

SUMMER WAGES

By

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August 1963. A foghorn droned near the distant shore on the Straight of Georgia. Calm waters almost made the thick mist bearable, but the going was slow and nerves were tight. Ty Robson gripped the rail and peered with strained eyes into the gloomy fog searching for free-drifting logs or any other debris big enough to cause damage. He could barely see the cold, gray water below, and though it was almost noon there was no sense of day or night.

Ty turned around and cupped his hands around his mouth then shouted to the wheel house, "Nothing doing out there, Ben."

After a good ten seconds of silence had passed, a voice boomed from above, "We'll be going into Malaspina Straight soon, go back and check the cables."

The faint dingling of an invisible buoy gave Ty some comfort as he made his way astern and tested the tautness of both cables that stretched firmly outward for six feet then abruptly disappeared into the dense haze.

"It's still there, Ben," he shouted chipperly.

After the usual suspension of time the voice from the wheel house bellowed, "That's good, boy, that's good, ya better get some grub now."

Ty paused and looked out to where the cables disappeared and tried to picture the huge barge that trailed behind with its mountainous load of logs. Just hours before they had hooked it up at Campbell River where the town's distant street lights could be seen in the quiet morning darkness. It wasn't until they were half an hour out that the fog set in and engulfed the barge like a giant ghost eating breakfast. Walking slowly to the galley Ty decided he was too tense to cook anything, so he slapped some bologna and eight slices of bread together and headed for the wheel house.

Ben's white hair seemed bright in contrast to the fog outside the window before him. His shoulders slouched heavily from the weight of too many hours at the wheel. Ty walked up beside him and offered two sandwiches. He hoped Ben would let him take over the wheel for a while.

Ben looked down for a moment, took half a sandwich then re-glued his eyes to the fog. "Thank ya, Ty," he said before taking a bite, chewing it slowly as Ty joined his gazing vigil through the window.

"This is what they used to call a 'Sea Witch,'" Ben said, nodding toward the fog. "Near the coast where the forest comes up to the shore cliffs, a crow might fly over a boat and in this kind of fog it looks just like a witch flying high up in the clouds. It'll play tricks on your eyes so keep your wits about ya."

Ty took this to mean that he should make his rounds on deck. He finished the last sandwich. "Well, I guess I'll head out, let me know if you want a break."

Ty was almost out the door when he heard: "Thanks, Ty, I'll give a holler if I get tired."

The sea was picking up a bit. Bigger waves slapped against the tug giving Ty an uneasy feeling. He walked ahead and signaled up to Ben by pointing at the water then bring his hands up together in an upside down V to indicate choppy water. Ben nodded.

After checking below in the engine room for any leakage, Ty went astern and stood looking out to where the barge must still be. He listened intently and was sure he could hear the distant waves splashing up against the flat wooden hull of the vessel as it barged through the whitecaps like a titanic fullback. This was Ty's last trip of the season. He would start his first year of university in the fall now that he'd earned enough for the tuition, but he'd still have a couple of weeks to cut loose in Vancouver.

Somewhere between Texada island and the Sechelt peninsula, Ty gave up trying to visualize the invisible barge and started searching for crows. "Caw, caw," he sang out, but not loud enough for Ben to hear. Suddenly, off the port side, a narrow stretch of fog faded into a fine pale mist exposing a tall stand of cedar trees. Ty stared, transfixed by the beauty of the moment, at the slowly passing trees. As the gap in the fog grew wider, Ty's eyes were drawn upward to a hazy glow barely visible through the clouds. "Clouds! Jeez, I can see clouds. Hey, Be..."

A loud blast from the boathorn interrupted Ty's jubilation. The outside loud speaker bellowed, "All hands to the upper deck; I need a breather."

As Ty turned and trotted to the wheel house he failed to notice the barge breaking out of its gray envelope, nor did he hear the harsh cry of a large, black bird perched atop the load of timber.

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(Two)

After Ben docked the tug by Lulu Island he took Ty to his house to settle the wages. By agreement Ben had held back most of Ty's pay during the summer and gave him only small advances for tobacco and other minor expenses when they were in port. As Ben figured out the accounts, Ty drank coffee with Ben's wife in the kitchen.

"Well, are you glad to be going back to school?" she asked.

"Yes, Mam, sitting down all day will be groovy compared to sliding around that old tug in the rain."

"Aha! Remember, I told you last Spring to get some good rubber boots before you shipped out. Those city shoes of yours aren't meant for tug work."

Ty gave a sheepish grin. "I know, but I'm used to these. I always get blisters on my ankles when I wear new boots."

Ben walked in, sat down and handed Ty a cheque. Ty looked at the neatly printed figures. \$3,572.00.

After expressing his appreciation for the summer job and shaking Ben's hand, Ty headed for the railway bridge that crossed over the Fraser River to his home in New Westminster. After walking jauntily for a few minutes the hot August sun started to get to him. He sat down on a bus stop bench to steady his legs. He mused over the cheque in his wallet. He would hit the bank, first thing, deposit all of it except for two hundred... no, a hundred and fifty, then go home and give his mom a hundred bucks, then clean up for a night out at the Royal Towers tavern. The thought of beer made him ferociously thirsty and slightly dizzy. He heard a motor and looked to see the seductive words on an approaching bus:

MARINE DR. TO VANCOUVER

(Three)

November 1963. Next to the Dominion Theater on Granville street was a green door that led upstairs to a hallway with 37 rooms. It was 5 p.m. as two men walked slowly down the hall talking excitedly. Lying half asleep, the occupant of room number 7 heard one of the men say: "Too bad, he was a good man."

