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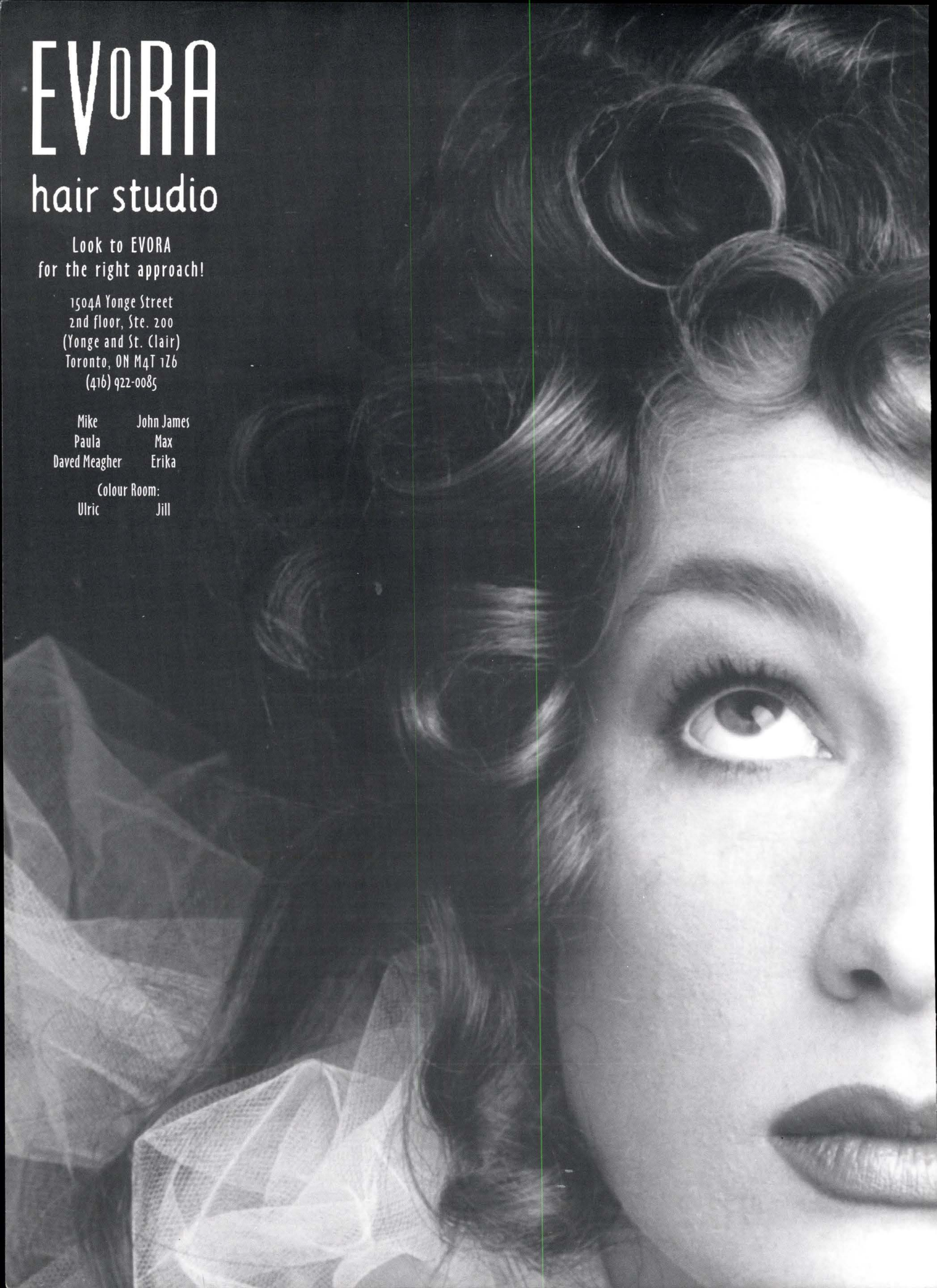
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TADDLE CREEK

VOL. II

CHRISTMAS 1998

No. 1

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COVER STAR

Francis Tobias, Christmas 1953. Photographer unknown.

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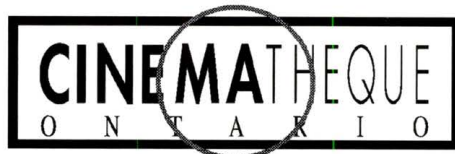
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EVERYTHING'S IN SOMETHING ELSE

FICTION BY STUART ROSS

A man had been saving all year for a microwave oven. Finally he brought it home from the department store. He unpacked it from its cardboard box and fastened it above his stove, just as he'd always dreamed of doing. Then he chose a microwavable dinner from his freezer and set the time and level on his new oven. But when he opened the door of the oven—behold!—there was a human head inside. *That's strange*, he thought. *A human head in my brand new microwave oven!* He referred to the instruction booklet, but in none of the six languages could he find an entry applicable to his particular situation. Blustering on regardless, he opened the jaw of the human head and—behold!—there was a small velvet-covered box on the tongue. *A small velvet-covered box in the mouth of the head in my microwave oven*, he thought. *That's really unusual.* He lifted out the velvet-covered box and set it on his kitchen counter. He checked to make sure he had plugged in the microwave oven, and everything seemed to be in order. Very gently, preparing to leap out of the way should he trigger some sort of detonation, he pressed the brass latch on the velvet-covered box, and the lid flung open silently. Inside the box, on a miniature scarlet cushion, there was a tiny plastic head. On closer examination, the man saw the head wore a military helmet and around its severed throat were

toothmarks. *Now I've seen everything*, he thought. *A chewed-off soldier's head in the velvet-covered box that came out of the mouth of the human head in my new microwave oven. A stranger thing I could never have dreamt up.*

Then something twigged in his brain. He ran to his storage closet and rummaged through bags and boxes. At last he came to a particularly tattered cardboard box and pulled open the flaps. He felt around the inside until he found what he was looking for. A headless plastic soldier carrying a bayonet. *So that's where it went, after all these years!* he exclaimed, rushing back to the kitchen.

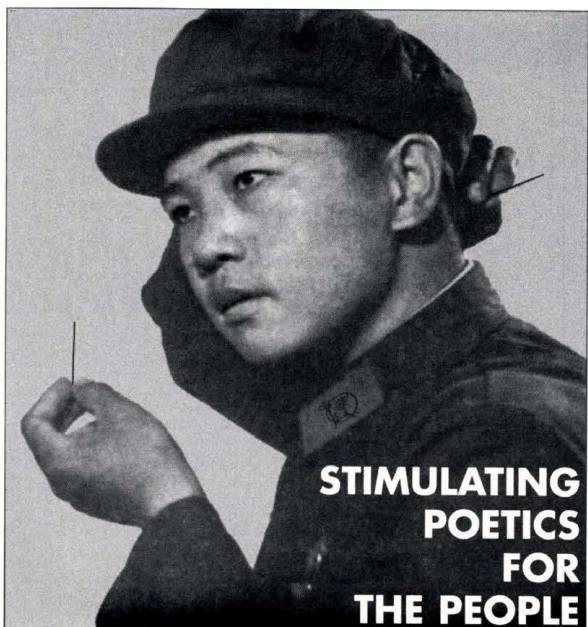
In the utility drawer, he found a small tube of superstrength glue and proceeded to glue the soldier's head back on to its plastic body. When the glue had dried, which didn't take long at all—behold!—the little plastic soldier grew up into a full-sized, flesh-and-blood soldier, right there in the man's kitchen. *This is something so amazing*, he thought, *that nobody would ever believe it!* Then he noticed that the head had disappeared from the microwave oven. It was the head that now sat on the shoulders of the soldier standing in his kitchen.

"Thank you," said the soldier. "Now I am whole again. I am your buddy Allen Burton from Grade Two. You once slept over at my place, remember? Then my

dad was relocated to Thunder Bay and the family moved. We never kept in touch, because that's the way it is with little kids. Later, I joined the armed forces and my head was blown off by a mine planted by our own men. I am back now to offer all my energy to the anti-war cause, and it is you who has made this possible. I will speak to the people and to the politicians. I will demonstrate in front of embassies and chain myself to the gates of armament factories. I will tirelessly cross this country again and again until our leaders have spoken out against all forms of violence; until they've dismantled our army and called for the dismantling of armies around the world; until people learn to solve their differences through talk and compromise instead of murder and mutilation."

The other man stared at the soldier for a moment. Then he lifted up a kitchen chair and beat him to death. He slid his microwave dinner into the new oven and pressed the start button.

Stuart Ross resides near Seaton Village. He has been self-publishing through Proper Tales Press since 1979 and is the author of Henry Kafka and Other Stories (Mercury, 1997) and The Inspiration Cha-Cha (ECW, 1996). His new collection of poetry, Farmer Gloomy's New Hybrid, will be released by ECW in 1999.



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VIATICUM

FICTION BY MAUREEN JENNINGS

The car ashtray was full to overflowing and her mouth tasted foul from too many cigarettes. As of Sunday last, she'd resolved to cut back, skip the morning pick-up and keep to ten-a-day, max. She'd lasted only a day-and-a-half until the phone call. The ringing had jolted her out of sleep and at first she couldn't understand who was speaking and why. She took in the words "social worker" but missed the woman's name. Her voice was soft and placating but the words were formal, out of a textbook.

"I regret to tell you, your father, Francis Newey, is seriously ill. We recommend that you come at once if you wish to see him."

She had a soft lilting accent which touched her words like a perfume but Liz couldn't identify what it was. East Indian? English?

"Miss Newey?"

"Are you telling me he's dying?"

A slight clearing of the throat from the woman. *"Yes, I am sorry to say that his condition is considered terminal."*

"Ob shit!" said Liz.

That afternoon she went in for her shift at the restaurant. She'd only been working there for three weeks and she was afraid they'd fire her if she asked for time off so soon. However, the manager, Edith, was sympathetic. *"Of course you've got to go. We'll hold the job . . . you and your father, were you close?"*

"No," said Liz.

The drive to Toronto was long and tedious and by the time she reached the edge of the city the winter afternoon had gone. A soft, wet snow started to fall, making the highway gleam black and slick. She switched on the wipers which squeaked irritatingly. The rented car was the most basic she could get and even that had taken her credit card to the limit. She wondered if he'd left something to bury himself with, some insurance policy. Hey, maybe he'd made her the beneficiary. She grimaced at her own thought. Fat chance of that. But the thought of a legacy, some

small amount to lift her up, was a moment of sweetness and she held on to it.

The defrost was inadequate and she rubbed at the foggy windshield. She was driving past a strip of rundown motels and she shivered suddenly. How many times had she woken up in one of those places, unable to remember a thing from the night before? Ten? Twenty? More than once she'd found herself with some man whose name she didn't know and who was as sodden as she was.

Suddenly there was the memory of beer, ice-cold, soothing to the back of her throat, parched from smoking. She pressed her knuckles hard under her chin. She wanted to stop. She hadn't eaten anything since this morning. She could see a green neon light glowing through the sleet. Open. Surely she could handle a bar now. A bit of company would be nice. All she had to do was walk in, sit in a quiet spot, order a soft drink, get some food. She glanced upward into the rearview mirror and met her own eyes. Tired eyes, lined and pouchy.

"Life begins at forty, Liz. You'll get your looks back." Trish, her sponsor, had said that but she was ten years younger and had less to repair.

Liz shifted restlessly in the seat. Out loud she said, "Who am I trying to kid? If I walk into a bar now, I might as well kiss the last ten months goodbye."

She reached inside her purse which was on the seat beside her and touched a piece of paper, stroking it like a medallion. On it Trish had written the names of two people Liz was to call as soon as she arrived in Toronto. That helped. So did the rush of anger she felt at her own weakness. She changed lanes, moving over from the exit. The seductive strip of lights slipped away. Ahead she could see the tall office buildings of the downtown core, the perpetual lights promising life and activity. A sign told her she was only one kilometer from the turn-off. She wondered if her father was still alive. Perhaps there would be

some telepathic communication when his spirit departed his corporeal body. If there had been, she'd missed it. She felt nothing.

Father Warren Clark sneezed violently. He was coming down with a cold for sure even though he'd been swallowing one thousand milligrams of vitamin C daily. And taking echinacea. He felt flushed and chilled all at the same time and the back of his throat was scratchy as a scouring pad. Surreptitiously, he checked his watch. Nine o'clock. He'd been up since five this morning and he was anxious to get home to the rectory where he could tend to his cold.

The man lying in the bed groaned and licked his lips which were foul with white canker sores. Father Clark didn't know him but the regular hospital chaplain had also been stricken with the flu and Clark had been called in to pinch hit. The sick man had requested a priest. According to the duty nurse, there was only one remaining relative, a daughter who was driving in from New Brunswick. There had been few visitors, all of them volunteers from the Cancer Society. The nurse said she hoped the daughter would arrive in time to bid farewell to her father. Contemplating the emaciated body in the bed, Father Clark doubted this hope would be realized.

The man seemed to have lapsed into sleep. He lay still, the only sign of life was the laboured rise and fall of his chest. The white curtains were drawn around them but there was a murmur of a television set from the adjacent bed. It was turned up too loud and the bursts of tinny laughter were distracting. The priest stifled another sneeze and approached the bedside table. He had brought his viaticum case with him and he placed it down, moving aside the hospital paraphernalia of bent straws and swabs.

The older parishioners still referred to the sacrament as the last rites but he was more comfortable with the new ter-

minology of extreme unction. He was a young man and he tried to be a contemporary priest. He opened the case which was of new shiny leather. This was in fact only the second time he'd had to use it and he handled everything with pride and reverence. First, he took out the narrow silk stole, unfolded it and put it around his neck. Next, he unscrewed the silver bottle that contained the oil. It was ordinary olive oil but specially blessed. He bent over and put his hand on the sick man's head. The skin was hot and dry, the life sap already draining away from the skeletal body. However, as he did so, the man opened his eyes. His irises were pale blue but the yellow of jaundice almost swallowed them up. He recognized the priest's vestments and he whispered, "Father, I am afraid."

Father Clark had forgotten the man's name but he glanced quickly at the card above the bed.

"We are all afraid at the point of passage, Francis."

Frank Newey has not been called Francis since he was baptized but Father Clark did not know that.

"Would you like me to proceed with the anointing?"

Newey nodded. The priest dipped his forefinger in the oil and anointed the dying man's forehead, reciting a prayer as he did so. Then he took each of the parchment hands and anointed them likewise.

". . . may God fill your heart with peace."

Newey shifted restlessly. "Ronnie blamed me . . . his letter . . ." His hand plucked at the sheet. "Why is he sitting over there? Tell him to come closer, I can't . . ."

Father Clark took the vial of holy water and sprinkled it on the sheets around the body.

"When the hour comes for us to pass from this life and join Him, He strengthens us with this food for our journey . . ."

Newey tried to raise his head. "Father, I must make my confession . . . my sins are mortal . . . Liz . . ." He muttered something indistinguishable and the priest had to lean close into the rank breath to hear him.

"I was bad . . . I let them down. All of them. Sue, Ronnie. Especially my Ronnie. I was bad . . ." His words were

those of a child.

"I'm told your daughter is on her way here."

The priest saw the fear come on Newey's face.

"She hates me . . ." His voice sank and Father Clark could only catch a few words. He thought he heard "sorry" and took that as a sign of penitence.

"We will say the rite of penance together."

This time, clearly and loudly, Frank cried out, "Liz!" and again, "Lizzie!"

The priest continued. "May the Lord be in your heart and help you to confess your sins with true sorrow."

But death is too close. The sick man moved his head but Father Clark could not tell if he was nodding "yes," or if he was trying to avoid his own pain.

"Francis? Mr. Newey? Can you hear me?"

There was no further response from the man on the bed.

Father Clark pushed against the revolving door and stepped out into the chill night. He shivered as the dampness penetrated through to his chest and he held the collar of his overcoat up close to his throat. Fortunately, the rectory was not far away, just on the other side of the park. He had made the walk many times in all seasons past the derelicts who claimed the benches. Many of them he knew by name.

