

TADDLE CREEK

NO. 38



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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



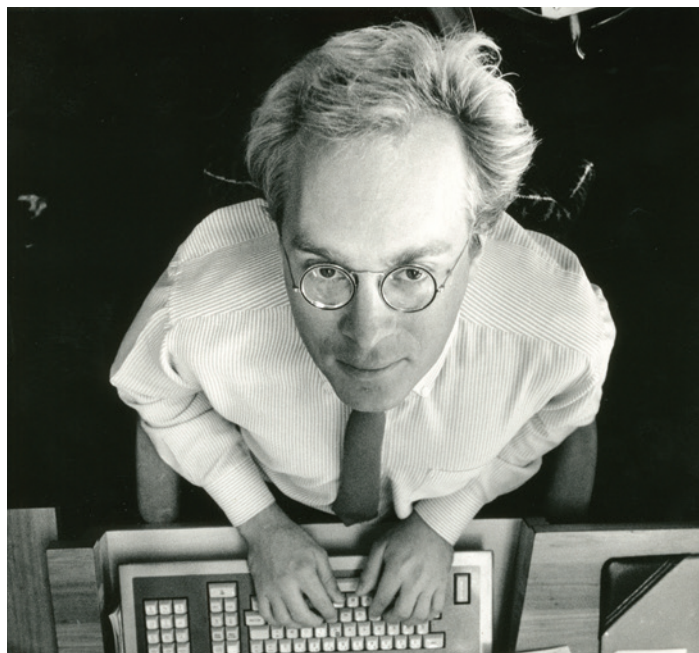
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TADDLE CREEK

NO. 38, WINTER, 2016-17



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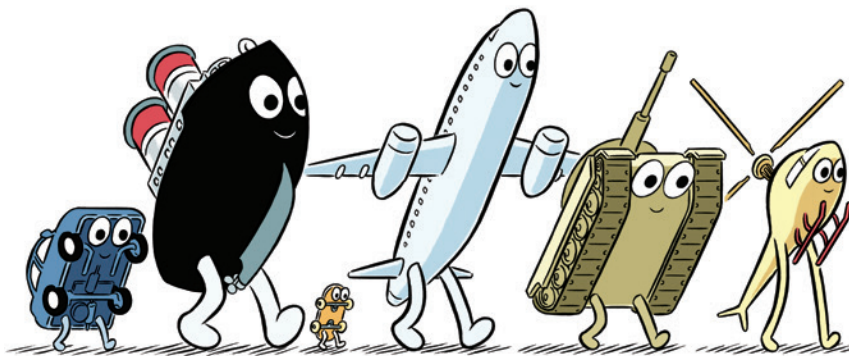
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THE CONTRIBUTORS

Amy Jones (“Aurora Borealis,” p. 4) published her debut novel, *We’re All in This Together*, earlier this year. She has won the CBC Literary Prize for short fiction and the Metcalf-Rooke Award.

Souvankham Thammavongsa (“Poster,” p. 7) will read her poems at the Guggenheim Museum, in New York, in 2017.

Thomas Blanchard (photograph, p. 8) is a photo-based artist, photographer, and visual arts instructor at York University.

Alex Pugsley (“Endnotes,” p. 10) recently won the Journey Prize. “Endnotes” is an installment in a narrative series about the Mair and McKee families in twentieth-century Halifax.

Kevin Connolly (“Love Removal Machine,” p. 13) is a poet and editor. His fifth collection, *Xiphoid Process*, will be released in April by House of Anansi.

Dakota McFadzean (“First,” p. 15) works as a storyboard artist for DreamWorks. His work has appeared in *The Best American Comics* and *Mad*, and on Funny or Die. His most recent book is *Don’t Get Eaten By Anything*.

Alfred Holden (“Lessons from the Reporters’ Trenches,” p. 20) is a *Taddle Creek* contributing editor. He recently wrapped up three decades as a reporter and editor with the *Toronto Star*.

Russell Smith (“Architecture and Democracy,” p. 22) writes on the arts for the *Globe and Mail* and teaches creative writing at the University of Guelph. His most recent book is the collection *Confidence*.

Chris Chambers (“Taylor Swift,” p. 25) won the 2016 International Festival of Authors Battle of the Bards Contest for reading a poem about a pigeon who gets run over by a car, and another about a guy who would help you move a fridge. His latest poetry collection is *Thrillows & Despairs*.

Suzanne Alyssa Andrew (“The Faces of Poetry,” p. 28) is *Taddle Creek*’s associate editor and the author of the novel *Circle of Stones*. She also plays bass.

Kelly Ward (“A Girl and a Dog on a Friday Night,” p. 36) is the managing editor of a small, independent publisher and the author of *Keep It Beautiful*.

Cassidy McFadzean (“A Charm to See Faeries,” p. 39) lives in Regina and is a graduate of the Iowa Writers’ Workshop. She published her first collection, *Hacker Packer*, in 2015.

Jim Johnstone (“New Values,” p. 41) is a poet, editor, and critic. His latest books are *The Essential D. G. Jones* and *Dog Ear*. Recently, he won *Poetry*’s Editors Prize for Book Reviewing.

Joren Cull (The Spots) is an illustrator and animator whose work has appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Walrus*, and the *Globe and Mail*. He received a National Magazine Award for spot illustrations in 2015.

Matthew Daley (The Cover) has been *Taddle Creek*’s in-house fiction illustrator since 2009. This issue’s cover was inspired by a vacation to Iceland, where he was visiting again as the magazine went to press.



“It’s important to be interesting.”

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T H E E P H E M E R A

THE AWARDS

The writers Andrew MacDonald and Dave Lapp together hold this issue's M.V.P. title. Andrew's story "Progress on a Genetic Level," from *Taddle Creek* No. 35, recently was nominated both for a National Magazine Award and long-listed for the Journey Prize, the latter of which sees his story appear in the annual *Journey Prize Stories* anthology. Meanwhile, Dave's *People Around Here* installment "Mom," also from No. 35, was chosen by the cartoonist Roz Chast for inclusion in *The Best American Comics 2016*—the third time Dave has appeared in this beloved series. Well done, and congratulations to both.

Speaking of the National Magazine Awards, a recent kerfuffle resulted in the creation of a new set of awards for Canadian magazines. Apparently the solution to the problem of too many award categories was to add a second show. *Taddle Creek* will be sticking with the original National Magazine Awards in 2017, having invested sixteen years in trying to win one already. Now that every major magazine in the country has abandoned the N.M.A.s, *Taddle Creek* is guaranteed at least a hollow victory—or an even more embarrassing loss than usual. Whatever shakes up the monotony, at this point.

THE SUBMISSIONS

Word on the street is that, as of December, the Ontario Arts Council will begin requiring those applying to its Writers' Reserve program (and all programs, in fact) to do so on-line. As a recommending magazine to this program, *Taddle Creek* certainly will not miss the annual stretch

of nightmare visits to the post office, which last from about Labour Day to late January, to pick up the dozens of applications that flood in every week, nor will it miss the pages upon pages of unnecessary extra paperwork resulting from the annoyingly high percentage of applicants who do not read the instructions properly and send in three copies of their entire package, not just the one-page main form.

This change got *Taddle Creek* thinking about its own submission process, which has gone largely unchanged for nineteen years. The magazine makes no secret of the fact that it does not care for most of the unsolicited submissions it receives, and much paper is wasted in the process of rejecting them. This system also only allows one editor to read submissions at a time, short of printing out multiple copies. *Taddle Creek* currently is not accepting submissions, but when it next does, it believes it will begin using an internal sharing system of some kind to allow it to funnel its toner budget into other areas.

THE CORRECTIONS

It recently came to the magazine's attention that a few errors crept into Eleri Harris's comic "Hell's Bells," which appeared in *Taddle Creek* No. 36: John A. Macdonald's name was misspelled in its final instance, on the comic's third page, as was the name of the location Rogers Pass. Also, the final panel should state "Canada is still a country 130 years later," not "127 years later." Eleri corrected these errors before press time, at *Taddle Creek's* request, but due to a production error, the corrected pages did not make it into the issue. These pages have since been substituted on *Taddle Creek's*

Web site. *Taddle Creek* regrets the errors.

In adding three unposted stories from *Taddle Creek* No. 1 to the magazine's Web site recently, some nineteen-year-old errors presented themselves (as reported in this corrections column previously, the first two issues of *Taddle Creek* were not fact-checked and should not to be trusted in print form):

In Michael Boughn's story "The Headache," the lyrics to the song "I Can See Clearly Now" were a bit off. Mao Tse-tung's name also was missing a hyphen. *Taddle Creek* regrets these errors.

In "The Mugging of Mrs. Melaney," by Kenneth Doiron, Lenox Hill Hospital originally was misspelled "Lennox." *Taddle Creek* regrets the error.

In the short story "The Silk Tie," by Caitlin Smith, a few proper names, including Living Language, Johnnie Ray, McGillivray, and Tensor, were slightly misspelled. A few of the French words and names were a bit off, too. *Taddle Creek* regrets the errors, especially Johnnie Ray.

THE NEXT ISSUES

Taddle Creek rarely gives hint of its upcoming doings, but 2017 is a big year. The magazine's summer issue (No. 39) will celebrate Canada's hundred and fiftieth anniversary (sesquicentennial to you) with work by authors and artists representing each of the country's thirteen provinces and territories. Then, come winter, *Taddle Creek* No. 40 will celebrate a smaller but no less important anniversary: *Taddle Creek's* twentieth. As the magazine does every five years, expect a slightly larger, slightly better than usual issue, featuring many of the magazine's regular contributors.

—TADDLE CREEK

THE FICTION

AURORA BOREALIS

BY AMY JONES

Jaime complains a lot. This is either something Keith has forgotten about his daughter, or something he never really knew.

“My toe hurts,” she says.

“Your toe?” Keith asks. “What’s wrong with your toe?”

“It’s all tingly. It’s like there’s no blood in it.”

She stretches her leg out and plunks her foot down on the dashboard, the untied laces of her combat boots draping over her bare shins like limp spaghetti.

“And my butt is totally numb. It’s like I’ve been trapped in this car for the whole entirety of human civilization.”

This has been going on since they left Toronto, close to twelve hours ago.

“I can’t get any cell service. . . . Your CDs are garbage. . . . This car smells like farts.”

She is a writhing, seething ball of negativity, vibrating with righteous indignation, calibrated by an inventory of perceived wrongs done to her. Like this trip, for instance—driving up north in the tailwind of a Bison transport, the same one Keith is sure they have been following since leaving the Soo, despite having periodically passed it. Just one more part of a nefarious plan her father has devised to ruin her life.

In the back seat, Keith’s wife, Carla, is reading a book to their four-year-old son, Henry, in the waning light of the late September sun. Keith makes eye contact with her in the rear-view mirror, and she gives him a fleeting, harried smile. She hadn’t wanted to come on this trip either, even though she would never tell him that directly. Just a snide remark here, a long sigh there. Saint Carla the Martyr, Keith calls her in his head, although he realizes this makes him just as disingenuous as her.

“And the cow says. . . ?” Carla trails off, waiting for Henry to fill in the blank.

“I hate you!” says Henry, kicking the book out of her hand. “The cow says, ‘I hate you!’”

Jaime crosses her arms over her chest. “I’m hungry.”

“We’ll stop at the next gas station,” Keith says. “I’ll buy you a Snickers.”

Jaime makes a face. Once, as a fat toddler, she liked Snickers bars. Keith realizes he has no idea what she likes as a teenager. She is all angles now, angles and purple hair and black eyeliner, so far out of his realm of comprehension she might as well be another language. And there won’t be another gas station for miles, anyway. The Trans-Canada, in this part of northern Ontario, is all rock and tree and lake and rock and tree and lake, transports and no-passing lanes, narrow potholed roads, the speed limit dipping down to fifty through the occasional tiny crumbling mill town. Slow moving and dangerous. Of course, it’s also breathtaking—the road swelling and then plummeting, curving along the contour of the lake—although no one else in the car has noticed.

Keith noses the car over the centre line, hoping to pass the Bison, then pulls back into his lane as another transport whizzes past them in the opposite direction. Jaime flips listlessly through his box of CDs, in case her first perusal wasn’t thorough enough and she’d missed an opportunity to be affronted.

Bingo.

“Please tell me you don’t actually listen to this crap,” she says, holding up a Soundgarden disc.

Just as Keith is about to say something about how Chris Cornell has more talent in his little finger than those ridiculous bands she listens to, in his head he hears his own father saying the exact same thing about Kenny Rogers.

“Maybe we can find something on the radio,” he says instead.

He reaches for the knob and begins scanning through channels, but finds nothing but unbroken static.

Jaime rolls her eyes at him. “God, what are you, *ninety*?”

Her earbuds go into her ears and she

slouches back down in her seat, eyes closed.

