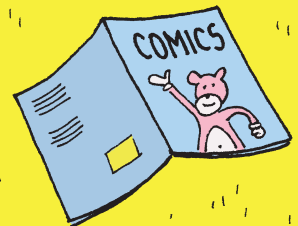
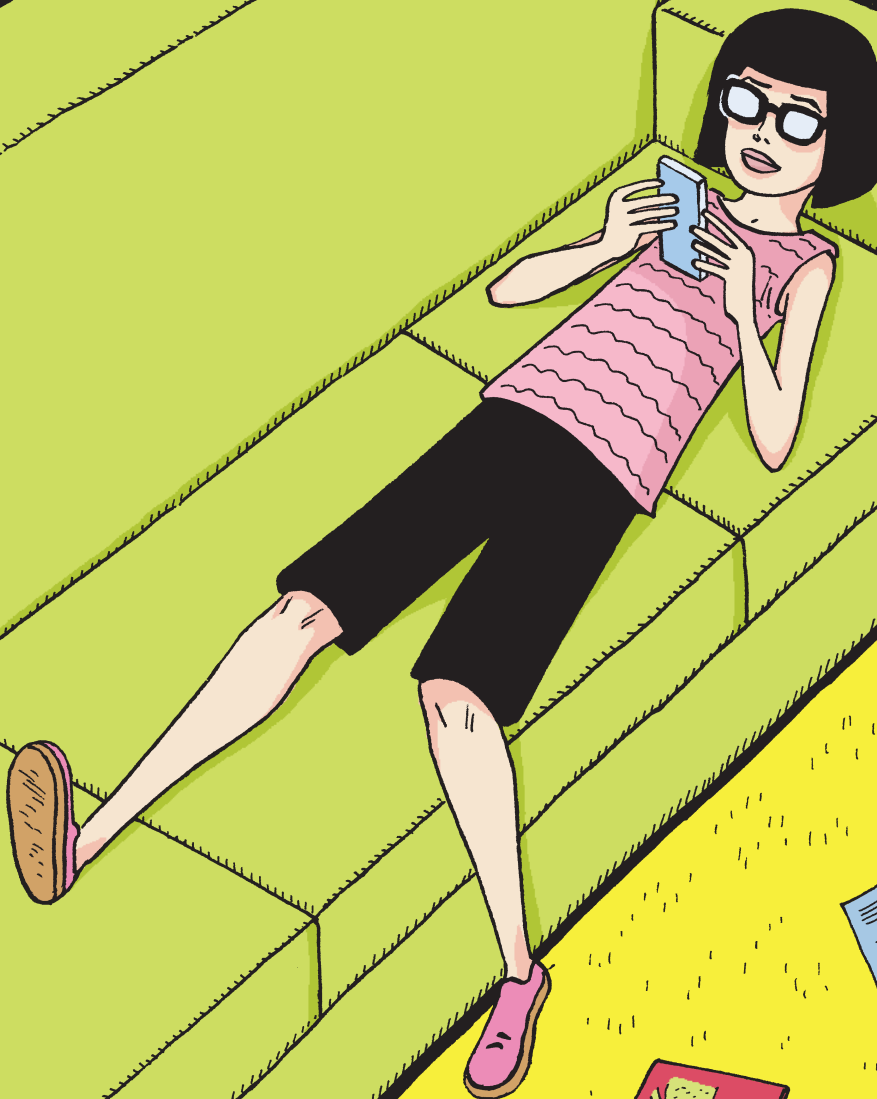


TADDLE CREEK

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**“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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TADDLE CREEK

NO. 37, SUMMER, 2016



The cartoonist Lou Skuce in his home studio, circa 1942 (p. 14).

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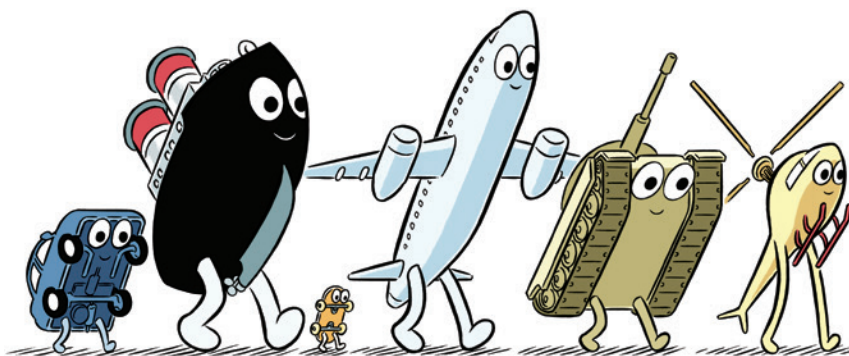
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THE CONTRIBUTORS

Jessica Westhead ("Empathize or Die," p. 4) has written fiction short-listed for the CBC Short Story Prize, selected for the Journey Prize anthology, and nominated for a National Magazine Award. Her short story collection, *And Also Sharks*, was a finalist for the Danuta Gleed Literary Award.

Michael e. Casteels ("A Brief Autobiography," p. 7) runs Puddles of Sky Press and has published more than a dozen chapbooks of poetry, most recently *Solar-powered Light Bulb and the Lake's Achy Tooth*. His first full-length book of poetry will be published this fall.

Shawn Syms ("Money Changes Everything," p. 10) is the author of the short-story collection *Nothing Looks Familiar*, which was seized by the Michigan Department of Corrections for its potential to "encourage criminal activity."

Jennifer LoveGrove ("Backyard Insurrection," p. 13) has written two poetry collections, and her debut novel, *Watch How We Walk*, was long-listed for the Scotiabank Giller Prize. Her next collection of poetry, *Beautiful Children with Pet Foxes*, will be published next spring.

Conan Tobias ("Canada's Greatest Cartoonist," p. 14) is the editor-in-chief of *Taddle Creek* and the senior editor of *Quill & Quire*.

Jess Taylor ("The Stink," p. 32) is the author of the short story collection *Pauls*, the opening story from which received a National Magazine Award. She is the founder of the Emerging Writers Reading Series and the fiction editor of *Little Brother* magazine.

John Porcellino ("The Frogs," p. 36) has been writing, drawing, and publishing mini-comics, comics, and graphic novels for more than thirty years, including the self-published series *King-Cat Comics and Stories*, which he began in 1989.

Andrew Daley ("Lindsay," p. 38) works in the film industry. He is the author of the novel *Tell Your Sister*, and a former associate editor of *Taddle Creek*.

David McGimpsey ("Plaxberries," p. 40) has written six collections of poetry, most recently *Asbestos Heights*, which won the A. M. Klein Prize. He is the Montreal fiction editor of the on-line journal Joyland.

Dani Couture ("Report on the Status of Raccoons on Fern Avenue," p. 43) is the author of three books of poetry and a novel, *Algoma*. Her collection *Sweet* was nominated for the Trillium Book Award for Poetry and won the ReLit Award.

Emily Schultz ("The Half Woman," p. 44) is the co-founder of the on-line journal Joyland, and the host of the Truth and Fiction podcast. Her most recent novel is *The Blondes*, and her next, *Men Walking on Water*, will be published in 2017.

Joe Ollmann (The Spots) won a Doug Wright Award in 2007 and lost the same award many other times. His next book is a comic biography of the writer William Seabrook.

Gilbert Hernandez (The Cover), along with his brother Jaime, has been creating *Love and Rockets* comics for more than thirty years, and will continue to do so come hell or high water.



... needs something in a heavy Creamsicle.

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THE PUBLISHER Conan Tobias
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TADDLE CREEK (ISSN 1480-2481) is published semi-annually, in June and December, by Vitalis Publishing, P.O. Box 611, Station P, Toronto, Ontario M5S 2Y4 Canada. Vol. XIX, No. 2, Whole Number 37. Summer, 2016.

THE SUBSCRIPTIONS Visit taddlecreekmag.com/subscribe. Two years (four issues): In Canada, \$18. In U.S., \$38. Overseas, \$58. Canadian Publications Mail Agreement No. 40708524.

THE PRIVACY POLICY Occasionally, *Taddle Creek* makes its subscriber list available to like-minded magazines for one-time mailings. If you would prefer your address not be shared, please contact the magazine.

THE SUBMISSIONS For submission guidelines, visit taddlecreekmag.com/submit.

THE FUNDING *Taddle Creek* acknowledges the financial support of the Government of Canada, the Canada Council for the Arts, and the Ontario Arts Council.

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T H E E P H E M E R A

PARTY LIKE IT'S 2012

One of the few things more prevalent in modern society than decadism is decadism nostalgia. The smoke from Y2K hadn't even finished puffing before the rapidly aging youth of yesterday began to wonder whatever happened to their Tamagotchis. Vinyl records are now more popular with the kids than compact discs, and even the lowly cassette is having a moment among music aficionados who miss the thrill of rewinding ninety metres of tape using nothing but a pencil.

Nostalgia for the first decade of the twenty-first century already is well underway, and *Taddle Creek* will be damned if it's going to be the last on the bandwagon for getting sentimental about the twenties. That's why the magazine not only is jumping on that bandwagon now, but steering it. Introducing the *Taddle Creek* app—the hot new technology of 2012 that combines the narrowly focused content of a single magazine with an application completely disconnected from the Web!

The *Taddle Creek* app doesn't just provide a PDF of each issue; it fulfills the promise made to consumers by the magazine industry of (almost literally) yesterday. Yes, now you can read *Taddle Creek* Gangnam style, with every story from the print edition completely redesigned and optimized for your digital device, in a scrollable, seemingly never-ending format. App users also can access audio and video extras not available anywhere else—with the exception of iTunes and YouTube.

The *Taddle Creek* app is free! *Taddle Creek* on the app is not. Print subscribers can access issues simply by entering their subscriber number, found on the envelope they discarded before reading

this page. (Need your number? Contact subscribe@taddlecreekmag.com.) Non-subscribers can subscribe through the app, or commit on an issue-by-issue basis. Visit the App Store now to get *Taddle Creek* for your iPad or iPhone.

(*Taddle Creek* would be remiss if it didn't thank Jeffrey Flores for the bang-up job he did developing its app. The magazine feels just awful that he'll be the first staffer to be laid off when Apple comes up with another expensive new replacement for print and apps are discontinued.)

EVERYTHING WRONG IS RIGHT AGAIN

The *Taddle Creek Podcast*, the magazine's other major new digital venture, is both long overdue, and perfectly timed. Podcasts took a while to catch on with the listening public, and *Taddle Creek*'s is proving to be no exception. Every Friday, *The Taddle Creek Podcast* presents a past or future contributor to the magazine reading a poem or short story of their own creation, with an occasional extended interview thrown into the mix. Thankfully, all past episodes are archived, so even if you haven't been listening to date, you can still go back and hear Hal Niedzviecki rant about the future, Alfred Holden rave about apartment-house design, and Derek McCormack repulse with talk of having things shoved up his ass (and not in a sexy way). *The Taddle Creek Podcast* is available for that magic price point of free. Subscribe on iTunes, or listen via the *Taddle Creek* Web site. It's just like *Serial* or *WTF*, but without the murder or comedy.

Did you miss *Taddle Creek*'s last launch party because you live out of town? Maybe the *Walrus* was presenting a seven-min-

ute talk on the plight of log drivers in landlocked small-town Manitoba on the same night. No matter. Thanks to *Taddle Creek*'s new YouTube channel—by far the least successful of the magazine's bold new digital ventures—you can watch Gary Barwin's latest mind-blowing on-stage musical freak-out from the comfort of your own home. You also can watch exclusive videos that take you ever-so-slightly below the surface of some of *Taddle Creek*'s feature stories (the egg cream video is especially fun). Can twenty-five subscribers be wrong? Maybe.

(*Taddle Creek* would be remiss again if it didn't thank its new A.V. squad of Ronit Novak and James Finnerty for their assistance in the above-mentioned audiovisual ventures. Their jobs will survive slightly longer than Jeff's. Thanks also to the Canada Council for the Arts and the Canada Periodical Fund, whose generous funding, via the Canadian taxpayer, helped make all of *Taddle Creek*'s electric dreams come true.

—TADDLE CREEK

Welcome to Suzanne Alyssa Andrew, who last issue came on board officially as *Taddle Creek*'s new associate editor. Suzanne has been contributing to the magazine since 2006, and recently published her debut novel, *Circle of Stones*. The slush pile awaits you, Suzanne.

And finally, some long-overdue congratulations: Frank Viva's cover for *Taddle Creek*'s kids' issue (No. 33) was the winner of the 2015 Applied Arts Photography and Illustration Award. Likewise, kudos to Sarah Meehan Sirk, whose short story "Moonman," from *Taddle Creek* No. 34, made the 2015 Journey Prize longlist.

THE FICTION

EMPATHIZE OR DIE

BY JESSICA WESTHEAD

A man is wearing a tuxedo. He is standing with his hands in his pockets, and a woman is kneeling at his feet with her arms outstretched. Where her head should be is a bunch of leaves blowing around, and her body is a giant high-heeled shoe, so the only actual human part of her are those long, graceful arms. The colours are mostly grey and black and white, except for the oversized green pear floating in the sky.

Dennis shakes his head in admiration and wonders, “What is the painter trying to say about society here? Something good? Something bad?”

He is always impressed by art that makes him think. And he’s in a restaurant! All he expected to do tonight was eat a hamburger. But now his cerebral gears are churning away, and what a treat it is to be inspired before he even orders his meal.

The waitress brings Dennis a menu. She is wearing a sleeveless top and her arms are long like the woman’s in the painting over his table. Aha! He points to the art with a dramatic flourish intended to be humorous and asks, “Is this a self-portrait? It’s very well done.”

“Are you serious?”

Her laugh sounds like an angel’s laugh from that movie he saw about angels that came down from Heaven to cavort with mortal men, which triggered the Apocalypse because of all the sin involved.

“Mission accomplished,” he thinks.

She says, “The owner’s kid did that. Thinks he’s Picasso or something. Makes me want to puke every time I see it. Can I get you a drink?”

He winks at her.

“What would you recommend?”

She says, “Uh, I don’t know, a coffee?”

He says, “Perfect,” and she goes off to fulfill his wish like a mystical fairy wearing a bikini woven out of flowers and moss she’d gathered from the enchanted forest floor. She’d had to gather a lot of flowers

and moss, because she is physically gifted in the way large-breasted women are gifted, meaning there was a lot of skin to cover. And she’d had to gather it quickly, because there were evil, lecherous goblins hiding in the woods. Meaning they would get her if she was naked.

When he opens his menu, a piece of paper flutters out in much the same way as a leaf would do in a similar situation, delightfully perpetuating the forest motif he’s conjured. It says, *OPEN MIC POETRY NIGHT: TONIGHT!*

He’d had no idea. All he’d wanted was a burger.

Dennis has always had a strong imagination. When he was only a boy, he used to draw a whole other menu on the paper placemats they gave out at Swiss Chalet. He drew chicken drumsticks with legs and eyes and claws, and his mom would say, “Yum! I’d like one of those, please!” She’d show his work to the waitresses and they would recoil a bit but then say, “Oh, isn’t that cute.” His mom would nod and tell them that Dennis was going to be rich and famous some day, and the waitresses would smile and smile.

Then he learned how to spell, and fell in love with the alphabet. He made up lists of words he liked purely because of how they sounded. His favourite word of all time was “cream.” There was something about it that made him feel like a billion tiny bubbles were frothing up under him, keeping him buoyant in a silky, white sea.

He took Theatre Studies all through high school, not because he wanted to be an actor but because he needed the creative outlet. Even so, his teacher said he showed promise, and Dennis respected the man’s opinion. That teacher was big on trust exercises with blindfolds. Dennis’s favourite was the “tropical sensory getaway” that ushered participants

through a thrilling adventure of touch, hearing, taste, and smell.

First off, he was blindfolded and led onto “the cruise ship,” which was really just a chair but by this point his disbelief had been fully suspended. The teacher honked a bicycle horn to signal his departure from port, and he was off. One of his peers ate Cheezies and blew in his face to simulate the bracing tang of a salty ocean breeze. Two of the taller guys rocked his chair back and forth to evoke the motion of the waves, and the prettiest girl in the class misted him gently with her hair-spray. When Dennis arrived at “the beach,” which was really just a box of sand, he took off his shoes and socks and wiggled his bare toes with abandon. Then somebody handed him a pineapple juice box and he had never tasted anything so sweet and exotic in all of his life.

Dennis eats his burger, and it’s delicious. He savours the spongy bun, the softly yielding tomato slice, the dill pickle with its knobby skin like that of an alligator. And of course the patty itself, pebbled and slightly chewy with the flavour of distant pastures and the kind of full blue sky that made his stomach hurt with possibility when he was a young man at the beginning of his life and he used to go on car rides with his mom, and whenever they passed a farmer’s field she would shout, “Dennis! Cows!”

And though the baklava and honey balls and rice pudding on offer may be very tempting, tonight he will indulge in poetry for dessert.

“Brown hair. Jeans, a pair. Black boots. Voice hoots.”

Truthfully, the poet doesn’t sound like an owl, but Dennis is pleased with his spontaneous verse nonetheless. Maybe he’ll share it with her later, when the performances have concluded, to show his

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appreciation for the poem she is sharing with him and a handful of other people now.

After paying his bill and liberally remunerating the fair waitress for her service, he'd moved from his table to one of the chairs arranged around a small stage at the other end of the restaurant. When the waitress saw him sitting there a few minutes later, she rolled her eyes at the empty microphone and said, "Have fun," and he replied, "I'm looking forward to it!" Which prompted more laughter from her that in turn gave him the same joyous bubbly feeling that the word "cream" had always elicited.

The young female poet's offering is more of a non-rhyming love story, actually, but all the same, her words transport Dennis to a distant yet comfortably familiar locale. He can literally visualize the hay bales in the dilapidated barn she is describing, and the ravishing farmer's daughter lying back on them with her generous spill of cornsilk hair, which means blond in a more poetic way. And the broad-shouldered farmhand lying beside her, uttering a manly grunt (which upon reflection is similar to the sound Dennis made when he finished his burger) signalling his satisfaction with either the farmer's daughter or the pleasantly scratchy cushion of hay—Dennis isn't sure at first, but that's what's called suspense.

Despite the drama unfurling before the microphone, however, Dennis senses a restlessness in his fellow audience members. Some are sighing, others are shuffling around in their chairs, and several are indiscreetly checking their mobile devices instead of enjoying the sheer entertainment right here in front of them.

Meanwhile, he is trying to pay attention to the engaging tale being spun from this woman's fetching red lips, speaking words that she herself wrote in an act of sheer invention. Literature! He is completely invested in the raw emotion being splattered onstage, even though apparently it's not quite up to snuff for the majority of this gloomy crowd.

He himself prefers to have fun and roll with life, and if he spontaneously wants to go out for a burger or even pizza, he'll do it. And if a nice-looking woman comes in and orders an extra large with pepperoni, mushrooms, and double cheese while he's sitting down to enjoy his evening slice, he might say, "There's a free table over here, Miss." And she might

give him a funny look and say, "I'm getting an extra-large pizza to go, but thank you." Then he says, "Hey, a big appetite is attractive on a woman." And she says, "It's for my family, at home," and waits by the cash register until her food is ready.

"Suit yourself," Dennis beams out at the sighers and shufflers and device checkers who don't seem to realize how difficult it is to craft a tale from nothing and to create believable characters people can empathize with.

The trick is, you need to pose the question, How can I locate some fellow feeling with this individual who is outside my own realm of personal experience? Because in art, as in everyday existence, we can all benefit from stepping into the shoes of others. For example, as Dennis learned from that wise Theatre Studies teacher of yesteryear, it is possible to envision yourself as another actual human being or a fictional fabrication of one, or even as someone in an advertisement, who is really just an actual human being pretending to be someone else.

Such as the man in the poster he saw in the restroom of this very establishment, which was an ad for gum. The idea of the campaign was to have safe breath in the event a person encountered romance. "Safe" in this case meaning minty fresh after chewing this particular brand of gum, apparently, so that you would make a positive impression when you started kissing a stranger. In the ad, a man was kissing a woman with porcelain skin and dark curly hair. They were both smiling so as to convey their mutual enjoyment of each other's breath. And, one would assume, sexual arousal as well.

