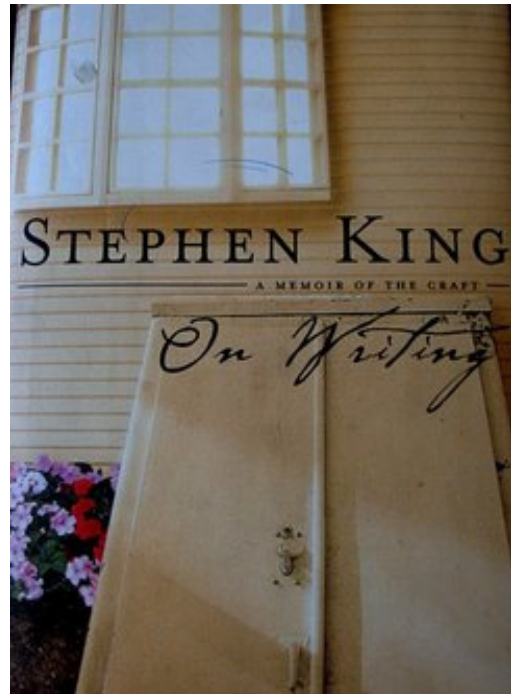


A bishop, a belcher and Stevie

I love reading. The seed was sowed – whether I had liked it or not– when I was a wee lad, no older than four I think. I was curious about the colour of the sky, so I went to my father, the fountain of all my knowledge back then and asked why it was *blue*. His answer still resonates loudly even today: ‘We have a library, go look it up.’ Damn.

Whether he was too busy with whatever dads do when their kids ask them strange questions or he was teaching me a life lesson about the innate power of books has escaped the grasp of my memory and now, I will never know for certain. But after his passing, the seed he had so subtly planted had matured not only into an adult but also into a very avid reader.



Now, let's fast forward to two and half months ago. I was enjoying myself at a bar on the Queen Street strip called the Bishop and the Belcher, catching up with a few friends and discussing photography. A few pints had tagged along as well. We were there until pretty late and whether it was alcohol, forgetfulness, tiredness or just my propensity for mixing all of the aforementioned options, I ended up leaving a book on the booth we had been at. Realizing it the moment I got home I phoned the bar. ‘Yeah, it's here. Drop by anytime to pick it up. I'll leave it behind the bar's register.’ Said the man on the other line. ‘Phew.’

I felt much better as I was well one third into it and was curious to see it through.

What's the name of the book, you ask? It's ‘Stephen King On Writing,’ by, well...duh. But first allow me to tell you just how much I normally dislike Stephen's main body of work. In the books of his that I have dwelled in, I always come out with the same conclusion: ‘overly populist,’ and by that I mean too mainstream. So, what if he has millions of fans and doesn't need to work another day in his life? No, that's not it.

I simply can't relate to horror novels in general, and partly because I cannot relate to the general subjects he picks, particularly his later work. Yes, I am unfairly shooting a horror genre messenger here, I know. That's like saying that I hate the colour white because I dislike zebras. Yet I would never dare say the man lacks talent. In fact, I have yet to read another writer alive who has honed

the craft to such capacity where his words seem to so effortlessly flow from page to page like a mountain stream pouring down towards the sea. He is *that* good. That is why I bought the book in the first place. In it he describes not only his take on writing, thankfully avoiding his usual clichés like poltergeists, socially awkward youth with startling mental powers and viruses wiping out 99.9% of the human race and talks candidly about his childhood and how he got into the craft.

Imagine my surprise to discover he begun writing due to his frail heal which kept him indoors for a good chunk of his early years. This book is simply full of surprises. It is really one of his best works and I cannot recommend it enough, especially for any would-be writer. Like they say, 'if you love to write, you've got to love to read.'

Okay, back to the present, my apartment and the issue of the lost Stevie. I thought of dropping by on that weekend and pick it up. 'No worries,' I thought. I mean, they found the book, is not like it was going to go anywhere, or so I thought.

I ended dropping by the following Monday night. Looking forward to finishing those two thirds left. Just as if I was continuing a dish that I had saved in the fridge for when I was really hungry.

'Sorry. Can't find it.'

'Excuse me? The guy I talked to last Thursday said that it would be in the bar.'

'Sorry. Checked already. It's not here. Maybe it got moved to the office. I don't have keys for the back. You are gonna have to come during the day when a manager is in, but call first.' With that he resumed pouring a draft.

Damn.

So I called a few days later. 'Yes, its here,' said the manager. 'When would be a good time for you to pick it up?' I was a little annoyed, but figured the weekend seemed like a good bet. I said I would be there on Saturday morning to pick it up. 'Sure, ask the bartender, it will be at the bar.' Okay, no big deal, the book is there, is not like someone took it, this sort of thing happens I told myself.

'Sorry. Can't find it.'

'Wha? I spoke to your manager on Tuesday. I was told it would at the bar.'

'Sorry. Can't find it.'

'The manager said it would be at the bar.'

'Who did you speak to?'

'Didn't ask. How many managers do you have on a Tuesday?'

'Two'

Damn.

'Well, the woman.'

'They are both women.'

Double-damn.

'You are gonna have to call back and speak with whomever you spoke about it.'

'But if I don't have their name how am I going to know unless I call until *next* Tuesday?'

'Then you are going to have to wait. Look, I am really busy and I looked. I am busy and it's not here. I can't help you.' And with that she turned and ignored me away.

Bitch.

So, I wait until next Tuesday and I speak to Jennifer, the manager.

'We can't find it Mauricio.' How could that be? She told me she had it only a few days before. I felt like someone was playing me for a fool.

