

WATCH

A NOVEL

Daniel Barton

WATCH

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Acknowledgements

I would like to comment on a possible misconception. As per tradition, 'Daniel Barton' is the only name following the title. This may induce the reader to think that I am solely responsible for the creation of *WATCH*. This would be an erroneous assumption, as many people have assisted. These people need to be acknowledged, and I wish that I had a more deserving platform by which to credit them.

My wife, Carolyn, has provided me with invaluable inspiration and support through the years. She typed the full manuscript, corrected countless errors, proof-read, and saved money to fund this project. My daughter, Sarah Michelle, has been a co-creator from the early days of the outline to the final printed word. Her intellect and creativity have substantially enhanced the final work and my authorial skills.

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Other contributors provided invaluable critique and inspiration: Sarah Luttrell (outline content) and Melissa Wright (early chapters review), Francis Guenette and Kelly Elizabeth Martin (proof-reads).

Each and every page of this novel has been graced with the loving read of a person with a deep respect for English literature and the written word. This is how I would like to say, 'thank you' to my editor, Christine Penhale.

The list could continue, but tradition asks that you begin an adventure, made possible by the efforts of many.

— Daniel Barton

*'He who would uphold honour shall
forever be at court with himself.' - Anonymous*

YEAR: 1940 GLASSÜTTE GERMANY

PREFACE (TRANSLATED)

Young Herbert Osterhagen sat behind his very own chest high workbench. Before him lay many scattered internal pocket watch parts, and off to his right lay his neatly organized watchmaker tool set. He inspected each tool: a small holding vice, two pairs of slender pliers, a set of small screw-drivers, a light leather mallet, long thin tweezers, a peg wood holding implement, an assortment of small files, fine horsehair brushes, and finally his most prized possession: a watchmakers' loupe—a gift from his grandfather for his seventh birthday. As he centered the leather strap over his head and lowered the small cylindrical magnifier over his eye, he recalled his grandfather's advice upon receiving this most excellent gift, *Remember Herbert, always keep both eyes open. At your age now, the brain will quickly adjust.* He was right. Already Herbert could focus effortlessly. For a young boy of only seven years old, wearing his own loupe made him want to pretend he was a super-hero. He could enter another world, a place where only he could go, where great discoveries were made in the smallest of things.

Often, he would come here to his grandfather's watch repair shop after school. Occasionally, Grandfather would be having a nap. On those days, Herbert would quietly enter from the back entrance, make his way into the repair room and retrieve his loupe from the bench. Then, he would go back outside scouring the surrounding yard for small insects. When possible, he would place the willing specimen in his hand, and thoroughly examine it, head to tail. What a wondrous world indeed.

On just such a day, Herbert intently focused on a small, interesting spider when he felt a hand on his shoulder. This startled him. The spider scurried off, sensing danger.

"Herbert!" He looked up to the stern face of his grandfather, a tall, slender man, with slightly stooped shoulders, close-cut white hair, and a short square-cut white beard, which highlighted his crystal blue eyes. Herbert knew he was about to be scolded for taking his loupe outdoors. But there remained a twinkle in Grandfather's eyes.

"What have we said about taking our watchmaking tools outside?"

"That they could get all wet and dirty ... maybe ruined."

"Indeed. And what form of punishment will be required to ensure that this does not happen again?"

Herbert cast his gaze downward, "My tools shall be taken away for a time."

"Do you believe this is a wise and just punishment, Herbert?"

He removed the loupe from his eye. Herbert stared into Grandfather's sparkling blue eyes, reached out with the loupe in his hand, and offered it, "Yes, sir."

As Grandfather gazed down at his young grandson, he could not conceal a soft smile that crept upon his face. He waved off Herbert's gesture and placed his arm around the young boy's shoulders. "I think, for the rest of this afternoon I would like to tell you a story. It's a story from a long time ago, about a special watch, a unique man, and your great-great grandfather, Hans Wilhelm Osterhagen."

Together grandfather and grandson, hand in hand, made their way back inside the watch repair shop. Herbert eagerly sat behind his workbench and watched as his grandfather strode over to a large cabinet located against the wall. He retrieved a set of keys from his pocket, selected one, unlocked the door and withdrew a silver pocket watch. Herbert could not help but notice a rather sad look come over him as he sat on his stool facing him. Saying not a word for many moments, grandfather gazed at the watch, "This is a copy of the original." His warm smile had returned, "It is a replica of the watch I referred to, a particular timepiece, created with the assistance of my grandfather—your great-great grandfather—Hans Osterhagen. The year was 1783."

"A gentleman, a man of great repute, commissioned him for some mechanical parts and an encasement. This person returned with the assembled watch to have the final engraving done. He paid quite handsomely in advance and insisted on paying a great deal more than the quoted price. Before he departed, he explained to my grandfather, 'This is a watch of significance, greater than the finest watches of our time. You are a young watchmaker with much skill Hans Osterhagen, but I am also going to call upon your honor. I ask you, no matter what may befall, to take great care of this timepiece.' He then left, never to return for the completed watch."

Herbert was breathless. He could feel his blood pulsing. He knew about his bloodline and loved his grandfather's stories, but this one was so very exciting. Who was this gentleman—a prince, a famous inventor? Grandfather reached over to Herbert, offering him the watch. The young boy held his breath as he accepted the watch in both his hands. He looked to his grandfather, who smiled at the boy's excitement, then gestured for him to open the encasement. As Herbert did so, Grandfather continued.

“The watch was a unique timepiece, as you can see by examining the replica; only one hand and the numerals on the dial

are quite unusual, like some ancient calligraphy, and there is no winding or time setting crown—most strange. The watch was put away in a cabinet, awaiting the day when its owner might return. My grandfather checked on it often, but this became less frequent as time went by.”

