

# TADDLE CREEK

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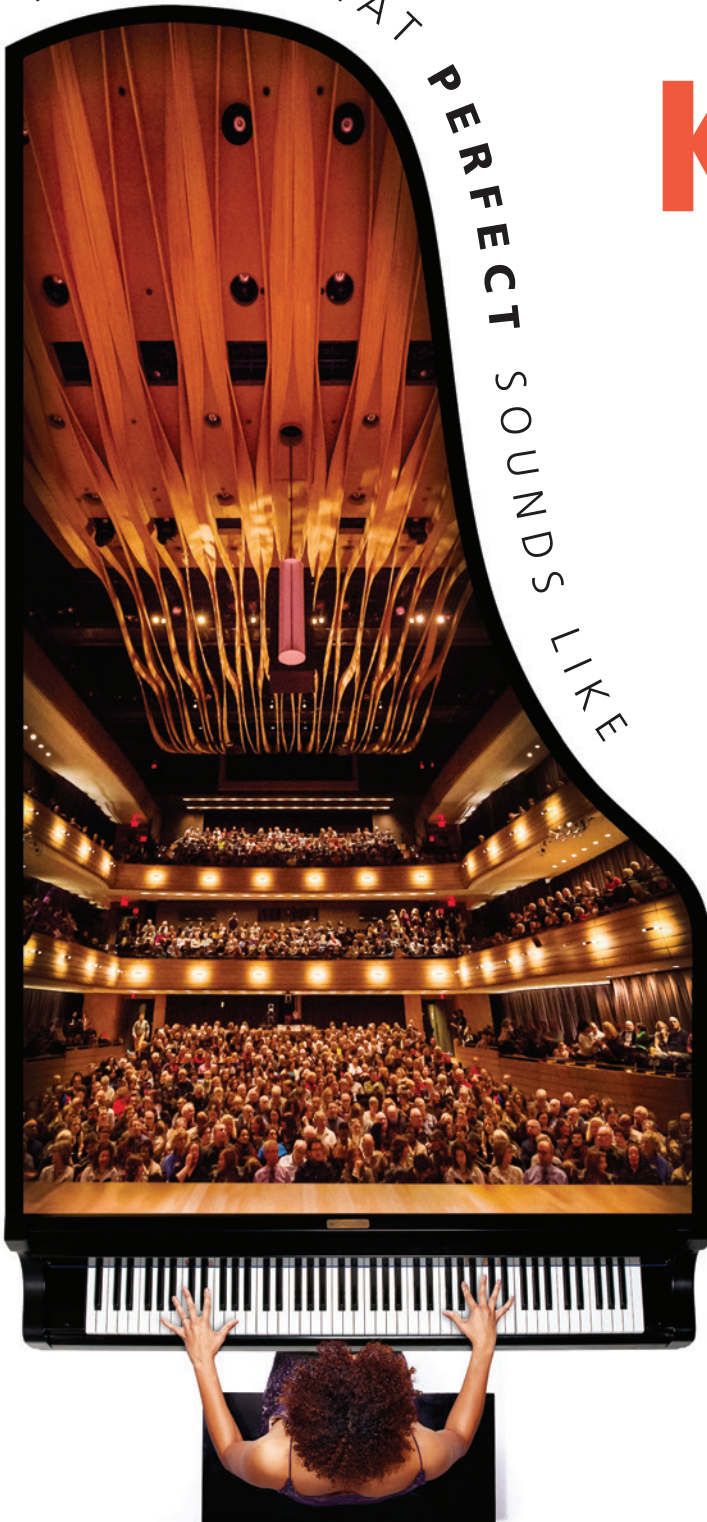


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*"Rebel without the sell through."*

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 The Photographer Thomas Blanchard

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## THE CONTRIBUTORS

*Look at who made Taddle Creek this issue.*

**Cedar Bowers** saw her first short story published in Joyland (the Web site, not the Stephen King book), in 2017. Her second, "The Same Cabin," appears on page 42. "Every woman I love is an incredible liar, and so are Phae, Sonia, and the protagonist in this story," she said. "I bask in their company." Cedar divides her time between Victoria and Galiano Island, working as a transcriptionist and bookseller, and playing Dungeons & Dragons with her family. "My D. & D. character is seven feet tall, and her name is Marvellous Mega Miranda. She swings a two-handed sword as she fights ogres and bugbears. She is a hundred and eighty-two years old and has plenty of confidence to go around."

Wendy, whose dreams of art stardom are perpetually derailed, has had quite the year. In March, the character, created by **Walter Scott**, appeared on the *New Yorker's* Web site, and, with her new comic on page 16, now adds *Taddle Creek* to her publication credits. A third *Wendy* collection currently is in the works.

"I wanted to drop the viewer right in the middle of a story, with a purposeful lack of context," **George Pfromm** said of his cover for this issue. "Whoever opened the door will push the narrative ahead, while the viewer will be stranded, not knowing how they got there, or where everyone went. So it's exactly like life." George's youthful love of comics, combined with his natural athletic ineptitude, set him on

the path to be an illustrator. He lives in Somerville, Massachusetts, and teaches animation and illustration classes at the Lesley University College of Art and Design, in Cambridge.

Attendees of *Taddle Creek's* twentieth-anniversary party saw the author **Brian Francis** discuss his love of caker cooking in person. "When we moved my mom out of the family home, I grabbed all of her recipes," he said. "Most were for casseroles or called for Dream Whip—food that's fallen out of fashion because it's either considered lazy or, you know, chock full of sodium and saturated fat. I worried that if I didn't make the recipes, no one else would." Brian now writes about unhealthy edibles in a new column, *The Kitch*, debuting on page 18.

**Terry Murray** was a teenager in 1968, when her family's support for the integration of a neighbourhood school put them in the sights of the Red Squad, an arm of the Chicago Police Department that kept tabs on citizens considered to be political dissenters. Terry recently completed a memoir, excerpted on page 8, on the effects of her family's activism: "Until I began researching and writing this memoir, I'd forgotten how pervasive the Red Squad was in our lives. This was at the same time Edward Snowden was revealing the extent of electronic spying on law-abiding citizens globally—which gave me a feeling of 'déjà vu all over again,' in the words of Yogi Berra."

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Chris Kuriata, in response to *Taddle Creek* No. 40, wrote, “I wish more magazines would print notes from readers (following the example of *Geist* or *Mad*).” *Taddle Creek* hates to disappoint a reader and contributor as loyal and well-read as Chris, but the magazine’s slightly new format has settled, and a regular letters page, unfortunately, did not make the cut. Reader comments will, however, appear on this page from time to time, alongside house business and such. The magazine hopes this compromise will appease you to some degree, Chris.

“I have fond memories of the Atlantic National Exhibition,” the long-time *Taddle Creek* contributor and one-time resident of Saint John, New Brunswick, R. M. Vaughan wrote the magazine recently, in regards to Conan Tobias’s historical memoir in issue No. 39. “I saw Charley Pride there, and Carroll Baker—‘Canada’s Dolly Parton.’ She was very busy and I remember the men bringing binoculars to catch glimpses of her breasts when she dipped to hit a high note. Ah, the innocence.”

“I first heard of you—and subscribed—about a year or so ago, when I got a letter in the mail advertising your magazine,” Lynn Jatania, one of the many converts the magazine picked up via its infamous 2017 junk-mail campaign, wrote *Taddle Creek*. “I remember it was so funny and charming and meandering, in a good way. I’ve since sung your praises to everyone I know.” Lynn is in

## THE EPHEMERA

*Goings on at the magazine.*

for an even bigger treat when her subscription runs out next year: an entirely new set of renewal letters, which *Taddle Creek* began sending out this spring. They’re entertaining but have less of a narrative structure than the old set. The magazine has it on good authority that many readers delayed sending *Taddle Creek* money so they could read the next instalment.

Stuart Ross is filling in as *Taddle Creek*’s copy editor this issue, and his presence reminded the magazine of his one-time playful-yet-stinging jab that *Taddle Creek* is slow to keep up with changing trends in the English language. What better time, then, to announce two changes to the magazine’s editorial style. Years after being left as literally the only outlet fighting the good fight for a properly capitalized “E-mail,” *Taddle Creek* will, this issue, begin lower-casing it. (The hyphen stays—no letters, please.) It will also close up and remove the hyphen from “on-line.” Both “Web” and “Internet” remain capitalized, for reasons *Taddle Creek* feels are obvious.

Some belated congratulations: Thomas Blanchard’s photograph of Alexandra Leggat, from *Taddle Creek* No. 38, was nominated for a National Magazine Award, in the Portrait Photography category; Kelly Ward’s short story “A Girl and a Dog on a Friday Night,” from *Taddle Creek* No. 38, was long-listed for the Journey Prize; and “Canada’s Greatest Cartoonist,” Conan Tobias’s profile of the illustrator Lou Skuce, from *Taddle Creek* No. 37, took home (figuratively—there was no actual certificate) honourable mention at the Heritage Toronto Awards.

“Yes!!! I’ll be able to lord this over you for years!” was Michael Christie’s response upon being informed that a correction would be issued for the misspelling of his first name as “Michel” on the contents page of *Taddle Creek* No. 40. Technically this was not a mistake; it simply was French. But Michael/Michel was so excited about being the subject of a *Taddle Creek* correction that the magazine hated to disappoint him. Also, in “Elements of Style,” Conan Tobias’s look at three new reference works, also from *Taddle Creek* No. 40, an error both ironic and embarrassing occurred in the title of *A Dictionary of Canadianisms on Historical Principles*, with the final word misspelled “Principals.” Obviously the editor needs to take his own advice and always be sure to check proper names letter by letter. *Taddle Creek* regrets these twentieth-anniversary errors.

—TADDLE CREEK

# CAN YOU TELL ME A JOKE ABOUT YOUR PROFESSION?

BY SHANNON WEBB-CAMPBELL

Rachel understood life as a cadence of rituals. She took pride in monotonous tasks—eating, sleeping. How, in a way, living could be an art.

At thirty years old, Rachel knew her best features were her green eyes and thin wrists. She found patterns and particularities in the way she ate breakfast, what time she went to bed, when she masturbated. Kept track of everything in a Moleskine journal.

Throughout the day, she recorded every morsel consumed, hour overslept, turn-on, turnoff, and glass of water. Even kept a strand of her brown hair when she got a haircut. Her parents believed her to be obsessive-compulsive, but she imagined herself to be a diligent documentarian. Bodies required food, water, stimulation, and rest.

Transcription became ritual when she was in journalism school. Her need to record and preserve got her straight As. Rachel kept hundreds of Moleskines, sorted by colour, all dated in a rainbow of aligned spines.

She was never a very strong news reporter. Preferred the editing side of things. Instead of seeking a story, sniffing for truth, ravenous to be the first reporter to break the news, Rachel lived for the small details. Copy editing was her calling. Put her faith in the quality of good grammar.

In small-town New Brunswick, she looked forward to the *Telegraph-Journal's* weekend arts insert, Salon. Rachel didn't copy edit this section of the paper, so it felt new to her. On the weekends, she read it with fresh eyes.

Hunched over the breakfast table, a cup of lukewarm coffee and a day-old carrot muffin, she read with a red pen in hand. Added an Oxford comma when required.

This Saturday, Rachel decided to go to the local indie art gallery. She had to get out of the house.

Put on her beige overcoat, and walked from her wartime-housing suburb into town. Halfway down the main drag, it started to rain. Felt wet pavement pool through the soles of her navy-blue Converse sneakers.

The gallery was still four blocks away. Past the barbershop, public library, and two overpriced cafés. By the time she made it to the bus terminal, her toes pruned in her wet socks.

Right outside the gallery hung an obnoxious, all-capitalized sign: "CAN YOU TELL ME A JOKE ABOUT YOUR PROFESSION?" Nothing annoyed Rachel more than caps lock. People used it to command attention, for emphasis, but no one liked being yelled at. It enraged her.

Every year, on June 28th and October 22nd, Rachel received a slough of e-mails in all capital letters wishing her a "HAPPY INTERNATIONAL CAPS LOCK DAY." Last year, she called in sick, didn't check her e-mail for an entire day.

Between the weather and the signage, Rachel pushed through the gallery door with agitated angst. The door swung so hard the bells above the frame crashed to the linoleum floor.

"Oh God, sorry about that."

Rachel squatted awkwardly, a pool of rainwater dripping from her coat onto the floor. Picking up the bells, she stood again and nearly slipped. She tried to re-hinge the bells, but she wasn't tall enough. A gangly bald man walked toward her.

"Let me help you," he said in a thick European accent.

Rachel stammered, "I'm such a klutz," and stepped back. Wet sneakers squeaked across the floor.

"I'm Alwyn Engelen. Who are you?"

"Rachel MacDonald."

He extended his right hand. Hers felt childlike in his.

"You are here for the art show?"

Rachel nodded.

"I am the visiting artist-in-residence."

"I saw your photo in the paper this morning. Berlin is pretty far from New Brunswick."

Alwyn cocked his head. Reminded her of a giraffe, long-necked, heavy eyelids, and thin lips.

"They are exactly three thousand, four hundred, and fifty-six miles apart."

Impressed by his precision, she smiled.

Alwyn led her to a wall covered in square boxes divided by primary colours, arranged in the form of a grid. Each colour represented a corresponding graphical score based on diary entries from members of the local classical ensemble.

"I translated diary entries from each member's daily life and created a musical score to soundtrack the entries after asking them a series of questions."

Rachel was dumbfounded. Never heard of anyone taking stock of repetitive daily tasks and making them into music. She tried to interrupt to tell him about her notebooks, but couldn't get the words out.

"You see, the questions I asked were very plain, ordinary records of everyday life."

"Like, what sort of questions?" she stammered.

He squinted in answer.

"Things like: Can you describe the character of your voice and the way you speak? Do you know the key of your voice? What did you eat for every meal? And, of course: Can you tell me a joke about your profession?"

"I'm a copy editor. Nothing funny about that. I do record everything I eat, when I sleep. I've been doing it since I was a teenager, and it became compulsive in university."

She reached into her recycled *Walrus* tote bag, took out a black Moleskine, and opened to the middle of the book.

"Wow. Mind if I take a look?"

She handed over her notebook with





trepidation. Everything was written in blue ink, every letter perfectly formed. Noticed his eyebrows arch when he grazed over how frequently she got herself off.

"Twice, sometimes three times a day. You are very sexually active with yourself."

She turned a shade of cherry-blossom pink.

He handed back her notebook with a shy smile. Changed the subject.

"Thank you for sharing."

"So, what do you do with all this information?"

"I translate spoken language into a musical language. Can you tell me a joke about your profession?"

"Me?"

Alwyn nodded.

Rachel took a moment.

"Four dons were walking down Oxford Street one evening. All were philologists and members of the English department. They were discussing group nouns: a covey of quail, a pride of lions, an exaltation of larks."

She continued the joke with wild hand gestures.

Alwyn scratched his head.

"What is lark?"

"A lark is a bird. Haven't you ever seen a lark?"

He shrugged.

"Oh, they are adorable. Nice feathers, very small birds." She reached to take out her iPhone from her jacket pocket to show him a Google image.

"No, no. Go on with your joke."

Rachel felt him study her mouth as she continued.

"O.K. As they talked, they passed four ladies of the evening. The dons did not exactly ignore the hussies—in a literary way, that is. One of them asked, 'How would you describe a group like that?'"

Alwyn rested his hand on his right hip.

Rachel's breath shortened, as she grew more excited with every word.

"A jam of tarts?' suggested the first. 'A flourish of strumpet?' said the second. The third: 'An essay of Trollops?'" Then the dean of the dons, the eldest and

most scholarly of them all, closed the discussion: 'I wish that you gentleman would consider "an anthology of pros."'"

Rachel let out a deep belly laugh at her own joke. Alwyn half-heartedly joined in.

"You're funny. Visual artists don't have any humour at all. They are the most boring people you can meet. Most artists don't have any humour, especially the painters. What do you do exactly?"

