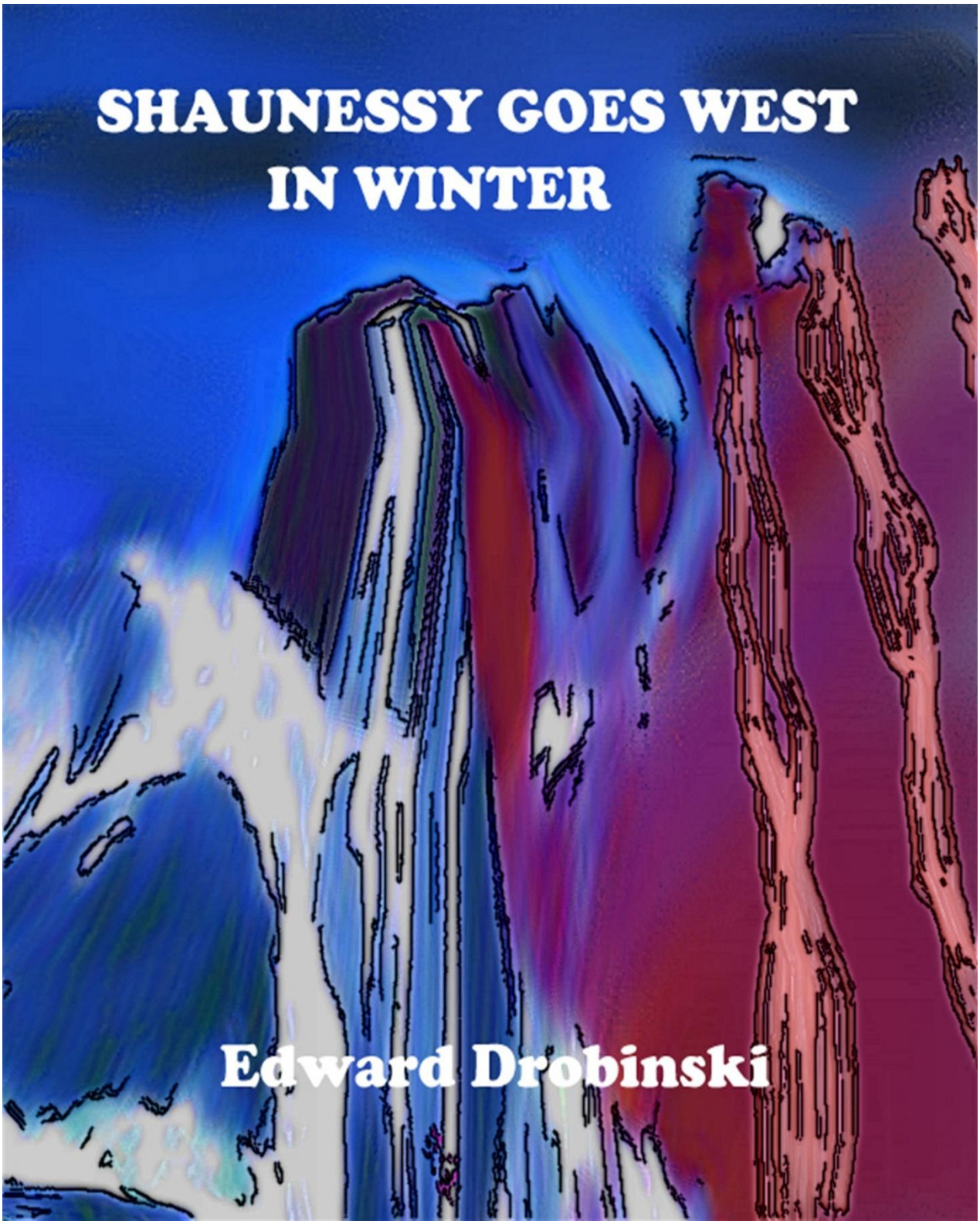
SHAUNESSY GOES WEST
IN WINTER
Edward Drobinski

# SHAUNESSY GOES WEST IN WINTER

**By Edward Drobinski**

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## *Chapter 1*

The predicted downpour started with a drizzle at dusk, enhancing the chill left by the early December overcast day. Lower Manhattan's streets were occupied by black umbrellas with varying kinds of legs. They shared a short, quick stepped gait, the primary objective of most, being to avoid a collision with another umbrella. This was a necessity of survival as an errant step could cause an offended umbrella to angrily use its ending metal spokes to pierce the thin black skin of the inept, resulting in a loss of protection and an undesired soaking.

