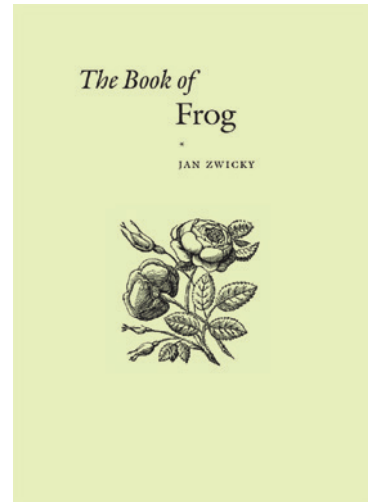
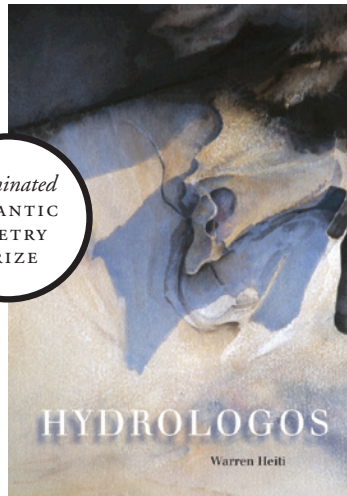


# TADDLE CREEK





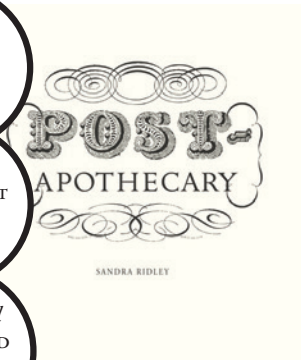
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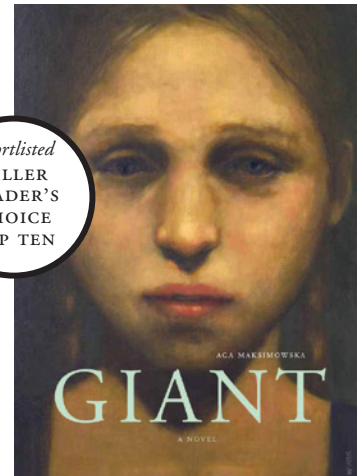
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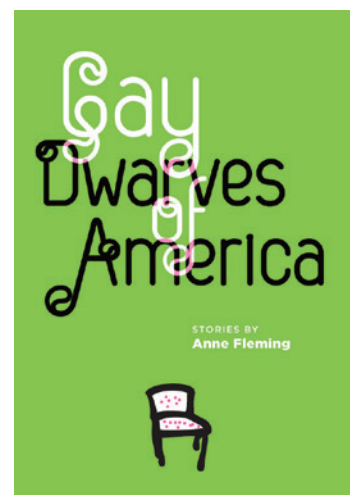
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THE MAGAZINE ABOUT ITSELF  
THE FIFTEENTH ANNIVERSARY NUMBER

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# THE CONTRIBUTORS

Zoe Whittall's latest book is the novel *Holding Still For As Long As Possible*.

Lindsay Zier-Vogel is the creator of the Love Lettering Project.

Jessica Westhead's short story collection, *And Also Sharks*, was a finalist for the Danuta Gleed Literary Award. She has contributed to the magazine since 2002.

Joe Ollmann's next book, *Burden*, is due in 2014. He lives in Montreal.

Tony Burgess writes fiction and screenplays from his home in Stayner, Ontario.

Tom Hicken is an editorial and news photographer studying photojournalism.

Stuart Ross lives in Cobourg, Ontario. He runs the weekly poem blog *The Week Shall Inherit the Verse*.

Heather Hogan is a fiction writer and editor living in Toronto.

Thomas Blanchard is a photo-based artist, freelance photographer, and visual-arts instructor at York University.

Marguerite Pigeon's first novel, *Open Pit*, will be published in 2013. She lives in Vancouver.

Chris Chambers has contributed to *Taddle Creek* since 1997. "Mexico City" is his thirteenth poem to appear in the magazine and his first sestina.

Adrienne Weiss has contributed to the magazine since 2003. She teaches part-time and writes sometimes.

Jason Kieffer lives in Kabbagetown. His latest comic book is *Zanta: The Living Legend*, the story of Toronto's most loved, and hated, street performer.

Matthew Firth's most recent collection is *Shag Carpet Action*. He lives in Ottawa, where he runs Black Bile Press. "Greeks" is his first story for the magazine.

Michael Christie is the author of *The Beggar's Garden*. He lives in Thunder Bay, Ontario. "Battleships" is his first published poem.

Alexandra Leggat's short story collection *Animal* was short-listed for the Trillium Book Award. She has contributed to the magazine since 2000.

Jeet Heer is a cultural journalist and academic whose work has appeared in numerous publications. He lives in Saskatchewan and co-edits the *Gasoline Alley* reprint series *Walt and Skeezix*.

Gary Barwin's most recent book is *Frangulations: The Imaginary Kafka Parables*. He lives in Hamilton and has contributed to the magazine since 2001.

Emily Schultz's latest novel is *The Blondes*. She divides her time between southern Ontario and New York.

Elana Wolff's latest book of poems, *Star-tled Night*, was long-listed for the 2012 ReLit Awards. She has contributed to the magazine since 2000.

Jason Guriel's new book, *The Pigheaded Soul: Essays and Reviews on Poetry and Culture*, is forthcoming in 2013.

Paul Vermeersch's collection, *The Reinvention of the Human Hand*, was a finalist for the Trillium Book Award. He has contributed to the magazine since 1999.

Alex Boyd's latest book of poems is *The Least Important Man*. He has contributed to the magazine since 1997.

Dave Lapp's most recent book is *People Around Here*, a collection of his strips from *Taddle Creek* and elsewhere. He has contributed to the magazine since 2001.

Nina Bunjevac's work has appeared in publications across North America and Europe. Her debut collection, *Heartless*, was published earlier this year.

John Montgomery is the art director of *Canadian Business*, *MoneySense*, and *Profit*. He has contributed to the magazine, originally without credit, since 2000.

Matthew Daley is a freelance illustrator and *Taddle Creek*'s in-house illustrator.

Joyce Byrne is on the masthead of a handful of award-winning magazines. As of this issue, she has proofread *Taddle Creek* for ten years. She lives in Edmonton.

Kevin Connolly is a poet, freelance editor, and *Taddle Creek*'s copy editor.

Conan Tobias is the editor, publisher, and founder of *Taddle Creek*. He writes a funny bi-weekly column for a business magazine, and lives in Toronto's Annex.

Ryan Heshka's work has appeared in publications and galleries across North America and Europe. He lives in Vancouver.



# TADDLE CREEK

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## T H E M A I L

### SIR, FIX 'A LOT'

I noticed a grammar error in the Toronto Humane Society edition of Dave Lapp's *People Around Here* (No. 28). One of my pet peeves is the use of "alot" instead of "a lot." This is a minor error, but I thought I would bring it to your attention because your magazine is generally flawless.

JEFFREY GREENING

*Redvers, Saskatchewan*

*You're right on both counts, Jeff. Taddle Creek admits to letting its cartoonists get away with a little more than its other contributors, especially old-school guys like Dave who still do everything by hand and refuse to buy a scanner. Unless it's a major error that Taddle Creek simply can't live with, the magazine often lets it slide. But Taddle Creek could, and should, have gone in and Photoshopped an extra space in there. The magazine is sorry it let you down.*

### THE UNINVITED CHECKER

I was listening to John Degen's Book Room podcast interview with *Taddle Creek*'s esteemed editor recently and wanted to confirm that Kent cigarettes, as mentioned in Mr. Degen's short story "The Uninvited Guest" (No. 15) were indeed available in Sweden in the nineteen-seventies. I remember them, having grown up in Europe, but double-checked for you by contacting a friend from Sweden who confirmed it for me as well. He also informed me that they did have the vending machines mentioned in the story.

Happy fifteenth anniversary!

NINA BUNJEVAC  
*Toronto*

*Thank you, Nina, for at last confirming the one fact in John's story Taddle Creek was unable to check off at the time of original publication. And readers, if you haven't yet subscribed to the Book Room, available on iTunes, do. For Taddle Creek's money, it's the best literary podcast in town, featuring many of the magazine's contributors, and also breaks new ground by featuring authors who have not appeared in Taddle Creek. Episode 12 is especially enjoyable.*

### STILL CHAMPION

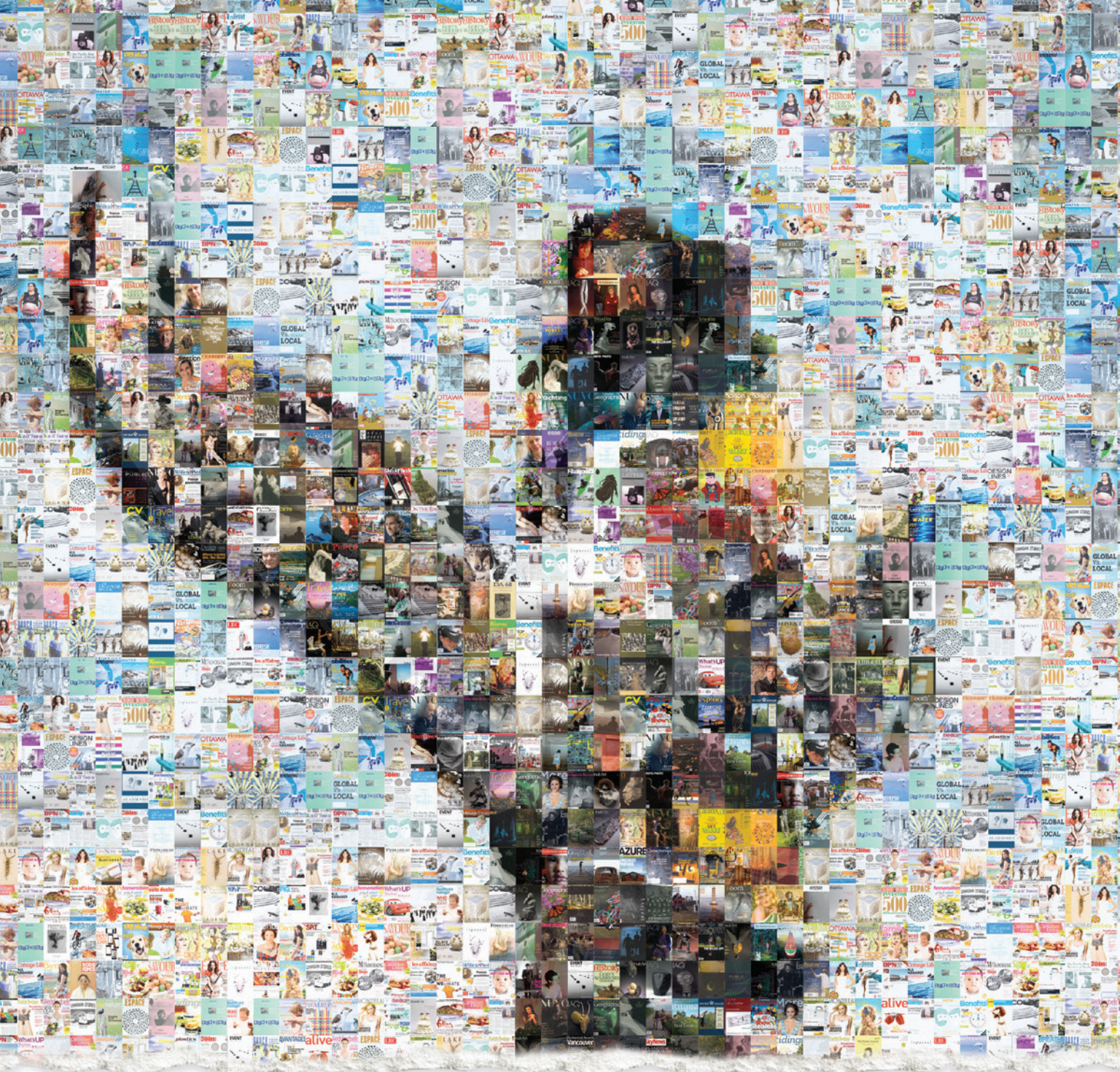
Hi, *Taddle Creek*. Can you believe it's been nearly eleven hundred days since you last published me in your pages? Yes, I know, I haven't sent you any new stories in that time span, though I do E-mail you at least once a week. Oh my. So much has happened—and not happened—to me since my story "Savage" appeared in No. 23.

As for the future, when another hundred and fifty days have passed, I'll send you a story about my exciting life as a creative writer. Now that you're a teenager of fifteen and almost able to drive (but still too lazy to mow the lawn with acuity), I hope you'll get a raise in your allowance. Let me know if you need anything.

NATHANIEL G. MOORE  
*Toronto*

*It's always nice to get a letter from Toronto's favourite son. Longtime readers will recall that Nat held the record of Taddle Creek's most-rejected contributor for many years, a streak he broke with the publication of the above-mentioned "Savage." He does indeed write the magazine on a weekly basis, sometimes more, and as a result now holds the record as Taddle Creek's most-unread E-mailer.*





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# T H E E P H E M E R A

## THE DIAERESIS DIVIDE

Of all the grammar questions *Taddle Creek* is asked—and it is asked quite a few, given its penchant for ranting about such things on a semi-regular basis—perhaps the one it hears the most is, “What’s the deal with the *New Yorker* and its umlaut?” *Taddle Creek* hates to speak for another magazine in regard to its editorial habits, but thought it would take the occasion of this, its fifteenth anniversary, to see what it could do to answer authoritatively the question that has so perplexed its readers for a decade and a half.

But before *Taddle Creek* answers, allow it to give two bits of important background information.

First, though it looks identical to one, the diacritic in question is not an umlaut, but rather a diaeresis. An umlaut is a German invention, used both to change how a word is pronounced and its meaning. A diaeresis, on the other hand, whose name comes from the Greek for “divide,” works much in the same way a hyphen does to indicate syllables. For example, where *Taddle Creek* (and most publications using British spelling: -our, -re, and the like) would spell the word meaning “to work together” as “co-operation,” the *New Yorker* would spell it “coöperation.” Common practice among most publications practicing American spelling (your -or and -er types) is to omit both symbols, settling for “cooperation.” While somewhat pedestrian looking, this latter spelling style isn’t terribly problematic, but can lead to a lack of consistency when one encounters a word that just begs for a hyphen, such as “co-op.”

Second, *Taddle Creek* is a big fan of the *New Yorker*’s brave insistence on using a

piece of punctuation that, in 2012, is too obscure for even *Taddle Creek* to use. (The magazine actually would happily become a diaeresis-positive zone if it felt usage wouldn’t invite unfavourable *New Yorker*-wannabe comments.) Stick to your guns, *New Yorker*. Don’t let the punctuation fascists who convinced you to stop capitalizing “E-mail” break you of this charming habit.

*Taddle Creek* was in New York this summer and took the opportunity to eventually return to Toronto and speak via E-mail to Mary Norris, of the *New Yorker*’s copy department. Mary explains that, back in that magazine’s early days, the powers that be, in evaluating their options, decided “cooperation” could be misread and “co-operation” “was ridiculous” (!). And so, the use of the diaeresis was settled on as an “elegant solution” (this was the nineteen-twenties, after all), resulting in a charmingly *New Yorker*-y *New Yorker*-ism still loved/hated by readers today.

“We stick with the diaeresis because we think it’s the best solution,” Mary told *Taddle Creek*, adding that the diaeresis is the single thing letter-writing readers of the *New Yorker* complain about the most. “Our predecessors obviously thought so. It might change someday, but the current head of the copy department likes it.”

Mary, in fact, wrote a fascinating blog entry earlier this year in which she told the story of the one time the diaeresis almost met its end at her magazine, and which she thoughtfully allowed *Taddle Creek* to share with its readers: “My predecessor . . . told me that she used to pester the style editor, Hobie Weekes, who had been at the magazine since 1928, to

get rid of the diaeresis. She found it fussy. She said that once, in the elevator, he told her he was on the verge of changing that style and would be sending out a memo soon. And then he died.

“This was in 1978. No one has had the nerve to raise the subject since.”

*Taddle Creek* certainly hopes no foul play was involved in Mr. Weekes’s unfortunate passing, but is glad fate found a way to intervene. The *New Yorker* without a diaeresis is like *Taddle Creek* without an en dash.

While the magazine had her attention, it further asked Mary how and when the *New Yorker* decides when the time is right to make a change to its style. “Our switch from ‘E-mail’ to ‘e-mail’ is a good example of the way things change,” she said. “A particular writer—a good writer and frequent, essential contributor—objected to the capital ‘E,’ saying that everyone else lower-cased it, and the way we did it made us look out of it—not just old-fashioned but benighted. That’s the way style changes happen: someone pitches a fit, and there is no good reason to resist. Other things we’ve changed style on, because someone who has expertise in a field has suggested (or insisted): ‘czar’ became ‘tsar’; ‘Teheran’ became ‘Tehran.’ There’s no pattern; we just want to do things right, and we don’t want to look antiquated.”

*Taddle Creek* thinks the *New Yorker* just called the magazine antiquated. Hmm. Food for thought. Thank you, Mary, for shedding light on this subject.

And there you are, curious readers—*Taddle Creek*’s fifteenth anniversary gift to you. (That’s not how this is supposed to work, you know.)

—TADDLE CREEK

# THE WORST KIND OF PEOPLE

*An excerpt.*

BY ZOE WHITTALL

Sometimes you can have the greatest idea in the world and be clueless about its potential impact to transform lives. The inventor of the Internet search engine didn't think anyone would feel compelled to use it more than once or twice in their lifetime. I think about that every time I type something into Google. At 2 A.M. I sat curled on Jimmy's basement couch with my laptop and typed in: "prison sentences for attempted rape," and "average prison sentences for attempted rape of minors." I scanned the list of potential articles without linking to any of them. Then I typed in: "why men rape," before closing the window. After my father was arrested, I volleyed between wanting to know everything and wanting to clip my own brain stem in order to be clueless to the reality of my life.

On the day preceding the arraignment hearing, I decided I definitely was not going to go. If even some of the allegations against him were true, what would my support mean? But every time I settled on a decision, I was hit by a powerful surge of guilt.

When your family needs you, you should be there.

Even though I recently had begun the transition from agnostic to atheist, there was no ignoring the impact going to church every Sunday for my entire life had made on my psyche. Those things you learn at the age of five come right back to you in times of crisis. Do unto others. Honor thy father and mother. If I was in prison and I believed I had done nothing wrong, would I want my father to abandon me?

I had no answers, no ability to rationalize or analyze, since I returned from New York City, when Jimmy and I stood at my open front gate, confused by the crush of cars crowding our driveway and the adjoining street. Seeing my father being led away, nudged into a car by two uniformed police officers. The look on his face, was it the burn of shame or utter confusion and innocence? A woman in a glossy blue jacket with lettering on the back wouldn't

let us into my own house.

"Where is my dad going? This is my house!" I was hysterical. I yelped like a hyena; screamed like a confused relation to the suspect on a TV crime show. It was my only frame of reference.

I kept crying. I don't know why, I just couldn't stop. Jimmy was silent, mouth agape. We ran toward the front door. The cop followed, yelling at us to stop. It took her forever to explain why she was there, why there were cops everywhere, opening drawers and taking photographs. One cop grabbed our family photo albums, carrying them outside to a waiting truck. All of our memories, clutched in a bear hug. For the longest time, my mother focused on that, all of the things we lost, all the photos of me as a baby, never returned.

We were hustled outside to the backyard to sit on our patio furniture. I sat down, and the tears of shock stopped. A numbness enveloped me. A lady cop tried to explain things to us. As if it could be explained, really. Where was my mother? Why haven't you gone to get her? Was she at work? She should know what happened.

As if I'd manifested her, my mother's voice was heard coming through the kitchen. "What are you doing to my house? What is going on? Where is George?"

A man in a suit trailed her, trying to explain, but she wasn't listening.

"I am a lawyer from the firm representing your husband. We are here to explain what has happened."

"What?" my mother kept repeating, as though the man's voice was a piercing sound she couldn't hear through.

Meanwhile, lady cop kept talking to me like we were just chatting in the park somewhere.

"Elizabeth, I understand this is difficult, but was your father ever inappropriate with you? With your friends? Did he make your friends uncomfortable?"

The cop had three red curls that escaped a series of tidy barrettes. Eventually she stopped trying to re-pin them and

curled a finger around them instead. When she leaned over I could see a tattoo of a blue sparrow cresting her collarbone. She took notes in a lined soft-cover paper notebook. I kept wanting to ask her, "Why don't you record this? Is there not some sort of phone application that would make your job so much easier? I could spill this water on your notebook and we would have to start all over. Pencil fades, smudges out." But I didn't say that.

"Dissociation," explained Jimmy's mother, Elaine, later, when I told her how it felt to be questioned like that. "It's how your body copes with stress."

"So I am not a cold, unfeeling psychopath?" I asked, between sobs.

