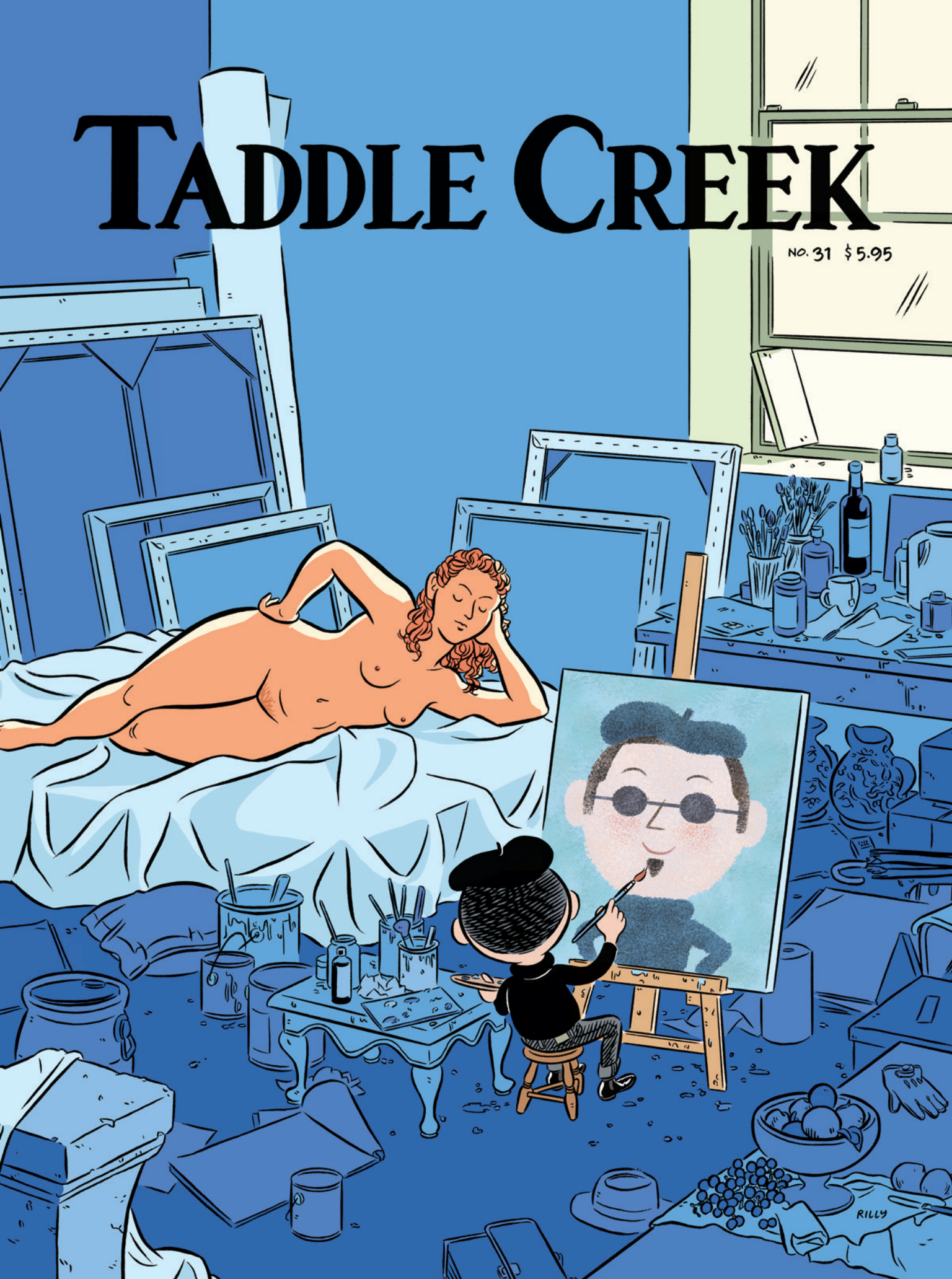


# TADDLE CREEK

No. 31 \$5.95



RILLY





# TADDLE CREEK

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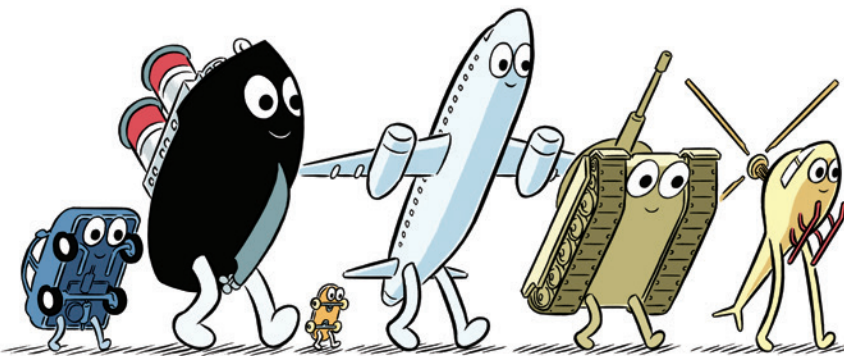
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## THE CONTRIBUTORS

Billie Livingston (“Prayers and Superstitions,” p. 4) won the Danuta Gleed Literary Award for her short story collection, *Greedy Little Eyes*. Her latest novel, *One Good Hustle*, was long-listed for the 2012 Giller Prize.

Julie Cameron Gray (“Thoughts of a Drunken Tourist . . .,” p. 7) recently published her first full-length poetry collection, *Tangle*. Her work has appeared in *The Best Canadian Poetry in English*, the *Fiddlehead*, *Carousel*, and *Prairie Fire*.

Colin Upton (“Confessions of a Techno-Luddite,” p. 12) has drawn comic strips, comic books, Web comics, political cartoons, cartoons for a movie, and cartoons for a play, lectured about comics, written about comics, and authored the graphic novel *The Collected Diabetes Funnies*.

Becky Blake (“Apoptosis,” p. 16) won the 2012–2013 CBC Short Story Prize. Her work has appeared in *Room*, *Front & Centre*, and *Kiss Machine*.

John Degen (“Big Muddy Lightning Storm,” p. 19) is a novelist and poet, and the executive director of the Writers’ Union of Canada. He has contributed to the magazine since 1997.

Sofi Papamarko (“Ark,” p. 22) is a freelance writer and matchmaker. This is her first published short story.

Sandy Pool (“On Lemons,” p. 25) is a writer, editor, and creative writing instructor. Her latest book, *Undark: An Oratorio*, was short-listed for the Stephan G. Stephansson Award for Poetry, and the Trillium Book Award for Poetry.

Georgia Webber (“15 Minutes,” p. 26) is a writer and comic artist whose current project, *Dumb*, chronicles her severe vocal injury and subsequent (mostly silent) recovery.

R. M. Vaughan (“Cardboard Forest,” p. 34) recently published the essay collection *Compared To Hitler*. He has contributed to the magazine since 2000.

Benjamin Lof (“The Hanger-on,” p. 40) lives in Edmonton and Toronto. He has been published in *The Journey Prize Stories*, won the Howard O’Hagan Award, and was a finalist for both the Bronwen Wallace Award and the Western Magazine Awards.

Catherine Graham (“Taken,” p. 43) is the author of the poetry collection *Her Red Hair Rises with the Wings of Insects*. She teaches creative writing at the University of Toronto School of Continuing Studies.

Robin Richardson (“Verity,” p. 45) is the author of *Knife Throwing Through Self-Hypnosis* and *Grunt of the Minotaur*. Her work has appeared in *The Best Canadian Poetry in English*, *Tin House*, and the *Malahat Review*.

Graham Roumieu (The Spots) is the creator of several faux Bigfoot autobiographies. His work has appeared in the *Atlantic*, *Harper’s*, *Esquire*, the *Walrus*, and the *New York Times*.

Ethan Rilly (The Cover) lives in Montreal. He is an illustrator and cartoonist, and the creator of the comic *Pope Hats*, which has won a Doug Wright, a Joe Shuster, and an Ignatz Award. Recently, he completed a multi-part comic for *Maisonneuve*.

## TADDLE CREEK

THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF & THE PUBLISHER

Conan Tobias

THE ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Grace O’Connell

THE COPY EDITOR

Kevin Connolly

THE PROOFREADER

Joyce Byrne

THE CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Kasey Coholan, Alfred Holden

THE ART DIRECTOR

Conan Tobias

THE CONTRIBUTING DESIGNER

John Montgomery

THE ILLUSTRATOR

Matthew Daley

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

## THE SHOUT HEARD 'CROSS THE PAGE

**T***addle Creek* currently is preparing a second edition of its editorial style book. Whereas the first edition, from 2007, was simply an in-house guide to the grammar and style rules most-oft referred to by the magazine's staff, this new book will be available to the general public and contain not only *Taddle Creek's* favourite entries from the first edition, but also some of the magazine's most popular grammar rants that have appeared on this page over the years. (A new edition of *Taddle Creek's* guide to fact-checking fiction is also in the works. The publication date for both is still to be announced.)

In tidying up its guide for mass consumption, the magazine came across one niggling thing it has meant to discuss for some time—something that, though covered off under a general rule in most style guides, could use some more specific clarification, in *Taddle Creek's* opinion.

*Taddle Creek* has noticed over the years the tendency—among laymen and professionals alike—to spell in all-caps certain proper brand names consisting of fewer than five letters. Perhaps *Taddle Creek* is biased, but this error seems especially to occur in relation to the spelling of magazine names.

Look up the rules for handling the titles of brand names or periodicals in most any editorial guide, and you will see they are meant to be treated as any other proper name: with the first letter of each word (save the odd preposition) capitalized. Never should they be written in all-caps, unless the name or title is an initialism or acronym, with each letter standing

for a specific word. And yet, watch how many people style the names of *Mad*, *Now*, and *Us* magazines, not to mention brand names such as *Via* or the *Gap*. You'll often see them written, respectively as *MAD*, *NOW*, *US*, *VIA*, and *GAP*, and this simply is wrong.

Many brands set their names in all-caps in their logos as a means of attracting attention, or simply as a design device. Others print their name this way in all corporate correspondence and try, out of a sense of self-importance, to insist the public and press follow suit.

In the case of magazines, there long has been a tradition of periodicals styling their own names in small-caps within their own pages. Instances of this can still be seen in such publications as *Time* and *Entertainment Weekly*. (*Taddle Creek* once considered this quaint affectation, but thought the better of it considering how often it refers to itself. You're welcome.)

Faced with these logos on a daily basis, it is very likely the average person becomes unconsciously trained to write them in all-caps. *Taddle Creek* is not a doctor, but if it were to put on its dime-store analyst hat, it would theorize that there may very well be something about the shortness of a three- or four-letter name that makes the brain see it differently than longer words and want to write it in all-caps. Evidence the fact that no one ever writes *THE NEW YORKER*, despite its own all-caps logo.

But again, *Taddle Creek* is not a doctor. So whatever the reason for this practice, once looked at logically, it is hard to argue against *Taddle Creek's* rightness. Expect more where that came from in the magazine's upcoming style guide.

## NOW EVEN WEBBIER

**B**y the time this issue sees publication (or shortly after if certain deadlines aren't met), there will be an all-new *Taddle Creek* Web site. It may not seem that new, but this one is more new than past not-that-new redesigns the magazine's Web site has undertaken.

It seems *Taddle Creek's* love of simple, clean Web design has finally caught on with the masses. This fact nearly made *Taddle Creek* take its new site in the opposite direction, until it realized how superior it could act at having created in 2000 what many are just getting hip to in 2013. Readers tell the magazine often that they enjoy its Web site's single text column, and that remains on the new site, with no "right rail" to besmirch its pristine whiteness. The major changes (aside from being completely rebuilt in WordPress and a whole bunch of other fun backend stuff the average reader will never see or know about) include the integration of proper social media sharing tools, and better ways to view "multi-media" elements that are so popular on Web sites these days. Most importantly, the viewing and sharing of comics will be a whole lot easier. The general look has also been updated, finally catching up to the redesign the magazine underwent four years ago.

*Taddle Creek's* new Web site was created by Matthew McKinnon and John Piasetzki, the Web-spinning team who brought you sites for such magazines as the *Walrus* and other fun things. Matt and John have been working hard all year, and *Taddle Creek* thanks them for their efforts. Please do stop by [taddlecreek-mag.com](http://taddlecreek-mag.com) and have a look.

—TADDLE CREEK

# PRAYERS AND SUPERSTITIONS

BY BILLIE LIVINGSTON

Just outside of Washington, Our Lady of Mercy Rehabilitation Center is surrounded by a thick wall of tall leafy trees.

"Is it only for men?" I ask as we walk from the parking lot. Fluke has been a resident here five months now. This will be the first time either of us has seen him since Vincent and Carla's wedding one year ago last week. Part of me wonders if this visit will do little more than dredge up more misery.

"It's mixed."

"You said it was built for clergy members?"

My brother nods. His sigh is implicit.

"Then how can *women* be staying here?" My accusation is implicit.

He looks straight ahead as we walk up the circular drive in front.

"I said this place was for priests and religious, and nuns are religious."

I keep my mouth shut. Our family is only nominally Catholic. All of us but Vincent, who is so Catholic you'd think he was a convert. Carla converted. She wasn't much for religion but she was baptized in our mother's living room, two hours before the wedding.

Perspiring under the weight of his robes and the August heat, Father Luke led Carla through the sacrament. This was the first time I had ever seen Fluke on duty. He crossed Carla's forehead with holy water and whispered, "I don't want to mess your makeup." His own lashes fluttered as rivulets of sweat trickled into his eyes. It was warm but none of us was sweating like Fluke.

I had dubbed him "Fluke" on the rooftop patio of the seminary as the three of us stared out over Washington, getting drunk on Russian vodka. Luke's ordination was coming up soon.

"One more month and you'll be Father Luke. 'F. Luke,'" I said. "*Fluke!*"

"You got that right, sister." Luke glanced at his watch and set down his empty glass. "Four weeks until I take the ontological leap. Who's up for male strippers?"

A grim smile crossed Vincent's face.

