

TADDLE CREEK



CHRISTMAS NUMBER 1999

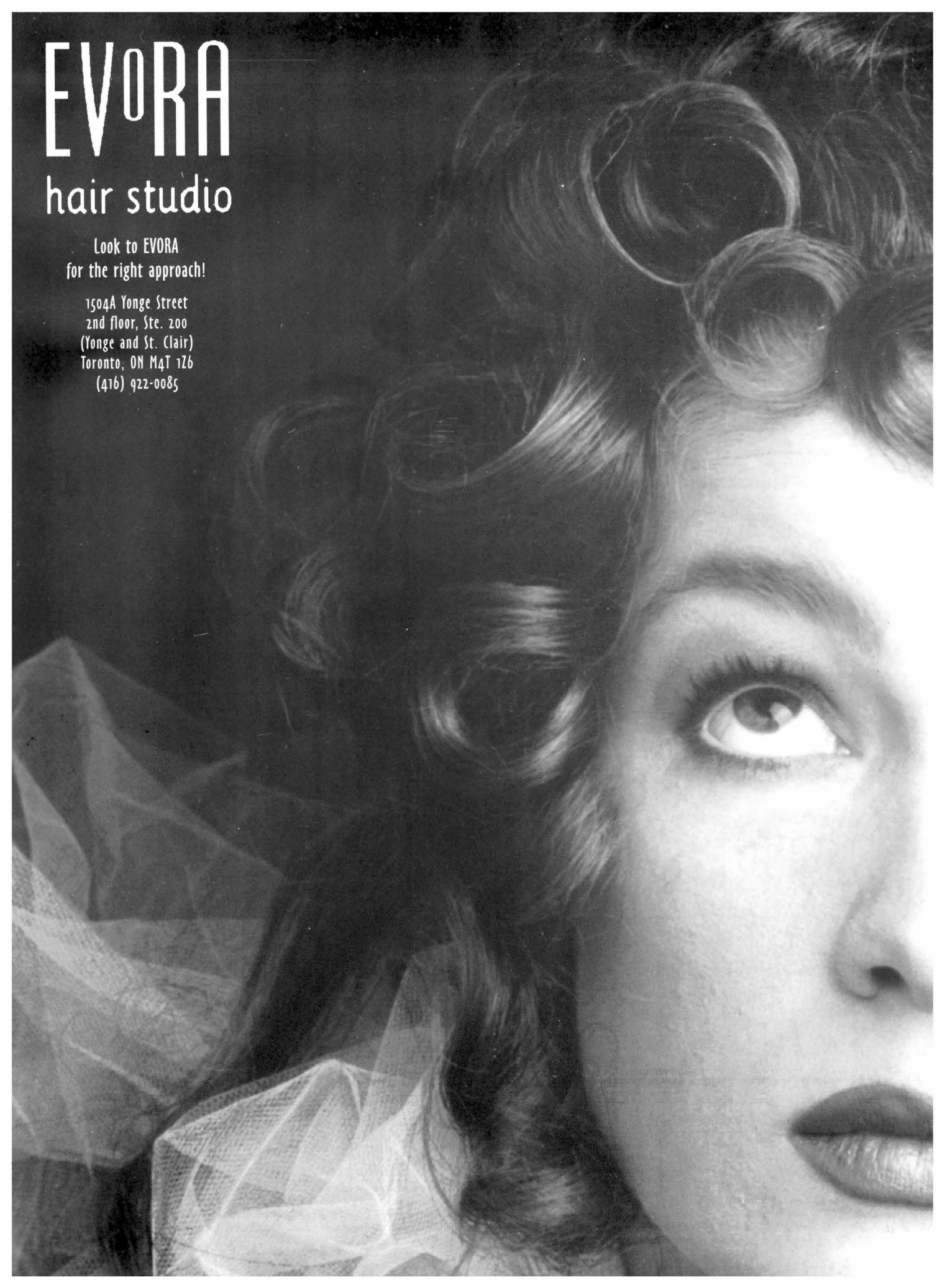
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TADDLE CREEK

VOL. III

CHRISTMAS NUMBER 1999

No. 1

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Laura Tobias, circa 1944. Photographer unknown.

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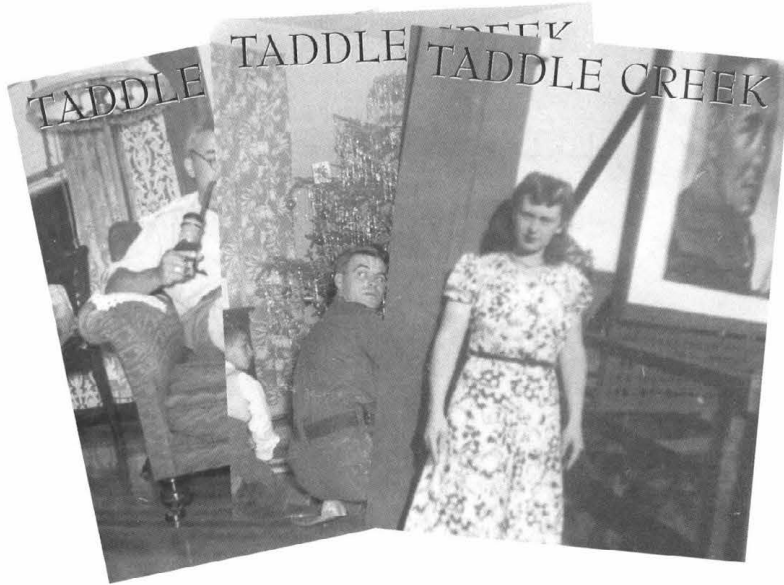
Photo Editor: AARON HAWCO

Copy Editor: REBECCA CALDWELL

Publisher: VITALIS PUBLISHING

Printing: MACH II PRESS

TADDLE CREEK (ISSN 1480-2481) is published annually in December by Vitalis Publishing, P.O. Box 611, Station P, Toronto, Ontario M5S 2Y4, and serves the neighbourhoods of the Annex, Seaton Village, Christie-Ossington, Little Italy, Palmerston, Mirvish Village, Sussex-Ulster, Huron-Sussex, Yorkville and the University of Toronto. Vol. III, No. 1, Whole Number 3, Christmas Number 1999. Submissions of short fiction, poetry and essays may be sent to the above address, provided author resides in one of the above areas. Please include address and daytime phone number. Submissions not accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope will not be returned. © 1999 by Vitalis Publishing. All rights reserved. Rights to all individual works published in Taddle Creek remain the property of the authors. No part of this periodical may be reproduced in any form without the consent of Taddle Creek or the individual authors. Annual subscription rates: In Canada, \$3.75. In U.S., \$4.60. Overseas, \$6.40. To inquire about advertising, circulation, subscriptions and single and back issues, telephone (416) 324-9075.



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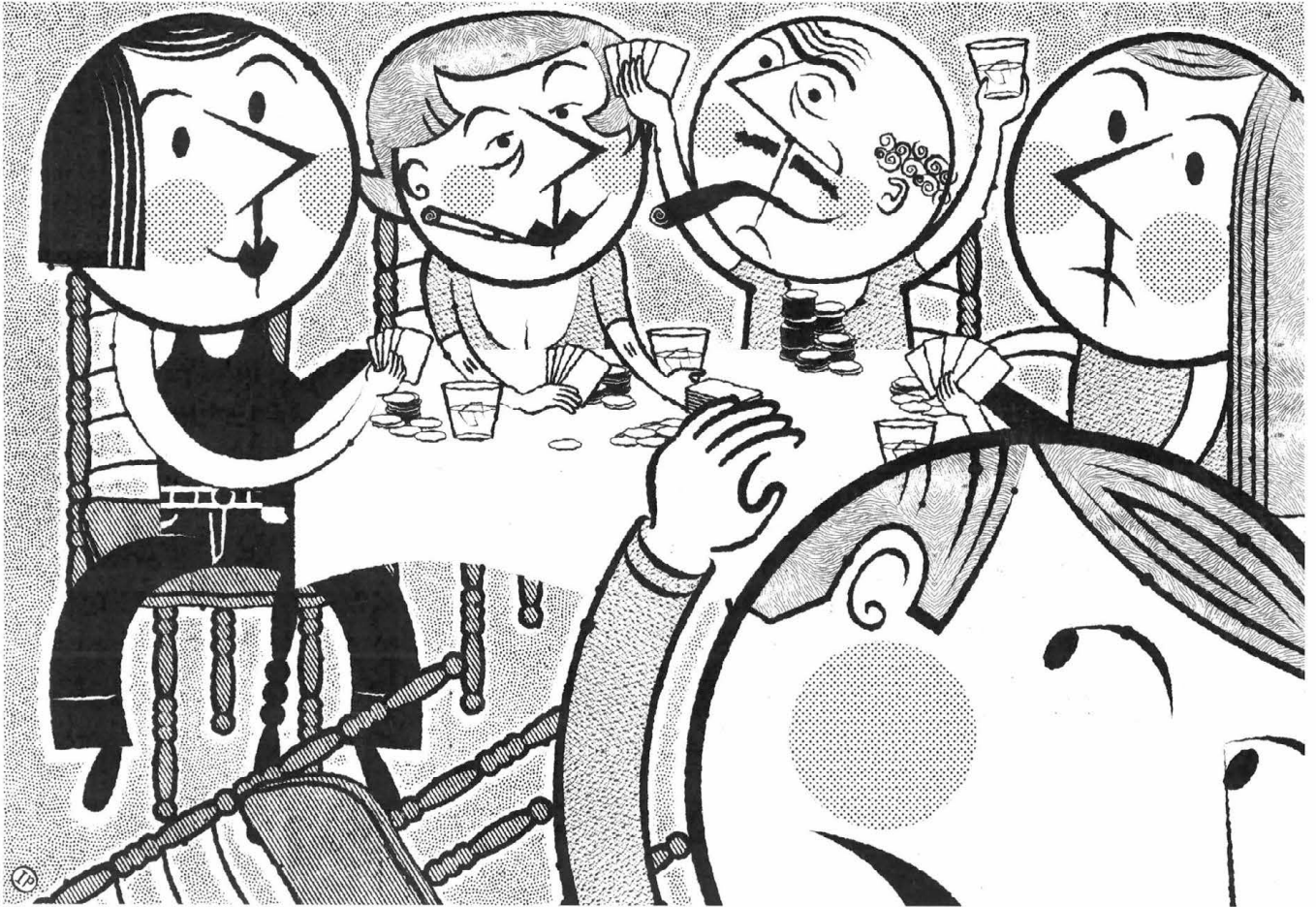
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Next issue: December 1, 2000

AFTER DINNER

FICTION BY MOE BERG



They drove in silence, the radio buzzing faintly in the background. Giant movie theatre complexes and factory outlets lined the highway. Andrew nursed his dread, and Sarah watched him, waiting for them to be almost there before she started anything.

"Maybe they won't feel like playing to-night."

"When was the last time that happened?"

"C'mon, is it really so bad? You liked it at first."

"I didn't realize it was pathological at first."

"Pathological? Please don't talk like that about my family."

"Sorry." But not really. "It would be nice if it wasn't a mandatory part of the evening. It would be nice to just visit or watch TV after dinner."

"It's their thing. They really like you. You know that."

Andrew didn't answer. He merged off the exit ramp, Sarah's parents' place was

around the next corner.

"Hello, dear," Mrs. Oliver said, hugging Sarah. "So nice you could come, Andrew. I've got a lovely pork loin in the oven. Sarah told me it's one of your favourites."

"How nice of you, Mrs. Oliver. You shouldn't have gone to so much trouble."

"Oh, it's no trouble at all. We love to see the two of you."

Sarah beamed at her mom, taking her by the arm and walking into the house. They looked nice together. Mrs. Oliver was really quite attractive for her age, her hair didn't have that dyed-and-styled-to-death look a lot of middle-aged women had. Andrew looked around the Olivers' neighbourhood; the suburban lawns, freshly pruned trees. This isn't so bad, he thought. The city was getting a bit claustrophobic. He marched up the steps, deciding to forget where he was.

"Can I get you a drink, Andy?"

"It's Andrew, Dad."

"That's alright, Sarah." Even though it wasn't. "I'm okay for now, Mr. Oliver." He settled into a brown, leatherette chair with big padded arms. Mr. Oliver sat in its twin, almost spilling his drink.

"So, how's business, Andy?"

"Good, no complaints. With spring arriving, people are already coming in looking to upgrade their rides, get tune-ups, new parts . . ." Andrew stopped. He sounded like a commercial.

"I hear Tanya is thinking about a new bike. Where is she? Ivy, where's Tanya?" Mr. Oliver yelled toward the kitchen.

"She'll be along in a minute. I just sent her to the store for some Coke." Sarah came into the living room carrying a glass of ice water and sat on the sofa. It matched the two chairs but had a crocheted blanket covering it. Better than plastic, Andrew thought.

The front door opened and in swept Tanya, Sarah's seventeen-year-old sister. Tanya was a younger, every bit as pretty version of Sarah except her hair was short and dark, and Sarah's was long and sandy. Betty and Veronica. Almost. She walked right up to Andrew and kissed him loudly on the cheek.

"Hey, Sarah," she said, flopping down on the arm of Andrew's chair. Sarah glared a pinhole through her sister's forehead.

"I'm thinking about getting a new bike, Andrew. Do you think you could help me?"

"Of course. Come on by the shop any time and we'll get you set up."

She ran her fingers down his arm as she got up to take the Coke to her mother.

"I'm ready here. Everyone come and get it," Mrs. Oliver sang.

The pork was wonderful and the conversation light and cheery. Andrew let himself be sucked into the warm breeze of goodwill blowing through the Oliver house that evening.

After the dishes were done and the second cups of coffee poured, Mr. Oliver went to the cupboard and pulled out a deck of cards.

"You up for a little cards tonight, Andy?"

Here we go.

"Actually, I've got an early start tomorrow. It's a long drive back into the city."

"C'mon, it's early. Tanya, get the Crown Royal from the linen closet. See, I'm cracking out the good stuff."

Tanya smiled at Andrew and scurried off to get the booze.

"You're in aren't you, Sarah, honey?"

"Well, just a couple of hands, Daddy. We do have to get back soon."

Her eyes begged Andrew for understanding.

"Just a couple hands," Mr. Oliver said, lighting a cigar. The whole family lit up, save Sarah who really hated that her family smoked, and forbid Andrew to.

"Cigar, Andy?"

"No, thanks."

"You don't know what you're missing."

Andrew saw that Sarah wanted to say something. He also knew she wouldn't.

"Tanya, deal the first hand. What's it going to be?"

"Let's open the bank first, Daddy. A quarter a chip. What are you in for, Andrew?"

"I'll have five dollars worth."

"Let's all start at five," Mr. Oliver said gaily. "Sit down, Ivy, but first grab a fin out of your purse."

Mrs. Oliver took a long haul on her menthol cigarette. She was one of those older women who drew huge amounts of

smoke and then kept it in her lungs, licking her teeth, getting every milligram of nicotine out of each puff and then blowing out a tiny patch of steam.

"Quarter ante, everyone."

"OK, five card draw, nothing wild."

Mr. Oliver slid the cards around the table.

"Who's in?"

Tanya casually threw in a single chip.

"I'm in," Mrs. Oliver said cheerfully.

"Not me," Sarah said, folding her cards on the table.

Andrew looked at the two queens in his hand. He knew he should raise the stakes.

"I'll see your quarter."

"How many cards, Tan?"

Tanya pulled so hard on her Camel that her face looked like a pushed-in squeeze toy.

"I'll have two, Dad," she said, blowing a long thick spray.

The next two-and-a-half hours were a hot, smoky blur. Andrew's throat was raw from whiskey and second-hand smoke. Mr. Oliver had maintained his jolly mood throughout, especially since he already had a little over twenty-five dollars of Andrew's money. Andrew had not won a single hand in over an hour and had long ago stopped returning Sarah's smiles.

"Alright, the game is the cross. Ante up, everyone."

The chips slid into the centre of the table like crochinate pieces.

Tanya dealt the cards, cigarette balancing in the corner of her mouth. Her sneaker was resting lightly on Andrew's but he couldn't find the energy to move. The bets went around the table.

Andrew fanned out Tanya's offering. Ace, queen, three of hearts, nine of diamonds and the eight of spades. Crap.

"Andrew, honey, are you in?" Sarah said, smiling, trying to keep things light.

"It'll cost you fifty to stay."

"I'm in."

Tanya turned over the first card. At the top of the cross was the queen of clubs.

"I'll check."

"Check."

"I'll raise fifty more," said Andrew.

"I'll see your fifty and raise you another fifty," said Mr. Oliver, crunching on an ice cube.

The girls all bucked up.

Tanya flipped the next card, the left arm of the cross. Six of diamonds.

Everyone checked.

The bottom of the cross was the ace of spades.

"What are you saying, Ivy?"

"I'll check."

"I'm out," Sarah said.

"I'll raise it twenty-five," said Andrew. His eyes went from hers to a tiny blemish on her chin and back again. She quickly touched the blemish with her hand. Mr. Oliver said, "I'll see your twenty-five and raise you another fifty. Seventy-five to you, Tan."

Tanya scattered three chips across the pile.

"There's your seventy-five and here's another fifty."

Here we go. Andrew wanted to try and win at least some of his money back. God, this is so mental. They looked like an alien family, fingering their cards, sipping their drinks, smoking their cigarettes. He half expected them to shed their skin and emerge as reptiles like an episode of *The Outer Limits*.

"I'll see all that."

"Too rich for me. I'm going to put on some tea," Mrs. Oliver said.

Yeah, you just fucking do that, Mrs. O.

Mr. Oliver relit the dregs of a cigar. The sucking sound was making Andrew nauseous.

"I've got your fifty and I raise you fifty more."

Tanya stood up and pulled off her shirt, revealing a tank top that was sprayed on to her torso.

"This isn't strip poker," Sarah said, frowning at Tanya.

Tanya didn't acknowledge her. Andrew felt like laughing.

"There's the fifty and here's fifty more. That's a dollar to you, Andrew."

He threw a dollar chip at the pile.

"Can we see the next card, already?" Andrew said, trying to sound funny.

"Alright, let's do that," Mr. Oliver said.

Tanya reached across the table and lifted up the ten of diamonds.

Well, Andrew would be going top to bottom. He was sitting on aces and queens and maybe that centre card held a full house.

"I'm in for twenty-five."