I hadn't really ever talked to Elaine much before this, other than the polite things you say to the mother of your first boyfriend. It was a role too new to me to really know exactly what the socially appropriate level of intimacy was.

Jimmy and I took off when we could. My mother was calling my brother, Andrew, and my aunt Clara. She told me to go. I knew she didn't really want me to go, but I felt like I was going to throw up for miles, and then the cameras started to arrive. How do they find out about this stuff?

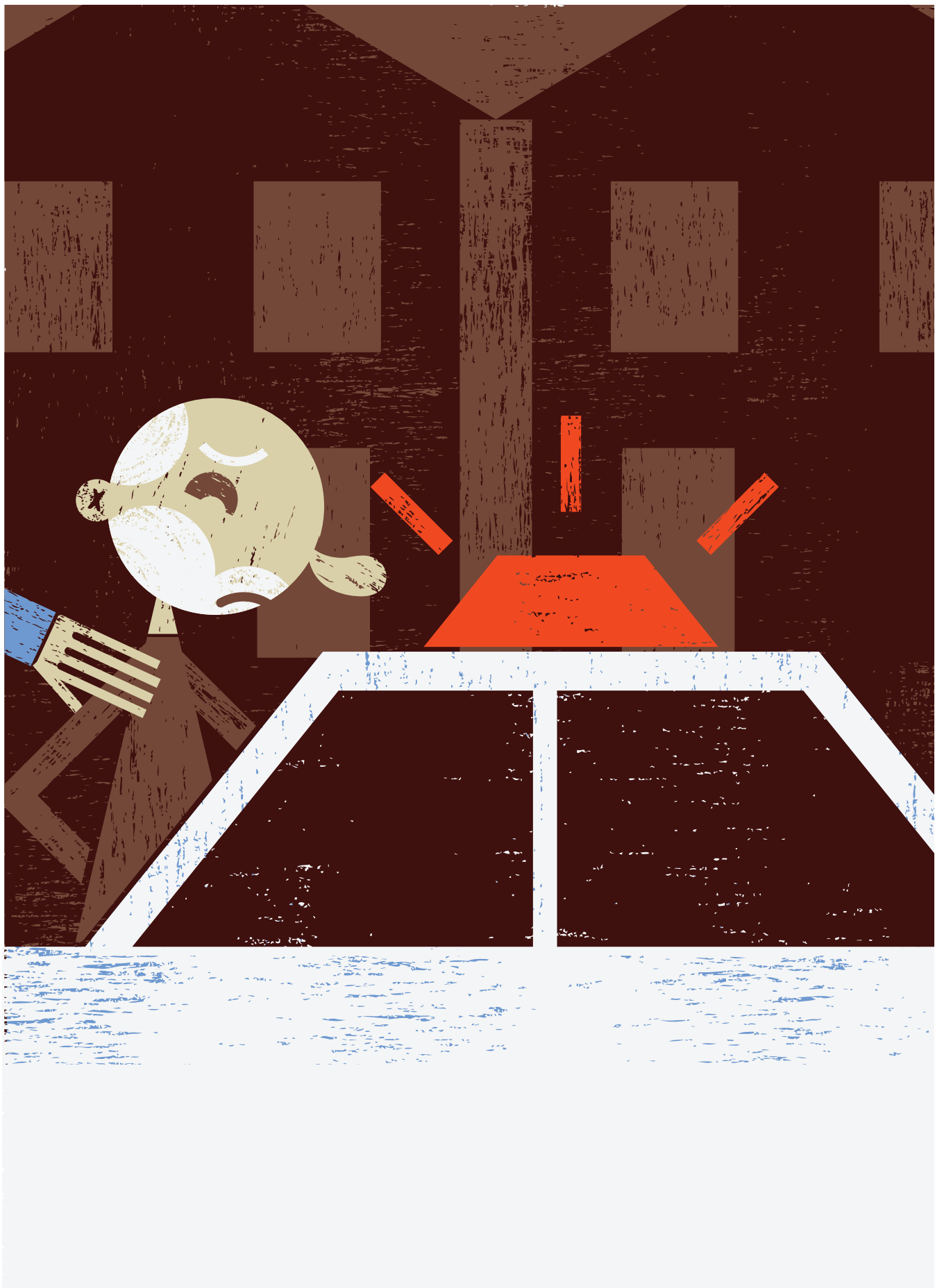
"Can we get a shot of your pretty daughter?" one man with a beer gut and polyester suit yelled at our closed front door.

I stayed up all night, sitting on Jimmy's couch, leaving in the pre-dawn light to spend the morning practising my sprints at the track outside our school. Two hundred metres, from one white line to the other. The world record was set in 2009: 21.34 seconds. I obviously ran nowhere near that time, but I was the best in school. I knew what to do and I did it, felt more certainty about my decision with the pound of each sneaker as it hit the packed dirt track. I ran my best time on two hours of fitful sleep, collapsed on the grass still dotted with dew, breathing in that earthy smell and staring at the sky as it changed from pinky-orange to blue.

Jimmy lumbered up, lines of pillow and

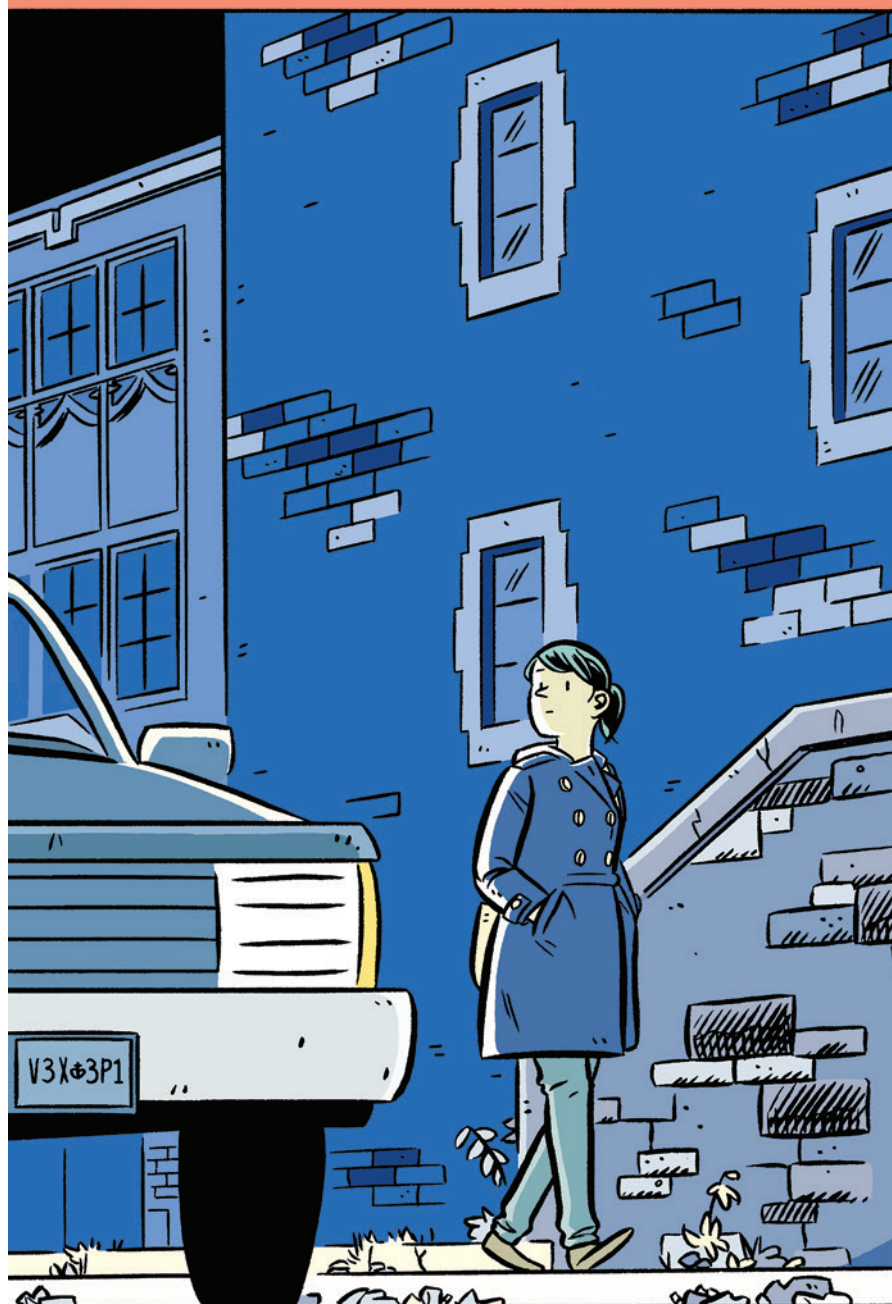
MATTHEW DALEY





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shock across his cheeks, his hooded sweatshirt pulled tight around his head.

"I figured you'd be here," he said, loosening the strings, pulling off the hood to free his matted hair. "Make good time?"

I shrugged, pulled him onto the grass beside me.

I was raised by two nerds—the kind who only allowed us to watch PBS, for one hour every week. My father sat reading *Harper's* and *Physics World* while I ran in track meets.

"So, they just run back and forth and jump over that bar?" I remember my father saying to me when I was a kid, watching the athletic field filled with ecstatic children with a mix of bewilderment and boredom. "Well, *good* for you, champ!" he'd said, reaching out to touch the first-place ribbon. But he was never more proud than if I'd won the science fair or an oratorical contest. Fair enough. What's going to serve you better in life, really? That I could run back and forth really fast, or that I possessed critical thinking skills or the ability to be innovative?

Still, nothing made me feel more present and alive than running back and forth idiotically between lines on the ground and beating my best time. Maybe I just liked the literal quality of the action, or the metaphor.

Jimmy put his hand on my shin and squeezed, and that one sweet motion prompted the arrival of sharp shots of tears I couldn't have anticipated.

When I was calm enough to listen he said, "Sometimes you just can't trust adults."

"You are so good with summary sentences," I laughed, in-between sobs.

"They turn out to be monsters sometimes."

Jimmy had an uncle who was a monster. Or apparently so. He'd only met him once. His mother had a restraining order against him.

Jimmy lay down beside me, then rolled over top of me, propped himself up on his elbows, and kissed my nose. His breath smelled of cereal. I ran my hand under his shirt, grabbed him on each side, and kissed his mouth.

The line between teenager and adult is more than just a birthday. Adults are often responsible for most of the ridiculously tragic things that occur in life: for example, thirty-seven per cent of Russians today approve of the direction in which Stalin took their country. There's



## LETTERS TO AMELIA EARHART

### VII

Dear Amelia,

They found your freckle cream, a flat metal jar, its top rusted shut. I heard about it earlier this summer, sitting in my mom's backyard, next to the geraniums she planted in front of the garage window.

It had been years since I wondered where you were, but ever since that dinner at my mom's, I can't stop thinking about your cheeks, your nose, the tops of your ears, the parts of you you couldn't stand.

### VIII

Dear Amelia,

He remembered that I loved you once, years ago, when my hair was shorter and I was living on the top floor of that narrow blue house. And he sends me articles now any time he sees your name, though they're not from newspapers any more.

There are no hastily scissored edges paper-clipped together. Instead, he sends them tucked into the bodies of E-mails with subject lines like, "I thought of you," and "Have you read this."

I've read all of them now and copied and pasted each one into a folder on my desktop, called "A." I titled it "love" first, but thought it might be confusing years later, trying to figure out if it was him I meant, or you.

### IX

Dear Amelia,

They're sending robots after your plane and I picture waterproof R2-D2s with cameras strapped to their foreheads, their agreeable beeping turned into bubbles that might never reach the surface.

It will look like the moon down there, in grey-scale with strange, uninhabited hills, and even though I know how unlikely it is, there is a small part of me that hopes they will find something—a wing, a lever, your scarf turned years ago into seaweed.

—LINDSAY ZIER-VOGEL

a man in North Carolina who has been in prison for fifty-five years because he once stole a television. Adults fuck up on such colossal levels so often, yet they're always questioning the motives of the young. When you turn eighteen you do not instantly develop an innate sense of intelligence the young cannot possess. All you get is the ability to vote and fight in a war, and you can go to jail without it being all your parents' fault.

"I have always trusted my father," I said. It sounded so simple, a fact so obvious that I'd never had to say it out loud before.

"I know, it's so weird. Of all the people to be accused of something like this, your father would be last on the list."

"I'd never suspect him of even cheating on my mother. He has always been an example of one of the 'good guys.' He's pro-choice. He donates to the local women's shelter every year. He's been giving me the girls-can-be-what-ever-they-want-to-be speech since Grade 1!"

I was sitting up now, shouting and using my hands for emphasis.

"I know. I've always been a bit jealous that you have such a good father."

"I mean, besides his inability to notice dirty dishes and bring them into the kitchen to be washed, he is pretty much, like, a perfect man. Other women

have always wondered how my mom ended up with such a great guy. I've thought that my whole life."

He has *never* touched me, or watched me, or made me feel uncomfortable. I don't say that out loud, because Jimmy knows it. But I wanted to repeat it to myself for some reason.

I know that feeling. I've had coaches who had the propensity to stare too long; a camp counsellor who liked to tell dirty jokes and take Missy Lederman on long walks to talk about what Jesus thinks about her virginity. You can sense it, sometimes, if you have some sense about people. My dad, on the other hand, treated me like an equal; he was interested in my opinions. He never seemed to care about whether or not I had made my bed; those kinds of life lessons were reserved for my mother.

Jimmy trusts his mom. She's like a rock of stability. Boring, boring stability, he jokes, but I know it comforts him. Her thick brown horn-rimmed glasses and wraparound wool sweater that is neither brown nor grey but somewhere in-between, from a mid-nineties-era L. L. Bean catalogue.

"I don't think we have to go back to school today," he said. "At least you don't. Cheryl can run the meeting."

Cheryl was student council vice-president. Jimmy and I fell in love after we bonded in student government because we were the only ones who knew what we were talking about. Other kids were there just so they could say they were on their college applications.

The kids in our school have everything most children in this country lack—not just money, food, and shelter, but attentive parents who want them to succeed. Parent-teacher nights at our school scare the crap out of the teachers, because almost all of the parents seem to care and want to know what's going on. Some of them even bring their lawyers along.

Our town seems ripe for parody, with its lack of a crystal meth problem and low high-school dropout rate. Jimmy and I are the kind of kids other parents use as examples. Now, I suppose, we were the kind of kids that will be talked about for at least a decade, the daughter of Mr.

Woodbury, once the most popular teacher and accomplished physicist, jailed for...whatever official charge they'll come up with at the hearing. ▽





# DUMPLING NIGHT

BY JESSICA WESTHEAD

We had the whole room for the entire evening. It was all ours, and it was incredible. The wallpaper was gold. Not actual gold, but a very shiny facsimile. There was a pond in the middle. A pond! We were told there even had once been real fish in it.

If you have ever booked the Special Banquet Chamber at the Golden Dragon Palace out on Staynard and Highway 12, you will know what I'm talking about when I say this semi-enclosed dining area was a mind-blower.

The best part: when we first arrived, Uncle Troy took me aside and delivered these instructions: "Glenn-o, somebody you don't know sticks his head in here, you look him in the eye and explain that this is a private party."

I pretend-saluted him. "You can count

on me, Uncle Troy."

If there's one thing I'm good at, it's telling people where they do and do not belong.

I make my living by categorizing classified ads, and you would be amazed at the far-out notions certain individuals have about what sections their precious third-hand sofa bed or expired coupon collection should be placed in.

Also, I'm a pretty big guy, so I often find myself appointed the unofficial bouncer on these sorts of occasions.

It was Dumpling Night. I know that because when I walked past the steam table, a teenage girl was there with tongs and she said, "Dumpling?"

I said, "What kind?"

She pointed to her apron, which was emblazoned with a cartoon creature re-

sembling a giant, happy slug. "It's Dumpling Night." Which didn't really answer my question, but at least I knew the score.

So I said, "Sure," and she plucked a shiny, puffy dough ball from the steam table and deposited it on my plate.

I thanked her and proceeded to the salad bar for some salad items. I had already planned out what I was going to get: pickled beets, green olives, mini-corn-cobs, water chestnuts, and sunflower seeds, although I was still working on the layering order. An important part of the equation was the tendency of beet juice to stain everything in its path.

I like buffets partly because of all the choices, but mostly because there's no waiting.

The other week I patronized a restaurant advertising a buy-one-get-one-half-price

MATTHEW DALEY



meat special—anything with meat in it, you could get two of, and pay half price for the least expensive dish. Intrigued by this attractive offer, I entered the establishment and settled myself into a booth.

I sat there unattended for at least ten minutes. I sat there feeling like an idiot, and all I wanted was a menu, to peruse the different types of available meat. And a beverage would've been nice. Who doesn't want a beverage? Finally I went up to the bar myself and requested a Sprite personally.

When I returned to my booth, there was a menu on the table as if it had been magically delivered by sprites, by which I mean the elusive, supernatural elf or fairy kind, not what I was drinking, which wouldn't make any sense at all.

Several more minutes later a waitress came by to take my order. She was pleasant enough, but I couldn't look her in the eye due to my preoccupation with thinking about how she must have seen me sitting in my booth for so long with nobody coming over, including herself.

Then I sat and waited for my food, a tasty combination platter of chicken cordon bleu and beef masala, which took the normal amount of time to arrive. In the end, I left an O.K. tip but not a great tip, on account of the initial Sprite situation.

But back to the buffet, because that's really what this story is about.

So I returned to our exclusive nook with my dumpling and my salad selections (having arranged the beets—of course—on the bottom), and I sat between Aunt Bernice and her daughter Ashley, who I guess technically should be my cousin. You'd think that, but not actually, seeing as Aunt Bernice is in fact a family friend and I only *call* her Aunt Bernice. Meaning she's not a real aunt, but she is a close family friend. So the cousin thing doesn't extend to her kids—they're just Aunt Bernice's kids. And Uncle Troy is Aunt Bernice's ex-husband, but their divorce was amicable, so I still call him Uncle Troy because that's always been his name.

I was invited to be the usher-slash-bouncer at Ashley's wedding, last year, and it was open bar for family, cash bar for everybody else. The family all wore name tags, that's how the bartenders could tell. So I didn't have a name tag but I said to the bartender, "The bride's mother is my Aunt Bernice."

And the bartender said, "So the bride is your cousin?"

I said, "No, she's just Aunt Bernice's kid." And he said, "Four-fifty."

Aunt Bernice had a major pile of fried rice on her plate. To make some friendly conversation, I said to her, "You like that fried rice, Aunt Bernice?"

She pointed a chopstick at me and sort of twirled it in the air as if to make a delicate light painting.

"What do you think, Glenn? I went and served myself all this fried rice because I hate fried rice? Yeah, fried rice makes me want to puke, so I made sure to get a lot of it."

I turned to Ashley on my other side and laughed, "Oh boy, that mother of yours!"

Ashley frowned. Her small features were concentrated in the middle of her face, so her frown had the effect of compressing them nearly into oblivion.

"What about her?"

I said, "Nothing," and cut open my dumpling. At which point I almost puked due to the pinkness inside, which was unexpected. I said to Aunt Bernice's son-in-law across from me whose name I couldn't remember, "Good thing I cut into it first—it's pink! Move along, salmonella, I won't be making *your* unpleasant acquaintance tonight."

He said, "It's shrimp. Shrimp's supposed to be pink."

I said, "Oh."

That's when this guy I didn't recognize stuck his head around the decorative folding screen that was acting as a graceful and effective partition against the prying eyes of other diners.

I shouted, "Private party!" and the guy went away.

"Attaboy, Glenn-o!" Uncle Troy yelled from over by the stunning wall-mounted display of samurai swords entwined with plastic orchids.

I yelled back, "I'm your man, Uncle Troy!" And then I pretend-saluted him, which was our thing, then stood and made my way back to the food area because it was time for Round No. 2.

I visited the chow mein station and started scooping, and this guy on my left said, "Looks like it's a private party for that chow mein."


I glanced at him, kind of over my shoulder. "You got a problem, friend?" That's when I realized it was the same guy who'd stuck his head into our room a few minutes prior.

"I didn't have any problems until I met you," he said.

I said, "I don't want any trouble here."

# Heartless

COMICS BY NINA BUNJEVAC




## GET YOUR COPY TODAY!


Heartless is just amazing! I laughed out loud a lot. It is chock full of great stuff and I'm hard to please!

Nina Bunjevac's art is a pleasure to look at. The writing is seriously demented, but in a totally brilliant, highly entertaining way. It is its own thing, imitating no one.

- Kim Deitch



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# Carousel

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It's Dumpling Night."

He asked me, "You tried the shrimp kind?"

I shook my head. "I thought it was something else."

"Shrimp's like that," he said. "Always masquerading."

And I knew he was having a go at me right there because since when is a shrimp anything but a shrimp? Since never, that's when.

By this time, a crowd had gathered. But not because they wanted to see a fight—more because they wanted chow mein.