So he put himself into this guy's shoes, even though technically he couldn't see them because the picture only showed the couple from the shoulders up. But regardless, there Dennis was, locking lips with this heavenly brunette creature, and it was snowing and he was wearing a leather jacket—a fashionable choice but not very warm so he was shivering but trying not to show it because shivering is not a manly action. The woman was wearing a red toque with a giant pompom, which he thought was stupid—such an alluring lady wearing a dumb hat like that? But he decided not to say anything because he wanted to keep her happy, and negative comments aimed at a female's wardrobe choices are often frowned upon by said females, or so he has heard. No, no—he

A BRIEF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I am a red sneaker, a blinking stoplight, Lake Ontario. I was born in a cabin with the roar of buffalo guns filling the room. No curtains. A ship in a bottle. The rains were few and these I carried in a hammock slung beneath the wagon. I have split myself down the middle, hopped in both directions at once, returned, and zipped myself back together. I held the dying light in my trembling hands, ate a burrito for dinner. I purchased the head of an axe, a stringless violin, a pocket watch engraved with a stranger's name. I tamed a shrew to perch on my shoulder, lifted a boulder to free the blind prospector. He lavished me with televisions, a lion tamer's gold tooth, a house of gingerbread. I am a phone booth in the desert, a drop from a faucet, the windowless basements of youth. Once, I flapped my arms yet remained landlocked. I am a tackle box at a yard sale, a bucket of rusted nails. I am a fruit fly, an ice skate, the lost highway at midnight twisting through the mountains like smoke rising from my grandfather's pipe.

—MICHAEL E. CASTEELS

wanted to stay in her good graces and thereby encourage her to keep kissing him forever.

O.K., they could maybe pause to get married and have a couple of children together. And one day she would stop at a pizza place on her way home from work and order an extra-large pizza for him and the kids, and they'd all sit down at the table and dig in, and the kids would say, "Mmm, pizza!" Dennis and his wife would hold hands even when they were eating, and after they put their little boy and girl to bed they'd wink at each other, which was their code for "adult time." Meaning he was going to crawl all over her and do all sorts of things to her, and she was going to let him.

Now the farmhand is fumbling around in the pockets of his dusty jeans—oh no, what does he have in there? A knife? Should the farmer's daughter be afraid of her darling farmhand? How well do they really know each other anyway, after merely a few dalliances in the barn and the stables and the cold cellar? Sure, they've just made extremely passionate love, with nobody to witness that passion save for an errant lamb who wandered in at a crucial point and made them chuckle at its frightened bleating that contrasted its soft woolly innocence against the violent throes of their mutual orgasms.

But when you get down to brass tacks, he is a mysterious farmhand without a past who was hired by her blind and therefore overly trusting father on a whim

when he showed up one day bearing a mysterious scar that remained unseen by the farmer, due to the blindness.

He is also poor. In fact, the farmhand's Achilles heel (literary parlance for weakness) is his crippling insecurity about his finances—and O.K., if you want to get right down to it, his general mental skills, otherwise why can't he earn a decent living? Even though he can ride a horse with his eyes closed, and we're not talking about a gentle animal here. We're talking the craziest steed of the bunch, who bucks constantly and has a thirst for human blood, which is unusual in horses.

But the farmhand is certainly working very hard as a farmhand, there's no doubt about that, and in fact he caught the eye of the farmer's daughter in the first place when he was huffing and puffing from exertion while wrangling. He'd become so overheated that he had to take his shirt off, and the daughter couldn't help but notice all the sweat dripping down his hard muscles. She offered him a paper towel, which didn't do much, absorbency-wise, but he appreciated the gesture all the same.


Plus isn't everybody looking for a way to make more money these days? For instance, Dennis's plan is to create a revolutionary on-line game where users can scan a photo of their head, which they could float around and plunk onto different bodies, such as a runway model or Olympic athlete or Dracula, or even various animals would be available.

It will be like a virtual out-of-body experience, which Dennis had last month in real life when he slipped on some ice and fell backwards onto concrete. He lost consciousness and the next thing he knew, his soul was performing the very tricky manoeuvre of hovering above his prone, motionless form. He gazed at himself and there was something important he wanted to say, but then he travelled to a whole other galaxy where the peaceful, squid-like inhabitants of a planet much like ours, only colder, worshipped him as a god.

They explained that they had the power to grant wishes and asked Dennis if there was anything he was truly in need of, deep down in his soul? And he said it would be appealing to partner up love-wise with a nice-looking lady. The aliens said, "Sure, why not?" And he was thinking, "All right, here we go!" Then boom, he was back on Earth again, lying on the sidewalk and staring up at the bright blue sky. A nice-looking woman passing by frowned down at him with concern, and he thought, "Thank you, aliens." He was about to ask for her number but then he passed out again, and woke up alone in the hospital with a concussion. Which was where his on-line gaming idea was born.

His users will have the opportunity to step into the shoes of an ancient Egyptian pharaoh or a cheetah or hey, perhaps even a tough-yet-tender farmhand. And through the magic of social media they'll be able to communicate with each other, such that a user pretending to be a fireman could send a message to a user pretending to be a prima ballerina. Like, "If you were dancing and your house was burning down, I would save you, but only if you took all your clothes off and started touching yourself."

In an early brainstorming session, Dennis also came up with the character of the handsome but emotionally unavailable and frequently sarcastic Cultural Studies major he'd roomed with in university who was always banging different chicks. The scenario: You're him, and you're lying in bed reading some porn, when there is a timid knock at your door. It's the girl from down the hall who wears leather shorts all the time and makes collages with found materials, which basically means garbage. She giggles shyly and asks can she sleep beside you? Just sleep, no sex or anything. And you say, "Sure, O.K. But you better



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make sure there's no s-e-x, like you said." And that funny remark causes her to laugh and makes her want to have sex with you after all. In fact, she starts begging because she really, really wants it. So eventually you decide to be nice and give it to her.

There will be an element of danger as well, such as the threat of a horrific on-line death if players do not sufficiently immerse themselves in their chosen personas, which will have to be measured by some sort of empathy barometer.

All Dennis needs now is a clever name for the Web site, and some game developers, and he's ready to go.

Meanwhile, back among the hay bales, the author is using the skillful technique of poetic justice when the farmhand produces a diamond ring from a pocket of his tight, worn denims and asks for the farmer's daughter's hand in marriage. So clearly this will not be a tragedy after all, even though the farmhand could just as easily have pulled a cruel blade out of his pants instead. They embrace, and the farmer's daughter shouts an ecstatic "Yes, oh yes!" The farmhand slides the ring onto the farmer's daughter's finger, and swears he will protect her forever.

"Safe," Dennis breathes. "You will always be safe with me." And then they kiss, obviously, because what else is there to do once a proposal has been made and accepted? Dennis closes his eyes and sinks into pure physical sensation. The farmer's daughter's lips are soft and malleable like the creamiest of rice puddings, her breath has the intoxicating sweetness of pineapple, and her hair-spray tickles his nostrils like the finest of sea mists.

At that moment, he hears a strange and menacing combination of sounds—low groans and snickers along with a restless tapping and shuffling only partially masked by a cacophony of coughs. The source of these noises is not immediately evident, so he tells the achingly beautiful farmer's daughter—his betrothed!—to stay where she is while he investigates.

With his lowered eyelids impairing his vision, he puts his remaining senses on high alert. His nostrils widen to sniff out the threat above the whimsical scents of straw, sawdust, and dung. His fingers scuttle stealthily over the pen he keeps

tucked in his shirt pocket in case inspiration strikes—he could use it as a weapon if brute force won't suffice. He tastes beef on his tongue, which is distracting. Didn't he consume a romantic picnic lunch of fried chicken and cucumber sandwiches with his gal before their splendid liaison in the barn?

"Be brave," he urges his trembling fiancée. He will hunt down the cruel beast hissing at her from the shadows and slay it with his large, calloused hands.

Then the two of them can go back to what they were doing before she agreed to be his wife. Ha ha, O.K., sure, and then she can get started on the wedding plans. He smiles at her indulgently. He likes a woman who knows what she wants. Plus, come on, she is *gorgeous*.

But hold on a minute here, because there's something weird about her head. Right before Dennis's disbelieving eyes it's dissolving, whirring, flapping like birds. Then the colour bleeds out of the hay bales, the chairs, the stage, and the dish of thick, luscious cream for the barn cat, and he thinks, "No, not wings—leaves." So many of them, and all from different trees. Even though it was winter the last time he checked. Where did all this crazy autumn foliage come from?

And just when he's beginning to suspect things may not be exactly as they seem, his beloved reaches her long, reassuring arms toward him, and applauds. And mutters something that sounds like, "Thank fucking *God*."

Dennis wakes up. He blinks rapidly. He looks around. He sits straighter in his chair and claps more exuberantly than everyone else. He is suddenly alight with ideas. He is on fire. The perfect title for his on-line game pops into his brain, and he is full of love for the universe and immensely grateful for the inspiration it bestows upon him every day, like a sparkling, shiny gift.

The host steps up to the microphone and slings his arm around the poet's thin shoulders. She slumps a little under the weight, but she's beaming.

He says to her, "That was great. You're great. I'd really like to talk to you more about that piece later, because it really moved me."

The poet nods and blushes until he lets her go. When she returns to her seat,

several people lean in and whisper loudly to her, "That was so amazing!"

The host is wearing a tuxedo—*just like the man in the painting*. He is younger than Dennis, but much taller, and with a carefully trimmed handlebar moustache that gives him additional authority, plus coolness.

"I see some new faces here tonight, which is awesome. We do this every Wednesday, guys, so put it on your calendars. Big thanks to the proprietors of Athena's Grill for providing this space for us to exorcise our creative demons. They also changed my diapers, which I guess is another thing I should thank them for. Except they also make me tell you to come early and order food first. Ideally one of the more expensive dishes, like the moussaka or the calamari dinner. Or the shrimp saganaki, which is my personal favourite. Or a burger, whatever. Just eat something to keep the old Greek people off my back, or else they're going to zap me with their evil eye."

"The host is the painter. And I had a burger." Two more serendipitous details that make Dennis marvel at the intricately random wonder of it all.

"And please don't forget to tip our lovely waitress generously, because she works like a dog."

The host sticks his hands in his pockets and grins as the waitress walks by, but she's very focused on balancing her tray of empty glasses.

"O.K.!" says the host. "We've got a great crowd here tonight so if you've got something special to share with us, now's your chance."

Dennis can hardly believe his ears. "Anyone can do this?"

"Remember—there's no time limit, and the sky's the limit. Anything goes. Just get up here and wow us."

Dennis's heart races with the thrill of a freshly minted fictional tale his mind has crafted on the spot, with barely any effort at all. The best part is the ending, which concerns the newly clarified understanding of a previous "reality" the protagonist has upon rousing himself from a deep slumber.

The host angles a palm over his eyes like he's shielding them from bright sun, and surveys the audience. "So, who's next?"

Dennis thinks, "I am."

He raises his hand and holds his breath, and waits. ☐



THE FICTION

MONEY CHANGES EVERYTHING

An excerpt.

BY SHAWN SYMS

If you don't stop, you'll lose everything." Karyn scanned Dan's text message, then tossed her phone into her purse. Not now. The bank representative would be back in a minute. Karyn tapped her fingertips on his desk and waited. Her nails themselves were silent; they didn't hit the wood surface. Unpainted, a touch jagged.

"I think we have everything we need now to review your file, Ms. Lake."

Evan Drinkwater, Karyn's client-services rep at mBank, was too young for the sharp, tailored blue suit he wore. The scent of his aftershave gave the cramped cubicle a medicinal scent. His skin was scrubbed. "I could see this one coming after my daughter like a shark," Karyn thought. "Not that Bella is particularly innocent."

Drinkwater sat. His chair creaked. He opened the paper file he had returned with and then typed a few strokes on his keyboard.

"Here we go."

This was the first time Karyn had been called into the bank for a meeting, at least since she got her mortgage. Before today, it was letters and phone calls. Letters shoved into a drawer unopened. Her ringer turned off. This is how you make things go away. For a while, anyway.

"Ms. Lake, the automatic withdrawal of your mortgage payment failed this month."

Drinkwater affected a neutral but pleasant tone. Karyn felt a lurch in her stomach, as if she might have an attack of diarrhea. She wasn't sure what could come out as she hadn't eaten in at least forty-eight hours.

"Based on the terms of our agreement, we always try again in seven days to access the required funds," he continued. "In the past, we've had to do this with you..."

He paused and looked up at the screen, then turned to face her again. Deep blue eyes. He was attractive, she admitted. Her stomach seized up again.

"... four times."

Karyn looked right back at him, un-

blinking. "You can't break me. This isn't even happening," she thought.

"This time, the funds were still insufficient."

Drinkwater picked up a pen and looked down at it in his hand, clicking and unclicking slowly a few times to release and extract the ink-covered tip. Karyn's mind felt empty, blank. Insufficient feelings. The young banker looked up at her with a solemn yet businesslike gaze.

"What are we going to do?"

"My daughter had an overnight school trip," she said in a monotone. "It cost me more than I had expected."

She waited.

"Ms. Lake." Drinkwater put down the pen. "You can't keep a house if you can't make the payments."

"I'm paid on Friday. Tomorrow. It goes right into my account. You'll get the money."

In her mind, Karyn was in a different room. One with soothing lights and sounds. Dim lights, muted sounds. Safer than here. The overhead fluorescent was hitting a blood vessel in her temple, causing it to throb. Her lips were dry. She needed to get out of there.

"Ms. Lake, I need you to understand what will happen if the payment doesn't go through again."

He looked up at Karyn, her long red hair pulled back tightly in a black scrunchy.

"You will be given fourteen days to acquire and submit the funds by whatever means are possible."

He paused, reaching his hand out toward her, then stopping himself.

"If you don't have the funds, the bank will initiate proceedings to foreclose."

There. The word finally out in the open. "There is no way that this will happen. Not in fourteen days. Or at least, not today." Karyn tried to remember to breathe. Her stomach made an audible noise, as if it were contracting in upon itself. She fought the urge to stand up and walk out without saying another word. What was there to say?

Drinkwater closed the file. The folder had a photo of her house stapled inside, on the upper-left-hand corner. Red bricks and a tiny front porch. She hadn't been home in three days. Drinkwater looked up at her again.

"Your mother? A friend? Is there someone who can help you straighten things out?"

Her mother, in the ground nearly twelve months. Nothing left in her account. She hadn't banked with mBank or Drinkwater could have checked himself. Her friends? Maybe Dan had some money. He always seemed to, even though he had a pretty shitty job. Karyn thought he might have stayed at her house the last few nights to babysit Bella. She never asked him to but he seemed to keep showing up; cooking, cleaning. Do you even call it babysitting when your kid wears a bra?

"I don't need anyone's help, Mr. Drinkwater. There is nothing to straighten out."

Karyn glanced down at her purse. Her phone, on silent, made a vibrating buzz.

"You'll get the money tomorrow. And this isn't going to happen again."

Drinkwater did not sigh. He stood up and reached forward to shake her hand.

"I'm really happy to hear that, Ms. Lake." He looked at his watch.

"I want to make sure that you have my card," he said. "If you need to reach me over the next fourteen days, I'm here for you. I would be happy to connect you with some additional advice if you need it."

"I don't. But thank you."

As Karyn stood up and leaned forward to accept Evan Drinkwater's firm corporate handshake a second time, she passed out and fell forward onto the desk, tumbling quickly to the ground.

When she came to, a woman she'd never seen before, wearing a lavender suit, sat next to her, wiping her forehead with a cool cloth.

"Please have a sip," the woman gestured toward a glass of water in her hand.

With a meekness she rarely ever felt,



Karyn bent toward the cold wet glass and complied. For a moment she was confused. "Where even am I?"

Looking around, it all came back. The interior design of this bank—the cool grey and blue hues, the modern lighting, the large touch screens and moving pictures everywhere—like a cross between some kind of artisanal whisky bar and the Apple Store. But a bank is a bank, no matter how they try to disguise it. Banks exist to take power away from you—to suck away your money in fees instead of letting you decide for yourself what to do with it. Like a Sunday school teacher or a parent drunk on authority.

The lavender business lady. According to the name tag, her name was Ruby. She spoke to Karyn gently.

"Are you feeling O.K., honey? Do you want a Coke or something? You must be a bit light-headed."

Ruby put her hand on Karyn's shoulder, where it felt like a dumbbell.

Karyn needed to get out of there. She said what she figured she needed to say.

"Yes, dear. I would really appreciate that. I've just been running a bit ragged lately, trying to get my daughter ready for tennis camp. She's a natural talent. It's been so hard since her father died. I stopped by here on the way to pick up her outfits for the camp. I've just been a bit tired lately. I could use some Coke."

Ruby smiled and walked over to the vending machine.

"I hear you, honey. I've got two girls, six and ten, and it feels like my day is never done. I hope your daughter does well in tennis camp. And I'm sorry about your husband."

Ruby pressed a button and Karyn heard an aluminum can clunk into the dispenser at the bottom.

"Yeah, my non-existent husband," Karyn thought. She stood, took the Coke, smiled at Ruby, and headed toward the bank's entrance, purse in hand. Out of the corner of her eye she saw Evan Drinkwater sitting at his desk. His eyes traced her figure as she cut a path straight out the door and picked up the pace. "This isn't happening. I need to come up with a plan. And I will."

Standing outside near the car, she took her phone from her purse and responded

to Dan's text from earlier. Dan. Her best friend. Her ex-lover.

"Nothing 2 worry about. Everything good. U around? On my way home. Maybe I'll see u."

Then she got into the car and went right back to the casino.

Dan's phone buzzed. It was a notification from the Grindr chat app. He'd hoped it was Karyn getting back to him after the thirteen messages he'd sent her over the past two-and-a-half days. It looked like Bella needed tampons, and he didn't really think he should be the one to have that conversation. He wasn't Bella's dad, though some days it sure felt like it. He sat in front of Karyn's TV, watching sports and waiting for Bella to come home for dinner. She'd gone to the mall with her best friend, Tina, and new boyfriend, Diego. At least he thought Diego was her boyfriend. It was a little hard to keep track of what Bella was up to these days. He just wanted to make sure she was getting at least one square meal into her. His condo building was just around the corner anyway. Yes, a thirteen-year-old could probably cook for herself—but she might not make the best choices.

Dan belched before getting up from the couch, then farted on his way into the kitchen. Standing in front of the fridge to grab another beer, he pulled his phone out of his shorts and tapped on the Grindr notification. He skipped through to the message as the app launched, the orange background flanking its weird black logo. It always reminded Dan of a skull.

"I would pay ca\$h to give you a blow job. PayPal?"

Dan stared at the message, not sure how to respond. He scanned the profile of the man who had sent it, someone with the screen moniker "Submit2u"—not bad looking, mid-thirties, nice beefy build, had obviously spent time in a gym. Dan doubted this guy would ever have to pay. Dan scratched at his five o'clock shadow, cracked open a can of Coors, and took a slug, heading back to the couch.

As he plunked himself back down in front of the game, Dan took a closer look at the man's profile. He lived 1,458 miles away. What he was suggesting—at least the

oral sex part of it—was a physical impossibility. Dan had received compliments on his endowment before, but it measured in inches and not acres. And PayPal—that's the program you use to pay for T-shirts and underwear and DVDs you order over the Web. What was up with that?

Dan assumed the guy had some kind of fantasy about paying for sex, but didn't want to actually do it or he'd be hitting up a sex worker in his own hometown. Although two of his good friends originally met on Grindr and were tying the knot in a couple of weeks, Dan understood that apps like this were, for most, a means to fulfill their cyber fantasies. Dan was handsome and well built; he attracted attention with very little effort, on-line or in real life. He toyed with these kinds of apps in idle moments but didn't have a lot of time for them. Working as a nurse could be pretty draining. When he wasn't at the hospital, he needed a bit of mind-numbing entertainment.

Dan was down for chat and little else. That said, some of the chat propositions he received could be a bit over the top. Like this guy. Well, then again, there was the one guy who wanted Dan to dominate him in an on-line chat session while pretending he was Willy Wonka of the infamous Chocolate Factory. That was a weird one—though Dan actually went along with it for almost a half-hour, mainly because he was lying in bed bored, waiting for Karyn to call him back about brunch with her and Bella.

That was a while ago. He hadn't shared a meal with Karyn—or seen her and her daughter together at the same time—in months. So no, he guessed, someone who wanted to talk about making an imaginary payment for an imaginary blow job was not all that bizarre. Just some lonely guy, needing a little fantasy material to help make his life a bit better. Dan imagined the guy tapping away while lying in bed. Maybe he was a potato farmer living in small-town Idaho. Dan was used to being perceived as a dominant in the queer world of tops and bottoms. It had always been that way with certain women as well. People who liked to explore their submissive sides were drawn to Dan and his conventional good looks, not unlike those of a stereotypical cop or fireman.

With the football game blaring away in the background, Dan reopened the app and started a conversation with Submit2u.



BACKYARD INSURRECTION

Without provocation, the leaves rise up
and fly to the edge of the wind's border.
Whisper something.
Then three trees tear
up from the dirt cracking like ribs.
Roots pried apart.
Naked, splayed.

