



The **CONSEQUENCE** of **SKATING**

A novel by **Steven Gillis**



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For Mary

“Though I have no productive worth, I have
a certain value as an indestructible quantity.”

—**Alice Adams**

“If I love you, what business is it of yours?”

—**Goethe**

“Call it self-defense/You can obfuscate/And
manipulate/But it’s only at your own expense.”

—**Barenaked Ladies**

THE CONSEQUENCE OF SKATING

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HERE IS WHAT I know: The world is round, not flat, though at every turn there are crack sharp edges. I know Ethan Hawke but not Jeff Bridges, know history has its Hannibals, its Hank Aarons, Henry Millers, Hitlers and Horatio Algers, and that human nature is constant, will keep producing each. I know my current affairs, both public and private, know Norah Jones can sing and Gwen Stefani wishes, know Gabriel Orozco is a whale of an artist, that Sonny Liston took a dive and Elin Nordegren took one on the chin. I know Brando was for a short while our greatest actor, and Ludovic, not John or Ted or Bobby, our greatest Kennedy. I know water boils at 212 degrees Fahrenheit, and at 211 degrees you have nothing

but steam. I know beans are a nut and tomatoes a fruit, but have no idea about the cumquat or rutabaga. I know Peter O'Toole has received eight Oscar nominations without a win, that George W. stole the 2000 election, that in Russia it's considered impolite to leave an open vodka bottle unfinished, and that in China there are 1.4 billion people who have never seen a single Mickey Greene performance.

I know the heart pumps almost 2,000 gallons of blood every 24 hours, that smell triggers memory more than any other sense, that praxeology is the science of human action, and that my own recent acts are vulgar and vaudevillian. I know the speed of light is 983,571,057 feet per second, and that a flashlight shined into space will still take 100,000 years to cross the Milky Way. I know eggs are designed so they can't be crushed from the sides but can be easily cracked in the center. I know Jim Mora coaches football and that Don Sebastian de Morra was a midget. I know sex at times is life-affirming, from foreplay to climax to the deep sweet slumber, and still there are days when nothing feels better than a good shit. I know Harold Pinter was the best playwright of the twentieth century, that he and Beckett were good friends, that the final play Pinter performed in was Beckett's 'Krapp's Last Tape,' and that 'The Homecoming' had no less than 224 Pinter pauses.

I know heroin works through our opioid receptors, that rehab is an execrable purging, and when I sleep at night my dreams try to heal me. I know how to skate and dance, though I can't ride a horse or draw a decent picture. I know about the Urumqi riots in Xinjiang, know Navanethem Pillay is the United Nations' High Commissioner for Human Rights, that Brangelina is legit and Jessica Biel isn't, that Mike D'Antoni and Kiki Vandeweghe coach the Knicks and Nets respectively. I know some Spanish but not Chinese, know my mother loved my father though she admitted this only after he was dead.

I know I loved Darcie, and that she loved me, and that here is proof again the world is round, how things turn and catch the slope, gather speed, so that despite all efforts to hold on, things churn and roll away.

Tonight I'm watching the Corkscrew snake in cold metal turns. The orange rails wind, the train of cars tarped and chained together, the carousel wheel making pin-spoke shadows through the center of the park. My job, as part of my probation, is to guard the grounds. It's one in the morning, in the dead of winter, the temperature cold enough to reach beneath the layers of shirt, jacket and sweater I'm wearing and freeze my skin.

Ten months ago, I did Pinter on hard candy, was Stanley in 'The Birthday Party,' high on Aunt Hazel, doped and nodding on stage at the Galaxy Theater. My timing off, unable to manage the gaps and pauses, I uttered the scripted, "Uh-gug... uh-gug... eee-gag..." before losing the thread, my body shaking from too much kabayo, I fell from my chair, Goldberg and McCann staring and waiting, Meg and Petey wondering what to do.

I was 32 then, am 33 now, a one-time working actor with a solid resume and decent reputation. That night the cops came and carried me off the stage, the paramedics in latex gloves assessing the damage. Following my arrest I spent a month in rehab. My brother Jay arranged everything, hired an attorney who petitioned the court for probation. At Marimin, I was given methadone and naltrexone, left to shiver and puke in my room. Toward the middle of my third week, I began feeling better, re-read Pinter's 'Moonlight,' and parts of Mises' five-volume treatise on human action.

