

TADDLE CREEK



CHRISTMAS NUMBER, 2003
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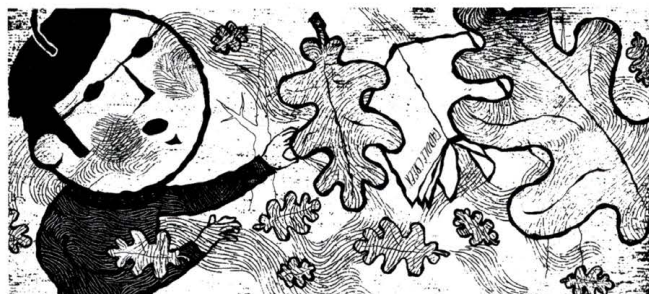
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TADDLE CREEK

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COVER STAR

Unknown, circa 1958. Photographer unknown.

BECAUSE IT'S KORRECT

A reader recently asked *Taddle Creek* why it insists on the continued use of periods with initialisms. The simple answer is: because initialisms, by definition, are comprised of initials, which by all the rules of good grammar, properly take periods. *Taddle Creek* recognizes that most publications today have chosen to disregard the use of periods in initialisms such as "A.T.M.," "C.I.A.," and the like, owing to the belief that "TTC" looks cleaner and more attractive than "T.T.C." *Taddle Creek* thinks "hymenium" looks better spelled as "hydrofoil," but would never dream of allowing such personal preference to get in the way of proper spelling and grammar. Plus, when one writes "TTC" it looks as though they are yelling the word "tuhca," which isn't even a word, at least not in English. Thus, *Taddle Creek* prefers to err on the side of correctness, choosing the path it seems only the most credible of magazines follow today, which is to continue the age-old practice of using periods with initialisms.

And for the record, the magazine feels, with the proper kerning, "T.T.C." is just as attractive as "TTC," if not more so. Though *Taddle Creek* has a great love for aesthetics, its first love is proper grammar. Those who put aesthetics first are probably more likely also to spell "E-mail" without a hyphen. Perish the thought.

Some argue *Taddle Creek* should at least draw the line at using periods in initialisms containing an ampersand, such as R. & B. *Taddle Creek* does not see what difference an ampersand makes. To close up "rhythm and blues" as "R&B" would put the magazine in the same camp as those who use no periods at all. Go with periods or go home, *Taddle Creek* says.

Taddle Creek does take a different tack with acronyms, however, which those who worry so much about how their words look will probably find more agreeable. (For those unclear on the dif-

ference, in an initialism, each letter must be pronounced separately, while an acronym can be pronounced as a word. Both differ from an abbreviation, which is usually a shortened form of a single word.) While some acronyms, such as "radar" and "laser," have long become words in their own right, others, such as "NASA" and "AIDS," have not. Because an acronym can be pronounced as a word, it does not require periods to guide the reader through the correct pronunciation. But instead of simply writing "NASA" and falling into the yelling trap, *Taddle Creek* sets its acronyms in small caps, as seen above. Whose words don't look good now?

And just to quell any further argument, though the magazine generally avoids abbreviations, were it ever to abbreviate "January," "inch," or "Street," it would use periods, resulting in "Jan.," "in.," and "St." Not that it would ever do that.

There are exceptions to every rule, of course. *Taddle Creek* does not use periods in radio or television station call letters (CBC, CIUT, NBC), nor does it use them for media formats and files, such as LP, CD, MP3, and EXE, though it has considered it in both cases. Media format acronyms, however—JPEG, TIFF, and the like—are still printed in small caps. (Though "CD-ROM" creates a mix of these two styles, *Taddle Creek* quite likes it.)

Finally, because the above-mentioned reader asked: "O.K." is indeed an initialism, standing for "oll korrekt," a nineteenth-century misspelling of "all correct" that, for reasons unknown—or at least widely disagreed upon—stuck in the lexicon. It is not a shortened form of "okay," thus: periods.

And with that, *Taddle Creek* thanks its loyal reader for allowing it to speak out on yet another fascinating grammar-related topic. As always, readers are invited to send questions, comments, or feedback of any sort to the magazine, via the addresses found to the right. ▽

TADDLE CREEK

"Pretty boy had a red wagon."

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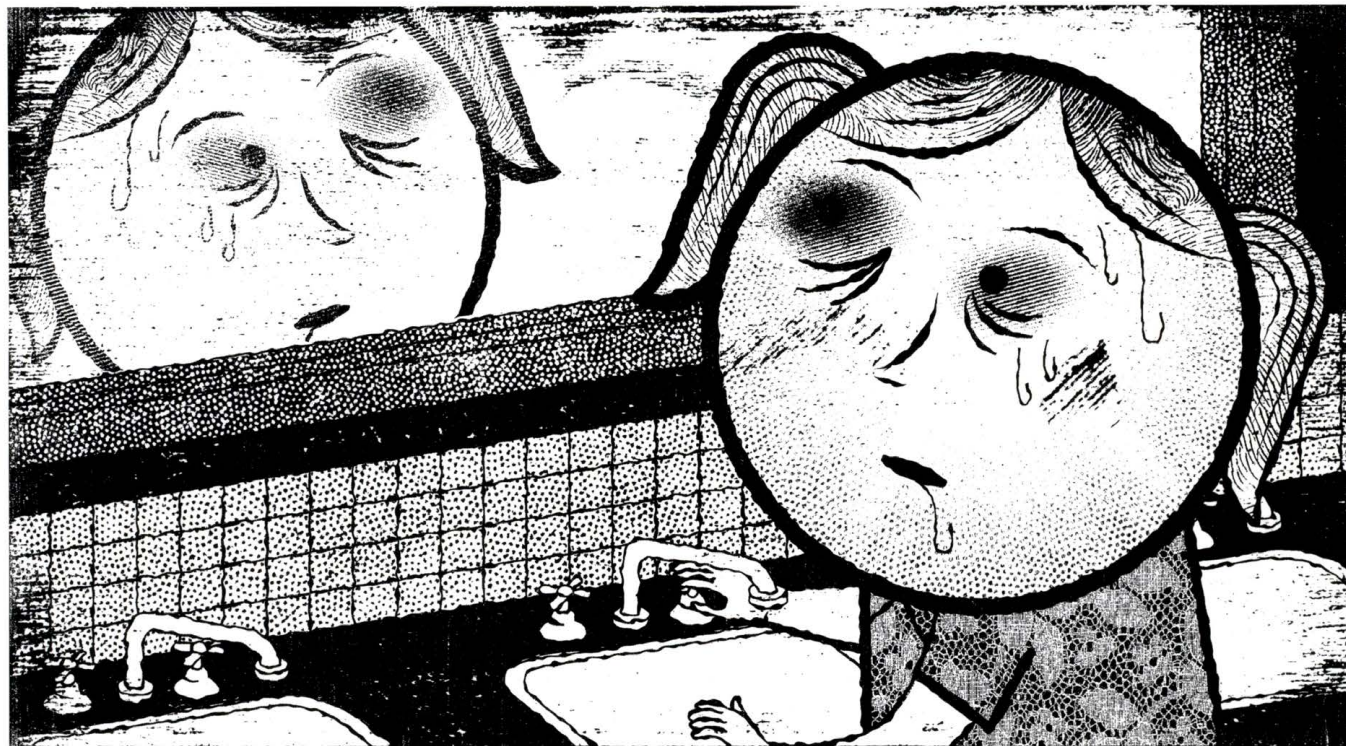
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CLOSING TIME

BY DIANNE SCOTT

"I don't know how you stand that place," Cindy said, as she sat down in her chair and turned on her computer.

"What's wrong with Scooters?" asked Ruth, as she leaned against Cindy's filing cabinet.

Cindy sipped from her coffee mug before answering.

"What does it have going for it? It's just a trendy bar full of pimply adolescents with attitude."

"So?"

"And the music is terrible."

"How is it worse than Gabby's or the Corral?" These were the bars Cindy and Ruth had frequented since Ruth joined Livingston Insurance, three years ago.

"At least they have appropriate men," Cindy responded. Ruth crossed her arms.

"You mean bald guys with wedding rings in their pockets?"

"At least I don't end up *alone* spending my *own* money," Cindy replied, as she got up to replenish her coffee.

It was Cindy who had told her about Scooters in the first place, Ruth thought, as she walked back to her desk. They

had gone to Scooters on the advice of Cindy's younger stepsister. All night Cindy had grimaced at the thump, thump, thump of the dance music and rolled her eyes at the young men who strutted by them without pausing. Cindy had vowed never to go back to Scooters again.

Ruth, however, continued to go on her own, much to Cindy's annoyance. In the first hour or so, Ruth would sip on a club soda, perched at the side of the bar near the stairway. She absorbed the glances of disinterest but still felt part of the ever-increasing, pulsing beat, as the bar breathed her in and out. She would watch people as they climbed the stairs, found friends, ordered drinks. When she felt herself slipping, cramped in her role of spectator, she let herself order a *real* drink. But only after she had been there for one hour. That was her rule.

Sometimes, late in the evening, a man Ruth's age would approach her, his face faltering from encounters with young women who'd shrugged him off rudely. Ruth would chat for a few mo-

ments, relieved to talk to someone, her eyes eventually straying to the young men surrounding her.

Sometimes, very rarely, someone younger came over, or casually smiled as he cruised by. Ruth would savour these moments, keep them like gifts to be unwrapped later in the privacy of her bedroom.

Ruth tried to figure it out the next time she was at Scooters; she surveyed the males scattered around the bar as she sat and tapped her foot to the beat of the music. But it wasn't just the men who attracted her to the place. Both the men and the women looked freshly baked, as if they had just emerged from the oven: fragrant, soft, and edible. Their faces looked so smooth that, if you touched them, you might feel the warm life rising against their skin. They looked strong and large and assured, moving among each other like first-borns, the dismal disappointments they felt only a faint shadow edging toward them.

Ruth had to have this . . . this thing they possessed. She could smell it, hear it in the tone and pitch of their voices. She could feel it getting nearer to her as the night progressed, sliding over her skin. If she stuck around long enough she could get it . . . some of it . . . enough of it.

She ambled over to the small bar by the pool tables, ordered herself her third cocktail, and slugged the drink back carelessly. Prowling was the best part of the evening. She wandered around the bar, music beating through her, anaesthetized to those who looked past her. She gave thanks that she had taxied it down, although she had intended to drive. She battled with herself each time she came here, unable to admit in advance that she might get—would need to get—completely hammered.

She staggered into a woman sitting in a high-back chair. After apologizing profusely, Ruth hung around the group of friends for a few minutes. They watched a foursome of men play pool, and caught each other's eye as they admired the lean bodies bent over the table. After a while, Ruth found herself sitting at the small bar in the corner, feeling the bartender's arm brush her

breasts as he passed people drinks. Eventually, she went to the washroom, fumbling with her zipper and tights, reapplying her bronze lipstick with her face held close to the mirror.

She exited the washroom, sauntered up to the dance floor, and danced by herself. She staggered around, eyes half closed. As the dance floor became crowded, she jostled shoulder to shoulder with the other patrons, almost one of the crowd, until she was dizzy and thirsty and needed a drink.

She plunked herself down on a stool at the main bar and ordered herself another cocktail. The bartender informed her it was last call.

"Christ, it must be two o'clock." Last time she remembered looking it was eleven-thirty. The lights flickered on and off to signal that the bar was closing.

Ruth did not recall going downstairs to the coat check, although she must have, because she had her leather jacket on when she fell. She remembered leaving and being jogged along by the bustling mass of inebriated youth. She brushed against a burly, dark-haired bouncer, who held the door open into the damp winter evening. She took two steps past the door and tripped.

Ruth fell, smashing her elbow noisily on a metal garbage can as she arced down, unprotected, thumping her head on the concrete.

Ruth felt hands on either side of her arms, pulling her up. She shrieked, and was dropped back onto the pavement. Ruth lay there in the slush, bare hands embracing the sidewalk as she licked her lip and recognized the metallic taste of blood. Her head throbbed. Her right elbow burned with pain, her breath coming out in quick, white puffs.

She heard a man swear, then another male voice mumble a response.

After a few seconds, one of the voices said, "Get up."

"I'm trying."

"Try harder," a second voice added. "We can all see your skinny ass."

Ruth slowly inched her knees under her. She could feel the dampness from the pavement soaking through to her shins. When she was in a kneeling position, she pushed herself up with the palm of her left hand. For a moment she saw the shadowy figures of the bouncers through her hair: one dark blur and a taller, blond smear. She brushed her hair out of her eyes, and her hand came away streaked with blood. She started to gag.

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ILLUSTRATION: SHAYNE EHMAN

WINTER STICKING ITS TONGUE TO A POLE

Snow has its own voice.
It swallows everything else.

It culls the click from dog toenails,
tucks it under with religious tenderness.

It eats the embers from your throat,
stills words before they are spoken.

It is propelled like a very young woman
who has removed her white brassiere,

and flings it into an unimaginable corner,
with an abandonment you can see she does not feel.

It says O, O, and O.
Its flakes are infinite as binary, discharging all doubt.

It falls through the night, sighing.
It seeps through the night, singing.

God does not love me, snow says.
I am December. I am forever. I am despair.

The world wrapped in slapdash skin.
The world wrapped in methodical air.

—EMILY SCHULTZ

She threw up, splattering herself as she
leaned over the curb into the street.

"Man, she's chucked up all over."

Ruth tried to slow her breathing now
that the heaving had stopped. Her deep
exhales evolved into a ragged whimper,
as she tried to edge away from her vomit,
seeing the world sideways as stragglers
from the bar came out onto the street.

"Who's this?" asked a third voice,
from beyond of Ruth's view.

"Some drunk hag."

"Well, get her out of here. Grab her
wallet, see where she lives, and dump
her in a cab."

A thick arm began groping around
under her body. The fingers casually
pinched her breast, and Ruth grunted
and tried to move away. She felt some-
thing unravel and be pulled out from
under her. *Her purse*. The person stood
up and shoved her with his foot.

"Fuck, she stinks."

It was quiet for a moment.

"Ruth Daniels," a voice said.

"I think she's hurt. Should we call an
ambulance or somethin'?"

"No way. She can sober up and take
care of herself in the morning. Just
make sure she doesn't come back."

Later, Ruth remembered screaming
once as they hauled her into the cab.
She'd passed out for most of the ride.

Ruth was prodded awake by a jab-
bing pain in her elbow and by the
pressure of her bladder. She kicked off
her black duvet, trying to untangle her-
self from the twisted, pinstriped sheets.
She stumbled to the bathroom, holding
her sore arm, shoved her skirt and
tights down, and urinated with relief.

After a few moments, she heaved herself
up off the toilet and staggered over to the
sink. She looked up into the mirror as she
leaned on the counter with her good arm.

"Oh my God."

Ruth turned her face to the left and
the image in the gold rectangular mir-
ror moved to the right. She nodded her
head slowly up and down, and so did
the reflection. In the image, mascara
raccooned around puffy eyes. Blood
fanned out into her hair from a gash at
her hairline. Ruth's eyes travelled down
to the swollen mouth, where blood
oozed from a split in her bottom lip.
She touched the mirror with her fin-
gers, outlining the grime fingerprinted
along her neck, trailing down to the
dirt encrusting the twisted folds of her
metallic top.

Ruth averted her gaze from the mir-
ror. She stuck her hands underneath the
tap, careful of her sore arm, and
watched the running water wash away
the rusty stains on her skin.

It took her a long time to take off her
clothes: the tights with holes in the
knees, the miniskirt that smelled of
vomit, the lamé shirt that was wrapped
sideways around her torso. Every few
minutes, Ruth would sit down on the
toilet lid, her head between her knees to
prevent herself from passing out or
throwing up. She stepped out of her un-
derwear, trying not to use her right arm
or bend and get a head rush. She clawed
at the hooks of her bra with her one
hand, catching glimpses of herself in the
mirror. She looked animalistic: her teeth
bared, the whites of her eyes moon-like.

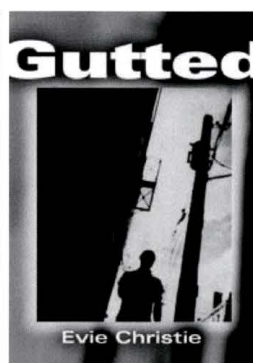
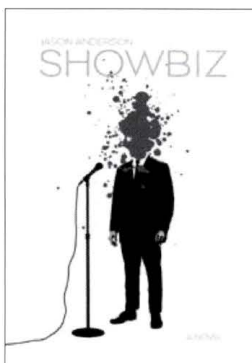
She stepped gingerly into the shower
and felt the warm spray hit her body.
She grunted as the water wet the cuts
on her face. She stood there hunched
against the pain, wishing the water
could clean her from the inside out,
wash away her loneliness. She squeezed
the pink bar of soap and it spurted out
from her grip. She made a grab for it
and missed, her body colliding with the
white and black tiles, then sliding to
the bottom of the tub. Ruth crouched
under the spray and started to cry, her
left hand holding on to the captured
but dissolving soap.

Ruth fell asleep on her couch. When
she woke up, squinting at the sun, she
could barely move her right arm. She
unwrapped the towel from around her
head. It was ringed with blood. She
wanted to call her sister for a ride to the
hospital, but she knew Marie would
freak out if she saw her like this. Marie
probably couldn't get a babysitter for the

From showbiz to hockey and pit bulls to poetry, ECW's Fall 2005 season has it all

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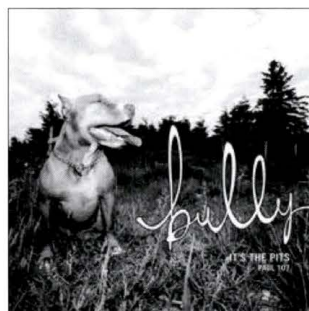


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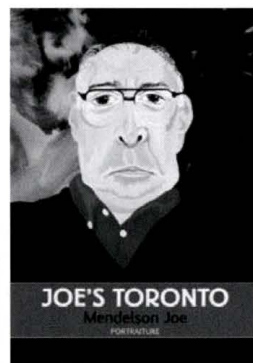
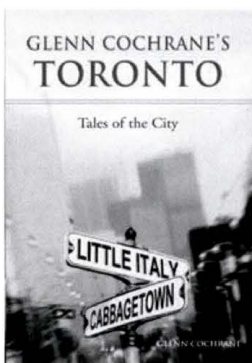
Bully: It's the Pits by Paul 107 \$23.95

Designed and illustrated by a network of cutting-edge artists, *Bully* is a celebration of the pit bull that gets to the heart of this oft-maligned breed and the cultures that surround it. From the streets to the suburbs, a scrapbook of pit bull love.



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MIDNIGHT, LEE'S PALACE

The crowd parted.
After a forceful effort,
I could have a better look.

Your hair was longer,
But still the same colour,
Still hiding your eyes.

In the years that passed,
I had cut my own hair.
You wore a ring.

I wondered what she would think
If she knew
That you'd moved on
And left both of us behind.

—DEANNA MCFADDEN

boys on such short notice anyway. Cindy was an option, but they hadn't really gone out together since Ruth starting frequenting Scooters. Ruth dialed a taxi.

Four hours later, she returned home with her arm in a sling, her head bandaged, and her purse crammed with antibiotic lotions. She left a message on her manager's voice mail, saying she would be off work for a week with a chipped elbow and head injuries. She also left a hesitant message for Cindy, telling her she had fallen down at Scooters and would try to phone her in a couple of days.

Ruth floated through the week, walking around in an old terry cloth bathrobe, ignoring the phone and letting the mail pile up. She sprawled on her black leather sofa, losing herself in trashy books and afternoon soap operas. She ate wherever she was—pudding, toast, bananas, potato chips—leaving bowls on the stereo and plates on her black wooden CD holder. Newspapers littered her coffee table and mugs multiplied around the room, finding homes under her bed and on the Mexican rug beside the couch.

Time was amorphous; she would wake up at 3 A.M., turn on the television, and grab a fashion magazine, trying to work up enough energy to make a pot of coffee, which she would drink through a straw. Every once in a while

she would catch a glimpse of herself in the corner of a mirror: flannel pyjamas askew, hair pasted back with clips, face bruised, eyes unfocused.

Ruth arrived at work early on the following Monday. Despite several layers of makeup, her face was still visibly discoloured and swollen, the antennae of stitches protruding from the uncovered cut at her hairline. She hung up her coat and skulked over to her desk, trying to camouflage her sling with the loose fabric of her ivory wool outfit. A pile of unopened mail lay in a mound of manila, cream, and white envelopes on her desk. She reached around the pile and turned on her computer; she had fifty-seven E-mails and eighteen phone messages.

She had just managed to wedge a notepad on top of her knee, so she could write without moving her injured elbow, when she saw a coat being hung on the rack. Cindy's head appeared from behind the black velour fabric.

Ruth smiled, even though smiling hurt her lip. Cindy backed up a half step, shaking her head slightly as if to clear the image. Ruth looked away and grabbed an envelope randomly from her pile, slashing it open with her left hand. The contents spilled out onto her desk. As she retrieved the papers, she sensed Cindy beside her.

"Hi."

"Hi."

"How you doing?"

"Good. Better."

"Great."

After a pause, Cindy said, "I got your message."

"Good."

"Anything I can do for you?"

"No. I'm fine. Really."

There was another pause.

"Well, I'd better be getting back to my desk."

"Sure."

"Yell if you need anything."

Ruth nodded and glanced up at her co-worker. Cindy's thin red lips parted in a smile; her eyes were narrowed in concern, and something else—distaste, censure, mockery—Ruth wasn't sure.

As Cindy backed away, Ruth could see the mail cart pulling up in the aisle.

God, she wasn't ready to speak to anyone else.

"Rough week?" Paul said, as he passed her an elasticized packet of mail.

"You could say that." Ruth coughed out a small laugh as she looked up at his lean frame.

Paul usually worked in the mailroom in the summer. He had finished his university degree early, so he was filling in at Livingston while he looked for permanent work.

"Actually, I fell coming out of Scooters."

"The bar down on Weyman?" Paul's grey eyes looked over at her.

"Yeah. Do you know it?"

"Uh-huh. I've been there a couple of times."

"You have?"

"Yeah, it's not bad. Has a pretty good happy hour." He laughed, showing a row of orthodontically straightened teeth.

Ruth cleared her throat.

"Are there lots of bars like Scooters?"

