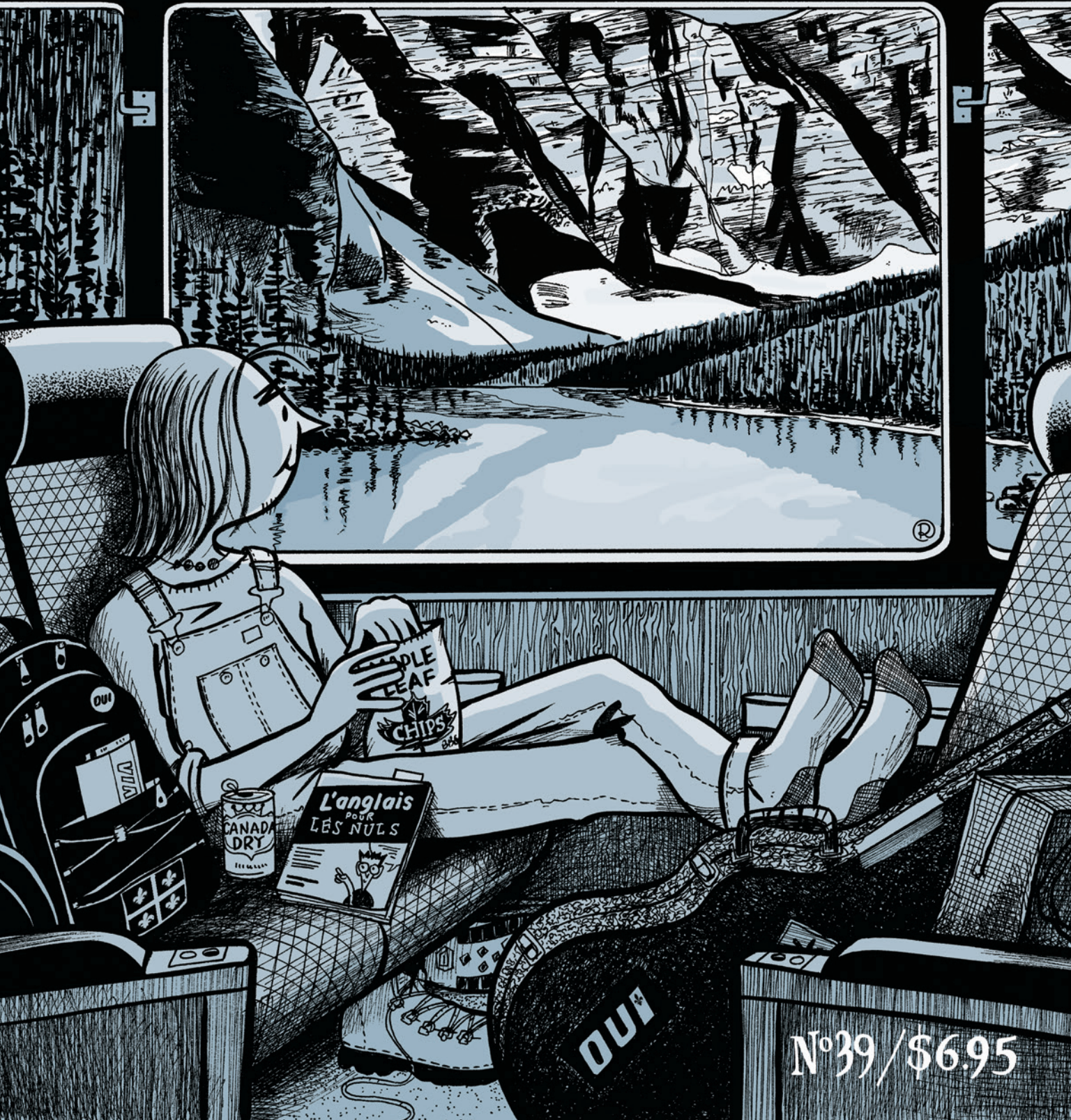


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The Canada Issue

TADDLE CREEK

NO. 39 • SUMMER, 2017



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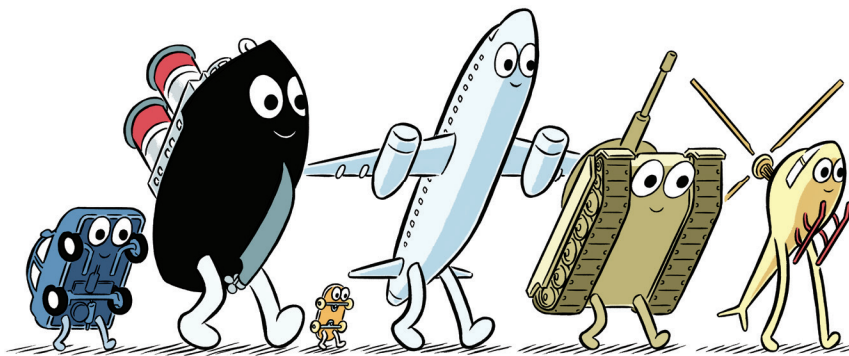
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By Michel Rabagliati

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



THE CONTRIBUTORS

Lee Henderson lives in Victoria. He is the author of the novels *The Man Game* and *The Road Narrows as You Go*, and the collection *The Broken Record Technique*.

Joanna Lilley lives in Whitehorse. She is the author of the poetry collections *If There Were Roads* and *The Fleece Era*, and *The Birthday Books*, a book of stories.

Jana Prikryl lives in New York, where she works as a senior editor at the *New York Review of Books*. Her debut collection of poems is *The After Party*.

Alison McCreesh is a cartoonist, illustrator, and fibre artist from Chicoutimi, Quebec, now living in Yellowknife. She is the author of the graphic novel *Ramshackle*.

Richard Kelly Kemick is a National Magazine Award-winning writer living in Calgary. His debut poetry collection, *Caribou Run*, was named one of CBC's fifteen must-read poetry collections.

Ann Y. K. Choi lives in Toronto. Her debut novel is *Kay's Lucky Coin Variety*.

Napatsi Folger lives in Iqaluit, Nunavut, where she works as a government policy adviser. Her first young adult novel is *Joy of Apex*.

David Collier lives in Hamilton. His most recent book is *Morton: A Cross-Country Rail Journey*. He has contributed to the magazine since 2010.

Conan Tobias lived in Saint John, New Brunswick for eighteen years. He now lives in Toronto, where he edits *Taddle Creek* and is the senior editor of *Quill & Quire*.

Nicole Dixon lives on Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia. Her first book is the short-story collection *High-Water Mark*.

Louise Bernice Halfe, also known by her Cree name, Sky Dancer, lives in Saskatoon, and served as the province's poet laureate for two years. She was raised on Saddle Lake Reserve and attended Blue Quills Indian Residential School. Her latest book is *Burning in this Midnight Dream*.

Deirdre Kessler lives in Charlottetown and is the provincial poet laureate. She is the author of two dozen children's novels and picture books, poetry and memoir.

Dimitri Nasrallah lives in Montreal. His second novel, *Niko*, was nominated for CBC's Canada Reads and the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award.

Lisa Moore lives in St. John's, Newfoundland. She is the author of three novels, *Alligator*, *February*, and *Caught*, and two story collections. Her latest book is the young adult novel *Flannery*.

Katherena Vermette is a Métis writer from Treaty One territory, living in Winnipeg. Her first book, *North End Love Songs*, won the Governor General's Literary Award for poetry. Her latest book is the novel *The Break*.

Dave Lapp lives in Toronto. His most recent book is *People Around Here*.

Michel Rabagliati lives in Montreal. He is the author of eight books about a character named Paul, two of which, *Song of Roland* and *Paul Joins the Scouts*, won the Doug Wright Award.



"Free the Expo 67!"

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For Shirley

TADDLE CREEK



T H E E P H E M E R A

THE CANADA “ISSUE”

Several years ago, *Taddle Creek* began planning a Canada-themed issue to coincide with the hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Confederation, an event being celebrated across the country in 2017. Canada, of course, did not spring from the ground on July 1, 1867. There are plenty of Canadian anniversaries that predate the joining of Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick into a dominion: Toronto celebrated its own sesquicentennial (a word slightly harder to say than it is to spell) in 1984; Saint John, New Brunswick, acknowledged the two hundredth anniversary of its incorporation more than thirty years ago; and this year Montreal marks three hundred and seventy-five years since its founding. Initial European colonization began a millennium ago, when Norsemen visited the Confederation-latecomer province of Newfoundland. Even that accomplishment was bested by Canada’s Indigenous population, whose ancestors arrived here from Mongolia and Siberia as much as fifteen thousand years earlier, who populated much the country before being pushed aside and largely wiped out by the spread of European-borne disease, and for whose word *kanata* the country is named.

Those who lived through and remember the country’s centennial year (and the beloved Expo that came with it) often speak of the pride Canadians felt in 1967. Others consider that anniversary to be a moment of lost innocence—a time when the many stains on the country’s history finally, slowly, began to be acknowledged, both by citizens and by government. Atonement and reconcili-

ation continue fifty years later, and are likely to continue for some time to come. Still, Canada is not the same country it was in 1967, and celebrating its complicated history is not as easy a task today as it was then.

For these reasons, many of the would-be contributors *Taddle Creek* approached to take part in this issue expressed an uneasiness at it being labelled a Canada 150 celebration. As a result, *Taddle Creek* decided to change the theme of this issue from Canada 150 to simply Canada. The magazine is happy and proud to report that no further changes were deemed necessary: from the beginning, the magazine’s mandate for this number was to celebrate the country’s diversity. In this issue, you’ll find stories from authors and artists living in each of the country’s thirteen provinces and territories. Among these contributors are English Canadians, French Canadians, Indigenous Canadians, and immigrant Canadians. There’s even a story written in French. And just to show that *Taddle Creek*’s Canada includes Quebec, this issue’s cover features a scene from the life of Michel Rabagliati’s Paul—a character (unfortunately) not that widely known in English Canada, but beloved in his home province.

(To be honest, *Taddle Creek* is kind of happy to not have to feature the official Canada sesquicentennial logo. The fact the previous federal government left its design to a student competition, with the winner—who created her entry in two or three days—receiving a mere five thousand dollars, frankly, is just one more thing to be ashamed of. Plus, it’s derivative of Stuart Ash’s wonderful 1967 centennial symbol.)

Taddle Creek does not mean to suggest there’s nothing in Canada worth celebrating. The country frequently is referred to by outsiders as dull, and while that is not *entirely* inaccurate, *Taddle Creek* will put Canada’s culture of Hudson’s Bay point blankets, Bonhomme, Stanley Park outdoorsiness, Wilensky’s Specials, Keith Richards drug busts, Grand River Powwows, Alpine lager, Ganong chicken bones and Pal-o-Mine bars, Sussex Golden ginger ale, Mr. Dressup, poutine, Rocky Mountains, and Kiwanis Dairy Bar ice cream up against that of any other country. *Taddle Creek* dare says it’s even published some decent Canadian culture in its own pages over the years.

For all the bad, there’s a lot of good, and *Taddle Creek* is pleased to be celebrating Canada, pre- and post-1867, with this issue—at least as much as it’s able to in sixty pages. Hopefully reading it will be a celebration in itself.

Happy Kanata 15,000!

TWENTY

Speaking of anniversaries, 2017 marks another major milestone in Canadian history: the twentieth anniversary of a twenty-one-contributor confederation that formed a journal called *Taddle Creek*. Today, that same journal has added nearly three hundred more authors and artists to its ranks, and expanded its reach from one small neighbourhood to the entire country and beyond. *Taddle Creek* usually celebrates its big anniversaries with a larger-than-usual issue in the winter, but this issue was so good, the magazine couldn’t wait. You’re welcome.

—TADDLE CREEK

THE FICTION

GNOMES WITH KNIVES

BY LEE HENDERSON

DEAR MAYOR, Recently I had cause to remember a short essay I published that garnered no small amount of praise, about how in the city of Vancouver there used to be more slugs. On my solitary walks through the lumpy Tea Swamp of Mount Pleasant as a teen in the nineteen-eighties, taking Polaroid pictures of the tilting homes and lopsided streets built up over the ancient beaver bog, I would count upward of a hundred slugs an hour, and kept a journal with daily tally. A Simon Fraser University research report estimates more than a million slugs and snails thrived in Stanley Park until the great decline of the nineteen-nineties. In heavy rains you'd see them stretched out on wet sidewalks like blissed-out hippies. The last of the turn-on tune-in drop-outs. Sticky, tongue-shaped banana slugs the colour of olive-stained dirty pennies, going so slowly somewhere, wriggling limbless on their bellies. You'd have to step over them. If you stepped on one they'd split open under your shoe, green and grey meat and the electric tingle of life's impulse ebbing. They lived among us. The slugs of Vancouver ate the crumbs off our city floor, ate all kinds of dead matter. I try not to think about their diet. They ate decay! And I can't get over how we took them for granted. The slug's existence is so simple, base, and essential, yet never celebrated. The slugs were here before any of us, before the saurischian dinosaurs, before Gondwana, yet we find them ick. When they were in our gardens and on our sidewalks, I admired them more than most but *still not enough*. I never should have ignored the absence of slugs I noticed early on in my daily tallies and said nothing about. Now it's too late. How foolish of me, of all of us, not to get to know them better. Why did our city's slugs die off? If there is any connection to be drawn between their

disappearance and some unknown agent, I would recommend our leading local conchologists investigate.

Sincerely,
ISAAC MIRROR

DEAR MAYOR, Today I write to you not about slugs but with regards to my friend Kieron Hermies. You must remember Kieron because you called the police to his residence at Bad Manors and had him blocked on Twitter after he threatened you in a series of late-night tweets. Of course whatever Kieron tweeted was all provocation and lie, but who could blame your reaction? And maybe what I write to say is, maybe, who, too, would prosecute Kieron Hermies? For many years I lived in the peaked-roof attic next door to Kieron, in a matching hundred-year-old Victorian-style pioneer home facing the baseball diamond in MacLean Park. Our landlord was someone I never met, named Chris Ortiz.

In 2006, Kieron's parents died very suddenly in a multi-car accident near Anarchist Mountain, on the Crowsnest Highway, and it prompted him to quit his job after two and a half seasons of what I thought was terrific work assistant-editing the relaunched *Battlestar Galactica* and go on a self-directed sabbatical with the money he'd saved. For the most part this involved lying in his bed reading translations of decadent French *fin de siècle* books by Huysmans, Wilde, Verlaine, Baudelaire, Rimbaud and those they inspired: Lovecraft, Crowley, Céline, and Lawrence, for a start. Kieron was already a kind of Huysmans' protagonist. Like Durtal in *Là-Bas*, he was one whose "sad experience led him to believe that every literary man belonged to one of two classes, the thoroughly commercial or the utterly impossible." *Battlestar Galactica* was thoroughly commercial. Kieron,

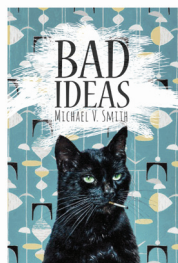
Mayor, was utterly impossible. And Strathcona was a neighbourhood for the utterly impossible.

I'm inclined to say Strathcona is not like other neighbourhoods, and much more of a small town hemmed in by city. Getting in and out of Strathcona can be something of a trek. Strathcona must be self-sufficient because of the odd isolation forced on it by commuter roads and Hastings Street. When I first moved there it was still ignored and forgotten in a city that, for the most part, was still ignored and forgotten by Canada. Right in the middle of Vancouver: moss-covered crack houses, ivy-choked whorehouses, smack houses, squatter houses, gang houses, grow ops, an occasional nuclear family home, mafia houses next to mafia houses with supposedly secretly connecting basements, student rental houses falling apart, art houses, abandoned houses, social housing, immigrants with no English, punks with no family, single mothers of vulnerable teens, the slumming sons and daughters of the wealthy, the dark-wood booths and long countertop at the seventy-year-old Ovaltine Cafe, the blanket sales on the sidewalk of stolen DVDs, cellphones, and a hair curler, the Emily Carr graduate's booming ceramic studio on the corner lot across from the projects, a money laundering Laundromat next to an anarchist bookstore, hotel pubs with pints for a dollar, after-hours basement clubs, chain-link fences, barbed wire, burglar bars over windows, rats, fleas, bedbugs, hundred-year-old brick public schools, pedestrian bridges over train tracks, underpasses sprayed with tags, impenetrable walls of blackberry bushes, a warren of rabbits. The sound of a skateboard on pavement cut through the night, the endless howl of sirens, how crackheads picked for hours at imperfections on the sidewalk as if a tiny little hit was lost there. Johns cruised Stamps

ILLUSTRATION BY MATTHEW DALEY



NEW TITLES

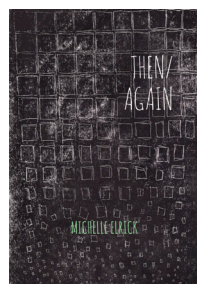
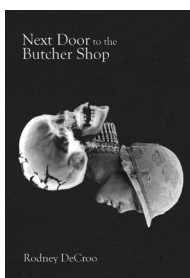


BAD IDEAS

Michael V. Smith's poems are hyperbolic yet sincere, battling themes of family, loss and love.

NEXT DOOR TO THE BUTCHER SHOP

Rodney DeCroo explores memory while combining lyrical and visceral imagery.

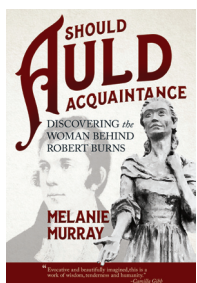
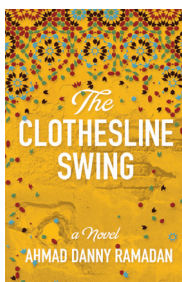


THEN/ AGAIN

Michelle Elrick creates a deft account of finding home in her second collection of poetry.

THE CLOTHESLINE SWING

Ahmad Danny Ramadan tells the story of two lovers in the aftermath of a dying Syria.



SHOULD AULD ACQUAINTANCE

Melanie Murray provides an intimate depiction of the life of Jean Armour, the wife of Robert Burns.

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Place and MacLean Park social housing twenty-four hours a day seven days a week. Public health services operated on every block of Hastings Street. Hastings Street, where the few exploit the many so flagrantly. Hastings Street, a fearsome open market for drugs, sex, and stolen goods. Slumlords like Chris Ortiz owned half the properties; the single-room occupancy apartments with two toilets to share among ten alcoholics on every floor; corner stores with expired cereal. At dusk, the bats fly like “bits of umbrella” as they feed on insects—but also like a small town in the heart of the city, everyone knows everyone. You know neighbours by name, you socialize in the same places on the weekend. Stories of notorious house parties, gang fights, dramatic fires, and other events get retold hundreds of times from all different witnesses. Every home had a story, and as I walked past these stories, dodging slugs on the wet sidewalk, I thought, “This is some kind of paradise.” One block east from where I lived, on East Georgia Street, was the art house called the Fishbowl. It used to be a corner store so the big windows looked directly into a front living room the long-term tenants converted into a party area (now demolished and converted to condos). And one block west was the adjoining single-room occupancy apartments known as Bad Manors and Good Manors, home to so many of the city’s artists, dancers, musicians, writers, junkies, and working poor over the decades (also demolished: condos). You could rent a room with a shared bathroom in Good or Bad Manors for two hundred and ten dollars a month. As mayor, I imagine you might have heard of our homes as well, the Bitter Suites. The big difference there was we paid two hundred and fifteen dollars more every month for our own bathrooms.

Kieron’s neighbours downstairs on the main floor were the heavy metal band Gnomes with Knives, who used to sell out Pat’s Pub, then the Starfish Room, then the Commodore, then broke up after their sophomore album, *Psychopsalm for Pneumonia*. Vocalist Jake Rowe overdosed at least a couple of times while I lived next door. Medics wanted his autograph. Once, it was Kieron who heard Rowe’s seizure slaps on the kitchen floor,

so he ran downstairs, kept the singer of such college radio hits as “218 Flavours,” “Cannie Annie,” and “Brave Bull” from choking on his tongue while they waited an hour for an ambulance.

“If I die, keep my skull,” Rowe said, and made Kieron promise. He didn’t die. According to Kieron it was Gnomes with Knives who named our homes the Bitter Suites, but years later I met the drummer, Ed Hopeless, at a Halloween party at the Rickshaw Theatre and he said no, the place was already called the Bitter Suites back when he was going there after high school to score heroin from a tattoo artist named Paula with attachments to the Hells Angels, so who knows. Gnomes with Knives were loud neighbours.

Four hyperviolent *Lord of the Flies* types under no supervision, with giant stereo and liquor cabinet: “the world, that understandable and lawful world, was slipping away.” They didn’t even rehearse there. Just a loud lifestyle. Confrontational extroverts, bullies with lots of friends, devout libertarians with a war fetish and lethal addictions, and obviously violently bestial rockers. They would fist fight each other, orgy with fans, damage their own property and Chris Ortiz’s house, then go down to the Union Market all bloodied to get coffee, sausage rolls, and chocolate cake for lunch. One fateful night in 2006, the picture window in the front room of their house shattered and fell to the ground amid loud screams and the sound of a leaf blower. I woke up, opened my window, poked my head out into the starry sky, and saw Kieron doing the same. We watched as Hopeless, the drummer, ran into the park, naked and smeared with blood, howling at the top of his lungs. Atra, the bassist, followed after him in a tour T-shirt and nothing else, a bottle of gin in one hand and a cavalry saber in the other, also howling, but hers was a beautiful howling, truly operatic.

“I’ll call the police,” I said.

“Why do that?” Kieron said. “Noise lived here first. It’s not metal to call the cops. And this is the city’s best metal band. No, best *band* period, since Skinny Puppy.” So we let Atra chase her drummer around MacLean Park for a few more hours that night in an attempt to “cut him to pieces” (her words). How could I



EPIPHANIES

Walking across a piazza in Florence
diagonally, rid of Edward for a few hours.
Aged twenty, a colonnade of repeated
relief that Italy was not relinquished
despite bad decisions. Architectural
ecstasy. Freedom frescoed. Excavated joy.

Twenty years later: functional Whitehorse.
A chain-link fence on the way to work
is a diagonal frieze of diamonds
framing broad, white mountains.
Epiphanies at other ages, before and after,
in more predictable places:

On Aonach Eagach ridge. Aeroplanes
above icefields and oceanic wind farms.
Or simply scooping soft ashes from the stove.
Switching off a computer.
Archiving backward in a kayak
on the wobbling sea, crown to fibreglass.

—JOANNA LILLEY

move to Bitter Suites and *not* expect noise? Mount Pleasant might be quieter, but that's why Gnomes with Knives moved to Strathcona, to be the loudest people in the city. Did I move here to complain? No one else complained. The cops never came. So I fell back asleep. As you may have already guessed, Mayor, the next day Gnomes with Knives disbanded. Probably for the best. Atrá, the bassist, went on to study opera at Indiana University Jacobs School of Music and is now a principal singer at the Met, in New York, perhaps the rare exception that proves Huysmans' rule that "money attracted money, accumulating always in the same places, going by preference to the scoundrelly and the mediocre."