The occupant of room number 7 stretched and yawned, and thought no more of the curious words. It was time to get up. He shaved, got dressed, then went down the hall to the toilet. The landlady's apartment was at the end of the hall not far from the toilet room. As he sat straining to have a bowel

movement he heard Zelda, the landlady, crying and talking at the same time to her "sickly" husband, Oscar, who no one ever saw, and who some doubted really existed.

"Oh, Oscar, vat's da void comink to? Oh, mine Gott!"

He flushed the toilet and tiptoed back to room number 7. Reaching under the bed he pulled out a guitar case, opened it and lifted out a Fender Stratocaster, holding it like it was a beautiful naked woman. It was the first major thing he bought after hitting town. He sat down and practiced the chords to the thirty or so songs he'd memorized.

At 7:30 he walked out to Granville street, guitar case in hand. It was already dark but the street sparkled in neon as he made his way through the heavy downtown foot traffic. Something was wrong. The usual spirited voices on the theater row were subdued and hushed like in a church or library. He passed a newspaper coin box and was struck motionless by the large black headline:

PRESIDENT SHOT - DEAD

He walked into the Italian Village restaurant and put his guitar case on a small stage below the front window. A well-tanned man in a chef's hat looked out through the kitchen's service counter and hollered, "Hey, Ty, how's ita going? You wanna you pizza now?"

"Hi, Gino. Sure I'm starving."

A free pizza and ten dollars a night were the wages Ty earned for what he liked doing the best. He sang from eight till midnight, taking a break every now and then to sit down with any flirtatious young ladies whenever the occasion presented itself. All the chicks seemed to come to the Italian Village in pairs. Probably because most of the male customers, who's main occupation was gambling, spoke in authentic Italian accents, giving the ladies a taste of exotic.

Ty wasn't Italian, nor particularly handsome, but he was young and a musician, which held some weight with the well-dressed ladies out on a Friday night prow. Saturday was another matter Ty had learned. On Saturday night the gamblers brought their wives. And on Saturday night he knew better than to accept any flirtatious invitations to join a table, choosing instead to take his breaks in the kitchen, sipping wine and talking to Gino.

At 8 o'clock Ty started playing. The customers, who had been on the quiet side because of the assassination, perked up and a few even sang along to "That's Amore". By nine, the spaghetti and wine were flowing freely. Some of the regular customers who knew Ty wasn't paid very much sent up a steady

stream of glasses of wine, and even though he wasn't of legal drinking age Ty was feeling no pain when he took a break and, on invitation, joined the table of Franko Giseppi.

Franko had been a big shot gambler who was known for his stakes poker games and his ability to pick winners at the race track. But for the passed six months he had taken advantage of his friendship with a number of nightclub and restaurant managers, and was now a novice booking agent.

Franko poured Ty some wine then took a notebook out of his jacket. "Ty, I've made a deal with Gino to book his place with entertainers. But Gino feels because you were working here before our deal, the deal won't take affect as long as you are working here. So it looks like I gotta make a deal with you. I get ten per cent from the people I handle but I can't collect ten per cent from you cause Gino says so."

Ty took a long swig of wine. "So what's your deal?" he asked with intoxicated bravery.

Franko poured more wine into Ty's glass. "Well, either you stay working here and I keep losing money, or you decide to quit, in which case I might do things for you."

Even though he was well on his way to being drunk, Ty had sense enough to know he didn't need an enemy like Franko. "I've been playing here for almost two months. I never thought of quitting, but I wanna be fair with Gino."

A groggy thought emerged in Ty's head of him and Ben and their late-night sessions when Ben had tried to teach him the finer points of playing poker. "Just never hit seventeen," Ben warned, "and you'll do alright."

Ty had found his way out! "let's play one hand of Blackjack," he said. "If I wing, I stay. If you win, I go."

Franko poured himself some wine and topped of Ty's glass. He waved over a waitress and handed her five dollars. "Go ask Gino for a fresh pack of cards, sweetheart."

Ty excused himself for a few minutes to go outside and get some fresh air. As he walked to the door he gazed around the room at the good-looking women and felt the warm ambiance of the table candles and the aroma of spicy food cooking. He didn't want to lose it all. And he sure as hell wasn't going to fork over ten per cent to Franko. Outside he felt cold. He was nobody out there on the sidewalk, just another strange face. Inside he was somebody who people recognized and appreciated. He took in three long breathes then returned to Franko's table.

"One hand, winner takes it all," Franko said, deftly shuffling the cards and then placing the deck on the table. Ty reached over and cut the deck.

Franko reclaimed the cards and put one each faced down for Ty and himself then dealt two faced up. Ty showed an eight of clubs against Franko's jack of diamonds. Ty lifted the down card with his thumb and saw a nine of hearts. His next card would have to be a four or less or he'd be over the maximum twenty-one.

"I'll stay," he said to Franko who flipped his down card showing a five to join his jack.

"Dealer shows fifteen," Franko said, pausing for a long moment. "Dealer takes another card."

Ty swallowed hard when he saw the three of spades join Franko's fifteen.

"Tough luck, Ty. But don't worry, you can finish up tomorrow night."

(Four)

It's strange how a tragedy brings people together. The assassination of a president didn't happen every day, and as the significance of such an event starts to sink in, people want to be around their loved ones. When Sunday rolled around, Ty caught a bus for New Westminster to visit his Mom and Dad instead of making one of his infrequent phone calls.

