

TADDLE CREEK



CHRISTMAS NUMBER 2001

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TADDLE CREEK

VOL. V

CHRISTMAS NUMBER 2001

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M. Fred Tobias (right) and unknown, circa 1943. Photographer unknown.

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Publisher: VITALIS PUBLISHING

Printing: POINTONE GRAPHICS

TADDLE CREEK (ISSN 1480-2481) is published semi-annually in June and December by Vitalis Publishing, P.O. Box 611, Station P, Toronto, Ont. M5S 2Y4, and serves the city of Toronto. Vol. V, No. 1, Whole Number 7, Christmas Number 2001. Submissions of short fiction and poetry may be sent to the above address, provided author resides in the city of Toronto. Please include address and daytime phone number. Submissions not accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope will not be returned. © 2001 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, \$7. In U.S., \$7 (U.S. funds). Overseas, \$15 (U.S. funds). To inquire about advertising, circulation, subscriptions, submissions, and single and back issues, write to the above address, telephone (416) 324-9075, E-mail to editor@taddlecreekmag.com, or visit our web site at www.taddlecreekmag.com.



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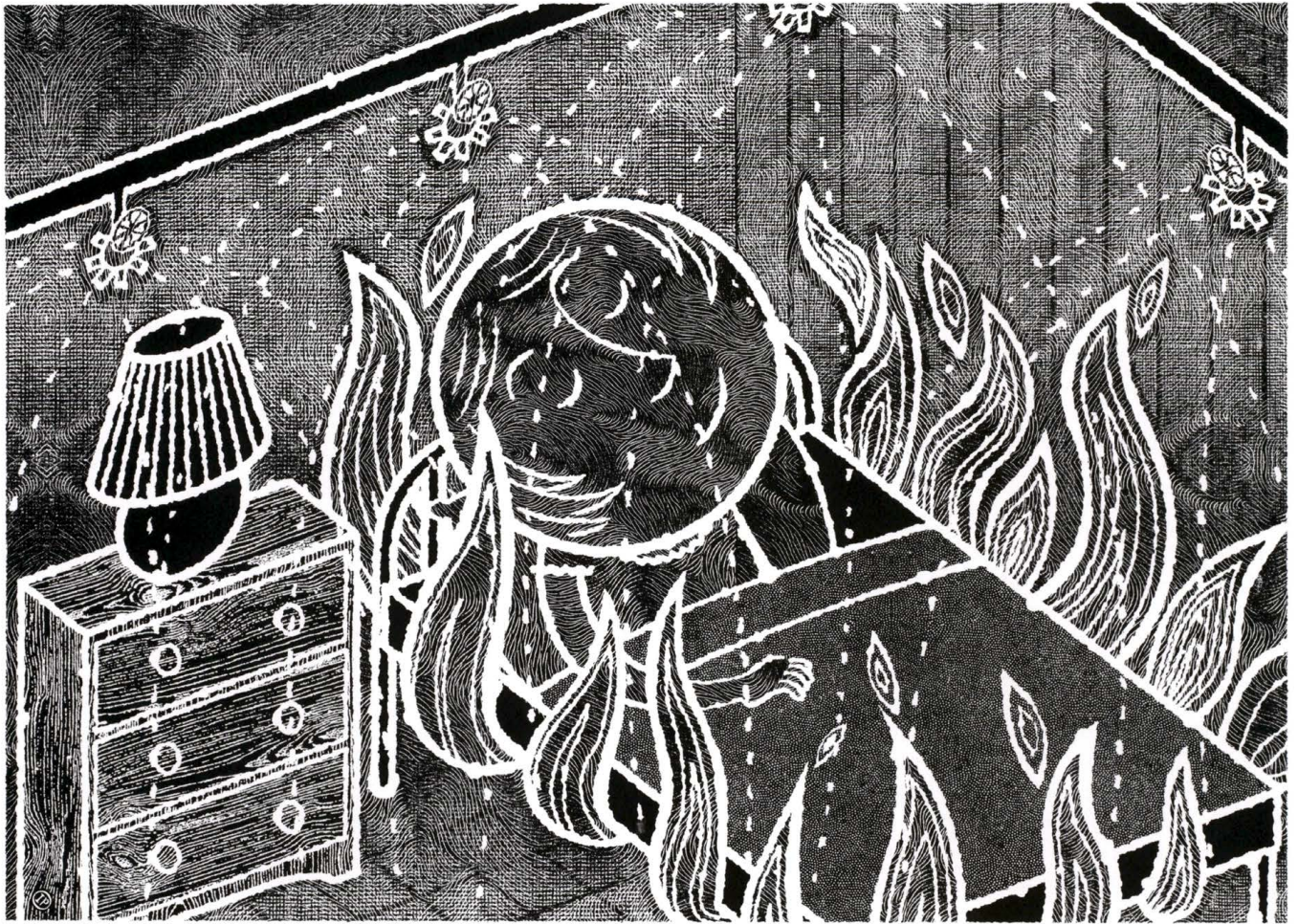
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VALHALLA

FICTION BY JENNIFER LOVEGROVE

Mom and Vikki are downstairs in the kitchen. Vikki is my big sister. Victoria. Queen Victoria, Queen of Everything. She has a bad temper, but I know now to hide when she starts. Dad calls it puberty, and he would know, because he's a doctor. But I know it's not puberty; she's always been mean. And I would know, because I'm here more than he is. She can get mad about anything, and when she's mad, she's loud, she shakes the whole house; she's an earthquake all by herself.

I didn't always know to get out of her way. When I was four, I didn't know. She was making a poster for an important contest at school—a safety contest—and her poster was “DON'T SMOKE IN BED.” She drew a big picture of a lady laying in bed with a cigarette in her hand, her arm dangling over the edge of her bed. Her

blankets were a mess, tangled and draped right down to the floor. Vikki had put big red flames all around the bed—a fence made out of fire, reaching almost to the ceiling. Even if the lady did wake up in time, she couldn't get away, not without catching on fire. But the lady didn't look like she was going to get up. Her eyes were closed. Mom was helping Vikki draw, but it wasn't cheating. It was late and the poster was due in the morning. I was supposed to be in bed asleep, but I heard them still up, so I came downstairs to see what they were doing.

“Can't miss a thing, can you?” Mom said. She told me that when I was a baby I didn't sleep very much at all—that if Mom was up talking with her friends or Dad or anyone, I would scream and cry until I could hardly breathe. They would sigh and shrug, get me up, and put me in

my baby seat right in the middle of the table. I would then stop crying, and just look at them with big eyes and listen. She says I haven't changed much, but I don't believe her. I'm in school now, and I never cry.

Vikki had to stop colouring her poster to go to the bathroom, and Mom went to brush her teeth, so I thought I'd help too while they were gone. It would be a surprise. I started to draw blue water in the lady's room, raining down from the ceiling. I wanted the lady to be safe. I wanted Vikki to win the contest. But Vikki came back before I was done. She ruined my surprise.

“Look what she did! She ruined it! You stupid brat, you wrecked my poster!” Vikki screamed, and snatched up the red pencil crayon, the one for the fire, and held my arm down on the table with her

other hand. She stabbed the point into my arm three times before it broke off, a tiny volcano poking from my arm. Mom ran back into the kitchen and we were both crying. Vikki ripped the poster up and refused to go to school the next day.

I have an old rocking chair in my bedroom closet. Mom was going to get rid of it. *Rickety*, she said, but she let me keep it. I looked *rickety* up in the dictionary:

rickety, *adj.* 1. Apt to fall apart, shaky. 2. Feeble, with age. 3. Of or affected with rickets.

rickets, *n.* A disease of children resulting from a lack of vitamin D and in defective bone growth.

She must mean that I could catch rickets from the chair, and that I would suddenly turn old, from the inside out, starting with my bones. I've seen that on television; children who look like grandmas and grandpas, but are only ten years old. A disease. That must be rickets. I didn't want to sit down in my chair to read and then turn into an old lady when I got back up, like the chair was some time machine. So I sprayed it with almost a whole can of Lysol, just to make sure. The Lysol made all the clothes in my closet smell bad, and Connie, who sits beside me at school, told Miss Hartfield that I smelled like bug spray, and could she sit at the front instead, since I must have lice. No one would talk to me at recess, even though I wash my hair every week, and everybody knows only poor kids have lice. But the Lysol wore off, so I asked Dad if I could have some vitamin D every day.

"What for?"

"So I don't catch rickets." Dad tilted his head and smiled.

"And just how do you go about catching rickets?"

"From the old rocking chair."

He laughed and said you can't catch it from furniture. I looked at Mom.

"But Mom said the chair was . . ."

She didn't look up. She was staring into her soup like she'd forgotten something and might find it floating there. Dad said he would give me some vitamin D anyway, just in case.

Now that I've pulled the chair into my closet, I can go in there and read with my flashlight when Vikki gets loud. Like tonight. I grab my book about Vikings and pull the door shut, but I can still hear them.

HORSE

In the days of big creamsicles

I never had a tricycle—

I had an airplane and a car

and a Campbell's soup can

infallible as a papal encyclical

simple and exciting as a new breakfast cereal

I got big enough for a two-wheeled bicycle

a green machine with a banana seat

I rode that bike till it fell apart

I'd run it like a horse down by the creek

galloping over hills and dales

and wrappers for sweets

rest it under a tree while I explored the filthy creek-bed

and skipped stones in a trickle of a stream

there was sugar in everything in those days

we didn't know any better.

everything seemed bigger then

the days were longer, cooler

a kingdom for my horse

— PATRICK RAWLEY

"Hurry up! You said you'd drive me there! Now, Mother, get up. Come on!"

I can't hear Mom. When Vikki yells it gets in every room in the house, even if you're in the tub and you put your head under water.

"No, it isn't too late! It's only six o'clock! We have to go!"

I shine the flashlight on my watch. It says nine-thirty-two, and it's a school night. But I know Vikki lies sometimes, mostly about where she goes when she's supposed to be at Catherine's house. I hear her on the phone.

"I'll just tell them I'm at your place, and you tell your parents you're at mine. Don't worry, my dad's never here, and my mom's too out of it to answer the phone. We'll get Ryan to drive us out there. He can get his brother's car."

I wish Mom would just take her wherever she wants to go so she'd be gone. I can hardly read. She's slamming doors and cupboards and something breaks. More puberty. I push my palms hard against my ears, but, as usual, it doesn't work.

"Where are your keys? Where are the car keys, Mother? I'll just take the car myself, Mother. I will. Catherine and I have a project to finish. It's due tomorrow! You promised you'd drive me, Mother. Right now! Where are the keys?"

I know Vikki can't take the car herself. She's only thirteen, and I'm pretty sure that's too young to even get your beginner's. I bet she wouldn't even know how to start the car. I pull a blanket over my head like a tent and hold the flashlight under my armpit. The Viking book has hard words and I need to concentrate.

The Valkyries were invisible to soldiers, except to those they killed. At the moment before their death, the warrior would look up into the white light surrounding the Valkyrie and see her flying down toward him, her hair a silver flash behind. As he died, his last glance would be into her face—the green mask of scales, the white horns, and the welcoming smile.

"What the fuck is wrong with you, Mother? Answer me! What's wrong with you?!"

I can't hear Mom at all.

"What's wrong with you, Mother? Do I have to call Dad at the hospital again? Do I? Haven't you been taking your pills? Or are you hiding them in the plants again? Huh? Are you?"

"Plant food," Vikki had told me, "Leave them there. They're special nutrients for the soil. Don't touch them or I'll tell." She grabbed my wrist, hard, and her nails left red marks—little grins in my skin—for days.

"What if Dad isn't really there? Huh? What if he isn't even at the hospital? What if he's fucking some nurse? What if he's fucking her right now? Huh, Mother, because his wife's a freak? Who'd blame him? I wouldn't, that's for sure. I bet even if I do call the hospital, he won't really be there."

I know Dad isn't having an affair with the nurse. He wouldn't. He loves Mom, even if she doesn't always take her pills. Who could blame her? I hate taking medicine too. He's not having an affair. He's only at the hospital.

Once, while Mom was doing the dishes, I asked her why Vikki's always so mad all the time. That's when Mom likes to talk; when she's washing and I'm drying and putting them away, stacking the plates, big ones on the bottom and little ones on top.

Mom sighed and wiped her hands on the towel, like my questions made her tired. She ran her hand over her short, buzzy hair and looked at me.

"Victoria likes a lot of attention," she said. "She wants everyone to look at her. The tantrums are just her way of making sure we don't forget she's here." Mom smiled, but it only made her look sad and I didn't believe her anyway. As if anyone could forget Vikki when she was around. That was a kindergarten answer, and I was in Grade 2 by then.

I'd overheard her and Dad talking about Vikki before and that wasn't what they said. I didn't understand most of it, but Mom always seemed upset, and Dad would act like it was no big deal; Vikki's screaming, and breaking stuff—dishes, my toys—yelling at Mom, even in front of people.

Last year she flipped out on Mom because Mom wouldn't take her and her friend Claudia from down the road to the mall—swearing and everything—and Claudia started to cry and Vikki said, "What's your problem?" and told her to shut up. She went home, and the next day Vikki called her like nothing happened.

Dad said it's normal with kids, the way Vikki is—whatever *it* is—just *sibling rivalry*, he called it, but I could only find *sibling* in the dictionary, without the *rivalry*. It meant we had the same parents, and I already knew that. So that meant her bad temper had something to do with me. I'm the only sibling, so it must. I didn't know why, since I stayed out of everybody's way as much as I could.

In fact, I know he's having an affair. I listened in on the phone. I heard him. Her name's Lisa. I'll tell her I'm working a double, Lisa. She won't know the difference. You're such a dog, of course he's having an affair. And you can't even tell the difference! A crazy dog, too! Are you going crazy again, like a rabid dog? Are you, Mother?!"

She's throwing dishes and shouting, like the guns and bombs in those movies I'm not allowed to watch. The ones I watch anyway, even when they scare me and I still don't look away. Sometimes Vikki scares me, but she doesn't know that. She also doesn't know that I have a secret weapon. It's from the kitchen. I hide it under my mattress, just in case. It's like sleeping on top of a secret.

I slide out of my chair in the closet, pulling on my fuzzy white housecoat. Trying to be quiet, I slip downstairs. I don't know exactly what I'm going to say, I just want her to shut up so I can read.

Vikki is standing in the middle of the kitchen, with bits of dishes around her bare feet. Mom is crying without making any noise, and rocking forward and back, even though the rocking chair is in my room. She looks shaky. Apt to fall apart. Rickety.

"Get down on the floor like a dog

then! Do it! Or I'll break this one too. Right now!"

Antiques. That means "of ancient times," which is really old, but not feeble. The plate in Vikki's hand is an antique, from Grandma. It has fancy edges like lace, but in gold. She pushes Mom down from her chair.

"Now bark! Come on, Mother. If you think you're a dog, then bark like one! Do it!"

Mom tries to crawl away through the glass, but Vikki breaks the plate in front of her. I run back upstairs, and Vikki's voice goes straight through the floor.

"What are you doing? What is wrong with you? Are you crazy again? What do you think, you're a dog or something?! You're supposed to drive me to Catherine's. Get off the floor! You're crazy, Mother! Get up!"

Vikki doesn't see me come back down the stairs. It's like I'm flying, with my housecoat spread out behind me like wings.

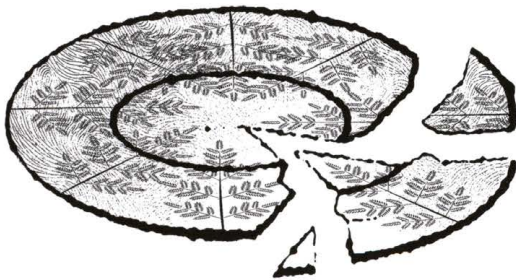
She's kicking Mom, who isn't trying to crawl away anymore.

I took the big kitchen knife from the drawer before Christmas so Vikki couldn't wave it around anymore when she's mad. If I hadn't taken it away, she'd probably have it in her hand by now; sometimes Mom and Dad forget about *safety*. Everyone thought Vikki took it, so they searched her room when she was gone. No one asked me. No one ever asks me.

Mom doesn't look like she's getting up. She has her eyes closed. Vikki doesn't see me come up behind her. I think I'm invisible. I step back and Vikki falls to the floor. It sounds like she's gargling salt water, like when you have a cold or a sore throat.

Then I dig all of Mom's pills out of the soil and help her to the couch. We are waiting for Dad to come home. He's a doctor, he'll know what to do. He will.

Jennifer LoveGrove lives in Parkdale. Her poetry has appeared in Ink, Queen Street Quarterly, Sub-terrain, the Fiddlehead, and the anthology The IV Lounge Reader (Insomniac, 2001). She is the editor and publisher of Dig, a literary zine, and Wayward Armadillo Press. Her first collection of poetry, The Dagger Between Her Teeth, will be published by ECW this spring. "Valhalla" is her first published short story.



BE KIND TO YOUR CHILDREN

FICTION BY MICHELLE BERRY

Mr. Roldo thinks that X-rays show he has no heart.

Markus eats bibles, page by page. When he is completely done an entire bible, he starts on another.

Noodle starts a dance every morning in honour of her dead father, but after breakfast she sits in front of the TV and watches Markus eat.

Meg is the nurse here. She has a bumper sticker on her beat-up convertible that says, "BE KIND TO YOUR CHILDREN. THEY ARE THE ONES WHO WILL CHOOSE YOUR NURSING HOME." She often wonders why some of the words are capitalized and others aren't. *Who chooses that?* she thinks. *Who makes all the decisions?* Meg doesn't like to make decisions, and so she can't fathom, even for a moment, who makes the complicated ones.

When Noodle first moved in, she had spaghetti in her hair. Mr. Roldo picked it out and ate it. His motions were soft and soothing, calming. But Noodle became so agitated that Meg had to lock her in her bedroom and put on the lullaby tape in the office. She had to project the sound down the hall, and so she pulled the tape recorder out of the office, the cord taut, and tilted it toward Noodle's room so the hush-little-baby noise would settle down the screaming. Meg used to do that for her mother. She used to hum sweetness into her mother's ears when the world was so close it hurt her mother to think of it.

"You're all in a noodle," Mr. Roldo said.

"Holy, holy, holy," Markus said. "The Lord Almighty is holy!"

And Meg shuffled on her swollen feet, back and forth, from the office to Noodle's room to calm her, back and forth.

Every morning, Markus starts with a new page. Then he visits the washroom down the hall. Then he goes to the TV room, settles in, and tries another page; swallows hard to get it down.

Even though she's in charge, Meg always wonders why. She doesn't know what to do half the time, and there are moments, lying in bed in the dark, her

nightgown twisted around her stout form, that she thinks she might be the crazy one and the others are the nurses. Meg can imagine Markus as a nurse. He has eaten so many bibles in his fifty-two years that the words of good seem stuck to his ribs. It's as if he's become one with the morals.

"When the Lord your God gives you victory in battle and you take prisoners, you may see among them a beautiful woman that you like and want to marry," Markus says. Even though Mr. Roldo has no heart, he takes a moment to be still and contemplate.

The Good News Bible Markus is working on is 1,138 pages, not including the map, chronology, word list, and all the other forwarding pages.

"Do you ever start from the back and eat forward?" Meg asks.

Markus's mouth is full.

Noodle says Markus hasn't ever read the bible. She says that he wants to get into heaven just by ingesting it. And then she wonders aloud what ingesting means and whether you can out-gest.

Today, they are going on a field trip. Meg locks up the home. She wants to tie them all together with rope to make them stay safe, like little children, but, instead, she has them each hold hands. Meg holds hands with Markus, and Mr. Roldo and Noodle take hands and walk up front. Over the parking lot toward Meg's car they walk, the other patients in the other scattered homes throughout the compound around the asylum look out the windows.

"We're going on a field trip," Noodle shouts. "We're escaping."

Meg requested this field trip several weeks ago when she saw the weather turning golden and clear. She asked Doctor Mayburn if she could take them out, just her three charges, into the sunshine, away from the home. Doctor Mayburn wondered about the request for awhile, the long fingers of one hand holding his chin as if his mouth might fall open. He smelled of wine and garlic, a cheesy smell lingering behind him somewhere. There were gnats above his

head. Meg thought to herself, *There's a peach pit rotting somewhere in this room. I just know it.*

And now they are in Meg's car. Markus is belted into the back seat next to Mr. Roldo, and Noodle sits shotgun next to Meg. Meg starts the car.

"Once, I was looking out the window of my house," Markus says, "and I saw many inexperienced young men, but noticed one foolish fellow in particular."

"Oh?" Meg says, grinding gears. "Which house was that? Your childhood home?"

"He lived all over the world," Noodle shouts. "He told me before."

The convertible shoots forward and back, Meg's foot heavy on the clutch.

"Let's take the roof down," Mr. Roldo says. "Not that I would care at all, but it's a beautiful day."

Meg pulls over by the exit to the Better Living Mental Asylum sign. "PLACE YOUR LOVED ONES WHERE THEY ARE CARED FOR IN STYLE," the sign states. "AFFORDABLE YEARLY RATES. GOOD DOCTORS. LIVE-IN NURSES. PATIENT TO NURSE RATIO AVERAGES 4 TO 1."

Meg sighs. Four to one until someone dies, she thinks. Then it's only three to one. Better deal for your money. She gets out of the car and starts to struggle with the roof.

Noodle begins to push the buttons on the radio. Billie Holiday sings the end of "Fine and Mellow," and then "I Got It Bad (And That Ain't Good)."

"Billie has heart," Mr. Roldo says.

Meg remembers back when she was little. When her mother used to take her to the dances at the recreation centre down the street from her house. All the little babies screaming in the corner while the mothers danced until dawn. And Meg was in charge of the babies. Again, she didn't know what to do. She's never known what to do it seems. Meg would change one diaper and the next until, suddenly, she was changing only clean diapers, her fingers flying over open safety pins, and the babies kept screaming and spitting up and wanting their mamas, and Billie



Holiday was singing heartbreak and sorrow all night long.

Meg gets back in the car.

"Where are we going again?" Markus asks. "I want to make sure I brought enough to eat."

"You've got an entire bible, Markus," Noodle says. "That takes you a month, doesn't it?"

"We're only going out for the day." Meg turns left out of the exit and heads south to the beach.

"Good God, it's fine to be alive," Markus says. He chews on the bits of paper stuck to his teeth.

