



SOMBERRIG

a novel by
RHONDA WATERFALL



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Dear Iris,

I don't know how to be a father. It's taken me till now to be able to put those words together. To be able to realize this is the crux of the problem. I don't know how.

I once spent the day with another writer and his family. He had two children just a bit older than you, but at the time they were six or so. I watched him observe his children kick a ball around. The look on his face, total joy. I asked him if he was ever afraid when they looked him in the eye. No, he said, Never.

I barely had a father myself. How much this plays into my wretchedness, I don't know, but it can't help. My father was a drinker. What dark shadows followed him I couldn't even say. I knew so little of him. Perhaps there are genetic things I've inherited from him. I don't know. But somehow that only feels like an excuse for my actions.

I love you. There's no doubt. But that love is what scares me. My fear of hurting you or not being enough has driven me to hurt you and not be enough. When you were little I would grow anxious when your wide eyes fell on me. They wanted something from me, and I didn't know what it was. So I stayed away longer and longer; the longer I stayed away, the easier it was to do.

But perhaps it's not too late. Perhaps I can make it all up to you.

I've come to the woods to make myself better. And when I come out, it will be to you that I go.

All my love. Forgive me. Actually, don't forgive me. I won't even burden you with such a request. Never forgive or forget a man who has hurt you, like I have.

Deep love Your Dad Thomas

Sombrio is a story of three fatherless fathers—Charles, Thomas, and Roy—sitting with themselves in a squatter's shack on the west coast, on Sombrio Beach with their decisions, with their addictions, with their deceits, and with their legacy as artists and as parents as the storm of the millennium approaches.

I'd suggest to you that the great theme of our time is precarity, living as we are on a climatic knife's edge with the inevitable influx of climate refugees on the horizon, with wealth and wage disparity at post-industrial highs, and daily advances in robotic, computing, and data-mining technology underway. And further that, in the midst of the MeToo, Black Lives Matter, Occupy, and Climate Justice movements, that *that* precarity has been intensified by and for the benefit of those in positions of authority.

And it's amid that theme of precarity, indeed in direct response to it, that this novel, Sombrio, which proposes the gendered misperception of individual superiority as the central catalyst of the precarity of our time, is set, in December of 1999 awaiting Y2K.

Against the background of the Canadian west coast—with its vibrantly relevant questions of land rights, of the Crown ownership of Indigenous land—perched on the cusp of impending armageddon, Sombrio is a story of untutored paternity and responsibility foregone. **It is a story for our time. It is a story for the people. And I look forward to discussing its adaptation with you.**

Core Themes

- Return to Nature;
- betrayal of the public good by those in positions of private authority;
- the societal costs of radical individuation over collective good;
- precarity in the Endtimes;
- Armageddon/nature's wrath;
- Indigenous Land Rights in Canada;
- masculinity/fatherhood in crisis.

Plot Summary

On the outer coast of Vancouver Island, in an abandoned squatter shack at Sombrio beach, three men, Thomas an ex-bank robber and poet, Charles a master painter, and Roy his apprentice have sought refuge in order to evade the chaos predicted to erupt on New Years' morning. When it is widely reported that airplanes will plummet from the sky, economic structures will collapse, and the thin threads that hold society together will crumble.

Each man takes with him beliefs of how he will conduct his life after the collapse. Thomas wants to kick his drug habit and be a true father to his drug-addled daughter. Charles wants to complete his masterpiece and be heralded a genius, a title he desperately covets. Roy wants the love of his girlfriend Fern, a mind free of demons, and world renown for his artist talents.

When Fern, with lazy indifference, sleeps with Charles, the fragile connections between the men begin to fray.

Thomas, tormented by his own childhood molestation and the nightmarish visitations of his daughter, hatches a plan for one last bank heist. When the plan fizzles, and depression overwhelms, he burrows into the earth and creates his own sanctuary.

Charles, narcissistic and blind to the pain of others, confronts his past with a brother lost in WWII and a father who may not have been biological. His three daughters, conceived by three different women, band together and taunt him for his attention and affection. They demand emotional reparation.

