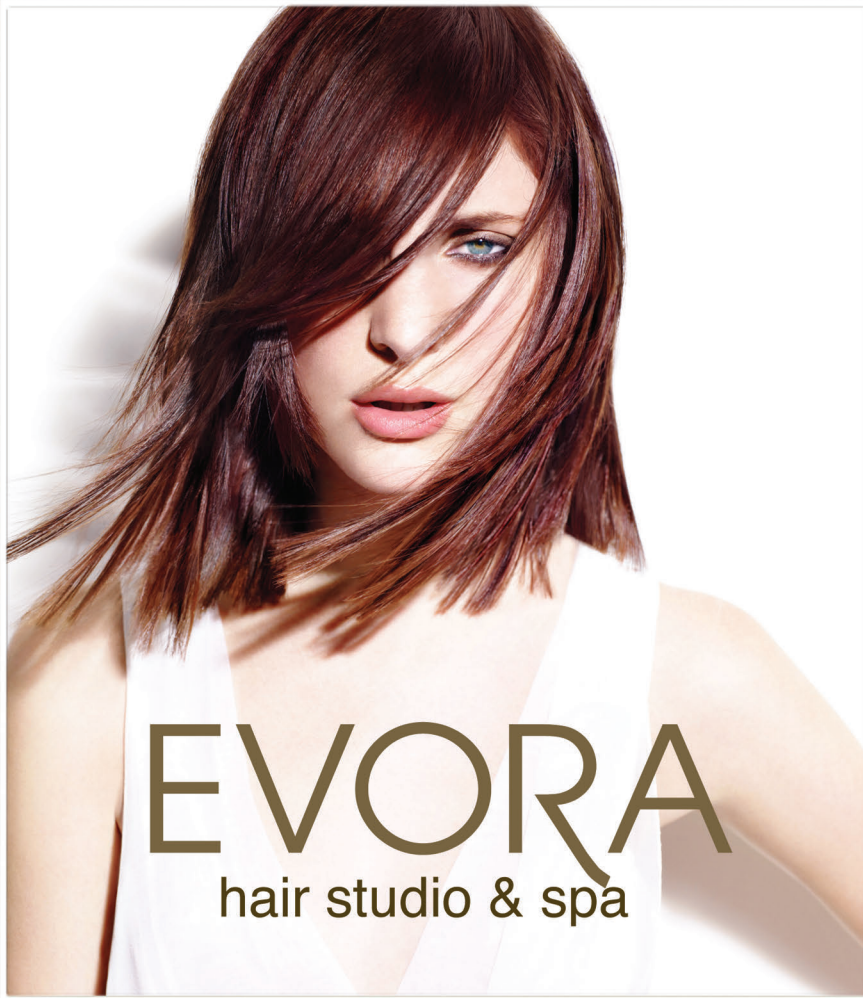


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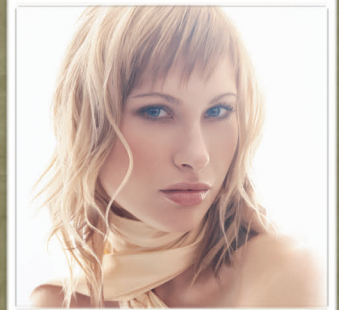


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TADDLE CREEK

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THE CONTRIBUTORS

Elana Wolff ("Caldera," p. 9) lives in Thornhill, Ontario. Her book of short essays about poems by Toronto-based poets, *Implicate Me*, is forthcoming this summer from Guernica.

David Collier ("James Joyce's Three Requirements for a Productive Artistic Life," p. 11) lives in Hamilton. His books include *Surviving Saskatoon* (Drawn & Quarterly, 2000) and *Hamilton Sketchbook* (Drawn & Quarterly, 2002).

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Catherine McGuire ("Meditation on a Nineteen-sixties Dress Pattern," p. 53) lives in Sweet Home, Oregon. Her work has appeared in the *Smoking Poet*, the *New Verse News*, *Folio*, and *Adagio*.

Dave Lapp (*People Around Here*, p. 56) lives near the Church-Wellesley Village, Toronto. His most recent collection is *Children of the Atom* (Conundrum, 2010). A selection from his first book, *Drop-In* (Conundrum, 2008), will appear this fall in the anthology *Best American Comics 2010* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt).

Jennifer Marston (the protégé) lives in Sussex-Ulster, Toronto. She is a recovering lawyer, and now works as a freelance writer and dabbles in the book arts.

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TADDLE CREEK

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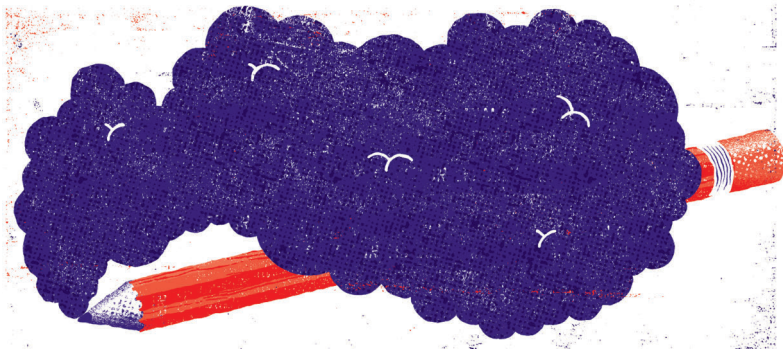
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T H E M A I L

Everybody Loves Chris

Chris Chambers' poem "Visiting Ours," from your Christmas, 2009, edition, is one of the most strikingly beautiful and cleverly looped poems I have ever come across. It doesn't aim to be smart for smart's sake, it doesn't forsake meaning for style. It's just lovely—a compact, rich story. I was so taken with the poem, I looked up others by him and have found myself a new writer with whose work I'm keen to engage.

Thank you very much for introducing me to Chris Chambers and for an excellent magazine that I turn to often for my own enjoyment, and also make use of in my mentoring of beginning/high-school writers.

DEENA SHAFFER
Toronto

For those who keep track, Chris now holds the record for most pieces published in the magazine. Get writing, Stu!

A Silver Lining

I am writing to you concerning the Support for Arts and Literary Magazines, a component of the Canada Magazine Fund.

You will recall that the program documentation sent to you last year included, in addition to the applicant's kit, a CD on the Report on the Use of Financial Assistance, which had to be completed by June 30, 2010.

However, I am pleased to inform you that the Report on the Use of Financial Assistance for the 2009-2010 funding cycle is no longer required by the C.M.F. As you know, this is the last funding

cycle for the C.M.F., which will be replaced by the Canada Periodical Fund.

NADIA LAHAM
Manager, S.A.L.M., Canadian Heritage
Gatineau, Quebec

Thanks for writing, Nadia. That really is good news. Not having to fill out a simple form consisting of checkboxes totally makes up for being shut out of the new C.P.F. because the federal government decided it only wants to give money to "commercial" arts, and, due to its twice-a-year schedule, Taddle Creek doesn't meet the new arbitrary minimum annual circulation required for funding. And it was very clever of you to allude to the fact that the magazine also no longer qualifies for a postal subsidy (which will cause its postage costs rise by about four hundred per cent) by mailing your one-page letter flat in a nine-and-a-half-by-twelve envelope at a cost of a dollar twenty-two when you could have folded it and sent it for fifty-seven cents. That's right up there with sending an easily E-mailed report form on a CD by registered mail.

For the record, the magazine spent the money it received on writer and artist fees, on gaining new subscribers, on general viability, and on additional printing costs for its ever-increasing print run.

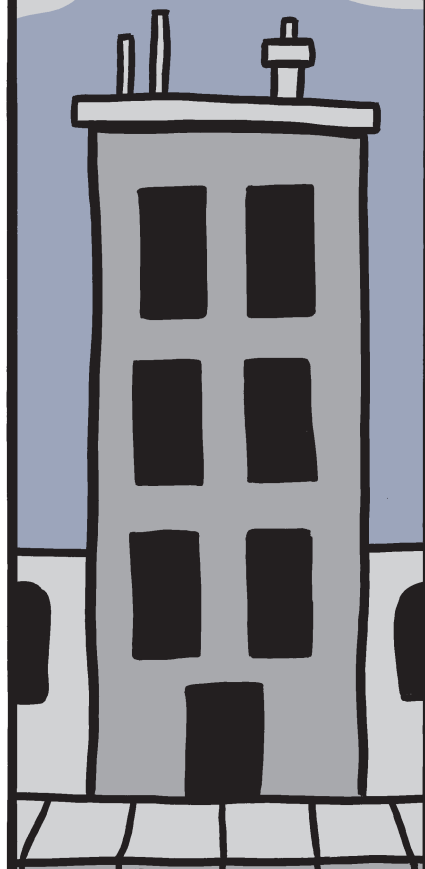
Taddle Creek is glad you're "pleased."

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.

THE RABBLE OF DOWNTOWN TORONTO BY JASON KIEFFER

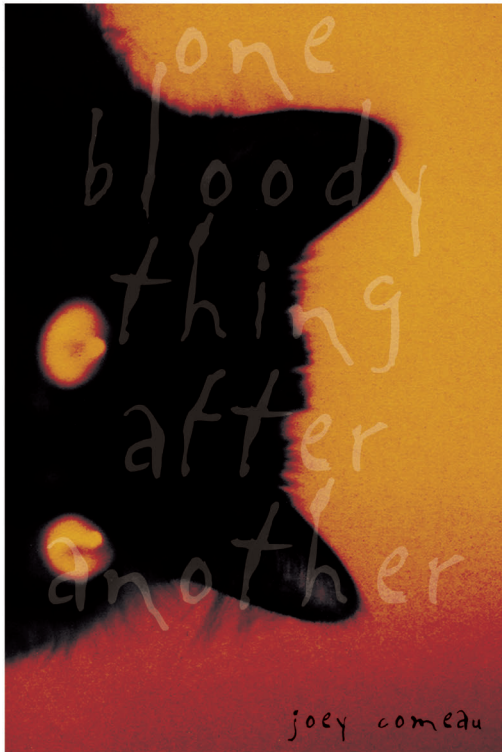
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- JOE FIORITO,
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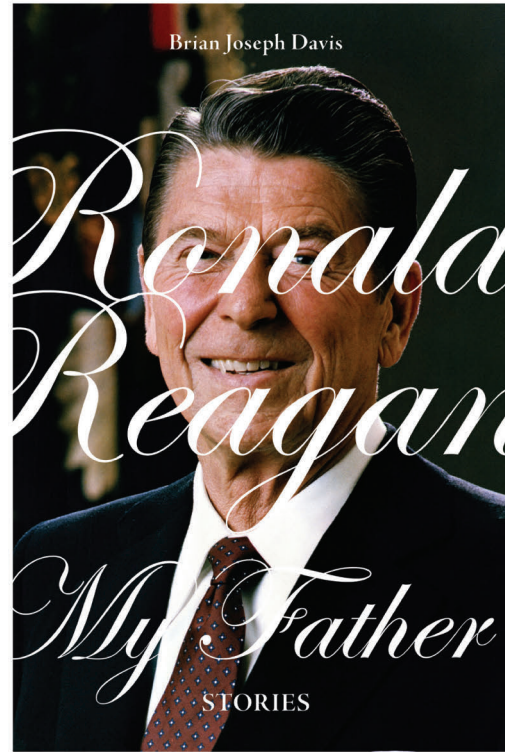


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T H E E P H E M E R A

Regrets, Taddle Creek Has Had a Few

Regular readers know that *Taddle Creek* takes the art of accuracy very seriously. The magazine goes to great lengths to ensure everything that is meant to be real-world factual in its fiction and poetry is so (to the dismay of many of its contributors), and goes to even greater lengths—if that's possible—to make sure its non-fiction pieces end up error-free. *Taddle Creek's* high standards in this area are both a matter of pride and a matter of trust between magazine and reader.

While the magazine's track record in the accuracy game is strong, even a magazine with such a crack fact-checking department as *Taddle Creek* makes mistakes. It's not something the magazine is proud of, but facts shows that it is impossible for a publication to be error-free one hundred per cent of the time, so *Taddle Creek* must trust its own research, however much it hurts.

But there is one area of accuracy in which *Taddle Creek* has been remiss: corrections. The magazine is happy to report that, to its knowledge, it has never published a *major* error—but it has committed many small ones. Some would argue small errors don't matter that much but, taking things to extremes, as *Taddle Creek* is wont to do, the magazine disagrees. Maintaining the gold standard of literary-magazine fact-checking means fessing up to even the smallest of mistakes. And so, beginning this issue, the magazine will make note of and correct any erroneous information it discovers in its pages, regardless of its perceived importance. Errors will be listed both on this page and on the magazine's Web site. On-line cor-

rections will be appended to pieces originally containing the error, and for the sake of public record, an on-line corrections page now lists every error that has come to the magazine's attention since its first issue, thirteen years ago (taddlecreekmag.com/corrections). And just to prove *Taddle Creek* is serious about owning up to its mistakes, any reader pointing out an error in an issue of the magazine will receive a free two-year subscription. (*Taddle Creek* reserves the right to decide for itself if it is in error.) Once again, *Taddle Creek* leads where other literary magazines fear to tread. You're welcome.

The (Recent) Corrections

The magazine's Halloween, 2008, Editorial stated that Original Foods was the only company in Canada still manufacturing molasses kisses. A loyal reader presented *Taddle Creek* with a bag of Kerr's kisses shortly thereafter, proving otherwise. *Taddle Creek* took the word of an Original representative while fact-checking and obviously should have dug further. *Taddle Creek* regrets the error.

In the Gallery article "The Art of Sport," by Conan Tobias, in the Christmas, 2006, issue, the cartoonist Lou Skuce's overhead-projector invention was referred to as a "Cartoonoscope." It properly is called a "Cartoonograph." *Taddle Creek* came across both spellings during the fact-checking process and, with only secondary sources at its disposal, opted for the former. It opted wrong. *Taddle Creek* regrets the error.

In the profile of the artist Sonja Ahlers, "Bunny Heads and Stranger Things," by Rachel Pulfer, in the Christmas, 2006,

issue, Ms. Ahlers was quoted making reference to a "heart" mural. It is in fact a "Heart" mural. When *Taddle Creek* fact-checked the article and asked Ms. Ahlers if she had indeed made a "heart" mural, she assumed the magazine was referring correctly to the band Heart, and not (incorrectly) to the internal organ, and said yes. It was *Taddle Creek's* fault for not assuming someone would ever make a mural with Heart as its focus. It knows better now. *Taddle Creek* regrets the error.

The House Business

The number of *Taddle Creek* you currently are holding is devoted to the Out-of-Towner—that one spot reserved each issue for those authors who make it past *Taddle Creek's* strict Toronto-only rule. *Taddle Creek* will be holding happenings across Canada (and hopefully beyond) throughout this summer and fall in conjunction with this special issue, so keep an eye on www.taddlecreekmag.com/tour for more info. *Taddle Creek* may be coming to your town.

In other news, Michael Cho's story "Trinity," from the summer, 2009, issue, has been nominated for a National Magazine Award in the Words and Pictures category, and has been chosen for inclusion in the anthology *The Best American Comics 2010*, edited by Neil Gaiman (Mike's also drawing the cover). *Taddle Creek's* Dave Lapp will have a piece in this year's edition as well.

And finally, if you liked The Taddle Creek Facebook Page on the Facebook (www.facebook.com/taddlecreek), you'll love The Taddle Creek Twitter Feed of Tweets, which can now be found on-line at www.twitter.com/TaddleCreek. ☞

The Quiet

BY MICHAEL CHRISTIE

Tonight he'd plucked an emerald green Mercedes-Benz S600 from the spiraling garage of the Queen Elizabeth Theatre. The sky was hung with violet dregs of twilight and the recent rain was held by tire ruts worn in the pavement. Finch piloted the Benz over the stately Lions Gate Bridge, up some switch-backing mountain roads to a turnout with a clear view of the city. Finch parked, careful to leave the car running—it wouldn't start again without Stanislaw's laptop. He discovered a set of pristine golf clubs in the trunk and hit nearly thirty balls from the cliff out into the inlet. This took an hour. He held the tall clubs below the grips, took four swings at each, murmuring "boom" with the satisfaction of each connection.

On his way back down, he dropped the stick into neutral, retracted the sunroof, stood, and coasted with his head in the jet-engine wash of night air until his eyes went gummy and his lips recoiled like the muscled dogs Jerzy kept in their yard. Sitting down, he found the sedan's stillness and grace so deliciously amplified in the aftermath of the roar he executed a jerky three-point turn near a curve and climbed back up to do it again.

While Jerzy and his boys preferred the growling flutes of Japanese or Italian design—sleek as swelling waves and painted in lipstick sheens—Finch liked the quiet ones. Sedans mostly, executive models, the kind diplomats were chauffeured around in, with classical music in their television ads, cars so noiseless, so painstakingly designed to hush even the meticulous whirring of their own engines, they floated over the road with the elegance of celestial things.

Finch took his first when he was twelve and emboldened by a confidence only youth can prop up. It was his brother,

Jerzy, who'd retracted the slim jim and swung the door out like a valet. "You going from B.M.X. straight to B.M.W., Ostrich," Jerzy said as Finch climbed into the leathery cockpit. Though he'd begged his brother mercilessly for the opportunity, Finch had never operated an automobile before—not counting those arcade games you sat in. That first night, Finch ground the B.M.W.'s gears for ten whole minutes while the others bent at their waists laughing, until finally he hopscotched the car out from the buzzing amber of the lot.

He'd driven hundreds since. Getting them was no problem. The expensive ones didn't even use keys any more. They were too good for keys, as if keys somehow stained a driver's hand. Stanislaw programmed laptops to open them. Twenty minutes near one was enough—digits and letters flipping across the screen with a shimmering speed.

Tonight, it took only twelve minutes before the locks of the Benz thumped and the engine came alive.

"It's your brand, I'm right?" Jerzy said before Finch went for the car, a weighty hand on his shoulder. "But this time no tour."

Finch nodded.

"Where do you go with them?" Jerzy asked.

"Nowhere."

"What? Speak up."

"Nowhere," Finch said, not much louder.

"What's this mouse-talking? Are you unhappy, mouse? Maybe you have a girl?"

Finch sunk his hands into his track-pants pockets.

Jerzy regarded him sideways, a grin turning on his lips. "It's no problem if you do. It would explain much."

"No girl," Finch whispered.

"O.K., no girl. Then you tell me, robin,

where do you go?"

Finch knew once his brother got his teeth into something like this he would not back off. Growing up, Finch had seen him take hideous beatings from bigger kids, men even, because he wouldn't let something drop, once by a giant sauntering man who'd let a door swing closed on them at a movie theatre.

"I just like driving, that all right with you?" Finch said, shrugging the hand from his shoulder.

Jerzy laughed and cupped the back of Finch's neck to force an interval of eye contact. Like Finch, he was still a boy, really, but his eyes were pleading and perennially tired, like a pair of deflated blue balloons. Jerzy turned to spit through his teeth onto the concrete floor. Finch saw Stanislaw shoot a panicked look to the stairwell.