A wet stench spreads
as leering neighbours teem.
One trunk leans, saplings bent
under its drunk weight,
suspended, double dared,
over the perfect house next door.

Mother runs horrified marathons
through horrified hallways
in horrified forests.
Asks me to tear off
bits of flesh from her
ankles and I do it.

Knotted fists, knotted branches,
knotted manes. A welcome home
banner snapping in the wind.

Splintered mother, folded
mother, lonely mother:
the fence is broken, the horses out
and charging down the road.

—JENNIFER LOVE GROVE

"Of course you'd want to pay for this.
Feast your eyes"

Dan, of course, had the requisite penis
pic, with angle and lighting design to en-
hance, if not outright exaggerate, its
natural impressiveness.

"Thank you for the pic, Sir. That's quite
the specimen. I'd pay ca\$h to worship it."

"That goes without saying. And I'd
take every penny from you."

Dan thought this was what the guy
wanted to hear, even though he had nei-
ther paid nor been paid for sex in his life.
The closest he'd ever come was selling his
blood and sperm during a low point in uni-
versity when he really needed the money.

"YES SIR THANK YOU SIR"

"You know you want to service a real
man like me."

"Yes Sir. I am low and weak. I am born
to serve a Superior male such as yourself.
Please let me pay you Sir."

"Damn right you would pay for it,
low-life."

"Please let me pay you now. PayPal?"

There it was again. What was this guy
even talking about?

"What are you asking me, cock slave?"

"Please tell me your PayPal address and
let me give up my cash for you?"

"dantheman@wiggler.com"

"How much Sir?"

What was the going rate when someone
random wants you to allow them to give
you money for free, apparently in ex-
change for nothing? Dan made a guess.

"You must pay me \$50, lowlife."

"Thank you Sir. Are you really going to
let me pay you, or do I have to beg you for
the privilege first?"

"BEG ME."

"Sir, I am low and weak and I exist only
to give up everything I have to Superior
males. I am inferior to you. The only way

my life has meaning is if I take everything
that I have earned and surrender it to you.
I am too stupid to have my own money.
Please let me start by paying you \$50.
Please Sir, I beg you."

"Go ahead, you inferior little worm."

"YES SIR, THANK YOU SIR."

Dan heard the ding of a text-message
notification go off. Could that be Karyn
finally getting back after all those texts.
When would she get home? They really
needed to talk. He quickly switched over
to see the message.

It wasn't Karyn. It was a message from
PayPal, letting him know that fifty dollars
had just been deposited into his account.
Dan returned to Grindr.

"Good little pig. You did what you are
meant to do."

"Sir, I just came Sir. Thank you, Sir. I
hope I can worship you again Sir."

Dan watched as Submit2u's profile sta-
tus changed to inactive. He contemplated
what had just happened. It was one of the
strangest things he had experienced in
recent memory. Even weirder than the
Willy Wonka freak. The guy wasn't really
after Dan's peen at all. It was the act of
paying someone—Dan—that had triggered
his orgasm. And then he was gone. Dan
had never heard of such a thing, but he
did have to admit the horny talk had got-
ten him excited. Making the submissive
man beg. Ordering him to pay. Hearing
the ding of the notification from PayPal
that money had been placed in his ac-
count. Dan hadn't even known that you
could receive money using PayPal unless
you were a store.

Dan dug into the sofa, between two
cushions, to haul out his phone from
where he had dropped it after chatting
with Submit2u. He was hungry all of a
sudden, so he called Jet's and ordered a
pizza. He splurged and got an extra large,
in case Bella or, fat chance, Karyn, actu-
ally showed up. He was almost nervous
about her coming home. Anyone else
might have called Children's Aid by now.
He ordered six toppings, twice as many
as usual, feeling flush with cash after his
PayPal experience. The guy at Jet's told
him that the pizza was forty dollars, but
it felt like it was free. In fact, he'd come
out ahead.

As Dan hung up the phone, he heard a
car in the driveway, followed, shortly
thereafter, by a key turning in the front
door. He braced himself for what he
might see. ☞





THE PROFILE

CANADA'S GREATEST CARTOONIST

Lou Skuce's charmed and versatile career.

BY CONAN TOBIAS

On the evening of February 2, 1951, the Toronto Press Club welcomed guests to its third-floor premises, located atop a steep set of stairs at 99 Yonge Street, to celebrate the reopening of its ladies' lounge. The club, then still known as the Toronto Men's Press Club, was where the city's newsmen met to drink and talk shop. Women were not offered membership until the nineteen-seventies, though the lounge, where wives and other female visitors congregated, was an early concession. The renovated room was spacious, with high ceilings. A dark panelling ran along the lower portion of its walls, and the furniture was tastefully modern. Barbara Ann Scott, the twenty-two-year-old Olympic figure skating champion, known as Canada's Sweetheart, was in attendance to untie the inaugural ribbon, while Viscount Alexander of Tunis, King George VI's charismatic and popular Governor General and himself an active club member, smiled and mingled alongside a who's who of local newspaper men, including the Toronto *Telegram* columnist Ted (the Moaner) Reeve and Jim Vipond, the sports editor of the *Globe and Mail*. Barkers and pitchmen from the Conklin carnival provided the evening's entertainment.

Most eyes that night were drawn to a mural that covered not only the room's walls, floor to ceiling, but also the ceiling itself, as well as the doors, moulding, and air vents. The elaborate work depicted the evolution of the fourth estate, from the Stone Age to the present day. Vignettes included a friar, possibly Martin Luther, nailing a public notice to a poll, a reporter chasing a nineteenth-century fire engine, a pool of switchboard operators, and a group of members mobbing the club's own bar to buy tickets to its annual By-Line Ball. Generic caricatures of newspaper staff—photo editor, slot man, sob sister—filled space between the ceiling's decorative slats. The mural was the work

of Lou Skuce, a short, stout man, often, by this time, referred to as Canada's Greatest Cartoonist. Skuce began making a name for himself as a newspaper illustrator more than four decades earlier. He had a natural talent that allowed him to develop a loose, unstructured style, and possessed a wit that played well with the blue-collar middle class. "Lou was a horse for work," the *Telegram's* Reeve once said. "Nothing was too much trouble, no detail in his work too small for him to look after."

Skuce was a champion athlete in his youth, but his trim frame had grown since into a rounder build that made him look jolly and lovable in his shirtsleeves yet suave and commanding in a suit. He retained a full shock of hair—once dark, now white—and his face was long, kind, and handsome. He often wore spats and smelled of cigars, which he tended to ash on his vest. Skuce was outgoing, well liked, and extremely generous. He was deeply religious, continuing his family's Anglican tradition, but stressed that the annual month-long orange juice fast he undertook later in life was simply for the purpose of keeping his weight under control. By 1951, Skuce had contributed directly to many of the major—and minor—daily, weekly, and monthly publications in Canada, and was one of the industry's most beloved figures. "Through the tireless efforts and artistic ability of Mr. Skuce," Frank Teskey, the press club's president, told the assembled crowd on the night of the ladies' lounge rechristening, "the Toronto Men's Press Club now possesses an invaluable special feature which might well be the envy of any newspaper club in the world."

Skuce was working in his father's blacksmith shop, in the village of Britannia, when, not long after the turn of the twentieth century, he began drawing cartoons for the *Dipper*, a small weekly newspaper

T. ANTHONY TRIFOLI. COURTESY TREVOR HOWELL

based in nearby Ottawa. Newspapers began using illustrators and cartoonists in the eighteen-nineties to alleviate the greyness of their pages, and by the time Skuce's career began, editorial cartoonists were a vital, popular, and respected part of the industry. His work on the *Dipper* soon caught the attention of the larger Ottawa *Evening Journal*—a right-leaning daily broadsheet with a more rural readership than the competing *Citizen*—which hired Skuce away. While on assignment in the House of Commons for his new employer, Skuce pestered the press-weary Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier so much that Laurier assigned a young member of Parliament to assist him. "I'll leave you with Willie, here," Laurier said, as he introduced Skuce to the future prime minister William Lyon Mackenzie King, then the deputy minister of Labour. "Willie is a good boy and a clever boy. You listen to Willie and he'll explain things to you."

In 1909, Skuce accepted a job as the featured cartoonist and art editor of the *Toronto World's* Sunday edition. The *Sunday World* was unique in Canada. American newspapers published their leisurely weekend read on Sunday, but stricter Canadian laws prevented business transactions from occurring on the Sabbath. As a result, papers such as the *Globe*, *Mail*, and *Star* printed their more lavish editions on Saturday. Many American Sunday editions were populist, secular reads, with entertainment coverage and a selection of content aimed specifically at women. Canadian papers like the Saturday *Globe* often were more traditionally nationalistic and Christian in tone, publishing book reviews and half-tone photographs in contrast to the colour comics and sensational illustrations preferred by many of their U.S. counterparts. The *Toronto Sunday World*—published on Saturday—took advantage of an unfilled niche, creating a Canadian version of the American metropolitan weekend paper, aimed more at the middle class than what was being produced by its high-brow competition.

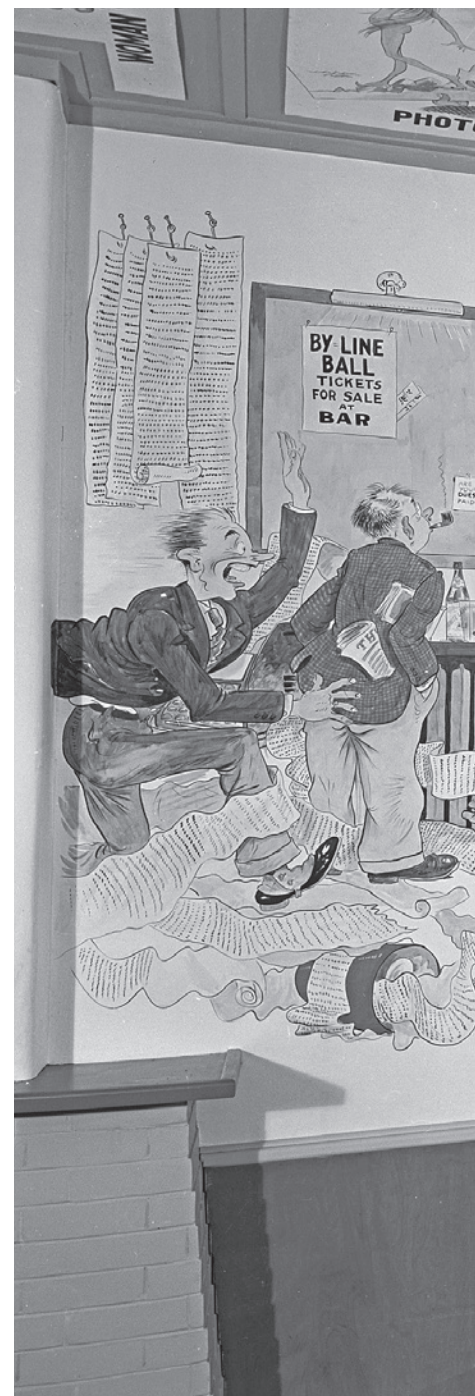
Skuce's earliest drawings for the *World* had an accomplished but traditional style that quickly gave way to full-on caricature and a general cartoonishness, much in the vein of his contemporaries A. G. Racey, of the *Montreal Star*, and, especially, Jimmie Frise, the creator of the popular Anytown, Canada, comic *Birdseye Center*. Skuce's

cartoons were visually frenetic and fun, with a sense of humour that played directly to the *World's* intended audience and soon made him a household name. "Skuce says the secret of his success is action in the drawings," said a reporter profiling the artist, "but . . . it is the merry way in which Skuce laughs with us, not at us, that has such a wide appeal." Each Sunday Skuce drew *Events of the Week in Cartoon*, a strip of five single-panel editorial cartoons that tidily summed up recent news items or offered witty, light criticism on subjects as serious as politics or as banal as the weather. Skuce contributed a similar weekly roundup, titled *How It Looks To Us*, to the sports section, while other strips—including *Things To Worry About*, *War Terms Explained*, and *XSkuce Me*—were more fluid, coming and going as they outlived their usefulness.

Skuce once asked Billy Armstrong, the *World's* handicapper, for a tip on the coming Saturday's horse race, which he incorporated cryptically into a comic—a trick popularized years earlier by Clare Briggs in his short-lived *A. Piker Clerk*, and later taken up by Bud Fisher in what eventually became the strip *Mutt and Jeff*. Armstrong's tip paid off, and Skuce continued the gag. Decades later, the *Globe and Mail* columnist J. V. McAree recalled that readers continued to use the sports page comics as a race card long after Skuce had moved on. Readers' "ingenuity in finding imaginary clues was extraordinary," McAree wrote. "On the whole they probably did a little better than when they were looking to Lou and Billy for guidance."

Skuce was the first to draw three-colour front-page illustrations for a Canadian newspaper. These covers frequently allowed him to showcase his fine-art skills and his ability to pack a wealth of information into a single drawing without losing sight of its focus: Santa Claus approaching the city by plane on Christmas Eve; a lively depiction of the first intercollegiate rugby game between McGill and the University of Toronto, at the then new Varsity Stadium; and a cutaway of the *World's* own headquarters, titled "The Toronto Sunday World in the Making," detailing the paper's composition room, library, press, and art, editorial, and circulation departments, that foreshadowed his press club mural.

Skuce's longest-lasting and most regular contribution to the paper was the character Mr. Fan, described in the *World's*



pages as "a middle-aged gentleman, who never becomes bored with life. Altho the father of a large and tiresome family . . . Mr. Fan always keeps up his spirits." Mr. Fan began showing up early in Skuce's tenure at the *World*, often, but not exclusively, in the sports pages to which he owed his name. His look changed radically between appearances, but his basic traits—a natty suit and an overly caricatured face topped with a tall bowler or occasionally a straw hat—remained consistent. In 1917, Mr. Fan began starring in his own strip,



A portion of Skuce's Toronto Press Club mural.

promoted by the paper as “the first full-page regular comic feature ever produced by a Canadian” and “the initial attempt of Mr. Skuce to put over a funny page. . . . There are very few people in Canada who are not acquainted with the work of this Canadian artist, the only Canadian cartoonist, by the way, whose work is funny.”

By 1913 Skuce's celebrity was strong enough for the *World* to publish a thin digest of his drawings, titled *Play Ball!: A Book of Baseball Cartoons*. For ten cents, plus coupon, *World* readers received a

twenty-four-page book capturing “a pictorial evolution in baseball, caricaturing the various phases of the game.” On-staff cartoonists specializing in sports to the extent Skuce did on the *World* were rarities in the Canadian newspaper industry, and his position as both caricaturist and commentator was a vital part of the paper's voice. Skuce's sports cartoons could be as much about the business of sport as sport itself, alternating from cheerleading to humorous criticism to compassion. A 1915 *How It Looks To Us* showed a hockey

player eyeing an Armed Forces recruitment poster and commenting, “Gee, that would be a great way to keep in good condition.” In the same space the following week, what appeared to be the manager of a ball team sat on a chest of mothballed baseball equipment, above the caption “Twix't love and duty,” bat in hand, the previous week's cartoon at his feet, as Mr. Fan looked on in sympathy.

In 1914, *Maclean's*, in a feature on Canadian cartoonists, declared Skuce a rising genius. Soon, he was contributing to

newspapers and magazines across the country, including the *Canadian* and the *Goblin*. "Name it and Lou will draw it," said a write-up in a 1921 catalogue published by the Newspaper Artists' Association. "Versatility is his middle name. Pretty girls and manly games, hick politicians and snappy shows—these are the things which made his name on the *Sunday World*. His full-page features carry a knockout punch. He gets action into every line." Maclean's eventually hired Skuce on a regular basis, usually to illustrate the work of the Ottawa columnist J. K. Munro. A 1922 ad in the *Globe* touted, "C. W. Jefferys and Lou Skuce are only two of the famous Canadian, English and American illustrators whose best work appears regularly in MACLEAN'S MAGAZINE," which surely was news to the *World*.

The *Star* began competing with the *Sunday World* in 1910, when it launched the *Toronto Star Weekly*, a weekend read with many of the same sections and features as the *World*. By the nineteen-twenties, societal mores were loosening and popular amusements were no longer of interest only to the middle class. As a result, more newspapers began carrying moving picture coverage and colour comics. The daily edition of the *World* published its final issue on April 9, 1921, after being acquired by the *Mail and Empire*. The *Sunday World* continued for three more years before being absorbed into *Star Weekly*, in 1924—an irony considering the first edition of the *Star* had been printed on the *World's* press.

Skuce once told a reporter that he planned to give up cartooning and begin making his living as a fine artist, but when he left the *Sunday World*, in 1923, a year before it folded, and moved to New York, it wasn't to paint over-the-mantle landscapes for wealthy Upper East Siders. Skuce continued working in areas where he'd already had financial success. He took a twelve-month contract with J. R. Bray's Bray Studios, one of the first studios devoted solely to animation. Bray was an early home to a number of successful illustrators and animators, including Carl Anderson, the creator of the comic strip *Henry*; Walter Lantz, who designed and wrote Woody Woodpecker; Paul Terry, whose Terrytoons studio produced *Mighty Mouse* and *Heckle and Jeckle*; and Max and Dave Fleischer, who created popular animated versions of *Betty Boop*,

Popeye, and *Superman*. Skuce was a pioneer of animated film in Canada. He wrote, drew, and directed the short *The Making of a Cartoon* for Filmcraft, a Toronto-based studio that produced several shorts and a single feature, *Satan's Paradise*, before the death of its founder, Blaine Irish, in 1923. At Bray, Skuce worked in the studio's commercial division, which produced mostly educational filmstrips.

Early in his career, Skuce began using an unnamed small black owl as his "mark" on many illustrations. After leaving the *World* he created a new signature character: Lou's Goose, a name *Caricature* magazine called "an unavoidable accident." The wisecracking bird with a hat worn at a rakish angle appeared increasingly in Skuce's work, and soon rivalled the popularity of his creator.

Skuce's main focus in New York remained newspaper cartooning, in particular comic strips, an art form that had begun to take hold in North American papers in the late nineteenth century and increased in popularity after the *New York Evening Journal* introduced the first full daily comic page, in 1912. Skuce spent three years as a ghost artist for various syndicates while pitching strip ideas of his own. Merit Newspaper Service Corporation eventually agreed to distribute *Cash and Carrie*, Skuce's story of two sisters who leave behind the fictional small town of Hickory Falls, Ohio (alternately referred to as "Littletown"), to seek fame and fortune in New York ("Bigtown"). Cash and Carrie, according to the preview strip that appeared in newspapers across North America, on January 10, 1927, were "happy, wholesome, modern girls; but they view Life and Men from different angles. Cash is more interested in real men and things domestic, while Carrie fancies frivolity and fun and her 'Boy-friend' must know all of the latest dance steps. . . . You'll find them interesting." *Cash and Carrie* began as a *Sex and the City* for the flapper age. The girls often found themselves in awkward dating situations, while trying to launch careers. Cash found work as a stenographer in the Wall Street brokerage office of Mr. Bott, while Carrie floundered in her attempts to become a Broadway dancer.

Two months after *Cash and Carrie's* launch, Skuce was replaced, inexplicably, by a new artist, Earl Hurd, another animation pioneer. Together with Bray, Hurd developed many of the processes

Clockwise from right: An editorial cartoon accompanying a 1924 Maclean's article on government extravagance; Skuce's 1931 New Year's cartoon for the Toronto Daily Star sports section, featuring both Lou's Goose and Mr. Fan; a lighthearted look at summer, 1914, for the Toronto Sunday World; a three-colour section opener for the Sunday World's October 8, 1911, edition, featuring Skuce's advance depiction of an intercollegiate rugby game at the recently built Varsity Stadium.





—By LOU SKUCE



involved in celluloid animation that dominated the field for nearly a century. He worked at a number of studios throughout his career, including Terrytoons, his own Earl Hurd Productions, and Disney, where he helped adapt the Brothers Grimm's tale of Snow White into the first full-length animated feature. He also created several newspaper strips, including *Trials of Elder Mouse*, the flapper comic *Susie Sunshine*, and *Bobby Bumps*. Post-Skuce, *Cash and Carrie* were sent on a visit home to Hickory Falls, where Hurd frequently abandoned them in favour of two new secondary characters: Lem Wheeler, a bicycle-riding telegram delivery man who wore square sunglasses and a moustache that covered the lower half of his face, and Ol' Man Hoppit, an older gentleman with a long white beard, black overcoat, and oversized fedora, who had no trouble accompanying Lem on his "rush" deliveries, despite being hobbled by crutches due to what presumably was a permanent case of gout. Together, the duo zipped across town, often providing local gossip to a reporter for the Hickory Falls *Bugle*.