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April 1964. When the mental state of the world's population is in a collective funk, the world is ripe for a kick in the butt to get it spinning right again. The kick came from overseas. It was felt by practically everyone, of course, but musicians felt it the hardest. After they recovered from the initial blow, almost every musician in Vancouver fanatically embraced the influence of the kick's perpetrators.

Ty was no exception. He knew all twelve Beatles songs by heart, and rehearsed them to perfection. He hooked up with a four-piece band got gig with them on the weekends at the Penthouse Cabaret playing from two in the morning till 5 a.m. The Penthouse didn't have a liquor license. It was the last of the bottle clubs where soft drinks were at a high price.

Up one flight of stairs was the Gold Room. It seated about a hundred people, and had a raised dance floor next to a high stage at the far end of the room. It was open only on the weekends.

Up two flights of stairs the length of the building was divided, with a small band room at each end, sandwiching a narrow dining room and kitchen from which escaped the strong aroma of spaghetti sauce and grilled steaks. These rooms were open all week long. If you were a regular customer, Carl, the chef would sell you a mickey of rye, vodka, or rum at an exorbitant price.

During the week Ty played in a duo at the back band room, but on the weekend he'd move downstairs to the bigger Gold Room and join the quartet who in turn were joined by other musicians sitting in from the other clubs that closed earlier because of liquor restrictions.

On Friday Ty arrived at midnight to move his equipment downstairs. After setting up the amp and his guitar he waited for the rest of the band. At two o'clock they started the first set as customers slowly filtered in.

Friday night was a real piece of work right out of the movies because of the inevitable mock raid. The raid began at a leisurely pace at the ground floor ticket booth where cover charges were collected. When the ticket taker saw the police amble in he'd press a buzzer which sounded a ring at the upstairs bar and behind the stage piano. the band would stop playing and sit down at a table while the waiters cautioned the customers to hide their bottles, preferably in a purse where the cops wouldn't look.

By the time the police got to the Gold Room it looked like a Wednesday night Quaker meeting. Several policemen would shine flashlights beneath the tables as they teased the working girls about being so late.

After the raid was over the highly amused customers settled back into their party mood. Ty took his break upstairs in the less crowded back band room where he could sit and observe some of the celebrities who came to unwind at the Penthouse.

One night Ty and Wilf, the drummer decided that they should go into competition with Carl the chef and start bootlegging bottles of booze to the customers. They could charge a few dollars less than Carl and still turn a good profit. They stocked up with a variety of mickey bottles and concealed them in Wilf's bass drum. In between songs the knowing customer would come up to the back room band stage and handed Ty the money which he handed to Wilf who would then produce the chosen beverage. For three weeks Ty and Wilf raked in the profits from their bootlegging sideline. They intended to make enough money for a journey to Toronto, the current music capital of Canada.

One early December night two things happened that would hasten Ty's trip to Toronto. The first event occurred as Ty was walking down the narrow hall to the back band room. Mickey, one of the Penthouse managers came out of the kitchen and put grip on Ty's arm. "Come here for a minute, I wanna talk to you," Mickey said leading Ty to a small anteroom. "I hear you been selling bottles, and I want you to stop."

Ty liked and respected Mickey which gave him the courage to plead his case. "But Carl sells booze," he said innocently. "Carl knows who he's selling to, you don't. All we need is for you to sell to an undercover cop and we'll be shut down for a month. So put an end to it."

Ty felt embarrassed. He hadn't realized the risk he was putting the club under. "Jeez, I'm sorry Mickey, it won't happen again."

Mickey smiled. "Okay, go play some tunes."

Wilf was sitting behind his drums as Ty told him what had just happened.

"No sweat, man," Wilf consoled, "we've got enough to get there and live for three months."

Just then, as Ty strapped on his guitar, the second event took place when he turned to see a thin woman with dirty blond hair standing in front of him.

"Do you know Yesterday by the Beatles?" she asked.

"Yeah, sure," Ty replied, Wilf counted the song in as Ty watched the thin woman walk to a table where she sat down, alone.

It's not that Ty was slow, it was just that he was nineteen and didn't yet understand the ways of an adult woman. He didn't know that this woman would set all the standards by which he'd judge women for most of his yet to be adult life.

When the next break came, Ty fought the temptation to go to the woman's table and went instead to the front band room to listen to the jazz trio. The front room band had a sax player, a pianist, and a drummer, all of whom were well into their fifties. In later years Ty would come to realize that their musicianship, though perhaps outdated, was superior to his own at that time. But for now they were an enjoyable curiosity.

"Hi, I'm Sheila."

Ty opened his eyes and looked up at the thin woman.

They spent the night together, and the next, and most nights thereafter. She was separated from her husband and had a child. Ty had expected her to just stop showing up as his few previous lovers had done, and when the Christmas holidays arrived he was relieved when Sheila was obligated to spend time with her family.

At the Penthouse he felt free again. He and Wilf were getting a good sound together, for a dupe, and they looked forward to setting musical word on fire in Toronto.

In a lifetime there are always little regrets that come back to haunt you. Little mistakes that claw at the soul on lonely nights and somehow force you to justify your loneliness. Her name was Margaret. She was a dance instructor who made love so desperately aggressive that Ty thought things in the world of sex were surely getting better with each new season. Margaret was new to the city with no family and few friends. She had the personality of a friendly nun. She wasn't flirty and seemed very loyal. But after Sheila, Ty liked his freedom. Not to fool around, but to concentrate on his precious music.

The night before New Years eve Ty and Margaret laid in bed. "So, are you playing on New Years eve?" Margaret asked.

"Yeah, till five in the morning."

"Can I come?"

"Ah, the place'll be packed, there won't be anyplace for you to even sit down."

"Oh! Okay."

