

TREATMENT FOR HAWAIIAN GARDENS

By Percy Adlon

1. Mr. Hu'óng looks up from needle and thread. About every hour he allows himself a small break, during which he watches what transpires in the mall. He owns his small business. Big letters on the window read MR. HU'O'NG'S ALTERATIONS. The strip mall is in HAWAIIAN GARDENS, a satellite town of Los Angeles. Far and wide, there are no gardens in sight, only straight, bare, intersecting, seemingly endless streets.

2. At the age of thirty, Baldur Graf, Baldi, is already a multi-millionaire. His business *Interbook*, which deals with book rights, runs quietly, inconspicuously, and at high speed like a stealth bomber. His skin stretches like a mask over his blonde face. He has never read a book. His company is located in a German forest. He feels secure there. A dozen well-trained young people are at his service. He lets no one see his cards. His calendar works in quarters: Three months traveling, three months in the office. Three on the road, three in the woods.

3. Rosa is seventeen and a half years old. Chicana. Straight A student. She is unique in how she watches, talks and moves. Self-confident, witty, and dreams sparkling in her eyes. Mother Consuela runs a Mexican restaurant in the strip mall, "Consuela's Tacos". After school Rosa helps out there. Books are her passion.

4. Baldi removes his true, his mask-like face when he is on the road. Disguised as a nice student he travels the world, visits old writers – their life's work in shoe boxes under the bed – drops a few honeyed words, a couple hundred dollars, the name of a publisher in Germany, copies everything, coaxes a signature on a one-page contract. Bam! The next one. Nigeria – 56 writers in seven weeks. Vietnam – 98 writers in six weeks, Egypt, Turkey, Ireland, Pakistan, Poland. Contacts through research in local papers, institutions, and bookstores. Direct recommendations from author to author. Two per day is his average bounty. What's there to lose, the old ones think, you never know...

5. Shulzov writes. Everybody knows that. But does he ever sell anything? Nobody knows. Everybody knows, however, that he doesn't want any visitors. No one in the mall is allowed to say if he actually lives up there, where the stairs with the iron railing lead to the first floor. "Just shrug if somebody asks for me"

is Shulzov's instruction. Exaggerating, he raises his bony old shoulders. He probably has his reasons, the others think. True, he does. He is the author of the biggest bestseller of the sixties, "Dog Shit". For a while he took part in the hype, then he removed himself from the race. Life in the real world. He writes day and night. He meanders around smutty corners, eats a carrot, drinks a coffee, sleeps standing up, sits in the sun on a rusty chair. The business owners have nothing against him hiding out in a corner of their store, watching clients, scribbling on his pad. Then he retreats into his bare box and transcribes his notes onto an old computer, always prints everything up, and stores the pages under the bed, where they lead a conglomerate-life with thousands of other yellowed pages. Once an inconspicuous young woman came and asked about Shulzov. Mr. Hu'o'ng was so concentrated on his work that he just pointed above him. Shulzov, however, was suspicious and didn't open the door. When he found out who exposed him, he didn't speak to poor Mr. Hu'o'ng for years.

Shulzov has one weakness: Rosa. Everybody in the mall knows the sight when he stands there as if he's frozen, one foot raised, mouth agape, eyes soft, watching Rosa.

6. What got into Baldi, that he wants to visit Shulzov? He is fully aware of walking into a trap. Even though his concept with unknown writers works so well. Maybe it works too well. So he breaks his well-tested pattern of the silent attack, of the guaranteed, quick kill. He built his business with ants, and now he suddenly wants to hunt down a grumpy old lion. It will cost him his life...

He is in Los Angeles now, on his way to the mall.

7. Rosa is something like Shulzov's surrogate daughter. He has been her mentor since she was fourteen and her father was sent to jail. She sees Shulzov in his room daily. They talk about the book she's reading. The highest calibers; from Dos Passos to Proust, from Cervantes to Mishima. If she continues on this level, at this speed, and with the same learning capability, she will be able to take over the direction of the Library of Congress after college.

8. Rosa, balancing the plates of burritos, carne assada, and quesadillas, all of a sudden stops dead in her tracks in the middle of the crowded restaurant. What is so special about the young, blond man with the backpack? Maybe he's a Scandinavian student traveling through the United States. "Rosa!!" her mother, Consuela, calls. "Rosa??" But Rosa doesn't hear. A plate slides out of her hand,

crashing to the ground. Baldi searches for an open seat and sits down. Laughter can be heard. Wake up, Rosa!