On Monday, April 4th, three weeks into Hurd's tenure, *Cash and Carrie* opened with a caption informing readers, "The scene now changes to Cash's office." As suddenly as it began, the Hickory Falls storyline was dropped, along with all of Hurd's characters. Skuce's signature again marked the strip, and distribution was now credited to the Bell Syndicate. I asked Allan Holtz, a comic strip historian and author, to theorize on what might have happened. He told me the most likely scenario was Skuce "got disgruntled with Merit or otherwise started shopping around for a better deal. Bell Syndicate offered him a contract, so he stopped drawing *Cash and Carrie*. Merit didn't want to lose the strip, so they got Earl Hurd to take over the drawing. My guess is Skuce and Bell both claimed they had a right to the strip, told Merit they had to cancel it, and after a few lawyer letters, Merit did just that, and Bell took over distribution with Skuce at the helm. The details are hazy, of course, but the basic plot is pretty clear." This provides a possible explanation why redrawn versions of Skuce's early Merit *Cash and Carrie* stories appeared in some papers in the fall of 1927. Bell "had no qualms about dated strips—they liked to sell a series from the start," Holtz said.

By 1927, the changing role of women brought on by the suffrage movement was mirrored in a proliferation of working girl/flapper strips on the comics page. The most successful examples distinguished themselves beyond their obvious premise. The star of Martin Branner's *Winnie Winkle the Breadwinner* worked to support her parents and brother. Chic Young's pre-*Blondie* strip *Dumb Dora* featured a lead who was smarter than her name suggested. Skuce sent *Cash and Carrie* on vacation to a girls' camp and featured a storyline about the invention of a square-doughnut machine. "Cross Word Puzzles are all of that," one reader wrote, in verse, to the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, *Telegraph*, but "Cash and Carrie, a little flat." The strip was carried by as many as a hundred and fifty newspapers at its peak, and was cancelled in less than eleven months.

Little Nell was the lone serious continuity strip created by Gene Carr, a newspaper cartoonist who entered the field at fifteen and pioneered the use of sequential panels. His *Lady Bountiful* is considered the first comic with a female lead. *Little Nell* was another Jazz Age story of a small-town girl trying to make it in the big city, launched in December, 1927, by United Features Syndicate. Initially, it looked like the strip might share *Winnie Winkle's* edge, teasing the possibility that Nell's idea of success wasn't high kicking but studying to become a psychoanalyst. Soon, however, it was obvious that Nell saw her future on Broadway, despite never going on an audition. *Little Nell* was wordy and disjointed, and was discontinued after only four months. Instead of ending cold, the final strip showed Nell, having returned home in failure, on the telephone with a friend, Mary Ann Gay, herself headed for New York. "You must see me before you go to the city . . . There's no work and the men, oh Mary Ann I must tell you about the men!" Nell warns. "But I have a job to go to in the city—on a news paper with Lou Skuce the cartoonist," Mary Ann replies in the final panel, above the note: "Watch for Mary Ann's adventures beginning in Monday's paper." Given *Little Nell's* lack of popularity with readers, this spinoff ploy seemed designed to promote Skuce, still a bankable name despite *Cash and Carrie's* failure. On April 16, 1928, five months after the cancelation of *Cash and Carrie*, Skuce launched his second strip, *Mary*

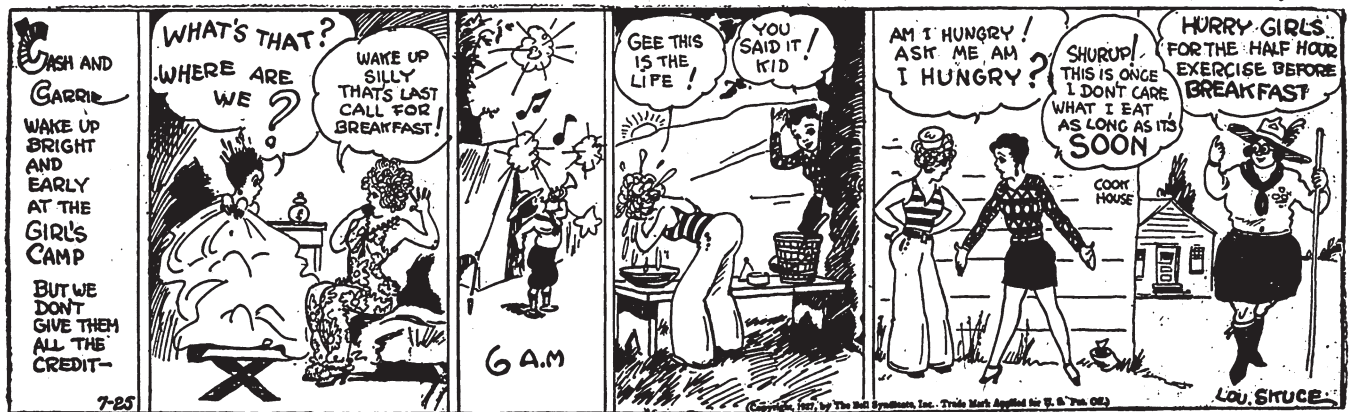
Ann Gay. *Mary Ann Gay's* premise was nearly identical to *Cash and Carrie's*. "Follow her little trials and tribulations and loves—you'll find them interesting," promised the debut installment. *Cash and Carrie's* dynamic was re-established immediately, as Mary Ann took an apartment with an old school friend, the overweight Eva Little, and found employment as a secretary in the office of a Mr. Baggs. By the time Skuce had Mary Ann and Eva vacationing at a girls' camp, he was lifting not only characters and jokes from his previous strips, but whole panels—composition, dialogue and all. *Mary Ann Gay's* run was shorter even than *Cash and Carrie's*, ending abruptly on October 6th, with Mary Ann and her new husband, Bud, honeymooning in Niagara Falls. When Bud fails to catch Mary Ann's hat after it's caught by the wind, she begins to sob: "Don't speak to me! And don't ever again say you love me!"

"The proverbial struggle to gain recognition became the lot of Lou Skuce, just as it has been with many others," Ben Batsford, a Canadian cartoonist with the King Features Syndicate, wrote years later about Skuce's New York period. "Toronto said 'How Are You'; New York said 'Who Are You.'"

The earliest recorded Skuce—or "Skeuve"—ancestors were Scandinavian drainage engineers who left Norway for Holland to build dikes and drain the Dutch lowlands. Some relocated to England, in 1422, when John of Lancaster, the son of King Henry IV, hired them to drain his estate, north of London. In 1649, a naval officer named Skuce fought in Oliver Cromwell's New Model Army during the English conquest of Ireland. Skuces also fought alongside the Dutch-born William of Orange's Protestant forces in 1690, at the Battle of Boyne, helping to defeat the Catholic army of James II as he tried to regain the British crown. During the Irish Rebellion of 1798, British Fleet Admiral Edward Skuce was stationed at Bantry House, in West Cork county. After the war, he settled nearby, in the small seaside town of Glengarriff, where he built a spacious slate home, which he named Derrynafulla. He married Elizabeth Coll, a widowed nurse, and together they had three sons, Thomas, James, and Daniel.

Thomas, born in 1804, met his future wife, Elizabeth Gosnell, a teacher and the

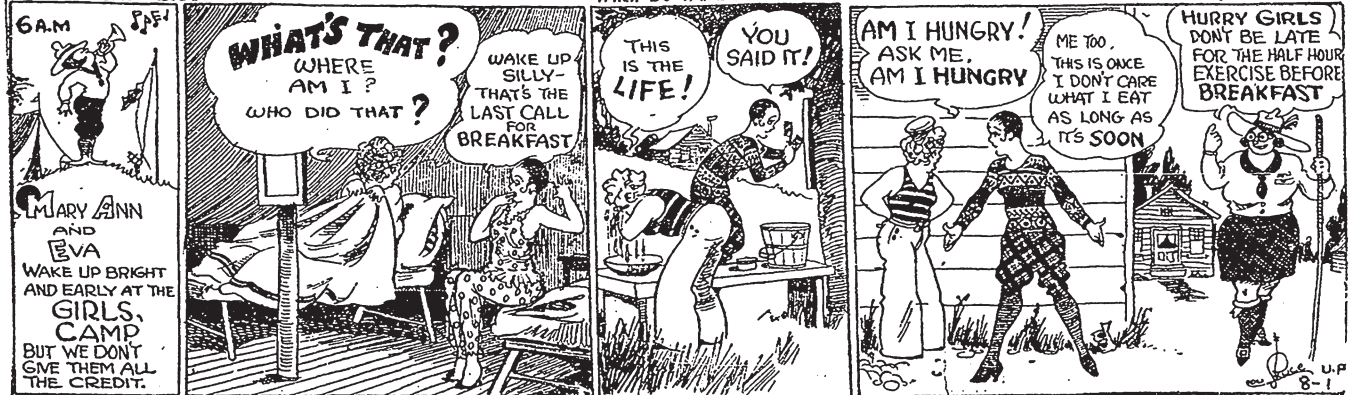
CASH AND CARRIE



MARY ANN GAY

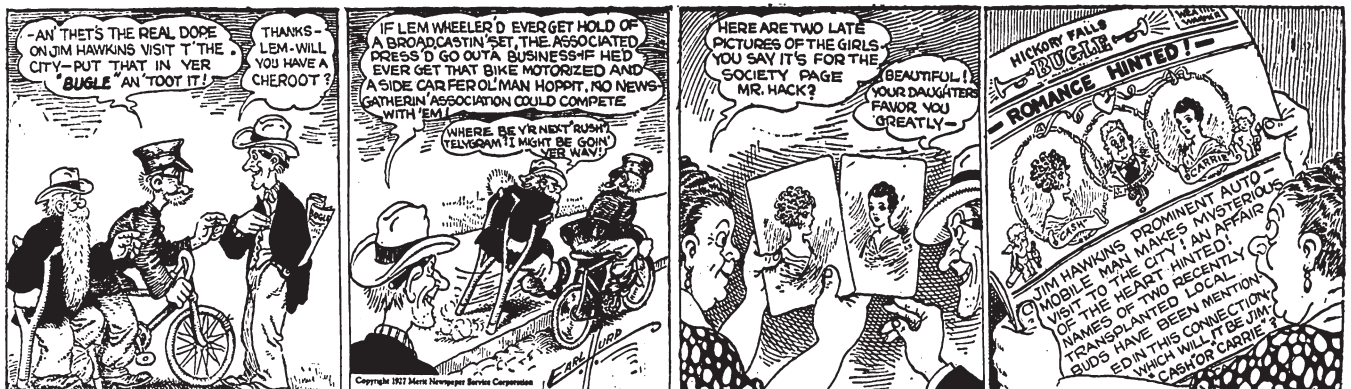
When Do We Eat?

By Lou Skuce



Cash and Carrie's 1927 girl's camp vacation is mirrored the following year in Skuce's second strip, Mary Ann Gay. Below: Earl Hurd's alternate take on Skuce's creation.

CASH AND CARRIE



daughter of a noblewoman, while working in Dublin. The couple, depending on which account of the Skuce family history you believe, immigrated to Canada, in 1849, either to seek a more hospitable climate for the sickly Elizabeth; to escape Elizabeth's parents, who did not approve of Thomas; or to settle a farm on a plot Thomas was awarded under a potato famine land-grant program. Thomas and Elizabeth settled first near Ormond, Ontario, and later outside of Hallsville, in the area known today as North Dundas. They had eleven children, and when Elizabeth died, in 1869, Thomas promptly married Cynthia Eberts, a significantly younger woman who had been hired to look after the Skuce brood, with whom he had eleven more, the last when Thomas was eighty-eight years old.

James Skuce, Thomas's third child and oldest son, was born in 1851, near South Mountain. Initially, James worked the family farm, but left at a young age to take up the blacksmith trade, eventually opening a shop in Ottawa with his brother William. He married Margaret Boulger, also the daughter of an Irish immigrant father, and together they had four children: John Howard, James Milton, Thomas Lewis, and George Orval. In 1890, James moved his family to Bell's Corners, a lively village with two churches, a school, three hotels, a tollgate, a grocery store, and a blacksmith shop. Around 1903 James uprooted his family again when he moved them to Britannia Heights, a neighbourhood in what is now Ottawa's west end. Britannia became a popular spot in 1900, when the Ottawa Electric Railway Company built an amusement park on the beach to entice city folk to ride its new Britannia Bay trolley line. For just pennies, Ottawa residents could travel to a puritanical version of New York's Coney Island to swim, boat, picnic, and attend concerts. The Skuce home was situated on a plot of land uphill from the Ottawa River, at the corner of Richmond Road and Carling Avenue. The house was a traditional two-storey frame structure, surrounded by an iron fence, with large maple trees in the front yard, lilac bushes to the side, and a garden and small cottage in the rear. A walkway led from the dirt road of Richmond to the front entrance. The interior consisted of a parlor-style living room, a formal dining room, and a large kitchen housing a wood fireplace that carried heat to the three upstairs bedrooms.

James was a kind and patient man. He had a strong, lean build, and neither drank nor smoked. With his family, he regularly attended service at St. Stephen's Anglican Church, and when it closed in the winter months James drove them all by buggy to the nearby Christ Church. James raised fruit, vegetables, hens, and pigs in his tidy yard. In Britannia, he found work at the Olde Forge, a single-storey log cabin built around 1830, by George Winthrop, that still stands today. Eventually, James built his own blacksmith concern onto the side of his home. He shod horses for eighteen cents, and removed the shoes again for twelve and a half. He also made winter slops for animals and built carriages. Margaret was James's equal in every way: kind, affectionate, and active in the community. She was able to make ends meet to feed her family in tough times, and in better days indulged her artistic streak, painting landscapes in the garden and tending to her flowerbed.

James and Margaret's third son, Thomas Lewis Skuce, known simply as "Lou," was born on July 6, 1886, in Ottawa. He attended Lisgar High School and by the age of eighteen was working with his father in the blacksmith trade. Lou's youthful interests spanned athletics and the arts. He played drum in the bugle band of the 43rd Battalion, also known as the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa, a Canadian Expeditionary Force infantry regiment. In 1907, he became the head usher at Bennett's, an ornate theatre located on Ottawa's Sparks Street, and the first proper theatre in the city to show moving pictures. Bennett's often featured vaudeville performances followed by a series of short films, billed as "the Bennettograph."

The Skuce brothers were active members of the Britannia Boat House Club—known today as the Britannia Yacht Club—located just a short hike down the hill from their home. The club was formed, in 1887, by cottagers who spent their summers at Britannia-on-the-Bay, and soon became popular among canoe and rowboat enthusiasts. In 1900, Britannia co-founded the Canadian Canoe Association and hosted that group's first annual regatta, on the Rideau Canal. Lou and his brothers paddled the war canoe, a fifteen-man boat usually raced to either a mile or half-mile. The event was especially popular, given the large size of its teams, and often drew sizable crowds. From the age of sixteen, Lou helped Britannia take as many as

seven Canadian and one international war canoe championships. In 1901, he paddled to the rescue of a man and woman who had drifted toward a set of rapids after one of their own boat's oarlocks broke. Lou transferred them into his canoe and spent half an hour fighting the current back to shore. His adeptness on the water made a news brief in the *Journal* a few years later especially amusing: "At a practice of the two Britannia war canoe crews the other night, there was a narrow escape from drowning when Lou Skuce fell overboard and was in danger but for his brother Milton. Milton did not know who it was till he got him near the dock. Lou says he can swim."

As competitiveness between the groups grew, boating clubs began forming rugby, hockey, and lacrosse teams to keep their athletes active in the fall and winter months. Skuce played rugby with the original Ottawa Rough Riders and, later, the Parkdale Canoe Club, in Toronto, in the days before the formation of the Canadian Football League, and for at least one season, 1907–08, he played amateur hockey with a Winnipeg club, before dislocating a hip and returning to Ottawa.

Lou's mother encouraged his interest in illustration and painting, and Lou exhibited work as early as 1904. One of his first jobs was as a show card writer for the Bryson, Graham department store, in Ottawa; passersby crowded the corner of O'Connor and Sparks for a glimpse of his hand-lettered advertisements. "It's as natural for Lou to draw as it is for him to breathe," Anson Gard wrote in his 1906 local history, *The Humors of the Valley*.

One to see his sketches would at once get the impression that he fairly bubbles over with humor, and yet he could no more tell a funny story than the Colonel could be serious at a funeral. No, Lou has to have a pencil in his hand before he can do any bubbling, and then he sees every point of humor in the subject, so much so, in fact, that one day needing an illustration rather than a cartoon, and he being the only artist who could do it at once, I was loath to let him try, but I did, and then I saw another side of the boy. He did the work so accurately that I could readily have believed that a staid old man with never a thought of any but the serious had done the picture, showing his double gift.

Around January, 1929, an advertisement for Buckingham cigarettes began appearing in Canadian newspapers. It featured a photograph of Skuce, dressed in his shirtsleeves and vest and sporting a trim flattop haircut, with a lit cigarette drawn into his right hand. Surrounding

him were illustrations of Mr. Fan, Lou's Goose, and four caricatures representing Politics, Sport, Fashion, and Drama. It read, "Lou Skuce, famous Canadian cartoonist, repatriated from New York by the Toronto 'Mail & Empire,' says: 'Buckingham is sure throat-easy. It's one of the good things Canadians miss when they cross the line.'" The ad was more than just another endorsement; it presented the *Mail and Empire* as a hero in the fight against brain drain and, more beneficially, helped Skuce save face on his return to Canada after failing—like his comic strip creations—to set Bigtown on fire.

Although Skuce had spent several years away, his syndicated work had given him an uninterrupted presence in Canadian dailies, and his stature at home was as strong, if not stronger, than when he left. As newspaper consolidation continued in the nineteen-thirties—notably the *Globe's* purchase of the *Mail and Empire*—even the most popular cartoonists had to hustle for work between contracts and endorsements. The *Toronto Daily Star* captured Skuce's modus operandi on October 31, 1936, beneath his drawing of an oversized hockey player standing astride a stadium filled with Lilliputian rugby players:

You look up from your mill and there's Lou Skuce, who draws the pictures, and Lou says it's a fine day, and how's tricks, and wouldn't it be an idea if he were to draw another picture for the paper."

So you say a picture would be fine, but you just can't tell him, "Go home and draw a picture"—it's got to be about something.

Lou makes his eyes all squinty and studies far horizons intently. "Monday," says Lou, "there's to be a charity hockey game at the Gardens. The Leafs. Blues against Whites, or something."

"The drawing is to be in black and white," you remind him. "Color stuff—that's The Star Weekly."

"This," says Lou, "is no time for wisecracks. I'm figuring out an idea. Now, hockey's starting Monday. And rugby's just in the middle of the season and very hot. Don't you think [sic] Rugby might be sort of sore at Hockey butting in that way?"

"Perhaps," you say, without enthusiasm.

"Well, then," says Lou, "we'll have a drawing with two figures, one labelled Hockey all dressed up in skates and sweater and the other a rugby player and they could be—aw, shucks, that's no good."

"Look, Lou," you say with your first glimmering of an idea in seven years, "have you ever read Gulliver's Travels—?"