"Are you going to stand there all day, or move, or what?" grumbled a lady in the long lineup of patrons keen on getting some mouth-watering bean sprout hash before they expired from a bean sprout deficiency.

So I stepped aside and the guy stepped aside and the crowd progressed along the table, shovelling and scraping. Then the guy said to me, "I was looking in that room for my Aunt Bernice. You didn't have to yell at me like that."

"Your Aunt Bernice?" I said. "I've got an Aunt Bernice!"

"Oh yeah?" The guy squinted at my face. "You don't look like you're related."

"She's not my blood aunt," I said. "She's more like my aunt by my parents' marriage. They're friends."

"Huh," said the guy. "Well, she's really my real, actual aunt."

"So you're Aunt Bernice's nephew. How about that?" I said. "And here I thought I'd met all the relations at Ashley's wedding last year."

"I had other plans. Who are you, again?"

"A very close family friend."

He nodded, and the two of us stood there for a moment, kind of mesmerized by each other is, I suppose, what the situation was.

Then the guy said, "I guess I'd better get in there."

"Yep," I said. "You'd better."

As a gesture of our newfound fraternity, Aunt Bernice's nephew tipped his plate in my direction, but only very slightly since there were a bunch of chicken balls rolling around on it. Then he walked over to that private room and disappeared into its glittery depths like a fish might fling itself into a beautiful ornamental pond.

I turned and headed back to the dumpling table, partly because I wanted more dumplings, but mostly because right then I couldn't think of anywhere else to go. ☐



# MOVIE NIGHT

BY OLD JOE OLLMANN













# EVIDENCE

BY TONY BURGESS

“This idea’s been in my head for years. You can have it if you want.”

—*Steve Roat, mentor to Ken.*

It comes down the stairs, clutching its heart. We have seen the flame on its face before. When it reaches the expansive floor, it claims to be on fire. These are the clichés he must follow in order to find it. It am in this space where someone will die in about three minutes.

In that time I am in his swimwear. Trunks. I have a nose clip on and plugs in my ear. At first, people, feel pride. A great swim. They see the colours of their flag. A great prize. Then the crowd goes quiet. They see me getting old. They see that I am not swimming at all, but sitting. Waiting. He appears behind me wrapped in a blue towel. A cheer goes up but there is three things about him that we should know.

The first, which I find particularly interesting, is his occupation. Peter Goutier watches surveillance video for criminal investigations. He has no law enforcement training. He took a three-month course. A detective brings hours, sometimes days, of video, and Peter’s job is to watch it and look for whatever it is the investigation needs to see. Often it is a person; sometimes an object.

There is an escaped felon whom the police believe went to his girlfriend’s place of employment. So Peter watches thirty-six hours of video showing a parking lot. Then thirty-six hours inside a Pizza Hut. In those seventy-two hours he must never take his eyes off the screen. Think for a moment what that must be like. It must require a special kind of person.

The second thing that is interesting began about twelve months ago. Peter started noticing a woman showing up in different videos. The same woman. She wore a broad white hat and large sunglasses. There was nothing remarkable about her. She was simply there. Taking money from an A.T.M. Having a juice drink at an outdoor café. Removing the

plastic from a CD case in a mall. The remarkable thing is that Peter noticed she was in most of the videos he watched. A strip mall in Sudbury. A self-serve gas station in Peterborough. A normal life lived, so it began to seem to Peter, exclusively for surveillance cameras. This was something that could not remain a mystery.

The third thing we must know is that a 3333333333 has taken up residence in the base of Peter’s throat. It is only about three millimeters wide, with a serrated edge at the top, but he can feel it, especially when it’s on the move. When he’s sleeping it migrates up to the back of his teeth. Occasionally it stays too long and has to slide sideways between two molars to escape the brush. It is a parasite that spends three years in this larval stage before anchoring itself in behind the uvula to draw the blood that will trigger its final transformation. In that stage, as a heavy wormlike adult, it will burrow up into the sinus cavity. Typically it is discovered by then and extracted. If not, it will enter the back of one eye, blinding it and eventually releasing its entire body into the vitreous humour and ultimately dislodging the lens, using spasms in the dilating sphincter to propel itself free. This usually happens while the person is bathing or showering, as water is its natural habitat. Its hope is that you are dead in a lake. Peter’s parasite has lived in his throat for two years. He has been misdiagnosed with chronic post-nasal drip, and his doctors have advised him the sensation will last his entire life, worsening or improving but never resolving.

Isobel Beauchamp is the woman in the surveillance videos. She is sales rep for Maybelline cosmetics and travels a great deal throughout the province. She is also very fond of fresh-squeezed juices and pizza. Her appearance in surveillance videos is unusual and coincidental, but not supernatural or surrealistic. It is, however, a loose surrealism, that is to say a nightmare mechanism found in nature, that she should become a person of inter-

est in a criminal investigation, and that Peter should find himself staring at a photograph, submitted to him by a detective. He is to find this woman in a video, and she is in all videos. Isobel Beauchamp’s husband is a member of Parliament and she has been meeting with a British arms dealer to peddle her husband’s influence in a covert sale of weapons. The video Peter must watch takes place over a twenty-four-hour period in a faux-British pub in Orillia, called the Dag and Dagger. There is no such thing as a ‘dag.’ It is here that Isobel is alleged to have met with the arms dealer and pays no attention. It starts to go on about an ongoing town council debate over rezoning farmland. It could want to feel like sub-documentary . . . like a local cable programming. The time it takes to distinguish these parts is unpleasant.

Remember this user name: Star-fucks3333.

I’m gonna find you, fuckwad, and I’m gonna toss your mind up against a wall.

I dunno if any of you fuckers are gonna get this, but it is my responsibility to tell you where you are and what you can expect. You are now home. You will live on these mats while we figure out who gets to go to school. Over the next few days we will be killin’ some of you and leaving some of you here to get ready for class. You have no control over what happens, so you might as well settle down until shit happens to you. Thank you, ladies, and welcome to Floor City.

“That fucker is coming out of the east this time. It’s a bad one. Somebody said they saw metal in it.”

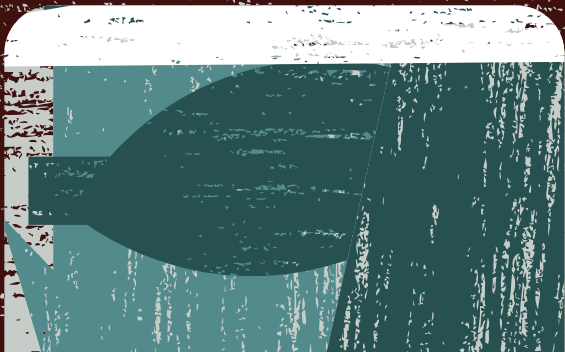
“What do you mean ‘metal’?”

“I dunno. We have to stay inside. Everybody. Nothing we can do. Heavy weather.”

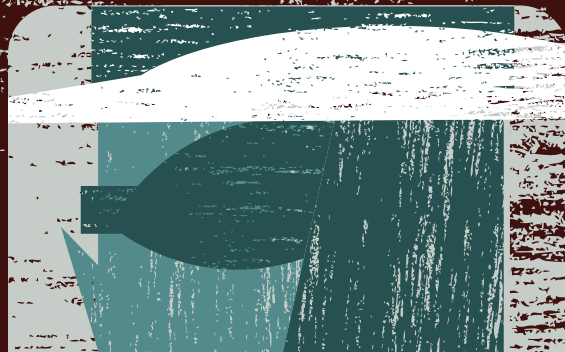
A bright light shoots across the high ceiling and a terrible squealing sound rips through the air. We writhe on our mats. The sound is too loud to bear. He turns and rolls, trying to cover his ears. The gymnasium is lit in negative, and the high grinding roar continue. ⚡

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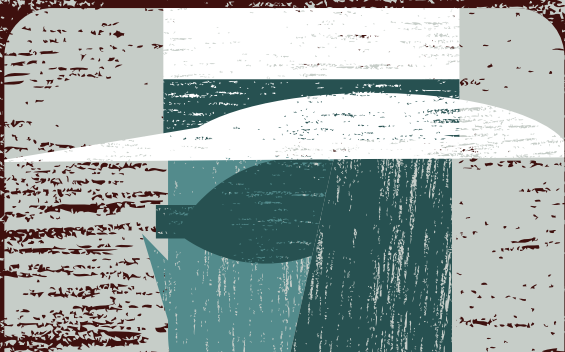




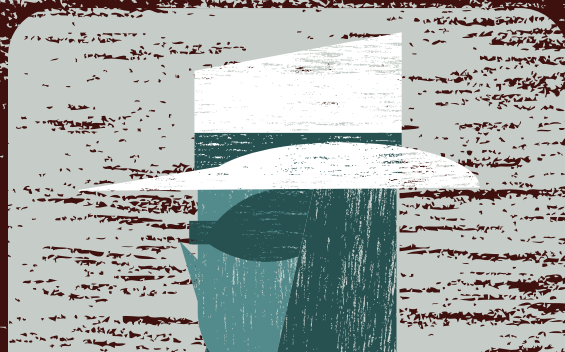
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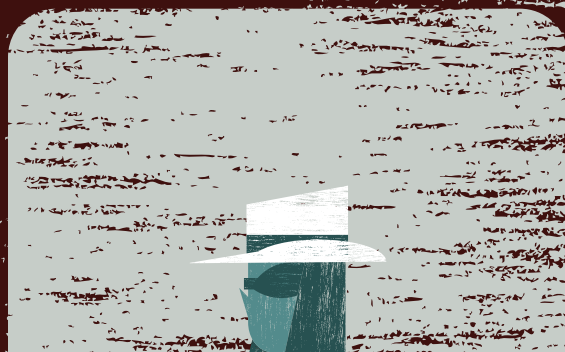
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# THE CITY

## HIS CARTOONISH MAJESTY REQUESTS

*Seth's obsessions take on a new dimension.*

BY CONAN TOBIAS

At first glance, the Crown Barber Shop, in Guelph, Ontario, doesn't look much different from other places men go to read magazines and get a haircut. But the shop's playful blue and silver decor, and a comically well-marked men's room quietly stressing that the proprietor Tania Van Spyk cuts men's—and only men's—hair, suggests Crown has more of a story to tell. A closer inspection reveals a coy collection of oddities: On the counter sits a hardbound volume marked “Royal City Telephone Book.” A wall plaque announces Van Spyk's induction to the Royal Order of the Golden Comb. And high upon a shelf sits a glass-encased effigy of a tiny magistrate, whom the lead article on a framed front page of a tiny newspaper called the *Royal City Record* reveals to be “the Secret King of Guelph.”

This spring, after years of apprenticeships and preparation, Van Spyk rented the small storefront that, by July, would become Crown, the culmination of a long-held dream. With her carpenter father on-call to build the store's cabinetry, Van Spyk turned the design of her shop over to her husband, the cartoonist Seth.

Many authors create simple backstories for their characters while researching or writing a book. Seth takes this habit to a point of obsession. Over a number of years he has created, in his basement, a cardboard replica of the fictional city of Dominion that appears in many of his stories. His books also tend to include minute details of his characters' lives, perhaps most notably *George Sprott*:

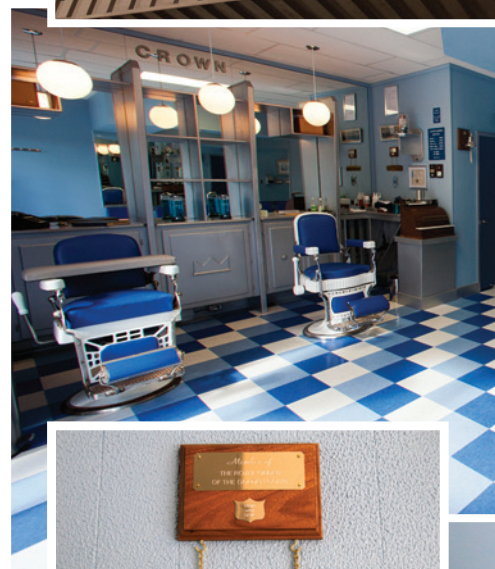
1894–1975, which is itself a lengthy fictional biography of its title character, peppered with illustrations and photos of “artifacts” handcrafted by the author. The Crown Barber Shop is Seth's latest character, and his first opportunity to unleash his quaint design and detailed backstory sensibilities on a real-world setting.

“We wanted the shop to have a retro look, obviously, since that's my thing, but we didn't want it to look like a re-creation,” Seth said while lounging in the shop's waiting area one afternoon. “Old-time styling, but still a practical, workable place.”

So far, business has been brisk, and Van Spyk has no regrets over her choice of decorator. “What could be better for a shop than to go back to the way people did it in such a way that they defined it to the point where it worked really well,” she said from the chair next to her husband.

“He's sort of a mysterious figure,” Seth said of the Secret King who overlooks Crown's two barber chairs. “He's behind the business, though never seen. The business was established apparently fifty years ago, in 1962, and has had three different barbers, of which Tania is the third. . . . You receive a summons from him when you're to report and be the latest one. That's the little conceit of it.

“I'd love to do more of this kind of thing,” he added. “It's like designing a book—you want every little detail right.” At which point Van Spyk realized her husband had not created a copy of her royal summons to hang on the wall, and Seth made note to correct the error. ▽







# HOUSING

BY STUART ROSS

I'll eat your house. I'll eat your house, and then you'll have nowhere to live. Where will you put your books and your bicycle? Where will you put your winter coat? Your jar of dried lentils? The framed photograph of your mother standing beside Carol Channing? I will not eat your house because I am hungry, nor out of any ill will I harbour toward you. I will not eat your house because it was poorly constructed, nor because it is in violation of any bylaws, nor because it stands in the path of a highway I'd like to build.

I do not know the number on your front door nor the street on which your house stands. You have never invited me to your house.

I will don my bib and wander the streets. My bib bears a picture of a lobster wearing a bib bearing a picture of a lobster. It will protect me from getting any house on the front of my shirt. If I ate your house, then went into work with house on the front of my shirt, my boss would not be pleased. It would be inappropriate for me to enter my workplace wearing my lobster bib with a lobster bib.

To enter the building where I work, I am equipped with a card with a magnetic stripe. I have put a Post-it note on the card, and the Post-it note says: "REMOVE BIB."

But I have a fear. I fear that as I approach my workplace, one of my workmates will be leaving, and she will hold the door open for me, and so I won't need my card with the magnetic stripe to get in and will therefore not see the Post-it note I wrote for myself. She would only open the door for someone she knew, so I must ensure that she doesn't recognize me. I

will buy a rubber face mask that has been manufactured to look like the face of an unpopular politician or a television celebrity. The woman will therefore not recognize me, and so she will close the door behind her, and I will need my striped card to enter and will see the Post-it note, and if I am wearing my bib I will remove it.

Although I have told no one about my plans to eat your house, many people have approached me to ask me how I am going to eat your house. It's possible that you told them, but I don't know how you could know, because I only just told you about sixty seconds ago.

This is how I had planned to eat your house. Originally, I had planned to eat your house from the foundations up. But then I realized the house would collapse on me. I didn't need to be an engineer to figure that out. And I am not an engineer. You do not want your house to collapse on me and I do not want your house to collapse on me. If it was a cartoon house, it is possible that I could begin eating it from its foundations, and if I ate fast enough, it would hover in the air until I finished eating, and then there would be a little puff of smoke drifting into the sky. Because your house is not a cartoon house, I cannot begin with the foundations.

A house has a top so rain cannot get in. I could eat your house by starting at the top. For this, I would need to bring a ladder or else find a ladder in your garage, if your house has a garage. One of the notable things about tops of things is that they are high. I, as a person, am very frightened when it comes to heights. I will not be eating your house starting from the top.

You heard me right. I will not eat your house starting from the top, because the top is high, nor will I eat your house starting from the bottom, because of the collapsing issue due to your house not being a cartoon.

Phone calls, telegrams, and letters to the editor of some of the most prominent journals are all asking the same thing: What will be my strategy for eating your house?

And I say, why don't they ask instead where you will live once I have eaten your house? Will you remain in the city or will you move elsewhere? Will you take your few belongings and board a bus? Will you find a remote patch of beach and settle in to start a new civilization there? A civilization marked by empathy and compassion, one where people don't step on the heads of others so that they may benefit at the expense of their fellow citizens. A civilization where each person is guaranteed a basic living stipend and where labourers and artists can walk with dignity, and not have to forage for potato peelings that have not yet gone mouldy. Where free health care and free education is guaranteed for all. *Lost in Space* plays on every television, followed by *My Mother the Car* and *Mr. Terrific*. This is the sort of civilization you could nurture, if only you would take responsibility for your own decisions and for the eating of your house.

When I eat your house, I will eat it respectfully and thoughtfully. Don't concern yourself with whether I start from the bottom or from the top. You've got enough on your plate right now. ✎

MATTHEW DALEY





## THE CHAT

# FORMATIVE OBSESSIONS

*What happens when a twelve-year-old girl gets hold of *The Handmaid's Tale*.*

What becomes of a young girl introduced to adult romance by *The Handmaid's Tale*, whose early literary obsessions include the macabre logic of fairy tales, and who, along the way, develops a penchant for the punch of a good short story? She writes, of course. Grace O'Connell's debut novel, *Magnified World*, the story of a young woman dealing with her mother's untimely death, has a knack for revealing how ostensibly ordinary moments can refract into heartbreak, humour, or otherworldliness. With this issue of *Taddle Creek*, Grace also joins the magazine as its associate editor, having previously contributed the short story "The Many Faces of Montgomery Clift." That story went on to be nominated for a National Magazine Award and was included in *The Journey Prize Stories 24*. Grace studied creative writing at the University of Guelph, and her stories also have appeared in *This* and the *Walrus*. *Magnified World* was published earlier this year under the Random House New Face of Fiction imprint.

—HEATHER HOGAN

"The books that may have had the most influence on me are the ones I read during my formative years. I loved all the CanLit they made us read in high school, like Margaret Atwood, Timothy Findley, and Robertson Davies. I was into fairy tales, too. Not just when I was younger, but also all through high school. I have a big collection of Andrew Lang fairy tales with all of the really gruesome, violent versions, like people being rolled down a hill in a barrel full of nails. But the books I read now—even the ones I love—they just won't be on the bone the way those books from my formative years were. So I do worry that I'm sort of aping Margaret Atwood, just because I read so much of her while I was growing up. I think I may be a trivia expert on her novels at this point. You know those branded trivia games, like *The Rocky Horror Trivia Game*? Well, I want the Margaret Atwood version.

"*The Handmaid's Tale* was actually the first adult novel I read. I was twelve. My sister gave it to me. I guess she'd just gone to a bookstore and said, 'My sister really loves books and reads above her grade level. What would you recommend?' And some insane clerk said, 'Give your twelve-year-old sister *The Handmaid's Tale*.' Which I loved! But I actually didn't understand a lot of the plot points. I just thought, 'Oh, she's in love with the chauffeur, how romantic!' And then, when I was old enough to understand it, I re-read it, and I remember going, 'What the...?'"

"I taught a short fiction workshop at the University of Toronto this fall, and it was really exciting, because I love short fiction. I think it's actually one of the most interesting forms of fiction to talk about. The craft of short fiction is often overlooked in terms of how hard it is to create a great short story. It's sometimes more appreciated by writers than by readers. It's a bit of a tightrope act in that it looks really easy, but it's really incredibly hard to do. I find it interesting that some writers feel an obligation to write novels, but they don't feel that same obligation to write short fiction. It's as if novels are the default form of fiction, which I don't think is true, necessarily. A good short story can pack a real emotional wallop.

"I really like the workshop environment. It's something I did in my undergrad and during my M.F.A., and I really enjoyed it. It gave me the ability to have a perspective on my work. I realized that I'm never going to please everybody, and I'm always going to please somebody. I have a handful of first readers, people I trust and whose opinions I really respect. Keeping them in mind is really helpful. Good readers are worth their weight in gold.

"When I wrote *Magnified World*, I had to decide fairly early whether or not [the protagonist] Maggie would be diagnosed with a mental illness. And I really struggled with it. But I decided I only wanted to know—and by extension I only wanted readers to know—what Maggie knows,

because it's not really the story of what happened to Maggie, it's the story of Maggie happening. I thought it was more compassionate to talk about mental illness in a way that would probably be more familiar to people who've experienced it or who've had loved ones experience it. It's just totally disorienting and painful.

"*Magnified World* opens with a death because I wanted to see what happens afterwards in the sometimes very banal circumstances that accompany very bizarre situations. Life goes on. What changes is your interiority, your thought process, or your relationships. The way you see the world might change, but your day-to-day life doesn't. You know who's really good at that, actually, is Lisa Moore. In her short stories especially, she has a couple of scenes where these big events happen but then she deals with the characters as they live with the consequences. I find that so interesting. Not only interesting, but it can be kind of funny sometimes, even when it's really dark. Nobody else is coming to clean up the mess. And I think sometimes it can be things that we consider very regular and very ordinary that are actually the most heartbreaking.