Ty never saw Margaret after that night, but years later that night would make frequent hauntings.

(Five)

January 1966. At the foot of Granville street Ty and Wilf removed their equipment from the overburdened taxi. Using a cart they made their way inside the train station. After a frantic forty minutes they settled down in their seats as the train slowly pulled out heading for virgin territory.

Wilf, who was ten years older than Ty, was an easy-going type guy and he'd enjoy the entire trip mingling and making friends. Ty, however, would grow increasingly miserable during the five day journey of being cooped up in the confines of the train. They had berths but the daytime activities of staring out the window or seeking refuge in the bar car started to get on Ty's nerves like a bad case of cabin fever.

The highlight of the trip for Ty was somewhere in Northwest Ontario when he spotted a distant pack of wolves trotting over a flat, snow-covered piece of barren land. Where were the wolves going, Ty wondered. Where was he going, leaving the safe, familiar womb of Vancouver for a place he'd only seen on television. All he really knew about Toronto was that Gordon Lightfoot and Ian and Sylvia were there, and if it was good enough for them it was where he wanted to be.

His only contacts in Toronto were two sisters who were once girlfriends of his brothers, and had lived at his family's house for a short period when Ty was fourteen. As anxiety and self-doubt were about to blow Ty's head apart, the train inched into the Toronto station.

It was just past ten at night when Ty and Wilf secured their equipment in the baggage department and walked out of the station which was on the waterfront so there was only one direction to go. They were too excited to worry about accommodations after five days on the train so they just walked, each carrying a suitcase. Picking the first street that looked like it led to something, they strolled wide-eyed taking in everything that was without doubt new and foreign to them. Finally they looked down a side street at a towering slab of cement with no windows that rose high in the sky.

"Looks like a prison," Ty offered.

Wilf grunted. "Maybe we'd better find a main street."

The "prison", in fact, turned out to be the magnificent Nathan Phillips Square building that housed the city hall, but at night, from that angle, to a couple of westerners who had just got of the train, it just might as well have been the gates of hell they were looking at.

With a mixture of tiredness and excitement Ty and Wilf stopped at a phone booth. Ty fished a phone number out of his wallet and dialed.

"Hello?"

"Hi, is Karen there?"

"Just a minute."

"Hello?"

"Hi, Karen?"

"Yes."

"Hi, Karen! This is Wayne and Ed's brother."

"Oh, hi, Ty! Are you in Toronto?"

"Yeah, me and my drummer decided to come and see what's going on here"

"Oh, good. Do you have a place to stay?"

"No, Karen, can you put us up for a couple of days?"

"Sure thing. Where are you?"

"Ah, let's see." Ty looked for a street sign. "We're at Younge and Dundas."

Karen gave bus directions and soon the travelers were entering a large apartment in north Toronto and being hosted by Karen, Marsha, and their mother.

Karen and Marsha had met Ty's brothers in Montreal several years previous while the brothers were touring. If you could multiply the word gregarious a hundred times, that would describe the

personality of Karen who instantly made a friend out of anyone who spoke in her general direction.

Marsha was more down to earth, but just as gregarious in subliminal ways.

While Ty's brothers were still touring, Karen and Marsha decided to visit the West. The brothers sent word that the girls would be showing up, and when they did, Ty's parents took them in. On several occasions Ty and Karen stayed up and talked well into the morning hours. Karen had that magic affect of validating a person's existence. Not ever having sisters, Ty found in Karen the only female outside of his Mother who treated him like a full-fledged person.

And it was with brotherly concern that he responded to Wilf's confession several days later, when they had secured their own accommodations, that he was in love with Karen and wanted permission to court her, that TY said it wouldn't be a good idea.

Yorkville Village was Toronto's musical heartbeat. It had several streets full of coffeehouses and boutiques. On the weekend those streets were solidly packed with sightseers peacefully strolling past the various venues. The Purple Onion with its open stage. The Riverboat where acts like Jessie Colin Young, Harry Chapin, Gordon Lightfoot, Ian and Sylvia performed. The Mynah Bird with dancers in the upper windows.

The likes of Neil Young had reported vacated Yorkville village six months earlier and headed for the United States.

Ty and Wilf walked by the Mynah Bird and looked up at a window where a girl dressed as Batwoman danced seductively.

"That looks, " Wilf said.

"Let's go in and see what's happening," Ty responded.

A skinny blond man met them at the door collecting cover charges.

"We're musician from Vancouver," Ty said. "We're interested in playing here."

The skinny blond man waved them in. "Okay, come in. I'm Mister Kerr. I'll talk to you in a few minutes."

Ty and Wilf passed a room on the right side of the hallway where younger people danced to recorded music. A set of stairs tempted them but they followed the hallway to a back room where a folk singer sat strumming a guitar at a serious looking crowd. They watched for a few moments then went back to the stairs. Going up, Ty noticed the wallpapers' rich red texture with intricate designs. He thought

it looked like wallpaper you'd find in a very expensive brothel. At the top of the stairs several rooms branched off the hallway. They walked into the front area where Batwoman weaved her body to the music for the onlookers on the street. Ty glued his eyes to her black, skintight costume. She turned and looked in his direction. From behind the black mask her eyes flickered like a gypsy fires. She looked wicked. Ty was certain he'd found the ultimate display sensuality. At that moment he put her on an unattainable pedestal that would one day crash down and leave a lifetime scar.

Ty's concentration was broken by the approach of Mr. Kerr. "So you fellows want to play here. Come over to the office."

On a cabinet behind Mr. Kerr's desk stood a high cage in which a dark brown bird with a curved beak was perched.

