

TADDLE CREEK



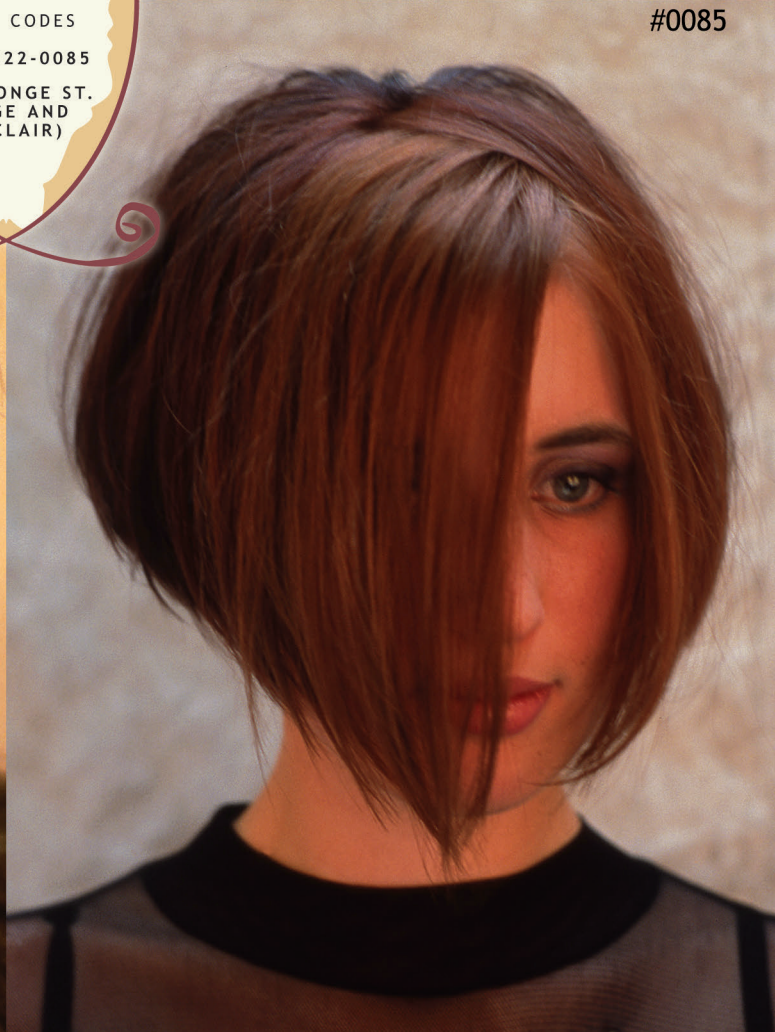
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TADDLE CREEP

VOL. XII, NO. 1 • HALLOWEEN NUMBER, 2008

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TADDLE CREEK

... is looking to buy a copy of "Kookie, Kookie."

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R. M. Vaughan ("A Wise Host Snuffs a Guttering Candle," p. 9) lives in Rua Açores. He will be spending this Halloween in Iceland, using turnips for jack-o'-lanterns. His latest book is *Troubled* (Coach House, 2008).

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Patrick Rawley ("Old School," p. 49) lives in Christie-Ossington. His work has appeared in *This*, *Word*, and *Dig*.

Rick Crilly lives in Downtown Toronto. He is the author of *The Tablecloth Trick* (ECW, 2007).

Jason McBride lives in Roncesvalles Village. He writes on pop culture for a number of publications.

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Susan Kernohan writes stories and poetry in Christie-Ossington and works at a library near Mel Lastman Square.

Nancy Baker lives in East York. She is the author of three novels and a collection of short fiction.

Erisa Niru lives in Mississauga. She is a writer, artist, and costume creator.

Brian Joseph Davis (1975–1993) lived in Parkdale. He died on the set of the film *The Crow*, after pretending to masturbate using a vacuum cleaner, not realizing it was plugged in.

Emily Pohl-Weary lives in Dovercourt Village. She writes, fears her messy office, and eats too much candy.

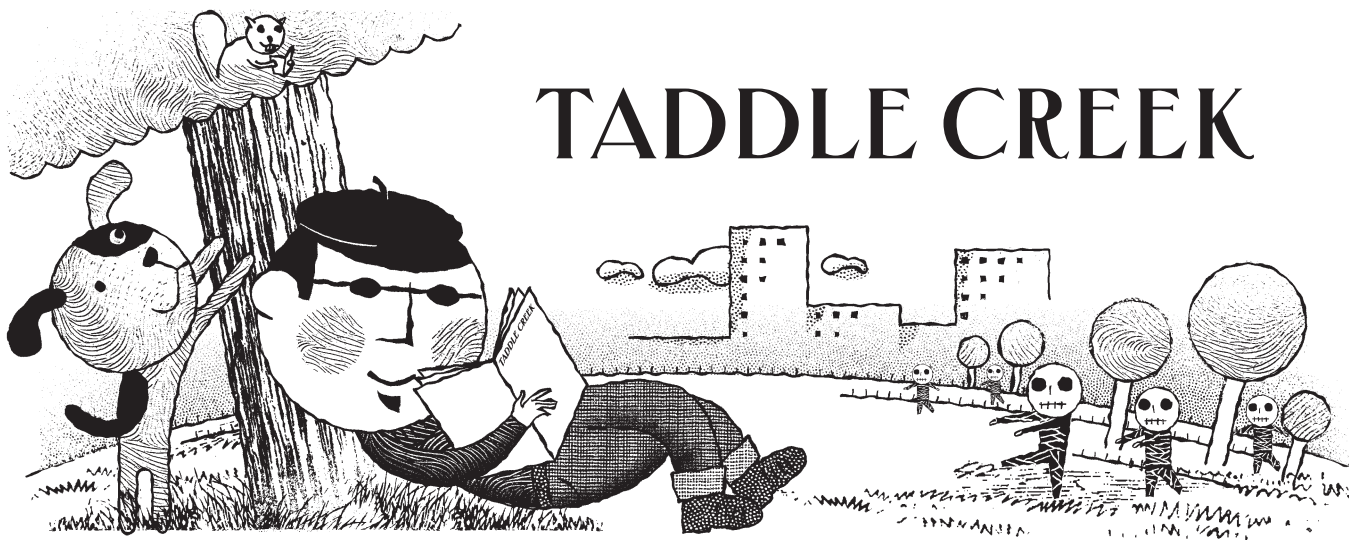
Pasha Malla, until recently, lived in Riverdale. He is the author of *The Withdrawal Method* (Anansi, 2008) and *All Our Grandfathers are Ghosts* (Snare, 2008).

Angela Rawlings lives in Kensington Market. She is the author of *Wide Slumber for Lepidopterists* (Coach House, 2006).

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Seth (The Cover) lives in Guelph, Ontario. He is a cartoonist and book designer. His upcoming work includes *George Sprott (1894–1975)*, an expanded version of his recent *New York Times* strip, and *The Collected Doug Wright*.

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TADDLE CREEK

MOLASSES: THE ULTIMATE TREAT

T*addle Creek* usually reserves this space to encourage the proper usage of a given piece of punctuation or to clarify a rule of grammar that the general public seems to have long forgotten. Given the Halloween theme of this issue, the magazine had considered lecturing on the slash, or discussing the séance it is planning to attempt contact with the ghost of Bo Diddley and convince him to change the title of his scariest song to “*Whom Do You Love?*” But this time around, *Taddle Creek* would like to plead the case of its most favourite of Halloween treats—the Halloween kiss.

Taddle Creek was dismayed to see that no fewer than two of the contributors to its Halloween issue had less than generous things to say about this taffy-like, molasses-based delight. Not that this is the first time *Taddle Creek* has heard disparaging remarks about the Halloween kiss. Even its Wikipedia entry states that “the majority of Canadian children dislike the strong taste.” (This should not be used as evidence that Wikipedia can be trusted. It can not.) But to see such talk appear in its own pages . . . well, it was more than *Taddle Creek* could bear.

The origins of the Halloween kiss are something of a mystery. Some suggest the treat was born as a replacement for taffy during the Depression, perhaps

because molasses was more affordable than . . . whatever the various ingredients used to make taffy are. In any case, the Halloween kiss has been an All Hallow's Eve staple in candy sacks and pillowcases for decades. *Taddle Creek* recalls a time when various companies produced versions of the Halloween kiss, most famously the Allan Candy Company. Allan abandoned the kiss a few years ago, and Original Foods (formerly Bonbons Associés), of Quebec City, is now the sole provider of Halloween kisses in Canada.

Philippe Canac-Marquis, general manager of Original, which has been producing Halloween kisses almost since its founding, in 1947, admits there has been a decline in the candy's popularity over the years. However, he says Original is dedicated to reversing this trend by using high quality ingredients and a high molasses content, which results in a kiss somewhat softer than many readers may remember. *Taddle Creek*, known for its strict fact-checking, has sampled several bags of Original kisses and can report that they indeed are the freshest Halloween kisses the magazine has ever eaten, and the magazine has eaten a lot. The wrapper isn't as nice as Allan's, but one thing at a time.

So this Halloween, *Taddle Creek* asks its candy-loving readers who have long

turned their backs on the Halloween kiss to try one again for the first time (they'll be available at this issue's launch). To dismiss the Halloween kiss is to dismiss molasses in general and *Taddle Creek* will be damned if it's going to let that happen. The Boston Molasses Disaster was an accident. It's time to forgive. *Taddle Creek* doesn't think you'll regret it.

A word of caution: In honour of Halloween, the ink in this issue of the magazine contains water from the real Taddle Creek. Though long since dead and buried, Taddle Creek still occasionally bursts from its grave without warning—a zombie stream sometimes found lurching in a basement or backyard. So don't hold this issue too tightly or the blood of Taddle Creek will be on your hands, literally.

On a less scary note, congratulations to Michael Cho, whose illustrated story “Stars,” from the Christmas, 2007, issue, brought home a silver medal at this year's National Magazine Awards. Congratulations also to Cary Fagan, for “Shit Box,” and Katia Grubisic, for “A List Before Departure,” both from the summer, 2007, issue, which received honourable mentions in the fiction and poetry categories, respectively.

—TADDLE CREEK

DÉJÀ YU MAKES THE PAIN GO AWAY

BY PETER DARBYSHIRE

THE TRAILER

The worst thing about being dead is the pain. I felt like I was being crushed inside for months after the heart attack.

The kids tried to help ease it before Sarah, my wife—my ex-wife now, I guess—took them away with her. Samantha, my daughter, told me the pain meant my heart was broken. She said it would feel better if I came home again. Jesse, my son, said maybe being dead is like when you scrape your knee or elbow. You get a scab for a while, but then the pain goes away.

Sarah wouldn't talk to me after I died. She wouldn't even see me. She changed the locks on the doors after she kicked me out. I tried to come back to visit the kids, but she wouldn't let me in. I had to talk to them through the door, or on the phone. Samantha said Sarah worried I'd give them whatever it was I had. But I didn't have anything.

My doctor said everyone dead feels the pain. He said there are different theories about it. The people who think our condition is caused by all the preservatives in our food say it's a chemical by-product. The religious people think it's purgatory, that we'll be able to die for good once we've suffered enough. The medical experts think it's the body's memory hanging on to the last seconds of life. My doctor said if I think feeling my heart attack all the time is bad, I should try to imagine what burn victims feel.

I just wanted it to stop.

THE WILLY LOMAN

The second-worst thing about being dead is you have to keep working. I still had my share of the mortgage payments, even though I didn't live in the house any more. And now I also had to pay rent on a new apartment. I had to buy gas for the car. I didn't have to eat any more, but I kept the fridge and cupboards stocked with groceries in case

Sarah ever let the kids come and stay with me.

All the bills meant I had to keep on with the life I had, despite being dead. There were some physical changes, obviously, like not being able to sleep at night. But I went to the office with everyone else in the morning. I went to the food court with my co-workers for lunch and watched them order the same meals I used to order and eat. I looked at the images on the video menus, of the men in suits with hamburgers, the children with fish sticks and fries, the women with salads, but I couldn't make myself hungry. I went to the bar after work with my co-workers and ordered drinks I didn't drink. I did everything but play minigolf with them.

That's because I had my heart attack on the seventh hole of Maximum Mini Golf in the Evergreen Mall during a game with two of my co-workers, Dylan and Hakim. I was ahead for the first time ever against those two. I was leaning on my club, watching Hakim tap a putt into the Wheel of Vegas, when suddenly I couldn't breathe. I knew he was aiming for the free massage at House of Pleasure, but he hit the free gym pass at House of Pain instead. That's when everything froze inside me and I fell to the fake turf.

I have to give Dylan and Hakim credit—they did what they could for me. Dylan performed his best impression of the C.P.R. he'd seen in the movies, while Hakim called 911 before taking photos of the scene with his phone. One of those photos—me with my tongue sticking out and my shirt torn open as the paramedics worked on me—went around the office mail afterward. I forced a laugh and a shrug when I saw it on people's computers and tried not to think about what was happening to me in that photo. But I couldn't forget staring up at the monitor as I lay there, unable to move, unable to do anything but watch the different im-

ages it flashed: a flag waving in the wind, a set of Nike minigolf clubs and balls, a smiling woman who promised to make me a millionaire off my accident lawsuit. When the paramedics rolled me away on the stretcher, the monitor showed a beach on a tropical island somewhere, with the caption, "YOUR AD COULD BE HERE."

The paramedics did their best to save me too, but I was already gone by the time they arrived. That's what the driver told me later in the hospital after the emergency-room doctor pronounced me officially dead. "Tough break," the doctor said, putting away the paddles he'd been shocking me with and handing me a release form to sign.

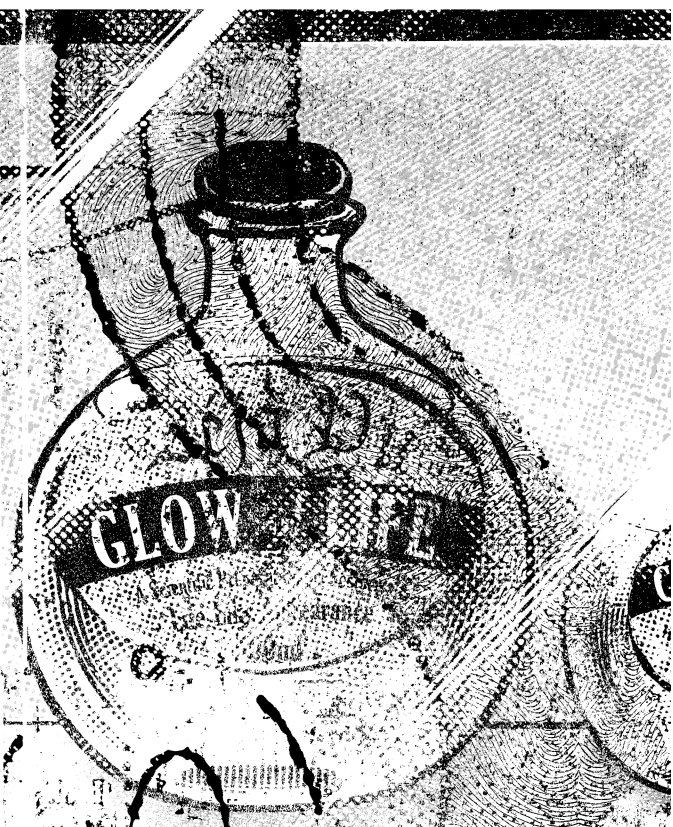
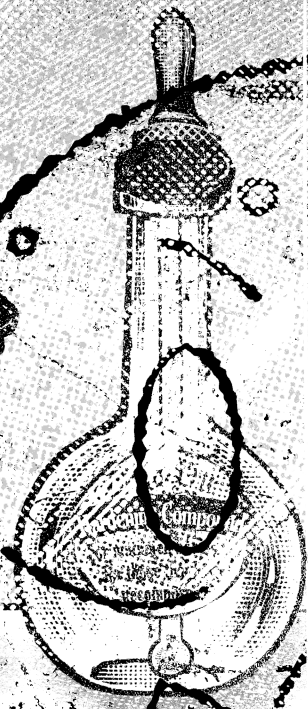
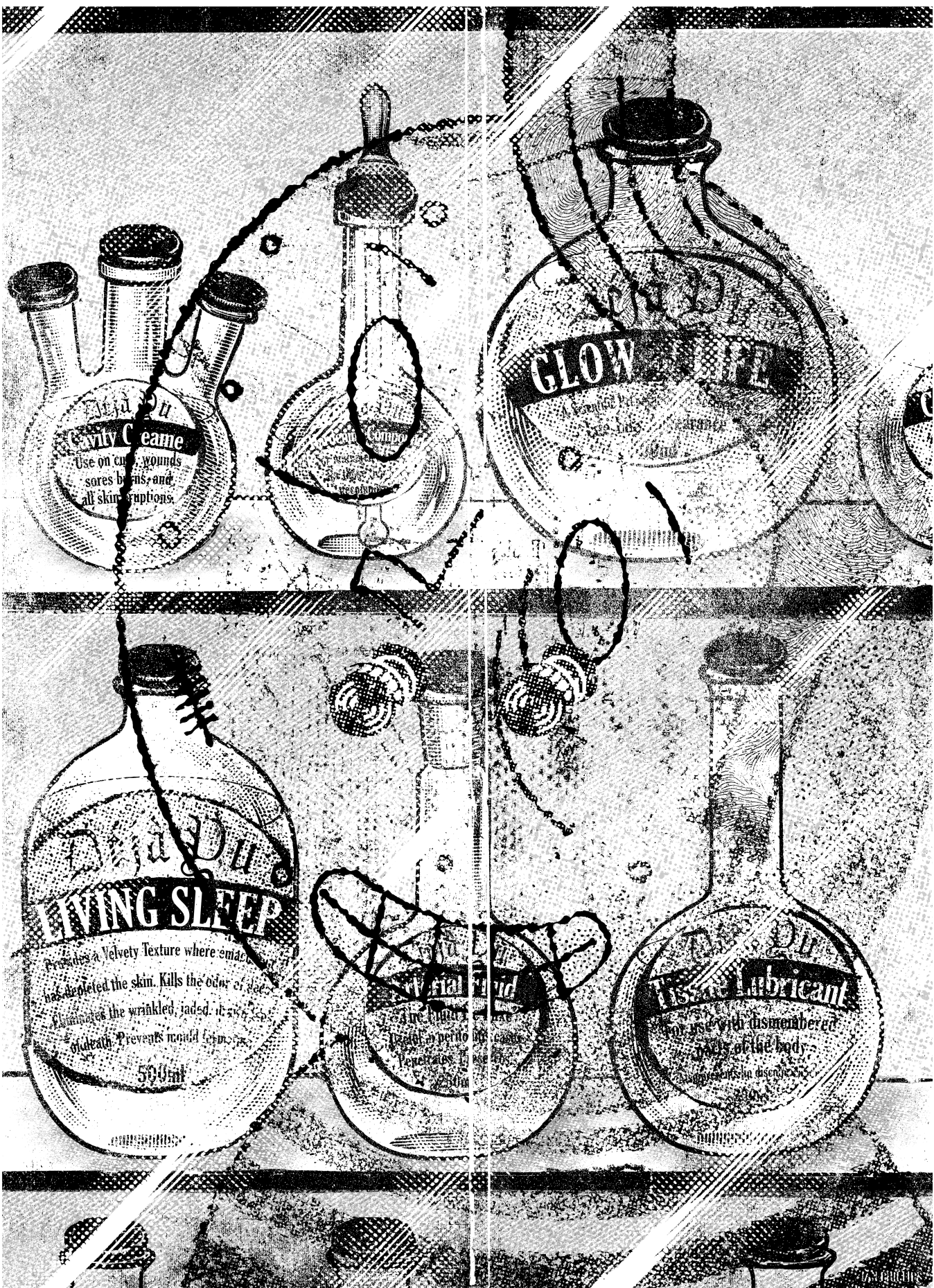
"Are you sure?" I asked him. "Can I get a second opinion?"

He looked at the paramedics. The driver nodded and said, "Dead." The other one was playing a game on his cellphone and didn't even look up.

