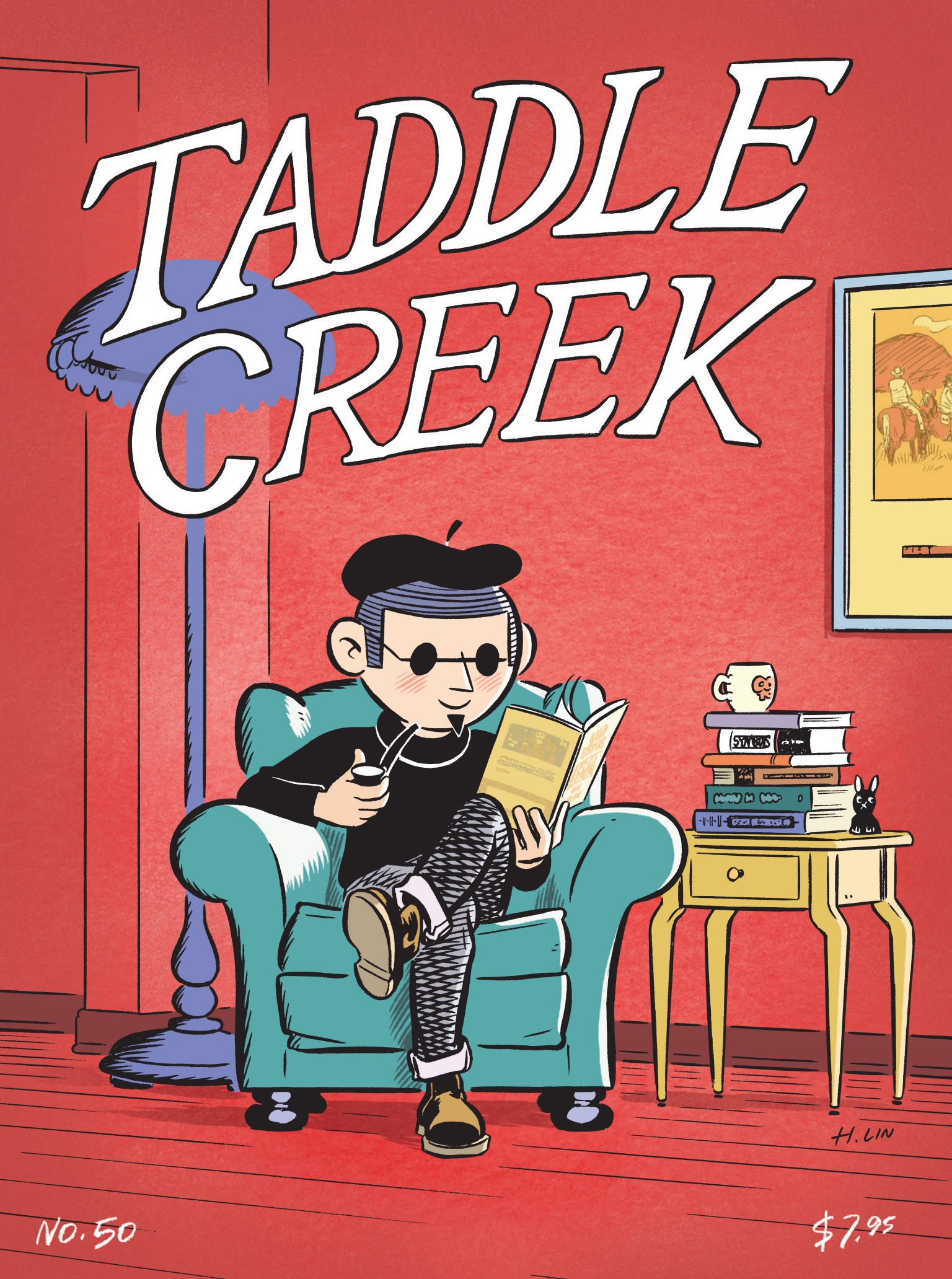
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TADDLE CREEK

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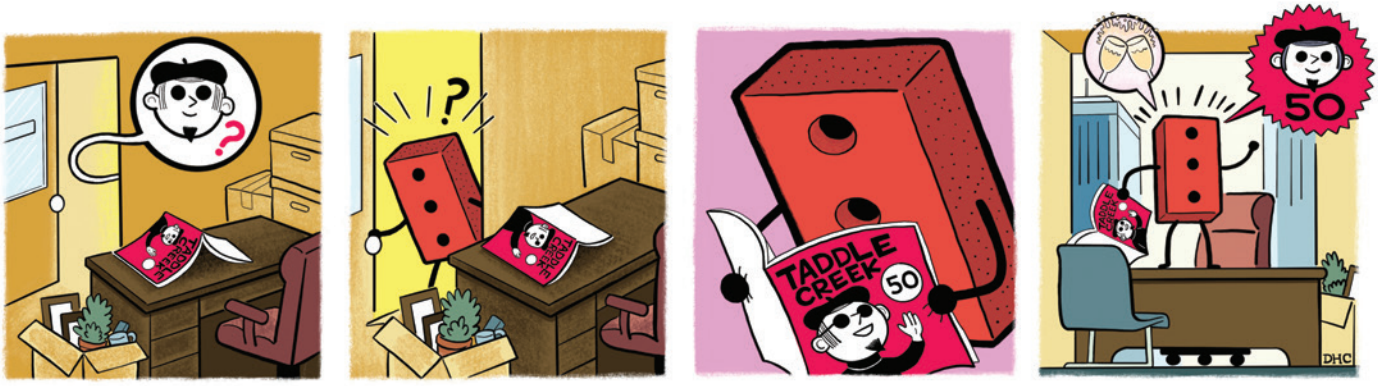

THE CONTRIBUTORS

Alexandra Leggat ("Centipede," p. 6) is the author of *The Incomparables* and a teacher of creative writing at the University of Toronto School of Continuing Studies. She first contributed to the magazine in 2000.

Adrienne Weiss ("Road Runner," p. 8) is the author of *There Are No Solid Gold Dancers Anymore.* She first contributed to the magazine in 2003.

Robb Mirsky ("The Band," p. 11) is a cartoonist and illustrator. His characters include Sludgy, Dingus and Dum-Dum, and the Lemonade Brigade. He first contributed to the magazine in 2019.

Gary Barwin ("Golemson," p. 14) is the author of *Nothing the Same, Everything Haunted: The Ballad of Motl the Cowboy,* which won the Canadian Jewish Literary Award for fiction. He first contributed to the magazine in 2001.

Lindsay Zier-Vogel ("Midnight to 2 A.M.," p. 16) is an author and educator, and the founder of the Love Lettering Project. Her debut novel, *Letters to Amelia,* was published in 2021. She first contributed to the magazine in 2009.

Joe Ollmann ("Flipping," p. 18) is the author of *Fictional Father,* the first adult graphic novel nominated for a Governor General's Literary Award for fiction. He first contributed to the magazine in 2011.

Jessica Westhead ("This Is the Way," p. 26) is the author of the short-story collections *And Also Sharks, Things Not to Do,* and the forthcoming *A Warm and Lighthearted Feeling.* She first contributed to the magazine in 2002.

Alex Boyd ("Dairy Milk," p. 28) is the author of the poetry collections *Making Bones Walk* and *The Least Important Man,* and the novel *Army of the Brave and Accidental.* He first contributed to the magazine in 1997.

Walter Scott ("Yet Another Night Out for Wendy," p. 30) is the author of *Wendy, Master of Art,* the latest in his comic series chronicling the misadventures of a young artist in a satirical version of the contemporary art world. He first contributed to the magazine in 2018.

Andrew Daley ("Tornado '85," p. 32) is the author of *Resort* and *Tell Your Sister.* He first contributed to the magazine in 1997, and was its associate editor from 2004 to 2009.

Emily Schultz ("Democracy Beach," p. 34) is the author of the novels *The Blondes* and, most recently, *Little Threats.* She first contributed to the magazine in 2003.

John Degen ("Magic Fingers," p. 36) is a novelist, poet, father, grower of apples, and global advocate for authors, but, at the moment, he is mostly sad that this will be his last appearance in *Taddle Creek,* to which he first contributed in 1997.

Evie Christie ("The Best I Looked," p. 38) is the author of *Mere Extinction* and other books and plays. She first contributed to the magazine in 2003.

Jay Stephens ("Journey into Fear," p. 41) is back to creating grassroots, small-press comics, with the cute-looking horror title *Dwellings,* which recently won a Doug Wright Award. He first contributed to the magazine in 2014.

Alfred Holden ("Return to Zenith," p. 48) is a former staff reporter and editor for the *Toronto Star.* His City Building column first appeared in the *Annex Gleaner* newspaper in 1995, and has appeared in feature form in *Taddle Creek* since 1997.

Brian Francis (The Kitch, p. 58) is the author of *Missed Connections: A Memoir in Letters Never Sent,* which was a finalist for the Trillium Book Award. The Kitch, his column of forgotten recipes, first appeared in the magazine in 2018.

Stuart Ross ("There Lies Rochester," p. 60) is the author of *The Book of Grief and Hamburgers* and *70 Kippers: The Dagmar Poems* (with Michael Dennis). *I Am Claude François and You Are a Bathtub,* his third fiction collection, will be published this fall. He first contributed to the magazine in 1998.

David Craig ("Brick Cleans House," p. 61) is a cartoonist whose most recent works feature Brick, an anthropomorphized building block. His books include *Brick Breaks Free,* which was nominated for a Doug Wright Award, and, most recently, *Curse of Brick.* He first contributed to the magazine in 2019.

Yasuko Thanh ("Netflix Mercy Interview," p. 62) won the Journey Prize for the title story in her collection *Floating Like the Dead.* Her upcoming novel is *To the Bridge*. She first contributed to the magazine in 2017.

Emily Pohl-Weary ("The Day is a Father," p. 65) recently wrote the audio play *The Witch's Circle,* and teaches at the University of British Columbia School of Creative Writing. She first contributed to the magazine in 2001.

Julie Cameron Gray (The Stitch, p. 66) is the author of two collections of poetry, *Tangle* and *Lady Crawford.* She first contributed to the magazine in 2013, and her knitting column, The Stitch, began in 2020.

Tony Burgess ("Succeeding a Feeble Middle," p. 68) writes fiction and for film. His books include *Pontypool Changes Everything.* He first contributed to the magazine in 2008.

Patrick Rawley ("Six Thousand Witches Versus Mary Tyler Moore," p. 70) has appeared in *This* and *The IV Lounge Reader.* He is known as Canada's Foremost Batmanologist. He first contributed to the magazine in 2001.

BRICK BY DAVID CRAIG. CONTENTS ILLUSTRATION BY HARTLEY LIN

THE CONTRIBUTORS

David Collier ("Good Ol' *Taddle Creek,*" p. 73) was born in Windsor, Ontario, in 1963. His most recent book is *Winter of Our Pandemic.* He first contributed to the magazine in 2010.

Cedar Bowers ("The Year of Chloe and Her Beautiful Horses," p. 82) is the author of the novel *Astra,* which was long-listed for the Giller Prize. She first contributed to the magazine in 2018.

Elana Wolff ("After 'Life,'" p. 84) is the author of seven poetry collections. Her latest is *Shape Taking.* She first contributed to the magazine in 2000.

Jennifer LoveGrove ("Flooded Basement," p. 86) is the author of the poetry collection *Beautiful Children with Pet Foxes.* Her novel, *Watch How We Walk,* was long-listed for the Giller Prize. She first contributed to the magazine in 2001.

Dani Couture ("How They Met Themselves," p. 88) is the author of several books, most recently the poetry collection *Listen Before Transmit.* She first contributed to the magazine in 2004.

Chris Chambers ("Jane Jacobs Variety," p. 91) is working on a new collection of poems. His latest book is *Thrillows and Despairos.* He first contributed to the magazine in 1997 and holds the record for most contributions.

Ian Phillips (illustration, p. 91) is the publisher of the micro-press Pas de chance, which has been happily sputtering along for almost forty years. He was *Taddle Creek's* in-house illustrator from 1998 to 2008, and co-created Tad, the magazine's mascot.

Dave Lapp ("People Around Here," p. 92) is the author of *People Around Here,* a collection of the strip that originated in the *Annex Gleaner,* in 1999, and has appeared on *Taddle Creek's* back page since 2004. He first contributed to the magazine in 2001.

Hartley Lin (The Cover) in the author of *Young Frances,* which won a Doug Wright Award. His covers for *Taddle Creek* Nos. 28 and 31 were nominated for National Magazine Awards. He has drawn Tad, *Taddle Creek's* mascot, since 2012, and first contributed to the magazine in 2010.

David MacKinnon is the owner of the tiny, perfect Junkshop recording studio and is one half of the Toronto band FemBots. He has produced all of the magazine's audio projects—including this issue's flexi disc—dating back to *The Taddle Creek Album,* in 2000.

Thomas Blanchard (The Photographer) is a sessional instructor at Ryerson University and an installation-based artist. His work in *Taddle Creek* has twice been nominated for a National Magazine Award. He has been the magazine's in-house photographer since 2008.

Matthew Daley (The Illustrator) has been *Taddle Creek's* in-house illustrator since 2009. It has been one of the recurring gigs he's enjoyed the most. His latest book is *Assorted Baggage.*

John Montgomery (The Contributing Designer) is the art director for *Reader's Digest Canada* and *Sélection.* He first contributed to the magazine in 2000.

Joyce Byrne (The Proofreader) has been the magazine's proofreader since 2003. She is the recipient of the Foundation Award for Outstanding Achievement from the National Media Awards. Her personal brand is "I Love Magazines."

Kevin Connolly (The Copy Editor) has been the magazine's copy editor since 2003, and first contributed poetry in 2002.

Conan Tobias founded *Taddle Creek* in 1997 and was its editor-in-chief, publisher, and art director for twenty-five years. It has been an experience beyond words. Thanks to all.

"Good night, and thank you."

THE EDITORIAL

The Editor-in-Chief Conan Tobias
The Copy Editor Kevin Connolly
The Proofreader Joyce Byrne
The Contributing Editors
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The Web Site Developer Matthew McKinnon

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THE PRIVACY POLICY

Occasionally, Taddle Creek made its subscriber list available to like-minded magazines for one-time mailings. If you preferred your address not be shared, you should have contacted the magazine.

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For submission guidelines, visit taddlecreekmag.com/submit. But it's too late now. You'll never be in Taddle Creek.

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HARTLEY LIN

THE EPHEMERA

Magazines aren't afforded the possibility of eternal life in the way movies, music, or television are—repackaged endlessly for the enjoyment of future generations. Old issues of magazines are out there to be found, but they're neither purchased as readily as other forms of media nor as sought out. Their periodic nature dates poorly, rendering them little more than nostalgic curiosities when accidentally stumbled across. Some forward-thinking publishers, mainly in the United States, have begun making their archives available online, but these cases usually involve mass-market consumer titles. The sad fact is a small magazine such as *Taddle Creek* fades from memory rather quickly after the publication of its final number—which is exactly what the issue you're holding happens to be.

The one thing a magazine is capable of doing on par with a long-running television show or movie series is ending with some flourish. Unfortunately, this rarely happens. In most cases, when a magazine title ends—something that has become more and more common in recent years—it does so with a whimper. Often, staff aren't even told they've published their final issue until after the fact, or they're forced by management to pretend the publication isn't really ending, but rather moving to a brighter future online—a story on par with telling a child their pet has gone to live on a farm.

These sorts of endings are disrespectful to the people who work on a magazine, to the readers of that magazine, and to the legacy of the magazine itself. And it's the type of thing *Taddle Creek* will have none of. Bucking industry wisdom one last time, this final issue of the magazine is double in size, and features not only new work by many of its regular contributors but also several pieces that celebrate and look back on *Taddle Creek's* twenty-five-year history. It also contains a couple of budget-breaking inserts to ensure this is a final issue to remember. You're welcome.

Not every magazine is designed to last forever. Some outlive their original function; others simply have their usefulness usurped by something new and more convenient. *Taddle Creek* does not need to end at this particular moment. Its page count and subscriber numbers are still strong, and there are probably some exciting new things it could yet do. But it knows it will have to end someday, and it would rather do so now, while still holding the vibrancy of semi-youth, rather than waiting until the inevitable day no one wants it anymore and it shrivels down to the size of a flyer before fading away with little to no fanfare.

Taddle Creek hopes you have enjoyed your time with it as much as it has enjoyed its time with you. The magazine thanks its readers, its contributors, and, of course, its staff, without whom *Taddle Creek* would be nothing.

Twenty-five years ago, *Taddle Creek* put forth a simple mandate, not for itself, but for its audience: to read. The magazine hopes it has given you some interesting stories with which to fulfill that simple request. And it wishes you a fond farewell.

—Taddle Creek

WELL, FAREWELL AT LEAST UNTIL THE TADDLE CREEK BOOK.

THE FICTION

CENTIPEDE

BY ALEXANDRA LEGGAT

Esmy and I sit in a coffee shop. A few blocks away our mother lies in a hospital room, waiting to die. Esmy sings softly. I stare into my latte and think, "Isn't it funny how arms get so tangled?" Despite everything that is happening with our mother, I keep recalling the time my ex-boyfriend said that. We were trying to find a comfortable position while lying naked on an unmade bed. I thought about his comment then said, "It is. It's funny."

It's not just funny that arms get so tangled, it's true. It is true. It must happen to everyone. Awkward things in beautiful moments, and when you really need those arms, more arms, it seems like you never have enough.

Esmy kicks me under the table. Awakens me to the coffee shop scents and murmurs. The realization that I'm not lying in his bed, entangled in each other's arms. Awakens me to the realization that we'll never be in tangles again.

"What are you thinking about?" she says.

"Don't kick me."

"It's the only way to bring you back."

It's true. It's been hard for me to stay focussed since all this started happening. The deaths and diseases, the endings of things. It's all become too hard.

"Claire?"

I sip my latte, something I never drank before he up and left me when I finally needed him, right in the middle of my mother's deteriorating health. We were raised on tea, but now, in the wettest, coldest May in decades, my mother's days being counted down like our heights were being chalked up on the bathroom door frame, I need a different taste in my mouth. A violent *kick* into my bloodstream, to keep me going.

I move my legs out from under the table and cross them.

"You really want to know what I'm thinking about?"

Esmy shrugs. Fans out her hands as if to say, "I'm ready."

"I was thinking about how awkward human arms can be . . . but . . . if I were a centipede, just think of all the ways those arms could help."

Esmy scrunches her face and mouths, ew, ew, ew.

"Not just that, Esmy. If I were a centipede, I could hang onto all the straws I attempt to grasp every single day."

I flitter my fingers as if there were hundreds of them.

The women next to us exchange glances and whisper.

Esmy is unaffected by strangers' judgements. Those women are like the rising mist from our hot drinks.

"It's legs that centipedes have. You know that right? Not arms."

"But if I were a centipede," I whisper, "I would use my legs as arms. I would hold onto everything that matters to me. I'd be able to complete all my tasks. All my tasks."

"That's so confusing. You're contradicting yourself."

"No, I'm not. Arms for Mom, arms for work, for chores . . . for you."

"What do you want? Your arms out of the way, or more arms, or do you really mean hands? Do you want more hands?"

"If I were a centipede—"

"O.K., I get it, figuratively, but, if you were a centipede, you'd have a shitload of legs that would just help you to keep running from your "tasks," and faster than you do now."

Thud.

I glance at the women next to us. They don't care about that, how Esmy shut me down. Fine, I think. But if I had more arms, maybe he never would have left, maybe Mom would be healthier.

It's not raining outside, but to me it feels and looks like it is.

I ask Esmy what she sees beyond the pane.

"What do you mean?"

"Out there. What's catching your eye?"

"That man over there, standing by the traffic light."

"What about him?"

"Well, you asked."

"So, the whole time we've been talking you've been watching him?"

Esmy tilts her head from one side to the other.

"And listening. Does he look suspicious to you? He's been there for ages. Not even in a waiting-for-a-bus-or-an-Uber way. You know?"

The man Esmy points toward is standing on the corner, close to the stoplight. Not moving. Pedestrians walk around him, some stop to look at him, some wait in case he wants to cross the road before them, or needs a hand. Then they move on. Certain people turn back to look at him. Esmy's right. It appears odd.

"Maybe he's thinking."

"Of what?"

"I have no idea, Esmy. You're the one who's watching him."

She sighs. Sighs like she's disappointed I don't have all the answers. The burden an older sibling bears.

"Do you see the rain?" I ask.

Esmy takes a breath. Her eyes sparkle behind the shield of her horn-rimmed glasses and she says, "Yes. Yes, I see the rain."

The two women next to us look out the window. "The rain?" one of them whispers.

Esmy stretches her hand across the table and squeezes mine. She moves to music that isn't playing, a little groove that she does every now and then. She is a blues singer, by birth, but she doesn't sing for anyone other than me and herself. She dances though. Goes swing dancing every week back home. Swing dancing in this day and age, which is

ILLUSTRATION BY MATTHEW DALEY

why I believe she also sees the rain, when to everyone else it isn't raining.

"We'll get through this," Esmy says. "Like we do."

Like we do. When has Esmy ever helped me get through family hardships? She peers through her glasses, releases her hair from the bun she'd rolled on top of her head after her little groove, and pushes it behind her ears. She has beautiful auburn hair that bounces when she lets it down. She doesn't think she has wonderful hair. She doesn't realize how beautiful she is at all. If she did, she may not have left when things weren't going her way, when our parents needed us.

"I believe," she looks down, then up, "he would have left sooner if you had way more arms, if you were a goddamn centipede."

"You don't understand."

"If anything, you should want to be a squid. They're supposed to be incredibly intelligent."

Esmy shrugs and looks out at the man on the corner. She gets up and says, "I'll be right back." She grabs her coat, puts up her hood because she knows I also see rain out there. She stops at the counter and orders something. Strides onto the street with a rhythmic step, a swing step, a little sway in her hips, in her hair. I imagine she's singing out loud. Maybe that song she sang in the car on our way to the hospital, "You Are the Best Thing," by Ray LaMontagne, she informed me.

Baby,
It's been a long day,
baby.
Things ain't been going my way.
You know I need you here
To clear my mind
all the time.
And, baby . . .

She's probably singing out loud as beautifully as she did in the car, because the man on the corner turns around, and other people do too, and smile. She stops in front of the man, shakes his hand. "I'm Esmy," she must have said. His shoulders quake a little, like he's chuckling. She points toward the coffee shop. He looks over, nods, then shakes his head and points across the road. She nods in that way she does, and I imagine she's saying, "Cool, cool, just wanted to make sure you're O.K. You can totally join me and my sister if you want to get in from the rain." She hands him the cup. He stares at her. He shakes his head and she drops hers. Shoot, I hope she didn't really say he should come in from the rain. He won't understand, or maybe she said, "Hey, come inside. My sister and I aren't all that conventional either. I mean, who stands on a street corner the way you are for this long. But we're cool with that. My sister wishes she was a centipede so her arms can be more flexible and she can hold this dude that she likes everywhere, so every part of him is held, and so she can balance all the other things in her life, too. She feels the need for extra hands, for the things she can't get a grip on, you know? Oh, and she sees rain when it isn't raining.

His lips move. She nods. Then she waves. He watches her as she walks back to the coffee shop with the drink she bought. He smiles, goes to wave. Drops his arm, his head, turns around and crosses the road. Finally.

Esmy stomps her feet when she reaches our table.

"Well, that was interesting."

"Where's the coffee?"

"Coffee?"

I glance outside.

"Oh." She giggles, bounces her hair when she sits. "It was chamomile tea. I gave it to the guy begging outside the door."

I touch her hand.

"He wanted money, so he wasn't that happy with the tea."

Esmy takes off her coat. Shakes it, like she's shaking off the rain only I can see. People watch her and look down. There are no puddles under her boots. She doesn't notice the others noticing. She glances out the window. Ever since our mother was admitted, it hasn't stopped raining.

"Shit."

The two women next to us whisper. I want to tell them to mind their business. Esmy doesn't give a damn, so I try to ignore them.

"Shit."

"What, what is it?"

"Shit," she says, "Jim, where the hell is Jim?"

"Jim?"

"Yeah, the dude on the corner. His name is Jim."

"He crossed the road."

She slaps her forehead.

"No? Awesome. Awesome."

She shakes her head again, like her hair is wet, exhales, giggles, does her little dance move to music that isn't playing.

"Awesome?"

When we left our mother earlier, Esmy had come to terms with her wanting to leave this world to join our father. "I can't live without him. I just want to

ROAD RUNNER

At the restaurant we sit as if for the first time sitting
together, considering the other across a table,
across years. On the TV, the Road Runner theme song
plays, but only you turn to catch a whirlwind of
T.N.T. smoke, the scraps of coyote, the remnants of
a lesson never learned before the owner's son flips
the channel and you must turn back to us as if for
the first time. The owner in the apron laughs, points
a pencil at the glaring screen, its residual static, that
song still vibrating, reminding us "That coyote is
really a crazy clown," as I try to order No. 19 without meat.

—Adrienne Weiss

die. For all this to be over." She waited for our response. Esmy said, "It's O.K., Mom, we understand if you have to go." No, we don't. I glared at my sister. "He's waiting for me, you know. He can't move on without me." For days I have been talking to Dad in the backyard, looking up to the sky, asking him what we should do. Asking him for help and is it true that he's coming for Mom like she believes. Esmy is good at letting go. Dad hasn't answered. I told Mom he needs to get more settled where he is. He's not ready for her quite yet. It takes time adjusting to his new way of being. She needs to be strong, to fight the disease. She can't give up.

"It's only been two years since he left," I said. "He wants you to stay with us a bit longer, Mom."

"Did he tell you that?" she said.

"Well, not exactly . . ."

"Right, so stay out of it."

Esmy looked at me when she said that. In her Mom-doesn't-mean-it way. The way our mother speaks to me differently when other people are around. That is why I see rain through the coffee shop window. Why it feels damp and cold and there's no groove in me. I'm trying my best, trying to do everything. Unlike Esmy, I don't hear music right now. I'm keeping the space between my ears quiet in case Dad tries to tell me something. In case he finally responds to all the messages I've left. I close my eyes for a minute and picture myself with many, many arms, hands. All the things I could do at one time.

"It's not a centipede you want to be. I think you mean a millipede."

"What?"

"It's actually Jim"—she points outside to the now vacant spot where the man, Jim, had stopped by the traffic light—"who said, 'Centipedes are venomous to people. She should probably wish to be a millipede, especially if she wants to get back together with the dude.'"

"You did tell him."

She shrugs, smiles, and does her little blues move.

"He went to break up with a girl."

"You're kidding."

"He was waiting for a sign. Some-

AARON HAWCO (1997)

THE ARCHIVE

DARKNESS AND LIGHT

When Taddle Creek profiled Lynn Crosbie in its first issue, in 1997, the author had just released Paul's Case, a collection of fictional letters to the serial killer Paul Bernardo that Crosbie called an "imaginative investigation." The book received a great deal of media discussion, much of it negative, and Crosbie faced multiple threats of violence. She recently spoke to Taddle Creek about how the book's reputation has stayed with her throughout a career that now spans more than a dozen books.

"I would say people remember me most for writing that book: 'Author of the controversial *Paul's Case.*' Oh my God. Why don't you just say 'Lunatic who wrote a disgusting book we hate'?

"I did develop a reputation for writing things that were too dark, too dire, and not sellable, as such. I do write about dark things, and I can get creepy, but so what? In any other market that's an asset.

"I continued to write books like *Missing Children,* which explored pedophilia. I went on to examine sexual violence and abnormal subjects, and my sometimes disquieting taste emerges from, among other things, my fascination with artists like Jean Genet or Charles Baudelaire—people who aren't afraid to examine the human condition and understand that the darkness is part of the light.

"I think the unfair part was I was condemned for writing a book no one read. I wasn't the only person—there were three sensational books out about the murders and they talked about every detail of the crimes. And I never talked about the crimes. I talked about trying to kill the killers.

"It's a little frustrating because I wrote it so long ago. But it's still better than being known for writing a book about a butter churner's daughter. I'm proud of it. It's a young book, but it's a good book. I've seen a couple of comments online: 'I thought it's about Bernardo, but it's fucking crazy. It's all drawings and shit. She doesn't even talk about the murders!' Which was exactly the point—to keep my eyes only on the criminals, not their vile deeds. The serial killer people just want to read disgusting perverse acts against young women, and they're not going to find it in my book. I don't want anyone reading that story. Those girls don't deserve that."

thing to tell him to just go, just do it."

"And that sign was you?"

"I guess so."

The rain grows heavier. I think about the girl on the other side of the street that must live in one of the condos lording over the corner of the busy intersection. He must have been staring up the whole time, picturing her inside, practicing what to say, how to say it. What if Esmy wasn't the sign, and he is breaking off a good thing? What if she altered the course of things and the sign is happening out there now that he's gone, that Esmy's gone, looking for him and going, "Oh snap."

"Esmy?"

"Uh-huh."

"How do you know breaking up with the girl was the right thing for him to do?"

She takes off her glasses, changes her hair again. Takes the sides and puts them in a small bun on top of her head. "Because he seems so sad, and really, why stay in something when you are sad?"

"But you don't know him, and you don't know her at all. I mean maybe they just need to talk."

"Did you see how long he was standing out there in the rain?"

"I—"

"He was clearly struggling, didn't want to hurt her feelings. But, really, is that any reason to stay with someone who makes you sad? I mean everybody out there was noticing him. He must have wanted someone to stop and talk to him."

Then she says, "You know, like in that documentary about the Golden Gate Bridge?"

I don't know the one.

"You don't?" she says. "Oh, it's amazing."

She continues to tell me how most people who go to the bridge to commit suicide, to jump, want to be stopped. They actually hope someone will see them and talk them out of it.

"It's true," she says.

I wonder if Jim really told Esmy he was sad. I wonder why, when she left Mom, Dad, and me to move to San Francisco, she never helped one of those people waiting to jump off the Golden Gate Bridge, waiting for someone like her, a sign. I wonder, when I wasn't there at the hospital, if she said to Mom, "It's O.K., Mom, let go. We'll be fine. Just go, get out of here. Go on, go get Dad. Be happy." What if Mom has been waiting by her proverbial traffic light, in the rain, for a sign to leave us and join Dad on the other side, and Esmy just said, "Oh go. It's O.K. Why be sad here without Dad?" What if Mom listened? Took Esmy as the sign, and when we go back to the hospital, the spot where she's been waiting is empty. I grab my coat. What if she's been waiting for someone to stop her?

"Where are you going?"

"Back to Mom."

She sits me back down.

"You're there."

"Esmy, stop."

She grabs my hands. "You are a millipede, remember. All your other arms are where they need to be, caressing Mom, holding her, wrapped around the dude, stroking your dogs, cleaning your dishes, mopping your floor. Don't worry. Everything is covered. And thanks to Jim you will never be venomous to other people."

"Jim? Jim? Some goddamn heartbroken stranger."

I grab my head. The ladies next to us shake theirs. Again, I want to tell them to mind their own business, but I don't have the courage to upset them as much as they are upsetting me.

A grubby man appears at Esmy's side, rests his dirty hand on her shoulder. The women next to us turn away, plug their noses, and snort like trotting ponies.

"Thank you for the tea."

The man leaves when the barista shoos him out.

She turns to me.

"Sometimes I hate myself for wanting Mom to move on."

"Why do you want her to move on?"

Her eyes widen. She scowls. Whispers, "I can't say it."

My phone vibrates in my pocket. I look over at Esmy to see if her phone is vibrating too, or is about to. I grab mine. She doesn't. It's the hospital. The nurse identifies herself, says there's been a change in our mother's breathing, "It's best you head back as soon as you can," she says. I tell her, yes, thank you, thank you so much for calling. I hang up. Look at Esmy.

"I told you. We have to go back. Mom's taken a turn."

Esmy shrugs.

"It's an act. A way to get us back there."

"Way to go, Esmy. Look at the rain. It's a sign."

When our father passed away, the priest said he was like the rain. I didn't understand what he meant then, the symbolism lost on me. Drowned out by the pain. He's come to me in dreams, but not since I've been beckoning him from the backyard, asking him about Mom. Maybe he did need more time on his own, alone, a bit of freedom before they reconnect.

Esmy grabs her coat and glasses and skips toward the door. I follow her. Like I've wanted to do for years. The thought of my mother's altered breathing echoes in my chest. I scan the sides of the road for my car. I whisper to my Dad, "What's happening? Dad? Dad?"

Where the hell is the car? Esmy starts walking along the road with a swing in her step. That groove. The car isn't here. We walked. I forgot we had walked. Walked from the hospital over to the coffee shop for a change in scenery. Fresh air. We had walked over in the rain. Even though we could have driven and kept dry.

I lift my hands toward the sky. Palms up.

"Esmy?"

She stops and turns around.

"What?"

My phone rings again. I sit down on the bench outside the coffee shop.

Esmy runs back to me. She's on her phone.

"What," she mouths.

"It's stopped raining."

I hold Esmy at arm's length. Expecting her to say something, something like, "Well at least she's not suffering anymore" or "See, if we were there she wouldn't have let go." She doesn't. She's still. No groove, or music emanating from her eyes. She's crying. I look at my arms.

She says, "They were always enough."

I float them like wings.


THE BAND
A MIRSKTOON!
HEY GUYS!
LOOK WHAT I FOUND!
YOU GUYS WANNA START A BAND?
BUT NONE OF US EVEN KNOW HOW TO PLAY ANYTHING!
LEMONHEADS
I'M PRETTY SURE ALL THE GREAT BANDS NEVER KNEW HOW TO PLAY ANYTHING AT FIRST EITHER!
IT'S TRUE, YA KNOW...
K, SO WHAT DO WE DO? WE ONLY HAVE ONE GUITAR...


EASY!
WE'LL JUST MAKE WHAT WE NEED!
FAKE IT 'TIL YA MAKE IT!
TAKE THESE TRASH CANS, FLIP 'EM OVER, AND WE GOT DRUMS!
SHAKE SHAKE!
AND HERE, YOU CAN PLAY THIS KIDS TOY THAT JUST FELL OUTTA THE TRASH!
WHAT?!! I'M NOT PLAYING THAT!! YOU PLAY IT!!!
FINE, I'LL PLAY IT... GET A GRIP, SOURPUSS
K, NOW WE'RE READY!


BUT WE STILL DON'T KNOW HOW TO ACTUALLY PLAY ANYTHING!
SO, WE'LL LOOK IT UP ONLINE!
"COOLEST ROCK BANDS EVER..."
TAP
TAP
IT SAYS HERE THEY ALL PARTIED REALLY HARD AND SMASHED THEIR EQUIPMENT...
KICK!
SMASH!!
AAH!
LET'S GO GET DRUNK!!
THAT WAS A FUN BAND!

THE FICTION

GOLEMSON

BY GARY BARWIN

"There is love in me the likes of which you've never seen."

—*Mary Shelley's Frankenstein.*

Night. I was waiting on a bench. On the sidewalk. In the fog. Toronto, Eglinton, near Dufferin. Outside a music store, its window filled with accordions, lurid red plastic trumpets, and an LP of *Que Sera Sera,* leaning against some maracas. It was a fitting theme song for the students who passed through the little back room, taking lessons with Pasquale, at least in terms of the uncertain melodies they produced with their nervous, ill-prepared fingers. But kids—who knew what those fingers were capable of now? The future's not ours to see, after all. It may possibly be filled with skilled accordionists.

But night and fog. The music store mute. He was walking down the street, moving between clouds of lamplit luminosity and obscurity. Wearing a dark suit and a bowler hat. Like Magritte or the men in his paintings. And like me.

Kidding. In a bowler hat, I'd look more like an aging droog. He moved toward me, with no kind of expression on his face, but I saw he was a form of regret made manifest. One of my many regrets. Usually they're not so dapper.

My golem.

I hadn't seen him for years. We'd lost touch and, in a way, I was surprised I recognized him. Surprised he was still alive. I didn't think golems could live so long.

We had been close once. Twins. Lovers, of a kind, even.

No. We never were. I know nothing of his viscera. I do not know if golems can love. Or if they can make love. With another golem. With anything. All that clay. Might gum up the works.

It's said that, like Adam, we're all born as golems. Guileless mammalforms. That misfortune shapes us into the complex humans that we are. But I've met some breadboxes more capable of love than many of the misfortune-moulded walking Freud couches I've encountered.

"My dreidel," I'd joke. "I made you out of clay."

But how do you make a golem? I didn't know, so I Googled it. It is said that you harvest a bathtub's worth of clay exhumed from a grave by a riverbed and fill a body bag. You take it home and form a colossal three-dimensional gingerbread man with your mortal hands. You knead the shapeless husk to near-human shape. You are tender and stern. You do this at night while weeping, praying while drunk.