He looked out past the railing to the basilica in the distance.

"Oh *puh*-lease, Mother Manguard," Luke needled him. "Don't be such a stick-in-the-mud!"

I grinned and flicked an ice cube at my brother. My dear and earnest Vincent. He had just begun Year 2 of his theology degree and it stuck him like a blade, the sight of infidelity rewarded.

"There he is," Vincent says. "Is that a *Bible* in his lap? He looks positively pious."

I spot Fluke seated on one of several moulded orange chairs in the portico. Black hair lacquered, he has a large book in his lap and a cigarette in his hand.

"Well, well, if it isn't Father YouTube," Vincent calls out.

I wince. My brother must think it's better this way. Better to chase the elephant out of the room before it makes itself comfortable.

"You're here!" Fluke's voice is frail. Closing his book, he sets it down on the cement and lifts himself carefully out of his chair as though nursing an injury. Twenty-eight going on eighty.

He switches his cigarette from one hand to the other and then opens his arms wide. The sheen on his eyes suggests tears are brewing.

"Sorry. I'm still smoking," he whispers as I step into his embrace.

He smells of soap and nicotine. His polo shirt is damp and my mind flashes back to Father Luke performing the sacrament of marriage, skin florid and glistening as he joined Vincent's hand with Carla's and pronounced them a couple.

Fluke lets me go and turns to Vincent. "Hey, brother. How's it going?"

I am struck again by the way the guys from Saint Michael's Seminary embrace in such an unabashed way. Not the usual one-armed man-hug severed with a backslap.

Once our greeting is complete, Fluke glances around as though he's forgotten his wallet.

"Let's sit," he says. "Gosh. Take a load off."

He adjusts a second orange chair for me. Vincent pulls one closer for himself.

"I'm on so many meds, I can't remember my own name never mind my manners."

"What do they have you on?" I study him: his hands and his eyes, the cadence of his speech.

"What *don't* they have me on? Let's see . . . lithium. For my bipolar. I was diagnosed years ago but I wouldn't take the meds. Gained too much weight. Different doctors, different approaches, but still, here I am on lithium and I look like Rosie O'Donnell. I take eight hundred milligrams two times a day. I think. And . . ."

I glance at Vincent. His left eyebrow is slightly arched. Rooting in my purse, I ask if I can write down the meds.

"I want to look them up. I've got a focus group coming up with physicians and mood stabilizers."

"Mood stabilizers, yup. Three hundred milligrams a day." He spells "Seroquel" for me. "And Lamictal, that's an anti-seizure, and, um, Klonopin . . ."

He lights a cigarette, tilts his head back to exhale.

"My sister says this kind of dosage is crazy. She just graduated. Full-on nurse now."

He looks at my notebook.

"You still working at the focus group place?"

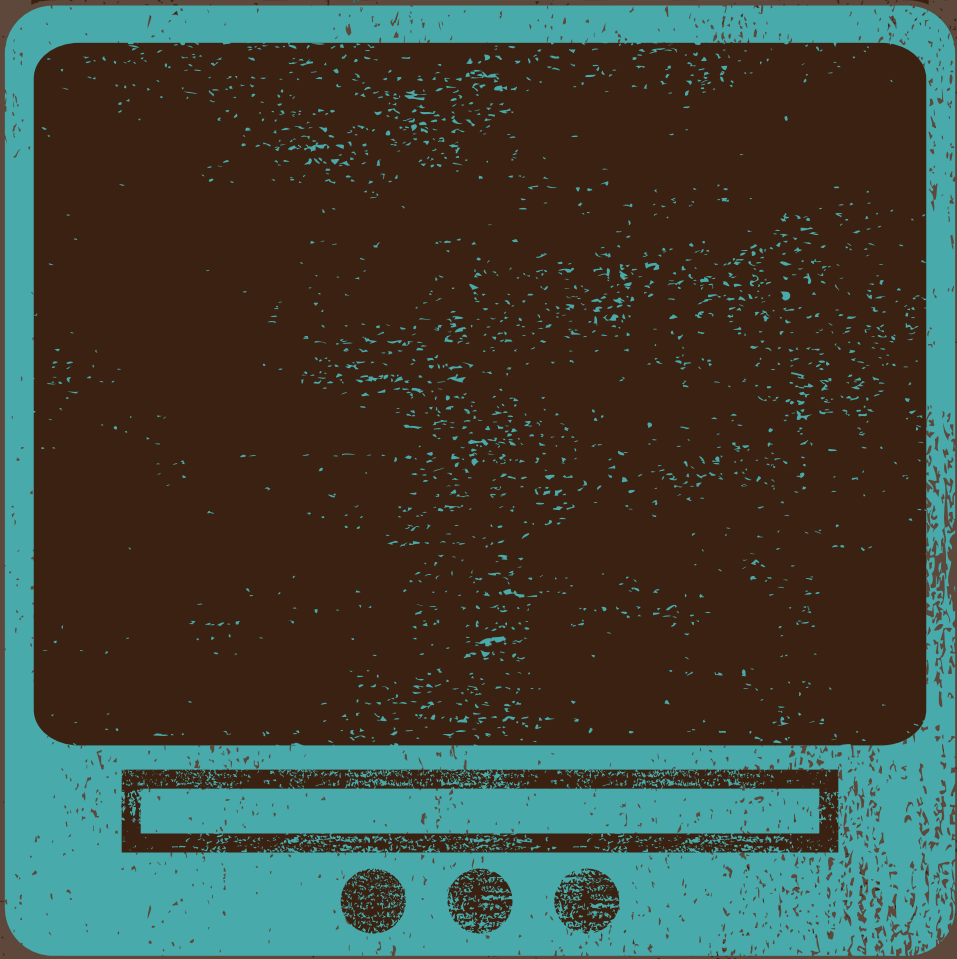
I nod and print "Klonopin, 4 x 1 mg/day."

My brother adopts a wry tone when the subject of my work comes up. "She's still there. Recruiting angels to dance on the head of a pin for fifty bucks a pop."

I look up from my notes.

"The smokers got *two hundred bucks* last week. So *ha!*"

Consumer Focus and Research pays people in the community to come in and try products or ponder advertisements and express their honest opinion on what they see, taste, and hear. I started there as a recruiter right after high school. I



have since become a moderator. My job involves the facilitation of conversation among participants for surveys and focus groups. Our slogan is Your Opinion Matters. Sometimes, I'm asked to stand behind a two-way mirror with the client, observing the reactions of our participants—still my favourite part of the job. Few people get to fulfill their natural desire to be a fly on the wall. My brother may hold fast to theology, but I have come to believe that one can find meaning in careful analysis and interpretation. It's a science that is pragmatic and yet hopeful.

"Speaking of dancing," Vincent says, "last time we saw you, you were the most downloaded priest on the Internet."

Fluke blows a stream of cigarette smoke. "My sister said I was No. 1 on YouTube for two hours. *Good Morning America* was parked on my parents' front lawn after the whole thing broke. Fox News. The *Today* show. My poor parents."

Back in February, Vincent had walked into the living room where I lay sprawled

on the couch. After everything that had happened to him in the previous six months, I had grown used to his flat, lost tone. But now there was a sudden heat to his demeanor.

"Google 'Father Luke Drunk Priest.'"

It sounded like an order. I reached under the couch for my laptop.

The headline was everywhere: "DRUNK PRIEST PROPOSITIONS COPS." Video footage was leaked: Father Luke chained by one wrist to the white brick wall of a drunk tank, shouting, "Get these fucking cuffs off me, lousy shits!"

Standing in a beige linen suit, bright orange socks, and a pair of buffed loafers, Fluke yanked at the chain, convinced he could free himself. After a while he changed tack and began to beg. "I'm not an animal. Let me go. I'll do whatever you want. Want me to suck you off? Be your boy toy? Because you can go fuck yourself is what. I'm innocent. Police brutality!" Each news agency that aired "the proposition," cut the tape just be-

fore Fluke's refusal to comply. They did, however, run excerpts of cries for his mother and his subsequent rendition of "When You're Good to Mama" from the musical *Chicago*.

"Jesus," I muttered, staring at the screen.

"He doesn't want to be a priest," my brother said. "He wants to play one on TV."

Vincent stormed back into his bedroom. "They're going to eat this up." The media, he felt, were gunning for Catholic priests.

"What was with those fetching orange socks?" Vincent asks now. "Were you out deer hunting that day, Father Fudd?"

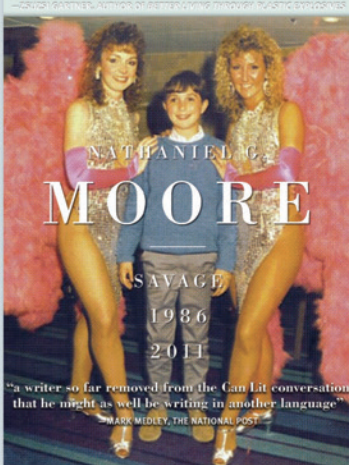
Fluke snorts.

"That could've been my audition reel. *Celebrity Rehab with Dr. Drew*: me and Janice Dickinson." He rolls his cigarette ash on the edge of the standing ashtray. "Although, *really*—there were only four of us at that so-called party and I had one glass of champagne. I should have stayed home."

According to the Portland police, Luke was three times over the legal limit and



"This is *Running (Backwards) with Scissors in Leaside*. Nathaniel G. Moore's emotional atomic drops and body slams in *Savage (1986-2011)* put the nuke in nuclear family. Moore writes in Technicolor™—he's a poet of fractured reality, minstrel of meltdown, clown prince of sad suburban absurdity."



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## THOUGHTS OF A DRUNKEN TOURIST AT THE BUSHMILLS WHISKEY DISTILLERY

In my skull there are copper stills, fermenting  
above sheep fields. Stray song lyrics stroll among  
American bourbon barrels and Spanish sherry  
casks licked smooth by grist.

Which resembles the pamphlet but nothing  
else, does it? Wet pipelines shuttle mash  
and wort, my pockets conceal tired boarding  
passes. I drink in the on-site bar until the Grey  
Lady ghosts by, then stumble back to the tour bus  
and threaten to go streaking, Who's with me?

It rained today. The cool hills blued  
with evening, like many times before.

My whole day was a waste;  
I missed castle ruins sleeping it off.

A week in and already I've been naked  
on grassy hills, drunk in dark bars, obsessed  
with the cantankerous sky.

I know there's nothing special about me  
being here; I see the same things as all  
the others, exclaim the same compliments.

But here in a warm wood-paneled bar, I'll pound  
my hand on the table, press my shirt to my chest,  
and declare, solemnly and without irony,  
that I too could live here.

—JULIE CAMERON GRAY

behaving aggressively. They needed to  
digitally record the situation, they said,  
for "safety reasons."

"When the video went viral," Luke  
continues, "my lawyer doubled his fee.  
Asshole. The new guy's good. When I'm  
ready, he wants to slap a civil suit—Oh hi,  
Dr. Baker."

We turn our heads to see a tall, angular  
woman trotting toward us. In her fawn-  
colored trousers and matching jacket she  
reminds me of one of those leggy hunting  
dogs. I swish the hem of my cotton skirt  
to catch a little breeze and wonder how  
she can stand being encased in so much  
fabric.

"Hello, Luke." The yellow shirt she  
wears gives her an insistent cheerful  
look. She strides up to our small circle  
and clasps her hands together. "How are  
you this afternoon?"

"Very well, thank you," Fluke says, sit-  
ting up a little straighter.

"I just wanted to check on you, make  
sure you weren't stuck out here talking to  
reporters."

Her eyes prick at the notepad in my  
hand.

"Oh!" Fluke laughs. He snuffs his  
spent cigarette in the ashtray. "Dr. Baker,  
this is Vincent. We were in the seminary  
together, and this is his sister,  
Ella."

Up on our feet, Vincent and  
I each extend a hand. Fluke  
stays seated.

"Nice to meet you. Have ei-  
ther of you been here before?"

"First time," Vincent says.

I watch her posture, note  
that she never crosses her  
arms, and the fact that she  
makes eye contact. This is a  
woman who is comfortable stating her  
opinions, one who does not fear reprisal.

"Has anyone talked to you about con-  
fidentiality?" she asks.

"Everything you see stays here," Fluke  
recites. "Everything you hear stays here.  
Hear! Hear!"

"That's right." She smiles

"We're aware," Vincent assures her.



I look beyond her to a man sitting on a  
sunlit bench on the other side of the cir-  
cular drive and wonder who might be here  
and for what sorts of addiction.

Dr. Baker excuses herself. Fluke  
thanks her. We sit in silence as she strides  
back up the walk. Once she disappears  
inside the front door, Fluke exhales and  
plucks himself a fresh cigarette: "What  
kind of reporter wears *white socks*?"

I look at Vincent's ankle, and snort at  
the stretch of sport sock between his jeans  
and black shoe.

Luke stares at the building's front door.  
"I can't shake the feeling that I'm in  
trouble now," he says. "I don't know any-  
more. It says 'histrionic' on my chart.  
That, and 'agoraphobic.'"

"Agoraphobic?" Vincent says. "Does  
that mean you can't wear fuzzy sweaters?"

I laugh and then stop. My brother's  
smile is almost a sneer.

Luke blinks at him a moment.

"Ha! Yes. Fear of the fuzzy. . . . It also  
says 'paranoid.' They got that right. Be-  
fore I came here, it got so bad I was scared  
to go downstairs after the liturgy. We al-  
ways had a little snack and coffee after-  
ward. But I would run upstairs and hide  
in my room. I was scared when the phone  
rang. E-mail made me feel as if someone  
was in my house. Dr. Baker wants to bring  
the lithium down, but I feel good now. I  
don't want to change anything."

I look from Luke to Vincent and think  
about some of those agency meetings at  
Consumer Focus, the steadfast belief that  
desire is shaped by fear. To sell a product,  
they believe, one must begin with the re-

alization that a person be-  
comes devoted to a thing, a  
place, another human being  
when he fears what life might  
be like without it.

"They do a big assessment  
when you first get here," Luke  
continues. "They even asked  
me how many sexual partners  
I had last year."

