

TADDLE CREEK



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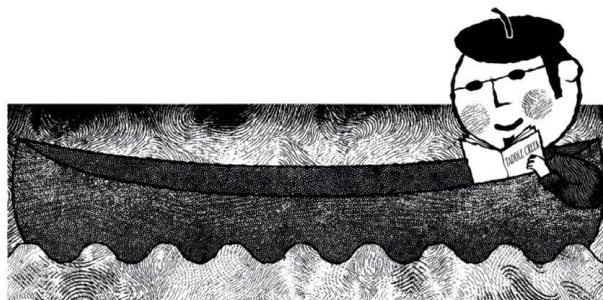
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"Beauty's sister is vanity
and its daughter is lust"

Hair by Paula Cerqueira



TADDLE CREEK

VOL. VIII, NO. 2 • SUMMER, 2005

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Unknown, circa 1962. Photographer unknown.

•BUNK• ALL ABOUT E

As discussed in the magazine's previous number, *Taddle Creek* has rescinded its earlier decision to lower-case the word "Web" and the like when used in reference to "World Wide Web," given that "World Wide Web" is a proper noun and "Web" simply a shorter version of the former. Thusly, phrases such as "Web site" and "Web master" shall retain their upper-case Ws for the same reason. And so, *Taddle Creek* was dismayed to find, upon last year's publication of the second edition of the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary*, the magazine's official spelling resource, that Oxford's editors had decided to close up and lower-case all Web-related words ("website," "webmaster," etc.). As Katherine Barber, the dictionary's editor, recently told the magazine, "We look at what current usage is. When we did the first edition, 'Web site' was still a pretty new word, and more people were capping it than others. By the time we did the second edition, more people seemed to be writing it as one word."

Sadly, this attitude is all too common amongst dictionary editorial collectives today, as dictionaries present themselves less as authorities and more as keepers of the public record. As a result, such as in the case of "Web site," dictionaries end up embracing the grammatical advice of ponytailed foosball players—those same people who would tell you that because the Internet and the Web are new, fast-paced frontiers the old rules of grammar don't apply; that it's not necessary to properly punctuate or check the spelling of an E-mail as one would a printed letter.

Contrary to popular belief, *Taddle Creek* more than understands the need for languages to evolve and grow over time. It does not, however, subscribe to the idea that advancements in technology must equal setbacks in the written language, which is exactly what those who promote the lower-casing of everything Internet would have you believe. Which is a roundabout way of saying, until Oxford starts lower-casing "baked

Alaska," *Taddle Creek* cannot and will not abide by these recent changes.

There is one other instance in which *Taddle Creek's* spelling style deviates from that of the *Canadian Oxford*. The word in question is "E-mail," which in the pages of *Taddle Creek* retains the capital E that fell out of favour quickly after the term gained popularity in the mid-nineteen-nineties. Again, *Taddle Creek's* stance is a matter of obvious principle, especially when one considers the word is no different than, say, "A-bomb." But, once again, there are those who would claim that, for no good reason other than it's faster to type, "E-mail" should be spelled as "e-mail" or, even worse, "email," which is a bastardization of the English language so great *Taddle Creek* will not justify it with a response.

With the publication of the eleventh edition of *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, in 2003, *Taddle Creek* lost its two biggest allies—the *New Yorker* and *Vanity Fair*—in the war on lower-casing the abbreviation for "electronic mail," when the dictionary, the major spelling reference for many U.S. consumer magazines, changed its spelling of "E-mail" to "e-mail" and, *Taddle Creek* assumes, the two magazines decided to follow suit. (Though the *New Yorker's* caving is especially disheartening, considering its continued use of the umlaut in such words as "rëemerge.") But *Taddle Creek*, always daring to be different, wishes to stick to its guns on this one and will continue to use the upper-case.

But again, as far as "Web" is concerned, please, don't listen to the people who wear suits without ties while still looking uncomfortable in social settings. Their industry collapsed within a decade of its birth—good grammar is forever.

Congratulations to Michael Cho, whose story "Night Time," from *Taddle Creek's* Christmas issue, has been nominated for a National Magazine Award. ▽

TADDLE CREEK

... has no cake.

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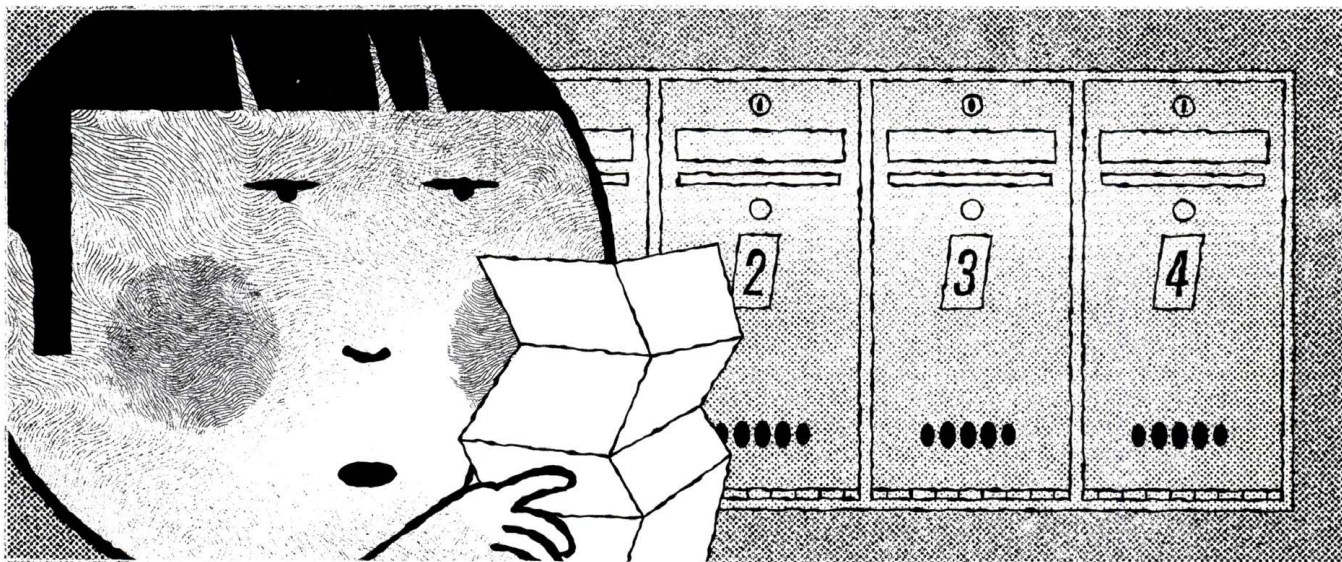
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NOTES TO SIMON

BY GIL ADAMSON

The problem could have started long ago, when I was a kid or a teenager. I know that. But I prefer to think of it as a recent problem, one that might go away as quietly as it arrived. And I don't feel a great need to get "better." They say that, don't they? The patient must want to change. Well, I don't.

Even though I'm unemployed, I still get up at six. Some habits are hard to break. As usual, I leave a note for the newspaper delivery man. Every week or so I leave a note. Today it's a page torn out of the *New Yorker*, from the front of the book. We call it "the book" in the magazine industry. I don't know why, but I guess everyone has to have their own jargon. Like people in the Armed Forces calling things "Alpha Delta Charlie" or "H.Q." or "bogey." Whatever. Anyway, my newsguy's name is Simon, so I circle a notice for the play *Kennedy's Children* at some little pub in Manhattan and write: "Simon? One of yours?"

I know that sounds psycho. I know it makes no sense. I mean, it's not really even a veiled threat or a come-on or even an admission of any kind. It's just deeply weird.

It used to be that Simon would simply look at the notes I left him and not touch them. Now he's collecting them. I'm not sure why. Maybe he wants to

take them to the police. It'd make quite the bizarre collection, I'll tell you. The first one, the first note I left the poor man, was a little porcelain figurine of a pixie or an elf or something, taped to an index card with the word "Simon?" written on it in pink pen. The pixie was grotesquely cute, with gigantic black eyes, and it was squirming in shyness or just childish delight. I put it next to the envelope with my weekly cheque. I heard Simon in the vestibule, standing there for a while, not moving. He was probably just trying to figure it out. That's what a sane person would do. The next week I made out a small hand-drawn map of our street and I put an "X" on a house down the road with the words "Your friends?" on it. I don't have the foggiest idea who lives there. I just picked that house because they had Christmas lights still up in April, and that kind of thing bugs me. That kind of optimism, or laziness.

I think I'm angry. O.K., I know I'm angry, but it's a kind of distant knowledge, like I'm stunned by the anger. Maybe that's the wrong way to put it. I'm not really numb—instead I feel like I'm going to burst with pure energy. Frankly, I feel like something is happening in my life, after a long period of . . . I don't know what. Walking franti-

cally in circles. Working, coming home, sleeping, and going back to work again. I shouldn't complain, now it's all stopped and I have free time. I don't know why I feel like this. At least I'm not staring through the windshield at 9 A.M. at a bumper sticker that says, "DON'T LIKE MY DRIVING? CALL 1-800-EAT-SHIT." At least I'm not listening to Carol tell me what a bitch Lisa is, and then, ten minutes later, here comes Lisa saying, "What did that bitch say?" At least I'm not fighting sleep in front of my buzzing monitor when the C.E.O. of the company walks by and everyone acts like they just saw Bigfoot. And, best of all, I'm not wondering why the back of Jim's neck bugs me so much. Things are far simpler now.

That's what I'm thinking, anyway, at 6 A.M., weak sunlight pouring in the front window, when I hear Simon coming up the porch steps. Tentative footsteps, to be sure. Poor Simon. He always walks softly, pauses in my vestibule, reading the crazy shit I leave for him, trying to make out what I'm up to. He could always go to the police and lodge a complaint, and the police would come to my door and talk to me, and I'd be forced to stop my shenanigans. I don't know how I'd feel about that. Sort of indifferent, I guess. Simon could switch

routes with another carrier, and then I'd be someone else's headache. I'd miss him, of course. But I don't think he's a runaway kind of guy somehow. And anyway, it's not like Simon is the only object of my senseless little games.

For instance, this new kleptomania. When I was still on contract with the Gibson Advertising Group—GAG, we used to call them—I didn't seem able to leave the building without something in my bag. I couldn't bring myself to walk out empty-handed. A package of Post-its, a box of pens, whatever—even a three-hole punch. What in the world did I want with a three-hole punch? And then, of course, I had to hide it when I got home. Stuff it down the back of a drawer. I was afraid someone from work would come over for a coffee and see this pile of office supplies, pristine packages, and . . . Well, my mind sort of freezes over what comes next. So into the sock drawer it goes. What's the point? Why do I steal at all? I just can't figure it out. I can't figure anything out.

Pulling up in the parking lot at work in the morning was always a bit of a freaky event for me. I'd park as far away from the door as possible, which distinguished me from everyone else who wanted to avoid breathing any real air or getting a drop of rain or snow on their powdered noses. So, picture this: there are fifty cars bunched up by the door, then an acre of empty spaces, and then my rusted little Honda off by the trees, pointing into them like I just went mushroom picking. And I always

arrived late, which means I was always, always nervous and guilty. But I was a temp, so no one cared, no one knew for sure when I was supposed to get in. No one knew what I did, really. My immediate boss was away on maternity, and the replacement thought I wasn't her problem. She didn't give a shit what I did, when I came in, or if I ran around nude, as long as I didn't approach her office door or even say hi. Her eyes would widen with panic when she saw me coming along the narrow divider-lined hall, and she'd duck her head as if something really interesting might be floating in her lumpy child-made Christmas mug with "MUNMY" written on it. Boy, I hated that mug.

So what made me angry? O.K. Let's pull out the mental snapshots and have a look. Here I am, dressed in a grey suit coat and short skirt, hands in my lap, and my toes pointing together. See that look on my face? That's what you look like when you're being "let go." They wanted my salary back. You'd think a magazine with a name like *Mondo Urbo* wouldn't have the nuts to do one of those Stalinist-type purges you see in the bigger outfits, but it did. Me, two designers, the receptionist, and four laser printers gone in one afternoon. The warehouse guy took each laser printer out to the curb, put it down, counted to five, and then picked it back up and walked it to his car.

Next: here's me being let go from *Echinacea News*. It was a part-time, fill-in job for the managing editor, Duska,

who, it seems, came down with some creeping undiagnosable ailment that required biweekly massage and chiropractic, a fistful of supplements with each breakfast bowl filled with gravel and wood chips, and unending calls in to me, to remind me to do things I'd already done. She was sweet as pie to me but called me "that little whore" when speaking to the publisher on the speakerphone. He'd just wince at me and make mollifying gestures that translated as: "It's the illness. She's not herself." By my best guess, Duska had never felt more alive. She was fifty and still raw from divorce. She was indulging herself and getting even. Still, I suppose it was remotely possible that she had a real illness, one that made her exactly like herself, only more so. One-hundred-and-fifty-percent Duska. So *Echinacea News* let me go so they could pay for all the pills she got on account of her benefits program. It was either me, they said, or Duska's health, and Duska was very important. Well, hell. Half a dead monkey could have seen that one coming. But I guess I didn't. In fact, now that I come to think of it, I'd have to say there's precious little in life I have seen coming.

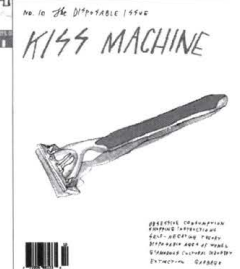
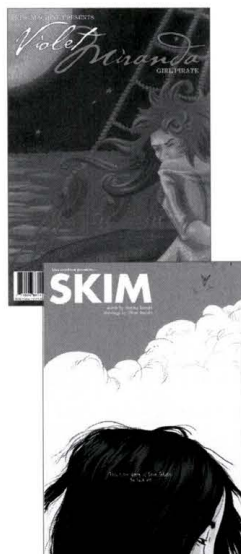
I don't mind that Jim started seeing someone else while we were still going out. That sounds so civilized, doesn't it? Or maybe it seems bloodless and selfish. It depends on your view of things. But for me it's true. After five months, I was getting horribly bored. At least that's what I think the feeling was: boredom.

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A MEMBER OF THE WAIT STAFF DELIVERS A GLASS OF ICE TO OPRAH

"Oh, you're an angel," Oprah said simply, when I rested the glass of ice on the Egyptian linen. As if I could stretch to the sky like a Judas tree, as if a message was mixed in the lead A. H. Heisey wineglass: *the gathering of waters She called seas*. An entire globe of ocean: plankton, algae, crawfish, and treasure, an answer swimming in Her maw, truth's great potion. How beautiful I felt then, in my alabaster blouse, wrinkled dress slacks, and dry, sensible black shoes, to resemble an angel. And in the glass, I swore I saw Oprah scull then glide on an improvised raft of sliced lemon, a knife for an oar.

—ADRIENNE WEISS

I can't be sure. But whenever Jim was due to come over, I'd wander around the apartment tidying, and I'd wonder why everything annoyed me. I'd bark my shins on the coffee table and shout at it. I'd drop a spoon and, after a moment, kick it across the floor. I was totally bitched out. But if he called to say he'd see me tomorrow instead, I felt like it was a short Friday at work. I had the whole evening to myself.

Did I learn from this feeling? Look at my life and think, "Hey, I'm bored, here. I have a choice. I can leave Jim. Freedom awaits"? Nope. I waited till he dumped me. And let's face it, it was much like being let go: I had to clean my stuff out of his drawers, and he paid for the cab home.

So here's my advice on what to do when kleptomania no longer turns your crank, when the threat of getting caught stealing Post-its is no longer enough to provide that I'm-still-alive signal from inside. You have a closet full of office supplies, right? Well, why not start bringing stuff back?

Suddenly, the stock room is overflowing. My goodness, where did it all come from? There's the old three-hole punch sitting right next to the new one. Who needs two? The secretary gets raked over the coals for ordering too much, wasting the company's money, even

though she's been there for eight years, is wound tighter than a kettledrum, and has never made a mistake in her life. So now she's furious at Accounting, and Accounting is pulling her files apart trying to figure out how she did it. People take sides. They don't sit together in the cafeteria. Lots of avoiding in the hallways.

Once that becomes boring, you can move on to other poltergeist tactics. Find your personal *bête noire*, which in my case was the profoundly lazy and nasty Carl, and put things from other people's desks into his cubicle. Emily's favourite watch, Lisa's little purple calculator. Just take them and slip them onto his shelf. If you're lucky, like I was, Emily will miss her watch, make a big deal about it, and, an hour later, someone will see it in Carl's space. Oh, the fireworks! Because, you see, Carl would have to be crazy to do something like that. So maybe he is crazy. At first, you'll hear these prolonged discussions at lunch about why the freak picked the objects he did, and then they'll start asking why he started stealing now after six years—someone offering, "He's been stealing all along, we just didn't know!"—all of it pointing to some uncharted perversion on Carl's part. Why did he choose Emily's watch? Well, of course, because he wants her. Someone

should call his wife.

Part of me was watching Carl and pitying him, but the pity was largely self-pity—how awful would I feel if I was as bewildered and hated as him. In fact, I was worse than him. Carl was just unpleasant—I was a criminal. Or so I thought. Turns out someone else was worse than me. One night, very late, every computer in the place was cleaned out. Then the thief waited till GAG bought thirty new computers and came back a week later and got those ones too, swiping in and out with a supervisor's card. Turns out I'm a sardine among sharks.

So, with that little gambit run to its conclusion, I had nothing to occupy me. That's when I started leaving notes for Simon. Actually, I've run into Simon in the hall a couple of times. He's a tall Asian guy with kind of amazing features, smooth and ethereal. Sometimes I think he looks like a Hong Kong movie star. Maybe he's Korean. I can't really tell about these things. Anyway, he was late that day, and I was on my way to work. We stood there like it was a bank robbery and we were both waiting for the bad guy to make a move. I don't even remember how we got out of it, and, thinking back on it, I don't know who was more scared—me or him.