"I'll see that and raise you fifty."

Tanya stared at her cards for a few seconds, biting her bottom lip.

"There's seventy-five and I'll go one higher," she said, tossing a chip.

"I'm in," Andrew said. *And you've got fantastic tits, just like your sister. Both your little girls are fucking hot, Mr. Oliver.* He felt something unpleasant but intoxicating entering him.

Mr. Oliver puffed at his soggy stub, getting the last couple of pulls out of it, then butted it in the overflowing ashtray.

"So, I need fifty to stay in and here's another seventy-five."

SEASONAL WISHES FROM NORTHERN QUEBEC

We are encased in snow.
I feel closer to Canadian poets, Al Purdy among them,
who have spent so much time describing this state,
the silence of the trees weighed down by mounds of white.
I'm glad to have the dog with me. We take long walks at night
surrounded by no sounds but our own.
There is no wind and we barely feel the cold.
She loves this weather, lying in the high drifts,
trying to catch snow that I throw her way.
She follows me around like, well, like a puppy.
We find comfort in each other's company.
I've been reading the book you gave me.
Portuguese sailors found their way by the stars.
Adventure and passion set their journeys in motion
but it was mathematics, the science of the sky,
precise calculations from the deck of a ship,
that led them to their destination.
And these same instruments led Hudson
through the bay that now bears his name.
They thought of this continent as little more than a century old.
Fresh territory, full of the unknown.
But each motion forward, into endless land, water, trees,
meant home and safety were another step behind.
Their captain was leading them to almost certain death.
The men mutinied, set the officers adrift,
left them to die.
The light that they followed falls on me now
and will fall on you when reading this
(choose a clear night to step outside and
count as many stars as you can).
I'm not mathematically inclined.
Despite reading the definition a dozen times,
degrees and radii along a disk,
the working of a sextant alludes me.
But, I agree with Hudson's men. This land does go on forever.
By measuring our distance from the heavens,
comparing angles and positions,
we'll find that our surest and quickest route
is by the stars.

— KATHLEEN OLMSTEAD

He's bluffing. Andrew was sure of it now.
*After I win this hand, I'm going to go home
and paint your daughter's face with my come.
Then, when Tanya comes to see me about her
bike, I'll let her suck my dick the way she's been
dying to ever since we met.* Mr. Oliver winked
at him over his cards.

"Dad, really. I'd leave you and Andrew to
duke this out mano-a-mano, but I've come
too far to fold now." Tanya forked over the

necessary chips and looked over at Andrew.

"Again, I'll see."

"Alright, I'll hold there. Tan?"

"Let's look at the last card, shall we?"

Tanya squinted over her smoldering smoke.

"The middle card is a . . ." turning it,
"seven of clubs."

"I'll bet a quarter," Andrew said, start-
ing at his cards like they might change if
he looked away.

"I'll see that and raise you seventy-five."
He's bluffing. Just hang in there.

"I'll see," Tanya said. "A buck to you."

Andrew slid a dollar chip towards the
sprawling stack.

"Alright, I'll call. What do you have,
folks?"

"A pair of kings and a pair of sixes."

"Andrew?"

"Aces and queens," he said spreading
them on the table.

"Well, looky here. Three tens." Mr. Oliver
reached over to the pile with both his hands,
sweeping the chips towards himself.

"Sorry about that, Andy. You'll win it back."

"It's Andrew. Andrew. How many
fucking times do you have to be told?"

"Andrew!" Sarah shrieked, panic reshaping
her face. "We'd better get going. I'm
sorry, Mom."

"Take it easy, Andy, Andrew. It's just a
game."

"Just a game? Just a game?"

Andrew heard himself changing his life.

"Just a game? You invite people into
your home and then take money from
them, take money from your own family,
and you think 'it's just a game'? A game
would be playing Monopoly or Trivial Pur-
suit *for fun!* You people are sick!"

He was stupid with rage. Tanya was sit-
ting on her legs with a huge smile on her
face. Mr. and Mrs. Oliver were flushed with
embarrassment.

"Please, Andrew, let's just go," Sarah
pleaded.

"I, you, I mean, God, fuck . . ."

He turned around and walked to the door,
hearing Sarah's apologies as he opened, and
left open, the front door. Sarah ran after him,
getting in the passenger side of the car. The
car jerked forward before she could get her
seat belt on. Once she was turned around
and belted up, she took in a breath to start
speaking, but he stopped her with a look, a
look he'd never given her or anybody.

The ride back into the city was like the
ride out, except that Sarah had begun to
cry softly.

"I'll drop you at home, but I'm going
to Danny's."

"Do you love me, Andrew?"

Do you love me, Andrew. She sounded so
pathetic. Andrew kept his eyes focused on
the road and the city glowing in the distance.

*Moe Berg is a Christie-Ossington resident. He
has previously been published in Blood and
Aphorisms. His first book, The Green Room,
will be published in 2000 by Gutter Press.*

SOLDIERS

FICTION BY ANDREW LOUNG

In the swath of brown grass bridging the front yards of our adjacent townhomes, Colin and I have marshalled our miniature armies, squinting over them like two ornery generals. The opposing forces are strategically arrayed across the lawn in rows, parabolas and heringbone formations. My troops consist of First World War American doughboys, spirited Zulu warriors, medieval Norman knights, mustachioed German hussars and several swaggering cowboys in chaps. Colin is in command of flinty Roman legionaries, prim-looking British Grenadiers, French cuirassiers from Napoleon's Grand Army, Japanese samurai in full armour and grey Confederate cavalrymen. The groupings are different each time we meet, though we always adhere to the same ceremony of us both dumping a shoebox full of figurines into a collective pile, which prompts a selection process that is part deliberation, part scrounging.

Because Colin cannot hear or speak, we conduct our enterprise in lumps of silence, broken only by the occasional throat clearing, or by Colin's gleeful, almost babyish squeal whenever he discovers a soldier placed just so. Colin owns a repertoire of what seems like unfinished words and strangled syllables, the meanings of each I am slowly deciphering. I have figured out that each of those numb, disjointed sounds he produces signals something very specific—a memory triggered by a blue jay alighting upon a branch, or perhaps an anxious sensation induced by the rumble of a passing truck, even the throb of impatience when I take too long in selecting my army.

Colin and I are roughly the same age, at the mouth of adolescence, and though Colin is nearly a head taller than I am, he retains the supple, open-ended expression of a much younger child. Colin is a neighbourhood original: he has lived in the house here all his life, has grown into it as he has grown, like a cactus, into all the surrounding severities to which his deafness binds him. I have heard some of the older boys on the street refer to him as "the village idiot," while girls giggle and

cross their eyes at him as if it were their favourite pastime. And Mr. Parkes, a hatchet-faced retiree with a moist lisp living at the end of the block, once slapped Colin across the face for drinking from his garden hose.

My family has lived here just over a year now. For Colin and me, the tin and plastic soldiers have become our one-note source of mutual interest; we keep company for nothing else. Or perhaps it only seems like there is nothing else because the vague, replicated episodes of swimming in summer, tobogganing in winter and biking in autumn all too quickly melt together in the memory as blurs of undifferentiated motion. We do not attend the same school, and I have no recollection of Colin ever wanting to visit the corner store with me and the others guys to buy licorice or an ice-cream bar.

This afternoon the primrose-coloured sun is high and partially concealed behind the corner of a cloud, in the way that the sun always protrudes from the upper corner in a child's drawing. The sky is an indelible blue. Our armies in front of us are set so vividly against the clear, clean day they are almost animated. It is at translucent moments like these that I realize soldiers are defined more by a common bond than by a common enemy. I can see it even in the spread of tiny figures at my knee. The staid uniforms and glossy armour, the slashing scimitars and polished derringers can all be substituted one for the other. But remove one figure from its placement, and a sad vacancy is created. There is more valour in comradeship than in killing. I hang on my bedroom wall a pewter replication of the seal of the Knights Templar. It is a plate-sized artifact that holds the tarnished image, in relief, of two bedraggled, helmeted crusaders on a single stallion. It is supposed to represent brotherhood and poverty, I am told. Perhaps you cannot have one without the other, because it has occurred to me that absolute brotherhood, like the absolute bond between two elements at the chemical level, requires an

impoverishment of everything else around it.

Every so often, a stately beetle or jouncing cricket will pass through our diorama as if tourists in a museum. Once, a roguish squirrel rushed in and made off with an olive-coloured Marine. But no other children come and join us, they just bustle past in slack little gangs, leaving me feeling marooned. Occasionally, an unsolicited rock will pounce into a section of our soldiers, accompanied by clouds of snickering or mock regard, like the clouds of dust that trail galloping horses. Colin never looks up at the perpetrators, only at me, to check if I will smile at them, as a gauge of how deeply the conspiracy runs. I can always sense that slight blur of rotation in his chalky complexion, then the clamp of scrutiny on me, then the release of the moment's traction as the rowdies grow bored and move on.

A figure approaches out of the sunlight. It is Virginia, a girl from the next street over, where a set of two-storey, gable-roofed townhouses identical to ours exists. She lives in the equivalent to Colin's house, fourth from the corner. She is wearing a short yellow sundress, and she is barefoot, her elegantly aligned toenails painted a watermelon red. Her shoulders and arms gleam, enhanced by a milky coating of lotion. Virginia is a few years older than us, and, approaching that sacred grove of womanhood, is rumoured to have a curfew well past ten o'clock (the after-ten world, unknown to me, resonates through my bedroom window each night as darkly mystical as a druid's grotto) and friends who can drive. And yet, she is still betrayed by a raw, childish spray of freckles, as she is now, whenever the sun lingers too long on her.

"You certainly spend a lot of time with those things," she says, standing on the edge of the lawn, indicating with a finger. Her fingernails are painted a darker red than her toes; they are almost purple, the colour of spring azaleas. Colin and I pause in mid-duel.

"It's better than spending time with you," I respond.

"What's the big thrill about it anyways?"

"That's for me to know, and you to find out."

Virginia gives a little cluck of exasperation, joins her hands behind her back and crosses the position of her feet. She sways for a second, and, at the instant that she limberly corrects her hips, she presents a strikingly fluent form for someone her age, moving with the swirling ease of a ballerina. Virginia already possesses that quiet but luminous feminine quality that will be called, as she grows older, such things as grace, guile, naïveté, vulnerability, self-assurance and charm.

"You have to do something for me," she declares.

"Says you."

"Don't be such a brat. If you won't do it, I'll get somebody else," she says with the provocative, omniscient air of someone who believes there is an obligation to accept this irresistible proposal of hers. She is standing boyishly akimbo now, in an open stance, and a pout has eclipsed her face. I am fascinated by a pale diaphanous delta that forms on the sheer material of her dress between her thighs where

sunlight passes through the organdy. Her cool, knowing, green eyes, homing in on what she probably interprets as my lecherous fixation, seem to trap sunlight and fade into a soft beryl colour, like the calm, shallow patches of a tropical sea.

"Alright, what d'you want?"

"I dropped a contact lens in my backyard doing cartwheels," Virginia explains. "You've got to help me search for it."

As I rise in an almost reflexive manner, I clumsily trip over a section of my patiently waiting army, knocking over several figures. I look down. The casualties include my favourite pieces, three Spartan hoplites, so intricately crafted the individual strands of the horsehair crests on their battered helmets can be perceived, and the scars can be traced quite easily along their naked thighs. The Spartans devoted themselves to military training from the age of seven, the same age I began collecting my model soldiers.

"You coming or not?" Virginia asks. She is making a stooping motion, her arms extended over her head like a worshipping pagan, practicing for a cart-

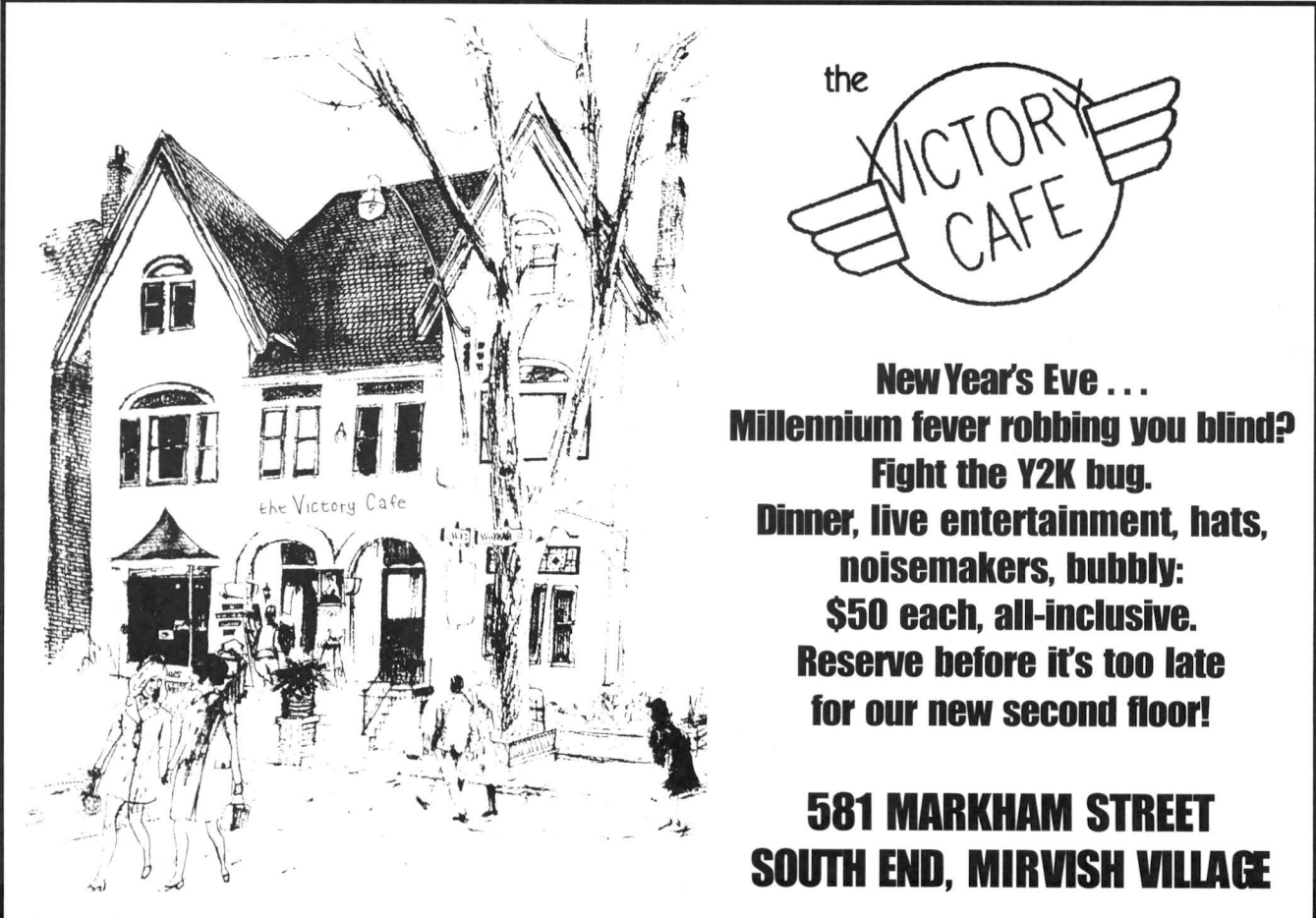
wheel. The muscles in her pale calves tense, then release. I wait for her to proceed with her gymnastic display, but she never completes it. It's an unfinished gesture that seems deliberate and tantalizing.

I watch her step over to my mother's tulip bed where she bends over and sniffs the bulbous heads of some bright red King Edward tulips, and then absently picks at the drooping petals of the pink buttercups in the back. It impresses upon me that she is the general of her own inert army.

I am about to march off with Virginia when I realize I should notify Colin how long I will be away. As I turn, a lead figurine hits me square on the bridge of my nose, and it is soon followed by the first trickle of blood.

I have foreseen this day.

Andrew Loung has a sublime appreciation for the Annex, where he lives, works and plays. He is editor-in-chief of the Varsity, the University of Toronto's student newspaper, and has previously been published in the Hart House Review, the UC Review and Ca Met Egal.



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SUPER OCTANE GIRLS GET DOWN TONIGHT!

Author Patricia Seaman makes herself laugh, and her readers dance.

INTERVIEW BY KERRI HUFFMAN

“My book made someone dance. That makes me so happy!”

I have just finished telling Patricia Seaman that there had been some dancing in my household when quotes from the song “Love Potion No. 9” popped up in the text of her latest work, the graphic novel *New Motor Queen City*.

Seaman laughs easily and heartily, especially when discussing her book, a small paperback filled with images culled from Mexican romance comics and overlaid with song lyrics, pop-culture references and quotes taken everywhere from Chinese restaurant placemats to Kathy Acker books.

Though not a household name, Seaman does have a following, thanks to her critically well-received collection of short stories, 1994’s *The Black Diamond Ring*, and her 1989 novella, *Hotel Destiné*. *New Motor Queen City* isn’t Seaman’s first graphic work—several years ago she self-published a few artists’ books and comics which, as she puts it, “no one has seen” due to their low print run of about fifty.

Moving from novels and short stories to comics may seem an unlikely thing to do, but given that Seaman has a background in visual art and design (as does most of her family), it isn’t unexpected. In fact, Seaman says a careful attention to language (she also holds a degree in English literature) links her various forms of artwork. “I really, really love language. I care about language,” she says. “I’m really interested in vernacular. I think there is a huge hierarchy attached to vernacular and I wanted to take the lowest, most pathetic, most devalued words and, by changing the context, give them more value. The word ‘underpants’ has the worst rap in the world, and I just love to use it. It’s my favorite word.”

New Motor Queen City is filled with such linguistic juxtapositions:

Woman: “Responsiveness varies depending on psychological conditioning. Goodbye.”

Man: “You don’t mean it! You’ll come crawling back to me begging for pre-coital play.”

Throw in the theme from *Shaft* and the book proves an unexpected mix.

“I like to take an academic language and put it next to another vernacular to deconstruct it,” Seaman says. “Neither has authority when you put them together. In their own context, in their own environment, they have absolute authority. So when you take that out of the context and put them together, it’s like two people with different languages trying to talk to each other.”

