

Gorden Schweers

**OUT
OF
BOUNDS**

A short story

She shouted back a promise Logan could never forget...

Relaxing under the cover of an umbrella, the life guard noted the winds had not developed offshore. Instead of turning to face the wind on their great chain tethers, the flotilla of deep sea ships waiting to be loaded with grain, logs, coal, and sulfur were scattered haphazardly across Burrard Inlet. The waters sparkled with diamonds from the sunlight. The maritime weather pattern had been so precise; you could almost set your watch by its consistency. For the last two weeks, by the afternoon, strong waves and currents had built up outside the circumference of cork floats forming the perimeter of the sheltered beach area. A sign was posted near the metal perch of the life guard station, warning swimmers of the danger outside the corral defined by a curtain of floats strung from one point in the cove to an adjacent outcropping.

The number of sun worshipers scattered across the white sands around the life guard's post was average for the middle of the week. After a month on duty, the guard recognized those who were regulars and the families who

arrived for a few hours on the weekend and were gone again by Sunday evening. As a competitor, he considered very few of those he supervised to be competent swimmers. For the most part, the crowd he was hired to oversee lacked stamina for anything more than a dozen strokes across the chartreuse surface of the shallow pool. On the other hand, there were those few who were exceptional athletes. He watched with admiration as those elites in the spirit of a Diana Nyad entered the water and began arcing their arms like windmills, gliding across the surface with effortless grace. He took great pleasure in watching such pros swim laps without stopping, the true sign of a gifted pelagic. Once they were in the water, the size and weight of the swimmer meant nothing. He had witnessed people who might be considered obese on land mutate in to buoyant torpedoes in the water. The younger generation though, for the most part, were built like himself; the product of good nutrition, exercise, and the healthy benefits of their communion with the sun and sea.

From his vantage, his shift for the afternoon as a guard promised to be tedious once again. There was consolation in the prospect of being paid to do nothing – even if he did dream of the notoriety of saving someone’s life at

some point, surrounded by a throng as he successfully performed CPR on a near dead victim. Beneath his chair, a bottle of water in a bucket of ice kept his lips moist and his body from dehydrating. The quiet afternoon with the thermometer reading the highest for the month of August forced the guard to fight against the inclination to have a nap in the sun. Last summer, a child had drowned in another pool in the area while the life guard slept on duty. The guard rubbed his face with ice from the bucket to stay alert. He knew the symptoms of fatigue, how it slowly insinuated itself in to a person's thought process. Then to his right, the guard was distracted for a second by the arrival of Logan Hanson, the trouble maker who was a student at his school, Roseville High. The Hanson kid was a junior but already his reputation as *a useless twit* was well circulated amongst the higher grades. The guard watched as the boy spread out his beach towel in the same spot as the last week or two, and sauntered down to the water, wearing his brother's blue satin boxing trunks for a swim suit. *Boy oh boy*, thought the life guard, *some people have got a lot of guts!* Four years had passed since Logan's brother, Denzel Hanson, had been killed in the boxing ring. Since that point, the Logan kid had caused everyone trouble. They had discussed his antisocial behavior during one of their counseling

sessions at Roseville, and were cautioned that Logan was acting out a suicidal impulse, unresolved grief from the death of an older sibling. Perhaps Mrs. Stanfield was right, the life guard thought, as he watched the boy in blue shorts wade out in to the water up to his knees, and plunge in headfirst. The kid's routine was entirely predictable. He'd do the dog paddle out to the corks, and commence breast stroke laps back and forth for fifteen or twenty minutes. Sure, he was slowly working towards more stamina as a swimmer; the life guard begrudgingly approved of the kid's intention. His laps were dedicated and improving. But if that dumb kid ever thought he could live up to his brother, he had another thing coming. A few of the seniors in Roseville reminded *Logan the Loser* on a regular basis he was a farce compared to the sleek animal his brother had been when he boxed like a champion. Logan for his part would flip off the comments, saying *F-U! F-U!* to his tormentors, but the tough guy attitude was contradicted by the haunted expression in his eyes.

