



2 Tales of the CITY

Composed of Two Amusements:

I. THE STONERS
AND
II. THE TRIBUNES

BY **JAMES
WALSH**

TWO TALES OF THE CITY
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More information about the author and his work may be found by visiting his web site:

www.JohnTKWalsh.net

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I.

The STONERS

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Dramatis Personae

Professor Richard “Dick” Jehnows, Biology, Thornton University

Brother Baldisari, Sons of Bedric, Dean of Arts & Sciences, Thornton University

Penelope Coyne, Confidential Operative for the Royal Family in Exile

Jenny, Waitress and Bouncer at The Sty

Sister Lucreza, Mother Supreme, Order of St. Stephen, Stoned (SSS)

Sister Evanora, SSS, Security Chief

Sister Hedwige, SSS, Malcontent

Professor Fingal O’Flahertie, aka “Oscar”, History, Thornton University

Sister Kalinya, SSS, Interrogator

Father Rico S. Fascant, Mendicant Monks of Malta (MMM), Chaplain to the Stoners

Sister Margarethe, SSS, Dean and Soccer Coach at Our Lady of Perspicuous Pansophy

Luis Cesar Rojas, Cultural Attache, Democratic Republic of the Rio Coco (DRRC)

The STONERS

Sisters Felsen and Wirbel, SSS

Graham Lucas, MI-9 Foot Soldier #1

Nigel Webb, MI-9 Foot Soldier #2

Jacques Pisces, Inspector from Interpol

Bairbre McIntosh, IRA Footsoldier #1

Seamus Croghan, IRA Foolsoldier #2

Sister Georgia, SSS, Night Security

Arvo Lutz, Aerialist and Assassin

Dr. Varga, Chief Medical Examiner, DRRC

The STONERS

The STONERS

Chapter 1

Dick Jehnows

The motherhouse for the nuns of the Order of St. Stephen, Stoned (SSS) stands on a promontory with a commanding view of Lake Katherine. It is a massive stone structure and, with its turrets and flying buttresses, looks like something Disney might have created in an attempt to replicate Hogwarts. In fact, the building had a previous existence as a castle, complete with moat and drawbridge, in Transylvania, deep in the Carpathian Mountains. In 1905, in more favorable times when the Order was prosperous, the castle was carefully deconstructed, the numbered pieces shipped to the United States, and then professionally reassembled on the present site, northeast of metropolitan Harrison, and five miles north of Thornton University. The bluff on which it perches is the highest point on the lake's southern shore. Some have described the structure as imposing, others as intimidating. Even shore birds are reluctant to nest in its upper reaches.

The Order of St. Stephen, Stoned was founded in 1096 by Stella Urquell of Brno in Moravia. The original purpose was to participate in the First Crusade. However, Pope Urban put a stop to that (the participation, but, unfortunately, not the Crusade). In some circles, Urban is still regarded as a poster-boy for male chauvinism. Actually, he missed a good bet. In battle, the nuns were so fierce that they made the Swiss Guard look like a

disorganized group of choirboys. In time, the order divided into two branches, one cloistered and the other functioning out in the world. The cloistered branch added the vow of silence to the traditional three: poverty, chastity, and obedience. In this country, the non-cloistered branch helps to staff many hospitals as well as a number of primary and secondary schools, and a handful of colleges. Some members of the cloistered branch work as archivists; others spend their time in acts of charity, meditation, and devotion. Were they not cloistered, a few might have found employment as professional mimes.

The motherhouse has three sub-basements. The lowest of the three was carved out of the native sandstone and quartzite. In size, it far exceeds the footprint of the original castle. It has the combined square footage of three airplane hangars. The environment in this vault is rigorously controlled: air conditioning, temperature, and humidity. Ranks of fluorescent lights line the ceiling, marching off into the distance. The vault is filled with endless rows of shelves and cabinets stacked high. Wheeled ladders, mounted on rails, provide access to the upper levels. Numerous separate storage rooms are scattered throughout. It reminds one of science fiction's Warehouse 13, but thus far without the paranormal effects. A small cadre of cloistered nuns rules this domain with very firm hands. Visitors are unwelcome. Security is strict.

On the beach below the castle, there is a haphazard pile of rocks, each the size of a small house. Geologists claim that these granite boulders date to prehistoric times and that they were disgorged from the bowels of the earth either by volcanic action or by a collision of tectonic plates. Over the ages, wind and surf

have carved out scenic grottoes in the pile. The tidal pools range from ankle-to-chest-deep. The light that filters down through gaps in the boulders lends to these grottoes a mystical atmosphere, similar to that found in some major European cathedrals. The whole scene is reminiscent of the experience had by visiting The Baths on Virgin Gorda in the British Virgin Islands. One might be forgiven for thinking of these grottoes as The Baths of Lake Katherine.

