

LITERARY NOVEL: THE NOVELIST BY JOHN LEGGETT

Summary: A novel within a novel as a writer is tired of self-publishing and seeks a publisher for his new book.

Comment: Relation to Marion? Is she the writer? When do we meet protagonist?

There were two flights of stairs from the sidewalk to Marion Everstreet's front door. Each flight contained eleven steps and it was her third consecutive day of making the climb. For Marion, a spry, high-spirited woman of eighty-two, the climb was more of an annoyance than an effort of labor. She paused when she reached the landing—not to rest—but to admire her panoramic view of the city. She enjoyed looking down on the landscaped homes and places of business that comprised the quaintness of Marshfield. They dotted the horizon and she viewed them as if they were houses and hotels on her personal Monopoly board.

Comment: So what?

Comment: Passive voice.

Comment: Wordy – but says nil. Writer's hand too visible here, clear that he's trying to be writerly.

Comment: Drags – too much description of something unimportant. Get to the action. Doesn't hook reader.

Until recently, she had driven her car up the winding hill that ran behind her house and parked in the small indentation of crabgrass that served as her driveway. Knowing her car was not available for ninety-some days, she was resigned to live with a limited amount of independence. Her groceries had to be delivered, dry cleaning was picked up and dropped off at the pleasure of the cleaning service, and she had resorted to making lists to ensure her trips to town utilized maximum efficiency.

Comment: Why? Again, passive voice.

She blamed her daily climb up the two flights of stairs to be the result of statements made by that wet-behind-the-ears police officer, Jimmy Bromfeld. Judge VanHuesen hadn't been much help either—believing Jimmy's testimony over hers regarding the charge of reckless driving—and then impounding her car.

Comment: Awk. She blamed her daily climb on the statements made by...

Comment: Get here faster – this is first hint of story. Condense first 2 pars into this one.

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Inserted: took

Comment: Readers already understand this. no need to overexplain.

Inserted: so

Inserted: every morning to

Comment: Again, I think this is understood by what comes next – your readers will get it without you spelling it out at every turn.

Inserted: As with

Inserted: Nor was she

Inserted: the

Comment: Obvious. Doesn't not need to be explained.

She had tried to appease her priest that morning. After a few minutes stewing over her latest courtroom incident, she tacked on a sixty-five year old sin she had never confessed.

Inserted: to which

Marion felt that revealing a sin, even of that vintage, might brighten Father Hanrahan's day if confessions by other members of the congregation weren't all that exciting.

"You know father," she began. "I've always been reluctant to confess this, but after we beat Deerfield High for the championship, well . . . I . . . I sort of put out for the judge in the back seat of his car." Her confession was immediately followed by an unnecessary clarification. "Of course he wasn't Judge VanHuesen then, just good old Tommy." The clarification was said with an attitude of you know how it was in those days. She then continued with a nonchalant, "Lord knows, it wasn't as if I went all the way or anything."

Comment: In what sport? Activity?

Comment: Sounds like he was the judge in whatever competition her team had just won. Needs to be clarified. Maybe: I sort of put out for Judge VanHuesen in the back seat of his car.... Of course, he was just good old Tommy then.

Comment: Expos.

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“Yes, Marion, the Lord *does* know,” the Father agreed. “And while I appreciate you making a clean slate of things, I think after sixty-five years God has probably let that ~~particular~~ sin fall by the wayside.”

Following a momentary silence, she resumed. ~~Her tone continued to carry a sound of justification as if she was explaining the Judge’s recent courtroom decision.~~ “Well, anyway, I mention it now because personally, I think that’s why he extended the suspension of my license last week. I think there’s still a bit of resentment ~~over him~~ . . . you know . . . not getting everything he wanted. He even gave me some cock and bull story that night about wanting to marry me, or at least that’s what he said when he unbuttoned my blouse and . . . well . . . you know.”

Comment: Expos.

Inserted: on his part for

Father Hanrahan didn’t seem concerned about her back seat sinning ~~that took place in the judge’s ear~~, but in acknowledgement of the act, he added an additional five Hail Marys to her penance.

prep

During her climb of the stairs that morning, she reflected on her most recent citation. It was the second one that month and ~~from the first step to the landing~~, she cursed the name Jimmy Bromfeld. Big shot Jimmy, she thought, who paraded around town in his police uniform. He was certainly all decked out a week earlier when he ~~cited her for reckless driving—strolling up to the car like he was so important~~. Marion almost laughed at all the contraptions on his policeman’s belt. Recalling the incident, she now realized ~~her initial comments were~~ probably not the best way to avoid a ticket. ~~“You auditioning for the next Batman movie Jimmy?”~~

Inserted: ,

Inserted: ,

Inserted: ed

Inserted: her

Inserted: “You auditioning for the next Batman movie Jimmy?” she had asked him.