The life guard pivoted his attention away from the loser, scanning the pool for any signs of distress. People usually put up a struggle in the water if they were in trouble. Most people just didn't slip out of consciousness

without a fight. Everything appeared normal in the pool. Off in the distance, the towers of the city's financial centre shimmered in the afternoon heat. Suddenly, with explosive determination, the life guard leaped to his feet and stood motionless with an orange whistle pressed between his lips. The rice cork floats had been breached! He should have known – it was that Logan kid again! Rather than swim along the inner side of the floats as he had been doing for a week now, Logan Hanson had stopped near the middle of the string, taken a deep breath, and slipped under the water until he was on the other side of the defense barrier. The life guard tensed, poised to leap down and race across to the edge of the pool. He hesitated, distraught with anxiety. *Why the hell bother?* he asked himself. *Why cause a commotion – and only for some twit who wasn't drowning?* Logan had transgressed another boundary, just as he was habitually doing in school, disrupting the rules in an apparent attempt to draw attention to himself. Mrs. Stanfield had read to the senior class from her manual, describing the obvious about youths like Logan Hanson, who acted out their frustrations in an attempt to deal with an earlier unresolved trauma. The counselor who also coached the girl's synchronized swim team for Roseville had urged the class of seniors to act as mentors for Logan, in view of the

tragic loss of his brother. *Yeah sure*, Terry Ference had volunteered, *I can give him good example but the kid's still a bozo*. The rest of the young men in the classroom laughed uproariously. The joke was at Logan Hanson's expense. Some of the seniors deliberately set the kid up to get implicated in their conflicts and see him marched in to the principal's office. *Old Owl Eyes* gave Logan the ultimatum he'd be sent packing if his behavior didn't improve. Mr. Rawley also handed the boy another blue slip for more sessions with Mrs. Stanfield in her office.

Now, in the middle of the summer, under the tutelage of the life guard, Logan Hanson had thumbed his nose at another rule, another clearly marked boundary. The life guard let the whistle drop from his lips. It was the fool's own decision to swim outside the white floats. He was an average swimmer in any case. Let him go. The life guard swore under his breath, *Shit!* If the kid didn't return, what difference did it make?

Logan clung to the cork barrier for a few moments, facing away from the beach. With sudden determination, he threw himself away and forward in to the forbidden waters of Burrard Inlet. The life guard watched the youth's arms rotating before him, his feet kicking up a

patch of turbulence for a wake. The *twit* was obviously intending to risk swimming out in to an area where the currents were unrelenting. A conical red buoy was tossing around like a child's toy a mile away, marking a reef.

Okay, thought the life guard, he's intending to swim to the buoy and back again. He might make it after all.

The day was August 12th. Logan P. Hanson's 15th Birthday. He had been practicing for this challenge for most of the summer, pacing himself up and down next to the floats on the rope. His brother had died in a coma a day before Logan's 11th birthday. Logan thought Denzel had chosen that day on purpose, a snub on the insignificance of Logan's own life. *If I can't have it, kid, neither can you!*

Logan rotated his head to one side, while kicking with his legs as consistently as possible, to pull in a mouthful of fresh air. He turned his face down again and slowly exhaled while pulling himself forward through the transparent medium of the water. Before him, in his hand, he imagined holding a stick that he had to grasp with his free hand:

Reach, grab, release; reach, grab, release; reach, grab, release...

