TADDLE CREEK

No. 44

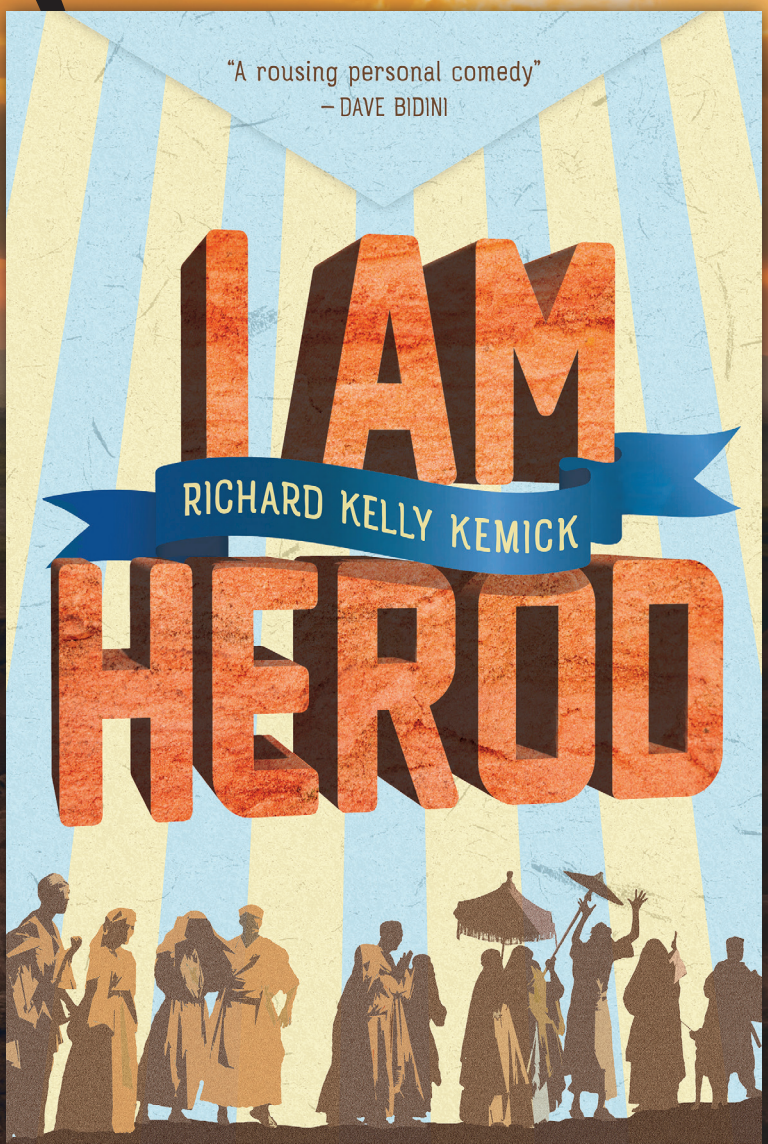
$6.95

Noah Van Sciver

NOT available in CHURCH

"Kemick's book is that delicious cross between *Waiting for Guffman* and *The Studhorse Man*, a rousing personal comedy that dances between the sweat of art and the glue of experience."

—Dave Bidini, author of *Midnight Light: A Personal Journey to The North*



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TADDLE CREEK

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THE CONTRIBUTORS

LISA FOAD

Lisa Foad's work in progress, *Hunting*, excerpted on page 4, was inspired by her preoccupation with missing women and femicide in North America. "So many questions began emerging for me," she says. "What does it mean to live in a culture where women and girls are frequently targets of violence? How does this impact the day-to-day lives of women and girls? What does it mean to simultaneously navigate desirability and disposability? *Hunting* scares me, but I know that if I'm not writing what scares me, I'm not really writing."

READ MORE COMIX

Robb Mirsky and David Craig are two-thirds of the Read More Comix collective. Together with James Spencer, they churn out stories through their eponymous comic that could be best described as "dad jokes on acid." This issue features, on page 20, Robb's Lemonade Brigade ("Their biggest conflict is figuring out how to spend their time and fighting over territory regarding their lemonade stand operation," Robb says) and two tales of David's signature character, Brick (pages 9 and 37). "Everyone loves Brick," Robb says. "He has a heart of gold."

VICTORIA HETHERINGTON

Victoria Hetherington—whose debut novel, *Mooncalves,* about the implosion of a Quebec-based cult, was published earlier this year—enjoys writing love stories. "What They Came For," on page 14, is an unusual tale of aliens on a fact-finding mission to Earth. "It's grounded in a love story," she says. "This is actually one of the most tender, gentle love stories I've written. I wrote it when I was alone in rural Scotland, watching *Dr. Phil* for hours at night. Being lonely can completely control your life."

NOAH VAN SCIVER

The Columbia, South Carolina–based Noah Van Sciver says his inspiration for this issue's cover was "my depleted attention span, due to my iPhone, and wishing that I still had the focus I once had to read all the novels I want to read." Van Sciver's upcoming projects include a graphic novel biography of the Grateful Dead and a book about the Mormon church. "It's called *Joseph Smith and His Mormons.* It will be a straightforward telling of the foundation of the church, interpreted by me, a former member."

MATTHEW DALEY. PREVIOUS PAGE: HARTLEY LIN. BO DOODLEY

The magazine that celebrates itself.

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HARTLEY LIN

THE EPHEMERA

Goings on at the magazine.

The seemingly impossible happened on the evening of May 31st, when RJ Edwards brought *Taddle Creek* home its first gold National Magazine Award. RJ beats out all competition in the fiction category, winning for the short story "Loose Time," originally published in *Taddle Creek* No. 42. This was both RJ's first time being nominated for a writing award and first appearance in the magazine, but long-time readers will note that this certainly wasn't *Taddle Creek's* first attempt to bring home a winning N.M.A. The magazine's scorecard now stands at one gold, one silver, and somewhere between nineteen and eleven million honourable mentions since *Taddle Creek* began entering the awards, with issue No. 4, in 2001.

Taddle Creek has mixed feelings about this victory. Winning only one National Magazine Award in nearly two decades is a lot less impressive sounding than the cool outsider status that comes with having lost nineteen. *Taddle Creek* might suggest that the National Magazine Awards people gave the magazine a prize just to shut it up, but that would also suggest RJ wasn't deserving of the honour, and that simply is not the case. So *Taddle Creek* will wear its award with pride (the magazine assumes there is an Order of Canada–like lapel pin to allow winners to publically flaunt their superiority), while offering RJ sincere and deserving congratulations—as well as a big thank you for breaking the magazine's losing streak.

With a National Magazine Award now under its belt, *Taddle Creek* will focus its attention on browbeating the organizers of the Journey Prize. (Six long lists in fourteen years? Come on!)

RJ Edwards isn't the only *Taddle Creek* contributor to receive some recent attention. David Collier's comic "Toronto Reference," from *Taddle Creek* No. 32, was included in the latest volume of the *Kramers Ergot* anthology series. If you enjoyed reading David's comic for two dollars, read it again for forty. Also, the magazine would be remiss if it didn't mention that Hartley Lin, Tad's official portrait artist, took home the 2019 Doug Wright Award—an award the editor is forcing *Taddle Creek* to call "Canada's greatest cartooning honour"—this May, for his debut collection, *Young Frances.* (His comics have also started showing up in the *New Yorker.*)

If you're reading this before January 5, 2020, and are in or can make your way to the Hamilton area, be sure to check out *This is Serious: Canadian Indie Comics,* a showing of contemporary Canadian comic art, hosted by the Art Gallery of Hamilton, co-curated by *Taddle Creek* super contributor Joe Ollmann, and including work by such beloved *Taddle Creek* regulars as Hartley Lin, Nina Bunjevac, David Collier, Michel Rabagliati, Seth, Fiona Smyth, Walter Scott, and Maurice Vellekoop. (Fiona's bit of wall even contains her comic from way back in *Taddle Creek* No. 22.) Old Joe tells *Taddle Creek* the show may end up on tour, but don't take the chance—see it today.

Welcome aboard to Skylight Books, Los Angeles's best bookstore with a tree in it. Newsstand isn't exactly a growing distribution channel for *Taddle Creek* these days, so when Skylight dropped the magazine a line expressing interest in carrying a few copies, *Taddle Creek* could hardly say no. The magazine will be popping in to sign copies at this amazing store on its next L.A. visit.

Taddle Creek's pulp issue made the magazine all manner of new friends, namely collectors of old pulps. The magazine also received letters from several regular readers saying how much better they liked the size and lesser paper quality of No. 43. It's enough to give a magazine pause. Still, *Taddle Creek* decided to return to its usual level of quality this issue, much to the joy of Chris Young and the gang at Prolific, the magazine's regular printer. (Chris now has the honour of having overseen *Taddle Creek's* printing for a record-breaking ten-plus years and more than half of the magazine's run. Thanks, Chris.) More quality to come next issue. Until then.

—Taddle Creek

THE FICTION

HUNTING

An excerpt.

BY LISA FOAD

We hate the mall. Its insides are yellowed and the air is stale and the stores are the same but their signs are different. The skylights are heavy with bird shit. The fountains are full of lucky pennies and piss. And the men are everywhere, clogging and leering.

But this is why we're here. The men. This is where we find them.

We're in the food court, with its terrible fluorescents and its stink of grease and its screaming babies. Me and Cat and Sierra and Liv and Coco. We're each sitting at different tables. We're each waiting.

This is how we find them. The men. We let them find us.

We sit alone in our scuffed sneakers and our cut-off denim shorts and our tube tops. We snap our bubble gum. We bend over and tie our shoelaces tighter, so the lace thongs we stole from the coin laundry peek past our denim waistbands. We flip through *Tiger Beat* and *Seventeen* and *YM,* magazines we stole from the 7-Eleven. We suck on the straws of our Orange Julius drinks. We look around. Old men. Fat men. Bearded men. If they smile at us, we smile back. It's that easy.

I look at Cat, then Sierra, then Liv, then Coco. Their eyes are bored, glittering, ready.

I look at the other teen girls, the ones with mothers. The girls sulking, white sundresses and white barrettes. The mothers scolding, white jumpsuits and white sunglasses. Still, they're holding hands. It doesn't make me miss my mother. She'd never have worn white, because white is winter. Besides, like Cat says, it's best to save missing mothers for bedtime. Otherwise, we'll sink like stones. I miss my mother. I sink the thought like a stone.

And then I smile at the man smiling at me.

He's leaning against one of the pillars that frame the food court, shopping bags in one hand and a cigarette in the other. He's broad shouldered and square jawed, salt-and-pepper hair neatly clipped. His suit is business charcoal. His shoes are shiny. His lips are thin. He looks like a father. He takes a long pull on his smoke, exhales slowly. His eyes are black holes.

He straightens and butts out his cigarette in a potted plant.

Then he's crossing the food court and sliding into the seat across from me, sliding his hunger into mine.

"You look like you could use some company," he says.

I smile wider so he can imagine crushing the field of flowers that lives in my mouth.

He tugs at his collar, loosens his tie. His gaze is greasy.

"Shouldn't you be at home writing a book report or something?"

"I guess I'd rather have fun," I say.

He eyes the bruises on my forearms, my wrists.

"You look like you know how to have fun."

"You have no idea," I say.

"I bet you could use some money," he says. "Bus fare. Nail polish. Candy bars."

"And then some."

He pulls his wallet from his suit jacket. It's wadded with twenties.

I twirl a fat hunk of my hair, and Cat and Sierra and Liv and Coco rise from their tables and cluster in front of the jammed gumball machines that are next to the out-of-order kiddie rides. They fiddle with the stuck levers. They idle.

He leans in. His breath stinks of tinned tuna. "Forty dollars," he says.

"Eighty," I say.

"Fifty."

"Sixty."

His eyes narrow. He crumples the bills, grabs hold of my hand, and presses them into my palm.

"This better be one hell of a blow job," he says, his hand twisting and squeezing mine, "or I'm getting my money back."

And as we walk to the back exit that's overgrown with weeds, I feel Cat and Sierra and Liv and Coco fall into soft stalking step.

Behind the mall, there's nothing but empty parking lot. No one parks back here because it's still strung with yellow crime-scene tape, even though no one is looking for the two women who went missing last month. We watched the men with police badges work the scene. It was just us and the birds. The men ate hoagies and had a push-up contest, and tracked blood spatter all over the lot.

ILLUSTRATION BY MATTHEW DALEY

"They'll turn up in suitcases or rolled-up rugs," said one to another. "They always do." And then the cars the women were snatched from were stripped for parts, and a family of raccoons moved into the leftover shells.

Me and Cat and Sierra and Liv and Coco aren't afraid of the empty lot, the yellow tape. We're making new crime scenes.

"You've got street on you," says the man, as he drops his shopping bags and shoves me to my knees. "But look at that baby face. What are you, thirteen? That's my favorite number."

He unzips his pants, pulls out his ugly grey slug of a cock, and says, "Suck it," his breath already ragged. Behind him, Cat and Sierra and Liv and Coco are looming, and I reach for his slug cock and he closes his eyes, and it's then that I punch his balls as hard as I can, and he yowls and drops to his knees, saying, "You stupid fucking bitch, I'm going to kill you." For a second, I sit inside his words. They're sharp and dark and thrumming. And it's then that he lunges. I scramble, but he gets a fistful of my hair, and then his hands are around my neck, squashing and squeezing, and Cat is smashing him upside the head with the rock in her hand, and Sierra and Liv and Coco are clawing at his back, his arms. He goes down, but his hands are wrapped tight around my neck, and I can hardly breathe. I knee him hard between his legs, and he loosens his grip, and I slip out, coughing, choking, and then me and Cat and Sierra and Liv and Coco stomp him until he stops his moaning.

And then Coco starts to cry.

"Stop crying," says Cat. "He's dead."

"But he should be more dead," says Coco. "He should be more fucking dead."

We roll his body toward the manhole that drops into the storm sewer that flows into the river. Cat tosses me the pry bar that's rusting nearby. It's been rusting ever since thieves used it to jimmy open the car doors of the two women who went missing. We watched them poke around the front seats and the back seats and the trunks and pocket the loose change they found.

I hook the pry bar into the manhole, and Cat wraps her hands around my hands, and with Sierra and Liv and Coco pulling hard at our hips, we yank until the cover pops open. We look at

the dead man. His eyes are glassy wide, two blanks. Cat grabs his wallet and I grab his shopping bags and Sierra grabs his wristwatch and Liv grabs Coco. We kick him down into the grey water below, reset the manhole cover, and run.

We run past the dry cleaners and the Chinese restaurants and the Ukrainian restaurants and the porno theatres and the florists. We run down the streets the men have made. John Street. John Avenue. John's Way. The men made every single street, and every single street is slimy with cum because the men jerk off in every place. We run past the dumpsters and ditches with their smell of dead women. Everywhere, carnivores are howling. We run past the houses and parks strung with yellow crime-scene tape. There is yellow crime-scene tape on every block. The wind whistles in our ears.

We run all the way to the Yvette Jade Wendy Gail Gloria Bridge, which is no longer a bridge, just a heap of crumbling concrete that used to bridge elsewhere until it was smashed by a wrecking ball because women were using it to drive out of the city and never return. That's what we tell ourselves, anyway. Because that's what our mothers told us.

We found the bridge because we were looking for a way out, but this city folds up like a cardboard box. The sky doubles back. The ground doubles back. The streets run in circles.

We climbed up the edge of the city, with its slippery slope and its craggy rocks and its dead shrubs. We were looking for a hole in the horizon.

Instead, we found the ruins of the Yvette Jade Wendy Gail Gloria, the bridge our mothers used to dream. We named it after them. It was clinging to the cliff edge, and what was left of its knocked-out roadway jutted like a snapped neck over the roiling waves below.

Sometimes, we walk the plank and throw rocks into the water, count for the plunk. We've never heard the plunk. It's a long way down, we tell ourselves. But maybe the water is just a mirror, like the city that stares at ours from across the chasm. That city looks exactly like ours, because it's really just a mirror. There are no holes in this horizon.