"Rajah," spoke the bird as the three men peered into the cage.

"This is Rajah," said Mr. Kerr proudly. "He's mynah bird."

Ty and Wilf fought the urge to bow or exchange greeting with the creature upon Mr. Kerr's earnest introduction. Wilf broke the momentary ice. "So you named your club in his honor."

"That's right," beamed Mr. Kerr, who took out his pen and reached for a piece of paper. "So what kind of music do you play?"

"Folk-rock," Ty replied, "and a few originals."

"Ah, good," said Mr. Kerr. "We've been wanting to experiment with live music in the big room downstairs because it has a dance floor, but we can't afford a full-piece band. Do you think the two of you could get people up and dancing?"

"That's just it," said Ty, "I play electric guitar and Wilf plays drums. We've got a big sound for a duo and people in Vancouver had a pretty good time dancing to our stuff."

Wilf nodded. "We've got a repertoire of over seventy-five songs from Elvis to Dylan, and Ty's got a few good songs he's written."

Mr. Kerr scratched his chin and looked at Ty. "Do you suppose you could write a song about Rajah?"

Ty went with the flow. "Sure, the Mynah Bird would be an easy title to work from."

Mr. Kerr put down the pen. "Okay. We'll start with three nights a week starting Thursday. How does twenty dollars each per night sound?"

Ty and Wilf rented a room in a large house three blocks west of Younge street. It was sparsely furnished with two beds, a chest of drawers, a sink, and a closet... After playing at the Mynah Bird for two months Wilf got a part-time job stocking shelves at a supermarket from midnight to eight. While Wilf slept, Ty spent the afternoons search for music stores and walking slowly through taverns on Younge Street where bands were playing for the "happy-hour" crowd.

When Thursday evening rolled around Ty and Wilf walked up to Yorkville Village where Batwoman waved to them from the Mynah Bird's show window.

"I've got to see what's behind that mask," Ty muttered.

Wilf laughed. "Just make sure Mr. Kerr doesn't find out, or we might be looking for another gig."

They called their duo "Wind and Dust," with Ty being Dust and Wilf being Wind. Ty mildly suggested it should be Dust and Wind, but Wilf pointed out that WInd and Dust was more phonetically poetic. After saying the names in alternating order several times, Ty agreed. He made a point of remembering that the sound of words in a particular order could possibly make his own songs more effective.

The dance crowd at the Mynah Bird was a mixture of older teenagers and younger office types who preferred the Rolling Stones over the Beatles. Ty preferred the opposite, but with Wilf's urging, they played a few Stone's songs like "Get Off My Cloud", which Ty sang with a vengeance at the dancers.

During the breaks Ty would often go upstairs and sit watching Batwoman, who always danced when the duo was on a break and took her breaks only when the band was playing. Ty decided that this would be the night. He had written a short note in which he confessed his interest, and included his phone number and address with an invitation to visit him sometime. He walked to the bay window where Batwoman danced on a wide sill. She gracefully spun around. Ty smiled up at her and put the note at her feet, then went back downstairs to do the next set. His heart was still pounding wildly as he and Wilf got back on stage.

"You wouldn't believe what I just did," Ty said.

"You finally talked to Michell." Wilf wide-eyedly responded.

"No. Is that her name, Michell!"

"Yep. I asked that British waitress. She's just out of school and isn't going steady with anybody.

And by the way, I made a date with the waitress."

"Yeah," Ty laughed, "how'd you manage that?"

"Well, I asked if I could take her home, and she said 'Oh, do you have transportation?' and I said 'sure, I've got a forty thousand dollar machine outside - it's called a bus!'"

By late Spring Ty had discovered that if you didn't have much money in Toronto, Center Island was the place to go. Most every Sunday he'd take a ferry to the island where he'd try to write some songs or simply walk around gawking at lake Ontario. By the time he got back to the room at night Wilf would be getting ready for his night job at the supermarket. With the extra money he earned, Wilf decided to take drum lessons at a local conservatory. He'd sleep till four in the afternoon then go for the lessons from seven to ten, and then take the subway to his job.

Monday night found Ty working on his songs. The music came easy but the lyrics didn't. He found it hard not to use words and phrases that were already in hundreds of other songs. Words like: YOU BROKE MY HEART; I'M SO LONESOME AND BLUE; I'D CLIMB THE HIGHEST MOUNTAIN; I'D DIE FOR YOU; I'M NOTHING WITHOUT YOU.

These words certainly captured a recognizable human conditions, but, he thought, there's got to be a fresher, more original way to convey emotions in the words of a song. His current effort was called "The Wild Dogs of the city," about a homeless derelict who roamed the back alleys looking for food. The chorus went:

AND THE WILD DOGS OF THE CITY,
THEY KNOW OF MY WAYS;
WAITING FOR FOOD SOMEONE HAS THROWN OUT
AT THE BACK DOORS OF DIRTY CAFES.

He was working on the last verse and was stumped. A gentle climax was called for but the words just wouldn't come. He wanted to take a break but then the pangs of loneliness that cursed his weekdays would have to be fought off. Going out and enjoying the night life was out of bound to Ty's meager budget, and he refused to even think about getting a part-time job as Wilf had done. No, he was a musician and getting a day job would as Wilf had done. No, he was a musician and getting a day job would be a sell out of his craft.

Ty heard a faint tapping at the door. He put his guitar down on the bed and started to get up but his foot was asleep. Limping to the door he opened it and saw a girl with long brown hair caressing a face with quiet features of beauty. The eyes! He'd know those eyes anywhere.

"Michelle! I'm glad you came. Come in."

