

Lochside Stories

(excerpt)

by Lawrence Uhlin

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*This work is dedicated to all the people who
inspired the stories, some of whom
I met along the Lochside Trail.
Thanks also to the town of Sidney by the Sea
and the Heart Smart Walkway.
And, as always, this is dedicated to Nancy,
my love and my muse.*

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“Morton, what will you do about this... this, problem?” Rosemary’s voice broadcast remarkably like a screeching bird, injured and pitiful. Morton, her husband and the target of the complaint, recognized the tone and though he did hear the question he chose for the moment to ignore his wife. After all, Morton knew that this was just the first round of what would turn out to be an entire day of fretting about a situation that Rosemary would build and construct chaotically to a crisis level, fuelled by her unabated compulsion to *awfullise* circumstances arising from their annual relocation to the small town of Sidney by the Sea from their permanent residence in Loyalist, Ontario.

“Morton, why are you not answering me? It isn’t as though this condominium is so large that my questions get lost in a multitude of rooms and spaces. I’m sure that it’s lovely for you to enjoy the seascape of your beloved Haro Strait, Mortimer. But I find our annual three month sojourn here to be more than tedious when events are such as they are.” Rosemary’s voice assumed an indignantly injured tone though still with the edgy rasping of the bird now on the verge of expiring. Still, she went on, monotonously adding theatricality to her already contrived upper-class Loyalist enunciation. Anyone overhearing her, apart from Morton, might imagine the sixty-something woman was rehearsing for a final performance pitched to an audience of fans who had maintained adoration through thick and thin of her now ebbing career. But to Morton it was merely the old Ontario upper-crust influence of a woman who knew unpleasantness as equal to an over-moist watercress and cucumber sandwich, sans crust; anything else was catastrophe. Still, there was a slight touch of anger in her voice that, despite his attempt to ignore her, managed to cut through the airways of their apartment condominium.

Rosemary never let an opportunity pass to remind Morton that she had given up a perfectly wonderful seven bedroom home set prettily upon several acres of unfarmed but carefully manicured grounds; in addition to the cultivated gardens surrounding the house built two hundred years earlier with Ottawa valley limestone. The home exemplified the inherited wealth of her family who had been granted the land in the township of Loyalist, situated on the island of Amherst. The house and grounds silently boasted of the region’s history and of Rosemary’s family who had continuously resided on Amherst Island since the American Revolution.

Rosemary blamed most of what was wrong with the world on the fact that the country ought to have remained as the United Empire Loyalists had envisioned it. She pined for the lost life several thousand kilometres away – that which was culturally modelled upon British traditions of the royal sense, class, manners, wealth of property and styles that rung loudly of traceable pedigree – all of a colour and consistency that begged no questions of the problem that troubled her and which she pursued with Morton.

Standing in the arched door way to the short hallway leading to Morton’s study, she raised her voice to the wall knowing it would reflect directly through to the small room cluttered with overflowing book shelves, stacks of paper lying about the antique, oak roll-top desk and finally the rasping pitch would reach Morton’s ears as he sat poised over his elderly Remington portable typewriter.

Morton sat heavily, though poised in his way at the desk. Poised always looked awkward with him, his face too sagged to look alert and his body too heavy to move with anything imminent in mind. But he had long ago learned that when he felt prepared to write that was the time when something would make its way to his forebrain, formulate and pass through his hands to magically type a profundity that would, if not now, at some later more appropriate moment, be recalled and fit nicely with a particularly illuminating paragraph or passage of prose worthy of a

man who has toiled these many years.

What was it now? Twenty-two years – three novels, 46 short stories and even a smattering of poetry – all of which remained unpublished. But Morton believed that his time would come, like inspiration – never failing when he sat before the small Remington, *poised*, and waiting for his muse.

Never failing was a slight exaggeration. What moderated between never and ever was usually Rosemary's voice articulating one of the frequent predicaments that the dear one encountered in their temporary, and for her, uncertain environment. Their home away from home was hardly a vacation for Rosemary. Her composure changed to one of anxious restlessness, the theatrical tone of voice assumed a sense of doom and discomfort that made its presence known soon after arriving for the annual visit to the condominium Morton had persuaded her to invest in.

"We can rent it for the months we're not here, my dear. Think of it, we'll have money coming in each month that we can invest without fear of loss, found money, as it were." Concerning logic as it applied to finances, Morton was somewhat unable to imagine that the two concepts had anything to do with one another. It was never clear to him that one had to invest significantly more than one would realize as a monthly income.

