

TADDLE CREEK



SUMMER, 2004
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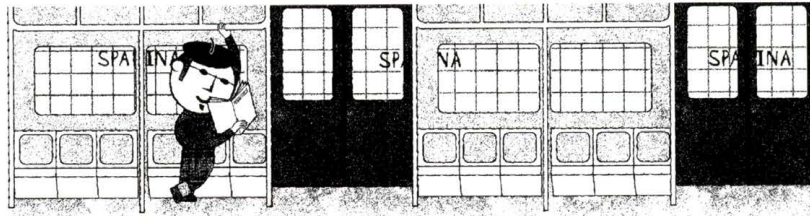
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TADDLE CREEK

VOL. VII, NO. 2 • SUMMER, 2004

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Unknown, circa 1962. Photographer unknown.

GOT POETRY?

This past December, the National Magazine Awards Foundation announced it would be discontinuing its annual award for poetry, thereby depriving Canadian poets of their chance to be nominated for a prize with somewhat less prominence, but, sadly, all the cultural cachet, of a Juno Award. It was the collective opinion of the foundation that poetry was not widely published in Canadian magazines—as opposed to food photography, which, given its continued prominence via the still-life category, is apparently available in abundance—and that other awards existed to reward those few poets managing to find magazines willing to accept their work.

Given that *Taddle Creek*, off the top of its head, could think of at least forty-two magazines publishing poetry in Canada, and not one award for magazine poetry outside of the foundation's, it immediately took offence at the cancellation, writing letters to the appropriate people and boycotting this year's awards. Many others wrote letters, too—nearly eighty in all. This was not the first time since its founding, in 1977, that the foundation—an incorporated body funded largely by the Canadian magazine industry through entry fees, as well as through donations from corporate sponsors—had discontinued its award for poetry. Thankfully, it now also may not be the last. The chorus of poetry supporters was heard, resulting in the foundation reinstating the award within two months. Without rehashing the events that transpired any further, *Taddle Creek* will simply say it is happy with the foundation's not-quite-unanimous decision, and is pleased poetry will once again have a chance to shine . . . as it were.

One of *Taddle Creek's* regular contributors often good-naturedly accuses the magazine of publishing poetry only to fill in the odd spaces surrounding its fiction. This is not entirely inaccurate. The truth is, *Taddle Creek* probably doesn't like poetry as much as the next mag. Oh, sure, there's your Chris

Chamberses and your Paul Vermeersch— that's some quality stuff that *Taddle Creek* just can't get enough of. And, oh, how the poetry of a Stuart Ross or a Patrick Rawley makes the magazine laugh. But, beyond the poetry found in its own pages, no, *Taddle Creek* is not the biggest of fans.

So, why fight for the reinstatement of the poetry award? Well, self-interest for one: without the poetry award, *Taddle Creek*, and all other Canadian literary journals (the magazine would like to call some of them "compatriots," but, frankly, not very many of them boycotted, and *Taddle Creek* is mad at them) would have its chances for nomination cut in half, leaving fiction as the only category it could hope to win. But the fight for poetry was also a matter of principle. To shun poetry so callously was simply not right. Is poetry any more or less important than fiction or illustration or essays? No. Is it more culturally significant than food photography? Good God, yes! (Sorry, *Food & Drink* magazine. Nothing personal, baby.) Throw the small magazines a bone and at least pretend to include them in the process. Most of them have so little . . .

But speaking seriously, as a literary magazine, *Taddle Creek* was overjoyed to see so many fans of poetry—and not just poets, but journalists, musicians, editors, readers, and the like—hop on the poetry love train and help correct this potentially horrible injustice. Hopefully, the matter is now closed. However, in the event *Toronto Life* ever stops publishing its summer literary issue, thereby putting the fate of the foundation's fiction category at risk, *Taddle Creek* hopes you'll help fight the good fight once again and keep those cards and letters coming. In the meantime, perhaps the magazine will lobby the foundation to once again redesign its award certificate. The type on the most recent version is quite small, and that bar-code-looking thing is way too Big Brother. ☞

TADDLE CREEK

"Come on in. Have a pie—have an olive!"

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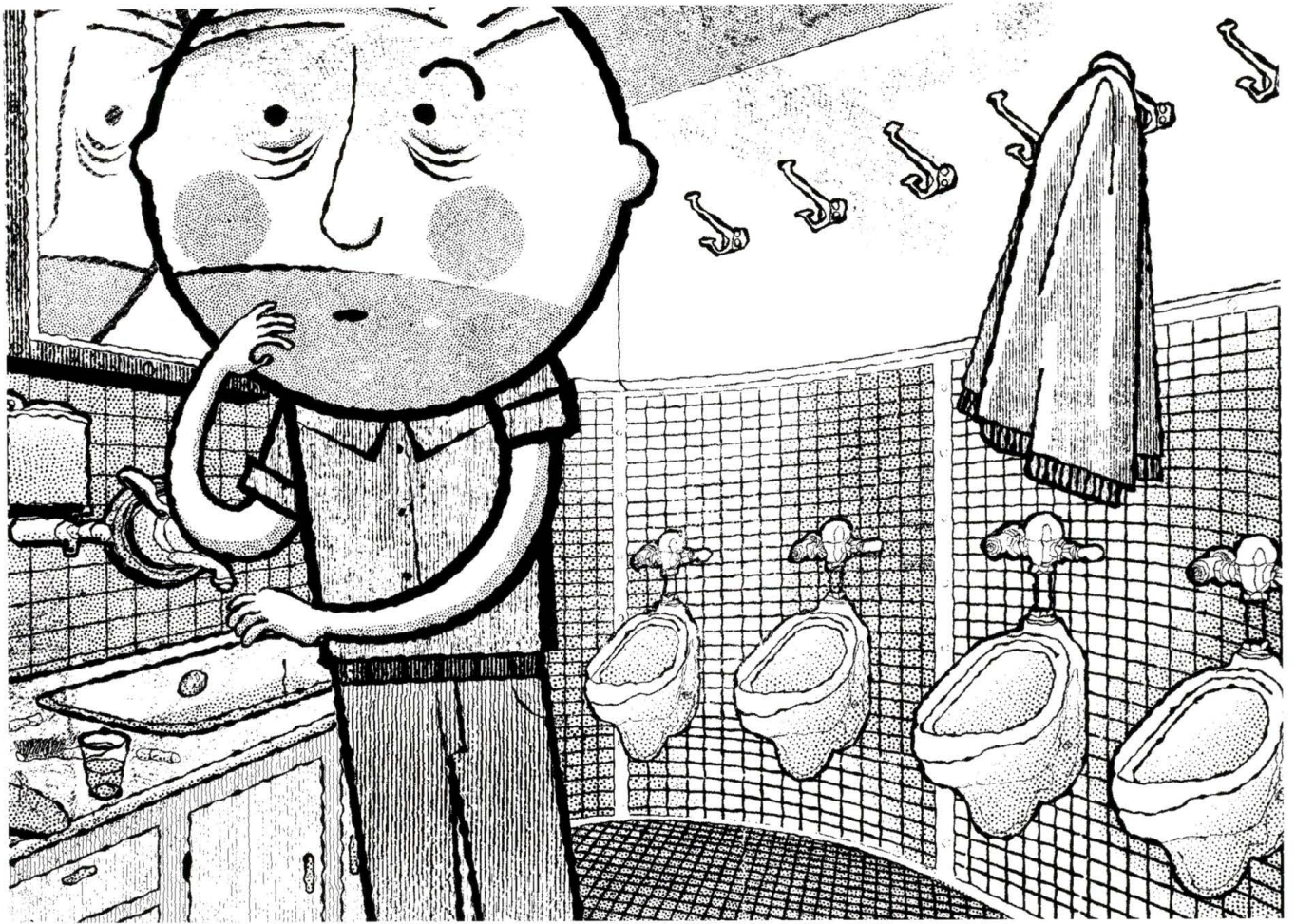
THE WIRE

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REAL ESTATE

FICTION BY HAL NIEDZVIECKI

My hand working it. Other hand clicking. Clicking.

Screen shimmers then blanks. I hit the space bar. The mouse. Nothing.

I'm protected. Pop-ups, scanners, scripts, cookies, worms. I'm covered. There's always something new, though. It's all the same, but there's always something new.

My softening organ, greasy with lotion and spit. Alien in the brackish glow. My clean hand tapping: space bar, mouse, space bar.

Nothing.

Hard drive whirring. Finally, the movie player opens. I'm expecting the clip I clicked on just before the system went down.

Thirty seconds of salvation. My crotch twinges. Ready to finish.

It's the way they look just before it happens. On their knees, mouths open, eyes nothing but slits. It's the way they jerk back from that first splash, can't stop themselves.

The clip loads.

I'm almost hard again. Only, it's not what I'm expecting. A girl in bra and panties. Staring at the camera. Skinny. Not terrified, but maybe afraid. Afraid the way you get when you know what's coming. There's no audio. Her gaze. Darting. Who's she looking for? Leans in. No sound. My hand. Working.

Please, she mouths.

I explode.

Marie Justins is a big lady, nurse in the geriatric ward, has some difficulties regarding her financing as a re-

sult of a recent divorce. I'm a mortgage broker who works from his basement home office. I can find a lender suitable to your needs. A lot of people go to the bank. Don't go to the bank.

Late afternoon. We sit in her living room. Marie outlines the pertinent details. I take notes, nod encouragingly. Marie's voice quavers. Clients can become emotional.

Since my husband left us—, she is saying.

Can you, I say, tell me again your average monthly take-home, after taxes? Marie pulls herself together.

Let me put these numbers in the office computer, I say. Your situation is not unusual, though of course, all clients have their unique needs. But I'm sure, I say, standing up, that we can find

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a resolution that will be more than satisfactory.

Really? Marie approaches. Her eyes glisten. Her blouse, bursting out. What's under it? Quivering.

We both hear the front door open.

Then a girl's voice: I'm *hoooooome*, followed by her arrival in the living room.

Marie seems flustered. Hi, she says, louder than necessary. This is Mr. Zikowitz. He's going to help us renegotiate our mortgage.

I'll bet, the girl says.

I must be going, I say.

We shake hands, palms mutually moist.

Byyyyy, Marie's daughter croons.

I slip out of bed and pad into the basement. I close the door to my office. Lock it.

I search.

With my wife, I perform diligently. Weeks pass. I do her from behind. It is not a case of her being unable to satisfy. It is not that she lacks sex appeal or adventurousness. What is it? You tell me.

Weeks pass.

We work. Earn. Speak of what there is to speak of.

I wake up. It is 2 A.M.

Again, the search.

A physical hardness, which I take care of, catching the mess in tissue.

Something else remains. Some desire unfulfilled. That girl. Not what she said—*Please*—but the way she said it.

The way she looked when she said it.

I monitor certain chat rooms, on-line forums.

People talk of things.

Just words.

My wife says, Are you all right? I shrug, sip coffee.

Maybe you should see someone?

About what? I smile.

You haven't really been sleeping, she says.

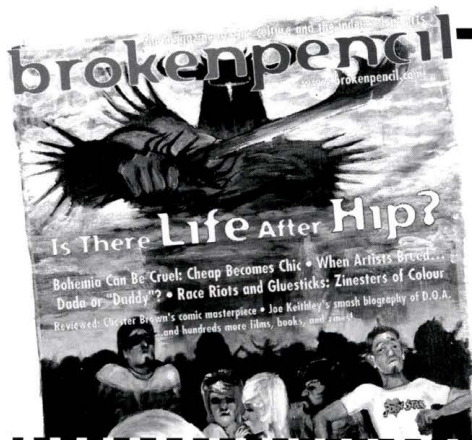
Am I waking you up?

The phone ringing in the basement.

This isn't about me, she says.

Duty calls, I say, hoisting my mug.

Stuart is a fellow mortgage broker I met at a conference. He lives not far from me in a similar home and works in a similar basement office. He has two



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CHERRY BLOSSOMS IN AN ORCHARD

Someone remembers smoke
rising from holes
drilled in teeth, the search
for dull metal
in the back of the mouth,
the glint of an earring lost
in the elbow of a drain.

Someone remembers a bicycle
crushed by a car, an antelope
crushed by a car, and a chicken's egg
tossed in a picnic game
landing safely in a plastic cup.

Someone remembers
cherry blossoms in an orchard.
Scandalous white blossoms,
his favourite little what's-her-names.

He remembers them, not
because of their scent,
or because August
fattened their green, gushing
ovaries into hard, sour fruit,
but because a dry summer
brought mice, and the mice
invited owls.

And there was gluttony
among the mice, and joy
among the owls, such that
at picking time, the trees
were bare, and the soles
of his boots snapped on grass
packed with tiny grey bones.

And what's her name, that flower,
was shaking in the doorway,
blaming him. And he hasn't been
home in twelve years.

—PAUL VERMEERSCH

children, young ones, a boy and a girl. We occasionally socialize, ostensibly to keep each other up-to-date in regards to the latest developments in our trade. There are always schemes, offers, loopholes to be explored and exploited. We talk shop, do something compatible we both enjoy. This weekend, his wife has taken the kids to their grandmother's,

and we have arranged to meet at the auto show, downtown.

We even dress pretty much the same. Polo T-shirts and chinos. Our wives have not met, though there has been talk about a dinner date, the four of us.

We stop to admire next year's Porsche, its yellow skin shimmering under spotlights.

Wow, Stu says. Can you imagine?

I shake my head ruefully.

Suppose you got your hands on a car like this, Stu says. What would you do with it?

I honestly don't know, I say.

You'd probably sell it, Stu says.

I shrug.

It's the opening weekend of the auto show. Very crowded. There are men, like us, wandering through, admiring r.p.m.s and zero-to-sixty. There are young couples, the women tolerantly trailing their boyfriends past an array of souped-up S.U.V.s lurking like dinosaurs in a section of the huge convention centre temporarily dubbed Truck Territory.

We stop to watch a floor show. Customized Honda. Engine bulging out, a radiated wound. Women in bikinis prancing around the car.

There are families, too, in the crowd, middle-aged husbands and wives dolling out twenties to their just-teen offspring so they can play the racing games or the bumper cars. Get yourself a hot dog, meet me back at the entrance in an hour, O.K.? In an hour. Right here. O.K.? O.K.?

The floor show continues.

I peer through the crowd.

Flicker of straight brown hair. Pair of doleful eyes.

Stu's attention on the bikini-clad spokeswoman, buxom blond whose suggestively amplified remarks about the kind of transmission she likes in her car elicit whoo-whoos and catcalls from the audience.

The back of long twiggy legs. Flash of near-white. Tartan skirt flaring. A hardness like a darkness. Black lump slipping free. Something inside me coming loose.

Excuse me, I say, pushing past. I side-step into a couple gawking at an R.V. the size of my house. Keep moving. She is graceful. Slips through the crowd like an eel.

At the front entranceway, she stops. Looks for someone. A dad or a boyfriend. Tight pink lips, pale cheeks twisted impatiently. She is slim and petulant.

Nice, huh? a man says to me.

My gaze followed. I put my head down, move in the other direction.

Hey, he says, blocking my way. I can help you.

MIDNIGHT GROCERY SHOPPING AFTER WATCHING DAYS AND DAYS OF VIKING WEEK ON THE HISTORY CHANNEL

grocery carts
would not make good longboats:
too many holes.
a disabled freezer chest
in aisle 5 provides
a cold sea to wade through,
and i do, with large, heavy steps.
tonight, i would be satisfied
with another man's woman
thrown over my bulky shoulder.
her name would be helga
to my sven.
barring a lack of women to abduct,
even a large fish to char would be nice.
instead, i am left with a tin can
of tuna—dolphin-friendly at that.
i throw the can
into the cart with more muscle
than needed.
an elderly lady hovering
beside the green beans
clutches
her pink sequined purse
tightly to her sagging chest.
overripe tomatoes
fall from her gnarled root hands,
explode, then bleed
onto the cool green linoleum.
i smell blood,
and like it.

—DANI COUTURE

He tucks his card into my breast pocket.

Charles Willet. Import-Export.

My wife is ready to have a baby. We've discussed her going off the pill. We've waited longer than most couples in our situation. Stable, up-standing. Capable of providing the right kind of nurturing atmosphere.

We are relatively young. Just barely into our thirties. There's no hurry, I tell her. I know, she says. She understands that I do not want us to be one of those couples that has a baby as a way of marking the passage of time. Why does one have a baby?

Still, she says, fitting her head on my shoulder. What do you think? Boy or girl?

Weeks pass. I plug Marie Justins into a great deal offered just under the radar. She is ever so thankful. Wants me to come to the house for a "little celebration," as she puts it.

I courier over the paperwork.

I need a hobby. Something physical yet mentally taxing. Squash. Chess. Pole vault.

I lock the door of my office. A shadow over my heart. This reluctant creeping doom.

The hours pass. Phone rings. I mute the player. Answer it. My hand still

stroking. Flesh numb. Waiting. Pleasure deferred. Tomorrow. The next day.

The next day my wife comes home early. I hear: knob turning. Hello? she says, puzzled at the locked office door. Are you in there?

Coming, I call, as if I have to travel down several flights of stairs and halls to get the door, instead of three steps across a messy office. I scramble with underwear, pants, belt. Hit the Power button.

Computer dies with a reverse whine. I open the door.

My wife wears a puzzled smile.

I am sweating, red-faced. My noncha-

lant grin turning hard at the edges, like old cheese.

What are you doing? she asks.

Working, I say.

She stares at me.

I didn't realize the door was locked, I say. Sweat beading my upper lip. Sometimes it does that, I say.

She peers past me into the dark office.