Inserted: that was

He bristled as he stood there in his shirt sporting creases sharp enough to shave with.

“I’ll have to see your license and registration ma’am.”

Comment: We already know she lost her license and why + we know she holds Jimmy responsible so what’s gained by this flashback to the courtroom scene?

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“What for? You know very well who I am and that little sticker on my license plate is obviously current. Perhaps I should ask to see *your* license. Are you old enough to drive now?” Her question was made as a reminder that, on many occasions during his infancy, she had been his baby-sitter.

watch more subtlety / naturally

Comment: Repeats below – fits more naturally there.

Inserted: dig

Jimmy ignored the *reference*. “I’m sorry ma’am, but anytime we’re called to a scene of an accident, we’re required to see identification.”

Comment: Misuse of semi-colon.

Inserted: ,

“Scene of an accident! Just what accident are you talking about? And, who’s the ‘we’ you’re referring to? I don’t see anyone else around.” As she asked the questions, she fumbled through her purse with the pretense of a search. “I can’t seem to find my license,” she told him, “and stop using that ma’am stuff on me. I changed too many diapers filled with your poop to listen to that nonsense. Maybe someday you’ll find a nice girl and settle down, although you’ll find diaper changing is not so much fun as pulling people over for no apparent reason other than to harass them.”

~~Jimmy knew she still had another two weeks remaining on her suspension and her banter was more or less a distraction from producing her license. In his effort to avoid embarrassing her, he took the registration and stared at it with as much diplomacy as possible.~~

Comment: We know all this already.

~~Marion thumped on the steering wheel. “As I said, there’s no accident here.”~~

“Well, unless the high-speed turn you took here that knocked Ms. Manning’s mailbox clear into her yard was intentional, I’ll give you the benefit of the doubt and *call* it an accident.” This statement from Bromfeld held his own tone of annoyance. “I’ll have to call this in Ms. Everstreet. I’ll just be a minute.”

Comment: Misuse of semi-colon.

Comment: Awk.

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Marion was well aware that Jimmy had it in for her. If he had *his* way, catching her driving without a license would probably result in prison time. She continued thumping the steering wheel as she recalled the scene in the courtroom two weeks earlier.

"It's the proverbial straw Judge," Jimmy testified. "You can see by her record that she has numerous speeding violations, many of which were issued right on Main Street."

Marion jumped up from her chair. "Objection . . . objection!" she yelled.

The judge ~~d~~ turned his gaze toward Marion and peered over the top of his glasses. The acknowledgement of her objection was received with a bit of frustration and he exhibited a lengthy exhale. "Go ahead Marion," he told her.

"Go ahead?"

"Yes, you need a reason if you're objecting to the witness's statement."

Marion looked around at the spectators as if one of them might have a good reason.

"Well," she began, "I believe the use of the term 'proverbial straw' is . . . is . . ." her voice trailed off as she searched for the right word—the perfect jargon ~~needed~~ from one of the TV courtroom shows she watched. "Oh, you know what I mean, Judge. The word is right on the tip of my tongue. It's that legal term lawyers always use."

Inserted: ,

Judge VanHuesen raised an unsympathetic eyebrow. "I'm afraid if the word you seek is refusing to jump off your tongue tip, we'll have to continue without its presence. I'm suspending your license for thirty days. ~~You're to relinquish it to the clerk following these proceedings and sign the necessary paperwork.~~"

"Prejudicial!" she yelled out.

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“Yes! That’s the word I was trying to think of . . . for my objection.” She then pointed a finger at Bromfeld. “That proverbial straw thing he said suggests I’ve had prior incidents. I do believe it swayed your verdict.”

Jimmy was still sitting in the witness stand and felt he needed to further justify the judge’s ruling. “Your honor, she was given a warning a day prior to the ticket for speeding through the parking lot of the mall.”

Inserted: issuing of the

“And I object to that!” This time she had her reason ready. “It’s hearsay.”

John's Comments

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~~There were~~ two flights of stairs ~~separated from~~ the sidewalk ~~from~~ Marion Everstreet's front door. Each flight contained eleven steps, ~~and it~~ This was Marion's ~~her~~ third consecutive day of making the climb. For Marion, a spry, high-spirited woman of eighty-two, the climb was more of an annoyance than an effort of labor. She paused when she reached the landing—not to rest—but to admire her panoramic view of the quaint city of Marshfield. She enjoyed looking down on the landscaped homes and ~~places of business~~ es that ~~comprised the quaintness of~~ Marshfield. ~~They~~ dotted the horizon, ~~and she viewed them as if~~ they were houses and hotels on her own personal Monopoly board.