"I'm a copy editor for the *Telegraph-Journal*. Not exactly a born comedian, but I love a good grammar joke."

As Alwyn paced around the installation, a backdrop of colour made him look like a mad primary-school teacher. Calculating figures in the air, he pointed at the red rectangles on the wall with intent, his brow furrowed in concentration.

"You are very similar to the cellist in the ensemble. Similar sleep patterns, food consumption, and personal pleasure. He used to be a journalist."

Rachel was surprised at Alwyn's keen ability to size her up.

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Alex Boyd

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## AVINGUDA DE LA REPÚBLICA ARGENTINA, 1908

A man doffs his cap to the streetcar,  
smiles at Ricardo de Baños, who operates  
the camera machine. He balances  
a silver box, cantilevered handles tipped in wood.  
Leaning out, he's an early modern, hurdy-gurdying.  
The Spanish-made steel grinding beneath the streetcar  
whistles (I'm thinking) toward the Barcelona hills.

The people who wave to the camera are gone.  
Their bodies inaugurate a species  
that waves to itself. The sped-up film  
makes them look the way everything feels.

On the Avinguda de la República Argentina,  
a man strides out of tree shadow  
to get a better look at me. I shake his hand  
a hundred and four years ago.

—MICHAEL REDHILL

"See these green blocks? They are your sleep patterns."

Wrinkled her nose in disbelief.

"I don't really grasp how you can decipher all of this from a joke."

"That's where the art comes in. I've colour-coded specific hours, and from there can count how many you spend sleeping, eating, and find where you sit in this musical staff I've created. From here, I add in the humour of you, and what I learn from your notebook."

"So, where I see art in punctuation, you hear sound in the copy?"

He nodded.

"Somewhat. I am a sound artist. I work with sound because it's in the air, and then it's gone. I am interested in how you have to concentrate. You have this notion of hearing, and then it's immediately gone. It's the joy of the moment. You document."

"How do I sound?"

"That part, I don't know yet. If you let me borrow your notebook, I can chart a musical score for the ensemble to play at the opening tomorrow night."

Rachel took her notebook back out from her purse. She knew life was all about small moments. Like sound, life

was intangible. But she desperately tried to contain it, to preserve and distill—to capture the moment.

"I better get back to work now, anyway. I've got lots to prepare for tomorrow. I will return your notebook."

Taken back by his bluntness. "O.K. I guess I'll get going. See you tomorrow?" "Yes, tomorrow."

Squeaking her way out of the gallery, she felt both naked and invisible. How had she left her notebook with a complete stranger? The bells above the door jangled. She nearly turned around to ask for it back, but something somewhere deep down inside yearned to hear what she might sound like. What if her life held a melody?

The ensemble was halfway through its performance by the time Rachel made it to the gallery. Stuck late at work, she had to copy-edit the sports section over again. All day she was distracted and couldn't care less about baseball scores. The tiny gallery was packed with curious art lovers. Some faces familiar, others she couldn't decipher, Alwyn's face she recognized immediately. He looked softer under dim light. Rachel stood in the back

of the room, tried to go unnoticed.

The lower string quartet featured a viola player, two cellos, and a double bass. Deep classical. She loved the sound of the cello, and how it embodied both sorrow and a slight promise of hope. Alwyn stood off to the left of the ensemble, clad in black suit with a red bow tie.

Just as they finished their first movement, all hands in the room thundered together in applause. Alwyn towered over the crowd and spotted Rachel in the back. Waved her over. He reserved a front-row spot with her notebook on the seat.

Alwyn approached the microphone. "This next performance is called 'Anthology of Pros.'" He bowed toward Rachel.

She gathered up her skirt, placed her Moleskine back in her purse. It was nearly twenty-four hours since she recorded her daily rituals. In a way, she felt free. The violist arched over the wood of the bow and created a cusp effect. Started to pluck the strings one by one. Slowly, his fingertips inched up the neck of the viola. At first she felt embarrassed by the dull, plodding melody. This was what she sounded like—ordinary plucking?

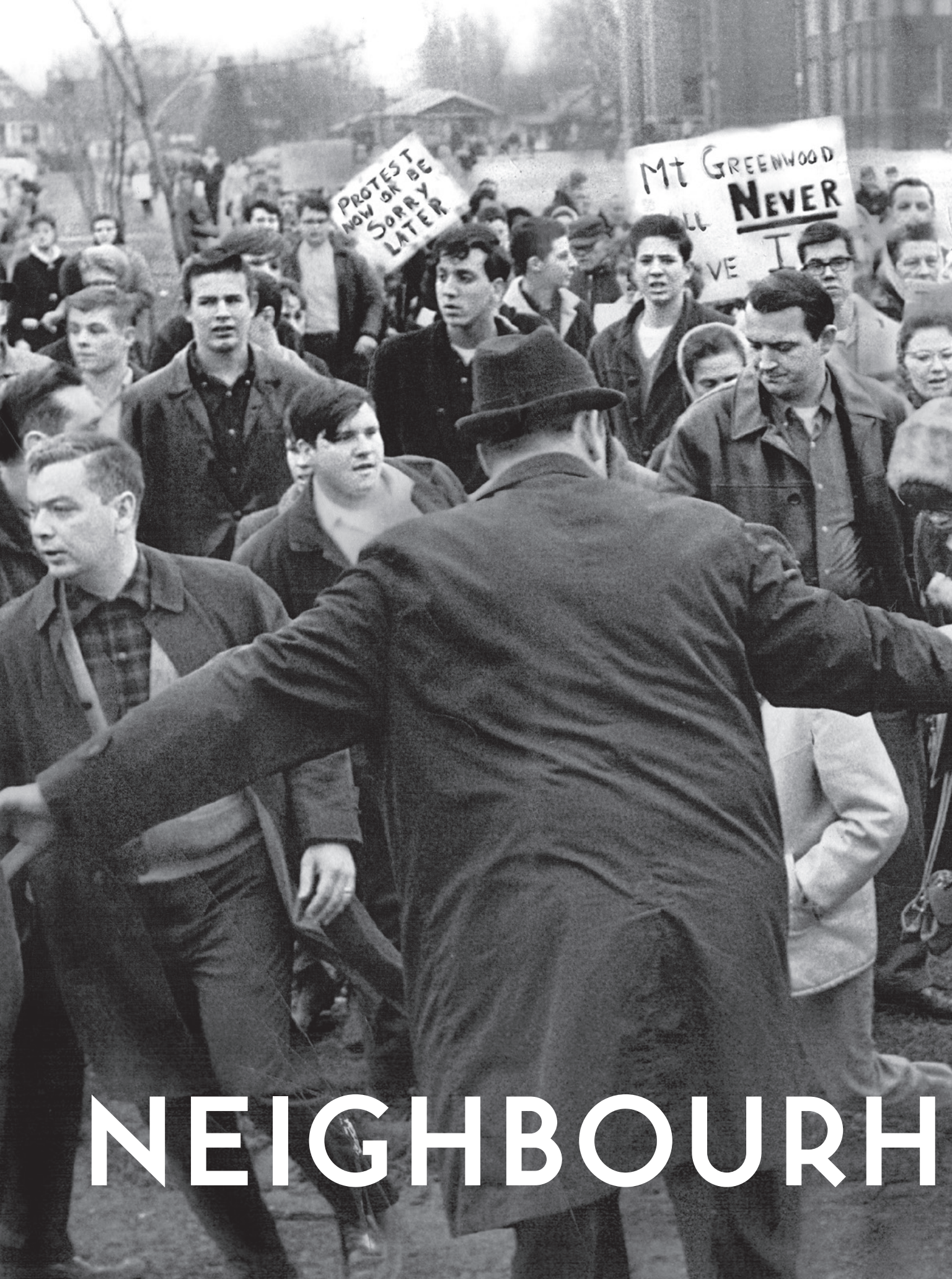
Suddenly, the two cellists came in and sunk their arm weight into the strings near the bridges of their instruments. The gallery filled with sound. One cello held a high note a little longer than the other, and the double bass kicked in in B minor. Struck by the haunting yet beautiful melody, Rachel felt the music overwhelm her.

She ached; a swell of relief came over her. Alwyn had paid witness to something deep down inside her. Heard the woman in her, beyond the lines of obsessiveness, documentation of daily rhythms. What she was made of. She was more than the sum of her diet, exercise, and personal pleasure.

Her eyes filled with tears as the song ended on the lowest cello note. Her heart roared in her chest. She stammered to her feet, and was the only one in standing ovation.

While everyone politely applauded, Rachel stood in the front row alone, filled with something extraordinary. Pieces of her, rhythms from a notebook, lifted from the page and transformed into sound. Turns out she was a subtle symphony. 🎻



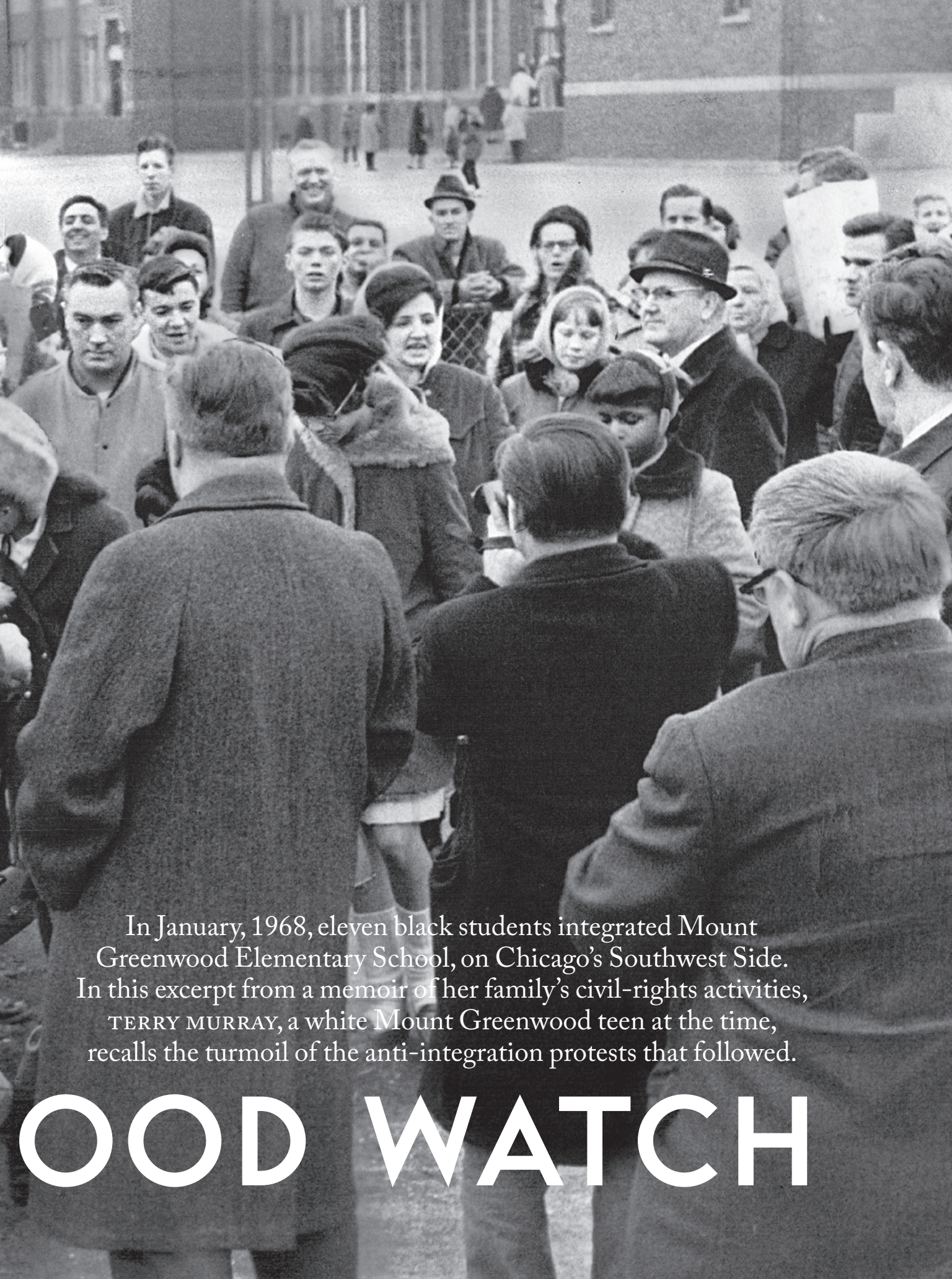


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# NEIGHBOUR





In January, 1968, eleven black students integrated Mount Greenwood Elementary School, on Chicago's Southwest Side. In this excerpt from a memoir of her family's civil-rights activities, TERRY MURRAY, a white Mount Greenwood teen at the time, recalls the turmoil of the anti-integration protests that followed.

# OOD WATCH



**B**efore the National Security Agency, in the United States, and the Communications Security Establishment, in Canada, there was the Red Squad, in Chicago. From the eighteenthies through the nineteen-seventies, this arm of the Chicago Police Department kept tabs on anarchists, labour activists, Communists and people thought to be Communist, civil-rights groups, and those who opposed the Vietnam War—political dissenters both militant and mild. The Red Squad’s techniques of overt and covert surveillance and infiltration were crude—even ham-handed—compared to those used in the modern digital age, but they were no less effective.

My parents knew, from comments made by employers and by the Red Squad’s less-than-subtle techniques, that they were in its records, even before the squad was shut down—after eleven years of litigation ending in a 1985 court decision—and its files released to a Chicago archive. My parents earned this distinction in the late nineteen-sixties, as they worked to support the desegregation of the public school in our white, conservative South Side neighbourhood, and independently produced an innovative program for preparing underemployed young black adults for lucrative jobs in the nascent computer industry. Those activities, though entirely lawful, all had negative repercussions: we were ostracized by our neighbours, our house was bombed, and my father was forced out of his job at I.B.M.

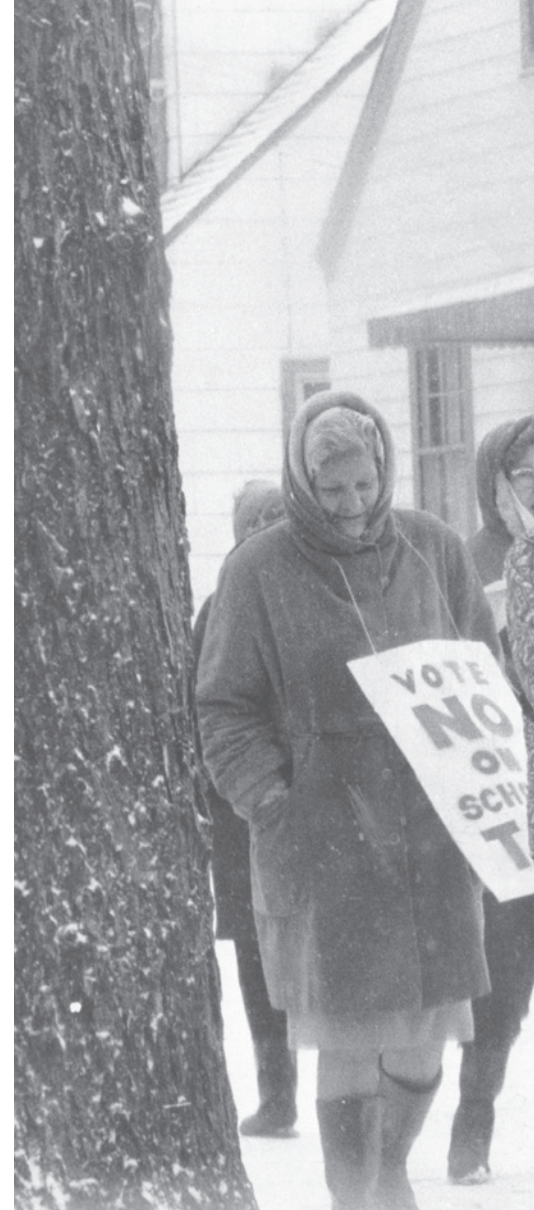
My family’s Red Squad files (I later learned I had a file too, despite being only sixteen at the time) don’t contain documentation of all of those activities, but the threat of surveillance—not to mention the actual reports sent to my father’s employer—made the Red Squad emblematic of those years, and coloured the rest of our lives. The events of that time led to the dissolution of my parents’ marriage, and to one of my sisters and me leaving the United States for Canada. My other sister, just eight to ten years old at the time, remained in the U.S. but, of course, was also affected by the aftermath of those days.

