

OSP Sampler

Excerpts from books published by
Oconee Spirit Press

OSP Sampler

Copyright © 2012 by Oconee Spirit Press

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permission of the publisher and author.

Foreword

Oconee Spirit Press (OSP) is an independent small press committed to publishing lively fiction and provocative non-fiction.

Here in this Sampler we're showcasing some of the books that Oconee Spirit Press is proud to offer. We hope you enjoy these snippets and that the appetizers will encourage you to read the books in their entirety.

All OSP titles may be ordered from Ingram or from your favorite bookseller (online or brick-and-mortar).

To learn about more of the titles available from OSP, please contact us by email at editorial@oconeespirit.com or visit our website: www.OconeeSpirit.com

Table of Contents

Excerpts from

From Here to Absurdity by David Hunter	1
Sharyn McCrumb's Appalachia by Sharyn McCrumb	7
One Coffee With by Margaret Maron.....	11
Ash Wednesday by Harold Eppley.....	15
The Bones and The Book by Jane Isenberg	21
Rendezvous in Veracruz by Carolyn Hart.....	27

From Here to Absurdity
by David Hunter

ISBN 978-0-9830040-1-1

\$15 trade paper Pub Date: May 2011

Humorous Essays

Do you find it odd that there are more plastic flamingos in America than the real thing? Does it seem strange that some people eat the second stomach of a cow as a delicacy? Or that electrocution is supposed to be a humane way to kill? If any of these tickle your funny bone, this is the book for you!

Love Everyone Except Antarcticans

Back in the 1960s, a columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle named Arthur Watterson Hoppe, in reaction to a Christian anti-Communist Crusade, which the columnist viewed as distinctly unChristian, launched the Love Everybody Crusade with a lot of fanfare.

“Being new to the crusade business,” Hoppe wrote, “I naively said what the public wanted was not another hate crusade, but a love crusade... It sank like a rock.”

Art Hoppe (1925 - February 1, 2000) was a popular columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle for more than 40 years and was syndicated in over a hundred newspapers. He was known for satirical and allegorical columns that skewered self-important people of all types.

He began his career the old fashioned way—as a copy boy—in 1949 and worked up through the ranks as reporter before beginning his own column. At the peak of its popularity,

Hoppe's column appeared in the Chronicle five days a week as well as being syndicated in more than 100 newspapers nationwide. His close friends included fellow columnists Art Buchwald and Russell Baker.

Hoppe was a champion of the underdog and took up many unpopular causes including opposition to the Vietnam War, which got him a file with the Central Intelligence Agency. In the early 1960s, when Hoppe began his column, the memories of the McCarthy witch hunts were still fresh and he was among those who showed little fear of them—along with Edward R. Murrow and Mad Magazine.

After the failure of the Love Everybody campaign, Hoppe thought it over and came to this conclusion: “I decided the truth of the matter is no one wants to belong to an organization that doesn’t exclude someone else. It’s the purpose of organizations.”

Hoppe’s realization was profound in its simplicity. Would soldiers volunteer if they didn’t get a uniform to set them aside from the common herd? Would those same soldiers submit to the hellish conditions of elite training without a special beret or pin to distinguish themselves from ordinary soldiers?

It’s not the joy of belonging that inspires people, but the opportunity to exclude others. Military leaders have always understood this and so have fraternities. Who would pay the money or go through the trouble of participating if there were no secret handshakes and passwords?

Exclusion has always been a working plan for the Church, both Catholic and Protestant. If salvation were universal, the thought goes, why would anyone deprive themselves of anything? Heaven is not a satisfactory option without a Hell to punish the people who did pretty much what they wanted in life.

Mind you, how one behaves is beside the point. Under Christian theology, an atheist could lead a virtuous life and still go to Hell for being an atheist. It’s tricky, but it has worked more than 2000 years for the Church to keep people in line,

more or less, and 3000 years to keep Jews from being totally absorbed by Gentiles.

So when Hoppe reinvented his campaign, he called it the Love Everybody (Except Antarcticans) campaign. He chose Antarcticans, which were mostly penguins, because he didn't think they would mind being hated.

He pointed out the ease with which penguins could be identified. If it walks like a penguin, talks like a penguin, and looks like a penguin, it has to be a penguin.