"Tons," Paul said. He leaned gracefully over his cart to grab Cindy's bundle of mail. "I can name a dozen bars like that my friends go to."

There was a pause.

"Excellent," Ruth said with a smile, her lip cracking from the unhealed cut. ▽

Dianne Scott lives in Riverdale, with her husband and two young children. Her work has appeared in the Windsor Review, the New Quarterly, and Other Voices, and has been broadcast on CBC Radio. She has completed a manuscript of short stories and is working on a book of survival tips for new mothers.

LOST KITTEN

BY ELYSE FRIEDMAN

She hadn't lost a kitten, but she called the number anyway. Two rings before a man picked up.

"Hello?"

Music played in the background. "Hotel California."

"Hi," she said. "I'm calling about the kitten?"

"Oh wow, great. Hold on a sec . . ."

The music faded. A sound like a dish clinking in a sink, then a cigarette being lit close to the phone.

"Yeah, hi," said the man. "Sorry about that."

"No problem."

"So, I guess I have your kitten, eh?"

"Um, I hope so."

"Well, I'd be surprised if there were more than one kitten missing in this complex, but just for laughs, can you describe her?"

She studied the poster taken from the lobby of her building. A crude line drawing of a cat face; no indication of colouring. These things usually included a photocopied snapshot. "Well, she's very tiny and very sweet."

The man laughed. "Most kittens are."

"And she's, um, kind of a mix of colours."

"Like calico?"

"Yeah, exactly. Calico."

"I guess this is her," said the man.

They made arrangements for her to collect the kitten that evening at seven-thirty. She plucked her eyebrows and gave her hair a VO5 Hot Oil treatment. He went to the mall to purchase a calico kitten.

The complex in which she and the man lived contained five twelve-storey high-rises positioned at various angles around a large and elaborate series of fountains. It was constructed in the nineteen-fifties, and it had a breezy, space-age look to it, one that exuded planning and optimism. The fountains now were dry and crumbling, but she remembered when they flowed. When she was a little girl, in the nineteen-sixties, her mother would bring her to see the swans that lived in the fountains, from

June until September. Her mother said the swans were a secret only they and the residents of the surrounding apartments knew about. Other people had to go to the Riverdale Zoo or Centre Island if they wanted to see swans, but they knew about these secret, private ones, and could visit whenever they liked without having to pay admission. Whenever her mother felt a mood indigo coming on, they would get in the putt-putt—the rusting, '58 Renault that Morris had given them—and drive to Moishe's on Bathurst Street. They would get two buttered bagels, one plain bagel, and a double-double coffee to go. Then they would head downtown to the fountains, where they would eat their buttered bagels and feed the plain one to the swans. The buttered bagels were wrapped neatly in wax paper. Her mother would give her sips from the coffee, and always saved the last and most sugary sip for her to dip her bagel into. It would soak up the sweetness, and turn brown and wonderfully soggy. They would watch the swans in the space-age fountains, and they would feel good.

"Someday we'll get an apartment here," her mother would say, "with a balcony that overlooks the fountain, and a bedroom for each of us." She'd say, "All it takes is dough, kiddo." She'd say it again on their way out of the complex, as they admired the cars in the parking lot—big Pontiacs, Oldsmobiles, Fords, and Chryslers that were rust-free and didn't have cigarette burns or splits in the seats with foam sticking out. Sometimes they'd pretend they were shopping for a new car. She would pick the red Thunderbird with the black interior. Her mother would take the Cadillac convertible, if it happened to be in the visitor parking that day. Once, they got right into the white Cadillac and pretended to drive it. Her mother was unafraid, even lit her Craven A with the car's cigarette lighter.

"All it takes is dough, kiddo," she said, blowing smoke and adjusting her sunglasses in the rear-view mirror.

They never did get an apartment there. Not together. She'd moved in five months after Morris had his heart attack, which was just over a year after her mother died, nearly five years ago. She didn't want to move out of the apartment she had shared with her mother for as long as she could remember, but the two men said she had to leave. They came to the door and said they were Morris's sons and that they owned the building now that he was dead. They called her Geraldine—her mother's name—and wanted to know why she hadn't paid a cent of rent for the past forty years. She told them she wasn't her mother, and that she didn't know why they hadn't paid rent, but guessed it was probably because they were friends with Morris.

"Friends, eh?" said the skinny one. "What kind of friends?"

"Good friends," she said. "He gave us cars."

"He gave you cars?" The fat one looked at his brother.

"I knew it," said the skinny one.

"And he'd come see us once a week. And bring Turtles, or kielbasa, sometimes Tia Maria."

"What kind of cars?" said the skinny one.

"Well, first there was the putt-putt. That was a Renault. Then there was a Cutlass Supreme—we liked that one 'cause it was big, and it lasted a long time. Then there was the Pontiac. And after that was the—"

"Honda Accord, right?"

"Right."

"And then, let me take a wild guess: a Toyota Camry?"

"How did you know?"

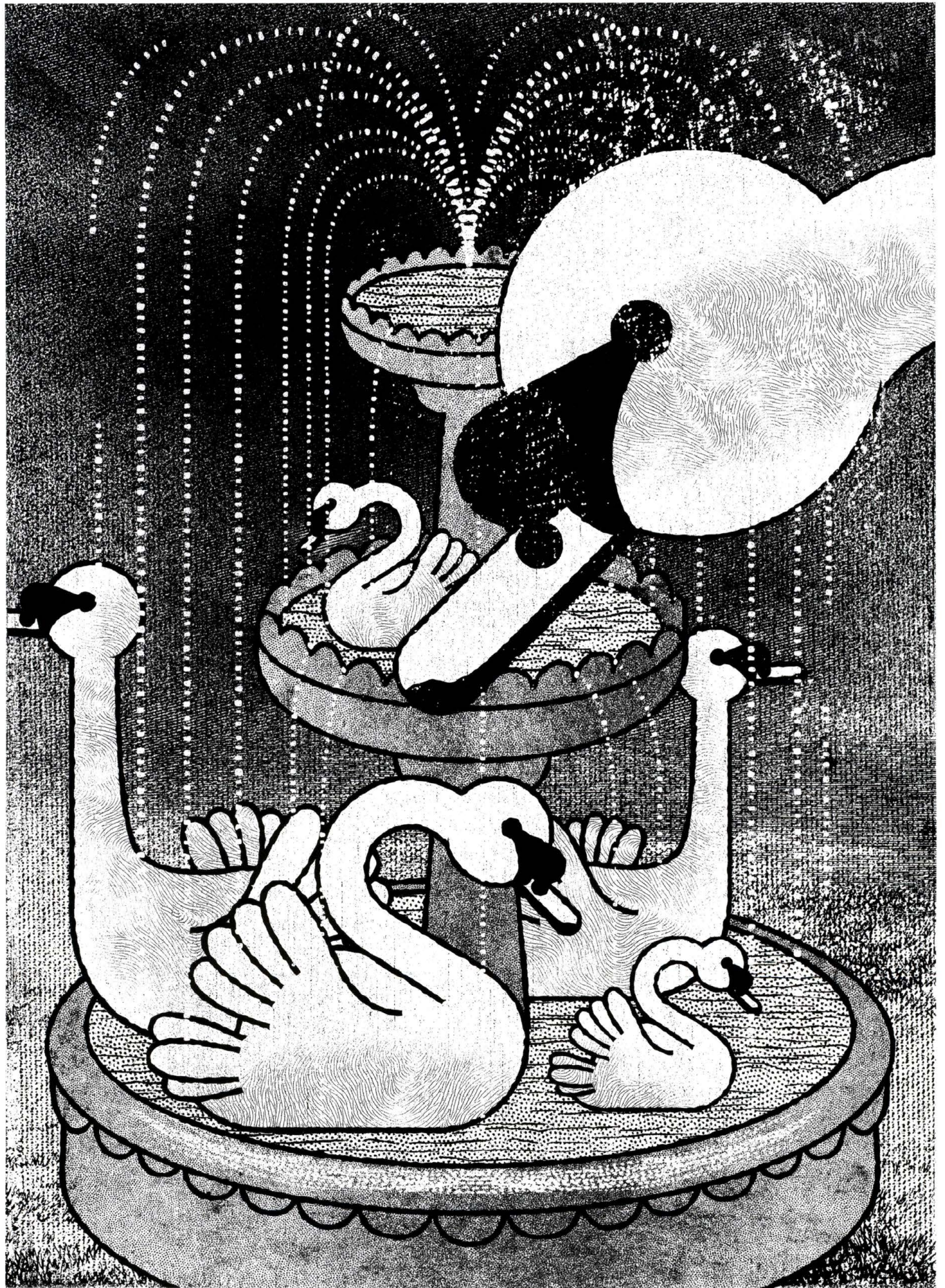
The brothers looked at each other and laughed.

"Unbelievable," said the fat one.

"I guess it was a trade-in of sorts," said the skinny one.

She didn't understand the joke, but she laughed to be polite.

"The Toyota was the last one," she said. "It's still in the parking lot. I don't know how to drive, but I like to go sit in it. I like to listen to the radio."



Sometimes I pretend to drive."

Again the brothers exchanged a look.

"Maybe we should talk to your mother," said the fat one. "Is your mother here?"

"No," she said, instantly having to fight back tears. "My mother is in heaven now."

They were nice to her after that. The fat one told her that everything was going to be O.K., and to stop crying and not worry about the rent she owed. He said they'd figure something out. The skinny one asked if she happened to have a picture of her mother. She couldn't help laughing at that. She had thousands of pictures of her mother. That was one of their favourite things to do, take Polaroids of each other. She invited the brothers in for a cup of Taster's Choice and to look at photos. Not any naked ones, of course, those were private—just the ones that were on display on the walls, shelves, windowsills, and fridge. The brothers seemed impressed by the images. They kept saying "wow," and calling each other over to look at this one or that one. They lingered long in front of the brass étagère, checking out the series in which she had done her mother as different nationalities—in a beret and trench coat for French, fur hat and muff for Russian, bathrobe with a bolster pillow fastened with a sash around the waist for Japanese, a towel turban and lots of beaded necklaces for Ethiopian. Her mother would make the costumes and set up the shots. She would take the pictures.

"This is really something," said the fat one.

"Yeah," said the skinny one. "I think I see a lot of therapy in my future."

She offered them another cup of Taster's Choice, but they said they had to go.

"You mind if I take one of these?" The skinny one pointed to one in a group of photos of her mother, wearing cut-off shorts and a bathing-suit top. She was stretched out on the hood of the Cutlass Supreme, reclining on the windshield with a Craven A burning in her hand. Her nails were long and red. Her blond hair was done up in pigtails.

"What the hell for?" said the fat one.

"Just to have. It's Dad's history after all."

"I don't think that's such a good idea," said the fat one.

"Why not?"

"Cause certain people can never find out about Dad's little history."

"How would she find out?" The skinny

DAVE COOK

I am Dave. Dave Cook.

Perhaps you know me.

I am not famous,

Dave Cooks aren't.

Not to my knowledge.

We carve the roast.

We lift our end.

Help out with the heavy stuff.

Oh sure, we fall in love.

Not every day. Not all romantic.

But practically. We make love sensibly.

On Saturdays we cut the grass.

Change the oil. Replace the filter.

Once in a while we go out for dinner.

We order the surf 'n' turf.

Drink the house red.

We don't often say no

at home or at work. We come in at nine.

Some of us carry a lunch box

and Thermos. Some of us carry sandwiches in Tupperware boxes with seal-fast tops.

We buy drinks from the vending machine.

If we'll be working late,

we phone home in advance with a warning.

one raised his voice. "Even if she found this—which she won't, I mean, how the hell would she—she wouldn't know who it was or what the hell it meant."

"She'd recognize the car."

"Oh that's rich. Half the time she doesn't even recognize us."

"Yeah, but it's the old stuff she remembers."

"But she's not going to see it!"

"Uch," said the fat one. "Why don't you just leave it alone?"

"Are you sure you don't want another Taster's Choice?"

"No!" they said in unison.

She hated when people raised their voices.

"So, can I borrow this?" said the skinny one, softening his tone.

"I guess . . ." Even though she had half a dozen variations of the same shot, she didn't want to part with it.

"Actually," said the fat one, "do you mind if I quickly use your bathroom before we go?"

She said she didn't mind, but in truth she already wanted them out. Except for

their brown hair and green eyes, they were nothing like Morris. Morris never raised his voice. He was always gentle and nice.

After the brothers left, she went into the bathroom to make sure the fat one hadn't stolen any of the Polaroids in there. He hadn't, but he had cleaned out her brush. She looked for the rectangle of hair in the wastebasket, but found nothing except used tissues and sanitary pads. He must have flushed it down the toilet. Why would he do that, she wondered. Was he trying to send a message that she wasn't tidy enough, that she should empty her brush more often? That was no way for a guest to behave. And she had just been thinking the fat one wasn't as bad as the skinny one, and that she could probably get used to him being the new Morris. She hoped she had seen the last of the brothers. Unfortunately, a couple of weeks later, they returned. That's when they told her she owed two hundred thousand dollars in back rent, not including interest payments. She said it sounded like a lot, and that she would have to phone her

Our wives are called Shondra, Maria, or Rose.
Our wives are Dinitra, or Shannon, or Marg.
For them (among others), we are never too tired
to look behind the fridge.
To replace a fuse. To trigger the mousetrap.
Never too tired to fight the raccoons over garbage,
or drive to the pharmacy
to help fight the common cold.

Our thick fingers can be taught
to diaper baby daughters.
Our hands can be taught to hold
and to quell baby daughters.
Each day, for the greater good, we leave.
When we return from our jobs,
we greet our homes, calling out,
“How’re my favourite girls?”

Years later, our babies
will confound us with questions and behaviour.
We’ll do our best not to say,
“Ask your mother.”
At night we’ll drink a beer. We will watch the game
when the television’s available.
We are beauty.
We are Dave. Dave Cook.

—CHRIS CHAMBERS

friend Mr. Pantalone, at the bank. But the brothers said no, that she didn’t have to call Mr. Pantalone, that they were prepared to forget about the debt if she signed some papers and moved out by the end of the following month. They told her they would help make the necessary arrangements.

There was only one place she could think of to go.

She stepped out onto the balcony and stared across the crumbling fountains to the high-rises at the back of the complex, wondering in which of the two the man with the kitten resided. She had lived in the complex for more than three years now, but had never been into any of the other buildings. Once, about eight months after she moved in, she’d attended a tenants’ association meeting in an apartment on the twelfth floor of her high-rise, the one marked PH in the elevator. She had seen notices in the lobby and the laundry room for weeks before the meeting. All the residents were invited. Refresh-

ments were going to be served. After she decided to attend, she began to grow increasingly excited about the meeting. On a typical night, she would have dinner, either at home or at McDonald’s, and then go see a movie or watch television until it was time for bed. The tenants’ association meeting was something out of the ordinary, something to look forward to. In the week leading up to the event, she spent hours each day co-ordinating and trying on different outfits. Using one of her mother’s old *Redbook* magazines as a guide, she experimented with a number of fresh looks for hair and makeup. She imagined there would be a lot of people at the meeting, and that after the official business was dealt with, the hostess would turn on music and everyone would mingle around a banquet table, eating ridged potato chips with onion dip, and crustless party sandwiches with spirals of salmon and cream cheese. She thought someone might bring a batch of homemade cookies, and even though she had never had it or

seen any outside of a movie, she hoped there would be punch—ruby red in a cut-glass bowl—and somebody nice to ladle out a glass for her. The apartments on the penthouse level were probably large and fancy. She envisioned an expanse of white broadloom.

The night before the meeting, she was unable to relax. She went to bed early, but proceeded to flip and flop in a kind of half-sleep until the sun showed up. After breakfast, she took a long bath and a short nap. At ten-thirty, she began to get ready for the six-fifteen meeting. She plucked her eyebrows and gave herself a manicure and pedicure. After lunch, she took a shower and did her hair—pigtails with the ends curled with a curling iron. She made sure to use a lot of Arid Extra Dry before donning her selected outfit—the brown and pink rayon dress that used to be her mother’s. It was snug around the belly and loose in the chest, but she still liked it, especially paired with her mother’s wooden beads. And she had used her mother’s trick of matching her fingernail polish with the brown in the material, and her toenail polish with the pink. Finally, she put on some Egyptian-inspired eye makeup—heavy black liner that swooped up at the corners to accentuate the thick mascara lashes—and some brown lipstick, pink rouge, and a triple spritz of Jean Naté. She half-watched TV for just over two hours until it was time to climb onto her platform sandals and head to the elevator, where she would have the pleasure of pushing the PH button for the first time.

There were three people at the meeting—all of them old women, wearing sweaters too warm for the weather. Two of them were crocheting. The apartment was exactly the same size and layout as hers, just reversed—bedroom and bathroom on the right instead of the left. And the refreshments were just tea and coffee. There wasn’t even any sugar, only crinkly packets of saccharin that looked as if they had gotten wet at some point and then been left to dry out instead of being thrown away. The worst part was that one of the women—the non-crocheting one—was the Scary Lady, the one with the buzz cut and the cracked orange lipstick and the terrible bugged-out eyes who was always in the lobby, scolding the superintendent and his wife, or the mailman, or anyone who didn’t wipe

their feet before stepping onto the carpeted area. The cracked orange mouth told her to sit down already, and so she had to. She perched on the edge of a wingback chair, in a cloud of Jean Naté, until she felt warm tears pulling eyeliner and mascara down her cheeks, at which point she jumped up and lurched out of the Scary Lady's apartment.

She would not make the same mistake twice. She was not going to overprepare for the kitten man.

He hoped she would be pretty, but not too pretty. Brunette would be good. And young. The younger the better, he thought, as he piled dirty plates inside the oven and used a stiff dish towel to flick macaroni remnants off the counter into the sink. His roommate, Glen, had refused to clean up his dinner mess, and now he was stuck with the task if he wanted the place to look halfway presentable. It was ten minutes to seven. He didn't have time to do a proper tidying.

"Why don't you get her to clean up if it's so freakin' important?" Glen said, punctuating his question with a loud fart. He didn't understand the concept

of guests, particularly female ones, and seemed, in fact, to resent them.

"We *need* a woman to clean up after us." Glen pounded his fist on the counter. "And to make us steaks."

"Look, why don't you just disappear for a while? Go to your room or something."

"No way, Jose. I want to check out this kitten chick. I want to see if she turns out to be a dirty slut or some kind of feminazi."

"And what if she's a sweet little old lady? Huh? What if she's a nice, innocent girl?"

"If she's a sweet little old lady, you're not going to invite her in, are you, pal?"

He didn't answer.

"You're going to jam kitty through the door and call it a night. But, hey, if she happens to be a nice, innocent girl—a young one like you like—I'll leave you alone, buddy. I'll go crash for a while. Hell, you know that. But first I gotta see what shows up at our door, O.K.? 'Cause if it's one of those braless man-eaters with her lesbo tits hanging out, or her legs all hairy and gross, I might have something to say to the gal."

"Oh really, like what?"

"Um . . . like, 'Your ugly-ass unshaven legs aren't gonna make you equal to me and aren't proving anything except that you're a stupid bitch who needs to become acquainted with a razor.'"

He sighed. Sometimes he just wished Glen would shut the hell up.

"Oh, for Christ's sake, shut that cat up, why don't ya," Glen said.

The kitten had been meowing for a while, so he scooped it out of its cardboard carton and cuddled it under his chin. He'd held kittens before, but never one as tiny as this. He brushed its fur against his lips and inhaled the warm kitteny fragrance. It reminded him of something and made him feel sad, but before he could remember what it was, Glen said, "Think how easy it'd be to just open your mouth and bite its little head off. Chomp."

"Oh leave me alone for Christ's sake!" There was a knock at the door then, and he knew for certain that his outburst had been heard in the hall. "Thanks a lot, Glen," he hissed, as he leaned down to check his reflection in the kettle.

"Such a handsome devil," Glen said, with a fake gay accent. Then he blew a



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big kiss to the reflection.

It was exactly 7 P.M.

Through the peephole he discerned the following: old—late thirties, or even older—but pretty. A brunette, like he liked. And something soft about her. Something meek in the posture. He opened the door wide.

"Hi," he said. "Sorry about that. My roommate is being a jerk."

"Oh," she said. "It's O.K., um . . ."

"Kitten," said the man, stepping back and aside. "Come on in. I'll just get her for you."

She hesitated on the threshold, peeking into the apartment, which looked both familiar and strange. It had the same layout as her own, and the same parquet flooring, which is how she knew it was the same size (three squares by four squares for the vestibule) even though it looked much smaller. The man had a couch and a chair and a TV in the same spots where she had a couch and a chair and a TV, but his were twice the size of hers and took up a lot more space. Also, the man had covered the large picture window and the window on the balcony door with green garbage bags and duct tape, instead of blinds or curtains. The total lack of view made the suite seem shorter, stubbier.

"It's O.K.," he said, smiling, gesturing for her to enter. "Glen's gone to his room."

The apartment smelled like cigarette smoke, which she liked. She stepped inside and closed the door behind her, as the man disappeared into the kitchen.

Flags over windows she had seen before, but never garbage bags. The only indication that it wasn't totally dark outside were tiny cracks of light peeking through here and there where a bag sagged or the silver tape had peeled back a smidgen. She noticed the faint sound of TV coming from behind a closed door down the hall. Laugh track. And the exaggerated voices of sitcom characters.

"Here she is!" said the man, returning with the kitten.

"Oh," she said. "So cute!"

As he handed it over, he noticed that the woman wasn't wearing a wedding or engagement ring, or any jewellery for that matter. She had nail polish on, but it was a soft pink, practically transparent. Nothing garish about that. Even Glen, who despised nail polish, couldn't call it trumpy. Her nails weren't too long either.

She seemed clean and well-groomed.

"Hello, sweet thing," said the woman, nuzzling the kitten. "Hello, sweetie pie."

"Is that her name? Sweetie Pie?"

"Her name? Oh, no. It's not Sweetie Pie. It's, um, Geraldine."

"Geraldine." The man laughed. "That's a funny name for a cat."

"I guess," said the woman, blushing and looking away.

He liked that she blushed and looked away. It made her seem young, even though she was old, at least ten years older than him, at least thirty-eight, maybe older. He had the urge to erase some of those years by switching off the overhead light, but decided not to even dim it just yet. No point in scaring her off.

