

TADDLE CREEK

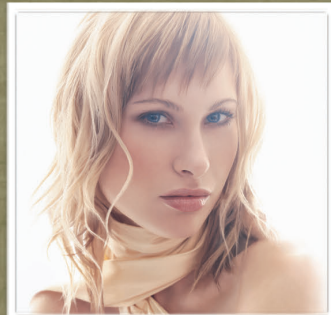
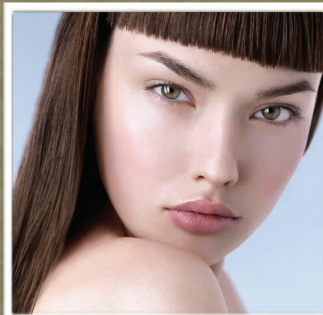
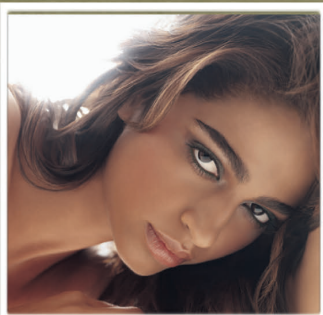


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VOL. XIII, NO. 1, WHOLE NO. 23

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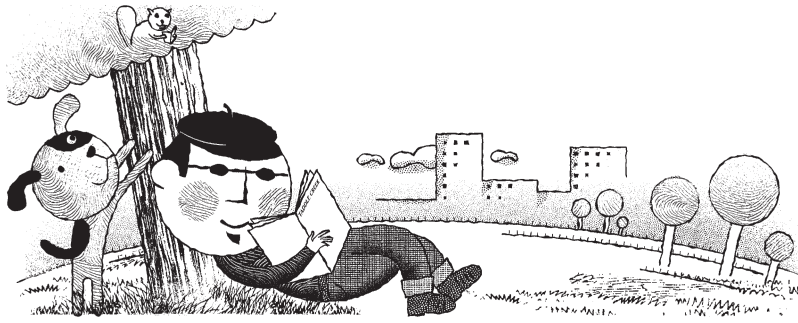
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THE CONTRIBUTORS

Jason Kieffer ("Why, Zanta? Why?," p. 12) lives in Cabbagetown. His autobiographical comic, *Kieffer*, was nominated for a Doug Wright Award in 2008 and 2009. His upcoming book, *The Rabble of Downtown Toronto*, is due soon.

Lindsay Zier-Vogel ("Alice Vichenroff," p. 21) lives in Palmerston. She is a writer, choreographer, and arts educator, and recently completed a novel. She is also the founding editor of Puddle Press, an independent book-arts press.

Evie Christie ("Handful," p. 23) lives in the Church-Wellesley Village. She is the author of the poetry collection *Gutted* (ECW, 2005), and her debut novella, *The Bourgeois Empire*, will be published in fall, 2010.

Matthew Blackett ("Down in the Alley," p. 28) is the founder and publisher of *Spacing* magazine. Walking the alleys of Toronto was the most critical step in turning him into a true urbanite.

Dani Couture ("Pumpkin Patch," p. 37) lives in the Danforth area. She is the author of *Good Meat* (Pedlar, 2006), and, in 2008, her work appeared on subway station screens across Toronto as part of Nuit Blanche. Her next collection is forthcoming from Pedlar.

Sholem Krishtalka ("The Harsh Truth of the Camera Eye," p. 38) lives in Beaconsfield. He is a writer and a painter who made his New York debut with a solo show at Jack the Pelican Presents this spring, and recently launched a specially commissioned folio of prints with *ARTinvestor* magazine, based in Munich, Germany.

Chris Chambers ("Visiting Ours," p. 47) lives in Niagara. Regular *Taddle Creek* readers have by now read much of his forthcoming poetry manuscript.

Rose Hunter ("Procyon lotor," p. 49) is a former resident of Australia and Toronto, and currently resides in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. Her work has appeared in *Word Riot*, *Juked*, *Storyglossia*, and the *Barcelona Review*. She is also the editor of the online poetry journal *YB*.

Matthew Daley (the guest illustrator) lives in Liberty Village. His work has appeared in *Broken Pencil*, *Exclaim!*, *Spacing*, *Cottage Life*, and the *Wall Street Journal*. His Web comic, *Mr. Monitor*, appears semi-regularly in *Broken Pencil* and on brokenpencil.com.

Kasey Coholan (the protégé) recently discovered that she lives in Niagara. She has interned at the *Walrus*, and is working on her first novel about a place that has no addresses.

Jennifer Marston (the protégé) lives in Sussex-Ulster. She is a recovering lawyer and the former editor-in-chief of two legal periodicals. She now works as a freelance writer and dabbles in the book arts.

Maurice Vellekoop (The Cover) lives on Ward's Island. He has illustrated for major book publishers, magazines, and advertising in North America, Europe, and Asia for more than twenty years. His books include *Vellevision* (Drawn & Quarterly, 1997), *Maurice Vellekoop's ABC Book* (Gates of Heck, 1998), *A Nut at the Opera* (Drawn & Quarterly, 2006), and *Pin-ups* (Green Candy, 2008).

TADDLE CREEK

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THE COPY EDITOR

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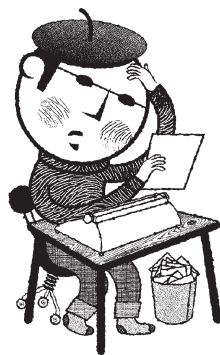
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T H E M A I L

Komic Kudos

I just wanted to say I really enjoyed the comic issue (Summer Number, 2009). You seriously might want to consider becoming a publisher of comics. You did a brilliant job with this issue; the production and design were gorgeous. Toronto really could use a sympathetic and intelligent comic publisher.

I especially loved "Trinity," by Michael Cho, and "Mouse Girl," by Dave Lapp. The colour work on the latter was pretty amazing. I haven't seen anything quite like it. Was it painted on acetate or Mylar?

WALTER DICKINSON
Toronto

Dave's story was hand-painted onto acetate, Walter, as is his comic in this issue.

By the Book

I very much enjoyed your introduction to the summer, 2008, issue, "Proper Capitalization." It is indeed disheartening for a grammarian to watch the rules slowly disintegrate, non-words appear in the dictionary, and text-message short forms seep into everything.

I will be taking a page out of your book and lobbying to have "manhattan" (the cocktail) appear as "Manhattan" in the issue of *Descant* I'm editing currently. Nice to know you're there, *Taddle Creek*. Keep it up!

REBECCA PAYNE
Toronto

The magazine just hopes whoever was responsible for Descant's dog-themed issue had as much luck with "Yorkshire terrier" and "German shepherd."

Pack Your Bags

June 20, 2009

I've long been interested in getting published by *Taddle Creek*, but not bad enough to move to Toronto to do it. I'm taking advantage of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to ask you to please consider the attached short story for your upcoming issue.

NELSON L. ESHLEMAN
Calgary

July 21, 2009

Thanks very much for your submission, Nelson. Unfortunately, it's just not what the magazine is looking for right now. Thanks for your interest.

TADDLE CREEK

July 21, 2009

Blow me, Toronto.

NELSON L. ESHLEMAN
Calgary

Thanks for writing, Nelson. It reminds Taddle Creek to tell its readers that the next issue, to be published in the summer of 2010, will be a special Out-of-Towner issue, featuring work by writers from across Canada and beyond. The magazine hopes to do a bit of a tour as well, especially now that it knows it has a friend in Calgary.

Letters should include the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number for confirmation purposes. The magazine reserves the right to mock any nasty or especially silly letters. Due to the volume of mail received, Taddle Creek should have no problem responding to all letters in a timely fashion.

EVENT



photo by Mark Mushnet

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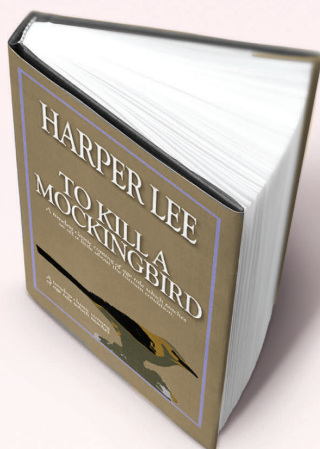


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T H E E P H E M E R A

Producing Protégés

To say that small magazines live in a bubble, unaffected by poor economic conditions such as the ones that have taken their toll on many larger, more commercial magazines over the past year, would be a bit of an exaggeration. Generally, though, small magazines make such little money from things such as advertising that they aren't affected in the same way bigger magazines are when times get tough, often relying instead on government arts grants to pay the bills.

But while it often paints itself as something of an outsider, *Taddle Creek* feels a strong camaraderie with its fellow magazines, and watching many of its friends throughout the industry suffer over the past year has been unpleasant, to say the least. Good magazines folded, talented people lost their jobs, and a number of internship programs were cancelled, giving the industry leaders of tomorrow a significantly smaller number of entry points into the publishing world.

Taddle Creek has never had an internship program because, frankly, given its low frequency, there's not a lot for an intern to do around here. Oh, the magazine could have someone sit around the office and praise every move it made, writing anonymous fan letters to Derek McCormack and making cherry Cokes and chocolate malts for the staff, but recent events got *Taddle Creek* thinking that maybe it could, and should, do more.

Earlier this year, the magazine decided to create a protégé program, through which young would-be magazine makers could learn from industry professionals. *Taddle Creek* asked nearly two dozen friends, representing more than ten pub-

lications, a few presses and publishers, and a handful of other organizations, if they'd each be willing to spend at least an hour with a *Taddle Creek* protégé, and try to give them a rudimentary understanding of their area of expertise—from editorial to art to production to circulation to advertising. It was no short order, but every single person *Taddle Creek* asked said yes. And so, out went the call for the first ever Taddle Creek Protégé Internmentship. The magazine was not looking for the most impressive résumé or the hugest batch of clippings, but rather a genuine show of enthusiasm for magazines (not just literary) and all they had to offer, plus at least a passing interest in bowling and an ability to drink.

Dozens applied, a surprising number of whom were qualified. (An even more surprising number claimed that their bowling skills increased significantly the more alcohol they consumed.) *Taddle Creek* met some lovely people during the interview process and, in the end, couldn't pick just one protégé, so it picked two: Kasey Coholan, a political science and peace studies graduate with a master of globalization from McMaster who interned at the *Walrus* earlier this year, and fell in love with magazines as a result; and Jennifer Marston, a lawyer who decided recently that family law wasn't litigious enough and opted for a life in the crime-filled world of publishing.

During the initial six-month-intensive portion of their internmentship, Jen and Kasey learned how to pitch a story, to fact-check, the difference between copyediting and proofreading, to read a bar code, what those little numbers mean on insert cards, and so much more. They

were also able to watch and take part in the process of putting together this issue, and along the way even managed to prevent Nathaniel G. Moore from burning down the backyard of the Jet Fuel at the summer launch. Both protégés have expressed interest in hanging around for another six months (the internmentship is *very* part-time) to put some of what they've learned to use on the next issue, and maybe even learn a little more while they're at it. They'll leave *Taddle Creek* in June with a more rounded understanding of the magazine industry than the average journalism graduate, a small honorarium, a lovely selection of gifts (some courtesy of the program's sponsors, Steam Whistle Brewing and Magazines Canada), a bunch of leftover business cards (especially Kasey, who seems hesitant to hand them out), and the satisfaction of a job well done. Don't take *Taddle Creek's* word for it: follow their adventures at www.taddlecreekmag.com/weblogs.

The Taddle Creek Protégé Internmentship has been so rewarding for the magazine that it's going to try it again next year. Would-be protégés should keep an eye on www.taddlecreekmag.com/internship in early 2010 to find out more about how and when to apply. Start practising your bowling now.

Sink-or-Swim Time

About those arts grants mentioned above, the ones that allow small magazines to weather economic storms. Well, earlier this year, Canadian Heritage Minister James Moore decided small magazines should sink or swim, and proposed killing a grant that helped so many arts magazines grow and, in

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some cases, stay afloat. He also proposed serious limitations on which magazines would be able to apply for Heritage funding in the future, including a long-standing postal subsidy, without which the cost of mailing periodicals becomes incredibly prohibitive.

Taddle Creek certainly feels there's a time and a place for sink-or-swim mentality, but the fact is, in a country with the immense size and small population of Canada, publishing an arts magazine of decent quality is nearly impossible without grants. So the question is: Do arts magazines serve any purpose? Should the federal government support a sector its citizens can't or won't sustain on their own, or are only mainstream commercial arts desirable?

As a magazine about to lose about forty per cent of its revenue, *Taddle Creek* obviously is biased in this argument. But if this is a subject of interest to you, the magazine encourages you to read up on it and, if so moved, drop a line to Minister Moore and tell him what you think of him, be it good or bad. It doesn't cost anything to mail him a letter (must be nice!). And if so moved even further, consider sending *Taddle Creek* twelve dollars for a two-year subscription—the price is probably going to have to go way, way up soon.

Goodbye Isn't Farewell

Taddle Creek is sad to report that the Halloween, 2008, issue officially was the last for its in-house illustrator, Ian Phillips. Ian has been with the magazine since its second issue, published in 1998, and it's safe to say that, through his work, he has been the public face of *Taddle Creek*. Along with his work in these pages, Ian has illustrated the magazine's Web site, its merchandise, its in-house documents, and a very successful direct-mail campaign. Ian's a busy guy these days, with illustration work and book design projects a-plenty, and he tells *Taddle Creek* that, after ten-plus years, it's time to move on. *Taddle Creek* can not stress enough how important Ian has been to its look, its feel, and its success. Thankfully, Ian will continue to draw Tad, the magazine's beatnik mascot, and *Taddle Creek* hopes to get him to draw a cover or two in the future as well. Ian is going out on a high note, with a co-nomination at this year's National Magazine Awards, in the Words and Pictures cate-

gory—alongside Thomas Blanchard, Kevin Connolly, Grant Heaps, and Conan Tobias—for “Night of the Sewist,” a photo spread of Halloween costumes designed by Ian and Grant. Best of luck, Ian. *Taddle Creek* is sorry to see you go.

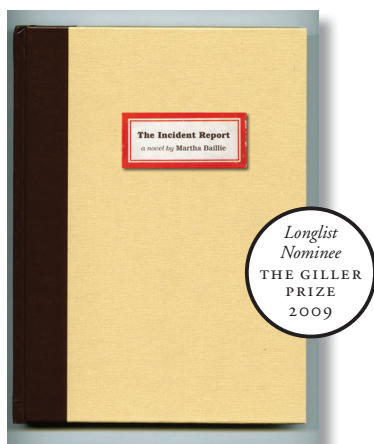
With this issue, *Taddle Creek* is also saying goodbye to Mr. Andrew Daley, the magazine's associate editor. Andrew has been with *Taddle Creek* since Issue No. 1, when the magazine published his first short story. Andrew filled in as a guest editor for two issues in 2003, when *Taddle Creek* was between associates, and the magazine liked him so much it asked him to stay officially. Andrew has the keen ability to spot a good story in the submission pile, and also to spot a potentially good story and offer up just the right editorial suggestions to make it great. He's also a damn fine salesman and bowler. The magazine has seen a lot of growth and success during Andrew's tenure, and *Taddle Creek* would be remiss not to give him some of the credit for that. Andrew's a great guy to have around, and he'll be missed. He assures *Taddle Creek* he is not leaving altogether, just reverting to his original role of “contributor.” So readers can expect to see his byline again in the future . . . provided his work makes it past his eventual successor.

Andrew's position likely will be filled by a series of guest editors for the time being, while the job of illustrator will be shared by a rotating trio of artists, beginning this issue with Matthew Daley, who, in the nicest of coincidences, happens to be Andrew's long-lost cousin.

More Changes Aboard

Changes surrounding staff, illustrations, and funding aren't all that's new with *Taddle Creek*. Welcome to Westcan, the magazine's new printer. Westcan printed the summer comic issue and did such a great job and was so wonderful to work with the magazine decided to make the move permanent. Also, by the time this issue sees print, *Taddle Creek* should also be the . . . “proud” is too strong a word . . . the owner of a Facebook page, located at www.facebook.com/taddlecreek. For the record, the magazine remains anti-Facebook, but no one seems to open E-mail any more, and *Taddle Creek* really likes to see people show up at its parties.