I signed the release—it took several attempts because I still wasn't used to the numbness that comes with being dead. But sometimes now I wonder what would have happened if I hadn't signed it—if I wasn't *officially* dead.

Anyway, the paramedics drove me home in their ambulance. I lay on the stretcher in the back. There was no room for me to sit anywhere. The driver said this situation was turning into a real epidemic. He offered to take me to Maximum so I could finish the game with Hakim and Dylan, but I said no, they were probably too far ahead of me now to catch up. Then he offered to tell my wife so I wouldn't have to, but I said no to that too. I said there were some things a man had to do himself.

In all honesty, I was planning on keeping it from Sarah, but she knew from the moment I walked in the door. She looked up at me from her yoga mat in front of the TV and then leaped to her feet and ran screaming for the bedroom, where she locked herself in.



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I knocked and knocked on the door, but she wouldn't let me in. "Go away," she cried. "I'm in mourning!"

I went back to the living room and watched the yoga program. A man was twisted into an impossible position. "Just hold it," he said. "Keep holding it."

Sarah threw all my clothes out the bedroom window and then called me on my phone to tell me to get out. I was glad we'd sent the kids to urban survival camp for the week. But I didn't know at the time I'd never see them again.

"I'll sleep on the couch for a while," I told Sarah. "Until you get used to the new me."

"Until death do us part," she said and hung up.

I went out and picked up my clothes. My neighbors were having a barbecue and everyone stood there with drinks and hamburgers in hand, watching me gather my shirts and ties, but no one said anything.

I called a taxi and waited in the front driveway. All the houses on the street looked the same. It was one of those cookie-cutter neighbourhoods. When we'd first moved here, I'd gone home to the place across the street by accident and didn't realize it until I was at the front door. The house was for sale now. I wondered if having a dead neighbour was bad for property values.

I took the taxi to my car in the Evergreen Mall's parking garage. I sat there for most of the night because I couldn't sleep. I thought at first it was because of the shock of being dead and what had happened with Sarah. And trying to figure out how to explain it to the kids when they got home. I didn't know back then that I'd never be able to sleep again. That's why you see so many people like me working the night shift at convenience stores.

Eventually a security guard driving around the garage stopped and shone his flashlight on me without getting out of his car. He told me I had to move on. There was a lineup of cars at the exit. Each one had a lone man inside. I drove to the office and got to work paying my bills. And that's been my life ever since.

THE HOLLYWOOD

Not long after I died, I got promoted. In fact, I got promoted because I was dead. I was put in charge of the

BLACK CAT GUM

Like the Rolling Stones song, it paints everything black: teeth, gums, tongue, even epiglottis—a word that delights my brother and me. Dave can't say it often enough, clapping his hands, Twizzlered up, "Right in the epiglottis!" as if it's something that's caught a hard pitch, been kicked. As if its bulge shape could grant it a place among the family jewels—this testicular tonsil that drops when saying, "Ah!" The kids say if you repeatedly swallow chewing gum, the doctor'll pull a tumour from your bum, a messy Hubba Bubba wad big as a fist.

American candy is better, so we plan ahead, hand out Heath bars, Lemonheads, Now and Later, Dots, and Blow Pops, though in 1983 someone tops us with Hot Pix. We amp up: grape and orange Chews, fifteen cents apiece. Witch kisses are for old ladies. Suckers and Rockets get assigned the first piles, but are last to pass by that ol' epiglottis. Dave's always a banker, counts his candy, trades Sweet Maries and Milky Ways like weak stocks. These are the days of popcorn balls, safe within this subdivision. Kids'll line up outside like going to the movies. For the trick-or-treaters Mrs. Hoorelbeck knows, there's fudge. Sparkling lumps of it.

Over the dish, my fingers shilly-shally, eager to command the largest chunk, have it telepath itself to me, leap magnetically to my thumb—as if its girth will give it more chance to seal sugar to my tongue for another year.

—EMILY SCHULTZ

Déjà Yu beauty products account. The next-worst thing about being dead is people can tell we're dead. We have the tint to our skin, the smell, the stillness when we're thinking about what's happened to us. The Déjà Yu beauty products are supposed to make us look alive again. Creams to put colour back in our skin. Aftershave and perfume to mask the smell. Balms to make our lips look warm. Eye drops to sting our eyes and remind us to blink. Shock pads for our chests to remind us to breathe.

Like all other beauty products, they

don't really work. My team's job was to make people think they do.

Before I died, I was junior member of the development team, which mainly meant I made runs to Starbucks for coffee and to Kinko's for the mock-ups of the ads. But the E-mail the partners sent around the office a few weeks after my death said I was now in charge of the team because of my unique circumstances. I was the only dead person in the office, the E-mail said. Congratulations.

My co-workers all sent me their own

E-mails saying I looked good. They said they could barely tell the difference from when I was alive.

I could tell from the looks that Dylan and Hakim gave each other over the cubicle walls they wished they'd tried harder to save me.

I didn't really want to be in charge of the Déjà Yu account. I didn't really know what I was doing.

The day of my promotion, I rearranged my monitor in my cubicle so no one could see the screen. I opened one of the company's Screenplay for Success™ templates and studied its rules:

1. The Trailer. Set the scene.
2. The Willy Loman. Make the audience identify.
3. The Hollywood. Give the audience some drama to keep them entertained.
4. The Pitch. The product.
5. The Punchline. Leave the audience happy and willing to buy.

There were large spaces left between each rule where I was supposed to add my notes. I couldn't think of anything to fill the spaces. I closed the file and logged on to my home site instead. I watched videos of me and Sarah and the kids at the local Disney Time. I wanted to cry at the shot of Jesse and Samantha holding hands with the Goofy in the army uniform, but my tear ducts didn't work any more. I phoned the house again to talk to the kids, but there was no answer. I tried to leave a message, but the voice mail was full.

The day after I was promoted, Hakim wandered over and asked if we were going to have a meeting about the Déjà Yu account. He said everyone had run out of spam to read.

I told the office manager I had to hold a meeting and she put us in the Coke room, which is a sign of how seriously the partners took the Déjà Yu account. I'd only been allowed in the Pepsi room before. The Pepsi room is just a standard meeting space with Ikea chairs and a table, but the Coke room has Aeron chairs and a video screen.

My team consisted of three people: Hakim, Dylan, and Phoenix, an intern from the university marketing program. I wasn't sure if Phoenix was her real name or not. When I sat beside her, she pushed her chair to the side, away from me.

We all stared at the blank video screen for a while. It took me a moment

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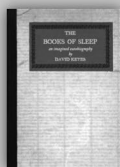
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to realize they were waiting for me to say something.

"Does anyone have any ideas?" I asked.

No one said anything. They all looked from the screen to me. I looked back at the screen. The only thing I could think of was my family at the Disney Time.

"Home video," I said. "We're going to make a home video."

They kept looking at me.

"We'll show them what they want," I said. "Life like it used to be."

I put Dylan in charge of finding us a set, Hakim of putting together a film crew from our regulars. Phoenix said she could get actors for free from the university's drama program.

"We need older people," I told her. "People with kids."

"Half the people in university now are older than you," she said. "The place is full of people who've lost their jobs to zombies."

I said that would be fine but let's not use the word "zombie." I went back to my cubicle and called home again. Still no answer. The voice mail was still full.

Dylan found us a house to shoot in a few days later. It was in a subdivision on the outer edge of the city. River Spring or River Canyon or River Valley or something like that. It was an area of scrubland, near an incineration plant. I didn't see a river anywhere.

The house had a mortgage foreclosure notice on the door, but there was still furniture inside. It was nicer than the furniture in my old house.

"Why didn't they take all this stuff?" I asked. "They could have got this out before the locks were changed."

"The bank guy told me they owed money on everything inside the house too," Dylan said.

"I still would have taken it," I said.

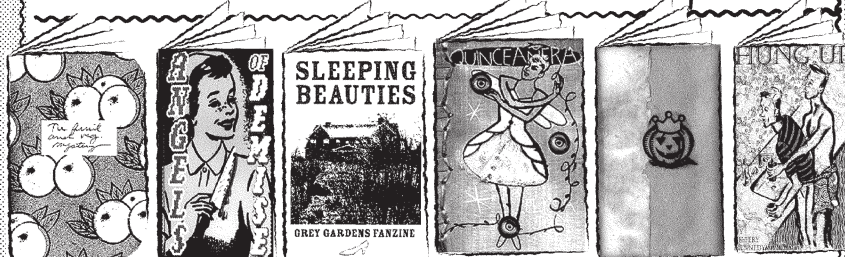
The director and cameraman Hakim hired both wore T-shirts with the Soviet Union's hammer and sickle on them. They stood outside the house and talked about how many African families would fit inside it while they smoked hand-rolled cigarettes. When I went out to say hello to them, they just stared at me and didn't answer.

I went back inside and found Hakim. He was in the kitchen going through the cupboards, inspecting the glasses and plates.

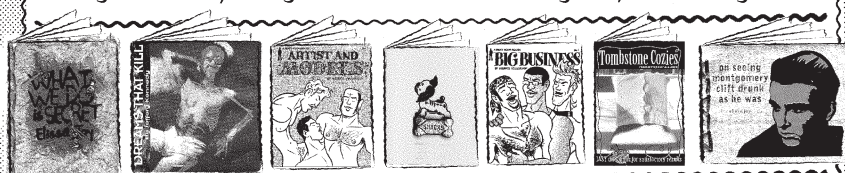
"Where did you find these guys?" I asked him.

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A WISE HOST SNUFFS A GUTTERING CANDLE

Or risks entry, subliminal, via eddies of dew, other moistures, of fainting, conch-coloured ghosts—the weaker sort of affreet and imp, demons with no agency but for finished wick smudges, radiator leaks, the moleskin of bats, any ingestible fur.

A careful lamplighter worries but does not chase the dumb heat that plods behind all incandescence. He knows the threat in Energy, how the veiled travel on wainscot thermals, wasted steam, between the click of dominoes. He knows that nothing expends, only changes. But to what?

Germes, yes, to infernal spores and hairy pollens. All manner of gnat and mite—spooks in sheets, and between. To the fat-and-sugar pong finished gum spreads as it dries (another favoured wind of jumbies, pupil sprites), to the skin on stale lard, aired treacle. To all the tickling whiffs we cover with joss sticks, and the sounds, the accidental jazz (crinkling plastic, the wheeze of can openers, first bites into jawbreakers) wee Furies depend on, ride like fleas on shoe leather. To vessels for the vile, the spectral, the red of iris and fang.

How stupid we are, we who do not discard, double quick, the wrapper (a transparency, and thus a window), who leave embers red, and wax liquid, and still wonder by what beacon, down what rivulet, hazard finds us.

I did not, did not take my sparking candles to water, did not bind each square of Cellophane with black thread, did not bury my apple cores, bread heels, candies chewed to oil. I did not, did not remember the smaller evils, their lock-picking tricks. Poor host am I, rich in mischief.

—R. M. VAUGHAN

“We couldn’t go with the usual union guys,” Hakim said. “On account of you.” “What’s wrong with me?” I asked.

“Union crews can’t work with zombies,” Hakim said. “They’ve got concerns about outsourcing and seniority.”

“Can we not use that word?” I said.

Hakim shrugged and dropped some glass tumblers into his shoulder bag.

I looked out the window at our film guys again. They were unloading gear from their van now. “But communists are O.K. working with me?”

“I didn’t say that,” Hakim said and walked away.

The real problem was the actors.

When Phoenix drove up with them, I could see they were dead. All of them—the man, the woman, even their little girl. They stood outside, a little apart

from each other, and stared at the house without blinking.

I pulled Phoenix aside, around the corner of the house. “What is this?” I asked her. “I thought you were getting me students.”

“They are students,” she said. “They came back to school after they died and lost their jobs. Except the girl. She still has a job.”

I peeked around the corner, at the girl. She was brushing the hair of a doll.

“She’s been dead for decades,” Phoenix told me. “She was one of the first, back before anyone knew it was happening. She’s actually a drama prof at the university. Revelatory hiring practices.”

I went back inside. Hakim was unpacking the kit of *Déjà Yu* samples for the actors. I took some of the cream

from his kit and put it on my arms and face. Hakim watched me but didn’t say anything.

The director came over and asked me what the plan was for the shoot. “Just make them look normal,” I said.

“What do you mean, normal?” he asked.

“Make them look like a real family,” I said.

I went into the bathroom and studied myself in the mirror while the actors put on the *Déjà Yu* stuff. The cream made me look slightly more alive again, but I didn’t feel any different.

The director decided to do a breakfast scene. I sat on the couch and watched them shoot it in the kitchen. The director told the little girl to ask her parents for a new phone. He told the woman to say she was getting plastic surgery done again. He added she should look like she was on anti-depressants. He told the man to think about the money he was going to take from Third World countries when he went to work.

“So it’s just like before I died,” the man said.

“Exactly,” the director said. “Act it like it’s the morning of your death.”

I closed my eyes while they shot the scene.

When they were done, I told the crew to come back the next day. I told the actors we wouldn’t need them any more.

“No offense,” I said, “but the last thing dead people want to see in an ad is more dead people.”

“I was thinking the same thing myself,” the man said.

“Maybe plastic surgery *is* the way to go,” the woman said.

The girl didn’t say anything, just kept brushing the hair of her doll.

I pulled Phoenix into the bathroom and told her to come back the next day with living actors. She sighed, but agreed. I went back to my apartment and tried to call home again. The voice mail was still full. I watched cop shows all night long. They were all the same. A man took his family hostage, the police surrounded the place and sent in the dead cops, maybe even some dead dogs. The cops got shot but it didn’t matter. Sometimes they brought everyone out alive. Sometimes they killed the hostage-taker and brought him out screaming that he was going to sue them for the bullet holes in his chest or

head or both.

In one show, the cops killed everyone in the house. It was a drug lab, and they shot the wrong bottle of something and the place blew up. The cops and the newly dead family all staggered out different doors, but then the man and his wife and son all found each other in the front yard and hugged, their skin still smoking from the fire.

And that's when I came up with the idea to get my family back.

THE PITCH

The next day, Phoenix showed up with a real-life family. Not only were they alive, but they were actually a family. A man, a woman, and their son. I could tell they were together by the way they sat on the couch, leaning against each other without saying anything while they waited for the cameraman and director to set up for the shot again. It was just like how I used to watch movies with Sarah and the kids.

"Where did you find them?" I asked Phoenix.

"They're mine," she said.

"You don't know how lucky you are,"

I said, but she just shook her head.

The director gave the same set of instructions to Phoenix's family as he had to the dead actors, even the comment about taking money from Third World countries.

"I thought communism was dead," I said.

"So are you," the director said, "and yet here you are."

Hakim didn't bother putting any of the Déjà Yu cream on the actors, seeing as they were already alive. I put some on my face and hands again while they tested the lights for the scene. I thought maybe it would work eventually if I just kept applying it. Hakim watched me but didn't say anything.

By the time they started shooting the scene, my skin was burning. When they reached the part where the son asked for a new phone, I felt like I was on fire. I ran for the bathroom to wash off the cream, but the taps in the house didn't work anymore, so I rubbed it away with a towel instead.

When I looked in the mirror, my skin was pitted and eaten away where the cream had been. I went back out into

the kitchen. Everyone stared at me. Hakim couldn't conceal a small smile. Phoenix and her family all put their hands to their mouths, even the boy.

I couldn't stand them seeing me like that, so I left.

I went home. My home where my family lived, not my apartment. I rang the doorbell, then knocked when no one answered. Then I kicked in the door. I waved at my neighbours, who watched from their windows, and went inside.

I was going to kill my family. I was going to do it as gently as I could, so they wouldn't hurt later. Maybe pillows over their faces or carbon monoxide in the garage. Then they would understand. Then they would be like me. Everything would go back to the way it was.

But no one was home.

And no one would ever be home again.

The place was empty, all the furniture gone, everything. Just some outlines in the carpet upstairs where the beds and dressers had been. Not even a note left to say where they'd gone.

My phone rang. It was the executive

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WITH PINK EYE

I want to dress
as a white lie,
a unicorn, a schoolgirl,
all of the above, blended.
Prefer the magical over
the deformed, lopsided,
or undead.

If this holiday is ruled
by the amygdala,
I am raging against fear
with glitter, that small pinpoint
in the brain, all lit up.

I smudge
pigment powder in oh!
around each eye,
the hot itch of a nineteen-seventies
polyester power suit.

What are you?

- a. A 1976 secretary with pink eye
- b. Stevie Nicks, the heavy years, with pink eye
- c. A new wave raccoon
- d. Lazy, with pink eye

You are dressed like an emergency.
Hold test results in your fist.
Rain shit-coloured toffee in
waxy orange-yellow wrappers over
your stubborn zombie face.
You actively haunt,
an appetite for dynamic disruption of truth.
You can't argue with a spreadsheet.

I pink-eye you when the fire alarm rings,
the dance floor empties,
the fire trucks provide a spotlight,
the scrappy underage Britney drag queen
and I toss her Cabbage Patch Kid baby.
You smoke while I pursue perfect quips,
smear pink across your jaw.

—ZOE WHITTALL

assistant for the partners. They wanted to know where I was.

"I don't know," I told her.

She said they'd heard about what happened. They wanted to know the status of the Déjà Yu account.

I went to the bathroom and looked at myself in the mirror while she talked.

There were still spots of cream on my forehead and neck. My skin was still burning, and strips were peeling off now, hanging from my face. The skin underneath looked raw, but grey instead of red.

I understood everything then.

I was dead.

"Are you there?" the executive assistant asked me.

"Yes," I said and disconnected.

I went back to Maximum Mini Golf in Evergreen Mall. I bought a pass and took a club and a red ball and started at the first hole like everyone else. I played through to the seventh hole. I waited my turn behind the other players and I recorded my score on my little scorecard like everyone else. When I reached the seventh hole, I lay down on the grass and looked up at the monitor. It showed a hamburger patty sizzling over open flames and then the flag.

Two men had just finished the seventh hole and were recording their scores. When they saw me on the ground, they took a few steps toward me and then stopped.

"Are you . . .?" one asked, while the other took out his phone.

The hamburger was replaced by an attack helicopter blowing up a car in a desert somewhere. Men in suits and ties stood in the desert and cheered.

I didn't hurt any more. My skin didn't hurt from the cream, my chest didn't hurt from the heart attack.

I didn't feel a thing.

I was dead.

THE PUNCHLINE

The monitor shows the "YOUR AD COULD BE HERE" tropical island again. I close my eyes and imagine the videos of me and Sarah and the kids at Disney Time again.

I imagine a motto superimposed on the videos of my family. The videos of my life.

"DÉJÀ YU MAKES THE PAIN GO AWAY."

I imagine the ad playing on the phone of the man standing over me now. Playing on my computer at work. Playing before movies. Playing on monitors in restaurants and stores in malls everywhere.

I imagine the ad is so successful it gets me an actual office at the agency, with my name on the door. My name added to the partner list. My name on every business card and company E-mail.

I imagine I'm lying on the floor of my empty house.

