

The Sea-Wave



The Sea-Wave

a flash novel



Rolli



**GUERNICA
EDITIONS**

TORONTO • BUFFALO • LANCASTER (U.K.)
2016

Copyright © 2016, Charles Anderson (Rolli) and Guernica Editions Inc.

All rights reserved. The use of any part of this publication, reproduced, transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise stored in a retrieval system, without the prior consent of the publisher is an infringement of the copyright law.

Michael Mirolla, general editor
David Moratto, interior and cover design
Guernica Editions Inc.
1569 Heritage Way, Oakville, (ON), Canada L6M 2Z7
2250 Military Road, Tonawanda, N.Y. 14150-6000 U.S.A.
www.guernicaeditions.com

Distributors:
University of Toronto Press Distribution,
5201 Dufferin Street, Toronto (ON), Canada M3H 5T8
Gazelle Book Services, White Cross Mills, High Town,
Lancaster LA1 4XS U.K.

First edition.
Printed in Canada.

Legal Deposit – Third Quarter
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2016935359
Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication
Rolli, 1980-, author
The sea-wave / Rolli.

(Essential prose ; 121)
Issued in print and electronic formats.
ISBN 978-1-77183-053-9 (paperback).--ISBN 978-1-77183-054-6 (epub).--
ISBN 978-1-77183-055-3 (mobi)

I. Title. II. Series: Essential prose series ; 121

PS8635.O4465S42 2016 C813'.6 C2016-901518-1 C2016-901519-X

*for anyone
who has ever drowned*



Memorandum Book



When the old man stole me I remember thinking: At least I have my memorandum book. It was in the hanging pouch on the left side of my wheelchair, with some pens and raisins. In the right pouch was my new copy of *David Copperfield*. My old copy got ripped apart by shitheads.

My memorandum book is two hundred unruled pages. I filled up most of them before I was stolen, so I'm fitting things in where I can, writing everything down that I can.

The old man ... The first time he talked was along the road with the roses. He bent over and his beard brushed the top of my head. I reached up to shoo the fly but felt his dry beard.

He could be talking about himself, his own life. Or remembering something. Sometimes I mix up things that happened to me and things that happened to David Copperfield. It'll be hard, writing my autobiography.

I'm not sure he's talking to *me* but I'm writing the words down. I'm a slow writer but he speaks slowly.



I'm the old man's biographer, too.

I'm scared to death.

He's coming back.

The Sea-Wave



I hear the sea. In the deep of night, I hear it. As I lie awake, and often in ... my dreaming.

It was a prison. A kind of prison. A cell, of stone. One could hear the sea. It shattered on, the walls. Beading them with water. I could feel this, in the darkness, sliding my hand. My terror was always that the walls would *truly* shatter. That I would drown, on wet stone.

The brothers. They came and went freely. Brother Ulgoth was a dark man. His skin, an African's. When he moved through the halls — I soon knew this moving — it was ... the moving grass. His robes. I would close my eyes. I would imagine grass, beneath his black feet. I would listen, to the rushing of grass, and then his voice at the grille of the door.

“Are you comfortable?” he would ask me.

I was so seldom comfortable. I would seldom say anything but: “Yes, I am comfortable.” Our ritual.

“I am so pleased,” he would say.

And he would move away. I would stand there, listening. To the grass. In the wind. Imagining.



And there was brother Godslee. He came instantly and without sound. Delivering food, water. I talked with him, sometimes. We talked often. Though never ... for any length. I would be speaking to him, about some small thing. About food, perhaps. And then I would ask him: "Where is this place?" Or: "What is the name, of this place?" And then he would change. His openness, would close. A curtain. He would say not a word, but turn away. He would pass me my bread, and turn away. He would slide down the hall like the crust of bread, down my throat. He would go. And I would remain. Wondering.

I was one evening, sleeping. I did not often sleep. The waves kept me awake. Sometimes I slept, for I woke one evening. There was something. The sliding, of something. A familiar something. It was ... the grass.

"Are you comfortable?"

I sat up. It was not the time. It was the customary voice. It was the question. But it was not the time.

I could not answer, I did not. When a man wakes in the night, when he is suddenly woken, he feels ... he is hanging. From his feet.