Early in the morning of a brilliant July day, Dick Jehnows approached the Baths from the west. Jehnows is a marine biologist, and a tenured associate professor at Thornton University, a Ph.D.-granting institution run by a Catholic order of priests, The Sons of Bederic, who sign S.O.B after their names. While they are ordained priests, their common form of address is Brother. Collectively, they are The Brethren. When they are not within hearing range, their colleagues have been known to refer to them as The Bubbas.

Dick was recruited and trained by Professor Noah Navarchus, who regarded him as his most promising student. Dick is slightly below average height and above average weight. He is in decent shape for a man in his early forties, and a survivor of Hashimoto's Thyroiditis. While he has recovered the weight he lost during the treatments, the hair on his head and body seems to have decamped for good. Jehnows is a familiar figure on the beach, collecting data, and specimens for his research program. This morning he entered the Baths and made his way to the grotto farthest removed from the lake. Here the water was up to his armpits. He checked to make certain that he was alone

and then slipped below the surface. On the east side of the grotto was a short underwater passage that led to yet another pool. He had discovered it by accident on an earlier visit. He believes, rather mistakenly as it turns out, that no one else is aware of its existence. Unlike the other pools where the barbarians have left their marks, this grotto was almost pristine.

On the far side of this pool was a small sand beach leading to a crude flight of stairs that had been carved out of the rock. Someone had been here before him but it had been a very long time ago. Jehnows climbed the steps until his path was blocked by a formidable, and locked, steel door set into the stone. Several visits ago, when he had first come upon it, he was intrigued and frustrated. He had come on a mission and this door thwarted him.

To understand his mission, we need to return to Thornton University and consider the dynamics of the Biology Department. At this time, the Chair in Biology was Dr. James Austin. To say that he and Jehnows did not get along would be a monumental understatement. Getting rid of Jehnows was high on Austin's agenda. But, this thorn in his side had tenure and no intention of leaving. Skirmishes were frequent but inconclusive. At the annual faculty evaluations last November, the two met face-to-face in the Chair's office. After a tense conversation, Austin had Jehnows sign the evaluation form and leave it with him. Once Jehnows had gone, Austin removed the page that contained his innocuous comments and replaced it with one on which the criticisms were scathing and vitriolic. It was this version that was forwarded to the Dean. He never shared the substitute comments with Jehnows.

Naturally, Jehnows' raises were minimal and promotion to full professor appeared extremely unlikely.

Finally, a Dean, Brother Baldisari SOB, figured out the game that Austin was playing and sent a copy of the most recent evaluation to Jehnows. It was a revelation! Immediately, he wrote a rebuttal. Then he began to wonder what other defamation had found its way into his personnel file. Invoking his rights under the Freedom of Information Act, he made a formal request to review his file. The officers of the Administration had been down this road before with other faculty members. It was not a journey they enjoyed. The problem was how to let the faculty exercise their legal rights without compromising the secrecy of their files. The solution they arrived at was to have two sets of personnel files, the complete one and a heavily edited, plain vanilla version. They believed, quite rightly, that sharing the complete ones would open the door to numerous, expensive lawsuits. Thus the faculty member making a request to review his file never got to see the original, but only the redacted one. The original files were consigned to the university archives, housed in a secure, off campus location.

When Jehnows finally got to see the contents of his file, there was so little there that he saw through the charade instantly. This was not transparency but rather obfuscation. There had to be another set of files, the complete ones. But, where would they be kept? On occasion, gossip at the lunch table in the Faculty Dining Room suggested that the University kept a secret archive tended by the SSS. With no supporting evidence, this gossip was soon dismissed as just another urban legend and it became the

object of much ridicule. Now, however, Jehnows had reason to reconsider the possibility. He decided that it was something worth checking. This is what led him to the Baths of Lake Katherine and the locked door.

On a subsequent visit, he had made a wax impression of the lock. Back in his laboratory, he fashioned a key. Today, from a waterproof pouch hanging around his neck, he extracted the key and used it to unlock the door. It swung open silently on well-oiled hinges. Jehnows stepped inside and closed the door behind him. It took a few seconds for his eyes to adjust to the lights. When they had, he stared in slack-jawed amazement. The scale of this operation was breathtaking. If the Thornton files were here, they made up only a very small fraction of the holdings. *What have I stumbled into?* Several aisles away, a nun flew by on a Segway. Jehnows crouched down behind a row of filing cabinets to avoid being seen. He studied the nearest file drawers and found the labels to be printed in Cyrillic. Clearly, they were not the Thornton files. *But what were they, and why were they here? What was going on here?* His search field had suddenly gotten much bigger and consequently his quest had become exponentially more difficult. For a thorough search, he would need to come back and spend several nights here.