

# TADDLE CREEK



New fiction and poetry by:  
Susan Swan  
David Macfarlane  
Derek McCormack

Lynn Crosbie  
on her controversial  
new book, *Paul's Case*

Coach House Books  
one year later

CHRISTMAS 1997  
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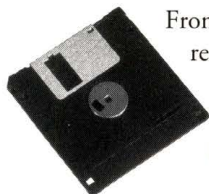
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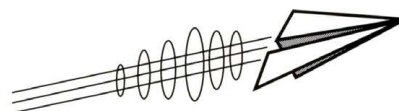
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# TADDLE CREEK

VOL. I

CHRISTMAS 1997

No.1

## ESSAY

- "The Forgotten Stream" ..... *Alfred Holden* 3  
*The real Taddle Creek—a brief history.*

## FICTION

- "A Way in the Dark" ..... *Alex Boyd* 7  
"The Headache" ..... *Michael Boughn* 10  
"Alice and Hazel" ..... *Andrew Daley* 13  
"Property Lines" ..... *John Degen* 18  
"One Strange Country" ..... *Hal Niedzviecki* 27  
"The Mugging of Mrs. Melaney" ..... *Keneth Doiron* 29  
"Wish Window" ..... *Derek McCormack* 32  
"The Silk Tie" ..... *Caitlin Smith* 33

## INTERVIEW

- Lynn Crosbie** Local author discusses the controversy surrounding her latest book, *Paul's Case* . . . *Kerri Huffman* 22

## POEMS

- "New" ..... *Susan Swan* 8  
"Are You Just An Ordinary Comma?" ..... *Susan Swan* 9  
"Hi There! Sports Fan!" ..... *Susan Swan* 14  
"Drive In Dream" ..... *Chris Chambers* 16  
"Digging the Stump" ..... *David Macfarlane* 19  
"How Carefully We Fail" ..... *Greg Kennedy* 30  
"More Sides Than the Moon" ..... *Susan Swan* 31  
*from "Anomia: Fragments Toward a Grammar of Endings"* ..... *Alana Wilcox* 34  
"Spasm of the Revolver" ..... *Christina Winchur* 36

## SPOTLIGHT

- Coach House Books** The revived publishing house forges ahead one year later . . . *Sarah Elton* 37

- CLOSING SHOT ..... *Dorsa Jabbari* 40

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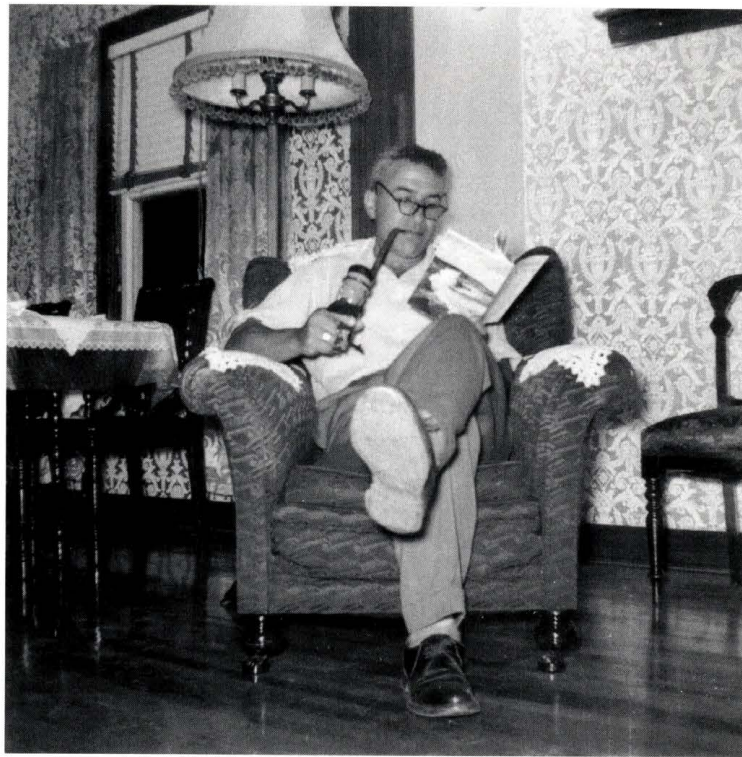
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## EDITOR'S NOTE

*Taddle Creek—a new winter holiday tradition  
and voice of the Annex's literary talent*

This past September, an article appeared in the *Toronto Star* titled, "Our tiny literary audience." In it, the author discusses Canada's growing lack of interest in reading quality, home-grown fiction. In describing how, over the past century, the modern mediums of radio, motion pictures and especially television have led to a steep decline in the once-popular pastime of reading fiction—especially short fiction—the author writes, "For one thing, television killed off the short story as a staple of mass circulation magazines—with the curious effect that this form of writing now exists mainly as a highly mannered, and almost entirely unread, product of creative writing courses and university-sponsored literary journals."

The remainder of the article paints a similarly bleak picture which, unfortunately, rings largely true. While many mass circulation magazines are no stranger to the occasional piece of short fiction, sometimes going so far as to devote an entire issue to such pieces, often times their efforts are no more than a dressed-up excerpt from an upcoming novel. Even

then, such stories are far from a staple and even further from the glory days of Charles Dickens' serialized novels or A.C. Doyle's monthly Sherlock Holmes adventures of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

At the same time, many modern literary journals which encourage and give voice to short fiction are far from the mass circulation category and are often produced at a lesser quality due to financial restrictions. Also, their popular chapbook format usually sees them exiled to the "miscellaneous" section of their local bookstore or, even worse, buried under their larger counterparts.

The first of *Taddle Creek's* two goals seeks to solve this problem. By focusing on a single community, in this case the Annex, a magazine with a small print-run suddenly becomes mass circulated within that community, and, with the help of local advertisers, is able to present itself in an accessible way, thus encouraging the reading of short fiction.

*Taddle Creek's* second goal is to support its community—Toronto's eastern west-end, commonly known as the Annex, but also

including the neighbourhoods of Seaton Village, Palmerston, Little Italy, Sussex-Ulster, Mirvish Village, Yorkville, Christie-Ossington, Huron-Sussex and the University of Toronto. This goal is accomplished by presenting a platform for local authors within the magazine's pages, which local residents will hopefully then purchase and, in turn, patronize the local businesses who have shown their support for this project through advertising sponsorship.

With the megacity looming in 1998, it is more important than ever for communities such as ours to retain their identities—a practice which the very concept of the megacity discourages. By staying true to its mandate and always remaining a neighbourhood publication, *Taddle Creek* hopes to do its part.

So, whether this month you're celebrating Christmas, Hanukkah, another holiday, or just taking a well-deserved break, set aside at least one evening, turn off the television and the computer, sit down . . . and read. We hope you'll choose to make *Taddle Creek* a part of your winter holidays annually.

— CONAN TOBIAS



# THE FORGOTTEN STREAM

*Or is it? Taddle Creek, once the pride of the University of Toronto's landscape, may be poised for a comeback.*

ESSAY BY ALFRED HOLDEN

It's such a Toronto thing to do. You take something beautiful, make it wretched, and bury it. Then a hundred years later, recognizing both error and opportunity, you dig it up and make it bloom. Such is the history, some of it yet to unfold, of Taddle Creek, the vanished but fabled stream that once ran through midtown and downtown Toronto.

No cynicism is implied here, nor any rural, pastoral yearnings or laments. Toronto has gotten along quite well without Taddle Creek, a resource that was discovered, appreciated and carefully used by native peoples but closer to our times ran against the flow of progress.

Indeed, while the Victorians praised Taddle's primordial beauty—University College at the University of Toronto was deliberately sited with good views of the brook, which was dammed here into a picturesque pond—they promptly polluted it. Architect-designed brick and stone mansions with parquet floors, shingled turrets and water-closets in the Annex north of Bloor Street, generated a less elegant antithesis at the less elegant end of the pipe.

In *The City in History*, Lewis Mumford laments the ease of flushing and the waste it represents. Many cultures learned agriculture, he found, but those that eventually thrived were the ones that learned to make farming self-sustaining by fertilizing the land. "Where human as well as animal dung was fully used, as in China, even the growing city offset its own blotting out of valuable agricultural land by enriching the surrounding fields," Mumford muses. "If we knew where and when this practice began we would have a deeper insight into the natural history of early cities. Water closets, sewer mains, and river pollution give a closing date to the process: a backward step ecologically, and so far a somewhat superficial technical advance."<sup>1</sup>

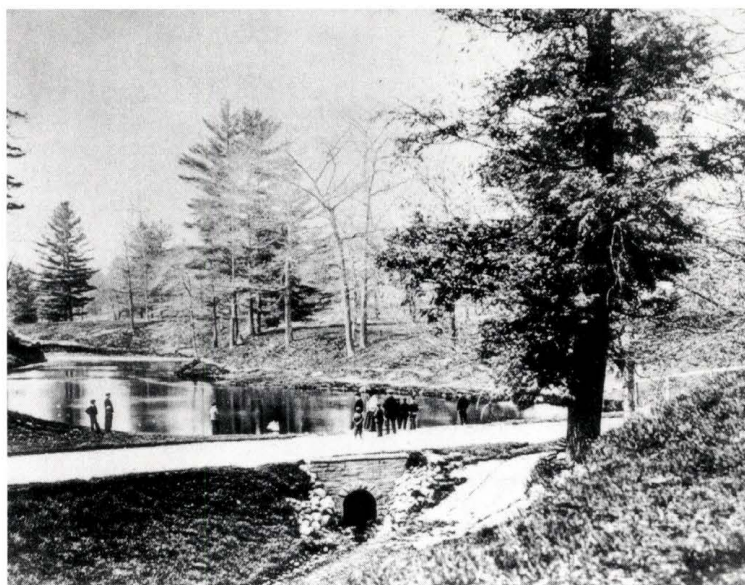
Taddle Creek had its parallels, among them Garrison Creek in the far west end and lesser-known Russell Hill Creek nearer in. All were inspired by gravity, the source of which was the Iroquois Shoreline,<sup>2</sup> the ancient bluff of Lake Ontario that rises just north of the Canadian Pacific Railroad tracks that cross central Toronto. It is a significant slope, a moraine that meanders east until it is interrupted by the Don Valley and eventually becomes the Scarborough Bluffs. "Sparkling

in a big city's stream of consciousness, long vanished but somehow known by citizenry who cannot have known them, demonstrates the power of collective memory and moisture's tendency to persist. As recently as 1985, when Metro Police were erecting their new Gucci headquarters at College and Bay streets, Taddle Creek sprang forth in protest, from seventy feet below, demanding a change of plans.<sup>3</sup> After crossing Bloor Street and meandering south to College Street, Taddle

would have had to make a pretty abrupt easterly turn at the university to get to the site where police headquarters now stands, so it's very likely we're talking here about another tributary. In any case, the result had to be a shallower basement and reinforced walls, and perhaps in the future police may also be blessed with that bugaboo some Toronto homeowners must deal with due to Taddle, rising damp in the basement.

The gurgling at police headquarters gave rise to other Taddle memories, as Gamester later recalled: "The Park Plaza hotel was another Taddle victim in the 1930s. Before engineers corrected the problem, uneven settling of the hotel's foundations caused it to lean about fifteen centimetres out over Bloor Street. For awhile, the hotel was known as the 'Leaning Tower of Park Plaza.'"<sup>6</sup>

Taddle Creek is perhaps most identified with, and lives on in memory most fondly, at the University of Toronto, whose campus the stream bisected between Bloor and College streets. Extant photographs justify the praise, showing the stone spires of University College reflected idyllically in the waters of the little lake created when a dam was built near where Hart House now stands. So perfect does it seem that one wonders to what extent these photographs, and perhaps even the landscape itself, constitute a sophisticated public relations



*Taddle Creek at the University of Toronto, circa 1876.*

with hope and promise, they spring from the hills of Davenport, only to be captured and forced into the dark netherworld of Toronto's underground," memory columnist George Gamester wrote in the *Toronto Star* a few years ago, commenting on the three creeks' common fate.<sup>3</sup> Taddle's source, then and now, is said to be the pond in Wychwood Park, part-way up the incline, but it is known to have had many tributaries. These include the now-absent stream in the Albany Avenue area that gained national attention a few years ago when Dr. David Suzuki told how the citizens' group Grassroots Albany, long familiar in these parts, wanted to uncover it and make it part of the landscape again.<sup>4</sup>

That these waterways continue so strongly





*McCaul's Pond, looking toward the east-wing of University College, circa 1876 . . .*



effort, designed to evoke just the right associations needed to sell the facility to faculty, students, and their upstanding middle- and upper-class families.

As a matter of fact such planning was not at all foreign to the Victorian sensibility. "To an age with an appetite for 'picturesque' effects, no landscape was complete without its decorative stretch of water, and Taddle Creek and the ravine in which it ran obviously lent itself to sympathetic imaginings," U of T art historian Douglas Richardson writes in his chronicle of University College, *A Not Unsightly Building*. "'By the planting of its banks, and the heading of the running water,' Henry Rowsell thought it [Taddle Creek] 'capable of being formed into a object of great ornament to the domain.'"<sup>7</sup>

There were even plans to install a botanical garden just east of the lake, about where Queen's Park Crescent now carries traffic.<sup>8</sup> It was never built, but the University College grounds indeed became, Richardson writes, "a semi-rural retreat with living space of its own, set apart from the city. It had its own garden which grew food for the College kitchen, while the wide fields behind provided pasture for the cows which supplied it with milk. A quiet lake, McCaul's Pond, named for John McCaul who was U of T's first president,<sup>9</sup> fed Taddle Creek in its valley of willows, rushes, and thick stands of trees."<sup>10</sup>

What a contrast it must have presented in the muddy, grotesque, nineteenth-century city. An account recorded by a freshman on arriving at U of T around 1860 describes "a beautiful pond, closed in with forest trees, the eastern edge blue with some curious water flowers, and at the upper end of the still blue surface a number of ducks were swimming about."<sup>11</sup> Spring and summer found students lolling about, "picking wildflowers and chasing butterflies" and even fishing for trout, meanwhile in wintertime skating on McCaul's Pond and tobogganing on Taddle's banks. Seniors dunked first-year students in hazing rituals each September—bully for them—and youngsters sailed toy boats.<sup>12</sup>

U of T students gave Taddle Creek life. It was also U of T students who sealed its fate. Abraham Lincoln once said that "public sentiment is everything . . . he who moulds public sentiment goes deeper than he who

enacts statues or pronounces decisions."<sup>13</sup> A scary thought, since media then as now were not exactly owned democratically. The student-run *Varsity* may not have been a Hearst rag or Colonel McCormick's *Chicago Tribune*, but it knew a safe cause to champion when it saw one. The newspaper took it upon itself to notice Taddle's increasingly unappetizing waters, made so by the drains of the new McMaster Hall (now the Royal Conservatory of Music), which fed directly into Taddle, augmenting the existing polluting efforts of the Annex and Yorkville. *Varsity* editors set out to mould the public's

poet, expressing no discernible regret, "The City Council would thy stream immure, and shut thee up with breaks and lime secure, and make thee—Ichabod—a common sewer, Taddle."

It must have seemed the right thing to do, much as building highways to meet the demand of traffic seemed to be the right thing to do in the 1960s. But there are often evil undercurrents in good intentions, and the catch in the case of Taddle Creek was simple. Burying it merely transferred the pollution problem to a bigger arena, Lake Ontario, and with a

thousand other similar creeks buried or finally just ignored, the big lake didn't stand a chance. Moreover, the principle "out of sight, out of mind" exacerbated the problem, for while the smell and squalor of sewage had prompted other civilizations to develop means of final disposal—or at least made them reckon more directly with the consequences of their own existence—Lake Ontario was big enough and far enough away from where most people lived that discharge there seemed like the final solution. When finally it wasn't, sophisticated sewage treatment then seemed like the answer, but it has its limitations, especially in Toronto. Here sanitary sewers serving homes were never fully separated from storm sewers taking runoff from streets and rooftops. After major storms the volume of water overwhelms the city's sewage pipes and treatment facilities, and the overflow, a brew of household and toilet waste mixed with less offensive storm water, pours untreated into the lake and becomes a major source of contamination.<sup>15</sup>

The nature and scale of planned solutions, not unlike the existing problem, boggle the mind. One of the last gestures of Toronto Council before the city was folded into the new megacity

of Toronto was the approval of a seventy million dollar, four-kilometre holding tunnel, five metres in diameter, that will be bored through bedrock between Parkside Drive and the Canadian National Exhibition grounds.<sup>16</sup> The purpose of the tunnel is to receive and store the overflow after each storm, until treatment plants catch up with the volume. It will probably work, as so much does in Toronto, but seems both grandiose and uningenious.



. . . and today.

desire to get rid of it. "The stench arising from the Taddle is very pronounced," the *Varsity* announced. "The prevalence of so much fever in the city is surely a good reason for the prompt abatement of this long-standing nuisance."<sup>14</sup>

In city politics universities tend to get what they want, and the clout of U of T was deployed efficiently to the desired end. A contract to bury the creek in pipes and conduits was let in 1884. Wrote a *Varsity*



Philosopher's Walk is a path that starts at Bloor Street at a handsome gate marked by a pair of historic electric lamps. But the promise of the name, and the grand gateway, is not fulfilled. The Chinese would say the walkway, which follows the former watercourse of Taddle Creek, has bad Feng Shui—it is not a comfortable, welcoming place to be. The reasons are partly physical, partly spiritual. When you walk down the ramp from Bloor Street, to the bottom of the creek's ravine, you feel vulnerable and alone; indeed fear of crime has led the university to install an emergency call box along the walkway near the Edward Johnson music building. An Ojibway lawyer, John Borrows, who studied at the U of T law school bordering the walk, has commented on the uneasy meeting between the surviving, indigenous landforms left by the creek—its empty ravine and its high banks—and the “western systems of planning and architecture” superimposed on them. They “have joined the law in privileging Western preferences,” he writes. “These streams were the springtime gathering places for the Ojibway.” But now “the spirits of land and water are buried and submerged. The stream is concealed, the fish are gone: people no longer gather to this site to witness the spectacular reproduction of life once present.”<sup>17</sup>

Can this loss be repaired? Much has changed in the hundred years since Taddle Creek was buried, including thinking about sewers and pollution, cities and city life. Some time ago a study for Toronto's Waterfront Regeneration Trust, which has been grappling with the Lake Ontario discharge problem, suggested that one answer may lie in the city's covered creeks. Ecologists have found that natural plant and water systems, though susceptible to concentrated pollutants, also possess an amazing ability to purify water and break down chemicals and contaminants typically found in storm water with natural enzymes. One proposal for Garrison Creek in the west-end would restore the waterway to its ravine with ponds designed to catch sediment, waterfalls that add oxygen, and wetlands to catch and consume nutrients considered undesirable in Lake Ontario.<sup>18</sup> Downstream the result would be much clearer water, and less need and pressure for more complex



McCaul's Pond.

treatment facilities or big, costly buried pipes.