But Meg has been wondering lately if it is fine to be alive. She's been shuffling with swollen ankles, edema from too much salt and improper shoes, back and forth down those hospital halls for over twenty years now. She's lived in that room next to the kitchen, one tiny room, for fifteen years; moved in to take care of her mother, just after the debt collector took the house and furniture, took everything but the tiny yellow dresser in Meg's room. Her mother died last year. In the asylum. Died with her head in Meg's lap. And Meg's been with Markus for eight years, with Mr. Roldo for six years, and with Noodle from the moment her daddy died in her arms, one year and three months ago. Noodle, the tiny little woman with the big head and hollow eyes. Her dance every morning is eerily perfect. It is noiseless with large movements and pained facial expressions. She dances to the music in her head.

But Meg wonders if dancing sadly is enough. She wonders if helping others is enough. *When*, she asks herself sometimes, *will someone help me?*

Meg pulls over in the parking lot at the beach.

"This," Mr. Roldo asks, "is it? This is where we are going?" He spits.

"We're going to walk the beach," Meg says. "We're going to get some exercise."

Mr. Roldo holds his chest as he gets out of the car and starts to walk down toward the water. X-ray after X-ray, but nothing will convince him that he has a heart. "Hear the beating, Mr. Roldo," the yearly doctor says during checkups. "Hear that bumpity-bump? That's your heart, man!"

"That's indigestion. That's a piece of fruit travelling through the stomach. That's bile turning in my chest."

A NIGHT LIKE MANY OTHERS

The truck hadn't even stopped and already, seeing the tailgate plunk open, I bolted from my waiting place behind ancient porch windows and was up and in, past rows of skinny knees and beer cases guarded by pretty hockey-haired boys, to the cool metal flatbed spot where my best friends whispered.

Packed in tight and breathing in dust, we rode there fast and I laughed, blinded by someone's swirling hair-sprayed layers. Then, gulping fast at an ill-gotten cooler, I turned to watch him and saw his smile flash silver under the nearly-last streetlight, on that secondary road, winding downhill towards the black lake.

Inside the cottage, the air got thick with bodies and summer stillness, and we were mad drunk. People made the rounds, music pounded, a fight started and ended, someone fell from the kitchen table and I leaned further into my friends, forgetting my careful clothes, spilling pink juice all over, when at last, he came to stand near me, so close, I felt the heat of his smooth arm.

But still drinks came and I wandered out through pine boughs, looking for a place to throw up, and everything blurred under that clear night sky, so that when I kissed someone, I didn't care anymore that it wasn't him, or that my friends had left, until, back inside, I glimpsed in a cracked mirror, my stained shirt, puffy lips, and that strange look of terror and victory in my own red eyes.

— MARGUERITE PIGEON

"There's no bile in your chest, Mr. Roldo. Just a healthy heart."

Of course, if Meg were to think about it, she would liken the old man's failure to admit he has a heart to the fact that his wife is dead. No need to miss her if you don't have a heart. No need to miss. But Meg has no family anymore and she has a heart. Common sense. Meg thinks she's practical and Mr. Roldo is a romantic. "Surely, Mr. Roldo," Meg says often, "surely you have a heart?"

"I am wisdom. I am better than jewels. Nothing you want can compare with me,"

Markus says, as he follows Mr. Roldo to the water.

There are several children sitting by the water with their mothers. Each child has a pile of rocks in their lap, and they are throwing the rocks into the water and applauding with every tiny splash. "I can do it," one child shouts. "I did it."

Meg stands up at the car and watches Mr. Roldo as he clutches his heart and limps toward the water. She watches Markus, bible in hand, looking down at his feet. She watches Noodle tiptoe daintily after the two men, watching them like a hawk, never letting her eyes leave

their forms. Noodle's dead father seems everywhere around her, watching her. Meg sometimes can see his soul hovering, taking care of his child. Meg wants to get back in her convertible and drive off into the sun. She wants to drive quickly and noiselessly away, her hair blowing in the breeze. It's almost full summer now and she wants to get away fast.

The way these people wallow in their sadness makes Meg tired. Sick and tired. Meg is a trained nurse. She knows they can't help what they do, but lately she just wants to shake them a little, knock them around, tell them to stop it. *Stop feeling sorry for yourself*, she wants to shout. *Stop it now*. Meg doesn't know if maybe she wants to say that to herself. Maybe she wants Doctor Mayburn, with his peach-pit gnats, his garlic breath, to raise his hand and slap her. Wake her up. Or kiss her. Maybe she just needs to be kissed. Since her mama died, Meg hasn't been kissed by anyone.

But Markus turns to her, halfway to the water, and smiles. His teeth are black from the ink. His pallor is grey. And it isn't what he says to Meg, but more of the way he looks at her that makes her move away from her car and head down to be with him. To be with them.

"Give praise to the Lord," Markus shouts, "he has heard my cry for help."

"Be quiet," Noodle says. "You're ruining the mood."

"Oh, my empty heart," Mr. Roldo whispers, but no one hears him as the children sitting by the water are suddenly noisy and silly. They begin throwing rocks at each other, and their mothers shout and holler.

"Let's walk further," Meg says. "Let's walk a little. Let's get away from it all."

The four move on down the beach. They are all wearing variations of white clothing—shirts, shoes, pants, skirts. The asylum outfits are greyish and pinkish, depending on what they've been washed with. Meg's uniform is starched so white it shines in the bright light.

"Lookit," one of the children says to his friend, as he points at the receding adults. "A bunch of lousy angels."

His friend throws a rock, but Meg and Markus and Mr. Roldo and Noodle are too far gone for it to hit them.

Meg's shoulders are high, her walk awkward. She doesn't know quite where she fits in anymore. It seems as

if she's more in the middle of this group than on the outskirts and, maybe, in this sunshine, walking with this bunch of lousy angels, that suits her just fine. Why should she be in charge? Who, she asks herself again, makes all the decisions in life?

Meg takes hold of Mr. Roldo and tells him, quite plainly, "You know, when I lost my mother last year, I thought for awhile that I didn't have a heart. I couldn't hear it beating anymore. I thought it broke. But listen. Put your hand there. Listen with your fingers."

Mr. Roldo places his hand on Meg's bulky chest. He smiles with delight.

"When was the last time," he says, "I got to touch a lady's breast?"

"Hear the thump, thump, thump?"
"No."

"It's there. You hear through your fingers."

"That's silly," Noodle says, starting up with her nervous jittery dance. "Mr. Roldo doesn't have a heart."

Markus opens the Bible to the first page he hasn't consumed and starts to rip off small sections and place them on his tongue. "You have changed my sadness into a joyful dance," he says, his mouth full.

"But, it's there," Meg says. "It's the beating of my heart. My mama left it there within me."

"I hear nothing," Mr. Roldo says.

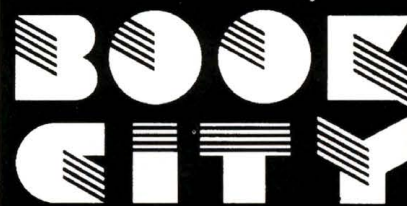
"How else," Meg says, "could I take care of you? You are my children. How could I love you without a heart?"

The group stops and turns to Meg. Stares her down. Markus chews slowly, like a cow, manipulating his mouth around the paper.

Meg laughs.

"In the beginning," says Markus. But then he forgets exactly what he was going to say and Meg says, "Let's move on. Let's just keep going."

Michelle Berry lives in the Beach. She is the author of What We All Want (Random House of Canada, 2001), the short story collections How To Get There From Here (Turnstone, 1997) and Margaret Lives in the Basement (Somerville, 1998), and a collaborative art/fiction book, Postcard Fictions (Key Porter, 2001), with Andrew Valko. She has published short fiction in magazines and journals across Canada and is a reviewer for the Globe and Mail. Her second novel, Blur, will be released by Random House of Canada in 2002.



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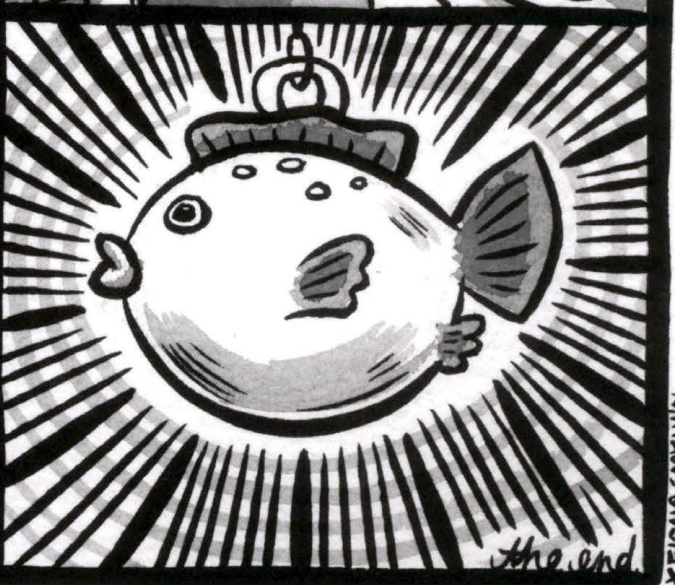
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THE MORAL PORNOGRAPHER

Is Tamara Faith Berger's work highbrow fiction or lowbrow smut? Does it matter?

INTERVIEW BY EMILY POHL-WEARY

Meeting Tamara Faith Berger for bubble tea at a College Street shop one Sunday afternoon, I am completely unprepared for the fact that this slight, smiling woman gives no outward indication—physical or otherwise—that she is the author of the pornographic debut novella *Lie With Me*. I had been expecting an entirely different person, having recently been bowled over by Berger's on-line performance art, glimpsed her novel-in-progress (tentatively titled *Whoredom*), and read several of the sexual-health columns she wrote for *Vice* magazine—maybe an overtly-outspoken, sex-positive feminist with flaming red hair, wearing a bustier and P.V.C., proudly reciting passages written by Kathy Acker.

Instead, a humble Berger slides into the booth across from me. She doesn't seem at all comfortable being interviewed, and squirms visibly when I break the ice by saying I feel *Lie With Me* is a remarkable book and that writing it was a courageous act. She speaks quietly, almost reluctantly, about the shame she feels after having written a controversial novel that has created a small stir within the Canadian literary establishment.

Lie With Me was launched amidst a flurry of sensationalist media attention, all of which focused on the controversial nature of the book. *National Post* arts writer Gord McLaughlin remarked that sex was the launch's big draw, listed the so-called A-list people who were in attendance, and warned, "Take heed: This is the sort of book that will reveal a lot about you by the reaction it evokes." In the *Globe and Mail*, Michael Posner noted "the Canada Council put roughly \$5,000 into subsidizing its publication, begging the inevitable question of whether this is a judicious use of taxpayer funds."

The inundation of press doesn't seem to have unduly bolstered Berger's ego. "I had so much shame about the book on a daily basis," she says ruefully, "that the launch was like a big coming-out party. The subject matter of the book is shame

also. For me, writing is the kind of thing you do in a locked room. I've never been so above-ground about sex, but there's something about the exhibitionist's shame that I find very interesting—the flasher who needs an explosion of courage to do it. I relate to that kind of exhibitionism, but on a day-to-day basis, I'm very introverted."

For an introvert, this woman can write hardcore sex—and not the abstract, metaphorical kind found in artsy erotica. After reading the book, one is left asking whether *Lie With Me* is literature or pornography. Is it simply another plea for attention in a society with attention deficit disorder, or does the book actually have artistic merit?

To be frank, *Lie With Me* is nothing if not shocking. Its cover features chicken-scratch drawings of naked girls Berger says she drew as a child. By the bottom of the novella's opening page, the narrative has already crossed the line between art and pornography, à la Georges Bataille or *Story Of O*, and never returns to safer territory. The unnamed, sex-crazed protagonist is given free rein to troll for men in bars and pickup joints, bring them back to her apartment, and submit to anal sex, submissive group sex, and various forms of humiliation. By the end of the novel, our heroine has been elevated to the point of sex goddess amidst numerous frenzied fucking scenarios and increasing narcissism.

Berger's editor, Russell Smith, an author in his own right and a columnist for the *Globe and Mail*, argues that *Lie With Me* is both porn and art. While discussing the book's curious narrative structure, Smith focuses on the second section, "a series of episodes related by various men who are having sexual encounters with her and the transformation she undergoes while having sex with them. It works as conventional, arousing pornography, but, in a way, Tamara is playing with conventions of porn written for men's magazines. You could call it a post-modern book because of its fragmented style and lack of literary

convention that requires a clear setting and characters, but also because it's a cross-hybrid of low- and highbrow genres: the lowbrow pornography and the highbrow small-press fiction."

I ask Smith whether he found the book shocking the first time he read it. "I'll say it was shocking," he exclaims without hesitation. "Downright horrifying at times. Luckily, policemen and Reform party members don't read fiction."

"It was shocking, I guess, but in an obvious kind of way—the animality of it," says Berger, in response to the same question. "I'm always relating my work back to what I learned at school; asking myself what is the perspective of the audience and how are they responding to my art? Writing, which is a little bit more internal than videos, is like propaganda. It has a desired effect, and it's doing everything possible to get the audience to respond. In a really different way, artists and filmmakers do the same thing—try to coerce a desired effect. I like the kind of manipulation you can achieve through porn."

It's remarkable that so little attention has been given to the quality of writing in *Lie With Me* and its interesting three-part structure. The first section is a confession-filled will; pithy sentences that attempt to define the nature of this anonymous woman's obsession with sex. The second brings us the unique perspectives of seven men who fuck her, each with a different narrative voice. The final section comes back to a man she's in love with and ties the book together with equal doses of regret, manifesto, and emancipation.

Unfortunately, the book suffers slightly from a lack of attention to detail that often plagues under-staffed, under-financed small press publications (in this case, Toronto's Gutter Press). Typos are smattered throughout, and some sentences lack the cohesion a more rigorous editing job would bring. Taking a critical look back at his own work, Smith comments, "When it first came in it was a little bit disjointed, not written in a

PHILLIP SMITH



literary arc. I pushed Tamara to make some changes that made it a little bit more unified."

Berger's literary "training" was a three-year stint as a writer for Full Deck Productions, where she paid her dues churning out stories for low-grade porn mags with names like *Sticky Buns*, *Butttime Stories*, and *Bump and Grind* on a daily basis. "They were kind of cool," she admits, "comic-sized digests filled with confessional fiction—stories you might find in *Hustler*; but even more bottom-of-the-barrel. I did the more diaristic kind of writing for a long time. Before that, I went to art school at Concordia University from 1990 to 1995 to study painting and sculpture. This interest in porno was partly a pure interest in sex as a subject and the tackiness of it. Porn's been around for so long in all its different forms, whether it's erotica writing or photography. I never wanted to draw pictures of sex. The porn industry is really the only visual representation of sex as a subject that exists."

Since then, Berger's work has taken on a variety of forms. For four years (1997 to 2000), she wrote a "monthly look at what ails you" on disease and sexuality, under the pen name "Nursex" for *Vice*. Topics broached in the column included intestinal worms, Tourette's syndrome, sex work, and even a guide to writing porn. Her work for *Vice* included the same psychosexual attention as *Lie With Me* and *Whoredom*. For example, in her piece on phantom-limb syndrome, she writes:

S. was born in 1972 with a full-blooded penis and half a scrotum. Interestingly enough, S. was also born with a vagina. It was soon discovered that S. was dual-gendered, an XXY, a classic hermaphrodite ripe for medico-sexual butchery . . . Much to my surprise, there has been little talk about the occurrence of PLS of the genitalia.

Whether intentional or not, Berger was making some very political statements. In an article titled the "Vice Guide to Rape" she wrote:

Basically, our prevalent social stereotypes assume that a male is sexually aggressive (he wants to get it in the hole) while a female is sexually passive-aggressive (she pretends that she doesn't want to get it in the hole and she must be "taken" so that she can't help but get it in the hole). This causes us to believe that a woman may not want to run from a sexually aggressive male, because she, like almost all females, harbors the secret desire to be raped.



Berger has also made four films on Super 8 and 16 mm: *Mount the Man* (1998), *Porno Dream Loops* (1998), *Raise the Garments of Females and Apply with Heavy Blows* (1998), and *I Love It When a Girl's Head Goes Down* (1997), which were screened at various events, including Pleasuredome's Toronto New Works Festival and the Carnival of Perversions.

She has also completed three web-based projects as Nursex. In the short digital film *Surgery* (drivedrive.com/nursex/surgery/drivecam.html) and the slide show *Third-Eye Wound* (drivedrive.com/nursex/thirdeye.html)—both completed in 2000—Berger stars as a nurse who performs blood-letting and surgical manoeuvres on anonymous subjects (viewers can fill out a pre-surgery application to apply for the role of patient). There's also the Nursex health questionnaire, "I Heal Bodies By Sensing Case Histories," featuring a series of multiple choice questions about sex, marital status, and physical health, resulting in Nursex's analysis of the respondent's sexual and emotional well-being.

Berger is one of a new breed of sex writers—a moral pornographer who provokes intellectual thought while exciting your senses. After writing so much porn, she felt compelled to write a book that allowed a slut to speak her mind and do things according to inner motivations. In *Lie With Me*, the protagonist clearly explains the predicament:

I know there's all these problems with a girl like me having sex so much. I think if a guy loves sex it comes from the pleasure he feels in his cock—which is why he's never called a slut. But because it's easier for a girl to get disconnected from all the feelings she has down there, she can get lost trying to *know* herself. Do you see what I'm saying? Being a slut kind of implies getting lost, going astray.

Smith explains why Berger's work is so ground-breaking, when situated within the context of CanLit: "I have been thinking for a long time about why there is no Canadian erotica or pornography—I make no distinction between those two terms. I had actually first had the idea of trying to publish a magazine of Canadian literary erotica. I was going to do it first on the web, and I wanted well-known authors like Margaret Atwood and Barbara Gowdy and Ann-Marie MacDonald to send me the porn they must have been writing. It turns out, nobody was writing any. They weren't interested.

"Then one day, [Gutter's publisher] called me and said, 'I know you're interested in pornography. I've got a manuscript and wondered what you'd think of it.' Immediately, I liked it for two reasons. It was extremely hardcore. When I had had friends submit pornography to me, I was frustrated by how incredibly tame they were, and non-explicit. They were just stories with an erotic undertone. I had wanted stuff that had the specific effect of arousal, not literary merit. If they had literary merit, that was great, but I was interested in titillation. So I was excited to find something that was no holds barred. Secondly, I was very excited to find that the style was very unusual and poetic—it had literary merit."

In 1998, Berger presented an essay titled "The Aural Language of Pornographic Stories, or The Moral Pornographer" at the World Pornography Conference, held jointly by California State University and the Free Speech Coalition in Universal City, California. The piece, later published in *Fireweed* magazine, shows Berger has obviously given serious thought to the effect her writing elicits:

In my practices as a writer of pornographic fiction, I've discovered that porn is a literary genre wherein the reader and the writer have a skewered kind of intimacy. In porn fiction, the *reader* projects desire into the text, as opposed to the conventional narrative form of most fiction where only the *writer/narrator* articulates desire.

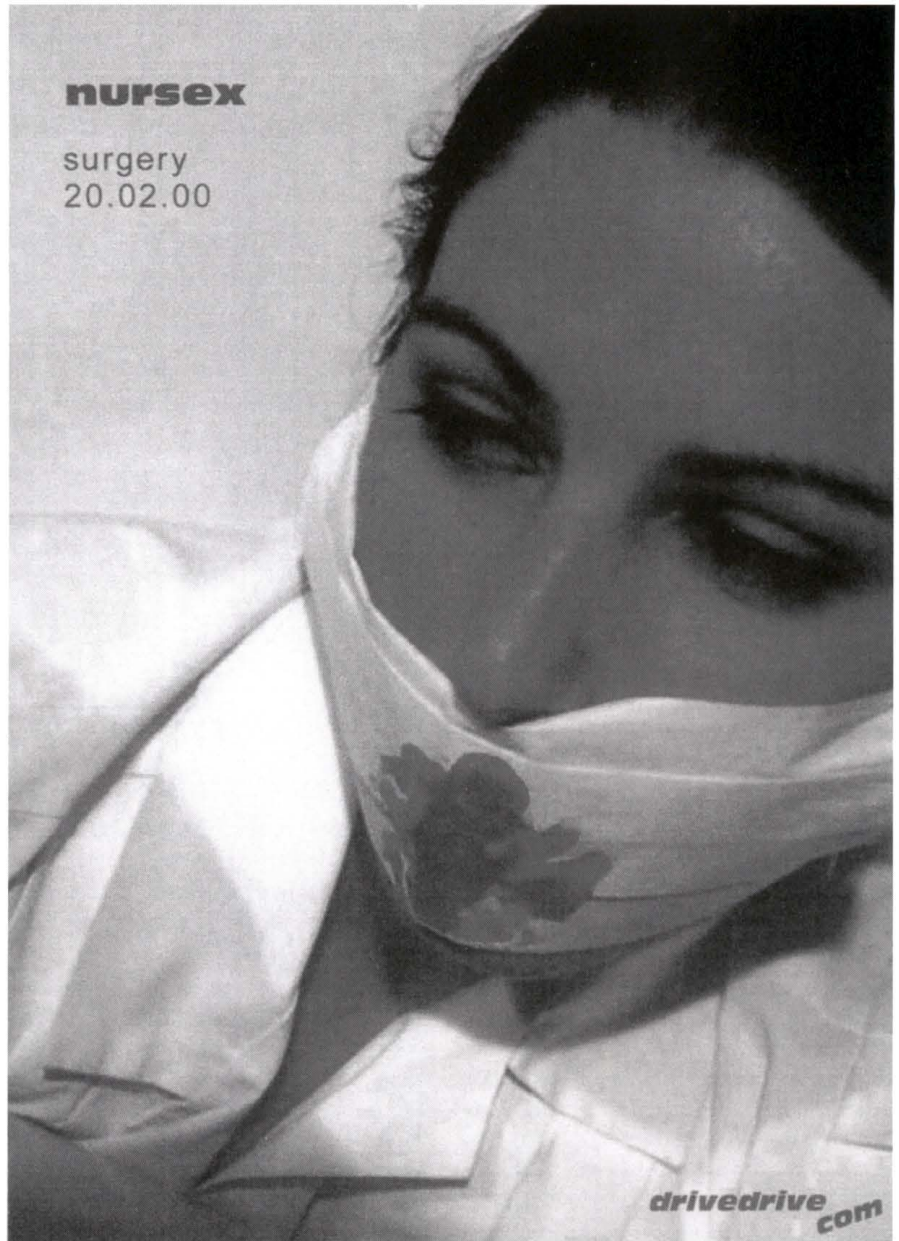
Angela Carter wrote that the pornographer is like a terrorist of the imagination who has the power to overturn society's most basic notions of sex relations. As a terrorist, I have my counter-alliances. I am not only working for one side, that is, I am not only working for the gratification of a male audience. I think that pornographic fiction, with its possibility for multiple points of view on sex experience is incredibly fertile ground for the thrills of gender vengeance. The pornographer can detonate her bombs in more than one site, with more than one intensity and for more than one ideal—which is why I wish more women read and made pornography.