“Several years passed, and then one day he thought he noticed, upon inspection of the watch, that the single hand had moved from its original position. To address his curiosity, my grandfather decided to dismantle the timepiece partially. He removed the four slotted screws that secured the dial. Removing the single hand, he then lifted the plate away, revealing the internal mechanism. What he saw astounded him. The watch had motion! It had never been wound in any way, yet indeed parts were moving! He witnessed a movement he had never seen before. After much observation, and with limited understanding, he expounded that this mechanism was driven by a type of perpetual motion.” ‘Impossible,’ he later proclaimed, ‘dual or split magnetic fields are causing a slow rotation, geared to maintain an almost microscopic movement. But why?’”

Grandfather paused. Herbert no longer examined the replica. He sat fixated, hardly wanting to breathe, lest he miss one word. “My grandfather, Hans Osterhagen, instructed, ‘This time-piece is never to be harmed or dismantled for fear it will cease to perpetuate.’ He also insisted, ‘Due to magnetic suspension, this watch does not require lubrication, thus scheduled maintenance will never be required.’”

“He cared for and studied the watch intensely and documented all he could, making drawings, sketches and blueprints, with precise measurements. All information, he recorded in this handbook.” Grandfather had risen and walked over to the cabinet. In his hand, he held a leather-bound book. “Finally, he would solder over the slotted screw heads that fixed the dial, making it quite difficult for anyone to ever dismantle the pocket-watch.”

Herbert’s gaze shifted back to the replica in his hands. He observed the small screws that held the dial in place and readily discerned the screw heads on the watch had not been altered. Grandfather returned to his stool. Once seated, he addressed his young grandson with a thoughtful smile, “I can answer the question you must be thinking Herbert. Although the watch you hold in your hands was made with great precision and precise detail, sadly it has no replicated movement. My grandfather, Hans Wilhelm Osterhagen was to become known as one of the world’s greatest watchmakers of

his time, both admired and respected by his peers. Ultimately though, the mystery of the unique watch eluded him.”

“The care of the timepiece was taken over by my father when my grandfather died. After many years, we became quite occupied, preparing to relocate and establish the Osterhagen Watch Company, turning the business into a much larger manufacturing platform. My father became extremely busy, and he eventually entrusted the care of the watch to me.”

With deep sadness, Grandfather declared, “I’m afraid I lost the watch.” Herbert was startled, he squeezed and held tightly to the watch in his hands as Grandfather resumed. “You see, I had been doing my best to help out. Much had to be done; our tools, equipment, cabinetry, etcetera needed to be relocated, a most unsettled time.”

“My father had taken on a new apprentice to help out with the many new tasks confronting us. It so happened that exactly at this time a man came to our shop to pick up a pocket-watch he had commissioned for us to build, several months prior. I do not recall his name. He was an oil rigger from a small Canadian town in the province of Ontario, apparently the first location for oil production in the world. It was 1881, and by that time the value of crude oil as an energy resource was widely understood; experienced men were required to locate and set-up drilling wells for oil in many parts of the world. Just such a group of these workers from Ontario were working then in Germany—at Oelheim—just south of here, near Hanover. They were unsuccessful in their attempts to locate substantial oil reserves, so a decision prevailed to move their team of drillers out of Germany to a location farther east in Galicia, known to be within the borders of Ukraine and Poland.”

“As fate would have it, this man—the oil rigger—arrived at the shop to pick up his timepiece at a most unfortunate time. Only the new apprentice was there to accommodate him. In great haste, he arrived, and in great haste, he departed. Many days later we learned an error had occurred. The oil rigger from Canada had been given the special watch by mistake!”

“Our many subsequent attempts to learn the location of the timepiece, alas, were in vain. Only this book and the replica remain with us.” Grandfather held the book to his heart.

“Of the Osterhagen family, it is you Herbert, who I believe shall eventually have possession of this book, and the replica watch. You show a keen interest in watchmaking. I would be proud, when the time comes, to bequeath them to you.” Herbert felt a single teardrop fall from his cheek, and splatter on the face of the watch he held in

his hands. Grandfather smiled a somber smile, but the twinkle in his blue eyes? It was always there.

And so as young Herbert Osterhagen adjusted his loupe, selected a pair of tweezers, and began to assemble the gear train his grandfather had instructed upon for today's lesson, he allowed himself a quick diversion. He must get a beautiful glass jar, one with holes in the lid, to be used for bringing in his willing specimens from the outdoors into the shop, for inspection.

He hoped Grandfather would approve.

ONE

SATURDAY, APRIL 26, 2014. 9:00 A.M. PETROLIA, ONTARIO, CANADA

The bright morning sun streamed through the front bay window of an attractive, well-kept, east-facing home, on a usually quiet cul-de-sac in Petrolia. But on this particular Saturday morning, Sanway Court had an almost steady stream of traffic both pedestrian and vehicle.

Edward James sat in his recliner-rocker near the window. It was turned allowing him to look out to the street and observe the activity. This day was the town-wide garage sale, an annual tradition. Every year on the last Saturday of April, many of the local 5500 residents would participate, buying and selling mostly used items. Residents displayed their wares from their property and were almost guaranteed a high volume of shoppers—bargain hunters. From surrounding areas, they would come in droves, descending on the small town, looking for deals. *Traffic, congestion, mayhem*, Edward smiled as he looked on. *But yes, we all enjoy it. Kind of a coming out from winter*, he mused, an opportunity to get out and chat with neighbours and catch up on local gossip.