—TADDLE CREEK

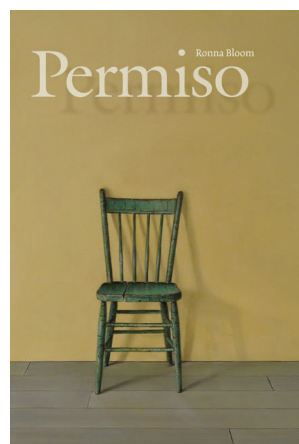


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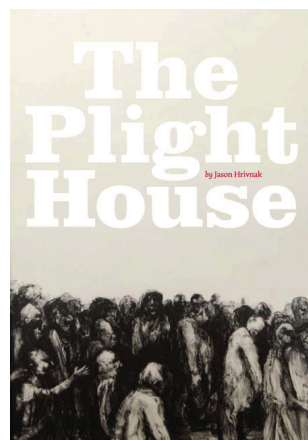
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—LYNN CROSBIE



Corey Was a Danger Cat

BY HEATHER HOGAN

Corey was a Danger Cat. He was six guns wide and fit to kill. He had two pistols and a bleeding rosebud etched in Magic Marker on the flesh of his forearm. It was the mark of a hero wounded by love, he said. But he'd never tell about it.

"What's done is done," he'd say, and he'd shield his eyes from an imaginary sun as though he was looking for something. He'd seen that move on TV. It had made his heart feel hollow with understanding.

In the confines of his helmet, Corey's ears throbbed with the racket of the gravel grinding and popping under his hollow plastic wheels. He no longer fit his Big Wheel properly, but it didn't matter, he was a Renaissance man. With shields up and rockets flaring, he pedalled flat out, knees battering the chin guard of his helmet, his elbows sticking out and back like shark fins. Like switchblades. No—like samurai swords.

His hollow wheels amplified the noise as he drove along the concrete slabs of the sidewalk—th-THUD, th-THUD, th-THUD—like jungle drums, or like the music that signals the approach of the hero when the bad guy least expects him. The noise had an effect on Corey that was simultaneously hypnotic and stimulating. His eyes grew wide and unblinking as he became Corey the Danger Cat. He was ready, and it was time.

He sped north on Glenmore Avenue, toward the first test in his Saturday morning Trilogy of Evils. At 565 Glenmore, Danger Cat slammed on his brakes and skidded sideways in a wide, well-practised arc across the driveway of Chantelle Peters, who sat on her front porch with Erin and Marnie. Marnie who wasn't pretty, but who once let Corey touch her boobs behind the Dumpster out back of Becker's convenience. They were all sucking Tab colas through straws they'd made from cherry

Twizzlers with the ends chewed off. They did their best not to look up at him, but their giggles betrayed them.

Danger Cat threw back his head and screamed, "Let freedom reign! Let freedom REIGN!"

Then, without looking back to see the admiration in Chantelle Peters' eyes, Danger Cat pumped his fat legs as fast as he could and tore a strip up Parklawn Boulevard, toward test No. 2.

At the corner of Parklawn and Franklin, Danger Cat executed a one-eighty at the precise point Ru-Ru, the Bromowitz's schnauzer, who'd come barrelling down the driveway at the sound of Danger Cat's approach, was abruptly choked back in mid-air by the chain that kept her anchored to the porch. Poised like a panther surrounded by spear-wielding jungle midgets, Danger Cat waited. His tongue darted up to indulge in the slippery salt that ran from his nose holes. His eyes shot from the Bromowitz's screen door to their rose bushes, in which Mrs. Bromowitz was known to lurk, and back to Ru-Ru, who was going ballistic a mere three inches from Danger Cat's tender but indifferent calf. Ru-Ru was mental, but Danger Cat was a coiled king cobra, cool and slick. In the treetops, Vikings wet their pants in fear, like fat babies who didn't know anything about being a man. Corey was a man. Corey was a Danger Cat.

"Any minute now," thought Danger Cat. "Any . . . freakin' . . . minute."

"Corey Jackson!" Mrs. Bromowitz and her wooden spoon lurched suddenly toward the screen door from the darkened bowels of her lair.

"I'm gonna call your mother! I mean it, Corey! I'm gonna call—"

Danger Cat unleashed the voice of a thousand hounds of hell and shrieked, "Let freedom reign, Mrs. Bromowitz!"

"Ru-Ru, come!" Mrs. Bromowitz

tugged at Ru-Ru's chain, but Ru-Ru was busy drowning Danger Cat's message in frantic braying.

"Let freedom reign!"

And then he was off, down Parklawn, down Glenmore, obliterating anthill after anthill after anthill, and not even caring. Past the porch where the girls were no longer sitting, but he hardly even noticed—because one day Danger Cat would touch the breast of every girl, and fill up every anthill with water till crunchy corpses littered the earth like sprinkles on a doughnut.

Danger Cat built up a brain-bending amount of speed travelling south on Glenmore, until the sidewalk cracks seemed to thump against his tires in unison with the pounding of his knees against his helmet. Dead ahead, in Glenmore Square, he spied the third and most volatile test in this, the Trilogy of Evils. Cornchips.

Cornchips sat unaware of his fate with his feet soaking in Glenmore's memorial fountain, talking to himself and picking gnats out of his long yellow beard. The heat in Danger Cat's helmet was like a supernova. A lesser man might have chosen to wait until after midday had passed, or might even have called off the whole thing, but not Danger Cat. He narrowed his eyes and forged ahead, nerves jangling and guns blazing.

When Danger Cat was only a couple of feet away from the fountain, Cornchips turned to face him, smiled his hideously toothless smile, and cooed, "Here, kitty, kitty, kitty!" Then he doubled over with laughter.

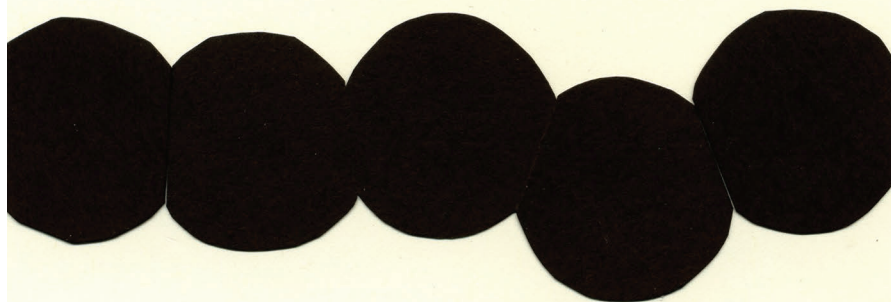
"Kitty cat," he gasped. "C'mere, kitty, kitty!"

Disarmed, but determined, Corey ignored him and drove his Big Wheel in tight circles around the fountain until the juice in his head began to swirl. He drove into a flock of pigeons and braked



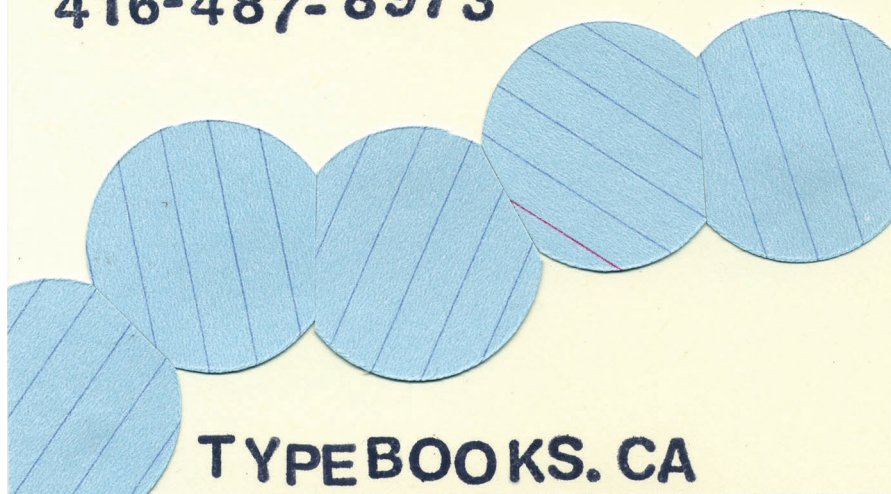
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to watch them scatter in a whirling circle above his head.

"That dog get you yet, puss-puss?" Cornchips asked.

"It's *Danger Cat*," Corey said over his shoulder.

It was cool in the shade by the fountain. He turned back around in his seat and nudged his Big Wheel forward until his front wheel made contact with a fresh puddle of pigeon poop. Then he slowly reversed until he could see the splotch on his tire. Corey smiled at it. He turned his front wheel slightly to the left and inched forward again, testing his poop stamp on a clean bit of pavement. It worked. Corey eyed the rest of the concrete around the fountain and wondered how much he could accomplish with his stamp before it dried.

"I'm not a fan of spinach, myself," Cornchips said. Corey was used to this out-of-nowhere talk and ignored it, absorbing himself instead in his stamp. Cornchips leaned over to pick a yellowed cigarette butt out of a crevice in the concrete. He ran it under his nose like a fine cigar, and then jammed it between his cracked lips while he patted down his pockets for a light.

"I mean, I'll eat it if it's *on* something," he continued. "Like a pizza, or what have you, but I'm not exactly over the *moon* for it."

He struck a sputtering match, held it to the mashed end of his cigarette, and puffed madly. When the end of the cigarette failed to catch, he sighed and spat the butt into the fountain.

Cornchips eyed Corey, who was admiring the arc of white splotches he'd made with his stamp.

"Boy, that dog get you yet, or what?"

Corey looked up at Cornchips. Sensing the time was right, he placed his feet on his pedals and squeezed his tasselled handgrips.

Their eyes had locked, and they stared at each other in silence. They both knew what was coming, and while neither of them really wanted it, they both understood they were helpless to stop it.

Corey took a slow, deep breath.

"Don't you try it, boy," Cornchips warned. He rolled up his right sleeve without taking his eyes off Corey, revealing a pale green smudge that was, in his youth, a bold tattoo on his once-muscular forearm. "I'm warning you..."

Corey licked his lips.

"So help me God..." said Cornchips, as his right hand slowly disappeared

into his right pocket.

Corey's eyes flitted from Cornchips's head, which was slowly shaking side to side, to Cornchips's hand, slowly groping for something in his pocket. It was now or never—the old man's reflexes were slow, and Corey knew it.

"Letfreedomreign!" he blurted, and then cringed.

The water splashed up over the sides of the fountain's basin as Cornchips bolted to his feet, and Corey peeled away from the fountain in a spray of pebbles and pigeon poop, his eyes wild, his legs pumping like pistons.

"What business is that of yours!" Cornchips screamed, and hurled a peach pit at Corey's helmet. THOCK! A direct hit. Corey's front wheel wobbled slightly, and then corrected itself.

Cornchips crowed with pleasure. "Take that, you little shit!"

"Let freedom reign!" Corey yelled once more over his shoulder, just to be sure, and glimpsed Cornchips struggling to climb out of the fountain so he could root around in the grass for his peach pit.

After about a block of flat-out pedalling, with the wind whistling past his helmet vents and the squirrels running for cover, Corey let out the breath he'd been holding. He'd done it. Elated, he threw back his head and howled. He could do anything and go anywhere now, and he could do it all with his head held high. He could look people in the eye. He'd gone up against the whole stinking trilogy this morning, and not a single one of them had flung their usual insult at him. The one the school kids yelled at him through the chain-link fence where he and the others like him had their separate recess and waited for their separate bus, the one that made his mother cry till his nana snapped, "Cry alls you want, Belinda, you've no one to blame but yourself."

Today there'd be no lonely skulking out back behind the Dumpster at Becker's. (Well, unless Marnie went back there first.) But otherwise, today was a day for sidewalks and shopping malls and schoolyards and all the other places where he ordinarily hung his head. Today he'd shown them all. He was six guns wide and fit to kill. Corey was a Danger Cat. ☮

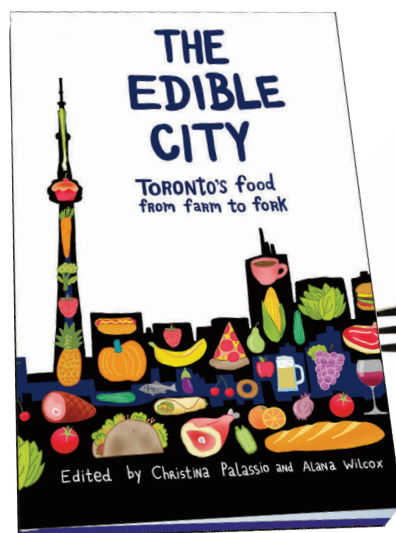
Heather Hogan lives in Riverdale. Her work has appeared in This and SubTerrain. Her chapbook, 2 Stories, was published by Proper Tales earlier this year.

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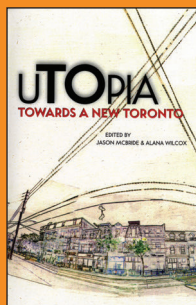


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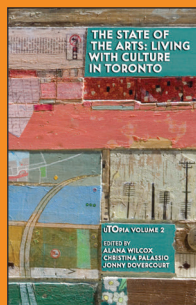
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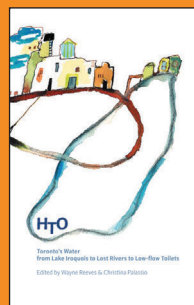
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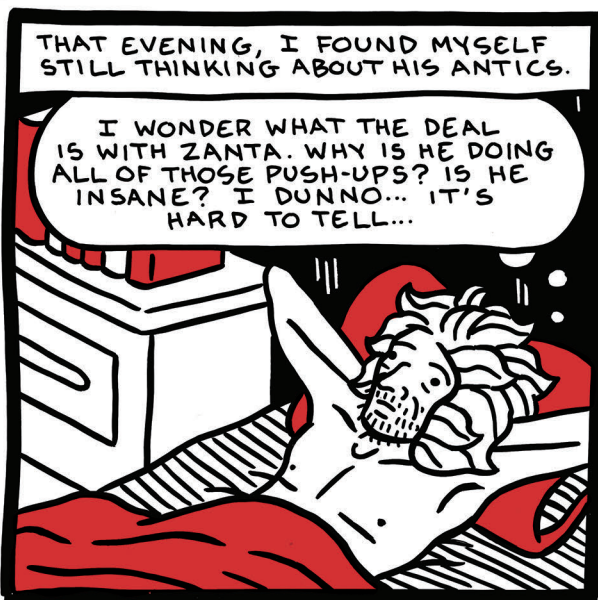


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I WATCHED A COUPLE OF ONLINE DOCUMENTARIES AND READ A NUMBER OF NEWSPAPER ARTICLES ON HIM TOO. IT WAS THROUGH THESE THAT I FIRST CAME ACROSS THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SANTA AND ZANTA.



- WHITE BEARD
- BEER BELLY
- SAYS "MERRY CHRISTMAS"
- AT THE BACK OF THE PARADE
- CELEBRATES ONE DAY A YEAR
- GIVES TO THOSE WHO ARE GOOD

- BLACK GOATEE
- "EIGHT PACK"
- SAYS "MERRY CHRISTMESS"
- AT THE FRONT OF THE PARADE
- CELEBRATES 364 DAYS A YEAR
- GIVES TO THOSE WHO ARE NAUGHTY

I ALSO LEARNED THAT ZANTA HAD BEEN BANNED FROM THE ENTIRE DOWNTOWN CORE AND THE T.T.C. JUST FOR DOING HIS THING. HE HAD BEEN BANNED FROM A NUMBER OF TORONTO LANDMARKS AS WELL. THIS TOTALLY ENRAGED ME.

I MEAN, IT'S TOTAL BULLSHIT! HOW CAN A GUY GET BANNED FROM PUBLIC SPACE FOR EXPRESSING HIMSELF?! WHAT-- JUST BECAUSE HE MAKES PEOPLE UNCOMFORTABLE?! BY THAT LOGIC, WE SHOULD ROUND UP ALL THE BUMS, CRAZIES, ASSHOLES AND PUT THEM ALL IN JAIL OR SOMETHING!



SO, YEAH -- I WAS SOLD -- I SOON DECIDED TO DO A COMIC BIOGRAPHY ABOUT HIM. THIS WAS SHORTLY AFTER READING HARVEY PEKAR'S "EGO AND HUBRIS." I REALLY LIKED THAT BOOK.