"Listen," he said. "I was just about to give kitty—I mean, *Geraldine*—a dish of milk. Would you like to come in for a minute? Maybe have a cold beverage?"

"Oh," she said. "O.K."

"Don't worry about Glen. He's not going to bother us, I don't think. Have a seat," said the man. "What would you like to drink?"

"Um, do you have any Tia Maria?"

"Oh jeez. I don't think so." *Tia Maria?*

"Um, I have some airplane bottles of Baileys in my room. You know, I might even have a Kahlúa," said the man. "That's pretty much the same, isn't it?"

"I don't know."

"Want me to check?"

"O.K. Thanks."

"Be right back."

Of course, he wasn't even halfway down the hall before Glen was on his case about the girl and her drink of choice.

"Tia Maria?" Glen whispered. "Tia fuckin' Maria?"

"So what?"

"So it looks like the lady is a lush, my friend. Too bad, buddy, 'cause she doesn't look too skanky on the surface, does she?"

He ignored Glen and slipped into his room.

"Come on, guy, think about it. What kind of woman waltzes into a strange man's apartment, then demands booze even though she was just offered a cold beverage, which, in my book, clearly means a glass of pop or juice?"

"Tia Maria is a girlie drink," he said, balancing on a chair to retrieve the miniature bottles of liquor from atop the bookshelf. "I don't think you can conclude she's a lush 'cause she asked for an ounce of Tia Maria. She probably just

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has a sweet tooth."

"Speaking of which, that tooth, sweet or not, is kind of long, don't you think?"

"She looks all right to me." He used a T-shirt from the laundry basket to wipe the thick pad of dust off the bottles. "These are still fine, don't you think?"

"Sure. Bottoms up. If the lush gets ptomaine poisoning it's her own damn fault."

"We don't know she's a lush, O.K.? So butt out. Piss off."

"Yeah, yeah. We'll see how things go. If she gets drunk and starts whoring it up, I'm coming out."

"Don't start, O.K.? Please." He pressed a hand to his left temple and sighed deeply. "And can you turn off that TV?"

"Sure, Sigh Sperling, Mr. Sigh Master. Better run along. You know how nosy these bitches can get. Don't want her poking through your things while you're gone. Don't want her straightening the sofa pillows, now do you?"

She touched the kitten's nose to her own. "Don't worry," she whispered. "You're going to come live with me. It'll be fun." She hoped that whoever had really lost the kitten wouldn't be too sad about it. She wondered why it hadn't occurred to her to get a pet before now.

"Here we go," said the man, entering with a drink in one hand and a saucer of milk in the other. "Hey, what happened to your shirt?"

She glanced at her tank top.

"You took your shirt off."

"I took my cardigan off," she said. "It's really warm in here."

The man sighed and set the saucer of milk down on the floor. Glen was going to have a field day with this development. Now she was not just a lush, she was also a tramp. At least she was wearing a bra, he noted, as he handed her her drink. Thank God for that.

"Thank you very much." She set the kitten down in front of the saucer and watched it tongue up the milk. Little flicks of pink. So sweet.

The man sat at the opposite end of the brown sofa. One large vinyl seat cushion separated them. The faux leather was covered in strips of criss-crossing duct tape.

"You're not having one?" she said, swirling the ice in her glass.

"I'm not really thirsty. But I'll smoke, if you don't mind."

"I don't mind."

WHAT WE LEAVE BEHIND

Sometimes the world crashes madly
Out there, and in here it smells like rain
And beats evenly at thin windows.

Inside, we are tired and naked.
It's cooler and darker, and I'm too happy
Not to think about everything you will leave behind:

An invitation to a party, sent to your mother
At seventeen, in her burning touristy homeland,
A list of your grandfather's horses

You'd like me to lay bets on a photograph or two,
A friend's phone number, a note you'd written
To stick on my door when you thought I'd be out.

But I wasn't out—instead we made awkward gestures,
Leaned into the door frame, and kissed suddenly,
For the second time. The snow still damp on your collar.

My boots drying on a plastic mat. I thought I might never
Want to see you again. Just love you from this place,
Or follow and die gently in a squall.

—EVIE CHRISTIE

He lit a cigarette, then offered her the pack.

"No, thanks." She took a sip of her drink. "Mmm. Yummy. What did you say this was?"

"Baileys Irish Cream."

"Baileys Irish Cream?"

"Yeah."

"It's good."

"Glad you like it." With dismay, he watched her drain the rest of the drink. Now he would have to offer her another, with Glen, no doubt, listening in the hallway. Great. At least she didn't smoke. Glen disapproved of women who smoked. He thought it was unladylike. He said it wrecked their eggs and made their babies feeble. If she'd smoked, Glen would probably be out here already, stirring up the shit, making his life difficult.

She set her glass on the upside-down milk carton that served as a side table. She licked her lips.

"Would you like another?" he asked, telepathically willing her to decline.

"Yes, please. Thanks."

"How about some food with that?"

I've got Bits & Bites. Or some Bugles?"

"No, thank you. Just Baileys Irish Cream, please."

As he poured out another mini bottle, he noticed that the largest butcher knife, the one they called Ralph, was missing from the block. He checked the cutlery drawer. No go. Earlier, he had transferred the dirty dishes from the sink into the oven, so he knew it wasn't in there. From the kitchen doorway he looked down the hall. Sure enough, there was Glen, squatting on his heels, rocking and smirking, smirking and rocking, with his hands behind his back. Time for some damage control. He returned quickly to the living room.

"Here you go. Cheers."

"Thank you. Mmm, yum."

"It's funny," he said, lighting another cigarette. "You don't strike me as a drinker."

She giggled. "I'm not a drinker. I mean, ever since Morris died, I don't drink at all. Except for right now."

"You see, I knew you weren't a drinker."

"How did you know?"

"Well . . . your complexion, the way

you're dressed. I'm really glad you're not a drinker."

"Thanks."

"So who's this Morris?"

"My mom's friend."

"Oh."

"And my friend. He used to bring us Tia Maria."

"Oh yeah."

"He died about four years ago."

"That's too bad."

"Yeah. He brought Tia Maria even after my mom died."

"That was nice of him—hey, are you O.K.?"

"Yeah. I just . . . I just miss my mom sometimes." She wiped tears from her eyes and turned her face away from the man. That's when he noticed Glen, sneaking a peek at the woman, or more specifically, at her breasts, which were not too large, but had depressingly prominent nipples pressing against an insufficiently padded bra and tank top.

No words for half a minute, just the sound of the woman sniffing and the man smoking. Then he coughed and said, "What's this?" He rubbed his thumb and index finger together.

"I don't know."

"The world's smallest violin." He laughed.

She laughed too. She thought it was nice of him to try to cheer her up with a funny joke.

"Morris had brown hair and green eyes like you," she said.

"Is that right?"

"Yeah." She picked up the kitten, which had finished the milk and had started to meow.

"Anyway . . . I guess I could go and buy my own Tia Maria. I just never think of it, you know."

"Well, that's good."

"It is?"

"Yeah . . . I mean, sometimes drinking can be very bad for your health." The man laughed loud. He tried to stop, but couldn't.

"Shut up," he said, finally stifling the fit with a hand over his mouth.

She didn't get the joke, but smiled anyway. This man had a good sense of humour. In the magazines she read, women were always saying that was the most important thing. They were always looking for a man with a good sense of humour. And now she had found one. The weird thing was, she

had seen this man before, walking down the street toward the corner where the stores were, or walking back with grocery bags. She'd passed him at least three or four times, but never thought anything about it. She didn't know then that he had a good sense of humour.

"I've seen you before," she said.

"Oh really?" The man wiped tears from his eyes.

"Walking down Lawton."

"I guess that makes sense. How long have you lived here?"

"Three and a half years."

"Hmm. And what is it that you do?"

"Um. I go to the movies, or stay home and watch TV, or I go to restaurants or the park. . . ."

"No, I mean what do you for a living? Where do you work?"

"Oh, I don't work. Work is for suckers."

"Excuse me?"

"Work is for suckers. My mom used to say that."

"Is that right?"

"Yeah. She said life is too short to waste on work or worrying."

"So she never worked?"

"No."

"But your dad worked."

"I never had a dad."

"Never?"

"Never."

"Well, I guess some people have all the luck."

She shrugged. "I guess."

"So your mom never worked, and you've never worked."

"That's right."

"Must be nice."

"Yeah, it's nice."

"Well, it's not like I'm a big fan of it or anything. I mean, my job totally bites, actually. But what if everybody felt that way? What if everyone thought work was for suckers?"

"I don't know . . ."

"What if the garbageman didn't pick up your garbage? Huh? What if the firemen were kicking back, having a beer while your house burned to the ground? Hmm? What if there was no doctor to sew your ear back on if a dog bit it off?"

"That would be bad."

"Certainly it would be bad. It would be worse than bad." The man stubbed out his cigarette, then lit another. He inhaled deeply and blew smoke through his nos-

trils. "What, are you rich or something?"

"I don't think so."

"You don't know?"

"Mr. Pantalone, at the bank, takes care of things."

"Where'd you grow up?"

"Bathurst and Wilson."

"Monster home?"

"Pardon?"

"Big house?"

"No. We lived in an apartment."

"Doesn't sound rich. So if your mom never worked, how did she pay the rent?"

"We didn't pay rent. Morris owned the building."

"Oh. I see. *Shit.*" The man hunched forward and closed his eyes.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing." He pressed the palm of his hand hard against his left temple.

"Are you O.K.?"

The man didn't answer. He sat hunched for a moment, then relaxed back on the couch and smiled.

"I think your mom worked," he said.

"I think she worked for buddy who brought the Tia Maria. Maybe you worked for him too, huh?"

"Morris was our friend." She set her

uTOpia: Towards a New Toronto

In which thirty-five Torontonians laud, lambaste and lead the charge for change in Canada's biggest metropolis. Incorporating many ideas, from the playful to the pragmatic, and two giant foldout colour maps of potentially perfect Torontos.

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STEPHANOTIS

We walked to the Leslie Street Spit from Queen Street
after my return.

We hadn't seen each other for more than a month.

Newly shy, intent together,
even after all these years.

I noticed weeds, the other walkers,

how you aimed to joke.

You took my photo by the lake

to generate a keepsake;

I bought a stephanotis.

Dormant on the hoop,
it stayed austere until July,

when out of army green it loosened spry, erratic shoots—
helical around the metal
slats of the venetian blinds—
coiled in pliable embrace
they looped-the-loop like snakes—
elastically.

So they would have been garters.

—ELANA WOLFF

empty glass down on the side table. She
licked her lips.

The man looked as if he were going to
start laughing again. He slid his hand
into the crack between the sofa pillows.

"No," he said. "Please."

"Please what?"

"Please . . . have another drink."

"Oh . . ."

"How about some more Baileys Irish
Cream?"

"Um, I don't know." She was already
feeling warm and dizzy from the first
two. It was awfully nice stuff though.

"Come on, one more won't kill you,"
the man said, heading for the kitchen.
"Hey, you mind if I turn off the over-
head light? My eyes are kind of sensi-
tive to light."

"I don't mind. Can I use your bath-
room?"

"End of the hall. Excuse the mess. My
roommate is a slob."

As he poured the last bottle of Baileys
into her glass, he could feel the
dread rising from his solar plexus into
his throat.

"Please," he whispered. "Just go back

to your room. You've got it all wrong."

"You think?" Glen smirked in the
warped reflection of the kettle. "You
figure Miss Guzzle Liquor in a Strange
Man's Apartment is a forty-year-old vir-
gin or something?"

"It's possible. I mean, she seems . . . I
don't know. Don't you think there's
something off about her?"

"Off? I'll tell you what's off. Her
shirt, O.K., after about five minutes in
a strange man's apartment. She's all,
'Doopsy-doo, check out the headlights,
boys!' You think she's expecting to
leave here without a good fucking? Huh? You think the slag's not expect-
ing a cock up her hole?" Glen adjusted
his penis, which was stiffening in his
pants. "Why do you think she's getting
so lubricated? She's getting ready to
take it up the ass."

When Glen got excited, he was diffi-
cult to control.

"Just calm down, O.K.?"

"Oh I'm calm, don't you worry."

"Where's Ralph?" He gestured to the
knife holder.

"You know damn well," Glen snapped.

"And you know exactly when to intro-

duce him to our guest."

"I don't think so."

"I think so!"

"But what if she's—"

"What? Nice? Sweet? I'll tell you
what, pal, if you put the moves on her
and she tries to stop you, I mean, *really*
tries to stop you, then we'll call it a night,
O.K.? We'll send her and her calico pussy
back into the world. Hell, maybe we'll
call her up sometime. Take her to a
Renée Zellweger movie." Glen laughed.
"Bring her some Tia frickin' Maria."

"O.K., quiet! I think she's coming."

She flushed the toilet and washed her
hands, drying them on her pant
legs. She didn't want to touch the filthy
towel hanging from a hook on the back
of the door. The bathroom was a mess,
and smelled awful—sharp, like ammo-
nia. Why would such a nice man live
with such a dirty roommate? Maybe the
man was dirty too. She wondered which
one of them owned the toothbrush in
the cup on the sink. It was caked with
dried, yellowing toothpaste, and the
bristles were all grey and bent back. It
had to be at least two years old. Or
maybe it looked that way because they
both used it. There was only one tooth-
brush in the bathroom. Did roommates
share toothbrushes? She hoped not. She
wanted to kiss the man, but not if he
shared a toothbrush with his roommate.
Was that the kind of thing she could
ask about if he started to kiss her? Prob-
ably he would think she was rude. She
would just have to kiss him back that's
all. A man with a good sense of humour
was worth it. And then maybe, after the
kissing and everything, he would visit
her once or twice a week, and get into
bed with her, and bring her things.
Maybe he would give her a car and
teach her how to drive it. She opened
the medicine cabinet, but there was
nothing there except toenail clippers
and prescription pills. She checked be-
hind the shower curtain. One bar of
soap. One dirty razor.

She wondered, as she returned to the
living room, if the man and his roommate
shared more than just a toothbrush. ▽

*Elyse Friedman lives near Allenby. She is
the author of two novels, Then Again (Random
House, 1999) and Waking Beauty (Three
Rivers, 2004), and the poetry collection
Know Your Monkey (ECW, 2003).*

THAT BIZ CALLED SHOW(BIZ)

An arts writer, a keyboardist, and a filmmaker walk into a book deal. The result is Jason Anderson's comedic debut novel.

BY ALEX MLYNEK

While most of his classmates were at home in their basements shouting at the devil along with Mötley Crüe, a fourteen-year-old Jason Anderson was debating the band's merits in *Vox*, a magazine published by CJSW, the University of Calgary's radio station. At *Vox*, Anderson received an early education in both writing and pop culture, while managing to avoid becoming precocious, cocky, or fawning. Today, at the age of thirty-three, Anderson is still none of those things. As his success as a journalist shows, he learned his lessons well.

Best known for his music and film writing in *Eye Weekly*, *Toronto Life*, *Toro*, and the *Globe and Mail*—and as a talking head on MuchMoreMusic's ever-increasing number of "list" shows—Anderson has also been pursuing a career in fiction for the past ten years. His short stories have appeared in *This Magazine* (and this magazine), and in the 2001 anthology *The IV Lounge Reader*. In September, ECW Press released his first novel, *Showbiz*, a comedic thriller filled with enough film, music, and general pop-culture references to keep even the biggest arts geek happy. "I sort of planned it so that it would fit in all this showbiz, entertainment stuff that I was interested in," says Anderson.

Showbiz follows Nathan Grant, a Canadian journalist living in New York, in his attempt to track down Jimmy Wynn, a fictional comedian not-so-loosely based on Vaughn Meader, a little-remembered comic from the nineteen-sixties, best known for his impersonation of John F. Kennedy. Like the real-life Meader, Wynn's career took a turn for the worse following the assassination of Anderson's fictional U.S. President Theodore Cannon. Grant becomes obsessed with finding the long-vanished comedian after stumbling across a used copy of Wynn's famous record album, leading the struggling journalist from New York to Las Vegas to California, and finally to a Niagara Falls

dinner theatre. *Showbiz's* world is part real, part alternate reality. While some of the book's characters are fictionalized versions of real-life celebrities (a Lenny Bruce who didn't die in 1966, but remains bitterly alive in a nursing home, for one), others are more-veiled homages, and part of the book's fun is in guessing who's who. The book also references such disparate cultural elements as, in Anderson's words, "crappy punk rock and illusioning."

"It was really fun to build a plot like that," he says. "That basic mystery thriller thing, where you make the reader feel like they're not three steps behind, but like a step and a half maybe, where they're just kind of getting a little bit."

Anderson identifies himself more as an arts writer than as a journalist, but his years of experience in the press more than qualify him to write a story from a reporter's point of view, and have served him well in his ability to tackle a novel. Nathan Grant is, as Anderson describes, "somebody who doesn't have a great deal of confidence about what he's doing, but does have that tenacity to keep moving forward." This juxtaposition of fear and doggedness allowed Anderson to use the character to keep moving the story ahead, either through Grant's actions, or those of people around him. This constant forward motion was integral to the success of the story, Anderson says. "I'd been writing things that were much more minimalist and static before.

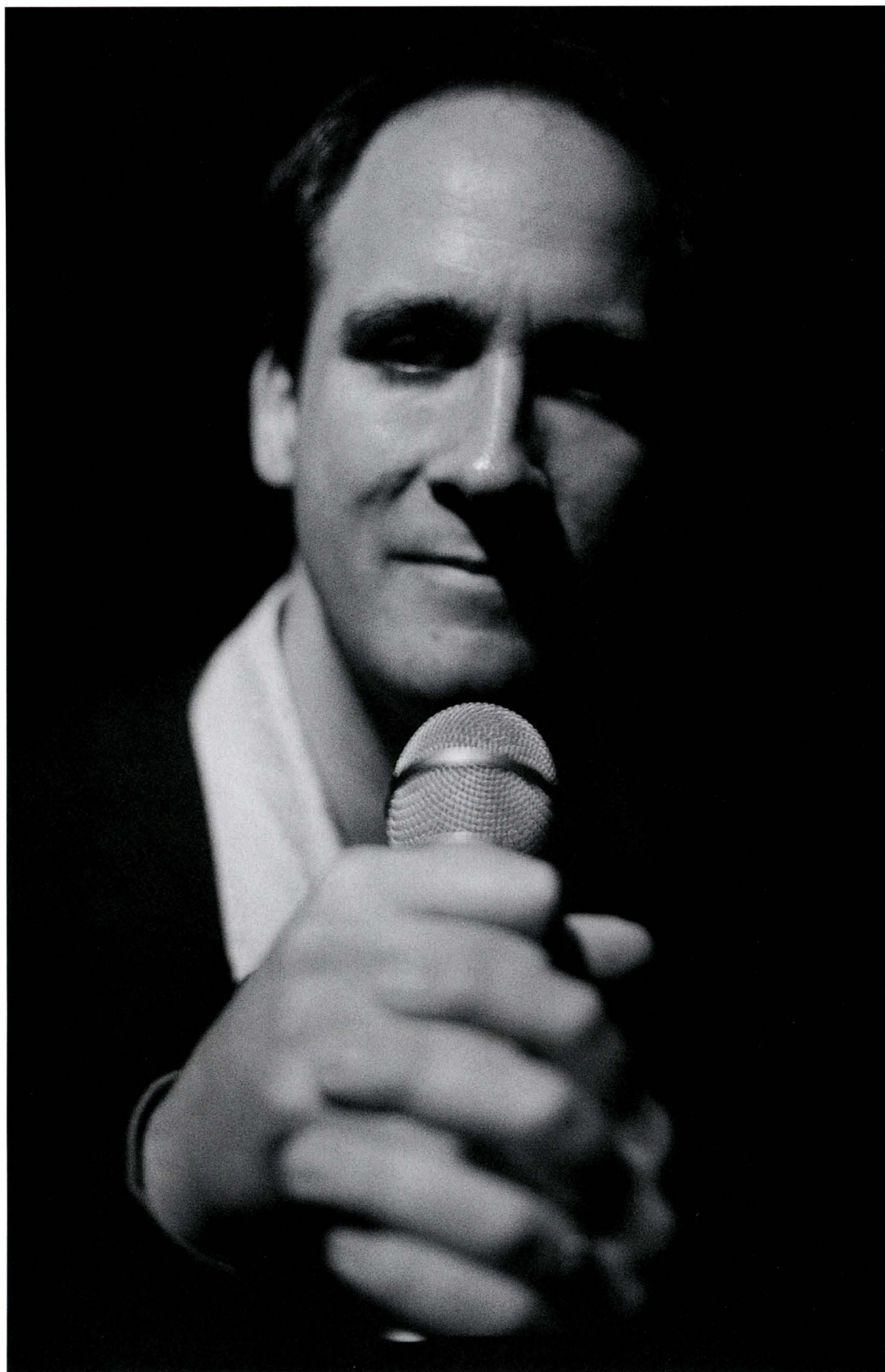
... The whole thing was to have a lot of story, and a lot of dialogue, and a continual momentum." The decision to make his lead character a journalist came from Anderson's initial conception of the book as a mix of the films *Citizen Kane* and *Melvin and Howard*—a road story with an interview structure.

"Having a journalist was not so much because I was interested in writing about a journalist's perspective," he says. "It was about using a journalist instead of a detective. They're both trying to do the same

thing, which is discover the mystery."

Showbiz is more than a litany of Anderson's far-reaching fascinations, it's an attempt to do something the author says few Canadian writers do these days—entertain. "I read and review a lot of CanLit where there really isn't a plot," he says. "A lot of character, a lot of theme, but there's really not a ripping-yarn story element to it." To buck this trend in the modern Canadian canon, Anderson decided that his book had to have a U.K. flavour, and he looked to the writing of authors like Northern Ireland's Colin Bateman and Scotland's Christopher Brookmyre, whose work he sees as "fast-paced, with a lot of plot—satirical and fun," to create a book closer in spirit to a Mike Hammer mystery than your typical Canadian fare.