With no chairs in the room Michelle sat on Wilf's empty bed as Ty cleared up the song sheets on his own bed and sat down facing her across the room. They chatted for a few minutes about the Mynah Bird, then Ty shifted the conversation to more personal matters.

"Do you live with your parents?"

Michelle's face dropped a bit. "Right now I do, but after summer I'm getting my own place. I'm starting a real job in the fall at a sporting goods store. How about you, do you have another job besides playing?"

Now Ty's face dropped a little. "God, no. I'm musician and nothing else. Guys like Wilf can do both, but I just can't see myself working eight hours a day just to make money."

Michelle laughed. "I can't wait till I get out of dancing. I feel like such a fool in that costume."

"Are you kidding! You look so mysterious and sexy. How come you don't like dancing?"

"I get tired. And I'd rather be going out to clubs at night. Last year i was a waitress at the Riverboat so I got to see all the big acts."

Ty heard pattering on the window and looked over his shoulder. "Hey, it's raining."

Michelle got up and walked over to look out the window. "I love the rain," she said sitting down on Ty's bed.

They both turned and knelt on the mattress resting their elbows on a high window sill and stared out at the rain. Ty liked the way she smelled. It was a mesmerizing scent that drifted into his nostrils and paralyzed his vocal cords. The words were there in his thoughts; how attractive she was, how much he liked her, but they were frozen in a panic state of ecstasy. She was so near. He could have just put his arm around her so easily, but his brain would not allow the process to take place. Part of him felt horrified at his inability to touch this beautiful young woman, and part of him was content that she was merely in the same room, on the same bed, breathing the same air.

Michelle spent the night, she on Wilf's bed, Ty on his own. In the dark he stared wide-eyed at the ceiling, listening to Michelle's soft breathing as she slept, and silently cursing his stupidity. Before she left the next morning they made plans to go to Center Island on Sunday with Wilf and his girlfriend. Ty was relieved that he'd have another chance at Michelle, and, he thought, next time he wouldn't be so respectfully meek.

The following Saturday the dance room at the Mynah Bird was jam-packed. It was a warm June night and everyone was in high spirits. Mr. Kerr was gleefully collecting cover charges at the door where a lineup stretched out nearly to the sidewalk. Wilf was in seventh heaven as he executed the intricate drum patterns he'd picked up at the conservatory. Ty was busting a gut to play the new songs they'd added to their repertoire. Sweat poured down his face as he half recited, half sang Dylan's LIKE A ROLLING STONE. And when they went into IN THE MIDNIGHT HOURS, Ty pretended he was Otis Redding, even though it was a Wilson Picket song. Outside the door of the dance room Ty caught a glimpse of Michelle leaning against the far looking at the floor.

"Let's slow it down a bit," he said to Wilf, who wiped his forehead and said: "Good idea, what'll it be?"

"Ahhmmm, let's do WHEN A MAN LOVES A WOMAN."

Wilf counted in the song as Ty tried to catch Michelle's eye. Just as he sang the first line, she looked up and Ty's eyes locked onto her's refusing to let go until the song was over. When it ended, Michelle smiled then left her position against the wall to go and get back into her Batwoman costume. She hoped Mr. Kerr wouldn't be disturbed that she had come out ofognito on her break.

One of the dancers called out for a Rolling Stones song, which put a momentary damper on Ty's mood. He banged down hard on a G chord and in ad lib tempo began to sing: "When I was younger, so much younger than today." On the word "today" Wilf came in and they played the Beatle's HELP two times through to end the last set of the night.

At one a.m. Ty, Michelle, Wilf and his girlfriend made a final arrangements for their trip to Center Island as they sat on the steps outside the Mynah Bird. They'd meet at Ty and Wilf's place then walk down to the ferry terminal at about nine o'clock. Then after cheerful good-byes, they went their separate ways.

When Wilf and Ty got home, Wilf went straight to sleep, but Ty sat on his bed quietly strumming on the guitar. He wasn't tired. He felt full of life and superhuman qualities seemed to seep out of his guts. He decided he could stay awake until Michelle came in the morning. Years later he would often recall this moment and then recognize it for what it was. It was a state of being that some musicians couldn't contend with. It was what could be called "Winding Down" from a successful night when built-up energy would just not dissolve to make way for another day. Superhuman. It sounds pretentious but when it's four in the morning and you're not tired, and you look upon your sleeping roommate with pity, then

superhuman, in retrospect, is what you would call your state of being. You lay back and try to relax. But all you can think of is reliving every song, every dancer who gave you a thumbs up look. It's like God peered down on the planet earth and saw Ty bloody Robson and a number of others making the best of what the world had to offer, and upon seeing this, God says, Ah, all is well on the planet earth tonight, then he, God, goes back to sleep for another day. Then God can go back to sleep in perfect perfection. Then God can go back to sleep...

.....

It was like the echo of machine gun fire. "Ty, wake up. Ty, wake up! Come on, wake up Ty. He's not going to wake up. Ty, get up!"

A breeze floated through an open window. Ty opened his drowsy eyes and yawned. He looked over at the clock that bombarded him with the digits 4:24. He had blown it, but was too tired to care. Shortly after 6 o'clock Wilf came home and spoke of a wonderful day of renting bicycles, eating popcorn and hot dogs, and sipping around the island like tourists. Wilf chose not to tell of Michelle's slight sadness.