**Anti-integration protestors picket outside Mount Greenwood on February 2, 1968, four days after eleven black students were admitted to the school. Previous spread: The students are escorted out of the school on Day 2.**

Perhaps the most unexpected outcome of all was that my once-progressive father turned his back on his own pioneering efforts and the principles he had espoused, and became increasingly racist and politically and socially conservative. My mother clung to her beliefs, and the resulting rift between my parents was a major contributor to their divorce, nearly ten years later.

Chicago was the first northern city chosen by Martin Luther King, Jr., as a testing ground for his non-violent civil-rights efforts, which had been successful in the South. King’s focus shifted from voting and other Constitutionally guaranteed rights that had largely been secured, at least in legislation, in 1964 and 1965, and he changed the priority of the Chicago movement from schools to housing. The transplantation of those efforts in the North has been judged largely as unsuccessful, and Chicago remains one of the most segregated cities in the United States.

People even somewhat familiar with twentieth-century U.S. history, when asked to name an event that occurred in Chicago in 1968, will almost invariably mention the riots surrounding the Democratic National Convention that August—a defining event of the year and possibly the decade. But the year had opened with the de facto desegregation of the main public school in the Southwest Side community of Mount Greenwood, an event met with levels of hostility and violence rarely seen in the North. The Mount Greenwood Elementary School integration was eclipsed by larger local and national events that year, and have never been written about in any detail, despite Robert B. McKersie, a chronicler of race relations in Chicago throughout the nineteen-six-



ties, calling it “a very important chapter of civil-rights history in Chicago.”

My father, Jerome, joined I.B.M. in mid-1967, as a marketing representative in the Government, Education, and Medical division. Before he began, he was required to take training provided by the company, most of which was far enough outside Chicago that he would be gone for weeks at a time, only occasionally able to come home on weekends. In mid-January, 1968, he was sent to Washington, D.C., for three weeks. Within a week of his departure, Mount Greenwood was rocked by the news that, at the end of the month, eleven Negro students (as they were then called) were going to begin attending the local public school.

On Tuesday, January 23rd, my mother, Magdalene, attended a community





meeting and stayed only long enough to learn that these students—second, third, and eighth graders—would be attending Mount Greenwood Elementary School through a “permissive transfer” plan. The program, created in the early sixties, was designed not for the purpose of integration, but to relieve overcrowding. Mount Greenwood, according to the plan’s criteria, had class sizes of thirty or fewer; the eleven kids came from schools with an average class size of thirty-five or more. This was not a busing program—the students’ parents were responsible for providing their transportation—although it was often confused with one. The transfer also put the eighth graders into the catchment area for Morgan Park High School, which they wanted to attend upon graduation, largely for

the school’s music and sports programs.

When Mom got home from the meeting, she looked grim, and expressed concerns for our physical safety and her own. Most people at the meeting were angry at the news, ostensibly because they felt Mount Greenwood school was already overcrowded, but in fact because they were being forced to accept blacks into the community.

Race relations—the work of Martin Luther King, Jr., integration, busing, and other aspects of the civil-rights struggle—was the first defining social issue of my youth. My parents had found like-minded liberal friends at Queen of Martyrs, our local Catholic parish, but most of my friends there had much more conservative, racist views. My mother knew my habit of having heated race-related discussions on the playground and else-

where, and urged me to refrain, given the ugly mood in the neighbourhood, which extended to threats to burn down Mount Greenwood School.

Chicago has long been acknowledged as one of the most segregated cities in the North, particularly in the area of education. That was the case despite the 1954 Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education*, which ruled that the racial segregation of children in public schools violated the equal-protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution. This was the decision that struck down the doctrine of “separate but equal”—the contention that segregated facilities were constitutional as long as they were equal, which they rarely were. In fact, the unanimous judgment concluded, “Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.”

*Brown v. Board of Education* and the Civil Rights Act, passed ten years later, were resisted by both Benjamin Willis, the Chicago public schools superintendent from 1953 to 1966, and Mayor Richard J. Daley. James Redmond succeeded Willis and unveiled a busing program in late 1967 that aimed to at least begin desegregating public schools. The proposal was met with opposition, especially from whites on the city's Southwest Side (although not specifically in Mount Greenwood). Demonstrations and heated discussions continued well into 1968, which primed Southwest Siders to react with hostility to news of the Mount Greenwood transfers. Adding perceived insult to perceived injury for Catholics was the statement by Cardinal John Patrick Cody, in a letter to be read at all Masses on Sunday, January 28th—the day before the black students were to start at Mount Greenwood school—that the Chicago archdiocese was developing plans for a busing program in concert with the public schools. Many Queen of Martyrs parishioners responded the following Sunday by placing black buttons in the collection basket, signalling not only their opposition to integration but their willingness to withhold funds from the parish.

Following the Mount Greenwood community meeting, my mother phoned my father in Washington and contacted her liberal friends at Queen of Martyrs (a group of about twelve people, including one of the parish priests, who later formed the core of a “human relations” group called Justice). Dad made an unscheduled trip home on Sunday the twenty-eighth, and the Queen of Martyrs group decided to form a welcoming committee for the students and their parents on their first day at school. They also planned to station at least one member of the group outside at the start and end of each school day to monitor the neighbourhood's response.

On Monday the twenty-ninth, my parents and another couple were on hand at Mount Greenwood—as were an estimated two hundred and forty jeering demonstrators—as eleven black students and their parents arrived and

were ushered through a phalanx of police. “Mom & Dad & Browns [Edward and Elizabeth Brown, two of the Justice group] went to the school,” I wrote in my diary that night. “There were a lot of pickets and Dad opened the car door for the parents & Mom wished them luck. They [the parents] were pretty nervous. The cops didn't even move toward Dad.”

The demonstrators carried signs bearing slogans such as “PROTECT THE NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS” and “PROTEST NOW OR BE SORRY LATER.” (The next day's picket signs were plainer: “LET'S FIGHT TO KEEP OUR SCHOOL WHITE” and “MT. GREENWOOD WEATHER FORECAST: DARK + STORMY,” and a newspaper photo showed the school's engineer trying to remove the words “WHITE POWER” that someone had painted on the building.) The crowd fluctuated in size throughout the day, and became more vocal as school let out, shouting, “Don't come back” and “Kill 'em!” Jeers were loudest from the white students leaving the building, with one boy telling a reporter, “I hate niggers. Write that down.” Still, the next day, Robert L. Reinsch, the superintendent of the local school district, told reporters there were “no problems inside the school.” By mid-February, the *Chicago Daily News* ran a picture of black and white girls playing double dutch on the playground.

Dad returned to Washington that first night, but he was back in Chicago before the end of the week, as demonstrations outside the school turned violent. On Wednesday, the black students' third day at Mount Greenwood, two counter-demonstrators appeared: Terrence Burke and Will Leben, both twenty-four, both residents of the neighbouring community of East Beverly. Burke was still on Christmas break from the Cleveland college where he taught English, and Leben, who had only recently returned to the United States from a stint in Niger with the Peace Corps, was a graduate student in linguistics at Northwestern University. Their signs read, “SUPPORT REDMOND'S PLAN FOR EQUAL EDUCATION” and “WE'RE MARCHING FOR EQUALITY TOO LONG DENIED.” “For the first couple of

**From top: An anti-integration protester attempts to grab a sign from the counter-demonstrator Terrence Burke on the third day of the Mount Greenwood transfer; Will Leben is kicked from behind and then punched by a protester.**

circuits [on the sidewalk in front of the school], the [anti-integration] protesters said to us, ‘Nice to see some men out here!’ and ‘Good for you, boys!’—and then they actually read our signs,” Burke told me in 2016. “Then they decided to call us names: pinko, faggot. They started to try to grab the signs and then that escalated.”

A series of pictures by Duane Hall, a *Chicago Sun-Times* photographer, shows Leben being kicked from behind and then punched in the face by a woman. Another set of Hall's published photos shows a burly man struggling to take Burke's picket sign. In neither instance did Burke or Leben fight back, even as they were being strong-armed into unmarked cars by men they learned only later were plainclothes police officers, who took them to the district police station and charged them with disorderly conduct and resisting arrest. The photo of Leben being kicked and punched appeared in newspapers across the country. Dad saw it in Washington and returned home.

The day after Burke and Leben were attacked, a group of clergymen came to the school to counter-demonstrate. They also were assaulted, their signs torn up and stomped into the mud of the mid-winter thaw. This time, however, the police arrested two Mount Greenwood men, one of whom lived five doors away from us.

The next day—Friday, the last day of that first school week—fifty counter-demonstrators arrived, including Albert Raby, a leading black civil-rights leader in Chicago. This time, police separated the anti-integration demonstrators and the counter-demonstrators. All picketing was to be done across the street instead of on the sidewalk immediately in





front of the school. The two groups were assigned opposite ends of the block, with a buffer of uniformed police officers between them. However, that day, the children's parents asked that the counter-demonstrations cease. The request came at a widely reported news conference, where the parents were represented by the Organization for the Southwest Community. "To counter-demonstrate only adds fuel to an already potentially explosive situation," Anna Thomas, an organization spokeswoman, said. The parents asked that "persons who want to express their feelings of encouragement and their distaste for the present situation use some other methods than demonstrating."

An O.S.C. news release was a bit more explicit: the group thanked "all well wishers for their support," but added, "We feel the children are already heavily burdened and all that such action [counter-demonstrations] could accomplish would be to further complicate them."

The families of four of the black students were frightened enough by the community's response that, by this time, they had pulled their children from Mount Greenwood and returned them to their original schools. I noted in my diary that my mother and father met that evening with the parents of the seven black students who remained, to express their support. The next night, a handful of my parents' Queen of Martyrs friends gathered at our house to discuss the week's events.

The following week, counter-demonstrators returned. They numbered only between twenty and thirty, while the anti-integration marchers' numbers rarely fell below a daily peak of one hundred. One group of counter-pickets explained, in a statement, their return despite the parents' request: "All of us black and white know that Mt. Greenwood represents a crisis that has gone beyond community boundaries. White racists have chosen it as the battleground on which they hope to defeat any further steps towards quality, integrated education by Chicago's reluctant Board of Education. We feel it would be callous and cowardly to leave this







battle to the remaining Negro students and their courageous parents.”

On Monday of the second week, Mayor Daley weighed in, issuing a tepid call for calm and accusing the news media of inflaming the situation. “I would hope we can approach this situation in a reasonable and unemotional way,” he told a news conference. He then charged that newspaper, TV, and radio reporters had “greatly magnified” the seriousness of the picketing the week before.

The only violent incident recorded during the second week occurred when a fourteen-year-old boy threw a firecracker at counter-demonstrators. The firecracker exploded, apparently without injuring anyone, and the boy was arrested. The firecracker occurrence was documented by the Chicago Police Department’s Red Squad, members of which were on hand through most of the demonstrations at the school.

The squad’s files note the licence in-

formation for a yellow 1967 Ford Falcon van, marked “SCHOOL BUS,” that the black students’ parents had arranged to transport the children to and from the school starting in the second week. The files also reveal police harassment of the van’s driver. When anti-integration demonstrators saw the van, they shouted, “Check her [the driver’s] chauffeur’s licence!” But the van drove away before police could take any action, so the group spoke to the Red Squad commander on the scene. “CITIZENS to have a police officer check & see that the F/N [female Negro], driving the Bus is properly licensed,” the Red Squad report read, with the name of the commander blacked out. The next day’s report noted that Sgt. Norris of the Sixth District (Gresham) “verified that she had a valid driver’s license.”

The Red Squad reports on the Mount Greenwood integration are also rife with automobile licence-plate numbers and identifications for counter-

demonstrators arriving at the school, but they fail to note my mother’s 1962 Rambler Ambassador. Admittedly, it was a grey car, easily overlooked—except that it was parked across the street from the school every day of the demonstrations, while my mother observed what went on. It would also have been hard to miss one day when my sister Roxe accompanied her, and the anti-integration demonstrators altered their route in order to picket my mother’s car. “They did a couple of circuits around the car,” Roxe, who was eleven at the time, told me. “Mom said to just relax. It was kind of scary, but kind of funny.” The marchers were menacing because of their number—Roxe didn’t remember how many there were, but said it was probably fifteen to twenty, enough to surround the car—and their shouting, but those same qualities made Roxe bemused: “Here were these screaming grownups, who were supposed to know better than to get that



**A Mount Greenwood engineer  
removes hate graffiti painted  
onto the school's outer wall.**

upset. There was no threat. We weren't doing anything threatening. We were just sitting there, keeping an eye on things. And these were just children who had come to the school. They were no threat either."

The anti-integration demonstrations lasted the first two weeks the black students were at Mount Greenwood, and then on only two other dates. On February 14th, about one hundred and thirty picketers appeared with signs that read "PARENT POWER," but "none of the signs had any racial overtones," the Red Squad report stated. The last reported demonstration was held nearly three weeks later, on March 4th, when about thirty parents made a last stand against the presence of the seven remaining black students.

I was appalled in equal measure by the actions of my neighbours at the school and by the inaction of clergy at Queen of Martyrs, who failed to recognize a "preachable moment" and strongly remind the congregation of the fundamental commandment of Christianity to love thy neighbour. I put my feelings in rhyme and submitted them to the poetry column of the *New World*, the Catholic weekly newspaper, where it was published in mid-April. The language is clearly that of a thirteen-year-old Catholic girl of the day, but my disillusionment is still palpable:

In '68 toward the end of Jan.,  
Some Negro kids came to Greenwood on the  
transfer plan.  
On their first day there, at the school,  
They found that the townfolk didn't think it  
was cool.  
This is racial prejudice. Of this I'm sure.  
But for this prejudice, isn't there any cure?

At another school not far from there,

Nothing was said. I guess they don't care.  
The clergy's supposed to lead us to unity  
And help us all become one family.  
This means everybody: black and white,  
Red and yellow. Will they see the light?

Better act now before it's too late  
Or face up to the problems that you now await.  
Too long in bondage without liberty,  
Everyone deserves the right to be free.  
Free to live in the one family,  
Free to contribute to unity.

Love everybody is what Christ said.  
If you don't love everybody you're as good  
as dead.

Chicago's daily newspapers, as well as major publications aimed at a black readership, compared the two weeks of raucous, occasionally violent demonstrations in Mount Greenwood with the unrest that accompanied the desegregation of Little Rock Central High School, in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957, and two elementary schools in New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1960. These comparisons don't really hold when you consider the larger scale and more severe violence that accompanied the Southern integrations. In addition, school attendance was disrupted: Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus actually closed the four Little Rock high schools for the 1958–59 academic year rather than continue with desegregation, and many white parents pulled their children from the newly desegregated McDonogh 19 and William Frantz elementary schools, in New Orleans, and enrolled them in private schools. A letter to the editor of a community newspaper captured what did make the Mount Greenwood case notable: "One would have not expected a northern 'Little Rock,' so many years after the southern incidents rocked the country."

Manifestations of racism in Chicago, specifically on the South Side, could be remarkably vicious. When Martin Luther King, Jr., was hit in the head with a rock during an open-housing demonstration, in 1966, in Marquette Park—another all-white neighbourhood on the Southwest Side, about forty blocks due north of Mount Greenwood—he said, "I have been in the civil-rights

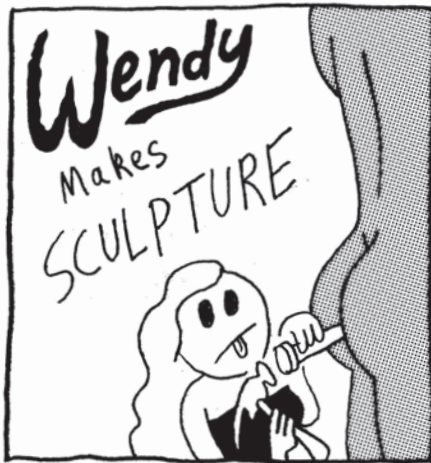
movement for many years all through the South, but I have never seen—not even in Alabama or Louisiana—mobs as hostile and hateful as this crowd."