Then you write the name for God on the skin of a woman who has died in childbirth, skin the span of a baby's chest. Or you ask for and are given a hymen on which you write "*Elohim.*" You write a "*Shem,*" a name of God, and a magic formula on a piece of parchment, a slip of paper—it could be a Post-it note—and place in it in the golem's mouth. You write "אמת," *emet,* the Hebrew word for truth on its forehead. When you wish to undo the life of the creature, the creature who was only a certain kind of alive, you erase the first letter, aleph, leaving, "מת," *met,* the Hebrew for dead. If you do not know Hebrew, you write something else. You free-write. You edit. You take the name of God from its mouth. Again, the creature becomes the bed of a river, is the earth only, can be used to make pots, or coffee mugs, or terra cotta tiles.

How had I made the golem?

Clay. Amphetamines. The Hebrew I remembered from my bar mitzvah.

A kit ordered from the Internet.

It was a mess the first time. The second time also.

I threw the clay over the fence.

He'd come to me in the night. I woke and, before I opened my eyes and saw him, I knew he was there, standing silently by our bed, a massive presence, a dark shadow in the dark. Wearing a dark suit and a bowler. A nice touch, I'd thought.

Mary was in the bed beside me. We'd been married for six years, though we'd been together for thirteen, having met at university when we both lived in the Annex, on Brunswick, just off Bloor. We tried to have children, but eventually our doctor had determined that, in terms of procreation, I was a Peter Pan, a feeble warbler in a choir of perpetual boys. The few swimmers I had were dog-paddling splutterers, only good for show.

"Will I ever be able to have a child of my own?" I asked.

"Unlikely," the doctor said.

We tried anyway. Each month a ritual of waiting, of hoping, praying, of temperature-appointed times, of reassurances. Of discussions of options.

There was a month when we had thought Mary was pregnant. Hoping against hope. Mary was late and she had a feeling, a kind of murmuration behind her ribs. Blood cells turning in a slow sarabande, or maybe it was too much smoked meat, too much coffee, an anxiety-hope blend. We'd been trying for so long. We'd made tomato sauce and soups together, had made bread and family meals, as if through this ritual we could transubstantiate our relationship into a living thing, a viable zygote that would divide and divide and divide into our child Zeno's paradox, the arrow finds its mark, the rabbit overtakes. We would make more cells in the world and the world would come into greater focus, a kind of higher-resolution pixilation. Our story would become more vibrant, luminous. Moving. Happy.

But as we worried and hoped, I was increasingly turning into a kind of clay myself, my cells joining, not dividing, becoming large simple shapes. Cellular goons. At one point, I gave sperm to the

ILLUSTRATION BY MATTHEW DALEY


אמת

doctor to be concentrated, centrifuged, boiled down like maple syrup, syringed.

Syringe. I remembered when I was a child in an Irish hospital ward. Rows of starched white sheets, metal-framed beds. A large needle stuck into my upper thigh. The needle still in, the starched blue nurse replaced the syringe with another and again emptied it into my muscle. I'd been given a first day of issue cover, commemorating John Millington Synge. I thought it said John Millington Syringe. His shaggy-dog moustache and expressionless face.

"Are you happy?" my wife would ask.

It was then that the golem appeared beside my bed, silent, shadowy, dapper.

My golem. I made you out of clay.

Was the golem happy?

It was then I ill-advisedly quit my teaching job without telling my wife, even though we had no real savings. I imagined myself a sad sack in a Tom Waits song, heading west with a suitcase and a back seat full of bourbon, looking for cheap hotels in which to write a mixture of despair and out-of-focus faith. But really, after I quit my job, I just stayed home, became silent, and slept during the day. My marriage ended. My grandfather used to say, "*Der oylem iz a goylem*"—"People are fools." And I was people.

For years I thought I saw my golem walking down the street, in the booth at a restaurant, in the passing lane beside me on the highway. I'd kept watching for him, waiting. And then I got an e-mail. It was from the golem. All caps. Typical. I didn't take it for Internet shouting but as an ironic dig at the simple preschool sensibility of the average golem. My wife—my ex-wife—had had a child. Unto her a son was born. Apparently, the child was his. I imagined their late-night coupling as if it were a folk tale and they, in the rain and fog, in a graveyard, had come together, an elemental and preternatural force. Hundreds of years ago, as if it had to be so. The cracking open of gravestones and of things as they were. I saw her thin hands reaching around the incredible clay hulk of the golem's shoulders, gripping, leaving scalloped impressions, like a child's squeezing fingers in a kindergarten craft project. The golem like the swaying of an old tree. His face wasn't peaceful; rather, I'd say, unperturbed. From a different time, a character in a legend following the story he knows to be written for him with quiet resolution and little emotion.

But it wasn't like that.

"I MADE THE CHILD," his e-mail said.

Again, an opaque night. A story. Under the crow limbs of a dark tree, he did agitate his fertile horn until his seed was free. Lightning striking the oak in a Jekyll and Hyde moment the instant of the golem's grounding. Glass vials like vacuum tubes hidden under the black wing of his cloak. And then he rides to town, a Headless Horseman, with his satchel full of jism.

I assumed that Mary hadn't planned on being the mother of the golem's child. I thought of that creepy yet surprisingly beloved kids' story where the mother slinks across town, sneaks into her grown son's bedroom to hold him and sing of her love, and imagined the golem silently crushing the screen door handle in his fist and letting himself in the back door to Mary's kitchen, Mary stretched out on the living room couch, her nightgown

MIDNIGHT TO 2 A.M.

The youngest screams every night.
Every night, she is molten rage and you are cold
because you don't wear pants to bed
and their room is the furthest from the furnace.
And you wish you were your mom because
she always had a robe on in the middle of the night, and
she always knew what to do,
and you never know what to do and you don't even
own a robe.

And they are screaming,
and now they are is throwing things—
dogs and birds and cats
fly through the air and collide with
the wall,
the IKEA dresser that is covered in stickers,
the bed they refuse to sleep in.
Instead, they have made a nest on the floor
because they are more animal than child,
unless they are snuggling you, and then they are all animal,
and you wish for a moment that you could be birthing them again
to remember the animal you were before the words returned.

They scream and throw and the room crackles.
They whip a panda and it bounces off the bookshelf
and you want to turn your phone on
and stare at small curated squares,
anything to take you away from this room, this rage, this animal child.

And then a pause,
the tiniest pause,
a pause you almost miss, but if you catch it,
this half-breath,
you can ask if they want to count the stars,

and sometimes they will look at you
and throw a handful of Shopkins at your face,
and sometimes they will look at you and fold into your shoulder,
and you will carry their hiccupping weight down the street in
your underwear.

And you will pray there are no clouds,
you will pray for even just one star so you are not a liar.
Sometimes you call a satellite a star
because it is one in the morning and you need a win.

Even though they are big, so big,
you will sway down the sidewalk
the way you did when they were a newborn,
passing your neighbours' dark windows,
their arms around your neck,
and you will play I spy—
I spy with my little eye something with a striped tail that is running
between the houses.
I spy with my little eye something that is moving behind the
garbage can.

When you cannot hold them any longer,
you will carry them upstairs, and they will lie in their nest,
and you will lie in your bed, eleven steps from their soft, sleeping
breath,
and you will look up robes, terry cloth, you think,
You pick a colour that will blend into the corner of their midnight room,
navy blue, maybe, with pockets.

You type in your Visa number.
You pay for expedited shipping.
You lie in your bed while the rest of the house sleeps,
and wait for it to arrive.

—Lindsay Zier-Vogel

hiked high in the summer heat, bottle of her customary sleeping pills beside her. Stalwart, silent, unblinking, the golem solemnly approaches. The golem had a syringe. A turkey baster.

But then my story fades. It was not the story he wrote in his e-mail. Yes, he arrives and stands before her in the summer heat, but then he touches his big fingers to her slim face. The golem large as an armoire. She smiles. He leans down, a hummock come to life. He kisses her forehead. She feels the cool coils of his lips, the low rush of his breath. His eyes are endless, filled with desire. To be human. To be tender. To love.

He would lie with Mary, would be lithe Romeo to her delicate Juliet. But almost-human that he was, he could not. Yet Mary would lie beside him after, butterfly fluttering through the great forest of his body. They would join. Would share life. Would create it, as the Golem was created from the unpromising mud of earth. Life would be created by sharing life. Their life. His forehead pressed against hers, imprinting it with the word. *Emet.* Truth. "*Met,*" death, always there within the word, but also, marked on Mary's skin, its mirror image.

The golem and Mary, from his sample, did join gametes, both male and female, and so did cause the spring. And I, distant, absent, my words telling another story.

The child, the golem said, was named after me. Kidding, he said. It wasn't. They named it René, after Mary's father.

When I'd finished reading his e-mail, I'd responded immediately.

"Golem," I'd said. "Congratulations. To all of you. And—since you seem to have some experience in this sort of thing—grant me, if you would, this kindness."

All the golems, from those in the Bible to those in Reb Loew's Prague, were Claymation palookas with no more wit than a brick. But they had life. Sometimes, a golem is created out of longing, ambition, failure, and a need to know that you are somehow real, that your ministrations and hope may affect the world. But sometimes, too, in time, a son can create his own father, a golem too, can create the writing that created him. A kind of pearl writing the clam into being. As I wrote him into life, or at least, wished it, so he would write me.

And so in the Toronto fog, we met at the hour and location he suggested. Midnight at the bench, outside the closed music store.

My golem was carrying a small box, a dented green metal cooler, held to his chest in an embrace. Protecting it, as in a mother-and-child painting. I was both disturbed and relieved by what was likely inside.

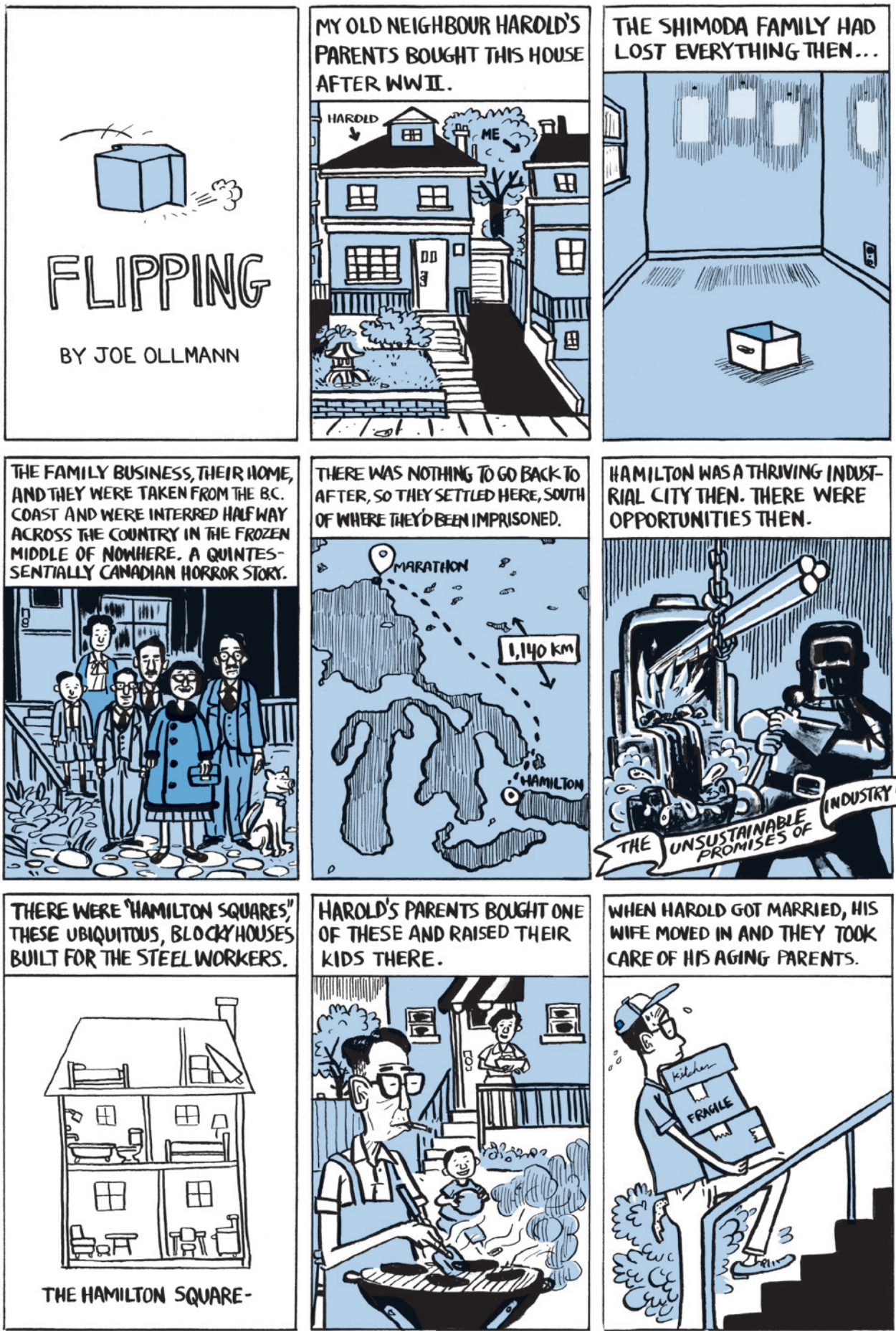
"I have it," he said.

"Don't spend this all in one place," I said and handed him an envelope. "Really," I said. "Don't."

And then he continued down the sidewalk, past the 7-Eleven, the library, the mattress store, and into the night. What was in the box? A corned beef sandwich? A donated heart? A taxidermy squirrel dressed as Napoleon, little tricorn hat pinned between its ears?

I opened the box with apprehension. I felt a cloud of cold on the back of my hand. Inside, an envelope. I pulled out the slip of paper with a sense of inevitability and dread.

"אמת." ✪

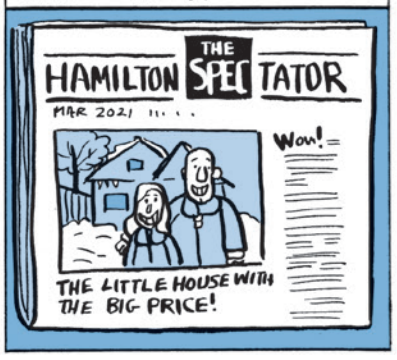

FLIPPING
BY JOE OLLMANN
MY OLD NEIGHBOUR HAROLD'S PARENTS BOUGHT THIS HOUSE AFTER WWII.
HAROLD
ME
THE SHIMODA FAMILY HAD LOST EVERYTHING THEN...
THE FAMILY BUSINESS, THEIR HOME, AND THEY WERE TAKEN FROM THE B.C. COAST AND WERE INTERRED HALF WAY ACROSS THE COUNTRY IN THE FROZEN MIDDLE OF NOWHERE. A QUINTESSENTIALLY CANADIAN HORROR STORY.
THERE WAS NOTHING TO GO BACK TO AFTER, SO THEY SETTLED HERE, SOUTH OF WHERE THEY'D BEEN IMPRISONED.
MARATHON
1,140 km
HAMILTON
HAMILTON WAS A THRIVING INDUSTRIAL CITY THEN. THERE WERE OPPORTUNITIES THEN.
THE UNSUSTAINABLE PROMISES OF INDUSTRY
THERE WERE "HAMILTON SQUARES," THESE UBIQUITOUS, BLOCKY HOUSES BUILT FOR THE STEEL WORKERS.
THE HAMILTON SQUARE-
HAROLD'S PARENTS BOUGHT ONE OF THESE AND RAISED THEIR KIDS THERE.
WHEN HAROLD GOT MARRIED, HIS WIFE MOVED IN AND THEY TOOK CARE OF HIS AGING PARENTS.
kitchen
FRAGILE


A LOT OF LIFE HAPPENED THERE. HAROLD'S ADULT SON DIED WHILE THEY LIVED THERE, HIS WIFE DIED WHILE THEY LIVED THERE.
HE AND HIS FAMILY LIVED IN THAT HOUSE FOR OVER 70 YEARS.
IT STILL HAD 60S VENEER PANELLING ON THE WALLS, ONCE NEW AND MODERN, NOW DINGY AND CHARMING. THIS WAS A HOME.
TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS
Toronto MAPLE
I FOUND A YOUTUBE CLIP OF A SUPER 8 FILM OF OUR STREET CORNER, SHOT IN 1950, AND SHOWED IT TO HAROLD. HE QUIETLY SAID THE NAMES OF THE LONG-DEAD GAS STATION ATTENDANTS. HAROLD HAD ROOTS HERE.
...that's John Hasting. ...and that's Karl...
HAROLD DIED AT 97, AND HIS EXTENDED FAMILY SOLD THE HOUSE TO A YOUNG COUPLE.
SOLD
SALE!
CALL US, BABY...
THEY SEEMED NICE ENOUGH. THOUGH THE GUY CALLED ME "BUDDY," LIKE A HYPERACTIVE BELLBOY IN A MOVIE.
HEY BUDDY!
THEY DID A LOT OF RENOVATIONS! HOLY MOLEY! NEWLYWEDS WORKING TOGETHER, HOW NICE, I THOUGHT. BUT NAW...
BAM BAM BAM
BUZZZ
SAT. MORNING!
JESUS CHRIST. I'LL KILL THAT GUY...
7:02
AFTER THE RENOS WERE DONE, A FOR SALE SIGN APPEARED ON THE LAWN, ALMOST EXACTLY WHERE HAROLD'S LITTLE STONE PAGODA USED TO BE. (NOT TO BE POETIC, IT'S JUST A FACT.)
GREEDMAX
FOR SALE
JOE SHART
253-7062
THE MOTHER FUCKERS ARE FLIPPING IT.


TALEN FOUND THE LISTING AND THEY'D GUTTED IT; REPLACED EVERYTHING WITH CHEAP, SHODDY BUILDING MATERIALS.
HAROLD'S HOUSE LOOKS LIKE EVERY SHITTY AIR BnB LISTING...
AND, IT WAS FOR SALE FOR DOUBLE WHAT THEY PAID.
STARTER HOME PRICED!
$799,000.00
GREAT INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITY!!
RAKE
RAKE
HEY BUDDY...
RAKE
RAKE
"HEY."
RAKE
RAKE
I GUESS YOU SAW THE FOR SALE SIGN...
YEP.
RAKE
RAKE
WE'RE SAD TO MOVE, BUT WE JUST GOT ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY TOO GOOD TO PASS UP ON...
MM-HMM...
RAKE
RAKE

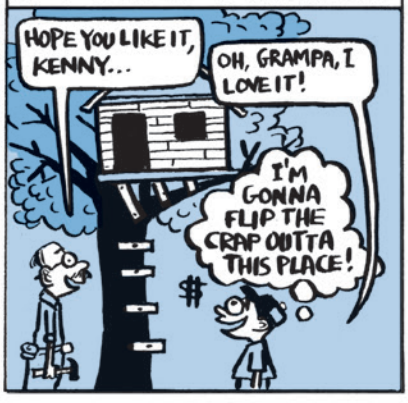
AT LEAST THIS GUY HAD ENOUGH HUMANITY TO BE ASHAMED OF WHAT HE WAS DOING.

THESE TURDS ON THE COVER OF THE LOCAL PAPER WITH SHIT-EATING GRINS, WERE'NT ASHAMED TO ADMIT THAT THE "MODEST WAR-TIME HOME" THEY BOUGHT FOR $430K WAS FLIPPED FOR $830K A FEW MONTHS LATER.



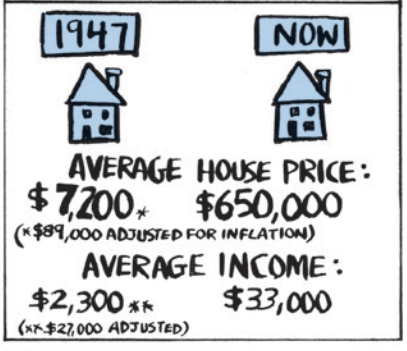
THEY SHOULD BE HOUNDED TO THEIR GRAVES, BUT THE NEWSPAPER PUFF PIECE, CALLING THE PARASITIC COUPLE "INVESTORS" HAD NARY A CRITICAL WORD.

HOW IS THIS SHAMEFUL PRACTICE NORMALIZED? YOU CAN SEARCH "HOW TO FLIP A HOUSE," AND IT COMES UP ON THE REMAX WEB-SITE AND NOT ON THE DARK WEB NEXT TO OPIOIDS AND ANIMAL PORN.



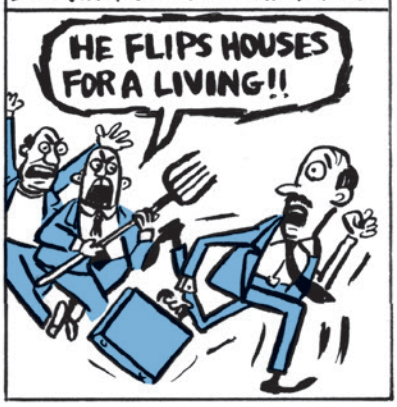
CAPITALISM FINDS A WAY.

THE RIGHT TO A HOME, AND THE ONCE-OBTAINABLE DREAM OF OWNING A HOME, ESCAPING THE END-LESS TRAP OF RENT, WAS A REAL-ITY FOR MOST WORKERS BEFORE THE HOUSING MARKET WAS SO OBSCENELY INFLATED.



THE GLEEFUL COMMODIFICATION OF THIS BASIC NECESSITY IS SOME-HOW TOLERATED IN LAW AND LIFE.

I KNOW THERE'S NO SOLUTION, AND CAPITALISM WILL HAVE ITS UNMIT-IGATED WAY, I JUST WANT THESE SPECULATORS AND "INVESTORS" AND HOUSE-FLIPPING MOTHERFUCKERS TO BE SHAMED OUT OF EXISTENCE.



THE PROFILE

ABOVE SNAKES

Derek McCormack isn't finished desecrating the things he loves.

BY CONAN TOBIAS

Derek McCormack was his usual self-effacing self this past February, when he took part in a Zoom conversation with the journalist Nathalie Atkinson, in support of his latest book, *Judy Blame's Obituary,* a collection of his non-fiction writing on fashion. McCormack, who is fifty-three but still has a slightly boyish look, despite his close-cropped hair and white beard, dressed in keeping with the subject matter, in a rubberized Jean Paul Gaultier shirt he said he bought in the eighties. Not that you'd know it. Slumped far down in the frame, he revealed little below his neckline, letting his backdrop of vintage Halloween decorations and carnivalia take up more space on the screen than he did. "There's nothing that could get me to stand up and show you any more of this shirt," McCormack told Atkinson. "It's like a halter top on me at this point."

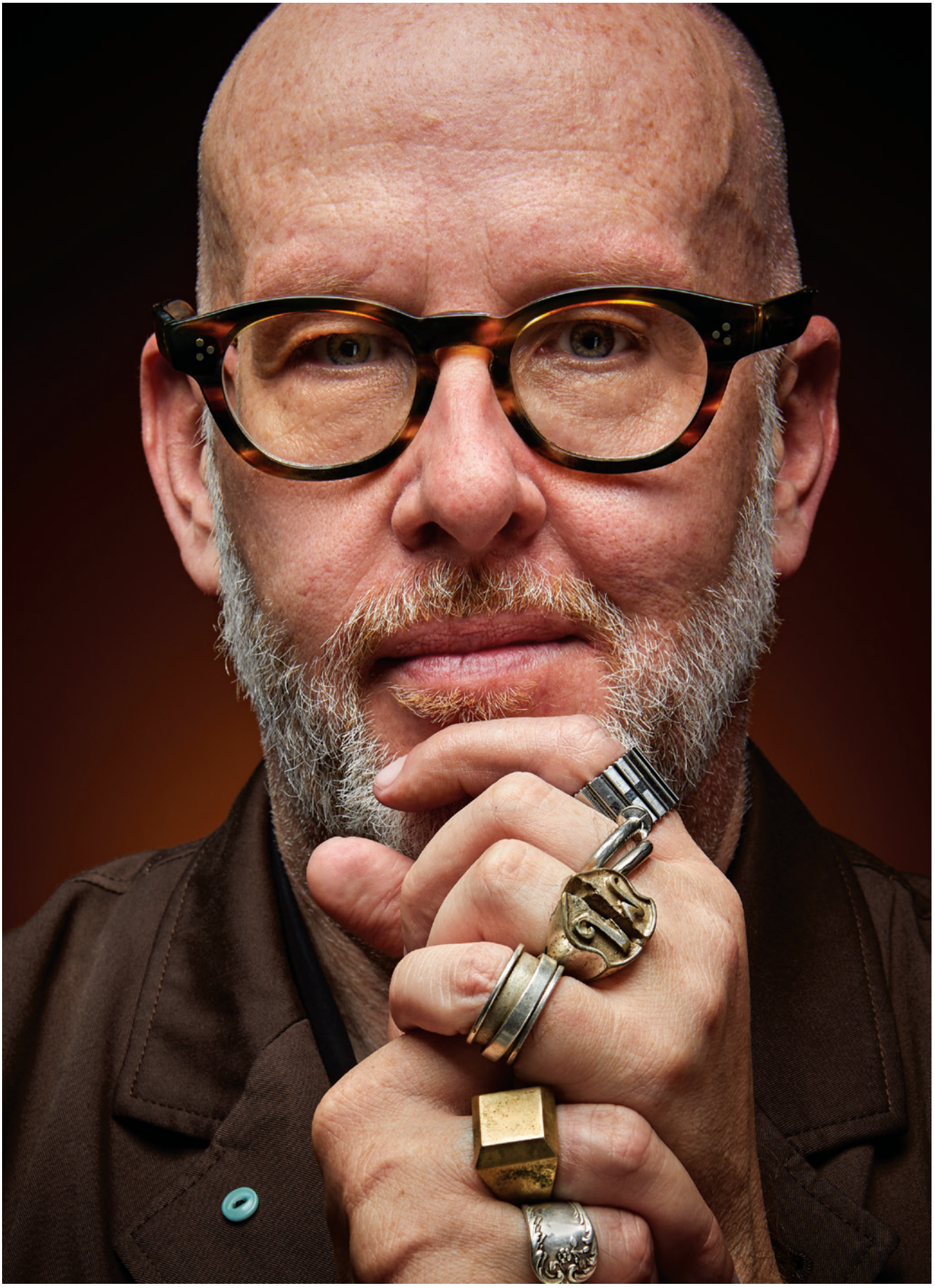
Judy Blame's Obituary is McCormack's ninth book since 1996, and the second published in just over a year. In 2020, he released *Castle Faggot,* his latest comically dark horror novel touching on various aspects of pop culture—in this case breakfast cereal monsters, the fashion world, and Rankin/Bass stop-motion TV specials—that may or may not be the third (or fourth) part of a potentially mislabeled trilogy. This uncharacteristic proliferation resulted in a number of online appearances for McCormack, including launches for each book and a lecture on dolls for Toronto's Bata Shoe Museum. Although McCormack likes to put on a sad-sack loner persona—and it is, in large part, a put-on—he's ready to perform in front of a live crowd again. "At first I thought, 'This is great. I don't have to leave my apartment,'" he said. "I would get quite into it. But then there's no one after to tell you how you did, or to get a drink with, or to go out for fries with. So I started to have these little tricks before I would do an event. I would leave TCM on my TV at a low volume, so when the hubbub just dies, I wasn't totally alone."

Over the past year, McCormack and I spent quite a bit of in-person time discussing his writing career—conversations that were equal parts entertaining, given his playful cattiness and self-deprecation, and frustrating, for his long-held resistance to answering questions factually. Our talks were inspired by the recent twenty-fifth anniversary of *Dark Rides,* his debut short story collection, but also by the fact that McCormack's career is such an interesting case study of a small-press author who came of age in Toronto's vibrant nineteen-nineties small press scene—one who received a not insignificant amount of mainstream attention early on, despite his work falling far outside the mainstream. The stories in *Dark Rides* were inspired by McCormack's youth as a gay teen in small-town Peterborough, Ontario, where his parents ran a local department store, and he fell in love with the writings of Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Burroughs, while devouring the fashion and pop culture articles he found in the pages of magazines like *The Face. Dark Rides* is set in Peterborough in 1952. It features various characters—many of whom are named Derek McCormack—who walk through life with an unearned arrogance, despite, or perhaps as a result of, a näivety that continually sees them humiliated either verbally or physically by rural locals who love nothing more than torturing those they view as different. "I was just showing readers the dangers of working on a haunted hayride or shopping at a joke shop or going to some honky-tonk saloon underage and getting hosed in nineteen-fifties Peterborough," McCormack said. "So I guess it's a cautionary book."

Despite being published by a Toronto-based micro-press, *Dark Rides* garnered a decent amount of, largely positive, reviews. "I was received surprisingly well," McCormack said. "I was pretty green, in the sense that I had no expectations. *Dark Rides* was distributed by a really great distributor in the States. In Canada, it was slow, but once it got reviews in the U.S., Canadians started calling. I was on *Imprint,* a literary show on TVO. I remember that because the first question was, 'Do your parents know you're gay?' That was the kind of question you got at the time. But you didn't get shelved in Fiction, you got shelved in Gay Interest, at the back of the store. The only books you could really get published by a mainstream press as a gay person were AIDS memoirs or coming-out books. That was all straight people wanted from you."

The height of McCormack's early Canadian fame was, arguably, a 1999 *Globe and Mail* article titled "Book Boys"—a puff piece that touted a group of then young authors—Andrew Pyper, Russell Smith, Evan Solomon, and McCormack—as "Toronto's literary Brat Pack." The group is described as having "lifestyles and agendas … a far cry from Pierre Berton and Peter Gzowski" and running "the cocktail circuit in packs, standing out in designer trainers and Prada knockoffs amid the rumpled-cardigan masses. Beautiful, cocky, determined to succeed and, like most packs defined by age, attitude, haircuts and hormones, slightly ridiculous." McCormack is said to be "probably the least recognized of the group, [but] the others treat him

PHOTOGRAPH BY THOMAS BLANCHARD



with reverence for his experimental style"—all of which he still bristles at today. "Have you ever heard a worse description of me?" he said. "Let's go through that. I didn't wear trainers. I didn't wear knockoff Prada. I didn't wear knockoff anything. I was not a party animal. I was not Spuds MacKenzie. There's no resemblance to me at all. And no one has ever treated me with reverence."

Over the next decade, McCormack released another story collection, *Wish Book;* a carnival-inspired collaboration with the poet Chris Chambers, *Wild Mouse;* the non-fiction volume *Christmas Days;* and two novels, *The Haunted Hillbilly* and *The Show That Smells,* not to mention several objects d'art though the Toronto press Pas de chance. With *The Haunted Hillbilly,* he moved his setting away from nineteen-fifties Peterborough and to a stylistically fictional land of his own creation, mixing real-world icons from the realms of country music and fashion with a variety of literal (often gay) monsters. McCormack continued to earn mainstream press, but a major deal remained elusive.

"Even though that *Globe* article was awful and depicted us as dipshits, it was weird to be a gay writer with three straight writers who were getting a lot of press and had big book deals. It didn't make sense that I was there," McCormack said. "There was a period when everyone was getting signed to agencies and big deals were being made, and gay men never made those deals. We were still considered outsiders. For all the great groundswell of CanLit and the money infused in it and the agents and parties and deals, you didn't get those if you were a fag. But then something really weird happened: gay lit sort of came into its own. In a short period of time it became recognized. It could go in Fiction. But then, in a heartbeat, it was boring, it was passé, it was too prissy, it was old fashioned. I think the moment came after gay stuff hit the mainstream in sitcoms and movies. Gay became normalized, but it was this super-sanitized version of gayness. There was a moment in the eighties and nineties when people were interested in transgressive literature. I had always been lumped into that. It's ridiculous, because transgressive literature was always defined as dirty-ass stories of urban living, drug use, prostitution, recklessness, and I was never like that. I was always writing about the fifties in small-town Canada or in Nashville at the Opry. But I guess there was enough finger fucking and rimming and shit that people saw it as transgressive."

Not long after his fortieth birthday, McCormack began experiencing pains in his stomach. He eventually was diagnosed with peritoneal surface malignancy, a cancer that attacks the tissue covering the abdominal walls and organs. Thankfully, a recent mid-life health kick had left him strong enough that doctors were able to try an aggressive surgery. In early 2012, McCormack entered Mount Sinai Hospital, in Toronto, for a daylong procedure, during which surgeons opened him and essentially lifted and scrubbed each organ, as well as his abdomen walls. McCormack's spleen, as well as parts of his liver, bowel, and intestine, were removed permanently, along with the lining of his abdomen. Doctors then briefly filled his abdomen with a warm chemo solution, before sewing him back up. Potential complications resulting from the procedure are plentiful: for example, because the abdomen lining will not grow back, doctors need to ensure organs don't attach to the walls. (McCormack's bladder did end up attaching to his abdomen, making him prone to infections.)

Recovery is as equally, if not more, unpleasant than the surgery. "I was in the I.C.U. for two weeks," McCormack said. "The surgery also shuts down your digestive system, so they have to hope it starts up again. With me it took about eight days. And the delirium. I didn't sleep for weeks. I was suicidal. When I had my eyes open there were beetles crawling all over me, there were outlets speaking to me, and I thought I had wind in my clothes. I thought someone had stolen my teeth and put British teeth in. Your body diverts all the glucose away from your brain to heal the body, so your brain is a damaged little animal. I stopped talking. And when I did open my eyes I'd say, 'I can't do this.' Eventually, I started to eat, started going on walks. I moved back into my own apartment. It did wonders for my brain to be there."

Because peritoneal surface malignancy is extremely rare and usually forms in patients over the age of sixty, there isn't a lot of information on survival rates for someone McCormack's age. Around fifty percent survive for five years. McCormack has now survived for ten.

McCormack is keenly aware that this real-life experience mirrors many of the fictional horrors in his writing. In the short story "Wish Window," a department store window dresser uses a display to expresses his anger after being diagnosed with cancerous tumours, while the country singer Hank Williams dies a slow, disturbing death across the pages of *The Haunted Hillbilly,* just to cite two examples. "It all makes sense," McCormack said. "When I was a kid, I started bleeding in my pee, and I had maybe four or five exploratory surgeries to see if I had cancer. I didn't, but it still gave me this deep expectation that it would be found one day. I was a terribly ill child, and I also grew up really openly gay in a space where that was considered a sickness—I didn't think it was a sickness, but obviously I developed this anxiety about being sick in other ways, which comes out in my books."

McCormack's first post-cancer book, *The Well-Dressed Wound,* a Civil War–era story featuring Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln facing off against the Devil disguised as the Belgian fashion designer Martin Margiela, is not only sparser than his earlier novels—many pages are mostly, if not entirely, blank, and several others feature little more than exclamation marks—it's also angrier. Two pages are made up almost entirely of the word "faggot," and everything, living or inanimate, is covered with AIDS. "*The Well-Dressed*

Wound is my cancer book," McCormack said. "I really wanted to write a book about dying and cum and shit and an angry screed, which I did. I think it's the sparsest book because I had to write more of it in my head when I was lying on the couch. I did not have the strength to sit up at a computer, and I didn't often have the strength to write, so it repeats a lot and it's rhythmic. I could only hold things in my head long enough and get them on the page and then think of the next page. Someone read *Castle Faggot* and said, 'Oh it's the angriest book, but it has the most emotion,' but I think *The Well-Dressed Wound* is by far the most emotional and the angriest of the books. There's very little time to stop and laugh in *The Well-Dressed Wound.* It's just outrage after outrage and death after death."

