

# TADDLE CREEK

NO.42  
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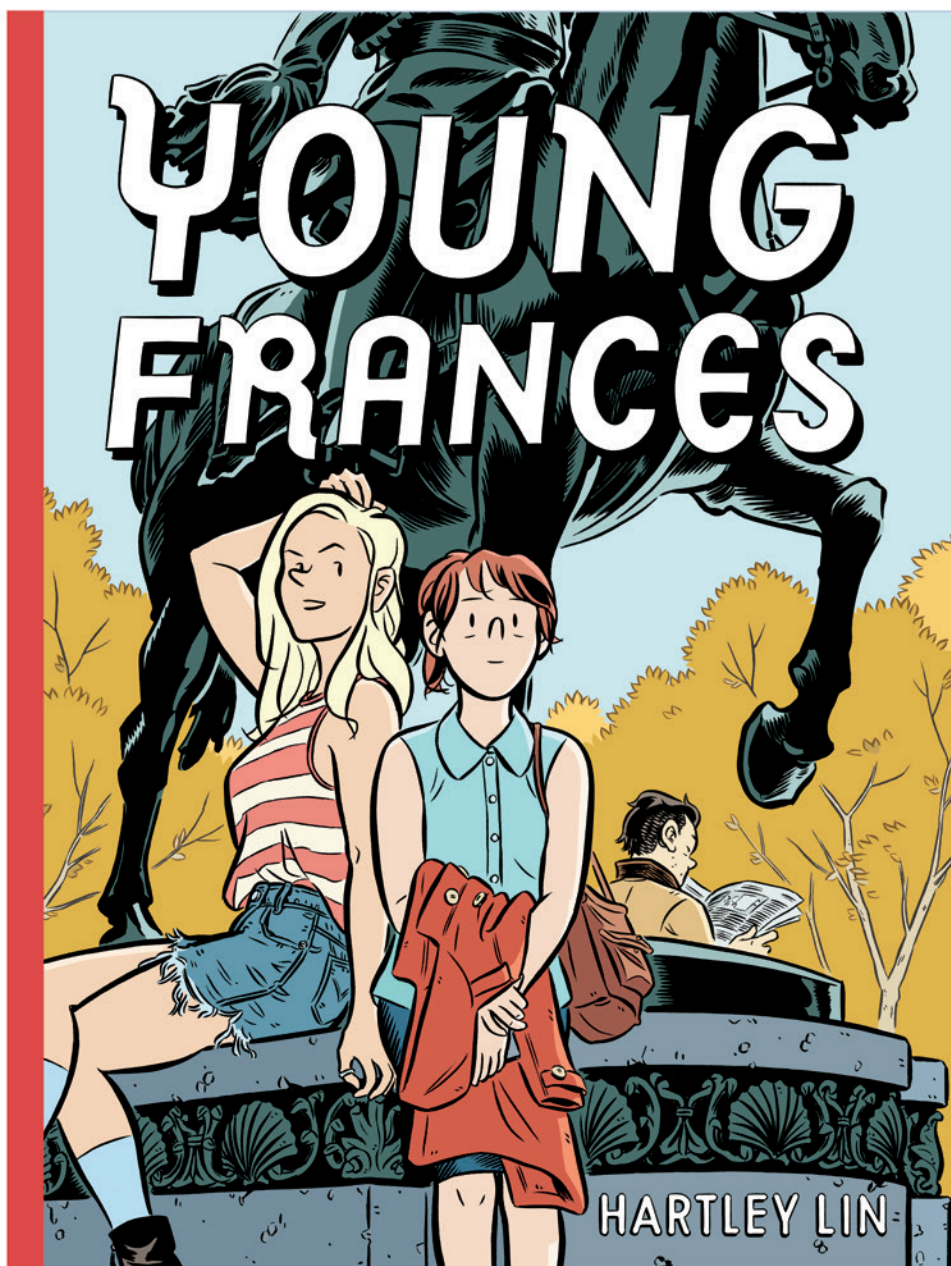
"*Young Frances* is a meditation on work and meaning. Its depiction of corporate culture and the finesse required to exist within it feels unlike anything I've read in comics."

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"Hartley Lin demonstrates a mastery of lithe narrative on a human scale. *Young Frances* is an important contribution to contemporary fiction—graphic or otherwise—that is both artful and eminently readable."

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*Named one of Publishers Weekly's Best Books of 2018*

"It's a testament to his vision that a book with such a long gestation can still feel so of the moment. Or maybe it's that the floating world of one's 20s, rendered here with such sympathy and humor, always lives somewhere in us, as accessible as a recurring dream."

—The New York Times

"On nearly every page, Lin conjures up lovingly detailed scenes from the city that aren't so much drawn as they are preserved for posterity."

—The Globe and Mail



# TADDLE CREEK

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# THE CONTRIBUTORS



"Not part of the national conversation."

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## ANN Y. K. CHOI

Lockdown drills were routine in Ontario schools when Ann Choi became a teacher, in 2001, two years after the Columbine shooting: "Lights off, students huddle around the classroom walls trying to keep out of sight from possible intruders as teachers struggle to keep them quiet. Even drills can be frightening, especially if there has been a recent shooting." Ann's story "Code Red," on page 22, "was inspired by my first high school lockdown, where I sat in the semi-darkness for hours wondering about my priorities as a new mother and teacher."



## REBECCA ROHER

In her new series of comics, Rebecca Roher—whose book, *Bird in a Cage*, won last year's Doug Wright Award—interviews centenarian women on their secrets to long life. Her latest installment is found on page 13: "Rose turned me down for an interview when she found out I was a cartoonist. She associated comics with silly gag cartoons and was worried I would be making fun of her. I sent her some comics I had made for the series, and she finally agreed to meet me, seeing that the comics could handle more serious topics with care."



## RJ EDWARDS

"Loose Time," the short story by RJ Edwards appearing on page 40, "contains some small seeds of truth from my own life. The briefly mentioned alien-abduction-themed shop was based on a real place in New England. I never visited it, but I worked in the café that later opened in the same location. In reality, I think it was an information centre that was very sincere about its mission, and also sold some tacky souvenirs." RJ lives in Vancouver, with their partner and their cat.



## FIONA SMYTH

Fiona Smyth, the feminist painter and cartoonist, saw the sex-ed. books she created with Cory Silverberg displayed in libraries and bookstores this summer, after Ontario's new premier vowed to roll back the province's revised student health curriculum. Fiona's cover for this issue, created with cardboard, paper, polymer clay, and acrylic gouache, "illustrates female angst and dread, the sometimes ill-at-ease feeling of introspection. This room is not a safe space or escape from external threats."





Soon after the summer issue of *Taddle Creek* began arriving in mailboxes, the magazine received a letter from Richard Sanger, of Toronto, stating, “My issue No. 41 arrived today and seems to be missing quite a few pages: pages 19, 20, 29, and 30, at least. Can you send me a complete issue? Otherwise, I’ll summon the ghosts of Clem and Sylvia Holden to disown Alfred.” *Taddle Creek* was unable to take Richard’s threat seriously, as Clem and Sylvia, the Vermont-residing parents of the longtime *Taddle Creek* contributor Alfred Holden, are still very much alive, at ages ninety-five and eighty-eight, respectively. This news so overjoyed Richard that no follow-up intimidation was forthcoming: “How wonderful to hear that Clem and Sylvia are still going strong! Please ask Alfred to give my and my brother Matthew’s congratulations to Clem on his ninety-fifth. Clem used to take us up to cross-country ski in the Gatineau Park in the nineteen-seventies, and I’ve always remembered his enthusiasm for those beautiful trails.” Of course, *Taddle Creek* still made good on replacing Richard’s faulty issue, which appeared to be an isolated printing error, though any reader in possession of a similar misprint should contact the magazine for a replacement.

The debut edition of Brian Francis’s cooking column, The Kitch, in *Taddle Creek* No. 41, incorrectly directed baking the recipe Devil Eggs and Asparagus in Casserole at three hundred and fifty degrees Celsius for twenty minutes. This will, in fact, re-

sult in a charred mess, and not the delicious summertime treat Brian intended. The correct temperature is three hundred and fifty degrees Fahrenheit. *Taddle Creek* takes full blame for this mistake, with no good excuse other than to say the magazine is new to this whole cooking thing. *Taddle Creek* regrets the error and any pool parties it may have ruined.

*Taddle Creek* lost a record four National Magazine Awards this June, bringing its career total losses to twenty. Apologies once again to the magazine’s nominees for the false hope *Taddle Creek* indirectly provided by entering their work for an award the magazine is very good at getting nominated for but very bad at winning: Lisa Moore, nominated for her short story “Visions,” from *Taddle Creek* No. 39, in the Fiction category; Katherena Vermette, nominated for her poem “When Louis Riel Went Crazy,” also from No. 39, in the Poetry category; Michel Rabagliati, nominated for “Paul Goes West,” his cover to No. 39, in the Illustration category; and Jeff Speed, nominated for

his photographs of the First Nations hip-hop scene, accompanying the story “Birthright,” from *Taddle Creek* No. 40, in the Portraits Photography category.

Donna Robinson recently wrote: “I just read Shannon Webb-Campbell’s short story ‘Can You Tell Me a Joke About Your Profession?’ I was puzzled by the word ‘slouth,’ as in ‘Rachel received a slouth of e-mails.’ Neither of my two dictionaries, nor a Web search, gave me

a definition. Help, please! I’d like a definition for my word journal.” Funny—and true—story: Earlier this year, Shannon very kindly provided *Taddle Creek* with a link to the Urban Dictionary page she referenced while writing her story, which defined “slouth” as a large pile, or something along those lines. However, in going back to review the definition again, the magazine discovered it changed to “water that has been sitting stagnant.” A trip in the Wayback Machine shows this to have been the dictionary’s meaning of the word in 2015 as well, leaving *Taddle Creek* unable to explain the definition blip. The magazine suggests marking “slouth” as an unsolved mystery in your word journal for the time being, Donna.

Next issue, *Taddle Creek* will undergo one of its occasional transformations, as it presents a collection of genre fiction, poetry, and comics, designed in the style of a traditional pulp magazine. The ninety-six-page issue will feature stories ranging from western to sci-fi to erotic to . . . whatever the hell it is Tony Burgess writes. Don’t miss it.

—TADDLE CREEK

## THE EPHEMERA

### *Goings on at the magazine.*



## JASMINE

BY ALEXANDRA LEGGAT

The Rouge River lies below me. From the cliff looking down, I wonder how it would feel to dive into the frozen water and drift beneath the ice. If it would be any different than the helplessness I feel on the edge of this cliff, in the cold, unable to change the outcome of things. My huskies pull me away. We walk along icy trails, led by my young male, an Inuit sled dog straight from Nunavut, born to pull, to navigate precarious trails like this in winter. They lead me safely to the van, plunk down in the snow. Their job is done.

I wanted to stay out there in the valley. A deep thunder alerts the dogs, pricks up their ears. I realize it's a train, just a train, and that trains sound different passing through the valley in winter than they do in summer. The hard, cold earth alters the acoustics out here. I want to record it so when I tell my friend he can hear what I mean. But my hands are too cold to press all the right buttons on my phone in time. So, I close my eyes while it passes and record the cadence in my head to repeat for him later when he presses his ear against mine. When we are alone and warm, talking about all things musical and mystical, sipping jasmine tea.

Jasmine berries turn black when they are ripe. My fingertips turn white when they freeze. I go to bed and I wake up and pull on my snow pants and Kodiaks, hat, scarf, and parka. I gear up the huskies, attach them to the sled. Snow fell all night and it's deep enough to sled on the road around my neighbourhood. The neighbours smile when they see the dogs pulling me around the block. They wave, some hoot, others take pictures with their phones. Cars pull over and drivers gape. "This is awesome," some kids say on their way to school. All passersby smile. Huskies pulling a sled in a suburban neighbourhood make people happy which makes me happy. I need to feel happy before I

leave the huskies at home and head to the hospital.

It's a different world in the Rouge Valley Health System than the Rouge Valley itself. It's been seven weeks since my mom was admitted. She made a good friend there and lost that friend. She was buried on Sunday. I keep in touch with her daughter. We bonded like our mothers bonded. I'm on a first-name basis with the nurses. We hug when we see each other. I imagine they live in the hospital. This is their world. I can't imagine how they could possibly balance another family outside of here, another existence. How do they have anything left to give? I imagine they don't sleep. They are programmed this way, to work without sleep, to be caring and giving twenty-four hours a day. They are their own breed. Down to what they wear, the nurse's uniforms, functional like animals' coats. Each one unique, zebras, jaguars, Dalmatians, parrots. This place is its own environment: a jungle, a park, a sterile park, a deep, deep valley with no trees or rivers, just stairwells and hallways and elevators and rooms and rooms and rooms and nurse's stations and hoteling offices for the doctors that move from one world, one universe, to another every single day.

When I'm in the hospital nothing is the same as in my outside worlds. I pass through the Rouge Valley to get here. They ploughed right through it to build this site. All this sickness surrounded by deer, skunks, squirrels, groundhogs, coyotes, foxes, woodpeckers, hawks, cardinals, snakes, turtles . . . Nature surrounds this structure, this world, this universe, full of so much poison, and there's nothing those creatures can do to change it. Why can't nature change what goes on inside here?

