

### **About the Author**

Josh Quirion is a French-Canadian writer from the Eastern Townships of Québec, Canada. He holds an M.A. in English Literature and Creative Writing from Concordia University. He is the co-founder and editor-in-chief of *yolk literary magazine* and author of the short story collection *Townners & Other Stories* (Shoreline Press, 2020). Quirion's writing has appeared in *The Malahat Review*, *Prairie Fire*, and *The Antigonish Review*, among others. He currently lives in Tiohtià:ke/Montréal, Québec.

# FLAMINGO

JOSH QUIRION

Daddy's footprints led away from the backyard and into the wide expanse of snow-covered farmland behind the house. That land belonged to the McDuff family. Last winter, Eliza McDuff had phoned the authorities on account of an old man wandering about her property in the nude. That old man was daddy. The doctors said another hour and the hypothermia would've killed him dead. The tip of his nose, two of his fingers, six of his toes, and the length of his penis were frostbitten. His nose, fingers, and most of his toes recovered, but half his pecker had to be amputated because the gangrene had set in.

When he'd awakened from surgery, morphine-mellow, slurring, and simple, he said he'd just crawled out of, *One helluva nightmare. Just the worst goddam thing!*

I tried to calmly explain things to him. *Daddy, they didn't have a choice. The gangrene had set in!* He worked on the farm his whole life. He was so strong, my mother said, he could pick up a hundred-pound hay bale and chuck it onto the flatbed with just one arm. When he realized most of his pecker had, in fact, been removed, it took just about the entire hospital staff and myself to neutralize him. They shot him up so full of sedatives, he was out for two days.

When he woke again, he was handcuffed to the hospital bed. Bob Tremblay, captain of the Coaticook Police and an old friend of daddy's, stood there with his hat against his breast like it was a funeral. [A note

here: daddy's name was Richard. His friends called him Dick, but not any more.]

*Richard, Bob said. It's a helluva thing. A helluva thing, really. Look, ain't nobody gonna be pressing charges or nothing. Everybody gets it. But, you gotta promise me you won't make trouble if I uncuff you.*

Daddy grunted and groaned as Tremblay removed the cuffs. He took a break from the farm after the procedure. Neighbours sent their kids to pick rocks at no charge. I took over day-to-day operations while he convalesced. Daddy started reading about eunuchs online.

*Did you know the fella who invented paper was a eunuch? And Farinelli, Italian fella, chopped off his own knob to keep hitting the high notes for King Philip V after puberty. They called him the castrati!*

In the shower, he'd belt out Neil Young in a strident falsetto.

He said to me, in confidence, that having his manhood removed had given him tremendous clarity. He said he saw the world for what it truly was now, and he made me promise to always be suspicious of my own thoughts—to consider if, perhaps, they were the thoughts of my Johnson, and not those of my head. But, his newfound attitude was fleeting.

Eight months later, daddy fell into a real deep depression. During his period of tremendous clarity, he'd said to my mother that he would understand if she wished to share a bed with another man.

But when she screwed Bob Tremblay, he didn't understand, and fell into a deep depression.

He asked me, in confidence, if I'd help him with something. He wanted to know if it was possible to have a fully-functional member surgically attached to his body. We did four months of research and found doctor in Central America performed the procedure for fifty grand.

Daddy booked a flight, wired the fella the money, and never heard from him again.

I followed the footprints onto the McDuff property. They went and went. From her balcony, Eliza McDuff was hollering something at me, but the words froze and broke on the cold, wily wind. The footprints continued into the forest beyond the farmland and down to a frozen lake. Daddy was there, at the centre of the lake: one leg up in tree pose, his skin pinkish, raw, with his eyes closed. He sang in the rarest, most beautiful falsetto I've ever heard.

The ice cracked beneath him, and he smiled.