

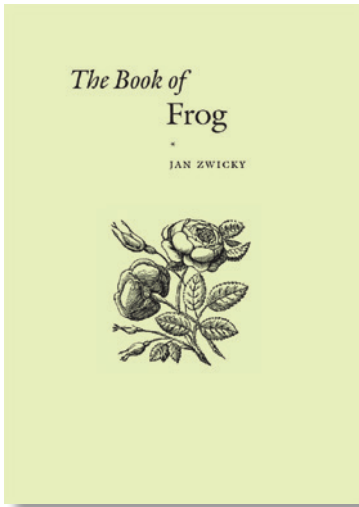
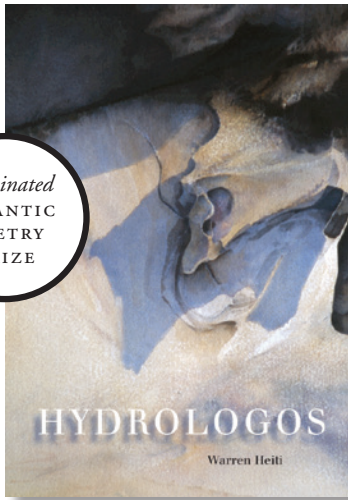
TADDLE CREEK

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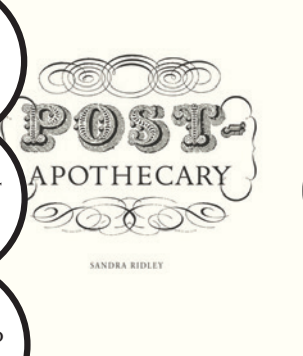
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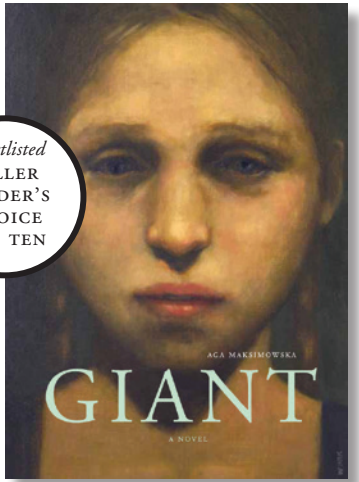
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TADDLE CREEK

TAKING THE RING OUT OF POETRY THROUGH FACT CHECKING

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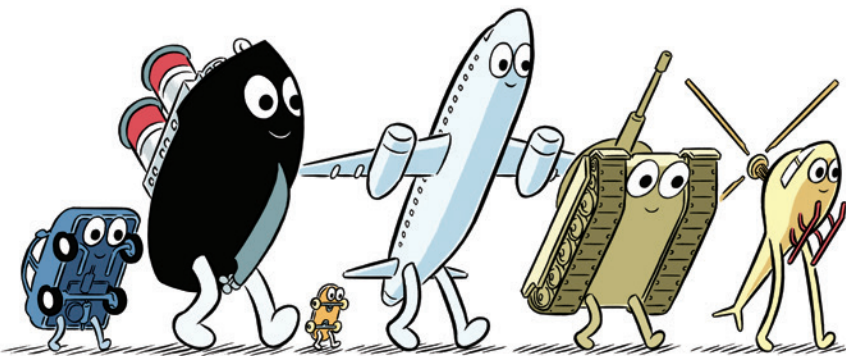
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T A D D L E C R E E K M A G . C O M



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TADDLE CREEK

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To see what *Taddle Creek* regrets today, visit the corrections page at taddlecreekmag.com/corrections.

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T H E M A I L

ROMAN STYLE

In the Ephemera column of *Taddle Creek* No. 29, the possessive “s” after the italicized titles “*Taddle Creek*” and “*New Yorker*” should be set in roman, not italic. See *The Chicago Manual of Style*, Sixteenth Edition, Section 7.28.

ELLIOTT PEARL
Toronto

While Chicago certainly is a resource Taddle Creek values a great deal, Elliott, the magazine does not follow it blindly. Taddle Creek’s first reference in such matters is The Taddle Creek Guidebook to Editorial Style and Its Usage, which states that in such cases, the possessive apostrophe and “s” should be set in italic. It forbids not only roman letters within an italicized words but also roman words within an italicized paragraph—this reply being an example. That other magazine you mention is another fine journal that knows ignoring the above rules not only is improper typography, but unsightly.

HOLD THAT RELISH

Taddle Creek No. 29 contained an error in your corrections column when it stated *Taddle Creek* “regrets the error.” Clearly, *Taddle Creek* relishes the error.

PETER JOSSELYN
Saint John, New Brunswick

Taddle Creek always regrets its errors, Peter. Sometimes, it even regrets its letters.

THE BOOK OF DAVE

Taddle Creek No. 29 is beautiful. Thanks for showcasing more of Dave Lapp’s work

(“This Ain’t Your Hippie Jesus’s Bible”)—though I do wish to ask him why a drawing of Adam would have a belly button if Adam never had an umbilical cord.

But my real reason for writing concerns what I think might be a spelling error in your house advertisement on page 27: “Learn what questions *Taddle Creek* gets asked to frequently.” Should it maybe be “too frequently”? I think you had it correct in the previous issue.

MICHAEL DARMANIN
Toronto

You’re right, Michael. The house ad was redesigned last issue to accommodate Tad’s insistence that his likeness be updated, and a typo crept in. It’s been corrected. But a more interesting topic of conversation, as always, is Dave Lapp. Taddle Creek spoke to Dave about the story of Adam and Eve at the time the piece in question was being put together and he admitted to not really knowing the story that well—something the magazine kind of admires him for. In any case, it’s unlikely your eternal question about Adam and Eve’s navels was at the front of his mind.

FONDEST WELL WISHES

Nice ish with Ollmann, Seth, and gang!
DAVID COLLIER
Hamilton

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



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T H E E P H E M E R A

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE CANADIAN OXFORD?

Every good magazine, newspaper, news organization, or publisher has a house dictionary—a spelling authority they decide to follow, for the sake of both accuracy and consistency. Publications based in the U.S. tend to lean toward *Webster's* and its attachment to “American” spellings (-or and -er endings and the like), while Canadian publications often tend to favour *Oxford* and its “British” and, thus, “Canadian” spellings (-our, -re, and such). But there are no set rules: Americans may use *Oxford* and Canadians may use *Webster's* and either may use one of a number of other dictionaries depending on what works best for them.

But what happens when a house dictionary suddenly ceases to exist or, more accurately, stops being updated? For a dictionary to be useful, it must continue to grow with its chosen language, adding new words as they enter the lexicon, and adjusting the usage (and sometimes spelling) of older words as need be. Though *Webster's* has not had a major update since its ill-fated third edition, in 1961, it stays up to date in the form of the more frequently published *Collegiate Dictionary*. *Oxford's* second edition, published in 1989, is somewhat overdue for an overhaul (a third edition is expected in 2037), but the press regularly publishes a number of smaller references, such as the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary*, the latter of which is *Taddle Creek's* subject for today.

In 1998, Oxford University Press published the first edition of the *Canadian Oxford* to much fanfare. Both a critical success and a best-seller, the dictionary

included such Canadianisms as “coureur de bois” and “toque” (and “Canadianism”). With a cover proclaiming it “The Official Dictionary of The Canadian Press,” it quickly became a mainstay in many a newsroom, and was adopted as the house dictionary by publications throughout the country. A second edition was released in 2004, including such new entries as “Nunavummiut” and “double-double.”

But in 2008, citing a downturn in the print dictionary market, Oxford laid off the staff of its Canadian dictionary division, promising to employ freelancers to help create updated future editions of its popular book. Nine years later, a third edition of the *Canadian Oxford* is nowhere in sight, leaving many organizations without an authoritative reference for the spelling of “Bieber” within easy reach.

Taddle Creek spoke recently to David Stover, the president of Oxford University Press Canada. He assured the magazine that the *Canadian Oxford* is still a going concern. “We certainly still sell a lot of copies,” he said, but noted that Oxford as a whole has seen a decline in print dictionary sales between ten and twenty per cent, year over year, for the past five years or so. In a world where Google can offer a quick spelling, definition, and audio pronunciation of nearly any word, why would the average non-academic or non-publisher bother paying for a dictionary? And unfortunately, those lost sales mean less revenue for an organization like Oxford to reinvest in updating its product. Mr. Stover mentioned Oxford does offer on-line references and he hopes someday this will include the *Canadian Oxford*—in fact, future editions of the *Canadian Oxford* could be compiled for on-line use first, with the print version ultimately

derived from this source. In any case, an update remains years away.

What to do in the meantime? Perhaps the most noted adopter of the *Canadian Oxford* is the Canadian Press news agency. *Taddle Creek* asked James McCarten, C.P.'s Ottawa news editor and the overseer of *The Canadian Press Stylebook*, how C.P. is getting by without an updated version of the *Canadian*. “We haven't had any conversation about what we're going to do,” he said. “We obviously use the *Canadian Oxford* as our touchstone with a lot of terms, but it seems more and more we have to make these decisions on our own. It's really not related to the lack of an update. . . . Things are changing very quickly, and suddenly we're confronted with, How do we deal with this issue?”

How indeed. Though *Taddle Creek's* main spelling reference is the complete *Oxford English Dictionary*, it does rely on the *Canadian Oxford* for newer words and, of course, words specific to Canada. Be it in print or on-line, *Taddle Creek* simply must have an authoritative, up-to-date spelling reference for its day-to-day editing activities. So, until the *Canadian Oxford* is a going concern once again, *Taddle Creek* feels it must demote it to one of several second references it will refer to, most likely the *Shorter Oxford*, C.P.'s *Caps and Spelling*, and (damn you, Oxford!) *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate*. *Taddle Creek* admits having so many references makes it nervous, but it shares Mr. Stover's optimistic enthusiasm when he predicts: “The on-line space is going to become a bit more stable than it has been so far, so at that point it may be easier to find a way forward.”

Taddle Creek certainly hopes so.

—TADDLE CREEK

SALT

An excerpt.

BY DANI COUTURE

PROLOGUE

I met my mother for the first time at her funeral.”

Kari Pierre leaned back in her chair and stared at her laptop screen. There was nothing else she could write, nothing more she knew about her mother’s life other than what she’d learned in the past twelve hours. She stood up, walked over to the bed behind her, and picked up her jean jacket. Her notebook, which contained the names and contact information for several people she’d met at the visitation, was tucked inside. “To keep in touch,” she’d said, after she’d told visitors she was a friend from out of town—not a journalist and the daughter of the woman about to be buried.

Earlier that day, inside a modest, one-level funeral home in a small town hundreds of kilometres from the familiarity of her Toronto apartment, Kari had looked at her mother’s face for the first and last time. Standing at the edge of the casket, she’d dragged her fingers across the cold, grey silk of Alana’s blouse, fingered the hem of her sleeve. She’d noted the fold lines in the fabric. The blouse was new, likely purchased specially for the burial. Who had chosen her clothing, the modest pearls at her ears? Undertaker or loved one?

Looking down at Alana’s face, Kari expected to feel something, some kind of outpouring, but felt little more than a pang of guilt muted by curiosity. An Internet alert for her mother’s name had arrived in her in-box when her mother’s obituary was posted on-line.

“It is with great sadness we announce the sudden and tragic death of Alana George.”

The visitation was the next day, which was to be followed immediately by the burial. Kari had packed an overnight bag and reserved a rental car. That night, she had not slept. When her alarm went off at 6 A.M., she’d showered, dressed, and set out for Essex County.

On February 21, 1975, at Hôtel-Dieu Grace Hospital, in Windsor, Kari was born to her mother and immediately put into her father’s arms. Her mother never held her once. “I’m not ready for it all to be over.” The words Alana had spoken to her husband, Lev, as they drove to the hospital that night. Seven months before, the same week she’d learned of her pregnancy, the results of Lev’s M.R.I. had come back. The doctor spoke to them both in pathologies and percentages. During her pregnancy, Alana had calculated her own percentages and made the decision to leave once the baby was born. Still young, she’d reasoned she could start over. “I refuse to be a widow and single mother by the time I’m twenty-five.” So, only hours after she’d given birth to her first child, Alana was gone—the joint bank account she shared with Lev emptied and a suitcase of clothing taken from their home. It took a week for him to discover her wedding ring, threaded onto the bottom arm of the cactus on the kitchen windowsill. He left the ring there until the plant, watered once a month for years, overwhelmed it—the thin, gold band enveloped by spiked green flesh.

Kari stood up and looked out the window of her seventh-floor hotel room. Across the river, the lit buildings of Detroit—a mix of turn-of-the-century Gothic and glass-scaled skyscrapers from better times—sparkled against the darkening sky. Whenever she thought of home, she thought of the hard silhouette of that American skyline, what she’d looked at every day for twenty years, not the city she lived in. What lay across the river seemed more real than the ground she stood on.

It was almost midnight. A kilometre west of the hotel, Lev was asleep in his home. Kari had not told her father she was going to be in Windsor, let alone the reason for her visit. After Alana left, Lev had never spoken her name again, as if he

could erase her existence by not saying the word. However, in that constant effort to forget her, he lived with the spectre of his wife. He’d never married again, instead spending his life enduring an endless stream of doctor’s appointments, operations, and hospitalizations, and raising his only child. If he ever wondered about where Alana had gone, if she’d flown back home to Cardiff, started another family, married another man, he never let on.

On the river, a freighter glided between the two cities, lights blinking like a felled skyscraper. Kari drew the curtains closed and sat down at her laptop. Her fingers hovered over the keys. Looking down at Alana’s face earlier that day, she’d searched for any resemblance that would tie her to the stranger. After brief consideration, she’d settled on Alana’s upper lip and touched it gently with her forefinger. The upper lip was hers. She could begin there. Her hands settled on the keyboard and she began to type.

CHAPTER ONE

The facts of a tragedy are often clean and unadorned. A patch of thin ice. The wrong pills swallowed. Ricochet. Undertow. A man walking out into the middle of a road. The tree-lined ditch.

When Alana George left her home for the last time, she was wearing a simple black knit dress and a pair of red rubber boots. She’d driven to the pharmacy in town to pick up a prescription and spent ten minutes talking to a friend in the parking lot. It had rained the night before, and puddles dimpled the uneven asphalt. Before driving the twenty minutes back to her home on Middle Side Road, Alana had picked up a large Earl Grey tea. Interviewed months later, the first responder on the scene would say that the inside of the vehicle had smelled of bergamot.

Kari read her words again. It had been a month since the funeral. What information



she'd gathered about her mother since could be contained on two single sheets of paper, although that wasn't all she knew. Over the years, she'd pieced together small details, her prized find a photograph. For all her searching, it had appeared unexpectedly one day in the *Windsor Star* twelve years earlier. The image was small and grainy, and she could barely make out her mother's face, but there was no question it was Alana. "Mothe resident Alana George stands beside prize craftwork." Her mother had left her family, but she hadn't even crossed county lines. Kari had clipped the photo out of the newspaper, folded it into her wallet, and carried it with her. She'd never told her father.

Kari closed her laptop and pulled out her phone. She dialed Lev's number. "Hello?" she said on hearing his voice, but it was his voice-mail message. She looked at the clock. It was just after seven. He was likely having dinner at Mr. Ragnarsson's, as he often did. She called back several times just to listen to his voice, its familiar gravel and drone, only leaving a message when she called back a fourth time: "Call me."

On the table, the battery light on her laptop dimmed and brightened with each breath. She watched it, breathed in time with it, then angled the machine away. The apartment had grown dark. The storm that had raged earlier was now gone, leaving behind a low, muddy sky. While it remained humid outside, cold air poured from the vents. Kari shivered and searched her closet for a sweater. Tired, she sat in the low chair by the front window, her head pressed against the glass.

Whenever a storm hit Toronto, she felt something was missing. The sound of windows rattling, the wind whistling through the gaps and cracks. The single panes of her youth that had threatened to shatter with every storm that passed through. In her apartment, the windows were doubled up, thick, and reached from floor to ceiling. An extravagance of glass. Kari pulled a blanket up around herself and placed her phone in her lap in case her father called during the night, or someone called about him, which was more likely to happen. She picked up a previously discarded book from the floor and read until she fell asleep.