While Seaman’s use of conversational language comes across as satire, even nonsensical in places, her critique of vernaculars is founded in a fundamental understanding of cultural politics. “I’m taking the piss out of everything, even academic language, because it’s a very privileged language most people don’t have access to and it gets used to intimidate them. I don’t think language should be for that,” she says. “But it also has the potential of being very clarifying. It was through academic language that I came to understand my perspectives on feminism, to understand patriarchy, deconstruction and a lot of the ideas I make use of in the book. So I think that they’re really valuable and useful and vital ideas to understand this weird capitalist, colonialist environment that we live in. It’s really important to have a language that can demystify as well as deconstruct all this bullshit that makes people suffer and that hurts people and that maintains the power structures and inequities that we have.”

Seaman’s political point of view also, ironically, attracted her to Mexican romance comics: books filled with women with perfect hair, hourglass figures and a heterosexual desire. “I liked the way they looked. I liked the totally bizarre, over-gendered, stereotyped information encoded in the images. Then I took out the text and replaced it with something that was in the context of what I was putting them into. In order to do that I only chose images that I loved, which were

usually the more extreme images—a lot of close-ups, men with mustaches, any image with a gun, and many D-cup drawings.”

In a book that is profoundly urban, it seems fitting for Seaman to have added text that, in typical postmodern fashion, is largely a pastiche of information taken from the Internet, various books and, in one case, flyers from a Toronto telephone pole. “In the case of ‘The Further Adventures of Elvis,’ I took posters that were stuck up on lampposts of somebody’s religious hysterical condemnation of the world in their own weird, psycho mindset, and I combined that with the image of Elvis and these hypersexual women.”

“The Further Adventures of Elvis” is certainly a bizarre tale. A demon-possessed Elvis, afraid he will do something dangerous, looks in the mirror and remarks, “Don’t he just look like that fella who refused to go down on Cybill Shepherd!” Seaman also manages to riff Bruce McDonald movies in “Hardon Road Killers,” a story where women take over the outlaw/rebel roles usually given to male characters. The D-cup women who litter the pages of *New Motor Queen City* are vixens leading men astray. They turn on their men, have lesbian love affairs and plan bank robberies. And when their men try to apologize, they give such responses as, “That’s OK, honey. All you have to do is make me cum, you know.”

Seaman says the use of obscenity in her work is meant to liberate the female characters through a kind of sexual language usually considered off-limits. “I like to give my female heroes the opportunity to go into territory they aren’t traditionally allowed to have access to. And it does give them power because it’s unexpected, and those are powerful words. That’s sexual ownership in a way that men have always taken, and so for women to take it is very independent.”

The women in *New Motor Queen City* are gutsy and adventurous, but they are also

PHILLIP SMITH



completely artificial, with torpedo tits, wasp waists and perfectly-coiffed hair. They are also sexually secure and confident, often a luxury for most women. "I don't think our culture likes women's independence. So, in order for women to take it, it's always a bit of a threat. But they're in an environment in this book where they can gain power from it and live well and benefit from it, whereas in our society women who take that kind of sexual independence have a lot to deal with, they have a lot of cultural consequences. We adopt the 'gendered' image as women because it's the norm and because there are rewards for doing so."

Seaman manages to critique and expose the artifice of womanhood by using these over-gendered women, but she also has fun with them. As well, she grabs hold of pop culture and sets it on its head. In "Requiem for Pussy," for example, a voluptuous woman lounges on the grass repeating Kathy Acker quotes: "I don't understand my own wants, but at the same time I can't deny my own wants without going so crazy that I can no longer bear my own craziness."

Seaman also uses the conventions of blaxploitation films (a genre she is obviously fond of) to score a couple of points on the subject of racism and the appropriation of black culture. "I have a picture of Richard Roundtree in my house. People come in and ask 'Why do you have a picture of Richard Roundtree in your living room?' and I always say 'If I kept it in the bedroom it would intimidate men!'"

For a book so completely embroiled in pop culture, it seems almost obvious that it would include musical references. Seaman's choice of music has several effects. She wanted to use familiar songs because of the way they trigger emotions. Also, Seaman felt the use of song would make the book more movie-like in style. "I wanted to use a soundtrack because I wanted it to be a little bit filmic. So, I dug back in my memory for all those great seventies songs I really loved, and I thought that would force the

reader to bring another dimension to it, because they'll know these songs and they'll be able to sing along while they're reading them—and dance too."

The songs in *New Motor Queen City* are such a huge part of the cultural consciousness that they are recognized from just a line or two; songs like "Suspicious Minds," "Hello, I Love You," and "Don't Sleep in the Subway." The trigger effect is so powerful it reminds the reader why such songs are used in commercial advertising. "In the case of advertising, it's just a trigger to



get the interest of aging boomers, because these songs are all from when they were teenagers or in their early twenties, which we all look back on that with great nostalgia and fondness and intense emotion, whether it was horrible or wonderful. It was sexual awakening, it was spiritual and political awakening. Especially when mbax used 'The Times They Are A-Changin''—there was all that uproar and it was obviously a way to attach boomers to capitalism and to what the bank wanted to sell. But, in my case, of course, I'm doing exactly the opposite."

Even the initial construction of *New Motor Queen City* had a cinematic style. Seaman would pour over the Mexican comics and select twenty to forty images. She

would then arrange them on a storyboard using only a visual narrative to guide her. Finally, she would place her collected text over the images with a song thrown here and there for good measure. Upon close examination, there is no traditional narrative in the book; the story is pulled together with voice-overs and dialogue.

Despite its language play, *New Motor Queen City* often confounds with its nonsensical storylines. In "Love Runaway," Mary and Rhoda engage in a lesbian affair where their love is secured by the magic of the Circle of Hearts Ceremony. Seaman's Elvis is a character terrified of women and possessed by demons who "can put thoughts, voices and emotions into our brains." And "Currency for the Otherworld" is an Egyptian tale told entirely with hieroglyphs. Seaman plays with conventions of narrative knowing full well the human desire to make stories out of whatever information is on hand.

"I know people who actually know what hieroglyphics mean, who have explained to me where I haven't made sense and where I've almost made sense. I wanted to take these images we identify as having a particular meaning and put them on top of other images that we also identify as having a particular meaning," Seaman says. "In the context of the book, the reader is going to recognize that it's some kind of gender story and have to make it all up. Part of

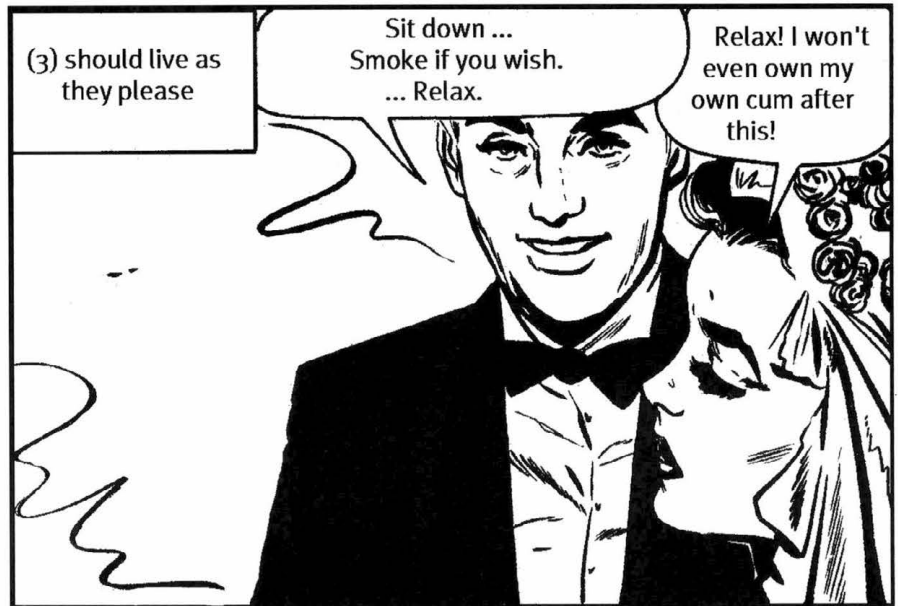
what I wanted to do was to figure out how we make meaning: why do we make stories. We always want to make stories. I think we are just total sluts for a story. So you can take really disparate pieces of information and people will try and integrate it so that it has a narrative meaning for them."

New Motor Queen City is not Seaman's first work to reject the traditional narrative thread. In "Facts About Shriners," a story from *The Black Diamond Ring*, Seaman combined a tale of a woman shopping for underwear with seemingly unconnected facts about Shriners. "When I write, I like to create rupture, because I think that rupture is what you need in order to be a critical reader. In order to interject your own

experience into the book, you need some spaces. You can't just be sucked in and pulled along. So, I very actively tried to set it up in such a way that you could make something out of it, but you have to participate in it or else it won't have any emotional impact on you. And I like readers to be able to have an emotional impact. You can read it on any level. You don't have to know that half the quotes in 'Requiem for Pussy' are from Kathy Acker, or you don't have to have seen *Shafi* or blaxploitation films. There's a certain level on which anybody could get some of the jokes from the book and find it a satisfying reading experience. But the more you bring to it, the more satisfying it's going to be."

Seaman also makes use of language jokes. In one section a man tells his young lover, "One should never generalize. Be more or less specific"—one of the references Seaman found on a Web site dedicated to explaining grammatical errors. Another section is filled with multiple choice questions like "The U.S. is fighting for women's: (1) freedom; (2) equality; (3) better standard of living." While in this context the question seems ridiculous, it comes from a propaganda manual used by American soldiers fighting in Vietnam. Seaman took the manual and changed the word "Vietnamese" to "women's" and managed to give the reference new-found humour and irony.

Despite the popularity of *New Motor Queen City*, Seaman doesn't envision creating anything like it ever again. "The



From "Hardon Road Killers."

way I think of it is, I love language, I love writing, there are a million possibilities. I never do anything the same twice," she says. "My first novella, *Hotel Destiné*, is very different than anything else I ever wrote. The short stories are different from the novel that I'm working on. This book is different from the art books that I made originally, and then the comic strip, and then this book. I'm always experimenting because I just want to play around and see what happens. I've never so far found a style and stuck with it, because every time I do something I learn so much from it that it makes it impossible to do it again. You always have to take the new informa-

tion, then you have to go forward, otherwise you'd be bored out of your mind."

New Motor Queen City was created from Seaman's desire to make something fun simply for "the joy of creating a new book." A few years were spent working on it in her apartment, with no idea as to whether it would ever be published. Eventually, in 1997, Seaman showed the book to Darren Wershler-Henry, who at the time was having his own book published by Coach House Books, which had just relaunched itself as both a traditional and an on-line publisher (Wershler-Henry has since become the press's editor). The staff at Coach House liked *New Motor Queen City*, and initially posted it on their Web page, where it ran in serial form for a year. After a successful run on the Web, the press collected the sections of *New Motor Queen City*, publishing them earlier this year.

But, when everything is said and done, Seaman admits *New Motor Queen City* is a book she created for no one but herself. "I love laughing. That's basically why I did this book, because I wanted to make myself laugh. I wanted to find whatever stupid, dumb, silly combination of stuff made me laugh. And I spent two years sitting in my apartment laughing my head off. So, what did my neighbours think? 'Oh, my God. She's in there again, hysterically laughing.' They were very patient; they didn't phone the paramedics."

New Motor Queen City is currently available from Coach House Books.



From "Calling Dr. Feelgood."

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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BITTERSWEET

FICTION BY DEANNA McFADDEN

I have a bruise, here, on the upper part of my thigh. It has turned colour in three different places. It proves my skin is alive. The colours are dark, darker than my own skin, deeper than my flesh. I have yet another bruise, here, in the hollow where my back meets my neck. This one is not so visible. But still, it proves that even in hollow places, my skin is aching to feel alive.

As my skin carries colour differently, his voice carries words differently, skipping syllables and garnishing blunt vowels with the long, patient trills of an ever-distant lover. I remember his cheeks are hollow and his limbs need constant adjustment. I stood motionless in front of his camera, somewhat beyond a decent sense of posterity. My mother always told me that a woman's posture is important. I can be proud, despite the motions of my life, despite the colour of my broken skin. I am captured, now, by a nameless, faceless object. I sit still. I am one of a series of Bellocq's whores. But today I could be the First Lady, crowned with a bruise for a tiara and a moment's rest. I could have a moment's rest.

Bellocq. Even his name rolls off your tongue like a back-porch whisper.

The thought of his name caresses my

aching skin, my broken tongue, my abandoned posture. I wish I carried an artist's soul. I wish that I wasn't a dreamer and that my thoughts could become live pictures, like the ones he takes. My life is bright with a tincture I don't recognize. I can feel his breath on my neck. I can feel his fingers brushing my lips. I can feel him moving my body into just the right light, just the right place between the here and the everlasting.

Men and women, they tell different stories. They take different pictures. A man tells a story from beginning to end. His ending is significant despite the varied contents of the story itself. His tale grows to have a life of its own. A woman is concerned with how a story is interpreted. Men tell stories forwards, women tell them backwards. Bellocq is aware of these differences; he captures them with a camera lens. As he attempts to tell the story of a woman, of many women, his vision is caught between artistic interpretation and a longing to tell a story backwards. These differences are posed, each woman, half-dressed, scarred, naked breast, soul escaping, and Bellocq can only tell their stories by looking forward. With his shades of black and white, and his sight dripping

all over the place.

When he kisses me it is like being kissed by love itself. A gentle, winged touch that centres your soul. Does he kiss all the girls like that? It is a poet's kiss. This lover, this photographer; I don't want to leave this room, yet my path is already chosen. This free life. The blood. The body. The stolen, frozen breath.

"Smile," he says.

"But not like that." The beautiful kiss. And then, I don't feel like a working girl. I feel like a poet's study, a verse, an ode, an everlasting phrase. One man. I am a working girl. The camera. The lover. The beloved. The sensual feeling of my bare-naked skin, bruises exposed, with skeletal muscles covering the gentle man who exists only for me. He stands in front with one eye to my bare skin and the other covered, extended by the machine. A man who likes things to stand still. A man who likes things to develop on paper. A man who is indentured by taking pictures of rundown whores. The blessed and the cursed. It seems now that I have lost my soul.

Deanna McFadden is a Palmerston area resident. Her work has appeared in Anonymous Juice, Existere and on www.bissyfit.com. She is currently working on a novel.

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ANTITHESIS

The First Book of Barbie.

FICTION BY SARO McKENNA

The Beginning

1 In the beginning Barbie created the smog and the suburbs. The suburbs were without form and void, and poverty was upon the face of the ghettos; and the Barbie Convertible was moving over the face of the highways. And Barbie said, "Let there be money;" and there was money. And Barbie saw that the money was good; and Barbie separated the money from the poverty. Barbie called the money "fun" and the poverty she called "food bank." And there was evening and there was morning—the first day. And Barbie said, "Let the suburbs put forth capitalism, markets yielding investors and Microsoft bearing computers which is their product, each according to its kind, upon the suburbs." And it was so. The suburbs brought forth capitalism, Wall Street yielding investors according to their kinds and Microsoft bearing computers in which is their product, each according to its kind. And Barbie saw that it was good. And there was evening and morning—the third day. And Barbie said, "Let the highways bring forth swarms of cars, and let the Concorde fly above the suburbs in the smog." So Barbie created the

great minivans and every Land Rover and sport utility that moves, with which the highways swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged Concorde according to its kind. And Barbie saw that it was good.

And Barbie blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the highways, and let the Concorde multiply in the smog." And there was evening and there was morning—the fifth day. And Barbie said, "Let the suburbs bring forth happy families and housewives according to their kinds: stock brokers and spin doctors and politicians according to their kinds." And so it was. And Barbie made the politicians and the stockbrokers according to their kinds, and everything that distorts and manipulates according to its kind. And Barbie saw that it was good.

Then Barbie said, "Let us make CEOs in our image, after our likeness; let them have dominion over the cars of the highways and the Concorde of the smog, and over the stock brokers, and over the suburbs, and over every spin doctor that distorts and manipulates."

And Barbie blessed the CEOs, and Barbie said to them, "Be fruitful and make profits, and fill the suburbs and subdue them; and have dominion

over the cars of the highways and over the Concorde of the smog and over every happy family and housewife that moves upon the suburbs."

And Barbie said, "Behold, I have given you every investor upon the face of the suburbs and every Microsoft with computers as its product; you shall have them for shareholders. And to every politician of the suburb, to every Concorde of the smog, to everything that has the breath of capitalism, I have given unto you for profits."

And Barbie saw everything she had made, and it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning—the sixth day.

2 Thus the smog and the suburbs were finished, all the host of them. And on the seventh day Barbie finished her work which she had done, and she went to the spa on the seventh day. So Barbie blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it Barbie enjoyed shiatsu and facials and frappaccinos, resting from all her work which she had done in creation.

Saro McKenna is a Seaton Village resident. She is a national science fair winner and has been awarded a scholarship to complete high school in Switzerland. This is her first published work.



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THIS FABULOUS PLACE

You wouldn't think of aging apartment houses as good place to put down roots. Think again.

ESSAY BY ALFRED HOLDEN

It was almost certainly Puccini, probably an aria from *La Bobème*, an opera about rent. Back and forth, two voices, a tenor and mezzo-soprano, jostled from open windows on the upper floors of separate apartment buildings in midtown Toronto—voices invisible in the dark and unable to see where, or who, the other was.¹

The spontaneous, semi-public opera, lasting about twenty minutes, added a surprising note to the St. George Street cityscape on a hot August night in 1996. Yet, it was no more surprising, really, than a little bit of urban theatre that startled neighbours and passersby here one winter evening a year or two earlier.

Sometime after the dinner hour, midway along this apartment building row that rose in the 1950s and 1960s, between Bloor Street West and Dupont Street, the bigger-than-life image of a plucked, dressed chicken escaping from a kitchen range was projected across a laneway between two apartment blocks, seven floors up.

The screen was the white, glazed brick south wall of 177 St. George Street, and the film was *Thanksgiving*, a National Film Board of Canada sixteen-millimetre short in which a raw, headless *poulet*, animated with the aid of stop-action filming, flees on its drumsticks to safety.

A warning on the film can read Not For Children, recalled the fine arts student—soon to study at Yale—who ran the projector for a gathering of friends from her glass-walled corner apartment opposite the movie, at 169 St. George Street.²

Not for children, indeed.

The exact same has been said about apartments themselves; one cliché among those accepted, repeated and generally believed in a North American culture infatuated, and in no small measure governed, by clichés—suburban homes, private cars, nuclear families, Republican politics. In this individualist universe, apartments, though creations of capital, have never quite fit.

