



*Tasting Life
for What It Is*

Gilbert Creutzberg

Tasting Life for What It Is

*a collection of short stories
and a stage play*

Gilbert Creutzberg



Strategic Book Publishing and Rights Co.

Copyright 2012

All rights reserved — Gilbert Creutzberg

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, or by any information storage retrieval system, without the permission, in writing, from the publisher.

Strategic Book Publishing and Rights Co.

12620 FM 1960, Suite A4-507

Houston, TX 77065

www.sbpra.com

ISBN: 978-1-62212-910-2

Typography and page composition by J. K. Eckert & Company

Also by Gilbert Creutzberg

The Mosaic

First edition Strategic Book Publishing/AEG Publishing Group
ISBN 978-60693-736-5 SKU 1-60693-736-7
© 2009 Gilbert Creutzberg—All rights reserved
(Original hard cover edition)

Second edition Strategic Book Group
ISBN 978-1-60976-772-3
© 2010 Gilbert Creutzberg—All rights reserved
(Soft cover edition)

Electronic edition Strategic Book Group
ISBN 978-1-61897-503-4
© 2010 Gilbert Creutzberg—All rights reserved
(Amazon.com, Kindle store, Barnes & Noble, Nook store,
All electronics world wide)

Ride the Forbidden Horse and Other Stories

First edition Todd & Honeywell, Inc.
ISBN 0-89962-344-1
© 1984 Gilbert Creutzberg—All rights reserved

Second Edition CreateSpace.com
ISBN 145058845X ISBN 13 978145058854
© 2010 Gilbert Creutzberg—All rights reserved

Third Edition CreateSpace.com
© 2010 Gilbert Creutzberg—All rights reserved
ASIN BOO4GNFLTC
Kindle edition/Kindle e-book

Contents

Foreword	vii
Chapter 1—Perfidia	1
Chapter 2—Confrontation	11
Chapter 3—Just Another Job	21
Chapter 4—The Contract Master	31
Chapter 5—The Expeditor	35
Chapter 6—A Candle for Jimmy	43
Chapter 7—The Night Nurse	47
Chapter 8—Deep Freeze	65
About the Author	95

Foreword from the Author

We all seem to have a need to taste life for what it is, each of us in our own way. To reach for the spice that lifts us out of a mundane existence, we are willing to risk the peace and serenity that help to balance our lives from moment to moment.

In a rather obscure Bible story, Noah, having survived the flood, starts to plant a vineyard. As told in Genesis 9:21, however, he gets drunk and passes out, stark naked, in front of his tent. A curse falls on his youngest son, who disrespects him.

What happened? Maybe Noah was bored. All the excitement with the flood, the ark and the animals had subsided. The time had come for him to settle down, but maybe he wanted to taste more than wine.

I have tried to create vignettes of people who enter the stage of life for just a few moments. We may recognize their plight, since there are times for each of us when we find ourselves snared at the brink of our very existence, questioning what we are doing here.

Some of the short stories and stage play in this book were inspired by my work as a counselor in the field of substance abuse over a forty-year period. The persons in this writing are fictitious and any resemblance to actual persons, alive or dead, is purely coincidental. Yet, this book couldn't have been written without the input of those caught in the throes of addiction. I feel deeply indebted to my clients who trusted me and confided

in me. I learned from them as they became my guides into their world. To them I dedicate this collection.

I want to express my thanks to my friend, Bob Hougham, who helped with editing and stylistic suggestions.

I also thank my friend, José L. Rodriguez, for the graphic design of the front cover, and for the photograph on the back cover.

The stage play, “Deep Freeze,” written in 1993, saw two performances, each attended by the more than two hundred residents in the auditorium of the treatment community. It was performed, directed, and staged by residents, thus, I cannot provide specifics without infringing on their confidentiality. I am happy to tell that the play was a success. Someone may stage a comeback. Not much has changed in two decades. We’re still looking for solutions, barely having scratched the surface.