Just after one in the morning, her phone rang. Kari woke with a start, panic rising in her chest. "He's dead." This always her first thought. She looked down at the small screen. "UNKNOWN." Already making a mental list of what she needed to pack and who she needed to call, Kari took a breath and answered. "Hello?" "Hamad?" "Hello?" The line crackled. A pause. "Hamad?"

"No. You have the wrong number." Kari listened and heard uneven breathing. "Wrong number," she repeated.

A woman, possibly elderly, spoke in another language. Another pause.

"No Hamad."

"Hamad? Hamad—"

Kari hung up and closed her eyes. By

RIVERSTONE

I'd breathe in noxious emissions for hours on the sidewalk beside the big brass doors underneath the awning of the plush boutique hotel.

I worked with Mohammed, who always had glowing words about his daughters. With Jeff, who represented us to the union, and had a preternatural understanding

of each attempted dupe by management. Dave, with whom I drank most nights. My shifts were from three to eleven, so the street would go through

a costume change or two over the course of a day, through two or three desires. It was my duty to be accommodating. If you needed your car parked,

I'd park your car. Needed help with your luggage, I'd carry your luggage. There were things I wouldn't do, of course; but those are better left unsaid, and besides,

were only requested intermittently: some strangeness in the air, in a glass, in the junior suites. But the faces on those notes would never ever change: Wilfrid Laurier,

John A. Macdonald, Queen Elizabeth II. If we were lucky, William Lyon Mackenzie King, or even Robert Borden, God forbid. Exhaust caused

pain in my sinuses. So did smokes on the loading dock bridge after bringing the Benzes around. Chit-chat with co-workers folded the hours.

the time the rain started again, well after midnight, she was asleep and dreaming of endless tree-lined ditches.

"Is it time for the shadow edit?" One of the editorial interns stood in the doorway of Kari's office. Kari pulled her headphones off.

"Sorry, what?"

"The shadow edit? You said four o'clock."

Kari looked at her watch. Hours had slipped by.

"I did. Sorry. Give me ten minutes."

Kari put her headphones back on and resumed typing. She'd been asking for another ten minutes for three hours now.

Liz nodded and shuffled back to her desk.

Since she'd returned from Essex County, Kari had spent most of her time researching the details of her mother's life, beginning with her death. Deadlines

Back out front I felt at home with those for whom
the shakedown was a thrill. Concocting parking scams
during the gala events, tipping off cops for a fee,

sending waves of guests to an Italian place we knew
we could eat at after punching out for free.
With Mohammed, who sent half his earnings home

to Mumbai. Jeff, who played in a band whose name
was a misspelled muscle car. Dave, who knew
where the booze flowed after the bars closed down.

I celebrate it all: sore back, hangovers, heavy stuff;
even the noxious emissions, which made sunsets stunning.
I do it to try to redeem an idea of myself. Though I failed

night after night to do anything good. To squirrel away
some of that dough for a later date. To dream. Best case
scenario on the street was a sudden summer shower:

the beautiful women of Yorkville made even more visible,
the musicians outside the Conservatory of Music
protecting violas and tubas with every free part of their body,

children splashing and running in circles while tired
commuters pushed past, shielding their heads
with the news. The air felt cleaner after, breathable,

and the street took on the glow of the lobby's marble.
The museum was still building its Lee-Chin Crystal.
And even I knew this could not be sustained.

—NICK THRAN

went unmet, invitations unaccepted. At home and at work, she chased the smallest thread to its end. However, she'd now arrived at an impasse. There was little else she could uncover without talking to people, and then, what would she tell them? If she asked questions, wouldn't they, in turn, ask questions of her. Why would she be looking into the life and death of someone who, on the surface, had lived a quiet life?

Kari clicked on the bookmarked link to the article on Alana's death that had appeared in the town's weekly newspaper. UNIDENTIFIED PEDESTRIAN ON ROAD CAUSES DRIVER TO VEER INTO TREES. The article went on to report the only reason the police even knew about the man was because he'd called in the accident from a pay phone a kilometre away from where Alana lay dying or already dead. Kari searched through her notes for the phone number of the police station in

Mothe and dialled it. On the third ring, a woman picked up. After ten minutes of creatively trying to explain what she was looking for, Kari was curtly told someone would call her back. Knowing they wouldn't, she found the article again. The writer's name was John St. Henri. Kari pulled up the Web site for the *Mothe Echo*, found his E-mail address, and typed a message.

As soon as she hit Send, her phone rang.

"Hello?"

"Hamad?"

She ended the call without saying a word.

Kari packed up her things and slipped out of the office without Liz seeing her. She'd planned to do more research at home, but instead fell asleep in her clothes, her computer still on. As was becoming the norm, she woke to the sound of her phone going off. More and more, she found the details of her life funnelled through the small device. Notes, mes-

sages, alarms. It gave her both the ability to make and thwart contact depending on her mood.

The text was from the publisher.

"Up?"

Kari thumbed back a message that yes, she was up, and leaving shortly. She'd forgotten about the interview. Her phone chimed again almost immediately.

"Take a cab. Don't be late."

Kari dressed in a pair of jeans and a T-shirt. She pulled her hair back into a loose ponytail and brushed her teeth. The host of a morning radio show had scheduled her to speak briefly about an article she'd written on counterfeit transit tokens. For a short time after each article, she became a lay-expert in a series of niche topics.

Once she was ready, she called for a cab and went down to wait. The morning was still dark and the streets nearly empty except for several taxis speeding back and forth. Just as the car pulled up, Kari realized she didn't have that familiar weight in her back pocket. She ran back upstairs and grabbed her phone. Three new messages.

"There yet?"

Back at street level, out of breath and running late, she climbed into the cab. "The corner of Wellington and Front."

The cab driver nodded and pulled away from the curb with a lurch.

Kari shut her eyes and put her head back. She'd only slept a couple of hours. During the night, the woman looking for Hamad had called back three times. The calls had interrupted dreams of her mother, dreams she'd had as long as she could remember. It was never her actual mother—always someone she'd seen that day. A woman on a sidewalk, in the grocery store, at the office. The mothers in her dreams were never the same and varied in age. In one dream, Alana was a child and Kari stood with her at the edge of the river watching the ships go by. But when she woke, the sun burned off the details of the dream like fog.

The taxi pulled up to the corner of Wellington. The driver's eyes met hers in the rear-view mirror.

"Here you are."

Once inside the building, Kari took the elevator to the third floor and sat in the green room, which was little more than an alcove with a coat rack hanging in the corner. A lonely boom box on a table played the morning show. She tossed her bag onto the floor and sat down on the

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couch. As Kari waited, her hands nervously pressed between her thighs, she listened to the steady beat of footfalls moving up and down the hallway.

When it was nearly time for Kari to go on air, a producer came into the room and nodded. He escorted her into the studio where she took a seat outside the booth. Waiting. Then a wink and a nod by the host, Matt, a slight man in a slim-fitted dress shirt and jeans. It felt, as it always did, too sudden. She took her seat across from the host and put on the headphones. While she didn't need them, she preferred the physical reminder of what she was doing, that this was not just a conversation between two people.

Matt, smiling, nodded again. The interview was going to start. Kari nodded back and mouthed, "O.K.," but felt uncussed. All she could think about was her mother, the next person she would contact. How easy it would be if she could just ask a question of the listeners. At least one of them would know something, a detail. Or someone that would.

"So when you were researching your article, you met with some of the counterfeiters. Your piece says they acted no different from a family running a restaurant or small business. Can you tell us what they were like?"

"Well, I—," Kari started, but stopped. Her thoughts drifted. She took a breath and started again, trying to reel herself back. "Let me try that again." Her usual focus absent.

It wasn't until she was in a cab on her way home that she turned her phone back on. It trembled to life and alerted her to the half dozen texts from her publisher and that her voice mail held several new messages. She dialed her voice mail first. The first message was the old woman asking for Hamad, the familiar crackle of the line. In the background she could hear a child crying. The next two messages were from her father's V.O.N. nurse, telling Kari that she had to come home. "It's Lev."

Lev Pierre entered the world weighing less than a pair of shoes. At two pounds and two ounces, the nuns at the hospital predicted he wouldn't live another day and fluttered about his incubator while his parents prepared themselves

for the loss of their first born. In preparation for his impending death, a priest was brought in to baptize him. Each of the nuns on the floor gave Lev their first names as his middle names. Six months later, Lev Esther Matilda Marie Pearl Ann Pierre went home for the first time. When his mother laid him in his crib for the first time, he was still smaller than most newborns. She looked at her son, and in that moment, saw his future.

"You won't be lucky, but you'll have luck."

When Lev turned sixteen, he got his first tattoo. He'd skipped school using a poorly written note and knocked on the door of a small, dilapidated house on Prince Road.

A man with a long, grey beard and an orange bandana tied around his head answered the door.

"Come on in."

Lev nodded and followed the man down into the basement. A large biker flag was nailed to a rafter at the bottom of the stairs.

Chad pulled the curtain aside to let Lev into his basement studio.

"So what are we doing for you today?"

The studio took up half of the basement, the other half blocked by several shower curtains stapled together to form a massive wall of hard-water-stained plastic. There was a tool bench identical to the one Lev's father had at home, but this one housed tattooing materials instead of tools. Bottles of ink, bandages, transfer paper, and markers. The walls were papered with tattoo flash. Dagger-pierced hearts. Serpentine jaguars. Gold anchors. Women with tip-over, peekaboo breasts.

Chad himself was a piece of flash. Dressed in jean shorts cut off at the knees and a black T-shirt worn inside out, every visible part of his body was tattooed. Lev looked at the drawings, but snuck side-long glances at Chad. His chest felt tight, his face hot, but he couldn't leave.

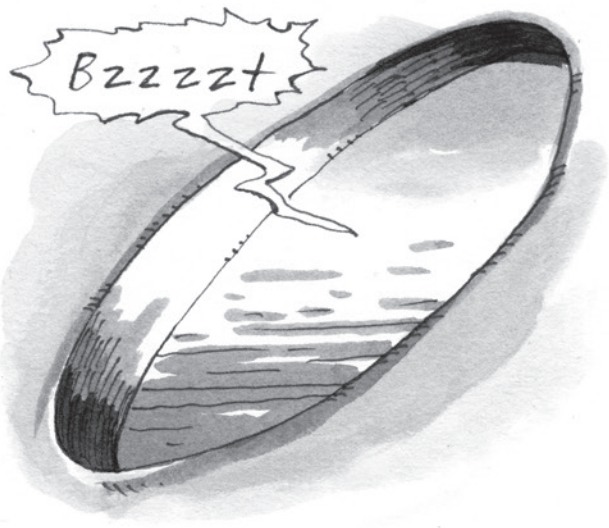
Noting Lev's fixation on his large neck tattoo of a black bear's face, Chad pointed at a snarling wolf's head on the wall. "Maybe this?"

The bear's mouth appeared to move whenever Chad talked. It made Lev feel dizzy. He pulled off his backpack and set it on the floor. He unzipped it and pulled out a horseshoe.

"This," he said. "Can you do it?"



RAINBOW TECHNICIANS BY LORENZ PETER

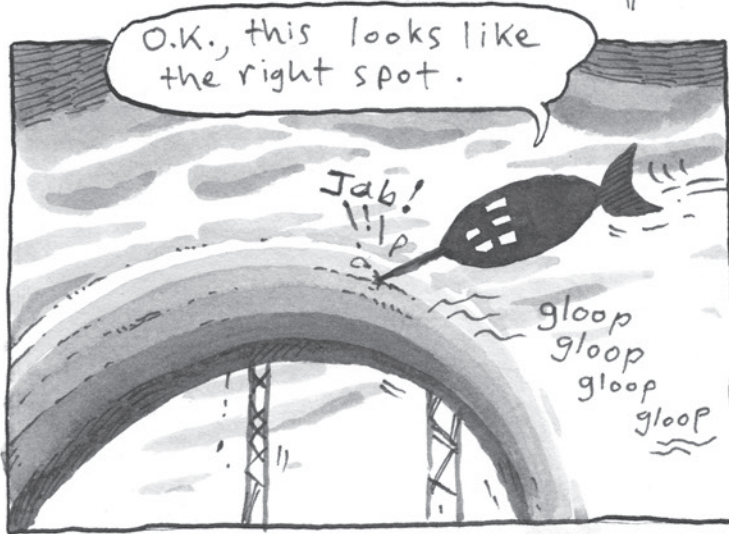




Control pylon to tech-pod, commence operations. Proceed to Arch-91 and apply glow-lustre fixative.



O.K., this looks like the right spot.



Initiative complete.



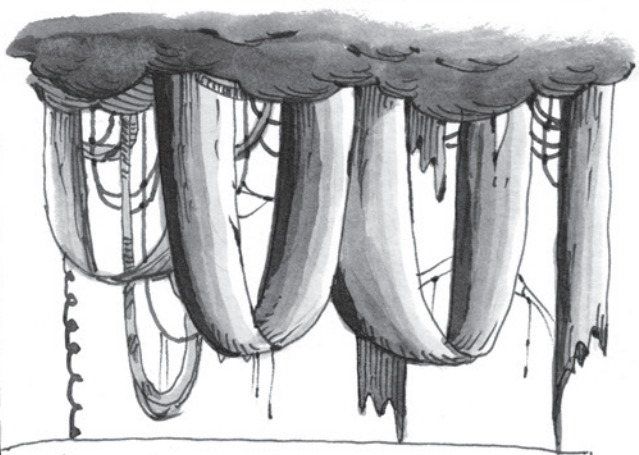
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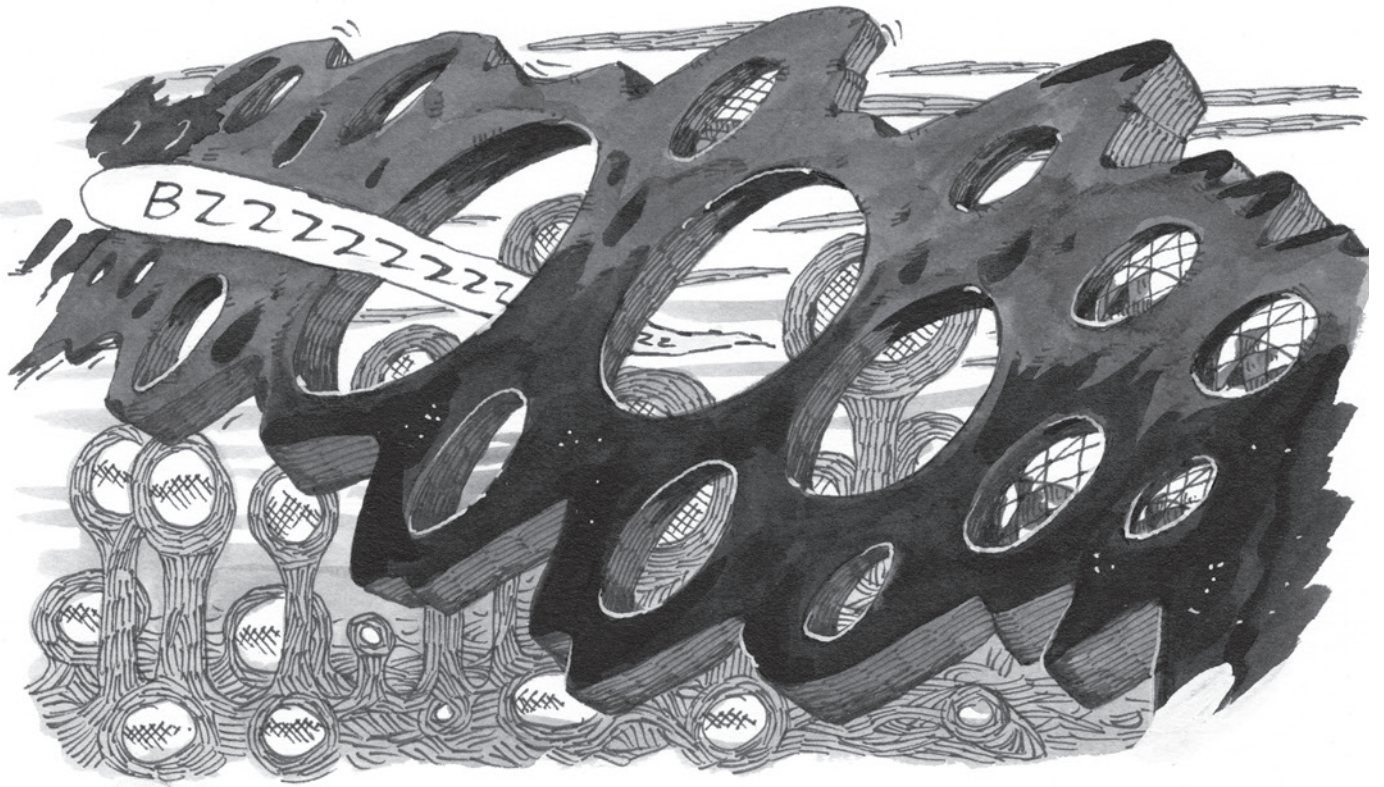