"Well this time, my feisty driver-bird, no tour," Jerzy said. "We need to flip this one quick. There's people we need to pay." He released Finch's neck. "At home in one hour. Not until everything is cool and clean."

Midnight by the dashboard clock and Finch was back in the city, giddy and ecstatic, his shoulders stiff from swinging the clubs. He'd found four hundreds, crisp and brown like book-pressed leaves, folded into a golf scorecard in the console. Betting money, he decided. He'd seen greater sums piled on his kitchen table and never taken notice, but those bills had not been his own. All he could imagine buying was a Ping-Pong table they had no room for, so he resolved to keep thinking.

He drove five under the limit, captivated by the pavement's glisten and the innumerable signs—the Benz like an exquisitely tailored coat he wore. He squirmed and adjusted the pillow he'd

MATTHEW DALEY



brought to boost him. Back when Jerzy took cars, his brother brought CDs—soaring orchestral samples over subsonic bass eruptions peppered with barking lyrics baroquely detailing the joys of wealth—that he let ring from opened windows with a strange pride. But it wasn't just rap, it was all music. It grated Finch, seemed to demand a response from him he could not give. As long as he could remember, he'd found contentment in the world's quiet places: pillow forts, closets, churches he'd visited as a boy with his father in Łódź, but nothing compared to the sedans, and their stillness was moveable: you could take it anywhere in the city you chose, especially when it was late, with the roads empty as fresh sheets of black paper.

After a couple more hours of aimless, blissful driving, Finch arrived home to find a few of Jerzy's boys on the porch, bottles of Żywiec pendulous in their hands. The Benz insulated him from the

thud of bass, but Finch could see it flexing the picture window of their house.

He should have killed the engine, but he needed to feel it. He half-yawned and removed his glasses to rub his eyes. He was beyond late. Jerzy would be more scathing with his boys looking on. It was doubtful Jerzy needed money. He'd always got paid, even in bad times. Four years previous, when Jerzy was fourteen and Finch was ten, their father, who worked security at the airport, had been killed in a dispute out front of a nightclub. The hospital



called and they spoke to Jerzy, who passed the cordless from one hand to the other like it'd just come out of the oven, clearing his throat mechanically. They waited weeks for someone from social services to come. When nobody did, they'd simply carried on. Jerzy had been a goofy, raucous boy, but this stopped when he became guardian. He built a bunk bed out of two weather-beaten doors they found in the base-

ment and made Finch sleep above him in his room. He quit school, sold stereos, gram bags, bikes, shoes, fake pills, even umbrellas for a while—all of which he kept padlocked in Finch's old bedroom. This was before he ordered a fifty-two-piece lockout tool kit online and moved onto cars.

Then, two years ago, Finch was hassled on the way to school by some Hindu kids, and Jerzy and Andrzej went and beat them with leather skipping ropes. Later, Jerzy got worried when people said the Hindus had gang-affiliated brothers. He pulled Finch from school, stowed his crew at the house, and reinforced the doors with sheet metal. At home and bored, Finch pestered his brother to bring him along at night, a privilege he was finally granted by suggesting he'd be safer with them than at home.

In the idling Benz, Finch considered inventing a story—he'd been followed, chased by cops—then let it go. Jerzy had a keen ear for fabrication. Yet in other ways his brother was a fool. It'd been two years, no Hindu gangsters, and his paranoia had not abated. Lately, Finch found



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Caldera

Born of a union of kingdom and mule.

Not even tumours could rule her.

By explosive reversal, amid shouts of “Backfire away,”

she vaults—out of the poorest postal code.

None of us could remember the last time that thing had had a flame in it.

The entire east side could have been saved with the amount they spent on cuts.

By axiology of ax.

The land assumed an orange-yellow cast:
demon/lemon *demon/lemon*

–flicker of a letter,

thin reed/cored 'd';

how tomb and womb are cognates.

Since each of the assaults had been in vein—
vain would be a typo, shadow,

hovering in a flurry of white on the incline.

Destined to live yet not yet recommended to earth.

-ELANA WOLFF

less and less reason to obey his brother, whose darkening demeanor increasingly reminded him of their father. Finch slept on the couch and locked himself in the bathroom to read encyclopedias. Now he saw Jerzy's warning for what it was: a desperate attempt to impose his will, a bluff really, because violence was his only remaining option, but one he would never use, if only because their father had employed it with such zeal.

Perhaps it was the bills in his pocket, or the impending reprimand, or the idea of another night on the top bunk, a pillow wrapped about his ears, the bass erasing any peace he'd gained that night that rendered Finch incapable of leaving the Benz. He dropped it into gear

and eased quietly from the curb.

After a string of deliberately careless turns, Finch found himself on a dark freeway, a greenish sea of city light churning on the clouds in his rear-view. He wasn't tired any longer. He felt sharpened and jittery and electric, like he would after emerging from an arcade or drinking a two-litre of discount pop. He supposed he was driving east—west was ocean, south was America—but wasn't sure. The sedan had a G.P.S. he didn't activate for fear it could locate him. Just a short trip, he told himself, luxuriating in the joys of freeway driving: the way

speed slowed the landscape, the geometric perfection of banking corners, the cinematic sweep of headlights, the thought of a million engineered parts spinning in unfathomable synchrony.

It was mostly trucks on the road, towns passing like fallen constellations. The night went blacker and Finch bent closer to the wheel. A light appeared in the dash. It looked like a robot pointing a gun to its head. He puzzled over this until a beeping sound came. Something was wrong with the car, and he felt a boy's sob gather in his chest. Then the same suicidal robot flashed by outside on a sign that read Gas and he swerved into the turnoff, nearly throwing the Benz into a ditch.

He came upon the station—an island cut in the blackness by a punishing white light—and pulled in. He'd never kept a car long enough to require refuelling. He studied a man filling his half-ton, then hoisted the heavy nozzle from a pump, unscrewed the cap, inserted the nozzle and squeezed. Nothing happened.

“Need a hand?” a woman said with a wrecked voice.

“This doesn’t work.”

“You didn’t select your grade,” she said, approaching the pump to smack a button. She gripped the handle and digits spun. She didn’t have a uniform. She wore a filthy puffy jacket and a mountaineering backpack with plastic bags strapped to it. She was middle-aged, about as old as Finch’s father had been.

“Oh, hey,” she said, “you gotta kill the engine!”

Finch had never heard of this before.

“I can’t,” he said.

Her forehead gathered into ridges.

“You can’t?”

“No.”

She glanced around the station. Finch realized then that she was alone and didn't have a car.

“That’s what they say, anyways,” she said, “doesn’t bother me.”

“What could happen?”

"Your car could explode!" she said in a voice

like a pot bubbling over.

Finch knew adults often said things they didn't mean, like how his father had always declared his love for his job





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at the airport, even though he'd been an engineer in Poland, not the kind that drove trains, but the kind who built them. He hoped what the woman had said was the same sort of thing.

Finch turned to the bright kiosk, the attendant already looking in their direction.

He extracted a brown bill from his track pants.

"Can you pay?" he said, his ears turning hot.

"You bet," she said.

She went in, stood at the counter, and returned with his change.

"Here, keep this," he said, pushing back a twenty, which she took without thanks.

She paused for a moment.

"Actually, I wouldn't hate a ride," she said.

The attendant was outside now, inspecting pumps and scribbling on a clipboard. Finch itched to escape the bright scrutiny of the lot. He was old enough to know there was no respectable reason for a woman to be stranded at a freeway gas station, but in her face he glimpsed the same desperation, the same doe-like vacancy, he had seen in the girls Jerzy's boys brought over, or the glitzy women his father had shepherded home from clubs, and in this he took a strange comfort. He popped the trunk and she tossed her bags in with the golf clubs.

"Where you going?" he said, merging onto the freeway.

"Just to Merritt," she said. "My kid—," then her breath cut off like a valve and she turned her face to the window.

Finch held off on more questions and watched the gas needle's deliberate rise.

"This is a whole lot of vehicle you got here," she said, eyeing the pillow beneath him.

"My brother's," he said, checking his mirrors.

Then a quiet overtook them, and Jerzy loomed in Finch's mind. He was going to be furious, more so if he found out Finch had picked up a hitchhiker. Finch could see no boundary in his brother between anger and concern. Jerzy would either kick him out or further tighten his grip, neither of which seemed endurable. Finch just needed a little more time in the car, to think. He'd

come up with a way to fix everything.

"You talk funny," she said as though he'd just spoken.

"I have an accent," he said, recalling the blunt comfort of his father's voice.

"I meant you whisper," she said, unwrapping a fresh pack of cigarettes, lighting one with a barbecue lighter pulled from her coat.

"I don't like noise."

"Makes sense, sweetie."

She reached for the radio and a bright breeze of enveloping sound—a hive of guitars, organs, and voices—leapt from speakers hidden on every side. Soon she began twisting in her seat, throwing her head in odd ellipses, unwashed hair draped into her eyes.

He tried to not let her see him looking. He'd never driven with a passenger

before, or with a real destination. He liked her there beside him, this dancing woman. He knew the car would have exploded by now if it was going to. It was the last sedan he would get, but they had three hundred dollars, a gas gauge that promised it was more than full, and he was

taking this woman to Merritt, wherever that was.

As they shot through the dead-flat valley, dawn lifting shadows from the weary shoulders of everything, the music reached out through the lightly tinted windows of the Benz, touched the signs and trucks and sulfurous lights and roadside buildings with no discernable function, enmeshed itself with this whipping landscape, enlivened it, and Finch was struck with an unfamiliar and almost stupefying sense of beauty.

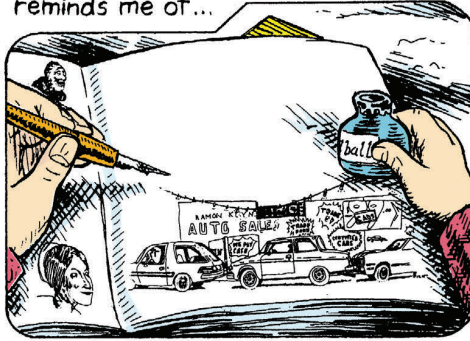
"I like this," he yelled into the fury.

"Sure you do," the woman yelled back. "It's a classic." ▮

Michael Christie lives in Victoria. He is the author of The Beggar's Garden, a collection of linked stories forthcoming from HarperCollins. A story from this collection, "Goodbye Porkpie Hat," was included in the 2008 Journey Prize anthology. He is a senior writer for Color Magazine, a skateboarding/arts publication, and recently completed an M.F.A. in creative writing at the University of British Columbia.



I'm a product of *Toronto*. I did all my schooling there. Then, I learned a *trade*. The first time I got a handle on a Hunt #102 Crowquill pen was on a sunny day in February, 1984, after a howling, 48 hour winter storm. I was sitting in a snowbank on *The Danforth*, my ass was wet. And external discomforts did not matter - I was *getting* this thing! Today however, I've spent the greater part of my life *away* from Toronto, which reminds me of...

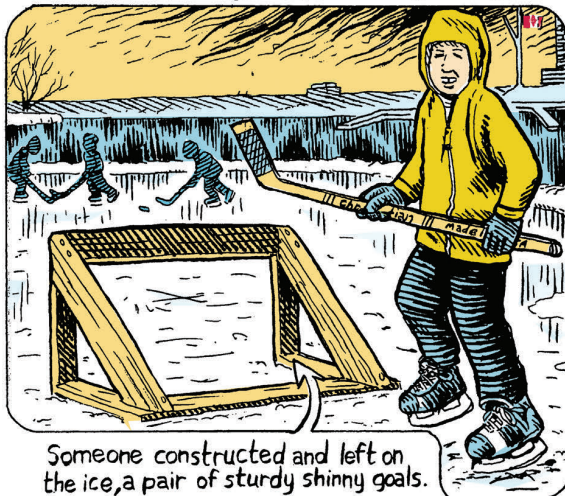


If you want to skate on *The Bay* near where I live now, you've got to do it all yourself. Scraping and shovelling; cutting a hole in the ice; dunking a big Rubbermaid container; smoothing the water and slush out with a floor squeegee ...it's a lot of work! And then you've got to deal with nay sayers who've heard on TV that no ice is ever safe, who don't know that it's only eighteen inches deep under the rink... "You're fuckin' nuts-and-a-half!", one man screamed from his idling car at my wife, child and me. Others quietly call the police from their cell phones. It's best to do rink making under cover of darkness.



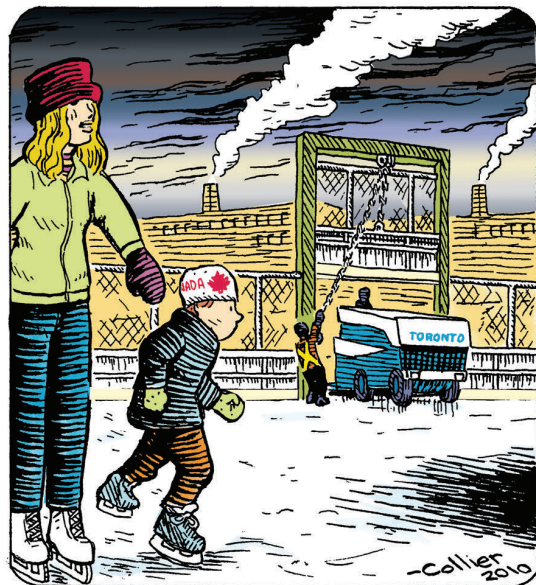
James Joyce's Three Requirements for a Productive Artistic Life #1. Silence

There's an *upside* to feeling like an outlaw on the ice, though. This kind of conflict with society attracts a certain type of boy. One 12-year-old in my neighbourhood is *always* in trouble with the law. If he's not breaking in to houses and cars, he's throwing eggs at windows. The police take him to his mom and step-dad...and nothing happens - the cycle repeats... But once this boy starts spending all his time on the Bay, the problems go away.



Someone constructed and left on the ice, a pair of sturdy shiny goals.

Of course, one could avoid all this hassle by living in Toronto. It's the Shangri-La of skating. Fuel is burned at a furious rate, through power plants and Zambonis, to keep the ice nice. There's heated change rooms serving fresh cookies and pizza. Rome, at its peak, *pales!*



#2. Cunning

#3. Exile.

His Own Private Shangri-La

By following his own path, Lee Henderson has emerged as the freshest voice in CanLit.

BY MARK MEDLEY

It's unlikely there is another writer in Canada like Lee Henderson. A devotee of Japanese noise music, curator of a travelling art salon housed inside an old hard-shell briefcase, he can dissect the work of the artist Marcel Dzama one moment, and debate the merits of Alabama's underground rap scene the next. He animated Sonic Youth's "Tunic" video when he was fifteen years old, held his bachelor party at Snoqualmie Falls, Washington, where scenes for the television show *Twin Peaks* were filmed, posed for the cover of *Quill & Quire* with his pet bunny, and co-starred in a made-for-TV movie. His friend, the writer Kevin Chong, calls him "one of the most effortlessly cool people" he knows.

With just one novel and a short-story collection, Henderson already has established himself as a strikingly original author, as bizarre and fascinating as the eccentrics and oddballs who populate his fiction. "Lee would be the hardest guy to profile. You need a profile to have a thrust, and there's no thrust to Lee," says the novelist Steven Galloway. "Lee is the weirdest guy I've ever known."

On a March afternoon, not long after the end of the Winter Olympics, Henderson, thirty-five, is walking through the Vancouver neighbourhood of Strathcona, where he lives with his wife, Anu, and their pet rabbit, Francis. During the Games, Henderson E-mailed me frantic updates describing the energy that was consuming Vancouver—a kinetic sort of communion that gripped its citizens. "I'm glued to the Olympics," he wrote one day. "The city is going bananas." His enthusiasm surprised me. In earlier conversations, he'd seemed unsure of the five-ringed colossus heading toward the coast. All the artists were leaving, he told me more than once.

Now, he seems almost happy to have hosted the world. "I totally got sucked in," he admits, talking to me on his stroll via mobile phone. "None of us could have predicted the reaction the city had to the athletes being here, because the lead-up was so skeptical. It just felt like no one was looking forward to them. But, obviously, we were all wrong—everyone was looking forward to them. It was such a release."

Henderson was mollified in part by the Cultural Olympiad, a multi-disciplinary festival running parallel to the Olympics that he thinks offered some of the most interesting public art and culture events Vancouver has ever seen. Henderson himself was featured in a showcase programmed by the author and musician Michael Turner at *The Candahar*, an art installation/pub created by the Irish artist Theo Sims on Granville Island. He read personal memoirs from Vancouver's formative years that he uncovered while researching his 2008 faux-historical novel, *The Man Game*, and discussed the book's relation to the city.

It's obvious Henderson has affection for Vancouver—surprising considering in 2003 he told the *Globe and Mail*, "I hate Vancouver—I hate everything about it." Yet, he's never left. "Sometimes you just hate where you live," he tells me. "You're just frustrated by it; that it's not more of what you want it to be. Vancouver's kind of a frustrating place. But I feel very at home here, too."

One of Henderson's recent short stories, "Long Live Annie B.," takes place in Saskatoon, the city where he was born and, aside from a few childhood years spent in Calgary, raised. The title character's west-side neighbourhood is described as crime ridden, prey

to police brutality, and littered with drunks and depressing apartments with "white-painted steel bars over all the windows in all the rooms." Henderson's own childhood wasn't as bleak, but he's still not a hometown booster. "Moving back to Saskatoon [from Calgary]—it was like moving back to hell," he says. "The city had a dark side to it that I didn't like."

Henderson is vague when asked about his family. He says only that his father's interests lay in "new technology," and that his mother worked in the Saskatoon library system. His maternal aunt, whom he describes as an "academic feminist historian," wrote a biography of the author, feminist, and philosopher Mary Wollstonecraft, along with a number of children's books (one dedicated to Lee, another to his younger sister, Alex).

A magazine article on the University of British Columbia's film school inspired Henderson, at the age of nineteen, and a friend to pack up and drive to Vancouver, determined to "make it" in the film industry. "Vancouver always had that Shangri-La, very leftist identity, at least from Saskatoon's point of view," he says. "Toronto was more, 'Get your shit together, get a job.'" But Vancouver in 1994 was far from a Shangri-La: "My first experience was seeing the Canucks riot," he says, referring to the violence that erupted following the N.H.L. team's Game 7 Stanley Cup loss to the New York Rangers that June. It was an interesting introduction to the city, and an experience Henderson would use when writing *The Man Game*, set a century earlier.

Henderson enrolled at U.B.C., but soon felt constrained by the high additional costs that came with a degree in film. He took some creative writing classes, and "loved the fact that you could do absolutely anything with no



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budget,” being a screenwriter, producer, and director all at once. He soon developed what one classmate called a “borderline labyrinthine” writing style, influenced by David Foster Wallace, Ben Marcus, and William Burroughs. “From his first piece on, I thought, ‘Oh my God, this kid is wildly talented,’” says the journalist and author Zsuzsi Gartner, one of Henderson’s instructors. The author Keith Maillard, who taught Henderson for four years during his undergraduate studies, and continued to work with him in graduate school, says, “If somebody said, ‘List me the most promising and interesting and edgy writing students you’ve had in twenty years,’ he would go on the list. His writing had such sparkle, and he was so committed to it.”