Mises is Ludwig Von (1881-1973) the one-time

leader of the Austrian School of Economics, and father to the modern application of praxeology. Mises contends that every conscious act has its root in self-satisfaction, that people act in order to improve their situation, and must have a specific dissatisfaction—or *uneasiness*—to resolve otherwise they can't act. Assuming this is true, I should be perpetually kinetic, as I have enough dissatisfaction to keep the hamster wheel going forever. Darcie left me while I was in rehab, moved all her shit out of our apartment. My agent dropped me. No one will hire me now. I'm tested three times a week for every sort of drug, stimulant and depressant, pharmaceutical and organic, weed, heroin and blow. I have to pee into a cup, am ordered to see a therapist, expected to talk about my *condition*, discuss my dreams, ambitions and disappointments. I'm asked about mom and dad, Jay and Ted, my career before and after. I'm questioned about Darcie and my addiction, which I see as one and the same and blur as I talk about either.

My counselors at Marimin were sympathetic, encouraged me to maintain a sense of forward thinking, presented me with short poems and passages from 'I Ching.' *I intend* is the mantra they had me repeat. *I intend* to perform again, *I intend* to produce a version of Pinter's 'Moonlight,' *intend* to remain sober—my few sips of whiskey here at Birch Bow Adventure being medicinal and no big deal. *I intend* to make amends to Darcie, *intend* to convince her to love me again, *intend* to show her that I understand all about love and don't excuse what I did because of our problems. This is a lie, of course. I blame love for everything and don't understand a single thing about it.

The ceiling of my booth is tin. The metal traps the cold, floor open to the dirt beneath. My shift runs

from 9:00 p.m. until 5:00 a.m. five nights a week. As an actor, there was talk of turning my time at the Bow into a documentary, or a reality show with scenes sketched out and other actors brought in. A contract was drawn up, but the court would not sign off, refused to let my punishment morph into a spectacle. I get it. That's cool. There's a definite protocol which needs to be followed, a lesson I'm supposed to learn. I appreciate this, want to prove that I'm repentant and accepting of all forms of retribution.

Working the night shift keeps me from performing in plays or movies, even if someone did want to give me a part. Isolated, the owners of the Bow expect me to walk the grounds once an hour, but there's no point really. After October the park's abandoned, all the rides chained and the wind chill down around three below zero. Only the ice rink and the aquarium remain open for a few hours during the afternoon. I bring my skates, visit the fish, walk the grounds between these two points mostly, though once a night I do a full loop and stare out at the lights from the city beyond the fences. Aldwich is a city of actors. Shakespearian and avant-garde, dramatic and comedic, creative, imitative and method, trained by Adler, Stanislavski, Strasberg and Katselas, disciples of Meisner, Ouspenskaya and Berghof, Michael Chekhov and Uta Hagen, at work in movies, plays and tv, adherents to the metaphysical method, the identity and substitution schema, sense memory and muscle memory. A stick can't be shaken in Aldwich without hitting at least three performers.

Forty years ago we were a different town, dependant on industry, relying on our metal works factories for commerce, plants owned by Ford, by Kenmore and Whirlpool and others producing steel for cars, refrigerators, washers and dryers, furnace ducts and vents. When the recession hit and markets across the board imploded, Aldwich's economy went with it.

Within two years, every third job was lost, plants were closed and labor moved overseas. Looking to silk purse a sow's ear, a group of investors decided to buy the old Raviery steel mill from Ford. The property was rezoned and converted into a co-op, with a theater on the ground floor and artists' studios above.

A crazy plan, a risk for sure, expanding the arts at a time when people had no money. Somehow though, the Raviery Theater did brisk business. Tickets were priced to sell and people out of work came looking for diversion. Soon another theater opened, and a bar with live music, a cinema-plex specializing in independent and art house films. Businessmen took notice, politicians and investors. The state stepped in, offered tax breaks for movies and plays produced in Aldwich. Filmmakers scouted locations. Writers and actors came hoping to land new projects. More theaters opened, writers and producers making their own plays and films, until steadily all the old industry gave way, the shops and services reinvented, the factories gutted and replaced.