“It is contended,” a contributor to *Canadian Architect and Builder* noted in the 1890s, summing up sentiments still heard today, “that there is no privacy in these

great piles, no place for children, and that many other things are lacking to the man who considers his home is castle.”³

Not much would change. THOSE NASTY APARTMENTS—AN OLD TORONTO PREJUDICE DIES HARD flashed a headline over a story that appeared in the pages of the *Toronto Star* just past the middle of the twentieth century. “All over town, various politicians, planners and newspaper editorial writers are huddling their skirts about them and shrieking . . .”⁴

APARTMENTS THWART PASTORS said a newspaper report in the same era, in which a building superintendent claimed to be able to observe the shift in a person’s personality when they moved from a house into an apartment. “They withdraw into themselves, they don’t smile as often and seem to lose interest in other people.”⁵ The inherent irresponsibility of tenants seemed proved, definitively, one June day in 1963, when someone returning from a weekend outing stocked a new Toronto apartment building’s reflecting pool with live brook trout, fishing the creatures out by casting from his fifth floor balcony.⁶

Obviously more genuine, as concerns, were the misgivings of urban citizens in Toronto and elsewhere who, particularly in the post-Second World War era, simply found the world of apartment houses rising about them all too brave and new. Building shadows, the demolition of landmarks, and the hulking presence of big, new structures in leafy old neighbourhoods seemed a dramatic incursion on normal life—which it was.

The post-war era’s planning credo, meanwhile, had also raised a red flag over high density, establishing that congestion and crowding—and what but stacked houses and office buildings brought these?—were mortal enemies of “satisfactory living conditions”⁷ in cities worldwide. Their mantra would pave the way (who would have guessed) for something less satisfactory—sprawl.⁸ No matter. “Some 150 ratepayers showed up at City Hall yesterday to knock down a proposed thirteen-storey apartment building planned for St. George Street,” the *Star* reported

on July 31, 1963, after developer Nick Detoro proposed building on several lots straddling No. 191, halfway between Bloor and Dupont streets. “Reaction among our residents [to Detoro’s plans] has varied from shock to incredulity.”⁹

Grievances were real and imagined, and, it appears, perennial. From the 1890s to the 1970s they mirrored not only the understandable upset of residents of old neighbourhoods, but also an age-old bias toward ownership, a hushed anxiety about the sort of people who might not have enough money to buy, and a measure of hostility toward the often unfamiliar people and capital designing, building and backing the new projects.

Yet, behind the upset and prejudice lay a powerful fascination with the possibilities—architectural, social, economic and otherwise. “This *was* the city of homes,” one Toronto observer wrote in the fifties, as new apartment buildings—despite zoning restrictions and Ontario Municipal Board hearings and such citizen protests as were possible at the time—marched up Jameson and Tyndall avenues in Parkdale, up St. George Street in the Annex and up upscale Avenue Road north of St. Clair Avenue West. “Now [Toronto] is becoming a city of apartments. Everywhere . . . huge piles of brick, with fancy doorways, panorama balconies and outsized windows, are rearing skywards. Toronto has a new breed of citizen—the cliff dweller.”¹⁰

At the University of Toronto, no less a city builder than Eric Arthur, the New Zealand-born professor of architecture whose later book, *Toronto: No Mean City*, would celebrate old buildings, was teaching his students how to build new ones—really new ones. One might record, adore and even build with the vocabulary of ancient Greece and Rome and Colonial America in 1950, but something else had come along that was conquering the world. It was the aptly-named International Style: “normative, universal and technically pure” in architects’ lingo,¹¹ “glass boxes, no gingerbread” to the layperson, and to both—at



Architect Wilfred Shulman promoted Sherwood Towers, 206 St. George Street, with a detailed model.

least for a time—the most exciting event in architecture since the Acropolis.

The style's champion, in Toronto, was Arthur, and if he seemed gruff and old and a bit mean to youths in U of T's five-year architecture program,¹² there was no mistaking his contempt was actually for the old guard in the city's architecture business—the big firms, some operating under names of men by this time dead, that, after the war, had resumed doing pretty much what they had done before it. (The trend was surely epitomized by the Bank of Nova Scotia headquarters at King and Bay streets, a stepped-back, jazz-age skyscraper designed in 1930 but built in 1949 to the plans of architect John Lyle, who died in 1945.)¹³

Arthur set out to install a new guard via the classroom and a rigorous Modernist curriculum (among those he invited to visit U of T to speak to students were Walter Gropius, Frank Lloyd Wright, Philip Johnson, Buckminster Fuller and Eero Saarinen), and sometimes his students paid a price. In the fifties, despite the boom, it was no easy matter for young graduates to land a job in the “insurance school”—the big established firms like Marani & Morris or Mathers & Haldenby, who were hard at work on only vaguely-modern brick piles for establishment clients like Confederation Life and Manulife. An Arthur-backed public protest by U of T architecture students against one such design can hardly have aided the cause of student employment after it helped kill, in 1953, a Marani proposal (already contracted to be built) for a new City Hall.¹⁴

Today, a list of students from U of T's Arthur era—forty-three years from 1923 to 1966—reads itself like a who's who of subsequent generations of name architects: Raymond Moriyama, John B. Parkin, Howard Chapman, James Murray, Charles Edward Pratt, George Boake, Jerome Markson, Irving Grossman and George Hamann, to name some. But most started small, without apprenticeships in plush offices. Typically, they started out with the required field placement, often in a small, anonymous firm, then broke out on their own as soon as they could. “The established firms that were in business before the war tended to grab off all the big jobs,” remembers Leo Venchiarutti, who graduated from U of T in 1947.¹⁵ George Boake reminisced in 1999 about the launch of his partnership with James Crang in 1952: “We started out working

GHOST STORIES

These partial stories, forgotten stories, gaps in stories, detailed stories, these unfinished stories, over-and-done-with stories, stories hidden in stories, stories hidden by stories, these shards of stories, hints of stories, dead-end stories, these spiralling stories, stories with unknown endings, tellable stories, unmentionable stories, repressed stories, these highlights-only stories, oft-repeated stories, filtered stories, fleeting-snippet childhood stories, these before stories, after stories, trailing-off stories, these spiked stories, like-yesterday stories
haunt us

and they will,
until we have them all, all,
exactly. And then,
mortal, they will haunt us still.

— RUTH MANDEL

in the basement of Jim's father's house on Regal Road. We very shortly thereafter bought a couple of [Victorian] houses on Huntley Street at Bloor, and converted these houses into office space.”¹⁶ The big firms? Well, “they were our competition!” Boake recalled today. He may be too kind, for while Toronto's establishment architects had the richest clients and biggest commissions, Eric Arthur was probably right: they were, by the fifties, running out of ideas. Arthur's students weren't. Hungry for work, freshly minted to practice a new philosophy, they would connect with younger, brasher clients and new kinds of projects the big guys cared little about.

Walk out onto St. George Street from the subway today, and a pleasant, urbane scene unfolds. Glance left and you see the York Club, “the most distinguished Richardsonian Romanesque house in Toronto,”¹⁷ completed in 1889 for Toronto liquor king George Gooderham, and today sitting on a lush shaded lawn. Kitty-corner across Bloor Street West is Raymond Moriyama's Bata Shoe Museum, its lid-like roof always seeming to be ajar over a building resembling a shoe box. Turn to walk north and you first see more Victorian-era mansions on the west side, dressed well in slate roofs

and copper trim. But right away, above and beyond, on both sides of the street, your eye moves to apartment houses, between seven and twenty storeys tall, which continue intermittently up the few long blocks to Dupont Street. Most were built on single house lots formerly occupied by mansions, some of which, like No. 157 at the corner of Lowther Avenue and St. George, where Timothy's son, E. Y. Eaton, once lived, remain between the newer buildings. (Many of these were men's fraternities in 1999.) To this mix, as you stroll north, is added the First Church of Christ Scientist on the northwest corner of Lowther, with formal, classical columns and a broad lawn; the Chinese consulate south of Bernard Avenue, a Jack Diamond-designed building from the 1970s, red brick and set back; the presence of elms and maples (albeit thinning), whose crowns, at intervals, form a canopy over St. George; and, finally, before Dupont Street, more typically modest Toronto Annex homes.

Virtually all of the apartment buildings were designed by University of Toronto architecture graduates, many of them fresh out of school, testing their mettle at the new Modernism, and getting a fast dunk in the swashbuckling, non-establishment side of Toronto real estate. “The

apartment business after the Second World War in Toronto was a gold mine for adventurers, newcomers in the field and fly-by-night entrepreneurs," said one observer, looking back from the sixties.¹⁸ George Boake found himself in the first two-thirds of such a grouping, when he and Jim Crang—both newcomers, and so, by default, adventurers—were hired to design 145 and 169 St. George. Their client was a man—well, really a youth, tall and lanky—named Peter Robinson, a principal with Keith Kingsley in Marshall Development Co., an entity that later vanished. "He was twenty or twenty-one years old, younger than either of us," says Boake. "He wanted to go places in a hurry."¹⁹

Wilfred Shulman, who graduated from U of T in 1943, linked up with his cousin, Leon Weinstein, to build Sherwood Towers at 206 St. George Street in 1954. One of the first high-rises on St. George, it mirrored, about half-and-half, Shulman's strictly modernist beliefs as an architect, and Weinstein's shrewd, and sometimes delightful, instincts as a marketing man.

Weinstein was the owner of Power supermarkets, an independent chain of grocery stores that would later be merged into Loblaws. Soon after investing in 206, Power would open a supermarket on Dupont Street, to serve what Weinstein's architect cousin forecasted would soon be Toronto's "second Park Avenue, second only to the towering posh apartments now going up on Avenue Road."²⁰

The pair had a toy-like replica of 206 made, which they had photographed, and they used the model and the pictures to promote the building. By chance or by design, the suppliers of materials for the building, such as the Hillsulate curtain-wall panels used on the front (and which Eric Arthur also specified on several projects), used pictures of 206 under construction in their own trade-journal advertisements.²¹

Sherwood Towers was modern architecture in its spare, economical epitome, a squared-off study in glass, brick and

balconies.

"Did he ever design a Colonial house or a classical—"

"Never," Shulman's wife, Rhea, said in 1999.²²

"It came as quite a shock to residents of St. George Street," Shulman himself acknowledged in a newspaper interview, after 206 went up, and right about the time he moved his studio to a new office building nearby, at 99 Avenue Road, which he'd designed. "But it is inevitable more will be built there [St. George Street] because of its valuable location. Homes in that area are of the type which require serv-



Architect George Boake at 169 St. George, September 20, 1999, his first visit in forty years.

ants. And since servants are hard to come by these days, it is possible many homeowners on the street would welcome a good offer for their property and move to a smaller place."²³

Weinstein's supermarket would capitalize on his apartment house in uncanny ways. "A sign of the era's trends in domestic architecture was a promotion [at Power on Dupont] for Delsey toilet paper (two rolls for thirty-seven cents) in pink, blue, yellow and green—the colours of the bathroom tile and fixtures in the spanking new apartments on St. George Street."²⁴ Later, Shulman would try to launch an idea imported from Europe, "co-op" apartments that tenants owned. He designed 74 Spadina Road as a co-op, but, in an era before condominiums, Casa Loma Towers, which today stands on mosaic-tiled pillars that were a Shulman trademark, didn't catch on.²⁵

Looking back from twentieth century's end at their mid-century creations,

some of the buildings' architects were candidly critical. "Most of them aren't, you know, that good, from a purist architectural point of view," said Venchiarutti, including in the critique his own mid-fifties buildings, the nine-storey Skyliner at 224 (named, perhaps, for the approaching jet age), and eight-storey St. George Towers at 214. "Well, maybe that one [224] for Cadillac [Cadillac Development Corp., later Cadillac Fairview] wasn't so bad."

Besides cocky youngsters like Robinson (who somehow found Bronfman money for some of his projects),²⁶ there were

"owner/builders" like Venchiarutti's Italian-born parents, who didn't build on St. George, but from whom he inherited the genes to work with the likes of other enterprising Italian and Jewish families—entrepreneurs the likes of Andy Ucci, and Meyer Wise—who did. "An owner/builder would go out and grab a couple of houses on St. George Street, and get a rezoning," said Venchiarutti. "You could build ten feet from the lot line; you could put a ten-storey

building right up against some lady's house in the Annex." In this highly speculative environment, where someone might build simply to sell or hold forever to bequeath to grandchildren, professional fees were lower, budgets tighter, the architect less of a god. "It isn't every architect that can understand how an owner/builder works," Venchiarutti said in 1999. "It came to me naturally."²⁷

At times, on St. George Street, it is difficult to believe that the apartment buildings were designed at all. Just steps from the subway entrance, on the east side, between Prince Arthur and Lowther avenues, three virtually identical buildings at 149, 151 (once "the Trevi") and 153 went up rapidly between 1959 and 1961. Featureless, rectangular slabs, they are carbon copies with three dimensions. Drawings on file in the city of Toronto property department suggest, indeed, that the same blueprints were recycled for each.²⁸ The triumvirate is testimony to the spare

efficiency of the office of Edward (Eddie) I. Richmond, a pre-war U of T architecture graduate who applied post-war minimalist principles with a particularly sharp pencil. Richmond was capable of better: up St. George, at the corner of Bernard Avenue, in 1958, he gave the Panoramic Apartments (whose street address is 88 Bernard) a spectacular, south-facing eleventh-floor roof garden (closed to tenants today), air-pressurized corridors to keep out cooking smells, and bright, airy apartments. Their layouts didn't waste an inch, and the units, as the building's name implied, offered views to die for when you pulled back their fashionable bamboo curtains.²⁹

So it wasn't art to many beholders. Was St. George Street's "modern" housing even architecture? Not in the eyes of the widows and university professors of the 1950s Annex who protested all the construction, understandably, at the time; not to 1970s sensibilities when it was noted, tersely, that in the fifties "an unforeseen loophole led to the rapid construction of some high-density apartments on large lots."³⁰ And certainly not, to most people, at the mil-

lennium, a time of reaction and nostalgia when the public more readily understood the nineteenth century than the twentieth. It knew better the names of dead Victorian-era architects like Eden Smith and E. J. Lennox (creator of Old City Hall), whose mansions were the pride of the Annex Residents' Association house tours.³¹ Hardly anybody gave a passing glance to the apartment buildings on St. George Street.

And yet, and yet. During the 1990s, a mysterious man could be seen, once in a while, standing on the sidewalk on the west side of St. George Street, looking across at the apartment building on the east side. Neatly, but casually, dressed, greying at the temples, he would gaze up at 169 St. George, a few hundred feet north of Lowther Avenue, appearing to examine the building. At least once he had someone else with him. They looked at the nine-storey apartment house, then turned to each other and talked, and looked again. It was obvious to people who lived at 169—and they did notice—that the man who visited occasionally wasn't up to anything nefarious. He was

admiring the architecture.³²

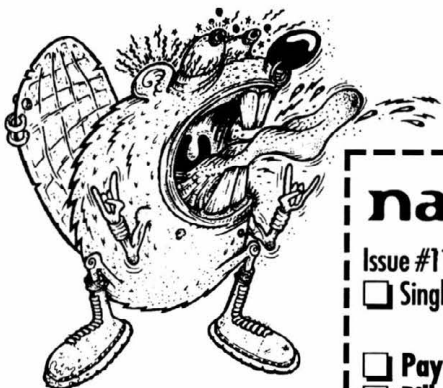
That didn't seem unusual to tenants, because they had come to admire the architecture themselves. If they knew nothing about Modernism or the Bauhaus in Dessau, Germany, whose artists perfected it; if they had never heard of Eric Arthur or the University of Toronto's School of Architecture, much less its post-war graduates; if they never even thought apartment houses rentable to middle-class people like them needed to be designed by architects—well, even if these things were not part of their conscious, they *did* know what they liked.

"We used to look over here and see all this glass," a seventh-floor tenant at 169, Margaret Oman, told a downstairs neighbour in 1998. Oman's boyfriend had once lived at 177 St. George Street, the next building to the north. They used to sit in his apartment, looking across the parking laneway between the two buildings, beguiled by 169's translucence—tenants' red or turquoise walls, their shiny venetian blinds, their lamps sparkling through frosted glass panels in the balcony railing frames. "I said to Bill [Bill Shaver, soon her spouse] why are you living here? Why

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don't you live over there?"³³

Since it was completed in 1958, 169 has had no other name—the legacy perhaps of that extra-youthful developer, Peter Robinson, who, if he was as sharp as architect George Boake remembers, might have known that in New York the smartest addresses are referred to by a shorthand—their numbers.³⁴ Notwithstanding, after forty years of wear and tear, 169 probably did not appear quite as smart as it did, say, on October 3, 1958, when Modernism was high style and this advertisement appeared in the *Toronto Star*: “Brand New Deluxe Building. Only Two Short Blocks North Of Bloor Street. In Finest District, Designed For Particular People, Wall-To-Wall Windows, Large Inset Balconies, Huge Closets, Spectacular Roof Garden, Close To Everything, Only A Few Left, WA4-0813.”³⁵

Stepping off the Bloor-Danforth streetcar at St. George that October day, an apartment hunter would have walked past the hoarding going up and holes going in for 149, whose ultra-plain plans Eddie Richmond, back in his office, may well have been duplicating for 151 and 153 on his Gestetner. They would walk past 145, also by Crang & Boake, but compared to 169 a whale of a building, going up on the site where the gracious 1891 Prince Arthur House had stood just months before.

The apartment hunter would have crossed Lowther, and after a few steps more looked up through the elms and silver maples. Towering—by the standards of the day—stood nine storeys of, basically, glass in slim, stylish steel frames and casements; ribbons of transparency in turn framed by a thin, grid-like concrete structure, the whole floating lightly on stilts. Its address, 169 St. George, was spelled out sans-serif over the entrance, which was itself a glass pavilion, leading into a lobby of plate-glass and glazed, speckled brick walls. On the ceiling in the lobby was a brass lamp, a sphere whose projecting spikes with little bulbs on the end made it

look like a satellite or some sub-atomic particle.

“Everybody smoked!” said Alec Keefer in the late 1990s, perhaps aware that, in the lobby, holes next to the elevator once anchored a half moon, stainless-steel ashtray.

“Women in seamed nylons, the sound of high heels on terrazzo, dresses of Wedgewood blue—light turquoise,” Keefer exclaimed. “The clothes were like curtain walls! Cool, smooth, sophisticated, easy.”