Meanwhile, the by-product for the city would be, in these places, a reconciliation between the built and natural environments, which late twentieth-century thinking has realized can not only co-exist but support each other. Indeed, quite aside from their function, the filtering devices the uncovered streams would become would provide significantly upgraded urban parkland. The late City of Toronto left the door open, if only a crack, to such alternatives, not only by funding feasibility studies for Garrison Creek but also Taddle Creek. Partly under pressure from community groups in midtown, the city and the University of Toronto are being forced to consider the same possibility for Taddle Creek. Caught by surprise, the new megacity might find such a project politically useful, given the need to appease Toronto's still suspicious burghers, and, compared to big pipes, more economically attractive. U of T, something of a bully in city affairs except when pushed and cajoled and embarrassed or bribed to be otherwise, can be expected to resist until it is time to revel in the congratulation and good public relations the achievement would bring.

The tale of Taddle Creek is a story still interactive, whose ending will be shaped by the sensibilities of a new millennium. It could go either way, as Toronto is swallowed up in a much larger political landscape. The rope in the tug of war will be lengthened, extending from the Pickering border to Mississauga, and it will be interesting to see

whether praise for diversity extends beyond race to intellect and aspiration. The scale of thinking may change; it will be harder to make the details matter. Suburban voters are more penny-pinching, more Republican, and to them what was Toronto may seem all too foreign and threatening. Compared to the suburbs, the old city is enormously complicated and full of apparent contradictions: a city of street cleaners and street people, fancy public gardens and grubby back alleys, Bay Street suits and shirtless squeegee teens, rumbling, clanging streetcars beneath glittering skyscrapers. Digging up an old sewer would be a Toronto thing to do. But

does Toronto still exist? That is the question of the hour, in this bizarre time of transition. I will be waiting, with apprehension, for proof one way or the other. I expect to find it in the waters of Taddle Creek.

*Alfred Holden is an Annex resident, freelance writer, and copy editor for the Toronto Star. He is also the City Building columnist for the Annex Gleaner, and is currently completing a book on street lighting.*

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Mumford, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Jacob Spelt, Toronto, Collier-Macmillan Canada Ltd., 1973, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> George Gamester, “Three forgotten streams run through city's heart,” the *Toronto Star*, April 17, 1995, p. A4.

<sup>4</sup> David Suzuki, “How Annex's Grassroots seed grew into a movement,” the *Toronto Star*, Sept. 12, 1992, p. D6.

<sup>5</sup> Darcy Henton, “One less floor for police station after underground creek found,” the *Toronto Star*, Nov. 7, 1985, p. A1.

<sup>6</sup> Gamester.

<sup>7</sup> Richardson, p. 76.

<sup>8</sup> Richardson, p. 54.

<sup>9</sup> Ian Montagnes, “Taddle Tale,” the *Graduate*, September/October 1979, p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> Richardson, p. 14.

<sup>11</sup> W.J. Loudon, *The Golden Age, Studies of Student Life*, as cited by Ian Montagnes.

<sup>12</sup> Montagnes, p. 15.

<sup>13</sup> Cited by Richard N. Smith in *The Colonel: The Life and Legend of Robert R. McCormick*, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 1997, p. xi.

<sup>14</sup> Montagnes, p. 15.

<sup>15</sup> Brian McAndrew, “Sewer tunnel plan \$11 million over budget,” the *Toronto Star*, Oct. 4, 1997, p. A4.

<sup>16</sup> McAndrew.

<sup>17</sup> John Borrows, “Buried Spirits,” U of T *Bulletin*, March 3, 1997, p. 16.

<sup>18</sup> Alfred Holden, “Taddle Creek, Lost to view but found in memory,” *University of Toronto Magazine*, Winter 1995, p. 43.



# A WAY IN THE DARK

FICTION BY ALEX BOYD

Ben raised his head and looked around. The words "I wish I could learn to do that" cut through the fog around his head.

"What?" he asked, still groggy after only a few seconds.

"I wish I could learn to do that. Sleep until my stop comes along." A young man sat across from Ben on the bus, smiling a soft but wide smile.

"Yeah," his response came out flat and dropped, like something heavy pushed out of a window. Ben pulled himself out of his seat, a dislike for the other man's smile swimming in his stomach. Still, he was relieved to be pulled from the current of a dream that had changed on him. It began with a wide, heavy darkness that had a certain calm, hidden feeling until the same thick darkness began to feel like he was lost, as if he were deep inside a collapsing water well. Buried alive. There was a word for that, he thought, irony or something.

As he stepped from the bus into the surrounding night, it seemed to him that his friend Simon would have a better way of putting it. Ben stood there looking up and down the road and at the streetlights that dotted it like stitching, as far as the eye could see. Simon had always known how to look at things, pull them apart in his mind like a child looking for bugs in a woodpile. Some of this curious ability had rubbed off onto Ben, but in comparison he had always felt like a poker player with weaker cards. Ben was always pulling his thoughts and feelings out one at a time, as if rescuing bodies from an old, fallen building. And now Simon, his friend and young apprentice in theft, was dead.

Even as the thought surfaced that Simon was gone, a man walked by wearing a dark, dress jacket and jeans, typical clothing for Simon. This young man even had the same mop of curly hair, but no glasses. Strange to think that there must be pieces of every dead man walking around in different places, Ben thought. There must be somebody around here who loved opera and culture, other bored young graduates looking for something to do. But that's foolish. Simon was dead and with his death came the extinction of all that he was, exactly as he was.

That was the thought Simon would have been proud of. Ben smiled inwardly and ran his fingers through his greying hair as he wondered just who the apprentice had been. The thought that Simon was dead kept bumping and scraping into his mind, trying to settle.

He began to walk the downtown streets while further shark-like memories circled him. The past had always felt like something he wished he could shake off, tin cans tied to the heels of his shoes. He wasn't even sure what had made him turn to small-time theft, just the fact that it was easy, he guessed. All the jobs he had pulled off didn't feel like much when gathered together in his mind, like a bundle of sticks, brittle and dry. And now there were fewer days ahead than there were behind. At least in the past few years Simon had tried to change him, massage into him a love of culture. What was the film they had gone to? Oh, *The Bicycle Thief*. Leaving the theatre, Ben couldn't help but remark that "in the part where the father tries to steal a bike out of desperation, I could have done a much better job." Simon had burst into laughter. Ben also remembered liking the end, that the father and son still respected each other. But now even memories of Simon brought a twitch of pain. He remembered reading in the cold, bare words of a newspaper, "BODY OF YOUNG MAN FOUND, SHOT DEAD." He remembered somebody trying to break the tension after Simon's funeral with a joke, a simple and honest one, but it was like lighting a match into a cold wind. The ice was unbreakable. A signal flare does not shatter the night. Ben didn't cry when he read the news, or when he attended the funeral. The emotion fluttered inside him like a wounded bird, and then was still. Someone had once told him his feelings were in the grave already.

The city streets had a harsh and constant edge to them. The loud, ambulance laugh of a woman blended slowly into the slurred words of a drunk up ahead. The drunk stood on the edge of the sidewalk, waving his fist and threatening to jump into the street, which would simply have landed him between two parked cars.

Teenagers hung out of the windows above and laughed.

"I'm gonna jump!"

"Do it!"

Ben passed by, watching that the drunk and swinging arms didn't get too close, noting the number of teenagers. In his career he had learned to catch all the details in case it was useful. He continued on, dropping the scene gently from his mind without further thought. He kept up his brisk pace, the street slowly sliding by, until an image jerked his mind away from the cloud of thoughts around it and he stopped. The plastic front of a newspaper box blurred a photograph on the front page. Three female cheerleaders with rough, black dot eyes, hair pulled back, and wide, right angle mouths had appeared to him like newborn feeding birds. So much wanting. He walked away slowly, wondering what Simon would have said. He wondered if he would always want to know what Simon would have said or thought. Probably he would always think of him, guess at his reactions to things. Ben had never wondered that before, never missed the presence of someone. He had seen death before, even the deaths of those he knew well. But it had never felt like somebody ripped away. Simon would have commented on the wanting. He would have said that we all want, that feeding chicks are a brilliant metaphor for cheerleaders, for the wanting and kicking and fighting we all do. And in the end, all of our individual struggles, all our unique thought and paths vanish, lost unless we write them down. Writing, Simon would have said, was the only way to tell people, really tell people, what you have done. Simon had poems that left Ben speechless, that actually stirred the embers of his emotion. And strangest of all, Simon had told him that he could write his experiences. After all, he said, all you've got to have are experiences, feelings, and a pen. Ben was sure about the experiences but not about the feelings. The death of Simon was the only thing that had moved him in years, perhaps decades. He had not been aware of how close they had become.

It was only a few steps to the corner where Ben stood waiting for several cars to slip into the larger street before he could continue on.



A woman in the passenger seat of a car was suddenly in front of him as her car moved up. Out of awkwardness, friendliness, she smiled. He returned the smile, but caught his own pointed features and leather-like skin in the surface of the car as it crept away and found that what he had managed to push out across his face looked more like a grimace. Again, before he could step off the sidewalk, a car was in front of him, this one green and polished. This could be Sinclair, he thought. Sinclair likes green for some reason. It probably makes him feel like he's closer to nature. The window slid down, accompanied by the automatic drone of such things. Ben needed no time to recognize the plump face, dark green suit and tie of Mr. Sinclair.

"We need to talk business," Sinclair said flatly.

"You know that Simon was killed? I don't know if I can do any jobs for awhile, I just don't know. I have some money stored away I can live on."

"I know about Simon, and I'm sorry. Get in and we'll talk. You probably need to talk, right? I'll buy you a coffee."

"I never should have let him do a job alone. What the hell was I thinking?" Ben was still stuck in his thoughts, sinking as if in quicksand while two of Sinclair's men stepped out of the car and, each holding an arm, guided him into the back seat with Sinclair. As the car left in favour of another part of the city, Sinclair sat looking at Ben with a slightly curious expression, while Ben slumped, as if lifeless.

Simon had challenged him once to come up with one good memory from any part of his life. Ben had stumbled around and pulled out a story from his childhood before he ran away from home. The family had driven up north to find that work on the cottage had been completed, but there was some thin legal reason why the family could not stay there that first night. The licence did not apply yet, or something. Ben and his family spent the night in an old barn, broken and full of holes. It sat exposed in the middle of a field, home to a number of bats. Despite being so exposed, the fear drained away from him, replaced with a sense of nestled security like none he had known. The sound of the bats soon blended with his dreamy, tired state, and became friendly and soothing, like distant waves washing up onto the shore of his fading thoughts as he drifted off. It was as if they were naked, exposed in defiance under the stars in the middle of nowhere, but safe. For the last time he was safe with his family. Safe inside the law.

## NEW

New windows  
new views  
the clothes  
in old closets  
no longer fit

— SUSAN SWAN

After that, the pressures began, on his parents and on him, and he began to look for an escape, a way to live his own life, take what he needed. Now that memory was distant, and broken off from everything else, like a shard of glass on the ground. Ben had seen something of this in Simon. A streak of warmth that was not completely masked by the little bit of sadness in his eyes. Simon didn't sit there grinning. No, not like an idiot. But there had been some colour in Simon that he had not quite known how to use. Or even if he could hang onto it.

One of Sinclair's men banged open the door to the roof. They had taken the elevator first, and Ben guessed that they were now thirty stories off the ground.

"This provides a little privacy for our discussion," Sinclair said, looking out across the rows of rooftops. "I hate this place. The city is a pool of desires, nobody caring for anybody else. I hate it when my work requires that I actually come into town. Most of the time, my reputation and my men can do it for me. Call me an older man if you want to, but I like the company of my trees, my gardening. In this world, simplicity is so rare that it's fucking beautiful."

"Yeah... simplicity," Ben said stupidly. He was always slightly nervous around Sinclair.

"Loyalty is just as rare, Ben. And when I find disloyal people, I need to weed them out. You've ripped me off, Ben, and this is something I can't tolerate."

"I what?" Ben was stunned, now facing the three men on the open rooftop.

"You and Simon did the job a few weeks ago, but didn't deliver all the money to my friends here," Sinclair motioned around him to his men who stood looking like surly store mannequins.

"Jesus... you killed Simon," Ben said, his mind passing back to the night they had hit the box office of a small, independent theatre on a busy night. Simon had commented that he

didn't want to do it. It was probably the one time Ben saw his mood drop so low. Simon had said that to hit a small theatre doing Shakespeare was as bad as a human could get. And Ben had promised over coffee that they would never do a job that gave him such a bad feeling. A fantasy hurried through Ben's mind in which he pushed money into Simon's hands, saying, "Go. Go to a beach somewhere and write. I don't want you to die. I don't want you to die." But who could tell this would happen? Ben knew that he was about to be killed also, but he must try to say something, something that would explain that he and Simon had taken nothing, something to clear their names, even if they were both killed. Ben wanted this for Simon more than he cared about it for himself.

"Look, we delivered exactly what we picked up, after taking our payment, like we arranged. It worked out to about two thousand, or..." Ben's eyes dashed around. He knew that his fear made him look guilty. The world began to spin around him. "We're... we're trying to begin a relationship with you, right? We wouldn't do that. Simon always said... he always said that you have to have principles..." His voice trailed off until he found a new thought. "If anything went missing, it was taken after the money left our hands, and before it was put in yours. Your men know that you don't know us very well..." Again his voice deflated as the two men on both sides of Sinclair produced pistols.

"What was that you said before about having some money stored up? Look, my friend, I still have respect for you, but I need to keep my reputation, and it must be absolute. It must be spotless. Believe me, I don't enjoy leaving my green, my fields. Do you have any requests? Anything I can do for you after this?"

Ben took a step back out of instinct. What a bastard to speak about his execution as if it were a minor inconvenience. He looked



# ARE YOU JUST AN ORDINARY COMMA?

I never liked grammar rules  
until you schooled me  
in the punctuation mark.  
What bothers me, though,  
is this: Are you just an ordinary comma  
or a colon denoting < !! # \$ + = \* ???

— SUSAN SWAN

around, a hundred thoughts worming in his mind. He flashed through them and discarded them like playing cards. He drew in a breath of crisp night air and savoured it, wondering why it had been so long since he had done that. It was one of those nights when the clouds were overlapping, layered round wads of cotton that fill the sky, the moon only asking for one bright corner, like a child nestled among all his toys. A child. The moon, the patchwork of city lights, everything demanded his attention so that he did not know where to begin, his mind bounced around to

touch and pull away, finally coming to rest on where he was now, what was about to happen, and how Simon was already gone. He felt the crest of emotion rise in his chest, choked off and bottled before tears could begin. No tears for himself. No tears for Simon. He couldn't help it.

"So you have nothing to say?" Sinclair stood looking at him, his men clearly impatient. Somewhere from the confusion, Ben pulled out one idea and embraced it. It would make it more difficult for them—and more, he quickly thought. Ben smiled. It happened

slowly, creeping out and growing into a full, unembarrassed grin. A smile of knowing that brightened even further when a look of astonishment was imposed into Sinclair's blank, almost bored face.

All Ben needed to do was twist his body around and take a few steps. One great leap, which, as he looked down, almost made it feel as if the buildings sailed away beneath him. As he began to fall, his voice broke off into a scream of fear, thrill and defiance as the force of the air began to surround his body, pushing tears that now burst out straight back, whipping back his hair and curling around his frame, which on his neck and shoulders felt like a reassuring but ghostlike hand. As his thoughts continued to multiply and spread, waves of emotion, caught and spinning together, impaled his stomach and spread outward from there in prickly jumps to his fingertips where it stood dancing like a sailor on a gangplank before the next wave of dull ache that brought unconsciousness. And he fell—a real, broken, shooting star of emotion.

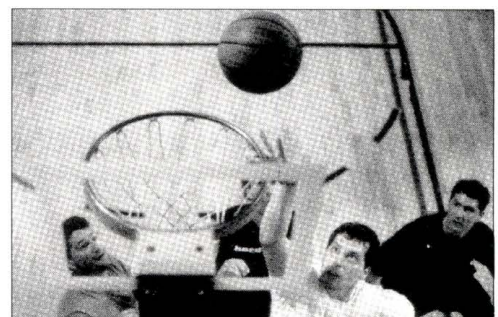
*Alex Boyd is a Seaton Village resident. He has previously published works in Ink magazine and York University's Existere.*

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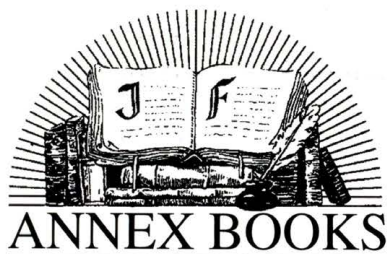
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# THE HEADACHE

FICTION BY MICHAEL BOUGHN

*"To build the city of Dioce whose terraces are the colour of stars."*  
— Ezra Pound, "Canto 74"

It must have started after about two months. I honestly don't remember how it began. I do remember standing in front of the apartment window one morning about 5:30, staring into the dark, wholly occupied by the pain. I could just make out the flat white field stretching to the mall invisible in the distance, an endless *terrain vague* at the city's blurred edge. Large runners of ice flowed down the inside edges of the cheap windows. The pain centered over my nose on both sides. A viscous yellow mucous packed every little hole and cranny in my skull quivering as my heart beat out its rhythm in pain. I felt like a putrefying carcass ready to burst. Claire, on her way out the door, asked me if I was okay. I stared out through the vague reflection of my face wondering if I could live through another day at the Institute.

After about a week, I mentioned it to him. It could have been longer. I don't remember exactly, but it was about a week. The entire Institute was scrambling to put out a final issue of the *People's Daily News* in time to get to Montreal for a Consultative Conference. I was coming out of the layout room when I passed him. He nodded.

"You don't look well," he said. "What is wrong with you?"

"I have a bad headache."

He looked at me with a mixture of pity and contempt.

"You people are really quite shameless, do you know that? You really are a bunch of anarchists. If you had the correct political line, this would not happen. But no. You have no interest in following the Party's line. You run around like some headless chicken, following your own line, undermining the Party's program. Then you get sick! Just when we need you. This is criminal activity, do you know that? You are just a bunch of wreckers!"

He was tall, about 6'2" maybe, and heavy, 200, 220 pounds. His belly hung out over his belt, stretching the cheap, white dress shirt he always wore with his navy blue polyester suit.