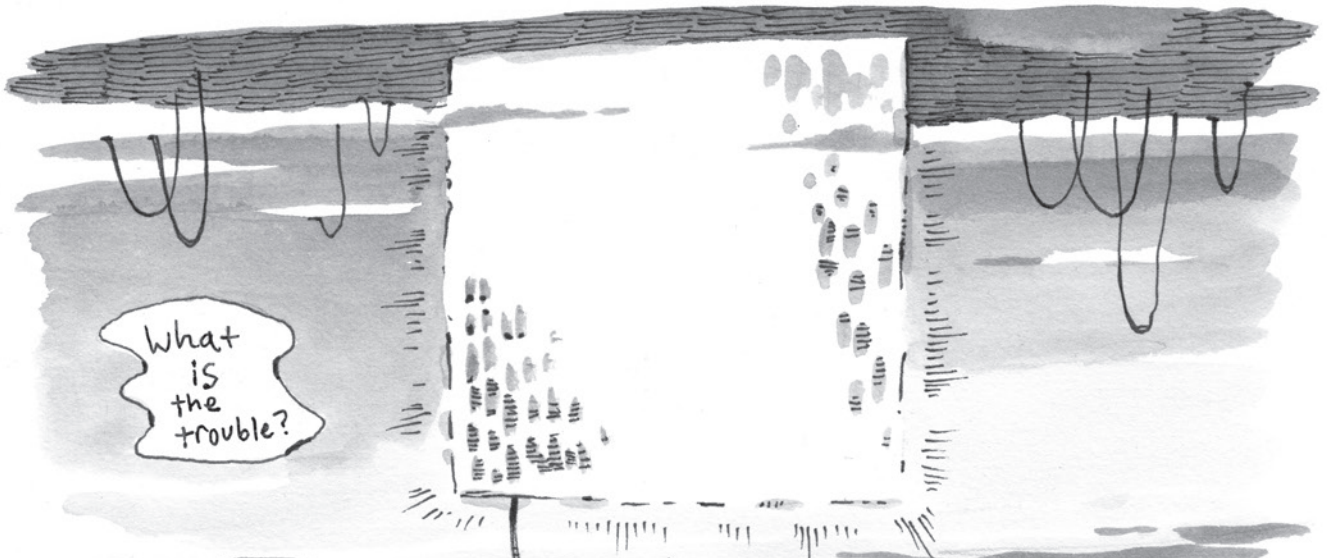
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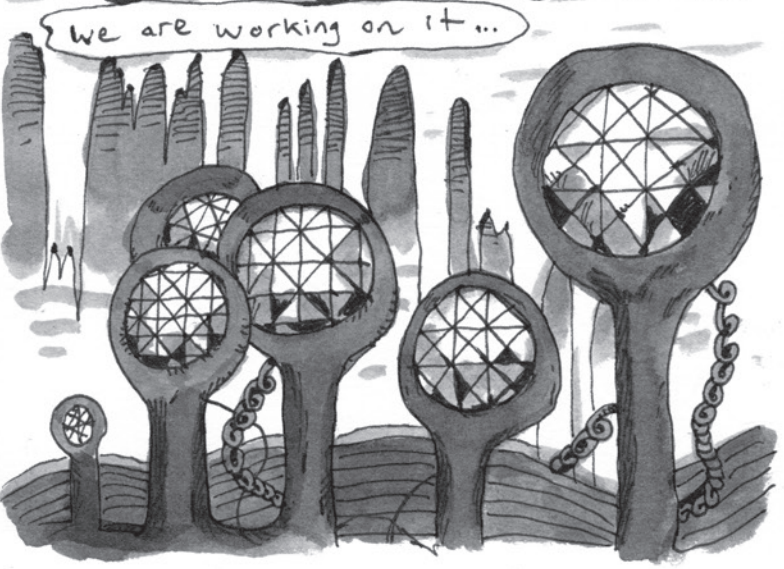
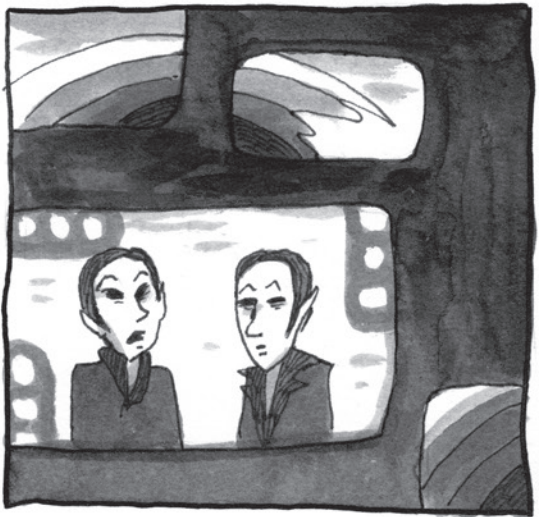
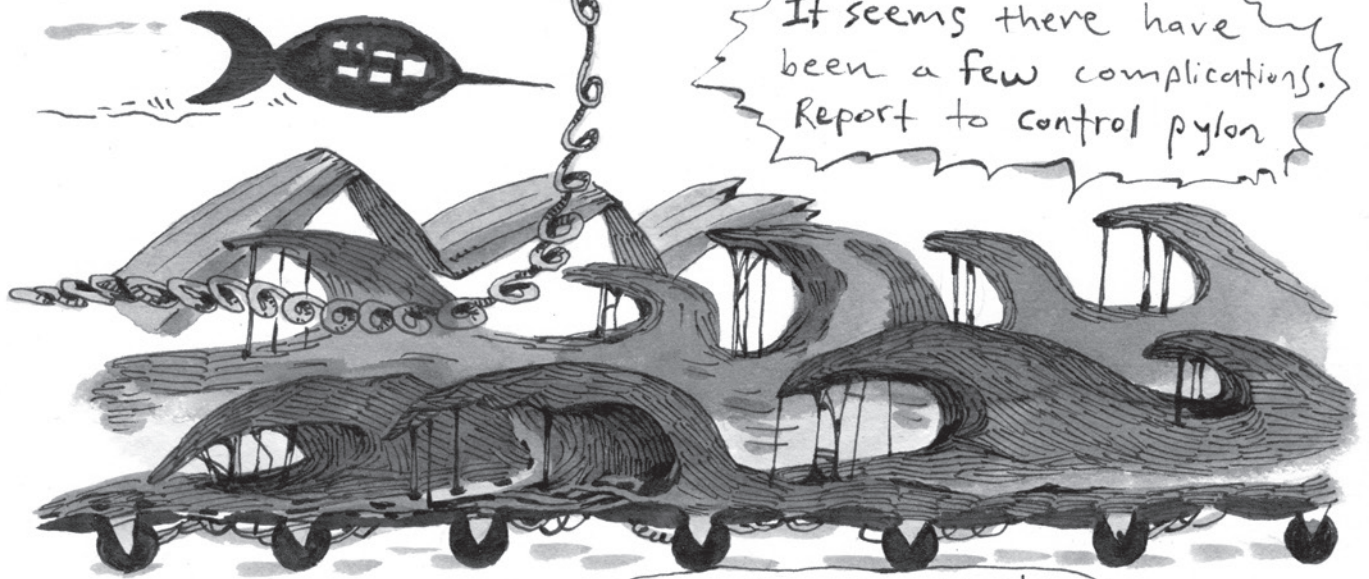
Every day!





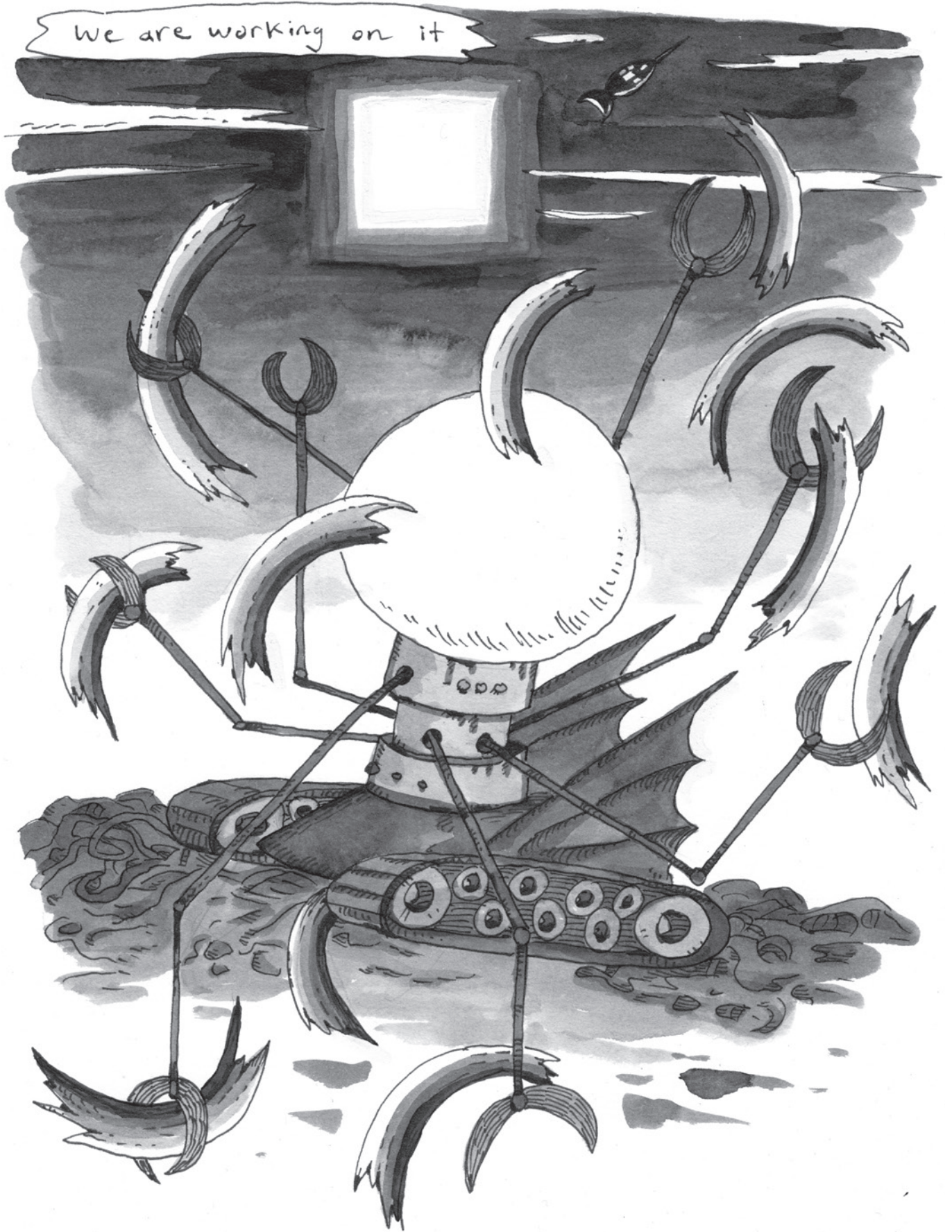
What is the trouble?

It seems there have been a few complications. Report to control pylon



We are working on it...

We are working on it



THE SPOTLIGHT

BLOOD THICKER THAN HONEY WATER

Saleema Nawaz expands the universe of two early creations in her debut novel, Bone and Bread.

BY JULIET WATERS

Montreal bagels have a mythology as deep as the wood-burning stoves they're cooked in. Some say they're impossible to replicate outside of those stoves. Others credit the honey-sweetened water they're made with. Either way, the best bagels are bought fresh from the factories in the city's Mile End neighbourhood. And you can't experience the right level of guilty pleasure if you're not at least subliminally aware of the boyish, mostly East Indian workers who spend day after day, hour after hour, like a brotherhood of bagel dwarves, pulling the golden rings from their fiery forge.

When Saleema Nawaz moved to Montreal, from Winnipeg, in 2005, her first apartment was next to the iconic Fairmount Bagel factory. "I couldn't have lived closer," she says. Still, Nawaz never spoke to the owners—with one exception: "I got mad because there was a dump truck that came to deliver their wood—it kept hitting my balcony and the whole building shook." As for the bagel boys, "I could have spied on them during their smoke breaks," she says. "But I'm too polite for that." Nawaz eventually moved from Mile End, but that didn't stop her from writing a story about two sisters, Beena and Sadhana, who do spy on the bagel boys, from the privileged position of their rooms above the factory owned by their Punjabi father. Not long after the father's death from a heart attack, the

factory is the target of anti-Semitic arson. The daughters are lucky to survive, having immunity to the smell of smoke after years of living over wood-burning ovens. Sadly, their luck doesn't hold, and they lose their eccentric, white, bohemian mother, who dies one day while choking on a chicken bone. The sisters inherit the factory, which is managed by a stern, emotionally distant uncle. As they come of age, spying becomes flirtation, with unfortunate consequences: both sisters miss their periods at the same time: Sadhana because she's anorexic, Beena because she's pregnant.

The story eventually was published as "Bloodlines" in *Mother Superior*, Nawaz's acclaimed 2008 debut collection. Another story from the book, "My Three Girls," won that year's Journey Prize, but Nawaz found herself returning to the story of the sisters. "I'd always had problems trying to contain them," she explains over coffee, close to where she works, as an administrative co-ordinator in McGill University's philosophy department. *Bone and Bread*, Nawaz's recently released first novel, reveals more about the sisters' early lives and follows them through adulthood, single motherhood, and chronic eating disorders.

The novel is a grim tale about doomed orphans, but there's also magic to their world, sparked by the imagination and curiosity of their mother. "There's a the-

ory," she tells them one night before either parent has died, "that the universe is getting bigger. It will keep expanding, like a huge loaf of bread rising, like a great fat belly, until there's nothing left to make it out of, no more heat. . . . There's also a theory that the universe is getting smaller. Millions of years from now it's going to start shrinking and heating, like fat and flesh melting into bone, because it is the destiny of things to come together." Science becomes prophecy as the sisters' comfortable universe explodes.

Nawaz admits that writing a story about two sisters may be something of a reparative fantasy. She was raised an only child, by her single mother, a Nova Scotia-born nursing assistant. So Nawaz knows something about reduced family life, its hungers and fierce intimacies. But with her new book and the year of literary festivals that go with it, plus her recent marriage to Derek Webster, the founding editor of *Maisonneuve* magazine, in most ways her life seems to be expanding unlike her creations. In one nice way, however, it's also circling back—the newlyweds recently bought an apartment, not more than a ten-minute walk from fresh bagels. This April, while waiting for their new home to be renovated, their rental apartment was destroyed by fire. Nawaz and her family escaped unharmed, proving to be even luckier than her characters, the immunity to the smell of smoke long since passed. ♪

PHOTOGRAPH BY THOMAS BLANCHARD



NO BLOOD

BY DAVID ROSS

Eli has never broken a bone. His spleen is intact, and infection eludes him. When he returns to his suburban hometown for a doctor's appointment, citing an absence of symptoms, what he thinks is: "I can't possibly have that great an immune system when my other, less corporeal defence mechanisms so often fail me." He feels unfairly privileged.