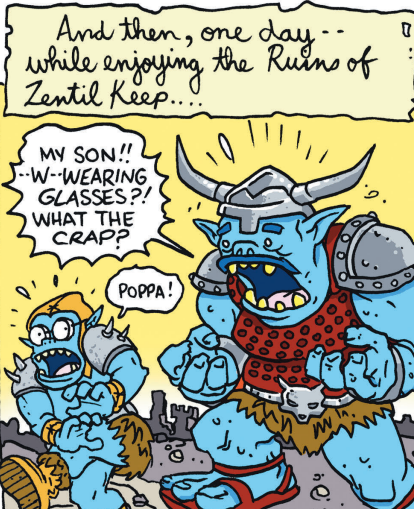
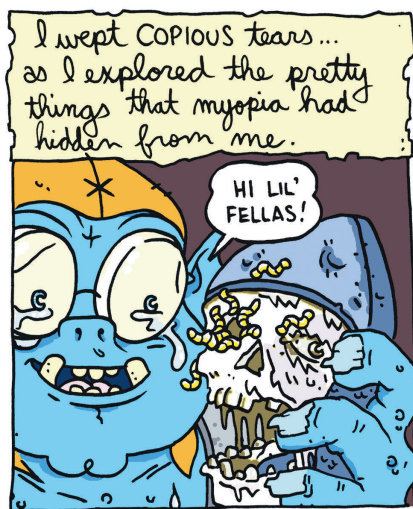
I imagine the rest of my life. ♪

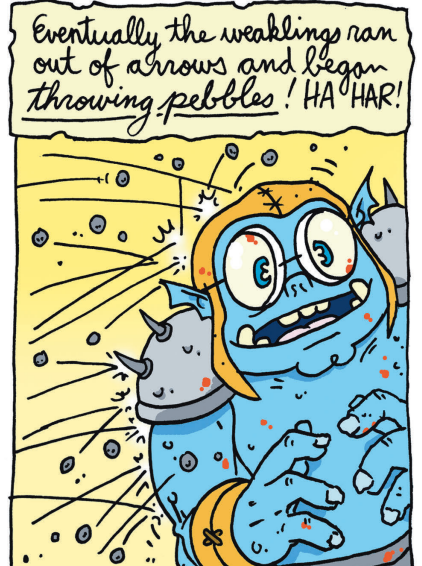
*Peter Darbyshire lives in Vancouver. He is the author of the novel *Please (Raincoast, 2002)* and an editor of the *Vancouver Province*.*

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THE CITY GOT BRAINS?

Toronto zombies walk the walk. Slowly.

BY CONAN TOBIAS

A graveyard can be a lonely place any time of the year. But for one afternoon every October, Toronto's graveyards are lonelier than usual, when hundreds of corpses rise and take to the streets for the city's annual Zombie Walk.

Actually, the zombies take more to the sidewalks than the streets, moving in a slow yet orderly fashion along a predetermined route. And most aren't even real zombies, but members of the living who enjoy masquerading as the undead.

Thea Munster founded the Toronto Zombie Walk in 2003 as a way to meet others who shared her interests in the films of George A. Romero and classic monster lore. The first Zombie Walk consisted of only seven zombies, but last year's edition drew about a thousand, and Munster expects an even higher number for the 2008 walk (taking place on Sunday, October 19th, departing from Queen's Park at 3:30 P.M.). The Toronto event has also inspired zombies in other cities, with sister versions now taking place in New York, Vancouver, Ottawa, and Melbourne.

The Toronto Zombie Walk's increasing popularity unfortunately means Munster is faced with providing costly police presence, required to obtain her city-mandated parade permit. But although she has been offered many lucrative sponsorship opportunities, Munster has opted to remain a regular zombie, not a corporate one. "It's not about selling cellphones," she says. "It's just its own entity and people just do it for fun."

Munster has befriended many of the Zombie Walk participants over the years, some of whom return on an annual basis. And despite the financial headaches and the long hours of preparation, she still feels the end result is worth the effort.

"It's cool how zombies could be monsters, but they could also be individuals," Munster says. "O.K., so they're just looking for brains, but it's only in zombie movies that you see business people and punk rockers and different subcultures all working together for the same cause. We don't even have that in real life." ▮







IT'S A KEEPER

BY JUDE MACDONALD

The first time he talked about the new high-end cappuccino machine at his office in city hall, it was boring. The third time in the same week, at 3:30 P.M., over the phone, an hour and a half before the commute home, it was also boring. Just as boring? More boring? Hard to tell. Glenda says there's a customer, and that she's got to get off.

"I love you."

"I love you, too."

"O.K., later."

At this time of day, on this day, cappuccino would only give the deadening fuzz a sharp, dull edge. Very dangerous if you're cutting gourds, that kind of knife. And it costs way too much, a cappuccino, and is kind of stupid and small, even if delicious though nervous-making by nature. The money makes buying one even more stressy than the caffeine does.

Also, not the right time of the month to deal with too much caffeine *or* with stressy money shit. Especially when it's a time of the month that takes three months to come.

Wicked cramps.

Glenda's head feels like foamy milk that was steamed a little too much in a bad metal specialty milk steamer thing that probably has a name, but who on the planet could possibly give a fuck? Especially now? But there must be those who do. There must be people who right this minute have jobs dealing with specialty milk steamers. Who make them. Order them. Sell them. Buy them. Promote them. This bad specialty steamer results in over-steamed milk that tastes kind of burnt and tinny, with a rubbery scum on the surface.

That is the kind of frothy light milk Glenda's brain is at the moment.

Finally, it is 4 P.M. The customer is rambling on and on about some shit she wants, like world peace in a pen that would make her husband love her

again. For fifteen bucks. In a colour that doesn't exist. She needs it now. Before it's too late.

The shift ends at five. The shift ends at five. The shift ends at five. News on the store radio is that the polar ice cap is completely gone, though the news reader says what that means is still ultimately up in the air. Glenda thinks no, it's in the water. In the sea. The last bit of melt happened all of a sudden, and some countries are already gone. California is pretty much doomed, and the shift ends at five.

It is a warm October. Strange birds are still around. Or at least their bodies. Strange birds are even worse than regular birds when it comes to high towers. Strange bird corpses cover the ground these days. Broken necks.

It is 5 P.M. on a warm October day. The dogs Glenda passes by look cagey. They pull at their leashes. They pull north.

The subway train is packed.

One teenager says to another, "So he asks me again what I said, and I tell him again, and he's all, 'What? What did you say?' Kind of laughing. And I keep telling him, and he keeps acting like he can't hear, and meanwhile this is how I'm feeling and everything."

"No way!"

"Yeah, I know. The ice is gone, I'm scared, and he's all about making me look like an idiot and wanting a blow job. His stupid face is, 'Get over it, Candace!' He doesn't have the guts to actually say anything—even just to ask for a blow job. Like I'm a surgeon. Like I should operate to find out what he's thinking. You know, like, hello, you could tell me? But he's, 'What? Huh?'"

"Unbelievable. Guys. Fuck."

"Yeah, I know. So I say, I say, 'O.K., nothing. It's nothing. And you can drown while you suck your own dick. See you.'"

"Holy shit! You said that?"

"Yeah."

"Good one. Hey, are you coming over later? We're carving pumpkins."

"I don't know. I've never carved a pumpkin."

"No way! You have to. You are *so* going to carve a pumpkin. You are *so* going to carve a pumpkin. We have knives. Good ones."

The station is announced. Glenda gets off. Glenda gets off at this station. She gets off, and she knows as soon as she's home, she needs to deal with her Keeper.

The guy with the baby stroller full of Pomeranians is coming at her. The dogs are barking. One is loose and running in the opposite direction from the guy. Running away. The guy doesn't seem to notice. Glenda says nothing. Makes sure not to make eye contact with the guy as he gets closer. They pass. Except the dog heading north. Quick as a tiny Pomeranian can go. Catching up with other free dogs.

How much of the city will be underwater? Maybe the shoreline will go back to what it was before all the infill. The condos will end up in the lake and the idea people will try to repackage the area like it's a new Venice. Not that it'll help with tourism much, what with the end of the world on its way and everything. Or, like everything else that's interesting, will the whole drama somehow bypass Toronto? Will the drama for the city be the lack of drama, and how we cope with that?

Glenda likes no drama, but knows she is in the minority. Glenda is tired, always, and just wants to sleep it off.

In the house, a housemate is talking to the phone. He says, "Cocksucker! Why can't I just get my messages? I just want to get these goddamned messages. Is that too much to ask? Jesus fuck. O.K., O.K., I am *pressing* fucking nine. It's pressed. O.K.? Fuck. There, is that what you want? Did I do it right this time? Apparently. Fine. Another message! Fuck! Who is always calling me?

ILLUSTRATION BY IAN PHILLIPS

What do they want from me? I have nothing. Jesus. O.K., yeah, don't call again. Three, three, three. Seven. Fuck. Go away!"

Glenda hears Combo put down the phone. Pick it up. Put it down. Pick it up. Put it down. Each time he puts it down, he slams it harder. Combo shouts, "Why is it fucking impossible to hang up? Is it illegal or something?"

Glenda doesn't like it when Combo uses "cocksucker" as an insult. It's sexist and homophobic. And anyway, she's sure he likes to get his cock sucked—what guy doesn't—so why use it as a put-down? It makes no sense. She will never figure this out. Glenda doesn't really like thinking about Combo and/or his cock, in whatever state and/or activity.

She reminds herself she needs to check her Keeper. Things seem different. Things are vague and hazy. Numb. The cramps come in waves. Like something out of a Roman Polanski movie. Like a flood. Like nothing she's ever felt before. A strange kind of pain.

Like she's got a dog pulling in one direction inside her. Out.

Day 2 so sucks.

As she opens the bathroom door, the waves turn liquid. Her pants are soaked. Everything will be ruined. She has a double-thick overnight reusable pad on, but nothing could contain this mess.

Of course, Glenda doesn't have a towel in the bathroom. She goes over to the toilet. It is a disaster. The last person to use it spewed shit, smeared the seat and lid, didn't flush. Glenda throws up into the sink. She's been throwing up a lot lately. Just the smell alone is enough. Without thinking, she rinses the sink out. It's what she does.

Her socks are making bloody footprints everywhere. She takes them and her pants off. Where'd all this blood come from all of the sudden? Why is it so watery?

Oh, fuck, and what is that coming through now? Even Glenda knows this isn't normal.

Her drenched, clotty, dripping panties and reusable cotton pad come off. She doesn't consider the toilet. She goes back to the sink. The blood everywhere makes her think more blood won't matter. She'll clean it up when this is over.

She always has to clean up the shitty, dirty bathroom. None of the housemates do. It is her chore. So she might as well relax for a change. Make it her own, first.

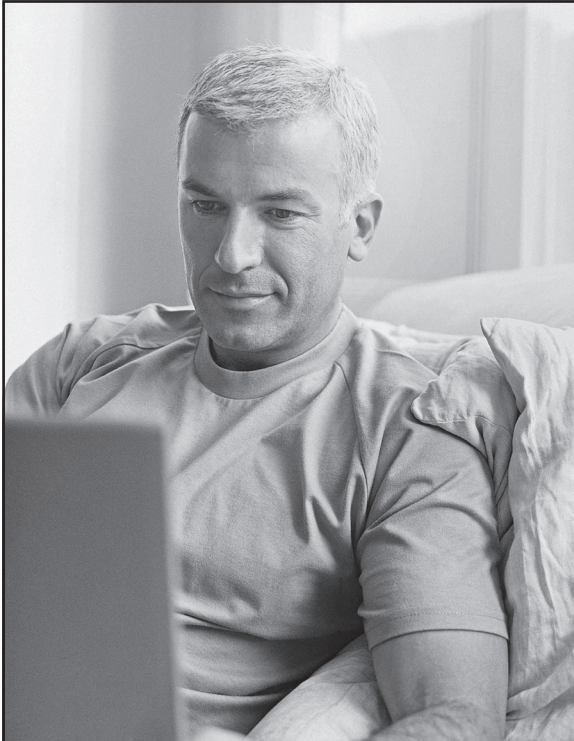
Her fingers pinch the base of the Keeper. There is a wet little pock noise, and she pulls it out. There is a gory mess right to the brim. She dumps it in the sink, deep thick red on white porcelain, then turns on the tap to wash it all down. Something won't go. As the water runs over it, the colour changes. Details emerge. It is a human blob, bigger than an inch. How did it squeeze into her environment-friendly menstrual cup? This is crazy. Where did it come from?

"You, you idiot."

The thing speaks, but not by moving its mouth. Glenda finds this hard to deal with. Something slides down her leg and plops on the floor. Glenda doesn't notice.

"What's happening?" Glenda speaks out loud to it, though she doesn't need to. Habit.

In her head, it says, "A bunch of us are checking out."



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BODY

"So there it is," she said,
then ordered me to touch it.

"Don't be a pussy," she said

I reached out my hand to
the motionless body
lying face-down in the creek
that ran behind our school,
its head smashed open
like a partially deflated basketball.

I felt as if I was standing before
something old and important:
an abandoned hospital
the trees were the patients
sick and alone with each other.

My hand hovering
above, trembling
(a deep resonance,
the dying of a bass note)
before laying it to rest
almost a caress.

Colder than I ever thought
a body could be, wet
like a sponge

and young,
younger than us.

"I can not believe you just did that," she said,
and ran away laughing.

Couldn't stop smelling my
hand all the way home,
almost sweet, almost
like playing with a sore in your mouth, a
loose tooth.

The front door is locked,

knock and my mother looks curious
when she answers, blocking
me from entering. I
try to step by but
she stops me.

"Excuse me," she says,
"do I know you?"

Her face is a haunted house,
her eyes
the windows
with drawn curtains.

—JAMES LINDSAY

"A bunch of you? What?"
"Fetuses. We had a meeting. Nothing personal. Though you're no prize."
"You mean I'm pregnant? Fuck me."
"Were. You were."
"But we haven't done it in a year."
"All I'll say is maybe you shouldn't be so trusting when he gives you pills to help you sleep. Selfish prick."
"What are you telling me? This can't be happening. This is stupid. Fetuses don't talk to each other."
"People like you sometimes find Jung helpful."
"People like me? What the fuck do you mean by that?"
"While you've been staggering around half-stoned and oblivious, I've been stuck inside you 24-7 for three months. I have some idea what kind of person you are."
"How did this happen?"
"You didn't know you missed your period for three months? This isn't rocket science."

"Yeah, well, you aren't a woman—"
"Could you dial it back? Technically, I'm not a person. I don't have feelings, true, but still . . . some basic respect."
"Sorry. It's not the first time I've missed, though. And no sex generally means something like you isn't happening."
"Sleeping pills and a creepy boyfriend sometimes does. Listen, if it means anything, I'm sorry, too."
"Oh, fuck him."
"We don't have much time. I'll get to the point. Go to high ground, Glenda. Quick."
"What?"
"The fetuses are checking out. Who needs it? But you born people, you're committed. You want a head start before the others clue in."
"What about you? I don't think I'm set up for breastfeeding yet. I don't fucking believe this."
"Look, the plan was to go direct-to-toilet. I figured what you didn't know wouldn't hurt you. Then someone laid a

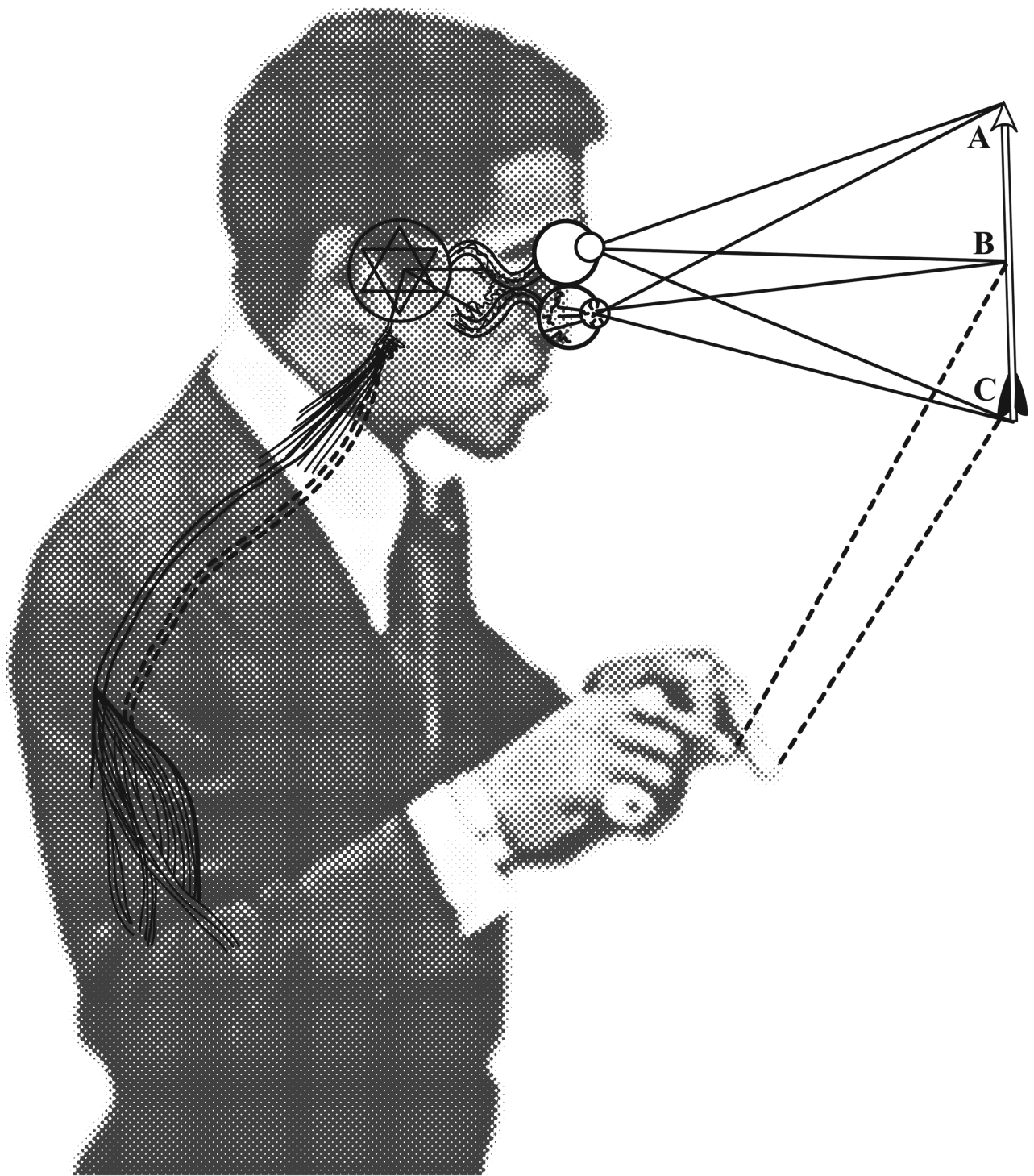
shitstorm, and here we are. Do me a favour, just get me in there and flush me down. I'll join the others. We have plans. Sorry about the mess. I know how much a clean bathroom means to you."

The colourless pinpricks swamp her sight. They take control. The sickly white room slathered in brown and red is swallowed by them.

Outside, through the bathroom window, Glenda hears the Pomeranian guy. He calls. Cries. Shouts. He sounds tear-choked. "Chaos, Chaos. Come home, Chaos! Chaos! Come back. Baby. Where are you? Where are you hiding? Chaos. Come here. Come on. Come on. Come on! Chaos! Please!"

Chaos will come. ☩

*Jude MacDonald splits her time between Toronto and the former Huttonville, Ontario. She is the author of *Jane* (Mercury, 1999) and *Grey* (Arsenal Pulp, 2001), which she wrote when she was a "Judy." She is working on a new collection of stories.*



"Candyman philosophica (1954)," by Rick Crilly.

THE DON'T YOU FUCKING LOOK AT ME! DEPT. THE STORY OF THE EYE

Ten terrifying tales.

Earlier this year, *Taddle Creek* sent a grotesque, goo-filled candy eyeball to a select group of authors and artists. “Stare at the eyeball,” *Taddle Creek* said. “Suck the eyeball,” *Taddle Creek* said. “Eat the eyeball,” *Taddle Creek* said. “Write about the eyeball,” *Taddle Creek* said. “Draw about the eyeball,” *Taddle Creek* said. The writers and artists obliged. (Except for Elvira, Mistress of the Dark. She sent *Taddle Creek* a merchandise order form.) The stories, poems, and drawing that resulted follow.

PORTRAIT OF AN EYE

Anna enters a sentence of Kathy Acker’s.

I’m fifteen years old; I hate everyone. I don’t hate everyone (that’s stupid).

Anna was afraid of Kathy Acker. Anna imagined Acker lying naked next to a naked lover, whoever that may be, there were many, the tips of their noses and their nipples touching. Acker always seemed fierce, mutable muscles blue with tattoos, roiling beneath Japanese garments. Anna had only one small tattoo, an insipid yin-yang symbol at the base of her spine. Her lovers stared at it as they fucked her from behind—an eye of sorts, mocking in its insistence on a universal order.