Until recently, she had driven her car up the winding hill that ran behind her house, and parked in the small indentation of crabgrass that served as her driveway. Knowing her car was not available for ninety ~~some~~ days, she was resigned to live with a limited amount of independence. Her groceries had to be delivered, dry cleaning was picked up and dropped off at the pleasure of the cleaning service, and she had resorted to making lists to ensure her trips to town utilized maximum efficiency.

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Whose story is this?
Marion or the novelist?

passive voice

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Like Judge VanHuesen, the sympathy she expected to receive from her priest had been somewhat lacking. His subtle reminders that the confessional was not to be mistaken for the booth used for complaints in the local department store did not go unnoticed. Likewise, she was not oblivious to his long sighs that followed her daily rants—sighs that indicated his impatience regarding her private affairs before she got around to confessing her daily sins. Once she concluded her confession, Father Hanrahan assigned her a few Hail Marys or Our Fathers and sent her on her way.

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“You know, Father,” she began. “I’ve always been reluctant to confess this, but after we beat Deerfield High for the football? championship, well . . . I . . . I sort of put out for the judge in the back seat of his car.” Her confession was immediately followed by an unnecessary clarification. “Of course he wasn’t Judge VanHuesen then, just good old Tommy.” The

— Show this scene in the courtroom.

Is Father Hanrahan an important character to the story? If not cut.



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clarification was said with an attitude of *you know how it was in those days*. She then continued with a nonchalant, "Lord knows, it wasn't as if I went all the way or anything."

"Yes, Marion, the Lord *does* know," ~~the~~ Father agreed. "And while I appreciate you making a clean slate of things, I think after sixty-five years God has probably let that particular sin fall by the wayside."

Following a momentary silence, she resumed. Her tone continued to carry a sound of justification as if she was explaining the Judge's recent courtroom decision. "Well, anyway, I mention it now because personally, I think that's why he extended the suspension of my license last week. I think there's still a bit of resentment over him . . . you know . . . not getting everything he wanted. He even gave me some cock and bull story that night about wanting to marry me, or at least that's what he said when he unbuttoned my blouse and . . . well . . . you know."

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He bristled as he stood there in his shirt sporting creases sharp enough to shave with.

put internal thoughts in italics.

good

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"I'll have to see your license and registration, ma'am."

Comment [PHS IS1]: If he knows her then why doesn't he call her Mrs. Everstreet?

"What for? You know very well who I am, and that little sticker on my license plate is obviously current. Perhaps I should ask to see *your* license. Are you old enough to drive now?" Her question was made as a reminder that, on many occasions during his infancy, she had been his baby-sitter.

Jimmy ignored the reference. "I'm sorry ma'am, but anytime we're called to thea scene of an accident; we're required to see identification."

"Scene of an accident! Just what accident are you talking about? And, who's the 'we' you're referring to? I don't see anyone else around." As she asked the questions, she fumbled through her purse with the pretense of a search. "I can't seem to find my license," she told him, "and stop using that ma'am stuff on me. I changed too many diapers filled with your poop to listen to that nonsense. Maybe someday you'll find a nice girl and settle down, although you'll find diaper changing is not so much fun as pulling people over for no apparent reason other than to harass them."

- pov shift. - stay in Marion's head.

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“Prejudicial!” she yelled out.

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Comment [PHS IS2]: Would she call him Tommy just to bust his chops?

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Jimmy was still sitting in the witness stand and felt he needed to further justify the judge’s ruling. “Your honor, she was given a warning a day prior to the ticket for speeding through the parking lot of the mall.”

“And I object to that!” This time she had her reason ready. “It’s hearsay.”

Show don't tell

Rather than tell the stories as backstory.

Show them as scenes so reader experiences them.

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Ed

I don't see any of this in the excerpt

well written

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wouldn't she do this every day?

shops?

1

Until recently, she had driven her car up the winding hill that ran behind her house and parked in the small indentation of crabgrass that served as her driveway. Knowing her car was not available for ninety ^{why?} some days, she was resigned to live with a limited amount of independence. Her groceries had to be delivered, dry cleaning was picked up and dropped off at the pleasure of the cleaning service, and she had resorted to making lists to ensure her trips to town utilized maximum efficiency.

achieved?

on

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- Not much happens, but I'm not a big literary novel fan.

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JULIE

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Start stronger:
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Van Huesen "ev"

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LITERARY NOVEL: THE NOVELIST BY JOHN LEGGETT

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She had tried to appease her priest that morning. After a few minutes stewing over her latest courtroom incident, she tacked on a sixty-five year old sin she had never confessed. Marion felt that revealing a sin, even of that vintage, might brighten Father Hanrahan's day if confessions by other members of the congregation weren't all that exciting.