The band left behind one chipped plaster gnome with a knife on the front lawn of the Bitter Suites, a stage show relic that gathered moss over the next couple of months. That gnome was a reminder of how quiet life became at the Bitter Suites without the band members.

On the first of October, a couple of newlyweds in their twenties moved in to the vacated space. They were well dressed, with undergraduate degrees, a lot of framed posters, dimples in their cheeks, and a flat-screen TV. From my open window next door came the smell

of vinegar and bleach as they sanitized all weekend. They paid no attention to the overgrown lawn or its plaster garden gnome with the conspicuous knife. The interior was enough work to cleanse. The husband—I honestly don't remember either of their names—introduced himself to Kieron and said, "Would you like to come down for our housewarming party? A couple college buddies, old friends of mine, I think a local artist I know is coming, too, and my Photoshop mentor. I'm cooking a traditional roast I sourced from a cattle farm in the Cowichan Valley. Great with white or red." Kieron told him he'd been a vegetarian and sober his whole life, but could bring down a soy burger to fry and some tea. "No, thanks, that's O.K.," said the husband. "Maybe we'll have you over another time then." So instead Kieron was left to listen to the party and smell the roast. The husband taught Photoshop four days a week at a private post-secondary arts institute downtown, next to Victory Square, and the wife worked full-time at a branch of the provincial department of health and safety.

Now that they were his neighbours,

whenever Kieron put on his stereo after dark, either the wife or the husband would climb the stairs, knock on his attic door, and ask him to turn it down. One night while we sat at his kitchen table and talked about Huysmans' peculiar genius, lasting influence, and call to recognize in art "only such works as had been sifted and distilled by subtle and tormented minds," we heard the husband knock at Kieron's door. In a stolen Hilton hotel terry-towel bathrobe, he asked us to be a little quieter: "Guys, it's past midnight and my wife gets up in five hours," he whispered.

Kieron didn't complain about the smell of the husband's cooking trapped in his attic—the amateur chef tried Welsh lamb sausage, Scottish beef pie, Tibetan lamb curry, Indonesian grilled pork and fried duck, Russian smoked fish, Hungarian beef goulash—food smells Kieron stank of so bad it wouldn't shower off his skin. Sometimes I could smell yesterday's pungent meals wafting off his clothes just sitting next to him in MacLean Park in the evening while I counted the bat colony overhead. And he never complained when forced to hear them laugh and laugh every night over *Friends* reruns and Friday's episode of *Sex and the City*. They watched *Battlestar Galactica* in stereo and made butter chicken popcorn. He tried to read his way through the agony, but the sound of his own editing shook the floorboards



and made the words jiggle on the page of *Against Nature*: "Once he had cut himself off from contemporary life, he had resolved to allow nothing to enter his hermitage which might breed repugnance or regret." But the seal of Kieron's hermitage was broken! His sabbatical was falling apart. Listening to *Battlestar*

Galactica against his own will may have grown a bit too much hair on Kieron's bananas, so to speak. He would never go back to editing *Battlestar Galactica* with its "fake cinema-vérité in outer space." I was glad to be next door where I could torrent the show without insulting him. But now the popular revamp was right there in the house, underneath his feet, to remind him of the career he put on hold, his parents, and how they had died, infused with the unwelcome pong of cooked meat and spices.

Instead of asking them to turn down

the volume or quit eating meat, though, Kieron started to clomp around on the hardwood floor above their heads in a pair of dress shoes. When they asked him to take off his shoes, he lied and said he couldn't, for medical reasons, and blamed his arches. He even forged a doctor's medical note to prove it. Kieron invited three friends over for his birthday, and the married couple downstairs as well. "I made a pot of black bean and sweet potato soup and tofu kangjung with brown rice," he said. "Thanks, Kieron, that's awesome of you to invite us," the wife said, "we will *definitely* figure out if we can. Should we bring anything—chips, booze, or cake?" The night of his party, I drank a bottle of Canadian whisky and we listened to Gnomes with Knives. The married couple never joined us. They stayed downstairs the whole birthday party, then called the cops. The police-woman who came to the door said, "Your neighbours want some quiet, that's all. It's late now. Wind it down."

"Hey, I reached out. I *invited* them. They just moved in and I've been here since the nineties. Today is my thirtieth birthday. Earlier this week they blasted *Battlestar Galactica* downstairs. Officer, I hate *Battlestar Galactica* but I didn't waste your time or taxpayers' money calling you here over *that noise*." That's what Kieron told her.

"You're the first guy I ever met who doesn't like *Battlestar Galactica*. Just keep the noise down, birthday boy." That's what the cop told him.

That night, while we slept, the gnome with a knife on the front lawn of the Bitter Suites went missing. The gnome wasn't there when I got up the next morning and went out to fetch a coffee, shortly after 11 A.M. Vanished. I told Kieron and he went and asked the married couple if they happened to see who took it. "That's a piece of local history, *gone*," he said. "Heavy-metal memorabilia. They had those gnomes made for their first show at the Cobalt. I guess I'll start asking around the neighbourhood."

"No, you don't have to do that," said the wife. "It was me. I threw it away. I didn't know the gnome was special. I was doing yard work this morning. I guess I thought the knife made him look hostile."

Kieron wanted to know if it was in the

trash; maybe he could retrieve it. But you know what she did, Mayor? She said she put the gnome with a knife in a plastic garbage bag and told her husband to smash it to pieces with a baseball bat. Then the wife took the bag full of smashed gnome with a knife, walked down Hawks Avenue to Hastings Street, and disposed of it in a bin behind the Astoria hotel. Why all the trouble? "I wanted to get the hostile thing off the property," she said.

"I'm not sure this new couple is working out so great," I said.

Kieron said, "We swapped Gnomes with Knives for gnat strainers. That's the new Bitter Suites."

He called them gnat strainers.

The next day there was a flood on the main floor of Kieron's place when the kitchen sink backed up, overflowed, and turned the married couple's kitchen and living room into a small lake. When Chris Ortiz wouldn't return their calls, they hired a plumber off Craigslist who located the problem after a few hours on his hands and knees.

He told the newlyweds, "What I see is not good. You got pipes filled with French fries. Poutine fries. I'm finding congealed gravy, lots of cheese curds, and a hamburger. I mean, cheeseburger, a bacon cheeseburger. And mushrooms. The works backing you up."

Kieron denied any role in this. "I'm *vegetarian*," he reminded them. But if not Kieron, then *how* did this pub food get clogged in the pipes? Then, not long after the kitchen flood was repaired, their bathroom flooded. The plumber returned and took apart their sink, shower, and bathtub, piece by piece, and found spaghetti and meatballs in the pipes. Blocking up the pipes behind their toilet was another cheeseburger, garlic bread slices, and more fries. This time, the newlyweds didn't come upstairs to ask Kieron what was going on. But he didn't let up either. He gave them a week to dry out and then used the knob-end of a broomstick to flush perogies down his toilet, and shove sushi down his sink.

The couple must have sent our landlord a bill for all the work, because within a couple weeks of this stunt Kieron found a letter slipped under his door. The gist: Our rental agreement is terminated. You have until the end of the month to vacate the premises. It was signed "Chris Ortiz."



He moved one block west. For the next two months Kieron lived in a state of total dispossession in a four-hundred square foot room on the third floor of Bad Manors. That's where he spent the last of his sabbatical money and wrote you those increasingly specific tweets. After the police incident, he left Bad Manors and Vancouver for Toronto. So you see, Mayor, home hasn't been the same without Kieron. I'm not blaming you, but I am. Chris Ortiz hiked up the rent: the new guy across from me in Kieron's old attic space pays fourteen-fifty a month and is an aspiring screenwriter with four generations of family in West Vancouver. He told me on first handshake that he texts Len Wiseman at least once a week. Rent has gone up for me at the legal rate increase over the years and so for the moment I remain here in my attic in the Bitter Suites (eight hundred and fifty per month).

Sincerely,
ISAAC MIRROR

DEAR MAYOR, You might recall my previous letters, regarding the plight of the slugs and the eviction of my friend and your enemy, Kieron Hermies. Although I have yet to hear back from you, today I write regarding a third concern that I hope you'll share, that is Vancouver's disappearing bats.

It was on a Saturday evening back in June of ninety-nine, a few days after I moved into the Bitter Suites, and I was in MacLean Park socializing with Kieron Hermies and twenty or thirty other Strathcona locals when I first saw the bats and, falling in love at first sight, began my habit of counting the local colony. In those days they numbered around fifty or sixty. For years I went out every afternoon to sit on the grass in MacLean Park and wait for them to turn up. If work or some other obligation took me away, Kieron or another friend would count for me. "Look up, and you see things flying / Between the day and the night," wrote D. H. Lawrence of the precious last minutes of sunlight at dusk when the bats come out to feed. They danced across the sky over MacLean Park. Sometimes they swooped low and their winged fingertips brushed against my hair.

While my friends played soccer drunk, I counted bats. "How are the bats doing, Isaac?" That's how most people greeted me if they saw me around Strathcona. To

acquaintances and those new to the neighbourhood, I was Isaac, “the bat-counting guy.” But even close friends began to think of me that way. “How are the bats of Strathcona doing?” Kieron began to ask, as if he didn’t know.

“Not good,” I started to tell people. “The numbers are dropping.” The colony went as high as fifty-eight in September of 2000, but a month later was down to fifty-five. By the next summer, numbers were sliding from forty to thirty. I thought the colony was going to steady out again at around thirty, but then in 2008, the population started to drop again. People stopped asking how the bats were doing. I had become Isaac, “that doom-and-gloom guy.” Instead I had to tell them even when they didn’t ask: “There’s twenty-five bats.” “There’s twelve bats, max.” “There’s no more than seven bats.” Today, Mayor, there are five.

Surely the bats are a worthy cause for us to all rally around. The bat colonies are shrinking, make no mistake. An irrational fear of bats should not overcome a rational concern for their decline. Bats are as essential as any other creature in this city and the fact they eat insects makes their species our natural ally. Bats eat the midge, moth, and mosquito. In the absence of bats we get genuine scares like more disease-spreading bugs. The long, ultrathin webbed fingers of their wings can pivot the bat through hairpin turns—“wings like bits of umbrella,” Lawrence called them. No doubt any vampire would prefer a bat’s more agile form to anything human. They can speed sightless through dense forest canopies. The bat’s unprepossessing face, covered in mouse hair, with dish-like cat ears, a lurid, pink pig’s snout over a wolf’s muzzle and alligator teeth—we fear that alien face might still resemble too much our own. Like the jungle ape, shedding snake, or domesticated dog, the bat is close spiritual kin. Nocturnal, the bat socializes the same way it sees, by ear, and sleeps hanging upside-down in tight, grotesque bunches. Blind like Borges, bats see the world through echoes: this fact alone. But besides that, bats are, in their dark unwholesome beauty, a source of inspiration. For the poet Charles Baudelaire, hope is “like a bat.” The only mammal that can fly. We must try harder to protect them.

Sincerely,
ISAAC MIRROR ▾



COMING TO CANADA

MEMORY MOSAIC

BY JANA PRIKRYL

My family fled Czechoslovakia in 1980. Following a year in a cramped apartment in Upper Austria, we ended up in southern Ontario, where my dad, an engineer, had received a job offer. We were refugees with a few suitcases and a thousand dollars from an acquaintance in Frankfurt, but once we landed at Pearson International Airport, in May, 1981, there was a stable future ahead of us. I was six years old. My memories of that time are numerous but hard to enlarge into stories; they’re like individual droplets that together form a kind of cloud, an atmosphere in which my Czech self transformed into my English-speaking self.

I don’t remember my first months, repeating kindergarten with kids who were younger than me but could actually communicate with one another. This fog clears by the last day of school, when each of us was allowed to take home one item from the classroom. I remember seizing my favorite book, *Little Raccoon and the Thing in the Pool*, about a shy raccoon who’s scared of his own reflection and overcomes his fear by smiling down at the raccoon in the water.

I remember that when the (English immigrant) real-estate agent who sold my parents our first house came over to celebrate, she brought with her the most spectacular thing I’d ever tasted: Kentucky Fried Chicken in a bucket.

I remember my (Macedonian immigrant) Grade 2 teacher, Mrs. Keevil, whom I loved and who, seeing how I was bullied at recess, proposed something miraculous: that I spend each recess with her in the classroom.

I remember Claire, whose (Scottish immigrant) mother knew my mom and

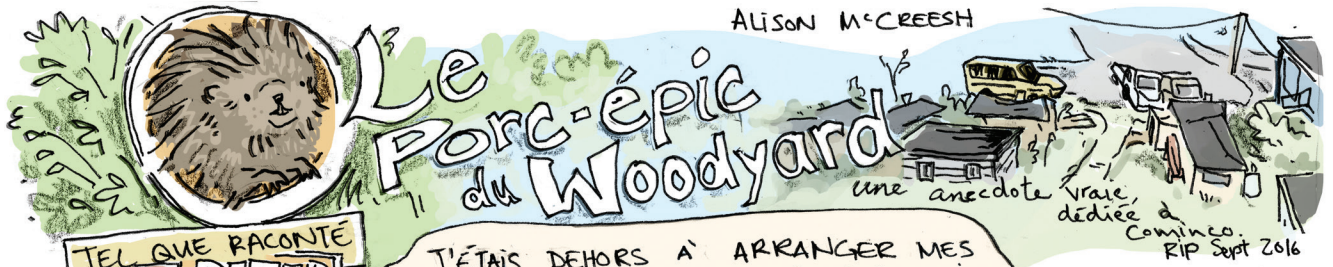
had probably told her daughter to be nice to me. Claire, a year older, beautiful and popular, was a totally benign Emma to my clueless Harriet. For reasons that still mystify me, she became my best friend, initiating me into the North American rituals of sleepovers and pool parties and cereal for breakfast and, most exotic of all, drowsy churchgoing on Sunday mornings.

I remember the (Chilean immigrant) doctor who treated my scoliosis and helped my mom—whose Ph.D. in metallurgy was gathering dust—get a job at the local university.

I remember one of my first Halloweens, when I decided to be the Princess of Mars. I cut out that title, in bubble letters, from green felt and sewed it onto an old purple sweater. Green tights, purple leg warmers, and a sequined mask completed the perfectly unconscious reference to my alienness.

I remember the (Welsh immigrant) friend of my parents who took care of me and my stitches for a few weeks after I’d been in a car accident, while my mom was in the hospital with breast cancer.

Recalling these moments of precariousness countered by acts of kindness, what stands out is how many were the work of Canadians who were themselves immigrants. The terrible irony of vilifying immigrants—now that nativism is seizing large parts of the world—is that they are precisely the people who tend to make the country they join a more generous and caring place. More diverse, yes, and in incalculable ways more cohesive. My impression of immigrating to Canada in the early eighties is that everyone we met believed this to be true. ▾



TEL QUE RACONTE
PAR **PETER**

J'ÉTAIS DEHORS À ARRANGER MES
SCULPTURES QUAND, DU COIN DE L'ŒIL,
JE VOIS PASSER QUELQUE CHOSE.

PENDANT UNE SECONDE,
JE PENSE QUE C'EST LE PETIT
CHIEN DES ROCHERS...

MAIS NON!

C'EST UN
PORC-ÉPIC!

PIS LÀ, COMME SI DE RIEN
N'ÉTAIT, IL RENTRE CHEZ COMINCO.

TU SAIS COMME IL LAISSE
TOUJOURS SA PORTE OUVERTE.

PENDANT UN INSTANT, JE RESTE
SURPRIS, PUIS SOUDAIN JE ME SOUVIENS
QUE SOPHIE EST EN VISITE CHEZ COMINCO.

SOPHIE!

SOPHIE!

IL FAUT QUE JE LA SORTE DE LÀ AVANT QU'IL
N'ARRIVE UN MALHEUR!!

A.M.

TEL QUE RACONTÉ

PAR

J'ÉTAIS BIEN TRANQUILLE DANS LA CHAMBRE DU FOND QUAND J'ENTENDS TOUT UN BARDAS DANS LE VESTIBULE.

Y'A PETER QUI EST LÀ, PIS QUI TIRE SUR LE COLLIER DE SOPHIE.

Y'EST CON OU QUOI ?!

CHAPEAU!

SOPHIE, C'EST UN BON CHIEN, MAIS C'EST AUSSI UN TRÈS GROS CHIEN. ELLE A DES PETITES OBSESSIONS, COMME LES CHAPEAUX. JE VOUS L'AI DÉJÀ DIT. PIS LÀ, PETER DANS SA MAISON, QUI TIRE SUR SON COLLIER, AVEC UN CHAPEAU !!!

PORC-ÉPIC!

CHAPEAU

GRRR

GRRR

PORC-ÉPIC

LE CRISS DE CHAPEAU!

FRÂNCHEMENT.

JE RÉUSSIS FINALEMENT À FAIRE SORTIR PETER,

ET À LUI FAIRE ENLEVER SON CHAPEAU.

UN PORC-ÉPIC ?

CHEZ-NOUS ?

T'AURAI'S DÙ LE DIRE.

ÇA FAIT QUE JE LAISSE SOPHIE À PETER, PUIS JE PRENDS MON BÂTON DE MARCHÉ ET JE PARS À LA RECHERCHE DU PORC-ÉPIC.

ÇA PREND PAS TROP LONGTEMPS QUE JE LE TROUVE.

SUR LA TABLE, À REGARDER DEHORS.

TOUT DOUCEMENT, JE PRENDS MON BÂTON ET JE LUI OUVRE LA FENÊTRE.

IL SAUTE PAR LA FENÊTRE,

PAS STRESSÉ DU TOUT.

IL PASSE TRANQUILLEMENT DEVANT CHEZ BATISTE,

PUIS DEVANT CHEZ-VOUS,

PUIS IL DISPARÂIT DANS LES FOINS.

THE YOUNG TAXIDERMIST OF ALBERTA

Where some see barbarism, Levi Wiebe sees connection.

BY RICHARD KELLY KEMICK

Coaldale, Alberta, is a small southern town that not only puts up its Easter decorations at the beginning of January, but also leaves its *KEEP CHRIST IN CHRISTMAS* signs hanging alongside them. Top Notch Taxidermy is one of the town's largest buildings in which hockey isn't played. Founded in 1987, the studio has grown into one of the country's most successful full-service taxidermy studios, meaning it tans, mounts, and stages animal hides. Its Web site features dozens of photos of prize-winning productions, set on a black background littered with multicoloured fonts. Most of the photographs are of animals, but the occasional human sneaks in. These anthro-photos are taken in the immediate aftermath of the kill, the hunters still dressed in camouflage, making their heads looked unattached and mounted on the backdrop—a foreshadowing of what will soon happen to the accompanying deer, elk, or otherworldly antelope with long, corkscrewing horns. There also are photos of Kevin and Kelly Wiebe, the studio's husband-and-wife owners, and of Levi, their son and heir apparent.

Top Notch's highway-facing wall features a looming two-storey mural of Canadian big game, from which a five-metre-high ram head surveys the streets.

I pulled in front and asked a passerby if I could park on the road.

"Park where you want," she said. "It's a free country here," her last word turning a truism tongue-bitingly political.

At 8:45 A.M., the winter sun already had resigned to failure. I grew up in southern Alberta, and recently moved back, from Vancouver. I realized how quickly I'd grown accustomed to West Coast comforts. Here, the air is so dry it hurts, and as I walked from my vehicle, the wind blew my eyes into glass. At the studio's front door, I peered up at the ram

and felt it not so much looking at but through me.

A robotic chime sounded as I entered, and Levi emerged from the back, smiling as he introduced himself. He was wearing a plaid shirt with the top four buttons undone. I, too, had opted for a plaid shirt that day (one I'd lain out the night before, a midnight substitution for my first choice of a plain white collared one), but mine was buttoned to the throat.

Levi guided me to the showroom, which was crammed with more than a hundred and twenty-five individual displays of wildlife. High on the showroom's eastern wall, between the caribou and rams, was an ibex. I once wrote a short story about an ibex, but had never seen one in real life. I was unsure if this counted.

"They live in Europe, right?" I asked Levi, recalling my story's French countryside setting.

"They do," he said, "but I got this one in Kyrgyzstan."

Kyrgyzstan is a former Soviet satellite. I heard "Kurdistan," the war-torn region of northern Iraq and eastern Syria.

"Levi, isn't it, like, super dangerous there?"

"I suppose, but I was fine."

"In Kurdistan?"

"Yeah. Kyrgyzstan."

"Isn't Isis there?" I asked.

Levi shrugged: "They're everywhere."

"But, like, mainly in Kurdistan."

"In Kyrgyzstan? Really?"

"I thought so. But I don't know a lot about Kurdistan."

"Neither did I," he said, "until I went."

We paused, both aware something was wrong, but not sure what.

"So what did you do there besides hunt?"

"Saw some historical sites. I also enjoy city centres—markets, mostly."

His casual bravery confounded me. While the United States infantry had altogether abandoned the region, Levi was strolling through its bazaars, asking directions to ancient cities, nibbling pecans, and sniffing grapefruits.

"Did you stuff the ibex yourself?"

Levi nodded.

"I wanted him as I found him."

I thought he meant alive, but, as he explained, he meant atop a cliff.

I looked up at the animal, its protracted horns almost touching the showroom's ceiling. Its hooves were perched precariously on a shelf of fake rock, and if its eyes hadn't shone with such confidence, I'd have worried the animal might slip and plummet onto us.

I was so taken with the ibex that I almost missed the sasquatch. It appeared to swagger across the showroom floor—mounted mid-stride, arms swinging, like the infamous photo—an impressive assembly of shoulder, neck, and bad teeth. It towered over us, at eight and a half feet tall, half the size of Michelangelo's *David*, but twice as impressive.

"He's for sale," Levi said, "and we've had a couple offers."

He told me the asking price was fifty-thousand dollars, an amount that might seem exorbitant in another province, but was perfectly reasonable here, especially when marketed to a uniquely Albertan demographic: Prairie royalty. Prairie royalty live like they simultaneously have all the money in the world and none at all. They own three trucks, a couple of motorbikes, and property in Fernie, but they haven't seen an optometrist in ten years. The men wear wrap-around sunglasses, go shirtless at the gym, and wield an inordinate amount of power in provincial politics. The women dress like endangered animals and have the most beautiful hair imaginable.

I caught Levi watching me scribble this

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LITIA FLEMING



Levi Wiebe, in the Top Notch Taxidermy showroom. "Most people think it's such a dark art," he said.

into my notebook, and I snapped it shut with shame. The more I stared at the sasquatch, the more I saw its value: why spend hundreds of thousands on an Emily Carr painting when you can't even drape your distressed leather jacket across its muscular arm?