Maybe it's that movie-star thing. Maybe that's why I can't stop trying to freak him out. Every day he delivers the newspaper, and I take it and open it up to the classifieds and stare blindly at them for ten minutes. Every day I hear his footsteps in my hallway, and sometimes I hear him pause, looking at the note or the picture or the object I left on the mail table for him. There's something comforting in the routine. It's a relationship of sorts. All right, it's a fucked-up one, but a relationship nonetheless. That's what I'm telling myself, holding my coffee cup, sitting in a little stripe of cold sun on a Tuesday morning, while Simon stands silent in the hall. I'm smiling, the cup halfway to my lips, when he knocks on my door. ▽

Gil Adamson lives in the Beach. She is the author of two books of poetry, Primitive (Coach House, 1991) and Ashland (ECW, 2003), and a book of linked short stories, Help Me, Jacques Cousteau (Porcupine's Quill, 1995). Her work has appeared in magazines in Canada and the United States.

THE ECLIPSE

BY DAVID WHITTON

My brother, Anders, had been with us for just two days, but already Larissa was complaining about the smell.

"He smells like a goat," she said. "It's like we're keeping a herd of goats in the living room."

"O.K., O.K.," I said.

"I mean, it's everywhere. The carpets, the curtains. It's seeped into the fabric of the couch."

"I know, I know, I know, I know."

For most of the two days, Anders had perched in a chair at the kitchen table, rolling cigarettes and staring dreamy-eyed into space. He was very quiet. Were it not for the smell, you'd forget he was even there. But Larissa found him unsettling. Part of this, of course, was his appearance. He had confused blue eyes, broken teeth, and drifts and stacks of pale yellow hair; it gave him the look of a demented baby duck. And he rarely slept. At four in the morning you could get up and go to the kitchen for a glass of water and there he'd be—smoking a cigarette and leafing through one of Larissa's *Women's Health & Fitness* magazines.

"Please, Chet. Get him out of the apartment." A lock of Larissa's hair came loose from her ponytail; it floated above her head like a question mark. "And keep him away until the place has a chance to air out."

"I said O.K.," I said, hoping that would be the end of it.

I took him to the car wash, the hardware store, the pet-supply store, the electronics superstore, the coffee shop, the library, the movies, and bar after bar.

It was on the patio of the Eclipse that I found out the reason for Anders' visit.

"I'm meeting a woman," he said.

Over in the corner, a chair scraped back, and then another, and then another, as a party of pink-faced businessmen paid their tab and left.

"What kind of woman?" I said.

"Just a regular woman."

"You mean, as in a date?" This was a rare and amazing piece of news.

"I guess you could call it that."

"You're on a date," I said, working the information over in my mind.

Anders lived in a derelict school bus on a scrubby tract of land in the Ottawa valley. There isn't a whole lot of talent in a place like that. His last girlfriend had been a Wiccan pot farmer who'd led him on just long enough for him to dry-wall her cabin. But at least she'd been single—the one before that had been fifty-eight years old and long-married. My brother: twenty-eight. When her husband found out about the affair, he paid a visit to Anders' school bus and knocked out two of his teeth with a Coleman flashlight.

"Tell me about this woman," I said. "Where'd you meet her?"

Anders took a sip of beer, wiped the foam from his lip. "Ummm," he said.

"What does 'ummm' mean?"

"It means I don't want you to judge."

"When do I ever judge?"

"You always judge," he said. He looked around to see if anyone was listening, but all the tables were empty. "I met her through the mail."

"This is beginning to make more sense."

"See? You're judging already."

Anders zipped up his jacket and crossed his arms. The day had been partly warm and partly cool. In the shadows you could still feel winter; in the sun it was all bird's nests and crocuses. And the air! The air felt like it had been locked away for months in some dark riverbed. It smelled muddy, fertile. Full of waking things.

"I just think you need to be careful of mail-order brides," I said. "They're mostly Russian hookers trying to get citizenship. You can pick up some vicious fungal infections from Russian hookers."

"She's not a mail-order bride. She's a . . . She's a . . . regular woman. She took out an ad, and I answered. We've been writing back and forth for a year and a bit."

"So she's your pen pal."

"Yeah, sort of, I guess."

"What does your pen pal do?" I said.

"What does she do?"

"For a living."

"Ummm," he said.

I see it in him. I see it in the way he holds his cigarette, the way he sits in chairs, the way he talks: I see me. Because I'm seven years older, and I've had some influence, you know? I see my mother's lunacy, sure, and my father's Nordic solitude, but mostly I see me. It makes me feel responsible. It makes me want to take care of him, because the poor bastard sure can't do it on his own. I throw him some work when I can. In the warm weather he'll come down south for a few days and work on my crew, laying expansion joints, tearing up old parking ramps . . . whatever. In the cold weather he'll spend weeks at a time up north by himself. He'll make beeswax candles to sell to cottagers. He'll get bored and experiment with explosives. And, apparently (this was a new one for me), he'll sit around writing love letters to women he's never met.

"She's currently pursuing some interesting opportunities," Anders said. "Trying to turn her life around, make a fresh start. That sort of thing."

"Uh-huh," I said. "And why's that?"

"Because she . . ." Anders scratched his head, coughed twice, and picked at something on his knee—anything to avoid my eyes. "Because until recently she spent some time in a federal penitentiary."

What could I do but laugh? "And why is that?"

"She stole some money from an old-age home."

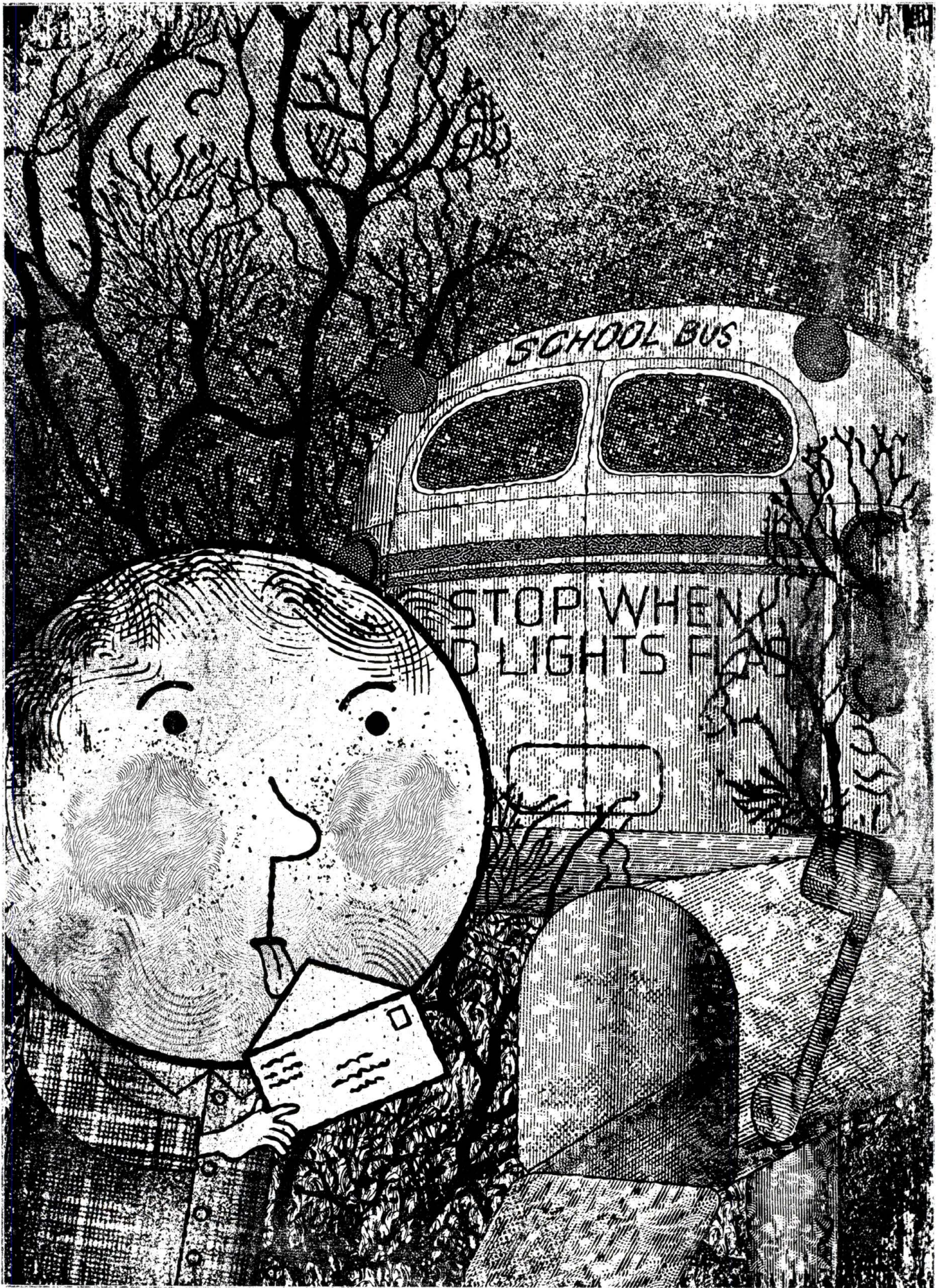
"You don't say."

"At knifepoint. But," he added, "she admits her mistake."

I had a swig of my draft, and then another, and lit up a smoke, and considered my fingernails, and stared off at the fragrant, peaceful sky. "Well," I said, "all things considered, she sounds like a step up for you."

"She is. She really is."

A new woman, a new start—it sounded pretty good to me. Someone who'd love you for all the wrong reasons.

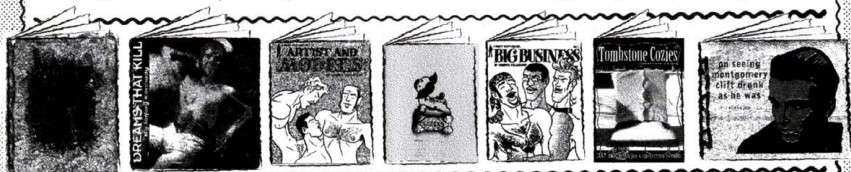


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Someone who wouldn't identify and exploit your every little weakness. It sounded pleasant.

I took a hard look at my brother. He was wearing an old blue plaid shirt and a pair of filthy army pants. His hair was matted up on one side of his head, and his face was covered with a week's worth of glistening blond stubble.

"You can't go on a date looking like that," I said.

"Why not?"

"Because you look like a felon. Bad analogy. But you see what I'm saying."

"No."

"You look like you've just spent three months in the bush."

"Well, but I have."

A tiny brown sparrow fluttered down to our table, eyeballed me critically, and fluttered off again. "But that's not appropriate in your dating-type scenario," I said. "It's unappealing."

"So what am I supposed to do?"

"Buy a new wardrobe."

Anders slumped in his chair, his face slack with desolation. "Really?"

"A new shirt that's not frayed in the cuffs. A new pair of pants that's not covered with food stains and bloodstains and . . . and whatever that is on your thigh. There's a flower in you, and it's just waiting to burst out."

"Couldn't I just—"

"No. And then you're going to need a shave. Why? Because a good shave sends a signal. It tells the woman you care about your appearance. It lends you the illusion of being further from rock bottom than you really are."

Anders ran a hand across his cheeks. His eyes were red-rimmed and shiny; he looked like he might start to cry.

"And lastly," I said, "and most importantly, you need a bath."

It was like I'd waved a rifle at him. He flinched, raising a hand to his head in a protective gesture. His face was full of pain, defensiveness, and, mostly, panic. If he'd gotten up and run away I wouldn't have been surprised.

"I just *had* a bath," he said.

"When?"

Anders eyed the front gate, the back gate—all the escape routes. "Why do I need a bath?"

"Have you smelled yourself lately? No woman wants to become intimate with that."

He raised the sleeve of his shirt to his

TWO MINUTES (ONE HUNDRED TWENTY PER HOUR)

The rain folds the night
like paper crackling
between its arthritic fingers.

We drive without talking,
without thinking,
the world around us an open mouth.

The wheels hold us, humming
over wet concrete.
The searching green-eyed glow of the speedometer.

A billboard's bright face against the dark.
An Exit sign.
We follow the arrows, read without reading.

Service centre like a space station,
we find our feet again,
unfold—lock up, fumble, walk, and float.

The air starched hard
against our teeth.
We carry out, and swallow sweet.

Tonight, tonight, tomorrow, tomorrow,
we go, slamming doors,
tiny teeth of a key kissing the ignition.

—EMILY SCHULTZ

nose and inhaled. "I smell good," he said. "I smell like woodsmoke."

Our waitress came out onto the patio with a fresh ashtray.

"Hannah, Hannah," I said.

Hannah was dark-eyed and almost pretty. She had long brown hair that she wore in fetching arrangements. And although I knew her only in her professional capacity, she seemed like she was a sophisticated and socially adept kind of person who could give us a lot of valuable feedback.

"Yes, darling?" she said, picking up our old ashtray.

"Do me a favour, would you?"

"Anything." She set the new one in front of me.

I pointed at Anders, sitting there with his stunned-deer look. "Smell my brother," I said. "Smell my brother and tell me what you think."

I try to be patient. It's not Anders' fault, the way he is. Defective D.N.A. travels through our family like a bad case of lice.

Our mother, for instance.

Mom was never entirely steadfast and rational, even when we were kids. There were always long summer afternoons in bed with the shades drawn, a damp washcloth on her head, *As the World Turns* on TV. There were always manic cleaning episodes: on her hands and knees, scrubbing floors till her hands turned the colour of raw pork. But, on the bright September day, twenty-odd years ago, that she discovered our father screwing the next-door neighbour, Mrs. Bridges, on our rec-room sofa, something in her head unspooled. It was a memorable day, though I don't remember much of it. I remember the screaming and crying,

the slammed doors and thrown porcelain, the phone calls to the police—and then, suddenly, an eerie quiet.

She kicked Dad out, of course, and soon after filed for divorce. The real trouble started a couple of years later, though. The real trouble started when, flush with alimony and a bottomless pool of spite, she decided to realize her life's ambition and become everything my father despised: a dealer of fine collectibles. That was the beginning of the long, slow slide. Because as soon as she got hold of, say, a Victorian watering can or an art deco snuff box or some other piece of dusty, worthless crap at an auction or estate sale, she couldn't bear to let it go. It was too valuable, she said. Too precious to go into the homes of whores and libertines. And so she put it all into cardboard boxes and stowed it away, and the boxes accumulated, and Anders and I watched as our childhood home slowly filled, floor to ceiling, with junk.

"One day I'll pass all of this along to you," she told us.

I had no doubt she'd make good on that threat. All those mouldy old boxes, full of stuff that belonged to someone else . . . It's why I got myself snipped. I was determined not to pass that crap along to my own kid—my own sweet, innocent, theoretical child, who, had he actually existed, would've never asked to be born.

"You look terrific," I said. "You look like a new man."

It was two days later. Anders was standing in the kitchen, submitting himself to our examination. In two days a miracle had occurred—a miracle of good taste, hard work, and organization. The man in front of us was clean-shaven and freshly bathed, wore a fashionably cut pair of jeans and an expensive blue shirt, and sported a flattening haircut, moderately gelled.

"Who knew?" Larissa said, scratching her cheek.

"Just one more thing," I said, "and the makeover will be complete."

I rushed into the bedroom, grabbed a bottle of cologne, and, before Anders could protest, sprayed some just above his head, so that a fine cloud drifted down on him.

"Why'd you do *that*?" he said.

"Because," I said, "cologne, like a

good shave, sends a signal. It tells the party in question that you've taken care to smell nice. And if you've spent all this time trying to smell nice, it means you've probably taken the time to wash out the crack of your ass."

It was twenty minutes to six. Anders had arranged to meet his ex-con at six o'clock. They were having fish and chips at Neptune's Cove, on King Street. I walked him down there in case he needed some last-minute advice.

"Whatever you do," I told him, "don't talk about Mom and Dad."

"Uh-huh," he said.

"And try not to talk about your school bus or anything involving candle-making. Or that incident with the dynamite—that was just embarrassing. And if the subject of ex-girlfriends comes up—"

"Yes, yes, yes."

"But do try to find out about life in prison. I want to hear about that."

It took ten minutes to get downtown.

Anders and I walked along in silence, down cracked sidewalks and buckled roads, the last of the sunlight making the sky go pink. Then, a block from the restaurant, he stopped. A warm spring breeze gently raised and lowered the flaps of his shirt pockets. He regarded me with great urgency.

"I don't need you to walk me to the door," he said. "I'm not some fucking baby."

He spun around and walked the final few steps to Neptune's Cove. There was a cockiness to his stride, a vanity to his bearing. And I'm not afraid to say there were tears in my eyes. Every doctor wants his pa-

tient to thrive, and I was no different. I'd done the major surgery. The rest was up to him.

To my way of thinking, it's better to indulge your vices and live a short, noteworthy life than to shy away from everything fun and turn into a sickly,

neurotic freak like so many of my friends and family. And maybe, yes, you spend too much time at your local pub, drinking with your buddies, and not enough time at home, talking about your feelings with your girlfriend, but if you don't take time to nurture yourself, how can you take care of anyone else?

That's why, after I delivered Anders at the restaurant, I popped in for a quick beer at the Eclipse. Larissa had told me to be home by seven. She wanted us to have a quiet dinner together, just the two of us, and I had every intention of being there, I really did. But Hannah was working that night, and the usual crew was sitting around the bar, and by the time I checked my watch, three hours had gone by.

"Oh shit," I said.

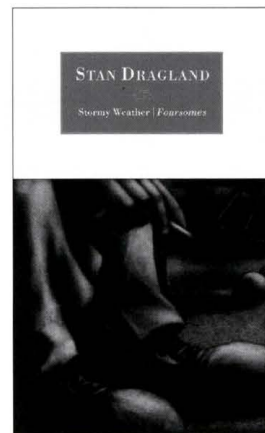
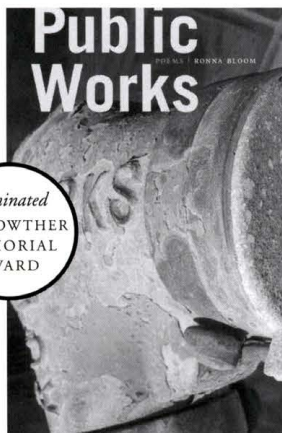
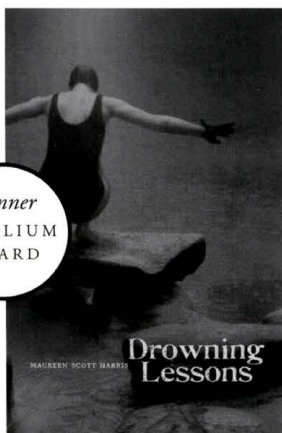
Hannah was at the cash, ringing in someone's tab. "What's up, Chet?"