Jasmine is used to relax people, to aid in liver pain, as an aphrodisiac, to kill cancer cells. Jasmine doesn't grow in the Rouge Valley. It is too cold here. My

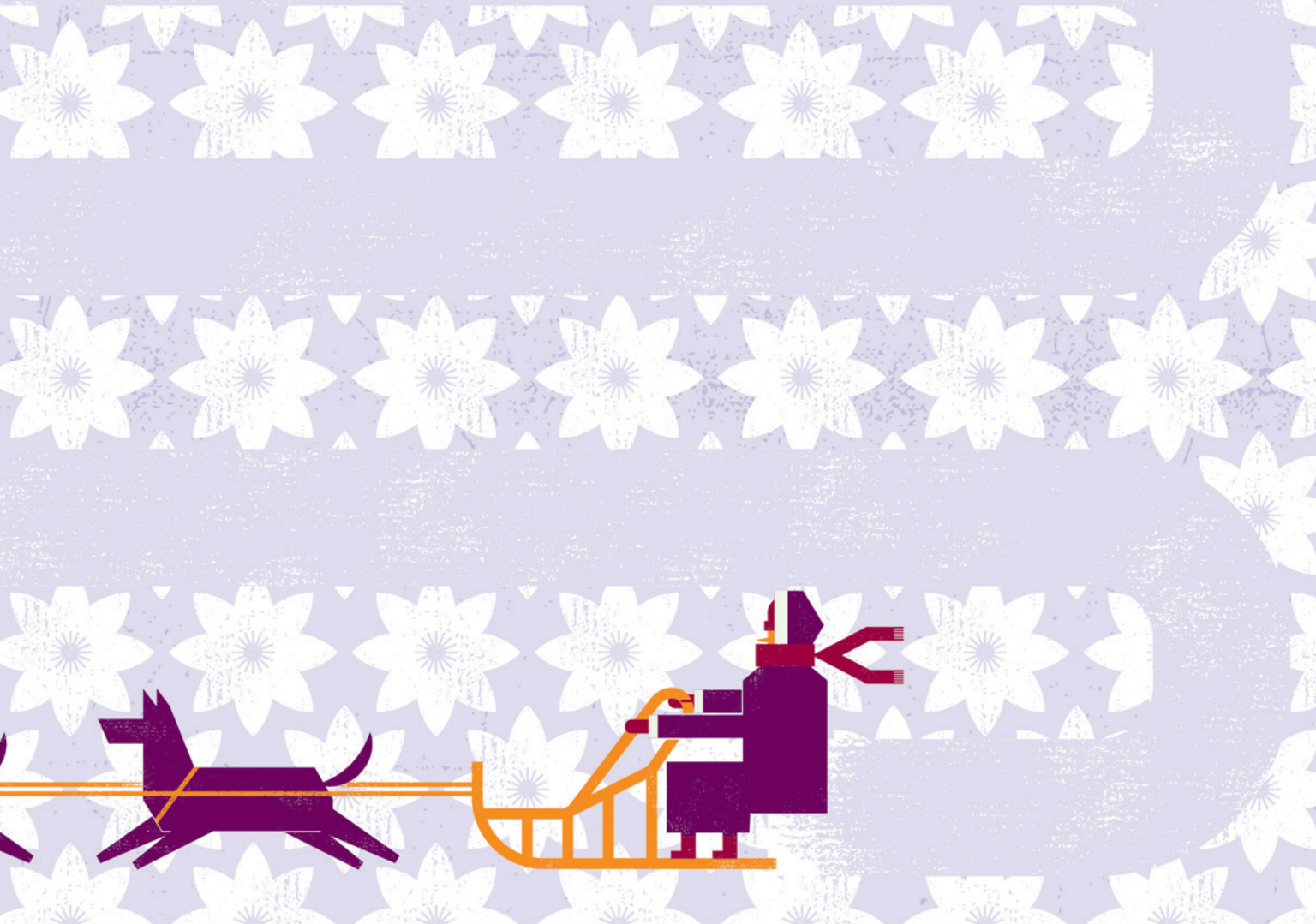
mother won't eat. Before the stroke, when she did eat, she loved going to the Mandarin. She always ordered jasmine tea. I wonder if we'll ever go to the Mandarin again.

My friend sends me a recording of a beautiful song called "Magnolia." Then he sends me his version of the song. His guitar, his voice and rhythms. His breath. It warms me like its suddenly summer, like I blinked and the seasons changed. The days are longer, the air is skipping, there's a sensation of chirping birds and cold beer and the smell of barbecuing, and the backyard he's never been in lights up with his voice. I play his version for my mother; she smiles in her sleep.

I'm split across three worlds. The hospital, where I feel like a robot, a







daughter robot—a daughter robot trying to emit as much love and kindness as the nurses, as much love and kindness as a robot can. I move mechanically. I have no control over anything in here. I just move from Room 4411 to the coffee shop, to the bathroom, to the chair beside my lilting mother's side. "You're not trying," I say. And when the speech pathologist comes in to check on my mother's cough, my mother points to me and says I gave it to her, when I haven't had a cough to give. The speech pathologist tells my mother it's not nice to blame me. Says she must go back to nectars, the thinner liquids are causing a change in her breathing. Says she must go back to pureed foods. Which causes my mother to make a face and

pretend she's shoving her finger down her throat. My mother has been nothing but successful her whole life. Regressing is not good news. For her to feel like a failure on top of the traumatic, debilitating effects of the stroke won't stimulate her appetite. She must eat to build up her strength. "You have to eat, Mom." She makes another face. When her food comes, she attempts to eat, for me. I promise to make her salmon, puree it, and mashed potatoes when I get back to my other world and bring it back to this world by five o'clock. Her eyes light up.

My other world is a two-bedroom bungalow in a place called West Hill, where I live with the huskies and an Epiphone parlour guitar. These are my

lifelines. I leave the bungalow to waitress at a bistro by a marina. I work beside yachts and water. I enjoy my job and the women I work with. They are sweet to me, like the nurses are to my mother. They are like sisters, all of them. We are all there because we have to be, keeping roofs over our heads, making money the way we choose to. "How's Mom," they ask. Some days I think I answered that she was getting better, but that was a week or so ago. The new answer will be, "Not great. She's regressing, confused, tired, won't eat." She's giving up. She can't give up. "It's hard," they say. It's all they can say. They ask and that is all I need. "Lean on your friends," my uncle says when he calls weekly. "That's what they're there for."





# Carousel

Poetry. Fiction. Comics. Hybrid Lit. Contemporary Art.



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I've never been good at leaning on people. I lean on trees, bars, and posts at times, but not friends. I'm learning.

The third world is where the music is. It is a song. It is laughter. It is pleasure. It's slits of blue eyes that lure me into a warm pool, water caressing my skin, water I can breathe under. Swimming. It is white flowers whose fruit turns black when it is ripe. It relaxes me. It is an aphrodisiac. It is the haunting depth of an E-minor, the melody of a velvet voice. It is the sweetness of clearing snow from my van windows when I am rushing to work, from one world to another. It is floating. It is like the greater-than-just-a-regular full moon that only shows itself every hundred and fifty years that very few get to see through clouds. It is the world that floats in and out of my bungalow, across the valley, to his world, and settles in there for a night.

The doctor calls and tells me he is concerned. If my mother doesn't start eating, they will have to consider other methods. I wait to see if he is going to bring up the other method. He'd spoken to me about the other method before. He brings it up. "If she continues to not eat, we are going to have to put a feeding tube into her stomach. It's not as bad as it sounds," he says. But it is. My mother said she'd rather die than have a feeding tube. Then eat, I said to her. "I can get her to eat," I tell the doctor. But I have no idea how I'm going to do that. The day I brought back the salmon and mashed potatoes, on a china plate with silver cutlery and a linen napkin from my other world, she didn't even look at it. She gazed past the food and me and pointed to the clock. "Mom, I made you the salmon. I went to all this trouble." She looked at me and said, "What?" I pushed myself away from the plate, my childhood memories pureed in front of me and landed next to the mashed potatoes. "This is how you used to make me feel all the times I tried to please you," I said inside my head and into my fists. "Walk," I said to myself, "go for a walk. Head into the stairwell and breathe. Come back when you are calm. It's not



## EVEL KNIEVEL

Won't need my own lunchbox  
and Thermos

I give up lunch  
to maintain my figure

Want my own pinball  
machine like Evel Knievel

The hips is going  
the ass goes next

Dang now if my custom pants  
ain't falling down

This old white suit  
fits like Super freakin' Dave

Blimey who should shoulder  
the blame

this moment in fashion  
or me?

—CHRIS CHAMBERS

her. It's the stroke, but oh no, it is her." Why didn't the stroke affect that part of her brain? Before she went in, all she ever wanted to do was eat. Eat, eat, eat. I began to resent food. Food was her company. Now it is our nemesis. "It's not conscious," the doctor says, "it is more than likely the stroke. She hasn't got an appetite." Of all the things for her to lose, her new best friend, her companion, since losing my dad, her appetite. Now what?

The bistro calls to let me know it's slow, they don't need me. If I want the night off to stay with my mother, the call-off is mine to take. I pause, think of my dwindling bank account, the company I will miss, the escape. The huskies watch me, four dark eyes pleading with me to stay home with them. They feel my absence, the tension, wonder where I go every day. The world that doesn't smell like the bistro, or the other world

my friend occupies. They know my mother, their grandmother, is not well. They sense it. It's in their eyes when I come home, in their loping gaits, the way they look at the phone then me when it rings and rings. The way they join me at the farthest corner of the backyard I run to, kneel and cry in the nights when I just can't take it. The nights when I scream into the darkness, "I cannot set foot in the hospital again. I need time to myself, my time. I need to be home. I need time at home." I take the call-off. Settle the huskies and float across the valley to spend the night with him.

Jasmine came up in a dream once. I don't know why. It was just there, that word. Then there was a child, a fair-haired child who as she ripened, turned dark.

The nurses call my mother "Mommy." Something she always wished I would call her. She told me once that when I was young I never took her hand—not

just to cross the road, anytime. I would never take her hand. The nurses tell me how much they love her. I think they treat her better than I could ever possibly treat her. They are all better daughters than me. Look at all the things they do for her. The other day she said to me, "That one, you know the one with her hair piled on her head? She said, 'You must have been such a kind mother. You must have been so good to your children.'" She laughed, then stopped and said, "What? What's wrong? Well it was nice to hear someone say something nice to me." She will miss them when she goes home. Home. What will that be for her? Where is she going? Back to her sprawling three-bedroom apartment in the Guild? Alone? Into my West Hill world, with the huskies and where my other world floats across the valley two or three times a week? The huskies lick my face and give me their paws, speak to me in howls, with their eyes and with their ears. I understand every single gesture. I prepare to navigate a new world.

My friend and I barbecue T-bone steaks under a sparkling winter sky. Stars crisp, a sliver of a moon like the curve of a fork. T-bone steak. Something my mother would have loved and eaten in a flash. I light a candle but it keeps blowing out. It's like camping in February. Something I never would have done, but I've come to appreciate the winter through the huskies and a friend that keeps me warm even when he isn't with me. At the end of the night we lie next to each other. I press my ear against his. His fingers tap out a rhythm on my bare thigh. A deep thunder. Trains in winter.

The doctor calls and tells me he is so happy with my mother's progress. She is eating, she is eating. He tells me she wants to talk to me. "Hi, pet," she says, in a still slightly slurred voice. She laughs a little. "I have one wish when I get out of here." "O.K., Mom," I say. "What's that?" And she laughs again. "Can we go to the Mandarin?" I close my eyes, reach out my arm, imagine slipping my hand into hers. Gripping onto it and pulling her through the phone into our new world. ☹



THE KITCH

## COMFORT FOOD, CANADA STYLE

*Taddle Creek's resident caker cook whips up a lasagna so strong and free, two out of two nonnas deem it serviceable.*

BY BRIAN FRANCIS

When it comes to comfort food, lasagna is up there with hash browns and orange macaroni salad. But not just any lasagna—I'm talking Canadian lasagna, packed with layers of noodles, mozzarella cheese, and ground beef. Not everyone is a fan of Canadian lasagna, specifically my Italian in-laws, who often force me to listen to all the ways dishes from their home country have been bastardized by Canadians. (Apparently, pretzel-crust pizza isn't a thing in Rome.) I suppose there are

a few untraditional ingredients Canadians put into their lasagna, like canned mushrooms and, well, cottage cheese, but that doesn't mean Canadian lasagna isn't damn tasty. This recipe was submitted by Irene Whitmore to the community cookbook *From Our Kitchens . . . With Love*, published by the Glen Ayr United Church Women. Irene is listed as the president of the U.C.W. executive, 1976–1978, which I'm guessing is the time frame the book came out. It's obvious Irene was a woman who got things done.

### Easy Canadian Style Lasagna

#### Ingredients

#### Sauce:

2 tablespoons oil  
 ½ cup chopped onion  
 450 grams ground beef  
 2 796-millilitre cans diced tomatoes  
 2 156-millilitre cans tomato paste  
 1½ teaspoons salt  
 pepper  
 ½ teaspoon oregano

*I added two cans of drained mushrooms, because that's what my mom used to do.*

TOM HICKEN













#### *Lasagna:*

*12 lasagna noodles, cooked in salted water  
and rinsed in cold water*

*450 grams mozzarella, shredded  
grated Parmesan cheese*

*500 grams cottage cheese*

#### *Directions*

1. Brown onions in oil. Remove onions and add ground beef to pan, browning slightly. Add all the other sauce ingredients and simmer one hour, stirring occasionally.

2. Spread some sauce in the bottom of a nine-by-thirteen-inch pan. Add a layer of four noodles, followed by a layer of mozzarella and cottage cheese. Add a layer of sauce. Then another layer of noodles. Add a layer of cheese, then sauce, then noodles, then cheese, then ... well, you get the idea.

3. Top it off with a final layer of moz-


zarella and the Parmesan cheese, and bake at 350 degrees Fahrenheit for about a half hour, until the cheese is melted and contents are bubbling.

Having made this, I have a few bones to pick with Irene. Her so-called Easy Canadian Style Lasagna wasn't so easy. I started making it at eleven-fifteen in the morning and didn't pull the damn thing out of the oven until 1:52 P.M. And just try lifting a twenty-pound lasagna. Let's also not forget assembling those layers requires concentration. I don't recommend making it if you're easily distracted or have poor hand-eye co-ordination.

All this said, I'm pledging allegiance to U.C.W. president Irene, because her Easy Canadian Style Lasagna was the bomb. Beefy, packed with flavour, and more layered than my last relation-

ship—Irene's recipe had me smacking my lips. Don't take my word for it. I taste-tested my Easy Canadian Style Lasagna on a pair of Italian nonnas. What did they think? "If you hadn't told me this was made by a Canadian, I wouldn't have known," said one. "Not that it was great. There was too much meat." The other nonna recommended skipping the tomato paste and using San Marzano tomatoes. "Otherwise, not bad," she said. "For a Canadian lasagna."

O.K., not exactly glowing, but it could've been worse, especially considering they crossed themselves before tasting it. Serve this lasagna at your next Sunday meal (along with an iceberg lettuce salad topped with French dressing and toasted hamburger buns sprinkled with garlic powder). I guarantee your guests will say "*Grazie!*" 🍴



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# ONE HUNDRED year-old Wisdom



with Rose  
Wilson

Comic by Rebecca Rober

Health & Wellness Report **WCHTV**



I'm meeting with Toronto Islands' oldest resident. Rose Wilson is 102 years old & has lived on the Island for 66 years.





Linda, Roses' daughter, doesn't invite me in.



The house is packed with 100 years of stuff.



Rose grew up in the Depression so she never throws anything out in case it might be useful.