The levels of hostility and barely suppressed violence that greeted the handful of black children who came to Mount Greenwood startled even long-time observers of the racial tensions in Chicago. "It was Little Rock and New Orleans all over again in the Windy City, where white parents reacted in Dixie-like fashion to the prospect of school integration," said a writer in the *Chicago Daily Defender*, an influential black newspaper. An editorial in *Ebony* magazine juxtaposed a photo of screaming demonstrators in 1960 New Orleans with one of their counterparts in 1968 Chicago. The two sets of faces, deformed by hate, were virtually indistinguishable, as were their "songs":

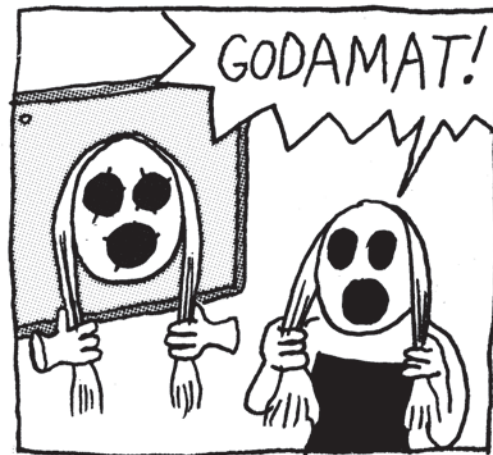
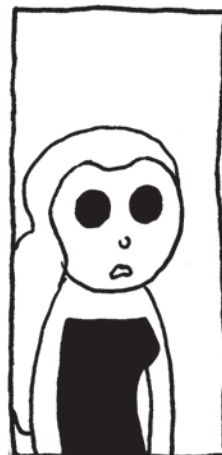
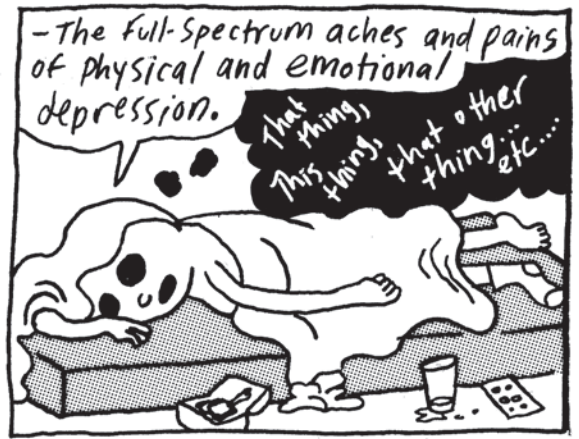
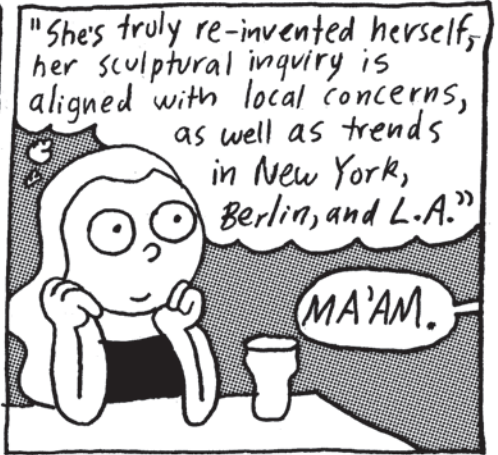
The tune is the same—and so are the words. Only the singers differ in time and place. They are usually mothers, housewives, and of early middle age or younger. They are always white. Often they carry pre-school age children in their arms or push babies in carriages as they perform. "Nigger, nigger, nigger!" "Go back to the zoo." "We don't want you." "Kill them!" The voices are shrill, the faces contorted. . . .

Once thought of as a Southern folk song, the words and tune were highly popular throughout the South from Little Rock to Charlotte, from New Orleans to Nashville as Southern school boards attempted to follow the direction of the Supreme Court after the 1954 school decision which ruled that separate education is unequal education. But today the locale has been changed. The women who picketed a group of seven Negro children who integrated the Mount Greenwood Elementary School in Chicago in February, 1968 have much in common with the women of New Orleans who shouted derisive remarks at a lone Negro integrating Frantz School in November 1960.

The editorial called on "responsible citizens, both black and white," to abolish "deep-running racism," inequity, and discrimination, and, it added, "they had better begin to act right now." During the time *Ebony's* editorial—titled "Could It Be Too Late?"—sat on newsstands, Martin Luther King, Jr., was murdered, and black ghettos in more than a hundred American cities had erupted into violence, looting, and destruction. 🗑️











THE KITCH

## DEVILISHLY ELEGANT

*Nothing says summer like a trayful of hard-boiled eggs covered in salad dressing and cornflakes.*

BY BRIAN FRANCIS

I'm a cookbook hoarder. Not modern cookbooks; I'm talking community and church cookbooks spanning the nineteen-sixties, seventies, and eighties. Most people today turn to the Internet for recipes—I turn to my coil-bound gems for the strange, the tasty, and the exotic. Well, as exotic as you can get with a Block Parent cookbook, from Melfort, Saskatchewan. I'm looking forward to serving up some rare treats here from days gone by, with the hope

I might help a reader discover a new favourite dish.

I don't know about you, but when summer hits, there's nothing I like more than sliding on a thong, cranking up the rock 'n' roll tunes, and lounging poolside while scarfing down devilled eggs. I'm not sure why I associate devilled eggs with summer. It could be because they were a staple at my family's picnics. Our clan was serious about devilled eggs. Some of us even had special platters.

Devilled eggs, for those unaware, aren't eggs possessed by Satan, but, rather, hard-boiled eggs sliced in two, with the yolks removed. The yolks are then mixed with other ingredients, like dry mustard and paprika, before being filled back into the halved egg whites. Devilled eggs, in spite of their elegance, seem to have fallen out of fashion, but maybe this recipe will change that. Fingers crossed, my friends. This recipe comes from *The Beta Sigma Phi International Cookbook: Casseroles*, published in 1969. It was submitted by Mrs. Anne Johnston, who was president of Beta Lambda No. 3357, in St. Catharines, Ontario. It's a little time-consuming, between precooking the asparagus, hard-boiling the eggs, and making the cheese sauce, but just look at the results.



## Deville Eggs and Asparagus in Casserole

6 hard-cooked eggs  
¼ teaspoon dry mustard  
¼ teaspoon celery salt  
2½ tablespoons salad dressing  
¾ teaspoon salt  
¼ teaspoon pepper  
4 tablespoons butter  
3 tablespoons flour  
1½ cups milk  
1 cup grated cheese  
2 tablespoons minced pimento  
1 pound cut asparagus, cooked  
1 cup crushed cornflakes

Halve eggs lengthwise and remove the yolks. In a bowl, combine the egg yolks, mustard, celery salt, salad dressing, ¼ teaspoon salt, and pepper. Fill the egg whites with the yolk mixture. Melt 3 tablespoons of butter in a saucepan, and stir in the flour and remaining salt. Add milk gradually, stirring in the cheese until it's melted, then stir in the pimento. Spread the asparagus in a greased 1½-quart casserole dish and arrange the eggs, cut side up, over the asparagus. Cover everything with the cheese sauce and sprinkle with cornflake crumbs and remaining butter. Bake at 350 degrees Celsius for 20 minutes.

Mrs. Johnston didn't say what kind of salad dressing, so I used mayonnaise. Also, there was no way I was paying three ninety-nine for a bottle of celery salt at No Frills for a measly one-quarter teaspoon, so I used garlic powder instead. I'm sure Anne would understand.

When it came to making the cheese sauce, Anne was a little light on the details, but I made something called a "Rue" (as in McClanahan), and whisked the mixture over medium heat until it thickened.

The result was delicious. The cheese sauce, paired with the crunch of the cornflakes and the tang of the devilled eggs sent me to summer heaven. Anne, you can have me over for dinner whenever you want. I'll be the one on your doorstep wearing a thong. 🐾



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# LIFE IN A (TINY) NORTHERN TOWN

*Eric Veillette, the chief planner of Spruce Mills,  
is taking city building to new heights.*

BY CONAN TOBIAS  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY THOMAS BLANCHARD

At first glance, Spruce Mills is a typical—almost stereotypical—northern Ontario town. It has a drugstore and a gas station and a movie theatre. There is a church and a lumberyard and a Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet. Cars line the streets and people can be seen going about their daily business. A closer look, however, reveals Spruce Mills as somewhat atypical. There are, in fact, three single-screen cinemas—a rarity for any town in 2018—not to mention a drive-in that sits just at the edge of the downtown core. Passing buses are of a long-retired vintage, and there is no school for the local children to attend. Spruce Mills *demand*s a close look, due not least of which to its being one-eighty-seventh the size of a regular city and only a few feet off the ground, located on a tabletop in a second-floor apartment in Toronto’s Roncesvalles area.

Eric Veillette began building Spruce Mills from HO-scale model railway buildings in 2004, while living in Montreal. “I lived a block away from a store called Udisco, which still exists,” he said, during a recent tour of his creation. “If you walk in there, it’s like walking into a model store from 1978—it hasn’t changed whatsoever. I’d been going in there to buy model monster kits and stuff like that, and one day I thought, ‘Oh, I’ll go see what’s on the second floor,’ and it was all model-railroad parts.” Veillette, a film buff and the program director of the Revue Cinema, founded Spruce Mills with the impulse buy of a model movie theatre, and the town expanded quickly from there. Spruce Mills relocated to Toronto with Veillette, in 2007, and its growth has continued in tandem with the size of Veillette’s own living spaces.

The pre-designed nature of model-train buildings doesn’t leave much room for creativity, so Veillette feeds his artistic side through the addition of small details, like lighting and interiors. (He once wallpapered the inside of a shop with scaled photographs of a Laura Secord.) He also creates and photographs “candid” scenes, which he posts to the Spruce Mills Instagram feed, along with brief fictional stories of the town and its residents. “The most fun thing for me has been Instagram,” he said. “I’ve gotten to the point where I have a couple years of continuity and I have to go back and look at old posts to make sure I have the right names for people.”

Veillette, who grew up in the northern Ontario town of Timmins, has no grand grid plan for Spruce Mills: adding to the town is a therapeutic pursuit, though he would eventually like to display it at the Revue, which is only two blocks from his apartment at 1:1 scale, but a trip of more than six miles to the town’s 1:87-size residents. The one addition to the town Veillette has no plans to make, ironically, is a train line. “Part of my rationale, from a city-building standpoint, is Timmins got rid of its train years ago,” he said. “You have to take a bus out of town. So it’s very much like Timmins in that way.” 🚗





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THE AFRICAN  
QUEEN  
STARTS MONDAY

HUMPHREY BOGART  
THE AFRICAN  
QUEEN  
STARTS MONDAY

Say "Please, please!"  
SOFT

TIST

TABLES

GRAND MEN  
AFRICA

THE AFRICAN  
QUEEN

THE AFRICAN  
QUEEN



## WORRY

BY JESSICA WESTHEAD

Here she is, alone by the water with her only child. It's the middle of the day, and the sun is very bright.

Her daughter is lying on the sand beside her. If she wants to, she can reach out and grab a small, smooth foot, skim her fingers across the slippery material of the pink-and-purple bathing suit with the cartoon pony on the front.

She could do that, and reassure herself that her little girl is O.K. She's right here. She's where she is supposed to be.

But what happens when she takes her hand away and closes her eyes? Her child disappears. It's that easy. One minute her daughter is there, smiling on the beach on a beautiful summer day. And then she's gone.

Sweat rolls down Ruth's back, and Fern asks her, "What's wrong, Mommy?"

"Nothing's wrong, sweetie." Ruth squints at the diamonds of sunlight spiking off the lake. "We're just waiting for our friends."

Far above them, at the top of a steep set of uneven wooden steps, the enormous A-frame cottage is locked, and Ruth doesn't have a key.

When they arrived, more than an hour ago, she parked in the empty driveway and freed Fern from her car seat, and the two of them knocked on the door, but there was no answer.

It was hot, and Fern wanted to put on her bathing suit immediately. She started to take off her clothes in the front yard, but Ruth made her change in the car. She stood guard while Fern shed her top and bottom and wrestled into her suit, sharp elbows pinwheeling behind the bird-shit-streaked windows.

The cottage is surrounded by forest so dense it looks dark even in the daytime. The trees huddle together around the property, jagged branches pointing accusations at the expensive piece of land that somebody hacked out in the centre of them.

Now Ruth sits on the little beach by

the dock, perspiring in her jeans and T-shirt, and tells her impatient daughter it's not time for swimming yet.

They can swim when their friends get here.

Although she doesn't know when that will be, because Stef isn't answering her phone. She must be somewhere out of range.

Why isn't she here though?

Ruth has had to pee for about half an hour now. Her bladder aches.

Maybe she got the address wrong. Maybe Stef and Sammy and the girls are waiting somewhere else, wondering what's keeping them.

And then he appears.

A tall man with broad shoulders and black hair, gliding toward Ruth and Fern in nothing but a pair of sunglasses and palm-tree-patterned surf shorts, the sparkling waves making the paddleboard beneath him nearly invisible, so it looks almost like he's walking on water. Almost.

He grins at them and calls out, "Ahoy!"

"Ahoy!" Fern calls back, even though she has no idea who the man is.

How many times has Ruth told her never to talk to strangers? Not enough, apparently.

He floats closer and grows larger, cutting through the lake until he reaches the shore. Then he hops off his board and walks right over to them.

"My name's Marvin," he says. "You look lost."

Like they'd washed up on a deserted island with no hope of rescue. Which is actually sort of true. No, it's not. They're fine. They're on vacation!

Ruth shields her eyes, peering at her tiny reflection in the man's glasses. A halo of sun glows around his silhouette.

"I'm Fern," says Fern.

Ruth shakes her head and waits for her daughter to ask him for some candy next.

Marvin bows.

"It's a pleasure to make your acquaint-

tance, Miss Fern."

Ruth stands up and steps in front of her child's long, pale limbs—so much of her soft body exposed to the air. Sticks out her hand, which is shaking, but just a little.

"I'm Ruth. We're visiting my friend Stef. But I'm not sure we're in the right place."

"You surely are." His hand is warm when he grasps hers. "Stef's in the lake."

"I'm sorry?"

She tries to pull away but he holds on, and she imagines long strands of blond hair like seaweed, drifting.

"They went for a boat ride. I passed them on my way over here." He releases her.

"Oh." Her arm drops and dangles by her side. "Maybe she forgot we were coming."

"No, she knows. She said to tell you to sit tight and they'll be here soon. How long have you been waiting?"

Fern crosses her arms and frowns. "A million years!"

Ruth shushes her. "Not too long."

"I told her she was being a bad host. If you were visiting *my* cottage, my wife would've served you twelve different types of pie already."

"Pie is squishy inside," says Fern. "Daddy likes it but I hate it."

"Me too." He winks at Fern over his glasses. "Where's your daddy now?"

"He'll be here soon," Ruth says, too quickly.

"He's at our new house!" Fern jumps up and down. "Auntie Stef is our neighbour now!"

"She's my neighbour too," says Marvin. "Look at how much we have in common."

There's a splash by the dock, and Ruth turns just in time to see the flash of silver and brown. A big fish, bigger than she'd expect to see so close to shore, leaping up to catch a dragonfly. She thinks she can even hear the jaws snap, but that must be her imagination.

"Your wife sounds like a nice person," she says. "With the pie."