Perfidia

In the heavy crowd he didn't stand out. The town's narrow streets around the plaza, designed by builders who never visualized modern-day traffic, bulged with people. All vehicles had been banned, and droves of bodies were pressing their way to the center. At the plaza, the mob moved like molasses, thickly and inexorably. A satiation point would be reached soon beyond which further density of people for the available space would be physically impossible.

The yearly *fiesta patronal* had transformed the town into a vast sprawling *marqueta*. Food stands, row upon row, displayed tantalizing delicacies. The smell of frying oil permeated the stalls, sometimes mixed with whiffs of vinegar, onion, garlic, axiote, curry and paprika. Varieties of perfumes and human sweat scented the air everywhere. Miniature gambling casinos were sprung up between the food stalls, and open-air bars offered the two essential potable ingredients: beer and rum.

He elbowed his way a few feet more and at last caught the first glimpse of the procession. A float, carrying the patron saint, moved in the open lane, cordoned off by the police. A second float, arrayed with crassly commercial banners and such American names as McDonald's left no doubt about the intent of the *fiesta's* sponsors. Next came a folkloristic display of voodoo masks and artisans' craft works, followed by a group of musicians playing timbales, congas, guiros, campanas, castanets, flutes and guitars, and, finally, two large limousines loaded with local politicians and business VIPs.

Before pushing deeper into the crowds, he had a shot of rum with another beer. There was no hurry to reach the bandstand, since the fun wouldn't start until the politicians had had their say, but it was important to get up close to get a good look at the dancers, roving their hips to the rhythm of salsa music. He gazed intently, frustrated by the awareness of physical distance.

The *fiesta*, put on each year around this time, provided local politicians the occasion to rally support in the upcoming elections. One could always tell them apart from the crowd since they were virtually the only ones wearing neckties and suits, looking dapper while sweating bravely and profusely. Their body movements bespoke the self-conscious theatricality of officialdom. When the music was brought to a temporary stop and the loudspeakers blared the rhetoric through the plaza, there were interruptions of applause, not so much as a response to the meaning of the words, which to the careful listener was hard to discern, but to the cadences of the sentences. It all belonged to the familiar spectacle, along with the trusted patron saint, the routine speeches of political hacks, the festive mood enlivened by rum and beer.

Paco had not heard a word of the speeches of the mayor, the president of the chamber of commerce, the fire department, the police chief, the school superintendent, and the priest. By the time he had worked his way up close to the podium, he had downed several shots of rum and beer. The music had resumed, and he was becoming less aware of his surroundings. All his attention was focused on the young women on the float who were dancing along with the salsa rhythm. He was drawn to the one in the middle, who was singing a song.

Paco joined in with the applause.

"Hi!" she greeted the audience, smiling warmly. "How are you tonight? Enjoying yourself?"

The crowd roared with approval.

"We'd like to introduce ourselves. This is..."

She ran off the names, but he didn't pay attention, nor did he care. The only name he remembered was her name, Marisol. He was pushing his way forward to a spot among the lucky ones who could view the performers from a few feet distance. As they went on to their next song, he could see pearls of sweat on the faces of the musicians in the heat of the tropical evening. His eyes were drawn to Marisol's thighs, snugly

clad in a turquoise bodysuit. He was slightly high, but not yet drunk. His brain was transmitting confused messages. There was something he was desperately trying to forget. His hypnotized stare at Marisol kept his mind fixated.

The song ended and Marisol addressed the crowd again, joking and flirting. Then suddenly, she directed herself to somebody in the audience, a young man standing only a few feet from him.

“You there, handsome young man, would you mind coming up here with me?” Paco watched him climb the steps to the podium.

“Hi! What’s your name?” Marisol asked, handing over the mike.

“Roberto.”

“Roberto, what do you do?”

“I’m a plumber.”

“I’m going to have you do all the plumbing in my house.”

The audience laughed as Roberto blushed, aware of the sexy twist in her voice.