What's going on with you?

I step forward, forcing her to back up. Close the door behind me.

I'm done for the day, I say.

Upstairs, I pour myself a drink. Scotch. From the single dusty bottle.

My wife watches me, eyes narrowing.

Neither of us is much of a drinker.

Home early? I say.

Things were quiet at the bank.

Great, I nod. My face, drying. I sip, feel the burn slip through me.

What do you want to do for dinner? I say.

She turns away from me.

Weeks pass. No one notices. A call from my aging mother, resident of a city some thousand miles south. Dad had chest pains, she reports,

checked himself into emergency. False alarm, Mom says. Dad's heart, an accident waiting to happen.

The economy slips into a long-promised downturn. People tighten their belts. Hoard cash. Put their plans for a first home off till next year. My card in a drawer filled with takeout menus, pre-approved credit cards, and broken corkscrews.

Cold outside, then suddenly hot and muggy. Is it spring or fall? Time expands to fill itself. Variations on a theme. My options narrowing, becoming inevitable.

Mr. Willet? I say.

My voice loud in the claustrophobic dark of my office.

Yes, speaking.

We met at the . . . auto show.

Of course, he purrs calmly.

He gives me an address, a day, a time. For our little *informational* session. There is a fee, he says sadly. I trust that six hundred dollars won't be an inconvenience?

I—

We offer the best sessions, he tells me. *Premium* sessions.

I love my wife, I say.

Spurt. Dribble. I clean myself up. Tap into the central bank. Interests rates rising.

Look, I tell my wife. I know I've been—we've been—lately. But I think I'm, I mean, I haven't wanted to say it, because, well, it's—this isn't—

What is it? she says.

I think I'm . . . depressed, I say.

Depressed? she says.

There is a stain on the linoleum. Shape of a starfish.

It's O.K., she says. We can talk about this. You can tell me anything. You know that, don't you?

I know, I say. I just . . .

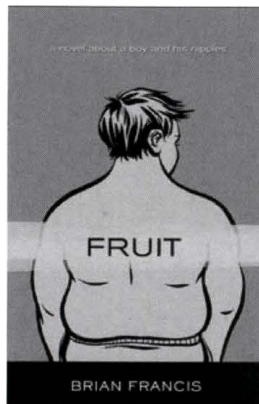
It's O.K., she says. There are lots of people who . . . These things happen. We'll figure it out. We'll get you help. We'll figure it out together.

I don't know, I say.

We'll figure it out, she says.

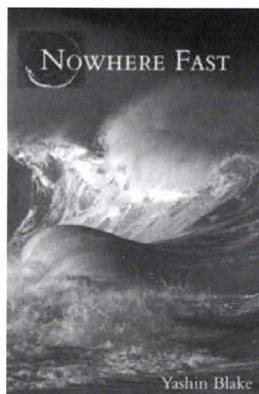
It's a combination of things. It's not one thing. A sense of slippage. One thing happens, then another. And so on.

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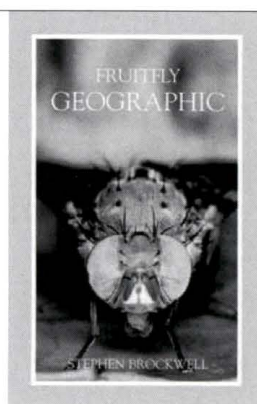


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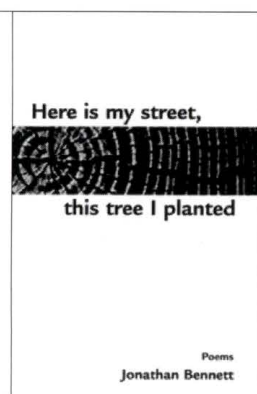
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**Here is my street,
this tree I planted**
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Jonathan Bennett

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And on and on and on. Until you are no longer really in control. But if not you, then who is to blame? Whose fault is it?

I drive into the city. A weekday evening. The streets all but empty. What people there are seem like travellers, waiting impatiently for their plane to board. Buildings looming over us, our shared legacy, these empty office towers and darkened arenas. Sky glowing purple, it could be dawn or dusk, midnight or morning. I keep looking in my rear-view mirror. The path behind me. The way I came.

I drive west, through a ramshackle neighbourhood, houses adorned with crumbling wood porches. Then blocks of warehouses, hipster clubs, strange art galleries, the kind of restaurants my wife calls rip-offs because it's five bucks for a Coke and you always leave hungry.

So . . . my wife says. She sits in the kitchen over a cup of tea. She is wearing her blue robe. The lines around her eyes, wedged grooves shadowed by fading light.

So what? I say.
So . . . she says, how are you feeling?
Better, I say.

Days later, I retrace the route. I take the elevator up. Knock on the door. Charles Willet. Import-Export. He greets me, shakes my hand. Leads me past the reception area and into his office. We are two men having a drink in an office.

Heating up, Willet says. They say it's gonna be a hot summer.

Nodding, I withdraw the envelope, place it on his desk. Without looking down, Willet makes it disappear.

So tell me, he says. What kind of experience can we offer you today?

I take a drink. My hand is calm, cool.

Brown hair. I say. Long, straight brown hair.

Willet nods.

And brown eyes.

Yes?

And slim. Very slim.

He waits for me to go on. I finish my drink.

And, he says gently. Beyond that?

If you asked me tomorrow to describe

Charles Willet, I would be at a loss.

Follow me, please. Willet leads me down the a corridor. Past the closed doors of other offices.

I can smell perfume. Her body.

Is there, I say . . . I'd like to . . . a bathroom?

Oh sure, Willet says. Right here. He opens an adjoining door.

I close the door behind me.

The bathroom is small, pink. On the counter, a hair brush, lip gloss, pink barrettes.

I stand over the sink.

My face in the mirror. ☪

Hal Niedzviecki lives in Portugal Village. He is the co-founder and the fiction editor of Broken Pencil, the magazine of zine culture and the independent arts. His books include the novel Ditch (Random House, 2001) and the cultural exploration We Want Some Too: Underground Desire and the Reinvention of Mass Culture (Penguin, 2000). His upcoming books are Hello, I'm Special: How Individuality Became the New Conformity, to be released by Penguin in 2004, and a new novel, entitled The Program, to be released by Random House in 2005.

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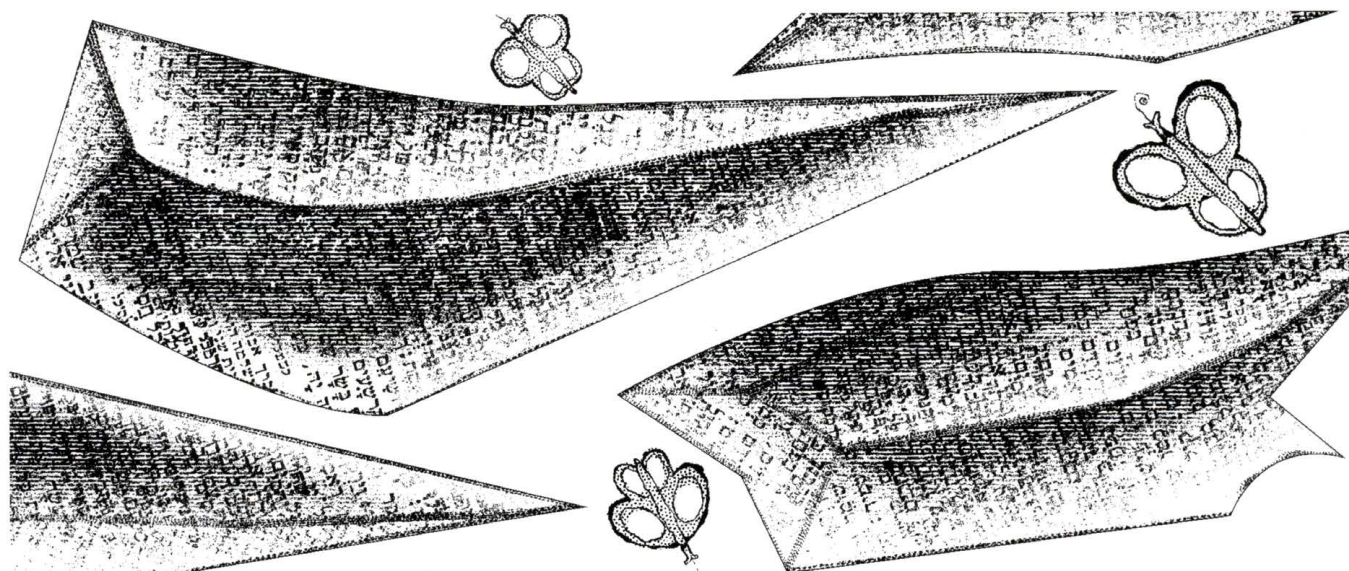
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RUNNER

FICTION BY GARY BARWIN

Of the thirty thousand runners running today, only one is made of glass. Only one could be shattered by a small stone. Of course, you can't tell what the runner is made of; clothes, gloves, shoes, a hairpiece, and speed conceal him.

A video camera set up at the check-point. From early morning, a constant stream. A few event vehicles. Flickering lights. Race officials. And always, a stream of runners.

The runner passes into view. Octagons of light on the camera lens. The runner expressionless with concentration. The stone at chest level, moving forward as he moves. He has been chasing the stone since the race began, and finally he is gaining on it. The road sinks down and the runner's speed increases.

No one knows the runner's name. His chest touches the stone, and there is an explosion of light and gloves. The camera has been plunged into a whirlpool of clothes and broken glass. A hairpiece limp on the sidelines. A shoe behind a bush. The runner disappears.

It is as if someone has replaced the air with nails.

The shards of glass embed themselves in spectators watching from the sidelines. They do not notice the intrusion, so sharp are the fragments. They remain fixed on the race, their eyes scanning for

family members and favourite runners. Tiny cuts speckle their bodies beneath their windbreakers; small abrasions mark their faces. The people take the glass home. They take the glass to restaurants and cafés, to homes and schools, to showers and doctors' appointments. They take the glass to bed. They press the glass against the skin of lovers, children, co-workers, pets. Here, poochie-poo, come kiss Daddy. And the shards are passed on to Rover's face.

While at work, a woman finds a piece of glass in her hand. She removes it. She is a research scientist and she examines the fragment. Iridescent edges, ridges the colour of eyes, fissures like sky light. There's a pockmarked section that looks like Mother Teresa. But of course, she thinks, everything looks like Mother Teresa. At a higher magnification, there are butterfly-shaped indentations, and scratches like tiny drawings.

"C'mere, Bob. Look at this," she calls to her lab technician. Bob sees Rhode Island, and scribbles that remind him of Hebrew.

"Are you sure?" the scientist asks.

"Absolutely," Bob says. "It's my bar mitzvah portion. And there's a bit that, if you sound it out, is an opening monologue Billy Crystal once did on *Saturday Night Live*."

They take the glass piece down to the electron microscope. The scientist sees her parents lying side by side beneath its surface. They look as if they have been buried in a frozen river. Their small faces are peaceful, their hands clasped together. They are young. The scientist examines them closely. Her parents become younger. Soon they are boy and girl, and the father has no beard. His face is smooth and unwrinkled, and the mother's body is slim as a child's arm. The parents become younger still. They are infants curled beneath the ice. They are tiny pink ears, their fists not yet unfurled. The glass is a womb, and the scientist's parents have become a single cell. The scientist calls out, but it is too late. They have disappeared, and the fragment of glass is empty.

The cut in the scientist's hand smarts. ▽

*Gary Barwin lives in Hamilton, Ontario. He is a writer, composer, and performer. His books of poetry, fiction, and writing for children include *Raising Eyebrows* (Coach House, 2001) and *Killer Poodle Made Me Island King* (Fox Meadow, 2004). His next two books, the fiction collection *Doctor Weep and Other Strange Teeth*, and the poetry collection *Fragments from the Fragpool* (with Derek Beaulieu), will be published by Mercury in 2004 and 2005, respectively.*

COW STORY

FICTION BY STUART ROSS

They pour from their offices into elevators, which carry them down to the lobby, from whence they crowd into revolving doors and spill out onto the sidewalk. On hands and knees, their snouts pressed hard against the pavement, their ears alert, they proceed home. When I say "they," I mean "we." We sniff the sidewalks and catch a bit of ourselves from earlier in the day, and the scent of urine and chewed gum and leaves that have drifted down from the trees. We love our jobs and we love autumn. Our hearts are big.

I stepped into the supermarket and walked through the aisles, sidestepping careening shopping carts and towering displays of baked beans. A piece of paper in my back pocket contained the words "canned tomatoes," but I didn't need to consult it. However, when I reached the pertinent shelves, a cow blocked my way, waving her tail. Two grocery clerks pushed at her haunches, trying to move her along, but she wouldn't budge. I couldn't get to the canned tomatoes. The cow moored. I decided to pick up a pizza on the way home.

At an intersection, waiting to cross, I turned to a man beside me. He looked dimly familiar. I was convinced he was my Grade 7 geography teacher's son, because he was the same age as me, and so could not be my Grade 7 geography teacher. "A cow stood beside the canned tomatoes," I explained. "Nobody could move her, and nobody knows how she got there. I've changed my dinner plans." As I got closer to my home, a boy was playing hopscotch on the sidewalk. I kicked him, and he tumbled into the street.

I had a pizza in my hands. The elevator door in my building opened. There were five of us waiting to board the elevator, but a cow stood inside, taking up all the space, and likely using up the legal weight limit for the elevator. "His name is Otis," said a woman I often saw in the laundry room. "No, Otis is the elevator's name," said a man I had never seen before. Fearing he was an intruder in the building, possibly responsible for

a recent rash of break and enters, I kicked him, which made my pizza fall from my hands.

I gazed out my apartment window at the mountains. My stomach was empty. They were coming down, down from the snow-capped peaks. They were in the supermarkets, blocking the aisles, and they were in the elevators, making me walk up the stairs, which hurts my legs. I couldn't recall whether or not I lived with anyone. "I'm home!" I shouted, but there was no response. In my bedroom closet, there was only my clothes. I fell immediately to sleep and dreamed that I lived with a girl who was in my Grade 7 geography class.

Shuffling barefoot out of my bedroom in the morning, wearing my red terry-cloth bathrobe, I heard music in the living room. It wasn't a CD that I owned, because it had words, and I had no CDs with words. A cow is a four-legged mammal bred for its milk production and because you can eat it. One stood in my living room, gazing at my stereo system, mooing. The song the cow was playing was "Long Tall Glasses," by Leo Sayer. After that song came "The Passenger," by Iggy Pop. After that song came "Stumblin' In," by Suzi Quatro, and then "Don't Go Breaking My Heart," by Elton John and Kiki Dee. I did not understand how the cow came to be in my apartment, but it had eclectic taste in music.

At the gas station at the corner, I waited by the telephone booth. Inside, a cow stood on its hind legs, its face pressed against the glass, looking at me. If it hadn't stood on its hind legs, it wouldn't have been able to fit in the booth. When I was in Grade 7, Murray Nightingale came to school with a cow's heart in a jar. What surprised me was that the heart was white, not red. There was sediment floating in the water in which the cow's heart was submerged. Murray's father owned a slaughterhouse, and Murray was always bringing parts of cows to school. I hated when this happened, because it made

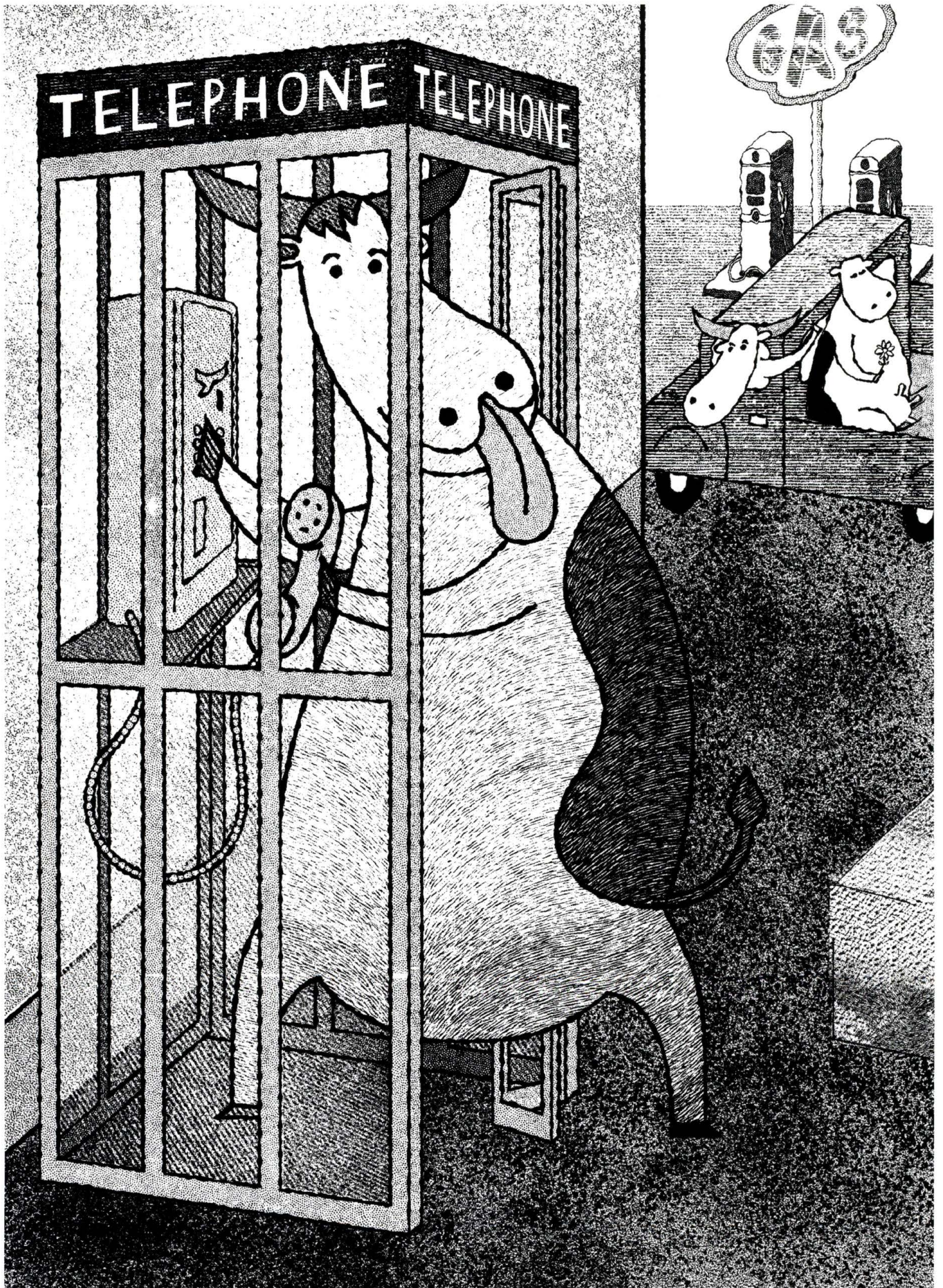
me sick to look at this stuff. He once brought a cow's eyeball, also in a jar. It looked at me like the cow in the phone booth was looking at me. I kicked Murray Nightingale.