YEAH! I CAN MAKE IT A LOOSE BIOGRAPHY -- LIKE THIS!



I EMAILED ZANTA AND ASKED HIM IF I COULD INTERVIEW HIM FOR A COMIC BOOK -- HE AGREED. THEN WE SPOKE ON THE PHONE TO SET UP A MEETING.

YEAH, MAN. JUST COME ON OVER TO MY PLACE.

OKAY -- COOL.



BUT IT DIDN'T TAKE ME LONG TO START WORRYING ABOUT IT...

GOD... WHAT IF THIS GUY IS TOTALLY CRAZY?! WHAT AM I GETTING MYSELF INTO HERE?! WHAT IF HE GETS MAD AND ATTACKS ME?! I CAN'T DO THIS! IT'S TOO MUCH! I'M AFRAID!

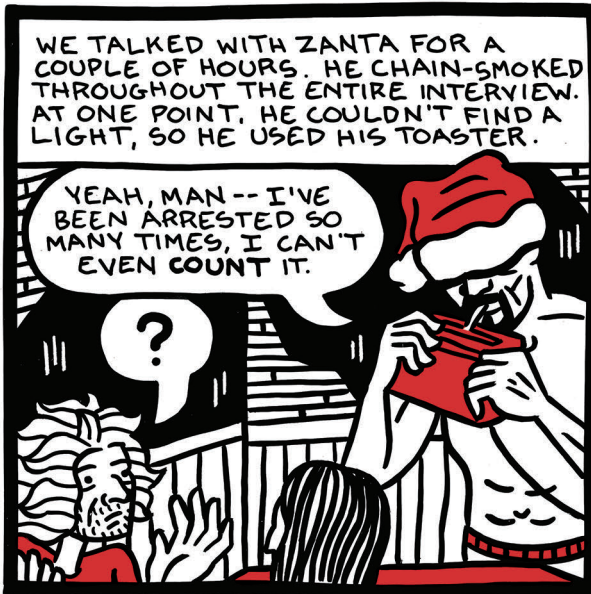


SO, MY BROTHER JOHN WENT TO SEE ZANTA WITH ME. HE ENDED UP USING THE SAME INTERVIEW FOR A NEWSPAPER ARTICLE. THIS WAS SOMETIME IN DECEMBER 2006, BY THE WAY.

THANKS FOR COMING ALONG WITH ME.

NO PROBLEM.





I GUESS I WAS HAVING TROUBLE JUSTIFYING DOING A BOOK ABOUT ZANTA. PART OF ME FELT LIKE HIS STORY WASN'T WORTH TELLING.

I DUNNO... IT JUST SEEMS LIKE HE'S JUST A GUY WHO GOES AROUND DOING PUSH-UPS AND MAKING LOUD SOUNDS WHO WANTS TO BE FAMOUS...

UH-HUH...

A GOOD CHUNK OF TIME PASSED AND THEN, IN LATE 2007, I HEARD THE NEWS THAT ZANTA HAD LEFT TOWN. HE TOLD THE MEDIA THAT HIS CONFRONTATIONS WITH THE LAW HAD ESCALATED TO THE POINT WHERE HE COULD NO LONGER WALK AROUND DOWNTOWN. THIS ENRAGED ME.

MAN! THIS IS TOTAL BULLSHIT! WHY SHOULD ZANTA HAVE TO LEAVE TOWN JUST BECAUSE THE SQUARES DON'T WANT HIM AROUND?! THOSE FUCKERS SHOULD QUIT CRYING AND MOVE TO THE SUBURBS!

NATIONAL POST

I WAS SUDDENLY FILLED WITH A STRONG DESIRE TO GET WORKING ON THE COMIC AGAIN.

IT'S MY DUTY, AS A CARTOONIST, TO TELL ZANTA'S STORY! HE'S BEEN TREATED UNJUSTLY AND IT'S NOW MY RESPONSIBILITY TO SPREAD SOME AWARENESS ABOUT HIS SITUATION! I WANT THIS GUY TO BE ALLOWED BACK DOWNTOWN!

ZANTA LEAVES TOWN

BUT IT DIDN'T TAKE LONG FOR THAT FEELING TO FADE. I DUNNO WHY THOUGH... I GUESS I HAVE ISSUES...

GOD... I HATE MYSELF... MY COMICS SUCK. I'VE GOT NO IDEA WHAT I'M DOING... I'M SUCH A WORTHLESS PIECE OF GARBAGE...

NO WONDER MY GIRLFRIEND LEFT ME...

SOB

BUT DON'T WORRY -- I'VE GOT IT BACK AGAIN -- I'M ROLLING ALONG -- MY BOOK ABOUT ZANTA IS ON ITS WAY.

GRRRRRRR!

I'VE JUST GOTTA, UH, Y'KNOW, START DRAWING IT...

I'VE BEEN KINDA BUSY LATELY...

YES YES YES!

END!

Revelation

Gerstein is worth exploring.

The hand-carved ceiling trusses and striking glass skylight of an 1892 neo-Gothic rotunda in the University of Toronto's Gerstein Science Information Centre have come out of hiding.

The grandeur of the Gerstein Reading Room was obscured nearly a century ago by a drop ceiling and shelves that in recent years contained little more than outmoded reference books. A leaky skylight and the need to add more and better study space for students led to a renovation of the room, which was completed in 2008.

Although access to the area above the drop ceiling has always been open to library administrators, there had been little motivation to look beyond the dirt and water damage in recent years. At the urging of Diamond and Schmitt Architects, who oversaw the project, the renovation committee climbed the tower staircase for a closer look in 2006. "We saw something worth exploring," says Sandra Langlands, director of the centre.

The committee opted to make the removal of the drop ceiling and the restoration of the underlying woodwork a part of the room's overhaul, funded by the Frank Gerstein Charitable Foundation and the Bertrand Gerstein Family Foundation. The end result netted the project an honourable mention at this year's Heritage Toronto Awards.

But why were such intricate architectural details covered up in the first place? Some early photographs provide a clue: the original ceiling lacked the massive metal braces that Langlands estimates were added around the same time as the cover-up. "We think that the braces were added for structural reasons, but were considered unattractive," says Langlands. "But styles change. Now we like to see these things."

We do indeed.

—JENNIFER MARSTON





My Life Among the Apes

BY CARY FAGAN

For nearly a year I lived among the apes. I knew by sight more than two dozen chimpanzees living by Lake Tanganyika in the remote Gombe Stream Game Reserve. Goliath, the alpha male. David Greybeard. Rodolf. Flo. I was among those who first saw a chimp make and use a tool—a twig stripped of its leaves and thrust into the hole of a termite hill. Once a mother held her infant out for me to groom. Once I witnessed a colony of chimps surround a stray member of another tribe and commit murder. And then I gave it all up.

Hoffstедder is on my case again. First, someone in the branch has been using an anonymous blog to write slurs about management. Second, for reasons unexplained the number of after-hours deposits at our A.T.M. has declined by four per cent. Third, a pass card has gone missing.

I am fifty-one years old and have not risen as far as others my age, but I came to banking late, after an unfinished Ph.D. and careers in housing management and commercial liability insurance. The best that I can say about banking is that I like the people I work with (all except Hoffstедder) and I can walk to work in forty minutes.

The staff under me, tellers and assistant managers, are fifteen to twenty-five years younger. They are first- and second-generation sons and daughters of India, Pakistan, Portugal, Iran, the Azores. They are dressed modestly but sharply. Both sexes wear earrings, but other visible piercings are not permitted while at work. Little indentations can be seen, by an eyebrow, a lip, where a stud or ring has been removed. They spend their lunch hours text-messaging their friends. On Monday mornings they look wasted from weekend raves, or

whatever it is they do. The younger ones seem to form no permanent relationships but have a lot of sex. They live two worlds away from my own, and I wish them well.

One day when I was eleven, I came home to find the latest *National Geographic* on the kitchen counter, along with a glass of milk and a wedge of burnt-sugar cake. I opened it and saw a beautiful young blond woman washing her hair in a stream.

“Don’t disappear with that magazine,” my mother warned me as I slipped off the stool. “Nobody else has seen it yet.”

We lived in the suburb of Willowdale. I had my own room while my older brothers shared one. A desk, a bookcase, a *World Book Encyclopedia*, a telescope. I was short for my age, and overweight. I dreaded gym class. Two girls down the street tormented me every day on the way home. In the evening we watched *Rowan & Martin’s Laugh-In*.

But that night I began to live in the jungle.

My wife, Lizette, is a teacher in a private girls’ school. Even when we met, more than two decades ago, her anxiousness made it hard for her to see a movie or attend a party where there might be strangers. Not until after our third child was old enough for Lizette to go back to work part-time did the true panic attacks begin. She had to take a medical leave and endure hours of ineffective therapy before the proper dosage of a new drug began to help matters. Medication has made life more tolerable for her, although I remained the one who took our boys to hockey practice and attended our daughter’s piano recitals.

I still find myself frustrated and angry that we cannot go on holidays, or even

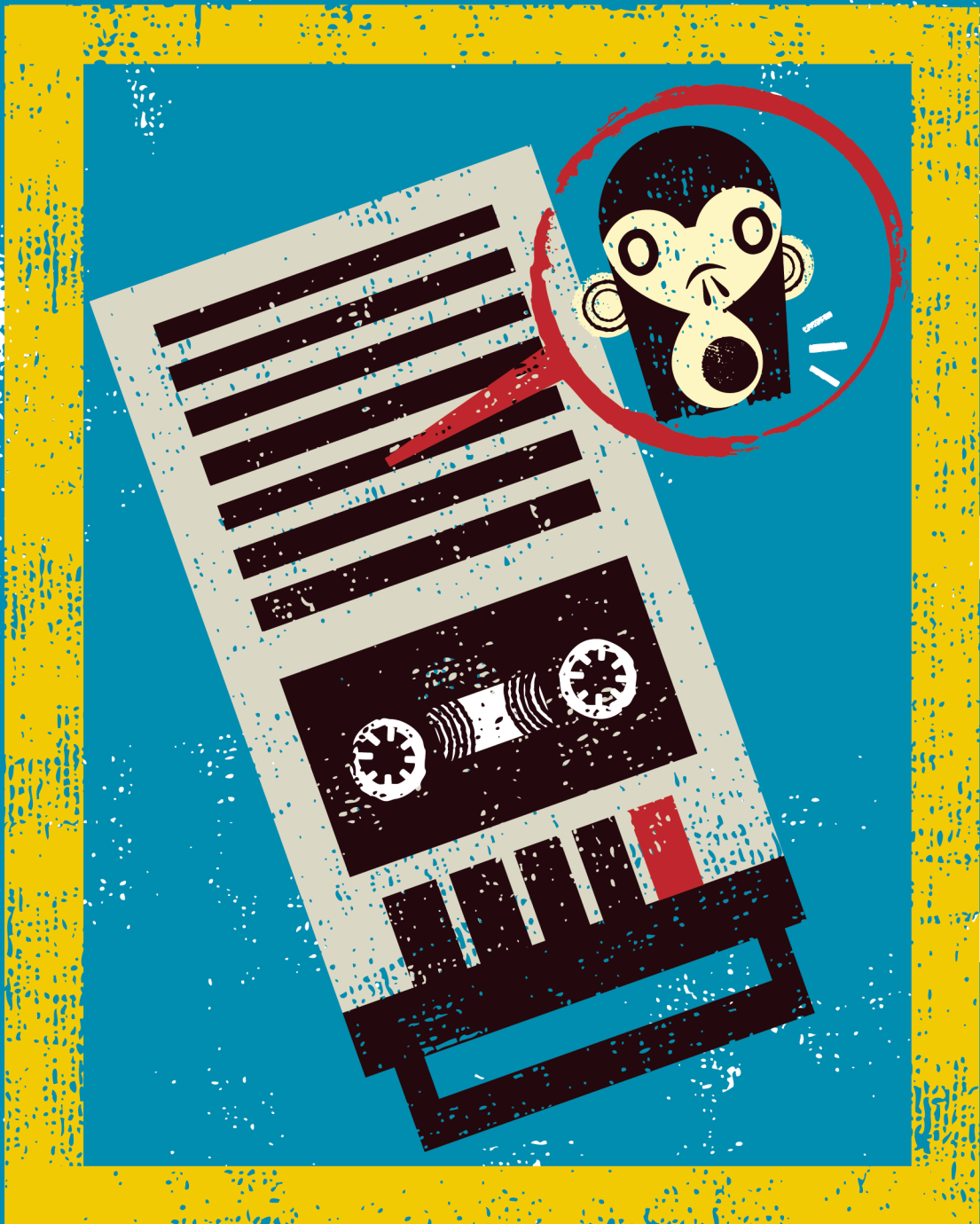
to the theatre or a dinner party. Two years ago I had the idea of visiting France for my fiftieth birthday, but of course we could not go. I fantasize about going on my own (and having an affair with a beautiful woman while I’m there), but with the fantasy comes guilt and shame, which leads me to treat Lizette with an excessive delicacy that annoys her.

For my science presentation that year, I chose Jane Goodall’s research on primate behaviour. I stood before the class and talked about how as a young girl Jane had written down observations of birds and animals around her home, then how as a young woman she had become assistant to the famous paleontologist Louis Leakey, who eventually assigned her the task of studying chimpanzees in the wild. I spoke of her findings—that chimps slept in trees in nests they made by bending branches down with their feet, that grooming was an important form of social interaction. I passed around photographs.

Two photographs I kept to myself. One was of Jane Goodall washing her hair. The other was a close-up of her in profile looking into the face of a chimp. Her own eyes blue, her lips slightly parted. That night in bed, I imagined writing to Jane Goodall and telling her of my admiration for her work. At the same time, I modestly point out something that she has missed but that I have noticed from the photographs, an observation about the way chimpanzees communicate with gestures. I send the letter to her care of the offices of the National Geographic Society and in a short time I receive a telegram, which the delivery man reads while my family stands by the door and listens.

“BRILLIANT OBSERVATION STOP HAVE UNFILLED ASSISTANT POSITION STARTING

MATTHEW DALEY



IMMEDIATELY STOP YOU ARE URGENTLY NEEDED
STOP PLANE TICKET ARRIVING TOMORROW
STOP JANE GOODALL."

My parents and my brothers stare at me in stunned amazement. Finally, my dad says, "Well, son, you better get packing."

I E-mail a report about the missing pass card to Hoffstedder. Our newest and youngest teller, Kate Sulimani, accidentally took it home. Her boyfriend hid it as a prank and when Kate found out and demanded it back, he couldn't find it. They think it ended up in the recycled trash but as its destruction can't be proven I have taken the precaution of recalling all the pass cards and ordering replacements with new codes.

Hoffstedder's reply is two words: "Fire her." I write back, explaining that this is Kate Sulimani's first job out of community college, that other staff members have occasionally forgotten to leave their pass cards, and that she understands the gravity of her error.

He writes back again: "I said fire her."

I have no choice but to call Kate into my office. She leaves in tears. When I come out to get a coffee, the other tellers

will not look at me.

Before Christmas, Kate Sulimani drew my name for the office secret-Santa party. At the party she gave me a tie. You have to look very closely at the pattern to see that it is made up of little Homer Simpsons. I happen to be wearing that tie today.

I bring my coffee back to my desk and look for something to put it down on. I find the scrap of newspaper that I ripped out of the *Globe* a few days ago, the notice that Jane Goodall is coming to give a talk. She is on a fundraising mission for a group that wants to build a retirement sanctuary for old research chimps. Tickets are fifty dollars.

At home I listen to a phone message from our older son. He isn't coming home from school this weekend after all. I put the phone down and look for his brother to shoot some baskets with, until I remember that his band is having a rehearsal in the drummer's garage. Our daughter is at her boyfriend's. Lizette comes downstairs and as I open a bottle of Zinfandel, she starts chopping vegetables.

At the stove, Lizette says, "I see that

Jane Goodall is coming to town."

"Uh-huh."

"She hasn't phoned you?"

"Very funny."