"I have a new writing project started. It's set in a town of my own making. It's very much influenced by video games, and like a good video game, it needed its own world. I've mapped it out, but I have to go back and add in new streets as I go along, because I realize that I need a street here, or I need a park there. That kind of detail was ready-made for me when I wrote *Magnified World*, which is set in the west end of Toronto. It's fun to create this new land, and it's freeing, but it's also added work.

"Writing fiction without an outline is kind of like walking in the dark with a flashlight. You can see two feet in front of you, but you don't know what's beyond that—whether there's going to be a river or a cliff. It's actually, I think, a good way to stay disciplined, because the only way to find out what happens next is to write it." ❧

THOMAS BLANCHARD





# MAKEOVER

BY MARGUERITE PIGEON

I spotted myself at a Japanese hot dog stand. Me. Exactly as I am. No toppings on the dog, as I prefer it, eating greedily, as I do. She shoved the last bite in with such recognizable eagerness that I can't say if it was disbelief or familiarity that stopped me cold. A taxi nearly ran me down before I stumbled across the street toward her—toward me.

"How?" I tried to say, but couldn't speak. I stepped up onto the sidewalk and clutched the hot dog stand's cool metal edge. One of the young people staffing it bent down, his round, red hat on a tilt. "Hot dog?" he said, cheerfully.

This other person who was me—I'll call her "the other me"—was still only half visible. It was lunchtime and a popular spot. I could see her face, framed by short dark hair, like mine until recently (I had added highlights and was growing it out). She wore no makeup, just as I normally did not. The skin around her eyes showed the precise signs of age I had seen in my own features just minutes before, standing in front of a department store mirror down the block, asking myself if I needed to start using cosmetics. I had decided I did and had allowed a salesperson to apply a face full of them. I could still smell the powder she'd applied to my cheekbones while looking at me like I was a half-decorated cake.

Then several people shifted out of the way and I saw the rest of her. My double. Sameness in the torso, the stance. Sameness in her wariness, which I sensed even at that distance. But there was one important difference: this woman's free hand was holding a stroller handle, pushing it gently back and forth. I stepped closer, incredulous, looking between the other me and her buggy.

She saw me. We locked eyes, hazel on hazel. I thought I would freeze again, but now my shock was mobile. I circled slowly, as if facing a mirror. I became momentarily worried about my mental health. I saw myself in the straitjacket and padded rooms of movies. I saw my elderly father visiting me, wiping away my drool,

trimming my toenails. He would resent every minute.

Someone gasped. I turned and saw people around the hot dog stand staring. Several more who were seated on a low brick fence nearby had stopped eating entirely, hot dogs horizontal, paused mid-air. The movie-like images in my mind switched to a montage of zombie horror: This crowd would become a mob. The young vendor would throw down his hat as he righteously dived forward with his long barbecue fork to pierce the hearts of each of us, we . . . aberrations.

I cleared my throat and forced myself to speak loudly enough to be overheard.

"I—didn't expect to see you here. Shall we get lunch? . . . Like we enjoy doing? *As twins.*"

The other me was still pushing her stroller back and forth absently. Her face was blank—with shock, probably. She looked around, taking in people's unease.

"O.K.," she said, and immediately began pushing the stroller away from the crowd.

I caught up to her. Neither of us looked back. At the next intersection, we hit a red light.

"We have to get somewhere no one can see us," I said, thinking aloud. "I'll get the next cab—no wait: the stroller. It won't fit. My place, then. It's close."

As soon as I'd said it, I knew I didn't want that. My apartment was a sanctuary for one. How could I bring this other, a total stranger, there?

"Actually . . . the concierge won't buy the twins thing. Forget that."

The other me said nothing, so I turned. There she was, completely grey, knees buckling. I reached over and grabbed her around the waist, holding her up just in time. She was thinner than I'd thought myself to be, bony-ribbed. Someone on her other side noticed her fainting too and took her arm. It was a young man in low-slung jeans and a hat that said "I'm HARD . . . to resist."

"She O.K.?" he said, his voice not quite broken.

"We're fine," I said. "Low blood sugar."

"You should sit," he said, pointing across the intersection to a chain bookstore that also housed a café.

Not knowing how to object to this reasonable suggestion, I steered the other me and the stroller across the street, turning back once to see the young man still watching. I hoped he was exactly as he looked: someone who'd forget about us in two minutes. I waved and smiled eagerly, opened the café door, letting the other me in first, then lining up the stroller's wheels to wedge it inside.

The other me let herself fall into the nearest seat. I brought the stroller over and tried to get it out of people's way. It was so big and awkward; I had no experience with strollers.

"Thanks."

"Sure," I said, and went over to a side table where there was a pitcher of ice water and glasses. I poured a cup. The clinking ice made such a normal, healthily physical sound I wanted it to go on forever.

The other me drank her water in three big gulps, the pink coming back into her cheeks. It was like watching someone colour in a black and white portrait of me.

She assessed me for the first time, which made me self-conscious, especially about my made-up face. I could almost hear my father. How, whenever I'd tried on lipstick or eye shadow in high school, he had smirked, deadpanned, "Hollywood superstar." I don't even think he thought I looked bad. He just didn't like the idea behind it.

The other me opened her mouth to talk, but then a sharp wail emerged from the stroller. The baby. She stood and lifted it out from a heap of blankets.

"Feeding time."

I nodded. She lifted her shirt and quickly put the infant to her breast—my breast! Except with huge, distorted nipples, based on what I glimpsed before the baby seized one.

"Coffee?" I asked, disturbed, but also





## MEXICO CITY

When it is time to sleep with the bedroom windows open I wake when a delayed plane descending through the night city (and my unconscious) crescendos into earshot—this is an old-fashioned ode to the hum of the city. From more faraway than just hearing the buses are running again—an alien from anywhere touches down on the vast suburban plain of Pearson airport.

The sound of a jet these days takes me about as far as the airport. To LaGuardia, Orly, or Schiphol. To the terminals where faraway starts: this century, in twenty-four hours a jet can take you anywhere on earth (just don't try it on a holiday weekend). An old friend (a guy who could learn a language simply by overhearing, I swear, two guys in a bar arguing) tells of boarding a bus in Mexico City,

riding twelve hours and never reaching the outskirts of Mexico City. Drunk on lost love, deeply under-slept, he'd wake up in the same faraway land, ask his neighbour in Spanish, "Where am I?" Awake, the ennui of "are we" or "aren't we" began to descend, but it never got old in the dreaming/remembering never-ending trip to the airport, and the neighbour's response each time might have meant anywhere,

but he always said "Mexico City" as if it was the outskirts of anywhere. "¿Dónde estamos?" "Where am I?"

seeing she was stuck where she was until it finished.

She agreed to tea. I ordered and we sat in silence, steam from our cups mingling between us. Words kept rising and falling away before they made enough sense to be uttered, like water not quite reaching the boil. Twice, someone approached our table. "Uncanny!" said the first, an excitable woman we willed away. The other, a man with a smug expression, said, "My daughter has triplets," as if this trumped every possible example of likeness. But these intrusions eased my panic. Everyone just assumed we were twins now that we were sitting quietly together. We didn't have to fake it.

The other me rubbed her forehead.

"What the fuck is happening?"

"I don't know."

"Who are you?"

"Who are *you*?" I said, a bit defensively, because the other me's tone had been sharp, like an accusation, as if she was the original, and me the copy. I saw things differently.

"And who is that?" I nodded toward the baby.

"She's mine."

"Well, I don't have a child."

"Why not?"

I didn't feel like answering the question. It was no one's business but my own.

"That's personal."

The other me laughed for the first time. A rebuking laugh.

"More personal than what's happening right now?"

I shook my head. I didn't enjoy explaining my life choices to people. Why I was single. Why men had not been a consistent theme in my life. How each one I'd been close to had been tremendous, but in the way an iceberg is, looming and fearsome too. I blamed this on my father, but no one needed to know that either. The other me was different, obviously. She wanted to share. Yet we were the same, weren't we?

I needed an explanation. Something sane-sounding, like ice on ice.

"*Could* you be my twin?"

It was her turn to shake her head.

"I've seen pictures. I came alone."

"They could've faked them."

Annoyance disrupted her composure like tiny local explosions she had to smooth over. Her eyes blinked fast. She licked her lips.

"They didn't."

I realized that this is what I also had done on countless occasions when I'd



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“Mexico City.”

That one can travel between any two points on earth in a day is an old adage now—but pack light! Don’t waste time at the airport standing around a baggage carousel—throw it all in your carry-on. Get away!

But don’t count on a good cup of coffee when you arrive faraway, unless you’re on the west coast of North America or almost anywhere in western Europe. And remember: French fries are available in every city. (Imagine the guy who discovered it was not just a rock, the old genius who first boiled a potato, centuries before air travel and airports, we need to honour that man, I

reckon. And the guy who deep-fried it in oil, him too, I declare.) And while French fries are prevalent, available anywhere, one can never count on a decent slice of pizza. Especially at airports: control expectations. There are six joints on earth (one in N.Y.C.) where great pizza is available. The best is in a faraway land known as Vancouver, not far from the old

Commodore Ballroom, a city, a memory that makes me feel old. Get to the airport—if you leave now you can be far, far away in a day, I dare say—near great pizza, perhaps—near fries, anywhere.

—CHRIS CHAMBERS

thought I could hide an inner battle against too much feeling, how anyone who had looked closely would’ve seen the effort. I shuddered at this insight; I’d never understood before how much people could know, just by watching you sit and think.

“What’s with the makeup?” she said.

“What about it?”

“It doesn’t suit—you. Me. Whatever.”

“Um, sorry, but do you get to say that?”

“This is all a big dream. I’ll say what I want.”

“It’s not a dream.”

“Even if it isn’t, I don’t like the makeup.”

I tried to let the comment go. I had practice letting things slide. Besides, part of me was bracing for a jolt, something funny to break the tension. This would turn out like those TV bank ads—she had invested for retirement, I hadn’t. Or gore was around the corner—this other me, an evil double, had arrived to harvest my organs. I would be eviscerated, the café patrons traumatized. My boss would be without his sales team leader that he could send anywhere, anytime, my father without anyone to systematically undermine. In stories, meeting oneself is supposed to be like that. Something impor-

tant. Corrective or horrific. But nothing was happening. I had met myself. She had a baby. I wore a mask of cosmetics. She seemed short-fused. She had questions. As did I.

“What’s it like?” I asked, nodding toward the baby.

The other me paused, then unplugged the infant from her breast and lifted it in my direction.

My eyes went wide.

“I don’t really know how . . .”

“It’s not hard,” the other me said stiffly, transferring its weight into my hands, then running a free hand over her hair.

“Ahh,” I said, experiencing the heft of a real live baby. A girl, she’d said. I couldn’t tell by the face, which to me looked like every other baby face.

“It’s work,” said the other me, answering my earlier questions. “But I don’t mind.”

I tilted the baby into a cradle position. What would she make of my face, I wondered. Her own mother’s face, but with painted lips and coloured hair. She seemed to like it. I thought I saw her smile. Then a stream of yellowish breast milk emerged from one corner of her mouth.

“I see a person forming in there, now,”

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the other me went on.

"I don't," I said, the warm milk soaking my sleeve.

I stood and put her back into the stroller.

"You don't know her."

"Are you mad about all this?" I asked, sitting back down.

"Why should I be mad?"

"You're judgmental."

"You sounded judgmental just now. Like I'm an idiot for having a baby. I could be free like you, right? Wandering the streets all done up and wearing clothes designed for someone ten years younger."

"O.K. That's—you don't look so great yourself, you know." Which was true. She was not only aging, as I was, she was obviously bone tired. Her entire face sagged with fatigue.

"Fuck you," she said.

"You're just scared. Reacting to the weirdness."

"Nothing is as weird as giving birth," she said. "This is just—strange. You might not know the difference."

"You make it sound like this is my fault.

I didn't ask to come across you. Or her."

"I think if these people really think we're twins, then they must be wondering why I look like a grown-up and you look like an overgrown teenager."

"Stop it," I said, my voice rising. "Just stop."

I swung my hand out in an accompanying gesture, accidentally overturning her coffee mug, which landed in her lap.

The other me glared, then did something amazing. She pushed my mug of coffee onto my lap. It lay in a lukewarm puddle on my skirt. Nearby, I heard someone clear their throat. People were staring.

I picked up the mug and brought a napkin to my thigh, but the other me got out of her chair and came over to my side. She pushed my shoulder aggressively.

"You did it on purpose."

"What are you talking about? You just spilled *mine* on purpose."

She pushed my shoulder again, harder. I noticed her clothes for the first time. She wore ugly jeans with a too-high waist.

Mom jeans. Into them was tucked a faded cotton top. I stood. I had never been in a physical fight, except once, in Grade 7, when the class bully had made me fight someone else whom she'd chosen. She always enjoyed creating difficult situations for her minions. But all I could muster was a pinch to the girl's arm. Then I ran home crying and told my father, who was busy reading a novel and was in the final steps of rolling a cigarette, his lower lip slightly wet. He ran the paper over it and said, "We need bread."

I did not relish the idea of hitting my double. But I also found her negative reaction to me painful and unfair. I grabbed her arm, as I had done in Grade 7, and squeezed it hard. Then I threw it back so she spun around slightly. She struggled to regain her balance before lunging at me. In the next moment several people surrounded us. A young woman from behind the counter stomped forward, waving her arms like a ref telling someone they're out of a boxing match.

"I'm calling security!"

The other me managed to scratch my face hard before someone with long, muscular fingers grabbed both my elbows and



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## MAGNIFICENT THINGS SURELY WILL COME

This summer, streets reek of defiant glamour, and hot-pink fingernails like talons scratch the air. I play Shirley Bassey for the strangers who slither in with sangria and stories no one should hear, and endure the cruise of chemical Kit Kat clouding Sterling Avenue, my conscience. This summer, you kill yourself while I job search, wander Walmart's maze of aisles, the devastating weight of stuff; and George Noory talks, each night, to a guy about the Antichrist, and men, each morning, navigate the slippery pink roof of another new condo complex. This summer, mourners manoeuvre conversation that flutters then darts away, and vases of professionally arranged daisies and chrysanthemums stand at attention, while at the harbour, around the corner from the wake, ducks, seagulls, Canada geese, and swans frolic on their private beach, mingle as easy as swingers at a party. They joke about the kid who flings his kite at the sky, then runs like hell. They guffaw at his father, who picks up the pieces, pulls at an invisible string, and runs too, calling, "It's hard to get right the first time. But it'll be O.K.," because that's what a father has to believe. This summer lies dangerous like exposed wire snaking into a future where police cars burn, World Cup soccer rages, and *Teenage Dream* posters obstruct all Blockbuster entrances. I watch the last chrysanthemum collapse, each petal a single flower falling that I will never catch, as women and men lean too far off the street's concrete planters, their bodies begging for air, for water to quench the grit's thirst, for this urgent lingering to go on, for the magnificent things that surely will come.

—ADRIENNE WEISS

yanked me backwards. "Take 'er down a notch," said a man's voice, in an accent I couldn't place. Rural.

The other me came forward again like she was going to hit me with a closed fist. I prepared for pain, or to awaken from the dream I knew this wasn't. But her baby started crying again, this time in a different pitch—hysterically, I thought. It screamed so hard the café worker and the man with the thin fingers both took a step back. "The twins have upset the child," was what they must've thought. They couldn't have accepted the reality that there were two of the same person present, that we had different lives, that we rejected one another's choices, that the baby was confused. If they had known, they might have ripped her from the stroller, warded us off with a crucifix, never let us touch her again.

The other me began organizing her things.

"It's fine. We're fine. We fight, my twin and I. She'll sleep if I move—the baby, I mean."

"She thinks I'm prettier than you," I said, my blood boiling.

I bent past the other me, who now seemed on the verge of strangling me. But now we had the attention of the entire café, and she held herself in check. I brought my face to within inches of the baby's.

"It's true, isn't it?" I asked her.

Her crying stopped and her bumpy potato-like features smoothed as they had in my arms. In her formlessness, her thoughts were a complete mystery, but I told myself that she knew: I was the one, the original. I kissed her. Then everything pinched again. She screamed.

"She's overtired," the other me said with finality. "We'll go."

"O.K.," I said, standing. What else could I do?

People started to relax. The café worker had not called security. The thin-fingered man returned to a table where he whispered something to a woman who seemed proud of him for intervening.

I turned to the other me. Another mirror experience. Two hysterics. Two fools. I felt compelled, suddenly, illogically, to hug her, and took her in my arms. She did not return the gesture. She was holding back, almost like she was waiting for the jolt I'd expected earlier. Something extreme that would justify fuller release. That she didn't recognize this as that moment angered me, and I also gave less than the moment called for.

As our awkward embrace ended, I reflected on the fate of the baby, what she could expect from knowing and being known, from having a parent, eventually leaving childhood behind for adulthood, and then, in time, aging. My face must've fallen, because the other me smiled without malice for the first time, and I caught the expression I'd seen in photos of myself, when I'd assessed my smile as inoffensive, but which had photographed as impatient, wanting freedom.

I smiled too, trying to show acceptance—of her departure, my inevitable separation from the child. Yet I was no longer sure how to judge what I was putting into the world through my face or body. Then, thinking I should use the restroom to attend to the scratch on my face, I said my goodbyes.

When the café door closed on the other me though, I didn't feel like moving. Generic music was playing. I lingered, listening, people watching me. It might've been delayed shock, but I suddenly was relieved to be rid of her, of both of them.

The very first man who'd approached us, with the smug mouth and triplet granddaughters, returned. "Don't get much alone time, eh?" he said, looking me over.

Oddly, it was these words that most upset me that afternoon. The veneer of everydayness seeped from the moment like makeup remover smearing mascara. I could feel, starkly, where I was in space, who I was in time. I looked at him blankly, unable to reply, then rushed to the restroom where, ignoring the throbbing scratch, I touched up my face. ♪



PIZZARRA PARRA  
NOM!  
SPRING'S JUST AROUND THE KORNER, RIGHT?  
TIME TO GET YOUR FAT ASS OFF THE COMPUTER  
& GET TO KANNING SOME OF...

# KIEFFER'S KRUNCHY KORNIGHONS

A HOW-TO  
KOMIC BY  
JASON KIEFFER

I LIKE-A  
GOOD  
FOOD!

IS  
TASTY!

OUT!

MONSIEUR  
KORNIGHON

HI. ONE DAY  
IN THE GROCERY  
STORE, I NOTICED  
THAT ALL OF MY  
FAVOURITE CHEAP  
PICKLE BRANDS NOW  
HAD POLYSORBATE  
ADDED TO THEM.\*

SO, NOT WANTING TO  
BE STERILIZED BY THE  
NEW WORLD ORDER\*, I WAS  
FORCED TO BUY HIGH END  
PICKLES (WHICH I LOVE BY  
THE WAY) ON A REGULAR  
BASIS, INSTEAD OF JUST  
ONCE IN A WHILE.

ANYWAYS,  
THIS ENDED  
UP KOSTING ME  
A LOTTA KASH  
SEEING AS I  
EAT A LOTTA  
PICKLED  
THINGS.

\*POLYSORBATES WORK AS EMULSIFIERS,  
BUT ALSO NEGATIVELY EFFECT  
REPRODUCTION & FERTILITY IN MAMMELS.

\*THE NEW WORLD ORDER IS REAL. FOR MORE  
INFORMATION VISIT INFOWAYS.COM, TRENDSRESEARCH.COM,  
CUTTINGTHROUGHTHEMATRIX.COM & MAXKEISER.COM

SO THEN  
I GOT THE  
BRIGHT IDEA  
TO JUST MAKE  
MY OWN  
PICKLES.

I FIGURED  
"HEY, PEASANTS  
CAN DO IT, SO  
WHY NOT ME?"

AND I SOON  
REALISED THAT  
KANNING, LIKE  
MOST KINDS OF  
KOOKING, IS A  
LOT EASIER  
THAN YOU'D  
THINK.

HERE'S  
THE EQUIPMENT  
I USE...

PHART!

8 1-LITRE JASON  
MASON JARS\*

\*IF I WERE  
YOU, I'D USE LIDS  
THAT AREN'T COATED  
IN PLASTIC. THE PLASTIC  
CONTAINS BPA, WHICH  
LEACHES INTO YOUR  
FOOD. BPA ALSO  
REDUCES FERTILITY IN  
MAMMELS. WEIRD  
COINCIDENCE, EH?...

A BIG, JUICY,  
FAT-BOTTOMED  
POT

ANOTHER  
BIG POT

OVEN MITTS  
& TOWELS

TONGS

PLEASE NOTE  
THAT THE TONGS  
ARE USED TO MOVE  
THE JARS IN & OUT OF  
BOILING WATER BECAUSE  
IF YOU USE YOUR BARE  
HANDS, THE FLESH WILL  
MELT OFF & WILL NOT  
GROW BACK IN THIS LIFE.

TO DO A  
BATCH, I  
GET THESE  
INGREDIENTS  
TOGETHER.