He was a big man with an air of authority. Later, after I somehow got away and made it back to the west coast, I wound up down in California one winter watching the elephant seals on the beach at Año Nuevo. As the old bull heaved his massive, quivering bulk along the shore bellowing at the young males, I found myself thinking of him.

"What have you been doing to rectify this problem," he asked with a sneer.

"I've been taking aspirin."

"You people are really quite unbelievable."

A lank of oily, black hair fell down on his forehead. His hand continually rose to push the hair back up.

"Unbelievable. Do you have any idea what aspirin does to you? When I was a biochemist I studied these matters scientifically. Aspirin is just more bourgeois garbage. We need revolutionary answers, answers that come from the science of Marxism-Leninism-Mao-Tsetung-Thought. This is your problem. You have no grasp of science. And yet you claim to be a revolutionary, a communist. You are truly unbelievable. In India, people like you are just wiped out, that is all."

This is all a mistake, I felt like saying as he walked away. I must have felt like saying it. I don't remember saying it or even thinking it, but it's funny about memories, how they shift and twist and fade away. Once it had seemed so simple, so clearly outlined by the sheer energy of our enthusiasm. Or had it? Things change and you are somewhere else. The trees look different, and the buildings and the pale faces. But different from what? Some place of golden, rolling hills dotted with oaks, all the room in the world to just sit and breathe and watch the tall grass pulse in the wind? Or was that a dream?

I'll change, I thought. I remember that vividly. We wanted to change things so badly. So we stayed to get denounced by JR again and again. It seemed to have something to do with revolution. Not the revolution we had once imagined, but we couldn't remember that after a while. This was the real revolution. This was the dictatorship of the proletariat.



Liberating the animals in Stanley Park was not going to stop men who dealt in mass death with less passion than they dealt in commodity futures. I had lived with the footage of napalm exploding, of bodies burning. We all had. Sometimes at night I would cry imagining it, myself a woman in the paddies with my child. Watching the greasy, orange ball roll toward us. The heat. Nowhere to run.

But before, it *had* been simple. I remember that, although I don't know if I remembered it then. In those days if you wanted to smash sexual hang-ups, and we all wanted to do that, then you had sex with someone. Maybe even with two or three people. If you wanted to change the social structure, or overthrow the state, or both, in one order or another, you just organized another demonstration and hoped that it was bigger and noisier than the last one. Sooner or later something revolutionary was bound to happen. If you bomb Laos, we will bust your windows. There was a certain simple-minded joy in it. Until they started killing us. But even then, no matter how serious it got, it was nothing like the Institute.

The Institute was under a storefront Chinese restaurant on West Eglinton Avenue. A flat slab of grey space woven in a greasy cocoon of power, telephone and street car wires, it was the perfect setting for the Ruby China with its greasy, frozen egg rolls, greasy chow mein, and Coke. We ate there a lot since the owner said he supported Chairman Mao. And the Ruby China was the perfect entrance to the underground realms of the Institute which lurked beneath it.

The first time I was taken to the Institute it was a vast, open cave-like space dominated by the hulking presence of a Solna Chief offset press. This was right after we had joined the Party en masse and come out east for one of the many meetings called to denounce Robert Trewe. The press was a bit like the beast in the midst of the maze, but without, at that point, the maze. Later the place was split up into four main working areas and a foyer where people waited until JR was available. There was a library, the press room, a dark room for photographic work, and the layout room. Running out from the press room was a narrow, four-foot wide space between the library and the darkroom where the headlining machine was located.

The headlining machine was primitive and had to be operated in the dark since it

worked by directly exposing a strip of photographic paper to light. Actually, it wasn't under the Ruby China, but under the Jamaican wig and record shop next door. In order to economize on time, all the headlines were done at once, which meant whoever did it got to go off into the dark alone for maybe an hour or more. The records constantly being played upstairs would boom through the floor. *I can see clearly now the rain has gone.* There was a certain peace there, alone in the dark, developing the slimy, wet strip of paper that read, "DOWN WITH THE FASCIST POLICE STATE ATTACKS! BLOOD DEBTS WILL BE PAID IN BLOOD!" *I can see all obstacles in my way.* Over and over and over again. *Gone are the dark clouds that had me blind.* We would complain about it, groan when it started up for the twenty-third time, mumble about bad politics. But there in the darkness, images danced. Music. *Gonna be a bright. Light. Bright, sun shiny day.*

The headache must have started after about two months. I can't remember exactly when it started, though I remember the headache well enough. Origins fade. And what preceded them. Then you make it up. History as fiction, which isn't fiction at all, but some kind of truth. Like those blank spaces in the photographs from Stalinist Russia and the accounts in American high school text books about "unprovoked attacks" in the Gulf of Tonkin.

I do remember getting up at 5:30 a.m. I would feed Sarah, who was just over a year old, Claire having left for work. Then we would get on the bus and I would drop her at the babysitter's, get back on the bus, which meant another fare, a huge expense in those days, and go on down the street to the Institute. On the east side of the Ruby China a tall, green slat fence with a hole in it separated a vacant lot from the street. You went through the hole in the fence and followed a well-worn path back behind the building where a heavy, dark green metal door faced the alley. You rang two longs and a short on the buzzer high on the left hand door sill. The door would open. You stepped down into the cave.

Even the exhaustion and terror fade, finally. Of course they do. I mean the memory of them. After getting to the Institute at about seven-thirty, I delivered the papers. Or else I printed the papers. See what I mean? I know I delivered the papers after I printed them, because I remember the drive. First I dropped them off all over the city. Then I

drove to Hamilton and Guelph, and finally to the airport where I sent off the deliveries for the rest of the country. By that time I could barely stay awake, so it was before I went home. So when I got to the Institute it must have started with the layout, then photography (though later, someone else did that, Richard I think, after he got out of jail), then etching the plates and printing the paper. Some nights I was allowed to go home at 3:00 a.m. depending on who was out of jail at any given time. Not having a car, however, I rarely got home before 4:00. Then it was up at 5:30 or 6:00.

I started off at the Institute doing layout because of my experience on the west coast working on the old *Gorilla*. But that had been a different world. We would stay up all night drinking cheap wine and coffee, playing with shapes and pictures and meanings, talking about revolution. We had a sense of community among ourselves, with the animals we once threatened to free from the zoo. A coming together in the image of something new. What happened to that? We had been infiltrated by the police. Some of us had been beaten by them on the street at night, documents stolen. Houses had been broken into. Phones were tapped. So we had started to tighten up. But there was something else as well, some vague, growing desire to control the process, to understand it absolutely and take possession of it.

I had laid out several columns of the *People's Daily News* that first day working at the Institute, and had decided to put a photograph in the center of the page. As I was appreciating the way the various blocks of lighter and darker hues balanced each other on the page, in came JR. He looked at the page I was working on and then stared at me with open disgust.

"What do you think you are doing?" he asked. He was a true master of contempt. His voice literally dripped with it, intensified somehow by his Punjabi accent.

"What do you think you are doing?"

"I was just laying out this photo. It goes with . . ."

"And you call yourself a communist?"

He nearly spat it, the contempt was so intense. The words were bitter in his mouth. He turned to the others in the room, all of whom were standing speechless, waiting.

"This man calls himself a communist! Do you believe it?"

You could almost hear their hearts beating, frightened and distant. The fluores-





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cent air quivered with it. I had come here with some of them. Jill and I had almost been lovers once. Steve and I had spent hours drinking beer in the Waldorf with the loggers and longshoremen, trading stories about being twenty years old and running from the FBI, sneaking over borders, living on the edge. With that one question it all ended.

"Do you want to know what you are doing? I will tell you what you are doing. You are sabotaging revolution, that is what you are doing. Like some fascist thug. Just like some fascist thug! What do you have to say for yourself? Well?"

I looked at the page again. Were the columns crooked?

"Well . . . what's the matter exactly?"

I realized immediately this was the wrong thing to say. He looked like he would burst with contempt.

"You are such a fraud," he said with quiet intensity. "You have the nerve to come in here, into this centre of revolution, claiming to be communist, act like a CIA agent and then ask me what you have done! You are shameless, absolutely shameless. What have you got to say for yourself? No, never mind. Just get out of here."

I was half way to the door, restraining myself from breaking into a run when he said, "No, wait." My heart sank.

Another time, sitting in the Ruby China, I was toying with one of those greasy egg rolls while he explained to us why we should never trust our first response to anything. "Your feelings are hopelessly mired in the corruption of your class background. This is a scientific Party, a scientific ideology. What is wrong with you that you cannot grasp this simple fact? Dialectical materialism is the science of the masses. It is the science of proletarian revolution against the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. There is no room for your petit-bourgeois feelings here. If you cannot grasp the science of revolution, then you should just get out!"

It certainly seemed like science, so clear, so simple, so absolute. What you felt was wrong. The science of Marxism-Leninism was right. Class consciousness was manifest in the selfish feelings that threatened to undermine the commitment to change and revolution, whereas the science of Marxism-Leninism was the logical, analytical tool whereby you could make sense of the evil and suffering in the world, and finally get rid of it forever. And the scientific line

would change and change again. And what was scientific one month was opportunist the next. And it was always so logical, so scientific, you had to agree. And agree. And agree.

I don't remember much about those lines now, but I do remember being bent over the headlining machine, listening to Jimmy Cliff in the dark. *I can see clearly now the rain has gone. I can see all obstacles in my way.* And I do remember the headache. I finally went to a hippy free clinic somewhere around Spadina. One of the comrades told me about it, though somewhat unwillingly. I went secretly. It was the first time I snuck around behind the Party's back, but hell, my head hurt too much to worry about principles.

It turned out to be an advanced sinus infection on the verge of becoming extremely dangerous. Brain damage, the doctor in the clinic said. She was kind. She gave me free penicillin and 222s with codeine.

"Why did you wait so long," she asked, incredulous that I had borne the pain.

I was speechless. How could I explain to her about the dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasant woman and her child? The clinic reminded me of San Francisco where I had almost been shot by the National Guard during the Fillmore uprising, and of Vancouver, where the soldiers had surrounded the whale tanks. The sunny, hazy past. Leaving the clinic I felt the urge to run back inside and tell her. But tell her what? That I wanted immunity? That I wanted an isolate, golden hill to sit on? What could she do? What could she offer?

It was a sunny day in the early spring. I remember that. The rows and rows of dirty, dingy brick houses with their peeling, crumbling facades and occasional lifeless trees seemed almost festive. To be outside in the sunlight was a rare treat. There was something about the doctor, something about the sun and the spring that nagged at me, wordless, pulsing with the blood and pus in my head. But no way yet to find the words. What could she do other than give me pills. She couldn't stop the war. She couldn't get rid of the men whose lives were dedicated to profits and death. Only we can do that, I thought, as I headed back to the cave, not yet aware of the thread she'd handed me.

*for Sharon Stevenson  
1946-1978*

*Michael Boughn is a Palmerston resident.*



# ALICE AND HAZEL

*(A scene from October 1954)*

FICTION BY ANDREW DALEY

Alice had known since after school that a large storm was approaching, but it wasn't until after dinner that she and Margaret heard on the radio it was a hurricane named Hazel. This presented Alice and Margaret with an opportunity to abandon their homework for games of snap and await any further news. Yet no sooner had they started their third game when the house lights flickered twice and went off.

In the kitchen, Margaret's mother, Mrs. Jesquith, screamed. Margaret rushed off to see if she had been hurt and Alice went to the front window. Not a single light was visible in any direction. Even the streetlights had lost power. Without the back light of the living room, Alice could now clearly see the great force with which the rain lashed up and down the street and against the window. She saw, too, that the rainwater flowing down Windermere Avenue was at least three inches deep and choked with pieces of plywood, branches of trees, and other debris. She could hear the roar of the wind from where she stood.

"How bad is it?" Margaret asked from behind Alice, her voice small with fright.

"Have a look for yourself," Alice replied. She opened the curtains wider so that they could both have a better view of the rain.

They moved their card game, but not their geography books, into the kitchen. Margaret explained that her mother frightened easily in storms, especially with Margaret's father and brothers away. Alice presumed they were exchanging their company for a relaxation of Mrs. Jesquith's vigilance over their studies. Soon, Mrs. Jesquith extinguished one of the candles in case the electricity remained out for a long time and joined her daughter and Alice in a game of crazy eights.

Alice found the quiet in the kitchen oppressive. She couldn't hear the storm and was tired of playing cards. Beside her, Mrs. Jesquith chattered nervously about the absence of electrical sounds, like the radio and the refrigerator, and how they're taken for granted. The sound of the front door opening and quickly slamming startled everyone and forced Mrs. Jesquith to drop her hand. Alice counted two eights before taking up a candle and following

Margaret and Mrs. Jesquith to the entranceway.

It was the Jesquith's neighbour, Mrs. Biggs, a large woman in a black, rain-slick mackintosh standing in the middle of a growing puddle on the floor. "I just wanted to see how you folks were doing," she was saying. "The Humber's rising higher and higher and they're putting sandbags up along Brule and Riverside."

"Oh, my God," Mrs. Jesquith said, falling back against the wall of the entranceway. "We're going to be flooded out!"

Mrs. Biggs shook her head. "Your house isn't in any danger. You're well above the level of the river."

"She's right," Alice piped in, remembering their geography test on Monday. "Those ravines are really steep. It would take a lot more to flood this house."

Mrs. Biggs glanced at Alice before continuing. "I came to help you girls make sandwiches for the guys out working because it's going to be a long night. My George thinks it's a good idea we stay here together tonight. He's already come back and gone out again."

"Anything to help," said Margaret, who now had an arm around her mother. "When will the power be coming back on?"

"Not tonight, probably. I've got more candles at home if we need them. Oh, and I almost forgot. You should fill the bathtub and all the buckets you can find in the house with water. Our supply might not be good to drink after tomorrow."

"Dear God," Mrs. Jesquith moaned. "Is it really that bad?"

"It is, Sheila," Mrs. Biggs said, hanging up her raincoat. "But we're all gonna be okay. And one more thing, George doesn't want us to leave the house until he comes to tell us it's okay."

"Can we go have a look around?" Alice asked quickly. But Mrs. Biggs didn't respond.

"We'll get started right away then," Mrs. Jesquith said. She flashed Alice a look.

Alice and Margaret secured the water supply, which wasn't easy with the single candle, and then found the two women busy with an assembly line of ham, cheese, tuna fish and a large loaf of white bread. Because Mrs. Biggs had arrived, Alice now doubted that Mrs.

Jesquith would let them out to explore. Mrs. Jesquith appeared more at ease with a task to occupy her, and was listening to Margaret recount her day at school. Nonetheless, Alice could see in Mrs. Jesquith's eyes that the woman was terrified of the storm, which only served to heighten her own sense of excitement over the prospect of rising floodwaters. It was typical of her luck to be stuck in the kitchen with the women.

Shortly, a solid, urgent knocking from the front door brought the production of sandwiches to a halt. "I wonder who that is?" Mrs. Jesquith said, exasperated. "We've only just got started here."

"I'll go see," Alice offered, quickly relighting the stub of her candle.

The knocking only ceased when Alice brought light into the hallway. She could feel her heart beating as she unbolted and opened the door. On the other side stood a large man in a dripping black coat and fedora.

"Good evening," the man started. "Ah, Alice, it's you!"

Alice brought the candle stub closer to the man's face, sending a stream of wax across the palm of her hand and onto the floor. It was her father.

"Alice, who is it?" Mrs. Jesquith called from the kitchen.

"It's my Dad!" Alice replied with some consternation.

"It's John Henderarch!" her father belted over her. He removed his hat and leaned closer to her, the candlelight beaming off his bald dome. "Alice, honey, you don't know how good it is to see you."

"What is it John?" Mrs. Jesquith said when she arrived with Margaret, Mrs. Biggs and the other candle. "What could bring you all this way on a night like this? Nothing the matter I hope."

"No. Nothing's wrong. I just thought I'd like to have everyone home tonight, so I came to pick up my little girl. I tried to phone but it's been out for some time. I'm afraid, Alice," he said, turning to his daughter again, "that you're going to have to postpone your sleepover to another night."

"That's wise," Mrs. Biggs said. "See, Alice, now you are getting out."



Alice had expected this from the moment she saw her father. "But why? You can see for yourself that I'm fine here." She placed the butt of the candle on a windowsill. "It's too bad you came all this way but I want to stay here."

"I think your father has a very good idea, Alice," said Mrs. Jesquith. "Why don't you go and gather up your things?"

Moving through the house with the candle, Alice listened as Mrs. Jesquith accounted for the whereabouts of her husband and sons and Mrs. Biggs explained what she knew of the situation on the Humber River. Alice stumbled more than she walked through the darkened house, enraged but not surprised that her father would ruin her night.

"The rain will come again," her father was saying as Alice returned to the entranceway, school satchel and overnight bag in hand. "Anytime now. The calm out there now is just the eye of the hurricane, or what's left of it. Anyway, it looks as if they've got Bloor Street closed at either Jane Street or the South Kingsway. That must mean the bridge is closed."

"So the Humber really could flood," Margaret said, confounding Alice even further with the distress rising in her voice.

"It could," her father said. "I don't know. It depends on what kind of flood controls they have upriver. I'm not familiar with them. But you two will be safe here on this hill."

"So we've heard," said Mrs. Jesquith, who looked genuinely relieved. "You're the third person who's told us that tonight. The second was Alice."

"Is that right?" her father said, smiling for the first time. "Well, Alice, are you ready? We've got to get moving."

Outside the rain had let up. Alice hung on the open passenger door, transfixed by the eerie calm that had settled over the city. The air was thick, humid and even quite warm, and this at eleven o'clock in the evening of what had been a cool, mid-October day. Were it not for the water still rushing down Windermere, she would never have believed that a few minutes before the storm had blown so hard.

"Hurry now, please, Alice." Her father motioned to her from behind the steering wheel of the big Dodge. "I want to get as far as possible while we can. Look, you can see in those trees the wind picking up again. It's coming out of the north now."

Her father drove quickly up Windermere and made the corner on to Bloor Street without stopping. Behind them Alice could see police cars and other emergency vehicles blocking Bloor a few streets past Windermere, their

## HI THERE! SPORTS FAN!

Ideas are a pastime  
like *Hockey Night in Canada*  
if I listen carefully,  
I can hear my books cheering,  
Hi there, sports fan!

— SUSAN SWAN

red lights bouncing off darkened storefronts and following them as they proceeded east towards the Annex and home. There were some people out, furtive, hunched figures running in either direction along the street. When they were alongside High Park and descending the hill towards Parkside Drive the first heavy raindrops began to splash against the windshield.