On the way to the doctor Eli visits his mother, who gives him the news that his childhood babysitter, Chrissy Parish, has been killed in a car accident. She is spare with details, but the story isn't in the details. Someone he knew as a child is now dead. She says she doesn't want to upset him—really this means she's the one who is upset, it being harder on the mothers when a child of the neighbourhood perishes, the sons and daughters failing to register much beyond swift shock—and changes the subject to Eli's older sister, Ames, who's gotten married and pregnant and has moved into a bungalow a block away. Talking about Ames makes Eli feel like a child. He's in his final semester of college and has found an apartment downtown, in a shabby building flanked by a Lebanese restaurant and a halfway house. His roommate, Lee, has a scar that runs diagonally over his rib cage and resembles a sliver of raw pork, and these days Eli's chief concern is whether to peek when Lee removes his shirt.

It's been years since Eli last saw his family doctor. Here is a man who hasn't seen his body since he sprouted chest hair. After a series of less intimate questions, the doctor asks his sexual orientation. Eli feels some abandon in telling a person however tenuously linked to his parents that he is a homosexual. It's a simple question, like "Do you smoke?" or "Have you ever had malaria?" If the doctor hadn't made it seem so banal Eli might have lied, as he does with others whose diagnoses he holds in lower regard. Instead the words glow on the computer monitor. "HOMOSEXUAL. FAMILY UNAWARE."

There is an air of clinical indifference.

Afterwards, in a different room, a nurse takes his blood. She asks him to spell his last name as she plunges the needle in. When she's done he stares at the tubes of maroon fluid on the desk in front of her. It's been a long time since he's seen his blood.

"Is that it?" he asks.

He wasn't expecting it to be so easy.

When Ames comes to the door she has sheets of bubble wrap in her fists from a crib assembled weeks ago, and for a moment she looks mildly frantic, as though the baby might arrive by ringing the doorbell. From the kitchen her husband, Murray, insists over the sound of ground beef browning in a frying pan that Eli stay for tacos.

They sit down in the living room, and Eli asks, "Remember Chrissy Parish?" The sizzling in the kitchen grows louder, like rain intensifying, and Ames twists her head to ask if everything is all right. Murray's reply is chopped into bits like green onion and they ignore him.

"The babysitter," Ames says. It's been over a decade, and many things have happened since then. Certainly Ames has changed. Eli is still reserved but he has developed a bigger laugh—a croak, something involuntary and unselfconscious. He tells Ames Chrissy Parish has been killed.

"Mom said she was driving to meet her boyfriend. Or maybe she was on her way back and he was with her. I don't think he died too, but maybe he was hurt?"

"Jesus," Ames says. "I think I know her boyfriend. I think she was dating my friend Marie's cousin."

Chrissy had not factored into their lives for years, but there were sporadic, unsolicited updates from their mother, who remained informed through various acquaintances. Eli didn't think about her often, but he knew, remotely, the things that had happened to her in the years since he'd left for school.

Chrissy was a girl who'd had an acceler-

ated adolescence and fizzled out by eighteen. She was tall and lean and could have been a ballerina or a track-and-field star if someone had pushed her toward it before she cultivated less constructive interests, like carving initials into her flesh or eschewing underwear at the spirit assembly. Eli's parents had not selected her for her virtues as a caretaker. She was chosen because the Parishes lived on their block and had a cottage on the same lake, and because Chrissy's father had once helped patch a hole in the bottom of their old fibreglass boat.

The first time Chrissy came over she was dressed in a brown bikini and denim cutoff shorts. She parked her ten-speed against the slatted fence and picked up a lounge chair that hadn't been moved in years, leaving four lime-green squares in the grass where the legs had stood. She dragged the chair to the farthest corner of the backyard and settled into it. Eli and Ames swam in the pool all afternoon, and Chrissy didn't say a word. She rubbed oil on her legs and belly. Eli didn't realize until much later that she'd chosen the only spot in the backyard where their next-door neighbour, a bachelor in his forties, could watch her.

"Chrissy taught me how to have sex with a boy," Ames says. "She had all these condoms in her purse. She gave me a handful even though I was probably only eleven. I sat in my room that night and blew a few of them up like balloons. It was the best thing I could think to do with them."

Eli isn't used to hearing Ames talk about sex. Bearing a child, he suspects, has made her frank about it—*there's evidence now*. Murray calls out from the kitchen that supper is almost ready.

"That was when she was dating Derek Carefoot," Ames continues. "He would come over to see her and not even look at me. Smelling like unwashed hair and putting his hands all over Chrissy's stomach. Me and my friends used to think he was so hot."



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WINDOWS ARE THE OPPOSITE OF MIRRORS

I'm organizing a field trip to the Museum of Windows of the World. I hear that if you look through them you will see what they saw when they were part of a wall, the shimmering lens that records a building's vista, every bright sky and bird strike they looked out on. In addition, the Optical wing features frames presented as if in their natural settings, when they were part of glasses, when they were part of a face—mounted on wax heads made from the death masks of miniature dead moons. There is a witness encased in the silica. The scientists we have hired, extracting the translucent cinema caught in the invisible, all that they've learned is that this process can not be reproduced in mirrors. Mirrors hold our facial refuse tight, unwilling to let go. Like metal in the microwave their elements are resistant to our impatience.

—JAMES LINDSAY

"I remember him." Eli says. In junior high Derek had gone around selling posters of sports cars for a school fundraiser. Eli, despite having no interest in cars, had begged his father for ten dollars to buy a poster of a white Corvette set against an improbable purple lightning storm. Now the idea of it makes him cringe, the image with time seeming more obscene, an artifact of his confused lust.

"I was so curious. She must have known. I wanted every detail of every date she went on, and I listened for little clues that she was talking about Derek. She described all the glamorous, sexual things she'd done and they came out like insults, like she was saying, "These are things you could never do."

"I still can't believe it," Eli says.

Ames shakes her head.

Murray comes out and switches the lights on. It's turned from evening to night without Eli and Ames registering the change. "Tacos," he says, and kisses Ames's head.

On the day they went into the woods—a memory Eli summons now, on the train back into the city—Chrissy had been watching over Eli and his friend Julian, who was more fanatical about catching frogs and whose crush on Chrissy, despite his being nine years old, seemed more

legitimate. Chrissy had led them along a narrow path, swatting fondling branches out of the way, betraying a reflex she relied on regularly. It was late afternoon by the time they reached the middle of the woods. The sky dimmed and the mosquitoes descended. Eli's mother always said, with a note of pride, that the mosquitoes liked his blood, that he'd inherited this



curse from her. When he saw that the mosquitoes did not discriminate he felt strangely less special.

They made it to the creek at the edge of the property and lingered without purpose, surveying fossilized soda cans and the jagged tendons of a flayed umbrella. Chrissy straddled a log. Eli and Julian clapped mosquitoes off their arms.

"It's your clothes," Chrissy said.

It wasn't unusual for her mood to change abruptly, for irritation to rise up without warning. She seemed suddenly to feel burdened by their presence.

"They're attracted to the smell of your

clothes," she said again. "If you want to get rid of them you have to take everything off and get into the creek."

At first they refused. Eli didn't want to be naked—not in front of Chrissy, not in front of Julian. But Chrissy stood on the log and said it again, grinning now, ordering them to strip as though they were her prisoners. It was hard to resist someone like Chrissy—someone cool and frightening and sexual—telling them what to do, and being kids they changed their minds fluidly. They left their clothes in the dirt and ran into the creek laughing. It was shallow but they crouched, wet and hairless as frogs.

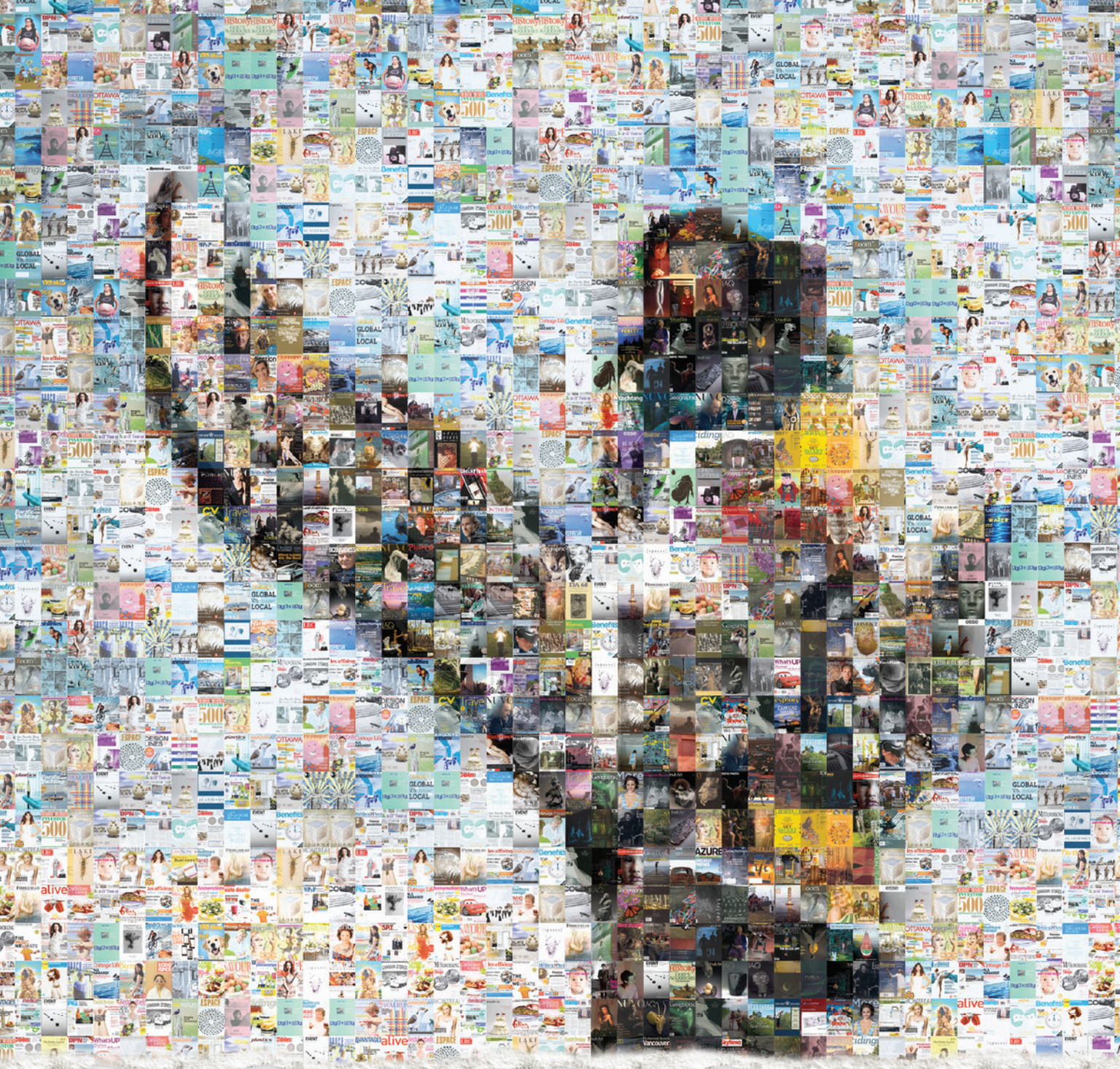
The memory has become vague over time. It isn't one Eli recalls often, and he's lost touch with Julian over the years. But when he does remember, due to some arbitrary trigger, he gets a chill. He'd been naked in a creek with his best friend, at nine. He can feel Chrissy watching him, her mouth open slightly in the slack, drugged expression she often wore, her attention so intense it was as though she was whispering in his ear.

When Eli returns to the city Lee isn't home. Bored, he lights an old half-joint and eats a pear. He remembers the bandage from the blood test, near the crook of his elbow, and peels it off with difficulty, leaving a gummy rectangular border on his skin. There's only a tiny red dot. He can't even bruise.

"Someone I knew as a child is now dead," he says aloud, to no one.

He sees Lee's T-shirt on the floor. Pale blue, cotton. Probably he'd taken it off, on his way to the shower or out for a run. Eli looks around nervously before picking it up and holding it to his face, sniffing in a hungry, primal way. The shirt smells faintly of body odour. He sniffs again and again until his heart is beating violently. Soon he's pacing the length of the apartment, a hand against the hot skin at his clavicle. He thinks, "Lee will come home and know what I've done." He thinks about leaving the apartment. In this momentary panic he puts on shoes and a coat, and, some minutes later, finds himself on the elevator floor with an erection. A woman his mother's age is struggling to lift him up by the armpits.

"Uh-uh. You're coming with me," the



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woman says when Eli tries, feebly, to push the button for his floor. There's concern in her voice, though she's a stranger to him. Possibly he's shared this very elevator with her before, attempting, as was his custom, to make himself invisible among neighbours past a certain age, for whom this apartment building was a permanent residence instead of a temporary student dwelling. She has the characteristic spectral presence. Her hair is gold and grey, her face gaunt, weary: Chrissy, had she survived the accident and made it to her forties. She has a plastic bag of groceries that's slick with condensation. Carton of milk, can of tuna.

"You took quite a spill," she says in a folksy way as they get off on her floor. "Had me spooked."

Eli leans against her for stability, reminding himself of his erection, while the woman rummages through her purse for keys. He wonders what her name is and imagines it's Dawn; it's Dawn who has rescued him.

He feels an unexpected intimacy crossing the threshold to her apartment—a feeling he is someplace he shouldn't be. It's an austere, tawny-coloured square, a macramé plant hanger drooping in one corner, and in another, a litter box for an invisible cat. Porcelain tchotchkes are gathered indiscriminately on a shelf opposite the wall where she's hung a mouse pad like it's a piece of art. Eli locates the sofa, where he unselfconsciously splays himself and watches the numbers of her digital clock jitter. Dawn disappears into her mostly brown kitchenette, returning with a mug of cloudy tap water.

"I don't get many visitors," she says, setting the mug down and ferrying clutter off in various directions. She disappears again and returns in a pillaged housecoat.

"I think I had an anxiety attack," Eli says.

"Drink," she says. She's lost the urgency she had in the elevator and has assumed the tone of someone who's invited him up for a nightcap. If she has any trepidation about bringing a strange man into her home, it doesn't show. She seems placid, not all there. Oblivious to the potential danger.

"I couldn't breathe," he continues. "Nothing like this has ever happened to me before."

The sentence lingers with him. He feels a compulsion to be honest, to pile his private humiliations onto the heap.

"You poor thing," she says, reaching over to move a strand of hair out of his face. It's a gesture of intimacy that comes easily to her, as though she's been storing it up in her solitude.

She's sitting on the coffee table, housecoat split open at her knees, exposing legs white as bone. Not Chrissy after all: no scars. Then she looks at his body in a way that fills him with a sudden modesty, and he brings his legs together, shifting onto his side.

"I was your age once," she says.

Eli doesn't say anything. He tenses as she runs her hand along his thigh, her touch feathery and tentative.

"Is this O.K.?" she asks.

"I fainted," he says, as if just realizing it.

"Why don't you come to bed with me?" she asks—a simple, gentle question, like a doctor asking, "Can you take a deep breath?" So transparent he almost has

to give it due consideration.

"I'm gay," Eli tells her.

"That's O.K.," she says.

She loosens the belt of her housecoat, allowing the fabric to slip off her shoulder and expose one breast. "You could just lie with me," she says.

The night begins to feel like a dream, a story he'll tell someone years from now—a lover, maybe, a man he hasn't met yet. With the effects of the pot fading Eli understands more clearly the steps that led him to where he is now. Events alike in their absence of climax. The patterns of a ghost.

"I should go," he says. "My roommate will be wondering where I am."

"Stay," she says. "Please. You need to rest."

Her words take on the brittle, singsong quality of someone on the verge of tears.

"I'll be O.K.," he says, borrowing her premise: concern for his health and not his sexuality. He tries not to meet her gaze, to return their interaction to the status quo of past elevator rides. It's in vain: probably they will see each other again. He might smile vaguely, acknowledge her with a nod. Maybe she won't remember this night in the way he will. Maybe she won't recognize him at all. ♪



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B-ROLL BURDEN

Who should be responsible for our celluloid civic history?

