

TADDLE CREEK



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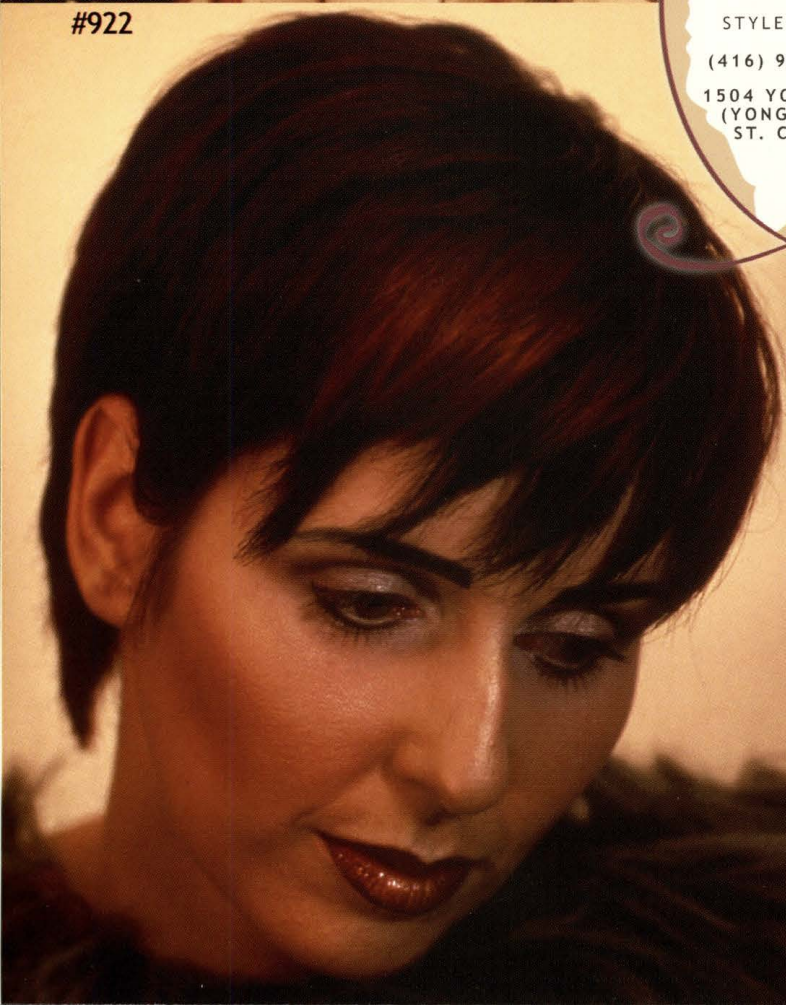
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TADDLE CREEK

VOL. X, NO. 1 • CHRISTMAS NUMBER, 2006

FICTION

"Quarter Turn"	Ryan Bigge	3
"Donut Castle"	Susan Mockler	6
"The Applicant"	Andrew Daley	20
"French Braids"	Jennifer LoveGrove	42

THE OUT-OF-TOWNER

"Foreign Bodies"	Danielle Egan	28
------------------------	---------------	----

ILLUSTRATED FICTION

"Therefore Repent!"	Jim Munroe, Salgood Sam	24
---------------------------	-------------------------	----

An excerpt from the upcoming graphic novel.

PROFILE

Sonja Ahlers	Rachel Pulfer	12
--------------------	---------------	----

Bunny heads and stranger things: the wandering eye of Sonja Ahlers.

GALLERY

"The Art of Sport"	Lou Skuce, Conan Tobias	36
--------------------------	-------------------------	----

Remembering Lou Skuce, "Canada's greatest cartoonist."

PEOPLE AROUND HERE

Avenue Road Arts School	Dave Lapp	48
-------------------------------	-----------	----

POEMS

"Good Old Daze"	Chris Chambers	4
"A Table Reserved in Your Name at a Burning Restaurant"	Paul Vermeersch	8
"Just Before the Night Ripped Open Like a Sash"	Emily Schultz	11
"Furnace Coat"	Gary Barwin	22
"Walking Up the Trebovir Road, Thinking You Might Not Be Pregnant"	John Degen	30
"Modes"	Elana Wolff	45
"Two Thirteen-Line Poems on How We Need a New Poem"	Alex Boyd	46

COVER STAR

Unknown, circa 1960. Photograph by W. C. Runder Photo Company Incorporated.

BUNK SEMI-CORRECT

T*addle Creek* recently received an electronic letter from Timothy Konczyk, of Toronto, in which he quotes the following passage from the magazine's Web site: "In December, 2000, the new semi-annual (not 'biannual,' which means every two years), Toronto-wide *Taddle Creek* was born." Tim's letter continues: "Semi-annual and biannual are synonymous. Perhaps you should use your 'official spelling resource' for the definitions too. . . . From the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary*, second edition:

"**bi-annu-al** *adjective* occurring, appearing, etc., twice a year.

"**semi-annual** *adjective* occurring, published, etc., twice a year."

Tim's letter ends with the following postscript: "I was about to hit send when I noticed 'December, 2000' in the text quoted above. Please see [Section] 6.46 in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th edition: 'Where month and year only are given, or a specific day (such as a holiday) with a year, neither system uses a comma.' . . . I am tempted to apologize for pointing out such trivial errors, but they are not trivial to me, and I would like to think you feel the same. I like your magazine very much, in part for the pride taken in high editorial standards."

No need to apologize, Tim. Trivial errors are the prime reason *Taddle Creek* doesn't read any other literary journals. Please allow the magazine to address your P.S. first: While *Chicago* is certainly one of *Taddle Creek's* main style resources, the magazine's No. 1 reference source, as discussed last issue, is *The Taddle Creek Guidebook to Editorial Style and Its Usage*, which not only allows, but insists, a comma be used in such cases. It's not a popular usage, but it is a valid one, and *Taddle Creek* is a strong supporter of underdog editorial-style rules.

As for the body of your letter, this is exactly why *Taddle Creek* has reverted to using the complete *Oxford English Dic-*

tionary as its primary spelling guide, referring to the *Canadian Oxford* only for more modern or distinctly Canadian words. The *O.E.D.* actually defines "bi-" as "occurring or appearing every two —" and "occurring or appearing twice in a —." It at least has the common sense to add, "The ambiguous usage is confusing and might be avoided by the use of *semi-*." *Oxford* defines "semi-annual" as meaning "recurring every half-year," or "once in every six months."

Strangely, it is *Webster's*, a fine but somewhat lesser dictionary, that offers the best advice. Although it admits to sharing the *O.E.D.'s* confusion over the meaning of "bi-," beginning in the tenth edition of its *Collegiate Dictionary*, published in 1995, it added the following passage: "[I]f you need *bimonthly* or *biweekly*, you should leave some clues in your context to the sense of *bi-* you mean. And if you need the meaning 'twice a,' you can substitute *semi-* for *bi-*."

And that is exactly what *Taddle Creek* has done. Thanks for your letter, Tim. *Taddle Creek* likes you, too.

Belated congratulations to Elyse Friedman, whose story "Lost Kit-ten," from *Taddle Creek's* Christmas, 2005 (sorry, Tim), issue, was nominated for a National Magazine Award this past spring. Although Elyse ended up taking home the gold, she did so for a story from *Toronto Life*, for which she was simultaneously nominated. Now that *Toronto Life* has dropped out of the summer fiction race, that shouldn't be a problem in the future.

Also, congratulations to David Whitton, whose story "The Eclipse," from the magazine's summer, 2005, issue, will be included in the next edition of *The Journey Prize Stories* (the magazine is calling it "long-listed"). The announcement was made in 2006 for Dave's 2005 story, and the winner of the Journey Prize apparently will be announced some time before the end of the decade. ☞

TADDLE CREEK

Like cupcakes on your mind.