I fuck and find out my mother’s been lying.

Anna was writing a biography of Acker, trying to. She had already spoken to many of Acker’s friends, writers mostly, travelling to Paris to talk with Dennis Cooper, to San Francisco, where she stayed with Dodie Bellamy and Kevin Killian. In New York, after their lengthy interview, Lynne Tillman wept slightly, not wanting Anna—or Acker—to leave. Unravelling Acker’s self-mythology was difficult enough, but more so was confronting the confounding, multivalent versions of “Kathy” other people still carried around with them like juju. Her ghost haunted everything except perhaps literature. Her example was forbidding, forgotten.

I know my mother lies about everything.

A troubled youth, Anna’s niece was fifteen, trying on trouble. Over some minor dispute—her mother refused to let her see her boyfriend, etc.—she threw a tantrum. She threw a mirror at her mother, Anna’s sister, and it shattered, glass cutting her mother’s fat flesh. Anna’s niece fled her suburban house, into the forest. She lay on the floor of the forest as it snowed, wet flakes ruining the makeup she insisted wasn’t goth. Police were called; their boots opening up fresh holes in the snow. She said to them, “There’ve been times I’ve wanted your death, Mom. At least, didn’t much care.”

Everything is incredibly beautiful.

Anna’s niece had never heard of Kathy Acker, read only *Gossip Girl*, but Anna would dedicate the biography to her. She wanted the girl to become something she wasn’t. To be something Anna wasn’t, or her sister, as fat as Gertrude Stein, wasn’t. But maybe Acker could save her niece’s life, as Acker had saved hers. This girl could still be a pirate, just as surely as pirates somewhere still roamed the seas.

—JASON MCBRIDE

IT WAS AN ACCIDENT

It was an accident. Nobody would ever find out. Nobody ever did.

“I got a knife.”

“Why’d you bring a knife?”

“Always be prepared.”

“But that’s your dad’s hunting knife.”

“So?”

All in our store-bought costumes. A cowboy. Freddy Krueger. The littlest one a penguin that won’t stop crying.

The lights in the houses through the branches. The Dillons’ annual theme-park production. Screams and thunder and a creaking door carried on the wind from a haunted-house sound-effects record. A floodlit man hanging from the front yard maple. Garbage bags stuffed with rags.

“I’ll go first. First gets to choose.”

“Who says?”

“Here. You want it?”

“Bet you can’t.”

“Watch.”

We take it apart. Take a part.

After, we stack our hands in a slippery pile. Blood brothers, though some of us are actual brothers. Swear to die if we ever told. All still alive, as far as I know.

That night, I pull out the box from under my bed. Look at it. Looks at me.

I would never try it in the daylight. But now, in the dark, I stick out my tongue.

—ANDREW PYPER

FIRST PRANK

“Put it in a baby stroller.”

“Wrap it up as a present.”

“Put it in Shitzer’s lunch bag.”

Em paused and looked down at the fetal pig on their table. Gelid. Arrested.

It stoically received Travis’s pencil in its tapioca eye.

“We could cook it in the staff room.”

Travis raised an approving eyebrow at her. The teeth in his grin sloped and snagged. She knew his jeans were too tight, his bitten fingernails rimmed with grime. His house, she imagined, had a tang of Chef Boyardee and nicotine, different radios playing in every room.

In Grade 5, Em used to take Travis’s gloves from his pocket in the cloakroom and smell them. Grass and hot dogs. He’d set the A.V. room on fire in middle school and everyone got a half-day. She hadn’t seen him again—tall and vacant—until Grade 11 biology. People said he was dating a woman old enough to have bags under her eyes. Em saw him one day at a bus stop holding a purse with a raccoon tail clipped to the strap, and he went blotchy red when he noticed her staring. She’d never made anyone blush before.

After that, they talked at school.

Travis reached into Em’s backpack and pulled out her lunch bag. Dumped

Holiday Arts Mail-Order School

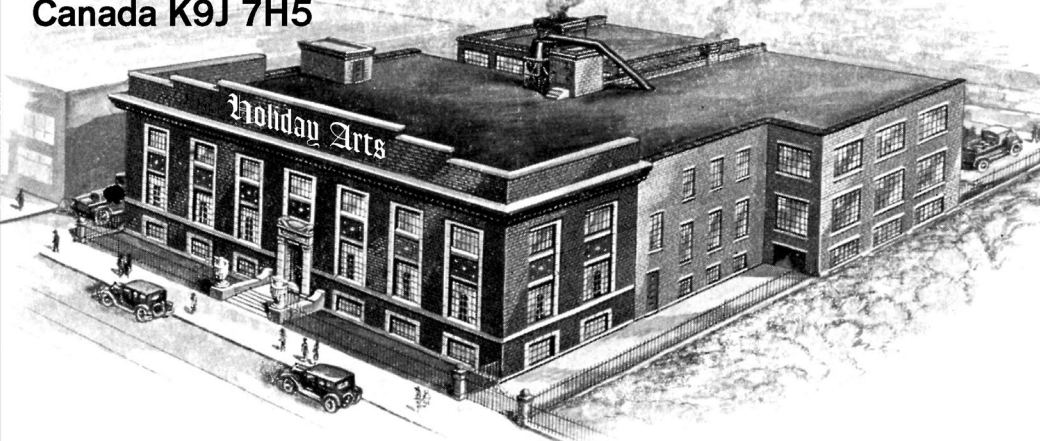
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IN

injuries result from objects striking or abrading the eye, such as metal slivers, wood chips, dust, cement chips, nails, staples, or chemicals

injuries from razor blades, scissors, robots, tweezers, pebbles, box cutters, ice picks, keys, meat cleavers, sabres, swords, teeth, arrows, ski poles, spears, drill bits, tent poles, fish hooks, throwing stars, turpentine, liquid bleach, skate blade, cheese in pressurized containers, yogurt, toothpaste, Christmas bulbs, push-pins, syringes, slivers, cement, chemicals

ladybugs, bee stingers, mosquitoes, hummingbirds, feather stuck in an eye, dragonfly across an eye, flayed eye, knifed, a fork, fuck my eye, my eye in a needle I need I eye Captain Hook fuck metal hooks, chips, dust, chips, snails, staples, chips, tails, teeth of a whisker of a tiger, survivor, chemist

beauty is performed by external incisions or pencils, pens, penises, or pensions, fucked in the eye, fucked by the government, headache like migraine auras like metal slivers, wood chips, dust, cement chips, nail, staples, or chemicals, or chemicals

—ANGELA RAWLINGS

out her sandwich and shook the crumbs from the container. He winked one of his skim-milk eyes and slid out of his seat. At the back of the classroom, he scooped a pig from the plastic tub into Em's sandwich box and was back beside her before Mr. Spitzer noticed he'd left his seat. Travis leaned close, passed the pig under the table. As he spoke into her ear, his vinegar smell coursed over-top of the formaldehyde.

"Shitzer would never suspect you. Just ask to go to the bathroom. The staff kitchen on the third floor has a microwave."

The tiny pig was pale as a rose petal, plump as a marshmallow. Em reapplied her lip gloss while Mr. Spitzer said, "... ventricle, aorta, electrical impulse." She raised her hand. Her heart spat static like a radio thrown down the stairs.

—SUSAN KERNOHAN

TELLTALE

I can feel *it* watching me.

Mother is watching me too, when she thinks I won't notice.

I won't notice either of them. I won't. I'll just sit here quietly and read my book and no one will know what I did today.

It's really not my fault. Sometimes things just . . . happen. There I was and there *it* was and it just . . . happened. Like things do.

I'm not supposed to do that. I know that. I promised Mother. I promised the shrinks she made me see. I promised myself.

But things just happen.

And it wasn't entirely my fault. *It* had something to do with it. *It* bears some responsibility. I didn't ask *it* to be there, to be so easy to take. To be so easy.

The least they could have done was take better care of it.

I stare at my book but the words are just black marks on the page. My mind is full of *it*.

It took just a moment, just a quick glance around, just a moment's reach. No one saw me. No one knows.

But I can still feel *it* watching me.

I hid *it* in a secret place, one that Mother doesn't know about. But not too well-hidden. I want to be able to get to *it*, after all. No point in hiding *it* so well I can't get *it* back in good condition. I left one too long once. It wasn't very nice when I finally managed to find it again.

I sit in my chair, listening to the clock tick, staring at the black marks on the white page.

I can feel Mother watching me.

I can feel *it* watching me.

Mother looks up suddenly, frowning. Looks up at the ceiling, as if she can see *it* through all the wood and plaster. As if *it* can see her.

I cannot stand it anymore. *It* will drive me mad with *its* staring, *its* relentless, reproachful gaze.

There's only one way to make *it* stop.

I rush upstairs, aware that Mother is behind me, aware that I'm betraying this hiding place too, but it doesn't matter.

I find *it* and *it* breaks between my teeth and the sweet, forbidden taste of *it* fills my mouth.

I'll be punished, of course. I'll promise never to do it again.

But I will. I can't help it.

—NANCY BAKER AND ERISA NIRU

THE COMPLETE WORKS OF DEREK MCCORMACK

"True," I replied, "the armadillo."

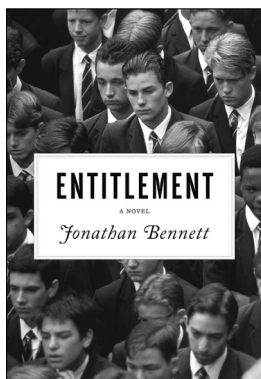
As I said these words I busied myself among the pile of bones in this cellar, which I have spoken of before. Throwing them aside, I soon uncovered a large quantity of slim novels by J. G. Ballard, Italo Calvino, Thomas Mann, Ian McEwan, Philip Roth, Marguerite Duras, and others. With these materials and with the aid of my trowel, I began vigorously to wall up the entrance of the niche where drunken Jeffrey Archer lay enchained.

I had scarcely laid the first tier of books when I discovered that the intoxication of Archer had in a great measure worn off. I laid the second tier, and the third, and the fourth; and then I heard the furious vibrations of the chain. The noise lasted for several minutes, during which I ceased my labours and sat down upon the bones. When at last the clanking subsided, I resumed the trowel, and finished without interruption the fifth, the sixth, and the seventh tier. The wall of books was now nearly upon a level with my breast. I again paused, and holding the flambeau over the books, threw a few feeble rays upon the figure within.

A succession of loud and shrill screams, bursting suddenly from the throat of the chained form, seemed to thrust me violently back.

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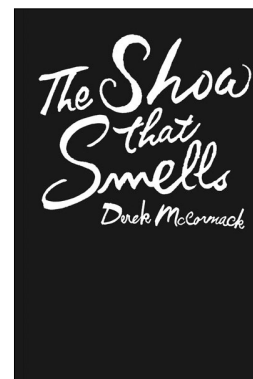
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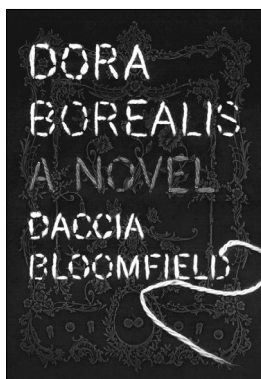


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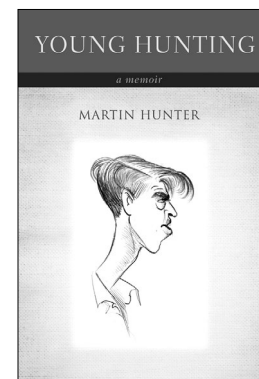
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AFRAID

Cold feet cold feet miscue
Foul, offensively foul, is everyman
bursting in at your door
The treats and tricks of language unconclude you You knew that
Colon's for Halloween, no? And comedy? And smug human
rights? How about the cruel huckster? Turning your pockets
inside out? Or maybe that's humanist

Offensively free is the unco everyman
undefined, invading your pious trade
Fob off a gumball eyeball for an eye, fall afoul of
the advance man slouching in grim
with lacquered frown
Gain is no word for it
Even the candy goes

(candy for the baby, your pie of live blackbirds)

—BETH FOLLETT

It was now midnight, and my task was drawing to a close. I had completed the tenth, the sixteenth, and the twentieth tier. I had finished a portion of the last; there remained but a single book to be fitted and plastered in—*The Complete Works of Derek McCormack*.

I struggled not with its weight.

I placed it partially in its destined position, near Archer's eyes. But now there came from out his niche a low laugh that erected the hairs upon my head. It was succeeded by a sad voice, which I had difficulty in recognizing as that of the noble best-selling author. The voice said:

"Ha ha ha. He he he. A very good joke, indeed. An excellent jest. We will have many a rich laugh about it at the palazzo. He he he—over our pet—he he he."

"The armadillo!" I said.

—BRIAN JOSEPH DAVIS

TILLIAN AND THE HAIRY EYEBALL

So I've got this route I take every Halloween to maximize my haul, and it ends at Mrs. Tillian's. Even if I'm out with friends, I hit her place alone. She sits there, waiting for me to show up, because she just *loves* to flash me the hairy eyeball. It's the highlight of her entire year.

Somehow she always knows it's me, no matter if I'm dressed as a skeleton, a

businessman, or Janet from *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. Old Till's face starts a-twitching and her eyes narrow to tiny little snake slits. It's hilarious, in an awful way.

She hates me so much because I'm a total slut. When I was eleven, she caught me doing something unmentionable to Rocky Mason behind her shed. Rocky lives two blocks over. He has curly red hair around his thing and the whole time I was doing it, I kept imagining it was carrot-flavoured dental floss. What no one knows is that Rocky threatened to strangle her stupid cat if I didn't. I was saving a poor innocent little animal! God, she should *thank* me.

O.K., there's another thing that happened. When I was thirteen, she chased me out of the Colombian church on the corner for playing spin the bottle with Bobby Santos and some other kids in the basement. Bobby Santos—who thankfully doesn't have red hair—and I were pretty much in love and kept making the bottle land on each other. When we finally got sent to the closet for seven minutes in heaven, we decided not to come out again.

Next thing I knew, there was crazy old Tillian, yanking open the closet door with her wooden broom swinging righteously. She snapped me right in the thigh and it hurt like hell. She

slammed Bobby in the stomach and he puked on the church floor. He can barely even look at me now, probably because he's reminded of her.

She's one of those old ladies who wears black all the time, except she's not that old. Her husband croaked while he was shovelling the walk five years ago. I was too young to really care, but my mom says he was a hard-living fifty. Whatever that means. Secretly, I bet Till's evil eye bounced off its intended target and landed on him one too many times.

She thinks that one day God will notice all her hatred and smite me or something. Like He'll decide to make me choke on some hot guy's tongue or catch a killer S.T.D. Then she'll be the supreme winner, because I'll finally stop coming to her door to taunt her. Because I'll be *dead*.

I only go to her place because she's so nuts. I mean, I'm fifteen, which is way too old for trick-or-treating. Plus I've got a job, and can afford as much crapola candy as I want. And she gives out those disgusting brown taffies that rip out your fillings and sit brick-like in your gut for at least a week. The only real reason to go anywhere near her is to show her I'm not afraid, that I remain victorious.

—EMILY POHL-WEARY

WHICH IS SCARIER?

Options:

1. You and your child go on a canoe trip in Algonquin park. On the second morning, you awake early to fog. After packing up, you head out onto the lake. Paddling along, you see something ahead on the water through the mist. You realize it is a rowboat, although nobody seems to be in it. You paddle up. You are in the bow and your child is in the stern. You lean forward to get a good look while your child steadies the boat. You see that the boat is full of blood and there are two human eyes floating in the blood, and a little bit of blood slops up over the sides of the boat as the boat rocks in the waves, while the eyes stare at you, bobbing side by side.
2. A skeleton riding a horse.

Answer: The boat of blood. Don't be stupid.

—PASHA MALLA

THE PROFILE

SLEIGHT OF MIND

A Ph.D. in E.S.P. has treated the local illusionist Mysterion better than an M.B.A.

BY LIISA LADOUCEUR

It's awfully mean to compare someone you're fond of to Michael Jackson. And yet, whenever I see Mysterion the Mind Reader gallivanting through Parkdale, I think of M. J., pre-nose job, in the horror-film-within-a-music-video "Thriller," trying to warn off his sweetie pie in the poodle skirt before he turns into a bloodthirsty werecat. Like Michael, Mysterion is "not like other guys."

You can believe his often-spun story about having a parasitic twin cut from his stomach or not (I don't), but there's no denying Mysterion is one natural-born freak. Long before he concocted his popular psychic-entertainer act and declared himself a "Ph.D. in E.S.P.," Mysterion was the kind of boy for whom every day was Halloween. Today, he puts his eccentricities to work as a performer. From his home base in Parkdale, he haunts the West Queen Street West strip, booking himself into pubs and clubs, where he does magic tricks and paranormal treats as part of an olde tyme sideshow. You don't even need to pay to catch his act, as he's often found delighting strangers on the street with sleights of hand, or giving them a good unanticipated spook from behind. Somehow, Mysterion has managed to make a pretty good living out of being a weirdo.

To religious scholars, "mysterion" is a Greek word referring to something that is beyond the normal apprehension of mortals. But our man the mentalist says his stage moniker is more inspired by Spider-Man's comic-book foe Mysterio, a master illusionist and special-effects wizard. One might suspect it's also a nod to the Mexican wrestler Rey Mysterio, since Mysterion's a big wrestling fan. It could be a derivation of all three. Like the Marvel comics universe, Mysterion's mythology is being constantly written and rewritten to suit his ever-changing audience. After several

years of shadowing him, I've learned enough to know his birth certificate doesn't actually say "Dr. Maximilian Mysterion." But grilling him about his offstage life still feels tricky, like trying to build a house of cards. And so we'll just have to wade carefully through this tale together, like skeptics in a carnival funhouse, for there is both amazement and truth to be found here, inside the weird world of Mysterion the Mind Reader.

Walking into Mysterion's apartment is like taking a trip to a midway. Before I can even ask about all the creepy curios on display, Mysterion thrusts a plastic laser gun into my hand and fires up CarnEvil, a full-size arcade game plonked down in his living room. Soon I'm shoot-shoot-shoot-reloading, trying to keep up with him. My death is swift and merciless, and Mysterion cackles. His walls are alive with monster-movie posters. He's got an entire room filled with wrestling figurines and other collectible toys. There's a Victorian miniature dollhouse that, when you lean in close, reveals a tiny plastic Mysterion living inside, fingers to his temples in his classic mind-reading pose. (For twenty dollars he'll sell you your own Mysterion action figure kit to paint and pose as you like.)

But not everything is child's play here. Seconds after our game ends, Mysterion is whipping up gourmet grilled sandwiches and jockeying calls from agents looking to book him for everything from bar mitzvahs to burlesque shows to banking luncheons (his high profile clients include C.I.B.C. and Indigo Books and Music). If corporate gigs seem at odds with his Queen Street scenester image, they're not. Mysterion revels in his ability to straddle art and

commerce—he is both the freak show and the carnival barker.

"I know that can be confusing to some people," he says, "but I think a lot of artists don't have business sense. And it's unfortunate, because their talent is being thrown away. I see people with great marketing skills with a subpar product who are able to finance their art and grow. And then I see people with fantastic abilities and they don't have even a simple business plan, so they sit and wonder why they are not getting work. It's sad. Not me. I won't lose opportunities."

Mysterion's attitude explains why he is so easily recognized, even by those with no interest in magic. From *Breakfast Television* to *Kenny vs. Spenny*, there's no camera he's ashamed to mug for. He'll start a sleight-of-hand routine on the streetcar. Bend spoons during dinner parties. Read your mind without warning while you're waiting for a drink at the bar, particularly in Parkdale, where a night out without running into the guy with the white streak in his pompadour and a trick up his shirt sleeve is an increasingly rare experience. This desire—nay, compulsion—to cause a scene appears to be an inherent impulse, a switch that never turns off.