Soon the rain came harder and in two more blocks it reduced their visibility to almost nothing. Alice stared straight ahead through the windshield and felt herself growing alarmed. How her father saw well enough to continue driving she did not know. Blurred shapes and objects appeared alongside them without warning, startling Alice but apparently having no effect on her father. She could feel the intensity of the concentration it required for him to proceed. Though growing frightened, she dared not speak. Conversation would have been impossible anyway, for the rain drumming off the car was unbelievably loud.

Beyond the intersection of Bloor and Dundas Street there loomed before them an even greater darkness. Alice had forgotten about the two railway underpasses they would have to negotiate before returning to ground level again. It was inconceivable that these two would not now be under even more water than the higher ground at the intersection. Her father would not be unaware of this either, yet showed no intention of stopping or even slowing.

They began their descent beneath the first set of railway tracks. "Alice, hang onto the door," her father shouted. "This could be dangerous." What shocked her most was not that he was going to proceed, but the suddenness with which the situation presented itself, allowing them no time to prepare. She could see the water beneath the bridge yet was unable to guess its depth. At the last moment her father finally braked and readjusted his

position behind the wheel.

Progress through the water was agonizingly slow. The water reached, she estimated, as high as the level of the door handle. It left Alice to wonder why the engine of the car did not give out.

If her father had similar concerns he did not display them. It was even darker beneath the underpass and Alice feared they would suddenly encounter the wall or one of the support pillars. For the briefest of moments the car seemed to float in the water, opening a great pit in the bottom of her stomach, and then the Dodge regained contact with solid ground. Her feet were getting wet and she looked down to see water rising in the floor of the car. Yet almost simultaneously they began their slow crawl out of the underpass and with that the two inches of water pooled beneath her slipped into the back seat and then out beneath the back doors.

Again on level ground, her father stopped the car and wrestled himself out of his heavy overcoat and flung it into the back seat. He then proceeded towards the second underpass, the outlines of which Alice could see forming ahead. Alice had never seen him look so determined before. She wanted him to speak, wanted him to tell her that they were going to make it home alright. Her father approached the second underpass as he did the first, braking at the last minute and never removing his eyes from the road. The water there was not as deep and although puddles again began to form beneath her feet their slow progress was not as harrowing as their first foray through the floodwaters.

Beyond the second underpass her father pulled to the side of the road and slumped against the steering wheel. Alice continued to stare straight ahead, following the outlines of nearby buildings that blurred away into grey. She wished herself anywhere else in the world, at home, even at Margaret's making sandwiches. The rain seemed to be letting up



although the high winds still whipped it about with staggering force. She kicked off her shoes and removed her wet socks.

"I'm sorry we had to do that, honey, but there was no way to say how long the rain would have come like that." Her father still had to shout, but she heard him and simply nodded. "Onward then," he said. "We're not home yet."

Within a few more blocks the rain let up even more and Alice could discern ahead of them lights of more emergency vehicles and flares flashing red and angry off the buildings lining Bloor Street. There was an accident at the intersection of Dovercourt Road and a lone human figure with a flare appeared and waved them towards the side of the road. Her father stopped the Dodge alongside the man. A wet, strained face appeared in the window, strangely lit in the pinkish-red of the flares.

"You're going to have to wait a few minutes until we get this cleared away," the man shouted above the roar of the wind and the incessant slapping of the windshield wipers.

"I'm not waiting for anything," her father shouted in a nonthreatening manner. "My daughter and I are going home. Can I detour south from here?"

"If you want. Stay to the right and please keep out of the way. It's pretty bad up there." The man retreated into the red glow.

At the intersection it was evident that the car travelling south had struck the one travelling west at considerable speed. Instead of bouncing off one another the two cars fused into one large L-shaped hunk of twisted metal. Shattered glass and pieces of metal glittered in the intersection and as the rain let up more people were emerging to view the scene. There was an ambulance backed up to the two wrecks and as her father turned right out of the intersection Alice could see the attendants lifting a stretcher into the back of their vehicle. The man on the stretcher had a large bandage on his chest and Alice could see that his face was red with blood that ran onto the mattress.

Again silent, her father proceeded south to the first cross street and made his way back up to Bloor. The rain had stopped and Alice felt herself growing cold in the car.

"If we were a few minutes earlier that could have been us," he father suddenly said. "It must have happened while the eye was passing over. They were fools to be driving so recklessly."

Alice thought of the people trapped in their cars and tried to imagine what they thought about as they saw the water rising beside them. Perhaps some of them even drowned there, trapped in the wrecks and waiting for help. "Dad, please let's not talk about that now, okay?" she said. She wished she had never seen the accident.

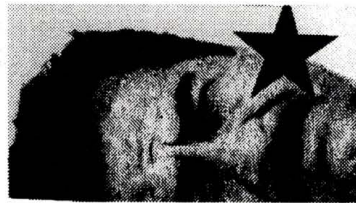
Her father glanced from the road. "Did I spook you, honey? I'm sorry if I did." He held out his right arm, under which she crawled.

Their reprieve from the wind and the driving rain proved short-lived. It came on again as they passed alongside Christie Pits, the wind now fully out of the north. Alice tucked her feet beneath her father's thigh for warmth and closed her eyes. There was wax dried to the palm of her hand which she began to pick at. Rain came over the car in sheets again, but Alice had decided she had seen enough. "Everyone's at home, right?"

"They are," her father answered. "They're waiting for us." And on he drove at the same slow, steady pace. She would phone Margaret when she got home, although she doubted she would be able to until the next day. She wanted to be home now, safe and warm in her own bed while the hurricane passed over the city. Alice felt the car turn left and sat up a few moments later and saw through the sheets of rain that they were on their own street.

*Andrew Daley resides just outside Little Italy.*

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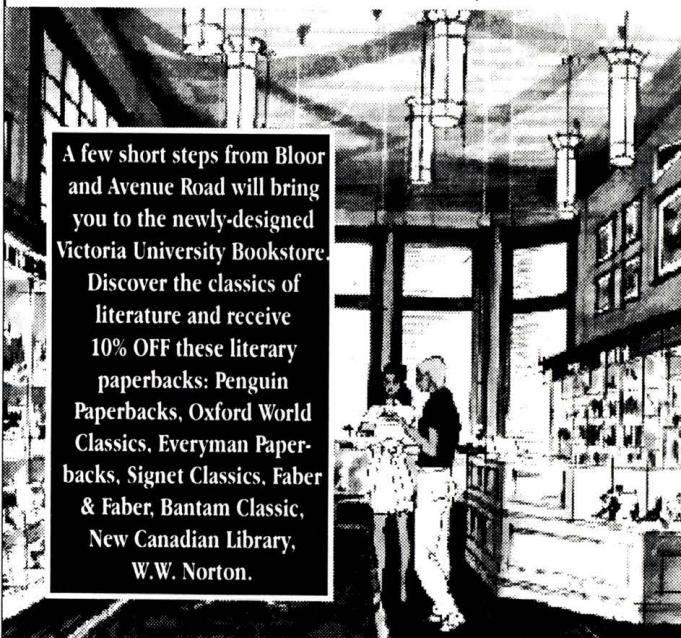
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## DRIVE IN DREAM

Tonight he dreams  
he is driving  
across a landscape impaled  
by satellite dishes.  
The land is a chia pet  
someone is painting with a secret  
so it sprouts  
UFO launch-pod-like  
satellite dishes.  
He stares  
out the bug-spattered  
tell a vision windscreen  
as he chugs to the future  
a place where  
with a clear reception  
you can watch anything:  
500 channels, 5,000 channels  
five million channels.  
He shifts gears with a  
telephone receiver,  
moves himself, his car,  
like a picture from a magazine,  
he moves his payload  
'cross the country  
changing channels  
using a converter box  
an old brown box  
with a single row of  
fifteen buttons  
framed as in life  
by a knob at each end—this rig  
on the dash of his car.  
He pushes buttons  
on the converter.  
He's on a superhighway now.  
A cul de sac in suburbia.  
A dusty track in the country,  
houses set far away from the road,  
each house guarded  
by a phalanx of satellites.  
He changes channels faster,  
steering his car  
with a measure of cliché  
white-knuckle desperation  
for that which he's searching,  
for that which he's left behind,  
missed, in a wide city  
boulevard now.  
Driving down a coast beside cliffs  
with the ocean below.  
He is back on the rain-blackened  
streets of his neighbourhood  
now. A commercial break  
on the windscreen.  
The gearshift begins to ring.

From its cradle  
between bucket seats  
he picks up.  
It's his ex on the phone.  
His ex from the seventies  
—no—from the eighties,  
his ex from the nineties  
his current ex lover  
yes her.  
She's calling out to him  
huffing into the phone.  
She cheats and hangs out  
with a clique.  
She shrieks and hangs up  
with a click.  
He stares  
into the receiver  
puts his foot on the gas.  
The sun is setting.  
Just another day in the future.

—CHRIS CHAMBERS

## PAPER WORKS

*Although described by author Margaret Atwood as "the most remarkable of her generation of woman poets," Gwendolyn MacEwen (1941-1987) remains relatively unknown outside of Canada. In an effort to expose her work abroad, Italian publisher Alfio Longo has recently released, The Last Hieroglyph: Selected Poems by Gwendolyn MacEwen, a bilingual collection of fifty-five of MacEwen's works covering her thirty-year career. The book also contains appreciations by Atwood, William Weaver, David Donnell, Rosemary Sullivan, Mario Luzi and Barry Callaghan.*

*The Last Hieroglyph is illustrated by Sandro Chia, one of Italy's leading visual artists, who only recently discovered the poet. So moved was Chia by MacEwen's work that he created a series of powerful works on paper inspired by her poems, including the one at right. These drawings are currently on display until Jan. 31, 1998 at the Italian Cultural Institute of Toronto, 469 Huron St.*

*A one-time Annex resident, MacEwen's memory was honoured this summer when the City of Toronto named a small patch of land in Walmer Road Circle, Gwendolyn MacEwen Park.*







# PROPERTY LINES

FICTION BY JOHN DEGEN

Tara leans her rolled sleeping bag against the rest of her gear—a small cooler with a weekend's supply of food, a four-litre jug of drinking water, a knapsack full of clothes and magazines, a Walkman she has borrowed from her sister. The public dock pushes out into the water in a T-shape, with the base anchored in the lake bottom and the crossing line a floating, detachable raft. Several small fishing boats are pulled up onto the sandy launch, and a white canoe is tied to a metal ring at the T's end. She wanders the dock, looking without interest at the speckled glare of the water. When she steps near the edge of the raft, the lake rises through the cracks and soaks her sneakered feet.

She grabs a Diet Coke from the cooler, and retreats from the dock to a shaded boulder to sit and wait. Despite the time of year, the sun is unbearably hot. Tara scratches her watchless wrist. Clicking footsteps ring on the dockwood. She opens her eyes. A tall, slim, balding man is struggling to lower two heavy cardboard boxes to the dock. He squats awkwardly, grunting, his chin pressing hard on the lid of the top box. He is wearing a dark brown suit and scuffed brown dress shoes.

He stands back up, straightens his jacket and turns to look at Tara, casually slipping his hands into his pant pockets. The man smiles, showing his top teeth, and smoothes back his thinning hair with a quick hand. He smiles a moment longer, turns suddenly and strides, clicking, onto the raft. Tara closes her eyes again to avoid witnessing his soaker.

At the sound of an approaching outboard motor, Tara allows herself to wake up and makes her way back to the pile of gear. The brown-suited man is nowhere to be seen. There are no boats in sight. The sound of the motor comes from a sheer line of cliffs butting against the water directly across the lake from the dock. It's a small lake with many islands and coves, like she's heard about from other people's summers.

A fibreglass power boat, painted turquoise-green, rounds a point to Tara's right. The sun flashes off the plastic windscreen. The boat looks old and slow compared to those at the landing. Its pilot is a blur of blue and grey.

"Glorious, isn't it?"

Tara turns to see the brown suit mounting the dock, a brown leather carry-on bag hanging from each shoulder by long leather straps. He looks like an old horse with saddlebags.

"The weather, I mean. Who would have thought we'd get a weekend like this in October. I might even jump in the lake if it stays this warm."

Tara nods, smiles, means to say something but can think of nothing. The old, green boat slows suddenly, drops its nose in the water and coasts up to the dock. Behind the wheel is a woman dressed in a dark blue jogging suit and floppy white hat. Her hair hangs past her shoulders, stringy and pewter grey. She cuts the engine and jumps from the boat before it stops moving. Tara and the balding man watch, unsure and expectant, as she ties up behind the canoe. She fits the description Tara has been given: shortish, dumpy, with a bit of a craziness in her eyes.

"You're Joan?"

"That's what I am. I'm Joan. And that makes you a friend of the Wilsons."

Joan holds out her hand to Tara; it's not a hand held out for shaking. Tara passes her knapsack to Joan and brings the water and the cooler to the boat herself. The brown-suited man clicks to the end of the dock and hands Tara her Walkman.

"Susan never mentioned there'd be two of you, or I would have brought the bigger boat. This is just my little runabout."

Tara and the balding man look at each other. The man smiles meekly.

"It's just me, I'm afraid."

Tara sends a meek smile back toward the brown suit. He reaches out his hand to help her over the side of the boat.

"I'm Gordon."

"Tara."

A long wood-strip power boat starts noisily toward them from a far island. At its bow is a young border collie barking into the wind. Joan nods her head and shouts over the noise at Gordon.

"So you're with the Rheinholts then?"

"Yes. Just for the weekend."

Cold spray jumps up over the side onto Tara's arm. They are passing by the

rocky bluffs she had seen from the dock, heading around the far side of an island. She turns her head back and sees the wooden boat beside the dock, the pup running back and forth across the parking lot. She sees Gordon heave an oddly shaped black case over the side of the boat onto the seats. The case catches the sun and flashes out a slick shine.

They pass between the island and the cliffs. The doors of an empty boathouse yawn wide toward them, the water inside black and still. There is an old cottage on the island, made of stone with wooden shutters nailed over the window frames. There is a child's doll on the floating dock by the boathouse; a plastic baby, naked, its hair hanging in the lake, its arms reaching up.

Beyond the island the lake narrows, two shores reaching in toward each other. They round the bend to their left and Joan slows the boat, hugging the shore. She points to a small green cabin on a wooded lot across the water.

"That's me over there. I'm pretty much always around if you need anything. You'll have to walk around the end of the lake though. It's a good hike, but you look up to it. Otherwise, I'll be around to pick you up Sunday afternoon some time. What did you say your name was?"

"It's Tara."

"Well, it's not a normal one, but it's lovely."

"Thank you. It's Irish. I think it means lake in the glen by the dale or something colourful like that."

"Uh huh. Well, there's not much you can say about Joan. About as plain a name as there is. There anything you'll be needing right off? You know there's no hydro? You'll have to use the wood stove for heat. Don't let this sunshine fool you, it gets nippy at night."

"They warned me."

"What do you plan on eating?"

"Oh, I've got plenty of stuff in the cooler. Fruit, veggies, granola for breakfast."

"Uh huh. A neighbour of mine just brought over a great big thing of bacon. Thick cut. You like bacon?"

"I don't eat meat, actually."

"Uh huh. Well, this is the place. I'd help



# DIGGING THE STUMP

With great commotion in the garden  
the stump finally came out.  
"That's got it," I said.  
My son cheered.  
And I rolled it  
up the side of the hole,  
and left it out of place  
like something odd  
fallen from the sky.

It fought me all the way.  
I did half one Saturday.  
I left it, and two weeks later  
found it undefeated,  
half its livelihood in ruins,  
grinning with new leaves.

There was more to it than I had dreamed,  
stretched through secret streams,  
grasped around underground walls,  
clutched into the earth  
like the fingers of somebody buried alive.

I hacked away at all of them.  
Splintering their knuckled strength,  
spraying up chips of imprecision  
while my son stood  
where I said he would be safe.  
He watched me chop, and dig the dirt way,  
and heave up the axe to where it paused  
above what I had cleared.  
It was like a snapshot.  
Like, years from now, a grown man saying,  
"I remember Dad digging a stump.  
Funny to think of him so young."  
Then the blade came down as hard and fast  
as I could pull it from the sky,  
and left a gash in the moist white meat  
of root thicker than my arm.

— DAVID MACFARLANE

you up with the stuff, but I've got to get back and feed the mutts. Hear them kicking up a fuss over there? Mastiffs. Hell-hounds—I breed them."

The boat slows and bumps up beside a dock jutting out from a mass of steep-sloping rock. A thick, bright yellow rope snakes up the side of the bluff and disappears over the top. Carrying out across the lake are the deep-throated cries of Joan's

hungry dogs. They bark from their stomachs, urgent and low. The sound bounces around the rocky shoreline.

"They recognize the sound of my boat. Nothing smarter than a hungry dog."

Rugged is the word they used to describe this place to her. Tara waves at Joan's receding back, thinks about shouting thank you but doesn't. She takes note of her shrunken horizon. The sun is already filtering through

the trees on the far bluff. She ties her supplies with a rope net she has brought with her, and drags it up the rock face after she has made her own climb.

There is one room, a loft above the back half, and a wooden deck that reaches to the edge of the cliff. The door is latched but unlocked, the windows shuttered. On the table in the centre of the room is a note under the salt shaker. Welcome. Please make yourself at home. If you use the stove, please bring in more wood for the next visitors. There is nothing of any real value here. No guns or liquor. Please latch the door on your way out. Thanks—the owners.

There is a small couch, a comfortable chair, a counter with cupboards and wash basin, a double bed in the loft covered with an old crazy quilt. There is a bookcase filled with musty paperbacks: Agatha Christie, Stephen King, John le Carré. There are old adjustable oil lamps with freshly trimmed wicks. Nothing of any real value.

Tara sits at the table, flipping through an old copy of *Chatelaine*. She pauses over a recipe for chocolate marshmallow brownies. She answers the first three questions in the quiz, How well do you handle yourself?, but gives up at "Do you have any habits that you must perform before you start your day, i.e. have a cup of coffee, cigarette, etc."

She wanders out onto the deck. The air is now uncomfortably cold, the sky a deep blue speckled with stars. She hugs her arms around her chest and leans over the railing. A crescent moon floats on the surface of the water. There are lights on in cottages all around the lake. She sees the bright yellow and white of electric lamps, the flickering blue of televisions. A car starts somewhere across the water, and Joan's dogs yelp tentatively.

On the mattress when she pulls back the quilt there are three tiny brown pods that look like wild rice. Tara picks one up and examines it in the light of an oil lamp. When she squeezes it, it bursts open, covering her fingertips with a grey, puss-like fluid. Eggs, pupae of some unknown creature, insect, that lives in the walls, floor, mattress.

She wipes her fingers with toilet paper, sweeps the remaining two pods into her hand and tosses them into the wood stove.

"Me or them."