I lean forward a little in  
anticipation.

"Seventeen."

"*Seventeen*?" I repeat.

Vincent keeps a placid face, but I re-  
cognize the flint in his eyes.

"The therapist said that even if I were  
a layperson she'd still recommend Sexual  
Compulsives Anonymous."

Luke looks at his dwindling cigarette  
and reaches for the pack. He lights a new

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one with the embers of the old.

"I'm not a sex addict. I just like having sex."

One night at Saint Michael's Seminary several of us sat on the rooftop patio, drinking vodka and gossiping. Many of the young seminarians were recruits from the Ukraine. Like barely pubescent boys, none of them met my glance or sent a word in my direction.

"So," Alexander called across the table. "Did you read the *New York Times* this morning? The pope is sending his army."

"Bah!" Vincent said. "They'd lose half their seminarians."

The *New York Times* had run several stories lately, articles that told of an impending witch hunt. Apparently the pope would soon be sending his minions around the Catholic world to interview priests-to-be and root out the homosexual element.

"Vincent," Rudy chimed in, "are you hiding any homosexuals under your bed?"

"I keep 'em all in the closet," Vincent quipped.

"No homosexuals in this place," Alexander said. "Only heretics."

"Those fuckers fuck with me," Luke waved his cigarette around, "and we'll see which newspaper receives a picture of which bishop with a big fat cock in his mouth. *Tout de suite!*"

I coughed.

"Luke, honey, you're killin' me."

"Saint Michael's Seminary," my brother mused, "a bastion of refinement and reverence. Speaking of which, the Giants are playing this Monday. Any of you knuckleheads going to watch the game?"

"Knuckleheads?" Alexander repeated. "Knuckleheads!" He laughed. "I never heard this. I like this one."

Beside me, Luke took long pensive drags off his cigarette. Arms crossed, he stared down at the table.

I gave him a playful shoulder butt.

"How you doin' over there?"

He pushed back his chair and headed inside to the lounge. Through the glass door I watched him wind his arms over the top of his head and then drop them at his sides again. He faced the patio. Then, catching my gaze, he reached over and turned off the light.

I glanced around the table. Vincent and the rest of them had segued into a discussion of various power brokers in the

church. I stepped inside just as my brother was saying, "Christ didn't call them a brood of vipers for nothin'!"

It was dark in the lounge but I could see the cherry of Luke's cigarette glowing.

"Hi, Ella," he murmured. He leaned against the wall near the light switch.

"Want some company?"

"I was just going to my room." He mashed out of the nub of his cigarette in a saucer on the table. "Come on. I want to show you something."

Following Luke down to the second floor I wondered if it was against seminary rules for a visitor to go into a man's room like this. I didn't suppose it was women who concerned Luke or his rector though. Still, I glanced up and down the hall while he put his key in the lock.

As I stepped over the threshold, he switched a lamp on. Dim light filled the small room and my eyes opened wider. Luke sat down on his crisply made single bed and I turned in a slow circle, peering into the faces of countless saints. Nearly every inch of all four walls was covered with a small wooden plaque, painted in golds and ambers, each one depicting a sacred event or a holy person. Up until this moment part of me had wondered if this seminary stuff was just a lark for Luke, something he was trying on—like an amusing but not very versatile hat. Now, staring at the dotting eyes in icon after icon, it occurred to me that the man who slept here craved salvation the way some crave food or sex.

I looked at Luke. The top drawer of his nightstand was open. Perched on the edge of his bed, he stared at the front of a Christmas card. The edges were worn, as though it had been held daily. He set the card in his lap and opened it. Inside was a photo. After a few moments he lifted the picture and held it gingerly between two hands.

"This is Frankie," Luke said softly. "They named him after me."

Sitting down beside him I found it difficult to pull my gaze from the somber faces of the men and women on the walls.

Luke exhaled.

"Frankie was my nephew."

He turned the picture toward me. A little boy in his puffy winter suit stood knee deep in the snow, grinning and pink-cheeked.

"He fell." Luke squared the picture to himself again. "He got up on the sill, put his little hands where he thought the window would be and fell all the way down. Four storeys. My sister's been sober ever since."

"Oh Luke. I'm so sorry."

"He was only three years old. When I feel like shit, I come in here and look at him. He was the sweetest, kindest little boy. And they named him Frankie."

"I bet he was crazy about you."

Luke set the photo back inside the card and slipped it back into the drawer of his nightstand.

"Sometimes," he said, "they refer to Saint Luke as 'the physician.' I thought, when I took this name, somehow it might be healing. 'Physician, heal thyself,' huh? So much for that."

Reaching down, he opened the bottom drawer from which he pulled out a carton of Marlboros and grabbed himself a fresh pack. Sitting up, he picked at the Cellophane.

"What's going to happen when they come?"

"Who?"

"Ella," he whispered. "We've known each other since we were kids, but I feel like we're just getting to know each other now." He stared into my eyes. "I'm gay."

The sight of little Frankie in his neatly pressed shirt came to mind, his red lips, his hair groomed, slick as a mannequin's.

I glanced around at the icons again. Nobody craves this kind of company without reason.

"I know, honey," I said. "I picked up on that. I guess I did back then too. I just didn't have the words."

His eyes brimmed and a tear trickled down. He wiped a hand across his cheek.

"What if *they* pick up on that? My whole life—since I was a little boy. This is all I ever wanted."

"It'll be O.K."

I tugged the cuff of his shirtsleeve, unsure what else to say.

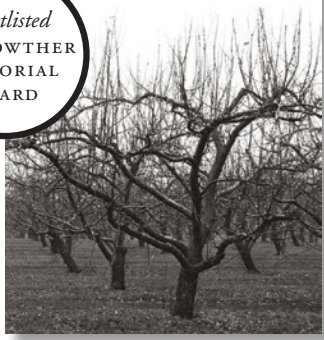
"If they find out . . ." He wiped another escaping tear. "Some people aren't as progressive as you. Even Vincent. I love Vincent. He's the best thing to happen to this place, but I wonder how he'd feel about me if he knew."

I kept my voice gentle. "He knows."



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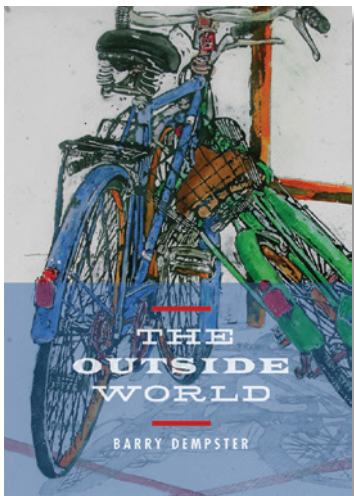
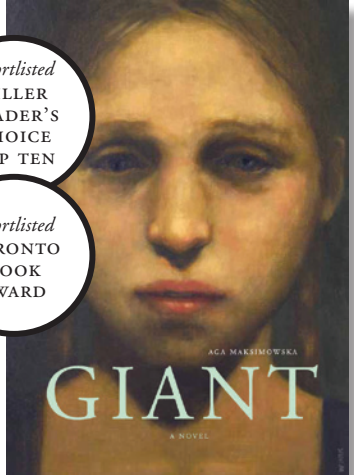
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Even the thirteen-inch television sitting on Luke's bureau had a Madonna and Child icon set on top. The baby looked more like a tiny, knowing man standing in her arms. One of his hands caressed her jaw.

"Why do you stay here?" I asked, keeping my eyes on Mother Mary. "You could go over to the Episcopalians. It's the same thing except they're O.K. with gay."

"You know what Bette Davis said?" Luke looked up at the Madonna too. "Gay liberation? I ain't against it, it's just that there's nothing in it for me."

If your parish would take you back, would you even want to go?" Vincent peers at Fluke.

"They want me back," Fluke says, his voice frail again. "It's pointless though. I can't say mass. I'll burst into tears. Every time I think about it, I'm doing this." He pops an imaginary pill in his mouth. "What good is a priest who can't say mass?"

Vincent watches him.

"It might be tough the first time. Find some priest friends and have them celebrate with you," he suggests. "Anyway," and his voice now takes on the sharp grit of gravel under tires, "it's about community, not about you."

Luke looks away. He grimaces as he rummages for cigarettes. He shakes the empty pack, then crumples it.

"My court date is set for ten days after I get out of here."

"What does your lawyer think?" I ask.

"This will be my third D.U.I. They could give me three years." He inhales a shaky breath. "I'll leave the country if that happens. I'll go to Brazil."

"Oh yeah?" Vincent says. "You got a certain someone down there?"

My eyes snap to my brother's. He looks as if he'd like to throttle Luke, wring out every squandered opportunity.

"Has your family been out to visit?" I blurt. My forced breezy tone sounds ridiculous.

Luke shakes his head. "I didn't want them coming all the way out here. You're my first visitors."

Vincent blinks down into his hands.

"I'm so grateful too. I wish I could sit out here with you all day." Luke sighs and glances at his watch. "Vespers in half an

hour though, and we're not allowed to show up in shorts."

My brother looks up, as if he's been caught off guard. When the three of us stand, his smile is lopsided.

Walking us back to the parking lot, Luke jams his hands into his big khaki pockets. Nobody speaks until we reach the car.

"This has meant so much to me," he says. His lips purse and tremble slightly.

At the car, Vincent's stance is wide and he sets his hands on his hips as though he is preparing for a punch in the stomach.

"I'm glad we came too," I said. "It's more relaxed than I expected. I thought they'd search us for contraband."

"Nah. All they care about is confidentiality. You can slip me crack, booze, heroine, just don't tell anyone who you saw here." He opens his arms to Vincent. "Brother," he says, "thank you again for coming. From the bottom of my heart."

Vincent's eyes become wet and he throws his arms around Luke.

"You'll get through this. I love you, brother."

Over Luke's shoulder, a quiet smile smooths Vincent's face and the sinking sun casts a light that brings out the sad, liquid blue of his eyes.

They step apart. Luke looks at me. "Oop, you've got an—"

"Eyelash," Vincent says. "Hold still." He touches my face. When he takes his hand back there's a tiny hair on his thumb. "Make a wish." He holds it out for me.

"Maybe you should take this one," I tease Luke.

"Won't work for me," he says. "It's yours."

I glance from my brother to Luke and, for a flicker of a moment, I wonder at the difference between a wish and a prayer. We plead for help from eyelashes, dandelions, pennies, wishbones, and shooting stars. And then some of us have the nerve to get down on our knees and clasp our hands in faith. What must it be like to be so brave and bereft at the same time? To drop all one's defences? It's one thing when a turkey bone is deaf to your deepest desires, but it must be something else when God goes silent.

Taking Vincent's wrist, I hold his thumb, close my eyes, and blow the eyelash toward the clouds. ▽



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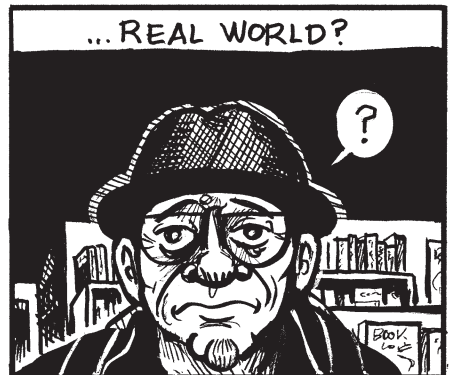
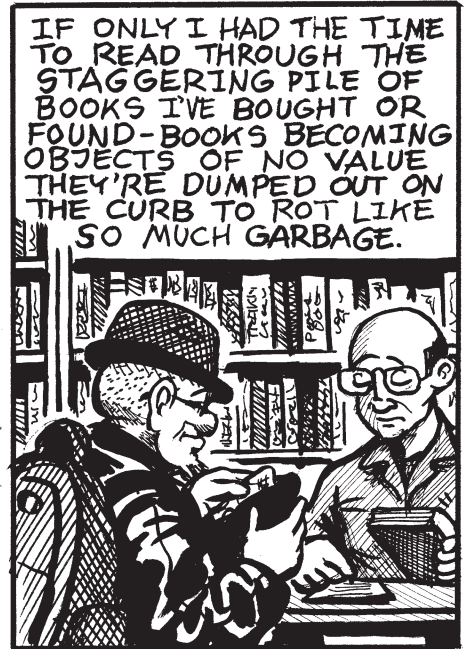
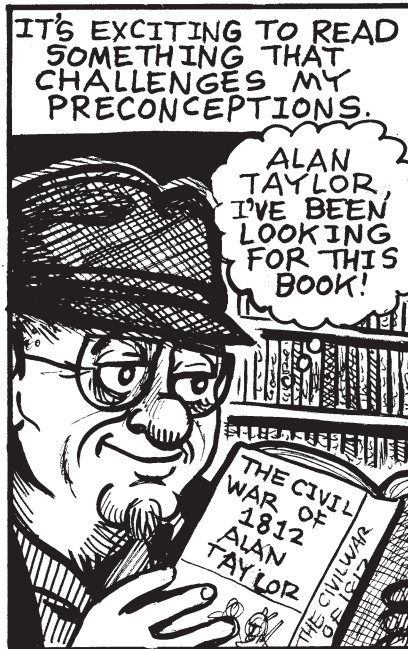
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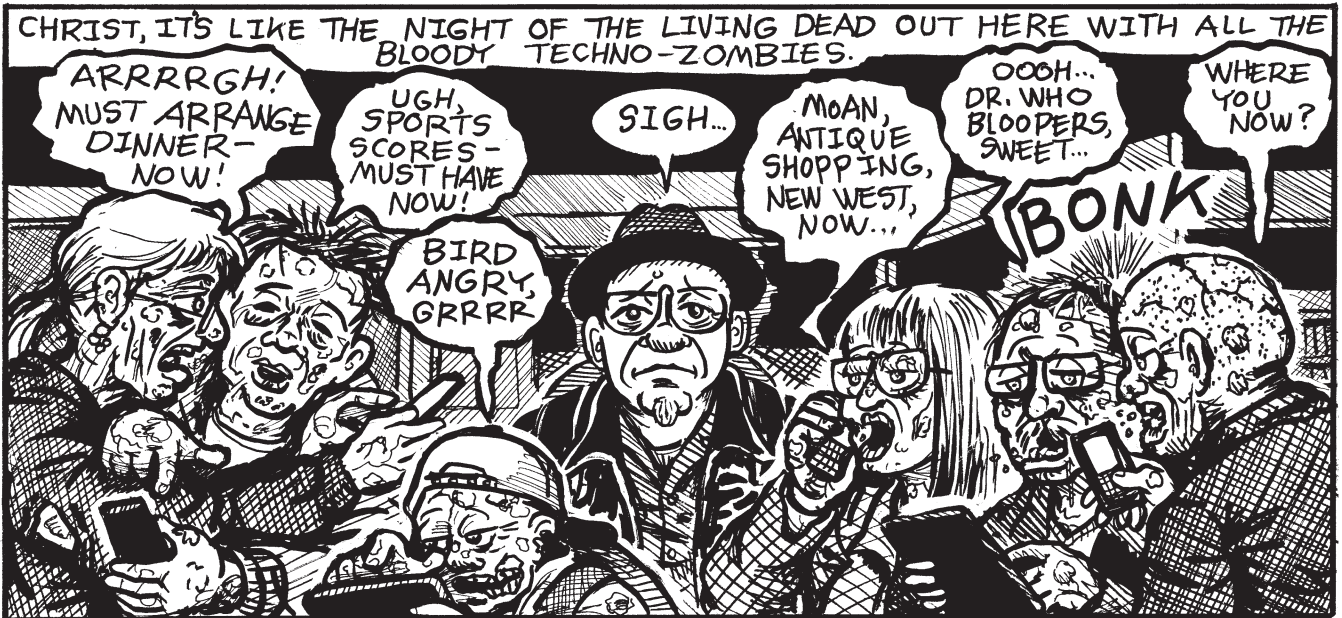
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# CONFESSIONS OF A TECHNO-LUDDITE