PEPPER  
CORNS

MUSTARD  
SEED

DILL  
SEED

\*USE SPRING WATER  
OR, AT THE VERY  
LEAST, FILTERED WATER.  
I CANNOT STRESS ENOUGH  
HOW IMPORTANT IT IS TO  
GENERAL. IT'S FULL  
OF HORRIBLE STUFF,  
LIKE FLUORIDE, &  
TASTES LIKE SHIT.

GARLICK

DILL  
GONE  
TO  
SEED

8 POUNDS (1/4 BUSHEL)  
OF KUTE KUCUMBERS

2/3 CUP OF  
PICKLING SALT

4 CUPS OF  
WHITE VINEGAR

1/2 CUPS OF  
WATER\*

FOR INFORMATION ON FLUORIDE  
& ITS MANY ADVERSE HEALTH  
EFFECTS, VISIT FLUORIDEALERT.ORG

\* MONSIEUR KORNIGHON & OTHER KUCUMBERS INSPIRED BY NICK MAANDAG'S "HENRY THE PICKLE"  
(SEE "SMILE & NOD" #2, "THE EXPERIMENT" & "LAFF DEPOT").





# GREEKS

BY MATTHEW FIRTH

I see them in the corridor and on the stairwell outside my flat. They grin at me. They snicker and mutter in their language. I don't recognize it, but my wife says it's Greek. She is probably right. Back in Hamilton, her parents have Greek neighbours. These guys look Greek. My neighbours in Hamilton are Italian. I know Italian when I hear it, but not Greek. A lot of Greeks and Italians look a bit the same: that swarthy, manicured, southern European sheen. But what do I know?

They live in the flat above us. They moved in a couple months ago. At first they were quiet, but then the noise started. The building is old, the floors bow and creak. I hear them walk above me. I hear the music they play—awful Eurotrash disco, the worst of the European song-competition dross.

I went up there last night. I knocked on their door. It took a long time for them to answer. When they did, they were both at the door, grinning and snickering at me.

"I live downstairs. Underneath you."

"Yes."

"The music. Your music. It's too loud."

"Iss no too loud."

"It's too loud. Believe me. I live downstairs. I can hear it plain as day."

"Iss no too loud."

One of them snorted and said something to the other one in Greek.

"It's too fucking loud and it's bothering me. Turn it down."

"Iss no too loud."

"Look, stop fucking saying that and go in there and turn the music down. Turn it down or I'm calling the estate agent."

Now they looked worried.

"We turn it down."

"It's crap music anyway."

I looked at them grinning at me.

"You guys are a cliché, listening to that shitty Eurotrash disco."

They looked confused.

"Whaz this mean, 'cliché'? It don't sound nice."

"Look it up."

That stopped their grinning. They closed the door and I stood there, waiting. The music went off. I went back downstairs to my flat. I sat in my living room reading a book. I sipped a beer, paused, and listened. There was no music any more, not a sound coming from upstairs. It was dead quiet in the building. My wife was out at the pub. She had called earlier to say she was going out for a drink after work.

I see them all over town—in Tesco, at the chemist, the post office, the Cellar Bar on Tuesday nights. Sometimes they see me, other times they don't. They are always together. They might be brothers; I don't know. When they see me, they grin but never speak. That is, unless I talk to them first.

I am downstairs, in the building's foyer, collecting my mail from the pile the postie pushed through the slot. The mail comes early here, between seven and seven-thirty. It's one of the highlights of my day: rummaging through the mail, looking for news on my writing, a letter from home, anything. There is one lousy letter today and my B.T. bill. The Greeks appear. I am startled. I am in my pyjamas and slippers. They are fully dressed, on their way out very early. Where were they going? I make eye contact and they stop. They don't snicker this morning. They look sober and serious. It forces me to pause.

"You looking for your mail?"

The Greeks stare at me. Do they think I mess with their mail? I'm not sure what's going on.

"I know that word now."

"Eh?"

I want to go upstairs. I feel vulnerable in my pyjamas, exposed.

"You call us cliché. I talk to people. I look it up. Iss no nice what you say."

They're right about that.

"You should apologize to us."

They stand there, expectantly. I shuffle the two envelopes in my hand. I scratch my left knee through the thin material of

my pyjamas. The Greeks want an apology, but I don't give them one.

"Where you from?" one of them asks. "You not sound Scottish."

"Canada."

Now the grins return. One of them exclaims, "Oh! Can-AH-DAH. Now we know. Now we know."

"What the fuck is that supposed to mean?"

They laugh and talk in Greek.

I start getting pissed with them again.

"Hey, I said what the fuck is wrong with that?"

They stop laughing. They look serious again. One of them says, "You say 'fuck' all ah time. Is that cliché? Are you cliché?"

They start laughing their asses off now.

"Are you a Can-AH-DAH cliché?"

I feel helpless. I need to get away. I blurt, "Just keep the fucking noise down and there won't be any problems, got it?"

They both look at me and grin. I turn away, head up the stairs, back to my flat. I close the door, throw the envelopes down on a table, and look for coffee. My wife is gone. She went for a run or something. The flat is deadly quiet once more.

At four o'clock in the morning I wake up to thumping and banging. I sit up in bed. I'm alone and confused. It's pitch black in my flat. My wife is not here. She's in Sheffield or some place for a work conference. More thumping and banging. The walls shake and vibrate from the impact. What the fuck? What the fuck are those Greeks up to now?

I sit up in the centre of my bed. BANG! It sounds like someone is being thrown against the wall. I jump to my feet. There is a loud thud against the floor right above me. I search for my slippers. I've had it with these Greeks. This is ridiculous. I'm wide awake. I grab my keys so I won't lock myself out and storm out the door and up the stairs. I bang on their door with my right fist. I hear more thumping and banging. I hammer on the door when there is a break in the noise. It





goes quiet. I pound on the door some more. I knock five or six times. It is quiet and calm but I am enraged. The Greeks don't come to the door. I press my nose in the door jam and holler, "I know you're in there! Open the fucking door!"

Silence.

I bang some more. "Open it, you fuckers. You Greek fuckers!"

It's futile. They are not coming to the door. I kick their door and then return to my flat. I can't sleep. I make coffee and sit in the bay window, looking out on the street. There is no more noise from upstairs, not even the sound of feet walking across the ceiling. The Greeks have shut it down completely.

I see them late the next day, on my way back from the post office. I stop them on the concrete stairs of our building. I'm enraged again.

"What was all that noise in the middle of the night?"

I didn't get enough sleep. I'm overtired and grumpy.

"What the fuck were you guys doing?"

They look at me meekly.

"You didn't answer your door. You must have fucking heard me banging on it."

One of the Greeks says, "We were worried. We didn't want to open the door. You sounded very angry."

"I was fucking angry. You woke me up and I never got back to sleep. It sounded like you were throwing each other around up there. What the fuck was that all about?"

The grins come back.

"You say 'fuck' too much. You should try and stop. Iss cliché."

I look at the swarthy Greek fucker who said it.

"Fuck that," I say.

It makes him laugh and he relaxes a little.

"We were wrestling. That is all."

"Wrestling? What the fuck? At four in the morning? What kind of a fucked-up thing is that to do?"

"Yess. We just wrestle."

"Another fucking cliché," I fire back. "Keep it the fuck down or I'm calling the estate agent."

I push past them into the building.

Early the next morning, I sit at the table by the bay window, drinking coffee. Our flat is on the second floor. There are no buildings here over four storeys. I look

## BATTLESHIPS

They met at a phone-book-ripping contest, while outside the auditorium, spring was a promise, the day was breaking.

He carried a Ouija board for whenever he wanted to say something controversial, drove in a way she could only describe as theatrical.

She was investigating the game Battleship as the perfect metaphor for love, said a number of self-publishing companies were currently uninterested.

Then, at his house, naked as a candle flame, she spoke as though she were in a phone booth, both feet up against the door.

And later, at her enormously small apartment, she said, "Beer is technically a bread-flavoured soda," and he laughed until it tore out his nose.

—MICHAEL CHRISTIE

out on the town, like a nosey old woman scouring the street. It's quiet in the flat, in the entire building. My wife has gone to Dundee for the day. I didn't see her before she left. She took the bus early this morning with a woman from France who she works with. They're going shopping. I go too sometimes, but not today. I like the Virgin Megastore, but nothing else about Dundee. It reminds me too much of Hamilton and Windsor. It's the teen-aged pregnancy capital of Scotland, possibly all of Europe. The pimply faced moms and dads pushing prams depress me. If you're still using Clearasil at night, you're too young to be a parent. The moms all look bitchy and tough. The dads tougher still, dressed in dark blue Umbro shell suits, trainers untied, sideways caps, sucking on fags, chewing on toothpicks or guzzling tins of lager. They skulk and trawl the high street, faces greasy from the chemical ooze of the drugs they gobble. And the entire city stinks—from the oil refineries, puke, piss, and dog shit. I can live without Dundee today.

Here they come. The Greeks. Back from an early trip to Tesco. I'd assumed they were sleeping still, that that's why it is quiet upstairs. But, no, they are up early. Their hands are loaded with shopping bags. They grin and yammer to each

other as they walk down the pavement toward our building. It is a bright, sunny morning. The Greeks each wear black toques and black ski jackets, though it is not really that cold. Another cliché: over-dressed continental Europeans who think the east coast of Scotland is the coldest place on earth. It's likely plus four or five degrees, which is not cold, not by Canadian standards. I want to tell the Greeks that they don't know cold; that they should come to Canada and they will experience real cold. But now I'm thinking in clichés. I huff at the sight of the Greeks. I should have gone to Dundee with my wife. It feels like I haven't seen her in weeks. For a moment, as the sun reflects up off a puddle on the street into my face, my mind fogs and I can't picture my wife's face. What does she look like? Where is she?

"Fucking Greeks," I mutter, as I sip my now lukewarm coffee.

The thumping and banging starts again. I jerk up in bed and immediately feel dizzy. My wife is not in bed. She must be watching TV or in the washroom. BANG! It sounds like someone just dropped an anvil on the floor above me. Then the lower thumping noises start again. Then BANG! Another anvil. Or the impact of



demolition. Is that what's going on? Are those fucking Greeks demolishing the flat above me? That's not wrestling. There's more going on up there.

I put on shoes and stomp up the stairs to the Greeks' flat. This time my pounding is answered right away. Their door flies open. The two Greeks stand in front of me, almost naked, sweaty; their bodies strangely hairless. They wear only loincloths. No joke: loincloths. The fucking Greeks wear loincloths. I step back and shake my head. They sneer at me and then grin.

"What the fuck?"

The Greeks stand there, breathing hard, sweating.

"What the fuck is going on? I mean, really, what the fuck is going on? What are you wearing?"

"Iss no your business what we do, what we wear."

"Yeah but . . . CHRIST!"

One of the Greeks steps toward me. They are uncharacteristically aggressive. "What you want?"

"The noise! The fucking banging! What the fuck are you doing in there? More wrestling?" I crane my neck to look past them into their flat.

"Iss no your business."

"Fucking right it is. It's my fucking business when I'm right below you trying to sleep."

Now both Greeks are really close to me. I can smell the garlic in their sweat.

"You faggot?" one Greek asks quickly.

I'm stunned.

"What? What the fuck?"

"You faggot? Iss simple question. Iss that why you bang on our door?"

The Greek who asked snickers to the other one. He says, "*Pousti*." They both laugh.

I want to grab the fucker, yank him out into the corridor and beat the shit out of him. I've wanted to do that for a long time. But where do I grab him? They're both wearing loincloths and are slick with sweat.

I stab a finger at the Greeks one at a time, at both their bald chests.

"I'm not a faggot, get it? And so what if I was? You fucking Greeks should know there's nothing wrong with that. And besides, you're the fuckers who are pretty much naked, sweaty, making a fuck-load of noise like you've been fucking each other up the ass for the past hour. You're the ones who look like faggots!"

"We no faggots. We brothers. We just wrestle."

My head spins.

"What? What the fuck? What's with this wrestling shit? I don't believe it. At four in the morning? You wrestle in the middle of the night?"

The Greeks shrug their sweaty shoulders.

"How old are you two?"

"I twenty-two. He twenty-three. We brothers. We wrestle. You no wrestle with your brother?"

I look at the Greek who answered.

"You've got to be kidding. Yeah, I wrestled with my brother. When I was a fucking kid! Not now. Not as an adult. There's a big difference."

Again the Greeks shrug their shoulders.

"And you're keeping me and my wife awake!"

Now the Greeks raise their eyebrows rather than shrug their shoulders.

Now what the fuck, I wonder.

"Your wife? Where your wife? We no see your wife? Where is she?"

They grin and snicker.

"She's downstairs," I answer feebly.

"Yess? We no see her. We see only you. We only ever see you. You follow us around—to the Tesco. To the post office. To the Cellar Bar. You look at us. You sit in window and watch us. You come upstairs in the night to see us. You must be faggot. And we no see your wife."

I've had it. I reel back and throw a haymaker at the Greek who called me a faggot. I miss his head. My punch hits his sweaty shoulder and deflects off into the plaster, where my fist gets stuck for a second. The Greeks are quick. The other Greek grabs me by the arm and wrenches it behind my head half-nelson style. It hurts like fuck. I go to elbow him in the ribs with my one free arm but the other Greek stops me. They both hold me. They bring me down. I grunt and resist, kicking and scratching, but the Greeks are too much for me. They are wrestlers, after all. The one Greek sits on my chest, his knees pinning my arms back like we used to do on the playground. His stinking, loinclothed Greek crotch is right in my face.

"Get the fuck off me!"

I bang my heels on the floor.

"FUCK!"

"You say 'fuck' too much," the Greeks say in unison. They laugh at me.

I shake my head back and forth, close my eyes and bear down, trying to summon the strength to shake two nearly naked Greeks off me.

Then I feel them relax their hold on me. I open my eyes and there's my wife standing there, wearing only an old T-shirt. Lying on the floor, I can see up her T-shirt easily. She is wearing white panties. Where did she come from?

"What the fuck?" she says.

The Greeks snicker. One of them says, "Yess. Ah yess. Your wife. She from Can-AH-DAH too? She say 'fuck' all ah time, too? We hear her say it before."

The Greeks stand in their doorway.

"Fuck you, Greeks," I manage.

"Go back downstairs," my wife says. "You're making an ass of yourself. You've lost it this time."

"I'm calling the estate agent on those two."

I point up at the Greeks from where I lie on the floor.

"Who cares?" one Greek says. "Fuck the estate agent. Iss our flat. We pay rent. We just wrestle."

My wife looks pissed. But she helps me up off the floor. I stand there, wiping crumbs and crap off my pyjamas. The Greeks stand defiant in their loincloths.

"Fucking Greeks," I say low, as my wife leads me down the stairs to our flat.

I look at her closely.

"Where have you been? I feel like I haven't seen you in weeks."

She peers at me.

"What? What the fuck are you talking about? Are you accusing me of something? Seriously—what the fuck are you saying? You've been obsessing over things too much."

"Like the Greeks."

"Yeah, like the Greeks. They have names, you know: Peter and Paul. They're brothers. Did you know that? They're decent people. They like to have fun. I know them."

I look at my wife. Fun? What is she talking about, fun? Did I hear her correctly? Am I imagining things? I haven't had fun in weeks. Maybe months or years. Maybe my entire fucking life.

I look closely at my wife but she seems blurry again, her face, her features, her body—all of it seems unfamiliar. I go to speak, but stop. I don't know who I am talking to any more. Is she really here? Where has she been? With the Greeks? I'm not even sure my wife is here with me now. I grab the banister that leads downstairs to our flat and hold it as tightly as I can with both hands. ☞



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# PHOENIX

BY ALEXANDRA LEGGAT

My brother lay on a wooden table, covered in a brocade bedspread. His expression serene, more colour in his face than expected, with a slight smirk. Candles flickered on either side of the white room. There were no flowers. He radiated like some kind of god. I took it to mean he was elated by what greeted him on the other side.

Our mother asked me to touch his hands. She was unfit to travel, couldn't face her lifeless son. Such beautiful long hands, she said. My niece lifted the cloth. Beneath it the effects of the disease, an emaciated body, ribs jutting like a desiccated cow. Trust him to put on a good

face, to go out smiling and hide the ruins of what killed him under an ornate guise.

He was clad in a stained blue T-shirt. His girlfriend said, "It's what he died in."

"You didn't want to change him."

"He didn't want to be changed."

She held his chin when she said it's one of the many things she loved about him. I couldn't tell if the underlying message was left for me.

When I reached for his hands his grown daughter already held them. Her eyes squeezed shut, trembling. There was nothing I could say to free her from what we faced. Time doesn't heal this and the missing won't get easier beyond the first

year. This was the initial crack in the shell we'd all become.

She didn't see what I didn't foresee, a pink tag around his wrist with his name printed in black ink. If there was also a number, I can't recall. When I shook him slightly, he didn't wake up. When his girlfriend and daughter folded into each other's arms, I shook him again. Wake up. Wake the fuck up. His mouth retained the slight smirk. He was free.

For our mother, I gripped his elegant hands. Unlike his face, they were lifeless. They were cold. He's next into the fire, we were told. He'll be warm there. At least there he'll be warm. ▽



## THE GALLERY

# THIS AIN'T YOUR HIPPIE JESUS'S BIBLE

*Viewing scripture through a glass less dark.*

ILLUSTRATIONS BY DAVE LAPP

The Bible is a strange and wondrous book, filled with startling images and lurid events. Scenes of rape, torture, and mass murder co-exist with ecstatic and hallucinatory visions of divine love. Unfortunately much religious art over the past century or so, especially in North America, has had a tendency to whitewash the Bible's ominousness, presenting soft-focus pastoral portraits of a blond, blue-eyed hippie Jesus, a pleasant fellow with whom we can happily sing "Kumbaya," while ignoring his many startling injunctions, such as his call to pluck out our eyes should they cause us to sin.

The cartoonist Dave Lapp's creepy and wildly imaginative drawings of selected biblical verses are part of a long counter-tradition of alternative cartoonists who have paid the scripture tribute by presenting unsettling images that

grapple honestly with the text. Robert Crumb's *Book of Genesis Illustrated* made the sheer fleshiness of the first book of the Bible abundantly evident. And Chester Brown's uncompleted adaptations of the Gospels were notable for showing a ferocious and stern messiah, one who made no concessions to modern squeamishness. Lapp's work is equally as honest.

Lapp started drawing bible verses nearly a decade ago as a contributor to the Flaming Fire Illustrated Bible Web site, a now-defunct attempt by many hands to illustrate every verse of scripture. He also used them to develop his draftsmanship, which tended to atrophy when he worked in the simplified and abstract style of his comics. In his narrative strips, Lapp often prefers to keep his art subdued so that it doesn't overshadow the stories he

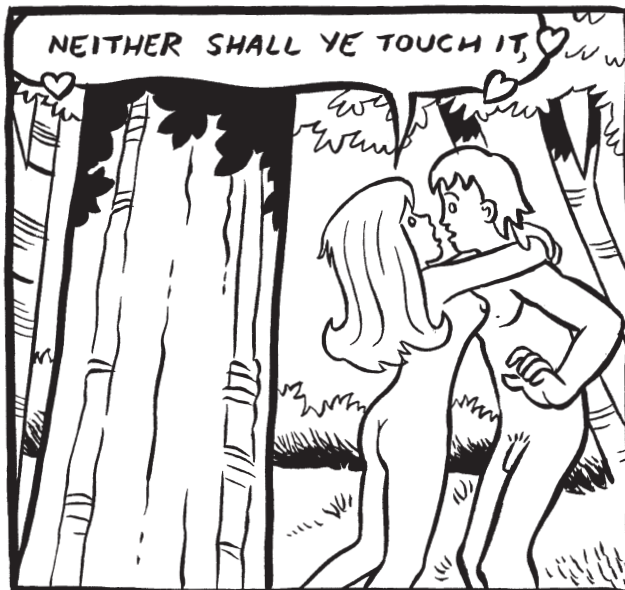
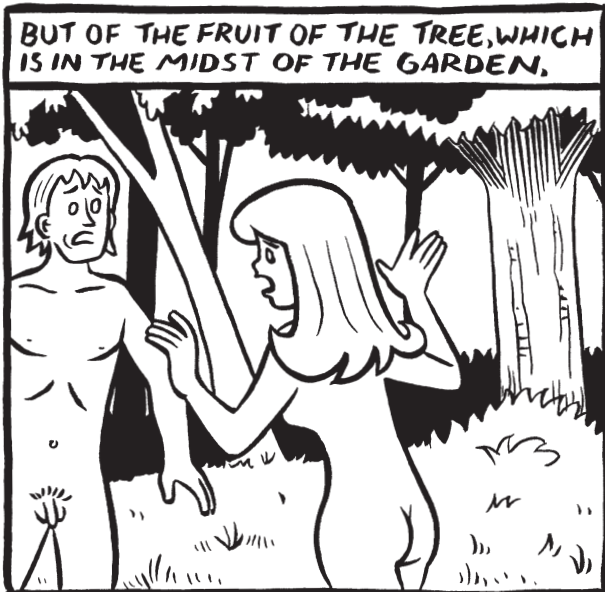
wants to tell. Drawing biblical verses freed up the more daring side of Lapp's visual imagination, allowing him to create staggering images of skeletons, ghouls, and tormented flesh. "That the Flaming Fire Bible was wide open to all kinds of interpretation from all denominations encouraged my agnostic sensibilities to create images that were more personal," Lapp says. "I also liked the grand madness of someone trying to illustrate the entire Bible."