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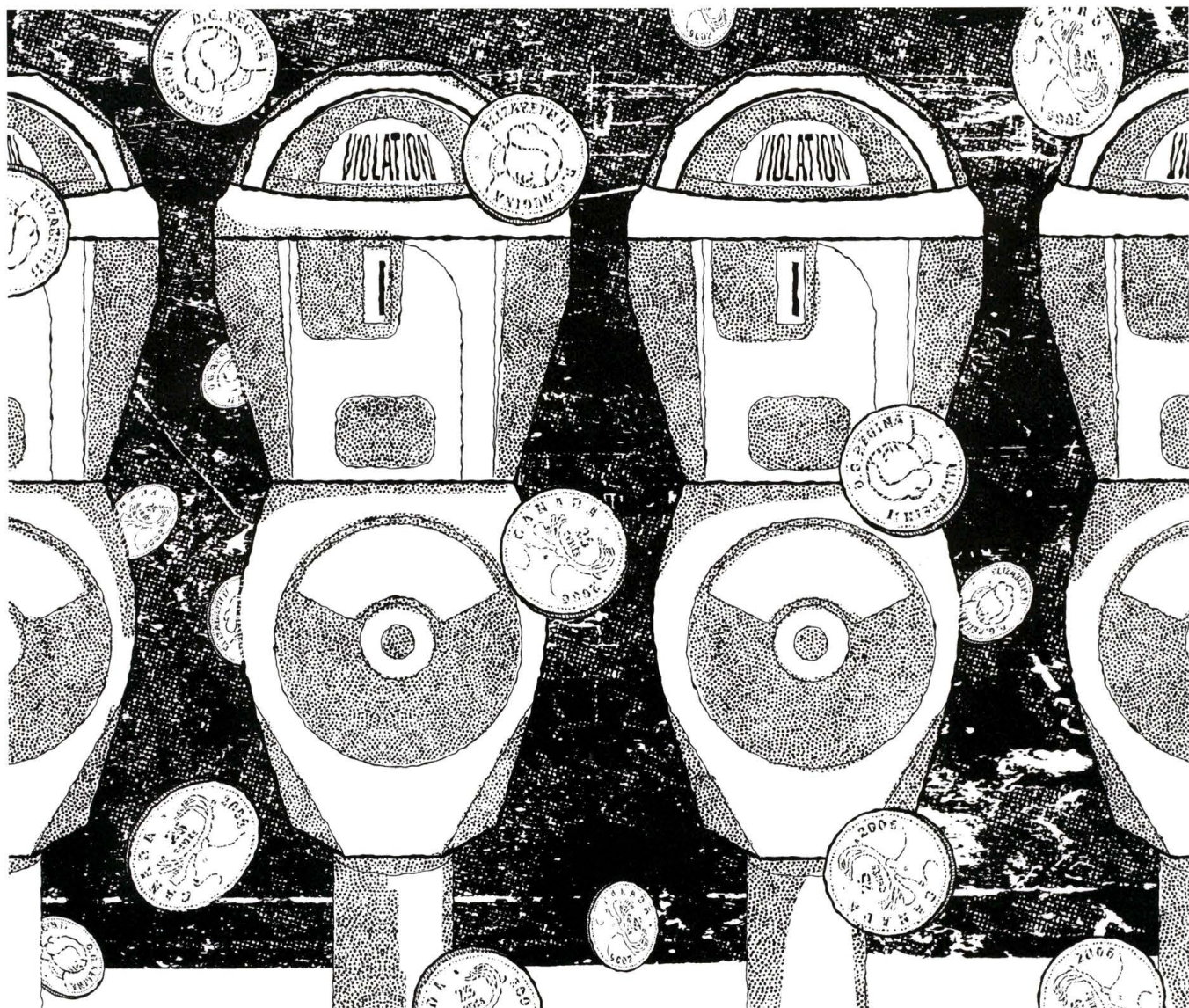


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QUARTER TURN

BY RYAN BIGGE

Dale locked his car door and walked toward the parking meter with a handful of change. A note, written on a piece of lined yellow paper, was taped to the glass that protected the time-indicator arrow. Instead of the usual out-of-order explanation, the note read:

DEAR WENDY,

I know only you'll understand. Please read them all.

Yours,
MARCUS

Dale looked back at his car, a blue Volvo with four doors, distinguished only by a small dent below the driver's-

side lock. His gaze returned to the note, then to the right.

The next meter also held a piece of yellow paper. A long glance showed that each grey, metal, coin-eating tree appeared to have similar specks of yellow.

To the left was the same. Across the street was also a flip-flap of yellow.

He wasn't late or early. If he fed the meter now, he could shop for low-sodium cereal and tins of organic chick-peas at the health-food store one block north and still be on time for lunch with his sister, Rachel. Alternatively,

once the money was in the meter, he could wander this block, study each of the notes, and forget about shopping.

Dale lifted the yellow note and slid a dollar into the slot. He turned the dial. One hour purchased. A quarter and a twist. Fifteen more minutes. Another quarter, and a final turn of the dial.

A parking meter was a vending machine in reverse, Dale thought, where coins didn't buy a crappy toy in a bubble or a tiny handful of stale peanuts. Only time and the absence of a parking ticket.

He decided to walk to the meter to

his right. If the note added anything to the first, he would keep going in that direction—the yellow tags, he assumed, were in sequence. If the note was confusing, he would retrace his steps and walk right.

The street was a short dead end, an overlooked place to park at the very rear corner of the city's historical district. On one side was a tall wire fence, protecting a large field of yellow grass and rusty weeds—a prairie made toxic from decades of industry. Across from Dale's car, on the other side of the street, were the backsides of several buildings: a restaurant, a ceramic store, a rug shop. It was a tame part of town, a compromise choice for meeting with Rachel.

His sister had no doubt used the pay garage two blocks over, Dale thought. He had saved himself at least four dollars by parking here.

At the next meter, the note read:

We loved love letters.

Dale lifted the note and studied its underside. Moving in the opposite direction, he walked past the first note, to the meter on the left.

The virtue of defects is oft overlooked.

Dale stopped and called his sister to say he was running late. She sighed into the tiny hole of her cellphone.

Near the dead end was a large oval lump meant to facilitate U-turns. There were another three parking meters with yellow notes on the left. The first read:

Anaphora. Let me say it again: anaphora.

Next:

Pen will kiss paper, again.

Finally:

First memories stolen from a hotel lobby.

The notes did not seem to be in any sequence. The first note, the one attached to his parking meter, was meant to be read first. But the rest were random offerings.

Across the street were nine meters. A red four-door occupied one spot near the dead end. A Yamaha motorcycle was in another spot, closer to the entrance of the street. There were no other cars or observers.

He crossed the street to read the other notes.

GOOD OLD DAZE

A guy can lament being soused all the time best when soused. Pragmatically burning the playhouse down daily. Still. A poignant observer.
If slurring. If awake.

Soused after work! Soused all day long!
Wake up in the night convinced of a (treatable) noble insomnia, then read books from miles of shelves. So many unread books had a guy yet to own. So many unread books did a guy own.

The living room was like a book city.
Its skyline mainly perfect uncracked spines.
Collecting books with good intentions,
like the light breaking through trees' branches, leaves—

like light beaming paths into a forest—fighting blindness with a thirst for words; quaffing beer and hockey replays, passing out again on the too-short couch.
It's the et ceteras in life that'll nail a guy.

Are you impecunious?

No, man. Pecunious. I'm pecunious.

Fine. Let's go to the bar.

I still hear your footfalls echo inside dead malls.

Our happiness developed in the pauses between photo-booth flashes.

You stitched random moments together into an insecurity blanket.

Everyone but me thought it foolish to chase after a girl with a ten-speed.

These notes, unlike the notes on the opposite side of the street, seemed to build toward something. But then the next note read:

DEAR WENDY,

You're in the middle of things. Be sure to read all my thoughts.

Yours,
MARCUS

Dale peered past the wire windows created by the fencing. A chipped slab of concrete lay even with the debris. He walked toward the final four notes on this side of the street.

Too much suction, not enough foresight.

The best answers blur like a Lomo photo.

You wanted cigarettes without the cancer.

I wanted affection without affectation.

He crossed the street to read the

remaining three notes.

String and glue and I love you.

Two corrugated lives can never walk smooth.

Too much coffee. Not enough gin.

The circuit complete, Dale stood one parking space away from his car. After looking at his watch, he decided to put another quarter in the meter.

He jangled the remaining change in his pocket. He ignored the cellphone as it began to vibrate.

Then there was a glint. In the middle of the street was a quarter, a few metres away from his Volvo's rear bumper. He walked over and pocketed it, listening to the tinny clatter as it joined some new friends.

He paused for a moment and looked down at the road. He put his right foot on the white line that bisected the asphalt and moved his left in front of it, as if he were walking a tightrope. Arms spread for balance.

Slowly he turned his head toward the backs of the buildings on the block, all antiqued red brick. Former factories. The three-storey building on the corner had large windows on the second and

It's a freezing March night outside. When the wind gusts
I can hear the foolish pigeon who has tried to build her nest
under our deck. The gusts that rattle the kitchen window
force a whimpering cluck out of her.

How do I know it is freezing on the deck?
I'm doing research. I have written a joke.
The punchline (sort of) is the fact that pigeons can't solve
problems by sitting down breaking bread and discussing them.

Tonight, how wrong I am.
The wind is leading to a major reassessment
as to the location of the nest being built and slept in
by at least two pigeons and perhaps one egg.

*Is there time to move?
We could do it.
My strength—it's not—*

*We'd be warmer there, out of the wind.
I don't like to fly after daylight.
It's not far. Follow me.*

—CHRIS CHAMBERS

third levels, and a smattering of ivy
creeping north. Offices. The ground floor
had a double set of metal doors where
restaurant staffers smoked cigarettes
and tossed heavy garbage bags into a
communal Dumpster located near the
street's rump.

One of the desks on the third-floor of-
fice faced the window. There was a man
sitting at the desk. This man worked in
a loft, and no doubt lived in one too.
Dale immediately hated this loft man,
and then hated himself for coveting
such an obvious, airbrushed lifestyle—a
guilty pleasure torn from an expensive,
glossy magazine.

The third-floor-office man looked up
from his silver laptop and saw a strange
fellow standing on the white line. The
office man stared, then stared some
more. Dale moved his left arm toward
the office man, at the same time lower-
ing his right arm, like a child pretending
to be an airplane. He wagged his hand.