On this particular day that was relatively clear and crisp outside of the luxurious condominium, Rosemary's tone accelerated, the edge in her voice scraped against the wall she spoke to. It took on an acoustic tone of broken glass that was sharp enough to sever Morton's poised thread of concentration.

An event like this could go on for hours, thought Morton as he sat feeling the muse of inspiration drift off, replaced by the thought that he had better deal with Rosemary or the dilemma would snowball into a lengthy critique of why they '...ought not to annually leave Ontario for this precarious, wilderness life on Vancouver Island.' The luxury of the condominium and civility of the upscale community of Sidney by the Sea did nothing to soften her wilderness notion of the island. Compared to Loyalist it was little more than a cave-dwelling.

Whenever Morton sat at the roll-top desk, poised, inviting his muse to inspire, he wore a well-worn burgundy smoking jacket. But comfort notwithstanding and regardless of the jacket, plans for the day and a non-responsive muse caused him to wonder if he should deal with Rosemary's dilemma of the moment. Best to deal with Rosemary's frantic sounding alarm; he reasoned, the alternative might preclude an entire day's creativity.

With an energized sense of resolution he wobbled into Rosemary's presence. She had settled uncomfortably on a loveseat that faced away from the sea view. Morton inquired about the nature of her turmoil and learned that it was the *lean-to*, again. He had hoped that she might have gotten beyond that one. Hoped that perhaps the people living there had moved on, abandoned the damn thing.

"Morton! Just this morning I watched them light their hibachi barbeque, they had some species

of bird that had several feathers still stuck in its skin. The woman wrapped the poor thing in seaweed and put it upon the grill.” Her voice rose to emphasize the seriousness, the audacity. “How can people live like that, Morton? Don’t they know that it’s not good for them; and what are we, as responsible citizen’s, supposed to do about such things? And, how can that lunatic woman whose residence is directly above them continue to throw her garbage bags and other paraphernalia on top of that shack they have erected, their *lean-to*, as you call it? Surely, it’s not sanitary.” Rosemary clutched at his hands; her face was clearly a mask of misery. She pulled him down to the brocaded loveseat, pleading, “Help me, Morton, I’m simply abhorred by this behaviour; it would never come to this in Ontario.” Morton nodded, compassionately.

“What will you do, Morton?” She was almost at the top of her voice level, but not screaming, she would never do that. A loud sob squeezed through her tightly pursed lips, as if it were forcefully sucked from somewhere deep in her body. Tears tumbled from her eyes and created narrow rivulets streaming down her long, aging sixty-something face. The gushing tears washed caked makeup that belied and covered the years that her mind would not admit to and her memory would not allow.

“Rosemary, my sweet one, I see how troubled you are. You’re so correct about this not happening back in Loyalist country, but we wouldn’t have an ocean to see there, and all of the sea’s abundant wealth. Remember for a moment, darling, how exciting it was to see that pod of Orcas passing a mere two hundred meters offshore, or the otter just last week, floating on its back and cracking clams and mussels. Never would we be fortunate enough to witness nature’s beauty such as we have here.” Morton talked quickly and touched a tissue to Rosemary’s welling tears. He talked quickly in order to obviate her attempts at rebuttal of his logic. It was enough he thought that he would have to quell her fears and deal with this worry of the moment. “I’m just going to fix you one of those Manhattans that you so enjoy; and then,…” he raised his broad figure to full height, held out his arms in some sort of supplication or perhaps it was surrender, “... I’ll call the city and see what the by-law officers will do to alleviate your distress.”

The Manhattan was a particularly potent drink, more rye than her usual for this early part of the day, and more bitters to cover the increased taste of rye. He suggested she sit on the enclosed balcony, facing south so as not to be disturbed by the sight of the *lean-to*.

Morton handed Rosemary the cocktail and the latest copy of the Loyalist Monthly as she stretched out on the chaise-lounge, slipping off first the jacket of her tailored suit then her shoes and neatly tucking up her still shapely legs showing below the skirt of the navy ensemble. The one of three that she owned and alternated throughout the week, each with a Union Jack pin fastened to the collar of the jacket, proudly displaying her allegiance.