BY JAY SOMERSET

The first thing you notice is the vastness: about five thousand round canisters of sixteen-millimetre film, each one about an inch thick and ranging from seven to fifteen inches in diameter, stacked on seven-foot-high metal racks. Housed in the basement of a furniture shop in Toronto's Junction neighbourhood, the collection takes up an entire room, about five hundred square feet, floor to ceiling. Standing here, dwarfed by the shelving and under dim bulbs powered by snaking extension cords, gives the feeling of having entered a secret vault; a library of dusty and forgotten oddities.

"We don't know the majority of these titles," says Colin Geddes, a programmer with the Toronto International Film Festival, who, along with the film historian and journalist Eric Veillette, now owns what once was the Toronto Reference Library's entire collection of sixteen-millimetre film. "We can hazard a guess on some titles, and we know there are lots of National Film Board and CBC films, but sixty per cent is who knows what." *The Land of the Disappearing Buddha, Rivers of Sand, Waking Up to Rape*—you won't find these titles on Netflix.

In 2010, Geddes learned through a friend that the library was determined to find a new home for its collection. York and the University of Toronto took away a few cans, but the majority remained up for grabs. Geddes quickly notified Veillette, with whom he shares a downtown office space. Almost immediately, Veillette set up a meeting with one of the chief librarians. "I was inquiring more as a reporter, never thinking I'd end up with all of it," Veillette says. Seeing the sheer scope of what was on offer, he immediately switched into salesman mode. "I grabbed a few cans and ran back to the office and said to Colin, 'This is insane. We need to get this.'"

Largely due to Veillette's involvement with the Revue Cinema in Roncesvalles Village, where he puts on regular screenings of silent films, and Geddes' own his-

tory screening movies and his involvement with TIFF, the librarian agreed to give them the collection, on three conditions: they had to take it all, they could only move it after hours, and they had to have it removed in less than two weeks.

Geddes and Veillette were able to secure about thirty people and a van, enough to move everything over two long nights. Along with the thousands of canisters, they also walked away with an assortment of peripheral materials: racking, stickers, push carts, card catalogue, pamphlets, and two film and sound editing machines, each about the size of a commercial photocopier. Too much to house in their small office, Veillette called his boss at the furniture store where he works weekends and convinced him to let them store it in a basement room. He agreed, with the understanding that it was temporary, and if and when Veillette quit, the collection had to go. "Turnover at the store was brisk, and he thought we'd be out of there in a few months," says Veillette. "That was more than two years ago."

There was a time, decades ago, when the Toronto Reference Library, like most other libraries, did brisk business loaning sixteen-millimetre films. Movies were borrowed for birthday parties and backyard screenings, for clubs and educational purposes. If you were in public school prior to the early nineteen-eighties, you likely remember the sight of a projector being wheeled into the classroom, the whirl of the reel, the faint smell of burning dust. "It always felt special," says Geddes, who grew up in Camden East, just outside of Kingston, Ontario. "Then came video, and suddenly the screen size went from something large enough to be projected onto a wall to the tiny spectrum of a TV screen."

The advent of the VCR did push sixteen millimetre from the public sphere, and the reels, like vinyl records and other antiquated technologies, became the stuff

of collectors. Now, at any given time, there are scores of sixteen-millimetre cans being bought and sold on-line, much of it derived from discarded or sold-off library collections. While most cans are virtually worthless—the film equivalent of dollar-bin LPs—some can fetch hundreds of dollars. Their value derives mainly from rarity and condition. "Most film fades or turns red and loses its tonal quality," says Geddes. "You'll see listings for films, and the seller writes, 'Has a nice vinegar smell.' Um, if your film smells like fish and chips, it means it's mouldy and you need to remove it from your collection immediately, otherwise it'll contaminate everything around it."

Because he still doesn't fully know the scope or value of the collection, Geddes has been spending evenings and weekends underground, cataloguing. "Eric keeps cherry-picking the good ones, but we need to put everything in order first, so we know what we want to keep and what we can shed," says Geddes. On one particular night, Geddes has been at it for two hours, dictating each can title into his laptop. "*The Insect Challenge*. New line. *The Jews of Winnipeg*. New line. *Can A Guy Say No*. New line. *The Man From Nowhere*. New line. *House of Flame*. New line. That's the thing—*House of Flame*, what the hell is that? There's not even a year on this one." Pausing, he opens up a large hardcover book listing each title, another artifact attached to the collection. "O.K., here it is: *House of Flame*, nineteen minutes. 'The spirit of a maiden who drowned 500 years ago asks a traveller to help release her from purgatory. . . . Animated puppets. . . . Japan.' No year."

While the N.F.B. and CBC titles most likely exist elsewhere or have been digitized (making them worthless in terms of preservation), many likely exist only in this collection—toss them, and they would be lost to history.

"There's this common misconception that most film has been digitized and put on-line," says Veillette. This is especially



Veillette and Geddes in their Spadina office.

true of local, or what Veillette calls “B-roll” cans: footage shot by amateurs or cameramen working for nearby TV stations, home movies, lingering reels of tape that show a time and place that might be long forgotten.

“We’ve got film from 1954 showing a tickertape parade after Marilyn Bell became the first person to swim across Lake Ontario,” says Veillette. “Most of this stuff doesn’t even have a label or name attached to it. We’ve uncovered footage from 1929 taken during the opening of the Royal York.” There’s also a documentary from the early eighties, called *Spadina*, which shows the street before it became Chinatown. But it’s the slow and seemingly mundane stuff that Veillette most appreciates. “We’ve got this one can, likely from the early fifties, showing people shopping near Queen and Bay. You get to see all these details, inside store windows, what people are wearing, cars going by—there’s even a part where

[the country music singer] Hank Snow gets out of a Cadillac and walks into the Casino theatre.”

As libraries culled their collections, much of this type of film was lost. Some, like the Windsor Public Library, had the foresight to preserve films chronicling local history. But not Toronto. “Our audio-visual history has been poorly preserved,” says Veillette. “We uncovered a T.T.C. propaganda film from the late nineteen-forties, shot before the construction of the subway system. It’s incredible. You see these streetcars barreling down Yonge Street, dropping people off at Eaton’s.” Knowing they were sitting on something special, Veillette and Geddes called the Toronto Transit Commission to let them know about the film. “They were saying, ‘No, this doesn’t exist. It’s not real.’ But it is. We were projecting it on our office wall.

“Part of the reason we took on this collection was so we could show these films to

people in the city,” says Veillette, who, like Geddes, believes the act of projection is itself a form of preservation. “This is valuable shit, and when it’s gone, it’s gone.”

As every collector knows, there comes a point when you have to decide what’s worth keeping, and what can be culled. After holding the film collection for nearly three years, the shine of ownership has been replaced by something akin to burden. “We rescued it because we knew the collection was special, irreplaceable,” says Veillette. “But it’s just too big. I walk into the room and I’m overwhelmed. It’s like going from having a stack of forty-fives to owning an entire record store.”

In early March of this year, Veillette got word from his boss at the furniture store that the film collection was no longer welcome, and had to be gone in a month. Harsh and alarming, the news was actually something Veillette welcomed. “I’ve wanted to quit that job for a year, but couldn’t because of the film,” he says. “It’s gotten to the point where I’d be willing to give away ninety-five per cent of what we’ve got.” But this is a shared collection, a partnership, and while Geddes is also keen to shave it down, he’s not quite as eager to slash.

“It would be great to create some sort of lending library or co-op where we could lend the films to people,” says Geddes. But that, he concedes, would be a full-time job and require them to find a new storage space equal in size. “I’ve been called a hoarder, I can admit it,” says Geddes, who, in addition to the collection he shares with Veillette, also owns a large cache of Hong Kong films and posters, which he stores in multiple storage spaces and sometimes sells on eBay. “I’ve got to be careful. I’ve seen too many people collapse under the weight of their collections.”

More than a month has passed since Veillette was told to move the stacks of film cannisters, with no repercussions. And so he continues to work, not because he needs the cash, but because he needs the space. Neither he nor Geddes seems quite ready to part with it. And so the cataloguing continues.

“How can you get rid of what you don’t know you have?” Geddes says. “A lot of this stuff is just educational garbage. Here’s one: *The Heritage of Slavery*. Let’s put on a 1968 documentary on slavery.

“Actually, I would like to see that.” ☞

THE CANADIAN GROTESQUE

BY MICHELLE WINTERS

Another commercial came on and Pam writhed in her seat, desperate for the man in the ravine. She had seen too much of him recently and likely was testing the limits of Alan's credulousness, but he showed no sign of having caught on. Besides, she had already set a date to break it off with the man, a fact that only intensified her yearning for him as the woman on TV lathered her already clean hair. Pam was pleased with her self-discipline in imposing her own deadline and felt she had earned the delicious fervor of these final visits. After next week, she would forget all about the man in the ravine and return her attention to making a baby with Alan.

With all the logistical and emotional intricacies of the liaison, Pam couldn't have anticipated, as it drew to a close, that one of the hardest things to give up would be the lying.

She could easily have passed off her new-found passion for evening walks as a developing interest in her health, but Alan would have insisted on joining her, because he cared. Instead, she decided to employ a device she never had previously thought had any use at all: John Spade.

Spade was a halfwit toady whose position at the firm where she worked was locked in by his cocaine fraternity with the C.E.O. back in the eighties, a decade in which Spade still resided. John Spade still smoked. He wore shiny suits and a crust of hair gel in the bristles crowning the head that had never completed a thought. Nothing in life seemed to have touched him. Pam pictured his insides as smooth and empty as an eggshell. She was convinced he could neither read nor write and that all he did at work was sit at his desk, paralyzed by the certainty he would one day be exposed as an illiterate fraud. Working with him so enraged Pam that whenever she was forced to, she would come home at night to Alan and treat him

to a spitting, snarling tirade that increased in pitch and vehemence until she eventually retreated in exhaustion. There was no chance of Alan's accompanying her so long as she was supposed to be working with John Spade.

And so, Pam had created a fiction about a stressful new project she'd been assigned at work with Spade that sent her home every night in a dead-on imitation of her blindest rage, a dissemblance in which she had discovered an unexpected joy. She was developing a sense of narrative nuance and realism, and found she was able to improvise endless new John Spade stories based on the copious material she possessed. It felt like art.

The man in the ravine quietly had been teaching Pam about her interior topography, the legend to her map. When she was with him all her cargo made sense. She could access her inner detritus, pick it up and roll it between her fingers, rub it on her face and kiss it. More importantly, she could show it to another person. She wished she could share it with Alan too, considering how much of it was wrapped up with him. She wished she could tell him how much he was part of her, how he would always complete her, but never could quite tell him why.

The first time she laid eyes on Alan, playing darts at the pub, Pam was overwhelmed with need. Tall, hirsute, disproportionately long and barrel-chested, with short legs, flat feet, and hands that were a little too small and tapered for his size, he filled one of her essential romantic requirements. When he finally became hers, as they walked among the luminaries dotting a path up the courtyard of an inn on Vancouver Island, she gripped his arm and whispered "Mine, mine, mine . . ." into his lapel.

Pam was not without a conscience, and it did give her the occasional tug. But

when she felt the creep of remorse, she would dig around inside and pick out this: One time, Alan's childhood friend Cherie, and her husband, were visiting from Peace River, and Pam and Alan invited them over for a barbecue. At one point, they were standing on the lawn discussing the recent sex scandal of a professional golfer who had been prodigiously cheating on his wife for years without her having the remotest clue, when Alan joked: "Guy's got balls." It didn't count as a joke, really, and Alan may or may not have intended it as one, but nonetheless, Cherie threw back her head and laughed. Pam watched in amazement until Cherie recovered and punctuated the outburst with a warm, lingering smile in Alan's direction. Pam hung on to this one.

She had never betrayed Alan before, nor desired anything outside their marriage. She coveted him. As part of a game they would play, he would loom hairily over her as he approached the bed and croon, at her insistence, "Here it comes . . . the Canadian Grotesque . . . you can't get enough." And she couldn't. Alan was like a beast right out of a story. A story about Alberta. Pam hadn't known she could want anything more until the day she stumbled upon the man in the ravine.

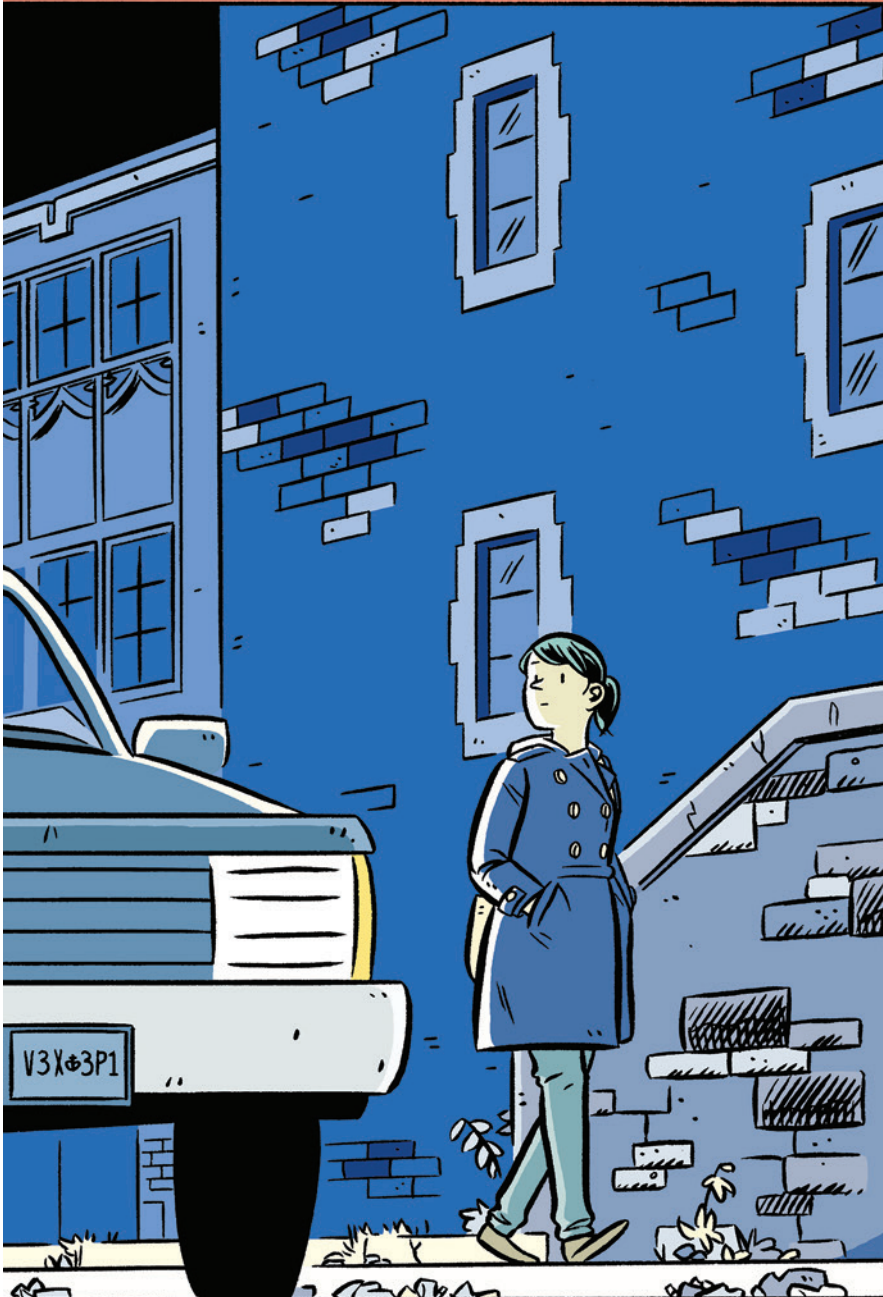
She had taken the afternoon off work after a root canal; no sense in going back to the office woozy. As the effect of the local anesthetic waned, the throbbing pain in her face was hitting her like seasickness. From the bus stop, it was a fifteen-minute walk home and Pam wasn't sure she could make it without throwing up. The ravine cut a path straight through her route, cutting the walk in two. It was just after noon and the bad kids would still be at school. Normal people, good people, didn't take the shortcut through the ravine. Pam didn't know their reasons, but she knew her

ILLUSTRATION BY MATTHEW DALEY



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own, and it was those kids. They hung around down there doing God knows what. Drugs, she supposed. Whatever it was, they frightened her, even though they were really just kids, not even teenagers. They couldn't have been older than eight. It was only after she was half-way down the staircase of roots leading into the ravine that she heard their voices (which she instinctively knew to be the voices of bad kids) and realized that, of course they were already down here; bad kids didn't go to school. She considered climbing straight back up and taking the long way round, but was seized by a wave of nausea and realized how exposed she now was to the kids, who hadn't yet noticed her because they were huddled around something they were setting on fire. It would be safer to skirt along the shelf running under the lip of grass and dirt and emerge unseen on the other side. But this meant she would have to pass the paprika-coloured house. Generally assumed to be either abandoned or haunted, it would have been an eyesore and a threat to property value had it been visible from the street, or had anyone been willing to admit it was even there. But no one talked about it. At all. Not a word. It was deep in the ravine, down on that shelf, covered from sight by the roots of the trees from the street above. Still, it was creepy and you'd think people would have something to say about it, given how much they had to say about everyone else's house. It was as though acknowledging the paprika-coloured house meant admitting to something . . . personal. Instead, it just created a warm mist of embarrassment wafting from beneath the town.