On my way to the police station, where I wanted to report the cow incidents, I saw a boy lying in the street. Concerned for his safety, I pulled him up onto the sidewalk and lay him in a large rectangle formed by a chalk diagram. Children used this diagram for a jumping game called hopscotch. At the police station, an officer asked me to sit down and catch my breath. "First there was a cow beside the canned tomatoes, in the supermarket," I explained. "Then there was a cow in the elevator at home, and we had to use the stairs. Also, a cow played music this morning in my living room. Most of the music was from the nineteen-eighties and the nineteen-seventies. When I went to phone you from the phone booth, there was a cow in the phone booth." It was like a TV show in the police station. A girl wearing leg warmers looked like a prostitute, and some people were angry and there was a lot of "commotion."

When everything was normal again, I felt a certain emptiness. I sat in my office and made big decisions, but it just wasn't the same. I swung around in my chair and looked out the window, into the mountains. I knew they were up there, and when they felt the time was right, they would come down again. After work, on our hands and knees, our snouts to the pavement, the sidewalks didn't smell right. We all looked at each other and agreed that the sidewalks just didn't smell right anymore.

In the mountains, there was activity. ▽

*Stuart Ross lives in a housing co-op near Christie and Dupont streets. His most recent book is *Hey, Crumbling Balcony!: Poems New & Selected* (ECW, 2003). His anthology, *Surreal Estate: 13 Canadian Poets Under the Influence*, will be published this year by Mercury. He teaches poetry at the Centauri Arts retreat.*





CRITICAL CHEERLEADER

Emily Pohl-Weary discusses demystifying the magazine-making process, her family's sci-fi past, and why mainstream culture isn't always a bad thing.

INTERVIEW BY ALEX MLYNEK

When Emily Pohl-Weary first became aware of zines, she thought, "I have to do this." It's been close to a decade since Pohl-Weary, now a writer and an editor, was introduced to the world of homemade magazines by her friend, the author and do-it-yourself maven Jim Munroe, while in her sophomore year studying translation at York University's Glendon College, in Toronto. Today, her popular zine, *Kiss Machine*, enjoys a print run of one thousand, will soon make the jump from twice-yearly to quarterly, and was recently named one of "four indie magazines worth looking out for" by the *Toronto Star*.

Pohl-Weary's first foray into self-publishing was a small, hand-stapled zine, titled *We Have Lives*, published in 1996. In it, she and her five female housemates attempted to show they weren't slackers, despite what the outside world may have thought of their unconventional approach to work and life (one was a dominatrix, another a poet-dancer). Two years later, upon being diagnosed with Crohn's disease—an inflammation of the intestinal tract that can cause abdominal pain, weight loss, and fever—she responded, in part, by publishing zines on the topic. The front cover of *Throat Flower* features a picture of Pohl-Weary with a flower growing out of her mouth. "I was throwing up, and the flower coming out of my throat was about figuring out some way to think positively about life," she says. Her next zine, *Pill Bottle Prose*, took the unconventional form of a small, plastic medicine bottle. "Over the course of the year when I was very ill, I collected probably one hundred little bottles of pills, and turned them into pill-bottle-like stories, and put macaroni in them so if you shook them they sounded like pills."

The theme of taking control of both medium and message remains a constant in Pohl-Weary's work, be it in her former position as the managing editor

of *Broken Pencil* magazine, her editorship of a new anthology of female empowerment fiction and essays, her work as a writer of fiction and poetry, or as the co-editor of *Kiss Machine*.

Pohl-Weary and her friend, the artist and writer Paola Poletto, began publishing *Kiss Machine* in 2000. The not-quite digest-size zine, which had an initial print run of four hundred, evolved out of the friendship the duo struck up while attending a writing group. Among other things, it publishes an eclectic mix of fiction, poetry, photographs, art, essays, and advice.

Pohl-Weary, thirty, and Poletto, thirty-five, have created a format that allows contributors to work within a framework of two themes per issue. One example was the "parallel" worlds of bugs and small business—an idea that grew out of noticing it was often restaurants owned by minorities that were targeted during Toronto health authorities' dirty-dining crackdown. "I could have never done (*Kiss Machine*) without Emily taking the front-row sort of role that she's taken in shaping the magazine editorially," says Poletto. "I'm much more interested in seeing how a publication can be an artwork. The thing that I think she's most brilliant at is having developed a fairly defined editorial eye. I'm much more interested in conceptual narratives that aren't linear, for instance, and Emily has a more traditional, linear focus, and so, when we come together, there's a real negotiation there."

The format and theme of *Kiss Machine* are ever-evolving. Two upcoming mini-issues will each focus on pairing an artist with a writer, one of which will be a fictionalized account based on the story of two real-life female pirates, Anne Bonney and Mary Read, by Pohl-Weary and the artist Willow Dawson. "*Kiss Machine* does sort of teeter on the edge of being kind of a more established, respectable magazine and a zine. I think that's part of what makes it interesting," says Hal Niedzviecki, a

writer and the co-founding editor of *Broken Pencil*. "It's kind of running better, more lively, more interesting material than most of the well-funded literary magazines in Canada. And it does so because it's on that edge and isn't so stodgy, and doesn't feel it has all of these mandates it has to fulfill. It just goes out and does what it wants to do."

Part of *Kiss Machine's* goal, Pohl-Weary says, is to fight the notion of elitism that surrounds the creation of magazines. "I think there's a mystique about writing like there is about other professions. A lot of that has to do with the hoarding of information or the creation of an elite," she says. "In a way, making *Kiss Machine* was our reaction to the whole notion that it is a mystifying process to create a whole institution. It isn't, actually. You can create *Kiss Machine* out of your one-room office."

While some of the contributions to *Kiss Machine* are less overtly political than others, the political nature of each issue's theme is always explored in some way—inevitable perhaps, considering Pohl-Weary's family history. With an activist mother, a stepfather who came to Canada as a political refugee from Argentina, and the major science fiction writers Judith Merrill and Frederik Pohl as maternal grandparents, Pohl-Weary's memories of life with her family include Sandinista house guests, and watching her grandmother smoke pot. Days were spent making trips with Merrill to the comic-book store, and with her mother, Ann Pohl, to the public library in her Toronto neighbourhood of Parkdale, from where she often returned with plastic shopping bags full of books. "The only thing I really enjoyed, when I think back to my childhood, was reading," Pohl-Weary says. "I don't think I was the happiest kid ever. I grew up in a pretty tough neighbourhood, where you were kinda scared sometimes when you were outside."

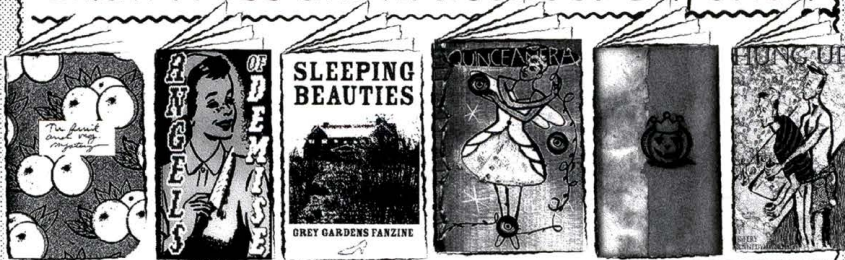


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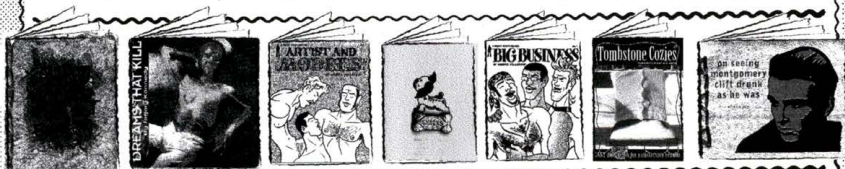
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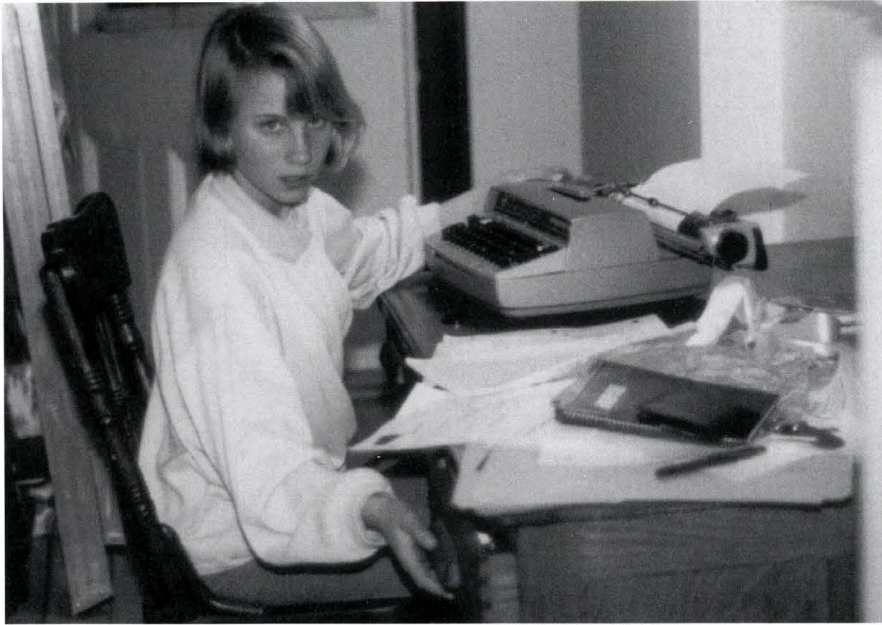
Partly in response to this lack of safe play areas for children, Ann started a summer activity program, which eventually became the neighbourhood's first community centre. "One of the main things my mother taught me was always question authority," Pohl-Weary says. "Never just accept what somebody says just because they're older than you or more socially powerful."

Part of Pohl-Weary's confidence and knowledge today comes from growing up with writers in the family. "It helps to dispel the myth that you can't do it," she says. "You see that they're just normal people. You also see the respect that they get, and the fact that you can actually make a living off it. A lot of it is simply having enough confidence to take the risk of not having the security that a full-time job gives you. And I think sometimes that's harder for women, because I think we're taught to value security even more than men—the importance of a nice home and being safe."

Pohl-Weary gave more than four years of her life back to the family that encouraged and inspired her by completing her grandmother's unfinished autobiography following her death, in 1997. *Better to Have Loved: The Life of Judith Merrill* won the 2003 Hugo Award—the sci-fi community's biggest prize—for best non-fiction book. Pohl-Weary helped Merrill with the book for several years before she died, visiting with her on a weekly basis and recording their conversations for about an hour at a time. After her grandmother's death, Pohl-Weary was left with tapes of their interviews, three completed chapters, and a list of memories and events Merrill wanted included in the book. "At the time, we were so close. She was reading my zines, and we were talking," Pohl-Weary says. "Part of the process of mourning, or I guess getting over the fact that I'd lost one of my best friends, was to go back and listen to those tapes and transcribe them."

With money Merrill left her in her will to finish the book, Pohl-Weary spent the next four years piecing together her grandmother's life story. "Through that process, I learned a lot more about myself and my mother and my family, and, I guess, a lot of the reasons why I am the way I am," she says. *Better to Have Loved* delves into life in the science-fiction ghetto of nineteen-

JUAN MIRANDA



Pohl-Weary, aged twelve, gets an early start on her writing career.

forties and fifties New York, but also explores Pohl-Weary's family history, and examines the many different sides of her grandmother's life. "What I wanted to do was show Judy, warts and all," Pohl-Weary says. "I wanted to show what it was like to be a woman, to be a

mother, to be divorced in the fifties, to be a single mom, to be a Jew in a small Catholic town. I wanted to show all of that and what repercussions it had for her personally."

Beyond her personal interest in the subject matter, Pohl-Weary also had a

larger goal in mind: "I think young people often forget that old people can be just as interesting. And that was also why I sunk four years of my life into creating this book, because I think, not only is this the way we make history, but it's the way we tell the world that not only youth are exciting." As an example, Pohl-Weary included images of her grandmother's zine work from the late nineteen-forties. "I wanted to make a point through the book that we're simply reinventing something, it's not a unique cultural product," she says. "People have been producing their own manifestos and writing about things that are personally important to them forever."

Pohl-Weary's interest in social commentary, particularly feminism, is reflective of both Merrill's and her immediate family's influence. Strong female role models gave her a heightened political consciousness from an early age. "I have this legacy of feminists going back three generations," she says. "[Merrill's] mother was a suffragette and ran a halfway house in the Bronx for young offenders. I couldn't have been anything but a feminist or an activist. I feel like

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A GUIDE TO LITERARY FOOTWEAR

FOR READERS WHO CAN'T ALWAYS CONJURE UP THE IMAGE WHEN THEY SEE THE WORD

<p>SOFT</p> <p>ESPADRILLE Fabric on top, rope and/or rubber below.</p>  <p>DUCK BILL Popular in the 1500s. The fur-lined slash opened & closed as the feet moved, resembling ladies' private parts.</p>  <p>The perennial MARY JANE</p> 	<p>HIGH</p> <p>PADUKA The high-water toe-knob sandal from India.</p>  <p>GETA It raised Japanese nobles above ordinary people.</p>  <p>PANTOFFLE A nicer word than MULE, of which it is a species.</p> 	<p>The WELLINGTON, Named for the Duke, who actually preferred to wear HESSIANS</p>   <p>WINKLE PICKER Contemporaneous with the onset of the Twist.</p> 	<p>POINTY</p>  <p>WIGWAM SLIPPER "For house, lawn and camping-out purposes" said one 1895 catalogue</p>  <p>NULLIFIER A boudoir slipper, a.k.a. Romeo (men's) and Juliet (women's)</p> 
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I've cheated in a way, because I have these feminists as my relatives. I didn't have to do any reading."

Following years of shunning corporate media and popular entertainment, Pohl-Weary's latest work trumpets her recent embrace of mainstream cultural consumption. *Girls Who Bite Back*, an anthology of comics, art, essays, and fiction compiled by Pohl-Weary, explores the theme of women as superheroes, witches, and mutants in pop culture. The book's contributors—which include Sonja Ahlers, Nalo Hopkinson, Zoe Whittall, and the honorary girl Sherwin Tjia—analyze both the good and the bad sides of these themes, and encourage readers to actively participate in the culture they consume. "As you just start accepting something without thinking about what you would change or what you would make better if you were in the position to create a magazine . . . then you become just like a fan, a non-active participant, and that's not good," Pohl-Weary says. "Fans see only one thing. They see this idol, and that's, I think, a

lot of what's wrong with the cultural industry, the mass-market industry."

Pohl-Weary credits her younger sister, Julia, as the reason she can once again watch television without cringing. "She brings this whole new world to me. As she gets older, she gets interested in things that are really cool, but that I wouldn't have ever known about because I'm thirty." Despite being told as a child that pop culture was not an altogether good thing, Pohl-Weary admits she has grown into an acceptance of pop culture. "My parents wanted me to read educational things or watch TV with no kind of product placement or action figures that you could go buy," she says. "I guess [it's] just me becoming more comfortable with myself, and feeling like it's O.K. to revel in pop culture a little bit."

In *Girls Who Bite Back*, Pohl-Weary attempts to share with readers the tools to look at pop culture critically—a theme she is considering exploring further in another book on creating art in a consumer culture. "I come at it from the perspective of seeing this in myself—devouring books or comics, or whatever, watching TV—and some-

times I'll sit down to watch one show that is actually good, and end up sitting there for four hours watching shit," she says. "And with books: How many books are in Chapters? Millions. How many get thrown out in the distribution process? Is creating a book simply adding to landfill, or is there greater meaning to it in this age of fast food?"