Closing the sliding glass doors Morton attentively picked up the telephone and uttered, sotto voce, a subtle stream of venom that satisfied his sense of literary inspiration of the moment and interruption of his daily ritual:

“Please, do try to come out and inspect the bloody thing. It will assist me in shutting up the whining absurdity of this cursed woman who is so goddamned controlled that she deigns not to talk or be seen – even by me, her most tolerant husband, until she bathes, dresses and palette-knives her makeup mortar between the lines of her horse’s face.” He then paused, smiling, carefully listening to the dial tone; he nodded and finally pushed the off button of the telephone knowing that Rosemary would have watched the balcony extension’s red light illuminate and fade. Marching with purpose Morton strode to the door of the balcony and slid it open. With his most pleasant voice of *man overcoming city hall* he informed Rosemary that the city clerks had to be persuaded but he settled for no less than a visit to the site of the criminal *lean-to* by the authorities.

“I did have to concede on one minor point, my love,” he fabricated. “They were unable to give a precise time to visit but did promise that it would be sometime within the next few days.” Morton, counting unwisely on the local weather advisory that seemed to change more frequently than the hours of the day, had hoped the wind from Juan de Fuca Strait would push through to Haro creating a sufficient wave force that would knock the *lean-to* down.

Rosemary smiled warmly at Morton. “Thank you, darling. You’re so thoughtful of my needs. I do hope that you will be able to retrieve your *poised* moment of creation, as you say.”

“Yes, yes, my love. I’m still feeling quite inspired.” His voice trailed off as he glanced in the direction of the *lean-to*, a questioning look crossed his face as he watched the man and woman dance on the rocky beach, they staggered amongst the boulders and slippery seaweed. The man, looking as scruffy as he always did was laughing and swinging the woman around in what looked to Morton like drunken joy. *Crazy bloody parasites*, he thought. His gaze fell to Rosemary and he was relieved to see that she was focussed back on the Loyalist Monthly. Her countenance at last relaxed.

* * *

Dallas Pettigrew was forty-two years of age. He lived three condominiums away from Rosemary and Morton, though he didn’t know their names or anything about them. On occasion he would see Morton entering or leaving the small circle of residences that rested expensively above the seawall and overlooked the Lochside Trail pathway that stretched from the north at Third and Henry, all the way down to the end of the Heart Smart walkway that paralleled Lochside Road. There were ten condominiums nestled in the cul-de-sac but only six were built overlooking the Haro Strait of the Salish Sea. When the residents of the spacious condos looked across the Strait they saw the islands belonging to Washington State and a defunct volcano known as Mount Baker.

Though Morton and Rosemary owned their condominium, Dallas owned little more than the clothes on his back. Dallas the deal-maker had never been very successful in the world of business; he had invested many thousands of dollars in a wide-ranging number of ventures, from

a small winery near the village of Brentwood Bay to a storefront operation in the heart of downtown Sidney that catered to art relating to horses – Art of the Horse, it was called. Dallas had given little thought to the fact that horses were not really a feature interest in Sidney by the Sea. He thought of that fact even less as he removed the stock to a storage locker, thinking only of his next venture.

Several of Dallas' business forays folded after futile efforts at wishing success more than working at it and largely because it was only a portion of his money that was at risk. For the most part it was his mother's generosity that permitted his various dabbling activities. Mavis Pettigrew was wealthy; consequently she frequently threw good money after bad in her attempts to assist her son to be as successful as his late father had been. Mavis rarely questioned Dallas when he broached yet another investment opportunity.

In the beginning, that is, when Dallas was about twenty-five and had attended six different universities, graduating from none, his mother would question the wisdom of choices that the young man made. She would try to encourage him to think of a 'fall-back' plan in the event of failure, but Dallas' enthusiasm would not be curbed by mere thoughts that interfered with his future plans.

Mavis applied the 'fall-back' strategy until he was thirty-eight years of age, the year that she learned of her dementia and the time that she and her son had their second fully engaged conversation – about her increasing forgetfulness and bouts of erratic behaviour with bursts of puerile language that punctuated any slight irregularity of routine. The first jointly meaningful conversation they had was when her husband and Dallas' father died of a rapidly progressing form of melanoma. The death was a shock to both of them, not because they were a close family, they were not; it was because the father had been such a large and controlling presence. They experienced another shock when they were advised by the lawyers of Mavis' inheritance. It was huge, and it was solely bequeathed to her with Dallas having to settle for a long wait until his mother's death to claim the entire estate. Mavis, before her dementia had reached a level of unpredictability, had arranged with the lawyers for a monthly allotment for Dallas. And from that account Dallas would cache enough to base fund his investment ventures. Inevitably, Mavis despite her moments of unpredictability, would top-up whatever additional money was required.