There in the rubble of the Gail Gloria, with its jagged rocks and its fat weeds, we settle in. The sky is empty blue. Our cheeks are flushed. In the distance, the city is crammed and heaving. We're not winded. We don't get winded. We run all the time.

Cat pulls out the cleanup supplies we keep stashed in the rocks: soap bars and sanitizer gels and hand wipes we've pocketed from dollar stores and drugstores and diners.

And one by one, we wet our soap bars in the bucket of rainwater we call a sink, so we can wash away the blood spatter.

"That got out of hand," says Cat, eyes on me.

"He got out of hand," says Sierra.

"He smelled like bandages," says Liv. "And sour milk."

Coco starts to cry again.

"He should be deader. He should be fucking deader."

I take the wetted soap from her hands

TOFINO

I

At the brick barrier of YVR arrivals, you stand
impatient and imperious in designer sunglasses
car keys hanging by the crook of your index finger.
Mad at me for the flight delay and lost luggage,
you tweet your displeasure @AirCanada.
We have a time booked for the ferry.

West of Port Alberni, the rainforest envelops us, wet and green,
darkness slows an already long drive.
Two lanes slick and bumpy, ridges in the road vibrate under our seats.
It feels we could spin out at any moment.
Water tumbles along granite shards, gathers across
pavement dropping into the lake on the other side of the road.
Verdant growth invades cracks and openings.
If I stretch my hand out of the car, I could touch the waterfall
feel my fingerprints get worn away.

My playlist is incompatible with your car, so you regale me with stories of the famous hockey bruiser whose team paid him off when he asked for help—
of the drunks and druggies, the sex addicts, the anorexics and cutters—
Can you imagine hurting so much that you cut yourself?
I say nothing.

We hit the coast and laugh at the road sign—
a little blue figure scrabbling up the side of a hill,
an oversized arc of a wave cresting overhead
"ENTERING TSUNAMI HAZARD ZONE."

II

Waking early, we walk the edge of Cox Bay.
Follow the arc of the beach to an ever-retreating
horizon of overcast sky converging with murky ocean.

Water pulls underneath our feet as the current recedes
standing at the end of the earth, waves wash over our words.

At the sandy inlet outside our balcony, we find
remnants of yesterday's wedding,
a limp boutonnière discarded on a craggy rock shelf,
a heart traced around "TOFINO" spelled out in shell shards pressed into sand.

You tell me of a summer night, a tinge of fall in the air.
As the oldest it was up to you to investigate the muffled
thump that echoed up the stairs.
You wrestled with the limp weight a drunken body holds.
Felt the clamminess of your mother's bare thigh
pressed against the kitchen tiles.

III

I wake throughout the night,
the bitter grit of Zopiclone clinging to the inside of my cheek.
A giant slug crawling outside our door
its black and beige mottled body camouflaged by the pebbled walkway
traversing the little rocks, knowing its slow path.

At dawn I shrug on a yellow
slicker to walk the crescent beach alone.
In the sheltered tide pool, clusters of barnacled mussels glue
themselves onto igneous shelves.
Their shells razor against my palm
jade anemones cluster into crevices, tentacles undulating
as they clone themselves into soft blobs.
Above them, I find two magenta starfish exposed to the air,
the diurnal tide stranding them there.
The soft warm arm of one hugging the other against the rock
waiting for the water to return.

—KERRI HUFFMAN

and wash the spatter off the toes of her sneakers and the tips of her hair. I rub her back.

"At least he's dead," I say.

She wipes the wet from her cheeks and nods.

I give her back her bar of soap.

"Now wash your hands."

I look at Cat, whose eyes haven't left me. And in the tunnel that lives between us, we find each other.

And while Cat digs through the wallet, I dump the shopping bags, and it's a good haul. Socks. Sunscreen. Cinnamon buns. Two wool blankets. Designer sunglasses we can pawn. Usually we just get allergy medicine and Old Spice deodorant and porno magazines: *Juggs, Creampie, Barely Legal.*

"What's that?" says Sierra, pointing.

I root out the sliver of pink poking out from the bottom of the pile. It's a make-believe magic wand. Its tip is a sparkly star, and the star is trimmed with a tail of ribbons, as though the star is shooting.

Coco's eyes widen. "I want it." Her voice is soft and pale as milk.

"It's for babies," says Liv, eyeing the wand's shimmer.

"I don't care," says Coco.

She stands, takes the wand from my hand, and points it at Liv.

"I disappear you," she says. And then she skips away, wand waving, into the sweeping field of wildflowers that surrounds our nest of rocks.

"Abracadabra!" she screams, over and over again.

"She's such a baby," says Liv.

She tugs hard at a fistful of weeds and hurls the green blades in Coco's direction.

Liv used to be the baby, until we got Coco.

"There are wings, too," says Sierra, who's been digging through our jackpot. "Fairy wings."

She tosses them into Liv's lap.

"I think they go with the wand."

Liv's eyes light, but she pulls a face. "I'm not a baby," she says.

"Still," says Cat. "It'd be fun to fly."

Liv gnaws on her thumbnail, looking back and forth from Coco to the wings. "Well, I wouldn't really be flying," she says. "But wings are much better than a stupid wand."

I help her into the wings, which are gauzy and glittery and pink, and which sit on her back via elastic bands on each arm. She stands and kick-stomps at the ground with one foot, like a bull. And then she charges into the sweeping field of wildflowers and Coco.

"They're both babies," says Sierra. She puts on the designer sunglasses, which are slick, aviator style and tinted green. "I want these."

"We're pawning those," says Cat.

"O.K., just the watch," says Sierra.

She shakes her wrist, and the fat gold watch winks and shines, nearly slides right off her hand.

"We're pawning that, too," I say. "Besides, you don't need a watch."

We tell time with our fingers. We start at the horizon line, and stack one hand atop the other until we hit the sun. Then we count the time clocked in each finger. Five hours before sundown. Four hours before sundown. Me and Cat have twenty-minute fingers.

Sierra and Liv have twenty-five-minute fingers. Coco has thirty-minute fingers. Each of us, our own clocks. Each of us, ticking.

"It's not fair," says Sierra. "They got something."

"Well, we can't pawn a kiddie fairy costume," I say.

Sierra rolls her eyes.

And then Coco and Liv are keening and wailing, wrestling each other to ground. "Give me the fucking wand," Liv is screaming. "Give me the fucking wings," Coco is screaming.

"I'll take care of it," Sierra says.

Cat and I watch her corral the girls and redirect them into a game of tag. And then we walk the plank.

"She keeps crying," says Cat.

"She's only eleven," I say.

"Liv didn't cry. Sierra didn't cry. We didn't cry."

"It's different," I say. "Her mom's not dead."

"She might as well be."

It's true. With her white bracelets and her white bath salts and her white pills for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, Coco's mother is barely alive. That's how Coco's father got his hands under Coco's bedsheets every night.

"She'll grow out of it," I say.

"Maybe we need to do an extra purge," says Cat.

"Maybe," I say.

But purges are hard. We do them every Friday. We sit in a circle and stick our fingers down our throats and get rid of the bad feelings that sit inside of us, so they don't thicken and harden and calcify. And then we name the expulsions. His fat fingers. His humping hips. His wood. Afterward, we're spent.

Cat traces her fingers over the bruising up my neck.

"You paused," she says.

"I know," I say.

"What happened?" she says.

"I sat inside the words," I say. Sharp. Dark. Thrumming.

"You can't play chicken like that," she says.

And I know she's right. But I can't stop wondering what last breaths feel like. What my mother's last breaths felt like. "I can't play chicken like that," I say.

She slips a hand into my back pocket and leans into me. We let the air fill us.

"How'd we do?" I ask.

She hands me the wallet. "Eighty dollars plus the sixty he gave you."

I look through the wallet's insides. And of course he was a father. Him and his winter wife and his winter daughter, smiling for the camera in front of the swirly blue backdrop they use in the backroom at photo marts. And of course he was a Wild Man. We see their posters everywhere, in doughnut shops, in coin laundries, tacked to telephone poles. "Are You a Man or a Mouse? Resuscitate Your Inner Wild. Weekly Meetings & Wilderness Immersions: Reclaim Yourself. Reclaim What's Yours."

I shove the photo and the Wild Man I.D. back into the wallet, along with the credit cards we know better than to use. And then I sail the wallet into the air, and we watch it whirl its way down toward the water, which is where we sink all their wallets.

And then me and Cat are putting one foot in front of the other, and Cat is whistling the girls back to our nest of rocks.

We wrap ourselves in the flannel shirts we have stashed in the Yvette Jade Wendy Gail Gloria rubble. We settle in tight together and dig into the cinnamon buns and stare out at the city with its high-rises and smokestacks, its jackhammers and sirens, its hungry fathers and dead mothers, all these streets that don't belong to us. We play I spy. We let the sky hold us. We wait for night to fall, because night is when we go hunting. When we first got Coco, she said, "Day. Night. What's the difference?" We told her. During the day, we let them pick us. At night, we pick them.

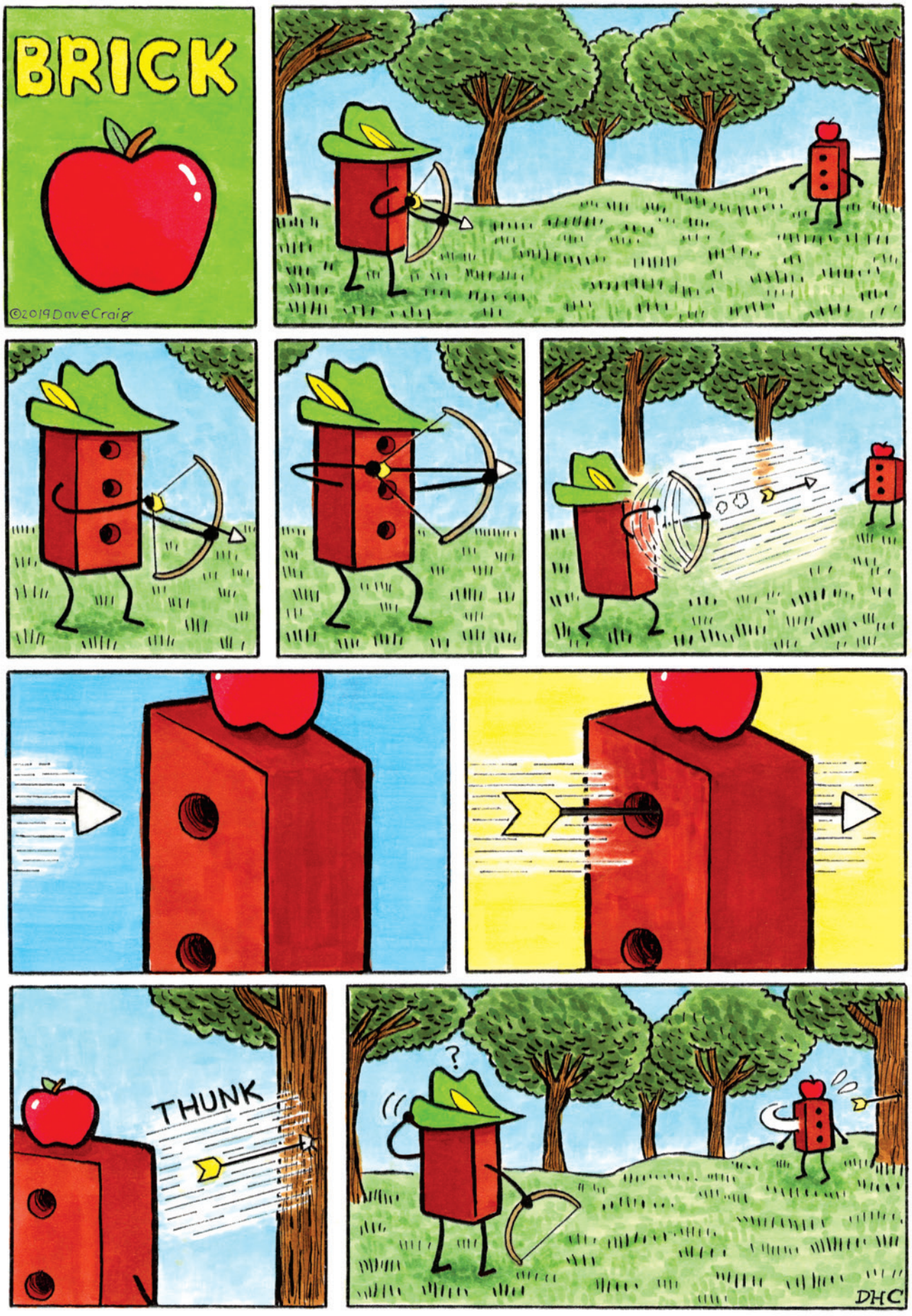
It wasn't always like this.

It used to be just me and Cat and Sierra and Liv.

And before that, it was just me and Cat and Sierra.

And before that, it was just me and Cat.

And before that, it was each of us alone, pretending to hold hands with the mothers we'd lost.


BRICK
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THUNK
?
DHC

FUDGING IT

Keep your chocolate-covered pickles, bacon milkshakes, and hot-dog-stuffed pizza crusts—fudge is the original extreme food.

BY BRIAN FRANCIS

I'm pretty sick of all these extreme foods that keep getting rammed down my throat. Chocolate-covered pickles? Bacon milkshakes? Hot-dog-stuffed pizza crust? What the heck is going on these days?

The simple fact of the matter is extreme foods are nothing new. Just open up any coil-bound community cookbook from the nineteen-seventies or eighties for evidence—that evidence being fudge.

Now look, I know fudge may not seem all that extreme, but consider the fudge facts. What other food calls for three cups of sugar, semi-sweet chocolate chips, *and* Marshmallow Fluff? Plainly put, fudge is the black hole of sweet. It's impossible to pack more sugar into a single square-inch cube. Believe me, I've tried. In fact, it's long been rumoured by historians that fudge was invented by a dentist in need of patients. I don't know if that's true, but it's a good reminder to brush your teeth after indulging in a piece. Or two.

Speaking of indulging, here are three recipes for fudge that take decidedly different, but equally tasty, turns into that sweet darkness. The recipes for Sour Cream Fudge, Creamy Fantasy Fudge, and Jingle Bell Fudge (which, in spite of its name, can be eaten any ol' time of year) come from my collection of trusted cookbooks from simpler times, when calories were laughed at and everyone owned harvest-gold-coloured appliances.

A word of caution: While fudge may seem easy to make, it can be a bit tricky in terms of temperature. For Sour Cream Fudge, the sugar mixture has to hit the soft-ball stage. So pay close attention. Lucky for me, I'm an expert at spotting soft balls.

Sour Cream Fudge
(From Runnymede United Church Women's *Centennial Plus One Cook Book*)
Ingredients
3 cups brown sugar
1 cup sour cream
¼ teaspoon salt
¼ cup butter
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 cup chopped nuts

1. Combine sugar and sour cream. Heat on stove until mixture reaches 240 degrees Fahrenheit or to a soft-ball stage.
2. Remove from heat. Add salt and butter.
3. Beat until mixture begins to grain. Stir in vanilla and nuts.
4. Pour into buttered eight-inch-square pan and allow to cool.

Creamy Fantasy Fudge
(From Royal Canadian Legion Ladies Auxiliary Branch 133's *Cooking Favorites of Cobourg*)
Ingredients
3 cups white sugar
¾ cup butter
¾ cup evaporated milk
1 300-gram package semi-sweet chocolate chips
1 7.5-ounce jar Marshmallow Fluff
1 cup chopped nuts
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1. Combine sugar, butter, and evaporated milk. Heat on stove until mixture reaches a rolling boil.
2. Boil for five minutes over medium heat, stirring constantly.
3. Remove from heat and stir in chocolate chips until melted. Add Marshmallow Fluff, nuts, and vanilla.
4. Beat until well blended. Pour into buttered eight-inch-square pan and allow to cool.

