

SINGING SCHUBERTMay 17, 1999James M. Murray

Sadness. . .Sadness: even twice summoned it would not come. She was really gone this time, he thought, as his calls had echoed unanswered through the condo and down the many months that now separated him from that moment. Little of life was the same, but all was the same to any onlooker. Professor Geoffrey Douglas was still the eminent Anglo-Saxonist on the faculty of the English Department of Leland University, full professor at the unheard age of 32, legendary for the number and importance of his publications, editor of the electronic Anglo-Saxon dictionary, and now working on the electronic Beowulf. He was of medium height, trim and sandy-haired, with a smooth and fluid walking stride that covered ground quickly and effortlessly, as indeed everything he did seemed effortless. But above it all there hung a certain disconnectedness; not that Geoff inhabited a higher plane than mere mortals – no it was more as if he had chosen a remote byway in life and seemed puzzled at the growing distance between himself and other people. And he could not for the life of him find a way back.

The Beowulf project was an enormous one, whose results were eagerly awaited by the scholarly community, yet Douglas was hopelessly stuck. You see, the poem had survived in only one eleventh-century manuscript, itself badly damaged in an eighteenth-century fire. Words and even whole lines of the poem had been rendered illegible, and were restored, as best they could be, by consulting none-too reliable transcriptions. And then came Geoffrey Douglas who with great energy and resourcefulness had brought to bear a team of researchers using the latest computer imaging devices. The manuscript had been scanned, imaged, downloaded onto optical disks, posted on the World Wide Web, where hundreds of Anglo-Saxonists had commented and suggested solutions and plans of attack for Douglas' edition. Now this mountain of disciplined electrons in all its mega – no, gigabytes, awaited his scholarly judgment. But nothing came of it.

"Then the powerful demon, he who abode in darkness, found it hard to endure this time of torment, when every day he heard loud rejoicing in the hall. There was the sound of the harp, the clear song of the minstrel. He who could recount the creation of men in far off times, spoke; he told how the Almighty made the earth, a bright-faced plain which the waters encircle, set up triumph the radiance of sun and moon as light for those dwelling on land and adorned the corners of the earth with branches and leaves, how also he created life for every kind of thing that moves about alive. Thus these noble men lived blessedly in joy, until a certain fiend from hell began to wreak evil. That grim demon was called Grendel. . ." (Beowulf, lines 85-100)

For a decade he had been obsessed with Beowulf, an obsession that kept him continually in his office crouched before his computer screen. The morning when he discovered his wife had left him, he had just returned from a long night of labor, ended only by daylight glare on his screen, which bored into his tired eyes as hunger did his stomach. His walk home took him through groves of shadowy eucalyptus trees, whose fragrance was released with his every step upon their cast-off leaves. There was a heavy dew upon the golf course grass, as his accustomed route took him along the fourteenth fairway of the Leland Country Club. The dew drops glistened in the dawn light, like ghostly prefigurings of the larger dimpled spheres soon to be hacked and hunted in the daily mayhem of play. As Geoff rounded past the fourteenth tee, the dark form of his home emerged in the dim dawn light. His condominium was in "Menlo Oaks" built on Leland land on the north edge of campus a mile or so from the Leland Shopping Center, across Page Mill Road from the golf course. His unit was near the rear of the low spread of a building, giving him a view of the creek and the coastal oaks, whose presence gave shade and calm, which never failed to meet him as he approached his front door. On that morning, however, the calm failed him as if in premonition of what he would find, or more precisely, would not find when he entered.

"Beowulf is a violent poem, some call it pre-Christian, as if Christianity had nothing to do with violence." Geoff was lecturing to a class of some

twenty undergraduates, all sitting glassy eyed and twitchy on this beautiful California afternoon. He liked to unexpectedly break into recitation of the poem in the original language by memory, relishing the Germanic consonants and glottal stops. He was known to startle his students at times by launching into recitation. He did this will full intent to shock, for most of his students were what he called "Damned Hobbit-buffs" devotees of J.R. Tolkien's fantasy. Tolkien had been an eminent Anglo-Saxonist in his own right before lapsing into a fantasy land of his own making, full of "cute critters with trite stories;" "teletubbies without the telly." Geoff had heard much about Tolkien during his own time at Oxford as a Rhodes scholar, and many of the dons still regretted the indiscretions of their late colleague.