“Are you single or married?”

“Still single.”

“Got a girl friend?”

“Yes,” he smiled back.

“Lucky girlfriend! Roberto, do you sing?”

“A little.”

“Good. This is how the song goes.”

Marisol started singing a simple refrain. Roberto joined in, good-humoredly though without talent and slightly out of tune. Soon, they had the crowd laughing and clapping their hands. Marisol sang the solos between the refrains, with lyrics bordering on the salacious.

“Thank you, thank you, Roberto. Please step down from the platform,” Marisol said, with the smooth authority of the experienced stage manager. Roberto complied.

“You there, *señor*, with the maroon shirt.”

Paco startled.

“Who, me?”

“Yes, yes, *you*. Come on up here.”

Paco knew he had to follow her command. He was pulled to her by some irresistible, magnetic force. As he got close to Marisol, he saw her make-up, smelled her perfume, and his eyes quickly darted to her hips and legs. He felt dizzy.

“What’s your name?”

“Paco.”

“And what do you do, Paco?”

“I’m a truck driver. I make long hauls. Right now, we’re doing this job for the cement factory, and...” She cut in fast, quickly aborting a potentially boring subject.

“Very interesting. Do you sing, Paco?”

“Yes.”

“Is there a special song you’d like to sing tonight, Paco?”

“Yes, in fact, I’d like to sing this old song, ‘Perfidia.’ Okay?”

“Sure.”

She gave a few quick directions to the musicians. They started the familiar song, giving it a contemporary twang with a pungent beat underscoring the bitterness of the lyrics. It was evident to the audience that Paco was singing from his heart. He belted out the words,

*“...y el mar, espejo de mi corazon
las veces me ha visto llorar
la perfidia de tu amor.”*

(“...and the ocean, mirror of my heart—
the times it has seen me cry
the perfidy of your love.”)

This was not just a performance, it was real. One could feel the drama of betrayal by a treacherous woman taking place, right there on the stage. Actual tears had formed in Paco’s eyes, and the fury trembling in his voice was clearly heard. The audience muttered approval, empathetic with Paco’s lament.

“Boy, he’s good.”

“Where’s he from?”

“He’s letting it all hang out.”

“He must be a famous singer.”

“I haven’t heard anything like this in ages.”

“He’s got a tremendous voice.”

“No, not really. But he’s a damned good performer.”

“Bullshit. Something’s really eating his heart out.”

“He’s been drinking.”

“He’s not from around here.”

“Do you think he’s on the radio or TV?”

“No...well, maybe.”

“Anyhow, he’s great.”

The crowd roared and applauded as the song ended with the bitter words:

“...*que lejos estas de mi.*”

(“...how far you are from me.”)

“Thank you, Paco. That was beautiful.”

“I sang it for my wife.”

Marisol looked at him with her dark, piercing eyes and she sensed that she was witnessing something extraordinary. Curiosity overtook her and she figured that a little injection of “human interest” wouldn’t hurt her performance. She was in full command of the show. With the confidence of a theatrical director, she whispered in the mike, “Did she play you...,” purposely not finishing the sentence, but adding, “You can trust me,” taking on the role of the confidante.

For Paco, there was no audience, only Marisol and he. He felt with absolute clarity that he could trust her. In fact, he had no choice but to trust her. His insides were tearing him apart. He had to talk.

“Yes,” he cried out, “she played me dirty. But she’s not going to get away with it. I figured out what she’s up to. I’m going to...”

His voice trailed off. Now, images came back to his mind, stark and vivid tableaux. The card game that afternoon, during the *siesta*. He had finished a delivery in the capital and afterwards, he had gone with his friends—guys he knew from work—to a private club where they sold cocaine to the regulars.

Someone known to one of his friends led them into the bathroom. Paco had a few snorts. Then the dealer whispered a word new to him, “crack.”

Paco felt self-conscious about being considered a *jibaro*, a country hick. His friends seemed at ease. He didn’t want to feel left out. He had to try that wonder drug with a name that crackled like fire, and that was smoked ritually.