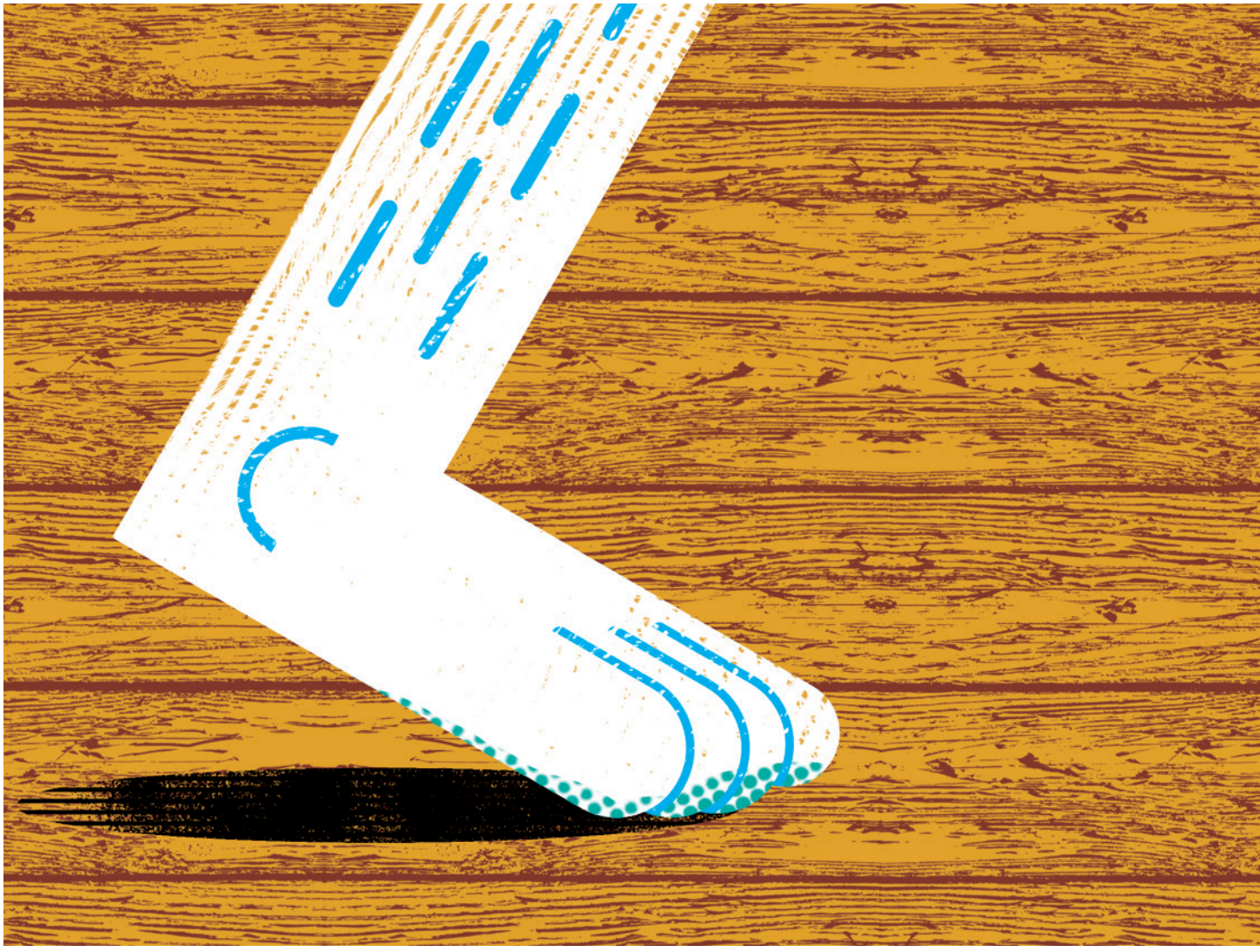
If his latest novel, *Castle Faggot,* feels like a return to form, it's because it was written largely pre-cancer. Originally a novel called *Rue du Doo,* it placed McCormack-styled versions of the General Mills Monster Cereals characters in a Rankin/Bass-type setting. But the book ended up short, even by McCormack's standards, and was eventually shelved. "I thought, Should I add these other ideas? Should I write other things? And then I got cancer, and when I was recovering the book didn't really interest me at all. Then, having survived and having had *The Well-Dressed Wound* flop, I thought, Oh shit, I've got to write another book. Oh my god, I have this thing here. I had someone read the Rankin/Bass section and they said, 'For something that was really short, there were a lot of boring parts in it,' and they were right. There's a general frustration with me as a writer: after twenty-five years, why can't I write the idea I want to write? Why do I always cut everything out? Why do I always not pursue things to the end? There's so much fun, rich nostalgic resource material and such personal feelings about those monsters. I'd tapped into it a bit, but I wasn't maximizing my own pleasure, which is what I tried to do in the end."

Ironically, the anger and outrage McCormack fed into his recent novels was fed back to him by some in the gay community. While the multiple instances of "faggot" in *The Well-Dressed Wound* managed not to draw too much public ire, its appearance in the title of his latest novel did. After years of being embraced by the gay community, McCormack was suddenly face to face with a new L.G.B.T.Q. generation that didn't agree with his long-held ownership and love of the word. Several bookstores refused to display *Castle Faggot,* and it was removed from Amazon several times, owing to a combination of customer complaints and algorithm flagging. "I hear blowback from young queer people who find my take on these things distasteful, but I also think they're just generally not interested in a middle-aged white gay writer," McCormack said. I don't blame them. I think that, at best, we're just super boring and, at worst, we're spoiled or privileged.

"I think I got reinstated on Amazon because my publisher, Semiotext(e), is distributed by MIT Press. But a couple of places were supposed to run reviews and didn't. Two of them were gay and lesbian publications. That said, it's been much less flak than I would expect. *Castle Faggot* had the fewest reviews I've ever gotten but the best sales. Part of that is distribution. I got interviewed by a kid who bought it at his bookstore in Jerusalem. I got a note from someone who bought it from the gift store at the Tate. I think the fact it had that title made it taboo. And I have a sense that word may be becoming more prominent again thanks to me. Just the other day on the street some people called me faggot and I thought, Oh, they loved my book."

Despite initially claiming he was done with his past characters, McCormack currently is working on a book that returns to the world of country music. "I can't even picture there being another book like my older books," he said. "It's going to be much less writing and more visuals, but the visuals will not be copied and they won't be black squares, they'll be things I made. The new book I do with images will be set in Nashville, in the country music world, and it's going to visit all the characters in the country music novels, but it's going to be like a wrap-up. I feel like there are a few things left I haven't desecrated in country music, and I'm just going to get in there and do it. I love writing about those country and western characters because they remind me of growing up listening to that music. There's also so much nostalgia: there was nostalgia for a period I wasn't born, there was nostalgia for a period my grandparents talked about, there was nostalgia for a period my parents lived through, and now I have nostalgia for the period when I was writing those things: that period when I wrote *The Haunted Hillbilly* and went to Nashville and drove around. I'm nostalgic for that youth and that freedom. And what I want to do with the writing has changed. My future books will all be attached to something I make. I'm not good at making things. But if the good Lord or Satan gives me a few more years, I would like to get good at making things. I can see some of them not being books at all. I can see one of them being a magic show that has no publication. Some of these things in my head look more like a craft category at a rural fall fair. I've been publishing for twenty-six years. I still like publishing, but at some point you're like, How can we vary this? My art friends have dragged me slightly into the art world, and I love watching people make things. It seems to me so gratifying and something you can do despite your bad health days.

"My idea for my last book is set in a miniature train, and I basically want it to be a cycle where I go back through the sites of all my books. It's a book about travelling through this landscape, where I keep returning to my ideas over and over, which is what all my books have been anyway. I really wanted to literalize the idea that I keep returning to the same things, kind of as a goodbye. There's going to be a serial killer on the train. And then I think someone might kill me. It's either a return to familiar ideas or admitting I only have one idea."



THE FICTION

THIS IS THE WAY

BY JESSICA WESTHEAD

You have to do it like this. But this is the way you have to do it.

Then you need to ask us to put the special stamp on it. Don't forget that part. We have the special stamp, but you have to ask us for it. You need to submit your stamp request at a precise but unspecified moment in the process, and if you miss that moment, we are not responsible for what might happen as a result.

You can do it another way, but that way is more complicated. But that's the way you'll have to do it if you don't take our advice about doing it the first way, exactly the way it's supposed to be done.

To be clear: We have the special stamp, and we are fully prepared to give it to you, but you need to ask us for the right colour or the stamp must remain in the drawer. We're sorry but our hands are tied. Because of the rules. The rules apply to all of us. You seem to be asking us to flaunt the rules because you seem to think the rules do not apply to you. That way of thinking is wrong.

If you tell us in advance that you need two stamps, which you might, but we can't tell you definitively at this point if you will or if you won't, then we will make a note of that. But we will only make a note of it once. You should not ask us again after that. We need you to understand that part. That part is very important. One stamp, two notes. Remember that, or you might as well rip up your application and start over. Although you can only apply once, so starting over is not an option.

You need to change your way of doing things because it is too collaborative. There are too many people involved in your project and we don't know what they're all doing. They could be doing things we don't approve of.

ILLUSTRATION BY MATTHEW DALEY

They could be using their own stamps! That would be one of the worst possible things. But we think you know that already. If there is an unregulated stamp you have not disclosed to us, there needs to be a line item about it.

We are supportive of the potential of your project, as we have stated. As we have stated many times. We will indicate our support often and enthusiastically. It's a good project. We plan on supporting it. But we need to support it in the way that is correct.

If you need our signature, just ask. The signature is not the same as the stamp. As we have already explained to you when we cited B. Reg.1002/46. That was the part about the signature not being the same as the stamp.

We will say it again: The project is good. It will be good and beneficial for all involved. We are supportive of the end goal of helping you get this project done! But only if it is in alignment with all of our policies.

We will not say anything bad about the project. But the way you are doing things, that is the problem. The way you are doing things is not in alignment. As we have explained. As we have explained very clearly, and outlined in the document we gave you with next steps and recommendations and then you came to us and said, "What?" And we said, "It's all there." And you got a look on your face that communicated something we did not understand, so we sent you the document again.

If you lose either version of the document we provided to you, we can't be held responsible for your mismanagement. You seem to think you're above the rules, but just a reminder that the rules apply to everyone. Just because you are doing this project that is good, the goodness does not extend to you. That is quite likely the heart of the matter here, which no one is talking about even as that heart is beating out its insistent and undeniable thumping rhythm in the background. The goodness of the project stands alone, without you. If you forget that part, we will remind you.

We are supportive of this project that addresses important themes. We cannot officially give you our support in writing on official letterhead until you get the stamps in the right order and in the right colours and you do those other things in the ways we have outlined. But we are absolutely in alignment with agreeing that the themes of the project are important and necessary. We all feel very enthusiastic about those themes and what they represent, both now and

in the past, and also in the future, if people keep believing that these themes are important.

But you should know that even if this project didn't exist, there would be other projects to address those themes. Because those themes are becoming more common now, which is, of course, a good thing. We can all agree there's no getting around the importance of those themes. If there was, we would not be having this discussion!

Things used to be easier before the important themes emerged, that's for sure. But even in those carefree days, the rules were in place for a reason. And that reason is: So we can all agree. So we can all have the same standard applied across the board. So there is no special treatment, which no one should receive. Because, whoa, once you start with the special treatment, then where does that end? There is literally no end to the possibilities of what might happen if you open that can of worms. Keep the can closed, please, we don't want those worms wriggling all over the place and making our papers slimy! Ha ha, no, but really. This is why we need the rules.

Don't worry. We will talk you through them. We think you might even come to love them, if you keep an open mind. The rules are written in a beautiful twisty-turny language that is like a sort of music to us. We have the urge to move and dance and ecstatically contort our bodies into all sorts of fantastical shapes when we sing Statute C-512 (which is one of the statutes that applies to your project, by the way!). It's as if there are flutes in it, but not the kind of flutes that are made out of metal. We're thinking more of ancient flutes made by ancient people out of animal bones, and perhaps you could do some research into ancient musical instruments, and add your findings to your documentation. Yes, please do that. Focus on flutes, but maybe you could look into drums too. We have the feeling that ancient drums were made out of animal skins. But how?? This is interesting to us. This is how you can make your application pop. You keep using the word "contemporary" in your application but we want to see more of the old stuff. We cannot guarantee that a permit will be granted if you include a detailed summary of all of the ancient musical instruments that have ever existed and how they were constructed (plus sample recordings of what they sounded like) and with all of your sources referenced using footnotes written in a cute miniature font, but we will say this: It certainly couldn't hurt.

Something else we are curious about is why you are interested in doing this project.

Yes, we know the themes are important. But aside from that. Who are the stakeholders? Please prepare a deck of the stakeholders. If you don't know what a deck is, we can't help you. No, it's not the thing you sit on in your backyard that is made of wood and that our husband keeps saying he will replace one of these summers, and we say, "Is *this* the

DAIRY MILK

On a metal shelf, nine pods of bread in short
neat rows as though at the morgue, an aisle
over from glue traps for mice. On pegs
round the corner, stuff for kids: dusty bags

of balloons that seem to quietly cry out
about missed birthdays. Handcuffs and gun.
Dairy Milk: a redundant name, I see now.
And with all the appeal of a boiler room, hard

to believe this bright, dusty place was my childhood
corner store, packed with wanted things.
This is where my dad said, "Why not?
You're a good kid," and bought me two *Superman*

comics so that I was speechless a moment.
I believe I said thanks. It was unlike a quiet man.
My mother enjoyed the happiness of others
the way you'd enjoy the warm glow of a fire,

gone now over twenty years as I sail slowly
around corners here. The first few times someone
dies or there's a sudden change, it's a few trees
falling, but the woods are still there.

To be older is to notice clear fields.

Well, fine. Let this store be a boiler room powering
me when I mule-carry groceries for my children,
pleased to pick them up from school. Can a room
sense what it becomes to someone else? As though

on an assembly line, a room rolls down landscapes
of purpose, and finally off the map. Leaving
the store, I bought a drink, asked about comics,
but he laughed and said, "No more."

—Alex Boyd

summer, Mitchell?" And he drinks another beer and says, "No, this is not the summer." But we remain hopeful! There are too many splinters in the old one and we have to wear flip-flops all the time. So, yes, not that kind of deck.

We acknowledge your frustration. We are frustrated too. We want to be able to walk barefoot on the deck and not worry about getting a splinter like the last time. Ha ha, just a little deck humour there. But seriously, we do want to be barefoot.

So! Who are the stakeholders? Break it down for us. This breakdown should be comprehensive and fulsome, and by this we mean it should comprise everything. Use PowerPoint. Or don't. It's up to you. But we do like PowerPoint. Or Google Slides are fine too. Except we like the functionality of PowerPoint better. There's a thrilling feeling of momentum and anticipation that builds during a PowerPoint presentation in a way that is absent from a Google Slides presentation. But whatever works best for you!

Include a clear timeline and specific outcomes. Will the outcomes clearly reflect the important themes, and will those outcomes be clearly executed in a manner that is clearly aligned with our policies, procedures, and regulations, namely L. Reg.12/77-C, which we are bound to uphold by the rules that are in place to uphold us?

You should also be aware that we do not make the rules, and we cannot change them. The rules exist as living, breathing entities that dictate what we can and cannot do. This might sound improbable, but believe us it's true and it's reality. And this improbable but definitely true reality can sometimes unfortunately result in awkward situations such as this one, in which we have to explain to you that we cannot change the rules because the rules have all the power. The rules tell us what to do and we have to obey because they have claws and teeth and a terrible temper, and the one time we tried to change them, there were extremely unpleasant and far-reaching consequences for everyone involved that we would prefer not to share with you for your own protection and because that memory is bad so we've tucked it away forever where it can't hurt us. Just alluding to it in these purposely vague and evasive terms is giving us a feeling we don't like, so let's move on.

We will say it again: We admire and echo your passion and commitment to this project. Your passion and your commitment remind us of something, but we can't put our finger on exactly what it is. Something that smells delicious like the pancakes our mother used to make for us when we were children, but then she would smother the pancakes in syrup before she gave them to us. Which you'd think would be a good thing, but it wasn't, because she put the syrup on about half an hour before she served us the pancakes (was this her attempt at efficiency? If so, it failed) so they were always wet and cold and mushy and we never enjoyed them.

Once again, we urge you to familiarize yourself with Q. Reg. 893/1B, which can be found by accessing the database we alluded to in an earlier e-mail, via the password and username we provided in that e-mail. Although by now that password may have expired, in which case you will need to apply for a new password within the next 30 days, or no dice.

We hope you have been enjoying your weekend so far! How about this gorgeous weather we've been having? Wow. It's starting to feel like spring (finally!) and we have been enjoying the sunshine on our deck. We would invite you over, but we don't want to.

But we do echo everyone's sentiments about the themes of your project being important and necessary! We will be toasting the themes of your project on our deck this weekend, while *you* meanwhile prepare your deck (ha ha, see what we did there?) and then ensure that you submit it in accordance with the way that you need to submit it, or else it will be invalidated and we can't read it, sorry. Because, as we have mentioned, we are bound by certain regulations, and so are you.

We wish you and the project and the important themes of the project well.

Cheers!


Sigh, Yet Another Night Out for
WENDY.
Walter Scott 2022
Oooooh! A negative test result!
You know what THAT means...
Time to go out and get wasted.
SO
LA LA LA!
36
I mean, it's probably not my crowd...
THE HOWL
But it's important to reach across the ideological aisle if we are to EVER understand one another.
Plus it's the only bar open in my 'hood.
BUT OF COURSE
No one will tell you that shooting vinegar into your eyes will dissolve the Vaccine's 5G chips because most people's pineal glands have been hijacked by chemtrails.
I, um, if that's, um, I um—
Can I get some cans to go?
SO
Am I going to die alone?
AND
YEP, home is where it's at. Definitely NO desire to go to an after-
YOUR UBER IS ON THE WAY


WELP
Hurry up, shh. It's $20.
The beer is $12.
I've never met an artist before. Are you ALL this cool?
SNNIIIIFFFFF
YES.
Dancing to a live cover of a Stevie Wonder song
Wendy. WENDY.
Who ARE you?
I am you, ten years from now.
I GET A TELFAR BAG?!
Yes, but not the color you want. Anyway, I'm here to tell you—
I know life is hard, and all you want to do is run from it. But I can tell you for a fact that something really good is coming soon.
Really? What is it?
wipe
No spoilers. Just pick yourself up off the floor please. And believe in yourself. You'll be okay.
Goodbye.
POP
If the future looks bright, if everything I need is inside me, then I guess that can only mean that...
One more drink won't hurt!!!
END?!

THE FICTION

TORNADO '85

BY ANDREW DALEY

Lander and Ryan lay entangled on the couch in Ryan's parents' basement, watching *Video Hits* and not studying French. Instead, Ryan was reading to her from his diary, a black sketchbook of drawings, poems, and stories about a girl named "Lindsay" or "Laura" or sometimes just "L."

"Storytime," Lander called it. She curled into his lap, listening to a story of how L.'s mother kept having breakdowns in the city, so L. had to live with her grandparents in a tiny town she hated. L. had a secret admirer who just happened to be named Ryan. The problem was that L. also had a real boyfriend who didn't write poetry, so she and Ryan could never be together.

In her favourite story, L. and Ryan run away to the city and live in a tall white apartment building. She loved that Ryan understood her, and maybe she loved him, too? Yes, maybe. She sat up, tossed his diary onto the floor, and kissed him. Soon they were groping at each other and there was no telling his needs from her own.

Ryan came up for air, panting excuses. His mother might come home and interrupt them, and what if Lander's boyfriend found out? Good points, especially about her boyfriend. Yet what did it matter if, as Ryan had written, they were already doomed? She unzipped his jeans, slid down the couch, and pulled him on top of her. Which was what he wanted, right? She guessed by his fumbling uncertainty that this was his first time, and liked him even more for that. Although maybe she should have asked first.

Too late. A few breathless moments later Ryan slid off her and pulled the scratchy afghan over them. Thunder cracked as he did, and the lights in the basement flickered. A storm warning had been issued that afternoon at school, and the threat had Lander feeling especially needy. Regret and guilt would come later, likely at supper. She expected a truckload.

Another massive wet cracking sounded dangerously close. Then the power cut out, banishing Madonna from the television. They dressed in the crisp silence and hurried upstairs to the living room. Beyond the bay window a silvery gloom was making night of the day. Wind bent the trees sideways, and the sky had a faint greenish tinge.

Ryan's hand found hers, and tugged at it.

"We should go back downstairs," he said.

She knew that. They could also cower under the kitchen table, or in the bathtub, wrapped in towels. Mostly they should get away from the window, against which the rain lashed like thrown stones. She thought of her grandparents, and all the trouble she'd lately brought them. And now this.

"I gotta be home for supper," she said. "I have to go."

"Are you nuts?" Ryan said. "You can't go out there."

But she was already at the front door, pulling on her sneakers. Ryan retrieved her denim jacket and knapsack from the basement. She hugged him because she didn't know what else to do.

"Call me when you get home," he shouted after her.

Outside, an eerie calm pervaded. Errant hot raindrops stung her, although the air was unnaturally cool. This was bad. This was very bad. She began running, promising herself she'd stay in the stupid town forever if everything could please please be O.K. The wind sent a hockey net tumbling along the street toward her. Before long, she was struggling to remain upright, and her feet rose from the ground. No, they didn't. She managed a few more steps before the wind lifted her again. Yes, they did.

And then she was gone. Impossibly so. Rising upward as roof shingles and a child's tricycle swirled past her. She reached for a lamppost, missing it by inches, and then grasped at the top branches of a tree, coming away with a handful of wet leaves.

The wind wanted all of her and sent debris spiraling perilously close: a picnic table, a plastic swimming pool, a lawnmower. Lander flew higher and higher. Curiously, the town below appeared unscathed. She saw her grandparents' bungalow on one of the many ordered streets. What a small and unimportant place, she thought. How so undeserving of all the concern she poured into it.

Yet despite the great danger in her stratospheric adventure, Lander was enjoying an unimaginable serenity. Her church, the arena, the high school—as she rose, the town slowly shrank into a dull grey blot amid the lushly green fields far below. Her inner peace deepened. It was so foolish of her to get worked up over gossip at school or stupid boys. All would be well in the end.

Eventually Lander rose high enough to see the earth curve over the horizon. Anticipation lit her up. It was terribly beautiful and so calming. She wasn't ever coming down. Above her, the sky burned through scarlet and purple into black, and the stars twinkled warmly in welcome.

The next thing she knew—as they say—Lander was beneath a lilac bush in someone's front yard, tiny petals covering her and the lawn like mauve snowflakes. She lay there quite happily, dizzy with the contentment she'd found on her flight and the sweet aroma of the lilac.

It was lovely there, just resting, until the sirens began to wail. She sat up,

ILLUSTRATION BY MATTHEW DALEY

DEMOCRACY BEACH

Do you lay out your bedsheet, floral and faded
Does the man beside you like baseball
or wear this badge for protection
Do you vote the same
though you speak different languages
Does the guy with the tattooed back
fly the dragon kite
to try to reach God
where drones are not permitted

Do the red-headed twins
in modest one-pieces covertly twerk
when away from family
Did you see the woman who is paler than the sun
with the twinkle of her phone in hip pocket
the music of a hundred likes
glinting through white linen
Do you believe it's the saddest year of her life

Is nudity contagious
Do we all remove our shirts at once
Do the plump and old enjoy the beach
any less than the slim and young

Do you want to know the name
of the colour the flag whispers
to a sky whose head is turned away
a curl of hairy cloud

Do you grow thirsty for the salt
of your news feed
Do you not want to be in the hot
gritty now of our lives
Do you sprint for the awesomeness of ocean
like a teen boy, Boogie Board tight to chest
Forget all shark footage, laughing teeth

Do you see that the eyes of the lovers
are the same, like the sable stones they throw
or do you cover your face with a cloth and sunbathe
Are you the type to end the season on unhappiness
Do you suck the seashells
Do you empty your shoes of promises
Do you lose something
Do you hold your head underwater
choosing the darkness

brushing petals from herself. She wasn't far from her grandparents' house. What luck to have landed so close to home. And to have avoided the downed electrical cable that lay across the driveway, sparking and flicking like a demented cat's tail.

Then the rain arrived in a flood, instantly drenching her. People called out for loved ones, their panic palpable. She leapt up and started running. The street became a shallow river of floodwater strewn with tree branches. More branches lay over cars and had toppled a fence. The destruction shocked her, since everything had looked fine from up above.

She turned onto her street. Her knapsack was gone, and with it her school work and her Walkman. None of that mattered when she saw that her grandparents' house was unscathed. Better still, her grandmother's backside was bent over the front yard, collecting fallen leaves and twigs. Bianca turned at her call, opening arms into which a suddenly tearful Lander plunged.

"Where's Alexsy?" she asked.

"He'll be back soon," Bianca said. "It takes more than a storm to stop him."

The power was out, as was the phone. Lost without them, she stuck by Bianca as the old woman canvassed the neighbours for news. A shopping plaza had collapsed, they were told, and a subdivision had been destroyed. The hospital was so overwhelmed it was directing the injured who could walk to get help in another town. The newly homeless were being sheltered in the arena.

Her grandfather returned at dusk to announce that six people had died at the plaza. No, nine, someone had told Bianca. A helicopter could be heard airlifting victims to the city. Some had been crushed under farm equipment. Others had been sucked out of their cars. Lander couldn't breathe, and her chest ached with dread and gratitude. It didn't seem possible that she'd survived having been blown into the sky by the storm. She longed to tell someone about her flight, even if doing so seemed insensitive.

Her friend Debbie lived nearby, but she couldn't see her because Lander was still grounded for shoplifting makeup from the BiWay last week. Although the police had let her off with a warning, Bianca and Alexsy had been devastated, and baffled: she didn't want for anything, not food, clothing, or love. Comparisons to her troubled mother were assumed but unstated. She didn't understand it either, and already sensed that she never would.

For supper, Bianca made sandwiches by candlelight. Thoughts of Ryan turned them to cardboard in her mouth. He was the only person she'd trust with her story. Too bad she'd decided she couldn't ever see him again.

Matthew arrived around eight o'clock. He was a big blond farm kid, already tanned golden brown in late May.

"Just making sure you're all O.K.," he said. "It's bad out there."

Do you read Emily St. John Mandel or Roxane Gay
or do you read nothing or do you read the clouds
Do you photograph the thin line
of ocean and sky and your parents in front of it
one of whom will die next year
Did you see that SARAH and SAMIRA
disappear the same, neither name
having staying power in sand
when water fills the finger-furrowed letters

Do you sip secrets
like the lady with the wide brim
or sunscreen your hefty breasts
with the talent of hands that dip
so quick, hands that have served
more customers than you can fathom
that have made perfect change all her life
Surely nobody you pass today could be the one
to carry and place the bomb
The sky would darken over them
and the seagulls shriek mad songs

Do you hold the sandy hands of children
who do not believe in danger
Do you test the water while
your brother eats his anger
Far out there, is the black whale waiting
Will the woman with bikini and braised
pregnant belly endure the ocean cold
and will her skin kick with each swell
Should she decide at just that moment
the name for the baby

Do you think fate is in the wind
that rushes the waves, quickening them
Does the ocean want
to detach your hair like seaweed
Does it slap you harder
than your mother did

And when you return home
under a starved moon
do you breathe again
that hardwood kitchen dust
Do you enter your own space, careful
to carry the sandy towel to the tub
to shake out all the hard granules
of the gentle day?

—EMILY SCHULTZ

"We were in the war," Alexsy said. "In Poland. This is nothing." Her grandfather had taught math at the high school until retiring last year. Country kids with fine manners like Matthew had been his favourite kind of student.

Matthew said the damage was greatest outside of town. His family's barn was flooded. Other farms had been destroyed.

"It's dark, people are scared, and help's not getting through."

"God be with them at this time," Bianca said, embarrassing Lander. Her grandparents' Polish accents and customs were so unlike her friends' normal homes and manners.

"What can we do?" Alexsy said.

"Make some food, when the power's back on," Matthew said. "The Army's coming from Base Borden, and the firefighters are organizing rescue teams tomorrow at the arena."

Lander's grandparents withdrew from the entranceway to give them some privacy, and Matthew pulled her into a long kiss. She melted into him, craving his certainty.

"Let's go," he said. Into his pickup truck, he meant, which he'd park somewhere secluded. "Come with me. Alexsy won't care. Not tonight."

He was right. These days Matthew was the only thing her grandfather liked about her. But she couldn't be alone with Matthew, couldn't face what she'd done. Not with Ryan still pumping through her.

"I can't. I've got a geography assignment to do."

"So what? You've been ignoring me. And there won't be school tomorrow."

"I can't." The need to please could be overwhelming. "Bianca's freaking out. I should stay here."

Matthew didn't believe her and left in a sulk. She took a candle up to her bedroom and dug out her own diary from her sock drawer. It had been a gift from her mother two Christmases ago, so the days were off by a year. It didn't matter. "Dear Diary, today I cheated on my boyfriend with the boy I really love. Then I flew to heaven in a tornado, or might have imagined that I did. But I can't tell anyone because people actually were blown away in a tornado and some of them died. I hate it here, but I also love it because it's safe."

The writing failed to settle her, so she slipped out the window to smoke a cigarette in the backyard. It was a fine spring night, the storm having passed. She stood staring at the stars she so nearly touched, and heard them calling her to reach up again.

Three days later Lander waited in the high school parking lot at dawn with two hundred other kids who'd volunteered to help with the cleanup. Yellow school buses blazed in the dewy sunshine. Debbie was late, as usual. Keeping an eye out for her, Lander hid behind the last bus in line, to sneak a smoke and avoid Ryan's hovering presence.

At school the day before, he'd been

her own little thundercloud. Many kids were absent. Their homes were damaged, or they had relatives who'd been injured. A girl she knew was in a Toronto hospital with her arm crushed. Debbie was telling people she'd had it amputated.

Through this fog of rumour and anxiety Lander had felt Ryan's confusion and exhilaration so keenly she mistook it for her own. And maybe it was. At lunch he braved Matthew's presence to follow her into the cafeteria and silently press a folded piece of paper into her hand. A poem. She read enough to know it was about their time together in the storm. Another poem, enveloped and hand delivered, awaited her at home after school. Bianca hid a sly smile as she gave it to her, and Alexsy pretended he hadn't noticed. The truth would make them weep.

The half dozen buses were loaded and got underway. Hydroelectric crews re-hanging power lines along the gravel roads outside of town stopped their work to cheer on the passing caravan. The damage in the countryside seemed random, even selective. One tree out of many lining the road had fallen. A house was without a roof, its neighbour unscathed.

By now the sense of calamity was ebbing. Most of her classmates claimed to have seen the tornadoes—more, she'd pointed out, than was possible. None claimed to have been lifted heavenward by one, or to have experienced, however briefly, that majestic calm. The further Lander got from her flight, the less she trusted her memory of it, and she still hadn't told anyone about it.

The chatter in the bus made it easier to ignore Ryan, who was sitting two rows ahead scribbling intently into one of his notebooks. She was dying to know what about. Debbie tapped her thigh.

"Look who's here," she said, pointing toward him.

Lander nodded. She had to be careful around Debbie, who'd had a crush on Matthew since they were in Sunday school. Debbie could have him, if she wanted. Other girls switched boyfriends all the time. Why couldn't she?

Confounding her situation was the conversation she'd overheard her grandparents having in whispered Polish about her mother. She'd understood enough to ask for the details in English. Her mother had been arrested for drug possession again. Now there was no chance of rejoining her in the city that summer and finishing her last year of school there. Lander was stuck.

The buses stopped by a long driveway half buried under downed maple trees. "PICK YOUR OWN," suggested a sign on a splintered trunk. The horde of kids spilled over a lawn littered with a family's possessions: books, a television, mattresses. The entire front of the farmhouse had been ripped off and the barn behind it was a smashed mound of hay and timber. It was the worst destruction she'd seen, reminding her of pictures Alexsy had shown her of Poland in the war, and rekindling the panic she'd known the night of the storm.

Lovelorn Ryan also had her rattled, so she reluctantly kept her distance. His eyes said he understood the situation. But did he? And what would she do when Matthew found out?

The teachers and adult volunteers wrangled the kids into smaller groups.

MAGIC FINGERS

I feel there's a novel
in all this,
and definitely not by me.
By someone so much better.

Vonnegut, maybe.
All about this room,
and the dark,
and the bed,
and the Magic Fingers machine
that probably has not worked
since the setting of Vonnegut's
best novel, *Not by Me. By Someone So Much Better.*

What is the word for the
line that eventually appears
on every forehead?
What is the line
for the word that infects
every tongue?

There is always
a novel in all this.
It takes place entirely in the
hour I wait for you
in this room, staring at
the Magic Fingers machine,
thinking about Vonnegut.
He is by someone
so much better.

—JOHN DEGEN

One of them got out a bullhorn, shrieking feedback and instructions. She and Debbie used the chaos to stray back to the buses, where Lander pulled a spliff of hash from her cigarette pack.

"Good girl."

Debbie sparked her Bic lighter.

"What's with that Ryan guy? He's, like, everywhere you go. I thought you told him to take a hike."

"I did, but he's back already."

Another thing she couldn't tell anyone was that she liked Ryan's eyelashes, which were long and dark, like Robert Smith's. She liked that he wrote stories in a town where few boys bothered to read. She liked that he dressed entirely in black, although that had already gotten him beaten up twice. Too bad that to survive in this town she needed a boyfriend like Matthew, with his scholarship to Western University, his Christian goodness, and his truck to drive her places. Matthew's parents had a satellite dish that got MuchMusic. Other girls were jealous of her. Before Matthew, no one even looked at Lander.

The hash brought a gentle, cheerful high that blurred the edges of her turmoil. Like on her flight in the storm, though not as peaceful. The spliff finished, they turned the corner of the buses and ran into Mr. Trent, the phys.-ed. teacher.

"Where are you two coming from?" he said.

Debbie looked to her for an answer. "We, uhm, had to pee," she said.

"Really? Behind a bus? You're a bad liar, Lander. That shit you smoke makes you stupid. And where's your gloves? And your work boots? Didn't you read the handout?"

She examined her red Chuck Ts.

"Does that mean I can't help?"

"No. It means you're an idiot."

Mr. Trent marched them over to a group led by the school librarian, Mrs. Betts, an older woman dressed in khakis, as though for a safari. Which was pretty funny to think about if you were stoned. She and Debbie succumbed to a fit of giggles. But Mrs. Betts was a friend of Lander's grandfather, so she kept her red eyes off to the side.

THOMAS BLANCHARD (2014)

THE ARCHIVE

SWITCHING TRACKS

For its kids' issue, in 2014, Taddle Creek profiled Cole Fleming, a then eight-year-old obsessed with public transit to such a degree that he caught the attention of the head of the Toronto Transit Commission. The magazine recently spoke to Fleming, now a sixteen-year-old high school student, about where his love of transit has taken him in the intervening years, and what's interesting him today.

"I've been to London and Paris since then and ridden their transit systems, so that was exciting. There was one night, in 2017, when I was eleven. We were in London and I was with a babysitter because my parents were out to a party, and I took the train with her. I don't know why she did this, but she took me all the way out to Epping, which is as far out as you can possibly go. We went all the way out and had pizza at some restaurant and came all the way back. Transit in London is interesting because it's so complex, so I really enjoyed London.

"Today, I'm just kind of trying to keep up with my school work. There's a Scotland trip coming up, and I'm looking forward to that a lot. This year I took Latin and read all about the history of Rome. I'm really into history and have been for a while now. I like knowing stuff. Travelling's great. Especially to places that have historical significance, so it'll be cool seeing Scotland. I'm literally going to be sleeping on a mountain for one night.

"I'm doing baseball now, too. I usually play somewhere in the outfield, but sometimes I do first base. This is my third season in my current league. I've been playing for four years.

"I have no idea what I want to do as a career. It'll become clear. But right now there's just too much of a variety to say.

"I do remember riding the Scarborough RT and the Bloor–Danforth subway for the *Taddle Creek* story. Not vividly. I still remember the yard when we shot the photo in the streetcar. I'm not as interested in transit as I was. I still find it interesting looking at the plans for the future. I have no plans to get rid of all my transit maps and stuff. It's possible my interest will come back."

Their job was to scour a field of flowering plants for debris. Her heart skipped to see Ryan waiting there with a few other kids. Mrs. Betts arranged them in a long line, three paces apart, and warned them about the potato plants.

"The farmers have enough problems without you trampling the crops they have left."

"These are soybeans, not potatoes," she said to the kids near her, which now included Ryan. This much she'd learned from Matthew, to whom she felt a sudden pang of loyalty.

Debbie laughed.

"What are you, a fucking farmer?"

"Ask Matthew," she said, loud enough for Ryan to hear. "When he gets here."

Her half-hearted intention was to frighten Ryan away. The worse she behaved, she hoped, the less likely he'd be to puppy-dog after her.

For all the devastation nearby, the field was oddly free of debris. A few shingles were found, and the farm's mailbox. She kept peering along the ragged line of kids to where Ryan paced the field. He caught her looking, providing an unexpected thrill. She wasn't ashamed of what they'd done. What she'd done, to be fair. In fact, she'd enjoyed it more with Ryan because she liked him better and he didn't expect it from her.

The group reached a swath of rutted earth where a funnel cloud must have touched down. She and Debbie abandoned their classmates to follow this furious path to a drainage ditch at the edge of the field. Some broken alders hid them from Mrs. Betts and the others. They sat in the grass and had each just lit a cigarette when Ryan surprised them.

"You again," Debbie said. "Can't you take a hint?"

Ryan stood blinking those eyelashes.

"I want to talk to Lander alone for a minute."

"There's nothing to talk about," Debbie said. "It's all in your head, so scram."

"Lander knows what we need to talk about."

"Now's not the time," Lander said. That sinking feeling came on again. "Later, O.K.?"

Debbie looked between them, puzzled, then waved her hands to shoo him away.

"Go."

Ryan lingered long enough to convey his disappointment, then loped off.

The longer Lander hung out with Debbie, the sooner the truth would emerge. She tossed away her cigarette.

"Let's go. I don't need Mrs. Betts telling Alexsy I slacked off."