There is a moment of light, when a marriage ceremony is held for Thomas and his wife, surrounded by a grove of sitka spruce and the Pacific Ocean in the distance. However, between all the men, fissures have begun to form and resentments simmer. Roy fears he has lost his grip on Fern, and with fragmenting mental health, climbs the tallest cedar tree and builds a crow's nest with a view of the horizon and the windstorm predicted to hit on New Years Eve. Charles is dumped by his art dealer and told his style is no longer in vogue. Thomas meets his daughter in the woods, tells her he is drug free, and they plan their future

together in the year 2000.

As the windstorm descends and rips apart their shelter, madness takes hold. Charles, convinced his daughter's want to kill him, drags his masterpiece out into the rain, and tries to salvage it by tying it to his back. Thomas, in a drug fuelled stupor, rejects his daughter and Roy shoots the man he finds in an embrace with Fern only to realize he has killed his own son.

The storm decimates the forest as the three men frantically try to mend their fractured lives. Charles, disoriented, in a forest of downed trees, his three daughters appear and he begs them to save their father. He stumbles toward their ghostly forms only to plummet to his death on the sand and rocks of the beach. Desperate, Thomas calls out to his daughter and finds her, under a tree, just as the noose tightens around her neck. He walks into the ocean and lets the waves wash him away. Roy distraught and wild climbs up to his crow's nest and in one last fire ceremony sheers off his braided hair. The tree trunk snaps in the wind and Roy falls to the earth below.

Meet the Principals

Charles Tindal

Visage: Christopher Walken

Character Specs: 79 years old; 6'2"; 163lbs

Description: Charles is like an old goat—dug up from the past with riddles and antiquated words on his tongue. He believes his painting will be the only thing to survive and some future civilized people will be raised on his genius. He can really talk some shit sometimes. No wonder his three daughters hate him.

Quotes:

“I filled this hovel with broads.” (14)

“My painting in the National Gallery is hung beside a Tom Thomson,” I say. Again, she cannot seem to conjure up a response. “I don’t know who that is,” she says. So many times I want to strangle her. (15)

“In the early fifties, I found Paris to be full of drunks and blowhards, so I went to Greece.” (29)

“I will name the painting, Sombrio,” I call out over the wind. “It will be the crown jewel at my next opening.” I remain silent for a moment to provide Cedar a chance to comment, but she doesn’t. “The tale of our adventure here will be a fortuitous addition to my narrative, much like the years I lived in Europe, and then in boats of various forms. It will be legendary, just like the stories of Rimbaud or Hemingway.” Cedar sits up and rests her hands on the plump flesh above her knees. “Rimbaud and Hemingway were mentally ill,” she sputters against the rain. (Charles, 137/138)

To give you a sense of Charles,
here is a character trailer created
by the author, Rhonda Waterfall:



Roy Kruk

Visage: Thomas Brodie-Sangster

Specs: 32 years old; 5'8"; 161 lbs.

Description: Resentful, Oedipal apprentice to Charles, born into meagre circumstances among five siblings who “would kick the feet out from one another for an extra piece of liver,” Roy is like all the light and darkness and beauty of the world in one man. He’s Charles’ apprentice but Roy is more talented, I’m sure. I love him and he’s broken but I suppose no more than the rest of us. Every day he waits for the end of the world.

- “I braid my hair in two ropes that hang down my back, the ends dipped in sandalwood oil and tied off with red string.” (3)

Quotes:

- “The day I stepped into the dark forest of Sombrio was the happiest of my life.” (4)
- father to Shane (13)
- “The big story [Charles] uses, to try and impress anyone who will listen, is how he has a painting in the National Gallery of Canada, hung beside a Tom Thomson. When I’m at my meanest, I say this has been done only to illustrate how weak Charles’ own technique is, a show of best and worst in the realm of Canadian art.” (19)
- There I was with all my earnest accomplishments in a portfolio case, marching off to art school where I would learn from the most polished minds. But all I found there were fakes and losers. There was no camaraderie. Everyone was locked inside their little protective shell. I thought we would pool our intellects, discuss the great troubles of the day, and ponder revolution. But instead, everyone was too busy putting purple food colouring in their hair and trying to get a job at the art supply store down the way. (43)
- **I could have painted over Shane’s sophomore efforts and put the canvas to better use. (47)**
- All around me, trees snap and crash to the forest floor. I run back to the shack, now only three walls and a collapsed roof. I rifle through my meagre possessions until I find what I search for. Under a pile of brushes and tubes of oil paint is a wallet-sized photograph of my son as an infant. I’m struck by how this infant’s face is like a puff of smoke that has dissipated into time and space, into something I barely understand. What is a baby anyway but something that becomes unrecognizable, something that ceases to exist moments after the photo is taken? If it weren’t for the writing on the back, “Shane, 2 months,” I wouldn’t even be sure this image had been my child at all. (134)

To give you a sense of Roy,
here is a character trailer created
by the author, Rhonda Waterfall:



Thomas DeWolf

Visage: Brad Pitt

Specs: 58 years old; 6'0"; 172lbs.

