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CHRISTMAS NUMBER, 2002
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CHRISTMAS NUMBER, 2002

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COVER STAR

Ken Tobias, 1965. Photograph by Ian MacEachern & Gordon Anderson.

ABOUT THE TYPE

T*addle Creek* does not believe in self-congratulatory, reflective editor's notes, even on such occasions as its fifth anniversary, which this number of the magazine happens to mark. Instead, this space will be turned over to a discussion on the all-too-ignored topic of typography. While the magazine also does not believe in redesigns, many readers will note that, as of this issue, *Taddle Creek* is employing a new display typeface (the type used for headlines and on the cover). While Bernhard Modern, the magazine's former display type, has served the magazine well these past five years, it was never a typeface the magazine was entirely happy with, having been originally chosen for reasons far too dull to discuss here. No disrespect is meant to Bernhard Modern. Designed in 1937 by Lucien Bernhard for American Type Founders, it remains a typeface's typeface if ever there was one. It simply was never the best type for the job in this particular case.

After an exhausting and frustrating search, the perfect *Taddle Creek* typeface was discovered: Stillson. First introduced to the printing trade in 1899 by the renowned Chicago type foundry Barnhart Brothers & Spindler, the typeface's design was patented by R. L. Stillson in 1900. The design of Stillson is typical of many display typefaces produced near the end of the nineteenth century. Exaggerated forms, such as the high crossbars of the "E" and "F" and the tall vertical stroke of the "G," mixed with the short vertex of the "M," produce a distinctive typeface that was deemed ideal for *Taddle Creek*. It also complements nicely the magazine's body font, American Garamond. (American Garamond is the digital version of Garamond 3, originally produced under the direction of C. H. Griffith at the Mergenthaler Linotype Company in 1926, and was one of the most popular text faces used in North America for most of the twentieth century.)

Unfortunately, after searching high and low, it was discovered that Stillson

had died along with the age of moveable type, never having been digitized into font form, as was necessary given the modern layout techniques the magazine is forced to employ. Enter Rod McDonald, type designer and typographer extraordinaire. Rod managed to track down sample sheets of the original Stillson at the University of Toronto's Massey College, and oversaw its recreation for the digital age as TC Stillson. (The majority of the actual recreation was carried out by Rod's assistant, Renée Alleyn, currently a student at the Ontario College of Art and Design.) TC Stillson made its first public appearance on October 23rd on the *Taddle Creek* Information Superhighway Location on the Internetwork (what some apparently refer to as a "web site") and sees print for the first time with this issue of the magazine. Rod also designed the magazine's new endnote, seen at the close of this article.

Rod has designed type for the range of Canadian periodicals, including *Chatelaine*, *Applied Arts*, and *Canadian Business*, the latter of which the magazine is told is Canada's premier business magazine. Cartier Book, his reworking of Cartier, Canada's first typeface, was chosen for inclusion in the Monotype Classics Library of typefaces. His most recent work, prior to this issue, was a series of custom typefaces for the July redesign of *Maclean's*, apparently a magazine of some note outside of literary circles.

While *Taddle Creek* does not believe in self-congratulation, it does believe in bragging: it is believed that TC Stillson is the first typeface to be designed especially for a Canadian literary magazine. However, no research whatsoever was put into discovering whether this statement is true.

The magazine hopes you enjoy its fifth anniversary issue—now available coast to coast on finer newsstands everywhere and, for some reason, a store that sells strange glass balls to tourists. ▽

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... doesn't want the world. It just wants your half.

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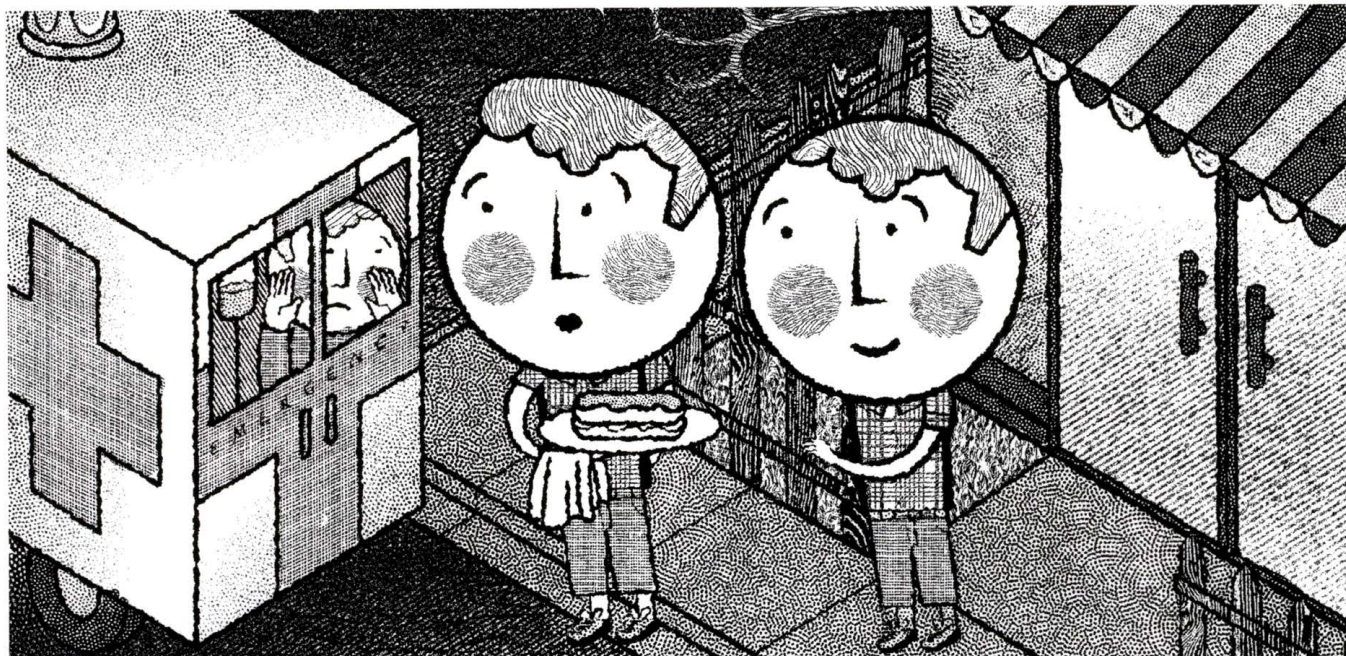
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‘WIGGIE WAITER BITES INTO MILLIONS!’ SAID THE NEWS

FICTION BY KRISTI-LY GREEN

Once, there was a waiter who sat down after work to eat a leftover chocolate eclair. But, when he bit, he found in his mouth a two-million-dollar engagement ring.

This story is true. The newspaper even said so.

But this story is not about a waiter. This story is not about a waiter at all.

This story is about a couple.

The couple consists of a girl and a boy. The girl is called Celia and the boy is called Eldrick. Celia and Eldrick are just sitting down to a meal at an establishment of fine repute, and they have reason to believe that they are in love (with each other, not the food, though it is good).

Eldrick believes that Celia loves him because: (1) Celia smiles a lot (even when Eldrick is around); (2) Celia says yes to doing things with Eldrick, such as going out for dinner in this instance; (3) whenever Eldrick and Celia go to the movies together, Eldrick swears that Celia holds his hand in just the same way that the girl in the Nu-Breeze™

shampoo commercial holds the hand of the boy whom she loves on TV.

Celia believes that Eldrick loves her because: (1) Eldrick asks her out a lot, just as he has done on this night; (2) Eldrick gave Celia a card on Valentine's Day that was signed "To Celia, from Eldrick, with love"; (3) Eldrick is paying for the meal.

So Eldrick and Celia must be in love. They *must* be, thinks the waiter—yes, the very same waiter we left with a mouthful of diamond in the first paragraph—and he shows the loving couple to their table; Eldrick, a little ruffled from getting dressed too quickly, and Celia, a little too pink in that way that young women in love just are.

What the waiter does not know is that Eldrick is unusually ruffled on this particular occasion and, although Celia herself has attributed this uncharacteristic quality to the perils of the long bus ride to her house, Eldrick is, it must be admitted—and as I have said before—*unusually ruffled* on this particular day.

What the waiter does not know is that our Eldrick is usually impeccable.

From the expertly styled threads of his well-conditioned hair, to the shiny tips of his shoes, which still smell of polish, Eldrick is, most certainly, impeccable.

The impeccability of Eldrick, muses Celia some days, seems to come from a sense of built-in standards he has; standards from which Eldrick never falters. It's a habit he developed at quite an early age, when most of us are being slapped for dribbling on the carpet or clambering into mixing bowls to get a better lick. The last day, it can be noted, that Eldrick strayed from his self-imposed path of spotlessness was in the early autumn of 1983, when he wore one black sock and one grey one with flecks; the cat died, Eldrick failed math, the septic tank exploded, and his parents told Eldrick they were divorcing. Since then, Eldrick's socks *always* match.

One matter of interest I'd like to bring up is the reaction of other people to our Eldrick. While Eldrick himself is much too genteel to impose any sense of his own flawless impeccability on anyone else or their manner, his presence alone can have

this effect. For instance, if you were to hang around Eldrick for awhile, you would be hard pressed to stop washing your hands. Why, the very sight of him in line at the local café (which is really nothing to speak of, except we will, because Eldrick goes there) brings tears to the eyes of the waitresses there. "Eldrick brightens the very corner that he sits in!" And the waitresses don't even have to mop.

"It seems," Celia has thought, on many a day, "that Eldrick couldn't look messy if he tried." But this was, Celia knew, one of the things she really liked about Eldrick. And one of the things that Eldrick, of course, liked about himself.

But the waiter doesn't know all of this. For if he had known, he most definitely would have wondered what in the world was wrong with Eldrick this night. Just as Celia was.

(What the waiter also doesn't know is that Celia hadn't sorted her darks from her lights in her most recent load of washing, and all she had going for her now was pink.)

Eldrick, on the other hand, isn't wondering anything about anybody. Instead, Eldrick is debilitatingly, petrifyingly, alarmingly, and distressingly nervous. He is too nervous to notice that the top button of his shirt has popped open or that the cufflinks on his sleeves don't match. He is too nervous, even, to straighten his tie without it tightening its grip around his neck. And he is ever too nervous to notice that each time he lifts his water glass to drink, his hand shakes so hard that he

splashes his white shirt and by now he resembles, Celia thinks, some sort of cold, sick, wet mole. (Outside, it is a beautiful day.)

Only one thing could make Eldrick so nervous. Only one thing could reduce a man like Eldrick, who was usually so flawlessly arranged, to the point of near hysteria, on such a seemingly ordinary dinner date. Only one thing could account for the rumples in his suit, the poorly-knotted tie, and the abominable, newly-awoken hair. Eldrick was going to ask Celia to marry him. This scared him more than anything in the world.

Eldrick first had the idea of asking Celia to marry him when he and Celia had been dating for a year and two months and the Nu-Breeze™ shampoo commercial first aired. Eldrick loved the Nu-Breeze™ advertisement not only because he approved of thick shiny hair without the burden of harmful chemicals, but also because he loved the couple on TV. If Eldrick could be anyone in the world, he thought, he wanted to be one person in a couple like that. The kind of couple who, no matter what happens, can always go to movies together and hold each other's hands and be in love with each other and with their hair. And due to the nature of television and the growing popularity of Nu-Breeze™ shampoo at that time, Eldrick found himself consistently bombarded with the dream that he wanted to become.

And then a funny thing happened. Eldrick realized that when he watched the Nu-Breeze™ commercial, he was no longer

just watching the ad. When Eldrick watched the commercial, he was picturing himself as the vital Nu-Breeze™ boy and Celia was his nubile Nu-Breeze™ girl. Eldrick rose from the sofa like a man who'd just seen God before racing to the bathroom to wash his hair.

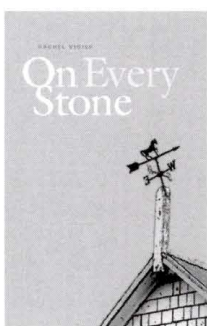
The next day, when Eldrick was out with Celia, Celia commented on his hair. "It's just so fluffy," she cried. In a moment of pure passion, Eldrick took Celia's confession as a sign and he decided to ask Celia to marry him. With a grandiose gesture, he bent down on one knee in front of Celia. Celia asked him if his shoe was untied. Eldrick lost his balance and fell over. Celia asked Eldrick if he was feeling all right before picking him up and sending him home on the bus.

Since that first incident, Eldrick was having trouble getting up the nerve. It seemed that everything—with the exception of his hair—had conspired against him. No matter where he was, or what he and Celia were doing, Eldrick's usually impeccable sense of timing was always off. And Celia was getting so sick of pulling Eldrick from the ground that she was beginning to think he was ill.

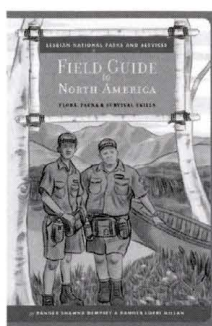
Which was strange, thought Celia, because Eldrick was so clean you would think he was untouchable by germs. In the past one year and three months during which they had been dating, Eldrick hadn't caught so much as a cold. Why, when Eldrick first introduced himself to Celia that day, where she gave tours at the Tootsie Roll plant, she saw in him a picture of lifelong health. Especially that



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LAPSE

I can't see the widow in the garden
her bright scarf grinning in the sun

I don't recall the swarm of fish—
the garish mouths, the little gasps of mud

I've forgotten the dice box of thumbs
their flight, their fret and clatter down the hall

I've stopped thinking of the sea of thought
the weak peaks, flotsam in the swells

I can't remember that particular
grey light (you know the one)
that lingers on the pavement and
keeps the day from warming

—KEVIN CONNOLLY

hair, thought Celia, with its fluffy waves and sturdy sheen. In fact, it had surprised her to see someone so seemingly healthy enjoying a tour at the Tootsie Roll plant. She had grown accustomed to leading groups of bland-faced sugar addicts, catching their limbs in tubs of brown goo at regular intervals. But someone like Eldrick? What was he doing there? The meeting was one of mutual attraction.

The next evening, Eldrick took Celia out for a drink. He picked her up at eight from her home, where she had spent the day doing laundry and washing her hair. He said she looked beautiful. She said he looked clean. They both felt it was the start of something grand.

And that was pretty much everything from the beginning to the end, to the life-altering events of this day. And this was the day, the day of Celia and of Eldrick, and the two of them out together for a bite. But it wasn't.

"No, Eldrick had never been ill in the past," thought Celia, "but perhaps he was dying of a disease." Celia, who was a young woman who had been raised with little independence and an even smaller sense of self, wondered what she would do with a sick person on her hands, especially one who stuttered and fell over so much as Eldrick did. "Yes," concluded Celia, "most likely he certainly is sick." Celia, whose own record of ill health consisted of a few unsightly rashes and one sole case of

dandruff in her teens, had heard about these "sick people" before. She didn't want to know what that meant.

Celia's resolution to avoid the sick Eldrick was harder to keep than she thought. You see, Celia had never really cared for anyone before, at least in the same way that she cared for Eldrick. No, Celia was a just a girl with a sturdy immune system and a pair of overprotective parents who gave tours at the Tootsie Roll plant. If anything, her life so far had been characterized by a lack of things of character. But, with Eldrick, she thought sometimes it might be love.

So when Eldrick—whom Celia hadn't seen since she last left him fainting on a bus a day before—invited Celia to dinner at Chez Wiggie, a local dining establishment renowned for its service and quality fare (not too mention exorbitant dinner prices), Celia could not bring herself to say no. Standing in front of the full-length mirror in her bathroom, dressed entirely in pink, Celia decided to forgive Eldrick for his recent poor behaviour and concentrate on his head of healthy hair.

When Eldrick arrived at Celia's door that night, he was shaking. It took him five tries to ring the doorbell because he kept losing his nerve and running around the side to smooth his hair. From the fence at the side of the house belonging to the parents of Celia, a marmalade cat rolled her big round eyes every time he

came her way. Eldrick was not too dizzy-headed not to notice that, by the fifth time he came round, the cat was gone.

It was then that Eldrick decided to get a grip. He must pull up his socks (in the literal sense) and march right up to the door for his Celia. He must take her away from all this, he thought (although, looking around him, he realized that "all this" was rather nice), and give her a ring and get married.

Imagine the dismay of our nerve-ridden Eldrick when he put his left hand inside the left pocket of his coat and produced nothing! Imagine the alarm of our sweaty-palmed friend when the very same thing happened on the right!

