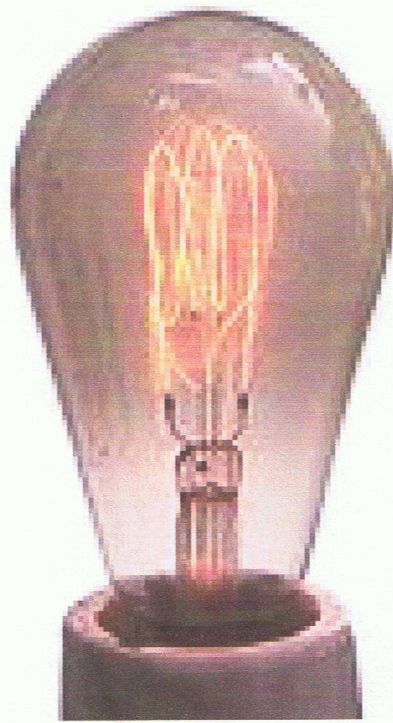


ECLECTIC



LIGHTS

Why 'Eclectic Lights'? Firstly, due to the fact that I can't resist a bad pun. Secondly, this anthology is eclectic in that it represents an odd collection of previously published short stories, most of which first saw the light of day as finalists of various short story contests, and light because I try to keep them that way. Nothing too deep; nothing too heavy. My stories are not written to preach, to educate, or to enlighten. They are written to entertain. Only that. Light.

But for those of you who like to see a moral at the end of a story I have included a few of my recent attempts to update Aesop by way of 'Fables for the third Millennium'. Still nothing deep or heavy here, although they may cause you to ponder a little.

I hope that they will interest and amuse you, and, above all, I hope that you will find them entertaining.

Barry Daniels

Western Shore, Nova Scotia

June 2009

Eclectic Stories

Rob's Cove: *Toronto Star Short Story Contest Finalist, 1985*
Our House: *Toronto Star Short Story Contest Finalist, 1986*
With Friends Like These: *Toronto Star Short Story Contest Winner, 1987*
There's no use rushing me; I'll remember in a minute: *Toronto Star Short Story Contest Finalist, 1988*
Tommy Delaney's One Hundredth Birthday Party: *Toronto Star Short Story Contest Finalist, 1989*
Chicken Scoop: *Tales of Mystery, Suspense & Fantasy. Mobius Books, 2004*
Wired: *Canadian Writers' Journal, 2003*
Redcap: *Ontario 'Scene of the Crime' Short Story Contest, 2004*
Gold River: *Open Minds Quarterly, 2008.*
The Dog Catcher of Innis Harbour: *Bard's Ink, Short Story Contest, 2004*
Farewell Speech: *Bard's Ink, Short Story Contest, 2002*
A Murder of Crows: *Canadian Writer's Journal 2003*

Fables for the Third Millennium:

The Angel's Bargain: *Writers' Collective, University of Winnipeg; 2005*
The Shoemaker's Children: *Not previously published.*
The Squirrel's Tale: *Not previously published.*
The Workshop Committee (or How Santa got the Sack) *Not previously published.*
The Beancounter and the King: *Not previously published*
The Carpenter's Hammer: *Not previously published*
The Stupid Bumblebee: *Not previously published*

SHORT STORIES

ROB'S COVE

I suppose that, the ethics of my profession being what they are, I shouldn't be telling this. But I've thought it through several times and I truly don't see how the telling of it can do anyone any harm now. I mean, they're all settled in at Rob's Cove, and there's been no challenge to their legal rights to the property, so I suppose the secrecy which was so much a part of the MacIntyre will is all over now. And it's such a fascinating tale; well, I mean the world has a right to know. That's the way I see it.

You must know, right away, that I've always considered myself a practical man. Down to earth, you know. I never did hold with all of that mumbo-jumbo about ghosts and hauntings and reincarnations, so I'm not trying to prove anything to anybody. I'll just tell the tale, and you can make up your own mind, you understand.

Well, now that I've convinced myself to the telling, I'll be damned if I know where to start! I suppose that, if you're to understand the thing, you have to know first of all about the will. And about MacIntyre himself, of course.

Robert Angus Stuart MacIntyre came to New Inverness, Nova Scotia, just before the turning of the 17th century into the 18th, and he found not much here but isolated settlements, a French fort here and there, and acres and acres of God's own country. It was said that he'd sailed with the British Navy and later as a merchant seaman, and, although his personal history is quite vague on the subject, it seems he came to New Scotland with a cloud hanging over him. It's quite likely he jumped ship.