She replaces the quilt and sleeps on top of it, bunched in her sleeping bag, a balled-up sweater for a pillow. If there are noises in



the night, she does not hear them. She becomes aware of an ash-coloured light on the walls of the cabin and is relieved. She doesn't feel like sleeping in.

She lies still on the mattress listening to the morning birds, hardly thinking. Quickly the loft becomes too warm; she descends the ladder and opens the door to the deck. The sun is a crushed violet sphere an inch above the far trees. Below, a purple-grey mist hides the lake.

"Tourist brochure beautiful."

Somewhere across the water a spring stretches, creaks back, a screen door bangs shut. She lights a fire in the stove and fills the kettle from her water jug for coffee. She waits in a chair on the deck, red, one-piece long underwear for warmth, knees hugged to her chest.

A third cup of coffee. Tara walks the property in a long bathrobe and sneakers. Young, bluish pine, half-bald scrub oak, dry, green moss and scaly, black lichen. There is a constant feeling of altitude. She is always equal to the horizon, most of the landscape below her. The rock is insistent, unyielding; a thrust into the sky.

She steps out of her shoes, drapes the robe on a gentle rock slope and stretches out in the sun. The lake sounds are distant—whining engine, faint shout. The rock face is cool through the robe, the sky cloudless. She thinks about sun-block and skin cancer, wonders if the lateness of the year will protect her. She chooses not to think about it.

Tara knows he is there, but can't be sure if he has seen her. She can't hear anything over the music in her earphones but she has seen a metallic flash and movement in the trees. They told her she would be left alone.

He doesn't fully emerge until she has replaced her robe. He is wearing green work pants and a red-plaid shirt. He appears to be in his late fifties or early sixties. He is smoking a cigarette, and flicks the dead ash into the palm of his hand before dropping it to the ground.

"Wouldn't want to accidentally hit that dry stuff with a heater."

Tara peers through the brush, trying to locate her cabin.

"Hi. Jack Sherman. You a Wilson, then?"

"A friend. The Wilsons aren't here this weekend."

"Oh, a friend. Tell me, you know anything

about the paint all over my trees? Someone's put a bright pink stripe on a couple of my nice pines, looks like a survey mark or something. I figured maybe the new owner, this what's his name, Wilson, must have been trying to figure out the property line, you know."

"Sounds reasonable."

"Yeah, only he's got it all wrong. There's a stake just over there in the bush and he's sprayed trees a good forty feet into my land from there. I mean a little paint don't bother me just so long as he doesn't get it into his head that they're his trees and starts knocking them down for firewood, you know."

Tara nods her head and looks concerned, tries to seem more than half-clothed.

"You can't be up here alone, a pretty young woman like yourself."

Tara smiles vaguely; not an answer either way.

"We've been up here full-time for twenty years, my wife and I. We go to Florida for a couple of months once the snow flies, but otherwise it's here. She isn't too well these days, my wife. Doesn't have her wind any more, some kind of lung condition—emphysema or something. Doesn't leave the house much any more."

Jack licks his thumb and folds the tip over the glowing point of his cigarette, squeezing it out. He puts the dead butt in his breast pocket. Tara reaches down to pick up her coffee mug, holding closed the top of her robe with one hand.

"But, I've bugged you enough. I'll get out of your way. Maybe you might want to mention the paint to your friend when you see him. No, don't you go, I'll get out of your way. You enjoy your weekend, you've got the weather for it anyways."

He waves a finger at her, sweeping it up and down her robe.

"And, uh, don't worry about that, you know. Feel free, I mean. I only came over on account of the paint, and I won't bug you again. Feel free. Beauty like that should be uncovered, I always say. Enjoy."

Tara smiles again. She remembers her grandmother. Take the compliments where you can get them. They'll stop coming soon enough.

Tara takes the wrong path. The cabin is off to her left when she reaches the clearing. She is near a lean-to that shelters the woodpile. Two chipmunks chase each other in circles around the split logs, wildly rustling the fallen leaves. There is no smoke from the stove-pipe. She loads small logs into the crook of her arm.

It is cooler inside the cabin than out. On the counter there is a wire basket of fresh eggs and a package wrapped in brown paper. On the table there is a green, two-litre wine bottle with the label removed. In the package is several pounds of bacon, thick cut. In the bottle is hard apple cider. Tara goes onto the deck and looks out over the lake. On Joan's property, three huge, slate-coloured animals are running and playing, solid as bears. The turquoise boat rocks on the black water beside the dock.

"Uh huh."

Tara eats two bacon and egg sandwiches for her lunch. She fries the bacon first and uses the hot fat for the eggs. She drinks three glasses of cider. When she has finished eating, her skin feels oily. She rubs her hands on her face and down her neck to her bare shoulders. She sits at the table for long while, sleepily breathing the bacon, rubbing it into her skin.

She awakens curled up on the couch, sneakers still covering her bare feet. Her head is dull and there is the taste of stale apple in her mouth. The cabin is darker but she can see blue sky through the screen door. It has grown cold again. An autumn breeze blows through. She sits up and wishes she had a cigarette. She gets up from the couch and lights two oil lamps. The light makes the room seem warmer. She clears the table, puts the used dishes in the basin, and tries to remember the date.

The memory of a dream ghosts through her. Golden light, music, echo, the banging of screen doors. She stretches up, takes her Walkman from the floor of the loft and goes out onto the deck, letting the screen door slam. She sits on the wooden rocking chair, blinking awake in the cool wind, and tries to find a station with no music. She wants people talking—news. The sun has sunk behind the trees to the west. The light around her is green-filtered.

The later it gets, the farther she can hear. American stations bleed over the border. Sports talk show from Chicago, baseball from St. Louis, open-line from New York, medical question and answer from Detroit. Blood in my stool, a lump in my armpit, bleeding gums, sore joints, swelling, my daughter won't eat, my husband snores.

"Complain, complain, complain."

It is dark and much colder. Swift clouds flow over the moon. Tara pulls the tiny speakers from her ears and shuffles back inside. There is a scratching at the back door. She



moves a lamp to the small table beside the door and lifts the latch. A racoon scurries back just beyond the frame of lamplight. The meat is still unwrapped on the counter.

Tara grabs a corn broom and bangs the handle on the cabin floor. The racoon shifts in the darkness, blinks. She reaches out with the handle and pokes the racoon in the side. It hisses and lunges. Tara drops the broom and slams the door.

"Make yourself at home."

The morning is wet. Tara wakes to cold water dripping on the back of her hand. It is early, sullen. She wipes her wet hand across her eyes and thinks about swimming. She wonders about the depth of the lake and the temperature of the water.

"Would they ever find me?"

She gets up from the bed, starts the fire under the kettle and stares out the screen door. She can see her breath. The rain has stopped, but water from the leaves above taps the deck. There is a metal pail at a corner of the railing, overflowing with rainwater. Tara peels off her long underwear and pushes open the door. The deck wood is slick, water clinging to it in sheets. She stands naked in the cold air and pours out the bucket over her head.

Her lungs empty and for a moment everything around her is hard and real. Her eyes will not close. She rubs her body fast—her face, her feet. She finds her voice and cries out in sharp, high clouds. She stares down at her belly and below at the drops clinging to the dark blond hairs.

Standing next to the open stove door, she dries herself with a towel. Her skin feels sore, scraped. She pulls on a pair of sweat pants and a thick cotton sweatshirt. She puts on thick socks and her sneakers. When she sits down at the table with a coffee, she is conscious of the fabric of the clothing running across her skin. Her body is hyper-aware, feeling everything at the same time. She tries to concentrate on what might be missing.

The sky clears and the air becomes warmer. Frosty mist rises from the clearing around the cabin and filters through the bush. Tara finds the corn broom by the wood-pile, and leans it against the porch railing. She walks slowly along the path, picking her way around puddles. Through the trees she spots a bright pink stripe, a scar on the trunk of a stunted oak, and farther on, another.

She reaches the edge of the bluff as it cuts through the woods; massive green stone falling out from beneath itself as though it has been undermined. Below, a lush, dark ravine runs down to the lake. The old stream bed is grown over with fern and tangle; a cinematic jungle scene minus the monkeys and elephants. She sits on an edge of rock, dangling her legs. Water seeps through her sweat pants, but she doesn't move. Music has begun somewhere.

Echoing out from across the lake are deep clear tones of a musical piece she does not recognize. The notes are recklessly thrown out, lacking certainty. A solitary musician not far away, on an instrument Tara has a shadowy memory of from high school music class. French horn. Deep, awkward—an instrument of accompaniment.

"Mr. Gordon Brownsuit and his shiny black case."

Deep and awkward, with no particular audience in mind. She begins to laugh.

*John Degen is a Christie-Ossington resident. He is the editor of Ink, a national literary quarterly. His writing has been published in Blood & Aphorisms, Pottersfield Portfolio, Canadian Author, Ash and ARC.*

( something to ponder over your next cup of coffee )

# If some letters are silent why are they there in the first place?

WHAT IF WE ONLY USED THE LETTERS WE NEEDED?

If English looked like it sounded? That would be nice.

On the othr hand, wat wood our languaj look lyk?

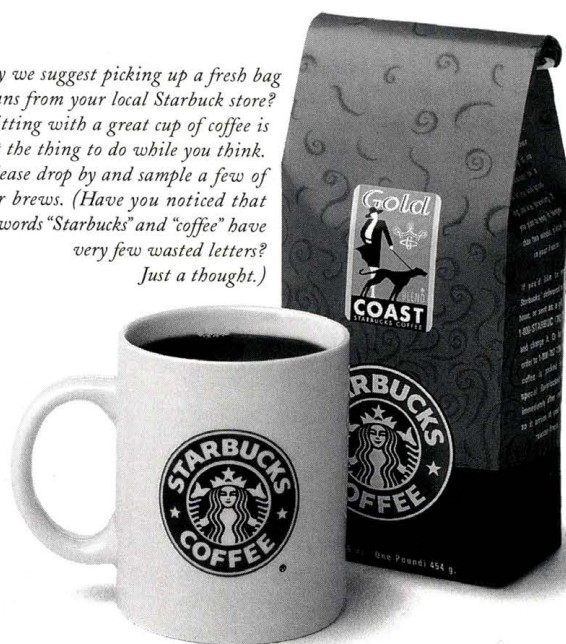
What would life be like if we whittled everything down to mere essentials? Wouldn't that be a life devoid of texture, surprise or whimsy? Hmm, maybe a few silent letters aren't all that troublesome after all.

May we suggest picking up a fresh bag of beans from your local Starbuck store?

Sitting with a great cup of coffee is just the thing to do while you think.

Please drop by and sample a few of our brews. (Have you noticed that the words "Starbucks" and "coffee" have very few wasted letters?)

Just a thought.)



(Think about it.)



# LYNN'S CASE

Local author Lynn Crosbie discusses her controversial new book, *Paul's Case*, a fictional look at the lives of Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka.

## INTERVIEW BY KERRI HUFFMAN

Since its September release, *Paul's Case*, the latest offering from Little Italy resident Lynn Crosbie, has stirred up a controversy to rival the very trial it depicts.

The fictitious work about the lives of convicted murderer and rapist Paul Bernardo and his wife/accomplice Karla Homolka has riled more than a few readers, and riled them in an unusual way. *Toronto Star* columnist Rosie DiManno has threatened to assault Crosbie; CFRB blowhard Michael Coren has suggested that the book not only be banned, but that Crosbie join Bernardo in prison; *Toronto Sun* columnist Christie Blatchford has threatened to sue Crosbie's publisher, Insomniac, for defamation of character; and letters of displeasure have circulated in numerous publications, voicing an outrage that the book was even published.

Luckily, Crosbie takes the criticism with a grain of salt.

"I really believe—and I think she should of me—that she is entitled to her opinion," Crosbie explains when asked about the DiManno column. "Her opinion is unfortunately very ill-informed. There is an oblique suggestion that my work originates in an envy of the prose of either Karla Homolka or Christie Blatchford. And that's probably the meanest thing anyone could ever say to anyone—to be jealous of Christie Blatchford's prose style."

While this type of controversy may be something new to Crosbie, notoriety is not. As the author of three volumes of poetry (*Miss Pamela's Mercy*, *Villian Elle* and *Pearl*) and editor of a collection of women's erotic writing (*The Girl Wants To*), Crosbie was once proclaimed "the worst poet in Canada" by one Montreal critic, and caused a few raised eyebrows when she posed for some "erotic" photographs for *This Magazine*.

But with *Paul's Case*, Crosbie was well aware of how serious a topic she was dealing with. Some who are critical of the book have felt the work mocks the tragedy that occurred at the hands of Bernardo and Homolka, or that Crosbie is perhaps defending those actions. Instead, Crosbie says she feels she is exploring all aspects of the case, part of

which means putting forth a variety of perspectives. As the author points out, there really is no genuine truth that came out of the Bernardo trial.

At the same time, the public outcry, based on common misconceptions about fact and fiction—or in this case about fact (newspaper coverage, true crime books) vs. fiction (*Paul's Case*)—is fascinating. These misconceptions all lead to one big question—is there a "truth" anywhere in this trial?

Crosbie is quick to answer this question: "There is no genuine recording of fact. The version from Paul Bernardo will differ substantively than the version Karla Homolka has offered to us. So who is the truth teller? There is no one. Which led me to fiction. The only compelling truth claims could be offered by the girls who are dead, and they can't offer them."

Since the Bernardo trial, there have been three true crime books published detailing the case: Nick Pron's *Lethal Marriage*, Scott Burnside and Alan Cairns' *Deadly Innocence* and Stephen Williams' *Invisible Darkness*, all of which do no more than restate the details of the couple's crimes together, reading very much like works of fiction. Their sources are often questionable, if not nonexistent. These true crime books graphically depict the murders of Leslie Mahaffy and Kristin French and do so in such a descriptive way that one would assume the authors have viewed the infamous videotapes, although they apparently did not. Crosbie points out that if the true crime writers are embellishing in their books simply to fill in the blanks, then they too are fictionalizing their accounts. In this case, it seems unfair that Crosbie should bear the brunt of the criticism for her work.

"If someone had lobbied all along to get rid of all of these books and then levelled a critique at me I could take that better," she says. "I would challenge anyone to sit through a reading of the Nick Pron book and sit through a reading of mine and actually say what sickened them more. If they chose to respect the 'truth' as they see it, I know I have to accept that. But

I also have to challenge that, because I am sick to death of their truths about this case, and I want to challenge it, and I want to oppose it, and I want to create different areas of discourse."

*Paul's Case* is indeed a difficult book. It is difficult because of the subject matter. It is difficult because of the creative spins Crosbie puts on the entire "case," ranging from the assassination of Homolka to the rape of Bernardo. It is also difficult because of the structure of the book, the complex literary allusions and the fluctuating style and perspective.

Crosbie categorizes this style as criti-fiction, or critical fiction. *Paul's Case* began as part of a book of essays. However, the more she worked on the essay, and the more she considered the case, the more Crosbie eventually came to realize she needed something broader to accommodate the criticisms she had.

*Paul's Case* is certainly nothing if not critical—critical of pretty much everything generated from the case, if even in an ephemeral way. In many ways, Crosbie is making her case against the accepted "truths" of the trial. *Paul's Case* takes a run at Homolka's manslaughter plea and her behavior on the stand, Bernardo's legal council, the virtual invisibility of the Scarborough Rapist case, and the media representation of the crimes.

There have been suggestions by other critics that Crosbie's book somehow details Bernardo's case against Homolka, a suggestion she denies. In fact, Crosbie says the book was set up with the assumption that the narrator was speaking to a silent Bernardo, a Bernardo who could be verbally tortured by the narrator and perhaps driven mad by the process.

Crosbie (who attended Bernardo's trial and read the true crime books, along with the magazine and newspaper articles) spent the year it took to write the book with a picture of Bernardo hanging over her desk, the thought of which is more than a little haunting. Crosbie says she felt she owed it to herself, and the people involved in the case, to be able to confront Bernardo, and remind herself of the







seriousness of the issues she was tackling.

"I felt that if I lacked the strength to go and behold them, and behold this spectacle that the trial had become, that I had no credibility," she says. "It's this idea that if I'm going to confront this I'm going to do this all the way. So I am going to look at Bernardo and I'm going to look at his cruel, twisted face, and I am going to be reminded every day of who he is so that there is no possibility that I can be glib about this, that I can't forget who I am dealing with or what I am doing."

One of the most disturbing passages in Crosbie's book is "The Avenger," in which the character of Emma Peel, from the 1960s British TV series *The Avengers*, is sent on assignment to kill the about-to-be-paroled Homolka. The scene begins whimsically enough by contrasting the haute couture style of Peel (she assaults people using Donna Karan hose) with Homolka's middle-class notion of fashion (Beaver Canoe sweats, Revlon make-up). But what begins with a snicker, ends in a sneer as Peel ruthlessly assassinates Homolka.

Crosbie points out that the reference to Peel is more than just camp slight of hand. The avenger is a pivotal role in the seventeenth-century Senecan revenge tragedies upon which much of *Paul's Case* is based. At the same time, the manner in which Peel kills Homolka is derived from Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho*, a book that was found on Homolka's nightstand.

"One of the things I am trying to do in this book is to take the Bernardos' language and take their tropes, take their desires, and turn them against them. So if *American Psycho* is a book that Homolka enjoys then apply it to her in this particular instance. There is a host of literary critical elements to the most disgusting passage to that chapter. Don't get me wrong, it's very hard to read, it was very hard to write," Crosbie willingly admits. "There are chapters in my own book that I find very difficult to read, but certainly less difficult than read-

ing the reality of what these people have done. I could be a thousand times more grotesque and not even approach what they were capable of."

Crosbie does, in fact, take a very hard line on Homolka and on the issue of her involvement with the crimes. A big part of what bothered her about Homolka's "battered wife" defense was that she saw Homolka as taking a feminist defense and monopolizing it for her own benefit.

In addition to the prose sections, Crosbie

a woman I saw defending herself in a court of law and she was smarter than the lawyer and [John] Rosen is no penny-ante lawyer. That scared the shit out of me, because I am frightened by intelligence, especially by people who are potentially psychopaths. She is brilliant and that makes her even more a figure of fear in my mind."

Part of what led Crosbie to write *Paul's Case* stemmed from her criticism of the media coverage. In some instances the actions of

Leslie Mahaffy and her mother were harshly criticized. There were suggestions that Mahaffy shouldn't have been out drinking that night, and that her mother shouldn't have locked her out of the house. These suggestions miss the fact that Bernardo shouldn't have been out raping young girls.