"I'm two hours late for dinner."

"Shall I ring you out?"

"Nnnn . . . I'd better just stay here till she's gone to bed."

Hannah counted out some bills and laid them on a little plastic tray. "That's a fantastically bad idea."



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THE QUICK

It wasn't long before the Quick ran out of the room in a cloud of feathers and I starved myself on blue fingers all day just waiting for a train that naturally never came but the smoke was there in a bottle under the heavenly pie and I lifted the fat lady's skirt but she wasn't there and that threw me for a loop but the Quick came back with many marbles and delivered a speech and we all cheered and hollered and then it rained but only under the fat lady's skirt.

I wondered where Jimmy was and as I looked around I saw them all slipping on the marbles and the Quick was laughing big, evil laughs and the floor was tilting away from me and, and, and . . . they were gone!

I saw Jimmy in the undergrowth outside the window but he couldn't hear me as I yelled, "Belief is a splinter in the finger of mind!" but he couldn't hear me I think and he popped open with a surprised kinda look on his face and his guts did a jig on the lawn. Funny.

—WILLIAM A. DAVISON

"On the contrary, I thought it was pretty good."

"Go home," she said. "Take your punishment like a man."

I pretended to consider her advice. "All right. Sure. I'll go home," I said. "Just give me one more pint. For, you know, courage."

Because, after all, what did Hannah really know about my relationship with Larissa? She knew what I told her. She didn't know it had devolved into a state of absolutes, of alwayses and nevers: I *always* left my underwear on the floor; I *never* emptied my ashtray; I *always* left the margarine out; I *never* flushed the toilet. She didn't know about the long silences, the nights on the couch. She didn't know about the screaming fights. I'd changed, Larissa had said. I wasn't the person she'd fallen in love with.

I left the bar around two, profoundly shit-faced, but managed to steer myself home. I stumbled down mucky spring sidewalks, past darkened houses and thrumming electrical boxes. The night sky smelled of birth. The trees were erupting into bloom. I soaked it all in and, for a while, forgot about my troubles. Forgot about Larissa. Forgot about Anders. It wasn't until I reached my front stoop, checked my pockets, and realized I'd left my keys on the kitchen table that the troubles all came

flooding back.

"Oh no," I said. "No, no, no, no, no, no." And I kept saying it, over and over and much too loud, until the words resolved themselves into an understanding and, finally, into a plan of action.

The only way in, I realized, was to break in. This made sense at the time. At the time it seemed perfectly correct and reasonable.

I went around back, rifled through the garage, and pulled out the landlord's wobbly aluminum stepladder. We lived on the second floor; if I placed the ladder under our deck and stood on the top rung, I'd be able to grab the top of the deck's railing and pull myself up.

That was the plan, anyway.

I fixed the ladder as soundly as I could and climbed it as carefully as possible. I reached the top rung, yes. But I was drunk, I was very drunk. So, when I reached for the deck, my foot slipped. My foot slipped and then my legs gave out from under me and then I dropped, slow motion, to the driveway, where I heard my right arm make a sound like a snapping branch, and felt the asphalt cool against my skull.

I blinked—twice, three times. Up in the sky I saw clouds, stars, jet trails. People in flight from one place to another. Then the world dropped away and I was swimming, swimming.

"I can't believe we did that," Larissa said, her voice fluttering with excitement. "I think maybe you're the coolest guy I've ever met."

"How many guys have you met?"

"Five. No, sex," she said. Then, catching herself: "I mean *six*."

Larissa buried her face in her hands, her body heaving with laughter. When she took them away, her face was the same shade of red as her lipstick.

"Oh, God, I wish I hadn't just said that."

The train was swaying gently as it shuttled through the darkness. And we were swaying with it, side to side, bumping softly together, our skin sticking whenever we touched. Outside the windows there was nothing but black countryside, our faces reflected against it. The wheels clack-clack-clacked against the track. It was our first date, eighteen years ago. We were on acid and in love.

"Can you imagine what it would feel like to fall all that way?" Larissa said. "The lights of the city spreading out below, and you just, just . . ."

"Bad," I said. "It would feel bad."

"But bad and great at the same time."

An hour before, we'd been at the top of the C.N. Tower. We'd taken the train to Toronto, taken the elevator up the tower, marvelled for precisely ten minutes at the pretty lights, and rushed back down to take the next train home.

It was a two-hour trip each way, and we laughed the entire time. Some of this was the acid, of course. Some of it was the stupidity of what we were doing. But most of it was relief. Relief because we knew we'd finally found it: a person who'd love us without judgment. A person who'd love us for who we really were.

"Chet?"
"Mmmm."

"Chet? Can you hear me? Are you O.K.?"

"Ggguhuhh."

"Chet? Chet, baby? Oh, God. Are you, are you—"

"I had the. Best dream . . ."

"What is it, honey? Did you say something?"

"I nnnnn . . ."

"Need? You need something?"

"Just need . . . Just need two wooden spoons . . ."

"Why do you need spoons?"

"Two wooden spoons and. A tea towel. For a. Splint."

"A splint? Is there something wrong with your legs?"

"I think. My arm is. Broken a. Little bit."

"We have to get you to an emergency room."

"I'm O.K. I'll. Be O.K."

"Really, though. We have to get you to emergency."

"No. Way. I'll fix it my. Self."

It's interesting—the knowledge that something's gone badly wrong inside you. And it is knowledge—bodily knowledge. It focuses the mind. It amplifies the senses. Wind chimes in the distance, the rustling of leaves far overhead, the squealing of tires down the block—they sound like they're an inch from your ear.

I was in bed. My own bed in my own room. It was morning. I could tell it was morning even though my eyes were closed. I could tell from the sound of birds chirping in the yard and from the light that came in through the windows and turned the backs of my eyelids pink. It was going to be another beauti-

ful day. I could tell that, too.

I opened my eyes and looked down at myself. The sheets were covered in blood. My arm was wrapped in a tea towel, with two blood-soaked wooden spoons sticking out. I gathered that at some point I'd fashioned myself a splint—it seemed like something I might do—but I had no memory of it.

"Larissa?"

The sound of running came from the hall, and soon Larissa entered the room. "You're up," she said.

"Uh-huh."

"Anders is going to drive you to the hospital."

"Yep. Sounds good."

She came over to the bed and sat down. There was a time when I'd looked at her and all I'd seen were sparkles. But now all I saw were puffy eyes, a creased forehead. She looked tired and worried and I was seized with the profoundest guilt: I hoped I hadn't done this to her.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I'm really sorry."

She seemed to understand what I was trying to tell her. A swirl of hurt and anger passed across her features and, for

a second, it looked like she was going to say something—probably something she'd been rehearsing all night. How she'd wasted her youth on me. How I'd jackhammered her life into little bits. Instead, she cupped my cheek in the palm of her hand and kissed me on the forehead. "You piece of shit," she said. "Can you move?"

The answer was: barely. I could move slowly, painfully. I could move even though every movement seemed to damage me a little bit more. And so I travelled from the bed to a nearby chair, from a nearby chair to a kitchen chair, from a kitchen chair to the front door, and, finally, from the front door to the driveway, where Anders sat behind the wheel of my idling pickup.

I slumped in the passenger seat—unwashed, hungover, most likely concussed—and waited anxiously as Anders began to back the truck onto the street.

"Why a ladder?" Anders said. "Why didn't you just knock on the door?"

"There's a car parked behind you."

"I see it, I see it."

He jerked the truck to a halt, then carefully started to back out again.

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"I didn't want to wake her," I said.
 "Why didn't you call and tell her you'd be late?"
 "Please shut up."

It was a short drive to the hospital—but everywhere was a short drive in this little city. On the way I made Anders stop at a variety store for a pack of cigarettes. It was, I surmised, going to be a long wait in Emergency. After that we detoured east, to a Portuguese bakery that sold the most unbelievably airy, buttery crescent rolls I'd ever tasted, and a wide selection of exotic cheeses.

After this second stop, Anders hopped back into the truck, made a theatrical sniffing sound, and said, "You smell like a bar."

"Do I?"

"You should have splashed on some cologne before you left the house."

"You're hilarious."

I cracked the window to let some air in and stared for a few moments at the streets, the sidewalks. Larissa was going to leave me. I could feel it in my stomach, in my balls. She was going to leave me and find someone boring.

"How'd your date go?" I said.

"Not bad."

"What's she like?"

"A lot bigger than in her pictures," he said. "She was, like, a giantess."

"Mmm. Bad genes."

"And she has kind of a gravelly voice and a lot of tattoos."

"She sounds, ummm..."

"And she collects dolphin figurines." He thought about this, then shook his head in amazement. "Which I suppose you wouldn't expect."

We motored down Wellington Road. Ugly southwestern Ontario architecture whizzed by on all sides. There was no snow or darkness, unfortunately—nothing to hide under. The sunlight exposed every last brick.

"So do you think you're going to see her again?" I said.

"Maybe tonight."

"Tonight! Wow! Then I guess it went well."

"It went well," he said.

"I guess my advice helped."

"No. It went well in spite of your advice."

One moment you're a successful concrete-protection contractor. Someone whose opinion is sought. A tastemaker, a counsellor. A man of confidence and dash. The next, you're battered and fucked and your misfit little brother, a person who's always depended on you, a person who's missed out on so many fundamentals, is shepherding you to the hospital, taking care of your most basic needs. You look like the same guy, but something has changed. The old you has cracked open. Something new is pushing out.

"Something new," I said.

"What are you talking about?" Anders was smoking while he drove, eating a crescent roll while he smoked.

"Did I say that out loud?"

"You said something out loud."

"I was just thinking," I said.

"You were gesturing and making faces, too."

"I have some things on my mind."

"You better not do that in the hospital. You'll scare the nurses."

The nurses, yes. I pictured the nurses: a bunch of huge, tattooed women in white uniforms. They carried stainless-steel trays covered with drugs and knives. "I wonder if they still give sponge baths."

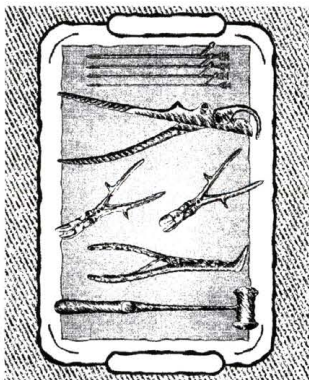
"Who?"

"The nurses," I said.

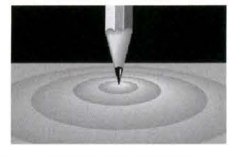
A sponge bath, a shave, a comb through the hair—these were things that told the world you were doing all right. A dab of fragrance, a change of shirt—they made you feel almost halfway normal. Not that there was any hope for me. My problems ran deeper than that. My problems required X-rays and I.V. drips and titanium rods drilled through bone. And even then: no guarantees. Fixed or broken, I'd be

discharged. Spat up and expectorated. I'd be back out here with the rest of the wounded. ▽

David Whitton lives in North Toronto. His fiction has appeared in the Dalhousie Review and the New Quarterly. He is working on a book of short stories.



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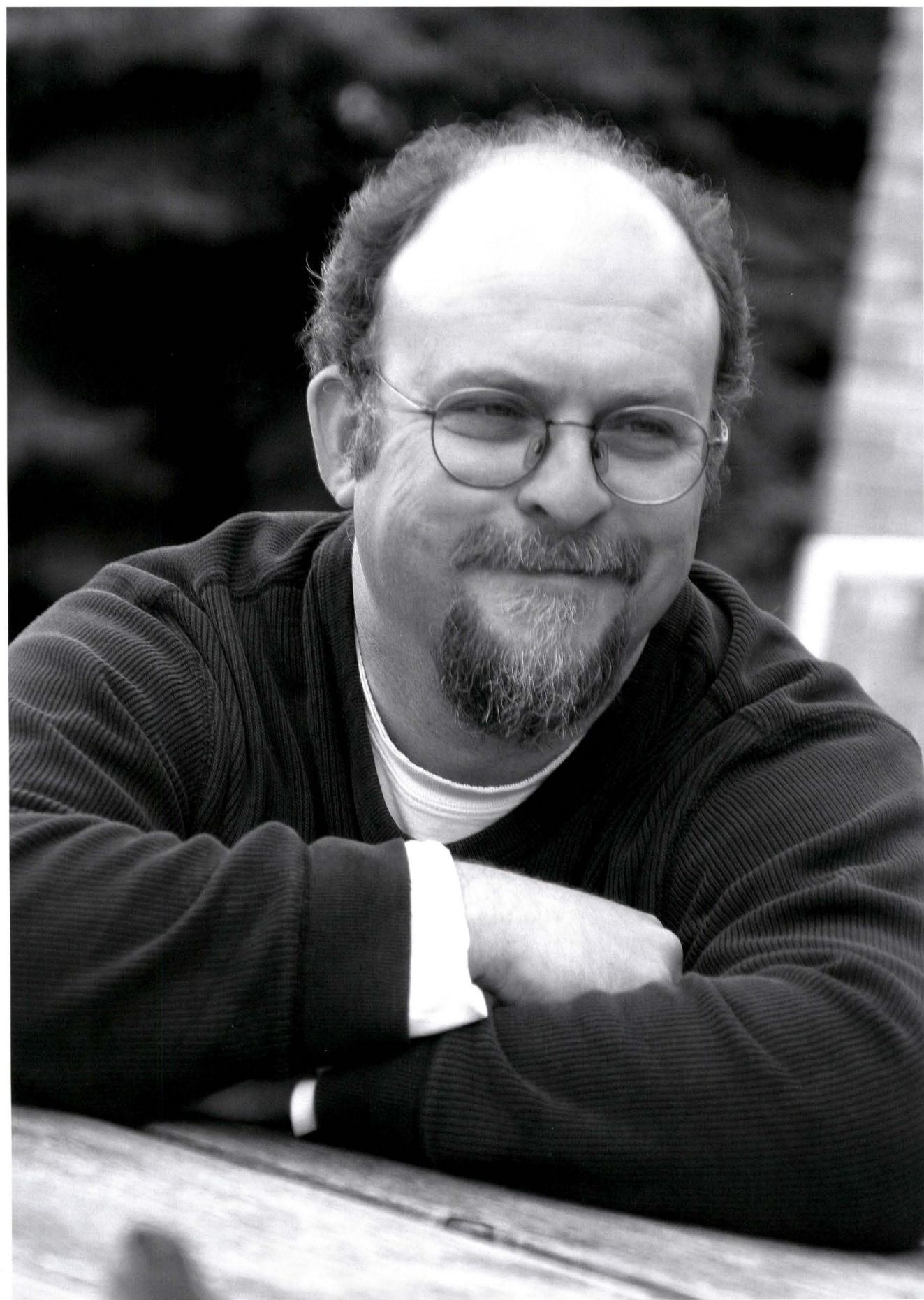
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THE INSIDE-OUT POET

With Drift, his third collection, Kevin Connolly continues to hone his complex intellect, biting wit, and sense of the absurd.

BY RACHEL PULFER

"Gosh, it's warm up here." It's a Thursday night in early April, and Kevin Connolly has just rushed the stage. He peers out at the crowd, half amused, half ill-at-ease; you'd almost think he's surprised to be here, in this trendy downtown bar, in front of all these people with artfully messy hair, threadbare cords, the odd powder-blue cardigan.

Clad in basic jeans and windbreaker, with a genial, open face, glasses, and small goatee, Connolly could easily be mistaken for your average sports-stats-readin' guy's guy around town. But Kevin Connolly is a poet, and this book launch is where he's meant to be. He's about to read from *Drift*—his third collection—to a packed crowd of poetry fans, and minor stage anxiety aside, he's clearly eager to get on with it.

He's the second of three readers, and he starts off in a rush of self-deprecation. He doesn't know how he's ever going to follow Act 1, he doesn't want to take up too much of the audience's time before Act 3, and he's gotta spend at least a couple of minutes thanking House of Anansi Press and all the people who helped bring the latest book of Connolly poems to light.

"These people have allowed me to be serious about being whimsical," he says, smiling, "so I am going to read you a poem based on a typo. The aim is to catch the typo halfway through." And he's away, reading from "Calmnesses," a poem that starts out as a meditation on quiet reveries (pluralized), then spins "calmnesses" into "camelnesses," a joke about camels, and ends with a send-up of the act of reading such a poem in the first place. "Think of a hump, in the middle of a desert," he intones gleefully, "with no riddles—not even Nelson Riddle / whose name itself puts the lie back in likeness, / and as you're no doubt sick of hearing, / I've disliked ourselves for some time now."

Kevin Connolly is an inside-out poet.

Somewhere in there is a highly complex intellect, with a lyrical ear, a keen sense of the absurd, and a biting wit.

That guy is kept strictly within, however, expressing himself through reverse-order stanzas, contradictory lyrics, and surreal juxtapositions of images that challenge their audience to even try and make sense of them. On reading *Drift*, your average reader will be hard-pressed to figure out who, or where, Connolly the poet is, exactly—floating somewhere between a variety of moons (pizza-faced; pale); behind the occasional boarded-up corner store; on a meandering drive-by through sprawl; meditating on the words "tennis," "lake," and "Napoleon"; or describing the "manicured hairpiece" that is his suburban lawn; with a dollop of persona-driven free-form sonnets thrown in for good measure. "It's almost anti-poetry," says Stuart Ross, Connolly's friend and a fellow writer. "It's a real slap in the face to those people who take their poetry incredibly seriously." Ken Babstock, the poet (and the editor of *Drift*), concurs: "He's constantly undercutting his own intelligence. He's interested in what the mind does when it is having fun."

"I like being evasive," admits Connolly, a few days before, during an interview at a determinedly unpretentious coffee shop near Danforth and Coxwell. "Almost like writing backward. The imagery of the poem is upfront and the narrative is something you have to dig a little bit more to put together. That's... my basic style."

At forty-three, with three challenging collections under his belt, Connolly might be considered by a callow reader to be an outsider to Canadian poetry. Said reader could be forgiven for thinking that Connolly's habit of sending up poetry, turning it inside out for the sake of what some call unnerving radiance, and others purposeful absurdity, might have something to do with keeping him on the poetry world's back burner.