In his early years he was not exactly the son every mother dreams of raising and - rough justice being the rule in the colonies back then - he escaped the noose more by good luck than good judgment, and on more than one occasion.

Again the history is more full of gaps than a good tale should be, but it comes clear enough when, at the ripe old age of 24, he met, courted and married Eleanor (Nell) Thompson, the daughter of a local fisherman and a spinster at 17 years old.

Well from then on old Rob MacIntyre was a changed man. A classic tale, it was, of a young rogue brought to heel by the love of a good woman. He got a job at a nearby sawmill, put down a deposit on a half-acre by the water, built a small cabin and turned over the sod for a vegetable garden. He set up house there at the edge of the Atlantic Ocean with his new bride.

With Scots blood on both sides of the marriage it was not long before the young couple was able to put enough aside to afford some of the finer things in life. Like a horse, a couple of cows, a small fishing boat, and seven children of assorted shapes, sizes and sexes. The half-acre plot with the small cabin gave way to a large, white-painted frame house on a five-acre lot; then a 10-acre lot; and finally came to represent 12,000 acres of the finest shorefront the country had to offer, complete with the grandest mansion in that part of the country, a smart fleet of fishing boats at the private harbour and a herd that provided meat to a good-sized portion of Nova Scotia.

By that time MacIntyre also owned the mill at which he'd started his working life (respectability had silenced the rumours of his earlier life as a mariner) along with three others, and half a dozen assorted enterprises scattered among local townships. One of his sons, Jamie, he sent off to Upper Canada to read the law. Jamie MacIntyre later came back to set up in practice close to home, and he, too, raised seven children. One of them, Edward MacIntyre, produced yet more sons, and if you follow the line down a couple of hundred years and through a few more MacIntyre generations, you eventually find Robert Angus James MacIntyre - the present occupant of Rob's Cove, until a couple of months ago.

Me, that is.

The first Rob MacIntyre died as do all men, rich or poor, and his wife followed him to the grave within the week. All of the county turned out for the wake and said how fitting it was that Nellie had gone so quickly and quietly, since the one without the other could not be imagined. The two of them had written a love story not yet equalled in these parts. Neither had been known to raise a voice nor say a bad word against the other. The two, it was generally agreed, had gone to lovers' heaven to take their place with Romeo and Juliet and all of the other great loving couples, be they world renowned or known only to each other, from the pages of history.

A fitting ending to such a beautiful love story, they all said.

But was it the end?

The reading of the will, as you might have expected, caused quite a stir hereabouts. The various descendants, in-laws, long term friends and just plain hopefuls turned out in quantity to hear Jamie read the will. It is said that as he tore open the envelope and read the first page, his face turned to stone. Jamie MacIntyre's little firm had not put it together, you see. A law firm in Halifax had drawn up the will, and whether Jamie liked that or no, he was probably expecting a fair-sized chunk of the estate to fall into his own hands.

He raised his eyes to the assembly and said, as it is told:

"There's nae a thing here ta hold ye, any of ye; so be about your business."

For Robbie MacIntyre had left nothing to anyone; he intended to come back to claim it himself, you see.

The terms of the will were simple. The entire estate was to go into a trust fund to be administered by Jamie MacIntyre's company. His eldest son was to become resident caretaker at Rob's Cove and have the right to whatever funds were needed to keep it in good condition. He was also allowed a small stipend from the fund to go towards the care and feeding of himself and his family. The eldest son was entitled to such privileges until his death, at which time the property passed on to his eldest son, who assumed the same function. And so on down through endless time.

But not quite endless.

At a certain point in time, old Rob would be back. He would present himself to whichever MacIntyre headed Jamie's company at the time of his coming, and claim his estate. The method of ascertaining that he was who he claimed to be, when he arrived the second time around, was spelled out in very specific terms. Very secret terms. The continued survival of the MacIntyre Law Company and the comfort of its owners were completely assured so long as the secrets of the will were known only to the principal himself. The day that anyone else came to know them the control of the

MacIntyre estates reverted instantly to the Halifax firm. Anyone else, that is, except old Rob on the way back.

The will was challenged. It held.

My father died five years ago, and I mourned his passing. In due course I took the keys to his desk, slipped my feet into his shoes beneath it, and opened the file on Rob MacIntyre's will. To say that I was amazed is to understate the case.