"You know, Father," she began. "I've always been reluctant to confess this, but after we beat Deerfield High for the championship, well . . . I . . . I sort of put out for the judge in the back seat of his car." Her confession was immediately followed by an unnecessary clarification. "Of course, he wasn't Judge VanHuesen then, just good old Tommy." ~~The clarification was said with an attitude of you know how it was in those days.~~ She then continued with a nonchalant, "Lord knows, it wasn't as if I went all the way or anything."

An introductory modifying clause has to do with the main point

unnecessary

JULIE

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“Yes, Marion, the Lord *does* know,” the Father agreed. “And while I appreciate you making a clean slate of things, I think after sixty-five years God has probably let that particular sin fall by the wayside.”

Would a priest say that - or always want a sin confessed?

Following a momentary silence, she resumed. Her tone continued to carry a sound of justification as if she ^{were} explaining the Judge’s recent courtroom decision. “Well, anyway, I mention it now because personally, I think that’s why he extended the suspension of my license last week. I think there’s still a bit of resentment over him . . . you know . . . not getting everything he wanted. He even gave me some cock-and-bull story that night about wanting to marry me, or at least that’s what he said when he unbuttoned my blouse and . . . well . . . you know.”

conditional

Father Hanrahan didn’t seem concerned about her back-seat sinning that took place in the judge’s car, but in acknowledgement of the act, he added an additional five Hail Marys to her penance.

Why?

During her climb of the stairs that morning, she reflected on her most recent citation. It was the second one that month and from the first step to the landing, she cursed the name Jimmy Bromfeld. Big shot Jimmy, she thought, who paraded around town in his police uniform. He was certainly all decked out a week earlier when he cited her for reckless driving—strolling up to the car like he was so important. Marion almost laughed at all the contraptions on his policeman’s belt. Recalling the incident, she now realized her initial comments were probably not the best way to avoid a ticket. “You auditioning for the next Batman movie, Jimmy?”

Back to stairs?

word choice

He bristled as he stood there in his shirt sporting creases sharp enough to shave with.

“I’ll have to see your license and registration ma’am.”

M
J
S

JULIE

LITERARY NOVEL: THE NOVELIST BY JOHN LEGGETT

“What for? You know very well who I am and that little sticker on my license plate is obviously current. Perhaps I should ask to see *your* license. Are you old enough to drive now?” Her question was made as a reminder that, on many occasions during his infancy, she had been his baby-sitter.

Jimmy ignored the reference. “I’m sorry ^{MA} ma’am, but anytime we’re called to a scene of an accident, we’re required to see identification.”

“Scene of an accident! Just what accident are you talking about? And, who’s the ‘we’ you’re referring to? I don’t see anyone else around.” As she asked the questions, she fumbled through her purse with the pretense of a search. “I can’t seem to find my license,” she told him, “and stop using that ma’am stuff on me. I changed too many diapers filled with your poop to listen to that nonsense. Maybe someday you’ll find a nice girl and settle down, although you’ll find diaper changing is not so much fun as pulling people over for no apparent reason other than to harass them.”

Jimmy knew she still had another two weeks remaining on her suspension and her banter was more or less a distraction from producing her license. In his effort to avoid embarrassing her, he took the registration and stared at it with as much diplomacy as possible.

Marion thumped on the steering wheel. “As I said, there’s no accident here.”

“Well, unless the high-speed turn you took here that knocked Ms. Manning’s mailbox clear into her yard was intentional, I’ll give you the benefit of the doubt and *call* it an accident.”

This statement from Bromfeld held his own tone of annoyance. “I’ll have to call this in, Ms. Everstreet. I’ll just be a minute.”

(3)

MA

incessant chatter?

word choice

Answered

JULIE

LITERARY NOVEL: THE NOVELIST BY JOHN LEGGETT

Marion was well aware that Jimmy had it in for her. If he had *his* way, catching her driving without a license would probably result in prison time. She continued thumping the steering wheel as she recalled the scene in the courtroom two weeks earlier.

"It's the proverbial straw, Judge," Jimmy testified. "You can see by her record that she has numerous speeding violations, many of which were issued right on Main Street."

Why is she representing herself?

Marion jumped up from her chair. "Objection . . . objection!" she yelled.

The judge turned his gaze toward Marion and peered over the top of his glasses. The acknowledgement of her objection was received with a bit of frustration and he exhibited a lengthy exhale. "Go ahead, Marion," he told her.

"Go ahead?"

"Yes, you need a reason if you're objecting to the witness's statement."

Marion looked around at the spectators as if one of them might have a good reason.

"Well," she began, "I believe the use of the term 'proverbial straw' is . . . is . . ." her voice trailed off as she searched for the right word—the perfect jargon needed from one of the TV courtroom shows she watched. "Oh, you know what I mean, Judge. The word is right on the tip of my tongue. It's that legal term lawyers always use."

