

# Hiski's Rocker

BY JOHN HISKI RIDGE

## Scene 1—At Home in Boulder, Reminiscing About That Old Rocker

After 40 years. After high school, college, marriage, and a daughter, that worn and weathered rocker somehow made its way across 1,200 miles and a continental divide to the living room of my second-floor apartment in Boulder. Hiski's rocker. There it now sits in front of my fireplace. I can feel it urging me to come, like an old friend. To sit. To rock.

But I don't know if I am ready for that journey. I don't know if I still believe.

It's smaller than I remember. Almost petite. But then the last time I saw it I was a 52-pound 10-year-old with a crew cut, and the whole world seemed larger.

And it's a bit more worn. There are deep scratches in the varnish, and one of the back spindles has come loose. "They didn't care for it like he did," I thought.

I can see the small depressions in the arms, where his elbows used to sit. He always held the books with his forearms resting on the chair and his elbows carrying the weight. I wonder what would happen if I brushed my fingers along those indentations, just a light touch. It has been four decades since I was in the Cave. I wonder . . .

Thinking back, I can't remember where Hiski found the chair, but I remember the white paint. He hauled it home and called me up. "Jussi-poika, come over and help." He didn't say more than that. He never said more than that. I jumped on my bike and pedaled the 3 miles until my legs screamed. As I rode up the narrow gap between his trailer and the next, I saw him scraping paint off the old chair with a shard from a broken beer bottle lying next to the steps. Letting the bike fall to the ground, I grabbed a piece of glass and started

scratching at the back where it didn't matter if I screwed up. "No, Jussi-poika, here," he said and pointed to the other arm. We spent every afternoon that July scraping the white paint with pieces of glass. We dug into the designs until every flower and every tree was free from the enamel covering and every spindle looked like it was fresh from the lathe. By the end of the month, the maple shimmered and every grain was visible.

"Jussi-poika." "Johnny-boy." I hadn't thought of that name in years. Those old-country Finns, they never used your English name. I guess it was easier for them to pronounce it in their own language.

"What color are we going to paint it, Grandpa?" I asked, hoping he didn't say white.

"No. No paint. The wood wants to be free, it wants to be seen. We will put some varnish on it to protect it, but no more."

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With brushes borrowed from an old paint-by-numbers we found in a trash can, we coated the chair until it mirrored the sun. Each stroke applied just a drip of varnish, seeping into every nook and every cranny. We let it dry for seven days, and then we brought it into the trailer and put it in the reading corner next to the books.

Neither of us sat on the rocker that day, and not for many days afterward.

But we eventually did. We eventually rocked. We eventually entered the Cave. We eventually saw the light.

### **Scene 2—Two Weeks Earlier, Sally Calls After Finding the Rocker**

“I found your grandpa’s chair. His old rocker. The one you helped him restore. Do you remember that? Do you want it?” Two weeks earlier, Sally, my mother’s sister, called from Portland with excitement edging her voice.

I was a bit groggy when I picked up the phone. It was only 10:30 there, late but not too late to call about a chair I guessed.

“Your cousin had it. But she doesn’t want it anymore. Your grandpa wanted you to have it when he died. I know it’s been a long time, but do you want it?”

The chair had disappeared shortly after Hiski’s funeral. I was never told what happened to it, and I knew my mother was upset that it didn’t come to me immediately. But did I want the chair now? After 40 years. I didn’t know. I sat up in bed and shook my head to clear the fog.

“Which cousin?” I choked out, sounding like a frog as I reached over and snapped on the small mushroom lamp beside the bed.

“What? I’m sorry, honey. I don’t understand your question.”

“Who had the chair?”

“Oh, Denise had it. Her mom took the chair after Hiski’s funeral, and Denise took it when she put her mom in the nursing home. About 10 years ago. But Denise doesn’t want it anymore. She says it’s just taking up space in her house. So I took it for you.”

“Hiski wanted you to have it,” she said again, silently urging me to say yes. But she didn’t fully understand what she was asking of me. No one could possibly understand.

The memories came back, not slowly, but in a rush of floodwater.