After lunch they re-boarded the buses and travelled to another farm. The house there was unscathed but the roof of the barn had been torn off intact and lay upturned on the front lawn. Matthew and other members of the boys' lacrosse team scrambled over its skeletal beams with crowbars to dismantle it. She felt lucky to be sent into a hayfield before she could say hello.

At the edge of this field a hydro crew was raising new poles and running cable between them from huge spools. Here the debris was endless: a television antenna, a toaster, a birdless birdcage, and many shards of metal roofing. Whoever found something held it aloft like a prize to show the others before walking it back to a mountain of junk forming on the farmhouse lawn.

The pieces could be tiny, and progress was slow. In an hour they'd advanced only fifty metres. A girl near her stopped and made a face.

"Do you smell that?" she said as a putrefying wall of stench reached Lander.

Two boys moved forward to investigate. Lander trailed them a few paces, her mouth and nose covered by the sleeves of her shirt. She stopped when the boys did, watching as the wind flattened the green hay long enough to reveal the unmistakable curved brown back of a cow.

Beyond the cow, the wind next revealed, was the knapsack Lander had lost during the storm. Just in time, too, since the further she got from her mysterious flight the more she doubted it had occurred. Yet here was proof, as a bit of that delicious freedom echoed within her.

She left the others gawking at the dead cow to place her bag on the school bus. When she returned, Mr. Trent pressed her into a group clearing a field of corn stalks strewn with lumber from the barn. She and Debbie each took an end of a board to walk them to a pile. Some boys, Matthew included, carried two or even three boards on their own. Debbie stopped to talk to him.

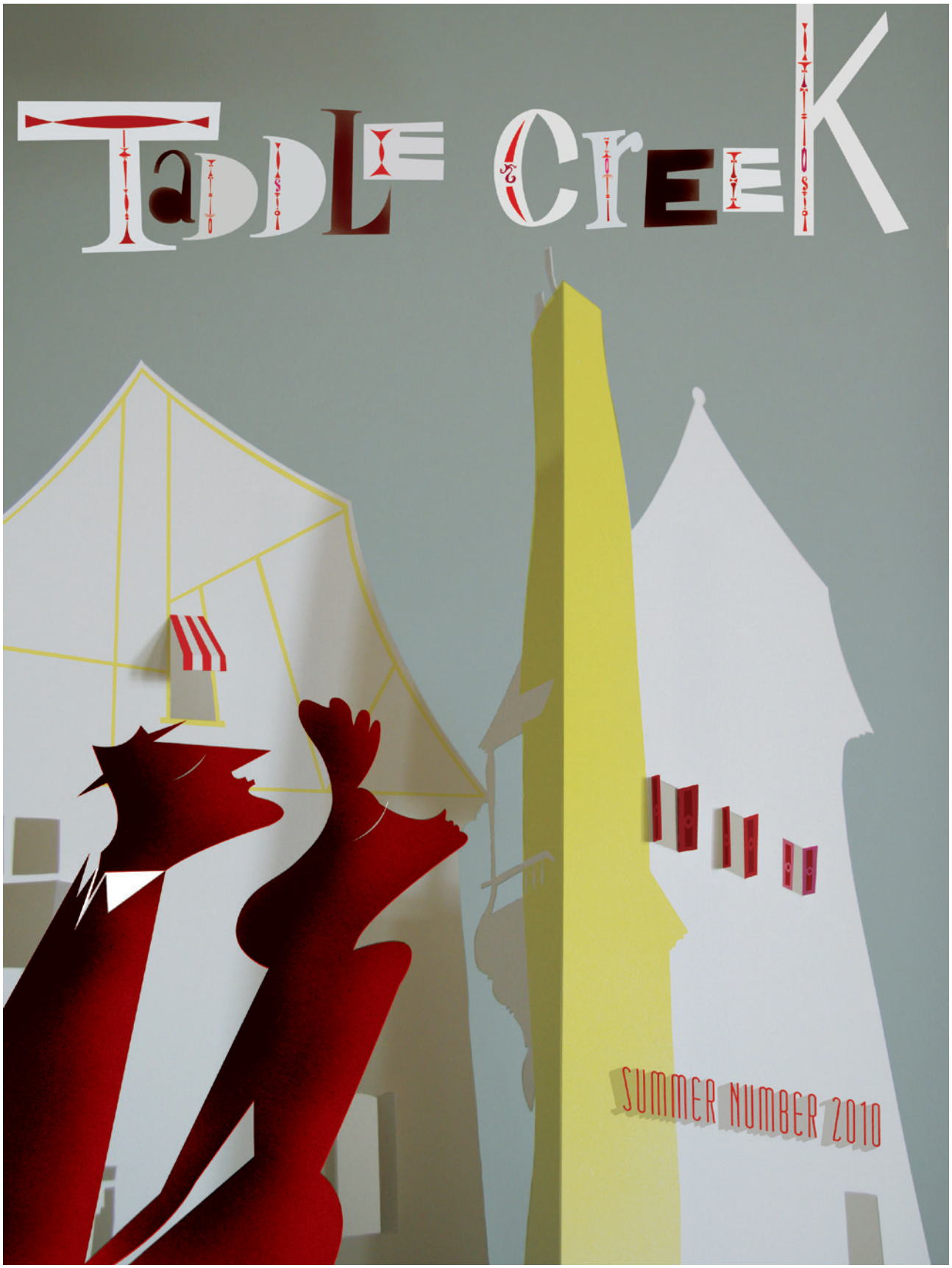
Ryan instantly appeared to take Debbie's spot. He lifted an end of a board and waited for her to take the other end. His smile pulled her to him as he looked about dramatically.

THE BEST I LOOKED

After Moriya Sen'an.

Everything is the end
of the world but really
there's only so much sadness I can
line this poem with. In the end, picture me
as I picture myself, standing in a river
shivering and stupid, or in a casket
filled with the gleaming baubles of big
pharma, and maybe it leaks and everyone within a hundred kilometres
  experiences so much
reuptake
or picture me the best I looked
last time I saw you.

—Evie Christie



"La promenade du dimanche," by Pascal Blanchet (2010).

"We're busting out tonight. At moonrise. You and me."

"You're so weird. Where? Where are you taking me?"

"Paris. Like we said."

For Ryan, France was the true home of frayed, wayward spirits like their own, and he was moving there to write when he finished school. Lander's mother had been born in Paris, oddly enough, just after the war. That Lander had only a vague sense of the city from photos of the Eiffel Tower didn't prevent her from picturing herself and Ryan there.

Debbie sidled up to them.

"What's with you and poetry boy?"

She looked down the length of a board at Ryan.

"He's all right."

"Really? Maybe he can be Matthew's buddy, too."

She shrugged and waited for a smirking Debbie to move off. It's doubtful Matthew had ever spared Ryan more than a puzzled glance, although that would soon change.

Ryan started a trust game with the boards in which you closed your eyes and let yourself be steered backward out of the field. If you looked behind yourself, to check your direction, you lost. It was fun staggering backward, until she rolled an ankle and tipped over. Even less fun was ripping open the elbow she used to break her fall on a jagged piece of metal roofing.

She leapt to her feet, cradling her elbow, then fell sideways again when she put weight on her twisted ankle. This time, Ryan caught her. The cut didn't hurt half as much as her ankle. Then blood seeped through her fingers and dripped to the ground.

"Let me see it," Ryan said.

A few drops splattered the white rubber tip of her Chuck Ts.

"Careful," she said.

He glanced at the cut before closing her hand back over it.

"You'll need stitches."

Some nearby trees marked the line between the cornfield and the hayfield. With Ryan and Debbie under her arms she hobbled over to them and flopped in their shade. Ryan insisted she keep her elbow raised. This sent a stream of blood into her shirt and armpit, where it tickled.

"She can't walk from here," Ryan said to Debbie. "We need something to move her."

"I'm right here," Lander said. "You can't just talk about me like that."

"I'll get Mr. Trent," said Debbie, who couldn't bother to hide her glee. "And Matthew."

Ryan sat beside her so she could lean against him, her arm held aloft. She didn't protest when his fingers sifted through her hair. There'd be no shaking him after this.

"If this were one of your stories," he said, "how do you think it would end?"

"You tell me." She closed her eyes. "That's your job."

However it ends, the story should include Lander writing in her diary that evening. In her haste to get everything down, she'd forget certain details of the day. The lunch Bianca packed for her, for example. The farm owners personally thanking as many of the volunteers as they could, the husband in tears. Or the small purse she'd kept on her all day, the same one she took with her that summer when she hitchhiked to the city to live with her mother. And later lost, like she'd lose her diary too, during her vagabond twenties, so that eventually all she had to rely upon to recall those brilliant days were her memories, which everyone knows can't be trusted.

Of course she'd always have the scar on her elbow to remind her. And not a day passed when she didn't long for the delicious weightlessness she'd known soaring over her hometown. In her dreams, it's a joy that's always just out of reach, and a reminder of the spirit of a girl who once believed she could fly.

Ryan never forgot those days either, particularly that stormy afternoon in the basement. Yet manners of the sort Alexsy valued kept him from mentioning them when he and Lander ran into each other many years later in a city that once seemed so impossibly distant. Ryan by then owned a digital marketing firm and was enduring some marital difficulties, and Lander was a costume designer for television who'd recently quit drinking and bought a condo in a tower along the lake. Funny thing, they'd lived just two streets from each other in Parkdale for a decade without ever meeting.

Naturally, their flame was rekindled. But Lander had a new boyfriend, and so would have said no to anything more than friendship. Or would she? She liked to believe she'd matured enough not to torture poor Ryan again. Anyhow, cooler heads prevailed. Ryan's marriage survived, and Lander became an aunt of sorts to his daughter, one of the few people who believed her story of being blown into the sky by a tornado.

Matthew wouldn't have believed her story, or would have used it to talk her into coming to church. But they never spoke again after that afternoon. The last she'd heard, he'd married a girl more suited to his expectations, and inherited the family farm. The adult Lander kept an eye out for him when she visited Alexsy at the seniors home. Not that she'd recognize Matthew, last seen racing across a corn field, genuinely wanting to help, and incapable of even imagining how she'd betrayed him.

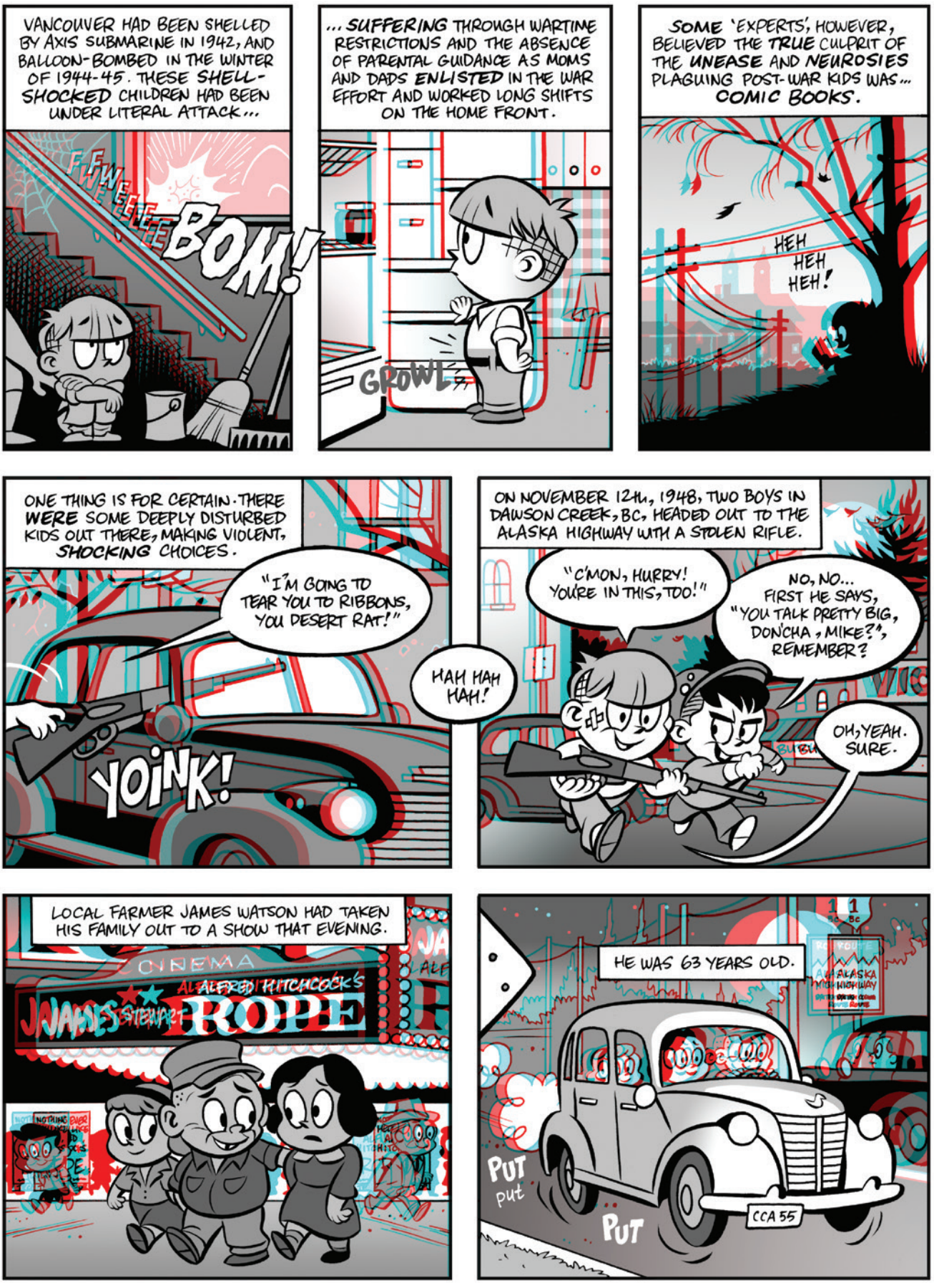
"Here it comes," Ryan said.

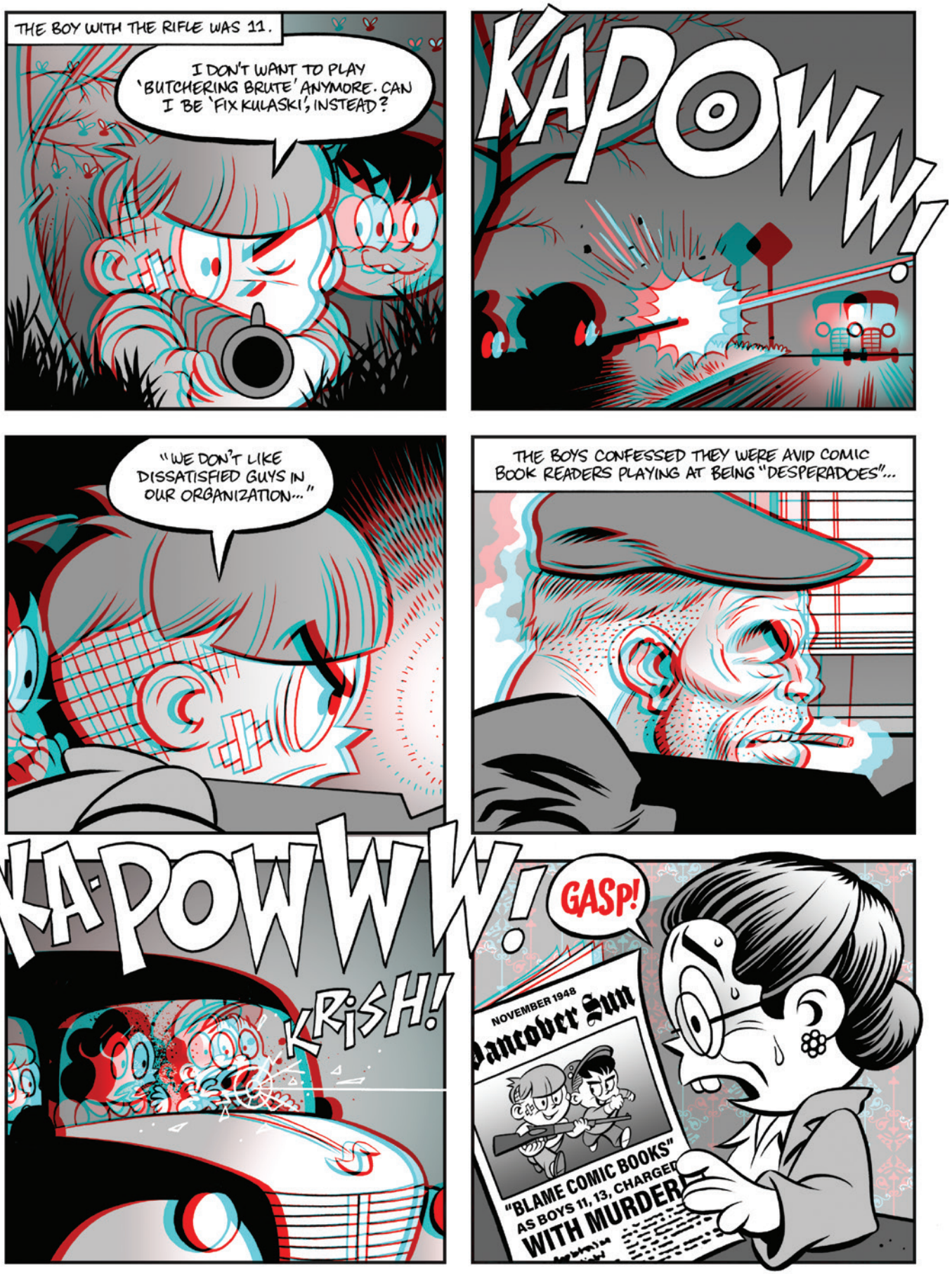
She opened her eyes. Mr. Trent was in the lead, jogging through the stunted cornstalks with a first aid kit, although a sprinting Matthew would soon overtake him. Well behind both, a grinning Debbie sauntered.

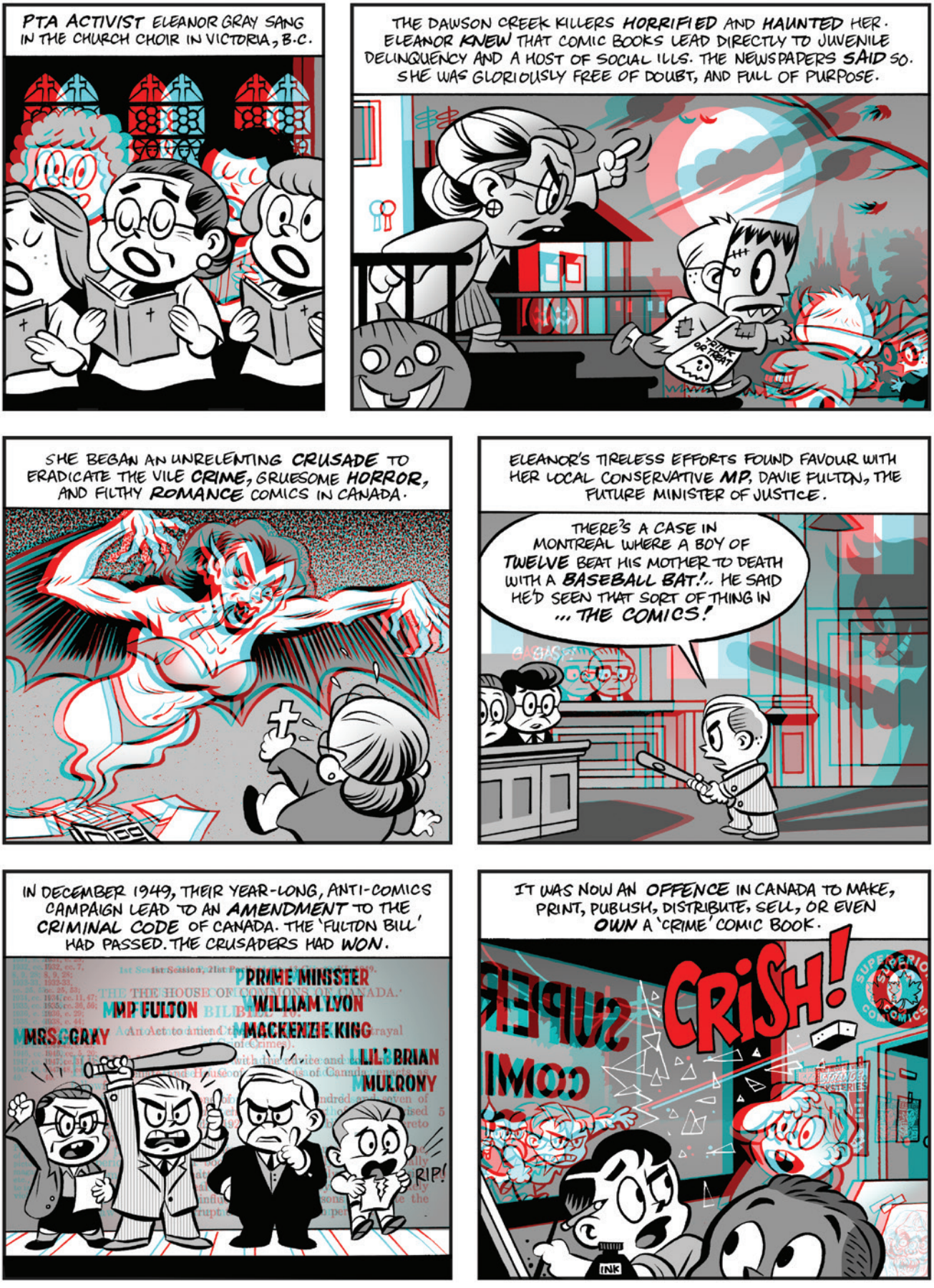
Safe in Ryan's sweetness, Lander didn't care.

The day had turned darkly cool, and a sharp wind moved over the hayfield like it was a green lake. She and Ryan clung to each other as dangerously familiar black clouds rumbled overhead. The air smelled of hot dusty raindrops, and the hydro workers and the other kids began quitting the field for the safety of the buses. Soon Lander would too, before the sky was torn open and another storm whisked her away from all that she'd found that afternoon.

BEST VIEWED WITH ANAGLYPH 3-D GLASSES!


VANCOUVER HAD BEEN SHELLED BY AXIS SUBMARINE IN 1942, AND BALLOON-BOMBED IN THE WINTER OF 1944-45. THESE SHELL-SHOCKED CHILDREN HAD BEEN UNDER LITERAL ATTACK...
FFWEEEEEE
BOM!
...SUFFERING THROUGH WARTIME RESTRICTIONS AND THE ABSENCE OF PARENTAL GUIDANCE AS MOMS AND DADS ENLISTED IN THE WAR EFFORT AND WORKED LONG SHIFTS ON THE HOME FRONT.
GROWL
SOME 'EXPERTS', HOWEVER, BELIEVED THE TRUE CULPRIT OF THE UNEASE AND NEUROSIES PLAGUING POST-WAR KIDS WAS... COMIC BOOKS.
HEH HEH HEH!
ONE THING IS FOR CERTAIN. THERE WERE SOME DEEPLY DISTURBED KIDS OUT THERE, MAKING VIOLENT, SHOCKING CHOICES.
"I'M GOING TO TEAR YOU TO RIBBONS, YOU DESERT RAT!"
YOINK!
ON NOVEMBER 12th, 1948, TWO BOYS IN DAWSON CREEK, BC, HEADED OUT TO THE ALASKA HIGHWAY WITH A STOLEN RIFLE.
"C'MON, HURRY! YOU'RE IN THIS, TOO!"
NO, NO... FIRST HE SAYS, "YOU TALK PRETTY BIG, DON'CHA, MIKE?", REMEMBER?
HAH HAH HAH!
OH, YEAH. SURE.
LOCAL FARMER JAMES WATSON HAD TAKEN HIS FAMILY OUT TO A SHOW THAT EVENING.
CINEMA
ROPE
HE WAS 63 YEARS OLD.
ALASKA HIGHWAY
PUT
put
PUT
CCA 55

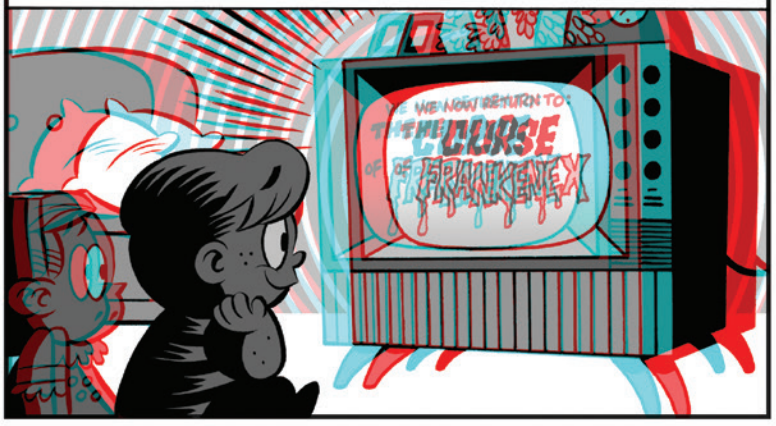

THE BOY WITH THE RIFLE WAS 11.
I DON'T WANT TO PLAY 'BUTCHERING BRUTE' ANYMORE. CAN I BE 'FIX KULASKI', INSTEAD?
KAPOWW!
"WE DON'T LIKE DISSATISFIED GUYS IN OUR ORGANIZATION..."
THE BOYS CONFESSED THEY WERE AVID COMIC BOOK READERS PLAYING AT BEING "DESPERADOES"...
KA-POWWW!
KRISH!
GASP!
NOVEMBER 1948
"BLAME COMIC BOOKS" AS BOYS 11, 13, CHARGED WITH MURDER


PTA ACTIVIST ELEANOR GRAY SANG IN THE CHURCH CHOIR IN VICTORIA, B.C.
THE DAWSON CREEK KILLERS HORRIFIED AND HAUNTED HER. ELEANOR KNEW THAT COMIC BOOKS LEAD DIRECTLY TO JUVENILE DELINQUENCY AND A HOST OF SOCIAL ILLS. THE NEWSPAPERS SAID SO. SHE WAS GLORIOUSLY FREE OF DOUBT, AND FULL OF PURPOSE.
SHE BEGAN AN UNRELENTING CRUSADE TO ERADICATE THE VILE CRIME, GRUESOME HORROR, AND FILTHY ROMANCE COMICS IN CANADA.
ELEANOR'S TIRELESS EFFORTS FOUND FAVOUR WITH HER LOCAL CONSERVATIVE MP, DAVIE FULTON, THE FUTURE MINISTER OF JUSTICE.
THERE'S A CASE IN MONTREAL WHERE A BOY OF TWELVE BEAT HIS MOTHER TO DEATH WITH A BASEBALL BAT!.. HE SAID HE'D SEEN THAT SORT OF THING IN ... THE COMICS!
IN DECEMBER 1949, THEIR YEAR-LONG, ANTI-COMICS CAMPAIGN LEAD TO AN AMENDMENT TO THE CRIMINAL CODE OF CANADA. THE 'FULTON BILL' HAD PASSED. THE CRUSADERS HAD WON.
PRIME MINISTER WILLIAM LYON MACKENZIE KING
MP FULTON
MRS. GRAY
LIL' BRIAN MULRONY
RIP!
IT WAS NOW AN OFFENCE IN CANADA TO MAKE, PRINT, PUBLISH, DISTRIBUTE, SELL, OR EVEN OWN A 'CRIME' COMIC BOOK.
CRISH!
INK

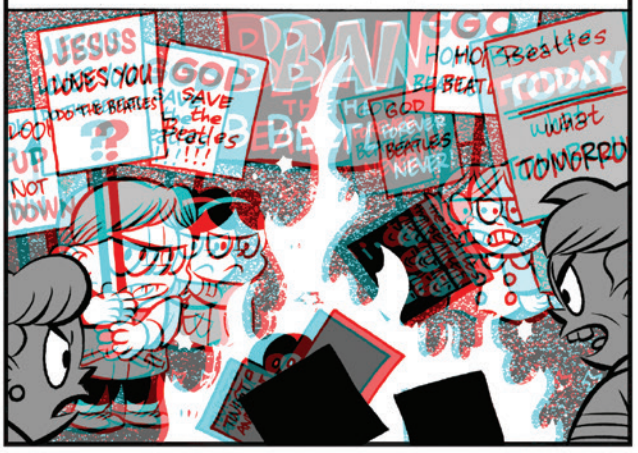

FLUSHED WITH MORAL TRIUMPH, MS. GRAY AND MP FULTON CONTINUED THEIR WITCH HUNT SOUTH OF THE BORDER, THE SOURCE OF THE WORST OFFENDERS OF LURID FOUR-COLOUR TRASH.
BURNING
NO!
JOINING FORCES WITH LIKE-MINDED GERMAN-AMERICAN PSYCHIATRIST DR. FREDRIC WERTHAM, THEIR TIRELESS WAR ON COMIC BOOKS RAGED ON.
TSK
TSK
SHOCK!
10¢
DR. WERTHAM'S FALSIFIED 'EVIDENCE' LEAD TO THE PUBLICATION OF HIS NOTORIOUS BOOK ABOUT THE CORRUPTING INFLUENCE OF COMICS, 'SEDUCTION OF THE INNOCENT' IN 1954, WHICH FEATURED A CHAPTER ON THE DAWSON CREEK MURDER.
HEH
HEH!
HEH!
DISMISSED DECADES LATER FOR IT'S ALTERED, COMPROMISED, AND FABRICATED DATA, THIS ANTI-SCIENCE DIATRIBE NEVERTHELESS BECAME A LIGHTNING ROD FOR WIDESPREAD COMIC BOOK PANIC, FANNING THE FLAMES OF ANTI-COMICS HATRED.
CRIME
SOMETIMES LITERALLY.
THE CRUSADERS HAD WON AGAIN. 'SEDUCTION OF THE INNOCENT' LEAD TO U.S. SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE HEARINGS IN 1954 ...
SOAP
FRAGILE
... WHICH LEAD TO THE PROHIBITIVE, PUNITIVE, SELF-CENSORSHIP OF THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY.
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
10¢


"CRIMES SHALL NEVER BE PRESENTED IN SUCH A WAY AS TO CREATE SYMPATHY FOR THE CRIMINAL..."
SNIF!
"...JUDGES, GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, AND RESPECTED INSTITUTIONS SHALL NEVER BE PRESENTED IN SUCH A WAY AS TO CREATE DISRESPECT FOR ESTABLISHED AUTHORITY."
"IN EVERY INSTANCE GOOD SHALL TRIUMPH OVER EVIL AND THE CRIMINAL PUNISHED FOR HIS MISDEEDS."
"...SCENES OF EXCESSIVE VIOLENCE SHALL BE PROHIBITED."
"NO COMIC MAGAZINE SHALL USE THE WORDS "HORROR" OR "TERROR" IN ITS TITLE."
SENSATIONAL
TERRO
"...ALL LURID, UNSAVORY, GRUESOME ILLUSTRATIONS SHALL BE ELIMINATED."
SIZZLE
"...WALKING DEAD, TORTURE, VAMPIRES AND VAMPIRISM, GHOULS, CANNIBALISM, AND WEREWOLFISM ARE PROHIBITED."
SLURP
UH! OH!
"...WORDS OR SYMBOLS WHICH HAVE ACQUIRED UNDESIRABLE MEANINGS ARE FORBIDDEN."
S#!*
"SEX PERVERSION OR ANY INFERENCE TO SAME IS STRICTLY FORBIDDEN."

AND THAT'S HOW A CHOIR SINGER AND TWO TROUBLED BOYS FROM BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA, WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR SETTING IN MOTION 60 YEARS OF RESTRICTIVE **CENSORSHIP** IN NORTH AMERICA, ENDING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND STUNTING THE GROWTH AND **MATURITY** OF THE ENTIRE COMIC BOOK MEDIUM.

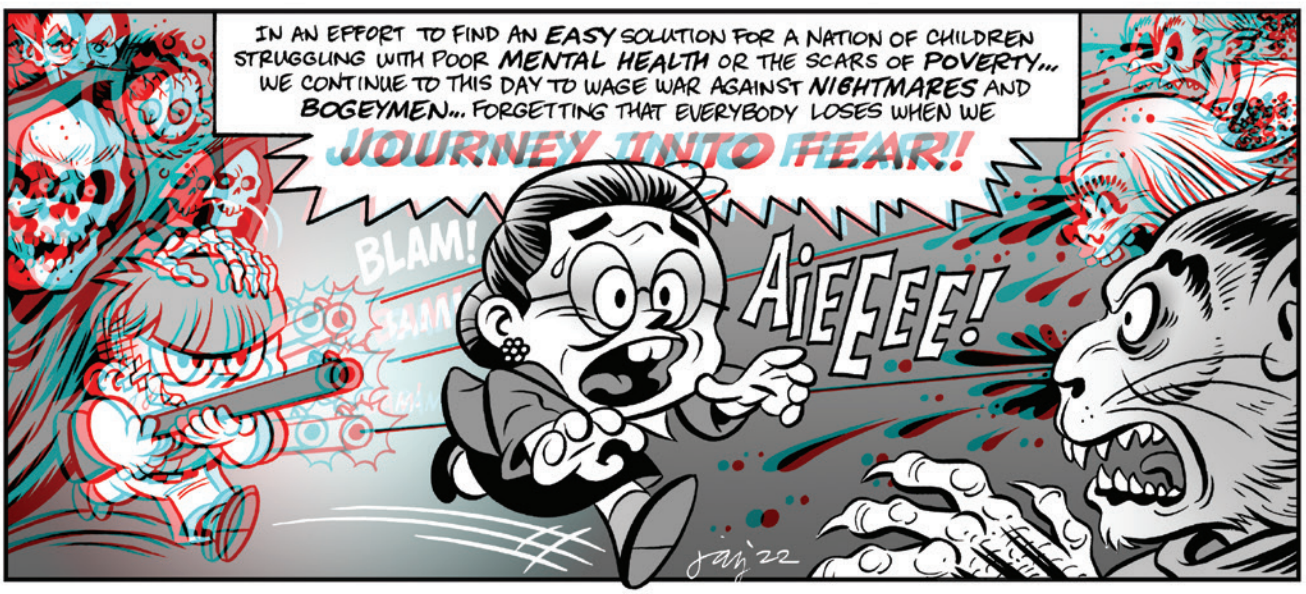


SOMEHOW JUVENILE DELIQUENCY PERSISTED. SOME CHILDREN CONTINUED TO ACT OUT VIOLENTLY... AND CHILD-PROOF COMIC BOOKS LIKE LITTLE LULU, ARCHIE, AND DONALD DUCK COULD NO LONGER BE **BLAMED.**



INEVITABLY, **NEW** SCAPEGOATS WERE FOUND TO CRUSADE AGAINST -- FEARFUL FINGERS POINTED **ELSEWHERE.**

IN AN EFFORT TO FIND AN **EASY** SOLUTION FOR A NATION OF CHILDREN STRUGGLING WITH POOR **MENTAL HEALTH** OR THE SCARS OF **POVERTY**... WE CONTINUE TO THIS DAY TO WAGE WAR AGAINST **NIGHTMARES** AND **BOGEYMEN**... FORGETTING THAT EVERYBODY LOSES WHEN WE



CITY BUILDING

RETURN TO ZENITH

Toronto's hard-working Dupont Street is heading in a brave new direction.

BY ALFRED HOLDEN

"Don't we all go by here a million times a month?" I once wrote about 950 Dupont Street, at the corner of Dovercourt Road, in Toronto. At the entryway, a larger-than-life image, seemingly etched in glass, of a mustachioed man from a century ago, greets visitors. He stands in his overalls, next to a massive industrial gear, such as were once made here, when it was the Hamilton Gear factory. One day last year, I went inside, unannounced. I spotted the silver-haired Patrick Johnson at the back. It had been sixteen years since I last came by, but Johnson remembered me. We swapped pleasantries across the big room. "He bought a hutch," Johnson told one of his sons, who, I can safely say, had grown up since I was last there. Talk about a memory: in 1967, my parents purchased two (actually) pine Québécois hutches from Johnson's *dad's* furniture store, in Ottawa's ByWard Market. "I remember sanding those things as a kid," Johnson says. "They were gorgeous." (Yes, they were.)

I also once wrote "so far, so good" describing his efforts to redeploy the old industrial plant as a furniture outlet, incubator spaces, and whatever else might generate income. In 2006, Johnson told me he bought the factory after studying its bones: the translucent pavilion at the corner that I called "a muscular cage of I-beams that seem one with the steel windows"; a section along the adjacent Canadian Pacific Railway tracks, with a saw-tooth roof, "rows of skylights tilted toward the northern sky—the classic factory roofs of toy train layouts." The deal came with enough junk to fill a dump, cellar reservoirs filled with waste oil, and the benefit of a stale real-estate listing ("unsellable," in realtor lingo) during the mid-nineties recession.

