Love, Liberty

and

Other Holes in the Fabric of the Universe

*A French-Canadian Telenovela*

By Frank Starns

Dedicated to Aaron Fattal

*Former President of These United States*

Prologue

He stood atop a mountain, his coat blowing behind him in almost a movielike fashion as the strong winds came in from the south side. Triumphantly sticking a flagpole in the fertile soil at his feet, he looked off into the distance at the lands beyond. With his fully semiautomatic musket in the other hand, he felt that nothing could stop him at this point.

Yerolda Manplicor turned himself away from the painting he had been staring at for at least an hour. Barely awake, he turned to face President Aaron Fattal, who had just been handed a tray of grass by his aides.

“Mr. Manplicor?”

Yerolda did his best to appear awake in the presence of the head of state.

“Did you hear what I just told you?”

“Oh, yes, of course,” replied Yerolda promptly. You were wondering if I wanted any refreshments.”

The president opened his mouth to speak as Yerolda cut him off.

“And I would like some refreshments, as a matter of fact. I feel like I haven’t eaten in years. What have you folks got up in the West Wing? Have some salted meats or something?”

The president was quick to respond.

“Mr. Manplicor, I was laying out the terms for your secession.”

“Right,” said Yerolda as he sunk down into his seat.

“This country’s resources are completely spent, not only from the war but for Lincoln’s funeral. I have neither the resources nor the energy to fight another war against a secessionist group. At least your group’s land is only ten square miles,” explained the president.

“So…?” asked Yerolda as though he were a two-year-old child waiting to find out if he could have ice cream before dessert.

“East West Virginia will no longer be admitted to the United States, effective immediately. Your state’s sovereignty shall be recognized by all governments of the world.”

“Yes!” exclaimed Yerolda giddily. Overloaded with adrenaline, he jumped out of his seat and embraced the president.

“I honestly have no willingness to deal with you. Get the fuck out of here,” said the president.

Yerolda promptly ran out of the Oval Office and made his way onto the lawn of the White House where his twelve comrades were assembled, eagerly awaiting the news of the negotiations with President Fattal. As soon as Yerolda emerged from the White House doors, they all rushed toward him in anticipation of the coming news. Was East West Virginia, sovereign and free state, going to become a reality? Yerolda prepared to make a speech to his associates who had worked for days to secede from the United States.

“It took many hours of negotiation and boredom in there, but the news I have for all of you is going to change all of our lives forever and ever. Today is a day that we have prepared for tirelessly and we finally have an answer to the question we have wondered about all this time. Today will be”

“Goddammit, just tell us what happened,” said Jeffery Jothymice, Yerolda’s second-in-command.

“We’re free.”

As the joy spread from person to person, Yerolda soon found himself on top of twenty-four arms carrying him ecstatically down the White House lawn. As his name was chanted repeatedly, Yerolda suddenly felt a sense of relaxation he had not been able to feel for days.

It was a few days later that the thirteen men made their way to their newly independent land on the eastern tip of West Virginia. The area was ripe with mountains and forestry, with abundant livestock lining the landscape as far as the eye could see. As the sun began to set, the men began to discuss their living situations.

“Where even is the closest water source?” asked George Redcarts, Yerolda’s best resource manager.

“Oh, it’s just a few miles back there over the mountain,” replied Yerolda, who was already eyeing the best trees to begin constructing their houses.

“Don’t you think we should get some water stored if it’s that far?” asked George, who was the only man in the group paying attention to vital resources.

“That’s a good idea. Want to get on that?” asked a distracted Yerolda.

“Alright then, but where are the canteens?”

Yerolda glanced at the many backpacks that the group had brought along with them. None of the water canteens that had accompanied the group on their journey over were there.

“Boys, what the hell happened to the canteens?” asked a confused Yerolda.

“I threw them all out. I thought there was a stagnant lake here that we would be using for water,” said Morton Darvish, who was supposed to handle supplies.

“Shit!”

Yerolda bent over in frustration, desperately trying to figure out how they were supposed to keep everyone hydrated. It had been at least four hours since their last drink of water and everybody was beginning to tire. If they weren’t able to figure anything out soon, they would all die of thirst.

“I’m going to head on over to the river and get us a temporary water supply. You guys just stay in the shade and try not to die,” instructed Yerolda, picking up his supplies.

“How are you going to bring it back?” asked one of the men.

“I’ll figure it out.”

Yerolda set off into the forest, not once looking back at the group of thirst-ridden men watching him leave in silence.

For the next two days Yerolda toiled through the thick forestry and thorn-ridden bushes that lined every step of the path over the hill. Becoming more and more tired and more and more dehydrated with every step, he began to see all that he fought so hard for start falling apart before his very eyes. As the trees and rocks became more and more blurred, Yerolda slipped further and further into disorientation and after a few minutes fell to the floor unconscious.