Description: Thomas is a poet and an ex-bank robber if one can be an *ex*-bank robber. He's also a junkie. He thinks he hides it, but everyone knows. Perhaps the only one who doesn't know is Thomas, poor fucking Thomas. He's got a big heart though. I've always liked his daughter when she isn't wrecked.

Quotes:

- "My wife visits when my drug supply runs low." (1)
- "Twenty years I've failed her." (2)
- "With her bare hands, she has torn into her gut; skin and muscle hang in tattered strips."
(11)
- I will stop the drugs and build my spiritual and physical strength. I promise her that I'll leave the woods a different man. A man she can be proud of. I'll write every day; poems will be the yardstick of my growth. Most importantly, I'll be a real husband and father. The father that Iris deserves and the husband my wife should have. I tell her we must have no secrets. (48)

To give you a sense of Thomas,
here is a character trailer created
by the author, Rhonda Waterfall:



SCENE 1

Reference pages: Page 3-5

Date: Late November

Scene characters: Roy

Scene characters: Fern

Scene characters: Chief

Character motivation/goals: Roy wants to be somebody. He wants to be noble, he wants to be from some place that is distinct.

Scene synopsis: Roy expresses the aspects that make him who he is. He wears his hair in braids and has a tattoo as if to give the image of nobleness. But he then goes to explain he is from a nowhere town from nowhere people. He expresses how Fern admonishes him for believing that his past dictates his future but Roy knows that everything about his past and future lead back to the cottage on the lake where he was molested by Chief.

I braid my hair in two ropes that hang down my back, the ends dipped in sandalwood oil and tied off with red string. Remember how you poked them the night I met you, in that basement bar, and you asked if I was going to a pow-wow. Then you laughed, a real laugh, an unhinged laugh that I knew would wrap itself around my neck and not let go. I imagine myself to be a majestic man on the edge of the western frontier, about to ride a horse into Indian Territory to fight alongside the Iron Confederacy. On my chest, a tattoo of a circle with a cross at its centre in the form of a plus sign, that symbolizes fire. This is our life experience, one big circle with a fire in the middle that will not stop burning. All we can do is tend the flames, to prevent an inferno that takes everything away.

I was born in a small inland town on Vancouver Island. My mother's people were a jumble of Western Europeans so far back no one can name the places they originated from. On my father's side, they came from Russia, supposedly near the Ural Mountains. But what does that mean? For dinners, we ate boiled wieners, carrots, canned peas, along with white bread and mustard sandwiches. When mom was distracted, we stole cups of white out to eat in the woods, a gooey paste formed on our tongues and the roof of our mouths. There were six of us, me, and my siblings. We would kick the feet out from one another for an extra piece of liver.

You, Fern, say none of this shit matters: where we come from, what our childhoods were like. You might be right, but then you had none of these experiences. You had two parents who lived together, who didn't want to kill each other. You were fed on a regular basis. You say people need to rise above their pasts, but you didn't have to rise above anything. Your

past lifts you up like a gold-plated escalator toward all that is good and true in this world.

My escalator only goes to the cottage on the lake and a headdress of eagle feathers worn by a fat white man. A lake tainted yellow by the cedar stumps that rot on its boggy floor. Why the headdress? Can you imagine being haunted by something you have no explanation for? Now, when I see a headdress I am suddenly nine-years-old with gangly limbs, a badly shorn head, dark circles under my eyes, and an empty belly, like some kid stumbling out of a Nazi concentration camp. Every moment of my life, I am that kid, alone in a broke-down cottage with light breaking through the dirty plate-glass window. I imagine that light to be sharp, to cut me in half, or to be a bomb, a bomb of light, that detonates and sends shattered glass through the air to slice throats and detach limbs. The dark forest floor left littered with timber and small-boy parts. How my forty-year-old self smiles at the image of my dead nine-year-old self, my blood seeping into the forest bed of pine needles and horsetail roots. There's more than one way to be immortal—immortal, like Picasso in an Indian headdress.

