

The Snows of Yesterday

by [Peter Glassman](#) (April 2024)



Native Son –by Jack Levine

A brown uniformed security guard raised his hand for Dr.

Bennett Walker's car to stop. The guard stood in the small white shack's doorway with a clipboard. "Sir, do you have an appointment at Coltan Pharmaceuticals?"

Walker replied over his half-opened car window, flashing his driver's license for an ID, "Yes, I'm checking in with HR. I'm one of the new MDs in the cardiovascular division."

The stern-faced guard walked to the front of Walker's car, "I'll just write down your plate number." He returned to Walker's window, "Do you have your letter for HR? Who are you to meet with?"

As he opened an attaché case, Walker exhaled visible white breath, "Here it is. It's really cold in October up here."

The guard recorded the number plate and driver's license number, "Well, this here is normal for Connecticut. You're from San Antonio, Texas."

"That's right, we rarely get to freezing temperatures and rarely see snow." Walker extended his right hand, "I see you've already had snowfall."

"Here's your license and letter back, Dr. Walker. Just follow this road until you come to two buildings. Your building's the red brick structure."

Before Walker entered the entrance lobby, he glanced at the white brick building on the hill to his left. There was a larger guard post and two signs he couldn't read from this distance.

He entered a high-ceiling lobby. It seemed infested with tropical plants and a trickling fountain. The young receptionist wore a dark blue suit and a Coltan ID card pinned to her left lapel. She verified his identity, took his picture, and had him sign in. "Dr. Walker, someone from HR

will escort you inside.”

She smiled and handed him a “welcome aboard” envelope. “Oh, Dr. Walker, you’re the one from Texas. We’ve had rumors that you were coming.” She stood up and shook his hand, “What a relief to have you here. Are you honestly an American Indian?”

Walker stared at the comely brunette. “Yes, to both.”

“To both, Sir?” she wrinkled her brow.

“Yes, I am both an American and an Indian.”

Before he could expand the conversation, an older woman walked briskly into the lobby. “You must be Dr. Walker. I’m Helen from HR. Please come with me.”

Walker followed behind noting the different turns in case they got separated. The place was a maze of sectional cubical units. Helen closed her office door pointing Walker to a tubular frame straw chair.

She sat facing him holding up a file folder, “We use first names in Colton unless we have formal presentations or are with visitors. I have all your essentials in here. You don’t know how difficult it’s been to find someone with your exact qualifications.”

Walker smiled, “I know my specialty, Helen. Research Clinical Cardiologists are not that rare a population.”

She returned the smile, “Are you curious how easy it was for you to settle on your high salary?”

Walker sat back, “Yes, I suppose. I mean, Colton Pharmaceuticals’ final offer was thirty percent above my present Texas income.”

Helen smiled, “Bennett, first of all, you are an opinion leader and well-published in the area of heart enlargement due

to chronic high blood pressure. And second, you're noted also for your work with American Indians."

Walker raised his eyebrows, "My special interest and my ethnic background was never mentioned before ... other than a check-box in the job application."

"It will be of paramount importance to your job here." She leaned forward and sipped from a bottle of water. "How many Indian Tribes across the country have you worked with, Bennett?"

"Oh, about three dozen. Why?"

She shifted in her seat, "Dr. Herman Musher will address your question. He's Colton's Medical Director in the US."

"Will I meet him today?"

She laughed, "Definitely, but now we need to get you settled in a place to live, a company car, and process your benefits. Your first paycheck will be next Monday and then every two weeks."

Helen walked him to the upper management division and Dr. Musher's elegant suite. Two busy administrative assistants raised their heads to acknowledge his arrival. "Hello Dr. Walker, I'm Dora and this is Henny, welcome to Colton Pharmaceuticals. Dr. Musher is eager to see you."

Tall, red-haired Dora's smile seemed to coalesce her facial freckles into a sun-derived tan. She walked him into a plush maroon carpeted office whose corners were framed with tropical plants. A circular conference table was to the right of a kidney-shaped oak desk. The man behind it stood to extend his hand.

"Herman Musher. I'm so glad you're here. Please be seated at

the table.”

Dora brought in a tray of breakfast items including coffee, tea, and water. “The bagels and Danish are fresh.” She left them seated facing each other over green bamboo placemats.

Musher unbuttoned his sports coat, “Thanks for your advanced review of the cardio protocols. I know you’re well-versed and ready to go with the drug development. Your department will have a staff of an admin, two clinical trial monitors, and a biostatistician. A separate personal admin and a yet-to-be-chosen bio-scientist will be most important to you.”

Walker smiled, “You’re the first one I’ve met who hasn’t referred to my Indian ancestry.”

