

# **Taking Liberties**

**By Dave Carley**

July 2008

## **Taking Liberties**

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### Playwrights Acknowledgements

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The quotes in Sara Munro's monologue are from *The Diviners* by Margaret Laurence (McClelland and Stewart).

This script has been updated for its presentation at the 2008 Fringe of Toronto Festival.

### Production History

*Taking Liberties* premiered at the 1992 Vancouver Fringe Festival. The cast was as follows:

Anne Harvie – Gillian Barber  
 Ron Bloom – Joe-Norman Shaw  
 Sara Munro – Celine Richmond  
 Heck Munro – Bernard Cuffling  
 Gerald Harvie – Andrew Wheeler

Directed by Jan Carley

Design by Craig Fulker  
Stage Managed by David Lyford

*Taking Liberties* had its Toronto premiere at the Factory Theatre Studio in November, 1992. The cast was as follows:

Anne Harvie – Dixie Seattle  
Ron Bloom – Michael Caruana  
Sara Munro – Stephanie Morgenstern  
Heck Munro – Gary Reineke  
Gerald Harvie – Tom McCamus

Directed by Stephen Ouimette  
Lighting Design by Peter Cochran  
Sound Design by Lesley Barber  
Stage Managed by Janet Gregor

## **Taking Liberties**

### The Characters:

Anne Harvie – 40 and 53  
Ron Bloom – 30  
Sarah Munro – 19  
Heck Munro – early 60s  
Gerald Harvie – early 30s

### The Time

1995, back to 1955. The forward to 2008.

### The setting

Various locales around Ashburnham, a mid-size city.

# Taking Liberties

## Anne Harvie

*1995. The setting is ANNE HARVIE's house – perhaps the front hall. Morning. ANNE appears, carrying a broom, dustpan and newspaper.*

Another night, another window. They're consistent, I'll grant them that. And there's a certain symmetry to it. Eh, Daddy? A certain symmetry through the decades - darkness, falling glass, morning clean-up... *(Begins to sweep glass.)*

It's better than Gallup. The temper of the populace as measured by the Harvie windows – accurate 19 times out of 20, to within three percentage points.

Who the hell do they think they are! Did you ever wonder that, Daddy? I've wondered it every day for the last six months. I thought they were my colleagues, my mentors, my students. Fellow travelers on the road to some intellectual Camelot. Was I wrong.

*(Starts to unwrap and spread campus newspaper; pauses to read headlines.)* “Dean Anne Harvie, Thatcherite Bull, Continues Rampage Through Groves Of Academe.” Florid, somewhat overstated. I'm surprised the cretins even remember who Thatcher was; it's been five years. Cartoon's not bad. *(Feels her nose.)* It's not nearly that long. *(Reads again.)* “Dean Harvie remains adamant in her opposition to affirmative action. Despite entreaties from the university's president, the head of the Department of History continues to demand that Philip Kirschner – a male – be hired for the position of associate professor in Medieval Studies. Harvie's stand is in direct contravention to the university's new regulations on affirmative action for the hiring of women. However no one should be surprised at Harvie's reactionary position; this is, after all, the same woman who ten years ago, in 1985, was defending a white supremacist, Arthur Sloane.” I was wondering how long before they'd dredge that up. “And so, to Anne Harvie's record of racism, it is now possible to add sexism.”

That was a fast trial! Convicted of multiple “isms”! This is journal – ism? *(Sighs.)* No, it's the campus press. Good for wrapping burst windows.

*(Opens the newspaper again.)* Dammit, not one letter of support! Not one student, not one professor defending me! Not one woman willing to stand against this as a matter of principle, or any men willing to debate this for fear of – what – appearing anti-woman? Un-feminist?

*(Sweeps furiously but soon comes to a stop.)* Oh God, what if I'm not right? There are so many of them, and they're so sure of everything. Their rage – it's genuine, no doubt

about that. This glass doesn't lie. Doesn't their rage at least hint I'm wrong? It's true the faculty has only ten women teaching out of eighty, I can't argue with facts. And yes, a good percentage of the men are truly piggish, and all of them are passing off a certain view of history; a narrow, white, very male version of it. I know what the word 'equity' means, because I've seen the flip side. My department's a hotbed of inequity. I'm trying to change it. So why are they on my case like this – why aren't they supporting me? Me, of all people! Me, the only woman dean at the university – their most logical ally!

Me, the one who understands the cost of exclusion. As if I haven't been fighting this all my life, right from when I was a child, right from when, from when you... As if I didn't have to claw my way through that goddamn department and prove myself ten times over, ten times more than any of the "guys" ever had to. Jesus, I even learned to play squash! And play it well. No, I really do understand, but they still call me a what – (*Reads.*) "Thatcherite Bull". Because I dare to question the prevailing orthodoxy. Dare to raise a question in the hallowed groves of academe.

(*Pacing, thinking.*) If you punish one group, in the short term, in order to bring long term gain to another group – is there any victory in that? Isn't the immediate damage greater than the ultimate benefit? Is it fair? Can I possibly deny the best applicant for this job because my predecessor hired too many "guys"? Even with the fancy hiring formula they've devised – dressed up, dressed down, it's still a quota and there hasn't been a quota yet that didn't exclude people at the same time as it was letting others in. I think. And that's oppressive. I think. But then, how could the racist, sexist Dean of History know anything of that?

Why can't I be as sure as they are? (*Pause.*) Perhaps that's my answer. Because of all people, I know where moral certitude leads...

I cannot be part of a university that enforces ideas instead of letting them clash. Where the pursuit of agendas takes precedence over the search for knowledge.