I remembered that Hiski wanted me to have the chair. I certainly remembered that because he told me so two days before he died. I was just a kid. We were sitting in the chair, not rocking, not talking, just sitting. He was staring out the window at the wall of the adjacent trailer 6 feet away.

“I am going to die soon Jussi-poika,” he broke the silence. “In a few days, maybe less.” His voice was soft but strong, like Archimedes addressing his students, and it came out without a break.

“You can’t die,” I squeaked out, as my eyes brimmed and a cloud descended on my brain.

“Time is time, Jussi. The present ends for me and becomes the past. The future becomes the present. It is time.”

I did not understand his concept of time, but I had heard it before. In the light outside the Cave.

“Grandpa” was all I could again mumble. The fog settled on me hard.

“You must listen to me now. This is important.”

“Grandpa,” I again mumbled.

“Focus, Jussi,” he snapped. “I am going soon. We must have this conversation first!”

I squeezed my eyes hard and took a deep breath. After a minute I was ready.

“I am leaving the chair to you when I die,” he said more gently. “It is yours. You must take it.”

“Grandpa, I don’t want it. Not without you. I can’t go there alone. I can’t go to any of those places alone. Not without you.”

“Jussi, quiet!” he again snapped. “Just listen, my boy,” he said, softening his voice.

I exhaled deeply and focused on the sound of his voice. Just the tone, the timbre, the rhythm.

“Time is rolling up for me. The present and the past are becoming the future. Soon, the light will come and I will move on. But I will come back to the present. Because the future and the past always become the present. That is the way of things. I know you don’t understand now, but you will. You will recognize the truth when you are older.”

I had heard that voice before, I thought. That tone, that cadence, that timbre. “Where,”

I wondered. Turning my ear to his mouth, I dropped my eyes to the floor and listened.

“You must try to remember what we learned in the Cave, but more importantly, what we learned outside the Cave, in the light.”

I clenched my eyes harder, focusing. I knew that voice. The anticipation grew in my stomach, churning. I knew the answer. It was coming out. Hard. But it was coming.

“In you lies the truth, waiting for recollection, waiting for you to remember. Always seek the truth. Seek to recall. Always go to the light,” he was continuing.

Like a flash of lightning in my brain, the answer exploded. I knew it when it came out more surely than I had ever known anything: I had heard that voice in the light outside the Cave. It was his voice. The old man’s voice. The same voice. The Philosopher’s voice!

All the air escaped from my throat in a rush. My head jerked back, causing the vertebrae in my neck to audibly snap. My pupils dilated as I looked deep into the well of his eyes. Into the blue. The Philosopher . . .

“Are you there? John Hiski? Are you still on the line?” “Hellooooo,” Sally said louder.

I shook my head free of the memories. “Oh, sorry, Aunt Sally. I was just thinking about Hiski. It’s been a long time. What has it been? Forty years, right?”

“Forty-two years. He died 42 years ago. Seems like yesterday.”

With her voice hesitating, anticipating an answer she didn’t want to hear, she asked again, “Do you want the chair? I can send it to you.”

“Of course, I want the chair. Yes. It’s Hiski’s. And thank you Auntie for getting it for me. It means more to me than you know,” I assured her. “How much do I owe for the shipping?”

“Pish-posh on your ‘How much do I owe?’ Your old Auntie wants to do this. Hiski would be so happy to know you are finally getting his most valuable belonging.”

### **Scene 3—The Rocker Arrives in Boulder, Bringing Memories Along With It**

The chair arrived two weeks later, coming from the seashore of Oregon to the mountains of Colorado. Sally had shipped it by a private

carrier, and the delivery driver dropped it off at 9:30 p.m., well after his regular working hours. He carried it up the stairs and placed it in front of my fireplace. “It’s a beautiful piece,” he said as he was walking out the door.

“Yes, yes it is,” I mumbled, more to myself than the driver, as I closed the door and walked back to the chair.

Standing behind it, I recalled Denise’s remark: “It’s just taking up space.” I reached out my right hand and gently pushed the back of the chair with my finger, making it rock slowly, silently. “She didn’t know. Does anybody know?” I wondered. “Do I even still believe?”