They had drinks and started a card game. One of the guys said something about picking up some girls.

“I’ve got to get back to my wife tonight,” Paco said.

“Hey, man, this is our night out. We get paid today.”

“No, man. Plus, I’m worried about my wife. She had to see a gynecologist.”

Then one of the guys made that stupid remark, “Man, I’d love to be a gynecologist.” They all laughed, except Paco.

“Examining all that...” The young man who was talking rolled his tongue over his lips.

More laughs.

“Man, I should’ve become a gynecologist. I missed out on a fantastic career.”

“What do you mean by that?” Paco asked, humorless, with a hostile voice.

“Nothing, man, what’s wrong with you? I’m just joking, just fucking around.”

“Well, don’t fuck around with me,” Paco said harshly. “Let’s play the game. Deal the cards.”

He lost money in that game and the next one, and left his friends without saying good-bye.

It was an hour’s drive to his hometown. He stopped at his house, but his wife had already left for the clinic. He drove straight on, speeding and looking suspiciously for unmarked police cars, his anxiety at fever pitch. He always was worried about his wife: she was just *too* beautiful, but this time he knew *for a fact* she was making it with another man.

He dashed into the clinic where the receptionist told him to take a seat and wait. *Why were there no patients in the waiting room? Why was his wife the last one to be examined?*

“I have to see her right now. It’s an emergency.”

“You can’t go in there. The doctor is seeing her.”

It’s a plot. She’s covering up for the doctor.

“I can go in. She’s my wife.”

He walked past the receptionist and into the examination room. He pulled the privacy curtain to the side. The doctor looked up, surprised. Paco’s wife was sitting on the examination bed, fully dressed.

Paco felt like a fool as the doctor, a young man his age, said, “We’ll be finished in a few minutes. Please have a seat outside in the waiting room.”

Though he had always known that truism, that doctors must be trusted and that they, mysteriously, had developed some sort of immu-

nity to nude women, looking at them and touching them, Paco had always found it difficult to accept, because it seemed next to impossible. From the days of his childhood when “playing doctor” could mean only one thing, to this day when, as an adult, he had to trust his woman with another man, he had reacted with gut feelings when his wife told him a week ago that she had to see a gynecologist.

“What for?” he had snapped

The answer had left doubts in his mind. His wife had mentioned wanting to have a child and had alluded vaguely to pains for which she wanted to get checked. She explained that the old family doctor had recommended that she see a specialist. Paco had insisted on going with her to the clinic and was astonished when the doctor turned out to be a young man his age.

Yet, the white coat, the diplomas on the wall, and the instruments on the shelves, all backed up the doctor’s authority and expertise.

Paco paced back and forth in the waiting room, picking up magazines without reading them, studying the wall decorations without registering what they depicted. He felt even more foolish now, aware that the receptionist was watching him with disdain. He ground his teeth, cracked his knuckles. He had been brought up to respect doctors as highly reputable persons with almost superhuman education and training. Why was this young whipper-snapper, no older than he, so much more successful, while he, Paco, had to eke out a living driving a damned wreck of a truck, an ancient model that broke down regularly on the highway?

“So, what did the doctor say?” he asked his wife when she came out of the examination room.

“Nothing. He just asked me a lot of questions and wants me to come back when the results of the tests are in.”

“Did he give you any medicines?”

“No. He first wants to see the results of the tests.”

They left the clinic.

“I don’t trust this doctor,” Paco said.

“Why not? He’s very good.”

“I just get bad vibes. Why can’t you see a regular doctor? What does this young dude know? He’s got no experience. You don’t need a newcomer.”

“This doctor knows his stuff, I can tell.”

“Yeah, I bet,” Paco said sarcastically.

“Now, what’s that supposed to mean?” she asked, honestly surprised.

“Oh, nothing. I just don’t want anything to happen to you.”