The day I stepped into the dark forest of Sombrio was the happiest of my life. It was the first time I had a sense that I was about to do something right and essential. I knew in here, I would find what I had always sought, above relief from my mind, more than just an escape, but transcendence. I will become a legend.

SCENE 2

Reference pages: Page 25-26

Date: early December

Scene characters: Charles

Scene characters: The daughters

Character motivation/goals: Charles believes his daughters have come to kill him.

Scene synopsis: Hearing his daughter's singing out in the woods, Charles bangs pots and pans together to scare them off.

The melodic intertwined cords of my daughters' voices singing Old Man tear me out of a dead sleep. I get up and hope the singing is just a strange sticky vestige of a dream that continues to cling in the air of the woke world. Out a knothole in one of the wallboards, there is only dark. Is it now they've come to kill me? Surely this must be their objective, to slit my throat and laugh as I gurgle my last breaths. I won't give them the satisfaction. With two cooking pots in hand, I go out onto the front path and bang them together, to scare the evil spirits away. Moonlight glows off the wet bark of the forest. For a split second, I believe I see the flash of a white robe. With a fiercer determination, I smash the pots.

“You will not get me!” I yell. “You will not get me!”

I smoke cigarettes and pace along the path in front of the hovel. The sound of their singing can still be heard but has grown faint. Is it a trick, I wonder. Are they only singing softer but steadily growing closer and nearer to me? Like the devils they are, closer and closer. I will sink a knife into their eyes and hearts. I will sink my teeth into their flesh. They will not get me.

Thomas comes out of the hovel and asks what the racket is all about.

“My daughters are out there. They have come to kill me,” I say.

“Not if Roy gets you first,” he retorts.

I ignore his paltry attempt at humour.

“Good luck,” he says and tramps off into the woods.

When I turn my attention back to where I thought the voices had come from, the girls are all there. If they are actually my daughters, perhaps they have been possessed by demons? Their white forms ripple amongst the trees like ghouls, with skin frighteningly luminescent. Their lips pressed together, they no longer sing but hum that gawd awful Neil Young tune. A song that has always grated my nerves. I bang the pots and step closer, and they rise up into the trees as if pulled by some invisible cord, like some trick of the theatre. Even my youngest, Cedar, does not come to me. “Cedar,” I call.

SCENE 3

Reference pages: Page 72

Date: mid December

Scene characters: Charles

Scene characters: Noreen (Charles’ sister)

Character motivation/goals: Charles believes his daughters have come to kill him.

Scene synopsis: Charles tells how his father was cold and paid him no attention and compares it to the upbringing of his own daughters that was full of adventure and nature.

As a child, my father was the man in a room with a closed door. On the odd occasion when the door was open, I’d peek into the room, knowing better then to step over the threshold.

He would be at his oak desk, absorbed in what I could only imagine were mysterious things, adult things. The drapes would block out all the light, and he would have one small desk lamp on. He never acknowledged I was there. So what that he paid for private school? I'm sure he'd have been at a loss to say where the school even was. What kind of life was that? Every day in that dark house with its wood-panelled walls and ornate furniture no one was allowed to sit on. My daughters, on the other hand, were born in the wild open world, with sticks in their hair and dirt on the bottoms of their feet. Their education, I'm sure, was better than any lesson I studied at school, with its ties and scratchy wool trousers. Those girls are the earth, and they have no gratefulness for it. Why would they visit Noreen? She can't do anything for them. Noreen shouldn't allow it. She should send those girls on their way. Honestly, they'll stop at nothing. Perhaps, I should do as my own father did, find a room and close the door to them.

SCENE 4

Reference pages: Page 92-93

Date: Just before Christmas

Scene characters: Roy

Scene characters: Roy's Mother

Character motivation/goals: Roy want's his mother's love.

Scene synopsis: Roy calls his mother but when she answers he is thrown into past trauma and finds it hard to speak. His mother questions if he is on drugs. In frustration he breaks the receiver.

The payphone has a door that doesn't close and busted out panes of glass. I dial the operator and say I want to make a collect call. There are clicks and popping sounds, and then my mother's voice, which I wish didn't send me down a spiral of being four, then eight, then twelve. How I wish the number took me to someone else's mother. A mother, kind, and eager to listen. For some reason, I begin to cry, a real cry with gasps and sobs. There's snot and tears and a white-hot burn in my chest.