"That Leslie was a little bit stupid to talk to Bernardo, or that Debbie, her mother, is in any way culpable for her daughter's death—these are obscene suggestions," she emphasizes. "So when I'm accused of being a cruelty mongerer, I'll accept that. And I'll accept that because I know that any mention of these girls will hurt their parents and that is unavoidable. That is something I will live with and I live with that with sadness. But I felt that at the very least I was writing against things that were critical of the conduct of Leslie and her parents."

Crosbie is also critical of the amnesia that developed in relation to the Scarborough Rapist case; the brutal sexual assaults on nineteen women became a non-issue during the trial. Bernardo made a deal on those pleas and the trauma of the

Scarborough rape case was swept completely under the carpet. In reality, the attacks became an addendum to the murder trial. As Crosbie points out, had Bernardo not been convicted of these sex slayings, the Scarborough Rapist trial would have been one of the most major trials in Toronto history. And her critique of the handling of the Scarborough case comes in the form of a found image—rows and rows of anonymous Barbie dolls.



has peppered *Paul's Case* with found images that reflect harsh criticism against Homolka, ranging from an image of a beauty queen wearing a sash reading "Kingston's Karly Curls" to the bizarrely witty cartoon montage "How to be a successful witness."

"She will be free and I can't live with that," says Crosbie. "That is the rage that I can't contain. I think her morality is just not there; that her intelligence, unfortunately is. This is



"I had found the picture of the Barbies with the tags around their necks a long time ago and I knew it would be useful at some point," she explains. "The women who were raped were reduce to these nineteen Jane Does. So this image of these very faceless women with tags around their necks was very powerful to me. I don't think that to Bernardo these women were anything more than ciphers. That's why it's called 'Bernardo Remembers the Scarborough Rapes.' I'm sure that's how he remembers them."

Crosbie is also critical of the way in which any exploration of female sexuality was eradicated from the trial. Bernardo and his sexual proclivities were a huge issue of the trial, and he was discounted as a pervert. Karla Homolka's sexuality was never called into question, something that bothers Crosbie immensely. She is also weary of designating the murder victims to the realm of sainthood, and in doing so defends Nick Pron's book, which was chastised because he made the speculation that in all likelihood one of the victims experienced pleasure during oral sex.

"Would it make these girls bad girls if they experienced pleasure sexually from forced friction?" Crosbie asks. "In the desperate desire to make martyrs of these girls, and they are, we don't have to completely eradicate their being to do so. I'm not interested in girls or women who are nothing but spectres of holiness. That's not what these girls were. They were complex, intelligent, brave, interesting young women; they were not saints."

It seems to be this complex approach to writing that is getting Crosbie into so much trouble. In a rambling *Star* column, Rosie DiManno proclaimed, "... if this is current feminism, give me a dead white guy anytime." Ironically Crosbie's other new book, *Click*, was released shortly after *Paul's Case*. *Click* deals specifically with feminist

issues and is a collection of essays by women recounting their journeys to feminism. It is a book that Crosbie worked on for three years, and one that she remains passionate about.

"I thought *Click* could be potentially tedious to work on because when you talk to anyone about when they became a feminist they inevitably invoke reading something like the *Female Eunuch*, as I would," she laughs. "I thought, what if we could dig a little bit deeper and what if by virtue of approaching a really diverse group of women we're demanding different responses to this



question. I was astonished all the time by the bravery of these women, because these are women I knew casually who were telling me things they would probably never tell me as a friend."

*Click* contains essays written by the likes of writer Trish Thomas, cartoonist Roberta Gregory and performer Sook Yin-Lee. What is amazing about their essays is how personal, yet infinitely political, they all are. At a time when proclaiming yourself not to be a feminist is far more trendy than being one, these essays are remarkably brave in their openness.

If *Click* turns out to be the bookend to *Paul's Case* it is pure coincidence, although Crosbie would be the first to point out that both books, although a contrast to one another, represent who she is and her beliefs.

"It just turned out to be a bizarre coincidence that these books are out at the same time," she notes. "If I had to contrast *Click* with *Paul's Case* it would be labour of love and labour of hate. That's the only way I could perfectly contrast the two. One is a way of exhausting my hate and outrage and another is a way of cleaving to what I passionately need to believe in—that there is goodness, solidarity and redemption."

But whether Crosbie likes it or not, much of the focus is now on *Paul's Case*, and that means she has to steel herself to attacks like the ones coming from the Rosie DiMannos and the Michael Corens of the world.

"Why is this book so offensive?" she asks. "I think it is because it goes into the realm of the fictional and because what purports to be fact is always protected. I think people genuinely believe that fact is something like a tree, it just grows in the woods; it's real and unquestioned and fiction is the deformed tree that you ruin the environment with."

But Crosbie maintains a strong belief in her exploration of the Homolka/Bernardo case, and she sees her work as being very different from the true crime books that are often

nothing more than obscene retellings of an obscenity.

"When you proceed from this trial and keep restating what has happened to those girls, then you are always under Bernardo and Homolka's direction," she explains. "What I tried to do was to take it out of their hands. I wanted to move things aside and create a different space and a different way of thinking about their victims—as people for once, not as the sex slaves of Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka. I certainly think the lives they led, short as they were, merit a lot better than that."



**glean** /gli:n/ v.t.r. **1.** v.t. Collect or scrape together (news, facts, gossip, etc.) in small quantities. **2.** Gather (ears of corn) after the harvest.

*—Concise Oxford Dictionary*



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# ONE STRANGE COUNTRY

FICTION BY HAL NIEDZVIECKI

On the way through they stopped at the gigantic falls. There was a darkness at the bottom of the falls, the meeting of all that coursing white and blue. He thought about God. Belief is made of strange places, quiet and loud, the rivers running fields down mountains, he knew all about belief. The mist caught in his beard. There are many ways to believe, he thought. The water disappeared in front of him.

He turned to tell her but she was not beside him. He looked around for a stick or a stone to throw in the falls, but it was all pavement and railings. They had argued at breakfast. She had become impatient and said that they were being mistreated, that the prices were too high, that the food would be greasy and bland, that they should not have stopped.

Enough, he had yelled, you are the woman who worries about the dress she will wear in her grave. She waved her arms about to attract

the attention of the serving staff. They ignored her. Her manner was unbearable. He turned away. He pressed his eyes shut with the palms of his hands.

You, she said loudly, you will not say anything?

They were her people. All around, shifting and staring in their tight denim trousers. He did not understand them. He closed his eyes. He opened his eyes. Underneath his beard was his skin. She was crying. He touched the ruffle of her cheek.

You, she said, pulling away from him.

After, they drove in silence. They stopped at the great falls. The noise of the water falling, the silence. His back hurt from the cheap seat of the car they had rented. Everything here is cheap, he thought. Where is she?

He saw her, the bob of her hair, a muted red spot in the thick mist air. He watched the blur of her face. She was always crying. He went to

her and told her that he was a shit, an asshole. She smiled. He put his arms around her and tickled her under her ribs. The thud of falling water, the smear of cosmetics.

Come, he said. Let's leave this.

Later, her lips were folded together. He would remember the falls. And when they were back in his country . . . He looked up at her hopefully. Her lips pressed. He did not like the land. The corn in planted, dying rows. Her hands were twisting a pretty scarf. He cleared his throat. He pressed down on the accelerator.

They drive slow, he said. In this place.

His back was sore.

They stopped along the road. He lay down gingerly in the dirt that separated the road from the fields of dying corn. A blur of brown and green edges rushed by him. Gently, she moved up and down his spine. Her balance was impeccable. There came from him cracks and

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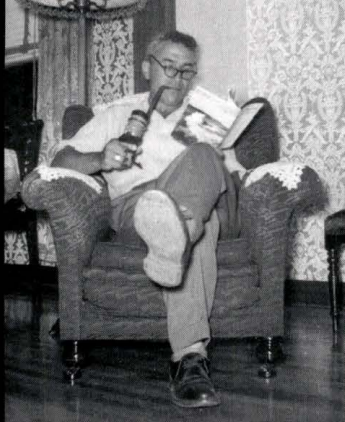
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groans and a long silence. She moved over him, one foot touching the other. A flock of black birds scattered. The corn creaked and rustled. She jumped up, suddenly, bringing her heels into him. His back split perfectly. Pain flashed across his body. She was in the dirt, her skirt pulled up. He took in air through his nostrils.

In the car he stretched out across the rear seat. It was cramped. He slumped down, pressing his spine against the upholstery. When he closed his eyes, the crops rushed by him. Everything was divided. He opened his eyes. His toes stuck out from his feet. He moved them. They swayed together, and he smiled. His shoes were off. The car was really too small—not just for him, but for the country.

Is there any air blowing? he yelled. Are there vents you can open? He couldn't see her, but he felt a rush of breeze on his toes through his thin black socks. Relieved, he closed his eyes into the hurried dream he had of corn rows pulsing and rippling, conduits of frothing water, reluctant strangers.

They were late. No time to tell her about his dream. He opened his mouth to speak. She looked up through her mask of make-up. He was quiet then. They were late. He tied his black shoes.

Come, she said urgently. She scowled at him. Everyone in this country grins. All the time, he thought, living mirrors. He put his arms into his jacket. Now he was dressed. He was handsome. Then they hurried out of their room in the motel and down the small main street.

He could see the spire of the church. Her heels rang out, hard against the sidewalk.

We are almost there, he said. He stopped to smooth his beard. She kept going. She was farther ahead of him. He stuck his hands in his pockets. He walked slowly, holding his back.

She waited for him at the entrance to the church. There were many people with bowties all the same colour. They waved, urgently pointing to the wooden doors of the chapel. He took her arm as the door swung open. Now we are the blessed couple. His fingers dug in, feeling the fleshy part of her arm under the sheafs of fabric. There was a space made for them. He wanted to close his eyes. He kept shifting. The seats in this country, even in the places of God, these people, it must be very difficult for them. He put his feet down flat on the floor and pressed his spine hard against the straight edges of the wooden pew. He winced. He leaned forward. She was still. The faces all around him. The

music played. She took his hand. The music was too loud. Everything, he thought, is too loud. The bride was not unattractive. He regretted the bilious folds of white lace she was wrapped in. The priest was enthusiastic about love.

He closed his eyes and opened them. His hand was limp in her grasp. The priest was sure about love. Jesus, they sang. Christ. The preacher was the loudest singer, he showed his throat like an answer. Her recessed lips. The pews in tight rows. He closed his eyes and saw the stalks of corn passing him. When he opened his eyes, there was clapping and polite hurrahs. She was silent, now looking at him, now looking away. Her tongue, a point between her brittle smiling lips, a parted darkness. So she did, after all, belong in this country. He thought of the corn, stained fields frozen the colour of rot. There was a line to leave the chapel. They joined in when it was their turn. He took her arm again, and he felt her wince.

Up close the preacher looked like a strange man. The reception held them in its fist. The room was hot. He did not take off his jacket. She had abandoned the cumbersome part of her outfit. The preacher was on her shoulders, on the straight lines of her arms. In this country, he thought, she is beautiful. He was holding a piece of cheese. He did not want it. He slipped outside the glass doors and stood on the deck. Inside, the preacher had the bulging eyes of his countrymen. A moth danced along the glass, attracted. The insects are so much bigger here, he thought.

He turned away from the doors. The wind lifted his tie over his shoulder and he pulled it down. Too many trees. He could see his breath. The cheese was clammy on the inside of his fist. He lifted his arm and rested it on the wood railing. He opened his hand. The waxen square spun as it fell. When is a crime forgiven? He looked up at the sky. The irregular constellations. The wind pushing against his beard. She will leave me here. He shivered, knocking his fist on the wood in front of him. He heard her laugh. The preacher bared his teeth. There was an echo; lines of running water.

*Hal Niedzviecki resides just outside Little Italy. He is the author of a book of short stories, Smell It, to be published this January by Coach House Books. He is also editor of the upcoming Concrete Forest, an anthology of urban Canadian fiction, published by McClelland & Stewart, and editor of Broken Pencil magazine, the guide to zines and alternative culture in Canada.*



# THE MUGGING OF MRS. MELANEY

FICTION BY KENETH DOIRON

Mrs. Melaney was mugged at the eight o'clock service; it was a very sad event and just about everybody said it was the saddest thing they had ever heard of. Who in the world would want to harm Mrs. Melaney, the sweetest, gentlest soul in the whole parish? How could anybody think there was to be anything gained from robbing a poor old lady living on a bare pension, just making ends meet? It was beyond Miss Curran and Mr. Perry and Ed Murphy and Mrs. Sikes, who kept the bakery.

It was a pleasant Sunday morning in May. Spring was in full promise, surprising the strolling folks with the newness of the leaves and how quickly they came. Before you knew it, there it was, all pink blossoms and fresh green grass already needing cutting. The breezes were soft and scented, wafting the scrubbed cheeks of the faithful. On such a morning as this Mrs. Melaney walked to church.

Saint Joseph's wasn't far from where she lived. Mrs. Melaney just had to go along Lex for six blocks and then turn left for two. Even in the winter she walked it and only took the stick if it was icy. This Sunday was no different from any other, except the weather was pretty hot. Mrs. Melaney thought the flaming New York sun would roast her good and early this year. Still, she was wearing the real wool underneath. She thought what she'd be like as a girl on a day like this, all flighty in blue and white gingham with curling hair blond as butter in the same sun.

"Mrs. Melaney was mugged at the eight o'clock service," announced Ed Murphy to the whole shop. Everybody looked up, but now that Ed got their early morning attention, he just hummed over the large square tray of fresh jelly donuts.

Mrs. Sikes, manageress of Glaser's, studied the reactions of the others before she exclaimed, "Now, Ed Murphy, you don't mean it!"

But Ed did mean it, and he confirmed it again without even looking up from the unlimited assortment of donuts. He picked one, guessing it was cherry. "Sure do. Sure as I'm eating this, this cherry jelly donut here." Ed played this guessing game every morning now, ever since he was laid off two months ago. He worked on construction when he worked, and he lived up over the bakery, so he was a regular.

"The poor soul," commented Miss Curran, musing on the choice between chocolate eclairs

and coconut macaroons. She called herself a retired spinster and she always wore blushing pink, no matter what. When she first heard Miss Curran call herself that Mrs. Sikes wondered, if she's a spinster I'd like to know what she retired from.

"Couldn't happen to a nicer lady." They all glanced guffawing looks at Mr. Perry. "Well, you know what I mean," he countered. Mr. Perry was the independent type, a former tie man for the railroad. He was in often to pick up sweets to surprise his invalid wife.

Mrs. Sikes hurriedly tied up Mrs. Perry's order of rum and butter bonbons. She got confused in her attempt to pump Ed for details, got tangled in the miles of twine twirling down from the bobbin on the ceiling. Ed soothed her frustration by gallantly offering his stubby finger to hold the string in place for the final bow on the white box.

Mrs. Melaney rounded the corner at eighty-seventh, and then? Only two more blocks. Of course her hair wasn't blond any more. To think of it! Me with these old grey threads, all knots and tangles like my sewing basket. But her hair was all even and meticulously neat, and braided too like that little girl's except now the braids were tied up on top. She wore a little pill box hat, nice and black with little pink porcelain berries on one side. Mrs. Melaney always said she wasn't much for dressing up so she just wore a simple house dress under her navy blue gaberdine, but Mrs. Melaney looked dressed up anyhow with her white gloves and that hat.

Mrs. Melaney had a habit of pinching her purse with the index finger and thumb of her left hand. Her marriage hand, as she used to call it. She was left-handed. I do everything with my marriage hand, she'd say. Her husband was long gone now, a good Irish man, a token taker for the city after he came home from the war. Mrs. Melaney didn't have any large purses. She didn't go in for lugging around all her worldly goods with her. No, it wasn't much bigger than a fair size billfold. It was black, all Morocco leather with a real gold clasp and it had lasted since the twenties themselves. Mrs. Melaney would hold it out from herself like it was a sign or something hot. She really held it as if it was something she didn't want to be part of her person.

"Now, Ed, you tell us all about it," said Mrs.

Sikes, anxiously tucking in her hair net. She was a fairly hefty woman, you could tell as she crossed her enormous arms over her even more enormous bosom.

Mr. Perry also nudged Ed on, even tempted him with a twinkling eye. "Yes, give us the low down, Ed, boy."

Ed Murphy gave the details between muffled chomps, "Well, they held her up, gun and all. Heard they got over fifty in cash, and jewels too. Met Mrs. Long, she told me."

"Oh, they'd be just rhinestones," said Miss Curran.

"Wonder that's all they got. She's the type that'd tote her life savings around in her bag," said Mr. Perry, adjusting his big glasses.

Mrs. Sikes tapped her fat fists on the marble ledge and proclaimed, "Well, she don't spend too much in here, but she's regular. In every Monday morning, about right now."

Mrs. Melaney was nearly there. The others were walking up to Saint Joe's, some strolling and some strutting. They looked hazy to her but she'd know a lot of those faces if they were up close. Mrs. Melaney's eyes weren't too good, in fact they were much worse than last year; the left one is almost caput on me, she'd say every time she had to squint at something. Still and all, she picked up some familiar faces, like Dora Long and Aggie Dunsford, old Auxiliary ladies from before the war. Oh, they had some times, some square dancing and bingos. Bean suppers were the best. They'd laugh, this generation, if you ever went and suggested it now. Mrs. Melaney was thinking all this as she passed by the great iron gates, the big black fence like prison bars capturing the church. Then she found the opening, the heavy bars parted where you could walk a dozen abreast.

It'll be good to get seated. Oh, pooh is me. Mrs. Melaney thought she had just enough wind and will to mount the seven steps. All she could think of was her rocker with her feet up on the oven door. The vestibule was pretty tiny for such a large church, no room to congregate around after mass. There was a door on either side leading up to the choir loft. They were heavy and oaken and the upper half of each one had six panes of glass. That was just a little detail Mrs. Melaney picked up for no real reason. Now she settled into her



usual pew very near the back, easy to get out.

The mass started. It wasn't her nice Monsignor Byrne who was so gentle and understanding in confession. There was a new priest who sounded German. He gave the readings and pretty soon poured the wine out. The consecration was coming up. Christ is God, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. Mrs. Melaney repeated it to herself even after the others finished, the whole story summed up in those three simple points.

Mrs. Melaney squirmed in her seat a bit. She just automatically got fidgety at Saint Joe's. She liked it better in the old days before they put in those modern lamps, flimsy things, flimsy as Venetian blinds and that's just what they looked like, and before they turned the altar around the wrong way, and that God-awful new thing of Mary, that big blue oval sky and her standing on a purple cliff. Mrs. Melaney was grateful at least they kept the stained glass windows. At least you know you're in a church, she promised herself. The bell rang, she received. Back in her seat she thanked God for herself and her three men.