Low, heavy, thundering black clouds quickly rumbled in, dropping the anticipated two inches of water in an unanticipated five minutes. The umbrellas congregated in doorways with overhangs and shrunk, revealing heads that looked almost humanly frustrated. They looked nervously up and down the streets that had become quickly moving streams, annoyed that they were temporarily unable to keep their busy important schedules. The eyes on the heads reflected its almost connected mind's preoccupation with their delays and the sickening necessity of huddling close to others, not allowing them to notice that the curb and street's moving water was washing away the prior two weeks' foul garbage, as the paper cups, candy wrappers, cigarette butts and dog shit excitedly bounced on the impromptu

streams, imitating joyful small boats, unaware that their destiny was to be the whirlpool sewer.

Some of the heads looked up in disconsolation as if to absurdly opine in self-absorption; "God, when are you going to stop doing this to me?" The thunder reply boomed, but they couldn't take any meaning from the noise. The skyscraper's top floors were concealed, fully enveloped in the masses of dark condensation, happily affording a lack of visibility, in or out, for the penthouse umbrella heads.

As he left his fifth floor condominium in Kew Gardens, Queens, en route to another miserable job in Manhattan, his car splashed through the potholes on the single lane side streets, launching torrents of water onto the parked cars, which feared a cold submergence in the dirty delivery. His mind wasn't on their temporary petty problems as he struggled to keep the steering wheel straight through the obstacles put in his path, hearing the windshield wipers groan in their effort to give him some visibility.

"Son of a fucking bitch," he muttered to the ugly conditions and perhaps, to everything in general, as he bounced through another foot deep pothole. He thought; "These fucking bastards always just happen to call me out on some 'emergency' whenever the weather decides to be uncooperative. It must

really make a huge difference to the dead. And of course, it's always imperative that I get there immediately because the beat cop needs instructions about the color of the tape needed and exactly where to put it, so that posterity is not confused about the corpse's precise placement. The morgue attendants need to be told not to fuck up the body. People have to be asked what they saw and the place gets roped off. Presumably no one will be bright enough to do these things until I get there and vocalize my brilliance. I wish I had some other job to piss and moan about."

He double parked in front of 464 Avenue C on the Lower East Side. "Loisaida," as the natives call it, is mostly a series of dilapidated three story brick buildings, with scary looking people sitting on the stoops, checking the terrain for easy pickings. Shaunessy thought of something he was told; "It is said that no police go in there because nobody there is doing anything legal. Therefore one has no business to go there unless they intend something illegal. So, therefore be prepared kiddies. At least that was what he was told by a career junky he arrested last year." Sounds more like a budgetary consideration. He ran up the three flights of stairs to find people scurrying about and screaming in the hallway near the open door to number 308. He painstakingly negotiated his way through the throng, entered and saw the gagged and neck-tied

body dangling. It slowly revolved, doing a macabre waltz, on an orange electrical cord attached to a ceiling beam, the other end circling the victim's neck.

He could see that the nude carcass was male, but he wasn't sure of the race. The pool of blood beneath it probably now contained the body's capacity and resulted in a sickly gray skin color. He guessed that the corpse was not that of a black man and felt reasonably assured that the darkest patches evident on the chest and genitals were the result of a blowtorch.

The taciturn forty-ish cop already on the scene pointed to an hysterically crying Spanish woman who was lying on the linoleum floor, wrapped in a yellow blanket. She was being held and talked to by two other women, who knelt beside her.

The cop said; "She's been raped..... They tell me he was a crack dealer," now gesturing to the one without any feet on solid ground.

Tom Shaunessy looked around the fifteen by fifteen kitchen, the flagship of the apartment, noting the small 1950's refrigerator, a black metal folding table designed for card games being used as a kitchen table and the white plastic "outdoor" chairs used as seats. Two tiny olive-skinned girls emerged from a back room, eyes wide, with fingers in their mouths, holding their loved sleeping companions; worn and torn teddy bears. They stared, too young to know exactly what had

happened, but felt somewhat safe as the swinging body didn't appear able to get to them. They ducked, hearing a loud creak, as the "victim" rotated, exposing a wide open, silently screaming mouth, now a home for buzzing flies.

Shaunessy hugged both of them and ushered them back to the dark room they had just left, saying; "You'll have to stay here for a while. Everything will be all right," full well knowing that he was lying of necessity. He thought, "They'll remember this forever, or at least until crying mama finds another crack head to hook up with." He wondered why new drugs had to be invented. Wasn't heroin good enough? At least it carried the possibility of a quick and quiet death penalty.

He was bewildered, not at the scene; as he had been a cop in Manhattan for more than thirty years and had seen a few similar places. He was bewildered about himself. Why did he choose a job that exposed him to the ugliest things? Or was he merely privy to the naked truth? He'd been thinking about the general subject for some time now and tonight he decided that he had his fill with this shit and wanted to see what other kind of shit that there was in the world. It would have to be an improvement.