But that reader would be wrong. Connolly is the most generous-minded of writers, both literary enthusiast and idealist. This is a man so committed to letters, he has spent a good chunk of his life publishing and promoting other people's work. From the fall of 1985, shortly after completing his undergraduate degree in English and creative writing at York University, in Toronto, to the spring of 1994, Connolly published *What!*, a magazine of Canadian and international writing. He and Jason Sherman, his friend and co-editor (now an award-winning playwright), were fiercely committed to quality, and relied on the kindness of friends as contributors, the odd grant, and their own finances to keep the magazine afloat.

In fact, it could be argued that for the first stretch of his career, Connolly, in publishing *What!* (and a series of chapbooks under the name Pink Dog), put personal literary ambitions aside to give fellow Canadian writers his own special brand of C.P.R. He was yanking them away from backwoods musings about the inspirational potential of CBC Radio, or drowning maidens in lakes as a metaphor for Canadian culture, and toward the gleam of the Coke machine and the shock of the new—toward a more urbane, internationally minded and entirely contemporary sensibility.

That Connolly is now publishing his third book of poetry, and that it is a poetry so fresh, so surreal, and, on occasion, so powerful (to quote the *Globe and Mail* columnist Lynn Crosbie: "No one else writes remotely like him"), is something to be celebrated, especially given a measure of witheringly acute self-mockery that would cut a lesser writer off at the first line—or the knees.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Connolly didn't start out wanting to be a writer. "I grew up in Maple, just north of here," he explains. "A small town: fifteen-hundred people, feed mill on the corner, candy shop on the other side,

surrounded by lots of fields." Connolly was what he calls a "nature nerd"; he collected bugs and butterflies "until I realized that was a creepy occupation. I wanted to be a zoologist—but of course my way of connecting to nature was putting it in a jar and poisoning it and killing it." A few clues hinted where his future might lead. His mother loved poetry and read to her three children regularly (Connolly reckons she was impatient to have her kids grow up so she could have an intelligent conversation with them). There was enough poetry lying around that it was definitely something he considered "worthy and grand." And also, Connolly was, self-described, "a pompous little kid," reading "like crazy. The whole point for me when I was ten years old was to carry the largest book around."

Almost on cue, Connolly suffered the standard junior-high treatment meted out to cocksure nerdy types. Determined to avoid an equivalent scenario in high school, he sent himself up instead. "I became one of the troublemakers sitting at the back; I was the class clown. But I never pushed it to the point where I got bad grades," he says. He was "bored silly" by Grade 13, started at London's University of Western Ontario, in English and political science, then switched to English and creative writing at York. "There were people I met at York—Lynn Crosbie, Stuart Ross, Jason Sherman, who were a real inspiration to me," he explains. "That's probably the line by which I made my way to becoming a writer."

Connolly started working at York's student newspaper, *Excalibur*, along with Ross and Sherman. He also put together a "really horrible" portfolio of poetry and gave it to the head of the creative writing program, Don Coles. "Somehow he let me in, so if anybody saw any ability in me back then, it was probably him," Connolly says. After completing his undergraduate degree, Connolly moved in with Sherman into "the worst apartment in Toronto," on Carlaw Avenue. The inaugural issue of *What!*, published in October, 1985, was just around the corner.

Connolly and Sherman had decided that what Canadian literature really needed was a feisty new magazine to shake things up. "We were young, full of beans—full of ourselves, really. We



Connolly, circa 1988.

liked the idea of taking what would be primarily a literary magazine and publishing it as a free paper—sticking it under people's noses rather than on the back rack of a bookstore," he says. Canadian writers obviously read international writers, so putting Canadian writing into an international context was, in Connolly's view, more reflective of Canadian reality than, say, myopically focusing on the bushwhacking antecedents of Susanna Moodie.

After putting out a handful of issues at their own expense, Connolly and Sherman applied for government funding—and discovered the merry world of Canadian grants, literary-periodical style. Because the magazine was free, eligibility rules at the time meant their ability to obtain major funding was limited. However, putting *What!* on newsstands and charging a cover price meant it was not as accessible as initially envisioned. "We ended up asking a couple of bucks," Connolly says, "subsidizing readers that way—we were mindful of the fact that if you have a local magazine, people aren't going to buy it if they can buy the *New Yorker* for half the price."

What! published poetry by writers such as Walid Bitar, interviews with everyone from the U.S. poet James Tate to the British novelist A. S. Byatt, and short prose from unknowns who, in the editors' view, deserved more attention than they were getting from the CanLit establishment. Above all, the magazine took writing seriously. Despite, or perhaps because of this, Connolly and Sherman were never really able to sustain it

financially; the magazine published its last issue in early 1994. "I was almost bankrupt," Connolly recalls. "I remember that very clearly. Then I started working at *This Magazine*—for free. Nice move there. When I really ran out of money, I worked at *Eye* magazine."

In between jobs, Connolly started focusing more seriously on his own writing. In 1995, he published his first collection of poetry, *Asphalt Cigar*, with Coach House Press. Although released to the loud silence that often accompanies such efforts, the book eventually—a year and a half later—garnered a good review in *Books in Canada* and a nomination for the Gerald Lampert Memorial Award, for the best first book of poetry.

One of *Asphalt Cigar's* highlights was based on a series of slides of the nineteen-eighties supermodel Monika Schnarre that Connolly stumbled across one day. The resulting series of poems, "A Supermodel's Story," was an extended meditation on late-twentieth-century obsessions: style, the collusion between speed and beauty, and the emptiness inherent to a society that gives that quality too much weight. For example, in "Chapter Three: Discourse on Beauty," Connolly recounts Monika's claim that she was ugly at school, taller and more awkward than other girls. He also describes one boy who did like her, Bobby Thornton, he of "terrible acne and huge feet"—someone distinctly under the radar of Canada's future gift to international fashion. Monika forgot all about Bobby, writes Connolly. She maintained her ugly-duckling status to the end. The result is a brilliant send-up of the standard celebrity interview—and the culture that gave us the deification of the supermodel.

Stung by the slow and indifferent reaction to *Asphalt Cigar*, financially still out of pocket from *What!*, and suffering a mild case of writers' block, Connolly began his stint at the Toronto weekly *Eye*. Bill Reynolds, *Eye's* editor at the time, was trying to make the magazine more serious, while retaining its humour. He asked Connolly to review books, gave him a column, Poethead, with a mandate to write about poetry in a popular voice, and eventually hired him on full-time as the arts editor. "He was most interested in spotlighting really interesting unknowns," Reynolds recalls. "People who were taking chances. He wanted to

make sure we were covering more than just mainstream writers and poets."

It is from Connolly's journalism career that he may have derived some of his clearest—some reviewers would argue his strongest—work. Toward the end of his time at *Eye*, he began writing poems again, including one long sequence that used material from an actual event, a 1990 fire that destroyed a New York nightclub, as its basis. The result was *Happyland*, a more surrealist collection topped off with a documentary poem in nine sections.

Published in 2002, *Happyland* elicited a strong critical reaction. Ken Babstock gave the book a glowing review in the *Globe*. To Babstock, the collection was "unbridled invention," the title poem a real achievement. Other reviewers' comments were less kind. Christopher Doda, writing in *Arc*, described the majority of Connolly's poems as meandering "from idea to idea . . . without much indication of what holds his thoughts together." The title sequence, however, he felt was "an excellent example of the documentary poem that stands high above the earlier lyrics." Doda's review ended with a prediction that this poem would "set the bar" for Connolly's future work.

Connolly admits he likes the clarity of "Happyland" but finds criticism that elevates it at the expense of his other poetry is "kind of like, oh, the abstract painter showing he can draw." He would rather be considered in light of what he is attempting to do as a whole. "My default mode is the more complicated, more evasive style, and that's the work I am most proud of, and most enjoy writing." He's referring to work like *Drift's* "Harmless Rituals," which features, variously, a walk through the woods ("Harmless rituals of summer: / aeronautical canopy of trees / jeered by passing clouds"); a hapless immigrant worker polluting the ground, and quite possibly himself ("Sven, / who speaks the language / but has a weak grasp on / the principles of tanning: / the cramped unsanitary huts, / the toxic runoff into the watershed"); and suddenly discovering Grandma in his pocket ("sharing space with a / bus token and a forgotten / anti-histamine"), reminding him to "Watch the ducks," who see everything. Or perhaps, most poignantly, the title poem, "Drift," where Connolly muses on "the village of tomorrow undone / almost by

accident, a loose coalition / of strip malls and strip malls and strip / malls."

This is Connolly's edge city, perhaps his hometown of Maple, now a sprawling bedroom community. It's his paean to the "lovely glorious emptiness of suburbia," the endless sameness that makes up so much of North Americans' mental picture of home. "Drift," says Connolly, was inspired by a Nestor Kruger painting of a suburban Don Mills, Ontario, bungalow, stretched out so it "looked like this wall of interference, defamiliarizing something that had all kinds of familiar associations." The poem, he says, is about the "familiarity of surface, and yet the lack of any kind of affect at the same time," a theme that he returns to constantly in this collection. "We now live in this kind of virtual reality," he explains, "in which we are constantly bombarded by surfaces—we think we experienced the Iraq war, for example, but 'we' didn't actually experience the Iraq war, only on a virtual level. More and more, our understanding of reality is made up by surfaces."

Does this work in poetry? Is it enough to critique surface with surface, to jar images arbitrarily, the way they jar in our day-to-day consumption of mediated reality? Perhaps. But with this latest work, critics will continue to be hard-pressed to place Connolly. "He doesn't really fit in the Canadian canon," says Crosbie. "That's his strength—and his problem." Babstock agrees: "Mostly he's working in an aesthetic—surrealist, entirely contemporary—that just doesn't happen that often in this country. There's a nowness to his work that is gorgeous—and hard for some to really understand."

Connolly himself doesn't seem too perturbed. The recipient of a Canada Council grant twice over, he is currently working on his poetry full-time, and his next collection, "an anthology of forty-five distinctly different poetic styles," promises ever greater heights of experimentation. The aim, he says, is to either disprove the whole idea of poetic voice, "or prove it, I don't care. The way to keep yourself honest is to make fun of yourself and have fun with what you are doing. For if you aren't having fun, then really, what's the point?" ▽

Drift is now available from Anansi. Rachel Pulfer lives in Trinity Bellwoods. She is a writer and editor with occasional—if swiftly squashed—literary aspirations.

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VISIT OFTEN FOR
OCCASIONAL EXCLUSIVE
CONTENT

HABITAT

BY DANIELLE EGAN

Quarla is bitter-tasting and grisly. Maybe wild beluga tastes better than the ones born in captivity, like free-range chickens and wild salmon. I go back to the barbecue pit and line up for seconds anyway. It's not about taste or hunger anymore because packages of food started parachuting down from the sky an hour or so after we put Quarla on the spit. But if we abandon her now, everything will be lost. Nobody speaks, and the only sounds are of laboured chewing and swallowing and the odd reflex gagging as everyone tucks into the meat with grim but orderly determination. Actually, eating the beluga seems like the sanest thing we've done the past four weeks, maybe in our whole miserable, cruel lives.

We were in total denial of our misery in those early days, so life was pretty great. Everyone was showing up at work but mostly to trade information about the terrorist attacks in Washington and L.A. and to watch CNN on the boardroom's big-screen TV. The upper managers seemed to loosen up a bit around the water coolers and even conversations about the weather revealed intimate things. By about 2 P.M. most people cleared out for the beach or to drink at sidewalk cafés or take advantage of the amazing store sales. Of course, after the incident at Banana Republic, which was called a riot but was really very orderly, with people in capri pants and pastel tank tops swapping sizes and compliments or advice, retailers started closing and independent kiosks appeared, selling second-hand clothes, massages, henna tattoos, ceramics, haircuts, and excellent homemade food. With the outrageous gas prices, everyone, even the police, took to walking and biking. Some people walked around on stilts, creating a summer festival feel; it was incredible how many people owned stilts.

Everyone got more sleep and more leisure time and realized this was the way they wanted to live. We had all this

time to get to know each other, along with some of the tourists staying on at the hotels, taking advantage of the discounts. I made lots of new friends at my apartment because there were never any awkward silences in the elevator and everyone got right to the important stuff. One was this very cute guy named George, who lived on the twenty-eighth floor and worked at the aquarium in Stanley Park. Sometimes we'd go up to the roof and talk about the future, and I could see this guy in my future, which was a relief, finally. It seemed like anything was possible and that the crisis in the U.S. could be a great opportunity to alter the way we lived without making too many hard changes. The tenants started meeting in the party room, downstairs, and began work on solar-powered blueprints and a vegetable and herb garden. By the time Abdul, the building manager, disappeared, the complex was running better than ever.

One Monday, four water trucks in the downtown core were hijacked at gunpoint, so the water-cooler water ran out. The New York Stock Exchange closed down the next day and none of the upper managers or Accounting Department staffers showed up for work that morning. They had all left polite messages on their voice mail that they were on summer vacation, or forwarded their phones to Gertrude, the receptionist. Gertrude forwarded her phone to the conference room where we all hung out watching NBC and CNN broadcasting from their new secure locations. Some of the commuters decided to move into the building and took over the corner offices, while others stayed at home, calling in the occasional news of lootings at Costco and Ikea. That Friday, all the downtown banks I passed on the walk to work were boarded up, with armed guards stationed in front. There were no paycheques anyway. Harold, from the I.T. department, followed me into the women's washroom and said,

"Look, my brother's got a sailboat at False Creek. We're heading up the coast tonight. Come with me."

"You're so very too late," I thought, but I told him I had to go to a birthday party tomorrow at the aquarium for the baby beluga whale.

He looked at me like I was nuts and said, "But I'll take care of you."

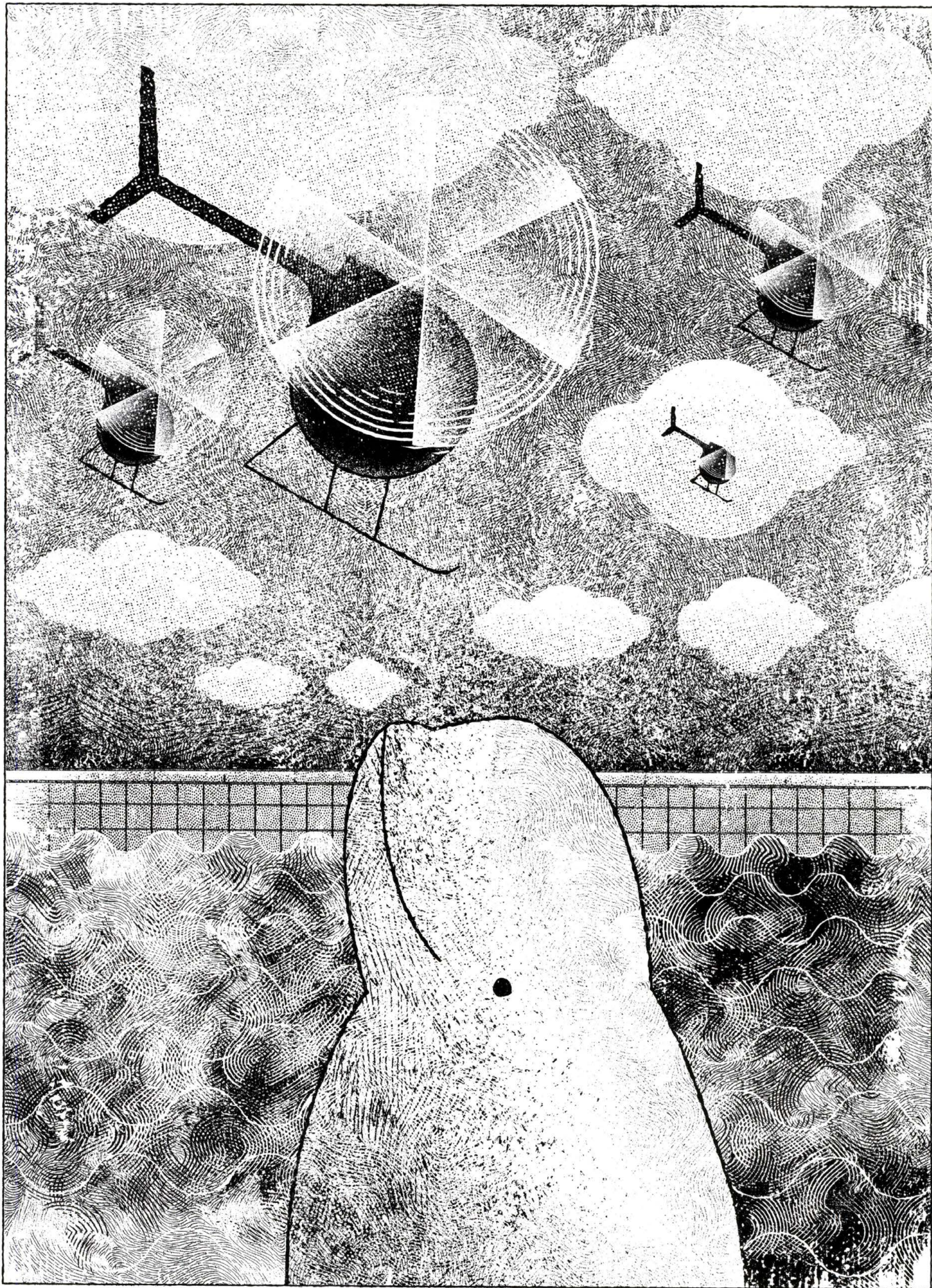
I couldn't believe it, thinking, "You could have stayed the night that time I told you those things I never thought I'd tell anyone. But no, you couldn't get away fast enough could you?" I said, "No. I'm staying here."

"You're not going to be safe here," he said, and when I laughed he said, "Fuck you then," and marched off with the three new iMac laptops, and all sorts of computer cables round his neck.

Everyone made a point of leaving with something from the office, and people were fighting over the stupidest things in the storage room, like the overhead projectors, as if there'd be an urgent need to put graphs and pie charts up on walls. Rick and Cam, from Marketing, even fought over the smelly old company mascot. Rick was wearing the big fuzzy bear head, and Cam tried to knock it off him, so Rick kicked Cam in the groin and made a run for it. It didn't make any sense until I saw footage of him later on TV attempting to rob a store in Chinatown. Because he wore the big head, his peripheral vision was obstructed, so he didn't see the baseball bat coming.