BY COLIN UPTON





NEVER BEFORE HAS IT BEEN SO EASY TO PRETEND THAT OTHER PEOPLE DON'T EXIST, TO BLOT THEM OUT. THE WORLD THEY LIVE IN IS FULL OF "FRIENDS" THEY'LL NEVER MEET AND REALITY IS WHATEVER SIMULATION THEY CHOOSE.



IN A WAY I DO FEEL SORRY FOR THE TECHNO-ZOMBIES WHO TREAT THE REAL WORLD LIKE A BAD SMELL...

..GURGLE GLUG...

BY SHUTTING OUT REALITY I FEAR THEY'RE MISSING OUT ON SO MUCH OF THIS COMPLEX, MULTI-LAYERED WORLD AROUND THEM. THE SIGHTS AND SOUNDS OF DULL, EVERYDAY EXISTENCE.

OH.

EXCUSE ME.

NO, REALLY?

MOAN, WATCH IT!

GAAA... GEORGE CLOONEY SIGHTING OOOGH...

IT MAY NOT ALWAYS BE PRETTY, SURE, BUT I FIND IT ENDLESSLY FASCINATING.

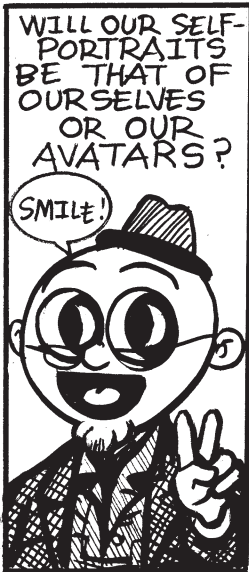
THE NATURAL WORLD OF COURSE BUT FOR ME BEYOND THAT IS THE WORK OF HUMAN HANDS AND OF HUMANITY ITSELF...

"TO SEE THE WORLD IN A GRAIN OF SAND" OR IN LITTER IN THE GUTTER...

ONE DAY I LOOKED UP TO SEE A SUNSET SKY OF VIVID JADE GREEN WITH BLAZING SALMON PINK CLOUDS.

THE ZOMBIES DIDN'T EVEN LOOK UP...





# APOPTOSIS

BY BECKY BLAKE

The only reason I could come up with for why I'd given birth to a mermaid was that I'd had unprotected sex in the sea nine months earlier. The doctors crowding around my hospital bed seemed hesitant to accept this hypothesis, but I told them, "Look, sometimes science has to play catch-up. Sometimes clinical trials are designed *after* the result is already known." The doctors frowned at me in unison. When I explained that I worked in medical research and had a Ph.D. in biochemistry, this only seemed to make things worse. I rolled over and focused my attention on the bassinets. I didn't have time to worry about doctors' opinions—I had a newborn merbaby to care for.

After some deliberation, I decided to name my baby Shiny. First, because Shiny was a name that worked well for either a boy or a girl—I wouldn't be sure of her gender until after the D.N.A. test—and secondly, because I wanted my baby's life to be full of luminosity. I imagine every mother wants that for her child.

Shiny was a happy baby, and I felt lucky to be a mother. At forty years old, some people might think I'd had no business having sex in the sea. But what can I say? I was on vacation and Ramón was a very good swimmer. When he'd moved aside the crotch of my swimsuit, I'd felt cold water flooding in to fill the space, and I remember thinking of Russian roulette and how the trigger pull in movies always happens in slow motion. From the beach, a large tanned man who looked like a manatee turned his head and made eye contact. I knew he must have a theory about what was going on under the water, but he couldn't see us from the waist down; he had no proof.

Returning home from my vacation, I discovered a whole school of words had come with me: chub, plankton, silt, aqueous, biota. I thought of those words each morning as I threw up in a toilet stall at work, and in the afternoons I had strange cravings for them, using them in conversations, searching for them on-line. Clearly my hormones were making me

crazy. A chub was a freshwater fish! It didn't even belong on the list!

My lab assistant, a soft-spoken Québécois man named Guy, tried to be supportive and cover for me when I was sick. We were doing a research project on mitochondria's role in apoptosis, the programmed death of cells that's a necessary part of new development. Mitochondria are responsible for letting cells know when it's their time to die, but occasionally the cells ignore these messages and continue to replicate, even after their expiry dates. I suspected the mitochondria were somehow to blame, but trying to prove this had already consumed the better part of my thirties, and we still had no concrete result. In science however, it's important to remember that no result is also an outcome. It proves that something *isn't* true, which can be equally useful to know. Just not as flashy. Or publishable.

Science journals are the tabloids of the biology world. After Shiny's birth, I fought hard to keep her out of them. Maybe when she's older, I told the researchers who called. Even over the phone, I could feel them judging me, fiddling with the point-and-shoot buttons of their cameras. Look, I told them, I know this is a learning opportunity but I'm not thinking like a scientist right now, I'm thinking like a mother. Then I'd hang up the phone and lift Shiny high into the air, spinning her around until she made her happy sound.

Shiny never learned to talk, but she could sing. She couldn't walk, but she could move herself around in a little wheelchair. When she was two and a half, I signed us up for Mom 'n' Tot swim classes at the public pool. Shiny loved the water, but after a few weeks we had to stop going to the class. We made the other mothers too uncomfortable. At first they were just nervous because Shiny could swim so fast, but their anxiety got much worse in Week 3, after Shiny grabbed onto one of their little cherubs and dove to the bottom of the pool. The baby was completely fine, but I understand—there's no

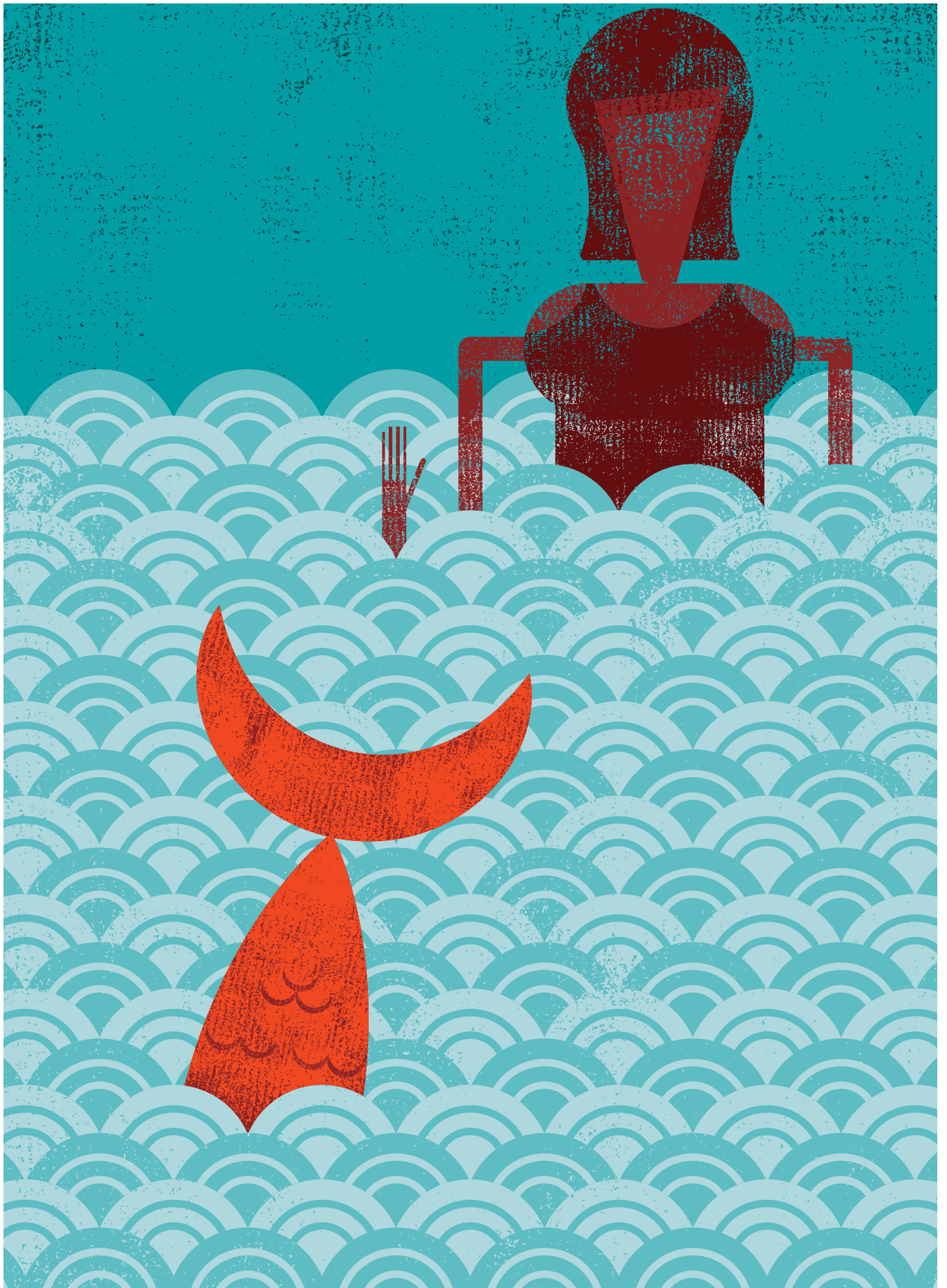
margin for error in water safety. I took Shiny back to the change room and promised her we'd go to the lake when the weather got warm. As usual, all of the lockers around ours were empty.

Shiny was having similar problems fitting in at her daycare but, being a single mom, I didn't have any other option for her during the work week. I tried to make it up to her on weekends. I served her fish-shaped sandwiches and gave her bubble baths and braided seashells into her fine blond hair. We had tea parties and went to the zoo and did everything normal mothers and daughters do. Often Guy and his partner joined us on excursions so that Shiny would have men in her life. The four of us went to the aquarium on Sunday afternoons and sat for hours in the dimly lit rooms watching giant fish, silent and powerful, moving through the glowing green water. The aquarium was Shiny's favourite place, but sometimes I wondered if it was good for her to spend so much time there. The fish always seemed to be staring at her. When it was time to go, Shiny would wheel herself forward and press her hands to the glass. Then the fish would swim over to look at her as if she were the one in the tank and they were the visitors.

Just before Shiny's fourth birthday, Guy and I made what looked like a breakthrough in our research. We thought we'd discovered evidence that some mitochondria were not just passing on messages to the cells like switchboard operators, but were actually generating their own messages—making prank calls, if you will. As you can imagine, this distinction was really exciting, but I couldn't help worrying that maybe we'd made a mistake. I wanted to stay in the lab to see if I could reproduce our findings, but Guy reminded me I needed to pick up Shiny.

I drove to the daycare, using extra caution at the intersections to make up for my distraction. When I walked into the playroom, a sea of tiny faces turned to look up at me. None of them were Shiny's. I

MATTHEW DALEY





spotted her sitting alone in a dark corner. Her lap blanket had gotten caught in the wheel of her chair and the tip of her bottom fin was exposed. She was wheeling herself out a few inches from the wall and then reversing, repeating the motion again and again like a research animal pacing in a too-small cage. Her face lit up when she saw me and I hurried over to re-swaddle her tail and retrieve her from the shadows. Shiny's life was not going to be luminous, I realized. Not while she was beached at Little Pomegranates Daycare, maybe not ever. The idea snagged me like a bait hook; it hurt and I couldn't pull free of it.

For several weeks afterwards, I tried to forget about what I'd seen, but eventually, to set my mind at ease, I decided to perform an experiment. It was a difficult choice because I knew if the trial was successful, there wouldn't be any other babies for me, merbabies or otherwise. As a scientist, I know that we only get one life. As a mother, I know time swims away from us. These facts made me hesitate in the departures lounge of the airport. Shiny was sitting quietly beside me, scribbling away in an activity book. She was working on one of those pictures that only emerge when the whole page has been shaded over.

"What do you think it's going to be?" I asked her.

She shrugged. She was only finished one corner.