Yes. It's time I went. Time, gentlemen. I quit. I resign. I'm not strong enough to carry the torch for the entire university. Where's my coat. Time to go down there and resign... I'll just tell them "I quit" and kid myself that one or two of them will keep a window of doubt.

I quit.

How's that sound. Daddy?

Does that sound familiar. Daddy? "I quit"?

Last night, when the rock came crashing, I didn't bother to get out of bed, didn't even bother because I knew the car would already have screamed off down the street – I could never get the plate number and would I phone it in if I did? You get blasé about persecution.

That's a lie. I was never blasé. I'd always jump up. I wonder if you ever heard me, running to the window, squinting through the dark, listening for Mom to hurry downstairs and sweep up the glass before I could see it the next morning. As if I was deaf. As if I couldn't hear the glass breaking or the silence in the house because she'd stopped speaking to you. Daddy. As if I couldn't hear you sobbing from behind the door of the room to which you'd been exiled. Daddy. As if I didn't know that every night the cars pulling up were packed full of people yelling, throwing rocks... smashing our windows... And now I'm sweeping it up again, just like Mom did thirty years ago, wondering why is it the innocent are left with the brooms and the dustpans.

It's bloody unfair you're not here to see it come full circle. You should be here to see these broken windows and the other things that are happening in this city now – glass breaking everywhere, paint across the synagogue, the attacks on the foreign students, the book bannings, the pornography. Lucky for you you're not here - I'd have asked for an explanation. Daddy.

Thirty years ago, I heard you leave your room and walk down these stairs. You came in here and put your coat on – why, I don't know. Why did you bother putting your coat on? You obviously weren't worried about getting a chill. I heard your steps go this way, through here, towards the garage... I lay in my bed wondering, "Daddy's left his room. Where's he going?"

Didn't you ever doubt what you were doing to me? Didn't you ever think of me? Why was it that you hated yourself – and not them?

*(Stops.)*

Wait. I'm tired. I'm only talking this way because I'm tired. I'm confused, I'm tired. Holding your head up and thinking with it at the same time – that's the most tiring thing in the world. And I've been doing it for so long.

So, yes. It's time. Time for the Thatcherite bull to go and resign. Time. Time, gentlemen, time.

## **Ron Bloom**

*It is late morning, spring 1985. Ron Bloom's parents have just driven off, and he is speaking to his wife Sara Munro.*

They say I'm humiliating them, Sara. They say their friends are upset with the letters I've been writing. Dad says, "Ron, just agree to disagree with everyone, then shut your mouth and quit writing letters to the editor." *(Pausing.)* Sloane is revolting, I'm not arguing with

anyone on that. And I'm not saying I don't wish Arthur Sloane and his kind off the planet; in my heart, of course I do. Everything he says and writes fills me with loathing and – and immense sadness; I'm no different from Dad or Mom or anyone on that. But I'm just not sure that because Sloane's written two pamphlets denying The Holocaust we've got the right to ban him from speaking at the library, or teaching high school math... That's all I've been saying. You'd think I'd been writing the pamphlets myself. I feel like – I feel like they hate me more than they hate Sloane!

Anne Harvie – excuse me, it's Professor Harvie now – says Sloane is only expressing an opinion. She says the Western Shield is just a tiny collection of idiots, cranks. She's right – I doubt there's more than ten of them in this city, ten out of a quarter million, and not that many more in Toronto. And these aren't jackbooted skinheads or good old boys burning crosses; they're no physical danger; they're just a pathetic band of very warped men.

But Mom and Dad say his opinions only need fertile soil, just a bit of economic uncertainty, perhaps a bit of this, a bit of that, and they'll flourish. Dad keeps saying, "Ron, remember the precedent." I just don't agree. I don't. Dammit Sara, this isn't Germany in the 30s; it's Canada, 1985! We're a literate society with a growing tradition of tolerance, with safeguards for minorities...

God – there I am saying that to them and I don't even think we need safeguards. I mean, Hate Law provisions in the Criminal Code? Anne Harvie says charging him, silencing him through the courts, raises a double-edged sword, one that's as strong on the upswing as it is cutting him down. And I agree with her.

This is what I've been writing to the Gazette. If we muzzle people, even those who spew filth, we lose more than we gain. It's not a question of freedom of speech versus protection of minorities, because there's really only one way you can protect a minority - with freedom of speech. That's all I've been saying. Anne's always quoting Milton: "Let truth and falsehood grapple freely, for whoever knew truth put to the worst, in a free, open encounter?"

I know how much this is hurting them. But charging Sloane is only giving him a forum, a legitimacy he craves and doesn't deserve. The trial's going to be a circus, if the Ernst Zundl thing is anything to go by. And it's just a little ironic that suddenly it's my Dad who's so damn militant all of a sudden, Mr. Don't Rock the Boat...

Oh – apparently Pearl Weiss is testifying at the trial. She was over in my folks' living room yesterday crying, wondering how it is a good Jewish son could write letters to the Gazette defending Sloane's right to speak. Pearl's going into court, she'll show her tattoo and, once again, tell her story; this fills me with disgust. I'm disgusted it should come to that. That it should be necessary, that anyone should even ask her to do it, that her story and the truth about the camps should ever be questioned, that we even dignify Sloane by hauling Pearl from her rocking chair, that we make her live it all again. And what happens when Pearl dies? Do we just stop believing The Holocaust happened because

there are no more eyewitnesses? Figure it out, it's 1985, a kid would have had to have been seven, eight to remember anything – the youngest is probably 50 or so, and there weren't many survivors in the first place. Soon there won't be any Pearls.