"What do you want?" she says.

And I have to wonder myself, what is it that I want? To wind back the clock and start over, to be birthed again into this world, fresh, untainted, unmolested. I want things that are impossible. I want things she can in no way provide me, even if she wanted to.

"There's a storm coming," I sputter into the phone.

“Good God, Roy. What is this? You on drugs?”

“No Mom!” I yell. “No, I’m not on drugs.” I slam the receiver into the payphone box over and over until the black plastic cracks. When I stop, the receiver is limp, like a broken doll in two halves. Only the wires, like intestines, hold the pieces together.

“Mom!” I scream into the dead phone, into a black pit of silence.

SCENE 5

Reference pages: Page 134-135

Date: New Years Eve

Scene characters: Roy

Scene characters: Chief

Character motivation/goals: Roy wants to cleans himself of his past.

Scene synopsis: Roy goes to the crows nest where he wants to cleanse himself by cutting off his braids and burning them. But he still feels the haunting of Chief and hears what he imagines are the cannons of The Sea Devil firing off shore but the sound is actually the tree beneath him snapping in the storm and Roy falls to his death.

In the crow’s nest, I’m tossed from side to side as the tree is assaulted by gales carrying the thick scent and cold of the ocean. If I was a real lost boy, I’d brandish my sword at the storm and tell it to go away, not to bother us anymore. With sodden twigs and strips of cloth I build a fire in a metal bucket. Fire is an amazing thing, bright and hot. Like the fire that burns at the centre of my chest. I wait till the fire fills the bucket, and I take out a single razor blade. I pull one braid taut, and near the scalp, I press the sharp edge into the hair. The blade slices through each strand and leaves the plait limp in my hand. I toss it into the fire and watch the fibres burst with flame and then curl and dance. I slice through the other braid and release it too, to the fire. The fire, like every fire, is hungry and wants more. I pick up an eagle feather and hold it together with the photograph of my son. My son who is dead, the son I killed. I’m a man between a dead father and a dead son, bookended by death. I drop the feather into the fire, and the flames sizzle. The fire eats each barb like a hungry ghost.

The heat on my face is so hot, I’m certain blisters will begin to form. It might be the best thing I’ve ever felt. It might be the first thing I’ve ever felt. What would the man in the headdress say? Come sit down. I have cinnamon buns. Come give me a hug. The fingers of

the fire reach out for the photograph of Shane. There's a cabin on the lake that all the kids in town say you shouldn't go to, that you should stay away from. The fire burns my hands, and then there's a crack sound that ricochets through the treetops like the blast of a cannon, so loud I can't tell in which direction it originates. Could it be Captain Hook's Sea Devil off shore? I stand up and feel the boards beneath me give way. An intense roar—like the very earth itself cracking open—overwhelms the night. For a moment my body hangs in space, blackness above, and blackness below. My being is weightless before gravity pushes me to the forest floor.

SCENE 6

Reference pages: Page 57

Date: late November/early December 1999

Scene characters: Thomas

Character motivation/goals: Feeling the heightened energy, fraying the bonds between the men, and trying to outrun his own addictions, Thomas decides to dig down into the earth to create a sanctuary that only he is privy to. A reflection of the calm he is trying to bring upon his inner turmoil.

Scene synopsis: With a rusty spoon Thomas digs a cave in the ground where he creates a private sanctuary.

Inside the shelter, near my dark corner where I like to perch, I start to dig a tunnel into the earth. I can see no other place to go but down. With a rusty spoon, I scrape away at the black earth, deeper and deeper. I hack through roots and remove large stones until there's a chamber that I can hide in. The thick root of a mighty hemlock acts as my chair. I light the space with candles and line the floor with newsprint. It's a fine spot that I've managed to keep a secret from the others. Even my wife is unaware.

Everyone needs a place that's all their own, a place no one else can see. I keep my most precious books here: *Junkie*, *Big Sur*, *Tropic of Cancer*, *A Season in Hell*, the plays of Sophocles, *Waiting for the Barbarians*. They sit on a small shelf carved into the earth. The pages within are thin and worn, specific words and sentences underlined, notes in the margin, the corners bent. Every once in a while, I'll take a book and open it at random and pray that what I might read there will reform me or provide me a guide as to how to be in this world.