"Violence. . .Struggle. . .Sudden death that is the world of Beowulf. . ." he shouted at his cowed undergraduates. He suddenly turned to face the most cowed, a Julie-something, who was trying to make herself as small as possible, struggling to shrink away from her professor's assault. He bent near her and raised his voice still higher,

"There are no Frodos there, no morality, no "Lord of the Rings." It is kill and be killed. You have to understand that." He watched as Julie's eyes turned from shocked surprise, to misty tearfulness. She sprang to her feet and bolted from the classroom with a retreating sob.

But did they understand? When he looked into their eighteen and nineteen year old faces, faces made soft and puffy by the comforts of American upper middle class life, he realized the futility of his teaching. Perhaps the children of Sarajevo, Beirut, or Ulster could know this world; his students could not. He could teach them the language, to write and mouth the lit-crit jargon so popular now. His grad students were good at that, but did they understand? Could they hear and smell the struggle, taste the fear, the blood, the death as he could?

Death had come to his marriage to Jenny as well, but not in a fit of violence. That death had come

trickingly slow, like an ice sculpture melting in the sun. They had met at Harvard while both of them were still graduate students, she in anthropology he in English. Typically their trysting place was Widener Library, with its vast expanses of bookshelves and darkened nooks and crannies. He remembered the thrill of studying alongside her, stealing glances at the curve of her neck as it disappeared into the green, shaggy sweater she habitually wore. These were the 1970s and they both sported the ragged, blue-jeaned wardrobe of the era. But even these could not conceal Jenny's beauty and freshness, her joy and energy. He recalled his disbelief at the growth of their love affair, he, a nearly hermetically sealed Rhodes scholar whose previous social life could be measured in a few disastrous dates and many evenings spent at home reading. The offer of a two-year Post Doc at Oxford upon the completion of his Ph.D. forced them both to decide a future with or without each other. They chose marriage and England, and Jenny abandoned her graduate work and hopes for an academic career.

They had arrived at Heathrow still enveloped in the glow of a splendid wedding and the impecunious but romantic honeymoon spent in a small hunting cabin owned by his uncle in the far north of Ontario province. They had sat on the rickety, rough-nailed porch and watched the raccoons and deer go about the business of living, pretending to be oblivious of the two humans. They had hiked, gathered wood for the cook stove, laughed at their efforts to bake bread in the uncertain heat of the wood-fired oven, made love on the narrow bunk in one corner of the single room, a bed he remembered as being infinitely roomier than the last bed they shared. And even more miraculous than the discoveries they made about each other in that week, was the one Geoff made about himself: that he could live an entire seven days without reading a book, checking a footnote, or writing anything. Life had a shining clarity and simplicity, which ended as they entered the gray coldness of their first English winter together.

Jenny hated England. She had not traveled much before, and had never lived far enough away from her parents that she could not visit on a weekend. Geoff

had had high hopes that he would bring her to love England as he had come to love the country during his two years as a Rhodes scholar. He took her to his favorite pubs in Oxford – she found all of them foul and decrepit. He took her hiking in the countryside, whose scenery she found dull and dreary. In desperation during those first weeks he booked an expensive room in a London hotel, purchased tickets to a play and tried to convince her of London's superiority to Boston and New York. He failed. No doubt the coup de grace was the old, soiled, bed-sit which was all they could afford for housing. It was owned by an elderly Polish woman who lived on the first floor. Jenny's relationship with her soured when Jenny's hairdryer repeatedly blew the fuse of the house's antiquated electrical system. This invariably led to a bilingual shouting match, with Madame Pulaski shrieking abuse about profligate and wasteful Americans, and Jenny answering nose-to-nose and spittle for spittle with her own litany about how much they were paying for creaky plumbing, and faulty wiring.

But most of all Jenny hated sharing him with England. The country was his undeclared mistress. He loved its ancient, dead but strangely vibrant, language. He loved the illogical, medieval twists and turns of Oxford's collegiate life. He loved all the things usually hated by Americans, loved them with a tenderness and good humor that elicited the most unusual response from the natives; they loved him, too. While most Rhodes scholars are politely, but firmly ignored, Geoff was befriended by faculty, staff and students. He renewed all these friendships on his return and steadily added new ones, resulting in a series of invitations to teas, parties, high tables and the like. He became an habitu  in a gathering of literary types, drawn from among the younger dons and readers of various colleges, who met weekly at the Bishop and Wolf, a pub they renamed the Belch and Howl, to read verse and stories aloud to each other over pint after pint of ale. Jenny had accompanied him to the first few gatherings of the group; but she quickly tired of the smoky and grimy surroundings of the pub, and though there were a few women among the regulars, she complained to Geoff that they talked just like men.