One-sixty-nine was as glamorous and modern as tomorrow, and “Tomorrow was just this fabulous place that we were all dying to get to.”³⁶



An “02” apartment at 169 St. George Street.

You'd go in a tiny elevator. Push eight, why don't you, to inspect one of those corner apartments, up high. “Wanna see an ‘02?’” asks the realtor. And you do. The key, brassy and bright, slides in, opening the door. The smell is of fresh paint over fresh plaster, barely dry. You step onto the parquet floor, all light and blond and slippery under fresh wax, and you are pulled in by light spilling into the hallway. You walk straight in and then daylight tugs you to the left and—

“Wow.”

Afternoon sunlight floods a huge corner living room. Windowsills are barely above knee level.

“Look. There is not one exterior wall,” a resident would write years later. “Even at corners, the building's support structure has been positioned outside on recessed balconies, so that the curtains of glass that enclose the living rooms can wrap right around the corners, unobstructed. . . . The windows stretch to the

ceiling, clear across every room, and into every corner.”³⁷

The balcony door—three pieces of glass held in the slimmest of steel frames—is ajar on its hinges, and shifted slightly by a breath of October air. A great rock mass from another era—Casa Loma—rises on the ridge to the north, somewhere above the source of Taddle Creek; to that Iroquois shoreline above Davenport Road spreads a carpet of treetops, whose fall colours are blazing in the sun.

You'll take it.

“We thought there was an opportunity here,” remembered Boake, who with Jim

Crang produced the design and drawings for 169 St. George Street.

The young architects had lucked into something valuable to an architect in swashbuckling Peter Robinson: a client who really didn't much care what they did.

“There didn't seem to be a lot of interference, if you like,” Boake said in 1999, and pleased with 169. “With this building we were able to do what we wanted to do.”

“One of the best small apartment buildings in Toronto,” Patricia McHugh would write in *Toronto Architecture: A City Guide*.

You, of course, wouldn't have met Boake there that day when you rented your apartment in 1959, or for that matter for another forty years: after 169 was completed the architect wouldn't return until 1999.

Like Rhea and Wilfred Shulman—the architect who designed the buildings whose curtain-walled upper floors were right across the St. George canyon from your place—you might have furnished your airy apartment with the latest, ultra-modern furniture lines. For instance, with a sleek couch that stood on pencil-thin wrought-iron legs that Boake himself designed for Metalsmiths of Toronto, and which won a National Industrial Design Award in 1953; or maybe, just like the Shulmans, you'd have gone for the chic, new Danish styles from J & J Brooks, uptown on Avenue Road. Perhaps you'd have simply gone down to Simpson's for a truck-



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SUMMER'S END

my roving eye catches
on a crisp September morn
meadows wet with dew
late summer blooms
and cattle corn still tall in the fields

bales of gold so nicely placed
as a picture in my mind
like Mother's pumpkin pie
and barns full of sweet hay
for a game of hide-and-go-seek

sweeping orchards
giving up their fruit fragrant the air
beckoning another day
to taste a sweet ripe fruit
in cool shade of a lazy afternoon
basking in glorious Indian summer
storing memories
for winter daydreams . . .

— E. M. COURTEMANCHE

load of funky Russell Spanner. Or maybe, on a flush weekend, you'd have flown down to New York on a new turbo-prop Trans-Canada Airlines Viscount, and brought one of those featherweight Eames plastic-shell chairs back, checked—with a little fast talking—as your luggage.

Living in 169, with all its windows, you might have noticed in *Canadian Architect* an article titled "Translucence," about glass-sheathed factories designed by Crang & Boake, not knowing they were the architects of your home. Years later you might have visited the Air Canada pavilion at Expo 67, not knowing it was designed by Crang & Boake, or shopped at the Hudson's Bay Company's new department store at Bloor and Yonge streets in the 1970s, or Holt Renfrew on Bloor Street in the 1980s—all Crang & Boake buildings. You might have noticed, but not made the connection, when a newspaper reported that a Toronto architectural firm, Crang & Boake, won runner-up in the French government's worldwide competition to build La Defence in Paris.

Were you still living at 169 St. George in 1998, you might have fought a later property manager's plan to shrink and block up the windows with thermal panes and opaque insulated panels. And you might have wept

when, partially, it happened.

"When a building is built with some kind of love or truth in it, it kind of makes you feel that," said one upset tenant. "And this building had that."³⁸

"Faludi! He didn't influence my work at all!" exclaimed Uno Prii, the architect of 191 St. George Street, which went up in the sixties. But he did: Eugene Faludi, a Budapest-born planner who advised the city of Toronto, wrote a report, one of several, that from the late fifties to early sixties changed the rules for apartment building in Toronto and the Annex. The new rules were a response to public alarm and planners' misgivings about the first wave of apartment houses that went up in Parkdale, on St. George Street and on Avenue Road.

"Taller buildings spaced further apart and with larger percentages of landscape areas can result in a better residential standard, even with a higher density," Faludi wrote in 1963, in a dryly written, dryly named "Report on Apartment Building Development in East Annex Planning District," prepared in his Church Street consulting office.³⁹

Dry, but influential. Faludi's philosophy mirrored the conventional wisdom of the

day, which in retrospect seems rather anti-urban: it abhorred “high densities” and congested streets, assuming landscaped “green space”—in essence, absence of city—and emptiness were, well, the cat’s meow.

“Narrow buildings with limited spaces in between,” was how Faludi disparaged St. George Street’s 1950s apartment development. He recommended for the east Annex (that part of the neighbourhood east of Spadina Road) a system of “bonusing” that in the future would let developers build taller buildings—*huge* buildings you could enter on St. George and leave via Huron Street or Admiral Road—if they would compensate by leaving large landscaped lawn areas around them.

It is, today, a discredited philosophy; St. Jamestown, Regent Park and any number of horrific U.S. housing projects proved that people were more social, informal, city-loving animals than believed by number-, space- and ratio-obsessed “theoretical city planning,” as Jane Jacobs punningly referred to the era’s basic planning principles in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*.⁴⁰

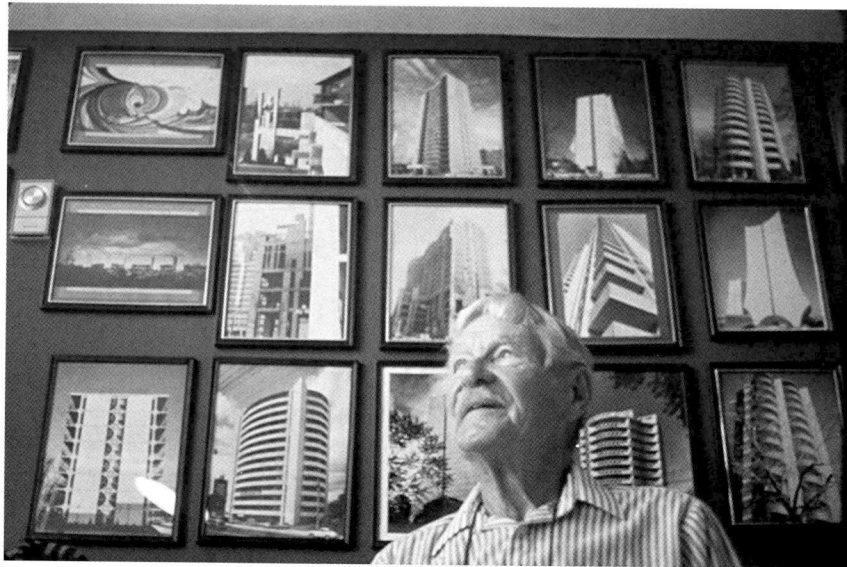
But that is how Faludi, an autocrat, came to influence Priei, an artist.

Priei, like the others who built on St. George Street and in the Annex, was a U of T architecture graduate (1955) and student of Eric Arthur. A top student, as a matter of fact; Arthur hired him summers to work in the office of Fleury & Arthur on Bloor Street East. Priei did, among other things, line drawings that appeared in *No Mean City*. Arthur was a Modernist, but as Priei sees it, his professor broke out of the box: “We have him to thank for the new City Hall,” the swoopy design by Finn Viljo Revell that was landed by international competition. Perhaps a taste for curves and joyful flamboyance ran in Baltic genes: Priei was born in Estonia, which shares its language with Finland. Baltic blood ran in the veins of Morris Lapidus, one of the twentieth century’s most flamboyant architects, designer of the extravagant Fontainebleau hotel in

Miami Beach.

Priei probably designed more apartment buildings in the Annex than any other architect. Their addresses read like a list of places where everyone in Toronto, at one time or another, seems to have lived: 191 and 277 St. George, 11, 35 and 44 Walmer Road, 100 Spadina Road, 20 Prince Arthur, 485 Huron Street (the one with the rounded balconies).

Thanks to Faludi, whose influence found its way into city bylaws almost immediately, Priei’s buildings are large—20 Prince Arthur tops them out at twenty-three sto-



Uno Priei, August 1999, with apartment houses he designed.

reys—and stand remote from the street, surrounded, indeed, by lawns, landscaping and sometimes, as required by the era’s car-hugging planners, parking.

Thanks to Priei, with a nod to Lapidus, whom he admires, they are also distinctive—unmistakably original, freestanding, flowing sculptures among those buildings whose functions, contrary to modernist doctrine, appear to follow their form. Indeed, Priei’s apartment buildings are a distinctly unsubtle protest *against* autocratic Modernism—the suburban Modernism of Faludi, the mechanical, automotive Modernism of Fred Gardiner (that’s his name on the expressway), the severe, squared-off, humourless Modernism of Mies van der Rohe.

“I got tired, eventually, of these straight boxes,” Priei said in 1999. “I thought, ‘let’s have a little fun. Why not create a different style that would make the buildings more interesting to people, and more appealing, and have their own life and character?’ I was painting in my free time, do-

ing some sculptures. So it became natural to me.”

Through the sixties, Priei had fun, using the new slip-form concrete moulds which could slide up buildings, shaping them in concrete, almost as fast as you could pour the stuff in. Alternately, Priei engaged and alienated potential clients, pitching his sculptural ideas with passion and keeping a thick skin when prospects got up and walked away, which they sometimes did.⁴¹ Harry Hiller was one who didn’t. Polish-born, a carpenter by trade, he’d been fired from two jobs when

he managed to buy a lot, build a bungalow and turn it over at a profit. For Hiller, who identified with Priei’s tastes and sensibilities, the architect would later design what he felt were his best buildings—11 and 44 Walmer Road and 20 Prince Arthur, with its massive flared base. “You know where I got this idea? The medieval cathedrals of Europe,” Priei said. “They’re flying buttresses,” which in fact reduced the need for wind bracing.

Priei gave 44 Walmer a fountain that looked like the curvy 1957 theme pavilion at Los Angeles International Airport. Thirty-five Walmer Road, “the Vincennes,” was given a soaring, curved canopy over its entrance, fins shooting out of the roof like Gemini rockets and a bronze sculpture of a woman in the lobby. It carried on a legacy of flamboyance that had preceded it, on this site, and seemed part of its soul, and architect Priei’s. For here had stood the Timothy Eaton mansion, “hung with art wallpaper and scattered with sentimental statuary, bits of interesting pottery and glass . . .”⁴² The description would have been apt for the architect’s own apartment on Bloor Street East, where in the 1990s he lived in retirement with wife Silvia amid art created and collected for a lifetime.⁴³

Of course, apartments as architecture and as businesses are separate concerns. Tenants’ relationship with the Hillers was not always smooth, particularly after rent controls ate into economic returns. Hiller’s wife “was something. She was fierce,”

remembered Maria Gold, who lived at 35 Walmer Road in the 1970s. "She had a beehive, dyed-blond hairdo and wore high heels. She ran the place like it was her personal residence."⁴⁴ Said Marion Murray, who moved with her family to 35 Walmer in 1975, "She had flaws, but she liked children and hated cockroaches. Which meant that you would get rid of the cockroaches, and keep the kids."⁴⁵

Critics found the designs strange—"a long way from the beach," a visitor from New York told the same Patricia McHugh who praised 169 St. George Street—and the apartment layouts conventional. Tenants felt fine. "We thought it a prettier building than most," said Murray, who had also lived in apartment buildings at 59 Spadina Road (a Shulman), 267 St.

George (probably a Richmond) and 15 and 50 Walmer Road. "My kids had a lawn to play on and a place to build snow forts in winter."

So, like Lapidus in the U.S., Prii found himself more popular than acclaimed. "I never actually won a medal or any recognition from my fellow architects," he said. "They thought my work just looked funny. 'Why would Uno Prii do such a thing?' They didn't like me. They didn't like my work at all." He didn't care. "My designs are original," said Prii. "And originality is the hardest thing to come by."

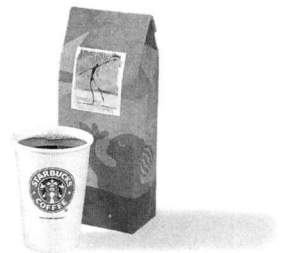
The irony at the turn of the millennium is that all this mid-century architecture in midtown Toronto—developments the planners of the day decried, that the

citizens feared would destroy—works so well. The recipe, in retrospect, is simple and classically Toronto: take a neighbourhood and add to it, with a bit of this and a bit of that. Create space for people with different incomes, from different races and backgrounds; provide varying densities and building sizes and designs. Allow not only many options architecturally—always nice—but a powerful, overall dynamic. St. George Street, so fully and comfortably inhabited, is a busy avenue of people coming and going all day. Like the modern buildings that created it, it has its own beauty. The Annex, a neighbourhood still dominated by Victorian-era homes, now very pricey, is still home to thousands of regular people who can't afford them, and are immeasurably richer for it.

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This wealth is a legacy of young University of Toronto architecture graduates, two kinds of Modernism that today are hated and denigrated—boxes, poured concrete—and serendipity. It might not happen if someone set out to do it today; it would be opposed, as it was then. The street, and Prii's buildings scattered through the Annex, are instructive, not least for their ignored architecture, which had a certain unconscious integrity.

"The buildings are kind of light, they had lots of windows," a young architecture scholar said about St. George Street, taking a fresh look in the 1980s. "They weren't oppressive."⁴⁶

That is one of the loftiest things homes, and especially high-rise apartment houses, can aspire to.

It was achieved better on St. George Street by fifties apartments than Victorian mansions; better on St. George Street by fifties apartments than most nineties condominiums with their glittering lobbies; better on St. George Street than strictly-planned St. Jamestown, Regent Park, and for that matter, luxurious, uptown Avenue Road. These buildings brought shelter, comfort, convenience and surprising theatre to thousands of people in a big city—ersatz opera on summer nights, a chicken escaping up a seventh floor wall. They are home for the Rodolfos and Minis of the twentieth century—ordinary folks who pay rent, and, like those in *La Bohème*, whose rich lives echo, literally, up and down the street.

For assistance on this project the author would like to thank, especially, the architects: George Boake, Uno Prii, and Leo Venchiarutti, who agreed to be interviewed about these long-ago events. I am grateful, too, for architect Jerome Markson's continuing assistance and kindness. Tenant Maria Gold shared her time and tenant Marion Murray her snapshots of apartment life. Others whom I spoke to included Merla Palmer, Margaret Mott, Virginia McDow, Maggie Oman and Bill Shaver. I would also like to thank artist Carol Sawyer of Vancouver, Alec Keefer of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario and the staffs of the Toronto Archives, the City of Toronto Urban Affairs Library, the University of Toronto architecture library and the librarians of the Toronto Star.

Alfred Holden is an Annex resident and assistant financial editor of the Toronto Star. He is also the "City Building" columnist for the Annex Gleaner.



Family life at 59 Spadina Road in 1969.

Notes

1. The soprano was Vancouver artist Carol Sawyer, who was a guest at 169 St. George Street. It is not known who the tenor was or where he was perched.
2. Margaret Oman, then a film student at the Ontario College of Art, would later earn her master of fine arts at Yale.
3. Harold Kalman, *A History of Canadian Architecture*, vol. 2 (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1994), 637.
4. Ron Haggart, "Those Nasty Apartments—An Old Toronto Prejudice Dies Hard," *Toronto Star*, June 26, 1962, p. 7.
5. Ken Hull, "Tenant-elected Superintendents In High-rise Future," *Toronto Star*, July 3, 1969, sec. A, p. 1.
6. Richard Cole, "It's Not Strictly For The Birds," *Toronto Telegram*, June 26, 1963, p. 33. According to the *Tely*, the tenant fished the trout from the pool from his fifth-floor apartment.
7. John Sewell, *The Shape of the City* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 124.
8. An early advocate of sprawl, though he hardly knew it, was architect Frank Lloyd Wright, whose 1935 essay, "Broadacre City," suggested cars and communications made concentrated cities unnecessary, and that people could live, more or less, in the country. Today, his model of a flat, spread out city criss-crossed by expressways looks, from a distance, like any modern regional suburb.
9. "Ratepayers Sink New Development," *Toronto Star*, July 31, 1963, p. 51.
10. Lloyd Lockhart, "Once City of Homes, Apartments Give Toronto New Look," *Toronto Star*, September 20, 1958, p. 10.
11. Leland Roth, *A Concise History of American Architecture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 277.
12. "I tried to keep away from him, a little," Leo Venchiarutti told the author in 1999. Others said the same thing.
13. William Dendy and William Kilbourn, *Toronto Observed* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1986), 253.
14. A worldwide architectural competition produced Viljo Revell's design for new City Hall, completed in 1965. Jerome Markson, a 1953 architecture graduate, in 1998 remembered the Marani proposal as "a lump," a "Mussolini-like monument that had nothing to do with the post-war idealism."
15. Leo Venchiarutti, phone conversation with author, July 1999.
16. George Boake, interview with author, September 20, 1999.
17. Patricia McHugh, *Toronto Architecture: A City Guide* (Toronto: Mercury Books, 1985) 239.
18. "Someone Lives In Mistakes Of The Fast-dollar Era," *Globe and Mail*, February 18, 1964, p. 7.
19. Boake, interview.
20. Alex Henderson, *Toronto Star*, circa February 1956.
21. "Hills 'Hillsulate' Double-Glazed Units, Glass Curtain Walling and Coloured, Insulated Backing Panels Were Used in the Construction of this Apartment Block at 206 St. George Street, Toronto." Advertisement, *Royal Architectural Institute*

of Canada Journal, 8, no. 2 (February 1956): 8.