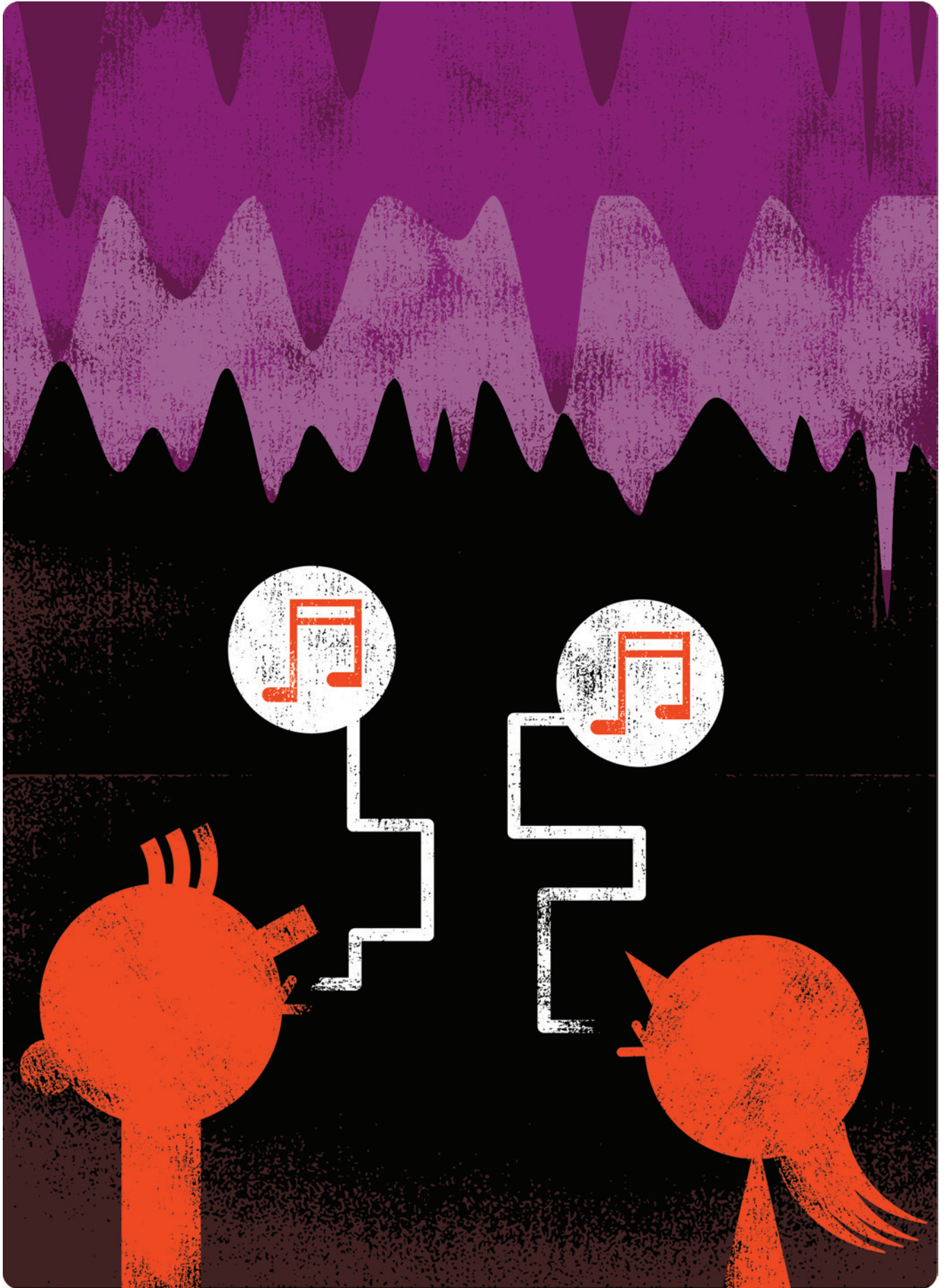
“You face, poo face, you face, poo face,” Henry chants from the back seat, then giggles maniacally.

Carla sighs deeply.

“Just five more hours, tops,” Keith thinks. And then what? What does he think will happen? That his desolate northern hometown will magically make them happy again? Keith doesn’t have any relatives left in Thunder Bay, has lost touch with most of his friends, his condo on King Street worlds apart from their camps and ice shacks, weekends spent with snow machines or fishing rods. He doesn’t even remember street names anymore, didn’t recognize any hotels or restaurants in the travel brochure. But it has been more than twenty years. Even a place like Thunder Bay gets new restaurants. Even a place like Thunder Bay has to change. Doesn’t it?

Still, he knows what is driving him here. Yes, he wants to be able to say to his southern wife and children: “There’s the house I grew up in. There’s my old high school. There’s where I had my first kiss.” But it’s more than that. He also wants them to understand things about the north he can’t explain. The massive, looming mesas. The stark beauty of Lake Superior. The vast expanse of boreal forest. The sheer size of it all, how small it all makes you feel. How small, and how infinite. As opposed to this car, which right now just feels small.

By the time they reach Marathon, everyone but Keith is asleep—heads pressed against windows, mouths hanging open—and Keith can feel his own eyelids drooping, exhausted by the monotony of the pavement, by the constant vigilance for roadside deer and moose moving through the pre-dusk shadows like ghosts. Finally he pulls over and gets out, at a gravel lay-by on the edge of a cliff overlooking Lake Superior meant for tourists to stop and take pictures. For those cross-Canada bikers and trailer-towing Americans you’d see



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POSTER

We used to have this poster on the wall. It was an advertisement for Minute Maid. A row of orange groves. It went on top of billboards and was sealed inside the glass of bus shelters. The poster gave my parents a different view than the one we had outside our window. We had only snow and the exhaust pipe from a car parked just outside. It was made of paper that didn't tear. Even if you tried. From afar, the blue in the sky and the green on the ground looked uniform. Up close, they were together a thousand little dots. The blue was made of blue, but the green was of bits of blue and yellow arranged on top of each other. The yellow came first and then the blue. It was the distant looking that brought them together, that filled the space between them. This poster was our future looking in on us, but we didn't see. We didn't see how inside it would be my mother picking oranges in those fields. Her nails cut short, dirt underneath quarter-moon shaped. And her hair would feel like straw and half her face would sag from a stroke. She says not to think on too much of it, she can't taste anything on one side except bitterness.

—SOUVANKHAM THAMMAVONGSA

every summer, fixated on covering ground, who gawk and click and continue on in their quest for kilometres. He stands with his knees touching the guard rail and feels the solid rock beneath his feet, the wind off the lake while the night tugs at him from all directions. There's something about the way the air up here feels in your lungs, as though you are the only person breathing it—unlike Toronto, where the air has already been breathed hundreds of thousands of times. He could feel his blood buzzing with it as soon as they passed Parry Sound. He wonders if Carla and the kids felt it too.

After a minute, he hears a door slam.

"The car better not have died," Jaime says, wrapping a sweater around her as she moves toward him in the dark. "I don't want to have to, like, sleep in a *cave* or whatever."

Keith pictures her back in their condo, reclined on their leather couch with her

laptop and phone and bottle of designer water. Designer water.

"You wouldn't last two seconds in a cave."

Jaime pulls her sleeves down over her hands.

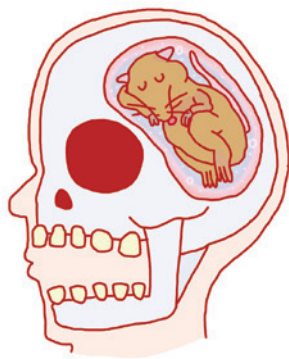
"It smells weird out here."

"That's because there's no smog."

He waits for a snide remark, but none comes. "This is where all my stories live," he wants to tell her. He thinks about terraced beaches, fingers stained purple from wild blueberries, feral gangs of bare-foot kids racing across a mossy forest floor. Camping trips, dented cans of beer, deer jerky and hot-dogs on sticks charred brown from the fire. The lapping of the lake against the side of a boat, the smell of motor oil on

his clothes, the hollow sound of your own voice echoing through seemingly endless silence.

But even as he thinks these things, he knows how ridiculous it all sounds. Those



moments, those memories, they aren't even real. They are glossed-over, sepia-toned, distorted by distance. So they just stand in silence, looking out over the lake, while Keith wonders what the hell they are doing here, what he could possibly have been thinking when he planned this trip in the first place.

"What's that?" Jaime asks suddenly, pointing out over the lake.

Keith follows her finger and sees a faint cloud of eerie green light dancing across a black expanse of sky.

"Aurora borealis," he says.

The icy sky at night. Those words always make him think of Neil Young, of his dad with his guitar on the back porch on Sunday mornings, coffee and cigarettes on the step next to him, the dog at his feet. Neil Young. One musician they could always agree on.

"Aurora who?" asks Jaime, scrunching up her nose.

"The northern lights."

Keith realizes Jaime has never seen them, has never even seen an actual night sky, unobstructed by buildings, by light. How could he possibly have let that happen?

"Whistle at them. It'll make them dance."

"Whatever."

"We used to do it all the time."

An old myth, something they would tell each other they could see just to not feel left out—then, later, something they would make fun of each other for believing in.

"Come on, give it a try."

Skeptically, Jaime breathes out a low whistle. The light continues to wobble gently in the sky, unaffected. Keith waits for her to say, "This is dumb, what were you thinking, as if that would work." But instead, her eyes grow wide, her face bathed in a faint greenish glow.

"Ever cool," she whispers. "You do it too."

For a second Keith can't breathe. He knows Jaime is seeing an illusion, a hallucination generated by expectation. He also knows this moment is an illusion, that back in the car everything will be the way it was before. But still he stands next to his daughter and whistles into the northern night, the sound echoing through seemingly endless silence.

And in that moment they are small, and they are infinite. ☪



PHOTOGRAPH BY THOMAS BLANCHARD



THE SPOTLIGHT

INSTINCT

Alexandra Leggat's Two Wolves Press.

BY CONAN TOBIAS

“One of my dogs is the wildest dog you can have next to a wolf. And I’ve always been inspired by wolves—anything that’s kind of wild I guess,” says Alexandra Leggat, the author who, this spring, made the jump to become a publisher. “Their freedom, their instinct their intuition, just their very natural way of communicating and being, that’s the impetus of the press to me.”

Two Wolves Press, which is run out of Leggat’s home, in Rouge Valley, on Toronto’s outskirts, plans a modest schedule of two titles per year. Its first book, Aileen Santos’s debut novel, *Someone Like You*, was published in May. *Nine Wire Road*, a novella by Joe Vermaire, will follow this winter. “I was feeling at a stage in my writing career where putting out my own work wasn’t enough,” says Leggat, who, since 2000, has published a book of poetry, three short-story collections and, most recently, a novel, *The Incomparables*.

Leggat also plans to use Two Wolves to make good on a promise she made to herself after the death of her brother, Graham, in 2011. She will re-release his first and only novel next fall, based on his original manuscript—a manuscript she says was so altered by its publisher that the finished product left her brother extremely dissatisfied.

Two Wolves will not be accepting unsolicited submissions. “I guess I need to know the person in a sense,” Leggat says. “If I come across somebody who has a story to tell and I have a sense of what they’re doing, I’ll ask them to submit.”

Leggat’s learning curve has been steep, but not unexpected. “I guess I could have planned more,” she says, “but the way I do things, I just have to do it and then work things out after.” So far, Two Wolves seems to be coping just fine. Santos’s novel paid for itself through its two launch parties, and has gone to a second printing. “I don’t know how publishers who put out four or five books in one season do it,” Leggat says. “That’s insane.” ☞

THE FICTION

ENDNOTES

BY ALEX PUGSLEY

HOWLAND POOLE MAIR

I saw him face-to-face only twice—one Sunday when walking to church and another Sunday when learning to swim. I was toddling with my mother to the salt-water swimming pools of the Saraguay Club where a solitary swimmer in late August twilight was described to me as H. P. Mair. He was climbing up the ladder of the deep end, water streaming from sun-faded scarlet trunks, thistles of white vellus hair vegetating from his shoulders and ear rims, and I was deeply impressed that someone so time worn and baldheaded would carry himself with such sovereign composure. I was mesmerized by the smooth curve of his crown, sun burnished with freckles and age spots, and I admired his self-serious intelligence, his skepticism, his assurance and conceit. My mother confided he'd once been premier—that he'd worked with my grandfather to build the city's harbour bridge and the province's highways—and her general tone implied a man of some consequence. But her inflections conveyed further insinuations of arrogance, difficulty, pride. She seemed of two minds about the man, reverent and skeptical. "You know he's read *War and Peace* twenty-six times? Who would read the same book twenty-six times?" I was four years old, didn't care for adult books, and more concerned that the mesh underlining of my bathing suit was exposed and tangled in my drawstring. When I came to read the book in later life, I would think of H. P. Mair and how his family had been by war dissolved—a brother destroyed in the Halifax explosion, another sunk in the Second World War, two sisters dead from tuberculosis brought back from Europe. But on this late summer afternoon I knew nothing of hawkish niceties nor the key ports of the British Seaborne Empire nor *anything* within his dark world and

wide and when I looked again toward the deep end, of course the man was gone.

HALIFAX MUSIC SCENE

Many of the teenagers in that *Quadrophenia* movie lineup—those that were then the Halifax Smart Kids—would become, yea, doctors and lawyers and professors, but some would congregate after university in cheaper sections of big cities—Parkdale, Mile End, Silver Lake, Commercial Drive, Wicker Park, Williamsburg—where they flocked into arts scenes various and impecunious, their weeks filling up with day jobs, headshots, chapbooks, merch tables, one-person shows, church-basement auditions, Merce Cunningham workshops, low-budget movie shoots, stories in little magazines. I was thrilled that, in the years following my departure, my hometown would become an alt-music hot spot, many of the kids present at our gigs going on to form bands—not only Pony DeVille and the thrash kids who became the Posers, but ambient synth poppers like Tanz Kopf and Smackanoid. These created a nucleus out of which burst a seriously effervescing music scene, the Halifax pop explosion as it was called, and acts and combos of every independent sort were set in motion—Fuckocracy, Fisher Bird, Off Day, Ack Ack Ack, Gobo Nobu, Morning Dick Cracker—many finding their way into surveys and anthologies of the era. Interested readers may wish to consult the compilations *Never Mind the Molluscs*, *Hear and Now*, *Cod Can't Hear*, *Out of the Fog*, *Out of the Fog Too*, and the Halifax chapter in *Have Not Been the Same: The CanRock Renaissance 1985–1995*. Lastly, and just mentionably, the second chord in "Changeling Girl" is actually an E-flat augmented fifth minor ninth no. 3 and the song's descending chord progression punkly reminiscent of everything from "Bela Lugosi's Dead" to Sum 41's "Fat Lip" to the swan-call finale in Sibelius's Fifth Symphony.