Lifting his shirt, Mysterion reveals a long, dramatic scar across his stomach, the souvenir from a deep cut in his flesh (and the former home of his aforementioned parasitic twin, or at least that's the tale). "I remember being in the park or at the beach as a kid and everyone just gawking at it," he says. "'You're that three-year-old freaky kid who doesn't realize you're different.' I didn't have any intent to scare anybody, but innocently, I did. So that perhaps is where some of my bravado stems from, being able to show that off."

Born north of Toronto, in the former city of North York, thirty-four years

PHOTOGRAPH BY THOMAS BLANCHARD



THE TADDLE CREEK INFORMATION SUPERHIGHWAY LOCATION ON THE INTERNETWORK



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ago this October 31st (so he claims), Mysterion was raised in government housing by his single mother and grandmother. His mom, Maggie, a God-fearing Irish lass, still lives in the same neighbourhood, often venturing downtown to watch her son pave his way to hell hosting devilish burlesque shows or summoning dark powers to read strangers' minds. One night at Clinton's Tavern, I watched Mysterion subject the feisty brunette to a very up-close-and-personal striptease. But while Maggie put on an air of shock, it was obvious she was part of the act.

"She is a rather loud and overly extroverted individual," Mysterion says of his mother. "And she's a good sport. She's used to my torment. I used to suck on blueberries and lie on the steps and pretend I had wrenched my neck and fallen down dead. My dad is Moroccan Jewish. Maybe that's where I get my mystic powers, from my dad. But I get my superstitions from my mom."

The origin of his morbid sense of humour is more of a mystery. As a youngster, Mysterion would feed cookies baked with laxatives to his classmates. He also once locked his younger cousin in a broom closet with a plastic skull, delighting in his frightened cries and screams.

"There was this mean streak that I guess I do have inside of me," Mysterion says. "If you ask me why, I don't know. I've always liked the idea that I can freak someone out, on whatever level that is. I used to tell my other cousin, Chantelle, that our house was haunted, setting things up and making her believe it, acting all freaked out myself so she wouldn't go in certain rooms. It was a thrill."

As an adult, the prankster found a new kind of kick when he moved to Toronto's Kensington Market, in 1996. He joined an Oi! band, the Blather-skites (memorialized on the out-of-print compilation *Brewed in Canada*), and took up amateur wrestling under the moniker the Blue Angel. But it was while working in the kitchen of the Parkdale rockabilly bar the Cadillac Lounge, in 2002, that he renewed his love of freaking people out with magic and the Mysterion character was born.

For years he had been amassing a collection of oddities—macabre museum treasures such as Fiji mermaids, witches'

teeth, and grotesque body parts swimming in jars. "I can remember one winter's night, before I started performing," Mysterion says. "I had no money in my pocket. I put a baby in a jar in my briefcase and took it over to Mitzi's Sister, with a sticker on it that said 'CONJOINED TWINS.' People would try to look at it and I'd say, 'It's a sideshow exhibit I'm carrying around. If you really want to see it, I'll take a toonie.' It was so freezing that night, minus twenty or something. But I made my way through Parkdale to the Rhino and the Caddy. I got to Sneaky Dee's and the Queenshead and Squirly's, and into the Gladstone—when it was not what it is now. Twelve bars I went into that night. I got home at three in the morning, pissed drunk, with a hundred and eighty dollars in my pocket. And I thought, 'I'm on to something.'"

That spooky something grew from a few arcane artifacts and mentalist feats to a full-blown production when Mysterion started inviting other weirdos into the act, many of whom still perform with him today. There's his sidekick, the Wolfman, who writes much of Mysterion's onstage shtick. Various girlfriends have been featured, from bodacious burlesquers to bloody human pincushions. Kindred spirits the Blue Demons often perform as his house band. The show is a combination of low-rent cabaret, Victorian parlour, and punk-rock house party. And while some of his mental tricks are truly amazing—he never calls himself a psychic, but his ability to probe thoughts is unsettling—his "sleights of mind" almost take a back seat to simply creating an environment where bizarre characters abound and anything can happen.

True to his self-proclaimed business sense, Mysterion says professionalism is the key to his success. "My basic rule of thumb is that you've gotta get your ass out there and you've got to do it whether it's for a penny or a thousand dollars—do the show as if it's for your mamma on her dying bed."

His other rule is "always dress better than your audience," which he does—usually in vintage suits and ties, although lately he's also taken to wearing mismatched shoes.

But for all his ambition and hustle, Mysterion doesn't dream of Vegas or

Broadway lights, which is probably wise. While his profile grew somewhat in tandem with magicians such as David Blaine and Criss Angel, Mysterion doesn't share his big-name counterparts' commercial flair. Look past his psychobilly scenester appearance, the tattoos and the slicked-back hair, the creeper shoes and the retro style, and you'll see a short man who walks with an unusual gait, a kink in his neck. The flip side to his gregarious, unreserved persona is the penchant for taking things too far for polite company. He is a misfit among misfits. As such, he feels more connected to other oddball club performers here at home, from his competitors in Carnival Diablo to his peeler pals in Skin Tight Outta Sight. (He helped the latter spearhead the first Toronto Burlesque Festival this July.) Mysterion also hates to fly, so he sticks around town, attending the occasional magic meeting—it's true, Toronto has secret magician meet-ups!—content to be part of the city's own particular cast of creeps.

When asked whether he feels accepted in Toronto's arts community beyond the circus-like environs of Parkdale, Mysterion takes an atypically long pause: "Yes. But I don't think it comes from my show. I think it comes from longevity and, dare I say, that I'm not going away. People realize that they have to accept me."

There's another element at work here, something out of his control. Even in creative circles, magicians rank somewhere below poets on the list of performers most people could do without. Mysterion is keenly conscious of his place on the entertainment fringe, but gladly rises to the challenge. A typical Mysterion performance involves comedy and costuming, acting and physical stunts, improvisation within a compelling narrative, and a show-stopping finale—often at pay-what-you-can prices.

"There's film, TV, theatre, commercials, then magician, comic, juggler, mime," he says. "It's a totem pole, but it's a very biased and bullshit hierarchy. I've seen horrible actors and fantastic mimes. I think the idea that magic is not a viable form of art is only there because magicians have not been able to perform in other formats, to walk into odd venues. That's why my greatest talent is that I have the ability to adapt."

Mysterion is currently in the process of adapting once again. Aside from working on a TV pilot and assuming the management duties of the local stranglehold wrestler the Kentucky Butcher, he has spent much of 2008 in semi-seclusion, redeveloping his act. He knows people have seen it all before, that he needs to suspend their disbelief once again. The sideshow displays are slowly being phased out, and he has recently introduced an extra-spooky gallows routine that he claims puts his very life in danger. Mysterion has performed feats like this before, but smaller ones that only risked damaging his hands. This time, he'll be slipping a noose over his head—chosen by an audience member from a row of four neck-snapping real ones and one fake—and hoping his powers of persuasion and mind-reading hold (him) up. He's even offering ten thousand dollars to anyone who can prove the real nooses are fakes.

Mysterion hopes his dedication to his craft will eventually lead to what he wants most—to dwell amongst ghosts and ghouls all the time, to combine his passions for collecting terrifying trinkets, documenting historical horrors, and performing spook shows into an all-inclusive environment where he can live out his nightmares and invite others to share in supernatural mysteries year round. He continues to collect his taxidermied creatures, specimens in jars, and historical artifacts. He has just purchased a set of waxed heads—an African man and woman—from Madame Tussauds, and spent a good twenty minutes of my visit browsing for haunted human skulls on-line.

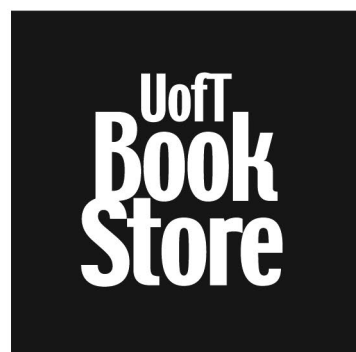
"I'm not a person who does things like take vacations or play outdoor sports or drive a nice car, what most normal men in their thirties would want," he says. "I would prefer a human skull and a snake. I worked hard to have these things you see around me, but this is not the be all and end all. I want to get a home—not just to live in, but as a performance space, an art space, with a small museum. My dream house is a haunted house." ☞

Liisa Ladouceur is a poet, arts reporter, and real live goth living in Parkdale who likes arcane words and dead things. Her dream date is Jack Skellington.



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THE USE YOUR BRAINS, DON'T EAT THEM DEPT.

HALLOWEEN ABCs

A selective history of the scariest night of the year—from All Hallows to zombies.

BY DEREK McCORMACK

A is for All Hallows Eve, or Halloween. All Hallows, also known as All Saints' Day, takes place on November 1st. It is a day when Catholics celebrate those who have been beatified. All Souls' Day is the day after All Saints'. The church decreed it a day to pray for those poor souls in purgatory—spirits suspended between heaven and hell. In the Middle Ages, the days were known collectively as Hallowtide. On the eve of All Souls', churches would ring bells to scare away the dead. Some churches rang bells all night long.

B is for Robert Burns, the Scottish poet. Burns wrote "Halloween" in 1785. "Some merry, friendly, countra-folks / Together did convene, / To burn their nits, an' pou their stocks, / An' haud their Halloween / Fu' blythe that night." The poem refers to the Celtic Halloween custom of fortune-telling with nuts and apple peelings. Emigrating Scots brought the custom to Canada. Other Halloween customs carried here by Scots and Irish: bonfires, begging for food door to door, playing pranks on those who would not furnish food.

C is for Caledonian Society. Founded in Canada, in 1855, by affluent Scottish-Canadians, the Caledonian Society held banquets across Canada on Halloween. "We are not divining the future, or burning nuts, or catching the 'snap apple,' but [we are] celebrating Scottishness," a speaker told Caledonians in Montreal, in 1885. In Toronto, George Brown was active in the Caledonians. Halloween here was a night of feasts: besides the Caledonian Society, different regiments of the military held a Halloween dinner, as did colleges at the University of Toronto. A meat market ran this ad on October 29, 1903: "HAL-

LOWE'EN POULTRY. We are having heavy enquiries already."

D is for Dennison Manufacturing Company. "You would be surprised," said a young lady in *Bookseller and Stationer* magazine, in 1924, "how many people give Hallowe'en parties the last two weeks of October." The young lady worked at a Toronto store. She supervised the crêpe-paper depart-



G is for ghost.

ment. Dennison Manufacturing, of Framingham, Massachusetts, was the country's main maker of crêpe paper. Dennison had a Toronto office in the early nineteen-hundreds. It was located on Wellington Street West. They were the first to sell yellow, orange, and black crêpe paper. They sold crêpe paper printed with owls, bats, jack-o'-lanterns, black cats with arched backs. They published *The Bogie Book*, the Bible of Halloween party guides. Place cards, Spanish moss, blindfolds, costumes—*The Bogie Book* told how to make them all from Dennison crêpe paper. Crêpe paper is combustible. The parties were firetraps.

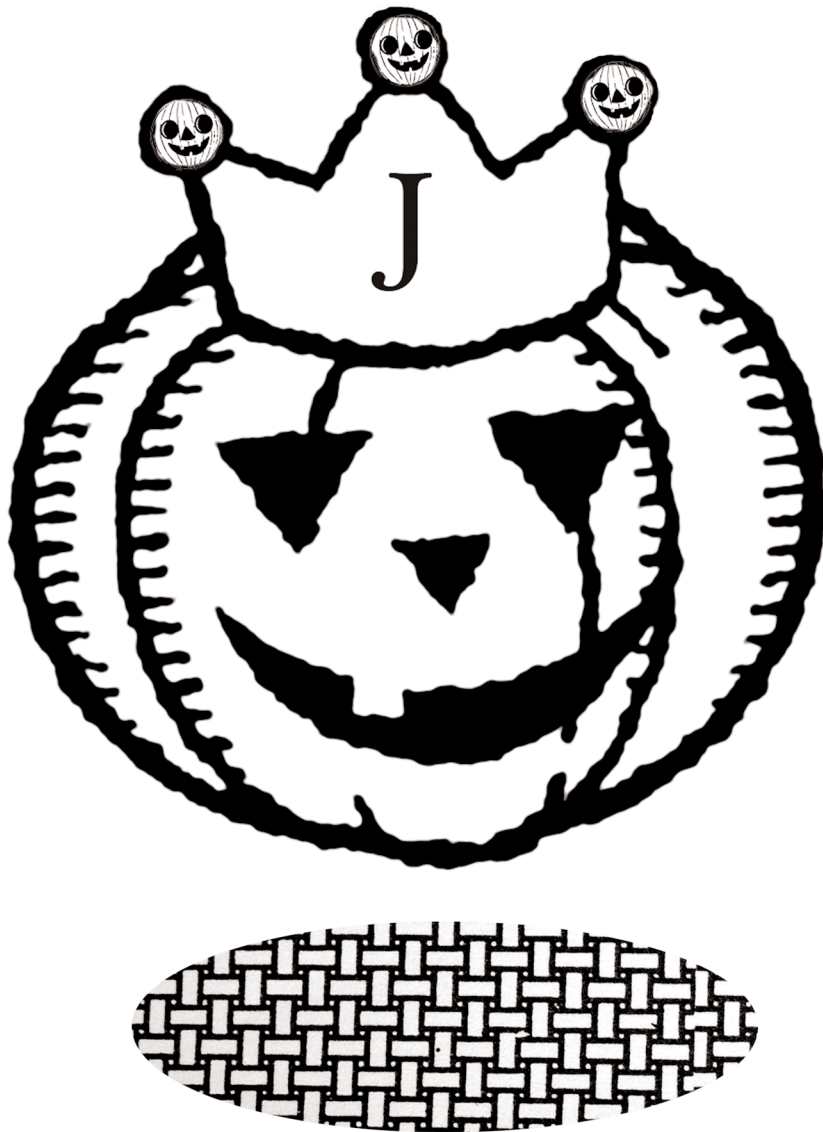
E is for Eaton's. "Don't Miss The Hallowe'en Parade," read an Eaton's ad in the *Toronto Daily Star*, in 1929. The Eaton's Santa Claus Parade

involved several floats and many paraders. The Hallowe'en Parade? "A big pompous general will lead Felix, Bluebeard—A gypsy, a Zulu, and other familiar folk in a march around Toyland."

F is for Frankenstein. Billy Pratt was a British lad. In 1909, he was flunking out of King's College London. He was studying Chinese customs and languages; he wanted to act. He travelled to Canada and wound his way to Toronto. The Canada Company office found him work in Hamilton. Pratt became a farmer, but after three months, he drifted westward, working as a ditch digger, a tree cutter. Soon he convinced a stock company in Kamloops, British Columbia, to let him join the troupe. He changed his name to Boris Karloff. Karloff was a surname of some of his relatives; Boris was a name he said he "plucked out of the cold Canadian air."

Karloff toured Alberta and Saskatchewan, then he headed to Hollywood. His role as the monster in *Frankenstein* made him a star.

H is for Dr. H. H. Holmes. Holmes built himself a hotel in 1893, in Chicago, that boasted, in the words of the crime writer Connie Fillipelli, "iron-plated rooms, secret passages, hidden chutes that ended in the basement directly above zinc-lined tanks, sealed rooms with gas jets, stairways that led nowhere . . . trapdoors, a dissecting table, surgeons' tools." The building was a blueprint for every carnival and amusement park haunted house to come. It's believed Holmes murdered more than a hundred people there. Then he went on the lam, landing in Toronto. He buried more bodies in the basement of a house near Barrie, Ontario. Pinkerton detectives shadowed



J is for jack-o'-lantern.

him. Again he fled. They nabbed him in Boston, tried him in Philadelphia. In 1896 he was hanged.

Is for Isabel Grace Mackenzie. She died in 1917 and was survived by her son, William Lyon Mackenzie King. Mackenzie King became the prime minister of Canada. He hung a portrait of Isabel in his study, and kept it lit night and day. He spoke to her through a Ouija board and a crystal ball. He contacted her during séances. On October 6, 1935, his dead mother communicated the following to him: “Long ago I dreamt that you would succeed Sir Wilfrid Laurier. Long ago I knew God meant you to be prime minister. Long ago I [more than] knew that God meant that you would serve His holy will. Good night.” King was buried beside his mother in Mount Pleasant Cemetery.

Kis for kisses. “Ducking for apples is rather out of late,” said the Everywoman’s Column of the *Toronto Daily Star*, in 1913. The topic: suggestions for Halloween parties. What did the column recommend? A taffy pull. “For the taffy pull, pull the taffy from buttered plates and save mother’s busy hands next day.” A taffy pull fulfilled two functions: it provided entertainment, and it provided eats. For hosts who didn’t have time to cook candy, stores sold it. At Halloween, a confectioner called Hunt’s sold a “Taffy Sucker, Face on Stand” for a nickel. In 1925, Eaton’s advertised a variety of taffies for Halloween: “peanut crisp, co-coanut and peanut, peanut and butter-scotch.” During the Depression, the molasses kiss grew in popularity. No one seems to know why. Maybe molasses was cheaper than the ingredients for taffy? “Just In Time For Hallowe’en Parties,” read an ad from Loblaw’s, in 1933, “HALLOWEEN KISSES.” Fifteen cents bought a one-pound bag.

Mis for David Manners, who played the handsome John Harker in *Dracula*. Manners was born in Halifax. His real name: Rauff de Ryther Daun

Acklom. He studied forestry at the University of Toronto, and acted at Hart House Theatre. He hightailed it to Hollywood, where James Whale spotted him at a party. Whale cast him in his directorial debut, *Journey’s End*. Manners went on to work with directors Frank Capra and George Cukor. Tod Browning cast him in *Dracula*. In *The*



L is for lycanthropy. O is for owl.

Mummy, Manners played opposite Boris Karloff. In *The Black Cat* he starred with both Bela Lugosi and Karloff. He eventually abandoned the movies. Some suggest he quit, in part, because his studio suggested he marry a woman (Manners was gay). Retiring from acting, he retreated to the California desert. He wrote novels, and died in 1998. Horror movies, he once said, were his “only claim to movie fame.”

Nis for noise. Making noise was at the heart of Halloween in its early days. Revellers tossed rocks and mud at windows and doors. They crafted noisemakers from tin cans, wooden spools, roofing tiles. A mid-century Halloween package produced for Canadian schoolteachers included instructions for making a Halloween megaphone. As early as 1900, Halloween noisemakers were being produced in Germany and exported to the United States. Styles for sale included horns, rattles, cranks, snappers, and clappers. “Weird Spirits

a-gamboling,” said a 1913 ad for Mason and Risch Limited, of Toronto. “Witch Caps—Pumpkin Heads—Dominoes—Flowing Robes—Holed-Out Eyes. Strange phantasies they are! Yet, WHO and WHAT are they? Listen, then, they are the *phantom witcheries of Hallowe’en!*” The ad was peddling the Victor Victrola. “To sit snugly around the open fire, revelling in all the mystic rhythms of this bewitching fairyland of Hallowe’en, conjured up so wonderfully by the little Victrola, will make the evening’s frolics complete!” Which mystic rhythms did the store recommend? “The Dance o’ the Fairies,” “Peer Gynt,” and “Will-of-the-Wisp.”

Pis for Philip Morris. In the nineteen-fifties he toured across Canada performing in a ghost show—a magic show with supernatural and horrific effects. His stage name: Dr. Evil. To garner publicity, he’d arrive early in a town and pull stunts. Drive a car blindfolded. Raffle off a “dead body.” The dead body was a frozen chicken. The R.C.M.P. once arrested

him for dressing as a gorilla in public. Years later he invented an artificial spiderweb made of cloth. He made a killing.

Qis for Kew Beach. In 1945, Hallowe’en hooligans burnt bonfires on Queen Street East. To feed the fire, they tore down fences and gates. Police were called. When they rode up on horses, they were pelted with stones and bricks. Hooligans blocked fire trucks with piles of concrete blocks. Thirteen troublemakers were taken in. A mob of seven thousand marched on the Main Street police station, hell-bent on springing the hooligans. Police cruisers rushed to the scene with tear gas. Water cannons dispersed the rioters. Five firemen were injured, as were a couple of cops.