I ask Rose why she thinks she's lived so long. She boils it down to her work ethic & perseverance

I walked a mile & a half to school in snowstorms in only my school clothes!



She grew up on a homestead at Agincourt & Sheppard where they grew food for the family to eat & flowers for sale.



When times were lean, they still had their vegetables.



She went to work when she was 15 doing childcare & cleaning for other families.



She was working as a house keeper at the Danforth Hotel when she met her partner.

It has since been torn down.



She & Ken raised 3 children together.



They moved to the Island when Ken got a job with the TTC on Centre Island.

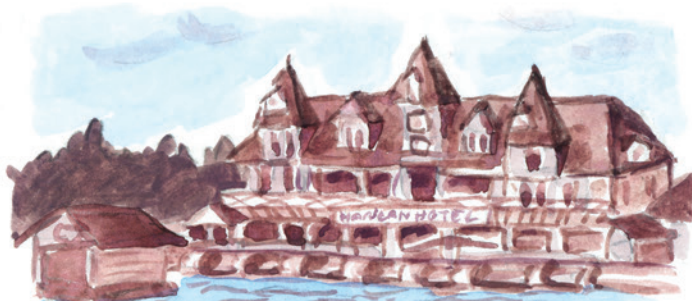


The Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) was running the ferries at the time.

They lived on Centre & then Hanlan's Point for a few years. Linda was 1 when they moved.



Back then, the Islands were entirely inhabited with 630 homes, many stores, hotels, dance halls, a movie theatre & bowling alley.



In 1953, the metro council decided to remove all the buildings & turn the islands into public parkland.

Demolition began in 1955.



When Rose & family were evicted, friends helped them buy a small house on Ward's Island.

The Ward's & Algonquin Islands residents protested & blockaded the bulldozers, successfully saving their homes.



When they tried to expropriate no one would sell, when they tried to evict no one would move.



Rose recently celebrated her 102<sup>nd</sup> birthday at Bridgepoint rehab in Toronto's east end. She had been experiencing back pain.



Two years earlier, just after her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, she fell over while using the dustpan & broke her neck.



Linda agrees that the reason for Rose's longevity is her perseverance.



She is convinced her neck is going to heal, even when the doctors told her otherwise.



Since she's been back on the Island, she hasn't been able to get up to put on the Kettle for her tea & oatmeal without assistance.



Linda has to go back to work, so she can't care for Rose fulltime. A friend suggested government-funded home care. Linda was a bit worried.



They come 5 days a week.



Rose has been an avid gardener her whole life.

I got it from my father.



She used to start her own seeds in the tub in the back of the house.



She transplanted a rose bush from the old house on Hanlan's Point.



I can't garden now & it breaks my heart.



Rose keeps busy in other ways. Tonight she's heading to the Island Café for fish & chips.



Tune in next time!

WCHTV





## THE MISCELLANY

# THE GOOD OF THE ORDER

*A found minute book reveals the day-to-day mysteries of Beulah Rebekah Lodge No. 5.*

**T**he International Association of Rebekah Assemblies was founded in 1851, as the female auxiliary branch of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, a non-political, non-partisan fraternal organization. (Each group admits both male and female members today.) The following excerpts are taken from a minute book of Beulah Rebekah Lodge No. 5, at the time located in New Westminster, British Columbia.

October 20, 1921

The regular meeting of Beulah Rebekah Lodge No. 5, I.O.O.F., held in the Oddfellows Hall, October 20, 1921.

Lodge opened in regular form at 8 p.m. Sis. Dougherty, N.G., in the chair.

All officers present at Roll Call except the R. & L.S., N.G. and Pianist.

Minutes of the previous meeting were read and adopted.

### Report of the Floral Committee

Flowers were sent to Sis. Hudson.

A communication was received from Jubilee Rebekah Lodge No. 14 enclosing a letter from Mrs. Mabel Hoyle asking for information as to the condition of her brother, I——L——S——, who is a patient in the mental hospital at Essondale. Moved by Sis. MacLennan, sec. Sis. Murchie, that it be received and attended to.

Miss Norah Jackson was then instructed in the mysteries of the Rebekah Degree.

November 3, 1921

A communication was read from Sis. Isabella Muir, D.D.P. of Vermillion Lodge No. 24, Princeton, reporting visiting Bro. H. H. Huff, who is very ill with cancer and asked that she write and inform the Lodge of his condition. Moved by Sis. Henry, sec. Sis. Ennis, that it be received and noted on the minutes and a letter forwarded to Sis. Huff, also to D.D.P. Sis. Muir for her kindness to our member.

### Report of Special Committee

Sis. Levar reported that she and Sis. Gilley had visited the Mental Hospital at Essondale on behalf of Sis. Hoyle and found the her brother I——L——S—— had been removed to the Mental Hospital in town owing to his condition being worse instead of improving and that they had written Sis. Hoyle and given her the information they had received.

Floral Drill \$4.49.

### Good of the Order

Bro. Mills spoke reporting that the Social Committee had \$10.00 on hand.

Sis. MacLennan drew the attention of the Lodge to the fact that Beulah Rebekah Lodge No. 5 would have a birthday on November 18th, having been instituted 30 years on that date.

Bro. Mills advised that the Social Committee would make a note of it.

November 17, 1921

### Report of the Floral Committee

Flowers were set to Bro. Wilson and Bro. & Sis. Hare.

A birthday cake was presented to the Lodge by Sis. E. Lewis, it being the 30th Anniversary. Sis. Pearce, who was



a charter member, cut the cake, which was very much enjoyed by the members.

It was regularly moved and seconded that a Dispensation be asked for to hold a whist drive and dance on November 29th.

December 1, 1921

A communication was received from Princeton Lodge advising of the death of Bro. H. H. Huff on November 20th. Moved by Sis. MacLennan, sec. Sis. Pearce, that it be received and the charter draped for thirty days.

The Social Committee reported having held a whist drive and dance on November 29th. Net receipts of \$13.80 were turned over to the Tres. Moved by Sis. MacLennan, sec. Sis. Evelyn Lewis, that the report of the Social Committee be received and the committee thanked.

Moved by Sis. Mills, sec. Sis. Breen, that the Good Cheer Committee act as in previous years and bring in their account to the Lodge.

December 15, 1921

Greetings for Christmas and the New Year were read from Sis. Helena C. Cozens, Pres. R.A. Moved by Sis. Henry, sec. Sis. Lewis, that it be received and noted on the minutes.

A communication was received from Sis. J. L. Wilson thanking the Lodge for the flowers sent during her illness. Moved by Sis. Breen, sec. Sis. Moffatt, that it be received and filed.

January 5, 1922

The Treasurer's report for 1921 was read showing total Receipts \$841.11, Expenditures \$690.54. Balance \$150.57. Moved by Sis. G. Lewis, sec. Sis. Ennis, that the report be accepted.

The annual report for 1921 was read showing 31 members admitted during the year, 2 withdrawn, 10 suspended and 2 deceased, leaving a membership of 79 bros. 139 sisters—218. Net increase—17. Per capita tax @ 40¢ per member—\$87.20.

January 19, 1922

A communication was received from Sis. Minnie Dempster, P.P., thanking the Lodge for the anniversary cake sent her and the Christmas Greetings. Moved by Sis. Pearce, sec. Sis. Lewis, that it be received and filed.

Bro. Turner announced that as Bro. Geo. H. Grant, P.G.P., is leaving for Japan on February 2nd, a farewell gathering in his honor will be given on Friday, January 27th, in No. 8 Lodge, Vancouver.

Moved by Sis. McLennan, sec. Sis. Ward, that the matter of entertaining Bro. Grant here by taken up with Royal City Lodge No. 3 on January 20th.

After some discussion the motion was withdrawn.

Moved by Sis. MacLennan, sec. Bro. Turner, that this matter be taken up with Royal City Lodge No. 3.

An amendment was moved by Sis. Lewis, sec. Bro. Macdonell, that a committee be appointed to solicit donations from the members for a presentation to Bro. Grant and to obtain snapshots of as many of the older members as possible.

Committee: Sis. G. Lewis, I. C. MacLennan and Emma Lewis.

Bro. Lewis suggested that a letter be sent to Bro. Grant expressing our regret at his departure.

February 2, 1922

The Christmas Cheer Committee reported having spent \$50.00 in their work in addition to \$10.00, which was donated. Moved by Sis. G. Lewis, sec. Sis. Breen, that the report be accepted and an order drawn on the Treasurer for the amount.

On behalf of the committee appointed to purchase a gift for Bro. Geo. H. Grant, Sis. MacLennan reported that a sterling silver "Eversharp" pencil was purchased and was engraved "Bro. Geo. H. Grant—Beulah No. 5." An illuminated address was also presented to him. The balance of the money collected was put into the purse collected by greater Vancouver and New Westminster, which amounted to \$251.00.

Moved by Sis. Pearce, sec. Sis. Breen, that the Social Committee be requested to prepare an entertainment in aid of the Home Furnishing Fund.

February 16, 1922

### **Report of Floral Com.**

Flowers were sent to Sis. Clifton, Furness, Coulson and Sis. Fehner's mother.

On behalf of the Picnic Committee, Sis. Evelyn Lewis asked for the opinion of the members as to whether they would prefer the Picnic to be held on a Wednesday or a Saturday and where. Moved by Sis. MacLennan, sec. Sis. Baker, that the representatives vote as they see fit relative to the Picnic.

On behalf of the Social Committee, Bro. S. Lewis announced that a home-cooking and rummage sale would be held in the store of Mrs. Hudson on Friday, February 24th. The proceeds of the sale to be for the Home Furnishing Fund. It was moved and seconded that a dispensation be asked for in connection therewith.

March 16, 1922

A communication was received from Sis. Coulson thanking the Lodge for the flowers sent her during her illness and the members for their visit. Also inviting members to visit her at White Rock. Moved by Sis. Dougherty, sec. Sis. Ennis, that it be received, filed and the invitation accepted.

### **New Business**

The Financial Secretary asked for a supply of cheque books. Moved by Sis. Mills, sec. Sis. Evelyn Lewis, that an order be drawn on the Treasurer for the amount and the books purchased.

April 6, 1922

A communication was received from the Picnic Committee asking the Lodge to contribute ten cents per capita to assist in defraying the expenses of the picnic. Moved by Sis. Pearce, sec. Sis. Henry, that it be received and filed and no action taken.

An amendment was moved by Bro. Mills, sec. Bro. Parr, that the representatives be instructed to vote against the proposed boat trip and the assessment. The amendment was carried.

Floral Drill \$5.68.

April 20, 1922

On behalf of the Picnic Committee, Sis. Evelyn Lewis reported that the motion for the per capita assessment had been withdrawn and she had been instructed to ask the members for donations of prizes for the 1922 Picnic. Moved by Sis. MacLennan, sec. Sis. Hamilton, that the report be received and members wishing to donate prizes report to the committee.

June 15, 1922

N.G. announced that Sis. McKercher would like each member to donate two dish towels as our supply is getting low.

Sis. Lettie Naylor, Belleville, gave a very interesting talk.

July 21, 1922

A communication was received from Sis. Macdonell thanking the Lodge for flowers sent her during her illness and the members for their visits. Moved by Sis. Montgomery, sec. Sis. Mitchell, that it be received and filed.

A communication was received from the Oddfellows' Annual Picnic Committee asking for donations to provide free ice cream for the children and advising a special meeting will be held on July 22nd, by which date all prizes must be in. After much discussion, it was moved by Sis. Murchie, sec. Sis. Emma Lewis, that the communication be received.

The Secretaries asked for \$5.00 in stamps. Moved by Sis. Murchie, sec. Sis. Walmsley, that the Secretary be instructed to buy \$5.00 in stamps.

October 5, 1922

The Social Committee presented an account of \$3.85 for refreshments for

last meeting, being a social evening. Moved by Sis. G. Lewis, recorded by Sis. Bowden that it be referred to the Finance Com.

October 19, 1922

Noble Grand reported Sis. M. G. Macdonell ill in V.G.H., and Sis. Purvis' two little boys in Isolation Hospital with scarlet fever.

### **Good of the Order**

Sis. Pinco opened her home on Monday Oct. 30, for a Hallowe'en gathering, to take the form of a dishtowel shower for the Social Committee.

November 2, 1922

### **Report of the Floral Com.**

Flowers were sent to Sis. Hellison and M. A. Macdonell, and were also sent to Mrs. Booth's funeral.

### **Good of the Order**

Sis. Rose moved, second by several, that a vote of thanks be extended to Sis. Pinco for opening her home for a dish towel shower on Oct. 30.

December 21, 1922

### **Report of the Floral Com.**

Flowers were sent to Sis. Todd's little girl, Sis. Hellison and Bro. Adams.

A communication was received from Sis. K. Hellison thanking the Lodge for the flowers sent her during her illness and extending the Season's Compliments to the members. Moved by Sis. Bowden, sec. Sis. Hyslop, that it be received and filed.

### **Good of the Order**

Bro. R. A. Merrithew made a few remarks and wished the officers a Merry Christmas.

January 4, 1923

### **Members Reported Sick**

Sis. MacLennan reported Sis. Enos ill in St. Mary's Hospital. N.G. reported Sis. Ethel Hardy ill in Hospital.

### **Report of Floral Committee**

Flowers were sent to Sis. Hardy.

### **Good of the Order**

On behalf of the members Sis. Turner, Jr. P.N.G., and Sis. Ennis presented Sis. MacLennan with a silk umbrella as a token of appreciation of her work as Staff Captain, which position she has held for the past eight years. Sis. MacLennan thanked the members.

March 1, 1923

### **Report of the Floral Committee**

Flowers were sent [to] Sis. Macdonell and Sis. Fehner.

A communication was received from the Ladies' Auxiliary of the Y.M.C.A. asking for a donation to replace dishes. Moved by Sis. Turner, sec. by Sis. Dougherty, that the communication be received and filed and the Secy. explain that this Lodge has not authority to make donations outside of the Order.

April 5, 1923

Letter of thanks was received from Mrs. J. Edward Phillips and sisters for flowers and sympathy sent. Moved by Sis. Moulton and Pinco.

An Easter card was received from Sis. Lulu Cole. Moved by Sis. Ward, seconded by Sis. McMurphy, that it be received and filed. Carried.

May 3, 1923

### **Report of the Floral Committee**

A letter was read from Sis. Sayer thanking the Lodge for flowers sent her father during his illness. Moved by Sis. Moulton, seconded by Sis. Pinco, that it be received and filed.

Floral Drill \$2.76.