THE WAEGWOLTIC CLUB

Built in 1861 as a residential summer property on the city's Northwest Arm, the Waegwoltic Club is still a going concern in the city's West End and it is, along with Vancouver's Hycroft, if you like this sort of thing, one of the more splendid examples of seashore stateliness in Canada.

HALIFAX PURLIEUS

The main ways and high streets of the city's downtown are now somewhat desolate. "Barrington Street's a graveyard now. No stores anymore. But they're building all these condos. I don't know who they're going to get to live in them. Who wants to live downtown? Not young families. They're all in Bedford." It would be the suburbs that would expand, the communities of Bedford, Spryfield, Cole Harbour, and Clayton Park proliferating with multiplexes, shopping malls, box stores, hockey arenas. Empire Plaza, Howland Mair's final development, when last investigated had two-thirds occupancy, top tiers mostly vacant, bottom floors leased to Atlantic Debt Advisors, Bluefish Sustainable Ocean Systems, Caledonia Lotto, Chebucto Business Academy, Jay-Dee's Catering, Marshlands Unlimited, the Nic-Nac Smokes Shoppe, Perfect Hair Nail Plus, P.M.D. Prosthetics Supply, Ruby Thai Thai, Scotia Investment Solutions, and Zaydie's Donair.

THE PUBLISHED WORKS OF CYRUS MAIR

The published works of Cyrus Mair would amount to three lengthy monographs published separately in three different academic journals. The first, "Context and System," came out when its author was just twenty-one. The second, "Symbol and Scheme," was published a year later. The

ILLUSTRATION BY MATTHEW DALEY

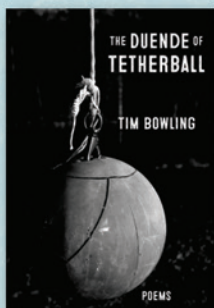


last in the series, “Identity and Consequence,” was in circulation two years after that. Cambridge University Press would collect all three in a slim paperback edition and soon thereafter, to my wonderment and semi-consternation, “Mair, Cyrus F.” began posthumously appearing in academic indices around the free world. The book has since been published in multiple translations, *Contexte et système*, *Kontext und system*, *Kontekst og system*, *Contesto e sistema*, and so on, but it’s that artfully designed first edition, with its distinctive pale blue cover, I remember best. It would follow me around in various ways: a peek-a-boo flash on a new girlfriend’s bedside table, a glimpse of blue faded to grey in a bookshop’s soggy remainder bin, and, most vividly, when an oddball ex-roommate waved a copy in my face at some random yard sale. His goatee festooned with multiple elastic bands, his eyes gleaming with the fervor of the converted, my ex-roommate held a well-worn copy to the sky and declared, “This is the best book I’ve read about *anything*.” I confess it remains a book I’ve never started. It’s not as if I’m waiting for something to come out in Urdu, I just don’t think it’s for me.

VANCE ALLAN BLOMGREN

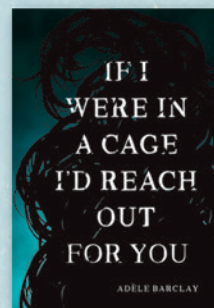
First-born son to Madeleine Zwicker and H. P. Mair, dubious drug-dealing mentor to me, biological brother to Cyrus, the only Mair blood relative among the quick after 1985, I would see Vance Blomgren sporadically in Halifax, most memorably one wet spring midnight when both of us were remanded to the overnight lock-up in the Gottingen Street police station for public intoxication. By this time, he was mostly out of the drug racket and reduced to driving cab for the Regal Taxi line. In the years of my boyhood, the trafficking of marijuana in the eastern provinces of Canada was nominally controlled by a work-around motorcycle gang called the Thirteenth Tribe. When the Hells Angels came from Montreal to run drugs out of the Halifax docklands, Deacon Vickery, Joseph Estabrooks, Martin Michael Longafils, and other Tribe members were patched into the Angels, sometimes amicably, sometimes not. Non-essential associates, street-level traffickers like Vance Blomgren, were made to know they were free to explore new opportuni-

ties. The night Vance and I reunited in the drunk tank he was very much in the midst of this transition. He was drunk and bleeding, did not recognize me from our earlier dealings, but, like many Maritimers, he turned and spoke to a stranger as if he had known him all his life. “Hey there, bud. What are you—just passing through? Like everybody else, I guess. Me, I’ve been here awhile. And why’s that? Fucking coleslaw. I’m here tonight, I’m here in the fucking drunk tank tonight, because of fucking coleslaw. You believe it? I swear to God.” He called to the corridor. “Hey there, Officer Bubba? Could I get some Mercurochrome or something? I’m bleeding all over here.” He kicked at the stainless steel toilet. “Fuck me. I haven’t dranken since New Year’s. You don’t drink for a while and you get fucking wasted. Nine beers and I’m done. Nine beers and I’m I don’t know what. Some circus professional. A fucking juggler. Juggler on the road of life.” He turned to me. “Now would you be surprised if I said I’m here because of a woman? This girl, this little deviant, she’s been breaking hearts since Grade 11, and if you saw her, you’d

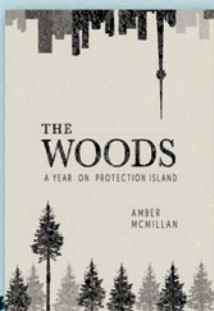


THE DUENDE OF TETHERBALL
poems by
Tim Bowling

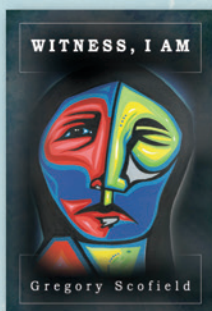
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CAGE I'D REACH
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LOVE REMOVAL MACHINE

(For Elyse)

The day's a crown we'd all want to wear, yet
few silent stars survived the transition to talkies.
Johnny Weissmuller, as per his dying wish, was
counted out with three signature Tarzan yells.
The lord of bad choices made seventy-nine whereas second wife, Lupe Vélez,
(Mexican Spitfire) rode out a cloud of Seconal at thirty-eight.
Many felt that was Gary Cooper's fault. Maybe it was.
In Keanu Reeves' return to the stage in Winnipeg, as Hamlet
no less, the audience broke into spontaneous laughter
on the line: "My excellent good friends!"
Life's a bad writer. Ask the lead singers of
passable hair bands now working shifts as greeters
while Rush reigns as mid-America's mid-market monsters.
Great art demands a great audience. Frye boots and mullets,
see-through net vests and poets' blouses—you can guess
where things went awry with this particular cult.
Much like this crowned day; its worry it won't pass for normal.
Normal meaning the mean, mean meaning what it usually does.
The world drags you down. Still, there are doves, gold sounds,
bees, having trouble with their direction. Wild flower, I love
you every hour. Isn't everything alive a kind of come-on?
Shadows of geese, gulls, the biggest asteroids rolling
over your shoulders as you ride the August light.
Doorbell's been disabled, screen door latched, still you'd
swear each morning you were roused by knocking.
The Witnesses never ask for shit, but look at them—
the script, the outfits—they're selling something.
So many different ways of doing, maybe the only sure
thing is the best bad guitar solo in arena rock history.
Check the bootlegs: that dude never does it any better.

Common sense holds you can't doubt you're doubting.
But find me anything interesting that's not done at least that.

—KEVIN CONNOLLY

think she's this perfect little "Skinny Minnie" Miller type girl, but think again. Because I'm telling you right fucking now, no word of lie, this girl is cracked. She's been wheeling and dealing her whole life but she couldn't win if she was crooked. And it's made her a very angry individual. She's mad at ump-teen people every day. Look at this. I'm not trying to fruit you, buddy, but she cut me with a screwdriver, two inches the other way and—foop—she'd've slit through my kidneys and I'd be dead. Seriously. Some people. Some people shouldn't have kids and her parents was one of them, all's I'm saying. And you know why she done this? Because I wouldn't drive her back to get her fuck-

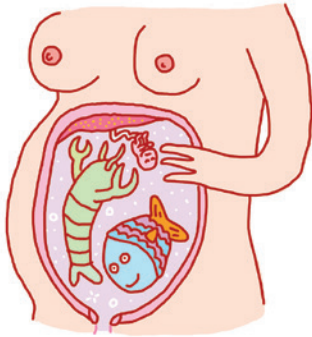
ing coleslaw from Kentucky Fried. After all I done for her. Styrofoam cup of coleslaw? Fucking juggle *that*. Seriously. Hey, maybe I'm not the nicest guy in the world but you think this girl would have the common decency to fucking understand where a man is coming from." He tucked in his shirt and looked up at the surveillance camera. "Or how about a Band-Aid? If it's not too much trouble." He was silent a second. "I mean the whole thing's so disgraceful I can't believe it. And I don't need the aggravation. I really don't. I know where she lives, too, right? You know the tanning salon on Agricola? On the north-hand side of the street there? Across from the Hells Angels? Sure you do. Everyone

knows that clubhouse. And I *know* the Angels, right? Joey Estabrooks, Deacon Vickery, friends of mine from *way* back in the day. Nicest guys you'd ever want to meet. Unless you rip them off. Rip them off and they don't fool around. Good buddy of mine, he's up to his nut sack in loans to those fuckers. You fuck up those deals and you're done. Lead poisoning. Tits up in Lake Banook. Fuck, these guys got fifty points on the Misty Moon, they own Little Nashville outright, they probably got the fucking Chickenburger for all's I know. Deacon's a serious son of a bitch now. For fuck's sakes, I used to run Fern Lane for them two fuckers! And they look at me now like I'm some jeezly little low-life. Like they wouldn't hire me to shovel shit in Upper Wilmot. But I'm not out of the picture. I got my own basic cable. Maybe it ain't ready right yet but it's on the go. It's happening. Because what does she want me to do—drive cab the rest of my life? Fuck that noise." He touched at the damp blood on his shirt. "We're having a beer at Camille's Fish and Chips and she gets there, whining about this and ragging about that, because I wouldn't drive her back to get her fucking coleslaw and macaroni salad. Then all of a sudden like this she says she's going to call Crime Stoppers to come arrest me for assault! And I haven't laid a fucking hand on her yet. Some bitch from Pugwash threatening to snitch on me then fucking stabs me in the women's bathroom! How's that for your Friday night? And she's crying like, 'Why don't you want to fight for the relationship?' Fight for the relationship? Who do I have to fight to get *out* of the relationship is what I want to know. Here I am, Jesus. Send me. Let's get this done. For fuck's sakes. Last thing I need's my name in the papers. Because I don't want to cause any rhetoric, you know? My name's in the papers and I'm a fucking liability. I do not need to be arrested again, thank you very much. And Halifax County Correctional Facility? You know what it smells like? Like a fucking mop. Like disinfectant. The whole place." He wiped his bloody hand on his jeans. "I can't believe she'd sell me out. And she's a Christian! She's a fundamentalist Christian who goes to church every Sunday. What a crazy fucking world. Two people could be riding side by side on the bus and one's a fundamentalist Christian who doesn't believe in dinosaurs

and the other thinks she's going to be reincarnated as an astronaut or, I don't know, maybe she's just some crazy bitch from Pugwash who thinks she knows better than me. I mean, don't get me wrong. She's a gorgeous girl, and I waited three fucking years for her to get legal, but enough's enough, you know? You don't want to be one of those guys who doesn't know when it's over, right? You don't want that. No, you do not." He looked up at the sound of a door opening at the end of the corridor. "Here we are. Here he is. Finally. Some medical attention." He squinted at me. "But buddy—have I seen you somewheres before? You look like a guy who's got a handle on things. You want a gum? Actually I might have a piece of gum somewheres." Searching through his pocket, he leaned close to me and whispered, "And you ain't looking for anything tonight, are you? I got a gram of hash at the house if Miss Pugwash hasn't stole it off me. Give it to you for twenty. Because you ain't in here forever." He pressed a stick of Juicy Fruit into my hand. "Life is short, the road is long. But juggling, let me tell you something about juggling there, brother. The thing about juggling is the balls always go where you throw them. Put that in your pipe while you're at it." Camille's Fish and Chips was a landmark North End eatery. It burned to the ground in March 2007 under never-explained circumstances. Vance Allan Blomgren would expire ten months later, the day before New Year's Eve, in a shoddy ice storm, a derelict in a snowdrift, his body found frozen on a sloped-over headstone in the Old Burying Ground, the oldest cemetery in the city, where the last person was buried a hundred and fifty years before.