Musher laughed, “Since you mentioned it, let’s get right down to it. Are you familiar with the Paugussett Indian Tribes in Connecticut?”

“I’ve mentored several cardiovascular studies at the Golden Hill Paugussett Reservation.”

Musher set his coffee cup down, “This whole area used to be part of the original Paugussett Reservation. The building we’re in is half the site Colton acquired to build their main Connecticut office here in Danbury.” He paused and waved his arm to point at the view outside a panoramic window. “The three-story white building you see out there is part of the other half. We have our drug production operating twenty-four-seven in that facility.” He paused again, “Let me modify that, we would like to run a 24-hour manufacture of our products over there.”

Walker folded his arms, “I don’t understand.”

“Bennett, we have a problem with that site, a big ... big problem. Things are happening over there preventing us from meeting our production orders.”

“What kind of problem?”

“I’m going to be upfront with you, Bennett. There are strange events over there that happen to everything from our mechanical equipment to our actual synthesizing of Colton’s drugs ... all of our drugs.”

“How do I fit into this conversation, Sir?”

“The problem, Bennett, is a Paugussett Indian problem. Tomorrow, I’ll walk you through the plant. Today is for you to meet your staff. Your current projects in the cardio division are adequately being mapped out for you. Your priority is to address the White building on that mesa of land and get our company up and running for drugs to get to market.”

Walker donned a bright orange hardhat as they entered the main entrance of the manufacturing plant. “So my Indian heritage was what clinched my hire? Is that right, Herman?”

“Yes, but don’t get me wrong, we want you for the cardiac drug program 100%.” He gave Walker’s right shoulder a soft pat. “Your cardiology experience and accomplishments put you on our top list for recruitment.”

They walked side by side. Walker noted some sections marked off as no admittance due to repairs. He stopped and looked at the wreckage crews amidst damaged packaging machines.

“How did that happen?”

Before Musher could answer a soft rumbling could be felt and heard underfoot. “What’s going on?”

Musher led Walker quickly to a central pylon support pole to their left. “Just hug the pole. These supports are the safest part of the building. The shaking will get worse. That’s why we wear the hard hats.”

They grabbed hold of small rail-like handles attached to the pylon. A loud intermittent siren signaled an alarm. A piercing voice came over the speaker system, "Tremor alert ... tremor alert ... all personnel proceed to safety stations."

Workers from the heavy manufacturing machines and assembly ramp areas moved in an orderly fashion and mingled with the administrative staff.

The soft rumbling gave way to overt ground movement, shelving collapses, drop-in ceilings shedding their white square overhead units, and sprinkler ceiling pipes spouting water in all directions. "They're used to this but we're understaffed here. There's a demand for experienced pharmaceutical equipment operators and engineers. We've lost dozens who left for other drug companies—our competition."

Walker felt his pulse quicken, "I noticed part of the parking lot was marked off as we came in. There were large cracks in the ground. Is this an earthquake?"

Musher raised his voice to be heard above the alarm system, "We've had seismologists from the University of Connecticut and the Federal government check that out. What's occurring is not a slippage of Earth's tectonic plates."

A spray of water reached their pole. Walker's hands were white from his grip on the pole hand-holds. "Well, what the devil is this?"

The ground stopped moving as suddenly as it started. Several safety officers checked all the workers, including them. "Okay, the all clear is sounded. The grounds crew will clean up the mess and assess how much we can fix and start up production again. Follow me. The yellow tape on the floor marks stable ground. We'll be going out the back entrance."

As they walked away from the building, Walker saw black smoke rising at the perimeter of the rear parking lot. Walker pointed, "What's that fire?"

Musher replied, "Remember you said you worked with the Paugessett Tribe?"

"Yes?"

"Well, you're going to become reacquainted with someone you know. He was one of the key references that prompted us to check you out."

As they got closer, Walker could define an older man in Indian garb tending a small campfire. Recognition sparked in the man's eyes as he stood, raised his right palm, and spoke. "It is you, Dr. Bennett Walker of the West."

Walker moved up to him. They shook offered forearms. The man's shell conchos made tinkle-like sounds. Walker smiled, "And you, Dr. Orin Skyville of the East."

Their smiles of greeting vanished when Walker asked, "What's going on at this place?"

Skyville folded his arms. "My presence prevents death but not destruction. We stand on sacred Paugussett land."

Musher added, "But all of this was once Paugussett land."

Walker touched his old friend's shoulder, "What's responsible for the disruption of the peace at this site?"

Skyville touched Walker's hand, "You will understand. You must make the rest understand."

"Understand what, my friend?" Walker looked at Musher and back to Skyville.