So more and more often she stayed at home alone, waiting for him to return.

But in retrospect, Jenny lost him to England through a near miraculous discovery made in the least likely of circumstances. Geoffrey's researches required long hours in the manuscript and rare book room of the Bodleian library poring over manuscripts containing Old English texts. He loved these hours filled with the smell of old parchment, the beautiful and involved script of the medieval scribes whose work filled his eyes like an art exhibit for one. But ironically his great discovery was not contained in the folios of a medieval book, but in the less disciplined hand of a seventeenth-century manuscript, which had once belonged to Lord Mandeville, one of the great early collectors of Medievalia. While leafing through the paper pages of this book, Geoffrey was startled to find some Anglo-Saxon text in the midst of a description of books owned by Lord Mandeville. He carefully deciphered both the seventeenth-century text and the Old English, realizing with growing excitement that what he had discovered was a previously unknown poem by Alfred the Great, the famous ninth-century king and savior of Anglo-Saxon culture from the Vikings. But this discovery, as Geoffrey knew, was only the beginning of his scholarly quest, for without a contemporary or near contemporary text, it was very likely his discovery was nothing but a seventeenth-century forgery. The challenge was to prove that it was the work of Alfred, copied from a now lost medieval manuscript.

For the next three months, Geoffrey abandoned practically everything in his life to the pursuit of proof, choosing an innovative methodology. He had reduced all the known writings of King Alfred to electronic text and set out to write a computer program that would give a statistical profile of the vocabulary and structure of the known works, which he could then compare with the profile of his discovered poem. The results of his work surprised even him: the analysis showed conclusively that his discovery was the work of King Alfred and his article, which he quickly submitted to The Anglo-Saxon Review, was greeted enthusiastically by scholars and featured in a front page story in The

Times. He was shocked to find that he had become a celebrity both in England and the United States, and the offers of employment and speaking engagements rolled in. Barely a year later he found himself at Leland as a tenured associate professor and embattled husband.

"Well, I'm not going with you this time. . ."  
Jenny had assumed that rigid pose – hand on hip, head cocked to one side – that were sure warning signs. "I'm sick of these English conferences and research trips of yours. Do you realize that we have not spent more than six consecutive months at home in years?"

Geoff rolled his eyes at this last reference, because he knew it was true and that the frequency of his research and conference trips had prevented Jenny from seeking employment, or "getting on with her life" as she put it. The unspoken subtext to all this, Geoff knew, was that his absence would interrupt Jenny's real obsession – having a child.

He was not even sure when this obsession had taken over their lives. Perhaps it came about one night when he lay half-asleep, and Jenny mentioned going off the pill. He had murmured assent and not given it another thought until several months had passed and Jenny met him at the door one evening:

"Aren't you concerned?" she had asked. Startled, he replied "About what?" "That it's been months and I'm still not pregnant." "Don't you think it's a little early to get so upset about it?" he answered, and immediately regretted this statement, for at that she began to cry so inconsolably that he found himself agreeing to the course of action she had planned out with her infertility specialist. It was a descent into hell.

"Your sperm count is adequate, but your seminal fluid may be a tad thick." The diagnosis had come after the acutely embarrassing collection of semen, a thorough groping of his testicles and anxious waiting. The doctor had pronounced it in a tone of mild reproach, as if presented with a slightly disappointing

wine or stock investment – "Good but obviously not quite good enough" he seemed to say.

After slipping his membrum pudendum back into his pants and recovering his dignity, Geoffrey felt almost disappointed that he had not been found to be the guilty party – the one responsible for the intolerable and growing weight of childlessness. It was that night that he made his second verbal blunder, raising the question of their adopting a child. That was what had driven her off.

They lay together after having made love, he exhausted after a long day and this command performance sex, she anxiously calculating her ovulation cycles. The screen door was open, and the night sounds seemed to rustle the curtains with the breeze.