The two men were standing in the shelter of the south transept door. They were poorly dressed against the bite of the November wind. Ken McBride, the younger by a year, was wearing a brown woolen toque, stained grey track pants and a red summer windbreaker which said "Canadian Tire" on the back. The other man, Henry Pereira, was bareheaded but slightly better dressed in blue jeans and denim jacket. They watched the slight figure of the priest coming towards them, hunched over against the wind and wet snow. Ken took a knife from his pocket and pulled it out of its sheath. Just to scare. Henry stepped forward first as Father Clark passed through the light of the lamp and into the shadows.

"Spare some change, mister?"

"What?" Father Clark asked not quite hearing because he'd slipped on a pair of earmuffs. But he was already reaching in



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his pocket for a handout. He stopped and came up with a quarter which he offered to Henry. Ken joined his partner.

"That's not much is it? Won't even buy a coffee."

"Sorry, that's all I've got with me."

"Give us your bag," said Ken. The priest was bewildered, not even afraid. He brought the viaticum case close to his chest.

"I'm a priest. This contains sacred implements."

If McBride understood, it no longer mattered to him and he made a grab for the case. Father Clark held on tighter. It was an ordination gift from his family.

"No, you can't."

For McBride this is one more moment of frustration, one more obstacle to delay the easing of his consuming need. He punched the priest hard in the side of the head. Father Clark cried out and staggered sideways but did not let go of his case. From behind, Pereira hit him viciously and suddenly McBride joined in, showering blow after blow on the priest's back and head. He fell to the ground, holding up his viaticum case as a protection. Rage burst through McBride's body. He raised the knife and stabbed Father Clark in the back of the neck, the blade penetrating just below the white stiff collar. The struggle which had lasted less than a minute, was over. Pereira grabbed up the case and the two men ran.

The lights had been dimmed for the night and the other occupant of the room was asleep, although the television set was still flickering. As Liz entered, a young nurse emerged through the curtains around the far bed.

"Oh dear. You must be Mr. Newey's daughter."

Liz nodded. "Am I too late?"

"Yes, that is . . . I'm afraid he has passed away."

"When?"

"Just now, really. We've sent for the doctor."

"That won't help him much will it?"

The nurse smiled uncertainly. "Would you like to see him?"

Liz hesitated. "I suppose so."

The nurse lifted the thin curtain and Liz stepped inside. She didn't recognize the wizened man in the bed. She almost said, "There is some mistake, this is not

RIVER

standing there on an avenue
of waters floating in the air—
above the hum of underground streams,
a fallow lake opposite
the house on the hill—
the plan of it
exacting
cautious sympathy within the frame
of my camera lens

if only I had a wide angle to challenge
overwhelming inadequacy, size defying
definition on paper;
the hot fluid of Ceausescu's brain
seeping across one
long rectangle in an absurd vision

I imagine them returning
from New York or Leningrad—
being kissed at the airport by schoolgirls
bribed with oranges and a fast ride
in sleek, black Dacias—
damning themselves through the streets
behind darkened glass,
an empty cottage feeling
like acid in their guts,
translating through nights
of fever
into broken spines and long,
narrow ditches down the avenue;
a Parisian boulevard
crumbling in reverse, and a house
big enough to block out the rest

at the river's ending,
where it slips beneath the hot road to Sofia,
brown boys dive recklessly
into opaque, brown water

— JOHN DEGEN

my father.”

She approached closer and then she could see the familiar shape of the mouth, the jutting nose.

“I’m so sorry you missed him. He was anxious to see you,” the nurse whispered from behind her.

“Was he? What did he say?”

“Well, just that really, that he wanted to see you. We had a hard time tracking you down.”

Liz sensed reproach in the young woman’s voice.

“We lost touch,” she said. She stared down at the bed. Her father’s skin was already turning grey and in the cubicle the air held the finality of death.

“Would you like to be alone?”

“No way!”

The nurse was startled and she clasped her hands as if in prayer.

On the bedside table was a vase of yellow mums browning at the edges and a card with a dancing leprechaun on the front. Frank loved to boast about his Irish heritage. Liz wondered who had

sent the card.

“He was quite a wonderful person, your father,” said the nurse in an appealing voice. “He’s been with us almost a month and he never complained. And what a sense of humour. Always ready with a joke.”

“Really? He must have been saving them up. I never heard any of them.”

She scrutinized the gaunt face. There was a smudge of oil on his forehead which shone in the light.

“Was he given the last rites?”

“Yes, he asked to see a priest this morning.”

“I suppose you’re used to deathbed scenes, moving reconciliations and all that crap?”

The nurse wasn’t sure what Liz wanted. “Sometimes that happens but at this stage, the patients are . . . well, they are usually sedated and—”

Liz thought. *I had my speech all ready. I’ve been rehearsing it for years. What a shitty father you were, how you destroyed Ronnie. And Mom. I even wrote a list of all the times you’d let me down. Wrote them out. All the times you were such an asshole you made me want to puke. It was a long list, I can tell you that.*

She turned away to face the window and she could see her own reflection, shadowy and dark. Below she heard a siren wailing as an ambulance raced along Queen Street. The nurse had been saying something.

“Beg pardon?”

“I said you might want to talk to Father Clark, one of our chaplains. He might have . . . perhaps there is a message. Your father might have asked him to pass on a message.”

Liz looked over her shoulder at the young woman. “Before he died, was Dad—”

She stopped. She hadn’t used the word for so long, the pain of it was like a shard of glass in her throat.

Maureen Jennings is a Seaton Village resident and the author of two historical mysteries, Except the Dying (St. Martin's Press, 1997) and Under the Dragon's Tail (1998), both set in turn-of-the-century Toronto. Except the Dying received a certificate of commendation from Heritage Toronto. She has also written several short stories and two plays. One, The Black Ace, will be remounted by Solar Stage theatre in January 1999.

FOCUS GROUP

FICTION BY HAL NIEDZVIECKI

There's a movie Paul wants to see, but it isn't playing in his neighbourhood. Instead, he stays home and batters fish. Paul tries to get himself to have new experiences, but he keeps having the same experiences. Fish.

He still thinks of the time he goes to bed as early, though he's been going to bed at that time for several years now. Paul gets tired. He watches TV. He imagines creatures living in the walls, spilling out like dust and dried out cadavers during home renovations. Not that Paul is about to attempt any sort of home renovations. He lives in an apartment. He rents. He fries the fish in butter, he doesn't have a cookbook, he doesn't need a recipe, he knows how to cook fish, he always intended to make the best of everything.

The phone rings. His brother calls in the evening. Paul puts the spatula on the counter. There is a pattern to phone rings, Paul thinks, a bursting swell spraying the room with optimism like some kind of aural air freshener. Good luck from a can.

Hey, his brother says. Are you on the computer?

No.

Is the computer on?

Yeah, it's on.

I called before and got the fax noise. I'm calling from the neighbours'.

You know your neighbours?

Listen, your computer killed our phone. The wife is pissed.

Does Joey know you call her "the wife?"

Is your computer still on?

I didn't have the fax on. The fax program wasn't on.

Turn off your computer. It did something to our phone.

You can't use your phone?

There's no dial tone. Just this crackling noise, like a campfire.

It has nothing to do with my computer.

Will you just turn it off?

Okay. Okay.

I'll call you back when it's fixed.

Paul hangs up the phone. The air is thick with burning butter. He runs into the kitchen, turns off the gas, rescues the frying fillets from their splattering hell. They aren't burnt, Paul reasons. They aren't

too burnt. The phone rings again.

Paul, his brother pants. Did you turn your computer off?

Yeah.

'Cause my phone works now. Don't use your computer for a couple of hours. We've got to make some calls.

Paul bites down on the tops of his fingers. The skin burns where the curves recede into newly exposed flesh. There's nothing he can do. Absolutely nothing. He's alone, like the last of some kind of species. He's the locus at the centre of a shapeless void. He could soak the tips of his fingers in a bowl of ice water. His life without incidence, without beginning or end or—worst of all—middle. He has a belly on him like a jacket in summer. Like pants worn too tight. Women are either a problem or not a problem. He thinks he might be gay, but only in the abstract the way a doctor thinks about slicing open spanking hot organs. If he could at least hate his brother, that would be something. He looks at his watch. It's two in the afternoon. He isn't doing any work. It's quiet, he should be working, reports to type up, statistics to be processed. The afternoon in tight spirals: minute hand: second hand.

Joey has taken to dropping by.

Listen, Paul says to his computer. Quit screwing up.

She walks in without knocking, crinkles her nose, sets her mouth in a wary line, sticks out her chest, says: Smells like fish in here.

Paul half gets up, thinks better of it, slumps back down.

I opened all the windows, he says.

You been two-timing me?

I wish, Paul says.

Joey points to the computer, raises her eyebrows.

I had nothing to do with it, Paul says.

Joey fills the messy office. Paul is always cleaning up. Nothing ever gets cleaned up. Something is different today. Joey is different. She is wearing a white blouse and brown skirt that holds on to her hips, that keeps her

from pulling apart.

Blue, Joey says. Nice lipstick.

When Paul doesn't know what to do, he freezes. Just stops moving. When he doesn't know what someone else is talking about he keeps quiet. They like that when they watch him run the focus groups. They sit behind the one way window and watch him freeze up, go quiet. They think he's taking stock of the situation, maintaining control, doing one thing or another thing in the same methodical way they themselves make their decisions, swing their golf clubs, transfer a kind of money into another kind of money. He licks his lips, tastes bitter. Joey laughs. He holds a fist up in front of his face. He's been chewing on a cheap plastic pen, a finger substitute. If there was a mirror, Paul would look at himself.

Shit, he says.

C'mon, Joey laughs. She leans over, drags a swell on his lip, smears it along the curved ridge. Let me clean you up.

Later, she's all skin and bones.

I might not be happy, she tells him.

Paul shrugs, wraps his arms around protruding flesh. He's soft outside, but inside there's something hard, a dead seed, a lump of irreversible possibility. He shrugs. He wants her to be happy. It occurs to him that he's never wanted anything.

You—

Shhhh, she says.

They make butterflies. They make fluffy clouds. They leave lipstick imprints. Blue kisses. Fingerprints. We are evidence, Paul thinks to himself. Something happens without them knowing.

Paul has two separate life insurance policies. He got them on sale. He lied about his health.

The phone ringing. The smell of hot fish.

Look, you're either in control or you're not. There's no two ways about it.

What is this? Paul thinks. I hate this.

That one. A burly man stuffed into a suit waves his hand at the row of enlarged photos. That one.

Which one? Paul says.

The other one, the man says.

You try and make it through though. You have to try. Centre Automobile Service Department assistant manager, Paul thinks. His mouth goes tropical. Wet.

The one with the girl? Paul tries to swallow. What exactly do you find appealing about this image?

You know, the man says. He giggles. His face is flushed. The beers are having the desired effect. Slowing minds and lessening expectations. The man says something about tits and the other guys in the group chortle appreciatively. Paul brings a hand to his mouth, starts chewing on a knuckle. He freezes. He's on camera. They tape the sessions. They get their money's worth, insight into the minute fluctuations of karma and carnality that make beer sell better in one place or another, on Wednesday or on Thursday. Stand up straight to smile. His grin showing half teeth. He puts his hands in his pockets. He's wearing a burgundy sweater with a V-neck, casual, luxurious, but not ostentatious—he's with them, one of them, just another beer-swilling junior executive. The sweater was a present. Joey wrapped it, picked it out, charged it. His brother

jammed the box in his ribs: Here. Happy birthday little brother. Paul starts to sweat. The woman in picture two blinks her blue eyes and grows a dick.

That's great guys, Paul says. He tastes perspiration, the trickling part of a dream that must be fear. That's great. Thanks a lot. See the secretary on your way out.

The men crowd around the doorway, cracking jokes and burping. They get forty dollars each. Focus group. Paul has an erection the size of Cleveland. He turns the camera off, slides the tape into its plastic case.

Let's get together. Let's do dinner. The three of us. To tell you the truth, we have to talk. Something's come up.

Paul isn't moving. He doesn't breath.

It's that phone thing. The bill's come and Joey thinks you should pay.

She thinks I should pay?

Let's get together. I never see you any more. Face to face. We'll work something out. If you can't afford it we'll think of something. It's a big bill. And you were the one who—

I had nothing to do with it.

Stop being a shit. I mean, if that's the

way you're going to be, it was your computer that was on when I called. And after that, the phone went dead. I mean, okay, if it was up to me we'd work something out.

How much is it?

Let's talk about it. Three hundred and thirty. Listen, forget it. Let's meet at Gambi's, the three of us. They had to rip the wiring up. We'll talk about it. What'dya say? Do you good to get out.

I get out.

Fine, yeah. Eightish.

At Gambi's there are candles on the checkered table cloths. Couples hush together over orders of spaghetti and meatballs. Bad pop songs, soundtrack distance.

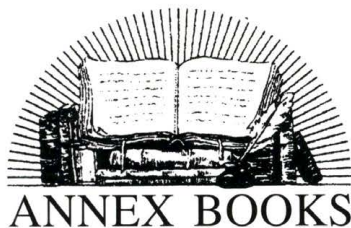
Joey's already eating. She's got a square of white pizza half crammed into her small wedge mouth. Appetizer. Her lips shiny with grease.

I'm not hungry, Paul says. He feels drunk. Nothing is what he thought it would be. He doesn't drink. His doctor forbids it.

Sit down, his brother says again.

Joey chews, swallows. Paul's got road rage, she says. Look at him.

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Road rage, his brother says, laughing. He doesn't even drive. He just needs to get laid.

Joey's wearing jeans, a T-shirt. She's slim perfection distended by shadows. Paul doesn't look. He can't quite see.

Yeah, Paul, she says. How long's it been?

What's all this crap about the phone bill? Paul says.

Oh, Joey says. Is that what you're worried about? We were just kidding.

Forget about it, his brother says. You can buy us dinner.

Road rage, Joey warns. She flags the waiter down.

But how does it actually happen? Obviously there's some pain. That's part of it. Things must get sticky. What about butt hair? Paul sticks a finger back there, feels the folds pressed together in the crack. Lubricants, he thinks. He does it like that to her. She makes him do it.

After, he eats kidney beans straight from the can. He needs energy. A group tonight. He picks up the phone to call in, to make sure all the panelists have been confirmed, to remind someone that he's still alive. The phone is dead. He runs into the other room. Turns the computer off. It doesn't matter. No one wants to hear from him. His brother had something to do with it, put a curse on the connection, made his dial tone go fuzzy and hazy like the hour before a storm. Paul starts washing dishes. He notices the smell, thinks, again, of how it might happen, how he might bend over. He can't get rid of the smell. The water stops in the middle. It's five-forty-five. The downstairs tenant has just returned from work. He's taking a two-hour shower or just letting the tap run, drawing the water down—it's like the more they take away from him, the longer he'll stand there over the sink, watching the water steam down the drain in useless spirals, the nether regions of power, tidal wave floods carried through by leaky pipes.

Light beer tonight. The women file in. Secretaries, fledgling bureaucrats. Paul watches them take their seats, fill out their name-tags, address the matter of the questionnaire. He stares through the mirror, tries to calculate his net worth, uses his fingers, decides to throw in the life insurance policies at the last minute—what the hell, he thinks.

One of the women looks like Joey. Paul

leans forward, touches the glass with his nose. He closes his eyes.

Everything alright? Dan asks.

Paul startles, smashes his face, pulls back.

Yeah, he says. Fine. Thanks. Was just feeling out the group.

Dan looks at his watch.

Time to get started, Paul says.

Right, Dan says.

Inside the board room, Paul pretends to adjust the camera. He stares over at the woman who appears to resemble Joey and decides that she is Joey. The name tag pinned to her breast pocket says Winona. She wraps her red lips around the end of a pen, ponders a vexing question concerning the average number of light intoxicants she imbibes on a typical Saturday night. A phone rings inside Paul's head. He's rigid, frozen. She's fucking with me. He closes his eyes, presses his hands to his ears. In the momentary darkness, he feels pain filling him, imagines how it might be perfect, how it might be like losing everything.

