

Open House: Excerpt from RSKY BZNS

by [Paul Illidge](#) (July 2022)



La Fenêtre ouverte à Nice, Raoul Dufy, 1938

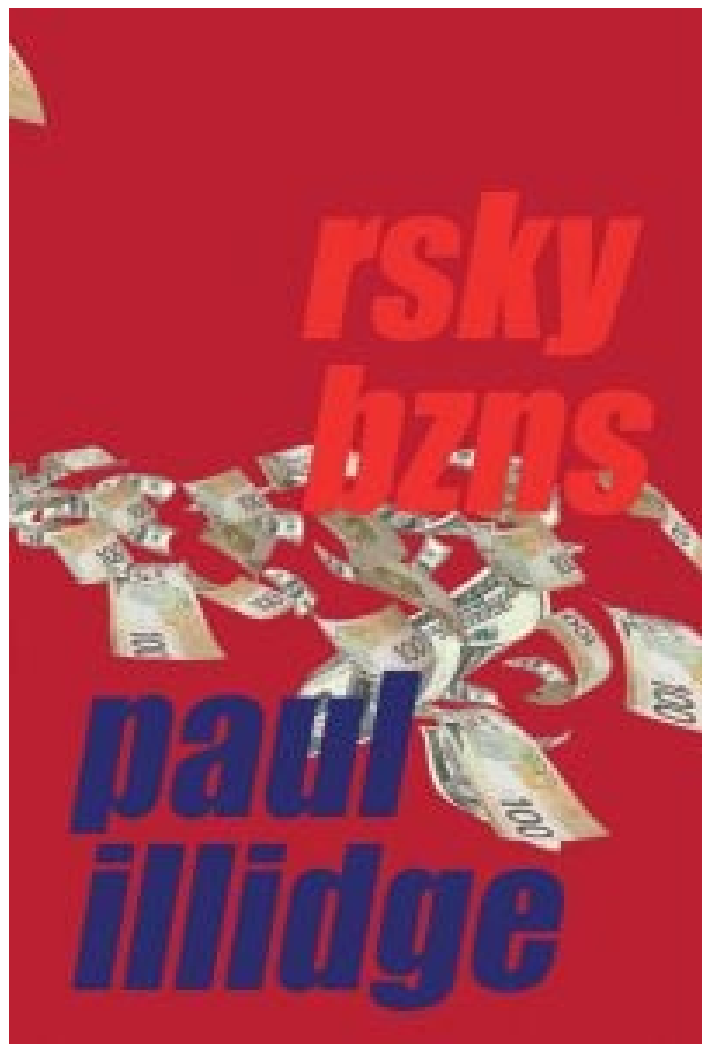
*The following is an excerpt from Paul Illidge's new book on
NER Press, RSKY BZNS.*

John was up early. In the best of moods, he had shaved, showered and dressed by 6:30. Karen came out of the bathroom in her white terry robe after her shower as he was leaving the room. Stepping over, he leaned down, gave her a lingering kiss. She pressed her body into his.

“—Uh-uh,” he said, backing away. “The suit!” They laughed, he gave her bottom a pat and went out.

Entering the kitchen, the fluorescents flickering to life, he noticed the business envelope with his name on it on the counter beside the portable phone. Karen had put it there before going to bed, reminding him not to forget it in the morning. He wouldn't, but he'd wait for her to give it to him. That always worked best.

He switched the coffeemaker on, Kenya AA beans, dark roasted, Karen's favourite brew. He sliced honeydew melon, bananas, oranges and strawberries then poured a bowl of granola for each of them. The radio on, soft rock, he left the kitchen to go to the front door and pick up the morning editions of the *Toronto Star* and the *National Post*, which Karen took with her to work. John would buy the *Globe and Mail* at some point in the day, read the business section and the *Financial Post*, and Tuesday through Friday the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*.



They talked while they ate, about an anniversary documentary they'd watched last night on the sinking of the Titanic one hundred years ago. John kidded Karen about their relationship having avoided the icebergs that sink so many. And speaking of anniversaries, he added that it was exactly six months since the Valentine's dating site meeting of RSKY BZNS and BLYTHE SPIRIT9 had taken place.

A headlong romance neither thought possible at this stage of their lives (they were both fifty-six), Karen had thrown her usual caution to the wind and let herself fall for this tall, dark, self-assured and charming man who had just enough of the bad-boy about him to suit her comfort level. His moving into her house after they'd been seeing each other for three months had seemed like the natural thing to do.

Her friends were instant fans of John's; her family was too. He was handsome, humorous, hard-working and happy-go-lucky. To their minds, he was the best thing that had happened to Karen since her divorce eleven years ago. He had brought joy back into her life again.

As they were getting ready to leave, John asked if she wanted to do something special that night to celebrate their six months. Karen hesitated, ruminating as if something of great weight was on her mind.