Anderson began writing for the Toronto weekly *Eye* almost immediately after moving to Toronto from Calgary, in 1991, when he was nineteen. One of his *Vox* editors, Bill Reynolds, had moved to Toronto before Anderson and was already writing for the newly launched paper (he would eventually become its editor). Today, aside from being a prolific freelance writer for a number of publications, Anderson is still a frequent contributor to *Eye*, has been its music editor, and writes a regular film column, Medium Cool. It was through *Eye* that Anderson—who had written and published poetry as a teenager—made the jump from criticism to fiction, when an assignment brought him into the novelist Paul Quarrington's workshop, at the Humber School for Writers, in the summer of 1995. Of his former pupil, Quarrington, the author of *Whale Music*, among other books, says, "[Anderson's] writing muscle is so well developed that he can use this tool to accomplish whatever he needs. ... At the same time, he doesn't need to impress you with how he's writing, so he can get to the more





The Two Koreas: Kieran Grant, Jason Anderson, Stuart Berman, David Gee, and Ian Worang.

important work, like the characterization, or the voice, or imbuing the book with some kind of subtext or tone."

What also makes Anderson's work unique is his ability to convey his enthusiasm for the things he loves—film, literature, and books—to the reader. "Whenever he is making an entertainment or a pop-cultural reference, it never seems forced," says Jennifer Hale, *Showbiz's* editor. "It's just sort of in there because that's the way he talks, and that's the way he writes." Comfort with subject matter is one thing, but those he works with regularly also appreciate his ability to hit the right tone. "He's really funny," says Kieran Grant, *Eye's* film editor, a former *Toronto Sun* music writer, and a longtime friend of Anderson's. "There's a certain irreverence that coexists with his knowledgeability that is just so tricky." Anderson's *Eye* column on the 2005 Toronto International Film Festival exhibits this quality, conveyed with pathos: "According to the early buzz, *Walk the Line* will be this fall's *Ray*, *American Gun* will be *Crash*, *Shooting Dogs* will be *Hotel Rwanda*, *Shopgirl* will be *Sideways* and *Capote* will

be *Kinsey*. No word on what poor movie gets to be *Beyond the Sea*." Says Grant, "Traditionally, music writers alienate people, but Jason has this warm way of conveying humour. And he loves Kylie Minogue. What can I say?"

Just as most actors long to direct, it's safe to assume most music critics long to be rock stars—another lesson Anderson has learned and accepted, but, thankfully, with a level head. "There was this unique situation for a while in the nineties where it seemed like there was a handful of rock critics at each paper who became good friends," says Grant. That gang of critics—Grant, Matt Galloway (*Now*), Stuart Berman (*Eye*), Ben Rayner (*Toronto Star*), and, occasionally, Anderson—soon started to d.j. together around town. In 2003, three of them formed a band, the Two Koreas, featuring Berman on vocals, Grant on guitar, Anderson on keyboards, the musician Ian Worang on bass, and the advertising writer (and *Showbiz's* cover designer) David Gee on drums. "Cheekiness run amok" is how Grant describes the band, which

proudly wears influences like the Fall, the Modern Lovers, and Can on its sleeve. The Two Koreas played its first show in February, 2004, at the Drake Hotel, on Queen Street West. "My favourite comment about that show was that when we started playing, at the back of the room there was this palpable wave of relief, where it was like, 'Oh, thank God they don't totally suck,'" says Anderson. "It would have been this uncomfortable thing for everyone." While the band does want to achieve some measure of success, it is not looking for a record deal (the band's first album, *Main Plates & Classic Pies*, was self-released in early 2005), nor is it interested in touring. The project, Anderson says, is more for fun: "[Like] having a band, but you get to take off all of the stressful stuff."

And directing, it seems, is not the dream of actors alone. Anderson has also tackled the film genre, having completed two short movies, one for an art show organized by the writer and artist R. M. Vaughan, the other made at a workshop led by the filmmaker and professor Philip Hoffman.

TORONTO THE ... BETTER?

A new collection of essays explores the city's zest for life.

Anderson's broad palate is often on display. In conversation, as in his writing, he can jump easily from heavy metal to avant-garde film to why Tom Green's 2001 critical and box office bomb, *Freddy Got Fingered*, may not be that funny, but is important in terms of its commentary on comedy movies. Anderson isn't one to rip a movie to shreds just because he doesn't care for the subject matter. "It really bugs me when I read people who have made no effort to understand what the context is. You see that a lot with horror movies and lowbrow comedies," he says. "It's completely useless as a review. To me, what's interesting is, what exactly are the gross jokes about? Or what kind of gross jokes are they?"

With *Showbiz*, Anderson hopes critics will extend him the same professional courtesy he tries to offer his subjects. "I kinda felt one thing that might come up is that the book seems kind of commercial," he says. "Although there are some parts of it that are a little more gonzo, I didn't want to make it obviously literary. I wanted it to have lots of jokes, and things that people are going to enjoy, and then bring in some of the themes about masochistic elements of art making." Anderson feels the world of comedy is the best place to explore these elements. "It's just so deadly to go out on the stage and weather that kind of abuse," he says. "There's a kind of sadness in the life of somebody like Jimmy Wynn." Sadder still, Anderson points out, is the fact that Wynn's real-life counterpart, Vaughn Meader—whose 1962 comedy album, *The First Family*, was the fast-selling album of its day—is now probably best known for the line supposedly delivered by Lenny Bruce following Kennedy's assassination: "Vaughn Meader is screwed."

Unlike Meader—and Wynn—Anderson's career has endured for nearly twenty years. *Showbiz* represents just the beginning of his literary career. The music his one-time classmates listen to has most likely changed, but Anderson's drive and enthusiasm haven't. Readers should only applaud that. ✂

Alex Mlynek lives in Sussex-Ulster. She is a writer and a researcher, and the host of the radio show 123! on CKLN. Her work has appeared in This Magazine, Azure, and Broken Pencil.

Alana Wilcox and Jason McBride are enjoying Sunday lunch at a neighbourhood restaurant. At a nearby table, six people in their mid-twenties are laughing and singing so loud it's a little hard to hear anything else. An energy is in the air. Energy is precisely what Wilcox and McBride are trying to capture in *uTOPIA: Towards a New Toronto*, a collection of thirty-five essays about a city with a newfound zest for life, recently published by Coach House Books.

"We've each lived in Toronto for at least fifteen years," says McBride, "and in the past five years, it's the first time that either of us can remember feeling genuine pride in the city." In their introduction to the book, Wilcox and McBride pinpoint the moment they feel this shift happened: November 10, 2003, the day David Miller was elected mayor. "He's a mayor, and there's going to be disappointment in his performance no matter what," says McBride. "But his election certainly inspired a lot of this sentiment—at least the optimism."

Wilcox and McBride, the editor-in-chief of Coach House Books, a forty-year-old Toronto cultural mainstay, and the on-line editor of *Toronto Life* (and Coach House's former managing editor), respectively, felt this surge of Toronto-loving needed to be documented. This past March, they started asking friends, colleagues, and city enthusiasts to contribute essays that were non-academic, forward-looking, and playful. As proposals were submitted, the editors were surprised at the diversity of topics. The fact that only two people wrote about the waterfront is interesting, considering how often its redevelopment is discussed in the media. "People are more interested in what's

going on in their own neighbourhoods," Wilcox says. "We want to know what's preoccupying people right now, what things people are interested in."

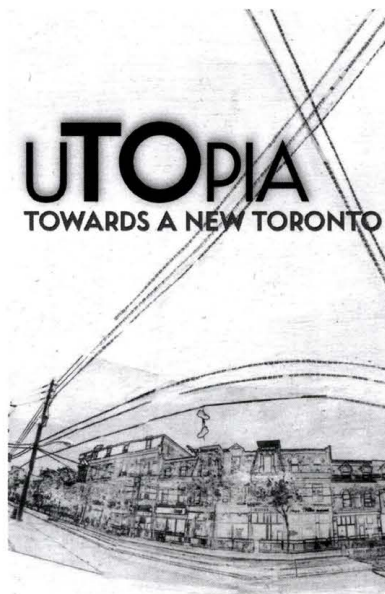
Some of *uTOPIA*'s essays are less conventional in style, like Dave Meslin's city hall newsletter from 2019 and Mark Fram's "Situationist Toronto" photo essay, while some seem idealistic beyond reach, like Chris Hardwicke's dream for a Velocity, a futuristic network of bicycle tunnels built above ground. But whether it's a discussion of the city's changing street signs, houses built in laneways, or pedestrian Sundays in Kensington Market, *uTOPIA*'s contributors touch on issues that many Torontonians will connect with.

"We would like it to [start] a larger conversation among more people in the city," says McBride. "And to ask people to think about things in a different way," Wilcox adds.

For the record, Mayor Miller (who wrote the book's foreword) says *he* is in fact the one who feels inspired by those with an interest in shaping Toronto in the years to come. "I sense a real optimism and vision for the future of this city right now," he says. "I honestly believe that what inspires people about Toronto is the city itself."

Whether credit is due to Toronto's mayor or its citizens, a new generation seems ready to propel Toronto toward the greatness it aspires to achieve. As Edward Keenan writes in his essay, "Making a Scene," "Toronto ... is a young city in a young country, famously grappling with its identity." Wilcox agrees. "It kind of is, right? We're finding our way with that kind of enthusiasm you have when you're a teenager." "And gawkiness," adds McBride.

—MICHELLE MAGNAN



LOCKS

BY MARGUERITE PIGEON

The cancer drugs stole my hair. Plucked me naked. What's grown back is like a message spelled out millimetre by millimetre: I'm not who I thought I was. A redhead. Whimsical. Someone whose nickname could be Pumpkin. The new crop, near-black and coarse, is all business. Each follicle mocks me, says, "Red, schmed!" then pushes out its dark strand.

I hate it even more than I hated being bald.

"I just *love* it," says my hairdresser, Li, who is always ready to lie in the name of hair. I return to her hydraulic chair after an eternity of illness without the hurrah I imagined would follow me in like a whirlwind, little bells above the door heralding Crystal Gayle, Rapunzel, Goldilocks. Reality is more subtle: piped-in Muzak, an enviable scatter of tufts on the floor, stubborn mirrors conspiring to show me a thin, pallid version of my true self with two inches of the dreaded dark hair.

"I'm thinking highlights," says Li. She uses a voice like many acquaintances do now, intended not to further disrupt my brittle bones. I feel I am being spoken to from very far away. Li opens her fingers into a splay and runs them abruptly through the rough mass several times, alternating hands, like her palms are planes taking off from the crown of my head.

"Or more sophisticated," she says, reassessing, reading something in the tussle. "Back to red, maybe."

"No. Not red," I say. I'm thinking about my husband, the first time he ever loosened the red bun I used to like to wear low on the nape like a tomato. The image gets blurred by self-pity, so I shake it away.

"Blond," I say. "White-blond, like snow."

Li's hands come out of my hair, pause palms down. My head could be a drum

she will play. Her shocked pause goes on a long time and I feel, oddly, ashamed to be undergoing yet another evaluation.

"Blond's *always* big," she finally agrees, with gumption. "It'll refresh you."

During one stay in the overcrowded ward, I shared a room with an old woman—lungs, Stage 3—who overcame not inconsiderable obstacles to sit upright and knit. The woman was Estonian, and she made mostly mittens for her ungrateful, terrified-looking grandchildren, who were ushered in most afternoons to visit. She wheezed as her needles went "click-click, click-click," day and night, contentedly stitching away her life. A goddamned swan song in patterned double-knits. I would turn the volume up high on my Walkman and look away, feeling rage, like boiling water, pouring through my insides. I wished I could take those knitting needles and stab the old woman's heart. Stab my nurses. Stab the I.V. bag so that jets of clear fluid exploded from its sides. One night, when I was out of batteries and feeling utterly suffocated by her busywork, I finally snapped. "For God sakes!" I yelled. "Will you please can it!"

In the hall, a passing nurse who'd never liked me anyway poked her nose through our swinging door and put a finger to her lips in a shushing gesture. Without thinking, I flipped her the bird and began, unexpectedly, to laugh. Then I turned to look at the old woman. She was facing resolutely away from me. Her forearms had fallen against her sides. The needles and wool webbing were plopped on her belly in a defeated, red and green heap. She sniffled awhile, her shoulders heaving, then began to snore. I watched her irregular breathing and didn't sleep all night for the satisfaction it gave me—or shame, I couldn't decide which. Mind you, I wasn't sleeping a whole lot at that point anyway. But still.

"You won't want me to stay just because of all that's happened. I know that much." He said this not long after I was finally home for good. I guess my husband was so used to speaking to people on my behalf, he'd begun to confuse his will with my own. We were sitting at the kitchen table, where I once pictured myself sitting for life. He'd brought home takeout Thai.

"You never liked this neighbourhood anyway," he said, trying to be light-hearted.

"I like the recycling program," I said.

"Hmm," he said disapprovingly. "Look, we'll wait till you've found your feet, but you won't want this to drag on forever."

"I want this to drag on forever."

He put his face in his hands and started to cry while I went on eating. The food was delicious. I liked the sweet and the spicy together. I loved the lime. The surface of things *did* matter, I thought. Taste. Touch. Appearances. The semblance of normal life was my ticket back to the world of the living. This new woman, newly "clean" of cancer, newly released from the prison of hospital and chemo, needed a husband. At any cost.

The week my hair finally did begin to grow back, forming a sudden shadow on my head like a map for a strange continent, my husband was in Montreal on business. I was avoiding former friends and had not seen a soul for days. One evening, I was standing in my underwear in front of the bedroom mirror, trying to believe I'd gained some weight, when I found myself wandering over to the closet. I stood facing my hanging clothes, most of which I hadn't worn in so long they didn't smell like me anymore but like the house, and like my husband. Everything bore his stamp now—he'd taped his hockey pool to our bedroom mirror; the bathroom cupboard was full of musky men's soap.



I reached in and fondled the material of a dress, then tore it from its hanger and put it on. I crouched down and tossed shoes out of the closet until I found a pair I liked. Then I dug out an ancient sequined purse, drew on lipstick—twice, in thick strokes—and called a cab.

On the way downtown, I rolled down the window and stuck my head out into the bitter night air. It nipped my nostrils like metal. The cabbie eyed me through his rear-view.

"Just watch the road!" I said, but half the words were sucked from my mouth by the wind. I saw him shaking his head. "Stop here," I said, when we finally reached a cluster of popular bars outside which young people were smoking and looking jaded. I paid and went into the one called Millennial Men.

Inside, it was very dark except for long purple lights outlining the performance area. Frenetic electronic music. Big groups of women everywhere. A whiff of violence as I breathed in their clashing perfumes. Everyone was applauding a dancer named Risky Business, who was making his exit wearing an unbuttoned white shirt and nothing else, two long white tube socks stuffed with money slung over his shoulder. I squeezed through the crowd and took a seat away from the rest but close to the stage. A waiter, whose fake tan was the colour of peanut butter, came by to take my order.

My first drink. It had fruit dangling from it. I toasted. "To melon balls!"

There was a pause before the next dancer. The lights came up. I saw how ugly the place was. All the matte-black paint on the stage and floor was scratched and covered in dust. I sipped my drink. The energy at a table nearby shifted, and I heard whispers directed my way. I thought of my ugly noggin reflecting the mean-spirited ceiling lights. I shot the women a kill-kill look, sucked harder on my straw, and raised my hand for another.

My husband and I met at a martini bar where I felt I didn't fit in but used to go anyway. He laughed at a dirty joke he overheard me make to a friend. We danced sweatily, then went home together.

"What do you think of this?" he said one day, a few months later, when we were out for lunch near his office. He was hold-

ing out a pamphlet for a resort in Belize.

"Are we going on the lam?"

"I think we should—I mean, I think we should get married there, Pumpkin." I agreed, and we went. I didn't think much about it. We got along and neither of us had ever been given a reason to say no to new possibilities. Two years after Belize, I got pregnant. My husband was ecstatic. He'd put his cheek to my belly all the time. "Productivity up this quarter," he'd say, refusing to bow to trimestrial accounting. When I miscarried, he was more disappointed than I was. "We'll build another factory," I told him. But we never did. I got sick the first time just a year after that.

From the start, I saw by the way my husband supported me in my illness—coming with me to appointments, picking me up after treatments, relating optimistic medical reports he'd seen on TV—that he was compensating for something. He was, after all, unservedly strapping. After my diagnosis, easy health and prosperity felt like overly fancy clothes. A heavy source of

TESTING PATTERN

a bus jumps out of nowhere and
runs over my daughter

I wake up
snap on the TV
students have pushed over
the prime minister have set him
on fire
my bedroom is a shouting mouth
my bed a gigantic tongue
my parents climb in beside me
and my children and my children's children
put on a show

my son the prime minister
forbids me to
jump in front of the bus

these are the things I will give you
I plead
two sizes of regret and a blowtorch

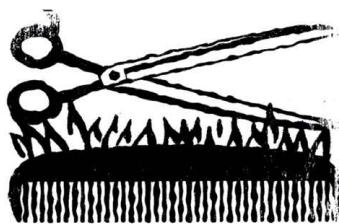
shame. Embarrassing. The more he tried to hide his, the more he eclipsed me—and resented me. I couldn't really blame him. Not yet.

A purple spotlight dangling on a pivot above me swung excitedly into an arc as the announcer prepared us for the arrival of the Jamaican Jiggler. A man appeared on stage to an accelerated reggae beat, not more than twenty-five, black, oiled, narrow in the hips, and, to my mind, painfully effeminate. The women went wild. The Jiggler lived up to his name and shook his half-erect penis with gumption, crouching low and barefoot. One unsteady, dishevelled

bride-to-be with helium balloons tied to her big ponytail was thrust at him. She put her hands up to her eyes as if to shield herself from the purple lights that framed her with the dancer, but

she was giggling like crazy. The Jiggler shimmied around her. Up and down. Circled her in faux-tribal fashion. She squealed and released a twenty-dollar bill into his clenched jaws.

The Jiggler sprinted into the crowd. I



the tiny beating wings of an anteater
the heart of a shovel
a can of fried lemons
some guilt that's had
better days

this is a touching moment in the life of the family
my son says
we need dental floss

irony is a test pattern in his eyes
I am hoping the broadcast day will begin soon
even if it's only
Yoga with Kim

my bedroom begins to snicker
then to yodel
my parents my children and my children's children
are propelled into space
just another family
squabbling
as they speed past the stars

—GARY BARWIN

followed his zigzag through the tables until I lost sight of him, then gave up, looked back at the stage, and waited. Suddenly, from behind, two hands took me by the armpits and lifted me to my feet. Nearby, women went, "Whoo-hoo!" Unsteady, I turned to look, but the Jiggler had already released me, and was around the front, looking me in the eyes. Slowly, he leaned in and brushed my lips with his own. They were coarse and warm. Then he slid his hands up onto my bald head, over the picky five o'clock shadow, while, below, he continued his unsettling, sexless jiggling. Above the neck I saw that he was fine-featured and soft-eyed, and I recognized things I'd assumed had been removed from my world. Generosity. Sensuousness. Without planning to, my own fingers came up to rest over several of the Jiggler's thick, dry dreadlocks. But no sooner had I done so than he pulled away, taking my hand, extending my arm, and dramatically withdrawing, leaving my hand lifted, empty, and trembling, while he resumed the false, devil-may-care smile that made some women near the stage jump up and down like little girls, their own big, sprayed or gelled hair swinging around sloppily.

Later, in bed, when the call came that I knew was my husband, in Montreal, checking in as I'd pleaded with him to do, I let it ring through the empty house, then turned off my bedside lamp and fell immediately to sleep.

My eyes are closed for a long time. When I open them, Li is standing behind me.

"What do you think?"

"I'm like Susan Powter without the muscle mass," I say.

Li laughs nervously. I pay up and she follows me to the door, telling me she'll be happy to do a touch-up in a couple weeks. Free. Just call her.

I walk outside to wait for the man who is still going through the motions of being my husband. On the street, a young girl and her mother have paused nearby, talking to an acquaintance. The girl has a short bob of hair, blond as mine and fresh as fleece. She carries a poodle that has been dyed pink. She has a bored, rich-brat demeanour and strokes the dog absently.

"Is he yours?" I ask, then scan the street both ways. My husband is late.

"She—yes, she's mine," says the girl. The mother, who is gesturing excitedly to her friend about something, ignores us.

"Pets are a lot of work, aren't they?"

"We have doggie daycare Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays," says the girl, shrugging her shoulders. Though she cannot be more than six years old, she checks her watch as if she has someplace better to be. Kids! For a long moment we stand there, pretending not to notice each other. Suddenly, a car horn blares nearby, making us both jump. My husband pulls quickly to the curb and waves sheepishly from the driver's seat. He is still handsome in that way that makes some women grin like idiots around him.

"Is that your boyfriend?" says the girl. I can't tell whether she's really asking or just making fun of me, and I suddenly feel very old and ungainly. A ghoulish Sharon Stone impersonator. Not a trace of Pumpkin.

"Used to be," I say. At a loss, I bend over to pet her dog. I am surprised to find its fur is silky, incredibly soft. Then, that pathetic pink plaything rolls up its matched, milky eyes and gives me a look of such unrehearsed eagerness that, for the first time in months, and against my will, I begin to cry.

"You'll get another boyfriend," says the girl, though I can tell I've unnerved her. She reaches for her mother's hand and begins to withdraw, but the pink poodle resists, its warm body wriggling every which way, straining. It sticks out a small, greyish tongue and manages to lick my entire face in several wet slaps, from my chin to my new near-white bangs. I straighten up, turn, and walk to the car, sniffing, holding my palm to where the animal's saliva is drying on my cheek.

Inside, the air conditioning is blaring away and my husband is looking down at his lap with his hands on the wheel. Something about him makes me recall the moment I felt closest to dying, how I'd secretly yearned to get it over with. I take the hand closest to me, put it to my hair, say, "See? It feels totally new," and then, turning to wave at the little girl, who is no longer paying attention, I let it go. ▽

Marguerite Pigeon lives in Vancouver. Her work has recently appeared in Grain, Room of One's Own, and Dandelion. She holds an M.F.A. in creative writing from the University of British Columbia, and is currently writing her first novel.

THE UNINVITED GUEST

An excerpt.

BY JOHN DEGEN

On a cool July evening in 1979, at the Hotel Royal, in Göteborg, Sweden, Stan wheeled the cup to his room using a luggage dolly he'd borrowed from the bell captain. The party had been short and respectful, one of the family- and officials-only events Stan preferred, since rarely did anyone get too drunk and make a mess he would have to clean up. The formal ceremonies had finished early, around ten in the evening, after a nine-course meal and several rounds of toasts. The young champion Swede, Oleg Bandol, had moved his smaller party of friends from the dining hall into the hotel bar, giving Stan a chance to put the cup to bed early for a change.