### **Good of the Order**

A short social time was spent at this time. Sis. Moulton favored us with a reading, which was much enjoyed; there was also a contest in which Sis. Foster was the winner.

June 21, 1923

A communication was received from the I.O.O.F. Picnic Committee advising that the "Princess Mary" had



been secured for Saturday, July 28, to Ganges Harbor, and asking for a generous donation to defray expenses, so that all children under twelve may be carried free; and also advising a special meeting of the Committee on Saturday evening, June 23. Moved by Sis. MacLennan, seconded by Sis. G. Lewis, that the communication be received and filed, the representatives notified of the Committee meeting and as many members as can attend, and that a Rec. Secy. be instructed to advise the Committee that this Lodge would not make a contribution toward expenses. Carried.

July 19, 1923

### Report of Floral Com.

Flowers were sent to Sis. Bowden, Slater and Sis. Curl's mother.

Bro. Lewis announced that the annual picnic would be held on July 28th at Ganges Harbor. Tickets \$1.80. S.S. Adelaide chartered for the picnic.

September 6, 1923

### Report of the Visiting Com.

Sis. Ennis visited Sis. Turner. Sis. McCabe visited Sis. Turner. N.G. phoned Sis. Turner.

### Report of the Floral Com.

Flowers were sent to Sis. Turner. A book was sent to Sis. M. E. Wilson.

A communication was received from the Sec. of the Rebekah Assembly enclosing a proclamation from the Deputy Grand Sire suggesting that the charter of the Lodge be draped for 30 days in memory of Warren G. Harding, late Pres. of the U.S. Moved by Sis. MacLennan, sec. Sis. Henry, that it be received, the proclamation noted on the minutes and the charter draped for 30 days in memory of Warren G. Harding, late Pres. of the U.S. and our late Sis. Evans, P.P.

Floral Drill \$2.25.

In view of her approaching marriage to Bro. Oxenbury, Sis. Ennis, on behalf

of the Lodge, presented the N.G., Sis. Eva Mosdell, with a cut glass vase and a bouquet of flowers.

December 20, 1923

The Christmas Cheer Committee asked for instructions as to dispensing the usual cheer and on motion of Bro. Merrithew, sec. Sis. C. E. Wilson, that the dispensation of cheer be left to the standing Committee, Sis. MacLennan and Pearce, and the N.G. & V.G. Carried.

### Good of the Order

Bro. Merrithew was called on and made a few remarks, telling us he had heard from Bro. Geo. Grant, now in Japan, and extended the Lodge and members the Compliments of the Season.

May 1, 1924

### F.C. Report

Fin. Com. reported having examined the following bill and found same correct—Pac. Can. Printing Co. 500 Letterhead \$5.50. Moved by Sis. McCale, sec. by Sis. Oxenbury. Recommended and an order drawn from the Treasurer for the amount.

### Report of Floral Com.

Flowers were sent to Sis. Ward's husband, Sis. Pinco's little boy, Sis. Hyslop's little girl and Sis. Hardy's sister's funeral.

An account was read from the T&B Flowershop for \$8.00. On motion of Sis. McCabe and Gutteridge it was referred to the Financial Committee.

Communications were read from Sis. Elizabeth L. Murray, P.P., and the family of the late Florence Taylor Pape thanking the Lodge for flowers sent and sympathy extended in their recent bereavement. On motion of — they were received and filed.

Receipts of the evening \$20.00.

Lodge closed in regular form at 11 p.m.

I. C. MACLENNAN,  
RECORDING SECRETARY.  
NOBLE GRAND, ETHEL J. ENNIS. 🏠



## MATTHEW DALEY: ILLUSTRATOR

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THE FICTION

## CODE RED

BY ANN Y. K. CHOI

As soon as the words “Code Red” are spoken over the P.A. system, the kids know what to do. They had practised ever since the Columbine High School massacre, five years ago. Stephen repeats the phrase, “Code Red,” as he sits against the classroom wall, dragging his backpack with him. He pulls out a Tupperware container and removes a lemon wedge to suck on. It calms him like nothing else does, and the citrus scent has a soothing effect on the students.

Next to Stephen is Peter. His mother is the only parent I’ve met so far who is younger than me. She had him when she was only thirteen years old, a detail I discovered in a document buried in Peter’s student records.

“Don’t get me wrong,” she said when

I first called her, concerned that Peter wasn’t doing his homework. “I care lots for all my kids, but I don’t have time to check homework every night. I’ve got a life of my own.” Later, when we met face to face at a parent-teacher interview, she laughed as she said, “I swear to God, I thought you were white. You sounded white on the phone.”

One thing they never taught us in teachers’ college was that dealing with parents would be one of the worst parts of the job.

Unlike my Grade 12 history and Grade 10 family studies classes with thirty-four and twenty-eight students, I only have eight kids in this Grade 10 class. The course was called Language-intensive English, a two-year program

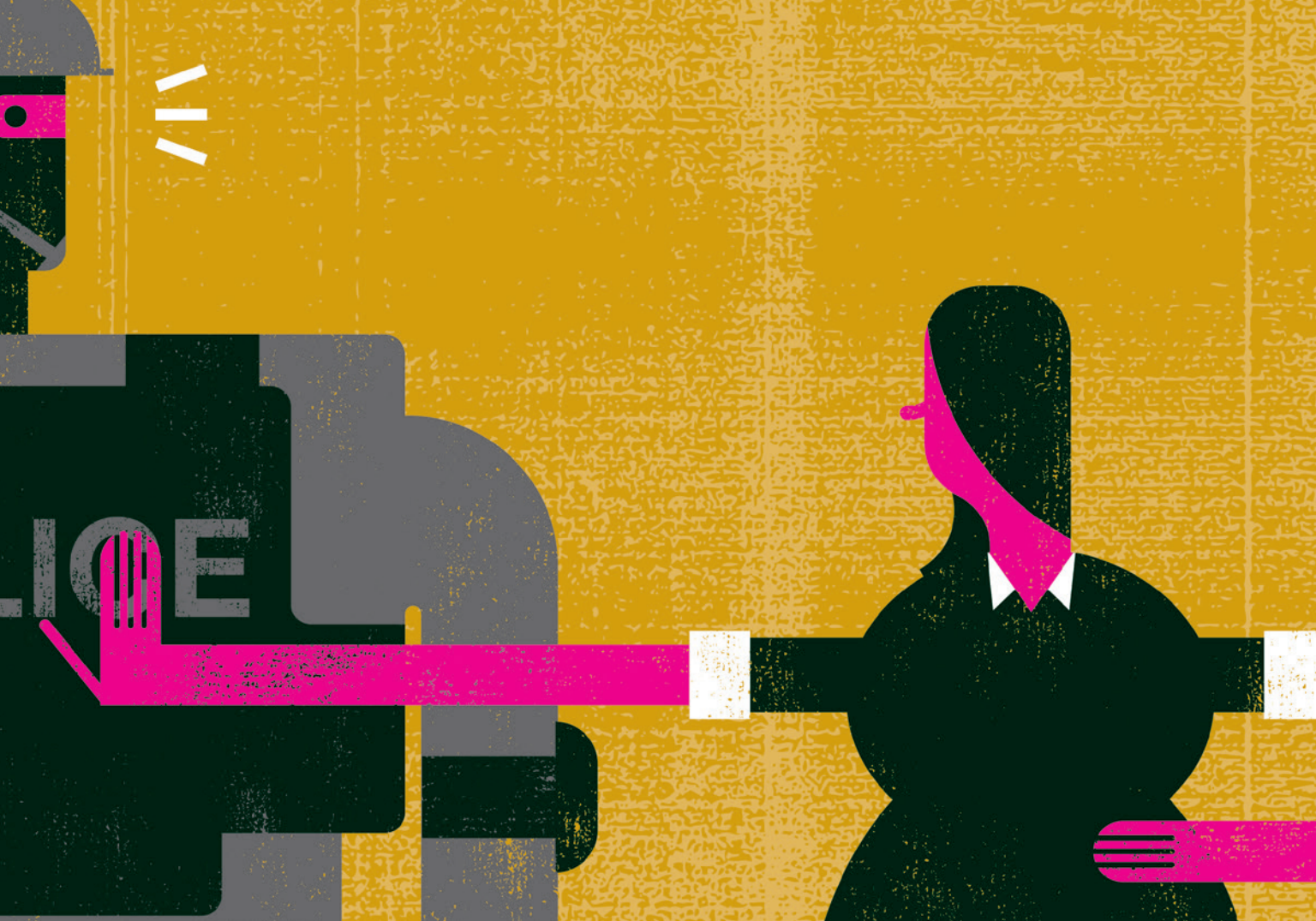
run by the special education department, for students with “learning challenges” in Grades 9 and 10. I didn’t know I wasn’t even supposed to be teaching this class until a new principal ushered me into her office earlier this semester to ask if I had my additional qualification in special education.

“I don’t think so,” I said.

“Kell, for heaven’s sake. She hasn’t been teaching long enough to get any additional quals under her belt yet,” Michael, the head of the English department, said. “She’s already in three departments. Let her have this one.”

In that moment, I had been grateful to Michael for coming to my defence, and then equally disappointed to learn later that it was only because no one else in his





department wanted to touch the course.

"I suppose you could finish off the semester," Kelly said. "After all, they are 'special.'"

Her blue eyes lit up.

Special. I hated that word. It implied that my kids were somehow less human than the other students, which, having already taught them Grade 9 English last year, I knew wasn't true.

"Do you think we're all gonna die?" asks Alex.

I ignore the comment. I've secretly hated him since last year, when these kids were all new to high school. He'd somehow convinced them I'd give them all SARS, which had made headlines in every Toronto newspaper for weeks. They started skipping my class. Then the rumour spread through the school and although no one said anything, I knew even some of my colleagues wondered. One of them made no attempts to cover up her worries by wiping down the door-knobs and desktops when she came in

after me to teach the same kids math.

"Yeah, I'm not afraid to die," Alex says, a little too loud.

Would I leap to take a bullet for him and leave my own child motherless? I shake off the thought and, after surveying the students lined against the walls I sit back down in my chair. The clock on the wall is stuck at nine o'clock. I regret not having asked a custodian to fix it earlier. I wonder what the weather might be like outside. April weather was always so unpredictable. At least we're able to keep our classroom lights on. The room is windowless. In any other classroom, we'd be sitting in semi-darkness.

"What time is it?" Penny's voice is a whisper, like her whole being. The only reason she's in my English class is because her father is our school trustee, and his wife had insisted their daughter be exposed to a "regular" English class, even though we all knew it really wasn't regular.

"Like you'd even know what it meant," Alex says.

"I know how to read time," Penny says. "I just forgot my watch this morning."

I tell them to hush. For all I know a gunman could be rampaging through the school. But it's too quiet for that. The kids know this. The ones with phones are playing with them. One girl, Jennifer, is buried in our class novel. *Children of the River* was the one book I knew with an Asian protagonist suitable for their reading level. Without consulting either Michael or the head of E.S.L., I had "borrowed" eight copies of it from the bookroom to use as my core novel for this class. None of the kids seemed to care that the Cambodian protagonist wasn't white. Instead, they had asked questions like, "Miss, are you a refugee too?" While the question initially caught me off guard, it led to a discussion about identity, cultural diversity, and social inequality that took up the rest of the class.

"What time is it?" Penny asks again.

"Time to shut the fuck up," Alex snaps.

I walk over to them, take my watch off, and give it to Penny.

"You can be our official timekeeper," I tell her. She smiles.

"It's 11:28 A.M."

I put a finger to my lips to quiet her.

I press my ear to the door, hoping to hear something. Anything.

"Do you hear that?" Stephen says. "Helicopter." He starts sucking on a fresh lemon wedge.

My stomach stirs. I straighten the papers on my desk, careful not to dirty the bell sleeves of my white blouse. Maybe I could get some marking done. I pick up a pen and only then notice that my hand is trembling. Inhaling, I find myself craving a cigarette. I hadn't had one since I'd given birth three years ago. I lean back in my chair and imagine exhaling, white smoke pouring out of my mouth, nose. What would my students think of me?

Every five minutes Penny announces the time, until Stephen suggests she let us know every fifteen instead. She looks at me for approval. I nod. I envision myself taking a bullet for her, then struggling to breathe. What is it about our basic human instinct that makes us want to protect the most vulnerable? Or the other extreme, to kill them. My thoughts turn to my daughter. A calm sweeps over me as I think about how much she loves to stick Dora the Explorer Band-Aids all over her arms and legs. She enjoys the attention they draw from others.

Half an hour passes.

"Something's definitely wrong," Stephen says.

"I'm hungry," Penny says.

"Me too," others say.

I open my desk drawer and pull out a bag of chocolate eggs. I'd originally bought them to give out for Easter, but had forgotten them when my daughter got chicken pox and I ended up staying home with her for several days.

I hold it up. Alex comes and gets one before passing it around to the others.

"I'm thirsty," Penny says.

I shake my head. No one can drink anything, I think. God knows how much longer we'll be here without ac-

cess to a washroom.

Suddenly I hear the sharp click of heels in the halls. I hush the class and wonder if I should push the desk against the door. The hovering of the helicopter above us seems to be getting louder, which causes everyone to look up.

"We're gonna die," Stephen says. He closes his eyes. Penny does the same, only she's choking back tears.

I think of my daughter in daycare. Who'd pick her up if I was still trapped? If only the telephones in the classrooms dialed out, I could call my mother and ask her—although that isn't the protocol. Code Red procedure is to sit still. Keep the kids calm. If they have phones, make sure they are turned off. "You never know," we've been warned by the administration.

"Miss, it's 12:28 P.M. Exactly one hour has passed." Penny's teeth are stained with chocolate. "I'm still hungry and thirsty."

I picture my daughter playing outside in the fresh air and sunshine. What would happen if a gunman showed up while the toddlers were outside with nowhere to hide? Did the daycare also practise Code Red drills? I'd never thought to ask, and make a mental note to do so.

An hour and a half passes.

Then, two hours.

Shortly after Penny announces the two-and-a-half hour mark, the classroom telephone rings. We all jump. I freeze wondering if it might be a trap.

It keeps ringing. I pick it up.

Liz, the vice-principal, says hello before I do. "Kelly and the police are going to be knocking on your door in a few minutes. It's O.K. to answer it. Step out of the class and answer their questions."

"Is everything all right?"

My voice is shaking.

"Please just do as I ask," she says and hangs up.