Edward laughed quietly. His wife Marie would be missing out this year. She had been called to do an extra shift at the hospital. Registered nurses always seemed to be modifying their schedules. Oh well, Edward found comfort in knowing from experience that missing the annual garage sale would never keep Marie in the dark concerning local current events for long. There were always backup resources available. Edward grimaced. Thankfully he was not one of them. Married to Marie for over 24 years, Edward knew himself to be the quieter, more introverted side of their relationship. They had differences for sure, and that could be a good thing. It was working for Carmen. As their only child, it was becoming evident to Edward she adopted the most positive attributes from each parent.

He thought for a moment, this must be the first time in 23 years she would be absent from the town-wide garage sale. Throughout her four-year Honours Specialization degree from Western University, she made a point of being home during this annual weekend, if for no other reason than to purchase a hot dog from one of her former dance instructors, who sold them for charity every year. Brad lived close by on Ernest Street. He would not be seeing her this year, however. *Let's see ...* Edward glanced at his watch with its bright orange GMT 24-hour hand that he kept set to Carmen's local time in Tel Aviv, Israel. *Ok, so 1700 hrs or 5:00 p.m., 8 hours ahead, she will be*

just now getting ready for supper. Hmm ... I wonder if they serve hot dogs at Carmen's residence in TelAviv?

Edward felt a familiar pang of discontent. He knew what it was, loneliness, although it was becoming less frequent now. Perhaps he was not sufficiently prepared for the recent life changes that confronted him. Carmen had chosen to continue her post-graduate education in a foreign land, and then 3 months later the commencement of his official retirement began, after 42 years of working in the construction trade as a certified high-pressure welder. It was a vocation not known for its good health environment. However, he did feel happy with himself for his personal commitment to physical well-being. Throughout his career, focused attention on safe work habits resulted in long-term health benefits. With an almost addictive passion for physical exercise, including mountain biking and road cycling, Edward also embraced a passionate interest in subjects like psychology and the sciences. He could easily see himself following up now on prior academic studies from the many college night courses he had taken in years gone past. So yes, confidence was realised for him going forward, embracing this new stage of his life. The trouble was, though, he could not share it with Marie. She was 12 years younger. He often wondered, given their age difference, if he was subconsciously seeking his own 'fountain of youth' and trying to be a better fit for her.

Edward glanced down again at the watch on his wrist—a retirement gift to himself—a white dial Rolex Explorer II. Saving for it by working many extra hours of overtime, he waited patiently for many years. When the time came to wear it proudly on his wrist, he became aware that the watch also generated a feeling, a kind of solace. But moreover, for him, the stature of a fine timepiece was the result of craftsmanship. Many of the skills required to make a quality timepiece could be related to the vocation of welding: precision, attention to detail, the art of creating or building something with your hands, the use of many different metals, and the understanding of their properties. Edward thought he was able relate. *Hmm ... maybe I might learn watchmaking; I have more time now. Time—what time is it?* He had just looked at his watch, but he hadn't noticed, too busy making analytical comparisons. *Ah, Marie would understand.* Edward inwardly smiled, recalling her advice concerning his watch.

"Yes Edward, you worked hard for many years, you have saved, and you deserve a beautiful gift to commemorate your retirement. So, go to a jewellery store and find a timepiece that matches your eyes." He could still picture her playful smile. "Then let's move on with life shall we? You can't though, can you? Can you understand Edward, your future watch and my Wal-Mart special will both read the same

time! When mine says 4 o'clock, yours will say 4 o'clock! Same thing!"

"But, I realise you cannot understand this. You have been, and will continue, to do research for months, years even, until you know every model number. You will need to learn all about the gears, springs, hands, nuts, bolts, I'm not sure, but 4 o'clock—still 4 o'clock! Do enjoy your new watch, Edward. I believe you will be happy." And off she went with that sly smile of assumed victory, reigning supreme, with things as they should be.

Yes Marie, enjoy your brief, assumed moment in the sun. But be warned: Carmen, our daughter who minored in Psychology, and I, are working on a new theory regarding watches and their ability to invoke passions and desires forming intellectual stimuli, both conscious and sub-conscious. When completed, perhaps I will title the theory in your honour, Marie. How about: 4 o'clock can be much more than 4 o'clock?

Edward smiled, knowing all too well how his relentless commitment to reason and understanding influenced his daughter's choice in her academic attainments. Her dream was to work within the realm of environmental sciences and bring into the vocation a solid understanding of psychology. Edward thought it an excellent match, and there was no greater pastime for him than to sit and talk at length with Carmen about her studies.

The loneliness returned, so he got up from the chair and started towards the front hall closet to get a jacket. While entering the garage and walking over to his mountain bike, a funny thought popped into his head. *Introverts don't talk much to people, for sure. However, do most talk to themselves constantly? I think yes, because they know they're the only ones who will listen?*

With a smile, helmet on, and passing through the garage side door, Edward went out into the crisp, bright spring morning, pedaling his way through the mayhem of treasure seekers, enjoying the town-wide garage sale of Petrolia.

TWO

The green book was part of him and had been for many years. He was a young man when he found it, almost 40 years ago. *Wow! Could it be that long ago?*

Edward turned onto Discovery Line heading east. It was much quieter here. The road bordered the town, with a part of it flanking the Discovery Museum property, a tribute to oil exploration and production from the early 1800s. As he peddled on, he surveyed the ever-common sight of the old working oil wells in the fields. A faint smell of crude oil permeated the air. He wasn't particularly fond of the odour, but you sort of got used to it. The source of that smell spanned great industry. His former career in welding was directly related: the manufacturing and installation of high-pressure piping systems for the massive oil refineries located 20 km west of Petrolia in the neighbouring city of Sarnia. And it was there, while he lived and worked in the city, where he found the book.