They got on about how it's strange it's Anne Harvie who's standing up for Sloane. Anne, whose father got the bylaws at the golf club struck down so we could join, Anne whose father was a friend to everyone before he...

Dad asked what was it he'd done to make me hate who I am so much I can't stand up for my people. God Sara, how can I make them understand that's not it at all.

The last thing they said as they left here, Dad said, "You're not our son anymore."

And then they tottered down the walk. I'm glad you weren't here to see it. They tottered off, two old, very wonderful people, clutching on each other for support, leaving here, thinking it was the last time, going that far, prepared to disown their son over this. "You're not our son anymore."

And me, watching through the picture window, wondering how it is I can hurt them so much when I love them, as much as I love you and the kids... All I had to do was chase after them, run after them and pull them from that stupid white car and tell them, "I'm sorry. I'll stand with you. I'll fight Sloane every inch of the way, I won't rest until he's in jail, he and his kind, every last one of them."

They drove off in that car and I remembered all those times Dad took me to school, in his annual white Cadillac; a thing so big, so magnificently finned it was like cruising in the Sydney Opera House. Me slinking down in the front seat, praying no one noticed me with this odd little man, praying no one connected the man in all the radio and newspaper ads with me. Cute Mr. Bloom... I wanted so desperately to be like everyone else... God! And now he tells me I'm a traitor but it's them who've spent their lives playing the game, it was Dad who always said we only had to out-Christian the Christians to get by. It was them, both of them, both of them have spent their every breathing moment being cuter, more philanthropic, more honest, better golfers. And still different enough that I hated it.

*(Back to SARA.)* This is a question of tolerance, Sara, and the tolerance that's being put to the test is ours. Anne Harvie and I are standing together, not because we're brutal, but precisely because we do understand what it's like to be different.

I used to think if I was the same I could be free. But now I realize I'm only free if I can be different.

The proudest story in our family is about the day Dad and Anne Harvie's father broke the rules at the golf club. Dad made a career out of fitting in but our best story is when he didn't.

But what does any of that matter, when my parents are driving off down my street, too stunned at what they've just said to see, to wave at all the people they've spent their cute lives waving to?

I can't live without them, Sara. The kids need their grandparents; we have to have them around here. I can't handle them not being around...

I want to be on their side.

*(Thinking of ways he can.)* He's a teacher. Sloane's a teacher. Anne Harvie says this makes no difference, he's not denying The Holocaust in class – he teaches math. And everything Sloane does with the Western Shield is after hours. But listen – is that right? I mean, Anne can say that, can't she – she doesn't have any children. But we do. Dad said the only reason he went golfing that day with Anne's father was so my brother and I could play; well, don't children change the equation?

Maybe the Miltonic ideal doesn't work with children. Of course it doesn't! How can “truth and falsehood grapple freely” when it's the teacher putting forth the lies – that isn't an equal fight! And – and we owe them a different standard of care. I owe that to Courtney. She'll be in high school in a few years; I can't send her there knowing that one of her teachers hates her for having a Jewish father. It's one thing to write pamphlets and speak at the public library if you don't have a position of trust – but it's a different thing when a few hours later you're in a classroom full of young, impressionable minds, teaching them. Yes! Even if Sloane sticks to math, even if he never gets beyond fractions and integers, even if he doesn't say anything, he's thinking it. Haven't I got a right to certainty that my child won't be discriminated against in that class? And what of the other children? They're bound to hear what he says after school! Some of them are bound to give it some credence. So even if Sloane himself doesn't hurt Courtney, it could be that other students will.

I should be saying this to Anne Harvie. I'll call her up. I'll ask her, “Anne, what the hell do you think it was that killed your father anyway? Have you forgotten what you felt all these years, God, what you probably still feel? Do you wish that on my little girl! It's all fine for you to sit out there at the university and talk about freedom of speech, but your students are older than Sloane's, university students aren't hurt by alien theories!”

*(Pause.)*

I can't say any of that.

It's only splitting hairs, isn't it. Sara? It's just splitting hairs. I'm jumping through hoops so I can run after my parents and tell them I'm with them...

What do I do? My head says the man must not be silenced. But my heart... My heart just drove down the street in a great white car.

## Sara Munro

*SARA knocks on her teacher's door, and enters. She is carrying some school books, and a hardcover copy of The Diviners by Margaret Laurence. It is late spring, 1975; school has ended for the day.*

Sir? Mr. Bales? It's Sara – Munro. I hope you don't mind me waiting around for you. If you want to get home for dinner I understand, but there's something I want to talk to you about, if you've got the time. I mean, it can wait, but I'd prefer it didn't.

I saw you on TV last Sunday. It was weird because there was the news: first the helicopters airlifting people out of Saigon and then Margaret Trudeau disco-dancing.... Then you! It was ages before I even clued in it was you. You don't expect your English teacher on national news. Not in colour, anyway. And you were great! Perfect grammar! Not one double negative the whole two minutes.

Seriously, I was really proud. I wanted to phone everybody up and tell them, "Mr. Bales, riding tall, Channel 12!" I was watching with Mom and she suggested I write an article on you for Reader's Digest: "My Most Unforgettable Character".

Hey – could I get a credit? Just joking.

*(Starting.)* I've been reading the letters in The Gazette. It used to be my Grandfather's paper, so I got in the habit, when I was younger. The letters were addressed to him, so it was like reading his mail. For the longest time I thought 'editor' was a synonym – synonym? – for Grandfather. I persuaded all my friends that the old men they had over for Sunday dinner were editors.