I forget until I put the receiver on its hook that we're not supposed to open the door under any condition until we get the "all clear" message on the P.A. system. My mind races to remember the details of the memos we've gotten about how to deal with Code Reds and other crises.

I look up to see Peter's face lose its colour. The carpet under him grows

dark as he wets himself. Stephen pulls away disgusted.

Penny screams when someone knocks on the door. Alex leaps to cover her mouth. She bites him hard, drawing blood. I dash over and use the sleeve of my blouse to stop the bleeding on Alex's hand. Penny's bottom lip trembles, oozing blood.

"It's O.K.," I tell them, "that's what the call was about. I'm supposed to open the door."

"Please don't!" Stephen's eyes are pleading. I look around the room to see every set of eyes just as big and unblinking.

The knocking becomes more urgent. I rush over to the door, then stop a moment to compose myself before gently turning the doorknob.

My principal is standing with three men dressed more like soldiers than police officers. Seeing their assault rifles makes my knees go soft. I'm used to seeing police officers in the school but never dressed in full body protection and helmets.

"Please step outside," says the tallest one of them.

"It's O.K., everything's O.K. They just need to ask you a few questions," Kelly says.

"What's going on?" I'm still staring at their weapons. I've never seen a real gun in person, never mind such menacing-looking ones. Their size and their potential to do damage make my heart race even faster.

"Is everything O.K. in the classroom?"

They're all looking into my eyes, as if I'd signal something by blinking oddly.

"Is that blood?" one of them asks, looking at the red splotches on my sleeves and hands.

"One of my students just bit another kid. It's O.K.—he was trying to help."

They don't seem convinced.

"No, it's fine," I say. All three men take a step forward as if to enter the class. I imagine Penny sobbing, sweat beads dripping down the back of Stephen's neck, and Alex moaning in pain. Inside my head something snaps. I move to block them.

"You'll scare my kids," I say firmly. "I told you, they're fine."



## THE BOOK OF THE DEAD FOR DUMMIES

I am past my expiration date. Some would argue water is not a human right. Maybe we are all dead awaiting rebirth. I do not believe the world exists. The universe is a giant hologram. Any first death is a practice run. We are stranded together amongst the office towers and traffic cops and billboards. Commuters read popular novels. Stare out windows on the subway awaiting resurrection. I wish I had been a better person in a previous life. Miracles go unseen. Bombs explode on prime-time news. I am stuck in a holding pattern. Past-life regressions are incarnations to prepare you for the other side. What kind of prison is this with its plastic water bottles and big-box stores? I am plotting escape. Let me begin again. I fall asleep every night only to wake in the same place. Is it wrong to love the feast if the guests are all ghosts? I am bound for a certain term to think about online profiles and the spirit's inferno. Purgatory is a late shift. Experience is an illusion. Had I grown up with demon gods, I might have been reborn already. I treat everyone like emissaries of the hereafter. Heart attacks are the way some people transition. Over time it occurs to me my body is a reliquary of stardust and unyielding losses, and despite my love of calla lilies, the smell of aftershave, massage therapy and hotel pedicures, Arabica coffee and French baguettes, morning smoothies and air travel, as an astral plane, I give this one three stars.

—CHRIS BANKS

"That's not your call to make," says the tallest officer.

"Sure it is," I say. He's so tall and so close to me, I'm looking up at the ceiling when I try to look him in the eyes. Even I'm surprised by the stance I'm taking.

I turn to my principal.

"You know what they're like, right, Kell? My 'special' kids?"

Her lips are tight. "We've still got a couple of classes to check," she says. A door opens and closes at the end of the hall. Luckily, this moves them along. I unclench my fists, quietly close the door, and then collapse against it when I'm safely back inside. The air is heavy with the smell of lemon, sweat, and urine.

"Are you O.K.?" Penny asks.

I go over to her and wipe the blood from around her mouth. I turn to Alex and ask, "Are you O.K.?" I grab the first-aid kit from under my desk.

"Penny, you weren't kidding when you said you were hungry," I say, examining Alex's hand. "That's got to hurt."

"I wasn't trying to hurt her," he says.

"I know," I reply.

He stares at me for a few seconds, then turns away as I take some alcohol rubs to clean the wound.

"Sorry, this might sting."

"Two hours and forty-five minutes," Penny says.

Peter tries to speak but trembles instead and wipes his nose with his shirt. I look over at the rest of the class. They

look terrified, but what can I do?

I go back to bandaging Alex's hand. Just then Liz is back on the P.A. "The Code Red is over. I repeat, the Code Red is over. Students and staff are instructed to proceed to their last-period class. An update announcement will be provided shortly."

The kids get up slowly, sore from having sat against the wall this whole time. Peter's still sitting. I need to call a custodian to clean up after him. I offer to call his mother to come pick him up, although neither of us is confident she'll come.

"He can borrow my gym shorts," Alex says, as he pulls them out of his backpack.

My heart swells at the unexpected gesture.

"Just wash them before you give 'em back," he says.

Peter nods and heads for the washroom.

"Sorry about your hand," Penny tells Alex.

"It's O.K.," he says.

Turning to me he says, "Sorry about your blouse."

It's my turn to say, "It's O.K."

At the end of last period, the entire school staff is called into the library, where we're told that there had been an armed home invasion in the neighbourhood. We'd been in lockdown because the police suspected the robbers might be hiding in the school.

"Just glad I wasn't on cafeteria duty," I hear a teacher say.

"Could have been worse," another says.

"So much worse," yet another agrees.

"I need a drink," someone says. A bunch of voices cheer as they plan to meet at a pub across the street.

"You coming?" Michael asks. "You survived your first Code Red, kiddo. Good job."

He smiles like he's told a good joke.

I shake my head. I have to call Penny's mother to tell her why her daughter has bitten Alex. Liz has already called his parents but I still have to fill out the incident report. I should call all the parents, I think, just to make sure the kids are O.K. I look at my watch and realize that I need to hurry if I'm going to pick up my daughter from daycare on time. 📱



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## THE MISCELLANY

# A NOBLE INSTALLATION

*Edmonton's Neon Sign Museum is helping revitalize the downtown and document the city's retail heritage.*

PHOTOGRAPH BY RYAN GIRARD

In 2002, David Holdsworth was walking down Ninety-seventh Street, in Edmonton, when he noticed a work crew removing the neon sign that continued to mark the location of Canadian Furniture, four years after the store shuttered. Holdsworth, a senior planner with the City of Edmonton, asked where the sign was going. When he heard it was headed for the trash, Holdsworth had it delivered to a municipal yard and contacted the building's owner for permission to obtain it for the city. Holdsworth saved several more examples of Edmonton's gas-filled commercial history over the next few years, until the collection grew large enough that the city was forced to figure out what to do with it. "Edmonton, like pretty much every other Canadian city, is actively seeking to revitalize its downtown, draw people in, and create unique spaces," said David Johnston, Edmonton's principal heritage planner. "So I think there was an appetite to say, We are accumulating some artifacts through this process, it would be a neat installation somewhere, so let's see what we can do in terms of finding a location for it."

Telus agreed to let the city install a framing system onto the 104th Street side of its central wire centre—a three-storey building in no danger of being torn down or redeveloped. The city also forged a partnership with the Alberta Sign Association, whose staff agreed to volunteer their time recovering, refurbishing, and remounting the signs. The Neon Sign Museum—which, officially, is designated an art installation—was switched on for the first time in 2014, and originally featured eight signs. Ten more have been mounted since then, and, in 2016, a second frame was added. "The original frame was looking only at double-sided signs that cantilever out from the wall," said Johnston. "As time went on, we started getting offered a handful of one-sided signs. We approached the property owner of Mercer Warehouse across the street and asked if he'd be interested in being a satellite location."

Every piece in the museum—which includes signs for national organizations like Canadian National Railways and local business such as X-L Furniture Rug Service and the Georgia Baths—once hung somewhere in the city or the surrounding area. One sign, for the jewellery store W. C. Kay, was left unfinished by its sign maker in 1960, and was lit for the first time when it was added to the museum, in 2016.

"The original wall has capacity for roughly thirty signs, so we still have a bit of space on the main wall," Johnston said. "We have some signs for the other frame that will put that wall at capacity. We have a fairly immediate need to find another satellite location in the vicinity, so we're starting to identify potential properties and reaching out to those property owners to gauge their interest. It's a good problem to have, but we're a bit of a victim of our own success."

—CONAN TOBIAS



MARTIN DIED WHEN I WAS FOURTEEN.



ON THE MORNING OF GOOD FRIDAY, MY FRIEND CHRIS CALLED ME.



IT WAS STILL FRIDAY THOUGH, SO WE WERE GOING TO THE COMIC SHOP. THAT WAS NEW COMIC DAY BACK THEN.



WHEN HE CAME BY MY HOUSE...



I HAD TO SEARCH MY HEAD. THERE WAS THIS TYPICAL "COOL" KID IN MY ART CLASS.



NOT SO SMART, SOMEWHAT BULLYING, A SMOKER. HE SEEMED DUMB ENOUGH TO GET KILLED.









HE WAS REALLY FUNNY, AND WOULD GO ALL OUT TO DO DATED, SCHTICKY HUMOUR.



BY GRADE EIGHT, HE SEEMED TO BE IN CHARACTER VIRTUALLY ALL THE TIME. IT WAS JUST WHO HE WAS.



WHEN HIGH SCHOOL STARTED, WE DIDN'T TALK MUCH. HE MOVED INTO THE COOL KIDS GROUP.



HE DIDN'T TURN INTO A JERK OR ANYTHING, HE WAS JUST A FUNNY GUY WHO BLOSSOMED IN GRADE NINE.



AFTER CHRIS AND I WENT TO THE COMIC SHOP, WE WENT TO WOOLCO,\* AND, STRANGELY, SHOPLIFTED A C.D.



STRANGE, BECAUSE I HADN'T STOLEN IN A YEAR, NEVER A C.D., AND I DIDN'T EVEN WANT IT.



\* NOW WAL-MART



TO MY CREDIT (AND I WAS FAIRLY SPINELESS AND SELF-SERVING AT THE TIME), I NEVER BLAMED MY BEHAVIOUR ON HIS DEATH.



CHRIS WAS FORBIDDEN FROM HANGING OUT WITH ME FOR YEARS. I FELT A DEEP PERSONAL SHAME I'VE NEVER TOLD ANYONE ABOUT.



HIS FUNERAL WAS HUGE, 500 KIDS, A THIRD OF THE SCHOOL. THE SOCIAL ASPECT OF IT REALLY DISTRESSED ME.



SO MUCH SO THAT A YEAR LATER, WHEN ANOTHER FRIEND DIED, THIS TIME OF LEUKEMIA, I DIDN'T GO TO HIS FUNERAL.



I STILL REGRET THAT.



WHILE MAYBE NOBODY IS PREPARED TO DEAL WITH DEATH, I CAN SAY THAT BETWEEN FAMILY AND SOCIETY, CHURCH AND STATE, I HAD NO TOOLS. IF SOMEONE ASKED HOW I FELT, I WOULD HAVE JUST SAID "FINE."





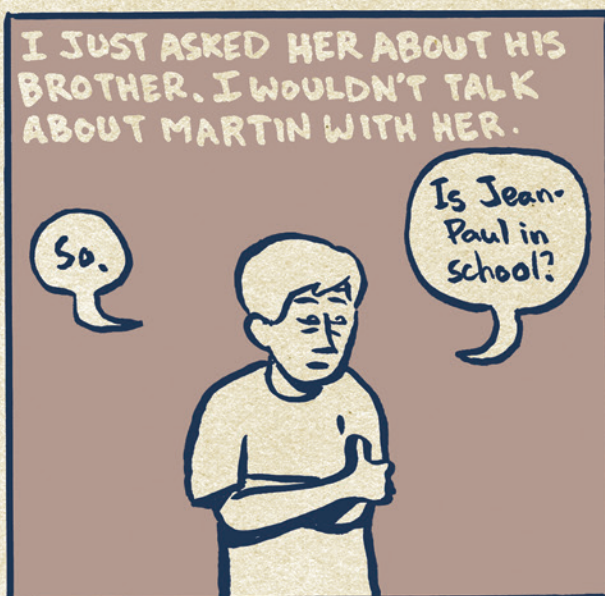
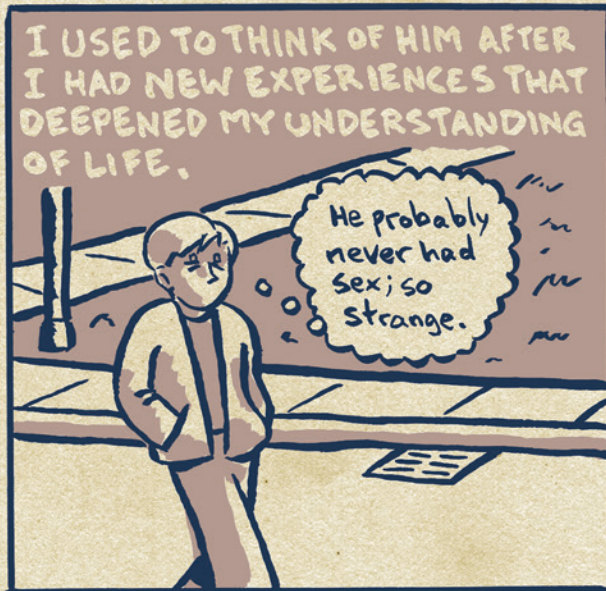
SO, THE STORY I HEARD WAS THIS:  
HE WAS DRUNK AT A PARTY.

FRIENDS WALKED HIM TO HIS  
APARTMENT BUILDING. HE  
WAS GOING TO SLEEP IT OFF  
IN THE LAUNDRY ROOM.

BUT HE WALKED OUT THE BACK  
DOOR AND TO A FIELD ACROSS  
THE ROAD.

HE TOOK OFF HIS COAT, FELL  
ASLEEP AND FROZE TO DEATH.  
IT WAS THE START OF SPRING,  
BARELY COLD.









THE MISCELLANY

## LAST RESORT

*How a complex neighbourhood made the best of a bad situation during an intense winter.*

BY JEFF SANFORD

*Jeff Sanford, a Toronto-based journalist and friend of this magazine, died on August 2nd, at the age of forty-six. The following article originally appeared this February, on the Local, an online magazine examining the health of Toronto's neighbourhoods. It is reprinted here, in tribute, with the kind permission of the Sanford family and the Local.*

I first saw the woman I'll call Anna early last summer. It was easy to miss her, tucked in under a rigged plastic sheet behind a Parkdale pay phone. She was dressed in random, eclectic layers, and sitting among a pile of suitcases, carts, clothes, and sleeping bags. She spoke in a rolling Caribbean accent, and might have been in her forties, though it was hard to tell.