Edward picked up his pedal cadence and switched to a higher gear. There was about 2 km before he would be in the east end and mainstream town congestion again. *A brief escape into the zone? Hardly worth it.* But he wanted to: deep breathing, heart rate climbing, all the way into the red if he wished. The red zone that is, where his cardiovascular limits would be pushed to the maximum. His body responded automatically, muscles warming, stored glucose triggered for immediate use, accompanied by natural chemicals being administered by neurons in the brainstem: dopamine, serotonin. A high, yes, and Edward knew the addiction. He settled his pace to a moderately high aerobic level; the zone he could count on for longer distances. It seemed to put him into meditative thought patterns as well, which in turn often brought him to the place of his own conscious presence; the place of 'I Am.'

*The "I Am" Discourses * Ascended Master Saint Germain* by Godfré Ray King, published in 1936, or simply 'the green book' as he referred to it now, was perhaps the real beginning of his own personal 'I Am' awareness. A similar setting to a garage sale was where he found the book.

That time was a defining moment in his life, a new beginning, a new path; a path that he traveled to this day, and the cost—mere pocket change. As the landscape rushed past, forming a kind of natural blurred abstract, Edward recalled the moment, the setting 40 years ago, still sharp and clear, when he saw the book for the first time.

He could see himself walking down a quiet, tree-lined street, close to the center of the city. Passing a small church, he read a brightly coloured temporary sign that advertised a sale of used items, set up for the weekend in the church basement. It was late Sunday afternoon. The sale would be winding down, with possibly not much left to choose from, but something on the sign prompted him to take a quick look: *'old and rare books.'* *Interesting.*

As Edward entered the building, located the stairs and began to descend, he could hear the sounds of activity beyond. He found the entrance to a large old reception hall. People scurried about packing up boxes, loading items on carts and cleaning up. The sale was basically over. Of the many stackable tables that had been set out, most were cleared off. Scanning the room with its many signboards still present, Edward spotted a big table made up of three regular sized ones, at the back of the hall, posted with its sign: *old and rare books.* The people packing things away had not yet made their way to the back of the room. However, what remained now were no more than half a dozen books. He was disappointed. *Oh well, you're here now, check it out anyway.* As he approached the long table, the few remaining books lay scattered in proximity to one another. At the far-right end, seemingly segregated from the others, lay one overturned green hardcover volume.

Many years later as he would play this scene over and over in his mind, the symbolism became striking. He was a shy young man and alone.

Purchased for a small amount of change, this book became a foundation of learning for Edward, helping him form his own personal, spiritual and intellectual growth. It stayed with him in spirit always. From this volume, he realized strength in positive thinking, which began in earnest that afternoon and continued to grow to this day.

The stop sign at the end of the road was fast approaching. A quick succession of downshifts, and a right turn onto Oil Heritage Road, brought him back into mainstream garage sale traffic.

Garage sales, you never know what you might find. Scanning an overflowing table set up at the side of the road, Edward thought of Carmen and Marie. He missed having them here, on this day. *Hey, cheer up! You had your best find ever, 'the green book' when it was just you! Alone.*

<< X >>

He had been out for almost an hour, circling the east end, and was now making his way back to the center of town. Pedaling along slowly and taking in the sights of this lovely old Victorian town, Edward recalled reading a few years back that Petrolia was rated number three amongst the most Historic Towns or Cities in Canada. He always sensed an underlying feeling of pride and dignity in this friendly place. Many times, he, Carmen and Marie went on self-guided tours through old Historic homes and buildings during scheduled open-house events hosted by the Town of Petrolia. There were many beautiful restored homes, mansions, and commercial buildings to be appreciated.

Arriving at Victoria Park, located in the center of town on the main street, Edward got off his bike and walked it across the road. The park was small, with many old trees shading the grass. Benches were positioned throughout, and surrounding the cenotaph, a tribute to the war veterans, making for a serene setting to view local downtown activity. Edward began walking with his bike around the perimeter. The three nearest sides were bordered by sidewalks, the fourth by Victoria Hall. Edward gazed at the magnificent building, 20 metres to the south, set back from the street: the crowning jewel of Petrolia. As a late 19th-century masterpiece, built in a Queen Anne style, with its old brickwork, stain-glass windows, and overseeing clock tower, this beautiful building stood a proud testament to Petrolia's heritage. The structure served as the town's municipal offices and council chambers, as well as housing an excellent theatre: the Victoria Playhouse Petrolia. Marie shared Edward's passion for live theatre, and together they attended dozens of live productions.

More importantly, the playhouse was for Carmen like a second home. She took acting classes there, at an early age, which led to her enjoying hundreds of hours of volunteer work for the theatre. Next for her came casual part-time help as an usher, then finally full-time employment during the summer, while enrolled in university. The stage, with its many expressions of fine arts, showed her a world full of classic, timeless wonder. Carmen revelled in it. Her own passion was dance and she performed in ballet productions at the theatre herself.

Edward was still looking at the building, but no longer seeing it; he was seeing Carmen on stage, performing en pointe, classical ballet. She was mesmerizing: tall, slender, toned, poised, elegant, and confident. Every movement, right down to the slightest of facial expressions, was precise. He could not look away for an instant, lest he miss even one second of her performance. Marie sat beside him squeezing his hand. She would be crying. All too soon the performance would be over. Then Carmen would smile and curtsy to the audience; she would search with those beautiful green eyes until she found them. They connected. His thought at that moment

was always the same: How could he, Edward James, have ever in part, created such an exquisite creature?