– “Of course we should!” she blurted suddenly. It was a great idea. She could use cheering up, what with the various crises at work that had been getting her down. She apologized that she'd been so preoccupied by them. She honestly hadn't remembered that it had been six months since they met. John waited for her to finish putting her coat on then slipped an arm around her shoulder, gave her a hug and said not to worry. He was happy to do the remembering for both of them.

Karen was senior planner for the town of Milton, the fastest-growing municipality in Canada, a demanding, high-stress job that paid her \$225,000 a year but which saw her bringing work home every night and on many a weekend.

Everything was so new at work these days, so fluid, moving so fast, but decisions had to be made in spite of the fact that the planning department was badly under-staffed, severely under-funded, and generally under-appreciated by her fellow bureaucrats, by politicians and by developers champing at the bit to start building.

John coming into her life changed all that. Right off the bat, he called her on what he termed her work-a-holicism, saying if she wanted a real relationship with him, either the weekend and weeknight work had to go, or he did; she couldn't have it both ways. He told her to make up her mind. She was living to work, rather than working to live. What was it going to be?

The decision turned out to be an easy one. Even with all she had on her hands at work, this was the most fulfilled Karen had ever felt in her life. Sometimes she had to pinch herself to prove it was really happening. With John she fully believed she'd found the love of her life, the soul mate that everyone talked about finding in a partner. Of course, his personal wealth, his homes in Miami, the Bahamas, London and New York didn't hurt, but even without that, his larger-than-life personality, his patience, humour and easy-going manner made him a significant catch, a fact that left her friends more jealous of Karen than they were willing to admit.

They came outside, Karen locking the front door, hurrying over to her silver Mercedes C 300 4Matic, a briefcase in each hand. (She'd had to break down and bring home some papers the night before.) John opened the passenger door for her, closed it then walked around the front of the car, a real estate sign on the front lawn of a house ten doors down catching his eye. Open House Today, 1:00 – 3:00.

With the car started, his seatbelt on, John shifted into reverse, was glancing in the rear-view mirror to begin backing out of the drive, when Karen held out to him the envelope that had been beside the phone. He'd forgotten it.

John took it, thanked her, leaned over and kissed her. "Let's make some money together, Blythe Spirit!" he said, tucking the certified check made out to Conquest Capital for \$200,000 into the inside pocket of his suit jacket. "Come here," he said, a gentle hand behind her head, pulling her toward him. "There's nothing to worry about, okay?" He kissed her. She looked into his eyes. "You promise?" "Hope to die," he said, crossing his heart.

Driving west on the 401, rush-hour traffic moving east into Toronto, it was just twenty minutes to the municipal offices in Milton where Karen worked, twenty-five this morning since they'd stopped at a Starbucks drive-through so Karen, who'd

left her thermos of Kenyan AA on the kitchen counter, could pick up her all-important second cup of coffee.

As he did every day, John let her off at the entrance to her building, telling her he'd think of something they could do that night. He'd surprise her.

He watched her go up the steps, waited till she turned and waved, waved back— he'd pick her up here at five— then drove out of the complex back to the Starbucks where he parked, took a screwdriver from the glove compartment, removed both license plates and, opening the trunk, put them in one plastic grocery bag before taking another set from a second grocery bag. After closing the trunk, he screwed the new plates on, picked up a coffee for the road and headed back to the highway in the Mercedes with its RSKY BZNS plates now attached for the thirty-minute drive to Toronto.

The branch of the bank where John kept his holding company accounts was on King Street, just east of Yonge at Toronto Street, adjacent to the King Edward Hotel. He deposited Karen's check into Conquest Capital, then transferred the funds into his Medallion Capital account, and finally into J.J. (for John James) Holdings, the account into which he "squirreled away" funds for times when he had to "take to the mattresses," a phrase from *The Godfather*, his favourite movie, meaning when people are looking for you. He had a word with Giselle, the bank manager, the seventh he'd dealt with over his twenty-eight years at the bank, a small, unprepossessing branch, yet the fortunes of some of Toronto's wealthiest families were said to be kept there.

After a trim at the barber shop in the basement of the King Edward, he went upstairs to the news kiosk, bought his newspapers and read them while having a light breakfast in the cafe. He made some phone calls while having his coffee, checking some of the irons he had in the investment fire as he phrased it. Things had been slow to recover after the meltdown

of 2008. The Madoff bust hadn't helped. More and more, deals that did come through, in some cases, weren't worth the effort that went into getting them. The situation wasn't desperate yet; Karen's check would keep the wolf from the door for several months, but in the meantime, he was going to have to work harder stirring up business. It was as simple as that. The beast had to be fed.