"Do you want to see it?" asked Johnson, during my latest visit. "Do you want to see what's going on? Come with me." Off we went and stepped into an old elevator. Slam, bang, a gate was pulled shut. Jane Jacobs wrote, in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities,* that cities "need old buildings," that "new ideas of any kind" must use old buildings. Mainly because—aesthetic and cultural reasons aside—the rent is usually lower. Johnson's bid to find tenants for the old gear complex's every nook and cranny speaks to that aspiration.

The prospect of too much decrepitude ended as we exited into the building's third floor, where a wide, long, tall room sat ready. We walked to the far end, where a man was prepping the floor, which had been ground smooth and was to be polished to a shine. At the time of my visit, the space had just been rented. Each storey is double height, placing the third floor far above the street. Ribbons of floor-to-ceiling windows ran the length on both sides, with views to the south overlooking Dupont, and north over the saw tooths, past the train tracks, to trees and houses on the rise beyond Davenport Road.

The layout was similar one floor below, except for a newish open stairway of concrete and glass that led up from the foyer below. This floor was occupied throughout the pandemic. At the near end was a chic bar. Juice? Fancy espresso? Something stronger? Young people in masks were seated with laptops and smartphones. Rows of long tables were set out. Upon them were computers, rolls of paper, and model buildings and the materials to make them. "Architects. They rented this floor," said Johnson, who moved quickly with me in tow, speaking softly, so as not to disturb his tenants. On one of the tables, I spotted a vintage Kenner Girder and Panel building set, such as I had when I was a boy.

On this tour, I followed in the footsteps of Donald Weston, a long-time employee of Hamilton Gear, whom I interviewed for a 1998 feature in this magazine, "Dupont at Zenith." A few years earlier, Weston had walked around the dying gear factory with a video camera on his shoulder. In one scene, he emerged into a huge glass shed, the one familiar to Torontonians as they pass by the factory today. Johnson has faced challenges finding uses for this part of the building. Weston told me of trouble doing precision work, due to temperature fluctuation. Johnson used the room to store the furniture he sold in his ground-floor showroom. Bellwoods Brewery considered moving in, but didn't. Clothier Frank and Oak held a warehouse sale here. The rental muse seemed to reward Johnson's patience with Second Sky, a company that offered private training in the circus arts. Peeking in once, I saw dangling ropes and hanging banners under the forty-foot ceiling, the structure's beams of bare steel seemingly tailor-made for training in aerial acrobatics and flying trapeze. But Second Sky didn't stay, and the musical chairs delivered Uchenna Academy, a post-secondary prep school focused on academics and athletics, which installed a gleaming wood gym floor and partnered, in the adjacent annex, with BallMatics, an institute that somehow combines math study and basketball.

Here was the prototype for a new-age Dupont Street, I thought, when I first saw what Johnson was doing. He called his place the Hamilton Gear Building, playing its machine-age past with the idea of ushering in a high-tech, or

The windows of 888 Dupont, after the artists and businesses that called it home were evicted this spring.

ALFRED HOLDEN

whatever, future. Executing his vision took more than twenty years. If Johnson's rents aren't as low as in the old broom factory down the street, the cool factor, not to mention the luxury of shiny floors and fancy lighting at 950 Dupont, is worth the premium. Where else was the virtual greeter a literal gearhead—that heroic figure, embossed on plate glass in the foyer? From what I could see, all up and down Dupont Street, interesting old factories lay in wait for similar transformation.

During this past winter, I wrote to a friend, "The gear factory is owned by a gentleman and his sons who enjoy the challenges it presents. He bought it derelict 26 years ago, has gradually rounded up the capital needed to redeploy it in ways tuned to its bones." I added, "The jeopardy is simply, what if someone comes along who offers his family $100 million? Who needs the trouble of finding a circus act to fill the glass shed?"

One afternoon around that same time, I parked my Smart car on the south side of Dupont and dashed across to the Farm Boy grocery store, located in the new Litho apartment block. In the fall of 2021, when the large middlebrow Sobeys supermarket just up the street closed to make way for another condo, a sign on the door suggested, "Come See Us at Sobeys Danforth," in Toronto's east end. Not so handy.

But Google around and you learn Farm Boy grew from a produce store in Cornwall, Ontario, into, as the *Toronto Star* put it, "A fresh take on the grocery store," not as hip as the midtown Summerhill Market, perhaps, but an "upgrade" befitting "The New Dupont"—the secondary slogan of seemingly almost every development on the street. You also learn about Farm Boy what Sobeys doesn't say: it's just Sobeys in designer clothes. Sobeys owns it.

I made it across to Farm Boy's automatic door. One of Dupont's good points is that it is not a food desert. Leon Weinstein opened one of his Power stores at the corner of Huron Street in the nineteen-fifties, when supermarkets were new. In the nineties, Loblaws built the prototype for its corporate future, the urban upscale superstore, at the corner of Christie, today with orange floors and, under studio lighting in jewel-like cases at its entrance, pyramids of macarons and banks of pastry to whet the appetites of grocery-getters. Those kinds of enticements were a trial run for the later, absurdly upmarket Maple Leaf Gardens Loblaws, a national shrine to hockey, now with a cheese wall. Farm Boy raised the bar further for urbanity on Dupont, with indoor parking. I needed to buy something to make my first visit real. Reaching for pomegranates to take home, I encountered Mikey the monkey, a stuffed ape that hangs from something vine-like in Farm Boy produce sections. He was signaling where the bananas were, but also, it was becoming clear, that Dupont Street might be heading in a direction different from what I'd originally thought.

"Rendering is artist's impression only. Architectural features and materials are representational only and subject to change. Views are not guaranteed." In a bird's-eye rendering of a grand boulevard, wide sidewalks are populated by idling flâneurs. The traffic, in this mythical picture of a day in the future, is light. It must be late afternoon, mid-summer, because the sun has come around and warm light, a hazy Parisian shimmer, is raking across the north façades of new condominiums along the south side of Dupont. The word "Air" glows in the space around the buildings' summits. If the towers were taller and skinnier, that might well be New York's Central Park across the street. But looking closely—are those railway tracks, threading among the trees? And isn't that Spotless Auto Detailing at the corner, its mascot, a turquoise 1955 Plymouth with flat tires, parked outside? The nondescript building, which also houses Portugal Kitchen Cabinets and an audio store, is there, all right. This is not Paris or New York, I see, but Dufferin and Dupont.

The image is a sales pitch, found online. But if you're reading this in 2025 and go over to check it against reality, it will all likely be there: the round-edge flatiron tower near the corner, with motifs said to be inspired by a radiator (such as were once made at a factory here); a pedestrian plaza between more towers, lined with stores, including a supermarket and sidewalk cafés; rows of trees and planters; more towers, different towers.

Developer ELAD Canada calls Galleria on the Park "master planned." In an online promo video, the viewer flies like the Jetsons around a virtual city skyline with views of a district long occupied by a low-end mall and a McDonald's, now being turned into something akin to Radiant City. Under construction are five hectares of condominiums adjoining three hectares of parkland. It was huge compared to other contemporary projects, and generated its share of NIMBY (not in my backyard) angst. There was concern about traffic, and regret at losing stores and public space in the downscale Galleria mall. A good word was put in for the Wallace Emerson complex, a city community centre adjacent to the shopping mall, also being torn down to make way. In 1982, the building won a Governor General's medal for architecture. Forty years on, a newspaper columnist thought there was life left in its brutalist ramparts. But brutalism is a hard sell. Dupont Street being, still, an edge more than a core, a border zone not as sternly curated by surrounding neighourhood groups. "Though it seems like cranes are everywhere in the city, they're actually confined to relatively few areas where multi-unit buildings are allowed to be built," wrote the urbanist Shawn Micallef, mentioning Dupont Street and the Galleria in his *Star* column.

But who really dreaded the transformation of gritty Dupont into a grand boulevard, if that seemed a possibility? It was a virtual *fait accompli* in the fancy magazine created to promote the high-end Bianca, printed on heavy-stock paper, with a table of contents and by-lined feature articles. Located east of Bathurst Street, Bianca is in Toronto's historic and expensive Annex, with condominiums "starting at $1.3 Million." To set the needed tone, the magazine offered, among other arts and lifestyle features, "Diva Dogs on Dupont," informing, "Whether you're outfitting a dashing Doberman, a neat Newfie, or a posh Poodle, there are sassy stores close by." The building's lead architect, Stephen Teeple, is pictured in the promo book with a red and black motorcycle. In an interview, he reveals less-known Dupont data, such as why all the new condo buildings step back in 1916 New York style (well, sort of), as they rise up: "Zoning laws in Toronto require mid-rise condominiums to be built at a 45-degree angular plane from the property line." Rising from the Dupont sidewalk, the

Bianca goes up in a 3-D kind of way, the apartment below becoming the terrace for the one above. It suggests "a mediterranean hilltop village," according to Teeple partner Martin Baroni, aping what Moshe Safdie had in mind for the puzzle-like Habitat, at Expo 67, in Montreal. Imagine that future—no, see it in the present; Bianca has been built—on Dupont Street in Toronto.

One of the vexing problems posed when a city experiences an endless real estate boom showed up a few blocks east of the Galleria, west of Bianca, where Dupont Street makes its diagonal jog across Ossington Avenue. As of spring, 2022, 888 Dupont was covered in the less-artful kind of graffiti that arrives like lightning when an address is emptied. In May, a wire fence appeared around the perimeter, and demolition crews began work inside. The building may be gone when you read this, after long service to many: to Thomas Oswald Aked, the yarn spinner and original 1921 owner of 888, to an epoch of blind broom makers, to the artists who most recently used its lofts to work and clandestinely live. "Pieces exhibited in the [Art Gallery of Ontario] were painted there," wrote Ben Cohen, in the *Star,* in October, 2021. "Memories and merchandise were packed up, but with few places to put them, as affordable spaces such as 888 become increasingly rare in Toronto."

Even in photos taken when it was brand new, 888 looks decrepit, with its industrial windows and concrete construction left partly bare to the elements. Most Toronto factories were made of heavy timber, which was cheap and flammable, as neighbourhoods around Dupont Street were reminded as late as 1999, when the brick-faced, wood-boned McMurtry Furniture factory, being prepped for conversion to condo lofts, burned to the ground, almost taking the neighbourhood with it. Eight eighty-eight Dupont, of cement and rebar, and notwithstanding its cracks, might have made a better candidate for rehabilitation. But its elderly owner, by some accounts, had no such ambition, nor much capital. He was happy "keeping artists in homes," said a former tenant, Tea Kittagucci, to the *Star.* "It was just him, he didn't have a company, and he's an older man. I heard some of the older tenants had tiny units and paid $200 a month. Those little closet units kept them off the streets." Mind you, space is a real luxury, and 888 had that too. It was "this big, sprawling cavern where you could do whatever you needed to do," said Lauchie Reid, an OCAD University instructor.

As a passerby I would wipe away grime on the windows along Ossington or Dupont and peek into the building's half-below-grade basement. One time, paint-splattered canvases sat leaning against walls; another, masses of plastic bags had been bunched into shapes resembling hot-air balloons. If you slipped into the building, which had an apartment-house-style buzz-me-up entry system, you could walk around and view Jacobsian old-building alchemy. The hallways were dark and shabby, the stairwells cramped, with wooden steps straight out of Dickens. But now and then a door would open, letting in a beam of light, and someone youthful in track pants and wearing a backward ball cap might step from one of those rooms, going to get a coffee. Some did seem to be lofty apartments, with ceilings of industrial height and nice wood floors, furnished with potted philodendrons and stylish twentieth-century furniture. An amenity was the ersatz park for tenants, hidden on the east side of the building, past the crumbling loading docks. Someone set out picnic tables and stools for taking breaks, which might or might not be interrupted by Canadian Pacific freight trains thundering by a few metres away. Here, among the weeds, also stood the factory's smokestack, with the painted letters

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"YARN" faintly visible high up on the chimney.

After the property developer TAS purchased 888, the new deal seemed to be, "stay on, but not overnight," with some enforcement, and a rule: "Kiss, don't diss, the landlord." One loft with a well-equipped kitchen, and no apparent bathroom, was advertised for photo shoots. The likes of photographer Lindsay Duncan and the design studio Manual Arts, both established there, continued, but the graffiti was on the wall. "If you're wondering why I'm not in the studio right now, it's because we all got evicted," Reilly Hodgson broadcast on the YouTube channel for his apparel business, No Fun Press, in October, 2021. For a decade, in a light-filled second-floor corner of 888, also blessed with dust from Dupont due to the porous windows, Hodgson stamped out cheeky hipster gear: No Fun caps and toques, F-word T-shirts, "ANNOYED BY EVERYTHING" bumper stickers, rugs patterned like brick walls and chain-link fences.

To be fair, the developer had a hip plan for 888. TAS's idea was for "an artist hub." There would be, in the brand-new building, a hundred and fifteen live-work units, ten percent of them "affordable" by one formula or another. The fourteen stories would rise over a podium about the size of the current building, its green-tinted façade suggesting, of all things, the old building's falling cladding. "We're not trying to do the normal here," a representative of Suulin Architects told the *Globe and Mail.* But still, evictions. One seen-it-all Duponter, Dimitri Levanoff, twenty-plus years at his printmaking studio, Image Foundry, at 1581, offered a chicken-and-egg theory to explain what was happening on Dupont, singling out coffee shops, such as the ones 888 tenants patronized. Were they, by drinking mocha, the authors of their own fate? Artisan coffee—suggesting a creative, relaxed life for inhabitants—was, paradoxically, a feature of speedy Dupont, from Wallace Espresso, in the Junction Triangle, to First and Last, at 346, to Haute Coffee, at Davenport Road. Before Café Con Leche opened, a couple doors east of him, there was "no reason for people to be on the sidewalk," Lavenoff said. Then Wallace Espresso came along and, voila, Mattachioni, a gourmet grocery store appeared. Suddenly, people were walking the block, and traffic-damaged Dupont Street was a place. His stretch is not yet the Gran Vía, in Madrid, Yorkville, or even nearby coffee-shoppey Geary Avenue, but, Lavenoff said, "I'm starting to now think of coffee shops as an entirely different animal."

If one thing captures the essence of Dupont Street through all its eras, all up and down its length, it is the business of auto repair. Still today, every day, there are dumpsters, shipping containers even, full of parts coming and going from garages along the street. The innumerable shops' names hint at specialties: Massive (collision work, east of Lansdowne), Spotless (at Dufferin, with its 1955 Plymouth), and Expert (opposite the Galleria site). Near Bathurst Street, Dupont Transmission and Auto Service changed its name to the anthropomorphic Mister Dupont, scoring one for the street's humanity.

Nearly anyone with a car in Toronto uses Dupont and likes its directness, if not its perils. The crosstown street was sewn together from other streets, to speed them up, and it did that. In the deadly Dupont dance, the car ahead is never fast enough, you honk at drivers making legal lefts, there is no signalling lane changes. When a no-stopping zone opens the right lane, you whip your S.U.V. over there and boot it, passing on the right, bullying back just before parked cars come up again at the curb.

Dupont's gas stations are legion. A Pioneer in the curve at Emerson Avenue has been immortalized, in the news, if not novels, for motorists' willingness to idle in lines for gas that is slightly

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cheaper than elsewhere. Art has been spotted in such locales. The night of October 31, 1923, a photographer stopped by the one-time Shell at 376 Dupont. In his urban still-life, there is mist in the air, a now vintage car, cobblestones between the trolley tracks. A hundred years later, Toronto designer Jeremy Hopkin dabbled dangerously by colourizing the picture. The canopy's red tile roof is washed by yellow incandescence. A Shell logo and the words "Motor Spirit" are aglow. Letters behind the skyscraper gas pump offer "crash service." Nobody is around.

Recently, I threaded my way between rusty Oldsmobiles to stick a note on the door of the garage at 1072 Dupont. The lot is tiny, the old cars jammed in; mostly Cutlasses, a mid-sized model. There was a big-bumpered nineteen-seventies four-door, and a downsized coupe from the eighties. Another car was under a tarp. Frames from parted-out vehicles leaned on the asphalt shingles of the house to the west. Stepping up to the metal door, I heard a noise inside and decided to knock. "I was looking to talk to you about your Oldsmobile shop," I said. The cars haven't been made for twenty years—what gives? A youngish, crisp-looking man opened the door. "Personal hobby," he said. "I'm in the middle of a service call. Hang around. You can take a look if you like." His name was Matt, he told me, and he said he's owned the lot since the nineteen-nineties. An electrician in his regular life, he fixes up the Olds cars here on Dupont, then drives them to somewhere else.

But a hobby is not a business; they live by different rules. At Dupont and Bathurst, a popular coin-op car wash prospered for decades on loonies and toonies (for a time it was called the Loonie Toonie, and, back in the seventies, Sofspray). In the late twenty-tens, one of Toronto's ubiquitous development signs ("A change is proposed for this site . . .") appeared at a corner of the lot. We who washed our cars at Loonie Toonie weren't surprised. I'd long joked with the owner that the property could fund his retirement. He was shy but often presided from a red Ford pickup, his son helping out on the lot. The business had suffered due to years-long street work, not to mention construction of the Bianca next door. So-called "no touch" car washes had come along, and he told me that covid-19 made cleaning cars "not a priority." One day in May, 2022, the sprayers went dry, the vacuums were removed, and the premises were surrounded by wire fencing and a Do Not Enter sign.

"You know, there's not going to be any, any, any garages downtown," said my mechanic, Angelo Tulipano, who owns a shop at 548 Dupont that has serviced several makes of mine over forty-plus years, including Chevrolet, Chrysler, American Motors, Nissan, and Subaru. Property values and high rent are responsible, but there are bigger, more existential reasons. The reporter-customer in me wonders: Is electricity—electric cars—to auto maintenance what the Internet was to newsprint? Tulipano's not sure. People are still reading, but, he adds, "the corner stores don't have newspapers."

Tulipano is sixty-eight and has been fixing cars since he was fourteen. His garage has two lifts, back to back. Tools are everywhere, in a somewhat orderly fashion. Deep shelving holds jugs of the spirits and solvents of the trade. Customers' summer tires ("alfred, nissan maxima," taped on mine) are in storage on high racks.

Looking around, you see where Tulipano is taking the business for the foreseeable future. Outside is the parade. More precisely, it is a cramped lot full of customers' vehicles, now mostly classic cars, from DeLoreans to Rolls-Royces to a more plebeian AMC Ambassador. Once, when I was inside Tulipano's shop, the shell of a sporty Jaguar was balanced at waist height on one of the lifts. It was an

ancient and shapely convertible, maybe seventy years old, in blue primer paint.

The garage door opens to the back, into a laneway parallel to the C.P.R. tracks. If Dupont is the speedway, this is the service road, a combination graffiti alley, boneyard, and jungle. In summer, Queen Anne's lace and wild daylilies threaten to take over. Feral trees have penned in the painter neighbour's derelict G.M.C. vans, now sunk to their hubcaps in dirt. A half-block away stands the former Model T factory at Christie Street, whose great mass, designed by Ford's Detroit architect, Albert Kahn, still dominates views along Dupont. The cars were sold in a street-level showroom, amid potted plants; they were repaired at 548, says Tulipano, in his cement-block premises—a fact he checked by seeing his late landlord's old pictures of the place. A hundred years on, cars are still fixed on the lot. For a while longer, anyway.

Dupont Street "could become chic," said Daniel Stubbe, a sixth-generation "konditor" and owner of Stubbe chocolate and pastry shop, at 653 Dupont. The tony store near Christie Street turns out chocolate reindeer, Easter eggs, Halloween goodies—whatever's in season. Or look in from the Dupont sidewalk: chocolate spheres are piled into mountains, trays of marzipan masquerade as healthy fruit, candy eggs are speckled like Jackson Pollock paintings. Even at Easter of 2021, the height of the pandemic, armies of chocolate rabbits stood at attention behind the plate glass, in Cellophane armour tied with a ribbon at the top, awaiting the marching order for curb delivery.

Stubbe's shop would fit in nicely off the Grand-Place, in Brussels, surrounded by guild halls. Or—the founding family being German—in Bremen's quaint Böttcherstraße. But, juxtaposition being in Dupont's D.N.A., the elegant store faces heavy traffic, across from Loblaws and a door or two from Marlene's Just Babies. The nearby A&W is overhoused in a 1915 bank building by Hogle & Davis. A few doors east, at 631, sits Roberts Gallery, Canada's oldest—founded in 1842 and moved to Dupont in 2020—erstwhile dealers for A. J. Casson, York Wilson, Jean-Paul Riopelle.

In something of a paradox, this previously existing Dupont, with its eclectic, frequently avant-garde shops and services, has been a major selling point for the New Dupont gradually replacing it. "It's people that make a place, and people with their infinite ideas are remaking the Dupont corridor, converting its former factories into welcoming social, work, and entertainment spaces," the Web site for ELAD's Galleria site, proclaims. "The New Dupont's art galleries, restaurants, brew pubs, cafes, and restaurants are exerting an irresistible pull on Torontonians from across the city who are looking for something unique and heart-felt."

I asked Stubbe, "Are all these new buildings going to be your windfall? Or are they going to do the old displacement thing?" For now he swings with the Farm Boy monkey, optimistic for "foot traffic" in the next era. His hopes are shared by others, from Bespoke Butchers to Nancy's Cheese, if not the muffler shops that still alternate between them. In Dupont by the Castle, the district south of Casa Loma, cobbler Nick Marinos pivoted to the most obvious upside of more pedestrians: "They all have shoes. They need to get them repaired." Nick's Shoes and Repair was, until pulling out for a new, more modern location, at Yonge and Adelaide, this July, one of several narrow storefronts in a generic brick building at St. George Street. In the show window, when Marinos presided, stood a row of miscellaneous boots. Inside was a small area for customers, with a counter and displays of laces, creams, and polishes. Yet spectacle and anomaly were not far away. If you took narrow stairs to the basement, the length of the building opened up. A

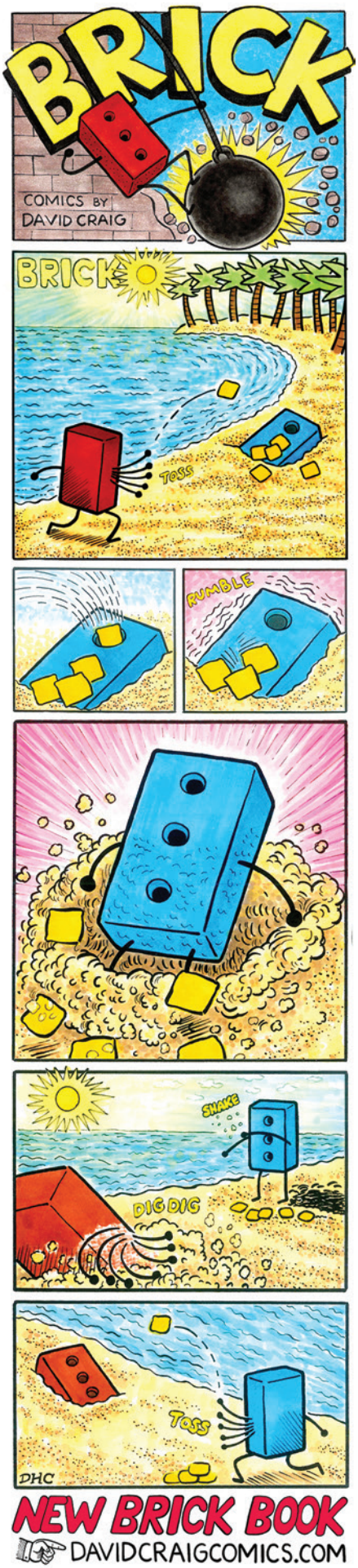
dozen people sat working amid the flotsam and machinery needed to make, fix, and customize shoes. The "fantastic rumour," as I called it, was true. When you had your shoes fixed anywhere in town, the work was often sent here. In 2021, after more than fifty years, the family sold the business. A measure of Nick's clairvoyance, the store's deep reputation, and the nature of the goods despite a new age, was that no Under New Management sign seemed to have been hung out by the buyer.

Another example of the old Dupont's persistence was how the street from long ago could jump into the present, like an Edward Hopper painting come to life. Let's say it's after dark and you're driving home hungry. The traffic signal turns red at Bathurst Street. You stop, and there is Vesta Lunch, a down-market Phillies from Hopper's famous picture. No blinds, so in you look. A couple of people sit on stools at the counter. No fedoras are worn, but the salt and pepper shakers are essentially the same, the napkin dispensers even. The pandemic shortened Vesta's hours from 24/7. The manager, Maria Lopez, had someone cut out giant letters in Day-Glo paper saying "OPEN TO TAKE OUT" and paste them on the glass. Now that things are returning to normal, is this Bathurst and Dupont scene 1955, 1975, or 2015? (All of the above, except for inflation: the all-day steak and eggs were up to $14.95 by June, 2022.) Lopez was upbeat. The folks on their way to redeem bottles and cans at the Beer Store on Dupont a half-block west disappeared with the building (new condo going up), but construction workers were coming in. Steps away, Bianca was nearing occupancy. Will the new folks be hungry?

Someone banking on that is Anthony Rose, a former restaurant dishwasher who by the twenty-tens was one of Toronto's most influential foodies. As boys, Rose and his brother ate at People's Foods, the hole-in-the-wall burger joint at 176 Dupont, its big blinking sign long visible at the top of St. George Street. One day his brother saw a foreclosure notice posted there and Anthony took the spot, opening Rose and Sons. The space was so small that, to make a go of it, he created Big Crow, a barbecue joint with no roof, out back by the train tracks—just a grill and some picnic tables. It worked, and a budding consortium soon filled several other Dupont addresses. They are all on the north side and, come evening, on Dupont's stretch from Howland Avenue to Davenport Road, the observant will notice couples waiting for breaks in traffic to dash across for dinner. The names, menus, and numbers of Rose's other restaurants on Dupont are Fat Pasha (edible Middle Eastern still lifes, at 414), Schmaltz (bagels and fish, behind 414), and Fet Zun (rustic Middle Eastern, 252). Big Crow finally got a roof, along with vases of fresh flowers, tiny lights, and humans instead of raccoons. Walking back from the Dupont sidewalk, diners dodged a fire escape, old pipes, and galvanized garbage tins. Weeds like triffids pressed in, but it was still smart to have a reservation. (Rose opted to close the flagship locations this summer, in order to focus on his other Dupont-based concerns.)

"Why are you so invested in—like, it's a crabby old street," I asked Rose one evening. It was a "happy accident," he said—the place where things worked out, as opposed to Queen Street, further south, or Pine Plains, New York, where he ran a tavern for about a year. "And every time something not on Dupont didn't work," he said, "I was so happy to, like, not spread my time." In the promotional magazine for the Bianca condo, there was talk of Rose's "empire," of plans for L.A. and New York, of Rose as "the man who would be king." But behind 176 Dupont, Anthony Rose, comfy in his ripped jeans, talked to me of doing "extreme local," of running his

ALFRED HOLDEN



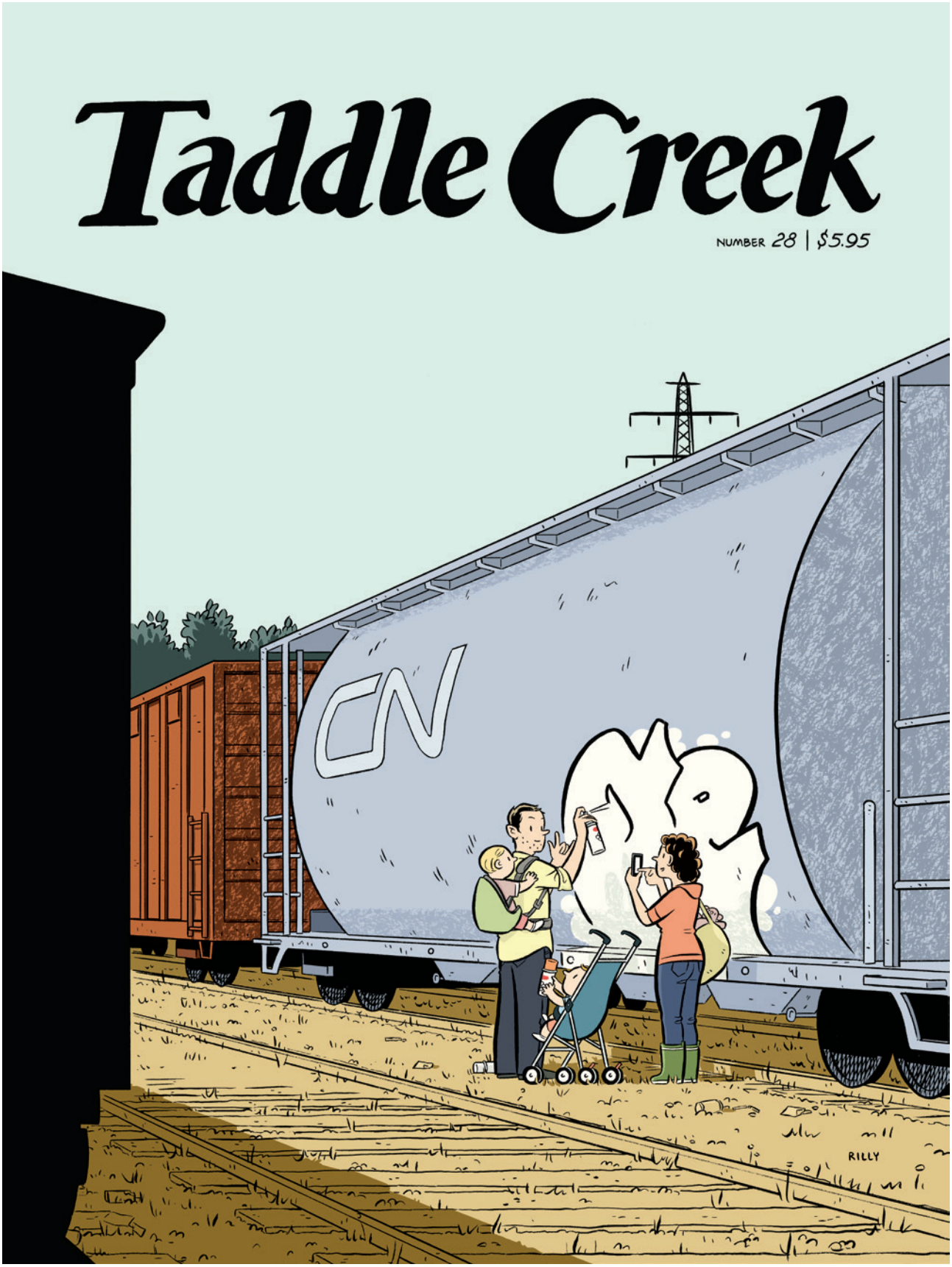
places happily "hands on" on the "extremely used thoroughfare," his loyal customers coming in twice a week. A photo in the Bianca magazine shows Rose guzzling a Coca-Cola, touting—as Vesta's Maria Lopez might—"the simplicity of the food we serve," which the condo's copywriter called, at Rose and Sons, "comfortable and familiar, but with that little something extra."

"Have you ever rented space in new construction?" I asked, suggesting what lies ahead along his favoured boulevard. No—he relies on old buildings. "When you're signing a lease, you look for five, five, and five. To be able to try to understand what you're doing for the first five, and then survive for the second five," and hopefully keep the space going for the next five years. I'm betting the king of Dupont Street will thrive. The question is: as Dupont continues to change, will that be enough for him to *survive*?

"When you look from afar . . . there's all these cranes," I said, talking to Dimitri Levanoff at his studio, way west, where Dupont disappears under train tracks and bridges before turning into Annette Street. "But when you walk it, you see, to some extent, its resistance to change." We were in reality-check mode in his sky-lit studio. The room was quiet but for cooling fans in plus-sized ink-jet printers. Some developers declare Dupont a "cultural corridor," for its orbit of galleries, theatres like the Tarragon, even the City of Toronto Archives, but this far west there are empty storefronts. Lavenoff attributes them to legacy, not poverty. Down the street is the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. The Canadian Madeira Club, a Portuguese community centre, is across from that, and Sporting Clube Português de Toronto is down the block. Family and descendants, Lavenoff says, "are living in those places, storefronts, and using them as just flats," cashing out as prices rise or people die off, but slowly. "The Portuguese base . . . was a foundational kind of society here on this stretch."

I mention the houses—Dupont's rows of semis with dirty porches, bottom-slider windows, odd half-turrets upstairs. Their modest yards front the fierce traffic in broken blocks from here to Dupont's far end at Avenue Road. City zoning puts the big buildings on the north side, smaller ones on the south, so most of the houses will stay. Resistance. "These condos going up right now," I wonder as Lavenoff and I talk, "is it going to bring some beauty here?" Weirdly, they have so far: at the Litho apartments, the fresh sidewalks are decorated with planters. But the liquor store window displays end abruptly at the property line. Old Dupont resumes to the west, with the dusty, useful yards of New Canadians Lumber, its wood gatehouse dating from who knows when. Yes, resistance.

Climb up onto the West Toronto Railpath bridge, over the street at Dupont's western terminus, in the Junction Triangle, and it's possible to watch the traffic flow under you like a two-way river. Looking east, you'll see cranes, and an endless procession of headlights turning toward you, where Dupont jogs around the Galleria site and there is often dust from construction. More cranes will be coming to Dupont for years to come. What will all this bring twenty-five years from now? Beware my forecasts, as we have seen. I envisage that the Green Line, a linear park along the hydro corridor, will come to pass. That it will be harder to get a new muffler—but that you may not need one. Food will be plentiful. Here's a gift: I predict the 26 Dupont bus will build back its ridership, with citizens going to work (if people still work, and go to work, in 2047), rather than coming to it, as in Dupont's factory age. Squinting, peering east from the bicycle bridge at Osler Street through the haze of time, I can see it will be a busy place, but in important ways the same—different jumble, same jungle. And that what you see, and perhaps experience, may be up to you. As the marketing people have masterfully shown, your real view—the outlook that finally applies—is made in your head, not on the street. Dupont in the twenty-first century will be whatever you think it is.



"Cool Parents," by Hartley Lin (2012).

A CELEBRATORY CAKE THAT'S SWEET MUSIC TO YOUR MOUTH

In his final column, the author not only takes the cake, but bakes it.

BY BRIAN FRANCIS

I know it's a cliché to say that all good things must come to an end. So, I'll modify that phrase and say that all good things made with saturated fat and sorbitan monostearate must come to an end.

For my final *Taddle Creek* column, I can't think of a better way to sail off into those fluffy Cool Whip clouds than by combining two of my favourite things: cake and country music. Now look, I realize I may not seem like your average country and western fan. But believe me—nothing melts my margarine more than some skillfully placed rhinestones, a few rows of fringe, and bleached hair piled so high it hits the chandelier as you tush-push past.

So it's only fitting my parting gift to you is the delicious down-home goodness of Barbara Mandrell's Pig Out Cake. This cake is also sometimes referred to as Pig Pickin' Cake, which sounds like it's made with pork. Or that you eat it with your fingers. For any millennials reading this, Barbara Mandrell is an American country singer whose hits include "I Was Country When Country Wasn't Cool" and "Sleeping Single in a Double Bed." She also had a television variety show in the eighties, alongside her sisters, Irlene and Louise. Clearly, Barbara was a triple threat: singer, musician, and baker extraordinaire.

I got this recipe from my copy of *National Mfg. Co. 1901–2001 Centennial Cookbook.* Although most of the recipes seem to be American, there's also a Swift Current, Saskatchewan, contingent. Those recipes are marked with a maple leaf icon and include such staples as Tourtiere Saskatchewan Style and Oreo Salad. I was curious about what the National Manufacturing Company actually makes. Can you even think of a less specific company name? It's like something you'd see in a Looney Tunes episode.

As to why Barbara Mandrell's Pig Out Cake bears her name, I have absolutely no idea. It could be that the recipe was once featured in the pages of *TV Guide.* Back in the day, numerous A-List celebrities would submit their favourite recipes (via their publicists, no doubt) so that common people could eat just like them. Who could say no to Tom Selleck's Beefy Lasagna? Or Loni Anderson's Weeknight Taco Bake? In any case, I can only guess that Barbara considers having this cake named after her more fulfilling than winning her two Grammy Awards. Make no mistake. This cake is sweet music to your mouth. And you'll be hollering "Sooey!" as soon as you dig in.

What makes Barbara Mandrell's Pig Out Cake so tasty is the hit of citrus from the (canned) mandarin oranges and the (canned) crushed pineapple in the frosting. The Cool Whip lends an air of sophistication as well. And I'm always charmed by cake recipes that list "1 box cake mix" in their ingredients. I know it may seem redundant, but I think of powdered cake mix as the rich soil from which Mother Nature's bounty blooms.