As the office man gave a cautious
wave in return, the first click occurred.
Dale stopped wagging and stood
straight again, rigid in his tightrope
posture. A second click. A third.

There were four parking meters in

front of him, and four behind. To his
left he heard another click, saw a flash of
red. To his right, a "VIOLATION" sign
appeared for a moment behind one of
the yellow notes in a meter window.

Now there was a click from the oppo-
site direction. The knobs of the meters
were turning on their own, alternating
from side to side. He watched them
ping and pong until all eighteen had
clicked and clacked on their own.

For a moment, enough time only to
exhale, there was silence. Then the clicks
resumed, and every knob turned, in per-
fect synchronization, to the right. Then
the clicks leapt from side to side in a
rapid staccato. The intensity of the click-
ing increased, and then increased again.

He waited, shoes on the white line,
silent and motionless. His cellphone
began to vibrate again. When it stopped,
quarters dropped from the sky, a cloudless
blue canopy. The percussive, shimmering
rain of coins became the opening bars of
Dale's favourite new tune, a song like a
jukebox being emptied of money. ♪

*Ryan Bigge lives in Dufferin Grove. His short
story "Her" was published in the anthology
Desire, Doom & Vice (Wingate, 2005).*

HAVE YOU CONSIDERED THE STATE OF THE ARTS IN TORONTO?

The history of Toronto on film?

The untapped artistic potential
of the CNE?

The importance of good stapling
to Toronto's small press scene?

The tremendous power of the
internet in arts communities?

The dearth of places where both
parents and kids can rock out?

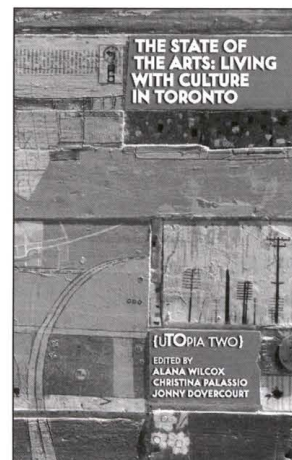
The sorry state of our hip-hop
infrastructure?

The lack of freaky millionaire art
collectors?

The use of art to shill condos?

The hazy line between party and
art?

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DONUT CASTLE

BY SUSAN MOCKLER

"Two plain, a French cruller, and two large double-doubles," the man barked over the crowd. Seven to nine in the morning was the busiest time. The bobbing heads and rustling feet of workers on their way to shifts at the Ford plant or sales desks at Bobby's Nearly New Autoworld. There were mechanics from Midas, Canadian Tire, oil stains tattooed in the crevices of their palms as they handed June their money and headed back to their cars, grasping brown paper bags, balancing cups in cardboard trays.

"Three twenty-five," she said.

"Keep a quarter for yourself, sweetheart," the man said.

Mornings were so busy, June didn't have to think. An automaton, pouring coffee, making change. Sorrelli's Donut Castle was a dump, a dive. A minimum wage job on the wrong side of town. Industrial. Poor. East of the tracks. But June had been desperate. Nineteen eighty-one. Summer jobs were scarce. Stagflation. Even with scholarships and loans, first year at university in Toronto was going to be difficult. She had to save what she could or she'd be stuck in London, Ontario, for the rest of her life.

"Will you get that?" Wendy shouted over the noisy crowd. Wendy was the longest reigning Donut Princess. A born-again Christian in her early thirties, she still lived with her mother in a walk-up apartment down the road.

June headed to the far end of the counter where, against a wall, the trilling ring and pulsing red lights of the switchboard beckoned. One of the duties of the Donut Princess was to serve as telephone operator for Sorrelli's Motor Inn, the eighteen units on the other side of the parking lot. Truckers and motorcycle-gang members passing through London were regulars; a half-dozen girls were residents, living and working out of the dimly lit rooms.

"Switchboard," June answered.

"Help!" A hoarse voice wailed. "I can't wake up Josephine. *Oh God.*"

"I'll . . . call an ambulance."

Room 15. Two of the girls. Transvestites, actually. Josephine and Jacquie. June often served them during the all-night shift. Stoned, they'd stagger in, each order two chocolate-dipped and a Coke. They'd giggle and gossip about various johns, advise June on fashion and makeup, suggestively licking the icing, daintily nibbling the cake of the doughnuts.

Under the glare of the fluorescent lights, in the cozy intimacy shared by those awake in a land of sleep, June felt part of their world. A world that was exotic and thrilling, gritty and real. She was impressed by how free they seemed—not degraded or degenerate, but free. Living how they wanted, not caring what anyone thought.

After the bleating siren, after the orange-and-white ambulance had taken Josephine away, June struggled to finish her shift. She wondered what could have happened. Drugs? A rough client? June's fingers trembled, spilling coffee, dropping doughnuts to the floor as she tried to focus on her work. But she couldn't stop thinking about Josephine.

June lined up the sugar canisters for refilling and almost burst into tears when she knocked several over, white sugar streaming onto the counter and the floor.

"You shouldn't be here," said one of the regulars, a farmer, long retired, as he passed June a metal canister lid that had rolled under his stool. "You're a nice girl. You've no business in a place like this."

He was right, in a way. June knew she didn't belong here. But that was the attraction, the thrill, the exposure to the seamy side of a city she'd always thought was the dulllest place on earth.

When June arrived at work the next day, Wendy filled her in. Josephine had almost overdosed on a combination of glue and Lysol fumes, Valium chased by vodka. Her stomach pumped, she was back in Room 15—the doctor insisted on a few days' bed rest—before returning to her life.

"That's great news," June said, relieved. She wondered if Josephine's overdose had been deliberate, but she doubted it. Josephine seemed to be having too much fun to want to kill herself.

"I prayed for her, I did," Wendy confided, fingering the gem-studded crucifix at her neck. "Jesus wasn't ready for her. It wasn't her time." Wendy's hand was mottled with purple-and-blue ink.

"Bingo last night?"

"Yeah. Those daubers, they really leak," Wendy said, glancing down at her hands. "Things are pretty quiet. I'm gonna go out back and make up some éclairs."

"I'll shout if it picks up," June said, smoothing the front of her brown-and-orange smock, frowning when she noticed she hadn't tied it properly when she'd changed for her shift. She undid the knot and wrapped the smock tighter around her body, making a bow at the side. Even though the uniform was hideous, June knew it flattered her—snug at the waist, tight across her hips and breasts.

Embarrassed to admit it, even to herself, she revelled in the attention she drew at the Donut Castle. The frank stares of men who gave her the once-over, flirting with her as if they were grateful just to be in her presence. For the first time in her life, June almost felt beautiful.

The door swung open and Tony Sorrelli swaggered in. A short, fat man in his mid-forties, greasy black hair plastered to his skull, he was the owner, the "brains" behind the Castle.

"Mornin', sweetheart," he said, leaning up against the counter, his belly thrust out, straining the buttons of his flowered mauve polyester shirt. He sparkled as the sunlight streamed in from the plate-glass windows. It was the gold. Tony was covered in gold. Rings, bracelets, and necklaces glinted from under the dense, dark hair that sprouted on his fingers, wrists, and chest.

"How's my favourite princess?" he said, sliding up behind June.

"Fine," she said, backing away.

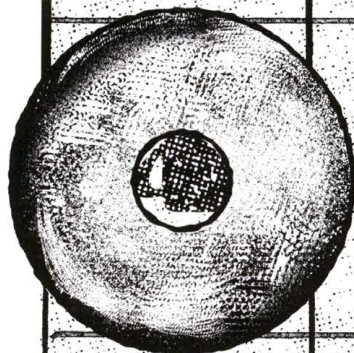
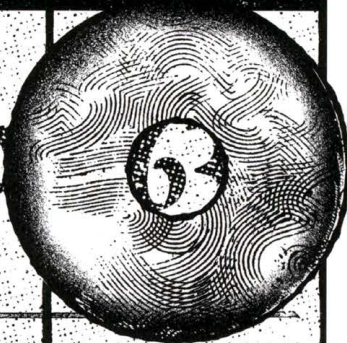
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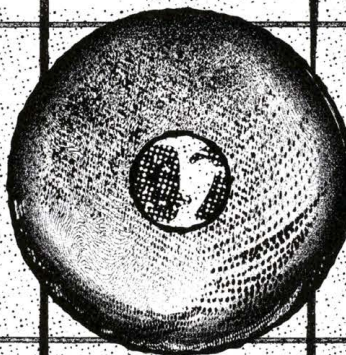
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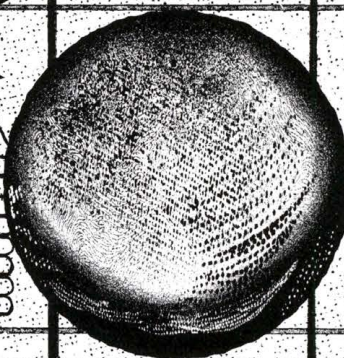


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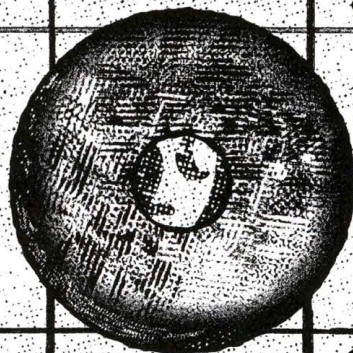
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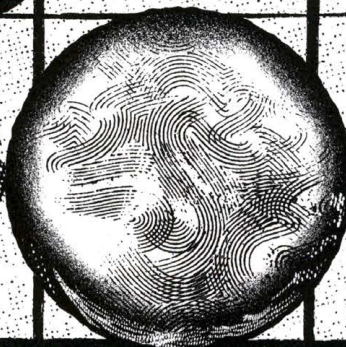
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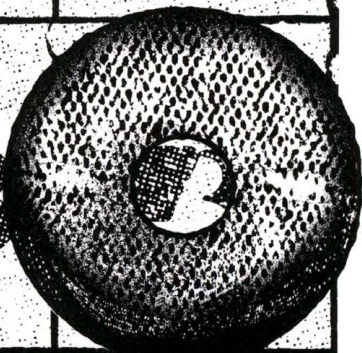
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"She plays hard to get, this one," he said, grinning at Wendy, who had returned to the room, a tray of *éclair*s in hand. "I'll leave you girls to it," Tony said, heading to the back office.