Along with her *Kiss Machine* duties, Pohl-Weary has two novels on the go. The tentatively titled *Sugar in the Ghost*, the story of a slacker whose boyfriend commits suicide, is expected to be published this fall by McGilligan. The second, a mystery novel—a genre Pohl-Weary loves—is based on an outline created by Edward Stratemeyer for the Nancy Drew series, launched in 1930, which Pohl-Weary was addicted to as a child. "It's such a pulp thing, mystery novels," she says. "There's no pressure to be literary, so when you do, it's almost like an accident. You can make your character do the most ridiculous thing at any one moment."

Writing isn't Pohl-Weary's only outlet for her cultural-consumption ten-

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Barroom discussions live on-line at Bookninja.

dencies. Since 2001, she and Poletto have curated the Inflatable Museum, an on-line gallery of blow-up toys, paintings, and performance items. "The whole paradox of the Inflatable Museum is that it's in cyberspace and it's actually two-dimensional, whereas inflatable art is inherently not," Pohl-Weary says. "So, we thought it would be funny to celebrate our inflatable culture and how anything can be inflated." Pohl-Weary is also creating a choose-your-own-adventure-style video game, titled Paula's Mystery Adventure, with Sally McKay, the co-founding editor of the now-defunct art magazine *Lola*.

It's easy to call Pohl-Weary a critical cheerleader. On one hand, she shows a great enthusiasm for the work of her friends: she describes the most recent book by the author Tamara Faith Berger—a modern retelling of the story of Mary of Egypt—which Pohl-Weary edited, as "incredible"; Poletto's artwork, she says with admiration, is "sensual and textual." This enthusiasm fuels Pohl-Weary's own projects, but it's not enthusiasm alone that makes them work, says Niedzviecki. "I think she's definitely someone who gets excited about things and does them, which is great," he says. "At the same time, you can't just get excited about everything and just do it. You have to have some reservation, some skepticism, and a critical eye. To have people out there that have both, I think, is a great example for younger, up-and-coming creators."

As *Kiss Machine's* popularity continues to grow—along with its production values—Pohl-Weary says she has no desire to see it become a soulless industry. "*Kiss Machine* can only be about enjoyment for me, or I won't want to keep doing it. When it starts to be an obligation, I'll have to stop," she says. "I keep coming up with ideas for things. They're all time-intensive, so hopefully I can earn enough money so I don't have to worry about not being able to do them." As long as she keeps coming up with ideas, thinking, "I have to do this," there is little reason to think she won't. ♪

Girls Who Bite Back is now available from Sumach. Alex Mlynek lives in Sussex-Ulster. She is a writer and a researcher, and the co-host of the radio show 123! on KKLN. Her work has appeared in such publications as *Azure*, *Wavelength*, and *Broken Pencil*.

Once a work of art is made available to the public, the artist's original intent is fair game for others to interpret: people read meaning into poems, see their own lives in novels, or find patterns in paintings that weren't consciously put there. In essence, they make the work their own. This type of reinterpretation happened to the literary web site Bookninja, where an audience, hungry for a new forum, helped reshape the format, content, and mission of the site, well beyond what its creators originally had in mind.

Live since August, 2003, the site's overseers, the authors George Murray and Peter Darbyshire, originally meant for Bookninja to be little more than a listserv, where a handful of like-minded folk could discuss experimental fiction and poetry. Having struck up a friendship several years ago while living in Toronto, Murray and Darbyshire often found themselves discussing art and literature with their friends for hours over coffee or beer. When both ended up leaving town (Murray to Guelph, Ontario, via New York, Darbyshire to Ottawa, then Vancouver), they found themselves isolated from their literary community. Gone were the discussions, the arguments, the camaraderie. And so, Bookninja was born.

The site's present incarnation (found at www.bookninja.com) contains several elements. The Hearsay section is a collection of links to interesting pieces of daily news, and includes an option for readers to discuss each piece. Another element is the regular cartoon strip *Litterati*, drawn by Murray, to which readers are sometimes invited to create their own caption. There is also an essay section and an area of miscellany.

The most considered content, however, is the "inverse omnibus review," in which two or three writers share a back-and-forth discussion of a book. Tired of the mainstream-media book-review format, Darbyshire and Murray try to struc-

ture the discussions so the results capture the feeling of sitting around in a bar. Their only mandate, Darbyshire says, is "to pick books we really care about, not those that are necessarily new."

These reviews are great fun: passionate, good-natured, sassy, educated, and, a rarity these days, long (a review of the recent reissue of Peter Van Toorn's *Mountain Tea* clocks in at more than twenty-two hundred words). For people unused to following on-line discussion

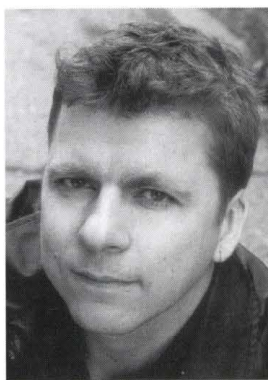
threads, these reviews are a good place to start dipping in. While they meander, they do so with a solid sense of direction, much like a really satisfying conversation. By contrast, the multi-contributor discussion threads are undirected, open to anyone who wants to jump in—that is, an editor isn't facilitating the discussion. This lack of a facilitator has evolved into the

site's most-loved quality.

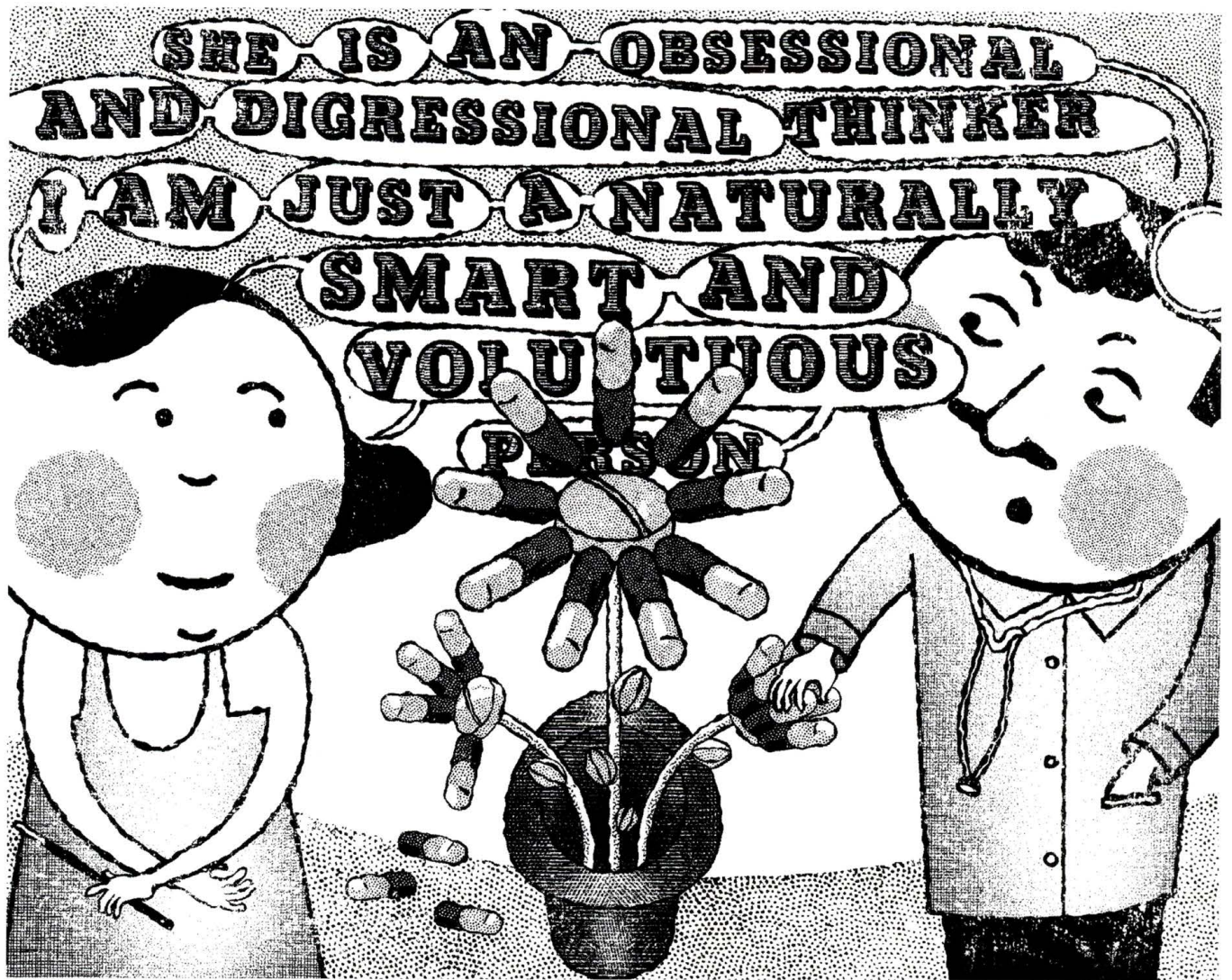
Darbyshire says the original plan was to keep an aesthetic, rather than national, approach to the site, and to include the option of discussions to supplement the main content. However, readers and contributors quickly made different use of the discussions. Says Murray: "I'm amazed at the number of people who visit the site—hundreds per day." These people developed a distinctly Canadian voice to the site. While Bookninja is still not a CanLit site, the discussion threads "made us think more about the Canadian scene," Darbyshire says. "Now we're being sort of conscientious that we're filling a need that wasn't being filled. It was a surprise—I hadn't realized there was a lack."

So far, Darbyshire and Murray have covered all the costs associated with the site, though they may look at some funding options eventually. Which is not to say their labours are without reward. As Murray notes: "I enjoy going to a party and hearing people I don't know talking about it, saying they read it every day."

—SUE MCCLUSKEY



Peter Darbyshire.



THE STRANGER ELIJAH

FICTION BY TAMARA FAITH BERGER

"Ill people may act not unlike a magician," the doctor said. He wasn't talking to me. "Their symptoms quickly evolve from the concrete to the mysterious."

We sat inside that gleaming hole, how only four asses can sit and not rise. "Quickly evolve" could mean one second, or "quickly evolve" could mean twenty years. In magic, the eye is ahead of the body.

Dr. M. pulled on his thin little ponytail that curled around his neck and perched on his shoulder. He had a tight, white mouth that was made all for me. So why'd he speak to my father, not me? My mother, not me? The lady

doctor, not me?

That lady, I felt her gaping at my face. Fuck it, she probably loved my pink craters—big bear and little bear over my brow. She didn't smile; O.K., but she didn't back down either. Whatever. I felt too funny to sit.

"Tara, sit down!" my father yelled.

God, I have a pain in the ass.

The actions of ill people—Dr. M. meant mentalized people—are like those of a magician's. My face acts like the mask of my twin, and we both have the same blotch of crap in our eyes. See, what the doctor doesn't know is that magic falls on the magician. Magic, it's true,

can just fall down one day. And magical vision is cultivated to precision in the exact time it takes to become an adept.

"Your big udders are what I got first," Elijah said after he met me.

"She is an obsessional and digressional thinker," Dr. M. said.

"I am just a naturally smart and voluptuous person," I said.

I listen to the one who makes the most sense. Elijah told me: "You are a cave." Then he entered the cave. Elijah's the one who recorded me moaning. He offered me water, and wrote down my deeds.

The lady doctor and my mum gave

each other some kind of eye.

"Tara is keeping something too strong inside her," the lady doctor said. "You see those angry marks on her face. We have to cool the fire and dry the damp. We will accomplish this with herbs and energetic techniques."

I groaned. Oh, God. Another fudge-healer. I bet she couldn't touch open sores. I bet she was pregnant and thought I'd shrivel up her fetus. Or maybe she always had that soft, fatty gut.

Can a lady doctor understand that there's only one way to get an egg from a chicken?

Hey, lady, it's not through fucking that a chick takes in sperm!

It's from thinking that sperm sites are inside of chickens!

"I wouldn't be shy recommending Celexa for her," Dr. M. said to my parents. "Our other, more conservative, option, of course, is Paxil."

"Her liver meridian is blocked, and Paxil will tax the liver."

Oh yeah, this lady doctor was a bit of a bitch. But probably she knew the secrets of Paxil. Its absolute spurts that take throat and cunt first. Paxil numbs membranes to stop new formations.

"I think we should try again, Tar," my mother whispered.

The lady doctor swallows flax seed oil, and Dr. M. eats a lot of eggs. I bet Dr. M. drives a really fast car. There's a fetus inside every egg, you know, Doctor, one that has to be born, even a clot. If you don't like abortions, you shouldn't eat eggs.

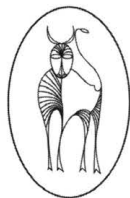
"O.K., folks, questions?" Dr. M. asked the room.

"O.K., fucks, suggestions?" I mimicked his shit.

My mother didn't look at me. She hunched her shoulders. My father glanced over, then coughed messily. The lady doctor said (and she sounded kind of mad): "We need to talk about the liver from a T.C.M. perspective."

I laughed out loud. Everything is loud. My inner ears have been centrifugally cleaned. Whatever they all say or don't say, it doesn't really matter now. Because even though I'll be better soon, Elijah will still hear me think. ☪

Tamara Faith Berger lives in the Grange Park area. Her second novel, The Way of the Whore, was recently published by Gutter. She is currently working on another book.



GUERNICA



Berlin-born artist Charlotte Salomon died young. The year before her murder, she completed a unique fictionalized autobiography-in-paint that she described as her means of conquering death. Charlotte perished at Auschwitz at the age of twenty-six, but her opus, evocatively titled *Life? or Theatre?*, survives. The sixty poems in *Mask*, centred on Charlotte Salomon's life and work, weave homage and history, invention and declaration, discovery and resolution.

Mask is Elana Wolff's second book of poetry. Her first collection, *Birdheart*, was published by Guernica Editions in 2001.

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THE MERMAID SINGS

FICTION BY MARGUERITE PIGEON

The night of my sister's wedding, I burn my bridesmaid dress in the scrubby alley beside my apartment building. The seafoam-coloured silk melts slowly, and gives off a smell like burned hair. In its thin glow, I make a decision: I will buy a wig and become a Joni Mitchell impersonator.

I quit my telemarketing job and withdraw my savings. I ask a friend to move into my apartment for a while, and he accepts. Having never really been anywhere, I walk to a public library and use an atlas and the internet to draw up a list of towns I think will be small enough to book an act like mine, then add the numbers for local hotels and bars. I make a series of calls. Using my trained telephone manner, I have no trouble setting up a string of gigs.

I take the subway downtown and find the wig I need at a shop that also sells beaded curtains, bongos, and old issues of *Heavy Metal*. At home, I bend over, pull on the wig, and stand up quickly, throwing the new hair back over my shoulders. It is long and blond. I look at myself in my small, medicine-cabinet mirror, the short tube of light buzzing above me. It makes the wig almost white at the crown, and my skin and eyes nearly grey. I don't stand there long.

I buy sheet music for all the Joni Mitchell songs I can find, and spend a long time neatly writing out the lyrics. My phone rings often but I ignore it. I write a note for my friend. He can relay the news to my family. I stuff my backpack with jeans and loose shirts, snap my guitar case shut, take a cab to the Greyhound station, and buy a bottle of water, a cling-wrapped egg-salad sandwich, and an open-ended cross-country ticket headed west.

On the bus, I claim a window seat. The sight of the disappearing city is dreary in the late-fall grey, but it isn't long before deep, gold-brown farmers' fields, then rusty rock cuts and pine trees, take its place along the highway. The bus stops often to drop off packages and give the smokers a chance to rush

down the metal steps and get some air. The person beside me keeps changing: an older Native woman who knits and nods, a university student wearing ear-phones who stares at my wig and also at my boobs, then a mother who ignores her five-year-old as he runs up and down the aisle.

"I'm a musician," I tell each of them. (The student has to pull out an ear-phone to hear me.)

"What kind of music?"

"Folk."

"Ah."

The Star Motel, in Gravenhurst, is my first venue. I've been offered free dinner and a room for the weekend, but no pay. I meet the manager at six. In person, I am less confident than over the phone, and he eyes me over his bifocals with open disappointment—probably thinking I am too short and too dumpy to be Joni—says I'm lucky a new-country trio bailed on him, but I can tell by looking around the low-ceilinged bar that, one way or the other, the place's reputation is probably sealed. We go over the set-up and he recedes into a dim backroom. I order chicken fingers and fries, finish my plate, then walk across the cigarette-burned carpet leading to my room. There, I make a single call and get the answering machine. "Hi, Mom. It's me. I'm sorry I missed the present-opening . . . and the goodbye dinner . . . and all the rest of it, but I had to get going. Don't worry. I've finally got something worked out for myself."