9. Bruno was the one who gave Rosa's father away to the cops. He stands behind the counter, shifty eyes, oily, dark hair, filling glasses with iced tea, coke, lemonade. He pinches Consuela's heavy bottom. She grins. Rosa's father was in great debt. He had to borrow the starting capital to open his restaurant. The monthly rent was always a problem. The owner of the mall, an elegant older black man, drives up on the tenth of every month, and collects the rent. He showed interest in Rosa. Her father arranged certain meetings, against rent reduction. That was three years ago. Rosa was fourteen. Now her father is in jail, while the landlord still pulls up on the tenth of every month. His money and his lawyers kept him out of jail. And Rosa? She talked it over with Shulzov. She didn't feel disgusted or abused. It was just another challenge. Soon she will tell Baldi about it, when he gets more and more under her spell...

10. Striezel is Baldi's closest employee back there in the Bavarian Woods. He is about thirty, like the other eleven young men. No women. A German pack of men, with identical suits, haircuts, gestures and speech patterns. Striezel found the name Shulzov in a small side note in the entertainment section of the Los Angeles Times, expressing the suspicion that the writer of "Dog Shit" might be hiding behind it. He had told Baldi about this with the comment how clever Baldi was to never venture into the territory of the famous.

Baldi told Striezel to research the validity of the Shulzov story for fun. This is how Baldi finally found himself in Shulzov's strip mall.

11. Baldi saw Rosa's reaction. He eats his lunch and leaves the restaurant. The next day the two are seen sitting on the metal stairs. Baldi is smart. He doesn't ask about Shulzov. But he comes back. They spend a day at the beach. He is not used to regular communication. He only knows his strategic formulas needed to reach his business-related goals. His sensual capabilities, in contrast, are underdeveloped in the most unbelievable way. He is like a hunter straight out of the Neanderthal woods. This is what fascinated Rosa so much; when she dropped the plate, something like a winter storm was raging behind him, and his friendly hitchhiker face was cold and hard like a glacier. It was as if he had stepped right out of one of her books. On this day at the beach Rosa seems like a miracle to him, how she leans into him, how she moves in the sun, how she kisses him calmly and without hesitation, how she wraps him into her towel with

her. She lets him be part of her free and secure physicality... until he asks her where Shulzov lives, and if she knows him. She goes to get an ice cream and doesn't return. He starts to freeze. He waits. He is completely confused. Like a woodsman in a metropolitan city.

12. Baldi's boldness is shattered. He has a crush on Rosa. No. He has fallen in love with her. He only sees her moving lips, her vivid eyes, her wet hair in the sun. He doesn't dare to walk into the mall. What? Baldi the brazen businessman, whom nothing can faze, is afraid to ask a seventeen-year-old girl why she took off yesterday. He waits across the street to catch a glimpse of her. Then he sees her in a yellow old timer, next to an older, black gentleman. Baldi stands there paralyzed. Rosa sees him. The car stops. Rosa lets him climb onto the small back seat. They are going to visit her father in jail.

13. Rosa's father is a touching, broken man. She whispers to him confidentially, and gives him small presents. In the background stand the two who actually should be the ones behind bars: the rich rip-off artist, Baldi, and the well to do pedophile. On their way home Baldi sits in front with the others. Rosa tells him why her father is in jail. Baldi doesn't comprehend how she can talk about this in front of the older man, how she talks about sex, and how the pedophile listens calmly. Baldi's head is spinning. He wants to jump out of the car. On this day Rosa takes him to Shulzov.

14. Shulzov is kissing Baldi's ass. Rosa has never seen him like this. He makes Baldi feel safe, plays the poor writer. Baldi feels that something is foul. The bait, with which he is being lured is stuck on a nasty hook, which Shulzov wants to see in his throat. Baldi, however, is helpless without his old tactics. His passion for Rosa has left him disoriented.

15. Striezel and the "Interbook" team want their boss to return. But Baldi isn't coming. Striezel smells a rat. Something is fishy. Baldi talks differently on the phone. His quick, precise directions are lacking. He says he found Shulzov. So what! Why doesn't he crack him? Or let him go, and return? There's enough work waiting. The mood in the company is strange. Fights. One man was intoxicated. Baldi should clean house sometime.

16. Rosa takes Baldi to the local library by bus. She leaves him at the main entrance, and sneaks out through the back. She arranges for a trip and doesn't show up. - She invites him to her room, then starts reading ULYSSES to him until

he is totally exhausted and falls asleep. - She blinks at Bruno just to get Baldi confused.

The mall watches the game. Mr. Hu'o'ng doesn't like Baldi. Rosa's girlfriend, Shirin, an escort by night (by request wearing a "historic costume" – she owns one 40's gown), who once again has a black eye, doesn't like Baldi either. Even Bruno doesn't like him. Only Consuela feeds him and calls him "darling".