Jingle Bell Fudge
(From *The Best of Enbridge*)
Ingredients
1 300-gram package butterscotch chips
½ cup chunky-style peanut butter
⅔ cup sweetened condensed milk
½ cup chopped nuts

1. Combine butterscotch chips and peanut butter in the top of a double boiler. Place over simmering water until butterscotch chips melt.
2. Remove from water and stir until blended.
3. Add sweetened condensed milk and stir until blended.
4. Pour into buttered eight-inch-square pan. Press nuts into surface. Chill until firm.

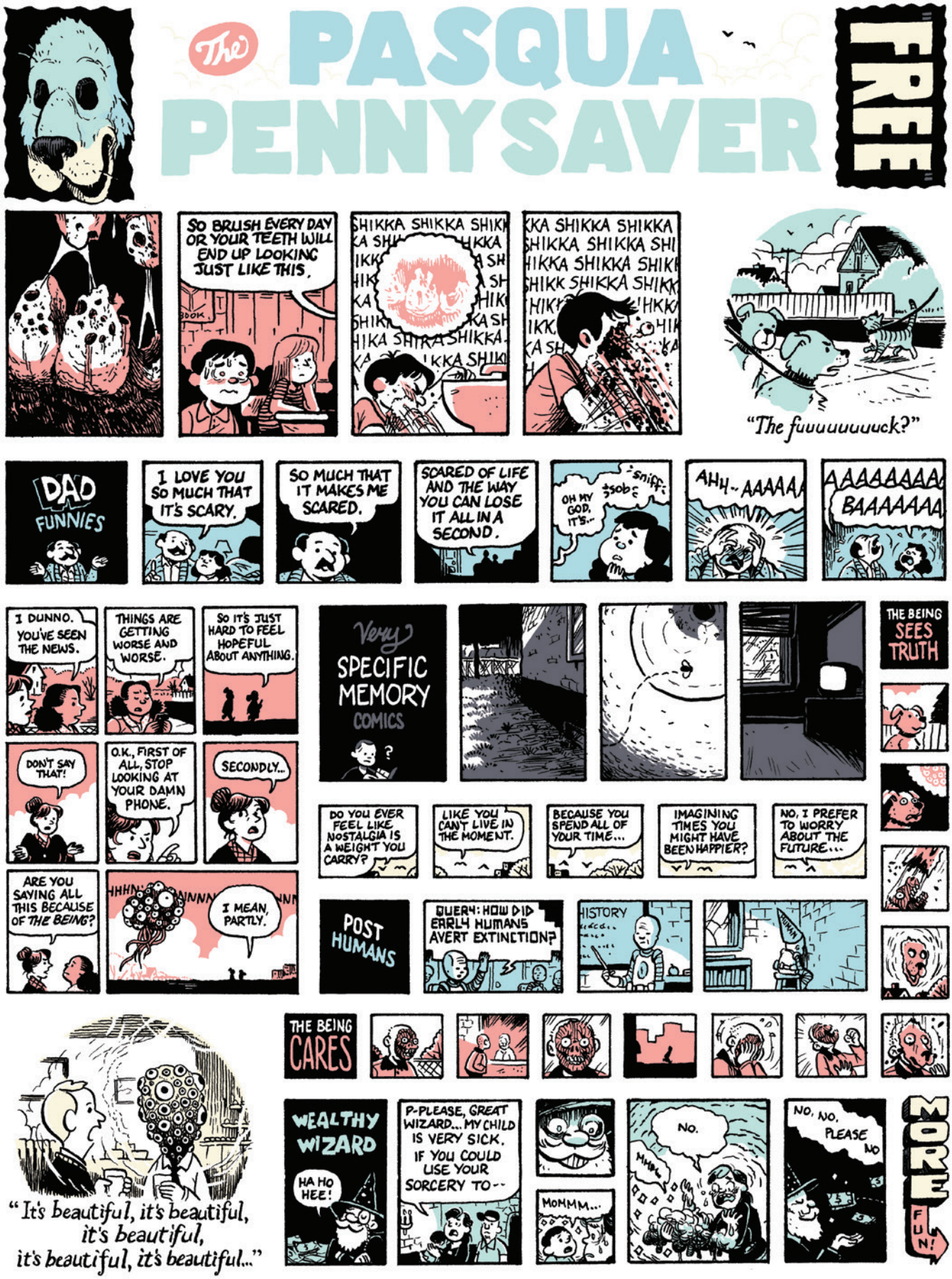
Three fudge recipes, three different ways to get a sugar high.

But I was curious: Which one of these fudges reigned supreme? So I packed up all seventeen pounds of it and hauled everything into work for a taste test. For once, I was a pretty popular guy in the office. Some people were fans of Sour Cream Fudge's tang, while others preferred the chocolate density of Creamy Fantasy Fudge. Sadly, Jingle Bell Fudge was judged out of tune and paled in comparison to its competitors.

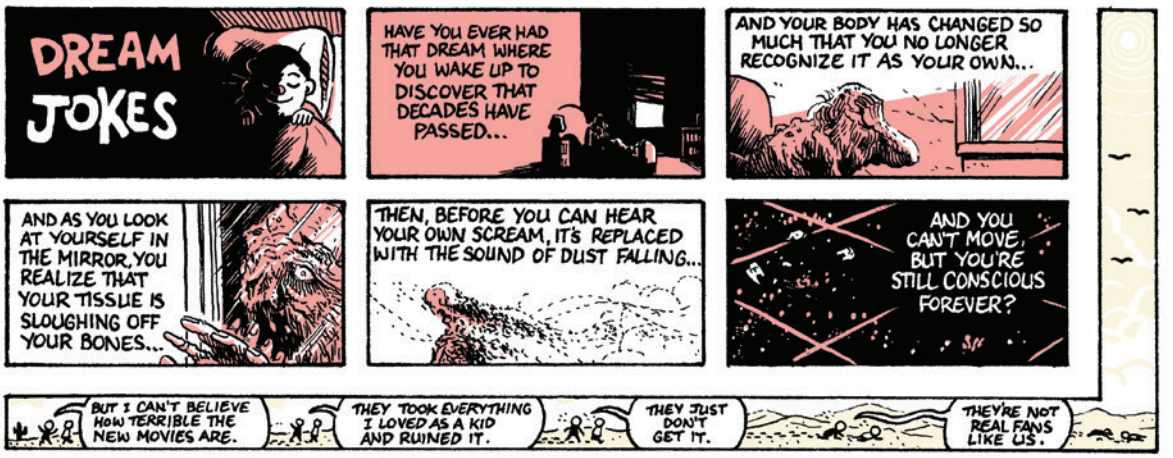
Ultimately, Creamy Fantasy walked away the winner. Tasters commented on its smooth and velvety texture. (Hi, Marshmallow Fluff!) Then again, it's hard to go wrong with a name like Creamy Fantasy Fudge. You could put "creamy fantasy" in front of Brussels sprouts and people would line up around the block.

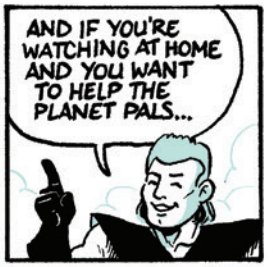
Whatever recipe you make, just remember to never miss an opportunity to go fudge yourself.

BRIAN FRANCIS


The PASQUA PENNY SAVER
FREE
SO BRUSH EVERY DAY OR YOUR TEETH WILL END UP LOOKING JUST LIKE THIS.
SHIKKA SHIKKA SHIK
KA SHIKKA SHIKKA
HIKKA SHIKKA SHIKK
"The fuuuuuuuuck?"
DAD FUNNIES
I LOVE YOU SO MUCH THAT IT'S SCARY.
SO MUCH THAT IT MAKES ME SCARED.
SCARED OF LIFE AND THE WAY YOU CAN LOSE IT ALL IN A SECOND.
OH MY GOD, IT'S..
sniff
sob
AHH~ AAAAA
AAAAAAAA BAAAAAAA
I DUNNO. YOU'VE SEEN THE NEWS.
THINGS ARE GETTING WORSE AND WORSE.
SO IT'S JUST HARD TO FEEL HOPEFUL ABOUT ANYTHING.
DON'T SAY THAT!
O.K., FIRST OF ALL, STOP LOOKING AT YOUR DAMN PHONE.
SECONDLY...
ARE YOU SAYING ALL THIS BECAUSE OF THE BEING?
I MEAN, PARTLY.
Very SPECIFIC MEMORY COMICS
DO YOU EVER FEEL LIKE NOSTALGIA IS A WEIGHT YOU CARRY?
LIKE YOU CAN'T LIVE IN THE MOMENT.
BECAUSE YOU SPEND ALL OF YOUR TIME...
IMAGINING TIMES YOU MIGHT HAVE BEEN HAPPIER?
NO, I PREFER TO WORRY ABOUT THE FUTURE...
THE BEING SEES TRUTH
POST HUMANS
QUERY: HOW DID EARLY HUMANS AVERT EXTINCTION?
HISTORY
THE BEING CARES
"It's beautiful, it's beautiful, it's beautiful, it's beautiful, it's beautiful..."
WEALTHY WIZARD
HA HO HEE!
P-PLEASE, GREAT WIZARD... MY CHILD IS VERY SICK. IF YOU COULD USE YOUR SORCERY TO--
MOMMM...
NO.
MMM
NO, NO, PLEASE NO
MORE FUN!

"Thanks, but I don't think I need the other two wishes now."





D.MCFADZEAN 2019

THE FICTION

WHAT THEY CAME FOR

BY VICTORIA HETHERINGTON

It was so cold that three layers of gloves couldn't protect Lorna's hands when she fed our neighbour's horses. The sunrise barely cracked the frozen black sky, but it was her birthday all the same. So we bundled up over our nice clothes and drove into town to the Tutankhamun exhibit.

"Storm's coming," warned the kid at the museum counter who took our coats, over-boots, and toques, slid them into a plastic garment bag, then disappeared into a back room.

While Lorna gazed at the gleaming, astonishing jewellery, the brittle cat mummies, and a dagger shaped from a meteorite, I read the inscriptions. Turns out King Tut was just a boy, the product of an incestuous relationship between his mother and her weird, embarrassing brother, and who was murdered halfway through building a lavish city out in the desert that was abandoned after his death. Tut couldn't walk without a cane, suffered from malaria, then died when he was nineteen, at most, likely a combination of the malaria and an infected broken leg. Lorna couldn't get enough of the peaceful expression on his gold death mask. To pry her from the exhibit, I bought her a miniature replica at the museum store near the exit.

"All this put me in the mood for sushi," Lorna said, mystifyingly.

I kissed her on the lips—brief, perfunctory—and we went to retrieve our coats.

As the sky clouded over, and the mounting wind screamed into Right Now Sushi behind each patron who entered, Lorna ordered hot, salty soup, slippery raw fish, and strange, sweet rice. I thought about Tut: the poor kid, sick all his life. His advisers ran the kingdom—with one eventually succeeding him—and when he died, they did the bare minimum, throwing together a substandard tomb filled quickly with the junk of another dead pharaoh. So paltry was his legacy, nobody bothered to find him. Through myriad incidents of near discovery and centuries-long biological and meteorological luck, archaeologists found his incredibly well preserved resting place and went nuts.

We're dumb about our ancestors, I know that much.

From behind Tut's golden death mask, fashioned as it likely was for another, female pharaoh, then swiftly fitted for him, he speaks for the rest of us—the unexceptional. For those of us born ugly, for those of us who never became brilliant medical specialists, for those of us who keep out of the news. Driving home, as Lorna slept quietly in the passenger seat beside me, I figured that one day trace elements of my own life—the metal in my molars, the gasoline in my clothes, the Red Bull and Doritos and other evidence of the combination 7-Eleven–gas station at which I diligently earn my keep—might be uncovered by distant descendants, and instill a sense of reverent, uncomprehending awe.

I could be exceptional at last.

I had no way of knowing that exceptionality would find me much sooner than that.

The next morning, we woke to grey slivers of light as snow fell steadily and ominously outside our window. The storm had begun. We'd wait it out, passing our evening with grim stoicism, candles and masses of blankets on hand in the likely event of a blackout, feeling the house's bones buck and strain under the alarming weight of the storm. This morning's snow fell thick but was as loose and powdery as the fake snow in old movies, which was rumoured (Lorna disclosed, over a foul can of breakfast tuna) to have been real asbestos, packing the lungs of the rich and beautiful Hollywood stars with tumours.

"Asbestos! Imagine, Mel. Imagine hunkering down to make a snow angel in that poisonous stuff, lighting up a cigarette between takes," she said, as she lumped another spoonful of mayonnaise into her tuna. For a guilty moment I longed for her smoking days again, starving herself fawnlike with Jell-O, celery sticks, and Virginia Slims. How young we were. It's winter seven months of the year here, but I remember those days as constant summertime, long and gold.

As the car warmed, I scraped frost and long knots of ice from the windshield. How we used to long for each other, Lorna and I. When we were together, I couldn't keep my hands off her. When we were apart, I couldn't bear it, shaving five minutes here, ten minutes there from the workday wherever I could, then speeding home. Sometimes, when I'd arrive at five fifteen instead of five forty-five, dazed in the kitchen and frantic from a day of rushing, of rushing for her. We'd lock eyes and I'd almost smell how slow her day had been—the fading scent of toast, the drone of the television. She'd wonder without speaking what all the hurry was. And I'd feel silly, but the nice sort, the sort of silly an eminently lovable man can afford to feel. All of it would add to the day-long burn she so easily soothed.

"I must have her," I'd write, starting poems that went nowhere. "I'm burning, I'm burning up."

I wrenched open the car door, knocking loose the ice that had settled around the handle. Of course, we still love each other, we're attached to each other. But our orbits differ now; we've slipped further and further from heat, slowing down in the dark.

I rarely leave my little circlet of comfort, driving ten clicks to the 7-Eleven, then back again. The storm's torments unscroll around me relentlessly: cars near-colliding, swerving wildly after

ILLUSTRATION BY MATTHEW DALEY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coaxing gas from the frozen pumps; the homeless, those brightly coloured sleeping bags bundled and ominously still in snowy doorways, and nubs of snowmen. All sharp reminders from the beginning of the storm, before the frightened hush settled into the afternoon. Dark falls before we know it. The boys who work for me barely speak, anxiously rearranging the bags of corn nuts, sneaking hits from their vape pens when they think I won't notice. I send two of them, a pair of young brothers, home early. They live with their parents—their mother is overbearing, tends to call the store even on the best of days. The youngest has only just learned to drive.

Dawes remains with me, insists he'll stay through the night shift. I like Dawes. He wears his hair in a long, thinning ponytail, and he's extremely pale. In a strange way, he's handsome. He moves like a bird.

The hush settles in, freezes us in place. We can barely see out the windows, save for the dark, lumbering shapes of trucks gliding up now and then, like whales. Dawes ducks outside periodically to check on the pumps. He leaves his coat inside, and I know not to comment on this. The lumpy parka sits beside me, covered in strands of his long hair.

All at once, a very different hush falls over the store, a silence like being under a thick, staticky blanket. Bright blue light blazes in through the windows, scrambling the letters on the lottery tickets under my palms. The hairs on Dawes' jacket seem to twitch.

As in those dreams I dread, I cannot move or speak. My palms are stuck to the counter, my feet are cemented to the ground. The light recedes a little, shimmering, and I see that someone new has materialized in the store, right in front of me: a woman. Her face takes a moment to cohere, its features running together and then settling in place like dew drops on a shaken leaf. When I recognize her, I start to tremble. It's Stacey Smith.

Stacey was the object of a humiliating obsession all through tenth grade. How I loved her long straight hair, her serious face. And there she is, standing by the stacks of kitty litter. She's wearing jean shorts. She's deeply tanned. Her toes wriggle slightly in thinly laced sandals. Her toenails are painted red.