While it seems Berger certainly has an understanding of the porn industry, she maintains, "I wasn't ever really into porn culture. It's a real culture. I was so immersed in it for so long . . . that the book really came out of it. I was never interested in becoming an L.A. porn director. I wanted to do something like that, but with my own sensibilities. I think that's a real power of art: to incite your mind. I'm not necessarily gifted at one particular aesthetic. I don't know whether I'm actually trying to fit into any particular aesthetic. It's more about the feeling. I think the best of the porn world is someone like [performer and musician] Peaches. She's so sexy. Before, she was just doing performance art. Now she's so sexual and that's a good thing—to incite sexual feelings in other people."

With songs such as "Loverbits," "Fuck the Pain Away," and "Suck and Let Go," the potty-mouthed Peaches exudes a sense of being completely in control while she stirs sexual feelings. While performing a couple years ago at *Exclaim!* magazine's anniversary party, two males in the audience got so worked up they pulled their pants off in the middle of the crowd and started pretending to fuck each other up the ass. For a couple minutes, it seemed they might actually do it, right there in the middle of a crowd of hip, pushy guys who were getting more and more worked up (bizarrely, very few women were in attendance that night).

"The porn writing I was doing was all about extremes of sexuality and male-female relations," Berger comments. "I was going a bit crazy writing all that porn for four or five hours a day. I got paid well—up to \$5,000 American per week—for doing it, but I got paid by the word, so I wanted to write a certain amount every day."

Having made the switch to novelist,



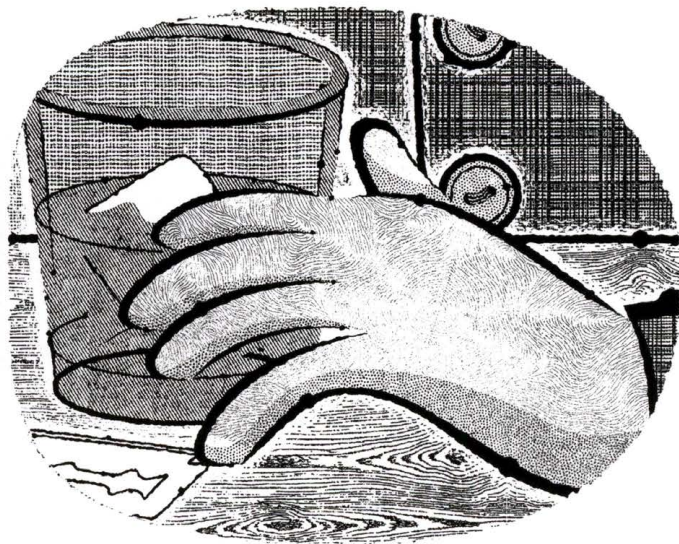
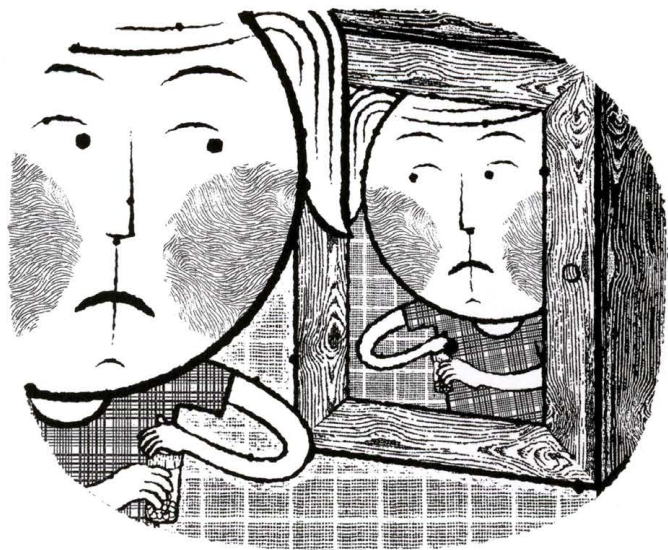
Berger as Nursex in a promotional postcard for the on-line film Surgery.

Berger is currently adapting *Lie With Me* into a screenplay. *Whoredom* is still sitting untouched on her desk. Berger hasn't shown it to anyone yet, and seems almost embarrassed to discuss its content, but notes, "I've already finished it. It's about an ordinary girl's first relationship with a man. Then she becomes a stripper and falls in love with one of the guys at the club. It's about the conflict between family and that kind of work."

So, how does this shy writer reconcile herself to life in the public eye? "I was really ashamed, and still am, of the book," she says. "I think it will take me another five years to come to terms with it. As it was all building up to the night of the launch, I felt like that night sort of

broke everything open. My parents did come—both of them at separate times. Obviously, I recommended that they not read it, but they're adults. They can do what they want. . . . I'm still ashamed, but it's become a little bit more acceptable in my own eyes. I read from it for the first time at the Canzine festival. It's my responsibility to stand behind the work. I have to."

Lie With Me is currently available from Gutter Press. Emily Pobl-Weary has co-authored a book on the life of her grandmother Judith Merrill, the *Zsa Zsa Gabor* of science fiction, to be published in February, 2002, by *Between the Lines*. She is co-editor of *Broken Pencil* and *Kiss Machine*, and is completing a novel, titled *Sugar's Empty*.



SUNCHILD

FICTION BY SHANNON QUINN

We're circle girls, standing shivering in the closet in the washroom of the club, smoking our dope.

We're the cold bodies leaning against stone walls that scratch our backs.

We're girls who make time go faster by making our heads go in slow motion and our bodies feel like they're floating.

We got it down like clockwork; Terry rolls it, I light it, and Mona fans away the smoke. I take a deep breath so that my lungs fill up with fire, and pass it to Terry. I stare hard at her eyes. I wanna copy my makeup like that; she looks real tough and sexy-like. Terry and Mona, they used to not talk to me much, but now we all get along fine and I don't think it's cuz I always got a stash on me. Both of them know that I'm not legal and they've never said nothing to nobody. My name's Theresa, but everybody calls me Thalia—my club name. Mona starts rabbit talking like she always does when she's high. She's going on about some new club where the girls are getting paid twice as much to do shows as we are and how unfair it all is and how Marcel is ripping us off and that the Château du Sexe would be a dive if we weren't all working here.

Terry is giving Mona this look, which means it's time for her to shut up, when the door flies open. Stupid Mona with her babbly rabbit talk forgot to fan away

the smoke from the vent. Busted. It's Marcel. He gets red in the face yelling at us that he isn't paying us to get high, and to get our asses back out on the floor. He likes to yell.

We all shuffle out of the bathroom-slash-boiler room and I do a quick wander-by of the new guys that have come in. None of them want me to dance for them, so I order a beer and sit at the girls' table. There's a new girl from the States there telling anybody who'll listen how great it is in the clubs down there. It's like a law or something that you gotta have plastic tits, but it's easy work. Most places don't make you take everything off and you make more money than you do here.

Dominique slides by onto a box to dance for some guy. She's got this funky, long brown hair that hangs down straight and a roundish body that you can just tell from looking is soft. We used to tour together. I watch her watching herself in the mirror; eyes half closed and kinda fogged over. She's the only one seeing what she's seeing—magic—or she's really stoned or she's doing her pretend sexy look. It's funny what guys think is sexy. She's watching the clock just like all of us, waiting for eight o'clock, when the night girls start and we're free.

I have a boyfriend. His name is Chris. Chris has got these hands; that's what

got me about him—not that he has hands, but the way his hands are: beautiful, thin, milky white fingers. Hands that don't grab. He shows up every day at eight to take me away from the girl haters.

Tonight, we go to a club where Chris has got "connections": a sweaty motor-mouthed dealer who, when he's in the mood, gives us a fair deal. We slip into a backroom of the club that hasn't really started for the night yet and Motor-mouth gives us a test drive. It's good. As I suck it through my nose to slap my brain, it doesn't burn so much, and the drip down the back of my throat is clean and tasty. Chris starts talking money with him and I pretend not to listen, cuz they don't like it when chicks get involved. So I'm pretending not to hear Chris answering how we can't do that kind of money and Motormouth talking about the quality of it all and how, for an arrangement, he could help us out. I know he's looking right at me and I don't like the way it takes Chris a second to say, "No. It wouldn't work," like he's almost thinking about it. I don't think sex is that great to begin with, so the idea of screwing a fat, sweaty, motor-mouthed pig doesn't exactly turn my crank. Chris works out the money part and we cut it down the middle so we can go our separate ways if we want to. It's no good when one person holds the

stash; makes the other person dependant on them.

Chris heads out to the main club with Motormouth and his group. I stay behind and start my own party. I don't like it when a club isn't living yet. I hate waiting. See, out there, people are just beginning to show up. They're looking around, just waiting for something to happen. The place is just a skeleton with this empty rib cage dance floor that the curfew kids stare at. One of the busboys brings a bottle of water so I can swallow the secret E that sexy-eyes Terry slipped me and I go about my business, slamming my brain through my nose so it swells up and feels good, and I'm all right. Now I'm just sort of meditating on the whole scene, listening to the rising and falling beats, the voices packing in beside each other, and I get to this point where I just gotta get out and dance, like if I don't dance this wave out I'm never gonna land back on this planet.

Out on the dance floor the skeleton has got guts and blood and flesh now. It's hot and crowded and fierce, like you gotta work hard to keep up. Sweat slides off everybody and is airborne—rain—

yours mixed with somebody else's. Toxic shit released from our body, but it can't hurt us no more cuz we have consciously chose to let it go. We—this big collective *we*—have the power. I get distracted for a second cuz I catch a glimpse of Chris with his tongue down some chick's throat and his hands all over her. Laugh on the inside, cuz I don't even have to tell myself that I don't care, cuz I don't. Then I wonder if I look just as stupid when he's grabbing at me.

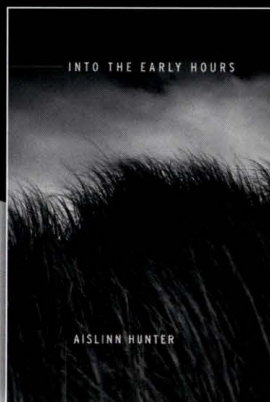
I come back to the collective *we* in the beat and forget what I wanted to. I'm thinking how the DJ's cranking us up, and he's doing it nice and smooth and it's going to be such a good ride for everybody, when I see her. Dominique. Dominique dancing away. I knew she'd be here. She and Chris have the same "connections."

It's like she's this impossible thing. Like I can look but not touch. It's like when I see her my mouth stops working. A girl with spiky blond hair pulls her aside and holds her close as she hands her a bottle of water. Dominique's lips touch that bottle and the water slides through clear blue plastic into her

mouth, and spiky blond hair is resting against her cheek and there's a hand running up and down her slick, smooth back, and my heart drops into my stomach. I'm not moving anymore. I watch as Dominique's lips touch this other girl's lips, and I feel like I'm watching something I'm not supposed to be watching, like I'm seeing something all wrong and private and I don't belong, and I feel guilty for just being there when someone elbows me from behind, but this ride is over and I can't get back with the collective *we*. I'm too crowded out by the sweat and my skin itches with alone, and I need a couple more lines to seal up the scary stuff that wants to leak out of my head, but I'm out of money. Motormouth is there by the bar, and he's looking at me with his slow look, and I figure I will take him up on that arrangement he mentioned. A few lines for a blow job in the bathroom. Fair deal.

I start to become real again when I'm at my apartment door. Only problem is, I can't remember how I got there. My shaking hands fumble with the keys. When I get inside, first thing I do is turn on the light. I hate the dark but love the

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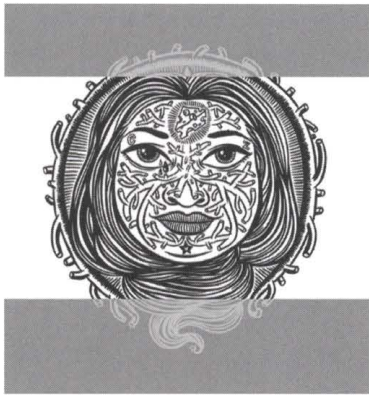
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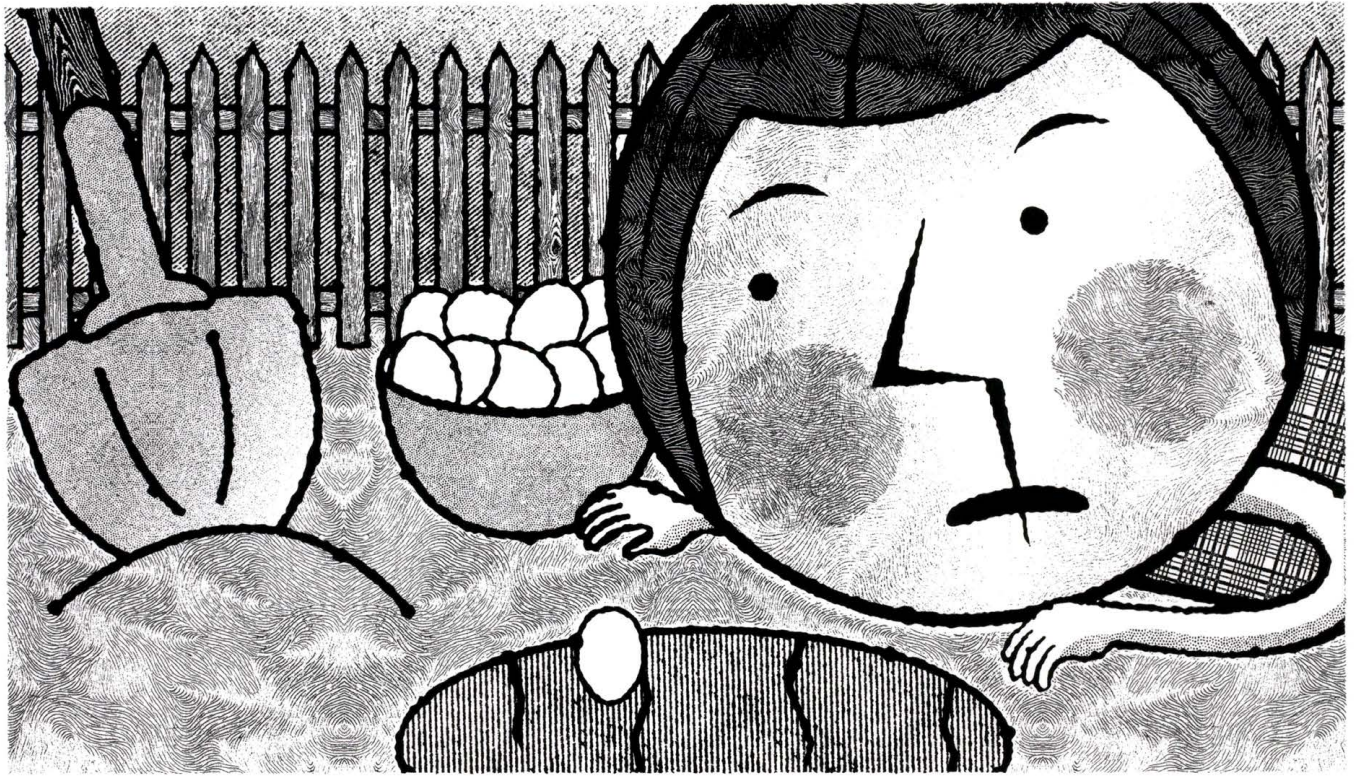
night. Night is where you can hide or pretend. Dark is where you wait for whatever's out there that you can't see. In the bathroom, the mirror shows me the face I've been trying to forget. I think we all have faces we want to forget—like sweaty motormouths that grab the back of your neck till you choke, or eyes that watch you with hate when you're naked. I get my Immovane and Rivotril from the medicine chest and take them together, even though I'm not supposed to. They give me sleep without dreams. Bliss.

In the morning, my apartment is too hot and thick. I need to escape. Chris came in at some point and is in the bed, stuck to me with sweat. I pull myself out of the stickiness and head to the park where they've got these crazy bongo players on Sundays.

You can hear the park before you see it. Coming down the street you hear this big thrum going on and then the first thing you see is this big statue where all the bongo players sit and play. Below them, people dance and there are kids walking around with coolers of beer for sale.

It's good out here today. Lots of kids and dogs running around. I lie in the grass thinking maybe I'll get some rest, but with my eyes closed all I can do is think about Dominique, so I couldn't wish her away even if I wanted to. But I don't want to wish her away. I want to touch and taste and smell. I want to share this small thing of hot that's burning in my gut, share it with a spoon. I want the sun to make my outsides feel the way my insides do. Or better, I want to lie here and bake, turning from white to yellow to that creepy fake-and-bake bronze, till finally I'm burnt crispy black. I'll just lie here charred till the night comes, but see, it'll be a night without dark, and this night will have a wind that wakes up faces, and this wind will blow slowly over me, blowing the black crispies off of me, and I won't need skinny-fingered boys to make me feel safe in the dark. I won't need to have dream girls or impossible things cuz I'll be slimy-baby new, and I'll slip along so fast that I'll slide right through the want and the wish and there won't be any hands that can grab me.

Shannon Quinn lives near the University of Toronto. Her short story "Mothgirl" recently appeared in This. She freelances as a feature writer for CBC Radio One.



SLICE

FICTION BY GARY BARWIN

My mother buried me with a handful of flour. He will rise, she said, and threw the shovel over the fence. Then she went inside and began to sing like a lizard.

No. Though her mouth was empty of soil, she didn't sing. And anyway, how would I know, buried in the backyard with a handful of flour?

Underground, everything was different. The worms bickering in the dirt, the millipedes cracking droll and ironic jokes under damp rocks, the yapping and slobbering of dogs burying their bones. My mother was silent, went to bed, pulled the covers over her head.

Was she feeling guilty? Do guilty-feeling people climb into bed in high-heeled shoes? Do they ignore the hammering of truant officers, of Boy Scout leaders, of can-he-come-out-to-play friends? Even Grandma, with her armful of cake ingredients, gave up knocking, went to the next daughter down the list.

The morning splintered as night threw a champagne glass full of dew into dawn's empty fireplace. A millipede cracked a

good one about an ant, and my mother got out the shovel. She had forgotten the eggs, the milk, a few other things. There was brightness for a few seconds until mother filled the hole.

It rained all that day. I could hear the raindrops thrumming, the earthworms irritated and cranky, heading for the surface.

My mother shouting on the telephone, railing against world history, built-in shelving, politics, the ocean. She'd lost her eyes in the ocean.

Not her actual eyes. Here I'm speaking metaphorically. Or I would be speaking metaphorically if my mouth weren't filled with soil. Let's just say it's like when I said her body was lithe and spiteful as a lizard's. The ocean had pulled her bones out, washed them away like driftwood on the waves.

There was a boat.

Small, wooden, propelled by oars. Don't ask what was in it. If I was so clever, would I be a living bone buried in the corner of the yard?

A recipe maybe. A child. An extensive Julia Child video collection. All of history

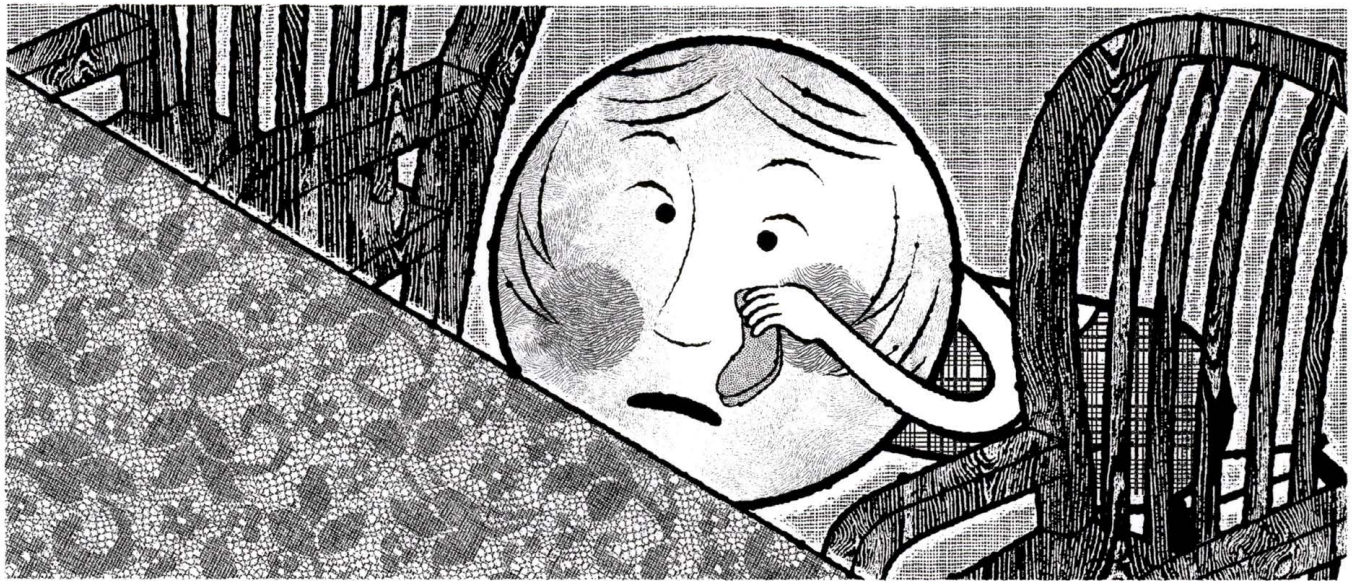
rolled up small then baked in a bread to escape detection at the checkpoints.

Why is it dark underground? Why are there no birds? These are the mysteries. I'm just buried.

The next day there was sun. The world was warm and I began to rise. I pushed away worms, squirrels, broken teacups, swing sets, patio stones, and barbecues. I was a vast loaf and the rec room became dark in my shadow.