He drove up River Street, took the Bayview Extension north to Lawrence Avenue and turned off at the Granite Club, one of the city's more exclusive private social clubs, where John had been a member for eighteen years. The sports cafe on the second floor overlooking the outdoor tennis courts served as his ad hoc office several days a week. He had his own table in a corner by the window that faced the door, the way he preferred it for security purposes. Not that he had anything to worry about on that score right now, but old habits die hard.

He phoned Pfaff Motors in Newmarket to confirm that his new black Porsche 911 Turbo would be ready tomorrow as promised. The owner, Chris Pfaff, who had been personally looking after John's custom automotive needs for twenty-five years, assured him that it would. He could come in any time that was convenient.

Graham Wishart arrived for lunch at noon. Graham had been the pilot in the executive air service John operated out of the Toronto Island and Buttonville airports in the 1990s and early 2000s. Flying executives, celebrities and the wealthy up to their estate properties and cottages in the Muskokas and up and down the Georgian Bay shore. John was in a position now where he could buy a pair of used Cessnas and bring Aviation Capital Holdings to life again, maybe this coming summer if Graham didn't have anything else on. Graham didn't. And even if he had, he would have dropped it out of loyalty if not devotion to John, who had been the only one to give him a break and hire him after he'd done his two years less a day

for sexually assaulting several dozen boys when he was head of music at Oakwood Collegiate Institute in west Toronto. John didn't care that Graham had a criminal record and was a registered sex offender. He'd done the time for his crime. He was a good pilot. When you were flying famous multimillionaires with high-powered lawyers around, that's all that mattered to John.

Graham pulled up the listings on his phone of Cessna 206s currently for sale in southern Ontario. There were three that Graham felt John wouldn't be wasting his time to take a look at. He agreed with John that the clientele was still there, and, in fact, had grown substantially with traffic congestion to the north, during the summer months, becoming such a nightmare. *Fifty-minutes instead of four hours and you're sitting on the dock having a cool drink* was still a hard-to-beat selling feature for the vacationing rich and famous.

After Graham left, John checked his laptop for messages on the various dating sites he subscribed to. There were numerous new emails for RSKY BZNS. He didn't bother reading them. He did go to his LinkedIn page, however, and added Aviation Capital Holdings to his resume. John had found that LinkedIn was the first place women on dating sites went, when they learned your real name. To see what your job credentials were, and, even more important, what your financial status was likely to be.

John prided himself on a business pedigree that women seemed drawn to but that anyone with the least knowledge of the securities and investment business would recognize in a second that his numerous international investment CEO and board of director profile was no more than cut-and-paste nonsense, one hundred percent ersatz: as fake as you could get. The irony for John was that the more unbelievably accomplished he made himself sound on his LinkedIn page, the more intensely certain kinds of women found themselves attracted to him: a man warning them in advance that he was risky business.

He left the Granite Club a little after one. The early afternoon westbound traffic still light, it was coming on one forty-five when he reached Mississauga. He turned down Karen's street, went on past her house and, reaching the one with the for sale sign on the lawn having the open house, turned in the driveway.

The door opened as he walked up, the agent, a woman named Melanie Roberts stepping out, welcoming him to the open house with effusive mock formality, letting John precede her inside where she quickly shut the door and locked it— John with his lips on hers before she had fully turned around, the two of them undressing on the way upstairs to the master bedroom for some Open House sex.

This had started during the second open house. John had popped in during the first one six weeks earlier. It wasn't well attended. John stayed around to keep Melanie company. They hit it off. Went to dinner (Karen was away at a conference), and after a second dinner and a night of wild sex, they started seeing one another, evenings when Karen was tied up with work, and at open houses during the day. It was John who suggested Open House Sex. Add a little risk and adventure to the sexual occasion, the thrill of being caught *in flagrante delicto* made for what they both agreed were explosive results. They hadn't been caught yet, at least not quite. One time, a man came in the back door, which Melanie had forgotten was unlocked. John got dressed first, went downstairs and said the agent would be right down. He raved about the house, waited till Melanie arrived, thanked her for the tour, and said he'd be in touch about putting in an offer.

They were enjoying some post-climax cuddling when the doorbell rang. It took a moment to register, and when it did, they both started laughing. Melanie, throwing on her clothes, felt she should be the one to go. He could leave by the back door—the bell rang again. A last smooch amid laughter, she'd call him later, she went downstairs. John finished putting on his suit.

Melanie had no idea when she opened the door who Karen was. "Sorry to bother you," Karen said with a confused look, "but is that your black Mercedes in the driveway with the RSKY BZNS plates on it?"

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Paul Illidge's most recent book is *Rsky Bzns* (NER Press). He is also the author of *The Bleaks* (ECW Press), a *Globe & Mail* Best Book of 2014, and *Shakespeare for the E-generation: The Page, the Stage, the Digital Age*. His work appears regularly on Mental Health Talk.info

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