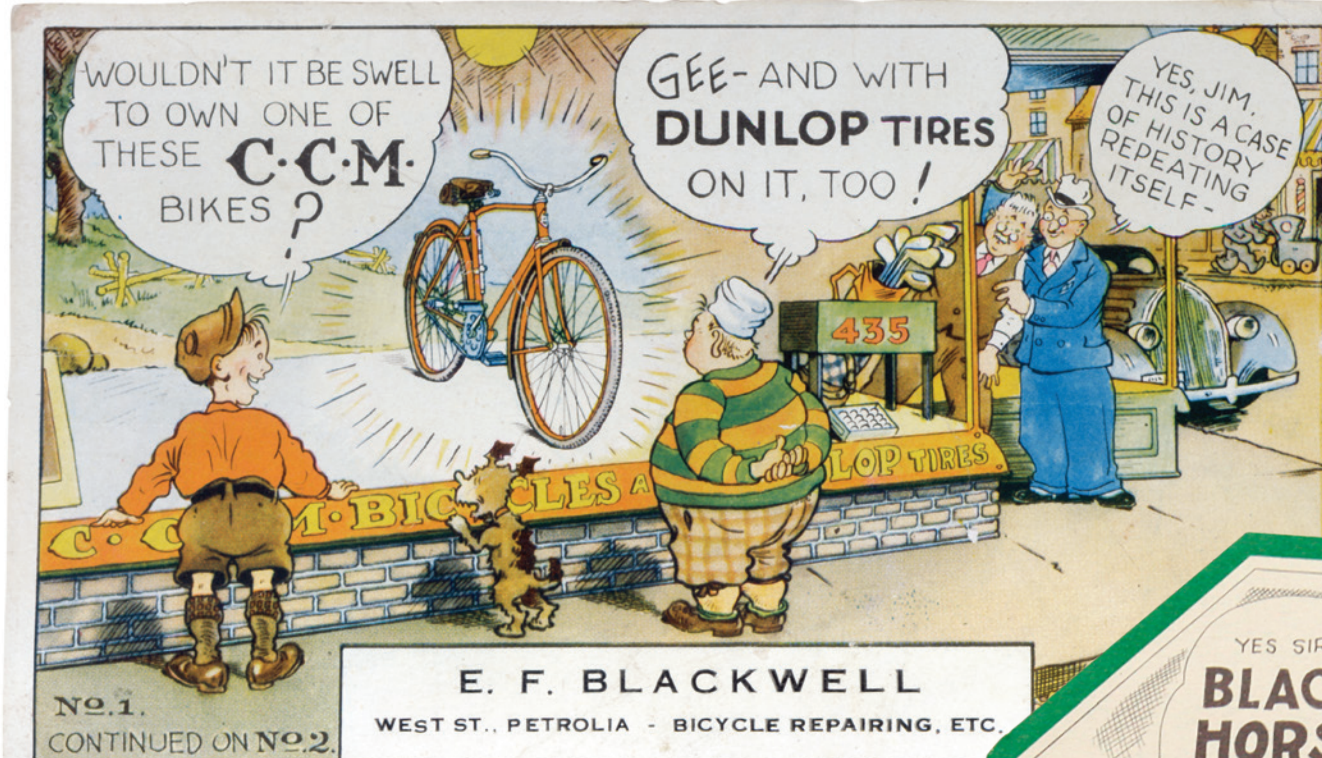
"Not another word," shouts Lou, grabbing his hat. "I'll be seeing you." Like a shot he is gone.

To-day you find Lou's brainchild on your desk in the cold, gray dawn and there doesn't seem much to do with it but put it in the paper.

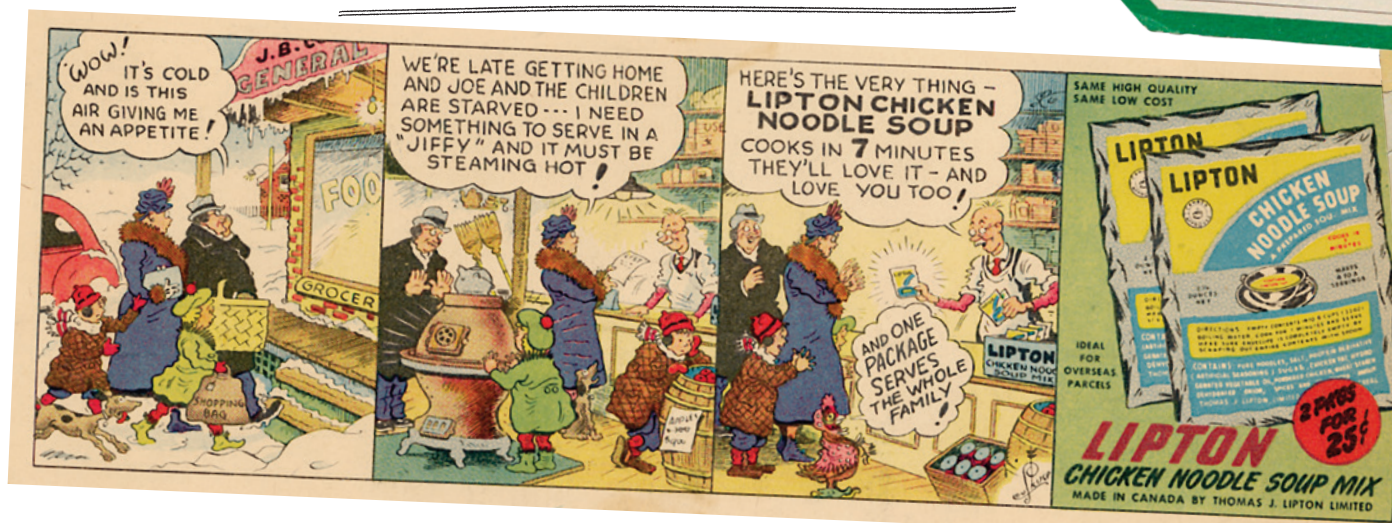
Skuce supplemented his newspaper income with advertising work as far back

*Clockwise from right:
Skuce in his Parkdale Canoe
Club uniform, circa 1909;
a late nineteen-forties Skuce
family Christmas card; Skuce
at his drawing table, 1915;
Skuce and his daughter
Nancy, circa 1935.*





A selection of Skuce's studio work and merchandise, including, clockwise from above, a C.C.M. blotter, coasters for O'Keefe's and Black Horse, a Hilroy scribbler, a postcard for the 1930 Shrine Convention, a jigsaw puzzle for Ottawa's Red & White Stores, and print ads for Lipton and a Toronto sporting goods shop.





as 1924, when he drew a group of university students staring enviously at a dapper classmate outfitted in the latest fashion from Tip Top Tailors, and an art deco-style flapper posed beside a McLaughlin Buick, above the tag line “What more could a man ask for?” Shortly after returning to Toronto, Skuce opened Lou Skuce Studios, located on the penthouse floor, in Room 2202, of 80 King Street West, the *Toronto Star*’s legendary “Superman building.” The paper’s headquarters was so named for inspiring the look of the *Daily Planet*’s building in the comics created by the former *Star* newsboy Joe Shuster and his childhood friend Jerry Siegel. Promotional materials for the studio boasted a staff of “outstanding leaders in commercial art, magazine and newspaper illustration, cartoons and comics.” Beside its Toronto address, Lou Skuce Studios listed offices in Montreal’s equally impressive Southam Building, as well as rooms in New York, Chicago, and Hollywood. A 1931 ad in the Butte, Montana, *Standard* sought a “state manager with sales and organizing ability to operate on a royalty and bonus basis. State qualifications. No investment required but small working capital helpful. A proposition which will stand investigation. Address general manager. Western Division Lou Skuce Studios. Box 593, Arcade Station. Los Angeles, Cal.” More than likely—considering the studio’s biggest selling point would have been illustrations drawn by Skuce himself—at least some percentage of Skuce’s marketing was clever showmanship. The classified section of *Popular Science* magazine in August, 1953, listed Skuce’s Hollywood address, at 5873 Franklin Avenue, in an ad that read, “HOLLYWOOD postmark! Letters remained 25c ea.”

The studio’s major output, alongside print advertising, was illustrated promotional “blotting pads,” or coasters. A 1931 ad in the Montreal *Gazette* announcing the opening of his office there, said Skuce’s “output of cartoon blotters during the past five months is in the millions.” Skuce’s client list was exhaustive, and included Firestone, Hudson’s Bay, General Electric, Imperial Tobacco, O’Keefe’s Brewing, General Motors, Spalding, C.C.M., Lipton, Imperial Oil, and the Shriners, in addition to local coal dealers, dry cleaners, florists, taxi cab companies, dairies, and bakeries. Skuce’s advertising work rarely strayed from the

lighthearted working-class humour he’d become known for, often sticking to a setup-and-punch-line format: “What this ol’ bus needs is more horse power!” the driver of a jalopy exclaimed on a coaster for Black Horse ale. “Yes—Black Horse,” replied his passenger, oblivious to the perils of drinking and driving.

Skuce’s illustrations also appeared on a variety of merchandise. He drew scribbler covers for the Canada Pad and Paper Company, once offered free by Tambllyn drug store with each twenty-three-cent purchase of Minty’s toothpaste. In an escalating battle for toothpaste supremacy, patrons of Dr. Gardner’s toothpaste could obtain a Lou Skuce jigsaw puzzle of the Stanley Cup-winning 1932 Toronto Maple Leafs. A newspaper ad for the Hudson’s Bay Company in Winnipeg instructed boys and girls to “be on hand bright and early Saturday morning” for the 9 A.M. jigsaw puzzle special featuring “Lou Skuce Double Comics.” A pound of tea or coffee from Ottawa’s Red & White Stores guaranteed shoppers a “75 piece JIG-SAW PUZZLE FREE! A different puzzle . . . designed by Lou Skuce, the famous cartoonist, especially for Red & White Stores . . . more than 75 pieces and interlocking . . . no advertising on the picture, but lots of fun putting it together.” And O’Keefe’s once produced a confounding set of four blotters advertising stone ginger beer, which the company usually marketed to children. Each coaster was die-cut in the shape of a different playing card suit, and backed with bridge tips “for use at card parties or social occasions where beverages are served. The hostess will find these blotters a protection against the blemishes left by tumblers on bridge tables and other polished surfaces.”

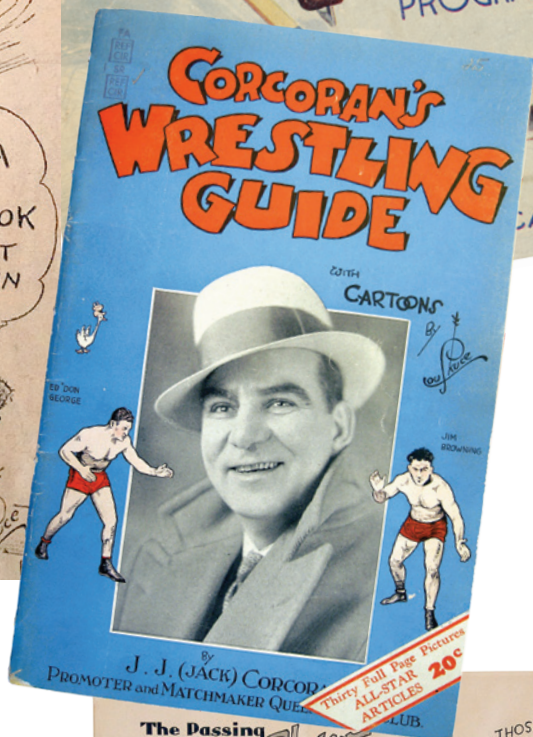
Sport remained a large part of Skuce’s life and career. He was a regular fixture at Saturday night Maple Leafs games, and encouraged the creation of the Lou Marsh Memorial Trophy, for outstanding athletes, named in honour of his friend, the one-time *Toronto Star* sports editor. Skuce’s own athletic background allowed him to draw especially detailed and accurate sports illustrations. His work in the area shows more consideration of composition than required by his lighter fare, and he was especially adept at balancing the friction between realism and cartoonishness in the single-panel profiles of sports figures that were popular at the time. Skuce once said his toughest assignment had been for Jack Corcoran,

the wrestling promoter and owner of the Queensbury Athletic Club, in Toronto. Corcoran became infamous after he was accused of knowing match outcomes in advance. His reputation survived—he denied wrestling was anything but legitimate—and fans continued to turn a blind eye. *Corcoran’s Wrestling Guide*, published in 1935, was a sixty-four-page program featuring illustrated biographies of Corcoran’s talent. Skuce drew the wrestlers with a sensitivity and elegance that made each look like a champion—even cultural stereotypes like Matros Kirilenko, “the Terrible Cossack,” with his *ushanka* fur hat; and Jim Clinkstock, shown in full Cherokee headdress. Skuce’s book of baseball cartoons for the *World* demonstrated his early mastery of single-panel gags, but the Corcoran guide showcased in combination his fully matured talents as a fine illustrator, top-notch cartoonist, and talented letterer.

A profile of Skuce in a 1932 Maple Leaf Gardens program called him “a staunch friend of Maple Leaf Hockey Club since its inception.” Skuce’s portraits of Leafs players and staff hung on the Gardens walls for decades. He drew program covers and, on weeks when it looked like attendance to the Saturday night game might be low, he produced a comic advertisement for the local papers to boost interest. Skuce, according to the profile, had an “unselfish sympathy toward any athletic venture in the Queen City. No matter what time of the day you call on him, or how little time you give him on an assignment, he is always cheerful in acceptance, and prompt in execution.” Today, Skuce remains well-known particularly among collectors of hockey memorabilia. Sixteen Skuce-drawn coasters featuring the 1932 Maple Leafs, produced for O’Keefe’s Big 4 beverages—“A cartoon history of the world’s star hockey players on blotters”—often trade for hundreds of dollars each. The *Vintage Hockey Collector* price guide values a complete set at nineteen thousand dollars.

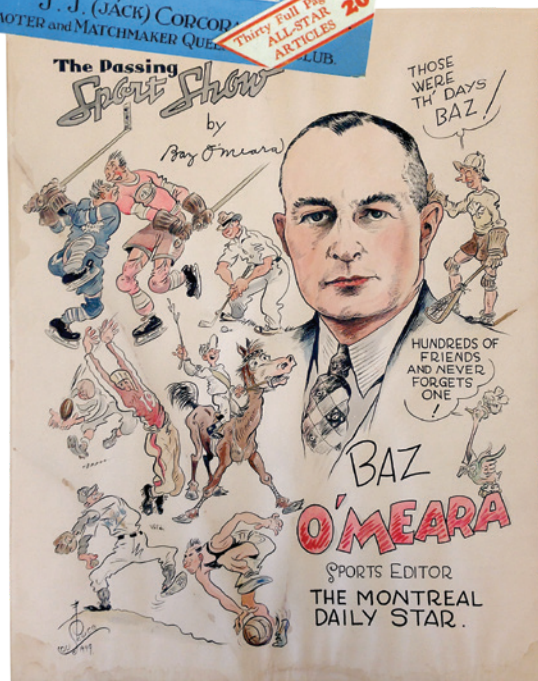
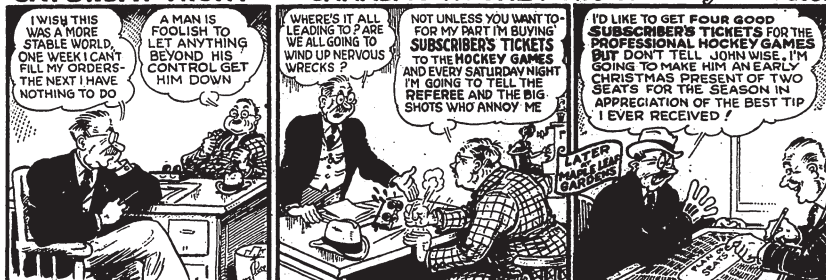
Skuce remained close to his family throughout his life. He visited Bell’s Corners frequently, and wrote lively letters to his mother in between. His brothers remained even closer: Jack and his wife lived in the backyard cottage while Orval raised his own family in the main home, taking over the property after the death of Thomas and Margaret, and

TONIGHT AT MAPLE LEAF GARDENS by Lou Skuce



Clockwise from top left: a 1941 Maple Leaf Gardens ad; the cover of the 1932 Gardens program, featuring "King" Clancy; the Corcoran's guide; one of Skuce's many sports portraits; a Leafs ad; one of the O'Keefe's coaster set featuring the 1932 Leafs.

SATURDAY NIGHT a CANADA'S HOCKEY NIGHT by Lou Skuce.



staying in the house until the property was expropriated, to widen the intersection of Richmond and Carling, in 1959. A short residential roadway on the former site is named for the family today.

Skuce started a family of his own in 1913, when he married Dorothy Edis, of Toronto. They soon had two children: Pauline, who, as an adult, opened her own dance school and later in life spent time teaching crafts to seniors and the mentally disabled; and John, who worked as a hard-rock miner in Kirkland Lake, Ontario, and flew with the Royal Canadian Air Force during the Second World War. Dorothy died, of breast cancer, in 1928, at age thirty-four, around the time Skuce was returning from New York.

Skuce married his second wife, Ruth Kipling (Kip) Fraser, on October 15, 1932, at St. Stephen's church, in Ottawa. Kip was the small and elegant daughter of William Alexander Fraser—the author who convinced Prime Minister Robert Borden to create the Silver Cross medal, presented to the next of kin of fallen soldiers—and the goddaughter and namesake of Rudyard Kipling, best known for the story collection *The Jungle Book*. Skuce and Kip also had two children: Nancy, in 1934, and Sandra, the following year. Nancy eventually married William Garden—whose father founded the original Garden Bros. Circus—and together they ran the Gene Cody and Kipling Bros. Circus for several seasons. Sandra inherited her father's artistic side; she trained as a window dresser and floral designer, and later ran her own ceramics studio.

Kip, Nancy, and Sandra became a loving part of Skuce's public persona. Each year, the Skuces sent Christmas cards featuring alternating caricatures of the family, one year depicted as flock of Lou's Goose-styled geese, another as a company of radio players offering season's greetings "over stations L-O-U and K-I-P a nation wide hook-up—sponsored by the SKUCE family." Kip's worldliness and family prominence combined with Skuce's increased fame made them perfect fodder for a press increasingly interested in celebrity gossip. Nancy and Sandra appeared often in the society pages, while Skuce and Kip made national headlines on at least two occasions: in 1937, after Skuce lost control of their car on the highway, jumping a ditch and crashing into a pole; and again, in 1945, when Kip

awoke to find Skuce overcome by coal gas fumes and called out to her sister, who was staying in the house, for help before collapsing herself.

Skuce and Dorothy had lived a quiet and simple life, but Kip enjoyed a faster pace. Skuce happily obliged and, as a result, the couple often lived beyond their means. "Half of Lou's problem was he wasn't getting paid for doing things," Evelyn Holstein, whose father was a close friend of Skuce's, told me. "If he drew an ad for some resort up north, instead of getting paid, he got two weeks with family—that sort of thing." There is no evidence Skuce and Kip ever owned a home. Instead, they moved frequently across the city, from Yonge and Eglinton to Deer Park to Summerhill. For three years the family lived at 35 Crescent Road, in the Boulton House, designed by S. H. Townsend and built, in 1895, by Horatio Boulton, the architect responsible for the colonial style of homes in Toronto's tony Rosedale area. The home often was noted as the only in Canada with a real Italian sunken garden, a feature that pleased Skuce, an avid gardener who loved to grow flowers "in the summer for the winter, and grow them in the winter for the summer." In the nineteen-forties, Skuce moved his studio into the family living room, "away from all the hustle, noise and smoke of a downtown area." An existing photograph shows him seated in a wooden office chair, in front of a low drafting table. A makeshift shelf over the radiator holds a lamp, a variety of books, and one of Skuce's own fine-art portraits. A wooden effigy of Lou's Goose sits atop a desk, near the window, and a small end table displays a cigarette case and a Bell Model 302 rotary phone. Wessely Hicks, a reporter for the *Telegram*, once recalled visiting Skuce's home studio while the artist was completing his mural for the Toronto Press Club. Skuce had "lined one wall of his large dining room with plywood in order to have adequate working space. . . . In putting up the plywood, Lou had sealed away most of the family silver. But no one suggested that he take the plywood down to rescue the silver, and I'm sure the thought never occurred to Lou. Lou was working and the family wasn't going to disturb him. So they happily shared whatever silver there was around and put up with the muss and fuss, and ate in the kitchen."

Skuce did not serve in the military during the First World War. Instead, he aided the war effort on the home front, producing propaganda for the psychological warfare branch of the defence department. He drew advertisements for Victory Bonds, and sheet music cover art for patriotic songs such as "Take Me Back To Dear Old Canada," and "Home Again: That's the Song of the World To Me." Skuce played an even greater role during the Second World War, when he was known as the official cartoonist of the Allied nations. "If my posters will help the government just a wee bit along the road to victory," he said, "my time is theirs." A fierce version of Lou's Goose sailed on the hull of the H.M.C.S. *Middlesex*, and, in 1944, Skuce's mascot was inducted—presumably on an honorary basis—into the Royal Canadian Air Force. A line on the bird's military I.D. noting visible marks on scars claimed "BUCK SHOTS RECEIVED IN FLIGHTS." An animated theatrical short Skuce produced in 1947 opened with a man plummeting to the ground, a tattered umbrella in hand. He soon is saved by a parachute made from a Canada Savings Bond. As the man glides gently to earth, Lou's Goose flies past, pausing to flash the message, "You'll Never Be Sorry You Saved."

Skuce's war work wasn't limited to public propaganda. He was contracted by the General Engineering Company to create a series of safety posters for its Scarborough munitions plant, east of Toronto. These posters didn't stray in style from Skuce's advertising work, with set-up ("I'm just dying for one puff of a cigarette!"), punch line ("So am I—but that one puff might be the death of a lot of us!"), and the occasional sidebar from Lou's Goose to drive the point home ("That's right—and you're a long time dead!"). Skuce also contributed to the "Canadian whites" comic books produced by Bell Features, a Toronto-based commercial sign business that shifted into the publishing field when wartime trade restrictions prevented the import of U.S. comics. Bell—no relation to the newspaper syndicate—produced the homegrown heroes Nelvana of the Northern Lights and Johnny Canuck. Artists such as Adrian Dingle and Fred Kelly made their names writing characters like Nelvana and Mr. Monster for Bell; Skuce, who by this time was a comic veteran, limited his contributions to cover drawings and single-page illustrations or gag strips, some of which

were recycled from past projects, such as *Corcoran's Wrestling Guide*.