'I saw it, but we are in the process of moving. Maybe it got packed into one of the boxes by one of the owners.'

I sighed.

'Alright, when are you moving?'

'Two weeks.'

'...!'

'Hello?'

'Sorry,' I said as I bit the %\$^##R\$#@ hell out of my tongue. 'I am just thinking what my options are here.'

'You could try calling *after* we move.'

'...!!'

'Hello?'

'That's fine, I'll call in two weeks.'

'Sorry.' She said as she gave me the new address near Bloor and Church streets.

'Thank you anyways, Jennifer.'

Alright, I bought the book on sale. I did not even pay full price for it. The book went for \$37 Canadian when it originally came out –yeah, for real— I paid \$6 at a used bookstore. I could just get another copy, and get it over with. But no, I liked my copy. I liked the way I folded the pages to keep track of where I was. No, no cheap cop-out, I was going to get my book back. If anything I was going to do it for the principle of it. But, if they ultimately lost it, is not like the world was going to crash and burn. Right? Right.

To be honest, I forgot about the entire affair after the first week. I mean, it was just one book and if anything it was probably in one of Toronto's landfills by now. Ready to be enjoyed by a flock of seagulls as either nesting filler or toilet paper. So the weeks went by. Sometimes I would remember and call but kept getting the same message, the phone did not exist. Strange since Jennifer told me they would keep the same number.

Another week or two flew by. The week after that one I tried again. Bingo! Someone picked up and apologized, it seems Bell Canada had messed up the line transfer and had finally gotten around to correct it. 'Look,' I said, 'I left a book at your old location...' As was getting ready to fill her in, 'You mean, the Stephen King book?' She interrupted.

Great! She knew about it, which would save me a good ten minutes of my life I would otherwise not get back.

'We lost it.'

You had got to be kidding me! How could they lose it? I mean, come on!

'It was packed on the move. I saw it here, but I can't find it anymore. Maybe someone trashed it.'

'Why would they do that?' I asked in surprise.

'Well, it had been here for over a month, maybe the individual figured you would not be back for it.' Sadly, she did have a point and I think she could hear my disappointment.

'How about if you call in a week, maybe it will turn up.'

'Yeah, sure,' I said.

Yup, seagull-toilet-paper, for sure.

'I will call. Thanks either way.'

A week went by and I did not call. I was in the process of doing some packing of my own as the entire floor in my apartment was going to get redone and had to move everything from my living room and into the bedroom and move out for a few days. Besides, I had lost hope in the book. It was gone. Out of my head. Finito, Adios! Or so I kept telling myself. But from time to time the thought had a way of cropping up through the proverbial "what if..." scenario. It bothered me and I hated it.

I am one of those who have trouble biting the bullet when it comes to these things—okay—maybe I am a little stubborn, so after another week I found myself making the time to get off at Yonge and Bloor subway station. I hadn't called the new and improved Bishop and the Belcher but it was only a few minutes away from the subway and at least this way I would know for sure.

The new place is located at the bottom of an office building and has a somewhat somber feel to it. Guess some of that 'office building vibe' managed to ooze its way into it. It had a quirk-ness about it before when it was on Queen Street, but now it looked like a strange green-carpeted-Firkin bar. If you know what I mean by the word 'Firkin,' then you know it is no great compliment. I got there in middle of the afternoon, way after the beehive lunch hour and the establishment was deserted.

'Hi,' I said to the pretty brunette near the bar. 'I know this is going to sound strange, but I left a book here a long...'

'The Stephen King book?'

'Uh, ummm...Yeah. It got packed. Jennifer told me it might have been boxed in the move and that I should drop by...'

She went to the back, behind the bar.

'I guess you found it?'

You got to be kidding me.

She came back wearing a very cheerful smile.

Here. It's Mauricio, right?

'Umm, yeah, thank you.'

'No problem,' and with that, just like that she turned back and disappeared into the kitchen. Ok, that was anti-climatic and a half.

On my way home on the subway, it suddenly hit me, this book had been out there for quite a long time, months even, how did it get lost? Had it been misplaced in some drawer along with some steak and chicken condiments? Used as a doorstop? A paperweight? Where had it been? I felt like I ought to be angry or pissed off.

Well, wherever it had been, now that I had it back, I sure wasn't going to let it out of my sight. Yes, I might have gone a bit overboard, but we are talking about a good book here. One that had picked my curiosity out of countless other books, one I wanted to get to read to its last page: It was *MY* 'Stephen King on Writing.' Albeit I felt a little silly for feeling so interested, even a little too passionate—or bloody stubborn, some would say—about it. In the middle of all of this, I noticed a small bulge within the hardcover; it was a piece of paper; a neatly folded white piece of paper, right in the middle of the book, and this is what it said:

'To the owner of this book,

I would like to offer my sincerest apologies for taking your book home. It sat in the back for a few days and the book had pigeon(ed) my interest, so I figured I would take it, read it, and bring it back. I meant no harm and I am sorry. Enjoy it Sir, for it is rightfully yours to enjoy.

**From,
The Book Thief'**

I had to smile. How could I not? I couldn't be upset. After all, the individual brought it back. Besides the curiosity of a good book, a good read, is what kept me going back and not just for Stephen's tome, but to every single book I have ever picked up after the day I was old enough to question the colour of the sky. I could honestly relate with this person and I was not about to get pissed off at the fact that he was also an avid reader just like me. If anything, I felt an odd camaraderie with this stranger...amazing the power of books, isn't? It left me thinking and remembering for a moment, 'Thanks for the great lesson dad,' I thought to myself.

I smiled again as I folded the piece of paper into my pocket.
Whoever the Book Thief is: Apology accepted.