The Indian MD folded his arms again, "Answer this question and all will be clear." He paused and stoked the campfire, "WHERE

ARE THE SNOWS OF YESTERDAY?"

Walker understood immediately. He turned to Musher, "Herman, we have to have a conference with Colton's upper management. Dr. Skyville must be present. There is a solution to your problem."

The main conference room could accommodate thirty-six attendees, however, Skyville insisted they use the smaller one in the production building. Three days had passed since Walker, Musher, and Skyville had met. Skyville addressed the group of twelve, "Our problem is not in this building, but is in its function on this plot of land."

The CEO, Irvin Colton, had arrived only last night from the Colton site in Paris. He stood up facing the assembly, "According to the reports, there is nothing wrong with this building. Nothing, that is, until the manufacturing machines and drug products were brought on board. I also have seismology reports as negative for earthquake phenomena as well as for the absence of any earthen faults such as shifting sinkholes." Colton glared at the standing Skyville. "Do you all expect me to believe that paranormal elements are causing this site's problems?"

Musher pointed to Walker, "Dr. Colton, we believe it to be so. We have called upon Dr. Orin Skyville of the Paugussett tribe and hired Dr. Bennett Walker for our Cardiology opening. Dr. Walker also has a strong American Indian background. We must listen to their definition of our problem and its solution."

Colton sat down waving his palms for Skyville and Walker to proceed.

Skyville was dressed in his ethnic Indian garb and began, "As I have offered to Colton Pharmaceuticals before, the hill on which your manufacturing site has been placed violates sacred

Paugussett tribal ancestral laws.” He paused for comments. There were none. “Very well, for all to understand you must read the one sentence on the paper before each of you. I will state it aloud, ‘WHERE ARE THE SNOWS OF YESTERDAY?’”

Facial expressions of doubt and confusion appeared on all except Musher and Walker. Skyville motioned to Walker to speak.

“Gentlemen, we must understand these words. We must hear the answer to this question. Dr. Skyville, please help us with this.” Walker nodded back to Skyville.

Skyville placed a hand on his concho necklace, “The words are offered as a question only to this group. The Paugussett people venerate its meaning. In our Indian lore the ‘snows’ refer to ashes and ‘yesterday’ refers to an ancient time—both refer to our ancestors.” He paused as all eyes were riveted onto his. “I now see recognition of its meaning in some of you. Yes, this place is the burial ground of Paugussett tribal remains. Today we use another site for this because of Federal and State laws for cremation and burial placement.”

Colton raised his hand, “Dr. Skyville, how does our manufacturing building violate any ethnic folklore? And how can this result in the physical upheaval of the building and its contents?”

Skyville folded his arms creating a tinkling of the conchos, “The chemicals used by your machines and their wasteful by-products spill onto the hallowed earth. The ground must be pure and the ashes of our ancients remain undisturbed. I cannot explain the spiritual power being used here. The building itself is not at fault—only the drug processing above it.” He pointed to Walker.

Walker faced the CEO, “Dr. Colton, as physicians, we all know that patients with strong religious holdings and feelings have found cures and treatment via such intense faith. The power of

prayer is not contested, nor is it understood. Such is the situation here. What Dr. Skyville is telling us is that our building must stop its function and change to some other non-land violable process.”

Colton stood to comment just as the ground began to shift and rumble. The sound could be felt as well as heard. The walls cracked with sharp high-pitched penetrating tones. The episode lasted for one full minute and stopped as fast as it had begun.

Musher’s raised hand was acknowledged, “Dr. Colton, the solution is to utilize the site for research purposes and relocate our manufacturing production elsewhere.” He held up an envelope, “Each of you has an envelope that contains details for such a site in Ohio. The proposed location is of a former drug company which can accommodate our updated machinery and begin operation within three months.”

Another attendee raised his hand, “We will lose more money staying here trying to meet drug orders than waiting the three months for Ohio production startup. Such a move does not require stockholder approval. We can act now on this.”

Three months later Walker and Musher attended the opening of the manufacturing facility in Ohio. One week earlier the new research facility was up and running utilizing computerized molecular modeling for drug development and a separate building for animal testing located away from the once-haunted structure. A shiny brass placard on the entrance to the research main office posed a question: WHERE ARE THE SNOWS OF YESTERDAY?

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Peter Glassman MD, PhD, LCDR, USN is a retired physician living in Texas, who devotes his time to writing novels and memoir-based fiction. He is the author of 14 novels including the medical thrillers *Cotter*; *The Helios Rain* and *Who Will Weep for Me*. Some of his short stories were written for presentation at the San Antonio Writers Group Meetup. You can read more about him and his books [here](#).

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