Pam took quick, shallow breaths as she approached from the trees, looking for a safe place to be sick. But as the shadow of the house's battered eaves fell over her shoulders, her equilibrium returned.

The foundation of the house was sliding right down the cliff. In fact, the bottom step of the front porch jutted out just beyond the shelf. It looked as though it could come careening down the incline at any minute. Pam climbed gingerly over the side of the banister and was navigating the holes and weak boards of the porch when she looked up and saw him in the front window. Sudden, close, and large, he stood staring softly at her, his big hands hanging limply at his sides. The bad kids ceased to exist as she fell

THE PERFECT VICTIM

You tell the poem: Do what I fucking say
Or I'm really going to have to hurt you,
Like how Cito's Blue Jays spanked the Yankees
7-6 at the SkyDome this afternoon.

It won't listen. It breaks down and cries,
Dries up, does its best Catholic shy girl bit,
And you're left holding your Bic, unsurprised
the muse has declined your romantic bait.

It won't love you. It won't say, "I love you."
So draw the blinds, unplug the telephone,
Howl away the Easter sun above you,
And see if it really likes being alone.

Every poem wants to be excused.
You follow it into the bathroom
Where your advances are always refused.
Kill your babies, discard what's bothersome—

The old masters knew it: just crack the thing
With a few hard stanzas and it'll break
Like a compliant egg, spilling its everything.
What the poem refuses the poet takes.

—MICHAEL LISTA

deeper into his face and a set of eyes that told her they understood; they understood her and loved every shred; they told her there was a place here, with him, in this house, for the thing that made her eat crushed grapes off the produce department floor.

Pam looked over at Alan on his end of the sectional, his double chin adorably foreshortened. He'd wanted babies from her since the day they met. They had put it off for years because of money, but she also was secretly worried she lacked Alan's noble zeal to patiently love something that would demand her attention at all times. The man in the ravine had changed that too. Now that she knew what lurked inside her, she knew what would emerge. And she couldn't wait.

But for this instant, the John Spade part of her boiled up with a frothy delight. As it did, her eyes rolled, her fingers tingled. She took one massive inhale.

"Tss," she hissed as the woman in the commercial shook out her hair like a silky auburn sheet.

Alan stiffened.

She grabbed her own hair at the temples, pulling and growling.

"God, I'm sorry. Just . . . working with him . . ."

Alan dropped his head.

"Jesus, you know what he did today?

God, he's . . . So, I have to pass all the reports on this project up through him for approval—as if he can even read them. So he's looking at the Management Exceptions report, and because he's a moron, and because it makes him feel important and appear functionally literate, he feels he has to make some changes before he approves—even if it's all fine, which it always is. And because he's a simpleton and can't read, the only thing that rings a bell for him on the whole report is the company name, which he can only identify because it has the logo next to it. So this is what he decides he wants changed. He wants it moved to the middle of the page. *The middle of the page.* Who publishes a report with the logo centered? And why?



Why? It's a template. It's the template we've been using for, like, ten years. Why even have a template if nimrods like him can come along and capriciously change it? A template is a template. But he wouldn't know. If you asked him, he wouldn't be able to define a template for you. He'd have to work it out phonetically, and I can guarantee he'd tell you it had something to do with dishes. It's just a meaningless word like the rest of them. And Burnside will O.K. his change, because of all the blow they used to do together at the disco, and because Burnside doesn't understand templates either, or he's just too rich to care."

From the corner of her eye she watched Alan's fingers splay rigidly across the corduroy sofa pillow.

"But then also, the name. We're 'Strategy Cascade, Inc.' It's our legal name. It's on all our letterhead and documentation. It's on the side of the building. *He* suggests—because he thinks it sounds *slicker*—that we take out the 'Inc.' in the name. Our company name. Because what? We're selling beer? It's a report. It's not selling anything. It doesn't need to be slick. He is the *stupidest* . . ."

Pam reached out and gripped Alan's hand where it lay, and he jumped.

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm gonna . . . I'm sorry . . .," she muttered, shaking her head and palpating her brow all the way to the front door.

Blood rushed between her ears as she laced up her running shoes. This one had been exceptional. It was loosely based on

an idiotic change Spade had in fact asked her to make to an inter-office memo about a year ago, so it had a satisfying verisimilitude. She could practically smell the smoke and hair gel.

Pam pictured Alan and Cherie, their deck chairs a little too close, talking as

though they'd known each other forever (which, in fact, they had).

She pushed the image from her mind and allowed a shudder of pleasure to run through her body as she imagined the moment when, free from all she was endlessly encouraged to want, the man in the ravine would reach for her hand across his soot-smear table, pull it slowly toward his mouth, select a finger, and with a rasp, insert it between his desiccated lips. ♪



THE GALLERY

MAD MEN WITHOUT A CAUSE

A hundred and thirty-five years of Acta Victoriana covers provide a time capsule of undergraduate intellectual self-branding.

How do you illustrate a literary magazine?

It's a curious question, and back in 1991, I faced it while serving as the editor of *Acta Victoriana*, the student literary journal of Victoria University, at the University of Toronto. Like the many editors before me, I gathered together a stack of what I hoped was impressive student writing, had it typeset and proofread, and then wondered, "What the heck should I put on the cover?"

The cover of a literary journal is a strange and awkward affair. The contents of each issue are often a bazaar of frankly uneven goods, so there's no single image that could possibly encapsulate them all.

Instead, campus lit-mag editors usually strain to produce a cover that will capture, in some vague sense, the visual Zeitgeist of the age: trends in graphic design and art, interesting things they've seen in other magazines and journals, all munged up with an inchoate sense of what looks "collegiate." It's sort of like *Mad Men*, except with absolutely no idea what you're doing; and because editors change every year, there's certainly no continuity.

The upshot is that lit-mag covers form a sort of ongoing Rorschach blot of undergraduate intellectual self-branding—and I mean that in a good way. *Acta* is Canada's longest-running literary magazine, turning a hundred and thirty-five

this year. Perusing old *Acta* covers, you can see the eras shift before your eyes. In 1898, it's a black-robed homage to Canada's anxious emulation of British college life. By 1935, Modernism takes hold, and it's a stark slash of woodcut, all sharp edges and void. By 1956, the groovy logo looks like something you'd have seen in a Pan Am marketing campaign. Then the sixties arrive and it's trippy, hand-drawn fonts redolent of Grateful Dead posters, or pre-Instagrammatic pictures of hippie students in a field.

They're by turns striking and charming, and occasionally quite beautiful: the face of student literature, one year at a time.

—CLIVE THOMPSON

ACTA VICTORIANA



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VOL. XXXVII.

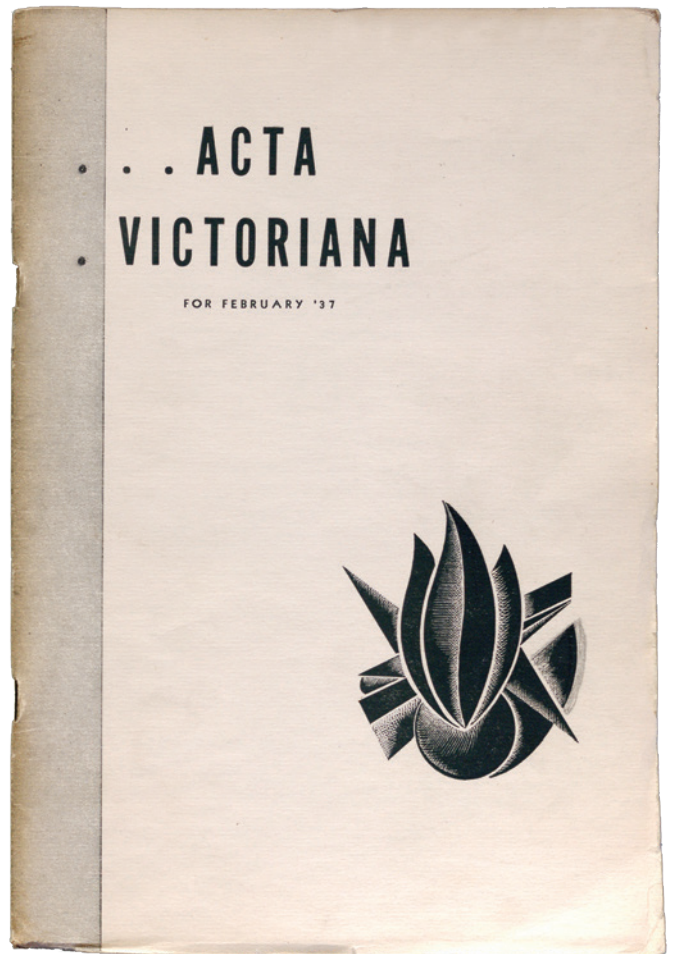
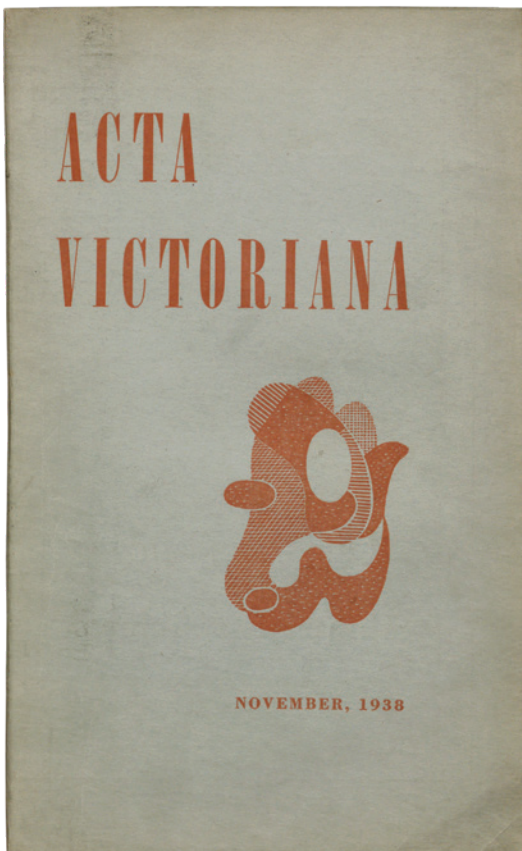
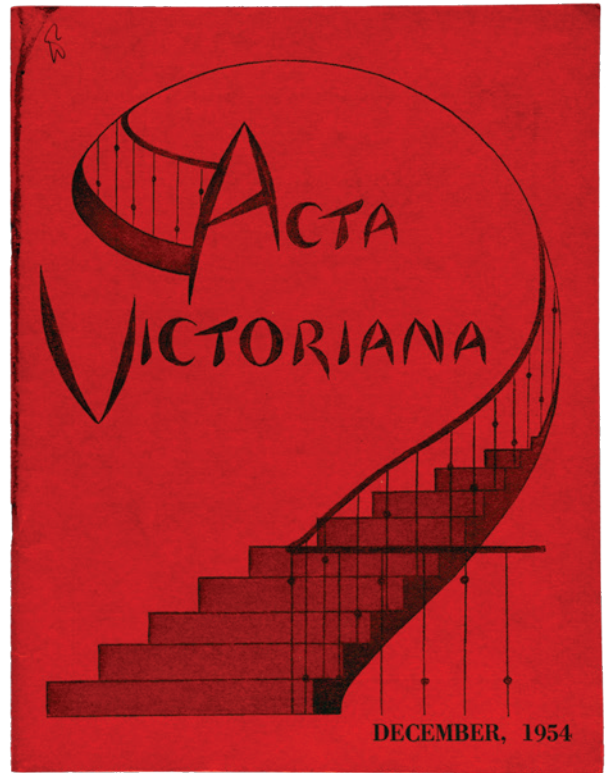
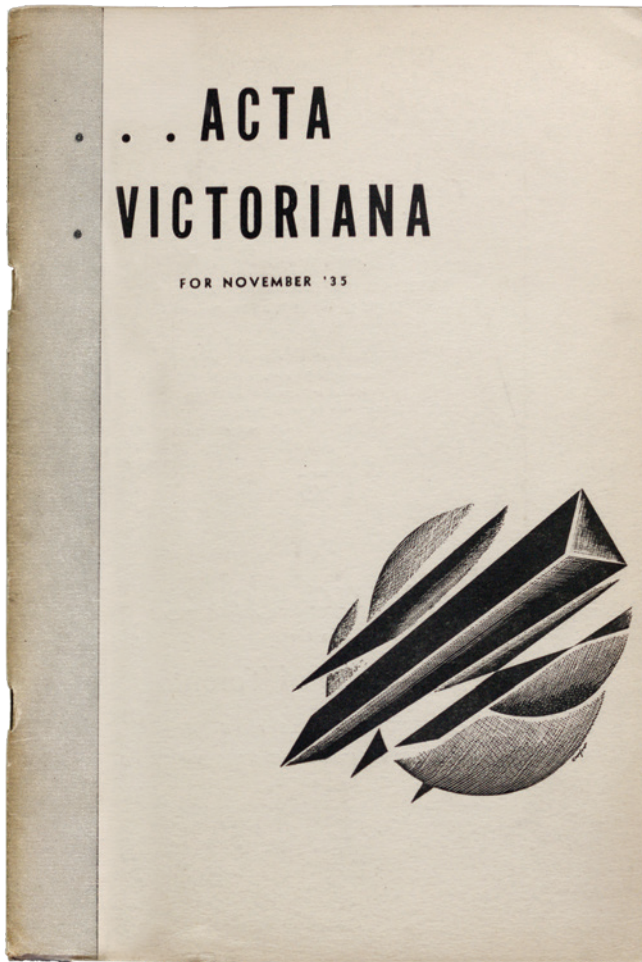
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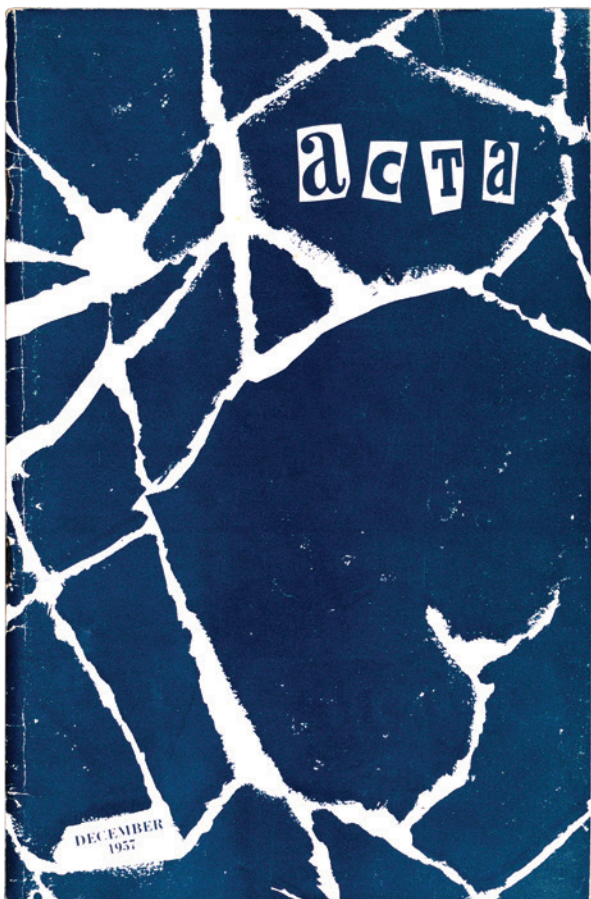
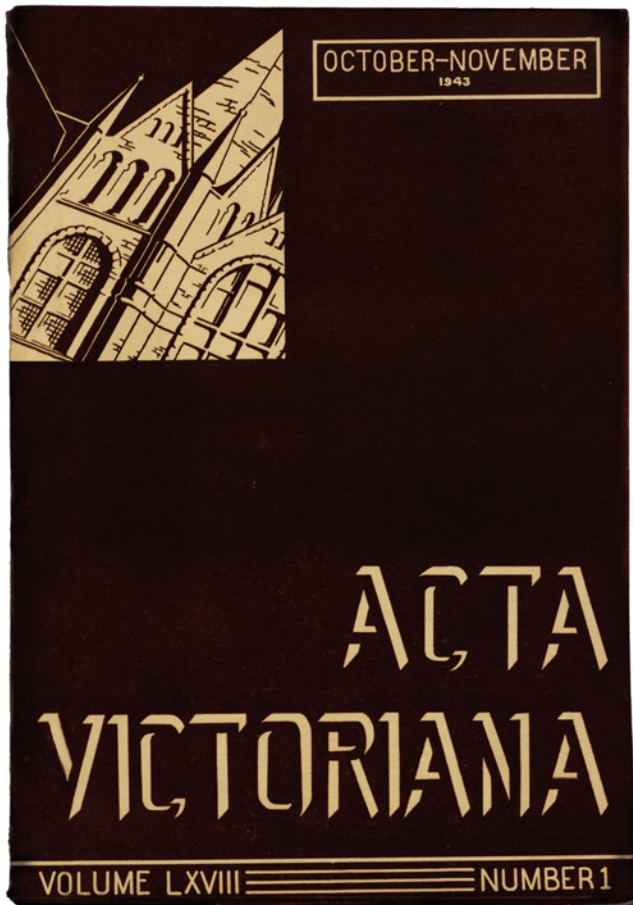
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BOOK ROOM PRINT