One important note: If you make this cake (and you should), try to make it a few days ahead of time. The longer it sits in the fridge, the better it tastes. I think it's the juices from the mandarin oranges seeping into the cake. Or the hydrogenated coconut and palm kernel oil from the Cool Whip. You'll see what I mean by Day 3. If you can last that long. Just like yours truly, this cake only improves with age.

I hope you enjoy Barbara Mandrell's Pig Out Cake as much as I've enjoyed bringing you these recipes over the past four years. I've had a lot of fun, put on a few pounds, and consumed so many preservatives, I'll look fifty when I'm ninety. Until next time, pardner.

Barbara Mandrell's Pig Out Cake

Ingredients

Cake:

1 box yellow cake mix
½ cup vegetable oil
4 eggs
2 284-millilitre cans mandarin oranges, drained (but save the juice)

Frosting:

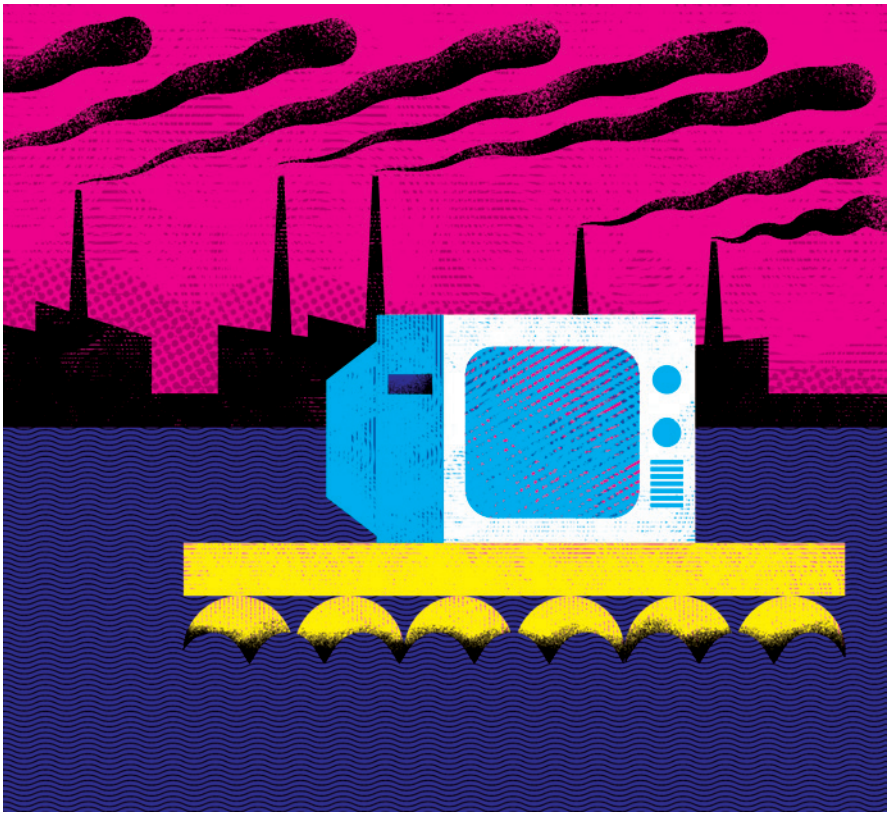
1 540-millilitre can crushed pineapple with juice
1 102-gram package instant vanilla pudding
½ 1-litre container Cool Whip

Directions

1. Add enough water to the mandarin orange liquid required for the cake mix.
2. Add the oil and eggs.
3. Mix well according to package directions and fold in the mandarin oranges.
4. Bake in a nine-inch-by-thirteen-inch cake pan at 325 degrees Fahrenheit for thirty-five minutes.
5. Mix ingredients for frosting and spread over cooled cake. Store in the refrigerator overnight or longer. But not too much longer. Not like a year or anything.

Now that's a cake so good you'll want to celebrate every day.

BRIAN FRANCIS



THE FICTION

THERE LIES ROCHESTER

BY STUART ROSS

This is the story of a child. He wears brown mittens. With mittens he burrows his way up out of the sand and then he is on the beach and the sun makes his eyes feel like eggs in a frying pan. He shakes the sand out of his hair, and what he's unable to shake out, the breeze looks after. He wears a T-shirt with a picture of a superhero on it, a blond man in red long johns whose limbs stretch for kilometres in every direction.

You asked what the child's name is, but I don't remember. But he emerges just like a hermit crab, and so I'll call him Herman, like Herman's Hermits. Listen to the hiss. It comes from the lake, whose weak little foamy waves wash up almost to Herman's feet. He cups a brown-mittened hand over his eyes and peers around him, turns in a full arc like a compass, the direction kind or the circle-drawing kind, it doesn't matter. The beach is nearly empty. In the direction of the nuclear plant, four little dots are prancing. A mother dot, a father dot, a child dot, and a dog dot.

Herman hears the faint chime of laughter. He turns toward the lake now. Something is upon it, far in the distance. A fish, a boat, a piece of driftwood. Herman uses his super eyes to zoom in. A television on a raft. On the screen is a cartoon penguin carrying an attaché case. He's on his way to a business meeting. Smokestacks leap into the air around him, pierce the sky, bellow great clouds of grey and black and red.

Herman reaches into the hole he just climbed out of and feels around for his lunch box. It is tin. It depicts Roy Rogers. He yanks it to the surface, and suddenly a girl is standing beside him, her shadow draped over his doughy face.

"Are you the child dot I saw a minute ago?" asks Herman.

The girl nods. She recognizes Plastic Man on Herman's T-shirt. Then she looks out toward the lake. She points with a mittenless hand. Herman admires her slender fingers, the chipped yellow polish crowning each digit. "There lies Rochester," says the girl.

Herman follows her fingertips across the water. A dark funnel stretches from the horizon into the sky, sweeping slowly across the most distant point of the children's field of vision.

"What does it contain?" Herman asks.

The girl brushes sand off the front of her clam diggers. She lifts a red sippy cup of orange juice to her lips, treats her thirst.

"The inky roiling smoke of the 'nado contains a multitude of mouldering plastic shopping bags; several ecstatic chihuahuas; an oak desk with a chartered accountant, a pencil behind his ear; a Kenny G CD case with the CD missing—"

"The CD's always missing!" Herman karate-chops into her sentence.

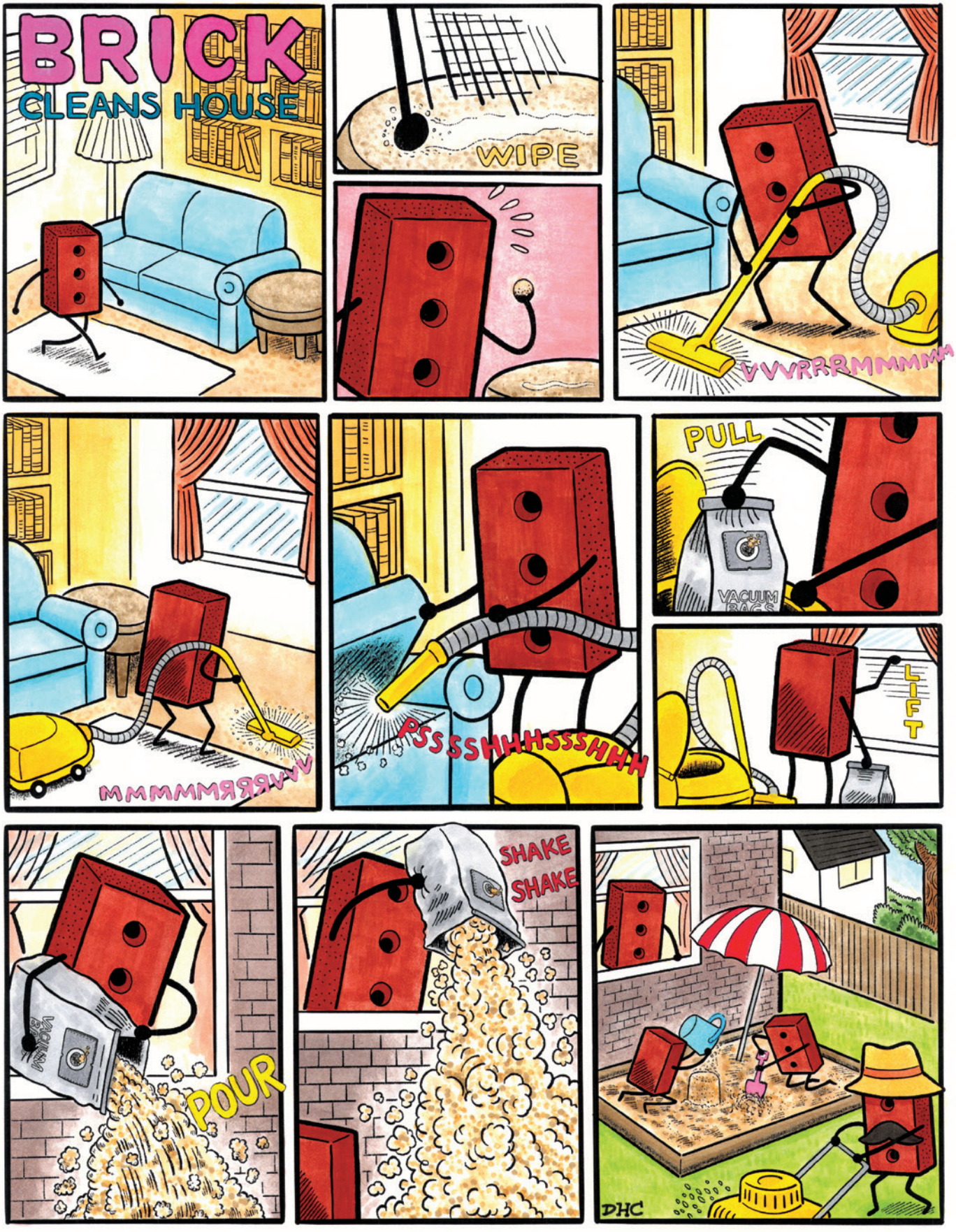
"—hundreds of photographs of dead relatives; a hailstorm of frozen peas, ricocheting off everything else; and our future. Any aspiration you may have, Plastic Man, is knotted into that limping angry 'nado."

At the mention of his name, the Plastic Man on Herman's shirt begins to tremble and then glow. Herman feels his belly become warm, and the warmth radiates through his shoulders and thighs, heading at freeway velocity toward his pudgy extremities.

Tentatively, Herman reaches out one hand, toward the lake, toward Rochester, and his hand keeps going and going. The girl dot bites her lips. Has she found the Saviour? Is *she* the Saviour, bestowing new powers among the ordinary men who walk the crippled earth?

"This is so weird," Herman whispers as his arm stretches farther and farther across the lake, until he feels a weather event nipping at his strained knuckles. His fingers begin to snake from his hands, and soon they tighten around the throat of the dark funnel over Rochester, and there they remain, holding on for dear life.

ILLUSTRATION BY MATTHEW DALEY


BRICK
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THE FICTION

NETFLIX MERCY INTERVIEW

BY YASUKO THANH

The night Chino went to the hospital I stared at his empty bed. He had tried to kill himself with a heroin overdose and only when my gaze came to rest on the hollow his body no longer occupied did I realize how much I needed him and what I would lose if he died.

Let me set the scene. We share a cell about the size of a gas-station bathroom. He occupies the bottom bunk. I take the top. In the thirty years we've lived together we've never come to blows over anything. The key is patience, compromise, communication, and never losing your temper so you do something you will regret. Because that's what kills you: not the crime, but reliving it afterward.

I was twenty years old when I started doing life. A guard enclosed within a bulletproof cubicle punched buttons on a central control board. Another guard wearing state boots that had a tough, glossy shine to them pointed a rifle out a porthole. As the cell door racked open, I felt frightened.

"Does he use the rifle?" I asked the guard.

"Only when shit jumps off."

I shuddered and stepped into my cell with my meager possessions. My cellmate had customized the window with drapes and there was so much wax on the floor I could see my reflection. Above the toilet he'd written:

1. No farting, belching, or masturbating when I'm in cell.
2. Don't go through my shit. I'll kill you.

So I waited until he came back from the prison yard to put away my things. When the cage door opened, Chino greeted me. He had been in prison nearly as long as I'd been alive. He had slick black hair and his prison blues were pressed. Back then he was a very healthy forty-one-year-old.

"Hey, this is your locker. You can put your things here. Where you from?"

While I put away my things, he listened to my stories about my best burglaries and sexual conquests. I looked around the cell. I noticed Chino had no TV, no radio, no property in his locker at all except for the folded state-issue clothes.

Hours passed. Then it was time for bed. As I lay on my top bunk, closing my eyes, I could hear the sound of plastic crinkling beneath me.

Chino got up and asked me, "Hey, can you hold this for me?

He wanted me to hold a belt to his arm, squeezing it tight to raise a vein, while he withdrew a hypodermic needle hidden inside a felt-tipped marker and began to fix.

Chino stayed up that entire night, pacing back and forth, enjoying the high. When the sun rose, he slept all morning. Then I understood that Chino had nothing in his cell because he'd sold everything he owned for dope.

Chino was the first guy to step up if something had to be done for the crew. If he came at a guy, he wasn't just going to stick him an inch, he was going to run something all the way through him. He put his own safety on the line. Others were scared to mess with him, and he took me under his wing. His crew was his family; he allowed no disrespect. Back then, he was pretty good at making booze, too. We'd drink a whole toiletful then fall asleep.

Now Chino stumbles in circles when he's let into the yard, mumbling to himself, lost in his own private hell. It makes a person sick to see. Chino's not the same man that came to prison.

"What happened to the walker we requested?" I asked the warden. "We ordered it a year ago and we're still waiting."

"These things take time."

"Chino can't take the stairs or walk all the way to the cafeteria. He can't get dressed or to go the bathroom alone. I help him shower. He can't even walk the distance to the pill line alone."

"Prison is a hard place," he told me, as if he was saying something new.

Chino didn't go to the doctor right away, but I knew something was wrong. He had lost sixty pounds and, tired of my nagging, signed up for a sick call. Three weeks passed before he saw a prison nurse. He took the permission slip, called a ducat, and showed up at the infirmary, where he waited all day in a holding cage to see the doctor.

I came home to see him standing in the middle of the cell holding a shoe in one hand.

"Man, I don't want to die in jail," he said.

I asked him what was wrong. He told me he had bone cancer and the prison doctor had said there was nothing he could do.

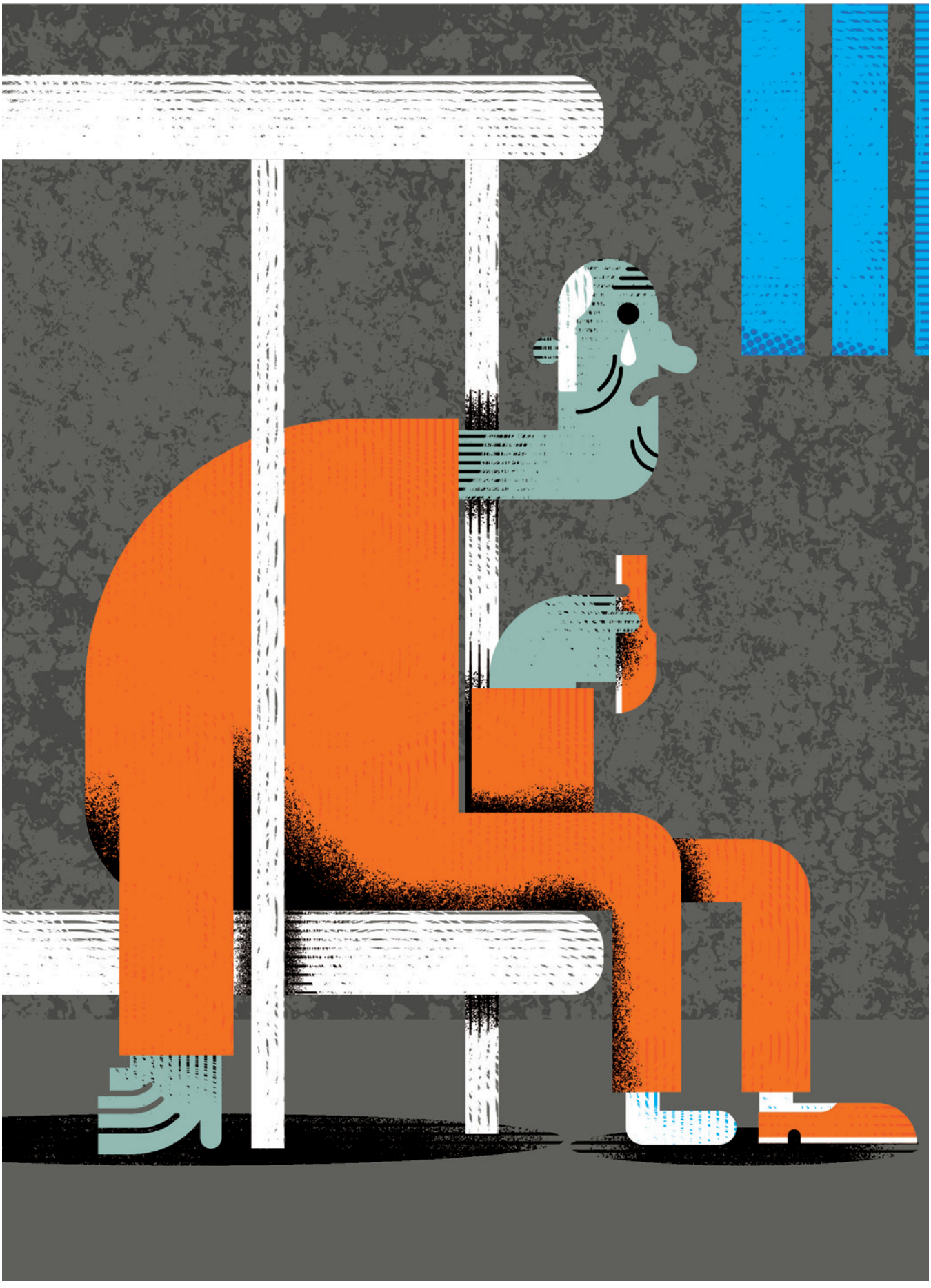
I couldn't take it. Sit in it. Dwell in it. I was terrified.

When Chino returned from the hospital after his failed suicide—his body filling the empty space in his bed, in which I had curled and wept quietly in the knowledge that he meant everything to me and that life was worth nothing if he were not a part of it—he had words for me.

"If that ever happens again you have to finish it."

I pretended not to know what he meant.

ILLUSTRATION BY MATTHEW DALEY



"I want you to finish me with a pillow," he said.

"I'm no killer."

"Promise me."

"If I was going to kill anyone, the last place I'd start is with you."

"I'm not fucking around, Holmes."

"It can't be tonight. I'm getting my nails done," I said.

I wasn't trying to make light of his pain. It's just that it all hurt too much to talk about.

He became deadly serious—looked at me with those I-could-shank-you-where-you-stand eyes, and spoke these words in a low tone: "Eh, so don't forget, Holmes—you owe me."

"It'll take time to stash enough dope to try again. In the meantime, you're here with me. You're O.K."

Calculating a fatal dose was a Ph.D.-level skill, considering Chino had been a junkie for most of his fifty years behind bars. It had taken weeks (try taking away a portion of a junkie's daily habit and see how far you get) the first time around.

I told him to hang on; new discoveries in medical science were happening every day. I told him to trust me, that he'd get his compassionate release, and soon he'd have all the pussy he could ever want. He smiled then, as if everyone he'd ever loved was in the same room, happy to see him, and for a moment I felt relief.

That morning I got him out of bed and helped him take a piss, and then I sat him down on his bunk to brush his teeth and shave him. I put on his pants and socks and shoes. I combed his hair and we waited for the cell door to open.

A hundred inmates stepped out onto the tier from their cells at once—faster, younger guys, half of them rapping, all hormones and macho bullshit on this range we used to rule. They streamed around us to the cellblock grill gate, gangbangers, punk kids, wearing their pants around their asses or hanging round their knees. We worked our way to the cafeteria but we moved slowly—like a steamroller this mass of men—swept into it, the screws hurrying us along, as if we were twenty-five-year-olds.

A guard yelled, "Tuck it in."

"What? What?" I asked.

"Tuck it in."

I'd forgotten my glasses in my cell and couldn't read his lips.

"Tuck in his shirt, now." He knocked Chino's cane out from under him. "Are you deaf? Tuck in his shirt."

Breakfast. Lunch. Count time coming and going. Coming and going again.

Before I came to prison I worked in a warehouse for an asshole. Financial trouble and personal woes weren't the half of it. Suicidal at 2 A.M., I was sitting in a bar and drinking and sharing such things with the only people one can share such things with—strangers—and because the desperate will grasp at anything to keep themselves from falling, the next day I found myself at the airport with eight hundred grams of heroin strapped to my body. I got fifty years and a transfer to this prison, housing seven thousand men. There is nowhere to lie down without touching despair.

I'm not trying to say I'm a victim—there's another one of those terms, like "cycles of abuse" or "anger management" from a psychologist's vocabulary list—it's just that everyone has a story that starts, "Let me tell you about the time . . ." Who hasn't been fucked around? Who hasn't dreamed of revenge? Who doesn't wish they grew up happy?

Back when I was a kid, my dad and uncle used to get deep into their cups. My uncle would push his way in through my bedroom door. Every time the door would squeak open, I knew what was going to happen, starting with my uncle calling me sicko and ending with me embarrassed, cleaning myself. When Uncle Gode left, he was always laughing.

Chino got his walker and, having regained some small amount of mobility, rallied.

But the independence gave him the means to start entering other cells by accident, thinking they belonged to him. He would get himself into trouble because of little gestures like staring, when he didn't even remember who he'd been looking at. One day, when the screws weren't around, he took a shit-kicking in the commissary because he'd lost control of his bowels and everyone was mad at him for stinking it up.

It was getting harder and harder to convince myself that what was right for me was also right for Chino, and the old cons had started talking.

In Chino's healthier days he would have said, "You fucker," in that way of his: chin up, looking at me for making him suffer, for making him, as I'd always done, bear the weight for the two of us. Chino, who'd always been the one to carry the conversation, the fight—you name it. Anyhow, the old cons felt so terrible about what had happened, they took up a collection. By the end of the afternoon, we had more than enough heroin to kill Chino.

So then I told the guard that Chino wanted to die, that four lousy ibuprofens weren't enough, that he no longer even remembered why he was in prison, that I'd found him crying with a shoe in his hand, that he couldn't remember the rules and was getting shit-kicked for it by guys who had no respect, who weren't good cons, and how I needed to protect him because guards like him weren't always around, and how I fetched his commissary, and cleaned the cell, and helped him with physical therapy, bathed him, diapered him, gave him a clean shave.

The guard told me I was helping him just by being there, and then he said he'd leave it alone. He said if I did it, killed Chino, no harm would come, no consequences.

"We're not all dicks, man. I get it."

"But I don't want to kill him. I want him to get treatment. I want him to get pain meds. I want him to get compassionate release."

"You do you, man," he said. "I've

THE DAY IS A FATHER

This poem is a day, light slanting through blinds
sun on a northern lake, fishing with a hook attached to a stick
playing baseball for hours, a fat cat winding around legs
wilderness hikes, canoeing, falling further and further behind

This poem asks questions no one else will verbalize
brings a stab of pain, causes awkward silence

This poem is playing roughhouse on the floor
with a daughter who learns to fight back. She giggles
swats at the poem's head. It always lets her win
never makes her feel powerless

This poem is an entire galaxy of curiosity, separation, regret
It's walking down the street talking about Darwin's theories
sucking on a piece of milk chocolate
while keeping a Hacky Sack from touching the sidewalk

This poem is programming the first portable computer
to repeat simple patterns. It's playing your first video game:
ASCII symbols arranged into rooms of a castle, monsters
only visualized by closing your eyes

This poem is the bright onslaught of our lives
It will not live forever, but I need it to
What would any of this mean without a poem that questions everything
loves with tendrils that stretch across a continent
does not say no, except in anger

—Emily Pohl-Weary

heard you. You tried. You made your point."

That night was the first night I'd had to diaper him before bed. The overhead light threw shadows into the valleys of Chino's blanket, and I listened to his raspy breathing, envisioning the grim reaper above him, ready to snatch what little life remained, unable to do a goddamn thing about it.

I woke full of guilt for allowing Chino to suffer—and all to satisfy my own sadistic need to keep him around. I thought about going back to sleep and pretending my bed was any bed, that I was anywhere, and imagined how it would feel to let go and fall from this life. I dreamed about breaking out with Chino so he could die a man, a free man, because a man can't be a man if he isn't free.

Chino woke up at 3 a.m. Saving for the fatal dose had put his body through hell.

"I can't sleep, I'm in so much pain."

Chino was screaming. The tier, yelling, "Shut him the fuck up."

"Shh, shh, shh," I whispered, stroking Chino's hair. "You're O.K."

His eyes were afraid.

"Holmes, I don't want to die in jail. I can't die in here," he said.

"I'll get the guard."

"I don't want to be transferred to the infirmary."

I tore out my hair listening to the screaming. I felt like a man standing on a land mine, only temporarily alive. All I had to do was put the pillow over Chino's face, hold it there. In a fit of strong emotion, like what the chaplain talked about, I found his heroin. He stopped screaming when I touched his arm.

"Is it time to go now?" I asked.

The entire range was yelling at me: "Shut him the fuck up." Every one of them at some point, had been innocent. Like a baby, I held him in my arms, the rig ready.

He couldn't struggle. I gave him the heroin I'd been holding for him—gave him an overdose, all of it—and laid him down when he became limp. Chino drifted off but he was still in pain, because when he woke briefly, he was moaning.

He was breathing in a rough-edged way.

"Finish me with a pillow. That's what you got to watch for."

I'm not a killer, but maybe there is something worse than being a killer. Maybe the worst thing you can do when someone is howling in pain is not be a killer. It occurred to me then, I could follow him where he was going. How do you remain a good friend when what your friend needs and what you need are opposites? Chino wanted to leave this earth. I needed him to stay.

In the beginning, I didn't think I could do life, but Chino turned me around.

He taught me life was my only possession, and so to respect life. He taught me how to survive one day at a time, and said it was important to die a better person than I was before I came to prison. But I failed him. I snapped. I killed. You wanted to know what makes a killer. Well, I'm sure my next cellmate will be a gangbanger, and if I get sick I don't see him backpacking me to the showers. He'll cut my throat with a shiv and drag my body to the showers for a screw to find me, and no one will see a thing. When you can't take care of yourself, you're a victim. And inside, there are only predators and victims. And since Chino always kept me alive, I don't know what will happen next.

A LIFE WELL SPENT

What we nurture persists, even after we're gone.

BY JULIE CAMERON GRAY

One afternoon in 1939, in the English countryside, Leonard Woolf was gardening while his wife, Virginia, listened to the news. The radio was airing Adolf Hitler's hate-filled rantings, and Virginia called out to Leonard to come listen. But Leonard said no. He said he was planting irises under the apple tree, and they would be blooming long after Hitler was dead. And he was right—those irises bloomed for decades after Hitler shot himself.

I was obsessed with that anecdote in 2018. I found ways to work it into all sorts of conversations. It feels endlessly applicable: do not get sucked into the drama of things you can't control, when you could be working on something that will last a lifetime.

Here's another: A few years before Woolf planted his irises, George Orwell planted roses in the garden of his English cottage. Orwell wrote about his roses in the *Tribune,* only to have readers write in to say no one wanted to hear about his gardening.

Clearly, that reader was not me, as I delight in foisting gardening lore on the unsuspecting. I love feasting on every scrap of information about writers who garden, as though they were turning over not soil but an idea in the mind, sifting through loam and suddenly having a breakthrough idea stagger into the scene, possibly on the wings of bees.

Gardens feel solitary, yet you are never alone. You are in the company of living things that ask very little, if anything, of you. I breathe a little deeper while my ears follow the chatter of birds, the white noise of cars on a road unseen, carrying a sound like surf striving for shore. The scent of the air around me, which in summer is full of the linden flowers and Japanese tree lilac, carefully planted twenty years ago by people I will never know. I'm grateful to those strangers.

Ten years ago, I noticed one of my neighbours spent most of the year training a wild vine to grow along the chain-link fence that separated our shared path from a road. He would often stand beside the fence, threading the wisps of new spring growth through the diamond mesh of galvanized steel. He did this well into the fall, when the leaves would turn wine red and reveal dark purple berries on bright red stems that birds feasted on. Then one year, a woman moved in with him. The following year, they had a baby girl, and the year after, they sold their townhouse and moved out of the city.

But the vines he nurtured all those years persist. Now whenever I am by the fence, I too weave in the tendrils of new growth. It takes so little to nudge nature onward, and yet I feel strangely vulnerable every time I do it—as though it is a loud declaration of my desire that this green wall of leaves should exist. That the birds that feast on those berries every fall should keep coming back for generations. That whoever lives here after me will also love these vines.

It might feel counterintuitive to plant anything while autumn leaves flame into reds and golds. But it's the perfect time to plant daffodils, bluebells, even irises. I hear they will bloom for decades.

Even today, Orwell's roses are still blooming.

Orwell's Garden Cowl

Gauge

28 stitches and 36 rounds in a 4-inch square in the charted design, on the larger needles. Can be made in small/medium or medium/large. Measurements: 19 (20.5) inches in circumference.

Yarn

Lichen and Lace 80/20 sock yarn in one main colour and three contrasting colours. MC will require approximately 180 yards. CCs will require approximately 70 yards each.

Needle Size

Circular knitting needles: 3 mm for the ribbing and 3.5 mm/U.S. 5 for the colour work

Colours Used in Sample

Linen (main)
Shrub, Sugar Plum, Amber (contrast)

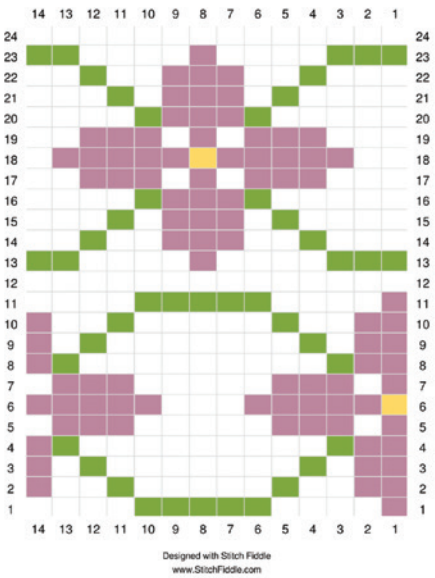
Materials

One stitch marker
Tapestry needle for weaving in ends

Pattern

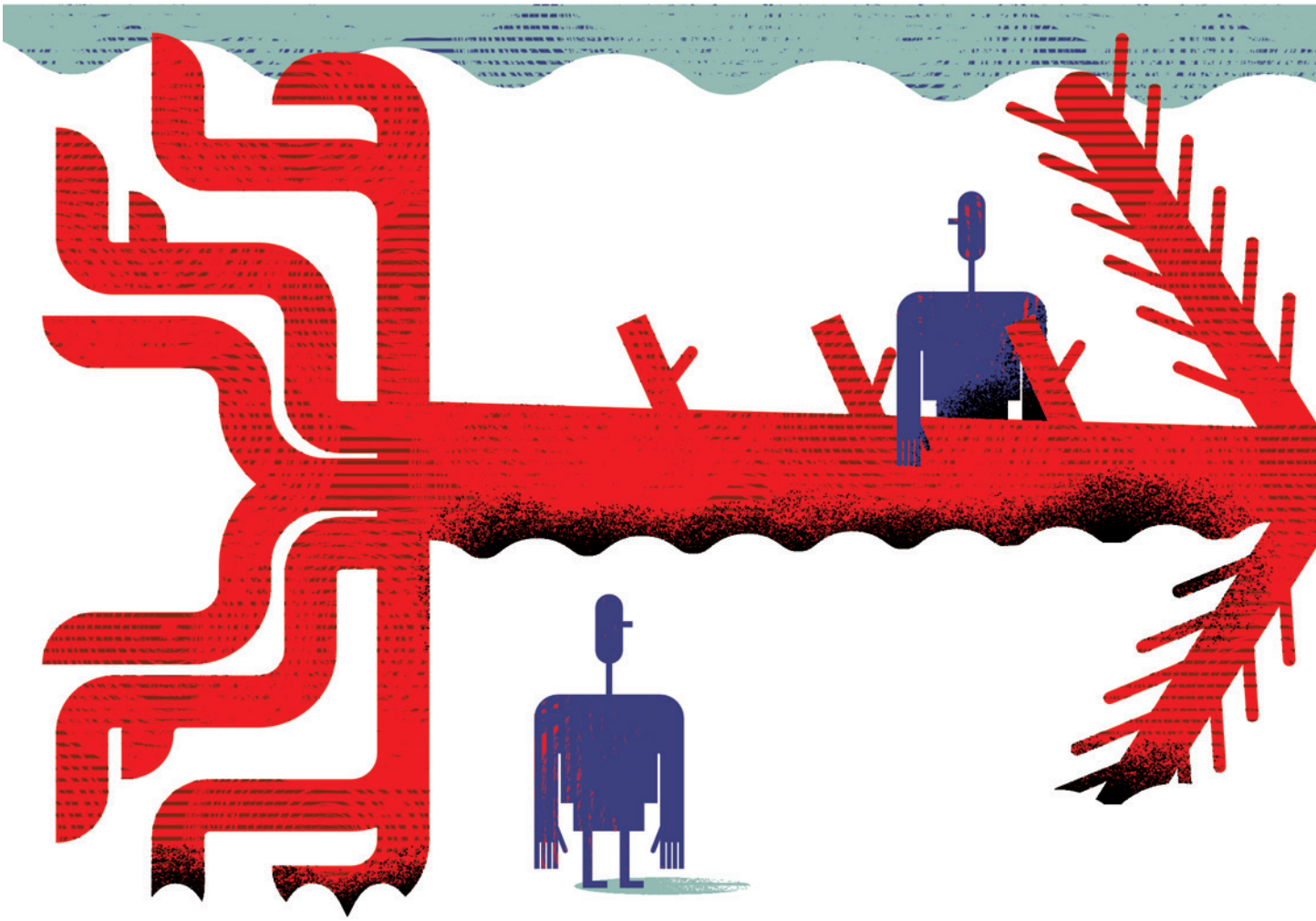
With MC and smaller needles, cast on 168 (196) stitches. Place stich marker to mark beginning/end of round, and begin working in K1, P1 ribbing. Work K1, P1 ribbing for 5 rounds.

Switch to larger needles. Knit 1 round in MC in larger needles, then begin chart:



Repeat the chart 12 (14) times for each round. Continue knitting the chart in the round until you have worked two full repeats (one repeat is 24 rounds, so you will work 48 rounds of the chart). When chart work is complete, switch to smaller needles and work K1, P1 ribbing for 5 rounds. Bind off all stitches. Weave in ends and wet block the cowl.

GUY CRAWFORD



THE FICTION

SUCCEEDING A FEEBLE MIDDLE

BY TONY BURGESS

This drop that the wind takes from escarpment to field is under such peculiar influences, the cold clap off the bay, the *yar* of new space, and the tong of pressure, that what form that wind takes, its speed, its evenness, are not predictable. As a pattern it is unaccounted for by conventional wind theory and is so eccentric that no explanation exists at all. Air, best understood as a suiciding man, leaps past the precipice, only to slam into the field as something else, only to be converted in that very same instant into a weightless violence so agitated that every second requires a renewed story. And even if one could access that story, it will have instantaneously attacked itself infinite times, producing endless moments. The air that comes across the field is not only mad itself, it *makes* madness. Out of tree, out of the psoriatic soil, out of insect destruction, deep in the eyes of those who look.

In winter, the testicles of clouds freeze solid and shatter into vehicles on Widgeon Road, causing them to lean and distort. On this January late afternoon, Bill Cooksey stands in the bay window, his hand over his face, and reads the wind surrounding his eighty-year-old prize red pine. Bill is a forty-eight-year-old real estate agent, a large man with woolly sideburns and eyes that sit overtop his glasses. He has a proprietary air, a sort of Old World gentry affectation. And he has a claim to it. The poplar-lined road leading out of the bottom of town, cutting diagonally through farmland, bears his family's name. The Cooksey Road isn't plowed in winter, and its washboard surface deters the summer traffic, but it's well used by tractors hauling broccoli-laden flat wagons. The tip of the red pine is leaning an entirely new metre to the east-northeast this morning. Cooksey presses

ILLUSTRATION BY MATTHEW DALEY

against the window to gauge how close the neighbour's shed is. About twenty metres. He glances up at the tree. *How tall would you say that is?*

"How tall would you say this tree is?"

He bends his index finger against the cold glass. A person says something within. Cooksey turns.

"How tall would you say . . ."

His son, Peter, enters from the front hall. He is a heavy-set boy, with wire-framed glasses holding on to his wide head. His age is not properly known.