Maillard and Galloway, a former classmate, both recall Henderson submitting a writing assignment set at a New Year’s Eve party. “It was so good that the rest of the class ditched Lee afterward, went to the pub, and got smashing drunk out of shame,” says Galloway. “Every once in a while, when you have someone in a class who is obviously on a whole different level than you, it can be a bit depressing. But because Lee was nice, no one hated him for it.”

At the time, many writing students were leaving U.B.C. with degrees in one hand and book deals in the other. Henderson was no exception. His short story “Sheep Dub” was nominated for the Journey Prize in 2000, and he was offered a two-book deal by Penguin Canada before he even completed his master’s degree, in 2002. “[The story] felt so fully engaged, so visceral, from the language to its emotionalism,” says Barbara Berson, Henderson’s first editor at Penguin. “I had never read anything like it.”

Henderson’s first book, the short-story collection *The Broken Record Technique*, was published in 2002. In its opening story, “Attempts at a Great Relationship,” a man named Dave—no, Eaton—and the love of his life, a woman with curly red hair named Molly (with “eyes like jawbreakers”) attempt to rekindle their relationship at a wave pool one afternoon, only to get involved in the near-drowning of a young boy. From the story’s first line—“But it didn’t quite happen like that”—Henderson seems to

be warning the reader that all is not right here, that what previously was thought to be true is a lie. Henderson would weave this feeling of uncertainty through many of the collection’s ten stories, and again in *The Man Game*.

The Broken Record Technique won the 2003 Danuta Gleed Award, given to the best Canadian first collection of short stories, and reviews were, for the most part, positive—though the late Derek Weiler, writing in the *Toronto Star*, argued, “Henderson’s ambitions consistently outstrip his technical abilities.” Each story in the collection, which includes tales of children wrestling in oversized sumo outfits and a boy and his talking toy marmot, was meant to test Henderson’s abilities. Every story was “like an experiment in trying to get it right,” he says in response to the *Star* review. “I’m always shooting for more than maybe I’m capable of.”

Henderson pushed his limits even further with *The Man Game*, the story of Molly Erwagen, a former vaudeville performer, who arrives in Vancouver from Toronto, in 1886, with her crippled husband, Sammy, to start a new life. Molly befriends two lumberjacks accused of starting Vancouver’s Great Fire, and together they devise a new sport called “the man game,”—a bizarre mix of street fighting, break dancing, and nude wrestling that becomes a citywide underground phenomenon. Molly’s story is told parallel to that of a young couple who stumble on a present-day man-game revival.

The Man Game took Henderson the better part of a decade to write, and weighs in at five hundred and thirteen pages. At times, Henderson struggled with the novel. One day, in 2003, he tossed out nearly everything he’d written up to that point—two hundred and fifty pages—and began again. He says he lost another two hundred and fifty to editing. There were days he thought he’d never finish. “A novel is such a strange thing to try to write,” he says. “You’re constantly searching for so many pieces at once: your characters and their motivations, and then the narrative, and where it begins, and voice, and you’ve got to marry all these things. It doesn’t always work the first time around. So much of the time I had such doubts about what the heck I was thinking.”

The book hit shelves in the summer of 2008, and reviews were hyperbolic: Brian Joseph Davis, writing in Toronto's *Eye Weekly*, said *The Man Game* "may be the best (and most divisive) book ever written by a Canadian," while Pasha Malla, in the *Globe and Mail*, described it as "phenomenally ambitious and artful. . . . This is the sort of sprawling, innovative, exhilarating yet quintessentially Canadian novel that many of us have been waiting for. *The Man Game* is an absolute triumph."

The novel was popular in Vancouver, where it won the City of Vancouver Book Award in 2009 and the Ethel Wilson Fiction Prize. The Wilder Snail, a grocery store and coffee shop on the main floor of Henderson's former apartment building, was, for a period, selling twenty copies a week. *The Man Game* now ties Henderson to Vancouver in the same way *In the Skin of a Lion* binds Michael Ondaatje to Toronto, or how the works of Mordecai Richler have become the gospels of Montreal. *The Man Game* reinvented, reinterpreted, and reenergized the city's mythology.

Still, while the book was nominated for the Writers' Trust Fiction Prize, it failed to make the shortlists for either the Giller or the Governor General's Literary Awards. "A travesty, really," says Gartner. "It does make you wonder about the entrenched aesthetics of the rear guard."

"Canada never really likes writers like Lee," Galloway says. "They'll like Lee when he does well in the States and Britain, which will happen at some point for him. We didn't much like Yann Martel either until he won the Booker. Although, the people who like him love him. He's got rabid fans."

Henderson is hesitant to discuss the plot of his next novel, to be published by Penguin, tentatively in the spring of 2012. "It's definitely about creativity," is all he's willing to say. Piecing together clues from various interviews, Henderson's book seems to concern a comic book artist, San Francisco, and the nineteen-eighties, and shows no signs of a willingness to pander to the mainstream for the

sake of awards. Nicole Winstanley, Henderson's editor and publisher at Penguin, says, "The next novel is all things: it's literary, it's political, it's playful, and it's unexpected."

The Toronto launch for *The Man Game*, in September of 2008, at the Gladstone Hotel, was standing-room only. The walls were adorned with the artwork of Vancouver expats like Keith Jones, Marc Bell, and Jason McLean, who'd recently fled to Toronto—a reverse of Molly and Sammy's migration.

males who listen to it and the black males who create it—all those divisions and things really fascinate me."

Henderson may be fascinated, but he is also wildly fascinating, with an energy he feeds back into the aspects of local Vancouver culture he feels deserves and needs support. For two years Henderson co-organized a contemplative improv music night called Father Zosima Presents He also curates the Attaché Gallery, a portable venue that recently showcased the work of the artist Shayne Ehman, now living in Toronto, and the "dirty drawings" of Lucas Soi, which Henderson describes as "kind of satanic images based around his obsession with those ex-girlfriend sites on the Web."

"Lee's a genuine enthusiast," says his friend, the author Sheila Heti. "I rarely hear him talk about things he does not like. And when he likes something, it's the 'best thing ever.'"

Friends recall the ubiquitous image of Henderson sitting in his window above the Wilder Snail, located at the corner of Hawks Avenue and Keefer Street, watching. "I had this little hawk's-eye view of the street," he says. It was so commonplace to see him there that he was nicknamed the Hawk Street Hawk. "He'd always be keeping an eye out on things," says McLean. In much the same way, Henderson keeps an eye on the artists of the adopted city he can't seem to decide if he loves or hates.

"He's always been so supportive of a certain community that's never gotten any attention in Vancouver," McLean says. "He's really made a difference for a lot of us. In Vancouver, it seemed like everyone was following the footsteps you're supposed to follow to make it, and he was being a voice in a different direction. He wasn't following the direction you're supposed to follow." ▽

Mark Medley lives near Little Italy, Toronto. He writes about arts and culture for the National Post. His writing has appeared in such publications as the Globe and Mail, the Walrus, Descant, This, Spacing, and the Mississippi Review.



Henderson and friend on the cover of *Quill & Quire*, in 2004.

Henderson started the evening with an hour-long presentation on hip-hop and urban dance culture, peppered with various YouTube clips, and explained how it related to a novel set in turn-of-the-century Vancouver. "He knows more about rap than any white kid from Saskatchewan has the right to know," laughs Galloway.

"It's very rhetorical, very polemical, very self-conscious," says Henderson, sounding more like an academic than a fan. "You just become fascinated with this kind of long poetic narrative that's formed by the music over time, between the beats, the samples, the rappers, the culture, the contrast between the white

Strange Attractors

BY DANIELLE EGAN

The highway worker flips his sign from Stop to Slow, and the line of vehicles starts creeping forward, shaking up the dust of pulverized ancient rock.

"I hope we make this run," you say.

Maybe you are counting the hours before this trip ends and you can move out and be done with me. Or maybe you're picturing us back in our nice little apartment, after a long cool shower together.

We are already sweating from having the windows closed, but the dust and heat get in anyway, through the vents, clogging our pores with the two-hundred-million-year-old leftovers of an inland sea.

The mountains on both sides of Kicking Horse Canyon have been blasted away, annihilated to make more lanes. Three giant concrete pillars cut across the canyon, holding up nothing, but soon they will carry a new highway and this road will be abandoned. The land will take it over again. Maybe one day it will all go back to the sea.

The sign operator looks like a guerilla fighter at the checkpoint of an occupied territory, with his camouflage pants, giant goggle-like sunglasses, and bandana-covered mouth. His arms are sunburned a deep, alarming shade of pink. I inch closer to the rusty bumper of the overloaded Pinto we've been behind since Banff, hoping we can stick together, feeling as if separation will make the journey too perilous.

"Come on, you can do it," I say to the sign operator, as if granting us passage now would be some kind of victory for him too.

The Pinto is halfway past when he turns the sign back to Stop. Damn him. Maybe there's something about us he doesn't like, or even hates. Or maybe he's just counting cars.

I ask, "Why is it called 'Kicking Horse'?"

I know today you won't offer up this kind of information on your own, but I need to hear you speak of things you know for sure.

You clear your throat and I picture fossils of tiny seahorses dislodged and swallowed.

"One of the explorers from the Paliser Expedition, a guy named James Hector, was kicked by a horse. He was unconscious for a while, so the other guys on the expedition thought he was dead, and they dug his grave and were about to bury him when he regained consciousness."

"He survived?"

"Yep. He was knighted later by Queen Victoria."

"He went back to England?"

"Uh-huh. But at some point, he brought his son back to show him the route. He got sick and died in a hospital in Revelstoke."

"The explorer?"

"No, the son."

I think about my sister, Jody. Maybe you do too, and wish you hadn't said that part, but I don't want you to feel bad, so I ask, "What's going on here?"

"With the construction?"

You're not sure if I mean this situation here or the one playing out in our minds.

"Yes."

"This is one of the most dangerous stretches of road in Canada. Over seven hundred accidents in five years. Twenty-one people died."

Twenty-one people divided by five, times how many years since this road opened? Thirty? Fifty? Attempting the math makes me feel dizzy and also hungry.

The Pinto has disappeared around the bend, so I stare at the vehicles driving past us in the opposite direction and imagine us starting this whole trip to

Calgary over again. Maybe if I'd played it better, last night wouldn't have happened and then ruined this whole return journey, the violence projecting itself onto the blue sky and slabs of glacier-carved mountains and icy green rivers.

The road sign operator turns his sign around to Slow and I wave at him: I acknowledge your presence and your work in this hostile place. Take care, wear sunscreen.

I want to catch up with the Pinto, but for your benefit I resist the urge to speed and get caught back up just outside the town of Golden. But at the first service exit, the Pinto turns right.

"Farewell, Pinto," you say, your voice slightly regretful, which makes me want to laugh and then cry and crush myself against you.

I turn the music down a little and soon your head is nodding sideways. You jerk it back into place twice before succumbing to the pull of sleep. After a few minutes, your mouth is hanging open and I start upping my speed. I'm not proud to say that I've taken your life into my hands a few times.

Maybe one day I won't even wait until you're asleep. Maybe I'll drive fast just to piss you off, like my father, and you'll become like my mother, the chronic passenger white-knuckling the door handle and pressing down on an invisible brake, lips pursed tightly shut, storing up the indignation and fear for the next fight.

I'm not going to be like them. I'm better than them.

Oh, but they did what they could. They did better than their parents. They barely even laid a hand on Jody and me. And they were so nice to you and so good for four whole days. Maybe I brought on the fight with all my stupid anxiety and my worried, darting, judgmental looks when

MATTHEW DALEY



Mom poured herself a third glass of wine or when Dad yelled at the barbecue.

They'll be waking up now. If she gets up first, maybe there will be a surge of contempt when she walks past the guest room and sees I've unmade the bed and bundled the sheets in the middle of the mattress. It will keep her tears on hold until she's brewed the coffee, and perhaps she's put a bag of frozen peas next to some bruised piece of flesh, and now she's at the table seeing my note, lighting a cigarette, blowing the smoke into the low sunlight when the tears come. If my dad gets up first, he will feel a stab of sorrow seeing the empty guest room. Then he will put on the coffee and start cleaning up the mess, making silent promises that it will never happen again. If he wakes up after my mom, he'll go to her, bend down and encircle his arms around her small shoulders and press his lips against her temple. They will be sad and humiliated, but also feel that sort of peaceful exhaustion that follows these fights, and also relief that they don't have to look anyone else in the eyes.

I look at your vulnerable sleeping face and I can't imagine us hurting each other like that. And if something ever happened to you and you slipped into a coma, I'd never leave your bedside. I'd spend my whole life waiting for you to wake up and even if you woke up too brain-damaged to talk and laugh and feed yourself, I wouldn't give up on you.

I realize you are awake again as I'm gunning past an old powder blue Mustang on a two-lane passing section of the Trans-Canada. The road curves and

there's an R.V. hauling a small speed boat that has inched over into my lane. I have to brake going into the curve and you jerk to attention, pulling your body toward your door as if we're on a boat and you can somehow take control of the car's direction. I feel guilty and then resentful, like when we're about to cross a street and you grab my hand, as if I'd run straight into traffic otherwise. I used to love that gesture. But why does your cautiousness increasingly feel like an assault?

I have no problem handling the bend and the R.V. long before the passing lane runs out, but I keep my speed down to about seven over the speed limit the rest of the way to Revelstoke.

There's a piece of bacon in my veggie omelette. You discover it after I've eaten one-third of it and have given you a chunk to help me finish it off.

"Bacon."

You hold it up with your fork.

"Gross."

I rake my fork through the rest of my omelette, but I don't search very hard. I'm really only a vegetarian because you are. Anyway, I'm too hungry to care about cross-contamination, so I work on the hash browns and toast. But now you push your own plate away. You've lost your appetite and your expression is slightly disgusted, looking back and forth be-

tween my food and the fork of bacon on your side plate. My toast is cold and rough going down.

"We'll leave it like this," you say, putting the forked bacon back on my plate, prongs up.

When the waitress comes to clear our plates, I point to the bacon and say, "There was bacon in my omelette."

She studies the fork and says, "Oh dear. How could something like that happen?"

I just shrug and she gives me a suspicious look, as if my silence somehow incriminates me, so I add, "I have no clue."

She takes both of our plates to a nearby bus station and confers with two other waitresses. They huddle around, staring into the omelette like it's some mysterious archeological find. One of the other waitresses picks delicately at its contents and the other eyes me periodically, as if she's worried I'll make a run for the door. They agree on something, nodding their heads in unison. Our waitress comes back with my plate.

"I'm sorry you didn't enjoy your meal, but we couldn't find any bacon. You probably just confused tomato for bacon. They look similar."

She holds the plate out. The fork is now prongs-down in the guts of the omelette and the piece of bacon is no longer visible.

"Where did you put the bacon?" I say, thinking this is probably the most ridiculous thing I've ever said—not in



VERY WELL.
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YEAH, WHATEVER.

Cappuccinos for the Planet

CNN offers round-the-clock coverage of a gaunt polar bear swimming for an ice shelf; an astronaut cut loose during a space walk. Ratings soar as we begin to understand the great love of floodwaters for what is submerged, and feel even our vilest waste vindicated. On the coast, a dockworker mutters a blessing with his last breath, then accepts the undertow.

The colossal scrap-iron olive branch erected over Toronto has grown carious and collapsed. Grief-stricken citizens find slag in the Kleenex as they blow their red noses, turn up air conditioners for the soothing hum.

The prophet's DVD has sold out, and his tour tickets are prohibitively dear. In Kensington Market you score a bootleg, watch it in the living room with the lights out.

And in an archway across the street, a pair of pretty red lips insinuates smoke rings into the closing dusk. You add yours to the millions of eyes that, right now, hold vigil in warm coffee-shop windows, thinking very hard about snow.

—JESSE PATRICK FERGUSON

my life, just to a waitress.

"There was no bacon, sweetheart," she says in her high, aggressively chirpy voice.

"There was a piece of bacon on that fork," you say, in your neutral, matter-of-fact tone.

We look at each other, silently wondering, "Where did she put the bacon?" Your expression is serious and I have to suppress an urge to grin.

"I can tell the difference between tomato and bacon and that was a piece of bacon," I say.

"Then where is it?" she asks, moving the plate closer to my face.

I have a stupid urge to swipe the plate away. The couple in the booth across from us are listening, but pretending not to.

"Look, this is ridiculous. Please, just

take it away," I say in a too-loud voice.

She goes away and we both force down our Cokes so we can get out as soon as she comes back with the bill. But she seems to go out of her way to be cheerful and overly attentive to the other diners, calling everyone "honey," small-talking about the weather, and telling someone in the booth behind me how busy and tired she is, how "the kid" kept her up half the night.

Eventually, she comes back with the bill and says, "I'm sorry you didn't enjoy your meal," for the second time, and again I have the dumb urge to smash something.

"It has nothing to do with *enjoying* the meal. There was a piece of *bacon* in it and I specifically ordered one of the only two things on the menu without

meat. But I got bacon."

I'm thinking, "Why the fuck do you care, you didn't make the thing. Just drop it."

"Well, I don't know how it could have got there," she says, as if I must walk around with a Ziploc bag full of bacon pieces just to make trouble at crap restaurants in the middle of nowhere.

"Look, I don't want to talk about this any more. There was a piece of *fucking* bacon in my omelette."

My voice is low, but I know I've gone too far now, what with the expletive. I can't look at you because your look might say, "This could have been funny, but now you've pushed it over the edge. Are you always going to blow up over the smallest things?"

"I was just going to say that we comped your whole meal," says the waitress, feigning hurt feelings, which fits her face and reminds me of my mom's face after she pushes and pushes and pushes and then acts all shocked when she pushes too far.

I look at you and you shrug and smile. You don't look wary of me.

Outside, you say, "Where did you put the *bacon*?" in your Arnold Schwarzenegger voice.

"Where did you *put* the bacon?" I say, but, as usual, my version sounds like the Swedish Chef from the Muppets.

"Ha ha ha. Really fucking funny," says a woman, coming up beside us. "Who the fuck do you think you are?" She looks familiar. "Get your kicks out of harassing a poor tired waitress at Denny's?"

I look at you and you raise your eyebrows.

"You think you're so special, people like *you*," she says, getting right up in my face, her breath smelling like coffee and some kind of sweet, liqueurish booze. "You think it's fun to just roll through town on your fucking *fancy* vacations and make people like my sister feel like shit."

Of course—she looks like the waitress, but younger and thinner and tougher on the outside, like a younger sibling.

"A fucking piece of bacon and you get on your fucking high horse and, 'Ooh, I can't eat this, it has *bacon* in it.' And then you have the fucking nerve to swear at her?"

She's so close, and slurring a bit and her spit hits my cheek and my stomach turns with anger, disgust, fear, grease.

I want to insult her right back, but in

the most passive-aggressively annoying way I can think of, so I say, "Just relax," and start to turn back toward our parked car. I barely get my eyes on it before I feel a sharp kick to my back and I'm flying into the pavement, face first. Then she kicks me again, hooking her foot under my hip and turning me on my side.