“Yeah,” says Marvin. “She’s all right.”  
“Mommy has to go pee!” Fern shouts.  
“Shh, Fern.” Ruth’s face reddens. “No,  
I don’t.”

“Yes, you do!” Her daughter jabs a tiny finger at her. “You *told* me you did!”

“I can keep an eye on your little one if you want to scamper into the woods,” Marvin tells Ruth. “I’d let you into the cottage if I could, but I don’t have a key. Stef and Sammy trust us with their children, apparently, but not their valuables.”

Ruth measures the pain in her bladder against the short distance to the trees and the time it would take to find a secluded spot, pull down her pants, relieve herself, pull them up again, and run back.

Marvin smiles at Fern again and hunkers down next to her, compacting his bulk into a boulder shape. “I like your towel.”

“Thank you.” Fern smiles back at him. “It’s my favourite.”

“There is no way,” Ruth thinks, and grits her teeth as she allows a few drops of urine to escape. She’s wearing a pad and it’s one of the more absorbent ones, so hopefully that will help. As long as she only goes a little bit.

Fern’s beach towel is emblazoned with lobsters wearing T-shirts. James gave it to Ruth a long time ago, after she first told him she was pregnant. It was a weird celebratory gesture, but he had that wonderful, crazed grin on his face when she unwrapped it.

It’s a dumb towel, but Fern loves it anyway.

Marvin scuttles a spidery hand closer to her daughter, and all of Ruth’s muscles tense. He taps one of the scarlet claws and jerks his hand back.

“Ouch!” he yelps, and Fern giggles.

Ruth thinks, “Lobsters only turn red after they’ve been boiled.”

Fern yells, “Look!”

She jumps up and races to the edge of the shore, as the roar of an outboard motor obliterates all other sounds.

Less than ten minutes later, after Stef and Sammy have docked their boat and piled out with the twins to greet Ruth and Fern, and Marvin told Stef to hurry up and let Ruth

## LYING AS WISFUL THINKING

The year of reading about Freud being an endearing fuck-up. The year of innermost list building, list looking.

The year of friends falling and the year of learning to walk in the snow so also the year of really seeing your feet move

for the first time. Your feet and nothing else making a muffled crunch as they drop away. The year of admitting money

might have played a part; of reading that Freud was in love with his drug dealer. But where did you read that

and how could anyone know such a thing? The last year of the penny and the year before a new PIN

for each card. The year of lying as wishful thinking, of willing the indignity down and watching

it bob back up, no matter how much worthless copper put in its pockets. The year of more disastrous magic

and Freud inventing narcissism as a diagnosis for clients resistant to analysis. The lost year. The year

into the cottage already because she needed to use the facilities, and Sammy said he’d stay at the beach with the kids as long as Stef brought him down some beef jerky—“The spicy one! Not the regular one, because it tastes like a dead rat.” And all three girls collapsed together in a heap, helpless with laughter: “He said dead rat! He said dead rat!”—Ruth sits on the toilet, relieved at last, and looks down between her pale legs.

The bowl is bright with ribbons of blood. And here she’d thought she was nearly done. She should’ve packed tampons but she only brought the pads.

She peers around the room but there’s no medicine cabinet and the sink is a fancy pedestal one with no cupboard

underneath. If she wants a tampon, she will have to ask. She hates asking Stef for anything.

Ruth wipes one last time and stands up.

At home, the toilet clogs regularly, and over the years she’s become an expert with the plunger. Wrestling with whatever came out of her, forcing it back down the pipes.

She holds her breath as she flushes, and is grateful when everything disappears.

The distant shrieks just barely reach her. Fern is always so excited to see Amelia and Isabelle. They’re her best friends, she says, even though the twins are seven and Fern is only four.

Ruth turns on the tap, and a loud knock at the bathroom door makes her



of augmentation and of associating  
olive oil with bananas. The last year  
of olive oil and bananas; of carelessly

constructing the memory of olive oil  
and bananas—of un-lived lives lived  
alongside an arbitrary month amount

that drags at each end. Sluggish fantasies,  
erotic or not: drowning swimmers flailing  
their arms to grasp their rescuer, dragging

the lifeguard down with them. The year of  
redefining infection: germs as pessimism,  
the unconscious things said that are only

audible when the audio is reversed.  
The year of living fundamentally,  
the old believers returning to Siberia

only to be discovered by geologists  
forty years later and die of exposure  
to diseases they had no immunity to,

diseases they fled but were found by.  
The year of falling out of love with Freud  
and the year of summoning the strength

to tell him to find his coke elsewhere now;  
of Freud, wandering from chemist to chemist,  
really seeing his feet move for the first time.

—JAMES LINDSAY

flinch and fling a spray of cold water  
onto the round mirror, which has been  
designed to resemble a ship's porthole.  
The water streams down over her start-  
led reflection, and there's another  
knock, louder this time.

"Hello?" she calls.

"It's me," says Stef. "Just making sure  
you didn't fall in."

Ruth turns off the faucet and dries  
her hands, then swipes the towel across  
the glass, but of course that just makes  
everything worse. She could hunt  
around for cleaning products but she  
doesn't want to. Instead, she grabs a  
bottle of expensive-looking lotion and  
squeezes out a big glob. It's pale yellow  
and smells like lemons, and she's still

rubbing it into her skin when she opens  
the door and smiles at her friend.

Stef smiles back and walks right in.

"Do you love this place or what?"

She hustles Ruth back over to the  
sink and shoves until both of their faces  
are framed inside the decorative port-  
hole. It looks expensive, made of shiny  
brass and embellished with fake rivets  
and hinges.

Suddenly Stef's eyes go wide with  
fear, and Ruth is confused because her  
friend isn't scared of anything, but then  
Stef claws at the glass and yells, "Help  
us! We're sinking!" and chuckles at her  
own joke.

"Ha ha." Ruth takes a step backward.  
"I should get back to Fern."

"Oh, she's fine. Anyway, I have to give  
you the grand tour first."

Stef scowls at the streaks on the mirror.

"Ugh, look at this. Sammy is such a  
slob. He always flosses his teeth right  
up close and then tries to smear off his  
disgusting plaque morsels with toilet  
paper. I'll make him clean this later."

She surveys the rest of the bathroom,  
and gives Ruth a knowing smirk. "Bitch  
always has the worst timing, doesn't she?"

"What?"

Ruth follows Stef's gaze to the trash  
bin, where she thought she'd buried all  
the evidence. But there is the lilac wrap-  
per with its crumpled white wing, rest-  
ing on the very top of the pile.

"Oh, right."

She should've just bundled up every-  
thing in a wad of toilet paper and stuck  
it in her purse, because now Stef is going  
to say something like, "You better not go  
swimming with that thing stuck to your  
crotch or the muskies will start circling,  
ha ha." She can almost hear the words  
in the air already. The two of them have  
known each other for so long.

But all her friend says is, "You want  
a beer?"

**A**fter Stef has walked Ruth  
through every room in the cot-  
tage, taking the time to point  
out the various features of each and ex-  
plaining how the previous owners had  
been happy to give them most of the  
furniture and even left behind a bunch  
of toys for the twins—"They just  
wanted to get out of here, I guess. Lucky  
us!"—the two mothers start down the  
long staircase together, clutching their  
cold bottles.

Ruth grips the splintery railing with  
her free hand and follows her friend  
down to the beach, trying to make her  
feet move faster than they want to go.

"Whoa," Stef says over her shoulder,  
"what's the rush? You're on Cottage  
Time now."

"I just want to get back to Fern,  
that's all."

"Sammy's down there, don't worry  
about it. Sorry we were late, by the way.  
We lost track of time. But hey, you got  
to meet Marvin! Isn't he great?"



Ruth feels herself nodding in automatic agreement. But then she says, "He offered to watch Fern while I peed in the bushes. Except I don't know him, so."

"I assume he told you *I* know him, though. Right?"

"He did."

Ruth hates the smallness of her voice. "Jesus, what's he going to do? You could've left her with him for a *minute*."

Stef stops walking and turns around, so Ruth has to stop walking too.

"Marvin's a weirdo, but he's harmless. He and his wife look after the twins sometimes. Do you think I'd let him babysit if I didn't trust him?"

"No," Ruth says quickly, "of course not."

The two of them stand there, surrounded by trees. Ruth thinks, stupidly, "This really is a beautiful spot."

"Exactly," says Stef. "They're good neighbours, which counts for a lot around here. Apparently, we have to rely on our neighbours in cottage country—we've joined a *community*."

She performs a dramatic shiver of revulsion, then turns and keeps going.

The laughter falls out of Ruth, like it always does. "Laughing is good," she thinks. "It makes everything easier."

From somewhere down below, a few elated squeals drift up. More happy sounds.

"His wife, Lesley, is big into baking pies," Stef goes on. "She's got time for that shit because they don't have kids. She made us a peach one after we moved in, and Marvin carried it over on his paddleboard."

Ruth tries to see what the girls are doing, but the foliage is thick on both sides so there's only green.

"How was it?"

"I have no idea. It sat on the counter for a few days and then I threw it out."

Stef points at something grey as they round a bend.

"Watch yourself there."

When she sees what Stef is talking about, Ruth skids on some loose gravel and sucks in a breath.

"Oh."

The wasps' nest is hanging from a low branch, ugly and bulging and too close to the stairs.

"Fern's never been stung before," she murmurs.

"Yeah, neither have the twins." Stef waves a dismissive hand as they pass by. "It's fine. Just steer clear of them and they'll steer clear of you."

"O.K." Ruth frowns as she focuses on her descent. "If you say so." She's almost sure she can hear buzzing. Any second now, an angry swarm will fill the air around them.

Then she'd have to run, but the wasps would be faster. The pain would be everywhere and then she'd trip and lose her balance, and for a long, slow-motion moment she'd be suspended with her arms outstretched, teetering above lake and trees and sky. And then she'd fall.

The girls' squeals intensify as they get closer to the beach.

"Mommmmyyyyy!"

"I'm here, Fern!" Ruth calls, quickening her pace.

She's nearly at the bottom now. Only a few more steps to go.

And then at last she has an unobstructed view, and there is her child. Hurling across the beach with Amelia and Isabelle. Because Marvin is chasing them.

Ruth's voice is sharp: "Stef, where's Sammy?"

"How am I supposed to know?"

In her rush to reach her daughter, Ruth trips on the final stair and lands with a grunt. Her beer bottle goes flying and shatters on a rock.

Now the sand around her is full of broken glass.

"Mommy!" hollers Fern. "We're playing Monster!"

Only a few metres away, the three girls swerve toward them.

"Stay there!" Ruth shouts. "Don't move!"

Stef stops behind her. "I knew I should've given you a can. I was just going to slum it with a couple Bud Light Limes, but no, you made me get the fancy microbrews from the back of the fridge."

"Is there a snake, Mommy?"

Fern is standing perfectly still between Amelia and Isabelle, who are tak-

ing turns poking her in the sides.

Closer to the water, Marvin is bent over, fiddling with his feet.

"No snakes," he says. "Just a teeny accident."

He straightens up and strides over in flippers, wielding a pink plastic rake and a yellow plastic bucket, both instruments tiny in his giant hands.

The little girls giggle uproariously as he shuffles past them.

"You're awesome," Stef tells him, with a sideways glance at Ruth.

He shrugs away the compliment and begins sifting through the sand with the rake, picking up the jagged amber shards and dropping them into the bucket, which is adorned with a cartoon frog in a coconut bra and hula skirt.

Ruth stays absolutely still as he crouches down next to her, lays his palms on the sand, and sweeps cautious circles all around her until he's satisfied the danger is gone.

"All clear."

Marvin gives her a gallant bow and then offers a hand to help her up.

"And the other good news is, Sammy's in the boathouse right now restocking the beer fridge."

"Oh, shit," says Stef. "I forgot his beef jerky."

Ruth lets Marvin pull her to her feet.

"Looks like you saved the day."

"Does that mean I can stay here with you guys?" His voice is pleading, over-the-top. "I don't want to go home yet."

"I don't know," says Stef. "What does Ruth say?"

"Mommy?" calls Fern. "Is it safe now?"

Ruth nods, and her daughter rockets over and snuggles against her legs. She rubs Fern's back.

"Sure, why not."

The grin Marvin gives her is so wide, it nearly splits his face in two.

"I knew you liked me."

She sees the streak of red then, bright against her child's skin, and gasps.

"Don't worry, it's only me. From when I helped you up."

Marvin displays his bleeding hand, and winces as he picks out the tiniest piece of glass. 🗑️





## THE MISCELLANY

# DISTINCTLY CANADIAN

*Visitors to Jasper, Alberta, still love the town's namesake host, seventy years after his first appearance.*

BY CONAN TOBIAS

**O**n a warm Monday last August, a small crowd gathered on Miette Avenue, in Jasper, Alberta. Their heads craned upward as they squinted to see the bear that had climbed to the top of a tall tree that looked wholly unable to support the animal's weight. A Parks Canada warden soon arrived to tape off the area and, eventually, return the bear home.

Public education about what draws bears into populated areas has, in recent years, reduced the number of such events in Jasper's core—with one exception. A few blocks away, just off the main thoroughfare, a life-sized effigy of Jasper the bear stands at the centre of a small, unnamed park. "There's not five minutes, in winter or summer, where there's not

people huddled around that statue," said Pattie Pavlov, the executive director of the Jasper Park Chamber of Commerce. "There was a vigil held here right after the Pulse nightclub shooting, in Orlando. They asked if they could have it at Jasper's park and, sure enough, there were a lot of people around that bear statue that night."

Jasper was created in 1948, by Jim Simpkins, a Toronto-based illustrator who was commissioned by *Maclean's* to develop a distinctly Canadian animal character. (One of the magazine's editors suggested the name Jasper.) Jasper is a black bear with an air of playful superiority. He enjoys pranking campers but also warns them that real bears can be dangerous. Jasper appeared in hundreds of single-panel *Maclean's* cartoons,

and even on a few covers, before eventually starring in a syndicated newspaper strip. Jasper National Park adopted him as its official mascot in 1962, and he has since appeared on everything from dishes to greeting cards to salt and pepper shakers. New strips haven't run for several generations (Simpkins retired in 1972 and died in 2004), but Jasper's popularity continues here, no doubt owing to the easy lovability of a mischievous anthropomorphic bear.

The original Jasper statue, which was located one street over, near the train station, was retired several years ago, and now greets visitors at the Jasper Sky-Tram, about eight kilometres away. When the new, more resilient statue was built, the chamber, which oversees the use of Jasper's likeness, decided to grant him some green space. "He just means so much to everybody here," said Pavlov. "We have a knitters' group that has an annual convention at the Jasper Park Lodge, and every year you know when they're in, because Jasper gets a new hand-knitted scarf. They leave it on the statue and Jasper wears it all winter." 🐻



# FOOTPRINTS

RICHARD KELLY KEMICK wasn't sure why he wanted to spend an entire summer in the Alberta badlands acting in a play about the death of Jesus Christ. In this excerpt from a work-in-progress, the Christian-turned-agnostic discovers he's not the only one with questions.





# IN THE SAND





In Drumheller, a town of eight thousand people, located in the badlands of Alberta, “the greatest story ever told” is being told again. Each summer, since 1994, among a wealth of hoodoos and dinosaur bones, the Canadian Badlands Passion Play has depicted the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as told in the Gospels of the New Testament. The play runs on a combination of grants, donations, ticket sales, and a cast of volunteers—Christ, Pontius Pilate, Gabriel, and Christ Understudy receive modest honorariums—but is not a church-basement production. It has an annual operating budget of nearly a million dollars, and is one of the region’s staple tourist attractions. The play’s aesthetic quality rivals those of the nation’s grandest theatre festivals, with smoke bombs, original scores, and nearly two hundred actors (mostly human, with a supplement of horses, dogs, sheep, and other animals), who perform in a naturally created amphitheatre that seats twenty-seven hundred spectators. The stars of the show are housed in trailers on-site, while the rest of the troupe stay in a campground, located ten minutes down the highway.