Maybe I have exaggerated a little. In truth, I was no garage-sized loaf, but a bread slice, large as a bedroom wall, and I made the birds cower. The sky was light and tawny through my translucent body, and my mother, peering from beneath the covers, noticed the change.

*Gary Barwin lives in Hamilton. He is a writer, composer, and performer. His music and writing have been presented in Canada, the U.S., and Europe. He is the author of *Raising Eyebrows* (Coach House, 2001), *Big Red Baby* (Mercury, 1998), *Outside the Hat* (Coach House, 1998), and numerous other collections of poetry and fiction.*



AERIAL VIEW OF A DINNER PARTY

FICTION BY KATE SUTHERLAND

Evangeline sits at the head of the long, oak table. Traditionally, this is where the man of the house ought to sit. But Evangeline, though she considers herself very traditional, is not willing to cede control of the table to her husband, Steve. She sits very straight and surveys the steaming array of dishes with a smile: chateaubriand, scalloped potatoes, garlic green beans, honey-glazed carrots, and an orange and walnut salad.

Evangeline is magazine-perfect and so is the meal. The colours, the textures, the flavours are all calculated to complement one another. Steve's friend Gordon, from his vantage point halfway down the table, notes the way the carrots and the green beans perfectly echo the mandarin oranges and the lettuce. He thinks that someone ought to take a picture before they dig in and ruin the effect. He nearly voices this thought, but realizes before he does that it's the sort of thing someone's mother would say. The rest of the guys don't laugh at his expense quite as often as they used to, and he'd like to keep it that way.

Evangeline is known for her culinary skills. Steve's friends reminisce about the meals she's served them with an ardour similar to that with which they recall their teenage conquests. "No wonder you're getting fat," they tease Steve, and jab him

in his softening belly, a prelude to the drunken tussle that sometimes follows the dinner party, once Evangeline has gone to bed. The fact is, however, that Evangeline only cooks for company. The rest of the time Steve cobbles together dinner out of boxes and cans, or orders it from fast food windows on his way home.

Belatedly, Evangeline remembers to raise her eyes and direct her smile at her assembled guests. Though most of them have dined here often, they're unwilling to take the initiative, to help themselves to food. They sit staring at one another, cradling their heavy wine glasses, until Evangeline elbows Steve, sitting to her left, and hisses, "Serve."

In high school, Steve was Evangeline's prize. The most popular of the popular boys. An accomplished athlete in all the sports that mattered. The lead in school plays, so long as the lead was an appropriately masculine role. Joe Hardy in *Damn Yankees*, or Sky Masterson in *Guy's and Dolls*. Now, he's a struggling entrepreneur, slightly gone to seed. He's not bald, but balding. Not fat, but a bit paunchy. These developments had provided considerable comfort to the other men in attendance at their ten-year reunion last year. Each man had gone home feeling a little bit more attractive, a little bit more successful than Steve.

Steve grasps the serving tongs awkwardly and begins to serve a slice of beef to Carol, on his left.

"Not her," Evangeline says. "The other side first." She wrests the tongs from him and places the slice of beef on Paul's plate, to her right. She fills Paul's plate, then Deirdre's next to him with a bit of everything before instructing the rest of the guests to help themselves.

Paul and Deirdre are this month's featured couple. Each month Evangeline introduces a new duo to the crowd. She collects them at the upscale boutique where she works half days. She chats up the wives as she helps them select designer outfits and accessories. Once she discerns that the husband is a doctor, a lawyer, or something equally important, she invites them to dinner. Evangeline is charming, and sufficiently authoritative that the wives believe her to be part-owner of the boutique, not just a salesclerk. No one has ever turned down her dinner invitation.

Paul and Deirdre are already proving a disappointment. It turns out that Paul is not a corporate lawyer, as Evangeline had thought, but a professor who teaches corporate law. He no longer has the whiff of the big money deal about him. And Deirdre has a disconcerting interest in current events. She even seems to be

enjoying Gordon's ramblings about the state of the Canadian film industry.

Paul and Deirdre only recently moved to Saskatoon from Toronto.

"What brought you to town?" Carol asks Paul. "I mean, it's usually the other way, people moving from here to the big cities, not the opposite direction."

"No one we know." Steve cuts in before Paul can answer. "Well, hardly anyone we know. None of our real friends."

"We probably would have stayed in Toronto if I'd been offered a teaching job there," Paul admits. "Not that I have anything against Saskatoon, it's a nice town, but Toronto's home, you know."

Everyone else is quiet for a moment. It never occurred to them that Toronto might be home for anyone. Steve breaks the silence. "Why couldn't you get a job in Toronto? There's a big law school there, isn't there?"

"Yes," Paul concedes. "Two of them, actually. But it's impossible for a white male to get a job at the big schools these days. They all have affirmative action programs. Guys like me are shut out."

They all shrug in sympathy, except Deirdre, who frowns. She has a budding interest in feminism that she hasn't yet voiced, not to Paul, not to anyone. Deirdre doesn't have any women friends in Saskatoon and she's lonely. She'd hoped this dinner party would be the beginning of something, but so far it's not what she expected.

Paul is equally bewildered by the gathering. Even without a tie, he feels overdressed in his houndstooth jacket. All the other men wear golf shirts and light-coloured cords or khakis. Large, loping, and sandy-haired, they're oddly interchangeable, apart from the skinny, blond fellow who's holding forth on Canadian film.

Deirdre peers earnestly at Gordon through elegant tortoiseshell glasses. She'd fished them out of her purse and put them on before dinner, as if she was in a restaurant and needed them to read the menu. Evangeline found this odd until she noted that Deirdre looks better with the glasses than without them.

Paul's lip curled a little when Deirdre put the glasses on. He doesn't like them and he doesn't believe she really needs them.

Carol eyes Paul tucking away the perfectly rare slice of beef that had almost landed on her plate, and tries to decide whether or not she's jealous of

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Deirdre. He's very handsome, in a Kendall sort of way. Carol is Evangeline's best friend and this responsibility seems to have crowded out anything else she might have done with her life. She dates with some regularity, but she's still single, not yet having met a man of whom Evangeline approves.

If Carol could have the man of her choice, it would be Steve's friend Dave, but Evangeline says she can do better than a washed-up high school athlete. Evangeline has seated him safely one place over from Carol at the dinner table. Carol leans forward and tries to catch his eye, but succeeds only in getting some cheese from the scalloped potatoes stuck to the ends of her hair. No one is looking at her, so no one notices.

Carol and Dave had once shared a romantic moment on Evangeline's back deck. It was February, and Carol stood shivering outside with a cigarette; she hadn't quit smoking yet. Dave came out to get wood for the fireplace, and the two of them collapsed into a kiss without saying anything. Carol is five feet eleven inches, nearly as tall as Dave, and the kiss was perfect. But Evangeline has a sixth sense about these things, and she appeared at the kitchen window at that precise moment. She opened the frozen-shut window with an ominous crack and shouted at them to come back inside. Carol kept hoping, but nothing like that ever happened again.

Gordon is shoehorned in between Carol and Dave, clearly the ninth person at a table for eight. This disruption of the symmetry of the table disturbs Evangeline. She's tried leaving Gordon off the guest list, but Steve always insists on including him. Steve is very loyal to his high-school friends. The only times he stands up to Evangeline are the moments when she provokes him to come to their defence.

Gordon has always been a little different from the rest of Steve's friends. He was never punk, but flirted with new wave in the eighties while the others remained resolute jocks. He'd sported a Flock of Seagulls haircut and skinny leather ties. He still thinks of himself as the artistic type, but he's learned to fit in a little better by talking about the business end of art. Hence, his current monologue about how the low Canadian dollar is luring American film projects to Canada. This is the topic that's caught Deirdre's interest.

S.A.S.E.

A composite poem of sentences from Rampike, Zygote, Black Cat 115, Ink, Cencrastus, Broken Pencil, Above/Ground Press, Coach House Books, Brick, Blood and Aphorisms, Pedlar Press, Quarry Magazine, Descant, and the New Quarterly.

Dear Ms. Alland,

You'll notice this is neither an acceptance nor rejection letter. There is no logical reason for this decision.

Recently, we rejected work from a writer who won the \$5,000 Stephen Leacock award two weeks later. Actually, this might mean it is better to be rejected by us if you want to become rich and famous.

Because our magazine is created in the scraps and odd shavings of time between paying our rents and living our lives, choosing work for each issue is a painful experience.

We prefer works that display polyphonic and dialogical qualities. This prevents us from taking some exceptionally fine writing.

Competition was fierce. Many projects were meritorious. As you can imagine, the majority of submissions come from writers we either publish

Gordon preens a bit under her steady gaze, unused to such attention.

"Surely that doesn't affect Saskatoon," Paul interjects. "There can't be much of a film industry here. Not like in Toronto anyway, I mean, on account of the size." Paul squirms in the hostile silence that follows his remark. He hadn't meant to remind them again of his outsider status.

Steve finally speaks, feeling Evangeline's elbow poised at his rib cage directing him to do something before her dinner party falls flat.

"Hey, Dave, remember what we did to Mr. Toronto at that party?"

Evangeline rolls her eyes. This isn't the sort of diversion she had in mind.

"Mr. Toronto?" Deirdre asks.

"Allan Smith," Carol explains. "He graduated with us then moved to Toronto right after. He's a doctor there now."

"He couldn't drink for shit," Steve says.

"Worse than our boy Gordon," Dave adds.

"He tried to keep up with us, I'll say that for the guy."

"But he was out cold pretty quick, before midnight even."

"So we gave him the magic marker treatment. The Groucho Marx thing—glasses, a moustache, the whole nine yards."

"Oh, sure," Paul says. "We did stuff like that in high school."

Deirdre shoots him a look.

Paul shrugs. He doesn't want to be

or who are friends of the magazine in some way.

Unfortunately, however. Please see the list below for reason(s) we could not use your work this time. You should hear from us in January. I apologize for the time it has taken. Whatever though, do keep in touch. Please consider becoming a subscriber.

We would have encouraged you to try again, but, unfortunately, we are ceasing publication.

Writing is an occupation which, generally speaking, requires a great deal of solitude.

It has become necessary to make use of these terribly impersonal reply slips. We have all received these letters and cursed the fools who sent them. We hope you understand. You definitely have potential.

Sincerely,
The Editor

P. S. I think I'm in the next *Paperplates* too. If it ever comes out . . . I'm reading at the Imperial Pub next week. See you there?

—SANDRA ALLAND

one of the guys, but he doesn't want to be Allan Smith either.

"It wasn't in high school," Dave says. "It was last year, after the reunion. That's what made it so funny. That stuff doesn't wear off for days, so he had to fly back to Toronto and go on rounds with "DOOFUS" written on his forehead in big, black letters."

Prior to this exchange, Dave had nearly polished off the whole main course without raising his head. He'd been on almost every team in high school, and though his exertions are now limited to the occasional weekend Frisbee game, his bulk has not yet turned to fat. He's usually dating a girl five or six years younger than him, but he never brings the cur-

rent girl to Evangeline's dinner parties.

People often dismiss Dave as not very bright because he's big and quiet. Paul and Deirdre have, Dave could tell from the glance that passed between them when Steve drew him into the reunion story. They're wrong, though. Dave may not say much, but he notices everything.

He could diagram the whole party, like pages from a football playbook. Most of the exchanges *are* set plays, they're that predictable, at least among the home team. Steve fakes left with the roast beef, hands it off to Evangeline, who passes it to the new guy. Beginning at this point, and continuing through the evening, Evangeline telegraphs her disappoint-

ment with Steve through a series of gestures: a flicker of her eyelashes, a particular tilt of her head, an occasional jab of her elbow. While Evangeline is thus occupied, Carol tries to catch his own eye in front of or behind Gordon, depending on how far back he's leaning in his seat. Gordon talks on and on, trying to capture anyone's attention.

The visitors are a bit more of a challenge, but Dave is beginning to figure them out as well. He saw Deirdre bristle when Paul started in about how tough it is for white men these days, then he caught Paul curling his lip when Deirdre put on her glasses. They don't seem at ease with themselves or each other, but they're a united front against the rest of the party.

Nancy and Jeff round out the table, Nancy at the foot of the table and Jeff seated to her left. As soon as Evangeline leaves to get dessert, Carol asks after their baby, Sarah.

"She's great," Nancy says. "She's fabulous."

"She's got a new word," Jeff adds.

"*Computer* . . . actually, *compewtaa*. That's how she says it."

"That's right," Nancy says. "When I ask her where daddy is, she says, 'compewtaa.'"

Gordon shakes his head. "*Computer*, eh? Straight from *mama* and *dada* to *computer*. That's a nineties baby all right."

"Compewtaa." "Compewtaa." Steve and Jeff mimic the baby back and forth between guffaws. Carol sits smiling idiotically, as if the baby is there in front of her.

When Evangeline returns bearing a gorgeous tiramisù, she's dismayed at the turn the conversation has taken. Ever since Nancy and Jeff got pregnant without consulting anyone, Evangeline has cut short any discussion of, first, the pregnancy, and, now, the baby. Not that Evangeline was surprised at Nancy's secretiveness. Nancy has never really been one of them, though she's been part of the crowd for twelve years now, ever since she and Jeff started dating in eleventh grade.

"Do you have any children?" Nancy asks Deirdre, as Evangeline begins laddling the tiramisù onto dessert plates.

"No," Deirdre says.

"Not yet," Paul adds, leaning forward in his chair.

"We might soon," Deirdre volunteers.

"We probably will," Paul says.

"Yes, we probably will," Deirdre agrees, and Paul settles back into his seat. "I think that I want to," Deirdre continues. "But I don't feel like I have to. I wouldn't

ON SATURDAY NIGHT

What do I look like, with my hair
parted
in the middle, slick, and glasses
sliding down

would you come over riding
an ice cream truck, careless, growing
big with milk fat, punching
new belt notches

with you, I'd embellish, do my hair bigger, wear
red lipstick, sloppily (I do not
own lipliner, I forgot these things)

then you could watch my TV and say
how strange I am, we'd force each other
up mornings, I'd stop napping and never drink
alone, maybe sometimes

I'd sink
into the couch, bag of
chips, bottle of wine, you
would flick channels and swat flies
with the *Cosmo* I bought at Safeway

only for the lipstick ads
(and the sex diagrams).
you don't part you hair in the middle, instead you smile knowing
they are jealous of, among other things, your blue suede shoes

come over and show me your truck.
I am cross-legged. circulate the air.

— K. I. PRESS

feel as if I'd missed my life's purpose or anything if I didn't." Paul leans forward in his chair again.

Now Carol is sure she's jealous of Deirdre.

"Well, *I* couldn't," Evangeline says. "I mean, I wouldn't. A child would ruin this place. Imagine a baby drooling on the Italian leather sofa or spitting up on the white, wool carpet."

Gordon, who'd once spilled a little red wine on the carpet and hasn't been allowed to forget it, imagines. He'd like to see it. Then again, he and Dave probably wouldn't get to hang out with Steve much anymore if he had kids. He'd disappear the way Jeff has.

Evangeline passes round the dessert plates, making sure that Nancy gets a

smaller portion than everybody else. "I know you're having trouble with your weight," she says. "I don't want to tempt you."

Nancy is not the least bit concerned about the twenty pounds she gained during her pregnancy. Small and round and energetic, she feels that she now looks exactly as she's supposed to look. She's come into her own. She loves sweet things and is partial to Evangeline's tiramisù. She particularly appreciates the unorthodox addition of raspberries. After a suitable pause, Nancy and Jeff swap plates, then Steve passes the leftover dessert down to Jeff so that he can top his plate up. Evangeline pretends not to notice.

Before she got pregnant, Nancy worked

as a bank teller, and she happens to know that Evangeline and Steve don't have nearly as much money as their showy dinners would lead you to believe. She knows they're up to their ears in debt. But she's very professional; she's never told anyone, not even Jeff. She thinks about it though, when Evangeline starts in on the subject of her weight.

As soon as dessert is done, Nancy and Jeff say their goodbyes. They have to go; their babysitter will be getting anxious. Nancy thinks to herself on the way home that one of the best things about having a child is getting to leave these dinner parties early. She'd prefer not to turn up at all, but Jeff insists. He remembers high school more fondly than Nancy does.

Paul and Deirdre also beg off early. Paul has papers to mark in the morning. Driving home in their Lexus, they're already plotting excuses in case Evangeline invites them again. (They needn't worry. She won't.) Still, Paul thinks, it wasn't a total waste of an evening. His account of it will entertain his colleagues at the faculty club.

Steve, Dave, and Gordon refill their

wine glasses and file out into the garage for an after-dinner cigar. Evangeline would be horrified at the cheap cigars Steve offers round if she knew. The trip to the smoke shop is the only aspect of the party preparations that she lets Steve take care of on his own.

With the strangers gone and Evangeline out of earshot, Steve relaxes. Slouching in an ancient lawn chair between Dave and Gordon, puffing on a stogie, he feels suddenly like himself. He's once again the centre of something. The three of them wave the cigars around in the darkness, like lighters held aloft at a rock concert.

"Remember that Trooper show in ninth grade," Steve begins.

"You mean the one where you and Dave nearly pushed me over the balcony," Gordon says.

"Nah, you almost fell all on your own," Dave says. "You never could hold your beer."

Carol carries the last of the dishes out to the kitchen. Evangeline lingers for a moment, brushing a few stray crumbs off the table. She catches sight of something pink underneath Nancy's chair and

retrieves a small, perfect pair of socks. This is typical of Nancy, she thinks, always leaving behind a scattering of children's toys, children's clothes, children's everything wherever she goes, even when she doesn't bring the baby with her.

Evangeline unfurls the pair and touches one soft cotton sock to her cheek. Then she scrunches them up again and stuffs them down the back of the sofa.

In the kitchen, she finds Carol licking whipped cream off her fingers. This strikes Evangeline as weak. "You were staring at Dave again at the dinner table," she says.

"I know," Carol says, looking out the window instead of at Evangeline. "I'm sorry."

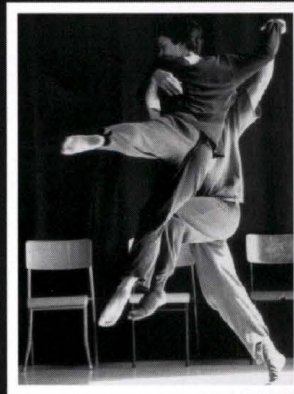
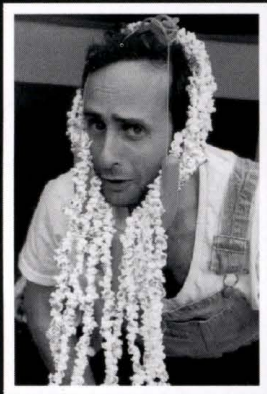
Together they rinse the plates and fill the dishwasher.

Out in the garage, the men light another round of cigars.

Kate Sutherland lives in the Annex. She is the author of the short story collection Summer Reading (ThistleDown, 1995) and has appeared in the New Quarterly, Queen Street Quarterly, Write, and the anthology The IV Lounge Reader (Insomniac, 2001). She is currently working on a second collection.

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The Place To Be





John Brook in his Avenue Road office, circa 1963.

ARE YOU 'MODERN' OR 'BORAX'?

How John and Joanne Brook and their furniture store pulled Toronto into a new age.

ESSAY BY ALFRED HOLDEN

Had you walked out onto Bloor Street on a spring evening in 1960 and turned north up Avenue Road, you would have seen, next to the old Park Plaza Hotel, built solidly of brick, the hostelry's new wing, standing there in juxtaposition. It was spare, glassy, shimmering—a tower that looked as modern as the Avro Arrow jet fighter.

The street lamps switch on. You glance up from the sidewalk, seeing their incandescence against a thicket of hydro wires—a stringy mess of the type that appalled the sophisticated Peter Dickinson, the young architect who designed the Park Plaza addition. A few years earlier, Dickinson, on arriving with his wife, Vera, from England, had declared Toronto the ugliest city he'd ever seen. With such modernist efforts as the Park Plaza addition, he had done something about it.

But at dusk, on this mid-twentieth-century night, the contrast between spanking new and weary old only emphasizes the problem—for the hotel addition sits amid crummy urban flotsam. A few yards up the street, garish strings of bare light bulbs illuminate the chrome-encrusted, obsolescing Buicks, Chryslers, and Oldsmobiles in the used-car lot of British & American Motors. Across Avenue Road, at Yorkville Avenue, the Supertest gas station adds to the clutter, its washable, white-enamelled exterior plastered with versions of the company's circular crest, a red maple leaf underlined by the claim "ALL CANADIAN."

But something else across the street catches your eye.

With darkness deepening and artificial light editing the midtown cityscape, what you see is a squared-off, spare slice of something like the new Park Plaza, grafted onto old Toronto—a modern, glass storefront added to an old three-storey Victorian house.

The sign over the huge show window says "J & J BROOK LIMITED."

What's in the window grabs you: a couple of chairs under a spotlight. They are not the monstrous recliners you see

perpetually on sale down at Lyon's at Yonge and College; these chairs bear no resemblance to the chesterfield suites upholstered in flower-patterned chintz fabric that Consumers Furniture sells at "warehouse prices" out of its big showroom at Bloor Street and Dovercourt Road. They are extraordinary chairs, as scant and simple as one of Dickinson's buildings. Their structure is slim—just bones really, merely there to hold up their throw cushions.

A recent headline from the newspaper flashes back as you stand there on Avenue Road under the street light. "ARE YOU 'MODERN,' OR 'BORAX'?" it had read. With this recollection, everything clicks—this is that "modern" furniture everyone is talking about. "'Borax' . . . is the huge, bulky, overstuffed variety [of furniture] that plugs up many a small-scaled home in Canada today," the actual news story had reported. "Yes, 'borax' is disappearing . . . Instead furniture makers are streamlining their products . . . riding the tail of the Scandinavian rocket currently sweeping around the world."

J & J Brook Ltd. opened their doors in January 1952 and at the time was one of the only, if not the only firm doing contemporary interior design in Canada," *Canadian Interiors* would reflect in 1965. When John Brook, who was born in Salmon Arm, British Columbia, in 1914, came of age in the nineteen-thirties, industrial design was so nascent in this country that there was not yet a program in the field offered at a Canadian university. Though Brook's inclinations might have been to become a Canadian Raymond Loewy or Henry Dreyfuss—U.S. industrial designers of the nineteen-thirties whose names became household words—he pragmatically majored in chemical engineering, earning his degree at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. But he was not a pragmatic man, he was an idealist; those he came to admire included Noam Chomsky, Maude Barlow, Mel Hurtig, Mel Watkins, and journalist Linda McQuaig. Like Toronto

architect Wilfred Shulman, he was a feisty N.D.P. supporter.