He shouldn't drink. There are health issues. He fits the key in the lock, marvelling at the jigsaw specifications of the most everyday activities. The light fluctuates in the living room. Blues and greys in sickly boardroom splatters. Paul lets his eyes adjust, freezes up, feels his fists clamping into his palms. He's sticky under his sweater. He hasn't had a shower, he should have showered earlier—it got late, he lost track of time, the guy downstairs, that fucking guy. If he could have had a shower he would have been able to wash the smell of fish out of his hair and hey, what happened might not have happened. It's as simple as that: people responsible; circumstances beyond his control.

This is the best part, Joey says. She's got the remote in her small fist, the cordless phone in her lap. Paul can't tell if she's talking to him. The phone doesn't work, anyway—voices trapped, they flow across wires and rooms and city blocks and there is no way for them to get out.

Joey is naked.

This part right here, she says.

Paul can't move. On TV he looks small, miniature, hopeless. The women sip light beer in oval mouthfuls. TV-Paul gesticulates, rips up a questionnaire, laughs like he told a good joke. He paces around the room, moves out of the camera's view, then comes back in. He reaches for a name

tag, yells something unintelligible. The sound of a ripping pocket. Silence. Then an administrative assistant named Karen says: Oh my god. Winona smiles mischievous schoolboy teeth, clamps her hand over her exposed bra and starts screaming. Paul stands in the middle of the living room, feels Dan's arms circling his chest, dragging him. Everything is small, distant, rewound in office colours. Paul pulls the phone out from between Joey's thighs. He feels a swelling in his hard part. My heart, he thinks.

Hello? his brother says. Hello?

Hal Niedzviecki is a Little Portugal resident. He is the author of Smell It (Coach House, 1998) and editor of the Canadian urban fiction collection, Concrete Forest (McClelland and Stewart, 1998). He is also the editor of Broken Pencil magazine, the guide to alternative publishing in Canada.

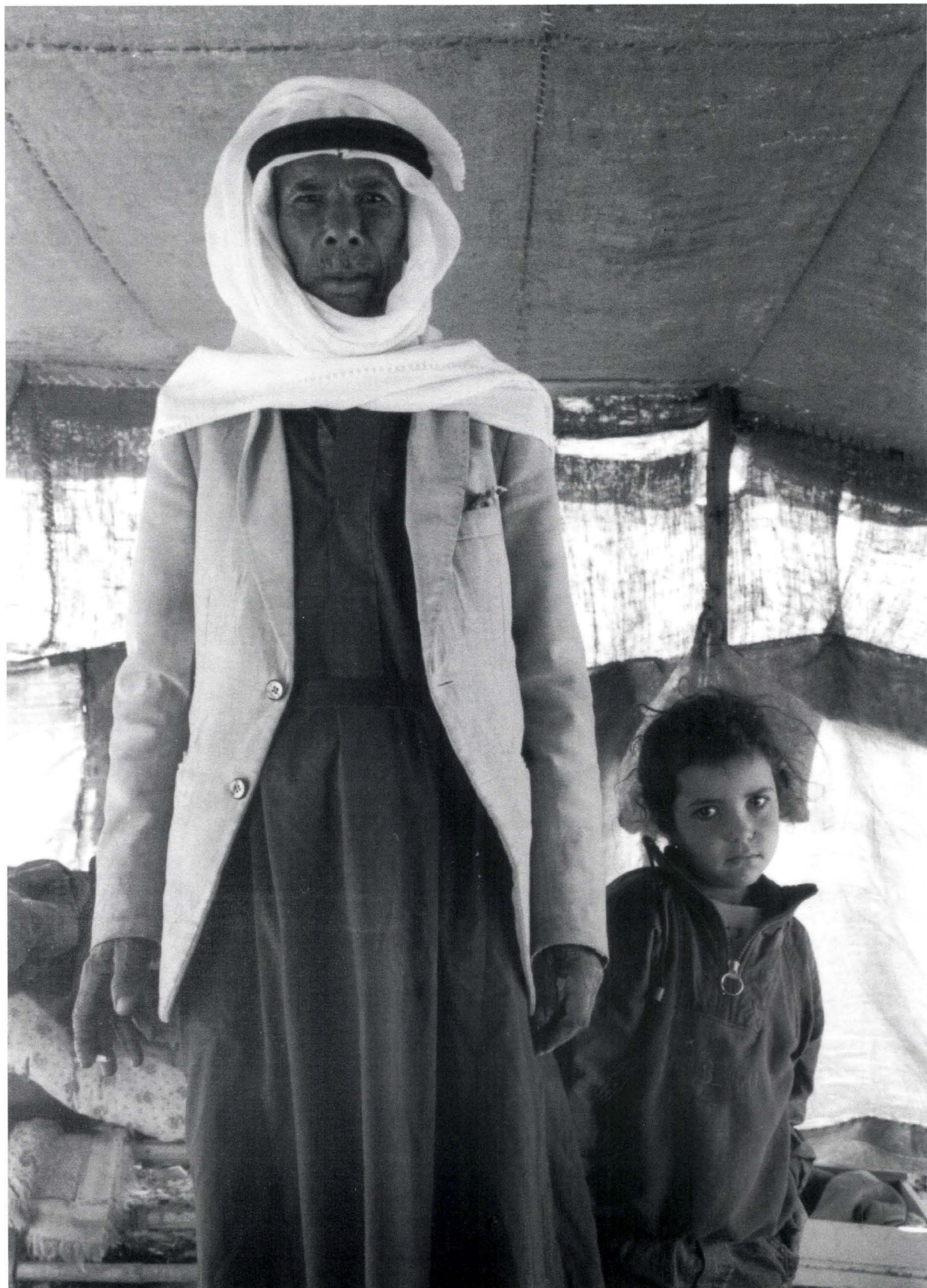
SECOND CHANCE

At a time in her life when most others would never dream of giving up job stability for a career in art, Annex-based photographer Beverley Abramson has done just that. A three-and-a-half week photography course in France proved enough to inspire Abramson, after many years as a career consultant, sixteen at the University of Toronto's Career Transition Centre, to heed the advice she had long offered others and start a career as a professional photographer in May 1996: "Photography made me see things in a way I'd never experienced before."

Although still attending Ryerson's photography program, Abramson has not been shy to show her work in public, holding a total of seven exhibitions across Toronto in 1998 alone.

Her love of photography has taken Abramson to Tuscany, Paris, Mexico and Israel, where she captured the scene at right of a Bedouin man and his granddaughter in the West Bank's Judean Desert earlier this year.

Having recently completed a showing at the Galleria in BCE Place, Abramson plans to continue her vigorous schedule in the new year: "At this point in my life I'm not afraid to take risks. Challenges are inspirational."





WHERE VOICES CROSS

Rosemary Sullivan dances her way through the art of biography with *The Red Shoes*, a look at the early years of the life of Margaret Atwood.

INTERVIEW BY KERRI HUFFMAN

Margaret Atwood is the only person I have ever seen make Pamela Wallin visibly uncomfortable. Not long ago, Atwood was a guest on Wallin's self-titled Newsworld talk show, promoting her then-new book *Alias Grace*. When Wallin asked Atwood what she thought of the real-life Grace Marks, Atwood fixed her with a piercing stare and said something along the lines of, "If you'd read the book you would know what I think of Grace Marks."

That somewhat cold, condescending figure is perhaps whom we usually think of as Margaret Atwood. We accept the persona so often made fun of in *Frank* magazine and we get used to seeing Atwood collect Giller Prizes and Governor General's Awards with each new book, so much to the point that it becomes hard to imagine her as anything but a machine churning out critically acclaimed best-sellers.

Atwood is obviously intensely private, shielding her home life with a public facade. As one of the nation's cultural icons, she is constantly under scrutiny: while daily newspaper and television reviewers fawn over her (as they do with any established Canadian writer), members of the young literary community tend to see her as head of the old guard of Canadian fiction.

For most, this scrutiny, fawning and criticism would make the act of writing about Atwood seem a daunting task. Nonetheless, it is a task decorated Canadian biographer Rosemary Sullivan was willing to take, resulting in her recently released biography on the Annex-based author, *The Red Shoes: Margaret Atwood Starting Out*.

Sullivan is no beginner when it comes to the art of biography, or writing in general for that matter. Her first biographical outing, *By Heart: Elizabeth Smart/A Life*, recounted the life of the Canadian author most famous for her work *At Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*. Sullivan won the Governor General's non-fiction

award for her next biography, *Shadow Maker*, focusing on the late Sussex-Ulster poet Gwendolyn MacEwen. Sullivan's other works include two books of poetry, a literary study of Theodore Roethke, and several anthologies featuring stories and poetry by Canadian women writers.

Oddly, Sullivan has been questioned on her supposed attachment to self-destructive, masochistic women: Smart had followed romantic obsession; MacEwen had creative drive, but part of that drive—the search for the perfect muse—tore her apart. Almost in answer to her previous subjects, Sullivan turned to Atwood, a woman who had succeeded in her goals.

As the title suggests, *The Red Shoes: Margaret Atwood Starting Out* gives great weight to the importance of Atwood's childhood; one spent with a somewhat eccentric family in the Canadian woods. Sullivan continues to follow Atwood through her education at Victoria University at the University of Toronto, where she counted Northrop Frye as one of her instructors, and then on to Harvard where the question of Canadian identity began to mould Atwood's way of thinking and writing. Sullivan follows Atwood as far as the late 1970s, when she had clearly become a strong force within the literary world. *The Red Shoes* does not continue past this point, focusing on the building of Atwood's career rather than her later success.

"I thought it would be fun to write about someone who had pulled it off. And I also thought it would be really challenging to write about someone who could talk back," Sullivan says on her approach to *The Red Shoes*. "In the course of writing about Margaret Atwood, the really deep, constraining factor was the discovery that I wanted to make sure that I never spoke for her. If you say to me, 'Does Margaret Atwood like the colour blue?' I say, 'Ask Margaret Atwood.'"

Ironically, *The Red Shoes* began to take form during Sullivan's research for

Shadow Maker. In the course of writing the book, Sullivan had long conversations with Atwood, who had been a friend of MacEwen, during which time the two discussed the nature of female creativity and the elusive search for a muse. At that time, Atwood searched through her hall closet looking for letters sent to her by MacEwen. Sullivan was struck that, while filing through MacEwen's letters, Atwood was torn as to whether to give such personal items to Sullivan, only to decide that MacEwen would have thought it appropriate.

"That issue of female creativity came up in my discussions with Margaret Atwood about Gwen. We sat down and talked about what is the muse for a woman and how difficult it was to find a version of yourself in the '60s. It was that conversation that led me to want to write *The Red Shoes*," Sullivan says. "I thought, that's really interesting and stuff we need to know. I think if I hadn't had that conversation with Margaret I might not have decided to go on with this."

This examination of female creativity and the drive to write is what makes Sullivan's biographies most interesting; in the course of reconstructing a life she also tackles life's philosophical issues. Where many biographies consist only of tangible life detail, Sullivan explores such issues as they enter the lives of her subjects.

"The drive to write is no mystery. It's like any art; if you can get far enough, if you're not frustrated early, it's the most interesting thing you can do because it's an intelligent form of play. With Gwen, what I wanted to make clear in that book is that writing isn't just a self-expression, it's a search, it's discovery. I committed myself to this notion that writing is not something hived off from life, it is life."

Placing art within the context of life is central to *The Red Shoes*, which may seem obvious, given that Atwood is often considered to be a cultural critic and satirist. But Sullivan delves into the issue of what it is to be a contemporary artist, follow-

ing the path of Atwood's career instead of exploring her personal life. And although Sullivan did not have access to Atwood's journals or personal letters, *The Red Shoes* does offer some unusual tidbits not widely known—Atwood is apparently excellent at reading horoscopes and has a keen interest in witchcraft.

Sullivan's approach takes a successful writer and allows for an examination of the course of her career and the development of a Canadian literary community as well. One of the integral issues in the book is the following of Atwood as a female writer starting out in a Canadian literary community where machismo was rampant. In her early visits to the Bohemian Embassy (a downtown Toronto coffeehouse where reading and musical performances were held) a young Atwood listened to Milton Acorn bluster that to be a poet you had to work as a truck driver first. The implication was that, as a woman, she could serve only as a muse. But Atwood was single-minded about her work; the poetry came first—a dedication accepted in men but seen as calculating in women. At one time, Al Purdy said there was something cold at the core of Atwood. As Sullivan points out, that was the romanticizing of women in the arts coming to the fore.

"Al Purdy has been very single-minded about his writing. And indeed, domestic life has not been central to Al Purdy, it has been sacrificed because, as for many male writers, the poetry came first. And when you found the same impulse in a woman it was considered cold."

Gwendolyn MacEwen had been subjected to this myth as well. As a young woman she married Milton Acorn but left him after a few months because of her commitment to writing and her disinterest in filling the role of muse/caregiver to him. Acorn carried a great amount of animosity towards MacEwen, so much so that when he died she was

reluctant to read at his memorial, feeling the writing community saw her as a woman who had used him to promote herself.

The Red Shoes works almost as a counterpoint to *Shadow Maker*, and Atwood as counterpoint to MacEwen. MacEwen fell into the "romantic" notion of the artist—a woman tormented by her childhood, who died an alcoholic, almost in poverty and remained relatively unknown in her own country, despite producing twenty books of poetry. Atwood, on the other hand, is internationally renowned, obviously financially stable (rumours circulated that the



fee for film rights to *Alias Grace* were over \$1 million) and by all accounts she lives a very down-to-earth life. Atwood has rejected the stereotype of the suffering artist, as is evident in a letter Sullivan quotes from Atwood to a friend:

"Nice girls get married and have kids, they don't write poems. Therefore if you write poems, you aren't a nice girl and deserve to be punished. There's another version of that: artists suffer. . . . But basically I don't like suffering very much. So I evolved a rationale that permits less of it."

For Sullivan, part of the point of writing *The Red Shoes* was to reject that myth as well. "We have a very romanticized version of the artist, that the artist is someone alone in an attic, following her

genius, and it usually leads them in destructive directions. Why do we consider that artists must suffer? I had somebody say, 'But what price did Atwood pay?' and I wanted to say, 'What cost did you want her to pay?' The work itself is hard enough. This model of the artist suffering means they're never supposed to live from their work. You don't pay them because they have to suffer. What lawyer has to moonlight as a lawyer?"

With *The Red Shoes*, her third biography in eight years, Sullivan is clearly having fun with the form. She notes that with *By Heart* she situated herself as an omniscient narrator, because, although she had known Elizabeth Smart in the later years of her life, she had to reconstruct the seventy years prior. It was in writing *By Heart* that Sullivan fell in love with the form of biography, feeling the complexity and texture of life come together so suddenly. She was also fascinated with the discovery that very little in one's life is ever lost—answers to any question can usually be found. In writing about Smart, part of the joy for Sullivan was discovering that the crazy stories Smart had told her were true, including

taking her children across the U.S./Canada border by pretending they were royalty.

As with Smart, Sullivan had been friends with Gwendolyn MacEwen. One would expect that their relationship would have formed through Toronto literary circles but instead they met through the men in their lives. Sullivan's partner of almost two decades played in a band with MacEwen's then-husband, Nikos Tsingos. The band played at Greek restaurants along the Danforth and Sullivan spent many nights listening to the band and talking with MacEwen. Sullivan says that MacEwen was a bit suspicious of her at first, thinking of her only as an academic (Sullivan currently teaches English

at the University of Toronto).

After MacEwen's death and after writing about Smart, Sullivan decided to write about someone she knew to be filled with a creative spirit and someone who had managed to produce a large volume of work over thirty years but still remained relatively unknown in her own country.

Serendipitously, when the author started research for *Shadow Maker*, she found that MacEwen had left her papers and notebooks with the instructions that they be given to her biographer. With that, Sullivan felt as though she had MacEwen's permission, or even blessing, to complete the book.