And Baldi begins to "sing". Rosa now has him at the point where she only has to look at him slightly astonished to keep him talking. He tells her more than he has ever told anyone and Rosa reports everything to Shulzov, so he can analyze it.

17. The walls in Rosa's room are covered with photographs and names of authors. Rosa refuses to kiss Baldi. He craves her touch so much that he would do anything. "Why won't you kiss me?" Rosa answers: "Because you have no heart." It's out.

So Baldi confesses everything to her. He wants to prove to her that he does have a heart. He confesses his sins. How he rips off the old writers, what insane amounts of money he makes off them, giving them nothing. Finally she knows everything, and passes it on to Shulzov.

18. Shulzov calls Baldi to his room, without Rosa. He pulls carton after carton out from under his bed and offers it to Baldi with a fake humbleness. Baldi feels trapped. He doesn't know anymore why he's there, what he has set out to do. He runs out of Shulzov's room. In a rage he destroys his motel room. The cops come. He buys his freedom with a large sum of money. He leaves town.

19. It seems as if Baldi and Rosa have switched roles. Is he the angel now, and she the devil?

Wearing a suit and his poker face, and not revealing his constantly burning self, everything seems to be back to normal. Until Rosa stands in the door to the big office, carrying a small suitcase and a warm coat. Striezel sees her first. "What do you want?" Then Baldi hears her voice. It shocks him. The others witness how Baldi drops his mask, loses his composure, stutters. Then he faints.

20. Baldi tries to figure out the nature of her visit. Why should it be anything else than love? But that's not what it is. Shulzov paid for the trip. He convinced Rosa

that she only could find out if Baldi's company really existed and what it looked like if she went there. She would also be able to test how serious she is about him, and if she could live in Germany. So, with Rosa's agreement, Shulzov booked the journey, and the Mall fell into a depression, because Rosa is greatly missed by everyone. Mr. Hu'o'ng decides that, given the chance, he would interfere, to make good for his previous mistake that had led the L.A. Times journalist to Shulzov. He feels guilty for all the pain and suffering, for the possible loss of Rosa.

21. Rosa, however, returns. After she ate "Germknüdel", that stared up at her from the plate like poppy-seed sprinkled white breasts, with thirteen men; after Baldi asked for her hand in a dark church; after he showed her some natural wonders in the woods; after she quietly sat and watched the men in the office working, taking in their strange sound and cold eyes; after Baldi promised that he would make sure his authors would get their due, she departed. In her hotel room Baldi was allowed to embrace her one last time. He did this like a drowning, feverish, man, sentenced to death. The next day she vanished, without a sound, just like she had appeared.

22. The mall is quiet in the early morning hours. Shulzov's old dogface yawns in the twilight. Shirin returns from work. She gives Shulzov a tired pat on the backside and a smile with sad eyes. Then Bruno's truck comes rattling around the corner, loaded with vegetables, Consuela steps out of the restaurant, chewing, and Mr. Hu'o'ng unlocks his business. With her suitcase in hand and her coat over her arm, Rosa climbs out of a cab. The sun rises over the mall. The greeting is tender, almost meditative. Everybody caresses her, hugs her. She feels very loved. She reports her findings to Shulzov. If Baldi showed up now, if he would ask her again, then she would give it a try with him, she says. "Rosa is leaving us," Shulzov says later to Mr. Hu'o'ng.

23. Baldi, however, does not return. Several months pass. Rosa hears nothing from him. She gets her high school diploma. Then, one day, she is serving lunch, arms loaded with plates, when she stops short, glued to the floor. The backpacker with the shy student smile stands in the door. Baldi did return after all. Mr. Hu'o'ng doesn't lose a beat. He wraps a silk thread around his thumb. Not long after his return, Baldi waits in front of Mr. Hu'o'ng's store for Rosa. Shulzov watches through the iron railings from the first floor. Rosa calls from across the mall that she will be there in a minute. Mr. Hu'o'ng opens his door. He is holding a cup of tea and makes an inviting gesture to Baldi. For the first time his face

shows a faint smile. Baldi follows Mr. Hu'o'ng into the store. Through the window, quick movements are seen, like the soaring up of a flock of birds. A silk thread is visible, a thump can be heard, then silence. Mr. Hu'o'ng's seat at the window is empty. Rosa descends the stairs. She is carrying her small suitcase. Shulzov stares at Mr. Hu'o'ng's store, Bruno and Consuela step out of their store, Shirin hangs out her "historic costume" to air, and suddenly stops in the middle of her movement. Mr. Hu'o'ng's head re-appears. He sits down at his worktable and begins to sew. Rosa steps close to his window, looks into the room, turns around, and, carrying her suitcase, slowly climbs back up the stairs.