



I AM
THE EARTH
THE PLANTS
GROW
THROUGH

a novel

JACK HANNAN

.||.

IAM
THE EARTH
THE PLANTS
GROW
THROUGH

a novel

JACK HANNAN

.||.

Copyright © Jack Hannan, 2021.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, for any reason or by any means, without permission in writing from the publisher.

The following is a work of fiction. Many of the locations are real, although not necessarily as portrayed, but all characters and events are fictional and any resemblance to actual events or people, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

Prepared for the press by Katia Grubisic

Copyediting: Jennifer McMorrان

Author photo: Molly Shea-Hannan

Cover design: Debbie Geltner

Cover image: Molly Shea-Hannan

Book design: Tika eBooks

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Title: I Am the Earth the Plants Grow Through: a novel / Jack Hannan.

Names: Hannan, Jack, 1949 – author.

Identifiers: Canadiana (print) 20210187034 | Canadiana (ebook) 20210187042 |

ISBN 9781773900957 (softcover) | ISBN 9781773900964 (EPUB) |

ISBN 9781773900971 (Kindle) | ISBN 9781773900988 (PDF)

Classification: LCC PS8565.A585 112 2021 | DDC C813/.S4-dc23

Printed and bound in Canada.

The publisher gratefully acknowledges the support of the Government of Canada through the Canada Council for the Arts, the Canada Book Fund, and the Government of Quebec through the Société de développement des entreprises culturelles (SODEC).



Linda Leith Publishing

Montreal

www.lindaleith.com

To Deborah, Molly, Nick, Jesse, Katrina, Kai,
Quinn, Miles, and Nesta.

“I would have chosen to have lost, among my memories, those of the self and the self’s failures, and to have retained the memories of our lavish world.”

—Anne Boyer

Prelude

Let me put you behind the wheel of a clean, rented automobile. You are driving on a highway between two cities. This is in Canada, and it will take a good part of the day to reach your destination. Your hosts will have dinner ready when you arrive. The speed limit is 100 kilometres per hour but you're going 118. The police seem willing to let anything go below 120. You are a relaxed and sensible person. There is a black Toyota Camry on the road about six car lengths ahead of you, with which you've fallen into a rhythm, travelling together over the last hour or so. You pass a lot of semis on the road and some clusters of cars, while other clusters pass you. There are a few people in that Toyota, but you are alone. You are on your way to visit friends. You have the radio turned up loud, and every few songs the station comes up with a good one for the road. *Get your motor running!* The music is loud and the windows are closed. It is easy to be swept away with the music, the trees passing along the side of the road. And you, on a line down the middle through fields and fields and fields.

At one point, more than halfway through your journey, another car draws up in the outside lane. It seems like it's going to pass you, but the driver is going about it very slowly. It's obvious he's using cruise control and he's set it at about 119 km per hour, only slightly faster than you. It takes him several long minutes to pass your car and you find this annoying, but you also will not slow down to let him pass more quickly. Why should you? He is beside you for a long time, inching ahead of your car as the two of you speed along. It feels oddly like an invasion of your personal space, as though your bodies were crammed on a subway train. Eventually he goes by, and is now slowly moving up on the Toyota. He is between your car and your unknown companion ahead, though he stays in the outside lane. You are a triangle gliding along the highway.

Then two motorcycles are behind you. They come up fast and almost right away they're on your tail. They swing out from behind your car into the passing lane, first one, then the other. The music on your radio changes when they do this, as though it knows, it feels their presence. Joe Cocker begins to sing, *give me a ticket for an aeroplane...* The motorcycles are already behind the third car, but still the driver doesn't increase his speed or change lanes. He ignores them, though they don't wait long. One motorcycle slides into the right lane, very close in front of you, and then the other follows. They move forward, slip into the passing lane in front of the third car, one, two, and they're gone. You can hear their engines fading as they speed away. The riders must be doing 160, 170. They're gone.



Here they are two years earlier, sitting up in a rumpled bed on a weekday afternoon. One of them is a woman, and it is unusual for her to have left the office so early. She is purposeful and collected in her work, yet still she called—*What are you doing?*—and they met here a little while ago. They drank wine and they made love with a remarkable enthusiasm for detail, and now they are having a second glass of wine. The man puts music on, music without singers. They talk, they touch each other's wonderful skin, each other's sex. They both admire the beauty of her sturdy feet. He bends his knees to bring his feet up close too, but his are thin and long, winter-white. The man's name is Tomas. Lately, he tells her, he's begun having house dreams. They aren't even living together yet. The woman says that in psychology a house is a symbol of the self.