"Mel," she calls to me. "I don't want you to be alarmed, O.K.? I'm just here to ask you some questions."

I open my mouth and try to speak. All I can manage is a groan.

"Mel!" she says, and a warm rush of courage floods through me. Those deep pangs of longing for Stacey, and Lorna after her—those golden summer moments—where did they go? When I remember them now, where do I find them? Do they melt, rearrange themselves, and materialize if I try hard enough? Are they here?

"Have you ever been in love?" Stacey asks.

"Yeah," I say. "Yeah, I've been in love."

She walks by the kitty litter and then turns on her heel, disappearing down the candy aisle. Her voice reaches me, and one of her eyes meets mine, peering through the gap between stacks of Kit Kats.

"Have you always consummated that love, Mel? Every time you've been in love?"

"No," I say.

Suddenly she's right at the counter, placing both of her palms on the glass that covers rows of lottery tickets. She slides around to the other side of the counter. Now she's inches from me. She wears a mood ring on every finger. One has a tiny photo of Kurt Cobain framed in it, another, Layne Staley, from Alice in Chains.

The night Layne died, I rode in the back of Stacey's boyfriend's car, watching her toss her hair, aching horribly. The three of us sang along to a Chains tape. Her boyfriend cried. When he wasn't looking, she leaned through the gap between the driver's and passenger seat, and kissed me right on the mouth.

"May I?" she asks, pointing at Dawes's stool.

I think she's going to bump his coat to the ground, but instead she picks it up, folds it in half, and brings it to her chest.

"You may," I say, my heart going fast. Is she eighteen? Am I?

"So, those times you were in love, why didn't you consummate it?" she asks, leaning against my chest, the crown of her head resting right beneath my chin. Her thin, centre-parted hair smells lovely and sour, like mealy magnolia petals gone brown in the sun.

"I don't know," I say, suddenly aware that I'm too hot for the first time in months. "Uh, sometimes it was because they didn't feel the same. Sometimes, they didn't even know I was alive."

"Do you love your wife?"

"Yes," I say—quickly, easily, and honestly.

Right beneath my chin, Stacey's hair shifts on its own, each strand almost watchful. I want to press my lips to it, close my eyes. To slow down my heart, to stop breathing.

"Is your wife the only lover you've ever had?"

"No."

"Have you wanted others?"

"Yes."

"How do you stay faithful?"

"I don't know. It's work," I say. "You know, desire is all action, it's all pursuing. But love is active, too."

"When you love a woman and can't get hard," she continues, her voice humming against my chest, "what do you do?"

"I'll tell you when it happens," I say, crossing my legs in vain against the hot, growing mass of myself.

"Do you want to stroke my hair?"

"Yes."

"Do you want to fuck me?"

"No."

"You don't?"

"I don't."

She winds the Layne Staley ring around with her thumb.

"Why is love worthwhile to you when it can be painful?" she asks.

I think about that.

"It's never the same twice," I say.

"How do you feel?" she asks.

"I don't know." I swallow hard. "Terrified."

"I'm not really Stacey." Her voice comes to me, gentler than before, a little muffled. "I'm not supposed to tell you that. I could get in trouble."

"Trouble—with whom?"

"We thought it would help, to show up as people you've cared for. But—I don't want you to be scared. It's just that there's some things we don't understand yet."

"I don't understand anything," I say, wondering how true that is.

"Thank you, Mel," she says.

And with that, she vanishes. The clammy weight of her, its strange and musty fragrance, is simply gone. My arms close in on nothing, then on my own chest. The store darkens. Lit only by our fluorescents, it seems to shrink. I stare down at the lottery tickets and find I can decipher them again: 16, 18, 26, 31, 39, 44 . . .

I slip from my stool and crouch, rubbing my eyes. The lip of the counter cups the top of my head. The snowy wind resumes, howling so loud that, once thirty seconds have passed, it's like it never stopped. A burst of cold, and the wind screams through the doors as they chime and slide open: Dawes is back.

"I finished the rest of the za. Sorry, man," he says. The pizza box sits, greased stained and empty, right by my knee. I ease myself back up onto my stool.

"Did you see the, the thing? Anything?" I ask.

"One of the long-haul guys there, he needed directions. We got to talking," Dawes says, tilting his head out toward the pumps. "Says he saw someone frozen outside a motel back in Windsor. Same day, one of his buddies just falls asleep at the wheel, veers right off the road into the woods. Hell of a thing."

"Hope the kids got home all right," I say.

He smirks.

"You think if they hadn't, their mom wouldn't've given us a call by now?" he asks. "Because she would've."

"Jackie, the older one," I say. "He's turning eighteen next week."

"Hell of a thing," Dawes says. "Eighteen, still can't drive."

"Yeah."

We listen to the storm awhile.

"Dawes," I say, wanting to ask him about Stacey, but the words refuse to come.

He looks over at me.

"Mel," he says, and laughs.

Lorna had hidden her vibrator so well from Mel even she couldn't find it. So she switched on the TV and got out the ice cream. If it ain't one thing, it's another.

"Do you know why they're laughing?" says Dr. Ted, gesturing to the TV audience.

"No," goes the wife on the show.

"Because this is a ridiculous situation. Because they don't want to stand up and say, on live national television, what the f— is this?"

The audience applauds heartily.

"Well f— this," goes the husband, yanking the mic from his sweat-stained shirt, fiddling with the wire, storming off the stage.

"Ronnie, please," moans the husband's mistress, seated opposite the woman and his wife, reaching for his arm as he passes.

"If you're looking for the exit, it's that way," says Dr. Ted, pointing stage left. The audience laughs as the man halts in his tracks and rubs his bald head. "They're the ones full of s—," the husband yells, unmiced, his voice swallowed up by the bright colourful space between him, the cameraman, the television screen, and Lorna.

"Well, since you're talking for them, I'll speak for them," says Dr. Ted, crossing his arms and leaning back toward the audience. "Are y'all O.K. with that?"

"Yes!" roars the audience.

"They're laughing," Dr. Ted says, staring directly into the camera from beneath his heavy eyelids, drumming his shiny, expensively manicured nails against his suit. "They're laughing because of your total and complete lack of insight and your narcissistic commitment to your own bulls— is more than they can take. And that should be a huge wake-up call to you! You should thank them!"

The audience roars again.

"They're not making light of this because it's funny," says Dr. Ted, climbing slowly up the steep flight of stairs separating one half of the squirming, cheering audience from the other. "It ain't funny at all."

One audience member, a man, perhaps somebody's husband, stretches a long arm into the aisle for a high-five. Dr. Ted ignores him, keeps climbing.

"Imagine Mel at one of these things," Lorna says to Peaches, who hasn't moved in hours except to roll over onto her back and kick, very gently, each one of her paws.

"And you." Dr. Ted pivots on his heel, points back down at the stage and directly at the wife, who's wiping her red, swollen face, a wobbly, tentative smile beginning at the corners of her mouth, which freezes under his gaze. "They can't believe why you keep sitting around, waiting for him to decide what happens in your life!"

The audience screams its approval. The camera cuts to a young woman with glittering eyes, slamming her hands together, her breasts bouncing. Lorna winces and turns down the volume.

"And you . . ."

All of a sudden, Dr. Ted's voice fills the room, which has flooded with sunlight.

Lorna jumps and the remote drops on the rug. Trees erupt from nowhere and fill both windows, twinkling with leaves like gems.

Summer unfolds into Lorna's lap. Dr. Ted is in the room.

"Don't think I've forgotten about you," Dr. Ted says, his voice not a noise filtered through wires but a real voice. He couldn't be more than six feet away from Lorna. He's standing in the doorway between the living room and the kitchen, leaning against the door jamb. He's wearing the same suit, blue and expensive-looking, and his signature sneakers are bright and clean like they've never touched the ground.

"May I?" Dr. Ted says, his big knotty hand outstretched toward the couch.

"Yes," Lorna squeaks.

"Thank you." Dr. Ted sits with a sigh, then looks over at her and smiles.

"Now, I know you almost called in to my show in 1998," he says. "Don't you try to deny it, darlin'. You sat with that big ol' ceramic phone pressed to your ear for damn near an hour. And what did you want to say?"

"I wanted to say that I love you," Lorna whispers.

"And I love you too. I do. Don't you know I do?"

Lorna sighs.

"Now I see it," she says.

"Do you believe, Lorna, that if you love someone long enough, they'll feel it and love you back?"

"I do," Lorna says.

Dr. Ted leans over and slides his arm around her back. She leans against his chest. He strokes her hair.

"How did the love happen, Lorna?"

"I . . . I guess I watched your show every day. First by accident, like by flipping channels. I found you, and then I'd wait every day for twelve-thirty to come, so I could see you. The old opening song—you know: 'Da, da, doo, Dr. Ted, yeah, he'll fix it'?—it was like heartbreak when the song changed, but now the new song, it gets my heart going just as much. I've been watching you since before you got your new hair, if you don't mind me saying so, and gosh I was thin—so thin and pretty then. And lonely. He, my husband, he was travelling then, selling sales solutions to businesses, which, honestly—"

"So you were lonely," he interrupts.

"Yes, I was, and I did as much as I could. I couldn't tape your shows because I couldn't think of a label for the videotape that wouldn't interest him, my husband, when he came home. He'd watch anything. He hates fish, and he's seen *Free Willy,* like, twenty times, you know? So on my grocery pad list I'd write love letters to you, take them with me in the car, then scrunch them up real small and throw them out at the grocery store. I had to be careful. But one time I wrote one and wrapped it round a penny instead, threw it in a fountain. I watched the pigeons at the edge of the fountain, bopping their heads like they heard your song, too. I guess I thought, 'This kind of love ain't no harm.'"

"What kind of love does harm, Lorna?"

He smells and feels familiar, but distant, like the aftershave of a teacher from long ago, or the shadows in the back of a black-and-white family photo that never look the same twice.

She thinks about it.

"The kind on your show. People get pregnant, people lie."

"What does the right kind of love feel like to you, Lorna?"

She imagines her husband's shirts and socks drying out on the line, filling in and out with breaths of wind.

"Not this," she says.

Dr. Ted seems hurt. He pauses.

"When did you first feel love, Lorna?"

"This guy, Buck Thurgood, he was a mechanic knew my dad. He took me for drives in the nicer cars he'd fix. God, his hands. But I don't like to remember. Because I was a child," she says. "And he wasn't."

Dr. Ted's hand, stroking her hair, grows still.

"How does a mother's love differ from erotic love, Lorna?" he asks.

"You don't want to fuck your kids," she says, feeling the nubs of his spine through his shirt, vest, and suit jacket. "We didn't have kids," she adds.

"How long does a broken heart take to heal?"

"I'll tell you once it has," she says.

"Has love ever made you do something brave or strange? Made you feel strong or weak?"

A low, warning growl from the edge of the room. Peaches is awake.

"Why are you here?" Lorna asks suddenly, caught between annoyance and fear. "Why do you want to know these things?"

The light in the room flashes a searing pink, then white-green, before resettling into that deep summer yellow. Lorna hears Peaches bark, a frightened yap, but can't see her. She pulls away from Dr. Ted, looking for her dog.

"Why, darlin'—"

"You're the one who tells people about love, don't you see? Every single

IT WILL RAIN LIKE RODS ON THE HILLSIDE IN SWEDEN

It will rain married men in Spain,
and intermittent toads' beards Saturday
morning in Portugal. An intense
Pacific frontal system of bamboo
grass and sand will fall over Tokyo.
There's a chance of young cobblers
developing over Berlin and running
riot across the country all the way
to Athens, where they will fall
Sunday afternoon alongside chair legs.
In Nantes, it's currently raining
nails, in Grenoble its *grenouilles,*
ropes in Reims, and Niort is
getting nailed. Cows are pissing
lightly over Paris. In the north
of Taipei, plums will plummet Monday morning.
There's a strong chance of fire
and sulfur over Reykjavík, which
will reek of burnt umbrellas for weeks.
In Bangkok, it will rain
children's eyes and ears shut for a month,
and then they will open and be quizzed
like little gods on all the winds in the sky.

—Kevin Spenst

day for thirty years, seems like. So why come here just to ask me?"

"Like I said, Lorna," Dr. Ted goes, in a defeated voice, like he's ashamed of himself. "I'm here because I love you."

"Prove it," Lorna says, leaning heavily against his chest and breathing in deeply. He smells both living and electric, like those grey-green moments right before a thunderstorm.

Peaches howls.

"I can't," he says, his voice going strange, like the static, the snow that would slide through the screen of her first television set. "And Lorna, you can't."

She knows full well that he can't. But she can, can't she? And how is that any different? So she kisses his lips. They're cold, colder than anything should be in this hot, honey-yellow room, as the elm trees positively barf their masses of seeds at and against the windows.

"You want me," she instructs.

"I want you," he says.

She kisses him again and opens her mouth, kisses harder, runs her fingers through his odd clumps of hair, which cluster and cling like dirtied fur and shake like frightened mice. His tongue presses up against hers, and she recoils: it's dry.

As if sensing something is wrong, he stiffens, and the room darkens. But she forgives him that strangeness too, seeking his free hand where it lies limp on the sofa and lacing his fingers through hers.

"Love's what I say it is, because it's something I know and you don't," she thinks, without needing to say it out loud. She knows he can hear her.

He freezes, his mouth hanging open in a kind of horror. He flickers and disappears.

All at once, the phone rings, Peaches barks, and the living room goes dark, lit only by the TV. It's a kind of flickering light that flits along the walls, refracted and blue, like it might look seen through gallons of water.

Lorna fumbles for her phone, letting out a strange, dry sob. She wipes her hands on her neck, then slides her fingers across the screen, accepting the call.

"Baby?" Lorna says.

Mel's voice comes to her.

"Tell me what you're wearing."

"What?"

She looks down at Peaches. Peaches looks up at her.

"Hardly anything," Lorna says.

"Oh, that's good," he goes. "That's really good. Do you remember our first time? We put your seat all the way back. It was so cold, so dark, so late. I didn't think we'd ever get home."

"Is Dawes there?"

A sigh reaches her, hissing like sand and ashes through an electric fan—distorted, no doubt, by the storm, by the speaker.

"He's gone," Mel says.

"How is it? The roads? Is it safe over there?"

"It's cold and it's quiet. All I hear is the wind."