He predicted that the racial supremacists would love hating penguins because penguins are materialistic atheists, or agnostics at best. Also penguins are mostly black and, in Hoppe's words, "their brain capacity is one-eighth that of a white supremacist."

He said the left would hate penguins not only because penguins are anti-big government, but also "notoriously non-intellectual" with "no interest in the class struggle," the very symbol of "bloated capitalists."

Hoppe created an I.D. card and a button for members to wear that said "Love Everybody (Except Antarcticans)." The button had a picture of a penguin with a knife protruding from its back.

Thousands of readers responded asking for I.D. cards and anti-penguin buttons. For three years, Hoppe wrote frequent columns about the "Penguin menace." Any subject a columnist can fall back on for three years is a pearl without price.

After three years, though, Hoppe abandoned the campaign because in his own words, "I found that I had come to hate penguins."

Which shows the persuasive nature of a good campaign, especially if there is a segment of the population that can be excluded. Let's face it, exclusion is what human beings do best. Nothing else even comes close.

Catholics exclude Protestants, Sunnis exclude Shia, Republicans exclude Democrats, on and on into perpetuity. The

Indian caste system was openly and unabashedly exclusive for multi-generations, and European aristocracy had a very good run at excluding commoners.

South Africa was the last European-based society to maintain an unapologetic system of exclusion. They had society divided into white, black, and coloreds. Visiting Asians in South Africa were deemed colored or white, depending on the economics of their nation of origin.

Even in the Soviet Union, founded on the philosophy that workers were the most important people in society, Communist Party members became the new royalty with special privileges every bit as exclusive as the Czarists before them.

The United States, of course, strives to be the model for the world when it comes to a classless society. Whenever I hear this said, I'm reminded of an incident in Joseph Heller's novel *Catch-22*.

A general, seeking a way to get some publicity for himself, toys with the idea of group prayers before missions. He calls in the chaplain and the conversation goes something like the following.

"If we had prayer before missions, how long would it take?" the general asks.

"Five minutes for the officers and another five minutes for the enlisted men," the chaplain answers.

"Enlisted men pray?"

"Yes, sir," the chaplain replies.

"They pray to the same God as officers?"

"Yes, General."

"And God answers enlisted men?"

"Yes, General."

"Just forget the whole thing," the general says.

True, the military is a caste system for the sake of discipline and order, but any enlisted soldier who ever served has seen, firsthand, naked and unapologetic exclusion. Officers have their own clubs, their own toilets, and in times past, their own brothels.

From Here to Absurdity by David Hunter

The last war of which I can speak because I was in the military when it was going on—though not in a war zone—is the Vietnam War. There were prostitutes who serviced white soldiers and those who serviced black soldiers. That's right, segregated whorehouses for soldiers in the same war.

Segregated cat houses didn't seem odd at all for soldiers of that era. In some places, they were not allowed to drink in the same bars when they went downtown, either. President Harry Truman had officially ended racial segregation in the armed forces in 1948, but racism was alive and well in the civilian world during the Vietnam War.

The moral of the story, I guess, is that the only way to unite a group of human beings is to give them a common enemy to hate. It worked well for Hitler.

Sharyn McCrumb's Appalachia
by Sharyn McCrumb

ISBN: 978-0-9830040-2-8

Pub Date: July 2011

\$5.99 trade paper

Essays

Recommended for Appalachian Studies classes,
or anyone interested in the history and folklore of
the region.

The strongest element in fiction set in the mountain South is a sense of place. That connection to the land is the key to understanding the people who settled here, those who are drawn to live here now, and those who cannot leave. In my Ballad novels I try both to celebrate the land, and to understand its power over those who have become a part of it.

The first member of my family to settle in America was my five-times great-grandfather Malcolm McCourry, a Scotsman who left a law practice in New Jersey in 1790, took a new young wife, raised a second family and homesteaded in a log cabin in the wildwood until his death in 1829—a sojourn in the wilderness lasting longer than his tenure as a lawyer on the eastern seaboard.

He must have felt at home in the mountain fastness of western North Carolina. What he never knew was that in a geologic sense, he was back home. In *The Songcatcher*, my novel based on Malcolm McCourry's life, the central theme was provided by a scholarly publication on Appalachian geology. In *Traces on the Appalachians: A History of Serpentine in America* (Rutgers University Press, 1988), geologist Kevin Dann writes

that the first Appalachian journey was the one made by the mountains themselves.

