

The Sound of Something

By Kent J. Bruyneel

The water near the shore of Prince Edward Island gathers in pools of red clay dust as you swim around. By yourself you can take off all of your clothes if you want and try very hard to sing-well loud. If you are on a beach with rocks and pebbles like diamonds you can start to pick them up, maybe keep them in a small cave, hide them away. If the shoreline is not so perfect, if there are sandbars everywhere, you can probably make all kinds of things up. You can run.

If you have a decent wind and can go for more than a little while, you can make it across a potato field very easily in the summer sun. If you step lightly, you can watch the reams of potato blossoms as they sway and dive beside your feet. If you are watching, you can see the oceans of history in those fields: forever working and forever in fear of the demon virus that may cause crop ruination. If you are a potato farmer in Prince Edward Island, you will know that a prayer may not go as far as a tractor, but modern farming relies equally on them both. If you are a potato farmer here, you will know what causes ring rot, and blight, and you will definitely know what causes potato wart.

If you were shipping potatoes to the United States of America, you were prohibited from that practice sometime near Halloween due to an isolated case of potato wart. If you were here in November, when the ban came down heavy on PEI potatoes, you will surely be impatient. If you are a citizen and expected your federal government to rise immediately to your defence, swinging weapons and threatening retaliatory embargoes, you have been waiting

awhile. If your crop insurance was not renewed from last year's problems, you are no doubt wary of even the slightest bad news. If you are still standing after the export ban gets lifted, you are brave, smart, lucky even.

If you are the Minister of Agriculture for Canada, Lyle Vanclief, you rode into town today, as a Knight, to assure the farmers of PEI that when you suggested they start growing something else, you were not doing so as a sign that the fight was over. When you compared the situation to widgets—if people don't want your widgets, you said, you can't keep making your widgets—you meant it as a positive. If you are a potato farmer, this is what you will call, "talking out your ass." If you are Vanclief, a farmer himself once who lost his farm to crop ruination, you will announce the Food Inspection Agency of America has begun the lifting of the ban. If you are Vanclief you will announce this on Potato Day, April 9, in a grand



hotel, with the men and women who work the soil standing all around you. If you are Vanclief this is your ace in the hole and you know it. You will say, "This is a giant step forward." And you will be hazy on the details of the restrictions—at the very least there will be imposed mandatory washing and spraying of all table and seed potatoes leaving this province—and on the zoning of Prince Edward Island.

If you are Vanclief, you will no doubt side step questions about why you would try to persuade PEI farmers to change their livelihood, their history, due to a low rent fuckarond that will become a cautionary tale of the New Trade Era, when borders are just Imperialist Fences—where an innocuous problem like potato wart, a purely aesthetic disease that makes the potato unattractive but not harmful, one prevalent in less than 100 potatoes in one small field can cause the dangerous interruption of an age-old economy—where only the tall

and strong get to see the rule book, and only the powerful can see for miles. If you are Vanclief, then you wouldn't have set foot here without that ace in the hole, and you know it.

If you were there, in that hotel so stuffed with media and board members and government officials, today, listening to the new plan, the division of this province into four zones with varying rates of restrictions depending at least in part on their proximity to the infected site, you were probably heartened to hear Mr. Vanclief say, "we asked [the Americans] for their science (proving continued presence of potato wart or threat of same on the Island's farms), and they could not show us any."

If you are Mitch Murphy or Wayne Easter—the Tory provincial minister of agriculture for PEI and the MLA for Charlottetown respectively—you will try to appear as more than towel jockeys and apologists for the Progressive Conservatives and the Liberal Party. If you are Easter, the Liberal, you will speak of how Vanclief's statement about "farming something else" helped because it put the discussion back in the "spotlight." If you are Murphy, you will wear your best shit-eating grin, and pray like hell that the Americans Do As They Say, and re-open the gates. If you are either, you will tug and pull at your collar and speak softly, though straight into the microphone. You will spin.

If you are in that overstuffed media room you will sense the benign animosity the two sides—politicians and farmers—naturally have for one another; their jobs could not be any more different after all. You will stare at