I moved around the side of the chair and sat in the leather recliner across from the rocker. I leaned back, put up my feet, and stared at the chair. I was glad Cindy and our daughter Maggie were visiting Cindy’s brother for the week so I didn’t have to answer questions. So I had time to think.

I reflected back to a previous thought: neither of us had sat in the rocker after we varnished it and put it in the reading corner. For two weeks it sat there, untouched. When I look back on it now, I wonder if Hiski sat in it when I was not there. I think he probably did. But I know we didn’t sit in it together—until that first time.

I had occasionally wondered where he sat to read during those two weeks. He was always reading. When he wasn’t fixing furniture or writing poetry, he was reading. There were piles of books everywhere in that single-wide trailer. The wall across from the chair was dedicated to literature. Sillanpaa, Kivi, Dostoyevsky, Turgenyev, Hugo, Dumas, Dickens, Hemingway, Steinbeck: these and other authors were scattered all over that side of the room. There was also poetry, which outnumbered the literature books. Basho, Issa, Yeats, Donne, Li Po, Whitman, Dickinson, and Eliot were his favorites. He was always quoting Basho and saying that a man didn’t understand haiku until he could see the scenes in the back of his mind and feel the images in the pit of his stomach.

Against the wall to the right of the chair was stacked every volume of the Loeb Classical Library. The Greek classics in green covers and the Latin classics in red covers. He had taken them from the dumpster behind the local

community college library where they had been tossed to make room for more modern literature.

In the spare bedroom was a mishmash of books, including biographies, politics, theology, science, and the history of mathematics. But mostly there were young adult books by authors such as Tolkien, Montgomery, London, L’Engle, and Wilder. He read and reread the Anne of Green Gables series so many times the books were held together with scotch tape.

But the most sacred place, the corner behind the chair, was dedicated to his favorite books: philosophy. There weren’t a lot of them, very few in fact when compared to the other books, but he always said they were the most important. He had everything ever written by Plato and Aristotle, in hulking, heavy volumes that were extensively highlighted, annotated, and worn. He also had volumes by Confucius, Augustine, Aquinas, Descartes, Leibniz, Spinoza, Kant, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and a few others. But he had very little recent philosophy. He said the only ones worth reading were Simone de Beauvoir, Bernard Lonergan, and Simone Weil, each of whom he considered to be on par with the ancients.

When he read, he held his books with both hands, his elbows sitting heavy on the chair. His eyes were bad, so he held the books close to his face, especially the philosophy, which he usually read out loud to himself. He read and reread the same book three or four times before moving on to the next. “Don’t just read the words,” he would say to me, “read the ideas. Explore the concepts. Then do it again until you start to understand.”

He usually read with a cup of thick, black coffee within easy reach, or a pinch of Copenhagen in his lower lip. He said the stimulation went well with the heavy ideas. He always read poetry with a glass of scotch in his hand. He liked single malt, but he could rarely afford it, so he drank the cheaper brands. He said scotch and poetry were like peaches and cream: a person could enjoy one without the other, but why would you want to?

When we read together, he let me drink coffee, but I was never permitted to try the tobacco or scotch. We read a lot of literature,

especially Jack London and Tolkien, both of whom I adored. We occasionally read philosophy together, particularly Plato and Aristotle. I liked reading Plato because we would each pretend to be the different characters in the book we were reading. He was always Socrates, but he would assign me one or two of the other characters. We were reading *The Republic* the first time we entered the Cave.

#### Scene 4—That First Journey to the Cave

“You read the part of Glaucon, Jussi. I will read for Socrates,” Hiski said. We were starting Book VII of *The Republic*. Socrates was telling Glaucon to “imagine a deep cave in which prisoners sit chained, facing the wall in front of them. They cannot look around due to restraints on their necks. Also imagine that these prisoners have been in this position since early childhood.”

The chair was languidly moving back and forth as Hiski continued with Socrates’ narrative.