The impassive cop on the scene again approached him, this time with questions about what to do now, but Shaunessy waved him off, saying; "Another detective will be taking care of this.

Be patient." He pointed at Mr. Dangles and said; "He's not going anywhere."

The stoic cop threw his hands out to the side and implored; "Just tell me where to put the tape."

Shaunessy had to laugh at this one and in a jocular fashion answered; "Go out and buy a four by eight piece of plywood, hang it from the ceiling and put the yellow tape on that." He left, wondering what the new detective would find.

He drove back home in a drizzle, laughing to himself about how his actions, or lack thereof, of the evening would play out with the boss he considered a pompous jerk. He hoped that it would induce a Maalox binge. As he hit one, he said; "Goodbye, potholes."

He ignored the messages he found left on his answering machine, certain of their undesirable origin and went to sleep, the covers feeling warm and comforting to his cold, wet body. The first thing the following morning a determined Shaunessy drove to his longtime, home away from home, a police station in Midtown Manhattan. It was an almost pleasant leisurely drive in the morning sunshine, as at least he could see the road hazards coming and for once, he was on no one's schedule but his own. Upon arriving he quickly walked down the long straight hall, thinking that if he had a little more time to rationalize he

might change his mind. He walked tall with his longish, now gray hair undulating in the heat duct zephyrs. He knew he was woefully out of style, but stubbornly refused to adopt the current baldy cut, preferring to show something he believed in; the sixties culture. He realized that most people no longer had an inkling as to what that was all about, but considered it their loss.

"Morning, Shaunessy" echoed in his ears, the greetings imparted by people hurriedly traversing the same area, carrying files, their heads down reading as they extended their cordialities.

He mumbled; "Morning," "Morning," "Morning" to no one in particular, not wanting to be accused of being in a bad mood and having to explain why to any of the friendly flock. That's an excellent way to get in one. No one seemed to understand the difference between being resolute and being angry, anyway.

The door he approached displayed a sign over the thick gray opaque glass which said; "RICHARD FITZPATRICK, CHIEF OF DETECTIVES." Not Richie, not Dick, not Rich, he was Richard or Mr. Fitzpatrick. Shaunessy always suspected that Richard must have had an unknown contact with someone influential, as the chief's capabilities and intelligence did not impress him or anyone else. Mr. Fitzpatrick answered the non-everyday questions by finding the most convenient area of the policy

manual, the area indicating "No" and was never open to the parts that indicated "Yes." That could be risky for Richard. It also made him extremely predictable for everyone else, resulting in a dearth of inquiries. Maybe his genius was that this was precisely what he sought. Shaunessy used to amuse himself, whenever he was unfortunate enough to have to speak to the Chief, by thinking; "Richard Fitz Patrick or maybe it's Patrick Fitz Richard, in either case, quite a sight."

Richard was pushing forty, unmarried, had no known relationships with the opposite sex, lived in a one room condo on 23rd Street, that prior to the Manhattan gentrification craziness, was used as a single-room-occupancy welfare hotel and he was said to have over one million dollars in his contributory retirement account. He had a penchant for repeating a joke everyone politely laughed at every time they heard it. He would say; "Do you know the golden rule?" and answer it with; "He who has the gold makes the rules," no doubt thinking that he qualified.

Shaunessy made two loud knocks and heard "Come in." Richard's usually neat combed and oiled, wavy, black, short hair was in a bit of disarray, with a cowlick protruding near the small balding spot on top, looking as if it were trying to escape as the other hair had. His dark Brooks Brothers suit covered a white shirt strangled with a yellow tie, all the

office fashion ten years prior. He demonstrated his busy importance by not looking up, continuing his "concentration" on some pressing matter the papers he held in his fidgeting hands, were apparently shedding much needed light. "Have a seat. Be right with you," he pertly said.

Shaunessy had seen the routine before and calmly said; "Thanks," and sat in one of the two available chairs, recalling that the "game" could only be survived if he didn't attempt to mimic Mr. Importance's contrived speed and merely stated his case with no regard for time.

Richard got up and stuck his head out the door, his hand doing its best to hold three somewhat rumpled papers and called out; "Vivian?"

His young secretary bounced right over. Her small eyes and plain face was topped by short dark hair combed straight back with more oil than Richard's. Her light brown pants suit leaned on the door frame as Richard held the papers up to her face and she looked at them with grave consternation. Richard said; "Call him and tell him that these pages will have to be entirely redone. It's not in conformance with policy." Her wrinkled brow became smooth and the corners of her mouth almost smiled, as she took the papers and charged off to use Richard's authority to attempt to terrorize someone.