Judge VanHuesen raised an unsympathetic eyebrow. "I'm afraid if the word you seek is refusing to jump off your tongue tip, we'll have to continue without its presence. I'm suspending your license for thirty days. You're to relinquish it to the clerk following these proceedings and sign the necessary paperwork."

"Prejudicial!" she yelled out.

"Prejudicial?"

JULIE

LITERARY NOVEL: THE NOVELIST BY JOHN LEGGETT

“Yes! That’s the word I was trying to think of . . . for my objection.” She then pointed a finger at Bromfeld. “That proverbial straw thing he said suggests I’ve had prior incidents. I do believe it swayed your verdict.”

Jimmy was still sitting in the witness stand and felt he needed to further justify the judge’s ruling. “Your Honor, she was given a warning a day prior to the ticket for speeding through the parking lot of the mall.”

“And I object to that!” This time she had her reason ready. “It’s hearsay.”

I WANT TO CARE MORE ABOUT MARION.
TELL ME HER STRENGTHS, PASSIONS, DAILY LIFE,
CAREER, VOLUNTEER WORK NOW, SOCIAL CIRCLE - FRIENDS.
DID SHE HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH TOMMY
VAN HEUSEN?
IS SHE MARRIED? WIDOWED?
WHEN DO WE MEET THE TITULAR NOVELIST?
DOES FATHER HANRAHAN EVER ASK MARION TO BE
INTROSPECTIVE?

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John-

As the summary shows, there is a plot line that includes the publishing/self-publishing problem that faces nearly every writer. In these first six pages, there is no mention of writing, or publishing. If that's the main plot, you might want to bring it to the front.

But, the main character, Ms. Everstreet, is wonderfully developed. I get a clear image of her, and her actions and reactions. She would be fun to follow for a while. But, feisty will take you only so far. After reading these pages, I have no indication of the plot.

If I follow the story correctly, Ms. Everstreet and the judge are contemporaries. If that's so, the judge must be in his eighties also. Do they allow judges to hear court cases as old as he is? I don't know.

All told, the characters are alive and fun to follow. The plot is invisible. That will dilute the story after a while.

Good luck

Dave

Summary: A novel within a novel as a writer is tired of self-publishing and seeks a publisher for his new book.

(Before reading this, I'm concerned. One of the warnings I got before I started to write seriously was to avoid writing about the difficulties of writing. It ends up sounding like a woe-was-me whining. Well, here goes.)

There were two flights of stairs from the sidewalk to Marion Everstreet's front door. Each flight contained eleven steps and it was her third consecutive day of making the climb. For Marion, a spry, high-spirited woman of eighty-two, the climb was more of an annoyance than an effort of labor. She paused when she reached the landing—not to rest—but to admire her panoramic view of the city. She enjoyed looking down on the landscaped homes and places of business that comprised the quaintness of Marshfield. ^{MA.} They dotted the horizon and she viewed them as if they were houses and hotels on her personal Monopoly board. *(Nice opening)*

Until recently, she had driven her car up the winding hill that ran behind her house and parked in the small indentation of crabgrass that served as her driveway. Knowing her car was not available for ninety—some days, she was resigned to live with a limited amount of

LITERARY NOVEL: THE NOVELIST BY JOHN LEGGETT

Passive

independence. Her groceries had to be delivered, dry cleaning was picked up and dropped off at the pleasure of the cleaning service, and she had resorted to making lists to ensure her trips to town utilized maximum efficiency.

She blamed her daily climb up the two flights of stairs to be the result of statements made by that wet-behind-the-ears police officer, Jimmy Bromfeld. Judge VanHuesen hadn't been much help either—believing Jimmy's testimony over hers regarding the charge of reckless driving—and then impounding her car. *(Need some clarification that the car could be parked up the two flights of stairs she needed to climb.)*

She felt some comfort in knowing she could continue her daily chat with Father Hanrahan. The church wasn't far enough to justify a taxi for her self-imposed talk with her favorite priest and, since losing her license, she walked to the confessional. Every morning she vented to Father Hanrahan, giving her disgruntled position on the city council and other pet peeves that struck her fancy. The current exasperation was her battle with the local judicial system. Like Judge VanHuesen, the sympathy she expected to receive from her priest had been somewhat lacking. His subtle reminders that the confessional was not to be mistaken for the booth used for complaints in the local department store did not go unnoticed. Likewise, she was not oblivious to his long sighs that followed her daily rants—sighs that indicated his impatience regarding her private affairs before she got around to confessing her daily sins. Once she concluded her confession, Father Hanrahan assigned her a few Hail Marys or Our Fathers and sent her on her way. *(Interesting scene, but is it essential to the story? The first few pages have to be loaded with potential incendiary material. If this discussion with the priest is to allow the reader into her state of mind, it should be relevant or deleted, or used later, once the conflict has been established.)*

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Marion felt that revealing a sin, even of that vintage, might brighten Father Hanrahan's day if confessions by other members of the congregation weren't all that exciting.