“Don’t worry, honey.”

From the pit of his stomach, he could tell that she was lying. He would take action, but first he had to finish his deliveries. He dropped her off at the house and continued his route. The last stop took him to a small town where a *fiesta patronal* was in progress.

§ § § § § §

Marisol, gazing deeply at him with her piercing eyes and demanding him to yield the secrets of his heart, interrupted his thoughts, bringing him back to the present. To Paco, she had become a goddess, and when she asked him, “What are you going to do?” he knew that he could tell her. Stammering in his anguish, he said,

“I’m going to...to...to...”

“Say it.”

Paco then blurted out the words he had kept at his innermost secret.

“I’m going to kill both of us. We’ll be together in death.”

Marisol felt the blood drawn from her face. A romantic tale of jealousy had suddenly turned much too heavy. If she didn’t act fast, the show would be ruined. She stood inches away from Paco and saw the fire of love, transformed into hate, burning with such fierce intensity that she knew he was speaking the truth and had every intention of carrying out his plan. He had to be stopped. But how?

For a split second, she felt panic and fear. Then, the professional actress in her took over and she quickly regained composure. She realized that the show was in danger of being stopped, and one thing she knew as an axiom, that the show must go on. She had to get rid of this madman, fast.

“Well, I’m sure tonight you’re going to tell your wife you love her. Right?”

Without waiting for an answer, she added, “Let’s have a hand for our talented friend, Paco. Thank you very much, Paco.”

She ushered him off the podium, at the same time giving quick instructions to the musicians.

Paco remained standing in front of the podium. He felt betrayed. For the first time, he glanced around and became aware that people were eyeing him strangely. He saw that Marisol was no longer looking at him and, in fact, was avoiding his eyes. He became acutely self-conscious. His own words rang in his mind, "I'm going to kill both of us. We'll be together in death."

"Hey, you, where're you from?" someone standing nearby asked.

Hurriedly, he made his way, disappearing into the crowd, away from the bandstand.

"Where are you going?"

"Watch it, you're stepping on my foot! What's the hurry?"

"Hey, aren't you the guy who sang 'Perfidia'?"

He finally reached territory where they hadn't seen or heard him. Now depression fell over him like a thick blanket. He slowed his pace and at last reached the truck, parked on the periphery of the town. A sense of loneliness and futility engulfed him. He knew that all beauty and meaning had vanished from his life, like a wilted flower. He had failed. There was no hope.

He got into the truck and started the engine. His mind was made up. He knew what he had to do.

§ § § § § §

Perhaps it was because she had been trying hard to block out the event, or perhaps it was because she regarded herself too much a professional performer to get caught up in something morbid and distasteful. She was unprepared for the shock when she recognized a familiar face in the morning tabloid two days later with the caption:

**SLAYS PREGNANT WIFE, THEN KILLS SELF
AUTOPSY REPORT SHOWS COCAINE AND
ALCOHOL
POLICE ARE SEEKING MOTIVE**

"I missed my chance, I could have stopped him from doing it," Marisol said to herself, aloud. Her boyfriend, still in bed, yawned. "What are you saying?"

She showed him the photo and the headline.

"Why are you crying, babe? Did you know the guy?"

She tried to explain what had happened, but the suspicion remained in her boyfriend's eyes.

"Have you been taking coke?" she asked. "It sure seems like it."

"I had a couple of snorts last night. Why d' you ask? You knew that guy, didn't you? Didn't you?"

She saw a flash of paranoia in his eyes. It was like a replay. For the first time, she was afraid of him.

"I have to get to a rehearsal. See you later," she said.

"Didn't you? Didn't you?" she heard him screaming behind the closed door.

Buy the B&N ePub version at:-

<http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/tasting-life-for-what-it-is-gilbert-creutzberg/1112083465?ean=2940015543544>

Buy the Kindle version at:-

<http://www.amazon.com/Tasting-Life-What-collection-ebook/dp/B009KWBZY4/>