

LUSTING IN MY HEART

BY

TIMOTHY GRAYSON

In the mid-1970s, President Jimmy Carter admitted to *Playboy* readers that he lusted in his heart. It undoubtedly contributed to his losing the next election. This isn't *Playboy* and my admitting to lusting has about as much shock value as Britney Spears doing something self-destructive. But it needs to be done.

Leaving my parents behind in rural Manitoba to go to university was the emancipation I'd been awaiting for a third of my life. Finally, I was going onward to new things. But I was most definitely leaving as well. And there would be no turning back. Though I had not actually *lived* in a city, cosmopolitanism had captured my soul.

In my adolescent sense of the world, the rural had been vanquished by the Industrial Revolution. Industry, service, technology, and pretty much anything that required advanced education and worsted wool suits was noble and to be pursued. Oliver Wendell Douglas, *Green Acres'* Park Avenue lawyer turned farmer, was particularly comedic because few things are more fish-out-of-water ridiculous than a cosmopolitan lawyer descended back into the rural hustings. That could not and would not be me.

It's hard to have anything against the small town where I grew up. There was nothing particularly bad or good about it: it was normal in a prairie small town way. The town revolved around farming, church, hockey, fishing, and the beer parlour—definitely not in that order. With about 2,000 souls in the vicinity—more or less at any given time, depending on how busy the abattoir was that week—my hometown was exceptionally average.

I had to leave because it did not fit my view of my place in the world. It was so... rural: the closest real city was Winnipeg (a description derisively disputed by many Torontonians), and that was five hours by car. How could a guy who had internalized the *Esquire* guide to upscale living possibly stay where implement dealers outnumbered restaurants, with people that drove pick ups and wore their Mack™ or Cat™ or Deere™ emblazoned headgear while eating "hat" cuisine? I couldn't. I didn't.

Leaving was like breathing fresh air. University and city life was a blur of new adulthood. I was

surrounded by hired cars and jet airplanes. The only tractors around cleared snow and cleaned skating rinks. Professional sports, rock concerts, and artistic events didn't require an overnight sojourn. Even the daily choice of cinema and theatre—if that's a valid indicator of higher civilization—was, to me, unprecedented. I was on my way; next stop Wall Street.

Although New York will have to wait some more, through the next twenty years I reveled in my urban urbanity. I, and later my wife and eventually our daughter, enjoyed those consumerist things critical to a good life: new house, shiny things in it, a choice of Szechwuan or Cantonese depending on your mood every third Wednesday, and Starbucks—always Starbucks.

Our first house was pretty good. It suited our needs well when we bought it. But in no time our shiny stuff outgrew our decidedly matte little home. That and moving onward and upward—to Toronto, again ("upward" in reference to Toronto being oxymoronic for Winnipeggers and other Westerners)—meant we'd need a bigger house. So we got one—a couple times. My wife, being of the same mind as me, had no problem with the moves. We found decent, smaller, and quaint neighbourhoods, each of which became more cosmopolitan while we lived there. It was everything that anybody could possibly want.

But even in our modest McMansion in a lovely new Stepford development, something wasn't right. My wife felt it first. I'd noticed the same thing but sublimated my feelings when I looked out upon my domain—if domain is the right word for a yard barely larger than the footprint of the house that sits on it. The world had closed in on our lives and we were suffocating in our urban wonder. The last straw for her was when the tall fences went up, caging us into our well-appointed backyard like Ling Ling and her erstwhile mate.

That was how we came to make our last move and become happy homesteaders on an acre of land with a 30 year old house near—not in—a community of many fewer than 1,000 residents. The downtown business district consists of a grocery, LCBO, post office, two restaurants, a flea market, and vet clinic. (That our little community is only an hour drive from Parliament

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Hill makes things much easier: Dim Sum every month is still within reach.)

The nearby Carp Fair happens to be one of the oldest country fairs in Canada, and with the exception of the BMWs and Volvos in the parking lots around the fair grounds, it is pure living nostalgia of my childhood. Every kid that knows better is no doubt deeply disappointed with the midway, consisting as it does of only about a dozen hair-raising thrill rides. But with horse shows and tractor exhibitions, judged jams, baking, and artwork in the barns, and concessions run by the ladies' auxiliary, this fair to me is the ghost of summers past.

And that's how I found myself sidled up to and caressing the shiny smoothness of a midnight blue, extended-cab, four-wheel drive, 2008 Ford F-150 in the fair ground display—aware that I needed penitence. So here's my own admission: It took a long time to come around, and it's not really the same because you can't step in the same river twice. But I guess that all the while I was being urban and civilized, I too was lusting in my heart for something a little more spicy in my life—salt of the Earth, to be specific.

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