As he turned away and began to mount his bike, any one of the many people passing by on the crowded street might have heard him say, "Life does indeed have its rewards."

<< X >>

"Where did all these cool old things come from?" Edward turned to the young couple monitoring this sale on Maple Street. "We're not really sure about any of this stuff that's up for sale here," the girl offered, as she leaned over the table next to Edward.

He guessed the boy and girl to be in their late teens. "It was the old cane sticking out with the top hat swivelling about in the breeze that caught my eye," Edward smiled. He glanced

over towards the boy, "You two don't live here?" "Ah, no sir," the boy shyly replied as he stuffed his hands into

the pockets of his jeans. "We live in Mississauga. Our mom got us this job for the weekend."

"Ah yes ... bring in the slick, suave, polished, high-profile sales reps from the big city to swoop down and prey on us small town folk!" Edward shifted his gaze from one to the other, holding a straight face. They looked at each other, then back to Edward, nervous smiles forming. *Having some fun with teenage awkwardness.* "Welcome to Petrolia," a grin spreading across Edward's face as he went back to rummaging through the box. "Hey, you guys might want to check out the hot dogs two blocks north on Ernest Street. Brad uses a secret sauce, revealed to none, but loved by all who have tried them; they're rated by my daughter as five stars, with an 'awesome!' added on."

"K, thanks!" Both teenagers grinned now as they stepped a

bit closer to Edward. The young girl continued, "This is our first time here. Our mom has a friend who is a niece of the man and woman who used to live here. The woman passed away recently, and the man has been gone for many years. Our mom's friend is responsible for selling the house and its contents."

"I see. Where do you suppose this box of stuff came from?" Edward held up an old pair of wing-tipped shoes tangled with a bright red pair of suspenders.

The boy offered, "A lady who was here earlier this morning said she knew the couple that lived here. When she looked at that box of stuff, she told us the man, hmm ... she mentioned his name ..."

"Lloyd," interjected the girl.

"Yea, that's right, she said Lloyd did lots of volunteer work for the local theatre here and that this would be an old box of props for sure."

"Makes sense." Edward examined a jewel-studded tiara. "You know these diamonds, rubies, and emeralds could use a cleaning. They have a film of black smudges on them. Actually, most of these items do." He looked up at the teenagers. "Never gonna get the millions this stuff is worth without a bit of polishing. Need to dazzle 'em a bit," Edward laughed.

"I wish we had more time," the young girl complained. "We didn't even get all the prices marked yet. But yes, the black smudges ... when the lady noticed the black on most of those things she said that Lloyd would have gotten the box of stuff after a fire at the theatre where lots of things got thrown out. The fire was terrible she said!"

"Yes, 'terrible' would be an accurate description of that catastrophe." Edward ceased rummaging for a moment. "It happened over 25 years ago, four years before my wife and I moved to Petrolia, and was thought to be an electrical fire that spread quickly. The whole building was pretty much decimated. It burned for days, apparently."

"Thankfully, no serious injuries resulted, however, the town almost lost its most beautiful possession. But, with pride and determination, the citizens of this small town rallied together and fought to restore her, at a cost in the millions of dollars, which came mostly from the generosity of donors. It was a spectacular fundraising campaign, considering the population. These people brought a new beginning to Victoria Hall."

"If you guys get a chance, go check it out. Very impressive. Hey, you have part of the history right here!" Edward reached way down through a vast assortment of costume jewellery, brooches, tangled necklaces, bangles, and earrings, until his hand felt something round and flat that was not tangled up in any of the mess. He brought the object to the surface and held it up, for gesture purposes. *Have the props, might as well use 'em!* He held their interest.

"Yea sounds cool!" The kids nodded to each other.

"I'll start to work on the stuff in that box. Things are slowing down a bit," the girl piped up.

“Okay, I’ll go get some rags. There’s some cleaner in a bottle on a shelf in the garage. Be right back.” The young boy sprinted off into the garage.

Edward stepped back as the girl lifted the box up and carried it over closer to the open garage door. He examined what he was holding in his hand, and with his thumb began wiping dust and black smudges off a metal casing. *Hmm ... interesting, looks like engraving ... feels solid.* He turned it over. *An old watch? Pocket watch? But no winding crown.* He ran his fingers around a seam that split the case horizontally. He located a small pusher that protruded slightly. Pressing with his thumbnail, it snapped open almost startling Edward. It felt like precision. Now he was genuinely interested. But what he saw confused him. *Damn!* He had forgotten his reading glasses. He now had to observe at arm’s length. *Yes, well maybe ... yes, a kind of pocket watch,* he thought. There was a dial, a circular pattern of markers and an intricate scale of close increments with no numbers—either Arabic or Roman numerals— but some form of symbols, perhaps copied from ancient Egypt or Pythagoras. *Strange for sure.* It had only one dauphin-styled hand. What was this supposed to indicate? *Not a clue.*

Edward closed the case again. He revolved it in his hand, looking for inscriptions. He could not see any, although there was a considerable amount of intricate engraving done by machine or hand. He thought the latter.

He glanced up at the sound of voices. Several people started up the driveway to peruse the displayed items. He walked over to the front of the garage entrance. The two teenagers were busy wiping down all the assorted items from the box of props which they had scattered all about.

“So, guys, how much for this? I think it’s an old pocket watch, but I’m not sure.” They both looked up from their task, then at each other. They shrugged.

The girl said, “We don’t know either. Would you like to make us an offer?”

Edward smiled and then reached into his pocket for his money clip. Leafing through a few bills, he paused, “Let’s see, you’re going to need a bit extra for hot dogs, and more of your time will be required to check out Victoria Hall hopefully.” He counted out all he had with him. “\$50.00 okay?”

