

A NOVEL

THE REFLECTING MAN

— VOLUME THREE —

D.K.R. BOYD

ALSO BY THE AUTHOR

The Reflecting Man: Volume One
The Reflecting Man: Volume Two
The Reflecting Man: Volume Three

For children, as David Boyd

The Face in the Flames

Spellbound!

The Danger Beneath

Earthwatch

Champlain Summer

Leonardo's Wings

Little Sure Shot

Khan of Khans

Suleyman's Library

Good Queen Bess

Heart Of A Lion

Marco Polo and the Roc

The Hidden Message

Pearl Harbour

Beware the Vikings

Napoleon's Land Stand

Hannibal

Pearl of the Tsars

Battle of Queenston Heights

*My Mom Always Yells Too Loud in the Arena and Other Poems about
Hockey (co-authored with Kathy Douglas)*

For YA, as David Boyd

Looking for a Hero

Bottom Drawer

Closer To Hamlet

Aftermath

Runner

*On The Lines: The Adventures of a Linesman in the N.H.L.
(co-authored with Ron Finn)*

The Grief Team (as David Collins)

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Chapter One

Yes, it is true, my dear Reader, that I have previously referred to William Lyon Mackenzie King, the Prime Minister of Canada, as “colourless” and “bland as unsweetened porridge.” Further, I have stated that, “You’d have to be delusional to think that our Prime Minister does anything more than call for hot milk before bedtime at ten o’clock.” These are not falsehoods in-or-out of any context for they represent the patina of the man’s public persona, the firm-but-fair *Caspar Milquetoast of Canada*.

A cartoon character in the ‘funnies is a Prime Minister? So they say.

It is also true that while this unmarried gentleman avidly appreciates members of the fairer sex who are attractive, intelligent, and full of vim-and-vigour, he nevertheless saves his “vital energies” (avidly *and* privately) for young ladies of the lowest social order. Time-out-of-mind, this practice is not considered unusual among the upper crust in Canada, Britain, or anywhere else Anglo-Saxons rule the roost—it is viewed as one of the perquisites of imperialism and is likely listed in the *Parliamentary Code of Permissible Conduct*. Practically makes one want to run for office; regardless, extracurricular coitus with whores was certainly not the focal point of my interest in this fellow.

No, I was not interested in the indiscreet goings-on of any gentleman-at-leisure from Ottawa, particularly our Prime Minister, and therefore I spurned my employer Lord Beaverbrook’s suggestion that I write about this man while he represented Canada at Bertie’s coronation and a number of adjoining international and Commonwealth conferences. A coronation, don’t we all know, brings all manner of very important people together and watching *George VI* receive the crown atop his handsome, somewhat vacant features was a huge draw across the world.

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“I know nothing about the man. He’s boring. Put a regular on him.”

“That, my boy, is the principle of good governing put to use.”

“Mackenzie King is not boring?”

“Kurtis, he is not boring. I think he’s actually quite charming. You’ve met him, Huge, what do you say about the man?”

“A rum chap, Max. I think Willie may be one of those damned Romantics. Knows a great deal of Carlyle off by heart.”

“Oh surely not, Huge...Willie is a Presbyterian...a Scottish Presbyterian, come to that.”

“Pardon me, gentlemen, while I snooze. There’s nothing as boring as a Scottish Presbyterian. And a pox on him if he’s a Romantic one. Carlyle’s twitterings about *'The Great Man'* is what Goebbels reads to Adolf at bedtime. Mussolini’s mistress has it tattooed on her posterior (or so I’ve been told). Why should Willie King be any different? Back in 1837 his grandfather started a rebellion in Upper Canada against the *Crown*, you know. People lost their lives...Max, the fan’s stopped working...look at the smoke in here...”

“Oh pish! I smoke like a chimney and I’m fit as a fiddle.”

“Look at him, Kurtis, my boy. Ever in your life seen a fiddle as big as that?”

“Max, you have done me the courtesy of reminding me that I am having lunch at the *BBC* tele-vision studio today.”

“You’re eating with the Governors?”

“No, my friends, I am the guest of Monsieur Marcel Boulestin on the inaugural broad-cast of his cooking performances for tele-vision. That is what the boffins call it...a broad-cast.”

“That’s rather exciting, don’t you think? You appearing on five hundred little grey screens all over London? All at the same time too. That’s exciting. What will you say or do?”

“I have the easiest role to play upon the stage, my dear boy...that of a trusted epicure.”

“Kurtis, Huge means he’s going to eat whatever Marcel serves up at the end of the show.”

“Indeed, I shall be devouring *Coq au Vin* apparently.”

“Well, there’s a silver lining in everything then. And, Max, I still won’t swan around London for a couple of months with Mackenzie King. I am paid to sleuth out juicy gossip and shocking secrets, not sift through squabbles on trade agreements and the price of Prairie wheat.”

“Not even if I mention that there’d be some money in it for that friend of yours? Echland?”

“Erl is working for *TIME*. He’s not making a lot but I doubt if he needs to go moonlighting that bad. How much are you talking and what’s the angle on Mackenzie King? Clearly you’ve got something up your nose about the man.”