As was his habit, he set the trophy in the bathroom, in the tub behind a drawn shower curtain, then locked and unlocked the room door several times to test for any quirks in the ancient mechanism. Leaving lights on and the room radio tuned to a jazz station, just loud enough to be heard from the hallway, he hung the paper Do Not Disturb sign on the doorknob and slipped quietly down the stairwell to the ornate lobby. Having earlier sussed the entire hotel, Stan knew to turn left at the tiny bronze statue of a naked woman and continue through a small wallpapered door, out the staff entrance, and into a short alleyway leading to Drottninggatan, a street in the city centre. In doing so, he need not cross in front of the threshold to the bar, where the remainder of the party could be heard singing and laughing.

Rooms are made secure through ideas as much as through locks. Stan tried always to leave hotels alone while others believed him still there. He had a reputation among the players for always retiring to his room as early as possible, and staying there until very near flight time. He ordered a schedule of meals ahead of time through room service to maintain a steady pattern of food trays on the floor outside his door. A careful eye would notice the plate covers had been untouched, but hotels are not

places for careful eyes. Being the boring old man who slept with the cup was a style he cultivated. It was his freedom.

Stan walked the darkened streets of Göteborg in a fog of cool salt air, following a long canal east out of the main tourist district and into the first ring of homes. In the car on the way from the airport, he had begun to orient himself with the grid, using the position of the sun to get a sense of the city's layout. Harbour to the southwest, municipal buildings in the east, houses in concentric rings from the centre to the suburbs. The front desks of hotels always had maps for the taking, and he would spend the short hours before any party, in any new city, studying the streets, delineating neighbourhoods, and thumbing through the ads in local newspapers and telephone books for business addresses, marking out his route in his mind.

Such was his science that Stan rarely had any trouble finding a good tavern or local restaurant in any city he visited around North America and Europe. He had no interest in hotel bars and recommended tourist spots. His habit was to find the quiet rooms where people were comfortable, where they might even be bored, near where lives were lived and children slept. Since his divorce, a domestic life had to be borrowed, and Stan found most good-sized cities to be generous with these things, if you knew where to look. He preferred streets trimmed with sitting rooms, where open windows spilled the sounds of conversation and favourite television shows onto the road. He liked to watch men talk to each other with low-voiced, finger-pointing intimacy.

Past the edge of the deep, black Trädgårdsföreningens Park, the stable squares of downtown began to soften and curve. He walked the broad avenue of Norra Gubberogatan, slowing to watch two young women buy cigarettes from a wall-mounted machine on the edge of a small traffic oval. He stopped behind them and fiddled with the for-

eign change in his pocket. It was scenes like this he watched for, evidence of the hidden life of a town. The girls smiled at him, took their cigarettes, and continued on down the road. Stan watched them turn into a doorway less than a block away. He bought himself a soft package of Kents and walked the short distance to the tavern.

As often happened for Stan in foreign countries, the evening became a corner table, some sweet, dark local beers, and his cigarettes. The two girls from the street sat at the bar and talked each other into tears about something lost on him. Wives came to retrieve their husbands, then stayed for a short drink themselves before heading home, all arms-at-elbows and comfortable laughter. Old men in hats played cards. There was a smell of fish and malted vinegar. A newspaper on the next table showed the handsome young Bandol, local hero, in front of the cup at the airport reception the day before. Stan recognized his own shoulder in the corner of the shot. But for the crazy language, and the extreme blondness and beauty of all the women, Sweden had the feel of Canada. If you ignored the age of buildings, and looked instead at how people walked down streets, Göteborg might be Thunder Bay. Even in July, you could see boys carrying bundles of hockey sticks, giant gear bags slung over their shoulders.

When the tavern closed for the night, Stan walked the residential streets, observing the turning out of bedroom lights, the soft blue flickering of late-night televisions. An hour before the sun, he made his way to the harbour on the Skeppsbron. There, a small restaurant fed breakfast to fishermen and dockworkers. He ate a cold herring salad and drank more beer. Knowing, obviously, Stan was not a local, the cook tried out his English on him. He talked to Stan about relatives in Sudbury, about watching hockey at the Montreal Forum on a vacation ten years earlier. At sunrise, he poured a shot of vodka for himself and Stan, to toast the day.

Stan made his way back downtown through a morning rush hour of bicycles and fresh blond people walking the sidewalks with purposeful strides. Shops and offices opened, café owners cleaned tabletops in the early sunshine. He reached the hotel in time for the morning shift change. A new young man he'd never seen before was exchanging covered trays outside his room door, loading a still-full dinner tray onto his cart and placing a breakfast plate and coffee urn on the floor. Stan waited for him to wheel the cart down the hallway before trying his key. There was no

her blond hair fell across her face. The cup stood upright on the other side of the bed, bobbing slowly to the rhythm of her breathing.

Stan nudged his breakfast and coffee into the room with his shoe, and closed the door. He opened the curtains a crack and examined the cup in a thin stream of morning light. Nothing had been added or altered, and the bowl was empty. There were some fingerprints and hand smudges around the rim of the bowl and at the base, the only remnants of whoever had moved it from the bathtub. They were large fingerprints, male. Stan

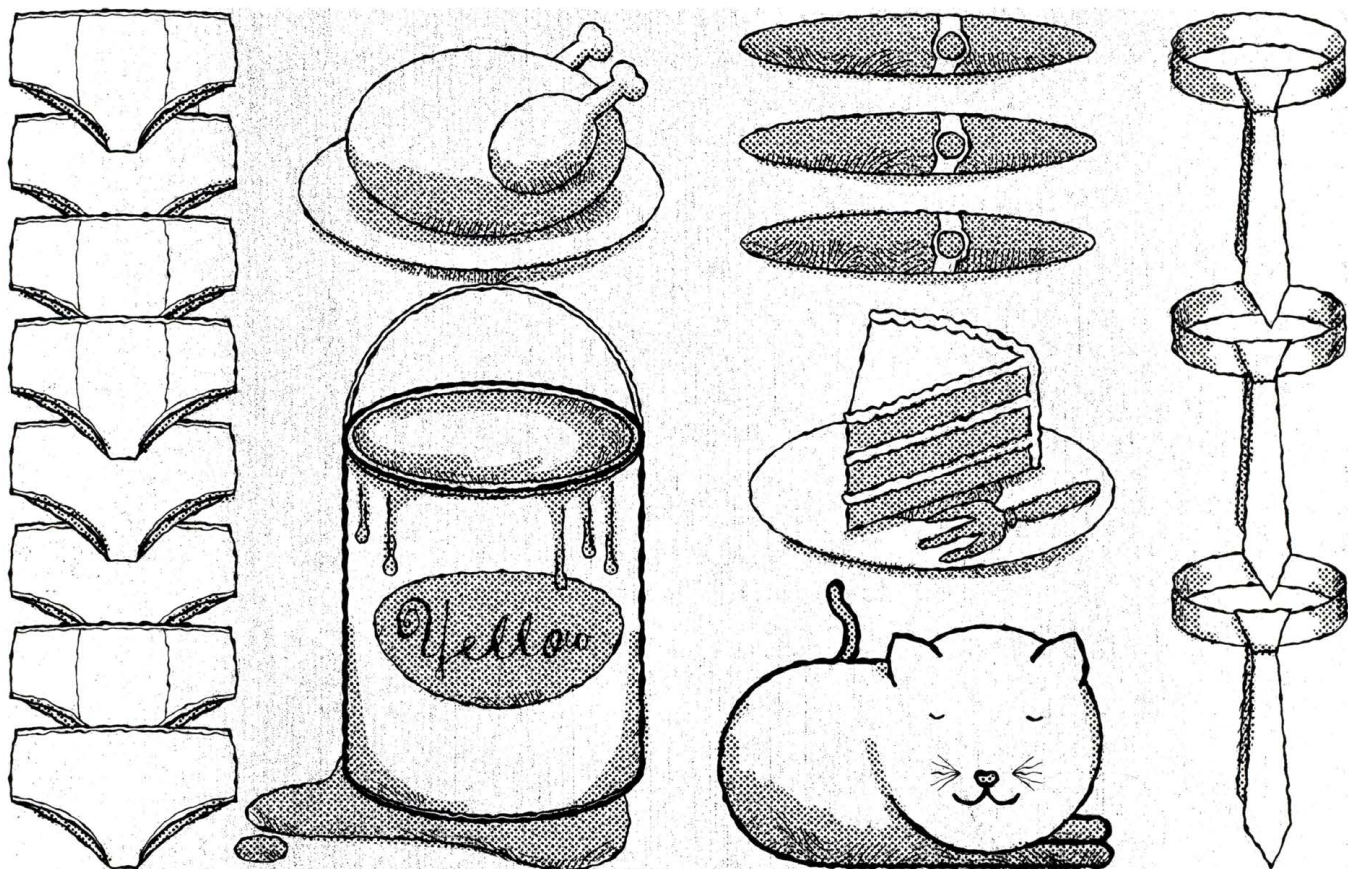
head in time to see the naked young woman glide into the bathroom. She returned wearing his bathrobe, picked up the breakfast tray from the floor, and sat with it on her knees on the edge of the bed, smiling at him.

"You are Stanley," she said, in perfect Scandinavian English.

"That's true," he responded, sitting upright and rubbing sleep from his eyes. His body ached for the bed and hours more sleep.

"You are not surprised to see me here?" the girl laughed.

Stan looked at her more closely. She



sound of jazz from behind the door, and no light from underneath. The key stuck in the lock, at first refusing to turn, and he had to stand back and make sure of the number on the door.

He saw the cup immediately as the shaft of light from the open door hit the bed where it stood, out of its case, gleaming like a child caught in a playful prohibition. Beside it, asleep on Stan's pillow, lay a young woman. She was curled on her side, one hand beneath her head, the sheet drawn to just below her shoulders, naked. She snored in a light, fluttering kind of way, and

checked the bathroom next. A small overnight bag leaned in one corner of the counter, a toothbrush, lipstick, and mascara beside it on the marble. The shower curtain was drawn just as he'd left it, and no towels had been used.

As quietly as possible, Stan removed his shoes and jacket, reclosed the curtain, and stretched himself out on the small couch near the window. He listened to the beautiful snoring of the young woman and slipped into sleep. Less than an hour later, he woke to the muted, almost imperceptible sound of bare feet on the carpet and turned his

could not have been more than twenty and unlike almost everyone else in this city, she was not a real blond. Her hair fell golden past her shoulders, but it was streaked with dark that pooled at the roots. She let strands of it cover her eyes, and smiled coyly through them. She bit the insides of her mouth, which pushed her lips out in a nervous kissing motion.

"Not so surprised," he said, trying to return her smile. "The boys think this kind of thing is very funny."

The girl removed the stainless steel lid from Stan's breakfast and helped

herself to a piece of bacon. She looked at the coffee longingly.

"Please. Eat it all," he said. "I've had my breakfast. It would just go to waste."

"Yes, I am a joke," she said. "But you ruined the joke because you weren't here. Oleg told me to stay until you returned. He said you had probably just gone out for a walk. I listened to your music, I ate from your dinner tray, I watched a little television, but then it was so late."

Her name was Ana, and she was a prostitute, a student at the technical school who paid for her studies with dates. She was from across the water, Copenhagen, where she had been raised the youngest of seven children, all boys but her. Her father worked at a brewery, brought his work home with him every night, and her mother had walked away from the house when she was nine years old, never to return. Ana assumed her mother was dead.

"Otherwise, how is it possible?" she said. "I have always thought she fell into a canal. It happens—people fall into canals and they are gone."

All this Stan learned in the first half-hour he spent with the beautiful young woman he had found sleeping in his bed. Ana had built her young professional reputation on a skill for massage, and that irresistible nervous habit of biting the insides of her mouth. She worked all the downtown hotels and had a very regular clientele of visiting Danish businessmen and local politicians. Her specialty was something she called the knee massage. With the client face down on the bed, she would remove all her clothing, spread oil across the client's back and her own arms and knees, and climb aboard. She was small enough not to do any damage, but just heavy enough to make a difference. She described the whole procedure to Stan, posing in the bed to show the posture.

"It is very soothing, and Oleg has already paid for it, so it is free to you. Come, take off your clothes. You look tired. I will put you to sleep in no time."

When Stan woke later that afternoon, he was again alone in his room. The cup stood on the floor beside the bed where he himself had moved it. He felt rested and relaxed, and his back was looser than it had felt in years. On the bedside table was a note written in green hotel-pen ink.

Oleg wanted me to find out for him why you are called Two-Second Stanley. I will have to tell him I still do not know.

Take care of yourself.

Ana

His trip to Sweden with the cup in 1979 was the first time Stan had crossed the Atlantic Ocean, twenty years into his tenure as keeper of hockey's championship prize. In the almost twenty years that followed this first trip, Stan crossed the Atlantic Ocean at least once a year, often more than once. His cabin home on Lake Simcoe contained hockey pucks and shot glasses from Sweden, Finland, Norway, Ireland, Iceland, Ukraine, Czechoslovakia, and Russia. The Iceland trip had been unplanned, an emergency refuelling stop on the way back from Norway. They were let off the plane to stretch, and Stan had walked the trophy around the outpost tarmac, amazed at the rawness of the landscape. Jagged rock peaks surrounded the airport, and steam rose from fissures in the land all around. He told himself he'd make a special trip back there someday, but never did.

Twice in his travels, Stan was detained at borders under the suspicion the cup or its case was being used to smuggle something in or out of the country. In 1985, the cup was confiscated at the airport in Prague. Stan stayed awake for thirty-six hours in an airport detention cell, waiting to have the cup returned to him, and then refused to board a plane until he himself was allowed to dismantle the trophy in the air-

port and make sure nothing had been altered or removed. Ten armed guards watched and laughed at the old man from Canada, removing the bowl from the top of the trophy and sticking his arm into it up to the shoulder, feeling

around inside for whatever might have been left there in the time he had lost touch with it. When he pulled out a Czech flag, the room erupted into laughter and cheers.

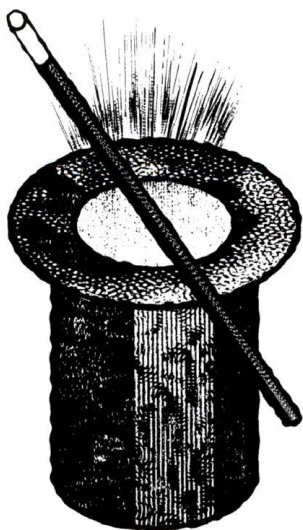
Flash cubes bounced off polished silver. Smiling and shaking his head, Stan respectfully folded the flag and handed it to the nearest guard, but the armed man insisted he take it with him. Then, in turn, as though somehow these men had not had enough of it in the preceding day and a half, each guard ran his hand along the side of the cup.

Over the years, Stan had removed hundreds of stickers and decals from the sides, and especially the bottom of the cup. He had untied countless neckties and pairs of suspenders attached beneath the bowl, fished out any number of folded notes and foreign bills slipped behind the nameplates, and unscrewed at least three false plates containing the names of local dignitaries, children, and historical figures—one, in fact, with the name of the pope on it. From the bowl, at the end of parties, Stan had removed pieces of cake, an entire roasted turkey, numerous cigars (some uncut and still in their wrappers), many sleeping cats, and exactly twenty-three pairs of panties, sixteen bras, and three garter belts. Once, in Stockholm, he woke to discover the entire cup, top to bottom, had been painted yellow.

Late in life, Stan calculated he had cleaned or polished the trophy approximately 4,560 times, an average of at least once a day, every day, four months of every year, for thirty-eight years.

Since the day, in 1952, he touched the cup for the first time at centre ice in Toronto, he had touched it again countless times. In the history of the cup, there has not been another person who has held, lifted, or touched it more than Stan Cooper. He lifted it on and off airplanes, trains, and ships. He rode with it in the back of an ox-drawn cart, the front of an ocean-going canoe, a hot-air balloon, and four different cable cars.

In late August of 1991, the cup was returning to Canada on a transatlantic flight from Moscow. Stan had spent a week in Russia, escorting the trophy to the celebrations of two different players. It had been an uneventful trip as foreign visits go. There was the usual unending supply of vodka to be poured from the bowl, but this time, thankfully, no one



THE SCARF

This scarf (still wrapped around my neck)
came wrapped with a box of condoms
(expiration date: 1992)
a box of twelve chances you expected me to take
on my eighteenth birthday.

You returned in the fall, knowing how to roll joints
and whether to spit or swallow.

For my part, I had only just let the hand of my new boyfriend
move that scarf aside, his flat palm curving to my breast.

And at that birthday party you threw for me,
you and Molly and Andrea and Melissa
(I didn't even like her)
danced around and smoked (I think), and drank (I think),
and you let slick slivers of cooked pasta dangle out the corner
of your mouth, hovering over their gaping lipsticked-pink lips
and let another snake in amongst nubile cleavage.

I was an alien dropped into a sleepover peep show,
and I wanted to run from there to my house,
only a block away where we had set up
Barbie houses and, a birthday before, snuck in a bottle of wine.

In the dark of my boyfriend's bedroom, he holds my face as he kisses me,
his breath as soft and tickle against my bare skin as
that feather boa we shared for an old Halloween costume.

With your parade of newly discovered lust, I can't recognize you,
and hide the blueberry-coloured stain that's swelling
as fresh as new lips between my breasts.

—KERRI LEIGH HUFFMAN

had vomited into it. At one party, Stan was introduced to two very well-dressed men about whom people whispered and pointed from the edges of the room.

There was something in the perfection of these men, and in their easy disregard for everyone else, something that smelled of violence. Other people's reactions to them made Stan nervous, but they seemed bored by the trophy; they ignored it and instead wandered the room in slow circles, boldly appraising the local girls with their eyes. The young Russian hockey player pulled Stan aside.

"Two-Second, don't worry," he said morosely. "They are here for my money, not your cup. They do their business as quietly as possible. Taking your cup would

make too much noise. They don't want to be noticed; they just want to be paid."

Stan relaxed, and found himself experiencing an unexpected and unfamiliar pity for the young athlete. The older Stan grew in his job, the less he had in common with the players who won the cup. Though he'd never much participated in the shit-sliding and underwear grabbing that seemed to entertain cup winners when he was a young man, at least they had shared a history as adults. With the kids he chaperoned later in his career, there was rarely anything of substance to be said, and he often could not even communicate with them. Their English vocabulary was held within the confines of the rink.

Over the years, these young men had become richer and richer, pushing an even greater divide between them and the older, underpaid man who carried their trophy for them. What do you say to a boy in his early twenties who owns his own helicopter? How do you make small talk with the kid who buys prostitutes by the half-dozen?

But the Russians were often different. They liked their fun as much as anyone, but as in the case of this young man, they also had troubles their Canadian teammates could not imagine. With their giant paycheques came immense notoriety back home, and with the notoriety, trouble. In a country where a meal at the new Pizza Hut could cost a month's wage, the salary of a hockey star was an obscene temptation. These players paid out hundreds of thousands of dollars in protection money for the privilege of returning home to an intact family. They themselves were never threatened. The local mobs would never cripple their winning horse. But the weight of generations of relatives hung around their necks. The flights to Moscow with the cup were never quite as raucous as the flights to Moose Jaw or to Thunder Bay, tinged as they were with a background colour of worry. And at this particular party, celebration of the cup came second to celebration of the payoff.

Each new cup-winning player in turn learned Stan's hated nickname and used it endlessly, despite objections. He was convinced half the kids didn't even know why he was called Two-Second Stan, but they all liked the name, and liked even more that he so obviously hated it. With the foreign players, for some reason, it was often easier to remember "Two-Second" than his actual name, a convenience that meant, in other countries, he was introduced as a slim measurement of time.

In 1991, Valeri Berschin was the latest talented young Russian to enjoy the curse of winning the cup. On the ice, he was a goal-scoring surgeon, cutting past defenders with a combination of raw speed and brilliant fakery. Stan had been present for his game-winning goal in Game 5, a subtle backhand chip into the upper corner. The boy had not even been looking at the net, or the puck. In fact, he'd been looking at nothing at all. The slow motion replays clearly showed a smiling Berschin with his eyes closed,

scoring by instinct and feel. As the puck left the tip of his stick blade, he took the inevitable hit in front of the net, spun deftly on the toe of one skate, and did not open his eyes until his back hit the end boards, his arms wide to receive an avalanche of teammates.

It was, in terms of raw skill and artistry, the greatest goal Stan had ever witnessed. And now the same young man stood by a table weighed down with food and drinks, sheepish in an uncomfortable-looking brown suit, the servant of two huge men with bad reputations. Stan waited until the evening became a bit louder and drunker, then approached Berschin.

"Look at the cup, my boy," he said.

The young man blinked and downed the last third of a tumbler of vodka.

"Two-Second," he said, smiling and drunk, drawing out the last syllables of Stan's nickname until they were longer than their meaning. "Yes, the cup. What about it?"

"Do you own the cup?" Stan asked.

"No, Two-Second. You own the cup. I know. I can win it, but only you can own it. You've told me this before."

"Do those two mobsters own the cup?" Stan asked.

"Two-Second, no. I told you already. You own the cup."

"So, look at the cup. You will take all that money you're making because you won this cup, and you'll divide it up and it will all go away into the world. All that money is long gone already: some to your family, some to these two guys, some to any kids you will have in the future or might have right now. Be certain—the money will go away. Do you think this cup gives a shit about your money?"

"I guess, no, I don't know what you mean." He was blinking now, trying to see Stan's point through a clear vodka fog.

"Stop thinking about these two guys. That's just life. Everyone's got his shit to deal with. They're your shit, so deal with them, but don't let them ruin this, this moment when this cup, which you do not own and never will, no matter how many fancy goals you score, this cup is here for you. It's a short time, believe me. Tomorrow, I take this cup away from you, we're back on a plane, and you, my boy, you may never touch

this cup again after that. Stranger things have happened. Have you ever heard of Bill Barilko? Compared to that fact, those two big uglies mean nothing. You get my point? I see you standing around worrying about two men who will steal your money. You want to worry about someone in this room, worry about me, because it's me who will take this cup away tomorrow."

"Two-Second, you win. You are the scariest man here." The young man smiled and slapped Stan between the shoulder blades. "From now on, I worry only about you."