"We may have timed the cycle just right this time," she said, remembering the tables she had recording her ovulations across many months. "How many times have you said that?" Geoff replied wearily, "Sometimes I think all this is just no use." You have been on at least three kinds of fertility pills. I've been worked over by two urologists, and no one can find anything wrong with us."

"What's wrong with us, Geoff, is that we don't have a child." Jenny snapped back. The brief optimism of the moment was gone.

"Honey, don't you think we should go back to that adoption counselor again?" Geoff was recklessly broaching a taboo subject. Jenny was crying now and between sobs she insisted that she wanted a child of their own flesh and blood. "I just can't go on like this any longer." Geoff had replied and before he lapsed into sleep, he remembered Jenny replying "Fine."

The message in his mailbox snapped Geoff out of remembrance and back to reality. The note was from his department chair, Charles Haskins, summoning him to his office that afternoon. This in itself was highly unusual, for since email had become widely available, Haskins had taken to using it for all his personal and administrative communications. He avoided meeting



anyone face-to-face. They had taken to calling him C.C. for cyberchair, and there was talk of compiling an anthology of his more memorable e-mails – the one forbidding socializing with graduate students was reckoned a masterpiece of e-prose.

Later, crossing the threshold of the chair's office, Geoff couldn't help the momentary start of surprise by the grandeur he encountered. All Leland faculty offices were grand, but in the renovation of three years before, Haskins had raised the bar several notches. It was rumored that he retained a London architectural antiques dealer to meet his desire for a "baronial room" – and he had succeeded magnificently. The thirty foot square space, with its fourteen foot ceilings was barely adequate to contain the oak wainscotting, magnificent brass chandelier, limestone fireplace with "fenders" – those curious upholstered railings near the fire where the half-frozen residents of unheated Victorian flats had once huddled. On the walls were original eighteenth-century oil paintings of scenes from the English countryside of the "Turner" school. Strangely absent, however, were books. Most of the shelves were filled with curios and objets d'art. It was perhaps the perfect postmodern faculty office, full of curiosities but somehow free of any overriding identity or evidence of fervent scholarly pursuits.

"Good of you to come, Douglas. . ." Haskins always called colleagues by their last name, one of his many British affectations, ". . .it's been some time since we had a good chat. Sit down. Sit down." Geoff chose the leather wingback chair nearest the broad expanse of walnut that was Haskins' desk, trying to settle the butterflies in his stomach. "How's that Beowulf project of yours progressing?" Haskins asked, but before Geoff could reply, he rushed on to the real purpose of the chat. "Good. Good. Glad to hear it." Geoff shut his mouth in mid-reply. "I was just on the phone with the Dean, who was elaborating upon the scorching email he sent me yesterday. I don't mind telling you that he was so hot that his message almost caused my machine to spontaneously reboot." Geoff smiled weakly at what he supposed was a joke. Haskins' ambitions for upper administration were well known,

which produced in him a dog-like callowness when exposed to decanal rage of any sort.

"It seems you verbally assaulted and humiliated a female student in your English Great Works class a week or two ago." Geoff's mind went back to the fleeing, sobbing coed, the result of his Beowulf tirade. "Yes, that was regrettable, but you see I was trying to make them understand the viciousness and violence of Beowulf's world. That it's not some namby-pamby video game. "Fine, Fine, Douglas," Haskins interrupted, "I have no reason to doubt your pedagogical instincts." But do you know what that girl's name was?" "Julie-something. I think. Look, Chuck. . ." But before Geoff could continue, Haskins broke in, "Yes, Julie Starr, the daughter of special counsel, Kenneth Starr, who is at this moment preparing an impeachment case against the President, who might just be the most powerful man in Washington right now. And do you know what little Julie did after your class? Do you? She called home in tears, informing her parents of what a brute her English professor was; how he was rude and disrespectful to the students. How he twisted and distorted literature to turn it violent, lustful and crazy. How she wanted to come home and leave Leland for good. Do you realize, Geoff, that your picture could be hanging alongside the President's on Starr's dartboard? And do you further realize that any dart thrown at you or Leland, pricks the English department in the ass? Do you? Do you?"

Haskins had half-risen from his chair, his face red and cicada-like in terror at the idea of a future suddenly bereft of the provostship that by right belonged to him. Instead, the English professor's Purgatory beckoned — twenty years teaching Freshman composition.