Shadow Maker was an unqualified success, winning the non-fiction Governor General's Award that year. (Although, it's sad to note that, while researching this article, I searched numerous Annex bookstores for any book of MacEwen's and came up empty-handed each time.)

Because Sullivan had known MacEwen for a significant period of time, her approach to *Shadow Maker* was somewhat different than her approach to *By Heart*. Throughout the book, Sullivan's own voice often enters the story, as if to remind the reader that she is putting the puzzle together. The book includes several passages in which Sullivan discusses the trail of research she is following; looking up names in school registries and discussing how she picked the photographs. Sullivan denies following any sort of post-modern discipline in writing biography. Including herself in the book is far more personal than theoretical, although she quickly points out that "this issue of truth is exaggerated in biography in the sense that we don't really believe in truth, there isn't really one truth."

If anything, the switch from omniscient narrator in *By Heart* to post-modern "I" in *Shadow Maker* could be attributed to an incident that happened when Sullivan was promoting her first biography. In following Smart's life, Sullivan recounted a time when

she was caring for four children in Ireland in absolute poverty because her lover, George Barker, had left them and taken all of their money. While under such strain Smart hit one of the children when he was misbehaving—an act which apparently shocked Smart, who was known for being a somewhat over-indulgent mother.

During an interview for the book a journalist told Sullivan he had quite liked Elizabeth Smart until he found out she had beaten her children—a comment that surprised Sullivan but also reinforced the realization of how much responsibility she carried as a biographer.



"It made me very, very aware that you have an enormous responsibility as a biographer when you are talking about other lives—not just the subject, but the people who surround the subject. So the intrusion of my voice as biographer saying, I can know this, this is my speculation, or I can't know that, seemed to be necessary to get the information across the way I wanted to," she explains. "I do feel that there is a certain slipperiness to biography. Biographies make enormous speculations about people who aren't there. I actually think I was pretty careful to resist that impulse in my books. I don't say categorically that this happened or this happened unless I knew it happened."

With *The Red Shoes*, Sullivan seems to be moving away from conventional biography even more. Instead of trying to recreate Atwood's life, Sullivan specifically formed a structure around Atwood's childhood and the route she took in becoming a writer. As Sullivan sees it she has become "the place where voices cross," as she was careful not to make any assumptions that she somehow knows the inner life of Margaret Atwood.

"My function was to record these voices and speculate about the bottom line with questions like, 'what shapes the imagination of a child,' 'what does a family do in terms of one's confidence,' 'how does one deal with the fear of failure as a writer?' All those things were the background questions rather than, 'what does she think about this?' I'm not sitting here saying I'm going to give you the whole story about Margaret Atwood. It's not *Margaret Atwood: The Life*. I'm exploring my obsessions which have to deal with the nature of the artist and what writing is."

It is the building of a career and the desire to write that Sullivan is so obviously entranced by.

"To me the drama of beginning is always interesting. The drama of success is harder to write. I decided early that I wanted to frame

the book in terms of the story of the movie *The Red Shoes*. The point of that was this idea that you couldn't be an artist and a woman without somehow violating the code of art," Sullivan explains. "One reviewer said *The Red Shoes* has nothing to do with Margaret Atwood. I think that misses the point. She started out like many women of her generation, thinking if you want to be an artist you have to abdicate from conventional life, so I wanted to pull you through to the point where she actually pulls it off."

The Red Shoes: Margaret Atwood Starting Out is currently available in hardcover from Harper Flamingo Canada.

AMNESIA

Excerpts from *Anomia: Fragments Toward a Grammar of Endings*

FICTION BY ALANA WILCOX

My dearest Aidan,
How I ache for you. My thighs, atrophied, my breaths shallow, reluctant. My heartbeat dull and irregular, slowed by its attempts to reconstruct the cadence of your voice through my veins. Pores closed tight, shoulders crumpled in, my body tries to close itself in around the last remains of you, the last echoes of your touch. Refusing, still, to admit that touch and truth might share only three letters, to admit the absence of—

I crumple the page. There is no room in this viscous night for reconsideration, the page too dimly lit for revision. Each word heavy with the hope that it will be enough; the threat, always, of melodrama. The dark impossibility of such a letter. I toss the wadded paper across the room to dim its glare. Will I acquiesce to your silence.

Such loneliness to this night, the dark pressed in against me like water. Desire circling me like sharks. Insidious, this darkness, it makes language evaporate around me, words so pendant with sorrow that they sink beneath my reach, and I am left only with the sound of my blood whispering your name through my arteries and the print of your body across mine. There is not light enough to see the page clearly, there is only a mass of forms strewn on the paper as I would be across you.

My dearest Aidan,

How I ache for you, the way you might hold me in so close, how this night holds its darkness pressed so tightly to itself against the threat of dawn

Ache. There is such longing in this word. Onomatopoeic almost, the sustained *a*, rent suddenly, *k*. But even this plaintive *a* will not do. I crumple the page again. Such a language, rhyming *ache* with *fake* and *take*, these resonances always accompany it. *Break, quake*. Such darkness crowding in under my pen, I cannot see my words, the shapes that might redeem them; the way the *c* and *b* kern, huddle in

together, inscribing a tiny circle, a sanctuary there.

*My dearest Aidan,
How I long*

How I

I had hoped to banish Aidan from my thoughts by writing to him, about him, to force his essence through the narrow pen and out onto the paper, condensed, extricable. But in the shape of words he is only more real to me. I have been struggling with this last letter to him for so long; I want to tell him everything and nothing all at once. I thought I saw him on the street yesterday, although he does not live here anymore. The same curly red hair, square jaw, unforgiving gait. And even though I knew it wasn't him, I felt my blood rush away from my heart into a suit of armour through my veins. This happens so often, still. I'm afraid that all my imaginings of his presence will accumulate and solidify into him, so that one day it really will be my Aidan. I hate that I think this still. If only I could finish this letter, if I could summarize what passed between us, I might be able to excise it. But I'm not sure if I know what did pass between us. Sometimes it is so clear, so lucid I can fit it into a single sentence. Like when your thoughts begin to shape themselves into words and you find yourself thinking not in vague images and blurry paragraphs but in sharp words, and I can almost contain us within this distinct sentence. But by the time I reach the period the beginning has begun to evaporate because nothing is large enough to accommodate this, us. And then I can't remember what colour shoes he had when we met or what the first movie was that we saw together. It makes me desperate with fear, this failure of memory. Details wrapped in oil, eluding me, and when I grab at them I clutch them so

hard I'm squeezing the life from them. Over and over I play back to myself the story of the first time we made love until it has become banal, until I am confused about which parts of it are real and which I have embellished. I try to touch my breast like he would have, but I can't remember how. I can't remember what he looked like naked, I have in my mind the pictures, the touches of other men. I try to remember the pattern of red hair on his chest, and I see it clearly at first but then I wonder if I'm thinking of a photograph of someone else. I try to mimic the feel of his hand around my waist because I think I can remember the degrees of possessiveness and reverence in the firmness of his hold, but I always forget to account for the promise of loss contained in that grasp. I want not to care about these things anymore, I want simply to write this letter, to seal it in an envelope that could hold it all and be done with it. I want these memories to fall, like helicopter seeds from trees, spinning gracefully, until they land, a soft cushion on the earth.

I have changed my route home from the library so that every day I walk past the house where Aidan used to live. And then I walk past the café where he used to go to write and I peer in the window every day although I know his red head won't be there. Every day I leave the library at the end of my shift and I say to myself, don't walk that way, don't walk past his house because you know he's not there anymore, he doesn't live anywhere near here, and still you're disappointed. And then I walk that way, and I try to pretend that I have no control over my feet but really I know that I always do and I feel worse for not exercising it. I feel worse because I know that I want to see him in that house because I can't imagine his new place, his new life, and I like to feel like he is still inside me, within me,

DEATH IN VENICE

I watch Gustav Ashenbach in his beach chair
as he watches Tadzio
wade into the Adriatic
raise a hand in farewell
the sweat of cholera running in
black rivulets
from the professor's recently dyed hair
and cry with him

cry for his weakness
his love for Tadzio
not because it is unrequited
but because he in his ordered life
his ill-mannered way of keeping his distance
has left him open

to feel some fragile joy
to weep
like the interior walls of a
sanctuary on a summer's day

— MARY ANN MOORE

even though it is so painful to have him there, and even more painful to know that he is still there inside me because I want him to be. And then as I walk past the café, I say to myself, don't look in to see if he's sitting there because you know he's not, and then I turn my head and I hate myself for my lack of control and I hate him for not being there and I'm relieved because if he was there he would know that I was looking for him. And then I worry because I know that for so long I felt with him that he was eluding me and I thought that if only I could catch a glimpse of him without him seeing me that then I would have captured him finally, and I still seem to feel this way. I think every day that if only I didn't do this that I would be *over* him, but then I think what does that mean. How it's not really about prepositions, that I have been *over* him and *under* him and *beside* him and *away from* him, and that the only way I would ever be *over* him is if there were no preposition between us at all. Or just a preposition with nothing, no Aidan, on the other side of it. I am *over*, *under*, *beside*, *against*. Then it would be done. Meanwhile he is al-

ways there, on the other side of some preposition, even when, especially when, he is not in the house and not in the café, and I am always disappointed, and relieved.

•
Perhaps I can dance you this letter, the clarity of motion in place of my hapless words.

Alone, here, in my cramped apartment. A small movement of the hand, a cursive arch of fingers. Uncertainty viscous as ink. The foot slowly points, an inarticulate memory. My arms reach out, one in front, one behind, the right leg pulls taut and begins to lift. The torso bends into this movement, this . . . The name of the step forgotten. Thoughts clumsy and laboured, the weight of self-consciousness.

I am bending further and further reaching toward the name of this, toward words of you *penché* this is a *penché* and I wobble. The words now, coming to me before the shapes they signify. *glissade fouetté assemblé brisé*. Faster and my knees begin to ache, my arms can no longer hold themselves up, my feet stepping on

one another. Stiff as prose.

A ballet lesson for you, my love.

plié the body rigid erect pried slowly open
the knees spread themselves apart

developpé toes pull up into a *retiré* and the leg slowly unfolds out to the front or side or back reluctantly as though it were being torn away

arabesque one leg lifted out high to the back straining the same side arm following the leg to the back the opposite arm pulling to the front the body forked in indecision

échappé legs together a sharp jump landing feet apart an escape

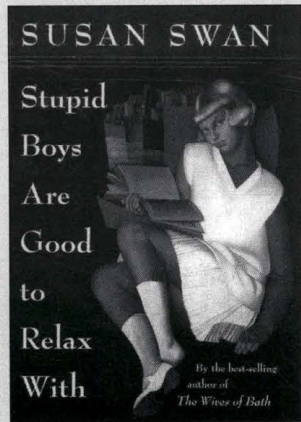
These steps will comprise my letter to you, their order irrelevant—this is a vocabulary outside of narrative, defiant of semantics. A vocabulary which never acquiesces to grammar. Most articulate in its phonemes, longing spelled out in the angle of the wrist. A tilt of the head a more compelling adjective than "sorrowful."

Because ballet is about suspension, I show you my heart, weightless and heavy since we parted. The ballerina holds her body, holds her every move as though she were between the up and down on a swing pushed too high, in that moment when the chains slacken, the swing, the heart, the breath all pause as if to forge such weightlessness into tangibility. Ballet asks you to believe in that moment, in sustained flight. To forget how the body finds comfort in symmetry, how every movement of a limb away from the centre is a risk, a betrayal of equilibrium.

But my dance would be a dance not of buoyancy but of indolence, not a celebration of reach but a frightened resistance to flight. The body confounded by asymmetry. No less turgid than all these drafts of my letter. Such a weight to my body that it could never leave the floor, efforts at leaping, at abandon quelled by the density of the flesh. Feet heavy as words.

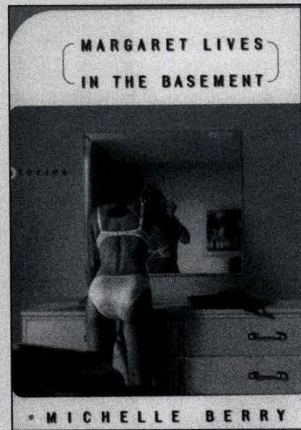
Alana Wilcox is a Seaton Village resident and winner of the 1998 Paragraph magazine short fiction contest. She is currently completing a novel and will soon be releasing a chapbook from Coach House Books.

SHORT LIST ... SHORT STORIES ...



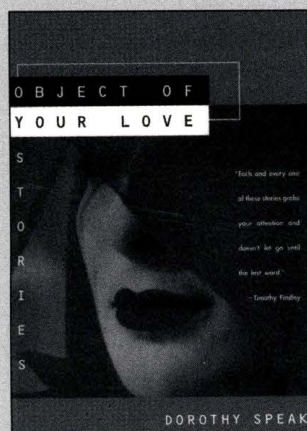
STUPID BOYS ARE GOOD TO RELAX WITH
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Dorothy Speak

“Few readers will forget the people in these stories.”
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LONG REMEMBERED ...

SOMERVILLE HOUSE PUBLISHING

ELEMENTS OF DAYDREAMS

*The buds, the keys, the leaves
those leaves, the colours, bare trees . . .*

Can't be wistful about money.
Wistful's got you know *wist*.

Plenty other things to go wistful on.
Take that G— works the desk

make you wistful. Faraway
train in the night make you.

Sun hits your neck when you have some
free time turn you wistful.

Shadow of a low plane arcing through
Eglinton Park. Trysts that you keep

on a map in your brain, places you save
in your savoury memory. Mansions

you fashion from stars from the sky
you can reach them from bed through September

night air. Open windows, all the rooms
in the world, I guess space can make you wistful.

Botany in time in season after season
in scrutiny fields of dandelion fluff

it's a fact: sniffing can also make
you wistful.

The tender of wistful
is daydreams.

Of dreams in the night
the tender is metaphor.

All this is precious little to do with money.
Wistful consists of space and free time: on occasion

it's misspelt as “wasteful.” Some folks just plain
don't get it. Some do. Some point

they take the time to pause
to stop resisting wistful.

— CHRIS CHAMBERS

JARDIN BOTANIQUE

FICTION BY JUDITH WILLIAMS

“How full it is!” she said, to escape the awkwardness.

The water in the lily pond was invisible, densely covered with the flat leaves and white petals of the floating flowers. At one end of its rectangular stillness, a trickle fed it from the mouth of a bronze lion who emerged with his stylized aureole of a mane from an Art Deco marble wall.

The lily pads undulated, slowly and gently, right to the edge. Surely they should be cleared? Weren't such pools meant to reflect the sky? She watched, almost expecting to see the plants creeping by hair's breadths up over the pool's lip.

“I hope there's a drainhole somewhere,” she added.

“They're using a circulating pump,” he said, balancing himself on the very edge. His voice was still the most beautiful thing about him—the faint remaining Irish now interwoven, after twenty years in this city, with a weft of French.

“You don't want to ruin your shoes,” she said; then she heard, and chastised herself for, the unwarranted concern in her voice. Her eyes fell from his pin-striped back to these shoes. They looked expensive. She did not know enough about the visible and outward symbols of wealth to know what degree of it they represented. But she did remember enough about him to know that they represented the wish to seem wealthy.

“It's nice to see you again after all these years,” she finally said. It was the sentence she had been practising for weeks, ever since he had answered her letter and agreed to meet. She had spoken it to her pillow at night and to her toaster in the morning; to her stainless steel teapot, from which her own face, bulbously distorted, regarded her skeptically; to her golden retriever, Grian, who tilted his head, sensing the importance of the words but knowing that

they were too complex, and wrenched too far out of context, to require a response.

She had spoken them aloud upon entering the imposing diagonal gate at the corner of Pie Neuf and Sherbrooke, and making her way up the pavement that led, between riotous banks of annuals, to the cascading pools that had first fascinated her in childhood. She had caught her first glimpse of him when she passed under one of the twin trellises that framed the compulsively symmetrical formal garden, and she had stopped there, hiding behind hanging vines, to say them to herself one last time.