The proof of this can be found in a vein of a green mineral called serpentine which forms its own subterranean “Appalachian Trail” along America’s eastern mountains, stretching from north Georgia to the hills of Nova Scotia, where it seems to stop. This same vein of serpentine can be found in the mountains of western Ireland, where it again stretches north into Cornwall, Wales, Scotland, and the Orkneys, finally ending in the Arctic Circle. More than two hundred and fifty million years ago (before even fish existed yet) the mountains of Appalachia and the mountains of Great Britain fit together like a jigsaw puzzle. Continental drift pulled them apart, at the same time it formed the Atlantic Ocean.

The mountains’ family connection to Britain reinforced what I had felt about the migration patterns of the early settlers. People forced to leave a land they loved come to America. Hating the flat, crowded eastern seaboard, they head westward on the Wilderness Road until they reach the wall of mountains. They follow the valleys south-southwest down through Pennsylvania, and finally find a place where the ridges rise, where you can see vistas of mountains across the valley. The Scots, the Irish, the Welsh, the Cornishmen – all those who had lives along the other end of the serpentine chain – to them this place must have looked right. Must have felt right. Like home. *And they were right back in the same mountains they had left behind in Britain.*

Perhaps it isn’t a unique experience in nature, this yearning for a place to which one is somehow connected. After years in the vast ocean salmon return to spawn in the same small stream from whence they and their forebears came; Monarch butterflies make the journey from the eastern seaboard to the same field in Mexico that had been the birthplace of the previous generation. The journey there and back again is unchanging, but each generation travels only one way. Is it

really so strange that humans might feel some of this magnetism toward the land itself?

If you go looking for the serpentine chain in Britain, the best place to find it is on the Lizard, a peninsula in Cornwall between Falmouth and Penzance that is the southernmost tip of England. There at Kynance Cove you can see the cliffs of magnesium-rich serpentine, and the chain of rocks in the bay that marks the path to Ireland's link on the great geologic chain. The other end of the serpentine chain follows the Appalachian Mountains from Alabama to the tip of New Brunswick. How wonderful, I think, that the people who loved those mountains in Britain found them again when they came to settle in this country.

My office sits perched on the edge of the ridge so that from my window I can see green meadows far below, and folds of multi-colored hills stretching away to the clouds in the distance. It could be any century at all in that vista, which is just the view one needs to write novels set in other times. I tell myself I don't want to live anywhere else, but every year or two, I make my way back to Britain, and I spend a few weeks wandering around the west of Ireland, or the coves of Cornwall, or the cliffs of Scotland—an ocean away from home, but still connected by the serpentine chain.

One Coffee With by Margaret Maron

Trade paperback, 6 x 9, 214 pages

ISBN: 978-0984010943 \$12.95

Pub date: July 2012

Before Deborah Knott, there was Lt. Sigrid Harald, a homicide detective with the NYPD. Now, with the re-release of Maron's very first book, long out of print, new readers can finally get to know the character that started it all. In *One Coffee With*, we meet Sigrid for the first time when murder strikes the Art Department of Vanderlyn College. Who poisoned the deputy chairman's morning coffee? Everyone in the department had both motive and opportunity and it will take Lt. Harald's cool, level-headedness to determine who the killer is before he – or she – strikes again.

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine has said, "Harald is no stereotypical policewoman....Getting to know her is a pleasure;" while the San Diego Union-Tribune says, "Maron combines a lighthearted style, surefooted suspense, and a captivating cast."

Harley Harris rose from a chair beside the bookcase. "Professor Quinn—"

"Not now," Quinn said brusquely. "Sandy, get me Dean Ellis." He reached around Harris and picked up one of the two Styrofoam cups on the bookcase.

"Now just a minute!" Harris squeaked. "I have a right—"

Quinn ignored him and, seeing Sandy signal that the Dean was on the line, went into his office and closed the door in Harley Harris's face. Harris turned angrily and almost collided with Professor Simpson, who was balancing his coffee on two thick reference tomes.