Mrs. Melaney had two boys, Brenden and Davey. But they were dead now, killed at war. Brenden was killed in France in some funny place that she couldn't pronounce, but it wasn't one of the more famous battles. He was on sentry duty and got shot in the back. Some said he was sleeping on the job, but Mrs. Melaney never believed that. Not her boy. No, her Brenden was an unsung hero and now he was lost in lonely obscurity. So Mrs. Melaney prayed for her older boy. Davey went to war too, Korea. His tank ran over a mine on his first day in action. And that was harder to take, for he was the young one. Now Mrs. Melaney prayed for Davey too.

Mrs. Melaney had a husband, big Dave Melaney, red hair and all. He could drink all of Yorkville under the table. But Dave was never late for work. He used to say if he had a nickel for every token he took and Mrs. Melaney would jump right in and say if he had a Hail Mary for every one. He was a good man for all. He never raised a hand to the boys, never. And he cried more than she did when they went. Mrs. Melaney was losing the flow of the mass, getting carried away praying for her three men. Oh, Mother of Perpetual Help, pray for me and my three men.

She always left before the last blessing, to avoid the crowds so she blessed herself in advance. Anyway, she didn't want to stand around in that tiny vestibule gossiping with

## HOW CAREFULLY WE FAIL

Sweat exits the pores, not art;  
and you, who thought to stand in the sun  
or to chop wood is poetry,  
are left in your damp clothes  
burnt and tired  
with nothing beautiful around you.

A little exertion, a short time of discomfort  
and nature would comply, would freely  
bend and twist herself into expression—  
of course, there must be resistance,  
but just enough to make the mechanics warm,  
lend the piece a glow.

But exertion mounts to strain, discomfort to agony  
and the same simple stuff which  
had winked at you and whispered promises,  
coquettish nature,  
turns her naked cheek away;  
you are denied permission  
to kiss, to praise, to materialize your exuberance.

An axe in your hand, cords of future fire  
stacked by your side,  
the mandatory evening coming on,  
you know yourself a plain labourer  
and your mind creeps into your hut,  
hungry for the bread and drippings  
and then the deepest sleep.

— GREG KENNEDY

everybody and getting sore feet. On the way she fussed in her purse for a quarter for the poor box. Remember the poor, the sign said. Mrs. Melaney almost said, You can say that again. But that would be getting uppity with Our Lord. God bless the poor.

Somebody, some boys were cramped in behind the glass, behind the door up to the choir loft. They rapped on the pane. They meant to call her over. The holy water font was next to the door and Mrs. Melaney blessed herself one last time. The door opened and wedged her in a bit. Such a tiny vestibule for a big church. Then he yanked her. The boy with the dark skin. Mrs. Melaney couldn't tell if it was a tan or not. They twisted her arm and grabbed the purse from her left hand. Then more hands than she could count scrambled into her purse. Not a word was spoken; it was as quiet as in the church.

Mrs. Melaney saw the knife shining close to her eye, flashing like the wing of a bird or a child's mirror in the sun. Was that her face reflected there? But quickly she couldn't tell; an elbow bumped her glasses, the bifocals pushed up a little, part of the knife was bigger like a pencil sticking out of a glass of water. Mrs. Melaney saw her nose neatly bisected, the left nostril twice as big as the right. Then a sharp pain in her side as if she had been jabbed with a sharp object. It was much like the pain she got once when she banged into her kitchen counter at home. Mrs. Melaney had a charming little walk-up flat on the second floor with lots of light, so it was full of plants all the time. But all she could think of now was the wound in the side of Our Lord and the blood of forgiveness flowing after that soldier's sword. Mercy!

There were five youths in all. Five! Can you



# MORE SIDES THAN THE MOON

I have more sides than the moon  
more currents than a river.  
Haven't you noticed  
as I walk towards you,  
a hundred limb image  
constantly flexing and refolding?

— SUSAN SWAN

imagine? Five big hulking boys taking a little old lady like that. They only got three dollars and change for their pains. Lucky they didn't get the big stuff. Mrs. Melaney had four twenties folded in four so they fitted exactly behind her social security card. All you could see was her name and number showing through the piece of plastic. Now one very impudent boy flings her purse in the corner and a few articles fly out. But Mrs. Melaney boldly asks that young man to pick up her purse. He does. And now those things too, over there. He obliges. And as the boy bends facing her with the field of his eagle-winged leather back, Mrs. Melaney wishes she'd brought her stick. I'd knock the living daylights out of him. And only the Lord knew Dora Long came out at that moment, she was just stricken dumb seeing it.

"It's a crying shame. You're not even safe in church anymore," said Mrs. Perry.

"Well you know how she carries her purse, don't you?" responded Mrs. Sikes, nodding her head sharp as a woodpecker.

"Huh? How's that?" asked Ed Murphy, licking the last traces of jelly from his fingers.

"Well she just holds it out like she was giving it away to you."

"Like what?" asked Ed, wondering what she could mean.

Mrs. Sikes picked up a Danish and pinched it Melaney style, poked a hole in her own Danish so she couldn't sell it anymore. But it made the point because they all nodded in agreement.

"I know, it's awful," sighed Miss Curran, slowly shaking her head.

"Don't surprise me no then," said Mr. Perry.

Mrs. Melaney scurried down the steps feeling pretty brave in spite of what just happened. She almost wanted to call back to those robbers and laugh at them for not finding her four folded bills. Ragamuffins. Not even clean. What their mothers must go through with them. She was almost past poor

Mr. Hemmell, the deli man, before she noticed him. Mr. Hemmell had a secret crush on Mrs. Melaney, but nothing ever came of it, perhaps because Mrs. Melaney was very prejudiced against German sausage, worst is a good name for it. She'd take a good old Irish blood pudding any day. But Mrs. Melaney waved back and called out hi to Mr. Hemmell.

Well, she had to slow down, her running and not even realizing it. When she got home, Mrs. Melaney actually skipped up the stoop. It was not 'till she was safe in her own kitchen, with her coat and hat hung up, that the full shock of it all hit. It happened to me. Heavens! The sound of her own voice frightened her as she toppled into her rocker. Oh, I'm poohed. I have to have my tea.

The kettle whistled. The boiling water poured into the little porcelain teapot, some spilling on the linoleum. Mrs. Melaney paced while it steeped, passing the little mirror the Lord knows how many times, each time looking in to see if she was all right, settling that one troublesome braid in place. It was fair enough to take a nerve pill now. She shook as she poured the hot tea into a dainty tea cup. Her tea set she'd never part with, best china, pure white with four-leaf clovers all around the edges. That'd be me, the lucky one.

That pain came back to her side again. It was stinging now like little needle pricks that don't go too deep. And she felt she was perspiring. And me not well. For a moment Mrs. Melaney couldn't remember when she last bumped into the corner of the counter top. She kept staring at the Sacred Heart calendar wondering about it. She wanted a biscuit but she was fresh out, too poohed to reach up to the cupboard even if she had some. Then right on the spot Mrs. Melaney took off her things, her dress, her slip, right down to whatever. There was blood. She had a wound in her side. After Mrs. Melaney had cleaned the cut

with cold water and applied a thick piece of gauze, she got ready. She put on another dress, scooped a handful of change from Dave's old shaving mug, grabbed her walking stick for protection, and went out and hailed a cab. Lennox Hill Hospital, young man. Emergency. What? I've been mugged. I'm just dandy, thank you, now hurry up. Mrs. Melaney secretly thought the driver looked like one of the lot, that long hair and droopy mustache, and the Lord only knows when he last washed.

Mrs. Melaney thought she took a little fainting spell at the hospital, but wasn't sure. It was the drug, made her feel all woozy, but soft and smiling. The doctors were so nice, except they told the cops and that started the whole uproar. All those officers fussing around her like she was some movie star needing an escort. And the questions. But Mrs. Melaney felt better when that nice young doctor with the blond hair gave her another one of those needles. Later, back in her rocker, Mrs. Melaney put her feet up and spent the whole of Sunday evening wondering what her three men would do if they knew about these goings on. You'd have to tie them up to hold them down.

"Well look at that would you? At least she's still walking," exclaimed Ed Murphy, pointing out through the shop window.

And, indeed, there was Mrs. Melaney stepping up to Glaser's. She had the stick but she was still pretty spry. She even looked summery in a nice powder blue dress trimmed with nice white lace, and not even a hat. But she had her purse with her.

"Mercy, she's a brave one," cried Miss Curran.

"Don't let on anything though," warned Mrs. Sikes.

Mr. Perry clapped his fist in his palm and exclaimed, "You can't keep an old horse down."

Mrs. Sikes mused out loud, "Every Monday for years. Gets her raison tea biscuits right here."

Now they all prepare themselves for Mrs. Melaney's entrance. She's almost on the step. The bake shop is perfectly quiet except for the slow persistent humming of the fan over one of the stoves. Mrs. Sikes brushes her floured hands on her little daffodil apron while Mr. Perry pushes his glasses back up on his nose straight. Ed Murphy simply clears his throat. Miss Curran instinctively clutches her purse more tightly. They all stand still, endearing, waiting to proffer their solicitous smiles to an enduring Mrs. Melaney.

*Keneth Doiron is owner of Ken's Fine Books in Mirvish Village. The above story was originally produced as a play for radio.*



# JMP

John  
McGreevy  
Productions  
wishes  
good luck  
to  
Vitalis  
Publishing  
on the  
first edition  
of  
Taddle Creek

JOHN MCGREEVY PRODUCTIONS

## WISH WINDOW

FICTION BY DEREK McCORMACK

"I chose Rosefield," the owner said.  
"From Furniture?" I said.

Roger Rosefield, the new Display Director, trimmed the main window with bunny dolls.

I measured some man's feet.

Roger hung spun-glass clouds, a pink crêpe backdrop. He arranged dyed eggs on a carpet of cellophane grass.

I fetched size twelve slippers. I fluoroscoped the man's foot. The leather looked smoky, his bones black.

The stench was like sulphur and old shoes. It crept from the main window to Cosmetics and beyond. Perfume girls atomized ounce upon ounce.

Roger tore out his display. I swung by the owner's office.

"I would never have used real eggs," I said.

I fluoroscoped some man's feet.

Roger carpeted the floor of the window in daisies.

Thousand-watt spotlights. They browned the daisies in under an hour.

I popped by the office. "Any idiot would've used crêpe flowers," I said. "Or sealing wax."

Roger ensembled child mannequins dressed in domino masks. Twenty jack-'o-lanterns. A backdrop of cornstalks.

I pyramided shoe boxes. I spied a dime-sized sore on my upper arm. It was purplish, tender to touch.

I shoved my arm in the fluoroscope. The spot vanished. My hand a crib scythe.

The sore blackened. I poulticed it with bread. It grew triangular. I rubbed it with zinc salve. It crusted and oozed and stuck to my shirt.

Halloween day I ran up to the hospital. A doctor palpated the sore. He inspected my scalp. He shone a flashlight in my eyes.

He X-rayed me. My spine a chalky zipper. Lumps ghosting my neck and ribcage.

"Tumours," he said. He said ultra-violet rays or coal tar or bruises could have caused them. Or bacteria: he said when cancerous tumours

are ground into juice and injected into rabbits, the rabbits develop the same kind of tumour.

"Can't you stop it?" I said.

The purpling sky. I trudged back to the store, pocket full of painkillers. In the window janitors were waving butterfly nets at moths flickering in and out of cornstalks. The jack-o'-lanterns puckered, their insides specked with blueblack mould.

The owner met me in Accessories. "Rosefield's out," he said. "You're in."

I curtained the main window. I bought glow-in-the-dark paint and brushed it onto merchandise.

Next evening the owner and comptroller and department managers massed on the sidewalk. Pedestrians paused.

I drew back the curtains. It was a night before Xmas scene—tinsel tree, toy trucks, dolls. Child mannequins in nightshirts and caps. All spotlit green and red.

Cars slowed. Pedestrians clapped.

A breaker switched. Lights died. The paint fluoresced. Suddenly the children were skeletons. Luminous limbs, skulls. Egg-shaped tumours glowing green between their ribs.

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*Derek McCormack is a Sussex-Ulster resident and author of Dark Rides: A Novel, published by Gutter Press. He is currently completing a new novel, Wish Book.*

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### POEM/PHOTO CREDITS

*Susan Swan (p. 8, 9, 14, 31) is a Sussex-Ulster resident and author of Stupid Boys Are Good to Relax With, published by Somerville.*

*Chris Chambers (p. 16) is a Palmerston resident. His poetry was recently featured in the chapbook Up and Down Bloor Street, published by Ink Books.*

*David Macfarlane (p. 19) is a Sussex-Ulster resident and a columnist for the Globe and Mail. He is also the author of The Danger Tree, published by Macfarlane Walter & Ross.*

*Greg Kennedy (p. 30) is a Palmerston resident.*

*Alana Wilcox (p. 34) is a Seaton Village resident.*

*Christina Winchur (p. 36) is an Annex resident.*

*Dorsa Jabbari (p. 40) is a University of Toronto student.*



# THE SILK TIE

FICTION BY CAITLIN SMITH

The highway shimmered in the humid July sun. Ellen walked towards the dirty bus shelter, making for the bench inside. She thought of all the patients whose rooms faced the street, who had an unbroken view of Taschereau Boulevard. A used car lot. The *Un Seul Prix* store. Speedy Muffler. Scott's *Villa de Poulet*. Dairy Queen. *Ti-Jean—Marches aux puces*. *Girls! Girls! Girls!* *Complètement nues!* Champion Lanes, with its giant ball and pins, the paint chipped and colour faded long ago.

The *Fruits de Mer* restaurant, with a partially burnt out cocktail glass in hot pink neon. Bill always laughed at new French words in the early days. All French words were new to Ellen in '51. *Fruits de Mer* was a favorite.

What a great idea! Fruit from the sea! Later, they'd have more than a few laughs over Ellen's confusion when Mr. Morin had shown them around the furnished room on that first day. *Et voici la salle de bain avec la toilette et la douche*. Ellen blushed scarlet but neither Bill nor Mr. Morin had noticed.

What's he talking about? She thought. Is he asking about our sex life? Does he know we're just dying to get an apartment so we can get to what we didn't get to when we spent our honeymoon with Bill's sister and her husband in Halifax? Is it written all over our faces?

The next night, after they'd moved in, they were lying entwined when Ellen told Bill what she'd been thinking.

First Bill had laughed so hard he started to choke and Ellen had to slap him on the back. Bill was already teaching himself French with the Living Languages records when he'd met Ellen at the Y dance. He wasn't much of a dancer but he was so good looking—and what a great dresser. Nothing like what he'd become.

There were times when Ellen would wake in the night and forget that Bill was sick. She'd find herself planning the next day—cleaning up, cutting the grass, maybe a trip to Plattsburgh in the afternoon. The trips were always fraught with tension. Bill was just like every man she'd ever known in that respect. He hated to admit he didn't know

something and would rather drive 50 miles out of his way then ask for directions. Ellen wished sometimes that theirs could have stayed the kind of marriage where they could laugh about their mishaps later, kidding each other as they told their adventures to other couples who were close friends. But instead, the unhappy car trips hung in the air between them, with so much that went unsaid.

Besides, they didn't have friends you could tell stories to, not really. They knew people from the church and some of the neighbours, but the only couples they knew well were the parents of Brian and Chrissy's friends. Once the kids had left home even these connections had gone slack. By the time Bill's cancer had come to dominate their life, it was just the two of them again. Sickness wasn't what Ellen had planned for their future! Who could have imagined that she'd be staring at his yellowed face and shrunken body in a nasty little room at the Charles Lemoyne Hospital?

Imagine the nurses wanting to know if she'd like to be alone with the body! She didn't like to say no—maybe you had to stay with the body for a few minutes, to make sure he was really... No, they knew that. Ellen had almost fainted when the nurse opened the door. It was lucky she was close enough to the wall to support herself. His body seemed half the size of the day before.

Ellen felt the tears forcing their way into the corners of her eyes. She swallowed hard and shook her head.

This would not do! "No!" she said aloud. She had so much to take care of, so many things that she needed a clear head for. She couldn't give in to her feelings now—no, not even now.

A passing ambulance, with sirens wailing, brought Ellen abruptly to her feet. *What time is it? Did the bus come and go?* She stepped quickly out of the bus shelter and saw a familiar number six come lumbering up the road. It came to a stop in front of her and she pulled herself up the high stairs.

Ellen opened her purse for her bus pass. It wasn't there. The bus began to move



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and she stumbled as she searched frantically for the little plastic folder with her picture and the monthly sticker. Yes, it was tucked in the little zippered compartment as it always was. She showed it to the driver, though he barely glanced at it. *I've seen him a thousand times before so I'm sure he'd recognize me. Do I look different now that I'm a widow? A widow. Black widow. Merry widow. Golfwidow. Widow's weeds.*

"Stop!"

"Comment?" Someone was looking at her, speaking to her. *Did I say something? Was I thinking aloud? God, I'm losing my mind.*

"Nothing, no, excuse me, pardon," Ellen shook her head and gestured that it was nothing. The young woman beside her looked away with a shrug. Ellen looked out the window and saw her stop approaching. She pulled the bell and pushed past her seat mate with a mumbled "excusez-moi." The tears were standing in her eyes so she tilted her head back to stop the flow. *Not now, not now! I must not break down in public.* Her only goal was to get off the bus and get home. The driver pulled to a stop and she got out.

Ellen suddenly felt too weary to go on. Home was less than four blocks away but she couldn't make it. Why did I ever go to the hospital by bus in the first place? A taxi sat in front of the Provigo store, waiting for grocery laden customers. She cut through the parking lot and approached the car.

"I'm only going to Arthur Street—will you take me?" she asked.

"Sure! No problem, lady," said the driver. He started the engine as Ellen opened the door and got in. She fumbled with the seat belt while he drove out into the street.

"I can't get this belt to work," she said.

"Oh, I don't know how it works, never sit back there myself," he said. He laughed at this. "It's just a short ride, you'll be safe enough."

"No, I want to do it up. Stop the car. I want to put it on first."

"Okay, you're paying, sittin' or drivin'."

Ellen couldn't put the seat belt together. She pushed the metal clip into the clasp but nothing happened. Near tears again, she slumped to the seat in exhaustion. Her hand banged against the seat and hit something hard—another clasp. She found the clip and fitted them together.

"Okay, I got it," she cried out excitedly to the driver. *Finally, something had worked today! Who would have thought that doing up a seat belt*

## FROM ANOMIA: FRAGMENTS TOWARD A GRAMMAR OF ENDINGS

On a mountain, I thought. Where love would have to be rarefied, precarious. Rocks, uncertain as promises, solid as disbelief. A stream, cold, honest, winding down towards level earth; the way the mountain shoulders this inevitability, the insistence of gravity. How my body sinks into you like trust. Air thin as conviction. Dawn, earlier on one side of the mountain, the light, the shadows always uneven. Lichen, invasive like doubt, moss deep as desire.