Brook met his future wife and partner, Joanne Price, in Niagara-on-the-Lake, where her family summered and she attended school part of the year. "I saw him at the first day of school, in flannels and a blazer, and I decided that was for me," Joanne said. The Price family's ancestors were Welsh, but Joanne, who was born in Cleveland in 1917, also had German blood on her mother's side. Her outlook was distinctly Canadian, the result of years of her time spent in Niagara-on-the-Lake, which, she recalls, had less pretence than now; it was "a little Irish town, dropped in the middle of nothing." She spent her youth in a state of flux, desperate not to return to Cleveland, and, casting about, found and took a design course in Toronto, "learning to make patterns for clothing. I tried very hard to get a job in that [garment] district on Spadina Avenue. I climbed up and down the street."

Completing her studies, she returned to Niagara-on-the-Lake. One day, in 1936, as the clock ran down ("I had twenty-four hours to get a job in Toronto or I'd have to go back to Cleveland"), Joanne bought a day-trip bus ticket and returned to her Oz. "I went to a lovely little [clothing] shop" on Avenue Road near the Park Plaza, Joanne remembered. It was directly across the street from the future location of J. & J. Brook. She got a job doing alterations. The next summer she sold woollens (New Brunswick handwoven skirts and sweaters) at that store and in Niagara, and learned that "I could sell anything, apparently." Perish the thought, thought Joanne Price—but this was not an unhandy skill in 1936, 1960, or 2001.

Some years before, a fellow Cleveland, Philip Johnson—who *The Conran Directory of Design* called a "socialite who became an architect and a creator of styles"—had put on his famous exhibit at New York's Museum of Modern Art, introducing the purity of European Modernism to North America. Joanne, mar-

ried by 1940 to John Brook, remembers nothing of it; that their taste was, if anything, Elizabethan—fussy and florid. But modern ideas would simmer everywhere during the war years, which the Brooks spent in Nobel, Ontario, near Parry Sound. John worked in the explosives factory there, and Joanne did the midnight shift in the plant hospital office.

After the Second World War, it was through John's brother Philip—an architecture student at the University of Toronto, where such luminaries as professor Eric Arthur taught the new Bauhaus principles—that modern design ideas filtered into John and Joanne Brook's consciousness.

Returning to Toronto, Philip lived for a time with the Brooks and his "contemporary architecture" came with him. John worked at Dow Chemical, establishing their national sales organization. After their second child was born, he was convinced his wife would go crazy staying home. "What about a loom?" Joanne remembers him asking. "I said, 'That would be stupid. You're still just looming away, all by yourself.' 'What

about screen printing?' And I didn't know what that was."

Few people outside design circles did, but silkscreening and block printing, both on paper and textile, were to modern graphics what oil paint and brush were to baroque canvases: a simple technique that produced instant results.

"So he started making screens and doing little squares. He did a design for a drapery fabric. We made all the curtains for the house." It was a bit like a yachtsman giving his wife a spinnaker: who was this really for? "One afternoon . . . Joanne Brook came home from a Niagara-on-the-Lake hospital with her new baby son, glanced downstairs and recoiled at the sight of a 30-foot table monopolizing her 30-foot basement," *Canadian Homes and Gardens* reported. "Joanne, an irrepressible brunette, passed the baby over to her husband John, propped her hands on her hips and inquired tartly, 'What are we going to do here—throw banquets?'" But "we were transplanted," said Joanne, "if this is what was going to happen—contemporary fabrics, not big floral English stuff.

"There was this viscous stuff, like custard," she remembered. "You'd pour it onto the screening table and, with a piece of wood, push it across. The goopy ink went through the screens where the pattern didn't block it out. For colour, you passed the fabric under several complementing screens that together created the whole."

Philip exhibited some J. & J. Brook fabrics with students' project designs at the University of Toronto, and soon Joanne Brook was making the rounds of the Toronto architectural offices, including Page & Steele, where Peter Dickinson first made a splash. Later, with his own office, "He sometimes failed to pay his bills promptly," Joanne said. "Colin Vaughan ran the office and he said to me, 'You know Peter.'"

In 1947, a friend of the Brooks, architect Bill Grierson, was scouting around for examples of good modern design for an exhibit at the University of Toronto's school of architecture, and picked some J. & J. Brook fabrics. Students liked what they saw, and soon Grierson was bringing a stream of young architects to the Brooks' home. The first big order, for



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fifty-five yards, came in from the head of the contract division of Eaton's College Street for a pattern called Flight. It was specified on a job at Malton Airport (now Pearson International). John Brook had worked the pattern out in his spare time. "They looked like geese in flight, but they could also be clouds, or something flying," Joanne remembered. With Flight, the Brooks' fledgling modern-design enterprise took off. In May of 1954, it was reported that "from a basement, they've graduated to a smart third-storey shop on Toronto's Avenue Road, tastefully furnished and temptingly draped with their upholstery and drapery fabrics. Seven years ago their taste was dyed-in-the-wool Elizabethan. Today they create only the most positive contemporary designs . . . to the uninitiated, some of those designs resemble the doodle you make on the wall of a phone booth. But even the confirmed critics of contemporary admit that they find the Brook creations pleasing, graceful, even entertaining."

Looking through the plate glass of the J. & J. Brook store in 1960, you see, further back and up a few steps, modern art on the nubby, exposed-brick walls. A photograph shows a boomerang-shaped ceramic sculpture hanging on the wall, perhaps for sale; there were often paintings—on this day perhaps on loan from nearby art dealer Av Isaacs—sometimes there were wall hangings by Karen Bulow, a Montreal weaver, one of the era's stars of Canadian textile design.

Interest in the line of fabrics had trickled down to the broader public. "'Tobacco Leaf' is much in favour," reported *Canadian Homes and Gardens* in a mention of one of John Brook's patterns, created, apparently, before the era of political correctness over smoking. "It is lovely in sandalwood with chocolate brown vein on natural, or blue grey with a bright citron vein. Designers Mr. and Mrs. John Brook have it in mushroom and black on

white in their living room." A design scholar would one day comment, "Tobacco Leaf has a bold and free-spirited style that is characteristic of the work of the husband-and-wife team operating as J & J Brook, whose draperies were admired for inventive design." By one account, Tobacco Leaf resulted when John "slapped a slice of wet rye bread on paper, admired the textured effect and turned it into a design."



Joanne Brook demonstrates screen printing at Simpson's Homemakers' Show in 1951.

"John is the designing genius of the team," the readers of *Canadian Homes and Gardens* were told in 1954. "He's a dark scholarly-looking man of 39 with a subtle sense of humour, just a trace of British accent acquired from ten years spent in England, and a talent for gleaning ideas from the most unlikely sources. . . . John feels that anyone, after sufficient contact with design, will develop an interest in good contemporary. You won't acquire it overnight and you can't learn it in school, he warns. But he believes its fresh creative forms—some of them, at least—will appeal to every person, depending on your inherent likes and dislikes."

The Brook designs caught the attention of the National Industrial Design Committee (later Council), a body set up in 1948 by the federal government to promote Canadian industry through better design. It operated under the auspices of the National Gallery of Canada, staging exhibits and opening permanent design centres as public showcases in several cities (in the nineteen-sixties, one would be

installed in the chic new Colonnade Building on Bloor Street). The council also published an annual design index of products judged to be outstanding.

John Brook's Manx—inspired by the coat of arms of the Isle of Man—Rush and Reed, Graphic, and Scrub Oak were early award-winners in the period. In 1956 alone, six fabric designs created for J. & J. Brook by Micheline Knaff won prizes and were listed in the design index:

Blockweave, Highlights, Elipse, Fiddlesticks, Weave, and Foliation. Those names aptly captured the simplicity of their rhythmically repeating, silkscreened, or woodblocked graphics. Others by John Brook included Galaxy, Squiggle, and the clever Thurber, which resembled the doodle-drawings by the famous cartoonist James Thurber.

"Yes, an engineer, designing fabrics," said Joanne. "That was post-war Modernism." John Brook quit Dow and put his chemical expertise into ink and textile production and, soon enough, industrial design itself.

Indeed, there was soon more going on at 33 Avenue Road than modern textiles. About those chairs in the window: in the nineteen-fifties, J. & J. Brook had added some famous lines of furniture—designs by Denmark's Hans Wegner, for instance, and Paul McCobb of the U.S. Joanne recalled that it wasn't much of a leap for John to start designing pieces himself. "We saw what people were doing with our draperies. We didn't, either one of us, have an interior design background, but we thought we could do as well." It wasn't unusual for the time. "Designers took on a myriad of roles. They crossed disciplines like design, engineering, production, and even marketing, engaging in unprecedented collaborations."

There exists a photograph, taken in 1999, of Rhea Shulman, wife of Wilfred Shulman, a University of Toronto-educated architect who designed apartment houses, sitting in her dining room on a three-legged Hans Wegner chair like the ones J. & J.

Brook sold. She is next to a blond wood dining-room sideboard without legs that hangs from the wall—an original J. & J. Brook piece. In the picture, her hands are blurred as she talks animatedly.

During the nineteen-fifties and sixties, Rhea Shulman sometimes stood on the sidewalk in front of J. & J. Brook just to see what was new. Her husband's office was in the modern building he had designed up the street at No. 99. She could walk a few steps from there, or from Bloor Street, with its clattering pre-war streetcars and stuffy traditional shops, to find in this storefront the sharpness, the newness, the optimism that radiated from post-war design.

The Hans Wegner chairs that J. & J. Brook sold were called "completely faultless" by Danish designer Paol Henningsen. Paul McCobb was Joanne Brook's own personal favourite. Said Rhea Shulman about J. & J. Brook: "They were, to our mind, the foremost designers and makers of modern furniture—a wonderful, wonderful design company."

By the mid-nineteen-fifties, much of the silkscreening was farmed out to Jimmy Farquahar, a screen-printer on

Front Street. The later furniture was usually made in Toronto, too. In the early nineteen-sixties, contracts from J. & J. Brook "sort of set me up in the business," remembered Gary Sonnenberg, owner of Craftwood Products, which manufactures for Herman Miller, among others, in 2001. He used to park his sunroof-equipped Volkswagen under the shade of a big tree in the gravel parking lot behind 33 Avenue Road.

Piece by piece, then, the Shulmans furnished their James Murray-designed, radiant-heated home in Moore Park, north of downtown, with Canadian modern furniture, much of it from J. & J. Brook. "All those young architects bought houses in that area that Jim designed for medium-priced, middle-class people," Joanne said.

As for that show window on Avenue Road, well, "It was a terrific window, marvellous window," said Joanne. "People used to get stuck in traffic, so there they would be, looking in. I kept making curtains for all those architects, which they wanted for their modern houses. Everybody was helping everybody else get this modern fling."

By 1960, J. & J. Brook, if it had been Toronto's pioneer in modern, was no longer the only game in town. Continuing north on Avenue Road, the modern shopper would have seen Herman Miller's own showroom, just south of Davenport Road; its display window—like J. & J. Brook's, tacked to an old Toronto Victorian—stocked with Charles Eames's new sculptural office furniture known as the Aluminum Group.

Herman Miller was based in Michigan, the world capital of borax by virtue of thick, hardwood forests that were turned into lumber, then, typically, frames for recliners and overstuffed couches. The company had deep roots there, but its products and policies evolved into the antithesis of overstuffed—there wasn't a ball of cotton batten attached to the fibreglass Eames shell chairs that would become twentieth-century icons. In the town of Zeeland, where Herman Miller was based, wood was not bolted into frames—it was defiantly moulded into sensuous, elastic-looking office screens, chairs, and cabinet doors.

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enue Road, in the pre-Bohemian, pre-chic Yorkville of 1960, Shelagh Stene was bringing in ever-sleeker teak from Scandinavia, and, in 1957, on Bloor Street, Georg Jensen, patriarch of Scandinavian modern and its more costly accessories, so thoroughly gutted and modernized his nineteenth-century shopfront to facilitate sales of silver and ceramics that, as late as the nineteen-eighties, architecture critic Patricia McHugh said it still looked good.

Readers of *Canadian Homes and Gardens* would have also known, from regular advertising, that the great American firm Knoll was purveying wiry Bertoia chairs and memorable credenzas from a shop uptown at Yonge and Eglinton ("WANT TO COME UP AND SEE MY FLORENCE KNOLL?" a *Globe and Mail* headline asked over an admiring story about them in 1998).

And, while the furniture department at the flagship Simpson's store on Queen Street might have seemed, to some, a likely borax desert, the fact was that for some time the masses had been invited, via newspaper and magazine ads, to check out Ruspan—"IT'S NEW . . . IT'S RIGHT"—the informal, even cartoonish furniture lines (splayed legs made pieces look apt to up and walk away) designed by Toronto's Russell Spanner. It was listed on the National Industrial Design Council's design index and manufactured at a plant on Elm Street in Toronto (the building later became part of the World's Biggest Bookstore). Ruspan became one of Simpson's most popular lines.

From its contract division, Simpson's sold other Canadian modern lines, such as desks designed by Dutch-born Jan Kuypers, and the chairs of Donald Strindley, first head of the National Industrial Design Council, both made by the Imperial Furniture company of Stratford, Ontario. Spanner notwithstanding, the truth was that airports, banks, museums, and office towers were the real market for modern furniture. At work, "durability and suitability were often

ranked higher than cost," and, in new showcase buildings, fussy Chippendale chairs seemed out of place—at least at the mid-point of the twentieth century.

Office buildings had complex needs, and interior designer Alison Hymas remembered specifying furniture from Knoll or Herman Miller for general purposes, "then I would design things that had to accommodate a special purpose." By the mid-nineteen-fifties, J. & J. Brook was doing the same thing, and even had a staff of its own designers, including Tony Wolfenden from



A 1959 view of J. & J. Brook's showroom and office at 33 Avenue Road.

Britain. Hymas remembered them as formidable competition, "a major force, progressive and aggressive."

The Brooks' Canadian interpretation of modern was straighter, squarer than the slim, sculptural, Swedish-modern teak of the Scandinavians. Canadian potter Mayta Markson thought it reflected typical "Canadian reserve," and liked it, though remembered Joanne Brook herself as a vivacious, "elegant, very beautiful woman." Canadian modern in general, and certainly the work of J. & J. Brook, was, for the most part, woodier, blonder, more informal than what American firms like Knoll (big on steel, leather, even marble) and Herman Miller (fibreglass, moulded plywood) were doing.

John Brook looked less severe than modern master Ludwig Mies van der Rohe in a thumbnail picture published with images of his Modulator office

grouping, a series in oiled walnut and brushed aluminum available with a matching \$29.50 (not cheap in those days) wastebasket. He is wearing large, light, fashionable glasses, with wavy hair and a dimpled chin.

Yet J. & J. Brook's office furniture may now be judged to be as squared and chiselled and metallic as van der Rohe's. J. & J. Brook's mid-nineteen-sixties Interchange series—chairs, coffee tables, and an unusual hybrid of the two, combining two seats and a seat-level table—were built around slim, squared,

chromed-metal frames. Pictures of the series, on file at the Toronto Design Exchange, show everything connected at right angles, except for the seat cushions, which were flat planes, tilted just so for comfort and dramatic effect.

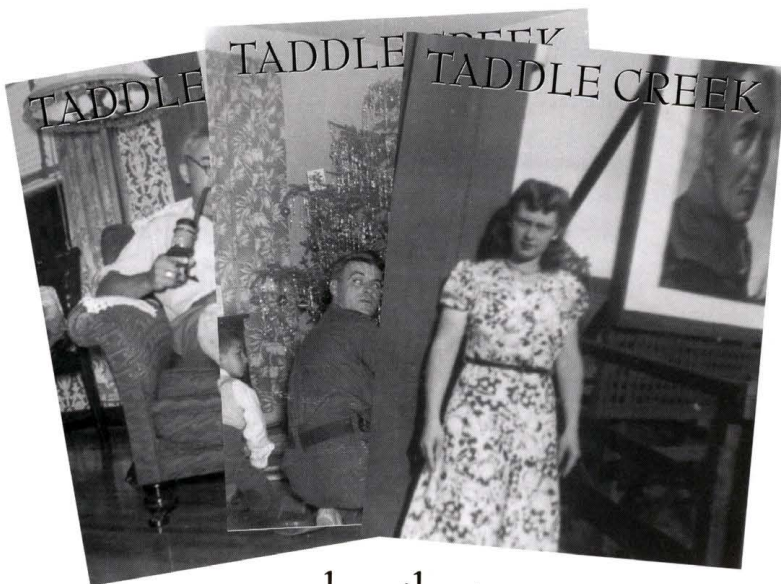
A catalogue of the early nineteen-sixties showed an extensive and sleek line of office-oriented furniture and accessories in the same spirit. They included various stacking chairs, the Graphic armchair, and a range of sculptural secretarial chairs. "Our biggest problem isn't

pushing Canadian designs on executives," John Brook was quoted saying in the *Toronto Star's Star Weekly* weekend magazine in March, 1962. "It's convincing them that their secretaries and wives aren't authorities on office interiors. They bring a residential taste to the office; they over-extend the nesting instinct. They like things too cozy."

The Interchange line's minimalism carried over into advertising. A 1966 ad in *Canadian Interiors*, part of a series, contained no descriptive text, just an image of the furniture, the words "DESIGNED BY J & J BROOK," and the name Contemporary Distribution, owned by J. & J. Brook.

The Brook's flagship product of the nineteen-sixties was the Tuxedo series—a rich, leathery, Miesian sofa chair group used in offices and homes.

George Baird, an up-and-coming young architect (later a professor at Harvard) bought one in 1963; a *Toronto Life* writer who saw it in his Annex home



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in 2001 commented, "its mid-century modern looks sit easily with two nearby Le Corbusier armchairs."

Joanne, who managed the large custom projects, such as the Union Carbide Building on uptown Eglinton Avenue around 1958, held fast to the tenets of Modernism—that, for instance, environments be fully designed, not mere containers into which anything at all was placed. "We feel very deeply that it is essential that the interior be a continuation of the architectural creative concept," she told *Canadian Interiors* in 1965. "More often than not we find the standard solutions unacceptable . . . We feel it necessary to interpret the client's physical and psychological needs in new creative ways, not making him uncomfortable but taking him much further than he would think he dared go."

Sometimes further.

For Union Carbide, "We commissioned a stainless-steel sculpture from an artist in upper New York state," Joanne remembered. Shaped like a Christmas tree, it was too much for the company's vice-president, who wouldn't allow it to be installed. (It was later installed in another J. & J. Brook project, the University of Waterloo's library in Waterloo, Ontario.)

Other clients of the Brooks included Canadian Kodak, Woodbine and Greenwood racetracks, and the Bank of Nova Scotia.






A celebrated event of the modern era was the Toronto City Hall competition—first, the worldwide contest to find an architect, but, later, as the building neared completion in 1964, the proposal-call to furnish its interior spaces and offices.

J. & J. Brook, through a partnership with manufacturer Sunar and Mitchell Houghton, was among the finalists, as were the contract divisions of Eaton's and Simpson's. The details of their proposals were dutifully laid out in the July, 1965, issue of *Canadian Interiors*; the Brook proposal played down flamboyancy—"the architecture had to be the prime visual statement," Joanne would write. Among the many ideas the Brooks offered up was a light, portable, moulded plywood shell chair with a sleigh-type runner base—the better to ease aldermen in and out of informal debate in the lounge of new City Hall's flying saucer-like main chamber.



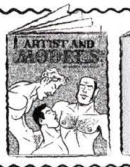


But the contract went to Knoll, de-

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spite its proposal being well over budget. “Just what is Knoll?” *Star* staff writer Frank Moritsugu asked, as the controversy bubbled in the spring of 1965. “Knoll is Rolls,” as in Royce, he learned. Decades later, noses all over the Canadian furniture industry were still out of joint. “You can do a terrific job at a million dollars more,” said Joanne. Yet, the Knoll pieces were mostly manufactured in Canada, prompting the authors of *Design in Canada*, a landmark history published in 2001, to write, “the implication was that Canadian companies were good enough to manufacture the furniture but not good enough to design it.” University of Toronto architecture professor Virginia Wright has called the furnishing of Toronto’s new City Hall “the country’s first, and to date only, public furniture scandal.” Mayor Phil Givens’s best answer at the time—not a bad one really—was simply, “Why, I find it [Knoll’s plan] beautiful . . . this is very hard to do. It would be like explaining love to you . . . It sends me . . . it grabs me . . . I mean it moves me.”

In the late nineteen-fifties, J. & J. Brook opened an office in Montreal, where Joanne had often bought art for the Toronto business and where, among other jobs, the company won contracts to decorate offices at I. M. Pei–designed Place Ville-Marie, Montreal’s flagship office complex. She remembered the Canadian Handicrafts Guild on Peel Street, not far from Place Ville-Marie, where “Eskimo art” (“That was what we called it at the time”) was sold. Though vernacular, it was cool, curvy and went beautifully with modern furniture.

And it was in Montreal, at Expo 67, held past the mid-point of the century that had been promised to Canada, that modern furniture would find its full expression, its high point, Joanne remembered. “Everybody I know from the design world in Toronto was down at Expo,” she said. “Some of them did the best work they ever did.”

That year, the *Star Weekly*—about as mainstream as media could get in Canada—published several articles on modern furniture at Expo, and a very mod double-page spread showing youthful men and women in tights dancing, phoning, spinning LPs, and exercising around knock-down furniture designed by Canadian Norman Strauss. Elsewhere, another lengthy spread was published on the designers of furniture used in various pavilions and displayed in model



The Brook-decorated lobby of Wilfred Shulman’s 206 St. George Street, circa 1952.

suites at Habitat, the Expo exhibit/housing project designed by Moshe Safdie, a McGill University architecture student. The likes of Alison Hymas, Jerry Adamson, Jacques Guillon, Sigrun Bulow-Hube, Hugh Spencer, Macy DuBois, Keith Muller, Michael Stewart, and Christen Sorensen were suddenly, if briefly, famous.

In the Expo afterglow, the public’s sensibilities seemed transformed.