I said nothing. I listened, but heard nothing. It was silent. I lay down. *My imagining.*

I attempted, again, to sleep. I was nearly sleeping.



But I was again arrested, by a sound. It was the moving grass. Then a breathing, at the door. The grille. And the voice said:

“The sea-wave comes and goes forever. It rushes against everything forever. Nothing, not iron, survives it. For the sea-wave flows forever. It takes away everything, forever. All crumbs, and the phantoms of all things. Until they’re nothing. Everything, we have. The good things of earth. The miserable things. All suffering. All, is salt. Your bones. They will wash away. It will take them, the wave, away. The Earth, itself, is salt, and will wash away. In the wave. For it comes and goes, forever.”

I closed my eyes. I close them again, remembering.

If I Were the Leaves, I'd Be Dead



When Tay-Lin comes over, just before, I take the elevator to my room and hide. I'm not afraid of Tay-Lin, she's pretty and shy. I just don't like being around people much. I go to my room and shut the door loudly, then open it a crack and listen.

Mom must value Tay-Lin as a listener because she never shuts up in front of her. Only sometimes do I hear this leafy sound which means Tay-Lin is speaking. When Mom asks her over I know it's because she's got something on her mind and she wants to dump it onto someone else's mind. She talks about things she probably wouldn't talk about if she thought I was listening. Or if Dad was around. One time she told Tay-Lin she didn't care much for milk in tea and she never really loved my dad. She married him because it was something to do. It was an uncertain time in her life because she was having seizures. She wasn't supposed to conceive on seizure meds but god's an eccentric and she's proud she was gifted with such a beautiful child.



When she said that I shut the door and cried for a long time. When I opened it again I could just hear leaves.

Another time, Mom said how hard her life was and wondered why god was punishing her. I'm not just a wheelchair kid: I double as a kind of holy wrath.

Listening to her, overhearing her ...

It's listening to acid rain.

Circuit Sam



I had the Chatter for almost a year. It sounds like a disease; I guess it was. It was a computer. It clamped onto my armrest like a feeding tray. I pressed letters on a screen and the Chatter said them out loud in a loud voice. The voice was called Circuit Sam, a deep male voice with zero expression. Which is just how I imagined my voice sounding.

My parents loved the Chatter because it made their lives easier. It made my life a bit easier, but ...

In a bookstore, if I pressed the bathroom icon, there were icons that saved time, Circuit Sam would shout "Bathroom," and everyone would turn their heads then turn them back and pick up the book they'd just put down. Sometimes the button would stick, and Sam would just keep saying something over and over until I felt like dying.

I stopped using the Chatter. I got sick. I felt like a sick machine. My parents wanted me to keep using it, but I'd only mash the keyboard or type profanity. So



they took it away. They never really got rid of it, just packed it away, like a wedding dress, hopeful.

I write notes now. It's slower, but I like it better. When you read a note in your mind, you read it — you think of it as being in a human voice, the voice of whoever wrote it. I hope that when my parents read my notes they hear the voice of a sad, bright kid who's at least trying.

They might just hear Circuit Sam.

The Loner



I like being alone but not really. Every day I wake up and think: What if Mom's dead, what if she just dropped dead? If she doesn't get me up by 7:35, I'm sure she's dead. I lie there under a thought bubble of her on the floor with a broken jam jar and a broken head. A closet shutting means she's collapsing. Then she comes in the door, and it's okay to hate her again.

I'm a loner. It's just easy. It protects me. It's safe in my room. I read books, I'm a bookmark. You don't get loved but you don't get hurt either by people you love, which hurts more than anything. It's easier to hate people the way they hate millionaires, they'll never be one. I'm alive, I have a skeleton, but I'll just never be a real kid or feel like a real human being.

When people see me they feel sad. They might smile sadly. I shake up their moral centres. I wreck their shopping day. There are people who do that even to me.

I *hate* being one of those people. I can't just hide all day though I sometimes want to. I sometimes do. I'm



trading happy for not being the wrecking ball and the house it's wrecking. I can do that for people, at least.

It's not much.

It's something.

Murder



I didn't *see* who stole me, not for hours. Not till we were out of the city.