GREGOR BURR

The most fantastically self-absorbed and vainglorious personality I would ever encounter, Gregor Burr never explained, never apologized, never admitted weakness. He did not allow into his systems and contexts any interpretation that did not benefit him. When my father acted for Gregor Burr in the various



sexual harassment suits brought against him by the R.C.M.P., Gregor's wife and sons were in the courtroom every day. Whether this sign of support made any real difference—and I know for many of the women of Halifax it did—no one will ever know. The case ended in a mistrial when the judge dismissed as unreliable the testimony given by a key complainant. There were two further cases, brought about some years later, which did not go to trial because they were settled out of court, the parties entering into an agreement to resolve the issues without any admission of liability and with the un-

derstanding that the terms of the settlements would never be made public. His reputation outwardly intact, Gregor Burr continued to serve as member of Parliament for Halifax West. When Brian Mulroney's government collapsed in the 1993 federal election, Gregor Burr returned to provincial politics and became the premier of Nova Scotia for three terms. He resides in the city now as a Tory elder statesman, the point man for the Conservatives in Atlantic Canada, enormously wealthy, having corporate directorships with National Sea Products, Sobeys, the Bank of Montreal, and Moosehead Breweries, as well as acting as senior counsel for what began as Merton Mair McNab and is now branded Merton Fortiers L.L.P. Two years ago, he established the Gregor Burr Scholarships at King's College in Halifax with a gift of two million dollars, the largest individual donation in the college's history. Philanthropist, patriarch, founding father, statesman, sportsman—over the decades, the city's attitudes toward the man have softened. "Old Gregor's a toothless lion now," said my mother. "But what a lot he's achieved. He's raised more money for good causes than anyone else in the city. And he loves his grandkids. Takes them to soccer. Takes them to hockey. That little boy, Gregggy, he plays on the same team as Carolyn's kids. And my, does Gregor *dote* on those children." I don't care. I have seen Gregor Burr smirk his way through life, at all points convinced of his own importance, his confidence stunning to behold, and I will know him

always as a bully who ignores everything that is not his own.

KELLY GALLAGHER

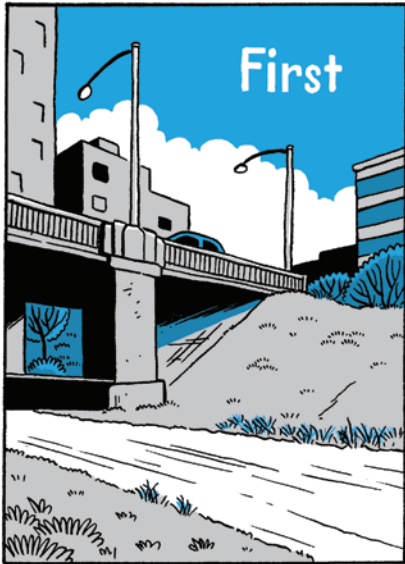
Petulantly fertile in youth, Kelly Gallagher in maturity would develop mental-health issues and walk the South End streets distracted with obscure sadness. Even so, thirty years later, grown men—single, divorced, married—remembering the beauty of her high-school years, would Google "Kelly Gallagher Halifax" and drunk message her, leaving lengthy notes on her Facebook page, suggesting she feel free to say hello if ever she comes through town—Kingston, Peterborough, Thunder Bay.

BRIGID BENNINGER

For some reason, in preparing these histories, I have thought often of Brigid Benninger. When we were young, there were many who argued Brigid was frigid and subsisted in Halifax without any perceptible emotional nuance or motivation. It was more complicated than that. The deaths of her mother and father forced her inside herself, I think, and reminders of these events, and her hometown's understanding of her lot in life, contributed to her decision to leave the city for good. Her beauty was stellar, prissy, ubiquitous. It was the first thing you noticed when you came through the door and the last thing you remembered when you left the room. Of course she never herself referred to her beauty but all meanings seemed refracted through its prism and the truth is, at least for me, it all got sort of fucking boring. Fast-forward a number of years, and I am someone's date at the Daytime Emmy Awards in New York. In the Rihga Royal Hotel afterwards, following the reception, a dark-haired woman walks into the piano bar. She wears black tights and an oversized sweater. She looks around, assessing the room, as if searching for her companion. I notice instantly her allure, a curtain of black hair flopping across her face and eyes. It is, of course, Brigid Benninger, whom I've known since I was seven and who, I notice, as she retreats from the room, chooses to engage with absolutely no one.

GAIL BENNINGER

Resurgam. ∇



First



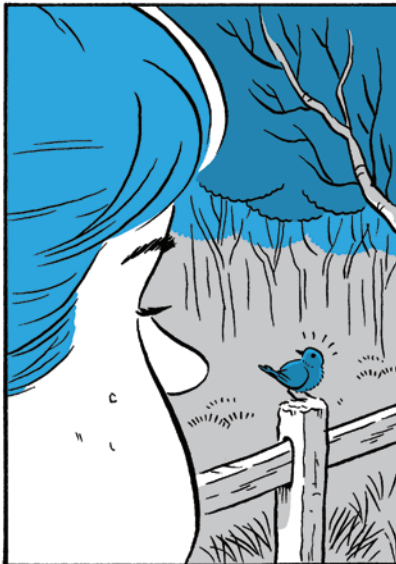
I GUESS BECAUSE OF MOVIES OR WHATEVER WE ALWAYS THOUGHT ALIENS WOULD BE KINDA LIKE US.



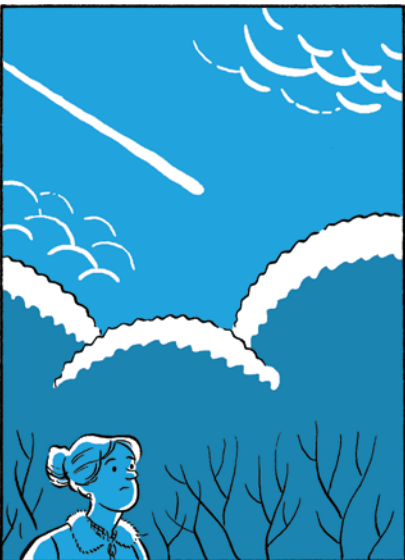
THEY'D GIVE US A BUNCH OF NEW TECHNOLOGY AND INVITE US TO JOIN THE GALACTIC EXPLORATION LEAGUE OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT.



OR THEY'D JUST KILL US AND TAKE OUR STUFF BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT WE WOULD DO.



DEEP DOWN, I THINK WE ALL FIGURED ANY REAL LIFE ALIENS WOULD JUST BE SOME KIND OF BORING ASS MICROBE OR WHATEVER.



BUT IT WASN'T LIKE ANY OF THAT.

Home

Denis @denisaurus
holy shit fuck, alens, yo!! Is this real life?
1 5

Neil deGrasse Tyson @neil...
I stand corrected. This does not appear to be a hoax.
5k 7k

Julia @thorazone...
I for one welcome our new elephantine overlords.
1k 2.4k

Jonathan @JR0TS...
The truth has landed.
#AllTheFeels #First
1k 1.7k

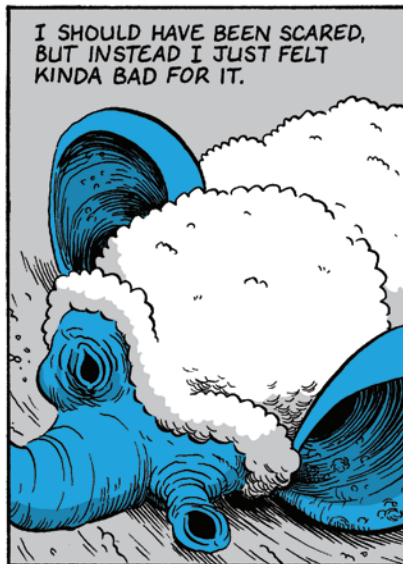
Vince @justvince97...
is it wrong that Im wondering what it tastes like lol #First
703 871

Hiro the Hedgehog @hirochan
I've seen enough hentai to know where this is going...
39 15

Liana @asarinuff
I think it's important that we use words that do not denigrate this lifeform.
1 3

Sean K. @snick2000...
Where's the birth certificate!
9k 10.2k

Greg Andrews @gandr...
how much u watna bet that space refugees become space terrorists;
30 47





Glen Michaels @glm...
 What we do with this thing depends on whether or not it can accept Jesus
 ↩️ ↻️ 2 ❤️ 15

1990 was 26 years ago @f...
 Still a better alien than Mac & Me.
 ↩️ ↻️ 1k ❤️ 2.3k

Chris @AKris47
 If any moonmen come near me, they get a hollow point to the face.
 ↩️ ↻️ 207 ❤️ 396

Sharon @sharkety...
 Make it happen Ridley Scott.

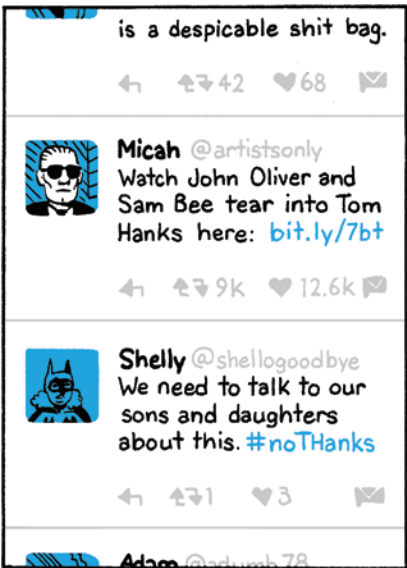
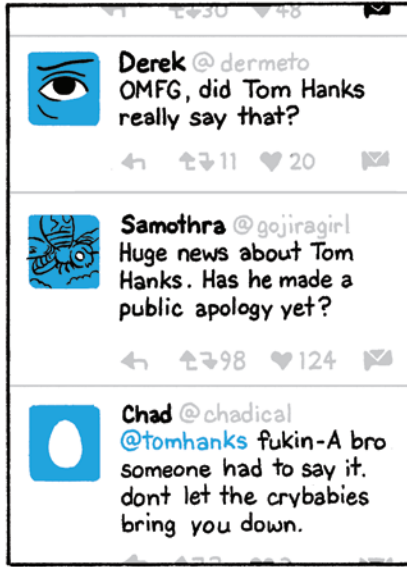
↩️ ↻️ 6k ❤️ 10k


Doge @suchdoge89...
 They should put the alien in a zoo so that my kids can see it.
 ↩️ ↻️ 11 ❤️ 31

Anita @ant937
 mfw people still call it an alien instead of its new taxonomic name.

↩️ ↻️ 506 ❤️ 1.5k

Scotty B. @scotbot...
 Preorder your Alien vs. Flying Spaghetti Monster tshirts NOW, <https://w...>





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LESSONS FROM THE REPORTERS' TRENCHES

The magazine's resident city columnist reflects on his three decades at the Toronto Star.

BY ALFRED HOLDEN

In the early days of this century, I was invited to give a guest lecture at my alma mater, the University of Vermont, on the topic "preservation and the press." Americans are, overall, better at preserving buildings than Canadians—more inclined to feel patriotic toward their architecture than to gut it. But, as a Canadian working in media, I thought I had something to bring to the table.

When I enrolled as a student in the university's Historic Preservation program (Class of 1992), I arrived fresh from a decade-long job as a reporter for the *Toronto Star* (a paper I would return to in 1997), where I had learned a thing or two about how readers react to media coverage. Response often seemed out of proportion: you could write something as filler—"Alf, we need five inches for the Metro page"—and some people, especially politicians, would imagine whatever you wrote to be an outbreak of public clamour. This could seem absurd, but it also showed the possibilities for getting things done: *The Star Gets Action*, as the paper often boasts.

To that Vermont class I brought lessons from the reporters' trenches, such as the small item I wrote about the languishing of the old Eaton's event space atop College Park in downtown Toronto. That brief led to several stories that reignited an old debate over the space's future. I remember at one point having an appointment to meet Eleanor Koldofsky, the former wife of the record king Sam Sniderman, in an underground garage, where she handed me a proverbial brown paper envelope stuffed with documents about promises made by developers to restore Eaton's Seventh Floor. Years would pass but, eventually, the French architect Jacques Carlu's beautiful streamline moderne space would be restored—a back-to-glorious-original restoration not usually seen in Toronto.

As I told the students, we had more, and perhaps more broadly significant, success reporting on Toronto's street lighting system. In the early nineteen-nineties

it was apparent that Toronto's old incandescent street lights were consuming too much energy, but people in the urbane (pre-amalgamation) city of Toronto had also noticed how nice, comfortable, and even safe Toronto looked under their creamy white, old-fashioned light.

It seems, at first glance, like an esoteric detail in a city's life, but this was a quarter century ago, when there was still fear that U.S.-style urban decline would somehow creep up to Toronto. Citizens were defensive when any threat to the urban fabric was perceived. Night in Toronto certainly seemed welcoming compared to most cities, which had adopted, almost as a default, high-efficiency, high-pressure sodium street lighting that painted the street, trees, and virtually everything else an ominous puke orange. Even so, the orange technology was being pushed hard as an energy saver by the huge industry that makes millions of roadway light poles, fixtures, and bulbs installed and operated at public expense virtually everywhere in the world.

But could you get good light *and* low energy consumption? I wasn't yet working at the *Star* again, but somebody asked the question, and the newspaper duly covered an ensuing public debate, into which I was pulled. Fresh out of preservation school, where I'd written an essay on urban street lighting, I got myself onto Toronto's street and lane lighting subcommittee as a citizen member.

Howard Levine, a city councillor who was something of a renegade, led the committee and the discussion, which was finally a battle of "big lighting"—represented at the city level by Nick Vardin, then the commissioner of public works—versus the committee on which I sat. (The committee also included other citizens, N.D.P. Councillor Peter Tabuns, and several veteran engineers from the municipally owned Toronto Hydro, who, as insiders in the industry, felt the providers had lagged in improving lighting technologies and needed a kick in the pants.)

As I told the students, there were several media-related tipping points in the conversation, without which I doubt Toronto would have proceeded to adopt a more progressive white-light technology. At one point I used my old contacts at the *Star* to get an op-ed piece I wrote published. In it, I laid out the dilemmas in as plain-but-interesting prose as I could. The nature of night in the city is, in its own way, a flashpoint, concerning as it does perceptions of safety.