He was still staring down at the lily pads. This was the moment. How would he respond? With another evasion into the world of small practicalities? Was he, even now, trying to think of something more to say about how the water system worked? But no. He turned to face her.

She blinked, and imagined him falling slowly and gracefully backwards into the water. Would it splash, or would the lilies bear him up? How densely were their stems intertwined below the surface? The thought of those submerged stems made her shudder. She closed her eyes again. It was hot and unusually quiet in the garden, even for a weekday afternoon in September. Beyond the lion's wall, and beyond a screen of trees and shrubs, the traffic was muted to the murmur of a distant river.

He did not speak. She knew he was not going to say that he was glad to see her. Nor was he going to ask why she had written. He stood with his arms folded in just the way she remembered from all those years ago and waited for her to go on.

Judith Williams is an Annex resident. This is her first published work.



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Next issue:
December 1, 1999

DUPONT AT ZENITH

An overdue memorial to the forgotten achievements of Toronto's twentieth-century avenue of enterprise.

ESSAY BY ALFRED HOLDEN

On October 17, 1994, Donald Weston drove from his North York home to the industrial plant on Dupont Street in central Toronto where he had been employed since 1952. He brought with him a borrowed video camera and, just outside the main door, switched it on, briefly photographing an iron plate identifying the premises as Hamilton Gear, 950 Dupont. With the camera still rolling, he mounted a couple of steps, opened the door and went in.

Room by room, Weston, aged sixty-two, proceeded through the factory, letting the tape run. He walked down a long, fluorescent-lit corridor of shelves loaded with the tools, materials and equipment of twentieth-century machine-making. He went through a workshop where men standing on a floor sprinkled with metal shavings were attending whirring, spinning lathes cutting teeth into gear blanks—disks of metal sliced, in another process, from heavy rods of tempered steel or bronze. Weston climbed down stairwells with his camera on his shoulder, recording walls displaying framed photographs of company products. He paused at one picture of a gear about the size of a very large round of cheese. Its hefty teeth are engaged with those of a “worm drive,” a tube-shaped gear resembling a giant piece of fusilli. The assembly has a satiny, silvery sheen, and in the film is being inspected by a thoughtful-looking man in glasses and overalls.

Weston made his way through the company's administrative offices on the second floor along the Dupont Street side of the plant. Telephones warble now and then, voices can be heard and a lone secretary says “smile.” Weston moved along, recording jerky glimpses of floors and drop-ceilings and hallway drinking fountains. He went into the company's vault where, he later recalled, nothing more or less valuable than the details of client orders from the last eighty-three years were stored on reels of microfilm and in thick paper files.

Descending into the bowels of the plant, past a Keep Door Closed sign, he entered a dimly-lit furnace room where boilers and compressors groaned and toiled, and where a hole in the floor contained a pool of water, ten feet across and twenty feet deep—“the swimming pool, we called it”—where at one time gears heated red hot in an oven were hoisted for a sudden, sizzling quench to harden their alloys.

By accident, the camera was aimed toward large, south-facing factory windows that let in so much light the image on the tape was momentarily whited-out before the aperture adjusted to reveal more of the flotsam of a machine shop: hoses, rods, wheels, pulleys, metal drums—not all of it in orderly storage. At many stops along the way, Weston, his camera's red recording-light blinking, was greeted by co-workers.

“What's this about?” asked a shipper. Following more light, Weston emerged into a vast room, larger than a high school gymnasium, with a ceiling four storeys high. Splashes of bright orange and blue—the painted surfaces of various walls and posts and pieces of machining equipment—seem to glow, since the big shop is flooded with daylight admitted through walls sheathed entirely in panels of green-tinted glass. Employees called this “the greenhouse.” The boxy building's skin of glass panes in industrial sash is hung on a structure of steel girders whose thinness is deceptive, for dangling from ceiling girders are huge trolleys and hooks used, Weston will later note, for lifting industrial gears more than twenty feet in diameter and weighing tons.

Machinists in another shop smiled, but said little. “What've you heard?” someone asks. “That we're going to close down?” When he was done, Weston went back outside, stood on at the corner of Dupont Street and Dovercourt Road and, with the camera's eye, recorded for posterity the For Sale sign that hung high on a west-facing wall.

It had been up for months. No buyer

had been forthcoming. Six weeks after Donald Weston made his video tour, Hamilton Gear and Machine Company, founded in 1911, ceased operations. Weston, a craftsman, was kept on to help inventory the remains. The following February the building's contents were sold at auction by Corporate Assets, who published an inventory of thousands of items. It read like an estate sale for a factory and, more gloriously, a catalogue of the specialized tools of the dying machine age. There were lathes and Sykes cutters and drills, gear hobbys and grinding wheels, pullers and sharpeners, brooms and office copiers and engineers' bookcases “with contents.” The firm's original Bertram boring mill was auctioned off. Offered and sold, to a buyer from Saskatchewan, was a storehouse of wooden mock-ups of gears. Crafted by staff pattern-makers from top-grade pine, these were the historic library of shapes from which sand moulds were made; moulds into which foundries poured molten metal that when cooled became crude wheels and disks, raw material for the deft hands and precision tools of Hamilton Gear Company, 950 Dupont Street, to plane, cut and polish into the wheels of industry.¹

Enterprises, as great as Eastern Airlines or as lowly as a corner store, will often die pathetically, with no ceremony or celebration of their achievements. Dupont Street in Toronto at the close of the twentieth century is an open graveyard of such industries, most of which collapsed without so much as a pauper's funeral. Their skeletons lie exposed. They are the parking lots, warehouse loft condos and retail joints of the post-industrial age: the soulless and struggling Galleria Mall at Dufferin Street, on the site where Dominion Radiator Company once made the pipes that warmed people's homes; the more meritoriously recycled McMurtry Furniture factory at Bartlett Avenue, which churned out sturdy pressed-back chairs by the gross but where developers lately spotted a new beauty (and perhaps dollar signs) in rough



A machinist poses with Hamilton gears, circa 1913.

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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brick walls and thick wood beams²; the empty hulk of Mono Lino Typesetting, a victim of publishing's shift from industrial plant to desktop; the Blockbuster Video at 672 Dupont at Christie, where you may rent copies of Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* in the very showroom where the Ford Motor Company of Canada sold Model T automobiles that it built upstairs and tested on a track on the roof.³

Indeed, the twentieth was supposed to be Canada's century, and you'd be hard-pressed to find another street in the Dominion where people worked as industriously to make it so. At scales minute and massive, Dupont created: "Davenport Works, Toronto, builds power, distribution, welding, furnace, instrument, control and street-lighting transformers," declared General Electric, describing in a 1930s-era booklet the sprawling factories between what is now Dupont Street and Davenport Road, along Lansdowne Avenue. In the illustrations, which include a bird's-eye view reminiscent of nineteenth-century line drawings which greatly exaggerated the size of factories, smokestacks and even clouds of smoke, GE showed eight railroad tracks servicing its smoke-belching complex of buildings and yards next to the Canadian Pacific Railway's North Toronto line, paralleling Royce Avenue, today's Dupont Street.

Electrical transformers weighing up to 230 tons, whose cores and coils could be hung like mere meat on hooks and jigs from the factory's beams, were manufactured here. One publicity picture showed a "thirty-six thousand kilovolt-ampere three-phase transformer" emerging from the Davenport Works on CPR flatcar number 309926 which, due to its cargo's height and weight, "had to be routed over more than one thousand additional miles to reach its destination."⁴

Such freight may have had something to do with the PCBs whose toxic presence later held up the site's redevelopment—one price ultimately paid for the utility derived.

Not noted by GE was the Davenport Works' previous lifetime as Canada Foundry Company, whose metal products were poured, hammered and molded under earlier, more Dickensian circumstances, but had more delicate, aesthetic applications. Two fanciful dragons (or "grotesque animals" as the inch-thick, cloth-bound Canada Foundry catalogue called them) once guarded the grand stairway in old City Hall's lobby. Part horse, part

ings, and "design number 1017," a park bench, "length five feet."⁵

Much later, Toronto's streets would literally receive their names from Dupont, from another plant where the street signs—black letters on white—that today mark street names at city intersections were fabricated. "They were made from galvanized steel in a hydraulic press with closed dies, then were painted in an in-house paint line," said William Ferguson, who worked at Rosco Metal Products, 840 Dupont Street, at the time. "My role was to process the orders in the sales department for the City of Toronto."⁶ The signs' installation, beginning in 1947, was a minor but marked event in the city's history: "Street Signs 150 Years Old? Cheer Up, New Ones Coming," said a headline in the *Toronto Star*. "Nice sign," proclaimed Mayor Saunders.⁷

Proclaimed at dozens of intersections by the new signs was Dupont's own name, more pedigreed than the street itself: the street was named for George Dupont Wells, "son of Colonel the Honourable J. Wells of

Davenport, county York," whose clout in nineteenth-century Toronto was such that George's daughter, Nina, daughter-in-law Dartnell, and even his house, Davenport, all had Toronto streets named after them.⁸ More humble than these folks, on George Dupont Wells' street, in the twentieth century, was the flow of not only street signs, but eavestroughing, downpipes and highway signage from Rosco's plant—products made at the intersection of Shaw Street where today a big IGA supermarket provides pop, pasta and Air Miles.

"Queues of men with lunch boxes clumped toward the immensity of new factories, sheets of glass and hollow tile, glittering shops where five thousand men worked be-



The former showroom of the Ford Motor Company, 672 Dupont.

fish, and dressed in flowing vegetation, they were designed by Toronto's foremost architect of the Victorian age, E.J. Lennox, and "executed in hammered iron," here. Lost, then found by a city bureaucrat in an antique store, they are now back near Dupont Street, at the Toronto Archives on Spadina Road, presiding over the entrance to the reading room.

More functionally luxurious were the elaborate bronze iron railings, made here, that adorned the stairways and grand saloon of the Great Lakes steamer Toronto of the Richelieu and Ontario Navigation Company. Also made here were the entrance gates to Trinity and Knox colleges, the rest of City Hall's railings and elevator cages, wrought iron porches for Ontario's Parliament Build-

neath one roof, pouring out the honest wares that would be sold up the Euphrates and across the veldt," novelist Sinclair Lewis wrote in the opening chapter of *Babbitt*, the 1922 novel that described the life and times and characters of Zenith, an imaginary mid-sized U.S. city. "The whistles rolled out in greeting, a chorus cheerful as the April dawn; the song of labour in a city built—it seemed—for giants."⁹

Yet Americans held no monopoly on ambitious outlook and productive ritual, as Louis Schmunk knew from his work in Europe and could see every morning at Dupont Street and Lansdowne Avenue, where he would arrive at 8 A.M. sharp to preside over the shift change of his two thousand employees. He was manager of the Canadian porcelain works of one of the world's early great multi-national companies, American Standard, manufacturer of bathroom fixtures.

Born in Russia in 1898, of German parentage, Schmunk was raised in Ohio and earned a degree in ceramic engineering from Ohio State University. His path to what became Dupont Street crossed some momentous events: he was assigned

to set up plants in Europe during the 1930s, and did so in France, Germany and Italy, until dictator Benito Mussolini began making life difficult for Americans and British.

American Standard's Toronto plant is a survivor from Dupont's zenith, thriving yet in 1998. Its fiery heart, in 1917, in 1935 when Louis Schmunk arrived, and today, has been its "tunnel kiln," which could never be turned off. "The cars that the ware was loaded on ran through the kiln continuously—ware went in at one end unbaked and came out at the other end fired," according to Margaret Spence, Schmunk's daughter. "To check on the temperature of these kilns there are peep holes every so often, and I remember looking in. Everything was red hot."

The factory operated around the clock. "Once in awhile you'd have what they'd call a kiln-wreck. One of these wagons that went through the kiln would go off track," Spence remembers. "In the middle of the night my father would go down to the plant, don an asbestos suit, and go into the kilns to see what could be done to get it fixed and operational. You could turn the heat down a bit, but certainly it

could not be turned off because everything in there would be ruined."¹⁰

Spence remembers watching skilled men manipulating huge sieves, suspended from the ceiling on chains, which were used to shake a glazing powder on cast iron bathtubs that when baked would come out all glossy. The very fine clay used for sinks and toilets came from as far away as China, arriving by rail on freight cars that could be brought in on sidings. Later insurance maps of Toronto refer to American Standard's kilns as "gas-fired," but in the 1930s and '40s, Spence recalls, they burned coal.

When he was nineteen, and working in Switzerland, Benito Mussolini was given an opportunity to emigrate to America. Unable to decide, he is said to have tossed a coin.¹¹ History might have been different had the coin landed on its other face or, for that matter, if as he later cobbled together his sawdust empire, he'd taken an overseas trip.

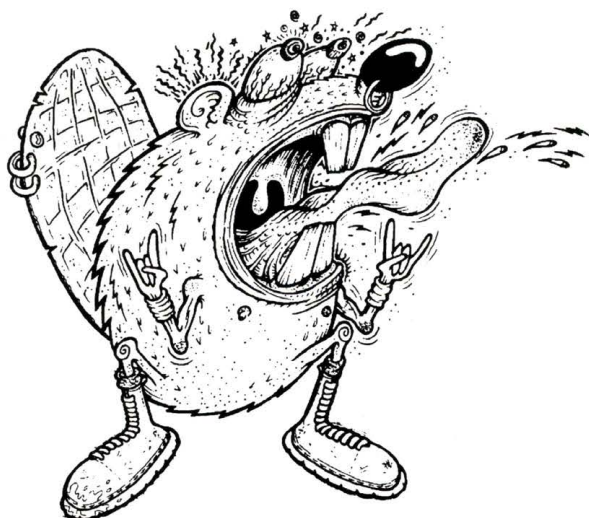
Let's say he did. Let's pick a destination—Toronto—and a day of arrival, say Saturday, July 3, 1937. That very week,

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Pan American and Imperial Airways began trial flights across the Atlantic via Newfoundland.¹²

Mussolini would have found a Toronto not unlike Lewis's imaginary Zenith, a strange mixture of the shabby and sublime where "clean towers" stood side by side with "grotesqueries," the "red brick minarets of hulking old houses, factories with stinky and sooted windows, wooden tenements coloured like mud."¹³

Riding the Dupont streetcar as it crossed Bloor, Mussolini might have been aghast at the thicket of overhead hydro wires—abhorrent, visible power such as had never existed in Europe's genteel capitals, where the lines were buried. At Davenport and Dupont there were only billboards and an Imperial Oil station (still there today) for the Duce to contemplate.

The dictator's dismay would have begun at Christie Street, where the Dupont car turned back and he would have been left standing on a dusty TTC loop where the big Loblaw's supermarket now stands. His goal would have been to trek west, to see a slice of Canadian and North American industrial might, and from now on he'd walk. Mussolini would have brought a street map, for until the late 1940s, when the city's streets were widened and many jogs eliminated to facilitate auto traffic, Dupont Street was not a single east-west corridor. Depending on the decade, west of Christie Street it became Warren Avenue, Van Horne Avenue, and finally Royce Avenue—names all relegated, by 1950, to the avenues of history.

As Mussolini walked west from Christie Street he would have witnessed the growing, changing character of North American industry. Before com-

ing to the monster factories—American Standard, Dominion Radiator, G.E.'s Davenport Works—he'd have passed smaller enterprises, formidable for their number and variety.

There would have been Roofer's Supply Company—later Rosco, of street sign fame—with metal cutting and shaping shops at Shaw Street. Mussolini might not have noticed the yards of Kendle Coal, west of Christie Street, or the strips of frame dwellings interspersed with the factories along the street west from here. But he would

from the Glidden plant south of Royce; and glue from National Adhesives.