"He's a pig," Wendy said.

"I know," said June.

Tony had been after June to "party" with him ever since she'd started working there. "Pot, booze—I'll get you anything you want," he'd said. She tolerated his attentions, even smiling and shrugging off his occasional lewd remark. But last week, he'd crossed a line. June was in the bathroom, changing from her uniform into her jeans, when Tony had burst in, filling the doorway. He'd grabbed her by the shoulders and plunged his thick wet tongue into her mouth. She'd screamed and told him to fuck off. When she got home, she gargled three times with Listerine. But though she didn't quite understand it, deep down she knew she'd hesitated before repulsing his advance, a few seconds of compliance before she shoved him away.

Friday night. The graveyard shift. Sorrelli's glowed from the inside out, a square cinder-block jack-o'-lantern breathing light. A beacon to those high on drugs and booze, scattered on the streets after last call. Headlights flickered like sparklers in the parking lot, young men in muscle shirts and cut-offs scarfed crullers, dangled their legs from the backs of pickups, and insisted, louder and louder, that tunes be cranked up. Miniskirted girls on stiletto heels teetered from car to car, sipping coffees laced with double cream, double sugar, and Southern Comfort. Middle-aged men clustered on the fringe, their murmuring punctuated by throaty laughter.

"The cops just drove up," Danny said, tossing the joint they were sharing out the open window. They were in the backroom, Danny baking and June icing the fresh doughnuts. Danny was wiry and freckled, with short, stringy, dirty-blond hair. He was older than June, just old enough to buy beer. He had dropped out of school at fifteen, but recently completed his high-school equivalency. And he had plans. Big plans. A friend had a job on an oil rig outside of Calgary, and they were hiring. So Danny was saving his cheques.

A TABLE RESERVED IN YOUR NAME AT A BURNING RESTAURANT

The diners have all fled the scene. They have survived with their hides intact, and now the flames are eating everything in sight: the crisp white linens, the black and red

carpets that made the floor seem deeper, somehow connected with, somehow supported by, the belly of the earth. And the high white ceiling opposite,

the sky inside, is blackened now and will collapse at any moment. The fire teeth are gnawing through the beams. The wiring snaps like sinews.

Soon the whole place will be swallowed, and yet, in the kitchen, there is a chef who will not leave. He's still singing his worksong, still preparing your feast.

—PAUL VERMEERSCH

Any day now, he'd be packing his things and boarding the bus.

"I wouldn't worry about it," June said, lighting a cigarette. "I'm sure Tony has some sort of 'arrangement.'"

"Maybe there's a fight." He tore off his apron. "I'm gonna go check it out."

June skimmed a doughnut along the surface of the chocolate, simmering just below the boiling point in the dented pot on the gas burner. The backroom was hot and stuffy. She reached under the counter and took a swig from the tepid Coors Light Danny had given her earlier.

"Sorry to say, no action out there tonight." Danny sighed. "Just some cop sittin' at the picnic table, shooting the shit with Tony."

"That's a drag," June said, placing the freshly iced doughnuts on a tray lined with wax paper.

"June," Tony called from the front. "Come out here, will ya?"

"Just a sec," she said, brushing powdered sugar off the front of her uniform.

He sat at a table by the window. "Oh, there you are," he said. "C'mon outside. Someone wants to meet you."

An uniformed police officer in his mid-twenties stood up from the picnic table, towering above Tony.

"Hi there," he said, smiling at June.

His black hair was short, clipped close to his head. He was different than the older, seedier cops who usually dropped by for a smoke or a chat with Tony.

"So, Rob," Tony said, pushing her forward. "This here's June."

"Glad to know you," Rob said, extending his hand. "You work here long? I never saw you before."

"A couple of months."

"Tony treating you O.K.?"

"I guess."

"Good," he said, fiddling with a lighter, adjusting the height of the flame.

"I better get back to work."

"Nice talking to you," he said

Minutes later, Tony burst into the backroom. "You want to go out with him?"

"Who?"

"Rob. The cop. He wants to take you out. Buy you dinner. Maybe more," he said, winking.

"No."

"Why not? He's a nice guy. Got a good job. He'd make it worth your while."

Worth her while?

"Forget it. I don't even know him," June said, grabbing a tray of doughnuts.

"Excuse me." She waited for Tony to move out of the doorway to let her pass. He shifted to the side, then followed her to the front.

"Be right back," Tony said, heading out to the parking lot. June watched him chatting to Rob.

A few minutes later, Tony returned.

"Well, I told him you didn't want a date. Tried to get him to take out one of the girls from across there," Tony said, nodding his head toward the motel. "But he wasn't into *that*. Only wanted to go out with you." Tony slid onto a stool at the counter. "Get me a Coke, would you honey?"

As June headed to the cooler, she wondered what had really gone on. Had the cop just wanted to take her out, or had he and Tony actually been negotiating for her body, determining a price? The lines between dating and prostitution weren't as clear as she'd once thought. June was surprised she wasn't angry, not even offended, just amazed at how effortlessly, if she wanted to, she could disappear into this life.

June placed the pop in front of Tony and continued her work. She sensed the flit of his stare on her as she emptied tin ashtrays, wiping them down with a dirty cloth.

"Guess where I was yesterday?" he said. "Took the Lincoln up to Port Huron, just across the border. Know it?"

"Mmm . . ."

"They got it good down there. Real good. Guess what they got there?"

"I don't know."

"You go into this bar, pay twenty bucks, and right there in front of you . . . right in front of you, on this stage they got there, there's these guys and girls doing it. I sat up close and saw everything. *Everything*. Maybe you and me'll go there sometime."

"*Right*," she said, deliberately leaning over to clear away his empty glass so that from where he was sitting he could peek down the front of her uniform. "I've gotta go help Danny," she said, smiling, once she'd seen him look.

"All right, princess," Tony said, winking. "Till next time." He smacked his lips against his hands, wiggling his tongue between his fingers. "For you," he said, blowing her a kiss. As she headed to the back, June felt completely in control. It was almost exhilarating how easily she could play him.

June spent her free time in the last days of August trying to break the monotony by reading, going to bingo halls with Wendy, and packing and

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repacking. She was working right up till the end. She could use the money. Besides, there was no one to say good-bye to, no one to miss. Her dad was camping cross-country with his latest girlfriend. Her mother had been staggering in later and later from dates with various Harveys, Harrys, and Pauls.

Time dragged during her last shifts at Sorrelli's. Danny had left for Calgary a week earlier. While June was happy he'd made it, she missed the comfort of his presence, their easy banter and laughter as the late nights became dawn.

When Tony heard that June's final day at Sorrelli's was approaching, he intensified his efforts. His hands brushed her breasts. He groped her from behind, grinding his groin into her, whispering, "Great tits," "Nice ass," and, "Come get high with me." June tolerated his advances, sometimes even responding, leaning into him, not contradicting his belief that she wanted it, too. She wondered what she was doing, playing a role in this sordid game.

But Tony's determination affected her, made her aware of her beauty, her good fortune to possess an arrangement of features, skin, hair, flesh, muscle, and bone men found attractive. There was something about his relentless pursuit, his raw hunger, that made June feel powerful. And she liked the idea of choosing this as her final London experience. Escaping with a flourish, liberated by behaving badly. She dared herself to do it—in some ways couldn't imagine a more fitting end.

So June agreed to party with Tony, after her final shift at Sorrelli's. It would be her last night in London; she was leaving for Toronto the next day. Without specifying the exact terms of the transaction, they negotiated a price: a dime bag of pot, a twenty-sixer of vodka, and at least one hundred and fifty dollars cash. Maybe more, Tony promised with a leer, depending on how things went. June wasn't sure how that compared to the going rate, but it was more than she'd expected.

June slammed the door when her last shift ended at 11 P.M. She stepped into the night and entered his waiting car. Tony pulled out of the parking lot, heading south on Wharncliffe Road.

"There's a place I know, just north of Lambeth. Don't want to go across the street," he said, grinning. "The other girls might get jealous." He pointed to a bag by her feet. "That's for you."

She peered in. A baggie of pot. A bottle of Smirnoff.