"Excuse me," murmured the old man and, nudging the boy aside, returned the books to the shelves below. Beyond Simpson's bent back Harris spotted Oscar Nauman just making his way through the crowded office, and his truculence wavered.

White-haired, six-foot-two and possessed of deep blue eyes that seemed to look past externals to the heart of any matter, the chairman towered over his colleagues mentally as well as physically. He tended to forget appointments and responsibilities, and left most departmental routine to Quinn and Sandy. When aroused in intellectual debate, his speech often became tangled and elliptical because his mind outran his tongue; but in his writings and especially in his paintings his brilliance shone forth unhindered. The only criticism ever leveled at Oscar Nauman's work was that it was too starkly cerebral.

Now he took the last cup from the tray on the bookcase, discarded the snap-on lid, swallowed deeply and grimaced, "God, Vance! This tastes like one of your acid baths!"

All this time Harley Harris, who barely came up to Nauman's chest, had been dancing for attention, and the artist looked down at him in mystified bewilderment as a Great Dane might gaze at a yipping Chihuahua. Frustrated, Harris shrilled, "You just wait then! You'll be sorry! And I hope you roast in hell!"

Nauman watched him flounce away through the nursery exit and, honestly puzzled, appealed to Sandy. "Is he upset about something?"

Malicious laughter rippled through the big room as Sandy reminded him of Harley's failure. "Professor Quinn told him yesterday that he wouldn't qualify for an M.F.A., but I think he

was hoping you'd override the committee's decision. He was supposed to have a meeting with you today but it had to be postponed."

Nauman frowned, uncomfortably aware that he'd been unintentionally rude to the boy. He could be, and often was, merciless in his treatment of those with intellectual pretensions, but picking on someone of Harley Harris's mental size was not quite sporting.

Around him the conversation had reached a raucous pitch. Among the younger staff members at the corner table, battle was joined over whether or not there was a shred of individuality in the whole second generation of abstract expressionists. Both sides had fervent, articulate defenders who shouted to be heard.

A bearded latecomer pushed his way into the group, snarling good-naturedly at a friend who'd maneuvered him into dating his girl friend's cousin. "You promised me a Venus," he grumbled. "She was a Venus, all right. The Willendorf Venus!"

Which led to fertility symbols, Paleolithic cave paintings, Stonehenge, Toltec technology and present-day earthworks and "—so his uncle's in the business, and he can borrow a bulldozer whenever—"

"I'll be damned if I'll buy it. What kind of art is it if you've got to go up five miles in a frigging helicopter to see the whole thing?"

"Ah, you're a reactionary—"

"—combines soft sculpture with collage and gets—"

"—so I told him where he could put holography, and she said—"

Nauman shook his head over so much simultaneous vociferous enthusiasm, but on the whole he approved. Some of his best paintings had been generated by freewheeling debate. He took a final gulp of the really unpalatable coffee and set the empty cup on the file cabinet between two of Sandy's potted geraniums while he pulled out an elaborately carved meerschauum pipe. As he lit it, he was cornered by Lemuel Vance,

who began buttressing his demand for a new printing press for the graphics workshop with data from three different catalogs. He almost had to shout to be heard over the surrounding din.

In the midst of all the loud hilarity and noisy arguments Sandy noticed a girl hesitating by the mail rack. At Sandy's gesture the girl, a student aide for Dean Ellis's office, edged her way over. Clearly such bedlam never occurred in the hushed sanctuaries below.

"The Dean wants to know if Professor Quinn's all right," she whispered.

"All right?" repeated Sandy in a puzzled tone. The decibel level began dropping as others became aware of this new diversion and paused to eavesdrop.

The girl nodded. "Dean Ellis was speaking with Professor Quinn on the telephone when he suddenly started—I mean, the Dean said it sounded like Professor Quinn was—" Embarrassed, she groped for a diplomatic term. "Like he was, well, you know, upchucking."

Sandy half rose. Nauman was closer to the door, but before he could move it was wrenched open and Riley Quinn staggered across the threshold. He clutched a wastebasket to his soiled shirtfront, and an acrid stench reached their nostrils as he heaved into it spasmodically. His eyes were glassy, his skin green-white beneath its deep tan.

"Help me!" he gasped hoarsely, retching at every word. "Oh my God, I'm dying!"