"Some day, Berschin, trust me, you'll be closing your eyes and chipping rocks through your fence rails out there, rather than chipping pucks past goalies in the finals. When hockey is through with you, it will let you know, believe me, and then those gangsters will be through with you as well. They'll have moved on to the next young superstar, because there's always another superstar. And when those days come, you will wish you were right back here tonight, with this cup on your table and those two men over there licking their lips because

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SMOKE

As small as I was, before my hair ever darkened, when I was still a flash of white, my platinum locks, my baby teeth, the white sclera that had never shown the blood vessels already burrowing like pinworms into some distant morning's hangover, some rage at grown-up failures. When I was still that flawless, that twenty-four-carat pure, I knew it was you who came into our house and weakened my father's heart, who choked my mother's laugh into a cracked and arid rasp. I saw you loitering in our kitchen, clinging to our windows, wearing your crude perfume, when in my nightmares you were always hiding in the closet or under the bed, or curled up like a polyp in the dog's nostril, waiting to explode. You lived with us. You touched everything.

We met again when I was sweet sixteen, you so neat and slim in your white slip, and me sliding, glass by glass, into my first drunk. At night in a friend's backyard, fifteen years ago, the fire-lit trees spread their branches into darkness. The stars above them seemed a little nervous when they twinkled. The chatter was coming unravelled; voices walked across the lawn without their mouths, saying words like "punk," and "fuck," and "faggot," words without targets, exempt from meaning, so that the edges peeled away from everything, every memory. When someone refused to kiss you, you came to me, surprised at how much I'd grown—taller, darker—and though you hadn't changed, I wasn't frightened. I brought you to my mouth and breathed you in all night.

—PAUL VERMEERSCH

of how perfectly you play your game."

Berschinn nodded and refilled his glass from one of the dozen clear, half-empty bottles on the table in front of him.

"You are the wise old man of the cup, yes, Two-Second?"

"Damn right," said Stan, and walked away, trembling from sudden anger. It was a cruel speech in many ways, and a kindness that made him feel briefly equal to the brilliant young player, an unfamiliar but satisfying feeling. On his way past the bar, Stan made a point of introducing himself to the two gangsters. Not caring if they understood him, he shook hands with them, and looked each of them straight in the eyes.

The next evening, on the flight from Moscow, Stan fell asleep immediately after dinner. He'd felt all day as though a cold were coming on, and was glad this would be his last trip overseas for

the season. The cup sat secured in its case, strapped in with a seatbelt in the first-class seat beside him.

He always gave the cup the window seat, as that kept him between it and the curious who walked by it over and over on every flight. Sometime between dinner and their initial landing in Montreal, over the Atlantic, Stan Cooper's heart stopped beating. The cold and indigestion he had been feeling had, in fact, been a building infarction, and Stan passed on as he'd always hoped to, in his sleep with the cup beside him. Because he died unnoticed while crossing time zones, no official time of death would ever be assigned to Stan.

The death of Two-Second Stan, of pulmonary infarction, at the age of seventy-two, was a problem for the airline flying his body home. The flight did not end until Toronto, but Stan's death

was discovered on the descent into Montreal by a startled cabin attendant trying to wake him. Normally, the body of a passenger who died in flight would be removed from the seating area at the first opportunity, whether it was that person's final destination or not. Bodies were then transferred into thick cardboard carrying cases, and stored with the luggage below deck. In this case, the presence of the cup beside Stan fouled procedure. While there was enough room in storage for both Stan and the trophy, the airline worried about their legal and financial liability with respect to the cup. The trophy had boarded the plane as a passenger, and so was considered the property and responsibility of Stan Cooper, its keeper. This was the standard agreement the league made with airlines to ensure Stan kept his eyes on the trophy at all times.

With Stan out of the picture, and no other league representative present, the airline lawyers were worried that liability would transfer to them, and they didn't want it, not even for the short hop from Montreal to Toronto. No one they contacted could put a price on the historic trophy. Stan and his beloved cup were both carried from the airplane at Dorval airport and stored under armed guard, in an empty hospitality suite owned by the airline, until the league could make arrangements for their transfer to Toronto. In an obituary in the *Montreal Gazette*, one writer suggested this wrinkle was Stan's way of finally delivering to Montreal the cup that was rightfully theirs, the cup he'd stolen away with his famous two-second blunder, in 1951.

The league sent Antonio Chiello to make the pickup. Tony had worked with Stan at the head office, in Toronto, and helped him prepare the cup for travel for the past two years. Tony rode to Montreal, a passenger in the hearse the league hired to transport Stan's remains. Childless and divorced, Stan had been the last of his line of Coopers for more than twenty-five years. Tony Chiello was the closest he'd had to family. ▽

John Degen lives in Etobicoke. His first novel, The Uninvited Guest, a story about victory—how a few people win, and most don't—will be published in 2006 by Nightwood.

THIS IS
LINCOLN
LEFT.
CRITICS
WILL
CALL
HIM "THE
CHARLIE
BROWN
OF COMIC
STRIP
CHARACTERS."
STUPID CRITICS.

AND THIS IS HIS FIRST STORY. IT'S CALLED:

LEFT!

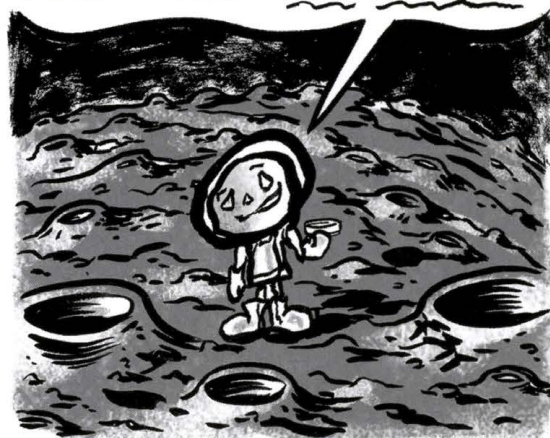
-On The Moon!!
by STEVEN CHARLES MANALE

HE ALTERS
NOBODY'S
PERCEPTION
OF WHAT
COMICS
ARE!





FRIGGIN' COOL! NOW I JUST
NEED TO FIND A CAN OPENER!



CANDY

The lost chapter to Christmas Days.

BY DEREK MCCORMACK

Turtles, Pot of Gold, Black Magic—chocolates my parents receive as Christmas presents. My mom stores Christmas ornaments in the empty boxes. Tree hooks in a Laura Secord box. Tinsel in a Godiva box. The tinsel smells like truffles.

I open an After Eight box. There are candy canes inside. They're flecked with white—it's either mould or fake snow. These canes aren't for eating, they're for hanging.

"How long have we had these?" I ask.

For the sweetmeats there were lozenges, both plain and with little mottoes written on them." Sweetmeats lay on trays that sat on branches. This, according to the writer James Bannerman, is how Torontonians decorated Christmas trees in the eighteen-fifties. "There were china baskets filled with sugared almonds, and bundles of licorice sticks, together with shining rings of colored barley sugar which looked like jeweled bracelets."

Barley water, cream of tartar, water, refined sugar cane. Combine, cook on high heat. This is how barley sugar's made.

It's stickier than it sounds. Cooked too long, barley sugar caramelizes. Starch in barley water can make candy impossible to pull. In the nineteenth century, Canadians bought barley sugar from confectioners. Tree jewellery, bracelets for branches.

Barley sugar bracelets weren't as cheap as barley sugar twists. Hudson's Bay stores sold the twists for pennies apiece. Eaton's did too. Everyone did. Also available: barley sugar shaped like horses and other animals. These "hung by the neck," as one writer put it. From confectioners in England came barley sugar fishes.

It was traditional for that period," I wrote Adrienne W. Lent in the *Edmonton Journal*, in 1989, remember-

ing her childhood in the Maritimes during the Great Depression, "to involve the whole family in preparing small red or green net bags that hung on the tree, filled with hard or ribbon candy . . . barley candy to suck on all day, and little surprises."

Barley sugar has a short shelf life. Moisture in the air makes it lumpy. A waterlogged sugar fish? Who wants to eat that? Confectioners substituted corn syrup for cream of tartar. Barley candy, the concoction's called. It's harder than most hard candy. Barley alters surface tension. Candy lasts longer. Hours of licking and sucking. In the late eighteenth-hundreds, Atlantic Canadian candy makers worked barley candy into moulds—Santas, reindeer, trains. Barley toys, they're called. Another name for them was clear toys.

Roy Robertson runs Robertson's Candy. He makes ribbon candy, satin mix candies, humbugs, mints. Clear toys are a forte. "Apart from flavouring and colouring," reported *Saltscape*s magazine in a 2003 article about Atlantic candy makers, "only three ingredients are used in the making of Christmas candies—sugar, corn syrup and water."

Robertson works from a factory tucked behind a residence on Charles Street, in Truro, Nova Scotia. In 1977, he bought it from the company's founder—his father, William Christie.

W.C.—as William Christie was known—trained with confectioners in Halifax and Hantsport before striking out on his own, in 1928. W.C. amassed moulds—two-piece moulds—thousands of them. Small moulds shaped like Santas, reindeer. Larger moulds made steeds and trains, a ship complete with sails and rigging. It took pounds of barley candy to pack.

Roy Robertson still uses his dad's moulds. "Some as old as 150 years," Robertson told *Saltscape*s, "and I wouldn't part with any of the big ones." Robert-

son boils his candy ingredients, then lades the molten mixture into chilled moulds. It cools into toys. He removes them, trims their edges, packs them in plastic bags. Candies made from large moulds sell at fairs and bazaars. Some aren't for sale. Some are for display only.

"Clear toys are a family tradition in the Maritimes," Robertson said. "Teenagers just take them for granted, but when they move away and can't get them, they become nostalgic about it."

And the rest of Canada?

The rest of Canada has candy canes.

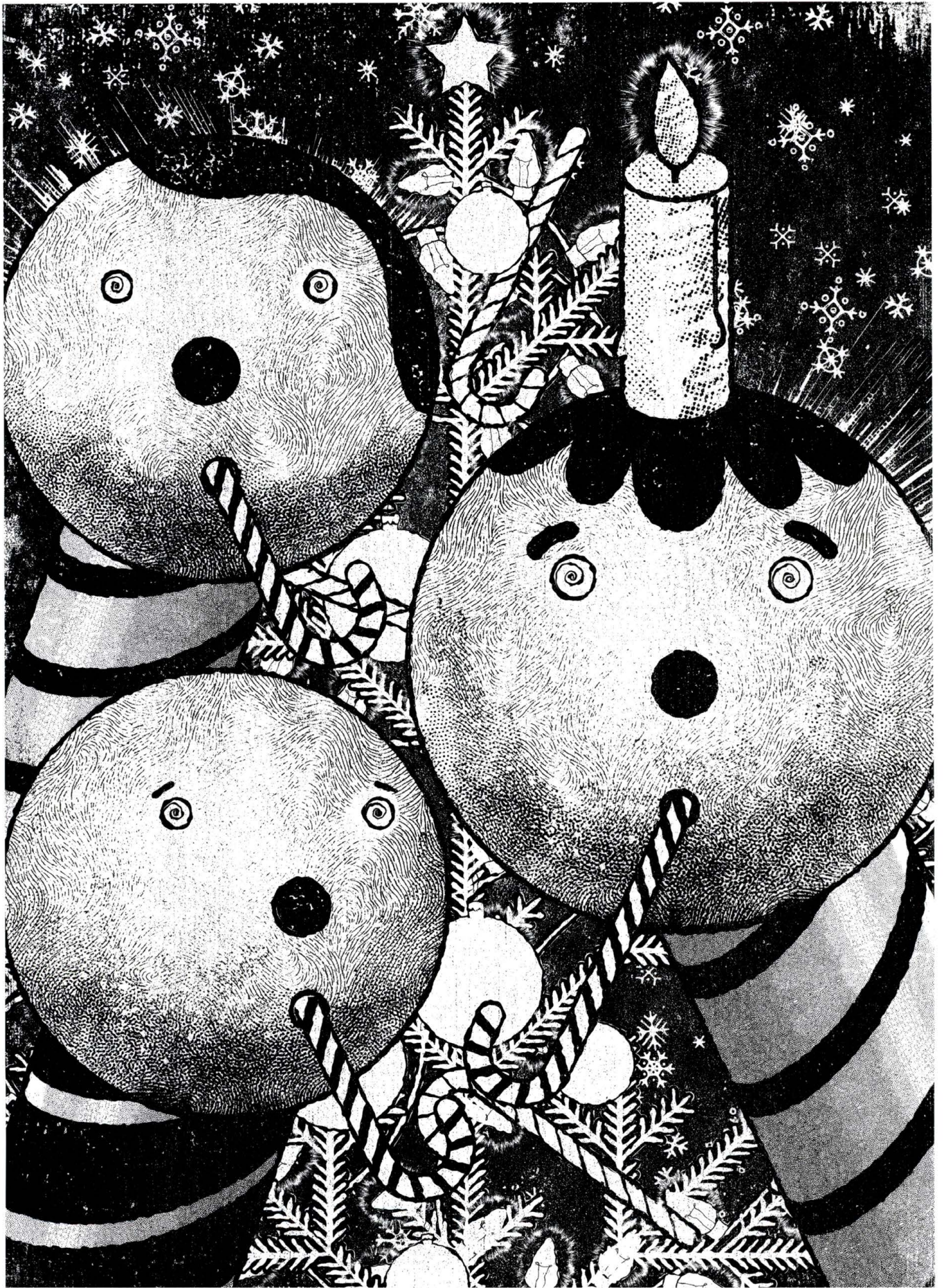
A choirmaster created candy canes. He worked at the cathedral in Cologne, Germany, in the seventeenth century. His choristers included children, who chatted during the Living Creche. He gave them white sugar sticks. He curved the sticks into shepherds' staffs. Candy crooks. The first candy canes—pacifiers doubling as props.

Wooster, Ohio, 1847, was where and when candy canes made their first documented North American debut. I learned this from the National Confectioners Association, in the United States. In Wooster, a German-Swedish immigrant decorated his Christmas tree with white candy canes and paper ornaments.

Locals noticed. How could they not? Finally, a candy that didn't need a hook or a ribbon or a string to hang it from a tree.

Don't forget candy canes for the Christmas tree," wrote an anonymous columnist in the *Montreal Gazette*, in the early nineteenth-hundreds. Candy canes had spread across Canada. Candy canes had become peppermint. No one knows who first flavoured them, not even the National Confectioners Association.

Candy canes had become coloured—white with scarlet stripes. No one knows who first added red. Did red represent



Christ's blood? Was white purity? This story still circulates. A Christian magazine recently investigated it, but found no connection between the colour of candy canes and the story of Christ.

My theory? Candy canes became popular in the early nineteen-hundreds, at around the same time that magazine ads and illustrations began depicting Santa Claus in a red and white suit. Candy canes—Santa's colour-co-ordinated accessories.

In the nineteenth century, "Canada developed a thriving regional penny candy industry, with small family-owned operations filling glass jars at the corner shop," wrote David Carr in *Candymaking in Canada*.

An example—Robertson's Candy. Another—James and Gilbert Ganong established a general store in St. Stephen, New Brunswick, in 1873. The Ganongs sold hard candy made in Saint John, but the candy was less than quality. The Ganongs shipped in candy from the States. Import taxes made the candy too expensive.

The Ganongs became candy makers.

In the early twentieth century, the Ganongs employed three hundred regular staff members. After Labour Day, it added four hundred seasonal workers.

"Inside the factory the scene was a cross between a fantasyland and something out of Dickens," wrote David Folster in his book *The Chocolate Ganongs of St. Stephen, New Brunswick*, describing the Christmas production rush. The Dickens part—long hours, little pay. The fantasy part—I'm not sure. What's fantastic about a Dickensian factory?

A team of master candy makers made chicken bones and lozenges. Chicken bones consist of unsweetened chocolate wrapped in cinnamon candy. Three boys and a man made nothing but barley toys. Six master candy makers concentrated on ribbon candy.

Frank Sparhawk could pull five hundred and fifty pounds of stick candy per day. His work contained words. Break a stick, and "Merry Christmas" was written across the candy, or the silhouette of a Christmas tree appeared. "Or a Negro face, or even Charlie Chaplin, complete with cane and bowler."

Another six master candy makers con-

centrated on candy canes. They stirred molten sugar by hand. Pulled cooling sugar by hand. Applied a coat of red candy by hand. Twisted it until scarlet swirled through white. Hand-rolled taffy into a pole. Cut it into sticks. Two or three thousand sticks, needing crooking.

A C.P.R. line ran through St. Stephen, bringing in barrels of white sugar, glucose by the cask. Carrying out Ganong candy canes to stores across Canada. Stores hung candy canes from wires strung throughout the store, or stood them in glass jars. Heat melted hard candy into a lump. Cold cracked it. Humidity made it gummy. Colour bled. Air made it stale. Age made it fade.

Candy canes needed to be eaten *tout de suite*.

"It was a laborious process—pulling, twisting, cutting, and bending the candy by hand."

The quote comes from a history of Bobs Candies. Bob McCormack founded his candy company in Georgia in 1919. He made candy canes as Christmas gifts for his kids.

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In 1950, McCormack's brother-in-law, Father Harding Keller, invented an automatic candy-cane maker, a machine that twisted strips of red and white candy into sticks. Later, it could crook the ends. "The Keller Machine revolutionized the stick candy market," says Bobs.

Keller's wasn't the only revolutionary contraption. By the nineteen-fifties, candy companies like Bobs could seal candy in plastic wrapping. Or vacuum-pack it. Break-proof packaging kept candy from shattering during shipping. Candy could sit on shelves without spoiling. Air conditioning units cooled both plants and stores.

Canada's candy capital is Hamilton, Ontario, home of the Cadbury Adams Trebor Allan factory. Workers crank out a hundred and fifty million candy canes annually, give or take ten or twenty thousand.

It's gold. Or goldish—a warm brown, really—sucrose and glucose cooking in copper kettles. The steaming sugar's poured onto a steel table cooled by cold water pouring through pipes beneath the tabletop.

Men in gloves knead the taffy. Kneading keeps candy from splintering, and gloves keep fingernails from falling in. Men toss the taffy into a pulling machine. Paddles pull, poke, twist. Oxygen infiltrates. As it's pulled, gold sugar whitens. When it's white, men add red candy.

The taffy's put into a machine called a roller. The roller rolls the lump into a lengthy rope. Then the rope's spun to a predetermined diameter: an inch, half an inch, a quarter. A machine cuts the rope into pieces. A machine loops the tops of the pieces. A machine seals them in plastic wrapping.

Candy cane production continues here all day and all night, every week of the year. From other floors come other Christmas candies—chocolate Santas, marshmallow puffs. For Valentine's Day—cinnamon hearts. An army of chocolate Easter bunnies awaits spring. ▽

Derek McCormack lives in Sussex-Ulster. He is the author of The Haunted Hillbilly (ECW, 2003). The above chapter is an outtake from Christmas Days—his first work of non-fiction—a historical look at the holiday season, recently published by Anansi.

RANDOMNESS FACTOR

Pontiac Quarterly is more house party than art wank.

Every regular at the Pontiac Quarterly knows there's a special moment when the night nearly flies off the rails. Literary events always have the potential to get ugly, but most maintain a pleasant facade in an effort to disguise the tedium, anxiety, and loathing—self or otherwise—that can permeate such evenings. Formerly a monthly, and now a quarterly event at the Drake Hotel's Underground room, Pontiac not only flirts with chaos, it makes it part of the program. That element of risk has defined the series since it was first mounted, in March of 2004. And a little danger can add so much to



Rogers at the debut of Pontiac Quarterly.

the evening, provided some Antonin Artaud wannabe doesn't leap off the stage and smack you with a chain.

Pontiac Quarterly was founded by its host, Damian Rogers, as a "live-action literary and arts journal," one Rogers hoped would avoid the shortcomings typically associated with literary readings—namely boredom, discomfort, and a sense of intimidation. "Of course, I really have no idea what it's like for people who stumble into Pontiac for the first time," says Rogers, a poet who lived in Detroit and Chicago before moving to Toronto in 2002 and becoming the arts editor of *Eye Weekly*. "What I wanted to do was create a night that was both smart and fun, a sweet and geeky social where people didn't feel weird about not knowing everyone else in the room."

Every "issue" of Pontiac Quarterly includes three Bingo Mikes, in which audience members submit their names in the hope of being called up onstage. Some recite hastily scrawled bits inspired by the evening's theme (e.g., sedation, conversion, thirteen); others get off the stage even faster. Then there are those who've come prepared with pieces so long and painful, they suck the night into a dark chasm of unfun. There's

nothing like the mix of desperation and curiosity you feel when trying to gauge the thickness of a reader's pages from fifty feet away and praying the text isn't single spaced. If Pontiac Quarterly really is a live-action journal, the Bingo Mike—as well as the sometimes unpredictable contributions by the poets, prose stylists, playwrights, commentators, musicians, dancers and

other artists who've taken the stage by design rather than chance—is the magazine's colouring contest.

Rogers' hope is to create something more like "a house party than a pretentious art-wank happening."

Though the randomness factor certainly enhances that vibe, Rogers has displayed remarkable acumen as a programmer, with each evening offering a diverse lineup of readers and performers. Some writers present published work, while others bring theme-specific stories, commentaries, or confessions (the ever-industrious Brian Joseph Davis popped pills to create a "Zyban diary" for the sedation issue). Live illustration and DVD projections of everything from *Little Darlings* to *Apocalypse Now* cover the walls. After the magazine's "classifieds" are read (there are never very many), the evening closes with a brief musical set by the likes of Gentleman Reg or the Hilozoists.

Rogers is more than willing to let each evening sort itself out. "The best thing that I did in the evolution of P.Q. was letting go of the idea of controlling everything," she says, "though I still clutch that clipboard like it has the power to impart order. I used to have full-blown panic attacks, but I've learned to enjoy it. So far, pretty much everything that could go wrong has—missing readers, all manner of technical difficulty, stolen drink tickets. And I am still breathing by the end of each night."

—JASON ANDERSON

SMOTHER THE OTHERS

BY KATHLEEN WHELAN

The air conditioner in the living room window was a housewarming present from my new boyfriend. Doug had found it at the Goodwill on Richmond, and promised it would be a more effective cooling system after he tinkered with it a bit.

It had been his idea to place my new Ikea king-size bed in the living room. Often there were night dwellers congregating outside the bedroom window. No one would be disturbed by sounds of sex through the living room window, which faced a fenced-in courtyard.