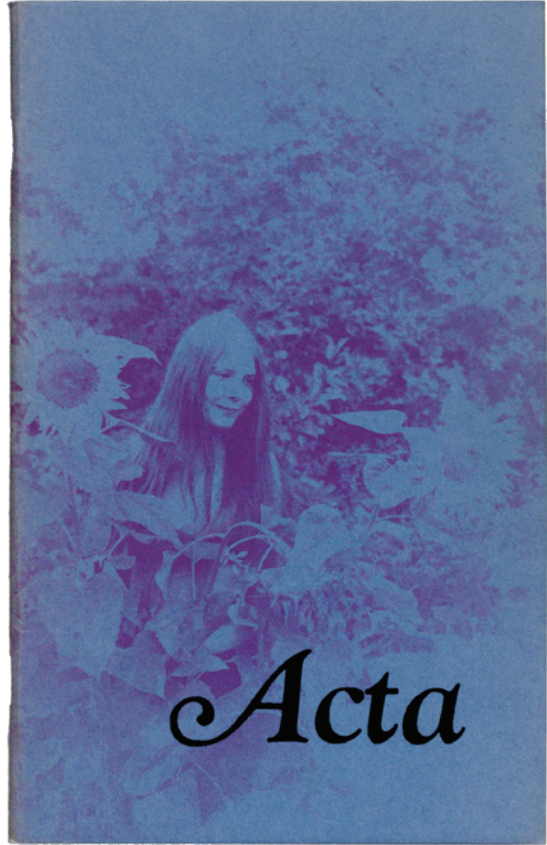
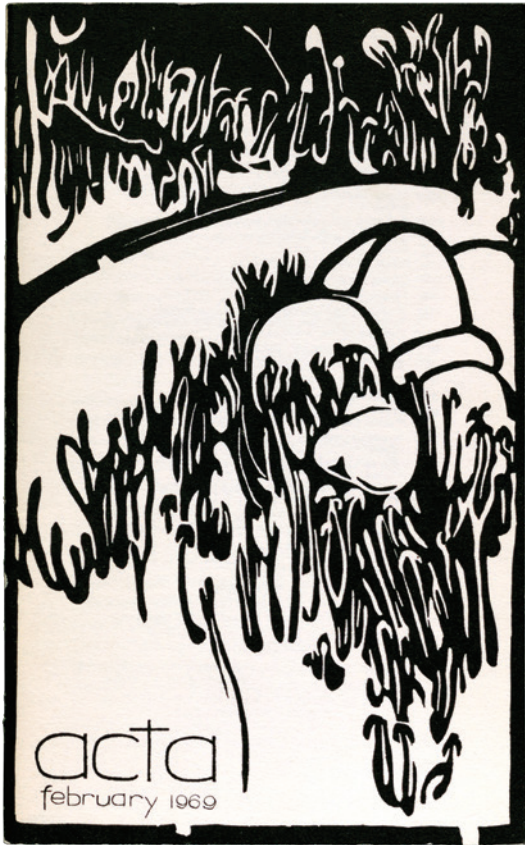


ACTA
VICTORIANA
WAR SUPPLEMENT





February 1968



FOUR MINUTES

BY ANDREW MACDONALD

My twin sister is wearing a lace bra and lace panties that don't match. She expects me to know which one will turn on her boyfriend. She believes a combination of two separate styles is something he will find enticing.

"I don't know, they all look the same," I say, which is true. Underwear is a language I've never been able to speak properly.

Women in the underwear store are looking at us. A hefty employee occasionally comes over and asks if we need help. Zelda says no, the woman's opinion isn't the opinion she wants. It's my opinion she wants.

Or, actually, my ex-girlfriend's opinion.

"What would Emily want?" Zelda asks.

She comes outside, to the area between the change rooms and the store proper, wearing the mismatched underwear and tapping a kind of Morse code on her stomach.

This is common Zelda behaviour. Nudity as a concept is less confusing to her than the necessity of always being dressed.

"Put some clothes on, please," I say. "Or at least go over there so nobody else can see you."

She rests her head against the wall and makes a burbling sound.

"Tell me what Emily would wear."

I lie. I tell her Emily never wore underwear. The truth is, I don't remember what Emily wore, and this disturbs me. This fact disturbs me more than discussing what underwear my sister is going to wear when she loses her virginity. The imminent event is marked on the calendar beside the fridge.

Emily and Zelda always got along. Emily took Zelda for gelato and tried to teach her to read Russian, even though Zelda really can't even read English past a fourth grade level. They used to practice their signatures together, filling up page after page in the living room of the apartment. While Zelda's signature is a free-range farm of looping parabolas, Emily's has the tightness of a compressed

accordion. According to an Internet Web site on graphology, Emily's small signature means she has good career aims and doesn't waste time or effort. Zelda's means she cannot face criticism.

"I like Emily," Zelda used to announce.

"Emily likes Zelda," Emily would say, making a mallet out of her hand and bonking it on Zelda's skull in a Three Stooges routine they'd worked out.

When Emily left me for her old college roommate's brother, Zelda asked why Emily didn't love me anymore.

"I don't know," I said. "People fall out of love sometimes."

"Are you going to fall out of loving me?" Zelda asked.

We were watching a movie about penguins and for the first time since the baby penguins head-butted their way out of their shells she looked away from the TV and fixed her big baby blues on me.

"No, Zee," I said, pausing the penguin movie so she wouldn't miss a second of the birds sliding down ice dunes on their stomachs. "No, the love we have is a forever thing."

Culpability is a difficult concept to process. Zelda has drawn pictures of it. In some of them me-as-fetus wears a cowboy hat and lassos her-as-fetus around the neck. According to the possibly inaccurate studies easily accessed on public library databases, thirty seconds of restricted oxygen can cause six per cent brain damage. While we were born, my umbilical cord choked her for four minutes.

The disability pension Zelda gets is enough to cover the apartment, while my job at the call centre, part-time for the time being, pays enough for our expenses. How Zelda saved up the money for her fancy underwear and her condoms and makeup is something I can't understand.

"Show me how to use the rubber thing again," Zelda says.

"I've already showed you three times," I say.

Then she frowns and flops on the couch, turning her back to me. I can tell she's pouting, making a show of it. We don't have any more bananas, so I use a carrot. She chastises me about using my teeth to open to condom wrapper.

"You said never to do that, since it could break the rubber thing."

"Good," I say, fumbling with the carrot. "You've passed test number one."

While putting the condom on the carrot, pinching the top like they say in the pamphlets you get at Planned Parenthood, the end of the carrot accidentally pokes through the rubber. Zelda laughs, I laugh, and suddenly the world isn't a place where terrible things arrive in waves. It's a nice, wholesome place where vegetables are responsible enough to use protection.

In the car Zelda wants me to tell her about my first time again. She thinks it was with Emily because I didn't have the heart to tell her it was with a person I didn't know, someone I met at a bar when I first came of age. Zelda believes people mate for life, just like swans.

"Did it hurt?" she asks.

Zelda's like baroque painters in this regard, obsessed with the human capacity for suffering. The drawings she makes suggests losing virginity is right up there with waterboarding on the Harvard pain scale. The faces of her mating stick-creatures are corkscrews of agony. They end up on the fridge with the rest of her crayoned artwork.

Once, when I was drunk, I told her the details and now I can't leave anything out or she'll get mad. Sex was so new to me I actually tore some of the skin on myself and bled everywhere. I wonder if there's a particular recliner in hell for brothers who tell their sisters things like this on the night they're supposed to lose their virginity.

"Do you think Marxy is like that?" Zelda asks. She sounds out every word.

"Circumcised? Was Dad circumcised?"
"Unknown to both questions."



I turn on the radio, hoping Zelda gets that I don't want to talk any more.

She walked in on Emily and me having sex once. At that particular point in our relationship, things had only just started to acquire the mist native to polluted relationships. The time we spent together was like a pre-op phase that preceded to the white picket fence. We talked often of down payments for condominiums in those days, of future advancements made in the name of our relationship. I'd found a ring made of endlessly folded Canadian silver topped with a speck of diamond that was delicate seeming but sturdy, an understated geological wonder that reminded me of Emily. I'd squirrelled away almost eight grand to pay for it.

We had been watching a documentary, Emily and I. I'd put Zelda to bed and could tell from Emily's eyes that amorous activity was on the horizon. She'd been inspired partly by the beauty of a pair of snails mating on the *Planet Earth* DVD, the one about rainforests. The things oozed out of their shells, turning an almost crystal blue as they hung from a tree on an ever-stretching teardrop of goo and coiled around each other until the body of one was imperceptible from that of the other.

"Shit, that's romantic," I said.

One had to acknowledge it: for invertebrates with underdeveloped nervous systems, they sure knew how to fornicate.

"It's been a bit," Emily said, lifting up my shirt and making a pink mess of my navel with her fingernails. "I think it's time we got like the snails and synthesize."

In long-term relationships, what excites must be cherished, be the muse wing tipped garden clogs or gobs of mating snails. We went at it with a kind of brutality, a violence of entwining limbs. Normally we used rubbers. This round we didn't seem to have time. Our lovemaking became a thing so grand neither of us noticed Zelda awestruck under the door's arch. She caught my eyes and waved.

"Howdy," she announced, snapping me out of rhythm.

"What did we say about fucking knocking?" I shouted. I threw a shoe that damaged her cornea so severely we had to take her to the hospital.

"What were you thinking?" Emily kept asking.

They were both in the back seat of the car, Emily cooing soothingly in my sister's ear. Every so often she dabbed at a mark I'd left on her neck, a cross-hatch of

BONNIE AND CLYDE

The summer my parents destroyed everything we pretended to be a normal family one last time watched *Bonnie and Clyde* at the repertory cinema then chugged home half asleep in Dad's rusty blue car divided and silent, to find a skinny couple looting our house

We entered to the rustle of cans
clatter of drawers being pulled out
They'd come for me, I realized
someone heard the call
of my bang bang heart!

Father didn't notice my reaction
he never did, just grabbed my bantam bat
from the front hall and crept back outside
prowled through the darkness
while my mother, a tight-lipped firecracker
herded the pair into his backyard trap

It was late, but I could barely stand still
knowing Parker and Barrow had no reason to be there
except for me, they would find nothing of value
in our skeleton house, we were poor hippies—
didn't own a television set, jewels, gold bars, cash
Just a broken cassette player that ate every tape

Dad swooped in, brandishing the bat
cornering them from behind like that outlaw Jesse James
forcing Clyde to grab some rusty fishing knife
that had scaled a thousand fish
but couldn't slice bread

blood vessels popped under the skin by my sucking lips.

I told her I didn't know, even though I did know: even then, I could feel her turning to air. If pressed to triangulate the exact moment Emily stopped loving me, all signs pointed here.

Occasionally Emily still calls to ask how Zelda is doing. The other day we had a conversation about Zelda and the Marxy kid making their own two-backed beast. My reasoning is this: if Emily thinks the sex shouldn't happen, she can tell Zelda and nobody will have to go through with anything.

"I don't follow your lingo, Scotty. Is two-backed beast an arts-and-crafts activity?"

Zelda liked making things out of other people's waste. She spent every Tuesday at the local community centre, with people a third her age, surrounded by mountains of multicoloured construc-

tion paper spaghetti.

I still fall into thinking of her as a child, something Emily endlessly chastised me about.

"She has a right to be sexually active. It's going to happen whether you consent or not. At least this way you'll be there."

"Like those needle containers in public libraries," I say.

"Come again?"

The public library downtown has this fluorescent container in one of its bathroom stalls, a hazardous waste sticker stamped on the side. The idea is, if you're up to any intravenous activities, say plucking your arm with a heroin needle, you can dispose of whatever's punctured your veins in these safety buckets.

Emily makes a chortling spit sound into the phone.

"It's for diabetics, fool."

"Or addicts. Have you ever seen a diabetic shooting insulin in the library? Not I.

I wanted to tell them I'd come willingly
they could take me now and leave unharmed
I stepped out from around Mother's legs
certain our kitchen held no mysteries
and saw it through their eyes:
a vault filled with treasure

Tell them why you picked our home! I hollered
but this woman was too plump to be Bonnie
and her man was too short for Clyde
She was already blasting our plaster ceiling
with a sawed-off shotgun and my parents flattened to the floor
I sighed. The couple fled into the night

Confused, I ran for a window
pressed my nose to the glass
praying they would come back for me
hoping to catch one more glimpse of my future
I waited all night, listening
to the wily soundtrack of police sirens

Dad was red-faced and shaking:
They could have grabbed you, held me hostage!
Why aren't you more like your brother
who understands how to behave and hid in the closet!
Our home bore those gunshots for a lifetime
After Dad left I understood that change
only happens when the head lets go

Hardly anyone answers the beat
of my heart's drum any more

—EMILY POHL-WEARY

But I've seen junkies wiping their asses
with encyclopedia pages when a fresh roll
of toilet paper is in the next stall. It's the
idea that you should facilitate something
potentially problematic, say a drop box
for dirty drug needles, which could just
increase the problem and encourage
more junkies to do more drugs. On the
other hand, the library ostensibly would
be a safer space, since there ostensibly
would be less needles lying around for
toddlers to swallow and the like."

"Ostensibly."

"Correct."

At this point I feel partially redeemed
for being disgusting. Emily repeating my
words back to me had always signified a
solidarity of opinion, especially when it
came to words that she didn't use much
herself in her everyday life. In the two
years we were together, plus the year of
courting, plus the four months since
we'd parted ways, I have never heard her

say "ostensibly."

"I love you still," I say.

"It's not even remotely the same
thing," Emily says. "If you're arguing
that they're the same thing, what you're
doing is saying that Zelda having a sex life
equals junkies shooting up in public and
leaving their diseased fucking needles
everywhere. Which is a complete and
utter bullshit thing to say about your sister,
Scott."

She stops.