He continued the procedure until it was automatic. At the same time, he was propelled forward one stroke, one kick at a time. Sunbeams were unraveling green strands of light under the surface of the water. Staring back at him from the fathomless darkness was the memory of that last fight, the one that had ended his brother's career and finally, his life. Their father, Ernie Hanson, was Denzel's trainer. For as long as Logan could remember, his father and older brother had been inseparable as he sat it out on the sidelines of their camaraderie. Denzel's sole purpose in his life was to be a champion, trained by his father to handle himself not like a boxer but as a dancer in the boxing ring. It was magic to watch the boy move around the ring, dodging blows with a side or back step. The boy they called *White Lightning* would suddenly, swiftly, like a bolt of electricity, flatten his feet with no warning and throw all of his weight in to his punches. Out of twenty fights, Denzel had never lost a match. Six of those matches had seen his opponents refuse to come back in to the ring after the fourth or fifth round. The boxing commission had taken notice, watching for further developments. Logan could still hear his father sitting in his brother's corner of the ring, screaming out instructions to his boy as he danced circles around his hapless opponents. A switch would turn on and – *thrust, jab, punch* – his opponents were toast. His fight with Romero

from Seattle was to have been decisive for his career but it became deadly instead.

Romero was ten pounds heavier than Denzel but less skilled as a boxer. He had, however, one trait in the ring his antagonist lacked and could not hope to understand: the youth from Seattle was capable of absorbing a great deal of punishment but could still retain a strategy. All of the other boxers in his division capitulated when they sensed that the *White Lightning* was about to unload on them with a barrage of hooks and thrusts. It would have been the same with Romero except that his trainer was a semi-retired diabetic who had coached many of the famous boxers from the West Coast. Romero's coach was incessant in warning him of the threat the agile Canadian boy posed to his career as a combatant. Using videos of Denzel's style in the boxing ring, his coach and father figure played one film after another, ranting over and over again about Denzel's professional aptitude in the ring.

“Watch, just you watch!” the veteran would rasp with the inflection of a rusty file. “Dat boy got grace, power – like a torrobred – like a...” (he searched for the appropriate metaphor) “a cheetah! Just watch! Look sees how he step

to one side to – wow! Did you see wat that mudderfawker just do, Romero?”

The veteran would struggle to his feet and re-enact in slow motion what Denzel had done to his opponent. Romero was gloved and hunched over in a chair with a towel over his sweaty back, wondering how he would ever know enough to pose a threat to the pampered white kid from Canada.

“I tell you one ting,” the veteran warned. “You let tat boy see a hint of fear in dem eyes of yours and...” the trainer drew an open palm across his own throat with the ghastly imitation of breaking glass, “...and you good as laid out kold; dead meat, buddy. Game over: career over.”

By the time Romero was in the opposite corner from Denzel, he looked tough and determined but his knees were weak. If he could have, he would have implored his trainer to let him walk away from this one. But that was out of the question. The bell rang. Romero moved about in the ring, hunched and defensive while Denzel improvised from side to side in his silk shorts. At times, Denzel laid his gloves at his side but Romero still could not get at him as the boy ducked out of his range. Around them, the crowd of spectators jeered the Seattle upstart

and howled for Denzel to finish him off. In his arsenal of punches, Denzel had a powerful left hook that was guaranteed to take out his best opponent. For a split second, he went flat footed and centered in on the Seattle youth. The strategy failed. Deep in his subconscious, Romero had learned something (either terror or wisdom) from watching the videos that empowered him to respond instantaneously. The left hook came flying at his face out of nowhere but missed as Romero's reflexes pulled him down closer to the mat than he had ever been in his career; and then he burst upwards with a fist of steel that contacted the dancer under his chin and sent him reeling backwards on to the ropes. Already comatose, Denzel's momentum was arrested by the ropes and he was thrown back in to the ring like some El Cid. The video at the inquest showed the boy coming forward at his opponent, arms akimbo, as if still attempting to fight his way out of the crisis. Romero responded in kind and slammed his open face with matching blows to the jaw and temple. Denzel's body crashed against the floor.

Outside the ring, a roar of disapproval rose from the stands. Spectators poured over and through the ropes. Ernie Hanson was kneeling next to his son, screaming for someone to get an ambulance. In the video at the inquest, the referee was seen telling the veteran and his protégé to

get the hell out of the ring and stadium as fast as possible. Still a couple of sports fans ran after them as far as their car but the veteran shouted them down, saying, “If you can’t stand da heat, get da hell out of da kitchen!”