Skuce's biggest contribution to the war efforts took place on the stage. He had retained an interest in theatre since working as an usher for Bennett's, in Ottawa, and was a lifelong member of the American Guild of Variety Artists, serving for many years as the chairman of its Toronto chapter. Skuce alternately is credited as a writer, producer, star, and set designer of several sketches that toured vaudeville circuits throughout Canada, the United States, and England around the time of the First World War. His name most often is associated with *Billet 13* and *The Shrapnel Dodgers*, which both received attention in the press for being among the first war sketches produced in the United States. *The Shrapnel Dodgers* was a twenty-two minute performance staged by four soldiers, all of whom had been critically injured in France, and, according to a 1917 *Variety* review, "sought to give a semblance to the audience of how amusement in the trenches is or was secured." When a later mention in *Variety* suggested the performers were not actual soldiers, Sgt. Major J. Parker, one of the show's stars, wrote in response that "each man in the act has his Canadian Discharge Certificate, which reads on the reverse side, under the caption, 'Campaigns,' Service in France, and each man has also his discharge button on which appear the words 'Service at the Front.' ... Although we fought with the Canadian Army, we are all Irishmen and I could tell you, if you want it, our opinion of the Old Countryman who hid behind the hospitality of the Stars and Stripes when his own country was in danger."

Skuce was "a real sportsman," Ted Reeve, the *Telegram* sports columnist, once said, "always ready to help some less able performer." In 1919, Skuce frequently checked in on an artistically inclined soldier he had befriended at a military hospital. On one visit, Skuce was drawn to a powerful voice singing "My Wild Irish Rose" from another room. He looked in and introduced himself to Eddie Jackson, a soldier who had lost a leg at the Battle of Amiens, the year before. Jackson confided to Skuce that he was worried about his future prospects, having been too young to receive any type of career training before his injury. Skuce asked Jackson



*Clockwise from above:
Skuce painting the
hull of the H.M.C.S.
Middlesex; a Middlesex
patch featuring Skuce's
mascot; a safety poster
for the GECO munitions
plant; the cover of
Bell Features' Joke
Comics No. 2.*



if he liked to sing. “Yes,” Jackson said. “It makes me forget myself.” Skuce encouraged the soldier to seek vocal training, after which Skuce found him work on *Billet 13*. Jackson said it thrilled him “to see the faces of an audience filled with interest and appreciation, and—oh, I suppose their applause means something, too.”

Early in his career, Skuce occasionally toured a stage show of his own. Sitting at a desk, in full view of the audience, he drew cartoons, cast onto a screen in real time through an epidiascope—an opaque projector that transmitted and enlarged images via a bright light and a series of lenses and mirrors. Epidiascopes descended from similar devices known as “magic lanterns”; both were common in the vaudeville era, though their popularity as a form of entertainment declined, along with vaudeville itself, with the rise of cinema. After returning from New York, Skuce began touring more frequently, billing the projector as his “Cartoonograph.” Claire Wallace, of the Toronto radio station CFRB, described Skuce’s show for her listeners in 1937:

Over a tiny, box-like machine Lou places a flat circle of ground glass. He gives the glass a quick coat of paint, then with a small stick begins to sketch out a design. It might be Lou’s famous goose, or it might be King George VI of England. But by mirrors the reflection of what Lou is drawing is thrown on a circular screen so the crowd can see. He works like lightning, scraping out a little paint there, a little here, doing most of his drawing upside down so the watching crowd doesn’t know until the last moment what his sketch will be. It’s an old-fashioned idea, Lou admits, but with a modern angle. And, is fascinating to watch.

After Canada joined the Allies against Germany, in 1939, Skuce tailored his Cartoonograph show as war-time entertainment, turning out “good likenesses of MacArthur, Churchill, Hitler, Hirohito and Roosevelt, with the full faces being superimposed upon some item they are identified with,” *Billboard* reported. “The Jap was drawn over the picture of a rat, while Churchill was sketched over a map of England.” Skuce continued to tour in peacetime, using his Cartoonograph show as another source of income. “I certainly don’t believe in specializing,” he told a reporter. “I find that by being able to handle all branches of art work I’m considerably better off

financially than many others who have devoted all their time to one branch of work. I couldn’t be filling a vaudeville engagement at present if I had been content to specialize.” Often, Skuce presented his act as a mini-vaudeville review, employing his daughters Nancy and Sandy to perform a tap routine, dressed in green velvet costumes trimmed with gold sequins. He played a range of venues, including the Allentown, Pennsylvania, fair, the Toronto Beaches Lions Club, the Adelphie theatre, in London, and the grandstand of the Canadian National Exhibition. In 1942, Skuce signed a year-long contract to tour houses across the United States. His most notable booking was a three-week engagement at the Roxy, a six-thousand seat theatre just off of New York’s Times Square, known as the cathedral of the motion picture and immortalized by Cole Porter in his song “You’re the Top.” The Roxy was home to the Roxyettes dancers, who went on to become the legendary Rockettes when the theatre’s namesake operator left to open Radio City Music Hall, in 1932. Skuce shared an eclectic bill that included the dance team of Fred and Elaine Barry; the acrobatic Novack Sisters; and a screening of *Iceland*, a war film produced by Twentieth Century Fox.

“It was amazing,” Jack Holstein, who, as a young boy, saw Skuce perform at the C.N.E., in 1941, told me. “That’s the only thing I remember about the exhibition. That fascinated me. You could see what he was drawing but it would be entirely different when he turned it over. People would cheer, gasp, and clap. I’d never seen anything like it before or since.”

The *Telegram* reporter Wessely Hicks recalled Skuce’s liveliness as he watched him finish his mural for the Toronto Men’s Press Club, in 1951. “He lay on his back and worked and lay on his stomach and worked and he stood on step ladders and chairs and boxes and worked,” Hicks wrote. “And always he talked.” In a silent 1951 film reel, Skuce is shown completing and installing the mural. His hands move with a calm accuracy while still managing to seem casually slapdash. In a bit of staged comedy, two women, unconcerned with his presence, step over Skuce as he lies on the floor adding the finishing touches to the powder room door. Eventually, the

film shifts to opening night. The artist chats with Viscount Alexander—whose Skuce-drawn portrait hung on the club’s wall—and mugs for the crowd, clapping his hands in glee after receiving a kiss on the forehead from Barbara Ann Scott. In 2009, four years before her death, I asked Scott what she remembered of Skuce from that night, nearly sixty years earlier. She said his mural “was very impressive,” and that Skuce was friendly, but “there were so many delightful gentlemen that were so good and so gracious that I think I was slightly overwhelmed.”

Nine months later, on November 20, 1951, Skuce died, of a heart condition, at the age of 65. He had performed at Toronto’s Sunnyside Pavilion as recently as late August, and a September 17th *Globe and Mail* report on a tribute dinner for Lillian Foster, the *Telegram* fashion reporter, noted that cartoons featured on the menu were contributed by Skuce “in spite of his serious illness.” Skuce filed a batch of cartoons to the Bell Syndicate shortly before his death, and died with a drawing board and unfinished comic at his side. He is buried in Beechwood Cemetery, in Ottawa, alongside his parents and his brothers John and James.

Little record remains of Skuce’s work today. None of his animation for Filmcraft or Bray seems to have survived, and the *Toronto Sunday World*, unlike its weekday counterpart, was never properly archived. Unlike his contemporary C. W. Jefferys, who built a name for himself as a master illustrator of Canadian history, Skuce did not become known beyond cartooning, and none of his characters, not even Mr. Fan or Lou’s Goose, remained in the public consciousness in the way James Simpkins’ Jasper the bear or Doug Wright’s Nipper continued to after their deaths. Skuce’s legacy is a product of the era in which it was made, when cartoons and illustrations were as ephemeral as the newsprint and blotters they were printed on. His singular talent aligned perfectly with the golden age of newspaper cartooning, and his success on the vaudeville stage managed even to outlast the art form itself. By the mid-fifties, millions of homes in North America would have a “magic lantern” in their living room. An unintentionally prophetic cartoon by Skuce, drawn in 1949, two years before his death, shows the artist seated at his Cartoonograph, as a dog by his feet exclaims, “It’s television!” ☐



Skuce on stage with his Cartoonograph, during the Second World War.

THE FICTION

THE STINK

BY JESS TAYLOR

That summer the stink grew and rose through a heat wave that left everyone in the city sticky with sweat. Keith, the guy I was fucking at the time, liked to ask me about women we knew and if I could imagine being with them. He made me feel like, with all the people I'd been with, I was just some splintery board waiting to be rubbed up against. Keith liked to watch me touch myself, and he told me to tell him what I was thinking about. He said it turned him on. Anyway, from this we learned that every day there was something new I found erotic. He told me whatever was sexy to me was sexy to him and we made our fantasies that way, at least until he got sick of me. He'd ask if I was attracted to people we knew. When he said their names, usually I said yes. I found almost everyone on the planet attractive at that time.

One day he said, "Melissa?"

And I said, "I don't know who that is," but of course I did.

I got him to describe her to me. He told me she was tall, taller than me by almost a head. He told me what he thought her breast size was and probably exaggerated, but stuff like that didn't bother me. "I fucked her once," he said. I could always tell when Keith was lying. Then we made up a scenario about the lingerie store where she worked. It was too expensive for me to go there. I was still bartending at the bar next to the store and people tended to tip me in gossip rather than money. In the lingerie store, according to Keith's fantasy, the saleswomen had to model the lingerie and customers ended up making out or having full-blown sex with them in the change rooms. I climbed on top of him as he spoke, begged him to keep talking, but even after just hearing the name Melissa I was ready to go.

Really, I couldn't imagine there was a woman out there who was more per-

fect than me. I was barely twenty-six, and I swelled with the power of my attractiveness. People started to secretly say I was conceited, but I had ears and I knew what they were chatting about. I knew enough by then to know people liked to think someone who loved their body was vain. It was the same thing they thought about Melissa. To be accepting of yourself gave you power and one of the ways to stomp on someone's power was by pretending its source was something shameful. I saw it in Melissa and liked it, and I liked it in myself. The others didn't know anything, they just knew how to move their mouths until they were tired or thirsty and then ordered another drink from me.

Customers complained about the stink. It coated their tongues, so they thought something was off in their drinks. The a.c. was also spotty. I'd journey into the basement and play with the settings, kick at that damn machine. Sometimes it started humming away and everyone clapped as I climbed back up, like I'd fought off a monster down there, delivered everyone from certain doom. But we were already stuck to the roof of a dead dog's mouth, everything hot and rancid and damp.

Eventually people called my boss about the stink even though it wasn't just in our bar. The stink was everywhere: under the shade of the trees and along the boardwalk, especially in direct sun, which glowed bright and red and deep. Sunsets and sunrises seemed to stay still and hover all early morning and evening. Time in general slid slowly around the clock. My boss ordered me to take out the garbage on the hour.

The garbage bins had less sludge at the bottom if I took it out often; less time to let shards of beer glass slice the bags open and release the slurry of food and old booze on me. One day, outside

in the alley behind all the stores and restaurants, Melissa was there smoking, on break from the lingerie store. I dumped the garbage. "Hi," I said to her. The stink swelled from the row of garbage cans. My boss kept adding more cans, thinking it would reduce the smell. I stared at her, though I didn't mean to. I couldn't get Keith's sexy scenarios out of my head. She just waved at me and said nothing. Crushed her cigarette against the brick of the building and went inside.

Melissa kept getting creepy messages from different Twitter accounts. Everyone kept talking about it. Keith had an almost photographic memory for language, so he'd recite the tweets to me from memory as we fucked. All I'd say was, "I'm Melissa." It was a game we played, one last-ditch attempt to excite each other before we both lost interest.

After we had sex three or four times and were both exhausted, Keith fell asleep beside me. His breathing whistled and his hand held my wrist as he slept. I hoped he wouldn't forget me, after we'd moved on.

"Who's tweeting at Melissa?" I asked him when he stirred.

"It's not as surprising as you might think," he said.

It was dark and the heat held us in such a way that we couldn't move.

"I think I might be in love with her," he said. "I talk to her from time to time."

"Fine."

It was too hot for me to give myself fully over to Keith again.

"Don't forget to tell me about it later."

I found Bryant when I hadn't heard from Keith in a week. He was slouched in a chair outside a coffee shop. "Well, hi," I said to him, kicking at his shoe. He looked at me with these great eyes like someone had taken a mirror and

ILLUSTRATION BY MATTHEW DALEY



smashed it and tried to put it back together all wrong. I knew exactly who he was and looked to see if Melissa was inside, to see if this might finally give her a reason to talk to me. When he and Melissa had started dating, back when they were twenty, people said they'd never seen a couple so in love. But he was alone now, as he was most times I saw him around. On his wrist, he'd gotten "MEL" tattooed in what everyone said was her cursive. I fell down into the chair beside him and introduced myself. Bryant handed me a cigarette.

I got him laughing, telling him about some of the gossip I'd heard behind the bar and told him I had half a bottle of wine at home. We started walking and goofing around. He stopped to bat at my ass every couple of steps. Even though I wasn't Melissa, he wanted me. After we had sex, he buried his face into my curly hair, and I asked him if we could keep fucking. I'd heard Melissa was more or less done with him.

"Are you sad you're breaking up?" I asked him.

"Everyone thinks she's perfect, but she's not," he said.

"I was with the woman for five years. It's totally different if you're with a woman like that." His whole face twitched. I wasn't sure if it was from exhaustion, sadness, disgust.

"It'll be good. It'll be good when it's over."

I never expected them to patch it up, but they did. Still, I kept fucking Bryant.

Bryant had gotten used to the air conditioning at Melissa's and couldn't stand the heat. I set up three fans to be ready for him the next time he came over, one facing the bed, one on a TV table I used as a desk and another beside the hot plate. They created a breeze on their highest settings, even though they stirred up the stink. My apartment above the fruit stand always stank during the summer anyway. Nothing but rot, but the place was a short walk to work and barely cost me anything.

Keith stopped by the bar to return a couple paperbacks I'd given him.

"I dropped one in the bath," he said. "I hope that's O.K."

I asked him if he wanted to fuck in the backroom. The bar was deserted.

"I can't," he said and ordered a Dark 'n Stormy.

I was glad to have him stay and chat. I wanted to catch up, but he didn't have all that much to say. I told him not to tell anyone, but I'd been fucking Bryant even after he'd gotten back with Melissa. That I didn't really hope he'd leave or really want to be with him, just liked sharing something with her. Keith finished his drink in one quick sip.

"I don't know. He's not a good guy from what I hear."

"Who'd you hear that from? Melissa? That's not what I've heard. And they're back together, so why'd you think that? What do you know?"

Keith shook his head and put money on the bar.

Most days, Bryant didn't come close to Keith. There was something about the way all those little shards of mirror in his eyes could flip around that gave him a hardness, especially while we fucked. It was those times that I could most easily slip into the fantasy that I was Melissa. It worked in the moment to send me over the edge, but after he left, I sat

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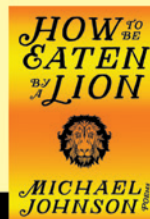
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on my bed with a book that had both covers torn off. They call a book like that a stripped book because it can't be sold, I guess. It's only valuable with its covers. I ran its frayed pages underneath my fingernails. It wasn't shame I was feeling, more like a troubling stillness. A fear I was destroying myself. In the shower I scrubbed at my skin, the stench growing even heavier with the steam.

My bedsheets were still wet from our sex. I combed my closet, pushing aside old winter coats, looking for the other fan I was sure I had. My hands were slow and clumsy and my wet hair slapped my shoulders as I moved. I picked up a bicycle helmet and garden tools and let them slip from my fingers. I clawed at a windbreaker I'd forgotten I had, and cut the side of my hand on a hammer. Blood gushed over the inside of the closet, onto the extension cords and power bars and instruction manuals. I put my hand to my mouth and sucked. The taste of my blood made me gag. I grabbed a towel and wound it around my hand. It stained quick, but stayed in place, soaking up the mess coming out of me. I decided not to strip the sheets. I was too tired and everything smelled and was surrounded by the damn heat anyway. It didn't matter what I did. Why strip sheets just to need to strip them again in the morning.

When I woke up, I checked my Twitter and then I checked Melissa's. I don't know how I knew, lying in my bed with my damp sheets stuck to my legs and my hand wrapped in that bloody towel. Someone had hacked into her account and written, "I will come for you, Melissa. Your family too." And another: "I will kill you, bitch." The stink did make me retch that morning, especially as I washed my towel in the sink. The blood clung like rust along the bottom of the drain. I breathed in and out slowly, trying to keep down last night's wine. I would see Melissa outside at least once a day when I emptied the trash. Sometimes I even bummed a smoke from her. The blood in the sink reminded me of the alley's brick wall, her crushed cigarettes.

I needed to say something to her. I wondered if she was scared. At work, I poured drinks and deep-fried pickles and chicken wings and counted down until the hour

was up and I could see Melissa. When I went out there, she was on break, smoking and crying quietly, staring into the sun that hung there like it hated us.

"I saw everything on-line. You O.K.?"

I dumped the trash.

"I don't give a shit about that," she said. "My dad had a heart attack."

"Oh," I said and moved closer to her.

She was the only one in this city who didn't smell. Close to her, I filled my nostrils. I wanted her scent to cover me, but as soon as I stepped away, the stink settled back on me. It was in my pores. Whenever I showered, I waited for the water to be scalding hot to burn away the stench. But it was in the water too. Putrid. Rot. It was like all the water in the world had gone bad somehow and no one had noticed yet. Like Melissa had water stored in her basement while the rest of us washed our bodies with the rank liquid that spewed from our faucets.

"Did you just hear?"

She nodded and glared up at the sky again, sucking on her cigarette.

"I'm out of this fucking place," she said. And while I was embarrassed about the stink hanging around me, I hugged her with one arm around her waist.

"I'm going to miss you," I said.

She moved my arm off her, but her fingers took their time as they pushed against my skin.

That night, when Bryant came over, I didn't pretend I was Melissa. I couldn't get into it. I lay there like a blow-up doll, like I had before I'd ever started fucking Keith. "What's the matter with you?" he said and shook me. "Don't you want to fuck?"

He held his hard dick in his hand and pumped it over me.

"It's too hot," I said and rolled over onto my stomach. "Everything stinks."

"Don't you have another fan around here?"

The three hummed in unison, waving their heads back and forth.

"In the closet."

Bryant pulled open the closet door, and he screamed high and long, not like I thought a man would scream, but like a dog, kicked deep in the stomach.

"What the hell?"

I dragged myself from the bed and walked over to the closet, naked. Blood

was everywhere. Over the walls and the cords and smeared on the door handle.

"What did you do?" he asked me.

The mirror pieces all flipped to their reflective sides, light glinting everywhere.

"What the fuck did you do?"

I laughed and laughed. I held up my hand.

"I cut myself by accident," I said. "I must've forgot."

"It stinks. It stinks like blood here. Nasty," he said. "I'm going home."

"Don't you know she's gone?" I said.

Bryant was pulling on his pants.

"She's left the city, Bryant."

"What?" he said.

"She left. Her dad had a heart attack."

"Her dad?"

He paused with one arm in his T-shirt before his hand burst through the sleeve.

"Why'd she tell you?"

I just smiled at him and shrugged, like I knew everything that ever would happen in his life and didn't care much about it.

He slammed his fist into the wall beside my head. I started shaking, but there was nothing he could do to me.

"You're scared?" he said, rubbing his hand.

I tried calling Keith after Bryant was gone, but a voice said his number was unavailable. I looked for him all over the city. But I was alone.

Keith came back to the city and showed up at the bar where I still worked. He put both elbows on the counter and ordered a Dark 'n Stormy. Nobody drank those anymore. He told me he'd moved with Melissa to her hometown for a while, that the air was cool and clear, but eventually the heat found him there too.

"What was it like being with her?" I asked. "Was it like we imagined?"

He shoved his hands into his hair, which already was sticking to his forehead. They trembled as he put them back around his glass, a habit he'd later learn to conceal.

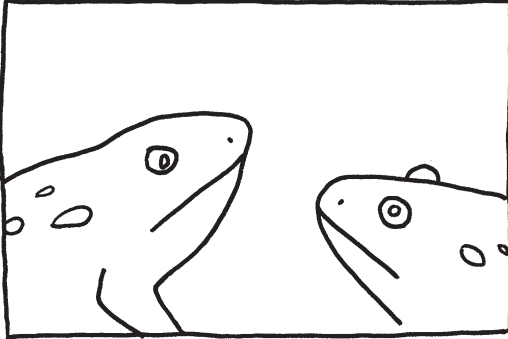
"It was a complete nightmare," he said.