"I'll give you the cash after," Tony said.

"O.K.," June said, "but I need some rolling papers and cigarettes now."

"I'll stop at the next store," he said. "You should ease up on the cigarettes, you know. They're bad for the lungs. I quit last year, using these." He popped a white Scotch mint into his mouth. "Want one?"

"No," she said. June was curious about how things would go. Unlike the other times she'd had sex, the anticipation was not in her body, only in her

mind. She wondered how things would unfold. The situation was beyond words. Their roles were clear. She felt free. She could speak in tongues. It didn't matter. He wouldn't care. She could say or be anything, here in the car, driving into the night. Only her body felt the smoothness of the leather seat, heard the crickets in the fields, smelled the sweet freshness of the evening air. She liked the feeling of being invisible. Disappearing, if only for a few hours, into this world.

The Golden Phoenix. A blue-and-yellow neon bird soared skyward, rising above an illuminated sign that read: "ROOMS \$19.99/NITE."

"Wait here," Tony said, squeezing her leg. "Gotta go get the room."

They parked in a spot at the back of the motel. A naked bulb shone on the aqua number nine.

"Have a seat," said Tony, as he held open the pale yellow door. "You want a drink?"

"Yeah," June said, settling into a black vinyl chair. She rested her feet on the edge of the bed. The ridges of the gold chenille spread tickled the bare skin of her ankles, exposed by the leather straps of her sandals. She placed a cigarette between her lips.

"I'll get it." She smelled sulphur as Tony lit a match. He opened a mickey of rye and poured the amber liquid into a glass.

"Not that," she said. "I want vodka. Over ice."

"Be right with you," he said, grabbing a plastic bucket from the top of the

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JUST BEFORE THE NIGHT RIPPED OPEN LIKE A SASH

God and I are in a cabaret,
my father playing piano
with a crowbar and a candlestick—
an instant set of string drums
—beating away, seventeen in his sixty-year-old skin. *Dix minutes*
pre-curtain, Death is off having near experiences
in the bathroom with the man they call Wilde.
When we see Death again, in his slim white
clam diggers, he's chewing on teeth
like they're Chiclets,
yammering two octaves too high, our leading man
utterly fucked up on formaldehyde. *Quel* disaster!
Daddy-O goes forte, for there's no such thing
as forte-piano when your audience is mostly ghosts
(their lives are quiet enough the rest of the time).

Onstage the painted set wobbles,
threatens to tumble over
like a Warhol girl in a crêpe-paper dress.

God staggers through the hall,
meekly barter away eternal life
as he bums a cig off a mortal
(it should only cost twenty-five cents, but human currency
occasionally befuddles our noble director),
sits in the overpowdered light
of the dressing room, muttering,
"Without Death, we have to cut the whole third act.
Without Death, it's the only option . . ."

In the chalky gloom,
beneath luminescent elbows,
the tabletop is globbed with glitter and rouge.
From the other room, above the smashing,
an arc of singing takes flight,
fastidious as a woman crying.

God sucks in a long breath, rewriting
sans lexis. The boas in the closet,
like live creatures, tremble.

—EMILY SCHULTZ

television. Minutes later he was back.

"Here," he said, handing June a vodka.
"Just the way you asked."

He gulped down the rye and made
himself another drink. He plopped on
the mattress and began stroking her
calf, the inside of her thigh.

"Take these off," he said, leaning for-
ward, fumbling with the metal button
of her jeans. "The T-shirt, too."

June stripped to her bra and panties.

"I want another drink," she said. She
lay on the bed. She was light-headed.
Her face was flushed. Tony bent over
her, slid her breasts out of her bra, and
began licking and sucking.

"No kissing on the mouth," she said.
"No oral sex." His face was bristly and
scraped against her skin.

"And you have to wear a condom."

Tony arranged limbs, positioned her
to gain access, seeking out the various
endpoints of his desire. June was re-
minded of playing Barbies with her
friend Jill, back when they were kids.
How they'd move Barbie's arms, her
legs, manipulating her through cart-
wheels, handstands, and splits. They
marvelled at Barbie's flaxen hair, her
flawless skin, as they dressed her in sil-
ver sequined halter tops and pink hot
pants. The high arches of her feet as
they wriggled purple pumps over her
toes. No need for cosmetics, her black
lashes permanently thick, her eyelids
forever emerald, and an immutable
smile always radiating from her rose-
tinted lips.

Tony spread her legs.

"Shit," he said, trying to enter her.
He rolled to the side of the bed and
June could hear a bag rustling. "Good
thing I brought this," he said, opening
a jar of Vaseline. She tried to numb her-
self against the cold wetness as he sank
into her, his bulk, the matted hair of his
chest against her skin. She wasn't there,
she reminded herself, she wasn't really
there. She stared at the ceiling as he
shifted and moaned. A deep grunt sig-
naled the end of the act. June leapt from
the bed. She went to the bathroom
where she washed and got dressed.

"Let's go," she said.

Tony turned over and rubbed his
eyes. "Right now?"

"I've got to get home."

He dropped her off a few blocks from
her house. It was late, nearly three. She
opened the car door.

"A bonus," Tony said, handing her
two crisp hundred-dollar bills. "You
worked out good this summer."

"Thanks," June said, taking the
money and turning away. As she
walked home, she gazed at the stars,
the sliver of the moon. The air was
crisp and clear. In about six hours,
she'd be heading to Toronto. What
would the residence be like? Her
classes? Professors? June wondered who
she might be in this new life. She sat on
the porch steps, shifting her legs, try-
ing to ignore the stickiness between
them. Lighting a cigarette, she waited
for the dawn. ▮

*Susan Mockler lives in Summerhill. She has
recently completed a collection of linked short
stories, entitled Not Available in Canada.*

PROFILE

BUNNY HEADS AND STRANGER THINGS

The wandering eye of Sonja Ahlers.

BY RACHEL PULFER

Though we've never met before, it's easy to spot Sonja Ahlers walking into a Vancouver café—all dark-mascara-fringed eyes, caramel-streaked hair, printed cotton skirt, and funky boots. She's shorter than expected, and the café at which she'd asked me to meet her has mismatched seats. When she sits down, the table comes up to her chin.

"I have this weird thing about seating," she laughs, looking across for a better fit.

"Would you like to sit here?" I ask. "Or I can get a chair from over there."

"No, then you'll be far away," she says. She pushes the table back, and pulls herself up slightly on a cushion. "I'll just do this for now."

Somehow, the awkward moment breaks the ice. Then again, that's Sonja Ahlers' stock in trade—awkward moments, elegantly repurposed. Moments most people would rather forget, like an enraged father ripping the ears off his daughter's stuffed rabbit, or the inevitably tragic fallout of an obsessive love affair gone sour. Ahlers snips, cuts, and pastes up her responses to such moments, putting the bizarrely beautiful results on display.

Ahlers' work to date spans two graphic novels—*Temper, Temper* and *Fatal Distraction*—installations of bedroom furniture turned inside out, a collection of stern-looking knit bunnies, and diaries painted on gallery walls. Her art is, at a glance, very simple. Yet look again and it's loaded with darker meaning. An ink drawing of underwear, for example, accompanies the line, "Should have kept these on." It's all uneasily familiar, as if Ahlers stole her ideas from a carefully suppressed place inside your own head.

Reviewed everywhere from *Bitch* magazine to the *National Post*, Ahlers has been praised for, among other things, bringing new depth to zine culture, and inventing a new genre: poetry

spliced with art. She's been described as everything from the Kathy Acker of the zine aesthetic to Beatrix Potter on Paxil. This fall, she took her bunnies and screen printing on a six-week tour of Australia and Japan. At thirty-five years old, she feels she hasn't even started to reach her full potential.

Ahlers began life on a characteristically awkward note. "My parents had me when they were both practically teenagers," she says. "We were moving constantly—up Vancouver Island and down again, between Victoria and Lake Cowichan, which is a logging town. It was a place that was very hard to live in if you are at all unusual."

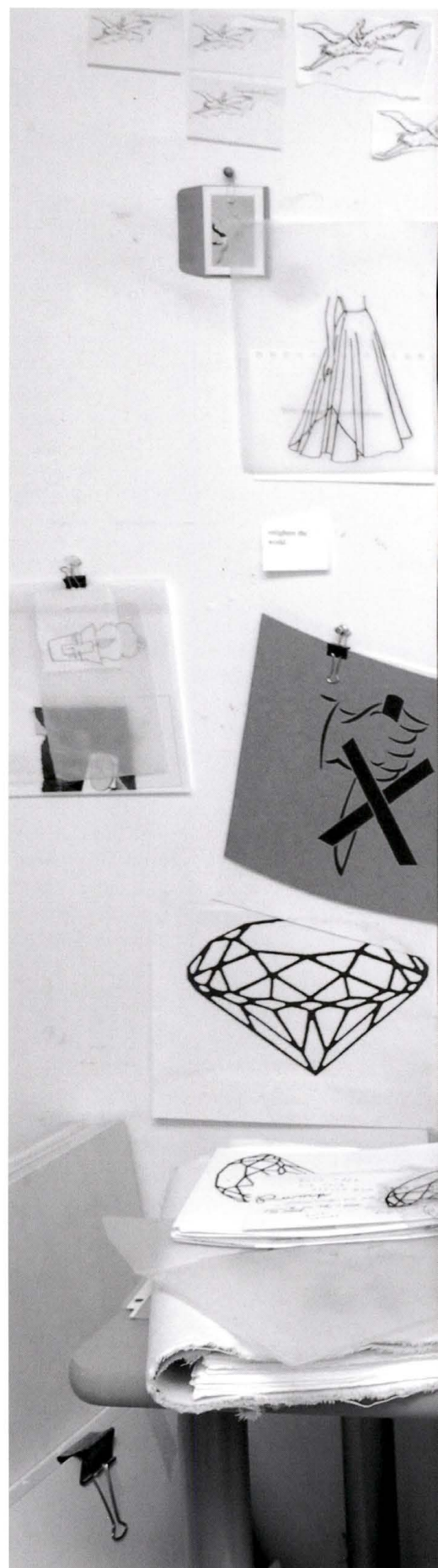
Ahlers' father worked as a logger to support the family, but really wanted to be an artist. Her mother took ballet. "We just didn't fit in."