By the time Eldrick arrived on Celia's doorstep for the second time that evening, he had no time to not ring the doorbell five times and run around the house in search of a cat. With his left hand securely wrapped around the small box in his left pocket, he punched at the doorbell with his right. Celia, her shoes lying empty on the bathroom floor beside her, registered the familiar sound of the doorbell as it rang through the house, slowly got up from where she was lying in her clothes in the empty bathtub, and shuffled down the stairs to the front door.

The first thing that Eldrick did when they got to the restaurant was leave Celia to go to the bathroom to wash his face. When Eldrick came back from the bathroom, he stopped at the top of the stairs. The restaurant was one of the fancy kind, with walls as white as teeth with nothing on them. Eldrick licked his lips and searched for Celia. She was tugging at the chain around her neck. Celia looked up and glanced around. Eldrick quickly ducked behind the coat rack. Celia pushed her face into the menu. Eldrick sidled deftly along the wall. Twenty small glass tables were neatly organized in a space as long and clear as a regular fish tank. Even the floors were sparkling clean. "The kind of floors a young gentleman could kneel on and ask a girl to marry him," thought Eldrick, "without fearing in the least for his life."

Eldrick caught the waiter by the tie as he was running from the kitchen with dessert. He pushed a small box into the waiter's apron and gestured at a chocolate eclair. The waiter, who was a waiter who, it is sad to say, was accustomed to being grabbed by the clientele at Chez Wiggie, paused in his tracks to give Eldrick a

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knowing look, just long enough for the ice cream on his tray to start to melt.

Now, anyone in the world with half a brain in his head might have thought that Eldrick, having arranged the whole ordeal with the ring and the food, could calm down now. That the rest of the meal would be smooth. But although anyone might have thought this, Eldrick didn't. Instead, Eldrick realizes, as he sinks in his seat, a sickening sensation spreading from the top of his head through every cell his body straight down to the soles of his shoes, he has whole hours to get through. They hadn't even ordered yet and Eldrick has no idea how he will make it through the meal. Eldrick begins to hyperventilate. Celia does not appreciate this one bit.

Celia asks Eldrick what he is having. Eldrick falls sideways out of his chair. "Oh no, not again!" laments Celia, as she leans across the table and uses one pink-gloved hand to set him upright.

This goes on all through the dinner. Through the cocktails, the appetizers, and the water refills, through the taking of the dishes and replacing of them with more elaborate versions. By the time dessert is ready to be ordered, Eldrick is practically on the floor and Celia is doing her best to ignore him. When the waiter asks the couple if they would like to try something sweet, Celia reports squarely that she is full. Eldrick, whose eyeballs have leapt a good couple of inches out of their sockets upon hearing this response, turns to Celia to ask if she is certain. Celia assures Eldrick that she is. In one swift flush, all of the blood leaves Eldrick's head until his face was no colour at all. Eldrick lifts his eyes to the waiter. Celia stares at Eldrick. She frowns. Surely, this was a very ill man.

By the time the waiter (who has not yet bitten into anything in this story—dessert, decoration, or otherwise—despite what you may have heard, and had been working quite comfortably all evening, in fact) makes it back to the table with the elaborate dessert designed for Celia, her seat is empty. He finds Eldrick face down in the sugar bowl. With the help of the maître d', the waiter lifts Eldrick, who has fainted dead away, out of his seat and through the front doors of the restaurant in the most discreet and subtle way that a half-breathing man can be carried from

his seat from a restaurant as stylish as Chez Wiggie.

In ten minutes, the ambulance is on its way to the hospital, lights flashing, with Eldrick strapped inside. On the sidewalk outside the restaurant, the waiter and maître d' exchange a look that says they will never speak of this evening again. Together, they go inside to work.

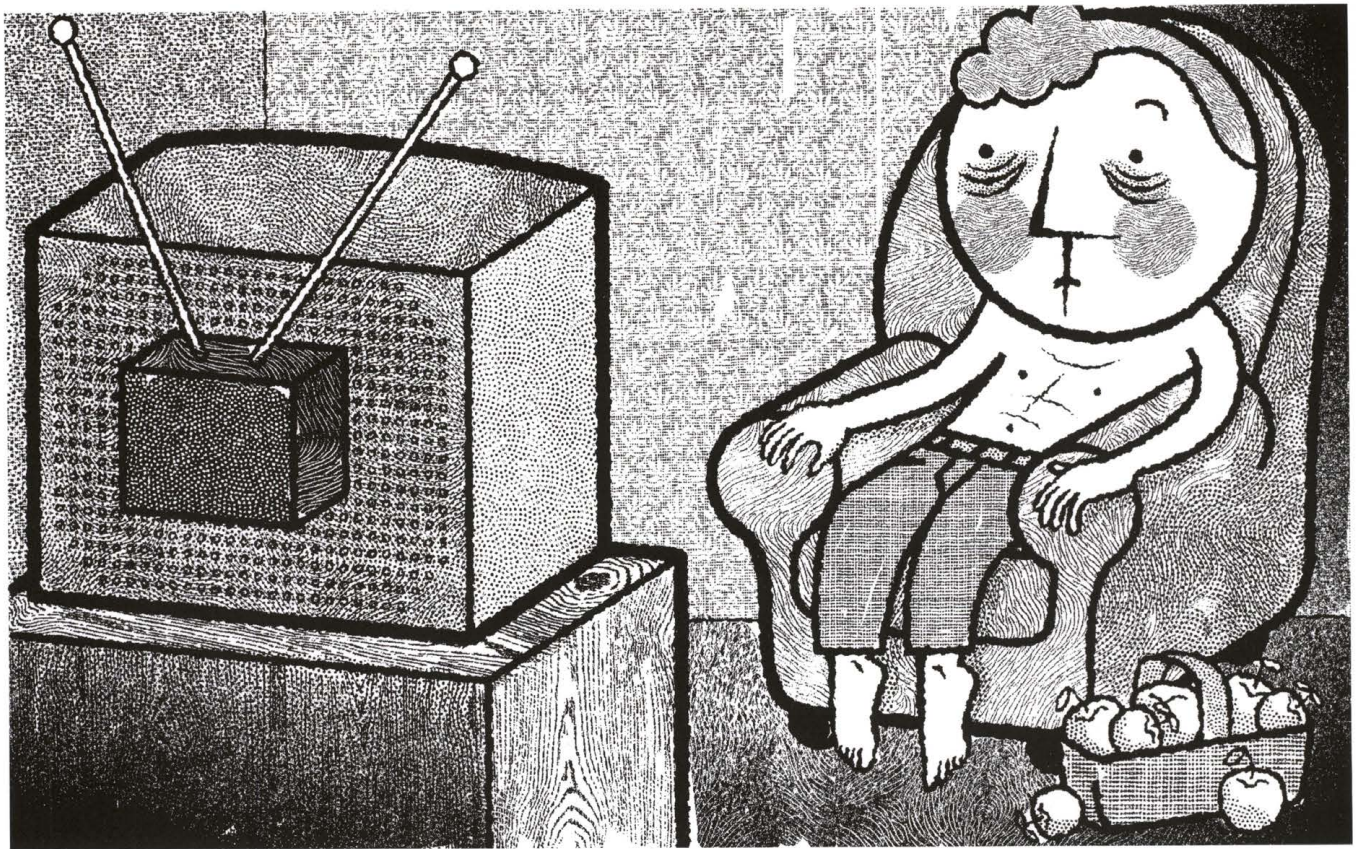
It is not the last time an ambulance visits the restaurant that night.

When the last plate has been cleared for the evening, and the bright chatter of diners has been replaced by the low functional tones of people whose working shifts are about to end, the waiter feels his stomach make a growl. He opens up the door to the great refrigerator at the back of the kitchen. The first thing the waiter sees inside the fridge—centred on the middle shelf and wrapped in cellophane—is a freshly-powdered chocolate eclair. The waiter pulls the plate out and grabs a fork from the sink, before settling onto a stool to take a bite.

The next morning, Celia awakens with her face in a frown. She gets out of bed, pulls on her bathrobe, spreads the curtains, and scowls at the day. She marches downstairs to the kitchen, where her mother has left her some toast. As Celia sits down to chew on the toast, her eye floats lazily to the newspaper lying open on the table. One of the headlines catches her eye. "WIGGIE WAITER BITES INTO MILLIONS!" said the news.

According to the paper, there was a waiter (whose name was Bob Franklin) who sat down after work to eat a left-over chocolate eclair. But, when he bit, he found in his mouth a two-million-dollar engagement ring. ♪

Kristi-Ly Green lives in Bloordale Village. Her book of short stories, Nits (Exile, 2000), was short-listed for the 2001 ReLit Awards. Her work has appeared in Exile, the Scrivener Review, Fireweed, the New Quarterly, and Room of One's Own, the anthologies The IV Lounge Reader (Insomniac, 2001) and Young Bloods (Exile, 2001), and a Mexican collection of Canadian short stories in Spanish, recently published by Fondo de Cultura Economica. She writes about fish and other things through Trout Factory, a Toronto small press, and is a founder of the satirical art magazine Whos Yer Dada?



THE FIRST RULE

FICTION BY JAY PINKERTON

Of course, now that the movie's out, everyone's an armchair fight clubber. It's so *au courant*. Jesus.

It didn't used to be like that, you know. In fact, back when I first joined fight club (it wasn't capitalized back then), all of you windmill-punching wannabes wouldn't have even recognized it.

The rules were totally different, for one.

I remember being huddled up in that dark basement with the guys when Brad Pitt first pulled out a stained piece of paper and told us all to gather round. This would have been around January, because I remember I could see my breath, and I'd led a little calisthenics routine on the guys a few minutes previous. To get the blood moving.

Brad took centre stage, pacing like the coiffed jungle animal he most certainly thought he was. Brad, man. I tell you. But more on Brad later.

"Now," he began, "a couple of you guys have been coming up to me in pri-

vate lately—with concerns." He nodded at me and a few other faces before returning his concentration to the scrap of paper.

I nodded back in acknowledgement. Me and a few other guys had, in fact, chatted Brad up earlier in the day concerning the addition of a few rules to the club charter. For safety concerns, you understand. Chad had gotten wailed on pretty bad the week before, on account of that big prick farmer down from New York state stomping a boot print in his face with that immense army-issue shoe of his. I mean, I was all for a rules-free environment as much as the next guy, but a no-shirt-no-shoes policy was clearly needed. So we'd brought the issue to Brad.

But back to Brad's little paper reading. A few of the guys shot me looks from across the room. These, then, would be the rules we'd motioned for earlier. There was a palpable fear in the

room as we awaited what Brad had managed to think up for us.

Brad wasn't terribly bright, you understand. Anything you told him on a given day would usually come back to you in a horribly mangled, bong-fuelled state some hours later, like a one-man game of telephone gone horribly wrong. Sometimes it was funny to watch, but usually only if it was some other poor guy trying to get something out of Brad: his watch back, a promise from him to stop hitting on his girlfriend, five dollars, whatever. The point was, it was time-consuming and fraught with idiocy. No one liked it when it was their turn.

But I'm digressing too much: the paper reading. Brad couldn't read very well (i.e., hardly at all), making the moment even more suspenseful. It required most of his concentration, as well as the silent movement of his lips, to execute properly. He sauntered on gamely.

"And so," he said finally, "in the interest

of these concerns, I've made up some rules." He coughed.

"The only rule of fight club—is that there are no rules!" He threw the paper up in the air with a nihilistic flourish, happy to be free of reading for another day, and cheerfully dragged one of us from the mob to beat the blood-soaked stuffing out of him on the cardboard we'd thoughtfully laid out.

Brad, man. I tell you.

I pulled him aside later and explained to him that the whole "no rules" thing wasn't quite what the fellows and I had had in mind. In fact, one could go as far as to say it was the exact opposite. I felt a mild headache coming on at this point, mainly in anticipation of the most assuredly painful conversation I knew would take place. Trying to argue with Brad was always like urinating directly into a gust of wind. You only did it once, and you ended up with piss on your face.

"You don't understand," he said, staring at me with a fierceness that I was certain he practiced nightly in the mirror. (Brad was kind of full of himself.) "Fight club is an extension of pain. Rules are for the Ikea culture. You are not a beautiful

snowflake. You are the all-loving, all-dancing shit of the world."

Christ. *This* again.

"Yes, yes," I cooed. "That's great, Brad. But I still wanted to throw a few ideas at you." I couldn't stand it when he started spouting that pseudo-deep catchphrase garbage at me. I mean, I liked fight club. It was great exercise and the people seemed clever and friendly when they weren't dancing around me planning to punch my face, neck, and genitals the first opportunity they saw. But the philosophy Brad could keep. I had a hard time taking advice on the direction of my life from a guy I saw whispering to himself that "the rabbit goes around the tree" when he tied up his sneakers. Anyway, I had the sneaking suspicion that Brad wrote most of his "you are not a beautiful snowflake" horseshit while higher than Christ. It didn't matter much to me either way, since I secretly held the belief that the only people buying into Brad Pitt's brain dribblings were in a bit of a heightened state themselves. Still, the guys and I had come to him specifically with the intention of putting rules in the damn

club. This "there are no rules" crap was just another way of Brad's to fuck something up in his usual well-intentioned-yet-still-profoundly-retarded way.

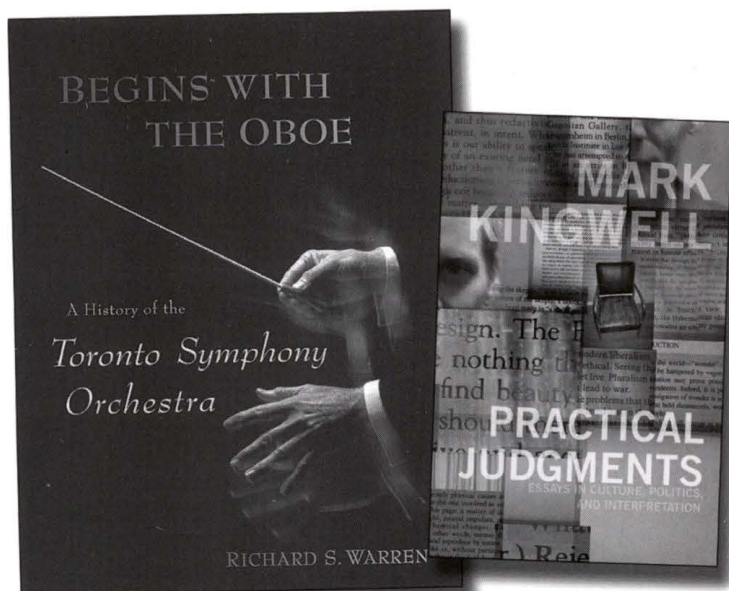
I pulled him aside and tried again, speaking slowly and accentuating my points with hand gestures.

"I'm one hundred per cent behind the no-beautiful-snowflake clause, Brad, that's some sensible thinking. Still," and I put my arm over his shoulder, "a few of the lads and I were hoping to get a few other rules laid down. Like shoes. I've got no problems with throwing a few punches around with the guys, but when I have to go to work the next day with half a boot heel embedded in my forehead, I think it's time to institute a shirt and shoes policy."

Usually, I would have to play verbal games with him, making him think it'd been him who'd thought up the idea, not me. It made him feel pretty sharp, and it was only due to this flattery offensive that we now had a Coke machine and snack table down at fight club. But I really didn't have the time for it today.

"But the only rule of fight club is there are no rules, Jay," he said, like I was an

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for the cloud
that caused such
electricity

even though his lightning
was a venomous snake-tongue spit
and his thunder, bullying rams
locked inside white slapping clouds

but he made you feel
soft and pink
not blue or grey as
sleeping asphalt.

So you'll continue
on this route
until the pavement dries
and the potholes are filled in.

—DAYLE FURLONG

idiot and needed it explained again. His eyes were clenched up in confusion.

I sighed.

"Yes, Brad. So I was thinking maybe we could amend it, to something like, 'The only rule of fight club is there are no rules—except maybe if you could take your shoes off before fighting, hey, no problems there, sports fan.'" Brad stared at me.

"I dunno, Jay . . .," he said. His face was starting to twist up in confusion again, and I could tell that, as usual, I'd managed to leave him twelve blocks behind me. I backed up and tried again.

"Brad—it's not even like the slogan makes sense. Yes, it sounds cool. Yes, we're—" I saw him open his mouth to speak and intercepted him. "—and yes, we're all not beautiful snowflakes, Brad." Brad went wide-eyed, no doubt wondering if I had psychic powers or something. I plowed on. "But if we have one rule, Brad, and that rule is that there

are no rules—" I was using my balled-up fists to represent the different parts of the argument. I knew the next hurdle was going to be tough. "—then we *do*, in fact, have a rule. Do you see, Brad?"