The airline staff had already called our names twice over the P.A. system. I didn't look over at them, just kept my eyes on Shiny's page. Her pencil scratched back and forth. There was a line that looked like a foot now at the bottom, or was it a nose? It could still be anything really. The airline staff called final boarding. A decision had to be made. I grabbed onto Shiny's wheelchair and pushed her toward the closing doors. The activity book slipped from her fingers as we ran down the long hallway to the plane.

When we arrived in Cancún, we took a taxi to the hotel and checked into our room. There was a towel swan on the bed and Shiny sat beside it, petting its neck as I changed into my swimsuit. Then we went for lunch at the buffet and I let her eat whatever she wanted: ice cream, kiwis, mashed potatoes. We had to wait an hour after our meal before we could go swimming. When the time was up, I lifted Shiny into my arms and began to walk with her across the sand.

"You're getting so big," I told her. I pretended to drop her and she squealed. Then

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## BIG MUDDY LIGHTNING STORM

Your house was built in twenty-four,  
brought down by tornado in twenty-five,  
rebuilt the same year. Since then, quiet.  
Relative quiet.

A black dog lives in the alleyway,  
sniffing the burning barrels, scratching  
at gravel. Without permission, wasps build  
a nest in your garage.

A mile away, wasted by heat, the Big Muddy  
runs aground on its way to the Mississippi.

Days of hundred degrees, darkness  
still as anticipation. We ride  
a slow current of pool  
filter and whiskey on ice.

We listen to tornado warnings,  
waiting to hear our county.  
Touch skin only under water.  
At midnight the black dog growls

and the sky splits into daylight.  
The rain is a collapsing house.

Your body, relative quiet.

—JOHN DEGEN

Isqueezed her close and buried my nose in her hair. She smelled like saltwater taffy and I wanted that moment to stretch out forever, but the sand was too hot underfoot. In no time, we were at the water's edge, and as soon as my toes were wet, all of my scientific curiosity dissolved, leaving me with nothing but the feeling of holding the child I loved above the waves.

Shiny studied my face, then turned her head and looked out to sea. I didn't want to tease her, so I began to wade into the turquoise waters of the Caribbean where she'd been conceived.

When the waves were up to my chest, I took a deep breath and set her afloat, trying to assume an objective, neutral stance. Unlike at the pool, there were no cement boundaries to contain her. For a few moments, she bobbed there, her strong tail churning just below the surface. She looked happy but unsure. I smiled at her and she reached up and touched my face. Warm salt water



dripped from her fingers, down my cheek and into my mouth. Then she was gone. I stood there for a long time, waiting to see if she'd come back. I measured the hours by the progression of the sun. Non-empirically, I can tell you it was the longest day of my life.

I spent the rest of the week at the water's edge, just in case. There was no way to know if I'd made a mistake, no way to ever repeat the experiment. When it was time to fly home, I buckled into my seat. The words travelling home with me this time were different: microscope, efficacy, progenitor, curative, legacy. As the plane climbed up through the first strands of cumulous clouds, I pressed my forehead to the window, looking down for one last glimpse of the sea below. It was so big, and Shiny could be anywhere beneath its surface. I hoped she wouldn't be too lonely without me. I hoped I wouldn't be too lonely without her. ▽



## MATTHEW DALEY: ILLUSTRATOR

web: [www.shinypliers.com](http://www.shinypliers.com)  
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## THE SPOTLIGHT

# ROUND 2

*No matter how many chairs are thrown at him, Nathaniel G. Moore won't let his shoulder touch the mat.*

BY CONAN TOBIAS

One Thursday night this July, the staff of Tightrope Books gathered at a cramped bar on Toronto's east side to launch their newest title. Halli Villegas, Tightrope's publisher, sold books behind a table at the bar's far end, while the author, Kelly Ward, worked the room before taking the mic to read and thank the audience for coming. Missing was Nathaniel G. Moore, Tightrope's jack of all trades and, often, the on-stage host of the small press's events. On this night, Moore had handed over his hosting duties, and was across town hoisting a sectional couch up to a second-floor balcony off the apartment of his girlfriend, the poet and teacher Amber McMillan. "Moving that couch really showed me that a relationship requires effort," says Moore, half-joking.

A native of Toronto, Moore began making a name for himself in the local literary scene in 2004, after two stints at Concordia University, separated by six years in Waterloo, Ontario, that he refers to as a "deleted scene" in his life, before returning home to stay. To date, Moore has achieved a level of success that would be considered modest in the grand scheme of book publishing, but decent by small-press standards. In 2005 he published his first novel, *Bowlbrawl*. He followed it up with two poetry collections, and another novel, *Wrong Bar*, in 2009. He also became known, if not always tolerated, among the insular group that attends the city's regular reading series and book launches.

For the release of *Bowlbrawl*, Moore posted a series of blog entries and videos of himself interacting with "characters" from the book, culminating at the book's launch at a Toronto Indigo when Moore planted a friend in the audience to provoke a staged fight. That same year, he used puppets to promote an anthology of up-and-coming Canadian authors. Moore even took his infamous persona—he says the Nathaniel G. Moore people see on-stage is a character he plays—to Ottawa, where he wrestled two other authors and ended up being thrown through a plywood table.

These stunts sometimes are met with applause, but many say they find his antics unnerving. "If you do anything weird in Toronto, people are upset. 'Why are you saying these things?' 'Why don't you just read something?'" says Moore. "When I go on stage I want to entertain people. But people don't necessarily want that."

Five, even four years ago, Moore spent most of his time dreaming up the next antic to foist on his unsuspecting public. But recently, his priorities have shifted. He began dating McMillan (who has a five-year-old daughter from a previous relationship) last fall, and they moved in together this summer. As a result, Moore's interests now lean toward the domestic. That's not unusual for a writer in his position approaching forty. But Moore says there's more to his transformation than just growing older. His latest novel, *Savage: 1986–2011*, is the story of a middle-class Toronto family very much like his own, and the effects the family's disintegration have on the book's protagonist, Nate. It simultaneously parallels the life and career of the wrestler "Macho Man" Randy Savage, from the time a twelve-year-old Nate first sees his hero live at Maple Leaf Gardens, to Savage's untimely death, twenty-five years later. Moore's previous books, in particular *Wrong Bar*, generally were well reviewed, but were purposely disjointed, tough reads, leading to the—apparently complimentary—assertion made by the *National Post*, in 2009, that Moore was "a writer so far removed from the CanLit conversation that he might as well be writing in another language." *Savage* is Moore's first straightforward narrative, and his most autobiographical work. The book took on many forms over the past decade as Moore used it to work out certain anxieties he had about his childhood. "I feel like a huge part of my neurosis and pain and self-obsession is over," he says. "I couldn't do it through therapy."

"The first thing of *Savage* I saw was a short story called 'Randy Savage's Mous-

tache,' and it was complete fiction," says the writer Spencer Gordon, Moore's friend and sometimes editor. "Nathaniel called it a 'coming-of-rage' story. . . . I thought the switch to autobiography was awesome. It lent an authenticity that wasn't there in his work before. I think it was a good evolution."

Another major life event that often hits writers of Moore's age is the realization that wider literary fame might not come, despite years of effort. The wrestling industry is "able to do the exact same thing over and over again and still make millions of dollars," he says. "The book industry is the same way. Although the money is completely skewed, it is, to a degree with grants and poetry contests, it is fake, it is prearranged. There are those situations where people say, 'No, I don't want to have that person win,' and no one can tell me that hasn't happened in Canadian publishing." Some writers become bitter when they reach this stage, but Moore insists he's simply reached a comfortable point of enlightenment and acceptance. He's cut back on readings, but has no plans to quit writing. (He left Tightrope this fall.) Instead of coming up with new ways to entertain barroom-sized audiences, he'd like to move into other areas, such as acting and screenwriting. "You go to a reading and it's, 'Here's my poem, and here's my giant bio, and there's my publicist not selling my book while everyone buys vodka, and I'll see you at my next book launch in a year and a half.' I'm just not interested in that," he says. "I've already done that for ten years."

"We've talked a lot about family as it relates to the book and what we're hoping for here—an ideal family unit—with our relationship," says McMillan. "I think that reflecting in the way Nathaniel has, and digging around the way he has, and being really insightful has definitely prepared him to be a grown-up apart from his childhood. I think there's a moment that you give up all the crap you're lugging around." ▽



# ARK

BY SOFI PAPAMARKO

“I need a man who will kiss me like he’s about to be sent to the firing squad,” Shelby declared between drags of a half-smoked cigarette. “What kind of man are you looking for, Julia?”

“Dunno,” I said, picking at my scabs. “Somebody nice, I guess.”

We’d been sitting on the football bleachers, watching the junior boys on their warm-up run. They were a small army made up of sharp elbows and concave chests, rosy cheeks marred by freckles and acne. Shelby insisted they were handsome.

I looked over to her, admiring her near-translucent skin and Vidal Sassoon-inspired bob. A delicate blue vein pulsed on her temple.

Shelby had spent that summer living in France with her aunt and uncle. She had developed an impressive vocabulary and world-weary attitude.

And also breasts.

I’d noticed that the boys were noticing her now.

I remained invisible.

The mid-September air that day was as oppressively hot as it was in mid-July. Remnants of summer remained. Near my toe, a bottle cap caught the late afternoon sunlight in such a way that I remember thinking that it was a very large, very still blue beetle.

When the boys started doing jumping jacks after their laps, I tried not to laugh at the pallid, sweat-stained marionettes. Shelby applauded and let out a flirtatious whoop.

“Tommy looks a little bit like Burt Lancaster, don’t you think?”

I squinted hard. I couldn’t see the resemblance at all, but I nodded sagely before getting back to picking the scab on my knee. It bled around the edges, but it itched.

“Darling, don’t pick at your scabs!” Shelby slapped my wrist. “*C’est vraiment grossier!*”

I never even tried to keep up with her French. I only knew *bonjour* and *pomme* and the French word for “seal,” but only because it sounded like something rude.

I stopped picking my scab and headed straight for my cuticles. Shelby sighed.

“Whatever will we do with you?”

I didn’t know who else she meant, because we were the only ones there.

When practice was over, Tommy waved in our direction. Shelby waved back. He barreled over to us like an oversized Saint Bernard, grinning and glistening.

“Hiya, Shelby,” he gasped.

“Thomas, dear!”

She acknowledged him with a demure cheek kiss and I winced at the sight of her cool cheek on a collision course with his sweaty jowl.

“Aren’t you forgetting someone?”

“Oh hey, Julia. Good summer?”

I mustered up the necessary levels of enthusiasm for a sincere-looking nod. Tommy was something of a dolt. I didn’t want to confuse him by using complicated language.

Shelby and Tommy moved down the bench and chatted for a while. She’d purr run-on sentences and he would answer her in sheepish monosyllables. I made no effort to participate or even eavesdrop. I was too busy weaving some dandelions into a chain—a complex task that demanded my full attention.

“We’re leaving,” Shelby announced. I felt relief wash over me until I saw Shelby and Tommy lock hands. “Get home safe, my darling girl.”

It sounded like a taunt.

“I made you a bracelet,” I said, extending thin arms toward her.

Shelby smiled and held out the hand that wasn’t all tangled up in Tommy’s paw.

Underneath the old stone footbridge. That was our hiding place. Every Wednesday evening, when our mothers thought we were at choir practice, we would make our way there. Sometimes together. Sometimes separately.

“There used to be water here,” I told her once. “When I was very little, we would play in this creek. We’d catch tadpoles sometimes. But it’s all dried up now.”

“I can still feel it,” Shelby whispered.

“Feel what?”

“The memory of water.”

Shelby brought a flashlight sometimes so we could see well enough to read chapters of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* to each other and string found buttons onto dental floss. She would show me how to pull the thread taut taut taut so that the buttons would vibrate in mid-air. We pretended that they were magical fleas at a flea circus and we were their ringmasters. For the grand finale, we would touch them to our tongues.

The footbridge was not a footbridge. It was actually a bomb shelter in disguise. Invisible glass surrounded us.

One day, we imagined the bomb came. And when we re-entered the outside world, everybody was dead. Our mothers. Our fathers. Our teachers. Shelby’s pet rabbit, Ginger. An H-bomb would drop while we were innocently playing gin rummy and we wouldn’t even hear a thing. Not a whisper.

“It’d be like that episode of *The Twilight Zone*,” Shelby said.

I hadn’t seen the one she meant. She told me that we would have all the time in the world to read books to one another, so long as our glasses did not break. Shelby seemed relieved to hear that I had perfect 20/20 vision.

Shelby was always so beautiful in the half darkness. In the half darkness, so was I.

I can’t really remember how it started. Except, no. That’s a lie.

She had been very quiet one afternoon. I was worried that she was upset with me about something. She told me that she had half-Frenched a boy at overnight camp when she was eleven, but hadn’t done anything with anyone since. She asked if I had ever been kissed and I shook my head no. She said that I could practice for the real thing with her if I wanted.

Everything went perfectly still. It was as if the big one really had happened and we were all alone in the universe. I couldn’t process anything except Shelby’s unsteady breathing and the scent of laundry detergent and the sound of running water, but there was no water anywhere to be found near that bridge, so maybe I was just imagining it.





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## ON LEMONS

For B.C.

If only I hadn't seen the baby bonobo with the cleft palate. If only the little leg braces didn't stick out from under the little boy's too-short short pants. If the mute girl with a mop of curls had sung "Barrett's Privateers," and the paraplegic had danced down the hallway. If only we were communicating. If only you loved me and our bodies weren't so ugly and I hadn't noticed your naked totter toward the bathroom late at night. I would have seen what's left—white bowl, three lemons.

—SANDY POOL

Shelby wasn't at school the day after we watched the boys' football practice. During attendance, Mrs. Macpherson announced, "Shelby is excused." After class, I asked and she told me Shelby's mother had called the school to say Shelby wasn't feeling well.

I hopped on my bike during lunch period and rode to Shelby's house. I was going to take her the orange my mother had packed in my lunch. I decided I would give Shelby's mother a little break from playing nurse. I would read Keats aloud to Shelby and feed her chips of ice with a spoon and smooth her hair away from her sweaty, feverish forehead. And she would feel better. And maybe she would teach me some French words. She'd be so grateful that she had a friend like me.