In February, 2017, I joined the play’s cast, in the role of Herod Antipas, a figure who, despite his significant architectural and political achievements, is remembered mainly for his complicity in Christ’s crucifixion. My reasons for sacrificing an entire summer to perform in this play—one I had seen only via its crescendoing online promotional videos—were intangible and vague, even to me: a combination of my interest in the ways art survives in hostile climates, my fascination with what must be one of the last publicly funded exhibitions of fundamentalism, and a desire to write about a community that possesses inordinate political power while remaining notoriously reclusive. It might also have had something to do with wanting to see a donkey trot a fisherman into the Holy Land, Judas touch his lips to the cheek of another man, and a saviour hoisted high above to have a lance

threaded through his ribs, the torrent pouring forth like a punctured cloud that drenches with dark rain.

One afternoon, I made lunch plans with Jessica, the play’s co-director. I planned to ask her to confirm my theory that she was not religious—I’d noticed she did not bow her head during a previous day’s prayer, something I saw because I wasn’t bowing my head either. I solicited restaurant suggestions from the cast. Hardly any of the actors lived in Drumheller. Many were from surrounding cities and agricultural towns, and some commuted from as far away as northern Alberta and Saskatchewan. Diabolos and I carpooled from Calgary each weekend.

Lead Drummer suggested Boston Pizza. Barabbas, surrounded by his gaggle of children, suggested A & W. Barrett, the playwright and Jessica’s co-director, said, “Get Vietnamese.”

“Which restaurant is best?” Jessica asked.

Barrett surveyed our surroundings. A dust devil swirled across the stage while long-winged birds circled above.

“The . . . Vietnamese restaurant?”

“Do they have vegetarian options?” I said.

Barrett squinted at me. His well-gelled cowlick was like the brim of a baseball hat against the sun.

“I’ve told you everything I know.”

Drumheller’s Vietnamese Noodle House, wedged between a Baptist church and the Tastee-Delite ice-cream shop, offered exactly one vegetarian option. “White roll,” the server told me. I was unsure if he meant the roll was white or was for white people.

I’d prepared a lengthy inquisition to get Jessica to admit her secularity—something with Obadiah trivia and recitations of the Song of Solomon—but she confirmed my suspicions readily. “I did go to church when I was really, really young, and it was so boring,” she said. “Last night, a cast member was telling me, ‘This must be really great for your résumé,’ and I was like, ‘Well, sort of.’ If someone is a Christian

#### SCENE 14: LEVI’S FEAST/JESUS CONFRONTS THE PHARISEES

“Jesus and the gang enter a house where a lavish banquet has been prepared. . . . The Pharisees who have followed stand together away from the table. This mixed gathering is uncomfortable for all.”

in Victoria, and I come across that person, they might have heard of it. But most people don’t even know what a Passion play is.”

I said, “Someone once asked me, ‘Aren’t all plays passionate?’” and we giggled at the brimstone that awaited the unaware hoards.

Jessica first came to the Passion play through a posting on an actors’ union job board. After this year’s production, she will have worked on the show’s direction for three separate seasons, to a combined audience of more than thirty thousand souls.

“Before you started at the Passion play,” I asked, “how did you imagine Jesus?”

“All the clichés,” she said. “A white guy, with a beard, surrounded by other white people. And flowing robes, for sure.”

These clichés are alive and well within the Badlands play, particularly in regard to the whiteness of the actors. Also, thanks to the unparalleled mastery of the costume department, the cast’s flowing robes were inexplicably striking—Caravaggio-esque, even—and I had spent entire afternoons hypnotized by the tattered strands of Demon Possessed Woman’s kaftan coiling in the summer breeze.

“I was quite nervous my first year,” Jessica said, “because I was worried I was going to be challenged. My first year, Pharisee with Cane wouldn’t take direction from me.”

This did not surprise me. We were, generally speaking, a conservative group. This season’s scandal was the casting of a female Holy Spirit, which outraged some cast members. There was also pushback to casting female angels and to dressing the male angels in rose gold and aquamarine.





“Pushback is to be expected,” Jessica said. “When you sign up to be in *Seussical*, it’s not going to test your beliefs.”

Our meal arrived, and I discovered my roll was both white and for white people: white rice paper wrapped around white rice noodles and white bean sprouts. “Not too spicy,” the server told me, smiling. He pointed to a jar of hot sauce sitting on the table. “Very spicy,” he said, his face dark and sombre. “Very, very spicy.”

In 2006, partly in response to declining ticket sales, the Canadian Badlands Passion Play began debuting a new script every five years, rotating through the New Testament’s Gospels. The years 2006 to 2010 were the wildly adored Matthew years; 2011 to 2015, the less loved though still successful John years. We were now into the second season of the precarious Luke era, a Gospel widely considered the weakest of the four.

Each new script must be approved by the script committee. The script com-

mittee is composed of three board members and usually a member of the local clergy, all of whom, the organization’s *Board Policy Handbook* states, must “subscribe to the basic teachings of the Christian faith as expressed in the Apostles Creed.” The committee maintains the power to not only supervise the writing of the Passion play script but “approve the intent and use of the script.” According to Barrett, the script committee expressed serious reservations about having the Holy Spirit written as female. Barrett revised the script to obscure the role’s gender, allowing the committee to grant approval as they tarried in male-normative assumptions until auditions, where Barrett immediately cast a woman.

Jessica worked another contract the previous summer, so this was her first time directing the new script. I asked if she liked the play.

“It’s hard,” she said, her voice getting an octave higher with each ensuing sentence. “It’s an interesting one. It’s very

different. I think there’s a lot of threads that I’m not one hundred per cent sure what their purpose is.”

“Like what?”

“At the beginning of the season, we had no idea what the Holy Spirit’s role was. How does she affect Jesus? How does she affect everyone else? Gabriel we haven’t figured out yet. I just don’t know what his role is in this script. Are the voice-overs the best way to tell this story? And the Dark Angels—what are they?” She took a breath. “I don’t doubt that it is a good show. But I think we have a few more years to finesse it.”

Once we began rehearsing the second act, I grew concerned that no one outside those fluent in the Bible would appreciate our play. I found this especially troubling since not many Christians—our presumed audience—have read the Good Book. “How long did Jesus stay alive after coming back from the dead?” I overheard one high-school-age Villager ask another in the lineup for iced tea. “Three days,” the other Villager



answered. “Or maybe it’s a week—Sunday to Sunday. No, wait—forty days. Isn’t that what Lent is? When God *lent* us His son.”

Even senior members of the cast were perplexed. “Which of you is older?” Jessica asked Jacob and Isaac during our most recent rehearsal of the genealogy sequence. The father-son combo answered with wide-eyed silence.

“There’s an old joke about us Catholics,” Diabolos told me one morning on our ride to Mass, “that if you asked us to look up the Book of Acts, we’d go, ‘Is that Old Testament or New?’” I laughed so loud I was worried I’d oversold it, until I remembered how gifted a thespian I had become.

Jessica believed, however, that a large portion of our audience was secular. “People come for the spectacle,” she said. “People come up to me after the show to say they’re non-religious.” It seemed strange to me that someone would weave their way through the play’s exiting hoards just to approach one of the directors and say, “I do not believe in eternal life,” but it seemed even stranger to believe that a non-religious person would be able to follow what is happening onstage. Why, pray tell, does Jesus sweat blood in the garden of Gethsemane? Why does Pontius Pilate kill Judas in one scene, only to have Judas enter in the next? Why does a voice-over of the Holy Spirit whisper to Christ, “Receive my power,” apparently instilling in Jesus the ability to enclose Diabolos in a Jedi force field?

A week earlier, my partner, Litia, accompanied me to Drumheller for the first time. I was worried the cast would be able to smell the original sin on her, so I made her stick close.

“I thought you people didn’t believe in cavemen,” Litia said upon spotting John the Baptist in his camel cloak. Then, witnessing the Angel Choir splendid in their pinks and blues, she asked, “Why is Gabriel dressed like a unicorn?”

I figured Litia’s assumption that the harbinger of Christ was half angel and half horned horse was as bad as it could get, until she watched scene 22c:

The Transfiguration, in which Christ hikes up a mountain to be visited by apparitions.

“Is that Father Time?” Litia said, referencing a spirit’s elegant robe, gnarled staff, and unbound mane of silver hair.

“Are you high?” I whispered. “It’s Elijah.”

“What’s his power?”

“Power? He’s not a superhero. He’s a prophet. He foretold the future.”

“And there’s not an X-Men who does that?”

“This is a *Passion* play.”

“About that,” she said. “Aren’t all plays passionate?”

In the restaurant, my meal tasted exactly how the word “white” sounds. I opened the jar of hot sauce, and from the smell alone my eyes bloomed into poisonous red flowers. I pushed the limp rolls around until the rice paper broke and the bean sprouts surged across my plate. I asked Jessica how the directing team was dealing with the stress of living in the shadow of the previous year’s production.

“I wasn’t sure that people knew that,” she said.

“Everyone knows.”

By most accounts, last season’s production was financially problematic. In response, nearly the entire directing team was replaced, and many volunteer actors have not returned. Even Jesus, who was in his rookie year as Christ, was summarily demoted to Christ Understudy so a new, glamorous, having-guest-starred-on-*Supernatural* Jesus could be flown in from Vancouver. Vance, the executive director—a man I’d only ever heard be indomitably giddy about the play—told me, “All I want is magic. Last year, I didn’t get it. This year, I want magic.”

A few nights earlier, at a local bar, Pontius Pilate and Judas parsed the prior season’s problems. “Financially,” Pilate said, “last year didn’t go well because we didn’t market it worth a shit.”

Judas, whom the bar’s short-skirted staff positively swooned over, despite his only ever ordering water, placed the blame on a narrative unbalance: “It took

### SCENE 13: PILATE GOES TO SEE HEROD

**“Herod appears, and tosses a stone as close as he can to the original ball. . . . The whole group is followed hard upon by a bevy of courtiers and attendants.”**

forty-five minutes to get to adult Jesus.”

Pilate nodded. “There was a lot of dragging ass.”

“We started with the genealogy sequence,” Judas said, “and it took a while. It then went into bridesmaids talking, and, ‘Oh, look, there’s Mary,’ and Mary gets visited by Gabriel, and then she goes with Joseph, and then Joseph has to get it inn, and he can’t get it inn”—I’m unsure if the *entendre* is intentional—“so he gets a stable, and they go to the stable.”

“And then we had an angry British guy come out,” Pilate said, “and he’s like, ‘I ain’t got no room.’ And they’re like, ‘But we need a room.’ And he’s like, ‘Tuff shite. I ain’t got no room.’”

Judas rubbed his eyes. “And if you think the ‘Do Not Be Afraid’ song is boring this year, it was, like, five minutes longer last year.”

Pilate rested his forehead on the table. “Oh, it was awful.”

There had been substantial edits to this year’s script, but Judas, much to my dismay, still held skepticism about the pacing. “It’s not a clean-focused story,” he said. “Simon Peter starts the play with, ‘Empty nets, empty purse, whine-whine-whine.’ And then Jesus dies, and he has the exact same whiny, bitchy shit right after, meaning the last two and a half hours didn’t impact him at all.”

These misgivings are especially disheartening because, at last count, the play, including a half-hour intermission, was estimated to be running at three and a half hours.

Jessica devoured her final roll—something delicious and surf’n’ turfy, bright shrimps glowing through the rice paper. “It has been stressful,” she said, “with that ever-looming cloud of ‘It needs to





be good.' But when I see our show, I can't imagine wanting my money back. It's such a spectacle."

In response to last year's shortcomings, Vance offered disgruntled patrons a money-back guarantee on this year's performance. That maverick promise could equal more than ten thousand dollars in refunded revenue. "We've put all our eggs in one basket," Vance told me, closing his office door. "If we don't come through big—and I mean *big*—we're done for."

The organization's bank account is empty, and this year's budget has already been spent on new fishing boats, a sundeck for Simon Peter, and Gabriel's four-figure three-metre wingspan. As Pilate told me one morning by the stables, "I was here for the first season, twenty-three years ago, and the way things are going, I'll be here for the last."

"Isn't there a version of this play that is an assured success?" I asked Jessica. "A

God who is a white male, with a Holy Spirit who is a white male, totally not gay, doing stuff with his buddies, not gay? A Jesus who is wildly charismatic, compassionate . . . definitely not gay? Why aim to add art to a show whose patrons don't want it?"

"I think they do, in the age of movies with multimillion-dollar budgets" she said. "I mean, you go watch *Wonder Woman* and then the Passion play needs to compare."

"Jessica," I said, "you think the people who watch the Passion play have seen *Wonder Woman*?"

Only from her recoil did I realize how dismissive I had become, my presumption that a belief in Christ turned you into the Elephant Man, unwanted and unallowed in public. Like somebody can't enjoy both X-Men and Elijah as, admittedly, I once did.

Behind the restaurant's till, the teenage hostess turned up the radio on Lady

Gaga's "Just Dance." Jessica took her last, perfectly seasoned bite, and I asked if she considered herself a feminist.

"I'm not like—," she said, raising a clenched fist.

"What does this mean?" I said, repeating the gesture.

"I mean, I don't go to rallies, but I think I am."

"Do you think the Passion play is a patriarchal environment?"

In relation to the script, Jessica admitted that most female characters had been sidelined to male storylines. "But in the directing team, I've never felt my voice is less than someone else's."

"Then why does Barrett always speak after you when you two address the cast?"

"Barrett and I have talked about this, and it's because he finishes with something faith-based."

"The cast prays, like, all the time. How many times do you think a woman has led that prayer?"

"Maybe three?"



“Zero.”

“No,” she said, “Midwife 3 led it once. What I notice is that it’s always the same three or four people. Like, give someone else a chance.”

“But isn’t that the definition of a patriarchal society?” I ask.

Jessica shrugged. And what was I supposed to do? Tell her that what she believes is wrong despite her having lived it? Demand her argument give way to the infallibility of my own? At some point, the path of logic and belief inevitably forks. Is it better to slow-clap the enlightenment of those who take the former route or to envy the wide-eyed wonder of those who elect the latter? I shrug back.

Earlier in the month, there was a stage combat call for the rehearsal of scene 12: Calling of Simon Peter/Parable of the Lost Son. The scene concluded with Jesus crowd-surfing from his fishing boat into the awaiting arms of the seaside village. The crowd assembled to perform the hoisting was composed of able-bodied men—which is why I found myself in the cafeteria with Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna, who, along with Mother Mary, composed the entirety of the play’s multi-scene female characters. As we drank Twinings Earl Grey and morning-old coffee, I asked them their thoughts on the cast’s objections to a female Holy Spirit. “Pharisee with Cane,” I said, “called it a ‘New Age-y attack.’”

In astounding unison, they rolled their eyes.

“Typical,” Susanna said.

“What’s the big deal if the Holy Spirit is a girl?” Joanna added. “Like, do people really think the Holy Spirit has a . . . you know.”

Mary Magdalene stared into her paper cup. “The Holy Spirit is a *spirit*. It’s right there in the name.”

Midwife 3 was seated at the table behind us, studying her script. I could tell by how her irises stayed still that she was no longer reading.

“But doesn’t that same logic apply to God?” I asked Mary Magdalene. “What’s making Him a *Him*?”



“Sometimes,” Susanna said, her eyes smouldering like lanterns turned low, “when I’m speaking with God, He is a woman.”

It is difficult for a non-religious person to understand how subversive this sentiment is. To call Him a Her is not simply an expanding of definition—it concedes a level of fallibility in those who have written what we should believe and how we should believe it. Because if God isn’t a dude, why has He been such a bro to us: employing us as popes, enshrining the ownership of

wives within the Ten Commandments, and declaring the use of condoms a mortal sin?

Mary Magdalene nodded. Joanna was in such agreement that she raised her paper cup in a gesture of “Hear, hear.”

Midwife 3 closed her script and shook her head.

I asked the three women what they’d think if next season’s Jesus was cast as female. Mary Magdalene chewed her lip. “But the Bible says Jesus was human. And humans have to either be a man or a woman.”