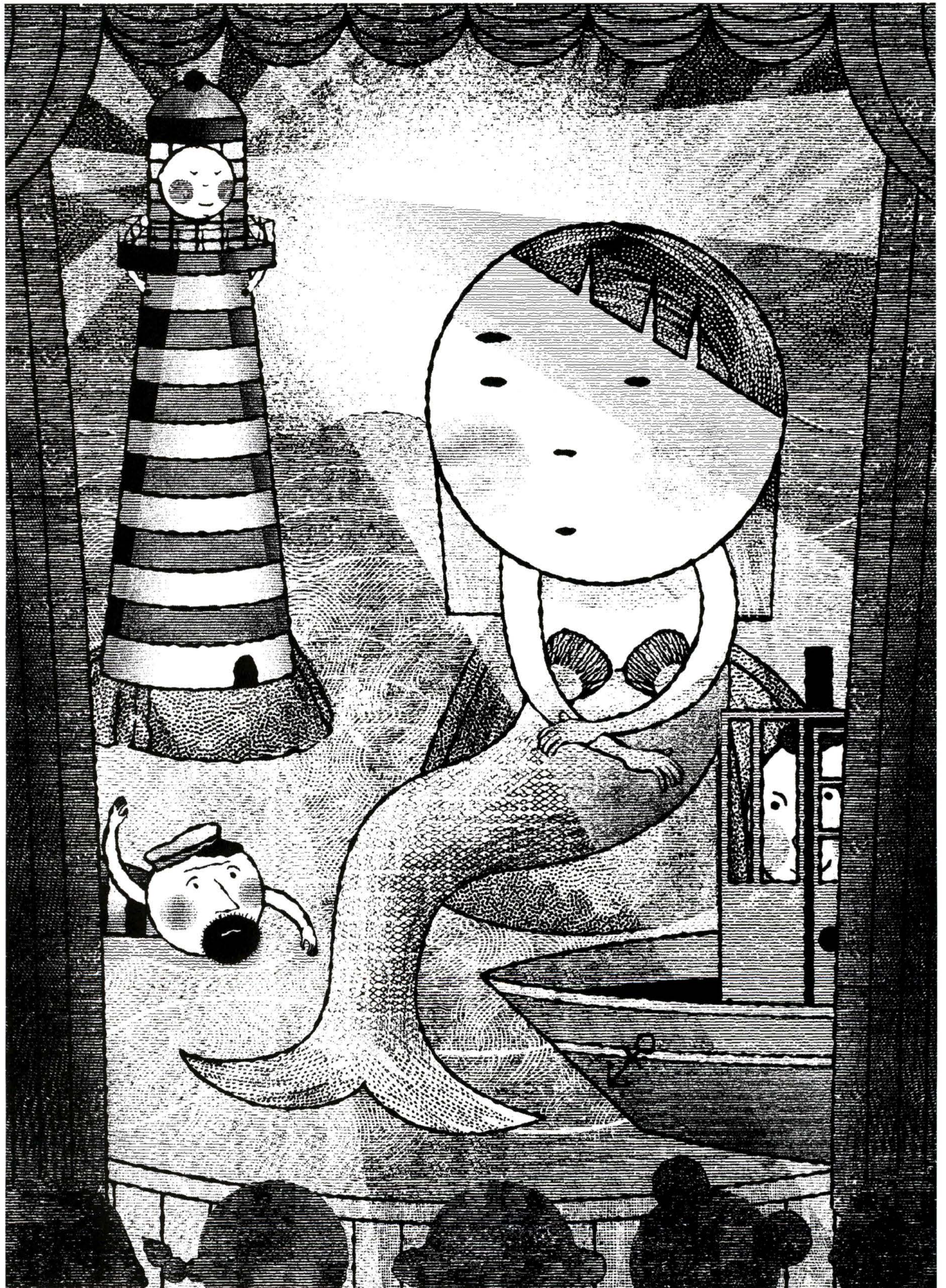
I am relieved to find there are only six people in the audience when I step up onto the plywood stage to begin my set. Two of them are older men, who sit across from each other and ignore me. They lean together, laugh in phlegmy spurts, and slap one another on the shoulder over their pitcher. One woman sits alone, cigarette smoke winding up from the ashtray near her elbow. The others look like summer students who've been drinking since noon. The bartender paces in the long space be-

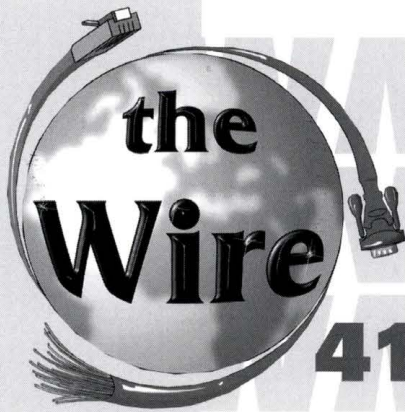
hind the bar with a dish towel over one shoulder, clinking glasses as she goes. I stand a moment, waiting for my courage. It arrives with the manager, who reappears from the backroom to lean on the bar, looking a little like a mobster.

The first song I play as Joni is "Blue." Then "Case of You." Then the song I sang for my sister at her wedding. I recognize that they had a point back then: my voice is wrong for Joni Mitchell covers. But the wig is right, and so are my jeans and loose cotton top. I smile as a few more people trickle in, and nearly all of them clap quietly as I finish my first set. I hadn't expected anything more—and probably a lot less.

I have a better show in Sudbury, and am paid for it. At the Canadian, in Sault Ste. Marie, I get too drunk on free draught and screw up the words to "Little Green." I apologize into the silver ball of the mic and the sparse audience gives me a staggered consolation clap before returning to their Wednesday night drinks. At the Whalen, in Thunder Bay, a drunk man shouts out, "Show us your tits!" but I don't. In Steinbach, Manitoba, the tiny Green Tree Café is full to capacity with people I later realize are Mennonites. They are my first sober crowd, and stand and clap as I finish, even though I'm sure I have been off-key. A short woman in a long skirt approaches the corner that's been cleared for my footstool and mic to tell me I am beautiful. Mennonites really are generous—no one has ever told me that before.

That night, in my motel room, I dream of a wedding. It is a lot like my sister's wedding, but there are important differences. My sister, when she lifts her veil, is bald. Everyone is horrified. They turn together to find me, the maid of honour, wearing a flaming seafoam silk dress and a blond wig. I run, and the entire wedding party chases. I stumble and fall. I look up from the ground, and find I have fallen at the feet of Joni Mitchell. Joni's eyes





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LIAR

From a work-in-progress.

This Christmas, I leashed Frank and fled my parents' house in Pointe-Claire, walked him by the United Church crèche: four plywood pieties painted by Harriet Henry, in 1959.

Two wise men, a bashful Mary, and Jesus, unperturbed at their feet.

We walked past Marina Crescent, where two snowmen stood, one fallen, one tilting; the elementary school, its windows a tablature of the idea of snow

and snowflakes, blind with battered paper.

I tasted white glue, the tang of dull, industrious blades. Saw a father teaching his children to ski, as Frank ploughed through the drifts, he called out,

"Raise your poles and keep your feet pointed."

The walls were lashed with ivy and puckered orange leaves; the fire hydrants lining the curb were a livid, paintbox red.

The father sailed through the snow as his children stepped like frogs, and I remembered

visiting my parents' friends, who had a daughter my age—five or so.

Her parents trundled us into the car one morning and took us to a sports store where they carefully chose and bought gear,

and I assumed I would be outfitted too, but I was not.

We drove to a clearing, and everyone stepped out and started to ski, making slight, determined tracks,

and I sat in the back seat as the mother chain-smoked and stared into the distance. She and I sat there for hours,

both of us resigned, still as pieces of paper, a field of new snow; as they cut past and through us,

as we exhaled,

our breath slipping through the cracked windows like a rattle, wedging in the hard, anchored slats.

—LYNN CROSBIE

shine like emeralds. With the power of her mind, Joni lifts me up. Then we are flying together over rolling hills made entirely of sheet music, passing a group of waving Mennonites. The dream wakes me. I am bathed in sweat. I take an extra-long shower, and give my wig a thorough wash and blow-dry

before checking out to reboard the Greyhound.

I sing in Carman. I sing in Brandon. And I sing in Moosomin. Between these gigs, and the free chicken fingers, I save enough money to afford a day off. I book myself into a bed and breakfast in Wolseley, Saskatchewan. The bus drops

me off in the early evening. The sun is already down. I follow directions and walk along a dark road, then over the railroad until I find it—a converted brick farmhouse with little white lights in the bushes outside. Classy. The girl at the desk asks about my guitar. I tell her I'm a musician, and she smiles as though this explains a lot.

In my room, I am disappointed to find there is no TV. I walk down to the tiny basement pub. As I enter, everyone turns to stare, give me cool smiles, then go back to talking and watching *Robot Wars* on an overhead TV. The girl from the desk comes downstairs and takes my order. I drink a Molson Ex and watch the robots. I order another, then another. I try to piece together a kind of mental scrapbook of my performances to date.

A young farmer comes in and sits alone with a beer. He looks over at me several times.

"I'm a musician," I say, not knowing how else to acknowledge his attention.

"Really." He says nothing more, but looks satisfied.

The local news comes on. During a report about a recent drop in wheat prices, the farmer turns in his chair and says, "I play synthesizer. Got the whole thing set up with the computer now. I can just make all this music. Great way to waste time. Specially now, after harvest."

"Yeah," I say.

"Is that a wig?" he asks, tentatively, then glances over at the other people in the bar, who are staring at us.

"No," I lie, and immediately regret it. "Yes."

"O.K."

"It's new."

"No problem."

We are silent for a moment.

"Ever recorded?" he asks.

"No, no. I just do covers. Gigs."

"You here long?"

"No, just taking tomorrow off, then I gotta get to the Alberta border."

"Well, you can come and see my set-up if you want. Farm's just up past the graveyard." He gets up from his table and stands over me. He makes me a map on the thin damp coaster that the waitress placed under my beer glass.

"Thanks," I say.

"Come out," he says, and walks to the bar to pay. The regulars are looking at him, then at me, and I wonder what

they make of it. I don't wonder long. I get up a few minutes after he leaves and go outside with my map. I want to walk and think.

I follow the directions, but get confused. Fifteen minutes later, I am still on the residential streets of the town, and not anywhere close to a graveyard. I double back and realize I have to use the bathroom quite badly. It's the beer. I notice lights on, and lots of cars parked around a grade school. I try the side door and find it's open. I walk down the green hall, lined with low coat racks and classroom doors, looking for a bathroom.

Behind me, someone pops a head out from a door. "Hey! Janet! Hey!"

I turn and see a woman in heavy makeup, waving. "Come on. You're late. It's almost time."

"What?" I yell back.

Another woman comes out from the door dressed as a fisherman with a fake moustache, suspenders, and wading boots. The two are gesturing for me to come over. I really need to go to the bathroom, but I turn and walk toward them.

"Who are *you*?" says the first woman, her forehead scrunched in annoyance, as I approach the door.

"I'm just here for the bathroom."

"Where's Janet?" says the fisherman.

"I don't know who that is," I say.

"Why do you have her wig then?" they say, pretty much at the same time.

I hesitate. I am not sure why I have Janet's wig. I put a hand up to touch the top of my head, a bit protectively.

The first one looks upset. "Look, Janet's really late. You're not from town, obviously, but if you know the part, then all she had to do was call and tell us she was sending you. I mean, the mermaid scene is coming and the whole group's getting nervous. We've been calling her number for a half-hour. Jesus."

"O.K.," says the fisherman. "Let's calm down here. Do you know your part?"

"Yes," I say, not sure how else to answer. I *do* know my part.

"Good. Let's get a tail on you then."

They rush me in through the door, which opens onto a corridor. I hear singing, then a burst of applause, and realize we are backstage. I am not sure what to do, but I can't turn back. I really can't. We get to an area where other

GETTING STARTED

Equal parts driven by ambition
and piledriven by alcohol,
the Drunken Cyclist
performs all his stunts—
from oblique to bleak—
smoking cigarettes.

"It'll be O.K.,"
goes his mantra,
"if I get started."

The Drunken Cyclist
goes like this:

Ten, twenty yards.
Slams the curb.
Takes a header. Swears.
Picks himself up.
Picks hisbike up.

Off balance—plainly,
visibly; succumbing to a far
stronger foe. Managing
gravity. Not managing gravity.

Briefly (barely satisfying
the Weightlifting Judges)
holds the bike over his head
like King Kong.
Throws it down. Disgusted. Swears.

Stumbles over to the pile of rubber,
paint-chipped steel,
chain and spokes, forgiving
this heap on the sidewalk—
close to tears now—

Picks hisbike up

adults stand, dressed in costumes—
more fishermen, a whale, some sailors,
and a man dressed as a lighthouse.
Everyone turns and sees me. I see ques-
tions come into their eyes.

"No time for explanations," says the
first woman from the hall. "Get the tail.
She'll be the mermaid."

I have on the costume. My legs are
not free to move much. A large swath of
the iridescent green material swings out
to the left of my ankles into the tail. On
top, the costume is like a brassiere, with
big blue seashells sewn into a skin-
coloured bodysuit. Janet must be smaller

than me, because it's too tight across
the back. I stand in the wings and won-
der what I am doing. No one stands still
long enough for me to ask. I can see the
actors on stage. I can see a slice of audi-
ence through the mist of the stage
lights. I have been on stages before.

Then, it's my turn. I know because
the woman fisherman comes up and
gives me a push. I am out on stage,
walking in tiny steps over to a big fake
rock that must be meant for me.

I sit. A fisherman, this one played by
a man, stands across the stage, beside
his boat.

(tough love) . . .
Slams it onto its wheels.
Drags it master-slave-like to the curb.
Again mounts up.

Instantly
takes a flying leap worthy of
cable TV off the sidewalk
into traffic.

How many drivers
on a Saturday night
outside the Horseshoe Tavern
are behind the wheel
stone cold sober?

One every five minutes?

And yet they manage to swerve around him,
to not run over the mess—
the Drunken Cyclist plus bike,
splayed, smoking & cussing in the road.

Glorious city!

Picks hisbike up. Returns to safety,
the sidewalk—pickle-strewn
from the hot dog vendor
who sells refreshments
at shows like these on this corner.

The Drunken Cyclist rests.
Lights a cigarette. Sighs.
Unbeaten. Crumples into his bike.
The Drunken Cyclist pauses.
The Drunken Cyclist naps.

Good night, Drunken Cyclist.

—CHRIS CHAMBERS

“The gods are toying with me!” he says excitedly, swinging an arm with dramatic flair up and in my general direction. “How else to explain that my eyes, *my hungering dry eyes*, this moment behold the greatest beauty there is?”

“Don’t be fooled,” says the boat, who is really a man in a brown triangle of boat-shaped foam and tights. “She is but a mirage! You have been looking so long, you couldn’t tell a mermaid from a Minotaur—anything real from the products of your starved stomach and insolent whim.”

Some people in the audience chuckle. “No!” says the fisherman, walking to-

ward me in slow steps. The boat keeps pace with him. “You’re wrong. And why am I talking to a boat anyway?” More chuckles.

“It is true, I am lonely. I have been at sea for such a long time that my eyes could play fools to any whim, but they do not do so now. Oh no! *This . . .* this vision before me is real. Real as my heart, anyway. Real as the love that grows in me like the storm that swept me to this terrible place so many moons ago. How could such beauty fool? Why, just listen! *Listen* to her sing!”

The actor pretends to leap from the boat.

“Dooooon’t!” cries the boat, his mouth, which is nearly lost in the brown face makeup, stretching into a wide “o.”

The fisherman pretends to swim over to the rock where I am sitting. He is looking at me hard, as though it is my turn.

“I say—just listen to her sing!” he says again, and everyone is silent.

Someone in the back of the gym coughs. Offstage, the woman from the hall gestures to me wildly. “Sing!” she mouths.

And so I do. I sing the song I know best, the song I sang at my sister’s wedding. I try to imagine that I am the mermaid. That I am Joni. That I am exactly as I’ve always wanted to be: far away, and very close and happy. That I am beautiful and free, and most of all, real.

“I’ve looked at life from both sides now / From up and down, and still somehow / It’s life’s illusions I recall / I really don’t know life at all.”

When I am finished, the actors are silent. The fisherman is still on the ground, staring up at me, confused. The fisherman played by a woman, offstage, looks angry. A woman in a blond wig identical to mine stands beside her with wide eyes—Janet.

But the audience, the audience is clapping. They are up on their feet, and they clap for me. I stand, careful not to fall over my tail. I don’t yet think of my wig and how silly it is. I don’t think of the tightness of my costume, or the way I am bulging in the middle of it and around the top, or my sister, or my mother’s answering machine, or my next gig, or how I will cancel it. I think of the warm lights that line the stage, and of the farmer and the map that’s in my jeans, and how it will be easier to find him in the morning.

I take a long, low bow and exit, stage left. ▽

Marguerite Pigeon lives in Vancouver, where she recently finished her master of fine arts in creative writing at the University of British Columbia. She is also the fiction editor of Prism International. One of her stories recently won subTerrain magazine’s annual literary competition. This summer, she will fulfill her dream of going home to northern Ontario.

SUNSET ECKLER

THERE I AM, **HOTSHOT REPORTER** TAKING ON WATER THROUGH THE BULLET HOLES IN MY BACK.



IT SEEMED LIKE MY **BIG BREAK** WHEN THE BOSS CALLED ME INTO HIS OFFICE.

GET IN HERE!



LORD CONRAD, THE FORMER NEWSPAPER BARON, HAS PASSED AWAY! GO TALK TO ONE OF HIS FORMER **SEXY, YOUNG NEWSPAPER COLUMNISTS.**



I FOUND MYSELF STANDING IN FRONT OF ONE OF THOSE **OLD MANSIONS** IN CALGARY, THE KIND THEY USED TO BUILD BEFORE THE **OIL DRIED UP.**



HI, I'M HERE FROM THE DAILY ...

WE'VE BEEN **EXPECTING** YOU.



CREEPY.

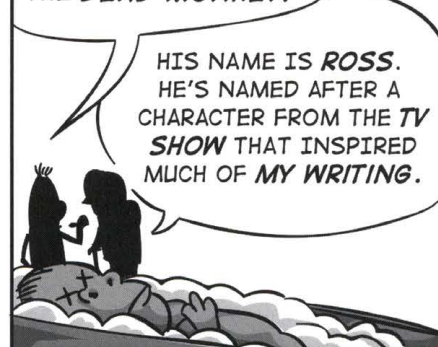
I CAN'T **BELIEVE** I'M MEETING YOU **IN PERSON!** I CAN'T BELIEVE I'M MEETING **RACHEL MARSDEN!**



MY NAME IS **REBECCA**, YOU IDIOT.