Meanwhile the citizens' committee filed its report, having learned of clear-light technologies in use in Europe; a recommendation to try it went to council and finally came up for a vote. Around the same time, an editorial appeared in the *Star*, under the headline **WHITE LIGHTS FOR THE BIG CITY**. It crisply parsed the arguments on each side, with the paper supporting the idea that this new European technology was more in keeping with Toronto's citizen- and neighbourhood-friendly city-building policies. The vote was close, but the policy was adopted. The plan was implemented over the next two years, when a new street-lighting system, much resembling the old incandescent one and pioneering the use of new white-light technology in North America, was installed across the city.

The appearance in the U.S. of Fox News, whose aggressive biases had, by the turn of the century, made the ancient given of social control in the newsroom more apparent to the public, may have been behind my class's obvious and expressed skepticism of a lot of what I said that day. They were skeptical of my rosy account of media power—theirs was the natural and needed defense mechanism in a world of uneven and often suspect coverage.

Perhaps I was the naive one, raised in Canadian journalism and having spent, until then, most of my career at the *Toronto Star*: It's not that the *Star* is any less a part of Canada's establishment than U.S. media is of America's. It is always tempting, when suggesting the *Star* is different,



The author, in the Star newsroom, 1988.

to point to the newspaper's famous Atkinson Principles—the idea that little folks deserve a fair shake in newspaper reporting, though the case could always be made that these principles are more good business than enforced policy.

But the thing is—I say now, having recently left the *Star* after working there for the better part of three decades—the journalists themselves take those principles very seriously. For many of us, the principles drew us to the paper; we detected them in its coverage. Once hired, reporters seized them as an enabler for their feral tendencies—something to leverage

to justify rabble-rousing, *Star* Gets Action stories. Those stories continue to resonate. People still say to me, on learning of my connection to the *Star*, that “the paper” does good work.

My personal experience lay behind my talk at the University of Vermont. To the class, I must have sounded like an earnest Boy Scout. I recall feeling disappointed: not in them, but that they had delivered a grim reality check to an Atkinsonian idealist from Toronto.

My revered professor, Thomas Visser, never mentioned the students' reaction, if he noticed it, and I don't recall seeing

any assessments of my presentation. My own analysis, in hindsight, is that they were right to be skeptical. But then I think about all that action achieved by the *Star*, in the time I was there and before. Newsrooms are never easy places to work. But journalists do their best when they are feral, and that's what we were, all those decades, not uniquely or exclusively, but classically. Journalists who, whatever control systems they worked under, were kind of out of control, in a good way—teeth clenched at injustice and, paradoxically, hearts at least partly filled with empathy and even kindness. ☐

ARCHITECTURE AND DEMOCRACY

BY RUSSELL SMITH

I am feeling much better. I am finally feeling ready to work.

So I have found this quiet room in my club—I have come back here, having avoided it for a few despairing months, largely for fear of seeing a woman who did not want me—and I find it is perfectly friendly and safe and indeed largely empty today, which is fine. I will slowly re-enter the world of friendly facades and frequent accomplishments and easy discussion of those accomplishments.

And I find it is so pretty, on a sunny day in here, so high up above the deadline-conscious street (all the stores seem to be about to close all the time in this city; one has only minutes to complete, whenever one tries, a day's worth of errands, but perhaps this is due to my inability to foresee, from the darkened confines of my apartment and the enervating fluorescence of my screen, the day elapsing as quickly as it does, which is itself part of the condition I must start, in all honesty, calling an illness. A condition or illness I am glad to feel has dissipated and is slipping away like a suit of heavy clothing). So pretty the great window is like a screen. The screen frames the top of a building under construction.

What do I see? The slow swing of a crane against the sky. The sky is a rather anemic blue, which may be due to some light-resistant, energy-saving property of my club's glass. I wouldn't be surprised if it were that, a flattening effect carelessly included by some insensitive environmentalist, so proud of his energy-saving ugliness. But this is the kind of irritability I will be able to resist today.

A man on a rooftop alone. The building is new and square and empty. It is made of white concrete and glass. Its roof and corner are all I can see of it from this window. Since there is nothing in it, you can see right through. There is nothing behind it but pale blue. I have a buzzing beep in my ears. It is a beat made by computers.

The man looks disoriented. He is just standing there. Someone dropped him

high up there, maybe from that crane, and he doesn't know how to get down. He is standing up there for all of us, the summit of humanity, defiant against the sky.

I am assimilating these various pleasures: the bright sun, the empty reading room, the sudden warmth and colour after so many weeks of rain, the fresh coffee on my tongue, the cool, clean bumping of this beat in my expensive headphones. And the waitress who brought me my coffee is lovely: she is long-haired and slim and arched and soft skinned and soft eyed and soft spoken. She is the feminine against this efficient cool room and precise music. She is the focus of all my longing now, all my lust, all my desire for sensation and images after the winter.

Sometimes physical pleasure is all it takes to dissolve a conviction that there is no such thing as a livable life. Sometimes a bright empty room is all it takes to open the brain to perception, to allow consciousness to actually occur.

I admire the engineering of the crane, its hard geometry, its economy of movement. Its leisure. It is deliberate and precise. I admire its majestic sweep. I am enjoying admiring these things. It is as if I have been asleep.

I could not appreciate this in my cramped study, with its papers and bills, its telephone with its angry blinking red eye. So I shouldn't feel guilty about the ludicrous cost of a single coffee and the indulgence of a glass of sparkling water in this excessive place.

Out another window, the humped back of the sports stadium reflects a white sheet of sun. It is sleeping.

All the glass condo buildings refract and reticulate light, a city of prisms.

I am actually relaxed. I will not think now about a woman who did not want me. I am happy to be alone. I am happy to enjoy these pleasures in confidence, without that ridiculous feeling that pleasures I cannot share with her are hollowed of their value, not even pleasurable at all. That is the sense I have had all winter.

That was the darkness of winter. I am in light now, and can enjoy the world without her. I can focus my lust and longing and yearning on this beautiful waitress, for example.

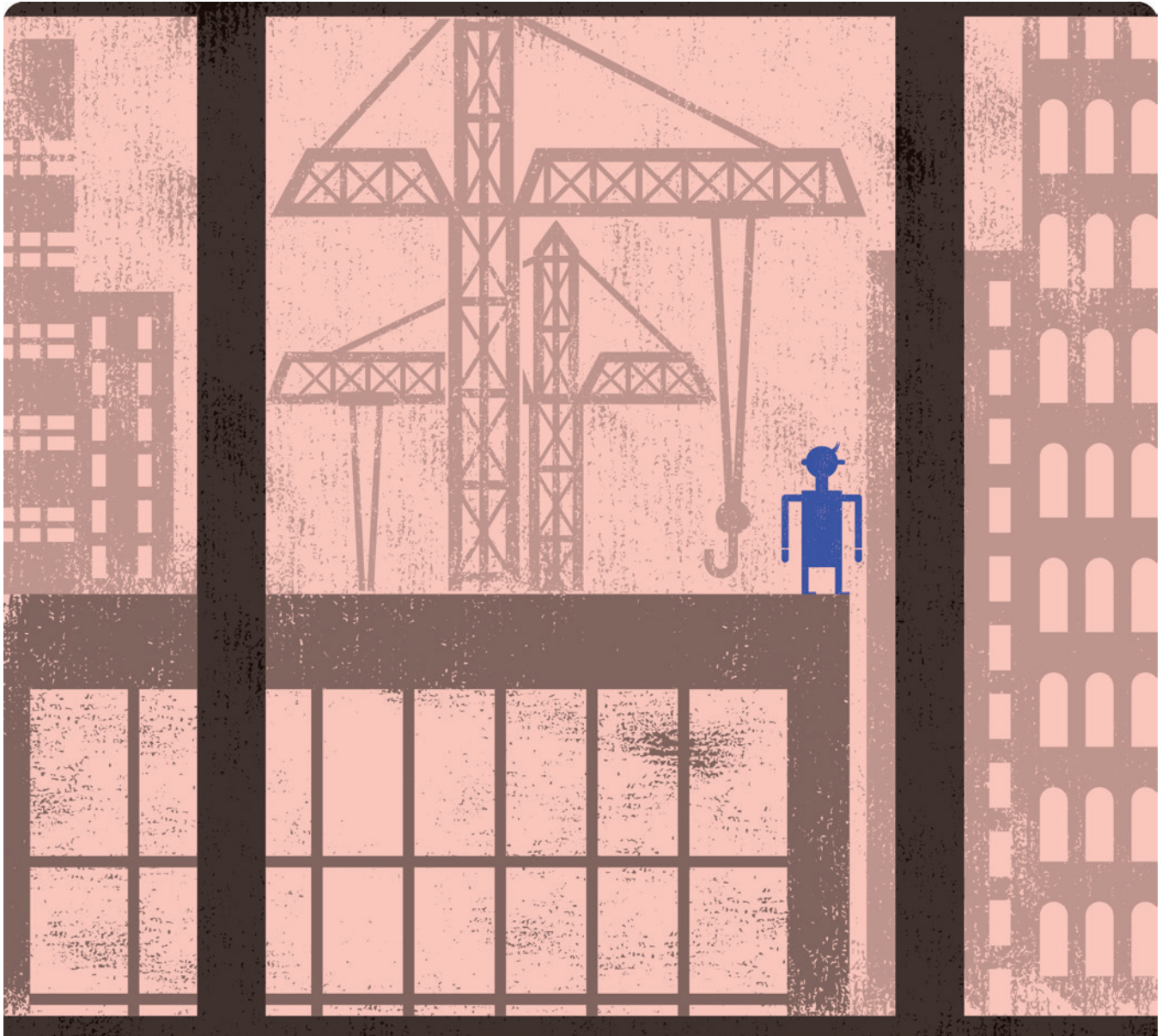
Imagine if I were still with that woman who did not want me—imagine if she had wanted me, and I was still with her, and had woken up with her this morning. I would feel guilty about my lust for the lovely young waitress. I would feel trapped and stifled that I could not pursue her, not even consider talking to her, asking her how long she has worked here and where she goes to school. I could do that right now. I am free to do it. I am free to live in a world of sensation and conquest. I should be extremely happy about this.

I have not seen the waitress for a half-hour. It was a young man who came to check on me and my coffee just now; he must have taken over this room. So I have possibly missed my chance to talk to her. She must be working the dining room, which by now probably is filling up for lunch.

It is also possible that she has a boyfriend, or even a husband. Or that she would be hardened to the men who come to this club—all the men my age, ten or fifteen years older than she is, with the confidence of careers and money, although in my case the money is more of a way of speaking than a reality—all the men who smile and ask her, somewhat condescendingly, if she is a student and how long she has been working here. She might see me as something quite embarrassing: a somewhat dull businessman going through some sort of mid-life crisis. She would joke to her boyfriend, who is an artist, a painter who works with wax, about the slimy well-dressed characters who hit on her all day long.

I am tired thinking about this. I do not want to compete with them. I do not want to be associated with them. Perhaps it is best if I just admire the waitress from afar.

I will not wonder if the woman who did not want me is also still alone in life. It is



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completely irrelevant. It has nothing to do with me. She did not want me because there is something, undoubtedly, closed in her, something tight and protective and restrained and ultimately crazy. She is probably incapable of love. I would not even want to be the man she is with, if she is with a man.

I should be working on my essay.

I am here to work on an essay about architecture and democracy. I do not really have any views on architecture and democracy. Unless it is simply that architecture is profoundly undemocratic.

There. Done. I would like to submit that—to the absurdly overconfident nontenured sessional instructor who commissioned it for his comically earnest and pious and almost unreadable quarterly—and get paid something for it. Something a great deal larger than that that has been promised.

I would like to write instead about women and architecture. About how the world is made up of beautiful things, and even the most clean and geometric and minimal of architectures exists to house the waves of brown hair on this waitress's neck. (Where is she?)

That there is no sense to architecture without women.

My coffee is cold and I must find the washroom. I will leave my computer here and hope that it is safe.

The possibility that troubles me is that that woman, the one who did not want me, may be with another man and love him, actually love him and give herself to him the way she did not want to do with me. This should not make me sad, as it has nothing to do with me, or with this lovely room and interesting music or the ideas that I must translate into words.

I really have to pee.

On walking back from the lovely, cool marble washroom, I passed through the dining room and saw the rare tuna salads and the glasses of white wine and I began to feel hungry. It would be easier to eat than to write. I wonder if I should have lunch here. I have not made a reservation, and it is really too expensive. But if I save this document and pack up the computer and walk out into the sunshine to find a hot dog or a sandwich, it is unlikely I will come back. I will end up in a park, smoking a joint.

I realize I am melancholy now, and that this melancholy is dangerous and I am now long past the darkest days of winter

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SINCE 1992

TAYLOR SWIFT

In a dream I am an old man and my mother appears to me.
I am happy and surprised to see her.
She is singing “You’re So Vain.”

*

Just before my own child falls asleep
we talk about Taylor Swift.
These minutes can actually be quite intimate.

And then she is unconscious.
Unconscious and in a way really gone,
at least until morning. That’s the goal.

“How old will Taylor Swift be when I am twenty?”
I do the math.
“Thirty-eight.”

“Whoa.
What about fifty?”
“Sixty-eight.”

“Whoa. And you, Daddy?”
“How old will you be when I am fifty?”
Different math. “Goodnight, precious baby.”

*

My mother doesn’t stick around for long,
just one chorus.
And in my dream I live forever.

—CHRIS CHAMBERS

when I thought and threatened those crazy things—the humming light and tan surfaces of the doctors’ offices seem like a foreign country now—and so this melancholy must not be allowed to develop, must either be extinguished or illuminated for what it is, a black fungus growing. It’s amazing how quickly this happens, how the shadow of melancholy will bloom into a cloud. Perhaps I am just hungry. Perhaps I am just missing the waitress.