"You know father," she began. "I've always been reluctant to confess this, but after we beat Deerfield High for the championship, well . . . I . . . I sort of put out for the judge in the back seat of his car." Her confession was immediately followed by an unnecessary clarification. "Of course he wasn't Judge VanHuesen then, just good old Tommy." The clarification was said with an attitude of *you know how it was in those days*. She then continued with a nonchalant, "Lord knows, it wasn't as if I went all the way or anything."

"Yes, Marion, the Lord *does* know," the Father agreed. "And while I appreciate you making a clean slate of things, I think after sixty-five years God has probably let that particular sin fall by the wayside."

Following a momentary silence, she resumed. Her tone continued to carry a sound of justification as if she was explaining the Judge's recent courtroom decision. "Well, anyway, I mention it now because personally, I think that's why he extended the suspension of my license last week. I think there's still a bit of resentment over him . . . you know . . . not getting everything he wanted. He even gave me some cock and bull story that night about wanting to marry me, or at least that's what he said when he unbuttoned my blouse and . . . well . . . you know." (*Cute detail. Essential? The Father's response was priceless.*)

Father Hanrahan didn't seem concerned about her back seat sinning that took place in the judge's car, but in acknowledgement of the act, he added an additional five Hail Marys to her penance.

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He bristled as he stood there in his shirt sporting creases sharp enough to shave with.

"I'll have to see your license and registration ma'am."

"What for? You know very well who I am and that little sticker on my license plate is obviously current. Perhaps I should ask to see *your* license. Are you old enough to drive now?" *(Great!) Her question was made as a reminder that, on many occasions during his infancy, she had been his baby-sitter. (I think this revelation would be more dramatic if you held it to the second reference later on.)*

Jimmy ignored the reference. "I'm sorry ma'am, but anytime we're called to a scene of an accident; we're required to see identification."

"Scene of an accident! Just what accident are you talking about? And, who's the 'we' you're referring to? I don't see anyone else around." As she asked the questions, she fumbled through her purse with the pretense of a search. "I can't seem to find my license," she told him, "and stop using that ma'am stuff on me. I changed too many diapers filled with your poop to listen to that nonsense. *(reference baby-sitting here)* Maybe someday you'll find a nice girl and

LITERARY NOVEL: THE NOVELIST BY JOHN LEGGETT

settle down, although you'll find diaper changing is not so much fun as pulling people over for no apparent reason other than to harass them."

Jimmy knew she still had another two weeks remaining on her suspension and her banter was more or less a distraction from producing her license. In his effort to avoid embarrassing her, he took the registration and stared at it with as much diplomacy as possible.

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"Well, unless the high-speed turn you took here that knocked Ms. Manning's mailbox clear into her yard was intentional; I'll give you the benefit of the doubt and *call* it an accident." This statement from Bromfeld held his own tone of annoyance. "I'll have to call this in Ms. Everstreet. I'll just be a minute."

Marion was well aware that Jimmy had it in for her. If he had *his* way, catching her driving without a license would probably result in prison time. (*Why was he out to get her?*) She continued thumping the steering wheel as she recalled the scene in the courtroom two weeks earlier.

(You need a transition here.)

"It's the proverbial straw Judge," Jimmy testified. "You can see by her record that she has numerous speeding violations, many of which were issued right on Main Street."

Marion jumped up from her chair. "Objection . . . objection!" she yelled.

The judge turned his gaze toward Marion and peered over the top of his glasses. The acknowledgement of her objection was received with a bit of frustration and he exhibited a lengthy exhale. "Go ahead Marion." he told her.

"Go ahead?"

"Yes, you need a reason if you're objecting to the witness's statement."

LITERARY NOVEL: THE NOVELIST BY JOHN LEGGETT

Marion looked around at the spectators as if one of them might have a good reason.

“Well,” she began, “I believe the use of the term ‘proverbial straw’ is . . . is . . .” her voice trailed off as she searched for the right word—the perfect jargon needed from one of the TV courtroom shows she watched. “Oh, you know what I mean Judge. The word is right on the tip of my tongue. It’s that legal term lawyers always use.”

Judge VanHuesen raised an unsympathetic eyebrow. “I’m afraid if the word you seek is refusing to jump off your tongue tip, we’ll have to continue without its presence. I’m suspending your license for thirty days. You’re to relinquish it to the clerk following these proceedings and sign the necessary paperwork.”

“Prejudicial!” she yelled out.

“Prejudicial?”

