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From Ellison Robertson's New Book In Love With Then • ""%?!)!T" Ellison Robertson of Sydney has written a powerful, disturbing, and yet winning new novel which has been getting good reviews and close attention right across Canada. Using the mystery genre to connect with readers • perhaps as a tool to leap past the idea that this book is "local" • Robertson drives through that "mystery" door with a text of deeper concerns. Here is a portion of a review by Marjory Whitelaw, and Ellison's own selection of a chapter from his book. The writing is elegant, the text unnerving • 'the book, fi? nally, concerned with healing and with growth. From a Review by Marjory Whitelaw This is not your Celtic Cape Breton, singing the sad sweet songs of olden days. This is the other island, and the story is set in the city of Sydney. Three of the main characters grew up together in Sydney and have been buddies in World War II. Mike McDonald, son of a doctor, is now an aging insurance investigator. Sam Donovan is the Sydney police chief. And Rags, on the day before the story begins, has been murdered, his throat slashed. In their wartime experience, Mike and Sam had known of two murders committed in the same manner, never solved, never really investigated. What's going on here? What went on back then? Is there a connection? Sam seems to know more than he's telling. It's a mystery, and Mike sets out to find some answers. I like this book. The characters are interesting, and I want to find out what happens to them. There's a dark strain here, too. I found the dialogue a little formal, even with many f-words, but there are wild flashes of Cape Breton humour.... Mike takes on his quest, as heroic in his way as any medieval knight. Separated from Emma, his life is in a shambles anyway. His father is dying, his elderly sister, a bossy nun, interfering. Why was Rags mixed up in the affairs of powerful Senator Burke? Who was the man in the pale blue suit, and why was he always tumming up? What to do about Emma? And Sam was stranger than ever. None of it made sense. And the worst of all was Neil. How could a son so hate his father that he would try to run him down on the street? Emma had tried to explain schizophrenia to him, but Mike could not bear the explanation. Maybe, if he solves Rags' murder, these other things will go away. Or maybe a couple of drinks would show him the way. Instead, they bring searing, terrible visions. Ellison Robertson is a new writer to me. He too grew up in Sydney, this is home territory. What fascinates me is his skill in working on so many levels, in keeping Mike's journey of redemption so powerfully linked to the other mysteries • those dark mysteries of the soul that so trouble the Celtic imagination. Perhaps it is, after all, related to the old tales told around the fire. Robertson's novel is, in its own dark way, a cheering and hopeful book. • from Atlantic Books Today (Spring 1993, Number 2) From In Love With Then by Ellison Robertson CHAPTER17 RAGS'S SHACK, AS BEN CALLED IT, looked like no more than a mound of earth and rubbish when seen from the back side of the militia's Victoria Park parade ground. It didn't look like much more as you came closer. The field, cut in half by a dirty, garbage-strewn brook, jutted into the harbour and was enclosed by the army base, where the Cape Breton Highlanders had been headquartered, rows of gas and



fumace oil bulk storage tanks, and the ravaged perimeter of the steel plant property. Farther along the shore, the plant's slag dumps obscured the lower portion of the massive cranes that were noisily loading rails onto a rust-streaked freighter, while across the harbour two scrubbed-looking red and white Coast Guard vessels were getting under way. The ground around the bunker was unevenly built up by random fill-loads of rubble, covered by a profusion of tough grasses, weeds and the humble, beautiful dandelion. Mike wondered why the property remained unclaimed and unused, but it was no doubt an accident of ownership and, unless the three surrounding giants needed room to expand, it might remain in its unlovely state forever. He didn't doubt that Rags had chosen it for just such reasons. Mike had to climb into the broad gully formed by the brook where it had eaten through the softer soil of the ten-foot bank above the gravel shore. A green scum coated the stones below the high tide line. The shore stank like a week-old corpse. He scrambled up the far side of the gully, getting a handhold on some weeds before Sam appeared and offered him a hand up. "Where the hell did you spring from?" "It's quicker if you come from the steel plant side. There's a break in the chain link fence. You haven't been here before, I guess." "No, I haven't. What are you up to, Sam?" "What do you think of it?" Sam gestured grandly at Rags's hovel, as if he was presenting a piece of prime real estate.

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