

Hebert Returns to America

(an excerpt)

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1

In the word was the beginning, in the syllable, the fragment, and in the letter, the atomizing. In the comma was found the claw, and in the period, the black hole of inner space.

In the beginning was the word, and the word was dog, and dog was followed by a hedgehog. And much trundled along after it.

And a ray of light shone in the darkness, and the darkness yawned and stretched and wondered, "What's up?"

- from the Subinkian Book of Genesis

Here I am, another day . . . I . . . I? Wait, who am I?
Damn, I've lost my ID . . . let's see . . . what am I doing? .
I . . don't know . . .

I must have . . . that thing . . .
that illness . . . what do you call it. . .

Alls-hammers is that it? . . .

Hmmmm

Well, there's something I need to remember . . .

Yes . . .

No... oh, I don't get this

Hmmm

Aah! Free of the body, at last, I return to my senses. No longer confined by that terrible affliction, Alzheimer's, I can wander now, albeit as a discarnate entity, through the pages of this book.

Let me start with my fatal decision to leave America. Or was it more fatal to return? Oh hell I know, I'll begin with a lead-in to the Gangreen incident. That episode, as I look back over my life (which, in my case, may best be described as installation art), was pivotal.

First, I want to sculpt a little background here, to render some contour for the Gangreen incident. To leap abruptly into the experience might snap the already taut rubber band of the cerebral cortex.

In the youthful days of my biography, I took a plane from Adolescent City, Illinois, to the manly realm of the Yukon Territory. I had to book my flight a week in advance. To economize, Crashlandia Airlines preferred to fly full bookings, and very few passengers aspired to go to the Yukon.

When the three-seater “de-planed” - the airline’s official description for what amounted to a rather abrupt flop-down in a swamp handy to the runway - I changed into a dry pair of underwear and hitched a ride into Iliad, a small town nestled in a setting of classic natural beauty, mountains rising from boreal forest, and great broad skylscapes filled with armadas of cloudships, complete with Spanish conquistadors and a bevy of scantily clad señoritas.

Strolling through Iliad, and scaling a bluff overlooking the town, I sat down under a lone pine to survey what lay below. My first impression of the town left me feeling a mix of wonder and apprehension. It was pleasant here, but all so new. Would I be able to adapt to the local lifestyle? Could I find gainful employment? Was that blond down there on Main Street hitched up with anyone? Did the town have any electronic technology, or were their video games whittled out of wood? Time would bear answers. For now, it was all an exciting mystery.

Nestling back against the pine, I closed my eyes and, with the sun beaming warmly upon the idyllic setting, I fell into a reverie. I felt giddy. I felt up. And then my inner horse bolted, and we went racing across an interior landscape.

We rode east into the rising sun. Looking down, I observed that my stallion was dressed in ceremonial attire - Cree Nation, circa 1780. I, myself, was decked in buckskin, beaded and feathered. It was a genuine Cree wardrobe, although the pair of Polaroid sunglasses on a string around my neck hinted a link to modernity.

As I took a breath, the air grew still, and when I exhaled, the wind rushed over the land. I hiccupped, and my mount stumbled. When I cleared my throat, a peal of thunder rumbled behind me on the horizon. In experimental inspiration, I whacked myself hard upside the head, and a couple of stars shone in the sky. Then I farted, and a stench of methane emanated from a swampy patch off to the side. What on earth was happening here? It was all so surreal.

As I rode on, I broke into a sweat. The sky began to pale and the mountains in the distance began a slow fade into unreality. Gradually, the grass under hoof became less and less substantial. Suddenly, my hair caught fire and my face burst into flames. "Whoa!" I screamed, and snapped out of my reverie to find myself back against the pine, the sun blazing hotly upon my now sunburned face.

Wincing with the pain of rider's legs, I arose and, tripping over a mound of horse dung, headed downhill to seek some affordable food and lodging. But I found prices

in town ran sky high. Unless you were a gold miner, a hooker, or a muskrat, the North was an expensive place to hang your hat. The cheapest deal in town was a room the size of a phone booth for a hundred bucks a night, and you had to sleep standing up with two other tenants. Groceries were steep, too. Eggs were a dollar a piece, yolks extra - ten percent off, if you brought your own shells.