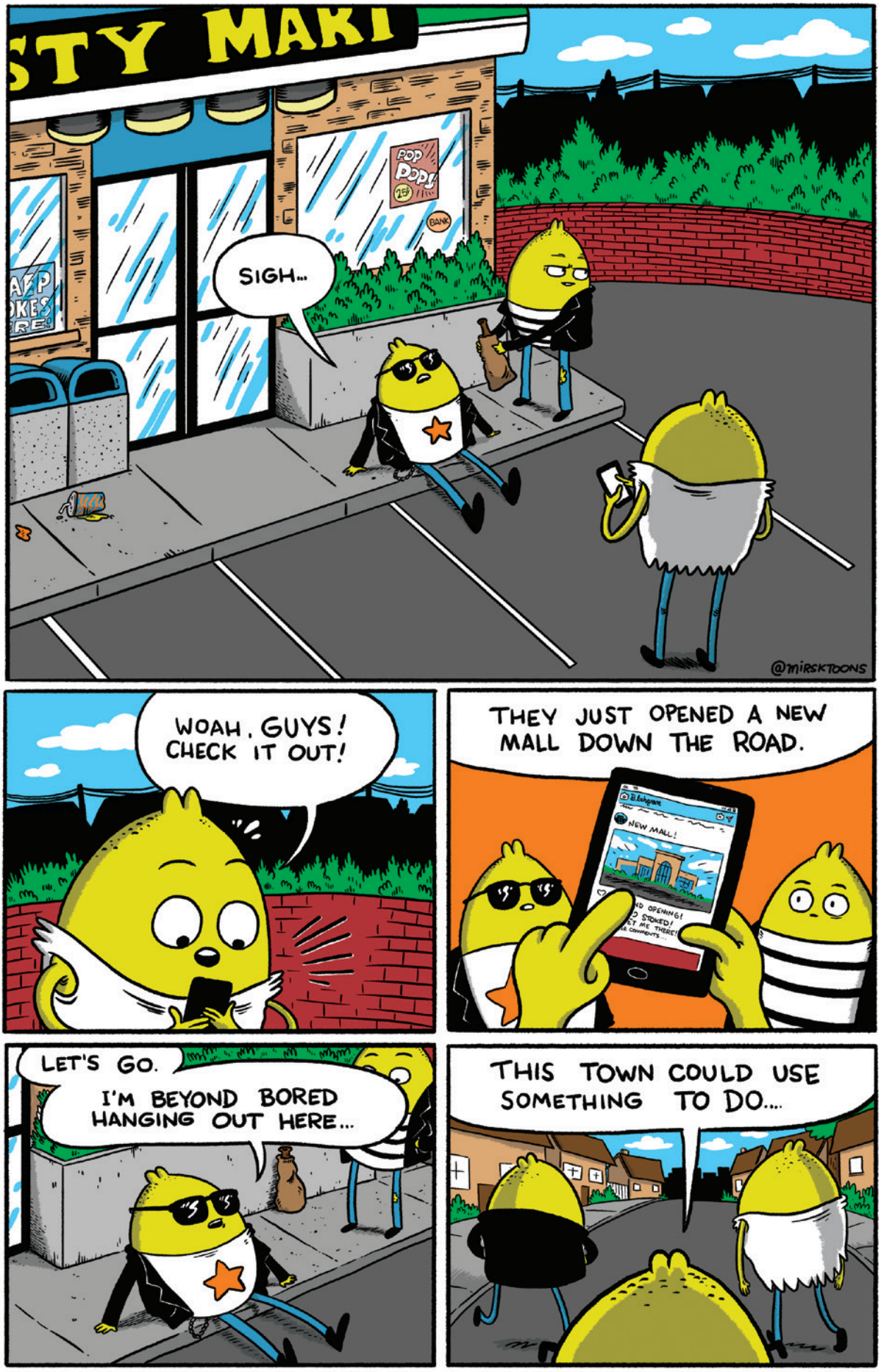
Lorna leans back on the couch.

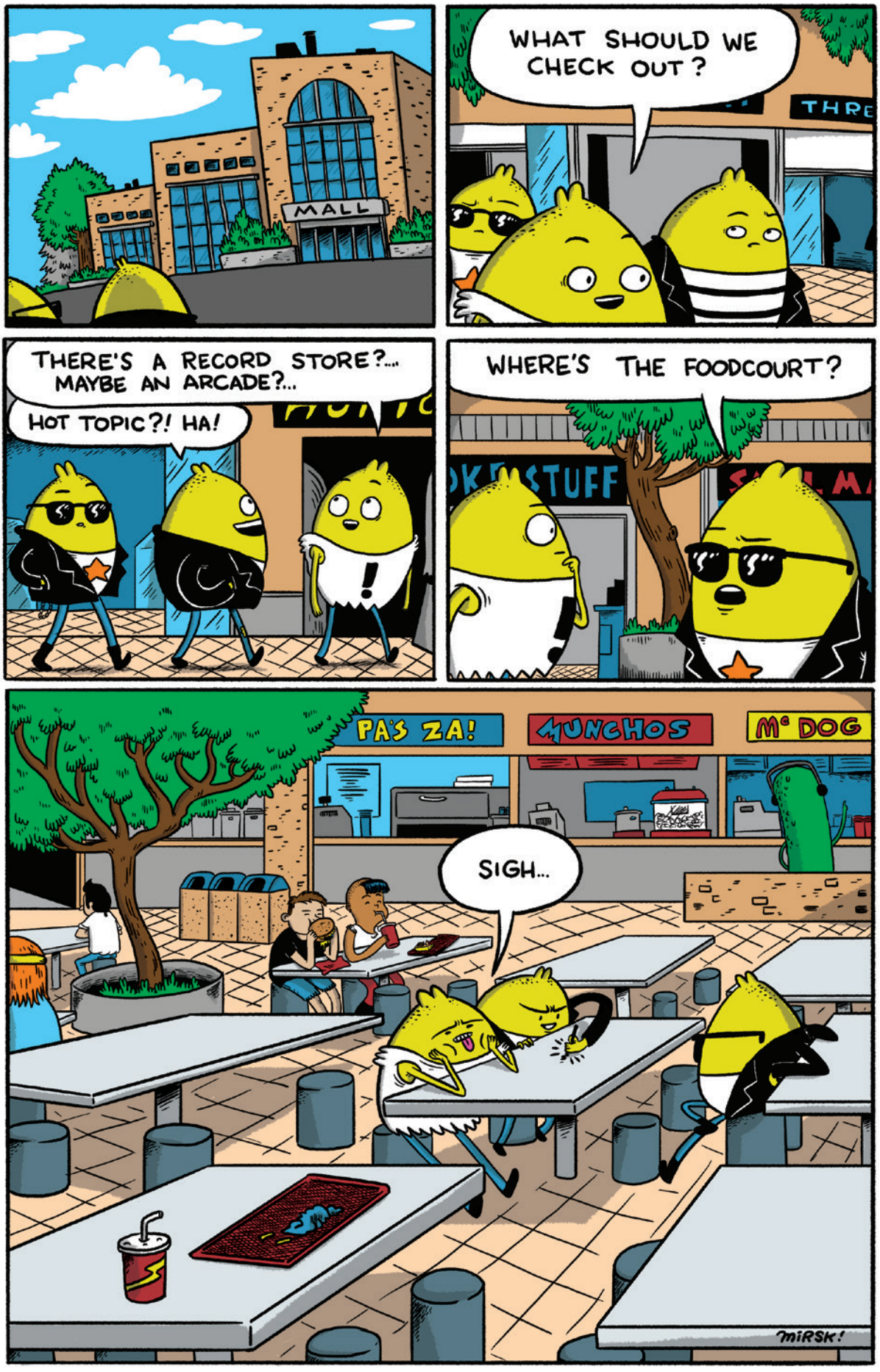
"I remember. Of course I remember," she says. "You popped two of my buttons off when you were unbuttoning my shirt. Pop. You saw my tits and said, 'Wow.'"

"I— Ha. That's all I had to say? No, I said, I remember saying, 'Please.' I kept asking for permission." There's a pause, a loud rustling. Perhaps he's switching his phone from one ear to another? Then: "Please, just a little further. A little more. I couldn't believe my luck."

Really, he couldn't have gotten there—on her, inside of her—fast enough, as he parted her shirt, as he caressed her thighs, as he discovered the wet of her. So gentle and reverent, his thin fingers so cold. She'd ached so deeply that she feared she'd combust somehow—throbbing once, enormously, and winking out of existence forever.

"You wait, you wait right there," he says. "I'm coming home to you."


STY MAKI
POP POP!
BANK
SIGH...
@MIRSKTOONS
WOAH, GUYS! CHECK IT OUT!
THEY JUST OPENED A NEW MALL DOWN THE ROAD.
NEW MALL!
LET'S GO.
I'M BEYOND BORED HANGING OUT HERE...
THIS TOWN COULD USE SOMETHING TO DO....


MALL
WHAT SHOULD WE CHECK OUT?
THERE'S A RECORD STORE?... MAYBE AN ARCADE?...
HOT TOPIC?! HA!
WHERE'S THE FOODCOURT?
PA'S ZA!
MUNCHOS
Mc DOG
SIGH...
MiRSK!

THE FICTION

CLEANING UP

BY SARAH GILBERT

When Liette stepped out of work the heat hit her like a soggy sponge. Thick, humid, unbearable—just like it had been that day in 2007. Along Saint Laurent, people's faces glistened.

Customers had complained all day as Liette scanned their items at the cash, but the air conditioning refrigerated the store so completely that the heat was a rumour she couldn't quite believe. Now, sweat soaked her eyebrows and melted her steps, her sore feet thirsty for the cool hose she'd put on as soon as she got home.

As she walked up the block she could make out something in front of the six-plex. Now what? Probably it was paperbacks and T-shirts strewn on a blanket for another sidewalk sale. Or else Anton, serenading passersby on the harmonica, with his artwork spread out at his feet.

A young woman on her hands and knees was chalking the sidewalk like a kid making a hopscotch. She wore short shorts, and her breasts bubbled out of a bikini top.

"Hey, Liette. You like her?" Anton came out with two tall beer cans and gave one to the girl.

She looked young, like all of grey-haired Anton's girlfriends, but what did Liette care. It took her a minute to realize he was referring to their drawing.

It billowed with waves of hair and arms. A woman held something different in each hand: a glass of coffee, a bagel, a guitar, a laptop, a telephone, a beer.

"She's Our Lady of the Coffee," said the girl.

"Our Lady of Mile End!" corrected Anton. "Give her your artists hanging by a thread, your trendy young professionals, your gamers, and your walking tours. You've got to admit, she adds some magic to the pavement."

"She adds something, I suppose."

Liette stepped around the squatting girl and through the front gate to the six-plex that she and Anton shared with their neighbours. The ugly white-brick building dated from the seventies, when it took the place of two old triplexes that had burned down. That was long before anyone had thought of heritage regulations or cared about the way this part of Montreal looked; back before the neighbourhood had its own name. As she turned back to latch the gate she caught Anton rolling his eyes.

She went inside to get away from the artists and their wavy woman. This meant walking right past her coiled hose and the oasis of cool mist she'd pictured for the entire walk home.

It had started that summer, a dozen years ago. Cleaning was the only thing that helped. She'd always kept the front yard tidy, if you could call the uneven stretch of asphalt a yard. But that July was when it had become a ritual. She liked to spray her flowerpots, rinse the paved yard, mist her feet. Watering the pavement calmed her.

When fall came, she raked after work and before bed. Making piles and bagging them to keep the cracked surface clutter free quieted her pounding heart. Sometimes, pulse racing, she got up and went out at midnight to pick up the drifting yellow leaves from the Norway maple next door. One by one, she collected every leaf. It helped her almost sleep. The yard spanned the width of the six-plex. On a block where every centimetre was in demand, this space was hers. In the winter, she shovelled it clear and then turned to the broom to brush away the quiet white.

Now she opened every window. No breeze. She doused her face at the sink, peeled off her dress, and lay down on the floor underneath the ceiling fan. Not cool enough. She got up and stood in front of the open fridge, wishing again it was possible to store up some of that icy a.c. from the store and feel it now. It didn't work that way. There was no holding onto anything for later.

Liette looked out the front window. She had to clean the yard before the police showed up. They usually came before the anniversary, and they hadn't been around yet. She had to spray the hose, but Anton and friend were still out there with the chalk, talking and laughing.

She lay back down on the floor, in her underwear, the fan spinning overhead, the rug rough against her back.

The doorbell yanked her awake. Half naked, she tugged on her dress.

A man outside her door pushed aviator sunglasses up onto his bald dome. The rims glinted like the chain inside his white shirt, which was open at the collar.

"Sorry to disturb," he held out a tanned hand, the Ferrari horse prancing on a gold ring. "I'm just here to say hello. We're the new owners. We bought the building from the Carusos."

"We? Who's that?"

He patted the pocket of his chinos.

"I don't have a card with me right now. We'll be doing some renos, but I'm sure we can come up with a good solution for everyone."

Liette looked over his shoulder and saw a large S.U.V. double parked in front. She'd known that Mr. Caruso's kids were selling. Liette, Anton, and their neighbours, all paying seven hundred dollars a month each, would have to go. New owners paid tenants like them to relocate during renovations, then quadrupled the rent.

"We realize a number of you have been here for quite a while."

"Twenty-seven years."

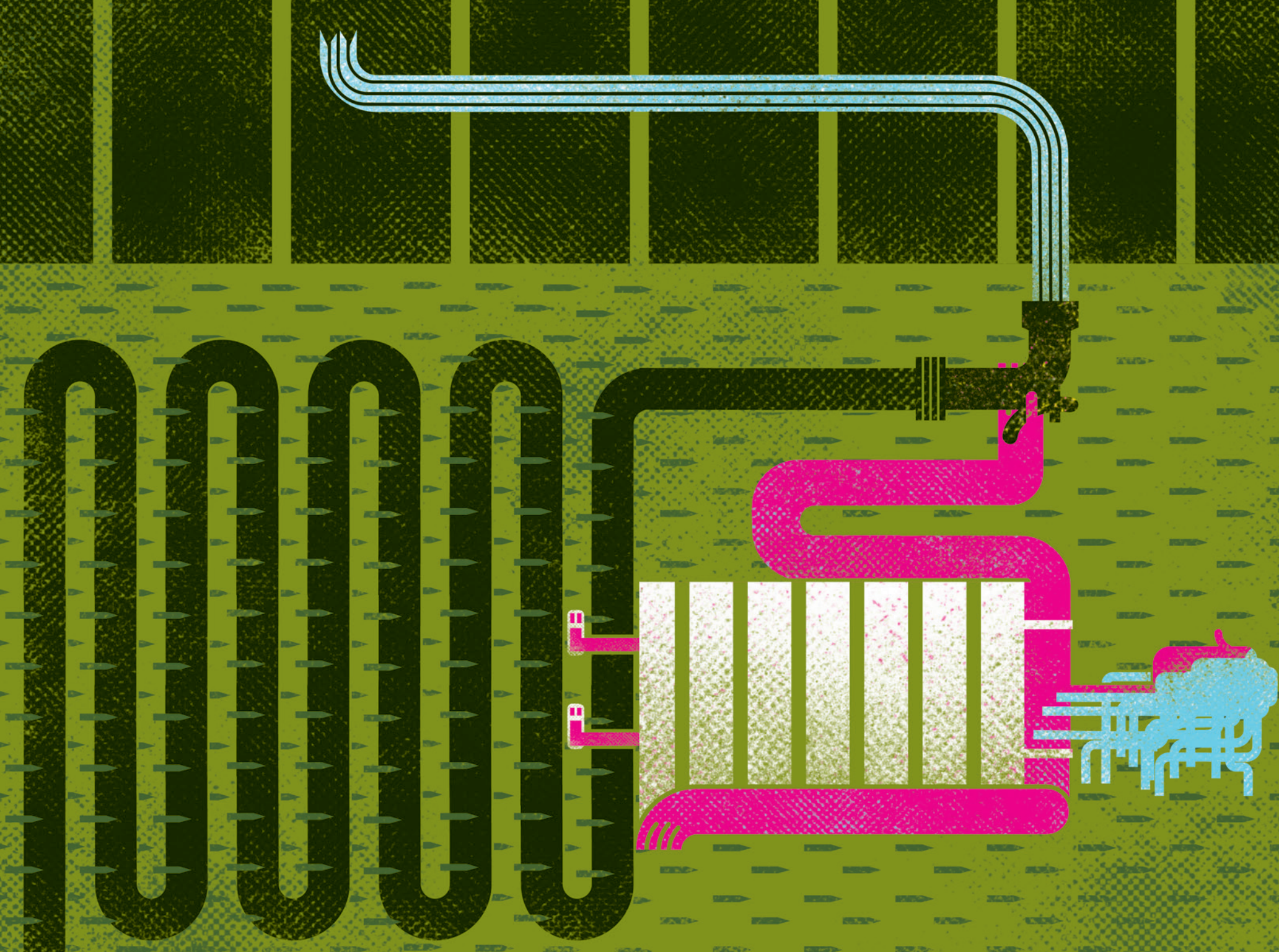
"For you."

He held out a white box.

When her arms stayed at her sides, he set the box down on the steps.

Liette watched the man get in his big car and drive away. No sign of Anton now, of course, when she wanted to know if this new owner had already

ILLUSTRATION BY MATTHEW DALEY



talked to him. She slipped on her flip-flops and stepped outside, her foot catching the edge of the white box.