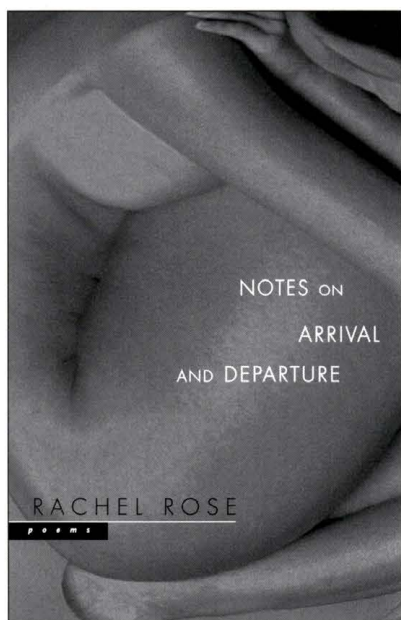
That fight really got everyone riled up, and we basically pillaged the storage room. I got a choice selection of Post-it notes and three giant jars of Coffee-mate.

The air on the streets was thick with a new kind of tension. There was a huge lineup in front of Safeway, and only mothers with screaming babies were being let inside, because the store couldn't keep up with food rations. I beelined home, thinking, "T.G.I.F.," and then, "How stupid. It doesn't matter



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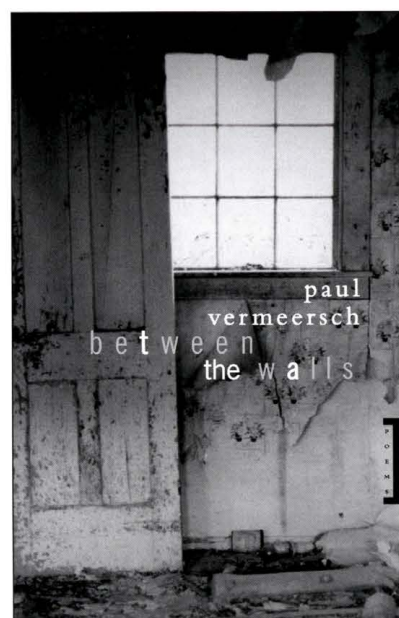
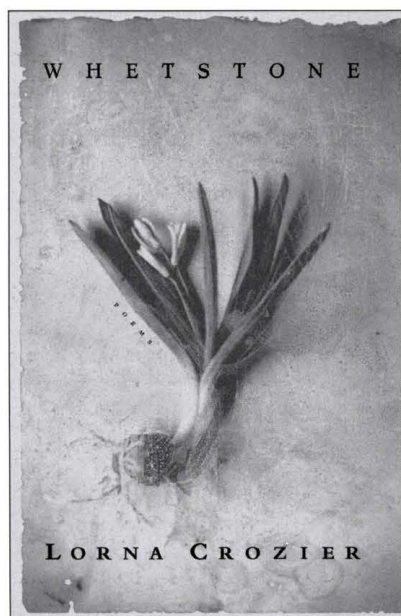
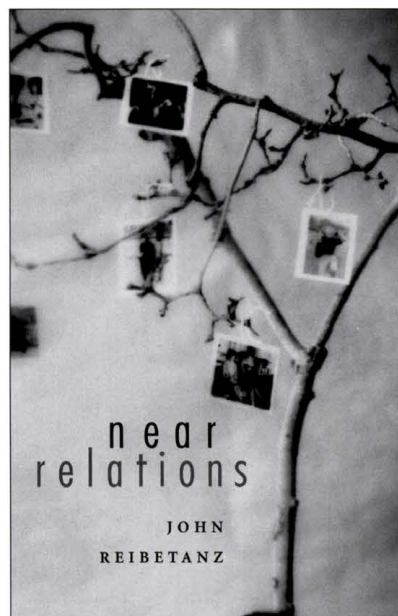
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SOME KIND OF MAN

Over time, his chin doubled, his face fattened,
his every word wheezed its way out.
He found himself in lurid settings—
throttling stock villains while
drugged Janet Leigh lay nearby,
innocent as a motel bible
(even then, she knew her niche).

Earlier, he'd held a god's office,
presiding over three famous minutes
of film, a single tracking shot
that elaborated the limits of his universe:
parked car, street, explosion—
but no more such ambitions.

By the end, he struggled merely to picture
the shape and make of a cane
that might steady his hobbled thoughts,
and wanted very badly to slap the Mexican clean
off Charlton Heston's bronzed face.
Marlene assessed a mess, honey.

Washing bloody hands in water
choked with garbage, Orson accepted irony.
Made popular his art. He longed, finally,
to sit down to a hot bowl of chili,
set lovingly before him by his dreamed-of gypsy.

—JASON GURIEL

now." At the apartment, people were hanging around the pool, swimming and barbecuing. Larry had lucked into three cases of frozen hamburgers. He had a black eye and a bloody lip, but nobody pushed him for more information. Shona told us the border had been closed because thousands of Americans were trying to get into Canada. There'd been more riots the previous night in Seattle and all over the States.

I ate meat for the first time in five years and had a romantic candlelit night with George. There were flecks of green in his brown eyes, and I thought, "Yes, this is the one." I said, "I love you," and felt terrified. When he didn't say anything back, I wanted to just disappear. He said it later while we were having sex, but it was like he was talking right through me to someone else he was angry at for hurting him. At least it was something, though, and in the morning we held hands walking to the beluga birthday

party. It was a beautiful blue-sky day, but, with the black helicopters slicing through it all over the place, ominous.

Animal-rights protesters were picketing in front of the aquarium. A couple yelled and spat at the ground in front of us as we went in. But inside it was nice and cool; there were people making balloon animals for the kids, and the belugas, with their big smiley heads, looked so happy and curious.

As the cake was being sliced, the power went out, and some people immediately got kind of hysterical, packing their kids into strollers and rushing for the exits. The generator kicked in and I went with George and some staff people to the admin offices to check out the TV and the Internet. The servers were down but what we saw on TV was unbelievable. CBC showed pockets of Toronto on fire, standoffs between farmers and suburbanites in the Prairies, and in Vancouver, angry demonstrators

burning shapeless effigies in front of banks. Then the footage of Rick in the bear head. I couldn't help thinking there'd be trouble at the office come Monday, and then, "Stupid, there will be no Monday like that anymore." I felt kind of euphoric. They interviewed the guy who ran the kayak school down at the beach, who'd been beaten with his own paddles by a group of women posing as sunscreen merchants. The women stole his kayaks and paddled off westward; you could still see them as dark splotches heading north on the Strait of Georgia. The strangest thing about the footage was that there were also people lying in the sun and kids swimming in the bay, just like every Saturday. But there was nothing normal about the footage from the States, where tanks had taken over the streets and Arabs were being hauled away to who knows where.

The vet said we should turn off the TV because we only had about twenty hours on the generator. "That's it. After that the Arctic habitat will start warming up," she said. So staff started discussing what to do about the belugas, dolphins, otters, and sea lions. Their food supplies in the two seven-tonne freezers wouldn't last long; the belugas alone ate more than fifty kilograms of food per day. How were they going to feed over sixty thousand species of fish, birds, reptiles, and mammals?

Outside, the protesters were yelling, "Free the whales!" and "No whales in captivity!" A security guy said they were having trouble holding the protesters back, so the aquarium director ordered a bunch of tranquilizer guns loaded up and guards were stationed around the perimeter of the aquarium. By dusk, ten or so protesters had been shot. A few were shot more than once, after waking up and groggily advancing again, looking like brain-eating zombies. George and a few other guys organized a mission to see what was happening outside and, if necessary, find an evacuation boat. They took a couple of tranquilizer guns and headed for the back entrance. I wanted to go, too, but George said I'd be too much of a burden. He shrugged my hand off his shoulder and didn't even look back. Anyway, I was stationed at the entrance to the Amazon rainforest to make sure none of the turtles wandered out. It was a tough job because the only thing keeping them in was the

temperature and, with the air conditioners turned off in the other areas, the whole place was starting to heat up. But the director was adamant about maintaining normalcy and keeping the facility functioning as usual.

Even the tree sloth moved slower than usual up in the tree.

George didn't come back that night. I thought about Harold, from I.T., and wondered if I'd made a big mistake and would never find anybody to love. I wanted to at least go to my apartment for a while, but the three people that had left over the past few hours had been held hostage by the most militant protesters, who wanted the whales released *immediately*. They had even broken a man's finger, but the aquarium staff wasn't budging for anything. Someone called the Fisheries Department but, naturally, didn't get anyone on the phone. Plus, of course, what would all these people do without the belugas? Their whole careers depended on those whales.

I started getting impatient keeping the turtles and tortoises. The tree sloth stared down at me noncommittally, but I felt it must be judging me. We ate

shrimp and crab for dinner. It tasted fine at first, but I developed terrible cramps later. On my break, I went to the underground viewing area of the beluga habitat and watched the whales. Mostly they were hovering at the bottom of the pool and not moving much. An animal trainer named Trudy said the whales were stressed out and that their heartbeats on the monitor were too high.

"Maybe we should try to get them to the bay," I said.

"Then what?" she snapped back at me. "They wouldn't know what to do out there in the wild."

So I didn't say anything, just sat quietly watching the belugas, and their heartbeats on the monitors, and feeling terribly sorry for them with nowhere to go. I wondered if they could sense the sea water surrounding them, sense that it was so close but impossibly far away.

"You know, belugas have higher I.Q.'s than us," said Trudy in a quiet, normal voice. She told me about a beluga named Minsky who beat a Russian chess master in less than an hour.

I told her that there used to be sloths that lived on the ground but they didn't

survive. Only the tree sloths survived. I wondered about our chances of survival with our little round human brains. Then, I wondered, "What is *our* natural habitat? What kind of place would be designed for us in captivity?" Quarla, the sixteen-year-old who lost her baby two years ago, came swimming up to the glass, smiling calmly, as if to say, "It will be O.K. We'll all be O.K."

By morning there were over five hundred people outside protesting. The situation everywhere had deteriorated to the point you'd have thought the protesters would have lost interest in freeing the belugas. But the eruption of chaos and fires in the city had sent more people into the park, and it seemed like they all enjoyed having something to scream about. One guy from George's team came back in shock and covered in blood. The vet examined him and soon rumours started circulating that he'd been raped either by gangs of rogue downtown security guards or by vigilante small business owners. That's when it really set in that we were trapped here. Finally some police showed up and got the hostages outside



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THE ORIGIN OF THE SPECIES

She knew early on
that invisible hands moved
her little people on the map
of larger and smaller countries
born of her sex forms of
a world without end
for girl and boy
growing limbs in her belly.

Taught to play with
her many selves she waited
for the red-hot fireman
who once fed the crescendo
of tenderness now tying
her to the flaming heart
of man eternal.

—BEATRIZ HAUSNER

released. Then they pepper-sprayed the protesters for a while and got them backed off enough so they could take turns dining on the last of the crab. They agreed to keep two cops at the aquarium and argued amongst themselves about who'd stay. Eventually, they agreed to take shifts. It was good having some real guns on the premises because our animal tranquilizer supplies were dwindling.

There was nothing I could do about keeping the butterflies in the Amazon rainforest, and every time the main doors were opened, dozens of butterflies would escape and work up the protesters. People from the S.P.C.A., Greenpeace, PETA, and the W.W.F. were waving banners and handing out Frisbees and T-shirts that said things like "WANTED: TIGERS IN THE WILD." Some of us started saying that the protesters were right and we should just free the belugas—what else did we have to do? We could make huge slings and fix them to a flatbed truck if we could find one. But we were afraid to get too vocal because the director had the security guards, trainers, and P.R. people on her side and they'd already turfed a couple of dissenters who'd been used as human shields against the pepper spray.

We ate barbecued snakes and turtles for dinner and the smell must have travelled because by nightfall thousands of

people had joined the mob out front. The R.C.M.P. moved in and, to the director's shock, they started rationing out food and fresh water to the mobs. Some people dropped their banners to tuck into the frog legs and octopus, while others started shouting slogans like "Meat is murder" and "Eat the rich." So, the R.C.M.P. began letting mothers and children into the aquarium. A nursery was set up in Clownfish Cove and the children got to learn all about the fish that would eventually be eaten. They also wanted to see beluga and dolphin shows, but the trainers drew the line at that because the Arctic tank was way too warm. The poor belugas were so stressed that their heart rates were constantly elevated, but it was hard to appreciate their distress, what with the huge grins on their faces.

Overnight, Alohaq, the dominant male in the dolphin tank, went berserk. He started ramming into the other dolphins and nipping at them. Even after he'd been shot with a tranquilizer, he continued ramming into everything, finally knocking himself out. He was in such bad shape the vets decided to put him out of his misery. So we had lots of new meat, but when the rations were sent out to the mobs, a dozen or so militant animal-rights protesters went crazy and started attacking people with their picket signs and sets of abandoned stilts. One

protester was killed by a rubber bullet.

Inside, things also took a turn for the worse. Nobody was getting along or doing their jobs, and assaults became pretty common after the fresh water supply ran out. I spent most of my time in the trees with the tree sloth. I'd feed him a few bits of whatever meat was on the menu. Tree sloths are vegetarians by nature, but I was determined some species on my watch survive. Since their metabolisms are so slow, they really don't need to eat much anyway. We could have avoided so many mistakes just by slowing down and climbing trees once in a while.

"I love you," I whispered to the sloth. It stared back, unblinking, and it wasn't scary.

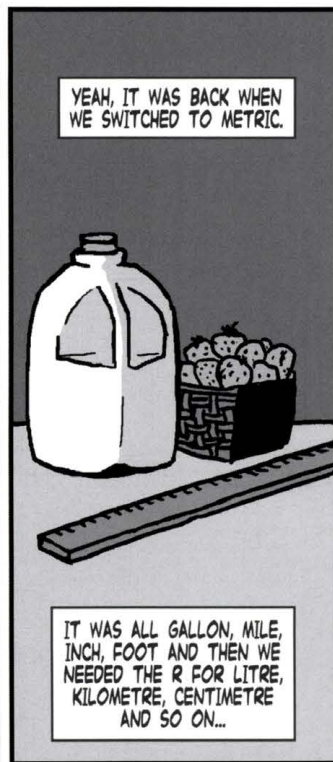
"The belugas are plotting against us," Trudy whispered to me late one night while we watched them from the underground observatory. True, they'd become more vocal since the power went out, but these were such melancholy sounds, I couldn't believe it. She couldn't possibly know what they were saying, could she? The tank was very murky, so the belugas mostly stayed above water, turned away as if they couldn't stand looking at us, couldn't care less what we were doing. We'd destroyed their innate curiosity, which never caused harm, unlike ours, which made terrible things happen.

"They're planning something. Just you wait," whispered Trudy. She looked really rough, crazy, hadn't slept in days. "Look at those big smug faces."

I wanted to get away badly. I could smell and sense the place I belonged in so sharply that it made my heart ache and my throat burn. Somewhere free but impossible.

The next morning, Trudy's body was found floating in the beluga pool. People were surprised the whales hadn't eaten her. But Trudy's body was perfectly intact. The marine biologist wondered if maybe she'd fallen in the pool and one of the belugas had pinned her to the bottom of the tank. Maybe Trudy just drowned from the panic, but the belugas did seem very suspicious all of a sudden, with their sideways glances and permanent grins. ▽

*Danielle Egan lives in Vancouver. Her fiction has appeared in *Maisonneuve* and she has written articles for *This*, *Jane*, *Bust*, and *Salon*. She is currently finishing a novel.*





JAPAN HAS SOME WEIRD TRENDS.

JAPAN? WHAT ABOUT THE STATES?



SURE, BAGGY JEANS HANGING OFF YOUR ASS WAS STYLE OVER FUNCTIONALITY. THEY WANTED TO IMITATE INMATES WITH THE WRONG-SIZE PANTS.



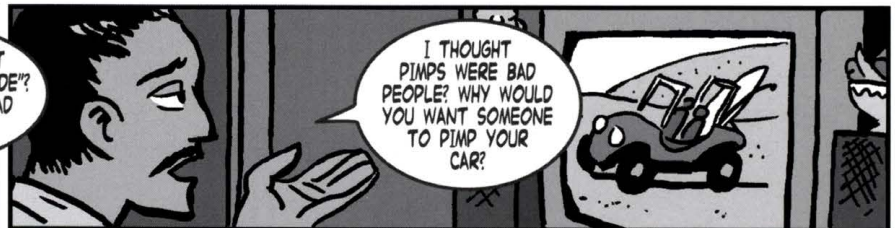
BUT I DIDN'T THINK THEY'D TAKE IT AS FAR AS TYING THEIR SHOELACES TOGETHER.

GOTTA SHOW SOLIDARITY WITH THE BROTHERS IN LOCK DOWN, EVEN IF YOU CAN'T RUN FROM THE COPS ANYMORE



YEAH, THEY REALLY GLAMOURIZE THE GANGSTA DOWN THERE.

REMEMBER THAT SHOW "PIMP MY RIDE"? ONE TIME MY DAD WAS LIKE...



I THOUGHT PIMPS WERE BAD PEOPLE? WHY WOULD YOU WANT SOMEONE TO PIMP YOUR CAR?



HE TOTALLY CAN'T WRAP HIS HEAD AROUND THE NEW SLANG. LIKE IF I SAID "WOW, THAT'S TOTALLY RAPIST," HE WOULDN'T GET IT.



IT STARTED WITH KOBE AND IT JUST BECAME COOL.

YOU MEAN "IT JUST BECAME TOTALLY RAPE."

WHATEVER.



THAT "RAPE MY RIDE" SHOW WAS ACTUALLY BETTER THAN "PIMP MY RIDE", THOUGH. THEY DIDN'T JUST THROW A 22 INCH TV IN EVERY CAR.