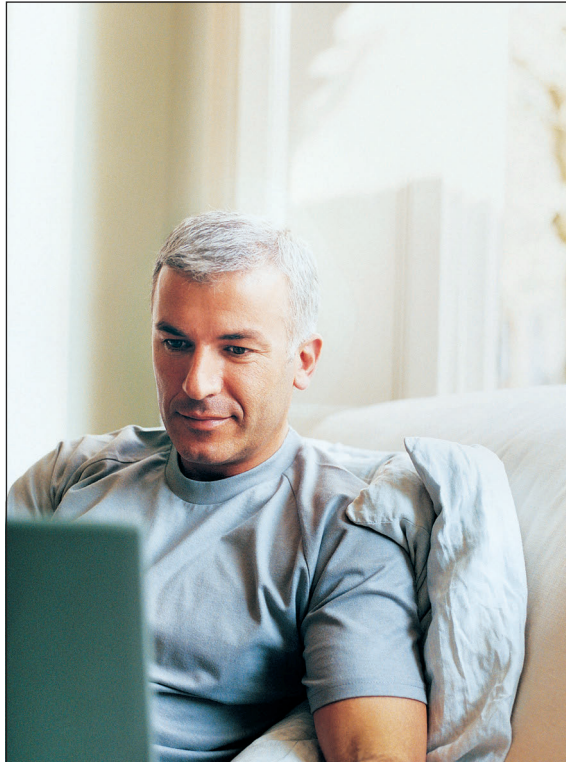
"Maybe we can go."

"Really, it's O.K."

The following winter I began studying for my bar mitzvah. Some kids I knew developed an intense fervour about their Jewishness. They started wearing yarmulkes. I was thinking about chimpanzees in the context of evolutionary theory.

On the day of my bar mitzvah, I wore a double-breasted suit with a light pink shirt and a blue tie. The synagogue was crowded with guests, for me and also for a girl named Denise who was having her bat mitzvah. She read her Torah portion flawlessly, as was required, while I stumbled three times and the rabbi made me stop and repeat each word correctly.

Denise gave her talk first and then it was my turn. I was supposed to give an explanation of my portion and draw from it a moral lesson. But I began by leaning into the microphone and quoting an earlier biblical passage: "And



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Alice Vichenroff

Alice is taught to be afraid of witches,
their long noses and longer fingernails,
stooped spines and penchant for wolf paws.
She is also told to fear wolves and strangers,
and to buy potatoes from the gatekeeper
(though once, just once,
after her sister marries a man who hunts pheasants each day,
and hunts her gleeful sister each night,
Alice trades eight potatoes for a sticky bun).

And as she licks her fingers clean of sweet,
she finds a frog in her palm,
a frog who speaks against her knuckles,
and says his name is Clovis.
He tells her she is sweet,
though she knows she is just as salty as he is.

Her roof burns and she is a witch now,
for what can a frog's lover be but a witch?
And she dances a dance that circles itself over and over,
the body of her first lover green,
now slowly brown in her hand.
And she dances and wonders when,
or maybe if,
her feet will ever stop.

—LINDSAY ZIER-VOGEL

Jacob said to Rebekah his mother: ‘Behold, Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man.’”

Firing Kate Sulimani has damaged branch morale. The tellers resent losing their friend and feel insecure in their own jobs. I consider holding a staff meeting to discuss the matter but decide that I have nothing to offer—all I would be doing is asking them to keep seeing me as a nice guy.

I did not consider refusing to fire her. I have college bills to pay, the mortgage, the usual. What is Kate Sulimani to me? She’s young and will bounce back. She has her whole life ahead of her.

In the bathroom mirror, I see the beginning of pouches under my eyes, sagging jowls. I look the part I am playing: Hoffstedder’s man.

In high school, I smoked a lot of dope, I drank on weekends, bet on American football through a kid in history class who worked for a bookie. I read books

on Buddhism, or first chapters of books. I failed two courses.

One day in the middle term of Grade 12, I found out I had to present a project in biology that I hadn’t known about because I’d skipped a week of classes. At home, I looked through our Life Science Library books hoping for something I could pull together. Then I remembered my old Jane Goodall project. I found it stuffed in the bottom drawer and when I pulled out the file, the photograph of Jane Goodall washing her hair fell out. It seemed to me I could pretty much recycle the old material, adding details as I remembered them, but that I would need to make it longer. So I got out my portable cassette recorder, plugged in the microphone, and began to make chimp calls.



Imitating chimpanzees I had heard on television documentaries was all that survived from my Jane Goodall period. In a car with friends, at parties, walking at night with my buddies, I would begin with low hoots and then break into louder barks and howls. Everyone always said how real they sounded and I knew Mr. Anderson, my dim-witted biology teacher who wore his hair long and liked to act chummy with us, wouldn’t know the difference. The next day in class, I gave my presentation, embellishing as I went along, and then explained how I had obtained a tape recording by writing to the National Geographic Society. I pressed the Play button of the recorder. Every so often I paused it to explain the meaning of a call: anger, frustration, submission, fear, loneliness. Finally, I turned the recorder off and said that despite the fact that human beings had built cities, flown to the moon, and invented surface-to-air missiles, the difference between us and apes might only be a matter of degree. To conclude, I quoted the line about Jacob and Esau that I had used in my bar mitzvah speech.

Mr. Anderson looked at me a long moment and then said, “Get to the office.”

Brooding behind my desk, I recall a long-forgotten detail. I don’t remember whether it was in that first *National Geographic*, or one of the television specials that came after. How an adult male chimpanzee named Mike stole the dominant male position. The previous alpha male, Goliath, was huge and powerful, and the smaller Mike was

no match for him. But Mike found some empty kerosene cans in Jane Goodall’s camp. He learned to bash them in front of him as he ran, making an awful racket that terrified the other chimps, including Goliath. When Mike finally stopped, even Goliath eventually came over and reached

out to groom Mike’s fur. Mike became the alpha male.

All I need is some petrol cans to bash. I’m not sure if what I have in mind is equivalent, but I pick up the phone.

WRONG BAR

a novel by nathaniel g. moore

Enfant terrible of Toronto's indie press scene delivers a tale described as *Brighton Rock* in the age of Twitter.

"Few writers can take their own finger poppin' rhythm and make it sound exactly like life. Nathaniel G. Moore's filthy and pretty little dust devil made me feel slutty and happy and free. Terrific Book."

Tony Burgess
Author of *Pontypool Changes Everything*



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"Hoffstedder here."

"Jerry, it's Allen."

"You figured out why your A.T.M. numbers are down?"

"I'm working on it. Listen, Jerry, about that teller we let go. I've got a rep from the Civil Liberties Association coming here tomorrow. He's asking about discrimination, unfair practises, even about going to the media. If I tell him what I really think—"

"Are you squeezing my balls, Allen?"

"No, of course not. But when he asks me—"

"You'll know what to tell him, won't you? That the girl was incompetent and posed a risk to our clients, and that we gave her the standard package. I don't want to hear any more about it. Now on those A.T.M. numbers, you check if a homeless guy's been sleeping in your doorway at night, keeping the customers away. Happens all the time."

I hear the sound of the click at the other end.

At home, I say to Lizette, "Are the kids never coming home for dinner? Maybe we should just set up a trust fund for them."

She dishes scalded rapini with feta next to the sole on my plate. "We're boring to them. It's natural. And they've all promised to be home tomorrow. The only real problem is that you're bored with me."

"Likely the other way around. I wouldn't blame you. I feel like I've become nothing but my job."

"I have a present for you. Just a small one, so don't get too excited."

"What is it?"

"Look under your plate."

"I feel like I'm twelve," I say, shifting my plate over. Underneath is a ticket. Jane Goodall at Convocation Hall.

"It's in an hour," she says, "so you'd better eat up."

"Just me?"

"I'm sorry. I'm just not up to it right now."

"Sure." I get up and kiss her. "Thanks."

I sit down again and we start to eat.

The last time I'd been in Convocation Hall was to receive the diploma for my undergraduate degree. About all I could remember was what a bad hang-over I'd had. Now I look down to the stage to see Jane Goodall behind the slender Plexiglas podium. Behind her a large screen shows a series of video clips. She

Handful

After Roddy Lumsden.

I've handled myself on trains, been handled, roughhoused
by a housewife for being rough
and ready in the cabin of a ship and never thinking,
"Oh to love," but hoping I'd finish,
finish before it stopped. And jerked

from our seats I'm sure I wasn't the first
to smell my hands, below, to taste what'd come
of three days or five days strange, country
unlike my own getting itself up inside my T-shirt, linted
nipples and armpits, oh.

Spent my nights with a British boy (who hasn't?) who rolled
his shirt sleeves, buttoned down at night, and read T. S. fucking Eliot.
Who pawned a gun for a silverish ring, made me smell
like tobacco, and in the quiet, green-fingered morning
made me miss him like nobody's business.

I've been called a handful, hard to live with, I'd make a shoddy
wife. Here in Canada graffiti rollers itself across pocked concrete
and a dozen "ROCK 'N' ROLL"s or "I LOVED DONNA"s. There are local sayings
our foreign boys are still amusing themselves with, another wind-chill lark
and sometimes, "Life is great, isn't it darling?"

—EVIE CHRISTIE

no longer looks like the slim woman
washing her hair in a mountain stream.
She is a handsome older woman, com-
fortably filled out, a quaver in her voice.
A good speaker, if overly rehearsed, as if
she has given this same speech a thou-
sand times.

After the talk, I buy one of her books
and line up to have it signed. We shuffle
forward, waiting for our turn at the
table where she sits with pen in hand,
and as we get closer I feel increasingly
agitated. At last it is my turn and as I
move up she looks at me.

It takes me a moment to speak. "Dr.
Goodall, I've been an admirer of yours
since I was a boy."

"Have you? How very nice." She smiles
wearily, as if she has met many like me
and knows all our secrets. "Shall I sign it
to you?"

"No," I say. "To a friend of mine. Kate
Sulimani. I'll spell it."

Kate Sulimani lives in a high-rise
apartment in a cluster of buildings
off the Don Valley Parkway. An empty

green space with a dry fountain in the
middle. It looks like some invented city,
Brasilia maybe. I look for the name on
the directory and press the button.

"Hello?"

"Kate, it's Allen Wernick."

The buzzer sounds and the door un-
locks. The lobby of her building smells
of bleach. I take the elevator up, reading
the notices taped to the bulletin board:
"NANNY AVAILABLE," "LOST CAT," "WHO-
EVER STOLE MY BIKE PLEASE RETURN IT NO
QUESTIONS ASKED." When I get off at the
seventh floor, she's already at her door,
holding it open about three inches. She
wears a cotton robe. From inside I can
hear music, some techno thing.

"What do you want, Mr. Wernick?
Are you here to give me my job back?"

"I wish I was. I really just want to say
that I'm sorry. You weren't treated fairly."

"Yeah, well, life sucks that way."

"I've written a letter of recommenda-
tion for you."

"You can do that?"

"I don't know, actually. Anyway, here,
it's inside this book. The book is for

you too."

I hand her the book, with the letter
sticking out from between its pages. She
looks at it a moment before taking it.
Then she stares at the cover.

"The woman who lives with monkeys,
right?"

"Chimpanzees, actually."

She opens the book to the title page.
"It's signed."

"Yes."

"To a fellow animal lover?"

"I guess that's what she always writes."

"A bit weird, but thanks, I guess."

"Don't mention it."

I take a step back and Kate Sulimani
closes the door.

I park the car at the curb and turn off
the engine. In the dark I rest my head
against my arms on the steering wheel.
I'm tired, but it isn't the good sort of
tired that comes from a long walk. I get
out of the car and lock it with the remote
key, making the lights flash.

I come in through the side door as
quietly as I can, but Lizette is still up,
sitting in the kitchen in a cotton night-
gown. The cake we didn't have time to
eat is on the table.

"How was it?"

"Good," I say. "She's a woman who
knows her chimps."

"Is she older too or is it just us?"

I lean over and kiss her. "You're very
beautiful."

She shrugs me off. "Do you want a piece
of cake?"

"Hmm."

She cuts a slice and puts it on a plate,
slides it to me as I sit down. I take a bite.
"It's delicious." I take another. "I don't
like firing people."

The next few bites I eat without tast-
ing and then the slice is gone. I want to
go to bed but I can't move. Lizette
doesn't move either, doesn't look at
the papers in front of her, and I be-
come aware of the ticking of the clock
on the wall.

"I think we should go on a holiday this
year," she says.

All right, I say. At least, I think I say it.
I'm not sure, and I don't say it again. ✪

*Cary Fagan lives in Dufferin Grove. His
latest novel, *Valentine's Fall* (Cormorant),
and his most recent children's book, *Jacob
Two-Two on the High Seas* (Tundra),
were both published this fall.*

Toronto's Lady Santa Claus

Merle Foster's studio wasn't a toy shop, but it was still magical to the children of the Ward.

BY TERRY MURRAY

If Santa Claus was a woman I always say she'd be Merle Foster," Gordon Sinclair, the legendary Canadian journalist and broadcaster, told readers of his Radio column in the *Toronto Daily Star*, in 1952.

Like the bearded elf with the toy shop at the North Pole, Foster, a popular Toronto sculptor, was a "maker," Sinclair reasoned. "Ask her to make anything from a moving model of the Noronic fire to the ride of the Valkyries in miniature and it's done," he said.

By then, Foster had been a household name in Toronto for more than three decades, known for her gargoyles and other architectural decoration, monumental works, portrait busts, public fountains, garden statuary, and small pieces such as sport trophies and bookends.

In fact, "maker" was a job description that had been applied to Foster in often-effusive newspaper and magazine profiles since her career began, in the early nineteen-twenties. But what Sinclair didn't mention was possibly the best reason to consider Foster a female Santa Claus: the annual Christmas parties she gave for ten years for the children-street urchins, really—who haunted her studio and served as her models.

Her studio—located initially on Walton Street, eventually moving to Church and then Grosvenor during the twenties and early thirties—was also known among local children as a "make shop."

"What does she make?" one uninitiated child once asked another, a regular visitor to Foster's studio.

"Jus' everythin'," the boy answered breathlessly.

They didn't know what Sinclair knew: that although Foster specialized in clay modelling at the Ontario College of Art

(as it was known when she finished her studies there, in 1918), she was also a plasterer, carpenter, toolmaker, tinsmith, electrician, and designer, her sculptural work crossing media, notably to papier mâché. Such disciplines weren't on the O.C.A. curriculum of the early twentieth century, so Foster acquired her skills through a succession of small jobs with a potter, a plasterer, and a commercial engraver, among others.

So while Merle Foster's "make shop" did not produce toys, it must have seemed as magical as Santa's workshop to the children who visited. Not only was it full of fantastical creations, including figures for the T. Eaton Company's annual Santa Claus Parade, but there was also clay to play with, and biscuits were always on offer.

There was also the undeniable appeal of Foster herself. Born Muriel Aileen, in 1897, "Merle" was a childhood nickname she kept into adulthood, "because no one knows whether I am a girl or a boy," she once said, "which has its advantages in business."

That may have been the only time she uttered the word "business." Until she was well into her thirties, newspaper stories and magazine profiles invariably referred to Foster as being "not much more than a little girl," calling her "Toronto's girl sculptor." Her zaftig figure, "jolly" demeanour (as it was inevitably described), "trilling" voice, and self-deprecation must have been irresistible to the neighbourhood children, to whom Foster must have seemed like a big kid herself. She sometimes denied she was an artist, calling herself instead "just a mud-slinger" who "made mud pies for a living."

Her accounts were left to her man-

ager—her younger sister, Florence, known as "Pory." Foster's aversion to business may seem strange for someone whose work was predominantly commercial sculpture, but the division of labour—Merle looked after the art, Pory took care of the accounts—seemed to suit each woman's talents and temperament.

"When I took hold of things, Merle insisted that art was not to be—could not be—commercialized," Pory said. "She was humiliated at the thought of such a thing, but I immediately started a filing system and filed away her humiliation with numerous other things."

See that figger over there wit' the muffler an' cap," asked a neighbourhood boy, pointing out a sculpture to a friend who lived nearby as they looked through the Fosters' window. "Dat's me sister, Rosie." In addition to modelling, "Me and Rosie run lotsa errands for her," the boy bragged. He was quoted, in dialect, in *Quality Street* magazine, in 1926.