In 1959, the *Star*’s Gordon McCaffrey, a youthful reporter with an interest in design and Hans Wegner chairs in his home, had lamented in a story that “what Canadians apparently like is the garish, the glittering, and the gaudy.”⁴⁷

This was not apparently the case in 1967. “In the verdant corner of western Ontario around Kitchener, Waterloo and Stratford, you can find towns with whole neighborhoods dominated by brooding, red brick hulks, grimy from a hundred years or more of stubborn, four-square survival,” James Purdie wrote in his *Star Weekly* home-design column, taking stock

on events. “These are Ontario’s original furniture factories. In some of them, sons and grandsons are still looking through catalogues of their fathers for design ideas, while works foremen take a leg from any table, an arm from any chair, and put them together for next season’s ‘trend’—a trend which, we can now hope, will never come to pass.”

“One of the most important achievements of Expo has been its disclosure that Canada has some of the world’s best product designers,” designer Harris Mitchell wrote in *Canadian Homes and Gardens*. “[T]his is the shape of things to come.”

Hardly noticed by the brave designers who now saw before them one continuous march into the future, was a gradual, subtle shift.

You might have spotted the shift—so to speak—as close as the Expo parking lot, in people’s cars. Artificial wood, a newish but not modern material that simulated the stuffy, the old, was gaining space on the dash, on the door panels, in the interiors of this most technological, more

typically forward-looking of possessions.

The truly astute might have seen the signs before Expo. Hindsight suggests they were visible in the Eaton’s catalogue, for instance, where, in the mid-nineteen-sixties, fussy, gold-trimmed, traditional dinnerware was once again displacing the spare modernist wares of England’s Midwinter or Eva Zeisel’s Hallcraft in the U.S., whose styles were the rage a few years before.

You could have seen the shift on St. George Street in Toronto. So recently it had been the harbinger of Modernism in the city, a boulevard of brave new apartment houses by architects the likes of George Boake, Leo Venchiarutti, and Rhea Shulman’s husband, Wilf, all brash, young University of Toronto graduates. But, by 1964, their more flamboyant colleague Uno Prii—no devotee of the Bauhaus, but a very popular contemporary architect—was erecting, along St. George, brand-new apartment houses in Spanish styles. They featured dark, warmed-toned brick, arches, and brass

sconces with wavy yellow glass guarding their entrances.

Barely discernable in their day, these disparate circumstances foretold how Modernism—a set of principles backed by what people thought were important truths about materials, philosophy, functions—was sliding. Signs that, to the public, modern was falling back to being just another style.

In January, 1968, at the Canadian Furniture Mart at Exhibition Place in Toronto, Luigi Torti and Angela Lettieri, soon to be married, “spotted the sofa they would like to have in their first living room. In a rich brocade, with the Italian provincial lines they like,” the *Star* reported. At the same show, a Canadian firm displayed a new series, Le Moyne, which was “based on furniture fashions of New France 300 of years ago . . . The series is made of spiced maple. Pin knots and other little distressed wood touches are left to complete the rustic look. . . . Another interesting exhibition is the Hauser Ironworks’ showing of a Spanish dining room.”

Norman Hay, head of design at Expo 67, would later wonder whether the fair had not been the beginning of an era, but the end of one. “Striking are the many references to the numbers of ordinary Canadians who would patiently line up to see specially mounted displays of new [modern] furniture. By the tens of thousands we would be entranced by the streamlined simplicity of these model rooms,” one reviewer wrote, after reading Virginia Wright’s history, *Modern Furniture in Canada*. “Sadly, one is led to consider just how many would turn out today.”

Reflecting on the 1999 demolition of the J. & J. Brook—outfitted Union Carbide Building, a particularly elegant modern-era piece, Joanne mused about what happens to the furniture when a building like that is decommissioned. “It’d be interesting to know, wouldn’t it?” The answer lay, to an extent, on web sites like eBay, where old modern furniture is auctioned off as retro, fetching hefty prices, not to mention Queen Street in Toronto, where chic shops with names like Red Indian and Ethel do brisk trade in modern, new and used, high-style and low. And at retail stores like Caban, where repro modern pieces are sold for more than the originals, their attributes appreciated—now as then



An armless high back by J. & J. Brook.

perhaps—by a discerning but limited portion of the public.

The life of J. & J. Brook bracketed the true modern era almost exactly. The store, moved from Avenue Road to 66 Yorkville Avenue, closed in 1976. The firm’s last large commission was the new *Toronto Star* building at 1 Yonge Street, a complex undertaking, much altered by 2001. Its unsung masterpiece—the huge, colourful wall-hanging in the lobby, suggesting the flow of ink through presses—was commissioned by Joanne Brook. The artist was Quebec-based Mariette Rousseau-Vermette, creator of theatre curtains at such venues as the National Arts Centre, Place des Arts in Montreal, and the Eisenhower Theater in Washington, D.C.

In the nineteen-seventies, Joanne was contracted by Imperial Oil, handed a half-million-dollar budget, and sent across Canada to buy original Canadian paintings for Esso’s new building in Calgary.

For John Brook, who his wife said had an insatiable appetite for projects, there were many: a line of pottery, designs for jewellery, and Pax Design, a sort of Canadian Georg Jensen, a store in Yorkville that sold native arts and crafts and beautiful imported gifts, all in a modern vein. It survived into the early nineteen-eighties. Not many of these made money apparently; one observer suggested as early as 1962 that John Brook’s success was “more esthetic than financial,” if influential. He “has encouraged others to design and make Canadian office furnishings.”

In the early nineteen-nineties, John

wrote a book, *Jobs: That’s “What Matters,”* attacking the policies of former prime minister Brian Mulroney. Also in that decade, the Brooks lived for a time in Alberta, where John developed training programs for oil and cement companies. He died in 1997.

Public taste moved on, and on, and sometimes went backward. Briefly to post-Modernism, with its tongue-in-cheek historical appliqué, seen mostly on skyscrapers. More permanently, among the wider public, to retro château style, seen on gaudy “monster” or “trophy” homes, built in various grades in subdivisions across the land. The furniture was like the sport-utility vehicles in their driveways—ill proportioned, expensive, and mostly symbolic in purpose.

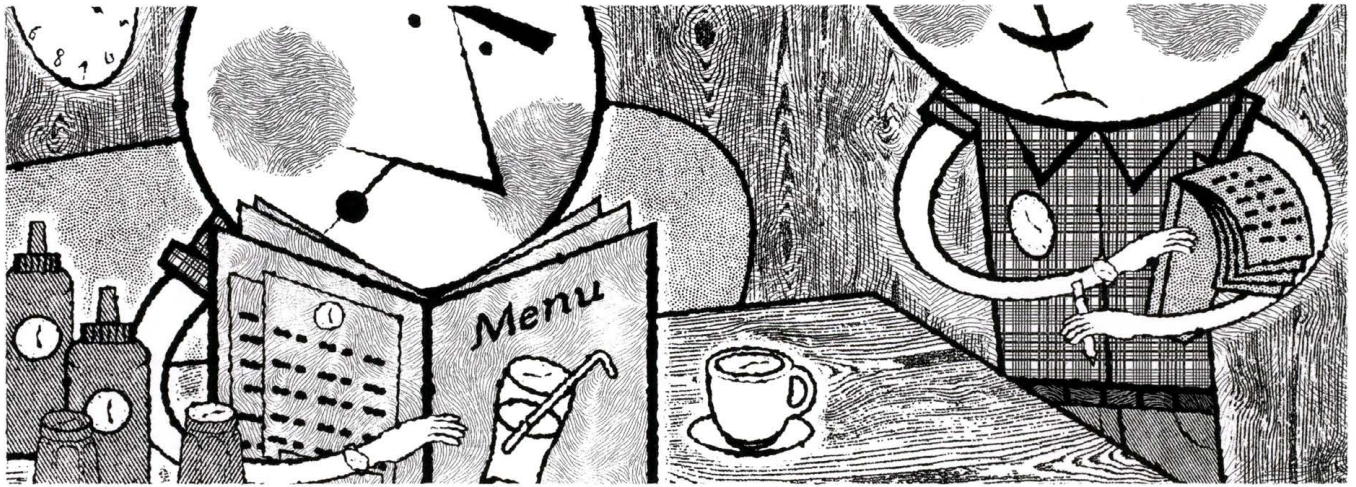
“What happened?” wondered Joanne Brook in 2001, in her uptown apartment, surrounded by prototype chairs, antiques, Canadian art, and sculpture. No one would have imagined this future, certainly no one looking in the window of J. & J. Brook on Avenue Road in Toronto in 1960.

They knew what the future would be. It had arrived—it was displayed there in front of them. In furniture that was to the home and office what Brubeck was to jazz or jets to air travel or colour to television—inevitable, true, timeless, beautiful.

Alfred Holden is assistant financial editor of the Toronto Star, “City Building” columnist for the Annex Gleaner, and a regular contributor to Taddle Creek. His Christmas, 2000, Taddle Creek essay, “The Streamlined Man,” was nominated for a 2000 National Magazine Award.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author is grateful to: Rhea Shulman, who first mentioned J. & J. Brook and was interviewed for this essay in June, 1999; Joanne Brook, who gave interviews from July to November, 2001, served tea, and showed her modern furniture; Rachel Gotlieb, of the Toronto Design Exchange, who offered materials and photographs; the City of Toronto Archives, for images; Alison Hymas and Av Isaacs, who gave interviews in July, 2001; Gary Sonnenberg, who was interviewed in October, 2001; and the *Toronto Star* library. In addition to the above, the following sources were used extensively: *Design in Canada*, by Rachel Gotlieb and Cora Golden; *Modern Furniture in Canada*, by Virginia Wright; *Sight Lines*, by Adele Freedman; *The Conran Directory of Design*, by Stephen Bayley; *Toronto Architecture: A City Guide*, by Patricia McHugh; *Toronto Star* (2/10/59, 10/9/59, 3/3/62, 5/1/65, 9/7/67, 1/9/68); *Toronto Telegram* (1/11/68); *Canadian Interiors* (11/65); *Canadian Homes and Gardens* (6/53, 5/54, 9/67); and *Toronto Life* (11/01).



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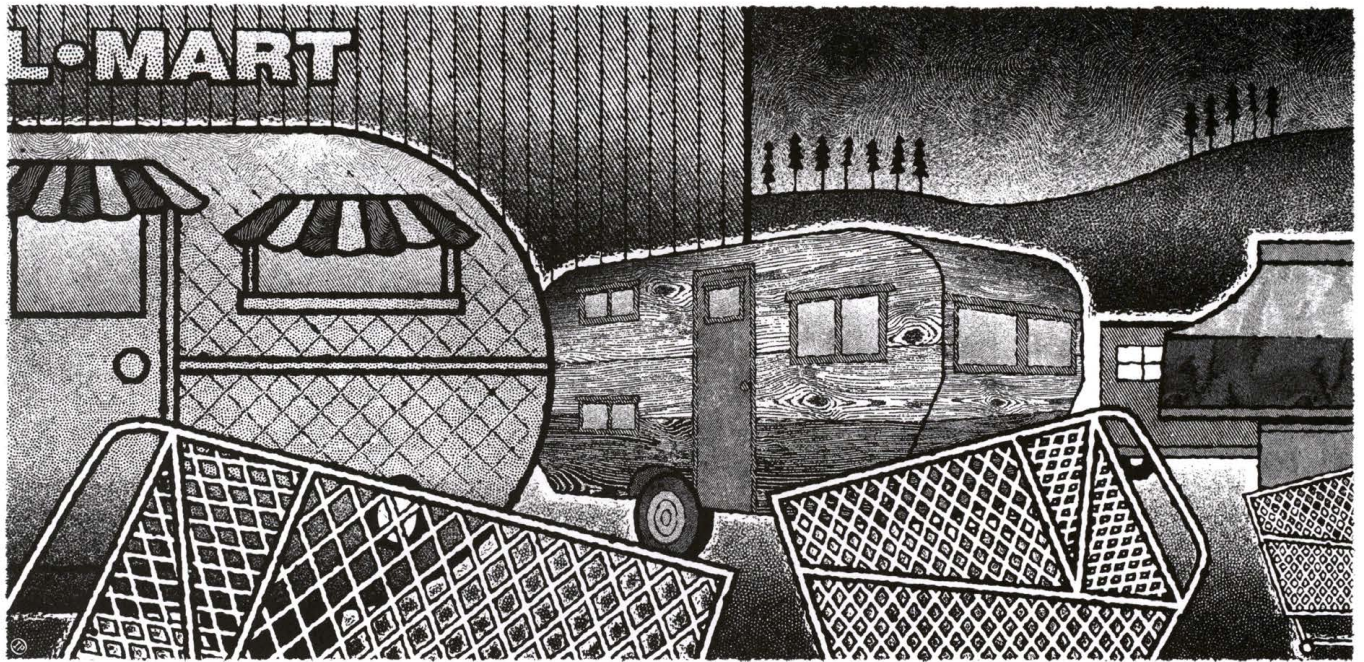
FICTION BY STAN ROGAL

He leaves his room: locks the door, steps down the stairs, enters the street. At the sidewalk, he brushes his jacket, straightens his tie, buffs his shoes on his pant leg, steers clear of litter, dodges doggie droppings—"Uhh. Lousy mutt."—and alertly evades every crack. He checks his watch. "Be right on time." Arriving at the corner, he tilts his face toward a large clock, then again checks his watch. "Damn." He raises his wrist to his ear, listens, shakes his wrist, listens. He adjusts his watch. "Damn. Now how the . . .?" He spins on his heels as if to return to his apartment, sighs, spins again. He crosses a street, enters a café, orders coffee and bran muffins. He reads a paper. Finishing his second cup of coffee and the last bite of muffin, he neatly folds the paper, places it on the counter, peers up, and spots a clock. "What . . .?" He twists his wrist, reads the time, compares his watch with the clock on the wall. He taps the watch crystal. He bends his ear to his wrist and listens. His eyes travel back and forth from the clock to the watch, from the watch to the clock. "Then, I wasn't late. I'm late now." He adjusts his watch. He pays and leaves. In the doorway, his head turns left, right, homeward. He checks the time, scratches his head, smiles, shrugs, reaches into his pocket and produces a coin. The coin flips, lands, is returned to his pocket. He points right, walks, sniffs the air, and gazes into the shop windows: books, clothing, hardware,

groceries, bathroom accessories, and . . . a clock. He stops, checks his watch, compares, shakes his head, and adjusts his watch. He returns to the café, sits in a booth, orders the veal cutlet special with milk, coffee, and rice pudding. He eats slowly, finishes, pays the bill, and exits. At the door, he stares left, right, homeward. A horn blasts from the left. He turns and follows the sound around the corner. For a few blocks, his legs stretch in long, even measures. At an intersection, he stops in front of a clock. He reads the time, compares it with his own, and adjusts his watch. He swivels his head, locates a restaurant, and hurries to the door. It is locked. He searches for a sign listing the hours of business, discovers one, reads, checks his watch, and tries the door again. He rattles the doorknob, bangs on the window, flashes his watch. No one answers. The place remains dark. He whirls, sees a second restaurant across the street, makes a face, and winds through the traffic. He enters the restaurant, orders spaghetti and ribs, a flagon of red wine, and salad—no garlic bread. He eats. The waiter takes the empty plate. The man calls for coffee, spumoni ice cream, and a brandy. After two brandies, he licks his lips, burps lightly, excuses himself to no one in particular, dabs his mouth, and pays. "Excuse me . . . but could you tell me the time?" "Eleven-thirty," says the waiter. The man looks at his watch, adjusts the time, yawns, curls up in the

booth, and sleeps. Two waiters and the manager form a half-circle at his table. They try to wake him with pleas and pokes. They shake him. No luck. The waiters grab his legs and slide him out of the booth while the manager waits to secure his head and shoulders. They pick him up, carry him to the door, and toss him unceremoniously into the street. He wakes up, opens his eyes, squints, cringes, shields his eyes from the bright sun. He feels for his watch—the crystal is shattered, the hands bent uselessly. The man leaps to his feet, spins, presses his fingers to his temples, and races down the street. Reaching a corner, he skids to a halt and freezes; feet spread, legs locked. His palms fly away from his head stretching his arms straight out from his body. For a moment, he stands immobile, trapped like da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*, in a small circle of space. Then, his thin arms begin to revolve slowly, slowly, slowly . . . ticking out precise seconds, minutes, hours. His face is black, his eyes are fixed as his body aims directly toward a tall, concrete tower upon which rests a massive round clock with brilliant gold numerals and no hands.

Stan Rogal lives in Bloorcourt Village. He is the author of six books of poetry, two novels, and two short story collections. His next novel, Moon in My Pocket, will be published by Insomniac in fall, 2002. His work has appeared in numerous journals, including the Fiddlehead, Grain, Quarry, Prairie Fire, and Rampike.



CAMPING AT WAL-MART

FICTION BY ANIA SZADO

Eureka parked the Airstream too close to the garbage Dumpster and she's too stubborn to move it, even though at night half the neighbourhood comes driving up with their headlights off to slip their trash bags in with Wal-Mart's.

"I can't believe it," I tell Eureka. "Can't these people wait for garbage day?"

"Oh, Evelyn, it's summer," she says, as if I can't *smell* that it's summer, "and they probably got their garbage pickup cut to once a week."

Eureka thinks nothing of changing towns once a week, taking her whole life with her, but she don't think it's strange that those people can't handle a change in their garbage pickup. Eureka's from the that's-just-the-way-God-made-them school. It's always, "Settle down now, Evelyn! No reason to get in a flap! That's just the way God made that lady driver. She's going places, that little lady. Nothing we can do about it."

Mouth the words with me: *Nothing we can do about it. That's just the way God made her.*

I'm gonna tell you something that Eureka doesn't know I know. This is it right here: Eureka doesn't even *believe* in God!

I wish I could really ask Eureka, *If you don't believe in God, then who did make that little lady and all those fine people out there?*

But I can't ask her, because Eureka is a recovering alcoholic, and to keep on being a recovering alcoholic, she's not allowed to not believe in God. That's why it's a secret.

Eureka lets things be what they are. She's really my granny, but she's been watching me for years. I'm gonna be fourteen soon—as old as my mom, Cathy, was when I was born. When I was almost thirteen, Cathy said she was gonna leave town and take me with her—"Little Evvy" she called me, even if I'm taller than her now, I bet—so Eureka just walked out and started up the truck with the Airstream hitched on, and I hopped in right beside her, because ever since Eureka got to be a recovering alcoholic I've had to keep a close eye on her.

Our first night at this Wal-Mart, someone knocked at the door, and I started staring at Eureka like we were in trouble for sure. But she just waddled over, wiping her hands on her dress, and crouched down at the door with a friendly smile, and I could just see below her jiggly arm that a nice looking guy was there, and his girlfriend was waiting on his motorcycle. And he said, "Hi. I was admiring your trailer. You folks come all the way from the coast? I wouldn't mind

making you an offer if you're thinking of putting down roots here. Always wanted an Airstream."

I know this trailer is a collector's item. When we stop in cities there's people that always stare. They look at us like we don't deserve it, too, just because Eureka's so wide and I'm, whatever, scrawny, or maybe I don't wear makeup so I don't look like a model yet, which is what I'm gonna be when Eureka lets me. Eureka's careful, and that's why the Airstream still looks so nice, and still a bit shiny, and not hardly dented, and why I'm not a model yet. I know those people might look nicer than us with an Airstream trailer, but that don't bother me, because one day I'm gonna look nice too, sitting here, right here, all alone in the driver's seat, hauling this hunk of aluminum all over the country.

The other time my mom said she was gonna take me and go somewhere, just me and her, and Eureka said, "No way, Jose," in her calm voice like vanilla pudding, Cathy yelled real loud, "It's my goddamn, God-given right," and Eureka said, "There ain't no such thing."

That was my first clue. After that, I watched Eureka pretty close.

We are not the only people in this parking lot. There's a family with a tent trailer across the lot. They shop all day and put the tent up at night. They never seem to buy anything, but I've seen them waiting for the doors to open in the morning.

I think our truck has broken down again. We've been camping here for six days now, and the only time Eureka stays somewhere so long is when there's no gas or the engine's busted. Mostly she'll find someone, maybe someone from the back warehouse or a hardware store, or one time it was a guy from a slaughterhouse, someone who knows about motors, and they'll just fix it for her. She says big men like big engines and they're happy to help. She sends me shopping or walking a while, but I know what's up. First they tinker with the engine, then they fiddle with Eureka.

Eureka says we might have to go meet those people with the tent trailer, because it would be the neighbourly thing to do. I just look at Eureka like she's nuts.

O.K., I'm gonna tell you a sad story and it's totally true. There's two girls living in that tent trailer with their dad and his girlfriend, and they never, ever, if you can believe it, lived anywhere else. Jennifer told me. She's nine, which isn't as bad as it sounds.

Eureka made me go and talk to them after I got back from the store. She always sends me shopping when we need toilet paper or cheesy crackers or whatever. She always says I'm so skinny that if someone looks at me I should just turn sideways and I will disappear. That's not true, though, because my shopping jacket is pretty baggy.

When I got back from Wal-Mart, those girls' dad was by the Airstream. Jenn and Reba were hanging out, staring at me, and Eureka said all happy, "Evelyn, honey, these girls can't wait all day! Off you go back to the store with them and have yourselves a nice time." She looked like she was gonna give me some money, but she just squeezed my hand.

Jenn says her dad's girlfriend sleeps all day in the car and her dad always says not to wake her. How can someone sleep all day for nine years in a row?

There was another clue right as soon as we stopped in our first town. Eureka left the keys in the washroom at the truck stop and a lady came run-

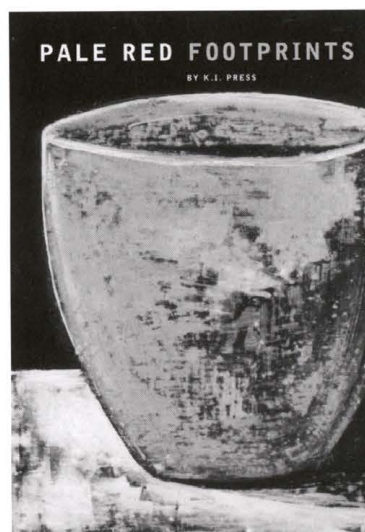
PALE RED FOOTPRINTS

poems by
K.I. PRESS

"...forming these letters/is
translation...across/generations,
grandfathers to granddaughters,
from you Pèpere, through my mother,
through the air/...from the paper dead/
to the paper living"

P

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ning out after her—actually a real lady with little heels and a little jacket that matched her dress—and after she gave the keys to Eureka and Eureka opened the truck door, the lady just stood there looking at her and at me. Then she reached into her purse and pulled out the Holy Bible, and she said in her pretty voice, “In the Scriptures, the good Lord tells us—” And Eureka didn’t even let that lady finish. She just climbed in and closed the door.