“Now imagine that behind these prisoners is a low brick wall, against which the prisoners can lean. Behind the brick wall, but a little higher, is large wood fire that casts its light on the cave wall in front of the prisoners. The caretakers of the cave carry objects between the brick wall and the fire, so that the shadows of the objects are cast upon the cave wall for the prisoners to see.”

The rocking became more energetic.

“If the shadows are the only things that the prisoners see,” Socrates posited, “don’t you think the prisoners would think that the shadows are real objects?”

The chair picked up speed, as if its own kinesis propelled it forward and backward.

“And if the prisoners heard an echo reverberating throughout the cave, don’t you think they would imagine that the sound came from the shadows on the wall?”

Faster we moved, and with broader depth of angle. Faster . . . Broader . . .

“Grandpa, why are you rocking so hard?” These words came out just as the chair began to tip backward.

“We’re falling!” I gasped, which were the last words I remember coming from my mouth until we landed, or rather, arrived.

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Hiski dropped the book and tightened his grip around my shoulders as we fell backward and began spinning feet over head. Visible circles of black and white swirled around us as the spin quickened on its vortex. The air rushed past my ears like a typhoon. I closed my eyes to fight the bile rising in the back of my throat. I thought I would lose my bowels if this continued much longer.

“Jussi. Jussi-poika. Open your eyes.” These words were whispered into my ear. “Jussi. Come back now. We are fine. Open your eyes.”

I was lying on my right side, with my knees pulled up to my chest. “Grandpa,” I mumbled, as I rolled onto my stomach and felt the rock under my hands. It was smooth and covered with a thin layer of dust. As my eyes flickered open, I saw the deep shadows and rounded walls of a cave.

Hiski was kneeling next to me, and I was lying in a pathway that ran along the edge of a back wall, spiraling downward toward a fire burning in the center of a cave. The ceiling was too high for the firelight to reach and looked like a starless night sky. The floor was flat and wide, and clear of any dirt or debris. The flames breached the darkness, with just a hint of brightness brushing up against the walls.

Seven men and women were coming along the pathway carrying firewood, so we quickly rose to our feet and pushed ourselves up against the wall to get out of the way.

They were hunched under the burdens, long hair hanging to their shoulders, wet with sweat. They could have been 60 or 16. I noticed their faces looked like the faces of everyone.

“They are us,” I whispered to myself, surprised that such a thought came from my head.

I looked around, paying more attention to the fire burning in the middle of the cave. It was large, with flames reaching 7 to 8 feet high. A brick wall 6 feet high sat 20 yards from the flames. Several people were walking between the fire and the brick wall, but close to the wall. They carried various items above their heads. The flames cast shadows on the far cave wall, but only of the items. The brick wall prevented the shadows of the carriers from reaching the cave wall.

Prisoners—many, many prisoners—sat side by side on the other side of the brick wall,

facing the opposite cave wall, and watched the shadows cast by the fire. My eyes widened and my forehead creased. “Grandpa.” The word leaked out.

“Yes, Jussi. The Cave. We are in the Cave. Come with me.”

Hiski started walking up the pathway toward a shallow alcove in the back of the Cave, and I followed while still looking around. “How, Grandpa?” I stammered.

“Wait, Jussi.”

**“Grandpa,” I mumbled, as I rolled onto my stomach and felt the rock under my hands. It was smooth and covered with a thin layer of dust. As my eyes flickered open, I saw the deep shadows and rounded walls of a cave.**

We reached the alcove and entered, stopping where we could still see the entire Cave, but also where we would not interfere with the activity in the Cave.

“The chair is a portal,” was all he said.

“Did you know?”

“I remembered. But don’t worry about that now. Look around. Learn. What do you see?”

“How do we get back home?”

“Jussi, you must learn to focus. We don’t have a lot of time here. What do you see?”

“The prisoners and the wall and the fire. Just like in the book.”

“Do the shadows look real to you?”

“No, they are just shadows.”

“How about to the prisoners?”

I scanned the prisoners. “Just like us,” again I thought. They ranged in age from very old to toddlers. They had short hair and long hair; they were tall and short, fat and skinny; they had skin of all different colors. Their eyes conveyed contentment, being neither fearful nor anxious. They were at ease, leaning casually against the brick.