Ty groaned and got dressed like an angry matador. He gave a curt good-bye to Wilf then went out walking, aimlessly at first, but soon he was on University avenue and shortly after he stood outside the Riverboat where Michelle worked on Sunday nights. He fished in his pocket for three dollar cover charge and went inside. A long narrow room with tables against one wall that had a series of lighted portholes opened before him. He found a table near the stage and waited for Michelle to appear. A poster on the wall proclaimed that Ian Tyson would be performing that night. Ty praised his good luck, but wondered why it was Ian Tyson and not the usual duo of Ian and Sylvia.

He saw Michelle approaching from the far end of the room carrying a tray. When she finally reached his table Ty smiled warmly as Michelle lit a candle that glowed over her lovely face. "So what do you want?" she asked in a neutral tone of voice.

"I'll have a coke and French fries," he replied, "and when you have a break, can I talk to you?"

Michelle left and returned four minutes later with the order, then left again without a word. Before Ty could call after her, Ian Tyson and two musicians took the stage and began tuning their guitars. There he was! Ty announced to himself, the man who wrote FOUR STRONG WINDS; the second national anthem. But where was Sylvia?

"Good evening folks," boomed the voice of Ian Tyson. After further preamble he added, "Sylvia's not here tonight because she's about to give birth to our first child."

A large splash of applause greeted this announcement, and as Ian introduced the first song, SPANISH IS A LOVING TONGUE, Michelle came and sat down across from Ty. "I've only got a few minutes," she remotely said.

'SPANISH IS A LOVING TONGUE
SOFT AS MUSIC, LIGHT AS SPRING'

"I'm sorry about this morning," Ty said with all the sincerity he was capable of.

'T'WAS A GIRL I LEARNED IT FROM
LIVING DOWN SANORA WAY'

"That's okay," Michelle replied looking at the stage.

'I DON'T LOOK MUCH LIKE A LOVER
BUT I'D SAY HER LOVE WORDS OVER,
MOSTLY WHEN I'M ALL ALONE:
"MI AMORE, MI CORAZON"

"I thought I could stay up all night until you came, but damn it, I fell asleep. I can barely remember you guys trying to wake me up."

'HOW THOSE ARMS WOULD GET TO FLYING,
ALL TOO SOON I'D HEAR HER CRYING
IN HER LITTLE SORRY TONE:
"MI AMORE, MI CORAZON"

"Don't worry about it," Michelle said as she took a sip of Ty's coke.

'WELL, I AIN'T SEEN HER SINCE THAT NIGHT,
I CAN'T CROSS THE LINE, YOU KNOW'

"So tell me what you think," Ty pleaded.

'THEY WANT ME FOR A GAMBLING FIGHT,
LIKE OR NOT, IT'S BETTER SO'

"I'm in love with someone," Michelle blankly stated.

'YET, I'VE ALWAYS SORT OF MISSED HER
SINCE THAT LAST SAD NIGHT I KISSED HER'

"I'm in love with someone too," Ty said, wishing she would know it was her, and yet too dismayed to say it outright, not knowing who was the object of her love.

'I LOST MY HEART, I LOST MY SOUL,
ADIOS, MI CORAZON.'

Michelle stood up and excused herself. At closing time Ty waited for Michelle but she had disappeared. He waited outside the Riverboat for a half hour hoping she would walk out the door, but she didn't appear, so he walked into the lonely night until the morning sun rose.

Friday evening was hot. The minutes before they were to play, Ty and Wilf sat outside on the steps of the Mynah Bird gabbing about music, love and stupid goofups. Just as Wilf was explaining the finer points of writing sheet music for drums, Ty saw a face leaving the busy sidewalk and coming toward him with a broad smile. After a confused moment he recognized the face. Sheila! The Penthouse. The autumn of sixty-five.

"Sheila," Ty gasped, "what are you doing here?"

Sheila gave Ty a hug and greeted Wilf. "I phoned your Mom last months, she told me you came out here, so I thought I'd join you. My divorce came through. He got custody."

"Ah, good," Ty said, trying to sound sincere. "We've gotta play now. Come in."

Ty started the set off with A WHITER SHADE OF PALE and sang it twice through, lost in thought. He felt like an animal that had been tracked down and trapped. He hadn't had a woman in over six months and was in great need. But he wanted Michelle. But Michelle wasn't talking to him. He was so bloody confused as he ended the song reluctantly. "What should we do next?" he asked Wilf.

"How about TICKET TO RIDE," Wilf replied, giving a slight tap on his crash cymbal. Sheila glanced out of her conversation with Mr. Kerr and smiled at Ty.

"I think I'm gonna be sad, I think it's today," Ty sang, trying to return Sheila's smile at the same time. "The girl that's driving me mad is going away."

Ty stretched the set out to over an hour before taking a break. He wanted to hide, which is what he did by walking passed Sheila without saying a word and exiting out the back door to the alley. After a fifteen-minute walk he returned determined to treat Sheila like a friend, and nothing more.

A small crowd stood and chatted in the dance room. The folk singer in the back room had an overflow audience. Mr. Kerr stood at the front door assuring people in the lineup it wouldn't be long before they could get in.

"Wilf and Sheila went to get something to eat," Mr. Kerr said to Ty who was anxious to start playing and regain the crowd from the folk singer.

Years later Ty would look back on this night and realize that he had been as immature as a three-year-old who assumed the whole world revolved around him and all others were merely characters to make his life more interesting. "Egocentric," he would say to himself as an old man, when he remembered these times. He hated himself for it, but forgave the fact that he was only twenty then, and entering a new state of being called adulthood. If he could go back and change anything, it would be the night he'd spend with Michelle. How simple thing would have turned out if only he'd try to consummate his hours alone with her. Dear, lovely Michelle. She had the courage to come to his room. Why hadn't he just put his arm around her shoulder as they knelt by the window looking out on that rainy night. He had wanted to, but some force of doubt made him powerless to touch this rare beauty of youth who danced to the wildness of the night high up in window on Yorkville avenue when he was fresh off the train and hungry for the very best that life had to offer. 'Oh, Michelle, I'd trade my soul to have that night back.'