Ris for rides. Leon Cassidy needed a “dark ride.” In 1928, Cassidy was the co-owner of a small amusement park in New Jersey. Lots of amusement parks had an “old mill” ride: boats floated

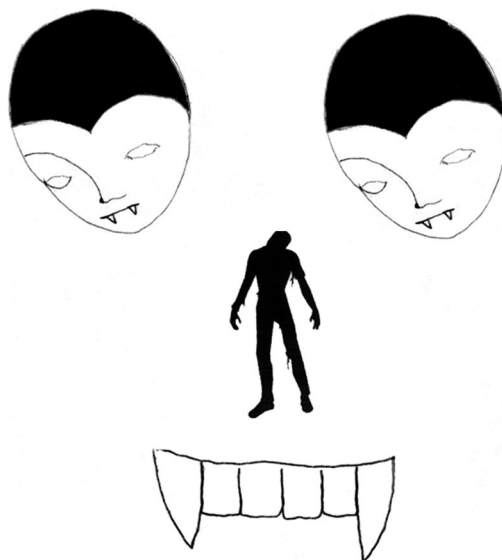
riders down canals decorated with scary scenery. Cassidy couldn't afford to build a boat ride. So he put dodgem cars on a twisted track in a darkened pavilion. The Pretzel, he called it. It was a sensation. He started the Pretzel Amusement Ride Company to provide Pretzel rides to amusement parks across the continent. In 1930, he came to Canada. He put down a floor base at the Canadian National Exhibition. He laid tracks on the base, then covered them in a black tent, covered by another tent. It was probably the first cartable dark ride on a midway anywhere.

S is for slogans. "Trick or treat!" It's what children scream on Halloween. But "trick or treat" didn't become the customary catchphrase in Toronto until sometime around the Second World War. Before then, kids yelled, "Shell out!" "HALLOWE'EN" said an ad for a grocery store chain, in 1929, "with its joyous merriment. . . . SHELLIN' OUT to the district cut-ups, guessing who the strange figure is who knocks on your door." From a Loblaw's ad during the Depression: "When You Hear the Ultimatum! SHELL OUT. Be Ready with LOBLAW'S HALLOWE'EN KISSES."

T is for Bill Tracy, a sculptor and engineer from New Jersey. In the nineteen-fifties, he revolutionized carnival dark rides by adding supernatural back-glows, glow-in-the dark stunts, *trompe l'oeil* to the decor. He created themed rides like the western ghost town and the haunted pirate ship. Sadly, he never invented safety features, like fire escapes. Wiring was makeshift. His rides tended to go up in flames. Very few still stand. The dark ride at Toronto's Centreville Amusement Park—the Haunted Barrel Works—is decorated in a distinctly Tracy mode. And it is safe.

U is for University of Toronto. According to the historian Keith Walden, spontaneous Halloween celebrations erupted on campus in 1884. Students marched into the downtown

core, singing, shattering lampposts, egging Eaton's. Police dispersed them. Torontonians complained. The parade became an annual event. In 1899 students barged into the peanut gallery at Massey Hall, disrupting the evening's performance. Veterinary students dangled dead horse parts over the balcony. Medical students banged human arm



V is for vampire. Z is for zombie.

and leg bones. Some students slit open a political effigy, showering the audience below with chaff, hay, and excelsior. Hector Charlesworth, the future editor of *Saturday Night*, was sitting in the pit. His suit was ruined.

W is for whoopee cushion. In the early twentieth century, an American named S. S. Adams invented a plethora of classic pranks: dribble glasses, joy buzzers, sneezing powder. In 1930, a Canadian "rubber concern" approached him with a new novelty—a bladder that made a farting sound when someone sat on it. The rubber concern? The Jem Rubber Company, headquartered in Toronto, on Dundas Street West. It produced parts for printing companies. Adams turned down the fart cushion, so Jem manufactured it on its own. It was green, with a wooden nozzle. Stamped on the face was a picture of a Scottish lad. He sported spurs and a sporran, and carried a rifle. Wouldn't bagpipes have been the obvious visual

pun? The whoopee cushion was a sensation, even during the Depression. Adams ended up coming out with a copy of the Canadian cushion—the razzberry cushion, he called it.

X is for XEPN, a Mexican border-blaster radio station near the Rio Grande. In the late nineteen-twenties and early thirties, Bob Nelson and his brother Larry hosted an astrology show on the station. Listeners sent in a dollar and, in return, the Nelsons sent them a mimeographed horoscope. The Nelsons also operated Nelson Enterprises, of Columbus, Ohio, which supplied mediums and mentalists with fake fortune-telling equipment—mind-reading codes, mechanical crystal balls, two-way radios that could be concealed under capes or in turbans. "Be it distinctly understood," said their 1931 mail-order catalogue, "that all effects described in this catalogue are accomplished by normal means, and are entirely divorced from any supernatural or supernormal powers."

Y is for yellow. "Green and red have come [to] be the Christmas colors," said a newspaper article from 1925, "just as black and yellow tell us of Halloween." An article in *Bookseller and Stationer*, from 1925, advised those celebrating Halloween to obtain "yellow and black crêpe paper for decorative purposes." In 1927, an ad for crêpe paper in that same magazine recommended "Orange and Black for Halloween." In coming years, orange and black would come to be considered the Halloween palette par excellence. What changed? Why did yellow fade out and orange fill in? ☞

Derek McCormack lives in Palmerston. Along with guest-editing this issue of Taddle Creek, he is the author of several works of fiction, including Halloween Suite (Pas de Chance, 1998), The Haunted Hillbilly (ECW, 2003), and Christmas Days (Anansi, 2005), a history of Christmas in Canada. His latest book is The Show That Smells (ECW, 2008).

YOU'RE FUCKIN' RIGHT, YOU'RE FUCKIN' RIGHT

BY TONY BURGESS

Someone stood on my hand in the night. They mustn't have seen me. Which is good. They might have thought I was a heavy bag or a balled-up carpet. I don't go out of my way to hide myself in the day, but I do look for places out of the sun. Sunken stairwells I like. Recesses. Spots that are not open. Wind goes elsewhere if your walls are all touching you. But last night, someone found me. Didn't find me, actually. Stepped on me. My hand. Pressure on the fingers, splaying them as I slept. Dreamed of being stepped on. So now that night has fallen I am going to move. I lift and leap to the roof of a shed in the alley, then I drop to the narrow curb running against the grass here. I can move silently and rapidly on surfaces that are four inches wide. My feet can grab and release the ground fast when they know what to expect. Up a fire escape. One arm and hand over, and I am up four flights in three moves then I'm using the momentum to fly up to the flat roof. The pebbly surface means I run instead of jump, but I'm still a blur and then I'm on the front, four floors up. I don't look to see who's in there. A man is standing by the entrance to a hallway. I push off the wall with my feet and move clean through his back with the balled fist. His spine hits the floor like dice. A woman in purple is going to turn, but I lop one of her arms off and keep going. The blood is loud as it lands. Kitchen empty, I think. Then gone. The apartment hall is great. Both feet halfway up opposing walls, and knees don't even have to pump. Just the spring at the ankle and I'm like water in a hose. Stairwell down but I don't remember. Then the street, which I hate, one older man is just a momentary wetness on my chest and left arm, then two teenage girls sort of pop like bubbles and leave a young red wind underfoot.

Then the recycling box and halfway up a lamppost onto the side of a building above pizza. A man in the window. Can't not stop, so I make the glass tiny and stop beside him for a moment. Don't know if he sees but I get one hand on his jaw and the other on top and turn it upward. I remove the centre and see the door is cracked. So go. I drop some of the middle of his head and because I'm in a hurry it gets bent around the door frame before something else happens to it. Didn't notice the dog, so I take one step back and one forward to drive the chest apart. Feel a little like I'm wasting my time with things that don't matter. Three at the elevator who saw the dog go down and don't see me come around off the corner, and because three together is not going to happen again for almost a minute I watch where I put things. His hands up into her back and out pointing down into his eyes. The fingers are hard and sharp at this speed so they scoop in and are bested by the back of the skull. Hard to know exactly how that ends, but I get a little spasm in my own finger. Could be anything. Probably pass. Gone already. The street again feels like I've been here all night and so, onto a streetcar, two steps, then a car, foot goes through and feel somebody up around it. Light suction as I get out. Red light. Jump to orange. And a hall. Big hall. Music. Land on the third floor but keep going. Don't know what but this is just the way it has to go. Hard to say and do at the same time. Two shoulders. Use somebody's hand to stand and it goes out. Chest. Three run. I think there is a sense that I am here. Decide to try a slap and four vertebrae go under a scalp so worth it again and this time the whole shoulder comes off and for a moment looks like you could cook it. Unexpected that it's its own side event and have to look back to see.

It turns an old woman's stomach into its cloth. He's yelling so I do my feet in a quick circle to take out just eyes. Only eyes with tips of feet. Feel good and use the circle as a way of going straight up. You never go straight up and I smear a caged light on the wall. Make it up far enough to reach a beam and dive, waiting for my feet to grab and that is a very, very advantageous way to pull so the beam comes free at the end I left and I have enough going that I can just hold on as I go through the concrete wall. The beam falls but I am going so fast that I have no idea. Dark, which I like, and people, probably thousands under. The move is amazing. I go probably six hundred feet without having to do anything. I should do anything and I hit the far side hard and fall. Don't like falling and it makes me mad. And slow. I make a mess. I pull a throat clear out and onto somebody so bad that the throat is part of his head before he dies. Still mad, I push a girl into what might be her boyfriend and her arm is bagged by his left lung. Keeps going cause I'm stuck until I feel better. I punch, which I rarely do, and her face caves like bubble wrap. Try this: put two shoulders into each other so pressure makes the stomach fizz out between the legs. Slap, slap, slap . . . eyes and teeth in a braid, then a tongue, as if it's happy to be doing this forever. It goes forever. I feel stupid. Like a bomb. So I move. Just feet to floor but I pump hard and feel people slip over me like hot food. Hold the last person at the door and under me they are a temporary sled. I lie on this wet person and go down the hall. The ground comes up through them pretty quick so I tap the friction and that sends me up through a tall window above the main entrance. Streetcar. I go too far and, luckily, into an alley and some papers there and a red light and



another fire escape at the end that I bend going up, as it turns out, twenty-three storeys. My steam takes me a few dozen more feet into open air, then down. Gravity, in spite of what you may think, slows me down, I am pushing against a second force that is terrible lazy and stubborn. I swing in at the fifteenth floor and divide a dog, a man, and three children into 3,989,793 pieces. Each one is cone-shaped for one very impressive second then recombine

as muck. I check my watch and realize I need to be somewhere.

It is built by Camerer Cuss and Company, in London. The face is what I expect, Roman numerals on the hour markers and a complete non-numerated minute track. It is framed in a hinged brass bezel that sits snugly in a wood bezel. Beneath this I see less. The pendulum assembly with its fusee stop and tension spring. I am aware of the

mighty and gold lenticular bob. The case has an inspection door on the side and at the bottom behind the bob, a hatch. The key is there too, the winding and the bottom door key, which are often missing from these old mechanicals. It has been wound and the time is correct, though who knows how she keeps it. It's easy enough to bend over when the attention's elsewhere and push a hand. I don't know if it's working and this upsets me unreasonably. I

could ask, but I will be told either that it works perfectly or that it is as it is. Its gong could have an ugly sound and no matter where you mount it you will hear this. It might need winding constantly and slip when you try. It may be something I will neglect, regret. Sitting on the wall like a shadow. It might be a last straw of some kind. I might be acquiring my last straw and not even know it. But if it is that, is it the best of all the straws? Isn't the last straw the one that makes a burden impossible, which, finally, is what a burden should be? I look twelve or so inches past it to a shallow sheet-metal case. Homemade. The green paint is chipped and scratched. Rust orange and two circular black marks and a heavy diagonal smear that may be a burn scar. The clasp on the side is loose. I flip the lid. Four or five screwdrivers. Each form a different set. Translucent handles. Green. Red. The Phillips has a messy burred tip. There's an old slip of wood. A level. I close the case lightly, more lightly than anyone has in years. An ashtray with a clear glass plate circled by a heavy replica of a snow tire. Ten hacksaw blades. An old Palm Pilot. It looks as big as a box spring. The stylus missing. There are pickaxes under the table. None of this stuff, at least nothing at this table, is going to help me. I push the pointer fingers on either hand down on the table edge so my hands bend in at the wrists. Sandra is probably watching me. After eight years together it has come to this. Money. It's all there is in the end.

The terrible dying baby in the hall. Your chest streaked with rage. The hour before you eat. The hour before you sleep. Sandra is back there somewhere, watching. She knows I'm wrong. I know I'm wrong. What we need is a gas stove. That would help hydro bills. We need a vacuum cleaner. Sandra is four tables over holding a tall glass. She's holding it up in the light. There are windows lining the top of the arena walls and sunlight stands like an inverted pyramid. I think she looked at me, then away quickly. She is saying, Don't look at me.

Don't look at me.

The crowd is making its way to the northeast. A short man with a straw hat stands saying nothing while they move on him. He holds a black microphone wrapped in a light blue hanky. He has a cruel face and he is impatiently watching a young man rearrange boxes.

Here we have here we have here we have the main event ladies and boys and boys and girls the main event here we go. We're gonna do boxes, everything in the box, you bid on the box and take the box the first box, here, we start some handy things for handy men, some tools hammer and flashlight and things you can take home and take a look. Two dollars two dollars the man in suspenders three, do I hear three for the box with the hammer, do I have three? Once it's gonna be yours, yeah you. Once, twice, and that's your box for three and one the next box we have some . . . turn these around so I can see,

we have a box of canning equipment get it all at once the whole kit starts at two and do I hear two, and two, everything you need to start canning all in a box there's two the lady in the red raincoat that's for this box here. Move the box, move it. That's two, two dollars come on folks that's a fine box of canning accessories going for two do I hear three three, three dollars for the, going once for two, twice for two, and sold to the lovely lady in the red. She's gonna have homemade jams and jellies. Next box folks next box. There's some. What is that? What is that? Looks like a mix box. We'll start at one buck for the mix box one buck . . . anybody gotta buck for this box right here? Right here right here, a box of mixed things. Different stuff only a buck a single dollar. Take a look if ya want, take a look one dollar and a dollar and a dollar dollaree. Moving on . . . to the back here. Move! Move! Move back! We have some things from the kitchen, the kitchen lotsa beauties for the kitchen and we start with the kitchen with the stove, this stove it's a gas stove heats great cooks great all the parts are there the parts the parts are all there, I used to have one just like this . . . self-cleaning no muss no fuss gas oven folks and in here there should be a rotisserie, no siree no rotisserie, that's fine we start the bid at fifty dollars fifty dollar fifty dollar fifty dollaree . . . right there do I hear seventy-five? Seventy-five for this working gas stove she's a beaut, seventy-five, seventy-five, seventy-five!

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OCTOBER COUNTRY

(As ever, for dear Mr. Bradbury)

Those children who are born to autumn
do not suffer spring, nor its greening glance.
Our shuttered eyes abjure the flotsam
joy of the petal storm, the pale presence
of purple-battered thistle or clover honey
spread over summer's deranged yellow heat.
We slip from the frozen grasp of winter's cunny,
that pan-cracked, brittle, ice-slippered sweet,
deny the ceaseless renewal, the so-called grace
of each sorry songbird's piercing April hymn,
and return to autumn's apple-fired embrace,
its red-leaf feathered burnished golden limbs—
escaping winter, spring, and summer's treasons,
forswearing that tyranny of marching seasons.

—SANDRA KASTURI

Young man not payin' attention down here did you say seventy-five? Young man with the hand there says seventy-five go eighty, go eighty go eighty. Eighty to grandpa out with the grand-kids wants to make Thanksgiving dinner the ways it wants to be. Go one hundred dollars, go one hundred go one hundrede this is a beaut folks. Had one myself. Cleans itself and heats instantaneously. One hundred. The young man with the hand. Do I hear one-twenty, gramps? One-twenty? Mr. Handy wants it for the wife. Here she comes. Do I hear one-thirty? One-thirty? One-thirty, one-thirty, one-thirty going once. Gramps likes the price. One-forty, one-forty, one-forty. Mr. Handy impresses the wife. Going once going twice, and sold to Mr. Handy.

My face is burnt now. It was like being on fire. He has such hard, hard eyes and he won't stop. Blow that hanky. Cough on that mic. I take a step toward my new stove and look up. The auctioneer sees me sideways through lids that, I swear, are sliding laterally across his yellow eyes. He lets me reach the oven, then points. I am to stay. I smile stupidly and turn like a game-show blond. Sandra has left. I am alone now. It didn't matter what we bought here today, I was going to be alone. Had I not bought the stove she would still be here. To fight one last time. Things going bad

has been our theme for a long time. She's happy now. It's weird standing here in front of these grim bargain hunters, feeling the woolly breath of the auctioneer on me. He's a cattle man; he eases livestock through the bottleneck. I'm a pigeon. A crow. A mouse lying backwards on a post. The three older women in the front row brush the bins and sniff at me. A boy in a yellow cap steals a stubby knife then chews his food at me. I try to make a sad face so someone will cry, but no one does. I lean my head back. The highest roof I have ever seen. Shooting metal rafters and wide ribs of steel turn above me. I expect to see the moon here, trapped and rootless, in the night sky near a nest. It's not that I wanted Sandra to stay, it's that I knew that when she left I would want to die. A pale red cable is woven through the rafters in chaotic lines.

"Wanna rotisserie?"

"Sorry?"

"I gotta rotisserie for this. Wannit?"

The auctioneer's teeth are bark brown. He spits.

"No charge." He piles his shoulders and turns.

"O.K."

He turns back, surprised. He blinks for a moment as if he's never laid eyes on me.

"O.K."

He turns away to the boy that helps

him. "I'm takin' lunch and gonna run this guy over to my place."

The kid looks at me, then nods obediently. The auctioneer omits details and does not like questions.

In the parking lot, I walk beside him and he doesn't seem to like this. He slows and speeds up to make me look awkward doing the same. He turns abruptly down a row of parked cars and I'm forced to step in a puddle. He stops in front of an old red pickup. The bed is ringed by warped wood rails pulled together by heavy wire. I look back to the arena. It is small now and far away. He notices this and disapproves.

"Where's your car?"

I go to answer.

"Get in."

The door moves as if it's breaking and it closes as if it can't. The seat is a red that has faded to pink, and the cab smells like uncooked meat. I sit waiting. I have given up and he starts the engine.

We bounce along in silence. I notice his hands. Swollen and dry, and the wheel glides through his palms. Such soft, quiet hands. Like his throat. Pink and petal-smooth.

We hit a pothole and I hear his teeth clap. They are false and he must keep them loose in there. I think for a moment that I should put on my seat belt.

We pull up a long mud driveway but there is no house, just a wide, low garage.

He reaches down and I think he's looking for a parking brake, but he brings up a tire iron.

When he hits me across the cheek I can see the side of his house peeking out from behind the garage. Some trees at the edge are keeping the snow on the ground. I flip to the door and see a purple curtain fall halfway across the windshield. He hits my nose with something and I think, "That's right, that's how to stop me." It's not so much that I am hurt, it's that he has suddenly switched me off. My legs and my arms are turning in directions without me.

Oh white Christmas! Oh mama mia! Oh! ☹

*Tony Burgess lives in Stayner, Ontario. A feature film based on his novel *Pontypool Changes Everything* (ECW, 1998), directed by Bruce MacDonald, premiered at the 2008 Toronto International Film Festival.*



THE GALLERY NIGHT OF THE SEWIST

Two local artists prove you're never too old for trick-or-treat.

COSTUMES BY GRANT HEAPS AND IAN PHILLIPS

In 1999, Grant Heaps and Ian Phillips were two men in their thirties wanting to relive the joy of trick-or-treating. That October 31st, they borrowed generic, store-bought disguises and dressed up for Halloween for the first time in about twenty years.

"It was so much fun having people stop you and ask you if they could take your picture," says Heaps. "The anonymous nature of wearing a mask was thrilling."