SCENE 7

Reference pages: Page 66-67

Date: late November/early December 1999

Scene characters: Thomas

Character motivation/goals: Thomas recounts the path of his suicidal ideation from his molestation as a child through to the suicide of an elderly man in the neighbourhood he grew up in.

Scene synopsis: Thomas attacks a man he believes is responsible for the molestation of a boy. After, Thomas spirals into what culminates in his first attempt at taking his own life. For the first time he holds a gun to his head but does not pull the trigger.

After a robbery in Ventura, we went to a drive-in for food. We had the appearance of a car full of college kids, out for some burgers and milkshakes. The Beach Boys played on the radio, "Good Vibrations". I went inside the restaurant to use the bathroom, and on my way back to the exit a kid caught my attention. He was seven or so with cut-off jeans for shorts, his blonde hair in a crew cut. I stopped and sat in one of the booths to watch that boy. For a split second, our eyes met, and I saw all I needed to know. At once, I knew we were the same, that everything he was living and experiencing was everything I had already known.

A man with a yellow t-shirt on and dirty jeans tapped the boy on the shoulder, and they went out to where the cars were parked. There was a hot flash behind my eyes, and it was as if a crack broke through my entire body. I followed them out into the heat and came up behind that man and smashed his head with my fists. He buckled to the pavement, and I kicked him over and over. The only thing that stopped me were my guys who pulled me away and forced me into the car. I forget who was at the wheel, but they drove out of there so fast, the force pushed me back against the seat. No one spoke until we got home and we were all out of the car, standing on the driveway.

"What the fuck?" one of the guys said. "What the fuck, Tom?"

But I didn't know what to tell them. I hung my head and told them to get over it. How could I explain to them how I knew the boy was being molested by that man? That the same thing had happened to me, once upon a time. Inside the house, I drank all the booze I could find. For days, I was like a wild animal on a rampage. The cops called out to me. We kept them down in the basement under a wood counter, and I could envision them there, in the dark, wrapped in burlap. Over and over they called my name and asked me to come and get

them. Visions repeated in my mind, the metal trigger against the curl of my index finger, and the barrel against my temple.

When I was a boy, back in my hometown, there was a man who blew his brains out. People in town said he had stormed the beaches of Normandy and done many other heroic things. I couldn't understand it. Why would a hero kill himself? Why would a man who had survived enemy fire shoot himself? A bunch of us clambered near the house and tried to get a look through the bedroom window, where it was rumoured the wall was covered with blood and brains. The cops shooed us away, so we ran out into the scrub and boasted to each other, how we would never be so stupid as to kill ourselves, especially if we were a hero. Heroes, if they were smart, got all the girls and became movie stars like Rock Hudson.

Every time I walked by that house, on the way to school, I thought about that man and wondered why he did it, and wondered if I could do it too. Could I pull the trigger? Over time the images and thoughts morphed in my brain until I became the man with the gun to his head. Over the years, I have lost count of how many times I've put the barrel to my head. But that time in Ventura, after the boy, that was the first time. The first time I picked a gun up with the intent of using it on myself. I sat there on the basement floor, with a bottle of whiskey and the weight of the gun in my hands. I cried and wanted everything to be black, all the mixed-up thoughts and emotions to stop. I wanted an answer for all the world's unanswerable questions.

SCENE 8

Reference pages: Page 75-76

Date: late November/early December 1999

Scene characters: Thomas

Scene characters: The Shadow

Character motivation/goals: Thomas' need to run from his past; from the shadow who represents his molester.

Scene synopsis: Thomas ruminates on his desire to escape his hometown and his molester. He illustrates the high one gets from bank robbing and how with his gang they lived a life of roaming the west coast, robbing banks, and living a life of what he considered wealth.

When I look back at my life, it's always the same vision: the dust stirred and lifted from a

gravel road, dried out by a prairie sun, tall grass, the smell of hot leather, and the struggle to pull enough air into my lungs, panic that I may never breathe again. The shadow cast by the man in the car has darkened my entire life. Then I'm on that gravel road, and I start to run. My seven-year-old heart pumps blood thinned with warm beer. I just fucking run and run and run. Nothing ever gets closer, not my mother, or my father, or the house where we live. It's just one dry hot dusty road that never ends. And then that same road leads out of town to other places, and to people I tear through.