“Yes! That’s the word I was trying to think of . . . for my objection.” She then pointed a finger at Bromfeld. “That proverbial straw thing he said suggests I’ve had prior incidents. I do believe it swayed your verdict.”

Jimmy was still sitting in the witness stand and felt he needed to further justify the judge’s ruling. “Your honor, she was given a warning a day prior to the ticket for speeding through the parking lot of the mall.”

“And I object to that!” This time she had her reason ready. “It’s hearsay.”

(This lady is a terrific character. I’m rooting for her all the way.)

Susan

10:58

LITERARY NOVEL: THE NOVELIST BY JOHN LEGGETT

Summary: *A novel within a novel as a writer is tired of self-publishing and seeks a publisher for his new book.*

good writing
① order
② more detailed scenes
(not summary)

There were two flights of stairs from the sidewalk to Marion Everstreet's front door.

Each flight contained eleven steps. I and it was her third consecutive day of making the climb.

For Marion, a spry, high-spirited woman of eighty-two, the climb was more of an annoyance than an effort of labor. She paused when she reached the landing—not to rest—but to admire her panoramic view of the city. She enjoyed looking down on the landscaped homes and places of business that comprised the quaintness of Marshfield. They dotted the horizon, and she viewed them as if they were houses and hotels on her personal Monopoly board.

Until recently, she had driven her car up the winding hill that ran behind her house, and always parked in the small indentation of crabgrass that served as her driveway. Knowing her car was not available for ninety some days, she was resigned to live with a limited amount of independence. Her groceries had to be delivered, dry cleaning was picked up and dropped off at the pleasure of the cleaning service, and she had resorted to making lists to ensure her trips to town utilized maximum efficiency.

Comment [SD1]: "small" is implied (indentation, being in the city)

Comment [SD2]: Use exact number

She seems like she would know

She blamed her daily climb up the two flights of stairs ~~to be the result~~ of statements made by that wet-behind-the-ears police officer, Jimmy Bromfeld. Judge VanHuesen hadn't been much help either—believing Jimmy's testimony over hers regarding the charge of reckless driving—and then impounding her car.

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2

Comment [SD3]: Did she mind the walk? Might be nice to go along with her on her walk, see what she sees, hear what she's thinking or conversations she has with people she passes. Would give us some insight into her character without you having to tell us. You could even have this punishment described in a dialogue she has with a neighbor...she's on her way and they talk about what happened. Would give us a better idea of her voice.

She had tried to appease her priest that morning. After a few minutes stewing over her latest courtroom incident, she tacked on a sixty-five year old sin she had never confessed. Marion felt that revealing a sin, even of that vintage, might brighten Father Hanrahan's day if confessions by other members of the congregation weren't all that exciting.

Comment [SD4]: Watch tense throughout this paragraph

"You know father," she began. "I've always been reluctant to confess this, but after we beat Deerfield High for the championship, well . . . I . . . I sort of put out for the judge in the back seat of his car." Her confession was immediately followed by an unnecessary clarification. "Of course he wasn't Judge VanHuesen then, just good old Tommy." The clarification was said with an attitude of *you know how it was in those days*. She then continued with a nonchalant, "Lord knows, it wasn't as if I went all the way or anything."

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“Yes, Marion, the Lord *does* know,” the Father agreed. “And while I appreciate you making a clean slate of things, I think after sixty-five years, God has probably let that particular sin fall by the wayside.”

Following a momentary silence, she resumed. Her tone continued to carry a sound of justification, as if she was explaining the Judge’s recent courtroom decision. “Well, anyway, I mention it now because personally, I think that’s why he extended the suspension of my license last week. I think there’s still a bit of resentment over him . . . you know . . . not getting everything he wanted. He even gave me some cock and bull story that night about wanting to marry me, or at least that’s what he said when he unbuttoned my blouse and . . . well . . . you know.”

Comment [SD5]: Interject here with facial expressions and body language

Father Hanrahan didn’t seem concerned about her back seat sinning ~~that took place in the judge’s ear~~, but in acknowledgement of the act, he added an additional five Hail Marys to her penance.

During her climb of the stairs that morning, she reflected on her most recent citation. It was the second one that month, and from the first step to the landing; she cursed the name Jimmy Bromfeld for the hundredth time. Big shot Jimmy, she thought, who paraded around town in his police uniform. He was certainly all decked out a week earlier when he cited her for reckless driving—strolling up to the car like he was so important. Marion almost laughed at all the contraptions on his policeman’s belt. Recalling the incident, she now realized her initial comments were probably not the best way to avoid a ticket.

①
Comment [SD6]: I think it’s important to do this in order. There’s a lot of back and forth as to what’s going on. I think this would work best with her stroll to see the priest—we learn about what’s happening through dialogue and her thoughts, and then dialogue with the priest.