"Dad, everything the other side of Station Park is out. No power."

"Take a look at this. Come here."

Windblown ice sizzles against the bay window. The temperature in this small space is several degrees colder than the rest of the room. A century and a half of gusts with deep fetch have bored millions of needle-width wormholes. Peter Cooksey feels this on his waist as he steps in beside his dad.

"Woah. It's leaning."

'It is, isn't it? I thought it always had a bit of a lean though."

"Not like that, Dad."

They stare in silence, sensing some fabulous change may be coming.

"Watch the ground on the other side. That's the tell. Is it rising at all?"

They both push their glasses up on their noses, like a synchronised pair of beefeater guards. Mary Cooksey is standing in the room.

"That wind has blown all the snow from the field into our drive."

Bill turns to his wife as Peter leans in closer to the glass.

"Yeah, Froot Loops doesn't do it on Sundays."

Froot Loops is Frank Coutts, the town yard man. Mary spins a tea towel propeller at her waist.

"That's nothin, Mom. Check this out."

Cooksey makes room for his wife in the bay.

"Is Froot Loops a churchy?"

Mary ignores her husband and follows her son's finger to the top of the red pine.

"Gotta watch the ground."

"Yeah. We are. Dad said."

As if to illustrate, a wide semicircle of snow across the west southwest of the tree separates and rises. Everything looks vulnerable to big forces now.

"Mary, how tall is that tree?"

"Oh, hard to say."

A series of subterranean cracks pop in the floorboards.

"Gonna be as tall as it wants to be, I guess." Awe in Bill Junior's voice.

The tree free falls. Black dirt flies from the ground, like a gush of blood, out over the snow. All three lean in to see where the tip will reach. Eyes measure fractions in the second and a half

it takes for the tree to lie down, with its top bent upward, like a desperate arm reaching out. The tip holds the edge of the neighbour's shed softly. Mary is the first to react.

"Well, that's it. Call him."

Mary whips the tea towel up her wrist and walks out. The Cooksey men don't move. A whale has come up from the depths and breached. It has ended its long life suddenly and now it lies on dry land.

Froot Loops owns four large properties at the far side of town, on a line whose name his family has lobbied the town for decades to change. The Couttses are not the Cookseys, however. The Couttses have lived in the Fourth Line since 1866. The patriarchs have reigned with a decline resembling that of emperors. From Augustus who broke ground for the Station Park gazebo, to Froot Loops, a whitewashed lawn jockey Nero, enabled by his retired schoolteacher, Agrippa. There is something wrong with Froot Loops, and his wife is too busy to fix it.

Two houses sit on two of the four properties. A post-war bungalow with no eavestrough, and a weathered white cottage that wore out its cute decades ago. On the third property, a steel Quonset with wide ruined doors pushes heavy machines out onto the mud and ice of the fourth property, like a massive ugly horn of neglect. Froot Loops's wife, Ronnie, has taken the flatbed to church. Froot Loops is pulling himself up and over the rust-rashed chassis of a vintage Hart-Parr Rumley Eagle. In decent shape, it could fetch twenty thousand. Froot Loops's boot knocks off a salt-eaten pin as he stands to full height over where the seat of the vehicle had once been. He is looking for a group of six weed whackers sat out last fall for storage. Wind has carved snow into fine drapery that folds neatly around complicated, disused machines. The cold sears into the left side of his face, where a thick fold runs from his cheek around to his missing ear. Despite what kids in town have said for generations, a disfigurement is not a sign of bad character. Adults say, "Nor does it prevent it."

Froot Loops spots Cooksey's yellow Civic bouncing in the rutted drive between buildings. It stops at a row of tarped machines by the side of the Quonset.

"Hey, Frank."

"Bill, Bill. Any offers on the Flemish place?"

Froot Loops always asks this question. Several times a day. Everyone knows the property he means but not the reference. The reference is to tulips that grew in the ditch, now filled, some thirty years a go.

Bill taps Cooksey pre-emptively with a mitt.

"You guys find religion or something? You look for a Sunday clear? I ain't even blown out St. Patrick's yet this morning. No point. Just blows back in the wind."

Froot Loops walks abruptly away from Cooksey, toward the white cottage. He yells back.

"Too cold for me, Frank."

Cooksey has never stood inside any of Froot Loops's buildings. He stands in the boot tray, by the door.

"Something smells good, Frank."

"Gravy."

Frank spots a large pot on the stove. Beef fog rises in the cold air.

"That's a lot of gravy for one meal. That for the church?"

"Ronnie freezes it."

There are six large sponges floating just under the surface. Froot Loops tosses them into the yards of dogs that have chased Ronnie on the mower this past summer. The sponge creates a fatal blockage inside the dog, and it dies after many days of agony. It works without fail.

"That big pine in my front yard came down."

Froot Loops turns down the heat under the gravy and fingers the memory of his missing ear. He is calculating.

SIX THOUSAND WITCHES VERSUS MARY TYLER MOORE

The Mandela Effect, where you remember it wrong?
Like your personal version to the lyrics of a song
It didn't happen that way, it's not true, you're incorrect
But that there's the rub with the Mandela Effect
Truth's a nice idea but it misses the point
One wrong little truth can empty the joint
A tawdry urban legend you heard somewhere before:
Six thousand witches versus Mary Tyler Moore

A tasty bit of gossip from a nameless magazine
A funny little item, if you know what I mean
A careless word that caused offence, the terrible result
A profane ultimatum from the sinister occult
Emblazoned on the cover in a scandalous font
Sex, Death, and Intrigue—what more could you want?
Bold as brass, big as *Life,* in every grocery store
Six thousand witches versus Mary Tyler Moore

The interview, notorious, where she said what she said
And her words got twisted and her message misread
The backlash, outrage, a scandal at first
That metamorphosed into rumours of a curse
Virally exploding into spiritual war
Six thousand witches versus Mary Tyler Moore

And I burned shoe leather, running down every lead
I haunted all the archives, I made my fingers bleed
How often did I get shown the door? Me and my
Six thousand witches versus Mary Tyler Moore

Lots of "No comments," "Let me check with my boss"
Lots of evasion and sudden memory loss
That old stone wall, speckled with moss
The eyes were all dotted, they just never came across
It went from an obsession to a thankless chore
Six thousand witches versus Mary Tyler Moore

Once Upon A Time, It Was Front Page News
But absent any evidence, there's nothing you can do
A candle always flickers, just before it fades
And never believe what you read in the trades
The Me Decade was a strange arcade
Better not to know how the magic gets made
And never you mind how the bills got paid
Focus on the sunshine and not on the shade
It's all best forgotten, kid, and that's the final score
Six thousand witches versus Mary Tyler Moore

—Patrick Rawley

Cooksey knows this exactly. Froot Loops stays in business by charging slightly below rate for sub-standard work. His is a widely popular service.

"You know the one."

An open toilet door leading off the kitchen. The yellow bird and bluebell linoleum is continuous.

"O.K., Bill. Getcha a price. I dunno."

Froot Loops habitually casts doubt on his jobs. Cooksey spots the empty toilet paper dispenser. A roll shape on the tank wears a thick pink cozy. Last June, Cooksey came upon Ronnie bagging her own feces under his apple tree. It was not as awkward as maybe it should have been. Ronnie works outside for ten or twelve hours a day in the summer.

"O.K., Frank. Thanks. Can I get that today? Really don't wanna live with it sitting there."

Froot Loops's other tactic is to let unfinished work sit until client despair sets in. He grunts. Cooksey sighs.

On the way home, Cooksey notes damage to other trees in town. Nothing as bad as his. *It's that damn crazy wind off the escarpment.* He decides to drop by St. Patrick's to see if he can't light a fire under Ronnie. Soonest window Froot Loops will even do a preliminary assessment is next January or February's warm up.

Darla Wheaton comes out the fire exit at the church, followed by others holding the door then making room for something. Cooksey brakes in the lot and watches. Folks hold the doors open and a few exit. They immediately sense the cold and slip back inside. Darla Wheaton spots Cooksey watching from his car. She hops slightly, then makes long strides to the Civic.

Cooksey draws down the window.

"It's Ronnie, Bill. She had a fit."

"You mean a seizure. She has them."

"We open the doors to get some air in."

Inside the church, the congregants are still in their pews. Father Keene is washing his hands at the front. The altar boy, Connor Garland, wide-eyed, holds a pewter decanter. He wants to go home and clear the walk so his dad's heart disease don't finish him. Ronnie Coutts has been dragged to the outside aisle. Darla Wheaton is wedging bibles under her head. Concern for her comfort is perfunctory.

Eucharist. I know that much. Cooksey eases the door closed behind him. Ronnie won't be much use now, and he's not certain whether his next step should be forward or backward. The only people looking at him are children. Cooksey waits to see what happens next. Keene leads a prayer mumble then crosses himself. The congregants quietly move to their knees and voice a strange song. Keene delivers another prayer to bowed heads, then crosses himself as the congregants rise. Ronnie is now sitting up on the floor. Darla Wheaton steps back from her. Cooksey notices that Ronnie's eyes are locked on him. She does not blink. Her mouth is dramatically downturned. Cooksey thinks, "What a weirdo." Ronnie's face looks volcanic.

"*Hozd el Pétert otthonodból! Gyilkosok vannak ott ! Menj most! Menj! Menj!*"

Darla throws her hands up.

"Well, folks, that cinches it for me. Ronnie Coutts has had a stroke."

Some congregants care. Most do not. Keene is dabbing spilt wine on the Corporal.

"Did she say 'Peter'? Ronnie, what about Peter? What?!"

Darla steps between them, a hand on Cooksey's arm.

"Anybody feel like calling 911? I don't bring my phone to church."

Mumbles. Laps patted. Jacket pockets fished.

"Ronnie! Ronnie! What about Peter? Please!"

"Nobody? Everybody left 'em home?"

The word "sheeple" is distinguishable in the broken telephone moving through the church. Darla Wheaton shifts her weight to one leg as she

watches Cooksey, on one knee with his hands on Ronnie.

"Why did you say my son's name. What language was that? What the fuck, Ronnie?"

Darla sweeping her arms over the congregation. The swear has upset her.

"She's a schoolteacher, Bill. You never take Latin?"

Cooksey stammers: "Nobody takes Latin in elementary school, Darla."

Darla smiles at a child sitting closest.

"Besides, it's a Catholic church, isn't it, sweetie? More Latin than you can shake a stick at!"

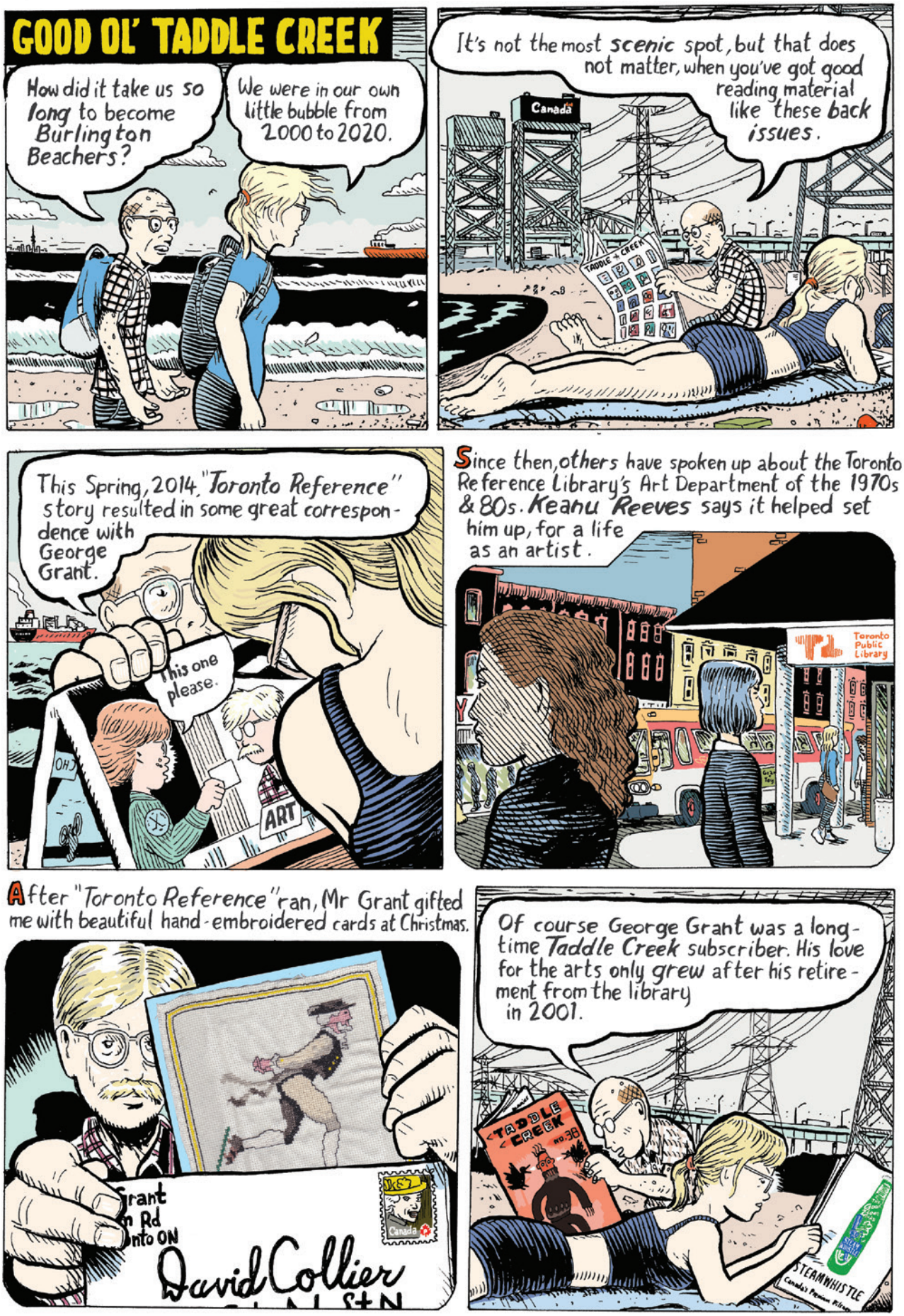
A wide fan of vomit sprays from Ronnie's face. The congregation gasps in a collective catch of breath. Darla half screams and places a hand on the child sitting closest. Cooksey looks down at the contents of Ronnie's guts, now stinking on his pantlegs. Ronnie looks up. Fear focuses her.

"I'm sorry, Bill! Go home! Please! I am sorry! Go home!"

Five wind hooves kick off from the escarpment's brow. Instead of heading to the far horizon, the goat tumbles in the fields below. It is seen from above as exactly this by the coven aloft, but it registers with them as a nothing. When we are running in wet mud there is no account of the pattern of displacement left by our boot falling for a third time. There are no theories to heed. Improvised acts of local laws are parsed only in the heaven of a distracted god. The hooves leave the animal and bang at short trees. One tree is chalk dust dropped from slates onto dime-sized laps. From the same tree Ronnie's own tap root snap flips from the earth and drives up into the goat's closing eye. All the trees are doing this, like a stand of chameleons firing their tongues. They could be mindless or raging, but the coven has already moved on to ignore similar events over the Atlantic, then, without a single word, over the west coast of Scotland. Bill Cooksey is here too, moving through a straw on the ground, pinched in the middle by a giant, to make a venturi, so that the poor father goes blind with acceleration. He would see this if he could: the wet back of a dead field mouse is thawing on a black stone. It would have taken Cooksey at least a minute to interpret this but he is only granted fractions of a second. The wicks of fur arrange to resemble Peter, his forehead split by Frank Coutts with a slicing blow not meant to kill him. The wind is on Frank Coutts, and he has a tree tongue attached to his eye as he forces more gravity into the poor child's lungs. One hoof has no memory and so was never part of the goat. Another halves itself then reunites for no better reason than to add the moment to its own nano-history. Where's Mary? Why isn't she in millions of pieces like the rest of us? Mary is not here because she went to the Circle K to fetch milk after greeting Froot Loop in the driveway. It's hard to even imagine how many years it took for her arm to drop to her side, in the lineup where she led a team of horses along a precipice in sub-Carpathian Ruthenia. The wind on the road lasts long enough to finally be Bill Cooksey, and has a chance to see Ronnie make a cave painting in the sex, sexy ice. It is impossible to know when all this starts.

Cooksey turns onto his driveway with Mary slowing to follow. Froot Loops's truck has been here long enough to have snow moulding in its lines. Mary exits the pickup and sidles past Bill sitting in the Civic. Bill watches her swing the bag of milk from the Circle K as she reaches the side door. Bill has decided that this is the last moment he will live without knowing what's inside his house and he wants to keep from losing this. Mary turns on the porch and gives Bill a look. She shrugs, making another face. The door opens and Froot Loops steps out smiling.

The air inside the Civic meets up with the coven now carried by vents over Finland. It feels good to Cooksey, feels right. This day-to-day life is just exposure to latching creatures in the deep, dark sea. "It will not be for me anymore," thinks Cooksey as he tightens the window's seal. "I am crystallizing now."


GOOD OL' TADDLE CREEK
How did it take us so long to become Burlington Beachers?
We were in our own little bubble from 2000 to 2020.
It's not the most scenic spot, but that does not matter, when you've got good reading material like these back issues.
Canada
TADDLE CREEK
This Spring, 2014, "Toronto Reference" story resulted in some great correspondence with George Grant.
This one please.
ART
Since then, others have spoken up about the Toronto Reference Library's Art Department of the 1970s & 80s. Keanu Reeves says it helped set him up, for a life as an artist.
Toronto Public Library
After "Toronto Reference" ran, Mr Grant gifted me with beautiful hand-embroidered cards at Christmas.
Canada
David Collier
Of course George Grant was a long-time Taddle Creek subscriber. His love for the arts only grew after his retirement from the library in 2001.
TADDLE CREEK
NO.38
STEAMWHISTLE

THE GALLERY

POINT OF PRIDE

Twenty-five years of Taddle Creek portrait photography.

Even the most relaxed, easygoing subject can become on guard or self-conscious when face to face with an inquisitive reporter or a camera lens. Alfred Holden and the photographer Phillip Smith both knew this in 2004, when they arrived at the Annex home of Jane Jacobs to interview and photograph the urban thinker for this magazine.

"Phillip knows to make small talk before you get to work," Holden recalled recently. "He had this fantastic-looking camera"—a Calumet four by five, for the record—"and Jacobs asked about it. He was delighted and told her a friend found it in the trash somewhere in New York City. It was a great ice breaker, and it helped me—I didn't have to do the ice breaking."

Taddle Creek's budget in 1997 didn't allow for original cover art or even, as the overall greyness of its first issue shows, so much as a single illustration (that began to change, slowly, with issue No. 2). The one thing the magazine insisted on from Day 1, however, was shooting its own portraits of profile subjects—no provided headshots or promotional photos—and that has remained the case for twenty-five years. The result is a quarter-century document of an eclectic group of noted and lesser-known writers, musicians, and artists. (A selection of these photos was displayed from June 1 to 30 at the Jet Fuel Coffee Shop, in Toronto.)

When Smith joined the magazine as its in-house photographer, in 1999, following the departure of the founding photo editor Aaron Hawco, he had recently given up his Toronto-based photography studio to move into the then young field of designing and building Web sites. This allowed him to pull double duty and also create the first version of *Taddle Creek's* Web site and its e-newsletter. (If you've ever attended one of the magazine's backyard-barbecue-and-free-beer summer launches, that was his idea too.) Today, Smith is the director of the Google News Initiative Startups Boot Camp, providing coaching to early stage news and information startups. "I always had an appreciation of portrait photography," he said recently. "I tried to find a unique way of putting people at ease, to find the rawest version of that person and try to capture it on film."

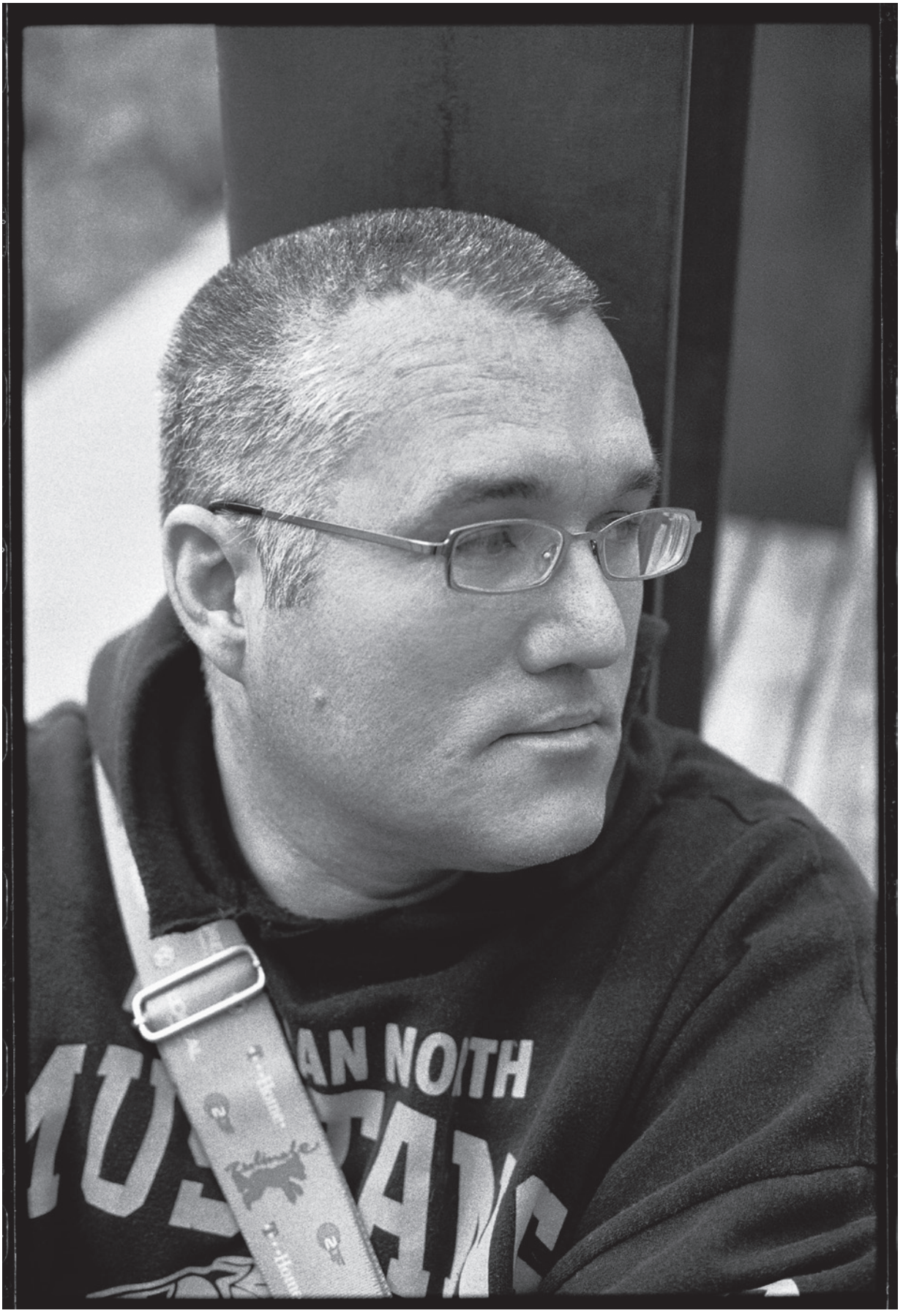
Smith was succeeded, in 2005, by Mark Lyall a graphic designer who continues to enjoy his life-long love of photography. (Two other photographers, Dina Goldstein and Richmond Lam, have stepped in over the years to shoot subjects in Vancouver and Montreal, respectively.)

Since 2008, *Taddle Creek's* in-house photos have been taken by Thomas Blanchard, a freelance photographer, a sessional instructor at the School of Image Arts, at Ryerson University, and an installation-based artist. Under his direction, the magazine's profile photography has transformed from its early straight portrait style to more staged productions. (Two of Blanchard's shoots for *Taddle Creek* were nominated for National Magazine Awards.) Like his predecessors, Blanchard knows the key to a successful shoot is making your subject comfortable. "I like to have a little background on people ahead of time, then I like to create a rapport and talk to them for a bit," he said. "I have to know something about them. I try and keep it in the creative zone of what they do. I definitely don't like to just show up and shoot."

Twenty-five years in, what started as a small point of pride is now a collection to be proud of.

—Conan Tobias

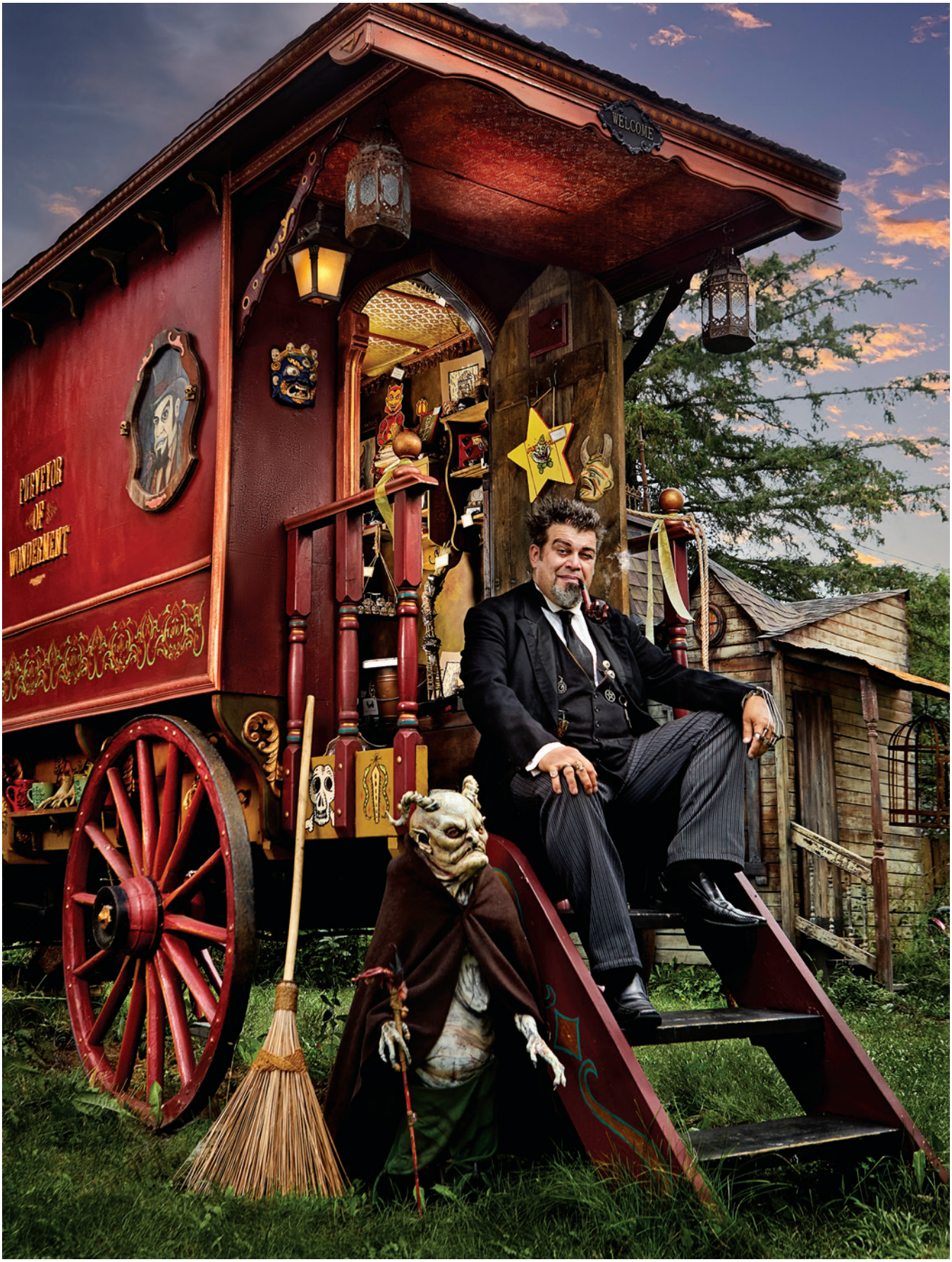
The author Emily Schultz, 2003. Photograph by Phillip Smith.



The writer and artist R. M. Vaughan, 2008. Photograph by Mark Lyall.

The author, theorist, and activist Jane Jacobs, 2004. Photograph by Phillip Smith.

Opposite page, top: the author and artist Sonja Ahlers, 2006. Photograph by Dina Goldstein; the author Alexandra Leggat, 2016. Photograph by Thomas Blanchard. This page: the author Tamara Faith Berger, 2001. Photograph by Phillip Smith.



The performer Scott McClelland, 2021. Photograph by Thomas Blanchard.

The author Saleema Nawaz, 2013. Photograph by Thomas Blanchard.

THE YEAR OF CHLOE AND HER BEAUTIFUL HORSES

BY CEDAR BOWERS

My mom didn't have money or land for horses. Chloe's family did though; she owned six. I know what you're picturing: a fussed-over spoiled girl with a stable full of the handsome animals, their glistening chestnut coats, their combed manes, their oiled saddles, because that's what I imagined before going over to her house, too. But it wasn't like that at Chloe's. Turns out her horses were skinny, grimy things. They were caked with mud, sway-backed, so starved their ribs and shoulder blades jutted out from under their dull fur at odd angles. When you tried to catch them, they nipped and kicked and pinned their ears back. But none of this mattered to me. I loved them simply for being horses.

Nobody in our Grade 7/8 class liked Chloe much. At thirteen, she had the snobby habit of tossing her fine blond ponytail over her shoulder so regularly it may have been a tic. Her mother wasn't much better either. She never got out of her minivan or talked to the other parents at pickup. She parked on the road, as far as possible from the school, hiding behind her tinted windows, a pinched expression frozen on her face.

No one ever went over to Chloe's, not even for a birthday party, so initially I couldn't understand why I'd been asked. I was a full year younger than her, and we definitely weren't friends. The invite came during our first week back at school after summer holidays, when she caught me flipping through a book on horses in the library, and out of the blue she asked if I wanted to go riding with her one day.

Obviously, I said yes.

Our island was small, only a thousand or so people living on it, and we all thought we knew everything about Chloe's family. They owned hundreds of acres, and this land had been in their hands for generations. Chloe's paternal great-great-grandparents had been some of the first whites to settle on and then log the green, lumber-rich island. My mom, who worked at the gas station and lived in a small rented trailer, gave me pointers on our way over.

"Chloe is different than us. Her family has *money* money. So say please and thank you and remember to be helpful," she said, before letting me out at the end of Chloe's driveway where the girl was waiting for me, sitting on a log, her hair tied back with a fuzzy pink scrunchy.

That first day, walking down the long cool driveway that was shaded by towering fir and smelled like end-of-summer dust, I was preoccupied with how I should behave. I worried that if I got it wrong, she'd regret the invitation and never have me back. I was overcome with the intense desire to impress the older girl, even though she was mean and intimidating and I didn't like her at all.

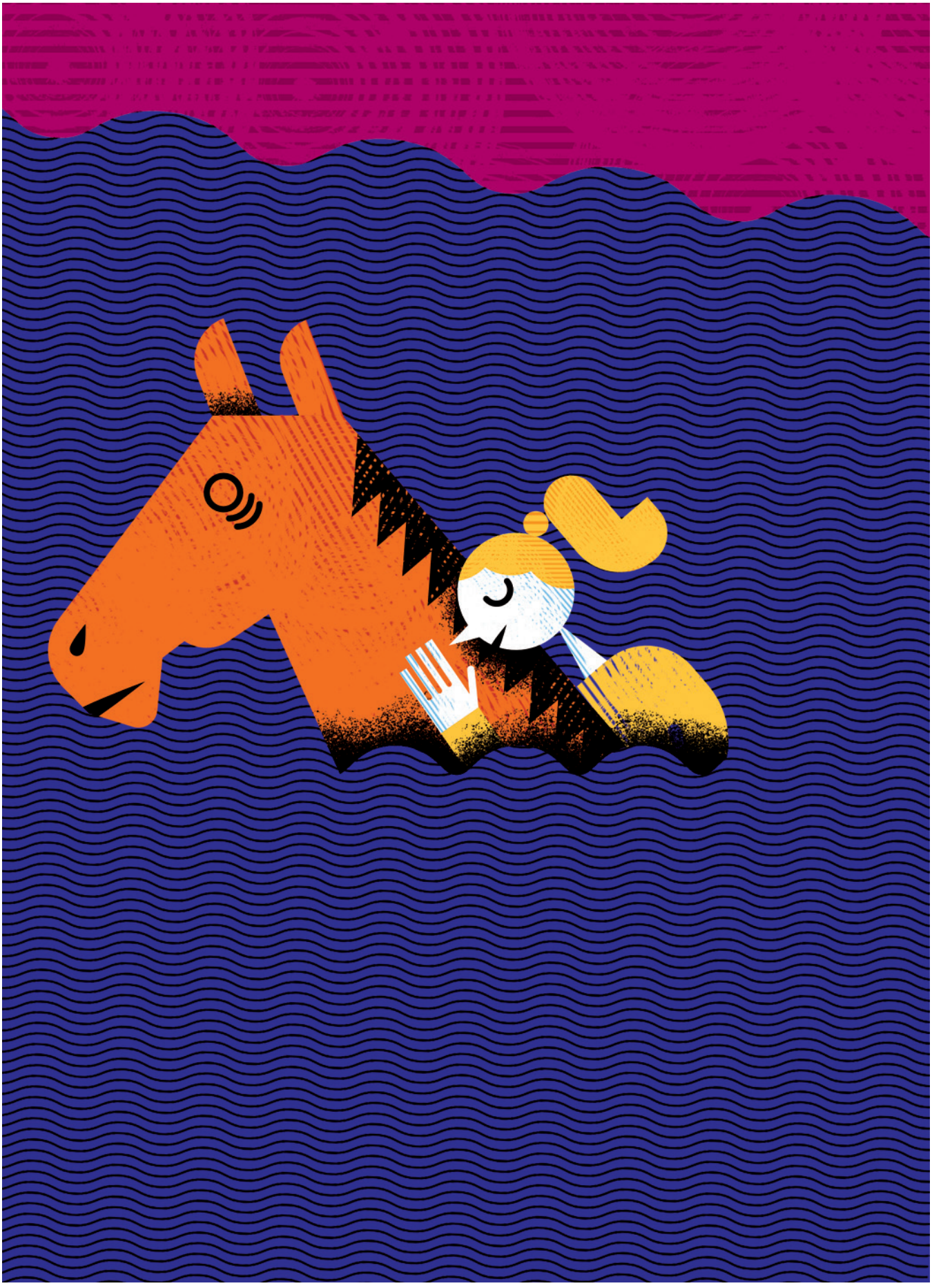
We had it right that Chloe's property was huge. It encompassed fields, forests, a scrapyard of broken-down vehicles from decades past, boarded-up cabins, and a whole south-facing bay of grey pebbles that, at low tide, exposed a rippling sandy bottom pocked with spitting clams. The only thing mildly civilized about the place was Chloe's mother's impeccably kept navy-blue minivan parked outside the house.

I realize now that the vehicle was the family's face. Their armour. Their honour. Driving such a car around the island made the right impression, the rich impression, fitting the story they so desperately wanted to perpetuate. As soon as I took in the landscape, I understood why I'd been invited. I was here because I was safe. Because I was young. Because I was poorer than they were. They knew I wouldn't tattle or gossip about what I saw. And they were right. I didn't. I never even told my mom how dirty or strange it was at Chloe's. I never told her about the rusting trucks, the starving vicious dogs, or how the house was in near ruins, the roof thatched over with layers of wind-shredded tarp. I kept everything about Chloe's family to myself. But I didn't do this to save face for them. I kept quiet for me. I kept quiet for the horses.

I started going over after school most days, weekends too. I grew accustomed to the shock of it. How outside, by the front door, and tumbling down the steps, there were heaps of garbage bags, always with a raven or two perched on top, working an apple core, a hunk of bloody Styrofoam, or a twist of meat-juice-soaked Saran wrap free from the sack—any treasure that glittered and stunk. Inside the house, the curtains were permanently drawn. There were holes in the hallway where the floorboards had rotted through to the joists, and the air hung with the smell of hard-boiled eggs, wet dog, and bone broth. The toilet only trickled with water when you flushed, the piss-smelling bowl coated in a thick, hard mineral-like substance the colour of gold. "Urine into gold," I thought each time I sat on the throne and added my micronutrients to the mix.

Chloe claimed they had a "fend for yourself kitchen," even though the cupboards were pretty much bare. When parched, we selected glasses from the filthy dish-covered counter, scrubbed out as much mossy black mould from

ILLUSTRATION BY MATTHEW DALEY



the bottoms as we could manage, and then squeezed our eyes closed against the taste of the foul well water. I never found out what dinner was like there—Chloe's family was always careful to send me away by five. Back at home with my mom, I pictured the three of them sitting around their sticky table as they munched down bulk saltines and canned sardines.