Everyone's got an opinion. Grandpa always said the job of his paper was to reflect community values but, if that's true, then I don't like what I'm reading, not if you use the letters to judge. I've noticed something weird; it's the short letters that call you the names. There's not so many long ones, but they stick up for you. I've been cutting them out, good and bad, because I want to have all the sides in case I write something for the yearbook, or somewhere.

When I was a girl, Grandpa would come over to the house at night with that day's Gazette and sometimes it'd look like Swiss cheese, he'd cut so much out of it. Articles he didn't think I should read, stuff he thought was too adult or would gross me out. He said, "A newspaper's job is to reflect the community, but a grandfather's job is to protect his granddaughter and, when the two collide, you win." I Win? It drove me nuts. But I don't know, if I was your wife, maybe I'd be cutting those letters out before you had a chance

to see them. I'd cut out the short ones and burn them, and I'd paste the long ones to your front door, so they'd be the first thing you saw when you got home from school.

When people talk about community values, how do they decide them? Do you just add up the letters, pro and con, and see who wins? Or – better – go by column inches, that way the smarter people win. There's no getting away from it though. Even at the supermarket. I do the shopping for Dad and I stand in the Loblaws lineup and listen to what everyone's saying. The cashier can lay on a judgment in the time she rings up your groceries.

“Oxydol pounda oranges you a student? Can I get a price check on Joy? They teachin' you that book? Fleecy Minute Maid it's filth, shouldn't be allowed Tide you like kiwis eh if I were you I'd throw your copy in the river and be done with it Seventeen fifty-seven have a nice day.”

The next time I went through I asked her if she'd read “The Diviners”. Of course she hadn't. “I don't have to take LSD to have an opinion on it, now do I honey.”

Mr. Bales: how can these people be so sure? It's not because they're all stupid – my Grandfather was the smartest man I ever knew and he was always sure of everything. He said evil can exist without you even seeing it, so you had to be extra careful. “A tree falling in a forest kills as much whether or not you see it fall.” He said sometimes it's necessary for other people to tell you what's wrong, because there's something in their eyesight that makes them see more clearly, maybe you can't see through the forest quite as well. Meaning, I couldn't see what I shouldn't see, but others can?

I really hope you don't mind me barging in on you like this, but this is really important.

Anne Harvie and I went to their church last Sunday, the church that's organizing everyone against you. I wanted to hear what they're saying. If you're thinking of writing a story you've got to hear both sides. So, the minister said the book shouldn't be taught, shouldn't even exist, because it's anti-Christian. This struck us as bizarre because just a few miles up the river there's another church, and Margaret Laurence at that very minute is sitting in a pew there. And it sure would've come as a big surprise to everyone around her that they were rubbing knees with the tool of Satan. Anyway, so what if it is anti-Christian – how's that make a difference? You already taught us “Lord of the Flies” – it's anti-children. My boyfriend, Ron, Ron Bloom, he says “The Merchant of Venice” is anti-Jewish – and we studied that way back in Grade 10, when we were really vulnerable.

But back to the church – here's the best part. In the foyer, the minister's stuck up parts of the book for reading. We go to the table and he whips over and says, “You girls, these are not for you to read!” I forgot to tell you – the only parts he's got up are the juicy sections. He's got them underlined in red, so you can't miss anything. Oh – and yellow if it's blasphemy. I say, “But sir, I can read all this in school.” He says, “Still, we can't let you sign the petition if you're under sixteen and we won't let you read the excerpts from that pornographic novel unless you're over eighteen.” Anne gets cross-eyed at this and asks about the seventeen year-olds who are apparently living in limbo. But the minister just

says, “And we’d prefer if girls didn’t read these parts anyway.” Anne practically yells at him. “But a woman wrote them!” He says, “Why compound the sin?”

So I say fine, fine, we’re both over sixteen; we’ll just sign our names and go home to our Christian baking. And when he looks away, I write, real fast, “Morag Gunn, 17 Oral Sex Lane, Manawaka”. And Anne writes, “Jules Tonerre, best lay in town.” And then we run like hell.

Made you smile, sir.

You didn’t see me, but I was at the Board meeting on Monday. When that minister demanded the Chairman read out the dirty parts of *The Diviners* I wanted to scream. Read the dirty parts from the Bible while you’re at it! See how they sound! And when the Chairman refused his request, when the preacher got up and read the parts himself, in that great rolling voice of his... Geez, I wonder if he realized how good he was making it all sound.

At least it sounded good at the start - he does have a great voice, for a goof. But after a while, well, it did start to sound dirty. He made the book sound like pornography, because it was him reading it, I think. (*Thinking.*) He was thinking of it as dirty, so it became dirty. I mean, the dirt – it was already in his mind, what he was reading was just a mirror of it. Like evil seeing evil.

That’s what Anne says. She says my Grandfather...

Anne came over last night and we were talking about you and the book and we read some of it again. I wanted to see if maybe we hadn’t seen the filth the first time through. We read a whole section of it out loud, really carefully, and we couldn’t find anything. Then we tried reading it with a different assumption, that instead of you being a good teacher and assigning us an important book, you and Margaret Laurence were really out to corrupt us pure high school girls. Still didn’t find anything.

That’s when Anne said the thing about only evil being able to see evil. Then she said she wasn’t just referring to “*The Diviners*” thing. She started telling me something else. She’s been my best friend for my entire life but there’s been something she’s held in for the last ten years. Her Dad – you know about him, don’t you? I mean, what happened to him... what he did... Well, Anne says it all happened because of my Grandpa. Because of Grandpa, back in 1965, before he sold the paper, because of something he printed...