The blankets were thrown off and I looked at his very manly feet and toes. I wondered if I would pay sometime down the road for making the first move on him. We had gone out for three months, and at the end of each evening he would shake my hand and say, "Good night, Marie."

Finally, I said to him, "Doug, I'm attracted to you."

"It's happening all right," he said.

Unlike my former boyfriend, Doug does not try to bewitch and bewilder with words. I put my arm around his shoulder and kissed him.

Doug mentioned that although he had changed his shirt that night, he was not a meticulous guy and needed to take a shower. Then he was released from four years of celibacy, kept in the hope his ex-wife would give him another chance.

Afterward he said, "Marie, we're hot."

I agreed. It seemed inappropriate for me to deliver a talk on sex and responsibility after having initiated the encounter.

We had spent every night together since. My apartment was larger than his room in south Rosedale. Doug sometimes talked in his sleep, and he also had revealing conversations with himself when he was in the shower.

That morning, while he slept in the dusty, hot room, Doug said, "Crossing guards dressed in black." The disjointed words were spoken in a terrified, slurred voice. I touched his shoulder.

"Wake up, Doug. You're having a nightmare."

"Doug's not here," he said, in the same, almost automated voice. He wasn't. Doug was asleep.

Doug's Fender Jazz Bass stood on its stand in the one immaculate corner of the room. Dust bunnies had gathered under my wing chair and mahogany dresser, and I noticed a cobweb hanging from the ceiling. Cleaning and vacuuming were impossible on such a sweltering day.

The nightmare seemed to have passed, and though Doug was still asleep, he had an erection. The thoughts of dust left my mind when Doug woke up and said, "Sex."

"God, it's so sticky and humid, Doug. Wait and I'll fill a bowl with ice and put it beside the bed."

The phone rang while we made love, without the bowl of ice nearby. The audio call display read out in an electronic voice: "Warrender, Glynn." With my new boyfriend lost in passion, I wondered how the telephone recognized my former lover's name. Glynn would not appreciate a machine associating his name with his cellphone number.

I imagined Glynn was a third party sitting on the bed. Doug and I were dripping with sweat, and I imagined Glynn mocking our earthy, traditional lovemaking.

As I was coming, I remembered I had keyed Glynn's number into the phone.

My twelve years with Glynn had been a maze of delicate, surprising deceptions. Even when he'd lived with me, I felt like the other woman. With Doug, I intended to be the only woman of record.

Doug was driving his two kids to summer camp that day and needed to get on the road. He was a devoted separated dad.

"What are you up to today, Marie?"

I rolled on my side, turned my back to him.

"I'm meeting Glynn for coffee. Remember, he's the guy I was involved with for a long time."

"But I'm the best boyfriend you've

ever had, isn't that right?"

For some reason, I started to laugh. Doug was a steady guy but lacked a sense of humour.

"Glynn owes me some money and he just got an Ontario Arts Council grant."

Doug picked his shorts up off the floor and got dressed for the day.

"Good for him. Money to sit around all day and do nothing. That's what I want to do with my music. If I get back in time, you and I will have a night out."

On the previous evening we had browsed at Home Depot, then went for fish and chips at Duckworth's. My preference would have been dinner and a movie, but I was convinced that any man who spends Friday night at a huge hardware store had to be monogamous. Doug was also the kind of man who would get out of his car to argue with a driver who had cut him off. This tendency made me reluctant to get into his van.

Wearing a white Goodyear baseball cap that read "#1 IN RACING," a pair of shorts, and a T-shirt from the dollar store, Doug approached the apartment door. I felt a twinge of guilt. I had just told my first lie to my new boyfriend. Glynn no longer owed me a penny, but I hoped he would give me some money.

"So, have you mentioned to your ex-wife that you're seeing me?"

"No. It's so busy with the boys when I see her. We never have an adult conversation. Don't worry about it."

I would not rest until the former Mrs. Doug Ferguson knew that the father of her two sons was in love with me. There were more daunting dustballs in the hallway. I drank coffee while lying on the bed, took a shower, and considered how I would approach Glynn. For a year after we had broken up, he had given me half of anything he made, even though sometimes it was only fifty bucks.

During our last six months together I had supported him. He is a poet, worthy of not working. Neither he nor I kept a record of our financial exchanges. After Glynn moved out last summer to be with his waitress/occasional actor, we

made a game of the repayment plan. Glynn would pretend he was paying me for sex. The last payment had been made a month before I first went out with Doug.

It was time to make the call. This time I would need to ask for money on the dubious basis of my word.

"Glynn, I considered telling you my tooth is about to abscess. I know you're a sucker for a girl in pain. I'm broke, and I'm afraid my telephone will be cut off. I hate to ask, but can you lend me, say, five hundred dollars until payday."

"What about your guy? Can't he lend

Instead, I walked from my apartment, on Spruce Street, to meet him. Along the way I drank three bottles of water and took a break at Riverdale Farm. The horses looked miserable standing in their corral. I felt a sense of failure because I could not afford to live in a place with central air or to rescue a horse from the heat.

Glynn was already at the teller. I thought of his balls, his unusually large testicles pressing against the inside seam of his ripped black jeans. Doug did not wear underwear either.

The heavy, scuffed Doc Marten boots

"Never during a heat wave."

"That's my girl."

I decided to let the comment slide and took the five hundred dollars he handed me.

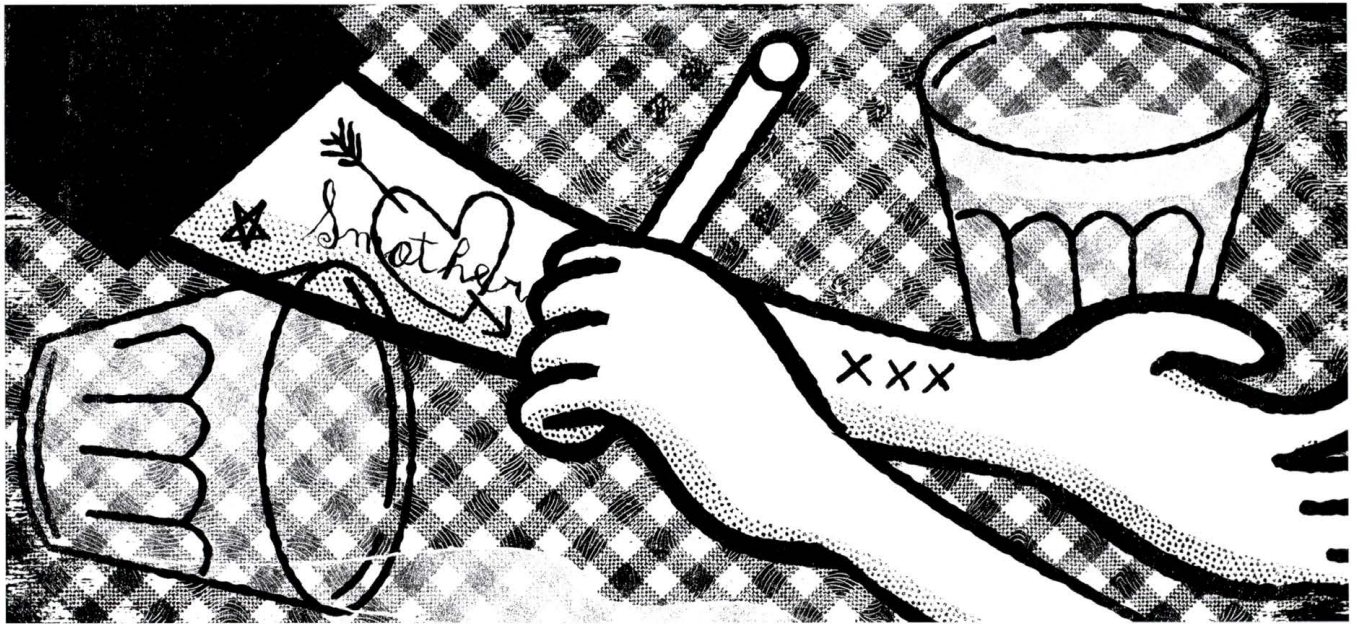
"Look, I don't want to be a prick about this. You'll have to pay me back," he said.

"What if I show you my ass? Just joking."

At forty-two, fifteen pounds overweight, it was wonderful to act as though he might take me seriously.

"How much time do you have?"

I marvelled at the freedom of not being afraid of his response.



you money?"

"I'm more comfortable asking you."

"I bet you are. No problem, Marie, I'm flush"

"I'll pay you back."

"Sure you will," he said.

We agreed to meet at his bank, on Broadview, south of the Danforth. I considered riding my bicycle out to meet him. Glynn wondered why anyone would ride a bicycle in the city. I recalled the summer before when, on a Sunday afternoon, I rode along the bike path to the Beach. It had been as busy as driving in rush hour on the Don Valley Parkway. Later, Glynn told me the waitress he was seeing had also ridden her bike on the same path that day. At the time I had felt violated, knowing I had shared the path with someone Glynn was sleeping with. The association had tainted my relationship with my blue Specialized bike.

he had on were soon destined for the garbage. He had bought them while he was seeing the waitress, who had influenced his style. The shoes had lasted longer than her in his life.

He kissed me lightly on the lips.

"I hate to ask you for this money."

"A few months ago I would have given you five grand. Five hundred is a deal."

"God, you look so hot. How can you stand the heat wearing black jeans? Do yourself a favour and buy a pair of shorts."

I ran my tongue over my upper teeth to create saliva.

"I need to get my hair cut. You want me to look like a mook? Why not suggest I wear a baseball cap, too?"

"My life is a sea of baseball caps, Glynn. Oh my God, it's fucking freezing in here."

"Would you please shut up about the air conditioning? Do you have any underwear on?"

"Don't get all weird and shit. I don't know why you would. You've got a boyfriend. A woman I haven't seen for twenty years tracked me down. I'm meeting her after we have lunch."

"Were you involved?"

"Briefly, but I was attached at the time. She's an honest woman."

"To have an honest thing with you, she'd have to be a detective. You'll fuck her," I said.

"I'm not everyone's cup of tea, you know. But who knows? *I am* single."

He ran his hands through his thick hair and blew on his bangs.

Without discussing where we were going for lunch, we walked toward the Omonia restaurant. For a long time some things had been predictable with Glynn and me. I suspected he was waiting for me to suggest an air-conditioned establishment and silently acquiesced to sitting at an outdoor patio.

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The waiter recognized us and I wondered if he remembered the last time we had been there. The memory of Glynn's anger after I'd rummaged through his knapsack while he was in the washroom and found the poems he had written to the waitress put a damper on the day.

While I was mulling over our last dismal chicken souvlaki meal together, Glynn reached into his pocket and took out a fountain pen.

"This is for you. I thought you'd like it."

"A Waterman. Thanks. It's beautiful. It's blue just like my bike. You must be pissed off at the person who gave it to you. But I'll keep it. I can't believe it—a present from Glynn."

"I've given you lots of presents," he said. "How's it going with your new man? Have you met his kids? What about his ex-wife?"

I reached into my water glass and took out a couple of ice cubes. I sucked on them, hoping to avoid the question. I knew Glynn would interpret Doug's reluctance to introduce me to his family as keeping me under wraps.

"Listen, I think my sister might have met your new boyfriend," he said. "He played bass for the Hogtown Hell-Hounds, right?"

"Things used to get pretty incestuous with us, knowing people from the same circles and all. So shut up."

"It was years ago. And she's my sister."

"Well, it wouldn't surprise me if they had met. The artistic community is so small in Toronto. But Doug hasn't supported himself as a musician for about ten years. He renovates houses. He wants to stay in town to spend time with his kids."

"The artistic community. Aren't you the pretentious little twit now that you had a letter published in *Now*?"

"How do you mean 'met'?"

"You know my sister used to be a stripper. She was working at a bar in Kitchener. The Hogtown Hell-Hounds played there. Who named that band? It's terrible. The guy she met was married. She said he talked about his wife a lot. She was some sort of pilot."

"The mother of his kids was a bush pilot. About a hundred years ago. He's been divorced for a few years. It could be him. But I doubt it. What are the chances?"

"That's it. A bush pilot," he said.

I reached into Glynn's water glass and took out a few ice cubes, wrapped them in a serviette, and rubbed my forehead.

"Doug sees a lot of his ex-wife because they do a lot together with their kids. Of course, I've met all of them."

"Went to Wonderland with the family, did you? You're lucky you aren't my girlfriend anymore. How can you do that in public? Wash your face in the bathroom if you have to."

"I'm trying to cool off. Glynn, we had sex once in an alley at noon beside a building at Avenue Road and Bloor and this embarrasses you? Give me a break."

He laughed.

I took the fountain pen from the table, took the cap off, and drew a heart on Glynn's forearm.

"Hey, stop. Are you trying to brand me?"

"My relationship with Doug has a proper name. He's my boyfriend. We are becoming a couple. With you there was never really a word to describe what we had."

"Where the fuck is our food? I have to scramble."

I reminded Glynn that the last time we were at the Omonia I had to pick up the cheque. I told him I had taken his dinner home and eaten it the next night.

"A gentleman would pay today, is that what you're saying?"

"Hold out your arm, Glynn." I was surprised when he didn't protest. Inside the heart I wrote, "SMOTHER THE OTHERS."

Our lunch arrived, with some extra pieces of garlic toast.

"Marie, I have to get out of here. My hair appointment is in half an hour. Eat in haste."

"I'm sorry about the crack I made about presents."

"That's all right. Do you still wear the diamond earrings I gave you? I kept the book on Aleister Crowley that you gave me."

"What diamond earrings? You gave me a book about Philip K. Dick, a pair of gloves, and a teapot. When I unpacked at my new place, I noticed the bride and groom figurines on the teapot. If you and I had gotten married, I would've worn a tea cup on

my head. With sugar cubes and a teaspoon attached to the saucer," I said.

"I spent a fortune at Northbound Leather, too. What happened to all that stuff?" he asked.

"I kept the corset. Everything else I sold at Doc's Leather, on Queen. I didn't get much, but it helped with closure."

"How can I get this off my arm, you clever little thing? Diamond earrings are my stock present. Some guys give flowers, I give diamond earrings. I can't believe I didn't give them to you," he said.

"Not even when we were in the diamond district."

"We were in New York on your nickel and you told me you hated diamonds. Look, I'm going to be late for Susan. I want to get a haircut before I meet her. Haven't been able to afford one."

"Who's Susan? Right, your old friend who tracked you down. Not an easy task finding you. Who did you buy earrings for?" I asked.

"Anyone of record," he said.

"The dancer, the waitress, and your two ex-wives?"

"Yes." Glynn smiled with one side of his mouth.

"You're joking, right?"

"I just gave you five hundred bucks and a second ago I paid for lunch."

We left the restaurant and Glynn stood at the curb, waiting to hail a cab.

"Glynn, I don't care if you're late. I have a fucking right to a pair of diamond earrings."

"Now you're with a guy with a big, working-class dick. Let him buy you earrings."

"Did your sister tell you that?"

"Don't be cruel, Marie. She said he was a little arrogant. But that was a long time ago."

"It wasn't him she met," I said. "We don't have a lot of time. There's a little jewellery store just east of here. Chop-chop."

"Can't this wait?"

An empty cab was driving west on the Danforth. Glynn raised his arm.

"O.K. You're right. But just not now."

"Absolutely not. It should have happened years ago. You bought fucking Angie earrings. Tomorrow you'll be out

shopping for the woman you're meeting tonight."

"You said Angie's name. You didn't call her 'the waitress.'"

Glynn put down his arm and I linked mine in his, hoping we would walk past an establishment that sold diamond earrings.

"How far is this store?" he asked.

With every confidence that, in spite of gentrification, the values of the Greek neighbourhood would translate into many jewellery stores within two blocks, I said, "I haven't met Glynn's kids or his ex-wife, but I will when the time is right."

"Thought he was a sheep but he's a wolf. If this place is beyond Pape I'm fucking off," he said.

Just before Gough Avenue I noticed a small store that looked as though it had been there since the nineteenth century.

"I bet you thought I was taking you on a wild goose chase. But here it is: the Limeneria Jewellery Store."

The sales clerk was a woman who appeared to be in her seventies. She was dressed in black, the way a widow might dress. Most items under the glass had a red tag attached. I told her I was allergic to cheap metals. I opted to be guided by price and chose a tiny pair of not-on-sale diamond earrings with eighteen-karat-gold stems. They cost five hundred dollars.

The woman was eager and approached us as though she thought we were in love.

While Glynn paid for the earrings, I said, "You don't need to wrap them. I'm going to wear them."

I put the earrings on, held my hair back, looked in the mirror on the counter, and said, "Thanks, Glynn. You didn't have to do this."

"Fuck you," he said. "I have to go."

The woman's smile disappeared. We had ruined her day.

Glynn hailed a cab.

"Kiss me quick," Glynn said.

With one hand on the cab door, he reached around my waist and put his other hand on my ass and squeezed. ✠



Kathleen Whelan lives in the Church-Wellesley Village. Her fiction has appeared in subTerrain, Blood and Aphorisms, Other Voices, Broken Pencil, and Front & Centre, as well as in publications in California, Ireland, and New Zealand.

COMPLEX STATES OF EQUILIBRIUM

BY SCOTT MCINTYRE

Friday. On the hottest morning so far that summer, the Stickle-McNabb was following his normal routine to exacting detail. He flirted with nearly every girl he encountered during his commute and, as always, he ordered a coffee in the shop around the corner from the office tower where he worked. His hair was unusually impressive. While riding the subway, he asked the pretty red-headed woman who was standing beside him if she'd ever had to kill anyone? With her eyes?

She stiffened and smiled the absent smile she had perfected while enduring many mornings much like this one. She exited the train at Bloor station and didn't look back.

Twenty to nine. That same summer morning. Seven floors below the office into which the Stickle-McNabb would soon be strutting so confidently, a friend of his was already bent over his computer working. This friend was Jomini. He had once been a slacker so legendary, if a film were made about biblical slackers, his character would have been cast opposite Jesus—a slacker John the Baptist maybe. In the past two and a half years, however, he had changed jobs six times: once voluntarily and five times in a fashion somewhat less voluntary. As a consequence, Jomini's confidence was evaporating like water droplets on a hot sidewalk. This encouraged a tendency to act as if he had somehow gotten himself twisted inside an indecisive straitjacket, one with second guesses for straps, and hesitation for buckles.

He jumped when his boss popped her head into his cubicle. She asked if he could join her in her office. She gave him ten minutes. He listened to the swish her nylons made as she walked away down the hall. For the next five minutes, he shuffled paper back and forth across his desk. He reorganized his pens. He didn't leave the safety of his cubicle until he had arranged the Post-it notes stuck to his cubicle wall, first

by colour, then alphabetically. It proved impossible to combine the two organizing principles. He shuffled the multi-coloured paper squares as though playing a shell game. He ripped them off the cubicle wall and pasted them back up, over and over again, in a futile effort to make them fit.

An unidentified phone number hastily scrawled on red paper: does it go above the company password, written in a solid yellow cursive, or beneath? The paper mosaic he'd created seemed deliberately intended to mock him. No matter which square he tore off and where he replaced it, a new dynamic arose.

A pink reminder for next week's departmental lunch? Where? If an answer was hidden inside these shuffles, it eluded him.

Doug made them three. A triad of warrior preppies wrapped inside a parallax of shifting perspectives, with only the tension between them holding things together. Doug claimed that even simple, widely accepted concepts such as time fell beneath his notice. Time was too bourgeois. When talking about himself, he employed terms like "Doug the Destroyer," or "the Scourge of the Middle Class." Modern hygiene bored him, and he rarely remembered to brush his teeth.

Jomini, the Stickle-McNabb, and Doug were travelling along similar trajectories. They were a triangulation, three distinct causes knotted around the same effect. Similar to the way highway traffic, when seen from above, appears to move in rhythm, as if following a deeply ingrained pattern. Like a stock market's fluctuations viewed over decades.

While Jomini was meeting with his boss and the Stickle-McNabb was proceeding as always, Doug was out front of the same office tower, at the corner of Front and Yonge. The traffic was furious. He was rolling as far back on his heels as he could without falling. The office tower scraped up above him

through the carbon monoxide, which clung like a low ceiling. He rolled back and looked up, and the tower veered like a stark white monolith, rows of mirrored windows puncturing its bright plastic sheen in a tightening, reversed-V pattern that stretched up into the hazy smog. Doug lost his balance and took a dizzy half-step backward. Steadying, he returned to what he had been doing: watching the traffic stop and start in impatient fits.

The day was already fishbowl-humid. A beatific smile came to Doug's face, and he unbuttoned his short-sleeved shirt. Two cameras dangled from his neck, his unbuttoned shirttails falling loosely behind him. A nattily dressed pedestrian stopped beside him. The man looked sideways, back and forth, his eyes quickening to every angle of the streets facing him. Like a nervous lizard, he shot a fast glance down Yonge, under the low concrete railway bridge spanning it, toward the condos that rose before Lake Ontario like glass sentinels. He watched the traffic crossing Yonge stop and start in impatient fits. The pedestrian adjusted his tie.

"You ever notice," he said with a neat smile, "how downtown sometimes feels like you've entered a giant bubble?" Then he left, disappearing into B.C.E. Place's pedestrian mall—that arched commercial palace of light and glass.

"That was weird," Doug thought.

Quarter to nine in the morning. The three couldn't have been further apart. At the same moment the pedestrian was walking away from Doug, the Stickle-McNabb was flirting with the petite blond girl who worked behind the register at his regular coffee shop. With a voice he deepened to an extra-jocular, athletic growl, he was saying the double-cream-double-sugar combination he liked in his coffee disqualified it from coffee status. He sipped, wagging his index finger in the negative.

"This merely qualifies as a coffee-like

beverage," he joked. The girl, the same one who served him most mornings, handed him the change from his double-double and complimented his hair. A smile lit her face like a reward.

"It's good today, eh?" she said. "The hair."

Ten to nine in the A.M. The Stickle-McNabb's thrust was more direct with the office receptionist.