2

I think the world of the world.

- from The Geographic Ponderings of Hebert Flabeau

I had been in the north for a month when the Gangreen incident took place. I still knew my name - Hebert Flabeau. *Last time I checked my I. D. I was me*, I'd muse whenever I wondered. But fate had delivered me to a neighborhood of Destitution City, so poor, it couldn't afford a zip code. I needed some income desperately. I'd

always wanted to be filthy rich, but so far, I'd only gotten the first part. I had forgotten what money was - I'd begun to think that *cash* was a hut you put moose meat in over the winter, and the word *dollar* must be a dead, or at least crippled, Latin noun.

For a while, I coped. *I may be penniless, but that's nothing - the Czar of Russia was Nicholas.* However, as time wore on, I became depressed by my economic state; my face was growing long. Confirmation of the length of my countenance came the afternoon prior to the fateful day in focus when a near-sighted parts man had mistaken it for a hubcap. Then, by early light of the following morning, my mug was mistaken for a no parking sign by a large trucker, named Bull Gangreen, who cursed me as I gaped at him with my arms wrapped around an accommodating birch tree. Not that it mattered - I didn't need his kind on my social roster anyway.

Bull Gangreen hailed from Bigotte, Arkansas. He was so big when he was born, the doctor was afraid to slap him. He was the kind of guy who hated cats and birds. "Too damn noisy," he'd seethe, as he padded his pillow with fresh feathers. He also hated any woman who had her clothes on. His wife was trying to divorce him for coming home too often.

On this particular morning, Bull had stumbled out of bed, wolfed down the neighbor's Persian, and blustered down to the bank to withdraw his life savings to invest in a fledgling firm, Diabolics Nouveau Inc., that trafficked in a compendium of electronic mutilation devices.

And as fate would have it, the only vacant parking spot by the bank was next to where I was engaged in morning embrace with sister tree and, when I saw the peculiar beast-man pull up, I couldn't resist shifting into my coyote cloak of reckless curiosity. I just stood there, gaping. I gaped away with abandon, open-mouthed, wide-eyed, brows locked in upright position.

Of course my indulgence was quick to trigger Gangreen.

“Goddamn tree-hugger! - how'd you like me to tie your windpipe in a reef knot?”

“Please, by all means!” I chortled.

“Whaaat!?” roared the incredulous trucker, “You some kind of wise guy?”

Before revealing my response, it's important for the reader to know that I, Hebert Flabeau, was wanted in seven emotional states for driving my karma recklessly.

“Well, yes, hopefully,” I parried, loading on extra crow sauce. “I mean, if God created an odd specimen like me, He also would've thrown in a few brains for balance. On the other hand, I don't know how to explain you - you're both bizarre *and* stupid, so that kind of blows my theory, doesn't it?”

Foam immediately spewed from the mouth of the three hundred-and-twenty pound gorilla. I could see nuclear clouds billowing in his bloodshot eyes. As Bull's neck turned a brilliant shade of scarlet, vehicles at the nearby crossroads swerved and screeched in the confusion resulting from the simultaneous glow of red and green traffic lights. Two feelings invaded my soul - terror, as it

dawned on me that in the next instant my life would surely end, and regret, as I thought how I'd only just topped the gas tank in my old beater.

Lucky for me, there are times when fate can play a hand. For it was at that moment that a stolen cement truck came charging up Main Street, an eleven-year-old at the wheel having the time of his life. When the youngster came upon the intersection of hysteria he did not know what a brake was. Naturally, there was nothing he could do but bounce onto the sidewalk and barrel over the charging Bull who, utterly intent on the kill, was oblivious to what hit him.

Bull Gangreen's remains were picked up with a sponge mop and cremated a few days later.

I was not invited to the cremation, but attended anyway.

I brought a bag of marshmallows.