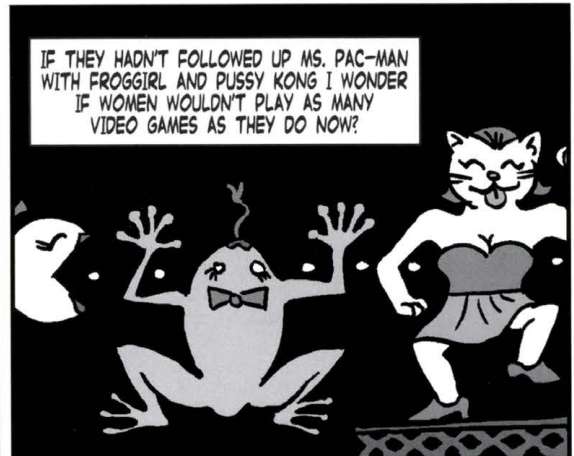
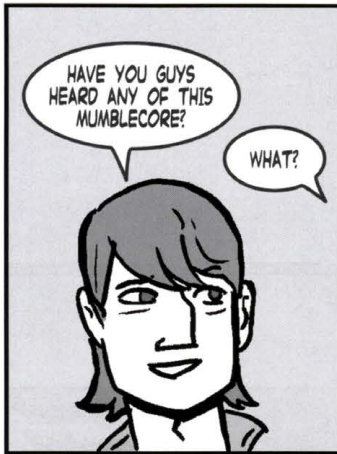
22 INCHES? SEE, METRIC SUCKS. ALL WE GOT WAS THE R.

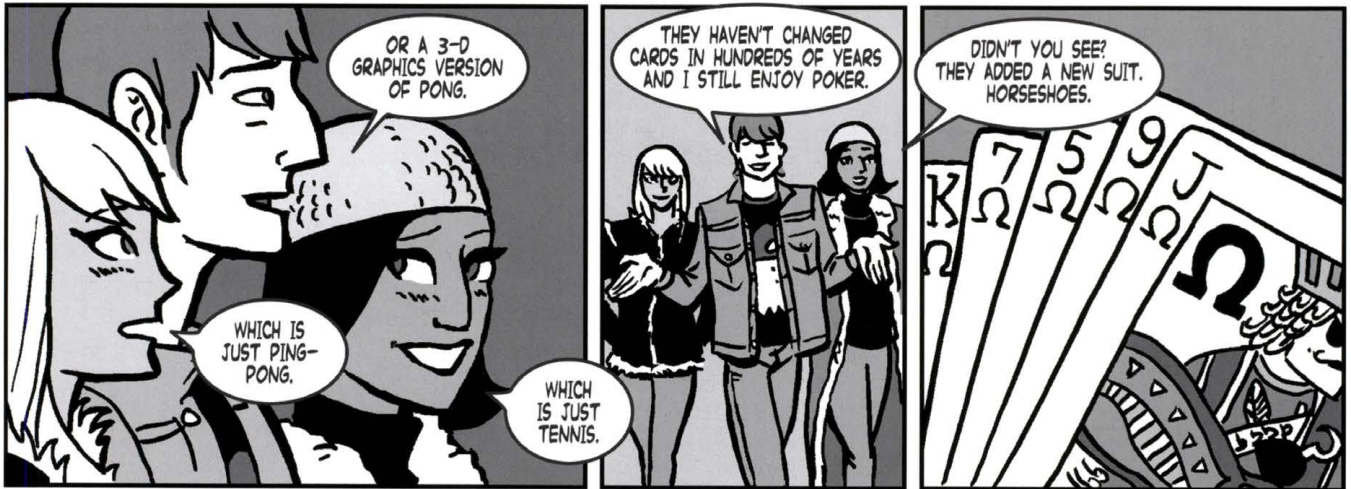
WELL, YOU CAN'T TELL PEOPLE WHAT'S GOING TO BE USEFUL AND POPULAR.



WHO KNEW PEOPLE WOULD SWITCH FROM GIVING THE MIDDLE FINGER TO GIVING THE RING FINGER?

MIDDLE FINGER WAS SO 1900S.





NEAR MINT

An excerpt from Showbiz.

BY JASON ANDERSON

“Hey, Matty.” He didn’t look up. He was sitting at the counter, his attention entirely focused on the crossword puzzle. He never said hello. When he did look up, it was usually to gaze at the consoling face of ageless country-music belle Evangeline Reynolds on the poster across from him. She was a popular figure for crushes among men of his generation and disposition.

In any case, Matty didn’t look up, so I took my CDs to Matty’s Music Mart’s friendlier employee, J.C. He stood near the cash register, with a pricing gun, going through a stack of discs. Mean, throbbing bass tones and clattery percussion emanated from his headphones. I stood in front of him. I thought, “Why pretend he can hear me?”

“I have some to sell.”

He nodded off beat.

I put my discs on the counter. “I’m gonna look around.”

J.C. nodded again.

Slightly wheezy from my brisk walk through the April drizzle, I inhaled deeply. There was panoply of familiar store smells: the faint remnants of yesterday’s after-hours cigarettes, the aroma of moist industrial carpet, the tomatoey tang of microwaved pasta and takeout pizza. In every second-hand record store, you can count on finding the scent of middle-aged men who live alone (a combination of B.O. and burnt nutmeg) and a sharper whiff of cat piss. Then, of course, there was the mustiness that emanates from five hundred thousand LPs, the store’s holdings according to the sandwich board on the sidewalk. Individual records rarely smelled of anything. I remember a few that literally stunk: a Captain Elephantiasis album drenched in Old Spice, a Room Service sleeve as rank as a vomitorium, a green-vinyl Edward Townes single that would’ve been valuable had the disc itself not stunk of skunk and boiled cauliflower. After touching it, I asked Matty if there was somewhere I could wash my hands. “This ain’t a bus station,” he said.

Matty’s holdings were so enormous and overwhelming, I had to be strategic about my browsing, lest I got caught in the store for the rest of the day and come out too poor for beer. I’d already investigated certain sub-genres: Welsh punk rock, East German psychedelia, Polynesian reggae, outlaw country ballads. My most beloved find in the latter category was *Devil Woman with Angel Eyes*, by Freddy Capp and the Six Pack. The back sleeve portrayed the scantily clad devil woman about to be cornered, in a hillbilly gangbang fantasy, by Capp’s drooling posse.

A few months before, I’d also found the record that had made me move to New York—I’d given away my last copy to my ex-girlfriend Linda. The band and the album were called Asphalt Diary. It was recorded in 1975, but I heard it in 1986, when I was thirteen. The singer, John J. Murphy, named himself after a park near Stuyvesant Town. He was a published poet and a committed junkie. Delivered over a musical backing at once elegant and abrasive, Murphy’s lyrics put a romantic spin on New York street life—songs bustled with hippie burnouts, huckster con men, struggling immigrants, and girls half-dead to the world. They often played CBGB in the days before it opened a gift shop. I fantasized about life in the city Murphy portrayed in all its scum-encrusted glory. (It was cleaner by the time I got here.) I wrote despairing free verse about heroin addicts living in the Evergreen Hotel. I bought a brown leather jacket from the Salvation Army but was too shy to wear it outside my bedroom. I practised a scowl. I planned my escape from the genteel suburbia of Fairview, Ontario, a place without street hassle. I never wanted to live on a golf course again.

Another big score was a not-too-beat-up copy of *This Morning Is for You*, the sole recording by Daisy, a sister act from California whose father-manager was convinced the girls would be global pop superstars. They weren’t—the sisters

could barely sing or play. The record was a disastrous flop, but over the next three decades Daisy’s music gained a storied reputation for both its inspired incompetence and its chance moments of beauty and grace. I’d heard a few songs on a college radio show, and I loved them like crazy.

“A mint copy’s worth five hundred dollars,” Matty said when I brought it to the counter. The one he was selling was so messed up with water damage it could’ve belonged to a porpoise. I argued him down from ten dollars to six dollars. The vinyl itself sounded fine on my turntable—those sisters belonged in a world of their own.

I was feeling a little starved for human voices that day, so my category of choice was spoken word and comedy. This trove had already yielded treasures like Lenny Bruce’s ace 1967 LP *Wisenheimer Deluxe* and a double album bearing the imprimatur of the early-sixties skin rag *Boudoir*. The lady on the record cover promised to tell me “the things every man needs to know.” I hadn’t listened to it yet, saving it for a special occasion.

I found Jimmy’s record when it slid out with its neighbour *Jasmine Woody: The Queen of Basin Street Burlesque*. Neither cover had—as I’d initially hoped—nudity. One did have a president. At first, I thought Jimmy’s record must’ve been campaign songs or a compilation of speeches—I had often seen a late-night infomercial for a four-CD set of Cannon’s “greatest oratorical achievements.”

On the cover was a man in a dark suit and a blue tie to match his eyes. He was giving Cannon’s signature double-thumbs-up gesture. He stood before a wooden desk and a U.S. flag in the Oval Office, or, rather, what the Oval Office would look like with balsa-wood furniture, paper rugs, and cardboard walls. Despite the chintz, the picture closely resembled a famous photo that had been on the cover of *Look* in 1961. It was one of the most famous images of Cannon from his early days in office. The imposter here bore a definite resemblance

to the president. Sure, his hair was too dark, his chin too weak, and his features less attractive on the whole, but he had the body language right (the forward tilt, the raised shoulders) and smiled the same brilliant, toothy smile.

Across the top ran the title in the same florid script preferred by this nation's founders. It read: *A Square Peg in the Oval Office*. Underneath the man's shoes (matte black Oxfords, just like Cannon's) was a

The fifteen-dollar tag gave me pause. I took the record up to Matty. "Excuse me." He didn't bother looking up from his crossword. "Uh, can you go any lower on this one?"

He peered up from the paper. "What's that on your face? You get mugged?"

"No. I cut myself."

"Hmph." He took the record from my hands. He ran his hand over the sleeve. "Little scuffed." He slipped out the disc

square. Did Cannon's voice real well, though. Then, after that day . . ." Matty drifted off for a few moments, then snapped back hard. "We took 'em off the shelves and never put 'em back."

"What happened to all those records?"

"Garbage," he growled. "People couldn't get rid of 'em fast enough. Every garage sale had one." He tapped his finger on the record's spine. "But seeing as folks did such a good job of making like Mr.



name: Jimmy Wynn. On the back was a list of titles ("Not on the Official Tour," "The African Ambassadors") and this note:

This album is for fun. Laugh along with Jimmy Wynn and his gang, the Capital Office, as they say some wacky things about some of the greatest people of our time. We hope that this record will be taken in the right spirit—no disrespect is intended. The very fact that the folks we joke about are able to laugh with us and enjoy this record is a big reason why we admire them so. Jimmy's pleased to present the lighter side of life on Capitol Hill. "This country has given me so much in my life, it was time I gave something back," says our patriotic prankster. "I just hope America can make change—all I've got is a twenty."

The Betsey devoted countless column inches to the most minor and most tangential aspects of Cannon's life, from his preference for argyle socks to the ratings of his favourite television shows. Yet I'd never seen any mention of Jimmy Wynn. This record smelled more like a lead for a story than it did like skunk or cauliflower.

and had a look. "Barely played. You're lucky—a first pressing'll go for five hundred dollars." Matty looked past me at Evangeline Reynolds, as if asking for her confirmation. "Fifteen dollars."

"Serious?"

"That's my price."

"The sleeve's pretty rough."

"Sleeve's fine."

"This can't be so rare."

"You got that right. This was a No. 1 record. Sold millions."

"So why's it so expensive?"

Matty stroked his whiskery chin. "Fair question. I remember going through piles of the damn thing when I worked at the record department in a big store on Broadway. Used to keep 'em at the cash register so I didn't have to run around. The same guy put out another record a few months later. This is the first one, I think. When is this? Sixty-one?" He scrutinized the fine print on the back cover. "Nah, '62. Mr. Jimmy Wynn. I used to see him on *The Manny Hudson Show*. Some people thought he was funny. Struck me as a

Jimmy Wynn never existed, his records are almost rarities." He drew the disc closer to his chest and eyed me jealously. "I should be asking twenty dollars."

"How about ten?"

"Twenty-five."

"But the tag only says fifteen."

"That's a goddamn bargain!" he yelled. He looked sternly at me, then the record, then Evangeline's all-forgiving face. He shoved the record in my direction. "It's fifteen dollars! Now get it out of my sight."

I went to the cash register before Manny tried to take the record back—the last time he'd gotten like this, I'd barely escaped with Daisy. I swallowed my pique over my failed negotiation and hoped that Jimmy Wynn was worth it.

I was very particular about how I listened to records. Compact discs never had the same aura as objects. I had gotten too many for free in the mail for even the ones I bought to seem special. Records had a certain kind of appeal that the discs couldn't. It was

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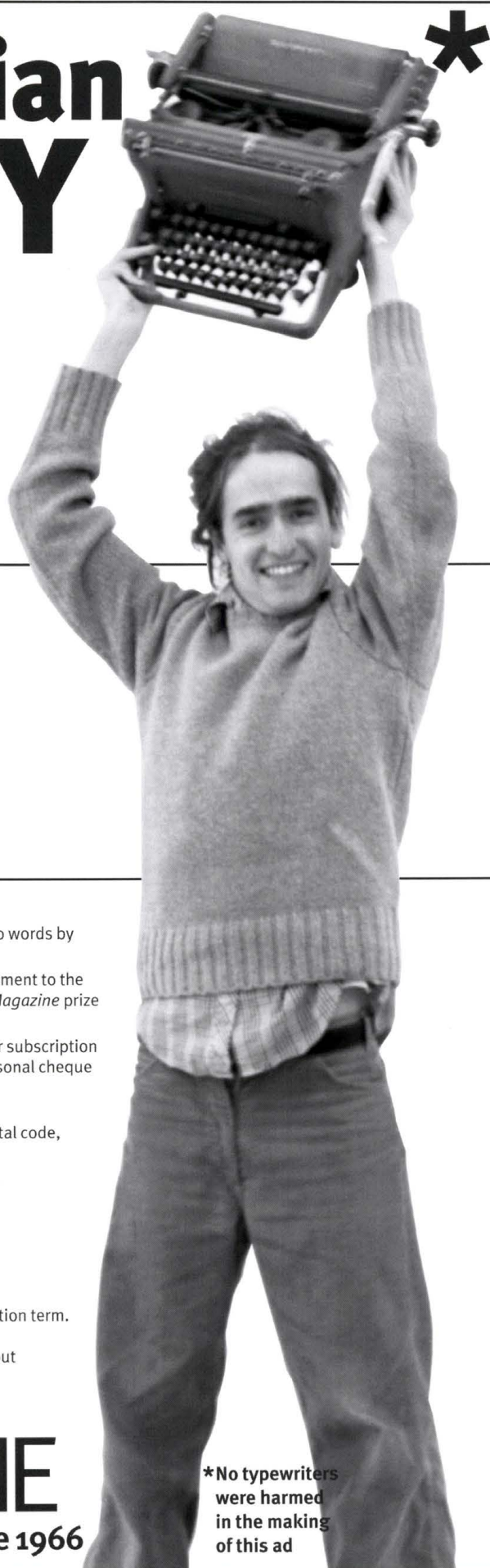
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were harmed
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AN OLD BROAD'S BELONGINGS

When the old broad who lived across the road went kaput, I thought, "I hope no one ever refers to me as 'the old broad,'" and the sick chambers of my brain wondered (in this heat) if she'd been up there long. The broad's kids parked haphazardly in her lane and hustled from their cars. The two daughters, dressed as garish gerber daisies, cleaned house, while the son (a capital-V virgin, I'm sure) played javelin with the stake of a For Sale sign; after several puncture wounds to the lawn, it stood erect.

I'd been to estate sales before, but not like this—the impression of her lower lip, Violet No. 21, imprinted on her water goblet (selling for a dime), and the dregs of her final breath still crawling out the front door.

—MEAGHAN STRIMAS

archaeological—on some level I believed that each time I bought a record from a shop or a milk crate on the street, I was rediscovering a past that had been suppressed or neglected. I hated it when a record I found was reissued on compact disc. Sure, the change in format made the recordings seem more permanent, but it wasn't the permanence those creators imagined. No, they dreamed of someone like me coming along in the hazy, distant future, someone who knew nothing of their lives yet was struck dumb by the product of their thimble's worth of hope and ambition. I proved that their work had lasted, regardless of whether it ever deserved to. Even if I tore the record off the turntable and smashed it against the radiator after enduring it for fifteen seconds, the gap between present and past was temporarily bridged. I treated every record—whether it was performed by a presidential impersonator, a briefly successful doo-wop group, or even a sad, drunk, middle-aged cowboy in a red codpiece—as an opportunity to fold time.

Thus did I pull the record from the sleeve, lower the stylus on *A Square Peg in the Oval Office*, and take up my position on the floor of the living room.

Here's what I heard first.

The crackle of the record mixes with the low murmur of a studio audience. "Ah, testing, testing, one and, ah, two." The simulation of Cannon's voice is

good enough to silence the audience's chatter. When they realize, no, it can't be, there's a ripple of relieved titters. "I'd like to, ah, welcome all of you listeners to a little something we've cooked up for your pleasure." The voice is smooth yet broadly Bostonian. There's less of Cannon's warmth—the charm is spiked with aggression, as if he's not so confident he'll be liked. "Connie? Connie, why don't you come over here and say hello to the nice folks." "Oh, honey, my hair's not ready." The woman's voice is not so close to the original—the words are too quick. "It's a record album, Connie. They can't see your hair." "But what about the photographers?" "No photographers, either." "Then how are they going to see me?" "The listeners will just have to imagine you in all your, ah, glory." "Well, I won't have anyone imagining my hair when it's in this state." Laughs from the crowd. I picture a stand of folding chairs, tape on the floor, free coffee, and a sign that somebody holds up to elicit APPLAUSE APPLAUSE APPLAUSE. "And, Theodore, I think your listeners would rather imagine you with your trousers on." "I would like to say that I am, ah, quite comfortable as I am. The listeners can imagine me however they like. So let's start the show." ☞

Jason Anderson lives in Davenport. Showbiz, his first novel, will be published this fall by ECW.

CONTRIBUTORS

Adrienne Weiss ("A Member of the Wait Staff Delivers a Glass of Ice to Oprah," p. 5) lives in Parkdale. She is a member of the all-girl sketch-comedy troupe the GTOs, and is the author of the poetry collection *Awful Gestures* (Insomniac, 2001).