The ambulance responded in record time, but Quinn had passed into a deep coma before it arrived. Death occurred shortly after twelve noon.

Ash Wednesday by Harold Eppley

ISBN: 978-0-9840109-0-5

\$14.95 trade paper

Pub date: February 2012 Comedic fiction

Gerald Weiss is a pastor in crisis. His wife abandoned him for a lesbian relationship, his parishioners are defecting to a megachurch where the sacrament of Holy Communion has been replaced by an All-U-Can-Eat Communion Brunch Buffet, and his job is about to be handed over to a graduate of Armageddon Bible College. As the members of Abiding Truth battle over everything from the time for Sunday services to the color of the sign out front, Gerald struggles to hold on to his sanity and his faith.

Filled with flawed yet endearing characters, *Ash Wednesday* presents an unsentimental comedic look at small town life, sexual mores, and the decline of mainline religion in contemporary America.

“Which vegetables are included in your garden salad?” asked Gerald as he peered up from his menu at the harried waitress.

“You know—lettuce,” she said, yanking the menu from his hand. “Zat what you want?”

“Which kind of lettuce would that be?”

The waitress glared at him like some haggard mother tired of her child’s incessant questions. “Let—tuce. It’s green. Crunches when you bite into it. Grows in a garden.”

Located along the interstate and frequented mostly by truck drivers on their way to somewhere else, the Highland Café was the only dining establishment within ten miles of Dustin.

“I’ll assume that’s iceberg,” said Gerald. “And which other vegetables?” He reached for his confiscated menu but the waitress pulled her hand away.

“Croutons and bacon bits. Look Father, I don’t mean to be disrespectful to a man of the cloth, but can’t you see the place is crowded? Ya want fries with the salad?”

“No,” said Gerald. Then remembering that he had to prepare a Bible study, a task requiring extra fortification, he called the waitress back and ordered a family-sized basket of onion rings.

Across the table from Gerald sat Allan Weiss, pastor of NEW CREATION!!! in Pottersfield. Though neither pastor was smoking, Weiss was shrouded in a gray haze that made Gerald feel as though he were conversing with a specter. They were seated in the restaurant’s recently designated non-smoking section, which consisted of four tables without ashtrays in the corner of a large open room where all the other customers could smoke. Most of them were.

Like Gerald, Weiss was an ordained minister in the American United Lutheran Church. In Gerald’s opinion, he looked more like a professional golfer than a clergyperson. Today Weiss had the gall to show up for their weekly dinner date dressed in a polo shirt and designer jeans. As usual, he reeked of cologne and sported a neatly coifed hairstyle which accentuated his boyish face and made him look much younger than his actual age of 35.

“If you want to relate to your parishioners, you’ve got to dress like they do,” said Weiss between bites of his bacon-less BLT.

“A pastor ought to look like a pastor,” said Gerald.

“In a black clerical suit? That’s what Catholic priests wear. May I call you ‘Father?’”

“No one calls me that.”

“The waitress just did. I’m curious, Gerald—do you ever take your collar off? You don’t sleep with it on, do you?”

Solitary by nature, Gerald had steered clear of most of his colleagues since his divorce. However, in an attempt to foster clerical unity, the Bishop had mandated that each pastor in the district partner and meet weekly with someone whose “theology and approach to ministry differs from one’s own.”

Worship attendance at Weiss’s congregation had tripled in the four years since he had become their pastor. His sermons were broadcast five times a week on a local television station. Weiss attributed his success to a number of bold decisions. NEW CREATION!!! had enlarged and renovated their sanctuary to include theatre seating, a coffee bar, and other modern amenities. They introduced a “non-traditional” service which included a band that played retooled rock songs, sermons aided by something called “PowerPoint presentations,” special lighting effects, and unorthodox communion practices. Weiss also convinced the congregation to change its name, removing the words “Lutheran” and “Church” from the title and adding fashionably excessive exclamatory punctuation.

Dustin was situated a mere 18 miles up Mount Kiersey from the sprawling valley village of Pottersfield but the two communities might as well have been on opposite sides of the continent. Unlike the many impoverished communities dotting the mountainsides of the Alleghenies, Pottersfield attracted a number of young professionals, including physicians and administrators who worked at the Mountain View Regional Medical Center in nearby Altoona.