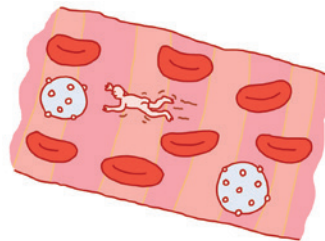
For it could be the waitress—really, it could be anyone, anyone who comes to save me from loneliness.

There, I said it.

And in fact, now that I have said it, let me admit, that it is not sex with the waitress I want. I had sex with the woman who

didn’t want me. She would have been happy to go on having sex with me, I think. Just not very often, and only when she wasn’t busy.

I do not want a woman who does not want me. Nor do I want to be desired by a thousand women and have my choice of them and treat them as coldly and distantly and carefully as she treated me. I do not want that revenge. I simply want there to be someone—not here, in this moment, for I am enjoying this solitude, this clarity—but someone somewhere else, possibly working too, somewhere else, possibly thinking and writing similar thoughts, but



aware of me, and eager to see me later, and to hear what I saw and what I wrote. I want to be connected to someone by an invisible and infinitely stretchable elastic band.

I was not meant to be a carefree seducer of waitresses, or of women generally. I am not good at conquest. I do not want either to be that solitary human high atop the empty building, with the grid of streets like canyons below him; I do not want his sense of triumph, of giddy clarity, if it means being alone up there. He is pacing back and forth now, as if agitated.

I suspect he is talking on the phone, describing what he sees.

Things aren’t any good if you can’t describe them to someone. And I don’t just mean write it down—I mean describe it to someone who listens and says, Yes, I heard what you said, I am with you.

Now I must finish this essay, and in order to do that I must be on my own, and in order to do that I must have lunch, on my own, and I must appreciate the beauty of the sunshine and the quiet and the sense of the city’s confidence, its streamlined majesty, and the almost unbearable poignancy of the unsharableness of this beauty, on my own.

This is good work.

The man on the building top has waved his arm angrily and thrown something off the edge. His phone. This is a stupid gesture, I could have told him, and one that could cause devastating injury. I hope it landed on a ledge below.

Close to the great window there is direct sunlight that will make me and these carefully cleaned and pressed clothes damp within minutes; that is another discomfort that will upset this equanimity and so is to be avoided. I should be in my chair working anyway.

The man has swung a leg over a sort of temporary railing or scaffolding that must be part of the construction process and is now standing on an unprotected ledge. He is braver than I; I would be afraid of a wind sweeping me off. But he works in this field; he is atop tall buildings all day.

He is still gesticulating although no longer holding a phone. Who is he shouting at? The sky?

Now he is sitting on the ledge, his feet dangling over.

And so now here it is again - this sweaty unwanted pressure to act, to engage myself, to leave my computer and my headphones, a pressure that comes at a person at every second of every day and that can be overwhelming, even paralyzing—that pressure that I am not quite ready, after the winter I have had, to respond to and that I thought would be avoided at least here in this expensive quiet and privacy. And with the pressure of course comes the guilt that one is so inept at responding to pressure. All this is to be avoided.

(Possible new essay title: “Architecture and Engagement”?)

The man’s building is a few stories higher than mine. He is at the very top. Below, I can see the street, the trees, the fire hydrants quite clearly, and I can tell who is female by their walk and hair but the bodies are too foreshortened to distinguish identity. In this part of town, down there, on such a lovely spring day, they would be the kind of person I know



or used to know, people I would greet happily and kiss and even flirt with. I will be that person again. Now they might find me thinner, sallow, older.

(Title: “Architecture and Solitude”?)

There is a clatter of voices from the room next door, the dining room. There must be people standing at the windows. So there is no longer pressure on me to alert someone; the action has been taken from my hands. I am now, firmly, observer

rather than participant.

Sure enough, it is a couple of waitresses, mine and a bursting busty one, their backs to the impatient businessmen, their faces close to the window, waving their hands as if anyone could see them through this environmentally resistant non-glass. It would look just like a mirror from outside.

From behind her I can study the inviting tightness of the new (spring season?) uniforms. They are not really uniforms but fashionable skirts and blouses

as designed by an admired homosexual. They change every season, which must partly account for the absurd inflation of our membership fees here. (I can write those fees off if I continue to do some freelance work here and there; hence “Architecture and Democracy”—and I should put “work” in quotation marks as well.) The skirts are stretchy, the blouses silky, everything is tight and confining and revealing, although horizontal bra straps are the only distinguishable undergarments. How hungry I am for some suggestion of underwear, some visible echo of it in such a highly clothed enclosure.

I am much more stimulated these days, tortured even, by round women than by slim ones, I don’t know why, perhaps because of my feeling of general weakness. Why should fat in women suggest (to me, in my neediness) kindness? Perhaps because it makes me expect admiration, devotion, a helpless sense of unworthiness on her part that would make me loved, always loved, no matter what I did? (Essay subject for *Xpel* or *Popsyck*: “Corruptence and Compassion.”)

The man is quite still now, looking down.



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Some vehicles have assembled on the street below: a fire truck, now two. There must have been sirens that I couldn't hear because of this super glass, this anti-human glass. The scene is a screen with the sound off.

Now there are police cars and the usual slow barricading of the street with motorcycles and apparently angry officers. Soon there will be the spreading of yellow tape, the brandishing of megaphones. Armed men will be on their way up the stairs now. The man has only a few remaining minutes of this gravid solitude. He must be aware of the vividness of the sky, the hysterical brightness of the sun on the concrete. All things I can't quite feel to be vivid from here.

I feel I should feel so much for this man that I should be reciting poetry ("For many a time I have been half in love with easeful Death"?) but I feel no emotion except a curious envy. I wish I were experiencing those colours, the sharpness of the lines, the cold wind under my jacket (it is definitely too warm in here), the feeling of action, of taking action.

I have been told, by all those compassionate young doctors mostly, to think of my work as a form of action. They were so kind, but they were too young to have known failure. And when your work is largely inseparable from lusting after disgusted waitresses it doesn't feel like action. My work is inaction itself. I would rather be pacing atop mountainous buildings.

All I can hear now are the excited voices from the dining room. Everyone must be at the window now, united and classless in their gleeful compassion. It is distasteful somehow.

The man stands, dangerously, unsupported. He is still too far away for me to make out his age, but he is slender and dressed possibly in a short leather coat, so, youngish. I bet he is a real-estate guy—how else would he have access to an unfinished building? And since the bubble burst surely the only reason to build these mammoths is to have a place to throw oneself from. What a petty problem, money.

But perhaps he is angry at a woman who does not love him.

It occurs to me that my little phone, in my breast pocket, is also a camera, but I have never taken a picture with it and would have to fumble for some seconds

before finding the right button. But doing so—talk about distasteful!—would once again involve me in the action, make me a participant, and that is not, never, for me.

The floor vibrates slightly: a helicopter darkens the screen for a second, then flashes out of sight. It must be quite noisy out there now.

He sways, his arms stretch out. My heart rate is increasing, but not with fear, not with anxiety, with hope. I hope he jumps. Only one of us can jump. He at least will not be afraid. We are all afraid to jump.

The back of the room, out of the sun, is cooler. I find I am sitting again, and my back is to the window. My heart rate had been faster than I was aware, I suppose, and I grew breathless. Perhaps this inability to watch something beautiful is indeed fear. And revulsion—for some reason I am cold now, nauseated. I need more and colder water.

That harsh high inhuman wind up there, how hostile it must have felt.

There are no shouts or gasps from the dining room; the tapestry of voices is still no more than a murmur, so the crisis has subsided. Perhaps representatives of authority have arrived on the unfinished rooftop and put an end to the pristine perfection of the man's vista, brought back the banality of responsibility.

The room is quite cool now. My computer still shines the pure unwavering light of dissatisfaction, challenging me to impose my will on it.

It is quiet now. I can hear the thin loungey music from invisible speakers again. The squares of light from the windows are unperturbed. The grey screen before me invites reflection. I am surprised to feel relief, relief at my insulation. It is not a cowardice to enjoy insulation. Insulation permits me to feel this painful and pleasurable solitude much more keenly, and perhaps express it to God knows who—someone, eventually—with much greater precision than I would be able to attain in some piercing wind, in wailing hysterical outdoor light. Imagine, that audience, that angry authority at your back, those sirens coaxing you to act! Much better, in fact, to be alone.

The fleshy waitress, all humid powdery scent, is leaning now into my space, asking if I want anything, and I can tell her with relief that I do not. I prefer to be alone. This is good work. ▽



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THE GALLERY

THE FACES OF POETRY

Melanie Janisse-Barlow's Poets Series.

BY SUZANNE ALYSSA ANDREW

Melanie Janisse-Barlow paints in a sunny corner studio, tucked inside the historic Capitol Theatre, in her hometown of Windsor, Ontario. Near the end of the twentieth century, this section of the building was a thriving hive of artist spaces. When Janisse-Barlow returned here to live, two years ago, she asked the Windsor Symphony Orchestra, the building's tenant, and the municipality, its landlord, to reinstate the since-shuttered spaces, and became the first artist on-site in years.

Janisse-Barlow's current passion is a round-robin series of North American writers. After painting portraits of several poets, including Damian Rogers, Christian Bök, and Paul Vermeersch, she asked each to suggest another poet subject, and each of those subjects to suggest yet another. Two years later, the Poets Series stands at more than seventy entries and counting.

Janisse-Barlow was inspired by Ann Mikolowski's miniature portraits of poets at the Alternative Press, a small literary and artistic press in Detroit, as well as her own love of poetry. Her 2009 collection, *Orioles in the Oranges*, was short-listed for the ReLit Award, and she recently completed a new collection. "Poets are mindful, ever-questioning individuals who guide me every day," she says.

Janisse-Barlow begins each portrait by asking the poet for a photograph of themselves. After creating an initial black-and-white sketch, which she often shares in an on-line gallery, she interprets the image into a formal painting, trying her best to "bring compassion, clarity, and mindfulness into each work." Reading the poems of her subjects is an important part of Janisse-Barlow's creative process, and she inscribes one of each subject's poems onto the frame of their portrait. "I spend a long time with the poem selected for the framing and this, of course, affects the overall work, as well as my reading of each poem," she says. "I try my best to hear the poem in this way. It's a unique way to read a poem."

This fall, Janisse-Barlow displayed a selection of the Poets Series at 26, a gallery space run by the artists Michael Davidson and Nicole Collins in their Toronto home. The exhibition included back-garden readings by eleven subjects, including Liz Howard, Catherine Graham, Damian Rogers, and Stuart Ross. A twelve-venue Canadian gallery tour and reading series is planned to begin in 2019.

Time and funding are the biggest constraints for the Poets Series, Janisse-Barlow says, but she remains ambitious: "I have begun to add new threads to the project, and intend to do this more in the coming year. Each of these gestures implies a continuous impetus to keep adding to a dialogue, to expand the thresholds of community, and to create generous space." ∞



Dani Couture.



Hoa Nguyen.



Christian Bök.



David Seymour.



Damian Rogers.



Kate Hargreaves.



Jenny Sampirisi.

A GIRL AND A DOG ON A FRIDAY NIGHT

BY KELLY WARD

Rachel can see half of her windshield through the front window of the store, above the pile of overstuffed bright pink pigs that lines the entryway. That helps. The constant glint of sunlight prevents her from seeing inside the car, but still she oscillates between glaring at the cashier—frantically willing her to move faster—and checking the windshield. It disturbs her that with every step she takes toward the register the visible area of her car shrinks behind the behemoth cab of a pickup parked next to her sedan.

On a wire rack beside her, a few headlines call out the unseasonably low temperatures expected for the weekend. “Nineteen is still hot,” Rachel thinks. “No. Not hot. Warm.” Seeing the check-out girl’s hand move to the phone next to her till and hearing her voice over the store’s P.A. system, Rachel cringes.

“Intimates, call 202, please.” A purple spangled thong hangs from the cashier’s left index finger. Rachel can see that the tag clipped to the thigh reads three ninety-nine, while the register blinks four ninety-nine.

“Honestly, I’ll give her the extra dollar,” Rachel thinks, training her gaze on the rail-thin woman at the front of the line, her sharp elbow straining against the pink velour of her zip-up as she leans against the conveyor belt, one hand perched on a bony hip.

The pickup has been replaced by a massive S.U.V. and Rachel’s car is now completely blocked from view. She thinks she might see someone standing next to her car through the tinted glass of the S.U.V. Above her, banks of fluorescent lights give the store a sickly, bluish hue, even from twenty feet above. “A hand lifting a phone to an ear? Is that a baseball cap? Maybe just the guy who owns the truck. Too hot for him to make a call from the driver’s seat? Goddamn it.”

The cashier continues to speak into her handset. The velour-suited woman has purchased an assortment of items that can only be amassed at a giant store such

as this: sequined thong, enormous bag of dog food, tube of glittery lip gloss. Teeth sucking and sighs are beginning to rise from the line of customers. Rachel is pretty sure she’ll have the crowd on her side if she complains, but she says nothing. Squinting through the glare that bounces from the S.U.V.’s left mirror, she tries to clearly determine who it is that’s standing next to her car. She looks for the silhouette of a brow, the profile of a jaw. She is most concerned that it is a woman. “A woman who thinks that dogs should be outfitted with water-dispensing backpacks six months out of the year. That’d be my luck.” The snark of her own thoughts makes Rachel feel a little ill. “You know you shouldn’t have left them in there.” Betsy is probably a bit of a grey area. Not a lot of fur. Used to being outside all summer. But Betsy isn’t the only one in the car.

