

HAUNTED HOUSE HILLAR ... THE HOMECOMING

Sometime mid-September 1987 a calamity of minor proportions occurred in my home province Ontario: the sale of tequila was banned. For those unfamiliar with the moralistic, prohibition-whiffed alcohol-policies of those times, the only (legal) way to obtain wine or spirits for home-consumption was – and still is – in a Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO) store, a monopoly which, incidentally, is the largest single-entity booze-purchaser in the world. Just last week I was decidedly pleased to have stumbled across a large photo of an LCBO store in the 1950s.

Here was pictured all I remembered: a large room showing one (of two) long tables spanning which was a white two-sided rising triangle; on both sides of this strangeness were paper-pads similar to doctors' tear-off prescription-instructions; on the floor were a garbage can and a hefty white-sand-topped tubular ashtray(!). The eye then moved to the back to view a wall-to-wall counter behind which three stern-looking uniformed men stood stock-still guarding a barely visible orderly-shelved first-row bottles-pool.

I took Magda outside to my jungle (as she called it), sat her down in the best light and, according to our ritual, obliged her eyes to be closed. I then placed said photo on a garden-chair, covering up the caption with a wide slice of mat paper – *You can open your eyes now, come and have a good look at what's on the chair, don't touch anything and when you're ready, tell me what you see.* She complied.

After thinking out loud for a minute Magda had it figured out – *It looks like a prison.* With glee – *Yes, Magda, yes!* After tormenting her for some minutes I revealed photo's provenance – *Customers were frowned upon, as though they had succumbed to a vice. They were treated with formality but underneath lurked a sense that degenerates, if not reprobates, were being dealt with.*

I explained the mysteries – or should I say opacity – contained within those triangles: a headline announcing wine's origin-country and directly below one found product's number, wine's name, price and, obsessively, its sweetness level as though it should dictate one's choice. Nothing about the grape varietals, terroir, etc. One would then fill out the LCBO's "script" with assigned numbers, how many bottles were desired along with their price and then waddle humbly to the counter. The items were fetched, one paid for them and went home – no doubt to have a glass of something to help recover from the ordeal!

Much has changed over the decades: LCBO customers welcomed; endless "vintages" bi-monthly releases; an overwhelming cascade of newsprint and on-line reviews. But back to tequila.

You need to understand that in my budding career as “working alcoholic” I always focused on one cheering up-lifter: first it was gin, then tequila, followed by Pernod (anise) and now vodka. Enamoured by spirit's charms I made a decision – were I ever to have a daughter, she would be named after my years-long love. “Tequila Liitoja” seemed to have a pleasing ring to it.

Life-blood deprived, the situation's direness must be apparent to you. There remained but one realistic option: to call my Montreal-friend, ask to stay over for a few days and empty the delectable liquid-amber from shelves of some *Société des alcools du Québec* stores.

Luggage-laden I arrived at my apartment building's front door to which a sign on DNA stationary – like a press release (FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, September 29, 1987) – was affixed –

*DEAREST HILLAR,
UNFORTUNATELY YOUR QUITE VALID REQUEST
FOR SOLITUDE REACHED THE EARS OF DNA A LITTLE LATE.
ALREADY THE WHEELS HAD TURNED, THE COGS HAD MOVED.
PLEASE REMEMBER, DNA COMES UNEXPECTED.
DNA IS NOT POLITE,
DNA HAPPENS ONLY ONCE,
DNA LOVES YOU, HILLAR.
WITH THAT SAID, “ARE YOU READY TO GO IN? WATCH OUT.”*

LOVE,

THE COMPANY

Reading this notice was most surprising and gave me a trace of pause. I opened the door and there was Kirsten Johnson, the perpetrator of this craziness. We carried my bags to my apartment's door and I was informed – *Someone will take your stuff in. But right now I am taking you out for a beer.*

So we walked over to the very-nearby Madison Pub and sat on a patio looking at a lovely sunset. Amidst my second beer, suddenly – *We have to go now.* I gulped down my remaining draft and we duly left.

Walking up the stairs I was told to knock on my door. I so did. It was opened by “Mrs. Hillar” – *Hi honey! Welcome home! SLAM!* Right in my face. This was repeated three times before I was allowed in. Awaiting me – beyond my newly acquired wife – were Blindfolded cat killer; Insulter; Bubble-blowing schoolgirl; Dante's wife; Bather and Pumpkin carver.

I truly regret not being able to recall almost anything that happened. Perhaps I was excessively stunned – not exactly a bad thing for a DNA aficionado, never mind being its Artistic Director.

Wandering around my newly-populated space I surely must have been delighted by the topsey-turvydom. Dante's wife on my spacious back patio, dressed in all-black, was intoning her "husband's" verses in passionate Italian. In my bath was a just-no-longer boy in shallow water presenting a lovely small bottom. It was irresistible. I bent down a little and planted a small kiss on it – upon which he sprung out of the white enamelled tub, threw open the window and squeezed his naked liveness out onto the walkway between my and the next door's apartment.

What fun! The wonderful once-only, solo-audience-member, performance must have lasted for about 45 minutes. And once over, were you at all familiar with the company's then-spirits and -inclinations, you would know a fair amount of you-know-what was smoked while imbibing a copious amount of you-know-what!

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