He would have had to notice, converging at or within sight of here from all directions, railroad lines. The Canadian Pacific North Toronto line, paralleling what is now Dupont; their double-track Galt subdivision and Toronto, Grey and Bruce line; Canadian National's Newmarket line and double-track Brampton subdivision.¹⁴ Had he paused he would have noticed that, like clockwork, freight trains passed pulled by massive steam engines, bigger and more powerful than any in

Europe, bringing raw materials and taking away finished products with a smooth efficiency that could not but impress the man who, after all, made Italy's trains run on time.

Benito Mussolini could have continued walking and seen even more, but wouldn't have. The implications of what he had seen would have been clear. Could a war be won against nations backed by the might Dupont

Street represented at its zenith? Benito Mussolini would have reached for a TTC ticket in his pocket. He would have dropped it into the fare box on the next southbound Dundas West car. He would have gone home to reconsider his imperial plans.

Mussolini was not yet conceived when James Kendle, early in the 1880s, took the emigration gamble and left Newfoundland for Toronto. He put his carpentry skills to work building houses on Palmerston and Manning avenues, where on the latter street he and his young wife, Sybil, a former opera singer from Pennsylvania, settled down at number 734. In the off-season James Kendle hauled coal, which proved lucrative, if also



A confident and successful James Kendle Sr. (with bicycle) and his new coal carrier.

have seen the smoke—not pollution in those days—emanating from stacks at T. Hepburn, an old and busy foundry near the corner of Ossington Avenue. He would surely pick out Hamilton Gear's long plant wedged between Van Horne Avenue and the CPR tracks.

He'd keep walking, past the big plants and on along Royce Avenue, as Dupont Street here was then called, to the subway—not a train, but the railroad underpass where Dupont Street today ends at Dundas Street West. Around here Mussolini would have smelled, as one still could until the 1980s, the fumes from Viceroy Manufacturing Company (makers of hard rubber, including hockey pucks); paint

competitive. His grandson, James Kendle Jr., today estimates there were once three hundred to four hundred coal dealers in Toronto, a good chunk of them on the corridor that is now Dupont Street, which is where the railways brought coal and where the Kendle business grew.

The Kendle Coal Company would have two yards, one west of Ossington Avenue and the other west of Christie Street next to where the Ford plant became Planter's Nut and Chocolate Company, which it remained for decades. As the years went by, Kendle's edge in this saturated market was the niche he carved out by selling home and business heating customers a special, high-grade Pennsylvania coal.

Anthracite, which was very hard and bluish in colour, burned hot and clean. Such was its reputation that in the U.S. the Lackawanna Railroad, which fueled its locomotives with the coal, worked up a memorable billboard campaign around one Phoebe Snow—not the singer, but a young woman who rode trains always dressed in white. She extolled the virtues of the Lackawanna, where clothes wouldn't get dirty from soot. "Says Phoebe Snow: "The

miners know that to hard coal my fame I owe, for my delight in wearing white is due alone to anthracite."¹⁵

There exist early photographs of a horse-drawn Kendle Coal Company wagon pausing on an Annex-area street of freshly-built homes. A young man sits stoically at the front, holding the reins in his left hand. The cargo box is loaded with canvas bags full of coal. By the 1920s a photo of James Kendle Sr., now a mature and successful businessman, shows him looking cocky and confident. Holding a bicycle by his side and wearing a cap and tie, he stands on what is now Dupont Street behind a spanking new flatbed truck parked at the curb (a horse and wagon are almost hidden). "J. Kendle and Company," says the decal on the truck bed, which is presumably loaded with premium product because there is a seal on the cab door, and the office window behind: "Celebrated Lackawanna Anthracite Coal."

Growing up around a coal yard had its perks. An unlikely one was the Santa Claus Parade, whose route, Kendle Jr. recalls, at one time followed Van Horne and Dupont streets into midtown before

turning south toward Eaton's. "They would back a coal truck up to the lot line and we'd sit on the back of it and watch." As a youth helping haul coal, he'd learn the disadvantages: Santa's November march wreaked havoc with Saturday coal deliveries.

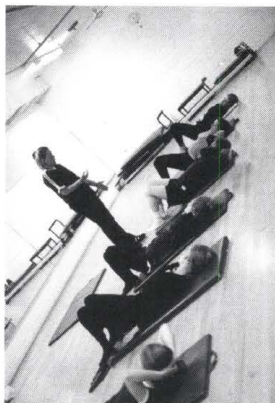
Originally shovelled and bagged by hand, coal here was later handled with chutes and conveyors. Today, Jim Kendle can still rhyme off the names of specialized cuts of anthracite required by the coal era's self-stoking furnaces. "Egg coal, stove coal, nut coal, pea coal, rice coal," Kendle says. "Buckwheat coal." One winter day Kendle scored points with a police officer on Davenport Road at the foot of the Bathurst Street hill when he took "a box of ashes from buckwheat coal and spread them over the street. The cars went right up." The cinders are rough, "like bits of popcorn." In wintertime, Kendle delivery trucks carried buckets of buckwheat cinders to help motorists. Says Jim: "It was good P.R."¹⁶

The rituals of heating with coal—"a ton of coal per year per room"¹⁷—are forgotten and unlamented. But they were

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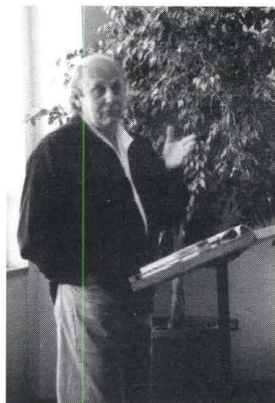
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Jan. 10: **Nomi Berger**
Jan. 31: **Ben Schlesinger**
Feb. 7: **Joseph Kertes**
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not without their poetic aspect. "To tell you the truth, Charlie kind of liked to keep that old furnace roaring: Getting the flames started with paper and kindling," George Gamester reported in the *Toronto Star* when Charles Overton, a Davenport Road resident, still fueled his furnace with coal supplied by Kendle from Dupont Street. He liked "banking the fire morning and evening, cleaning out the grates; wielding the poker and flue brush, feeling the explosive 'whoof!' when he pitched in too much coal powder from the bottom of the bin."¹⁸

Alas, coal had been in decline since World War II. The Trans-Canada pipeline sealed its fate and with the advent of gas and disappearance of soot Toronto took another leap toward modernity. "End of company, end of an era," Gamester wrote one day in the 1980s. "Next Monday, Jim Kendle closes the gates forever at the J. Kendle Company on Dupont Street, coal merchants for 105 years."¹⁹

The future is always visible, but hard to decipher. Who'd have thought when grocer Leon Weinstein bought a coal yard at Dupont and Huron streets, somewhere around

1956, and erected a supermarket there a year or so later, that it was actually watershed. But it was—a preview of Dupont's post-industrial future, visible to the eye if not the conscious mind, even as the street's industrial might yet grew.

Weinstein was the Dave Nichol of his era—an outgoing, cigar-smoking marketer who parlayed a small grocery store at Coxwell and Danforth avenues into a chain of thirty-eight supermarkets. "Power" was the name they went under. It was lifted, the story goes, from a gasoline ad.²⁰ The banner was a bit obscure

but decisive and forward-looking; the moniker looked good on the new Dupont store (the Loblaws at Huron Street in 1998), showy and modernistic in a 1958-era photograph with the store against a background of Casa Loma's medieval-looking towers on the Davenport hill. In front, the supermarket's transparent glass wall overlooks Dupont's archaic streetcar tracks.

There was now, prophetically, a parking lot where coal had been piled, and a few blocks south rose the dust from construction whose future implications Weinstein must surely have understood. Along St. George Street, south of Dupont to Bloor, decrepit mansions were giving way to a brave new world of

Such juxtaposition has always been part of Dupont's cityscape. As long as they cut gears and made hosiery, printing ink, paints, and rubber here, they have also given women permanents and served 24-hour breakfast in greasy spoons (Hamilton Gear crews ate at Central Lunch; today the Vesta comes to mind: "All Day Steak and Eggs, \$6.95"). Cars have been made, sold, and wrecked on Dupont Street; at fierce-looking banks at key intersections deposits have been received and capital dispensed.

Few think of Dupont as a neighbourhood. Its length and grunginess today may disqualify it. Yet people have always lived here and, to a surprising degree, identified with the street. Displaced by the Hungarian uprisings of 1956, Susan Stiasny's family arrived in Toronto the next year, renting an upstairs apartment on Dupont Street above what is, in 1998, the Red Raven, a pub.

To her five-year-old sensibilities Dupont was the centre of the universe. In her overgrown backyard, tight against the CPR tracks, she and her brothers cleared enough brush to create a pile of cuttings so deep they could jump into it from a second-storey

window. Another picture of Weinstein's Power store shows, in the window, a coin-operated rocket ship for the kids to ride, if they could cajole their Cold War-displaced mom to give up the nickel.

From time to time, Power drew the crowds with free rides, if not free lunch: "They had a little fair [merry-go-rounds, ferris wheels, etc.]. As neighborhood children, we made as full a use of these free rides as the harassed attendants allowed."

The Stiasny kids' connection to the outside world was the clanging, bumping streetcar (which would be converted to



The glass-fronted Power supermarket (now Loblaws) at Huron and Dupont, circa 1958.

apartment blocks.

These buildings signalled a sea-change, not only for architecture, of which they represented some of the city's earliest, best and worst modernist examples, but the functioning of Toronto's aging core, which, unlike U.S. cities, would receive a perennial tide of immigrants and young middle-class as industry moved out. For their needs they would require housing, Power, and much else—muffler shops, locksmiths, Birkenstock shoes—and Dupont Street, between its factories, would provide.

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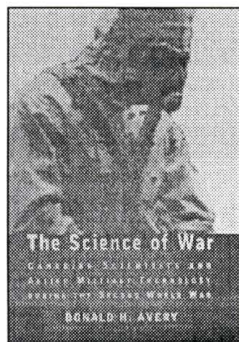
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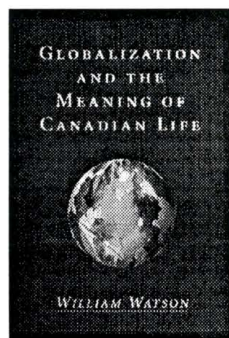


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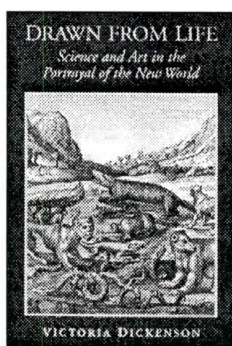
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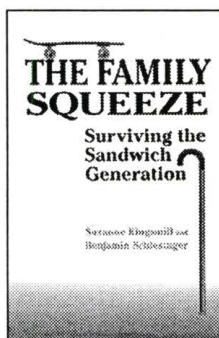
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The Sandwich Generation refers to the growing numbers of middle-aged people who must care for both children and elderly parents while also managing full-time jobs. The authors follow the life of a typical family caught in this situation, with advice and comments helpful for anyone coping with the conflicting demands of work and family.



electric trolley buses in 1963 and to diesels in 1994, coinciding with a crash in Dupont's transit ridership). "As an interesting variation on the game of 'chicken,' we played 'stop the streetcar,'" Stiasny remembers. "When the streetcar stopped for passengers we would all lie down on the tracks in front of it. The one who ran first when the conductor finally came out to personally kill us was the loser." Later the youngsters found other uses for the Dupont car. "One day, my father gave us money to go to a movie—my first. My brother, our friends and I rode the streetcar around onto Davenport Road and into downtown. We saw *The Blob*, a Steve McQueen classic, about a huge wad of gum that rolled along eating people. Never having seen a movie, I was quite convinced of its reality."

Dupont Street, with its known dangers, was a lot safer. "For me, I guess Dupont was a refuge in which I had opportunity to freely experience, and from which we made forays into the larger world."

For a privileged few out in the larger world, Dupont itself was an escape. There is a photograph in the Toronto Reference Library of Clifford Sifton, Katherine Capreol, Sydney Pepler and Melville Rogers performing a figure-skating maneuver on the indoor rink of the Toronto Skating Club, an arena which was built on the north side of Dupont Street near Manning Avenue in 1922.

Minus its ice, the club, somewhat mysteriously, is still there, right down to its original wicker furniture. In 1957, Imperial Optical magnate Sydney Hermant, an avid tennis player, led a group which purchased the building and converted it into an indoor tennis club. The front door is always locked (members have keys), and membership is by invitation; it includes, at this writing, former prime minister John Turner and former MP and cabinet minister Barbara McDougall and one wonders if the two, who once sat opposite each other in the House of Commons, have ever faced off at tennis on Dupont Street. The handsome building's unused look is probably registered as an asset by club members, who presumably value the privacy they can find on Dupont more than any pretension which they cannot.

Dupont is a street transformed from century's beginning, yet in fundamental ways the same. If you walked

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it, as I did in 1998, from its junction with Dundas Street in Toronto's west-end, to where it halts abruptly at Avenue Road six kilometres east in mid-town Toronto, you would see that it has changed from a place where you earned money, to where you spend it, but neither grown beautiful nor much uglier. You would walk past a Lamborghini showroom, a Jaguar dealer and one of the biggest, flashiest supermarkets in the country. You would walk past crummy warehouse stores that sell everything from lawn ornaments to used computers. There is a specialist in supplies for babies, a billboard with a ten-foot image of Albert Einstein's face hawking Apple computers, and a pop art-era subway entrance that looks like a bubble stuck to the ground. There is little graffiti, little litter; there are still overhead wires and blocks and blocks of small semi-detached homes whose yards and porches, assaulted first by heavy industry and later by heavy traffic, put a mean mask on the surely varied existences within.

But keep looking, keep peeling back the layers of wear and time, and Dupont Street begins to change.

Let us return to Dovercourt Road and Dupont to revisit, in 1998, the green glass house at what was Hamilton Gear, which still stands.

There is a chance, quite good, that the paper you are reading this on came from a mill whose equipment still relies on Hamilton gears, cut in the green house on Dupont Street.

It is a certainty that every ship that has passed through the St. Lawrence Seaway—and thus every shipment—has been accommodated by Hamilton gears from Dupont Street, because they open and close the locks.

The nickel in your pocket may owe a debt to Hamilton gears made for Inco or Falconbridge. Hamilton's resource-generating, nation-building gear customers also included Cominco, Placer Dome, and Noranda. Hamiltons were ordered from Dupont Street for the great Polaris mine on Cornwallis Island (seventy-six degrees north, ninety-seven degrees west), N.W.T.

Throughout the day, today, Canadian National trains will cross lift bridges, such as that crossing into Vancouver over Burrard Inlet, that are lowered and raised by Hamilton gears, cut and machined on Dupont Street in Toronto.



Two couples at the Toronto Skating Club, Dupont and Manning, 1922.

Forty years ago, when the supersonic Avro Arrow jet was launched, Hamilton gears, machined to perfection on Dupont Street, opened and closed the pilot's canopy over the cockpit.

Far into the future, a great radio astronomy telescope in Green Bank, West Virginia will still follow the stars on mechanisms driven by Hamilton gears, made on Dupont Street.

At Front and John streets, Hamilton gears transmit power to the wheels of the movable roof of Toronto's domed stadium.²¹

When you know all this, Dupont Street, so flat, long and gritty, rises to heights. It is a place where visions and achievements far-reaching, even spectacular, began. In ways unseen, unrecorded, Dupont Street in Toronto was one of the places where the twentieth century, now at a close, was made.

For assistance on this project the author would like to thank Don Weston, Margaret Spence, James Kendle, William Ferguson, Susan Stiasny, and Donald Hood; also Alec Keefer of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario, Sally Gibson of the Toronto Archives, Sandra Notarianni and Anthony Fredo of the Ford Motor Company and George Gamester of the Toronto Star.

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 writing a book about street lighting.