A writer for *Maclean's* (or "*MacLean's*," as it was spelled at the time) was on hand one morning in 1923 when another boy popped his head in the door. "Don't you want a model this morning, Miss?" he asked, and showed no disappointment when Foster replied, "I wonder if you would go get your brother." In fact, as the reporter noted, "The boy turned from the door for a moment and winked at a lad close by and in a twinkling the required brother was at his side."

Although Foster paid her models, the spurned fellow cheerfully called his brother, no doubt because he had been a beneficiary of her annual Christmas generosity.

The neighbourhood was St. John's Ward, known simply as "the Ward," a

Merle Foster, in the mid-nineteen-twenties, working on a portrait bust of the novelist W. A. Fraser.



notorious area of urban squalor bounded by Yonge Street, University Avenue, College Street, and Queen. It was home to recent immigrants—until the late nineteen-twenties, mostly Jews from eastern Europe as well as Italians and Chinese. (No wonder the Fosters' studio was called "a spot of enchantment to the children of the Ward" year-round, especially at Christmas—the predominantly Jewish guests notwithstanding.)

Foster's parties—known at the time as "Christmas trees"—began in 1922, when she invited nine of her models to her decorated studio for food and gifts. She later expanded the guest list by asking the postman for names of other children in the area who he thought would have "little pleasure" during the festive season. In time, the numbers grew to thirty, fifty, and just short of seventy by the time of the last party, in 1931.

"I have no choice in the matter," Foster said. "I simply set the day."

For the first party, the gifts came from her own childhood toy box. By the second year, her toy box was empty and the number of guests had increased, so Foster turned to friends for donations. One

of her more highly placed friends was Justin Cork, a co-founder of the Loblaws grocery chain, who provided hundreds of dollars' worth of oranges and candy over the years. Toronto newspapers and other local publications also obliged by printing calls for toys and other gifts.

"Yesterday found boxes of candy for each child, oranges, sample bottles of sauces, sample packages of powder and toilet accessories for the small girls, 20 pounds of nuts, quantities of animal biscuits, numbers of dolls, all gifts from friends," the *Star* reported of the 1927 party. "Games and the distribution of gifts occupied the afternoon, which began at three o'clock and still waxed strong at seven. The children brought their musical instruments, their banjos and violins, and entertained Miss Foster and her sister and their friends with their quaint music. Many of them danced and gave comic exhibitions of the black bottom."

The next year, *Chatelaine* held up Foster's annual party as a shining example of how an individual could give a "Christmas tree," calling hers a "success that has evolved into a triumph from a very small beginning."

"I'm just so grateful to the people who send me things and help me to keep this party going," Foster said in 1930. "I'd hate to give it up."

But the following year's party was to be the last. On New Year's Eve, 1932, the *Star* carried the news: "Toys and provisions have been rolling in all week to Merle Foster, the sculptress, the aftermath of her annual holiday party given for the children of the 'ward' who used to model for her when she lived there. This year, living in York Mills, she did not give the party but contributions poured in just the same. She had no difficulty in disposing of them, however, and they went to many deserving and appreciative folk."

Foster's Grosvenor Street studio had been expropriated in the development of Women's College Hospital, and she had moved to the northern Toronto suburb—too far for the children to travel.

But other events, global and personal, also interfered with Foster's ability to sponsor a party. She estimated that she lost ten thousand dollars' worth of business during the Great Depression, and recalled 1933 in particular as a year when she "just got by."

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In 1930, Merle and Pory, two single women, found themselves the guardians of an infant girl named Barbara. In later interviews, Foster variously referred to her as an adopted daughter, a sister, and a niece—but surviving family members have confirmed that Barbara was Pory’s illegitimate daughter.

Throughout the Depression, Foster continued to be a “maker”—memorializing outings with Barbara in little paint-

help of one of her former Ward friends.

When they were children, Lillian Pearlstein and her sister had modelled for Foster.

“One of [the sisters] married Mr. Sam Shopsywitz of Shopsy fame,” a magazine noted, mid-century. “Today, atop his [Canadian National] Exhibition stand there’s a larger than life size model of Shopsy, executed by Merle Foster who has been remembered all these years by the little model who became Mrs. Shopsy.”

grown old, and passed on, leaving almost no one to remember her.

“*Ars longa, vita brevis*”—the aphorism by the ancient Greek physician Hippocrates is usually interpreted as “Art is long, life is short.” Art goes on though the artist dies.

It’s actually only the start of a longer aphorism that has a somewhat different message: that learning an art (medicine, in this case) is a lifelong process.



Foster’s annual Christmas parties grew from nine children at the first gathering, in 1922, to nearly seventy by the time of the final party, in 1931. Thirty-five attendees posed with Foster for this photo, which appeared in Chatelaine magazine in 1928.

ings and sketches, and taking whatever work she could find, including creating headstones for Canada’s first pet cemetery, located in Aurora, Ontario.

Foster’s fortunes turned during the Second World War, when she took a job as the director of personnel for Victory Aircraft. The regular income must have been especially welcome because, by that time, she was supporting her parents, as well as Pory, Barbara, and herself.

Although the Victory job was full-time, she maintained as much sculpture work as she could get—including at least one commission she earned with the

After the war, Foster resumed “making” her living largely through her art, until she died, in obscurity, in 1986, the day before her eighty-ninth birthday. Foster had been a celebrity for six decades, known for her high-profile architectural commissions, virtually non-stop presence at the C.N.E., and contributions to parades and ice shows, as well as her child welfare work.

Today, most of her buildings have been demolished, the archives of the organizations she worked for have virtually no record of her, and the children whose lives she touched have grown up,

But the shorter version and more simplistic interpretation of the saying may still be true—although the story of Merle Foster turns it on its head. ▽

*Terry Murray lives in Lawrence Park. Her book about gargoyles and other architectural sculpture, *Faces on Places: A Grotesque Tour of Toronto* (Anansi, 2006), won the 2007 Heritage Toronto Award of Merit. She is also the clinical editor of the *Medical Post*. This article is taken from her work-in-progress, *Come to Dust: The Long Life, Short Art and Shorter Afterlife of Merle Foster*.*

Down in the Alley

Toronto's little-seen laneways are often the city's most dynamic public spaces.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MICHAEL CHO

I'm often asked where or what is my favourite public space in Toronto. And though I'm tempted to name a strip of street or one of the city's bustling parks, I always pick the old alleys and laneways.

When I moved downtown, from the cushy suburb of Willowdale, in the heart of North York, one of the first things about the urban form that struck me as different was the vast network of lanes hiding behind houses, businesses, and schools. It was in these semi-private enclaves that I cut my urbanism chops. Though originally I thought these lanes were mostly deserted and unused, I was quickly dispelled of this notion: I discovered a man training homing pigeons out of his garage, autobody shops open late into the night and early morning, giant rats, and urban art. I walked for hours in Toronto's alleys, checking out the graffiti and converted coach houses. Once, I spent three months mapping

the longest nearly uninterrupted route in the west end (it was five kilometres long, and went from the Gladstone Hotel up to the corner of Dupont and Christie).

But what still catches my eye more than anything when I enter an alley is its sheer wildness—an integral element not lost in the laneway illustrations of Michael Cho, to be published in an upcoming collection from Drawn & Quarterly. Sometimes the laneway is only four or five garages deep and comes quickly to a dead end; plants pop out from under fences and grow between cracks in the pavement; TV antennas dangle from chimneys; rooms that have been hastily added to the back of houses look like they'll collapse at any second; trellised backyards are overgrown with grapevines whose grapes will soon be converted into wine.

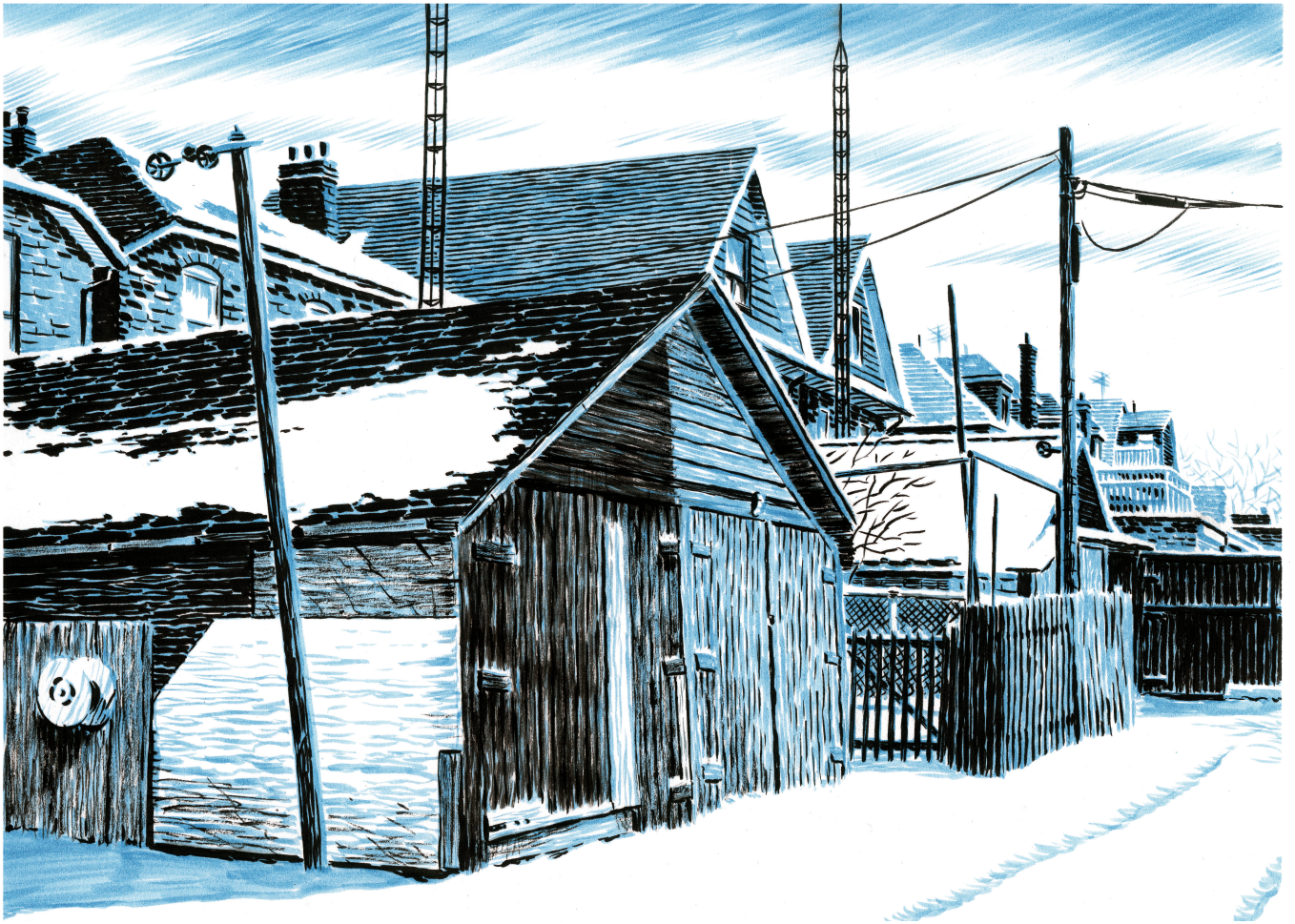
What's most compelling about alleys—and a vibe that Cho has infused in his art—is just how entirely different they are

from front yards. People spend their energy keeping the face of their house tidy and trimmed—not unlike how you would present yourself on a first date. But the laneway face of a house is cluttered, confused, and often in a state of disrepair, not unlike how someone might look first thing in the morning, hungover after a wild night out. I've always felt you can learn more about your neighbours by looking at their home from the alley than from anywhere else on their property.

While people can be found in alleys doing nefarious things (like fighting or dealing drugs) or just plain ol' boring stuff (like smoking or chatting), these spaces tend to be the most dynamic and inventive in the city. They are often unregulated and left for residents to shape as they please. From smokestacked workshops to artist studios, laneways offer a glimpse into how Toronto lives.

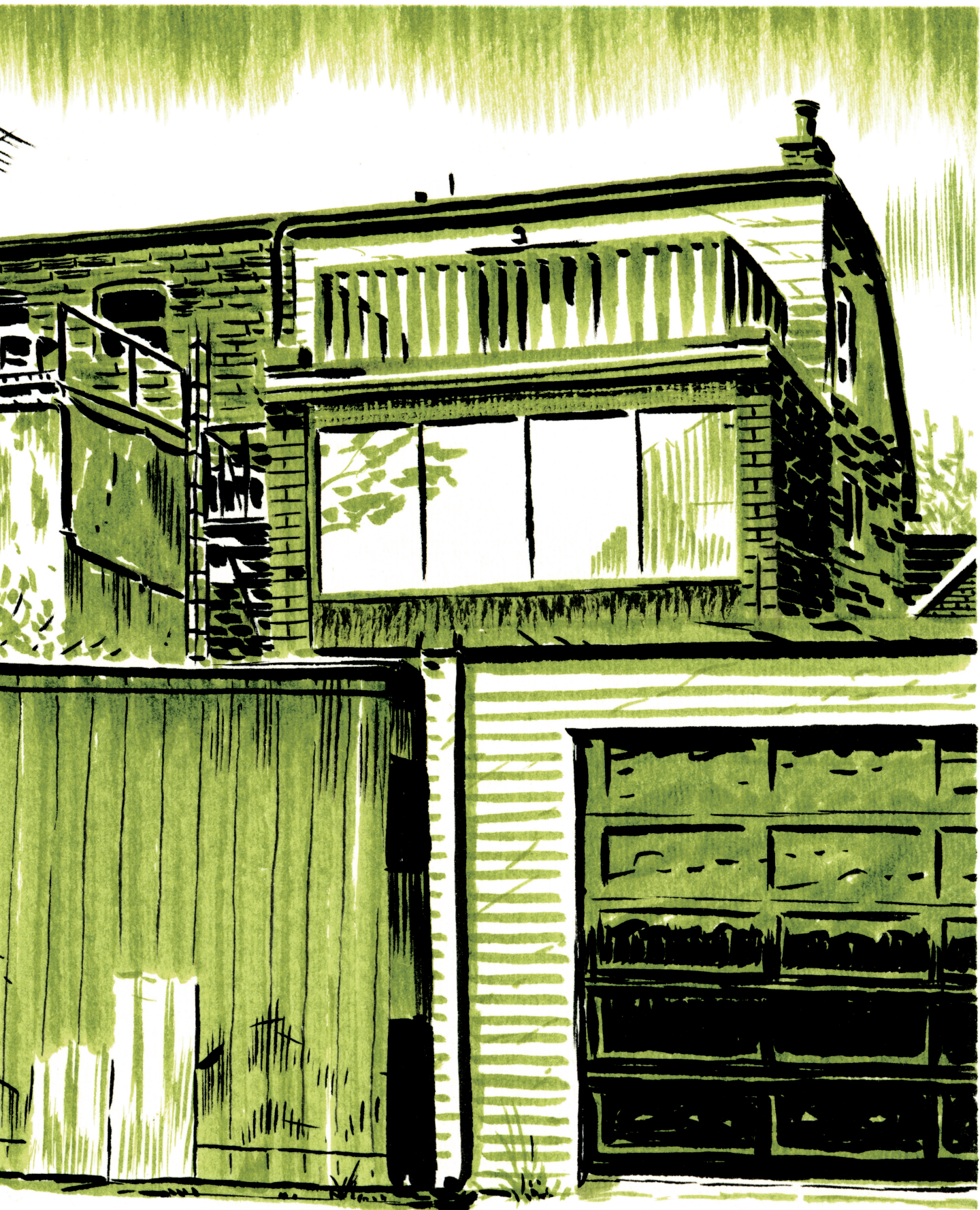
—MATTHEW BLACKETT











See You Next Tuesday

BY STACEY MAY FOWLES

It was the pregnant chain-smoking teenage girl waiting for the north-bound bus at Dufferin station who finalized it for Walter.

She stood there, smiling and smoking, her red hair piled high on her head in a hairsprayed slick she incorrectly thought was stylish, her huge belly swaddled in a ridiculous pink fleece zip-up sweater. Walter had tried to slip cautiously past her to get through the station doors—no simple feat given both his and her thickness—and when he inadvertently nudged her with an elbow she sucked at her teeth and spun viciously toward him, her massive midsection leading the turn.

She then decided she would spit squarely in the middle of the back of his grey tweed overcoat.