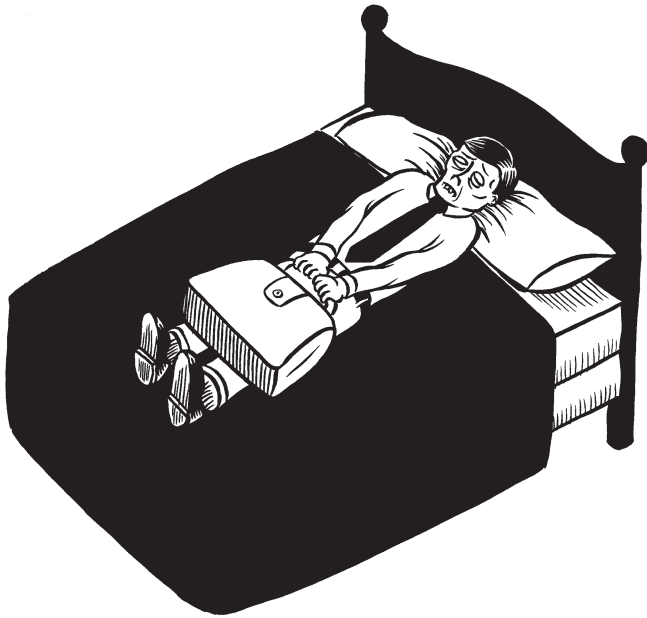
As with the work of his underground predecessors, Lapp interprets the Bible in a way that seems wholly new and unfamiliar, even though it is much more closely rooted in the actual words of scripture than most conventional religious art. His stunning drawings should surprise secular and pious eyes alike.

—JEET HEER

*Above: "For her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead."—Proverbs 2:18. Facing page: Genesis 3:3.*







*"O LORD, rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure." —Psalm 6:1.*



*"My soul is also sore vexed: but thou, O LORD, how long?" —Psalm 6:3.*



*"Mine eye is consumed because of grief; it waxeth old because of all mine enemies." —Psalm 6:7.*



*"Let all mine enemies be ashamed and sore vexed: let them return and be ashamed suddenly." —Psalm 6:10.*

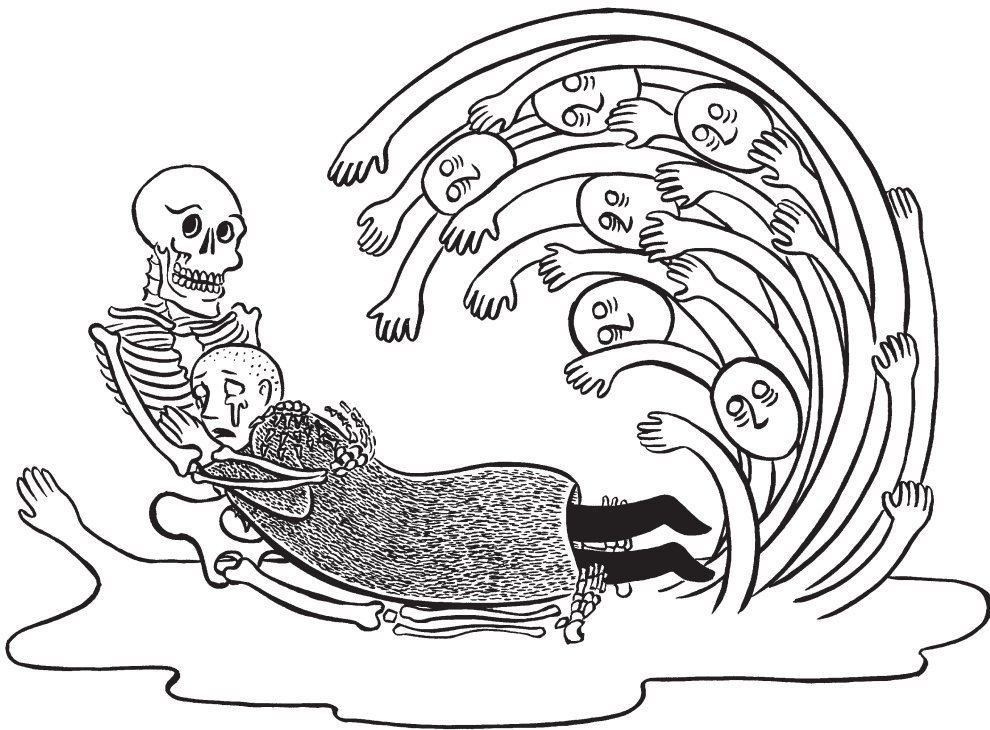




*"And I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter." —Revelation 10:10.*

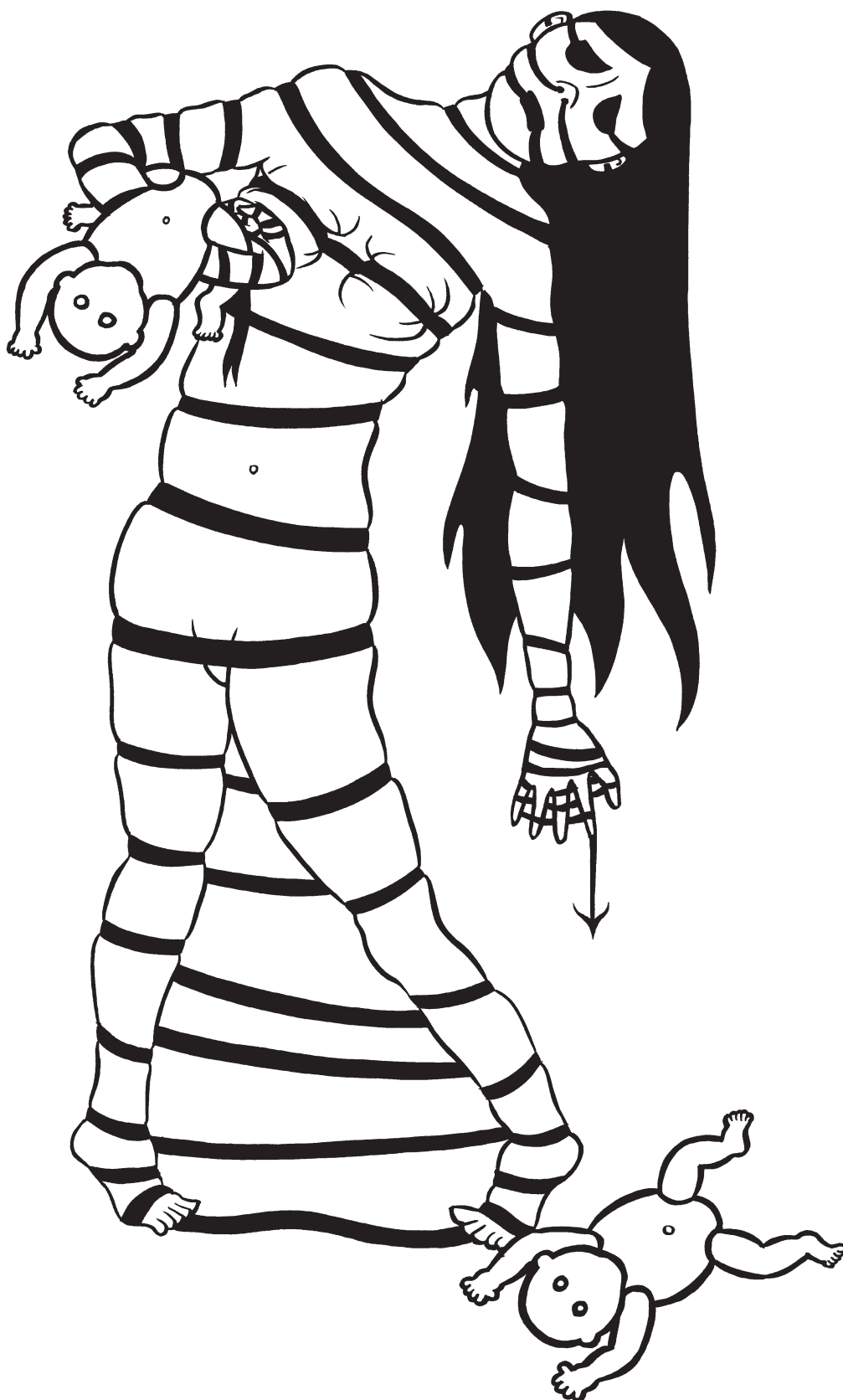


*"To deliver thee from the strange woman, even from the stranger which flattereth with her words." —Proverbs 2:16.*

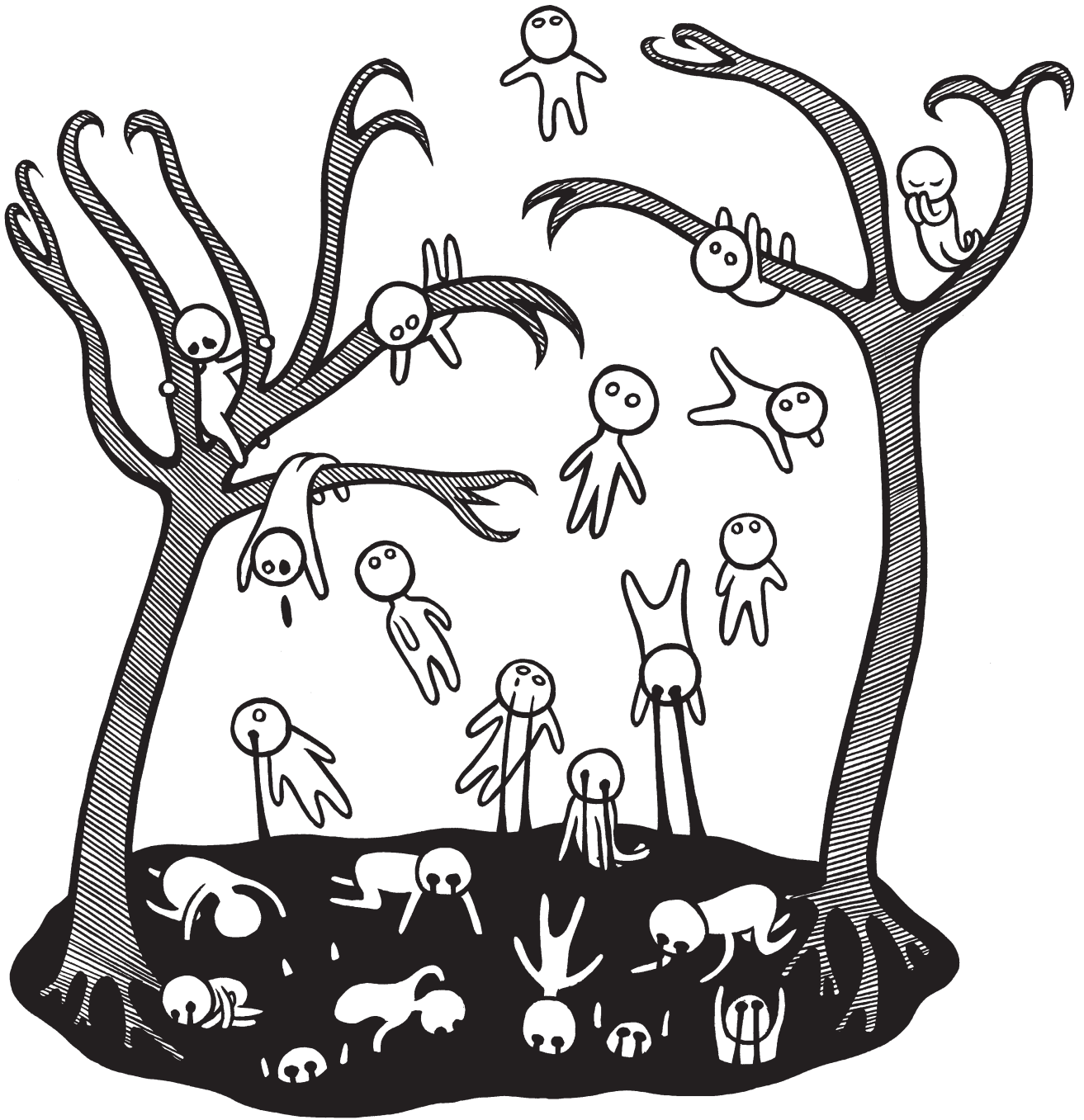


*"The sorrows of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid." —Psalm 18:4.*



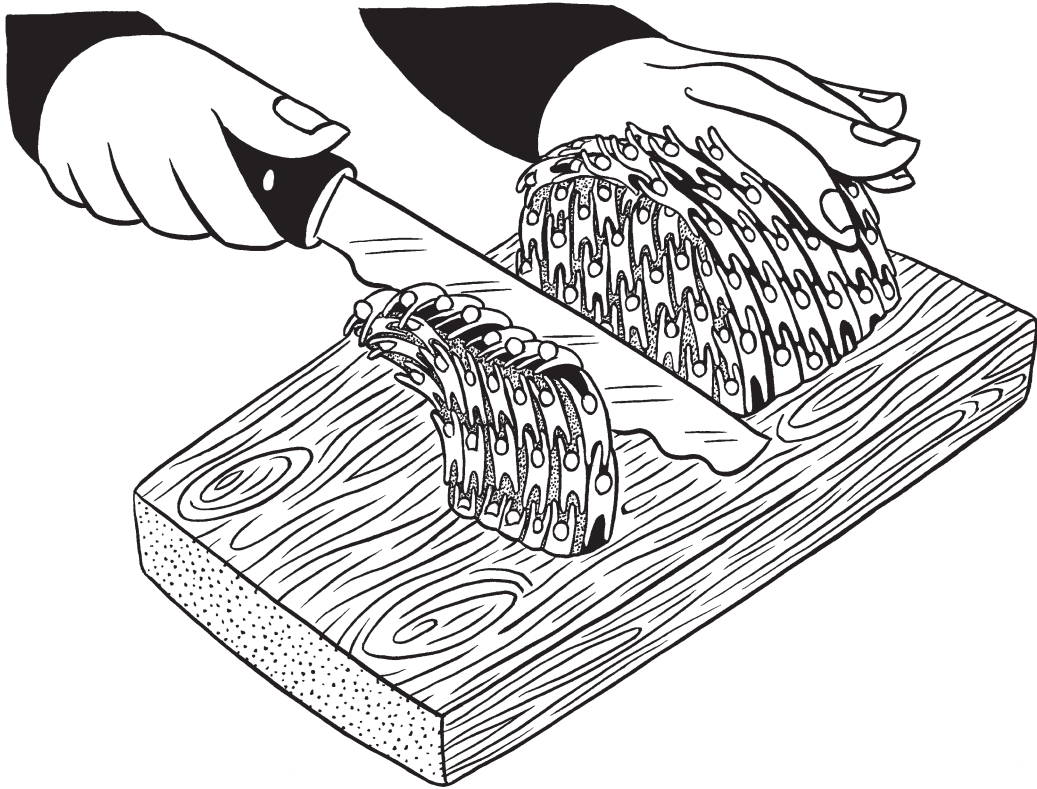


*"And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?" —Luke 13:16.*

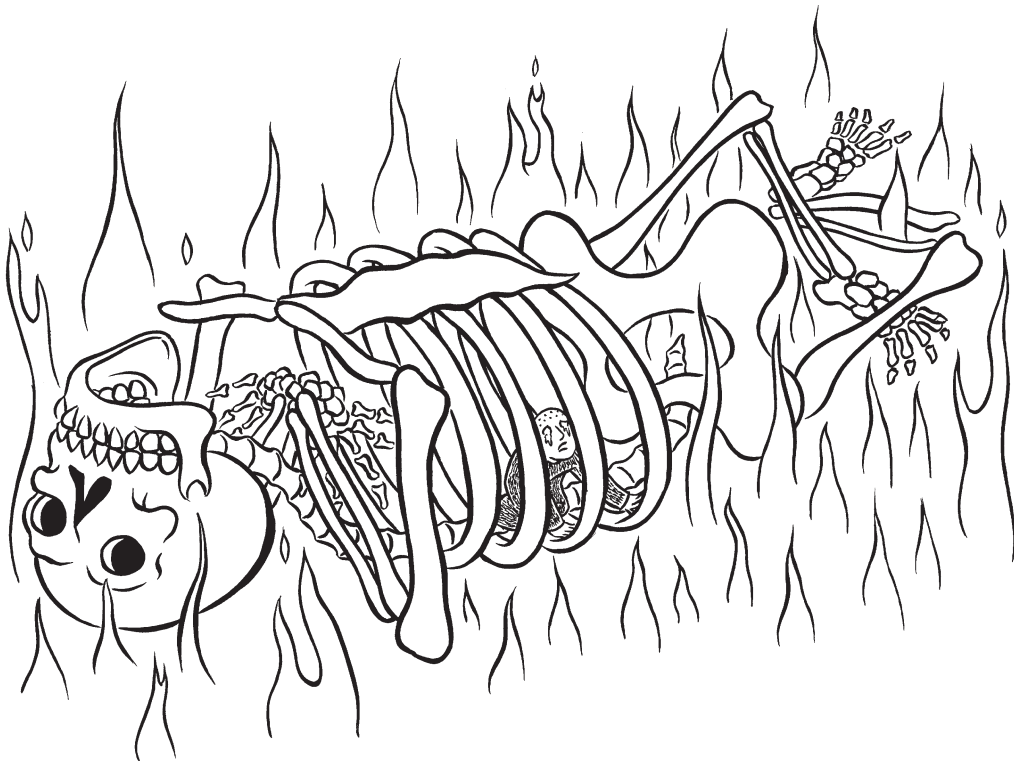


*“To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.” —Acts 26:18.*





*"Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge? who eat up my people as they eat bread, and call not upon the LORD." —Psalm 14:4.*



*"The sorrows of hell compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me." —Psalm 18:5.*

# FLIGHT PATH

BY GARY BARWIN

In my country, two men often marry. Two women also. And these people are happy or not, in the manner of any marriage or of any couple throughout the world or time.

And so the time came for me, when I, too, was seized with the desire to marry. But I wanted something closer than holly and ivy, closer than two sprigs of holly, or two vines of ivy. Something closer than bread and toast. Something more like breathing.

So I married myself.

Marriage is like a Möbius strip, a twisting, turning thing that appears to have two sides, but, in reality, has only one. Or that appears to have only a single side, but in truth has two. It's the edges that are important. It's the edges that are often forgotten.

It was a beautiful day. There was music. In the man-made glade, there was a flute and a harp. Or two harps. Or a single flute. There was a rabbi. A single rabbi with a snow-cloud beard like Santa Claus. There were piles of food and an ice sculpture in the shape of God and Adam pointing at each other from the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. In the middle of the boundless sweet table, there was a three-tiered wedding cake, and at its summit, under a little icing-sugar *chuppah*, a single person in a black tuxedo. This, in the language of celebration and the alchemy of cake-decoration, was me. After the traditional ceremony on the stage of the lovely country chapel, I embraced myself and cried as I promised to be true to this life before God, my parents, my friends, and myself. Then I stomped on the wine glass and the people broke into song.

My love was not absolute, for life is changeable, uncertain, a minefield of betrayals and tragedy. But I had faith. I had the courage of my promise. I would forever be true to this love, whether it flickered or shone bright. Whether it was

a candle or a Klieg light. Whether it was a Klimt or a Sigmund Freud. My love for myself would deepen with time. There would be therapy, counselling, and walks by the sea as the sun set. I thought how the sand was like the ripples I felt as I touched my tongue to the roof of my mouth and explored.

I gave myself pleasure, laughed at my own jokes. Sometimes, I knew what I was thinking; sometimes, I did not. After a while, it became more difficult to surprise myself, but I managed. I was a man of routine, but then, without warning, I would change. I'd find myself across town eating somewhere new, trying something different. Is this sea cucumber? I've never had sea cucumber. I'd take in the ballet or a ball game. Sometimes within an hour of one another. I would add spice to things that never had spice. I would dress in the dark, only open my eyes downstairs before the mirror. I would write notes to myself without looking. I learned to speak without first thinking, learned to anticipate my every need. I appreciated the little things. Is that a new tie? I can't believe what you managed on that triple-word score.

I filled my house with mirrors so I was surrounded by love. In some places where there were two mirrors, it seemed that there were an infinite number of marriages, my life a Ziegfeld Folly down a connubial corridor, a blissful kaleidoscope of spouses waving at each other, looking out with endless pairs of eyes into the same happy and domestic world.