Notes

1. Donald Weston graduated from Western Technical High School and joined Hamilton Gear in April 1952. In 1998 he was living in Weston, part of Toronto.
2. Jennifer Bain, "Furniture Factory Lofts Have Link To Long Industrial Past," *Toronto Star*, May 6, 1998, sec. P, p. 1.
3. "Assembling Plant For Toronto," *Ford Times*, 8, no. 1 (March 1914): 341.
4. *Pioneers of Progress*, (Toronto: Canadian General Electric Company, ca. 1940), promotional booklet.
5. Photographic reproductions of architectural iron work executed by the Canada Foundry Company head office and works, Toronto, catalogue no. 11.
6. William Ferguson, in e-mail to author, July 26, 1998.
7. "Street Signs 150 Years Old? Cheer Up, New Ones Coming," *Toronto Star*, Sept. 9, 1947, p. 5.
8. Eric Arthur, *No Mean City*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 279, 280, 286, 292.
9. Sinclair Lewis, *Babbitt*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922), 2.
10. Margaret Spence, phone conversation with author, August 1998. Her father was manager of American Standard's Dupont plant from 1935 until 1969.
11. George Seldes, *Witness to a Century* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1987), 215.
12. "Giant Planes Ready To Start Test Flight Across the Atlantic," *Globe and Mail*, July 5, 1937, p. 1.
13. Lewis, *Babbitt*, 1.
14. "Another Step in Toronto's Grade Separation," *Contract Record and Engineering Review*, (February 10, 1926): 116.
15. Phoebe Snow ad for the Lackawanna Railroad, ca. 1910 postcard, republished by the Anthracite Museum, Scranton, Pa.
16. James Kendle, interview with author, August 1998. Kendle now lives in Willowdale, Ontario.
17. George Gamester, "Charlie and Jim Shovel Their Last Ton of Coal," *Toronto Star*, March 25, 1986, p. A2.
18. Gamester, "Charlie and Jim."
19. *Ibid.*
20. June Callwood, "The Informal Leon Weinstein," *Globe and Mail*, June 16, 1975, p. 8.
21. This list of projects is from the corporate archives of Hamilton Gear, rescued by Donald Weston and comprising a wide range of records, advertising, photographs, and files.

THE CALL OF THE LOONS

FICTION BY SONYA FREEDMAN

Right after dinner, as soon as “free play” period is announced, Myra hurries down to the dock and claims her favourite canoe. Two weeks ago (on July 17, 1952, to be exact, a date she’s sure she’ll never forget), she passed the “solo” test that allows her to take it out alone. She kneels reverently in the stern, the wooden ribs cutting into her knees, the bow riding high, practicing the silent art of paddling that Laurie has taught her. Slicing the blade deep, twisting it slightly so it causes barely a ripple coming out, bending her whole torso forward into the next stroke, she begins to feel the rhythm taking over her body. “My paddle’s *keen* and bright. *Flashing like silver, swift as a bird* in flight. *Dip, dip and swing,*” she sings to herself, bearing down with each beat, as the slender craft cuts swiftly through the water.

She watches Laurie, his blue beret cocked rakishly over one ear, patrolling

the designated area in his canoe like an aquatic centaur. Now and then, he reprimands a camper who’s gotten dangerously rowdy, or tactfully prevents a too-eager swain from spiriting his girlfriend off to a small nearby island. Too soon he blows his whistle to signify that it’s time to return the canoes to the beach and put the paddles and lifejackets back in their proper places in the boathouse.

As usual, Myra stays behind to tidy up after the others have trooped noisily up the hill. There’s always a paddle left standing incorrectly on its blade rather than its handle, or a damp orange lifejacket carelessly tossed toward a peg and abandoned on the floor. Laurie doesn’t mind if she lingers, as long as she’s quiet; sometimes he doesn’t even seem to notice she’s there as he sits leaning against a post at the end of the dock, smoking his pipe and watching the last

streaks of colour drain from the sky.

“I missed you yesterday,” he says suddenly, his back to the spot where she’s standing in the shadows. Her throat constricts so that she can hardly breathe. “Where were you?”

“They made me stay overnight in the infirmary,” she says. “Stupid Marilyn who sleeps in the bunk above me told Barb that my coughing was keeping her awake and she was afraid she’d catch my cold.”

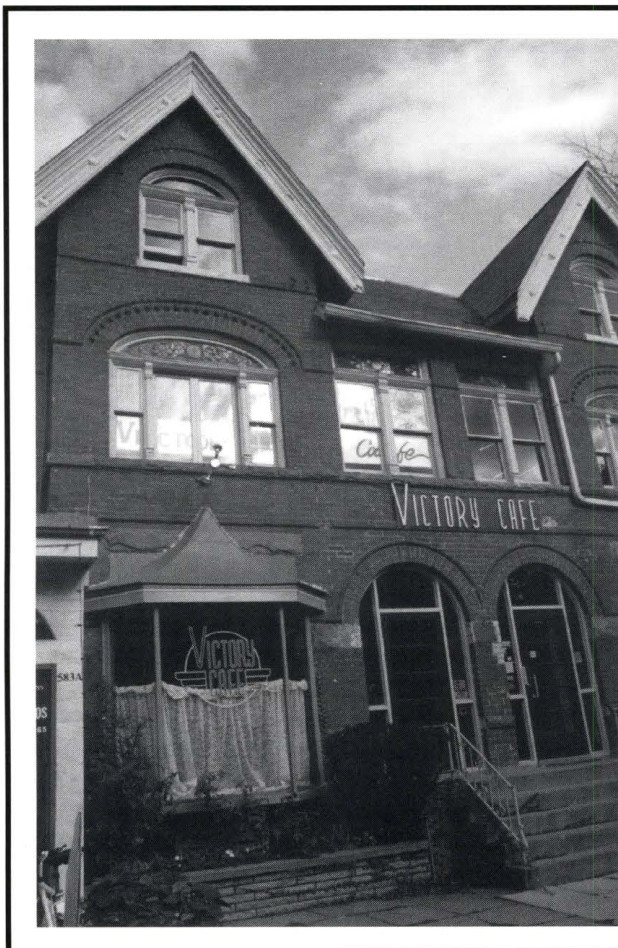
“Are you feeling better?”

“Sure. Dr. Johnson gave me some cough syrup, so naturally I stopped coughing. It was so stupid. They could have given it to me without making me stay in that horrible, miserable place. I hate it there.”

“Oh, it’s not so bad.”

“It is so. And I hate that Pat—that nurse.”

“Ah, yes, Pat. She’s not so bad either.” Myra thinks she detects a note of mock-



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you've left this Lilliputian clue:
"one island
small as a wish . . ."
that has
"never quite been found."*

* (from "Night on Gull Lake" by Gwendolyn MacEwen)

— KAREN L. L. ANDERSON

ery in his voice. He's treating her like a baby. And she isn't a baby. She's fifteen. Old enough to know what it is to be desperately, hopelessly in love.

"You wouldn't say that if you knew what she said about you." The minute it's out she's sorry.

Laurie takes a long slow pull on his pipe. "I can barely see you back there. Why don't you come over here and sit down."

"I've gotta get back to my cabin," she says.

"You've got fifteen minutes," he says, still looking out at the lake.

Myra sits down, her feet dangling over the water, her hands under her knees tightly gripping the rough edge of the dock. She bends her head so her long silky hair falls forward, smooth as a curtain, hiding her face. Her heart is pounding so hard she's sure he can hear it.

"Will you be coming back as a CIT next year?" Laurie asks.

"I don't know. My mother says 'counsellor-in-training' means your parents get to pay while the camp owners get to use you as free labour."

"Your mother's got a point."

She presses her arms tightly against

her sides to control her shaking. "Are you coming back?"

"Nope. Afraid this'll be my last summer at camp. I'll be starting my internship next spring."

"Where are you going to intern?"

"I don't know yet. I'll be applying to a few hospitals. I'd like to get into the General, but the competition's fierce there."

"My father's at the General."

"I know."

"You do?"

"Of course. Everybody knows your father."

She turns her head and glances quickly at Laurie. His eyes look so deep and sad. She knows his father died when he was very young. She struggles to restrain herself from brushing a stray lock of sun-bleached hair off his forehead.

"So what did Pat say about me?"

"Oh nothing."

"Come on. You said you heard her. Who was she talking to?"

"Barb. She took me over to the infirmary and, after the doctor left, they were talking in Pat's room. They thought I was sleeping, but I wasn't. I could hear every word they said.

"Hey, you'd make a terrific little spy. So what did they say?"

"I can't tell you."

"Sure you can."

"No, really."

"Here I'm going to all the trouble of getting special permission to take you on that five-day trip next week and you won't even tell me what terrible things people are saying about me."

"I'm going on that trip?" Her delighted smile frames her perfect teeth.

"Well, it's supposed to be just the CIT girls, but we're short one person, so I said there was someone in your cabin who was really good at handling a canoe . . ."

"Oh please, please . . . I'll do anything . . . scrub the pots . . ."

"What did Pat tell Barb?"

"I didn't really know what she was talking about."

"What did she say?"

Myra studies the reflection of the soles of her brown and white saddle shoes in the water. "She just said you weren't going to get away with treating her like that."

"Like what?"

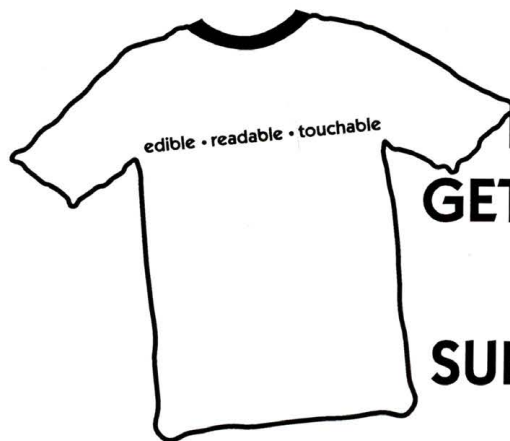
"I don't know. And she said that even though she wasn't—you know—she was going to let you think she was . . . 'make you squirm,' that's what she said." The words are tumbling out now. "She said she only came to this camp because of you, but nobody was supposed to know you even knew each other—especially Mr. Jessop. She thought you were different because you gave her a ring and everything, but she found out you were the same as all the other med students. You all thought you were God's gift to nurses and you needed to be taught a lesson."

"Whew!" Laurie lets out a long breath. For a few moments he's silent, then he turns to Myra and smiles. "You could get a job spying for the RCMP," he says. "Now you've got to promise . . . this is our secret. Not a word of it to anybody." He takes her hand. "Promise?"

"I promise."

Halfway up the hill, she stops and looks back. He's still sitting on the dock; she can see the lonely glow of his pipe in the dark. She would do anything for him. Anything. She presses the hand he had held to her cheek. *They would live on a tiny remote island in Algonquin Park. Just the two of them. They wouldn't need other people. Every evening they'd take their birchbark canoe out onto the lake at sunset, then they'd sit together*

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by their campfire under the stars, and in the morning they'd awoken to the call of the loons.

Preparations are underway for the last trip of the season. Laurie's in the tripping shed going over the supply list with Don, one of the other trippers.

"Take a whiff of this bloody wannigan," Don says, wrinkling his nose in disgust. "These damn pots were put back without being washed properly."

"Don't worry about it. There's a kid on this trip who's just dying to scrub pots."

"You mean Myra, the nubile little wench with the big, baby blue eyes?"

"That's the one."

"Better watch out—she's jailbait."

"Don't worry about it. I've got her trained." Laurie opens the large white tin box with the red cross on the lid. "Will you look at this? Antiseptic's spilled, calamine's almost empty, no gauze, not even a frigging Band-Aid."

"No time to pick them up now. The girls'll be coming by to drop their bedrolls off any minute. Did I tell you that Shirley wanted to know if she could bring her hair curlers?"

"By the time she's carried a canoe and a pack over those three portages we've got lined up for them, her hair'll curl by itself."

Myra approaches the doorway nervously. She hasn't seen Laurie since their

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Ian Allaby (p.33) is an Annex resident and a periodical writer. His fiction has appeared in Descant and StoryTeller.

FORSYTHIA

yellow petals on the wet walkway near the door where dead letters lie
while forsythia hunches inside counting marble memories from a jar
they popped up everywhere
the ghostly white orb in the grass at granddad's funeral
the crazy-quilt agate like a mexican blanket rootled from the sand
on her honeymoon
the cat's-eye after the stillbirth
and the swirling blue and white sphere she found the day
the rock who was the world slipped away

— IAN ALLABY

encounter on the dock two nights before. She wonders if he's been deliberately avoiding her. The message that she'd be going on the trip had been delivered by Don, who had also instructed her in the finer points of rolling a good tight bedroll around an extra change of clothes and wrapping it in a groundsheet to keep it dry. "Where do you want my stuff?" she asks him.

"Just drop it over here in the corner," Don says.

Laurie doesn't look up.

Myra stands on one foot, rubbing the other against her calf. "Anything I can do to help?" she asks.

"Yes, as a matter of fact, there is," Laurie says. "Take this list over to the infirmary and tell them we need these things for the trip. I'll sign for them later."

"Sure," she says, setting off at a run.

Don watches her go, noting the white shorts rolled high above her smooth tanned legs. He looks at Laurie with raised eyebrows and shakes his head.

"She's just a kid," Laurie says.

"Yeah. Right."

Of course he couldn't say anything to her with Don there, Myra tells herself as she hurries through the woods, careful not to snap a twig with her soft leather moccasins. Just like an Indian. Or a spy. She comes out into the clearing in front of the infirmary. The screen door squeaks as she opens it. No one in any of the cots today. The doctor's office is locked. So is the supply room.

Pat's door is ajar. She knocks softly, waits, then goes in. The room is narrow; the thin mattress on the metal-frame bed is made up with hospital-like precision, the corners perfect, the grey blanket tight. It

looks as antiseptic as an operating room and as unlivid in—except for some scraps of paper scattered over the top of the dresser at the far end of the room. Myra pieces them together easily. It's an enlarged snap-shot of two people—Laurie and Pat in formal dress at a dance, his arm around her shoulder, hers around his waist. A gardenia corsage is pinned to her strapless tulle gown; her frizzy blond hair is pulled back in a sleek roll. Myra studies Laurie's image intently; she has never seen him like this—the dark suit and white shirt accentuating the leanness of his frame, the sensitivity of his chiselled features. She moves the two halves of the picture apart. Much better. *Once in a while maybe they'll leave the park and go into Toronto so they can get dressed up and go dancing. Maybe they'll even live in town in the winter and save the island for the summer.*

The screen door squeaks. Myra moves away from the dresser just as Pat bursts into the room. "What are you doing in here?" she demands, her tall, solid figure blocking the doorway.

Myra feels like the chipmunk that got trapped in her cabin last week. One of the girls chased it into a corner with a broom and laughed as it stood there on its hind legs terrified and trembling. "They sent me over from the tripping shed for some first-aid supplies."

"So what are you doing in my room?"

"I told you. They need some merthiolate and stuff for the trip." She shoves her hand into her pocket. "Here's the list."

Pat pushes her aside, grabs the torn picture and crumples it. Myra watches as she turns, a flush rising from her neck, mottling the fair skin of her face. She holds her fist in front of Myra. "My God,

it was you, wasn't it? You little sneak. Of course. You told him, didn't you?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"You were here. In the infirmary. That night. Did he send you over here to spy on me again?"

"I told you. I came to get supplies." She inches toward the door.

"They know that no supplies leave here without authorization. Are they trying to get me fired?" She grabs Myra's wrist, digging her blunt fingers into her skin. Her clutch is painfully strong. "What did you tell him, eh?"

Myra tries to pull away, dragging Pat with her out of the room. "Leave me alone."

"You're in big trouble, you know." Pat's voice is menacing. She drops Myra's wrist suddenly, and follows her through the infirmary. "What were you doing in my room? Stealing things?"

Myra hurries down the path toward the dining hall, Pat at her heels. The lunch bell has just rung and campers are flocking in. She heads for her cabin's table and sits down on the end of the bench. Pat sits on the bench of the table behind her, leaning toward Myra's back. "What were you doing in my room?" Myra can feel Pat's breath hot against her neck.

Other girls sit at the table chatting and laughing, oblivious to Pat's presence. Myra tries to join in their conversation.