Luca had screamed when Rachel tried to unbuckle her seat belt. Arched her back so that her bony little rib cage pulled tight against her pink Superman T-shirt and pressed her white-knuckled fists into Rachel’s chest.

“I’m not going! Not going!” she’d said, baring her teeth in primal defiance. As soon as Rachel had finally given up and let her fall back into the well-worn cradle of her booster seat, red-faced and breathless, she’d added, “Get me a Rolo, Mom?”

With no additional cashier in sight, no movement in the line, and the disturbingly consistent whirl of the store’s air conditioning in her ears, Rachel can’t move her eyes from the front window of the store. She can make out the hood of her sedan. For a moment it looks as if she had imagined the figure standing beside her car, phone to ear. There’s no movement beyond the flash of a slight shadow over the blue hood. The plastic clatter of the cashier’s phone finally finding its way back to its hook brings her focus back into the store. The underwear are quickly bagged and the bra beneath the velour hoodie is awkwardly adjusted as the en-

tire line waits for APPROVED to appear on the debit machine screen. As the girl at the front of the line pulls her card out, something catches Rachel’s eye.

Another shadow. Short this time, and hovering over the hood of her car. Getting longer. A body in movement toward the nose of the sedan. Finally she comes into view. A woman, maybe forty, forty-five, her bleached blond hair piled high in a messy topknot. Rachel watches as she moves to the front of the car, phone still to her ear. The woman looks down at the licence plate. She’s reading the plate number. Into the phone. The woman looks back and forth from the plate to the windshield, her eyes pinched at the corners, her head just barely shaking.

Shit.

The wire shopping basket hits the floor with more clatter than Rachel would have liked. She runs to the automatic door too quickly and she waits—face an inch from the glass—for it to open enough to slip through. The heat of the day hits her, and her fright mixes with guilt and a fresher, deeper panic that has nothing to do with the stranger calling in her licence plate number. “Nineteen without the humidex. Shit.”

The keys are somehow in her hand—she doesn’t remember fishing in her purse—and she is shoving them into the driver’s-side-door lock before the woman in front of the car can say a word. She doesn’t look into the back seat—won’t look until the ignition has been turned.

“Hey. What are you doing? You left your kid in there. It’s practically sweltering out. Don’t—hey!”

Rachel is in the driver’s seat and the door is somehow closed beside her. The keys won’t find the ignition. She pulls her hand back and tries again.

“I called you in. The cops are coming and they have your plate number.”

The woman is right next to the driver’s-side window, she pushes a pair of bug-eyed sunglasses onto her head to look Rachel dead in the eye.



Finally Rachel leans her entire body to the right so that her face is inches from the ignition. Only then can she successfully push the key through the slot and start the engine. She still doesn't look into the back seat. If she did, she thinks she might be sick. A warm lick on the back of her neck as she rights herself does little to quell her feelings of dread. Betsy's kisses are usually cool as a tomato slice. Those are Luca's words, not hers. She instinctively twists one arm behind the passenger seat to back out of the parking spot, and meets Luca's shining pink face as she does. She's blinking, and flushed.

"It's kinda hot in here, Mamma," Luca says.

The woman outside slaps the window as Rachel pulls away.

"I'm gonna wait here for . . ."

Rachel can't hear the end of the sentence over the A.C. fan, but she is pretty sure she gets the gist. The traffic light just outside the parking lot is red, so she makes a right just to keep moving.

"Betsy thinks I should get two Popsicles when we get home," Luca says, as she presses one finger against the glass next to her. "And she'd like to chew the sticks when I'm done, please and thank you."

Rachel drives for ten minutes in whatever direction will put the most distance between her and the mega-mart store in the shortest span of time. She finally stops at a rusty little parkette.

Two of the four swings hang limp and unslung from their chains, but the two that still cling to their hinges are enough to send Luca swirling toward the set, arms pinwheeling as if she were directing some uncontrollable orchestra. Betsy bounds around her, bowing and jumping as they go. Rachel thought there would be absolution in seeing them play and run freely, proof that she has done them no permanent harm. But that doesn't come. Relief perhaps, but guilt nonetheless. Luca leaps onto a swing, trusting the fraying canvas to catch her weight. Betsy is cautious as ever. She is just careful enough so that Luca will keep playing with her, keep loving her. The two of them, Luca and Betsy, have that in common. A calculated manipulation that comes from a place of total innocence.

Rachel pulls her phone from her pocket. She unlocks it, sliding her thumb slower than usual over the greasy screen. She knows she has not missed any calls;

the side of her abdomen where the phone rests in the kangaroo pouch of her hoodie is acutely attuned to its vibrations. But she hopes. Maybe in her panic at the store she's missed a text, E-mail, something, from Travis. Nothing.

Their last conversation had been exactly seven hours ago. Rachel was on the way home from picking up Luca at the community centre—where she had spent three hours chasing soft red balls around a gym and sitting in a circle singing songs she didn't know the words

to. Rachel was sure there was more to it than that, but those two activities seemed to be the only ones Luca ever remembered participating in.

"How was Little School, Lu?" Rachel would ask as they rushed through the brown-tiled hallway of the community centre. "Little School" was Luca's name for the community centre daycare program. It was where she went three days a week before Long School, a.k.a. kindergarten.

"Same. Sang a song."

"Oh, yeah, what song?"

"How would I know?"

Rachel arranged her lunch breaks on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays to coincide with shuttling Luca between the community centre and school. It was a tense trip that saw Rachel lead-footing through every just barely red light she came across and whipping glances between the speedometer and the rear-view mirror, constantly fearful she'd see flashing lights behind her. Travis should have known not to call between noon and one on a Friday. At least Rachel thought he should have known. So she ignored the first buzz of her phone against her rib cage. Telemarketer, she figured. Or their landlord calling about the next six months' worth of rent cheques. It buzzed a second time just as Rachel was attempting a left-hand turn into the school parking lot through a not-quite-wide-enough gap in the steady flow of midday traffic. An oncoming pickup sped up for dramatic effect while blasting its horn directly into Luca's ears in her passenger's-side booster seat.

"Loud much?" Luca had said, turning her face full and defiant toward the approaching silver grill.

Rachel swung into the closest open parking spot and pulled the phone from her pocket. She nearly tossed it against her cheek.

"Hello? Yeah, hello?"

"Hey. You sound like you're running. What's going on?"

"Jeezus. You know I'm in the middle of driving Lu, why are you calling me now? Hold on a sec."

Rachel reached into the back seat and preemptively unclipped Luca's seat belt. She dropped the phone on the driver's seat as she shuffled around

the car—her work heels making running impossible—to the passenger's-side back door. She lifted Luca from her seat and swung her onto one hip. Luca would soon be too heavy for this manoeuvre. Rachel resolved to try lifting weights to delay that reality. Once Luca was required to move around on her own, the pace of Rachel's life would slow to an unlivable crawl.

The period bell was ringing just as Rachel plopped Luca in front of the classroom door. The door itself was split in half widthwise so that adults could see into and out of the classroom, but students were kept inside by an impassable four-foot barrier. All the children sat on a red carpet at the rear of the room, save one chubby little girl with stringy blond hair who stood in the middle of the room on her tiptoes trying to see over the half door to catch a glimpse of who it was that was arriving after the bell. Rachel reached over the door to unlatch it and guided Luca into the room. Luca didn't look back as Rachel kissed the back of her head before closing the door behind her. Rachel made a mental note to find out why Luca's hair smelled like peanut butter as she sprint-shuffled back to her car, almost turning her heel as she tried to jump the loose metal threshold on the door to the playground.

"Hey, O.K., sorry, I had to get Luca into school."

Rachel was breathless as she clambered back behind the wheel and started the car.

"Dude, this is long distance," Travis said. "You could have just said 'Call me back.'"

"Whatever. I'm in the middle of



A CHARM TO SEE FAERIES

The first time I saw fireflies
my eyes were scratched with flecks
of dust I tried to blink away.

Did early impressions of the galaxies
seem to stargazers also a mistake?
I watched the trails the insects left

in a blink of light, a shooting star
I could grasp and hold tight
until the light went out, then discard it.

Witnessing my wonder, James spoke
of being woken by flashing in the night,
fire stealing inside his window.

Visions came to me in this way,
in the dress I wore of long tulle
Winter's mom called "luna moth."

We sat inside the Foxhead, Winter
and me, above us grinning taxidermy,
one of my last nights in Iowa City.

Upon graduating from poetry school,
—a mostly made-up degree—
we held certificates with no name

and watched a green-winged moth
flittering at the street lamp. It was
drawn to its light as we were,

its movements becoming violent,
gesticulations bringing it as close
to the lamp as it dared. Time

fizzled away. We moved home,
Nathan held my body, made me squirm.
I closed my eyes and heard wings.

A moth flew above us, flicked
itself against the lamp, and fell
against the wall. I folded there.

—CASSIDY McFADZEAN

something here. You know I have a whole routine."

"I'm standing at a pay phone with a line of six guys behind me."

Travis lowered his voice.

"I had to pretend I was still talking to you that entire time so they wouldn't get pissed."

Rachel laughed.

"What did you say?"

"They think you have a prescription drug problem now. It started with me pretending I couldn't hear you, then you were high, then we fought about you taking out prescriptions in my name. It was the best I could think of on the spot."

"We are more than even for me leaving you on hold then."

A yellow light in front of her, Rachel decided to stop. It was good to hear Travis's voice.

"Hey, so listen," he said, his tone straightening a little, as it did when he had something practised to say. Rachel noticed the change, but ignored it.

"Ohmigod, it's, like, twelve-thirty, aren't you supposed to be on your way to the airport?" she interrupted.

"Yeah, that's the thing," his tone remained rigid, unmistakably so. "So, Deluth has a double he needs somebody to work, a straight turnover between night shift and afternoon today."

"O.K. . . ."

"So I'm gonna do it. Since it's overtime it'll be time and a half, and it'll be a full shift. Nine hours."

"O.K., so you're gonna come home tomorrow, then?"

"Well, that's the thing," Travis said again. Everything was "the thing" when Travis tried to convince Rachel of something. It is among her top five pet-peeve phrases. Along with "no-brainer" and "slam dunk" (when not used in a strictly basketball-related context).

"The shift runs from four till one, so I'll get back to my bunk around two. I'll need to sleep off the double shift, and then get cleaned up and packed, so by the time I'd be ready to come home, the only flight would be a red eye, and then there would kinda be no point."

A small, nauseating quiver shot up Rachel's spine, but she did not speak. Having a relationship that consisted solely of phone conversations for five days a week, inflection, intonation, and phraseology had become incredibly important to her. She hated the way Travis built his sentences like scaffolding around his point. Language was never a bridge for him, something that linked his thoughts to her understanding by a straight and sturdy route. His speech reminded her of the planks she'd once nailed to the dying pine tree in her parents' backyard, trying to fashion a ladder when she was too weak to climb it. Like those planks, Travis's words spiralled round and round, looking sound enough at first glance. But as soon as Rachel tried to rely on them, they all came loose.

"So, bottom line is, you're not coming home."

"Well, don't say it like that! I don't have a choice."

"Yes, you do. Just say you can't do the



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double. What am I supposed to do with Lu? I have stuff I gotta do. There's . . . just, stuff. And I don't do it during the week because I know I'll be able to do it when you're home."

"Yeah, I know, but Duluth is already gone. He had his brother's wedding or something last night, and when he asked me I'd already had a couple, and I didn't know what to say."

"You've known since when, then?"

"What do you mean?"

"Since Wednesday, then? If he had his brother's wedding last night?"

"Well, yeah."

"And I talked to you on Wednesday night. And you were drunk. So you must have talked to Duluth before you talked to me."

"Jeezus. I don't know. I guess."

Rachel looked out over the steering wheel. Her left arm was looped through it backward, so that her fingernails were hooked over the top, facing her. She had been anticipating a turn. She suddenly realized that she needed to do her nails. The matte, powder-blue polish on her index finger was chipping and she could see the flaky ridges of the brittle nail beneath.

"Hello?"

Rachel said nothing.

"This call is really expensive. So if you're not gonna talk, I'm—"

"Yeah, O.K. I gotta go anyway. I'm driving."

"Kay."

"Kay."

She slipped her thumb onto the red circle on the screen without even moving the phone from her cheek.

A muffled thumping follows Rachel and Luca as they wind their way from the park to home. Rachel rolls up her window in an effort to stifle the sound. She knows it is coming from somewhere within the engine of the Honda, but she is convinced that if it can be made inaudible it can't be bad enough for a trip to the mechanic. But the metallic drumming can still be heard through the closed window; and over the whine of Christina Aguilera through the speakers; and over the whirl of the fan through the vents. Rachel exhales and rolls her eyes. She has always been a champion eye roller, even without an audience. It's automatic. Symptomatic. Like a cough or a sneeze, the unique sound a person makes when

they first sit down after a day spent on their feet. There will be no trips to the mechanic until Travis is back to deal with it.

In the rear-view mirror she watches Luca as she considers the city, block by block, fence post by fence post, as it passes her window. Rachel can see her eyes twitch as they try to focus on the moving objects. For a second Rachel wonders if Travis notices things like that. When he decided to take a job that would put two provinces between him and Luca eighty per cent of the time, he had told Rachel it would be good for them. Make the time he did spend with her more fun. "I'll be home on weekends, so I'll be here for all the good stuff." Somehow he seemed to forget that left Rachel with the bad stuff.