Pottersfield boasted a main street with ten blocks of successful businesses ranging from antique shops to computer supply stores. The village was also home to the golden-domed Berkson County courthouse, a magnificent new library, and an 18-hole golf course. Weiss’s parishioners enjoyed seasonal recreational activities, golfing in the summer and skiing in the

winter. Most of Gerald's parishioners preferred to go hunting, both in and out of season.

Dustin's main street consisted of a row of vacant buildings. There were only four active businesses, the most successful of which was the Aschenbrenner Funeral Home. Karen's Korner Bar, the oldest business in town, attracted large crowds on weekends. The block south of Karen's included a general merchandise store the locals called *Bubby's*, though the hand-painted sign out front read *Guns N Gifts*.

A fourth business, *Dick's House of Movies*, owned by one of Gerald's parishioners, rented videos and DVDs. Dick's was commonly known to have a sizable collection of XXX films, available only to those who knew a password that provided access to a dimly lit room in the back of the store.

Six days a week and many nights a steady stream of coal trucks rolled down Dustin's main street, grinding gears as they went. They left behind a thin dusty coating which settled on the windowsills of the parsonage and irritated Gerald's sinuses. Since its own mine had closed ten years earlier, Dustin had become a place to pass through, a town enduring its insidious demise.

Gerald was about to inform Weiss that he did not make a habit of sleeping in his clerical collar—except for last night—but Weiss was on a roll.

"Traditional religious symbols don't mean anything to the new generation," said Weiss. "People under 30 find them highly irrelevant to their lives."

Gerald had heard that Weiss's salary was five times what he earned at Abiding Truth. Unlike most rumors, Gerald was inclined to believe it. Either that or Weiss had racked up an excessive amount of debt trying to maintain his affluent appearance.

"I prefer irrelevant to irreverent. And I dare say, God does, too," said Gerald.

"Do you actually enjoy listening to those German funeral dirges your organist cranks out week after week?" said Weiss.

"I don't attend worship to enjoy anything. I'm there to show my respect to God, not to dance around like I'm at a rock concert."

"We don't dance. We sway."

"The pipe organ is inherently majestic. It conveys a sense of the sacred—a quality which is sorely lacking in electric guitars."

Weiss started to hum.

"What's that?"

"'Take Me Out to the Ballgame.' I was thinking how sacred it would sound played on an organ."

"Oh, hell."

"Look Gerald, I know you don't like what I have to say. But the world is changing and the church needs to change with it."

Weiss smiled flirtatiously at the waitress as he handed her a twenty-dollar tip, twice the cost of their meals.

"Why, thank you!" she said, her previously dour face now beaming.

Weiss glanced at his latest electronic time-keeping apparatus. "We better get going. It's time for us both to come clean, don't you think?"

"You're not going to subject me to that again, are you?"

"I thought we agreed."

Weiss had persuaded Gerald that their weekly meetings should include time for personal confession and absolution. In a private location—usually inside Weiss's Porsche since they carpooled and Weiss refused to be seen in Gerald's Buick—they would alternately repent of their recent transgressions. Then by the authority vested in them by God they would pronounce each other forgiven. This was all to be done confidentially, in keeping with their ordination vow never to betray secrets.

"My roommate and I did this in seminary every week," Weiss had said the month before. "It's the most meaningful spiritual activity I've ever experienced. It will change your life."

OSP Sampler

“You want me to confess my sins to you?” asked Gerald.
“That’s a matter I’d rather keep between God and myself.”

Yet before he knew it, Gerald was admitting that he had eaten too much chocolate cake and listening to Weiss’s detailed description of his erotic fantasies about his 22-year-old youth director. Gerald dreaded what this month’s confession might bring.

The Bones and The Book
by Jane Isenberg

ISBN: 978-0-9840109-2-9

Pub Date: October 2012

Trade paper Historical mystery

The bones of the title were once Aliza Rudinsk, a young Orthodox Jewish immigrant from the Ukraine who came to America in the late 19th century. Aliza's bones turn up in Seattle's underground streets in 1965, along with a book written in Yiddish. This book, Aliza's diary, is translated by recently widowed empty nester Rachel Mazursky, former history teacher turned bored housewife. Rachel shares her translation with the reader, so Aliza's distinctive voice alternates with Rachel's own passionate first person account of her interaction with the diary. She is so moved by Aliza's story that she feels compelled to search in the diary and in Seattle for clues to the identity of the young woman's murderer.