Emily Schultz ("Two Minutes," p. 9) lives in Parkdale. She is the author of the short-story collection *Black Coffee Night* (Insomniac, 2002). She retired from the editorship of *Broken Pencil* recently to make more time for poetry and her anonymous chapbook series, the Pocket Canon.

William A. Davison ("The Quick," p. 11) is a miniature Alsatian trapped in a soap bubble floating somewhere in the vicinity of Bloorcourt Village and . . . oh, look—there's Steve Venright's apartment way down there! A few of his works have mistakenly appeared in *Rampike*, *Muse Apprentice Guild*, *Perpetual Motion Machine*, and the recent Mercury anthology *Surreal Estate*.

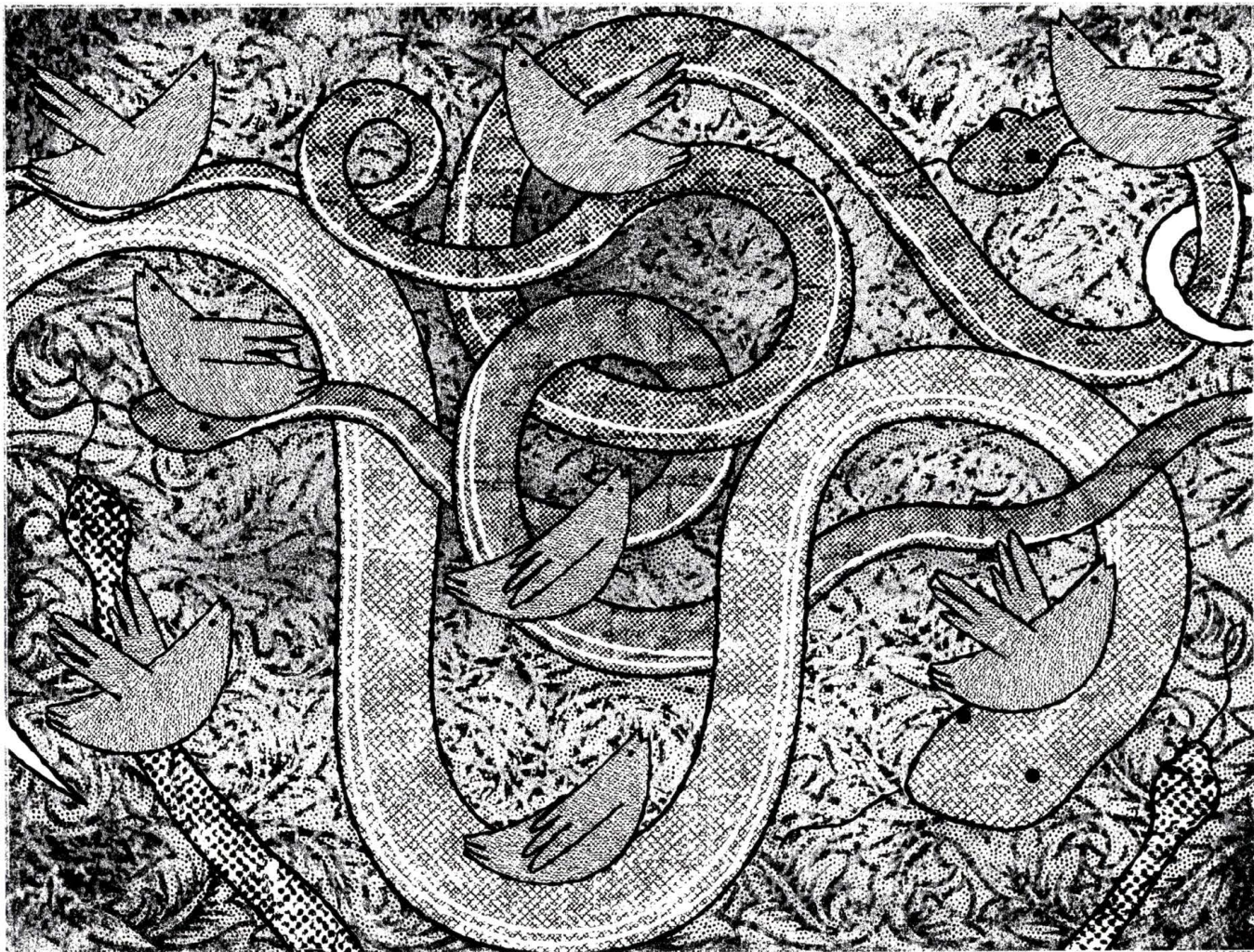
Jason Guriel ("Some Kind of Man," p. 21) lives in Etobicoke. His poems have appeared in the *Dalbousie Review* and *Exile*.

Beatriz Hausner ("The Origin of the Species," p. 23) lives in Little Italy. Born in Chile, she is the translator of twenty-five titles of poetry, fiction, and children's literature, principally from Spanish to English.

Brian McLachlan ("Fad to Grey," p. 24) lives in the Grange Park area. He writes for *Owl*, writes and draws the cartoon *The Princess Planet*, for the *Toronto Star*, and has written for *Vice*. He is the author of the graphic novel *No Dead Time* (Oni, 2004).

Meaghan Strimas ("An Old Broad's Belongings," p. 31) lives in Little Italy. She is the author of the poetry collection *Junkman's Daughter* (Exile, 2004) and is working on her second collection.

Dave Lapp (*People Around Here*, p. 40) lives near the Church-Wellesley Village. He teaches cartooning to children, self-publishes the mini-comic *Window*, and is the co-editor of the comic anthology series *Don't Touch Me*.



ALBERT'S PARADISE

BY GARY BARWIN

Now the sun rose higher and the heat of the day increased. The whole company remained in the pleasant shade, and, as a thousand birds sang among the verdant branches, someone asked Francesco to play the organ a little, to see whether the sound would make the birds increase or diminish their song. He did so at once, and a great wonder followed—for when the sound of the organ began, many of the birds were seen to fall silent and gather around as if in amazement, listening for a long time; and then they resumed their song and redoubled it, showing inconceivable delight, especially one nightingale, who came and perched above the organ, on a branch over Francesco's head.

Hey, Frank, it said, that's pretty good, for a human. Why don't you have an-

other cup of coffee? I know it's pretty hot out here, but when you pour the milk I'll have an opportunity to tell you about Bessie, the cow whose milk it is. Why, I've seen her conducting, I think it was the Vienna Philharmonic. I know what you're thinking: you don't often see a female conducting an orchestra. But Bessie's different. No one does Mahler like she does, though it's true they have to stop when her udders get full and she needs to be milked.

And Frank, a word about these other birds here, redoubling their song in inconceivable delight. Well, don't be fooled. You should see how they act when Stevie Wonder is around.

Did I ever show you how I can eat a

worm and sing at the same time? Hey, maybe later you'll come on over to the verdant glade, just past the river, and play Twister with the beasts of the field and the other birds of the air. You should see how the garter snakes make a lattice of themselves, while the sparrows, each of them like a summer flower, bedeck it. It's really not bad, what with the deer singing their sweet little R. & B. songs and the blind moles coming up from their tunnels underground, dressed in flashy clothes, telling tales of Milan and Ferrara in the sixteenth century.

Anyway, I've come to ask about Albert. I haven't seen him in a while, not since we went south.

It's like this, Frank. Once, me and a bunch of other birds, a flock really, made ourselves little harnesses hewn of spiderweb and then attached Albert to us with blades of grass. The sun was like a giant yolk in the centre of the sky's blue egg, and we pulled up into the wind. There we were, speeding over fields, cutting off blue jays, careening around clouds. Albert hung beneath us in his grass nest like a gunner in an old warplane. He was singing and calling out to the surprised farmers in the fields below, "I am the sky's tractor, a dolphin of the air. I am Pegasus, my wings of nightingale made. Nothing, not even shag carpeting, can soar as I soar."

And we birds, we knew how he felt. Once, we rode a city bus downtown, and once, some of us travelled the Sea of Galilee in a glass-bottomed boat. A bunch of us have even been in the trunk of a Lamborghini as it sped down the Autobahn. When the driver, a certain Mr. Beerbaum, opened the trunk to get his suitcase, we burst out, each of us carrying an apple in our claws, apples that Mr. Beerbaum was bringing home to his mother, who made the kind of succulent apple pie that any bird would delight in flying out of, as if from the trunk of an expensive Italian car.

All night we sailed across the sky with Albert beneath us. We were a web of birds, and Albert, tied by the sticky threads of grass, was our catch. As the moon rose, the shadows of nightingales flickered across his sleeping face. He was dreaming he was a lawn chair sitting by the pool. Through the living room's open window, he could hear his wife playing "Midnight in Moscow" on the organ and he hummed along.

By the time we passed over Algeria, Albert had woken up. We flew far above the clouds, hardly moving our wings so that Albert could shave. "Where are you taking me?" he asked. "I feel like a walnut cabinet, or chewing gum on a basketball player's chair."

We birds were in a convivial mood and so we joked with him. "Knock knock," we said. "There was an Irishman, an Italian, and a Jew. What do you get if you lift a Canadian in the grassy arms of nightingales flying south across the desert?"

I want you to know, Frank, though it's hard to understand, sitting here playing organ in the pleasant shade, Al-

bert taught us a lot. He taught us the words to "The Star-Spangled Banner," told us about Tintern Abbey and Saskatchewan. He explained about salt.

You should know that the time we spent carrying Albert across the earth was a time of song, of quiet speech, of croissants and coffee. We learned how to use a wheelbarrow, a compass, how to make food crisp in a FryDaddy.

And we, in our turn, taught Albert. We showed him the vulture's ten-speed bike, the tears of the sobbing moon. We explained how to make a dining room table from camel skin, how the jackals like teak veneer. We taught him to recognize Iceland by its shadow, how to cut down trees by sound.

In the time Albert spent below us, he learned what the web-bound chests of nightingales know, exhausted and flying for weeks on only coffee, the occasional croissant.

And yes, have another coffee, Frank. You deserve it. Let me tell you that though Bessie's Mahler was good, her Wagner was terrific. The tilt of her head, a movement of her broad nose, and they wept for hours in the balconies' dim light.

In fact, it was Bessie's idea for us to take Albert over the earth in his cradle. She phoned from a tour of New Mexico. "Take Albert beneath you," she said, "over the ocean's bevelled floor. Take him," she said, "over Europe and across Africa's blond plain."

Though presidents and prime ministers have invited us skiing, and we're consulted by butchers and priests, it was to Bessie we listened that rain-dappled day. A letter was sent to Albert to which he replied, "I will dress as a heavyweight boxer. Frank will play the organ while I'm away. Your voices are like the song 'Midnight in Moscow,' performed by mimes. I am not, nor have I ever been. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you." ♪

Gary Barwin lives in Hamilton, Ontario, with vague yet colourful delusions about Toronto. He is a writer, composer, and performer. His books of poetry, fiction, and writing for children include Doctor Weep and Other Strange Teeth (Mercury, 2004) and Raising Eyebrows (Coach House, 2001). His next book, the poetry collection Fragments from the Frigpool (with Derek Beaulieu), will be published later this year, by Mercury.

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• CITY BUILDING •

FAKE AUTHENTICITY

The de-evolution of Toronto's street signs attempts to showcase their majestic past, but instead displays an uninspired future.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALFRED HOLDEN

Chalk up another victory for cars over people. The legacy? New and “improved” street signs dotting Toronto’s roadways. Unlike the large street markers that began hanging over the city’s major intersections in 1999 and could, theoretically, be removed with no harm done, these new signs signal a more permanent change to Toronto’s urban landscape. The city says the new design (twenty-five per cent larger than that of its predecessor) is a response to the increasing number of complaints from baby boomers unable to find their turn while driving—no doubt a result of sitting too high up and driving too fast in their S.U.V.’s as much as of the aging process.

Toronto’s new signs are also a victory for the bottom line. What cost six dol-

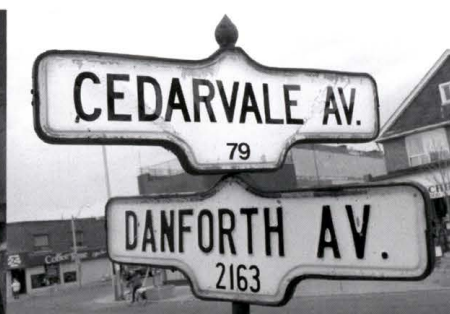
lars and ninety-five cents per unit in 1947, the year the former street sign design was adopted, has since risen to nearly one hundred and fifty dollars. As a result, the city has found ways to manufacture its street signs—a two-part sign held together with a metal casing, featuring embossed, upper-case sans-serif lettering and crowned by a black knob, or “acorn”—more and more cheaply over the years, most notably by replacing the embossed letters with stick-on ones. The new signs—two one-sided metal panels bolted together and, thus, not requiring a metal frame—cost almost half the price.

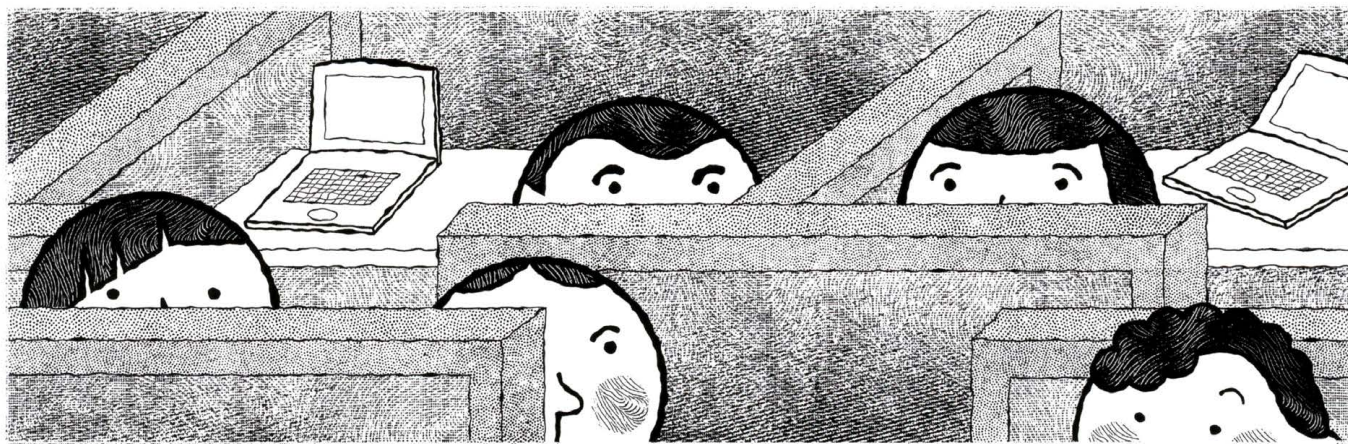
While previous cost-cutting measures managed to retain a look and feel nearly identical to the 1947 originals, the replacement signs feature a new

typeface (the cheekily named Clearview), not to mention a number of exposed bolts. Most noticeably, the lack of a metal casing means the loss of the acorn, replaced by a two-dimensional representation. The end result rings of fake authenticity, a cartoon reflection of what came before.

Sadly, these new signs have been met by positive reviews or, more commonly, indifference. And while a number of pre-1947 white-on-blue street signs remain safely bolted to the sides of buildings across the city, it seems unlikely any 1947-style signs will remain in a few years’ time. Seconds may be saved from an across-town road trip, but pity the poor pedestrian, whose walk to work has become a lot less stylish.

—CONAN TOBIAS





OWNERSHIP

BY KEITH PRESTWICH

Someone is stealing things from my drawers. I know this. Usually in the afternoons while I'm downstairs getting a hazelnut coffee, with skim milk, and a packet of sesame crisps, the benefits of which I feel have been unjustly ignored. At first it was occasional—once a week or so—and just a few things. Staples. Rolls of tape. Mechanical pencil leads. A sample vial of unisex perfume. I knew it was escalating when I lost an entire twelve-pack of large blue-marble-print adhesive notepads that I had, only the day before, stolen from the supply cabinet. No small feat considering how closely Erika-with-a-k monitors our access to the supplies. She is a stony, obdurate guardian. I respect and hate her for this. The theft of the staples and perfume I took in stride, but the notepads were a bit much. Maybe it was the size, maybe the audacity of the mid-morning timing, but in some tiny way, it hurt. I told this to Brunette Jennifer, but she gave me a dismissive look, a look that said I was not entitled to my own feelings, so I stole her staple remover and one of the Milky Ways hidden among her jumbled and dog-eared files.

I know I have secret adversaries. I know I am envied. My new highlights are lustrous: rosewood on mahogany. I am adept and charmingly solicitous with clients. My handwriting is a beacon of legibility, ensuring my position next to the whiteboard. Recently, I have lost a lot of weight (more than fifteen

pounds) without much effort. While the Break Bar is always abuzz with debate over the newest and best weight-loss methods, I have sworn off the anti-carb fads, protein blasts, tea purges, and soy isoflavones. I have stayed true to the Clock Philosophy," and, thus, to myself. Imagine your plate is a clock. Twelve to three is protein. Three to six is high-fibre starches. Six to midnight is fresh vegetables. The Clock Philosophy has a simple elegance I admire. Losing weight is just as easy. Simply keep the proportions and reduce the portions. Maintain the ratios while lowering the overall quantity until the air crackles like crisp autumn leaves and the daylight hours have an artful cinematic blur. That, and seven hours of spinning each week. I am proud of the results: the flat, milky stomach and the slender thighs. They are mine alone. Once, while hiding in the men's washroom, I found a profane but flattering homage to my ass on the wall. It buoyed my spirits and helped steady my breathing. Praise is the greatest succour, a holy balm.

The boy who fixes my computer tells me that the thefts have become both epidemic and arbitrary. A coffee maker is missing from Finance. A crate of twenty thousand billing envelopes, creamy white and bristling with potential. A large succulent from the third-floor lobby. At least I am not alone in this. I lean in close to this boy in my chair, drawn to the black whorls inked on the

nape of his neck, and the hipster check of his shirt. I'm filled with a warm, urgent desire tell him about my scattered years: the Ukrainian gangster, my dentist, short hair, Adorno, the nights in old, grimy gay clubs, slipping like a shadow into the back room, just to listen, the comical wet sounds of anonymity. He blushes painfully when I lean too far. He believes it is all a vast hoax, a training exercise by upper management. The last of my gel pens are gone, but I am unbowed. I fix the boy with a great wide, radiant, soul-crushing smile that is only great because I mean it. At least my computer will always work.