Mavis and Dallas had a maid, a young woman from Malaysia who worked hard at keeping the condominium clean and orderly. Amanda was advised by Mavis to ensure that everything was always in its appropriate place. Mavis' episodes of forgetting were rivalled in number by her removal of items placed where they had not usually been seen or assigned. Thus, anything that was out of the ordinary would often be discarded. On several occasions Amanda had retrieved strange items placed in the disposal box kept in the large laundry room of the condominium. Usually, the retrieved items were things that belonged to Dallas, his expensive Rolex watch had several times been rescued by Amanda, many items of his clothing found their way into the trash

and Amanda felt certain that not all of these had been successfully restored to his bedroom. Once she found a partial denture that had been removed by Dallas owing to its extremely painful rubbing on a large chancre sore. On occasion, usually the day that the garbage disposal unit was put out for collection, Mavis would find an item that was out of context and in frustration at not being able to put it in the bin she would roll back the sliding glass door, step on to the expansive deck and throw the troublesome thing over the rail where it usually ended up on top of the *lean-to* constructed on the rocky beach below. One of Dallas' expensive, finely tailored sports jacket was seen by Amanda worn not by Dallas but by the scruffy looking resident of the *lean-to*. Another time Dallas left a catalogue on the island in the kitchen. It quickly disappeared and that incident, that is, the disappearance, had been the cause of an episode of high-level frustration, vain searching and a mild rage owing to the catalogue being a one-off, priced at more than two thousand dollars and promised for loan to a potential partner in the last of Dallas' failing businesses. The potential partner was to peruse it on his flight back to Munich; however, had Dallas been able to see into the *lean-to* he would have witnessed both the man and woman leafing through pages of the glossy catalogue titled 'Art of the Horse' and its pages being subsequently torn out and fed into the hibachi that served double-duty as heat and cookery.

In the main, Amanda kept the Pettigrew household immaculate and generally free of objects where they ought not to be because Mavis' clearly indicated that counter space and shelves, coffee tables, kitchen table and dining room table, in fact, all surfaces were to be free of encumbrance unless attended to in physical presence by Mavis, Dallas or Amanda. Dallas, however, was the most frequent offender and was often seen with a perplexed, searching expression on his dumpling round face. He looked quite unlike either of his parents, Mavis was lean and petite, barely five feet two inches tall; his father six foot one and like Mavis, lean and angular. Dallas was a rather rounded figure of a man. At five foot seven inches he healthily ought to have weighed in at somewhere between one hundred and forty to one sixty pounds. Instead he found himself regularly fighting to keep his weight at no more than the one hundred and eighty pounds that led to his roundness. But his temperament was generally kind. He would often give money to charities and to pan-handlers on the street. His sense of moral value was usually reflective of a balanced upbringing. He was against the death penalty, believed in God or some mysterious power that controlled everything and determined one's course in life. He rarely gave in to anger, the catalogue incident being an exception; he was generally effusive with his compliments to others, he treated his mother kindly and with increasing concern as lately her growing incidents of forgetfulness caused him to wonder if she might accidentally harm or even kill herself. The thought, though originally couched in concern, began to resonate not unpleasantly with him. They were really not very close, they rarely talked of matters seriously and lately her dementia seemed to preclude even the simplest of conversations, little was spoken beyond greetings of hello and goodbye. Dallas was thinking these thoughts as he cast his gaze

about the kitchen searching for the bag of treats he had brought in earlier and placed upon the counter beneath the cupboard he used for his stash of things he would treat himself with later. Arriving home, he had quickly entered the front door, dropped the bag on the counter and hurried to the bathroom and luxuriated in a feeling of profound relief. He then answered the ringing phone that his mother would never answer. Saying a gentle ‘no’ to the telephone marketer who offered a once in a lifetime credit card contract Dallas realized that he had not checked the mailbox before rushing in to relieve himself. By the time he finished reading the mail and answering yet another telephone solicitation, he had almost forgotten about the Thrifty’s Market degradable plastic bag stuffed with a variety of sweets and salty snacks that he was preparing to hide. It was gone. He checked the disposal bin, aware of his mother’s need to maintain smooth and uncluttered surfaces – then remembered the bin was outside for pick-up; she must have put it somewhere else. The telephone rang again, and he forgot the bag, once more.

Later, Dallas gazed out of the window, looking down upon the *lean-to*, hoping that his mother had not again, thrown something over the balcony. *She’s getting worse*, he thought. Unable to see evidence of the bag his gaze wandered to the line of surf lapping at the shoreline just beyond the *lean-to*. The tide had reached its maximum height and a Great Blue Heron stood at its edge, its long neck coiled so that the head seemed to rest between the shoulder-like wings giving it the appearance of a vulture.