22. Rhea Shulman, phone conversation with author, July 1999.
23. Henderson.
24. Alfred Holden, "Never Walk Away From Your Customers," *Annex Gleaner*, September 1999, p. 13.
25. Rhea Shulman to the author. See also, advertisement, "For Sale: Live for \$28 to \$48 a Month," *Toronto Telegram*, November 1, 1957, p. 4; and Edwin Strachan, "Purchase Your Own Apartment," *Toronto Star*, September 7, 1957, p. 7.
26. Boake, interview.
27. Venchiarutti, interview.
28. Blueprints may be viewed on fiche in the City of Toronto department of buildings and inspections, nineteenth floor, east tower, City Hall.
29. The author lived at 88 Bernard Avenue from 1981 to 1992.
30. Jacob Spelt, *Toronto* (Don Mills: Collier-Macmillan Canada Ltd., 1973), 115.
31. Alfred Holden, "When The Private Becomes Public," *Annex Gleaner*, May 1997, p. 24.
32. Observed from 1992 to 1997 by author and others.
33. Alfred Holden "A Good Building's Grotesque Transformation," *Annex Gleaner*, November 1998, p. 13.
34. Paul Goldberger writes, "834 and 740 and 101 ... mean 834 Fifth Avenue, 740 Park Avenue, and 101 Central Park West." Paul Goldberger, "A Touch Of Crass," *New Yorker*, August 16, 1999, 87.
35. Advertisement in *Toronto Star*, October 3, 1958, p. 41. The "WA" refers to the downtown Toronto "WAlnut" (92) telephone exchange; naming exchanges made numbers easier to remember, but phone companies soon ran out of number/letter combinations that could form words. In 1999, most tenants at 169 were still "92s."
36. Alec Keefer (former president of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario), interview with author, April 1999.
37. Alfred Holden, "Diamond In The Rough," *Annex Gleaner*, March 1996, p. 16.
38. The tenant was Claire Barclay. Interview with author, September 1998.
39. Eugene Faludi, *Report on Apartment Building Development in East Annex Planning District*, E. G. Faludi and Associates, Town Planning Consultants Limited, 1963, p. 3.
40. Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961), 12.
41. Uno Prii, interview with author, April 1999.
42. William Dendy, *Last Toronto* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1978), 172-175.
43. Uno Prii, interview with author, August 1999.
44. Maria Gold, interview with author, April 1999.
45. Marion Murray, interview with author, August 1999.
46. Adele Freedman, "Is There No Home Sweet Home In An Up-To-Date Subdivision?" *Globe and Mail*, Dec. 11, 1988, sec. C, p. 13.

FAMILY REUNION

FICTION BY ALAN YOUNG

The poet looked around the church basement, undisturbed by the empty seats and the indifference of the few curious onlookers who politely took their seats. His red-flannelled belly hung over his belt like a glacial flow as he paced quietly back and forth on yellow running shoes, stopping often to light his cigar. His hair hung in strands over his left eye. His left eye being opened wider than the right gave him this monocled, maniac look, but the bottom of his face contradicted the mania of his eyes. A pointed billy-goat goatee gave him a placid, grazing look. In high school I remember the teacher saying that a poet should speak of contradictions, and I guess it would be convenient for the trade to also be built of contradictions.

He began his reading. Words about politics, history and the injustice of many as he paced back and forth muffling his words with his constant shuffling. He stopped to gulp the Styrofoam cup of water, but the water seemed lodged in his throat. The world stopped still. He hesitated and was lost in thought. He cleared his throat and then the words floated out of him as if guided by a veiled god of their own:

I don't think Christ was crucified
on a day like today.

At most today a fly will be caught
between a window and screen.

A light bulb will flicker
in its dying moments.

A man will sigh heavily,
waiting for the marvelous thing to
happen.

But I don't think Christ was crucified
on a day like today.

I lost him as he incanted verse upon verse. This was far too much for me. All I wanted was a dry shelter while the sky emptied out its wrath on all us street dwellers. I checked into the nearest church and happened upon this noontime poetry reading for the bored and distracted. So, as the poet intoned, the dampness of the rain on my hungry body gradually gave way, and, except for that undying wetness in the inner thighs that speaks of further rashes and mould, I was ready to face the sullen beauty of a rainy fall morning. The irony here in this place was just too

strong for my weak stomach.

You see, my dad used to call himself a poet too—a poet of the obscene. When he was drunk, which pretty much is like saying when he was breathing, he would make up these dirty limericks and revel in his ability to make body parts the subject of poetic inspiration. And he was a church-fearing man too. Every Sunday, Jamie, Mom, Dad and I would walk to St. Paul's and I would watch my dad pray like he meant it. But all the time I knew he would just go back home, get drunk and beat on Mom. After one Sunday too many I took to the streets, and now that I was dry enough to escape this luncheon-time silhouette of my old world, I returned to my solemn ground.

On this pavement I build my church. I have only been on the streets for five weeks, but already I worship the cracks in the sidewalk, the trash cans that feed me and the car exhaust that blackens my skin and reminds me that this is now my home. It was tough at first. All the stray people seemed threatening, but after a while you establish your territory and learn whom to trust and whom to avoid. You scam together, steal together and beg together. And then, after a hard day of survival, you retire alone to some covering in a spot where you should be able to avoid any upsetting contact with the real people. These same people who feel serious pity when they see us on a television docudrama fairy tale would run and call the police if they saw us in flesh and blood, sleeping in their backyards.

The rain had died and the clouds broke to reveal the horror of another bright day. It must have been way past noon by now and this day, like every day, Cathy would be out on the bench in Allan Gardens waiting for me. She always sits there upright on the slivered bench, like a monument to the dispossessed, and when she sees me she will always say "Billy boy, the darkness of the city is still in your eyes. Let me kiss them good morning." I love her. At least it seems that way. We never spend the nights together, so as not to ruin the days, but today I don't want her to be there. Maybe the church has spooked me, but when I think of her today I can feel the pounding image of Dad beating on

Mom—the screaming, the frantic and futile attempts to shield the blows, and then Dad yelling at me to go to my room and mind my own business. I don't want to see her but, as usual, I will.

She was there talking to Tenpole. At first I didn't like him—his prune-like face sitting on top of a powerful young body. Unlike my other fellow urchins, he had a presence and this made him a threat. He was experienced and, like a cat, you knew he would always wind up on his feet. He was always chewing something—glass, paper, matchsticks—and with a crooked smirk he would always punctuate a conversation with some trite observation like "That's the way it is and that's the way it will always be." Out of his crooked mouth, the worst cliché rang true like the words of sage. All impression and no substance. I didn't like him at first, but lately I have found out how useful he could be.

Like today, he was there sitting with Cathy and he had cigarettes. Cathy blurted out her "Billy boy" routine and I signalled Tenpole for a smoke. We sat around smoking for breakfast, tasting the stale depths of our throats and hacking out little jokes to pass the time. Cathy told us about the perverts in the park. Tenpole told us how he would turn the park into a reservoir for all us street dwellers to wash in. I was left with the clean-up story, and I told some stupid fabrication about how my dad used to drink so much that he would often forget my name. But that was one thing he never forgot—always barking out orders and terrorizing the family with the way he could scornfully call out your name. Except Jamie, of course. Jamie could have been Dad's press secretary the way he was always standing up for him. Now that my older brother was a small-time success as a real estate agent, he and Dad would go out drinking together.

We banded together our money and Tenpole went to the Mac's to get us coffee and crackers. I couldn't look Cathy in the eye when I told her I kept out of the rain by stowing away in a church. Having had similar experiences in our brief childhoods which we were forced to abandon without a comforting rite of passage, we had the same poi-

THE THIN BLUE LINE OF THE OCEAN

Last night I dreamed. Dreamed I was Clarissa
instead of Mrs. Ramsay by the sea. I woke several times
to have reflective moments of being
while gazing to the horizon, the horizon of the long flat mattress,
at the thin blue line of the ocean.

Then back to sleep between the pages of sand
left on the beach by the lighthouse. The sunburnt summer days
receding and receding with each sunset. All the while
I'm still Clarissa,
criticised Clarissa, while asleep at my home in the city.

A gale wind blowing in over the edge of the balcony, a fog,
thick with feet, pouring over the railing and cascading
down along the floor, tossing the leaves of house plants yearning
for morning sun and cool fresh air; only to go back to sleep. Each hatch
battered down and only one clay pot cracked to the ground.

Nothing will be lost, all will wake up, so all will be fine.
Go back to sleep, slip between the pages of the book
to the summer-burnt days on the beach where
the heat stays on your skin all through the night.

— CHRISTINA WINCHUR

sonous view on the church. She found my sanctuary amusing, muttering how much better it was to be baptized in the rain than drowned in holy water. I love Cathy. Especially the way she can take the dismal and turn it to tolerable. I told Cathy that we should steal some money and use it to get married today, and with the rest we could put a down payment on a slab of concrete. She thought it was a great idea, seeing that we had nothing better to do.

Tenpole came back with brunch, and he brought along a newspaper he found in the trash. The headline read AIR WAR IN GULF ESCALATES! Tenpole said it was just blood for oil, but I couldn't care less if it was an eye for an eye. I'm sure everyone has started debating about whether it is a just war or whatever, and sides would soon be drawn with opinions held dearly to the chest like the embrace of a loved one. But, to me, it was all self-interest disguised as words, and I was above it all. How could this affect me—the rising price of oil, the impact upon the economy, the casualties, the changing world order. These things had no bearing on my life, and as Tenpole spoke

of imperialism and the bloody horror of battle, I began to feel powerful and secure. The world could cave in around all the real people and I would still be left standing and unmoved.

We walked through the park. Saturday brought out all manner of families and it was usually a good day to beg for change. But, as we worked our way through the park, I could see a familiar face stop his car on Sherbourne Street. Jamie was here. And I could tell he had been sent. His head darted to and fro like he was circling in for the kill. I did not hate my brother, but I was sickened by this messenger-boy cowardice. I knew it would only be a matter of time before Dad would send him in to do the dirty work because Dad would have been getting too many embarrassing questions about my absence. I thought to run, but I drew on that faint sense of power I felt only a moment earlier.

I told Cathy that good fortune had descended upon us and we could plan a honeymoon in a suburban bus shelter. She saw that I was looking down the road at someone and asked if it was possible that I knew

the guy with the fast car and the shiny shoes. Jamie dressed for success. Every move he made had to be perfectly scripted and directed. With his perfectly-tossed salad hair and his banal chatter, he was blessed with the luck of the undeserving. He was the type to waltz into parties with a smugness that showed he thought time stood still until he arrived. "I haven't seen you lately, Bob. You look in poor shape," he would say as he would grab Bob's newly-acquired pot belly, squeezing the skin like he was kneading flour. Then with a smile he would turn to the nearest woman and say "I'm learning to parachute. I fear nothing." Some women flock to him thinking that stupidity heightens the sex act, and, with his money and his fleeting pleasures, he appeared content at all times. As I saw him approaching, I knew what had to be done.

I told Cathy and Tenpole that we were going to make a big score and that Mr. Alligator Shoes was going to subsidize our street nuptials. But my friends were skeptical because as Jamie neared he donned a look of concern—not concern born of real feeling, but an institutional concern like that shown by a parole officer confronted by a parolee who can do nothing but disappoint and confound.

The meeting was not as uncomfortable as might be imagined. Just the usual exchange of civilities and the expected talk of breaking the hearts of the parents who designed this whole fiasco. I made arrangements to meet Tenpole and Cathy later that day and then Jamie and I left to find a restaurant.

At the restaurant I was overwhelmed by the simplest of foods. Jamie nattered on and on about the pressure he felt trying to hold the family together, and I nonchalantly took it all in while relishing my return to the food chain. After Jamie finished his speech, I told him that I was really happy he had shown up.

"I know you won't believe this, but I want to marry Cathy," I told him in a matter-of-fact way. He looked at me and started to laugh. I ignored his laughter, not being of the infectious kind, and I made my plea. "I know it's off the wall, but we really want to do this and we don't have the money to get the licence."

Things turned kind of bitter at this point. I was accused of being selfish and losing my grip on reality. This was of no concern to me as I was prepared to suffer through his self-righteous monologue because, in

RARE APHRODISIAC

For S. H.

Someday, darling,

all the tigers will be dead and gone

and the sun-dried pricks of our perfect killing machines,
salted and stored

in candy jars
at the Chinese pharmacy,

will be worth millions—

but Christ,

how they killed

on the banks of the Mekong,
bright leaves come alive to rip out the antelope's throat, oh,
how they rolled out
the low growls

and blood-soaked roars

and savagely fucked by the river at dawn.

Perhaps this occurred to me

because there was a picture of a tiger
at the party where we met,

awash in pink martinis,

and the night,

as we stepped into it,

kissing,

was purely mammalian, darling,
the temperature of blood,

and for days I could still see the purple
teeth-marks you left in my shoulder.

They were my proof.

At least I had proof.

Still,

I can't pinpoint exactly when it occurred to me,
but it did occur to me—

when the young men in white shirts

finally bag the last tiger,

when the wily beast rears up
against the leveling of rifles,
and the jungle stands still
pretending not to notice,

when the sad bastard
rumbles the last word for his kind,

a spiteful cry

that will go unrecorded,

when the triggers are squeezed
and the poor thing jitters into oblivion, biting
at the pain before the end, biting the slick holes
flamed into his coat,

as the young men watch the last tiger

violently try to escape his own brain, the killing brain
in paroxysms, at the last, at the end,

before they finally skin him, slice out

that long thin cock for a fortune,

it occurred to me—

when that happens,
the moment the tiger falls, that you might be beside me,
somewhere, consoling me
for some other,

unrelated sadness:

a dying friend, a bad prognosis, an accident,

something horrible,
and you would be the mate to my unhappiness,

but I'm sorry, darling, no, I can't

remember exactly

when that might have occurred to me.

— PAUL VERMEERSCH

the end, all I wanted was his money.

"Bill, she is dirty, you're dirty. The whole thing is crazy." With that comment I was inclined to abandon my mission. Now I knew for sure that I loved Cathy because his dismissal of her, as some bit of furnishing that needed dusting, brought my resentment to a boil. I stood up to leave. I would have been out the door, but I couldn't let one of the few opportunities

that pass my way fall to nothing. I let my anger dissolve and I asked Jamie if he would stay in town and at least buy me dinner for tonight. He agreed, and I left to prepare for this sacrificial last supper.

I found Cathy and Tenpole back where I left them. Tenpole had already chewed through half the newspaper, and Cathy was anxious to know if I had scored. I told them that Jamie was to meet me in a few

hours at the corner of Parliament and King, and that we could score big-time if we rolled him. At first they were shocked by my suggestion, but the shock turned to laughter and eventually to excitement. Revenge for me, a night's amusement for Tenpole and an expression of my deep commitment in the eyes of my bride-to-be.

Jamie was there, right on time, doing his ostrich-neck routine. He was obviously un-

comfortable in the dark, empty downtown streets. We marched up to him defiantly, as if on military manoeuvres, and as soon as we could hear Jamie asking why I brought my friends, Tenpole smashed him over the head with a stick. It was awful. My brother bleeding while the beeper on his belt signaled yet another real-estate closing. In a blind reflex I kicked my brother a number of times as he was falling to the pavement. Cathy grabbed his wallet and we fled like vultures in shame and in fear of the tormented spirit of my fraternal prey.

As we ran down the street I could see the poet from the church stepping out of the liquor store. I ran up to him and thanked him for the inspiration he provided earlier in the day. He smiled, thinking he had reached a listener, that he had tickled someone's intellect, that he had ravaged someone's feelings, but his smile turned taut when he saw the blood on my outstretched, shaking hand. The customary handshake was passed over, and the poet scurried away without a word. I had rendered—or at least the dripping blood had rendered—the poet speechless. I felt intoxicated by my new-found power.

We had wine at dinner. Cathy was cel-

ebratory. Tenpole spoke like a boasting general, and I was left struggling to conceal the annoying ambivalence I felt as my belly filled up. I knew that I had descended into a moral vacuum, but, on the other hand, I also felt an enormous sense of relief. My descent would make me that much more able to cope with the street, for now I could protect my body without worrying about damage to my irretrievably lost soul.

While we ate the apple pie, I drifted off and shut my eyes. There was Jamie as I knew him when I was ten. He refused to let me play baseball with his friends, so I went into his room and I ripped up his entire baseball card collection. Hundreds and hundreds of ballplayers torn in half and lying on his bed waiting to be discovered. Jamie came home, muddled but triumphant, and he screamed when he entered his room. He chased me with his bat, and I'm sure he would have split my skull, but Dad stopped him. Dad then hit me so hard that I remember the whole room shaking and the voice on the television quivering like the broadcaster was speaking naked from an Arctic cave. I had to apologize to Jamie, and he mocked me by mimicking the way I had begged Dad not to hit me. I

thought of telling Tenpole and Cathy about what I was thinking, but what was the point. Tenpole asked me if I was going to finish my pie and I passed it over to him without a word. With my belly full, questions of right and wrong began to plague my thoughts, and I yearned to be hungry once again. With a stomach empty and aching, I would have little patience for matters of conscience.

The feast came to an end, and Cathy and Tenpole went east while I went west. As I watched them walk away, I knew that they would spend the night together. This seemed wrong considering that Cathy and I were to marry tomorrow. But after tonight I was in no position to judge anyone or anything. I walked past the church and into the alleyway behind the grocery. I lay down on a loading dock and fell into a deep, dreamless sleep. I hoped to wake up hungry in the morning.

Alan Young is a film-school dropout who went on to become a civil rights lawyer and a professor of law at Osgoode Hall Law School. He has written full-length works for the theatre and resides in the Annex. This is his first published short story.

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PLAYING IN THE DEEP END

Poet Chris Chambers is ready to put his goldfish on a wagon and show it to the world.

INTERVIEW BY DAVID ALAN BARRY

For an emerging poet like Chris Chambers, working at a popular Bloor Street bookstore can be both a blessing and a curse. On the plus side: the security blanket of a regular paycheck, the opportunity to meet fellow writers and publishers (including the head of his current literary home, Pedlar Press) and, of course, the forty per cent employee discount. But, as a writer mustering up the courage to put his own volume on the shelves, working the stacks can also be a frightening and dissuading experience. “You see these beautiful books come in and you check them out and they’re fantastic—but no one is buying them,” Chambers says. “And then they just get returned to the publisher three, six, nine months later, and you’re thinking, ‘whoa.’ There’s this harsh reality side to it, and it can be scary.”