“It looks like the prisoners are happy. They don’t know they are prisoners. They think the shadows are real.”

“That is all they have known for their entire lives,” Hiski said, his voice catching as the words came out, his eyes casting down. “But watch those two prisoners on the end, to the right,” Hiski said, “the big one and the skinny one. What do you think they are doing?”

I focused on them for several minutes. The big one held his head high above the other, his shoulders back, and spoke loudly, like he wanted others to hear him. He kept punching the arm of the skinny prisoner. “It sounds like the big prisoner is laughing at the skinny one for asking whether the shadows are real. I am not sure, but I think he is scoffing at the questions.”

“Watch closer.”

A guard in a bronze breastplate and helmet, and carrying a short sword, came over and unchained the two prisoners. Both tried to stand, but their knees buckled. They grabbed onto the wall for support until their legs could hold them. They took a few tentative steps, then spun around in a full circle. Looking around at the wall and the objects and the shadows, their eyes crinkled and deep wrinkles appeared on their brows. When they looked at the fire they abruptly turned away, rubbing hard at their eyes.

The guard grabbed them and pushed them to the center of the Cave, near the flames.

The smaller prisoner continued looking around, twisting his head back and forth, up and down. Then his eyes snapped wide, his mouth moved in silence, his head began shaking back and forth.

“What do you think is happening, Jussi?”

“I can see the light dawning on his face. He is struggling, but he understands.”

“What is he struggling with, Jussi?”

“The shadows are becoming shadows to him.”

“What else?”

“He is starting to understand. He is starting to see that the objects are real.”

“Humph,” escaped Hiski’s lips. “You have a lot to learn, Jussi. But later. Pay attention to the bigger prisoner now. What is he doing?”

I narrowed my eyes to see better and stepped a little way out of the alcove. “He is shaking, Grandpa. Look, he is running back to his place at the wall and putting the chains back on. Why?”

“Why do you think he did that?”

“I don’t know. Maybe he doesn’t want to know about the objects. He just wants things to stay the same.”

“Yes?”

“He is scared, I think.”

“Yes, he is, Jussi. Most likely he will never leave his place at the wall again,” Hiski said with sadness tinging his voice. “But come now, we have someplace else we must be.”

### Scene 5—The First Excursion Into the Light

I followed Hiski as he left the alcove and began a long walk up the narrow pathway toward the mouth of the Cave. Up and up we spiraled.

My legs were leaden when I noticed the light gradually increasing. Slowly I was able to see the walls of the Cave, then my feet on the path, then I could see the mouth of the Cave as it opened into the sunlight.

“Jussi, hurry up,” Hiski ordered as he exited the Cave onto a green field that stretched to the horizon.

“Grandpa, I can’t see. The light is too bright,” I complained while covering my eyes with my forearm. “It hurts. Let’s go back into the Cave,” I said, turning back into the gaping mouth.

Hiski grabbed my arm, turning me around. “Give it time, Jussi, you will be able to see soon enough. Come and try again.”

I closed my eyes and slowly removed my arm, letting the sunshine brighten on my eyelids. While my pupils were narrowing, I cautiously opened my eyes, squinting against the stabbing pain in my vision.

At first, I could only look at the shadows on the deep, green grass of the field.

“They look so real, Grandpa. I can see a rainbow of colors in the shadows.”

Exhaling slowly, with my hand shading my eyes, I looked up and looked around.

“Oh,” was the only word I could pass across my lips. “Are they real?” I was finally able to ask, mouth agape and eyes widening. “Are they real?” I again whispered to myself.

“Yes, Jussi, they are real. Look around while I talk to this gentleman over here.”

Hiski pointed to a sharp-featured man with shoulder-length hair, white with age and experience. His shoulders were broad and erect, as he stood rod straight. He had the long muscles of a swimmer that twitched with energy. Kindness gleamed from his eyes, and when I glanced at him, he smiled at me and waved. I immediately liked him.