Well, I suppose I can buy some more on the way back from my dinner meeting with Arthur, and I’ll pick up some more lottery tickets. He thought vaguely about the thirty-two million dollar prize and said aloud to no one present, “It would be nice not to feel that I was waiting for her death.”

* * *

Crash and Karen picked their way across the rocks to the concrete stairway leading to the Lochside Trail walkway. Turning right they began to walk toward the downtown area of Sidney. It was time to check out the dumpsters located near the Legion, Safeway and Thrifty’s Market. Their walk was laboured, Crash complaining and Karen following close behind, head bowed and shaking at the stupidity of her partner’s comments.

“I’m walkin’ along this bloody pathway an’ I got a pain ...I got a pain in my leg.” His voice was strained as if talking in response to torture. “I got that pain, an’ I got a pain in my back, an’ ...an’ I got a pain in my goddamn heels. I don’t know why I got these bloody pains! God! Oh, God! I’m just a friggin’ wreck.” The last words a high-pitched explanation to no one, his arms raised to emphasize his epithet.

“Why are you saying God, oh, God? You don’t even believe in a god.”

“Jesus Christ, Karen why do you have to be so literal. I’m just explaining how much all this aching hurts. Two and half years we been together now and you still don’t understand me when I talk.”

“I understand most of the time, Crash. But sometimes you just go on and start insulting people with your disrespect and complaining. And, it isn’t two and half years. It’s just one and a half.” Then quietly, to herself, “It just seems longer.”

It was seven years earlier when they first met at the Mission Folk Festival. Though she had gone to the festival with friends they soon went their own way and she found herself dancing to the Leahy Family Band on the main stage. Dancing alone for a while then joined by a late thirty-something guy who wore a wide grin. They danced and laughed, drank beer and cuddled; finally crouching into his tent to share a bottle of red wine and intimacy. In the morning she looked for her friends, leaving the tent before Crash woke. Eventually she made her way back to Vancouver and her husband who complained of her absence but was secretly glad to have had the time to meet with a friend at Wreck Beach before heading off to a gay club they liked to frequent.

Crash had read about the folk festival while working as a classroom assistant in a small public school in the town of Lillooet. He was a natural wanderer of the country, almost fearing to settle and put down roots, ‘once burned, twice shy’ was his mantra. Breaking away from places where he was known, some alcohol, a toke or two and he would loosen long enough to forget his own admonitions for a while. So, when he woke and found Karen gone he felt no remorse, no loss, just a simple satisfaction that his weekend was unfolding as it should.

The next time that Karen and Crash met was several years later. She remembered the man she had shared intimacy and red wine with at the Mission Folk Festival. She remembered the wide smiling face that had become unsmiling with uneven spaces separating his features. He had been involved in an accident. It happened on a weekend, a winter weekend on a clear day. Descending a mountain on the road to Shalalth his car slipped off of the first hairpin turn and tumbled into the forest. Badly smashed up – the surgical team tried to make the face normal again and only partially succeeded. His face was lopsided, his eyes no longer on the same plane, one ear gone, like his memory. Neurological opinion differed as to whether his memory would ever return, but they were unanimous about not daring to surgically stimulate its recall. Crash was told that surgery could correct his misshapen and oddly vacant looking face, but it would take many operations. He balked and left the hospital, drifting from one disability payment to another, finally locating to the downtown streets of Victoria where he had heard the weather was milder, not as much rain as Vancouver and it was easier to supplement his pension with handouts on the busy tourist travelled streets.

Crash had his corner; he had to fight for it and eventually won the respect of the other street-people who vied for the same ‘location, location, location’ as the realtors say about the city in general. He had no friends, only his ideas. The memories were gone but not his intelligence. Not his ability to always see the injustices of a society that had too much of everything while others had so little.

Karen walked by one day and recognized him, though she puzzled about his face, the

unbalanced crookedness, as if his head had been an apple split down the middle and put together again just slightly off-centre; not unlike one of the characters in Truman Capote's book *In Cold Blood*, she thought. It was when he smiled at a woman who dropped an American five dollar bill into his outstretched hand that she recognized him. The smile pulled his face together to a more recognizable likeness of the man who treated her with respect, years ago.

The woman who asked if his name was Crash stood unrecognized before him on the corner of Fort and Government streets.

"Well, I'm told that Crash was a nickname I had. Got it back again, now. But, yea, though I don't remember it, I was called Crash. Did you know me?" he asked.