The last weekend he was home, while Rachel made dinner for the three of them, he'd taken Luca to the park near their apartment. Just a little grass square with one swing set and a free-standing, rust-rimmed metal slide. Luca returned riding high and hands-free on Travis's shoulders. Rachel watched them from the living room window as Travis spun down the street, taking two steps forward and then spinning in place three hundred and sixty degrees, dipping his head from side to side to let Luca flop and sway this way and that. In the two strides forward, Luca would catch her breath, clasp fistfuls of hair from the top of Travis's head. Then, just before the spin, she tossed her arms above her head, her fingers spread wide and joyous, blue sky breaking between them as he sent her swirling. It was a level of physical wonder Rachel would never be able to recreate. She didn't have the height, nor the stomach, needed to twirl Luca with seeming abandon over concrete and asphalt and know that she would not be dropped.

Travis's love was huge and grand. It was an obvious kind of love Rachel assumed any child craved. She watched them walking for half a block, taking a full seven minutes to cover a hundred and fifty metres of sidewalk. When the front door finally swung open, Luca was already in full sprint toward Rachel.

"Did you see me flying?" she squealed, leaping with her arms outstretched toward Rachel.

Rachel caught her under the arms, but the heavy force of her momentum and her growing weight meant that the leap

NEW VALUES

The fire was once a field.
The new world order

once the new world,
old gods tapping the glass

like drunks pausing
to feel the panes kick.

Here's a new one:
what do you call a man

who falls over while
unwrapping a lozenge?

Hypoglycemic.

The kind of parent
who'd set fire to a summer

drive, tell their kids
to *get out of the car*

and walk. When the curb
has overtaken the road,

those left join the traffic
that ran them aground.

I'd like to help, but I'm too
busy protecting myself.

—JIM JOHNSTONE

resulted in a feeble little half spin, and then Luca was grounded again.

“Daddy’s a lot stronger,” Luca said, hands on her hips.

She ran through the wide doorway toward the kitchen, where Travis stood arched over the open fridge door. Luca ducked under his arm and stood staring up into his face.

“Hey, Lu.”

In the rear-view Rachel can see that Luca hasn’t taken her eyes off the window. A man walking three miniature pinschers passes by and Luca actually swivels in her seat, straining her cheek against the glass to watch the stumps of their little docked tails jutting straight up toward the overcast sky.

“Lu? Hello? Mom to Lu. Are you there?”

Luca waits until the dogs have rounded a corner, before slowly turning her head. “Um-hmm?” she hums, looking Rachel straight in the eyes through the mirror.

In that look Rachel sees a glimpse of the teenage self Luca will become—it is both amusing and terrifying.

“How about we swing by the park again after dinner?”

Luca turns back toward the window, shrugging her shoulders.

To enter their apartment, Rachel must drive the car down the laneway between their house and the neighbour’s. The boxy little sedan nearly skims the brick on either side as she manoeuvres around two sets of trash bins. Clear of the laneway, she makes a tight left onto the wavy patch of gravel that serves as a park-

ing spot. The yard of the house is enclosed in chain-link on three sides, the open side running directly parallel to the length of the car.

Rachel throws the car into park, grabs her purse from the floor of the back seat, and unbuckles Luca’s seat belt with one deep lean between the front seats. Luca is dexterous enough to scramble out and pop open the door once the criss-cross of buckles has been unlocked. Betsy leaps out after her, clearing the booster seat completely and landing on the gravel. They skip around to the back of the car. In the rear-view Rachel can see the fuzzy purple spray of Luca’s scrunchy over the lip of the trunk. She stays in the driver’s seat for a moment, listening to the intermittent pings of the cooling engine. The dash clock reads seven thirty-two. Sixty-two hours before she’ll walk Luca back into morning snack time at the community centre. She hears Luca in the tiny, almost-fenced yard running up and down the wooden steps to the apartment door.

“Up, up, up, and I’m a king in the castle. Down, down, down, and I’m drowning in the moat.”

Through the loose faux leather of her purse, Rachel feels her phone vibrate. Not long enough to be a call, so she knows it cannot be Travis. A spam text, reading, “IMPORTANT MESSAGE: YOUR mobile number has been identified as part of a massive online banking breach. To confirm your account is secure, call this number back immediately.” The number is international, at least fourteen digits long. The whole thing doesn’t fit in the little box at the top of the message. Rachel texts back as she gets out of the car, “Should I just send u my visa number and bank account login now to save myself the long distance? Asshole.”

“Lu, let’s go,” she calls to Luca, who is bent next to the fence, her face inches above some grass Betsy is chewing. She turns her head toward Rachel without righting her body.

“Now, guys, come on.”

Luca skates across the grass, not lifting her pink boots from the ground, and lets her arms swing stiffly at her sides.

“Speed skater,” Luca says, in a mockingly deep man’s voice.

Betsy takes another pull from the crabgrass and jumps up onto the moldy decking

without using the stairs, careful to avoid landing on the one rotting, grey board.

Inside the kitchen the steel of the door is cool against Rachel's forehead. She leans against it as she toes her shoes and kicks them onto the heap next to the door. She pivots on her forehead to face the kitchen. Dishes piled high and dried just enough to make scrubbing futile. And beyond, in the dining room, Luca's scrambled mess of crayons and construction paper. She can't see Luca, but she can hear her in her bedroom, the springs of her mattress straining under what may well be her last round of jumping. Betsy has her front paws up on the edge of the Formica dining table, her head tilted to the side, straining to grab a red crayon in her jaws. Rachel doesn't stop her. She won't relish dabbing up the inevitable bloody looking vomit hours from now, but she's not in the mood to raise her voice to the level it would take to stop her. Her purse buzzes again.

"You're kidding me," she says as she taps open a text from the same long-distance number.

"Yes ok. texting details is fine. We will make sure your account is secure."

Betsy's nails make one final, digging pull to lunge her lips toward her prize. As soon as she has it she scrambles into Luca's room, the metallic crunching getting louder, and more frayed with each leap. Then silence. And a barely audible, "Oops."

They finish up a late meal of Kraft Dinner and hot dogs, and Rachel shuffles Luca from the table into her pyjamas, with some cajoling, and finally onto her now broken bed with one duct-taped spring.

"I wanna play space when Daddy gets home."

Luca says this not with excitement or glee, but with the stern look of someone making their final offer after a terse negotiation. She will tolerate nothing less than playing "space," which means sitting on the steps of the porch and leaning back so that the roofs of the four houses that surround their little scrap of backyard form a perfect frame through which to travel to the stars. Forget that most of the "stars" are actually overnight flights or the odd satellite. This is one of many games that only Travis is permitted to play with Luca. Early

in the summer, when the long days meant no lights could be seen in the sky before 10 P.M. Rachel had tried to soothe Luca to sleep by suggesting they play space. Luca's bedroom was sweltering, nearly forty degrees, Rachel figured, when she opened the door to find her lying starfished on top of her duvet, her sweaty head flopped sideways toward the door.

"I need some water, Ma. I'm dying in here," Luca had said, before flinging both legs up into the air and back down onto the mattress with a loud huff. Rachel gave her a drink that was sixty per cent ice and carried her out onto the porch to cool off. The only fan in the house rattled from the kitchen ceiling, so she left the back door open with the fan whirring at top speed. It was enough to move the air a little bit on the porch, on an otherwise completely breezeless night. Rachel put Luca on the step and leaned her elbows back against the prickly wood.

"Are we ready for liftoff, captain?" Rachel whispered, mimicking the lines she had heard Travis use. Luca didn't respond. She craned her face up toward the sky.

"We're headed for Orion's Belt this mission, right, captain?"

Still no response. She looked down and took a sip of water.

"Captain, I need the O.K. to start the engines."

Luca looked up at Rachel, hair matted across her forehead in wet, sweeping strings. Luca pushed it aside, giving her head the distinct look of a middle-aged comb-over.

"We can't play space, Ma. You don't sound like a spaceman."

"Well you don't sound like a spaceman either. Just use your imagination."

"No. You gotta have one real spaceman at least. That's the rule."

Luca took another sip from her cup, then stood. She leaned in and hugged the top of Rachel's head, then shimmied off into the house to fall asleep on the cool bathroom floor.

Telling Luca that there was no chance she would be playing space this weekend might permanently derail the evening—send Luca sailing into a tight-lipped rage. Rachel looks at her daughter, who is propped with her hands outstretched behind her, her brow scrunched into an impossibly deep furrow.

"Maybe another time," Rachel says, leaving the news that Travis won't be coming home unbroken for the time being. She'll tell her tomorrow. Or not at all. She doesn't want to see Luca's disappointment. She's tired of seeing it. And the fact that she's tired of it makes her feel even worse.

Rachel leaves Luca on the bed, sitting bolt upright, singing a song to Betsy as she holds the ends of Betsy's soft limp ears between her fingers and makes them dance.

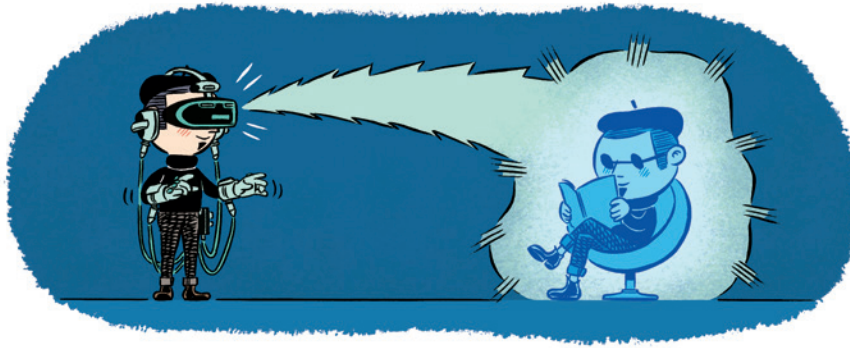
Outside, the night is breezy, but still warm. Rachel drops herself onto the top step of the porch and digs her elbows into her knees. A bat darts between the big maple that stands just beyond the rusted-out Honda and an evergreen in the neighbour's yard. She wonders what else lives in that tree. Whether it is full of its own dramatic life of feuds and turf wars and angling for leaf and trunk space. She doesn't marvel at the thought. It feels futile. Kind of sad. A song begins to drift through the upstairs neighbour's window. The first three words are curses before a deep bass and drum line take over.

Another bat shoots out from the canopy of the maple, this one followed by a small bird that twists around it, pecking and flapping madly. The fight continues into the neighbouring evergreen and out again into the darkness until Rachel can no longer see them.

The summer Rachel nailed up those seven-inch lengths of board on the bare and knobby pine in her parents' backyard, she'd used some thin little one-inch screws and a rubber hammer she'd found on her father's tool bench. Rachel knew that screws were not meant to be hammered, but she thought if she hit hard enough and for long enough they'd go in. And they did. A bit. But she didn't have the strength to hammer them deep enough into the dense wood of the tree to support her weight. When she tried the climb anyway, she made it to the third board before a screw popped and the spinning piece of wood sent her ass to grass.

She remembers sitting there, post-fall, looking up at the gnarled bark, the untouched boards looking firm and sturdy, yet completely useless.

"I'll have to teach myself how to use a drill," she thought. ♪



THE DIGITAL POSTSCRIPT



What kind of magazine publishes only twice a year? One with a lot of digital offerings between issues.



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Many years ago, my sister and I offered to clean my dad's filthy apartment. He kept saying he'd do it... but he never did.



It got worse and worse so I confronted him...



Are you okay with being found dead in your own filth?

We spent a week tossing out garbage, scrubbing, wiping... we found strange things in strange places.



Why are there plates of dried food in his clothes closet?

As we cleaned, we found out cups and bags and bowls and piles of coins all over his apartment.



Many of the coins were sticky, dirty and dusty. They were mixed with pills, paper clips, oatmeal, shredded wheat, dry peas...



Dad! Don't throw the dirty ones in the garbage.

We filled a waste paper bin and when I tried to pick it up to take to the car...



Ugh, I can't lift it!

With effort, we rocked it back and forth and onto Dad's scale...



WOW! 250 POUNDS!

Over the next few months we removed all the coins, rolled them, and cashed them in. The final tally was SIX THOUSAND DOLLARS!



Oh... I didn't think there'd be that much.

Dad appreciated what we'd done and we finally booked a monthly maid service he'd been too embarrassed to allow into his home. He has kept things pretty clean, but...



... he'd accumulated another sixty pounds of coins! I took two fifteen pound buckets of coins home to Toronto with me.



Do this while he's alive. Do this while he's alive. Do this...

I did not want to roll the coins this time... I knew there was a coin counter at Canadian Tire, so I put a bucket of coins in my bike basket.



As I rode up Yonge Street I had an idea...



I should give a bunch of these coins to a street person.

There was an older guy in front of a Tim Hortons, I nervously stopped my bike... I felt so stupid I almost didn't do it.



What am I doing?

I grabbed the pail and started filling his cup... I couldn't stop myself... I had to fill the whole cup... coins were falling on the ground...



sorry

People were staring at me... my actions were making me feel so embarrassed.



Thanks, now I can take a break.

After cashing out about three hundred dollars, I went home to get the other bucket... I rode up and stopped at Starbucks.



There was a young guy there... I grabbed the bucket and began filling his cup with handfuls of coins.



sorry

sorry

He looked up at me with a face full of wonder and joy... like a kid...



Thanks buddy, you're the bomb!

People were staring at me again and I did not want to get caught, so I quickly rode away.



I feel happy. I feel really happy.

Later, I started to second guess myself and thought "it's easy to be generous with your dad's money..."



No. Filling those cups was a good idea. My idea.

THE TADDLE CREEK PODCAST



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DO ONE THING REALLY, REALLY WELL.