We had a big fight. Anne took off. This morning I skipped and went to the library and looked up the old Gazettes. She wasn’t making anything up. I feel like one huge pile of shit. Wouldn’t you?

(*Pause.*) But that’s my problem. I’ve been keeping you here and you probably want to go home and I could talk about stuff all night, but here’s what I really came to say:

I overheard you with the Principal yesterday. I was in the office waiting for someone and his door was open and I want to be a reporter... I mean, I wouldn't have listened if the door was closed.

I heard him suggest you teach another book, there were other books by Laurence you could teach that wouldn't cause such a stink.

And today in class - you told us you were teaching the other book. That it was better to do so. And I understand. I understand the pressure everyone's putting on you and your family, and I know that the principal's stopped sticking up for you – but Mr. Bales, you can't do this, you can't stop now, not after being on the news, not after getting yelled at for so long!

*(Opening book.)* Listen to this! Listen, it's the first couple of lines from the book: "The river flowed both ways. The current moved from north to south but the wind usually came from the south, rippling the bronze-green water in the opposite direction. This apparently impossible contradiction, made apparent and possible, still fascinated Morag, even after the years of river-watching."

I think about you, and you leaving off teaching this book, which you say will be so good for us to read, and I think about my Grandfather and what he did, and I can't help thinking the opening of this book is so appropriate, that the current does flow both ways. For us it's flowing forward and these books are going to be accepted; and it's also flowing backwards, because the writers of all those short letters are pulling us that way, too. And I'm thinking that, on one hand, we want to be open and, on the other hand, we're pulling back in the direction of hiding things. And sometimes being too open about things can cause trouble, or is it only the real reason behind your being open that's bad? And isn't it weird how I can read this book and see nothing but beauty, but when someone else reads it out loud it sounds like filth. And it's weird I can feel old and young and really convinced of things, and confused, and really stupid and, at the same time, I feel smarter than all of them put together, all of them.

"This apparently impossible contradiction, made apparent and possible..." How'd she know!

"The river flowed both ways."

And these lines from the last page: "The waters flowed from north to south, and the current was visible, but now a south wind was blowing, ruffling the water in the opposite direction, so that the river, as so often here, seemed to be flowing both ways. Look ahead into the past, and back into the future, until the silence."

You can't teach any other book, Mr. Bales. It has to be this one. It just has to be.

## Heck Munro

*HECK is the editor/publisher of The Ashburnham Gazette, the city's daily newspaper. He's an old-style print man, in his early sixties. The time is early evening in late summer, 1965.*

*(Entering, hollering back out the door.)* I want the names! *(Holds up the story a reporter has just handed him.)* You think this is any good without names, Logan? I'm amazed you even wrote "bus terminal"! Why not just, "Some place somewhere in the centre of the goddamn city"? Jesus. And Logan, have I ever told you what a pretty picture you make leaning there? Interviewing the water cooler, are we? Get back to work! And save the cup! *(Slams the door.)* Goddamn reporters. Bunch of –where the hell are my cigarettes? *(Lighting cigarette.)* Going to lose the lungs from yelling at them before I ever lose them to these.

If this city only knew its scribes. A hundred and fifty thousand good souls out there and I get two dozen of the laziest, most booze-fueled... the worst defining the best. Community standards translated by a pack of degenerates.

If you only knew, my gentle readers. Your sports are written by a lecher who'll chase anything in a skirt, even if it means missing a game and making up his story. Around Town's the work of an alcoholic so perpetually pickled he can't even see the town he's supposedly around. The Women's Page? Those dainty trillings are written by the most foul-mouthed slut to walk the streets of this city. Reporters.

*(Going to typewriter.)* Editorial. *(Stabs cigarette out.)* Why the living hell the goddamn Americans have to have a goddamn surgeon general and why I have to have a doctor who reads his reports... It's not even the same country! "It's the same smoke, and the surgeon general now says it causes cancer." Well, it didn't cause cancer a year ago. Goddamn alarmist Yanks.

Now. *(Stops.)* How can I write if I can't smoke? *(Lights another.)* There. OK. "It isn't often our city faces issues of moral import. The great debate of '64 was Sunday movies. That was last year. This year - oh yes - it's the Ladies and Escorts doors - do we keep them? Ah: burning stuff. *(Looking at sheet the reporter had given him.)* But this will make my gentle readers sit up and take notice. Your city's turning into a goddamn Sodom and Gomorrah. The facts here are: "After a six month surveillance of the bus terminal washrooms, city police have arrested and charged 23 men with 148 counts of gross indecency, buggery, indecent assault, disorderly conduct, nude in a public place, indecent exhibition, mischief, disturbing the peace, trespassing, loitering, common nuisance..." Jesus, they've hit them with everything but trapping out of season. 148 counts. And some sucker of a gumshoe had to watch. And keep score.

*(Continues to write.)* "No one questions the need for justice in these arrests. These men have broken laws which protect this community."

But this evening I even get a visit from the goddamn clergy. Telling me how to run my paper. “Mr. Munro, you don’t want to be printing names in a case like this – these men have suffered enough.” Well, my holy friends, you don’t have the faintest clue what’s going on out there and how much protecting we need from these weirdoes. It’s not Jesus who’s keeping them reined in, it’s the laws, the cops, and the newspapers making it all public... Maxie Bloom’s got the right idea – he says it’s like driving. He says there’s curbs on either side of the road and most of us don’t have to keep checking where we are to avoid accidents, but others need reminding. Bloom’s the worst goddamn driver in the world. Worst goddamn golfer, too. But I gotta say he understands the value of laws. Understands it a lot better than these so-called goddamn Christians.