Jenn is tiny. She’s almost as short as Reba, who is only seven, but she’s smarter. When I ask her, “How come the shopping carts don’t roll down the moov-a-tor?”—that’s what she calls the flat escalator that goes to the basement level—she looks at me like I am so dumb. I say we should go down and up again so we can make sure Reba isn’t following us. But really it’s so I can get another look at the wheels on those carts.

Halfway down, I stretch my arms out along the moving handrail and say, “I’m going to be a model, you know.”

“You’re too short.”

“Eureka thinks I’m tall as anything,” I say.

“You just think you’re tall because your dress is too small,” Jenn says. “Your sleeves are too short. Your arms hang out like a monkey. And I can see your underwear.”

I drop my arms and hold my dress lower. I’m mad at Jenn now. I forget about the shopping carts. I move my eyes around, looking for a mirror. At the bottom of the escalator, Jenn walks off first. It takes ages for us to pass a mir-

ror, then all I see is my face, looking almost like a crybaby.

Jenn stops in the girls’ department and smiles at me. “Let’s pick out something nice for you.” She smiles at me for a long time.

I want to hug her.

I hardly even look at the dresses Jenn points out. I’m thinking I could live in that trailer with her, and she could dress me up and go to model go-sees with me. She could even sign my pictures for me, the ones I send to boys who write, if they write nice things. I keep on thinking about it all the way up to the main floor. I don’t even know which dress Jenn has under her sweatshirt when we burst out into the parking lot. She’s giggling, so I do too.

In the Airstream, Eureka is sleeping. I strip down to my underpants and Jenn helps me wiggle into my new dress. It’s navy blue, with pleats that start at a white ribbon below my chest and go all the way down. The hem zigzags just above my knees. Jenn closes the buttons in the back then stands behind me without saying anything. I don’t know what to say, either. I can feel Jenn’s breath on my neck. I can smell the sweat from her. My arms are locked to my sides, pressing everything inside me into a tight, hot bundle. It takes me a minute to realize that Jenn is holding them there. The insides of her elbows are damp where they cross over my arms. Her hands are flattening the pleats over my belly. Her little body is pressed against mine and the posts of the buttons are pushing into my back, up and down my

spine. It takes me a minute to really know all that.

By then, she’s already out the door.

This morning the stink is gone from the Dumpster, just like that. It’s a cool morning, a bit windy. Eureka says we’re leaving. It’s my birthday, but Eureka’s tired. She woke up and said she feels old today, but she didn’t say, “How you feeling, Evelyn?”

She didn’t notice that I’m older today.

Across the parking lot, Jenn is sitting on the hood of her car with her legs dangling down. Reba is sticking stones in Jenn’s sandals, under her toes, and Jenn’s feet are jumping.

Jenn slides off the car and Reba begins to run. Jenn runs after her. Their mouths are open. They are laughing. They look very far away.

Eureka turns the key and the engine starts up. I’m still standing at the Airstream window in my nightgown when we start to move.

I think I will stand here all day today, like a photograph going by. I’ll take a marker and write on the window: “MISSING.” Let Eureka drive up front while my face and my word flash by all the people on all the sidewalks.

Years from now, those folks will still be looking for me. They’ll see my real picture, my model picture, and say, “I’ve seen her face before; before she started wearing that navy dress.”

The dress is under my mattress. It’s flat, still asleep.

Ania Szado lives east of the Danforth area. Her fiction has appeared in This, Lichen, and (Ex)cite.

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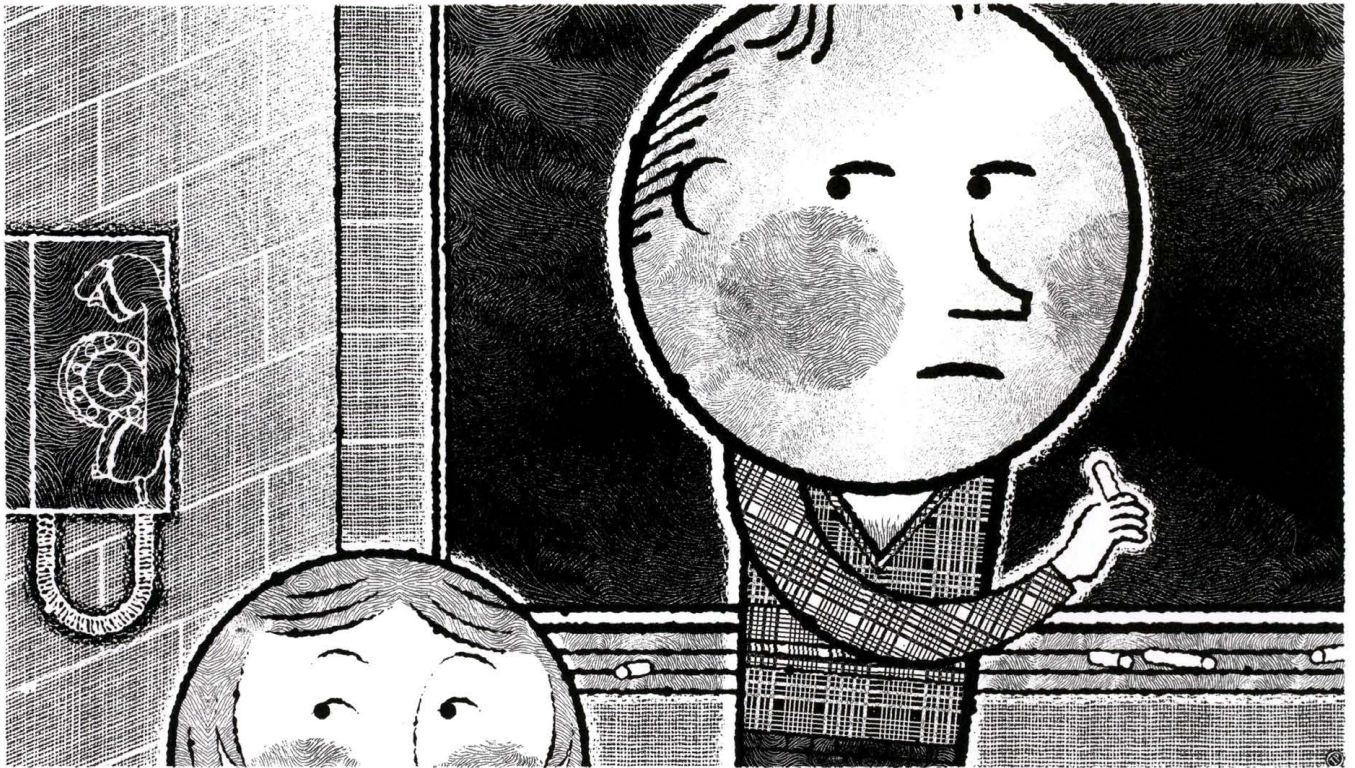
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ROLLING PENNIES

FICTION BY DIANNE SCOTT

The classroom was quiet except for the rustle of turning test pages and the hiss of steam through the metal radiators beneath the windows. The grey-white sky pressed against the thick glass panes that lined one side of the classroom. In the distance, a snowplow's blade could be heard scraping away the morning's cover of snow from the school parking lot, and then silence as it dumped its load onto a hulking mound on the lot's perimeter.

Click . . . clink.

Jenny Warren's pen paused at the sound. She didn't look up, even when she heard another *click* as a coin hit the metal leg of her chair, wobbled for a few seconds, and then fell with a *clink* onto the scuffed tile floor.

She sat at the front of the class, facing the chalkboard, her desk pressed against Mr. Alman's hulking oak desk. From this vantage she could easily read—upside down—her teacher's attendance records, marks sheets, and daily lesson plans written in bright green ink. Today, his agenda read, "Per.3—Gr.10 Drama

Test: Shakespeare, Marlowe and Elizabethan theatre."

Jenny continued her answer to the question, "Give three reasons why *Romeo and Juliet* is considered a tragedy," as she tried to ignore Bradley Townson and his buddies.

Because Romeo and Juliet died.

This seemed too simple. Does death make it tragic? Sometimes death seemed the right answer, easier than life.

Click . . . clink.

Mr. Alman looked up from the paper he was marking. Jenny could tell he recognized the sound of the coins Bradley was rolling down the aisle from his seat at the back of the class. Throwing money at her. Pennies for the whore.

Jenny shook her head slightly at Mr. Alman, signaling him to ignore it.

Mr. Alman looked past Jenny at the window seats near the back, where a group of male students sat around Bradley Townson like a rugby scrum. The rest of the students were scattered throughout the room. The two female students, Sarah and Ashley, were seated

by the bulletin board to the left of the door. Behind the two girls, the classroom veered into an "L" where the outline of a small stage, several chairs, and props could be seen in the unlit darkness.

Jenny watched Mr. Alman. She used to think her teacher was good-looking, for an older guy. He was in his late thirties, tall and slim, with light green eyes and butterscotch hair sheared short to the scalp. His lips barely covered big, white teeth. She used to see him last year when she was in Grade 9, smiling as he greeted students in the hall.

Mr. Alman stood up, smoothed his wool sweater over his corduroys, grabbed his chair, and plunked it down beside Jenny's desk. He stared down the aisle at Bradley and his circle of friends, most of who played on the Kilmore Collegiate hockey team. Bradley, Jimmy, and Alan were all first liners, even though they were only juniors.

Jenny tried to act as if whatever Mr. Alman was doing had nothing to do with her, but she couldn't help glancing over her shoulder. Jimmy and Alan and the

rest of the guys were scrunched over their tests, avoiding Mr. Alman's glance. Bradley lounged in his desk, his bulk overlapping the chair as if it were toddler furniture. He stared with flat brown eyes, the muscles in his temples working as he chewed a wad of gum. He pulled a coin from the pocket of his Kilmore Knights leather hockey jacket, showed it to Mr. Alman as if he were going to do a magic trick and placed it on the corner of his desk. Smirking, he pulled the test toward him.

It was just money being thrown at her, Jenny told herself.

Sometimes, at the end of class, a handful of scattered coppers surrounded her seat. After everyone had left, including Mr. Alman, Jenny would scout around and retrieve the pennies. She would throw the handful of change into the garbage as she exited the class, the coins sounding like pellet gun spray as they hit the metal container. She would go wash her hands, scrubbing them until her knuckles showed pink through the suds.

One time, Mr. Alman noticed the change under her desk, scooped up the money, looked at Bradley, and said with a smirk, "Thanks. I'll use it this weekend." Bradley's expression went flat. There were no rolling pennies for a week after that.

It was worse outside the classroom. Bradley and his friends waited for her at her locker, hooting and grabbing themselves when they saw her, following her as she turned around, making sucking sounds and asking how much it cost for some head.

Sometimes, Bradley stepped in front of her as she descended the long staircase in front of the school, blocking her, while her mother peered over her steering wheel at the bottom of the sloping hill, wondering what was taking her so long.

So maybe it would only be rolling pennies today. At least she had Mr. Alman sitting beside her, watching out for her.

Jenny turned to Question 4: "How was Marlowe's playwriting influenced by the environment (social, economic, religious) of the 17th century?"

It was a very Christian society, Jenny wrote, and tucked a strand of blond hair behind her ear. She thought about the signs welcoming newcomers into the town of Kilmore: Green Valley Protestant, Kilmore Pentecostal Baptist, St. Theresa's Catholic, Gillian's United,

and Good News Gospel—over ten churches for a town of eight thousand people. Usually, she didn't mind going to Green Valley with her parents and little brother, but she was worried now that people at church might hear the rumours.

Jenny turned back to her test and continued writing. *So in plays like Marlowe's Doctor Faustus, evil is punished.*

Jenny paused. Was she bad? Is that why Bradley Townson picked on her? Punished her? Did she wear her clothes too tight? Was she really a whore?

She hadn't even had a boyfriend this year. Or done any of the things he said she did.

But Jenny knew that Bradley sensed

something the first day of drama class seven weeks ago. He knew that she wasn't that smart. That she would be easy to pick on. That she wanted people to like her. That she was afraid.

Mr. Alman had tried to do something. If Jenny had known her teacher was going to tell the vice-principal, she never would have met with him after school. Mr. Alman made her repeat all the things that had been whispered in her ear, or scratched on her locker—words like

whore and *slut* and *bitch*. He was so nice that Jenny showed him the drawing that had been left in her desk that she had been too afraid to remove. A girl with shoulder-length hair lay on



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WHERE HAVE ALL THE JOHNNY COWBOYS GONE

"The trouble with you is you don't love me."—*Kevin Quain.*

I've discovered recently
that the Devil is really just
Death in disguise;
Death and I go out for
coffee every afternoon, and he
tells me how much
he hates his job,
never gets a vacation,
and the pay just doesn't make
up for it—and he only gets
to do a little devil work
on the side, people
do enough of it
on their own

he tells me my days
are numbered if I stay with you,
losing a pint or two of blood
every week from sewing your clothes
and giving in to your fetishes

So I pack my bags, me and
Death hit the highway for Vegas—
he's always had a dream of
retiring as an Elvis impersonator,
and I'd be quite content
playing poker all day and
looking for my Nevada cowboy—
who only ties up horses
and knows how to treat a lady

— SHELAGH M. ROWAN-LEGG

her back smiling, as a guy with a big oval penis lay on top of her. To the right of the figures, five stick men waited in line.

She should have known better. Vice-principal Leedle told Mr. Townson, Bradley's father. Mr. Townson was the head of boys' physical education at the school. He was also the coach of the Kilmore Knights hockey team, the school team that had made it to the provincial championships three years in a row.

Everyone knew nobody messed with Mr. Townson, or with his son, the hockey champ. Everyone except Mr. Alman.

Jenny shook her head and looked down

at her test paper. She continued her response to Question 4:

It was a very social environment. The kings and queens would listen to concerts or see a play. But not everyone thought plays were good. Some thought them dirty. Anyway, Marlowe and Shakespeare wrote mostly about wealthy people and earls and kings in their plays.

Some of the girls thought she was dirty now too. Her friends she had known from Pleasantview Elementary School, the school her brother went to now, peeled away from her as soon as they saw Brad's gang coming down the hall. They tried to be helpful at first. But even Calli, her best friend, began to phone her less, and

sometimes avoided her at lunch. Jenny worried that Rosa, Kathy, and Calli believed the rumours. They said they didn't, but who knew. Now they said hi to Jenny in the hall and maybe sat with her once or twice a week at lunch. Jenny was too scared to complain, in case they abandoned her completely.

Mr. Alman coughed. Jenny looked up. Mr. Alman's right elbow almost touched the crooked elbow of her writing hand. She scraped her chair to the left. Mr. Alman glanced at the increased space between them.

Jenny tried not to be grossed out by Mr. Alman. At first, she didn't believe what everyone was saying—that he lived with a man over in Bainbridge. That he had been seen shopping in the IGA with his boyfriend over the March break. She pictured Mr. Alman leaning over and kissing this man, sticking his tongue in the man's mouth, and she knew, without even having to ask God, or her mother, that it was wrong.

He was the only one who knew what was going on and didn't ignore it or laugh or think she must be a slut. But he was a homosexual. If everyone thought she was dirty, then what was Mr. Alman? A man who liked it up the bum.

"Fifteen more minutes, everyone," Mr. Alman called out. The class shifted in their seats. Mr. Alman smiled at Jenny and she looked quickly back at her test.

He tried to make Jenny tell her parents about Bradley and his friends, even before he went to the vice-principal; to get her parents to phone the Townsons. Or talk to the principal, Mr. Handsel.

Then, two weeks ago, Mr. Alman phoned home and spoke with her mother. Jenny spent an hour explaining to her mom that Mr. Alman was concerned because there were only three girls in the drama class. That he just worried a lot. The guys liked to tease her, but it was for fun. Just like when her brother, Paul, bugged her.

She was so mad at Mr. Alman that she didn't go to school that Thursday or Friday, telling her mom that she had period cramps. She lounged in bed listening to Madonna, playing with their dog, Rufus, and making a 3-D puzzle of a castle with her brother. Jenny's mom liked her around because Jenny could help with dinner and take care of Paul if her mom had to go see one of her clients. Her mom did the accounting books for some of the farmers in the area. Her dad was away in

town all day, working in the municipal utilities office.

Jenny did go back to school when she heard about the graffiti. Calli phoned her that weekend to tell her about the words spray-painted across one of the red-bricked walls of the gym. Last Monday, Jenny sidetracked around the left side of the school, following the path made by smokers, to see it herself. In thick red letters, each three feet high, were the words "FAGGOTS GO TO HELL!"

Jenny looked up at the clock. Ten after one. She had to stop daydreaming. She had five minutes left to finish the test. She looked around the class and saw Bradley staring at her. After several seconds, she heard the familiar *click . . . clink* as a penny hit her chair leg. She flipped through her test, looking for blanks, trying to block out the image of Bradley and his friends.

Drama class seemed a bit better the week after the test. Maybe it was because everyone was working on their independent projects, so students got to go to the library or the computer lab or the seminar room. Or maybe because they had a few days that were above freezing that hinted at an early spring. Jenny made sure she stayed with Mr. Alman, wherever he went. He liked her project on masks and masquerades. She was going to make a mask at home out of papier mâché for her presentation and paint it black, like the masks they used in Restoration drama.

On Friday of that week, Mr. Alman returned their tests and gave them their mid-term report card marks. As Mr. Alman distributed the tests, Jenny could hear male voices swearing. It sounded like Alan and Bradley's voices.

"O.K.," Mr. Alman began, "so, there were some good tests"—he looked at Jenny—"and some not-so-good tests. I also wrote your report card mark on the bottom of the first page. The report cards will be mailed home to your parents in two weeks time, on April 12th. The breakdown is as you see here." Mr. Alman pointed to the chalkboard behind him: "Two tests, three assignments, participation, and homework."

Jenny felt someone beside her.

"What the hell is this?" Bradley asked. He stood in front of Mr. Alman's desk, almost slapping Mr. Alman in the chest with his paper. Mr. Alman leaned away and then straightened up.

THE BOXER

A boxer I once knew told me he used to put his hands into the cherries each night like a hunter might drape buck or lion skins over a stone to show their original size, preparing himself, he said, by thinking—of the skeletal dog's head he and his son found in a washed away grave by the riverbank out back, its bone and teeth so indistinguishable from a wolf's that it ruined their weekly meeting—of or of what little he's heard of the beating I received that day in Sunday school when, on asking the quiet teacher if when God says "Worship no false idols before me," he's implying he is a *true* idol—of or of that dockside pimp he used to frequent after a stint at sea, the one who carried penicillin and morphine in a folded white doctor's coat to clean his best clients up before sending them back, minus the memory of pain, to the women waiting in the toilet stalls—of or of the night he caught his cat shitting

"Pardon me?" Mr. Alman said.
"You failed me. You went and God-damn failed me."
"If you want to talk about your mark, see me after class."
"I want to talk about it now."
"Now is not the time."
"Why? Can't you just tell me why you failed me?"
"You mean why you failed."
"Whatever."
"I'd prefer to discuss it privately."
"How about if I don't want to meet you in private?"

Mr. Alman paused. A few snickers could be heard around the room. Mr. Alman crossed his arms and leaned back on his heels.

"O.K., fine. Bradley, you obviously didn't study or read the plays. You missed several questions completely, and many of your other answers were either too brief or incorrect."
"Aw, c'mon. Have another look."
"Why? Did I add up anything wrong?"
"Maybe you did."

Mr. Alman took the test and flipped the pages quickly, his lips moving

slightly as he counted. Everybody in the class was silent.

"Seventeen out of fifty. That's the mark." Mr. Alman handed the test back to Bradley.

"Look at it again."

"No."

"I can't fail the test."

"Well, then maybe you should have studied. Now go sit down."

"You don't understand, Mr. Alman," Bradley said as he leaned forward, smiling, as if he were going to invite Mr. Alman to watch him play hockey. "I can't fail."

"Then I suggest you study next time."

"I mean, I can't have a failing mark on the report card."

"Well, do the work and I'm sure you can pass the course."

Bradley moved over so that his six foot two frame blocked his friends' view of the teacher. He looked at Mr. Alman and lowered his voice: "The hockey scouts don't look at players who fail mid-terms. Even if it's only one course. Not even if their stats are great."

"So . . ." Bradley dropped the test gently back on Mr. Alman's desk and smiled, "have another look."



in the woods behind his home, her grace swept away in one long crouch, the look over her shoulder with jewelled eyes, the ginger stepping away without a trace of shame— or of what I mentioned of the gypsies in Rome, how no babies were ever thrown at me, but how one woman shoved her hand wrist-deep in my pants as I boarded a tram below the Vatican, trolling about for change on the wrong side of a pocket, how if I wasn't being robbed I might have paid her prettier cousin for something similar— or of that time at the coal docks in Cardiff when, after months at sea and just one night on a wooden pier, he suddenly realized that trees were meant to be seen only by sunlight, moonlight, and, so briefly, firelight— or of the braggart hunter he killed with a single punch in that Mexican cantina, how no one realized the man was dead until the bartender tried to serve him a consolation drink, pulling him down like a sack of stone hammers, his slumped, silent form falling heavily from the bar.

— GEORGE MURRAY

"I've told you. I've seen all I need to see."

"C'mon.

"Sit down, Bradley."

"Sir—"

"I said sit down."

"You sit down," Bradley roared, causing Jenny and several other students to jump in their seats, "and take out your marks"—here Bradley grabbed the papers on Mr. Alman's desk and shoved them at the teacher—"and have another look."

Mr. Alman didn't move.

"For Christ's sake, look at it."

"That's enough," said Mr. Alman.

"Listen, you fuckin' queer, you're gonna have another look, got it?"

Jenny wasn't sure if it was she who gasped in the pause that followed, but she felt the class react behind her.

"Get out." Mr. Alman's mouth was so tightly closed a white ring formed around it.

"Not until you change my mark," Bradley said.

Mr. Alman walked over to the house phone on the wall beside the door and dialed. The students' heads turned in unison to watch him.

"Mr. Leedle. I need you to remove Bradley Townson from my class."