There's an unbelievable feeling one gets after robbing a bank. It's euphoric. It's your best day multiplied by a thousand. It's your best high. That's why I believe no one ever robs just one bank in their lifetime; you have to repeat the experience. Twelve hours of pure nirvana can be yours; all you need is a gun, a gang, a bank, and a plan.

The first bank I robbed was so easy I couldn't not do it again. It was 1968, and I was nineteen. After the robbery, we hid in the hills inland from San Francisco and waited. Not a thing happened, no sirens, no takedown, no cops. We combed the newspaper, and there was only a small mention. How was it that more people weren't holding up banks? We got maps and came up with guidelines: rob banks in small towns, towns with multiple roads out; never rob more than one bank in a single county. We worked our way up and down the coast: California, Idaho, Oregon, Washington State.

The newspapers started to call us the 5'o'clock gang on account of the robberies going down just before the banks closed for the day. That suited us just fine. We thought it was a real hoot. And then there we were, with money, time, and girls. Like normals, we'd leave the house as if heading into the city for a 9 to 5 and come home with milk, bread, and bags of cash. We grilled steaks by the pool and floated in the water until the stars came out. My girl floating by my side. Both of us dumb enough to think that our lives would always be this way.

SCENE 9

Reference pages: Page 118

Date: Just after Christmas 1999

Scene characters: Thomas; The Shadow; Iris; Charles.

Character motivation/goals: Thomas wants to hide in his cave and get lost in the words of his book. He wants to avoid all the chaos happening above. He wants to disappear.

Scene synopsis: With Charles ranting about the storm and tension building,

Thomas slips into his cave to escape everything. He picks up *The Wreck of the Hesperus* and reads the first stanza. He tries to conjure peaceful thoughts about his daughter but the memory of the shadow overwhelms.

Above me, I can hear Charles rant about the government and how he's convinced he's under surveillance. For what reason I can't imagine. He slams things to the floor and against the walls. There's the smash of glass, an ashtray perhaps. There's no end to the madness that rages above me.

Fern told us a storm is expected, the storm of the century; and I wonder of which century. Every storm now is the storm of the century. There are no layers to the immediacy or categorization of devastation. Everything is—all live, or all die. You make your choice.

I take *Tropic of Cancer* off the shelf, open the book to a random page and read what's there before me. The words rise and swim through my mind. I could eat these words. I want to become the words. I want to be in my cave forever with my books and absorb everything they might have to tell me. I let *The Wreck of the Hesperus* fall open and read the first stanza I see:

“Come hither! come hither, my little daughter, And do not tremble so;

For I can weather the roughest gale, that ever wind did blow.”

I close the book and meditate on those words and tell myself that I'll read these words to Iris when I'm clean and we're all together. Then a darker thought enters my consciousness. I was just a boy when the shadow introduced me to heroin. I try to push the thoughts away and the numbness they bring to my body, but the numbness overwhelms. The shadow knew things I didn't.

SCENE 10

Reference pages: Page 127

Date: New Years Eve

Scene characters: Thomas

Scene characters: Iris

Character motivation/goals: Thomas wants to please his daughter by getting the shell but it turns into frustration and crying on Iris' part and bewilderment for Charles. He does not understand her needs.

Scene synopsis: Charles dives under the water to get his daughter a moon snail shell she spotted but when he surfaces she takes the shell and throws it back in the water.

When my daughter was ten I took her out in a rowboat, into an inlet known to be shallow and sandy. She spotted a moon snail shell on the bottom and asked if I would get it for her.

“What if I drown?” I asked her.

She burst into tears. I was confused. I didn’t know what to do. I told her I’d get the shell and not to cry.

“No,” she begged. “Don’t go. I don’t want you to drown.”

“Don’t worry,” I said. “You want the shell, I’ll get it for you.” I jumped into the water and swam down and grabbed the shell. When I broke the surface, her face was buried in her hands.

“Here,” I said and held the shell out for her.

She grabbed the shell and threw it back into the water. “I didn’t want it!” she screamed.

Setting/Location

Sombrio Beach, British Columbia, December, 1999.