*(There’s a knock on the door.)*

That better be the names! *(Crosses to door and opens it.)* About time, Logan. *(Shuts door and re-enters the room.)*

So, who’ve we got here. *(Reading, muttering.)* Alden, Drummond, Godfrey, Harvie, Miller, Novak *(Stops.)* Harvie? Jesus. Wait a minute – Gerald Harvie. Jesus, Gerry?

There’s got to be another. Where’s the goddamn phone book. No, it’s him - Harvie, V-I-E. No one else spells it that way. Jesus. Gerald Stephen Harvie. Gerry, Jesus goddamn Christ.

*(HECK slumps in chair. Long pause.)*

So that’s why I see you out at night. You’re on your way down to the bus depot.

Jesus, Gerry.

Poor what’s his wife’s name – Claire! And he’s got a goddamn daughter for Christ sake. Annie. She plays with Sara. What a goddamn idiot! What a bastard he is to do this to them!

Alden, Drummond, Godfrey, Harvie... It’s there, black and white.

Jesus Gerry, what a spot you’ve put me in.

He stops by here all the time. We shoot the breeze, have a coffee. I never thought... We golf! Jesus, we golfed last Saturday. He’s a good golfer! What do I do?

Alden, Drummond, Godfrey...

I thought he had guts – thought he was a regular guy – and the whole time he’s going to the bus terminal with a bunch of pansies. Jesus.

He's the one who got Bloom into the golf club. He decides one night he's going to challenge the bylaws and he stops by here – on his way to? He stops by here and says he's taking Bloom out on Saturday. I can see his logic; I say I can't in all fairness take a full page ad from Bloom every week and turn around and not let him in...

So Ger marches up to the tee that Saturday with me and Bloom. And waiting to tee off after us: every goddamn big shot in the city, all of them wondering what the hell Bloom's doing there. Bloom's scared shitless, I'm scared shitless, only Ger seems calm, like he's ready to bring all the crap of the city down on himself. Like this is small potatoes. So I might be nervous but I hit a good one, couple hundred yards. Then Ger tees up and hits it further than I've seen him – 275 yards at least. Then Bloom. Arnold Palmer's never been watched more closely. Bloom tees up, nice swing, good form – he plays down in Florida – and goddamn if he doesn't slice it right into the parking lot. I mean, all we need is a nice drive down the fairway so we can get the hell out of there, and Bloom's bouncing it off the fins of his Cadillac.

The sky doesn't fall. There's a letter waiting for Ger, taped to his locker, but he tells them he'll take the club to court, and I threaten to write some editorials, so they cave in. And now Bloom's son Ronny is the junior champ and my granddaughter Sara's the goddamn girl's champ and sometimes I catch myself wondering if it's true that we never allowed Jews in. We're one big happy family.

Alden, Drummond, Godfrey, Harvie... I could throw this away. I could leave Gerry's name out. (*Crumpling paper up; stopping.*) The bus terminal?

No. Gerry always said we had to be treated the same. That was the whole purpose of the golf club thing – no one gets left out. I've got to print those other names, it's my duty. Can't make an exception, this time. And I can't make an exception for Gerry. I have a granddaughter I have to protect.

(*Back to editorial.*) "An act is immoral if it harms others. There can be no question that the activities in that bus terminal washroom have caused grave damage to this community. A tree falling in the forest causes the same damage regardless of whether it is seen or not. There is no such thing as a victimless crime. The very existence of these acts in our city makes us all victims.

"I have been asked by members of the clergy to suppress the names of the accused in this case, in the interests of "Christian compassion". I have been told that to print the names of the accused is to invoke double penalty upon them, because of the loathsome nature of the crime. Well, these 'men' should have thought of that before they tripped down the bus terminal stairs. And those who would have me suppress the names should consider for a moment how important it is the public knows what is taking place in its community. The best interests of this city can only be served by uncensored, unfettered freedom of the press."

Uh, I should make an analogy for them, they love analogies. *(Thinking.)* OK. “If your child was being babysat by a person charged with child molesting, wouldn’t you want to know? Of course you would. So why should the news of men romping about public lavatories be treated any differently?”

Weakness is the handmaiden of immorality. Gerald Harvie and 22 other residents of this city commit unspeakable acts in public washrooms. They are the puke of society. But as long as I have this paper...

*(Back to editorial.)* “Gentle readers, you need to be protected. You have that right. The names of the men charged are: Andrew Alden, James Drummond, William Godfrey, Gerald Harvie – Gerald Harvie... Gerald Harvie, Matthew Miller, Edward Novak, Philip Peterson, William Thompson...”

## Gerald Harvie

*The time is late evening, in the early fall of 1955.  
GERALD is leaving his office; we hear mostly his internal  
voice.*

*(On telephone.)* I’ve got another hour’s work. Claire: I said I’m sorry. I know the time. No, don’t pick me up, I like the walk. I’ll be home in an hour. I don’t want you coming out – it’s late, you’ll get a chill, you’ve got to take care. I’ll be home by eleven. But don’t wait up for me OK?

*(Puts the receiver back in cradle.)* Yeah, lay your sleeping head, my love. *(Sighing.)* An hour.

*(The door opens; street ambience up. This is a weeknight in the city, so  
there’s not much traffic – no sirens, very few pedestrians.)*

*(Locking the door.)* One hour. Night slinks over my city. Our day’s been full of industry and now our cars are garaged, our doors locked, milk bottles glint on stoops, quarters shining on their bottoms. My neighbours are turning, tucking in, faces rinsed, eyes shutting... My Claire, so uncomfortable, hauling her flannelette bulk up the stairs, creaking onto the bed, stoically waiting for birth. Claire, hoping for the sound of my steps.