“Did you know that? The house is a symbol of a person's own life.”

The woman's name is Marie Lextase.

“You're always in the house with me.”

Neither of them speaks then for what seems like a long time, absorbed in their own thoughts. She is a young married woman sitting naked in Tomas's bed in the late afternoon, leaning back on a pillow against the wall, a blanket over her legs, drinking wine from a water glass. The man is a photographer, and the walls around them are covered with photographs. More and more in the last few months there have been many pictures of her among

them, a graphic display of the way she is filling his dreams. This room is their bold and secret place; the pleasure of their skin and the cold wood floor. It's a palace for them, a storybook kingdom. Harry Zeus's Pancake Heaven, he calls it, *and I am your short-order cook*. It's winter, and already growing dark outside. Her clothes are on a chair, her coat on a hook near the door.

Finally, she does ask. "Tell me about the house."

"It's empty, but we're excited because we've rented it and we're going to move in. We're thrilled. The house is very big, many of the rooms are big, but it's old and it needs to be painted, and we talk about how much furniture we'll need. It changes every time. In one dream you wished that there was a bigger balcony and then, just like that, there are two big balconies, one at the front and one at the back, and you set up a garden with a lot of clay pots. Is that my life? Are you setting up a garden of pots in my life? Maybe I'm dreaming about marijuana?"

"No." Marie smiles, but it's a worried smile too. "No. I know what you're dreaming about."



"The first time I was arrested was in Halifax in 1968."

This is Tomas speaking. Tomas Heyerdahl is seventy-four years old now. His son and daughter-in-law are making up the pull-out couch so he can stay at their house for the night. Lorca has brought sheets down, a pillow and a blanket, and towels. She unfurls the sheet with a crisp snap that startles the two men. They both look up. This

pleases her and she smiles around at them with an exaggerated shrug.

“I used to make beds at the Colibri Hotel.”

It's past midnight, and they have to get up early, but they've had a very pleasant evening, celebrating Charlie's birthday. Tomas's eyes are half-closed, and whatever he's thinking about, it's making his head loll slightly to one side and then the other. Lorca thinks maybe he's singing to himself, but now and then he gets a nice look on his face, watching them; he is happy in their company. It's been a good night. A little loose in the limbs tonight, our Grampa Tomas. Tomas is surprising his son. All three have had a fair bit of alcohol. Tomas's son is named David Heyerdahl, and David's wife is named Lorca Casal. It's after midnight and they are making up the couch so Tomas doesn't have to go home, or so David doesn't have to drive him home, or send him home in a taxi.

“Dad.” David is helping Lorca tuck in the sheets but thinking about what his father said. “You never told me that you'd been arrested.” When the cake was done, once Charlie had left the table to the adults, they came around to telling their youthful police stories, most of which David had heard before. His aunt had been arrested in Washington during a Vietnam War protest. *They took us away in paddy wagons. I was lucky I had my Canadian passport!* Neither David nor Lorca have ever been arrested, but three of their relatives had been picked up for underage drinking during various police raids on bars, and they compared experiences, laughing about their fake IDs, which led to reminiscing about favourite old bars and places that no

longer existed. The Seven Steps. La Bodega. His uncle was picked up for drinking in a park with friends. The police didn't arrest him, but they did drive him home to have a serious conversation with his parents, which was mortifying. Through all those stories, Tomas never said a word, but now that everyone else has left, and he's half asleep in the armchair, his veiny hands folded in his lap, it seems to be his turn to talk about the past. David and Lorca are listening. David rolls his eyes—*Are you hearing this?* They'll have a lot to talk about upstairs later.