Mastering his anger, Haskins slumped back in his chair. Geoff was stunned speechless at the outburst. He had never seen Haskins like this and it frightened him.

"Geoff, Geoff, I'm sorry. It's just with budget cuts and now this, well, it's been a strain. I know you have had a hard time of it since your divorce.

That's why I think it's time to give you some time off from teaching. You know we think of teaching here like the Quakers do religion, you should only do it when the spirit moves you." Geoff struggled to smile at the weak joke.

"So I'm telling the dean that I've assigned you to research duty for a year or two," Haskins continued, ". . . use the time to finish the Beowulf project and get your life together." The meeting ended with some small talk.

A strange thing happened in the weeks and then months that followed his removal from teaching. His life fell still. This came not all at once or even gradually in a way one could recognize. No, it was more like what happens with one of those water-filled winter scenes. You know the ones – the glass sphere, with the miniature village and trees, and the fake snow that when shaken rides up through the water to settle again on the glass bottom. And of course if left on a shelf, the settling snow remains motionless in that watery silence.

For Geoff, with no classes to teach, and no one to go home to, this meant even longer hours in his office seated before the one-eyed tyrant. Not that his work on Beowulf made any progress; if anything he made less. And one by one the trickle of graduate students seeking him out to solve the conundrum of Old English syntax and vocabulary subsided; so that the twos and threes became twos and ones, then a solitary student once in a while, and then no one at all. He realized sometimes that entire days passed without his speaking to anyone. He even thought about buying a television simply for the sound of human voices and the opportunity to shout back at them.

He had struggled against the stilling of his life. He had continued to attend the weekly department meetings held in their common room, that is until his colleagues began appearing to him as cartoon characters. Admittedly, this was not much of a stretch for some of them – Haskins, for example, was perfect as Daffy Duck, strutting to and fro before his seated departmental colleagues with unruffled self importance.

And old Professor Tompkins, hairless and hard of hearing, appeared to Geoff the very image of Mr. Magoo. Geoff was about to nudge his neighbor to share the joke when he realized that he was the only one seeing the show. The rapt attention of his neighbors to the succession of great cartoon sketches unfolding before Geoff's eyes – the absurdity of Daffy, the blundering obtuseness of Mr. Magoo; there was Mickey and Minnie, Pluto. They laughed and whirled and spun before his eyes, a cacophonous witches' sabbath of sound. Geoff staggered to his feet, desperate to get away, and with that the faces of his colleagues turned towards him, suddenly cleansed of their cartoonishness, and most with a look of pity for him. Somehow Geoff's legs carried him from the room and back to his office.

"Thus [Beowulf] the son of Healfdene constantly brooded on the sorrow of his time, nor could the wise hero set aside his grief; that strife which had befallen the people, cruel and malicious distress, worst of night-horrors, was too harsh, loathsome and long-lasting." (Beowulf, lines 189-194)

"I know it's none of my business, Geoff, but is everything all right with you? You look a little, well, a little unkempt." The question came from Stephen French, professor of Italian, and it was pronounced over a plate heaped high with smoke salmon, capers and white asparagus, just assembled from the buffet line at the Leland Faculty club. A glass of Chardonnay glistened green/gold at his elbow, and he was applying a large dollop of butter to a crusty, sourdough roll. French was a regular at the club and so had obtained a choice table against the large, sliding glass doors at the center of the club, which framed the Zen garden outside like a tranquil still life painting. French had been approached by a group of Geoff's friends to confront him gently and convince him of the need to seek help.

"Oh, I'm fine, fffine." Geoff stammered. "The clothes? Yes, it's been a while since I did laundry. But I'm fine, really. It's just. . ."

"Just what, Geoff?" French replied, checking his assault on the salmon long enough to fix a concerned gaze at Geoff.

"It's just that I keep misplacing things."

"What kinds of things." French was concerned.

"Oh, little things mostly. . .at first. Yes, at first I lost only a few minutes here and there. Maybe a half hour at the very most. I thought nothing of it. You know, you're concentrating on your research and writing, sometimes you lose your sense of time. But lately I've lost days and weeks. . .gone just like that." Geoff's gesture was a slow empty release with his hand, as if a weightless object had just drifted off.