Kook nisht azoy oometik ... Don't look so sad...

Thanks to Jackie Kennedy I got through Harry's funeral dry-eyed and without a cigarette. That morning while I was wedging myself into a borrowed black sheath, I pictured the black-veiled and straight-backed widow holding her two little ones by the hand beside that flag-draped coffin. Like me, Jackie had been catapulted into bereavement, yet that day she

stood tall for her children and for us all, a saint in a pillbox hat. I wanted to be strong like her for my own daughter. I focused on Jackie's dignity and decorum when she laid her Jack to rest.

After my mother died, I was strong. Manya's struggle with cancer had served as a cruel luxury, her year of suffering giving me time to prepare myself for what, until then, had seemed unthinkable: my fierce fighter of a mother would die soon, would never even know her grandchild. And that's what happened. Mere months after Manya's death, I gave birth to Marsha. I told myself this twisted version of Godly giving and taking meant that the Deity somehow knew what He was doing. I diffused my grief changing diapers, warming bottles, and nagging God to come up with a surefire colic remedy.

But for Harry, death gave no advance notice. One morning he left for work and never came home. Incredulous and red-eyed, Marsha flew back from New York to sob in my arms. But at the end of the mourning period, she was ready to return to her job and her friends. Thank God, Marsha had her own life, would not be eating dinner alone every evening.

But I would, and I'd be sleeping alone too. From where I tossed and turned in too much space, it seemed that this time God had got the giving and taking completely wrong. I'd been raised to be a wife and mother but then, poof! I had no husband and a daughter nearly grown and gone. Only a month had passed since the disaster, the funeral, the prescribed seven days of mourning, and I was still struggling to accept the sudden and unexpected death of my husband of twenty years.

Harry, may he rest in peace, wasn't perfect. He was 4F, not a war hero like Jack Kennedy, and Harry could be stubborn, especially about Marsha going east to college and about me going back to teaching. But he was a hard worker, a steady provider. Marsha's college money was in the bank and, of course, Harry had plenty of life insurance. He used to tell potential clients, "This policy is so good I bought one myself to protect my wife and daughter when I'm gone." In fact, Harry was going to see a prospective client when he died. He

was so proud of his salesmanship. He always said, “If I weren’t Jewish, I’d have been made a partner at Pratt and Pringle years ago.”

With my dead husband’s words echoing in my head, I opened the *Seattle Times*. Every single day of the four weeks since the cataclysm claimed Harry, I examined the paper for further revelations about it. Even during the week of mourning when family and friends crowded our little house, I pored over the *Times* in search of quake-related items. I knew all about the other poor soul who, like Harry, died when he got hit by debris, and I cut out his obituary too and pasted it and the articles detailing the extent of the damage and the cleanup effort into one of Marsha’s old three-ring binders.

I had binders bulging with articles about the Internment, the Holocaust, and cancer. Harry never understood how cutting, ordering, pasting, and labeling helped me cope with the catastrophes that comprise human history, but it made sense to me that after the earthquake, I was, once again, trying to constrain chaos within the covers of a binder. By confronting and cataloguing reporters’ accounts of the seismic shudder that took Harry, I hoped to make his disappearance manageable.

For the same reason I walked past downtown sites that were hardest hit. But a month had passed. Clean up crews had hosed Harry’s blood off the square of sidewalk where he died, carted away the rubble, and repaired damaged masonry. The earthquake was no longer news. That’s why I didn’t really expect to find it headlining a prominent article on page one.

Quake Bares Bones Under Pioneer Square Yiddish Book Uncovered With Human Remains

Two Cleveland High School seniors Saturday stumbled onto a collection of human bones alongside a handwritten book in the subterranean streets below Pioneer Square. The students, Royal Townsend and Jennifer Larson, are members of Linda Thurman’s journalism class. The class had volun-

teered to help clear out earthquake debris so the historic underground streets could be reopened for tourist expeditions.