“You auditioning for the next Batman movie, Jimmy?”

He bristled as he stood there in his shirt, sporting creases sharp enough to shave with.

“I’ll have to see your license and registration ma’am.”

LITERARY NOVEL: THE NOVELIST BY JOHN LEGGETT

“What for? You know very well who I am, and that little sticker on my license plate is obviously current. Perhaps I should ask to see *your* license. Are you old enough to drive now?” Her question was made as a reminder that, on many occasions during his infancy, she had been his baby-sitter.

Comment [SD7]: Facial expression or body language here

Jimmy ignored the reference. “I’m sorry ma’am, but anytime we’re called to a scene of an accident, we’re required to see identification.”

She snorted. “Scene of an accident! Just what accident are you talking about? And, who’s the ‘we’ you’re referring to? I don’t see anyone else around.” she said. As she asked the questions, she fumbled-fumbling through her purse with the pretense of a search. “I can’t seem to find my license,” she told him said, “and stop using that ma’am stuff on me. I changed too many diapers filled with your poop to listen to that nonsense. Maybe someday you’ll find a nice girl and settle down, although you’ll find diaper changing is not so much fun as pulling people over for no apparent reason other than to harass them.”

Jimmy knew she still had another two weeks remaining on her suspension, and that her banter was more or less a distraction from producing her license. In his effort to avoid embarrassing her, he took the registration and stared at it with as much diplomacy as possible.

Comment [SD8]: How does she know he’s feeling this?

Marion thumped on the steering wheel. “As I said, there’s no accident here.”

Jimmy glanced at the front of her car (point out something regarding the surrounding mess). “Well, unless the high-speed turn you took here that knocked Ms. Manning’s mailbox clear into her yard was intentional, I’ll give you the benefit of the doubt and *call* it an accident.” This statement from Bromfeld held his own tone of annoyance. “I’ll have to call this in, Ms. Everstreet. I’ll just be a minute.”

grammatical
told him → said
words not needed usually (e.g., small)

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Marion was well aware that Jimmy had it in for her. If he had *his* way, catching her driving without a license would probably result in prison time. She continued thumping the steering wheel as she recalled the scene in the courtroom two weeks earlier.

Comment [SD9]: Why?

"It's the proverbial straw, Judge," Jimmy testified. "You can see by her record that she has numerous speeding violations, many of which were issued right on Main Street."

Marion jumped up from her chair. "Objection . . . objection!" she yelled.

The judge turned his gaze toward Marion and peered over the top of his glasses. The acknowledgement of her objection was received with a bit of frustration, and he exhibited a lengthy exhale. "Go ahead Marion," he ~~told her~~ said.

"Go ahead?"

"Yes, you need a reason if you're objecting to the witness's statement."

Marion looked around at the spectators, as if one of them might have a good reason.

"Well," she began, "I believe the use of the term 'proverbial straw' is . . . is . . . ~~it~~ her voice trailed off as she searched for the right word—the perfect jargon needed from one of the TV courtroom shows she watched. "Oh, you know what I mean, Judge. The word is right on the tip of my tongue. It's that legal term lawyers always use."

Judge VanHuesen raised an unsympathetic eyebrow. "I'm afraid if the word you seek is refusing to jump off your tongue tip, we'll have to continue without its presence. I'm suspending your license for thirty days. You're to relinquish it to the clerk following these proceedings and sign the necessary paperwork."

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LITERARY NOVEL: THE NOVELIST BY JOHN LEGGETT

“Yes! That’s the word I was trying to think of . . . for my objection.” She then pointed a finger at Bromfeld. “That proverbial straw thing he said suggests I’ve had prior incidents. I do believe it swayed your verdict.”

Jimmy was still sitting in the witness stand and felt he needed to further justify the judge’s ruling. “Your honor, she was given a warning a day prior to the ticket for speeding through the parking lot of the mall.”

Comment [SD10]: This is change of POV. Delete this section and let his words show that he felt he needed to justify further.

“And I object to that!” This time she had her reason ready. “It’s hearsay.”

Overall, I think you’re writing is good. Marion is a funny character and I enjoyed reading about her. I think, though, that you jumped around too much in the telling of your story, going back and forth between the present and the past, or different pasts. Some of this can be done through recollection, but this is too much back and forth for me to follow. I don’t think it’s a difficult fix, though. Make a list of the different scenes that are happening here, and then think about how you can present them in a more linear order, at least enough not to confuse the audience. Marion is an interesting character and it would be great to have more interaction between her and other characters.

→ good voice
good writing

Also, for the scene with the priest, I think you should make it completely back-and-forth: you were somewhat in the moment, and somewhat not. Make that a complete scene that takes place in the present.