The cream filling was dense and sweet, the shell light and crisp. On the front steps, as the sun was setting, Liette ate three cannoli. She wondered if Anton got a box, too. He'd been there about ten years now, arriving a couple summers after it happened.

A minute of misting made the terracotta of the geranium pots give off the smell of wet clay. Robin had shaped her a pottery bowl, in art class, for Mother's Day, in Grade 4. The teachers always got them to do something. He'd been excited, hiding the surprise in his room, putting up a sign—KEEP OUT DON'T LOOK IT'S SECRET—and making a big fuss over presenting it, wadded in ten layers of plastic bags, watching her as she opened it, to gauge her amazement. Later, he hid other stuff in his room. There'd been no more signs—none needed. The message had been clear: Keep out. Stay away. That's when she should have gone in. She should have pressed him to talk to her about what he was doing, where he went when he stayed out all night and with whom. Mother's Day always gave her twinges, the seasonal displays of flowers, chocolates, and cards reading "TO MOM" in loopy cursive or fake kid writing made her tight heart thump too fast.

Her fingers gripped the lever on the hose nozzle. Today was just as bad, kind of like Mother's Day in July. Where were her annual visitors, anyway? They always showed up to say they hadn't forgotten. If she moved, like Big Car Cannoli had in mind, how would they find her?

Spray caught her feet and felt so good she turned it to mist her torso, legs, face.

Dripping, she loosened her grip so the water turned off as she stooped to picked up cigarette butts. An endless supply blew over from across the street where smokers sat on benches outside the *terrasse* of the café.

"Don't you think it's wasteful, Liette?" Anton had asked more than once. "They say Montreal loses half of its drinkable water through leaks in the infrastructure, and you're spraying the other half on concrete."

She turned it on full and blasted the asphalt.

The water pooled and a trickle ran under the fence, into the hair of the giant woman they'd drawn all along the sidewalk. Bright water coloured with chalk dust ran off the curb into the street. Tired from the heat, the day, that guy at the door, she watched the colours float.

"Liette! Stop!" Anton slammed through the gate and grabbed at the hose. She turned away from him and water sprayed everywhere.

"What the hell? We spent hours on that. Turn it off, you fucking crazy anal bitch!"

Anton grabbed the hose and flung it on the ground. He shoved her shoulder.

"Don't touch me."

"You idiot. You're such a *loser*. Watering the pavement. You're pathetic!"

He jabbed his finger at her sternum, as his girlfriend tried to grab his arm.

Liette stumbled back.

"Get away from me. I'm calling the police."

Still dripping, her flip-flops squelched the cannoli box as she ran for her phone. Damp fingers slid on the screen as she pressed 911.

She looked up from the phone and there they were, filling her doorway. "Already? How—?" The large policemen came into her front hall.

"How are you, Madame Morin? Is there a problem?"

They were here. Their appearance was not miraculous, she realized. They'd been en route, they were here for the other thing.

"Nine one one. Nine one one," the voice on the phone repeated.

"Oh!" she looked at the screen jammed the red circle to end the call.

"How have you been?" said the older cop, Passard . . . Perreault . . . Tétrault . . . she searched for his name. She had his card somewhere. Silver tinged his temples now. "We understand it's hard. We just want you to know, we're still on it. As we've told you, sometimes the perpetrator of a drug-related shooting is not tracked down for years."

"Twelve, even? Twelve years?"

"It happens, Madame Morin. File's still open. I'm not giving up."

Every year, the same exchange. They knew their lines. What else could they do.

Her phone was ringing. She refused the call. It rang again. She saw it was 911 and thrust the phone at him.

"Community Relations, Officer Tétrault," he answered. "We came to the address for an unrelated visit."

He listened, nodding, and assessed Liette.

"Is anyone in any danger?" he asked her.

She shook her head, wondering why he wanted to know. It was a dozen years too late to do anything about it. Anton's shove came back to her, resurfacing as if floating up from under water.

"Under control," he said into the phone.

Liette sat down and looked at their big bodies and giant boots in her living room. The young one was especially big.

"How old are you?" she asked him.

He looked at Tétrault.

"Twenty-eight," he said. He had light hair, shaved close.

They'd moved in when Robin was two. He'd played outside in front. He had a tiny slide. In the summer they filled up a little plastic pool. She was so happy to get a place on the ground floor, even if the yard was paved. At least there was a fenced-in space for him to run around, like a mini-playground. She kept the stroller inside the front door and the sled for pulling him to daycare in the winter by the steps outside.

"Robin would have been a year older now. I mean, a year older than you. He had big feet too."

The years spun away from her as she spoke. Twenty-seven years here, she'd told the man. Where would she go now? How could she leave? How had she stayed this long? She stared at Tétrault's partner's boots.

They watched her, as if waiting for her to come up with something else. She just kept nodding. That seemed to be all she had to say. Robin would have been twenty-nine. He had big feet, too. He didn't anymore.

"Madame Morin." Tétrault reached

ESSENTIAL

I used to drive to D.A.D.'S Bagels
and eat Indian food at 4 A.M.

O.K., that's not true.
That would have been insane.

But it was essential
that I could.

They sold Jewish bagels
and freezer-burned Indian food

so spicy, I always
regretted eating it.

Open twenty-hour hours a day:
5732 Sherbrooke Street West.

The cashier often threw in
free onion bhaji so hot

they'd keep my hands warm
on the walk back to the car.

D.A.D.'S Bagels is a now a Dollarama
with birthday decorations near the cash

and a hamburger joint
that's becoming beloved.

I never went to D.A.D.'S Bagels
to eat Indian food at 4 A.M.

but it was essential
that I could.

— Joshua Levy

out a hand and squeezed her clammy fingers. "I wish you a good evening."

"Wait! Here!" She went to get the dented box from the front. "Take one!"

They looked in and gave her a quick glance.

Liette's T-shirt dress was damp with sweat and water from the hose and it stuck to her body like a wet bathing suit. She looked and saw the pastries in the box had been mashed flat, their creamy guts spilled out of splintered cylinders.

"I suppose they don't look too appetizing anymore—"

Tétrault reached in, scooped up a handful, and popped the goop in his mouth.

"Mmm. Thanks," he said, as if it was the best treat—as good as an ice-cold beer—as if he weren't accepting the loopy offer of a deranged lady. A pathetic fucking crazy anal bitch.

She blinked, tapped the back of her hand to her eyes.

In the dusk, out front, the officers walked past Anton, who said something to them she couldn't quite hear.

Tétrault stopped, spoke to him, gestured to the door where she stood.

Liette held up her hand, a static wave.

She sat down on the steps. Dusk settled over the block. It was still hot. The *terrasse* of the café across the street was quiet except for a few smokers around the outside edges. Most customers were inside now, enjoying the air conditioning. They used to prop the doors open on hot nights, and she'd lie in bed and listen to the clack and thunk of balls on the pool table. They got rid of pool years ago, to squeeze in more tables for more coffee drinkers. Young guys who worked at the video game company had moved to the street, as well as new families with fancy cars or those bicycles with boxes on the front big enough to carry a couple kids. When the new owners got them out—her and Anton, the Russian families, and the two old couples upstairs—they would renovate and rent to people like that. Unless they fought it, Liette thought. Maybe in the morning she'd talk to Anton. Whatever the new landlord offered next time he came around, they could refuse it. The tenants could get together, go to the rental board. At least buy some time.

"Liette."

Anton came toward her and then, before he got close, he stopped. His face was blurry in the half dark.

"I didn't know. I mean, I knew about your son, but I didn't know what day it was today. The cop told me. I'm sorry."

The asphalt yard was still damp in spots. Liette got up and walked over to the gate. The girlfriend had a flashlight and was doing touch-ups to their wavy woman with all the arms.

"Maybe you should give her a hose," Liette suggested.

The girl nodded.

"I can add another arm."

"And a shovel."

"Broom?" Anton asked, digging out his own piece of chalk from the pail.

"I think so."

Liette opened the gate and stepped out of her enclosure to get a better look at the woman juggling so many different things.

RESILIENCE

Bo Doodley's deviant art as a form of therapy.

The artist known as Bo Doodley recently hosted a workshop at the Canadian Comics Open Library, in Toronto. The subject was illustration as a tool for boosting personal well-being. "I am not advocating using art in place of medicine or therapy," she told the two-dozen assembled illustrators and library supporters. "I'm advocating it as a means of helping yourself."

The thirty-three-year-old Doodley knows first hand how the simple act of drawing can build resilience. Her own struggles with physical and mental health led her to use art as a way of working though problems she couldn't always express in words. "It really kept me going," she says. "It's like meditation. I needed to laugh about it a lot. I needed to find humour in it. So I was making a lot of gross drawings."

Doodley, who was born in India, started drawing as a child, signing up for extra art classes and "entering drawing competitions I'd never win." When, in university, she found herself enrolled in an economics program she wasn't enjoying, she came up with a plan. "I told my parents if they wouldn't let me go to animation school at the same time as going to university, I would just quit everything," she says. Her parents agreed to the unorthodox ultimatum, and Doodley managed to complete her two programs simultaneously. Following graduation, she worked in two animation studios over two years, before moving to Canada, in 2010, to attend Sheridan College's visual and creative arts program. "I wanted to move my skills forward, so I was looking for art schools," she says. "The ones I looked at in India were very hard to get in to, and they didn't have the kind of instruction I

PHOTOGRAPH BY
THOMAS BLANCHARD

wanted. I did not want something that was just conceptual and free-for-all. I definitely needed parameters. So that's how I found Sheridan."

After completing the program, Doodley—who chose her pen name while listening to a Bo Diddley album—began working odd jobs as a graphic designer. It was then that she became ill and threw herself into illustration and cartooning. She started showing her work to friends and posting it online and, in 2015, rented a table at a zine market, displaying prints and homemade stickers ("I sold nothing, but that's O.K."). Discovering *Broken Pencil* magazine's annual Canzine festival shortly after inspired her to take her work to the next level. "I hadn't made any zines at the time, but I walked out of Canzine and decided I was going to do it the following year," she says. "One of the hardest things, at least for me, is each time I change medium, my style changes. So a lot of my work doesn't look like it's coming from the same person. It took me a while to put a body of work together that would fit in one book."

Doodley labels many of her comics as "deviant," or "lowbrow," art, a genre that includes the work of underground cartoonists like Robert Crumb and Ed "Big Daddy" Roth, the creator of the hot rod mascot Rat Fink. But Doodley's comics are far from derivative of the artists who have come before her. Underground work often is male-centric to a fault; Doodley's stands out not only for her feminist bent, but also for her bold use of bright colours and her masterful skill in combining them.

Doodley's main artistic outlets to date have been comic zines, pins, and stickers, but she continues dabbling in other forms of art. "There isn't a charted out plan," she says. "I wish someone would tell me what my options are. I would love to make something more formal. I don't have a C.V. or a portfolio, so I need to do those things. I'd love to be picked up by a publisher, so that's in the back of my mind. I think I just want to do more and do better."

—Conan Tobias


SEE YA
NEVER


PMS PATTI
MEN ARE
THE MURD


I OWE YOU
NOTHING


THIS IS YOUR BRAIN ON SOCIAL ANXIETY


UGH THIS FIVEHEAD!
SHOULD REALLY JHUJH IT UP.
SNIP SNIP SNIP SNIP
JUST A BIT MORE...
SNIP SNIP SNIP
AH! SO MUCH BETTER.
©Bo Doodley


EVEN MY THERAPIST HATES YOU

THE FICTION

RETREAT

A fairy tale in pieces.

BY J. R. McCONVEY

HEART'S HAVEN

The week before this happened, someone torched a Jeep two blocks from my apartment. The sound of the explosion woke me up, and I smelled gasoline and burnt rubber on the breeze all morning. It had been hard enough to concentrate before the riots. Once the looting started, I didn't do much but sit on the floor, look out at a sky gone the colour of a furnace flame, and try to pretend it was all going to be O.K.

I was like this when Chris called to tell me about the retreat.

"Sally Von Sann," he said. "From the nineties. She calls it Heart's Haven."

It was in Caledon, an hour or so north of the city. As more and more infrastructure failed, the rich had decamped to rural areas to hide out on their compounds, estates, and ranches. Chris's parents had a property on the same road as Sally Von Sann, the movie star. She had converted an old Bavarian-style chalet into an artists' refuge as a way to support creative work in chaotic times. In her action-film heyday, Sally Von Sann had rescued the world from nuclear destruction and robot enslavement, and ended up married to one of the richest men in Hollywood. Now she was trying to save something in real life, and who could blame her?

"Why me?" I asked, even though I already knew I'd accept. A lot of neighbourhoods in the city had intermittent power. I was lucky to live near the core, where supply was more consistent. There had to be hundreds of artists whose work was more disrupted by the riots than mine. Besides, Sally Von Sann was an unlikely aficionado of my writing.

"I put in a good word," said Chris. "Told her we need voices like yours in these times."

"Has she read my book?"

He sighed.

"Does it matter? Take the place, Sam. The city's not getting any safer. It's a good opportunity, a good connection to have. Besides, what else are you doing?"

It was true: you had to get on with things. And if there was an antidote to the chaos, it was nature. The same thing that was killing us, sure—but only because we'd stopped paying attention. You had to get out to nature, avow your sins.

"Of course," I said. "Of course, I'll take the place."

Any escape was welcome. This? It was divine luck. Of course: I'd work my way through the rupture. I would breathe spruce and goldenrod, liaise with whatever bees were left.

FORBIDDEN PATHS

My first day at the chalet, I spent the morning reading: *Wilderness Tips,* the Brothers Grimm, a magazine article about flooding in the States. I ate a lunch of boiled eggs and cured ham, a grapefruit seltzer, and strong black coffee to gear up for the day. Out front, a huge deck faced a valley that sloped down to a glimmering pond. I stood and inhaled the clean air, savouring the vegetable scents and the sounds of burbling water. Birds swooped and twittered. It felt like a kind of physical remembering: I was tucked away in a green universe, part of a past that was already gone.

Before settling down to write, I wanted to go for a run on the property's trails, a network of looping paths that ran through the lush meadows and wooded hills of the backlot. Instructions taped to the fridge told me that the trails abutted private property and that the owners of the farm next door sometimes rode horses on them, so I should stick to the path marked with orange ribbons. If I heard a horse coming, I was to call out to avoid spooking it off into the bush.

I tied my laces and thought about the times when I was young and my grandparents would take me to the park near their house. It was beside a ravine, one of the first places I ever came into contact with real nature: moss and loam, raccoons and wet bracken. That's where I felt I was heading to as I set off at a trot down the sloping path. My muscles were buzzing with caffeine as I passed the pond and jogged into the mouth of the enveloping woods.

At first, the forest was like something out of a fairy tale. Jays leapt in the treetops. The ground was alive with scampering squirrels and chipmunks. The maples were beginning to turn, and sunlight glinted through reddening leaves, making flame-hued gems in the foliage. A great blue heron burst up from a hidden pond. Every so often, I caught glimpses of the cottage through the pine and cedar boughs, its gabled roof haloed in sunlight.

As I ran, dodging ferns, breathing hard, it struck me how little I'd thought about the city since arriving at Heart's Haven. The daily tension of wondering whether today was the day you'd get caught in a fight over territory or cash, wondering if it might all blow over, even though you knew this was just beginning—it had dissolved the minute I'd stepped out of my car and felt the soothing calm of the retreat, the curative essence of the rural air. As I ran, my mind drifted, up through the trees and down among the dark berries clustered on the soil.

For a while, the orange ribbons were easy to see, and I counted them carefully. But at some point, jarred from my reverie by a twinge in my calf, I

ILLUSTRATION BY MATTHEW DALEY

realized it had been a long time since I'd passed a trail marker. My stomach soured a bit. It's fine, I said to myself, just a long stretch without a marker. I kept running, making turns, climbing hills, convincing myself that I'd soon turn a corner and see another orange flag or the silhouette of the cottage in the distance.