“It was during the summer, 1968. Sunday afternoon. I was nineteen years old. I had a job near the docks then, a small assembly-line job breaking down containers, and I was hanging out with a few friends the rest of the time. On a Sunday, two o'clock in the afternoon, four of us were sitting on the grass in Wellington Park, downtown. It's a square with a few benches along the paths, and a rotunda in the middle. No swings or a slide, no playground. So we were sitting on the grass, it was about two o'clock, a Sunday afternoon in July, and a police cruiser drove slowly around the park twice, looking at us. We ignored them. They stopped their car and stared at us. We ignored them. The cop in the passenger seat called out to us to move, but we acted like we didn't know they were there. Finally, they got out of the car. One of my friends stood up and left right away. Maybe we all should have done that, but we didn't. The cops came over. *What are you doing?* We said we were sitting in the park on Sunday afternoon. We smiled. We were pleasant. They took us in the car down to the police station. They put us in a

pretty large room with benches and counters along each wall and left us there. It wasn't a cell, I guess it was a sort of holding room. They said they were charging us with vagrancy. *How can I be a vagrant*, I asked, *I work full time on the docks and I'm just relaxing in the park on my day off*, I said, *Leave me alone. I'm a citizen. I pay taxes.*

"The trouble was that all three of us had LSD in our pockets. We each had a tab of acid, one tab, and we had to decide what to do with it. We figured that eventually they would search us. We looked around the room for places to hide the pills to pick up later, or we talked about crushing them under our shoes.

"In the end," Tomas says, his eyes closed, waving his hand a little, "who wants to waste good acid? We took it. And we sat in the room, getting high and laughing. Maybe that lasted for an hour or two. We were able to focus and talk with the cops, as long as we didn't look at each other, and after a while they gave us papers to sign and let us go. We had to be at the courthouse about two months later. They never searched us, and we left. We went somewhere to eat."

David is both amused and surprised. He and Lorca are standing at opposite ends of the couch and she holds out her hand toward Tomas, smiling at her husband. "You did notice that he said that was the first time he was arrested?"

Tomas asks them if they take drugs, and they wait a moment before saying yes, they do sometimes smoke a joint, nothing else. "Pot and alcohol, Dad. Wine. Beer. Good single malt Scotch."

"And caffeine. My fair share of caffeine."

“Oh, I never liked pot or hash,” Tomas says. “That depressed me. It felt like I was pulling a heavy blanket over my head. But I did enjoy chemicals. LSD, mescaline, cocaine.”

He stands up, undoing the buttons on his shirt. “Good night, you guys. Thank you for letting me sleep here.”

“Dad, you’ve been arrested! You have a police record!”

“Yes. A couple of times.”

“Was my mother ever arrested?”

“No.” He finds that an odd thing to imagine. He’s smiling, already going quiet. He has decided he’s not going to say any more.

Heading upstairs, Lorca puts the palm of her hand on David’s back. She has been enjoying this late, weird mix of humour and discomfort. She likes Tomas. “It’s not that funny,” David whispers. “He’s my father. Has your mother ever been arrested?”

“No, not as far as I know.” She turns back. “Good night, Tomas,” she calls out softly. “Sweet dreams.”

“Thank you.” And Tomas calls her dear: “Thank you dear. See you in the morning.” Tomas lies down, but he’s not relaxed anymore. He already regrets telling that story, thinking, *I should know to just shut up*. Thinking, s-w-e-e-t d-r-e-a-m-s, and he spells to himself again, s-w-e-e-t d-r-e-a-m-s, which is just something he does now with his nervous energy, n-e-r-v-o-u-s e-n-e-r-g-y.

Upstairs, Lorca and David are side by side in their own bed, hands and shoulders in the shadows of the light coming through the window. “There’s a lot I don’t know about my parents,” David says. Lorca holds his hand up in

the air over them, arms straight. When Lorca asks if he's sure he'd like to know more, David says, "Yes," but he whispers it, as though apologetically. "What about your parents?'

"Ha," she says. "My parents met briefly, though I have to say not nearly brief enough." Actually she remembers her father quite well. "I don't need to know more."

Their son turned twelve years old today. He is sleeping in the other room. They have been together for fourteen years. David's father is asleep in the living room. They have a house, a car, furniture, three bicycles, insurance, bank accounts. They have never been arrested. They are middle-class people who shop for gifts at pop-up craft fairs. They like jars of artisan chutneys, mustards, woolen scarves. These are Lorca's fortress walls. There is a bureaucratic surface to David's life, in his work and in his interaction with the world around him, including his family, but there is another part of him too, that Lorca knows, and which she saw more of in their early years together—the two of them lying in bed like this after midnight, before and after Charlie was born. This is the part that she likes to draw out, the pleasure of his company. They are lying side by side on their backs. She holds his hand straight up in the air, their arms together in the faint light from the window. She brings his hand down to her body and turns toward him.