

## LITERARY NOVEL: THE NOVELIST BY JOHN LEGGETT

*Summary: A novel within a novel as a writer is tired of self-publishing and seeks a publisher for his new book.*

There were two flights of stairs from the sidewalk to Marion Everstreet's front door. Each flight contained eleven steps and it was her third consecutive day of making the climb. For Marion, a spry, high-spirited woman of eighty-two, the climb was more of an annoyance than an effort of labor. She paused when she reached the landing—not to rest—but to admire her panoramic view of the city. She enjoyed looking down on the landscaped homes and places of business that comprised the quaintness of Marshfield. They dotted the horizon and she viewed them as if they were houses and hotels on her personal Monopoly board.

Until recently, she had driven her car up the winding hill that ran behind her house and parked in the small indentation of crabgrass that served as her driveway. Knowing her car was not available for ninety-some days, she was resigned to live with a limited amount of independence. Her groceries had to be delivered, dry cleaning was picked up and dropped off at the pleasure of the cleaning service, and she had resorted to making lists to ensure her trips to town utilized maximum efficiency.

She blamed her daily climb up the two flights of stairs to be the result of statements made by that wet-behind-the-ears police officer, Jimmy Bromfeld. Judge VanHuesen hadn't been much help either—believing Jimmy's testimony over hers regarding the charge of reckless driving—and then impounding her car.

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She felt some comfort in knowing she could continue her daily chat with Father Hanrahan. The church wasn't far enough to justify a taxi for her self-imposed talk with her favorite priest and, since losing her license, she walked to the confessional. Every morning she vented to Father Hanrahan, giving her disgruntled position on the city council and other pet peeves that struck her fancy. The current exasperation was her battle with the local judicial system. Like Judge VanHuesen, the sympathy she expected to receive from her priest had been somewhat lacking. His subtle reminders that the confessional was not to be mistaken for the booth used for complaints in the local department store did not go unnoticed. Likewise, she was not oblivious to his long sighs that followed her daily rants—sighs that indicated his impatience regarding her private affairs before she got around to confessing her daily sins. Once she concluded her confession, Father Hanrahan assigned her a few Hail Marys or Our Fathers and sent her on her way.

She had tried to appease her priest that morning. After a few minutes stewing over her latest courtroom incident, she tacked on a sixty-five year old sin she had never confessed. Marion felt that revealing a sin, even of that vintage, might brighten Father Hanrahan's day if confessions by other members of the congregation weren't all that exciting.

“You know father,” she began. “I've always been reluctant to confess this, but after we beat Deerfield High for the championship, well . . . I . . . I sort of put out for the judge in the back seat of his car.” Her confession was immediately followed by an unnecessary clarification. “Of course he wasn't Judge VanHuesen then, just good old Tommy.” The clarification was said with an attitude of *you know how it was in those days*. She then continued with a nonchalant, “Lord knows, it wasn't as if I went all the way or anything.”

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“Yes, Marion, the Lord *does* know,” the Father agreed. “And while I appreciate you making a clean slate of things, I think after sixty-five years God has probably let that particular sin fall by the wayside.”

Following a momentary silence, she resumed. Her tone continued to carry a sound of justification as if she was explaining the Judge’s recent courtroom decision. “Well, anyway, I mention it now because personally, I think that’s why he extended the suspension of my license last week. I think there’s still a bit of resentment over him . . . you know . . . not getting everything he wanted. He even gave me some cock and bull story that night about wanting to marry me, or at least that’s what he said when he unbuttoned my blouse and . . . well . . . you know.”

Father Hanrahan didn’t seem concerned about her back seat sinning that took place in the judge’s car, but in acknowledgement of the act, he added an additional five Hail Marys to her penance.

During her climb of the stairs that morning, she reflected on her most recent citation. It was the second one that month and from the first step to the landing; she cursed the name Jimmy Bromfeld. Big shot Jimmy, she thought, who paraded around town in his police uniform. He was certainly all decked out a week earlier when he cited her for reckless driving—strolling up to the car like he was so important. Marion almost laughed at all the contraptions on his policeman’s belt. Recalling the incident, she now realized her initial comments were probably not the best way to avoid a ticket. “You auditioning for the next Batman movie Jimmy?”

He bristled as he stood there in his shirt sporting creases sharp enough to shave with.

“I’ll have to see your license and registration ma’am.”

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“What for? You know very well who I am and that little sticker on my license plate is obviously current. Perhaps I should ask to see *your* license. Are you old enough to drive now?” Her question was made as a reminder that, on many occasions during his infancy, she had been his baby-sitter.

Jimmy ignored the reference. “I’m sorry ma’am, but anytime we’re called to a scene of an accident; we’re required to see identification.”

“Scene of an accident! Just what accident are you talking about? And, who’s the ‘we’ you’re referring to? I don’t see anyone else around.” As she asked the questions, she fumbled through her purse with the pretense of a search. “I can’t seem to find my license,” she told him, “and stop using that ma’am stuff on me. I changed too many diapers filled with your poop to listen to that nonsense. Maybe someday you’ll find a nice girl and settle down, although you’ll find diaper changing is not so much fun as pulling people over for no apparent reason other than to harass them.”

Jimmy knew she still had another two weeks remaining on her suspension and her banter was more or less a distraction from producing her license. In his effort to avoid embarrassing her, he took the registration and stared at it with as much diplomacy as possible.

Marion thumped on the steering wheel. “As I said, there’s no accident here.”

“Well, unless the high-speed turn you took here that knocked Ms. Manning’s mailbox clear into her yard was intentional; I’ll give you the benefit of the doubt and *call* it an accident.” This statement from Bromfeld held his own tone of annoyance. “I’ll have to call this in Ms. Everstreet. I’ll just be a minute.”

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Marion was well aware that Jimmy had it in for her. If he had *his* way, catching her driving without a license would probably result in prison time. She continued thumping the steering wheel as she recalled the scene in the courtroom two weeks earlier.

“It’s the proverbial straw Judge,” Jimmy testified. “You can see by her record that she has numerous speeding violations, many of which were issued right on Main Street.”

Marion jumped up from her chair. “Objection . . . objection!” she yelled.

The judge turned his gaze toward Marion and peered over the top of his glasses. The acknowledgement of her objection was received with a bit of frustration and he exhibited a lengthy exhale. “Go ahead Marion.” he told her.

“Go ahead?”

“Yes, you need a reason if you’re objecting to the witness’s statement.”

Marion looked around at the spectators as if one of them might have a good reason. “Well,” she began, “I believe the use of the term ‘proverbial straw’ is . . . is . . .” her voice trailed off as she searched for the right word—the perfect jargon needed from one of the TV courtroom shows she watched. “Oh, you know what I mean Judge. The word is right on the tip of my tongue. It’s that legal term lawyers always use.”

Judge VanHuesen raised an unsympathetic eyebrow. “I’m afraid if the word you seek is refusing to jump off your tongue tip, we’ll have to continue without its presence. I’m suspending your license for thirty days. You’re to relinquish it to the clerk following these proceedings and sign the necessary paperwork.”

“Prejudicial!” she yelled out.

“Prejudicial?”

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“Yes! That’s the word I was trying to think of . . . for my objection.” She then pointed a finger at Bromfeld. “That proverbial straw thing he said suggests I’ve had prior incidents. I do believe it swayed your verdict.”

Jimmy was still sitting in the witness stand and felt he needed to further justify the judge’s ruling. “Your honor, she was given a warning a day prior to the ticket for speeding through the parking lot of the mall.”

“And I object to that!” This time she had her reason ready. “It’s hearsay.”