When they took my gleaming stainless-steel travel mug I knew it was a time for action. It was mine, and a thing of beauty. Girded in a custom-tailored chalk-stripe suit and a pearl-grey beaded silk corset top, I contemplated the opposition. Erica-with-a-c truly detests me, but she was at home, swollen with child. Her replacement, a small and good-natured Laotian gentleman, seemed far too stable. Brunette Jennifer had the necessary spite but not the follow-through or sense of timing. I arranged my top drawer to enhance its allure, leaving a rainbow box of coated paperclips dead centre, a ripe and low-hanging plum. Taking the tray from the electric pencil sharpener, I sifted out the wood shavings, reserving the graphite dust, and sprinkled a fine, glittering layer over the drawer's contents. As a result, I was

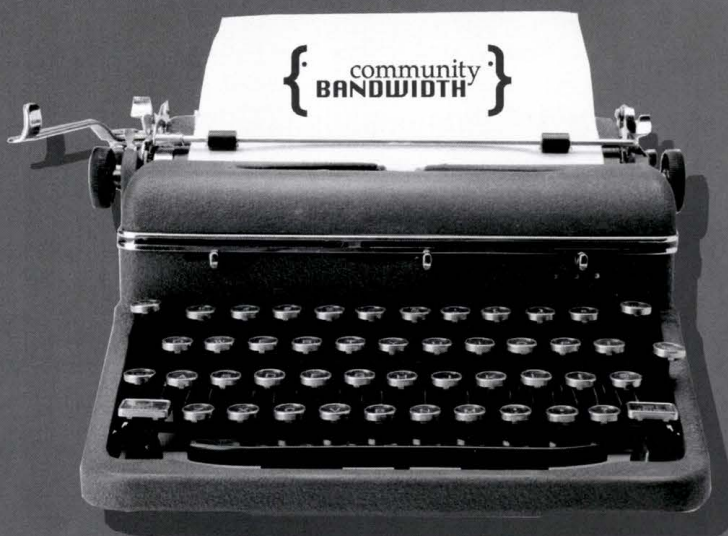
late for lunch with my business group: Mary, Maria, Carmen, and Lynn. Some call her Lynn 2, in acknowledgement of the blotchy woman who preceded me in my current position, but I don't indulge in that kind of sentiment. There is always the persistent cured-meat smell in my office to remember her by. We talked of the pale-green armchair missing from reception. All four glared balefully from behind bales of spinach and strawberries at my well-proportioned, deconstructed seafood lasagna and baby greens. I ate quickly, in large, graceful bites.

Later in the day, I achieved concrete results. Naturally, my paperclips had disappeared by four-thirty. By five-fifteen, a culprit was discovered. When Mary swayed off for the day, the left back pocket of her pale pink denim skirt (hardly, I think, Tuesday-appropriate) was defiled by a black smudge so large and terrible, I felt immediate, gut-clenching tines of remorse. Perhaps it wasn't Mary. Perhaps the real thief had rifled through my drawers, then pawed at her ass like an animal, leaving the telltale sign. Perhaps it was a man. Perhaps another woman. Doubt is a stinging nettle. Regardless, it was a pyrrhic victory. The next morning, my corkboard and all its contents were gone. As were Maria's inbox, Todd's miniature lava lamp, and Khamsing's ailing spider plant.

I redoubled my efforts and reset my trap, this time with a three-pack of Liquid Paper. Clad in oxblood calfskin gloves, I crumbled a small cotton-candy clump of fibreglass insulation from the renovations on seven over the whole arrangement. The red welts on Carmen's neck and hands were ultimately unsatisfying and utterly ineffective.

Deterrence wasn't the answer. I was forced to admit that the problem was beyond my capacities. Larger than any individual person. I sat slumped in my office, absent-mindedly playing with the bicycle lock chaining my plush ergonomic leather chair to the radiator. I looked out my large window at the expressway and contemplated the impermanence of objects, the tenuous nature of life, both in a greater sense—great sandstorms of particulate time scouring us, all our collected bulk and wisdom, into multicoloured dust—and also in a smaller one. How quickly objects come in and out of our possession. Accretions

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of objects washing up against us and collecting, piece by piece, only to break off and vanish into the foam. I thought of all the possessions I had lost in my life as though I had stolen them from myself through carelessness. I enjoyed all of those things. Their absence rankled, yet seemed natural. In a way, hadn't I stolen the very view I was viewing (among other things) from Lynn? Had she felt the same sense of ownership over the off-ramp, the impound lot, the Satin Hand-Wash and the Pleasure Chestz Lounge? Yet the view was not mine. It wasn't even a physical *thing*. I had two margaritas for lunch and waited out the day in a sad and peculiar mood.

The weather is lovely these days, clear and warm with cool breezes in the afternoons. Quarterly profits are up significantly and falcons have finally moved into the expensive metal nests constructed for them on the window ledges. Yet none of this can conceal the fact that the place is a shambles. Thieves have taken a photocopier from Traffic and all of the vertical blinds from the fifth floor. Several of the backlit frosted glass letters are gone from

our corporate logo in main reception, as are three of seven chrome fish from the kinetic sculpture in the atrium. Patches of carpet have been torn up. What's worse, someone has begun leaving enormous trays of cookies, pastries, and squares in public areas. These trays are emptied as quickly and as secretly as they are left. Everyone is gaining weight. When no one is looking, I take handfuls of cookies out of camaraderie but do not indulge. I understand his (it must be a man) sick plan and my will is cold iron. I leave them in my bottom drawer, as my wastebasket has also vanished. In response to these developments, the Wellness Committee has started lunchtime tai chi lessons in the fourth-floor boardroom, now emptied of furniture. I find the slow, deliberate movements very soothing. I feel a bit guilty for not guarding my office at all times with improvised weapons, as most of my department has taken to doing, but it doesn't really matter. My office has been stripped of nearly everything but the chair, a locked cabinet containing my immaculate files, and my computer, skilfully and lovingly

bolted to the heavy desk with stout metal bands.

Still, I feel strangely hopeful. If this weather holds, I will eat my lunch outside after tai chi and maybe start running again. Next week I will ask the boy who fixes my computer out for a drink, and he will say yes, and for a short time it will be very nice. We will make love in the men's washroom, my real ass pressed against the sacred words about my ass, smudging them, merging with them. We will breathe into each other's mouths and talk in low voices. We will sit together in my office, alert and upright and smiling as the paint is stolen, then the drywall and ceiling tiles, as the whole building dissolves around us. Maybe we will dissolve as well, blur and separate into tiny coloured dots, collapse into outlines of ourselves. Flat shapes of opaque white, waiting in the sun amid the bare girders and metal ribs for someone to come and write upon us in big blue-and-red block letters, to give us names again. ▽

Keith Prestwich lives in Danforth Village. This is his first published short story.

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build



secure



edit



sell



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website development

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.)

● *Drift*, by Kevin Connolly (Anansi, 2005; \$16.95). Reading this delightfully amusing collection makes *Taddle Creek* sad that Kevin Connolly only gives the magazine a poem once every five years. Sigh. Get to know Kevin Connolly! He's profiled elsewhere in this issue. Then track down his E-mail (with a capital E) address and tell him how much you'd love to see more of his work in *Taddle Creek*.

Sweetness in the Belly, by Camilla Gibb (Doubleday, 2005; \$32.95). *Taddle Creek* will refrain from any humorous remarks surrounding this book, as its subject matter—the life story of an Ethiopian woman torn by political upheaval in both her native land and her adoptive home of London, and the hardship and loss she endures—is quite serious and the result of many years' work on Ms. Gibb's part. Fans of Camilla Gibb seem to agree *Sweetness in the Belly* is her strongest work to date.

● *Between the Walls*, by Paul Vermeersch (M. & S., 2005; \$17.99). Paul Vermeersch's poetry finally gets the big-press treatment with this, his third collection. *Taddle Creek* admits it was a bit worried to see Pauly leave ECW for M. & S., but everything seems to have turned out just fine, as this is simply an excellent collection. And my, how he enthralled the collected mass at his launch party. (Though *Taddle Creek* would like to point out that, while Paul complains every summer that the Jet Fuel is too far to go for the magazine's summer launch party of free beer and food, his launch party was at the Dora Keogh, which is much, much further east, and *Taddle Creek* didn't complain once.)

The Program, by Hal Niedzviecki (Random House, 2005; \$29.95). My, how *Taddle Creek* has been enjoying Hal Niedzviecki's fiction of late. His previous novel, *Ditch*, despite some passages

being written in E-mail form, which the magazine finds a bit too gimmicky, was simply a delight. Word on the street is Hal will be refraining from publishing non-fiction books (which have been outnumbering his fictional ones of late) for a while and focusing on his fiction. Nothing against his last book, but *Taddle Creek* would trade ten *Hello, I'm Specials* for another of Hal's fine novels any day. Thankfully, at least he seems to be putting his work on that *Cyborg* book he ghostwrote for Steve Mann to good use in *The Program*. Pick it up and find out how.

Ticknor, by Sheila Heti (Anansi, 2005; \$19.95). *Taddle Creek* couldn't help but have a chuckle when *University of Toronto Magazine* printed an interview with Sheila Heti earlier this year mentioning she was leaving town for a secret location, only to have *Eye* nonchalantly reveal weeks later she was moving to Montreal, no secret implied. Oh, *University of Toronto Magazine*. . . (Oh yes—*Ticknor's* a cute little book. And it's only a hundred and nine pages, so if you don't like it, no time lost.)

● *Surreal Estate*, edited by Stuart Ross (Mercury, 2004; \$17.95). Not one for extended readings, when *Taddle Creek* arrived at the launch party for *Surreal Estate* and found out it would feature readings by virtually every one of the book's thirteen contributing poets, it tried to crawl out the window, before being stopped by the fact the party was on the second storey. But hot damn, what a party! The magazine can't recall a more enjoyable evening of readings. If you missed it—and shame on you if you did—redeem yourself by rushing out and picking up this collection immediately. If all poetry were surrealist, *Taddle Creek* firmly believes the genre as a whole wouldn't have such a bad rap.

A Girl Like Sugar, by Emily Pohl-Weary (McGilligan, 2004; \$22.95). *A Girl Like Sugar's* protagonist, Sugar Jones, has sex with a ghost several times during the course of this story. Thankfully, there's nary a pottery wheel to be found, which makes the sex a lot hotter than in that Patrick Swayze movie. Emily Pohl-

Weary actually makes sex with a dead person seem cute, as only she could. A tale of girl-power life-awakening, *Sugar's* charm is matched only by its damn fine copy-editing.

● *Doctor Weep and Other Strange Teeth*, by Gary Barwin (Mercury, 2004; \$16.95). That Gary Barwin's one crazy mofo. Mickey Mouse heart surgery? A talking Sigmund Freud action figure? How does he come up with this stuff? *Doctor Weep and Other Strange Teeth* is, as it rightfully says on its back cover, both comic and magical. So it's really two books in one.

Proof of a Tongue, by Sandra Alland (McGilligan, 2004; \$16.95). Although *Taddle Creek* was disappointed to see that this book doesn't include that poem Sandra reads about all the evil words that start with "man-," it enjoyed her debut collection of poetry nonetheless. And such nice glossy paper! If you get the chance to hear Sandra read from this book, check it out. It's entertaining stuff.

Fatal Distraction, by Sonja Ahlers (Insomniac, 2004; \$21.95). Ah, to be a fly on the inside of Sonja Ahlers' mind. Hmm, maybe that could be better phrased. Be that as it may, Ahlers seems an interesting girl, to say the least. *Fatal Distraction* is her long-awaited follow-up to 1998's *Temper, Temper* and contains even more strange thoughts, witticisms, clip art, and line drawings, often in the form of those adorable, disturbed-looking bunnies. Interesting indeed.

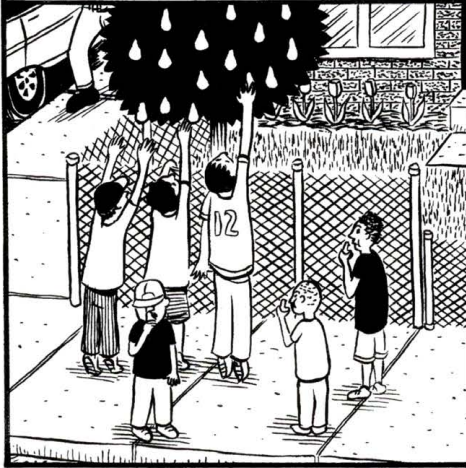
● *Ruined Stars*, by R. M. Vaughan (ECW, 2004; \$16.95). If it's . . . a day of the week, it must be time for another R. M. Vaughan book. Seriously, this guy gives Niedzviecki's output a run for its money. (Take a lesson, Derek McCormack!) R.'s lucky he's so damn funny (not to mention a natty dresser). The "Performance Poems" section is a riot, especially "7 Steps to a Better Artist Statement." It's about time someone said it. The book is marred (no pun intended) only by the misspelling of Morrissey's name on page seventy-two. (But if you didn't get the potential pun, you probably didn't notice the misspelling either.)

PEOPLE AROUND HERE
YORK SQUARE LOBBY · DAVE LAPP ·

...IT HAPPENED WHEN WE WERE KIDS, WE WERE COMIN' FROM THE EVELYN GREGORY LIBRARY... GOIN' THROUGH THE NEIGHBOURHOOD AND WE GOT TO THE HOUSE ON THE CORNER...



...WE STOPPED AND GRABBED SOME PEARS OFF A TREE... AND THEN THIS SKIN HEAD GUY WITH A NAZI TATTOO ON THE BACK OF HIS NECK COMES OUT OF NOWHERE.



AT FIRST HE CAME UP TO US IN A NICE WAY... AND THEN HE JUST 'BROKE OUT'! LIKE HE'S SCHIZO OR SOMETHIN'...



THEN THIS GUY JUST GRABBED 'PRINCE' AND HE'S TALKIN' TO HIM, BUT WE CAN'T HEAR HIM... THEN PRINCE TELLS HIM...



PRINCE DROPPED HIS BASKETBALL AND TRIED TO PUSH HIM AWAY!



THEN THE GUY HEAD BUTTED HIM RIGHT IN THE MOUTH!



PRINCE STARTED TO BLEED ON HIS LIP AND TRIED TO GIVE THE MAN A HARD HIT...



...THEN THE GUY HEAD BUTTED HIM AGAIN! JUST ABOUT KNOCKED HIS TEETH OUT!



THAT'S WHEN WE PICKED UP STICKS AND WE'RE LIKE 'IF PRINCE HITS THE FLOOR, THEN THIS GUY'S HITIN' THE FLOOR TOO!'



THE GUY NEVER TOOK HIS EYES OFF PRINCE...

YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE THE BIG GUY IN THE GROUP? YOU TALK FOR EVERYBODY? YOU'RE THE MOUTH?



NO, BUT THAT'S MY FRIEND Y'KNOW. BASICALLY YOU'RE HOLDING ON MY FRIEND. I HAVE TO SPEAK UP YOU KNOW!



HE LOOKED AT ME AND THEN HE LETS GO OF PRINCE AND THEN I'M LIKE 'HOLY FUCK' IT'S ON ME NOW!



THAT'S WHEN EVERYBODY TURNED INTO 'TERRY FOXES'! I NEVER RAN THAT FAST IN MY LIFE!



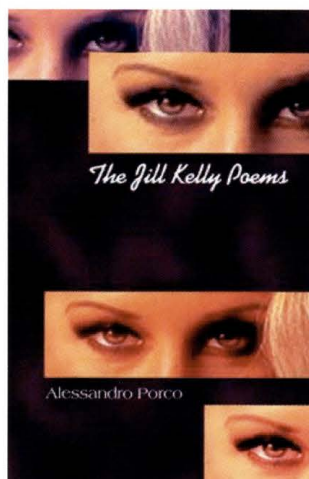
New verse



I Should Never Have Fired the Sentinel by Jennifer LoveGrove

"LoveGrove uses language like a mad scientist; a miscreant making Origami."

— Lynn Crosbie

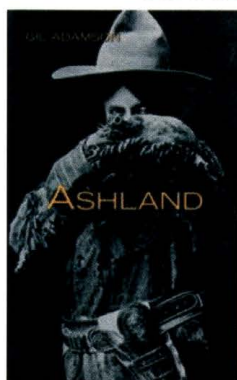


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— Josey Vogels

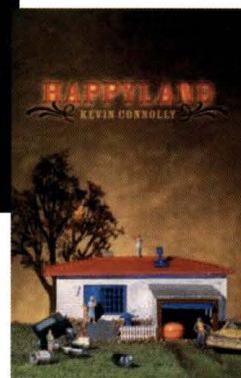
Other bestselling titles



Ashland by Gil Adamson

"*Ashland* is not only one of the best poetry books of the year, but one of the best books published in Canada to date."

— *Prairie Fire Review of Books*

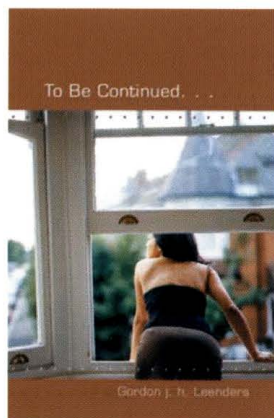


Happyland by Kevin Connolly

"Connolly's work sells you a ticket for the stand-up act and leaves you in your seat for the end of the world."

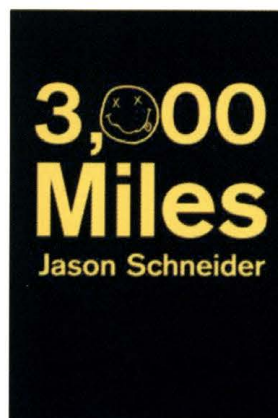
— Michael Redhill

New words



To Be Continued... by Gordon J.H. Leenders

People, places, and ideas collide at random in this collection of linked stories, creating a chaotic pattern that characterizes life as we know it.



3,000 Miles by Jason Schneider

If Kerouac's *On the Road* mapped the landscape of a new America, *3,000 Miles* explores its ultimate dead end in this novel about a young man who drives from Quebec to Seattle to take his own life.

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