Brad had his finger in the side of his mouth and was sucking on it. Christ, I thought, this would be so much easier if I could just talk to the Edward Norton side of him.

"Obviously. Yeah, I know. Totally," he said. I could tell it had flown so far over his head it was in a new time zone by now. I tried once again, using word substitution. This had worked in the past with Brad. "Say, for instance, Brad, that the only peach is that there are no peaches."

This went on for hours. By the time dawn broke, I was fairly sure I'd managed to sink it into that thick lead-encased skull of his. He promised me that he would amend the rules for the next meeting.

I should have known better. Brad gathered us together the following week

and, once again, pulled a frayed scrap of paper from his pocket.

"The first rule of fight club is that you don't talk about peaches. The second rule of peach club is that you don't fight."

Confused stares were traded amongst the mob, but rules were rules. Luckily someone had brought a deck of cards.

That long and boring Friday night, the first rule of old maid club was to pass to your right, and the second rule was that, for the time being, the joker would represent the old maid. The guys unanimously voted that I go and have another talk with Brad, since I'd had the most luck in the past, and they were all at the ends of their ropes about the whole new "no fighting" fight club rule. Besides—peach club? There was talk of retracting membership. Either that, or making some preserves and delicious jams, and no one seemed to know where to start with that.

"You have to go talk to him, man."

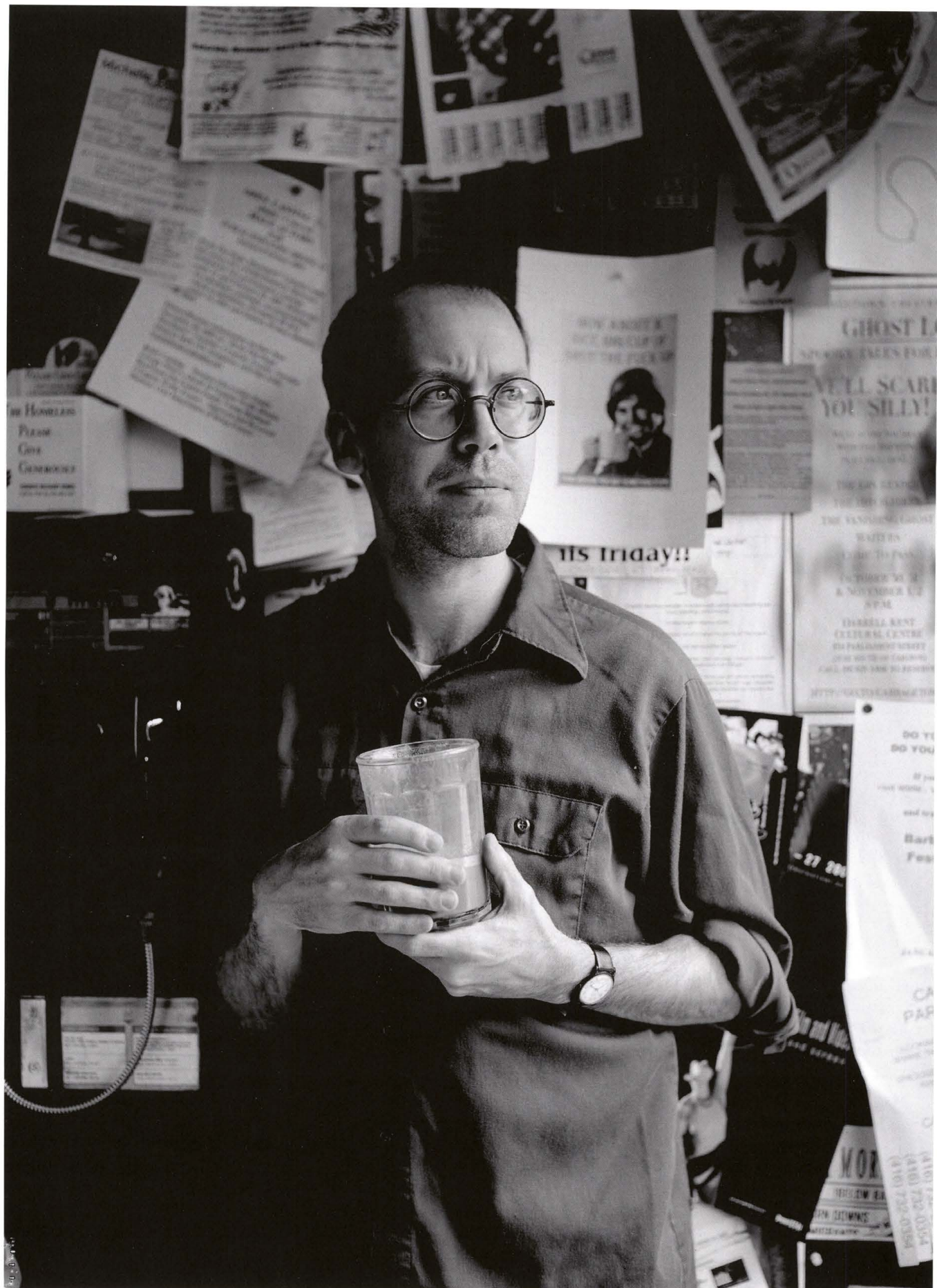
But I was having none of it. That night I just drafted up the rules my damn self and mailed them anonymously to Brad. Sure enough, the next week they were in the amended club charter. I noted with regret that Brad had also taken the time to add in two more of his typically opaque, meaningless rules to the list I'd helpfully prepared. Now there was some stupid caveat that we weren't even allowed to *talk* about fight club. I hadn't written that. The second rule was the same as the first. No, I mean it was the exact same rule. I can't even begin to imagine how insanely stoned he would've had to have been to write out the same rule twice but, in classic Brad fashion, he soldiered on like he'd written it twice on purpose.

One of the guys leaned over to me. "Isn't he breaking the rule just by telling us about the—?"

"It's probably best not to think about it," I said.

That night, I plowed into some accounting executive with an uppercut, busting his jaw open and feeling more alive than I had in ages. I was happy to learn that being barefoot actually helped my balance too, which was kind of nice. ☾

Jay Pinkerton lives near the Church and Wellesley area. His various essays and articles have been published in National Lampoon, Modern Humorist, and many other fine publications. Born "Illegitimate Pinkerton" in Kingston, Ontario, at the age of zero, his name was later changed for reasons of coherency.



WHAT'S THE FREQUENCY, JOE?

Meet Joe Matt, indie comics' answer to nerd rock.

INTERVIEW BY CONAN TOBIAS

To say Joe Matt's world is the street where he lives isn't much of an exaggeration. In the decade and a half he has been writing and drawing his life in the pages of his comic, *Peepshow*, Matt has concerned himself with little more than his few personal obsessions: book collecting, girls, music, and the dubbing of pornography—which, inevitably, leads to his related obsession, masturbation. To view the world through the eyes of Matt's autobiographical “quarterly” is to think such things as Reaganomics, the fall of the Berlin Wall, grunge, the internet, Y2K, and 9/11 never happened. In *Peepshow*, world events not only take a back seat, they aren't even in the car.

Matt, thirty-nine, began chronicling the minutiae of his day-to-day existence in 1987, in a series of one-page strips published originally in two comic anthology series, and later collected into a book under the title *Peepshow: The Cartoon Diary of Joe Matt*. Since 1992, he has published thirteen issues of his comic book, also titled *Peepshow*, as well as two more books of collected work, the most recent of which, *Fair Weather*, was released this fall. In its early days, Matt's strip was most easily—and often—compared to the work of Robert Crumb, the godfather of underground, autobiographical comics, both for its cartooning style and its themes of self- and sexual obsession. Since then, Matt has developed storytelling and artistic styles of his own, as well as a small cast of supporting characters—Matt's real-life friends and cartoonists Seth and Chester Brown—who are forever subjected to his notorious cheapness, his whining, and his relationships with women, both real and imagined.

While *Peepshow* may not enjoy the sales numbers of *Superman* or *Spider-Man* (though, since *Peepshow*'s first issue, the circulation of superhero comics has plummeted, narrowing the gap significantly), Matt's following is as hard-core as it is impressive. Though a glance at the letters page of any given issue suggests many of Matt's fans fall into the stereo-

typical fanboy category (young men living in their mothers' basements, substituting pen-and-ink fantasy women for the real thing), *Peepshow*'s subscriber list also crosses over into the nerd avant-garde. Self-professed fans include Crumb himself (“I can't wait to see what happens next”), *Simpsons* creator Matt Groening (“I'm a Joe Matt fanatic!”), musician Moby (“*Peepshow* rocks hard, poppa”), and comedians Jeanne Garofalo and Ben Stiller. Even Rivers Cuomo, of the nerd-rock group Weezer, once gushed, “Your work has been a big influence on my songwriting.” But perhaps even more bewildering is Matt's popularity with young women (two of Matt's recent relationships, including his current girlfriend, were all initiated either via *Peepshow*'s letters page or through comic conventions). “A part of it is his portrayal of himself is not entirely unsympathetic,” says Peter Birkemoe, owner of the Beguiling comic shop in Toronto's Mirvish Village. “I think he confirms all the fears girls have about men, maybe not their worst fears, but they see a guy who's confessing all these horrible things, and for some reason they seem to find that endearing.”

Peepshow's circulation of about eight thousand is very high for an independent comic. (Any given Batman or Superman title may sell a hundred thousand copies per issue.) Only a few independents, such as Adrian Tomine's *Optic Nerve* or Daniel Clowes's *Eightball*, fare significantly better, both reaching the twenty-thousand range. Independent comics are not huge money-makers, and, unlike many of his contemporaries, such as Seth and Tomine, Matt doesn't increase his income with magazine illustration work. (The meager income he earns from his *Peepshow* royalties is supplemented only by his savings, upon which he maintains “an iron grip.”) While the Joe Matt depicted in *Peepshow* considers such work a violation of his artistic integrity, the real Joe Matt admits he's just too lazy to bother. Instead, he keeps his expenses low, and enjoys

a comfortable life, even if it may not be as luxurious as that of his many famous admirers.

Though he has resided in Canada for fifteen years—the last eleven of which he has spent in a boarding house in Toronto's Annex neighbourhood—Matt grew up in Lansdale, Pennsylvania, thirty miles from Robert Crumb's childhood home, Philadelphia. His father spent twenty years working for Amtrak, while his mother studied painting at the Philadelphia College of Art, only to give it up shortly after graduation to raise a family.

Many of the eccentricities that make Joe Matt the comic book character so interesting to read—his collecting of daily newspaper strips, his selfishness, his obsession with collecting literally any comic-related memorabilia—began during the real Joe Matt's youth. This early love of comics—and the encouragement of his artist mother—inspired Matt's early doodles.

In high school, Matt found that his increasing ability to illustrate quickly won him friends in the popular group, something the nebbish youth had previously been unable to obtain. “It made me feel good,” says Matt. “The response I got from kids and my parents and stuff was much more gratifying somehow than getting good grades.”

It wasn't until his second year of art school (like his mother, he attended the Philadelphia College of Art) that Matt was introduced to the work of Crumb. Crumb's autobiographical work was painfully honest. Though more overtly political than Matt, Crumb was a sexual neurotic, and his art ran the gambit from cartoonish to grotesquely realistic. This discovery began to quickly have an influence on Matt's choice of reading material—drawing him away from the superhero camp—and, eventually, on his own work. “It already felt nostalgic, like something from the past, even though it wasn't,” says Matt of his early affinity for Crumb. “His style was obviously

influenced by [political cartoonist] Thomas Nast; the really early cartooning of the twenties and thirties.”

To Matt, college was the ticket to a career as an illustrator. Today, he admits that, at the time, he had no idea what being a career illustrator meant or how to go about becoming one, and recalls with horror days spent shopping his portfolio to magazine after magazine upon graduation. “I didn’t have the social graces to endear myself to these art directors,” he says. “I just stood there while they looked at my portfolio.” Matt began drawing minor, everyday events from his life in a sketchbook. Friends read the strips and convinced him to start an autobiographical comic of his own, in the tradition of Crumb. These early white-on-black pages chronicled Matt’s miserable summer-long stint colouring *Batman*, his moves from Lansdale to Montreal to Toronto, and his first meetings with Seth and Chester Brown. (A reviewer once referred to Seth and Brown’s *Peepshow* appearances as “the indie comics equivalent of *The Jetsons Meet the Flintstones*.) Many strips seemed to act as a form of therapy for Matt, dealing with events from his childhood and teen years, his past relationships with women, and his penchant for pornography. Most, however, focused on his relationship with then-girlfriend Trish. Given their monthly frequency, new strips often found inspiration in Trish’s reactions to previous strips, resulting in a comic book *vérité* style that was both uncomfortable and entertaining to read. Readers were also given a glimpse at the increasing tension in Matt’s relationship with Trish, caused largely by the couple’s sex life taking a back seat to Matt’s love of pornography and his chronic masturbation.

After a run of nearly four years, Kitchen Sink Press collected Matt’s adventures and released the original *Peepshow* book. At this time, Matt decided to move to the more narrative-friendly format of the comic book. In 1991, he joined the growing roster of Drawn & Quarterly, an up-and-coming Montreal publisher that had printed many of his *Peepshow* strips in its eponymous anthology series. (Drawn & Quarterly also became home to the work of Seth and, eventually, Chester Brown.) The first issue of *Peepshow* depicts a lustful Matt fantasizing about a girl whom

Trish had recently befriended. Committed to his frank autobiographical style, Matt lays bare his infatuation and his futile attempts to impress her behind Trish’s back. The real-life result—as seen in the next issue—involves a humiliated Trish finally bringing an end to the couple’s tumultuous four-year relationship. “I didn’t expect it. I wanted her to just believe me that I was exaggerating this for the effect of outraging the readers,”



Chester, Joe, and Seth, from *Peepshow* No. 13.

Matt says. “I wanted her to stand by me like Howard Stern’s wife does, and realize that this is just a shtick. But, in hindsight, that was the end, and my infatuation with that girl was indicative of this crappy relationship. It wasn’t healthy. I obviously didn’t want that relationship to continue, but part of me did. Part of me just wanted to be alone to watch as much porn as possible because I hadn’t lived that dream yet, so that’s the biggest reason I think I drove her away. In the comic, I gave her a black eye; twelve years later now, I still don’t hear the end of it. I never drew the hundreds of times she was punching me. I was like a battered husband. I tried to make myself look bad and part of that was admitting I had a crush on this girl.”

The final pages of *Peepshow*’s second issue depict Matt on the verge of an insane frenzy upon realizing Trish is really gone, before collapsing in a fit of sobs. The issue ends with a touching flashback to the couple’s second date, where a bashful Matt first admits his love for Trish. Over the following four issues, Matt attempts to come to terms with his loss, while consistently failing to find love with anyone new. *Peepshow*’s first extended story ends with Trish compromising her artistic integrity—in Matt’s eyes, at least—by taking an animation job with Disney and moving to California, leaving Matt alone in his room, seemingly destined to continue loving

only his pornography—and himself.

The first six issues of *Peepshow* were collected into one volume as *The Poor Bastard*, originally published in 1997 (the book has sold more than seven thousand copies to date). While Matt’s cult status had slowly been building up to that point, *The Poor Bastard* cemented his reputation as one of the leading comic book artists and storytellers of his generation. “Despite some deviations from fact, *The Poor Bastard* was a much more honest portrayal than people were used to seeing,” says Birkemoe of *The Poor Bastard*’s commercial and critical success. “While someone like Crumb lays everything bare, people can’t conceive themselves confessing the way he does. With Joe, they can.”

Unlike the world of big-budget superhero comics, where an artist and a writer will often co-create a book, assisted by a dedicated inker and letterer, underground comics are generally the vision of one person. This person is usually solely responsible for the story, art, lettering, and inking. Considering Matt’s lifelong love of comics (he continues his childhood hobby of collecting newspaper dailies, though in the somewhat more expensive form of amassing Frank King’s run of *Gasoline Alley* from the nineteen-twenties to fifties), not to mention his profession, it is somewhat odd that he prefers to think of himself as a writer rather than a cartoonist. Given the choice, Matt says he would rather write than draw. “Chris Ware [author and artist of *The Acme Novelty Library* and *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth*] said something like, ‘If you put too much effort into the pictures, they’re going to be distracting from the read, you’re going to slow it down.’ Comics are for reading. Sketchbooks are for looking at. I would like to just write, but I feel like it’s easier to be a bigger fish in the small pond of comics. Because there’s no money in comics, really, there aren’t that many people doing it.”

