
The Man

Who Gave

Away His



ORGANS

TALES OF LOVE AND OBSESSION AT MIDLIFE

RICHARD MICHAEL LEVINE

ALSO BY RICHARD MICHAEL LEVINE

Bad Blood: A Family Murder in Marin County (nonfiction)

Catch and Other Poems (poetry)

The Man Who Gave Away His Organs

Tales of Love and Obsession at Midlife

Richard Michael Levine



Capra Press, San Francisco, 2015

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, organizations, places, events and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or events or locales is entirely coincidental.

“The Lost Father” first appeared in *Pennsylvania English*.

Copyright © 2015 by Richard Michael Levine
All rights reserved
Printed in the United States of America

ISBN: 978-1-59266-104-6

Book design & typography:
Studio E Books, Santa Barbara, California

Cover illustration from an Edo-period Japanese medical textbook.
Majimaryūhidensho : Shinpengenshūganmōkunokirigami : owned by Majima Yoshinao;
Hajime Sōda, Zusetsu Nihon iryō bunkashi; Shibunkaku Publishing, Japan, 1989.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2015932885

Published by Capra Press
San Francisco, California
<http://caprapress.net>

For Lucy

CONTENTS

But Is It Art?	11
Jeopardy	33
Tlac	59
The Second-Tuesday-of-the-Month Irving Horowitz Support Group	81
The Lost Father	113
Love and Death at the Golden Bear Recreation Center	123
The Man Who Gave Away His Organs	147
A General Theory of Shopping	175
Becoming Burt Reynolds	215

The Man Who Gave Away His Organs

But Is It Art?

THE COST of placating his wife with gifts after their frequent blowups had gotten out of hand even by Arnold Frommer's lavish standards. In the early years of their marriage, when he was a struggling law lecturer at Rutgers, a bouquet of flowers or an ounce of her favorite perfume would do. During the years he was an associate at Himmelfarb, Destefano and Ho, slogging through sixteen-hour days toward the promised land of partnership, there had been a succession of silk blouses in the lavender family Norelle (née Nora) Frommer favored and expensive dinners at the kind of Italian restaurant that would as soon serve a matzo ball as a meatball. After Arnold made partner and started pulling in what he learned to call "serious money" (more money in a good year than his late father, the only Jewish police captain on the Brooklyn force in his day, made in his entire working life), he apologized with vacations to what he also learned to call "the Saints" — Barts or Moritz, Kitts or Tropez, depending on the season. After a particularly bad argument on Norelle's birthday two years ago, he upgraded her to a Lexus, even though, as he pointed out in subsequent arguments, the only driving she did was to and from their country place in Southampton, and even then they often caught a helicopter out to beat the weekend traffic.

Arnold even thought of the spacious Fifth Avenue co-op they

had moved to from the Upper West Side as a present to Norelle to assuage her complaints about all the time he had to spend on the road (a phrase he loved saying for its footloose, devil-may-care ring, although the truth was that if his favorite hotel suite in one of the cities he regularly flew to first class wasn't available, it could punch a big hole in his day). Arnold couldn't help but take pride in his smart new address, at least until Saul Friedlander, the managing partner who had originally hired him, mentioned that he knew the building, "one of those white-brick jobs in the low nineties, isn't it?" By this Saul meant that, in contrast to his own red-brick, prewar co-op in the mid-sixties, Arnold's newer building had twelve- instead of sixteen-foot ceilings, entertainment-industry neighbors prone to throwing noisy late-night parties, and a round robin of ununiformed and unshaven Maltese doormen who looked like they were just as likely to knife you as flag down a cab for you. They all seemed to be members of one enormous family that had cornered the doorman market in all but the toniest Manhattan buildings—just the kind of hostile takeover Arnold was often called in to prevent.

But the ring was the last straw. Arnold had bought it for Norelle after a cute, upwardly (not to mention horizontally) mobile intern on the West Coast had left a message on his home answering machine to call a Mr. Hightower in the L.A. office. There was no Mr. Hightower in the L.A. office, as Norelle Frommer had confirmed with a telephone call there, and even though she never knew for sure that Arnold was having an affair, much less that "Mr. Hightower" was the young lady's affectionate name for what Norelle had long ago taken to calling his "thing," the seed of suspicion had already sprouted and could only be uprooted by a particularly expensive gift at the next available opportunity.

So Arnold, a quick study, learned all he could about precious gems and got a good price on an untreated pigeon's eye Burmese ruby from a friend of a friend who had a store in the jewelry district. It still set him back 60k, but it was a flawless beauty, clear as running water and winking away on every facet like a late-night stoptlight.

At 3.5 karats, it was “not *quite* Liz Taylor size but big enough,” as the friend’s friend put it. “A little smaller’s better if the quality’s there,” he added, “so she shouldn’t get her finger ripped off by some *shvartze* kid high on crack.” He had the stone mounted between two melee diamonds in a four-pronged antique Tiffany setting and presented it to Norelle on Mother’s Day.

The arguments about the ring began almost immediately, but at least they deflected further interrogation about any funny business in L.A. Arnold kept meaning to get the ring insured, and Norelle kept meaning to have it sized down to fit properly, but neither had happened by the following Saturday, when they were due to drive up to visit Jade (*née* Susan) at college and attend her graduating program for performing arts majors. The invitation had come three weeks earlier. Engraved in blue type on heavy cream-colored stock, reply card enclosed, it looked like an invitation to the bat mitzvah Jade refused to have no matter how much Arnold had begged her:

BUT IS IT ART?

A Life on Tape in Two Acts

by Jade Frommer

McGurney Hall, Franklin College

Act One: Sat., May 23, 7:00 P.M.

Act Two: Sun., May 24, 7:00 P.M.

(please arrive promptly)

DESPITE Arnold’s repeated pleading, Norelle insisted on wearing the uninsured, unsized ring. For one thing, Bob Lerner, Norelle’s ex-husband, Jade’s biological father and Arnold’s former best friend, was flying in from L.A. for the occasion, along with his new wife. And just as importantly, the ring was the perfect accessory for the off-the-shoulder red Galliano knockoff Norelle had picked up at Bergdorf Goodman—although in this case it wasn’t entirely clear which was the accessory and which the accessorized.