“Really?” they both responded together. The young girl stood.

“That’s more than we’ve made all morning! Yea, thank you sir.”

“Then we have a deal.” He handed her the money. “You’re welcome.”

With his new purchase safely stowed in his pocket, Edward pedaled in the direction of home and his reading glasses. He turned back towards the young man and the young lady. They waved goodbye to him. He called out, “Again, welcome to Petrolia!” Lasting smiles that only diminished with the increasing distance was his parting vision.



With reading glasses adorned, and a small, high-intensity floor lamp pulled over close to his chair, Edward sat again in his recliner in front of the bay window at his home. With a magnifying glass in his hand, he focused intently on the newest addition to his modest watch collection. He reached over to set the magnifying glass on a coffee table to his left. Looking back to the pocket watch, *at least I think it's a pocket watch, but I'm not sure!* He realized then that he didn't know much about antique pocket watches.

He glanced at the coffee table and his open laptop. The last page was still up: *History of Watchmaking*. He had learned the earliest watches made had only one hand. That was interesting, but did that apply to this watch? *No idea. But no winding or setting crown?* That appeared strange. *A child's toy?* That didn't make sense either. He was not completely sure, but the engraving on the encasement, to him at least, gave an indication of excellent craftsmanship. And then the single hand: dauphin-styled, brass or gold—he couldn't be sure—and very precise, finely made. Not something stamped from a press. Opening and closing the case, the hidden hinges, the clasp and its release mechanism all showed excellent build quality. The dial was simple yet elegant. It appeared to be a brushed steel alloy, or maybe silver, with engraved black markers. The graduations were intricate; the magnifying glass showed them to be exact. *But this scale? A mystery for sure.* There were seven dominant markers, in brass or gold, with some symbols over each, engraved with precision. Nowhere was any indication of a 60-minute, 24-hour scale, only graduations of seven, subdivided differently, sometimes by ten, sometimes by seven. *Quite confusing.*

And finally, to 'seal up the mystery', Edward focused on what appeared to be four tiny screws that fixed the dial. The removal of them would allow access to the internal movement of the time-piece. However, and this seemed the most confusing of all, the slots in the screw heads had been soldered over, making their removal most difficult indeed. The tell-tale signs of slight blueing or discolouring of the surrounding metal at the screw heads indicated to Edward a high silver content in the solder used, and a high tem-

perature needed to melt it, approximately 1,000 degrees Fahrenheit. *But why? Why would someone do that?*

Edward swivelled his chair around towards the coffee table. He left the watch open and set it on the table. Reaching back, he turned off the light. Gazing at it, lost in thought, the minutes passed. *What is your story?* He turned away towards the laptop. The screen was dark, into power saving mode. "No help here," he said aloud as he reached over to shut it down. *Let's see ... time in 24 hr that is; 1100hrs 55 minutes, the only scale I know. I wonder if anyone else has heard of a different time scale?* Edward looked at the watch on his wrist. *I wonder... how about Colin?*

Colin was the proprietor of Nash Jewellers in London, Ontario, where Edward purchased his Rolex watch. Located right down- town, the store was a beautiful old historic building. 2018 would mark the 100th anniversary of the business: three generations. Colin's grandfather founded Nash Jewelers in 1918. Edward recalled getting a tour of the upstairs level of the building, where he saw many old photos and display cases set up, showcasing an excellent collection of antique watches and jewellery. He remembered seeing several old pocket watches on display. *Yes, that might be a place to start. Alright, let's do it.*

Edward got up, folded the laptop, and closed the watch case. Putting it in his pocket, he grabbed his coat from the couch and headed for the door. It would take a little over a one-hour drive to get to the store. He should be okay to stop by Brad's and get a couple of hot dogs for the road. Allowing 4 hours total, he could be home just before Marie got back from work. She would want to hear all about his garage sale adventures, and any local gossip he might have picked up along the way.

As he settled into the driver's seat of his Volkswagen and pushed the garage door opener button clipped to the visor, he had to grin. He thought of, and tried out a suave opening line to greet his wife, when she came through the front door later that afternoon: "Hi Marie, hope you had a wonderful day at work. Listen ... I went out to the garage sales today, and, well, I bought another watch." A pause would be required here. "It's a pocket watch I found at the bottom of a box of theatre stuff. And well ... strange, there's no 4 o'clock. Like ... I'm sure it's a watch. However, like I said, *no 4 o'clock displayed anywhere! Wanna have a look?*"

Edward turned the car onto Ernest Street and parked along the side of the road, roughly 50 metres from Brad's place. Smoke was wafting up from the barbecue, with many people milling about waiting for their hot dog, or chatting with the master chef. *Okay, must keep this short. However, an excellent place, nonetheless, to obtain a few brief*

tidbits of local gossip. This would be good hard currency to encourage Marie's acceptance of the new addition to his watch collection.

THREE

“**Y**ou want to go *where*?”

“New York City. Ah ... Brooklyn, New York, to be more

specific.”

Marie had returned from her job at the hospital 20 minutes ago,

and now was not looking overly impressed. They were sitting at the kitchen table, on which directly in front of her lay the opened, newly acquired timepiece. She was looking at it, with her head cocked to one side. Her expression seemed to be one of amused concern. Combined with her short blonde bob that framed her pure, unaltered facial features, Marie at times had a schoolgirl quality, *but opponent beware*. Edward thought his presentation had not been exceptionally convincing. Truthfully, a more loving and caring person than Marie, Edward had never met. Intelligence was included as well. If she were to be fooled, it would not be for long. He was giving her his best hopeful look. Acquisition of any local gossip he could present as an offering to her had not gone well. So, tact and diplomacy would now be in order.