The showroom's southern wall held the decapitated heads of more than twenty pronghorn and mule deer, as well as a bison, a moose, a black bear, and some turkeys—breathless, every one. In the centre of the floor, an adult bull elk strutted across a base of deadfall and grass. Levi pointed at the small stage and told me this is called “habituating”: the taxidermic inclusion of the ecosystem. I asked him where the foliage comes from.

“We get the driftwood from a family cabin,” he said, brushing his hand through a sprig of grass. “And for the wildflowers, I'll spend a weekend in the coulees with a pair of scissors.”

At twenty-eight, Levi Wiebe was only a year older than me. But standing beside him, I felt like a child. It was only when I restrained myself from casually propping an arm atop the elk's rack that I realized how badly I wanted him to like me.

“You're a vegetarian?” he asked.

I had no idea how he knew this.

On the western wall was a collection of African animals. I gaped at the wildebeest, gazelles, and antelope. I asked what they were called. Levi listed their species, and I realized he'd misunderstood me. I'd meant their Christian names.

Modern taxidermy emerged at the turn of the nineteenth century, closely mirroring the Victorian era's own rigid and lifeless moral structure. The term “taxidermy” derives from the Greek *taxis*, meaning movement, and *derma*, meaning skin. The combination of these terms shows that the animal's husk composes only half the art: the insinuation of movement is what differentiates the craft from simple preservation. The tanning, embalming, and dehydrating of pelts has been practiced for an unknowably long time, but none of these styles of preservation consider the charisma of their animal subject as taxidermy does.

The profession of taxidermy, from the time of its conception, has attracted the bizarre, the enigmatic, and those with an

oddly empathetic relationship with the wild world. There's the American Carl Akeley, the father of modern taxidermy, who once was mauled by a leopard but managed to beat it to death, then carried the big cat back to camp and taxidermied it himself for a museum exhibit. There's the British Rowland Ward, who literally wrote the record book on big game trophies. More recently, the Swedish Monica Silfverstolpe laboured so long on restoring a road-kill lynx she slipped a red cardboard heart into its chest before stitching up the sternum.

Like all fine art, taxidermy has its own parlance. A finished piece is not a “stuffing” but a “mount”; an animal is not “hunted”—or, as I'd observed to Levi, “murdered most foul”—but “taken.” The verb “to naturalize” expresses the taxidermist's objective in depicting the animal as sentient, and in this sense, a successful mount conveys the self-same sentience the animal previously was believed not to possess, thus making it killable.

In Top Notch's backyard sits a tiny, sloping garage—one that, if you closed your eyes, you would no doubt remember from the nightmares of your childhood.

“It's going to smell in here,” Levi said as he reached for the doorknob.

The hinges whined theatrically, and we were greeted by a darkness so thick it seemed liquid. Levi's warning was apt. It did smell. Pungent and acidic, like an old folk's home: not of death, but rather of life preserved past the point of death.

Levi found the light switch and the fluorescents flickered on. In the centre of the room was a wooden table worn smooth by years of oil oozed from skin. Off in the corner was a separate shower room with a drain gaping grotesquely in the concrete floor. All around us, on the whitewashed walls, hung mounts finished but forsaken by their owners, the bills unpaid.

“This is where,” Levi said, slapping the table with his Ove Glove hand, “we salt the skins.”

“Do you skin the animals yourself?”

“No,” he said. “Hunters dress them in the field. When you kill, like, a mountain goat, it's usually too heavy to piggyback down a ridge.”

I was about to ask what exactly a hunter would dress a dead mountain goat in, but Levi had moved on.

“We salt them twice and then put them in here.”

He turned to a door behind him, which I'd assumed was an emergency exit, and tapped in a pass code. We walked into a cold storage room, dark except for the light that seeped in behind us. As my eyes adjusted, I saw uncountable rows of steel shelves packed with rolled-up skins. Instead of being astonished by the sheer scale, I was struck by how small they were. I approached a hide, which Levi told me was a mule buck. An animal that weighted over a hundred kilograms had been reduced to a couple of softball-size pieces of skin.

Levi left the storage room as I stood locked in thought. I scampered after him, terrified the door would latch behind him and the horror movie of my life would begin.

“Once the skins are rehydrated,” he said, back at the table, “we pickle them.”

Against the wall were three vats, within which sheets of fur were floating.

“They soak for a bit, and then they're tanned.”

As Levi explained the tanning process—something to do with shrinking the follicles to hold each hair—my gaze wandered to the abandoned taxidermy. A fox, a couple of fish, some geese. All of their eyes, dusted by time, held a look of utter betrayal. Why did you do it? they seemed to say.

“Any questions?” Levi asked.

I pointed to one of the abandoned salmon (trout? tuna? shark?) and asked if it's trickier to mount fish.

“No, but we don't do fish anymore. It got too . . . I dunno.”

Levi glanced at my notebook, my pen quivering with anticipation.

“You know how fish people are.”

I clicked my pen. I nodded. I knew.

I assumed that after the tanning stage we would flee the garage, but I was mistaken. The true terror was yet to come.

“Most skin,” Levi said, “is too thick to be worked. So this tool”—he patted what looked like a small band saw—“is called a flesher.”

Levi, boasting the mime skills of a mid-century Frenchman, proceeded to demonstrate how he holds the skin taut against the spinning blade. I could almost see the make-believe hide turn transparent between his calloused yet dexterous hands.

Earlier, Levi told me that his long-term



Some mounts are “habitated”: the taxidermic inclusion of an ecosystem.

girlfriend (they met in high school) worked at the University of Lethbridge. As a result, Levi often attends university functions and rubs suited shoulders with donors. Watching him toil in a shed destined to be featured on one of Canada Post's Haunted Canada stamps, I had a hard time imagining him in any other habitat.

"At those university functions," I asked, interrupting his demonstration, "what do you tell people you do for a living?"

He seemed confused by my question.

"I tell them."

"But doesn't everyone ask the same stupid questions?" I wondered, not realizing at the time that I had been asking the same stupid questions all day, including, "Do you skin the animals yourself?" "Do the skeletons stay in?" and "Do you stuff pets?"

"I appreciate the chance to tell my story," he said. "Most people think it's such a dark art."

Keats believed beauty occurs through the unification of contradiction: a snowstorm in the desert, a horse with wings, a God that both saves and slays. There are two sides to Levi Wiebe—the side that spends all afternoon in the Badlands sun, snipping wild sage, and the side that returns to the shadows and hunches over his fleshier, his hands full of menace and tenderness.

We exited the garage. I chose not to ask what the shower room was for.

Back in the main building I received a tour of Top Notch's well-lit workshop, where the cured skins are fitted onto forms made of polyurethane foam the colour of jaundice.

"Do you ever think of the factory in China that makes these things?" I asked, as I tossed an erect meerkat between my hands.

"They're made in America, actually," Levi said.

He showed me the supplier's phone-book-thick catalogue. I flipped through the glossy pages and looked at every species that made it onto the ark. Each furless animal seemed startlingly human, whether it was a cougar reposing or a dingo pouncing or a koala nestled into a forked trunk. When I mentioned this, Levi told me of the time he naturalized an adult male baboon, and how his stomach squeezed as he gloved the primate's fingers onto the awaiting hand.

"Have you ever seen a black bear without skin?" he asked.

I let the question linger.

"Not that I remember."

"They look exactly like us," he said, "especially if the head is gone."

Skinning an animal, such as a black bear, is surprisingly simple. The animal is rolled onto its back, and a shallow incision is made from anus to jaw. Another cut runs from each hind heel, up the thigh, returning to the anus. For the forearms, a crucifying cut is made from the chest to both palms. Most hunters then fracture off the feet, and the hide is peeled from the body. A thin rind of fat underlies the dermis, making the entire process near bloodless, as the black pelt is pared back to reveal a saintly white corpse. The final step is to guillotine the head at the Atlas vertebrae. Top Notch's clients are afforded a generous amount of mutilations thanks to Levi's talent. He can conceal knife slips and hacked edges within the fur's natural folds, and can purse the lips of puncture wounds. On his workbench was a warthog (one collected by his mother) perforated with so much buckshot that when you held the hide to the light, it resembled a map of the constellations.

A mould will never suit a skin perfectly, so to best sculpt the musculature Levi sandpapers away some parts of the foam while moulding clay onto others. Once the body fits, he sews the hide in place and slips in a plastic nose and ears to substitute for cartilage. A pair of glass eyes is inserted, and at this point Levi glues on eyelids and must consider the ethos of the piece. A bison bust should convey calm power and therefore have a lid that rests low on the eyeball; a bugling elk would have a slightly recessed lid; and a wolverine mid-maul would have full rings of white around the iris. A centimetre off and everything rings false.

Once the skin sets, final adjustments are made, and the nose is painted with a fine-bristled brush.

"Do you paint the eyes too?" I asked.

"Kind of," Levi said, and led me to a toolbox brimming with different-sized eyes, all of them shining and useless. "I take a micro-brush and touch on a water-based gloss to make them look wet."

Everyone has seen bad taxidermy: the moulting fur, the tortured posture, the

impotent growl. Worst of all is a failing of the eyes—not just a lopsided but a lifeless gaze, one that betrays the stuffing inside. The care Levi takes in perfecting the eyes affirms his belief in an animal's inner self, that it is possible to brush a spirit into a dry stare. That's why Top Notch doesn't mount pets: it's not that your best friend would look soulless, but rather it would have the soul of someone else.

Top Notch recently has ventured into the replica antler market. When a particularly prized buck is collected, the hunter may request a reproduction of its rack. The reproduction is created by coating the original antlers in a chemical substance that gels into a wobbly mould. Another chemical substance is poured into this shell and allowed to harden, after which the mould is husked back to reveal the twinned set of antlers. Once a replica rack sets, Levi airbrushes the faux bone. If the antlers are pre-rut, he also affixes velvet. The final product is indistinguishable from the original. But who wants fake antlers?

"Usually hunting partners," Levi said.

As we sat at the store's desktop computer he brought up a photo of four deer heads, each with a rack that could hold a hipster's hat shop worth of fedoras. "This," he said, wiggling his mouse over the deer at the far right, "is the original."

He told me a story of a hunter who one season found the shed antlers of a record buck. He and a friend tracked the buck for the entire next year, finally collecting it while it wore a new season's rack. The original shed antlers

were mounted on a deer head that was donated by a hunter who only wanted the animal's meat. Levi then duplicated both sets of antlers, and each replica was attached to other donated heads.

"He wanted both himself and his hunting buddy to have the antlers that brought them together," Levi said. I couldn't help but think it would've all been easier if the two men had just said they loved each other.

The popularity of false antlers baffled me. The prevalent defence of taxidermy is that it immortalizes memory—Levi himself used this defence when I asked why he needed to kill the ibex—but doesn't this defence disappear when the memory is manufactured? If a photograph can't substitute for a kill, why can



a chemical creation? When I asked Levi this, he rubbed his face.

"It's not that simple," he said. "Someone else would've killed this buck, and they wouldn't have had such a connection with it."

Back on the computer, Levi showed me a close-up of a fake antler.

"I don't like to use the word 'perfect,'" he said, "but it's not far."

It was the only time all day he hadn't been humble.

Earlier, in the shadow of the sasquatch, Levi told me about the toll killing takes on him.

"The animal doesn't always die right away," he said, "and it's sad."

"So why do it?"

He told me about older hunters, like his grandfather, who've had the ardour wither within them. He told me about placing your hand inside paw prints. He told me about standing over an animal and weeping. He told me many things that didn't answer my question.

"Wouldn't it be easier," I asked, "to just stop?"

"Sometimes I want to," he said, running a hand through his hair, "but it's hard to explain."

I turned back to the sasquatch and noticed that even though I stood at ball-level, the beast was sexlessly smooth—like Milton's angels. Perhaps we would all be holy if we were born without passion. Because isn't it the nature of passion to reveal our best and worst selves, mounted for the world to see?

"Do all hunters get sad?" I asked.

Levi said no, a few do it just for the blood.

How could he tell the difference?

"Something in their eyes."

There are those who find taxidermy barbaric. Some days I am one of them. Consider the Minnesota dentist, or the B.C. huntress Jacine Jadresko, or the Jeep I once passed in the backcoun-

try with a slack-jawed wolf strapped to its hatch. Levi told me he has a giraffe bust on the docket. Some airlines have adopted a ban on the "big five" animals and no longer transport lion, leopard, elephant, rhino, and Cape buffalo hides. In August, 2015, during the fallout from Cecil the lion, Air Canada announced its participation in the ban. Several international airlines still fly the Big Five, but their only Canadian stops are Vancouver and Toronto, so hunters must

contempt. Levi saw the statement as a vindication of his life's work, but I couldn't get past how the logic assumes the animal shares a human view of the afterlife—that it looks down from hyena heaven, at its mannequined body snarling from above the lintel, and thinks, "Frankly, Elgin, I'm honoured."

Levi and I ended our day in Top Notch's staff lounge, replete with a Keurig, pool table, and antler chandelier. The lounge was located in a loft above the showroom, overlooking this Albertan archive of the world. The busts and bodies seemed small from this vantage. The black bear was more diligent than savage, the bucking wildebeest more fraught than free. The wall of deer heads stared like Shakespearean kings killed for their crowns. Even the sasquatch looked delicate enough to love.

I asked Levi what he was most proud of. "Your ibex?"

"No," he said, "mysheep."

He told me the story of how he and his father trekked for days through northern Alberta, having already failed for seven years straight to put a bighorn in their sights. He pointed to a ram skull on the ground and in the corner. The white simplicity of it.

How wonderful to have met a person who so dazzlingly surpasses your expectations. Someone thoughtful, well travelled, and who considered the aesthetic implications of art on a nine-to-five basis.

People amaze me. They collect dragonflies, buy white bread for pigeons, and name their cats after dead prime ministers. People fishtail on the range roads to take a picture of a pronghorn in the distant soy. They wear fake fur jackets and red leather boots. They grow patio avocados. They invent astrological signs like a mountain-serpent sea-goat all to understand fate. People limbo, scuba, and downward-dog. People love something so much, they rip the skin right off it.



Levi Wiebe paints the eye of a bull moose.

now truck their kills into Alberta.

Stencilled on Top Notch's front wall is a quotation from Elgin Gates, one of the most prolific hunters of the twentieth century. Gates, in defence of trophy hunting, wrote it "is a more noble and fitting end than dying on some lost and lonely ledge where the scavengers will pick his bones, and his magnificent horns will weather away and be lost forever." Levi took great solace in this quotation. I read it with suspicion, even

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Is it the act of killing we find distasteful, or is it the reminder?

I consider what I have killed: a couple of fish, insects, a dozen mice, and a chipmunk my dog caught, broke its leg, and lost interest in. I suppose also the hundreds of farm animals that came from my twenty-three years of omnivorism. And those chickadees I hit while driving. That gopher (slingshot), that sparrow (badminton racket), and that frog (my bare hands). How far should I extend this: to the oil slick that smothered the seal, the six-pack ring that noosed the turtle? The list is longer than I'd assumed, and I hold taxidermy responsible for this mortal accounting.

Taxidermy is, at heart, the art of consumption. It is the art of greed made tangible, of watching the arrowhead of geese migrate across the sky and wanting to hold them still and suspended and forever yours. If the aim of art is to communicate a human soul, then perhaps taxidermy is the most honest art form we have, as it speaks to our base desire: to keep what's beautiful, beautiful—and find a way to be close to it. Who amongst us cannot extend King Midas a certain level of mercy? Who would keep their hands to themselves if they knew there was a golden world out there, all within reach, just waiting to be touched?

I took the secondary highway back to Calgary, as the wind dragged long lines of snow atop the asphalt. A couple of kilometres ahead of me, a coyote jogged across the road. I pulled over to watch it. It was making its way west, trotting into a shorn wheat field, but no matter how far it got, I could still track it.

What versions of ourselves should we present to the world, and what versions should be hidden or subdued or abandoned in some haunted shed? What to consume and be consumed by? It's a choice that gets my hands wringing in the time-honoured tradition of those who do not fully know themselves. But it's a choice Levi made when he first hovered above the fleshier, thinning his skins until the sun shone through.

I watched the coyote for so long that entire lifetimes seemed to pass. But after rubbing the water from my eyes, I realized what I'd been staring at was a distant boulder. The coyote had long disappeared. ▮



COMING TO CANADA

POSSIBILITIES

BY ANN Y. K. CHOI

When my family moved to Canada, in 1975, we lived in a seven-storey government subsidized building in North Toronto. I was seven years old. One day, I stepped out of the elevator and ran into Ian, a boy with red hair who lived in the apartment across the hall, where most days the TV could be heard blaring from behind his front door. When I turned to walk away, Ian stretched out his arms and legs to prevent me from passing. He was smaller than me, so I pushed him aside and headed home.

He was waiting for me the next day. As I was about to push him again, I saw his hand reach into a pocket and pull out a wrench. Its metal tip grazed my ear as he swung it. We wrestled and I managed to get on top of him, suspending the wrench high in the air, beyond his reach. The elevator doors opened and a man and woman exited. They leaped at me, forcing the wrench from my hand. As the woman yelled I stood helpless, unable to offer a defence because of my lack of English. Stunned at the twist of events, I wanted to shrink into myself when the woman grabbed my chin and drew my face into hers. My stomach churned seeing the hostility in her eyes. Why was she forcing me to look at her? Such brazen eye contact between a child and adult was considered an unthinkable expression of disrespect in Korea.

I felt humiliated by what happened and I couldn't tell anyone. Instead, I avoided the elevator, and for the rest of my years in that building I climbed five flights of stairs to get in and out. I wondered how I could feel smart in one language and stupid in another. I had sat cramped in our living room with my

neighbours back in South Korea, watching professional wrestling and *The Six Million Dollar Man* on our block's only television—but those shows were dubbed into Korean. I had a warped notion that all Americans had super powers, their vulnerability limited to bionics that failed in sub-zero temperatures, but it never dawned on my young mind that they spoke another language.

I hated English. All the odd sounds I tried to mimic left me exhausted and frustrated. Nothing in my new surroundings made sense. Books suddenly were filled with pictures of blond girls climbing and falling down hills with boys named Jack. I didn't see any images of the foods I ate or the games I used to play. I discovered that by changing my thoughts, I could change how I felt. In class, rather than allow myself to feel stupid in English, I escaped into daydreams and memories that took me back to my home in Chungju. Music turned out to be a great distraction. One of my happiest "discoveries" was finding a collection of vinyl records in our local library. I spent countless hours listening to the soundtrack of *Mary Poppins* and dancing to "A Spoonful of Sugar" and "Chim Chim Cher-ee." I even learned to say "supercalifragilisticexpialidocious" to convince my parents just how absurd English sounded. I moved on to Billy Joel and started singing along to "Piano Man" and "The Ballad of Billy the Kid" without any real sense of the songs' meanings. That hardly mattered—the music lifted my spirits and helped me to relax. Although I didn't know why, I sensed an underlying sadness or angst in Joel's lyrics and melodies that made me oddly happy. I can still picture the look

of disapproval on my teacher's face when I started using some of my newly learned slang. Her displeasure made me like Billy Joel even more. I quickly went on to memorize all of his songs, determined that if I had to learn English, I would do so on my terms.

Things changed in my third year of school in Canada. My new teacher—an immigrant herself—was the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen. She had long dark hair, a soft voice, and shiny shoes with heels that added inches to her already stunning height. We played games and used music to learn new words. On very cold days she asked me to clean the blackboards during recess. I accepted her invitation happily, though I knew my flimsy jacket had made her concerned about me being out in the cold.

When this teacher told me that English was a beautiful language, my mind opened to that possibility. Seeing the elegance of the cursive alphabet solidified that belief. I practised diligently, enjoying the feel of the sweeping motion of connecting the letters. As my penmanship improved, so did my confidence. I developed a sense of urgency to learn the English language and became an avid reader. I even allowed myself the dream of becoming a writer.

June came, and a deep sadness settled when I realized I'd be losing my beloved teacher. To my surprise, she slipped me a piece of paper with her address and a note: "You can write to me and keep practising your English." I wrote to her in my best cursive, and to my delight, she wrote back. We continue to write each other after forty years. In one of my happiest letters to her, I shared the news that my debut novel was about to be published. ▽

THE FICTION

NAMESAKE

BY NAPATSI FOLGER

It was early August and Qaqqasiq had spent most of the summer playing by herself. Boredom had driven her to this moment with some of her schoolmates. She had seen the other kids taking turns racing bikes up and down the dirt road in front of her house, and worked up the courage to join them. They sniggered and whispered among themselves as she slinked over.

"Can I bike too?"

"You can race with us if you do something first," one boy said.

She looked at the ragged blue and yellow bike with envy. It was in rough shape and covered in dust, but it sure beat no bike at all. She had been adopted by her aunt and uncle who already had four children of their own and little money for bicycles.

"What do you want me to do?" she asked with resolution in her voice.

"Huck this rock at that window."

The boy pointed at a nearby house. They all knew the old man who lived in *that* house. He was Qaqqasiq the *angakkuq*, the only practising shaman in Iqaluit; little Qaqqasiq knew this because her aunt had complained about him many times. Her family were devout Anglicans and her aunt had feared him as a child, after the local priest warned that he was a "conjurer of evil spirits."

She'd overheard her aunt complaining to her grandmother about him one day after church. "It's 1983 for crying out loud! Inuit don't use *magic* anymore."

Qaqqasiq hesitated, but thought about spending another day playing in the dirt by herself and picked up the large stone. The others jeered behind her as she took a running start and launched the fist-sized rock through the dark window of the old shack. The pane was thin and made a low, hollow sound as it broke. The rock had made a large hole just before the rest of the glass fell like icicles out of the grey wooden frame. Qaqqasiq immediately felt

a surge of guilt as she realized all the windows on this side of the house had suffered the same fate. She turned to see the others racing away on their bikes and yelled out for them to wait for her. When she heard the creaking of the door she ran up the road until she couldn't see the old man's house anymore.

She knew he had heard her and, being her neighbour, he was sure to recognize her voice. She moped around the playground, worrying about what Qaqqasiq would tell her aunt and uncle, and finally dragged her feet home several hours later when she got tired and hungry. To her great surprise, nobody was angry with her, or even noticed that she had come in for dinner. For the next few days she anxiously waited for a knock at the door that never came, and soon she felt comfortable enough to leave the loud and stuffy house to play out in the sun—alone as usual.

It was a warm, bright day and Qaqqasiq, hearing the crunching of tires on gravel, shut her eyes and turned away to avoid getting a face full of the dust that was about to erupt in the wake of a 1975 Chevy pickup. When she opened her eyes again she saw trouble—her hulking cousin Miali was approaching with some friends. She braced herself for whatever was coming next. No matter what it was, she wasn't going to like it.

"Eli, you wanted to throw rocks at a dog? Look there's one!"

Miali pointed at Qaqqasiq, sneering at her as she picked up a stone. Her friends followed suit. Eli chuckled and so did most of the others, but Miali held up her hand and they fell silent. She looked angrily at Qaqqasiq's shirt, a brand new baseball tee with red sleeves and CULTURE CLUB printed across the front. Qaqqasiq's aunt had ordered it for Miali from the Sears catalog but it didn't fit.