You yell, "Stop it! Get away from her!"

I see her flip-flops and toenails painted in a French manicure style coming toward my face. But her foot hits my shoulder this time.

"Fuck you," she screeches, then stomps downward, the foamy underside of her flip-flop ramming into my cheekbone.

"Get your fucking hands off me," she yells.

I open my eyes and you are behind her with your arms circled around her, trying to pull her back. It's a strangely intimate embrace and for a moment she seems to relax into your body. I feel like we are all very safe, as long as everything stays like this. Then she screams, "Don't touch me, you fucking pig!" and kicks her leg backwards, hitting you in the shin and getting free.

Behind you, a minivan has pulled into

the parking lot and two shocked faces stare out of the window as she rushes at me again, as if she's about to kick a football. But there is fear in her eyes, and regret, which prevents me from moving.

She gets me under the chin. Her big toenail digs into the flesh, and I wonder if I'll need a tetanus shot for this, as my head is thrown back. The sky flashes above me, such an impossibly remote deep blue.

You try to grab her from behind again and she yells, "Stop touching me, you fuckin' pig," elbows you in the stomach, and starts flip-flopping away, the awkward slap-slap fading in the distance.

There's an eagle way up there in the blue sky.

You drive even more cautiously than usual, as if even a slight bend in the road will hurt me. My body is throbbing, but I feel a numb peacefulness.

"You sure?" you ask, for the fifth time, meaning you will turn back and take me

to the hospital where that explorer's son died, or at least to the Revelstoke police to report my attacker.

The people in the minivan had taken down her licence plate number as she screeched off in her truck while I lay there staring up at the eagle. And then your face, hovering about me, so pale and worried, calling my name with increasing urgency. I'd never felt so present and in my body than at that moment, with your hand cradling my head. Then

you said, "Someone call an ambulance, please," and tears started to stream down your face.

"No, I'm O.K. No ambulance," I said and sat up and let you carry me to the car like a little girl, setting me down ever so gently and cautiously.

And then the crowd of concerned strangers, saying that I should go to the hospital just in case I was in shock and it was masking a serious injury, offering their phone numbers as police witnesses. I pictured my attacker's face looking



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terrified and already remorseful for something that hadn't even happened yet, and I thought it was ludicrous to bring the law into this. Making trouble for her seemed somehow like an unjustified betrayal of her trust.

Now you grip my knee and say, "I wanted to punch her in the face. I wanted to break her bones and really hurt her, but that just made me feel sick and useless and weak."

"No. You did everything you could do. I'm O.K."

"You could have a concussion. I can't believe—what the hell is wrong with the world? She could have killed you."

I picture myself unconscious at that hospital and you sitting beside my bed for days or weeks or months and having to finally make the decision to turn off the machines keeping me alive. My throat burns, because you are so beautiful and loving, even after you had to face the ugliness of where I come from.

I should never have brought you there. When I told you that story on the way, we should have turned around and gone to the waterslides in Salmon Arm and had a real summer vacation; called off the whole thing with the parents. But no, it had to be done. You had to see me for what I really am.

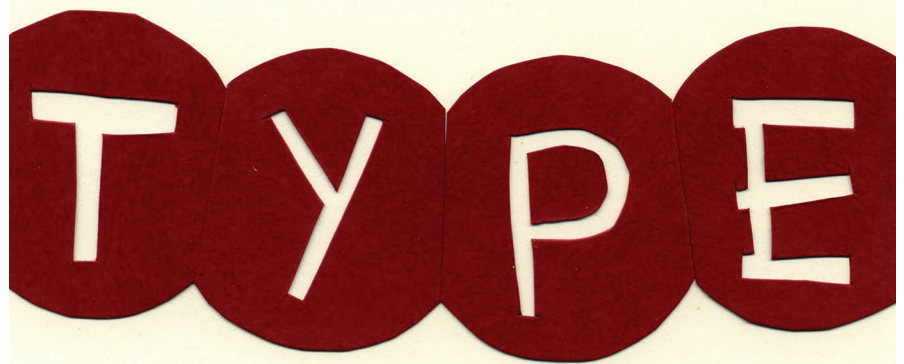
It seems like months since I told you about me and my sister at that waterslide in Toronto—the long lineup, and how it took ages to inch our way up those stairs, with the sun beating down ruthlessly. When we finally got to the top, I was dizzy and scared and wanted to chicken out. But with the pressure of hundreds of others behind us, I really didn't think I had a choice; I had to go down the slide.

It was Jody who said, "I can't do it."

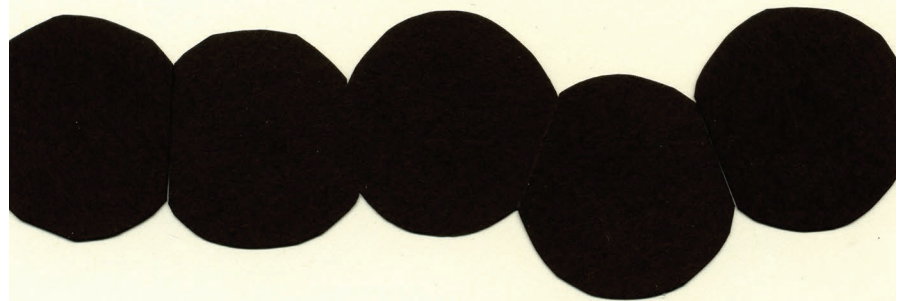
"We have to do it," I told her, but Jody looked petrified, and I knew I couldn't do it without her, even though it was humiliating inching all the way back down those stairs, with all of those arms elbowing us, and some kids saying, "Scaredy cats," and going "Bock-bock-bock" at us.

When our parents started fighting that night in the adjacent motel room, we thought that it was because we didn't go down that waterslide.

You put your hand on my knee and said, "You were right to be scared. Waterslides are dangerous." You talked

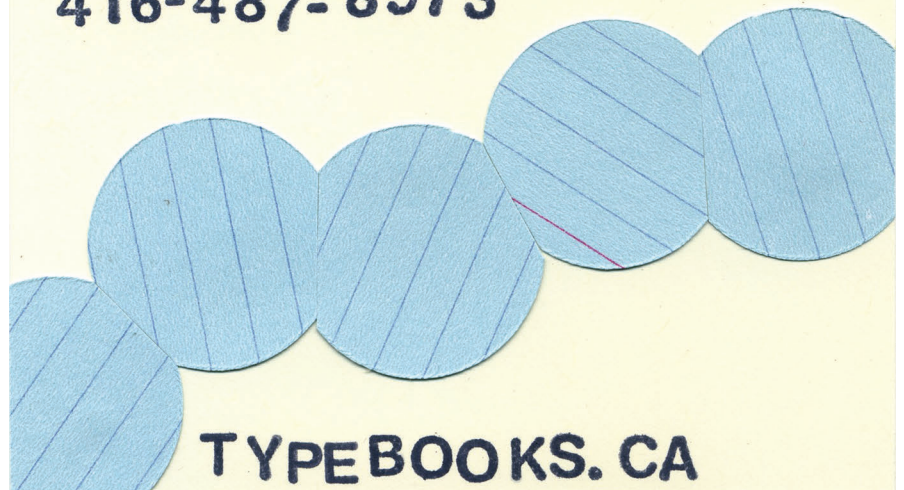


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about how even the most advanced physics and engineering and computer-generated prototypes can't guarantee whether a waterslide's design will be safe. Too many incalculables come into play that affect water-flow turbulence and defy the laws of gravity, like specks of dust in the air, wind, or even the bathing suit the rider is wearing. You called them "strange attractors" and said something about fractals and chaotic dynamics; said until a slide is built and tested in real life, nobody knows whether it will be safe. And every day brings different conditions, so, over a ten-year period, eight Americans have died on waterslides—double the number of roller-coaster deaths. No amount of planning and calculating protects you from potential tragedy. You just have to ride it and take your chances.

Maybe in a way you were preparing us for the impending visit with my parents, but at that moment, sharing that story took away some of the weight and shame,

and that was enough.

You stop at a gas station and get a bag of frozen corn for my face, two Slurpees, and big fat, red licorice whips. I appreciate your slow driving speed and your reluctance to pass vehicles unless there's a

passing lane. The sky is so blue and the mountains look so much friendlier now. The breeze is ripe with summer. Maybe it isn't too late for us to make something good out of this.

"I don't want to go home yet," I say.

"I agree."

"Let's go to those waterslides in Salmon Arm."

"Excellent plan."

I turn on the radio and find an oldies station and we sing songs we both still know by heart.

Then that song "We are family / I got all my sisters with me," comes on and everything turns. My mind starts replaying loops from the distant past that have become so familiar they flicker in fast-forward up to the unsorted events of last night: us lying in my old bed,

grinning at each other in the dark. Then their tense words becoming increasingly audible through the wall. My dad storming from their bedroom, stomping down the stairs. Her following behind, screeching, "How dare you walk away from me when I'm trying to talk to you," and him bellowing back with the usual, "I will this time, I swear if you so much as utter another word, I will walk right out the door and never come back." Then the walls shaking from doors being slammed closed then flung open again as they scream their ridiculous accusations and denials. The whites of your eyes getting bigger and me wanting to grab your hand under the sheets, but feeling too embarrassed. Then the sound of glass breaking followed by a loud thump, and now we are bolt upright in bed, trying to decode each and every sound. Then the eerie silence, which is maybe worse, followed by a scream that sounds so like murder that both of us instinctively jump out of bed.

Maybe you were relieved to see them cowering together in the corner of the living room like two wounded animals, but it infuriated me. "Everything's under



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Originally serialized in Western University's *The Gazette*, then weekly in Vancouver's *Georgia Straight* newspaper from 1998-2003, *Children of the Atom* is like a Samuel Beckett play in comic strip form. The two characters Franklin-Boy and Jim-Jam Girl live in an absurdist world of their own making, exchanging philosophies, dancing around any possible love story. Influenced by the comics of Mark Beyer, Lynda Barry, and George Herriman's *Krazy Kat*, Lapp has created his own tightly conceived but loosely rendered world through poetic language, simple lines and shapes, and surreal settings.



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control now. Just go back to your room,” said my dad, as if they’d just fended off an attack from a predator who’d got into the house. As if I’d never told you what they were like, and was supposed to keep all of their secrets to myself; as if they were my secrets, too. I should have taken your hand and led you back upstairs, just like Jody used to do, but instead I screeched something about how they always ruined everything, how they destroyed Jody and turned me into an unlovable monster. I ran upstairs and shut myself in the bathroom, leaving you standing there in your underwear.

When I crawled back into bed, you didn’t turn around to face me, and it seemed like you were punishing me by denying me your face, your silence a kind of violence. And when your body started twitching from the sleep pulling you away, I wanted to punch you in the back,

and then I felt the worst kind of fear that the brutality was inside me, too. I talked myself into believing that you must leave me and all that was left of us was this one last night, clinging to your sleeping breath.

Now, I say, “I’m so sorry for everything.” The cracked, high pitch of my voice warns that there’s a reserve of tears inside me, in danger of spilling over.

“Don’t be sorry. Let’s just get to the waterslides and have some fun.”

You smile at my mangled face like it’s the prettiest thing in the world.

As we walk through the hotel lobby, some people stare at my face. One woman even gives you a stern look. Does she think you did this to me? It’s ridiculous and I want to laugh out loud, but you look pale and worried. I grab your hand and squeeze, but you don’t squeeze back.

The desk clerk is blank-faced and starts tapping efficiently on her keyboard. She’s probably seen all kinds of things in this vacation town in the middle of nowhere, but maybe she’ll be hesitant about giving a room to people like us. People like *us*! I grin at you, but now you look startled by my face, or maybe it’s my expression. Maybe you think there’s a part of me that enjoys playing

the battered wife.

“You’re in luck,” she says. “We have a cancellation. It’s a junior suite though. We have nothing smaller.”

“How much?” you say, sounding worried.

“Two forty-nine.”

You glance at me and I’m afraid that whatever fucked-up proclivities are visible on my face will make you back out. But you say, “That’s fine,” and pull out your credit card.

In the elevator, I clench my fists and pump them up and down, saying, “I can’t wait. We’ll start with the tallest one.”

The suite is large, but I can barely register anything. I just want to get changed and get out there. I don’t care if I shoot off the lip and plummet to my death.

“Maybe we should lie down for a while,” you say. Your lack of decisiveness is irritating.

“No! Let’s go.”

Under the fluorescent bathroom lights, I’m ludicrous in a yellow bikini, with a boxer’s mashed up head tacked on. The chlorine is going to burn those pavement scratches on my face and palms and knees, but at least it will be a kind of disinfectant.

You’re just standing there, still in your jeans and T-shirt and running shoes. You look so exhausted. Am I too much for you, finally?

“Please. Let’s not think any more.”

We do the tallest slide first. At the top of the chute, I sit down and you tuck in behind me, clamping your legs around mine and putting your arms tight around my waist. Sliding down the chute, at first you try to steer our course, but as our speed picks up, that becomes impossible. Projecting off the slide’s lip, we are two separate entities flying through the air.

We don’t think for hours, just climb, slide, fly, plunge. Even later, when we’re lying in bed with our hot, sunburned, chlorine-smelling bodies pressed together, saying, “Let’s never bury each other alive, but, let’s set a time limit,” the weight of it doesn’t seem too heavy. ♡

Danielle Egan lives in Vancouver. She is a freelance journalist and fiction writer.



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Tragic Hero

Saint John long struggled for identity and purpose. In some ways, it still is.

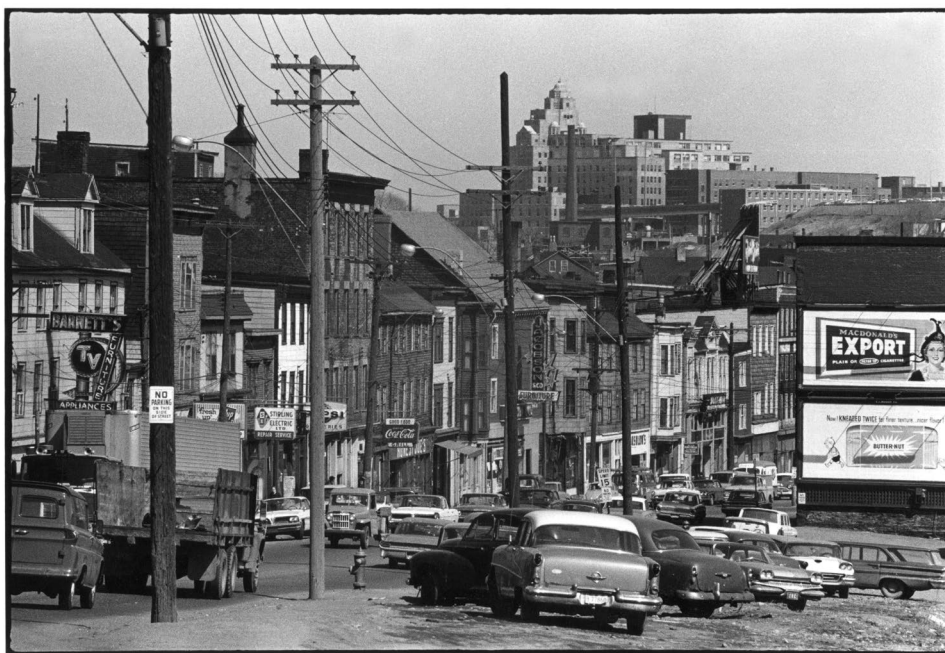
PHOTOGRAPHS BY IAN MacEACHERN

Saint John, New Brunswick, feels old. It has always felt old to me. Not old in a cultured, antiquarian way, like Rome, Barcelona, or Paris, but more Dickensian and emphatically classified. At least, in retrospect, that's how I recall it being for the first ten years of my life, growing up in the city's east end, and through my

on the high seas from its launch, in 1851, until it was forced aground on Prince Edward Island and broke up, in 1883.

During the years of the Second World War and beyond, Saint John could boast of having one of the largest dry docks in the world, and along with its port it stood tall alongside such gritty indus-

destroyed *neighbourhoods*, either replacing them with housing projects or with nothing at all, while gutting the heart of the city and paying more attention to the automobile than to people, an attitude that seems to continue to this day. Jane Jacobs, the renowned champion of new, community-based strategies for city



teen years, living in the public housing project known as Crescent Valley before finally “moving up” to the sanitized suburb ironically called Forest Hills.

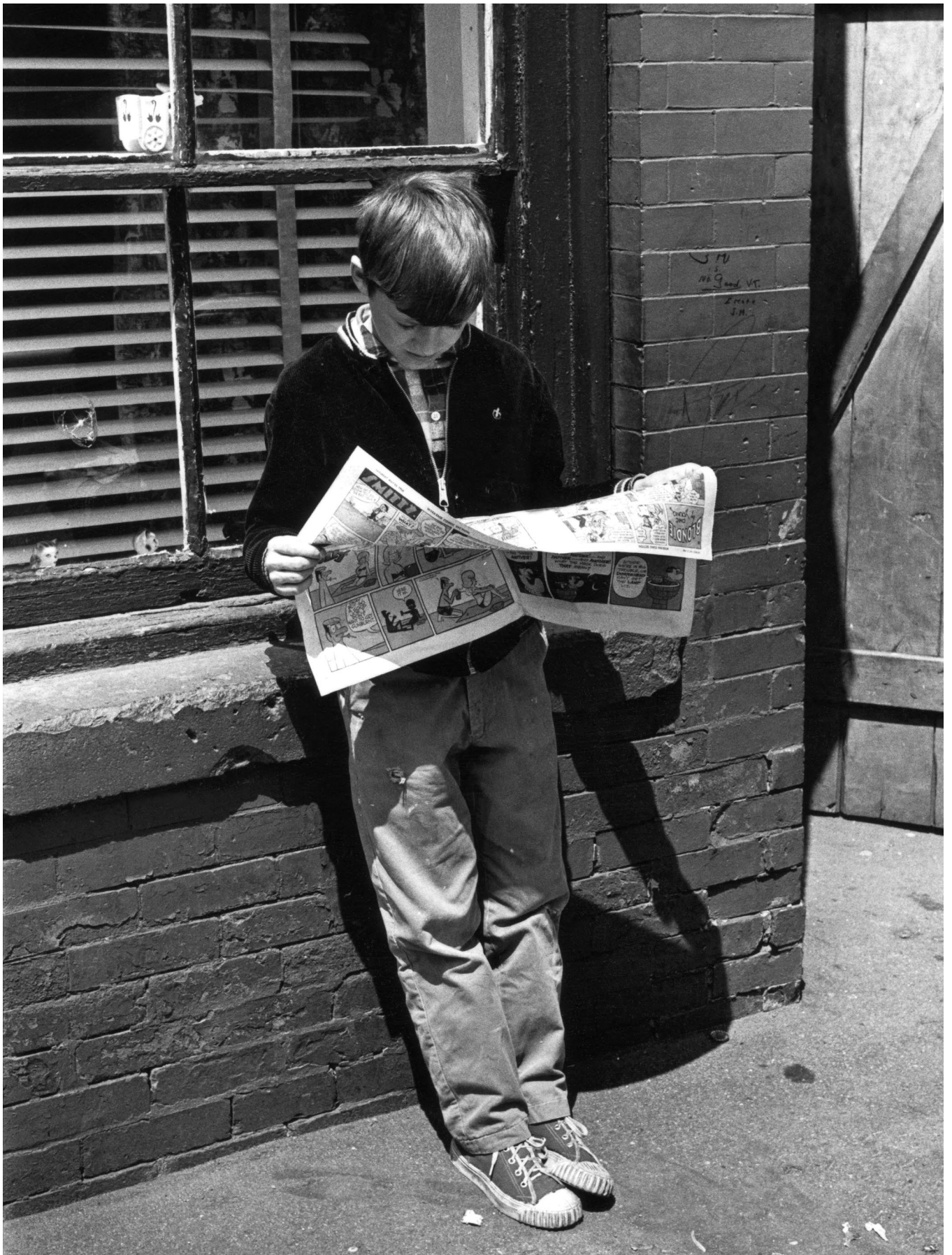
Relatively speaking, this industrial port city on the Bay of Fundy at the mouth of the Saint John River *is* old—at least in Canadian terms. Saint John is Canada's first incorporated city, chartered in 1785. It became renowned for producing some of the greatest ship-building craftsmen in the world, whose bragging rights would include the construction of the three-masted *Marco Polo*, which ruled as the fastest clipper ship

trial cities as Rotterdam. When you are a port city of that calibre, the world comes to you. It comes from the most exotic places, with names read from the headlines of international papers, and still other places you might only have heard about in geography or history class or in stories read to you before bed.