I pictured — in the bubble above my head was a pudgy guy with glasses and acne, floating in sweat, who filled the whole bubble.

The guy who walked in front of me when my chair stopped moving and climbed down the riverbank and knelt down ...

He was just a frail old man. A stick man, who pricked the bubble.

The old man knelt down and looked at the water, at his *reflection* in the water, I'm guessing. Like Narcissus only old and puzzled. He didn't drink at all, just stared.

When he got up, I closed my eyes. I'm not sure why. I didn't open them until he was back behind me, and we were moving again.

I think if he was going to murder me or hurt me ...
He'd've done it a long time ago.
Right?

Writing



My memorandum book was a gift from my cousin the writer. At first I thought it was cheap because I'd've rather had a real book. But then I thought it probably would've been one of *her* books, so I was lucky. I threw the memorandum book in my desk drawer. But one time when I was just so angry I couldn't read I took it back out and started writing in it. Writing is hard for me, it takes a long time, but I'm getting better. It helps with my anger. My sadness.

My cousin said all kinds of family drama winds up in her books, and since no one reads them, no one finds out. She still gets invited to the BBQs, and gets handshakes from the people she said were bullshitters. Writing is a kind of minor revenge, like stealing the left slipper of someone who stabbed you in the neck, which I guess to her makes it worthwhile. Personally ...

I haven't decided yet.

The Angel Lady



*O*ur daughter vanished.

The woman looked pretty normal. She had long hair even though she was over forty. She had a brittle voice that made you listen carefully in case you dropped it.

She was a beautiful, healthy girl. And she vanished.

The whole time she spoke to us she didn't blink. The trick to not crying might be to dry out your eyes.

She was a prostitute. She got into hard drugs.

I have to admit that sort of made her less angelic in my book. I was picturing Little Dorrit or something. I'm pretty judgmental.

We found her in the Parliamentary Gardens. In a rose bush. Bleeding. They were actually white roses.

Even my teacher swallowed hard. I stared at her like, Where do you find these people? She stared at a square on the floor.

My daughter is an angel. She speaks to me. She hovers above me, and guides me. She forgives me. She loves me.

Without really realizing it, I think the whole class looked up at the ceiling. All I could see was the curved



mirror they put in after the shootings. In her warped back reflection the woman's shoulders were a bit like folded-back wings.

I looked at my teacher again. She started clapping. I guess it was over.

I Have No Friends



I have no friends. It just isn't possible. It would take a pretty weird kid to touch me and murder their social life forever. Life is tough. It might be even tougher without friends. So what.

Every Saturday, my mom or dad takes me to the park. We sit by the water and feed the birds. One time half my class walked by, going wherever kids go. They looked at me, and not one of them smiled or said hi. But then one girl, the new girl, looked back and laughed. Then they all looked back and laughed. I squeezed my bread bag until the crumbs were just dust. I felt like the dust rattling in the bag.

I closed my eyes hard. Then my mom said: "Jealous. They are all just jealous." That's her word, that's always the word for children who are broken. I'm not sure she even understands it. Because when you're not pretty or popular, and there isn't even a chance of having talent, what could they be jealous of, Mom? You never really think.



There's a tree in the park that's the one thing I like. It's just a perfect small tree that's by itself. I like to sit under it in my chair and read. Or sometimes my dad lifts me and sits me on the grass. I want to be buried under that tree. Only I've never told anyone.

Acknowledgements



Extracts from *The Sea-Wave* were first published in *The Walrus* (online), *Broken Pencil*, *Word Riot* and *Writing Tomorrow*. My thanks to the editors. Thanks to Guernica, too.

About the Author



Rolli is a writer, illustrator and cartoonist from Regina, SK, Canada. He's the author of two short story collections (*I Am Currently Working On a Novel* and *God's Autobiography*), two collections of poems (*Mavor's Bones* and *Plum Stuff*) and two children's titles (*Kabungo* and *Dr. Franklin's Staticy Cat*). His cartoons appear regularly in *The Wall Street Journal*, *Reader's Digest*, *Harvard Business Review*, *The Walrus*, *Adbusters* and other popular outlets. Visit Rolli's website (rollistuff.com) and follow him on Twitter @rolliwrites.