Richard returned to his desk and sat down behind it, folding his hands in front of him, perhaps to appear restrained under the circumstances and said; "I understand that you exhibited very unprofessional behavior last night."

Shaunessy grinned and replied; "I suppose some would call it that, but it's really irrelevant."

Richard's face registered shock that someone would have the audacity to tell him what was or wasn't relevant, but he professionally controlled it with a small gulp and a tightening of his enmeshed fingers and said; "Walking off the job and telling the beat cop to go buy a piece of plywood is certainly relevant in my book."

Shaunessy couldn't help but laugh and said; "Did he actually do it?"

Richard's eyes widened and in a very serious tone, hopefully mock-serious said; "**Under your authority**. The result of which was a contamination of the crime scene."

Shaunessy struggled to contain his laughter, first visualizing Richard's imminent Maalox binge and then picturing the crime scene with taped plywood dangling and finally said; "I had heard that some of the career beat guys are really stupid, but I had no idea how much. Of course that was extremely obvious sarcasm."

"Then you admit you said it?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm going to have to write you up on an 'EXTREMELY POOR BEHAVIOR' form."

He had seen a few of these in his working days and certainly could care less about another one now. Shaunessy smiled at Richard, but quickly ended the farce with an unintentional snort.

Richard was confused and his round face went blank. He looked at Shaunessy and, he, too, saw nothing. He used his best tactic and repeated himself; "No joking matter; an 'EXTREMELY POOR BEHAVIOR' form."

Shaunessy feigned fear, popping his eyes widely and putting one hand in front of his face, making it quiver like Don Knotts. He said; "Okay, this is getting tedious. Write whatever you want, but I'm here to tell you that I quit and the policy manual tells me that I have to get the forms through you." He took his badge and gun from his pocket and gently laid them by Richard's still folded hands.

Richard's eyes blinked a few times, as he tried to remember if the official reprimand would serve any purpose under the circumstances. He tried a delaying tactic and said; "I think some amount of notice is required."

"I have accrued vacation time owed me. Use as much of it as notice may require."

Richard finished his mental calculations, determining that the reprimand was of no use to him and said; “You’ll have the papers by mail in a week.” He then stood up and showed Shaunessy to the door.

At 6’1’’ Shaunessy was about five inches taller than the Chief and felt like getting in one last shot. At the door he stopped, turned and said; “Oh, little Dickie, if the correct papers don’t arrive in one week, the union attorney will be on your ass. I understand he likes that position. Do be a good boy.” He gave little Dickie a soft slap on the cheek and added; “Wish I could say it’s been nice working with you,” turned and left.

## *Chapter 2*

Shaunessy's plane landed at the Albuquerque Sunport at 2PM and as soon as he stepped outside, he was greeted by a stiff breeze, making him wish he was carrying his heaviest coat to fend off the winter chill caused by the wind and the weak sun filtering through a uniform blue gray sky. He quickly walked five hundred feet to the rent-a-car emporium and was relieved to be hit in the face by the heat when he entered.

He approached the elongated desk where a young Spanish man was looking down at something. Shaunessy said; "I'll need a car for a few days, nothing fancy."

The clerk kept his eyes glued to whatever he was reading, held up an index finger and said; "I'll be right with you."

Thinking of his silly expectation that a desert was a hot place, Shaunessy nervously added; "And make sure the heater works. Damn, it's cold here."

The clerk smirked and calmly said; "It's winter..... Okay, what is it you need? We got Chevy's, Chryslers, Nissans, you name it."

"How about a small deep blue Chevy?"

Shaunessy ran the engine a while, at times gunning the gas pedal, shivering. When the temperature gauge passed into the

red zone he gingerly turned on the heater and, feeling the warm air emitted, he turned it up full blast. He left the rental agency parking lot and followed the signs out of the airport. The roads were being used by only a few other cars and he happily found the travelling extremely easy by New York standards, as he watched for signs that would lead him to the interstate north.

After passing by the hotels and more car rental places adjacent to the airport, the road became somewhat strange to him in its diversity; small houses, car repair shops, a cemetery, open lots, convenience store gas stations, Fed Ex/Kinko's copy places and the University of New Mexico at the end of the road. Being forced to make a turn, he made a left onto "Route 66," which didn't look like any "Route" he had previously encountered, with the possible exception of his vaguely recalled short "vacation" here a few years prior. Its hodge-podge restaurants, clothing stores, furniture stores, jewelry shops and American Indian retailers of sundry "native" merchandise, made him think a name like "Broadway" would be more appropriate. Its twenty-five mile per hour speed limit, traffic lights and single lane with on-street parking reminded him of the shopping districts that existed back east before the malls put them out of business. He would later discover that Route 66 was also known as Central Avenue, at least the part where he had been.