Ty sat on the front steps. All his problems were out of sight except to get back on stage and play. He tried to plan the next set. They'd start with a ballad: JUST LIKE A WOMAN; then maybe something faster like DOWN IN THE BOONDOCKS; then I WANT TO HOLD YOUR HAND; and then a bloody Rolling Stones song, hmmm...SATISFACTION...no, a ballad: AS TEARS GO BY.

Ty looked up out of his thoughtful gaze and slowly focused in on Wilf and Sheila walking up the sidewalk hand in hand! He got up and went inside to the dance room. Picking up his guitar he felt the weird feeling of competitiveness burning in his blood. How dare Wilf do such a treacherous thing. If Wilf had just discussed in first, all blessings would have been given. But this was war!

The old man shakes his head and smiles. 'Good old Wilf, he sure knew how to manipulate people, with the best of intentions, I'm sure.'

Wilf climbed the stage without saying anything. He thumbed his bass drum and tightened the wrench on his high hat cymbal. Ty calmly fiddled with his guitar, then broke the ice. "Let's do Ruby Baby."

After the end of another long set, Ty put down his guitar then found Sheila and took her out the back door. He kissed her, softly at first, then deeply.

Within days, Ty, Wilf, Sheila and a generous friend moved into the generous friend's apartment above a store in north Toronto. Sheila's story of the past year was revealed over the weeks. She'd taken a beauty course at Blanch McDermit's school of cosmetology and hair design, where she learned to make herself artificially beautiful with makeup and hair manipulation. She'd come east because of Toronto's job opportunities, and because she had friends there.

As autumn approached Sheila found a job as a manicurist in a highbrow barber shop. She and Ty got their own apartment and Ty got his first experience of living alone with a woman. At first it was blissful. Ty would spend the afternoons exploring upper Toronto while Sheila was at work. Every few blocks seemed to present a fresh neighborhood different from the last. He liked the old houses with trees in the yard shedding colourful leaves that covered the sidewalks. He kicked his way through the leaves just as he'd done as a child in New Westminster. Autumn in Toronto was similar to southern British Columbia, which was a blessing after Toronto's summer that was like walking in an invisible steam bath compared to BC's moderate summers.

At about five o'clock Ty would head home and wait for Sheila who arrived around six-thirty. Then, after several weeks, she began getting some at seven, and then seven-thirty, and finally, one evening, Ty sat in the apartment at eight o'clock with no sign of Sheila. 'My God, maybe she's got into an accident. Maybe she's lying in the hospital right now with no friends or family at her side!'

Ty went down to the porch of the large apartment house and waited for her to appear. His mind felt a torment of anguish as the minutes passed. Just after nine a car pulled up and stopped. A time later Sheila got out of the car and walked leisurely to the porch. She was startled to see him standing there, but quickly smiled and said "Hi!"

Ty turned and walked up to the apartment as Sheila followed. They didn't speak for several minutes, then they entered into a dialog of accusations, denials, and refusals to believe. Ty's heart throbbed beyond control as Sheila's shrieks assaulted his ears. His hands found themselves shaking her by the throat until the shrieking stopped pounding into his impassioned brain. He withdrew his hands and Sheila gasped for air.

From that time on, Ty was virtually Sheila's slave. She had brought him to the bottom of the pit of hell, and there he chose to stay so he would never again rise to the passion of being a potential killer.

Winter came and Ty received a letter from his second-eldest brother inviting Ty to come to Whitehorse in the Yukon Territories to join his band playing at a local cocktail lounge. Slave or not, Ty couldn't be stopped from journeying to the Yukon. Sheila wanted to stay with her job for the time being, but, perhaps, she would join him in a month or two.

The morning before he was to fly to Whitehorse, Sheila ordered him to come to her place of work for a manicure, his first ever. He showed up at ten-thirty and Sheila introduced him to the owner, who Sheila recently told Ty, had said of him: "He doesn't seem to have much on the ball."

Sheila gently held Ty's hand and applied a clipper to the overskin above his fingernails. Ty watched with calm confusion as slight amounts of blood appeared on each fingertip...

Ty had never flown before. He wasn't nervous but didn't know what to expect. He sat by window and watched the pavement below as the plane slowly taxied to the runway. As speed built up he gulped and felt his heart thumping, then the pavement suddenly began to sink. His head felt light as the plane swooped up over the land. He decided he like this flying business, and shuddered thinking about the hellish train trip to Toronto. Wilf hadn't been at the airport to see him off. In fact, they hadn't seen much off each other lately. Wilf spent a lot of time in Detroit playing with better musicians who were more into jazz.

Hours later, after a few stops, the plane landed on a plateau above the city of Whitehorse. Maybe it wasn't a city. To Ty's eyes it had looked like a small outpost town from the air, surrounded for miles by trees and rivers layered with snow. He got off the plane and immediately noticed a white puff of fog leaving his mouth with every exhalation. By the time he got in the taxi his mustache was a host to dozens of tiny icicles which he wiped away with his thumb and forefinger. He shuddered and wondered what he'd gotten himself into.

The Bamboo Lounge had a comfortable atmosphere but otherwise was the same as most other night clubs with a stage, a dance floor, and enough tables and chairs for the young adults of Whitehorse who preferred rock and

(To be continued...)