Even if Crash's memory had remained intact he would probably not have recognized the Karen he once shared an evening with. Her body was lean, *a nice figure* he thought; but her hair was matted, dirty, as her clothes were. Her smile was guarded, closed-mouth so that he couldn't see the empty spaces sparkling white teeth used to fill. Several scars on her once attractive face drew the attention of those who spoke with her.

It was raining, a March rain that in Victoria suggested spring was never coming and summer could not even be imagined. Karen shivered as she moved beside Crash, getting out of the way of his customers as he called them. Throughout the afternoon they talked of his accident, her life.

"The doctor figured he gave me the virus. He was hangin' out with all these gay guys. But he sure wouldn't admit that he was gay. Anyway, they said I had this virus, HIV and I just slid after that. I took everything the street offered, good and bad, drugs and men and all kinds of weirdoes in between."

Crash nodded and said of himself, "They tried to tell me that in time I would want my face straightened out and that there was a chance my memory would return. Nobody ever thought to ask me if I wanted my memory back; or if I hadn't had enough of hospitals, operations, doctors, nurses, you know – the caring ones. Right, I only met a couple who cared, the rest were there puttin' in time, barely waiting to get the hell out of those sick places. I could see through the mechanical niceness – it was mostly phoney so I just did what comes natural, memory or not, I left. A social worker set me up on a disability pension and life just keeps goin'."

Karen responded, "Yea, the social workers I met steered me to a place, a bed or a meal, not that I ate much. But nobody could get me a pension; I was a slider, one of the dregs at the bottom of a cheap bottle of wine on East Hastings.

"I almost died, got beaten pretty bad and left in the rain, bleeding. Cops found me and took me to a hostel. I met a counsellor there who helped me beat the shit; and when that was done she arranged a voucher for a week's room and food and the boat fare to get here. We both thought it would be a new start. Three weeks I've been here and you're the first person I've talked to other than askin' for a handout or a safe place to sleep."

Crash bought Karen a veggie pita for supper and took her to his room where they talked most

of the night. They shared a second intimacy that began a renewed relationship, *eighteen months and counting* she thought.

Karen said: “You know, Crash, if I’m literal it’s because you taught me. Losing your memory took away a lot of meaning for you. I mean, like, you don’t have a lot of familiar memories anymore. Not that that’s all bad, I’ve got too many familiar memories. Anyway, how do you know so much about one thing meaning another when you can’t remember being taught all of that?”

“Cause it was drummed into me, Karen. I don’t know who or why but it was pounded in there when I was younger, probably something to do with me learning to be a professional classroom assistant. It’s called rote learning, kind of like riding a bike; you never really forget it, right?”

“Sure, if you say so. Anyway, it’s something to talk about, isn’t it – this thing of yours – about not believing in any higher powers?”

“The higher powers I believe in are up there, Karen.” He pointed to the condos that lined the trail and overlooked the Haro Strait. “I believe in them ’cause they’re there and they represent proof of an unbalanced world. A world where someone is so stinkin’ rich they can afford to look out at nature from a very expensive point of view that most of the rest can only dream of; but not me. I know the higher power of wealth, it’s called oppression. And it’s incredibly strong. It’s oppression that pushes us down, Karen.

“Goddamn, my back gets so achy when we walk on this bloody trail.” Crash pulled the too-large overcoat tighter around him as he walked, limped and complained his way along the Lochside Trail. They passed an older couple holding hands and tilting in toward each other like a couple of magnets. “Good morning,” they said and Crash cursed, Karen smiled at them apologetically.

Karen and Crash had moved from Victoria to Sidney by the Sea, taking up residence on the rocky beach front of the Lochside Trail and overlooked by the expensive condominiums rising richly above their thrown-together driftwood shelter. The unobstructed view of the Strait, the islands beyond and the snow covered, pyramid-like extinct volcano were now the new viewpoint of the condominium owner’s new neighbours, unwanted neighbours. The move had been precipitated by the closing of the rooming house that the two weary travellers had occupied. Victoria was cleaning up! Coming down were the old ramshackle multiple dwellings and broken down hotels, replaced by modern condominiums low and high rise structures in preparation for investors to buy and rent to the world’s visitors to the capital city of British Columbia. All of that spurred initially by an influx of visitors anticipated for the 2010 Olympics. The seat of the British Columbia government had also proclaimed that it had quite enough of street people panhandling, disturbing the tourists and being a nuisance to the shop owners.