At the same time, Matt is also tortured by the artistic process. That, combined with his self-described laziness, caused his quarterly comic book to fall behind schedule after its second issue, soon publishing only twice a year, then once. “Joe would be seeing more sales if he were more prolific,” says Chris Oliveros, publisher of Drawn & Quarterly. “You



A typical Joe Matt day, as seen in *Peepshow* No. 12.

need to come out more frequently to build a following. It's amazing he does so well considering how often he comes out." But Matt has somehow managed to hold on to his following, despite the fact that, since 1998, he has been averaging only one issue every two years. "I'm so anal-compulsive, the inking is such a horrible nightmare to me. I can barely make a stroke or two before I have to white it out," Matt says. "The whole thing's very unpleasant to me. Even when I'm penciling, I'm uptight about thinking the oil from my fingers is going to get on the board and later the brush stroke will hit that slick of oil. It never stops. I really love comics, I feel it's what I'm best at whether I like it or not, so I shouldn't be trying to write novels."

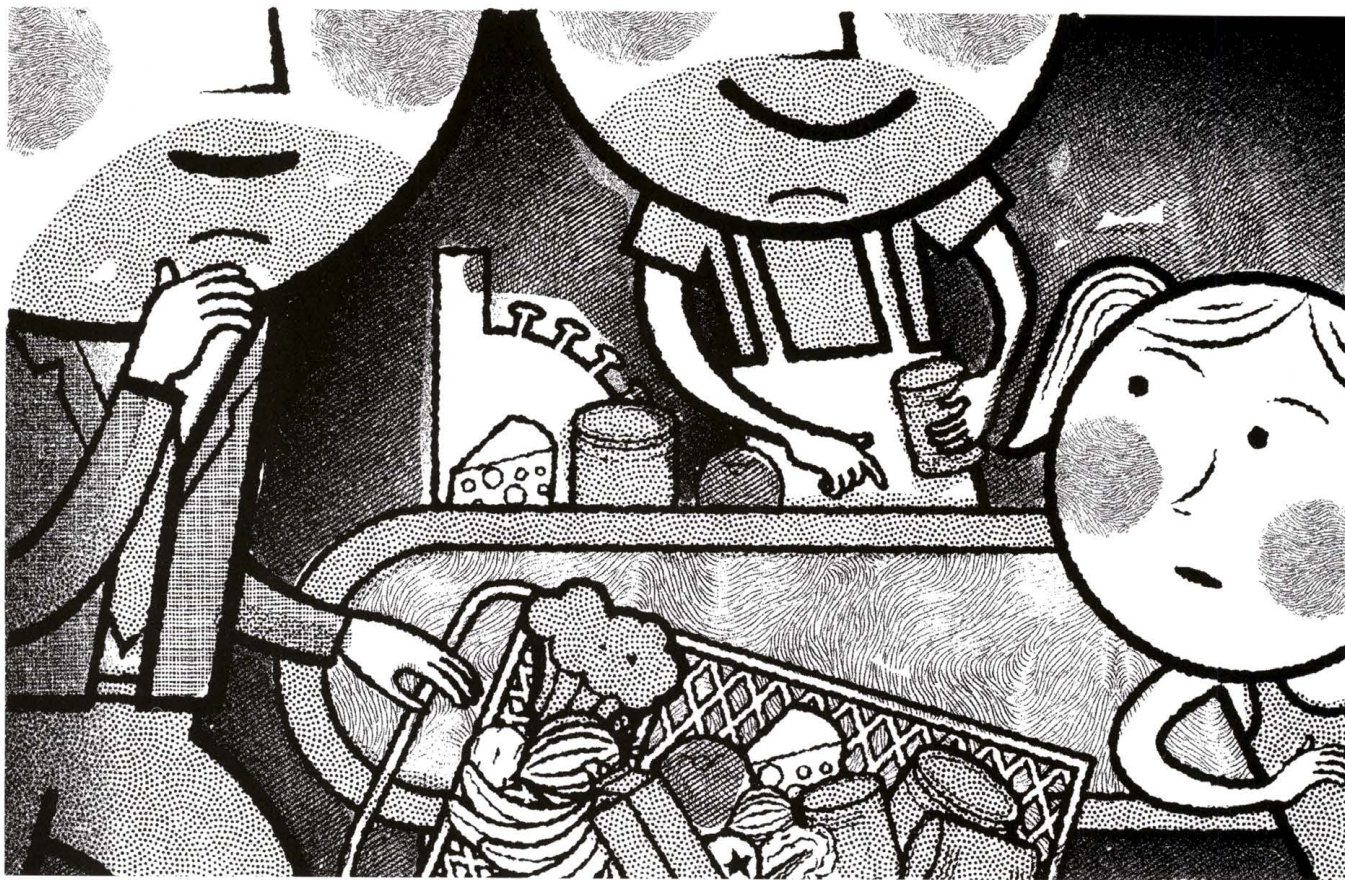
Matt's most recent collected work, *Fair Weather*, published this fall by Drawn & Quarterly, collects *Peepshow* Nos. 7–10, originally published from 1995 to 1997. Emotionally drained from his breakup with Trish, Matt broke from *The Poor Bastard's* masturbatory

self-loathing style, focusing instead on an isolated tale from his childhood. While *Fair Weather's* ten-year-old Joe Matt is easily recognizable as the selfish obsessive he would later become in *The Poor Bastard*, the story's subject matter could not be further removed from his previous work. "I would have preferred to do something else in retrospect," Matt says today. "After *The Poor Bastard* and after losing Trish, I felt like I was so miserable I didn't want to do anything for years, and I didn't even know what to write about. I felt like just doing anything would be better than nothing, so I chose that story." *Peepshow's* letters page has always received an equal number of letters both praising Matt for his storytelling and berating him for his lifestyle and his treatment of Trish. With *Fair Weather*, however, Matt drew his first batch of hate mail directed at *Peepshow's* storyline ("What a royal piece of roach shit," wrote one reader). Many who had loved *The Poor Bastard* for its portrayal of Joe Matt, porn-addicted, masturbating freeloader, seemed to have little toler-

ance for the back story, especially considering *Peepshow's* ever-decreasing rate of publication. "A lot of *Peepshow's* appeal is the character of Adult Joe," says Birkemoe. "The child character is not as complex or interesting. I suspect he may have ended the story early as a result of the criticism."

Despite his slow output, Matt is determined to continue chronicling his life—all of it. While the move to comic books has allowed more freedom in terms of extended storytelling, it has lost the immediacy and instant reaction of the original monthly strip. Matt's current storyline, dealing with his addiction to watching pornographic films—and his obsession with editing out their story-forwarding devices and extended close-ups of men to create a series of ultimate highlight reels—began in *Peepshow* No. 11, published in 1998, and picks up not long after the final installment of *The Poor Bastard*, published in 1994. Now three issues in (*Peepshow's* most recent issue was published in early 2002), Matt is ten years behind in chronicling his life. If he continues his current rate of publication—and assuming he won't become even less prolific—his projected ten issue story will not end until 2016, by which time Matt will be fifty-three years old. "It's frustrating. I've got such a backlog of things I need to cover," Matt says. "I have two big relationships behind me that I need to depict in the comic. I sort of feel compelled to write about every sexual encounter. There's only been a few, but they're important to me. And my relationships with Chester and Seth, and my relationship with pornography, these are the themes that continue today. There's a vague plan [to increase production], but days go by and I still don't do anything. It's like the last ten years, all the dubbing of pornography I've done has occupied maybe fifty per cent of my waking hours. As long as I'm controlling the masturbation and pornography—the compulsion is really my biggest problem—as long as I'm trying to control that, it can only follow that I'll be more productive. Trying to find that discipline is my personal hell." ☞

Fair Weather is currently available from Drawn & Quarterly. Conan Tobias is Taddle Creek's editor-in-chief.



WHOREDOM

An excerpt.

FICTION BY TAMARA FAITH BERGER

Men always think that a woman alone at night is a whore. It doesn't matter what she's wearing or how she's walking, if it's late on the streets and she's all by herself, he'll roll down his window and stare at her ass. It's like he's waiting for something. Some tiny click. Her jump in the car saying "yes," saying "more." . . . And if the woman didn't think about it, then maybe she really would do it. I mean get in the car and believe she's a whore. Because all women could do it—complete that kind of bravery that it took for the guy just to stop and show off his dark little smirk. She probably *should* just get into the car, to get rid of that smirk that's making her blush. Because when she's sucking his dick he's not going to smirk. Not when she's letting him get in her either.

Men started smirking at me when I was pretty young. It happened for the first time when I was at the supermarket

with my father. I was around twelve, and the guy at the cash said, "You better keep a close watch on that one." His eyes squinted down at my chest when he said it, those two lumps pressing up under my shirt. Then the guy made a noise, a grunt laugh through closed lips. My father looked down at me and laughed quickly too, but it sounded like he didn't really mean to. Then, when we got in the car, my father didn't say a word. He just turned up the news and started driving really fast. I put my forehead against the window and watched us pass all the cars. I could still feel that guy looking right through my shirt. I thought for a second that my chest had pushed out more when the guy was staring at it. I heard my father's breathing go loud, air scratching past the hairs of his moustache. And something started happening. . . . Between my thighs on the seat I felt hot little beats. Like a

pulse or a bird was whipping down there. It started going harder. I had to squeeze my thighs tight. I was trying not to make any sound from the pulsing, trying not to let it fall out in those breaths. . . . But when we finally got home, I kept hearing what that guy had said, how it made them both laugh. "You better keep a close watch on that one." I didn't really know what it meant. I thought the guy meant, maybe, I was pretty, but when I tried to think more about really what he meant, I felt strange. Lying on my bed, the feeling wouldn't stop spreading. It started filling up my underwear, hot little beats. It felt O.K., it felt good, but I didn't want it to keep happening. Because I thought that my father knew what had happened. I thought in the car he could smell it.

Things started to happen more often after that. I started getting that feeling around men, older men, men in stores,

on the street. It was always when I thought I saw men looking at me, the ones that I thought I'd never meet in my life. The construction men working in crews on the road. Men who were with their kids and their wives. The best looking men were the ones who were biggest. The ones who were furthest, darkest, steepest. That beating between my legs started happening so much I thought that those men could see right through me. Just how my body was standing or walking. I thought that it meant that I wanted them to see. All those beats from my body, hanging there loud.

Sometimes I'd imagine a man at my house, a stranger in the bathroom, watching me shower. His two dark hands would open a towel when I stepped out. Then he'd dry me, rub me, move the towel really fast back and forth behind my shoulders, behind my back and all the way down. My flesh would be shaking close to the man's face. My ass red behind me. Eyes blooming wide. The man would follow me into my bedroom, his footsteps sounding in time to my beats. He'd stand over my bed while I pretended to sleep. With one of my feet sticking out of the covers, then one arm, leading up to my chest. If I rolled on my side the man would see more. How my breasts were starting to grow from my body, my nipples getting hard, my hair down there thick. If I rolled on my back the sheet would fall off and the guy would see straight up between my two legs. I'd spread them for him. I knew I would. I was pulsing so much there I'd have to. Because I thought that if the man could see me naked like that, just silently watching, then it would be O.K. That I'd stay quiet while he touched me, anywhere he wanted. I'd want him to come back every single night, too. So he could tell me how much bigger my breasts were getting. How much more hair he was seeing on my vagina. How much more stuff he was feeling down there.

I'd never even really touched myself where I imagined a man doing it. Maybe if I had, then everything would've been different, I don't know. ▽

*Tamara Faith Berger lives in Chinatown. Her first novel, *Lie With Me*, was published in 2001 by Gutter. She is currently working on a screenplay and another book.*

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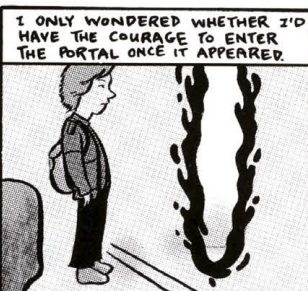
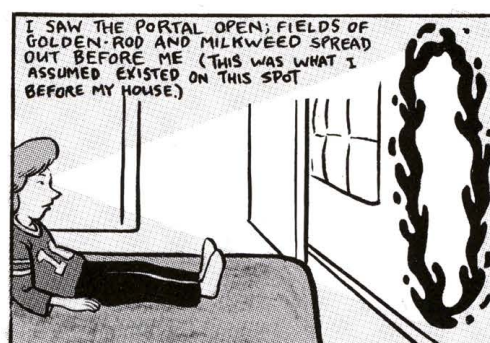
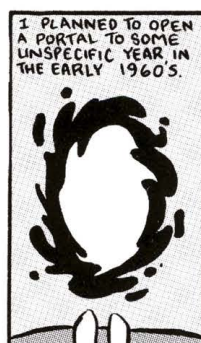
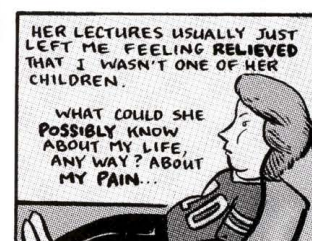
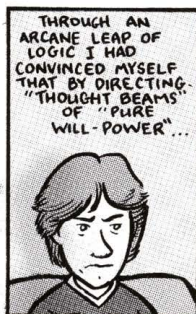
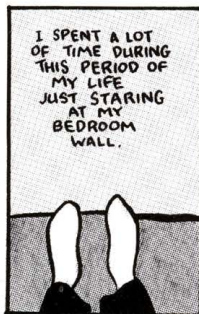
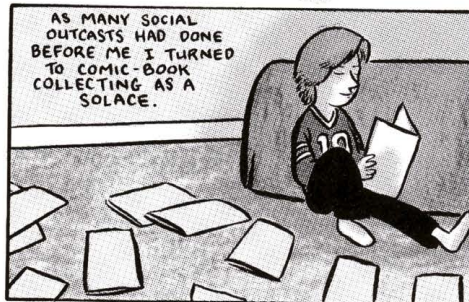
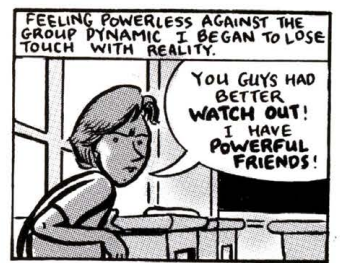
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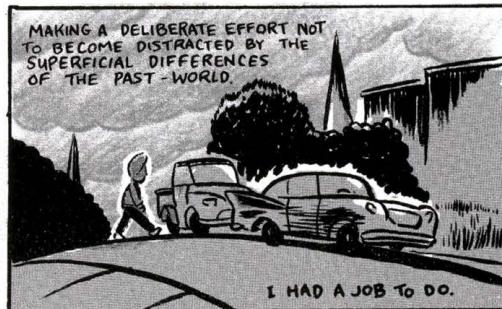
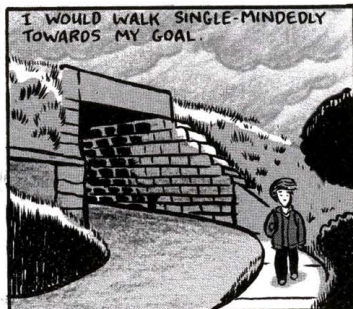
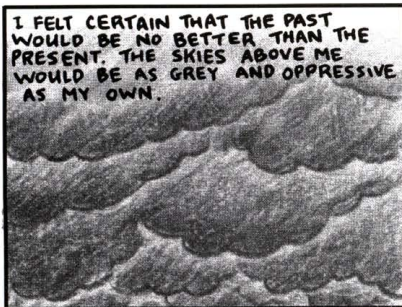
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The PORTAL

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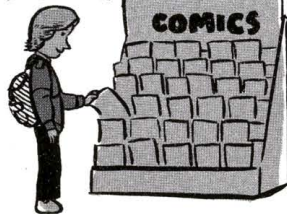




I HAD A JOB TO DO.



THE RACK WOULD BE FILLED WITH EVERY COMIC I HAD EVER LONGED FOR.



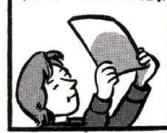
JUST A FEW OF THESE COMICS WOULD BE WORTH THOUSANDS IN MY TIME.



I SAW THESE AS THE OBJECTS THAT WOULD SOMEHOW DELIVER ME.



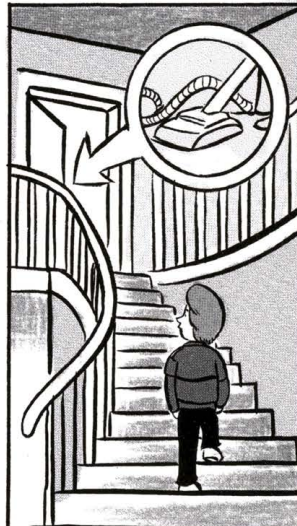
THEY WOULD RESTORE TO ME THE AURA, THE ESTEEM, AND THE HAPPINESS THAT HAD BEEN TAKEN FROM ME SO UNJUSTLY.