"Shelby's upstairs, resting," her mother said, barely looking up from her rapid-fire knitting. Knit one, purl one. Green and yellow yarn.

I walked upstairs and quietly entered Shelby's bedroom. She was facing her window, her body curled up tightly, like a snail or a sea horse. Her breathing was steady and rhythmic. Inhale, exhale. Silence in between.

I sat on the corner of her bed.

"I brought you an orange," I whispered. She didn't say a word.

I remember thinking that she must really be sick if she didn't feel like talking.

I slowly unravelled the orange so the skin stayed all in one piece—something I learned from an old camp counsellor. I lay

the orange peel down in front of her face, hoping my trick would make her laugh.

Shelby didn't speak, and she didn't move. She continued breathing steadily. I put my hand on her cool, exposed shoulder and started to hum a French lullaby. I wanted to sing it properly for her, but I didn't know the words.

Shelby's breathing got less steady. I thought she had the hiccups until I realized she was crying. My hand was still on her shoulder. I got to thinking about electrical circuits in science class and how I didn't ever want our circuit to break so I was never going to take my hand off of her shoulder. I would keep it there forever. Or until I ran out of lullabies. I started to hum another.

Shelby finally turned her beautiful, swollen face toward me.

"It's not like in the movies," she sobbed. "It's nothing like the books say."

There was a loud noise. The room tilted and Shelby's bedroom filled up with water. Cold water. Dark. It crept up so fast. Her bedside lamp sparked and the bulb popped like a champagne cork. Shelby's bed began to float, like Noah's ark. The sound of rushing water filled my head, but instead of the ghostly rustle of a creek that had since wasted away into nothing, the whole of the ocean surrounded us now. I could hear the waves collapsing around our two warm bodies, waves that pushed and pulled sand and debris in its wake, accompanied by a greedy undertow that clutched onto anything and everything it could carry along with it. ♪♣

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# 15 minutes

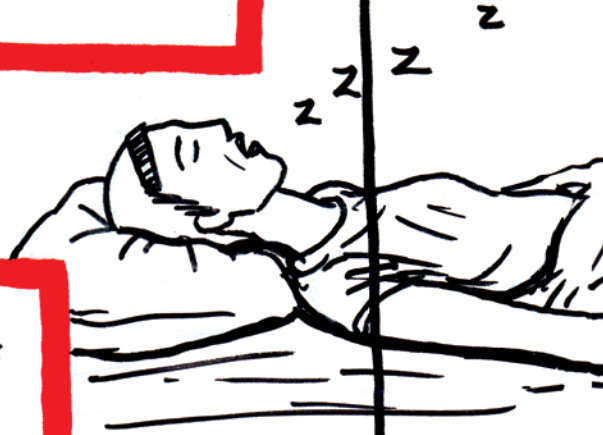
a DUMB comic by georgia webber

In October 2012, I faced the worst of a vocal injury I had been ignoring since the spring. To accelerate my ~~re~~ recovery and alleviate my pain, I chose to stop speaking for all but 15 minutes a day.

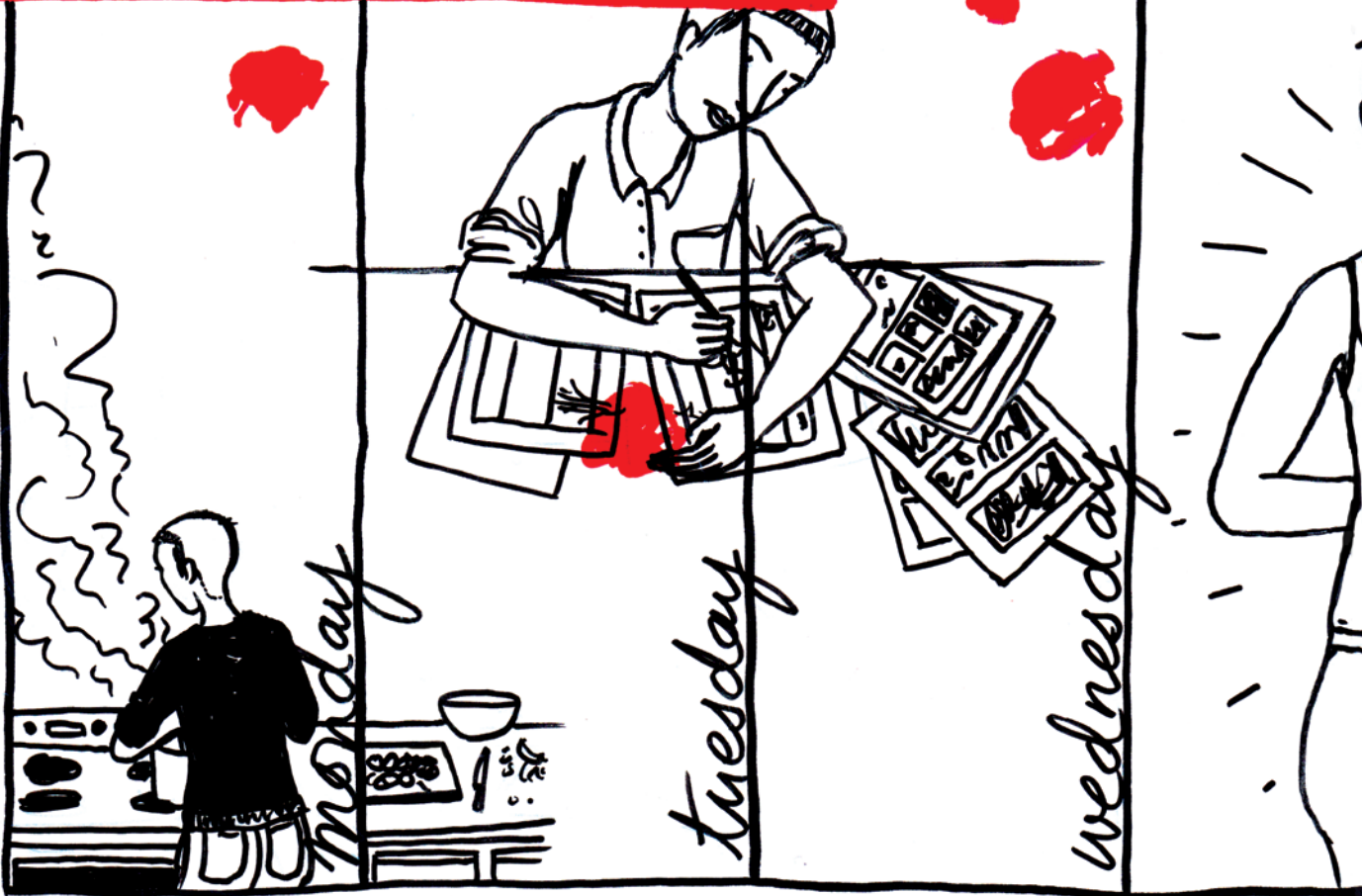




it's important to me



to be well-spoken when it matters most.





practice makes perfect...

or in my case, pain.

people often ask me, "do you save the 15 minutes to say only important things?"







when i talk i just want to  
feel normal,





i don't really know what's normal anymore.



THE GALLERY

## CARDBOARD FOREST

*Context is everything in Jacqui Oakley's playful recreations of popular woodland creatures.*

ART BY JACQUI OAKLEY

Robert Bloch, the author of *Psycho*, once declared, "Horror is the removal of masks." And he knew from horror, having worked in vaudeville. What, then, to make of the mask makers? What grisly secrets are they hiding? From what are we being shielded?

Jacqui Oakley's masks appear to be playful recreations of popular woodland creatures. Don't be deceived. Woodland creatures thrive on other woodland creatures—cute little animals they hunt down and eat before, of course, the hunters are themselves consumed. Nature is as adorable as a machete, and twice as effective.

In her day job hours, the Hamilton-

based artist is the go-to illustrator for a specific type of high-concept, hybridized imagery—fusions of the chirpy and the caustic, the plush and the imperilled. It's hardly surprising that her foray into mask making has resulted in a similar push-pull. Comprised of strips of layered corrugated cardboard, the masks are full of romper-room wonder and a keen, wonderfully counterintuitive, feral energy. Nothing made out of paper should have such fangs or razor-wire whiskers, should carry such promises of torn flesh and snapped bones.

But context is everything. "Growing up in the Middle East, I only really saw the odd camel herd, and geckos on our ceil-

ing," Oakley says. "But visiting England each summer, the countryside held all sorts of 'exotic' animals, such as squirrels, badgers, and hedgehogs. I would spend my time filling up sketchbooks with drawings of these strange creatures."

Oakley describes her masks as spontaneous acts, works she builds freeform, without a plan or goal—which leads to Jungian questions about Oakley's subconscious, and the happy and/or hungry animals that bounce around inside it. But that would be prying. Besides, we already have the final products, works loaded with mystic energies and crinkly secrets.

—R. M. VAUGHAN

JACQUI OAKLEY













# THE HANGER-ON

BY BENJAMIN LOF

“What about Lena?” Tom said as the wind sliced through the cabin walls around us. I didn’t know whether he was talking about her safety or how could he keep her life tethered to his. But that’s not how it started.

My friends Tom and Lena had found me both high and low, standing on the side of a country road, looking into the autumn trees. It was not clear, even to me, whether I was coming out of or going into the ditch. Perhaps I was waiting there for a sign, and when other humans appear in your private moment, as if sent by a god of bad timing, and they treat you like they know you, that could be it.

“Hi there. You O.K.? Need a hand?” Tom said from the car. He’d rolled his window down only a few inches, even though there was a lane between us. “Oh, it’s you! What in the hell? Hey look,” he said to Lena. “It’s Ben. Hop in, Ben.”

I got in the back of the little Toyota.

“This is too much,” said Lena. “What are you doing in the middle of nowhere in upstate New York?”

“Upstate,” I said, stalling, trying to recall how it was that I knew these people. That afternoon was the tail end of a spree, a weeks-long wandering aided by mind changers, meant to eclipse the boringly awful breakup, the intrusive poverty, the ever-unhatched career.

“Strong chemicals,” I said at last, in a famous moment of honesty. “I’m doing strong chemicals. Witness a leaf turn. You know, figure things out.”

“Oh? Good for you,” said Lena, like she meant it, as we drove off.

The ride would have been cozy except I couldn’t get comfortable. There was a pair of prehistorically giant chicken feet, with legs, stuck down the back of my windbreaker, as if I were a pot of soup, the rubbery bones pushing against my spine so that I had to ease off the upholstery and hunch.

“Hmm,” Tom said, his eyes on the road. “Let’s go for something. Coffee? Should we?”

He looked at his wife. He’d said it like it was the most natural thing, like it was a Sunday afternoon in the city.

“Super cashmere, eh?” I said.

“What’s that?” said Lena over her shoulder, about to laugh. She had a loveliness to her then. She didn’t get me, but she gave me the benefit of the doubt, ready to embrace whatever materialized. This must be the simple math of friendship. In these moments the friend cannot help but be physically beautiful, her face total radiance.

“Super casual,” I said. “Like old times. How long has it been, anyway?”

Lena grinned and then, incredibly, reached back and put her hand on my knee, and did laugh.

“I know, right? It is really good to see you.”

“I’ll second that,” said Tom.

“Nice car,” I said, giving up.

I brushed at the back of my neck to make sure the feet weren’t sticking out. I felt the creeping feeling and wanted to open the door and jump from the vehicle.

Lena reported that they were in New York for a library conference of hers, but it was also a marathon vacation—race, that is—a week that culminated, for Tom anyway, in a run the previous day. He finished in three-and-a-half hours, good enough to place him in the top five thousand. Lena meant to run as well, but pulled out last minute with a stomach bug. This was their post-race free day, touring around before flying back home.

“Toronto?” I asked.

Lena said home was still Edmonton. I guessed they were old acquaintances I’d simply forgotten or couldn’t retrieve from a memory blanched by the day’s drug concoction. At a crossroads we joined the main highway and shortly after pulled into a gas station attached to a dilapidated diner.

The interior of the restaurant was marble and crystal throughout, chandeliers and high-backed booths, so different

from its frontage that we initially went back outside to see if we’d come in the right door. The host sat us and unfolded linen onto our laps. I produced a slimy ten-dollar bill from my pocket and held it out for him.

“I took about this much in gas,” I said, “from out there, a few days ago.” I cocked my head to the pumps beyond the window. “And I’ll have an American coffee.”

“Excuse me?” said the man.

I repeated the speech about the gas. He simply stared. Tom, reddening, cleared his throat, ready to interject. I can say now that Tom likes the anecdote but not the actual moment. If there’s a scene, he better be the one making it. Many moments passed in a dead stalemate.

“We don’t deal with them,” the host finally said, cringing at the soiled bill. “The petrol people.”

“*Tres americanos*,” said Lena, Spanish being the universal icebreaker. “*Por favor*.” “I’ll send your waiter.”

The host turned and left. Soon he reappeared at the booth diagonal from us, which held a state trooper and a park warden, and set down an ivory rotary phone on a silver platter. I scratched the side and back of my neck.

“Nice prank,” said Lena, sizing me up.

“Ha,” said Tom, looking away.

The state trooper lifted the receiver and waved it near his head, looking straight at me, and spoke into it theatrically, eyebrows raised. Then he held it toward me, as if to say, Go ahead, pick up. I tried not to glance at him.

“Are you all right?” Lena asked.

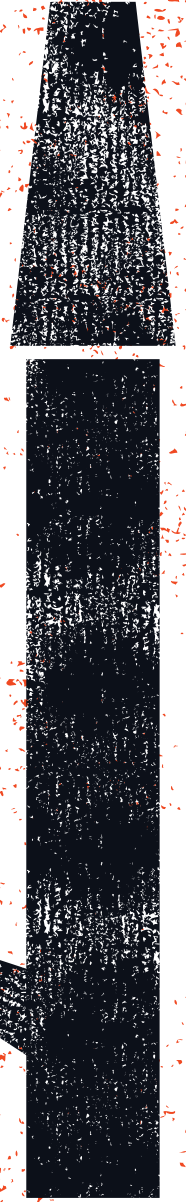
“Fine,” I said. “That officer over there is staring.”