Today Aldwich thrives. Television shows, studio and indie films, plays and musicals are in constant production, our Aldwich Arts Festival a huge success each summer. Sundance and Tribeca, Toronto, London, Edinburgh, Boston and New York now keep an eye on us. Our music, film and theater departments at the University rank in the top ten nationally. We're a community devoted to the particulars of making money through a good show, our approach one of self-preservation and artistic integrity, both practical and prescient. Recently however, investors have begun backing less high-end theater and artistic films, complaining of the narrow draw, anxious to offset the latest economic downturn. More commercial shows are brought in, tourist-friendly plays and other accessible programs meant to appease a larger audience; 'Mary Poppins' and 'Rock of Ages.' While Aldwich still takes pride in her

artistic aesthetic, a third of our stages are now filled with mercantile productions of ‘Dr. Seuss,’ ‘The Blue Man Group,’ and ‘The Lion King.’

A sign of the times. Twice before I crashed and burned at the Galaxy my agent called with offers for me to play a dancing troll in ‘The Hobbit: The Musical’ and Gaston in ‘Beauty and the Beast.’ I refused, my sights higher. I was more arrogant then. And now? I realize how much things have changed, how need creates a different perspective, an altered sense of the choices that are really out there. Short on cash, if I was somehow offered a part in this winter’s ‘Shrek on Ice’ it would serve me right, I think, to climb inside the costume and play the donkey’s ass.

Outside, I zip my jacket, pull my grey cap over my ears, tug on my gloves and kick through the snow. The air’s frigid, cuts under my collar, stings my nose and threatens my chin. As I walk, I think about my friends, all finished with their rehearsals and performances for the night, while I’m here walking the grounds with carnival ghosts. “Whose fault, Mick?” I say this to be clear and not feel sorry for myself. There’s a reason for what I did, though I can’t in any rational way explain it. I think: Here’s the thing—the thing, yes, that is what it is—there are reasons for all that happens, but all that happens isn’t reasonable. Despite what Mises wrote, human action defies logic. Our moral compass is more primitive, as Stephen Toulmin explained. Shit comes and goes because we make it so, but we rarely make it so because we know what we’re doing. Mistakes occur as we cause them, mishaps and misfortunes, our errors and successes individually ordained. We act, yes, but half the time we’re clueless. That I did duji up on stage as Darcie prepared to leave me was all part of a

perfect storm, the product of a long list of earlier conditions I failed to manage.

For guarding the Bow, I'm paid three bucks an hour, a prison wage, toothpaste and candy-bar money. I've already blown through my earlier savings, am pretty much broke and rely on occasional loans from Ted and the work I do for Jay to sustain me. Jay owns properties in and around Aldwich, buys and sells houses and buildings for profit. I do odd jobs each afternoon, painting and drywall, putting in new toilets, windows and floors. I'm good with my hands, a skill I seem to have accidently acquired. The work suits me. Jay is generous, keeps me on his payroll even though the latest downturn in the housing market has cut a huge hole in the center of his business. He tells me not to worry, insists I'm still a bargain. "Cheap labor. Don't sweat my problems." He slips me cash under the table.

I walk counter-clockwise, which seems right, past the Corkscrew, the Gyro Jump and the Tilt-A-Whirl. The path from my booth through the grounds is narrow, carved by my boots, the snow crushed to ice. Being at the Bow is purgatorial, a terrestrial isolation, like walking across Reykjavik, as foreign as the moon. I think of love and loss, remember how mom grieved when dad died, though she used to break his heart routinely. I picture Darcie on stage, the way she channels Gabrielle Drake, Mary Anderson and Stephanie Beacham, is small framed, a sinuous shape, handsome like Geraldine Chaplin in 'Dr. Zhivago,' her look also slightly off center, like Amanda Plummer. There's a ferocity in her eyes, both sexy and vulgar. She commands the stage and screen in ways unexpected, the audience following her without knowing why.

The tarp on Shivering Timbers has come loose, the