FOR THE TIME BEING I WOULD ENDURE THE DAILY HUMILIATIONS...



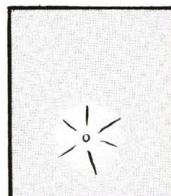
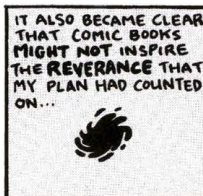
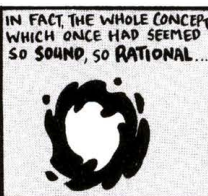
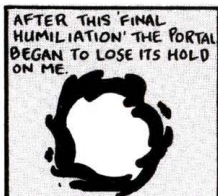
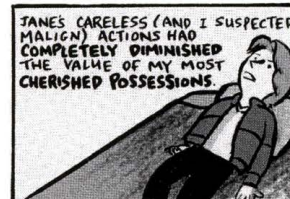
COMFORTED BY THE KNOWLEDGE THAT I SOON WOULD BE RETURNED TO MY RIGHTFUL PLACE IN SOCIETY.



I TOOK THAT AS A BAD SIGN...



SHE HAD PIERCED THE COMIC ITSELF!



THE RAT

FICTION BY ANDREW PYPER

Oh God! Another story of an affair. Extramarital, mid-life, May-December. The sort of terrible thing that screws up everybody's lives and makes you think hard about your own for a time, as though your life might, given sufficient effort, allow itself to be figured out. Have you heard this one before? Don't answer that! Just accept my apologies in advance. Along with the explanation that this is my story and therefore carries the small virtue of authenticity. As for its commonness, there's nothing I can do except try to point out the microscopic ways in which it might be unique. Because even the most predictable human events have their own surprises if you stick your nose in there far enough, don't they?

So let me throw out my aces right here and now and see if I can't convince myself: I was thirty-nine at the time, the girl was eighteen, and the whole thing ended in what some might call a symbolic death. How's that?

Now, the names: I'm Richard (not Dick, *never* Dick), my wife was Alice, and the girl was Penny. The last being an anachronistic sort of name that can still be found in the small Ontario towns such as the one we lived in at the time. A name that today belongs only to drug-store cashiers or field-hockey prodigies (both of which my own Penny proudly was). Suitable for cutesy jokes ("A Penny for your thoughts!") as well as a constant reminder of the costs involved.

There. You see? We're already real.

We met at the gym. Both Penny and Alice, twenty years apart. In both cases it was after Christmas, I was feeling uncomfortably inflated by too much chocolate and egg nog, and dug out my membership card with ideas of some serious short-term toxin shedding. Next thing you know, I'm asking a girl to run away with me.

And Alice was just a girl at the time. Not only because she was younger then, but because of her particularly girlish qualities, such as bubble-gum popping

and skirt-twirling cries of "Oh, *you!*" As with many young women in those days, it was as though she'd modelled her personality after Gidget.

There, next to the drinking fountain in the field house at the university we both went to, flushed from her yoga class. Tall and unsure of her limbs, twiggy fingers playing shy over her lips. I don't remember the words we shared, but Alice seemed to find me a clever bit of naughtiness, which pleased me. Being naughty with girls is the best kind of naughtiness, a truth she seemed already aware of. We talked ourselves into eloping even though our parents weren't against the marriage. And then things started to move pretty fast, or unbelievably slow, I'm not sure. But the gist is we got married and older, and Alice pretty much abandoned the Gidget routine halfway through the honeymoon.

Penny was a somewhat different story. She worked at the Shoppers Drug Mart where Alice and I would pick up pads, pills, and our mostly neglected prophylactics on Saturday afternoons. A little in love with her at first sight, as I tend to be with teenaged cashiers forced to wear those unflattering, polyester apron thingies. Always a smile, a "yeah, no kidding" to any comment I might make about the weather, a whiff of lemony moisturizer rising up from the coins poured into your palm. There were three or four teenagers who worked there, and, until I really spoke to her, I confess I couldn't distinguish Penny from the others. She was just one of the "Shoppers Drug Mart girls" who occupied my mind in the same way as the "corner store girls" and "library loans counter girls." Pleasant faces and poking nipples to grace a small-town fellow's day.

So this is what I did: I took a common fantasy—a settled, responsible man running off with a virgin (more or less)—and made it happen for real. Where's the confession? I'll sign.

Me and me and me! Where's my Penny in all of this? There: her face moving into my field of vision as a lip-glossed moon as

I lie below her on the bench press, gasping. The cashier optimism of her "Hi! Can I work in some sets with you?"

"Of course you can," I said, before I figured out what it was she was asking me.

Penny reset the weight to twenty pounds heavier than I was attempting (a flash of teeth to sweep away my embarrassment) and lay down to swiftly lift the bar eighteen times. She looked to me like some kind of enchanted machine, as though I'd been thrown back a few centuries and was setting my eyes upon Gutenberg's press for the first time, printing off page after page of identically wondrous verse. A machine that smiled a lot and whose cheeks turned an almost alarming red and wore a St. Helen's field hockey T-shirt that would have been technically considered one size too small.

Say "Penny!" out loud and the first thing that will come to my mind is how my sweetheart looked pumping away on the bench press that January afternoon. Young and almost laughably healthy, a farming-stock heart pounding inside her ribs. And, as it turns out, this first impression was pretty much correct. Her back is broad. She is a very capable girl.

"Would you like to work in?" she asked when she was finished.

"Would you like to have lunch with me?"

Penny looked at me without the looks I might have expected.

"What's your name?"

"Richard."

"Does anyone ever call you Dick?"

"Never."

"O.K., Dick. But I have to be at work by four," she says. Then I recognize her. The apron thingy. The name tag. Doing a price check on Alice's antiperspirant.

"Penny. Right?"

"Married. Right?"

I bought us drive-through cheeseburgers and we ate them in the town's only underground parking garage so we didn't have to leave the engine running to stay warm. We had, as you would guess, precious little in common. Yet we

spoke easily to each other; she about high-school characters, and me of my memories of them. A bit about her family, whom I feared. But her parents didn't seem to care where she went, which made things go smoothly for us (although I walked past her father on the street once and held my breath as he went by, a far bigger man than I would have wished). And there was always sex to fill the time when conversation failed. Penny knew as much about these mat-

wasn't shame at all, really. More a particular version of happiness I'd never experienced before, an unsanctioned lightness I initially mistook for misery. This confusion had to do with my efforts at finding an explanation (for there has to be a simple, withering reason for why men like me do such things, doesn't there?). Was it "just about sex"? A symptom of a "mid-life crisis"? An irrational response to my "fear of death"? Yes, yes, and yes. But when you're a part

this, at any rate, is how I've come to understand my doing things I probably shouldn't have.

Somehow, all of this had to do with the rat. It might have been a creature of a smaller scale, as I never saw it myself. Yet it was a noisy enough son of a bitch to be a rat. In those days of increasing distance between us, it was kind of nice for Alice and I to share this one domestic plague.



ters as I did, possibly more. I was shocked by this, over and over, which was a pleasure.

And what did she see in me, aside from a bald patch ("Does it get cold up there?") and an eager laugh? God knows. I'm just glad she saw something. The thought that she might have seen it before in other men occurred to me more than once, but not wanting an answer, I never asked.

At first I felt a lot of shame, but it turns out I was wrong about that. It

of the hard situation behind such catchalls, they tend not to mean much. How can you talk yourself out of an obsession just by recognizing it as an obsession? Yes, my life is a blissful agony since I met her, but I know that it's only a *projection* or *transference* or *glandular secretion* or something, so I'll just be heading off for some counselling now. Sorry for any inconvenience!

Not a chance. You're already in there, it's your life (and therefore real as anything), there's nothing you can do. Or

I should point out that we never used to fight, which made the fighting after she found out about Penny and me that much worse. I blamed her, that's the simple fact of it. Blamed poor Alice for getting a good job at the bad university on the edge of that town, and me having to give up on my book. Oh, that's too much just to say aloud! "My book!" More the book-that-never-was, the most talked about non-existent book of the season, the biggest runaway blockbuster in the history of Richard and

Alice. Then I went and spoiled things by reading it. Printed up the few thousand words I had on the computer to take a look at how it was coming along, you know, to check out how it flowed. And it flowed right off my desk and down the toilet at the end of the hall.

I was astounded at how bad it was. Not astounded that it *could* be bad, mind you (for I'd always warned myself of this possibility, usually in the terrible minutes prior to the first coffee in the morning), but that it *was* so bad. You know what it was like? It was like picking up the phone first thing on a Sunday morning and having a stranger at the other end call you an asshole before hanging up (this has happened to me more than once since Penny and I got together). A damn nasty shock is what it is.

So I gave up on my book—my theoretical book—which, when I added it up in my head, had more or less happily consumed my mind for the preceding six years of life and marriage. Abandoned my characters (of whom I felt sure of only one, and I hadn't even introduced her yet), my startling metaphors (all still just "in my head"), and my story (which had no ending, aside from the notion that somebody major had to die). As it turned out, giving up on all of it was easier than I would have thought. Spent a week or two looking around the town Alice had brought me to and saw that there was not a thing for me to do in it. Or nothing I wanted to do, at any rate. Nothing that looked appealing if I squinted at it through the main street windows or on the index cards of the unemployment office bulletin board.

And the whole time Alice was so supportive and encouraging—her greatest mistake. She cheered me with all my past successes and was left breathless by the wide variety of my current options. Maybe this was the break I'd needed all along! What about getting to some of that freelancing I'd mentioned, or sniffing around for part-time work at one of the county newspapers, just something small to get me started. Yeah, sure. Good idea. I'll definitely look into it.

Oh, how I blamed her!

And then the rat arrived.

It only visited at night, and never strayed outside the kitchen, which, as luck would have it, lay on the other side of our bedroom wall. He'd like to get inside things—the back of the stove, the

cupboards, the canvas sack of imported basmati rice that Alice insisted on—and make far more noise than vermin have a right to. He liked to break stuff, this rat. But, when I'd get up and turn on the kitchen light, the room would go instantly quiet. I'd fling open the cupboard doors and shine a flashlight in, each time expecting to be met with the glinting buttons of his eyes. But there was never anything but another shattered coffee mug and a trail of black turds the size of Tic Tacs.

When I'd return to bed, Alice and I would talk about the rat. We wondered if he was single or kept a family in the basement. We tried to gauge his size in precise terms, what he might feel like to lift in your bare hands. But mostly we'd talk about traps and their ethical implications. The poison: effective, but how long was the poor beast made to suffer? The "humane" trap that keeps it alive so you could release it outside: yes, but it would only come back. The glue paper: too, *too* horrendous, even for a rat.

So we settled on the old wood platform springer, which we convinced ourselves of having the advantage of swiftness. One second he's licking at a hunk of Velveeta, the next his spine has been snapped. No time to swallow or blink or (the worst case scenario for us) utter a squeak of recognition. This was our hope, anyway.

I bought three: behind the stove, under the sink, the gap between the dishwasher and fridge. And every night he'd come back to play the same crazed drum

BROKEN LOVE POEM

(For Glenn Gould)

in between and all around the piano sounds
I can hear you
breathing
sighing
humming.
it is not Bach but your
small sharp gasps
that keep me listening.

I guess it is always this way with me.
all I ever care about is the
music underneath.

—ALEXANDRA WILDER

solo on our appliances as before. Alice would be awake—I could feel the hesitations of her breathing next to me—waiting for the dull thwack we imagined might accompany its death. Some of the longest hours I've ever known, if you'd like to know the truth. On the other hand, those last nights spent listening to the clamour of the rat in our kitchen turned out to be the final intimacy of our marriage. A part of us would be touching—the sides of our calves, perhaps, or stray, entangled fingers—and the only things in our heads would be this point of warm contact and the horror that was about to happen in the next room. I was gone for good on the third morning.

And there it is: the drama of the never-caught rat. What's it have to do with me and Penny? I think it's about waiting. For the animal to come as it must, for the trap to snap down as it must. There's a lure and coiled spring out there with your name on it and you will go to it as you are meant to and nothing will ever be the same again.

There! I've done it again. Think of the rat starting out as me, Richard, the man who set the traps. But somewhere in the middle I switch over. Somewhere in the telling I become the rat himself, sniffing out his fate in the dark.

Alice and I never had any children, a fact that probably explains my recent poor behaviour in the eyes of some. Maybe wiping goo off little chins and sleeping four hours a night prevents a

man from thinking about teenaged cashiers, you never know. But I'd always said I wanted kids, which should count for something. We even tried for a while, years back, in the unspoken way of "forgetting" to take the pills and "losing" condoms in the sock drawer. Nothing happened. We tried harder. A good year and a half of conjugal privileges enjoyed the way God intended them, and not a single direct hit. I suppose we could have consulted a physician at that point, had them bring out the Petri dishes and turkey basters. But Alice never mentioned it and I felt too protective of her feelings to bring it up myself. It never occurred to me that the problem may have been mine.

Then Alice brought up China. Adoption there was quicker, so maybe we should sign up and in less than a year we could have our own little Chinese baby girl (they had a law against them over there, I was told). It was just like Alice to come up with a practical, morally-sound solution like that. How could you ever respond to it by saying, "China? Somebody else's reject baby in goddamn China? Not a chance!" You couldn't, could you, without being the sort of man who says such things? So I told Alice I thought it was a fantastic idea and phoned up the consulate myself to get all the forms.

And this brings us to my cancer scare. A week before we were to fly to Beijing to pick up little Xiu (they sent an adorable photo of her and everything) I get this strong idea that I have a tumour in my lungs. A pain, or something like a pain, in my chest. And breathing is difficult. But the doctor takes one look and sends me home with nothing more than a Valium prescription. Nevertheless, I'm still convinced that I have only a few days left. Alice, we can't go to Beijing right now. Not with me and this cancer thing. I can hardly breathe!

And Alice said, "If you don't want the baby, just tell me."

"I do! You *know* I want the baby! It's only that, right now, with the lungs and everything . . . Can we just withdraw our application so we can get ourselves totally set for the next go round?"

"Richard, has it ever crossed your mind that you can actually talk to me?"

We cancelled the flight, put our names down for the next year. Soon after that I started working on my book (the cancer

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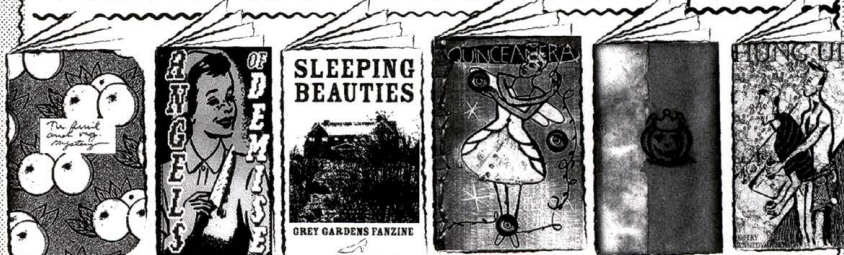


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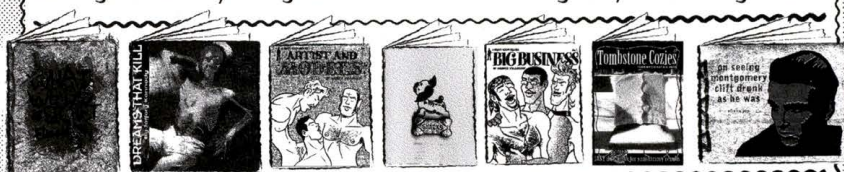


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THE INEVITABILITY OF TIME

The summer is half over and the brilliant people have gone,
The city is emptied of all its change,
Spent on festivals of food and clothes,
And great winged birds hover over the lake.

Something too far away to see is beckoning.
You feel it in your guts.
It is the feeling you get when your mother cannot carry you anymore
Or when being told you're too old for certain toys.

I can sit down and look at your face now,
Before I saw my own reflection in it and thought it was beautiful.
The knives and forks will be used again and again,
And your laughter cuts through the tedium.

Beyond the lake and the sad-looking buildings
The world is ready to change.
Soon it will be orange and red and gold.
The autumn will come to us on a river, pouring out its death, leaving boulders along the way.

This odd struck time before the cold, before the end
Of summer is our gracious moment.
Holding hands, we buy fish and eat it on the roof and you give me a sweater to wear, the twilight casting shadows in our eyes.