The horses weren't fed much besides the heap of decaying hay behind the tack shed that they nosed through, snorting and sneezing. But this was the way it was. All the animals scrounged. The six horses, the five dogs, the twenty-some-odd cats, and the ever-fluctuating number of chickens all had to fight for the scraps. Seagrass, thistle, lichen, mice, bugs, stunted vegetation, and garbage. Being flightless birds, the chickens felt the brunt of the neglect. They had bare patches where their feathers had been yanked, and because they didn't have a proper coop, they roosted quivering high in the tool shed, shitting all over the rusted wheelbarrows and chainsaws and plows, their eggs smashing to the cement floor to be scarfed by the barn cats. During daylight hours they were plucked from the ground by eagles, and at night they were stolen by raccoons, but this didn't seem to bother anyone. When their numbers dipped too low, Chloe's mother took the ferry to the mainland, bought a cardboard box of fertilized eggs, and set them on the kitchen table under a lamp. That was the only time I ever saw her smile, when those chicks emerged from their shells and she saw their soft sunshine-yellow puffs of life.

Chloe's father was a terrifying specimen. Always in his housecoat on the brown recliner, with his shiny bald head, a glass of Coke fizzing and falling flat in his hand as he stared at the wall. I never heard his voice once that year, not even the day he got out of the minivan with the gun. But as my mom always said, some men could throw a lot of power with their silence. All Chloe told me about him was that he named the horses himself. Leopold, Pizarro, Cortés, Robinson, Columbus, and Napoleon. I didn't understand the impact of those names back then. But please forgive me for everything I was taught at home and at school. Please forgive me for not knowing anything yet. And if you can't do that, that's O.K., but maybe forgive them if you can. It wasn't their fault they were given those horrid names. They were only horses.

There were no fences around their land, and the only reason the herd didn't stray too far was that Pizarro, the stud, was kept hobbled at his fetlocks. Cruel. Still, catching Columbus and Napoleon, the two tame-ish enough to ride, proved difficult. They hid from us in the underbrush, or in the thick woods, or down by the beach, and the hunt could take hours. The horses didn't wear halters, and when we finally managed to sneak close enough to throw a rope over their withers they'd snort, flick their hooves at us, and prance off.

"It's a game," Chloe explained the first time. "My dad says they're as vain as girls. You've got to trick 'em and grab 'em and get 'em good."

During September our outings on horseback were mostly innocuous. On our first, we rode to where the retired teacher lived, got out of our saddles, peered in his windows, snickered at the socks he'd left strewn on the floor. The next time we rode to the R.C.M.P. officer's house. Stampeded our horses across his lawn, back and forth, back and forth, hooves flinging clumps of moss into the sky like barn swallows, until Chloe felt we'd done enough damage and we jumped the overgrown flowerbed back to the main road. On our third outing, I held the horses' leads outside the store while Chloe stole Mars bars and cigarettes. I watched through the window as she deceitfully chatted with the grocer while sneaking the loot into the waistband of her pants.

AFTER "LIFE"

I read a poem by A.C.
in *The New Yorker.*
It has to be good, it's published
in *The New Yorker,* I love *The New Yorker.*
—What's more
emblematic of having arrived?

I'll read anything
penned by the great A.C.
Her quirk,
her style—the way she pulls off beige
on beige, red
shoes to boot.

Once at a reading, I spoke up and told her
her lines remind me of Iceland's
Halldór Laxness.
"His work is sad,
so sad," she said, by way of oblique reply. Like

putting an ice cube in my wine,
under a henna
party tent. With humidex, the temperature
was over 40 C.

Father of the groom, nice man,
was sweating like a fish. "At least it didn't
rain today," I bantered. "Best henna
since my son married
the sister of the bride-to-be."
He smiled and what came next: the great procession,
ululation.
Bride-to-be borne forth in crown and caftan in a palanquin—
splashy as a bath bomb.

How *not*
to want to be seen
as someone or something we're not.
Why not simply admit.

I love the word "Calvados,"
have loved it since I read it
in *Arch of Triumph* by Erich Remarque—repeated
like a mantra throughout the book.
Calvados. Brandy
from apples: as typical as any fruit,
but what a plum
as emblem
of having arrived—

—Elana Wolff

Then she sauntered out, took Columbus' reins from my sweating hands, and off we cantered up the road.

Though we weren't allowed to swim in the frigid waters and fast currents, a few weeks after we started hanging out, we took the horses into Chloe's bay. Napoleon, the horse I always rode, nimbly approached the waves, snorting at the skuzzy foam and dead kelp at the shore, but he picked through it. After our few rides, he'd started to trust me. His ears flicked back, straining to hear my voice over Chloe's. She was beside us, shouting, beating a terrified Columbus into the waves.

As Napoleon waded in, my boots filled with the salty ocean and became two suicide stones pulling at my feet. When the water crested his withers and he took his first strokes, I understood that a swimming horse is even less graceful than a dog-paddling dog. Napoleon's gait was jerky and struggling, his nose barely above water.

About fifty feet from the beach, Napoleon started sinking. I wasn't a strong swimmer either, and I was sure that if I stayed on his back, on this course out toward the pass, we would be swept away. In a panic, I slipped off and made my way up to his head. While his front hooves knocked my shins underwater, I tugged at his bridle and spoke to him as calmly as I could. Once I had him facing his beach again, he relaxed and his strokes grew confident.

"Go on, gorgeous," I said.

As he pulled ahead, I ran my hands down his otter-slick body. When my numb fingers reached his tailbone, I clutched his wiry black tail tight and kicked my heavy boots. We didn't even glance at Chloe, who we could hear screaming at us over the surf, calling us a bunch of scaredy-bitches. Our eyes were held firm on the shore.

It's Napoleon that I miss most from this time. The realness of his hate, the softness of his forgiveness, the bright pink flash of his tongue. He had a coal-coloured coat and his life, though mildly better, wasn't too distant from Black Beauty's, that over-read book on my nightstand. He was frail, his muzzle greying, and he heaved laboriously when our rides took him too far. When I removed his saddle back at Chloe's, his fur underneath would be white with sweat. I stroked the star on his forehead, scratched behind his ears, kissed his velvet lips, and whispered, "I'm so sorry."

To this day, I'm convinced that, even though I was part of the problem, he loved me too.

The shoulder on the island's main road was just a skinny strip between the passing cars and forest, so most of the time we rode single file, Columbus in front, Napoleon tagging along behind. Over those months I got to know Chloe's back quite well. How her hips stuck to the Western saddle like they were glued there with rubber cement, how her freckled arms got sunburnt even when it was overcast, how she always wore her blond hair up in that scrunchy. I can still hear the punch of her heels on Columbus' barrel-shaped belly, recall how she pulled her feet back before she kicked, aiming at the most sensitive part of his flank. It was clear Chloe had a lot of rage inside and that this is how she let it out. She didn't care about the horses. To her they were just a mode of transport and something to beat. The hollow sound of those kicks on empty belly made me want to vomit.

It was only when Chloe veered us onto the quiet gravel roads that we trotted side by side. There, we'd find a shady alcove, halt the horses, and light our smokes with the matches she kept in her dandruff-flecked bra. We let the hungry animals rip the lush grass from the ditch with their yellowed incisors, sea-green foam flinging from their jaws as they chewed around their bits, tails whipping at flies. Once our smokes burned down to the filter, Chloe said it was time and we tugged the horses up from their grazing and started crunching along in the gravel again. We were

like cowboys in a movie, but female and with no real purpose. God, I loved that smell: fur, dust, mucky ditch, and smoke. And the rhythm: *Clip-clip. Clip-clip.* Hoofbeats.

On those side roads Chloe would talk incessantly. She asked about my mom, about our trailer, about my mom's boyfriend, Bob, and then she asked what had happened to Frank—he was the guy before. When Chloe interrogated me like this, she wore a little sneer that made her look like her mother. While answering her questions with the sun baking my hair, or the rain soaking through my thin windbreaker, I understood that this was why my mom made me promise never to gossip. Because it felt horrible to be mined for information, and even worse to know that eventually everything you said would be used against you.

Once Chloe grew bored of my guarded answers, she talked about her family instead. She talked about money and travel and buying stuff. She talked about Mexico and Paris and Spain—even though I knew for a fact she'd never been on a plane. She described what her relatives wore to what fancy restaurants in what specific cities, going into detail about her mother and aunts' lace-fringed dresses and sparkling jewels, as if I hadn't been in her house a hundred times. That we hadn't once snuck into her mother's closet and sat on the pile of dirty, dog-shit-smelling pumps, looking up at the few drab items hanging above us on mismatched hangers. There was plastic duct-taped over the windows in that bedroom too, but I didn't judge them for that. I only wondered why they were so committed to lying. Why this desperate story of wealth and fame? Why was her family holding firm to this idea that they were different from everyone else? Why did they insist on reminding everyone on this island that they were better? My mom didn't do this. She'd taught me that us humans were more or less the same; that there was both something to despise and something to admire in everyone. *Tick-tick-tick-tick.* That was my mom's heartbeat.

FLOODED BASEMENT

The beige carpet in the hallway
is dark with spreading wet
feet fetid socks soaked
my sister and I hide
outside when the bunk beds
earthquake on their own again
those pairs of hands silent
on the stairs staring
unrelenting as mint as
the rotten pears that pool and picket
the fence everyone else
sitting in a circle in the basement
arms linked heads swivel
to me doorway a-clutch
(No, there is nothing
wrong with the floor)
they said they're saying

—Jennifer LoveGrove

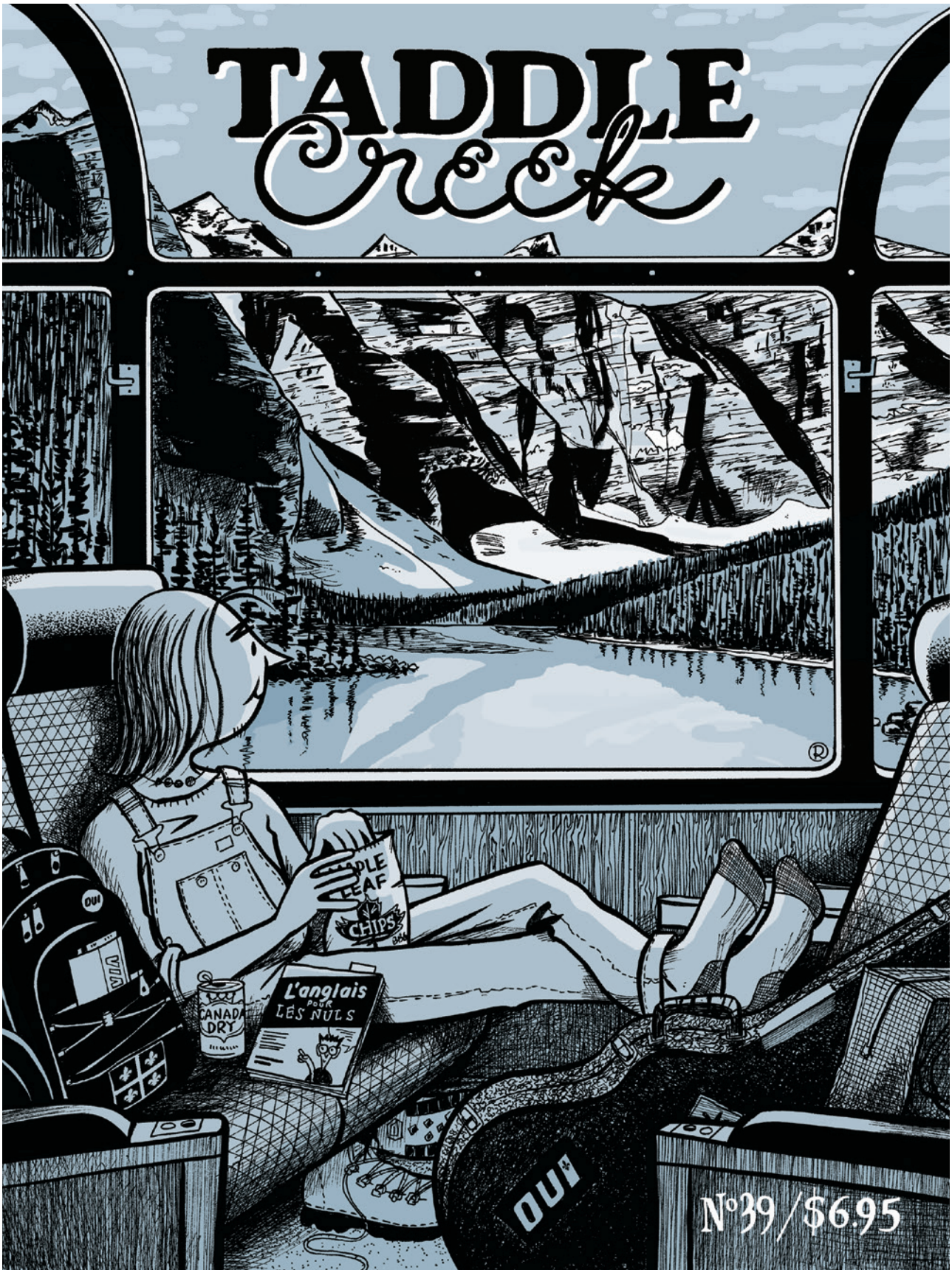
Chloe changed a lot during our year as friends. She grew bigger breasts, sprouts of orange hair under her arms, and she started talking more and more about boys: which ones smelled bad and which were worthy of her time. She would be starting high school next year, and she reminded me that once September came around there was no way our friendship could continue. I didn't care about that. I wasn't going to miss her. My grief was only over losing Napoleon. I vowed to sneak onto Chloe's land to ride him in the dark. I vowed to smuggle him food. I vowed to steal him if I had to.

Chloe was actually very bright. One of those intelligent, cruel girls apt at utilizing a friend's vulnerability to get what she wanted. Though I cringe saying this now, because isn't this what I'm confessing here? That I did the same? I let Chloe believe I liked her just so I could ride her horses when she probably wanted so badly to be liked. I suppose I was horrible too. Anyway, it didn't take long for Chloe to pinpoint my weakness. And that year, as things got more complicated, when, say, I shyly suggested we didn't steal the cash, or siphon the gas, or break the windows, she'd casually reply, "Sure, don't come. I don't give a fuck. But I'll never let you see Napoleon again."

She used to tease me when he peed too, telling me to look at his dick. And it's true, I blushed when, after a month or two, Napoleon stopped running from me. He started trotting right up whenever he spotted me crossing the fields. He'd blow his whiskers in my face and I'd tell him about my day at school, while Chloe chased Columbus around the thickets of Scotch broom, lassoing her rope and yelling her head off.

I wasn't in love with Napoleon—I hate when people say this about girls and horses. My relationship with him only proved something: that even in hard times, even starving or mistreated, kindness can open doors into hearts that have been locked for years. That it's always possible to soften again. That's why I blushed, because what Napoleon and I had was real.

At first everyone thought the boys in our class were the ones stealing, but really it was Chloe and me. It was an island: nobody locked doors.



"Paul Goes West," by Michel Rabagliati (2017).

We knew who worked where. What time they got home. If they had a dog or a gun. It wasn't hard. At first, in the fall, it was harmless stuff. Chloe slipped in and took the coins she found in the key bowl by the front door, or what was dumped on peoples' kitchen counters. This was before debit cards were a thing, when folks mostly used cash, and change was left all over. But by early spring, Chloe grew bolder. She wanted to up our game and start carrying backpacks along to lug all our bounty home. She still stole quarters if she found them, but took to searching for hidden stashes of cash as well: wads kept in an envelope, or in a junk drawer, or behind a picture frame. She took jewelry too. Watches, small electronics, sealed bottles of booze. All pawnable stuff or stuff her family wanted/needed. I don't know if Chloe was given a list, if she planned these robberies ahead of time, or how explicitly she and her parents discussed the stealing, but Chloe's mother started watching for our return from the seized porch swing that sat on the porch and didn't swing. While we unsaddled the horses she marched down the front stairs, past the garbage bags and their raven royalty, and, without acknowledging us, she'd lug our backpacks of stolen loot into the house.

Rides on Wednesdays were the worst, because that was when the mechanic was off-island getting parts. On those days, Chloe ordered me to put the jerry can and hoses into my pack. Then we'd ride over, sneak through his screeching metal gate, and siphon gas from the vehicles on his lot. Because of those Wednesdays, I'm still terrified of fuels. I remember gas on our hands, on our jeans, in our mouths, up our noses. Dogs barking from their straining chains. Every car that passed us creating a spark of fear in my chest so hot I was sure it would ignite the gas strapped to my back and blow us to smithereens.

I sobbed discreetly behind Chloe and Columbus the whole ride home, gasoline sloshing in my ears with each step. I was going to explode—I deserved to explode. Each time I swore that if I lived, I'd never go riding on a Wednesday again. But of course, once we were safely back on Chloe's property, after we'd dismounted and she was funneling the precious flammable liquid into the minivan's tank, I would stare into Napoleon's chocolate eyes, and know that I'd do it again, and again, and again. I'd do anything for that horse if Chloe asked me to.

I say Chloe was the ringleader because she was. The horses could be caught and could be ridden, but they were not well-trained. Both feared being tethered to anything solid and would rear back in panic if they found their reins around a tree. They were only calm in a human's hand—in my hand. So mainly my crime was holding onto the horses while Chloe worked. She was the brain and the brawn, I handled the getaway vehicles.

The R.C.M.P. officer figured us out eventually. That was the following August, the same day our friendship ended. He claimed he put it all together because of the hoof prints—what a detective! Each place we robbed had a trail leading up to the house and then back down the driveway. Once he clued in, his mind turned to the two girls on horseback riding aimlessly around the island every afternoon. He probably remembered coming home and seeing his own lawn and the holes in the grass. The officer was proud of himself, but

HOW THEY MET THEMSELVES

Your face first seen by me in a photo sent by a friend
with the question: *Is this you?* The other person

beside you and the room, strangers to me. Answer:
No? But the mole, the eyes, the odd fiddlehead

curl of the ear. Think: *Yes?* My ex once ran
after you until he realized: right face, wrong

stare, wrong gait. A loved one snapped
a pic of you in a dollar store as you considered

one empty jar over another. *Even her lean.*
I haven't seen you in years. That one fall

evening we passed on the street. I smiled
at you because you looked familiar. Like morning

in the mirror, half asleep. Is it you or is it me
who is me? Who is us? Is it you or is it me who

has changed enough to be lost to the both of us?
Are we the only ones left of us, if only lost to one

another. Together, we are a doubled fingerprint,
repeated snowflake, idea that promises,

You're the only one. You're the only one who's me.

—Dani Couture

really, it took nearly a year for him to add it up. He wasn't all that clever.

Chloe got off scot-free. Because her family was "wealthy" while mine was not, it was easy to believe her when she said I pressured her into everything. After I was issued my community service, I spent every Saturday for a year walking the same roads where I once rode Napoleon, thinking about him, missing him, bending occasionally to pick up chip packets and beer cans with my bare hands. No one waved as they drove past. Though I'd once been well-liked, the recent gossip was a more powerful substance. Chloe had made me into a girl with a bad reputation.

Chloe and I had already been fighting the afternoon we were discovered. People had been talking, and because of this we'd started to find more and more front doors locked. At first I was relieved our luck was bad. I didn't want to keep stealing, I wanted to stop, but Chloe was pissed. Because this stealing wasn't just stealing for her. It was personal. It was survival even. I never asked why they didn't just sell the minivan if they were so broke. Or sell some land. Or sell a horse—Pizarro was still young and could have brought a few hundred dollars. I didn't ask because there was no way Chloe would have talked about it. That's often the case with friends, with the ones you love and the ones you hate: you take care of them by avoiding subjects they can't handle.

When we set out that last day of our friendship, that last day of our year with her beautiful horses, Chloe informed me that we were hitting up the summer houses this time. The empty ones would be locked, yes, but she brought a rag to protect her fist if she had to punch through a window. This is what started our fighting. I said no, she said yes. Of course she won.

There was a spot on the island with a high bluff and some vacation homes overlooking the water. It wasn't far, just a kilometer or so up a steep, twisting gravel road. On our way up, Napoleon often slowed to catch his breath. When I dismounted to lighten the load, I noticed his knees shaking.

"Don't worry," I told him. "We're almost there. We'll take our time."

The first house had impossible-to-break double-paned windows, along with evidence of recent guests: a bicycle laying on the grass and an empty wine bottle on the porch, but Chloe deemed the second house to be perfect. It was a little older, and the windows were big, so she could get a good look inside. I did my part and held the horses while they grazed on the lawn. I looked at the view off the cliff, saw a ferry passing below, saw an eagle circling overhead, saw the sun shimmer off the rolling waves. The water was like an unrolled spool of aluminum foil. I lay my face against Napoleon's shoulder, closed my eyes, and felt his steady chewing though my cheek.

The alarm shrieked, both horses spooked, and the leather leads slipped through my small hands. The horses skidded to a stop near the drop-off, pivoted on their hindquarters, and shot past me down the road at full gallop, reins dragging along behind them, stirrups loose and kicking their sides.

Half walking, half running, we scrambled down the hill toward Chloe's property. Fighting again, but worse. About whose fault it was. If we were going to get caught. How much she hated me. How much I hated her. Who hated who more. Reaching her property we slowed, then we slowed even further when we noticed the steaming heap of animal ahead of us in the middle of her driveway.

Columbus wasn't anywhere to be found. It was just Napoleon, lying on his side, his left foreleg looped in one of the reins, his cannon bone jutting out of his skin.

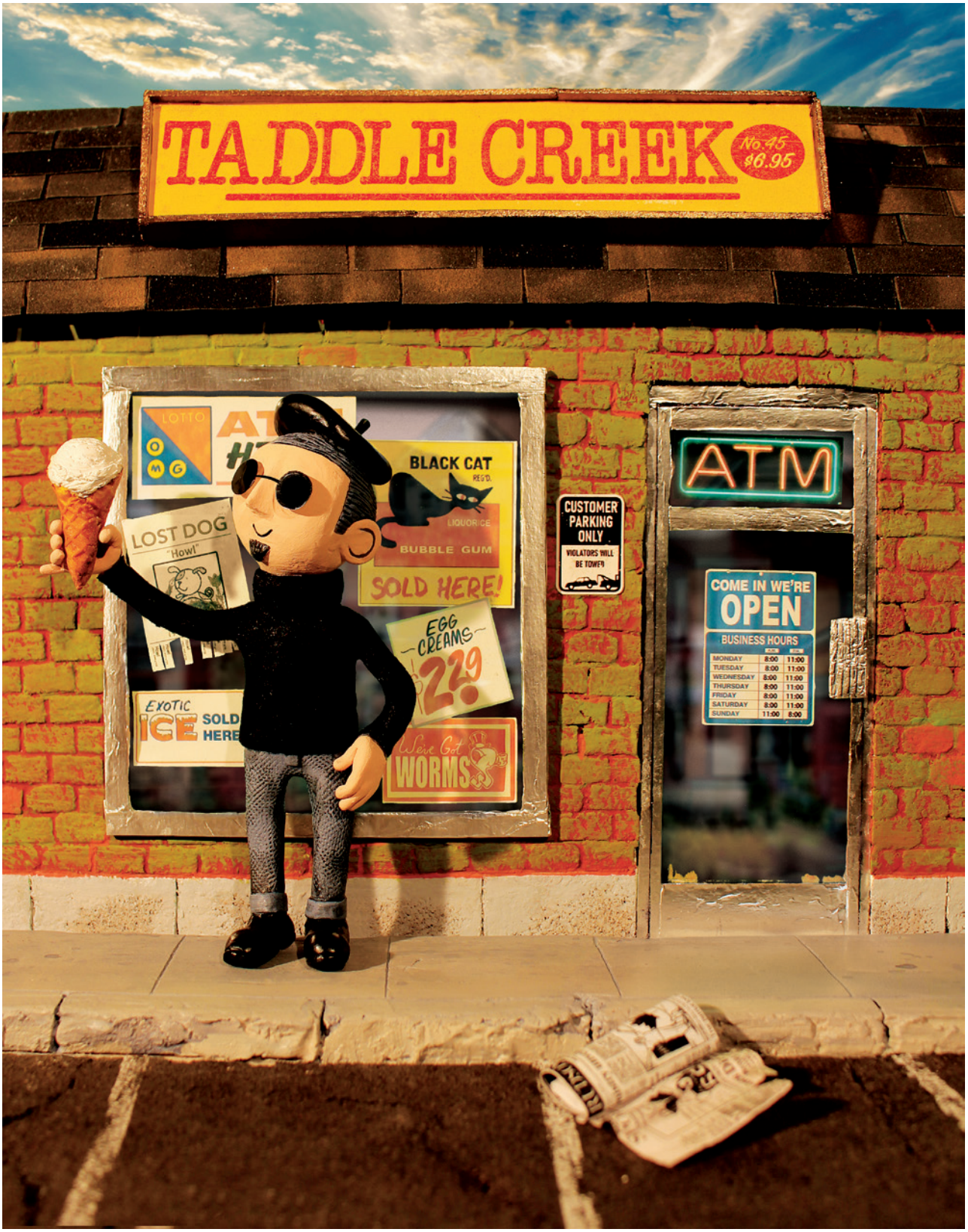
"Well, great. Now we need my dad," Chloe spit, before marching off toward her house.

Napoleon was breathing heavily. His coat creamy and foaming with sweat. He lifted his head, nickered at me, but knew better than to try and stand. I sat cross-legged on the ground and shuffled under him so he could lay his giant face on my lap. I kissed his forehead. His eyes. His soft nose. I told him how if it hadn't been for me, none of this would have happened. How they were going to kill him and it was all my fault. I explained that I hoped I'd shed as much light in his life as he had mine. It seems almost selfish how much I went on and on, but it's not like he could say anything in return, even if he wanted to. He didn't have words. He was a horse. And I saw that my voice calmed him.

I had ten minutes with Napoleon under that canopy of trees, with the smell of his sweat and the fir needles. Ten minutes before Chloe came back in the minivan with her dad. Ten minutes before he climbed from the driver's seat, in his housecoat, shotgun clutched in his weak-looking hands. Ten minutes before the R.C.M.P. car pulled up in the driveway and Chloe pointed at me and said, "It was her." I had ten minutes alone with my best friend.

Now, I should add that there were times when Chloe would smile and show a little humility. Sometimes she would stop lying, or putting me down, or saying she was better than all of us for a minute. There was one particular day out riding bareback, forest thick on either side of the road, dust browning the emerald salal and swaying sword fern, when we sang the 4 Non Blondes song that was huge that year. We knew every word, and together our voices wove in and out perfectly. I swear we sounded as good as the original. Once we hit the last note, we started right up from the beginning again. That was a good day.

I suppose I'm trying to say that Chloe wasn't all bad, and that in some ways we were actually similar. We were both young, and we didn't know much about anything yet. Nothing about why our families worked the way they worked, or why our country was the way it was. We didn't understand money, its power, or how it managed to hurt everyone we cared about. What we knew were those rides around our small nothing island, on innocent animals, named after the worst of all men.



"Summer Treat," by Nathan Campagnaro (2020).

JANE JACOBS VARIETY

Next act: a small convenience store
like Joy Cigar with a big pine magazine rack
and a few smart regulars to live it out with.

Maybe a single barber chair in a small back room
and an old Greek barber who keeps hours
Mondays, Thursdays, and Saturday mornings.

Or some young guy
with a neat-trimmed beard—I wouldn't mind—
after all the old Greek barbers have retired.

I'll keep up relations with my magazine connections—
Leanne, of course, at Disticor,
and Steve, from Metro News, with the wax-tipped moustache

and Yvonne, who might be retired
and long gone, of course.
Things change.

We get older, sure, but people still need
Psychology Today, a pack of white Zig-Zags
and a Lucky 8 Ball scratchy, no?

We'd carry *Vallum* and *Poetry,*
ARC, CV2, and *Poetry is Dead*—
all the greatest journals.

And the local writers would come in to visit,
some blithely followed
by off-leash dogs needing baths.

Every February our bookkeeper would wonder
why we had such a good week
just after the P.L.R. cheques hit the street.

Our flash sign, designed by a local with an Etsy shop,
would dazzle and pop:
Jane Jacobs Variety

(maybe we lose the barber chair—
though probably Jane would have been fine
with the barber chair . . .)

Or:
Taddle Creek One Stop
And we could mock up a subway map

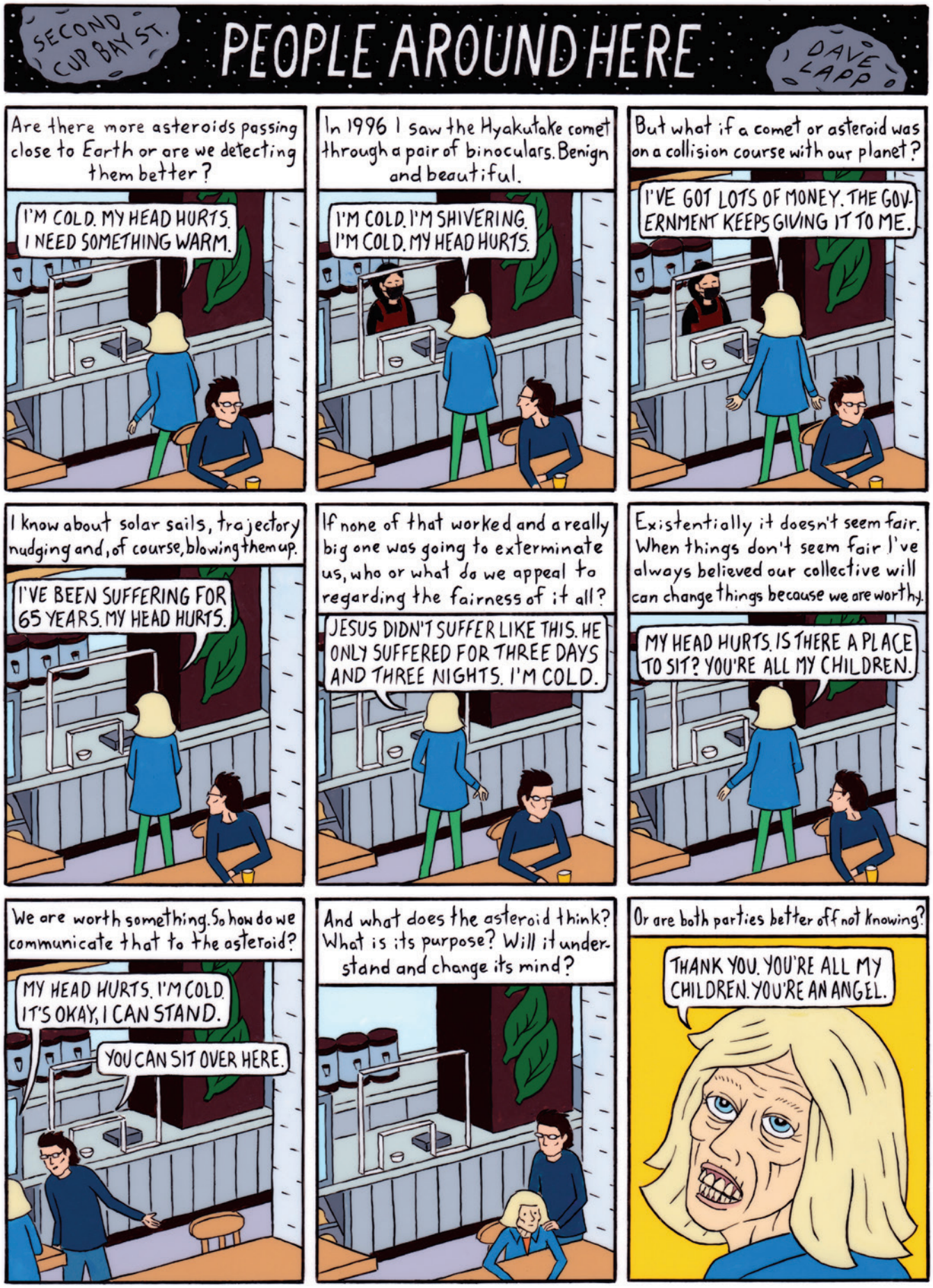
with the *Taddle Creek* One Stop marked slyly onto it
until some sticky T.T.C. official spots it, flashes badge
and makes us pull it down.

Owning the building would be real helpful,
but in the business plan
we only crowdfund the first five mil.

After this poem gets out
for a piece of this action
the V.C.s'll be lining up with their chequebooks out front.

—Chris Chambers

ILLUSTRATION BY IAN PHILLIPS


SECOND CUP BAY ST.
PEOPLE AROUND HERE
DAVE LAPP
Are there more asteroids passing close to Earth or are we detecting them better?
I'M COLD. MY HEAD HURTS. I NEED SOMETHING WARM.
In 1996 I saw the Hyakutake comet through a pair of binoculars. Benign and beautiful.
I'M COLD. I'M SHIVERING. I'M COLD. MY HEAD HURTS.
But what if a comet or asteroid was on a collision course with our planet?
I'VE GOT LOTS OF MONEY. THE GOVERNMENT KEEPS GIVING IT TO ME.
I know about solar sails, trajectory nudging and, of course, blowing them up.
I'VE BEEN SUFFERING FOR 65 YEARS. MY HEAD HURTS.
If none of that worked and a really big one was going to exterminate us, who or what do we appeal to regarding the fairness of it all?
JESUS DIDN'T SUFFER LIKE THIS. HE ONLY SUFFERED FOR THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS. I'M COLD.
Existentially it doesn't seem fair. When things don't seem fair I've always believed our collective will can change things because we are worthy.
MY HEAD HURTS. IS THERE A PLACE TO SIT? YOU'RE ALL MY CHILDREN.
We are worth something. So how do we communicate that to the asteroid?
MY HEAD HURTS. I'M COLD. IT'S OKAY, I CAN STAND.
YOU CAN SIT OVER HERE.
And what does the asteroid think? What is its purpose? Will it understand and change its mind?
Or are both parties better off not knowing?
THANK YOU. YOU'RE ALL MY CHILDREN. YOU'RE AN ANGEL.

“Alice Munro published early work there.”

—A MISINFORMED TADDLE CREEK SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWER.

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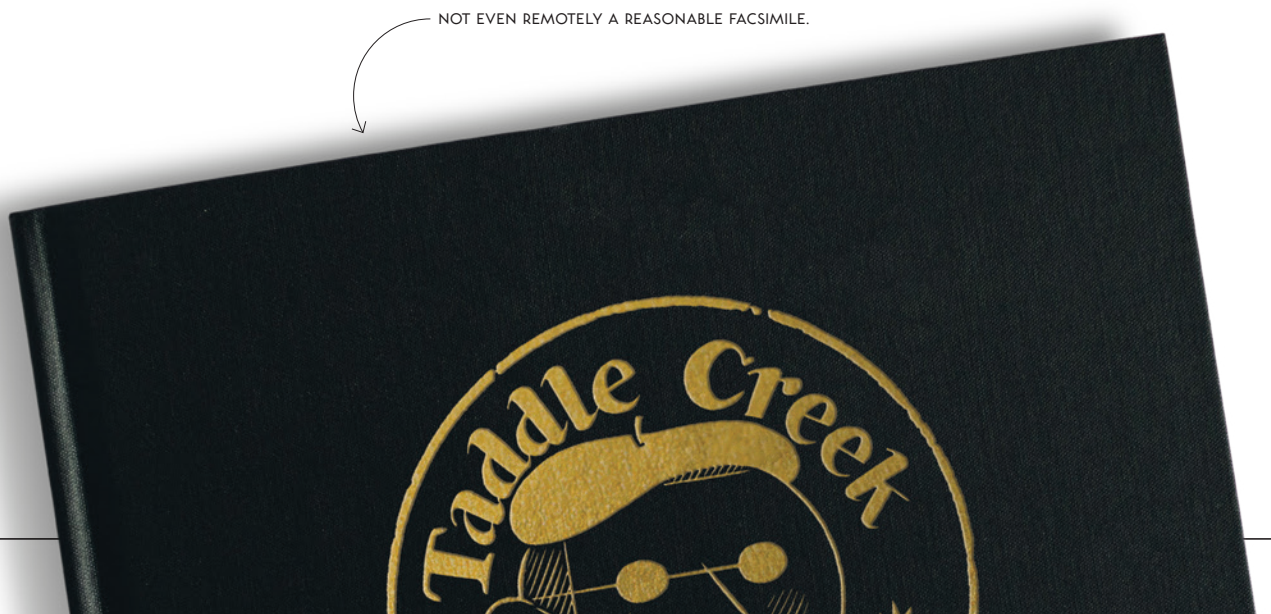

STEAM WHISTLE

CANADA'S PREMIUM PILSNER