Denzel’s coma and confinement to intensive care was a terrible shock to his family. Logan stood at the side of his brother’s bed during that period, sickened by the tubes and monitors that were holding his life in place by a thread. Outside, in the hospital grounds, dozens and then hundreds of people stood in the rain, holding candles in a vigil that culminated with Denzel fading in to the realm of those who die young. The city was in shock. Denzel’s picture was all over social media and his career was discussed on call-in-shows on the radio and TV. His brother’s life may have been over but Logan’s nightmare had just begun. The funeral at the Cathedral featured an open casket with bronzed gloves placed next to his folded hands. Logan’s father went to pieces at the funeral. He wailed and sobbed, such that the priest had to shorten his homily. Something had snapped in his father’s mind with the death of his favorite boy. The casket was pushed to the back of the church and the lid closed by the undertaker in preparation for its burial. Logan’s heart was broken to lose his brother but, as an act of compassion, he slipped to the opposite end of the casket

and stood there smiling back at his father, as if to say: *It's okay, Dad, I'm still here for you.* That move on the chess board of fate proved a serious mistake. It defined the situation Logan had lived with since his first breath: he was supernumerary. His father saw the boy through his tears and sobbed, “Why wasn’t it you rather than my Denny!”

Logan was devastated. It had taken a decade for the truth to come calling like the angel of death during the Passover. Unable to move, shocked, one of the pall bearers put both of his hands on his narrow shoulders, and lifted the boy out of the way. The casket was rolled away in to the sunlight: August 14th. A few days earlier, Logan had turned 11. He was being asked to grow up too quickly....

Okay, exhale, he coached himself. *Slowly exhale.* He’d sink like a stone if he let these memories interfere with his supernatant defiance. Along one edge of the inlet, a modern metropolis of skyscrapers defined the Cenozoic ascendancy of the human race. There was no other edge. The open ocean was the other edge. Logan’s refuge was 3000 feet away in the shape of a red can buoy.

Reach, grab, release. Reach, grab, release...

For once in his life, Logan wanted to stop being *Denny boy's baby brother*. Last semester, the opportunity seemed to arrive on the bus the students took down to a football match in Everett, Washington State. The best jocks from Roseville were to be pitted against the best from MLK High. The bus rolled along through the dark night. Logan came in contact with one of the cheerleaders on the bus. When returning from handing in his paperwork to the chaperone, the cheerleader smiled up at him while chewing gum and said, "Hey, good looking, got any ideas?"

Logan had never considered himself good looking at all. Denzel was the chick magnet never himself. But he said to her, "Come back and find out."

The only full length seat was at the very back of the bus. The other students moved aside when Logan and his trophy came back, giggling to themselves. Out of sight of the driver and chaperone, Logan commenced to fondle his new lover. Exhilarated, he gave the cheerleader a love bite on her neck in appreciation. She cautioned, "Hey that hurt."

By the time the bus arrived in Everett, he was convinced Juliet Moore, the cheerleader, was in love with him and couldn't wait to be in his arms on the return trip. Out on

the field, Miss Moore was shaking her pom-poms above her head and flicking up her short tutu just to entice his attention. The spectator stands were cold and impersonal. His school team won when the quarterback, Dale Vipond, broke free of his defensive linemen and ran like the wind fifty yards to a touchdown. Miss Moore along with her other cheerleaders were ecstatic, jumping off the ground and tossing their pom-poms in the air. The game was over. Soon enough, Logan would have his lover back in his arms for the return trip on #32 bus. He was going to recite some poetry to her and tell her how much he loved and needed her in his life.

Reach, grab, release. Reach, grab, release...