—VICTORIA WARD

in remission, as far as I could tell). And as the year went on Alice mentioned the Chinese baby less and looking for a new job in some other town more.

The baby deadline passed again, along with another set of birthdays. We started remembering the pills and finding the condoms. For a while I had these dreams where I'd lost a child to a fire or peanut allergy or something terrible. But then I'd wake up and remember that I never actually had anyone to lose in the first place. When Alice asked me what my nightmare had been about, I'd say, "Just monsters, honey," and laugh a husband's laugh.

I've thought about leaving the next part out entirely. But it happened. Was meant to happen from the very beginning, I suppose, although I couldn't have seen it coming. Only when I woke up one morning six months ago with a pinpricky numbness down my left arm

did I become aware of it at all. I didn't tell Alice I'd made an appointment with a doctor for that afternoon. This was before she knew about things, and it was an afternoon I usually spent with Penny. As a consequence, the entire day had developed a kind of liar's cloud over it.

But the diagnosis that came in a week later was true enough. A specialist read it out to me from a lab report that had just come back from Toronto, which made things slightly easier for both of us. It was those bastards a hundred miles down the highway that wanted to tell me I had multiple sclerosis, and not this serious but kindly fellow sitting across the desk from me.

I was on my own. I'd left Penny in the car outside because I feared the worst. Alice still didn't know about the test or the numbness, because it was important for me to understand the problem on my own before I could tell her. Or to protect her from needless worry. Or some other

reason that casts me in a less favourable light, such as I assumed Alice wouldn't stay with me for long if she knew. Which is a funny concern to have, Christ knows, given that I was spending a lot of time searching for parking spots to do the horizontal mambo with a teenager round about then. But there it is. Better, I thought, if the news was bad, to fall in with someone new, someone who was aware that I was a lousy prospect right from the get-go. Penny was more than young enough to have a whole other life after I'd lost the use of mine. Maybe thoughts like these were crossing my mind as I sat in that specialist's office. But they would have only been thoughts and nothing compared to the compulsions of the moment, the desire for one fresh round of love, a bye-bye wave to good sense. The need to make the kind of mess one leaves behind while living and being aware of it at the same time.

In any event, I've just been told that

in five to ten years I'll be making my permanent home in wheelchairs and beds with little cranes attached to them. I ask a couple of questions and get the answers, according to the current state of science on the matter. Then the specialist and I spend a silent, curiously masculine minute staring down at the page of lab results. You'd be surprised at how little you have to say after hearing a thing like that.

Now I've done it. And I really didn't want to bring the Disease into this thing between Penny and me because there's always the risk of sympathy—or worse, forgiveness—whenever bad luck is introduced. And let's face it: it may be that I don't deserve either.

The funny part is that I was more ashamed at the time of contracting a degenerative muscle disorder than my carrying on like some slippery pervert. I took to thinking that all the questions I had a hand in determining myself just illustrated how badly I'd wasted my time, a dishonour to my forty years of functional body parts. Besides, a numbness in the arm and a stiffening in both legs that would turn a single step into a stricken reaching out for strangers' shoulders wasn't why I ended up taking off with Penny. It is, as far as I can tell, a coincidence, and nothing more.

When I make it back to the car, Penny leans forward to take in my face. Asks why I'm crying.

"It's the sun," I say. "It's just too bright today."

And I believe that it was.

Love stories are allowed to cheat. Why do they get to fade out into the "happily ever after" while stories of an affair—the ugly cousins of romance—must finish with a bloody car wreck of a breakup? The rules on this are strict. If there's no come-uppance for the adulterer, his story is no good to anyone, like a murder mystery where the killer gets away with it. So why do we continue to tell ourselves these tales when we know in advance how they're going to turn out? I'll give you my theory: It's because we *don't* know. Not as it's actually happening we don't. This may be the world's first story of an affair where everyone understands, only minimal feelings are hurt, and bystanders refrain from judgment. There's always a chance of a surprise twist at the end.

Penny and I live in a different town now, even smaller than the one we came from, in an apartment above a trophy store. (There's an irony in this, I think, but maybe not. Maybe it's just an apartment above a trophy store.) We get along well. Or better than you'd guess. Better than the national getting-along average, I would say. We still use the word "love" outside the context of an apology. My body is turning to stone, but I'm still able to hold her.

What's left is the outstanding matter of that death I promised. I learned about it through a note delivered by my lawyer after a meeting with Alice's lawyer (they were both busy giving Alice all the things I was happy enough to lose). It came in one of those tiny white envelopes, the kind to be found stuck in the thorny stems of store-bought roses. I knew it was from Alice before opening it, of course, and I knew it couldn't be good. But I was curious all the same. Was it going to contain one last, hateful remark, something piercing and emasculating? I doubted it. Alice didn't like hurting people's feelings. Even mine, even now. But surely the message couldn't be so big-hearted as to wish me and Penny luck, an offer of no hard feelings? Nobody had better rights to hard feelings than Alice. So how could she sum up all of our time together—our *lives*—in the space of a flower store card?

I waited until Penny had left for her new job at the Kwikkie Mart before opening the envelope. And when I did, it was as I sat with my back against the tub in the bathroom. For some reason I needed to be on the floor, in a small room with a closed door that locked. The taps turned on all the way to cover the sound in my throat.

Alice's handwriting. Tall. The letters tilted over to the side as though sailing masts caught in a stiff wind.

"We finally trapped the mouse," it read. ♡

Andrew Pyper lives north of the Fashion District. He is the author of The Trade Mission (HarperFlamingo, 2002), as well as Lost Girls (HarperCollins, 1999), a novel selected as a notable book of the year by the Globe and Mail and the New York Times, and Kiss Me (Porcupine's Quill, 1996), a collection of short stories.

CONTRIBUTORS

Kevin Connolly ("Lapse," p. 5) lives in the Beach. He is a poet and a part-time word wrangler. His second collection of poetry, *Happyland*, was published in April by ECW.

Dayle Furlong ("Road Signs," p. 9) lives in York. She has written mainly for zines and student publications, as well as monologues for theatre collectives. She is currently putting together a chapbook of poems while working on a novel.

Alan Hunt ("The Portal," p. 16) recently returned to his hometown of Georgetown, Ontario, after a decade in Toronto. His comics have appeared in the *Toronto Star* and the *Annex Gleaner*, and his strip, *Maciek and Fiona*, an ongoing story about a day in the life of a disintegrating relationship, recently wrapped up its four-year run in *Exclaim!* His work can be viewed at www.alanhunt.ca.

Alexandra Wilder ("Broken Love Poem," p. 20) lives in Sussex-Ulster. She recently entered the M.A. program in English literature at the University of Toronto. She has been published previously in *Tuesday*, the *U. C. Review*, and *Marginalia*.

Victoria Ward ("The Inevitability of Time," p. 22) is a painter and writer living in Haliburton County, Ontario. This is her first published work.

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Bill Kennedy ("Apostrophe," p. 30) lives in Scarborough. He is a writer, web designer, co-host of the Lexiconjury reading series, and director of the Scream in High Park poetry festival.

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TWO STORIES

FICTION BY SONJA AHLERS

KURT VONNEGUT HAD A DOG

called "Pumpkin". NOT QUITE the kinda dog you'd IMAGINE KURT TO HAVE - a little LHASA APSO (THEY had the same HAIR/FUR). When PUMPKIN died the TOMBSTONE READ: PUMPKIN LOVED TO SLEEP. & so did he. KURT LOVED TO NAP with Pumpkin. He SAID HIS dreams WERE SO WORTHWHILE IT WAS LIKE SATURDAY AFTERNOON @ the MOVIES.

I'VE BEEN

BORROWING

Ian's pink pogo stick
@ night time.

I'm getting really
good @ it - 50X in a row

I've FOUND

IF I don't think
about what I'm doing

IT'S EASY.

he & GRANT
FOUND MATCHING
ones by the side
of the road.

HOT OR COLD

FICTION BY ROSE HUNTER

What do you think it means when as soon as he leaves, instead of slipping on the T-shirt he always leaves behind, you not only strip the sheets, but also wash and tumble dry the duvet and then get back into bed and hold the smell of detergent to your chest?

This is the question I'm left pondering after my only real contact with the world wordlessly left while I wordlessly watched him leave, and I'm still pondering it when I drag myself out of bed for the third time that day.

I've just started battling the water pressure under the shower when I hear a knock on the door. It's the only person it could be: Romano, wanting to show my apartment. I towel myself off and put on my extremely unattractive track-suit pants. Romano has a man and a woman with him—a couple, I assume immediately, because of the way they match.

While they take a look around, I start the kettle and assemble my cup, tea bag, cream, and sugar. I'd like a coffee, really, but lately the stuff I've been fixing hasn't been great. It's been undrinkable, in fact—inexplicably, as I've been making coffee in the same coffee machine with the same kind of coffee and adding the same combination of cream and sugar for years. Then, suddenly, one day it just didn't taste right anymore. I varied the proportions and combinations—even tried using filtered water—but nothing worked. Puzzlingly, coffee from elsewhere tastes marginally better (the reverse of the situation before), but still not like it used to. So now I drink mostly tea.

The man and woman both have soft black leather coats and are wearing new denim. The woman is blond and has lots of different colours on her face. They both look like they go to the gym. The question is, what are they doing *here*? Some people who have money don't like to spend it, I guess, at least not on rent. They'd rather have soft leather coats. Or maybe they think it's artsy here. It's not artsy here, it's just rundown, but sometimes yuppies confuse the difference.



I say hello to the woman but she doesn't acknowledge me; she's too busy looking around the apartment, or, more accurately, scanning it like a hawk. She's like Mirelle at my old work; one time, when a guy with a bunch of good clothes actually showed up, and the usually aloof little Mirelle went through them all with this sudden fixed attention, like there was a magnetic field between her eyes and the target, as she examined, pounced, gathered her bundle, and made careful decisions about which ones to try on—a total focus on the task of getting the best possible thing. That's what it is; she's got to get the *best possible thing*. That's how this woman is. She pierces through. Nothing wrong with it, I suppose. It's just a bit out of place in my crappy apartment.

Her boyfriend seems much less concerned. He glances around casually, nodding his head at the occasional statement by Romano: not bad cupboard space . . . close to the T.T.C. . . . I notice the rent Romano is quoting them is fifty dollars more than what I'm paying, and that he's sweating profusely, even for him.

They don't stay long and I'm taking my first sip of tea and searching for the converter when I hear another knock at the door and the woman reappears.

"Could I ask you some questions," she says, with no rising intonation in her voice.

I stare at her, but still without getting any kind of whole impression. It's been happening with me a lot lately—floating along and usually remembering what's gone on or what I said or did afterward, but only partially, and still with no clarity. Mundane stuff like getting a nickel for change, but always with this haze around it—like someone's taken charge of my body and is performing all the necessary actions for me, and what I'm getting is the video replay.

"What's it like living on the ground floor?" the woman asks, at least with the hint of a question about it this time, but I'm fixated on her blue eyeshadow. Then a wave of confusion passes over me as I think, "What's it like? What's it *like*?"

"I don't know," I say.

She takes a moment to process this, then looks at me like I'm an idiot, as everyone does when you indicate a lack of knowledge about things like this—it's out of the question, apparently. You must know, they say. You *must know*.

"Well," she says, narrowing her eyes a little, probably trying to work out how to handle this and deciding on an impertinent look of patience, "I notice the laundry room is just across the hall, for instance, and I was wondering about any noise coming in from the street?"

"The laundry closes at ten," I say, aware of the possible marginality of this comment, but only after I've said it.

"O.K. . . .," she says. "And before ten?"

"It's not noisy. I mean, you can hear the coins go in the slots and hear the machines starting up," I blurt out, uncharacteristically, "but it's not noisy."

Now she's looking at me like I'm crazy. I guess that didn't sound too great, but what do you expect here? Soundproofing? *She's* the crazy one. I'm aware I find the rhythms of the laundry room comforting: the tinkle of the coins going through the slots, the beep that sounds with the fifth quarter, the start-up whirr that always follows.

"What about the temperature," she says.

"Of what?"

"Of the *apartment*."

"Depends," I say.

"Can you elaborate, possibly . . .," she says, like she can't believe someone wouldn't. She's waving one hand out slowly in front of her body, in a gesture that indicates a desire for more of something, and she's grimacing slightly.

I could elaborate, I think. I could say, "If what you want is a controllable environment, why don't you go somewhere else, you crazy bitch? You can't predict that kind of thing *here*." Let's see, I could say, "The *temperature* was O.K., I guess, for most of the winter, except that the heating broke down on several occasions, which made it quite cold, which was exacerbated by the fact that the pipes also froze on several of those several occasions, making a compensatory hot shower (or any kind of shower) impossible. The *temperature* is fine now, but my guess would be that in summer it's going to be quite hot in here because the window is small and I don't see any sort of air-conditioning apparatus, do you?"

I guess this would be an answer to her question but, since I've already thought it, I'm not inclined to say it. You get into

the habit of thinking and not saying, and then eventually, when you're called on to say something, you realize you've already thought it, and then to go back seems really difficult, and perhaps also pointless. So I just shrug.

She looks at me like she can't quite believe I exist. Maybe she thinks I'm retarded. Probably she thinks I'm just stupid. Probably she thinks I can't speak well or answer questions, just because I haven't answered hers. Probably she thinks like I used to think: demonstrated inarticulateness being tantamount to a crime. It must be that I can't speak, because if I could, why wouldn't I? Because that's what people do. They answer other people's questions, even volunteer extra information. It matters to do this, she probably thinks. What she doesn't realize is that it doesn't. It doesn't matter what she says or what I say because neither of us knows anything important and it doesn't matter that she doesn't understand this and thinks I'm stupid and no one is watching and everything everyone does falls into a void and even if she did move in here, whether the temperature was to

her liking or not would be irrelevant in the long run.

And for that matter, I think, noticing that I'm shaking with something I think I recognize as anger, or maybe it's just disorientation, don't walk into my apartment with your boyfriend and leather coat and your scanning like a hawk and your assumption that I'm here to provide information for you. Did it ever occur to you that I might not want to speak today, or maybe not for the rest of the week and the week after that and however the fuck long?

The woman's gaze has softened now, though—it's suddenly changed, like my coffee. Maybe she was just hit by a wave of sympathy for the impaired. But she gives me a smile and pauses for a moment, shakes her head with something like regret, then leaves.

Good thing, too, because a bit more of that and I might have broken down. I might have asked which thing was it that she wanted to know: whether it gets too hot—or whether it gets too cold. ▮

Rose Hunter is currently between neighbourhoods. This is her first published work.

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STEAK AND EGGS

FICTION BY JESSICA WESTHEAD

Doug walked into the staff kitchen of the tourism board, where Tippy and Celine from his department were discussing Randi, from Shipping, again.

"She has this *voice*," said Tippy. "Well, let me just say that you want to put as much distance between you and that voice as possible."

Celine nodded. "She has the worst voice *ever*."

"And she believes everything she sees on the internet."

"She does."

"Hi, Doug," said Tippy.

"Hi, Doug," said Celine.

Doug was their boss.

"Hi, Tippy. Hi, Celine," he said, eyeing the fridge.

His cubemate, Brick, had the door open and was scanning the shelves, looking hopeful.

"Hi, Brick," he said.

"Hey, there's potato salad in here." Brick held up the container and inspected the label. "Yep. Potato salad. I thought Dave ate all the potato salad." He opened the container and peered inside. Then he heaved a sigh and replaced the lid. "That's not potato salad, it just says potato salad." He returned the container to the fridge, one shelf lower than before. "It's macaroni." Brick turned to Doug. "Anything new and/or exciting?"

"No, I don't think so."

"That's it. Right there."

"What?"

"You said it." Brick retrieved a paper sack from the third shelf and closed the fridge. "You coming outside?"

The guys at the tourism board liked to eat their lunch at the college up the street, on the tarmac where the massage therapist trainees assembled to smoke.

"Sure," said Doug, but only after checking that Tippy and Celine had left.

The story about the bears was all over the news by the time Doug got home.

His wife, Vicky, was in front of the TV. She patted the empty part of the loveseat for him.

The two senile polar bears at the zoo were called Steak and Eggs, and they were the pride of the community. They were old, and their fur had yellowed so much that the only snow that could have offered them camouflage was the kind used by too many dogs.

Steak and Eggs held court in a tank that attempted to simulate their Arctic heritage. They could swim in a murky, blue-tinted soup if they wished, or they could lounge on the chipped Fiberglas iceberg if they just wanted to lie there, which was most of the time.