One hour. My chosen city: a fantasy magazine cover. A Saturday Evening Post fantasy, by day. My shingle rocking back and forth – Gerald Harvie, Accountant.

At night... Claire waits for me in the west. Choose. West or east. East, west. Choose. One hour. Chosen: the dark side of town. Where darkness is a blanket that muffles and

smothers innocence. Where darkness caresses a hot, quivering fringe, where dark wraps ragged edges and makes alleyways electric with possibility. When, from under the heavy buildings and from around the safe corners, the rats begin emerging, only a few, yes, but rats, slyer because of their isolation, eyes nervous, shot with excitement, peering through the sleepy dark for their kin.

No. Claire: her troubled face on my pillow, breathing my remembered scent, willing me back to her. Concentrate on her, Gerry! Think of my child growing in her, Gerry! Think!

Claire. Claire half-joking. "I took you for better and I took you for worse, but did it have to include this city?" We're unpacking. Claire and I, starting our new life. Claire's brave but she's already missing her friends. Me? I'm only feeling relief. It puts spring in my steps and I'm running from truck to house with boxes; running, I'm that goddamned relieved. Until I look up in the arching elm and see a rat. Did they stow away in the truck?

"Look!" She cries. "The squirrels are grey here!"

I manage to keep busy for six months, because busy minds don't turn down alleys. Don't come alive when darkness comes. Don't roam streets. Busy minds travel west in precise lines, home to Claire.

And Claire lies west, her belly rising as gently as the hills surrounding this city.

*(Pause.)* I go east. There. The first battle's lost. I lose every battle in this war, always have. When it gets dark I only want to lose.

"Why Ashburnham?" She says. "We don't have any relatives there! You don't have any classmates!"

"It'll be better when we start having children. Trust me Claire."

Trust me. We have to go where I'm handcuffed to the centre. Where I know my steps are watched, my every stumble enumerated, where the watching of my neighbours holds me.

Except even here I can break out. There are secrets here too; these cities smash you in the face with the dark knowledge they pack.

*(Sound of traffic, or footsteps.)* Listen. I'm alone. I have these sidewalks to myself. But look again. Look harder. There's more here. Look through the dark long enough, things start to move. The things you want, you see them start to move.

I hear everything. I can see a million miles in the dark, I can smell this city, smell every drop of sweat off every loin, yes... I walk further, and every step is more exciting than the last. This is my real home – these night streets.

If you could only see me.

*(Sound of the street; a car passes.)* I keep walking, my skull peeling back, my brain's a convertible, the night wind whipping it alive, danger whipping it alive; this is what it's like to really live. I walk on. To a window, a yellow square in the black. Typewriter clacking through the black, coughing and clacking, then a plume of smoke seeping out the open window. Heck Munro.

Heck Munro. Some nights I stand here and look up at your window and wrestle: west, east, go in? If I go in we'll share cigarettes and bad coffee, and talk about my Claire and your editorials and our golf games, and one time you'll even tell me you wish you had a son just like me. And eventually you drive me home – I can hardly refuse – and that saves me, for a night.

So Heck: who are you aiming tomorrow's volley at? Give me a preview.

“A bit hard up for material right now. Think I might write something about Ike's heart attack. People are making too much of it. Might stop him from running again. Or maybe goddamn fluoridation. Dentists say it stops goddamn cavities. Or – ban the goddamn bomb. I don't know – you got any ideas?”

I've got too many ideas.

“We like you Gerry. Everyone likes you.” Heck said this last night, from behind his cloud of Black Cat.

It had been a long day and I wasn't feeling tolerant. “Like they like Max Bloom?”

“What's Max got to do with this? How'd you know Max?”

I met him in Florida. We golfed.

“Didn't know he played.”

He doesn't, here.

“Don't expect he does,” he says.

Don't expect he's allowed, I answer. But he's good. He whipped my ass.

Heck exhales, long and slow. “He cheat on his score?”

This is how they talk here. They smile, then they spew shit. I didn't say a word. I can argue with him about bus boycotts in Alabama, but I didn't stick up for Bloom. Last night.

Next time I stop in I will. Tomorrow. Heck and I'll glare at each other across his desk, and carefully I'll lay down my trump card. “How much does Max Bloom advertise in The

Gazette?" I already know he takes a full page every Thursday. A full page is \$250, which is over twelve thousand a year, which is a senior reporter's salary. That's what it'll take to get Heck on the golf course with us.

But that's tomorrow. This is tonight. I've got better places to go. Heck's light is on but I'm not going in there tonight. The sidewalks pull me along.

*(Sound slowly builds. Park-like noises. Twigs, thuds, perhaps the squall of a cat. Leaves. Heavier breathing and words now coming out in a stream.)*

Pull me east. Pull me east, away from Claire, pull me to the park. To the park, dark breath of green; exhaling slow and clear and dark, sound receding, sounds of city sliding off behind the trees. Twisted path. Curve. Curve and dip. Duck for branch. I walk in darkness. Down through the ravine. Up through the ravine. Knowing each dipping branch, each blocking log, knowing, knowing all these things and letting myself be pulled along.

Branch brushes face. Scratch. Blood? How do I explain blood? Blood on my handkerchief. Then: ground hard as I cross the green, soft again as I slip into the trees.

Dirt breathing out. Exhaling. Carcass of rotting animal. Thread of smoke. Tobacco smoke.