"Listen, Geoff, I've had bad patches myself, dark days when I was almost catatonic due to something absent that I couldn't name. Ten years ago, after my divorce, I didn't leave my house for a month. Couldn't bear to open the door. My ex-wife left me food and finally brought her therapist around to help. You know what she taught me. She helped me to see that sometimes you wander off somewhere and there seems to be no way back. You remember Dante:

"Midway in our life's journey, I went astray from the straight road and woke to find myself alone in a dark wood."

French interrupted his quotation to spear a stalk of white asparagus, twirling it to emphasize the words of the immortal Florentine. A yellow drip of Hollandaise sauce took off at 12 o'clock low bound to wreak collateral damage on one of their neighbors.

"The only way is to work your way through it by finding a time in your life when you felt connected and secure." He continued. "When life wasn't constant preoccupation or fear. Then you fix on that time, that moment perhaps and pull yourself towards it somehow. It's different for everyone. For me it was fly fishing.

"Fishing" Geoff repeated dumbly.

"Yes, I realized that the few times in my childhood I had felt free were when I was fly fishing with my grandfather. Before his death, I spent summers in Montana with him and my grandmother. My home life was a horror, as I may have told you. But summers with them were an oasis, though I was much too young to realize it at the time. So now my wife insists that I go off at least two weeks each summer to a trout stream somewhere." He was just about to embark on a discussion of the various places he had tried in recent years, which flies had worked best and what he had caught, when he caught sight of Geoff's face, which bore an expression of peaceful attention.

Geoff's memory had taken him immediately to the trout stream equivalent in his life. "For me it was singing." He said.

"I didn't know you sang, Geoff." French replied, surprised at this revelation from his usually reticent friend."

Oh, I don't now, haven't in years. But when I was a kid, eleven or twelve, I suppose, I was the lead boy soprano in the St. Alban's school choir. It was a kind of turning point for me really. Before that, I had been a sickly, stay-at-home kind of kid. I read a lot, but I never joined the boy scouts, or played baseball with the other kids. And in my school, if you didn't play sports you didn't exist. But I did like music and when I became a choir scholar they discovered I had perfect pitch, which led to the cure to my headaches."

"Headaches" French interjected, interested enough now to forget his food for a moment.

"Yes, I had suffered from excruciating headaches since I was two," Geoff continued, "until the choirmaster made that discovery."

"I still don't see the connection." French said.

"Well, Mr. Stevens, the choir director, had pitch too, and when he heard about my headaches he asked my

mother about sounds and noises around the house. It turned out that the old Electrolux vacuum she ran most every day, emitted a pitch at the quarter tone between F sharp and G natural and it threw my brain into convulsions. As soon as we got the Hoover (Hoovers always run in B flat) no more problems. So for two years I sang and steadily improved until I was singing lead."

"Why'd you stop?" French asked, reaching for his wineglass.

"I didn't stop," Geoff continued. "I was stopped – by puberty. It couldn't have been more embarrassing either. We were doing César Franck's Panis Angelicus for a Sunday evensong. The piece was a huge solo – quite high, with a number of very exposed passages. Well, to make a long story short, I began the piece as a soprano and finished it as a baritone. I'll never forget the feeling. It was as if my voice had been hijacked by aliens – the tone would be ringing in my mind but my voice couldn't produce it. The rest of the choir almost collapsed in laughter. Mr. Stevens said later that he had never heard such a rapid change of voice."

"I think you're on to something there, Geoff." French had finished his lunch and was swirling the wine in his glass, content both with the meal and with his foray into psychotherapy. "I can imagine the grief you suffered at the loss of something so important in our life. Why don't you let me call over the music school to see if there's someone who could work with you. I've had a few singers in my classes, and there is likely to be one of them who's teaching voice as well. Voice lessons might be just the thing for you. Just the thing."

A week later, Geoff was navigating an unfamiliar corner of the Leland campus. His path took him diagonally across campus, along paths lined with palm trees, and traversed by speeding bicyclists. His appointment was for 10 o'clock in practice room C of the main music building. The note from French had said his teacher was Mary Livingston, a doctoral student in voice performance who also taught on the side. He said

that she was a former student of his and that he could vouch for her. Geoff had ransacked his wardrobe for a clean shirt, his best tweed sport coat and a red bow tie to add a note of jauntiness to his look. He was frankly apprehensive about the lesson. On the one hand he admitted to himself that he couldn't continue drawing into himself and away from other people. It was harming him and harming his work. But then again he had come to find comfort in his aloneness, living without the need to please other people.