Miss Larson said they found a knotted brown leather sack in a metal container. “I untied the knot, and then Royal pointed his flashlight inside. That’s when we saw the skull—and the book. I ran and got Miss Thurman.”

Miss Thurman continued the story. “Jennifer was talking so fast I could hardly understand her. But when I saw what was in that bag, I suggested we all go outside for a break, and I called the police from a pay phone.” Police collected the bones and book for investigation.

Detective Louis Lombardi said the book was written in a foreign language, and he thought some letters resembled those on the old synagogues in Seattle’s Central District. “I took the book over to the rabbi at the University of Washington’s Hillel. The rabbi said the writing was Yiddish, using the Hebrew alphabet. The dates in the book go back to the 1880s. We’re not interested in remains that old, so we turned the bones and book over to the Department of Anthropology at the University of Washington.”

Timothy Hunter, UW professor of physical anthropology, said he and his graduate students will study the bones. “Maybe the little book will help us determine whose bones we’ve got,” Hunter said. “But I’m not making any promises.”

My mother, may she rest in peace, would have said it was *bashert* or fated that the same damn tectonic twitch that took my Harry also turned up a book handwritten in Yiddish. Maybe she was right because after I read the article I felt compelled, driven almost, to seek out that exhumed book. I needed a project to distract me from my grief. But my compulsion was further fueled by my belief that if Jews really were God’s chosen people, what He chose us for was to take notes, write down what happens, write history. What if nobody wrote

The Bones and The Book by Jane Isenberg

down what happened in Egypt? At Sinai? Torah exists because a few people bothered to jot down what went on. I wanted to read that Yiddish book unearthed downtown.

So I didn't paste the article about the bones and the book in my binder. I put it in my purse and called information to get the phone number of that anthropology prof with the WASPy name. I suspected there was no one he knew at the University except Hillel's Rabbi Yosl Moscovitz who could read enough Yiddish to translate the book. But Rabbi Moscovitz was too busy arranging kosher meals, planning mixers, and conducting religious services for Jewish students to take on another project. Professor Timothy Hunter didn't know it yet, but he needed me.

Rendezvous in Veracruz
by *Carclyn Hart*

ISBN: 978-0-9830040-4-2

Pub Date: February 2012

\$10.95 trade paper Young Adult Suspense

When feisty American college student Maura intercepted a mysterious message, she never dreamed she'd be caught up in the middle of an international crime spree. With no idea how many of her acquaintances are involved, she doesn't dare to trust anyone! Her only option is to go on the run in order to elude the ruthless criminals who will stop at nothing to protect their secret.

Maura was in the communal bath down the hall with Lin waiting impatiently in a hall chair when the front door knocker sounded. Lin sat up straight as she heard the soft scurry of the maid's footsteps.

It had to be either Luis or Juan! The other girls either didn't have dates or had already left. But it shouldn't be either because it was still half an hour until eight o'clock.

Very quietly, Lin moved close to the head of the stairs and bent low to peer between the banisters. She saw the flurry of Maria's long skirts as she turned toward the kitchen and then she saw Luis standing in the middle of the common room. Lin was just ready to retreat and alert Maura when she paused, puzzled by Luis' manner.

He was standing very still and the taut line of his shoulders reminded her of a painting that hung in her father's office. She had never liked the painting. It was of a black panther

poised to leap, his muscles bunched, his eyes gleaming, a study in grace—and danger.

Luis' head moved slowly as he looked around the room. Then he stepped quietly, so quietly, into the hall and peered toward the kitchen wing. Lin knew the swinging door would be closed now, the maids readying their own meal.

The entrance hall light gleamed on Luis' upturned face as he lifted his head to look up the stairs. Lin stiffened, but he didn't see her in the darkness of the upper hall. She felt a quick rush of thankfulness that *Señora Alvarez* was so particular about the light bill. Lin was quite sure she wouldn't have liked Luis to see her watching him.

Luis glanced once more around the entrance hall. It lay quiet and empty. Satisfied now that he was alone and unobserved, he moved quickly into the common room and crossed to the ornately carved mantel above the stone fireplace. Again he glanced swiftly around, then in a hurried and furtive movement he pulled a cream-colored envelope from his breast pocket and thrust it beneath the slightly raised base of a bronze clock that sat on the mantel.