I left Keith to watch the bar and descended the steps to the basement to check the a.c. Even down there it was foul and hot. I flicked dials and switches and fuses, kicked and hollered and begged. I wrapped my body around the machine. The more I moved, the more I stank. The cold would never come. ▽

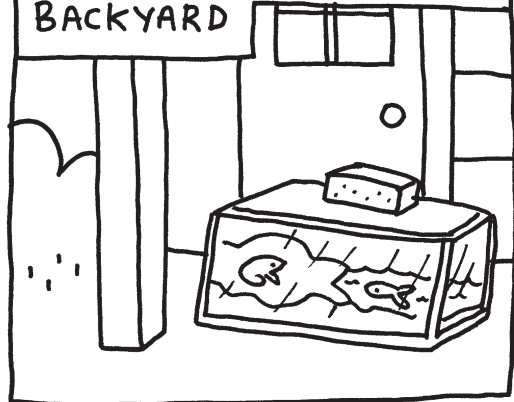


The Frogs

THE SUMMER WE LIVED
at GRANDMA'S, WE HAD
SOME FROGS AS PETS

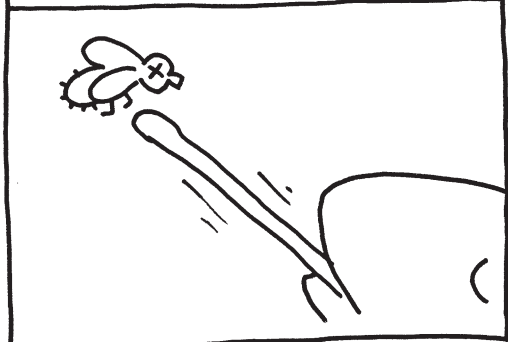


THEY LIVED IN OUR OLD
AQUARIUM, IN the
BACKYARD



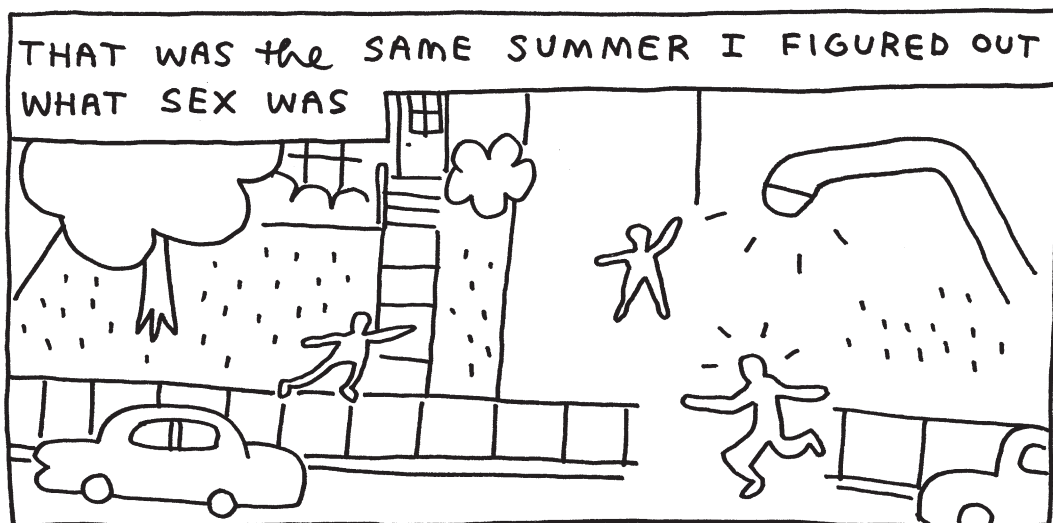
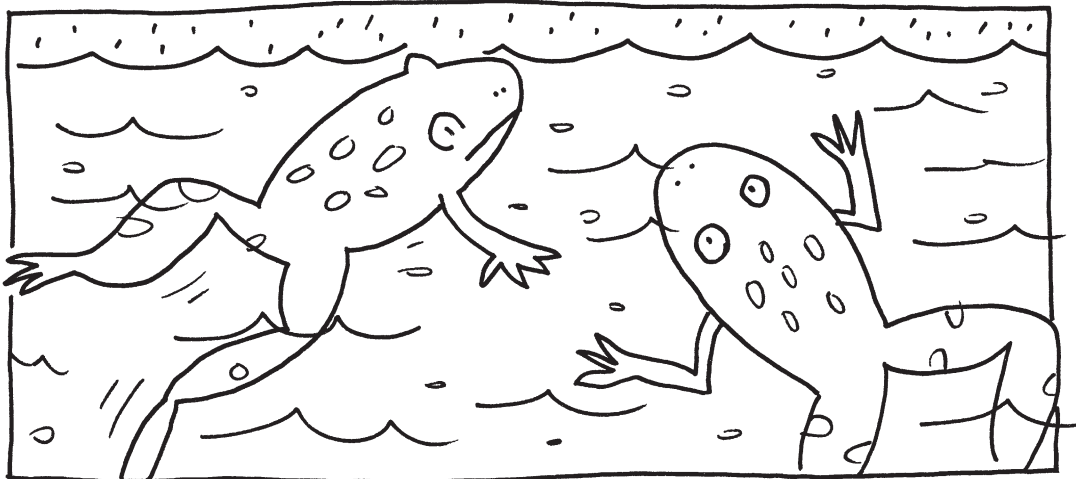
TO FEED THEM, WE'D
CATCH FLIES. The BEST
WAY TO CATCH FLIES
IS YOU PUT A SLICE OF
BALONEY ON A PAPER
PLATE ON the DRIVEWAY
and WHEN the FLIES
LAND, YOU WHACK THEM
WITH A SWATTER...

Then YOU FEED THEM
TO the FROGS



WE ALSO FED them LIGHTNING BUGS, and
YOU COULD SEE THEIR STOMACHS FLASHING
IN the NIGHT...





HAPPENED SUMMER 1979 · TYPED INTO MY PHONE 12/26/14-10:18 PM
DRAWN 1/7/15-2:03 AM
John P.

THE FICTION

LINDSAY

BY ANDREW DALEY

Lander hurried down the stairs to the church basement, trailing slush and bitter night cold. Fifteen or so women sat on chairs arranged in a circle. Lander was shrugging off her parka and bubbling with self-satisfaction when she was struck by a sudden dread. All the women had name tags stuck over their hearts: Lena, Carly, Rebecca. She'd assumed the counselling would be anonymous. Isn't that how it worked?

She instantly thought of Lindsay Werner, in whose former house, Lander was convinced, she'd recently rented an apartment. Twenty-five years ago little Lindsay was admired by all the Meis, Lourdes, and Ginas in Lander's Grade 3 class for being the only girl with blond hair. Since moving into her new apartment she'd been wondering where Lindsay was now.

Lander glanced around the room. Lindsay certainly wasn't in the basement of St. Helen's with her now, inches from trying, hopefully, to figure out why she was drinking so much.

The last of the group were taking their seats. A young woman with a clipboard—Beatriz, according to her tag—was happy to see her.

"You must be Lander Martins," she offered.

"I'm *Lindsay* Martins," Lander said. "Seven-fifteen Gladstone, Apartment 3?"

The woman checked her list.

"There you are. I didn't think 'Lander' looked right."

"It's not," she said, accepting the sheet of name tags and the felt-tip pen offered to her.

Dr. Beatriz Alvaro was a resident in psychiatry at the Queen Street Mental Health Centre. Her program had a mandate to engage women with substance abuse issues at the community level. Lander decided they were the same age—early thirties—and that with her sol-

idly Portuguese name, Beatriz was likely also from the neighbourhood.

Beatriz started by asking what everyone hoped to achieve in the program. As the circle was rounded, Lander was unnerved by how readily the other women revealed their demons. With the new year—and the new millennium—just days old, the room hummed with the enthusiasm of fresh starts and second chances. Talking about her drinking had seemed easier when she saw the flyer for the program at a yoga studio.

A woman in a suit, named Susan, was a cocaine addict. Carly, a beautiful young black girl, spent every weekend zonked on ketamine and ecstasy. Maura, a big woman in overalls, said her court order stated only that she had to attend the group, not that she had to speak.

When it was her turn, Lander decided that "Lindsay's" life was nearly identical to her own. She'd recently finished working as a wardrobe assistant on a television series and was settling into a new apartment, her first on her own. She'd also had a boyfriend briefly, a focus puller named Nolan she'd met on the series. But he'd left a month ago to spend the winter in India and so far hadn't bothered to call or write.

The only difference between Lindsay and Lander was Lindsay probably didn't have a ten-year-old daughter named Jennifer who lived north of the city with her adoptive parents. Lander hadn't seen Jenny in those ten years, and couldn't think of a reason to mention her to a roomful of troubled strangers.

"Would you like to tell us what brought you here today?" Beatriz asked.

For a moment, blinded by the expectant faces looking her way, Lander couldn't say.

After the meeting Lander drifted past the streets of her childhood: St. Clarens, Margueretta, and Brock. Snow

crunched underfoot. To hell with Nolan, she thought. She had friends, a new career, and less of a drinking problem than most of the women she'd listened to that night. The looming bulk of Brock Public School made her wonder if Lindsay Werner, wherever she was now, could claim as much.

So far as she remembered, the year of her friendship with Lindsay had been her last at the school. The summer after third grade Lander's mother moved her to a small town for a few years and she never saw Lindsay again.

Her new second-floor apartment had felt eerily familiar when she first viewed it. But it was only after Nolan helped her move in that she realized the house had once belonged to the Werners. Nolan hadn't cared about a friend from long ago she could barely remember. At the time they'd been so busy enjoying each other she didn't give Lindsay much thought.

It was Lander who'd suggested Nolan move in to save money for his trip. It was too soon for them to cohabitate, but with working so much on the series they barely got half a weekend together. He'd help make dinner on Saturdays, chopping or stirring beside her, though he was of more use driving her to Ikea and setting up her new computer. He'd also select a wine for dinner, and then forget about it after the meal, engrossed in surfing the Web for camera equipment. So Lander would have an extra glass or two and show some interest in lenses and filters. Later there'd be beer at a pub or more wine at a party. Even then she'd thought it was too much.

On the day of Nolan's departure Lander returned alone from the airport to an apartment twice the size as the one she'd left and was instantly overwhelmed by memories of playing there as a girl with Lindsay: the closets they'd hidden in, the posters of Leif Garrett, the Barbies they'd both pretended to no longer like. It was

ILLUSTRATION BY MATTHEW DALEY



as if it had been a week ago, not twenty-five years.

Then a few days later, at the wrap party for the television series, she got spectacularly drunk and fell down the stairs leading to the washroom. She blamed her heels, but no one was fooled.

At the start of the second meeting Lander was writing “Lindsay” on a name tag when she saw none of the other women were wearing them. She scrunched it up and hurried to the seat beside Beatriz.

“You’re Lindsay, right?” the doctor said. “Not Lander.”

“You got it.”

Susan the bank executive had been caught doing lines in the parking lot of her kids’ daycare and now her kids were no longer welcome there. The rave girl, Carly, had spent the weekend on ecstasy. Lander hadn’t seen people this messed up since her own messed up days in Kensington Market, when she’d given birth to Jenny. Their helplessness broke her heart.

Lander had spent the week painting her kitchen—first a pale lime Nolan had recommended, then, when that failed to satisfy, a Creamsicle orange—and obsessively checking her Hotmail account to see if he’d written. When it was her turn to speak she said she’d thought about having a drink a few times when in fact she’d never considered it once.

“Sometimes it’s easiest just to avoid temptation,” Beatriz said to her before turning to the circle. “Would anyone like to comment on what Lindsay’s shared with us?”

When no one did, Lander told herself it was because she hadn’t said anything of interest.

Beatriz called a ten-minute break, and Lander took her disappointment outside, to smoke on the church steps. A hooded Carly slid from the shadows and asked for a cigarette.

“Sorry to be bumming,” the girl said. “I don’t get paid until tomorrow.”

“No problem,” Lander said. “Here. Take a couple for later.”

“Thanks. So you work in the movies, huh? Who’s, like, the biggest star you’ve met?”

“None, really. I haven’t been doing it for long.”



Carly accepted a light as well, and mumbled her thanks to a passing street-car rather than to Lander. Her movements were oddly exaggerated, and she wouldn’t meet Lander’s eye. That was fine, since Lander felt stupid for fibbing to the group, and had begun to suspect she was wasting everyone’s time. So they smoked in a companionable silence, hunched against an icy wind.

The next Wednesday Beatriz began the session by explaining that a person in recovery must reconsider all of their personal relationships. Friends and family, she warned, might be threatened by the changes a person makes and tempt them down dangerous old paths.

Lander disagreed. That week at a birthday party she’d easily ignored her friends’ encouragement to get drunk with them. Nor did her excuse that her stomach was upset

prompt anyone to ask why she was gorging on the Indian food and cake. It felt great to get out, and she had fun until her friends got too loud and began repeating

PLAXBERRIES

Raspberries are symbolic of remorse, which may account for their appearance in every dessert made in the nineties. Raspberries are the backwards jeans of fruit, the Crystal Pepsi of the vine. Seedy, sour, or whatever stands in for sad, middle class sads, the “clowning” of the lips, the “castles of red” the mother calling “Taylor Emerson Langley MacDree! You get home right now!” Pouty raspberries all the time, steering into pop fodder, all the while it was becoming clear I didn’t “make it” and for reasons that had nothing do with the way people chew bay leaves and instinctively exclude crude, fat men. It didn’t help that I lied. Didn’t help that Gerard Manley Hopkins tweeted “I hope that David McGimpsey doesn’t publish more. I mean, we get it! Jesus!” What helped was bowls of cereal, and General Mills cereal mascot Franken Berry. Every morning, I’d wake and seek to help the world by reminding it that Franken Berry was afraid of cats, Franken Berry was afraid of parrots,

the jokes they’d told an hour earlier.

Carly reported she’d taken ecstasy but avoided ketamine. Natalie had thrown an ashtray at her father before passing out at a family dinner. Listening to them, Lander knew it was pointless to share another dull week with women who had real issues, so she invented a version of the wrap party in which she’d been pressured into drinking. She’d have to choose better friends, she admitted. When this story failed to get a response she added that she liked drinking less because she’d lost three pounds and hadn’t spent as much money. Only Carly laughed.

Next up was a ragged Susan, who said her husband had insisted she attend Narcotics Anonymous. She’d gone once, leaving the meeting to do coke in the washroom of a sports bar. Lander pictured her Hoovering lines in the same suit she presently wore.

On the church steps, during the break, Carly produced a pack of Player’s from the folds of her oversized hoodie.

“Payback, girl. So how come you didn’t call your sponsor?”

“My sponsor?” Lander said.

and, mostly, Franken Berry was afraid of talking shoes. The kind of talking shoes which never mourned alienated friends and did not feel remorse. The shoes would say remorse was a thing for hard prisoners or a Civil War general who led young men into a heavily defended forest. Remorse was for Plaxico Burress, the Super Bowl hero who shot himself in the leg at the LQ nightclub, on Lexington, as his pistol slipped down his pants. Raspberries would shoot themselves if they were given the chance, even if they won the summer Super Bowl. They always taste like summer, in a way, and summer always tastes of fading away, of the slight depth in a chill that asks you "Are corduroys coming back in fashion?" Autumn comes in cuffs and tasseled loafers and a hope some exam ends with an A. What is the best way to get through a test and to endure the sting of Hopkins' lies? Plaxico Burress I think said it best: "Hi, haters! I'm having wings and disco fries!"

—DAVID MCGIMPSEY

"Yeah. Don't you go to A.A., too? You're a drunk, right?"

"Not like that."

She pictured a roomful of sad-eyed old men. Is that what they thought of her?

"Hey, chill out." Carly rested a hand on Lander's forearm. "I'm asking if you've got someone to call if things get shitty."

"I'm all right." And for a moment, suspended in Carly's clear, steady gaze, she was.

"Sure." Carly flipped open a cellphone. "Gimme your number. It's Lindsay, right?"

"No. Yes. And I don't have a cellphone yet. I have to get one."

"No cell?" Carly was confused. "What the fuck is that?"

There wasn't any film work at present but if she watched her spending Lander would survive until the season resumed, in March. It was how to fill the months until then that concerned her.

Snow bound, she paced the floor of her apartment, frowning at corners she lacked the furniture to fill. The long nights were the worst. She missed the banter—once so annoying—of her former

roommates. But what was the point in calling them since everything they did together ultimately involved drinking?

She amused herself by half-recalling the games she'd played with Lindsay, a little girl who hovered, semi-formed, on the edge of her memory. Where was Lindsay now? Did she live in the suburbs with her husband and children? Or in L.A., where she designed costumes? Maybe Lindsay still lived nearby and Lander passed her every week on the street without recognizing her.

One night, feeling especially restless, she confronted her closet. Although overflowing with her clothing, its most notable feature seemed to be the absence of Nolan's shirts and pants. How was that for unfair? Worse, all her clothing belonged to an outdated version of herself. She tossed a knitted shawl she didn't like to the floor, then a raincoat she'd never worn, then a straw sun hat.

So it began.

At first she organized the cast-off items into piles based on their proposed destination: a consignment shop, the Salvation Army, friends, or perhaps back into her closet. She moved on to her dresser,

and then an additional wardrobe. But the more she purged the less certain she was of her decisions. If she changed her mind, some items would be hard to find again.

By midnight her bedroom and hallway were blocked by various mounds of clothing. Defeated by this new muddle she'd made of things, she retreated to the living room and turned on the television.

At the next session Lander found her usual seat beside Beatriz occupied by another woman. Yellow sticky notes with names on them had been placed on each seat. Beatriz anticipated her alarm: "You're not here to form habits, Lindsay. You're here to break them."

Her new seat was beside Susan, who reported that her husband had taken the kids to live with her parents. She'd been scared straight temporarily but knew she couldn't hold out long. With her hair in a loose bun and her nails freshly painted, Lander thought she looked great for a woman circling the drain.

Happily, it wasn't all bad news that week. Natalie had drank just once, dodging a bender. And Carly had stayed off ecstasy by smoking a ton of pot. Beatriz beamed her approval.

As usual, Lander didn't have anything to share. She'd been in a funk, sleeping a lot, and tripping over all the clothing underfoot. The link to Lindsay made her feel stuck in the past. Memories haunted her: sidewalk chalk drawings, a tiny bike abandoned on a lawn. She kept trying to picture Lindsay, but never got it right.

Frustrated, she told the story of her fall down the stairs. In this version she landed on her behind, which she assured everyone didn't need to get any larger. This got some laughs, though none from Beatriz. "You could have been seriously hurt," the doctor said. "Do you know why you drank so much? What led you to it?"

"I'm not sure," she said. "But I'm going to make sure it doesn't happen again."

At the end of the session Carly trailed her up the stairs.

"Why didn't you call me?" the girl said. "I could have talked you out of it."

"There wasn't a pay phone at the party."

Rather than sink deeper into her lie, Lander set off toward Dundas Street.

"Why do you always run away?" Carly called after her. "Where you gotta be?"

The answer stopped her.

Nowhere. She had nowhere to go.

WIGFORD REMEMBERIES

A NOVEL

KYP HARNESS

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KYP HARNESS

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NIGHTWOOD EDITIONS

The Galaxy Donuts by Lansdowne station hadn't changed from when she used to live nearby with her mother. She felt safe in its fluorescent glare, loafing with transients and Indian cabbies.

Carly forgot they'd come to discuss Lander's drinking and complained about how her roommates had their boyfriends over all the time. One of them only left the living room couch to sell weed in Parkdale and still never contributed to the rent. Last week he'd passed out drunk on the couch with his knuckles dripping blood from a fight.

Lander had endured her share of moronic roommates. She'd also been twenty and broke once so she knew that suggesting Carly move out wasn't a real option. Instead she spoke of self-respect and making careful decisions, sounding like Beatriz but lacking the doctor's compassion.

Carly's pain hovered in the over-sweet aroma of crullers and samosas. She had a brother still in foster care and a mother she was supposed to have seen that week for the first time in two years.

"How did that go?" Lander felt compelled to ask.

"She cancelled. Which is worse than seeing her, the bitch."

"Sorry to hear that."

There was more she could do for this girl, but Lander was wary of needful strangers. Especially those who reminded her so much of herself.

At the airport Nolan had warned Lander it would be a while until she heard from him. This was his second trip to India. He'd provided an itinerary of his tour of temples in Tamil Nadu, and the many reasons why it probably would change. He also explained there was almost no Internet in India, that the phones were unreliable, and that it could take a month for mail to reach Toronto.