The buoy was only 2000 feet away. If he hesitated for a split second, he'd be stranded, unable to return to the beach and too paralyzed to reach the buoy. *This is the crucial point - he reassured himself - I can't turn back. I can't turn anything back...*

Logan found his Juliet near the changing rooms in the stadium and urged her to make it back quickly to bus #32. But she was sullen and contemptuous. Her eyes looked for support which she found in Dale Vipond when he came out of the locker room. His helmet and pads were cavalierly slung over a shoulder.

“Got a problem, junior?” he snapped at Logan.

“Umm, no – not at all. Juliet and I are going back to the bus together.”

“He bit me,” she interjected.

The quarterback seized Logan by his jerkin, pulled him forward first then tossed him back again.

“So you’re a little creep, are you? Well, just maybe you think you’re Denzel, right?”

As the beautiful people, Dale Vipond and Juliet Moore held in contempt those who didn’t belong to the same elite club and scoffed at people like Logan for the attempt.

“Beat it, dud!” Vipond threatened.

Logan tried to remember the poetry he was going to recite but Juliet moved over to take the arm of her stallion.

What was with this jerk anyways? He couldn’t take a hint or what! Logan had no choice but to slink back alone to bus #32. He was the last one to enter. When he did, someone from the back of the bus called out, “Hey, Logan, where’s the cheerleader?” Before he could answer, the whole bus seemed in on the joke (even the bus

driver) and laughed at him. His first impulse was to get off the bus but it would have left him in a strange place, a different country, and he had to get back home like any other student.

Reach, grab, release. Reach, grab, release...

The buoy was 1000 feet away. His body was acting like a meticulously constructed machine. The only human aspect left was his determination. Rather than being exhausted, his stamina increased. The buoy was 500 then 300 feet away. He was going to make it! In a fit of exhilaration, his hand contacted the rusted pipe that encircled the bottom of the buoy. He had made it! For the first time in his life, he had challenged death and won the contest. Logan let out a scream of joy. Nothing else mattered. Not Denzel; Ernie his father; Mr. Ramsey; not Dale Vipond nor Juliet Moore. “Yes,” he screamed in jubilation, “Yes, Yes, Yes...”

A moment later, a white ball burst to the surface next to his face. Before he had a chance to think, the white bathing cap spun in his direction.

“Mrs. Stanfield!” Logan gasped in shock.

“That was a superb effort,” she panted, regaining her wind after a long and arduous swim. “I saw you leave and was behind you all the way.”

“I made it!” Logan bragged. “I made it!”

“You have the making of a great swimmer,” she insisted. “The genome of a champion.”

They were facing each other, immersed in the same membrane. Then Logan did something he would never have dreamed of doing in any other situation. He reached over and pulled down one strap that held Mrs. Stanfield’s red swimsuit in place. In any other context, she would have screamed bloody murder and had Logan charged with assault. Miles away from them in Georgia Strait, a loaded deep sea freighter had weighed anchor and was moving out to the Orient with a cargo of coal. The bow wave traveled unimpeded across the open waters until their buoy responded to the high swell. Mrs. Stanfield and Logan Hanson rose and fell on the same wave. Her green eyes were flecked with the color of the sky and clouds.

“I want you to come and be with me this Friday night,” she confessed.

Logan's mouth dropped open in astonishment.

"It's alright," she assured him. "Gerry is away in camp for the next two weeks."

Before he could speak, she pushed herself away from the buoy with a back stroke, and called:

"My door faces the patio. I'll leave the key in the bird feeder."

"I...I can't," he called back timidly.

Her head turned in a tight circle as she pirouetted like a ballerina. She was laughing and shouted back a promise he could never forget:

"Don't keep me waiting, Logan. Let me show you what a 38 year old woman can do."

The pigmentation on the soles of her feet flashed on the swim back to the beach with its safety netting. Logan held fast to the buoy, resisting the impulse to race after her. The nearest landing other than the beach was on one of the Gulf Islands, across a shipping lane some 4.2 miles to

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his north and west. Without a moment's hesitation, Logan struck out for Deception Pass, convinced he was young and strong and invincible. The offshore winds had finally materialized.

END