They were both toothless by now, and at feeding time they were given buckets of foul-smelling seafood paste; the odour was known to cause migraines on humid days.

Apparently, the night before, two tourists camping nearby had gotten into a bottle of local hooch they'd picked up at a rummage sale, and decided to stagger to the zoo for a look-see.

As usual, the security was pretty lax—the guards liked to get in a few rounds of Yahtzee before the animal noises lulled them to sleep—so the boys strolled through the gates unmolested.

The tourists found their way into the indoor exhibits, where the polar bear tank was located. At that point, mistaking the tank for a pool, they decided to undress for a dip.

One of the young men was interviewed from his hospital bed. He claimed that Steak and Eggs had been out of sight, underwater.

The boys didn't stand a chance.

The feeble-brained bears hadn't seen live prey in a while, but they'd recognized the flailing limbs with an instinct that years of fish pabulum couldn't erase.

One of the boys, the one they interviewed, lost an arm. His friend wasn't so lucky; Eggs's claws had aimed lower than Steak's.

Somehow, though, they managed to get out of the tank alive; when the commotion woke up one of the security guards, he found them lying naked and bleeding on the concrete.

"I radioed back to base and reported that two young boys was dead, one with his arm tore off and the other one missing his man parts," the guard said on camera.

"But they weren't dead," said the reporter.

"No, they weren't. I was surprised, is all. There's not many you'd expect to survive that kind of damage to their privates."

"We've been told he's on the waiting list for reconstructive surgery."

"Surgery to reconstruct *what*? From what I saw there wasn't much left to put back together. I seen them grow human ears on mice on TV, but not all the ears in the world could make that boy right again."

The general consensus at the tourism board was that the boys had gotten what they deserved, as it was widely believed that these were the vandals who had defaced the town's beloved figurehead, the Big Fancy Fawn.

The oversized plaster animal had already been showing signs of wear and tear, but the spray-painted proclamations of love and hate that had recently appeared on its flank had united the community in anger and disbelief. Such an outrage, they reasoned, could only have been perpetrated by outsiders.

"They asked for it," said Tippy.

"Serves them right," said Celine.

"They had it coming," said Brick.

"It's hubris," said Stacey, from Accounting, the man with the girl's name.

"What?" said Brick.

Stacey went away.

Unfortunately, the mauling of the two young visitors threatened to leave a stain on the town's tourism industry, and so, as minister of foreign relations, it was Doug's job to put a positive spin on the zoo incident.

He didn't know how he would do that.

"Buttons," said Vicky over dinner that night.

Doug blinked at her over their jar of pearl onions.

"With pins on the back. People believe things they read on buttons."

He nodded slowly. "Like a slogan."

"Like a slogan," said Vicky, reaching for the jar.

Vicky was a freelance designer of temporary tattoos, and was always full of ideas.

Doug sat up straight. "How about, 'STEAK AND EGGS WERE ONLY JOKING'?"

Vicky nodded and scooped some onions. "That sounds nice."

Her support was unwavering, thought

"Look at this E-mail Randi sent us," said Tippy, clicking on her in-box.

Doug looked. The message that Randi had written at the top of the E-mail read, "IT'S REAL!!!!"

Tippy opened the attachment and a photo showing a farmer holding up a giant tabby for display, his arms stretched wide so as to properly showcase the cat's exaggerated proportions, filled the screen.

lax—the guards liked to spend their lunch hour at the massage college down the street—so the polar bear strolled through the gates unnoticed.

Goaded by a yearning for tall grasses triggered by the recent blood sport, Steak made his way to the town limits, where the community's newly graffiti-free mascot stood proud and true, decorated from antler nubs to hoof points with "STEAK AND EGGS WERE ONLY JOKING"



Doug, feeling a rush of gratitude for the woman seated across from him who was lining up condiments like jewels on her plate.

The button campaign caught on fast. "It was a great idea," said Tippy, who was wearing two buttons on her ribbed cardigan.

"A super idea," said Celine, who was also wearing two buttons on her ribbed cardigan, but arranged in a slightly different pattern.

"No cat is that big," said Celine.
"No *real* cat," said Tippy.

The story about the bear was all over the news by the time Doug got home.

Vicky was perched on the arm of the loveseat this time, only half-watching the TV. Doug could tell she was thinking so he sat down quietly.

Apparently, Steak had escaped from his tank some time around noon.

As usual, the security was pretty

buttons. At that point, the bear decided to attack.

The town's pastor, returning with his wife from one of their monthly "love thy neighbour" jaunts to a suburb with a good Chinese buffet, witnessed what happened next from his four-by-four. In his interview, he claimed that Steak "was like an avenging yellowish-white God going to town on a false idol."

The Big Fancy Fawn didn't stand a chance.

Steak attacked the statue with twenty

APOSTROPHE

(YOU ARE ENTIRELY HAPPY WITH YOUR POEM)

From the Apostrophe Engine.

you are entirely happy with your poem • you are not happy then there is no charge and your deposit is returned • you are totally satisfied with the outcome • you are a man • you are a little confused • you are entirely happy with your poem • you are not happy then there is no charge and your deposit is returned • you are totally satisfied with the outcome • you are wonderful, lori • you are a wonderful and very gifted person • you are entirely happy with your poem • you are not happy then there is no charge and your deposit is returned • you are totally satisfied with the outcome • you are far from home • you are fed up with suitcase life, and sleeping on your own • you are fed up with airline food, and feeling half dead, half alive • you are entirely happy with your poem • you are not happy then there is no charge and your deposit is returned • you are totally satisfied with the outcome • you are near • you are really kind and generous, and would sacrifice anything for me, you are the solid branch of our new-found family tree • you are the best! • you are entirely happy with your poem • you are not happy then there is no charge and your deposit is returned • you are totally satisfied with the outcome • you are my last hope for a man, and I'm your mid-life crisis, we're just doing the best we can! • you can never sit still, you are always out mowing the grass, not that it's really hard work, because you just sit on your big fat ass • you are a world champion snorer, boy, you can really snore! in fact, you've sawn so many logs, they litter our forest floor! • you are the most loving man i have ever known in my life, and i am so very, very happy to be with you as your wife • you are much more than a husband, mike, you are like my very best friend, and it is hard to wrap all that up, as these words come to an end • you are entirely happy with your poem • you are not happy then there is no charge and your deposit is returned • you are totally satisfied with the outcome • you are cute • you are more than that to me • you are cute • you are more than that to me • you are more than welcome to publish the poem on your site—after all, u wrote it! but i would appreciate it if you could leave out my story altogether as now that i've told all my friends about your site, there are some of whom i wouldn't like to know about this • you are entirely happy with your poem • you are not happy then there is no charge and your deposit is returned • you are totally satisfied with the outcome • you are going to be a daddy, happy anniversary, happy father's day! • you are entirely happy with your poem • you are not happy then there is no charge and your deposit is returned • you are totally satisfied with the outcome • you are on a roll • you are entirely happy with your poem • you are not happy then there is no charge and your deposit is returned • you are totally satisfied with the outcome • you are wonderful, lori • you are awesome!!! i like it, thank you very much • you are entirely happy with your poem • you are not happy then there is no charge and your deposit is returned • you are totally satisfied with the outcome • you are so full of charisma and grace

—BILL KENNEDY AND DARREN WERSHLER-HENRY

years' worth of pent-up predator know-how, his reflex to separate the weakest from the herd reactivated in his kernel of a cerebellum.

When it was over, all that remained of the town's prized totem was a hoof, a few doilies, and the buttons.

The sheriff, who along with his deputies and a handful of concerned citizens had swarmed and clubbed the bear to death shortly thereafter, said into the reporter's microphone, "It was for the best."

"How?" said the reporter.

"That bear ate a lot of plaster. Plaster's not good for a bear."

Doug turned off the TV and looked up at Vicky. "I think I need more than buttons this time," he said.

"Cupid," said Vicky, and then her eyes widened and she jumped off the loveseat. "I have to write that down!"

She was conceiving a new line of romantic body art to pitch to newlyweds and had been spending a lot of time listening to inspirational music.

"Roses and doves!" she shouted from down the hall, and when Doug heard the saxophone start up he knew she didn't have any ideas to spare.

"What you have to realize is that we're dealing with very volatile subject matter here," said Doug's boss the next day.

"Yes," said Doug.

"It's not just the kind of thing where you can say, 'Oh, well. It's not our problem.'"

"Right."

"Because it is. It is our problem."

"Ours. Yes."

"Sympathy is key. If people don't sympathize it's all over. But look who

I'm talking to. I'm talking to the guy who did the Cake City pamphlet."

The Miniature Cake City had been the brainchild of an enterprising but short-sighted municipal councilman. A small, fenced-in compound was erected, containing seasonal foliage and scaled-down replicas of skyscrapers and condominiums carved out of stale cake donated by the local bakeries. In the winter the upkeep of the park was minimal, but in the warmer months it got to be a nuisance, as the buildings were eaten by scavenging birds and animals and had to be regularly replaced. After awhile, people from surrounding counties started calling the attraction "Miniature Crumb City," and attendance dwindled dangerously.

The Cake City pamphlet had turned it all around.

"You made people sympathize with

cake," said Doug's boss.

The pamphlet had won awards.

The pamphlet had been Vicky's idea.

"I took it to the printers," was what Doug wanted to tell his boss, but all he said was, "Thank you."

"What about a billboard?" Doug said to Vicky over dinner that night.

She shook her head. "STEAK AND EGGS WERE ONLY JOKING" worked on buttons. It's too much on a billboard."

"But why?"

"Big pink lips!" said Vicky, sitting up. "A heart with an arrow through it!"

And she was gone.

Doug held a meeting with his staff the next morning.

"A billboard's no good," said Tippy.

"Tell me why," said Doug.

"How should we know?" said Tippy.

"You're the boss," said Celine.

"Just do another pamphlet," said Tippy. And they were gone.

At lunchtime, Doug waited for Brick to finish offering a light to a thick-limbed student masseuse, then said, "But a *billboard*. Where the statue was. So when people drive in they'll see everything's O.K."

"Bad idea." Brick made a vehement slashing motion with his hand. "Didn't you do that pamphlet last year? The pamphlet was a good idea."

Doug sighed.

"If I had a lot of money," said Brick, watching a class set of broad shoulders empty out of a nearby portable, "I'd buy a lot of statues."

Doug blinked at him. "Why?"

His co-worker shrugged. "I just like the way they look when they're standing there."

The story about the bears was all over the news by the time Doug got home.

Vicky was out meeting with an engaged couple she'd schmoozed at the Diamond Depot in the mall, so Doug settled onto the loveseat alone.

In the absence of a proactive tourism board campaign such as a pamphlet, the

pastor had taken it upon himself to organize a funeral for the felled bear.

Eggs was the guest of honour, fitted with a papier-mâché crown made by the public school's kindergarten class, shot full of barbiturates, and seated in the front row next to local dignitaries and the zookeeper.

The service proceeded smoothly enough, but when the pallbearers moved into position around the Dumpster that was serving as Steak's coffin, a switch flipped on in Eggs's brain.

Powered by a thirst for vengeance that negated the sedatives' effects, the bear rose up on his hind legs to reclaim the flesh-rending impulse bred out of a long line of caged ancestors.

The mourners didn't stand a chance.

Reinforcements were called in from surrounding counties to blast Eggs into oblivion, and after some discussion with the pastor's widow, it was decided that no funeral would be arranged for the second bear.

The mayor was interviewed from his cot in the survivors' area of the triage the paramedics had set up outside the funeral home.

"If this is a bear's idea of a joke," he said, wincing as he adjusted the bloodied sling on his arm, "then I'd say those creatures have a pretty sick sense of humour."

"We're going on a spa retreat," Tippy told Doug the next day.

"We need to get away," said Celine.

Doug noticed they were no longer wearing their buttons.

Tippy nodded. "Breathtaking, stress-free beauty," the pamphlet says."

"It's a great pamphlet," said Celine.

They had both downloaded vacation-scene web shots for their screen savers.

Doug stood by and watched the pretty scenes unfolding.

"They rub salt on your body, if you want them to," said Tippy.

"They lay you down on a table and get out the salt. It's supposedly good for the skin."

"Supposably," said Celine.

A towel spread out on a white-sand beach. Change. A hammock strung between two majestic pines.

"What it does is it zaps the free radicals."

"But not when you eat it."

Doug walked back to his desk and sat down.

"They say too much salt in a diet . . .," said Tippy.

" . . . is no good," said Celine.

Taking a deep breath, he slid one of Vicky's CDs into his computer.

"But it's so good on macaroni salad," said Tippy.

"Well, you need it on macaroni salad," said Celine.

"You do. But how often do you eat macaroni salad?"

"You're right. It's a treat."

Doug clicked up the volume.

"What's that playing?" said Tippy.

"Saxophone," said Celine.

"Well I know *that*. I know it's a *saxophone*. I mean *who* is it."

"You said 'what.'"

"Never mind what I said." There was a pause. "What was I saying? Before, I mean."

"It isn't working," said Doug.

"What did he say?" said Tippy.

"I don't know," said Celine. "You were talking about macaroni salad."

"Right. They should serve macaroni salad at the spa."

"They probably do."

"But with the mayonnaise? And the salt?"

"Yes, maybe without those."

Doug skipped ahead a few tracks, and waited.

"Then you might as well not have it," said Tippy. "Because what's macaroni salad without the mayonnaise and the salt? It's just macaroni, and nobody likes that."

"They should smarten up, these spa people."

"Serve something people like."

Last song. Still nothing.

"You are pampering yourself, after all," said Tippy.

"That's what the pamphlet says," said Celine.

"It's a great pamphlet."

"It is."

Doug pressed Eject. ▢



Jessica Westhead lives in the Annex. She is a writer, editor, and medical transcriptionist. She is also currently completing a short-fiction-collection-plus-novella called *Nice To Me*.



AESTHETICS

Karen Eull bridges the gap between old-school art and modern technology.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY KAREN EULL

When Karen Eull was about six years old, her childhood friend told her the story of her great aunt Ming. As the tale went, Aunt Ming's hobby was to visit schoolyards after class had finished for the day and leave behind a variety of toys for the children to find upon their arrival the next morning. Aunt Ming lived in an era when television dials stopped at channel 13; before VCRs, video games, and the internet replaced hopscotch, marbles, and jacks. So it's likely Ming's simple gifts of buttons and ribbon were looked upon as treasure by those lucky enough to stumble across her anonymous surprises.

Eull always remembered her friend's story and, in 1999, decided to pick up where Aunt Ming left off, even if for just a day. Retaining the spirit of Ming's era, Eull purchased an armful of generic toys

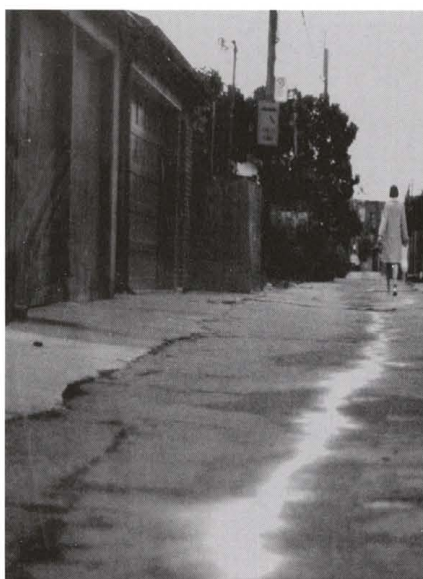
and piled them into three groups in the yard of Charles G. Fraser Junior Public School, located in the Queen and Bathurst area. She brought her camera along to document the event, and a photo exhibit, *The Great Aunt Ming Project*, was born. Ironically, when Eull related what she had done, her childhood friend "didn't even remember the story."

While Eull continues experimenting with still photography, mainly for use in book collaborations, most of her work of late has been in the area of digitally animated photography—photographs altered by computer to give movement to selected elements; a cross between still photography and film. Eull has staged numerous exhibitions across Canada since graduating with a B.F.A. in art history from Montreal's Concordia University in 1996, but only recently took her

first photography course. Oddly, she does not consider herself a photographer, nor does she consider herself to be a very technically inclined person. Perhaps indicative of how computer technology is continuously encroaching on the art world, Eull considers herself simply an artist. "When I have an idea, I just go to the medium best suited to that idea," she says. "I think people will always go back to the aesthetics [of old technology], but things are blurring more and more."