"Take off my shirt, dog!"

"It's not yours. You're too fat! MIALIKALLAK!"

It was the simplest kind of insult—adding "fat" as a suffix to her name. It was also the wrong thing to say, but Qaqqasiq knew she was going to get beaten anyway. She might as well humiliate Miali while she could. As she held her breath in anticipation of the stoning she was about to endure, a shadow enveloped her. The others, with masks of horror on their faces, dropped their rocks, twisted back toward the road, and ran away yelling incomprehensibly. Qaqqasiq turned slowly, sensing her saviour was possibly even more frightening than her attackers. Towering over her was an ancient man with wild, white eyebrows that looked long enough to poke out his own eyes. If she had not been paralyzed with fear, she might have even wondered if that was how he had gone blind. He had milky white eyes that matched his coarse, long hair, and severe lines in his face that gave him a look of perpetual anger—it was easy to see why he was so frightening to impressionable young souls.

"*Atikuluuk*—my namesake, come in for tea," he commanded, and little Qaqqasiq followed him inside without a word.

She stood close to the door of his plywood porch trembling, until he waved his hand for her to sit down.

"How did it feel to break an old blind man's window?"

Little Qaqqasiq was confused by his tone. He sounded more curious than anything.

"Bad."

"Why did you do it?"


"So the other kids would play with me. They said I had to break your window to race bikes with them. I'm sorry."

She had her head down and was mumbling into her lap.

"You should always keep your head up when you speak. Only shame bends us

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down. When people tell you what to do or how to act, think of how it felt to break my window. Think of holding your head up and telling others about what you have done, and maybe you will make better choices in the future.”

He stood and walked to the kitchen, where there was tea already boiling on the stove. She relaxed a tiny bit when he put the chipped white tin cup in front of her and she smelled the orange pekoe—it reminded her of camping on the land with her grandmother.

“I was friends with your grandfather. He was like my brother. Did you know that he asked your mother to name you after me before he died? They were going to name you Iola, after him, but he wanted you to be strong—he wanted you to have the power.”

She remained silent, sipping her tea, unsure how to respond. They sat quietly for several long minutes, drinking.

“Sometimes I talk to you in my dreams,” she said finally.

“Yes. I have been visiting you recently. Do you have any questions for me?”

She looked at his worn face and imagined how long it had taken the wind to blow his skin into the cracked and drooping landscape that stared at her now. He wore an INUIT CIRCUMPOLAR CONFERENCE JAM! 1983 T-shirt and she noticed a small tattoo on his left forearm. It read “E.7-24” in slightly blurry sailor-blue ink.

“What’s that on your arm?”

The old man laughed, and rubbed his tattoo automatically.

“Don’t you know about E-numbers? Too young, I guess. I tattooed mine on so I would never fail to remember how the *qallunaat* treated us. People like to forget. But *angakkuit* never forget. You’ll see.”

Little Qaqqasiq, whose fear of the old man had dissipated by now, was leaning close, eager to hear all of the forbidden things Qaqqasiq the *angakkuq* had to say. Other adults had never been so frank with her before, and she wasn’t sure how long this might last. As she leaned in, she noticed the old man’s eyes change. They looked as if they could see again. His face, too, looked younger somehow. He began to speak.

“I am from Kimmirut originally, like your grandfather. That’s where we first

met the *qallunaat*. They had medicine, food, and bibles for us. It was 1941. I remember I was about your age, maybe ten or eleven when they started with the E-numbers. The government wanted to count us. Back then we were born and given only one name, but it was too confusing for them. They had tried fingerprinting everyone, but the priest said we should not be treated like criminals. Ha! Instead, they treated us like dogs. We got our Eskimo number when the R.C.M.P. officer pointed at us and wrote our name down next to the number. Then they gave us leather tags with our number stamped on it, with a hole at the top so we could wear them around our necks.”

He sighed deeply and seemed to return to the present. Qaqqasiq was shocked by this information and they sat quietly for a moment as she soaked it all in. The elder Qaqqasiq turned his head slightly toward the little girl and she saw a different face now. The madness she had imagined so many times while listening to stories about the *angakkuq*’s “black magic” was not present in this face. There were hard lines and ferocity, but she also was surprised to see kindness hidden behind his untamed hair.

“Why is everyone so scared of you? Do you do bad magic?”

“No. People are scared of me because I am different. I never stopped practising my *angakkuq* traditions, and people don’t like that. I didn’t follow them into Jisusi’s house to pray, so they convinced themselves I was a devil. There *are* bad *angakkuit*, but I don’t do that kind of magic. Mainly healing, and we Inuit need healing more than ever. Most of us just don’t know it.”

Old Qaqqasiq stood and took away their tin mugs. While he rinsed the cups, little Qaqqasiq decided to speak.

“They treat me bad. Can you teach me how to fix that?”

“Who does?”

“Everyone mostly.”

“That is because you have power and they know it. Inside themselves they know it. Come back tomorrow. I’m tired now. You are my namesake, and I will teach you how to survive.”

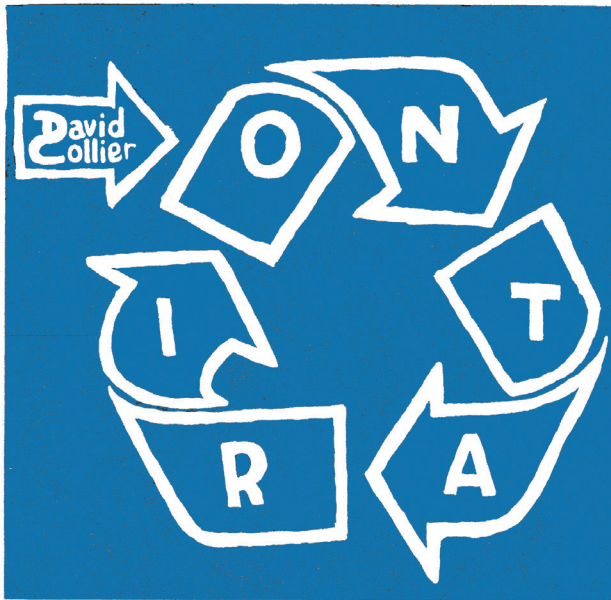
She stood up, full of a kind of excitement she had never felt before. Her fingers were tingling and she walked out of the old shack with purpose. ▽



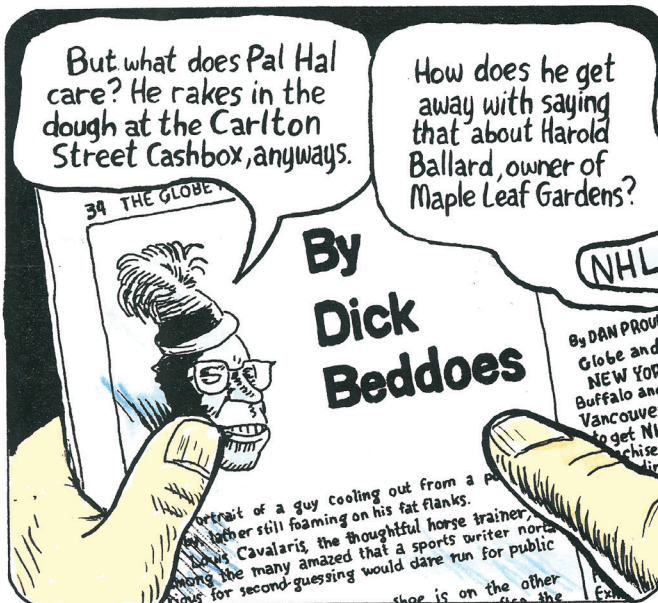
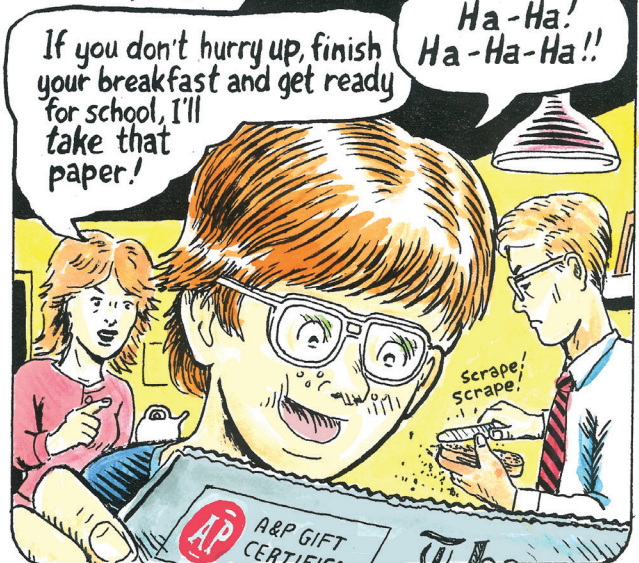
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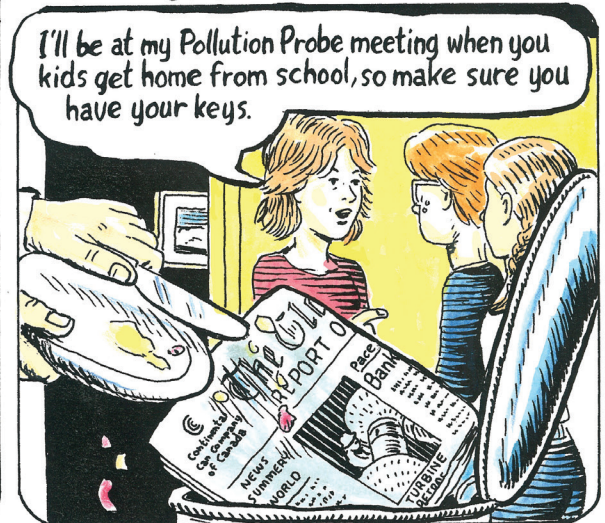
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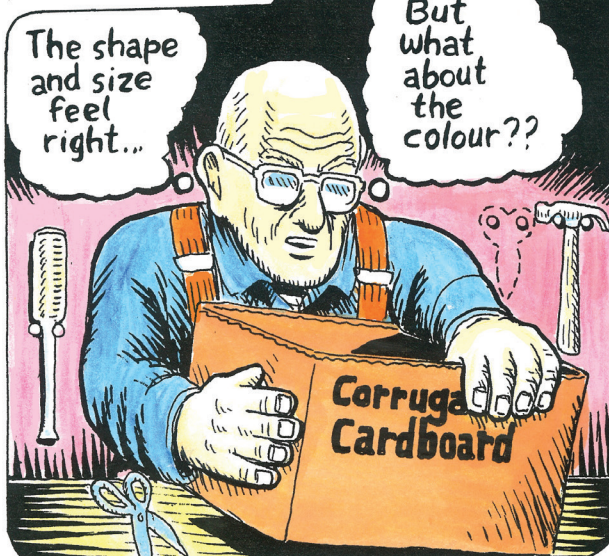
Toronto, 1960's



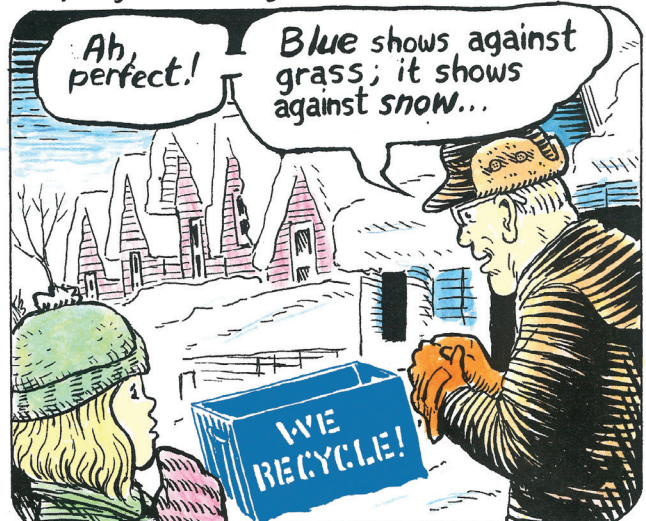
It's hard to believe now, but even in enlightened households, the daily paper just went into the trash & landfill.



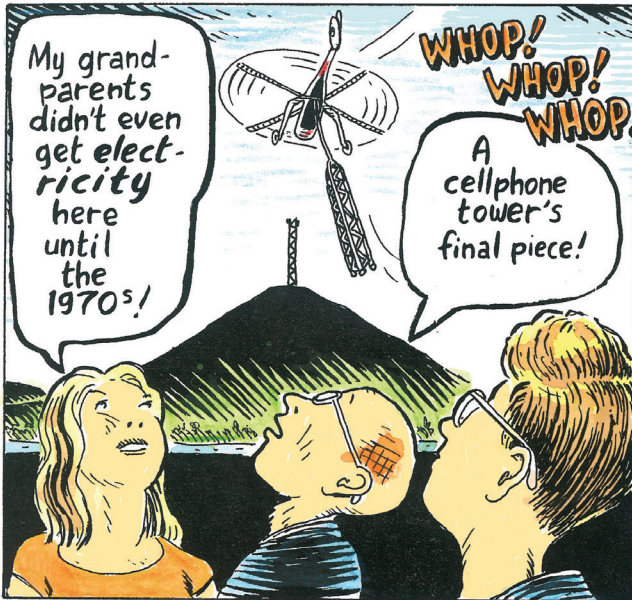
Kitchener, 1970's



Local garbageman Nyle Ludolph invents something simple, yet instantly internationally iconic - !

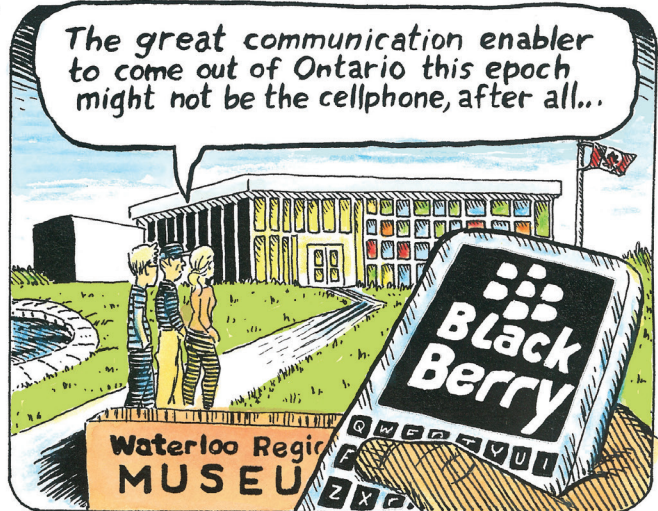
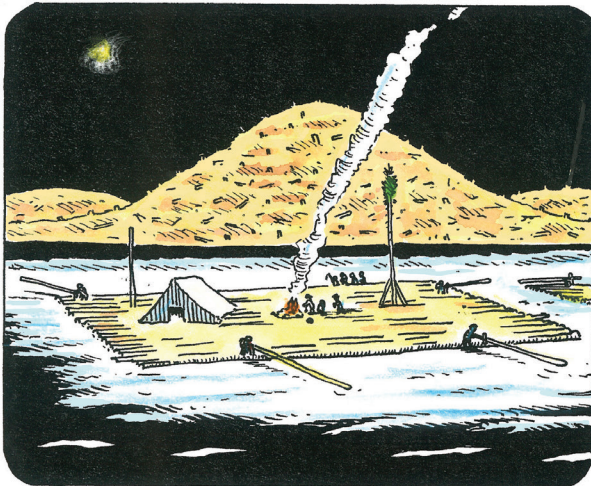


The Upper Ottawa Valley! Where my wife's mining family's presence goes back generations.



The forest around here is actually mostly second or third-growth. This river used to be busy, with flotillas heading to the mills.

History is not necessarily linear. Remember the takeaway from our visit to the Waterloo Region Museum?



But rather the Blue Box Recycling Program, which allows us to read well, without guilt, like no other scheme!



THE FEATURE

ROLLER COASTER RIDE

The Saint John Ex's ever-changing fortune.

BY CONAN TOBIAS

Forest Hills is a suburb located on the east side of Saint John, New Brunswick, in an area known as the parish of Simonds before it was amalgamated with the city, in 1967. Development of the neighbourhood began in the nineteen-fifties. It was built, as its name suggests, on a hilly range, heavily forested and dotted with fields. My parents were among the first residents of Forest Hills when, in 1958, they purchased a small, three-bedroom bungalow on Braemar Drive, a short street of twenty-five houses that runs straight along the hill's base, before curving up and to the right in its final leg. All of the neighbourhood's amenities are located adjacent to Braemar, including a convenience store, a Bank of Nova Scotia, and a red-brick strip mall that, during my youth, in the nineteen-seventies and eighties, housed a Kentucky Fried Chicken, a public library, a pool hall, a hair salon, and a Chinese food restaurant. For years, several undeveloped fields opposite this strip marked the entryway to Forest Hills. Parkway Mall opened on one of them in the mid-seventies. McAllister Place, another shopping centre, followed soon after. One portion of field that remained undeveloped ran flush against Braemar Drive's backyards, acting as a buffer between the neighbourhood and about sixty-five acres of land known as Exhibition Park. At the north end of these grounds sat several horse stables, a large wooden grandstand, and a racetrack. Toward the south was the Simonds Centennial Arena ice rink, and an equal-sized exhibition building, where car and boat shows sometimes were held. A ball field, overseen by the Simonds Lions Club, was located to the east, and easily accessed by neighbourhood children through a series of well-worn paths that led from behind many of the homes on my street. In the centre of the exhibition grounds, a paved area of approximately seven acres usually sat empty, with the exception of one week each August, when the event that gave the area its name took place.

From the year I was born, until the summer I turned seventeen, I spent the week before Labour Day at the Atlantic National Exhibition, an end-of-summer rite for the residents of Saint John, especially those who, like me, could see and hear the attractions from their house. The A.N.E. was smaller than both Toronto's Canadian National Exhibition and Vancouver's Pacific National Exhibition, but was comparable considering Saint John's population, which peaked in the nineteen-seventies, at just less than ninety thousand. The A.N.E., like all exhibitions with roots dating back to the nineteenth century, slowly shed its industrial origins and evolved into a spectacle that entertained more than it educated. There were small rides to scare children, bigger rides to scare adults, balloons to burst with darts, and clown heads to topple with baseballs. Burlesque dancers performed in an adults-only tent, and a freak show drew crowds well into the nineteen-eighties. Trailers scattered throughout the midway offered tattoos and tarot card readings. Rooty, A&W's Canadian-born Great Root Bear, roamed the grounds at least once, while his compatriot Ronald McDonald visited on a regular basis, often staying long enough to put on a show for children. Onstage entertainment ranged from popular headliners like Tommy Hunter, Ronnie Prophet, and Jeannie C. Riley to B-list travelling performers to local talent. Single girls between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five possessing "good character, poise, intelligence and beauty" competed for the crown of Miss A.N.E. Small permanent wooden buildings around the grounds' perimeter showcased work by amateur painters; homemade quilts, pies, and preserves; and various species of fish and game. The food building, like the city itself, was populated mainly by mom-and-pop vendors, supplemented with an occasional corporate retailer, such as Dairy Queen. Dozens of exhibitors and vendors set up

in the main building, across from the rink; some of them were transient, but others, like CHSJ radio and Fundy Cable television, were annual anchors.

When I was very young, I spent a lot of my exhibition time behind the booth hosted by the Canadian Red Cross Society, where my father worked as the provincial director of water safety. Every year, he spent the week educating passersby on proper paddling techniques, extolling the importance of C.P.R., and—at least once with my assistance—demonstrating life jacket safety on local television. My mother and I attended the daytime entertainment, held on a custom-built stage in the Simonds arena. Many of the afternoon acts were aimed at children. (I still own a 45 r.p.m. keepsake of Billy Earl and Henrietta the Singing Chicken, a touring ventriloquist act.) We also made frequent visits to the bingo tent, where dried corn kernels were used as card markers. I won more often than my mother did, which caused some tension and guilt when inevitably I chose a frivolous prize instead of one of the useful household items she would have preferred we take home.

I didn't like candy apples, but enjoyed a stick of pink cotton candy, which was available from a number of vendors, including one much maligned stand that looped a custom cover of "The Candy Man" non-stop for every hour the exhibition operated, and that could be heard from my house. I rode the mini-train, coasted on a burlap sack down the giant slide, crashed bumper cars, and got lost in the glass house. After some early stomach trouble on the Tilt-A-Whirl, I moved up to the Teacups, the Scrambler, and the Gravitron—a deceptively named ride that owed its popularity more to centrifugal force than gravity.

When I got older, I attended the exhibition with friends. My neighbour Andrew Gordon lived in one of the homes with a path leading directly from his yard to the fairgrounds across the swampy field. I

received a free admission pass to the Ex for years after my father retired, but sometimes Andrew and I still tried to sneak in by scaling the fence at the back of the fair. I moved up to larger rides, like the Ferris wheel, the Polar Express, the Spider, and the Pirate. Andrew insists to this day that someone fell to their death from the Zipper when a cage door opened mid-ride, but I've never been able to find any evidence of this, and I've heard similar Zipper myths from people who grew up in other parts of the country.

One year, I became obsessed with trying to win Cover the Spot, a midway game in which the mark is given five metal disks to drop onto a red painted circle. To win,

Ride tickets cost sixty cents each, but could be bought in advance from Sobeys grocery stores for half price. Entertainment was provided by Kelly Garver, a pop and country fiddle player who had been Miss Michigan 1986, and a juggler who performed at the White House for the first President Bush. The fair ran for two extra days to mark the occasion, and attendance reached a ten-year high.

The concept of national exhibitions to showcase technological innovations and advancements originated in France, in the late eighteenth century. In Saint John, exhibitions, fairs, and circuses have been a part of the local culture since at

Canada's first industrial exhibition. Commercial transportation methods were still limited, so most of the exhibits displayed locally made wares. This sounds narrowly focused, but a considerable number of goods were made within the city limits. Saint John soon would be Canada's fourth largest city, after Montreal, Toronto, and Quebec—the 1861 census reported a population of 27,000, made up in large part of British and Irish immigrants who found work in the city's successful sawmill, agricultural, shipbuilding, and fishery industries.

In 1867, the year of Confederation, an exhibition was held on City Road, at the Victoria Skating Rink, a round building



The Atlantic National Exhibition midway in 1978, including the infamous Zipper, to the left.