There were years of happiness. Holidays. Promotions. Birthdays. Good times, with friends and alone. A new house. A cottage by the sea. Late night drives out into the country, nothing but the stars, the empty fields, and thoughts intertwined with the quiet songs of the radio. Sunday morning coffee on the porch or in bed. Dreams shared. The prosody of

reality scanned. New family. Crises met, averted, or suffered.

I was taken by surprise when the news came, though I had not been feeling well and had been taking it easy, pacing myself, spending more time at home, and at rest. But still, I was young. I felt strong, and there was much to do, much to look forward to. Soon it would be spring. There was gardening. The crocuses had bloomed between the mess of dried stalks in last year's gardens. A niece and a nephew were learning to roll over, to walk, beginning to name things, to delight in their new discoveries. My parents had become warm and sentimental, feeling joy and satisfaction in their family and each other, now having time to deeply experience each small trouble or accomplishment. And my marriage. I looked forward to an old-age marriage: of cups of tea carefully carried to the bedside, of memories dim yet strongly felt, of fastidious preparation on the calendar for each minor outing or appointment.

The doctor said there was not much time. Maybe a month. Maybe only two weeks. I thought back to the day of my wedding. I don't know why but I remembered the stains on the waiters' white jackets, the cloying questions of the videographer, my brother's bad jokes, the beautiful lithe body of an old friend from college, and my own young self. There was the future like the inconceivably long flight path of a migrating bird. A path stretched out before endless generations of birds. Each bird could not conceive of the distance of its destination or of the vastness of its route, but knew only the winds, the position of the stars, and some kind of deep pull from far inside its brain.

At the end, I sat myself up in the wheelchair and waited. The nurse had helped me dress and shave. I had brushed my hair carefully and put on cologne. I was as handsome as I'd ever been. ✧

MATTHEW DALEY





# THE SIDE SLEEPER

BY EMILY SCHULTZ

He has slept on his side for four nights now, four nights facing away from her. Christyna doesn't much care, except that it means she always wakes up to a back-blank and long. She stares at the back and feels like she is looking at a wall.

The side sleeper's name is Russell Mark—not that it matters, not to Christyna, who hardly ever uses her own last name. Usually she goes with Everett, or Johnston, or sometimes Johns. Christyna Johns. She likes the way it sounds. That is her name tonight and the past four nights. Every night when they go to bed, he tells her he is sorry, but he has to turn over. It is the only way for him to fall asleep. Christyna wedges herself against him. She sleeps on her back, but pressed right up to him, or sometimes on her side, facing the same way he does, so that she is spooning him. It's not that she feels it should go the other way around—it's just the back when she opens her eyes, that's all.

She doesn't sleep in one set position herself, she sleeps any which way: back, side, stomach, curled fetal, one arm under a pillow and one leg on the outside of the blanket. She sleeps as if she has been thrown over a cliff onto a rock bed beside the sea, and she always wakes up cold. Suddenly she finds herself turning over, taking solace in a square of light coming through the window where the curtain gaps. A pillow has made its way beneath one leg. He has good pillows, like someone else maybe bought them for him and spent more than he would have. She has slept enough places to know good pillows from bad pillows, and is always happy just to have any. He continues sleeping. She gently raises herself up on one arm, then pushes herself off the bed and finds her way around its perimeter, awake now, so awake, her fingertips probing the darkness for the wall.

Christyna finds her way out into the hall and down its narrow pathway—linoleum floor broken, and sloped enough that you wouldn't need a marble to tell you it isn't even—toward the kitchen. The apartment

is on the second floor of an old house in Leslieville, not a great neighbourhood but not a bad one either. The house is landscaped in the front, but it's not his doing; instinctively she knows that it doesn't fit with his personality. Probably the owner or the downstairs tenant.

The hall continues to the bathroom, but Christyna has stopped. She doesn't turn any lights on, just stands considering what she is doing here in this man's apartment for the fourth night, and what she might want.

When she takes something, the relationship changes. Sours or ends, begins a descent. Christyna knows this.

There are things that you take for use, and then things you just take. It's the second kind that gets her into trouble. She has held regular jobs, but then one day she'll alienate her co-workers by pocketing something that isn't hers. Then there's a brouhaha and drama, like the time she snagged the photo of one of her friend's kids, and usually she either quits or is fired.

Once, she walked out of a restaurant where she'd been waiting tables for eight months, and when she got outside she found the entire grey rack of utensils hanging between her hands—about twenty pounds of forks, knives, and spoons—for what? She'd stood there on the street, breathing in great gulps of air, young women in kitten heels and shrug sweaters moving around her lugging Roots and Banana Republic bags. She carried the tray of utensils for two blocks, feeling incredible, invincible. Then she realized its absurdity and flung it into the bushes of a parkette. The heft with which she chucked it amazed even her—the weight was suddenly gone as the container flew. A stack of white paper napkins fluttered in the April air; a rain of silver fell through the juniper, forks snagging in the thick green branches. Steak knives impaled the scrubby grass. The tray landed upside down, half in and half out of the garden, and Christyna walked on, laughing like

she had a case of the hiccups.

In Bloordale, and Parkdale, and Cabagetown, Christyna has lost rented rooms and even half-decent apartments, ones that maybe had mice but also had hot water, damn it. She has had her things dumped out in the alley. She has been dumped out in the alley herself. She has lost friends, lost time, because you can't go back and you keep getting older and needing more, and nothing you take can change that.

Her favourite job is always telemarketing. She can last the longest at those companies—there's nothing much to take. Pens. The telephone itself. It fit perfectly in her purse. They didn't even notice. Someone just said, "Where'd the phone in this booth go?" Then went to the back and got another one and plugged it in.

Things that you take for no reason at all: lipsticks, compacts, jewellery, watches, pencil sharpeners, salt shakers, coffee cups and creamers, half-packs of cigarettes, Zippos, ashtrays, jackets.

Things that you use: chequebooks, E-mail addresses, names.

Things that you use are not the same as the things you take just because, Christyna tells herself. Things that you use are things that you're owed. You've put out and you've given. You deserve to be kept alive a little longer. It's just common sense to take them. These are things that don't really even belong to the person who has them. What is a name or an account number? They're the most impersonal things in the world. Christyna already has two of the side sleeper's chequebooks. They were in the obvious place, the top desk drawer in the living room, and she took them while he was in the shower the first morning after she came home with him. She had gone over to look at the glowing Macintosh laptop. Then her hands found the drawer, and it was open, and her work was done for her. She slipped them into the lining of her jacket through a hole in the shoulder. She could have left then, but she didn't. He

MATTHEW DALEY





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wouldn't notice or he would think he mislaid them.

His kitchen is moon-coloured, that hue that is neither white nor yellow nor green, but somehow also all of these. Like the inside of a pear, she thinks, and she sits down at the side sleeper's table and runs her palms along it, as if measuring it. It's a fine table, and feels like it belongs with some other life he may have had. There is food in the refrigerator, she is thinking, and she could take it. The light would spill from the open door and the breathing sound of the apartment might change, but the side sleeper wouldn't care. In the morning he might notice something was missing, but she was his guest after all. He'd still offer her coffee and toast, just as he did the day before. Anyway, it isn't really hunger that has woken her.

The side sleeper has treated her well. He has wanted to feed her and make a fuss for her, the way men do when they have female guests, as if to prove their existence is somehow full, that they are capable, that they ordinarily cook and clean and behave as humans do, that they have things and lead good lives. Christyna isn't fooled. The way he keeps it, the place is only a step up from a dump. It's pretty outside, but inside it's old, the paint is scabby from many layers on the baseboards, there's dust, and you can see that the windows have been painted shut in some rooms. She guesses it costs him eight hundred dollars a month. Which means he is banking most of his salary—or perhaps drinking it, as he was when she found him. She imagines it could be nice if someone cared. But Mark, or Russell, the side sleeper—he only began caring when she came home with him. She can see that. He tidied up as he went, apologizing, and then they'd landed on the couch, falling together with neither one on top, and the groping began and their wine tongues tangled. They had the kind of sex strangers have: so hard it's not entirely satisfying, but hard because it is so needed, because it has been so long since one was satisfied.

Except that it hadn't been that long for Christyna. She is waiting for him to ask her to leave, but he hasn't yet. She finds places to go during the day; there are the usual inventions. Something she noticed early on was that people—male or female—will suspend all logic and forget every detail if they think there might be a



## THE STUNT BEAR, THE BELL TREE

The landscape is loaded. Cluttered with bats and beer halls—  
bats wrapped so the hands don't slip while swinging.  
Beer halls—darts and pool. She lifts a mirror to her face,

stares into her deep blue pools. Street lights are pale moons,  
street moons. The air perfectly natural, naturally candid.  
There are intervals of dark not even sun can interrupt.

Clouds—narrow, white as femurs—flowing over the city.  
The second hand keeps ticking away; the first, mute as meal.  
Someone's rocking the barcarole, disrupting the dreamy dream.

Bathers, waiting for something to happen, look so glum  
they could be shot. Many have fallen this way.  
Many more have acted maniacally happy to save their lives—

only to end them later because they'd survived.  
Find her while there's time—before the exits  
shift. The stunt bear with the bell tree is exposing his tinny teeth,

the engine of his body chugging up. Rage rising, bells  
revelling, inner fire bright.  
Anyone who's broken down knows how savage health can be.

—ELANA WOLFF

chance of orgasm. She knows she could draw the whole thing out a while longer if she spent a couple nights away from him. Tomorrow night, she will go to her sister's. She looks at the clock on the microwave, and its stick numbers tell her it is quarter to four. So tonight then, tonight she will go to her sister's, Christyna tells herself.

She is always staying with her sister, when they ask. Her sister with the potbelly. Her sister with the five-o'clock shadow. Her sister, Kenneth, and his younger brother, Bob. Christyna guesses they've known her longer than anyone. They know her shit. Kenneth always tells her, waving his hands around like the queen he is and taking clear pleasure in doing so, "That big unwieldy pile of mental shit of yours? Get it together, miss." And he means it in no uncertain terms, but he also means it as emphatically when he says her biggest problem is that she likes the bad Bowie years—his eighties hits. Kenneth and his brother let her keep her things with them when she's "in between," which is how Christyna always refers to it. And when Kenneth's patience is worn thin, which it is frequently, Bob

will sometimes stash a few boxes for her in the back of his junk shop. Gem's Antiques. Who is Gem anyway? Some of the shoppers call Kenneth that. What a load of crap. The Sunday men come for the furniture, which Bob drags onto the sidewalk while Kenneth, hungover, gives snide commentary they all find adorable even though he's aging and won't get away with it much longer. Bobby, as Kenneth sometimes calls him, is six years younger. He takes a lot and never cares what she takes. She'll crash with them, *just for one night*, and then she'll come back to the side sleeper and say, "My sister's going through something right now. Can I stay here with you? Anyway, I know we said we'd take it slow, but I couldn't stay away. You're addictive, mister. This is something else."

Christyna can say anything if she puts on lipstick. If she puts on lipstick it isn't her who says it, but just a mouth. A red mouth on a girl who only looks a little like Christyna.

Kenneth and Bob are always a pain. A few years ago, Bob thought she was his

bitch. It was unlike him. Normally he let everything roll right off. He got so possessive Christyna wrote herself a cheque, cashed it at the Money Mart, and got out of town for a while.

She went to Niagara Falls, where everyone was a tourist and things were easy. She pulled the Melon Drop all day. She would dig through restaurant recycling bins, find the best champagne or Scotch bottle. Fill it with water and shoplifted food colouring. Get herself accidentally jostled by some tourist and drop the bottle. Curse a blue streak or start to cry. "That was thirty-dollar Scotch. Forty-dollar Scotch. Hundred-dollar Scotch. For my boyfriend. For my boss. For my brother's university graduation present. I'm sorry, but it wasn't mine. You have to reimburse me. Dammit, but you bumped into me. Is this the way you always treat women? You can see by the label. You owe me. Please, please. He'll be so angry with me. He'll be so disappointed. What am I going to do?"

But Niagara was small and lonely: 80,000 people. They got to know her too well.

Sometimes she does the door-to-door. She sells magazine subscriptions. "Part of a work program to help the unemployed. To help women gain skills. To help disadvantaged women. You don't sound like you're from here. Really? That's where I'm from too. What school did you go to? No, I didn't, but I know it. Do you know Matthew Bloom?" She has some photocopied forms, all the magazines you can choose from. "Wouldn't it be nice to get something in the mail every month?"

Other times she sells and plants oak trees. Little clusters of sticks tied together with string. They cost her nothing, and she can work her way neighbourhood

by neighbourhood, pulling them in a borrowed two-wheeled cart. A bundle of burlap and dirt. No tree, just branches. It takes a week or two before the buyers realize it won't grow, can't grow. The shovel costs seven bucks at the dollar store, but she can sell a tree for a lot more than a subscription. "You

have a lovely home. Wouldn't you like a nice tree for your yard? Proceeds help breast cancer research. Proceeds go to the Hospital for Sick Children. Proceeds go to the Humane Society." (When she can hear a dog, that's an easy one.) "Watch



your tree grow year after year and know that you've made a difference." She doesn't feel bad about it. They do make a difference to Christyna. It's no less honest than any other business.

Christyna goes to the cupboard and opens it slowly. She can hear the side sleeper breathing in his half-naked room at the end of the hall. He has lived here a while, she can tell by the dust, but still hasn't hung anything on the walls of the room where he sleeps. Inside the cupboard are the four plain white plates and two white bowls he placed there the previous evening when they did the dishes together like a yuppie couple. There are also several mugs with logos on them, the kind of things that look like someone might have given them to him. Impersonal totems. Niagara Falls and a rainbow. Dubble Bubble. I.B.M. Dow. A mother and baby grizzly bear. A bikinied woman fighting the surf and the word "JAMAICA." There is one wine glass, probably remaining from a set that has since been toppled, and two short whisky glasses. Christyna turns the logos on the

mugs so that they face the back of the cupboard, and their white sides are now facing out.

She opens the refrigerator after all. She takes the lid off a jar of apricot jam and smells it. She can't decide if it has gone bad.

The night before, the side sleeper made her lamb chops. He told her to come at eight, and she arrived early. She'd stayed away as long as she could but it had been raining, the kind of dreadful bright rain where the sky seemed to mock her as it poured so hard, the sun shining somewhere behind it, and there were only so many coffee refills she could get. So she had turned up early and found him overwhelmed. It warmed her to think he cared that much, going to so much trouble for her, some girl he met in a bar who was "new to town," who was "staying with her sister," who had a story. But it was only Day 3, and the side sleeper had no idea how soon he'd tire of her. They were often naïve in that way.

The lamb chops had taken longer than she thought she could handle. The smell

made her salivate, and he kept trying to engage her in small talk about her day, but there was nothing to tell, and Christyna had tightened the sash on her faded wrap-around blouse to try to hold in her hunger. He would want dinner and more conversation, there would be wine or maybe gin or vodka, and sex—which wouldn't be as bad as the first time. He would be slower now and last longer, but she didn't much feel like it, and he might say some things, more tender or perhaps dirtier than the first time—and then finally, finally she would be able to use his shower. The hot water, God bless hot water.

She screws the lid back on the jam jar. It smells like childhood and Christyna feels a strange pit open in her stomach. She closes the fridge door.

She'll have another bath. She deserves it. The side sleeper is still in slumber, and he will continue in this state until his alarm goes off at 7 A.M. sharp, at which point he will stir out of his precious side sleep, one arm mosquito-swatting at the alarm clock. He works in an office, doing something tedious with numbers. The side sleeper has told her what it is, but she can't remember exactly, as it seemed,



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## SATISFYING CLICKING SOUND

“There was the (alleged) time he asked engineers on the original iPod team to stay up all night fiddling with the headphone jack so that it made a more satisfying clicking sound.” —*Farhad Manjoo, on Steve Jobs.*

This poem, says what’s  
his Yeats, better  
close with the click  
of a well-made box—but  
he’s vague on the specific make  
of click. Is it one chirp  
of a cricket, sifted  
from its field  
of creaks and isolated  
on its own track?  
A swan’s neck high-  
heeled until it goes crack?  
Or is it richer sound—  
a couple of castanets  
cut from the bones of a pair  
of Marie Antoinettes  
and clacked the once  
and disposed of?  
Whatever, it better  
resound. We trust  
a diary will keep its word  
under lock and key or stay  
mum on the names  
of persons we wish  
to sleep with—but the clasp  
when we close it  
better cluck its tongue  
cleanly. What’s grating  
is the indefiniteness  
of the death rattle-  
ragged, the way  
we have to guess  
which one’s the last  
gasp by waiting  
out the sequence.

—JASON GURIEL

even as he explained it, that he himself found it tedious. If she wants to keep him around a while, she’ll have to invent something better, some tales to tell him, things that will make her seem exotic and interesting, but believable at the same time.

Christyna enters the bathroom and shuts the door behind her before turning on the light. She runs the bath and watches the mirror mist, the whole room sweat, the old radiators glistening with the moisture and heat. She takes off the

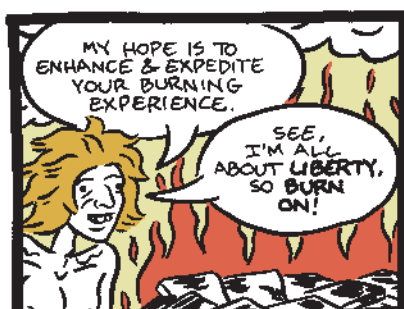
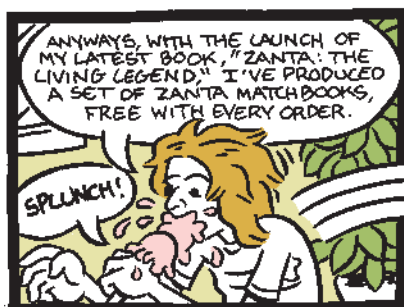
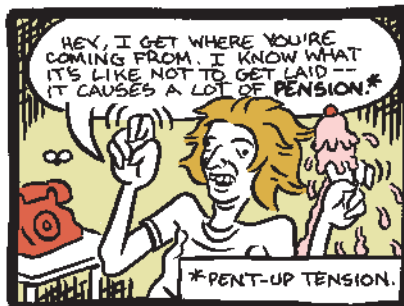
oversize Hanes the side sleeper gave her to put on after he came. It’s not the one he was wearing earlier, it’s clean—from his drawer—and it smells like Tide, she’ll give him that. The tub fills up and she stands, transfixed, looking at herself in the mirror. Her body looks like someone else’s these days. The only parts that aren’t bone are her breasts. Inherited from her mother, they are large enough even when she wastes away; Christyna guesses she got at least one thing that is

good for something. Her hair is at half-length, a ragged red cloud around her face, dyed to cover the thirties grey that is coming in faster and faster, twisting through her own like snakes. She dyed it this colour because men like it, notice. And because her natural hair colour is too dark to go blond without a lot of effort. It takes more than one box of peroxide, and that adds up. Even now her roots show, an inch of brown and silver forking out from her sloppy part. She should sleep while she can, she knows this, but the bath is too tempting, and the hours when she can be indoors here—the hours she can really think—are so limited. Besides, the side sleeper won’t think this is weird if he finds her here. If he does wake in the middle of the night, if he reaches for her side of the bed and she’s gone and he comes down the hall looking, this is normal. “Couldn’t sleep,” Christyna will say. “Cramps.” She will smile sleepily, wistfully, up at him from his bathtub, which is not all that clean but will do, and Christyna will look at least for another night or two like someone you could love, like someone with a life.

It isn’t that hard, coming up with reasons why he can’t have her phone number. She’s supposedly staying with her sister after all, who doesn’t like it given out. “She had a real problem with a man a few years ago, had to take out a restraining order. Sorry, and my cell hasn’t worked since I got here. I’ve been back and forth with my service provider and it’s just not happening—they’re not doing a thing for me. I have to wait and see what they can do. No, you can’t call me at work, I’m on the road all day. I do seminars for bars and lounges, teach them about the wines they serve. I promote for Rémy V.S.O.P. Courvoisier.” (Because she likes its name.) “I do fundraising for charity, so I can’t take any calls. My job is being on the phone—there’s no time for personal calls. I’m sorry, but it just wouldn’t be right.”

But the story of her life, the story she normally tells, goes like this:

“I married young. I was so naïve. I know. In this day and age, who gets married at nineteen? But I did. My folks just hated it. He was a good twenty years my senior—it was what he wanted. Mel. Me and Mel. Mel and Christy. We had a good life. He was good to me. I thought mine was the perfect marriage. He managed a bar and grill, I waited tables there. He had a house in the Beach. I did the garden,



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## SUGAR TRANSFORMED BY THE SUN

"Whatever can / be destroyed is going to be destroyed.  
Patience, patience. / Hate what needs to be hated.  
All is finished. All's completed." —A. F. Moritz.