It is a reality, however, that Chambers has at last come to terms with, having just released his first full collection of poetry, *Lake Where No One Swims*. Fifteen of Chambers’ thirty-six years were spent preparing the book. Those years saw him leave Toronto to attend university and later to work in Europe before finally returning home, all the while with notebook in hand. Chambers perfected many poems in his head for years before even putting them on paper. Even then, pieces were abandoned, revisited and revised at a later time, in some cases years hence.

Chambers says he was in no rush to publish his debut collection. His two previous efforts have both been collaborations: the 1997 chapbook *Up and Down Bloor Street*, featuring works by Chambers and two other Annex poets, and the delightful *Wild Mouse*, co-written with fellow author/bookseller Derek McCormack. (*Wild Mouse* was shortlisted for the 1999 Toronto Book Awards.) His reluctance to do a full-fledged solo project stemmed partially from his above-mentioned insider view of the bookselling world and partially from having seen many eager young poets put out volumes too early in their Holy-Grail-like quest for “the book.” Chambers wanted to be sure that with his first collection there would be no regrets. “I

wanted to make something people care about and like, that can go out in the world and that I can feel good about, so I’m not saying a year later, ‘Shit, I hate that poem.’”

Lake Where No One Swims, which Chambers characterizes as his “top thirty-one poems,” bears a wonderful coherence for a collection written over such a long period of time. Common themes and images—swimming, dreams, escape, city, country—weave and wend their way through his pieces, creating a book of poetry that is more than the sum of its parts. The collection also shares the properties of its most ubiquitous image, water. Both within and between the poems there is reflection, refraction and echo—ironic coming from a poet who admits to having been a poor swimmer in his youth, and who avoided swimming lessons at summer camp (“I was kind of a suck about it”). But, Chambers says, for whatever reason, he thinks about water a lot, and, in a sign that his sinker days are behind him, enthusiastically volunteers that he’s a “damn fine guy to have at your cottage,” particularly if it’s on a lake.

Also drawing the pieces in the collection together is a sense of restless energy. Chambers’ poems often deal with movement and travel—people walk, run, swim, cycle, drive and fly. Viewpoints and vantages, consequently, change often, keeping the pieces fresh and pulsing. “I’ve got a lot of energy,” Chambers says. “I would call myself restless, sure. I like the positive side of that word, which is keeping moving, having a lot of energy, being alive. I think the book is filled with poems that are alive.”

This past summer, Chambers had to channel his energy as he sat down and poured over his poems, preparing them for publication. Thanks to a grant for new writers from the Toronto Arts Council, he was able to take two months off his usual job to focus on his manuscript. But Chambers says he found having suddenly so much time to devote to his poetry a challenge, forcing him to shed his work routine and establish a writing and editing regime. He persevered, and the more time he spent with his

poems, the better they became. (Chambers also worked closely with his editor, Stan Dragland, co-founder of Brick Books in London, Ont., and Chambers’ former creative writing professor at the University of Western Ontario. Dragland retired last spring and spent much of the summer moving about. As a result, Chambers had to catch him on the road, resulting in meetings at both a Tim Horton’s and a mall food court in Kingston, Ont., a fact that brings Chambers endless amusement.)

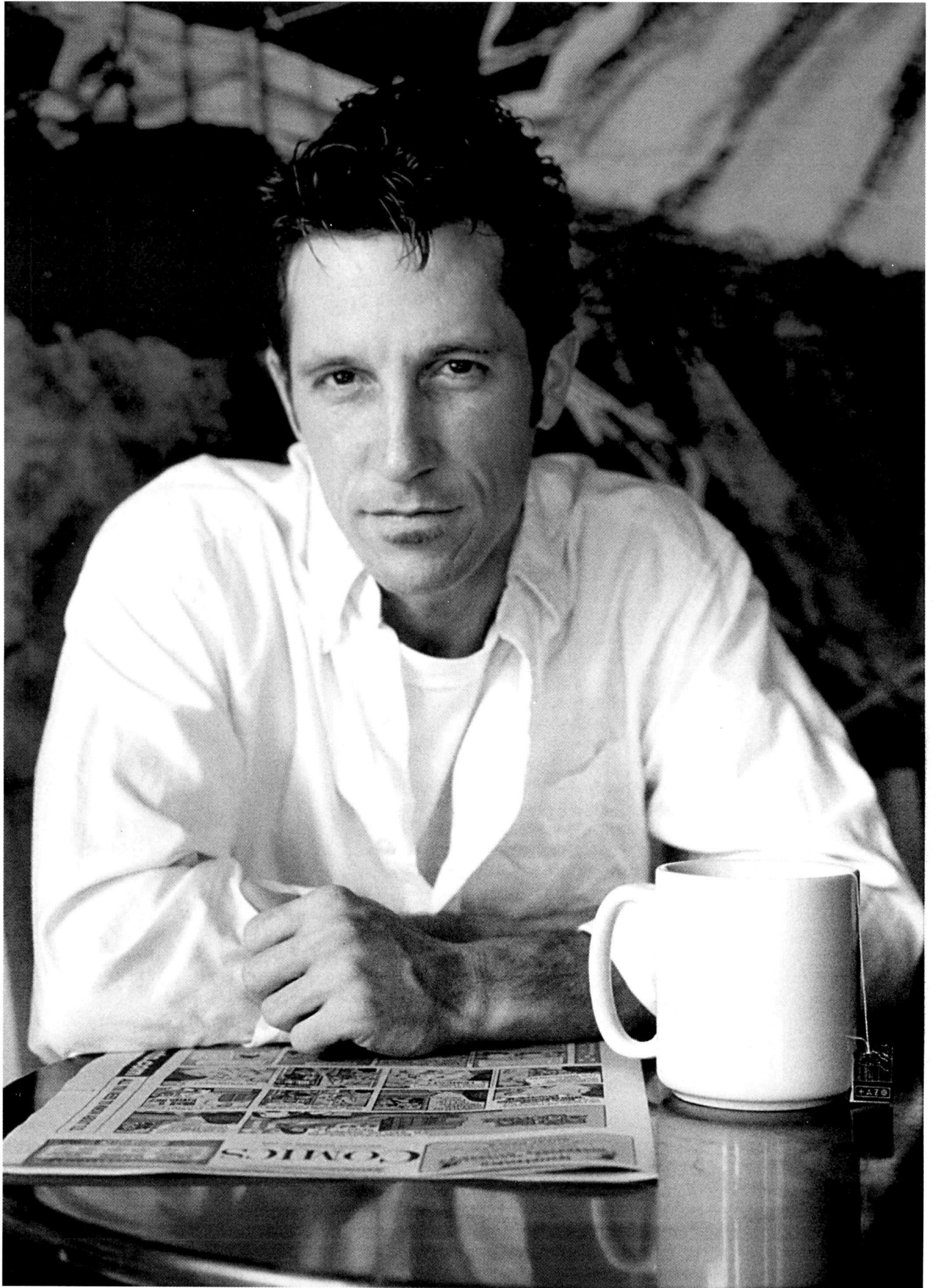
On a more existential level, Chambers was also faced with determining whether or not the life of a full-time writer was his future path. For such a kinetic person with a busy job and a social life that is, by his own description, “alive and well,” just staying still long enough to get any work done seemed formidable. On top of that was the adjustment to life without a regular paycheck. But Chambers found he was able to make the commitment to himself and his poems, as well as remain financially solvent while doing so.

Of course, Chambers realizes that to a very large extent, “full-time poet” is a contradiction in terms. According to a survey published earlier this year by *Quill & Quire* and the Writers’ Union of Canada, the average Canadian poet can expect to make about \$10,000 gross income a year from writing. Chambers knows that, as he continues to write poetry, he will always have to have other balls in the air. But given his love of writing poetry, and that doing so seems to be such an innate part of who he is, Chambers doesn’t seem to mind.

“The upside of writing poetry is you get to make something pretty and put it out there in the world, and maybe others will think it’s pretty too,” Chambers says. “It’s like the little kid who’s walking down the street with his goldfish on his wagon and saying, ‘Five cents a look. Look at this fucking beautiful goldfish. This is my beautiful fucking goldfish. Check it out.’”

Lake Where No One Swims is currently available from Pedlar Press. David Alan Barry is a Palmerston area resident who works with seniors and writes in his spare time.

PHILLIP SMITH





THE DUKE

Previously unseen photographs candidly show Duke Ellington at his peak.

PHOTOS BY CLAUDE MILES

Five weeks after Duke Ellington's July 7, 1956 appearance at the Newport Jazz Festival, *Time* magazine stated (in a cover story, no less), "The Ellington band was once again the most exciting thing in the business. Ellington himself had emerged from a long period of quiescence and was once again bursting with ideas and inspiration." To receive such praise was no small feat for a band that had seen varying degrees of highs and lows in a career that was nearing its thirtieth year. Equally impressive was Ellington's ability to command such attention for a form of music then being overshadowed by the fresh new sounds of rock 'n' roll.

But if Ellington reached the peak of his performing career that night in 1956, he was continuing to ride the plateau eight years later when he arrived in Toronto to rehearse for and tape *The Duke*, an hour-long special for CBC-TV. Claude Miles, a photographer with the now-defunct *Toronto Telegram*, was invited to capture Ellington and his band at rehearsal by Helen McNamara, the paper's jazz columnist (who also happened to have scripted the special). Miles shot over fifty photographs of Ellington in the CBC studios, none of which have seen print until now.

Miles' pictures show a not-often-seen side of Ellington, a man renowned for his

polished physical appearance. Here, Ellington is relaxed, his guard down and shirt unbuttoned—a far cry from the made-up, corset-wearing band leader usually seen in publicity stills of the day.

Examined as a complete series, Miles' photographs also amazingly show the process of an Ellington rehearsal. As Miles recalls, the band would laboriously rehearse and rerehearse a single bar of music, leaving many band members with little to do for long periods of time. "The music sounds so spontaneous, but it's not," says Miles, an avid jazz fan now living in Seaton Village.

Miles spent two hours at the 1964 rehearsal (which lasted three days, September 2-4) before leaving without having spoken a word to the legendary band. "I wasn't aggressive the way I'd normally be," says Miles, who usually covered the court beat. "I figured I could be thrown out at any time."

The Duke, which aired March 3, 1965, was little seen in its original form until after Ellington's death in 1974. Rarer still is the treat of seeing this collection of photos. Miles, who understatingly jokes he has a tendency to procrastinate, will be displaying his collection for the first time beginning this month on his web site, www.ellingtonto.com, and on-screen at the Bloor Cinema.

—CONAN TOBIAS



Above left: Sam Woodyard (at drums), Lawrence



Below: Duke Ellington, Johnny Hodges (partially hidden by bass), John Lamb, Ellington and an unknown copyist. Above: Ellington, Hodges and Russell Procope.



Tenor saxophonist Paul Gonsalves.



The "unpolished" Ellington.

CASSANDRA

FICTION BY G. J. LINDEBLOM

There is a time and a place for everything. That's my motto . . . or at least, one of them. So, how did I end up standing here helpless in the middle of Glastonbury Abbey, while half the city of Osaka makes a celluloid record of this moment? I consider my options carefully and decide that I cannot kill her without definite risk to myself. A thousand photographs would be compelling evidence indeed when the case came to trial. I've seen her pack and unpack her bag half a dozen times this week, but I've never seen that white choir robe before. Yet, here she is, a vision of purity, lying spread-eagle on Arthur and Guinevere's grave. How could she do this to me?

As I looked closer at the apparition, my breath constricts. Even from twenty paces, that stupid gown screamed cotton-polyester blend. What could have inspired my sister to commit such a fashion crime on top of this other indiscretion?

The public-relations man in me sprang to the fore. It can only be a matter of minutes until a professional photographer turns up. I can easily spin the New Age ritual—after all, most tabloid readers truly believe in extraterrestrials and the like. But how will I ever explain the polyester when a simple muslin would have been just as easy to pack?

Even more embarrassing than Cassandra's bad taste is the talentless supporting effort of her two friends. The Gregorian chants and ludicrous Isadora Duncan choreography around the outstretched maiden offenses at least two of the senses. I look around the familiar grounds. This has always been one of my favourite places in all of England, but now the commotion caused by my sister and her woolly wickens has turned this hallowed sanctuary into a three-ring circus. Where are the guards? I don't want my sister carted off to jail or anything, but shouldn't they at least be paying some attention to what's going on? If this sort of thing happened back home, the cops would have arrived in sufficient force to put down a small uprising.

In the thirty-three years I have been her brother, my ability to influence Cassie on

personal matters has been circumscribed. My persuasive talents are limited to her business decisions. What would St. Shirley MacLaine do now, I wondered? I looked at my watch and sighed. She'd probably go with the flow. After all, it's only one life. But I had to try to retrieve the situation. I shouldered my way through the crowd of camera-mad onlookers. "For Christ's sake, Cassandra, get up!" I said.

All eyes in the gallery turned on me. Abby and Patricia stopped and glared at me. Cassandra's eyes remained closed and her face retained its calm, composed appearance. "Shut up, Peter! You'll break her concentration," Abby said.

"I don't give a damned if I break her concentration, I want her to get up off the grave and out of that robe-of-dubious-fabric-origin right now," I said.

Patricia looked at me severely. "She's attempting an astral projection."

"I know what she's doing, you twit. I simply want her to return from wherever she is and stop making such a spectacle of herself." By this point, all I had accomplished was making myself the centre of the spectacle, while my corpse-like sister remained immobile. I was torn by my desire to wash my hands of the whole situation, and my responsibility to my sister and our business. There was no doubt in my mind that she would need my assistance any minute now, and these two chanting cretins were unlikely to be much help with the authorities.

Patricia helped make the decision. "Why don't you just go take a chill pill, Peter?"

How could I compete with such a rapier wit and razor tongue? This New Age bitch would be completely incapable of managing the situation when officialdom arrived. Even without calling on my powers, I could foresee it all. Actually, anyone with two eyes could figure out how this scene would end. In the meantime, I needed a drink. I looked at my watch. It was only eleven, but somewhere in the world it was past five and I could project myself there if necessary. Fortunately, in this part of England, you can get plastered at virtually any hour of the day. As I reached the exit to the abbey, I looked back at the ever-increasing

throng around the gravesite.

As I sat down at the George and Pilgrim, I heard the siren and saw the police van go down the street and around the corner. I ordered a pint of ale and waited at a table by the window. In about ten minutes, the van returned up the street, the siren blaring. I knew where to collect my sister. Perhaps it was the warm, amber liquid or the warm, amber light, but following the van with my eyes, I felt abandoned. This was the first time Cassie had excluded me from her plans. Staring at my half-finished pint, my mind wandered to our first time. It seemed like yesterday, but it was six years ago.

The final descent into Hong Kong's airport is probably the most exciting in the world. You feel as if you are landing on top of the skyscrapers, and the glitter from the lighted buildings is breathtaking. It was my first visit. I was eager to see the city and Cassie. She had moved here about nine months earlier to get production going on her line of clothing. Cassie is the creative side of the business; I am the marketing and public relations. This had been the biggest risk of our careers. Fortunately, events had transpired even more successfully than we had dreamed possible. Not bad for a couple of kids from the suburbs of Toronto.

The week was a whirl of meetings and inspections. Hong Kong's frenetic pace exhausted and exhilarated me in a way I'd not known before. Cassandra had become a minor celebrity by virtue of her name being on the backside of a million pairs of jeans. Yes, it was a bit tacky, but my idea had worked nicely in providing her with a higher profile, both at home and here in Hong Kong.

By Sunday morning, we were drained. We slept late and then Cassie suggested a trip to get away from it all. We caught a ferry to Lamma Island. It was like taking a forty-minute ride to another planet. The hurly-burly of Hong Kong gave way to the pastoral charm of the mountainous island. It was the first quiet moment of the week.

"I come over here almost every Sunday," Cassie said.

"I can understand why," I said, looking around at the foliage cascading down the

KLEZMER MUSIC ON CHRISTMAS EVE

Away from the reindeer and the tinsel
Jewish singles congregate
searching for that elusive Other.
And the faith is incidental to most of the secular Jews
who are looking for old-fashioned love
with all the trimmings.
Brimming with earnest hope
and cynical voices,
no, I never come to this sort of event—never.
This last, of course, said behind artfully painted red lips,
poised demurely, meeting a coffee cup, still smiling.

We're in group denial; we are here but we aren't really here.
My friend dragged me along, didn't tell me what it was.
Though it's obvious we are all hungry,
we'll die before we admit it.

If life were a perpetual single's buffet, I'd throw up from the indecency of
all that misplaced desire.
Inside of a fortress of insecurity we keep on smiling,
desperately smiling.
I never want to pack myself in leather again, provoking the shy with my cleavage.
I never want to expose myself to all that taut misery again,
hope contracted so tight
you can hear it snap when it breaks.

— MYNA WALLIN

mountainside to the edge of the beach.

"It's the only place I know where I can really think," Cassie said, as we walked along Lo So Shin Beach. "This is a great city for getting things done, but it's a lousy place for contemplation." She turned to me with a pursed smile. The glint in her eyes betrayed her excitement. "Pete, there is a special place I want to show you." She reached out her hand, which I took.

We turned off the beach, walked down a path for about thirty minutes and came upon a small temple on the edge of a village. We went under the torii gate and into the temple yard. Cassie clapped and bowed three times, and threw some coins into an offertory in front of the altar. She nodded for me to do the same. Then, she took my hand and led me to a small courtyard off to the side. It was so quiet and still that you could actually hear the wind in the trees. We sat down on the grass and said nothing for what seemed to be the longest time.

Cassie broke the silence. "Do you ever feel that you are being moved by forces outside your control?" she asked, and stared at me. I nodded without speaking. "There are times when it seems I am being guided by hands I can't see or touch or even really feel. But they are pushing me . . . I know it." She reached out for me with both hands and I grasped them. A current passed between us and the words began to flow. That conversation has led us in a six-year quest for the force that guides us all. Occasionally together, but usually separately, we have sought out those forces in a series of adventures that bind us even stronger than our blood.

I checked my watch after my second beer. It had been forty-five minutes since the police van passed, which was probably enough time to let Cassie experience the wonders of a provincial British jail cell. I left the pub and walked down the block to the jail.