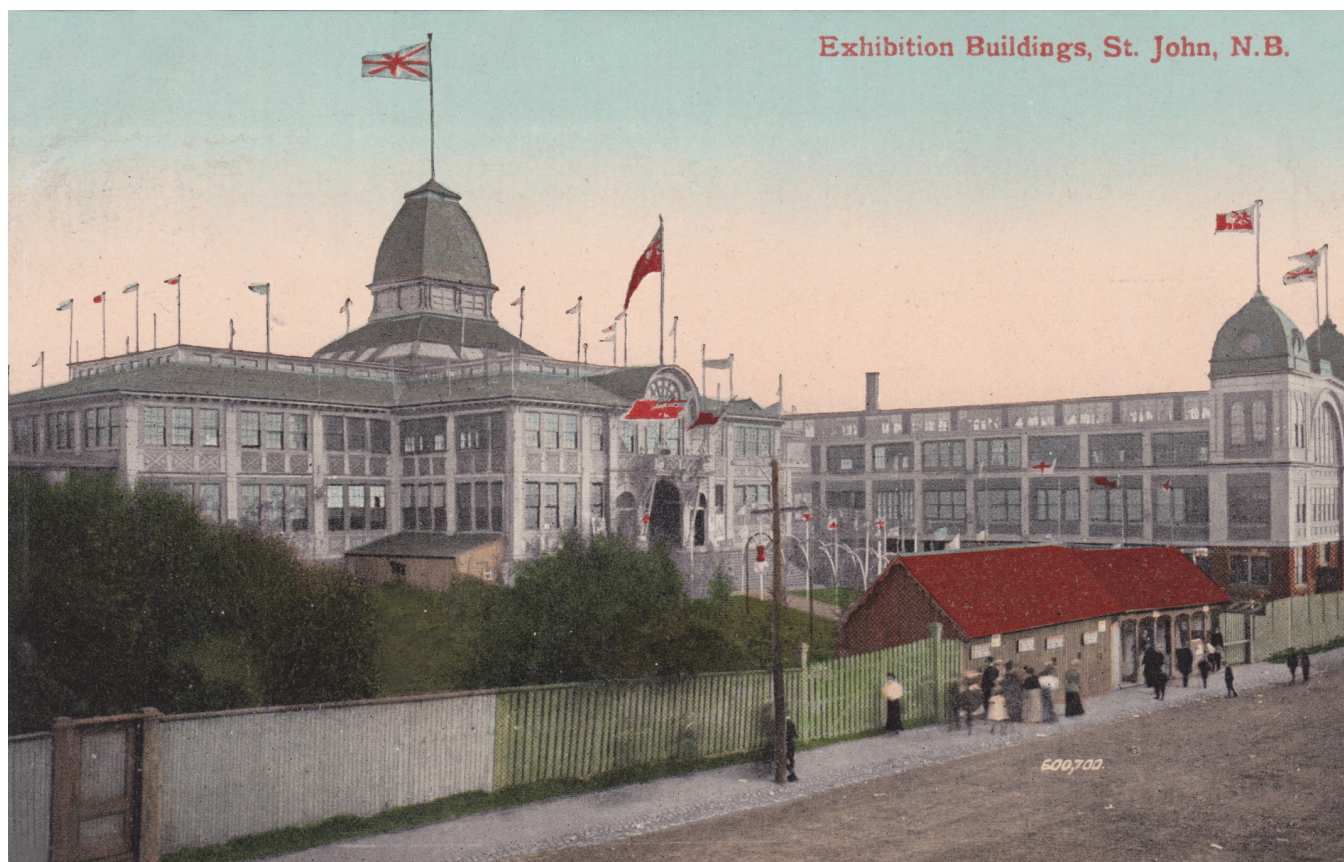
the disks have to cover the spot completely, and they cannot be moved once dropped. I spent what must have been close to a full summer's allowance on Cover the Spot that August, but despite the carny's deceptively easy-looking demonstration and the theatrical encouragement he gave me every day, I went home on closing night frustrated, poor, and minus a prize I didn't even really want in the first place.

My final visit to the A.N.E. before I left home was in 1990, the year the exhibition celebrated its hundredth anniversary.

least 1818. The names of these events varied, but often included a grand designation like "Provincial," "Canadian," "International," or "Dominion." The city's first major exhibition took place in August of 1842. It was organized by the directors of the Mechanics' Institute, and held in the group's hall, on Carleton Street, with a stated purpose to encourage commerce and education in the areas of art, science, and nature. In 1851—the same year of Prince Albert's Great Exhibition, in London, and two years before New York's first World's Fair—Saint John held

with a domed roof, that was used for roller-skating in the warmer months. For twenty cents, fairgoers could board a train to the Pleasure Grounds, near present-day Kennebecasis Park, to watch horse racing, a sport with as long a history in Saint John as exhibitions.

In 1880, Saint John's main exhibition moved to a permanent location: the Barrack Green, a twenty-acre military training site on Sydney Street, in the city's South End. Organizers constructed an exhibition building a hundred and sixty feet long by eighty feet wide, with an



A hand-painted postcard of the Barrick Green exhibition buildings.

additional dome-covered front. Horse and cattle sheds were constructed, and a second, two-storey building, measuring two hundred feet by eighty feet, flanked by two towers, was added three years later, bringing the exhibition's total floor space to ninety thousand square feet. The 1883 fair, held the year of the city's hundredth anniversary, was dubbed the Dominion Centennial Exhibition. It featured Saint John's first use of electric lights, which illuminated the grounds and buildings—until the dynamo machine failed and emergency gas lights had to be installed. Exhibits included the first centrifugal cream separator used in North America, and the unveiling of a drinking fountain donated to the city by the Polymorphian Club.

In April, 1889, members of the local board of trade, city council, and various other organizations formed the Exhibition Association of the City and County of Saint John, with a mandate to combine the best elements of the city's various fairs and exhibitions. The new event debuted the following year, billed as Canada's International Exhibition, though the press referred to it, unofficially, as the World's Fair. It consisted of two sites: the Barrack Green land, where the midway,

outdoor shows, and displays of farm machinery and livestock were located, and Moosepath Driving Park, located just east of the city limits. Moosepath was large, but the marshy ground on which it was built left horses to race in mud for much of the season. Nine hundred horse stalls and four hundred cattle stalls were added to the track's existing stables for the exhibition, and trains connected the two sites. More than three hundred commercial exhibitors displayed their wares that year, including, W. H. Thorne hardware, Canong Bros. confectioners, T. S. Simms brush company, and J. and A. McMillan stationers. Fifty thousand people attended, including Prime Minister John A. Macdonald and Governor General Lord Stanley and his wife, Lady Stanley.

Over the next two decades, the Saint John exhibition featured moving pictures of the Boer War, trampoline acts, merry-go-rounds, fakirs, palm readers, games of strength, and performers such as the Marvellous Marsh, who, twice daily, rode a bicycle down an incline atop a forty-foot tower before launching himself earthbound, headfirst, into a tank of water seventy feet away. Paid attendance reached eighty-five thousand by 1910, the year the renamed

Dominion Exhibition was sanctioned the country's official exhibition.

The Saint John exhibition was put on hold during the Great War, when the Barrack Green was turned over full-time to the military. It was revived in 1920, but suspended once more due to Canada's entry into the Second World War, just as the 1939 edition was set to begin. This time, it would take a decade and a half for the exhibition to restart, after a fire on the barrack grounds in 1941 destroyed the exhibition buildings. In 1952, the exhibition association purchased the Moosepath land and much of the surrounding area at the base of what would soon be Forest Hills. The land was renamed Exhibition Park, and the fair, now known as the Atlantic National Exhibition, relaunched in 1954 and has been held in the same location every year since. Rides were provided by the Bill Lynch Show, the largest midway operator in the Maritimes, and eventually one of the largest in Canada. In the early days of Exhibition Park, before any permanent buildings were constructed, large canvas tents were erected to house the horticultural and livestock exhibits, and a rolling stage for live entertainment was built on the racetrack, facing the grandstand.

Simonds Centennial Area was built in 1965, and hundreds of exhibitor spaces became available in the main building and the smaller wooden buildings surrounding the midway.

Traditional industrial fairs had been falling out of favour for decades, as magazines, newsreels, and television began reporting news of technological innovations at a much quicker pace. Local manufacturing became less cost effective, which meant smaller and fewer exhibits. By the nineties, the massive cultural shift caused by the Internet made events like the A.N.E. even more antiquated.

I left Saint John in 1991, but visit frequently. Over the years, I've observed the changes to the exhibition grounds, most of which took place in the early nineteen-nineties. A Cineplex movie theatre sprung up partially on the site of the Simonds ball field not long after I moved away. The ice rink and exhibition buildings were demolished soon after. A succession of fast food establishments—including, fittingly, an A&W and a McDonald's—were built on a field formerly used for parking. The grandstand

was demolished, and many of the barns are now empty.

I visited the city this February. Before I arrived, I contacted Frank McCarey, the current president of the Saint John Exhibition Park Association, to see if he'd be willing to talk to me about how the exhibition had changed over the past quarter century. On the morning I pulled up in front of the association's office, the city was still digging out from its third major snowstorm in about a week. Snow banks along some sidewalks were piled six feet high, but the exhibition grounds, somehow, showed no trace of snow or ice.

McCarey told me the association began leasing off parcels of land in the nineties because "the finances of the association had become absolutely desperate." The exhibition had always been a loss leader for the organization, but by the nineties it was losing more than usual. "Attendance was dropping," McCarey said. "How many kids now haven't been to Disneyland? The exhibition was a pretty special time, but it just doesn't hold the same attraction it did at one point." Much of the association's income came from harness racing, which was extremely profitable for decades. "Harness

racing is basically dying everywhere," McCarey told me. "When you look at it, the attraction was the gambling aspect, and government-sponsored lotteries sort of decreased that attraction. I think next year the only harness racing in the province is going to be here in Saint John." The association pitched the idea of building a racino—a racetrack with video lottery terminals and other electronic games—when the provincial government solicited casino proposals more than a decade ago, but a similar proposal put forth by the neighbouring city of Moncton won out in 2007. Now, plans are underway to install a cricket field in the centre of the raceway.

The exhibition buildings and arena reached the natural end of their lives at the same time the association's finances became dire, and the grandstand was condemned by the time it was torn down, in 2003. Once the association became solvent again, about a decade ago, it was able to begin thinking about rebuilding. The board "made a decision that, instead of putting up a building that we're going to use once a year, let's see if we can leverage it to something that's more useful to the community," McCarey said. The group



An aerial view of the grounds during the 1957 exhibition.

recently donated a portion of its undeveloped land—which McCarey values at one million dollars—to the city, for the construction of a field house, which will contain two indoor soccer fields. It also donated an additional four million dollars toward building costs. In return, the association will have use of the building for one week a year during the exhibition.

“We’ve seen attendance go up in the past couple of years,” McCarey said. “We’re trying to change how we market it. We stopped charging for admission and that’s brought more people out. It’s sort of leveled off and it’s been going great since then. What happens now is people will come out one night to the exhibition. It used to be people would come out every night. We’ve got it budgeted next year at a cost of about two hundred and fifty thousand. We’ll generate about a hundred thousand and lose about a hundred and fifty. The intent is not to make money on the exhibition. The Ex never made money. The intent is to do something for the community.”

In August of 2016, I returned to the Atlantic National Exhibition, now known as the Saint John Ex (“We decided to call a spade a spade,” one organizer told me), for the first time in more than a quarter century. I met my friend Andrew at his parents’ house, down the street from my own. We had no incentive to scale a fence now that admission was free, but I convinced him we should at least retrace our childhood steps through the field. We regretted our (my) plan fairly quickly, when we became entangled in tall grass and weeds. Without a ball field, there seemed to be little reason for the rutted paths to stay rutted, or maybe there were simply fewer children in the neighbourhood than there used to be.

The layout of the midway had changed significantly, but I soon realized the acreage reserved for the exhibition itself was the same, even as the land surrounding it now had other uses. A newer building that I remember being constructed in the early eighties now housed exhibitors, amateur arts and crafts, and the onstage entertainment combined, while some of the decommissioned stables displayed prize-winning vegetables, flowers, and livestock. A smaller building featured a mom-and-pop

grill. There was still a collection of rides for children and adults, including the Tilt-A-Whirl, a Ferris wheel, and the infamous Zipper. The bingo tent was largely unchanged, though proper markers had replaced the corn. There were still games to throw and shoot things at, with prizes that looked no more appealing than they had years before. Vendors who once sold studded wristbands now peddled hash pipes. Some of the midway foods available at the Canadian National Exhibition found their way east, including deep-fried Oreos and a knockoff of Tiny Tom doughnuts. Throughout the grounds, show cards hand-lettered by Norman Jackson—a local artist known for his panting *In This Decade*, depicting John F. Kennedy overlooking the moon landing—pitched everything from a baby show to a high-dive act to a poultry competition.

I offered to take my mother to the exhibition—a reversal of our previous roles—and we spent an evening watching the stage show. Before that we walked around the grounds. She refused to play bingo with me, but I’m confident this was due to lack of interest, and not a lingering bitterness. She commented that the exhibits were nothing like they’d been in my father’s day. There was definitely less to see and do at the Saint John Ex than there’d once been, but the organizers seemed to understand that times had changed, and adjusted accordingly. The Ex wasn’t breaking new industrial ground, and it wasn’t offering any special sort of fun that couldn’t be had elsewhere. But it was homey and genuine, and entertaining in a new and different way.

I returned another evening with my friends Peter and Pamela. We passed Cover the Spot and I told Peter about the week-long defeat I’d suffered years before. He goaded me to play, and handed the carny some money on my behalf. I lost Peter’s money and a bit of my own, but this time I had the willpower to walk away before things got out of hand. When the carny—who went by the name of Bones—tried to coerce me to continue, I told him I’d lost enough money to the game three decades earlier. I jokingly suggested it probably had been him who’d taken it from me.

“How old are you?” he asked.

“Forty-three,” I said.

“I’ve been running this game for thirty-four years!” he cried. “It *was* me!”



Top: Fred Tobias and Cindy Crawford work the Red Cross booth in the late seventies.
Bottom: The A.N.E. entryway and midway, 1978; the author meets Rooty, 1976.



THE FICTION

SALMON UPSTREAM

BY NICOLE DIXON

First sunny day we've had since school let out—it's been rain, drizzle, and spit since grad—and the skate park's packed. Ray, Jimmy, Kyle, everyone's there, which is probably why the scooter kids are staying away for once. Shaping up to be a sick sesh. Been working on this frontside feeble, just know I'm gonna get it today. But alls I can think is, Where the hell is Silas?

"Girlfriend," Kyle says. Then he sees the look on my face. "Aw, Melvin's jealous!" he shouts, as he throws down and lines up the flat bar, laughter rolling like his wheels on the pavement.

Silas is not from New Waterford. He just showed up one day in Grade 10. I saw him putting his board in his locker and practically ran over to him.

"Dude, you skate?" I asked.

"No," he grinned.

Silas's mom's a prof—she got a job at the university, so they ended up here. They *chose* to live in New Waterford. Who does that? Why not Sydney? Or Northside?

"Dunno," Silas shrugged. "Mom liked it here."

They've got a sweet house. Right on the cliff. O.K., back a bit—it's not gonna tumble into the ocean next big storm.

I'm there all the time, 'cause Silas practically has the whole basement to himself. We talk skating, watch skate vids, look at photos and videos we've shot. In and out of the basement I'm always hoping to say hi to Silas's younger sister, Sara. Hi is pretty well all I've managed so far.

Silas's parents are split up, like mine. Seems his mom's doing better than my mom, though, with the big house and all their stuff. Mom and I live in a little one storey in New Vic; it's nice, but it's little.

In the fall, Silas is heading to university. Halifax. For science or something. I dunno what I'm doing. Sticking around

here for a bit? I could head to Halifax, I guess. Visit Silas. Skate their wicked skate park. But I like living on the island. I don't think too much of leaving. Anyway, I'll figure it out. I've got all summer.

I was twelve when I started skating. I tried other sports—did soccer and baseball, a bit of hockey—but never got into any of them. There was an older kid on my street who skated and one day I was like, That's what I wanna do. Mom was cool about it. Got me my first board and pads and helmet and all the shit I was supposed to wear but never did. Dad didn't say much, but hell, he was out west by then already and didn't have too much to do with us anymore. Has even less to do with us now.

I was shit at first, but at least I could balance. Pushed mongo until that same kid on my street was all, Dude, no. Gave me some old *Big Brothers*, *Thrashers*, and other skate mags. Told me to look up Bob's Trick Tips on-line. Showed me where my feet should go. Then I started watching all the vids, snuck those skate mags into school. Some teachers let me read them in class during reading periods, but most said, No, put that away. Teachers, parents—they see skateboards, they think graffiti, drugs. Vandalism. Swearing and shit. But you never hear of a team of skaters raping a girl. Whole football team sings about rape and everyone's just, They're good guys. They've got a bright future. Boys will be boys! But I'm pushing up Plummer Avenue or wherever and people are all, That guy's trouble, and all I'm doing is heading to the skate park. It's bullshit. Bottom line for any skater, rich, poor, hungry, full, on drugs, anything? Bottom line is skating. That's all we care about. Which is why I'm all, The fuck?, when Silas didn't show up yesterday. I mean, what else is better than skating?

Next day, me and Silas meet up at the skate park. It's cloudy and cool. Windy.

"Yesterday was better," is all I say to him.

Silas shrugs then runs up the ramp, drops in, and ollies the two-way. I like Silas's style, but it definitely had to grow on me. You watch him at first, he looks slow and lazy. Then, outta nowhere, he lipslides the flat bar. Silas can go faster and get higher than any of us. Dude should seriously be sponsored.

Kyle shows up. There's high-fives. Kyle's loud. After every trick he doesn't get—which is most of them—he swears or screams or throws his board. Poor bastard needs new wheels, so even his board's loud.

"Missed a sick sesh yesterday," Kyle says to Silas. Silas looks right through Kyle. He does this. As if Kyle, as if no one's there. Like he's just seeing his next trick and not Kyle trying to take the piss. Fuck, it was awesome when we were in school. Nothing deflated the meathead hockey guys faster. They'd start in, calling us druggies or whatever and Silas would just walk by them like they weren't there. Walk right through them if he could. Ollie over their fat, empty heads.

But Kyle's not one of those meatheads. Kyle's something else. Kyle smokes a lot of pot and sells drugs on occasion and wears this grungy old green toque, even in summer, and talks a lot of bullshit about bullshit. He says he's on his way out west but I say he's on his way to burnout. Dude's not even twenty and already he's got a patchy old-man beard, stained nicotine brown around his mouth and nose. Like he's someone's gramp. Silas hates him. I just don't care. You get used to weird people in town. Not too many of us, so you get used to them or you get out.

I'm itching to get back on my board but Kyle won't let it go.

"She must have some sweet little pussy to make you forget about skating," he says.

ILLUSTRATION BY MATTHEW DALEY



I watch Silas. He gets up all slow and lazy like he always moves. His eyes are hidden under his hair and eyebrows. Looks like he's gonna punch the guy, but instead Silas just turns to Kyle and says, "Game of SKATE?" I nearly die. Fucking guy. SKATE: Call a trick. Miss the trick, get a letter. First guy to spell "SKATE" loses, and Kyle always loses. So this is how Silas is gonna win. Not yelling or punching. Just by being the better skater.

It's KOTI weekend. King of the Island. The local skate shop—Skate the Whole Island—puts on this contest each summer. You get a team together and do all these tricks for points. You film the tricks and make a video. Team with the most points wins.

I think we've got a good chance this year. We've got Silas, and Drew's home for a few weeks from out west. Kyle's always good to do the crazy shit—eat a raw fish, chug a slushy, that kinda thing. Jimmy's gotten about a foot taller since last year. Looks eighteen but is only fourteen, so it's like he's still getting used to his body. Heavy on the board but light on his feet. Shit, even I can hippie jump a picnic table and last year that trick was worth thirty points.

This all depends on Silas's camera and Silas isn't here yet. I've been trying hard not to bug him about it—I mean, he's already said yes—but I keep worrying he's gonna bail. Then Silas pulls up in his mom's car. He's not alone. Three get outta the car—Silas and Sara and another girl. We're all staring, so I stop staring.

"Silas's bae," I hear Jimmy say.

How does he know? Doesn't matter. What matters is I see Silas pop the trunk of the car and pull out two skateboards. He hands one to the girl who isn't Sara and she grabs it and heads toward us.

Girls come to the park all the time to hang out—girlfriends and wannabe girlfriends. They grab a board once in a while to goof around. But until today, I've never seen a girl bring her own board. A couple of the boys start laughing and I turn and glare at them—give them a fire-eyed Silas stare. They stop laughing but keep grinning as Silas adds his backpack to the pile of bags under the roll in.

"This is Breagh," Silas says, not really

to anyone, so it seems he's just saying it to the roll in.

"Bree," says Breagh, and I stop myself from saying, "Like the cheese." I'm guessing Bree doesn't want to hear that. Instead I nod and mumble my name. The boys say nothing—just go off and skate. I'm staring at her board. She sees me looking and flips it over to show me the graphic: a map of Nova Scotia, the whole province, from Yarmouth to Meat Cove, floating in turquoise, stretched along the length of the board.

"It's Nova Scotia," I say. I don't say anything else 'cause I feel like that alone sounded stupid, but Bree just laughs.

"Where can I sit?" Sara asks. I look around. Of course there's no benches or chairs or picnic tables. The closest spot to sit is on the other side of the fence, near the walking track. Whoever builds skate parks, I guess they never think skaters wanna sit on a bench or need shade or even water. There's stadium seats at every football field and basketball court and baseball diamond but all we get is broken glass and a gate they forget to unlock even in the summer. Here, Sara, sit on this lovely spot of pavement. Just lemme brush aside this broken beer bottle. Make sure you don't sit in the weeds over there. It's full of used condoms.

"We sometimes sit up there," I say, pointing to the top of the roll in. Right then Kyle hits the roll in and does a kickflip to fakie.

"Yeah?" says Sara skeptically. She looks around. "That tree over there," she points to a big maple on the other side of the fence.

"That looks all right."

By now everyone else is skating. Even Bree. All I wanna do is watch her. She's pushing back and forth—nothing fancy. Just a few flat ground tricks. But still. A girl is skating in NDub and it's fucking awesome. No wonder Silas has been M.I.A. these past few weeks.

With Bree skating and Sara reading a book under that maple tree, I kinda forget where I am for a sec. Then Drew floats a giant frontside flip off the two-way and the "Yeoooo"s from the boys wake me up. I slappy noselide the box, joining the boys and Bree.

Eventually we take a break and gather round the roll in. Even Sara joins us. She

and Bree clamber up the ramp and sit at the top.

"We still don't have a team name for KOTI," Silas says.

There's some lame ideas—Coywolves, Super Duper, Party Boyz—nothing sounds good. We're tired. For those who have suppers cooked for them, it's past supertime. We're hungry. We're always hungry. We need to stop and go eat but we hate stopping. There's still an hour or so of sunlight. If only skating fuelled our bellies like it fuels the rest of our bodies.

"Salmon," Sara says suddenly.

I look at her. So does Silas. So do some of the boys. Kyle laughs.

"Like the fish?" he says.