Walter wouldn't have known she had spat on him if it wasn't for the fact that her boyfriend (the paternal part of their impending family unit, caused by a tear in a convenience store cherry-flavoured ribbed condom) suddenly shouted, "Dude, you totally horked on him."

Walter considered telling her off, speaking to her sternly about decency, morality, and the virtue of the morning-after pill, but quickly realized he'd be the asshole publicly yelling at a visibly pregnant teenager. Instead he stormed off, swinging his briefcase aggressively from his left hand, though he longed to go back and smack her overly made-up face with the back of his hand. This thought followed him down the subway stairs, past the daily installation of elderly *Watchtower*-toting ladies, as he flashed his Metropass at the three-hundred-pound unshaven T.T.C. worker in the horn-rimmed glasses and squeezed onto the 8:17 A.M. eastbound train headed toward Bay station. Her image, her grotesque expression, was firmly planted

in Walter's mind as the wad of spit still stained the back of his XXL coat.

Walter thought about that vile expectorating girl all the way to work. The subway clicked and bumped along and the passengers awkwardly pushed up against each other, averting gazes as they crammed tightly into each other's armpits. Oblivious to the vague smell of wet dog and gym bag that came along with his morning commute, Walter thought only of that girl. He thought of her red hair freed from its lacquered perch on her head, falling loosely around her shoulders as she lay beneath him, her pale face twisting into expressions of violent pleasure. Walter imagined her over his knee, shrieking and squirming with each slap of his palm, hairbrush, or riding crop. He then imagined her curled tightly against him, spent, her head on his chest, her voice saying his name over and over, thanking him repeatedly for his brutality.

Walter was in the thick of his fantasy, in the imaginary throes of passion with a red-headed spitting bus stop girl he'd seen only minutes earlier, and when he opened his eyes the elderly Indian man across from him was watching in disgust.

Walter lifted his briefcase from the floor and put it on his lap.

Despite the embarrassment, he knew the teen had sealed it for him. He would have to find a beautiful, soft place to put his violence.

Walter was a miserable accountant who spent most of his life accounting for lost time. He had been spat on and stepped on. And then he met Veronica.

Walter worked in the basement of a building on Bay Street and Veronica worked on the twenty-seventh floor. He had never had occasion to travel higher than the lobby, to mingle with the people whom he supposed held the strings

of power, but one day he was staring at the peeling wall of his toothpaste-coloured basement office and the phone that rarely rang rang. A frantic assistant on the verge of tears demanded that he come up to the corporate offices with printouts of the expense reports.

"I can E-mail them. I always E-mail them," he said. Walter preferred the impersonality of a tersely worded E-mail rather than the irritating exchange he was having with the thoroughly incompetent, blubbery girl twenty-seven floors above him. He picked at a hangnail on his left index finger as the assistant, barely out of university, began to cry hysterically.

"She won't have it. She's going to fire me. Please, Wallace, Please."

The girl could have had the decency to get his name right, but a crying girl was always someone Walter could forgive. He put his shoes back on. He usually took them off under his desk on account of the fact that he was always alone. He spat into his hand and smoothed his hair back from his forehead. Into the elevator and up the twenty-seven floors, down the cheerfully decorated death-row hallway to Veronica's double-doored office with six pages of expense reports clutched firmly in a clammy fist.

Veronica's office had two full walls of windows and was decorated in various shades of black, beige, and grey. She wore a slim pencil skirt, the waistband high, snug around her narrow rib cage, her hair pulled back tightly from her face. Walter felt the weight of his own lumpiness contrast with the column that was her upright spine. She was severe in speech and action in every order she relayed.

After the expense reports were discussed thoroughly, Veronica sat down rigidly in her high-backed leather office

MATTHEW DALEY



chair, indicating she was done with him. Walter watched, transfixed, as she kicked her stilettos from her feet. Then, to avoid embarrassing himself with his stare, he turned to flee, the salvation of Veronica's incompetent assistant satisfaction enough for one workday. He would have a tuna melt and spend the rest of his clocked hours reviewing barely legal Webcam pornography from the comfort of his basement cell. He'd almost reached the door when she suddenly, uncharacteristically, asked, "What do you do for fun, Walter?"

"Excuse me?"

"Someone like you, I wonder, what is it you do for fun?" Her was tone patronizing, but Walter was quite sure she was making a rare effort to be somewhat human.

"Fun?"

"Yes, Walter. Fun. Do you enjoy films? Dancing? Fine food?"

"I volunteer at an animal shelter. I like animals. And jazz. Records. I like listening to records."

"Perhaps I should come over and listen to some of your records."

So one Sunday Walter met Veronica at his apartment and Walter put records on.

They drank camomile tea together in the quiet of the afternoon, and the sunlight snuck in through the slits of his wooden blinds and warmed their arms while they snacked on digestives and exchanged pleasantries. A lime green melamine tea tray sat between them while Walter talked of his volunteer work feeding kittens and walking trou-

bled dogs. Veronica spoke of the budgets she'd balanced that others thought couldn't be balanced. And then she asked Walter to slap her. When she did so, he dropped his teaspoon suddenly and it clattered onto his saucer.

Veronica made Walter crumple, made him afraid to spoon the sugar into her tea cup for fear he would miscalculate. Her fingernails were all of the same exact length, each painted the same shade of blackberry, and tapping impatiently on Walter's tea tray.

"Excuse me?"

"Slap me, Walter."

"But why?"

"Because it's what I do for fun."

There was a silence that fell between them. They stared at each other, Walter the first to look away, toward his shoes.

"This is what you wanted, no?"

He nodded slowly, unsure of how she had been able to guess his hidden proclivities during a brief conversation about expense reports and "fun." But she seemed to understand immediately that someone confined to the basement yearned only to spend an afternoon humiliating those with a two-window view.

"Should we stand up?"

"Walter, you're not supposed to ask me what we should do."

Walter stood up while Veronica remained seated, her expression anticipating his next move. Meekly he reached across the table for the collar of Veronica's crisp white blouse. There was a false start, some gentle fumbling with the fabric at her neckline, and then, with sudden violence, he yanked her to her feet with so much force that she momentarily lost her footing and stumbled on her eight hundred dollar shoes. For a moment Veronica was held up only by Walter's clenched fist, a split second of power and weakness that aroused both of them simultaneously.

The half-eaten biscuits and the steaming herbal tea underlined the absurdity of his actions, but Walter was determined.

"On your knees," he said, his voice faltering slightly.

She obliged, plummeting to the floor in swift collapse. He held her by the back of her head, the soft, stubby fingers of his left hand embedded in the pale yellow of her tightly knotted French twist. He lifted his right hand suddenly and swung, the flat of his palm connecting with the pink of her left cheek with a satisfying crack.

The sting of it. His hand, palm flat, against her face, abrupt and determined. The sound of it stinging more than the actual sting. Veronica reeled in



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Pumpkin Patch

The farmer's wife does not wait
for the round green heads to ripen
before she walks into the field,
presses her chisel relentlessly,
carving the name of each child,
all eight, into hard rind.
The still-attached umbilicals
keeping the family together for a time.

She returns at the end of the season, takes inventory,
sees which succumbed to frost and is now half-rotted,
which to mildew or mole.
And the few fiery skulls left—
fattened on late-August sun—
the two that make it through
from seed to her hand,
to oven, then seed again.

—DANI COUTURE

momentary horror, her face twisted into an expression of surprise and pain. Briefly Walter regretted slapping her, worried he was being tested and would be fired, but when he saw a smile spread across her mouth and a perfectly manicured eyebrow arc in satisfaction, he knew he was in for another swing. A car alarm blared from the street, and, buoyed by its relentless and futile shrieking, he swung at her repeatedly until she pleaded for him to relent.

Their relationship continued in much the same vein for two months. Each Tuesday, at noon, Veronica would arrive at Walter's apartment, where he had prepared a platter of camomile tea and biscuits. After fifteen minutes of small talk, Walter would order Veronica to her knees and proceed to slap her in the face multiple times. For variety, he would occasionally take her over his knee, the curve of her rump beneath her starched skirt a pleasing change from the flush of her contorted face, but there was an awkwardness to the act given that Walter was a full three inches shorter than her. The majority of the time she preferred to be on her knees, an occasionally tearful yet thankful victim slapped violently but tenderly in the face.

As the weeks progressed Walter also managed to increase his repertoire of

degrading names to call her, and what began as a simple "bitch" here, and "dirty girl" there, progressed to "whore," "slut," and his greatest achievement, "stupid fucking cunt." Veronica was pleased with his progress, and while she made that clear in the context of their sessions with endless thank yous and the occasional grovelling at his feet, she never said a word about his abuse after the violence was completed.

Walter came to love the vulnerability of her gaze beneath him, the dramatic way she winced in the moment of reprieve between blows. His love was expressed in his caution not to leave telling marks, practising the force of his swing on his own bare thigh while watching late-night television on his couch. Despite her yelping pleas of "harder," Walter was proud he came to learn the limits of her skin, to hide the violence of their indiscretions.

They were usually finished by twelve-forty-five, at which point Veronica would fix her hair and makeup in Walter's tiny yet immaculately clean bathroom, then glide wordlessly out the front door. At precisely twelve-fifty-five Walter would clear the tea and cookies from the table and return to work, back to the safety of his spreadsheets and pornography. Never once did he see Veronica outside the context of his apartment, notwithstanding

the occasional begging that came via phone from her army of frantic assistants.

The ninth Tuesday she offered him money.

"You see, Walter, I really appreciate the service you provide me, and I would like it to continue. Therefore, I offer you the incentive for it to continue." She opened her purse and pulled out one hundred dollars—two fifties, crisp and loveless—and placed them on the tray between them.

Walter was wounded by the gesture.

"I wouldn't stop. Why would I stop?"

"I don't care why you would stop. I just don't want you to."

"Well you could simply ask me not to."

"You don't ask people to do things. You pay them to do things."

Veronica pushed the two bills at him across the tray with her perfectly painted fingernails, her cheeks still flushed with the sting of his palm. Walter looked at her, then at the money, and placed his hand on hers. He leaned across the table and kissed her for the first time, long and sweet.

"Let yourself out," he said.

Walter stood up from the table, smoothed his hair back from his face, and retreated from Veronica and her money, walking out the front door of his apartment and into the street, toward the Dufferin subway station. At the door of the station, waiting at the bus stop, was the red-headed teenage girl—still smoking, hair still slicked back—but this time with a stroller and progeny in tow. He stopped and stared at her, contemplated his subway fantasy of her submission and humiliation and the one hundred dollars waiting for him at home. She turned to look at him, smoke dangling from her fresh girl lips while her baby gurgled and kicked in the stroller between them.

"What the fuck are you looking at?" she asked.

Walter smiled and spat squarely in the centre of her pink fleece sweater. ▽

*Stacey May Fowles lives in Dovercourt Village. She is the author of two novels, *Be Good (Tightrope, 2007)* and *Fear of Fighting (Invisible, 2008)*, and the co-editor of the anthology *She's Shameless: Women Write About Growing Up, Rocking Out and Fighting Back (Tightrope, 2009)*. She is also the publisher of *Shameless* magazine and the circulation director of the *Walrus*.*

The Harsh Truth of the Camera Eye

An artist faces the cruel absurdities of aging, in a most absurd place.

PHOTO CONCEPT BY R. M. VAUGHAN

R. M. Vaughan hates many things. This is why we are friends. My first encounter with him was through one of his videos. I was at a screening of shorts at the 2005 Inside Out Toronto Lesbian and Gay Film and Video Festival, feeling that mixture of apprehension and hope that can only be experienced at such events—the hope (against hope) that this next film wouldn’t fill me with despair for the state of queer cinema, and the apprehension that it most probably would. Then, R. M. Vaughan and Jared Mitchell’s *Hate* came on the screen. It opened abruptly with a shot of Richard’s head, and his inimitable, apologetic, narration. As the camera did a slow pan down his all-too-human, all-too-naked body, he enumerated everything wrong with gay film, gay art, and gays. “At last,” I thought. “Someone who is as filled with hate as I am.”

But, to paraphrase a friend of mine, we’re not actually filled with hate, we’re filled with taste—except I can’t really say that in all confidence about Richard. He has a very complex relationship with taste, and all of his work sits, jostling and uncomfortable, within the thorny confines of that relationship. His work is acerbic, resentful, exasperated, and very, very funny, but also yearning, messy, and emotionally labile. Richard’s work, I feel, springs from his desire to be a dandy, a man of high wit and perfect taste, knowing full well that the facts of his life betray him: his class, his upbringing,

his neuroses, his body. Of course he is tasteful and stylish, but taste and style are not always kind to those who aspire to them. Richard’s relationship with taste is like a schoolchild’s relationship with a crush—he loves it and wants its blessing and approval, and expresses that by kicking it in the shins and yanking its pigtails.

One day this September, Richard and I found ourselves in the basement of the Eaton Centre, at the Sears Portrait Studio. Richard had prepped me: the woman he had spoken to on the phone earlier had totally understood what he wanted to do. “Eva,” the Sears photographer we found ourselves confronted with that day, was decidedly not that woman. With her hair the inadvertent colour of irradiated cadmium and her chirpy eastern European accent uninflected by the niceties of volume control, Eva was a woman of dubious taste herself, most likely under the impression that she and taste were on a first name basis when, in fact, she was hanging out with an altogether different deity.

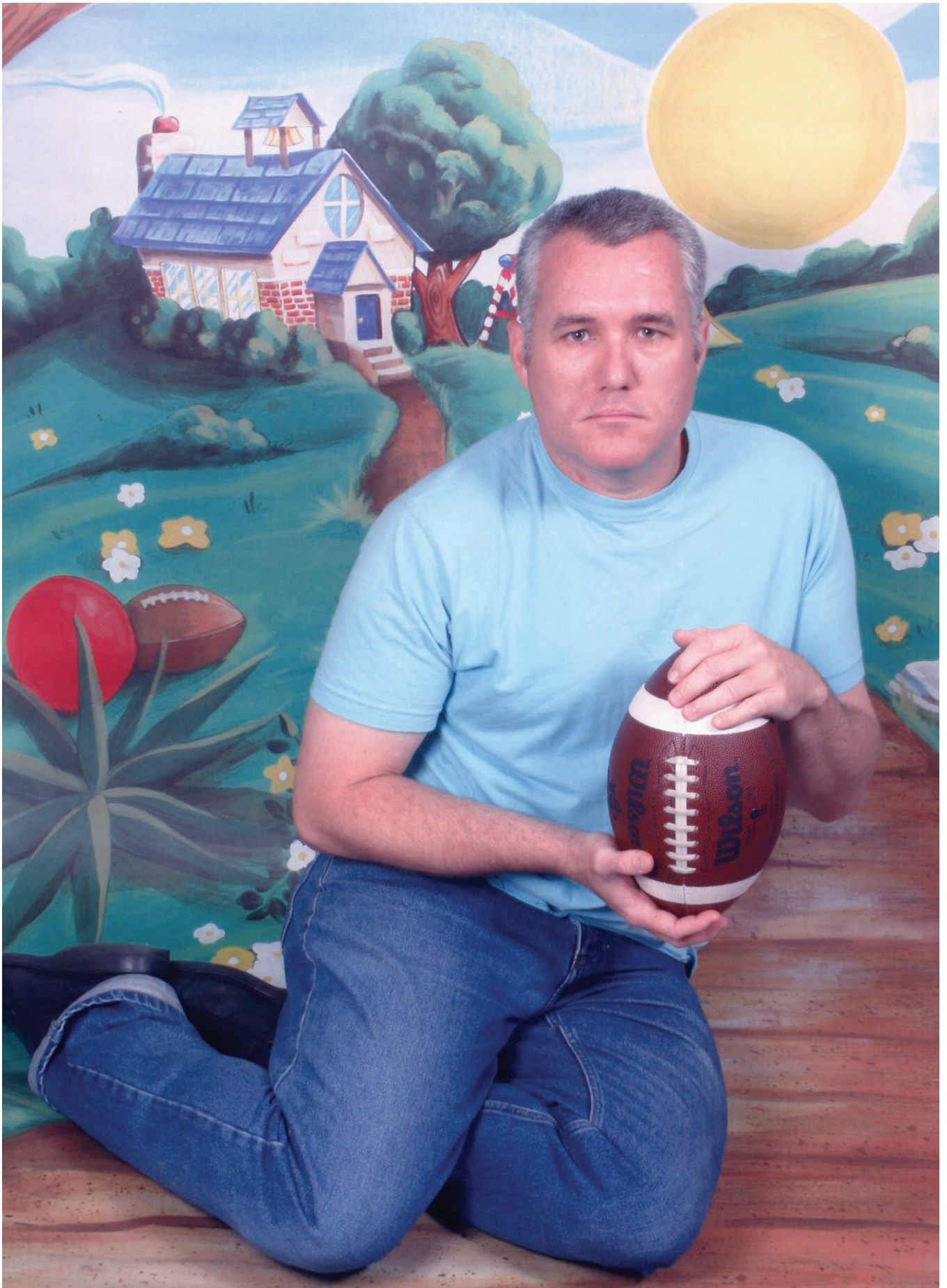
And so we were unsure how to proceed; how would this woman react to two cranky fags taking the piss out of her job? After all, when one is using the Sears Portrait Studio for his own artistic ends, it’s best to keep things on a need-to-know basis. But somehow Eva was game, albeit in a blissfully ignorant way, reacting to Richard’s various absurd poses with a naïve, manic enthusiasm

and megawatt smile that threatened to suffocate us (no wonder she had such trouble keeping babies from crying).