Eventually he found his way to practice room C and he knocked lightly on the door. When it opened, Geoff was astonished for a moment. Mary Livingstone looked all of twenty in a long skirt and blue blouse. Her auburn hair was pulled behind her ears, from where it fell over her shoulders in a silky cascade, and her fair, even transparent skin seemed too delicate to be real. She was lovely in a quite unmannered and unfussy way, with a beauty that was not exclaimed but whispered. Geoff gasped in spite of himself, for when he thought of female singers the image was always of the women who sang in his church choir. They were also formidable, even pushy, and their voices often had an Electrolux-life effect on him.

"You're Professor Douglas?" Her voice broke his momentary paralysis while completing Geoff's impression of her, for the voice was in complete harmony with her appearance.

"Yes, Yes. . ." he stammered, "I realize I'm a little early. I could come back if you're not ready for me yet."

"No, now is fine," she replied, "my 9:30 student didn't show."

Geoff entered the room, which was a windowless, minimal kind of space, with no furniture other than a grand piano on one side and a music stand on the other. The fluorescent lights emitted a sotto voce F sharp. Geoff took a deep breath to calm his nervousness and turned to face Mary.



"Professor French told me a little about you, that you used to sing and that you'd like to take it up again to reduce stress. You teach in the English department, don't you?" "Yes," Geoff answered, "I'm an Anglo-Saxonist working on Beowulf at the moment." He warmed to the familiar words of his specialty in this foreign space.

"Beowulf?" She replied quizzically as if trying out the word for the first time. "I think my parents had some of their albums. Yes, I'm sure they did."

In that moment she charmed him. "Imagine," he said to himself later, still smiling inwardly, "she thought Beowulf was a sixties rock group."

With that they began the exploration of Geoff's voice. Mary began the scales and arpeggios on the piano, which Geoff dutifully sang, the ahs, ees, and ohs up and down. He felt the pleasure of his voice's unlimbering as the sounds came ever more easily. The notes rang in both his mind and voice as he felt himself relax and enter into a state so familiar, yet at the same time so strange, like visiting a house that was once your home.

When they were finished with the warm up, Mary searched through a pile of music lying on the piano, found what she was looking for and then placed it on Geoff's music stand. "What's this?" He asked. "Schubert," she answered, "The Litanei auf das Fest Aller Seelen."

"All Souls?" Geoff asked.

"Yes, that's today, the second of November, the day after All Saints. And it should suit your voice." She replied.

Before he could object to the impossibility of sight reading Schubert, she had begun the accompaniment. A D minor chord with the root doubled in the left hand, then down to G sharp minor – so Schubertian – the chord an arpeggio in the right hand, resolved ever so gently into A minor, and then as if from nowhere:

(Sung)

Ruhn in Frieden alle Seelen,  
Die vollbracht ein banges Quälen,  
Die vollendet süßen Traum,  
Lebenssatt, geboren kaum,  
Aus der Welt hinüberschieden:  
Alle Seelen ruhn in Frieden!

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CULTURE WARS

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Kingston Fletcher

The Chairman of the Fine Arts Fund campaign received the bad news as he was driving down the 9<sup>th</sup> fairway in a golf cart at Ponta Verdra, Florida. It was April 28, 1990, just over nine years ago. The voice on the other end of the line was Carl Lindner. He said he was unable to support the Campaign personally and through his various companies due to his opposition to the exhibit at the Contemporary Arts Center. His stance put a large hole in the Fine Arts Fund drive, leaving it \$250,000 short of its goal with only 3 days left. If the shortfall could not be made up, it would be the first time in thirty plus years that the target would not be met.

The Lindner decision raised the ire of the business community. They felt that no one individual was going to derail this traditional and successful campaign that provided essential support not only for the Contemporary Arts Center but also for the other seven major arts organizations in the city (Symphony, Opera, Playhouse, Ballet, Art Museum, etc.). The drive chairman left for the Queen City the next day determined to close the funding gap.

What brought about this state of affairs? The potential donor, although a man who shunned publicity, was known for his philanthropy. How could he be so at