"Yeah, like the fucking fish," Sara says. "The way you skate? I was watching. Up those stairs, up the ramp, over that bar, and even over all the Tim Hortons litter. Up and over everything. Like salmon going upstream. Against the current. Nothing gonna stop you, not even gravity."

"I like it," Bree says quickly. I see Silas nodding.

My dad, when he still lived here, he'd go fishing. Mom would always bug him to take me and one time he did. Took me to Margaree to catch salmon. He'd catch them but give me his rod and I'd reel them in. When we got home he told Mom I'd caught 'em all. We cleaned them and cooked them for supper. We were all happy that night, even Mom and Dad. One of the last times I remember us all being happy together.

"Salmon," Ray says.

"NDub salmon," Jimmy says.

We laugh. It's kinda funny. And since none of us have any better ideas, it sticks.

Saturday morning, I'm just a couple blocks from the park when my phone buzzes. Not once but over and over. Phone's in my hand but I can see the boys at the park. They start shouting. Both ramps—the roll in and the bank—are flipped upside down. Both ramps! Just last night we were skating them. Just last night! I start shaking.

"The fuck," I say. "The fuck!"

"Who the fuck?" Drew says.

"Who fucking does this?"

"One of the other teams," Jimmy says.

"No way," I say. "They wouldn't. You know that."

It had to be big guys. And a lot of them. Those are heavy fucking ramps. And the



REMINISCING

The wagon's wheels lift over the ruts as
the horses' tails swing gracefully on their backside.
Their occasional stench blows into the faces
of my grandmother and grandfather.
We are huddled in patchy quilts
as the stars sprinkle the heavens
like fireflies.
It won't be long before we arrive
at the camp.
I imagine the skeletal hands of my ancestors
caressing our hair as we watch the bats
in the clearness of this dark prairie sky.
The year is when the prairie dust stormed.
When my grandfolks couldn't leave the reserve
without a permit to visit our neighbouring relatives.
There is no sound except the breathing horses.
We are all dressed in dark heavy clothes,
for we are fugitives in this land
we once roamed like buffalo.
The settlers are often scared,
as if our emaciated bodies could run across
their threshold, rob them of their stale bread.
We will find shelter in the thickness of the coulees,
munch on dry meat and pemmican,
huddle like rabbits in broad daylight.
We are the prairie
and the prairie is a tumbleweed inside us.

—LOUISE BERNICE HALFE

noise they woulda made going over? No one noticed? All the houses around here and no one called the cops? What were they thinking? That us skaters would do this to our own park? That we're vandals? That we deserve this just 'cause we skate?

Silas pulls up in his mom's car and out he gets with Bree and Sara.

"Can't flip concrete," he says. It's true. If the ramps were concrete instead of shitty plastic and metal this couldn't have happened. But they'd rather spend money on washrooms for cruise-ship tourists, on splash pads and playgrounds for toddlers. Teenagers can fuck right off.

"Anyone call anyone?" I ask.

Ray nods.

"Called the number on the sign and left a message."

I look at the sign. I've looked at it a million times. It's from Parks and Rec and lists park rules. Wear a helmet. No skating after dark. Rules no one follows. The sign is covered in graffiti and stickers, is burned and melted in one corner.

"I'll get Mom to call," Sara says.

"She's in the garden," Silas says.

"Gimme the keys," Sara says.

I hear Silas mutter, "barely sixteen" and "licence," but then he hands Sara the keys.

We stand around holding our boards. It's as if we've forgotten how to skate. I stare at the upside down ramps and it feels like I'm upside down.

"We could just skate street," Silas finally says. "I mean, we were gonna anyway."

"I just really wanted to start here," I say.

"What's it matter where we start?" Silas asks.

Last night, all I kept picturing was us opening the KOTI envelope here, at our park, not somewhere else. But I don't tell Silas 'cause if it wasn't for Bree, I woulda said it to him last night. I look at Bree who's looking at her phone. She looks at me, then looks at Silas.

"This park's no Coxheath," she says, meaning the concrete skate park by Riverview High that, I hate to admit, is a million times better than this one.

"Fuck that park," I say. "We're *NDub* boys."

Bree's eyes widen but she doesn't say anything. She just looks down again at her phone. Instead, it's Silas who's looking at me with that dead-eyed stare he usually reserves for assholes. But I go on.

"I mean, we got the team together weeks ago and no one said anything about doing this anywhere else or with anyone else."

Kyle laughs then and says, "Yeah. No girls allowed."

Shit. Kyle's agreeing with me.

"You know what?" says Silas. "Fuck KOTI."

He picks up his board and shoulders his backpack. He's not looking at any of us anymore. He just walks away. Walks out of the park and away from all of us. Bree follows. She glances back and catches my eye and waves her middle finger at me.

"Great," Jimmy finally says. "There goes the camera."

Around eleven a Parks and Rec truck shows up with Sara following behind on a bike. I'm the only one left at the park—Kyle and the rest took off after Silas and Bree. Two men get outta the truck and come over to look at the ramps. They circle them, shaking their heads.

"No way we can flip these without the crane," one says. The other nods and looks at me.

"Musta taken a lot of guys to do this," he says.

"Yeah," I mutter. I'm sitting, leaning against the fence, rubbing my phone on my pants. Sara sits beside me and we watch the guys go back to their truck and make phone calls.

"I passed by Silas and Bree," she says.

"Yeah."

"Silas wasn't happy."

"No."

"You don't look happy either."

"Fuck," I say, and bang my head against the fence. The fence rattles then stops.

"Mom wouldn't let me drive back. She was mad I drove home but she still made the call. She was all, 'This is Dr. Healey and I work at the university. As a concerned citizen of New Waterford, blah, blah.' It was awesome. But then she told me not to drive the car again 'til I have my licence."

I look at her. Sara's a bit sweaty from biking here and a few of her blond hairs are stuck to her forehead. Her cheeks are red. She even smells a bit sweaty, a musky smell mixed up with that fruity scent

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being published today like it."
-Slate.com

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most girls have. I realize I like the musky smell way more than the fruity smell and how Sara smells and looks is enough to make me forget about Kori and Silas and Bree and those upside down ramps. But just for a sec.

The Kori envelope's at my feet, still unopened. What's the point? It's past eleven. We've lost hours. No doubt the Glace Bay or Sydney teams have filmed at least a dozen tricks by now. Sara picks up the envelope, reads, "Do no open until Saturday morning," then holds it up to my face. I shrug. She starts to open the envelope and I tell her to wait. I get my phone and start filming as she rips it open and pulls out the challenge book—a black Duo-tang with eight pages inside. This moment is usually the best moment. Sara opens the Duo-tang and Skate the Whole Island stickers fall to the ground. I stop filming. I look at the stickers, look at the upside down ramps, and sigh.

"Can I have a sticker?" she asks.

"Sure. Whatever."

"Melvin—" Sara starts, then stops. "Do you have a pen?"

I scrounge through my backpack, find a pen, and hand it to her. Sara turns to the first page of the book and under Team Name writes in big, black letters: SALMON.

"Dude, look. You're salmon. Remember what I said? They'll fix the ramps. Silas is downtown at Davis. Go find him. Go salmon it up."

"I dunno if he wants me there."

I say this, but I'm standing up. Sara stands up, too.

"I dunno either. But he told me where he was going and knew where I was going. So."

She hands me the challenge book and I put it in my backpack. I want to hug her. Then I do. And Sara hugs me back. I feel two wants then, to hug Sara all day in the warm July sun and to skate with Silas.

"Will you come?" I ask as we leave the park.

"Nah. But I'll find you later. I'm gonna head to the beach."

There aren't too many spots to skate street in New Waterford, which is why we tend to stick to the park or go to Sydney. But Davis is a decent spot. There's a gazebo with a chill three-set and this monument with a miner on top

that looks cool in our shots. Plus, William Davis, the guy the spot's named after, was a badass. Him and a bunch of miners were all 'Fuck this' about how shit their jobs were and went on strike and Davis got shot and killed in the process. Now 'cause of him we have a day off school in June.

One time I was sitting there waiting for Silas and I went up to the monument and read all the names of the guys who were killed in this huge mine explosion in 1917. Over sixty guys, torn up, crushed. Beside each guy's name is the age he was when he died. Some of those guys were my age or younger. Imagine being seventeen, or even fourteen, working miles under the ocean and then—kaboom. Some of those guys probably never even kissed a girl, let alone fucked one. Died virgins.

I told that to Silas when he showed up and he laughed and shook his head. Then he looked up at the top of the monument and said, "Most towns have kings or queens or prime minsters or memorials for war dead. But New Waterford's got a statue of a miner."

When I get to Davis, Silas and a coupla the boys are skating the gazebo. I join them. I pull the challenge book outta my backpack and the boys grab it and pass it around. Silas comes over and starts leafing through the pages.

"Look, man, I'm sorry. It's just, Kori—," I start, but Silas shakes his head.

"It's just a game," he says. "It's not worth going crazy."

"I guess."

"Also, you are not in Bree's good books."

"I'll apologize."

"Cool."

"Where's Bree at?" I ask.

"Gone to the beach with Sara."

"It's cool watching her skate," I say.

"Yeah. It is."

"And Kyle?"

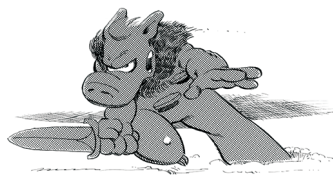
"Bree told him to go fuck himself."

"Bree's all right." I smile.

"Yeah," Silas says, and he almost smiles, too.

Then we sit on the steps of the gazebo and start divvying up challenges.

Saturday night the boys go camping and Silas and I edit footy at his house. Bree and Sara join us and we get talking about



STRANGE ROOTS

Summers, she said,
they used to swim the cattle over.
Low tide.
Walk and swim.
Father in a rowboat,
kids in and out of it.

They were Robinsons, their farm on the brow of the hill.
In view: Robinson's Island in the Gulf of St. Lawrence,
west of Brackley Beach, east of North Rustico Harbour.

You can drive there now, over a causeway
soon to be reclaimed by sand, marram grass, bayberry.

The Robinsons cleared old-growth Acadian forest.
Two sons, two farms, two farmhouses,
outbuildings, pastures.
Have a look in the 1880 Meacham's atlas.

Families of the two sons moved to the mainland,
let the seasons take the buildings, let the fields become
summer camp for young beef cattle.

Later, a national park and campground for humans.
Then not a campground, the land left alone.
Certain species jumped up to fill the cleared spaces:
raspberries, alder, sweet gale, Norway maple, spruce.

This autumn an environmental studies group
is planting long-ago species: eastern white pine,
sugar maple, yellow birch, hemlock.
Roots of saplings reach down, reach out.

A niggling begins at the back of soil's memory,
pinging from cell to cell.
A slow wave of recognition,
a who's your father electrifies the earth.

Welcome home.

—DEIRDRE KESSLER

skaters we like and show the girls some of
our favourite videos.

"Bree skates," Sara says. "Other girls
must skate, right?"

Bree's nodding. So's Silas.

"Yeah, of course," I say.

"So how come all these videos only
have guys in them?"

"Didn't you notice the girl in that
Dylan Rieder part?" Bree asks.

"The one stripping and arching her
naked back? The headless gal with the
pointy little tits? Classy," says Sara.

"What's the point of her exactly?"

"The point is that skating's just as
douchey as all the other sports," Bree says.

"I thought we were better," I mutter.

"But there's Kyle," Bree says. "And
guys like Kyle—" Bree shakes her head.

"Guys like Kyle," Silas says, "would
rather see naked girls in their skate vids
than girls on skateboards."

"Better to jerk off to," says Bree.

"So why do it?" Sara asks Bree. "Why
skate?"

Bree shrugs.

"Why do anything? It's fun, right?"

She looks at me and Silas. We nod.

"They have fun—why can't we? What,
we're not allowed 'cause skating's for
boys? Fuck that. Everything should be for
everyone. Plus, if no girl does it, no girl
will ever do it, right?"

"Right," Sara says. "And guys like Kyle
fucking hate that. Like girls skating takes
the fun outta it or something. They don't
want the naked girl to be all, you know,
'I'm gonna put on a hoodie and grab a
board and join you.' 'Cause what if she's
actually better than the dude?"

"His dick might fall off if that hap-
pens!" Bree says.

The girls bump fists and laugh. Silas
searches on-line for another clip and in-
stead of working on the kotr video like we
should, we end up watching girls skate.

None of us have slept much, but as
Sunday evening gets closer and the
shadows get longer and the air finally gets
cooler, we're still at the park skating. One
of the challenges is to order a pizza to a
skate spot, so Silas makes the call, then
we text Bree and Sara to come join us. The
girls show up with water and chips and
cookies, and we all stop for not even ten
minutes, that's how much we wanna keep
skating. We're stoked. The team's at
about a thousand points.

Skating's humbling—after ten years
I'm still learning. Before this weekend,
I'd never landed a blunt to nose blunt. But
'cause it's worth thirty points we all give
it a shot. Boom, Silas lands it, but we don't
get footy and he can't get it again. I hand
Silas his camera and give it a go. I can't
get my weight right over the board. Come
close to throwing it over the fence.

"One more," I say.

One more. How many one mores have
we all promised? One more before I go get
some water. One more before dark. One
more 'cause I'm starving and exhausted.
One more and I'll land it.

"One more."

But it's probably eight more before I
finally get it. The boys clap and cheer.

"You film it?" I practically yell at Silas.

He plays back the footy on his camera
and we gather round him to watch.
There it is—there I am—landing that god-
damned trick.

"Salmon!" I shout.

We hear Kyle before he's even at the
park—those shitty loud wheels of his that
sound like he's riding on cobblestones.

Bree says “ugh” or “fuck” or possibly both.

“Yeah, pizza,” Kyle says, and without asking he starts opening pizza boxes, looking for leftover slices. All he finds are crusts and one sad, dried out cheese slice. He nibbles at the slice, then tosses it into the middle of the park, nearly hitting Ray as he’s landing a nosegrind.

I wanna ignore Kyle. But he’s the kinda guy who’ll just get louder and more in your face until you’re yelling and he’s laughing.

“How many points you boys at?” he asks.

Ray and Jimmy look at me and I look at Silas.

“Gotta add it up,” Silas says.

“Boys in Glace Bay, they’re close to twelve hundred.”

“Well,” I say. “Good for them.”

“You skating with the Bay boys now?” Drew asks.

“Nah. Was at the bowl this afternoon and asked. You guys know I’m an NDub boy. One of NDub’s finest.”

Kyle looks around the park.

“Got the ramps back up?” he asks.

It’s a question we don’t need to answer ‘cause the answer’s obvious. Still, he skates around the bank and roll in, like he’s inspecting them. Sara and Bree are sitting on top of the roll in. Sara pulls her knees in closer to her chest. Bree looks toward Silas, but Silas is watching Kyle like a dog watching a stranger in its yard.

“So, you got girls on the team but you kick me off,” Kyle says.

“Kyle,” I say. “You here to help us or just talk shit?”

“Kyle always talks shit,” Silas says.

Kyle laughs.

“You boys’ll miss me when I head out to Fort Mac,” he says. “Dubs’ll get boring right quick.”

“Look, Kyle,” I say. “We’ve got just a few hours left for KOTI. Either help us or fuck off.”

“I say he fucks off now,” Bree suddenly says.

Her face is red and getting redder. Everyone in the park gets quiet. No one’s skating. Feels like the quietest the park’s ever been. Then Kyle throws down, starts skating back and forth between the roll in and the quarter pipe, back and forth, back and forth, getting closer and closer to Bree and Sara. Finally Bree gets

up and jumps off the ramp. Sara follows. The two of them come over to where Silas and I are standing. We’re all watching Kyle, who’s trying to land these huge frontside airs. Except he keeps kicking his board away and yelling, like he’s doing it on purpose.

Sometimes, I feel kinda bad for Kyle. I know where he lives and how shitty his house is—one of those rotten company houses that you’d swear is abandoned until you realize it’s not. It’s how a lot of people live in NDub. Silas doesn’t really know, ‘cause he’s from away. Some people here, they wanna set those houses on fire. Some do. So I can’t hate Kyle. But I wish he’d calm down and help us out. He can be a douche but he’s crazy and that comes in handy for some tricks. I’m ready to say this to Silas, convince him to give Kyle another chance, but suddenly Kyle stops and says, “Ramps seem good. I figured they’d be way more fucked up, the way we flipped ‘em over.”

“We?” I say.

Kyle stops skating and lights a cigarette.

“We got bored Friday night. Me and some boys from Sydney. Were drinking and thought it’d be funny.”

Why’s he saying this? What the fuck? I look at the other boys and the looks on their faces: cold. Pale and cold and dead. No one’s saying anything. No one can say anything.

“How did you—?”

I have to say something

‘cause I swear I’m about to black out.

“Why?”

“Dunno. They were heavy.”

Kyle looks at me and I glare at him.

“Fuck, Mel, it was a joke.”

He laughs.

“But you knew it’s KOTI weekend!” I manage.

“Don’t blame me, Mel. It was Silas put the idea in my head.”

I don’t know what I’m hearing anymore. I look at Silas. Silas says nothing. He just goes and leans against the fence. He doesn’t even look at me. He’s looking at Bree, though, and I can’t stand it.

“Kyle,” I say. “What did Silas fucking say?”

Kyle’s laughing.

“We were talking about KOTI last week and Silas said he didn’t care.”

“That’s not what I said, Kyle,” Silas says.

“What *did* you say, Silas?” I ask.

Silas sighs.

“I said I was bummed I hadta take time off work ‘cause I need the money for school. And then I mighta said I was glad this was the last KOTI I’d do, ‘cause it’s a lot of work for not much, Mel. So Kyle’s genius idea to fix shit was to flip the fucking ramps.”

Without thinking I grab my board and throw it at Silas. It smashes into the fence pole beside him and bounces off, landing with a clatter and crack on the pavement.

In all the years I’ve known Silas, all the times we’ve been hassled by everyone about skating, Silas has been the calm one, chill as fuck, getting me to calm down. So I can’t believe Silas is coming after me until he’s actually on me, right on top of me. He doesn’t hit me—he just leaps on me and we both fall to the ground and start rolling around. We’re more wrestling than fighting, pushing and pulling, yanking each other’s shirts, trying to grip the ground with our feet and slipping in the grit instead. I hear Kyle laughing. Even the other boys are laughing, and we both realize right then how pathetic we look, so we stop and just lie there in a tangle of arms and legs.

Sara breaks us up even though there’s not much to break up. She’s yelling both our names and swearing.

“That was a lame-ass fight,” Kyle says.

It was. As soon as Silas was on me, the fight just went outta me. I look at Silas and he’s looking at me and it’s him that says it first.

“Sorry.”

I nod.

Silas stands up and holds out his hand. I grab it and he pulls me up. My hands are scrapped from gravel and glass and my knee hurts. I go to my board and pick it up. It’s chipped, but still together. It’ll be tough to skate, so I’m a bit pissed at myself for fucking throwing it.

“Hey,” Bree says and we all look at her. “Throwing a board. Isn’t that worth ten points?”

I nod.

“Yeah. It is.”

“Cool.” Bree says, as she holds up Silas’s camera. “‘Cause I got footy.”

We don’t win KOTI. We come in third, which isn’t bad considering the late start and all the fuck ups and fucking



Kyle. The team from Sydney gets first. They always get first. But next year—I have a feeling it’ll be our year.

We get some stickers and T-shirts and a gift certificate. I give my T-shirt to Sara. The boys tell me and Silas to split the gift certificate, ‘cause we edited the video, but Silas gives it to me. Sunday, I didn’t even know if Silas would wanna finish the video. We were leaving the park and I said to him, “I still wanna finish it, but I can do it on my own.”

Silas went to hand me his camera and stopped.

“I’ll help,” he said.

We may not have won, but I’m stoked on the video we put together.

Sara’s wearing the T-shirt when I see her at the skate park a week later. She’s cut the sleeves a bit to make it fit her more and her arms look tanned and good. Since *KOTR* all I can think about is Sara—more than skating sometimes.

My board’s new, so I’m taking it easy. I watch Sara sit under the big maple and eventually I stop skating and go over and sit beside her.

“Hi,” she says, putting a bookmark in her book.

“Hi,” I say.

“Melvin?”

“Yeah?”

I can’t look at her but I can smell her. That sweaty, fruity smell that gets me going. I gotta calm down, so I look at the park and the train tracks and the town and all the company houses, some rotten, some fixed up and pretty, and, way in the distance, the ocean, blue ‘til it blends with the sky.

“Bree says it’s not too hard. Skating. Just need to learn and practise. Balance. Not be too afraid. Mom said she’d get me a board for my birthday. I don’t wanna be another girl who watches the boys. But—” she pauses and she’s looking at me and I still can’t look at her.

“I need someone to show me.”

She doesn’t quite ask, but I know she’s asking. Then I realize, Silas leaving, well, it’s not so awful, maybe. Sara will be here for at least another year. Shit changes, I guess. Sometimes you can do something about it, but mostly you can’t. You can only deal.

“Yeah, I could show you.”

And then, even though it’s hard to say, I say, “I’d like to.”

“I’d like you to, too,” Sara says. ☪



COMING TO CANADA

CULTURAL MAINTENANCE

BY DIMITRI NASRALLAH

One morning my fridge broke down. I called a repairman. When he arrived at my door, a grin broke across his face as he saw me, a type of smile I’d come to recognize over the years. The repairman realized he was entering the home of another brown person. He was from Bangladesh, he told me, examining my fridge. We’d landed in Canada the same year, 1988, he as a young man, I as an eleven-year-old boy.

As the repairman disemboweled my fridge, he recounted his first memory of Canada—the drive from Mirabel airport into Montreal. I remembered that drive too: the open spaces, so much unused land, such lush dampness in August.

As the morning wore on, the repairman grew more interested in sharing his story and less interested in my fridge. That day he arrived, he confided, was his second birthday. His older brother, the first of his family to arrive, had sponsored him and his other brothers. They worked hard and bought real estate. Then he showed me a video of him eating a meal with the prime minister. There was Justin Trudeau, dutifully connecting to immigrant communities.

I had to nudge him back in my poor fridge’s direction, which he eventually fixed. He knew he was talking too much, but our brownness and our shared immigration story moved him to boast.

The next day, I taught a class at Concordia University, where many of my students are the children of immigrants. I had them comparing personal essays by two eminent Canadian writers, Wayson Choy and Neil Bissoondath. Choy’s family arrived from China in the early twentieth century, and was ghettoized for generations by the Chinese Exclu-

sion Act. After the act was overturned, Choy was encouraged to “get ahead” and take advantage of the opportunity he had to become someone else. It was only after his parents died that he began to look back in earnest at who he was.

Bissoondath arrived from Trinidad more recently, a young man in search of a new life. He complained about being encouraged to keep his roots while navigating Canada’s unspecified value system. It made it hard for him to be simply Canadian. He saw his hyphenation as a burden imposed by Trudeau’s father, Pierre, the architect of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act.