“So, let’s see if I’ve got this right.” Marie’s blue eyes held him captive. “You find an old pocket watch today at a garage sale. No, wait ... you *think* it’s an old pocket watch. Although, it appears to be broken, as one of the hands have fallen off. You would really like to see if it might actually tick, but the device doesn’t have the knob on top to wind it up. Well ... maybe you could take it apart to find out why it doesn’t tick. But no, someone welded it shut. Hmm, most perplexing, what to do ... How about a drive to London to talk to someone more knowledgeable than yourself about watches, and get his advice? Good, but turns out he’s as confused as you are. However, not to be defeated, he knows the answer! Go to the top, seek an audience with the ‘Master,’ the ‘Sage,’ the ‘Guru.’ A simple flight to New York and all will be answered!” There was a pause. Edward held her gaze. The pause was for effect. He admired her eloquence, a formidable opponent indeed.

“So, Edward, I must ask you, what esoteric wisdom is to be gained by this? I understand retirement can be a challenge. An adjustment period is required. But you’re not alone. Many others just like you are in this situation. They like to support each other, meeting for coffee every day at the local coffee shop. They love to chat. Chat about ... well you know, various things: the weather, politics, you like talking about the weather, don’t you Edward? What do you think? Give it a try?” With a loving smile, a gleam in her eye, and an ever so slight bow of her head, Marie leaned back. She understood her role

and played her part with the utmost of confidence. A brief interlude of accolades was permissible now.

“Thank you, Marie. You’re in fine form today; that is evident, and I sincerely do appreciate your concern and insight pertaining to the many challenges I face with each passing day.”

“However, I can believe now, perhaps we have a slight misunderstanding regarding my recently acquired timepiece. Yes, I would admit, confusion does seem to prevail at present, but both Colin and I are of the same opinion, that there are merits here which need to be acknowledged. I can assure you Marie, one of the hands did *not* fall off. The watch was designed and built this way. Welded shut? Definitely not. You may recall I said *soldered*. The screw heads were soldered—*big* difference. Seems like someone wanted to make disassembly quite difficult, but not impossible. I can assure you, Colin would not recommend I go to New York if he didn’t think it worthwhile. He believes the timepiece shows much precision and hand craftsmanship.”

“Ok Edward, apparently, you’ve come across something here that has piqued your interest. Please tell me again: Why all the way to New York to visit one particular watchmaker; Herbert Os ...?”

“Osterhagen, Herbert Osterhagen.” Edward recognized the slightest glimmer of interest in Marie’s eyes. “Colin’s father knew him personally. They had met several times at different venues of horology in the Greater Toronto Area. Herbert would be in his early 80s now. He owns a small watch repair shop in Brooklyn, no Internet access, doesn’t even talk on the phone: in person only. He does have an answering machine in service, though. According to Colin’s father, there is almost nothing about horology—watchmaking in particular—this man does not know. He is descended from a long line of family watchmakers, dating back well into the 18th century. To quote Colin’s father, ‘Herbert Osterhagen is a genius of watchmaking.’ So, Marie,” Edward leaned forward, picked up the pocket watch and held it out, “given the most unusual circumstances surrounding this creation, would you not agree it behooves me to further investigate?”

Marie smiled at his word choice. She could tell he was trying to impress her. “What I *would* agree upon Edward, is that we need to decide on what we’re having for supper tonight. Are any of your investigative powers being allotted to this mystery?” Marie thought to herself: *Two can play this game!*

Closing the watch and setting it back down upon the table, Edward reached forward and softly held Marie’s hands in his. “I was hoping

to take you out, in celebration, to one of Petrolia's fine dining establishments this evening."

"Celebration?"

"You and me." Their eyes were locked. Marie cocked her head slightly, and said nothing. A quizzical look came into her eyes. Edward responded gently, "Just you and me. That's enough."

A soft, subtle smile radiated from her face, a smile from a special place deep inside her, for him and him alone. She had given Edward his answer. Marie released her hands from his, and then stood from the table. "I'm going to draw a perfumed bath. I want to enjoy a nice relaxing soak in the tub, and then I'm going to pick out a pretty dress. You've got a date!"

As he watched her walking down the hallway, he detected a slight spring in her step. The thought that came to mind: *Life should be about passion, and right now I'm not complaining.*

FOUR

“Mmm,” Marie opened her eyes. She stretched within the comfort of the soft, warm bedclothes that cradled her. The bedroom had only dim morning light filtering through the drawn window curtains. The bed was empty beside her. A quick glance at the alarm clock on the bedside table showed 9:06 a.m. She took another stretch and rolled over. Edward sat at a desk positioned in front of the window, his laptop computer open in front of him. His index finger poised, he glanced over at her and smiled. He swiftly executed a final strike on the enter key,

closed the lid and pushed his chair back.
“Well, good morning sleepy head.” He walked towards her,

leaned down and placed a warm lingering kiss on her mouth. Gently breaking off their morning greeting, he stood back upright and headed for the door. “Be right back!”

The warmth on her lips contrasted with the feeling of cool morning air on her bare shoulders. Sitting up and gathering the comforter around her, Marie shifted back until she was upright against the headboard. The noise of Edward descending the stairs two at a time and a blender starting up in the kitchen sounded.

No way that guy is 60 years old! After last night! I think he’s been lying to me all these years. Leaning her head back, she closed her eyes, not to sleep again but to be in the moment. The blender stopped. With a faint sound of birds chirping outside the bedroom window and her rhythmic breathing, she could feel the ever so slight warmth still lingering on her lips. She searched for a word. Another sound presented itself as she slowly opened her eyes to the sight of his tall, slim figure in the doorway. As he started to move forward, the word came to her: *contentment*.