As a child, Ahlers found herself frequently parked with her Scottish grandparents, whom she says were "heavy drinkers—very unhappy." Her father was physically abusive, and her environment, as she describes it, a picturesque yet oppressive forest valley. By her telling, it was a childhood laced with fear that occasionally exploded into violence: her father would lose something, decide Sonja had stolen it from him, and tear her bedroom apart. Ahlers also has a strong memory of her family arriving home to find the rabbits they kept in their backyard mutilated by one of the neighbourhood dogs.

"There was blood everywhere," Ahlers recalls with a grimace. "My mother was screaming. I'd never seen her so devastated."

The moving stopped when Ahlers was about ten, and the family finally settled in Victoria. But the strangeness persisted.


"In high school I was in the gifted program, but also in the learning disability





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class for math—which was crazy.” Ahlers eventually found her feet in her new school, and her niche, in drama class. “I realized that it is crazy how much your environment can affect your life.”

Ahlers says she did well in school, but describes the years after graduation as a mix of the occasional course taken at Camosun College, raving all night, and frittering away energy on clothes and boys. But her desire to retain her individuality persisted.

“People would start to copy the way I dressed, and I’d do an extreme left turn,” she says. “I’d shave my head, even. I had to wear a wig for a month after I did that.”

The artist Lisa Smolkin, who met Ahlers in a women’s studies class at Camosun, clearly remembers her shiny white nail polish, big black boots, dismissive attitude toward “dumb assignments, like memorizing poems,” and the way every surface in her bedroom was decorated.

Ahlers also developed an obsessive fascination with dark thoughts and suicide: “I was listening to maudlin music—Dead Can Dance—and wandering through graveyards,” she says, rolling her eyes. “I just felt desperately alone. I eventually got so obsessed with this one boy, I had to move to Montreal just to get away from him.”

Ahlers stayed in Montreal over the winter of 1992. Feeling isolated in a city she didn’t know, she became fascinated by a friend’s collection of *Drawn and Quarterly*, a magazine publishing groundbreaking, semi-autobiographical comic-book work by Julie Doucet, Seth, and Daniel Clowes, among others. “My friend was really into it, and she encouraged me to do comic-book art, but I felt like I was copying her, and I didn’t want to copy her. I started cutting up books instead.” Ahlers began making word-image collages, and cultivated new obsessions, this time with Sylvia Plath and Marilyn Monroe—female icons whose lives and careers were enabled, distorted, and ultimately undermined by male adulation and rejection.

Back in Victoria, nine months later, Ahlers decided to channel her energy in new ways. It was 1993. Youth unemployment was endemic, grunge was the rage, and whatever race, colour, gender, or sexual orientation you were, if you were a part of Generation X and even vaguely arty, you were finding creative

ways to express your anger and frustration. Ahlers chose to start a punk band, which she named Kiki Bridges, after a character in Martin Scorsese's film *After Hours*, a dominatrix sculptress who sold paperweights by day and sculpted statues of men screaming in agony at night.

"I was the singer," she says. "There was lots of screaming."

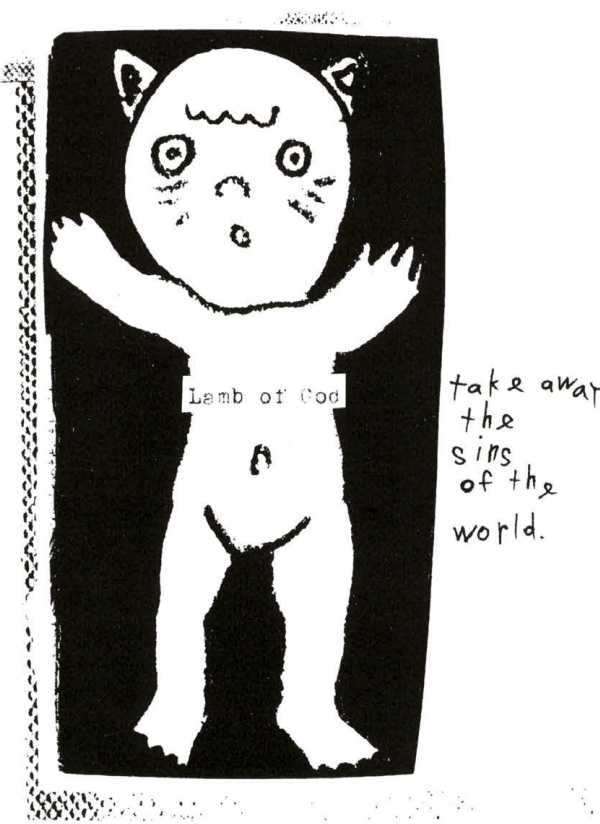
Many have linked Ahlers with the riot grrrl phenomenon—women giving full vent to their anger through poetry, song, and spoken word. Surveying Ahlers' music and graphic art, with its jarring juxtapositions of pretty bunny images, dainty body parts, scowling faces, and hints at sexual violence, it's not hard to make the connection, though Ahlers now says she wasn't really ever a part of that movement. "I got tired of yelling," she says. "I invited a friend—a doctor, one of the first people who ever bought my art publicly without being a friend beforehand—and I was screaming onstage, and I saw him getting up to leave, and I realized that performing can be kind of gross."

By 1995, Ahlers had started to work seriously on sewing and making her series of Fierce Bunnies—rabbit figurines knit from angora, their aggression stifled by a sewn X for a mouth. She found that by selling her bunnies on-line, she could start to make something of an income from her art. Ahlers was also working on *A Wandering Eye*, a zine of accumulated words typed out as poems, with illustrations to match. Ahlers only mailed *Wandering Eye* to people she knew about and admired, but did not directly know, to avoid dealing with her friends' reactions to her work.

"I sent one to [the poet and critic] Lynn Crosbie," she says. "She was the first poet I'd read who used contemporary imagery—she wrote about Farrah Fawcett! And she wrote back." Crosbie asked to publish one of Ahlers' pieces in *Click*, an anthology of feminist writing she was editing.

After the publication of *Click*, Crosbie asked Ahlers to send her her accumulated work to date, which consisted

of a collection of *Wandering Eyes*, and a number of unpublished pieces. "I didn't have a lot of control over what I was doing at that time," Ahlers remembers. "I was just looking for someone who understood, someone with whom I had a connection." Crosbie edited the collection, along with Michael Holmes, an editor at Insomniac Press. "They laid it all out and found themes and pieced them together." Ahlers received it back in the mail as a finished work. "They saw



From *Temper, Temper*.

it as an expression of riot grrrl culture," she says, "and [Insomniac] wanted to put it out right away."

The completed version of *Temper, Temper* is a compendium of sparsely arranged words and images, with a cover image of a scowling young woman in bunny ears on a jacket of shocking pink. It starts, somewhat ominously, with the words, "Don't worry—you won't feel a thing." Ahlers' short poems and fragments of text, accompanied by images of scowling animals, scratchily photocopied babies, and blackened, crossed-out type, touch on everything from drugs ("He told me he goes where the needle is. / I am so naive / I thought he meant / record player") to obsessive anger over lost love

("After you left / I burned the sheets").

The book clearly hit the right post-modern note. Ahlers hadn't so much crafted a narrative as obliterated it completely, then tried to make sense of the pieces. Hilary Clark, writing in *Broken Pencil*, hailed her originality as the voice of a new generation. "Language is just another hint in Ahlers's work," Clark wrote. "The ephemeral and the visceral, the real and the surreal, the past and the present, all these things are merged into one communicative mass of symbolic pop culture hieroglyphics. *Temper, Temper* stands as a manifesto, the harbinger of a new literature as relevant and meaningful to this generation as Beat writers like Kerouac and Ginsberg were to a generation equally in need of voices to recognize as their own."

Despite the high praise, Ahlers felt as though she'd let her work get repackaged into something quite different from what she intended. (Crosbie and Holmes both declined to be interviewed for this article.)

"*Temper, Temper* had become an object, something outside of me," she recalls. "But it was the late nineties, and I was into punk rock, and I was obsessed with not selling out." Ahlers says she designed a second cover, "softer and more fragile—the bunny wasn't so mean-looking," but the choice was made to go with the angrier look. When the book was published, Ahlers says she felt she had to detach from it: "I was in shock."