They turned to look but he already had dropped the receiver and was sipping out of a mug, listening intently to the park ranger.

“So,” Tom said, “where the hell you living these days, anyway?”

“Mostly Buffalo,” I replied. “My stuff’s there.”

I didn’t expand on this because my



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jacket was too tight. And the trooper was at it again with the phone.

“Excuse me,” I said, sliding out of the booth and walking carefully past all of the empty tables to the washrooms in the back.

I eased myself into a marble stall and repeatedly slammed my back into its walls and door, trying to flatten the chicken feet and legs. Eventually I got stuck, hung up on the coat hook. I closed my eyes and breathed for a bit. I raised my arms and began a wriggling dance and slid out of the jacket down to the floor. Free, I stood and bundled the coat as much as possible, left the stall and threw the balled-up windbreaker to the ground where I engaged in a private stampede over it, left then right foot, then both with a jump. I stuffed the mess into the garbage and splashed my face in the sink. Squaring my ringed eyes in the mirror, I told myself to get it together, that these people were in some way my friends, that I was just bottoming out. Then there was a limb extending into my periphery. I swallowed a yelp. It was a towel on the end of the outstretched arm of an old attendant I hadn’t noticed standing against the wall. He stared at me, though not unkindly. I dried off and gave him the ten from my pocket.

I returned to find the state trooper and park ranger leaning over our table. The trooper ushered me into the booth.

“Just telling these guys of the big old nor’easter due in tomorrow,” said the ranger.

“Hey,” said the trooper. “Didn’t you have a coat before?”

I gazed at the steaming coffees that had arrived.

“I must have forgotten it,” I mumbled.

“No trouble,” he said. “I’m paid to notice things. It’s what I do.”

He gave me a long look.

“You all take care,” said the ranger.

“Try the lamb tartare,” added the trooper.

We tested the coffees and looked out the window at them talking in the parking lot.

“I didn’t really understand them,” said Lena.

“Not sure it was English the whole time,” Tom said. “What was that accent?”

We watched the ranger attempt to bear hug the trooper, unable to lift him off of the ground. Then they got into their cars and headed in opposite directions on the highway.

A while and much small talk later, congregated next to the bumper of Tom and

Lena’s rental car, I wondered if we three also should hug as I said goodbye.

“That’s nonsense,” said Tom. “You’ll hike with us.”

“A nature walk,” Lena added. “No real incline. See some birds.”

“We’ll give you a ride after. More time to catch up.”

“It’s settled then.”

“But I’ve already imposed too much,” I protested as they got into the car. “I feel like a third wheel, or a hanger-on,” I said as we drove off.

Lena tsked. “Don’t be silly.”

“A *what* now?” Tom said.

“You know, like an extra appendage.” I recited a poem from childhood:

I am the meat on your bones  
Oats stuck to your stomach  
The yoke on the finest cattle  
The burr, the wetsuit saddle  
I am the hanger-on, but don’t worry  
No-o-o-o don’t worry  
Soon I’ll be gone gone gone  
I am the hanger-on  
But soon I will be gone

“And the atmosphere has officially been sucked out through the air vents,” said Lena. “I adore that.”

“My grandma would sing it.”

“I get it,” Tom said, slapping the steering wheel. “You’re a hanger-on by birth.”

I said something about there being a few of us in every generation. I was getting drawn further into their day when I wanted out, but I couldn’t conjure a plausible escape route.

Lena rolled down her window.

“You can’t not love it here,” she sighed. “I told Tom it’s criminal to make us go home.”

We arrived at the rest-stop lot where the trail head was and consulted the glass-encased route map. It conflicted with the tourist brochure Tom and Lena had brought with them from New York, which Tom decided was outdated.

We set off into the woods, down the path toward promised lakes, sloughs, and a royal court of microhabitats culminating in a bird sanctuary. They called it a national Wildlife Management Area. Enveloped in leaves, mostly yellow, giving everything a golden hue (though the sun hid behind the layered pudding of rolling clouds), we walked single file in silence for a very long ten minutes. That creeping feeling had returned and was impossible to keep at bay in these conditions. I was overwhelmed. The feeling was akin to

## TAKEN

The sun keeps unravelling  
the yellow string through the eye  
of my navel  
until cold and wet-less, I sing.

There is music here and I know it.

Born in the bone, a melody  
strung to absentia's music  
through the fog-smoke I cough  
my mad expletives through.

*Fucking disappeared girl*

I am tired of them.  
I am tired of the gone.

—CATHERINE GRAHAM

bumping into objects in the dark while hearing a parallel off-kilter version of a song you know well, recorded live, the piano pedalled, and the drums draped in a veil. It sneaks into your bloodstream, plucks at your recesses, producing goosebumps. I later thought of it as a bleak and aimless longing.

The feeling was interrupted by Lena's voice breaking the silence.

"Did I ever tell you about Shell, my old friend? From before Edmonton? Now, there was a clinger of a person."

Tom, in front, sighed and grabbed the first of many errant branches and snapped pieces off, flinging them into the bush. I was next and Lena brought up the rear. Her voice became entrenched in the twitching of the forest, providing a lulling effect, at times only snippets of her speech arriving clear.

"Shell," said Lena, "would appear at a house uninvited and stay for weeks. When she was a kid, her parents were afraid of this wildness in her, and she became a part-time orphan, adopting herself to a friend's family here and there—she only ever kept one friend at a time—and in adulthood the trend continued. She made four different attempts to finish a university degree, and in these periods her hosts included a man with an identical bus schedule as her but never any destination, student instructors, a newly landed Iranian custodial manager, and most of her professors, men and women.

All of whom—well, except for a linguistics assistant who procured a restraining order—she had affairs with. Some of them we're talking full-blown affairs, but all of them were short-lived. When it was time for students to evaluate their teachers, she wrote instead cryptic paragraphs on what she called 'sexual honesty.'

"She once read a self-help book entirely through the reflection of two mirrors. It took her a month and she had to see a physiotherapist after. Everyone thought something about the technique worked because it was the only book regarding human psychology she didn't burn in the firepit at the park. She also never forgot a birthday. Sent endless postcards to the vaguest acquaintances. She absolutely hungered for contact at times. God, it was desperate.

"She wouldn't let people go home at the end of a night out. A separation anxiety always crept in. She would be first and last drunk. One time everyone was at the bar—no occasion, just a Thursday night, and someone brought Shell along—and this one guy, James, left after the first round because he had to work early. Shell bought him another drink—some exotic beer—before he actually left the big table, to entice him to stay, and you could tell this was a risky, invested gesture on her part. But still he left without touching it. She blushed and squirmed for half an hour. When the bar closed she pleaded for everyone, anyone, to come over, but it

was common knowledge she was staying on someone's couch. It's too late, everyone said. Her beseeching got painfully awkward before she eventually relented and all went their separate ways. Her way was biking across town, straight to James's house, where she dragged garbage from the bin all over the lawn, screaming 'Coward!' repeatedly until many sets of lights came on. She was a stranger to most of the crowd. How she knew his address was anyone's guess. She made it a tradition to terrorize that lawn on the same date every year, regardless of who lived there—"

Tom slowed and cut in over his shoulder.

"Ha. That's a lot of Shell stuff, huh? Your dear old friend Shell? Does Ben really need to know the ins and outs?"

"What?" I said, treading through a stupor, jarred by the interruption. "No, it's fine."

Lena resumed: "There was a two-year spell where Shell got involved in a church. That all ended with her baptism. After being dunked she refused to get out of the baptismal tank, though three acne-ridden boys were waiting their turn behind her. When the pastor tried to gently coax her out, she threatened to drop the live microphone in the water and fry them both. No one in the congregation was sure if this would in fact electrocute them. Shell merely wanted to stay in the tank until she truly felt something, because being submerged and breaking back through the water into the air had been anti-climactic. No catharsis, no metamorphosis. She knew this was supposed to be a symbolic event, but still. The only thrill had been the pastor's strong bony hands gripping her back and chest. She never returned to the church after that day, though she did manage a good five minutes more in the water before two deacons hoisted her sopping wet form from the tank.

"Shell's idea of being a citizen was paying her way into a Reform party convention, buying a membership, and arriving with a leaf blower backpack, which may or may not have been reversible, and going straight for Preston Manning's eyeballs with the wand. Remember him? Well, she got mobbed. You wouldn't believe the thugs they have working security at those things. She was detained and eventually fingerprinted. They put her in a jail cell, but she stayed stoic, like a good citizen, all cuts and bruises, until charges

were dropped. An officer took her aside before she left the police station, and he actually asked if her intent was to suck or blow away the politician. Presto changeo, she said, and then walked out feeling all triumphant, but crummy too, wishing she'd had an accomplice.

"One time she fell in with a married couple, renting out the back bedroom of their apartment. They needed money and she was kind of floating. She was working in shipping at a contact lens warehouse, and also worked as a night guard for a storage garage. If things were quiet when she started her night-watch shift, she would turn around and go home for hours, occasionally calling her desk or logging into the cameras from her computer to make sure she wasn't caught. During these times she was often alone with the husband, and they soon found each other 'essential.' Or that was his word for it.

"The wife came home once to find Shell practicing Spanish verb conjugations on his ass cheeks with a Sharpie marker. When it came to Shell in these situations, things were exactly as they appeared—that is, she'd asked if she could

write on his body and he'd said yes. But sooner than later they got up to more. The wife seemed to turn a blind eye or didn't mind. Either way, she too was attached to how Shell filled a room. Tiny little Shell had a big presence, moved at all times with an orbit of books, lotions, sticky notes, and layers of clothes peeled and peeling off. She'd drink boozy Turkish coffees at midnight. It turned out Shell was plaster on the chinked wall of their marriage.

"But it couldn't last. This was the first time in history Shell had been embraced back—the couple clung to her—and this sent her into a slow-burning panic. Finally her bluff had been called. She had to quit her warehouse day job. She had to fuck the husband all the time. The wife also, a few times. Never at the same time. Both liked to pull her hair in bed, causing her scalp to ache for days. She'd wonder if they yanked each other's hair, and if they didn't, then they might start and find they had no use for her. Then she'd cry so much she thought it was a mini-breakdown. They bought her gifts. She threw up. It all left her nervy. Shell had no backup plan with love given back. Too new, too fast.

She was completely rattled. Then around five one morning a fire started in the building and Shell saved their lives. Saved their lives! She woke them and led their groggy, frightened bodies downstairs to safety on the street. Looking up at their apartment, they could already see flames behind the windows' crazed glass. The fire may or may not have started in their own kitchen, but they would never know. In a hotel room the next evening, their place in ashes and possessions decimated but bodies intact, the three of them toasted. "A new lease on life," the husband slurred. Shell heard "leash." The next day the wife left—"

Lena's voice trailed off.

"Sss, oh," she said behind me.

She had pulled up a few paces back, all of her weight on one leg as she bent to touch the opposite ankle.

"Didn't see that big root," she said.

I'd balanced my arch on that same root while going over it. We doubled back.

"You should sit," Tom said, irritably.

She had twisted the ankle badly, and he softened to comfort her. She hopped off of the path to the trunk of a large tree.

"I'm feeling crummy," she said. "Think



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## VERITY

There's a tale I recall when I'm in deep:  
Some lanky, long-faced girl with tumours  
in her cheeks like blush was ushered off  
to England to allay her parents. She pulled  
into Devon's pier as lightning likewise  
settled into her, unleashed its streak  
of Lichtenberg across her thigh. She'll never die.  
She slept beneath the statue *Verity*  
for centuries, then freed herself into a swarm  
of monarchs. May have made this up,  
but it's consoling how a soul endures  
in fiction too.

—ROBIN RICHARDSON

I'll just rest here."

"We'll take a break and then get back to the car," said Tom. "Are you going to be sick?"

"No, you go ahead, we're almost there," she said. "You can hear the birds getting closer. Collect me on the way back."

"That's ridiculous. We're not leaving you here—"

"Go," she demanded, and Tom relented easily.

"I'll stay with you," I said. "I'm not a bird guy anyway."

"No, it's fine," Lena said, not looking at me. "He's terrible with time. If he goes alone he'll lose all track."

"She'll get extremely angry soon," Tom whispered near my ear.

"Say hi to the winged fellows for me," she said.

I looked back as we set off. Tom later told me that Lena had a death wish, and was pregnant.

The thick sky had lowered, snuck down on us, clouds supplanting clouds, the newest dark grey, only the treetops holding them up. It being just the two of us now, we apparently had nothing to say to each other. We kept on our route through the dense forest, past a decrepit blank information post, sticking with the skinny path even as it doglegged back on itself then veered straight north. We found ourselves far from birds then, or they'd gone quiet.

"Must be circling around to them," Tom declared, our first words since leaving Lena, still walking single file.

Within five minutes we rejoined the main hiking trail and soon found a clear-

ing where Tom thought the bird sanctuary ought to be. There wasn't a chirp. The clouds billowed then and the sky turned a nauseous green. It was around three but cooling off quickly, a wind gusting. We circled the fringe of the clearing and on the far end found the same small animal path we'd been on with Lena, which we thought must loop back to her.

"I give up, you win," he said. "Forget the birds."

Two things quickly became clear as we wound up and down the rises: this path was not the same, would not lead back to where we'd been, and also, something wild was in the air. Puffs of our breath were visible. And then, in that way when a thing feels preordained once it occurs, the wind picked up further and began to sting, carrying a wetness that stuck. It was snow.

"Ha," said Tom bitterly, as if he should have known.

We stopped, dumbstruck. It had been a mild October. Winter wasn't expected for some time. This was something else, a freak. Heavy snow was soon blasting sideways, even in the middle of the bush. We'd been catapulted into a dreamland. It might've been beautiful if it hadn't been such a struggle to stand up straight against the lashing.

"This takes the cake," Tom said.