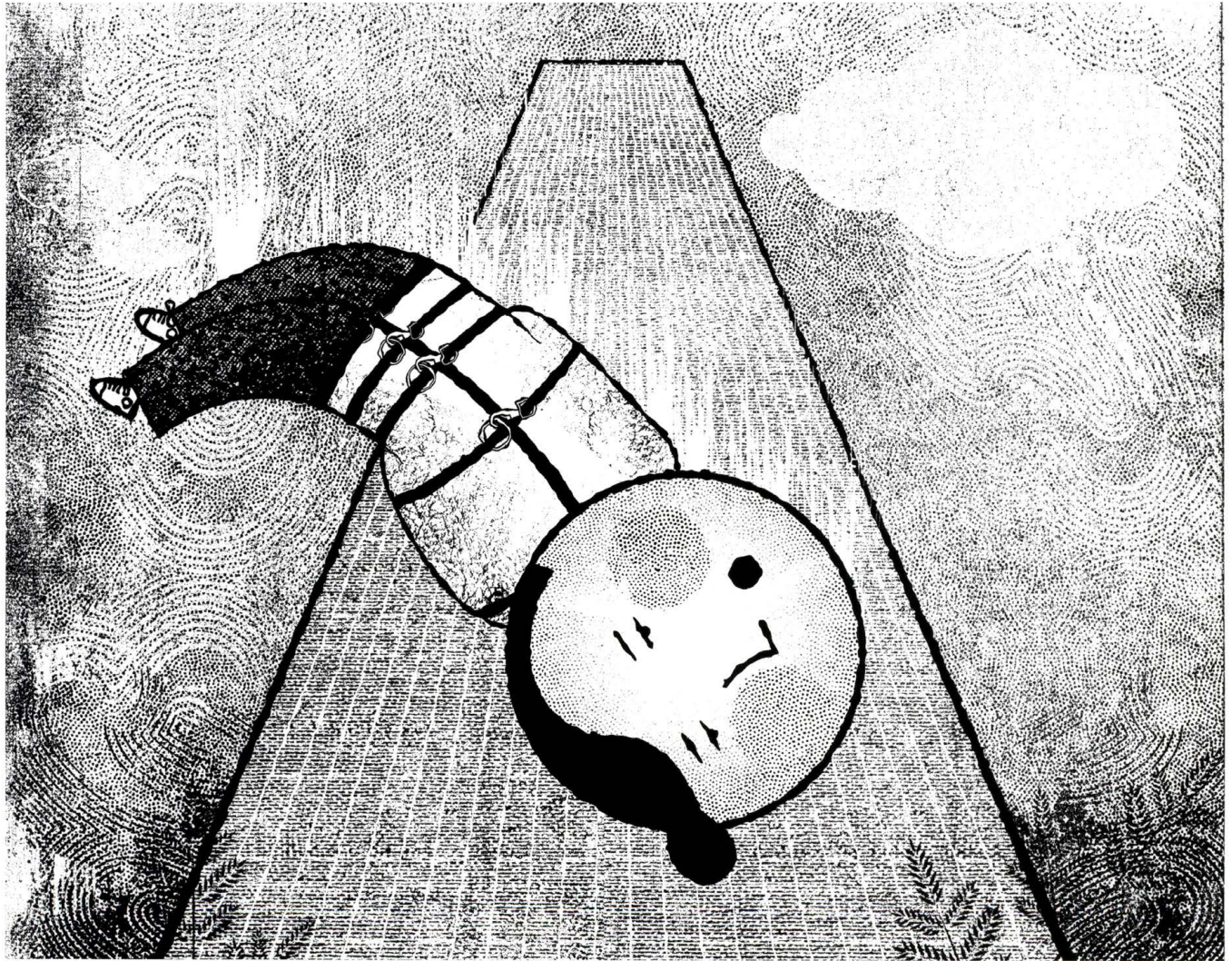
"Sleep with me?" he asked her.

She sighed. "No."

in for his day. He pulled a framed picture out from the leather satchel he used instead of a briefcase, walked around his desk, and removed the picture hanging on the wall. In its place he hung the new picture, blank, except for an illegible name and one badly executed doodle. It looked like an abstracted Charlie Brown being attacked by Snoopy. Stepping back, the Stickle-McNabb, after a self-satisfied pause, turned and admired himself in the other wall's mirror. He

at his own desk, had his feet up and was busy deleting messages from his voice mail, a pencil in his mouth. He watched as a small bulbous airplane took off from the Toronto Island Airport. He, like Jomini, was alone.

Gum spotted the sidewalk in front of the office tower, like some odd reminder of something forgotten. Jomini had by now fled his office. His stomach felt hollow as he lit a cigarette and won-



"C'mon. Please?"

"No."

"Tuesday then? You don't want to lose your chance."

"No."

"Great. Wednesday's perfect for me, too."

"Hmm . . . good point. No."

IAN PHILLIPS
Five to nine. Jomini trailed his hand along the wall as he walked to his boss's office. He arrived late. Seven storeys above, the Stickle-McNabb was settling

repeats this routine at least once a month. This morning, the mirror revealed an errant hair, which he immediately patted down.

"Best one yet," he said, looking back at the picture.

Nine A.M. Seven floors below the Stickle-McNabb, Jomini sat in his boss's office, pictures of her kids staring back at him. She was making him wait. The Stickle-McNabb, sitting

dered what he should do. Noticing Doug, he waved and walked over as casually as he could. Damp sweat was already sticking his shirt to his back. Doug, who was always on about how he needed investors to merchandise the quit-smoking method he claimed to have developed, had a cigarette drooping from his mouth. He didn't notice Jomini until Jomini was close enough to notice Doug hadn't swabbed his underarms with deodorant that morning. Jomini tapped

him on the shoulder. Doug turned and immediately began to explain something. His sentences were Joycean in their complexity. His cigarette, bouncing along to the convoluted rhythms of his speech, distracted Jomini.

"Huh?" Jomini asked. "You're what? Counting red S.U.V.s? Why?"

Doug exhaled a dense trail of smoke and, turning back to watch the traffic, waved his hands excitedly, then stopped to frame a passing car inside outstretched fingers. He kept his fingers locked around it as it passed through the intersection. "No man," he said, "art shots. Listen, per capita, Canada's one of the most heavily franchised countries in the world."

"Huh?"

"It's all the doughnut shops we got up here."

"Right." Jomini checked his watch. He dropped the cigarette he had been smoking and stepped on it, twisting his foot like the thing had insulted him. "It's, like, nine-thirty in the morning, man. What are you doing up?"

"I don't care about time."

That was when Jomini blurted out he'd been fired. He couldn't hold it in any longer.

Doug's reply was immediate. "Just now?" He waited a second before adding, "You know what? I don't feel sorry for you. At all. You know that though, don't you?"

"No, I didn't know that. Is that some Zen thing?"

"No, it's not a Zen thing."

Every management book Jomini had ever read clearly stated it was better to wait until the end of the day to fire an employee. This time frame offers them less opportunity to steal. Jomini didn't think he was the kind of person who got fired at twenty after nine in the morning. He dismissed the notion he might be considered too cowardly to steal. He was the kind of guy who develops new business ideas, industry-embracing strategies, while telling jokes beside the coffee machine. A minimum-input-maximum-output type of guy. Not a first-thing-this-morning-must-remember-to-fire-that-guy type of guy.

Doug promised to wait while Jomini went back to retrieve his stuff. Actually, he agreed in principle, but refused to guarantee he'd stay in the event of unforeseen circumstances. Doug squinted directly into the sun, which had begun to shine patches through the day's pollution.

"Doug the Destroyer can't promise anything," he said. "If something happens, it would be imperative the Destroyer leave. The Destroyer must remain safe."

Jomini sighed. "What could happen?"

Doug thought for a second, stubbing out and lighting another cigarette before speaking. "A fire. The Destroyer would leave if there was a fire. Flooding . . . snow leopard plague . . . a windstorm—for sure if there was a windstorm. The

Destroyer hates windstorms."

Jomini didn't let him continue.

While he watched Jomini walk back into the office tower, Doug flipped open his cell, tapped a button, and autodialed the Stickle-McNabb. According to the schema Doug used to order reality, cellular telephony was the opposite of bourgeois. Unlike time.

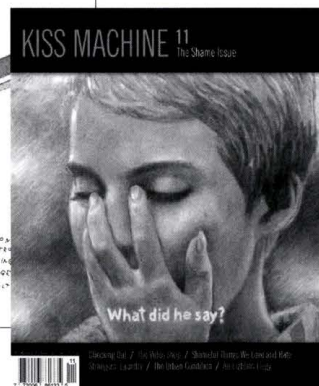
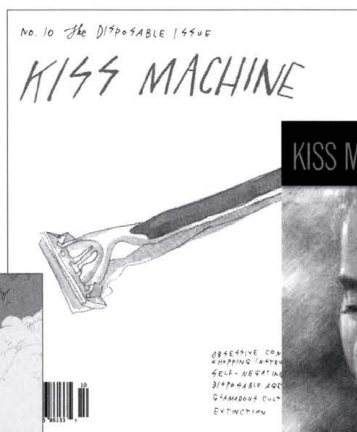
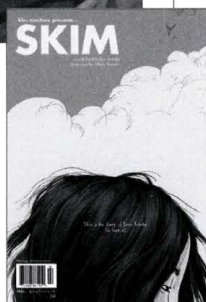
Jomini slid up his building's smooth intestine of an elevator shaft and discovered a group of guys he recognized from Institutional Sales bunched in his cubicle. A solid, square guy sat slouched in Jomini's chair, swivelling it beneath him. He was Chinese. Jomini recognized him from the company hockey team. A defenseman, he had a face like a chipped puck. Imitating Jomini's terrible posture as he swivelled, he drooped his arms so the knuckles of one hand scraped the ground, apelike. His laughing friends—two other Chinese guys, a Sikh, and a white guy—all hunched around him. The Sikh guy watched Jomini approach with a wicked smile. His beard made his teeth appear huge, and his black turban clashed against his blue suit. Jomini quickly scanned his cubicle. The white guy was awkward—so tall his limbs appeared elongated. The other two Chinese guys were neat with horn-rimmed glasses. Post-it notes lay everywhere. In his chair, the first Chinese guy pretended he was speaking into Jomini's phone.

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He was imitating Jomini.

"Sorry, buddy!" he said. "Very busy this afternoon. I'm off to go play golf with my rich white friends."

That wasn't nice. Jomini tapped him on the shoulder.

"Excuse me, I think you're in my chair."

The group stopped laughing.

The Chinese guy swivelled and stared up at him. He stammered something.

"Can I ask why you were being racist?" Jomini said.

The Chinese guy looked at his friends before turning back to Jomini. He tensed up the same way he would if he was lining up a corner check and the ref was busy on the other side of the rink. Metaphorical stick in hand, what little apology had decorated his face disappeared.

"You know that I'm, like, Chinese here, eh?" he said. "You know that, right?"

They stared at each other.

Non-telephone confrontations always made Jomini uncomfortable. But then, the Chinese guy did something unexpected: he dropped his tough-guy look. Not like gloves, but as if it were an unnecessary, redundant something not needed when it came to Jomini. He opened his hands toward Jomini, palms out.

"Hey, whatever," he said. "Listen, man, we all heard, and that's just tough luck."

Someone behind Jomini chirped, "Bosses are bastards."

Promises to drink beer were made. The Sikh in the black turban said, "So fucking what? Gives you more time for golf though, right, buddy?" He punched knuckles with the white guy.

Jomini forced his mouth's ends upward. It felt as if he'd pulled a muscle.

The Stickle-McNabb bragged how the summer suit he'd bought on a business trip to Hong Kong—spun by tobacco-addicted spiders in an underventilated sweatshop—weighed less than three ounces. Ear to his cellphone, he approached his window and looked down.

"What up?" he asked Doug, and then listened. "True dat!" he said.

Doug waved and said he was standing on the sidewalk below. The Stickle-McNabb leaned until his forehead pushed against the window. A dot with an open shirt might be waving, but he couldn't be sure.

"I can't today," the Stickle-McNabb said. "I'm busy. I've got to interview, like, three people."

The Stickle-McNabb gave interviewees twenty minutes to write an essay. They had to write about a two-sided print he showed them, by the Russian artist Wassily Kandinsky. Abstracted colour shots, explosive, cut through with perpendicular lines, amorphous blobs, that sort of thing. The Stickle-McNabb got the idea from the movie *Six Degrees of Separation*. The first thing he did after watching it was go out and buy two Kandinsky prints and glue them together, making himself a copy of the painting the movie's high-end New York art dealers keep in their apartment. The one they flip from front to back, each side having a different, opposite abstract painting on its canvas—one side wild, the other, orderly and restrained.

Sitting the interviewees in an empty storage room, the Stickle-McNabb would inform them that, upon completion, their essays would be read over the company intercom. After they settled in to work, he would interrupt them, then again, and again, each time wordlessly flipping the print to its other side. Interviewees had cried. The Stickle-McNabb framed his favourite examples and hung them in his office, like a proud parent hangs his child's kindergarten work.

The blue screen on Doug's cellphone shimmered against the heat floating off the sidewalk's chapped concrete. He tapped a button and autodialed Jomini. Jomini was on the other line with the Stickle-McNabb. The three of them conferred their cellphones. The Stickle-McNabb agreed to take the day off. He would tell his boss he had a rare variety of summer flu. Jomini was riding the elevator back down, his arms around a cardboard box stuffed with looted stationary, cellphone cradled against his shoulder. His voice mingled with theirs as though they were lounging beside a digital oasis, where electronic palm trees swayed in an ethereal breeze. They asked Jomini how everything had gone.

"This Chinese guy and some of his buddies made fun of me is all," he replied. "No biggie." ☐

Scott McIntyre lives in Beaconsfield, with his wife, daughter, and beagle. His work has appeared in Crank, Descant, and Regina Weese.

CONTRIBUTORS

Emily Schultz ("Winter Sticking Its Tongue to a Pole," p. 5) lives in Parkdale. She is the editor of *This Magazine*, and the author of the short-story collection *Black Coffee Night* (Insomniac, 2002). Her first novel, *Joyland*, will be published in 2006 by ECW.

Deanna McFadden ("Midnight, Lee's Palace," p. 7) recently bought a fixer-upper in the Village of Brockton.

Chris Chambers ("Dave Cook," p. 10) lives in the Palmerston area. He is the author of *Lake Where No One Swims* (Pedlar, 1999), and the co-author (with Derek McCormack) of *Wild Mouse* (Pedlar, 1998).

Evie Christie ("What We Leave Behind," p. 15) lives in Downtown Toronto. Her first poetry collection, *Gutted*, was recently published by ECW.

Elana Wolff ("Stephanotis," p. 17) lives in Thornhill, Ontario. Her third collection of poetry, *You Speak to Me in Trees*, will be published in 2006 by Guernica.

Gary Barwin ("Testing Pattern," p. 24) lives in Hamilton, Ontario, with vague yet colourful delusions about Toronto. He is a writer, composer, and performer. His most recent book, the poetry collection *Fragments from the Frag Pool* (with Derek Beaulieu), was recently published by Mercury.

Kerri Leigh Huffman ("The Scarf," p. 29) lives in Little Italy. Her poetry and fiction have appeared in various journals, including the *Fiddlehead*, the *Cormorant*, *Contemporary Verse 2*, the *Hart House Review*, *Broken Pencil*, and *Kiss Machine*.

Paul Vermeersch ("Smoke," p. 31) lives in the Junction. He is the author of *Between the Walls* (M. & S., 2005), *The Fat Kid* (ECW, 2002), and *Burn* (ECW, 2000), and the editor of 4 A.M. Books, Insomniac's poetry imprint.

Steve Manale ("Left!" p. 32) lives in Trinity Bellwoods. His Ignatz Award-nominated comic strip, "Superslackers," appears each week in the *Toronto Star's Brand New Planet*.

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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.)

Christmas Days, by Derek McCormack (Anansi, 2005; \$24.95). *Taddle Creek* literally had to chase Derek McCormack down Bloor Street to get him to finish fact-checking the lost chapter to *Christmas Days* found in this issue. Derek called *Taddle Creek* all kinds of names and swore he'd never write for the magazine again, though the magazine is sure he was at least half kidding. That said, *Taddle Creek* didn't actually get to see this book before press time. But it saw the galleys and read some passages and is convinced the finished product is (by now) another feather in Derek's big feathery cap. (Don't stop loving *Taddle Creek*, Derek.) Derek's first non-fiction book—a reminiscence of Christmas-time in Canada, from the country's very early days on up—is also quite amazingly illustrated by Seth, *Taddle Creek's* second-favourite illustrator, after Ian Phillips. Why can't every book be like *Christmas Days*?

Faux, by Derek McCormack (Pas de Chance, 2005; \$25). Speaking of Ian Phillips, he and Derek have collaborated on this *Christmas Days* side project in their own special way, namely a handmade glittery clay snowball that, when broken, reveals a Cracker Jack—prize-size twenty-eight—page booklet featuring a slightly altered version of *Christmas Days'* chapter on fake snow. If you thought asbestos was dangerous before, you'll develop a whole new fear after reading this book. Be sure to buy two: one to break and one to keep.

Utopia: Towards a New Toronto, edited by Jason McBride and Alana Wilcox (Coach House, 2005; \$22.95). Even though this collection is edited by the two-time *Taddle Creek* contributor Alana Wilcox and friend of the magazine Jason McBride, *Taddle Creek* must admit its big reason for recommending this book is the chapter written by the magazine's editor-in-chief—a conversation with

Taddle Creek's resident essayist, Alfred Holden. Which isn't to say that this collection of fine essays on Toronto revitalization by a big group of city lovers isn't great for a number of other reasons. It's a big Toronto love-in, and there's nothing *Taddle Creek* loves-in more than Toronto. (A side note: the book's title is actually *uTOpia*—get it?—but *Taddle Creek* refuses to start a sentence with a lower-case letter, so following Coach House's style would have resulted in this paragraph starting with the word “*UTOpia*,” and that's just wrong.)

● *Showbiz*, by Jason Anderson (ECW, 2005; \$18.95). *Taddle Creek* declares the September launch of *Showbiz* the book launch of 2005. Though it was another of those Pages This is Not a Reading Series things—which, following an uncomfortable introduction by Marc Glassman, always somehow manages to involve people reading—Jason and co-launchee Brian Joseph Davis (*Portable Altamont*, Coach House—also recommended) delighted the crowd by—yes!—not reading, opting instead to discuss *Buffy* fan fiction and the quarter-century transformation of Burt Reynolds' face. Jason also discussed and played snippets from *Showbiz's* inspirations: the comedian Vaughn Meader and the reluctant pop group the Shaggs. A nerdfest supreme. Stuart Berman was onstage, too.

● *Gutted*, by Evie Christie (ECW, 2005; \$16.95). A lovely poetry debut from Evie Christie, with tales of love, lust, vice, small towns, and jerky travel companions who don't know when to shut the hell up and who should probably apologize.

● *Iron-on Constellations*, by Emily Pohl-Weary (Tightrope, 2005; \$12.95). Non-fiction, anthology, fiction, and now poetry—Emily Pohl-Weary conquers yet another literary style with this, her fourth book in as many genres. And all while publishing a small magazine to boot. Is there no stopping her? No, there is not. Go ahead, try to stop her. You can't do it. What's next, children's literature? *Taddle Creek* wouldn't be surprised. Another flawlessly copy-edited book by Ms. Pohl-Weary.

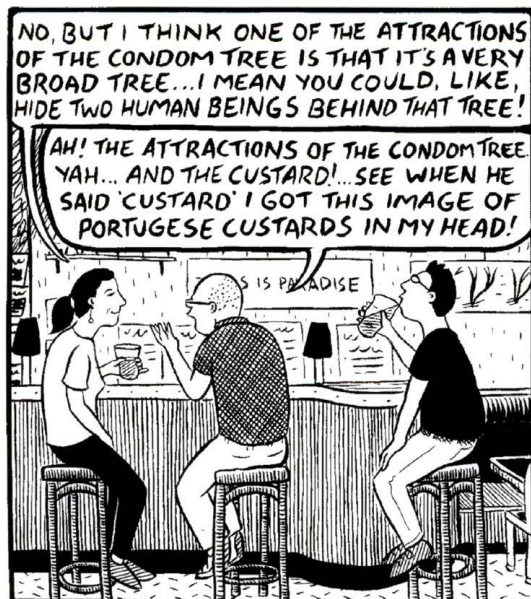
Confessions of a Small Press Racketeer, by Stuart Ross (Anvil, 2005; \$16). Someone's a Gloomy Gus (or a Sad Stuart in this case). This collection of Stu's Hunkamooga columns, originally published in *Word*, should serve as a horrifying lesson for anyone under the age of twenty thinking about throwing away a promising career to become a writer: even the most successful small-press authors end up embittered and angry after twenty-five years in the biz. At least ol' Stu still has a sense of humour about it all. And thank God someone finally said something about Insomniac Press's typos—a major pet peeve of *Taddle Creek's*. Speaking of *Word*, what's the deal with turning it into an on-line-only monthly? *Taddle Creek* wants to get its listings on the street, damn it!

● *I Should Never Have Fired the Sentinel*, by Jennifer LoveGrove (ECW, 2005; \$16.95). *Taddle Creek* misses Jen's pirate poetry, but her new stuff more than makes up for the loss. The Beauty Killer Poems section is especially entertaining/disturbing. If you like high-school proms, hockey, and bad office politics, you'll love this book.

Funeral, by Ian Phillips (Pas de Chance, 2005; \$25). The Ian Phillips lovefest continues. *Funeral* is another of Ian's stream-of-consciousness picture-and-texture books, made up entirely of material found in a dead neighbour's garage. Delightful, as always.

ALBUMS

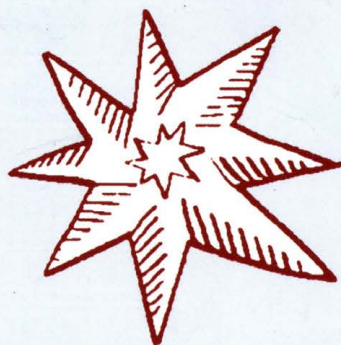
The City, by Fembots (Paper Bag, 2005; \$15). Keep your Dearses and your Broken Social Scenes—Fembots are the true kings of Canadian indie rock. The group's third album is by far its best—*Taddle Creek* would go so far as to call it the local (and perhaps beyond) album of the year—with a sound more traditional than the band's previous efforts, yet still unmistakably Fembots. If hit records were actually based on talent and not ability to dress like a whore, “My Life in the Funeral Service” would be No. 1. *The City* is the Fembots album that finally makes *Taddle Creek* cease to lament the absence of Teddy Ruxpin from the group's live shows.



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