Heaps, the assistant wardrobe co-ordinator for the National Ballet of Canada, and Phillips, a book maker and illustrator (occasionally featured in this very

magazine), became addicted to that thrill and decided to create their own costumes the following year. A visit to Goodwill yielded the suits required to dress as Mormon missionaries, and the duo made their way across the city, handing out pamphlets as they went.

"People we know crossed the street to get away from us when they saw us coming, not realizing it was us," says Phillips. "People thought we were real and left a wide berth for us."

From there, their level of creativity and daring only escalated. With Heaps doing most of the sewing and Phillips

the accessorizing, the next six years yielded a butcher and his slaughter, a giant pair of jeans, sad-eyed puppies ("So our pup, Fancy, could come out with us," says Heaps), sock monkeys, Sea-Monkeys, and, perhaps scariest of all, star-spangled Americans.

"The giant pants won us one hundred dollars at Vazaleen," says Heaps. Adds Phillips: "A lot of people opened the fly and reached inside . . . we weren't prepared for that."

Apparently wearing a mask can be even more of a thrill than expected.

—CONAN TOBIAS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY THOMAS BLANCHARD



*"We overheard people saying the Americans were the scariest costumes they had ever seen," says Heaps.
"There was lots of booing," Phillips says. "But people are supposed to say 'boo' on Halloween."*



"The Sea-Monkeys were super fun. We got drunk and ran around like maniacs hitting people with our tails," says Heaps. "People either got it right away or had no clue," adds Phillips. "I think we somehow ended up on some home-improvement television show that was shooting on Church Street."



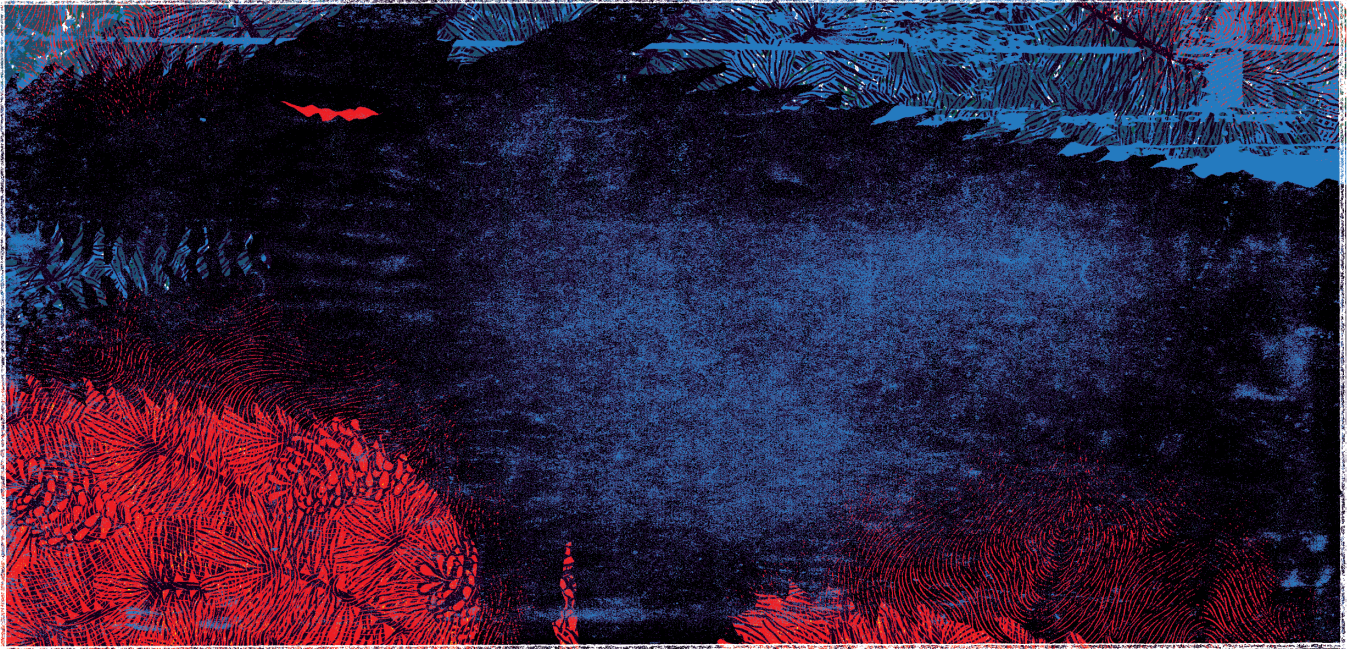
*"The sock monkeys were made from a hundred and twenty pairs of socks I bought at the Army & Navy, in Vancouver," says Heaps.
"They destroyed the {sewing machine} serger making them."*



"Someone told us we were really sick when they saw us on the street in this costume," says Phillips. "What were they thinking?"



*"These costumes probably garnered the most verbal abuse—someone on the streetcar threatened to kill us," says Phillips.
"A prostitute propositioned us, said not to worry, that Jesus would forgive."*



AND THEN THE WEREWOLF

BY JOEY COMEAU

In the park, we drink the wine right from the bottle and lie on our backs on the pine needles.

"You got any kids?" she says.

"No."

"I'm never having kids," she says.

My fingers are cold, but when I touch her, she smiles again. I slide my hands across her stomach, so smooth and warm. I think about life growing inside, under my hand. She puts her hands on my hips and stomach. Maybe she thinks the same thing. She slips a finger into the elastic of my pants, and I want her fingers inside me. I want her lips under my breasts, in that warm spot.

She sits up and pulls her sweater off. It pulls her undershirt up with it, showing me the very bottoms of her breasts. I reach out and take the shirt in my hands, and I hold it down as she pulls her sweater the rest of the way off.

"Thanks," she says. Underneath she's wearing a strapless shirt that just sits on her small breasts. I am still holding the bottom of the shirt, and she looks down at my hands. I haven't let go, and I don't want to. All I can think about is how I know she's not wearing a bra underneath. Her skin is smooth and pale, and the shirt

clings to her. The material is so perfect and thin.

"I don't want any kids either," I say. I feel stupid for saying it. She's looking at me like I've got my lines all out of order. Maybe I do.

I still haven't let go. I grip the sides of her shirt tighter, and I pull slowly downward. The elastic top catches on her nipples. I can see the soft pink skin right above them. I tug, and the shirt falls down around her stomach. She has such small nipples. I touch them with the tips of my fingers and thumb.

"Kids ruin everything," she says. We do have the dialogue all wrong. I should be saying something about these breasts.

She turns me around and takes a hold of the front of my blouse. She gets hold of each side, then tears it open, buttons popping everywhere, the breeze suddenly on my own breasts. She pulls my pants down, just to my knees, just enough so her hand can reach between my thighs, running up and down the inside, ignoring my cunt, pulling and pinching the skin just inches away, and then she shoves me forward.

"I ought to slap that lawyer," she says.

"Right in that smug face." I am on all fours with my face in the pine needles, and she has my underwear down now, too, and the breeze is cool on me. She is still ignoring my cunt. Gets down to kiss the backs of my knees. Breathes hot on me. Or is that her tongue? Then she is pushing one finger into me, slowly. She pulls it all the way out. I can feel the finger close to my pussy but it is not touching. My body knows it's there, but it isn't touching. Then she pushes it in again, a little further than before. Something underground is rumbling. I can hear cars honking nearby, on the street. "He said that the judge would like me better if I were a mother. I'd have a better chance."

"You should kill him instead," I say. "You could be a murderess." I love that word. Murderess.

"Not worth it," she says.

But it would be worth it. Of course it would. Hidden in the back of the library, I used to read about murderesses. The big book of murderesses. I read that book again and again. That was the first time I fell in love. Page 67. She killed her whole family in the middle of the day, one Sunday afternoon. In her

picture, she looked like she'd just finished eating.

My murderess.

This girl is no murderess, but she scowls. She has another finger at the mouth of my cunt now. Two fingers. She has a wet fingertip against my asshole, and then everything is hot. She is breathing on me, and I press my face harder against the pine needles.

I think of my own lawyer, of the condescending frown he must have given the judge when I didn't show. Her finger is inside my ass now. She breathes on me again. Oh, please touch me. No. Don't touch me yet. My lawyer frowns at the judge, and the judge frowns at my lawyer. The prosecutor frowns at everybody. The big church windows burst inward, and my murderess is standing above the courtroom, screaming. Guns are firing everywhere. Axes are flying. Tomahawks. She has her tongue on me, now. It is too soon. It is perfect. She's licking all the way from my clit to my asshole. She licks so slowly and so firmly. Back and forth. She spends her time with each.

The courtroom is on fire, everyone is standing on their chairs. There is music playing and the air smells like pine needles. I have pine needles in my mouth, I am moaning and biting the ground, driving my teeth and tongue into the dirt while she fingers and tongues me.

My mouth is full of dirt. There's a sound in the brush, and I look over, expecting a man out walking his dog in the park, hiding in the bushes and watching the free show. But it isn't a man. It's an animal. Exaggerated. Distorted. It's so big.

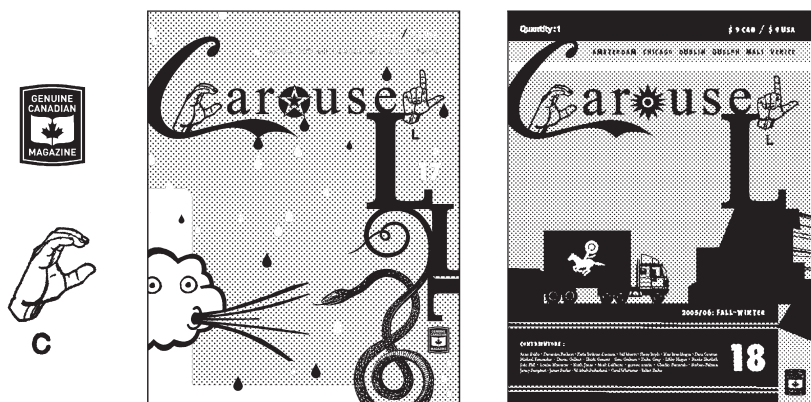
She doesn't see, her tongue still working between my legs. The creature goes straight for her, and there is a sound like crisp lettuce being torn. Then I am on my back, trying to get out of the way, blood on the backs of my thighs, her finger still inside me. ✧

Joey Comeau lives in Chinatown. He is the author of It's Too Late to Say I'm Sorry (Loose Teeth, 2007), Lockpick Pornography (Loose Teeth, 2005), and the novel Overqualified, to be published next year by ECW. He co-creates, with Emily Horne, the photo comic A Softer World, which appears weekly in the Guardian. The first Softer World collection, Truth and Beauty Bombs, was published by Loose Teeth in 2006.



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THE MACHINE IS PERFECT, THE ENGINEER IS NOBODY

BY BRETT ALEXANDER SAVORY

When she touches him, he flinches awake. Lying on a filthy mattress, he stares up at the low rock ceiling, listening to the sounds of machinery. Her breathing, close to his ear, blends with the mechanical sounds, nearly indistinguishable from one another.

"What do you think they're doing out there?" she asks.

He sighs. "We've been over this a thousand times. I don't know what—"

"Yes, yes, but what do you *think* they're doing?"

He turns on his side, away from her.

Outside their little cave, gears grind, engines roar deep and throaty. The stench of oil exhaust permeates everything.

A few moments later, she touches him again. He does not flinch this time, does not respond at all. In all the time they've been here, she has not asked this question, has not had the courage to do so. But now she does, now she feels she needs to: "Are we going to die in here?"

He turns back to her, cups her cheek with one hand, and kisses her gently. It is the first time they've kissed.

They fall asleep, their backs touching.

Four months ago, when they first arrived, they'd thought to escape through the small vent in the ceiling, but when they'd finally gotten the vent cover off and shined a lamp inside, they saw that the shaft went straight up as far as they could see. It probably only went up a dozen metres or so, but they had no way of getting a grip to climb up its metal sides, and it was small enough that either of them could've easily gotten stuck.

Piled in one corner of the cave was a supply of lamps and kerosene. In another corner they'd found canned food and bottles of water, stacked nearly to the ceiling. A toilet-sized hole was dug

into the floor, in a tiny cul-de-sac, as far away from the bed as possible. As with the vent, they couldn't see how far it extended. Within the first week, they'd run their hands over every inch of the walls, ceiling, and floor and could not discover how they'd gotten in. When they'd asked each other what they remembered about getting to this cave, neither could recall. One of them felt that the other was lying.

Several hours after kissing her, he gets up from the mattress, lights a kerosene lamp. Yellow-orange light dances on the walls until the flame settles. The vent in the ceiling flaps with the strength of the wind outside.

He looks into the corners of the room, these corners that used to be completely stuffed with food, water, and kerosene. Now only four bottles of water and six cans of food sit in one corner; two containers of kerosene are left. He goes back and sits on the edge of the mattress with a can of food and a bottle of water. He pulls his utility knife from his belt, cracks the can open, pulls up the edge of the lid, and scoops out the beans with his fingers, shovels them into his mouth. He hopes she doesn't wake up to see him eating a whole can to himself in one sitting.

When he finishes the beans, he neatly and quietly stacks the empty can in another corner of the cave. He sits back on the mattress, facing her, and sips his water. She stirs when he sits, knuckles her eyes, turns, and grins sleepily at him.

"What's for breakfast?" she asks.

He smiles briefly, but it quickly slips. "There're only five cans left."

She yawns, sits up, says, "You don't have to tell me. I know."

They are both so thin that their cheeks

are sunken and their vertebrae poke through their thin black shirts.

"Do you want to talk about the kiss?" he asks. Despite their situation, he still, absurdly, blushes.

"What is there to talk about?" she says. "It was nice. Isn't that enough?"

His eyes fall to the floor. "Well, what I mean is—"

She suddenly brushes past him, picks up a can of beans, holds it at arm's-length in his direction. "Can you please open this?"

He has had control of the utility knife the entire time they've been here. Now he pulls it from his belt, extends his arm toward her, palm open, upturned. She looks at him strangely for a moment, then gently takes the knife from his hand.

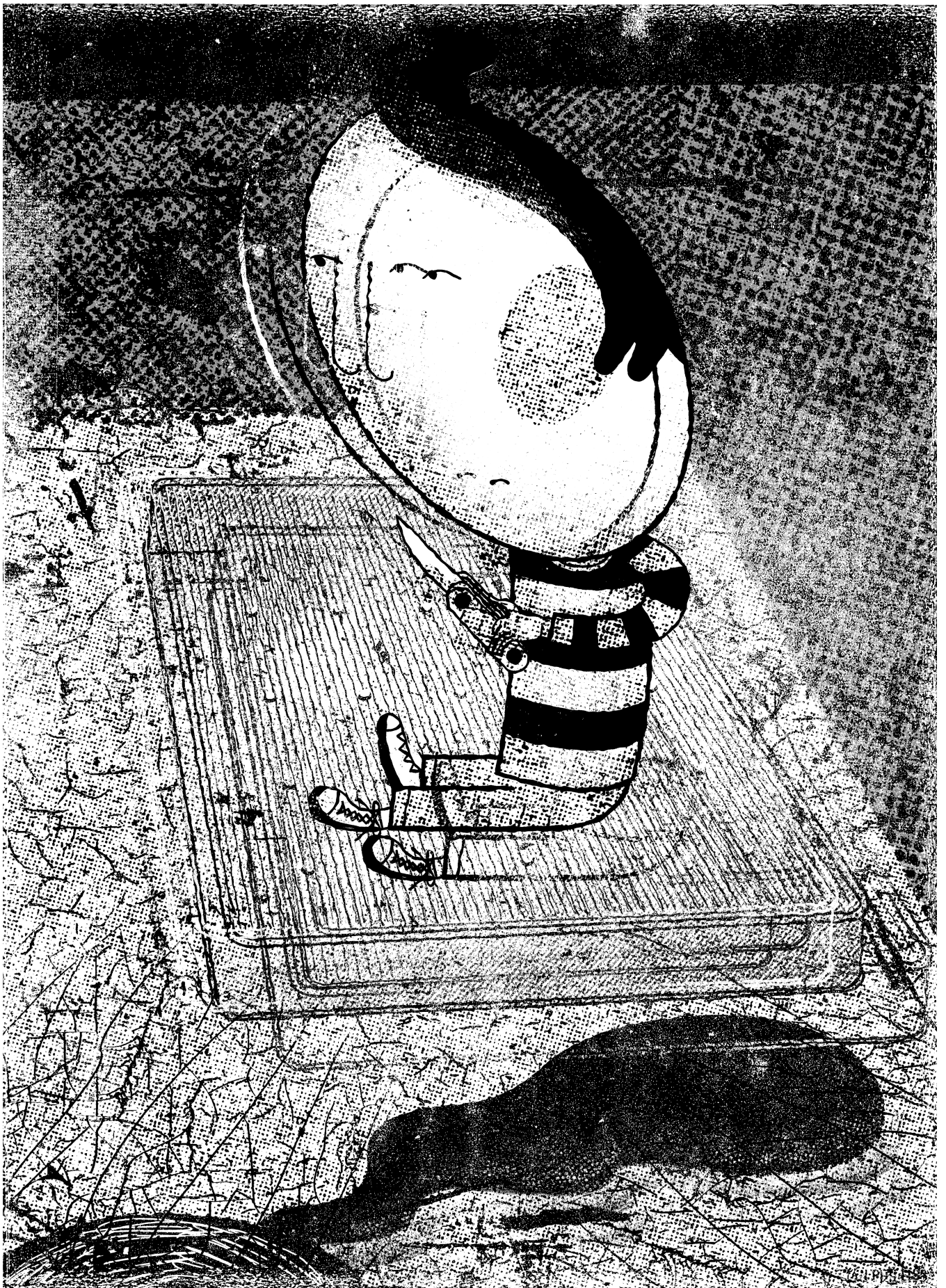
Later, they are lying on the mattress, trying to sleep, but both wide awake. The machines pound and they pound and they pound. Sometimes small bits of rock fall from the ceiling, sprinkling them, their mattress, the floor. It is one of the only things that makes this experience real to her. She says, "If that vent just goes straight up and out, why can't we ever see daylight when we look up it? It doesn't make any sense. I don't understand."

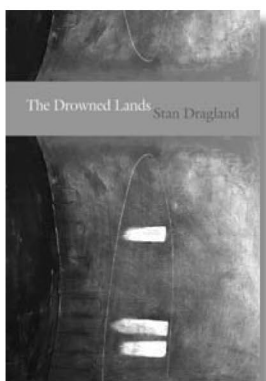
He waits a moment before he responds, fiddles with his watch—the watch that tells the time and date. The number twenty-two sits in the little window, on its way to twenty-three. Glancing at the remaining supplies, he knows they probably won't live to see much of next month.

"We don't ever see daylight when we look up the shaft because the daylight is gone," he says. "It's gone."

They sleep again, but this time their backs do not touch.

ILLUSTRATION BY IAN PHILLIPS





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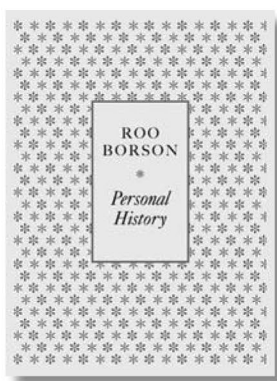
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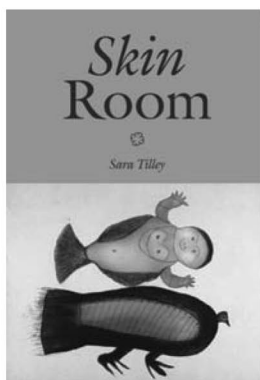
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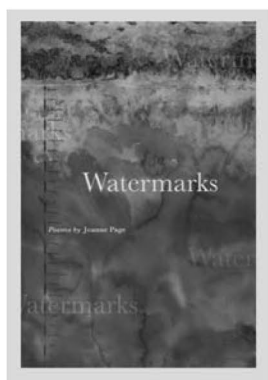
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A couple of days later, eating and drinking, trying to ration what little they have left. They sit on the bed, cross-legged, facing each other. The man thinks of it as their attempt at creating a civilized dinner-table situation. The woman simply sees it as heartbreaking and squalid.