Mr. Alman held the black phone rigidly, staring down at the floor. Jenny felt the edge of Bradley's hockey jacket press against the side of her desk. She moved the black mask she had made to cover the "78" written in green ink at the top of her test.

"I can't wait," Mr. Alman continued, "I need you to do it right now." He turned into the phone, his blue-shirted back toward the students.

"I will not relax or calm down. I want you, as my superior, to take this boy out of my class."

After a few seconds, Mr. Alman slammed the phone down. He walked over to his desk, grabbed his book bag, agenda, and papers, and walked out the door.

The class was silent. Jenny had never been in the classroom without Mr. Alman. If she was early for class or if his desk was empty, she went to the girls' washroom until she was sure he would be there.

"Stupid, fucking, homo faggot." Bradley's voice rang out over the classroom. He turned to face his friends. "I'm gonna stick my fist up his fucking ass so high he'll burp it out."

"He might like it," said Alan's voice. There were a few relieved chuckles from around the room.

Jenny could feel people shift in their seats. A minute passed. Nobody came from the office. Not even the vice-principal or another teacher. Several students started zipping up their binders and knapsacks. The two girls got up in unison and slid out of the door. Everyone else started to move too.

Jenny stood up. She felt, rather than saw, Bradley turn to her.

"And what is the littlest ho doing?"

Jenny unwrapped her coat off the back of the chair and shoved her arms into it; she picked up her knapsack with her left hand and her test and mask with her right hand and quickly walked towards the door.

A hand grabbed the back of her down jacket.

"Hey, not so fast."

Jenny swung around, trying to get free of Bradley's grip. She could see his friends gather their stuff and start moving towards her.

"Don't."

"Don't what? Touch you? I thought you liked it."

Jenny tried to back away toward the door. Bradley switched his grip from the back of her coat to her sleeve.

"Relax. I just want to ask you a question."

Jenny tried to keep moving, but the paw of Bradley's hand rooted her to the spot.

"Got a key?"

"What?"

"Do you got a key?"

Jenny's mind raced. To her house? Was he going to try to break in?

"I said, do you got a key on you . . . a house key, locker key, whatever."

Jenny let herself nod.

"Good. Then I got something for you."

He handed Jenny a piece of folded paper.

"You'll know what to do with it." Bradley let go of her jacket and Jenny staggered back several steps.

Bradley turned to Alan, who was now beside him. "I'm gonna go find my dad."

No one was left in class. Jenny uncrumpled the piece of paper. On it was scrawled "ACCK 015." It looked like a licence plate number.

The next day, Jenny stuffed one of her mom's old parkas into her knapsack. It had a muggy, dog smell from Rufus. She

FELT LIKE CRYIN'

Mr. Simpson never was too friendly, but he sure did go out the store like a house on fire with his packa Craven A up his arm like a friggin' box

en the fers at the counter was watchin' arfter him like hawks, en whin one of them asked me if they could buy me a packa O-Pee-Chee I told them I'd take a dollar's wortha bologna instead

en whin I set there gnawin' on the thing like Shep done her bone, I saw the tractor pass by, 'cept it weren't no tractor, it were a big bulldozer, en Merle en Eldon were talkin' 'bout the piler money Mr. Simpson made whin he sold off the orchard

en whin I thought about Shep pissing on Mr. Simpson's flower bed, I didn't so much feel like laughin', I felt like cryin' when I thought of Shep, leg all cocked, glassy eyes in Mr. Simpson's headlights, ready to keel over from a heart attack

— JOHN STILES

made sure she was late, waiting with her brother at the bus stop in front of the Andersons', plodding the two miles to Kilmore Collegiate with her scarf wrapped around her face to protect her from the wind. By the time she arrived at school, the buses had come and gone with their loads of students. She waited until it was one minute before the national anthem, when everyone would be scrambling to class.

She rounded the right side of the school into the parking lot, glancing up at the windowless bricked wall. She looked over the large expanse of the school parking lot. The day was cold, but bright, the morning sun glinting off the checkerboard of car hoods. Jenny walked behind a row of cars where the staff usually parked, squinting beneath the fake fur trim of her hood, scanning the slush-splashed license plates.

Jenny moved closer to a car and then knelt behind it. She took out the piece of paper Bradley had given her yesterday and checked it against the licence plate. She unzipped her knapsack and took out her black papier-mâché mask. She had taken elastic from her mother's sewing kit last night and tied it through small holes she had bored on either side of the mask. She pulled the mask over her face, the material cold and stiff, and snapped the elastic around the back of her head.



She fished in her left pocket for the key. She had made sure to wear her leather gloves that had a good grip. Still squatting, she pressed the key along the side of the car and started to move, the scratch line beginning thinly and get-

ting fatter as her pressure became consistent. She squat-walked around the car to the front, little pearls of white paint sticking to the edge of her key, and began work on the other side. She finished quickly, shoved the key in her pocket, and squat-walked

between the cars all the way back to the side of the school.

She took off her mask and shoved it into her knapsack. The wind felt cold against the layer of sweat on her face. She unzipped the parka, rolled it into a ball, and stuffed it into the metal garbage container bolted to the ground. She walked around to the front entrance and went to her first-period gym class. She spent most of the class on the bench, pretending that she had forgotten her gym clothes, making intermittent trips to the bathroom to throw up until she was retching only air.

She skipped drama class that day and the next. She couldn't face Mr. Alman after what she had done to his car. Or Bradley. It didn't matter though, because Mr. Alman wasn't at school either day.

On Wednesday, Jenny was called out from her volleyball game during gym

class and asked to report to Mr. Leedle's office. Jenny walked slowly down the hall, her knapsack hung over one shoulder, the sweat on her back cooling in the frigid air of the hallway.

The attendance secretary motioned her into Mr. Leedle's office. As she entered, Mr. Alman turned and smiled at her. Jenny, startled, tried to smile back. Beside him was a uniformed Ontario Provincial Police officer and a man in a business suit with an attaché case. On the other side of Mr. Alman, Jenny recognized Mr. Leedle and Mr. Handsel, the principal.

The man with the attaché case said, "My client," he indicated Mr. Alman, "and I will be in Mr. Handsel's office." He looked over at the police officer. "Can we get a copy of the statement as soon as it is available?"

The police officer nodded, and checked his breast pocket for a pen. Jenny wondered if he would arrest her right there in her gym shorts. Or take her out in handcuffs, like they did with Jason McGuire when he was caught dealing drugs at the school.

Jenny sat down and felt the bare flesh of her legs stick to the chair. She placed her knapsack on her lap for warmth. As she grabbed it, her fingers touched something hard and lumpy inside: her mask. Mr. Handsel cleared his throat and introduced everybody, including Sergeant Whakefield from the Kilmore-Bainbridge O.P.P. detachment. Jenny looked

up for each introduction, then kept her eyes on the carpeted floor. She wondered if they had called her parents.

"Tell us what happened in class the other day, Jenny," Mr. Leedle said from behind the desk. He was balding, with long tufts of side hair Brylcreemed back to give the illusion of hair. Despite his rodent-like appearance, everyone knew he was the one who ran the school, not Mr. Handsel. And you wanted to stay on Mr. Leedle's good side, like all the jocks did.

"What do you mean?" Jenny was sure that they were going to ask her about the car.

"On Friday. In your drama class." Jenny tried to capture last week in her mind, but it was like a television screen that was all fuzzy and white.

"The usual stuff."

"Like what?" Sergeant Whakefield interjected.

Jenny shifted in her seat and felt her mask again.

"We're doing projects."

"What else?" Mr. Handsel encouraged, smiling at her.

Jenny tried to smile back. Mr. Handsel was supposed to be nice. She looked behind Mr. Handsel at the shelves of books covering the wall. She scanned the titles she could read from her seat: *Fire Drill Procedures*, *Anti-Racist Education*, *Safe Schools*, *The Grade 10 Literacy Test*.

"Mr. Alman gave back a test."

"Do you know the student Bradley Townson?" Sergeant Whakefield said, his pen poised over his notepad.

Jenny nodded, her eyes no higher than his bulletproof vest.

"Do you remember a conversation that Bradley had with Mr. Alman in class on Friday?" Sergeant Whakefield asked.

Jenny remained quiet.

"They were talking about marks."

Jenny thought of the green "78" on the top of her test.

"Did Bradley get his marks?"

Jenny nodded.

"What did he say to Mr. Alman?"

Jenny shrugged.

"Was Bradley mad?"

"I guess so."

"Why?"

"I guess he didn't like the mark," Jenny commented.

"What else?"

"That's it."

"What else was said?"

"Nothing."

"Jenny, we have ten other students who have given an account of that day," Sergeant Whakefield said. "So, just tell us what happened."

Jenny felt a whisper of relief. It wasn't just her telling.

"I guess Bradley was a little mad. I don't think he got a high mark."

"What did Mr. Alman say?"

"To stop talking to him that way."

"Did Bradley say anything else?"

"I don't know. They were both mad."

"Did he say something about Mr. Alman?"

"Don't lead her on, Sergeant," Mr. Leedle said. "Only if she remembers something."

Jenny didn't know what to do. Did anyone else say that Bradley called Mr. Alman names? She was sure Bradley would squeal on her about the car if she said something. Or make her do something else to Mr. Alman.

Jenny looked up at the sergeant. "I don't know."

The sergeant gave a little snort. "Maybe you remember this." He pulled out a piece of paper from a manila envelope. Jenny recognized the stick figures right away.

There was a knock on the door and Mr. Townson came in. There was a bit of a shuffle as Mr. Handsel and Sergeant Whakefield stood up, but not before Mr. Townson noticed Jenny. Bradley had exactly the same flat brown eyes as his father.

"Sorry about that. Just wanted to talk to Al and Arthur for a second. To get this thing with Brad cleared up. I can see you're busy," he looked at the principal and vice-principal. "So, I'll catch you both later."

He smiled around the room, looking at Jenny last before closing the door softly behind him.

Sergeant Whakefield slammed down into his seat.

"I don't know that picture," Jenny said quickly, before Sergeant Whakefield asked again.

"Mr. Alman said that you showed him this picture," Sergeant Whakefield continued. "That some boys in your class were harassing you."

Jenny couldn't get Mr. Townson's brown stare out of her mind.

"Mr. Alman has given a statement that you told him that several boys were call-



On submissions...

In celebration of the magazine's upcoming fifth anniversary, Taddle Creek plans to devote its summer, 2002, issue to the work of its many regular contributors. Therefore, the magazine requests that new authors and poets wishing to submit work please consider refraining until June of said year, as there will not be an opportunity to publish work by new contributors until next Christmas. The magazine thanks you for your patience and understanding.

ing you names, that they were sexually harassing you. That he has caught Bradley Townson throwing money at you. That you feel threatened by Bradley and some of the other boys in the class."

"They're just joking," Jenny said through thin lips.

"He also said they are harassing him. In fact, I'm in here investigating a possible hate crime committed against Mr. Alman. The comments in the class on Friday and the graffiti on the gym wall. And the property damage that occurred to Mr. Alman's car."

Jenny felt an icy block lodge in her throat.

"So, if you have something to say, about comments and actions directed at you or at Peter Alman, by Bradley Townson or anybody else, it would be very helpful to get to the bottom of this."

Jenny said nothing. The seconds ticked away. She looked over at Mr. Leedle for permission to leave. Mr. Leedle smiled and walked her out of the office.

Jenny grabbed her clothes from the gym, quickly changed, and walked home in the cold midday sun. She told her mom that she had been interviewed about problems in one of her classes between a student and a teacher. She didn't know what they were talking about. She asked her mom to phone the school to tell them that she didn't want to talk to anyone else, including the lawyer.

Calli phoned her after school while she was watching *The Two Guys Animal Show* with Paul. It was her brother's favourite show.

"You wouldn't believe it," Calli said. "Mr. Alman called the cops on Bradley."

"Really," Jenny replied, trying to act surprised. "What for?"

"You know. You're in the class. Did Bradley really call Mr. Alman a fag? To his face?" Calli giggled.

"Well, sorta," Jenny giggled a bit too. Paul looked over at her. He began to imitate the monkey on the television, rocking in his seat on the coach.

"And you should see Mr. Townson. He just flipped out on Mr. Alman. Right in front of the office."

"Wow." Paul started climbing on the back of the couch toward her.

"Now Mr. Alman has some fancy human rights lawyer from Toronto."

LETTER TO A FRIEND

The perfume of wet pavement rattles the air
enters the nostrils like a bee sting
sings of:
honeysuckle
wet dogs
ripping grass at the park

The trees limp,
under a heavy enamel of rain
the gum-tattooed cement glistens
in its own selenium-toned ooze
organic emulsion of man-made grief.

Oxygen in an urban rainforest travels
the veins like bricks, graffiti, and newspaper boxes

All this apocalypse to post a letter
which will arrive with your name
in large
bled
ink.

—SUSANA MOLINOLO

Jenny thought about the tall man with the attaché case.

"Rosa said that Mr. Alman refused to come back until Bradley was arrested or expelled or something."

"Can he do that?"

"I don't know. Can you imagine? Mr. Townson would freak."

Jenny tried not to think about the school getting rid of Bradley. What was the point in hoping? Paul jumped on her neck from behind, making monkey-screaming sounds, and Jenny dropped the phone.

"Sorry."

"Anyway," Calli continued, "Mr. Leedle wouldn't let that happen. That's for sure." Mr. Leedle led the fundraising efforts for the hockey team every year. He also went to every game, even most of the away ones.

When Jenny got off the phone, she chased Paul around the room, tickling him until he screamed for their mom. As she wrestled with Paul, Jenny wondered what would happen if Mr. Alman left Kilmore. In some ways, it would be a relief. But what would happen to her

drama class? Would they get a supply teacher in? Would Bradley still be there?

She could never go back to the class without Mr. Alman to protect her. But how could she go back anyway after what she did to him. What Bradley knew she did.

Jenny was lying on her bed on Friday night, relieved that the terrible week was over. She had gone to school the past two days, skipping drama of course, hiding in the library at lunch, worried that the office would call her down again, or phone home.

The telephone rang and she reached for it from her side table with the frilly white lamp.

"Turn on the game," Calli ordered.

Jenny knew she meant hockey. Not only was hockey a town obsession, everyone knew that the boys' competitive league, the Southern Ontario Hockey League, played Friday nights.

In elementary school, they used to get together at Calli's or Jenny's on Friday night and watch the game. Sometimes, they even went to McCarthy Arena when the local teams played in town, imagining going out with one of the older, sophisticated high-school boys. They



talked about their favourite players as if they knew them, memorizing all their stats and arguing about who was the better player. Sometimes they got up enough guts to say hi to a player as he walked out of a dressing room, equipment bag in hand, hair wet from the shower.

She used to see Bradley Townson play. He was so good he always played with the older guys. With his flushed cheeks and the way he punched the air after each goal, she thought he was brave. And romantic.

She hadn't watched a game in a long time.

Jenny walked over to her bureau and turned on the small television she inherited after her parents bought a new set for the living room.

"O.K., it's on," Jenny said into the phone as she sprawled on her bed. She watched the Oaklanders make a rush on goal.

"Just a minute. You'll see it in a second."

It looked like the other team was in blue and white. The Stampeders. Bradley's team.

"There—look."

Jenny squinted at the screen. The puck had gone up over the glass. They were panning the crowd, and Jenny saw some people in the seats holding a banner. She could make out the word *bate* and the tail end of a word ending in *-ment*. The camera swung back to the ice and the faceoff in the Stampeders' end.

"So?" Jenny asked.

"Did you read it?" Calli asked.

"Parts of it."

"Can you believe Mr. Alman?"

"What do you mean?"

"To print that stuff about Bradley."

"Mr. Alman is at the game?"

"Yeah. There are a whole bunch of men taking turns holding the sign. I bet you they're all gay guys from Toronto. I bet you one of them is Mr. Alman's boyfriend."

"Mr. Alman is holding a sign about Bradley?"

"It says—wait a sec, I wrote it down—it says, 'HATE CRIMES AND HARASSMENT DO NOT BELONG IN SCHOOLS. EXPEL BRADLEY TOWNSON.'"

"Oh, my God." Jenny put her hand over her face.

On Sunday night, Jenny still hadn't decided if she was going to go to school the next day. She went out back with the dog, walking into the velvety darkness until she reached the light by the shed that frosted the blanket of snow in their yard. Beyond the circle of the light was the shadowy edge of the trees that populated the rest of the ten acres. Jenny plodded around in the snow in her stained Sorel boots, wrapping her father's old plaid fleece jacket tightly around her torso, waiting for Rufus to pee.

Jenny heard Rufus barking and she realized he had already gone back to the front of the house. She started back, worried that the dog might run onto the road if he saw something to chase. As she came parallel to the side of the house, Bradley Townson walked toward her with Rufus jumping at his side.

Jenny stopped.

"Hi," Bradley said smiling.

Jenny looked around. Bradley was blocking her way to the entrance at the front of the house and she wouldn't be able to run very fast in the deep waves of snow in the yard.

Bradley shuffled his big frame from one foot to the other, stamping down the snow. Rufus bounced over to Jenny, and back to Bradley, tail wagging.

"I was wondering if they talked to you about Alman?" He seemed subdued, almost polite.

She looked at him. Jenny thought about lying, but remembered Mr. Townson's eyes looking at her.

She nodded.

"He's making trouble for me."

Jenny thought about the banner at the game, the red words. She thought about the graffiti on the gym wall that still hadn't been removed.

"I need you to do me a favour."

Jenny looked at him.

"Tell Mr. Leedle that Alman was bothering you."

Bradley bent down and scratched Rufus behind the ears, and continued talking without looking at her.

"Bothering you, like touching you, phoning you, talking to you after school, whatever you want to say."

They stood there for a few moments, as the dog ran back and forth between them.

"Nice place your parents have here," Bradley said, looking around. He spied Paul's hockey net shoved against the cement wall of the house, green plastic hockey sticks hanging over the top of the goalie net.

"You have a brother?"

Jenny nodded.

"What's his name?"

Jenny hesitated. "Paul."

"What school does he go to?"

Several seconds ticked by. "Pleasant-view."

"I got a cousin who goes there."

Bradley gave Rufus one last pat before he turned around and walked the smeared path of mud and slush back to the front of the house. Jenny heard a car engine sputter and start. The twin-beam headlights travelled over the snow and struck her face, whitewashing it into a mask, before moving past her through the trees as the car sped away.

Dianne Scott lives in the Harbourfront area. Her work has appeared in numerous journals, including the Prairie Journal, Other Voices, the Danforth Review, and (Ex)cite. Her current work-in-progress is a short story collection focusing on the theme of crossing boundaries.



AFTERTHOUGHT

A cigarette burn like a cherry
on my palm, to one side of my lifeline.
Let's say I did it for the scar.

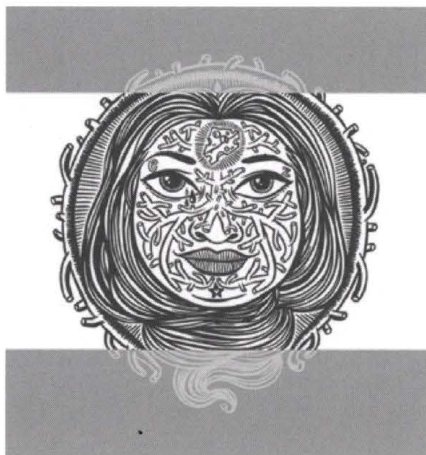
An experiment: one day I'll glance
idly at the mark and wonder how I got it.

Better: to realize,
in a keen, slicing instant,
it's gone.

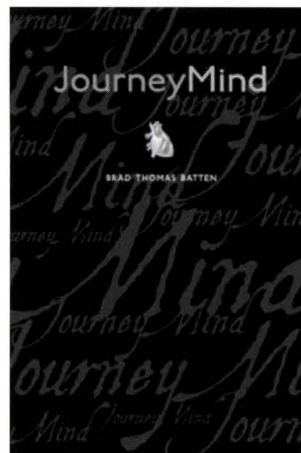
— SUSAN KERNOHAN



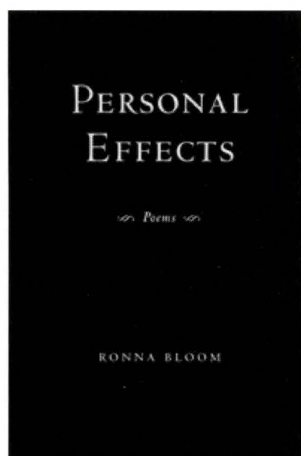
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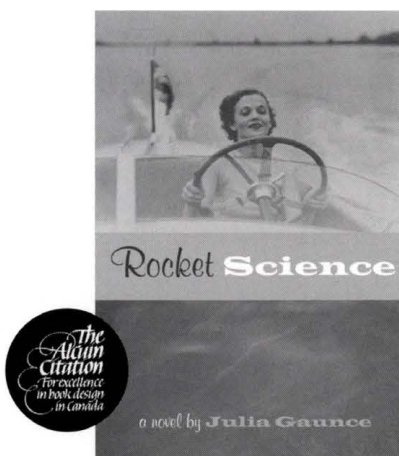
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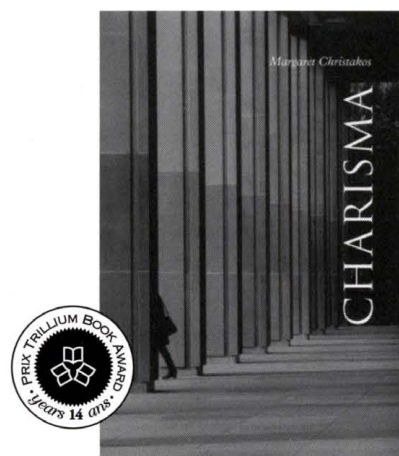
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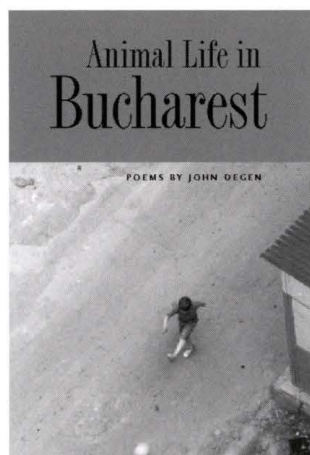
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For more information, call the Bell Infoline, 416-968-FILM, or visit the Official Website: www.bell.ca/filmfest.

THE TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL GROUP IS A CHARITABLE, CULTURAL, AND EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATION DEVOTED TO CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE IN FILM AND THE MOVING IMAGE.



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