Tonally Similar Films

Beasts of the Southern Wild Dir. Benh Zeitlin

The Lighthouse Dir. Robert Eggers

The Witch Dir. Robert Eggers

The Last Blackman in San Francisco Dir. Joe Talbot

The Assassination of Jesse James Dir. Andrew Dominik

True History of the Kelly Gang Dir. Justin Kurzel

Tonally Similar Music

“Electric Pow Wow Drum” by A Tribe Called Red

“Uja” by Tanya Tagaq

Tonally Similar Paintings



RALPH STEADMAN



JACK SHADBOLT

Author Rhonda Waterfall studied Sales and Marketing at The Sauder School of Business at the University of British Columbia and Creative Writing at The Writer's Studio at Simon Fraser University where she was mentored by Stephen Osborne. For many years she worked in Ad Agencies directing print production and managing creatives and the creative process. For a time she lived in Zimbabwe and worked for the Zimbabwe Book Development Council where she was involved in creating a Zimbabwean Book Skills Directory and event planning for the Zimbabwe International Book Fair. She has had fiction and non-fiction published in several literary journals along with the novel, *The Strait of Anian*, published by Now or Never Publishing and a short story collection, *The Only Thing I Have*, published by Arsenal Pulp Press. She was born in what is now the ghost town of Ocean Falls on the west coast of Canada and currently lives in Toronto. Her novel, *Sombrio*, is forthcoming from Gordon Hill Press in Fall 2022.

Publisher Jeremy Luke Hill was born in Guelph, Ontario. He completed both a BA and an MA in English Literature at the University of Guelph, and he's been working in the city's literary scene ever since. He founded Vocamus Writers Community, a non-profit organization that promotes book culture in the Guelph area. He also founded Vocamus Press, a local-centric micro-publisher that specializes in Guelph literature. Growing Gordon Hill Press as a national trade publisher is his next step in building literary capacity in the area.

Editor Shane Neilson is a writer from New Brunswick. He holds an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Guelph at Guelph-Humber, an MA in English from the University of Guelph, and a PhD in English and Cultural Studies at McMaster. He has extensive editorial experience in Canadian Literature, serving as the editor of Frog Hollow Press, a Victoria-based chapbook press for almost twenty years and counting; a prose editor at Anstruther Press, a Toronto-based chapbook press; and an associate editor at *Hamilton Arts & Letters*, an online magazine based out of Hamilton. In addition, Shane has worked with several Canadian presses to ready manuscripts for publication and has edited many of the poets and poetry critics at the forefront of Canadian literature and has a wealth of experience that he brings to bear with both poetry and nonfiction manuscripts. Shane does not freelance and only works closely with writers publishing with Frog Hollow, Anstruther, *Hamilton Arts & Letters*, and Gordon Hill Press.

Extraliterary Liaison Kevin Andrew Heslop is a polydisciplinary doofus whose work in film, theatre, visual art, and poetry has respectively appeared with the Toronto Short Film Festival (2022), the Los Angeles International Film Festival ("), the Milan Gold Awards, the Vancouver Independent Film Festival, the Berlin Shorts Award, the Paris Play International Film Festival, the Montréal Independent Film Festival, the Forest City Film Festival, and Astoria Pictures, a film production company he founded in 2022 and for which he serves as President and CEO; the Grand Theatre (2017), Purple Shorts (2018), and TAP: Centre for Creativity (2017, 2019, 2020, 2022); TAP Centre for Creativity (2018), Artlab Gallery (2021), McIntosh Gallery (2022), the plumb (2022), and Westland Gallery (2023); and The Blasted Tree (2018), Frog Hollow Press (2019), Anstruther Press (2020), Gordon Hill Press (2021), and Knife | Fork | Book (2023). In his capacity as Extraliterary Liaison for Gordon Hill Press, he facilitates the adaptation of Gordon Hill Press works through various media, particularly visual art [McIntosh Gallery (London, ON, 2022); Heaven Scent (London, ON, 2022); and Westland Gallery (London, ON, 2023)] and film.



Gordon Hill Press is a publisher of poetry and stylistically innovative fiction, non-fiction, and literary criticism (especially concerning poetry). We strive to publish exemplary writing by a diversity of writers, particularly writers living with invisible disability.





White



Ripley's Aquarium



astoria pictures



Things She Wants

Directed and produced by Kevin Andrew Heslop, *movements.* is a filmic anthology of some of the best of Canadian poetry, 3/12ths of which is provided here to give you a sense of what the nascent Astoria Pictures produces, should Heslop's involvement as a co-producer, spec writer, or director of a filmic adaptation of *Sombrio* prove possible.