Ever since the city's Great Fire of 1877, Saint John has been trying to recover. During the urban renewal period of 1960 to 1985, more than four thousand irreparable homes were demolished. However, along with the destruction of physical dwellings, this renewal

planning, once wrote, “Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody.” I often wonder what she would have said if she had been consulted on Saint John's plans for its future.

The photographs exhibited on these pages are, in my view, nicely voyeuristic. Ian MacEachern, the photographer, is not from Saint John. He was born in Glace Bay, Nova Scotia, and only arrived in Saint John from Sydney in the early nineteen-sixties to work as a cameraman at the CBC affiliate CHSJ-TV. His



Opposite: Main Street, 1964, looking toward the art deco General Hospital. Built in 1930, the hospital was shuttered in 1982 and demolished in 1995 when no viable options could be found for its reuse. Above: a boy reads the weekend comics, in the south end, 1968.



stay in Saint John was brief, but the city intrigued him with its architecture, numerous fires, and imminent urban renewal. He soon was dedicating more and more of his downtime to his photography, documenting the changing face of the city. MacEachern moved to Toronto in 1966 (though returning frequently to Saint John for several years), where he worked as a freelance photojournalist for several magazines, including *Maclean's*, *Chatelaine*, *Saturday Night*, and *Time*. MacEachern's photographs have been exhibited extensively across Canada and the United States, and he now lives with

his family in London, Ontario.

When I look at MacEachern's photos, I think of a time in the sixties when, as a teen, my friends and I would get into a car and drive "uptown" (our "uptown" was the equivalent of most cities' downtown or strip). We would circle King's Square for what seemed like hours, playing the radio and looking for girls. In retrospect, we were playing a role in our own "Canadian Graffiti," like teens in every small town and suburb across the country. Eventually, we would park and head to a booth at the Riviera restaurant, where we would down a glass of

cherry Coke and plan the rest of the night with the other "Riv rats." Soon we would be back in our car, driving around King's Square again, dreaming that one day we would get off that wheel and find adventure in a greater world.

Now when I visit Saint John, I can't help feel that same strain of possibility that I felt when I was young. It still feels like a company town. The antiquated parts of the city appear frozen in time, like one of these photographs, while the newer parts seem still to be struggling for purpose and modernity.

—TONY TOBIAS

Above: a Main Street backyard, near the uptown viaduct, 1964. Opposite top: built in 1933, Union Station (shown in 1968) was a major component of Canada's railway system, having hosted King George VI and Queen Elizabeth on their 1939 royal tour. By 1973, its perceived viability had lessened and it was demolished. Fort Howe, the eighteenth-century British army fortification site, sits on the hill beyond. Opposite bottom: children play on the residential Moore Street in 1968.





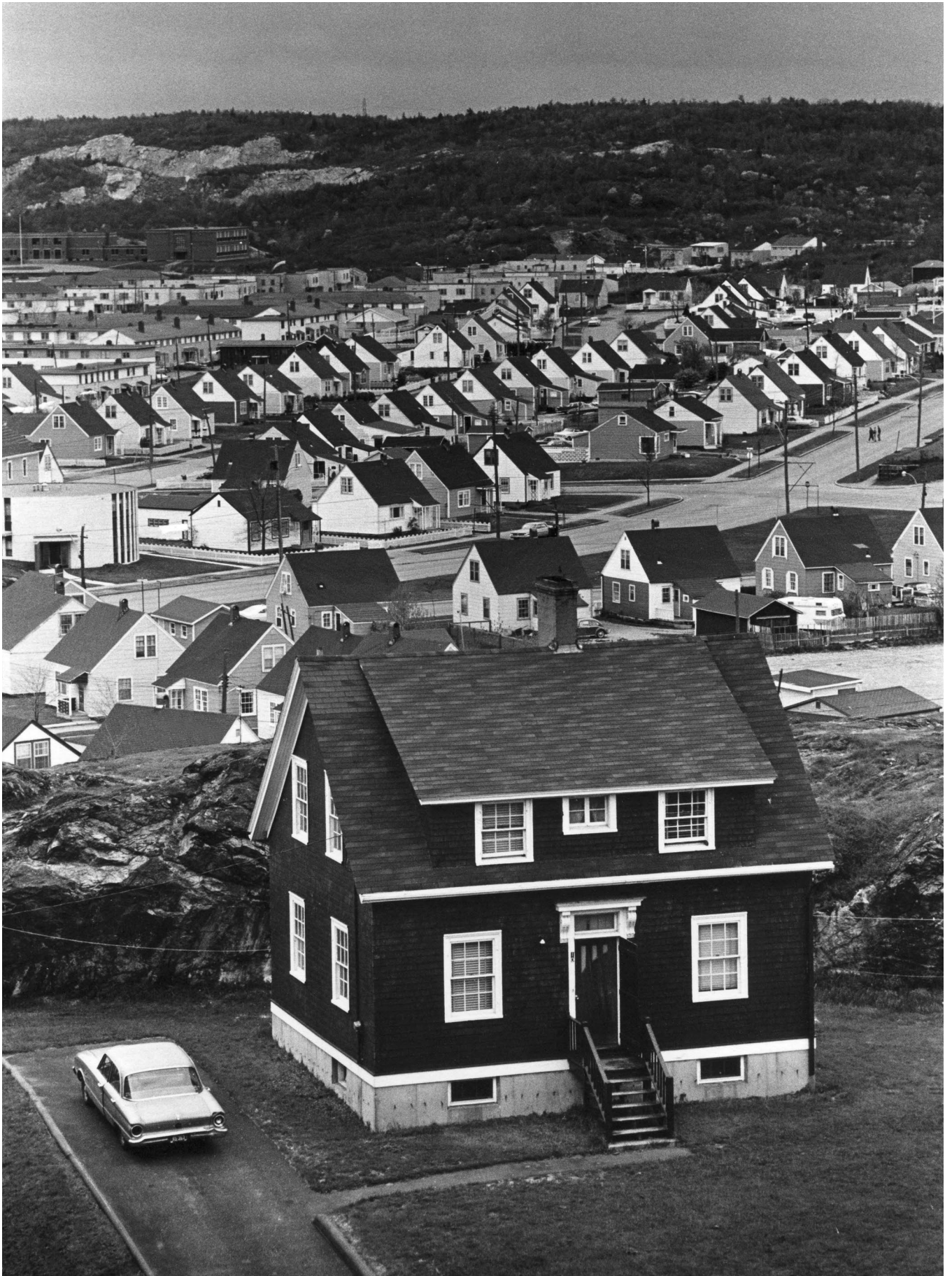
King's Square, looking west, in 1964. The neon sign of the Riviera can be seen in the background. The restaurant was destroyed in 1986 by



a gas explosion.



Top: urban renewal at the foot of Union Street, 1968. Above: built in 1876, the City Market (shown in 1965) survived Saint John's Great Fire the following year. Its roof resembles the inverted keel of a ship. It is the oldest continuing farmer's market in Canada.



Portland Place (shown in 1968), Crescent Valley, and the Rifle Range were Saint John's major post-war housing projects.

A Private Woman

BY DAVID ROSS

April moved into their new apartment—a ground-floor peppermint-green tomb—without Jared, who was finishing law school in another city. They had decided they would live together once Jared graduated, and found an affordable sublet one semester early.

To handle Jared's absence (she soon discovered her life was dull with him subtracted from it), April bought a cat, which she named Marble. Now her arms were covered in scratches—the deceptively severe kind, pink outward from the edges. In spite of this, April had grown very fond of Marble. She had taught herself to think of Jared less.

Unlike Jared, April had never had firm career plans. She'd been applying for temp jobs until a plan emerged (which it never seemed to do), but this still did not fill her days. When the cat was asleep she engaged in private, silly games for amusement. She had begun naming objects around the apartment. She named the faucet. She named a jewel-encrusted sofa pillow. She named a turquoise hairbrush and the ice-cube tray.

There was a man who lived in the apartment across the hall from her. April gave him the name "Dean Handsome." She had only ever exchanged neighbourly platitudes with Dean. His real name was probably something as plain as "Pete" or "Jim." She decided he must be a lonely, sensitive bachelor—a man with heaps of love to give.

April was returning from the grocery store when Dean Handsome entered their corridor, no doubt returning from some equally banal errand. They smiled in fractions before disappearing into their suites. As April set her bag of groceries down she said to Marble, in an

affected voice, "Did you see? That was Dean! We like him. We like Dean, don't we?" She stroked the cat and thought about Jared. She had never been apart from him for this long; she counted the days in her head to be sure.

"Should we call Jared?" she asked. Marble was still, perched on the arm of the sofa. April reclined and said, "You're right. We probably shouldn't bother him." She fell asleep to the wind issuing in from an open window.

When April woke up the sky was dim and her cat was gone. She wandered into the kitchen, driven only by hunger, briefly forgetting Marble even existed. She sat on the counter and ate cold macaroni and cheese from the fridge. Jared called an hour late. April told him she'd overslept, and he teased her for not having much to be tired about, making sure to call her "baby" every chance he got. She reciprocated, hanging the word at the end of each sentence like a decoration: "I miss you, baby. When are you coming home, baby?"

The macaroni stuck together in gooey clumps.

"Oh, shit," she said, hanging up the phone.

She took a tin of cat food from the cupboard and filled Marble's dish with wet meat.

"I'm sorry," she called. "Please forgive me. Dinner's ready! Forgive me?"

She walked back into the living room but Marble was not there either. The window was open, and even the smell of her had fled the apartment.

Any memory of her conversation with Jared faded. Calls merged together; lack of shared experience had

made each one indistinguishable from the next, and Jared refused to bore April with the one thing that now inhabited his mind: tax law. This is not to say the conversations were indifferent. In fact, both of them tried very hard to muster genuine interest. The result was usually a conversation fraught with disguised sadness.

April cursed under her breath, and, having searched every corner of the apartment, got down on her knees to check underneath the claw-footed bathtub. She blew a wisp of hair out of her face. She cried in a quick burst, which lasted three seconds, and then changed her mind.

The next afternoon a tap on the shoulder startled her as she was locking her apartment door. It was Dean, from across the hall. "Jesus you scared me," she said, turning to face him.

"Are you O.K.?"

"I think I locked my door three times," April said. "I don't know what's wrong with me." Then she began to cry—the wrinkly, ugly cry no one was supposed to see but her.

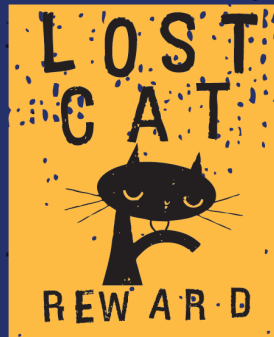
April and Dean Handsome were in a coffee shop. They had known each other for half an hour, and twice now his leg had grazed hers under the table.

"When was the last time you saw her?" he asked.

"A couple of hours ago, before I fell asleep."

A sudden shame bubbled up. This fact had crept up on her: Dean Handsome was an actual human being, with ears, and a voice.

Between her apartment door and the coffee shop they had not said much; they hardly knew each other and April



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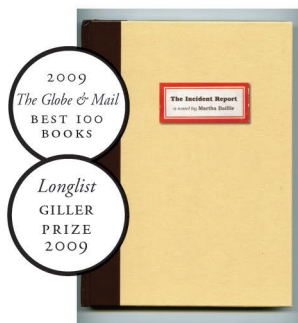
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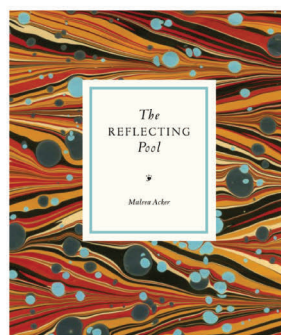
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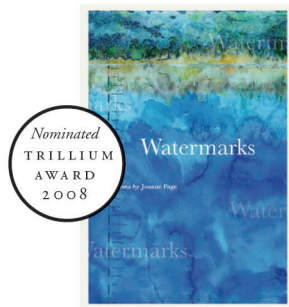
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was embarrassed he'd seen her cry. He asked simple questions and she answered them without flourish or elaboration. She admired the stubble on his jaw—Jared never could grow a beard, no matter how hard he tried.

Dean suggested April find a photograph of Marble, which wasn't difficult. She'd only taken one, a Polaroid from the afternoon she'd brought her home. It was streaked and purplish, but it would do.

"If we don't find her," Dean said, "we can make one of those corny flyers."

Sensing April might panic at this possibility, he added, "Merely a precaution."

But they hadn't found Marble. They scanned the parking lot, and the garden that wrapped around the perimeter of their building. They looked up into leafy treetops and in other less reasonable hiding places, like the inside of a newspaper box, only because these things happened to be there, and you never know. Then it had started to rain, and they took refuge in the coffee shop.

"Don't worry," he said, "we'll find her. We'll go to a copy shop and make a flyer on fancy coloured paper: honeydew melon . . . or dandelion . . ."

"Those don't sound like colours," April said. She hadn't expected to be aroused by his voice, and found her imagination—in some remote corner—willing him to continue: champagne . . . almond butter . . . sand dollar . . .

"You really miss her," Dean said, drawing his own rather simple conclusion from April's inwardness.

There was one other person in the coffee shop, and the only background noise was the folding and smoothing of his newspaper pages.

"I don't suppose I miss her yet," she said. "I will, yes."

"You'll be O.K."

"I'm lonely," she blurted out.

They grew silent and beyond Dean's shoulder the newspaper crinkled briefly.

"Can I tell you something?" he asked, nearly whispering.

"What?" April said. "You actually hate cats?" She laughed artificially.

"About a year ago my wife disappeared." He took a breath, allowing a pause for this unusual news to register. "She vanished one night," he continued, "and I haven't seen her since."

Freight

At night the freight train murmurs to the floor.
The floor is moved and shudders in its boards,
and we're awake. I wish I had a better ear.
A nail chatters in its slot, taps up against the wood
it split once, years and years ago. Its beat
might teach us of a nail's life: a single thrust,
baptismal, then the holding fast, the holding things
one to the other. This is a life that knows
with clarity its purpose—for a time. The ties
do loosen, though; and so the fretful nights
when train seduces floor, disordering the peace.
I wish I had a better ear. For all this fuss
the train sticks to its route: it perseveres,
moving and moving on and leaving things
a little more dislodged. And we're awake.

—PETER NORMAN

April was silent. Dean concentrated on something in the distance, perhaps a technique he'd developed after frequently retelling his story.

"My wife was a private woman," he said, as if this were a disease. "There's just so much I don't know."

"God," April said. "I had no idea."

"She kept to herself a lot, never talked to me about her work—I guess at some point I stopped asking. She had friends I never knew about, women she took classes with. Pottery, or yoga. If only I'd met them. Some nights I stay awake trying to remember their names: Dana?

Alison? Eleanor from aerobics? Other times I have trouble just remembering what her nose looked like."

April touched her own nose without realizing it. Then, she tentatively put her hand on Dean's hand, before finally withdrawing it altogether. Dean rubbed his eyes with the heels of his palms and said, "Sorry, this is what happens when I open my big mouth."

Dean knocked over his cup accidentally. April sopped up the coffee with napkins and Dean scrubbed at the stain on his jeans, both of them diligently attending to their tasks, as if to compensate for the swell of relief. By the time he returned from the restroom it had stopped

raining. They left the coffee shop, and the gravel outside was like slime under their feet.

The next afternoon was gloomy. April worked on her résumé and thought about Dean. She was surprised, given the acceleration of their friendship, that she hadn't seen him yet today. She did things to distract herself from the thought of knocking on his door: she pictured Marble licking the exhaust pipe of a motorcycle a block away, in the hollowed gutter of a tire in a junkyard, in the corner of a garden shed

in the suburbs.

When Jared called in the evening he asked about the cat.

"Any luck?"

"No," April said. "You don't have to ask every time you call, you know."

"I'm just concerned."

"I'll find her. It's not a race."

He cleared his throat and said, "Tell me about your day."

"It was fine. Uneventful."

"You didn't do anything?"

"Not really."

"You didn't do a *thing*?" he asked, frustrated.

"Jared," she sighed, "I guess, maybe I did. A man with one arm came up and

fixed the faucet in the bathroom."

"The super only has one arm?" Jared said. "Why didn't you tell me that before? That's something. You see, that's the sort of thing I want you to tell me about."

"O.K.," April said, exasperated. "I'll be sure to update you on the details of our super."

"No, it's not that."

"I have to go to bed," she said. "Good-night, Jared." After settling under her duvet April realized it was only eight o'clock. She shut her eyes anyway.

That night, a conversation in the hall woke April. She slipped into her sweats and tiptoed to the front door. It was midnight and Dean was paying a pizza delivery boy.

"Hi, neighbour," she said, closing the door behind her.

"Do you like double cheese?" he asked, as a curl of steam escaped from the box. She agreed to join him for pizza and a beer. In her sweats April felt more at ease. She was keen to learn more about the character she had once drawn so flatly in her imagination.

"Avocado," she said. The tab of her beer can made a crisp pop. "I went with avocado. For the flyers."

"Let me help put them up," Dean said, ripping two slices of pizza apart.

April thanked him, and then they were silent.

"You know, you don't have to do any of this," she said. Dean merely swatted the air to convey it was no bother.

They had a few more beers and talked mostly about ordinary things until eventually the conversation became an exercise in omission, each of them editing their significant others out of memories, telling stories without the central character. Then Dean said, "A lot of people think maybe my wife left me deliberately. Lydia wouldn't do that."

"I didn't think that," April said.

"We were good. We were doing O.K."

