

[Page 46 - From Alison Robertson's New Book: In Love with Then](#)

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earth and decayed vegetation, garbage of multiform composition? The hot air settled over him with a symphy weight. But panic and disgust fled. It was not simply death and decay that he smelled here, but life lived in spite of the corruptibility of everything life touched. God, Rags, what were you doing here? Mike wondered, appalled at this sudden knowledge of his friend. When was the last time I saw you? In early March you were coming down George Street, gingerly treading across an icy intersection, your face alive in the morning light, hands deep in the pockets of a shabby overcoat. You spotted me a block away and came on with your eyes locked on me, dodging the mesh of salt-crusted cars, weaving in and out of the plumes of exhaust, the slantings of sunshine spilling out of the eastern sky. You looked happy, I recognize it now, and I wanted to hide from you. Mike set about examining Rags's home, if that's what it was. Again, what he saw was overlaid by the sense of deep familiarity, the shock of finding what he expected. After the stink and the heat, he fought the dark. The place was a cave. But gradually he perceived there was enough light, though it was amber-hued, seeping through the dirty glass and yellowed plastic, and hanging in the air without touching the confusion of filthy, shadowed debris. There were piles and stacks and scatterings of salvaged junk, boxes and ancient trunks spilling over with rags and papers. Mike winced at the thought of searching through all this and was happy that Sam or someone else had already done it. He laughed to think of fastidious Ben; if he'd been repelled by the outside, this would give him fits. Except for the complication of the junk, and the objects crowding the walls and beams, the structure fit with what he remembered from the war. He had a vision of Rags strutting about the site of Rags City, wagging a stick like a limey officer's riding crop, shouting directions and encouragement while offering refreshment from a wineskin slung over his shoulder. The men had laughed, joining him in his self-mocking dance, and yet they were instructed and inspired to the task he had set them. A fool ascendant. Rags smiled as clown. He had patterned the structure on his memory of an ancient barn that stood near where he'd spent the summers in Cornwall as a small boy. He'd read about such architecture in the meantime, and visited the barn several times on leave. Mike had even gone along once. Rags City was built into a slope, walled and roofed with whatever oddments of timber were available. The Cornish barn was thatched, whereas Rags City was covered in brush, ground sheets, canvas and salvaged boards from a bombed village, on top of which earth and sod were laid. Warm in winter, it had leaked like a bastard in the cold spring rain. The new hovel was the same size and shape, but the timbers • discarded power poles • were heavy and straight. The thatching was a more careful arrangement of sheet metal, lumber and plastic vapour barrier, again covered by earth and sod. Mike had no idea when Rags had built this, or how long it might have taken. Had he worked alone? Despite outward appearances, the place was carefully built and looked as if it had cost a bit for the materials. Well, there was no telling how much Rags had cadged over the years, and he might have received money from social assistance.

The main space was about twenty-five by thirty feet, broken only by four supporting posts. Because you stepped down as you entered, the ceiling was higher than you expected from outside, about thirteen feet at the front, sloping back to about eight in the rear, where there was a series of narrow stalls lined by bunks. In this incarnation they were more like wide shelves, littered with objects culled from the garbage or along the trash-uttered shore. The center stall had a grimy bed, a milk crate table, and a wooden rocker. How impersonal this dim cell was • no clothing, no books, no food or cooking arrangements. Mike wondered if anything had been removed. In the main room he looked more carefully at the piles of junk and at the walls, roof and posts, where thousands of objects were nailed and wired, then painted over in a sour institutional green. He brushed against a post on which something swung with a clatter. A hurricane lamp. He heard the sloshing kerosene, smelled it. He lit the lamp and carried it into the back. As he'd thought, the bunks, or shelves, were piled deep with junked objects, giving the cubicles the appearance of eerie, abandoned market stalls. Dirt coated everything, but there was a relative sense of order, the objects still possibly useable. He noted children's toys, high heeled alligator shoes, books, toasters, clocks, pieces of clothing, tools, packs of cigarettes, glasses, radios and records. He took up a pack of cigarettes, a brand and package design he hadn't seen in many years. He broke them open and pulled out one plain, unfiltered cigarette. He rolled it in his hand and it shredded to dust. Years and years old. A chill tiptoed up his spine. He picked through the books, swearing aloud as he read his own name penned on the flyleaf of a book he'd missed for years. He'd accused Neil of making off with it, basing the accusation on Neil's once having taken the scissors to a book of Audubon's birds. He lifted another book and saw underneath a 78 record in a dirty, faded paper envelope. Even as he reached for it he knew what it was. The label read simply Danny Anthony And His Big Band. The tunes had no titles, just an A and B side. He no longer remembered the B side, but the A side was a tune sung by Danny himself, called "In Love With Then." He'd written it when he was overseas, and a dozen or so of the guys had pooled enough money after they came home for Danny to cut a demo record. A hundred had been pressed. He gave a few to friends and began sending the rest to radio stations and record companies. They all shared in his dream, a link to the wide world of fame and immortality, and his death in a car wreck in early 1947 symbolized the futility of such dreams. Their youth had been used up. Life was a serious business, and, even as they lived it, they were haunted by nostalgia for a time that never was: Love needed no reason In our sunny season We lovers who 'll always be In love with then. Mike hummed the fragment of the tune he remembered. Suddenly he felt trapped inside Rags's grim joke, and he hurried outside to the light, taking the record with him. He scrambled across the gully, looking back only when he reached the road and Rags City was no more than an innocuous hillock, glowing with coarse grasses waving in the late morning breeze. He snapped a few photos and hurried to the car. Thanks to Elizabeth Eve, editor of Atlantic Books Today, for permission to reprint Larjory Whitelaw's review, and to Goose Lane Editions for permission to excerpt from the book. In Love With Then is available through bookstores right across Canada. Atlantic Books Today is available in bookstores across the region, or by subscription from 2085



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