“To start your day,” Edward held up two tall frosty glasses. “Bananas, fresh strawberries, and blueberries, with a slice of mango.” He sat on the edge of the bed offering her a glass.

“You do know the way to a girl’s heart.” Marie took a sip. “Yes, nailed it ... the mango, right?”

“I wasn’t talking about the smoothie. Although ...” She took

another sip. “Yes, it’s wonderful too.”

A big grin radiated from Edward’s face. Marie thought a slight

crimson colour too, but the light was still quite dim. “Edward, I would like to ask you... why do you think an exceptional bottle of champagne, when opened shortly after returning home from a wonderfully romantic dinner for two, seems to quite literally evaporate into thin air?”

“Hmm, I too have pondered this question, Marie, and using last evening as an example, I do readily agree that this unusual phenomenon does exist. I’m thinking ... something to do with the bubbles.”

“I’m thinking ... something to do with *whom* you are sharing those bubbles.” They sat on the bed, sipping their fruit smoothies in a contented silence, neither spoke.

Sometimes silence can portray that, which words cannot fully express.



Marie joined Edward in the kitchen just as he was serving up two omelettes he had prepared. Her hair was still damp from her shower. Both were dressed in their usual Sunday morning attire: jeans and orange sweatshirts. Place settings had been set on the centre island. From there, they could enjoy their meal and look out to the tree-lined backyard through the sliding glass patio doors. The beginning of the day was looking to be clear and sunny. “Have you heard the forecast for today?” Marie pulled out one of three tall high-back chairs and settled in at the island.

“Sounds real nice—15 degrees Celsius and sunny, with modest north-northwest winds. The open road is calling for sure. How about you, any plans?” Edward set the last plate on the table, slices of whole-wheat toast. Then he looked around; a quick check to make sure everything was in place. He pulled out a chair and joined Marie.

“I’d like to go for a run later, but right now I’m very hungry. This smells *so* delicious! I bet you could hear my stomach growling all the way from the bedroom.”

“That’s what the sound was! I thought the furnace was acting up again!” Edward raised his glass of orange juice. “Then, I am sure you will enjoy our Sunday special entrée: a spinach, mushroom, cheddar cheese omelette garnished with green onions, red pepper and parsley, served with bacon, whole-wheat toast and preserves on the side ... accompanied with your choice of juice—as long as it’s orange—and coffee. Please, enjoy!”

“Mmm, excellent.” Marie tried her first bite of the omelette. “Edward, you do spoil me at times.”

“I will concur on that point Marie, but I must warn you: dish-washer personnel will yet again be absent. I think it’s union issues we’re having again.”

“Those issues, would they be money, benefits, or working conditions?”

35 watch

“Well, seeing as how I’ve never actually seen any of them here, I think we can rule out the latter.”

“Okay, we need to be firm Edward. I’m here for you. I say we go it alone. If we can’t make do, we’ve always got Carmen for moral support.”

“Now there’s a saving grace if ever there was one! As I’ve come to understand our educated child, she doesn’t major in, minor in, or even participate in household chores. She has her sights set much further upon the horizon.” They both started laughing.

The joking around was fun, and they thought themselves humorous, but they knew it was a cover, used at times to help them adjust. They missed her so much. For 23 years Carmen, their only child, had been the main focal point of their lives. They wanted to believe she still was, but the ‘letting go’ thing, the ‘leaving the nest’ protocol, hurt. The laughter subsided, but smiles remained.

“Remember Edward, we’re Skyping Carmen at noon today.”

“Right, I’ve already sent her a Facebook message. I attached pictures of the pocket watch. In the description, I included most of the details.” Edward grinned. “She’s getting excited.”

“Oh, I’m sure she is. You two will become an investigative team concerning this watch. Carmen would never pass up an opportunity to solve a mystery like this. I bet she’s scouring the Internet seeking information.” Marie had finished her omelette and was now spreading her own homemade strawberry-rhubarb preserve on a slice of toast. “Listen, Edward, I hope you know that it’s not my intent to keep you from anything you enjoy or wish to do. I will always support you, no matter what. The passion you generate for things that interest you, is, at times astonishing, and maybe it’s what I love about you the most. I believe Carmen shares in this trait with you, and we both know who she gets it from. And I think maybe, well ... that sometimes I’m holding you guys back, but don’t you think things

balance out most of the time?" Marie set the uneaten slice of toast down and reached for her napkin. She looked at her husband for reassurance.

Edward could see that her eyes were starting to well up. He gazed deeply into those eyes. "I think I have been fortunate and our lives *do* seem to balance out, most of the time." He took his napkin, reached over and dabbed a single tear from her cheek.

"Carmen sent a message back, while you were in the shower. We both agree that your idea is best: to post some photos of the pocket watch online and request information. Makes a lot of sense, better to try that first, rather than me jumping on the first flight I can get to New York."

"I now have posted on three major watch blog sites. Hey, I bet being a Sunday, probably thousands of watch aficionados are now studying the photos. Good call Marie. Wisdom prevails. Thanks for holding me back!" Edward gave her a warm smile.

Marie set her napkin back down and retrieved her slice of toast to resume eating her delicious breakfast. In a couple of hours, they would be Skyping with Carmen. It would be a challenge to get a word in. The two of them would be all over this new pocket watch mystery. But they would be together again, a family. Well, at least electronically. There was that word again, *contentment*, appearing in her mind out of nowhere. She smiled at Edward. No, it did not come from nowhere; it came from happiness. Marie took a bite of toast. She loved strawberry-rhubarb jam. Marie was happy.