April raised a can of beer.

"To Lydia," she said, perhaps just to hear herself say the name.

Dean raised his can but couldn't look April in the eye. He swallowed as if his sip contained a hard lump.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I didn't mean to upset you. That was stupid of me."

"I shouldn't be happy," he said, and got up to pour the rest of his beer down



the kitchen sink. He emerged moments later and said, "I think I'm drunk."

"Me too," April said. She thanked Dean for the pizza and returned to her apartment.

The next day, April and Dean spent the afternoon together. They used glossy yellowish tape to stick pictures of Marble to concrete posts, though April hardly thought about her cat. For the first time she could envision herself being unfaithful to Jared. She imagined everyone was fated to cheat, but only some were afforded the perfect circumstances.

There was flirting, bracketed by stretches of silence. April had Dean apply tape where she was too short to reach—she relished the moments in the canopy of his arms. They stopped for a break in the playground of a public school.

"I haven't been on the swings in years," April said.

"Your cat," Dean said. "Do you think

she'll turn up?"

"I'm not sure any more."

April didn't mention Dean's wife, but the question was there and she deserted it, walking over to the slide. She took a seat on the yellow lip.

"I'm glad I met you," she said. She breathed out through her nostrils. Her eyes connected with his and expressed some urgent desire. Dean

reluctantly touched the waistband of her jeans. He hooked an index finger underneath. April nodded. He unbuttoned her pants, yanking them down to her thighs.

There was the illusion that she was Lydia, April suspected—an illusion so brittle a noise or gesture

could fracture it. She was conscious of the colour of her underwear, of the various properties of her pubic hair, hopeful that her body could be anonymous and aware it didn't matter in the end. She tensed as he inserted himself. Though she'd expected he would avoid kissing—"This is how men cheat," she

thought to herself—it was still a surprise. Dean looked around: the playground was deserted, and fifty yards away a couple was playing tennis in a well-fortified court. He hunched there, inside her, and did nothing. In that moment April felt the weight of his body hovering over her, and beyond that: discomfort, moistness, breeze at her ankles. His penis became for her an annexed organ, a vague shape pressed in against other shapes, still as a kidney. Until he just pulled it out, and in the distance, a tennis ball popped.

April spent the following day alone. She ate semi-sweet chocolate chips from the bag. She lay on the sofa with her arms folded across her chest, and despite the silence in her own apartment, heard nothing from across the hall. Sometimes her thoughts turned to Dean. Mostly she thought about herself. But by afternoon her heart was quickening to the sound of doors opening and shutting, a sound that confirmed Dean still existed.

A day passed and nothing much happened. When Jared called she told him



STROLL

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Nest of Sisters

Another day spent
patrolling the box we've
nested ourselves in.
You take five steps
and I'm right behind you—
five steps, too.
We live in parallel.
Our inner solar system
of paradox and puzzle
the hemming membrane
that keeps everything out.
I strove to be the smaller one,
because everyone knows
the leader is liable.
When mother can't not
look at us, she clutches
her chest in distress.
We are not the same,
but we wear each other's name.
We sleep together in our girlhood bed,
legs dangling over the edge.
I awake in the night
to your tarnished lashes
blinking Morse code messages.
Other people don't know
who they are.
We eat sandwiches
smaller than our palms
and take slow baby spoons
to the pudding.
Each day is another step back
to before we had history.

—ALEXANDRA WILDER

she was feeling ill and didn't want to talk. She knew precisely how he felt when she put down the receiver.

"There's nothing I can do about it," she told the radiator.

But on the third day, April became curious. She hadn't seen Dean in the hall or parking lot. She decided to leave the apartment and go for a walk. On her way out she saw the super lingering in the foyer, his peachy nub of an arm exposed.

"Excuse me," April said. "Have you seen the man who lives in fourteen today?"

The super pulled a cigarette from its

perch above his ear and stuck the end into his mouth.

"Fourteen?" he said. "He moved out yesterday."

April nodded, unable to disguise her disappointment.

"Yeah," the super said. "Men are pigs. I know. Move on."

He laughed like a toothless street-corner drunk.

Two nights later, April concluded she would never see Dean again. She wondered if something had happened with Lydia, or if something had changed in Dean. Regardless of

what it was, she had lost him; posterizing the neighbourhood would be futile, if not pathetic. Had he wanted to speak to her he would have done so already. Still, she felt cheated out of a goodbye.

She resumed her calls with Jared under the pretense that she was feeling better.

"Must have been a bug," was all Jared said.

They still talked about nothing. It was as difficult to say, "No, I really do want to know *everything* that happened to you today," as it was to respond to the request.

April got the cable hooked up and began watching the evening news regularly. Always there were stories of abduction, assault, murder. Often the victims were children; sometimes they were teenage girls, sometimes women. One night, while on the phone with Jared, April nearly broke down. She asked him to hold, her voice verging on a gurgle: the onset of the ugly cry. The bodies were discovered in remote places, in cellars, and on deserted beaches. This time, a ravine. The photos, usually blurry or snowy, showed women not unlike April in age and appearance—tonight was no exception.

"Sorry," she said to Jared, switching the TV off like a frightened child. "What were you saying?"

Her chest tightened. She had the feeling that if she stopped talking to him the peppermint walls of the apartment might close in, asphyxiating her.

In the wake of recent events, April prepared to fill another void: her apartment. It was a task she'd been putting off since the arrival of Marble. Now there were no longer any distractions. She picked up a framed picture from a yet unpacked box: her and Jared at the lake. She studied her boyfriend's face and considered the possibility that everyone, in some way, was repulsed by their partner. She wondered if she still missed him.

"I don't suppose I do," she said to herself. She set the picture on the coffee table, as if in anticipation. ♡

David Ross lives in the Church-Wellesley Village, Toronto. He works as a production editor for Penguin Canada. His fiction has appeared on the Web zine Joyland.

Zine Machine

Cutting out the middleman.

For nearly a decade—knowingly or not—Louis Rastelli, a Montreal-based author and cultural historian, has been riffing on the stereotype that smoking and the arts go hand in hand. Rastelli plugged in his first Distroboto—a repurposed cigarette machine that dispenses small-press objects instead of tobacco—in 2001. Today, nine Distrobotos can be found in cafés, libraries, and bars throughout Montreal, dispensing small books, cassettes, short films, photography, even buttons and finger puppets—any piece of art small enough to fit in a box the size of a standard cigarette pack.

Thirty-five thousand items by more than seven hundred artists have been Distroboto-ed to date. The project receives about a hundred submissions a year from around the world. Some are submitted by mail, others are submitted in person during Expozine, the annual small-press fair organized by Archive Montreal, a non-profit arts organization Rastelli co-founded in 1998 with a mandate to promote, distribute, and preserve local independent culture, and that oversees the Distroboto project. “The idea of installing a vending machine to sell samples of my work and that of the artists and writers I was publishing became enticing,” Rastelli says. “And cutting out the middleman was very satisfying.”

When Quebec banned smoking from public areas, in 2006, Archive Montreal bought up more than a hundred cigarette machines that were headed to the scrap pile, hoping to extend Distroboto’s reach. Though, with a dollar seventy-five of each two-dollar item vended going directly to the artists, and no arts council funding as of yet, Distroboto is a long way from having the budget for such an expansion. Until then, Distroboto remains another unique part of Quebec society.

—JENN HARDY



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TOILETRIES
FOR
TUGBOATS

BY
JASON TURNER
2010









Neighbourhood Watch

All communities have stories to tell. Montreal's Mile End is no exception.

BY SARAH GILBERT

Sarah Gilbert has lived in Montreal's Mile End—a high-density multicultural area, long popular with artists but increasingly gentrified in recent years—since 1990. In 2008, she began recording the neighbourhood's stories, in a blog titled Mile Endings.

Voice of the Tree (September, 2008)

On St. Viateur East, in the shadow of an old factory building, a tree has a small sign around its slender trunk. It is part announcement, part polite plea, expressing the point of view of a tree whose bark is slowly being worn away: “THE TREE SAYS: ‘There is now, at the corner of St-Viateur East and St-Dominique Streets, a slew of bike racks for you to lock your bicycle. Why not take a few seconds and use them? I thank you!’”

In the square of earth around the tree, there is a tiny flower garden full of carefully kept marigolds, geraniums, nasturtiums, tall grasses, and daisies. Along the block between Casgrain and St. Dominique are three more trees with signs and neatly tended squares of garden around them.

Diane Boyer kneels on the sidewalk, deadheading the flowers and tending to the plants. She wears gardening gloves and knee protectors, and has a bucket of gardening tools she moves with her from square to square.

A man wanders over to say good morning to her.

“I’m not awake yet,” he says, looking like he needs a cup of coffee.

“Gilles is a woodworker,” Diane explains. “He donated the bamboo and made the fences.” She points to the tiny fence posts protecting the flowers.

“We just had some good news. There’s an éco-quartier contest about improving your neighbourhood,” she

says. “And we won! Helen Fotopulos, the mayor of the borough, is going to come give us a plaque.”

Diane has lived in the factory building, where both pianos and shirts were once made, for eleven years. She shares her fourth-floor loft with her cat, Picolo, who has extra toes on each paw and stalks around with a big-footed air of entitlement. Diane has plucked many sewing pins—relics from the shirt manufacturer—out from between the wooden floor planks. Her sunny space features a purple-painted leather couch and bright blue, green, and red walls adorned with wooden sculptures.

“I paint, draw, sculpt, and grow plants,” says Diane, whose day job involves re-recording English film and television dialogue into French. “I used to have a community garden, but I gave up my plot and I thought this space in front would be my garden. My neighbours pitched in and lent me hoses. I hook up to a water outlet at the loading dock on Casgrain, and when I connect two hoses together they reach all the way to St. Dominique.”

Since she started the gardens, in late June, people have been receptive to the trees’ messages about using bike racks instead of locking up to their trunks. As a result, the trees are doing better. Diane indicates a fresh sprig poking out of the same trunk where the bark had been worn away.

“The only thing we can’t control is the cats and dogs who wander at night. The cats use the gardens as a litter box. But there’s very little damage.”

As Diane adjusts one of the tree signs, two women walk out of the building.

“You’re the one who did these gardens?” they ask. “They’re great!”

Diane smiles and plucks a dry leaf off a daisy.

Caps for Sale (November, 2008)

As soon as the Laundromat turns into a bistro, or the garage on the corner becomes a condo, or the appliance repair shop reopens as a boutique, their old selves evaporate.

Sometimes I walk down St. Viateur trying to remember: What was the crêpe place before the big flat griddles and the paper cones for take-out crêpes arrived? What used to be on the corner where the fancy ink and stationery shop now is? The chocolatier two doors down sells tiny, pretty chocolates for two dollars each. What was there before?

The neighbourhood is changing so fast I can hardly keep up.

Maybe that’s why I’m so happy to find Barry Shinder at Maple Leaf Hat and Cap Manufacturing Company, on St. Laurent, north of St. Viateur. When I ask him how long he’s been here, he crows, “Too long!”

He’s stitching caps on the heavy black Singer sewing machine once used by his father when he started the business, in 1930, on St. Laurent, between Pine and Prince Arthur.

“I’ve been on St. Laurent all my life,” Barry says. “Me and my brothers used to lie on the sewing tables as babies.”

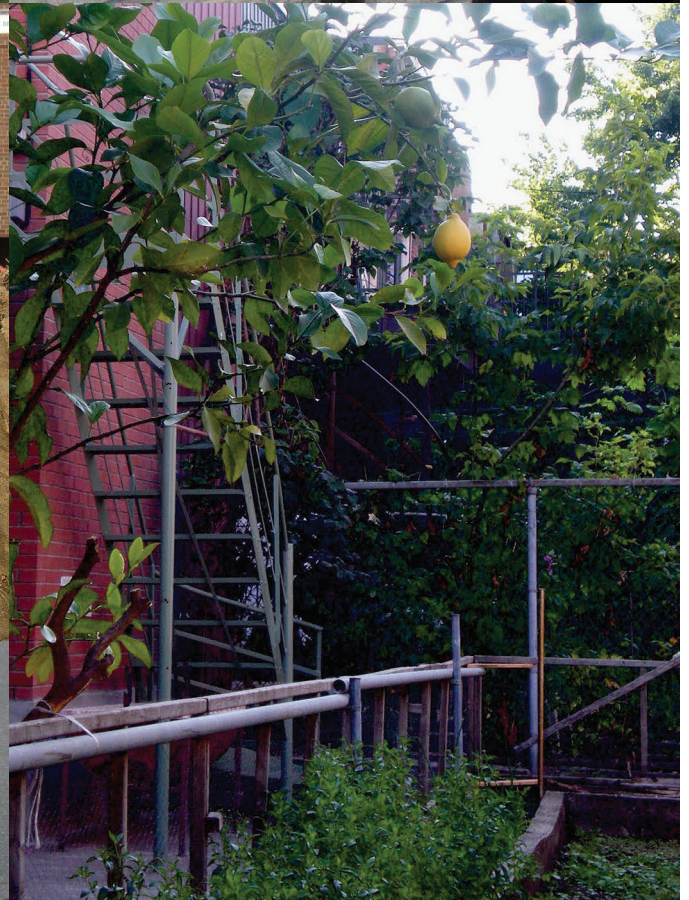
Barry lives with his wife and daughter in the apartment where he grew up, above the cap factory. He works weekends and nights, sometimes until 11 p.m.

“It’s convenient,” he says. “I’m a workaholic.”

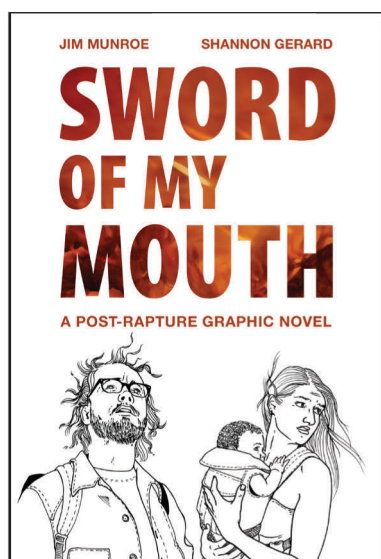
Barry, who is sixty-one and boasts an athletic frame and a quick wide smile, picks up a flat cap, also known as a newsboy, and admires it.

“The beauty of men’s hats? The style is what it was in my father’s day in the nineteen-thirties, and it’s still going.”

The caps are like the ones stacked



Top left: urban gardener Diane Boyer. Top right: Barry Shinder outside Maple Leaf Hat and Cap during its final days. Above left: Emily Rose Michaud and her living armor. Above right: Spiros Moumouris's lemon tree and backyard garden.



"It's completely nuts.... It's a book about what if the Rapture actually happened, and that's all I'm gonna tell you."

— Pulitzer Prize winner Junot Diaz on *Therefore Repent!*

Ella's baby isn't quite right. But since the righteous floated into the sky and magic started working, not much is.

A stand-alone story continuing from the acclaimed graphic novel *Therefore Repent!*, *Sword of My Mouth* moves the focus from Chicago, under siege by angels with machine guns, to the urban prairie of Detroit. Folks in the D have banded together to turn land with burned-out crackhouses into farming tracts, and seem to be on a road to self-sufficiency... until Famine rides into town.

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high in *Caps for Sale*, the classic children's book about a cap peddler who falls asleep under a tree and wakes to find that monkeys have stolen his pile of hats. Barry's 2008 models are dark-coloured wool, tweed, or corduroy patchwork, with a brim and a button on top. Some have a snap fastener on the brim.

Talking to Barry Shinder is like finding a living link between the neighbourhood's past and present. I've been in Mile End through two decades of changes, but he's been here his whole life. And Barry's memory seems to keep up with the neighbourhood's changes just fine, piling up the layers of history like a stack of caps: "The Mile End station was over where Million Carpets and Tiles is. Me and my cousin used to hop trains to Outremont. . . . General Motors was on the corner of St. Viateur, where Yellow shoes is. . . . Before Café Olimpico was Open Da Night, it was Tony and Franco's."

He talks without stopping his work, which at the moment is stitching sweatbands into poor-boy caps.

"I do the work of three, and so we're actually six," he explains, gesturing to the three Haitian women who've been sewing for him for a combined total of thirty-nine years. Margaret, Jacqueline, and Rose use words like "cool" and "respectful" to describe their boss.

"Every year it gets tougher," Barry says of the business, citing the flood of inexpensive imports from China as a factor. "At one point I wanted my son to build it up. But why ruin his life? He's going to work sixty to seventy hours a week in here? Is there a future in this? I can't see it. I'm a dying breed."

After he stitches the sweatbands, one by one, into a pile of caps, Margaret takes them and sews in the label of a clothing company. As it was in Barry's father's day, ninety per cent of Maple Leaf's work is contract.

The caps they make will sell at the historic high-end Henri Henri hat store on St. Catherine, or at l'Hiver en Folie shops across Quebec. Yet Maple Leaf Hat remains strangely invisible—you could be wearing a Maple Leaf cap and never know it.

That's sort of like eating a tofu wrap at le Cagibi, on St. Viateur at St. Laurent, without ever knowing it used to be a pharmacy with wooden apothecary shelves that held medicines and reme-

dies before they held zines. Except the story of Barry Shinder and Maple Leaf Hat and Cap Manufacturing Company is not just a story of what used to be, it's a story of what still is.

Postscript (January, 2010): The sign in the window of Maple Leaf Hat and Cap Manufacturing Company reads, "WE'RE CLOSING. EVERYTHING MUST GO." I can't believe it. I knew business was bad, but Barry Shinder tells me his manufacturing costs became too high. Last week his main client, the garment company who contracted him to make their caps, said they couldn't afford his prices any more. Now, instead of sewing caps for the business his father started eighty years ago, Barry will commute to work in the Chabanel district and get paid a wage.

"I've never worked anywhere else," he says. But he'll be bringing his dad's old Singer. "That is one thing I'd never sell."

As I leave, wet snow is falling and I notice that just north of Barry's place, in what used to be a neighbourhood tavern full of battered wicker chairs, a fancy new bar has opened up. Change is everywhere. Everything must go.

Secrets (July, 2009)

Tommy, the barber with the blue and yellow walls, museum-piece barber chairs, and tonics pickling in jars, says no to me.

"No. I don't want. I have nothing to say. No, no, No."

He fans me out of his shop with the newspaper he's holding.

The bicycle-riding blade sharpener, who I'd heard of but never seen, also says no. He appeared like a mythical creature out of a billow of blowing snow one Friday afternoon this spring, with his grinding wheel in front of the handlebars and a hinged wooden box behind his seat. It was like running into a horse-drawn ice cart.

I yelled out to him, "I've been looking for you!"

He agreed to meet me when it wasn't a blizzard. I asked if I could take his picture.

"No, no, not today," he said, and pedaled off into the flying snow, down toward the underpass, vaporizing like the sasquatch or Mr. Snuffleupagus.

And then he stood me up.

Barry Shinder at the cap factory, who gets his gigantic antique scissors honed

by the bike sharpener, guessed it was because he works under the table and didn't want publicity or problems.

Over on Parc Avenue, the staff of Chez Rose Marie Lingerie don't want to spill the beans either.