Was there a way Lander could have made him stay? She'd never told him about Jenny, assuming the truth would scare him away, which was stupid since he was leaving anyway. She stared dumbly at her new Aptiva computer while the modem screeched and gargled its way to a connection. Waiting to check her Hot-mail account induced a state she called "anticipointment."

Lander spent all day alone under the slanted ceilings while car wheels spun on the snow-clogged street below. Last winter the mayor had called in the army to



REPORT ON THE STATUS OF RACCOONS ON FERN AVENUE

The children have elected them, en masse, as head gardener, tastemaker, first love. Individually, some are mistaken for escaped house cats or nothing at all—renter's-side of a one-way mirror. Assembled, they move as one. A giant fractal considering the neighbourhood, licking off shingles for the gap-toothed view of our pills, passwords, and occasional sex. Last frost is their favourite formula. Their claws are fashioned from pull tabs, lighter silver, and lost earrings. The only words they know are "I am sorry," spoken in varying orders, velaric, almost, and often, swallowed.

Each animal forms a binary system with one of the feral chickens of Kauai. They believe they are an island. Some are able to camouflage themselves as kitchen-made satellites moving across telephone wires. They collect open-window data, half-lives of half-heard conversations. They party-trick refuse, ingest, then leave it on porches, neatly, in curls: intestinal cherry-stem knots. Each individual hair on their coat is an antennae to another. They reclaim old pelts, cold crowns, from attics, commune with their dead, and wonder why we pick our brushes clean. They believe we invented the rat and the car tire.

They understand construction cranes to be a form of prayer. They take more meaning from the lay of flagstones than they should. They're partial to the sound of human crying. They sleep unmolested on the eaves we'll never finish paying for.

—DANI COUTURE

(With a line from Elizabeth Renzetti's Globe and Mail article "In Toronto's War on 'Raccoon Nation,' I'm Siding with the Critters," April 10, 2015.)

haul away the snow, and there were rumours he was going to do it again. She was stuck, too, and by evening all the thoughts she'd had that day had seemingly been scrawled on the walls for her to read again and again.

She braved a snow squall to visit the pub where she and Nolan had been regulars. The candlelit tinkle of glassware and a Guinness brought a contentment she hadn't known in weeks. A second beer couldn't hurt, so she flagged a waitress. But the barman himself brought it. Derrick or Darryl. She watched him approach, her heart sinking. He and Nolan were friends.

No, she hadn't heard from Nolan. Smiling like she'd never given this a second thought. Well, she lied, except for a postcard mailed just after he arrived in India. No, she hadn't wanted to go. But it had seemed at the time—this just occurring to her—that she'd rather stay home feeling abandoned and pining for his return. And that's exactly where she was.

She left her beer where the barman had placed it and wandered the icy streets until her face was half frozen and the shame of her own stupidity burned slightly less hot.

It was only much later, lying sleepless

in bed, that she realized she'd never once considered whether she should be drinking or not.

En route to St. Helen's, Lander cooked up a great story about her boyfriend returning from India and dumping her. In it, she threw him out of the apartment and then got so drunk she made herself sick and missed a day of work. Yes—and before that she'd also thrown all his clothing out the bedroom window into the snow.

Carly sat beside her. The girl had called twice in the past week to see how she was doing. "Cool pants," Carly said of Lander's green cords. "You wear the coolest stuff."

Lander had glimpsed a lovely figure beneath the girl's perpetual hoodie-and-cargo-pant combination. Carly might feel more like the woman she wanted to become if she looked the part.

"I've got plenty more . . ." was all she managed to say before a hush silenced the room.

At the bottom of the stairs, Susan turned from the coat rack to reveal a battered, blackened left eye. Her hand reached up to it, in shame or protection.

"It's not as bad as it looks," Susan said. "And it wasn't my husband. He's on my side. It was a guy at the bar."

Beatriz got them settled and thanked everyone for coming. Then she asked them all to join hands, close their eyes, and share their strength with Susan.

Carly's hand was exceptionally warm, and the girl was near tears. There was no point, those few moments suggested to Lander, in making up stories of hardship and failure when there were so many real stories to be shared.

Carly's ex-boyfriend was coming to Toronto to headline a party at the Government. She wouldn't admit she was nervous about seeing him, but she'd instantly accepted Lander's offer to borrow some clothes for the party.

Lander lifted some jeans from a pile. "You're like, a four? I used to be."

Carly accepted the jeans without much enthusiasm. "Have you got any sweaters?"

"No. You need to stop hiding in those hoodies. So what if you get upset when you see him and want to use again? Have you thought of that?"

"Yeah, that's cool now. I'm over that shit. No more partying."

"If you say so."

It occurred to Lander that Carly was the only other person to enter her apartment since Nolan left two months ago.

Carly found an ivory cardigan decorated in a western style, with scarlet roses and lariats. The silver buttons were tiny pistols.

"Cool. Can I have this?"

Lander bristled. The sweater was a cherished relic of her Kensington Market days.

"Only if you wear it over a cute dress."

"I haven't worn dresses since I was a kid." Carly dug out Lander's white go-go boots, and laughed. "What the fuck are these? Michael Jackson moon boots?"

The boots were also favourites but her days of wearing them, she'd decided, sadly, were over.

"You should take those, too. You've got the legs for them."

Carly laughed.

"They're like, the old disco days," she said, providing Lander a lightening flash of how she must appear to this girl. "I'd get laughed out of the party."

Later that week two friends turned up at Lander's apartment unannounced on their way to the outlet malls in Buffalo. Here was a chance to revolutionize her wardrobe in a single day. But it would mean missing a session at St. Helen's.

"So long as we get back by six-thirty," she said, knowing they never would.

When she got home at midnight there were four messages on her answering machine. Expectation lit her up. There hadn't been many people calling her lately, and she'd just spent the day with two of them. She tossed an armful of shopping bags and shoeboxes onto the couch.

One message was from Beatriz, asking after her absence, and three were from Carly, increasingly desperate, describing an ordeal with her ex-boyfriend. Lander called Carly back three times in the next hour without getting an answer, then lay awake wondering how much trouble Carly actually was in since the girl tended to exaggerate.

The next morning she was down the street at the Radio Shack in the Dufferin Mall buying a silver Motorola flip phone and a plan that included international minutes. Her first call was to Carly, who still didn't answer.

At the next session Carly wore the jeans and cowgirl sweater Lander had given her. Lander approached to offer a compliment but Carly ignored her to chat with Natalie. Which was ridiculous, since Lander had left Carly five messages in the past week.

A sombre Susan reported she'd been

THE HALF WOMAN

The day they found her, the out-of-business antique shop owner set up a Dumpster to clear out the old stock, ducking police tape to discard eroded chairs.

Onlookers picked through the alley, treasure seeking, ignored the line of cruisers. A delicate rain and a delicate sun competed for our attention.

The drunks on the corner said, "She's not one of ours." The "she" was a part-top half dropped one place, hips and buttocks trundled off somewhere.

Soon, an hour north, a lone leg uncovered. Silver ankle-bracelet heart: her only identity. Friends and co-workers, whoever they were, sat silent as cats in windows.

The camera crew smiled like it was Christmas. That first week police came knocking at every door, asking: "Can we look in your closets? Will you show us your knives?"

clean nine days and hoped to see her kids on the weekend. Then Lena described how she'd arrived at work, typically late and hungover, to find her boss waiting with a security guard to escort her from the building. Beatriz asked them how much they would give up to continue boozing and drugging?

At the break, the doctor snagged Lander's sleeve.

"What happened last week?"

"I couldn't make it. Sorry. I should have let someone know."

Beatriz was shaking her head.

"You're Lander Martins, right? Not Lindsay."

"Um," she said. "Well . . ."

"Says so on your answering machine. You were in my sister's class at Brock. Denise Alvaro? She remembers you. Didn't you have a kid with Patrick Zagorski?"

"Don't talk about Jenny."

Whoever that was. All she recalled was an infant she'd never heard laugh, see walk, or helped in any way.

"Don't talk about her here."

"O.K. But we need to understand why you'd lie like that."

"I don't want anyone to know I have a problem."

"But do you even have a problem? Or is this some kind of joke to you?"

A few other women picked up on the doctor's tone, and looked toward them. Lander burned.

"I thought this would be easier if I was someone else. What's wrong with that?"

"You need to think about whether you should be here or not. Let's talk after the session."

She fled to catch up with Carly, meeting the girl at the top of the stairs. Carly, haloed in cigarette odour, shared an accusatory pain before heading down the stairs.

"Grow up," Lander called after her, not caring who heard. "I should have been there, I know. But if you won't answer your phone you can't be having little tantrums like this."

Lander slumped in her chair for the second half of the session, astounded less by this particular mess than by her penchant for making them. Is that why she was here? To share her brand of catastrophe?

At the end of the session she waited while Lena spoke with Beatriz. Carly hovered by the stairs, an unlit cigarette dangling from her lips. Lander sensed she might be forgiven, and motioned for the girl to wait outside so she wouldn't learn the truth.

All that fall, round the apartment I spun
like lightning banging the sky.
I fought with sleep like a cheating husband,
while rain exhaled her nameless song.

A pebbled dirt crept in and out
with each breath. At night the stars blurred,
anxious, wanting to move farther, farther
into the black, away from this street.

An arrest: casual as the corner store
cranking open its gate, unbending
its awning, snapping plastic ties from a bundle
of newspapers. Story of husband and wife.

MADE YOU LOOK, the sign declared as a custom jeweller
renamed the antique place. Inside, gauzy girls
extended necks, wrists, for gold baubles.
Outside, a memory of torso and ankle

severed, disappeared with each downpour.
Leaves etched themselves into the sidewalk,
blood brown. Unchanged, we locked our door,
trudged to work in the shock of real air.

—EMILY SCHULTZ

Beatriz also waited, hands on hips.
“So. Lindsay. Have you made a decision?”
She had.

By now her borders were well-defined. Galaxy Donuts to the west, east to Dovercourt Road, and south to the basement of St. Helen’s. She hadn’t left her neighbourhood in months, and didn’t care what lay beyond it. All she needed was in Dufferin Grove: the library at Bloor and Gladstone, Blockbuster Video, the obnoxious mall, and the rink in the park.

The white leather of her figure skates, saved from the purge, had yellowed with age. She liked to skate at twilight, liked the scratchy chatter of the ice, the couples holding hands, and the shrieks of kids lost to the darkening sky. She especially liked how the little ones in their snowsuits, after slipping from their parents’ hands onto the ice, always got back up.

From the adjoining rink came the sharp thunk of the puck against the boards. As in her day, the boys played and the girls watched. Jenny’s father, Patrick, had played hockey here. The girls shared

cigarettes. When they got too cold, or bored with the boys and their dumb game, they crossed Dufferin Street to warm up in the mall. She knew those girls very well.

February waned, dusk falling later every day, as she turned slow circles on the ice.

One morning Lander bundled up most of the clothing lying around her apartment into garbage bags and hauled it down to the Salvation Army on Bloor Street. She was ambling home when she saw Susan on the other side of the street with a little boy and a little girl. She guessed they might be going to the library, and hurried to arrive there before they did.

She waited in the library, savouring the dusty smell of old paper, and opened the door to exit just as Susan led

the children up the steps. The kids peered up at “Lindsay” skeptically, no doubt wary of their mother’s weird friends.

“We missed you last week.”

Susan looked lost, and her makeup couldn’t entirely hide the yellowy remains of her bruised eye.



“How are things? You holding on?”

“I’m good. I haven’t been drinking.” Which wasn’t a lie. She hadn’t been drinking. She hadn’t even thought about it. “How about you?”

“Three weeks clean, and I’ve got my babies back. Everyone was so supportive. I couldn’t have done it without you guys.”

The kids were anxious to enter the library, and interfering with people leaving. Lander helped usher them out of the way. When the little girl met her eye, Lander waited for the guilty pang that often accompanied her encounters with endearing children. Susan preempted it by saying: “Next week’s the last meeting. You should come. We’d all like to see you.”

The idea that she may have helped others floated her home. And all along she’d worried her presence in the group had been a distraction.

At Galaxy Donuts later that day, Carly said she was attending a party at the Phoenix to see a friend who owed her money. Lander thought that was asking for trouble, and suggested Carly meet her friend beforehand and avoid any triggers. Carly disagreed: she might smoke weed, but her drug days were over. Lander walked her to the subway at Lansdowne, concerned but helpless.

That night her sleep was broken by a dream of an unknown person skating away from her into a murky distance. As the skater receded, a voice began calling “Lindsay” from far away. It wasn’t Jenny, because she’d never dreamed of her. It might be Nolan, but they’d never gone skating together. She lay half asleep, feeling very small and alone, until she realized someone was calling the name of her childhood friend from outside. She guessed who, climbed out of bed, and raised the window.

Carly lay half sprawled in a snowbank.

“You aren’t answering your phone.”

“I don’t answer at night. Jesus. Go around to the front.”

She tiptoed down the stairs to the front door, the confusion of the dream still clinging to her. Maybe it meant she should come clean to Carly about who she really was.

The girl stood grinning on the front porch, her tear-stained eyes fully dilated.

“I’m sorry. It wasn’t me. It wasn’t me. My friend put an E in my beer.”

“Some friend,” she said, opening the door wider. “Get in here.”



MATTHEW DALEY: ILLUSTRATOR

web: www.shinypliers.com
email: matt@shinypliers.com
blog: www.shinypliers.blogspot.com

Representation by:
Three In a Box Inc.
www.threeinabox.com

Back in December, riding home alone on the bus from the airport, she'd felt awful about her last moments with Nolan. There'd been a kiss and a squeeze after he'd checked in, then not even a backward glance as he hurriedly disappeared through customs. She knew he was excited about his trip, but had hoped for more of a goodbye. For more kisses, definitely. And promises.

The bus back to the city plunged through an alien suburbia, the wet streets gleaming with Christmas lights. She'd somehow known then that if she saw Nolan again it would be by chance in a bar or on another television series. It would be temporarily awkward at worst. But what did she expect if the most she ever asked of people was for some of their sadness at the end?

Lander was early for the last Wednesday session, nosing down the stairs like a thief. Beatriz was placing bottles of sparkling fruit juice and pastries from a Portuguese bakery on a table. Lander was partial to the almond tarts.

"Lander." The doctor laughed. "Sorry. Lindsay. I'm glad you're back."

She was too. So far.

"I wanted to see everyone again. Plus Carly wanted me to come."

"I have something to show you. You'll like it."

Beatriz opened a worn cardboard folder to a school photo of three rows of kids in gingham and velour anchored by Miss Wong, whom she'd completely forgotten.

"That's my sister Denise there." Beatriz pointed to one of the many dark-haired girls in the class. "She's in Vancouver now. She just had a new baby before Christmas. Her second girl."

Lander spotted herself in the middle row, second from the end, in a navy pinafore with a lemony top. Her feet, if they could be seen, would be in Mary Janes.

"And my cousin Nelson," Beatriz continued. "He's a mechanic up in Markham."

Lander scanned the rows again. There was a blond boy, but no blond girls. She read the names listed below the photograph, then read them again because there was no Lindsay Werner listed.

"Where is she?" she said.

"Where's who? That's you there. That's my sister. And that's Connie Boccia. We still hang out. She remembers you, too."

Could Lindsay have been in a different

class? But Lander had such specific memories of their desks beside each another. Or did she?

"No one," she said. "Never mind."

"Since we've got a moment," Beatriz said, "I need to tell you to be careful with Carly. You know she looks up to you. You can't be lying to her."

"Of course not," she said, as Susan and Maura started down the stairs. Beatriz placed the photo back in her handbag.

"Thank you," Lander said. "I don't remember that picture. I'll ask my mom if she's got it stored away somewhere."

Lena arrived, then Carly. The basement rang with their greetings. It was graduation day.

"Ask her," Beatriz said. "If she doesn't, I can copy it for you."

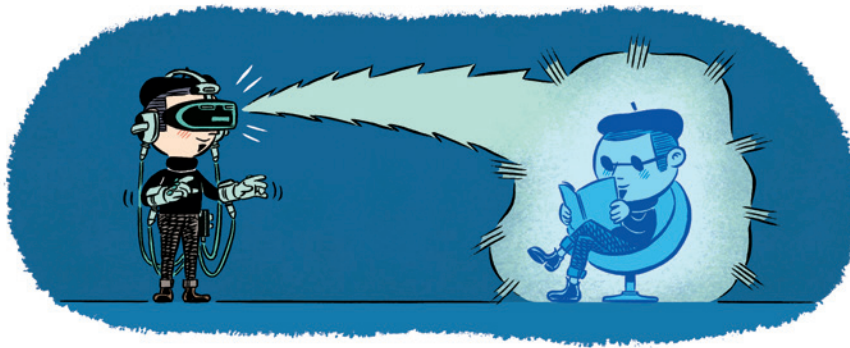
One afternoon at the mall Lander met a guy she'd known through Nolan or from some commercial she'd worked on. Or not, because he didn't mention Nolan or the television business. His name was Rupert, which she thought was cute. Earlier that week she'd gotten a call to start working on a series of beer ads for Molson. It was time to leave her comfort zone.

Rupert chose a hot spot on College Street, a few doors from the restaurant where she'd tumbled down the stairs. He talked about his screenplay. Everyone had a screenplay. Wherever she'd met him, she'd forgotten he was dull.

Lander excused herself to the washroom. Like so many places along College Street, it was in the basement. When she finished, she paused to listen to a message on her cell. Someone was turning thirty, and there was big night planned at the Dance Cave. She needed a reason to ditch her date.

Upstairs her glass of Merlot sat half-finished. Two months ago she'd been so frightened of her drinking she'd enrolled in a substance abuse program. And a month before that, so she understood, she'd entirely believed she once had a childhood friend named Lindsay. These things might be better ignored after some vodka cranberries and a fun night with her friends.

She climbed halfway up the stairs and then hit the preset for Carly's number. As usual it went straight to voice mail, so she tossed the phone back in her purse before carrying on up the stairs to the bar. ▽



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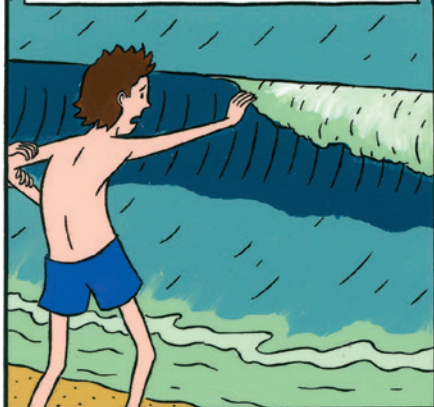
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2016

mom dreams

dave
lapp

mom, there for a second... in an aqua blue bathing suit, then gone. i wanted to look for her in the waves... my sister stopped me... because of the undertow.



mom cleaning the front door of her house. the door was wrong... the door opened the wrong way.



mom wants me to sell an appliance. i will myself to turn away from how the dream is supposed to go and stare at her. this is the only place to make new memories with mom. mom is annoyed.



mom's nightie adorns a long reaching arm coming from the attic. it is a malevolent force trying to pull me in.



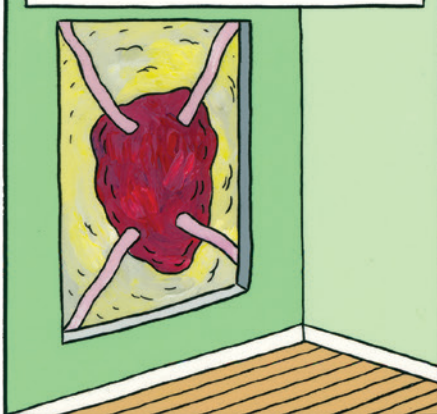
mom... radiant at the kitchen table. a nimbus of light glows around her head. i see her from a child's point of view.



mom's beside me in bed. she won't move over when i bump her. i float above the bed. she didn't move over because she is dead.



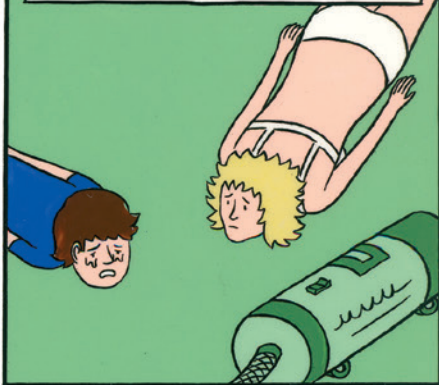
mom's house... in my old, empty room... a portal with a huge beating organ in it tries to suck my brother and i in... but i save us.



mom cradles me like an infant on her left arm. in her right hand she holds McDonald's french fries.



mom floats down to the living room in her bra and panties. i explain to her that i understand she is transitory. she turns on the vacuum cleaner and interrupts me. i cry and cry and cry.



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