Instead, I found myself low on energy, thirsty and light-headed in the heat, turning and turning in an endless upward spiral of uneven turf, tall grass, and brambles. Finally, I had to accept that I was lost. A ringing anxiety set in. My phone was back at the cottage. I had no water, no idea where I'd gone off the path. This was like a fairy tale, too—except not the ones with lush meadows and doe-eyed woodland creatures, but a story in which children lose their way in woods that get more haunted as they go. The thought hit me that maybe riders would come and I could ask for directions. But, despite the piles of horseshit I passed, the thought was naïve: most of the droppings had been there long enough for mushrooms to grow, days or weeks. I didn't even know if I was still on the same path the farm used. A shrub ahead quaked and sent my heart into my throat. I stopped short, imagining the appearance of a troll with drool-dripping fangs and a necklace made of apple-cheeked children's heads. Still panting, I picked up a big pine branch to wield like a scorpion's tail in case it came to a fight and stood shaking in the heat, suddenly aware all over again how things that had once seemed simple and comforting could turn deadly in an instant if you didn't heed to the warnings.

RECONNAISSANCE

I wasn't totally lost: I could see fencing and other houses not far in the distance. Shame kept me away, though. After all, I'd been told to stay on the marked trails, and look where my carelessness had landed me. I checked the sun to try and orient myself. My head throbbed. Blood pounded in my temples. I stank like a rotten onion in a mushroom patch. Over the hills, I heard the whooshing of cars on the highway. I followed the sound, turning and turning back again, looping toward it.

Finally, branch lolling in front of me like the neck of a skeletal dragon, I popped out onto a long gravel drive winding up among the trees, leading up to some gated manor hidden far back from the road. Not far up the drive, two people, a man and a woman, stood pruning an evergreen hedge along the black iron fence. They were dressed in formal whites, as though headed to Sunday Mass, but I could see the bulk of body armour under the fine cotton. When they noticed me, they tensed visibly, their faces puckering like blanched prunes. The man was holding long shears and the woman a small but vicious-looking pitchfork. They held their tools before them, talismans of threat.

I dropped the branch and put my hands out, coming forward slowly, anxiety pinging like a hit pinball.

"I'm really sorry to bother you," I said, aware of how delicate I needed to be with strangers in these times. "I'm staying at Sally Von Sann's cottage. Heart's Haven. I went for a run and got lost on the trails. Do you know how to get back? It's on, uh, Cozy Lake Road."

The man looked at me as though I was a feral Chihuahua, both harmless and repugnant.

"What are you doing on this property?" he demanded, his tone sharp and agitated.

Suddenly I was hyperaware of the No Trespassing signs posted at regular intervals along the fence.

"I just ended up here," I said. "I'm sorry. I don't know how. Wrong turn, I think. I lost sight of the trail markers."

"You can't be here," said the man.

He held his shears at waist height, blades open like the beak of a ravenous bird. Behind him, the woman stood, silent as stone, eyes flashing the black of a lacquered coffin.

"I don't want to be," I said. "It was a mistake. I'm sorry. Can you help me get back?"

They glared at me, and I could feel the rage, the defensiveness, radiating from them. Whatever they were protecting, whomever they served, was not open to disruptions from the failing world. I imagined what it would feel like to get the woman's pitchfork in the stomach, how strong she'd have to be to twist my guts out in a sloppy coil. The man stepped forward, shears open.

"Go back on the main road, toward town," the woman said from behind, iron voice pausing the momentum of the man's rage. "Turn on Dullahan Side Road, by the cemetery. Then left at the cottage road."

"How far is that?" I asked.

"Ten, twelve kilometres," the woman said.

"I'm on foot," I said, eyes bugging. "In this heat!"

The light reflecting off their white shirts was dizzying. In the distance, the muffled echo of a siren rode on the grit in the breeze.

"Better get on, then," said the woman, talking to the hedge but waving the pitchfork toward the road. "You'll want to be back before dark. And be sure to tell Ms. Von Sann she can expect a follow-up on this."

I nodded.

The man snapped his shears, and the matter was closed.

COMPLICITY

If I had to pinpoint it, I'd say it started when the insurance companies collapsed. Some put it as early as the 2008 financial crisis. But for me, the fall of insurance was the moment when the social safety net got bested by haywire weather you knew wasn't going to improve any time soon—was, in fact, going to get a lot worse.

Once insurance went, it was infrastructure. The money and time needed to keep things in decent repair was impossible to sustain in conditions that amounted to ongoing assault. Most things still work sometimes—less and less, though. The cascade of failures happens slowly

FLORA

From Manuelzinho.

She's born under a broccoli leaf
delivered by the hermit next door
the pills I take transform his voice
to an abacus of inaudible words
the white-gold sky
bursts open like a boy in love

I'm too high to know if I'm holding
my daughter or a sea bass
her mouth is dramatic and I swear
she has scales!
Everything glitters—
the garden, the clouds, her skin
Manuel's strange and sudden wings

He must have flown me home
for when I wake, sunset blooms
in the garden of our wallpaper

Flora sleeps
still as a pinned butterfly
Manuelzinho snores gently
exhausted by fatherhood

I was not built
to hold this much love

—Leesa Dean

enough that you don't realize what's going on around you until you can't go back. Then one day, a Jeep explodes two blocks from where you live and you can feel the shockwave inside your apartment. Suddenly you're worrying about what will happen if a window shatters and you have to live exposed to the ash-filled sky. And already you're looking back and thinking, We should have seen it. We should have known.

But we didn't. We still don't.

FIRST FUNCTION OF THE DONOR

On the sunbaked shoulder of the highway, I swallowed again and again to try and calm the knives in my throat. Cars rushed by, chucking up pebbles and dust. Turkey vultures mused overhead. My feet dragged along the pitted asphalt. All the wonder I'd felt in the forest had burned off in the brutal heat. I thought about what was happening back in the city—days ticking toward some irreparable breach—and cursed myself for wasting the precious time I'd been given at Heart's Haven by not sticking to the marked trail, not turning back when I should have.

Ahead, I saw the shapes of two vehicles parked by the side of the road. Maybe, I thought, someone could tell me if I was actually headed for Dullahan Side Road, or if the furious gardeners had sent me marching toward death. As I got closer, the silhouettes resolved into a big pickup, outfitted with a steel trailer, and, further from the shoulder, a huge military transport vehicle painted in green camouflage, a For Sale sign hanging askew in its window. Beside the truck, two men stood talking, one average-sized with thinning black hair and a Hawaiian shirt, one tall and thick with a blond buzz cut, squared-off muttonchops, and a black T-shirt emblazoned with the words "X-FORCE TACTICAL PRODUCTS" in red text under a logo shaped like an assault rifle.

"Um, excuse me," I said, walking over. Their talk stopped and they both turned to look at me. "I'm looking for Dullahan Side Road."

They sized me up in silence. I was wheezing and dressed in torn and faded clothes, too-skinny jogging pants, and a shirt with a stylized dove on it, soaked with sweat.

"Where you headed?" said the bigger man.

His eyes were like blue glass singed by the heat of an explosion. A huge, finely detailed wolf tattoo bulged on his bicep.

"Heart's Haven," I said. "It's a . . . cottage. On Cozy Lake Road." I realized how ridiculous I sounded. "I went running on the horse trails around the property and somehow got turned around. Ended up having to follow the traffic noise. I came out of the woods about a kilometre back. There were some people—"

The man in the Hawaiian shirt coughed, frowned.

"They told me to take Dullahan Side Road, ten kilometres this way. I just want to know I'm going the right way."

The big man eyed me. I figured he was deciding on the best jab at my weakness, the best way to point out the sad state I was in.

"I'm going back that way," he said, instead. "I can give you a lift. It's this one." He jerked a thumb at the pickup, as though there might be some confusion that he'd arrived in the military vehicle to begin with. "Gimme a minute."

I nodded and stood, breathing heavily, while the men finished up their business.

RECEIPT OF A MAGICAL AGENT

What you are given isn't always enough. To work with what you have, to do what you can: sometimes these things fall short, dwarfed by the tidal movements of the bigger picture. We wonder, how far can our dreams take us? How deep into the unknown will we go before our minds warp and our skin peels off in the sun? How much of our dreaming must we mobilize for rescue, and how much will we allow ourselves to take away from the work of memorializing a world that's still trying to teach us how to save it?

At the park near my grandparents' house, I used to pick up pine cones and prickled chestnuts and arrange them like artifacts in the sand. They were coded keys to a world that lived beyond the chain-link fences, treasures borne up from the ravine. But I misunderstood what they were giving me. Or it failed to take somehow. I lost the ribbons, time and time again.

GUIDANCE

The cabin of the big pickup smelled heavily of rubber and engine oil. As we pulled away, I looked back out the rear windshield and saw the transport vehicle parked by the roadside like a huge, inert turtle. The bars of a steel rack cut across the truck's window, the silhouette of a rifle hovering on the bottom rung. It rattled with the growl of the engine.

I nodded my head back toward the transport vehicle.

"Don't see too many of those for sale," I said.

"Not enough, anyway," he said. "Fuck. I should buy it."

We drove for a while, silent. Sweat streamed in rivulets down my back. I was afraid, but that was nothing new—fear lurked in every interaction now.

"Guy wants fuckin' a hundred and eighty grand," the man said. He let the number hang there for a few seconds. "Those things'll go anywhere, though. Impregnable tires, perfect suspension. Got an air chamber up top, you can clear eight feet of water. Even got hooks on the roof, so you can attach that thing to a goddamn aircraft, drop it wherever you want. Middle of the fuckin' jungle. Middle of the fuckin' desert."

"What was that guy doing with it?"

"He just bought it one day, fuck knows why. He has the money, does what he wants. Realizes it was a stupid idea because he has no idea how to deploy the fuckin' thing. Me, though. I know these vehicles. I should buy it." He tapped his hand on the steering wheel and frowned. "It's not getting any better, you know?" he said, voice rising. "Fuckin' Texas, Florida, Alberta, California, B.C. Now here, down in the city. All this madness."

For a minute, he sounded like he might break down sobbing.

"I live in the city," I said.

"I fuckin' know that!" he barked. "So do I."

The cab was stifling and I had a sudden urge to put my head out the window, to let the rushing air blast away my lingering headache and dry the sweat on my back.

"One of those vehicles, no matter what happens, you got a way to get around," the man said. "Help people." He glanced at me sideways. "You understand?"

I nodded, but couldn't look at him. In truth, I wasn't sure anymore.

LIQUIDATION

The road hummed beneath us, cracked and searing. Outside, the fields glowed gold, burnished by early autumn sunlight. The highway sloped downward and I could see the gnarled shrubbery, swamped ditches, and crooked stones of the cemetery up ahead. I waved my thumb.

"This is the road I need to take," I said.

He nodded and pulled over, the pickup's tires crunching on the gravel.

"How far over does that go?" he said, pointing a thick finger down the road I'd be taking. "I'm headed to the next town. If that goes all the way, I could drive you to the cottage lane."

"Don't know," I said, without geography. "I've only been as far as the first left."

He gave me a look a sheepdog might give, deciding whether to trust an ewe to cross the highway alone.

"O.K. then," he said, finally. "Anyway, you don't have too far to go."

"No. Thanks. I appreciate the ride."

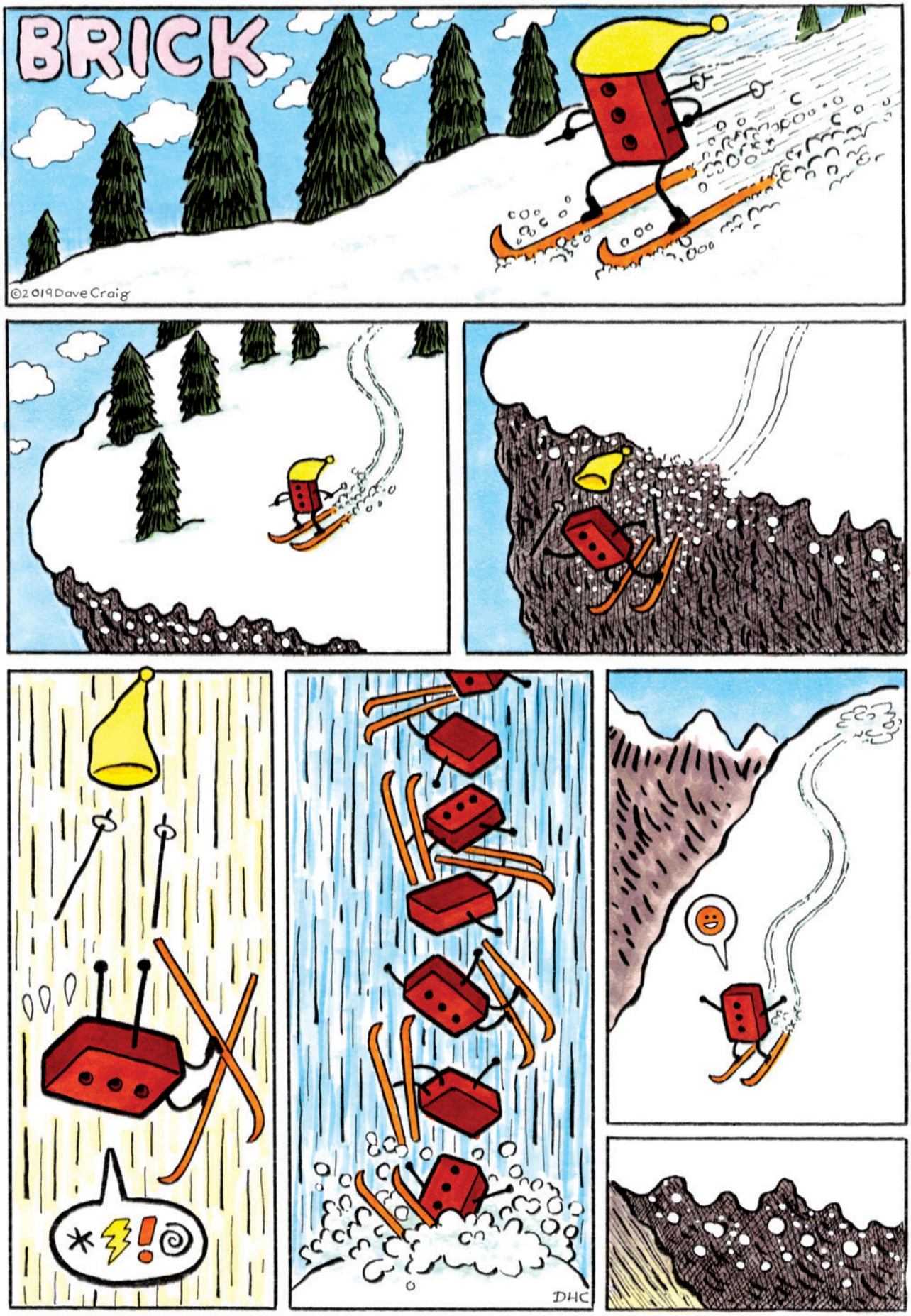
"Maybe stick to the trails next time," he said. "Or bring a fuckin' phone, at least."

I nodded, acknowledging sound advice. He pulled away, the pickup's engine gunning. I wondered how long it would take for him to come back and to try bargain for the army vehicle, and how long after that until he might put it to use as he imagined. How long before its eight-foot clearance wouldn't cut it anymore, because the roads were down too deep.

RETURN

I crossed the highway, to where the road dipped past a cluster of tamaracks on the cemetery's edge before curving up into the bush. I still had four or five kilometres to go up Cozy Lake Road, back toward Heart's Haven. Slowly, I started running again, feet slapping the tarmac in a steady rhythm. My calves burned and my chest ached with the pressurized thumping inside. I already knew I wouldn't be able to keep it up the whole way—that by the end, I'd be walking, slowly.