WHAT'S WITH THE **DEAD MONKEY?**

HIS NAME IS **ROSS**. HE'S NAMED AFTER A CHARACTER FROM THE **TV SHOW** THAT INSPIRED MUCH OF MY **WRITING.**



SO, YOU'RE A **WRITER?** I'LL MAKE YOU A **DEAL.** HELP ME WITH MY **AUTOBIOGRAPHY** AND I'LL TELL YOU **EVERYTHING** I KNOW ABOUT **LORD CONRAD.**



SHE WAS A **COLUMNIST**, WHY CAN'T SHE WRITE IT **HERSELF?**



SHE WANTS IT TO **MAKE SENSE.**

AS PART OF **OUR DEAL**, I MOVED INTO THE **MANSION.**



MORE FAN MAIL!

FAN MAIL?

"LORD CONRAD HAD A *VISION*..."

WE NEED TO *STIR UP* THE *NATIONAL DEBATE!* THEREFORE, I AM CREATING A NEWSPAPER FOR *ELDERLY, WHITE, MALE READERS!*

"I WAS PART OF THAT *VISION*. I WAS A *FOOT SOLDIER* IN THE *GREAT NEWSPAPER WAR*. I WAS A *STAR. A STAR!*"

"BUT ALL *GOOD THINGS* END..."

LORD CONRAD! YOU USED TO BE *BIG!*

I AM *STILL BIG*. IT'S THE *SHAREHOLDERS* WHO GOT *SMALLER*.

SOMETIMES, OTHER FORMER *SEXY, YOUNG COLUMNISTS* WOULD COME OVER AND *PLAY POKER*.

HEY SON, *EIGHTY* IS THE *NEW FORTY!* RIGHT, LEAH?

OH RUSSELL!

AXIS OF *EVIL KНИЕVEL* ...
 AXIS OF *WEEVILS* ...
 AXIS OF *MEASLES* ...

DAVID HAD *ONE MOMENT OF GLORY* AND SPENT THE REST OF HIS LIFE TRYING TO *RECAPTURE IT*.

MY *EVERY NEED* WAS MET.

LET'S SEE HOW THE *SUIT* LOOKS.

I ALSO *BOUGHT YOU* A WATCH.

BUT I FELT *SMOTHERED* ...

WHERE WERE YOU *LAST NIGHT?* OUT WITH *WOMEN?* I *DEMAND* TO KNOW!

... THEN I DISCOVERED THE *TRUTH*.

YOU WRITE THE *FAN LETTERS?*

I *ALWAYS* HAVE.

YOU'RE *KEN WHYTE!*

"WHEN WE LAUNCHED OUR NATIONAL PAPER, *WE DIDN'T HAVE ANY READERS*, SO I WROTE THE *FAN MAIL*. I'VE BEEN DOING IT EVER SINCE. THE *TRUTH* WOULD *BREAK HER HEART*."

I HAD TO *RECLAIM* MY *DIGNITY*.

FROM NOW ON, I'M *LIVING LIFE ON MY TERMS!* WHICH ARE THE ONLY TERMS ANY MAN *EVER REALLY KNOWS!*

NOOOOO!

**BLAM!
 BLAM!
 BLAM!**

SPLASH!

IT WAS ALL OVER, EXCEPT FOR ...

BLAMB 2004

MR. *WHYTE*, I'M READY FOR MY *BYLINE!*

BUNKIE

FICTION BY JULIE WILSON

Dad always said when you cross the path of an animal in the backwoods, best thing to do is stay put, and under no circumstances pose a threat. But if you were in a car it was a different story. If something got in his way—*fuck* it.

I was lying in the back seat, and Mom was watching the treetops speed by. Wham played on the radio, and Dad mumbled something about art fags and the death of rock 'n' roll. He peered through the windshield and perked up.

"Would you look at this? Brats are practically on the road, for Chrissake."

He looked for me in the rear-view mirror and said, "Hey, kiddo. Isn't this your girlfriend up ahead?" and hit the gas. Mom grabbed the dashboard.

"Don't you . . ."

My head smacked the roof and I rolled onto the floor, legs up over my head. Mom was grabbing at the air behind her, struggling to right me. Dad fought to bring the wheel around and we fishtailed to a stop.

"Stupid, fucking girls!"

It wasn't the usual ping of a chipmunk bouncing off the tire wells. Whatever we'd hit, it'd gone under *both* wheels. Mom cupped her mouth, to keep from puking or crying, I couldn't be sure.

I scrambled up onto the seat and counted three of the Chambers girls—five, seven, and nine—huddled against the rocks. The fourth was missing. I stumbled out of the car and motioned to the youngest, a deaf girl who wore a box around her neck you had to yell into.

"Elsa, where's your sister?"

She shook her head. I grabbed her shoulders and screamed into her chest.

"Where's Cass?!"

She came out of the brush carrying a long stick, burrs stuck to the hem of her Adidas shorts. We were in Grade 9 together; best friends forever since the summer.

"Your dad's an asshole, you know that? We were just trying to get it off the road."

"It" was a snake, massive and thrashing like a fire hose. As I got closer, it stopped and pressed its head flat against the asphalt, hissing like a leaky tire. Gregg, the kid next door, once told me about this girl from someplace foreign like Russia who'd fallen asleep in a tomato patch and when she woke up she was in the hospital choking up a garden snake. Gregg kept jabbing his tongue against the inside of his cheek, and laughed so hard he snotted himself.

Cass was trying to scoop the snake up off the road. Mom was running up the shoulder, waving me back. The snake kept rolling over, belly-side up.

"What the fuck is it doing?" Cass asked, thrusting the stick harder.

Dad spun the car in reverse, clipping Mom as he passed.

I grabbed Cass's pinkie and leaned in close to her ear.

"Playing dead."

When we got home, I waited outside, cracking twigs and watching Dad pace the front room. In the winter, he worked recovering snowmobiles from the bottom of Kawagama Lake. During the summers, he'd been managing the Tasty Creem: Home of the Foot-long Hot Dog.

One day he told us, through forkfuls of mashed potatoes, that a regular named Barb had convinced him to come work for her selling cars. He nodded happily to himself, chuckling at some far away thought.

"She says I have a killer smile, and that she'd buy just about anything from me."

He scraped his plate clean, his knife hanging useless in the other hand.

"This is really good, hun. Any more?"

Now, Mom was on the phone with Flora Robinson, the volunteer co-ordinator for portage routes. Every once in a while, Dad looked out at me, helpless, like he'd really done it this time. Mom stood nodding, pressing her thumb into the flowers in the wallpaper like she was extinguishing a bug. She snapped her fingers at Dad to get her purse, and pulled out the cheque book. Dad

stormed out of the house, up to the welcome tree, on the main road, where he pried off the family's name. I'd painted that in summer camp when I was five.

"Never fucking wanted fucking hicks to fucking find us anyway," he spat.

Dad'd killed Beloved Big Ben, a rare eastern hognose. Turns out there'd been only five sightings in the last ten years, six if you counted ours. The next weekend, Mom dug out her bug jacket from the back of Dad's shed and started the first of twenty-seven-years' volunteer trail maintenance. Not long after, Dad left to live with "civilized people" in the city, and a pregnant Barb.

I woke up one morning to find Mom standing in my room.

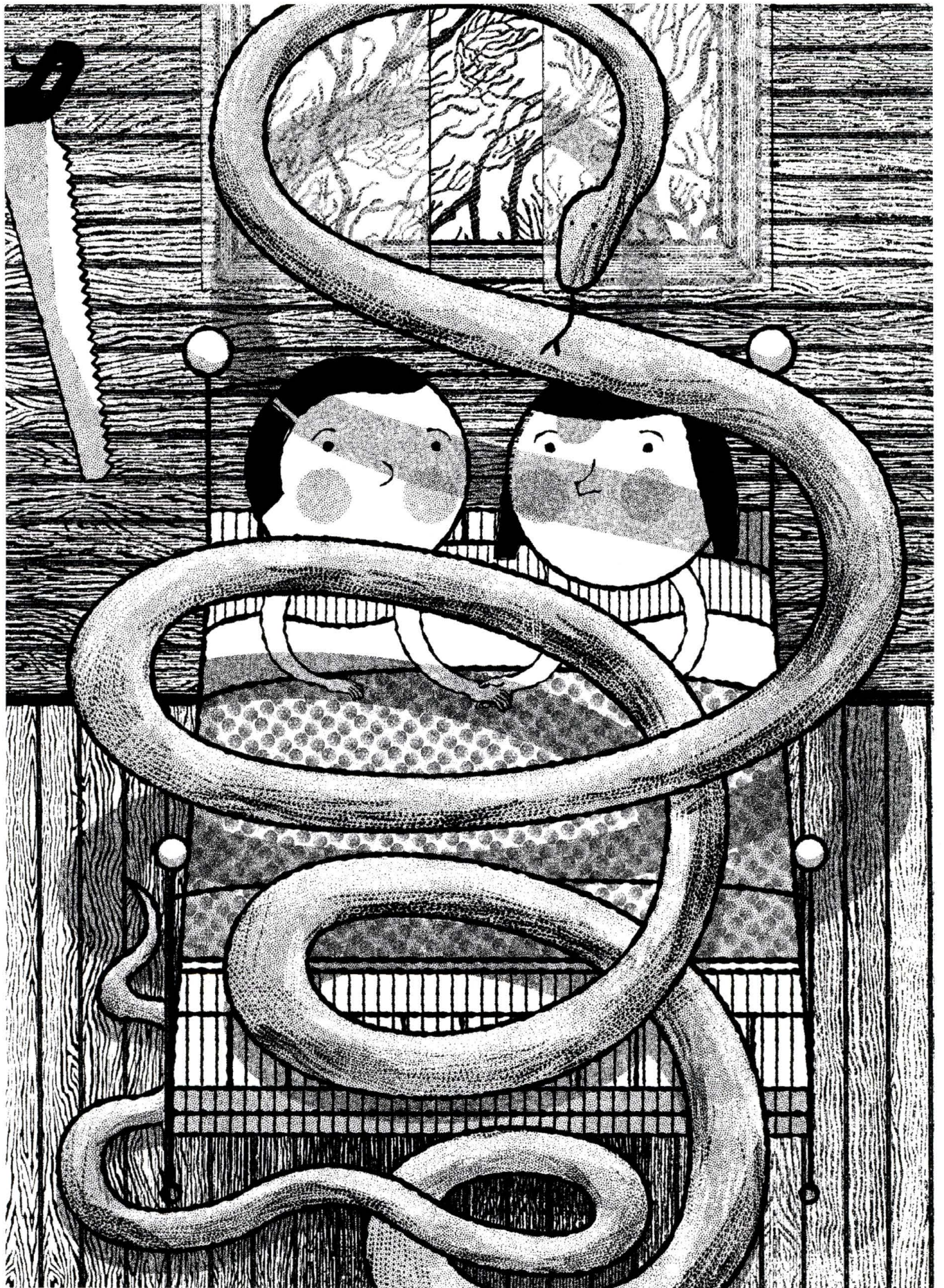
"What's say," she pondered, petting the ceramic figurines she'd used to decorate my room, "we do something special soon. Hey, baby? Just us gals?"

Just us gals. That's what we'd become. I started to spend more time at Gregg's. He was always horny, and we're pretty sure he gave me lice, but he was the only other kid on the circle; all the others were two hills away by bike. On a good day, you might make it over one, but never both. Mom got sick of wondering if I'd make it back—"Kids can have strokes, too," she'd say—so I had to settle for hanging out with Dirty Birdy Gregg.

We spent most weekends spitting, back behind his boathouse. It usually ended up dribbling out of my mouth, which sent Gregg into a fit 'cause he said it made me look like the girl from his uncle's porn mags. He showed me. Sure enough, there she was, stuck in a fishnet with a line of spit running down her chin.

During the school week, though, I barely spoke to Gregg. And all he wanted was for me to set him up with Cass Chambers. Ever since she'd pushed him up against a locker for touching her butt, he was all, "I'm gonna give it to her so bad." Like he ever had a chance.

Cass was new to town from the city. There were rumours she'd been put in a



hospital for a drug overdose, but she told me she'd just left her tampon in too long. We let people think whatever they wanted to. I didn't really want any other friends.

When Cass first moved here, I biked past her house so much her parents made her come out and invite me for a swim. I borrowed the nine-year-old's one-piece and circled the edges, churning the water into a whirlpool. Cass sunbathed on an inner tube. Her boobs were really big; I'd seen her change in gym class. She was taller than the rest of us, almost six feet, and broad. "Big-boned," they'd call her.

She squinted at me, stretching her arms out to steady herself.

"Stop it. You're making me sick."

She sank through the centre of the inner tube and disappeared under the surface.

When I was a little kid, I used to take a rubber shark into the bubble bath and scream when it bumped into me. I kept hoping I'd get used to it. When Cass brushed through my legs that day, I peed a little.

That's how it started. Every day I saved a seat for her on the bus. We crushed our legs against each other and every bump sent shivers below.

Mom was hell-bent on ridding the house of anything Dad, starting with his tool shed. I offered to clear it out, on the condition that I could use it as a bunkie and have Cass for a sleepover. My real plan was to move into it, so I'd only ever have to go inside the house to eat and use the bathroom. Little by little I was moving things in, and keeping some of what I'd found, like the dirty magazines under the floorboards.

All that week, I taunted Gregg that Cass Chambers—*Cass Chambers*—would be right next door, naked under her sporty T. Come Friday, I followed him off the bus and up his drive, yelling that he shouldn't be such an idiot just 'cause some stupid girl didn't want to go out with him. He spun around and hocked a loogie at my feet, like I was trespassing.

"Fuck off, cunt."

I waited on the deck for Cass to arrive. Mom came out and leaned a glass of wine on the railing, looked out over the bay.

"I don't know why you two would want to sleep in that hole. It's not very

BEAUTY KILLER POEM NO. 2: LA DOCTORA SURVEYS HER CLIENTELE

Shame stretches their skin,
and they come to me.
Bloated, canvas of hurt, I am
repulsed. Curl into myself
like a yard snake.

The women shuffle
and heave in my doorway,
laden in track-suit folds.
Even their dreams sweat. They flinch

at the slightest touch, all bruise
so easily. That's how
they got here.

Like American prom queens,
scheming their own
funerals. A tear in every eye.
Heavy as ripe fruit, determined
to drop. The sun, a siege
in their kitchens,

screeches morning. The dishes
march toward them
in rows. Firing-squad precision.

The poorest plead

nice for your friend."

I kept my breath.

She turned to face me, brushing my bangs hard off my face.

"Your father never liked this girl, y'know that? Said there was something about her."

I kept my head low and stayed quiet.

Eventually she went back inside to top up her glass. She got out the vacuum, running it back and forth over the shag rug, paying special attention to the stain Dad made when he dropped a platter of barbecue chicken. She yelled over the noise to no one in particular.

"I think maybe we'll tear down that shed, after all."

"Mom!"

She yanked the cord from the wall.

"Look, if you want to live with your father, go *ahead!* Call him right now. See

what he says. Maybe you'll be happier then. Get what you want . . ."

The sound of gravel signalled Cass's arrival. She got out, carting a duffle bag. Without a goodbye, her mother lurched the station wagon out into the circle, spinning a blast of dust behind her.

"The woman can't even come in to say hello? What's wrong with people?" Mom huffed.

She took what was left of the wine into the den to watch *Wheel of Fortune*. I took Cass straight to the bunkie, sick that I might have to move away to the city to live with my father and his new family.

We ate potato chips and drank grape soda and listened to music Cass had taped from the radio; groups I'd never heard of. Tones On Tail. The Cure. The Smiths. My favourite was Bronski Beat. I pictured the singer not much older

a bargain. The currency
of desperation. When husband
turns at night
to thin daughter.

For a price, I can
fix this. Though sometimes
I don't want to touch them.
This weakness, a contagion,
can jump like fleas,
from their arms to mine.
The blood we all want.

To smile and not crack
like the clay without rain.
I whisper, love will fall
from the sky.

Dishes will not break,
and husbands will sleep
in their own beds.

Today their front lawns
try to swallow them whole.
Thirsty yards buckle and lurch.
They hurtle down sidewalks,
in wobbling stiletto panic.

I offer the end of a rope.
A doorway. A promise.
That heads will turn—
and fall into their laps.

—JENNIFER LOVEGROVE

than us, like one of the lonely boys in choir. Skinny, sunken chest, tiny around the waist.

I showed Cass the porn mags. There was a picture of two women in a science lab, naked and straddling a telescope, sucking their fingernails. I don't even want to know what's under my fingernails. We decided to look at yearbooks instead, pointing to all the girls we thought were pretty. Cass ran her finger up and down the rows, past my picture, and onto the next page.

The bunkie was getting light again. We could barely keep our eyes open. Cass was pushing letters into my palm like I was Helen Keller, her head nodding toward me. Across the bay, a small waterfall rushed. Cass's breathing settled into a soft gurgle, the sound of water drowning. It ached. If I could just kiss her once.

There was a crunch and I woke with a start. It was morning. Cass had her head on my pillow and her arm around my waist, and someone was outside the bunkie tiptoeing away.

Breakfast had been laid out but Mom was nowhere to be found; only a note saying she'd be back sometime later and that Cass's mother was expecting a call the second we woke up. It was noon already.

"We'll pretend we didn't see the note," I begged.