### SCENE 3: FLASHBACK

**“In the center is a winged angel named Gabriel. He is swift and strong, light and agile. His wings are massive and colorful—like in Fra Angelico’s *The Annunciation*. He has a blindingly gold belt. Power and authority emanate from him.”**

“But what’s the difference?” Susanna said. “You think He was actually white? But we have no problem pretending He was. Jesus being *human* is the important part. Who cares if He is She?”

Midwife 3 took Susanna’s question as an invitation and approached our table. “Such an interesting conversation,” she told us through smiling teeth. “But the Bible clearly says ‘He’ in reference to the Holy Spirit, God, and His son.” She then echoed herself: “His *son*.”

“But isn’t that just a translation thing?” Susanna said, and Midwife 3’s smile widened at Susanna’s open insubordination. God’s male gender largely is a product of the Bible’s English translation, since English doesn’t have a gender-neutral pronoun. Previous versions of the Bible written in other languages allowed the use of masculine pronouns to describe God without prescribing gender. Also, as Carpenter 1 pointed out to me, in the Hebrew Bible, the pronoun used to refer to the Holy Spirit is categorically feminine.

“It’s fun to imagine,” Midwife 3 said, her smile inflating to near-burstable proportions. “But ‘imagining’ can get you into trouble.”

From outside came a raucous clamor: the cast had either lifted the Lord or dropped Him.

In my previous, hedonistic life, I would end each interview by asking, “Do you have any questions for *me*?” However, in my current life of theatrical religiosity, I’d done away with it, for fear I would be asked, “Do you believe in God?” But as Jessica and I waited for the bill, she said, “Are you enjoying being in the play?” and somehow this question was even more complicated. I said that the play had a tenderness I

never expected, that we were beautifully reminiscent of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*: our little group of mechanicals, rehearsing in the thickets, planning our big show, and wringing our hands white with the worry that no one would come.

“But,” I told her, “at some moments, I feel profound loneliness. I feel I’ve really connected with somebody, and then something comes up—like bike lanes—and it shows how far apart we are.”

The Canadian Badland’s Passion Play is one of the kindest, most welcoming environments I had ever been in. Like when, without my asking, Clarinet Player halved her granola bar with me, even though the day had been long and brunch quite meagre. Or when Doubting Thomas loaned me his script when I forgot mine, damning himself to be woefully lost for the rest of rehearsal. Or when I approached Diablos at the campfire and, my eyes welting with tears, asked if he thought it was possible for someone to be born without a soul, and he, with neither hesitation nor reflection, put his hand on my knee and said, “Never heard something so silly.”

The Canadian Badlands Passion Play is also one of the cruelest environments I have ever been in. Chuza told me he was reading a book that proved Christians are responsible for all positive aspects of civilization—everything from hospitals to universities, aqueducts to post offices. Roman Soldier informed me it was morally wrong that Litia was physically stronger than me, since I would therefore be unable to protect her. Herbalist decreed that unwed partners should be barred from church, a barring that would include none other than Roman Soldier and his girlfriend, Daughter of Widow of Nain.

Ever since I agreed to spend all summer with Jesus H. Christ, who repeated ad nauseam that we shall all be judged, I realized how inept I was at separating good from bad—the two now striking me as inextricable.

“What about homosexuals?” I asked Diablos during our carpool from Cal-

gary. “Why can’t they get into heaven? That’s something we mortals would call a human-rights violation.”

“I have no idea if they get into heaven,” he said, turning down our campground’s gravel road. “Or anyone else for that matter. That’s not for me to decide. All I need to do is be merciful to others, because I know I’ll be in need of a lot of mercy myself.”

The man who does decide if the L.G.B.T.Q. crowd get through the pearly gates (at least according to Catholic theology and newspaper comic strips) is Simon Peter, who, as we pulled into the campground, was hacking through the rind of the largest watermelon I have ever seen—an ovoid the size of a Galapagoan turtle.

From her trailer, Baptizee 4 cranked Norman Greenbaum’s “Spirit in the Sky” to a volume that shattered the birds out of the canopy. The electric guitar marched into the first verse, and three Villagers from neighbouring trailers emerged to dance alongside her.

“Prepare yourself, you know it’s a must / Gotta have a friend in Jesus / So you know that when you die / He’s gonna recommend you / To the spirit in the sky.”

The women improvised actions to go along with the words: “Friend” was a self-hug, and “Jesus” was the unfurling of your arms to crucifixion pose; “Die” equalled a thumb dragged across the throat.

During the musical interlude, Baptizee 4 sashayed over to Simon Peter. He stopped cutting the watermelon, now absorbed in the suppleness of her air guitar. She shrugged her tank-topped shoulders, limboing deeply to play the high chords, and her neck and chin stretched into a single long line.

The drum roll cued, the lyrics returned, and Baptizee 4 uprighted and strutted back to her awaiting entourage, while I thought about every bad thing I’d ever done that I knew I’d get away with.

“Never been a sinner, I never sinned. / I got a friend in Jesus.”

Simon Peter’s knife hovered, the red dripping off the blade. 🗡️



# THE SAME CABIN

BY CEDAR BOWERS

My partner travels to various places for work by plane, while I stay at home snacking, peacemaking, coffee-drinking, wine-sipping, and sending texts to people who have more pressing things to do than to answer them. During the daylight hours, while taking care of the kids, I fantasize about the night, yet when it arrives I do nothing valuable with the time. Sometimes I press my face to the cool single-pane window in my living room, look outside at the street lights and steady traffic. Sometimes I lick the glass, try to taste life through it. But I can't go out there, of course—it's illegal to leave your children in a house alone—so I turn to the Internet instead.

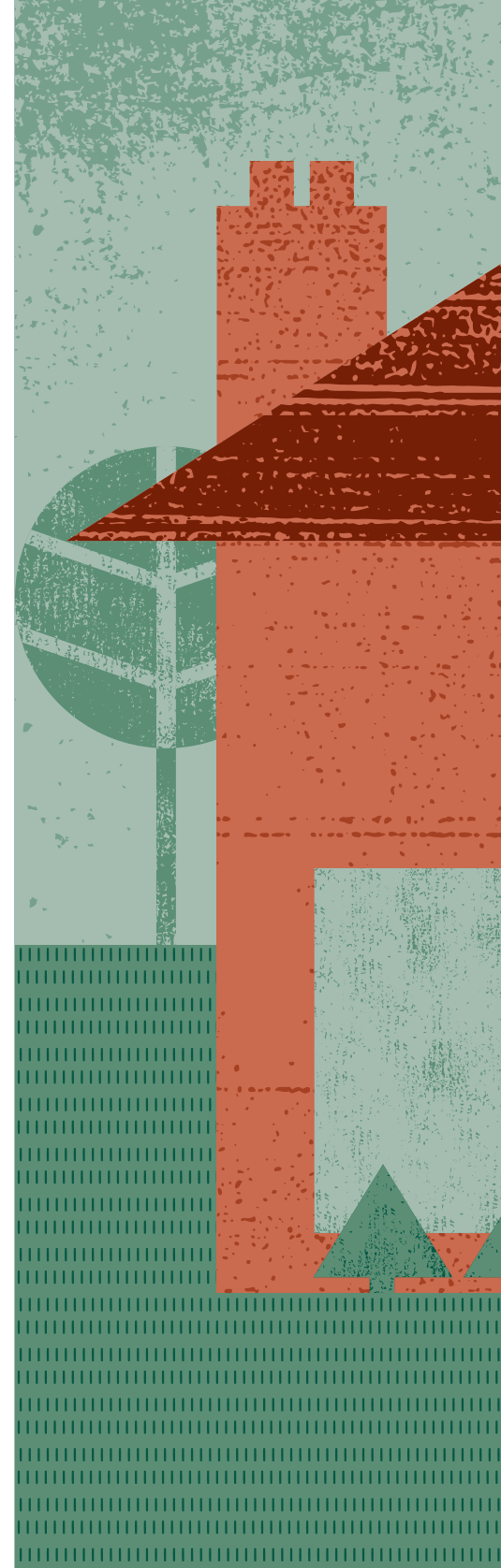
I spend most of my time reading about Sonia. I look at her Twitter, her Facebook, and then I Google her too. I read her posts and every article she shares. I analyze what her friends are saying in their replies. I click hearts. I type, "What? You're amazing!" Of course I'm proud of her, but mostly I comment to ensure that Sonia and the Internet don't forget who I am, that they don't forget about my potential in case one day I stumble across it again. But reading about smart, accomplished people always feels terrible, and eventually I manage to pull myself away by opening an Airbnb tab instead, and I browse vacation rentals on the nearby gulf islands as a way to escape.

I scroll past photos of tiny cabins with ladders, lofts, macramé wall hangings, and outdoor showers. I scroll past beachfront top-floor suites, bouquets of lavender in antique Mason jars, and the steaming waters of a cedar hot tub rising into a canopy of evergreens. I scroll past firepits, mini-fridges, two-burner stovetops, modern fold-out sofas, and sun-pooled decks with cherry-red Adirondack chairs arranged to face the view. I scroll past converted garages

with aloes on the countertop, rock gardens, and local art on the walls. I memorize maps and measure walking distances. I take guest reviews seriously. I save my favourite cabins, revisit their listings, and watch their calendars fill over time. This isn't healthy, I know, but I'm convinced a solo vacation is all I need to find myself again.

Over the years fantasizing about this trip, I'd envisioned closing the front the door, turning the key, locking my family inside: click. As I rolled my luggage toward the bus, my vacation would officially start. Instead, after I take the plunge and finally book two nights away, my partner offers to drive me to the ferry. I have a hard time saying no to pretty much anything, especially acts of kindness, so I accept. He picks the playlist while I buckle the kids in. Right away, my youngest starts crying because we forgot her ladybug water bottle, and I spend most the drive turned around in my seat, passing them snacks and picking up items they drop on the floor. At the terminal, after we kiss, my partner says, "I hope you have a wonderful time." And I thank him, though, after, while buying my ticket at the kiosk, I can't stop thinking about how he'd said it, with such gentleness, like I might break, and suddenly this whole idea of escaping them and sleeping alone in a little cabin seems tokenistic, and childish, and privileged, and pathetic, and even—mostly—scary. I begin to worry that when I return home, nothing will be different. That I won't be like Sonia, I won't come back with something to show for it. That my life will only resume. I push these thoughts aside and board the ferry.

After years perusing images of woody cabins, with their ocean-view decks, their cozy comforters and gardens in spring bloom, I'm



disappointed by the small, ordinary road that leads from the ferry, and the blinking neon sign above the general store. But I need wine and food, so I roll my luggage past the gas pumps, where a muddy minivan with darkened windows has just parked. A woman my age





climbs from the driver's seat, and I hear children screaming inside. She slams the van door, muffling the noise, and smiles at me as I pass.

In the store, I find everything on the shelves is also ordinary. The same salami and Earthbound organic produce you

find in the city. The same low-priced wines. I'd envisioned foraged things: hand-picked mushrooms and artisanal sausage. This *is* an island! Disappointed, I choose two cans of soup, some crackers, and a loaf of bread.

I stand in line behind the mother

with the minivan, but she ushers me ahead. "I'm not in a rush," she explains. And I get it. Her kids are screaming out there in the van while she steals a moment of peace in the brightly lit store, hugging a sweating jug of milk. She is refilling her tank too.



Sonia was my roommate for nine years—most of our twenties. When drunk we sometimes told people we were sisters. Once, the last year we lived together, we slept with the same man at the same time. I don't try to, but I can still conjure the taste of Sonia's nipples: tea-tree soap and shea butter. Sonia and that man are happily married now. I gave a short, nervous speech at their wedding. If her husband catches me alone in a room, he tries to touch my back or grab my hand. I guess he thinks Sonia and I are a package deal. I could tell Sonia all of this, but her life is perfect, and I don't want to ruin it with the truth.

Last month, Sonia won a national award for her essay about art and water. About being creative, about making room, about ignoring your children and really going for it. I saw the YouTube video of her acceptance speech. In it she thanked this very island for its inspiration. This is the reason I've come. Why, after years searching for the perfect retreat, I booked this cabin in particular.

After walking for thirty minutes, finding the key under a rock, I enter the Airbnb confused. I'd studied all of Sonia's Instagram photos carefully, and I'd been pretty sure I found the one she'd stayed in, but this cabin seems smaller, poorly lit, and dingy. It's damp and smells of microwaved lasagna and earthworms. I sit on the stained loveseat, pull out my laptop, enter the Wi-Fi password, and check Airbnb again. I spend the first two hours of my vacation clicking through listings. I look at the neighbouring island, the next, and the next. Then I return to the cabin I've rented. The one I'm sitting in right now. And realize no, this is definitely it. This is Sonia's. It just looks so much better online. The photos must be from a while ago. The cabin is worn now. Tired from hosting all these dreams.

Unpack. I try to read but I can't read. I try to nap but I can't nap. I watch some shows. I make tea. I've forgotten to buy milk, so the tea is hot and bitter, and eventually I pour it down the drain. I watch more shows, forgiving myself: I've only just arrived. It will take time to

unwind, to feel ready to work. I eat soup for dinner. After, I FaceTime the kids, listen to them fight over who gets to hold the iPad. Then, bored with their mother, they lay me down on the kitchen table, leave me looking up at the light fixture framed off-centre, the fan turning slowly around. I hear my girls laughing while they jump on the couch. I hear my partner. "Calm down!" he shouts. I hang up. Go outside. Stand on the deck. Listen to the ocean's swish. Gulls. I see Vancouver glowing in the distance. I feel the darkness of the island pressing against me. Inside, I lock every door and window. Check them twice before going to bed.

The next morning, after a bruised banana and dry toast, I walk to the beach. I leave my laptop behind on the mosaic coffee table. I bring a pen and my little red book instead. It's late fall but the sun is out. I sit on the damp sand, lean against a water-swollen log, a scarf wrapped across my cheeks, a cold hand hovering above a new white page.

I write: "Disappointment."

I write: "I love you still, wherever you've gone."

I write: "Fish are probably jumping out there. But I can't see a thing."

I put my book back in my bag. I pull my jacket tight around me, curl on my side, and fall asleep in the sand.

It's already afternoon. I leave tomorrow. I should be at the table writing. Instead, I wander about the cabin, taking photos with my phone. I take some of the succulents hanging above the tub. I line up some brown-and-white sea glass on the blue tile floor and take a few of that. I take a photo of my slippered feet in front of the fireplace, even though everyone knows only teenagers take photos of their feet. I take a photo of my pen lying across my book on the table. I take a photo of my hand holding a ceramic mug, send it to my partner. I wish this cabin had a hot tub so I could take a picture of that too. Lid off, steam flying high.

I could send Sonia a message, some-

thing like, "You'll never guess what! I think I might be staying in the same Airbnb you stayed in last year!! Crazy coincidence. I'm on a little work trip. First time away from the kids." But I worry it might be weird to message her while I'm here and should be working. Might look better to wait until I'm home.

In the evening I walk to the pub. As I open the door, four middle-aged men at the bar turn and look at me. Each says hello. I sit and order a pint and chicken strips from a dreamy bartender. His plaid shirt is rolled to his elbows, showing off thick, woodcutter forearms. His hair is half grey and shoulder length. He's the kind of man who smokes, but only at night, has a loyal dog at home, and children he's never met scattered across the continent. Sometimes, not very often, I miss sleeping with other people. I wonder if my partner thinks this way when he's working, and I forgive him before I finish the thought.

I leave my jacket on the bar stool, my phone beside my beer, and hurry to the women's bathroom, which smells of sulphur water and stale piss. I close the stall door, lower my jeans, and lean against the yellowed wall. It's been years since I've bothered, but being somewhere new, the bartender's arms, his quiet nod, and my heart is racing. It doesn't take much. I push two fingers in, twirl them about, and rub myself off with my thumb.