He set into a haltering speed walk and I followed. He had tightened up, braced. We tried to run but he winced and stopped, his post-marathon legs shot. He punched his thighs. This brought mild

panic. I was shaking in my soaked grey T-shirt. Tom wore a hooded sweater, and we'd left Lena in a tank top with a flannel shirt tied around her waist. We'd been apart from her about forty-five minutes, maybe an hour.

"My phone's out of range," I shouted at Tom's back over the wind. "Yours?"

They weren't phone people; they shared one cellphone and it was in the car. And Tom had the keys. We walked on. The snow began to coalesce on the forest floor. After a few more minutes of silent trudging we arrived at a high wire fence, tall enough to keep something the size of a bison out, or in.

"This shouldn't be here," said Tom.

"Fence is good," I said. "Fence means road. Highway."

"It's all wrong. This means we're at the back of the park."

He turned around and set off, but stopped when he realized I wasn't following.

"Were you sent here by my mother?" I hollered. "To find me?"

She had loaned me a moderate sum a couple of years earlier and wasn't one to let such things go.

"We're lost," he said, walking back, gauging me. "This is crazy. We have to find Lena. Let's go."

"It just occurred to me that you could be a loan shark. I'm trying to piece things together here."

If he'd heard me right he wasn't taking me seriously. He stepped toward me with pure annoyance in his face, like he was ready to shake or strangle me, but stopped short.

"You're kind of a mess, aren't you," he said. "You ought to come back with us. All of your friends are there."

He wiped his wet face with both hands, turned, and resumed walking. This time I followed him as he pushed through sparser bush where possible. He let me take the lead after a little while. There was the crack of a tree limb breaking overhead every couple of minutes. I'd become so cold and wet it felt like my fingernails were shrinking. No familiar marker appeared, the snow making finding one increasingly improbable. At one point Tom stopped and stretched his calves, swearing. I told him that the park couldn't be so big we'd stay lost for long, but my tone was too unsure. We continued.



“Tell me,” I said, trying to distract from our current circumstance. “What became of Shell?”

“Ah,” he sighed. “You know.”

“No, I don’t.”

“Ben, come on. She became a librarian . . . got married . . .”

“Librarian,” I said. “Just like Lena.”

“Lena Michelle. Same person. You know this. You’ve seen her do the thing where she talks in the third person.”

“Oh. Yeah, right. What?”

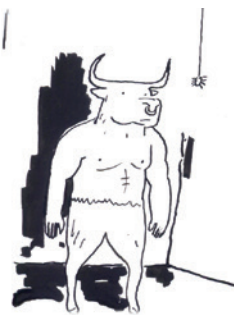
He strode ahead of me and I wanted to see his face then as he shook his head.

“You were half of the married couple? She saved you from the fire?”

“Or maybe,” he said, “maybe I was the guy who wouldn’t drink with her. It doesn’t matter who I was anymore.”

We seemed to be miles from any path and in the whiteout it had grown difficult to see very far ahead. I realized I’d known nothing about who they were to each other. Nor what else had happened with that old Lena, with “Shell.” Why the change, that is if she had actually undergone one? What was she hanging onto now? I knew nothing. But the sound of Tom’s voice letting its guard down was finally something I could understand. I’d hear it again, years later, picking up the receiver and getting swallowed by that same voice: “She’s gone,” it would strain, as if over another pummeling wind. “Let me know if you hear anything.”

We were different, desperate creatures by the time the dark mass of the cabin rose into view. From the hips down my joints ached, locking up, penetrated with wet cold. It seemed my flesh could slough off and my bones would just go clambering on without me until they shattered. I’d come around to sharing Tom’s fear that we were in danger, not of hypothermia yet, but of becoming increasingly lost and decreasingly relevant in the grand scheme of the elements. Not to mention the fact we’d left Lena sitting hobbled against a tree. There was a half-hearted disagreement over starting a fire, and the snow continued to carry on a wind I now equated with meanness. But out of nowhere came this hidden cabin, a tiny charred-looking log box propped up on blocks and well caged by trees. We ap-



proached, slowing down, as if it might be alive. In many places the law says if you squat on government land for X number of years without detection then you can’t be forced off.

“Might as well be an old haunt of my dad’s,” said Tom, who would eventually write a book, a modest success, on being no match for the old-time manly feats of his father, builder of many houses.

After palming the door I began picking the lock, then Tom threw his body into the wood and it cracked open.

Inside, it was clear no one had been there for some time, and that there’d be nothing of use to us—no heat, but at least a momentary buffer from the storm. It was still, dark, and empty. An industrial sink and small cupboard on one side and a bunk bed on the other. The damp mustiness in the air was a briefly comforting smell. For some reason, Tom began urinating in the rusted-out sink. The piss clattered, steam rising.

“Can you do that?” I said.

“She’s behind all of this,” said Tom. “She willed this.”

I found the chain and pulled on a light bulb that hung in the centre of the room. Held my shaking hands to it for warmth. Tom rifled through the cupboard and I took a turn at the sink, producing a trickle. My penis looked snake bit. A small framed chalkboard on the wall read, in a faint white, beautiful cursive, “IN CASE OF EMERGENCY, USE HELICOPTER. HA HA.” Above the sink there was a square-foot window and in its dim reflection I saw a shape behind me, a big shelf adjacent to the top bunk, two feet below the roof. I climbed the ladder to the top bunk and looked at the large board jammed

into the wall. It was a storage ledge, and on the near end sat two puffy ski jackets. I asked Tom to fetch the oar that was mounted on the wall and pass it up so I could stab across at them. The jackets dropped to the floor and Tom fell on top of them.

“This is what we need,” he said, energized.

We were on the floor like children opening gifts. The coats gave off a combination of smoke, cooking, and sour sweat smells. Were the owners dirty when they got into them or did they get dirty while wearing them, I wondered.

“These smell, bad,” I said.

“You were pretty ripe yourself when we found you,” said Tom, and his face beamed, actually seeming to grow or swell, before settling into a painful grin. He chuckled, as if we were a couple of joke-telling drunks in the night. “You see,” he said while holding up the jacket, “in small ways, in between all that goes awry, we’re taken care of.”

He was laughing with tears now, saying, “But what about Lena?” And then he was up, jacket on, and out the door. I stood in the empty cabin and looked around in vain for something else to pilfer, somehow not ready to leave, not wanting to forget anymore. Then I put on my coat—well, it would be Lena’s. I would wear it until we found her, and give it to her warm.

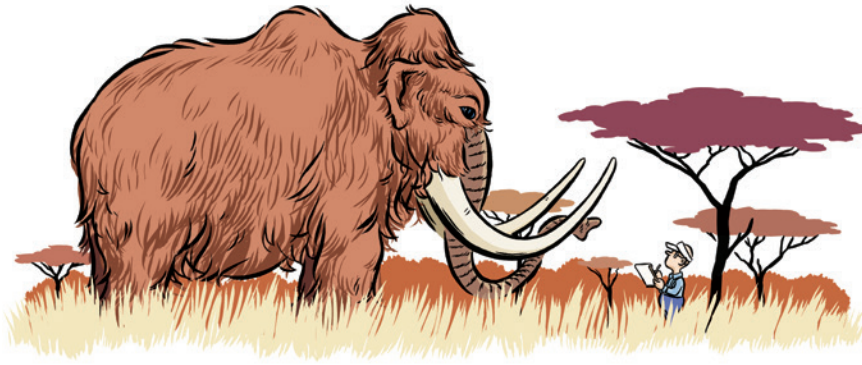
Tom’s jacket seemed to provide him with adrenalin. He was able to run now, in fact sprint, and we were crashing through the trees at a decent clip. He had become certain we were travelling due south. It was only a kilometre before we heard voices and then reached the unworldly sight of human figures inching through the gloaming in the distance ahead of us, making their escape.

We yelled until we were hoarse but they didn’t slow. They couldn’t hear.

“You bastards,” said Tom, and we gained on them, and soon found ourselves on the main path, meaning the parking lot was nearby.

They were leading us out, where eventually we’d find Lena, tight-lipped, eyes raw and somewhere else, sandwiched between two sleeping toddlers in the back of a vacationing family’s S.U.V. But we didn’t know that yet. In the woods, as the snow tapered off slightly, the creeping feeling returned, but this time I didn’t mind it, in the midst of this marathon of stranded idiots, this eternal exercise of our early ancestors. With the coat on I wasn’t myself, or at least I’d inhabited the not-myself which had been missing, and I was grateful. I knew this not-myself had something to do with Tom and Lena, but with him already beside me it was her I was anxious to see. I remember grinning while we bounded through the whiteness, both away from and toward lives that were probably damned. And then, as I tried to keep up with Tom’s bolting form, all feeling gave way to a ball of warmth and happiness, actual happiness, quivering behind my sternum, gaining speed and mass as it moved in me, leaving my chest, rolling from one shoulder to the other, opening them. ☪





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

## POMP AND CIRCUMSTANCE

With this issue, Nathaniel G. Moore pulls off one of the biggest career turnarounds in *Taddle Creek* history. Long-time readers may recall that, for many years, Nat was *Taddle Creek*'s most-rejected author, famously having had every story and poem submitted from 2001 to 2008 turned down for inclusion. Nat wrote about his struggle in *Taddle Creek*'s tenth anniversary issue, in 2007, a story that was solicited from him by the magazine and did not change his most-rejected status, though it did give him the honour of being the first would-be contributor invited by *Taddle Creek* to write such a piece. Nat's reign ended in 2009, when his short story "Savage" was published in *Taddle Creek* No. 23. And now, with the launch of his novel of the same name, Nat joins the elite group of artists chosen by *Taddle Creek* to be interviewed and photographed in its pages. Never in the magazine's sixteen years has an author risen from such *Taddle Creek*-induced depths. Congratulations, Nat. And you're welcome.

## THE COMIX

Always the contrarian, *Taddle Creek* will, if all goes as planned, be adding an issue to its 2014 publication schedule. Sadly, this first-ever spring number will be a one-time bonus, in the form of an eight-page broadsheet-newspaper comic section, featuring the talents of David Collier, Joe Ollmann, Dave Lapp, Michael Cho, and others. This special issue will be available at the Toronto Comic Arts Festival, in May, and at selected newsstands and comic shops. Though it will not count against issues owed to subscribers, *Tad-*

*dle Creek* will strive to see those who enjoy home delivery of the magazine receive it anyway.

## THE KIDS

Speaking of special issues, *Taddle Creek*'s next regular issue will be for all the kids out there. (Real kids, not the man-children who seem to make up a good portion of the magazine's readership.) *Taddle Creek* points this out mainly to alert those who buy the magazine on the newsstand, in the event the issue gets slotted in a different location than usual. Though, at the rate newsstands are closing, it is very possible none will exist by the summer of 2014. In any case, rest assured that while the focus of *Taddle Creek* No. 33 will be kids' stuff, it still will be an issue all ages can enjoy.

## THE BOOKS

Nathaniel G. Moore's *Savage: 1986-2011* (Anvil, \$20), a book whose tumultuous creation is a tale on-par with any W.W.E. storyline, is now available. Catherine Graham's latest book of poetry, *Her Red Hair Rises With the Wings of Insects* (Wolsak & Wynn, \$17) is also available, and is quite a beautiful book. Sara Heinenon's debut collection of stories, *Dear Leaves, I Miss You All* (Mansfield, \$20), featuring two stories originally published in the magazine, is now on shelves. Stacey May Fowles questions societal norms in her third novel, *Infidelity* (ECW, \$18.95). Jennifer LoveGrove relates the story of Jehovah's Witness family's splintering belief system in the novel *Watch How We Walk* (ECW, \$18.95). Clive Thompson challenges the common conception that

technology is making us dumber in *Smarter Than You Think: How Technology is Changing Our Minds for the Better* (Penguin, \$29.50). Jeet Heer offers a fascinating look at the life of the *New Yorker* art editor and *Raw* co-founder Françoise Mouly with *In Love with Art* (Coach House, \$13.95). Cary Fagan's latest novel is *A Bird's Eye* (Anansi, \$19.95). Robin Richardson's latest collection of poetry is *Knife Throwing Through Self-Hypnosis* (ECW, \$18.95), while Julie Cameron Gray presents her poetry debut with *Tangle* (Tightrope, \$19.95). Peter Darbyshire takes on a *nom de plume* with *The Mona Lisa Sacrifice* (ChiZine, \$18.95), the first book in a terrifying trilogy penned by "Peter Roman." Joe Ollmann tells a science fiction tale with a twist in the still-aptly titled *Science Fiction* (Countrum, \$18). And Amelia Kahaney, one of *Taddle Creek*'s very favourite contributors from south of the border, has a new novel for teens, *The Brokenhearted* (HarperTeen, \$23.99).

## THE CORRECTIONS

In the short story "Salt," by Dani Couture, in No. 30, a flashback scene details the character Lev's receiving results of an M.R.I. in February, 1975. Though invented years earlier, the first magnetic resonance imaging scan was not performed on a human until 1977, a fact brought to the magazine's attention by Bret Dawson, a *Taddle Creek* Twitter follower who is fast becoming a corrections page regular. So used to the existence of M.R.I. machines is *Taddle Creek* that it honestly did not even think to check this fact, placing the magazine in error and, thus, also in regret.

# dreams around here

dave lapp

I knew it was under the bed, I knew it was real.

It was pulling the blankets under the bed as it tried to return to its realm.

I wanted to prove to my wife that it was real, so I leaned over and grabbed the sheets.

I could feel it writhing beneath and I was terrified but I refused to let go. I wanted to show her that this is what is in me... this is the source of my problems.

I gripped as hard as I could... the bed had disappeared and I was on the floor of my mother's bedroom.

The only part of the demon I could see was its huge brown hands... massive, powerful, and slippery.

My wife was in the washroom and I was yelling her name with greater and greater urgency...

I'd had the proof in my hands but it slipped away, returning to the other side.

My only evidence that it had been there were the gloves I'd pulled off its hands. They were see through like condoms, and there was blood on the tip of one finger.

I made a mental note that I must add to my 'to do' list...

...get an exorcism.

... she never heard me.

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

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

**—Sarah Polley**



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