Skin. An eye. An ulcer. Whatever  
can bleed will be torn by the nail  
or the knife. Matter that ripens, that  
rots, will be cuisine for the grubs.  
If it can burn, be it paper,  
or muscle, or coal, it will be ash  
when the sun swells and reddens,  
taking the inner planets into its bloom  
when the apparatus falters.  
Whatever can be destroyed

with a look, with a glance, will stand  
before the basilisk, the gorgon,  
or the cockatrice, and will petrify  
as when the heat escapes, all at once,  
from a face, from a forest,  
and is swapped with layers of  
many-coloured silica. Whatever  
can be lied about, will. I have  
forgotten you. This sentence  
is going to be destroyed.

And the nail as well. And the knife.  
And the grub. And the sun will  
corrode and get dull and

everything was beautiful. But it didn't last long. A year or thereabouts. I got suspicious. He worked till close every night—but never on my shift. The girls, the girls. Waiting tables in short skirts. I knew what they would do for his attention, because I'd done it. He was a slick one. He was a charmer. He had dimples, and experience, and cash, and made everyone feel special. Everything just fell apart. I drifted for a few years . . . I mean, the pain. I really drifted. My parents told me I made my bed, and didn't let me home again. But then one day, you just say, 'No. Enough.'

In the story she doesn't tell, Mel is Melissa. A woman can be as bad as a man, that's what Christyna has learned. It goes pretty much the same way—Mel's betrayals, the sneaking around, and the girls, except that there wasn't a marriage certificate and it ended in Mel's garage in Mel's car (everything was Mel's), with a hose and carbon monoxide. It wasn't Mel—with her solid hands—who reached Christyna and hauled her out. The hands

were small and fast: Lucia's maybe, one of the other servers. At the hospital, they wouldn't let Mel in to see Christyna, because she wasn't family. At least, that is what Christyna told herself. She recovered, but nothing has ever been the same. She can't say, "No, enough." She drifts, she keeps drifting. As if when her lungs filled, her heart also bloomed into a balloon stretched with helium.

And she can't stop taking things.

Before the accident, as she refers to it in her mind, she never took a thing. She worked the jewellery counter at the downtown Bay during her final year of high school, and never one thing. The other girls, her co-workers, found ways to avoid the cameras. Those sixteen-year-olds had it all mapped out. They knew which cameras covered which areas of the department store. They would unlock the stock under the cabinet and straighten it, roll fresh water pearls into their palms, hide them between their fingers while doing other tasks, and



pass into a fizzled, brown lump.  
 All of this is to say even  
 a mountain is fragile, even  
 one that came from the bottom  
 of the world, that came by inches,  
 by eons, that rose over India, and was worn.  
 Patience, patience.

The erosion of Elik, of New Orleans,  
 will be repeated. Even the Earth,  
 at intervals, must miscarry.  
 And what to do in the interim  
 but revel in the soft tissue? To conduct  
 the blood inaudibly to our extremities  
 in the revelling. To taste the spit  
 in our mouths. Burn through  
 the calories. Savour the injury.  
 Hate what needs to be hated.

Fracture, cancer, lesion, and virus.  
 Though a virus might be taught  
 to sing like a wren, become  
 the darling instrument on which  
 we play our message: Dear reader,  
 all was beautiful. All was sugar  
 transformed by the sun. All  
 was teeming in the seas. All was  
 admired while we could admire it.  
 All is finished. All's completed.

—PAUL VERMEERSCH

when enough time had passed that no one who was watching the tapes would notice—whoosh—into their pockets. They emptied earrings into plain envelopes, which they stuck with the unused Visa slips under their registers, and then nicked later so it looked like they were just grabbing supplies. Maybe, maybe when Christyna worked the perfume counter she did take a tester once, Calvin Klein's Obsession, she seems to remember, but that was all. Peer pressure, a testing of social circles. There was no thrill to it. There was no compulsion.

Before she and Mel were involved, Christyna worked at the restaurant, and even with all that money in hand she never, never tried to pad her tips. Some of the other servers had a system of shot glasses that worked like an abacus. They would overcharge drunken customers, put the cash in the register, but do the math in their heads. When they had reached a ten-dollar surplus they moved a jigger over on one of the shelves. At the

end of the night, they counted the shot glasses. Six shot glasses, they scooped sixty bucks out into their pockets. Christyna knew about the scam, but wouldn't be part of it. But everything changed after Mel. "Everything changes," Christyna reassures herself.

In spite of being soap-scummy, the side sleeper's tub is the old-fashioned kind with the claw feet. It's deep and the water is up to her chin. Christyna sinks into the water until it covers everything but her nose and mouth. If she fell asleep here, the side sleeper wouldn't find her until morning. Through her eyelids, the light is green. The image of a jade bird comes to her, settles, as if perched on the bridge of her nose. She knows this feeling, the shape of it.

There was one time when she worked at the jewellery counter, a man, older than Christyna was then, in his mid-twenties, came in to buy a necklace for his girlfriend. Nothing she showed him seemed to satisfy him. Christyna was in the twelfth

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grade, couldn't he see that? Why would she know anything about jewellery? She showed him the Majorca pearls first. The pearls were cultivated underwater for ten years; they were one of the most expensive items in the counter.

"She's got really good taste," the guy said, running his palms down the sides of his cargo pants. He was wearing a collegiate T-shirt, but Christyna hadn't heard of the college. "She likes American southwestern stuff, turquoise, Navajo motifs—do you have anything like that?"

Christyna showed him everything, but it was the Bay. In downtown Toronto, *Canada*. There was nothing southwestern-themed. Christyna was seventeen and a half, she was pre-Mel. She had given a partial hand job to a guy from school to see what it was like, and had kissed her best friend once, but had never been in love. Still, she knew instinctively: this poor guy wanted his girlfriend to love the present. If she loved the present, she would love him. But she wouldn't.

The man paced around for nearly two hours.

Christyna found a gift, in the end. It was a necklace she'd seen before but never understood. It was black jade, a strange upside-down L-shaped pendant on a sterling silver chain. It cost a hundred bucks, which was more than Christyna made in an entire shift. The guy was won over. "Yeah, maybe . . ." he kept saying. "Maybe, yeah. I think so. What do you think?"

She had already taken his cash. She was removing the tag and putting it in the box.

That was when Christyna turned it over and held it for a second and saw what it really was. She'd thought it was abstract, but now she saw it was, in fact, meant to be a bird with its wings spread in flight. It was just that it was broken—a bird with one wing. It wasn't an L at all, but a T with one part missing. She'd already taken his money. To give him a refund she would need to get her supervisor. And she couldn't go through the whole process again, the search for the perfect thing. He would give the broken bird pendant to the woman who couldn't love, and because she was obviously difficult to please she would see immediately that it was flawed.

"Why did you get me this?" she would say.

Christyna closed the box and handed it to the man.

She had just wanted off her shift, but the guilt had followed her for days, weeks. He'd been a tourist and couldn't ever return it. At the time, Christyna had thought it was the worst thing she'd ever done, would ever do.

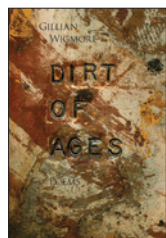
The memory has the weight of a stone in her stomach and Christyna comes up for air, slicking her hair back, rubbing her hands down her face, blowing air hard from her lips, water sloshing almost over the edge of the side sleeper's bathtub.

The side sleeper doesn't get up and come down the hall. He sleeps on, oblivious, as Christyna reclines again in the tub, and cries, with joy, or possibly relief, at having survived, or something the opposite, she is never sure any more.

When she gets out of the tub, she dries herself off, watching in the side sleeper's mirror as she does, feeling like she is in a movie or a commercial. Like he should come in now, in jeans and bare-chested and put his arms around her, enjoy some new scent or soap or skin cream she has just used. Except she hasn't. The towel is white but not as fluffy as a movie or commercial towel. It's the same one they used earlier that night, last night. She used it, then he used it, and now she is using it again. She shrugs on the T-shirt and wraps the half-soaked towel carefully around her hair in a turban, feeling for just a moment like she knows how to take care of herself—she does, doesn't she? Who else is going to, who else has gotten her through this life?

Christyna opens the medicine cabinet. There are the uninteresting drugs she has been popping over the past couple days. Nothing much. A handful of anti-inflammatories and a drugstore box of sleeping pills. Something that sounds like an antidepressant. Cough medication. The first time she came in, she dumped half of them into her purse. Now, every time since, she culls a couple extra caplets of this or that and tucks them away. Some she will sell, and some she will give away, but most she will take herself.

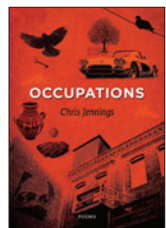
She removes the box of sleeping pills, breaks open the foil and floats two into her mouth with a fistful of water from the sink—no glass, this guy. She reminds herself to bring one in here from the kitchen. Tomorrow, in the same way, she's going to skip off for a while to keep



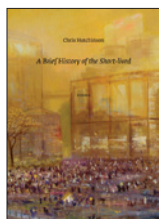
**Dirt of Ages**  
Gillian Wiggmore  
POETRY



**Wedding in Fire Country**  
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**Allegheny, BC**  
Rodney DeCoo  
POETRY



## DEAD MAN'S PASSPORT

All the numbers that hustle into place for a date of birth, address. A signature that's a set of billowing clouds, a plane ascent line. He looks into a camera at the future, blank as a flash. Extra pages for stamps, all those business trips, to see different sets of middle-aged men with sunglasses and cellphone. He only needed to see them once, but look—they were on every corner. Most space outside reserved for cars, he arrived in his own armoured bubble, left in it. He stands over himself, reminded of dull moments he stood in the bathroom, cum shot of soap in his hand—everything was something in the way. But there was that time he called a black cat a walking piece of midnight, the time he watched a man give an alarmed look as elevator doors closed, as though going to his death. From now on, the entire world will be Paris in the twenties.

—ALEX BOYD

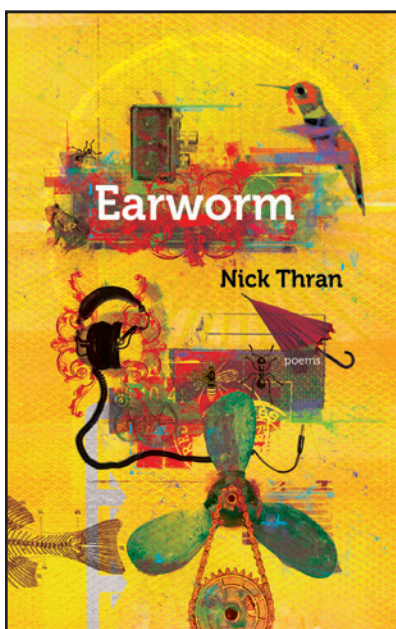
him interested—absence makes the heart grow fonder—tomorrow. And tomorrow she'll also get herself a new blouse some way, somehow, so that she looks like someone with a job—hell, a career. She could get an old one from her stuff at Kenneth and Bob's, but a new one would cinch it. Because Christyna could stay here forever if she played things right. Christyna is in love

with this man, this boring, ordinary, medium-dicked, fast-coming man, this man of one-towel, this side sleeper—in love, and you don't forget your beloved's name, even if you only met three days ago. Four. What time is it? Five. The name that appears in type on the bottles is "MARK RUSSELL." Mark, she repeats silently, Mark.

The pills go down and as Christyna is

wedging the box back in place, she notices the ring. It's a woman's ring. The style is simple enough that it could be a man's, but when Christyna reaches into the back of the cabinet and plucks it up between her middle finger and her thumb, she can tell almost immediately by its size that it is, undoubtedly, a woman's ring. She holds it for a moment. It's silver, or maybe white gold. No ornamentation. A wedding ring. A very serviceable, very modest wedding ring. It's worn, not scratched, but definitely worn by someone kind of careless, which makes sense to Christyna as it seems to fit with the personality of the side sleeper. No stone. It won't trade for anything. Fifty dollars maybe, not much. It is close to worthless. Its only value is what it represents, what the side sleeper might imagine it means.

She is about to replace it where she found it, but then Christyna feels a brief rush of pleasure, a fluttering, like a dirty pigeon has got loose inside her. Christyna slips the band onto her ring finger, and when it feels too loose there, she tries it on her other hand. It still hangs a size too loose, like some older cousin's castoff. A fat girl's ring. The mirror cabinet is half open and only one side of Christyna's face and neck shows, but suddenly this half of her is more recognizable, looks more like her—flushed, healthy, strong. Christyna licks her lips, unfolds the towel from her head and shakes her damp hair back. Christyna stows the sleeping pills in the cabinet, shuts it, and, still wearing the loose ring, opens the door to the cold sleeping night.



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—Michael Lista, Post Media News



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It is, she knows without a doubt, the ring of a woman who is not coming back. The apartment is too drab. He lived somewhere else with this woman, and now he lives here, alone, with some of their things.

Christyna edges her way down the side sleeper's hall. Back in his room she hovers, gauging his breath, which is shallow, barely there. She feels the euphoria being replaced with something heavy. It's too soon for the sleeping pills to kick in. She should go. She should just leave. Now. His room is so close to the door that leads down the stairs and outside.

He's too kind. She says the right things and that, and that alone, makes him think she matters. Because he hasn't been laid in a year or more and she followed him home like a puppy. She shouldn't draw it out and begin to do that thing where she bleeds him dry gradually, where she takes things that are insignificant for no reason other than to take them. She already has his chequebook and that is all she needs besides the shower, and the food, and the bed, and the warmth.

She shouldn't let him love her even for a moment. She shouldn't let him come on her breasts, which he will eventually, and call her a whore, which he'll also do. She knows he is a good person. A boring one, and not particularly well off in comparison to others she has known, but not above realizing he's being used, duped. He will find out her lies and he won't love her then.

She takes each step slowly, one foot and then the other, around his room, around the sleep of this strange, unfamiliar, unsuspecting man. She slips the ring off her finger and it falls into her purse without a sound, and in that moment all the fears and the feelings vanish.

She lies down and presses her mouth against his neck, which is turned away from her. He smells like milk and dry leaves, and the paprika of sweat. She can sleep now. She will sleep. The side sleeper has been to Niagara Falls and Christyna has been to Niagara Falls; it's possible they were there at the same time. Maybe she Melon Dropped him on his honeymoon. "Who was she?" Christyna wonders about the woman who wore the ring. "Why did she leave it, and why did he keep it, and why do I want it when I can't remember his name?" These are the things the back sleeper thinks just before she feels herself going under, a faint taste, a little like poison, lining her gums. ▽





# T H E M I S C E L L A N Y

## THE PRODUCTION NOTES

Welcome aboard to Grace O’Connell, who as of this issue becomes the third *Taddle Creek* associate editor. Grace is a relative newcomer to the magazine, but she’s been a loyal reader for some years now, and has contributed to *Taddle Creek* previously, both as a writer and an editor. You can read a whole lot more about Grace on page 22 of this issue, so *Taddle Creek* will say no more about her here.

Over the summer, “Local Hero,” Jay Somerset’s profile of the music promoter Dan Burke, from *Taddle Creek* No. 27, received the Professional Writers Association of Canada’s 2012 features writing award. Jay tells the magazine his PWAC certificate now hangs proudly over the record player in his fancy bachelor-pad-like downtown office.

Astute readers may notice that Tad, *Taddle Creek*’s groovy beatnik mascot, looks somewhat different this issue. The magazine has been asked not to go into detail regarding the reasons for this change; it will only say Tad went away for a while this summer and returned looking refreshed and better than he has in years. He thanks Ethan Rilly for services rendered.

*Taddle Creek* is now on Google+. It’s a lonely place. As a result, the magazine still is spending most of its Facebook-type social-media time on Facebook. But if you’re one of the few people who signed up for Google+ and actually uses it, say hello to the magazine next time you’re near its circle, won’t you? If *Taddle Creek* still remembers Google+ exists, it will say hello back.

## THE ANNIVERSARY

This issue marks *Taddle Creek*’s fifteenth anniversary. It’s a bigger issue than usual, with more stories and more pages. It was meant to be even bigger, but apparently this was the year many of the magazine’s contributors decided to try their hand at postcard fiction. A big thank you to everyone who has contributed to, read, or otherwise supported the magazine thus far. Watch for an anniversary event or two over the coming year.

## THE BOOKS

Until *Taddle Creek* can figure out a better way to convey such information, it continues to discuss recently published books in boring, unreadable paragraph form. The magazine’s new B.F.F., Nina Bunjevaca, proves herself to be Robert Crumb’s long lost love child in her debut collection of comics, *Heartless* (Conundrum, \$20). Emily Schultz stands up for dark-haired women everywhere with *The Blondes* (Doubleday, \$29.95). Cary Fagan’s *My Life Among the Apes* (Cormorant, \$22) is jam-packed with stories originally published in *Taddle Creek*, which may explain why it seemingly was long-listed for the Giller Prize before it even launched. Matthew Tierney’s third collection of poems, *Probably Inevitable*, is now available from Coach House (\$17.95). Ethan Rilly keeps the old-school comic book (don’t call it a “floppy”) alive with the third issue of *Pope Hats* (AdHouse, \$6.95). And Jason Kieffer returns to please all takers with his second meticulous self-published graphic tale, the biographical *Zanta: The Living Legend* (Old Boot, \$15).

## THE CORRECTIONS

The corrections column in No. 28 called out Tim Davin for stating falsely in his contributor biography that his wife does not listen to the radio. Tim has since informed the magazine that such a slur was never his intention, and that the error simply was that of a misplaced comma on his part, appearing originally after the word “sons.” Tim’s bio in issue No. 27 should have read, “He lives with his wife, and two sons who don’t listen to the radio.” *Taddle Creek* now anxiously awaits word from Tim’s children. And regrets the error.

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# PEOPLE AROUND HERE

ANNIVERSARY  
STORY  
• DAVE LAPP •

DO YOU REMEMBER THE LAST TIME YOU BOUGHT AN ENGAGEMENT RING? OR ARE YOU ONE OF THOSE LUCKY INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE ONLY HAD TO BUY ONE?

I KNOW THERE'S ANOTHER MAN.  
BREAK UP?  
BUT...



THE LAST TIME I BOUGHT ONE, I'D JUMPED ON A TRAIN FROM TORONTO TO BRITISH COLUMBIA TO TRY AND SAVE A NINE YEAR RELATIONSHIP.

I DON'T REALLY NEED MY FRIENDS, MY FAMILY... I DON'T NEED ANYTHING EXCEPT OUR LOVE.



DURING A STOP OVER IN WINNIPEG I DRAINED MY BANK ACCOUNT AND BOUGHT A THREE HUNDRED DOLLAR DIAMOND RING.



MY SURPRISE ARRIVAL SEEMED TO MAKE HER MORE NERVOUS THAN HAPPY, BUT SHE ALLOWED ME INTO HER HOME.

NO, NO, NO, DON'T. I HAVE TO DO THIS.



LOOKING INTO HER BIG BROWN EYES AND SEEING THAT I WAS NOT IN THERE, BEING RIGHT IN FRONT OF HER AND GONE... COULD IT REALLY BE THAT I WOULD NEVER SEE HER AGAIN?

I CAN'T BELIEVE SHE LET ME DO THAT ONE LAST TIME.



WHAT A SAD LITTLE RING... CAN YOU BELIEVE I WANTED TO KEEP IT? SAVE IT FOR THE RIGHT ONE... MAKE IT WORK FOR ME?



I RETURNED IT FOR CASH AT 'SQUARE ONE' IN MISSISSAUGA.

LATER I TRAVELLED TO MY MOM'S HOUSE TO RELUCTANTLY BURN ALL OF THOSE GOD DAMNED NUDE POLAROIDS OF HER.

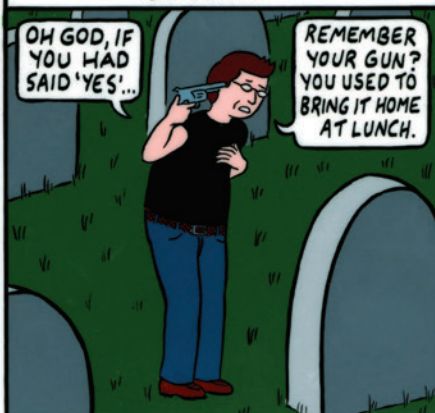
I'M GONNA WISH TO HELL I NEVER BURNED THESE.



IT'S BEEN TWENTY YEARS AND I HAVEN'T SEEN OR HEARD FROM HER. NO AMOUNT OF MY WEB SEARCHING CAN FIND HER... SHE MIGHT AS WELL BE DEAD.

OH GOD, IF YOU HAD SAID 'YES'...

REMEMBER YOUR GUN? YOU USED TO BRING IT HOME AT LUNCH.



I HAVE NO DESIRE TO REUNITE WITH HER, BUT SHE DOES VISIT ME IN MY DREAMS AND I CAN FEEL THAT OLD LOVE THERE.





**“THIS...  
doesn't try to be hip,  
it just is.**

**It never ceases  
to make me think,  
question things  
and get angry”**

**—Sarah Polley**



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