As my eyes adjusted, I glanced around the field. It was covered with objects. I walked over to a tree and stared intently at it. The bark was deep brown and perfectly smooth. The branches were evenly spread out around the tree, with no bunching or crowding. The leaves shown bright green against the deep blue sky, without a hint of decay. “Perfect,” I thought, “just perfect.”

After looking at other objects, I turned and watched Hiski and the old gentleman deep in conversation. Their heads were bent close together as they talked, like old friends. The old man abruptly threw his head back, and peals of laughter rolled across the space between us. The sound was deep and strong, and the joy slammed into me and rolled over me. I couldn’t help but giggle with him. He then slapped Hiski on the shoulder, turned on his heels, and strode across the field toward me, with Hiski in tow.

“Let me introduce you to an old philosophy professor from my youth,” was the only thing Hiski said when they reached me.

“Hi,” was all I could manage.

“Hello, my young friend. You’ve been in the Cave, I see. Tell me what you learned.”

Looking at my feet, I whispered, “Some people only see the shadows of things. And even when they are set free, they want to return to the shadows. They don’t want to see the real things. But there are others who want to see.”

“Yes, you are correct, my boy. All of us start off staring at shadows. Some of us never leave

that world. But there are those who ask the right questions. Those who seek the right insights. Those who want to make the right judgments. They eventually move beyond the shadows and enter into the passage toward the light. Some find this too hard and run back to their chains. But others persevere.”

“It seems hard to get into the light.”

Shaking his head, he whispered with a hint of sorrow, “It is Jussi, it is. We have to want to change. We have to want to move beyond our pride and our prejudices. It can be humbling to question ourselves. But we can do it!”

“And when we get to the light, what do we see?”

“Look around, my young friend. What do you see?”

“The trees and grass and other things all seem perfect to me. It’s weird.”

“Yes, yes. Some people call them forms, Jussi. Others call them ideas in the minds of the gods.”

“They are perfect,” I said again, with a tinge of wonder creeping into my voice. “Everything else is like a bad copy made on an old copier. It’s hard to think that there are people who don’t want to see this.”

“It is hard to believe that, isn’t it? Some people just don’t want to know.”

“But why?”

“Lots of reasons, my boy. But it’s mostly fear.”

“Fear of what?” I asked.

“Fear of finding out that shadows are shadows. But let’s not fool ourselves—everyone suffers from this predicament to some extent. It’s the philosopher’s job to help people understand this and move toward the light. That’s our job! Don’t you agree?”

I looked into his eyes, deep into the blue. “Hmm. What do you mean by our job?” I asked, emphasizing the pronoun.

Throwing his head back, a loud laugh escaped his throat.

“I have to go now, my young friend. But we will meet again. Until then, study hard. We will need you soon.”

“All right,” I said shyly, the sound barely escaping from me.

“Hiski, my friend, it is good to see you. I may need you again soon.”

As the philosopher strode across the field, Hiski turned to me with a smile. “You have met the Old One, my boy. The Philosopher.”

“What’s his name?”

“Plato, my boy. Plato.”

“That was Plato?” I asked in a whisper, my eyes following after him, watching the wind toss his long hair as his legs carried him swiftly out of sight. “Oh, wow. He’s awesome!”

“Exactly Jussi, exactly. But now we have to go.”

“Can’t we stay longer?”

“No, we have to go.”

“How do we get back?”

“Come, Jussi, jump into my arms.”

Iran and leapt into Hiski’s arms, but I jumped too hard and we began falling backward.

“Grandpa!” I screamed.

“Jussi, Jussi-poika, open your eyes.”

My eyes snapped open to see that we were slowly rocking in the chair in the reading corner of Hiski’s single-wide trailer, sitting in the same positions we had been when we left.

Hiski reached to the side table, methodically taking a pinch of tobacco with a practiced hand and placing it in his lower lip while continuing an ever-lessening rock.

“Grandpa, you knew,” I said. You have been there.”

A bubble of laughter burst from his stomach, and the blue in his eyes became deeper as a smile spread over his face.

“Jussi, there is much for you to learn.”