I walked in the front door and was greeted by a uniformed young man behind a desk. He peered up at me, expressionless. I flashed my most winning smile. "Hi! My name is Peter Cochrane, and I'm here to retrieve my sister, Cassandra."

He stared at me blankly, without speaking. It seemed unlikely that they would have jailed too many Cassandra Cochranes that day, but I felt compelled to press on. "She's the one from the abbey—the one wearing the white robe."

At that he smiled. "Oh, yes!"

"Yes, I've come to make arrangements for her release," I said.

"Fine. Do you wish to bail her out?" he asked.

"Actually, if it would be possible, I would prefer to pay the fine and settle the entire matter," I replied.

He opened a large book and read through a table of figures. He looked up and said, "If she pleads guilty right now, the fine would be a hundred pounds."

I flashed another of my public relations smiles. "Do you take American Express?" I asked.

The drive out to the tor was silent. Cassie seemed calm, but her appearance was disheveled. The back of her robe had grass stains and dirt all over it. There was still some dirt in her hair, so I handed her a brush.

We parked the car at the foot of the tor and walked up the path to the base of the hill. Picking our way carefully through the sheep droppings, we ascended to the top. The view of the town and the surrounding countryside was gorgeous. The various shades of green and gold in a Wessex summer were visible in their full glory. For the first time since she had emerged from the cell, Cassie smiled. We walked into the Chapel of St. Michael and looked up through the roofless tower. "Thank you for getting me out of there," Cassie said quietly. She stepped forward and gave me a big hug.

I broke the embrace and smiled at her. "No problem. I'll add it to next month's bill."

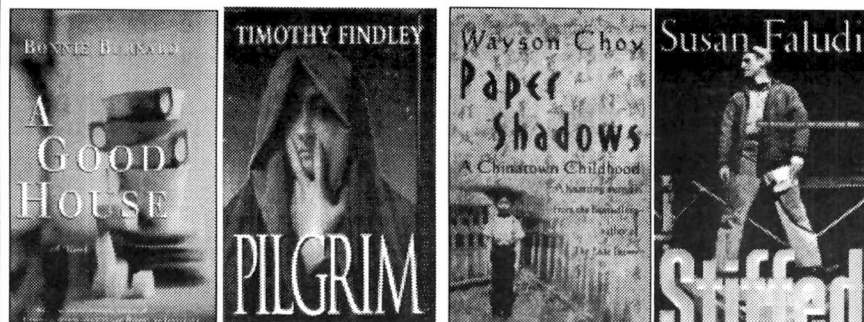
"What about Abby and Patricia?" she asked.

"Oh, I've made arrangements for them too, but I thought we could keep them locked up for an hour or two to give us a chance to talk," I said. "Or, if we like, we can leave them here to rot forever."

Cassie shook her head. We walked out of the chapel and sat on the hill looking down over Glastonbury. "Wherever did

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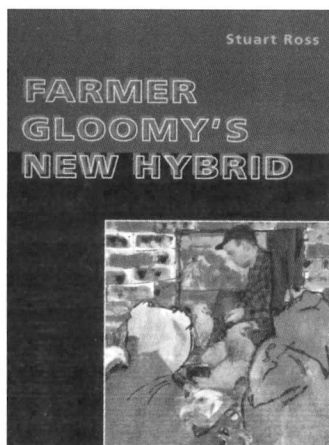
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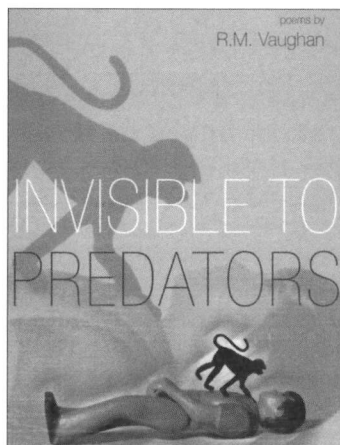
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you find those two?" I asked.

Cassandra peered at me, confused. "I thought you'd like them," she said, defensively.

"Cassandra," I snorted in my most older-brother way.

"Well, you must admit—they've got spunk," she said.

"Spunk?" I sputtered. "You call that spunk? More like punk, don't you think?" Cassie mock-punched my shoulder and laughed. I turned and smiled at her. "You know that I would have arranged anything you wanted," I continued quietly. "We could have been there at dawn or dusk, or anytime at all." Cassie nodded. "Why in the middle of all that chaos?" I asked.

Cassie didn't answer.

A cold flash went through me. I grabbed her arm and squeezed for a moment. "Tell me that wasn't a publicity stunt," I begged.

Cassie looked at me and frowned. "You,

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of all people, should know better. Haven't you done exactly the same thing?" she asked.

"Of course," I replied, indignantly. "But I did it at dawn on a foggy day and had the good taste to wear a burlap cassock for the event." Having stared at it longer than I could justify, I finally fingered the suspect fabric of the robe, fearing that my lifelong allergy to polyester would cause my skin to break out. There was another long pause. I hoped that Cassie would say something, but she didn't appear inclined to continue the conversation. She just stared down at the abbey. "It's difficult to imagine astral projection working in the middle of a busload of Japanese tourists," I continued.

"Give it a rest," Cassie whispered without looking at me. She must have heard my mouth open to continue, because she reached out and put her finger to my lips. "For Christ sake, Pete, think where we are! We are atop Glastonbury Tor. Somewhere beneath us the Holy Grail is buried. Don't you believe that?" I turned back to look at St. Michael's tower and then my gaze returned to the valley spread out below us. I nodded without looking directly at my sister. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Cassie pointing to the valley below. "And you must believe that Arthur and Guinevere lie together in the abbey." She turned to me, her eyes wide with excitement. "Peter, surely you can feel the magic here! It's all around us. You wouldn't love this place so much if you didn't feel it. You would never have brought me here if you didn't want me to try to find it too. All I did was try." There was a long silence. I wasn't sure how to respond to her. She turned and looked directly into my eyes. "My timing may not have been great, but we never know when the truth is going to reveal itself. I took the opportunity that presented itself. That's all," she said, quietly and calmly.

I looked around the Wessex countryside and then down on the gravesite below us. "Did you feel anything?" I asked.

She smiled and slapped the ground. "So the scolding is over and now you want to horn in vicariously on the experience," she said. "You drive me nuts, Pete. You claim to be on this search for the spiritual, but only at the right time and in the right outfit. You are so obsessed with how you go about looking that you'll never actually be ready when you find the answers," she said. "Earth to Pete—the force will be disorderly and frightening, not stylishly dressed or polite. If you want to explore . . . really explore . . . you've got to take risks and be

willing to lose sometimes."

I bowed my head and mumbled something indistinct, even to myself. "Are you hearing me?" Cassie asked. I turned to her and nodded. She pointed at the tower behind us. "Do you know who St. Michael is?"

"Of course I do. He slew the dragon," I replied.

She pointed her finger at me as she spoke. I hate it when she does that. "Right! It's time to take some inspiration and slay some dragons, Peter."

"That's not fair," I said.

Cassie put her hand on my shoulder. "What harm did I do? Did I embarrass you?" I blushed and glanced away to avoid her piercing stare. "I'm sorry if I caused you any discomfort. But, Pete, we're explorers—or at least you say you are. You can't bottle yourself up and yet be open to the possibilities at the same time. You'll never discover anything that way. More important, you'll never discover what's in here." She touched my chest.

I put my hand over hers. She turned around again and we stared down at Glastonbury for a minute. Without turning back to me she said, "Thank you for bringing me here. There *is* magic. I can feel it." With that she gently forced my hand onto the dirt in front of us. "I can feel it," she repeated.

She let go of my hand and we stood. We walked wordlessly back down. At the base of the hill, Cassie looked over at me. "We better get Patricia and Abby out of that cell," she said.

I smiled. "The rest will have done them some good."

Cassie smiled at me and patted my cheek with her dusty fingers. "Be nice, brother, dear. Tomorrow is Patricia's day. She's really looking forward to Stonehenge."

I stopped suddenly and turned to my sister. "What do you mean by that?" I asked.

"The deal was that I would do my thing here, and she would do hers at Stonehenge."

"Cassie, don't," I blurted, grabbing her arm. "They don't let you anywhere near the actual stones at Stonehenge. It won't be some friendly provincial constable who handles you guys, it'll be someone from the Salisbury police."

"Peter, haven't you been listening to anything I've said. Look, a deal's a deal. We're going to Stonehenge tomorrow, with or without you," Cassie said, exasperated. We got in the car and headed back into town.

The next morning, I dropped them off in front of the entrance to Stone-

henge. The early morning mist diffused the light to a golden glow, casting a heavenly aura on all in our sight, even the two tour buses in the parking lot. It almost made me throw caution to the wind and go in with them, but I resisted the temptation. "I'll come back for you at noon. If you're not here, I'll call my office to find out where they have taken you," I said.

Cassandra rolled her eyes slightly. "Peter, we'll be fine. We can take care of ourselves, but thank you for the help. We'll see you here at noon, OK?" She kissed me on the cheek, and they turned and walked toward the entrance. I couldn't help but wonder what they had in the basket, but I dared not ask, although I took secret satisfaction that they had packed a woollen smock in lieu of yesterday's disaster. I thought of driving past the Salisbury constabulary for practice, but decided that I would have that pleasure later in the day anyway.

I got back in the car, turned on the ignition and put the car in gear. Over and over, I replayed yesterday's conversation with Cassie in my mind. Without consciously choosing my way, I realized that I was passing the sign for Glastonbury, and was soon at the foot of the tor. I got out of the car and climbed to the top of the hill. The view was even more spectacular than it had been yesterday afternoon. The morning sun had broken through the mist, heightening the colours in the surrounding countryside to a vividness I had never seen before.

I felt for a moment that I was going to cry. I sat down, propping myself against the wall of the chapel. I sat there quietly for a few minutes, looking out over the abbey and the village below. Suddenly, I got up on my knees and put my hands flat on the earth in front of me. Slowly, I brushed away the top layer of loose dirt. Then my fingernails dug into the earth, breaking the surface. As I proceeded, I dug more quickly and deeply. The earth got progressively darker and moister. My hands and forearms took on the color of the soil, as I reached into the hole that now swallowed up to my elbows. I dug more and more feverishly, thinking of all those who had dug in this hill through the ages. But it wasn't the Holy Grail I sought—I just wanted to find the magic.

G. J. Lindeblom is a Seaton Village resident and a photographer with New York City gallery credits. He has recently completed his first novel, for which he is seeking a publisher.

THE INTERVIEW

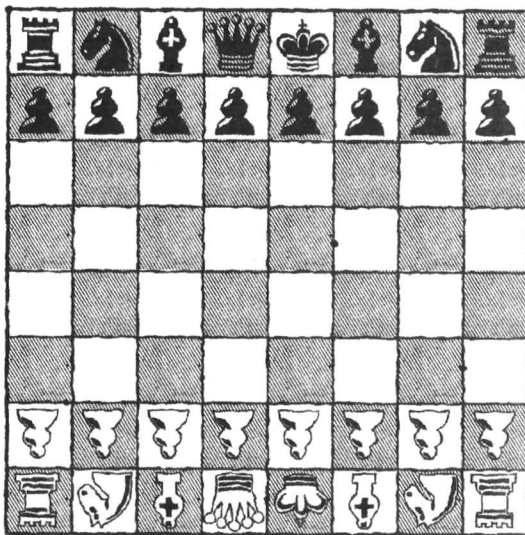
FICTION BY STUART ROSS

My feet have touched more pavement than dirt. When I say pavement, I refer to everything that is not dirt. When I say dirt, I refer to everything that is not pavement. Actually, I think I must expand on this. When I say pavement, I include the floor of my father's car, I include the monkey bars in the park, I include the hardwood surface of my bedroom floor, I include the carpet in my aunt's living room and den. I also have to throw in escalators, linoleum and the endless metal fields of my dreams. When I say dirt, I refer to water and to grass and to sand. I must include mud, which is a combination of two of the above elements. Also, the emerging roots of old trees, the trunks of trees, and rocks. Rocks are very important. I've spent a bit of time on rocks and it was quality time. But I've spent more on pavement. It feels so much more molecular. Like flesh. Which is something I haven't categorized yet, but I think maybe it's half dirt and half pavement.

Where had I gotten to? Oh, yeah. I'm eleven years old and Larry Stein is sitting on my chest with his hands pinning my arms down. I am lying on my back on pavement, and I'm trying to squirm my way out of this. A crowd begins to form around us, and I see Debbie Larker. She is puny and has dark hair, and her mother is missing several fingers. Surely I would someday marry her. I found this out—about her mother's fingers—when I went to her house to work on a geography project we were forced to do together. And now Debbie is watching me lie on my back under Larry Stein, so I have to try to act nonchalant, to appear in control. I have an idea and I put it into action. "Larry," I say, "you're such a homo. Get off of me." Larry's grip on my arms loosens a bit, and, as the circulation returns to them, I can feel all the little pebbles that have become embedded in my elbows. I peer beyond Larry's shoulder, but I can no longer see Debbie among our spectators. "You're the homo," Larry says to me. "A double homo." I wiggle about a bit, try to rock from side to side, but I can't get out from under Larry, and when I try to reach

up and shove him off, his fingers dig into my arms again. I have many loyal friends, and they are sprinkled through the crowd, joining in the growing chant, which deals with what a double homo I am.

When I lose my temper, I'm careful not to smash things. I would get in so much trouble, and also I might destroy something I'll later miss. So, what I do is shove my furniture around. I have a bed, and this I shove diagonally across the room, knocking over a chair. I push my desk away from the wall, as well, and slide it in



front of the door. This way, my brother can't get in and see me crying. My bookcase is attached to the wall so I can't move it, but I take down great armloads of books and stack them on the floor. I'm careful, because I don't want to wreck their covers. I also pull my dresser out of the corner and turn it carefully on its side. When I'm done shoving everything around, I flop myself onto my bed and become like jelly. I sob and yell into my pillow, and it is my room, a room I have control over. I wiggle and wobble on my bed, until my tears have run dry and I have fallen asleep, and into the world of endless metal fields.

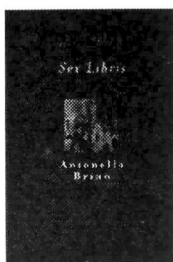
I think we've reached my seventeenth year, or perhaps my thirty-fourth. Regardless, what happens is my self-esteem begins to mistakenly build and I can actu-

ally talk to people and occasionally look them in the eye. So, an old man comes into the library where I'm working, and he asks if I play chess. I guess I look like the type who plays chess. I look down at his fingers, and they are thin and bent in strange directions. I figure he must be good. I tell him I play, but not well. We agree to meet in the park beside the library later on, and he will bring his chessboard. We do this for years, every day playing chess for hours, so that I have to sneak in through my bedroom window so my parents don't get angry. (I must be seventeen.) The old man's name is Schaeffer, Mr. Schaeffer, and as we play, he tells me about his ailing wife, in his thick German accent. He loves her very much and his eyes water as he talks. His eyes are always watering. I wonder if, when you get that old, everything just seems so sad. I become a stronger player with every game of chess. Mr. Schaeffer loans me books to study, by Znosko-Borovsky and Reuben Fine and Emanuel Lasker. I study the classic openings, learn about the strength of the measly pawn, go through the end games until I know them inside-out. But still, after three years, the score is 612 games to zero. Since my self-esteem is so enormous, I feel I have a chance of catching up. It's only a matter of time. But before I have the opportunity, a strange thing happens. An old woman meets me in the park. She asks my name. I tell her. "Klaus is dead," she says. I look down at her gnarled fingers and say, "I didn't know his name was Klaus."

Can I go now? You can probably figure out the rest of my life based on what I've just told you. It follows a predictable pattern, with few surprises. I will leave you hair samples and nail clippings, which might be some help as well. If you have any questions, you can call me. Besides, I'm late now. I have to pick up my mother's belongings.

Stuart Ross lives in a housing co-op near Christie and Dupont. He is the co-founder of the Toronto Small Press Fair and the author of *Farmer Gloomy's New Hybrid* (ECW, 1999) and *Henry Kafka and Other Stories* (Mercury, 1997).

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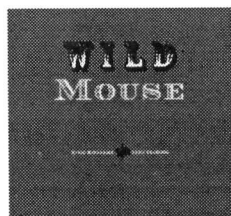
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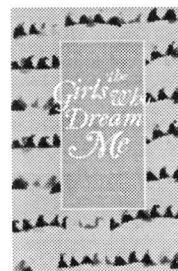
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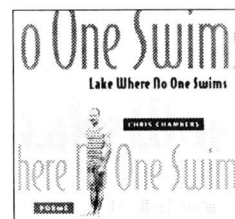
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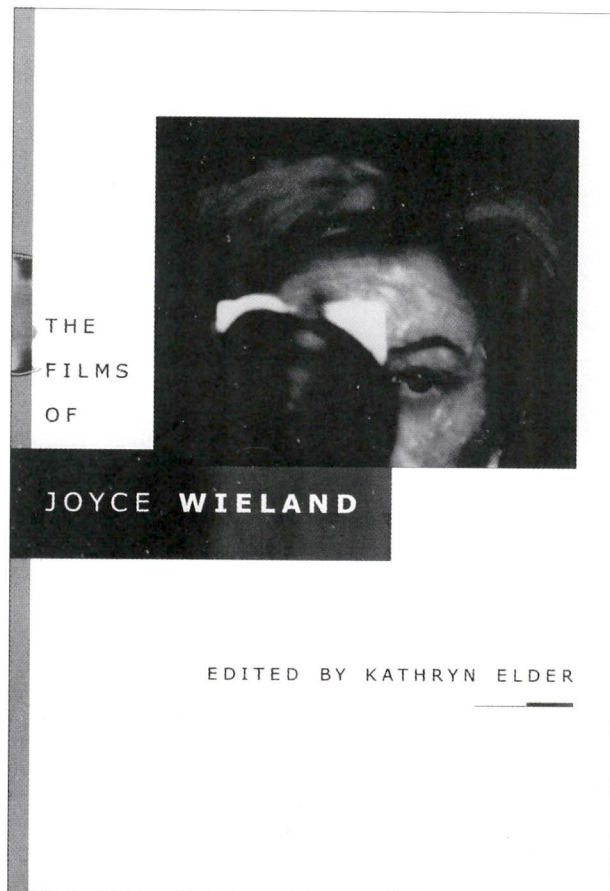
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