Ahlers recalls attending the annual Canzine festival, in 1998, and seeing nearly everyone present clutching the recently published issue of *Broken Pencil*, featuring her picture on the cover. "I wasn't prepared for that," she recalls. "I had to go on autopilot." Misgivings aside, Ahlers enjoyed the adulation, though, perhaps characteristically, she frames it as a negative: "I only realized how popular that book had been once I stopped getting attention for it." She also noticed attention did not necessarily translate into riches. "The book was going through circles and being lent to friends and all that, but it didn't really pay the bills."

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A story as old as recorded time

If olive trees could speak what would they tell us?

Would they recount the glories
witnessed in this hallowed place.

Would they tell of the horrors that
transpired long ago in the name of many things.

Would they recall the small human lives that
lived for generations in pastoral dignity.

Would they give evidence of the suffering and
abuse inflicted by mechanical monsters and ill-inspired men.

Would they share the love they have received from
the once young and now old who tended them.

Would they boast of the healing, the wealth
and the comfort they bring.

Would they complain of the loneliness of the field
and the neglect of the world.

Would they speak of the hope and courage that lives
in the earth and endures in the souls of its children.

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What *Temper, Temper* did do was pave the way for a unique artist to develop her work in a wide variety of genres. In 2003, the editor and writer Emily Pohl-Weary asked Ahlers to contribute to a new feminist anthology she was editing, *Girls Who Bite Back*. Ahlers' contribution, "... And the Myth That Things Have Progressed," is a critique of women who keep each other back to get ahead in a man's world. When it was published the following year, Ahlers and Pohl-Weary—joined by the writer Tamara Faith Berger, who was promoting a book of her own—embarked on a reading tour of the West Coast, organized by the indie publishing guru and author Jim Munroe. "The tour was fun, but it was also a nightmare," Ahlers laughs. "Imagine driving nine hours to read to three people."

Pohl-Weary recalls a scene at a bookstore in San Francisco. Ahlers was giving a slide presentation when an audience member began to scream at her. "She totally misunderstood Sonja," Pohl-Weary says. "She thought Sonja was being anti-feminist. It was very upsetting—and it was too bad, because out of the three of

us, I felt the person least equipped to deal with a reaction like that was Sonja."

Another mini-crisis struck during the tour when *Vogue* magazine took a



From *Fatal Distraction*.

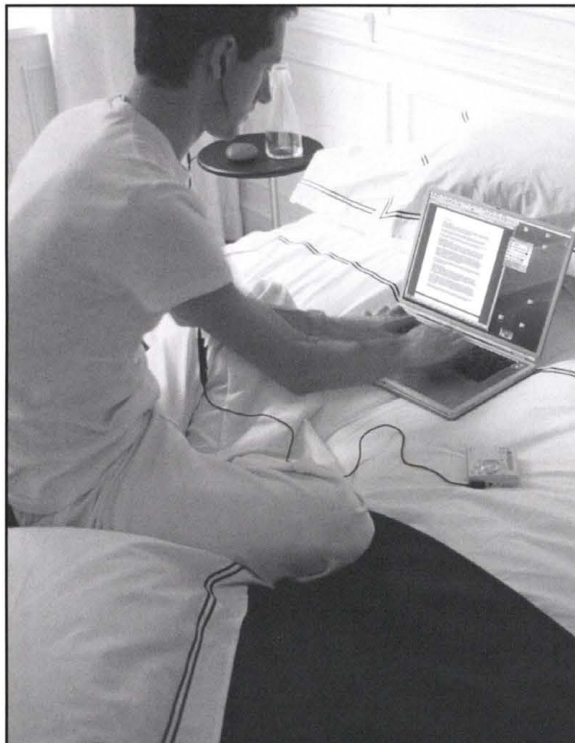
liking to Ahlers' Fierce Bunnies. "I got this call from this woman who'd seen the bunny in a shop in L.A. and wanted to include it in the magazine as a toy,"

she says. Ahlers explained that the bunnies were handmade, and couldn't be mass-manufactured; that it wasn't really a toy; and that she was in the middle of a reading tour and unable to provide the magazine with information on where the bunnies could be bought.

"I had so many people saying to me afterward, 'You should get the bunnies made in China, then you could produce and sell so much more,'" she says. "I kept wondering, do these people know what goes on when something is made in China?"

On a softer note, Ahlers would often end her slide shows with what Pohl-Weary calls her "potato chip heart." "She found a ketchup potato chip shaped like a heart and she put it in a frame," says Pohl-Weary. "That summed up Sonja for me. Often if you actually eat ketchup potato chips you don't want to tell anybody, but here's Sonja turning it into art. You'd be embarrassed; she'd be like, no, this is cool."

The title of Ahlers' second book, *Fatal Distraction*, was a riff on *Fatal Attraction*—the 1987 movie starring



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Glenn Close as an obsessed adulteress stalking her married former lover, played by Michael Douglas. Ahlers says she has watched the film enough times to have considered making an installation piece based on the story. (The film's most famous moment involves Close's character boiling a child's pet rabbit to death.) Playing on the movie's title was Ahlers' chance to destroy its take on obsessive female behaviour in favour of a more positive read. "I found my obsessions actually helped me get through stuff," she says. "I could use my obsessions to make art."

But, in retrospect, Ahlers seems mildly disappointed with *Fatal Distraction*. Certainly it is aesthetically daintier, more polished, less raw than *Temper, Temper*—from the ethereal cover drawing, featuring a bunny-costume-clad girl-woman floating through lacy foliage, to the thinner, more refined lines Ahlers uses to create her drawings. But the message, the im-

pulse to connect, to cut through the superficialities of a world obsessed with image, seems less clear.

"[*Fatal Distraction*] feels contradictory to me," she says, "like I am stifling myself. It felt like there was a lack of re-

he had named names.



From *Fatal Distraction*.

sponse [from the press] . . . and yet I've gotten so many E-mails from young women saying, 'You are inside my head or something—I have felt exactly the same way.' And that's incredible to me,"

Ahlers says, "because I don't even consider myself an artist."

For a non-artist, Ahlers has shown her work in several galleries, both solo and as part of a group. One of her more significant shows featured herself and two other female artists at Open Space, in Victoria, in the spring of 2005. "It was more political and conceptual than some of my other work, and appealed to a different audience—other artists," she says. "Normally, I make art for people, not artists." Ahlers spent nine days building a room with a heart logo mural and four different "moods" of her work on each wall. There was dismembered furniture, pieces of fabric and a wall collage "representing chaos," and display cases featuring a museum of objects under Plexiglas "to show perfection." These included a book on Dorothy Stratten, a *Playboy* model born in Vancouver, whose husband murdered her in a jealous rage.

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"My friend, the director of the gallery, had a heart attack while we were putting the show together," she says. "But it was only later on I realized the connection to [the show's heart mural]."

Magic Pony, a concept store and gallery on Queen Street West, in Toronto, included Ahlers as part of *Touch My Bunny*, a rabbit-themed show that ran in 2005. The store's co-curator and co-owner, Steve Cober, said he picked the bunnies up because he found them "languid, naïve, gentle—yet unsettling at the same time."

Some may find Ahlers' work veers too much toward art therapy: one woman working through her angst, loudly, angrily, on paper but always in your face. But Ahlers' capacity to nail pretensions with a spiky sense of humour takes her work beyond mere adolescent angst. It shows us our darker, sadder thoughts and motivations, yet sends them up at the same time.

Pohl-Weary says Ahlers work is compelling precisely because she absorbs and rethinks pain in a way other people cannot. "At its most elemental, her art is about survival—getting through life's crap. It resonates because she's taking something you do or think every day and spitting it back at you in this stark, no-punches-pulled way. A lot of people will stop, see crap, and go in another direction. Sonja just keeps right on going. But she's also having fun with it."

Ahlers' itinerary for Australia included Melbourne and Tasmania. While in Japan, she was slated to do a residency for ten days to make art in front of and with groups of high-school students.

"Sounds freaky, but I think it will be fine," she says prior to leaving. "It's easier to do that kind of work in a different culture from your own. Anyway," Ahlers laughs, "I'm getting better at taking feedback. There was a time when I wouldn't have been O.K. with feedback, I was too volatile. Now I can do this, and be with other people. That to me feels better, to have it this way."

For the angry woman who only ever wanted to connect, getting to this point might be more of a personal achievement than anything she's done to date. ▽

Rachel Pulfer lives in Trinity Bellwoods. She is a writer and editor with occasional literary aspirations.

GODS AND MONSTERS

Terry Murray surfed webs both modern and old to tell the grotesque story of Toronto.

The researching of history has been turned on its ear by the Internet. By surfing the Web, Terry Murray found a motherlode of material about Toronto sculptures for *Faces on Places*, her recently published book of photos and stories about the gargoyles and grotesques watching over Toronto's streets from high architectural perches. More than seventy-five newspaper articles, for instance, turned up about Merle Foster, a once-famous sculptor, on Pages of the Past, the searchable archive of the *Toronto Star*. Many of the buildings where these stone-faced griffins and goddesses, angels and dragons hang around are listed on Archidont, the Toronto Public Library's inventory of Ontario buildings. And, of course, Murray relied on Canada411; few remember how hard it was to search for people when you had to go to the library and browse out-of-town telephone books.