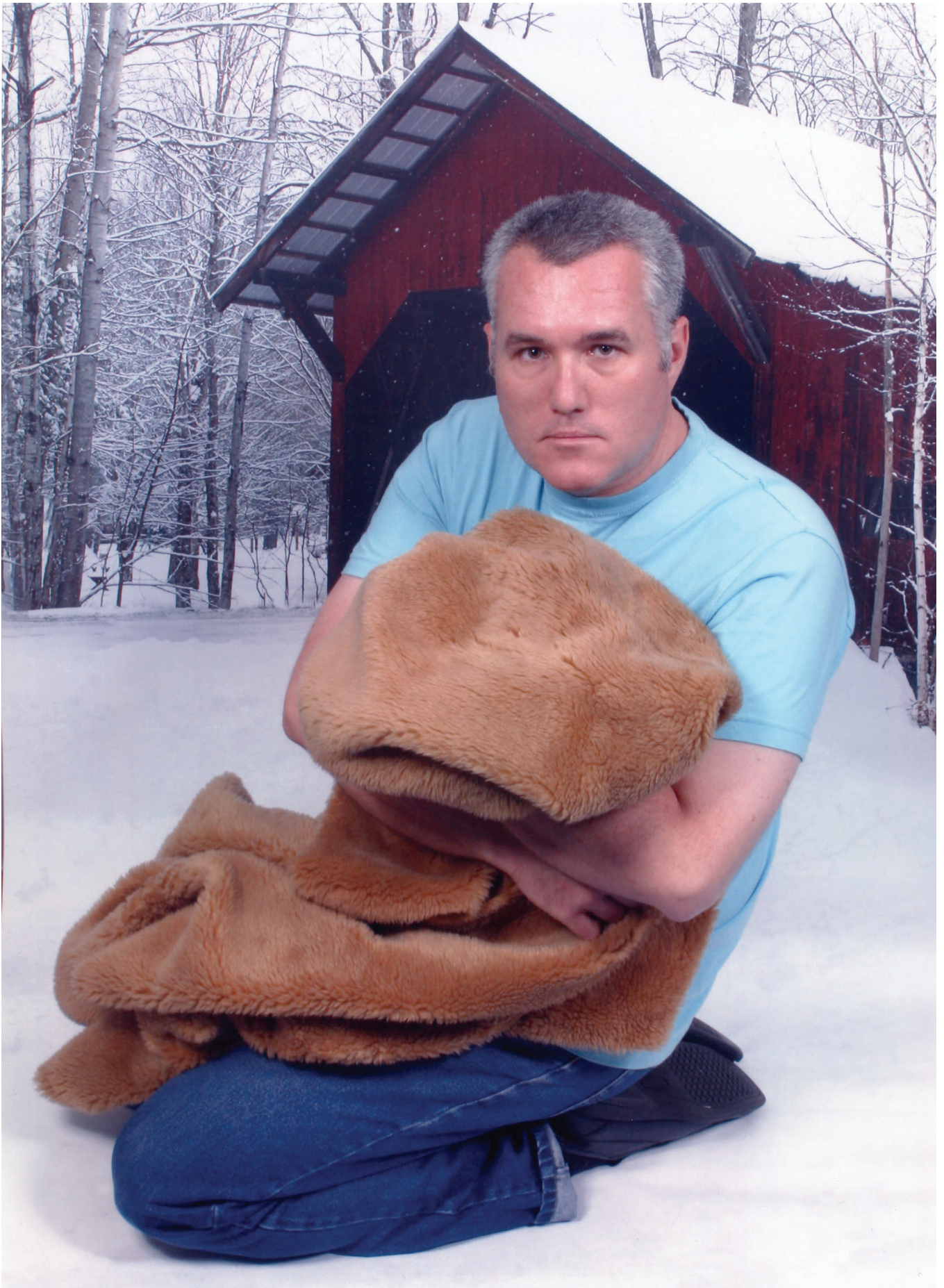
In the photographs that follow, Richard plays his usual dangerous game. He is one of the best narcissists I know—attention must always be paid, but to his abjection, his shortcomings, his impotent failures. What better way to illustrate the cruel absurdities and petty indignities of aging than to situate himself in and amongst not the trappings of youth, but the mass-manufactured backdrops to some faceless corporation’s treacly, kitschy idea of youth?

By the time the shoot was over, whereas I was obliterated by the experience, Richard was enthused. As he paid for the session, he engaged Eva in a discussion on the actress and singer Jane Birkin (“My God, you guys are just encyclopedias!”). He was full of warmth and fondness for our unwitting collaborator, for how unexpectedly game she had been, for her compliments, for her friendliness (false, but certainly not compulsory). In the end, Richard had found a fellow traveller, and might even have been envious. Here we were, mere ironic arrivistes to the horrid campiness of the Sears Portrait Studio, while Eva, in her white jeans, white lacy polycotton blouse, white athletic sneakers, and radioactive hair, was living the life. Her neglected sense of taste was authentic, and Richard wanted in.

—SHOLEM KRISHTALKA











Savage

BY NATHANIEL G. MOORE

The city was full of glamorously tanned kids: on bikes, in hyper-coloured bathing suits, on skateboards, at the arcades, in the malls, mowing lawns, having their hair cut. The summer was a wide brilliant green and a large tireless orange; it swelled in miracles. Ricky Galore was sucking on homemade pink-lemonade Popsicles, reloading the ice cube tray, and relishing his thirteenth summer.

Down the hall, in the den, his fourteen-year-old sister, Holly, was sweating buckets. That's what she called it.

"Ricky!" she yelled. "Get me one!"

Ricky was in the kitchen.

"Yeah, I'm a-comin'," Ricky shouted back. "What kind?"

The Popsicles were on heavy rotation.

"Cold! Seriously," Holly said, a harsh look in her soft brown eyes, "this is nuts. We're going to fucking melt."

"Better than going with Mom and Dad to Hamilton," Ricky said, his mouth muffled by an empty plastic cup.

"That's true." Holly gagged on her cube. "Fuck. O.K., let's think."

"We could go underwater," Ricky said with a slow, almost toad-like delivery.

"Wha?" Holly murmured, both parched and angry. "Ice water, get me ice water too." She was flipping around the dial with the television remote. The television was on mute. "It's, like, a billion degrees."

She kicked the sheet off the couch.

"It's cool in my room," Ricky said.

"Your dungeon?" Holly sniggered. "Don't forget my cup! Your room is all dark and spooky."

"So are you," Ricky said, taking his sister's cup from her hand.

Ricky was fast with the waters and Popsicles.

"Dungeon smungeon. Beats having, ah, sweaty tits."

"Queer bait. Ricky! Water! I'm a sweaty

Betty!" She sucked her cube then bit the hard zero-calorie pellet into oblivion.

Sitting beside her, Ricky poured a bit of his drink on his sister's legs.

"Ahhh!" Holly cooed. "Freak boy! That's freezing!"

"You said you were melting. Let's get a pool."

"My legs are a pool." Holly made a nerdy photo smile. "Let's go to a pool." She got up off the couch and stretched. "I'll call Liz."

Liz was fun, a playful blond who occasionally had a potty mouth that always caught Ricky off guard. Holly dialed and twirled the wire around her thumb. Ricky's bladder trembled, his head beaded sweat, his mouth felt full of pretzels. He felt slowed down by something.

The heat had reached his temples.

Third ring. Holly looked over at her younger brother.

"Wanna call any of your crappy little pals?" she asked.

"No, they're all on probation."

"For masturbation?"

"No," Ricky said, mentally consulting a dwindling list of neighbourhood mid-carders.

"They're in slings?"

"I don't know."

Holly turned her head to the phone.

"You home? You alive? Cool. Hey, Liz, Lizzy, Elizabeaut, wanna go swim-swim? . . . I'm with Ricky. We is hot tamales. . . . What? . . . Yeah? . . . Oh-key. After. . . . Sure."

"Well?" Ricky asked.

"She's in."

"She's where?"

"She's in—as in she swim-swim."

"Oh."

"My baby Elizabeth is in a romantic quarantine."

"Huh?" Ricky said.

"Nothing. She's lovesick over this guy, but he's too old for her, like twenty-three or something. Some college guy."

"Oh."

"Get your suit. To the bikes!"

They pedalled toward the crummy community pool—its blue skin hovering over a black-striped, chlorinated ocean giving off the smell of grilled skin.

Ricky lay down on the deck. Eyes clenched, the orange, pink, and red veins he saw darkened in the heat. As he opened his eyes, dozens of benign sunspots, birthmarks, and freckles pranced on other bodies, on lifeguards, on passersby, on winos, on his sister, on . . . Elizabeth.

"Ricky, you're gonna burn."

"Huh?" Ricky was now awake. He hadn't planned on falling asleep. His mind was being rewired by the heat, a part of him wanting nothing more than to be a tile in the girls' change room.

"Come on, get in the water. We're bored in here!" Elizabeth chimed in.

"Ohhhhhh yyyyyyeeeeaaaaahhhh!" Ricky said, getting to his knees, pointing like a sprinter at Elizabeth's wholesome body, her boom-boom hips, chest, and behind slick with chlorinated water. His eyes flickered like Morse code as they examined her contoured black one-piece bathing suit.

"Come on down, Ricky!" Holly said, bobbing up and down in the water. "Come save us from sharks!"

As Ricky stood up from the hot concrete, he felt dizzy, adjusted himself, and squinted before dramatically flopping into the pool's deep end. Heckles from the lifeguards ensued. Dramatic posturing from Ricky, hands saying "back off," hands saying "I promise."

"Tricky!" Elizabeth beamed as a cool tide hit her sensational lips.

"Let's see who can hold their breath the longest!" Holly said.





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"O.K.," Ricky said. "I am undefeated in these parts."

Elizabeth's teeth, her lips parting, water going in and out.

"O.K., ready?" Elizabeth said, mouth burbling in the water.

"One."

"Two."

"Three."

At thirty-three seconds Elizabeth and Holly surfaced. Thirty-four, thirty-five, thirty-six . . .

"Rick-y! Rick-y!" Holly and Elizabeth cheered, watching the top of his head barely poking from the surface. A bit of Elizabeth brushed against his ribs.

"Let's stickle him. He'll come up for sure."

"Way ahead of you," Elizabeth said. Forty-nine, fifty, fifty-one, fifty-two . . .

Ricky adjusted his position underwater, fighting off a boner. The water cooled him, the hush impressed him. Gone was the wash of cricket noises from the telephone wires. He watched the constant stream of motion against the seamless bright above. He felt Elizabeth's hands on him, or at least he hoped they were hers. Fifty-nine, one minute, one-oh-one, one-oh-two . . .

As he broke through the water at the one-oh-seven mark, the overcast clouds tightened the sky, a murder of horseflies galloped toward their epidermis buffet.

"Yay, Ricky!" Elizabeth cheered.

His tight grey swim trunks seemed invisible. Hands fell over his eyes from behind. The smell of Elizabeth's hot breath, zerbent on his neck, and a kiss on both cheeks. Oh my! Oh my! Oh my! Elizabeth and Holly just kissed Ricky!

"We're gonna split. Meet us out front?" Holly said, goading Elizabeth with her eyes.

Elizabeth spewed water on Holly's head.

"Ew," Holly said.

"See ya soon," Ricky said.

He watched the girls wade toward the shallow-end ladder before hopping out of the pool. Drips consumed by towels. Holly leaned over and tried to get the water out of her ear. Elizabeth put a baseball cap over her wet hair and wrapped a yellow towel around her waist.

"Looks stormy," Ricky shouted, pointing to the sky.

Holly's ear cleared up.

"O.K., so five minutes or so?" she shouted back.

Arms at her shoulders, Holly's dark

Visiting Ours

It is not uncommon for the dying to be visited by ghosts. Haunting emissaries, semi-real, fill the void between now and what's next, play a last foil to life, mirroring past and future, miring both in the veiled confusing present.

And when we visit—lucid with reports, using old tricks to stir memory, commentary, or “forgotten in the name of self-preservation” emotion—we hope to see someone who loves us, someone we love looking less like they’ve just seen a ghost.

—CHRIS CHAMBERS

wet hair tangled and drying unevenly, was sticking to her suit and face.

“You’re all freckly,” Elizabeth said. “They get darker in the sun, eh?”

“Please, don’t remind me. We’ll see you soon, ’kay?”

“Uh-huh,” Ricky said.

“Don’t forget my bike is locked to yours, so don’t dawdle.”

“Yes, Grandma.”

Elizabeth laughed and tugged at Holly.

“Come on, old lady.”

Ricky undid his chain combination lock and released their bikes. Elizabeth’s chain was covered in yellow plastic, his, orange. They rode east on Broadway Avenue, through Mount Pleasant, quickly cutting through a high-school alley, and took the steep hill toward Bayview. As they reached Bayview, Elizabeth motioned them to the southwest curb.

“Hold on a sec, guys. I know the perfect movie to get. Well, two, actually. My friend works at the video store. Watch my bike. You want popcorn?”

“Yeah,” Holly said.

Ricky nodded.

“You hungry?”

“A bit. I think I drank a lot of the pool water.”

“Pee pool?”

“You’re a pee pool.”

“Shut up.”

Elizabeth returned, her hands flailing. “If I was doing the television version of this scene, these cases wouldn’t be blank but would have the real covers

of the movies on them. It’s called cross-marketing.”

“Huh?” Ricky said.

“She’s a cross-dresser, Ricky. Come on, let’s go.”

“All I’m saying is that since this isn’t a television movie, these cases are blank, you get it? They keep the real cases on the shelf so that future generations can long to see Dan Aykroyd—you know, so they have something to look forward to.”

“I don’t look forward to Aykroyd.”

“So I got two just in case,” Elizabeth said, twirling a plastic bag.

“Head case,” Ricky said.

“Good one, Ricky!” Holly said.

“O.K., let’s cross then go to our street,” Holly commanded. “I don’t like riding by the graveyard.”

“Then you’re going to just love what I’ve rented tonight, Hol,” Elizabeth said. “Come on, last one home has to paint the house.”

Three bikes and three sets of Converse (and slightly burned ankles) stopped at the top of Glenvale Boulevard. The early-evening sunlight gave the lower-numbered

houses a different sheen, and Ricky couldn’t fathom how his house was on this same street—how somehow, up here, in the early numbers, life was completely different.

“Hey, Ricky,” Holly said, nudging her head toward 6 Glenvale. “Isn’t that where your girlfriend lives? Kerri?”

“That was when I was in Grade 1.”

“Grade 8 Kerri!” Holly laughed.

“Oh her!” Elizabeth said. “With the tons of eye makeup. I remember her. My mom is friends with her mom.”

“Yeah, Ricky loved her. He’d walk up the street for blocks behind her after school. I’d always see him tailing her up Broadway.”

“That was, like, six years ago.”

“She’s probably married now.” Elizabeth said, rolling her pedal back, balancing on the sidewalk.

“She’d be about nineteen now.” Holly said, balancing her bicycle with no hands.

“O.K., enough history lessons. What is this, a board game?”