As the summer went by, Anna's encampment began to spread and grow. Items came and went mysteriously. She didn't move from her spot during the day, but somehow, each morning, new items appeared. A lamp arrived one afternoon, a bicycle the next. Eventually, her little mountain of possessions spread over a

couple of sidewalk squares. It's not the kind of thing that would be allowed in most neighbourhoods, but this was Parkdale, where there is always space for the marginal. In a country with the land mass of Canada, it makes sense that there is one square kilometre for those with nothing. The nearest property to Anna was a rental that had been emptied of long-term residents and handed over to Airbnb visitors, so no one seemed to mind her presence. She became just another person living in the neighbourhood.

A couple of years earlier, I had taken a single room in a house just down the street. The loss of a job in the Great Recession, plus some long-simmering personal issues, had knocked me down a rung on the Toronto housing ladder. No longer able to afford a regular apartment, I started living in rooming houses. Quickly, I found that some were worse than others. I was booted out of an illegal building in Kensington Market when inspectors began cracking down in the wake of a fatal fire. In Parkdale, however, I found a space in one of the better rooming houses. The owner took

care of things and didn't live far away, and the fire department stopped by annually to test the alarms. Stereotypically home to ex-cons, the mentally ill, and addicts, this rooming house also attracted a couple of millennials who couldn't afford Toronto's housing market. Sure, there were bugs if you weren't clean, and the halls were painted that institutional lime green, but it was a place to live that wasn't on the street, and it was a community.

A woman in her sixties, living upstairs, who had fled an abusive relationship in Winnipeg, told me she liked living among other people. She didn't have to worry she would fall and no one would hear her. There was always someone around to carry her groceries up the stairs. Settling into bed on cold nights, I gave thanks there was a roof over my head. At least I wasn't living on the sidewalk down the street, like Anna.

In Parkdale, locals recognize one another and are quick to talk—social boundaries become less rigid. Where the typical middle-class Torontonians is distant with strangers and open to friends and family, that dynamic reverses itself somewhat among local Parkdadians. Going about my daily errands, I walked past Anna several times a day, and we soon began talking. It turned out she was perfectly lucid and rational, which surprised me, but maybe shouldn't have. Over the summer, other locals stopped to talk, bringing



her coffee or Tibetan momos from the restaurant across the street. Rummaging around in her junk one day, she pulled out a mess of wires and a rechargeable CD player.

"Hey, can you charge it up?"

"Sure," I said.

"Are you going to the store?" she asked another day.

"Yeah. What do you want?"

"Salt and vinegar chips."

Anna was just another resident in the urban village of Parkdale.

Then fall arrived, and it started getting colder. Anna had Olympian strength and resiliency, and seemed to handle any type of weather, from the beating sun of July to pouring rain. As fall turned to winter, she remained in her spot, wrapped in ever-growing layers of clothes and blankets. As the temperature dropped into negative territory, however, I began to worry. Eventually, I asked her if she wanted to go to a shelter—it seemed an obvious choice as the snow began to fall.

"No," she said. "I'd rather stay outside."

When I pressed her, she turned the question on me: "Have you ever tried to stay in a shelter?"

I hadn't. Point taken.

Of course, people living on the street experience scary health outcomes. In 2017, ninety-four homeless people died in Toronto. A 2013 study from the Centre for Urban Health Solutions, at St. Michael's Hospital, found that the homeless use the emergency room there eight times more often than the population at large. But living in the shelter system can bring a different set of health challenges. Those who have dealt with vulnerable populations know that the problems around homelessness can seem intractable. Addictions, mental illness, and the simple daily stress of living in desperate conditions create tension. Crowding too many people together in a shelter causes new problems. Shelters can be violent. They can host outbreaks of influenza. Your stuff gets stolen. You get bitten by bed bugs.

This winter, the extreme cold sent more people than ever into a shelter

system that was already bumping up against capacity. The *Toronto Star* began reporting on an influenza outbreak at Seaton House, the largest shelter in the city. Many of the older residents staying on the long-term floor were sick. This string of illnesses followed one last November, in which sixty-seven were infected during a strep outbreak that lasted nineteen months. With the shelters running at more than ninety per cent occupancy, viruses spread easily through the population. Anna's decision to stay outside, under her pile, didn't seem so crazy.

But by late December, the lows were hitting negative double digits. Arctic air was pouring down from the north. Shuffling by on the way to the streetcar, I would offer Anna a quick wave. At night, under the blankets, I wondered how she was handling the cold. How long must that night seem to someone sleeping on the street?

By this time, a twenty-four-hour women-only drop-in had been set up around the corner, on Cowan Avenue. Homeless advocates and street nurses had pressured the city into opening up extra shelter space. A police car would often roll up to check on Anna's condition. Workers from the Parkdale Activity-Recreation Centre, a local social services organization, would also stop by her encampment to check in.

Thankfully, early in January, as yet another wave of frigid weather arrived, Anna finally seemed to have had enough. She relented and went to a shelter. Walking by her camp a week after she had been picked up, however, I was astounded to see her back.

"What are you doing back here?"

"They don't want to deal with me."

This time, buried under her huge mound of possessions, Anna seemed more withdrawn. The sense of humour, clearly evident in the summer, was gone. As the extreme cold temperatures stuck around, one day she asked if she could come back to my place. "No," I said. The superintendent wouldn't have it. And sneaking her into the shed at the back of the property would have put my own hard-won, beloved space at risk. I shuf-

fled on with a twinge of guilt.

It was around this time a local hero provided an unexpected answer: a wooden cubicle-like box that appeared one morning. About twelve feet long and three feet high, it was painted purple, with a window built into the top. It was a small, single-person shelter—a place to go in the middle of the night during the coldest weather.

It stayed there, between Anna's encampment and the fence behind her, a tiny purple hut on the side of the street. It wasn't clear who had built it. Several organizations, when contacted, said they didn't know. If you walked by in the morning, the little door would be closed, keeping Anna out of the snow and wind. It was tiny, unlicensed, presumably violated some bylaw, and no way for a person to live long-term. But it was a last resort. Again, most neighbourhoods would not allow it. But it worked in Parkdale. At least somebody was doing something while city officials dithered over shelter space.

But as yet another period of intense cold settled in, it became clear that something more substantial was needed. Anna was taken in and her encampment was torn down. The hut disappeared. As the mountain of stuff was levelled, the tragic side of Anna's story became clearer. There was food marbled through the layers of decaying possessions. The shelter had been there on the coldest nights, but it could only provide a temporary option. Anna needed more help than this.

In the weeks after, as the patch of sidewalk returned to the way it was before Anna had taken up residence, news reports confirmed that one of the men recently taken out of Seaton House had died. Staff who dealt directly with sick residents were advised to wear masks and goggles. And those who stayed outside in the cold, rather than in the shelters, continued to pull off that unrecognized Olympian feat of human endurance. Thank you to whoever built that purple shelter. At least someone was doing something, however small, about the city's housing crisis in this cold winter of 2018. 🏠



THE GALLERY

# A VERY COMIC CHRISTMAS

*For nearly a decade, James McNee, a Toronto-based communications consultant, has hired local cartoonists to draw his family's annual holiday card.*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY THOMAS BLANCHARD

**"I read Archie as a little kid, but I didn't keep up with comics as an adult. One year, I read Seth's book *It's a Good Life If You Don't Weaken*. The story starts in London, Ontario, my hometown; he reminisces about Strathroy, where my wife grew up; then he ends up in Cabbagetown, my current neighbourhood. That was sort of my arc too."**





**"We always sent out a Christmas card with a family photo on it. When my marriage broke up, I thought it would be cheesy to have competing Christmas photos. There was a show at the Jet Fuel Coffee Shop featuring panels of the café drawn by local cartoonists. I met Jason Kieffer there and approached him with the idea I had for a card featuring my kids, Aiya, Grace, and Spencer. Jason drew the first one."**





**“Jason had the idea to get a different cartoonist for each card. The next year he introduced me to Dave Lapp, and then Dave got Nina Bunjevac involved, and it just continued from there. It gives me great pleasure. I think they’re wonderful.”**





**"My children are all adults now. At worst they tolerate it, at best they enjoy it. I guess I'll continue as long as we can get artists and the kids don't say stop—or until the family grows. That's either a time to expand the card or pull the plug."**





## LOOSE TIME

BY RJ EDWARDS

Hi Mom,

The cold's all right and the work itself isn't too bad, but the sap is driving me crazy. I come home feeling like my skin is covered in it and nothing gets it out of my clothes. I can't stand touching my gloves. Too sticky. But it'll be over in a few weeks and the pay is decent.

Russell is doing well, thanks for asking. This Christmas tree gig is right up his alley. Please try to remember to call him "he." I know you try your best but

Eli taps his spacebar several times then deletes the unfinished thought.

Please try to remember to call him "he." If you come down for a visit we should all get dinner together—he looks really different these days. Lost some weight and grown a beard. Seems to be staying out of trouble.

Tell Aunt Barbara that I won't make the party, but I'm driving upstate the next morning—got a few days at the restaurant off in exchange for working Christmas Eve. Will be sure to visit her while I'm around. Please take care of yourself, and let me know if you need anything. E-mail works best.

Love you,  
ELI

Eli hits Send and checks the time in the corner of the screen. He rummages through his closet until he finds something untouched by tree sap.

It's exactly eight when he pulls his station wagon into a parking spot at the restaurant. He steps out into a puddle of sludgy half-snow, what TV weather forecasters gave the much-too-cheerful description "wintry mix." Eli extracts his boots from the mess and trudges on toward the kitchen.

The restaurant, Francesca's Inn, is a beautiful building from the early nineteenth hundreds that has been Frankensteined with mismatching additions over the years. The upper floor is a family restaurant; there's an adults-only bar downstairs. Eli is grateful to work in the back, where he doesn't have to deal with drunks. He walks through the employee door and hangs up his coat. His cheeks

are flushed as he ties his black apron around his waist. One of the waitresses—Stacy, maybe?—is on her break, hanging out in the kitchen, flirting with the cooks. She sees Eli and waves at him. He nods at her and heads toward the dishwasher. Eli is boyishly handsome, but never got the hang of flirting.

Ninety minutes into his shift, Eli has heard "Jingle Bell Rock" at least three times. He slides another tray of dishes into the machine and pulls down the top. There's a lull at the moment, and while the dishwasher runs, he checks his hands. The cracking skin around his knuckles reminds him he needs to pick up lotion on the way home. He wonders if Russell has any.

Eli feels a vibration on his hip. He's not allowed to answer his phone at work, but he quickly checks the screen. It's his mother. He lines up some more dishes and puts them through the washer, moves the clean dishes down the line. He waits for the phone to chime, telling him his mother has left a voice mail. It doesn't. She hasn't. Instead, the vibrations start over. She's calling twice in a row—he wonders if something is wrong. He's lining up dishes on autopilot. He doesn't notice the hair, not at first.

Eli picks up a plate and yells, "Shit!"

It's covered in long, dark, thin hair. He looks around in a panic, but no one has seen it yet. One of the cooks shouts back, "Is everything O.K.?"

"I, uh, burnt my hand," Eli replies, "but not too bad."

Eli tries to scrape the hair off of the plate and into the garbage, but the mound does not get smaller. Thin black hair begins to pile up and over the edges of the plate, growing longer and more tangled. He drops the whole plate into the trash. The phone is still buzzing. When he reaches into his pocket to turn it off, he touches a clump of hair. It's wet, and it sticks to his skin, and

Eli's heart is pounding as he tries to trash the hair faster than it can appear.

The edges of Eli's world start to blur and dislodge. He digs his fingernails into his palms, willing the hair to go away. He tells himself it's not real, that he's going to open the dishwasher and finish the dishes and it is going to stop. Eli's boss tolerates, but doesn't like him. He needs to focus to keep his job. When he counts to three, the hair is going to stop.

One. Two. Three.

•

Hi Mom,

I called Dad and told him. He sends his best wishes. How long do you think you'll be staying at the hospital? If I can switch shifts this Wednesday, I could drive up and visit. Let me know. I've attached pictures of the apartment. It's definitely big enough for two. Before Viola left I slept on the futon for

Eli remembers he never told his mother that his girlfriend was living with him.

It's definitely big enough for two. Quiet building and there's an elevator. Just an option—we can talk about it whenever you feel ready. Get some rest!

Love you,  
ELI

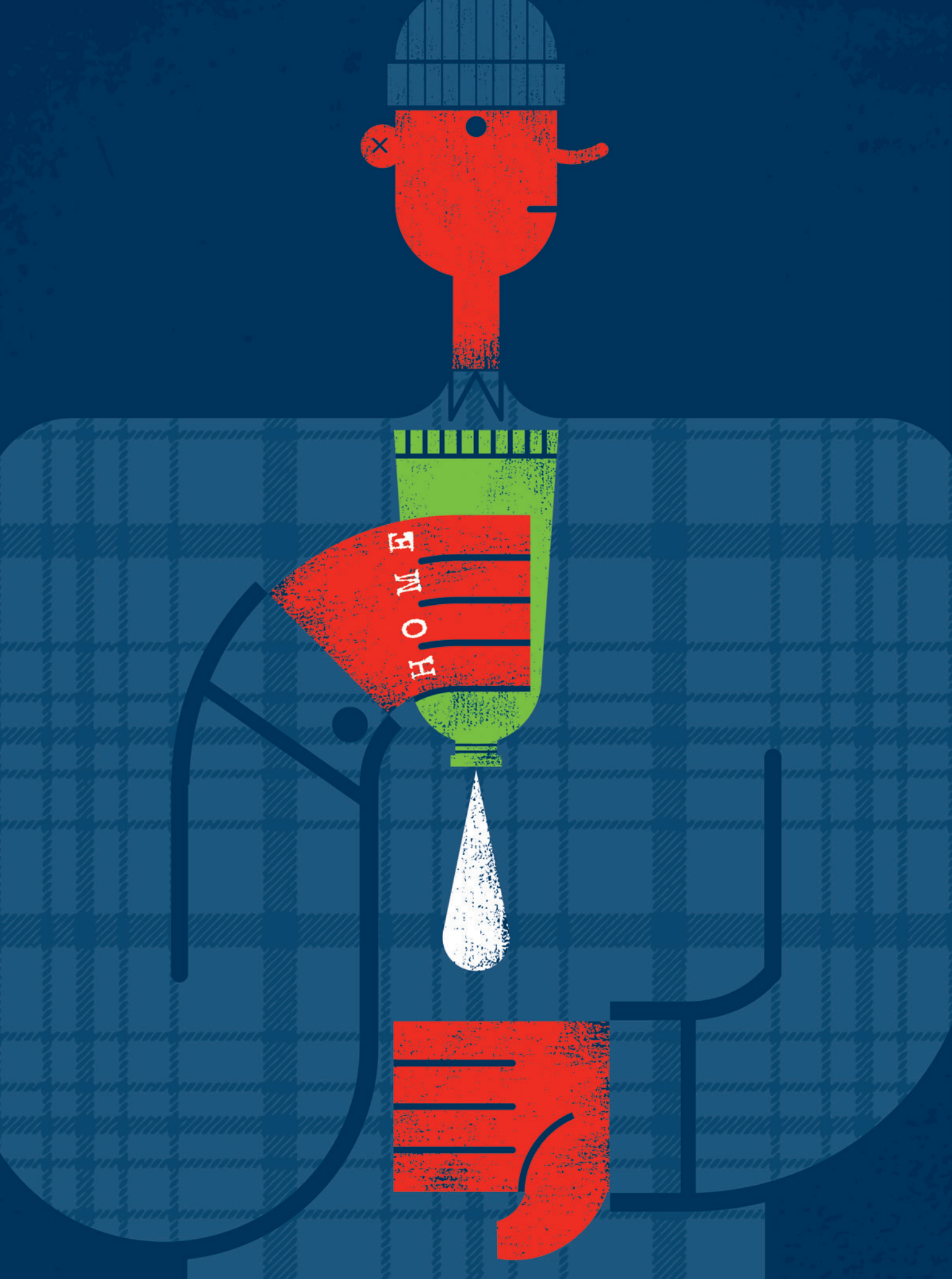
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"That's fucked, dude," Russell says to Eli the next day. "Your mom's not even that old. Is it, like, broken broken? Hair fracture or, like, does she need a whole new hip?"