Snap of twig. Fallen leaves. Leaf rustle. Squirrel? Rat?

Glow of cigarette. Then dark. Then glow. A shape. I come close. No. No. No. I back away.

Freedom: to belong, to exist. To hit a great long drive...

Strength: to be a husband, a father. To leave here. To turn away, turn home, walk home to my Claire, walk west to my Claire, to shut her reddened eyes with kisses, to walk home to her. Yes. Yes. I can do it.

No.

I turn downtown again.

*(Sound of city again, increasing, and becoming bus terminal sounds. Muffled announcements of buses leaving for various destinations. Buses idling. Footsteps in foreground.)*

There is another place. There is something I need and something I want and I know where it is.

Smell of bus, lingering smells of bus and crowds; people leaving town, good people leaving town, good people returning, destinations announced, good people greeted,

people ignored, names called out, people walking through crowds unnoticed and now me, my steps ringing across deserted pavement, almost no one here now. Almost no one here.

*(Greater bus terminal sounds now. He's there. Door opening, door shutting. Quieter now. Footsteps descending.)*

I'm inside. There's a door. I open it and walk down the stairs. I walk down the stairs until I reach the bottom and now there are two more doors. I am drawn to one and I go inside.

God forgive me.

I am here now. Are you there?

I have crept into the bowels of my city. I have crept here and now I stand and pretend and hope. I catch his gaze, then I look away. I look back, look away, look back and now I am no longer even in my body. I have fled that prison and I am flying a thousand, a hundred thousand miles above this green and pleasant town. I am looking back at myself walking over to my fellow human and I'm only feeling this incredible freedom and this great, overwhelming rush of liberty and, finally, finally: power.

### **Anne Harvie**

*(It's 2008. ANNE has been using her laptop. She closes it.)*

When I was nine, my father was arrested on a variety of charges relating to his activities in the washroom of the bus terminal. The police came one evening, summer '65, August, August 12, and took him away in handcuffs. To say this frightened me, that is an understatement. My father's name was printed in The Gazette, along with the charges he faced. To say this destroyed our family - that too is an understatement. A cycle of terror began. Our car tires were slashed, our windows were broken. Night after night our placid street was violated by hooligans pulling up and heaving abuse, plus the more tangible offerings of their hatred, at us. My father was released on bail of course, but he was too ashamed to leave the house. He stopped working. My mother banished him to the back room. She couldn't, wouldn't speak to him, would hardly even look at him; didn't want me to, either.

And then Daddy killed himself in our garage. In a way so disgusting, so revolting... It defies description. It defies telling. It defies comprehension that despite the turmoil he was in he would do this, and do it to me. I was nine, nearly ten. I'm over 50 now and I still won't forgive him. I'll never forgive him.

You see, I found him.

I didn't speak for ten months, and then I did. I didn't go to school for a year, and then I did. I didn't make friends, didn't trust anyone in this city for five, ten years, for decades actually.

But that's just me. One life. Who cares.

Well, care about this. The forces that killed my father in 1965 are always present. Still. Forty years later. With us, in us. In this city. At my university, and everywhere else. Sometimes flourishing, sometimes dormant, but always, always here. Yes. And my devotion to history – that's why I'm an historian, it's why I study and teach it... because if I can understand why they want to crush liberty, if I can understand that and explain it, to myself, to you... If I can do that, I can stop them.

Ten years ago I almost resigned as dean. Seems like ancient history now, but I'd taken a position against the university's employment equity rules and I was getting crapped on by everyone. There were motions to have my tenure revoked. The university president was distancing himself. There were editorials written against me in the Gazette. Some rocks were thrown through my windows...

So I was this close to quitting. In fact, I'd set out for the university to do just that. Off to see the wizard, hand him my resignation, clear out my office, stop by the hardware store and get a new window pane, then never ever emerge from here again.

But as I walked through this city... I realized exactly what I was doing... I was walking in... Daddy's footsteps.

He was a brave man and then he gave up. I had taken a principled stand, and I was giving up.

Except: I-don't-give-up.

Not then. Not now.

Giving up would be capitulating to those who would restrict us. Oh, the intolerance out there would subside momentarily because this month's target had removed herself. But it would flare up again, and it has, it will continue to do so. Except now they have to deal with me writing letters to the editor, giving interviews, speaking to anyone who will open an ear and a mind long enough to listen...

And most famously, I've got a blog now. Everyone reads it. I've dedicated it to offending every person, institution and belief in this country. In the name of freedom. Muslim, Jew, Catholic, Protestant, left, right, fence-sitter, French, English... I'm coming to get you. It's very cathartic. And surprise of all surprises: complaints have been made to the thought police at the Human Rights Commission. Lots of them. And guess what - they are – as I

speak – doing backflips trying to find ways to establish jurisdiction over me. To zip my lips. To shut me down. To shut me up. To shut us up. Because we're all in this together.

Daddy.

That's what fuels me. I'm not like you, Daddy. And I'm not alone. We have evolved. This city, this country. A crabby dean of history can sit at her kitchen table, write what needs to be said and hit 'Send'. And when they come to throw rocks I can surround this house with people now, people hold up placards for me, people who use signs to bat away the stones. People who write on my behalf and send their words out into space, words flying to the heavens, bouncing off the stars and satellites and zinging back to earth, exploding into a million minds.

Ten years ago I nearly quit. And now I'm almost an optimist.

So how does that sound? Daddy. Do you hear what your little girl's saying, Daddy? Your little girl's telling them to bring it on. Bring it on.

Bring it on.

**The End.**