"It's a boring life, but it's my life," says Rose, who has wavy grey hair that tumbles over her shoulders. She's an Armenian-born, Paris-trained corsetiere who's been working in Montreal for close to fifty years. Her arm is in a sling from the strain of decades of bra-fitting and sewing alterations. She's obviously a fountain of stories and inside information, but she refuses to give them up to me.

pers buying up bras at reduced prices. September 1st, it's empty—counters and displays gone, pink walls bare of vintage Wonderbra posters.

"WE ARE NOW CLOSED," reads a handwritten sign on the door. "PLEASE CALL US FOR ANY INFORMATION."

I dial the number and get a recording: Rose's voice telling me to leave a message. No information, no stories, no secrets.

Oasis (August, 2009)

In the alley behind Esplanade, there's an oblong oasis: tomato plants, beans, squash, and tall purple-flowered ama-

But when I finally return to tell the gardener how much his trees mean to me, I'm too late. I find a young couple out in the garden. George Moumouris tells me that his father, Spyridon, the keeper of the lemon tree, died in 2008.

"When I was growing up, he was out here until it was so dark you couldn't see any more," George remembers. "My mom would be inside, yelling, 'Come in! Come eat with us!' I didn't used to get it. But now I do."

Weekend mornings George is now out in the gardens, front and back, with a watering can. "My dad is all around me," he says.



Left: Tommy's traditional barber shop. Right: shelves of hat moulds at Maple Leaf Hat and Cap Manufacturing Company.

"It's an intimate thing," Rose says. "It's not like selling dresses."

She and her daughter, Nora, are as discreet and enigmatic as special agents. The way they tell it, bra-fitting is an undercover operation.

"Sisters come in together, but they don't even want the other to know what size they wear," says Nora.

So, although sometimes it feels as if there's no privacy in this village within a city, as it turns out, there are still some secrets in Mile End.

Postscript (September, 2009): Chez Rose Marie Lingerie remains mysterious until the end. In August, closing sale signs appear in the windows. I think this sudden turn of events is my chance: now they'll want to tell all. But they don't, at least not to me. Inside, for a few weeks, the store is packed with shop-

per rustle behind a chain-link fence.

On summer evenings I used to see a silver-haired gardener move along the rows, tending his plants. One time, a few years ago, I stopped and stared.

"Are those lemons?"

Large fruit hung from the branches of a potted tree on the patio.

"Those are lemons, these are grapefruit," the gardener said, gesturing in a casual way, as if anyone could grow this stuff on trees around here.

Years ago, in Spain, I travelled through lemon groves on an old train with wooden seats and open windows. The sight of citrus trees in an Esplanade alley was like magic, a sudden secret passageway to the Mediterranean, a quick ticket for the Lemon Express. I carry around with me the image of the luminous fruit growing there.

Spyridon Moumouris, or Spiros, as he was known, was born on the Greek island of Corfu, and moved to Mile End from Athens in 1969. He worked at a chemical factory and later switched to construction. In 1986, he bought the fourplex on Esplanade and hired neighbourhood kids to help him break up the pavement in back. His garden was born.

In the front yard, George notices the first ripe fig of the season, and picks it to share with his wife. The branches of the beautiful pear tree are laden with fruit, although he says it's no good this year, too much rain. The grape arbour, thick-leafed and studded with bunches of grapes, shades a bench and a table on the patio—a cool place to sit. It reminds me of another shady grape-arbour haven up the street. I discover that Spiros helped plant that too.



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It seems there are traces of Spiros all along the block; stories of things he grew or helped along. Derek Reade, who lives near the corner, with his garden full of black-eyed Susans and dahlias, says he once asked Spiros for advice on a fig tree.

"In the winter, put it in the closet. Just don't forget to water it!" Spiros had instructed.

Reade followed this directive and, to his surprise, the tree produced figs that summer. But the second winter, once the tree was relegated to the closet, the watering was forgotten. The next spring, when Reade discovered the dried-up fruit tree, Spiros's words came back to him.

"He could do anything," says Jane Churchill, a former neighbour whose home Spiros renovated. "His specialty was plaster: curved walls, straight walls, ceilings. . . . He was like the king of the neighbourhood. Everyone stopped to talk. He loved telling stories. He'd stand in front of his house with his little cup of coffee, a swirl of citrus around him."

One of Spiros's famous passions was his olive tree. "FRUIT-BEARING OLIVE TREE BEATS ODDS: ESPLANADE AVE. MAN PUTS HIS HEART AND SOUL INTO SAPLING FROM GREECE," read a headline in the *Gazette*, in 1997. It described Spiros hugging the tree and admitting, "Sometimes, I'm crazy and I talk to her."

"He brought it over from Greece as a cutting in his pocket," explains Churchill.

"The olive tree got sick when he did," recalls George, pointing out a planter at the side of the front garden with a skeleton of branches in it. "It was weird."

The olive tree has faltered, but the rest of Spiros's grove lives on—the fig, pear, grapefruit, and lemon trees; the vegetable garden Spiros started when George was a kid; the grapevines. The stories neighbours tell each other about him continue to thrive as well.

I missed my chance to seek his counsel, but I can still picture Spiros in his oasis, king of the neighbourhood, grower of lemons.

Field Custodian (September, 2009)

Past the east end of St. Viateur and beyond a gap in a chain-link fence, between the factory buildings and the railroad tracks, sits a grassy vacant lot criss-crossed with dirt paths.

This lot, a huge expanse of open space

by Mile End standards, has been attracting attention lately, in part because of Emily Rose Michaud.

If you talk to her, she'll tell you the lot is not actually vacant at all.

"It's a wild space in the middle of the city," she declares. Emily and the other neighbourhood proponents of the area call it Maguire Meadow, and despite lingering contamination from its days as a railway yard, they say it has its own ecosystem and habitat.

Originally owned by Canadian Pacific Railway, Lot No. 2334609 was acquired by the city in June of 2009, and plans for its development are under discussion.

Emily, twenty-six, grabs my pen as we talk, making sketches on my notepad to emphasize and illustrate her points. She says I've caught her on a high-energy morning, but it's hard to imagine her lethargic.

Emily was initially drawn to the wide open space as an art student, and enjoyed walking through it along with the dog walkers, workers from buildings on Casgrain and de Gaspé, and neighbourhood residents going to or from St. Denis.

Then, two years ago, she undertook a year-long independent-study project on the site, and her relationship with the area grew even stronger.

"I paid hundreds of dollars for four tons of compost to be delivered. I figured lots of artists spend that much on paint and canvas," she says.

Emily recruited a dozen volunteers to help her layer the compost with hay, leaves, and cardboard, in a pattern she'd spray-painted on the November snow.

In the spring, bright green new grass formed over an area three hundred and twelve feet square, forming a Roerich symbol, an emblem devised after the First World War to protect cultural and heritage landmarks.

So Emily's sculpture course was now over, but she found she couldn't let go. She wanted to maintain her Roerich Garden and protect the life of the field.

"It became an obsession," she says.

Emily formed the gardening ensemble Sprout Out Loud and began to or-

ganize work on the site, including the planting of donated sage and hosta, as well as bee balm and red clover bought with her own money.

Diane Boyer, a Mile End gardener who became a member of Sprout Out Loud, says Emily opened her eyes to seeing the space in a new way.

"I used to cross the lot to get somewhere and I never thought twice about it," Boyer said. "Then Emily started mentioning it as a field with its own biodiversity. I'd bumped into rabbits there, something you don't usually see around



Maguire Meadow and the Roerich Garden.

here, but I didn't think of how much it balanced out the cement and asphalt and buildings around us."

In addition to cleanups and planting sessions, Emily programmed and coordinated Sunday events. The writer Bronwyn Chester spoke on the field's trees, herbalist Lana Kim McGeary on the wild herbs, and the urban botanist Roger Latour on what he calls "flora urbana."

"It takes a lot of energy to keep it up," says Diane. "Also, her symbol is huge. It's a big landscaping job. And with volunteering, it's always the same people who do the work. Physically, Emily is very strong. I look at her with her long, long

hair and I see a sort of Xena goddess!"

Emily, who squirms when likened to the TV warrior princess, persevered in her efforts to bridge art and science on the site and the Roerich Garden project gained momentum. Last spring, Annie Cavanagh, a master's student in bioremediation, approached Emily about an experiment in decontaminating the area through natural methods. Annie planted one hundred willow sticks around the edge of the Roerich circle, where they sprouted and grew all summer—until August, when the city mowed them in an attempt to rid the lot of ragweed.

"It was very sad," sighs Emily, who recently met with the city to protest the mowing of the wild space. The city has agreed not to mow the area for now, although it may eventually decontaminate the site through soil removal.

There's a book on the Roerich Garden in the works and a Web site in progress, and various citizens' groups are actively imagining and proposing ideas for the future of the field.

At the St. Viateur East/de Gaspé street festival, Emily sits on the curb next to a piece of brown burlap covered with green patches of sprouting wheat grass and red clover. When the raucous drum troupe finishes its performance, Emily begins to sing quietly and cut into the burlap. Gradually, she stitches a garment that's alive with green, attracting the attention of passersby, who stop to look at what she calls her "living armor."

On the grey street these tender sprouts are unexpected. When Emily steps into the burlap and sews it up around her it's even more surprising. It's become a sprouting dress and she's a kind of wild fertility icon—or the warrior princess of the urban field.

Postscript (November, 2009): Emily announces that she will no longer be coordinating events in the field, but will remain active on the Mile End Citizens' Committee. After two years of hard work, she plans to wrap up the book project and focus on her art. ☛

Sarah Gilbert's work has appeared in Carte Blanche, Matrix, Le Bathyscaphe, and the Montreal Gazette, and on CBC Radio.

Snorkel

BY JUDY McCROSKY

The sand was fuchsia, the water lapping at the beach was lilac, with silver highlights where the rising sun reflected off the gentle waves. Tyson waded waist-deep and announced, "Cool, but refreshing." He dipped his hand in and sucked on a finger. "And not nearly as salty as at home." He turned to where his wife of two days stood, twirling her mask by its rubber strap.

"Ready?"

Behind her, pink sand dunes undulated into the distance, their curves broken only by thatched drink emporiums, souvenir vendors, and the odd tourist. Clumps of tough desert grass dashed down the sandy face of a nearby dune, and took up residence in a spot shaded by a deck chair. Tyson started for the beach to look the plants up in the guidebook, but Lizbet nibbled her lower lip, something that always opened a warm puddle in his heart, and he forgot all else.

"I don't know if I'll like this," Lizbet said.

She put a hand on her hip and rested all her weight on one leg, something that always sent lightning bolts surging through Tyson's stomach, especially in her new bathing suit, a narrow strip of white that spiraled from her neck to the tops of her legs, strategically covering certain areas while leaving the overall impression she wasn't wearing anything.

"Sure you'll like it, honey," he said. "It's why we chose planet Aquaveeta for our honeymoon. Remember what the Fodor's guide said: 'A snorkelling experience unlike any other, where the lilac ocean teems with beauty and adventure.'"

She tapped a foot, drawing his eyes to where her black-polished toenails caught the sun.

"Snorkel," she said. "It's such a funny word. Snorkel, snorkel, snorkel."

"What's that, sweetie?"

Something brushed his leg and he fit-

ted his mask on so he could look into the water and see what was there.

"Snorkel?" said a voice from a clump of red bulbous leaves.

Lizbet shrieked. Tyson looked up and was glad to see her taking quick steps toward the water.

"That's it, honey. You know you're a brave girl. Don't worry, I'll be right beside you all the time."

Lizbet ran faster. Behind her, a succulent plant rustled, its thick leaves waving wildly from side to side. Tyson noticed that not only were the leaves moving—the whole plant was. It waddled down the beach after his wife.

She screamed again and ran into the water, ignoring—uncharacteristically—the drops that made her hair wet. Tyson stood a little taller, proud that after only two days of marriage, his wife was already learning to be almost as tough as he was. She leaped into his arms and he held her tenderly against his chest, standing with his legs apart, easily holding her slight weight. He looked, he thought, like a tough guy from one of the old movies that you could still find on the Net, though they were illegal now because of all the violence. What was the name of the one guy, bare chest, bandanna around his head? Sly or Syl something, like the cartoon cat on the kiddie rerun channel. Syl, Tweety—no that couldn't be right. Oh well, it didn't matter, not when he had his trembling wife in his arms.

The plant reached the water and stuck a leaf out, as if testing the water temperature.

"Snorkel?" it said.

Lizbet buried her face in Tyson's chest, causing him to push his shoulders back even more, which made his chest stick out further. He heard a muffled "Ow," and figured his manly breast

must have pushed too hard on his lady's nose, but there was no blood trickling down his firm abs, so he figured she was O.K. That was good, because he didn't want to risk checking on her. His gaze stayed firmly on the plant.

It looked like a plant, a clump of leaves fanning out from a tight cluster at the bottom where the root should have been. It didn't have a root, though, not that he could see, but it could speak, or at least say one word. Tyson didn't know any plants that could talk.

"Isn't this great?" he said to Lizbet, setting her on her feet.

"No."

"Hey." He put a finger under her chin and tipped her face up to his. "We came here to be somewhere different. To have an adventure, right?"

"The only excitement I wanted," she muttered, "was having sex for the first time, and what an adventure that's turned out to be."

Tyson looked at her, surprised, but the plant, or whatever it was, waded closer.

"Snorkel," it said.

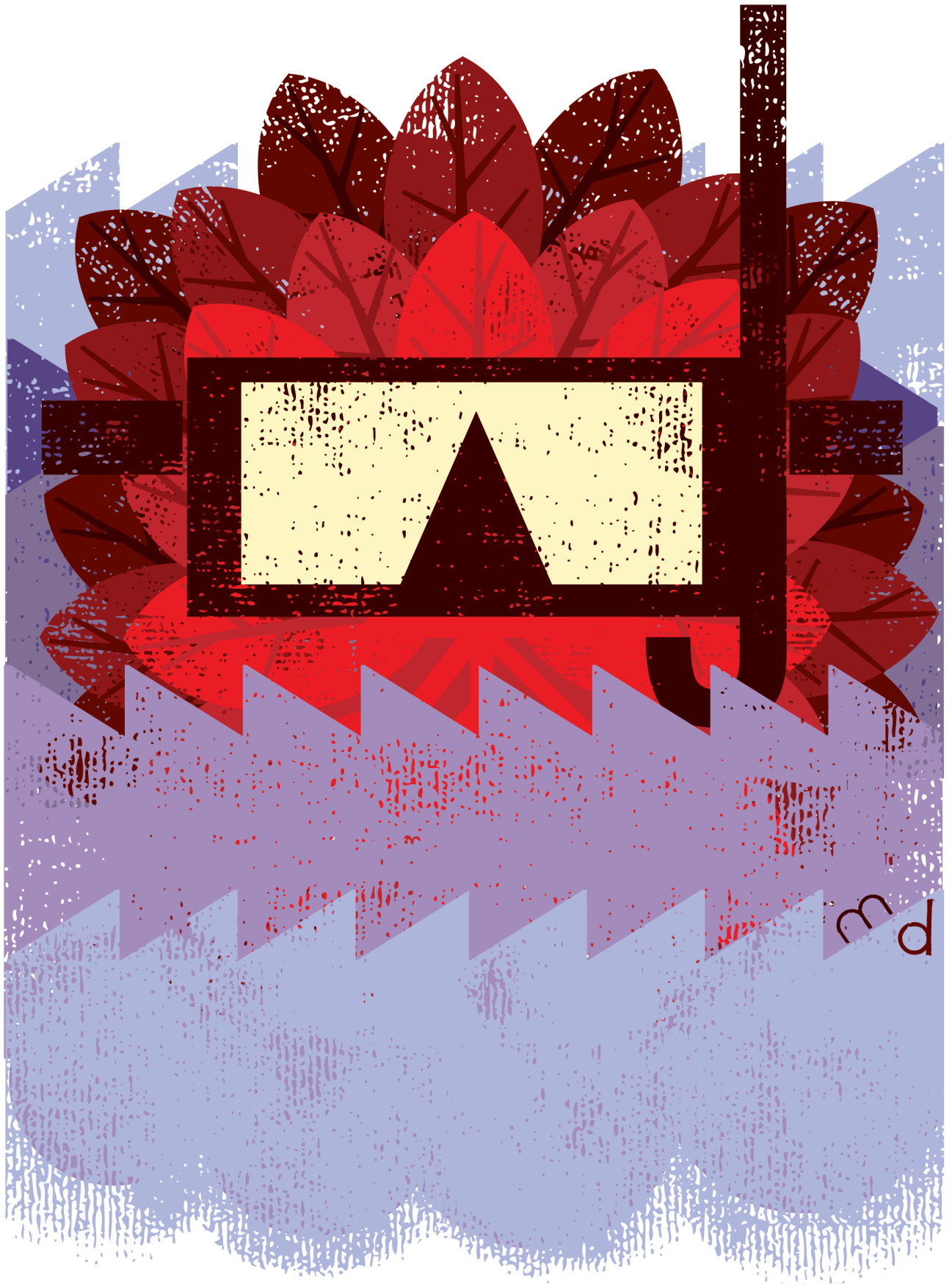
Tyson held out his mask with the snorkel attached to one strap.

"Snorkel!" the plant repeated, and slapped one of its leaves against the water, sending a purple splash into the air.

"It doesn't want the mask," Lizbet said. "It doesn't have eyes."

Tyson wanted to point out that the plant didn't seem to have a mouth either, but he knew that forging a strong marriage required patience, so he slid the snorkel off the mask and handed it over. The plant took it with two leaves and slid the snorkel, mouthpiece down, into the center of its cluster of leaves. Then it ducked into the water.

Tyson and Lizbet looked at each other, then back to where the plant was swimming. Its leaves fanned out on either



side, moving together like the oars of a galley, the snorkel stuck up in lone splendor in the middle. The plant moved parallel to the shore, stopping from time to time, perhaps to examine something it had discovered beneath the surface. Since it hadn't asked for the mask, and presumably didn't have eyes, Tyson wasn't sure how it was perceiving the underwater life.

Something brushed his leg again, and he remembered why he'd been putting on his mask in the first place. It must be a very daring creature to brush up against something so big and foreign as his leg. But while he'd be able to see them briefly with just his mask, how was he supposed to breathe without a snorkel?

"How am I supposed to snorkel without my snorkel?" he asked Lizbet.

Still watching the swimming plant, Lizbet handed him her mask.

"Oh no." He smiled fondly. "I couldn't ask such a sacrifice of you, honey, but it's very sweet of you to offer."

The fish, or whatever it was, passed by again. It felt long and snaky, but Tyson was a man, and snakes didn't bother him. Besides, its touch felt almost like a

caress as it rubbed against his skin, curving back and forth as if twisting between the hairs. Tyson was a hairy man, thick curls on his chest and wiry dark twists on his legs. He'd read once somewhere that hairy men had higher levels of testosterone.