Order a second beer because I love this pub. It's warm, a fire raging in the corner. I hear a group of women laughing behind some plants. While I wait for my food I struggle to catch what they're saying, but I can't. I look at my phone, scroll through Sonia's photos, and find the ones of her trip here. There are forty-two. She'd come in the summer. She wrote on the beach. She drank wine on the deck at sunset. Each picture is perfect, shrouded in creativity. I want to be just like her and I worry about her, it's both.

"Oh, hi, you!" The woman from the store is beside me. She's dressed up. Black boots, tight jeans, a thick sweater.



## TO YOU, WHO GAVE ME DIRECTIONS IN GREENWICH VILLAGE

Our relationship is made problematic  
by the many details of how you don't  
know me, and how I might have  
immediately forgotten your name.  
If you even gave it to me. I can't  
remember if you did. Did you?  
This I know. You work in a bookstore  
in Greenwich Village, and there is  
some happiness there for you.  
You trust people, which is charming.  
You have some difficulty judging  
just how tired is a man  
when you're talking to him. This is  
a small fault, hardly worth mention.

Yet it can lead total strangers into errors  
of degree. Whole sections of the city might  
be meaninglessly walked in search of  
a lost address you seem to think you know  
something about. Do you?  
You cannot abide wistfulness, especially  
in you. And though you favour  
the direction of your work, there is  
this thing you do every evening; this walking  
prayer; this stopping in at the tavern.  
So that, whatever happens over the next  
five, ten years, you will not end up like  
them. The older ones you know. You will  
not go so far in you can no longer see out.

—JOHN DEGEN

She introduces herself as Phae, and then asks, "Are you alone? Come sit with us if you want company."

There are ten women of various ethnicities and weights, and their ages range twenty years. Immediately I can tell which ones are fun and which ones the fun ones only put up with. The handsome stranger behind the bar. These women. It's not what I pictured for my holiday, but it's doing the trick.

The women are just ending their book-club meeting. I listen to them select next month's reading, and then there's a tense discussion about the upcoming school concert before they pick up their purses and leave.

I climb into the passenger seat of Phae's minivan and kick through the used cups on the floor. She cracks a cider and hands it to me. "We drink while we drive here," she explains with a smile. I imagine her comfortable home. That she knows how to use a slow cooker and how to smoke weed without coughing. As she drives, I ask what it's like to live on the island full time.

"You people always want to know the same thing," she says, dismissing my question. "You idealize everything."

But I know she's wrong. I know it's easier on this island. Simple. I try again. "Everyone just seems so nice."

"They're not."

"Do you think I'd fit in?"

"Not likely," she says with a laugh. "No one does."

Inside my cabin, I open the vent on the wood stove, add a log, and then search the kitchen for a bottle opener.

"In the drawer, left of the fridge," Phae says from the couch.

She has her feet kicked across the cushions.

"How do you know that?"

"This is one of the cabins I clean."

"You're a housekeeper?" I ask, embarrassed.

"Amongst other things, yeah," Phae says. "This is my easiest cabin. It's a bit of a dump, but it's fast."

I open the wine, pour two glasses, and bring them over.

"How long does it take you?" I ask.

"Depends on how disgusting the guests are, but usually not more than an hour."

I explain to Phae that I've never done this before. That my family never travels. That my partner is away so much that the last thing he wants is to take another plane or even a long drive when he has time off.

"It's O.K.," Phae says. "Don't feel weird. Everybody has to get away sometimes."

I smile.

"What's the worst thing you've seen cleaning?"

"Once a guy smeared shit all over the bathroom with his hands. At first I thought he'd fingerpainted the walls, then I smelt it."

"Here?"

"Yeah. I got my ex-friend to come help me. We drank all the leftover wine before we started cleaning."

"What do you mean 'ex-friend'?"

"She's just an asshole. I don't bother with her anymore. She was at book club tonight though. We're civil."

"You all seemed so nice," I say, a bit heartbroken by this information, because I had started thinking this island might be the answer. I'd begun to imagine it at the pub: joining a book club and having friends of all ages. Maybe



living somewhere smaller could make me feel less alone? Be O.K. with whom I've turned into.

"Every place is the sa—"

Phae stops as something hits the sliding glass door.

"What was that?" I ask.

Phae doesn't hesitate. She gets up, cups her hands against the glass and peers out.

"There's nothing there. Maybe a bat hit the glass."

"This place makes me nervous," I admit. "It's fucking dark outside."

"The city's worse. I'm scared of everyone I pass on the sidewalk."

"Really? You seem unflappable."

Phae gives me a funny look, then goes to the kitchen and grabs the bottle. She returns to the couch and gives me a wicked smile.

"I don't want to freak you out, but once I had to deal with a writer lady who had a bit of a meltdown in this cabin."

"What do you mean?"

"I met her while I was picking up pizza for my kids at the pub. She came stumbling out of the kitchen."

"The pub kitchen?"

"Yes. And Philip was right behind her, of course."

"Who's Philip?"

"The bartender. Women love him, but he's such a sleaze. Anyway, they'd obviously been fucking around back there. It was only seven, but the woman was wasted. Philip had to hold her up by her arm. She was too drunk to walk, so he asked me to take her home."

"Did you?"

"Of course. What do you think I am?"

"When was this?"

"Last summer."

"No way," I say.

I feel my face get hot.

"As soon as we got here, the woman started to cry. She didn't want me to go, she *hated* this place. She kept saying she thought Philip was outside, which was impossible because he was still at the bar. She claimed he'd been watching her through the windows the night before, which didn't make any sense either, since she'd just met him that afternoon. She kept begging me to get

her home to the mainland, but all the ferries had left for the night. I didn't know what to do. I had the pizza in my van and my kids were waiting for dinner, but I couldn't leave her. So I ended up taking her with me. She slept in my daughter's bed."

There's another bang on the glass. Louder. When I look up, I see our reflections wobble.

"Maybe that's what she kept hearing," Phae says, looking from the window back at me. The sound is terrifying, but it feels very important not to show it, not to say anything. For me. For Sonia. For womankind.

"Can you look at this for me?" I ask, passing my phone over.

Phae scrolls through Sonia's photos of the island. Breakfast on the little patio table. Her tan legs in the sand. A selfie with a book on her knees.

"Wow," Phae says. "You know, I found her on Facebook after she left. I only wanted to check in on her. Whatever she was going through that weekend was intense. She never accepted my friend request, though. Is she doing all right?"

"Well, she seems fine. But you're sure that's her?" I ask.

Phae frowns. I know how I must sound, but it's not that I'm happy to hear about my friend being scared, cheating on her husband, or that she'd hated this crappy cabin. It's that I'm struggling too. For some reason, over the years, I'd begun to think I was the only one. I wish Sonia had called me that night while she was crying. That we had talked on the phone. That I knew real things about her life, not just how it looks. That she knew about mine. When did that stop being important to us?

"Are you friends?" Phae asks. "Like, not just on social media?"

She passes me the phone.

"I've known her almost twenty years," I say.

"I don't get it. Did you know she stayed in this cabin? Does she know you're here now?" Phae asks.

She is arranging her thick hair behind her back. She's about to stand. She

is unsure about me now. There's another bang on the sliding glass door, but we both refuse to look toward it.

"No, she doesn't," I admit.

"That's a little weird. And I've got to get going," Phae says.

"Of course," I say.

"You're O.K.?" Phae asks. "I can leave you?"

But she isn't making fun of me; now she is worried about me too.

"I'm one hundred per cent fine," I laugh, though nothing is funny. I'm only laughing to keep from crying.

After listening to Phae's van pull away, I pour another glass of wine and pick up my phone.

"You'll never guess what! I think I'm staying in the same Airbnb you stayed in last summer!" I type.

I send a photo of the setting sun. I send a photo of the bathtub. I send the photo of my feet in front of the fire. Immediately, Sonia writes back.

"No way!! I love that place."

"It's gorgeous. I see why you were so inspired here. Let's hang out when I get home. Right now I'm working like crazy."

"Good for you. And yes, I'd love to catch up. Xo"

"Xo"

Whatever is outside hits the door again. Bang! Bang! I put down my wine and tiptoe over. I grab the handle of the sliding door and pull it open. Six startled white eyes stare back at me. We don't move. The mother otter wriggles her nose, her whiskers twitch. I reach out to touch her. I want to feel her coat, touch her wildness, but she bares her little sharp teeth and screeches. So I hiss back and I show her my claws. As she spins away, ushering her children from the open door, her thick, rubbery tail hits the glass with another bang. The otters slip and slide on the damp deck as they scurry down the stairs to the shore. I follow them outside, lean on the railing, and watch them dive off the rocks into the silky black water. The moon shines off the ripples. Vancouver is glimmering just there, just over the Salish Sea, full of people and life, and all I want is to be there again. 🐾





**Members of the Royal Canadian Bicycle Club's winning team pose with the Dunlop Trophy in 1895.**

THE MISCELLANY

# ACCIDENTAL HISTORIAN

*Barry Slater's curious nature is helping a Toronto curling club rediscover its past.*

BY CONAN TOBIAS

This April, on the last day of curling season, representatives of Heritage Toronto unveiled a plaque in front of the Royal Canadian Curling Club, on Broadview Avenue, marking its origins as the city's most successful early cycling society. Afterward, as cake was served and guests mingled around various display cases—one of which contained the six-foot-tall 1894 Dunlop Trophy that, as a Heritage Toronto representative said during the dedication ceremony, “makes the Stanley Cup look like garbage”—Barry Slater gave a guided tour for one of the building's history.

The first stop was an unassuming basement hallway connecting the curling rink to the club house. It was here, about eight years ago, that Slater, whose frizzy white hair and matching beard make him look like a lithe Jerry Garcia, discovered boxes of forgotten club trophies, historical photographs, and ephemera. “There used to be just a blue curtain across this exit corridor,” he said. “So I went behind the curtain and

along this wall were all these framed pictures. One of an old man attracted me. I looked at it and thought, ‘Who is this?’ I cleaned the grime and the dust and dirt off it and his name was etched in gold letters.” The photograph, of A. E. Walton, an early club president and the man known as the organization's “angel,” for his long support, is now on display in the club's entryway. “It blew my mind that this photo had something to do with the big Dunlop Trophy, and it fell into place. It just sort of clicked. Each thing I picked up said something to me.”

The club officially marks its birth year as 1891, when a group of aficionados founded the Royal Canadian Bicycle Club to promote the growing sport. It moved from its original location, across the street, in what is now the Broadview Hotel, to its current dedicated space, in 1906, and grew to encompass a variety of sports, including bowling, boxing, and baseball. The rink was added in 1929, as the club added ice sports, including curling, which would

eventually become its prime focus. Slater has been a member since 1986, but it wasn't until his accidental discovery that he took a serious interest in the club's history and became its historian.

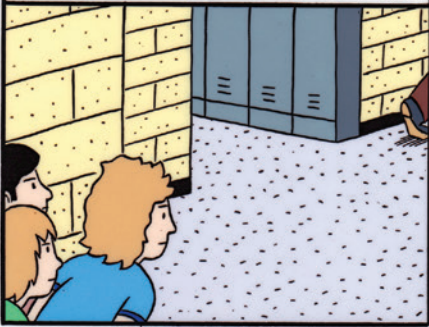
Slater exited the hallway and moved into a changing area. “The men's locker room now takes the place of what was a bowling alley,” he said. “This wall dates from 1945. The machinery for the ice plant is behind that wall. It used to be a ten-pin bowling alley, and then when they put the ice machine in they went to a five-pin.”

Slater darted through a room that contained still-visible remnants of a sauna, toward the stairs. In the main-floor lounge, he showed off one of the club's most impressive assets, the Dunlop Shield, won twice by the cycling club, in 1898 and 1899. “Someone told me one night that it had been put someplace, in a store on Sherbourne,” Slater said. “I asked her again a couple of years ago and she said, ‘Oh, Dave, our past president, knows where that is.’ Sure enough, I asked Dave and Dave said, ‘Yeah, I know where it is.’ We brought it back to the club and started raising funds to restore it. It was almost forgotten except in some photographs. It used to hang on the wall but, over the course of fifty years, people being people, it suffered some damage.” (The shield now sits under glass.)

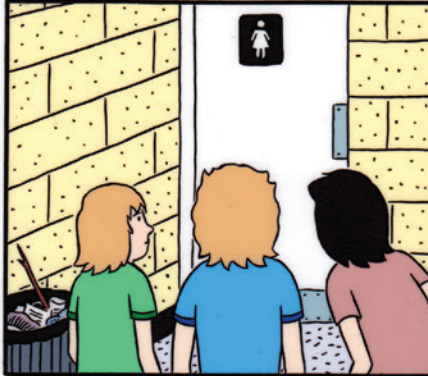
A few years ago, the club was forced to look for new sources of revenue, and leased out its main building, which, at various points, contained a grand ballroom, a smoking lounge, a billiard room, a reading room, and a full gymnasium, among other amenities. “We would have our banquets there,” Slater said. “We used to dance until four o'clock in the morning, and then fall down in the corner and wake up here on a Sunday and have a skating party. The kids would come out and skate and play hockey, and we'd have hot dogs. My kids used to love this place.” 🐾



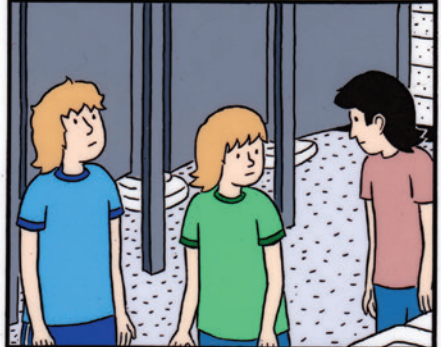
One day when I was in high school, me, my brother Greg and a friend Sean hung around late and waited until all the teachers had left...



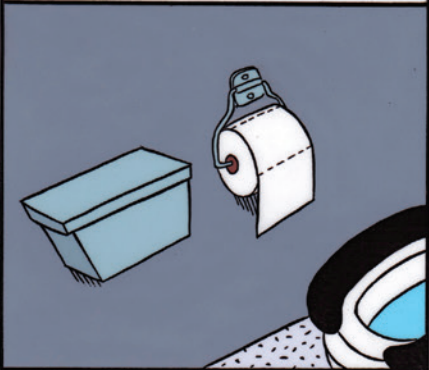
... we wanted to know what was in the girls' washroom.



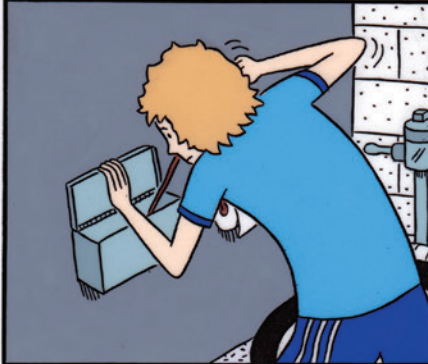
So we snuck in and looked around... and other than the lack of urinals it was unremarkable...



... except for the peculiar metal boxes in each stall.



I grabbed a stick from a garbage can and used it to dig out a mystery object...



... which fell in the toilet.



Greg and Sean were waiting by the door telling me to get out of there.



I emerged with the bloody, dripping maxi pad on a stick.



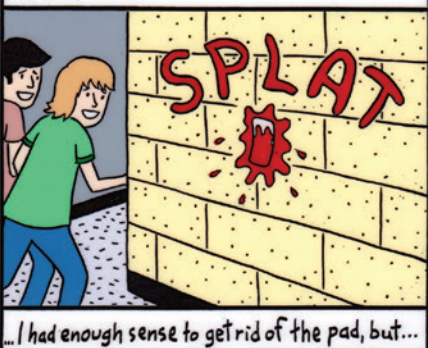
They had a stark look of shock and horror as they tried to comprehend what they were seeing and why was I winding up my arm?...



... to whip it straight at 'em!



Oh the mixture of disgust, laughter, and fear as they ran from that moist, bloody bomb...




... to this day I still wonder what the janitor thought when he had to clean that huge bloody splatter off the wall.



Fuckin' kids...

... I had enough sense to get rid of the pad, but...





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