"I guess I don't know," Eli says. He drags and piles branches while Russell takes his first cigarette break of the day.

"Well, that's pretty fucked." Russell adds between puffs. He's not supposed to smoke on-site, but the wood chipper is way out at the edge of the farm. He usually doesn't get caught, and Eli doesn't say anything. He's a little impressed that Russell can operate a lighter with those big, clumsy gloves







crusted in sap. They're identical to the ones Eli wears—Eli bought them packaged together.

They hear the boss call out to them and Russell quickly stabs out his cigarette and throws the ash remains into the woods. They hustle past rows of nearly identical fir trees. When a customer makes a selection, they cut it, drag it, wrap it, hoist it, and tie it to the customer's car. There's also a delivery option, but no one ever takes it. It costs extra, and in this part of Maine everyone owns a car. At least, everyone except Russell, who recently moved back from New York City. Eli drives him everywhere, just like in high school.

"So, you heard from that Viola chick?" Russell asks as they drag the tree toward the wrapping station. It's a tall one, and fragrant. It's one thing Eli likes about the job: the smell.

"She's not—no. She's gone," Eli says. "Over. Like, not-speaking over."

Russell sucks his teeth dismissively.

"What was her deal again?"

"She got an internship, down in Rhode Island."

Eli carefully lines up the trunk of the tree in the packager, a little metal hoop rigged up with bright orange mesh. "And, you know, it wasn't going that well."

"That's such bullshit, internships. It's like they started passing laws about volunteering and they had to think of a new, hip word for working for free. It's like you get all this student loan debt—"

"Hey, pull it?" Eli asks.

Russell pulls the trunk from the other side of the hoop, and the big, unruly tree comes out, tightly bound in the shiny, criss-cross orange plastic. The vibrant shade of the mesh reminds Eli of Viola's hair when they first met.

Eli squints at the wrapped tree, seeing it quiver and bulge. Something is moving inside of it. He hears a familiar whining sound and hooks a finger through the mesh, tugs on it as if to test its strength. Russell cuts it off at the hoop and just before he ties it closed, a black cat shoots out of the end of the tree. When Russell doesn't react—doesn't see what Eli saw—he knows that it was Viola's cat, Wednesday. Eli feels nervous

sweat threatening to leak through his heavy layers, but he gives his head a shake and gets back to the job.

They hoist the tree up onto the customer's minivan and tie it down. The customer—a pale blond woman who looks too young to be the mother of the three kids dozing in the van—slides Russell a tip. He thanks her with an "aw shucks" and a wink. She smiles at him for a moment too long before leaving. Russell, unlike Eli, is a masterful flirt—especially with women, even though he has no interest in dating them. Perhaps *because* he has no interest in dating them.

They head back out into the trees, looking for debris to drag to the wood chipper. Russell continues as if the conversation was never interrupted.

"So, it's, like, you go into all this debt to go to college, because your whole life *that's* what they tell you need to do to get a job so you can buy a house or whatever. Then you work for free, because now that's what you need to do. You work your ass off in school, and then you work your ass off for free and then when someone will finally pay you, you're so broke that you'll work for any bullshit rate. And people with actual good jobs call people our age lazy, but . . ."

Russell rants on, but Eli is focused on something far away. He's thinking about that mesh, about Viola's neon-bright orange hair, about lacing his fingers through the mesh, through her hair, and he sees a flash of that bright orange moving between the rows of trees. Eli feels the ground underneath his feet shifting, the memory trying to pull him inside of it. Instead of letting himself slip down, he steps forward. He can see her—Viola, laughing as she runs. Then Eli sees himself. He sees Eli chasing Viola. Eli follows.

He loses himself and Viola for a moment and walks faster, jerking his head around to peek through the jungle of evergreen branches. There: Eli has caught Viola by the arm and they're kissing now, they're reclining onto a bed that isn't there. Eli is touching Viola over her jean skirt and she's saying, "No, not there," and he says, "Show me where," and she guides his hand with

hers. She takes a finger into her mouth and bites it. The Eli that's watching remembers this is the first time they had sex, after they made out in the car until it got too cold and she raced him up the stairs. Eli is seeing this moment from behind a row of unclaimed Christmas trees, but he also sees Viola from inside that memory. He lets himself sink inside the heat of this playful first time and the heady feeling of blooming love. His face is brushing against her skin; he doesn't know why it smells like pine.

When Russell touches him, the moment evaporates and Eli feels as if he's been yanked up out of deep water. He gasps and shudders, and Russell pats his shoulder.

"Losing time, man?" Russell asks. That's how Russell talks about what happens to Eli.

"Yeah," Eli says. "Thanks."

"Come on. Somebody else needs a tree."

Aside from the two years Russell spent in New York City, Eli and Russell have been inseparable friends. In high school, everyone thought they were a lesbian couple, especially since Russell dressed and acted so butch. It was Eli who came out first, though, and Russell was one of the first people he told. Russell had reacted with disbelief, and with a weird kind of anger Eli couldn't name or place and certainly hadn't anticipated. Two days later, Russell apologized and told the truth: he was trans too, and was convinced their parents would never believe them if they both came out at the same time. His devastation was short lived: *But fuck what my parents think. It's just one more thing they won't get about me.*

Still, they were careful to tell a story that wrapped the coincidence up in fate. "I guess that's why we related to each other so well," Eli would tell his mother. They chose different therapists and doctors in different neighbouring towns and didn't mention each other to them. In their backwoods part of the state, it was easy to imagine a doctor with two young patients requesting hormone replacement therapy deciding it was a



trend instead of a need. Coming out more or less together wasn't all bad, of course. They could do each other's shots when one of them wasn't feeling brave. They went shopping together, celebrated each other's milestones, swapped horror stories. And Russell helped Eli stay grounded in the present whenever he started to lose time.

Eli settled in Maine, close to home, pretty early. Their hometown inspired constant anger in Russell, who instead floated across New England for a few years. He started college in Vermont and then quit. He grew weed in New Hampshire until he almost got busted. He lived and worked in a motel in the rural Berkshires. He was a barista in Boston, a tattoo apprentice in Providence. He worked for six months at an alien-abduction-themed business just outside of Hartford, Connecticut—Eli couldn't understand if it was a gift shop, some kind of museum, or just a weird tourist trap. When that place closed its doors, he hopped on a train to New York, met a guy named

Dylan, and disappeared for two solid years. Eli only knew he was alive because of the occasional cryptic e-mail he would send: "Laptop stolen. Public computer at the NYPL. Life's fucked, huh?"

Eli hands Russell a bottle of ibuprofen while they're at a red light. Russell thanks him and pops one into his mouth, swallowing it without any water. On the radio, bells are ringing and Darlene Love is begging her baby to come home.

"Lotion's in the glove compartment if you want," Eli says.

"Definitely," Russell mumbles and reaches forward. He pulls out the lotion, squeezes a bit too much into his palm. He rubs it into his sore left hand, where his knuckles read: L-E-S-S. Then into his right: H-O-M-E. Russell takes stock of where the skin has cracked and frowns.

"So Saturday's Christmas," Eli starts.

"Yeah?" Russell replies in a tone that lets Eli know he has just said something incredibly dumb.

"Do you know what you're doing yet?" "For Christmas? Family bullshit, probably."

"I meant after," Eli says, turning down the radio. "Thursday's our last day."

Russell says nothing for a moment. Then: "Maybe ask Mary if there's other stuff I could do for her."

Mary is the woman who owns the tree farm. Eli knows she'll say no—she has a day job. The trees are a side income.

"I could ask at Francesca's," Eli says.

"Yeah, I guess," Russell says. "But I can't keep staying with my parents."

"Rent's pretty cheap around here," Eli says. They drive past an elaborate Christmas light display that has just flickered on in someone's yard. Russell points at it.

"All this stuff looks so stupid with no snow on the ground."

"Yeah. Global warming, maybe."

"Maybe I'll go back to New York," Russell chimes, as if this is a positive option.

"You're kidding," Eli says. When Russell doesn't respond, he asks, "Where would you stay?"



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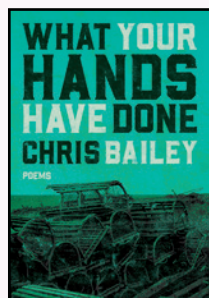


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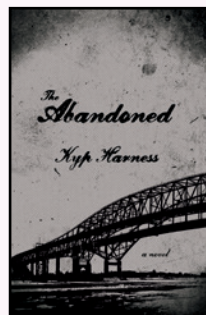


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"With Dylan, probably," Russell mumbles.

Eli flexes his hands, squeezing the steering wheel. Russell pretends not to notice the discomfort.

"He kind of called." He shrugs.

Eli has never met Dylan, but he doesn't like him. He doesn't like the way Russell talks around him, avoids questions about him, like he's a secret. Eli suspects Dylan is the reason Russell stopped talking to his friends. Eli suspects Dylan is the reason that, when Russell showed up so suddenly at his door again in October, he was skinny and jumpy and willing to move back in with his parents. Eli suspects that Russell's laptop wasn't stolen. Eli has never asked if Dylan ever hurt Russell, or took Russell's money. After growing up with him, Eli has learned not to press on the sharp places.

Instead he asks: "What did he say?"

"Oh, he's sorry, blah blah blah. Misses me."

"Did he say if he was sober?"

Russell shrugs and stares out the window, his stony face telling Eli not to ask anything else.

Eli grabs the ibuprofen and his water bottle, puts the pill on his tongue, and washes it down. He picks up the lotion Russell left on the passenger seat. He pauses, feeling as if he forgot something, then puts the bottle back in the glovebox and heads inside.

As Eli climbs the stairs toward his apartment, the forgetting feeling strikes again: something is tugging at him, like a hook stuck in his consciousness. He doesn't know what it is—usually when a memory tries to pull him back through time, or when something from the past leaks into the present, he can identify what triggered it. But this sensation is unfamiliar, and getting stronger. He grips the railing with one hand and steadies himself against the wall with the other. When he finally arrives at his door and stumbles into his apartment, Eli is exhausted. His limbs ache from the day of labour and he's growing lightheaded from the strain of resisting the pull of this memory. Or whatever it

is. He drops his jacket on the floor, leans against the kitchen counter with both hands, and allows his mind to drift toward this unknown force.

It pulls him inside fast. His legs tremble, and he's swallowed before the fear of being swallowed can fully form. He realizes that it is a memory, but it's not his: somehow, it's Russell's.

Muscles twitch, head swims, vision falters. He knows his heart is racing and there's a pounding in his skull, but other than that, it's hard for him to feel his body. He might be crying, but he doesn't know what about. The room reeks of piss, smoke, and alcohol. Eli is on the floor but doesn't remember collapsing. There are shadows moving in his peripheral vision, people he doesn't recognize. They step around him. Thoughts bubble up half-formed: Where is? How much did he? Dying?

Eli hears a crash of something nearby, then slips out of consciousness completely.

The next morning, after Eli runs to the bathroom and throws up more than was in his stomach the day before, he calls in to Francesca's Inn and tells them he's sick. It's not a lie, but his boss sounds suspicious. When he finishes the call, he looks at himself in the bathroom mirror. He looks as bad as he feels, and there's a long blue bruise on his jaw. He carefully brushes his fingertips against the spot. He's not sure if this is where he hit the floor or if this is a side effect of time travel.

Eli returns to the kitchen. His jacket is still lying where he dropped it last night. In the opposite corner of the room, he sees broken glass. He rips a paper towel off the roll and starts picking up the pieces. His hands are still a little shaky, and he makes a mental note to eat something soon.

The picture frame that fell off of the wall contains a photo of himself and Viola on vacation, standing in front of Niagara Falls. Her hair was its natural brown colour, long, and she was wearing big round sunglasses. He had been trying to grow a moustache at the time,



## AT THE ZOO

We fed bread slices to snakes.  
They swallowed them whole.  
Satisfied, we left them lying  
with fat lumps in their throats.

At the seal display  
Phyllis played Debussy on her clarinet.  
They barked, howled  
and drowned themselves to “La mer.”  
The otters demanded an encore.

Manny taught the gorillas  
how to shit in front of the crowds.  
The great apes weren’t so great  
except when they drank the sherry  
we left by their cage.

After we told the giraffes  
their numbers were endangered  
they circled in their pen  
and tied knots in their necks.

We rode the elephants into  
the gift shop  
traded their ivory  
for toy elephants  
fed cigarettes to the camels  
painted the zebras black  
unleashed hyenas in the food booth  
taught the baboons how to shoot chimps  
launched penguins at parrots  
and gored the rhino with his own callused horn.  
Skinned the lions with the claws  
of a sloth, waving their pelts  
like bloody flags  
and with the teeth of the last lonely polar bear  
crowned ourselves: kings  
of the concrete, cages  
and rubble.