"What were you doing in my room?" Pat says. "What were you doing in my room?" she repeats again. And again. And again, her voice not audible to anyone else over the general din.

Myra leans forward, hunching her shoulders, pulling her head turtle-like toward her chest. Pat leans closer. Myra chews on a piece of bread. She can't swallow it. It's hard to breath.

Myra has always been taught to respect her elders. Her mother's friends have often remarked on how polite and well-mannered she is; a model student, she's the one most often chosen to clean the blackboards, to hand out the exam papers. In the five summers she's attended this camp, her counsellors have consistently given her parents glowing reports on visitors' day.

Coiled tightly, she turns her head warily toward her tormentor. "Cut it out," she says, the words catching in her throat.

"What were you doing in my room?" the voice repeats, relentless, insistent. Unbearable.

Suddenly, Myra is on her feet. She can

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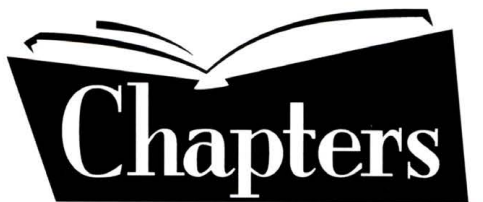
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hear her voice screaming as though from a great distance, can sense the sudden, shocked silence in the room, can feel the heat where her hand connected with Pat's face. Then she's sprawled outside on the lawn, crying uncontrollably as a group of worried-looking girls gathers around her.

"Alright now, what's this all about?" Mr. Jessop, the camp director, is looming over her, Pat at his side.

"I couldn't help it. She wouldn't leave me alone," Myra's voice comes out in staccato bursts between sobs. "She kept bugging me and bugging me and bugging me."

"She's hysterical," Pat says. "She needs a sedative." An outline of Myra's hand is etched in red on her cheek.

"Pat and Myra, we'll discuss this in the office. Everyone else, back to the dining hall. Everything's fine. Finish your lunch," Mr. Jessop orders.

Pat shoots Myra a triumphant glance. Myra has often wondered how Marie Antoinette must have felt walking toward the guillotine. Now, making her way on trembling legs toward the office, she thinks she knows.

Mrs. Jessop is on the telephone when they come in, assuring a concerned mother that her son has been getting his allergy shots. Mr. Jessop motions to her to hang up. He leads Myra to the couch. Mrs. Jessop sits down beside her and puts her lean, tanned arm around Myra's trembling shoulder. She's known Myra since she was ten. Myra's father performed her hysterectomy last winter. "There now," she says, handing her a Kleenex, "try to stop crying and tell us what happened."

Pat remains standing. She can feel the ranks closing around Myra, shutting her out. It's a familiar feeling. "I caught her snooping around in my room," she says.

"Hold on, Pat," Mr. Jessop says firmly. "We'll hear what Myra has to say first."

"I went to the tripping shed to drop off my bag and they asked me to go over to the infirmary with a list of first-aid supplies they needed for the trip." She chokes back a sob and continues. "Laurie said he'd sign for them later."

"I would never give out medical supplies to a camper without proper authorization. They think they can treat nurses like dirt—sending this little sneak—I caught her in my room—look where she slapped me."

"Wait," Mr. Jessop snaps. He turns to Myra. "Then what happened?"

"Well, Dr. Johnson wasn't in, so I went to Pat's room to see if she was there." She looks up at Mr. Jessop through tear-filled eyes. "She was supposed to be there, wasn't she?"

"And then?"

"And then she came in and grabbed my wrist and started yelling at me." She begins to cry again. "There, there," Mrs. Jessop says, patting her shoulder. "And then she followed me to the dining hall and kept bugging me and bugging me and bugging me."

Mr. Jessop is worried. Parents didn't pay all that money to have their sheltered children bullied by his staff. He glares at Pat. "Now, what do you have to say for yourself?" he says.

"Oh, what's the difference," she says. She starts for the door, then stops. "Look, I thought I'd lost something. A ring. I ran up to see if I'd left it in the rec hall. I was just away for a few minutes. Then I thought maybe I left it under some stuff on my dresser, so I ran back and she was

there—at my dresser—messaging with my things.”

“Are you accusing Myra of stealing this ring?” His voice is steely. “That would be a pretty serious accusation.”

Pat feels as though someone has just pulled a plug and all her energy has gone down the drain. “I’m not sure it was . . . I don’t know. I’m not saying anything. Who’s going to believe me anyway?”

“Now hold on a minute. Myra, did you take a ring?”

Myra looks at Pat, standing dishevelled in the middle of the room, patches of perspiration making her white nylon uniform stick to her body. Her upper teeth protrude slightly, her eyes, beneath their light-coloured lashes are red-rimmed. She looks, Myra thinks suddenly, like a drenched rabbit. She wonders how she ever let herself feel threatened by her. “I didn’t see any ring,” she says. “All I saw was a picture of . . .”

“Forget it,” Pat says. “I’m sick of these spoiled brats and I’m sick of this place and—”

“That’s obvious,” Mr. Jessop interrupts. He looks at his watch. “There’s a car going into town at two o’clock,” he says. “It can take you to the bus station.”

“It’s rest hour. I’ll walk you back to your cabin now.” Mrs. Jessop leads Myra to the door, her arm still around her. “Congratulations on being chosen to go on that five-day canoe trip with the older girls,” Pat hears her say brightly as they go down the steps. “I hear you’ve made great progress in your canoeing classes this summer.”

Myra dabs at her nose to hide her grin. “Laurie’s a really great instructor,” she says.

Five days of paddling in Algonquin Park, four nights of campfires and sleeping under the stars. Eight years difference in age isn’t too much. Her father is eight years older than her mother. As soon as she gets home, she’ll have to start working on Daddy about that internship for Laurie. Daddy never refuses her anything.

It’s the third day out and it’s Myra’s turn to be in the bow of Laurie’s large supply canoe. The early morning mist has not yet burned off the water as they paddle silently across Little Joe Lake. Along the shore, the trees stand like ghostly sentinels; a tiny island ahead seems suspended, mirage-like, on a cloud.

“Hey, slow down,” Laurie says, laughing. “We’re getting too far ahead of the others. Those lily-dipping girls don’t paddle the way you do, you know.”

“Sorry.”

“Nothing to be sorry about. You’re doing great. In fact, you’ve been a terrific addition to this trip. Take a break and we’ll drift for a while ‘till they catch up.”

Myra turns around carefully as she’s been taught, keeping low. She leans back facing Laurie, slowly drawing one knee toward her chest, arching her ankle. Across the lake a loon calls to its mate. She knows that this is another one of those perfect moments she’ll remember forever. In her pocket, her fingers close around a small hard object. She puts her hand over the side of the canoe. The water feels warm and silky. She opens her fingers and trails her hand languorously as the ring drops to the bottom of the lake. She doesn’t want the stupid thing anyway. Some day Laurie will give her a much nicer one.

Sonya Freedman is an Annex resident. Her work has appeared in The Canadian Forum, Parchment, the Fiddlehead, The Antigonish Review, The New Quarterly, Grain and Quarry.

(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?

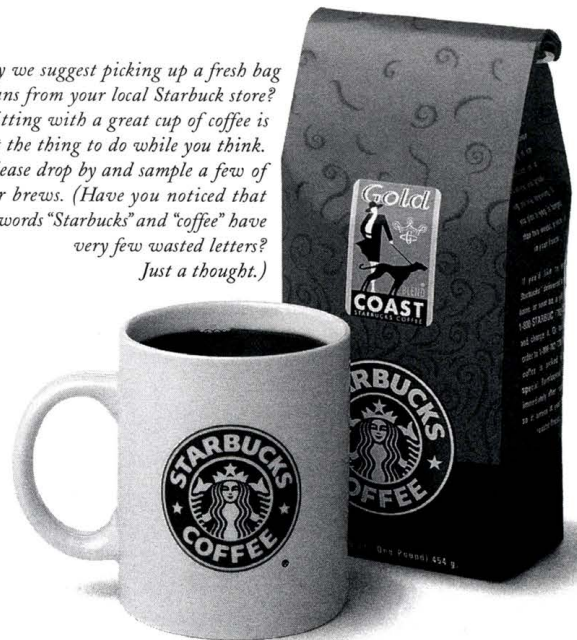
What would life be like if we whittled everything down to mere essentials? Wouldnt that be a life devoid of texture, surprise or whimsy? Hmm, maybe a few silent letters aren’t all that troublesome after all.

›May we suggest picking up a fresh bag of beans from your local Starbucks 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.)

THE AUTHOR

FICTION BY DEREK McCORMACK



A cushion. *Flowered Art Cretonne*, I wrote, *with lovely pleated cotton-back satin trim.*

It was round.

In the favourite round shape, I wrote, *this handsomely-covered cushion is sure to be popular on sleigh rides this year!*

I carried the cushion to the illustrator. He sketched it. Not five feet away janitors were banging air compressors with wrenches.

"Excuse me," I said, "but we're trying to produce a wish book here!"

I worked in the basement, not far from the furnace, creating captions for the upcoming Christmas catalogue.

Embroidered Linen Runner is very prettily embroidered with holly sprigs, making a pretty article!

Moccasins Are Always Popular! Furred, beaded and lined, they make useful and greatly appreciated holiday hostess gifts!

Pretty Pearl Necklet! Look and wear like pearls. Pearls are very fashionable this Christmas. Why not give one?

A floor manager came in. "We're having a little trouble," he said. "Mr. Turnbull wants you to clerk."

"Upstairs?" I said.

Black skirts hanging on a waterfall. A T-rack of black throws. Gloves,

veils, purses, armbands, hatbands, bonnets—all crepe, all black.

The Black and White Shop. Funeral accoutrements.

A woman wanted stationery. I unlocked the showcase, an oblong, swelled-top, walnut job. I pulled out calling cards edged in black.

"The stylish widow shops at Turnbull's," I said, "for a full selection of the finest vellum funeralia. Why don't you? And remember: the wider the edging, the deeper the mourning."

"How dare you speak to me in that tone?" She huffed off toward Women's Boots.

An elderly gent asked for silk wreath banners. "For the cenotaph," he said.

I had them in red or blue silk, stamped Mother, Brother, Darling, etc. "Perfect on a graveside wreath, as a sash in a parade, or to fly from the car antenna during a cortège," I said. "A must-have for the well-heeled veteran of any conflict."

"Show some respect!" he said. "Where is your supervisor?"

A young fellow picked up a plastic wreath.

"Don't let foul weather spoil your internment," I said. I had Harp or Lyre, standing; Crown, flat or standing; Bro-

ken Column; Monument; Shield. "Immortelles—the smart choice for a winter or summer burial!"

I licked a pencil. "What may I put you down for?"

"I'll put you down!" He lunged over the counter.

The floor manager pried him off me. "What's wrong with you?" he said. "Ever hear of a little tact?"

"Please!" I said. "I'm a wordsmith!"

Six-foot valentines. Composition candy canes. I scurried past the garbage room, the prop room. Bunnies bled stuffing from mouse bites.

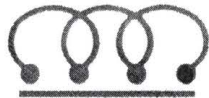
I fed paper to my Underwood. On my desk the next featured item. A souvenir snow dome.

I shook it. Snow flittered around a store made of bisque. Turnbull's, Peterborough, 1934, it said on the base.

I unplugged it. Drank the water, which was laced with antifreeze. The snow was bone chips.

Derek McCormack is a Sussex-Ulster resident and the author of Dark Rides (Gutter Press, 1996) and Halloween Suite (pas de chance, 1998). He is also the co-author of Wild Mouse (Pedlar Press, 1998), a collaboration with Chris Chambers.

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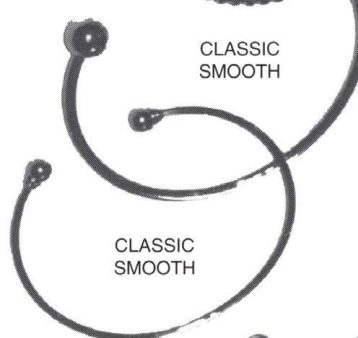
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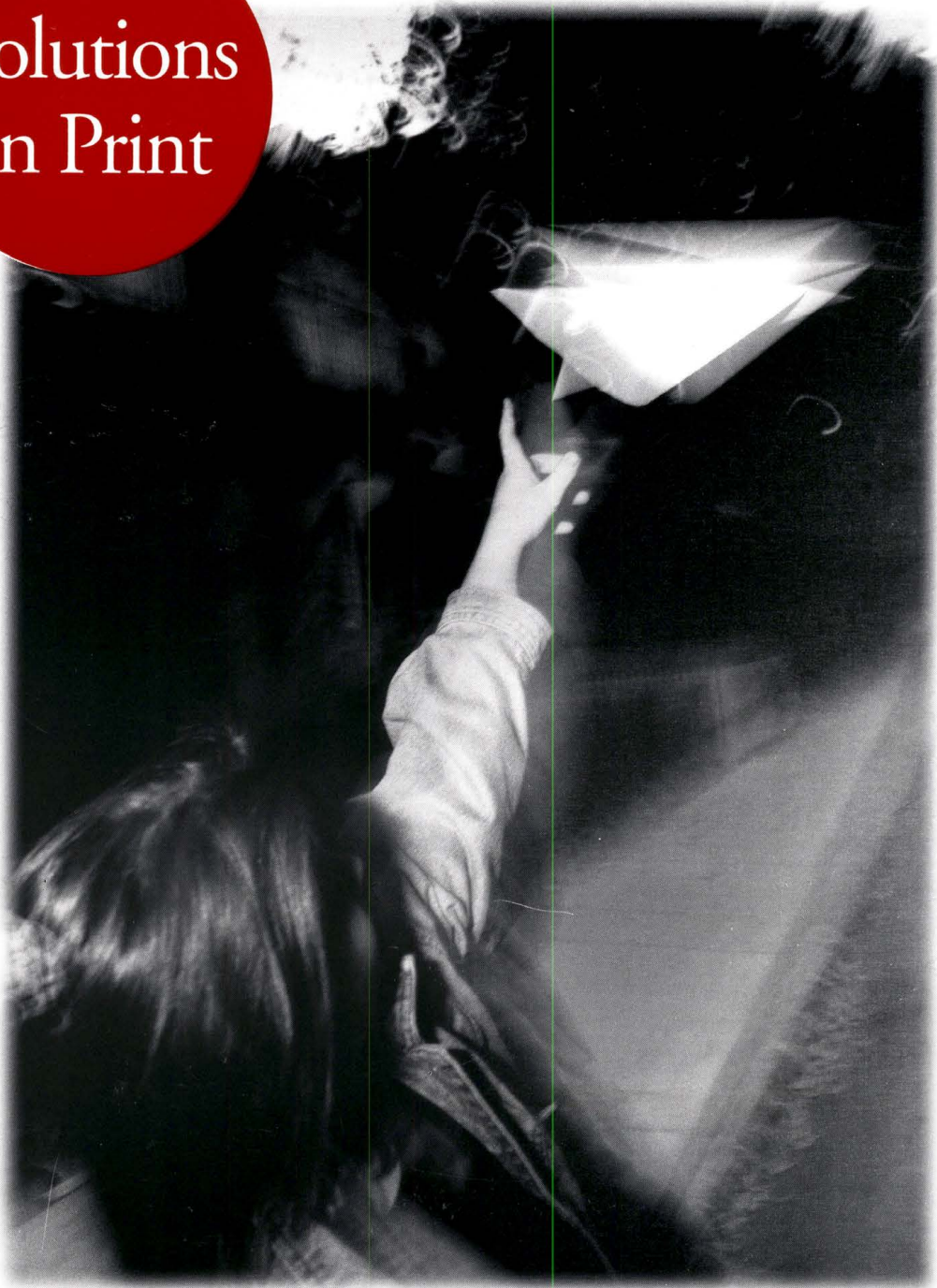


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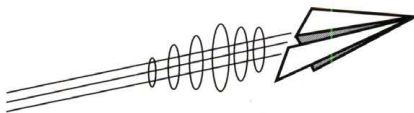
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