:the way your body caved into mine, how you denied this avalanche, refuted the inconstancy of the escarpment. How you thought solidity was a virtue:

How love might be in this place. Solitary as a tree, slow and certain as moss. Unobtrusive as light. Paths clear as grammar, routes laid out like some familiar language. Verbs sure-footed, nouns irrelevant as pebbles. Adjectives and adverbs thinned out with the oxygen, there is breath only for the certitude of action. Description, superfluous. How we would breathe, speak, so slowly and deeply in this place. A piece of rock, unencumbered by ambiguity; I will seal it into an envelope, this will be my letter to you.

— ALANA WILCOX

*could give me such a feeling of accomplishment?*

"What number on Arthur Street, ma'am?"

The driver caught Ellen's eye in the mirror.

"Two hundred and fifty," she answered.

"The one with the spruce trees."

"Nice property," said the driver. "That'll be \$3.50."

*Yes, it was a nice property, but how could I ever keep it up now? The same way I have for the last ten years while Bill was panting and wheezing, I did all the yard work. He was such a sidewalk superintendent! Seems I couldn't do anything right when it came to the lawn. The time I ran over the extension cord, you'd have thought I'd committed murder. Nosy Fred from across the street had come down from his porch, sweeping the sidewalk, to listen in as we argued. And then I had to race out to Legault's before it closed to get a new cord so the lawn could be finished that day. Why did it have to be finished that day anyway?*

*These things never made sense when you looked back at them. Like the time Brian had offered to cut the grass and Bill had insisted he, not me, would be doing it later. He was so pigheaded! He never would admit he was dying. I'd tried to discuss his funeral arrangements once—God, what a mistake that was! "Take me out with the garbage," he answered, with a sudden burst of anger. I'd laughed it off—what else could I do?—and said that although he'd lost a lot of weight, a garbage bag with him inside was still*

*too heavy for me to lift. Mind you, I would have had just as much trouble with such talk if the tables were turned.*

"Lady, are you okay?" The taxi driver stuck his head out of the car window. Ellen realized she had been standing on the sidewalk in a trance.

"I'm fine, thank you," she said. She crossed the street, opened the door with her key and entered the house. She pulled the door closed behind her and stood for a moment listening to the silent house. Suddenly, as if struck by an inspiration, she turned quickly and headed down the basement stairs. At the bottom, she stopped to turn on a light and then took a sharp turn to her left. She pushed open a sliding door and entered a small cupboard under the stairs. Cartons of ornaments, winter clothes and hat boxes were stacked neatly in piles. A branch of an artificial spruce tree poked through the top of a large box. Against the wall sat a blue steamer trunk. Kneeling down in front of it, Ellen undid the clasps and opened the lid. On top lay a bridal headdress with a veil, wrapped in plastic. Beside it was a shoe box, with a silhouette of a stylist woman from the 1950s printed on the top. Ellen opened the box and took out a packet of letters. She set them on the floor and reached in again. This time she removed a man's silk tie. It was royal blue with tiny



red geometric shapes. The smooth fabric felt cool against her cheek.

*Bill was such a great dresser in the early days. He really used to wow them at the Y dances. He was so unlike all the other ex-servicemen. I had just given one the brush off when he'd asked if I'd like to "shake a leg, baby." It was just a minute later that Bill walked up. He asked if I could pencil him in on my dance card! Ruby and Dixie burst out laughing! We didn't have dance cards! Of course I said I was free to dance right away.*

*He looked so handsome! His suit was the latest fashion, but not flashy like some you saw then. The pants were baggy but not too baggy, the lapels were wide but not extremely so. His socks were always the talk of the night: argyle, houndstooth, zig-zags—you name it. And colours that drew stares in those days, with everyone still wearing Depression gray. His hair was styled like Johnny Ray's. He looked like such a gentleman. So different from the usual guys looking for a one night stand.*

*This is the tie he wore on the night he first walked me to the bus stop. I must take it over to McGillvray's Parlour tomorrow. I know Bill will want to be wearing it for such an important day.*

Ellen held the tie at arm's length. She swallowed hard and wiped her sleeve across her eyes. She quickly put the letters in the shoe box, replaced the box in the trunk, and set the bridal headdress on top. She hesitated for a moment, with her hands still clutching the dusty plastic. With slow and deliberate movements she unwrapped it, and removed the fragile lace headpiece. She caressed the delicate flowers that were sewn to it. The gentle sound of falling beads woke her from her reverie. She peered into the gloom of the cupboard, gathering tiny pearls that had scattered across the linoleum. Taking up the plastic wrap, Ellen folded it around the headdress, making a tiny pocket for the pearls. She set the package on top of the trunk and stood up. She stepped out of the cupboard, sliding the door shut behind her.

Ellen moved swiftly across the basement, opened the door of a cabinet, removed three green garbage bags and went up the stairs to the main floor of the house. Starting in the bathroom, she began filling the first bag. She put in six vials of pills, a tensor bandage, an inhaler, an electric razor, two cans of shaving cream and a can of deodorant. She set the bag down and opened the second one.

Ellen crossed to the bedroom, collecting jockey shorts, undershirts, pajamas, socks, four frayed shirts, two pairs of work pants, a pair of slippers and a ratty bathrobe. Stopping by the bedside, she added a stack of tattered magazines and a pile of handkerchiefs. She set down this bag too, and opened the last one.

Ellen went to the living room next, putting in more magazines and a few paperbacks. From the front hall closet she gathered two pairs of shoes and a trench coat. She set down the third bag in the front hall and returned to the bedroom and bathroom for the other two. She tied two bags tightly with twist ties and stopped abruptly. She went to the kitchen, retrieved her purse and opened it, extracting a pair of glasses. She placed the glasses in the third bag and tied it, too.

Propping the front door open with one bag, Ellen carried the other two to the end of the driveway and set them down. She returned to the door, gathered up the last bag and put it with the others.

As she straightened up, Ellen noticed she was sweating, and she felt a crushing weariness setting over her. She looked down at the garbage bags in wonder.

*Where is he now? Where is Bill now?*

Her arms hung limply at her sides as the tears rolled down her face.

*Caitlin Smith is a Sussex-Ulster resident. She is a marketing manager at a book publishing company.*

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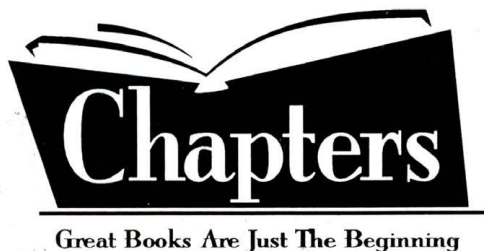


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tip perfect across a spiteful scar

— CHRISTINA WINCHUR



# THE ELECTRONIC AVANT-GARDE

*One year later, the "new" Coach House continues to forge ahead.*

SPOTLIGHT BY SARAH ELTON

Tradition meets modernity head-on at Coach House Books, where book publishing is being reinvented for the twenty-first century. In an old coach house on bpNichol Lane, nestled between St. George and Huron streets, the staff of the publishing/printing house straddle the past and the future. While the age-old smell of ink fills the air, the worn floorboards, scuffed after many years of wear, creak under the weight of Doc Martens and high-tech computers.

Welcome to the newest stage in book publishing, where "e-book" is a common expression and the bound paper package which we call a book is referred to as a "fetish object."

"This is a business that has been created over hundreds of years," says Hilary Clark, managing editor. "It's a model that is well established and we are bucking a lot of the trends."

Coach House is taking advantage of the Internet, using its services as the basis for the publishing operation. But while the house is experimenting with a new medium, it remains a product of the past.

This new addition to the Canadian small-press industry came onto the scene a year ago.

Coach House Books rose from the ashes of Coach House Press, which closed its doors in the summer of 1996, some say as the result of a drastic reduction in provincial government funding, while others blame a too rapid expansion. The old press, which separated from Coach House Printing in 1990, was created by a group of friends who loved books,

and had a mandate to publish new and experimental writers—writers who wouldn't necessarily produce a best-selling novel or collection of poetry. As a result, many of Canada's big-name, best-selling writers of today—Michael Ondaatje, Anne Michaels, Margaret Atwood—published early works at Coach House Press.

Located again in the original building, the new Coach House Books is, according to Clark, similarly run by a "few old friends," and plans to carry on the legacy and publish the new and experimental writers of today for a specialized audience.

But there is a distinctly new feel about Coach House Books. For one thing, the staff is a combination of the older crowd who originally founded the press in the mid-1960s and younger people like Clark.

"We're avant-garde when this is a generation of older people reconnecting with the younger people," says publisher Stan Bevington, who orchestrated the comeback.

The obstacles faced are avant-garde too. Recently, Coach House has been having problems with its Internet server—which wouldn't normally be a problem for a

publishing house, unless its main operations are on the World Wide Web. Which, in this case, they are.

With an eye on the Internet, Coach House Books has decided to back out of the distribution business and print small runs of only fifty to three hundred books. Instead, it is peddling its books on the web. This means that to read a Coach House book, one can simply call up [www.chbooks.com](http://www.chbooks.com) and read the text off a computer screen. There is a selection of e-books, including poetry, and even a comic book. And taking full advantage of the multi-media potential of the net, there are animated poems along with sound effects.

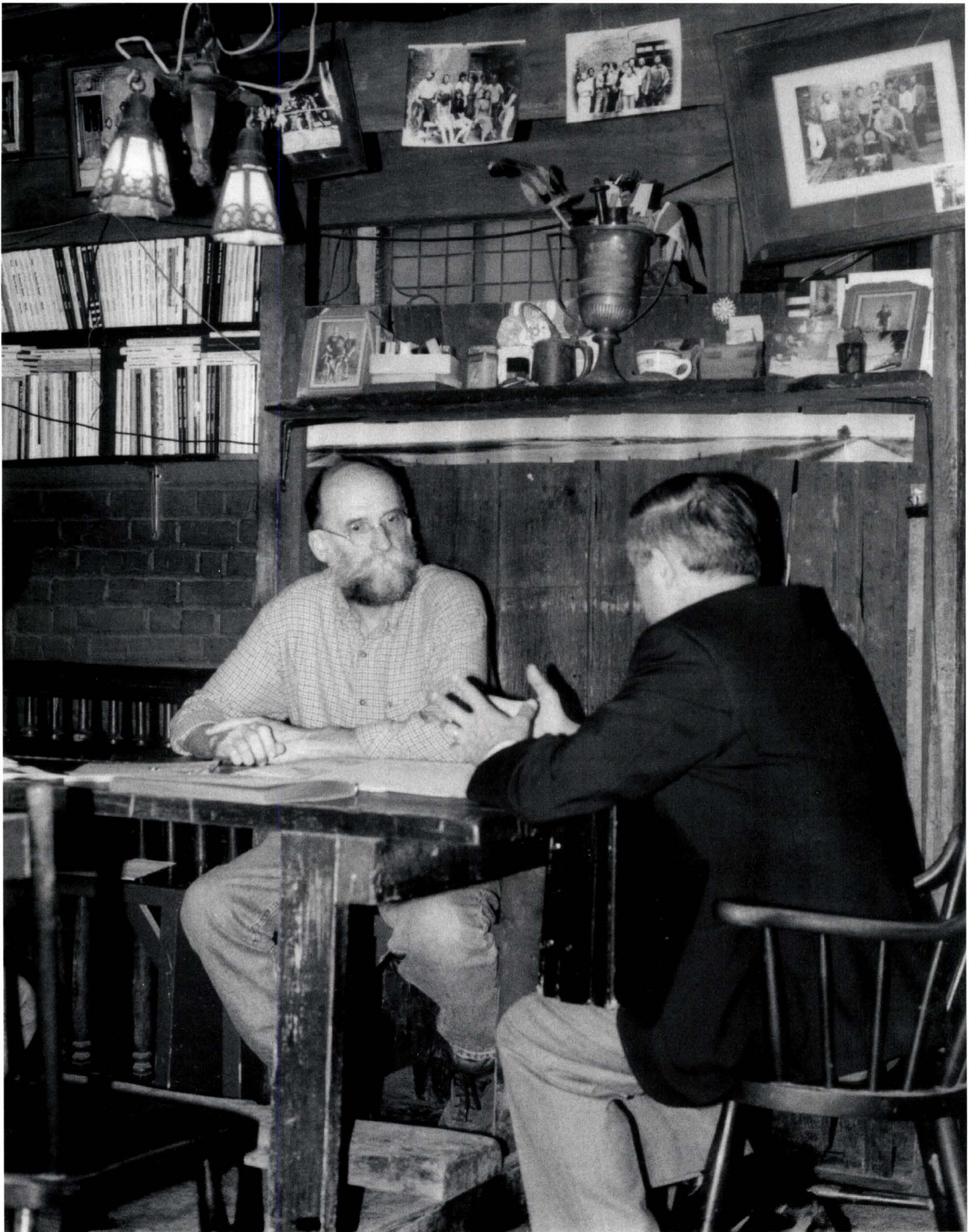
But by placing books on-line, Coach House has had to find an innovative way to pay writers for their work. If people read poems for free off the Internet, then the writer does not receive royalties. Bevington has solved this problem by creating a system where readers, out of the goodness of their hearts, can tip the writer. (As the site reminds you, tip the writer, not the waiter.) A reader can't miss the links to the "tip the writer" page

where an appropriate amount is suggested—ten per cent of the book's sale-price, which is about the same return the writer would receive from a hard copy of the book. To tip, all the reader has to do is key in the amount along with a credit card number. Tipping the writer has turned out to be a success since not only are people tipping, but they



PHOTOS BY AARON HAWCO





*Bevington (left) entertains a potential client in the Coach House lunch room.*



are also ordering copies of the books over the Internet as well because, according to Clark, "the people who read [a book] on-line also want it for their shelf." This means that Coach House will probably not have to abandon its Gutenberg-style publishing in favour of the e-book.

"The books will be made in beautiful hardcovers because people like beautiful hardcovers," she says.

The advantage of the Internet is that it offers a small publisher access to an enormous audience for the price of a monthly Internet server. Through the web, Coach House gets approximately three thousand hits a week from people in places as far away as Australia, Malaysia and Israel. Recently, a man from the southern U.S.A. called Toronto, thrilled by what Coach House was doing, and ordered several books, including a limited edition collectible book worth more than one hundred and fifty dollars.

"This is a massive expanse that is usually only available to companies with massive ad budgets," says Clark.

Bevington believes that when people catch on to what is available, the e-book will grow in popularity. He suggests that when people realize the potential of having the books on-line—reading the book you forgot at home on the office computer over lunch—that the Coach House web site will get even more hits. As it stands, most of the on-line requests are for the electronic books.

"When you are doing something totally different, it takes a while for people to say, 'so that's what you're doing,'" explains Clark.

Where people seem to be catching on slowly is in the payment department. People are reluctant to use their credit cards on the net because they feel that it is not secure. Clark points out it is just as safe to give your credit card number to a waiter in a restaurant as it is to send it over the Internet. The transaction is encrypted, meaning that the only people

who have access to the credit card number is the credit card company itself. Not even Coach House has access to the information.

Coach House is hoping to finance its Internet endeavor by spreading out over a variety of sources. Over the Internet they are hoping to raise funds through the sale of ordinary books as well as collectible ones, and by soliciting memberships. People can subscribe to Coach House for a fee and receive the company's newsletter. However, the backbone of the business is the printing press that sits on the

without having to give in to market pressures and publish what sells rather than what it likes. While Coach House is not reeling-in money, it is staying true to its original focus.

"We're not doing cookbooks," says Clark of the ultimate money-maker.

Speaking excitedly, Bevington professes that a principal reason Coach House reopened with the help of the Internet was due to his concern for accessibility. With an electronic book, someone who can't otherwise read the text of a hard copy because the size of the print is too small, can read it on Netscape by choosing to increase the size of the letters.

"We're ardent about giving racy new literature to old folks on the web," he says.

E-books do not only offer reading through voice generators to the visually impaired, but also to those who are unable to hold a book.

"All our pages are designed so that they are friendly to these types of readers," says Clark.

But it seems that at Coach House the editors don't really mind who their readers are. They are not picky, they are simply driven to create good, beautiful books for whomever is interested in good, beautiful books.

"We just have a different vision," says Clark.

The Internet is only another vehicle to get books out and enjoyed by as many people as possible. While Coach House forges ahead into the new world of publishing, it is reassuring that they are doing so not for personal profit, but rather for the sake of the books themselves. If critics condemn the e-book, favouring its not-so-

ephemeral cousin, they cannot condemn the editors at Coach House because it seems that they are doing what they do for nothing more than the love of books.

*Sarah Elton is an Annex resident and Features Editor of the Varsity newspaper at the University of Toronto.*



ground floor of the coach house, below the editors in the second-storey office. Not only do they print and bind their books, but they are also commissioned to print other publishers' products.

This means that Coach House Books can continue to do what it does best—publish specialized books for a specialized audience



# CLOSING SHOT

PHOTO BY DORSA JABBARI



*Local resident and author of Fall On Your Knees, Ann-Marie MacDonald (with author Mordecai Richler at left), Convocation Hall, October 6, 1997.*



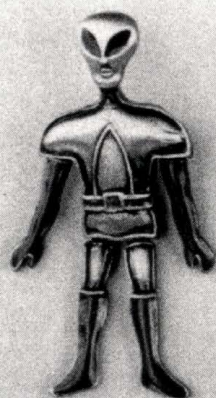
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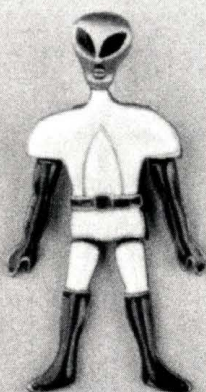
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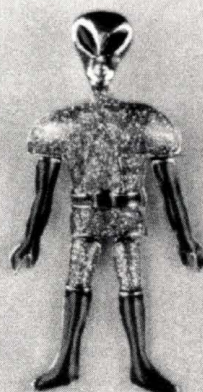
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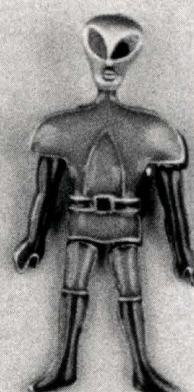
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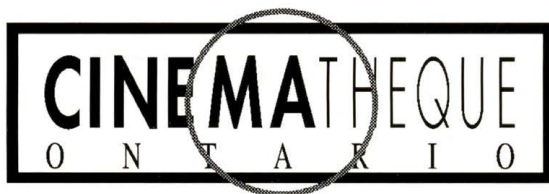
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