Two weeks later, Concordia shut down following a bomb threat. Someone had been offended by Muslims washing their feet in the sinks of the Hall Building. The school was evacuated, and we all worried that Donald Trump-tainted racism was floating north of the border. The next day an arrest was made: the culprit was a forty-seven-year-old immigrant from Lebanon, like me. What happened to him, I wondered, to make him slip so out of step with what he was supposed to be thinking? What *was* he supposed to be thinking?

Immigration does not automatically breed an acceptance of diversity, and multiculturalism can occasionally feel as mechanical and plastic as the insides of my fridge. But in Canada both ideals are worthy of continued maintenance, because, here, my repairman can dine with the prime minister, Choy can delve nostalgically into a personalized mythology, Bissoondath can have his complaints taught at university, and an angry immigrant can access the mental help he needs.

And I can write about it all. ☪

THE GALLERY

HOMEGROWN HORRORS

Ryan Heshka's Romance of Canada.

Ryan Heshka, the Vancouver-based artist, does not have a typical view of his home country, at least as evidenced by his work. Heshka was raised in Winnipeg, in the nineteen-seventies, in what he says was a conservative household. He recalls a city very closed off, at least culturally, from the outside world. As a child, Heshka sought out strange imagery in old magazines, comic books, and movies—anything that varied from the bland diet offered by Canadian television, one of the few exterior windows available to him at the time. He also enjoyed exploring nature, and viewed its microscopic elements as eerie, alternate worlds.

In many ways, Heshka's childhood influences are brought full circle in *Romance of Canada*, a series of paintings he created for the Antonio Colombo Arte Contemporanea gallery, in Milan, in 2015. Heshka's Canada is neither realistic nor cliché, but a literal dreamscape both frightening and grotesque. It is a land where the early twentieth century's vision of the future—a vision in many ways ironically unable to see past its own time—has become reality, but not in ways expected or desired. Beautiful high-heeled women wield menacing power, and nature suffers no fools. "It's a sort of glamorized postcard of Canada, an excuse to create these tableaux of Canadian bathing beauties or costumed winter carnival queens," Heshka says. "It's very un-Canadian. Maybe it's a little bit decadent, maybe a little bit violent."

Romance of Canada touches on a few Canadian totems. A young wife weeps over the ice-encased, uniform-clad body of her dead husband in *Hockey Widow*. The full-frontal figure of a red-haired woman—nude save for heels, stockings, an eye mask, and a cape—crawls out a window, a scarlet rodent at her side, in *Red Beaver Bandit*. A motley crew of hunters, divers, and freaks pose under a banner reading I'M SORRY in *Canadian Military*. Other pieces, such as *Masters of the Man-Dogs*, have a more tenuous connection to Canada the Good, as chain gangs of masked men in Devo jumpsuits are enslaved to work as sled dogs by Russ Meyer extras. Some, like *Myth of the Blue Caribou*, create bizarre, altogether new Canadian legends. "When I had booked the show, I thought, 'This will be a fun subject matter to tackle where I don't have to be serious and I don't have to speak to Canadian people,'" Heshka says. "So there was no one saying, 'This isn't accurate' or 'This is wrong' or 'This never happened.' If I was to show it in Canada, I think there'd be a lot of scrutiny. It seemed like a good excuse to just present something that's totally ridiculous."

—CONAN TOBIAS



Hockey Widow.



Myth of the Blue Caribou.



Red Beaver Bandit.





Masters of the Man-Dogs.



Winter Festival.



Blue Birds.

THE FICTION VISIONS

BY LISA MOORE

I started having visions in late July, just as things were starting to heat up. Optical disturbances. Floating prisms in my peripheral vision. Unaligned rainbows, or shimmers that sometimes drifted in front of my eyes as if carried on a light breeze. They were radiant but opaque splotches, so if I was looking directly at someone's face, the mouth might be obscured. If I darted my eyes fast to the right or left, I could sometimes shift the spot so I could see the person's mouth, but then an eye would be blocked, or a cheek. I thought early migraine symptoms, or detached retina, but there was no firm diagnosis.

I began to experience these floaters, or whatever they were, a week or so before the actual visions. I don't know if the people I saw were in any way connected to the minor visual disturbances that preceded them. I say "people"; they were corporeal. But that is all I can say for certain.

My husband told me he was leaving me the same week the civil-sector layoffs were announced and I lost my job. I saw the first vision a few months after that, the man at Low Point beach. You would think stress, maybe. Psychotic episode.

A marriage is this: Put the glasses with the glasses, put the cups with the cups. Every morning you do this and I come down. The cups and the glasses.

The bath running, pipes shuddering, lolling surges of water, the scrudge of a calve or buttock along the white enamel of the cast iron claw-foot tub we salvaged from an abandoned house in Low Point, a house collapsing into the long grass.

Marriage is: You buy a cabin (a cottage, they would say on the mainland) with a veranda and garden, a lilac tree and an apple tree, blossoms all over the ground, in outport Newfoundland, maybe an hour or two from town. Canoes, barbeques, an A.T.V.

We are: The dog in the Anglican cathedral churchyard during the winters in town, rippling through the chest-high snow at dusk. A mutt, mottled like an old

mirror, an undulation over the graveyard, and my husband, unshaved, with the black nylon leash wrapped around one of his puffy Gore-Tex gloves, letting the metal hook of the leash slap against his thigh.

We are roast chicken dinners with chicken seasoning that we bang out of a tin can with the flat of our hands. The chicken from a frozen package of three, purchased at Costco, frost burnt and plump. We cook with haste. Long as it isn't raw. We buy the jumbo Party Mix and shovel handfuls into our faces while we cook and do the dishes.

We tell each other stories, outrages from my husband's office, flecks of pretzel flying as he talks about this one or that one. Or I talk about my work in the civil service; the new Excel spreadsheets I'm using for inventory, glitches in software.

I type, I say. Then there's a delay.

These are fillable forms?

A delay and then the letters and numbers flick across the screen. Meanwhile, I'm not doing anything. These are fillable.

You're not touching the keyboard?

And the letters pour across the screen, seconds later, like, thirty seconds maybe.

He doesn't like the gloves I use for washing the pots and pans. Yellow rubber gloves.

You leave them all over the place.

They're gloves, I say. Grease, what do you call, globules in the water.

You leave them, he says.

Clots of dog food, pork fat, a soggy crust. I don't want my hands.

The feel of them, the insides, he says. Wet, icky.

And then, like, a half sentence of text ticks out all by itself across the screen.

Turn the machine off and turn it back on. I do. Do you turn it off? I do.

We are: A box comes in the mail. Something rattled around in a cardboard box. I had to slit the packing tape with an X-Acto knife. Here, let me get you a knife. I got it. No, use the knife. O.K., give me the knife.

Even then, I had trouble ripping open the heavy cardboard.

Present for you, my husband said. Guess what it is. No idea. What's the occasion? No occasion. You can't guess? I've no idea.

A dildo, bright purple with ridges, a smiley face at the tip. Hilarious. Set in a bed of Styrofoam Ss. I twisted the wheel on one end and the vibration was industrial. The Ss squeaked against each other, writhing in a pelt of static electricity. Twisted the dial back the other way, a gentle hum.

Give it a whirl, he said.

We are the neighbour's snow blower at dawn. Trips to the dump.

Marriage is: You should get that windshield wiper fixed. I will. Don't go on the highway like that. I won't. Stop at Canadian Tire. I will. Did you stop at Canadian Tire? No. You drove like that? Yes, I did.

The wiper with the rubber flange torn away from the metal arm so that the strip of rubber wiggles over the glass like a maddened eel. The metal arm scratching an arc in the glass.

Sucking your cock; the vibrator on roar.

How was it? Oh my God. Was it good? Oh my God.

I buy the convenience store in Low Point with the money acquired from dividing the assets. We were scrupulous about right down the middle. But I'm still thinking: we.

We are the new surveillance system I have in the store after the break-in. A camera pointing in every aisle. The simultaneous feed on a flat screen at the cabin. A young woman with long dark hair and a black toque. A young man loading bottles of ketchup, pickles, and relish into an army surplus bag. Systematically cleaning out the shelves of food. I'd phoned the cops from the landline and they'd blocked off the highway on both ends, the only two ways out of Low Point.

After the condo fiasco I have to stay in the cabin and remortgage the store, on the



WHEN LOUIS RIEL WENT CRAZY

I

after the Red River Rebellion of 1869
Louis Riel went crazy, he ran off and hid
in a bush along the Seine, a land that jutted
out into the stream, a place
everyone called Vermette's Point, a thick
mass of thin trees, next to a narrow
slot of ploughed land, and a meek
farmhouse, a brief place, nondescript
but the prideful home of my great-
great uncle and aunt
Riel stayed there a month, a long
month when the spring
spread out slowly
separating him from his "crimes"
and my aunt left food at the bush's edge
for him, bannock lard and meat on an old tin plate
a meal for a dog, or
a "rebel,"
something he would have to hurry to
so the foxes didn't get there first
some say that's where Louis took
the name David, where in
his cold, hungry penitence
God spoke to him, gave him
his divine purpose
and a middle name
when Louis Riel was hanged in 1885
my great-great uncle had no land, Manitoba
had become a province, and Canadian

surveyors came in, Métis
farms were dissected,
bisected, halved, quartered,
over and over again until
nothing was left, only
a square to balance one foot on
for only one second
before they all fell over
Ottawa took it all by then, all
those half-breed homesteads, ribbon lots not
"properly bought" were sold, and my
ancestral uncle's home was pulled
up from under him like a rug, a rug
rolled up from the river's edge all the way
to the road, tucked under
Canada's collective arm
and chucked on an eastbound train
with all the other rugs, all the other
rolled-up land that became tidy
cylindrical tokens, conquered
presents to be presented
to John A., nothing more than
rolled-up grass like pressed cigars
he lit up and smoked
'til they were spent
only white
ash brushed off
red coats
and made
nothing

verge of real collapse, to which you said:
O.K., until we figure out something else.

You got the cabin in the divorce. We
split everything down the middle, the ac-
cretion of a life, the worst being the doo-
dads, the worst being the Aerolatte from
Bed Bath & Beyond for milk foaming. The
worst being the Dirt Devil, and all the
hand-held devices for cleaning to which
I'd inexplicably formed an attachment.

The worst being the Christmas decora-
tions, dragged from the basement in the
heat of summer: the needlepoint Santa
my sister did naturally went to me, the
pewter reindeer.

The very worst was the tin salamander
from Mexico City with plastic jewels on
its back and space for a tea light behind it.
The salamander you bought after we'd
stood over the graves with the Plexiglas
covers embedded in the stone of the
courtyard, outside the central cathedral
in Mexico City, unable to see what was

below because of the sunlight on the glass
and the murk and moss of decay.

And the wild fucking in the too-muggy
hotel room behind the cathedral, and the
bar when the Mexicans, one at a time,
stood up from tables squashed with rela-
tives, maybe fifteen at a table, all ages,
and sang out folk songs, and the enchila-
das and old grandmothers. You took the
salamander.

I had lost my entire share from the di-
vorce in the condo fiasco, but after thirty-
two years of marriage what could you do?
You would not have: I was put out on the
sidewalk. For a time, until I got on my
feet, I could stay at the cabin in Low
Point. Of course this was not us. This was
my lawyer and your lawyer.

I was a dancer until I was twenty-seven,
then arts and admin, then tourism at
the Confederation Building. But once,
when I was twenty-seven, I performed in

a dance that began at dawn in the grave-
yard of the Anglican cathedral. We danc-
ers lay face up on the graves. Many of the
headstones in that graveyard lie flat on
the ground and the words and dates are
smoothed away, gouged by centuries of
rain and sleet.

We were wearing long gowns and pet-
ticoats, the colours too brilliant for pe-
riod dresses. A troupe of fifteen young
women. We rose from the graves as the
sun came up, yawning, stretching our
arms in the air. We each had a big silver
tray with heaps of cut fruit that we of-
fered to the audience. Fog crawled
around the graveyard. The trains of our
dresses left streaks of bright emerald in
the dew-greyed grass. I was wearing a
ruffled dress with a stiff lace bodice; the
smell of baby powder and the comfort-
ing stink of some other actress's stale
underarm sweat. Lying in a faint de-
pression in the earth formed when the

II

there is still a place called Vermette, just
southeast of Winnipeg, landlocked but
not far from the river Seine, it has
a postal code, a store and a sign because
they let us use the names of our dead
as if that means
we're allowed to honour them
we do not forget our dead, we know
where they are, and sometimes we pull
them out of the ground like relics
we brush them off and wonder
at their possibility, like rotting bulbs of some
rare and fragile orchid, we tend to them
all winter and put them back
into the earth come spring with nothing
more tangible than hope to
make them flower
our names are scattered
seeds all over this
mother land, fathers' names
sons' names
Ritchot
Béliveau
Beaupré
just words long lost of meaning
Dumont
Desjarlais
Debuc
Leduc

south side street signs, markers
Tourenne
Turenne
Traverse
Trembley
this city is a graveyard
Guimond
Guiboche
Guibault
Gautier
my conquered people, these
children of bereft sons who
once thought themselves so grand
they had the nerve to create
a province
Carriere
Charriere
Chartrand
Cote
dead names breathing
thin dusty life
and Riel
Riel
everywhere Riel
we are intertwined within
this city, as if we belong
as if we are honoured

—KATHERENA VERMETTE

coffin below me had rotted through and collapsed.

Dancers live by their bodies; they know the muscle and gut, ache and attrition. It's a short stint, dominated by youth, strength, and sexual appetite. An ungovernable hunger. That's around the time we got together. When we accept the idea of decay, we are no longer dancers. We hold the simple tenet: everything that moves is alive.

It was in the early evening at Low Point beach. The man was wearing a too-tight plaid jacket and jeans with the crotch hanging low enough on his thighs that it seemed to pinch his gait. He walked with a cordoned strut. He was standing with his phone out, trying to take a picture of the water.

The ocean was teeming with cod. They were so dense near the shore I could see their backs break the surface, their vio-

lent writhing. They formed a solid sludge. The sun was setting, turning the water a streaky orange. Close to the beach it was a bloody violet. All the windows in the houses along the shore glowed amber. It was only a matter of minutes before the sun disappeared into the horizon.

I smelled the alcohol. His face was slack except for a ridge of cheekbone, high and sharp under his deep-set eyes, the corners of which radiating white lines in his tanned face, as if he had been squinting into a permanent glare. His forehead swooped back, the pate spattered with brown patches. He had a beard, tufts of thin hair, almost colourless. He was bone with hard knots of stringy muscle and very short. I'd never seen him before.

People said with the downturn in the economy, strangers were coming from town to cause trouble, break into homes, vandalize, steal what they could get. This

was new in a community that slept with their doors unlocked.

What's happening? I asked.

Fish, he said. I saw there were cars with their headlights on lined up on both sides of the harbour. People standing at the edge of the cliff. I had never seen anything like it. It was unnatural. The water churning.

I was trying to post a picture, he said. But you got no reception here.

Sometimes you get one or two bars, I said. Up near the church.

You don't belong here, he said. What are you? From town? He ran his eyes over me and slid his phone into the back pocket of his jeans. He started to walk beside me toward the road where his truck was idling. He took a flask out of the inside breast pocket of the jacket. The bottle was in a paper bag, soft with thousands of fine wrinkles from reuse. He tilted the mouth of the bottle toward me.

This was also the night of the fire at the Bay de Verde fish plant. Down the shore a few miles, a whole community was going up in flames. People moving out in school buses.

The smell of fresh paint in the condo; fifty-six people defrauded of their life savings. A chalky vanilla scent. They are scenting interior paint these days. But I'd stepped inside the one-room condo in St. John's with Marion Sullivan that day and felt nothing out of the ordinary. I am not a good judge of character. Even in hindsight it is hard to believe Marion is not the well-meaning, never-stops-talking-but-canny person I thought she was.

Marion intuited the divorce when we were getting a coffee at Tim Hortons, though I hadn't said. But at Tim Hortons, the pressure I'd felt. Preparing to sign the papers for the condo at the bank. My husband would have known about Marion Sullivan. He can smell a false, bright confidence as surely as I could smell that vanilla paint.

I had my son, Kevin, with me the morning I'd signed for the condo. He'd been

skateboarding outside the bank with friends, but the security guard came out to make them leave. All Kevin's buddies dispersed with the slump-shouldered lag of kids who don't respect authority but would find anything other than sluggish compliance beside the point.

Kevin stepped on the tail end of his board so it seemed to leap into his hand, and then followed me into my meeting without a word.

The day before I'd let myself in the front door of our downtown house on Gower, after a visit to the condo with Marion Sullivan, and I'd looked down the long hall to the kitchen where Kevin had been standing at the counter making a sandwich. He'd been lit up by the setting sun from the patio doors at the back of the room. A full-body halo. He winked out of view; I heard the kiss of the rubber seal on the fridge door as he pulled it open, tinkling the jars and bottles, and he winked back into view, a black silhouette against the blazing light.

Kevin had sprouted during the divorce. He'd shed a stunting dormancy, arms and legs telescoping out, shoulders broad and muscled. The growth was accompanied

by an unexpected elegance, a loping grace. In that instant, while he was backlit with blinding sunlight, I thought Kevin was his father. I thought my husband had come back, or more accurately, had never left.

What's happening out there? I asked the man at the Low Point beach. A lockjaw wince stole over his face before he spoke.

Fish, thousands of fish, he said. He was one of those men who pause too long before answering, a subtly coercive silence that counts on you to be polite and wait it out.

It wasn't quite dark yet and there were lots of people around, but the man stood too close to me. When I stepped back, he stepped toward me. It looked like the whole town was out on the cliffs to take in the leaping bodies of the fish. Cautious stories on the news, lately, of a return in the cod stocks. But cod don't usually do what I was seeing. They don't behave that way under normal circumstances.

The fire took the crab plant in Bay de Verde that night. Everybody coming into the store was talking stamps. There

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had been a promise; the plant owners were committed to providing work. But there was the question of how many hours. People needed the overtime for their stamps if they wanted to get through the winter.

Percy Strong picked me up on the road that night and drove me up the hill to the store. Percy owns the only other house on my lane, his lights visible through a stand of whispering aspen and a few birch. Percy's daughter, Jocelyn, lives behind my cabin, an acre of hay between us and a high row of white rose bushes.

Jocelyn has put in one of those motion-sensitive halogen lights and it pierces the cabin's kitchen at all hours, in the middle of the night. A car or a coyote will set it off. The bright things in the kitchen flash—the chrome kettle, the stainless steel fridge. When Jocelyn's light comes on, the picture window in the kitchen goes black and reflects everything in the room. Even the print of pandas on my flannel pyjamas is visible. Perfectly delineated pandas, little white chests, each chomping on a branch of leaves. Sometimes, I've wandered out to the kitchen for water just in my underwear, and there I am, lit up.

On the day I thought Kevin was my husband: we have a stained-glass fish, a sculpin (mouth hanging open, protuberant, saucer eyes) made by a local craftsman, suspended in the window transom above the front door. The reflection of the fish was visible on the wall, red and amber, floating without moving, as though the fish was working against a current too strong for it. Kevin has his father's posture, his voice.

The illusion—the moment I'd thought my husband was back—afforded a reprieve so tender and dreamlike it weakened my knees. I stumbled over the boots in the front hall and had to hold the bannister.

Part of the reason I was buying the condo was that Kevin had decided to live with his father. He was moving out of his second-floor bedroom, full of dirty dishes smeared with hardened ketchup, the wall-sized flat screen for video games, the blasts of pseudo automatic rifles, the way he talked (too loud because he couldn't hear himself with the headset) to people all over the world, somehow sounding in command, offering strategy, logistics, in a voice both calm and full of intelligence, cajol-

ing, instructive, often playing through the night. The hole in the wall where he had smacked a basketball hard against the Gyproc, the posters of rap artists smoking joints, the electric guitar and amp, the pile of laundry. The three-storey Victorian downtown house was too big for me if I were living alone. It was also a fuck you to my husband. I expected him to intervene. I expected him to decide to come home once there was no home. I wanted him to think I'd moved on.

At the bank, Kevin had sprawled in the chair beside mine, his legs flung wide. He shot questions at the manager. He finagled me a lower interest rate by threatening to go to another bank. But the threat was so pleasingly articulated, amid banter about the advantages of a particular iPhone upgrade, the young manager complied without argument.

Outside the bank, Kevin dropped the skateboard and put one foot on it before it rolled away.

What will you do with your life? I said. He told me that a friend's dad, driving them from a field party at four in the morning, kept saying that Kevin should do communications.

I want a job where I convince people to buy things, he said.

What sort of things? I said.

You gave up too easily, he said. Then he blushed, but his eyes met mine. A floater, opalescent and the size of loonie, dropped onto his mouth.

Your father did this, I said.

I flung my arm out at the bank as if everything we had just experienced in there proved I was the injured party.

Please, he said. Really?

What should I do? I said. You tell me.

It's so easy, he said. He was rolling the skateboard back and forth under his green and blue suede sneaker.

I was driving back to town from the cabin for a meeting with my lawyer. It had begun to rain hard around Holyrood; the wind was so high I had to grip the steering wheel tight to keep the car from swerving across the line. Water shivered down the glass. A transport truck passed, covering my car in a hard wave of slush and I could see absolutely nothing except the writhing tail of black rubber detached from the

passenger wiper, squiggling so hard it looked as though it was trying to bore its way through the window to suction itself to my face.

Marion Sullivan wore linen in earth tones, drapery things. Not the ordinary gabardine navy suit jackets with brass buttons and the tight all-weather Reitmans skirts that stretched across thighs gone to fat worn by most of the real estate agents I'd encountered.

Marion didn't say anything about my husband's betrayal; there was nothing cloying in her approach to selling real estate.

She was offering a deal. Not a great deal, but a credible deal. When I said that my husband was seeing someone else she touched my hand with her fingertips. My hand on the table and she'd stroked it; I felt her long false nails graze the skin on the back of my hand. An erotic charge that radiated from between my legs all through me.

She leaned in over the table, resting the heel of her other hand against her cheek and talked about the man she was seeing without drawing breath.

His face isn't much to look at but I'm telling you, she said. Works in a camp outside Fort Mac, up on that scaffold, and you have to haul things up with rope, a hundred feet sometimes. There's some that complain about the food, but you don't hear him complain, she told

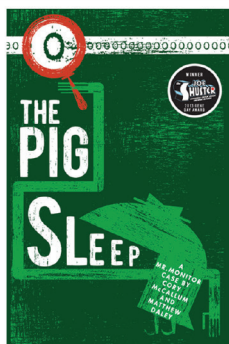
me. They has steak once a week, they has chicken. Six weeks on and two home, and I give it to him. I make it worth his while. What he lavishes me with. You see this pin. That's a diamond chip.