He heard a sort of whispering and, after finding that it wasn't his wife cooing sweet nothings into his ear, realized the sound was coming from the sea. It was like the noise made by sandpaper against cherry wood. (Tyson dabbled in the manly art of woodworking, and had even made a spice rack for Lizbet as a wedding present.) He spun around to look. Out on the purple ocean was a smooth ridge of water, taller than all the other waves.

He reached to gather his wife into his arms, knowing how frightened she'd be when she saw it, but she was still watching the snorkelling plant. Meanwhile, the wave, or whatever it was, rapidly swept toward the shore.

The plant had changed direction and was coming back, hopefully to return the snorkel, although Tyson knew he couldn't think about such things now, not when

Lizbet was in danger from the oncoming wave. As it got closer, it showed no sign of rearing up and breaking in the shallower water. It was still a smooth ridge, and the sandpaper noise was louder. Tyson's heart began to pound, and he was glad his body was responding with the adrenaline that would provide extra strength in case it was needed.

"We read about these in the guidebook, lambie," he said, pointing to the plant. "Plants here can move."

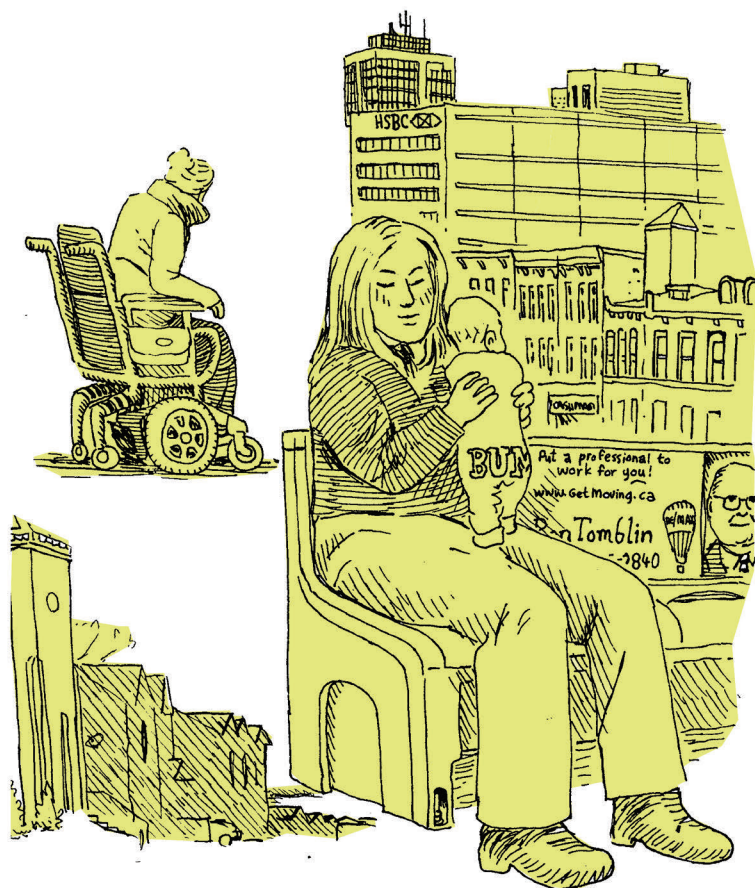
"The book didn't call them plants," his love angel said through gritted teeth. "I didn't think they'd look like plants."

Tyson wrinkled his brow, knowing his high forehead was a sign of intelligence, as he tried to remember what the guidebook said.

"Got it! They were called 'flora fauna.'" The book said the environment here is harsh, not suited to most life forms, and so the flora fauna evolved the ability to—

"Great," Lizbet muttered. "I'm in a place unsuited to my life form."

"Don't worry. I'll protect you. And besides, Fodor's said the flora fauna are not dangerous."



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cruel cuts by the coffee klatch;
forever fresh, ready for the party
that must be on the inside of the envelope.

—CATHERINE MCGUIRE

He paused to look seaward and saw the wave was nearly upon them.

The plant had nearly returned to where it had started and Lizbet moved nearer to it. Poor innocent thing, she was still unaware of the danger that was almost upon them. Tyson ran toward her, strong strides, and placed himself so she was between him and the wave, reasoning that if he was in shallower water than she, he'd be better able to pick her up and whisk her away.

The snake-like thing was back and now another rose out of the water and twined around his chest. He could see them clearly now. They weren't snakes—they had no eyes and no mouth—they were tentacles.

The one slithering across his chest felt almost as good as Lizbet's fingers. It was a lot stronger, though, and Tyson's muscles swelled, ready for the challenge. He'd seen a movie once in which a guy wearing a hat had wrestled an alligator. Tyson had hoped to try this himself, until he learned that alligators were extinct. But here, at last, was his chance. Man against beast.

The snorkelling plant rose above the water's surface. Lizbet reached out and softly stroked one of its leaves. A wave reared up, but not to break. But, it wasn't a wave at all—it was a huge orange banana-shaped thing. Something brushed Tyson's leg, lingered to caress his leg hair, and then wrapped around his ankle.

Lizbet held out a hand and the plant returned the snorkel, but she dropped it. Tyson, or rather Fodor's, had been right. This thing was harmless. It just liked to look at fish. It reminded her a bit of Tyson, in fact. One of the things she had found attractive about him was the joy he took in small things.

Lizbet kept her hand outstretched, and the plant placed one of its thick leaves on her palm. The leaf was covered with thin bristles, but they felt more like fur than thorns.

From somewhere beside her, Lizbet heard a watery sound that wasn't exactly a splash, but wasn't a kerplunk either. She turned to see her husband disappearing beneath the surface.

He wasn't wearing his mask, and he didn't have his snorkel, so it was unlikely he was looking at the fish that had so enthralled the plant. Then something eel-like slithered over her calf, but it jerked away before she could flinch herself. A wave bumped against her, pushing her toward shore. This was the first time a wave had been big enough to move her, and she looked out to sea, only to find her field of vision obscured by an enormous orange banana. The wave had been caused by the creature lifting its body to reveal an underside

that was mostly mouth. A big mouth, filled with spiky teeth and small writhing tentacles. Without further thought, Lizbet flung herself at where she'd last seen Tyson.

Her searching hands found him quickly, the warm firmness of his chest, his flailing arms, and a tentacle slithering sensuously over the hair that coated his belly. She grabbed the tentacle and it jerked away from her touch. She held Tyson under his arms, jammed her feet into the sandy bottom, and pulled.

Gasping, both of their heads broke the surface, but Lizbet could see the tentacle once again twining about Tyson's chest, pinning his arms to his sides. Using his shoulder to keep herself up, she pushed her feet between tentacle and husband. It likes hair, she thought, and made sure that as much as possible of her shaved and waxed skin touched it.

The thing had more than one tentacle, though, for while one pulled away from her, another grabbed Tyson's leg and dragged him back under. Lizbet stood up just in time to see the banana, its two ends resting in the water, its mouth manoeuvring over Tyson.

Fur and warmth caressed her shoulder, and the plant pushed the snorkel at her. Then, thrusting all its leaves to one side in a massive scoop of water, the plant propelled itself directly into the banana's mouth. Lizbet screamed. The tentacles rubbed the leaves and apparently found them hairy enough, because the banana's mouth closed and the creature withdrew its hold on Tyson. It fell back on the water with its full length, sending a curved wall of water over Liz-

bet, filling her eyes, nose, and mouth. The world became nothing but lilac.

Time had passed, she was sure, when she opened her eyes and found herself carried in Tyson's arms up the beach. "It's all right, rabbitkins," he said soothingly. "You're all right. I'd never let anything hap-

pen to you."

Lizbet stared at him, wondering if purple water had affected her hearing, then struggled free of him and dashed back into the water. There was no sign now of the banana or the plant. She fell to her knees and covered her face with her hands.





She heard Tyson splashing toward her, but before she could decide whether or not to let him touch her, something warm and furry brushed against her shoulder. She let her hands fall, and saw a single thick red leaf floating beside her. She cradled it in both hands. A spindly root-let trailed from one end.

A root? she thought, and allowed herself to hope. Surging to her feet she ran through the purple water and over the pink sand to where the plant had stood originally. Tyson arrived beside her as she crouched and feverishly began digging a hole.

“What are you doing?” he asked, and when she didn’t answer he knelt beside her and helped. Together, they stuck the leaf, tendril-end down, into the hole and patted the sand firmly around it.

They stood and looked at each other. “Thank you,” Lizbet said, “for helping.”

“I will always be there when you need help,” he said, and Lizbet was unable to stop herself from reaching out and hugging him tightly. All adventures won’t be as exciting as this one, she thought, but we will be together. And besides, adventure was simply not knowing what will happen next. Perhaps what would happen when they got back to their room would be just the adventure she’d been looking for.

A group of tourists who’d been staring wide-eyed at them now approached. “That thing wasn’t in the guidebook,” a woman said nervously.

“What’s it going to say?” Lizbet asked. “Beware of giant bananas?”

“And,” Tyson added, “the book does promise adventure. You can’t have adventure without challenge.”

As they walked toward their hotel, arms around each other, Lizbet glanced back over her shoulder. Behind the tourists, she saw Tyson’s snorkel bobbing on the water, a little way from shore. She thought about telling him, then shrugged. She’d leave it for the plants, so they could look at fish and the other wonders beneath the lilac surface. Then she faced forward, and walked with her husband into the unknown. ✧

Judy McCrosky, when not circumnavigating the globe, lives in Saskatoon. She runs a creative writing program for Holland America cruise line’s world tour, and is the author of four books, with a fifth due this fall.



T H E B O O K S

Children of the Atom, by Dave Lapp (Coun drum, 2010; \$17). Many of the books on this page are being published just as *Taddle Creek* hits newsstands, and, thus, were reviewed by the magazine from advance review copies. But despite being a regular contributor to the magazine, ol' Dave didn't want to let *Taddle Creek* have a peek at his new collection of *previously published* (yes, that's right) work. Some jazz about superstition. Thankfully, the magazine has seen these strips before and has no problem recommending D.L.'s fine collection. (Dave...)

• *The Reinvention of the Human Hand*, by Paul Vermeersch (M. & S., 2010; \$18.99). Paul's suite of poems about Looney Tunes is genius. Anyone who dedicates a poem to Mel Blanc is all right in *Taddle Creek*'s book. But Paul: where was "Boys Who Envy Werewolves" when *Taddle Creek* put together its Halloween issue?

One Bloody Thing After Another, by Joey Comeau (ECW, 2010; \$14.95). Not that *Taddle Creek* wasn't expecting a quality book from Joey, but *One Bloody Thing* was pretty awesome, right down to the secret small-type sentences between chapters on the book's blank pages.

• *The Warhol Gang*, by Peter Darbyshire (HarperCollins, 2010; \$29.99). Rightfully described as *Fight Club* meets *The Office*, but with an additional dose of Symbionese Liberation Army meets *Crash* (Cronenberg's, not that thing Tony Danza was in), *The Warhol Gang* is a unique look at a dangerous, offbeat future. The excerpt *Taddle Creek* ran a while back doesn't even begin to set the tone.

• *I Still Don't Even Know You*, by Michelle Berry (Turnstone, 2010; \$19). Another brave short-story collection for a world that (apparently) refuses to buy short-story collections. Don't give up the fight, Michelle. *Taddle Creek* loves short stories, especially yours.

• *Sweet*, by Dani Couture (Pedlar, 2010; \$20). "More zombies, please." It was a simple request. Dani said she'd make it happen next time around. Got to say, you came up a little short on that promise, kiddo. But *Taddle Creek* loves you to death, so you get a pass. (Seriously, more zombies next time, O.K.?)

Ronald Reagan, My Father, by Brian Joseph Davis (ECW, 2010; \$17.95). *Taddle Creek* can't say too many good things about Brian's work. If you're a fan of his previous books, the magazine has no doubt you'll enjoy his latest collection of stories too.

• *A Good Time Had by All*, by Meaghan Strimas (Exile, 2010; \$18.95). If this collection of poetry is at all autobiographical (which *Taddle Creek* assumes most poetry is), it sounds like Meaghan leads exactly the kind of life *Taddle Creek* feels a poet should lead. The collection's title says it all.

The Rabble of Downtown Toronto, by Jason Kieffer (Old Boot, 2009; \$10). Ah, the book everyone's loving to hate right now. *Taddle Creek* has had a front seat for the controversy surrounding this cartoon guide to the city's street "characters," and it's been quite the ride. It's always fun watching people who don't realize that trying to censor something

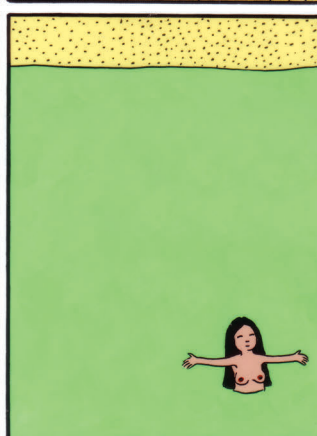
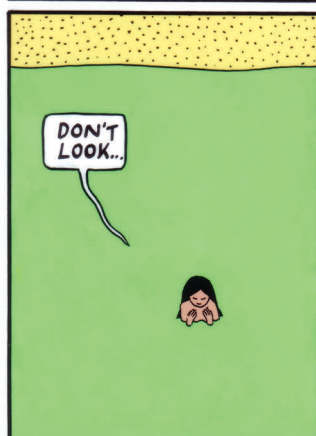
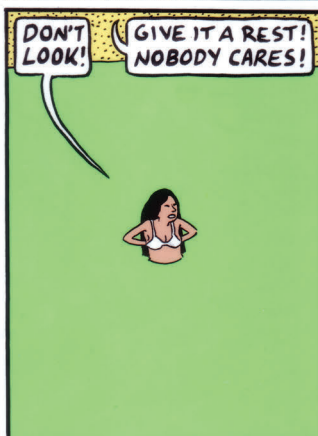
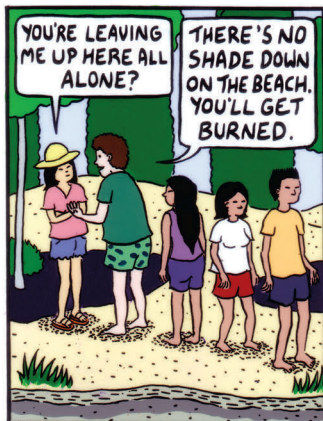
is a surefire way to give it more attention than it ever would have gotten otherwise. Well played, Mr. Kieffer, well played.

Wrong Bar, by Nathaniel G. Moore (Tightrope, 2009; \$18.95). There's a really douchey literary magazine described in *Wrong Bar* that sounds suspiciously like *Taddle Creek*, but the magazine likes this book anyway. Although it's more than just a fun takedown of the Toronto literary scene, that's really the aspect *Taddle Creek* enjoyed most: "There's no way that sixteen of the city's twenty literary magazines are, just by coincidence, having sea-themed escape issues." No, but *Descant* probably is.

Valentine's Fall, by Cary Fagan (Cormorant, 2009; \$21). *Taddle Creek* isn't sure how much attention Cary Fagan's adult novels get, but it can't help thinking they don't get as much as some books by younger, small-press, quirk-without-substance authors. If that's the case, it's too bad, because this is a damn good book.

Holding Still For As Long As Possible, by Zoe Whittall (Anansi, 2009; \$29.95). Finally! A book that uses the em dash as it was meant to be used and doesn't substitute an en dash in its place for "optics." (Yes, the book's great in general, but *Taddle Creek* really was most excited about the em dash thing.)

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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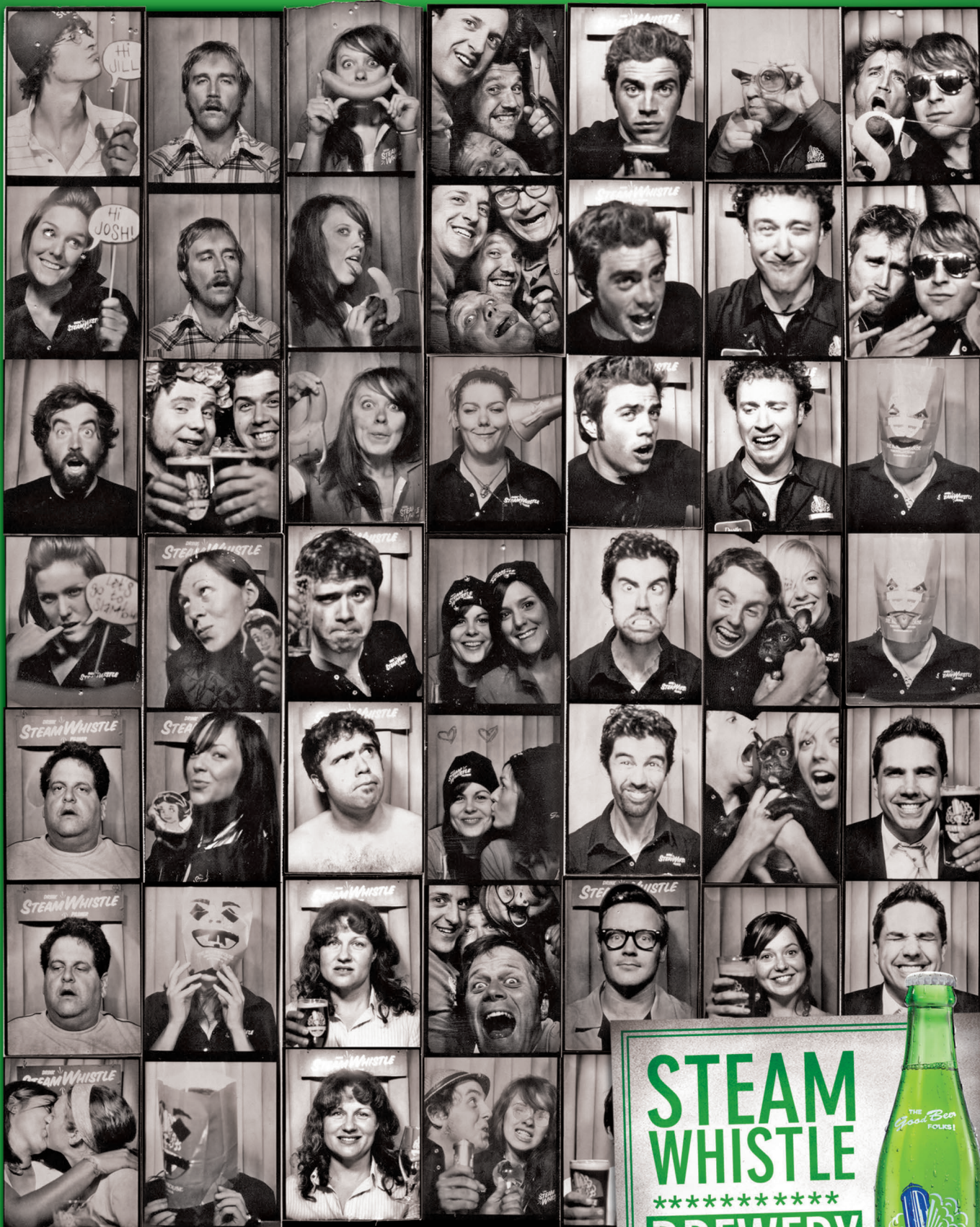
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