“Well, if Huge is off to the *Beeb*, I suggest we follow him as far as the *Crown* and have hot pies and ales for our luncheon. I will be delighted to tell you everything I have in mind.”

“I say, you might, if either of you have a mind that’s good at remembering things, bring back a rabbit pie or two for me. For afters.”

“For afters?”

“Indeed. For afters. The Chef is only making one *Coq* after all.”

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And so it came to pass, amid pies-and-ales at the worthy *Crown* tavern, that yours truly learned of—and became devilishly fascinated with—the clandestine attendance of Mackenzie King inside the residence located at #16 *Queensberry Place* which, if you are unaware, is home to the *London Spiritualist Alliance*. A popular guest, Mackenzie King last crossed its threshold less than a year ago in 1936, according to L.B., and our Prime Minister is expected to do so once again when he returns in his official capacity to attend the coronation of His Majesty King George VI.

As Kurtis Tod, of Lord Beaverbrook's *Daily Express*, I found this anomaly tickled my fancy. It is true that neither I, nor Erl Echland for that matter, cared a tinker's damn for Mackenzie King in the midst of the *Abdication Crisis* and so we did not cross paths with our Prime Minister in 1936. One year on—May and June '37—would prove to be an altogether different matter. You will be pleased to know, my dear Reader, that Erl got his money's worth, as did I. And now, so shall you.

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On Saturday, April 24th, 1937, my journalist/colleague and former boss Erl Echland sailed out of Québec City on the *Empress of Australia*, an honourable ship, fêted for its role in saving hundreds of lives in the massive *Kanto* earthquake in '23. Berthed in Yokohama harbour, the great vessel had survived the disaster and immediately set about rendering aid. In her charity she became famous, and is now sharing the popular Atlantic route to the New World with the *Empress of Scotland*, offering the finest in *Canadian Pacific Steam Ship* service. Erl found himself sharing a berth in second class with a dour Cornishman, Arthur Rowe, who'd given up on Canada as the land of opportunity and was going back to his little village of Pendoggett; pop. 175.

"I'm homesick," he admitted straight away, "and Canada is far too big a land for me."

Fair enough, though, like Erl, I'd have thought that a skilled castrator of sheep and cattle could find work pretty much anywhere around Barrie, Ontario. Still, homesickness is a disease of the mind and the blood and some must succumb and dissolve back into the life and the person they once inhabited. Whether Arthur, who twisted the nuts off living things for twenty cents a piece, had contemplated this is irrelevant. He was at peace with his decision and, for the odd *Bird Bonz* out of Erl's personal supply, Arthur had no objection to the clatter of a *Remington* in full-flight

in the next bed half-the-night. *All art is mimetic but nature*, decreed Plato, berating his posse of pedants every second lesson.

Erl's prey had been the last to board and was now ensconced in *Suite 140*—reserved for distinguished passengers only—sipping tea and munching on oatcakes. Nothing stronger reportedly, for the man is a noted tea-totaler and fallible to expounding upon the vicissitudes of demon alcohol when given the slightest opportunity. Of course, Erl had jumped at L.B.'s telephoned lure of some extra cash (and it was substantial) and he was reeled in, and then landed with a nod-and-a-wink between them that what *TIME* in New York City did not know would not hurt them.

It meant longer hours and significant travel but Erl is a pro and can grind out column after column after column of the sweetest journalist's prose you ever read. In any event, days later, he was back from France where he'd been glued to the observation window of the Duke and Duchess of Windsors' menagerie, re-packed, and on the train to Southampton where L.B. had booked passage in his name to Québec City, via Cherbourg. Once arrived in Canada, Erl would be able to enjoy three, possibly four, days in *Vieux-Québec* at a local tavern/guesthouse, before boarding the *Empress of Australia* bound for Southampton. Along with his quarry.

According to Erl's dictated notes about the voyage back to *Old Blighty* with Mackenzie King in tow, our *Prime Minister of Canada* is a dyed-in-the-wool adherent of a branch of Scottish Presbyterianism known as the *Secession*, which demands a sharp-and-clear division of the powers of the church-and-state, and promulgates a faith guided by reason and conscience; what many would call "*common sense religion*," but what any passing *Baptist* (such as myself) would call, "*too little, too late*."

Far be it from me, my dear Reader, to provoke a religious war in *Auld Caledonia*, but I've never heard of '*St. Presbyter*'. I can point you to *St. John the Baptist*, however, and you can weigh for yourself the eternal benefits of joining those closest to God. Still, I find nothing in Mackenzie King's ethos to provoke consternation or worry, so let sleeping dogs lie for the time being.

As Erl initially discovered and, as I later proved irrefutably through close (and very fast) reading, Mackenzie King keeps a voluminous, detailed, daily diary of his practical doings and goings-on. And, like a true *Secessionist*, he keeps those musings—always dictated to his clerk/companion/servant Edouard Handy—separate from his even more secret scribblings about what takes place round a medium's table inside the spiritual world.