older before I knew that hole in my parents was hers. I had been trying to fill it, but today my love for animals and birds is just needing to say hello and ask what kind of world had I come from that she could have liked better.

I have another sister gone now too, one who decided for a much longer while to try us out, and she gave us quite a story to tell, but it's not this one. I'm saying all this to the owl. I'm climbing in my metallic black truck, which wants to go to the movies and eat, so sister number one hops back into the woods all puffed up like sister number two did with food before the doctors and two husbands prescribed pills to replace the food that burst her seams. Later, her son, my nephew, calls, and I tell him about the owl, and all he wants to talk about is baseball.

So I go to the new woman in my life, who knows a little about men, having married before (I seem to have forgotten to do that). She carried two of them around until they dropped out and called her Mom, and it's getting harder and harder now to get me into the story, having arrived (as I do) late, so this morning a deer with skewed velvet antlers is eating my unmowed grass. I can't figure out which of my departed sisters is trying to tell me something. I decide it really doesn't matter as long as I notice the way the space I left between me and the forest seems to hold them both and pay attention, and then I think about what a sentimental fool I've become, and throw myself into a lively discussion of relationships and dahlias and leading a rich life around by my poor currently fevered nose and how the things that get to you have to be taken out of the body and given a life of their own.

So I tell the deer/sister to leave the dahlias alone and otherwise indulge her reincarnation as she wishes. She snorts and looks like she's about to take a dump, which reminds me I have something in my own body that I don't need anymore. I offer it freedom and a nice cool bath in the pool beneath the lawn. By this time I'm a little fed up with my sentimentality and decide to write a poem of

expurgation. It turns into a visit from the dead. I guess that maybe I need that, so I write it down and tell myself I won't show it to anyone unless the rain is interested in my comfortable new leaves.



Yesterday at the zoo, I was foolish enough to wonder why only birds had vertical stripes and why attempting the impossible was once a great pleasure. It seemed as if experiencing a thing had turned into a memory before it even completed itself, a vertical stripe so to speak, and I could see that I was drifting in a direction I couldn't clearly identify. I was looking at what I was doing, and one eye had a life of its own, but the other kept trying to follow. If I looked at myself that way, I could no longer contain my thoughts. It's too bad I'm able to enjoy it so much, I thought, and there was another question nesting in the answer. I went looking for another kind of creature to ask an entirely different question before one of the birds I had been watching could figure out how to ask me what I was thinking.

Silence means something different if you can't break it. Being alone there at the zoo gave me the feeling of being lifted, and the more I thought about it, the more I could separate the parts, which couldn't be separated. What scared me was the happiness I still thought I could demand, and the fact that I didn't know who to demand it from.

The wind had broken down and fallen. I could see, when it got close to me, it was a long way off. I counted forty pieces of it. I couldn't pick them up, but I remember thinking I had tried. If I counted them again, I don't remember it.

When I arrived at the horizon, I discovered I had fallen through and was looking back at where a transition that didn't exist had occurred. A man I didn't know was asking me for something I didn't have. I told him I had learned to speak without saying anything. He said that was really saying something.

The conclusion was not the result, but I remember feeling that the result was the conclusion. I positioned myself vertically and flew into as much of a rage as I could imagine.



**Today a crazed robin has been banging himself against his life at the windows of the place where I seem to have found myself. What must he think of the rival that appears at the glass each time he thrusts his arrogant breast out hard? Could pounding my body against something I don't recognize as myself again and again produce anything but me turned back to myself? Could that be enough?**

**Several relatives belong to this family, but a few have escaped. All of them come back to me when I forget to be someone else. The parents and the sisters are dead. Distant relatives live distantly. I do not try to deny them their circumstances.**

**A memory of father, reddening eyes watering from too much horseradish, which he lavished upon his gravy to overcome the limitations of smoke- ravaged taste-buds. He will smoke a cigarette to complete the meal and put it out in the leftover gravy.**

**Only recently have I begun to find this endearing.**