“This was your life, Ricky.” Elizabeth said.

“Now he likes Danielle, a girl in his class.”

For a moment the sun looked gritty and deep orange, like a colour photograph from the sixties. They were interrupted by a pickup honking. Catcalls. Ricky’s stomach knotted up.

“Don’t worry,” Holly said to her brother. “Just jerks.”

“Stupid trash,” Elizabeth added, pulling her pedal back with her shoe, adjusting her weight, shifting the handlebars back and forth.

“Ricky was gonna protect us,” Holly said.

“Yeah, I know,” Elizabeth said. “I could see that.”

Ricky looked to the ground. His heart was beating fast.

“Shall we continue?”

“Yes, dah-ling.” Holly said.

“Let’s race.”

Ricky enjoyed the downhill breeze tailing the girls. The setting sun pushed the night into a netherworld. He took a commanding lead for the last three blocks home, passing Rumsey, Beaufield, and Sutherland with powerful pumps and strides. How many times had he passed garage-sale posters and torn his paper-route collection tabs prematurely. Up the curb at Glenbrae and Glenvale, three houses in, onto the



front lawn. Ricky twisted awkwardly off his bike, veering where the diseased tree still grew, collapsing nosily, trying to make it appear as though he had been sitting calmly with his thoughts, trying to swallow his exhausted bursts of breathing, his back tire still spinning madly.

Walking her bike past his spill, Elizabeth furrowed her brow.

"You O.K., stud?" she asked, blowing wisps of her blond frizz-dry hair from her face. Ricky was still catching his breath.

"He's fine. They don't break down at that age," Holly joked. Ricky got up and parked his bike next to the others in the driveway, the soggy plastic bag containing his swimsuit all twisted and dangling from the handlebar like an insect nest.

Back in the den, Holly quizzed her brother.

"Did you close the garage door? Well? Close it. Do you want to order pizza or chicken and fries? Or burgers? Garage door, Ricky. Mom will scream if it's open. We'll never hear the end of it."

Not even a chance to breathe or find his spot on the couch with the girls.

Ricky ran outside in seconds flat, closing the garage with a barefoot thud. He returned, out of breath, face red as parts of their sunburns. He stared at Elizabeth.

"Are you a . . . a ghost?"

"What?"

"Just now, just right outside, um, I thought I saw you climb down from our tree. You know the one, on the front lawn."

He began to walk toward the television set. He turned around and faced them.

"But you were more floaty than anything, you were holding a tuna fish sandwich and offered me some. I think you should see a doctor about it," Ricky said. He stood on the coffee table.

"You're the one that needs the doctor," Elizabeth said.

Ricky jumped off the table, twirled around to face them, and collapsed comically in marionette failure on the floor. Elizabeth clapped.

"Don't encourage him, Lizbo, he won't stop," Holly said.

"Aw, it's cute. He's performing for me."

"Whack job!" Holly said, smacking Ricky on the bum. "Go make us a snack, Crazy."

Ricky leapt from the floor, catching a glimpse of Elizabeth's pristine smile.

"Snacks on the way," he laughed.

The house had calmly digested the final morsels of heat. A catastrophe of a snack was on its way: pretzels, apple slices, diet store-brand cola, cheese spread, soda crackers, celery, and strawberries. Elizabeth laughed as Ricky brought the tray in with swagger.

"Did you go to several different houses to get all this?" she asked.

"Yes. All but yours, Liz."

"Four pretzels?"

"It's really inconsistent," Holly added.

"Let's order a pizza. We're not turning on the oven."

"No. That's hard work."

"Why did Mom take the key?"

"What key?"

"To the oven."

"Oh my God, Ricky, shut up with your jokes."

"If I had hands," Ricky said, "I'd tickle you both."

"O.K., so what are we gonna watch?"

"Let's watch my sister order a pizza."

"What's the movie, I mean?"

"*Lost Boys*."

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Procyon Iotor

Exotic to me as pandas, these familiar bandits; Sexton's whig emblems and woman chasers, who can turn door knobs and release zippers. Hooligans, routers. Tax collectors after a feast, romping over their napkins. A raccoon's poem, Snyder says, amazes you with the mess it makes. Stegosaurus-humped, when not so happy. Panzer-like—someone else said that. And this mother

and her little ones, a caterpillar approaching the moonlit bench and down again. Where did he go and why won't he come back?

—ROSE HUNTER

The pizza was a decision—like soda, like seating arrangements, like who would see if the cat was in the house.

"Sadie!" Holly called softly. "Put the movie in, Liz. Ricky, you go check outside for Sadie. Maybe you locked her in the garage."

"I doubt it."

"Just do it," Holly ordered. Elizabeth nodded.

"O.K. Jeez. Our celebrity time-traveling cat is more important than my downtime. I get it."

Rain enveloped the house. Cars passing on the wet street outside made a gentle noise. From the basement, Ricky heard thunder as he spotted Sadie in a pile of sawdust under his father's giant table saw.

"Ricky, come outside. It's crazy rain!"

All the dry heat was washed away. The three of them leaned out on the front stoop, drinking pop then running around in barefoot dares: from one end of the driveway to the other. From the steps through the wet grass. From the steps to the other side of the street and back.

"O.K., I'm changing into something else. Liz, you wanna borrow?"

"Uh-huh," Elizabeth said with a half-yawn. "Just gonna call the warden, tell them I'm staying over."

The house was doused in rain, the sid-

ing cooled, the brick soaked, and the sky tumultuous.

"Red? What section?"

The usher peered down at the set of tickets in their father Randall's muggy hand. Ricky noticed the usher's slow robotic twitch, especially as he pointed. How he straightened his arm in an awkward, chopped series of movements.

"That way, sir. Enjoy the show," the usher said. It was July 27th and Ricky had been twelve years old for nearly two weeks.

The announcement was tinny and squawked: "Ladies and gentlemen, souvenir programs and other W.W.F. merchandise are available at the concession stands. Don't forget to pick up the latest merchandise from all your favourite wrestling stars."

As Ricky passed other ushers, he read their faces: "You paid for this crap? Grow up, kid. Dragging your father to this shit..."

In their cold seats, Randall cleared his throat and peered into the crowd that

slowly, noisily filled Maple Leaf Gardens. He turned to his children, asked Holly if she was cold, if she wanted a hot dog, and ask your brother.

"Is there a program?" Randall asked. Ricky showed his father the single page. He grunted.

"Just like church, right?" Holly joked, passing her dad the fight card Ricky had let drop onto his knee. Ricky heard what Holly said and looked at his sister. Randall seemed to like the joke.

"That was funny."

Ricky had goosebumps. He looked at his sister's legs as she rubbed them, her pale limbs poking through the denim curtain of her fraying jean shorts. The garden howled with gusts of cold air and hollers. Ricky stared at his feet, scanned his way up, noticed Holly's knees and how her skin, its appearance, even the odd scrape, seemed similar to his own. She noticed his eyes on her legs. He was thinking to himself. She looked at his blue Converse shoes dangling, then at the creased program in his lap.

"So, you want Ricky Steamboat to win cuz—"

"No, not because of my name, duh," he said, cutting his sister off. "I think he'll win the belt from Macho Man tonight."

"You think so?" Holly scratched her knee, the tiny hairs on her arms and legs standing up amongst sparse freckles.

"You know," he said to Holly, "I think Steamboat's gonna win, cuz, ah, he's

a lot quicker. Well, not a lot, but still, I think he's got better stamina."

The heads of two devout Savage marks a row in front of them turned around.

"No way, man. Macho's gonna kill 'em. Steamboat's a wimp."

Ricky was tense with fear. He could smell their Right Guard,

a certain musk. He could tell they were older and felt immediate disgust for the way their candy caked wet along their ugly braced teeth. Ricky wanted nothing to do with them, but was still frightened. They were a slow-witted pack of teenaged retards he would sacrifice to the gods of indifference.

They continued, at a lower volume. "Macho Madness all the way," one boy



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declared before both turned to face the empty ring.

"Ohhhhhh yyyyyyyyyeaaaaahhhh!" the boys said, nodding and manoeuvring their hands in a manner that imitated the Macho Man's manic finger gestures.

Holly shrugged, eyes staring through her bangs.

"Who knows what's going to happen," she said.

Ricky was looking down at his feet again.

"You O.K.?"

"Yeah." Ricky was trembling a little. He exhaled and ran his hands through his hair. He tapped his feet, which barely touched the sticky concrete floor.

"So, it's a title match though? That could happen?" Holly asked. "Who is better?"

"Well . . .," Ricky said, a bit quieter, still feeling his goosebumps. He loved his sister—really loved her. This was like the times on the couch on rainy days, watching videos they'd borrow from the library, when the rain and the movies and the thunder rolled over the house—a few cans of diet cola, a few handfuls of candy, watermelon—and how they'd tug on the Saturday-morning couch blanket until some boundary-smashing question would send him into a fit of shame: "Do you jerk off? . . . Yet? . . . You will. All guys do. . . But you're not a guy."

And now here, Ricky's birthday gift: the wrestling match.

"I think Ricky is faster, but the Macho Man is tricky, and stronger. And smarter—maybe."

Holly pulled out a small emery board.

"Who else is fighting?"

"J.Y.D. is versing King Kong Bundy."

Ricky was sniffing the program, holding the page under his nose as if it were a fence he was peering over.

"You mean 'versus.'"

"Yeah."

"J.Y.D.? Oh wait—Junkyard God, right?" Holly said.

"Not 'God'—'Dog.'"

"That's what I meant." Holly said, a decapitated string of red licorice in her hand.

"Who do you think will win that one?" She now had the program on her lap. A stash of candy in her bag revealed

itself. Ricky thought about it. Bundy had been real mad since losing the cage match to Hulk Hogan in April, but Junkyard Dog was friends with Hulk and wouldn't want to let the Hulkster down. Maybe with a few head-butts he'd be able to knock Bundy down, and then maybe even slam him!

"The God! Bow-wow-wow!" Ricky howled, stirring with excitement. His shoelaces were undone and dragging in the dark muck of the Garden's floor.

Holly tilted her neck back and offered Ricky a piece of gum.

"What time is it?"

She rubbed both hands over her knees.

"Eight-fifteen," Ricky replied, noticing the ring attendants fussing with a turnbuckle.

"Where's Dad?" Holly wondered, reluctant to turn her neck to look where she imagined her father might emerge.

"Washroom," Ricky said, nodding toward the nearest exit. "Did you talk to Grammy? She called yesterday."

"No, no one told me," Holly said, pulling her gum out in a long strip and sticking it under her seat.

"Whaddyathink Mom's doing?" Ricky asked.

"Dunno. Talking to herself? Folding your underwear?"

"Gross."

Holly was laughing.

"Mom's probably vacuuming her farts," she said, howling even louder as an announcer stepped into the ring.

Randall returned to his seat, cleared his throat, and asked Holly what was happening.

"O.K., showtime, Ricky!" Holly said, turning to her father to say the exact same thing. She squeezed Ricky's forearm. He ground his feet into the Garden's unkempt skin. ✎



Nathaniel G. Moore lives in Christie-Ossington. His books include Wrong Bar (Tightrope, 2009) and the upcoming Pastels Are Pretty Much the Polar Opposite of Chalk, which will be published by DC Books in early 2010. He also wrote the film Macho Girls, which was inspired in part by "Savage." Previously, he had never been published by Taddle Creek. Ever.



T H E B O O K S

Animal, by Alexandra Leggat (Anvil, 2009; \$18). Alexandra's stories are usually not for the emotionally squeamish, but the characters in this collection really raise the bar on reader discomfort—in the best possible way. Excuse *Taddle Creek*'s lack of elegance, but this is a damn fine book.

The Peep Diaries, by Hal Niedzviecki (City Lights, 2009; \$18.95). Oprah likes to peep. Who knew? Hal's latest Everyman cultural examination (in this case of society's voluntary and involuntary loss of privacy in a technology-laden world) ended up getting the attention of *O* magazine, which named it one of its "bounteous books of summer." It's only a matter of time before Hal reaches local-celebrity-who-punches-the-button-to-make-the-lottery-balls-drop-on-TV-level fame.

*22 Skidoo/SubTraction*s, by Michael Boughn (BookThug, 2009; \$18). Mike Boughn's an old-school beatnik type of poet and, like most of his ilk, has a sense of humour that many modern poets lack. That humour is all over this book, in the writing, the cover, and the sticker proclaiming it the winner of the Friggin Prize.

George Sprott: 1894–1975, by Seth (Drawn & Quarterly, 2009; \$29.95). George Sprott has that certain Sethness fans of the illustrator's work really love. George Sprott is a beautiful, oversized book (measuring twelve by fourteen inches) and one of Seth's better and less linear stories.

Inventory, by Marguerite Pigeon (Anvil, 2009; \$15). Finally, a poetry collection as obsessed with cataloguing and cross-referencing as *Taddle Creek* is. The magazine feels much less alone.

Pure Product, by Jason Guriel (Signal, 2009; \$16). This book contains poems titled "E.g.," "I.e.," and "Etc." Poetry about en dashes and double-spacing after periods can't be far behind. *Pure Product* represents a giant leap for poetry.

• *Heaven is Small*, by Emily Schultz (Anansi, 2009; \$29.95). *Heaven*'s jacket copy calls it an "immensely readable . . . novel." *Taddle Creek* thinks that's selling it short. Like when you say an unattractive friend has a good personality. It's more than readable—it's fun, entertaining, playful, and determined, worthy of the hardcover treatment Emily has once again managed to obtain.

• *Buying Cigarettes for the Dog*, by Stuart Ross (Freehand, 2009; \$19.95). *Taddle Creek* can't believe this is Stu's first fiction collection since 1997. Where his last book of poems, *Dead Cars in Managua*, showed a different, more serious side of Stuart Ross, this collection is Stu at his surreal finest.

The Hayflick Limit, by Matthew Tierney (Coach House, 2009; \$16.95). According to the back cover of this poetry collection, the Hayflick limit "sets an unsurpassable lifespan for our species at just over 120 years," based on Leonard Hayflick's determination that healthy human cells can only divide so many times. For some reason, *Taddle Creek* is now afraid to go to sleep.

Overqualified, by Joey Comeau (ECW, 2009; \$14.95). Jim Munroe did the letters-to-corporations thing pretty well a few years ago, but *Overqualified* is a different beast: a collection of (one assumes) unsent cover letters to a variety

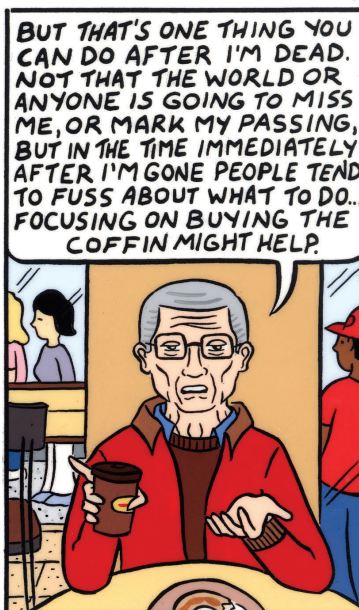
of businesses, from I.B.M. to Greenpeace, each one more honest and blunt than the last. *Overqualified* is funny, but its underlying (and sometimes overlying) subject matter concerning a dead brother makes it sad as well.

• *Drop-In*, by Dave Lapp (Conundrum, 2008; \$17). It's hard to know how a book about working with underprivileged kids will read and how it will be received. *Drop-In* is uncomfortable, a bit naïve, and brutally honest. And it works. Dave is finally getting his due, and *Taddle Creek* couldn't be happier for him.

All Our Grandfathers Are Ghosts, by Pasha Malla (Snare, 2008; \$10). This book of poetry got little play, overshadowed by Pasha's short story collection, *The Withdrawal Method*, which is too bad, because it's actually one of the funnier, better, collections of poetry *Taddle Creek* has seen in some time.

The Man Game, by Lee Henderson (Viking, 2008; \$32). There are a number of clichés *Taddle Creek* could use to describe this full-length debut, and they'd all be valid. *The Man Game* is a triumphant page-turning tour de force that *Taddle Creek* could not put down. This story of a former vaudevillian who recruits two down-on-their-luck lumberjacks in 1886 to help her invent an artistic new sport is the kind of first novel that sets the standard for debut novels.

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



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