We wasted the day biking into town for candy, ducking off the road each time a car passed. When we got back, the answering machine was full of messages, one from my father wanting to know why Mom wouldn't just sign the damn papers so they could "put this behind" them. All the other messages were from Mom, wanting to know

where I was. In the background there was banging and hissing, the zrrr-zrrr of an auto shop.

The phone rang.

In the distance, Mom was yelling, asking how much fucking longer it could take to replace a goddamned windshield. Then she was deep in my ear.

"Where have you been?"

"Mom, are you all right?"

"All right? No, I'm not all right. Fucking thing just ran right out into the road! Your father always had to do *all* the driving!"

I gripped the phone cord, winding it tight around my fingers.

"Where have you been all day? I needed you."

Cass was backing out the door. I mouthed for her to wait.

"Good God, is that her? Is she still there? I should've listened to your father. He saw it. Why do you think he left? Coward never faced a thing in his life. You must think I'm such a fool. Under my own roof!"

She was hysterical, fuming. Something had run into her car and she couldn't afford this and it was all my fault because she'd been upset and how could I do this to her and why didn't anyone ever care about *her* feelings and—"I want that fucking girl out of my house by the time I get home!"

I slammed the phone down and started to cry, throwing vegetables into the sink. Cass came from behind, crossing her arms around my chest. I shrugged her off.

"You gotta go. I have to get dinner ready."

She came again, resting her lips against my neck, simple and tender, her breath thick and crackling with Pop Rocks.

Overhead, a helicopter strained under the weight of its cargo, diapered in a sling like a child on a fair ride—the moose that had hit Mom. Drivers craned their necks to get a better look. Gregg tightened his grip, trying to concentrate, growing hard under his comforter. And two young girls opened their mouths to each other over a pile of Brussels sprouts. ☩

Julie Wilson lives in the Danforth area. She is currently at work on a book of short stories about growing up in a queer little world as a queer little girl.

HELL

FICTION BY KERRI LEIGH HUFFMAN

Carolyn cuts herself with kitchen knives. She started with one of the carving knives, thinking it was the sharpest, but was wrong. With the carving knife she had to apply a lot of pressure. After working her way through a few of the knives in the house, she settled on the bread knife—the serrated edge like little crescent moons or tiny half-smiles. When she took it to her arm, she could feel the skin break immediately, but it didn't hurt as much as the carving knife. The blood pops up like little polka dots along her skin, and Carolyn thinks it's the most beautiful colour she's ever seen.

She began by cutting the inside of her upper arms. Her T-shirts were long enough to cover the marks she carved. After awhile, she moved down her arm and found no one noticed. Besides, she could always say they were cat scratches.

"I was saying let me out of here before I was even born!" Carolyn screams. She bounces on the seat of the truck. If they go fast enough, and Carolyn isn't wearing a seatbelt, her behind hovers over the seat when they take the hills.

"It's such a gamble when you get a face." Sebastian's glance returns to the dark road in front of him. "I belong to the blank generation!" they shout. "And I can take it or leave it each time." Carolyn writhes in her seat and screams.

"You, my friend, are a freak," he says.

They take the back roads on the way home from the stable because they're so hilly. Sebastian pushes the truck over one hundred kilometres per hour, and the front wheels leave the ground. He holds his hands as far above his head as he can without hitting the roof of the truck and yells, "Wheeee!" What's left of the ice at the edge of the road crunches under the tires as the truck swerves.

"Who's the freak now?" she asks. Outside the truck windows, only a farmhouse or two lights the path home. The dark hovers beyond and makes her feel secure. She stares at the bare, spidery branches and thinks that in little

more than a month, tiny buds will be breaking through.

In her room, Carolyn is looking at pictures of Richard Hell on an album sleeve. She's picking her favourite photo of him and decides on the head shot from the liner notes, his lips dark enough to be covered in lipstick, his penetrating eyes belying a heroin haze. She recalls hearing that he had made a T-shirt that read, "Please Kill Me," which he never wore. She wishes she'd been old enough to be part of the seventies punk scene, so she could have run away to New York. She imagines buying Richard Hell heroin to get his attention, and him falling in love with her quiet beauty. She'd help him kick and then serve as his muse. He'd put out a romantic record about her. She'd sit at the back of the bar waiting for his set to finish, and he'd leave with her instead of finding a place to shoot. His friends would hate her, but Richard wouldn't care. He'd even let her call him Rich.

In Horst's stall, Carolyn brushes his sides, using the bristles to smooth out the matted hair clumped together by sweat. It's almost the end of winter, but she's in her T-shirt, still hot from the ride. Her nose is filled with a thin layer of arena dust, the smell of her own sweat, and the comforting smell of Horst—sweat, manure, mixed with urine that smells lightly of apple juice. While she picks out Horst's hooves, he nuzzles her behind with his nose. She slaps it lightly away with her fingertips. His whiskers are moist from his breath. Glancing over her shoulder, she can see Sebastian standing in the doorway looking at her, but he doesn't catch her eye. She moves to Horst's back hoof, scraping out clumps of dirt. She stands to face Sebastian, but as she looks, he's turning and walking away.

The sun is setting when they leave, and they drive west, chasing after it. In the truck, Carolyn thinks of the night Sebastian kissed her, and she wants to go back. She was scared as hell at first, being assaulted by slobber and teeth, but now she decides she wants that again. She looks over at him as he drives. From the side he's a bit ugly, and

there's a pimple resting on his cheek that she suddenly wants to reach over and pop.

"What happened to your arm?" he asks.

His fingers burn. She pulls her arm away quickly. "They're cat scratches."

"Doesn't look like cat scratches to me."

She pulls on her sweatshirt and smells the scent of Horst. She breathes in and breathes in, until she is filled with his smell and her lungs feel bigger than any part of her body. She'll let them float away without her. She waits for Sebastian to tell her he loves her.

"I hate Television," she says, pointing to the car stereo. "You're doing this just to bug me."

"I know this is hard to understand, but the entire world doesn't revolve around you." He turns up the stereo.

"You are such a shit," she says, but at the same time, she wishes he would pull the car over and kiss her and tell her the truth about other things.

Carolyn marches into homeroom, sits down, and waits for someone to say something. Her classmates look at her shirt but are too afraid to say anything. She looks down and tries to read "Please Kill Me," but the paint is too wobbly.

Before lunch she's called to the principal's office.

"Carolyn, we're all concerned about you," says Mr. Healy, leaning over his desk toward her. "Your grades have dropped this year and, well, the T-shirt you're wearing is inexplicable."

"It's a nod to the history of punk music."

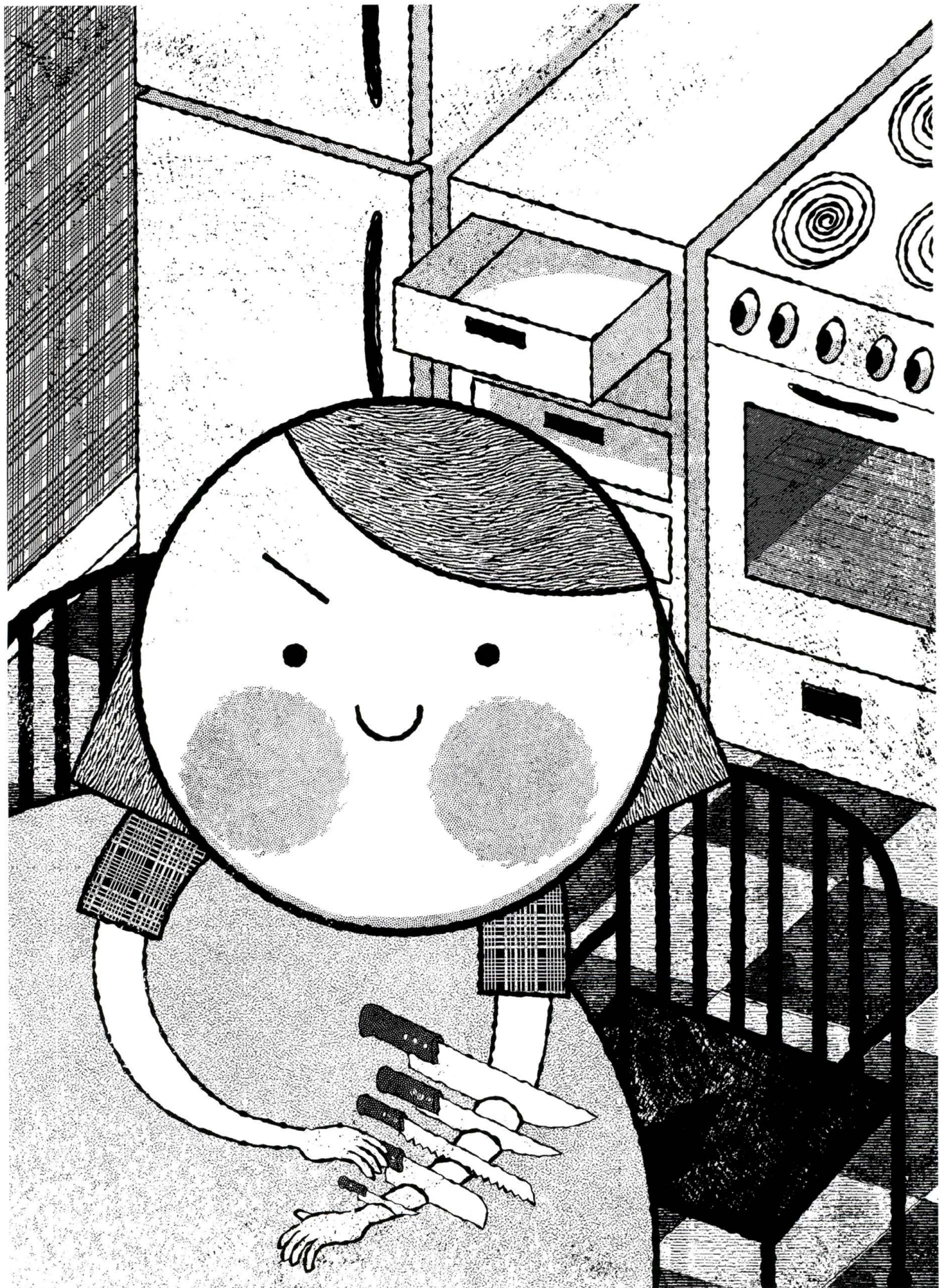
"I'm concerned someone will take it"—he points at her T-shirt—"seriously."

Carolyn snorts.

"I'm giving you a week's detention."

Pulling Horst around in a small circle, Carolyn feels him curve snugly around her leg. As he stumbles quickly over a stray hoof, her hip dips down with his shoulder, and her heart leaps seeing the ground move closer to her eyes.

When she recovers, she moves him along the straight wall of the arena, letting his body lengthen by dropping the reins to the buckle. Conscious of her tailbone grinding



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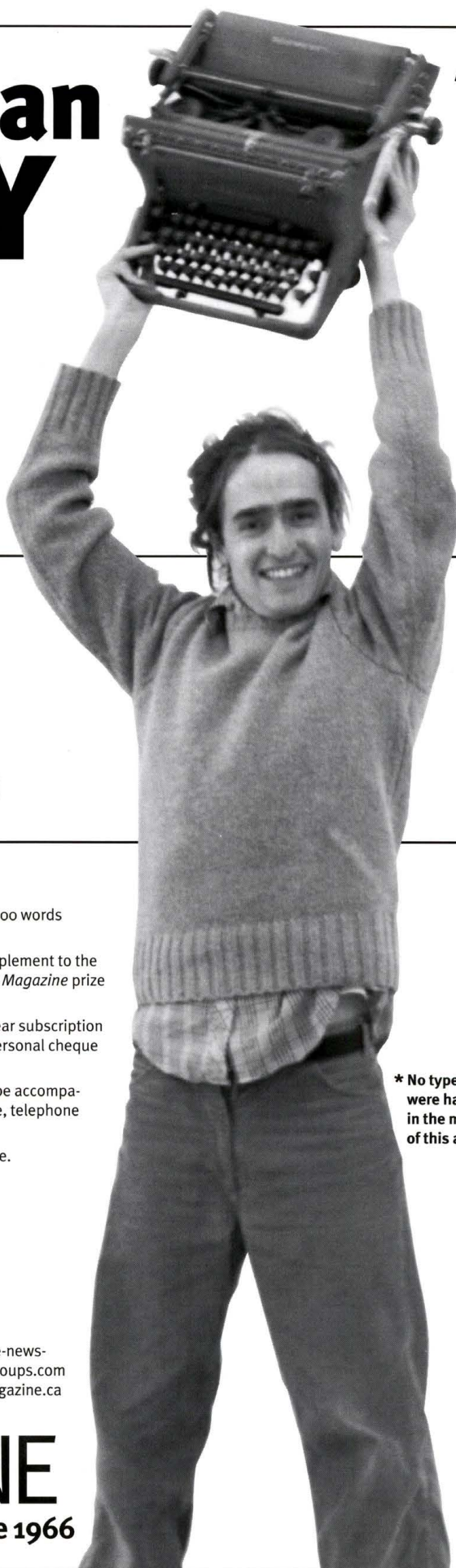
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—SHELAGH M. ROWAN-LEGG

into the seat of the saddle, she feels her pelvis slowly rocking back and forth. With a crash, one of the remaining skids of ice slides off the roof and crashes down along the arena wall. Bucking, Horst takes off. Carolyn slides from side to side. Horst spins, bucks again, throws her. As she falls toward the ground, Carolyn can see flecks of dust suspended in air. As she lands, a cloud of dust puffs up to surround her.

The arena door opens, creaking and swinging back and forth, and Sebastian's head pokes in. It takes him a moment to notice Carolyn lying, struggling to get to her feet. She hears his voice. He's laughing. She finds Horst, grabs the reins, and already feels the particles of dust hardening in the corners of her mouth. Licking them away with the pink tip of her tongue, she says, "I'm O.K."

Sebastian moves back from the door, giving her room to take Horst back to his stall. "Hey, how did you get here tonight? Do you need a ride?"

She laughs. "My dad bought me a car for my birthday."

Caroline thinks of last summer when she showed Sebastian the new horse trailer her parents bought her. It sat in their driveway for days, the silver paint reflecting the sun. Even so, the trailer was filled with stale, humid air. Sebastian stepped into the front of the trailer, closed the door behind him, and shuffled by Carolyn. Padded crossbars blocked them from the two long rows where the horses stood while being pulled along the road. Carolyn unhooked one to show Sebastian how it worked, but it swung toward them, trapping them in a small triangle of space. She can still feel the weight of the hot summer air pressed against her bare arms. It was so heavy and thick, as though she was looking at him through a mist. He grasped her upper arm when he moved to kiss her, his fingertips resting on the newest scars. She hooked her finger through his belt loop.

Carolyn's just finished riding, and takes Horst back to his stall, leaving him with a few pieces of carrot. The rain hasn't stopped for days, and the rivers are flooded

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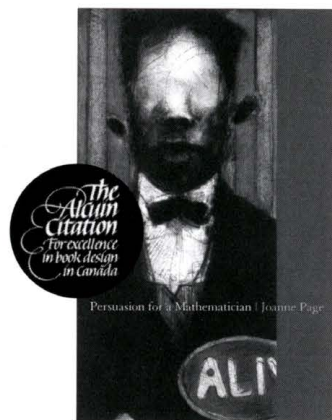
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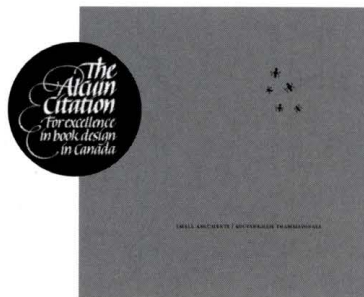
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poems by SOUVANKHAM THAMMAVONGSA

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Small Arguments collects small lives and argues for their belonging. It also serves as an argument for my own belonging. I was born in a refugee camp. I was not given a birth certificate. It is not enough that I am living but a piece of paper needs to prove this. *Small Arguments* offers this. Why poetry? In the words of Gwendolyn MacEwen: "You know the answer and still I have to say it: // Poetry has got nothing to do with Poetry."

— Souvankham Thammavongsa

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MID-WEEK CABLE

Watching *Live and Let Die*
on some popcorn afternoon.
I tell you about Louisiana,
the forgetful American Way.
It's all among Roger Moore,
speedboats over bridges, alligators
become crocodiles. Commercials,
and I think of Huey Long and
Jimmy Swaggart's warm-up band.

We end up lying side by side. You've walked
me through the end of a schoolboy
fantasy. Tell me again about how Linda
never let Paul out of her sight.
Always in the same room.
Always watching the same TV.

—JOEL BAKER

with chunks of snow. Sebastian's standing just outside the barn door in the small back paddock. He's sucking on a joint, holding everything inside him. Carolyn takes a puff and tries to hold the smoke in, but coughs it out with spatters of spit.

"Hey, you're getting it wet," Sebastian says. He flicks at the ground with the heel of his boot, his silver spur dipping into mud.

"I'm not doing it on purpose."

He moves quickly, his hand on her shoulders, pushing her back against the wall with a thud. He puts his left forearm across her throat, and pulls at her shirt with his right hand. Carolyn keeps her arms by her sides. He pushes his tongue into her mouth and bites her lip.

"I know you," she says, holding his face in her hands. She kisses him, tastes his bad breath, the residue of smoke. He pushes her and walks away. Carolyn stands looking at the rain falling off the eaves and splashing into the mud. She brings her fingers to her nose and tries to smell him, then searches her mouth for his taste, but finds only slivers of the carrot she bit apart for Horst.

