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Memoirs of a Canada Council Visiting Writers Hostess

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Memoirs of a Canada Council Visiting Writers Hostess

Susan Holbrook

The one who spit.

The one who choked.

The one who drank water looking at the ceiling.

The one who drank water reading the label, with crossed eyes.

The one who unscrewed the cap of the water bottle before a poem, screwed it back on afterward, never drinking. It made us thirsty.

The one with the huge flashy earrings shaped like potato chips with bites out of them. They made us hungry.

The one who kept calling me Sharon.

The one who kept reminding us he had been "much anthologized" as if "anthologized" meant "knighted."

The one whose entire reading consisted of standing at the podium, reading poems silently to herself, chuckling, flipping to the next one.

The one who had to have barbeque ribs "Southern-style" and, when we finally found some, left a letter of complaint with the hotel manager because the take-out box wouldn't fit in the waste basket.

The one who said I'll be reading for approximately 40 minutes and then read for two hours and forty minutes, interpreting every thank-god-it's-over smattering of claps as encouragement to continue,

the only exit door tantalizingly behind her, her animated head obscuring the glowing letters variously, EXI, XIT, IT, EX.

The one who was not as interesting in person.

The one we were glad to be sitting for, the story knocking the pins right out from under us.

The one we were glad to be sitting for, in case we fell asleep.

The one who always wore his "lucky" shirt to readings, our venue the last on his three-week book tour.

The one who threw up shrimp.

The one who talked about how tedious publishers' escorts can be, especially in Paris.

The one who needed to borrow pants.

The one who, over dinner, regaled us with hilarious anecdotes about her cat, Hawthorne, who once ate a whole can of tuna, for instance, meows when you touch his feet, and loves nothing more than twist-ties, which he'll run after if they land with a satisfying skip, and Hawthorne also loves Sundays when Grandpa, a.k.a. Gappy, comes to visit because he's always up for a good twist-tie session. When the sushi finally arrived we learned that Hawthorne would probably like it, except for the avocado and rice.

The one who thought he should be paid twice as much because of all the double entendres in his work.

The one who acted as if her success was all a terrible mistake.

The one who suffered from loud, nervous farting, especially between poems, though he capitalized, most studiously, on the camouflage of short bursts of applause.

The one who obstinately read from new work, aware we were all there to hear the greatest hits.

The one who always read final lines as if our lives depended on them.