But you can't go walking in the woods up there, the wolves will get you. They can be aggressive. And the bears. Coyotes are shy, but they get together in packs on the periphery of, what do you call, society, they attack. The money is good but you're a hundred feet up. And dangerous? If somebody up there gets word, or say somebody passes it around, that you used to have trouble with your back, that's it, you're gone. You're done. They don't invite you back. There was them that had to go further north and by the time they drove back they were two hours in the bus and starved then and missed supper. And some of them complained and they were let go, gone. Complaining does not go over.





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Marion Sullivan touched me for the second time then. This time pressing one knee between mine under the table.

Do you hear me? she asked. I said I had heard her.

Complaining gets you nowhere, she said.

You have to decide what you want and get it. This is a man, we sleep together when he's in town. Not a looker, but the arms on him. She was gathering our napkins and the empty Styrofoam soup bowls, the plastic spoons. Squishing it all together.

You have to make people do what you want, Marion Sullivan said. People love to be guided. You're doing them a favour. The hardest thing is deciding. Decisions are exhausting. You ease them toward what you want. Jimmy, that's his name, he goes down on me.

She was standing up and she blew a breath up over her top lip to get a wisp of hair off her forehead. You decide for people they will follow you. Doesn't matter what you decide, they follow.

Let's go see this condo, she said. Two walls of glass. View through the harbour. I think you'll be excited.

Gas pumps and the lottery tickets, cigarettes, beer. You would not believe the money I make on a bucket of salt beef. They buy it by the piece. The stuff turns me; the brine watery, a dark wine colour smelling mineral. Thick clots of fat floating on the top, callow as candle wax, and the way the chunks of meat roil up from the bottom when people dig around with the ladle for a choice piece—so I make them do it themselves. There's a box of surgical gloves next to the tub. They are powdery inside, an invisible talc, and the tongs are attached by a string to the bucket.

I went with her to view the condo. At the viewing the two walls of glass were covered in plaster dust. The milky light. High ceilings and noises reverberated without the furniture to absorb sounds. Plaster dust on the hardwood, floating in the air like smoke. A man on a ladder with a mask and goggles turned off the sander and twisted to look at us.

In the sudden quiet, without the sound of the sander, his breathing in the mask was loud, like a death rattle. I knew the sound because I had been present when my mother died, a rasping,

ragged breath, strangled and wilful.

Even Marion Sullivan shut up for a minute or two as the dust whorled; cloud-bursts of silt, rising in the draft that came with us. The dust looked like figures waltzing, twisting around each other. There was a white film on my jacket when I stepped outside again.

It turned out that Marion Sullivan—a lively, but not manic, former social worker—was borrowing from investors at eighty per cent interest. She had borrowed large sums from all the real-estate agents in her office who were devoted to her. She had borrowed from a city councillor. She had not paid them anything in months.

At the beginning of July one of the condo buyers wanted his down payment back. Next people were dialing the radio call-in shows. Ms. Sullivan did not return their calls. I left a message on her cell. Then several messages.

At first, I will admit, I could not accept she had lied to anyone. I felt indignation on her behalf, a fierce but ultimately shallow loyalty. Then, though I understood she had lied to most of her customers, I could not believe she'd lied to me.

Finally I understood, everything I had taken from the divorce was lost.

Jocelyn Strong, my neighbour in the back, Percy's daughter, has five children. The eldest, Libby, is sixteen, the first to move out, working at the Dollarama in St. John's. I'd heard at the store she had shackled up with an abusive boyfriend and I'd heard drugs and maybe sex work. People will say anything. I only knew she was gone for sure because I was shopping at the Dollarama for platters to put out baked goods at a fundraiser we were having for the people who lost their homes in Bay de Verde. There was a lineup, and my sister, who was with me, was talking about Lysol wipes.

You just keep them under the bathroom sink, she said. Toothpaste or whatever, you can just pull one out and wipe things down. It's very convenient. Everything is sterilized.

There was a woman ahead of us in the line who stepped out to pick up the Lysol wipes, and she was standing there, reading the instructions. My sister started talking to her. They were agreeing.

When I got to the counter there was Libby Strong, the white skin of her mother, with the same freckles, the

orange-blond hair, and three studs in her plump lower lip, a lot of concealer around her left eye like there might be a bruise.

Libby Strong has eyes like her grandfather's, pale blue with a black rim around the iris. The girl had spent a long time with Percy when she was little. She had his composure. Wiry like him, stocky. Comfortable with the prolonged silences in conversation. The kind of quiet talk that occurs with people who live in rural areas. The sense that insight forms long before the utterance. Not a need to drag things out, but no impatience. As if speaking were a minor sacrament.

Libby, I said. Look at you.

I like town, she said with instant defiance.

I suppose you got your high school?

I got all As, she said. She was wrapping brown paper around the individual glasses that belonged to the customer in front of me.

All A-pluses, actually, she said. They told me I was going to win two prizes, and one of them was for perfect attendance, and the next day I told Mom, I'm staying home. I wasn't walking across no stage for perfect attendance. But the scholarship I got, that's what let me move to town.

Your mother was in showing me the pictures from the prom, I said. I don't know where you got that dress. I know it wasn't from around here.

On-line, and I'm after selling it on Kijiji and making fifty bucks off it.

I hope you never had someone come to your home, I said.

We met at a Tim Hortons downtown, she never had a car, Libby said.

Your mother mustn't be very happy with you gone.

Even up in Cowan Heights I can see Cabot Tower, she said. I can see all the way downtown, because in Cowan Heights, you can see. You can see everything up there.

Are you going to university? I asked. All you Strongs are so smart. You could do anything you want.

No, I got this job, she said.

Your mother must miss you, I said.

She was counting my plastic platters. I knew there was a rift between them. They weren't talking.

Mom, she said.

I think there's five.

You got six here.

Six, is it?

She holds up a single platter to the pricing gun and the red laser flickers and it dings six times.

Mom is too controlling, Libby said. My sister puts the Lysol wipes on the counter.

Ring them in, my sister said.

I'll pay for them, I said.

She'll pay for them, my sister said. I'm going to give them to her. Make a convert. She's a sceptical one, but I can break her spirit. I mean if you have them in easy reach. The toilet bowl. You live with men you have to be wiping the toilet all the time, they don't do it.

Libby Strong met my eyes when my sister mentioned living with men. So Libby knew my husband and I had separated. Maybe she even knew the divorce had gone through. That meant the whole shore knew. Of course she did. Even out here in Cowan Heights, with a new life ahead of her. Even at the age of seventeen she would know everything. She had also figured out that my sister didn't know most of it. She has weighed my failure to communicate this against her leaving her mother's house. She had weighed my humiliation against what she's doing to her mother. She saw she had the upper hand. She wouldn't give me away, but I'd have to stop trying to make her feel guilty.

They're antibacterial, Libby Strong said.

That's no way to talk about your mother, I said. Your mother is up there with four youngsters underfoot. She's on her own. She works like a dog.

I like it in here, Libby said. She put the platters in a bag.

Looks like you got a shiner, I said.

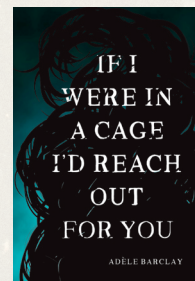
Dad had me over, she said. Sunday dinner. He's living with somebody else now.

It was meant to sting me, refer to my own situation. Jocelyn Strong's husband did a three-week rotation on the White Rose but they'd shut her down. Their house in Low Point was a two bedroom and when all the men on the White Rose were laid off the marriage went sour and he'd moved into St. John's.

Listen, I said. I wrote my phone number and the address of the Victorian House on Gower and the code for the front door. It had not sold yet.

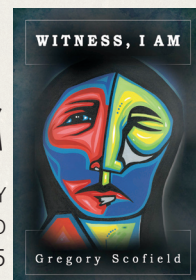
If ever you need a place to stay for some reason, I said. My husband is there half the week, and I'm in sometimes, but often she's empty, if we're at the cabin. Empty bedroom on the third floor. You're always welcome, Libby. Any time of the day or night.

READ NIGHTWOOD



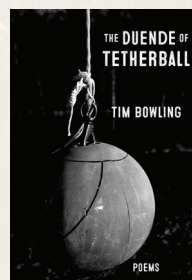
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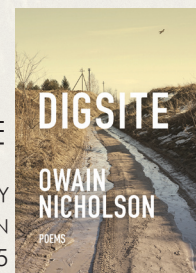
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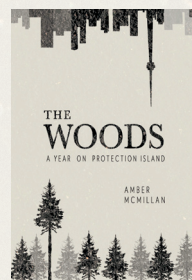
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She took the scrap of paper and read it. She knew what I was implying, and she was afraid I would tell her mother about the bruise. But she crumpled the paper in her fist and let it drop in the garbage bucket behind her.

I have a place, she said, in Cowan Heights. She turned to glance out at the parking lot, which was packed. Then she held out my bag of plastic platters and Lysol wipes.

Thank you for shopping at Dolarama, she said. I have to get this lady behind you.

One evening at the end of August, the man I'd first met at Low Point beach appeared at the foot of my bed. He was as solid and present as the bedpost, wearing the plaid jacket. Though I was fully awake, or felt I was, my body was paralyzed. I could not move. He picked up the corner of the eiderdown from the foot of the bed and pulled it off my body. I was wearing my pyjamas with the pandas, but my skin was covered in goosebumps. I was full of terror but my heart was beating very slowly, like a drum at a memorial service, a deep, hard muffled

beat that may have been the ocean across the street, crashing on Low Point beach. Still, I could not move. The phone was on the bedside table, and with tremendous effort I flung an arm out and slapped my hand around it, but there weren't any bars.

The kids who robbed the store abandoned the van they'd stolen and took off into the bog. As the cops closed in, they got so far and gave up. It was November and the bog was partially frozen and they'd run over a long flat white surface and the ice cracked and they were up to their waists. Of course there are sinkholes and you can disappear; a few cows have been lost that way, all the community out with a rope around the cow's neck pulling with all their might, until they gave up and shot the terrified animal before it sank all the way under.

When the teenagers came out of the woods back onto the highway they were surrounded by five cop cars with the lights going. Both held syringes in their raised fists, threatening to jab anyone who came near them. The cops drew out

their Tasers and the youngest cop, trigger happy, shot the girl. She was a long time before she could move. Just lying on the pavement. The boy dropped the syringe and was arrested peaceably. The army surplus bag of ketchup bottles and mustard, and whatever else was on the shelf he happened to clear out, had disappeared in the bog.

The whole town of Bay de Verde had been evacuated. Houses gone. Beverly O'Grady was staying with her sister in Low Point and she'd come in for a tin of Carnation.

They got everybody put up in the gym, she said. They're waiting for the ammonia tanks to blow.

A reporter from VOCM had stopped for gas and was eying the apple flips. There had been a new batch of them that morning and they were almost gone.

Elaine Barrett came after Beverly and she said, The calls are coming now. They're saying thirty-eight hours is all they can promise. Thirty-eight hours for everybody but you got to go to the two other plants, a long distance away. Hard for people got no transportation.



Conundrum Press Presents...

THE COLLECTED NEIL THE HORSE! by ARN SABA

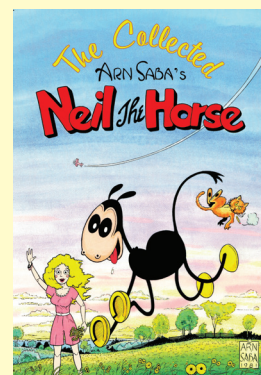
Making the World Safe
for Musical Comedy

Neil the Horse ran 15 issues in the 1980s. It is a totally original hybrid influenced more by Carl Barks and Fred Astaire than by the underground comics of the time. Originally produced under the name Arn Saba, Neil's creator transitioned to Katherine Collins after the last issue.

Neil and his friends Soapy and Mam'selle Poupée are a struggling song-and-dance act. Their magical and absurd adventures take them to outer space, the past, and the future in a mix of slapstick, romance and show business.

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ISBN 978-1-77262-015-3
8x10 inches, 360 pages
b/w, softcover, \$25

Introduction by Trina Robbins

NOVA SCOTIA



That's a start though, I say. Thirty-eight hours.

Thirty-eight is no good to anybody, she says. You can't get enough for stamps with that. We need overtime. People are screwed unless they get overtime. People are saying the Thai workers should be sent back. If there's not enough work for people here. They should go on.

I snapped the plastic bag for her bread and milk.

I knows they're sending money back to their families and that, she said. But people are put up in the gym down there. A lot of them homes got no insurance. Burnt to the ground. I'm lucky I got my sister up here. I'll have one of them apple flips and give me five scratch-and-wins. Then she bit at a hangnail so her finger bled a little stream of thin bright blood, which she licked away. She was wearing plaid pyjama bottoms and a jean jacket with a rose on the back in plastic jewels and silver studs.

Because of all the activity I wasn't that surprised to find a stranger at the beach.

Then I saw the cod jumping. Thousands, hundreds of thousands it seemed, throwing themselves in the air and flopping down. I wondered if there had been some shifting of tectonic plates out there. But we would have heard about that.

I was trying the phone, the man said. But you got no reception here do you? You got no way to call someone if you ever needed to.

You can't get a signal in some places, I said.

Where are you from, he asked. You don't belong here. He winced, a kind of slow spasm.

I grew up in St. John's, I said.

You want a drink, he asked. He lifted the bottle.

No, thank you, I said.

Too good for a drink? he asked. I looked back over the cliffs, all the cars were leaving, one after the other. There would be something about the fish on the news.

I'm just out for a stroll, I said.

I'm Lorraine Cake's cousin, he said. Lorraine will vouch for me.

I don't care who you are, I said.

You got a husband or anything? he said. Fine woman like you don't want a drink?

I turned off the dirt lane from the beach to the highway that leads to the store. At

the top of the hill, near the church, I'd get a few bars of service. He took my elbow then.

Not going to answer me? he asked.

Yes, I am married, I said. The church is maybe five minutes away and is lit with garish red floodlights the new minister had installed at Christmas last year. They lit up the building all through the summer and fall. I wrenched my arm out of his hand.

Percy Strong's truck drove up then and I waved him down.

Nice-looking woman, the man called out, as I got in the passenger side of Percy's truck. He swept Coke cans and crumpled bar wrappers off the seat.

Heading up to the store, he said.

Yes, I said.

Who is that? Percy asked.

Some asshole, I said. The guy was in his truck then and he tore out in front of Percy Strong and zoomed away, down the road toward the highway.

Bat out of hell, Percy said. He stopped at the store and came in for smokes. He moved to the edge of the counter, and worked a handful of loonies out of the pocket of his jeans. He won twenty bucks and I opened the cash and handed it to him.

Have an apple flip on me, I said. I asked about the layoffs in the camps north of Fort Mac where he has a year and a half to go before he retires.

The likes of which you've never seen, he said.

After he left, the grey monitor affixed to the ceiling showed me the empty aisles. The engines of the milk coolers buzzed hard. There was a rush around nine-thirty, several cars at the pumps. Lorraine Cake came in and I asked about the man.

Said a cousin of yours, I told her. I described him and truck.

Lorraine said she didn't know anyone fit the description I gave of the man at the beach. She was certain she didn't know anybody like that. She questioned me on each detail. Then she asked me did I see the fish.

I never heard tell of anything like it, she said. They're saying the scientists will be down here tomorrow.

Standing beside the man at the beach, when he had his phone out, I'd remembered a dream I'd had the night before. In

the dream, on my left breast, four new nipples had grown overnight. They were raised and stiffened, raspberry coloured, incredibly tender. They were large nipples and threatened, it seemed to me, to spurt milk. They really hurt, the way nipples hurt when a milk duct gets blocked and the skin cracks but is constantly damp with seeping milk or bright blood. I was thrown back seventeen years to when I had given birth to my son. The gentian violet I'd used when I got thrush. The word "thrush," something a barn animal would be afflicted with. The shock of it, because we were encouraged to continue breast feeding, despite the pain, so sharp it brought instant tears, and the baby's mouth also painted that indigo purple, an ugly stain so everybody knew what was going on.

The new nipples in the dream made my breast like a pig's udder, and in the swollen follicles around each nipple, stiff silver hairs were sprouting.

I filled with a shame so intense my main preoccupation in the dream was to hide the extra nipples, until terror made me show them to my husband. When I took off my T-shirt, the nipples were gone. The skin was inflamed and there was a mark and swelling where each new nipple had been, like a mosquito bite.

At midnight I shut the store and walked back down the road to the cabin. The ocean was calm then. No sign of the fish. The plant owners in Bay de Verde had been on the radio. They would have the plant up and running in a matter of months. There was work in the reconstruction. It would be repurposed to process cod. In the kitchen I made myself some tea and I thought I saw a movement in the garden, in the bushes. Jocelyn's light came on at once and I couldn't see what was out there, it was just me in the glass with my cup pressed to my chest with both hands.

That night the man was at the foot of my bed again. I could not move at all. After straining very hard, I managed to fling my arm over my body to the bedside table and I had the cellphone in my fist. He got on his hands and knees at the foot of the bed and straddled me until he had worked his knees into my armpit





and held my wrists down and then dug both his knees into my chest. I couldn't breathe. And he put his hands around my throat. He was wearing latex gloves. He was wearing the gloves I had near the salt beef bucket at the store.

His mouth, I saw, was stained blue, and he lowered his face toward mine and kissed me, and began to suck what little breath I had from me. When he pulled away from the kiss his face was gone, just an opalescent star of light hovering above me. With one hand he was working at his belt.

I felt the phone in my hand change shape, transmogrify. The man shimmied forward on his knees, thrust his hips out, wagging his penis near my face; the whole room filled with a sweet stink it took me a moment to recognize: vanilla paint. He must have bathed in it.

I knew rather than felt that the phone had turned into a syringe, and with more effort than I have ever exerted in my life, as though I were lifting a hundred pound weight with one hand, I forced my arm off the bed and drove the needle into his side. I felt it sink deep and hard; I felt the long needle crack as it drove against a bone. I gasped raggedly, drawing deep breaths, soaked now in sweat, sitting up on the bed. He was gone. My phone lit up. It was a text from Kevin. He asked me to buy a frozen pizza on the way home. I saw it was a text from more than a year ago.

It was then I heard the screen door at the back of the house wheeze open, the door off the kitchen, and then a key in the lock, and then the back door and the stamp of two feet, the scrudging on the rug. Someone was getting the dirt off his shoes. The clatter of an animal in the hall; it sniffled and trotted to my room. The dog. It was my husband's dog. He found me, dug his snout into my lap, pawed me, moaned. Then he turned and barked, twice. Sharp high-pitched barks at the wall, as if there were something behind it. I hauled him out of the room by the collar.

In the kitchen, Jocelyn Strong's motion-sensitive light filled the black window with the reflection of my husband. There were floaters on his face, two coins of shimmering light over his eyes; I blinked and blinked until they faded.

I thought we could talk, he said.
Please, I said. Really? ▽

Carousel

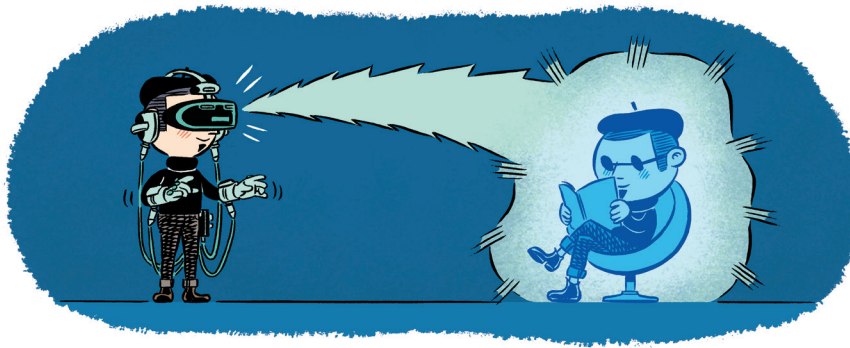
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Canadian Cartooning

· Dave Lapp.

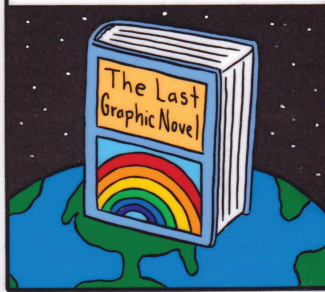
A psychiatrist once told me "There's no such thing as pure thought."



I suppose I saw cartooning as a pure art form...



...if one individual creator did all the writing, pencilling, lettering and inking by themselves, then what they made must be art.



By making your art, all the good things would naturally follow...



... glowing reviews, awards, status, camaraderie, recognition, money...



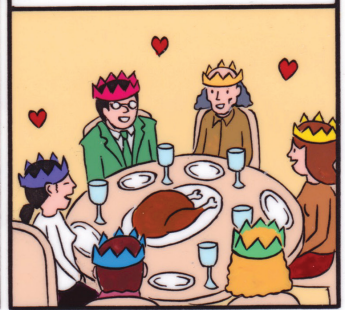
... those things are there, they're all there ... but not like I'd expected...



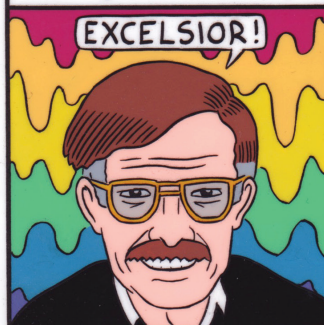
The cartooning world is small, all the good things are small... and the money is very small.



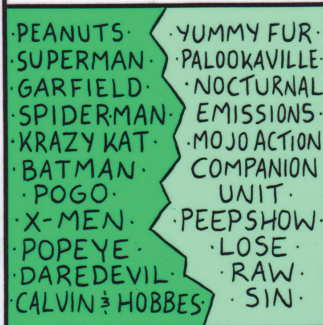
I really thought it would all be so much bigger, happier... something like a big, happy family helping each other with work and life and art.



... maybe this idea comes from the illusory residue generated from images of 'Marvel's Bullpen'.



... maybe it's from confusing commercial products with artistic ones...



... a Canadian best selling book numbers around 5000 copies... and maybe the artist collects a buck or two per book... for all the years of work involved, there's no way to create an equation that's much above poverty...



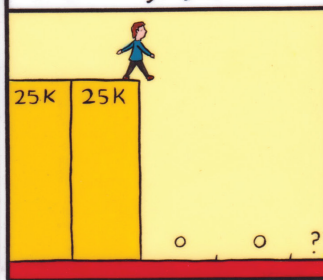
These great projects should have great rewards, but there's no financial security... I believed it would turn into regular paying work that you loved doing.



To the chagrin of many others, I've analyzed every aspect I could think of ... book sales, art sales, illustration, commissions, movie options, screenplays, show appearances, prints, T-shirts, buttons, Kickstarter, Patreon...



... and grants... if you're lucky, really lucky, you can receive 50 thousand dollars to get you through a 4-year period of creating a graphic novel...



So... where does one look to find what it takes to continue? Salvation? Denial? Hope? Withdrawal? The Lottery? ? ? ?



I look to getting my art done and done well... that's all I've got left, and it's pure.



**“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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