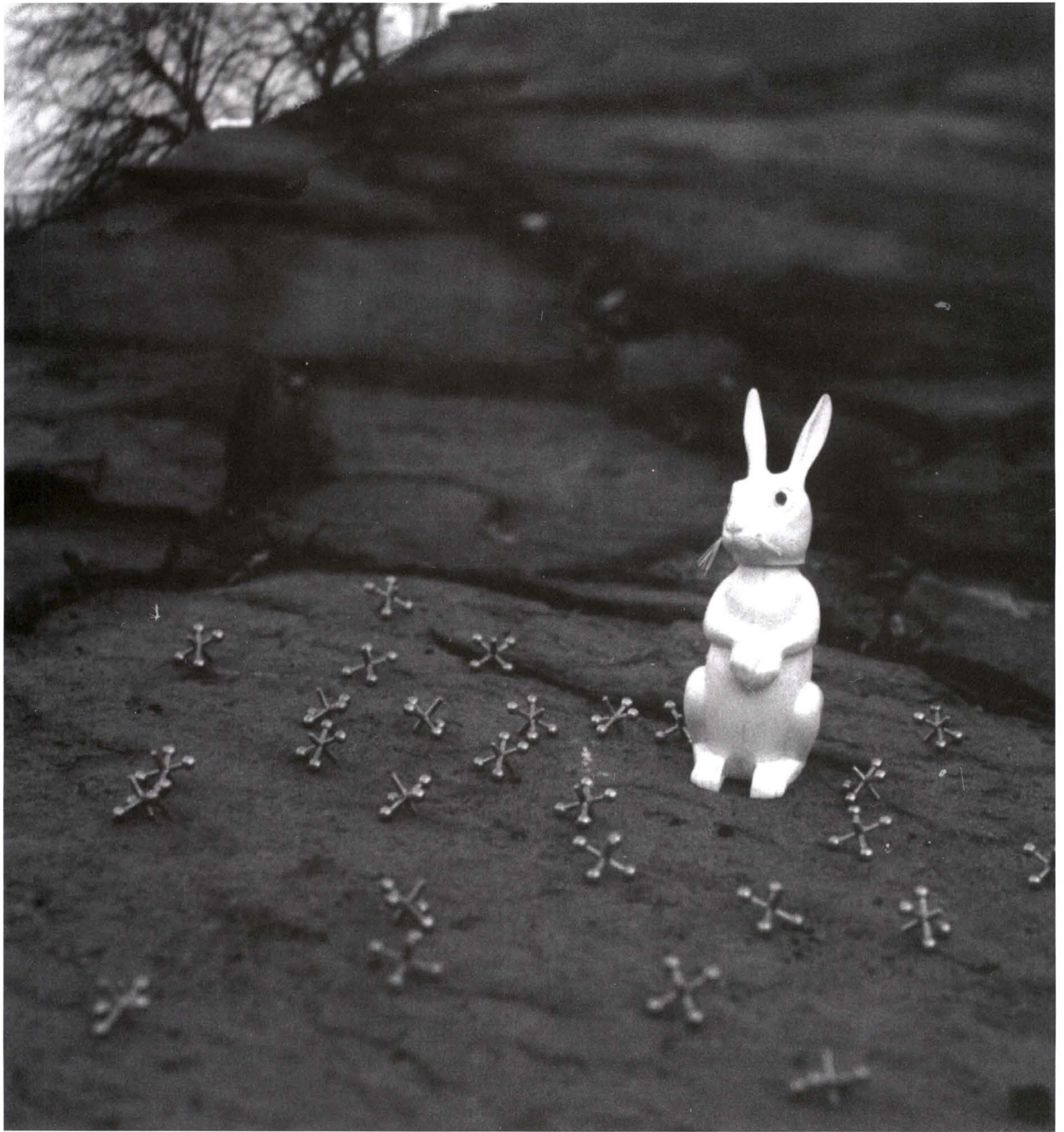
Eull's next show, *Stain*, is a series of urban landscape photographs, animated to show colour as a tool for communication. *Stain* opens on January 25, 2003, at the Archive Gallery, 883 Queen Street West. ▽

—CONAN TOBIAS



*Acrobat, a still from the series Ether, 2001 (opposite). Four stills from the series Marigold Library, 1999 (above).
Two stills from The Great Aunt Ming Project, 1999 (following pages).*







THE TESTIMONY OF CARL SANDERS, INVENTOR OF THE MICROCHIP

FOUND FICTION

Beginning this issue, *Taddle Creek* will be distributed nationally by the Canadian Magazine Publishers Association. The association requires that all magazines under its control carry a universal product code somewhere on their cover, apparently for the convenience of the many fine newsstands employing electronic sales machines. Not wanting to besmirch its very stylish covers, the magazine has opted to place this unsightly bar code on the back cover of its newsstand copies, in sticker form.

The following story speaks to the magazine's reluctance toward adopting similar technology—albeit for very different reasons.

Step right up and get your microchip implant! No hassles, just a little stick in the back of your hand or your forehead. Good for anything that ails you! No more need for cash, cheques, or credit cards—the microchip does it all. Through electronic transfer of money, one hand sweep over the grocery store or other business's scanner device linked to the Central Accounts Database and voila—funds are automatically deducted from

your personal account! And crime will certainly be curbed substantially because how can thieves steal or use your microchip imbedded in your forehead or hand? No more need for bulky keys or combination locks. Your microchip puts out a frequency of your own personal digital identification number. Serving as an access code, it will unlock your car, your house, your office, and whatever else you wish to lock up! How convenient!

One hundred and one uses for your personal implanted microchip! So why not take the chip and join our "New World Order society"? Because we love you. . . . Don't be a rebel or dissident to this grand plan to bring about global, national, social, and individual harmony and well-being. Because we love you. . . . Be a good little citizen in our "brave new world." Because we love you. . . . And, if you refuse to take the mark, then you would be showing that you are unproductive and a rebel to our new society and we won't like that. Because we love you. . . .

We know you've been influenced and brainwashed by those extreme fundamental religious bigots and you can't help it. So, before we chop your head off, we will give you a few chances to change

your mind. We will send you to a reprogramming centre for some brain-wave massages and see if that might convince you that our way is the best way. Because we love you. . . .

Now, you might think this is funny, far-fetched, and Hollywood science-fiction type stuff. But, folks, I wouldn't laugh or scorn too soon. The following information hasn't come out of some science-fiction movie or magazine. It is true and happening here and now!

Never in the history of the world has knowledge and technology so skyrocketed to unlimited heights. The technological advances and computer age of recent years have certainly paved the way for the "mark of the beast" and the one-world system prophesied in Revelation. Through satellite and computers and the "New Information Highway," we are linking every man, woman, boy, and girl to a national network and database. The acceleration of these technologies and communications are swiftly taking us into George Orwell's 1984 "Big Brother government" scenario. Mr. Orwell was right . . . only, he was off a few years.

There is a microchip now in the hands of the government that has the potential

of becoming the mark of the beast, where you cannot buy or sell without it. Carl Sanders was a top electronics engineer and inventor for the U.S. government who worked with the F.B.I., C.I.A., I.R.S., and other government agencies designing spy technologies and surveillance equipment. He holds several patents and has been presented with the President's and Governor's awards for merit and design excellence.

Carl Sanders sat in seventeen New World Order meetings with heads-of-state officials such as Henry Kissinger and Bob Gates of the C.I.A. to discuss plans on how to bring about this one-world system. The government commissioned Carl Sanders to design a microchip for identifying and controlling the peoples of the world—a microchip that could be inserted under the skin with a hypodermic needle (a quick, convenient method that would be gradually accepted by society).

Carl Sanders, with a team of engineers behind him, with U.S. grant monies supplied by tax dollars, took on this project and designed a microchip that is powered by a lithium battery, rechargeable through the temperature changes in our skin. Without the knowledge of the Bible (Brother Sanders was not a Christian at the time), these engineers spent one-and-a-half-million dollars doing research on the best and most convenient place to have the microchip inserted. Guess what? These researchers found that the forehead and the back of the hand is not just the most convenient place, but is also the only viable place for rapid, consistent temperature changes in the skin to recharge the lithium battery. The microchip is approximately seven millimetres in length, .75 millimetres in diameter, about the size of a grain of rice. It is capable of storing pages upon pages of information about you. All your general history, work history, crime record, health history, and financial data can be stored on this chip.

Brother Sanders believes that this microchip, which he regretfully helped design, is the "mark" spoken about in Revelation 13:15–17. The original Greek word for "mark" is "*charagma*," which means a "scratch or etching." It is also interesting to note that the number 666 is actually a word in the original Greek. The word is "*chi xi stigma*," with the last part, "*stigma*," also meaning "to stick or prick."

In light of these definitions, implantable

"*Please* is a wry and quick and screamingly wild look at an underground culture of aimlessness and emotional loss."

— Michelle Berry, author of *Blur*

"Springsteen sang, 'There's a darkness on the edge of town.' Darbyshire's characters live in that darkness, infected by the absurdities of the contemporary sitcom."

— *The Danforth Review*

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microchips could very well be the physical mark spoken of in the Book of Revelation.

Some of you are most likely reading this and saying to yourself, "Boy, I'm sure glad that I'll be caught up into the Rapture before all these things take place." Now, I don't want to get in the pre-tribulation-post-tribulation debate, but I will ask you to consider a question: What if the popular pre-tribulation theology is wrong and you find yourself smack dab in the middle of Revelation's nightmare? Will you still serve God? Let me ask you it in this way: If the choice is laid before you to hop on the New World Order bandwagon (receiving the blessings and economic/financial freedoms associated with taking the mark) or to reject Big Brother's provisions and live an uncertain life of poverty and persecution, which would your heart choose? You may say, "Oh, that's easy. I'd choose Jesus and reject the mark of the beast!" Would you? Are you living for Him now? You see, if you're not living for Jesus now in a time of peace and prosperity, how do you think you're going to make it when they give you the choice to take the mark or get your head chopped off?

Folks, it will come down to a choice of the mark or martyrdom! Look: "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years" (Rev. 20:4).

Yes, we are seeing so many technological and political advances recently that it is quite possible that we are closer to the end than we think! Be prepared and pray! Don't be deceived. Stay close to Jesus. Be a diligent seeker and believer of God's word! Be faithful in your walk with God! Live in holiness, humility, and the fear of the Lord. Love the Lord with all your heart, soul, and mind! Say no to microchips, but say yes to the Master! Say no to sin, but yes to Jesus! Think about it! ✠

For more information on Carl Sanders, contact D.P.M., P.O. Box 27, Farmingville, N.Y. 11738. For more information on the Canadian Magazine Publishers Association, visit www.cmpa.ca.

TADDLE CREEK RECOMMENDS

Taddle Creek does not publish book reviews. However, the following books were recently written by contributors to the magazine and are, thus, highly recommended. (● indicates books containing work originally published in Taddle Creek.)

The Petty Details of So-and-so's Life, by Camilla Gibb (Doubleday, 2002; \$32.95). Camilla Gibb's much-anticipated second novel chronicles the turbulent lives of Emma and Blue Taylor, the children of dysfunctional parents. Simultaneously heartbreaking, hilarious, and grotesque, *The Petty Details of So-and-so's Life* explores the emotional terrain of Emma and Blue's separate adolescent lives through to their respective adulthoods, as they struggle to redeem and fully discover themselves. Hard-core and vulnerable, Blue obsessively seeks his AWOL father, while bookish Emma continually reinvents herself.

Lost: Lost and Found Pet Posters from Around the World, by Ian Phillips (Princeton Architectural, 2002; \$24.95). Dogs, cats, birds, cows, ferrets, rabbits, hamsters, and snakes—they're all here in this collection of handmade lost pet posters, some funny, some sad, some bizarre. With *Lost*, Ian Phillips's unique hobby, which he perfected in several earlier collections through his small press, Pas de Chance, finally gets the big press treatment it deserves.

The Notebooks, edited by Michelle Berry and Natalee Caple (Anchor, 2002; \$25.95). This insightful and dynamic anthology of diverse contemporary Canadian authors pairs a piece of fiction, whether a polished story or an excerpt from a work-in-progress, with a generous in-depth interview. For readers, *The Notebooks* offers a fascinating window into the writers' creative processes, as well as the various issues, hurdles, triumphs, and influences that comprise the writer and the writing. For writers, *The Notebooks* is an invaluable resource to learn from and be inspired by.

Everyone In Silico, by Jim Munroe (No Media Kings, 2002; \$20). Jim Munroe's latest and most skilled novel is a futuristic race through corporatized Vancou-

ver, set in the year 2036. In order to prolong youth, people with money can upgrade to newer, better, virtual selves. People with no credit are left behind. The bizarrely interrelated characters include an aging marketer, an octogenarian assassin, and a genetic artist. *Everyone In Silico* is a romp through underground culture and the superficial—if not emotional—things that make people tick.

Happyland, by Kevin Connolly (ECW, 2002; \$15.95). Kevin Connolly's exhilarating second collection of poetry balances the cerebral and the sensory with startlingly inventive imagery and juxtapositions. His poems are disturbing and disruptive, yet beautiful and redemptive, particularly those in the book's middle section, "Midnight on the Moon." *Happyland* is distinctly contemporary, referencing a range of pop culture and world events with wit, menace, and beauty. While *Happyland* is a challenging read, its levels of meaning will impact repeatedly.

The Dagger Between Her Teeth, by Jennifer LoveGrove (ECW, 2002; \$15.95). Images shoot through your mind like a burning cannonball: female pirates with a flair for killing kitchen maids and keelhauling; biblical heroes Lilith and Judith conducting bloody births and murders; crazed children running amok in the wilds of small-town Southern Ontario. An incredible debut poetry collection, visceral and sexy. It will leave you reeling like you've drunk a bottle of wine and smoked a hundred cigarettes.

● *The Fat Kid*, by Paul Vermeersch (ECW, 2002; \$15.95). In his second collection of poetry, Paul Vermeersch tackles an issue normally reserved for women—unhealthy body image—from a male point of view. What could be an uncomfortable read from another author, *The Fat Kid* is entertaining and thought provoking, thanks to Vermeersch's trademark style of intertwined humour and sadness.

Better to Have Loved: The Life of Judith Merrill, by Judith Merrill and Emily Pohl-Weary (Between the Lines, 2002; \$29.95). *Better to Have Loved* isn't a complete account of the world of science fiction

writing in the second half of the twentieth century—nor is it meant to be. It's the account of a life, and a fascinating one at that. Judith Merrill's autobiography comes across just as those familiar with her and her work might expect: frank, brash, opinionated, and painfully—refreshingly—honest. *Better to Have Loved* is not just about science fiction, but also politics, society, family, friendship, love, and motherhood, making it an entertaining and interesting read for both sci-fi and non-sci-fi fans alike.

● *Killing Things*, by John Degen (Pedlar, 2002; \$19.95). John Degen's beautiful collection of urban poetry shows the big city as more than the sum of its stereotypical parts. Degen's Toronto isn't just busy streets filled with cars, concrete, and workaholics; it's also rain, bicycles, mist, dogs, holding hands, and stealing kisses. *Killing Things* is a departure from Degen's first collection, *Animal Life in Bucharest*, but just as enjoyable, if not more.

● *13*, by Mary-Lou Zeitoun (Porcupine's Quill, 2002; \$14.95). According to Marnie Harmon's mother, she is nothing but "miserable." But trying to find her way through the Ottawa suburbs in 1980 is hard for the thirteen-year-old Marnie—her parents don't understand her, she's growing apart from her friends, and her teachers are sexual predators. One could say Mary-Lou Zeitoun's coming-of-age story is a girl's version of *Catcher in the Rye*, but it's much more fun than Salinger's magnum opus. Within pages, Zeitoun's zippy and conversational style draws you into Marnie's mind and world.

Blur, by Michelle Berry (Random House, 2002; \$32.95). Berry follows her debut, *What We All Want*, with *Blur*, a cunning neo-noir embrace of celebrity culture and broken dreams. Tired of writing profiles of boy bands and starlets, Bruce Dermott, a down-at-the-heels entertainment journalist, stumbles across lost Hollywood legend Emma Fine, a screen siren whose star set with the discovery of her lover floating face down in her swimming pool. Digging into old case files, Dermott slowly pieces together the tragic story.



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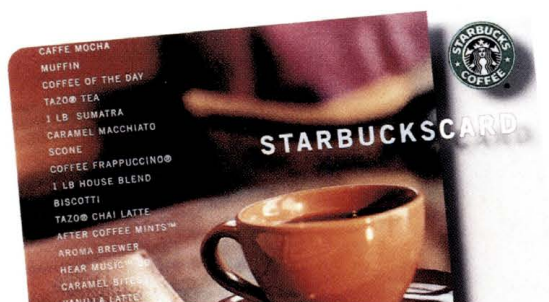
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