In the hayloft, Carolyn moves close to Sebastian and kisses him lightly on the lips. He slaps her hands away, stands up, and says, "I don't want you." She moves to him quickly, putting her hands on his shoulders, and shoves as hard as she can. Caught off guard, Sebastian trips and falls through the open trap door. Car-

olyn looks down and sees him on the floor of the barn. She holds her body suspended in the opening and drops to the asphalt floor. Sebastian's body twitches slightly. She brings her head down close to his. It's flopped to one side, and blood runs from his ear and his nose. Carolyn touches her finger at the edge of his earlobe, lets drops of blood collect on her fingertip. She touches his blood against her mouth, a slick lip gloss.

Carolyn pulls out onto the highway. Her hands are cold, and they shake against the steering wheel. She realizes that she's following the headlights from her car. The asphalt snaking through the swamp looks alive. The water has gotten so high that the marsh looks like it's floating alongside the road. The rain looks like huge drops jumping on the pavement. Carolyn tries to hold in the tears, but they're collecting behind her eyes. She looks at the drops and realizes they're too big to be rain. Carolyn slows the car and sees the pavement is covered in frogs. The highway is littered with frogs trying to escape the swelling swamp. Hundreds of them are already dead, flattened into the texture of the road, and Carolyn cries. ▽

Kerri Leigh Huffman lives in Little Italy. Her writing has appeared in numerous journals, including the Cormorant, Contemporary Verse 2, the Fiddlehead and Broken Pencil.

CONTRIBUTORS

Paul Vermeersch ("Cherry Blossoms in an Orchard," p. 5) lives in the Annex. He is the author of *The Fat Kid* (ECW, 2002) and *Burn* (ECW, 2000), and the editor of 4 A.M. Books, Insomniac's poetry imprint.

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Lynn Crosbie ("Liar," p. 23) lives and writes in Parkdale. Her latest book is *Missing Children* (M. & S., 2003).

Chris Chambers ("Getting Started," p. 24) lives in the Palmerston area. He is the author of *Lake Where No One Swims* (Pedlar, 1999) and the co-author of *Wild Mouse* (Pedlar, 1998). He is preparing a new manuscript that includes poems about bicycles, birds, birches, and booze. And that's only the Bs.

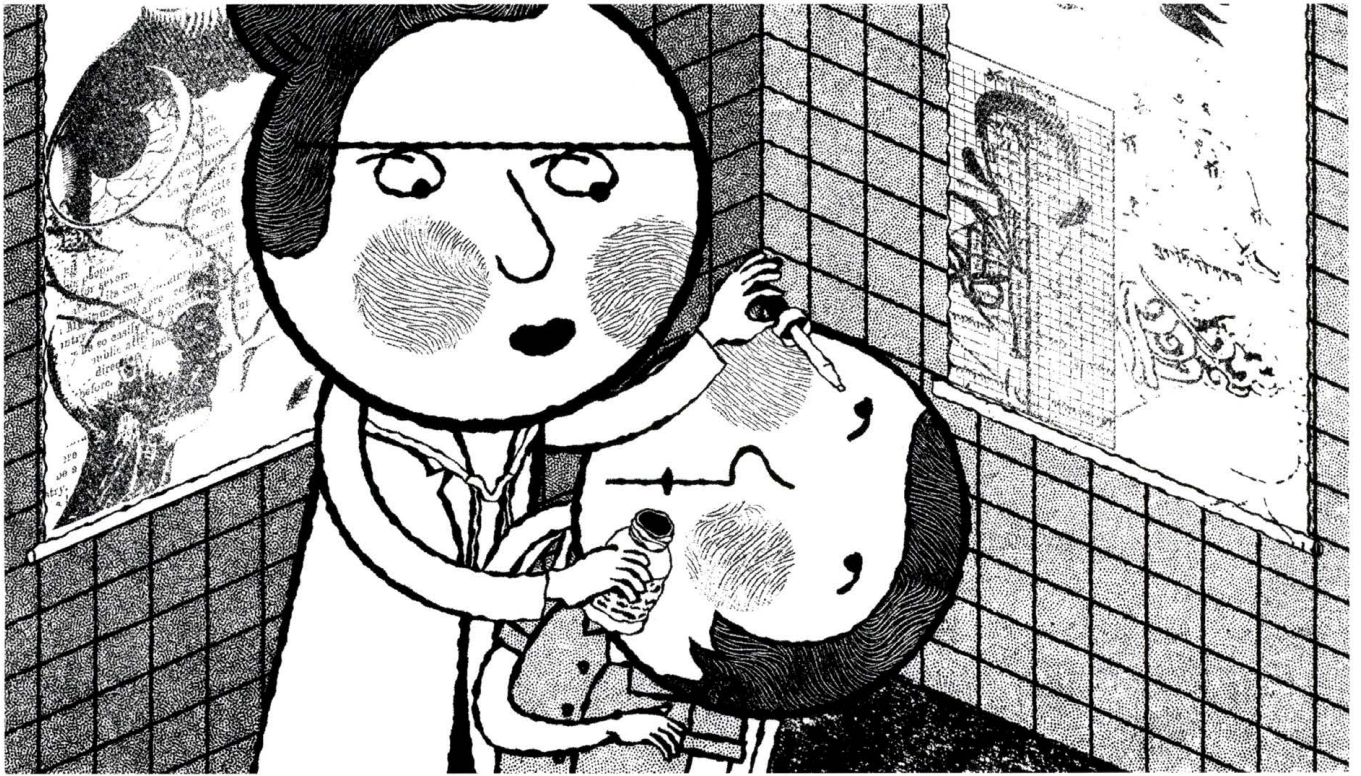
Brett Lamb ("Sunset Eckler," p. 26) is a freelance cartoonist and graphic artist living in the shadow of the Dufferin Mall. He was the graphic designer for the 2004 Hot Docs festival.

Jennifer LoveGrove ("Beauty Killer Poem No. 2," p. 30) lives in Parkdale. She is the author of *The Dagger Between Her Teeth* (ECW, 2002). She writes the literary column for *Hive Magazine*, and edits and publishes the literary zine *Dig*.

Shelagh M. Rowan-Legg ("You Are Here," p. 35) lives in Cabbagetown. She is the editor and publisher of Thirteenth Tiger Press and has published poetry in *Pottersfield Portfolio*, *Cormorant*, and *Lichen*.

Joel Baker ("Mid-week Cable," p. 37) is a resident of Parkdale. This is his first published work.

Dave Lapp (*People Around Here*, p. 40) lives in the Palmerston area. He teaches cartooning to children, and is the co-editor of the comic anthology series *Don't Touch Me*. His weekly strip, *Children of the Atom*, will soon be seen again, in the *Washington Spark*.



THE INFECTED KNEE, THE GALLBLADDER, AND THE SUMMER OF LOVE

FICTION BY KRISTI-LY GREEN

It is perfectly fair of me to be upset with you because you won't sleep with me. And if you think otherwise, then I am afraid we can't be friends.

This issue has me all tied up in knots. My stomach hurts all the time, even right now, as I type this. Because of you. And your stupid morals, too. I can't even go to the bathroom until all of a sudden when I really, really, really have to go to the bathroom. One day, when this happens, I may not make it in time. I think you should know this about me.

Yesterday (which was my second time at the ophthalmologist's in my whole entire life), I was sitting in the waiting room waiting to see the ophthalmologist, when the nurse came out and dripped three drops of solution in each of my eyes. Now if that were the end of

this story, it would be fine. But I insist on telling you what happened next. It is your fault, after all.

No sooner had the last drop of solution descended from the eyedropper and, after a brief taste of flight, plopped onto my left eyeball, did I feel the familiar lurch in my stomach. It almost knocked the breath from me, you know. You have no idea what kind of effect you have on people like me. People you won't sleep with, I mean.

I tried to get up, but the nurse told me I had to sit down. I hated you and the nurse just then, even though I knew that wasn't fair. So, I sat in the chair, very still, with my eyes closed, and I tried very hard to imagine everything inside me freezing up and going still, one big cold gust starting at my bum,

slipping into my anus, and spreading through my large and small intestines into my stomach, cooling the gallbladder and liver as it passed, up to my esophagus and into my mouth, leaving my tongue lying motionless between my jaws. For an instant, I felt relief, sitting there on my small plastic waiting-room chair, unable to move, barely breathing, my body a frozen shell of ice, full of ice pathways and ice tunnels worming their ways through my torso, when a second, unstoppable spasm sent me careening out of the chair, my arms outstretched on each side, crashing into walls and people, upsetting a sun-faded poster of Van Gogh's bedroom pinned onto the wall, unable to navigate through frosted vision, until I finally managed to find a door to push through and run

outside. Now, I will not regale you with the kinds of indignities I endured there. I have too much respect for you to do that. Even if you won't sleep with me.

This is really killing me, you know. I mope around the house all day, and sulk when I have to answer the phone. I've been having shitty sleeps. It was during one of these fits of weakness I've been having that your mother called and told me to be grateful it wasn't biliary tract disease, which is something like pancreatitis. Did you know that your mother has that?

You know, friend, just because I understand the reasons why you can't sleep with me (and there are, admittedly, more than a few), it doesn't mean I have to like the situation. Actually, I am very depressed about it. That, and this sore knee of mine that I'm not supposed to do anything with. It's a real drag for someone like me, who likes to keep moving. You know how terrible I am at sitting still. You should also know, Clarence, that I am still a little pissed at you about it, because at the time of injury, before I fell down that hill, I really believed that of all the possible outcomes of the situation, including the possible bang-up of a knee, there might be a chance that sleeping with you would be one of them. But it wasn't. Now I know. I am in need of ointment. My shins hurt.

I think it's perfectly fair of me to be angry with you for not sleeping with me the other day. Especially with all these dietary concerns. I don't really understand how our friendship could get in the way of our sleeping together, but I know there are other things, too. Such as same-sex marriage and common-law relationships. But I was talking to Sylvia last night, and she said that she thought if I explained myself clearly to my special other friend (like I'm doing right now, with you, for example), then my special other friend might understand. After all, I like to think that I would understand if my special other friend had a kind of friend like you. One to love and sleep with, without all this.

Yes, I like to think so. Don't you? ☞

Kristi-Ly Green lives in Bloordale Village, where, daily, she attempts to avoid early death at the hands of a Portuguese teenager in a hot rod, across the street from the fish cannery, down the road from the chocolate factory.

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.)

Girls Who Bite Back: Witches, Mutants, Slayers and Freaks, edited by Emily Pohl-Weary (Sumach, 2004; \$26.95). In *Girls Who Bite Back*, contributors such as Mariko Tamaki, Sonja Ahlers, and Eliza Griffiths take turns defining, analyzing representations of, and teaching girls how to be superheroes. A consistently thoughtful treatment of the subject matter makes this a good read, particularly if you've ever watched *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and thought, "Wow, I love this show, but it would be so much better if . . ."

Beginning of Was, by Ania Szado (Penguin, 2004; \$24). A beautifully written and richly textured debut novel, Ania Szado's *Beginning of Was* follows Marta Fett, a young woman who flees her small-town Ontario home following the deaths of her husband and daughter, to find she can only deal with her grief by facing it head-on instead of running away.

● *Mask*, by Elana Wolff (Guernica, 2003; \$12). In *Mask*, her second collection of poetry, Elana Wolff creates both an homage and a response to the work of the Berlin-born artist Charlotte Salomon. Wolff combines elements of her own life experiences with those of Salomon to create an evocative, thought-provoking collection.

Sub Rosa, by Stan Rogal and Jacquie Jacobs (Wolsak & Wynn, 2003; \$20). A collaboration of lyrical poems by Stan Rogal matched with—and inspired by—a series of abstract paintings by Jacquie Jacobs, *Sub Rosa* can be viewed as an interesting experiment: what meaning does a poet cull from an artistic work without knowing the artist's intent?

The Monster Trilogy, by R. M. Vaughan (Coach House, 2003; \$16.95). The ever-prolific, genre-bouncing R. M. Vaughan returns to the theatre with this collection of three plays, originally produced

between 1996 and 2002. In *The Susan Smith Tapes*, Vaughan riffs on the public's obsession with unwarranted celebrity. *A Visitation by Saint Teresa of Avila upon Constable Margaret Chance* examines a middle-aged police officer obsessed with race, bloodlines, and genetic determinism. Finally, *Dead Teenagers* is a monologue told by a reverend addicted to funerals for murdered children.

Spells, by R. M. Vaughan (ECW, 2003; \$19.95). Poor Andy Loch. Instead of being that sexy outsider, he's the fat, pimply kid reviled and feared by the people of his hometown. Motherless and hating his father and his life, he turns, like any young angst-filled teen, to witchcraft. R. M. Vaughan immerses the reader in the world of the occult, while writing about the adolescent search for identity. Filled with gross-out images like severed heads, bilious, blue vomit, and sudden death, *Spells* may seem like a genre book, but it's really about growing up and being misunderstood.

● *The Haunted Hillbilly*, by Derek McCormack (ECW, 2003; \$18.95). After years of obsessing over cowboys, country music, and monsters in the short story form, Derek McCormack makes his novel debut with *The Haunted Hillbilly*, a humorous—and fictitious—retelling of the quick rise and fall of the singer Hank Williams. Unlike the real Williams, McCormack's anti-hero meets his end at the hands of Nudie, a gay vampire rodeo tailor obsessed with Hank's perfect ass. A lengthy tale by McCormack standards, but an all-too-brief-read for fans of his sparse, witty prose.

● *Verandah People*, by Jonathan Bennett (Raincoast, 2003; \$19.95). Jonathan Bennett follows his 2001 debut novel, *After Battersea Park*, with a collection of loosely connected short stories of Australia's "verandah people." Unlike their derogatorily named North American counterparts, the porch monkeys (or honkies), Bennett's characters use their shelters as "a retreat from hostile bushland or city street and a seductive barrier to participation in the wider world."

PEOPLE AROUND HERE

THE GREEN ROOM
DAVE LAPP

THEY'RE 'LEECH KIDS' WHO'LL TALK TO ANY ADULT, EVEN TOTAL STRANGERS TO GET EVEN A LITTLE SCRAP OF ATTENTION...

A PLAYGROUND IS A COMMUNITY...

...THEY WANT TO SUCK ALL OF THE ATTENTION AWAY FROM THE BLOOD OFF-SPRING, LIKE A COWBIRD BABY PUSHING THE NATURAL CHICKS OUT OF THE NEST!

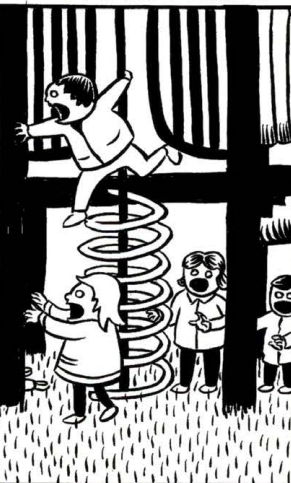
THAT'S AWFUL...KIDS ARE GENERALLY CURIOUS, THAT DOESN'T MAKE THEM 'LEECH KIDS'.



THE GOAL IS TO TOTALLY IGNORE THEM OR YOU'LL NEVER GET RID OF THEM!

"I JUST TURN AWAY AND ACT LIKE THEY DON'T EXIST."

MAYBE THEY ARE NICE KIDS...IT'D BE NICE TO BE NICE TO LONELY KIDS...BUT YOU'LL ABANDON YOUR OWN FAMILY!



"YOU CAN'T EVEN SPEND FIVE MINUTES?! I SUPPOSE IF THEY REALLY WERE GRABBING YOUR LEG AND SUCKING YOUR BLOOD!"

IF YOU DON'T PAY ATTENTION TO THEM FROM THE START, YOU DON'T HAVE TO REJECT THEM LATER ON... THEY DON'T NEED THE REJECTION...THAT'S MEANER!

NO, I THINK YOU GET SO FOCUSED, YOU DON'T WANT TO HAVE TO BE BOTHERED WITH ANYONE ELSE...

...WHAT DO YOU WANT? ISOLATION? YOUR OWN LITTLE WORLD? INTERACTING IS NATURAL, YOU DON'T HAVE TO MAKE IT A PROBLEM!

YAH, WELL, THEY'RE SO ANNOYING IT'S UNBELIEVABLE! AND THEY'RE EVERYWHERE!



DRINK

STEAM WHISTLE

PILSNER

THE
Good Beer
FOLKS!



STEAM WHISTLE

CANADA'S PREMIUM PILSNER

Beer: 341 ml 5% alc./vol.

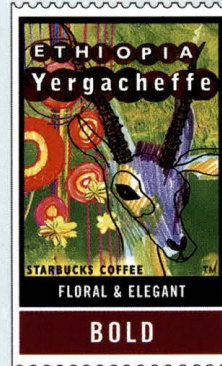
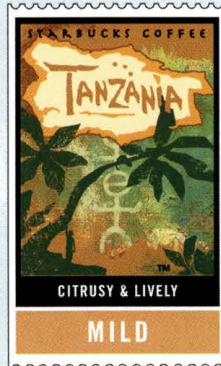
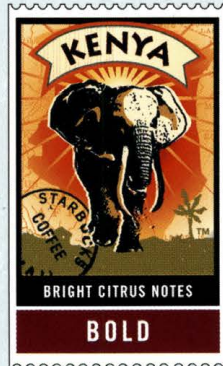
**REWARD
YOURSELF!**

CANADA'S PREMIUM PILSNER



**ROBUST AFRICAN COFFEES
HAVE BEEN AROUND
SINCE THE BEGINNING
OF RECORDED HISTORY.**

**COINCIDENTALLY,
SO HAS ICE.**



*This summer,
try our African coffees over ice.*