Yerolda was barely able to wake up after at least a day of dehydrated unconsciousness. As he opened his eyes, he saw before him a sight that immediately restored his strength – the Levine River. Twenty feet wide and carrying water clearer than his sister’s skin, the river stretched on for miles throughout the mountain range. Yerolda immediately drank the incredibly clean water to restore his strength and began searching his backpack for a way to bring some back. Digging through the supplies, all he found was a few plastic containers he had brought cookies along with him in, a pack of matches, canned liver, a spork and a few different outfits. Dejected, he threw himself against the tree behind him and sunk down to the ground. He glanced back into the bag and saw one more item – his childhood blanket.

The twelve men remained at the camp and sat patiently under a large tree awaiting their leader’s return. They had been napping in twenty-minute intervals in order to keep a look out for Yerolda and were becoming more and more frustrated with themselves. As the sun set on yet another day without any water, the group lay silently under the tree.

“You know what, Morton? This is all your fault,” quipped Travis.

“Shut the fuck up, Travis. You haven’t contributed anything to this. You just linger and expect all the rewards,” snapped Morton.

“And you have?”

“All of you shut up! You’ll last longer if you talk less,” added George.

Travis and Morton silently agreed and went back to watching the sun set. Suddenly, a figure emerged from the trees along with a bulbous sphere. The twelve men shot up and looked out at the shadow that was coming into view. It was Yerolda, and he was holding a gigantic fabric bulb that was at least twice his arm length. He was having trouble not dragging it on the rough terrain or dragging it against a sharp thorn.

“Water, anyone?” Yerolda yelled from the distance.

The bulbous sphere was the fabric blanket that had kept him content throughout his early years. Swollen to thirteen times its size, the teddy bear pattern was still visible in the outstretched stitches.

The men, too dehydrated to stand, eagerly awaited Yerolda as he stepped up to the tree. As he cut a hole in the gigantic sack, the group each drank some of the cleanest and most pure water they had ever experienced in their relatively short lives.

“Yerolda, when East West Virginia is a booming metropolis in a few decades’ time, this blanket will be immortalized in a museum. Encased in feet of glass. Hailed by all over the nation. It will be a symbol of freedom, survival and perseverance,” said George, hardly believing that he had been able to survive.

“For sure. But first let’s focus on getting some irrigation in place. You and Travis come with me so we can start planning. We’ve got all the water we’ll need and the others will be able to store the rest in makeshift canteens,” instructed Yerolda.

As the remaining ten men began forming canteens and storing the water, Yerolda, George and Travis walked to the middle of the canyon and looked up at the mountains.

“And it will be named… the Fabric of the Universe,” George said triumphantly.

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“Welcome to East West Virginia Morning News. I’m your host Ted Barrett and this is our weatherman Barry Theodore. It is eight o’clock on Wednesday, June 23, 2019.”

Dale Rumack was suddenly awakened by the TV he had left on the previous night. As the morning news finished introducing themselves and started discussing the morning’s news, Dale lay awake in bed staring at the decaying ceiling above him. A drop of water leaked through the thin roof and landed on his nose. Birds were chirping like usual and cars were zooming by on their way to work and school. Grabbing his glasses from the nightstand, Dale slowly emerged from his bed and went over to his kitchen. As he poured himself a cup of coffee, the news continued to spit out meaningless news.

“And this just in – it has been reported by the Science Company that bananas may cause radiation poisoning if ingested along with too much potassium.”

Dale turned away from the news and looked out the window at the awakening city. Town City was the capital of East West Virginia, which was its own country rather than a further division of Virginia. Established immediately after the Civil War, Town City had grown into an international meeting place and trade center despite its being landlocked. The adjacent Yeroldopolis was where Dale grew up, living a perfectly average suburban life far from the town square. A graduate of Palacci Community College, Dale lived a perfectly average life over in Town City, where he was able to exist alone and be the perfectly average individual.

Dale walked across his perfectly average walkway and got into his car. That car had been with him for nearly a decade and had plenty of mileage to go due to his short commute. Dale pulled out of his driveway and turned onto Redcarts Road, and after about a mile, pulled up to the East West Virginia Museum of the Breakaway, or as it was known colloquially as the Breakaway. Parking in the employee lot, he walked into the lounge. There were a few minutes before the museum was to open and he was to begin giving tours of the historical exhibits that culminated in the Fabric of the Universe, East West Virginia founder Yerolda Manplicor’s fabric blanket that allowed his party to escape dehydration after a misunderstanding regarding their water canteens. The museum was dead as it ever was without the presence of any other employees, the majority of whom arrived hours late. Touring groups usually only arrived on the weekends unless a school was coming through on a field trip.

The grand clock on the back wall struck nine and Dale unlocked the front doors, preparing himself mentally for a very long day without many people to actually give tours to. The place was quiet as a mouse and Dale sat patiently as he continued sipping his coffee.