### Scene 6—Back Home in Boulder

The memories seemed fresh, uncorroded by time. I pushed deeper into the warm leather of the recliner, recalling the many other places we had visited over the short time we had together. Of course, we returned to the Cave, several times, until I finally understood. We saw Socrates’ trial and Aristotle’s peripatetic school. We visited Rousseau’s natural world, and we were there when Descartes finally understood his beginning: I think therefore I am. We saw Siddhartha enter the light, walked with Basho on his journey, and sat with Soren Kierkegaard as this troubled soul finally found his rest.

I pushed myself upright, to the edge of the recliner.

“I wonder,” I thought.

Rising, I moved over to the rocker, hesitant, tentative, careful. Standing in front of it, I gently pushed the back with my right hand and watched as it rocked slowly back and forth. It was silent as a grave.

I turned and lowered my weight onto the seat. It didn’t make a creak, not one, even after all these years. It felt solid, firm, like an old friend.

Pushing with both feet, I moved the rocker. Memories of Hiski flooded my mind: the books, the tobacco, the scotch.

I jumped up and moved to the kitchen for a scotch. Pouring two fingers of Balvenie over one ice cube, I returned to the chair. “Hiski got one thing wrong,” I thought as I took a sip. “Philosophy and scotch also go together.”

I leaned back to think more about that first visit to the Cave when I immediately started tumbling.

“Stupid boy! It took you long enough to get here,” were the first words I heard as I opened my eyes to see the deep green grass of the field. “I said the chair was yours when I died. You should have gone and gotten it.”

Rose slowly, old joints creaking as I struggled to get on my feet.

“Hiski,” was all I could say as my tongue grew strangely reluctant. I gazed at him intently, as he stood before me, taking him in head to foot. Here was Hiski, but he was changed. His hair was longer, reaching to his shoulders. He stood straight, unbent by years of hard work. His shoulders were broader and the blue in his eyes shown like tower lights.

“Is this real?” I hesitantly asked as I looked around.

“Is this real?” burst out from Hiski’s lips, along with rolling laughter. “That is what you asked the first time you came here. Haven’t you learned anything in all these years?”

Hiski reached out and grabbed me to him. His arms were like cords around my neck as he squeezed. I hugged him back, joy bursting from my chest.

“Come, Jussi, we have much to talk about.”

We walked for miles that day, across the green field, around a dark, blue lake with ripples of waves lapping the shores, up long, languid hills with knee-high grain growing wild, and through

fruited orchards where we picked apples to fill our stomachs, talking about everything under the sun. And then it was time to go.

“I have missed you, Jussi. I have missed our conversations. Come again soon. We have much work to do.”

“I will come soon.”

“Bring Maggie to me next time you come. Promise you will bring her to me. I look forward to meeting her.”

“I don’t know, Hiski. She is not like other kids. I don’t know if she is ready.”

“What do you mean?”

“You know she has 22q11.2 D.S., right?”

“Ah, pish-posh on your genetic disorder excuses. She is needed here. Her present and past will soon be wrapped up in her future. It is necessary for her, and for those still to come. They will need her also. Look into her soul. She belongs here in the light. Bring her to me next time.”


“Okay, Hiski, okay. I’ll bring her.”

“And Jussi. I am glad you came!”

“Same here, Hiski.”

“And tell Sally to come one last time.”

“Sally? Aunt Sally? She knows?”

Hiski’s smile grew across his face. “Jussi. Jussi-poika. Oh, how I have missed you!” 



**John Hiski Ridge** is a Colorado attorney and professional writer. He has published articles on many topics, including diversity in the workplace, leadership, legal writing, and mountain climbing. He is a graduate of Boston College, where he earned both his J.D. and a Ph.D. in philosophy. He is the author of *Maggie and Me*, a blog that discusses issues facing young adults with disabilities—[johnhiskiridge.com](http://johnhiskiridge.com).

Creative Corner is a space where Colorado lawyers can share their creativity with the legal community. Creative works related to the law or law practice are specifically encouraged, but any work of fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, photography, artwork, or other form of creative expression will be considered for publication. Email submissions to John Ridge at [john.ridge@outlook.com](mailto:john.ridge@outlook.com).