Over a hundred people had, over the years, presented themselves to the occupant of the office in which I now sat and had claimed the estate as their birth-right. Robbie MacIntyre had apparently tried to come back more than a hundred times. Twenty of the claimants had tried within five years of old Rob's death and the fact that they had been alive at the same time as the old man did not seem to have cooled the ardour with which they pressed their claims.

Anyone had the right to present a claim.

None had even come close.

Over the first four years after I took over Dad's chair only two claimants arrived at my office. I sent them both away as soon as they opened their mouths. Neither could substantiate his claim to be old Robbie, reincarnate. Each time, the old, yellowing papers were carefully refolded and locked within the small safe which I then carried down and locked in the vault in the basement of the old building. I kept the only key to that safe. All of my staff knew that to even touch the small steel box would mean instant dismissal, with little chance of ever finding employment in a law office again.

Old Robbie's secret was as well kept as ever a secret can be kept.

On a Monday morning in February I came into my office at nine and was met at the door by Mrs. Innes, my right arm in all things administrative.

"There is another of "them" waiting to see you Mr. MacIntyre." she said.

Sure enough, a young man sat quietly in the ante-room, his hands on his lap, staring into space. He nodded good morning as I passed.

Anyone had the right to try. I took the key to the vault from my desk, and went down into the basement to get the papers. "Let's make this as quick and painless as possible," I thought as I sat at my desk and opened the file. I pressed the intercom switch.

"Mrs. Innes, have the young man come in, please."

What I knew, you see, and the young man did not, was that the very act of stepping into my office would disqualify him. The very opening of his mouth would destroy his case.

The door did not open. Instead, my intercom buzzed.

"The young man will not come in, Mr. MacIntyre," said Mrs. Innes, obviously distressed. "He says you should know better than to ask him right now."

A cold wind seemed to blow through my office.

For five weeks the young man came to my office every morning at nine, and sat there 'til three when we closed up. Each evening he walked down the street to the small hotel where he apparently ate in silence and then went directly to his room. He spoke to no one.

It was a Wednesday morning. My intercom buzzed. Mrs. Innes said "the young man says he'll come in now, Mr. MacIntyre, if it's all right by you. And there's a young woman just come in who says they're together.

I found my mouth would not work. I was dreadfully cold, yet I could feel the sweat forming on my forehead. "Have him ... have them come in, Mrs. Innes," I was finally able to croak.

The young couple came hand-in-hand and stood before my desk. I did not need to look at the old papers to know what the man was about to say.

"I'm back with Nellie to claim my land," he said, and to my undying shame, I passed right out.

Well, things came back into focus with the young couple fussing over me and Mrs. Innes trying to get me to down a jigger of brandy - which I did - and we got on with the business. I cracked the old wax seal on the parchment envelope and took out the questions set by old Rob; the questions which no previous candidate had ever got to hear; the questions which no one had seen since they were written by hand on a cold winter's night back so many, many years ago. But by that time I knew that the asking of the questions was no more than a formality.

I moved out of Rob's Cove that weekend. "Rob", of course, had correctly answered the six questions set for him and "Nellie" had answered her six equally letter perfect. I didn't know what to believe. It was against all of my upbringing. It went against everything I'd ever believed.

But what other explanation could there be?

For me, a greater "proof" of the thing, meaning far more even than the answering of the questions, lay in the couple themselves. The 20th century "Rob and Nellie" were as warm a couple as you could ever wish to meet, and obviously meant the world to each other. I asked when and where they had first met, and "Rob" did not surprise me when he said: "In your office, Mr. MacIntyre, when we came to take the test. But we always knew each other, if you know what I mean. We each knew that we'd come together somehow. Only recently it became clear how." He'd come from Scotland. Nellie had come to meet him from British Columbia.

The final "proof" came a month later. In my office John and Patricia Bellamy (aka Rob and Nellie MacIntyre) signed away their rights to an estate worth over thirty million dollars. The trust fund continued to be operated by my firm, but with all profits and proceeds, plus all capital and real holdings, made over to a local charity.

They kept the land. Rob's Cove. They live there now and I call on them when I can. John has a small vegetable garden out back, and they keep chickens. He talks of running a few cows when he learns how. He has no concrete memories of any "previous life" but, as he puts it, "This place feels right to us. Like it's always been home and I've known no other."

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