"And don't ever say that again."

"About Zelda?"

"About loving me still. Now I have to
go. It's your decision as to what to do. But
if she calls me and asks me to help her, I
will help her. Sex can actually be beautiful
and an expression of love."

Emily hangs up. In between punching
the wall and regretting punching the
wall, I notice Zelda has been doodling
pictures of naked four-limbed upright

creatures that could, ostensibly, be taken
for humans engaged in various gravity-
defying acts of sex.

"Emily says hi," I say, stepping over the
pornography in search of a Corona. "And
F.Y.I.: it doesn't look like that. Just so you
know. It looks like this." I make my fingers
into a gun and blow my own brains
out. Zelda laughs and mimics the move-
ment before falling on her back. The gun
in her hand becomes a fist she starts lick-
ing. It's a joke Emily taught her, a parody
of an old me who used to overrate the use
of the tongue while kissing.

I crack open my Corona on the edge of
the dining room table, thwacking off a
small spear of wood. Zelda has stopped
laughing.

"We all miss Emily," she says to one of
her drawings, this one incomplete—a pair
of headless, legless torsos sporting capes
and breasts.

The clerk at the motel swivels around
in his chair lazily. His fingers shine
with the dust of potently flavoured Cheez
Doodles, the sheen glowing when he licks
each pad individually. His name tag is
something incomprehensible, either Pat
or Tat or Clat.

"Is there some kind of convention?"
the clerk asks, clacking on the keyboard
with his orange fingers.

"Pardon?"

"Of them."

He points his pen at Zelda, who's
found an itch on herself that seems to
travel from her ear to her neck to her
shoulder. She walks around the lobby,
examining the framed black and white
photographic reproductions of Paris in
the 1930s. Her dress already has a mys-
tery stain on her ribs.

"If you are going to say 'retards,' or
gesture verbally in that direction, I think
we're going to have a problem here."

The clerk shrugs, possibly stoned, pos-
sibly still thinking of saying 'retard' but
not prepared to deal with the repercus-
sions of doing so.

"I was going to say people dressed up
for prom."

"Good." I hand him my credit card.
"That's the correct answer."

We make our way down the motel's L-
shaped corridor that winds around what
could be a leisure area, the concrete pool
cracked and empty, not much more than
a gouge, discarded swimming parapher-
nalia scattered around the pool's gums.

We find our room on the second floor, right across from where Zelda's boyfriend and his mother are staying. After setting up basecamp in our room, we cross the hall and Zelda slaps at the door.

Marxy participates in Zelda's biweekly social group for younger adults with developmental issues. He is taller than I remember, hair Brylcreemed to the left in a side part that belongs in the late fifties. Unlike Zelda, who could "pass" unless you really gave her a hard stare, Marxy wears his condition irrefutably, just enough features exaggerated to tip you off. Zelda had introduced us a few times when I picked her up from her group. Still, he's cleaned up nice and makes a passable Casanova, holding flowers out to Zelda when he opens the door.

"Well howdy, partner," I say, standing awkwardly to the side as Zelda kisses him in a way that approximates the techniques she's been practicing on her fist. Normally I would jimmy myself between them, a human prophylactic. A voice eerily similar to Emily's echoes in my brain, saying, What's the point? In two-hours' time, things will have reached critical mass between them.

The woman I assume to be Marxy's mother appears behind him, nudging past them both to shake my hand.

"You must be Scotty."

She introduces herself as Pearl. Her fingers are clammy in my hands, though warm to the touch. From the way she wrote her E-mails I thought she might have been a teenager; no grown woman I've met indulges in that many emoticons and that many apostrophe-less contractions. But she's not a teenager. The best way to describe her would be: Woman, fully grown and languid. I have trouble imagining Marxy being brewed in her uterus.

From an objective standpoint, factoring in age, Pearl is not bad looking. Her hair is blond and she has fairly high cheekbones, which men are supposed to find appealing. A part of me is glad I'm taller than she is. The bow on her bra, the fringe of which I can see from under my sunglasses, is a different kind of fabric than the rest of the bra, some kind of fluffy stuff knitted together.

Marxy and Zelda quit kissing and we all migrate into the hotel room.

"Drinks, anyone?" Pearl asks, lifting a bottle of Jack Daniel's. Marxy raises his

hand, so Zelda raises her hand. Soon I'm the only one not raising a hand.

"Maybe we should save that for later," I suggest, even though the fog of a good buzz might make the situation seem more reasonable. Zelda has never been drunk, as far as I know. She turns and pulls on the skin of my elbow, tugging the excess skin taut. With her other hand she holds Marxy's hand.

"Please?" she asks.

"One nip or two can't hurt," Pearl says, already pouring out four plastic cups.

Irrespective of one's gender, erections are a difficult thing to avoid staring at. As Marxy walks around, his penis announces itself against the fabric of his suit pants.

"I think it's cute," Pearl says. "It shows he's passionate, in love with your sister."

The television is tuned to one of those adult music channels that plays songs that are the audio equivalent of what lava lamps are to the eye.

Marxy and Zelda have started dancing, vaguely approximating a box step. Neither of them knows much how to lead. As they turn, Marxy's erection moves like the dial of a compass.

"Zelda's sweet," Pearl says, flopping



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STEREOPHONIC

Underground, current transforms, rounds
into a measured throb of chords. Take
“Train in Vain,” broadcast without the sound
of Mick’s guitar—all low-end, the quake
of a track revived in a basement
when we were seventeen, lit and flip-
ping though a freight of *Hustlers*, intent
on Johnny Holmes’s moustached lip.
We would look, and look again: making
sure we recognized our meager sex
as human, eager for the birth
of Spector’s wall after countless takes.
Our hope knew his soundtrack’s reflex,
ranged like static in bandwidths of surf.

—JIM JOHNSTONE

down on the bed next to me. She kicks off her heels and starts massaging one of her calves. “She’s a few I.Q. points over Marxy, but on the whole I think they’re pretty compatible.”

I swish the whiskey between my teeth and swallow the burning.

“Seems that way.”

“She didn’t get enough oxygen, that right? Some umbilical cord issue?”

I nod.

“It wrapped around her neck.”

She puts back her drink and pours another few fingers into her cup. The song shifts to a slow, grinding song that confuses Marxy and Zelda. He wants to keep the old pace, while she’s already adjusting to the change in rhythm. Eventually they synchronize, bumping against each other like billiard balls.

The deal was I’d pay for the room, while Pearl and I sit tight, make pleasantries, and wait for nature to run its course.

“Zelda and Scott,” Pearl says. She’s got a deck of cards and does a professional job of shuffling them, cards spitting from one pile to the other in a pink-checkered blur. “Why does that sound familiar?”

“Ever read *Gatsby*?”

“Not since high school.”

“F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote it. The love interest in it’s based on his wife, Zelda.”

“Named after a married couple?”

Pearl deals out a handful of cards, sculpting them into two piles. I’m not sure what we’re playing but fan the cards out

anyway. Pearl flips over a card from the deck and snaps it on the bed between us.

Without meaning to, I start thinking about how it might feel to wakeboard my tongue down the contours of her chest. In the months since Emily parachuted into someone else’s life I’d only made it with one other woman, as easy to recollect now as a window smudge. We’d been drunk and flailing, the last two people at a Martini bar with a jukebox that played only Brit pop. The number she left sat unnoticed in my pants for days. By the time I’d remembered it, the washing machine had smelted it to gummy paste.

“I’m drunk,” I say, putting my cards down, slurping the booze through the filter of my teeth.

“Figured as much. You’ve been putting those back like you mean it.”

Instead of crumpling, the plastic cup splits into the shards when I give it a squeeze.

“How do you suppose they’re doing over there?”

“Fine, I imagine. I gave Marxy a two-hour lecture on how to treat a lady, how to put a condom on, how not to neglect the sweet spots on a lady’s body.”

“Jesus.”

I stand up and scan the room for another plastic cup. Pearl leans back, using her arms to buttress herself. A slug of a vein pokes up from under her skin, right near the elbow.

“One of the things I learned straight off, having someone like Marxy, someone who’ll never be like other people, is that

you need to accept the reality while doing your best to improve things. Do I think it’s completely normal for a mother to be teaching her son how to do finger tricks to please a woman? The pope would not approve. But if I don’t show him, who will? He can’t even spell his own name right more than thirty per cent of the time.”

The glow coming from the half-lit sign outside the motel hits Pearl’s face in a strange way, and for a minute she could be made of freshly blown glass. In that glow I reach out for her thigh. We both seem surprised when I make contact.

“We should probably put the brakes on,” she says. “I told my therapist I’d stop doing this kind of thing.”

She doesn’t elaborate on how I went from very good brother to a thing.

She gets up, flicks on the TV, and sits over in the other bed. A laugh track pulses from the channel. Pearl messes her hair.

“Are you a fan of improvisational comedy?”

“She died a horrible death,” I say.

“Who?”

“Zelda Fitzgerald. Was in a mental institution waiting to be zapped by electroshock when a fire broke out. She was caught inside and got burnt to a crisp.”

The look on her face is like a photograph of the look I’d seen a hundred times on Emily’s. Am I trying to be funny or am I secretly praying for locusts to descend over the evening and make the sky black.

“Aren’t you a ray of sunshine this evening,” Pearl says, flopping back on the bed.

Sometime while watching skits on television I fall asleep. No dreams come to me, just jets of colours—par for the course when I’ve been into the drink. Blue, purple, red, my brain projecting for me a buzzing panorama. None of them make it clear to my dream-self that my sister is in another room, making love or screwing or fucking someone.

I’ve never owned a cat, but they say the awful creatures have modulated their howls to replicate the sound of babies wailing, a Darwinian trick that makes them impossible to ignore even when you’re asleep. Something about babies and crying hard-wired into the circuitry of our brains, a secret code delicately folded into the meat of our limbic systems.

Waking up, I can think only two things are happening: either a cat’s fallen off something very tall and landed on its head, or a particular kind of sicko is doing



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a very bad thing to an infant.

“Just relax, honey,” Pearl is saying, ushering in a haze of nakedness I come to recognize as my sister. Her body shivers, hiccups. She’s got tears making a glimmering mess of her face. Soon Marxy rumbles into the room, a towel around his waist.

“Stay a ways back, Marxy,” Pearl says.

Marxy’s hair is still stiff to one side. He’s crying, too.

“I did what you said, the way you said,” he announces to the air.

“It’s O.K., just sit over there.”

Pearl wraps a blanket around Zelda. Marxy doesn’t even notice me. For all I know, I’m just a figment of his imagination. Zelda rolls up into a little walnut shape, squeezing her legs together around her hands. This is the shape of something that’s suffered, I decide.

And it occurs to me, just then, that Marxy’s face might make an ideal landing pad for the ridges of my fist. I complete the operation quickly, the interaction of our bones echoing the sound Tupperware containers make when they’re opened very quickly.

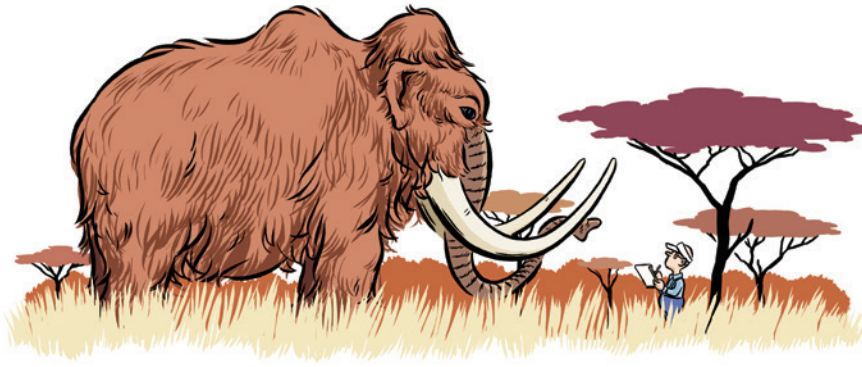
And so I see red. The sound of my fist hitting Marxy’s nose is the only external stimulus that makes it through to my brain.

Instantly I understand that there has been a kind of miscalculation here. Pearl turns herself into a human shield, using the hem of her untucked blouse as a cork to stop the blood coming out of Marxy’s nose. Marxy whimpers, curling into a nautilus shell.

Something has gone wrong. Brothers do things for their sisters. They take action when action is required. Should a bullet whistle through the air, on a trajectory heading for the sister’s forehead, brothers must react in such a way as to negate the bullet. They must discover gaps in the theory of relativity. They must thwart Newton’s laws. There is a theory that once every eleven billion times you drop a pencil, the pencil will rise instead of fall.

“No,” Zelda starts up. She’s yelling not at me but to various objects around the room. She sweeps the coffee machine onto the carpet. She throws the remote into the ice bucket, where it bobs like the carcass of a long-dead sea creature.

Zelda falls onto Marxy, a shawl expanding over him. Her back has Marxy’s handprints on it. I can see the chorus of pink fingertips from my end of the room. From here, they are each very distinct, and each very far away. ✧



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

THE PRODUCTION NOTES

Taddle Creek's fifteenth anniversary continues into the summer months! This June, the Jet Fuel Coffee Shop, in Toronto, will host the Second Taddle Creek Art Show, a retrospective of cover photos from the magazine's first decade, blown up and displayed in their original context, with no duotones, cropping, or type. The show runs from June 1st to June 30th, so stop by for an iced latte and enjoy.

Congratulations to Ethan Rilly, whose cover illustration for *Taddle Creek* No. 28 was nominated for a National Magazine Award. Ethan holds the distinction of being one of the few illustrators to have contributed all three comic, cover, and spot illustrations to the magazine. (He is also the exclusive portrait artist of Tad, the magazine's beatnik mascot.) Almost as impressive, his comic *Pope Hats* recently was nominated for both Doug Wright and Eisner awards.

This fall, keep an eye out for the all-new *Taddle Creek* Web site. It's been a while since the magazine's on-line presence has been tweaked and even longer (read: never) since it's had a complete top-to-bottom redesign, as *Taddle Creek's* contributing editor Kasey Coholan continues to point out to the magazine on a regular basis. Hopefully this will please her.

For those who keep asking, yes, *The Taddle Creek Guidebook to Fact-Checking Fiction* will be reprinted soon. *Taddle Creek* might even take the time to update and redesign it. The magazine also is considering releasing its in-house-only *Taddle Creek Guidebook to Editorial Style and Its*

Usage, updated for outsiders. As soon as *Taddle Creek* gets the above-mentioned anniversary fun out of the way, it promises to turn its attention to getting these useful reference works back into print, both on paper and digitally. As this issue's Ephemera column shows, authoritative editorial resources are more important now than ever before. You're welcome.

A big thank you to Joyce Byrne and Kevin Connolly, who last issue and this issue, respectively, celebrate their tenth anniversary with the magazine as proofreader and copy editor (again, respectively). Kevin has copy edited nearly every issue of *Taddle Creek* since No. 11, while Joyce has given an uninterrupted final polish to every page since No. 10. Is there a better editorial staff to be had? No, there is not.

THE BOOKS

Marguerite Pigeon follows up her debut collection of poems with *Open Pit*, her debut novel (NeWest, \$19.95). Tamara Faith Berger's long-out-of-print first two novels, *Lie With Me* and *The Way of the Whore*, are available once again, now in a single volume titled *Little Cat*, thanks to the good people at Coach House (\$19.95). Kelly Ward's debut collection of short stories, *Keep It Beautiful*, is now on sale from Tightrope (\$21.95). Ania Szado sets a fictional tale of the real-life author Antoine de Saint-Exupéry against a nineteen-forties Manhattan backdrop in her second novel, *Studio Saint-Ex* (Viking, \$30). Peter Norman returns with a new collection of poetry, *Water Damage* (Mansfield, \$17). Andrew Pyper's fame continues to grow to frightening heights with his latest horror story, *The Demonologist*

(Simon and Schuster, \$29.99). David Collier examines everyday life in his adoptive town in *Hamilton Illustrated* (Wolsak and Wynn, \$19). And Michael Boughn touchingly says goodbye to his late friend and mentor, the poet Robin Blaser, in *Nine Blue Moments for Robin* (BlazeVox, \$10).

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—Sarah Polley



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