I kept thinking about the trails, wondering if I'd have it in me to go out again tomorrow. Whether it would ever be possible to recover the feeling I'd had during my first moments in the woods, when I'd forgotten myself in the beauty. How closely I'd watch for orange ribbons this time, if I'd watch for them at all. Whether I'd see horses and have to call out—and what voice I would summon to let them know I was no threat nor boon to them, just an artist and a runner, easily lost.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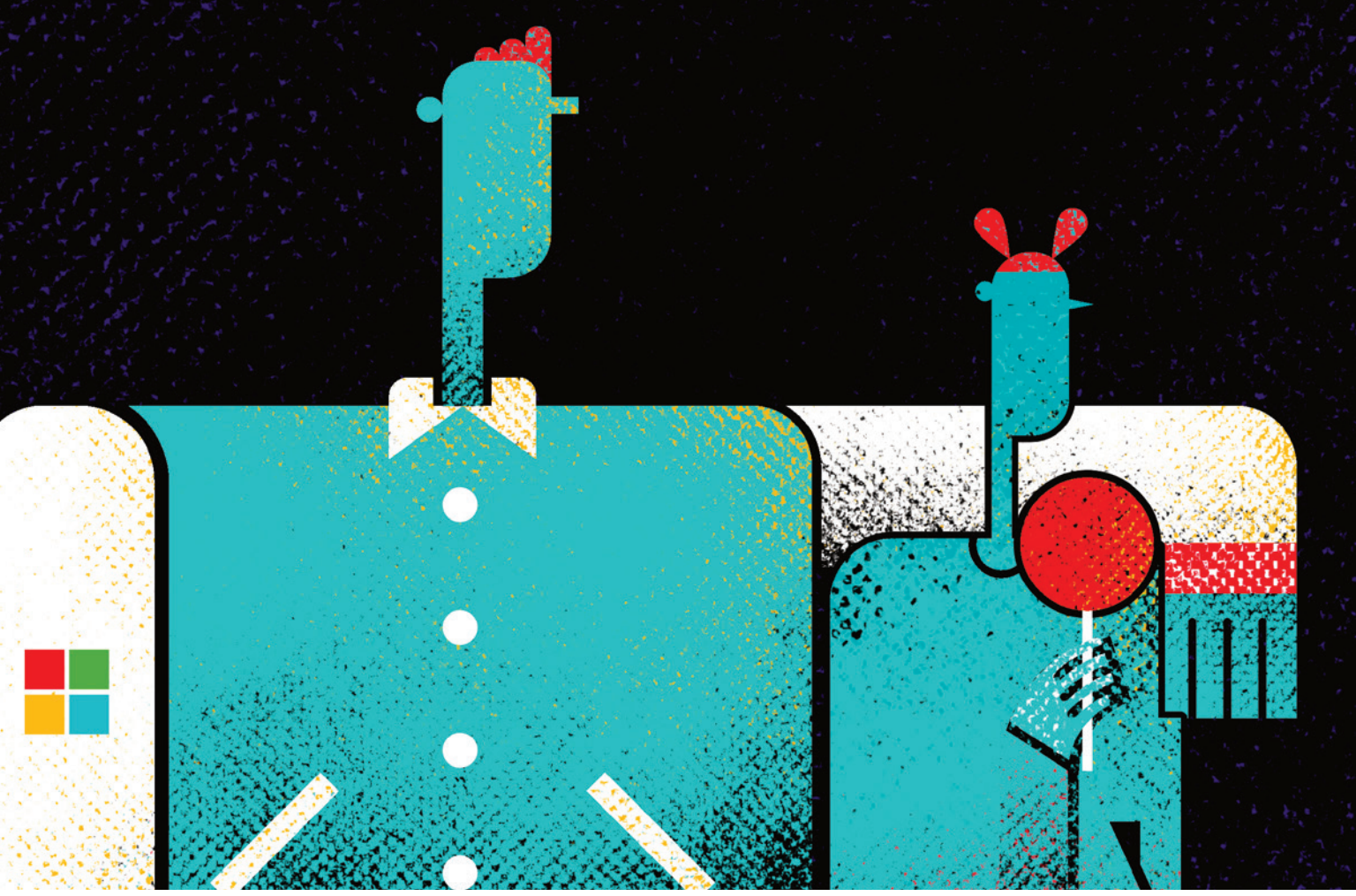


THE ARCHIVE

U. OF T. 2020

Yesterday's future is now today's present.

BY JIM MUNROE

Mere months after the would-be apocalypse twentieth-century humans dubbed "Y2K"—an event that saw society narrowly avert destruction at the digital hands of its own creations—Jim Munroe was already looking toward another future—that of the year 2020. Jim captured his predictions for that then far-off date in a short story titled "U. of T. 2020," which appeared in Taddle Creek's pages in the retrospectively innocent summer of 2001. To commemorate the future's arrival, the magazine below presents Jim's tale of life on the University of Toronto campus in today's present, exactly as it appeared in Taddle Creek No. 5.

Elizabeth took a slurp of the oversized lollipop, willing the sedative coating into her bloodstream. She wanted to be numb before she got into the lecture hall.

"...I mean, what'd ya want? To go back to the old style of schooling, all on hypotheticals?" Bill was looking at her for an answer, but she knew he'd be happy to provide one of his own. "I sure don't. What's the point of getting a degree without a corporate backer? They need people who are up to speed on company history, ready to hit the ground running."

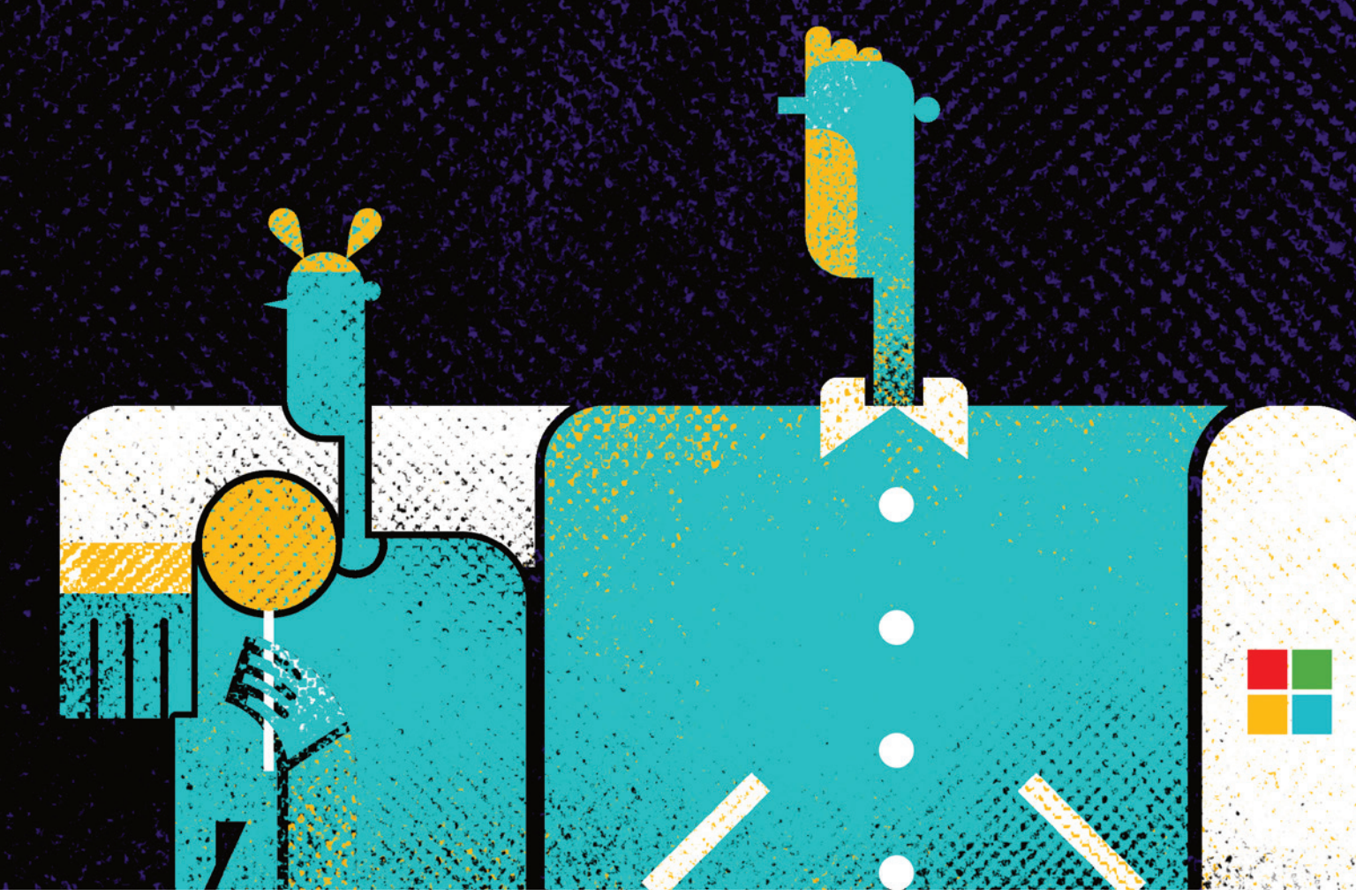
"I know," Elizabeth said. Bill put his arm on her shoulder. Elizabeth looked at the arm of his U. of T. jacket for a second—the Microsoft logo below the year he was supposed to graduate—and dully wished he wouldn't touch her. But then where would she be? She looked at the students passing by, seeing a girl like her similarly attired with pigtails and skirt and boyfriend. She was also eating a lollipop, but because she was blond, hers was lemon. Elizabeth sighed, wishing they had red lollipops in flavours other than cherry. She was sick of it.

Bill was annoyed that his pep talk hadn't worked, but covered it up with a pretty good likeness of sympathy. "You're just pissed 'cause you have to do that demographic assignment again."

She shrugged, batting her eyes at him and sucking prettily around a smile. He smiled smugly and yanked one of her pigtails.

Of course he was wrong. When was he not? She had done that assignment

ILLUSTRATION BY MATTHEW DALEY



"properly" in an hour flat. How many eighteen to thirty-fours her company would attract with extreme-level shoe ads versus how many thirty-fives to fifties it would repel was insultingly easy; Elizabeth had originally factored in the greater consumer loyalty of the older demographic. We're covering short term this week, the prof had said, adjusting his Nike sweatband like he always did when he was annoyed.

No, it was last night that was bothering her. Seeing Simon jamming his clothing into a backpack, chattering about Mexico like it was a good thing that he was going there, that he didn't mind having to move every few months to the next ghetto as the rent climbed beyond his means. "We're not economically displaced, we're the new gypsies!" he had said, and she had fought the stinging in her nose. Could she have saved him if she had fought harder with him about applying for a corporate backer? He had given her a bracelet he had made of latex and string, and shouldered on his backpack. Their goodbye hug had squeezed tears out of her.

Elizabeth started crunching her lolly. Bill fished out his card, slid it through the Coke-can-shaped reader, and disappeared into the building with a wave. As soon as he had lifted his leather-swathed arm from her shoulders she felt light, a giddy and frightening feeling that she attributed to the sedatives. She continued toward the lecture hall, her tummy a balloon, wondering if she could float away to Mexico on it.

THE 'FUTURE' IS NOW

Jim Munroe looks back to tomorrow.

This amusingly naïve story was written in 2000 for a project called Science Friction Action Heroes. It was an attempt to splice together political action and science fiction. A small group of us (including Emily Pohl-Weary and Nalo Hopkinson) chose neighbourhoods and flypostered one-page stories that were relevant to that neighbourhood on poles. "Kensington Market 2020" was the first, and "U. of T. 2020" was another. Other things eventually caught our attention, and we stopped doing it, and the world went on.

That said, the idea keeps coming back around in different ways. Last year, I helped convene something called the Multiversity Collective, a like-minded political sci-fi project jumpstarted by Toronto 2033, an anthology conceived of by Matthew Blackett, of *Spacing* magazine.

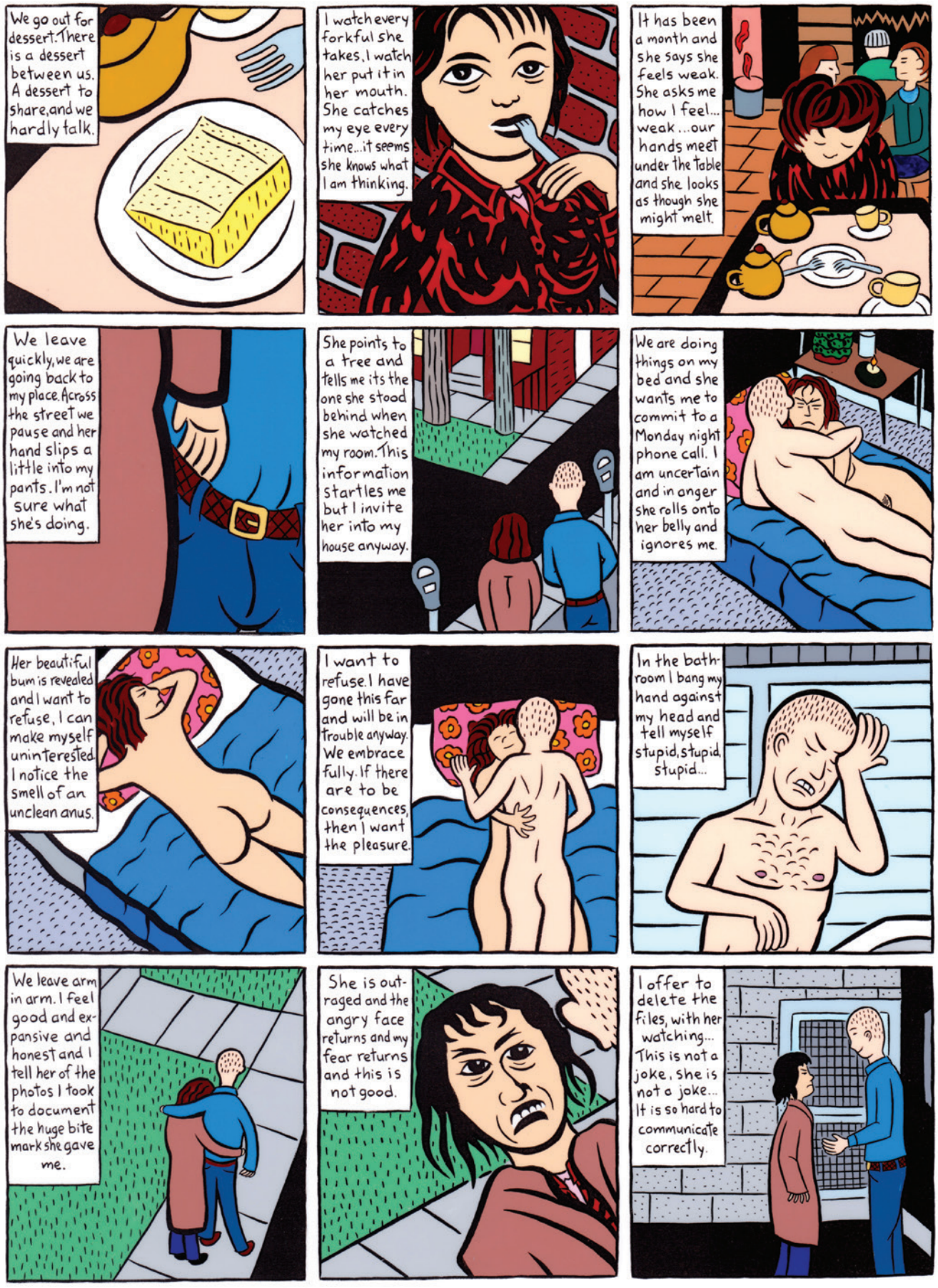
It's probably predictable that these activist-futurist projects happen around years of science-fictional significance: 2000 and 2020. Maybe some ideas are just on an orbit that draw us into their slipstream every twenty years.

So, see you in 2040—I hope!

—Jim Munroe

Old

·Dave Lapp·



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