—TARA AZZOPARDI

unsuccessfully, and his plaid shirt had noticeable pit stains. The glass is destroyed and the frame has popped apart at one corner. Eli lifts the whole mess and dumps it into his trash can. He makes himself some toast and jam, eats it at the counter, then fishes the photo out of the trash and puts it in a drawer.

Eli finally takes off his boots and lies down on his bed. He’s still nauseous, and his head and body ache. He wonders if he should go to the hospital, but he doesn’t know what he would tell them. Maybe they wouldn’t find anything wrong with him at all.

He tries to think about when it

started—losing time. Definitely before he met Viola, before Russell moved away, before graduation. Before that? Did it happen in elementary school? Eli didn’t think so, but then, he didn’t have a whole lot of past back then. Would it get worse as he got older? Would what happened last night—other people’s time pulling him in—would that happen more?

Eli suddenly feels something on the bed with him. The mattress creaks as she steps, slowly and carefully, toward his chest. He can’t see the apparition, only feel it—Wednesday’s paws kneading the blankets and then her weight settling on him. Her comforting presence gives him permission to close his eyes. The purring guides him to sleep.

•

Hi Mom,

Sorry, but I don’t think I’ll make it to visit today. I’m feeling pretty sick. Maybe picked up something at work. We still on for Saturday? E-mail me please?

Love you,  
ELI

Eli thinks about calling Russell all afternoon, but doesn’t know what he would say. He paces the apartment, practising out loud for a conversation that will never happen.

“Are you O.K., man? Hey, man, is everything O.K. with you? Listen, man, I’m here. Talk to me. You don’t have to—please don’t—don’t—” He presses his palm on the kitchen counter where he passed out the night before. His stomach churns. “Don’t go to New York. Don’t talk to Dylan. You deserve so much better than that, that asshole! Jesus Christ. You idiot. You asshole! You used to tell me everything. How? How did you do this?”

Eli’s voice cracks in his throat.

“How could you leave me? How could you leave me alone? Don’t disappear again, you asshole, you bullshit asshole, you’re so full of shit, fuck.” Eli punctuates the string of curses with a hurt noise like a scratchy growl.

His phone goes off in his pocket, and he feels his chest seize up as if he has been caught. He checks and sees his mother’s number. He takes a deep breath,



wipes his face, and answers.

"Hi, Mom."

"Hey there, honey," she says. "You're not feeling good either, huh?"

He forces a chuckle, rests on the futon. "Yeah, just a stomach bug for me, though."

"Well, drink plenty of fluids. And you don't have to drive up this weekend if you're still not feeling well."

"Mom, it's Christmas," he says dismissively. "And you're all laid up. Of course I'm coming."

"It's not a big deal. I know it's a drive—"

"It's, like, two hours, Ma."

"Well, I guess that's true."

Eli feels the cushion beneath him shift; a memory starting to rise around him. He tries to ignore it. He wishes, again, that she would reply to his e-mails instead of calling.

"So, uh, did you look at the pictures?"

"Which pictures?"

"Of the apartment?"

Silence.

"My apartment that I sent you? Yesterday?"

"Oh, right. No, I'm sorry, honey. I've been . . . you know."

"Yeah, that's O.K.," Eli says. "I just want you to know, you know, that I'm completely serious. You can move in here. It would be a lot easier, you know, if anything happens—I'll be right here."

"I'll be O.K.," his mother insists. "I'm going home the day after tomorrow."

"Well, what if, uh, you know," he struggles to say the difficult thing without using any of the difficult words. "What if it's something else next time? Like, if no one's around and—who knows? You could move here, or—I don't know, maybe I could move in with you."

"Honey, I'm fine."

The words pierce Eli's calm and bring on the memory in full force—he cringes as he hears a yell, and then a door slamming. He sees her from far away, through a window in his childhood home. His mother is running from the house and down the street. Part of him stays at the window, calmly allowing the memory to unfold before him, while the

frightened child he was runs outside after her. "Mama, mama, I'm coming too." She turns, looking shaken for a split second, then forces a smile. She crouches down and tucks a strand of thin black hair behind her ear. "Honey, I'm fine," she says. "I just thought I'd go for a walk to clear my head."

Eli watches as the child puts on a cheerful face and pretends to believe her. He watches the child learn how to lie.

"O.K.," Eli says. His mouth feels as if it is full of a thick, sticky syrup that tastes like dust. "We can talk about it later."

•

Eli buys another tube of hand lotion before work the next day. When Russell gets into the car, Eli hands it over and tells him to keep it.

"Thanks," Russell mumbles, pocketing it.

"Last day," Eli says.

"Yeah. Y'think it'll be slow?"

"Who knows," Eli says. "Maybe there'll be a bunch of people who waited until the last minute."

"Shit, I hope not," Russell says. "How're you doing, dude? You look kinda beat up."

"I'm fine," Eli says.

"How's your mom?"

"She's fine," Eli says. "Have you figured out what you're doing next week?"

"Guess not," Russell replies.

They find ways to avoid the topic for the rest of the day.

•

HEY MOM,

Just got off work and headed to bed. Let me know if I can pick anything up on my way over tomorrow. Merry Christmas!

Love,  
ELI

It's after eleven on Christmas Eve when Eli pours himself a glass of bourbon and settles in to watch *The Muppet Christmas Carol*. The Ghost of Christmas Past had just taken Scrooge's hand when Eli hears his buzzer going off. He hits Mute and gets up. The sudden visitor makes him nervous, even though he knows who it will be.

Eli buzzes him up and waits, leaning against the kitchen counter and swirling his drink, watching the ice cubes melt. There's a knock, and Eli opens the door.

Russell is sweating despite the cold, wearing an oversized winter coat and backpack with ripping seams. He's holding out the gloves he wore when they dragged Christmas trees.

"Hey, man," Russell says. "I just wanted to return these."

Eli did buy them, but hadn't expected to get them back. They're crusted in dirt and sap and Eli knows they'll go into the garbage by tomorrow morning. He takes them.

"Thanks," he says.

He waits for Russell to step inside. "Come on, man. Come in, have a drink."

"Yeah, O.K.."

Russell takes a seat on the futon while Eli pours another glass. He grabs a chair and sits across from him. The Muppets are still on the TV, muted. Russell grimaces as he takes a sip. Bourbon isn't his drink.

Something occurs to Eli.

"Did you walk here?"

"Yeah."

Another sip, another grimace.

"My stepdad kicked me out again. On Christmas Eve. Can you believe it? New record for him on being an asshole."

Eli stares into his drink.

"What are you going to do?"

"Well, he'll let me back in tomorrow morning. That's how he operates. But the job's done and I'm sick of it, so."

"So, what?"

Russell shrugs.

"Might leave."

"Leave town?"

"Yeah."

"Like, on a bus or something?"

"Yeah. Or I could hitchhike."

Russell sees Eli's skepticism and gives a short, sharp laugh.

"You know I've done it before."

"Are you going to move back in with Dylan?" Eli says as evenly as possible.

Russell shrugs again, raps his knuckles on the arm of the futon.

"He's dealing again. So. Nah, I don't



think so. And anyway, fuck him.”

Eli extends his glass, toasting the sentiment. Russell laughs again, more relaxed, and touches his glass to his friend’s.

“You deserve better,” Eli says.

“I guess.”

“You do.”

“Yeah, well.”

Russell takes a gulp, a hot, courage-gathering gulp.

“I have to figure something else out before I fucking kill myself.”

The air in the small room feels heavy with the statement and all it contains. Eli yearns to travel back in time—in a real way, a useful way. Back to when things were simple, or at least when things were difficult in a more familiar way. He realizes this is the moment one of them should suggest that Russell stay, stay right where he is.

Eli feels the familiar sensation of the world sliding away, but for once, time does not shake loose. Instead, it hardens: the moment crystallizes, and Eli can see every side of it. He rotates it in his mind, feeling every groove, all the possibility and regret it contains. Through the prism of this moment shine infinite pathways.

He can feel out the path if he extends the offer—the lost time gets much worse, then gets a little better. Russell is still angry and wounded, but safe. Eli feels resentment down this path, most of it his own. More than anything, Eli feels hurt. He feels Russell hurting him, and he feels himself hurting Russell. Lashing out at each other becomes the rhythm they live by. Eli feels pain, passed back and forth, over and over, until the path stretches too far for him to follow.

He grasps with his mind for another seam, one that traces the way of no invitation, and finds it—long, smooth, and calm. Russell goes back to New York. Eli visits his mother. He still experiences the past and present bleeding together. He manages. There are none of the sharp and hot feelings of hurt here, just uncertainty. And a low, dull throb of shame.

“You O.K., man?”

With a snap, the crystal shatters, and Eli is in the present. Russell is eyeing him, worried that he’s drifting again. Eli tries to look at his friend from another angle, but is left only with a hollow feeling. Though he’s never seen into the future before now, he finds it suddenly maddening to only be able to see this one Russell, locked in this one moment, and to not know what he will do.

“Yeah, I’m fine.”

Eli feels sick with himself, a feeling stuck to his bones and his guts, making it difficult to breathe and swallow. He can invite Russell to stay and see what kind of mean, petty, terrible friend he’ll turn out to be. Or he can take the easy path and keep his cowardice his own secret.

Eli finishes his drink and says nothing. The moment slips away.

Russell lies, says he’ll head back to his parents’ for the night. Eli pretends to believe him and gives him a hug. They promise to keep in better touch.

After he leaves, Eli returns to the TV. Scrooge has seen the error of his selfish ways. Eli doesn’t pay much attention—he’s seen this movie a hundred times, and he’s watching through the fog of the thought that he’ll never see his best friend again. When he had watched this story as a young girl, he believed implicitly that he’d grow up to be a good person. It seemed easy and obvious, being good.

Fifteen minutes and another glass of bourbon later, there’s a noise at the door. He tries to enter unannounced, but Eli had locked it, and the tension loosens in the moment it takes Eli to get there and fumble with it until it opens.

Russell stands in the doorway, his face sort of screwed up. He never left the hall. He’s struggling to ask the question, and of course he is—the question has to claw its way up into the doorway from the moment that had passed, the right moment. This moment isn’t right at all—the TV is still making cheerful noise in the other room. There are no tears, no heavy revelations, no promises, no embrace.

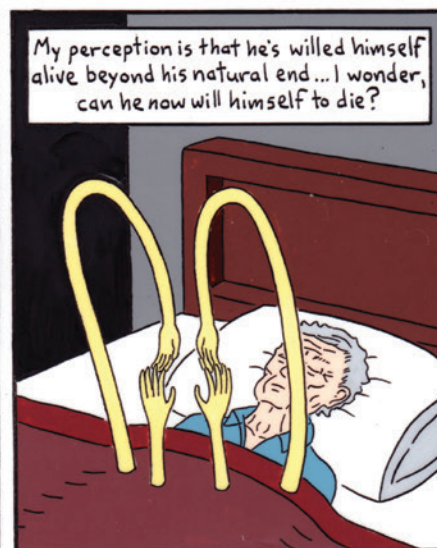
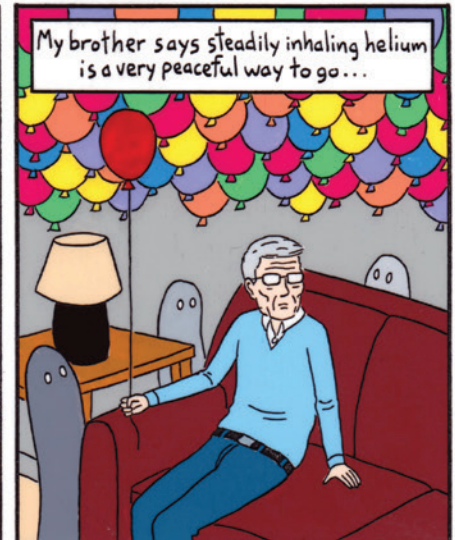
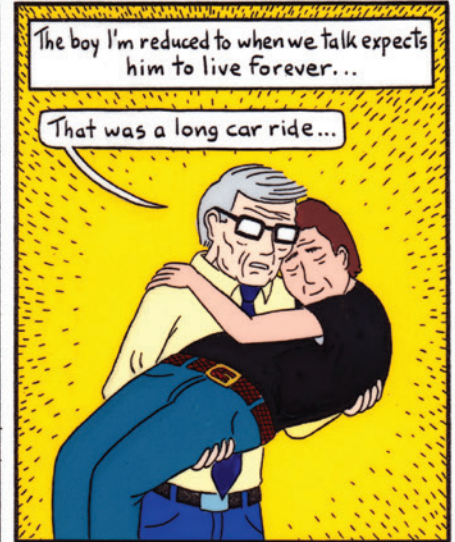
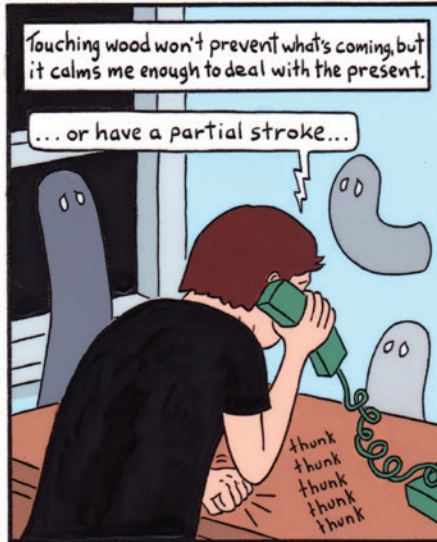
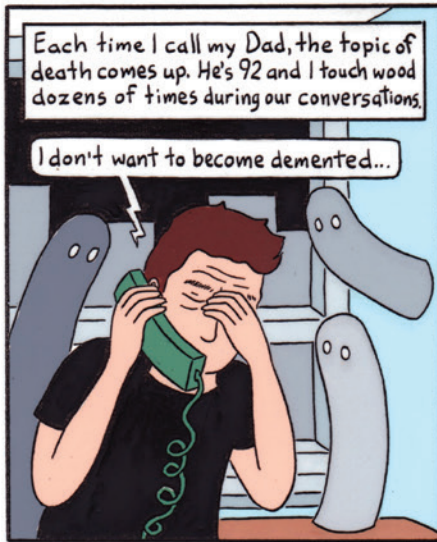
Eli lets him stay, all the same. 🏠





# Touch Wood

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