"What did you mean when you said the daylight is gone?" the woman asks, licking beans from her fingertips.

"I mean the daylight is gone; it no longer exists," the man answers. He does not look at her when he speaks.

"So what happened? Does it have something to do with the machines outside? Or maybe something to do with what they're digging for?"

"I don't know. I really don't." He wipes bean sauce off the inside of the can with his index finger, angling it so he doesn't cut himself on the sharp edges.

"Sometimes I feel like you're not telling me something."

The man finally looks up from his can. "Like what?"

"I don't know." She reaches a hand out, touches his knee lightly. "You wouldn't hide anything from me, would you? We're in this together, aren't we? I want to think that I can trust you."

The man grins a little, touches the woman's hand with his own. He plays with her fingers like they've known each other for years, gently stroking the tops, curling down to slide under her palm. His familiarity simultaneously excites and disturbs the woman.

"Yes. Yes, we're in this together. I'm glad you think so. I really am. I know I haven't said it before, but I'm very happy you're here with me."

Something about the phrasing of this statement makes the woman pull her hand away from the man. "Happy you're here with me," she thinks. "What does that mean?"

Something like suspicion crawls across her scalp, settles deep at the base of her skull.

When they fall asleep, one of her hands is curled into a tight fist, nestled next to her heart; the other hand wraps around the fist, pulsating in time with the grind of the machines.

He is awakened by more pounding, but this time it's much closer and not nearly as deep. Not the bone-rattling pounding of the machines outside,

OLD SCHOOL

And I find myself driving through the neighbourhood,
the baseball diamond, the church, the smoke & gyp,
the place where I was born.

It occurs to me: monsters are as real
as the *New York Times*, as the headlines.
Revelation has more facts in it than a history textbook.
I should know. I know them both, equally.

Kids believe in magic.
They come right to your door.
Trick or treat. Oh, it would be a treat
to trick with you.

Zip ties changed the whole game.
No more keys to lose, no more rattly handcuffs.
Quick. Quiet. Nice and smooth.

Those Internet freaks, with their electric trophies?
Those onanistic losers that every parent's terrified of?

Amateurs. Rank fucking amateurs
who wouldn't know beauty
if they found it in their soup.

—PATRICK RAWLEY

but a machine inside—or at least very nearly inside.

He springs from the bed—a movement he wouldn't have thought himself capable of any more—and reaches down to his belt for his utility knife. "Fuck," he thinks. "I knew I shouldn't have—"

"Here," she says. "Calm down, it's right here." Awake now, too, she hands him the knife. He snatches it from her hand, flicks open the longest blade with his thumbnail.

The noise comes from beneath them. A drill. Louder with every passing moment. The floor shakes. He is very aware of the knife in his hand, his thumping heart, blood pounding through his system. She yells something at him from where she sits on the bed.

"What?!" he bellows back, the floor now buckling. The faint outline of a manhole-sized circle forms.

She takes a deep breath and shouts, "I said, why do you want to kill this person? Maybe he's here to rescue us. What's wrong with you? What's *wrong* with you?"

The tip of the enormous drill finally breaks through, scattering pieces of rock across the floor of the cave. The drill then recedes. Muttering voices as it's passed from the driller down to someone below him. The driller tentatively pops his head into the cave. He eyes the man and the woman in the room. He raises himself up a little more, bringing a gun into view.

For nearly a half-minute, no one says anything. Just heavy breathing, wild-eyed stares, and the sounds of the machinery growling outside the cave walls.

Then: "Nearly out of water, I see," the driller says. He's wearing a heavily scuffed hard hat and dark goggles. "Food, too."

The man with the knife just stares, still in defensive posture.

The woman speaks: "Are you here to rescue us? We've been here for so long."

The driller does not look at her.

"Sir," he says. "We have to get you out of here. They're getting closer. They've nearly drilled down to where they think it is. But they're getting

bizarre readings, indications of something no one expected to find this deep and—"

"I'm not leaving," the man with the knife says.

The woman's brow furrows. "What are you *talking* about? And what is *he* talking about?!" She moves her head in the direction of the driller. "What is this 'sir' shit?! What's going on here? What—"

"Dr. Farrid, listen," the driller says, cutting the woman off. He steps up out of the hole in the floor, kicks aside chunks of rock to get a firm foothold. "We don't have time for this. We need to leave *now*. They're getting close, and I know you wanted to see it, but—"

Farrid steps forward quickly, pushes the knife out in front of him, hisses through clenched teeth, "I'm not. *Fucking*. Leaving. I need to see this. I need to know what it is. And *do not* say my name again, understood?"

"Sir," the driller says, clearly intimidated, even though he holds the gun. "No disrespect intended, but these are orders from higher up—higher than both of us. We need to get you to a safe place, somewhere through the service tunnels, maybe to the first check post, where we can—"

Farrid steps forward quickly, slashes the knife across the driller's throat as hard and as fast as he can, then steps back. Blood bubbles out of the driller's neck, his eyes wide, throat gurgling. He drops his gun, slumps forward onto the floor. Twitches once, and is silent.

Farrid pockets the knife, picks up the driller's gun, points it at the woman's face. "Not one sound, do you hear me? Not one sound."

But the woman isn't thinking about speaking or screaming, or making any other sounds. Only one thought runs through her mind: "He kidnapped me. He kidnapped me. He kidnapped me."

Someone calls up from below: "Derek? Everything all right, brother? What's going on up there?"

Another few moments of silence as the man below waits for an answer that will never come. Then booted feet clanging on metal ladder steps, coming up. Farrid points the gun at the hole, but keeps his eyes trained on the woman.

The man, far from expecting to see his colleague's dead body, comes up fairly

**“THIS...
doesn’t try
to be hip,
it just is.
It never ceases
to make me think,
question things
and get angry.”**
—Sarah Polley



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quickly through the hole, glances at the woman and Farrid before casting his eyes down to see his fallen partner. Shocked, his mouth just flaps a couple of times, then his hand instinctively reaches for the gun on his belt.

“Don’t,” is all Farrid says, shaking his head once.

The woman, finally finding her voice, says, “Why did you do this to me? We don’t know each other. I don’t understand.” Her hands flutter like curious butterflies at her sides. “Why did you do it? What sort of sense does it make to—”

Farrid motions with his gun at the woman, speaks to the man: “Take her. Go.”

There is fury in the man’s eyes, a tightness around his lips. He wants to go for his gun. Farrid sees that he desperately wants to try. Farrid shakes his head again. “I will shoot you both before you even get your revolver halfway out of its holster, son. Just take the girl and leave me. I’m sorry about your friend. Really, I am. I did not mean for things to turn out like this.”

Farrid sees wetness on the man’s eyelids. The face hardens further. Farrid squeezes the trigger a little, sensing movement of the man’s hand toward his holster. Then the man’s eyes drop to his friend again; they remain there for a few moments before he lifts them to the woman. Frightened, confused. Her breath comes in hitches. The man holds his hand out to her. The butterflies at the ends of her arms settle a little. One of the woman’s hands comes up slowly, then, before her and the man’s fingers touch, she says quietly, “Are you here to rescue me? You’re here to save me, aren’t you?”

The man does not react, just keeps his hand out for her to take.

The woman takes the man’s hand, steps over the blood-soaked body of the driller, focuses her attention on Farrid once more. “Liar. Murderer,” she says.

Farrid nods.

The woman’s lip trembles, but she does not cry.

Outside, the machines seem closer, the earth shaking more than at any other time since he’s been here. Concerned voices drift down the airshaft. Farrid cannot make out the words, only the tone. Curiosity. Fear.

The man steps out of the hole, moves

aside, helps the woman find the top rung of the ladder several feet down. Once she’s safely on her way, the man lowers himself to the top rung, locks eyes with Farrid, says, “I’m taking the body.”

Farrid nods again.

The man pulls his friend’s legs toward him, manoeuvres them so they’re aligned with his back, rests the torso on his shoulder in a fireman’s lift. He descends slowly with the body, making sure not to bump the head on anything.

Farrid lowers the gun, stares at the red streak of blood leading to the hole, the congealing pool a few feet away, the flecks spattered across the jumbled rocks.

“Liar. Murderer,” he thinks, and knows the truth of it, but is unable to dig from himself anything resembling remorse.

Farrid picks his way through the rocks to the stained mattress, sits down softly. For a brief moment, he imagines the gun in his mouth, the knife sliding along his wrists. He feels this is what he should be thinking about, but he is not. He is thinking only of what the machines have found. What he has waited his whole life to see.

The ground suddenly shakes like a bomb has gone off. The kerosene lamp flickers out. Darkness wraps him in a stifling blanket. He cannot breathe, but he does not want to breathe; he wants only to see it, hear it, feel it near him. If he can just have a taste of its presence, this will all have been worth it.

The machines outside suddenly stop, every one of them powering down. The silence is enormous, as if all life on the planet has suddenly been vacuumed out into space. It fills Farrid’s ears, his heart, his mind. Batters at his skull to get out. Then a massive throbbing sound, of blood pumping through gigantic veins.

“They found it,” he thinks. “They found it, and it’s alive.”

He feels it awaken, senses its life in his mind, through his entire body. It cries out, once—a deep, lonely, mournful sound. It does not want to be here. It does not belong.

Farrid is the only one who hears it. ✎

Brett Alexander Savory lives in York. He is the Bram Stoker Award-winning editor of ChiZine, the publisher of ChiZine Publications, and a senior editor at Scholastic Canada. He has published two novels and nearly fifty short stories, and writes for Rue Morgue magazine.

THE BOOKS

Taddle Creek Recommends.

• *The Show That Smells*, by Derek McCormack (ECW, 2008; \$19.95). What better way to kick off the Halloween installment of this column than with a scary new book by Derek McCormack, this issue's guest editor. Derek has out-gayed himself again with this companion volume to 2003's *The Haunted Hillbilly*. The gussied-up cowboys and vampires so prevalent in that book are this time joined by images of Coco Chanel, *Vogue* magazine, and more fashion-world jargon than you can shake a runway at. The scariest thing about Derek's work is that it isn't read by every last person—living, dead, or undead alike. It's been a pleasure, Derek. Associate editor Daley says he can't wait to work on a Christmas-themed issue with you.

The Killing Circle, by Andrew Pyper (Doubleday, 2008; \$29.95). Another excellent book for the Halloween season. Andrew has written a page-turner of a thriller, about a serial killer who appears to be targeting the members of an amateur writing circle. *Taddle Creek* can't think of a better place to scout for murder victims. As some advance reviews for this book have pointed out, Andrew doesn't always get the respect he deserves, straddling genres and taking brave chances with plot. Well, count *Taddle Creek* as a fan. Its respect for Andrew's work oozes like worms from a rotting grave.

• *I.V. Lounge Nights*, edited by Alex Boyd and Myna Wallin (Tightrope, 2008; \$21.95). (Hmm. Not much of a Halloween angle here except for having "night" in the title, and that's when Halloween takes place. Good enough.) For *Taddle Creek's* money, the I.V. Lounge Reading Series was far and away the best reading series in town during its ten years of existence. Unfortunately, since this book was published, the owner of the I.V. Lounge has closed the bar, and the reading series is no more. But how many other series had such longevity and spawned not just one, but now two anthologies? The end of the I.V. Lounge Reading Series is a major loss to the Toronto literary scene, and *Taddle Creek*

tips its hat to the host Alex Boyd and his predecessor, Paul Vermeersch, the series' founder, who gave everyone a reason to go out on Friday night.

The Red Element, by Catherine Graham (Insomniac, 2008; \$11.95). *Taddle Creek* was hoping, given its title, that this was a book about blood. It's not, but it's still a lovely collection, with a bit of a focus on childhood, and contains a poem called "His Birthday Falls on Halloween," so Catherine gets a pass.

Dead Cars in Managua, by Stuart Ross (DC Books, 2008; \$16.95). Ah . . . another book about death, even if it's just cars. This book feels a bit different from most of Stu's books. *Taddle Creek* hates to say it has a more serious tone, because not all of Stuart's work is funny by any means. But something about this collection is even more serious, more grave than his previous serious work. The title section's inspiration—a series of trips to Nicaragua, both during and post Sandinista rule—certainly doesn't hurt. It's nice to see Stu continuing to search for fresh subject matter this far into his career.

• *Revolver*, by Kevin Connolly (Anansi, 2008; \$18.95). (Revolvers? Very scary.) What's the deal with Mclusky? Kevin and his better half, the author Gil Adamson, both have mentioned the band in recent work, including in this excellent new collection of poems. What's *Taddle Creek* missing out on here? Anyone?

• *Troubled*, by R. M. Vaughan (Coach House, 2008; \$16.95). What *Troubled* lacks in Halloween scariness, it more than makes up for in real world scarieness. This tale of a psychiatrist-patient relationship gone horribly wrong is a freakin' nightmare!

• *What If Red Ran Out*, by Katia Grubisic (Goose Lane, 2008; \$17.95). Another book not about blood . . . But that's O.K., because *Taddle Creek* enjoyed the launch of this book simply to death. It was held in the Hart House Library,

minutes from Taddle Creek World Headquarters, so the magazine did not have far to go. Plus, the room has exactly the kind of old-school Agatha Christie-style stuffiness *Taddle Creek* so loves for a book launch. The readings began fairly promptly, and Ms. Grubisic was in fine form, as was her co-launcher, Naomi Lewis. Speeches were at a minimum, and *Taddle Creek* was home within an hour, door to door. Best. Launch. Ever.

Taking the Stairs, by John Stiles (Nightwood, 2008; \$21.95). *Taddle Creek* almost thought it wasn't going to be able to make a cheesy Halloween joke about the title of this one, but then it realized taking the stairs is exactly what all the slutty soon-to-be-dead girls do in slasher movies! Perfect. Following two collections of poetry, *Taking the Stairs* is Stiles' first novel since 2001's *The Insolent Boy*, and it's a very interesting, seemingly personal work. It's nice to have John back on the page, even if he personally remains a continent away.

ALBUMS

An Orphan's Song: Ben Walker Sings Stuart Ross (Peak/Proper Tales, 2008; \$15). Ben Walker really must love Stuart Ross's work because, unless you're Leonard Cohen, releasing a CD of poetry set to music is a commercially risky venture, to say the least. But it's obvious there's much love in this collection of tunes appropriated (with a bit of editing) from four of Stu's small-press poetry collections, with the U.K.-based Walker lending not only vocals but also acting as a one-man band. Stuart often seems perplexed when people say they find some of his surreal poetry funny. Well, funny a lot of it is, and many of the poems are even funnier when set to music. "Ladies and Gentlemen, Mr. Ron Padgett" is pure genius. No. 1 with a silver bullet.

Taddle Creek does not publish book reviews. However, the above books were recently written by contributors to the magazine and are, thus, highly recommended. (• Books containing work originally published in Taddle Creek.)

PEOPLE AROUND HERE DAVE LAPP

Y'KNOW HOW WE'VE ALL HEARD OF RAZOR BLADES, OR PINS OR SOME NASTY OBJECT PLACED IN SOME KID'S HALLOWEEN CANDY?...



THE KID CAME BY IT HONESTLY I GUESS ... HIS FATHER WAS A PRINCIPAL ... HE WAS ONLY TRYING TO SHOW GOOD MANNERS.

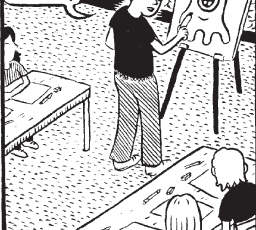
YOU HAVE TO SAY PLEASE IF YOU BORROW SOMETHING.



BUT THE POLITENESS THING REALLY ANNOYED SOME OF THE CAMPERS.

WELL, A FEW YEARS AGO I WAS WORKING AT THE ART GALLERY OF ONTARIO'S SUMMER CAMP...

IF YOU DRAW THE EYES LIKE THIS, YOU CAN MAKE ANYTHING LOOK CUTE, EVEN THIS BLOB!



ANOTHER PROBLEM WAS A BOY WHO WAS TOO YOUNG FOR MY ELEVEN TO THIRTEEN YEAR OLD CLASS.

AW, DO I HAVE TO?

THIS IS BORING.



MIKE WAS EIGHT OR NINE, STUCK WITH HIS OLDER SISTER. THE KID SHOULD'VE BEEN IN A SPORTS CAMP.

THE CAMP IS FROM 9:00 TO 4:00, MONDAY TO FRIDAY FOR TWO WEEKS. IN THAT TIME THERE CAN BE ALL SORTS OF PROBLEMS.

LISTEN TO GUYS! THERE IS NO BULLYING IN MY CLASS! I DON'T KNOW WHAT GOES ON DURING LUNCH, BUT DON'T BRING IT IN HERE! GOT IT?!



NOW, THERE'S NO WAY I CONDONE BULLYING, BUT THE KID THEY WERE PICKING ON DID GET KIND OF IRRITATING.

HEY PETER, PASS ME YOUR ERASER... YOU DIDN'T SAY THE MAGIC WORD.

PLEASE PASS ME YOUR ERASER.

OKAY.



TRY DRAWING IT LIKE -

HUH?

YES PETER?

YOU DIDN'T SAY THE OTHER MAGIC WORDS...

SIGN: THANK YOU.

YOU'RE WELCOME.



WHILE I WAS CHECKING ARTWORK, MIKE CAME UP WITH A PACKAGE OF CHERRY NIBS* AND OFFERED SOME TO PETER.

PETER, WOULD YOU LIKE SOME NIBS?

OH YES PLEASE!



*CANDY LIKE LICORICE BUT SOLID

AWWW, HE'S SHARING...



THAT'S SO NICE...



...BUT WAIT...



...WAIT...



INSIDE HIS MOUTH



... AMID THE CHEWED NIBS



... A GLINT OF SILVER...



... AN OPEN STAPLE!



PETER! SPIT THAT OUT RIGHT NOW!



OH, OH, BUT THAT'S A STAPLE... IF, IF I'D HAVE SWALLOWED IT...

YOU DIDN'T SWALLOW ANYTHING DID YOU?

N-NO, SNIFF, SNIFF, B-BUT IF I HAD...



MIKE! YOU - YOU GET OUT OF HERE!

BUT I DIDN'T...

IN THE HALLWAY NOW!!



I JUST WANTED THE KID AWAY FROM ME AND DEAL WITH HIM SEPARATELY.

ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE OK?

YES THANK YOU, BUT I'M NOT SURE WHAT MY DAD WILL HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THIS...



I WENT OUT TO TALK TO MIKE, WHO WAS SITTING ON THE FLOOR CRYING HIS EYES OUT...

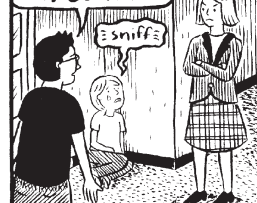
I DIDN'T DO IT! I DIDN'T DO IT! IT'S AN ACCIDENT!



... AND WHO SHOULD COME WALKING DOWN THE HALLWAY?...

... HIS MOTHER!

MADAM, YOUR SON GAVE ANOTHER BOY ONE OF HIS CANDIES AND IT HAD A STAPLE IN IT.



SHE ROLLED HER EYES AND SAID "I'LL HANDLE IT", AND "DIDN'T MIKE TELL YOU WE'RE LEAVING EARLY?"

AFTER THEY LEFT, I TALKED TO THE CLASS ABOUT WHAT HAD HAPPENED...

IF HE'D SWALLOWED THAT, PETER WOULD'VE HAD TO GO TO THE HOSPITAL.

WE TOLD THE KID NOT TO...

YAH, HE SAID "DON'T BUG ME."



SO... THE BIG QUESTION IS: DID HE DO IT ON PURPOSE, OR WAS IT AN ACCIDENT?...



... BUT REALLY, WHO STAPLES THEIR CANDY AND PUTS IT BACK IN THE BAG?!

STEAM WHISTLE

PILSNER



**DO ONE THING
REALLY, REALLY WELL.**