But the World Wide Web can only drill down so far. In early 2003, Murray heard contractors would be installing new gargoyles on Old City Hall, replacements for the originals, lost to gravity and worry decades ago. "I gave them a call and said, 'Can I come up and have a look?'" Murray recalls. Swapping her hat as a writer and editor for the *Medical Post* (her day job) for a hard hat, up she climbed one February day "on the scaffolding," virtually—no, actually—face to face with her grimacing subjects. A close-up photo she took for *Faces on Places*, a view few will ever have, shows the lion-like head of a winged beast. Seemingly made of stone, we learn it's actually bronze—lighter and more resistant to freeze-thaw cycles that chip away at rock.

Details matter, in architecture and in journalism; surprising story-shaping data and experience are there for the asking. Thus, in the twelve-year course of re-

searching and gathering material for her book, Murray found herself on the roof of the Whitney Block, at Queen's Park; atop the Bank of Commerce building, in the financial district; and near the summit of the Royal York hotel. "Nobody said no," she says. "It was a bit like being up with the birds, seeing things you do not normally see."

Beyond the Web's reach for the foreseeable future is the virtual time warp offered by old trade magazines, bound into volumes, waiting dustily in library stacks to give their day's insider account of the progress of every art and industry imaginable. In 1931, the architect Charles Dolphin described to one such journal his timepiece above the lacy, iron-bedecked Consumers'



Head above the Don Jail's main door.

Gas building (now a Puma store) on Yonge Street as having "an allegorical design of a bird."

It can be exhilarating to go where Google has never been, meeting the architect E. J. Lennox or the artist Michael Snow through less-known images and print. "It is like surfing the Web," Murray observes. Finding one thing leads you to the next—maybe a useful journal on the shelf next to the one you went looking for, or a promising, unexplored topic, like Merle Foster, an artist whose work decorated a Pierce-Arrow auto showroom on Yonge Street. Her carved figure of a male—cradling a car, holding a spoked wheel—later guarded the CBC-TV studio there, today an office-supply store.

Who was Merle Foster, Terry Murray wonders. For her next project, she hopes to find out, with some help from the modern Web, and the original one—cobwebbed old archives yielding backstories and new disclosures that tell the city's long-lost tales, refresh its memory, and give us the long view.

—ALFRED HOLDEN

THE APPLICANT

An excerpt.

BY ANDREW DALEY

A mild, bright afternoon in a dripping town weary of winter, traffic hissing along the slushy streets. Waites, in black jeans, a denim shirt, and snowmobile boots, sat at the counter over the *Toronto Sun*, two copies of the application form beside him. Aaron finally remembered him from years ago, when he and his friends visited the Donut Cove to use the pinball machines at the back. Waites had always been nice to kids, and a soft touch for cigarettes.

—Why don't you fill this in, and then we'll get some lunch? Waites said, without looking up. —You're not working today, are you?

—No, I'm off, Aaron said.

Hoping lunch wouldn't cost more than the four dollars in his wallet, he borrowed a pen from the waitress. He had tiny, precise handwriting, from writing in his journal, but for this application he printed in slow, block capitals.

Waites read the application over when Aaron was finished.

—Look's good, he said.

Aaron got excited then; when he'd tried to apply at Allied Plastics, last fall, he'd been told they weren't accepting any applications.

Outside, Aaron looked for Waites's brown Caprice in the parking lot until Waites unlocked the passenger door of a black Chevy van.

—My new girlfriend, he said. The lenses of his glasses were darkening in the daylight. —Picked her up this week.

The van's interior smelled of pine air freshener and cigarette smoke, and a black curtain hung behind the two bucket seats, blocking off the cargo area.

—I've got to make a quick stop before we eat, Waites said.

They drove around the park downtown, then north along Pulcher Avenue in a sudden, sun-drenched shower of big snowflakes. Waites steered with the wrist of his right hand, while his left hand held a cigarette aloft. If Waites could run two cars on what he made at Allied Plastics, Aaron would go along for the ride. A job there was his ticket

out of the boarding house, extra money for his sisters, and eventually a car of his own.

—I told my mother about you, Waites said. —She said she knew your mom, used to see her up at the Red & White and Woolworth. We're sorry about your loss, Aaron.

—Well, that was a while ago, Aaron said. —I miss her, but not as much as my sisters do.

—That's what a life of hard work does, tires you out. Then you get sick and you haven't got the strength to fight it off.

They pulled into a plaza where Pulcher Avenue became Highway 11, on the northern edge of town. Though the recession had emptied many units, there was still a lumberyard in operation, a Christian bookstore, a hair salon, and Spectacular Sounds, a small audio equipment dealership. Waites pulled a Blaupunkt car stereo from behind the black curtain.

—This ought to buy us a nice lunch, he said.

Inside the store, a big Technics system was blasting the song he was hearing everywhere, the one about standing in the dark by the band with the blond hair. Aaron recognized the owner as the fat man in the Hawaiian shirts who would d.j. all the high-school dances. Brian, the guy's name was. As they approached the counter, Waites took him sharply by the arm.

—Why don't you check out the merchandise? Waites suggested, as he released Aaron toward a display of portable stereos.

Smarting from the rebuke, Aaron fingered tape decks and tuners, some with the new digital displays, that were five times what he paid in rent. Soon he'd replace the turntable he'd inherited from his mother. If he didn't screw up again. He should have known the transaction being conducted in murmurs at the counter was likely illegal.

Then they were outside again, Aaron blinking in the sudden brightness while Waites stuffed a roll of bills into his pocket.

—That fat idiot thinks he can screw me for a good radio, Waites said. —He'll get his like the rest of them.

In a convenience store further along the plaza, Waites bought two packages of Player's Filtered from an Asian woman and quickly unwrapped one to get a cigarette into his mouth.

—Goddamned immigrants are taking over everything, he said.

—So I hear, Aaron said. He hadn't heard anything like that, and knew he'd have to overlook much more before he got the job.

—White people don't work as hard as they used to, Waites said. —That's why we need immigrants, 'cause they'll work the hours we won't anymore. Then we complain that there's not enough jobs. I say people should stay in their own country and sort their problems out there, rather than bring them here.

—I heard English is the most difficult language to learn, Aaron said. —It must be even tougher trying to learn it while you're working.

—That's if they're working at all. Lots of people come here looking for a handout.

They drove north again. On both sides of the highway bare patches of dark earth, dampened by the recent snowfall, showed in the windswept centres of the fields. This was the direction in which Aaron's grandparents had lived. The countryside would soon turn marshy, the scrubby cedar and pine forests divided by the highway. He hadn't been up this way since he was a kid.

At a crossroads named Reunion, Waites pulled into Galaxy Burgers, a flying-saucer-shaped drive-in restaurant. The silver-and-pink dining room was full of farming families at the end of their Saturday shopping expeditions. It smelled of vinegar and wet wool, the floor sloppy with muck. Aaron was relieved when Waites asked him what he wanted.

—Burger, I guess, Aaron said. —And a Coke. No, water. Water will do.

—You don't want fries? Galaxy makes the best fries.

—I'm not that hungry, Aaron said.



—Sure you are. Have some fries. I'm gonna get some onion rings. You get some fries.

—O.K. I'll get some fries.

Waites bolted his hamburger and onion rings, his chin shiny with grease, then started in on Aaron's untouched mound of French fries.

—You ever fire a gun? he said.

—A bunch of times, Aaron said. —There's a shooting range at the high school.

—Oh, I forgot about that. How about a handgun?

—No sir, never.

—How come you didn't stay on to finish Grade 13? You're smart enough.

—Things were still kind of screwed up for me last year. I wasn't ready for it. I'm going to college, though, when I get some money saved up. That's why I really need this job.

—Leaving school will be the best thing you ever did. All it does is brain-wash you into thinking you're supposed to be poor. Doesn't matter how hard you work. My father worked his ass off for years, and all it got him was dead.

Waites leaned closer to Aaron over the crumpled food wrappers and dirty napkins.

—People are cattle, he continued, almost in a whisper. —Take a look around you. They go to church every Sunday, they never break any laws. They think they're happy because they've got food on their plates and a roof over their heads. Our prime minister talks about a just society, but justice for him means keeping things creamy for his rich friends and to hell with poor people—they know their place.

—I never thought about it that way, Aaron said.

—You're a little young yet. You have to be out in the world a while before you see what's really going on. Everything I know I had to teach myself.

—Well, you're doing pretty good.

—I'm still working the morning shift at Allied, aren't I? It's even worse in England. There they elected a woman who actually tells people they're stupid and lazy, that it's their own fault they haven't got any jobs.

—Doesn't seem like there's much a guy like me can do, Aaron said. He picked at the wax on the side of his paper Coke cup.

—Sounds like you're giving up already. Did you read *Dune*? All's we need is a real leader like that. But I'm too old

now, and too ugly for TV. You like sci-fi?

—Yeah, but I haven't read *Dune*.

—I'll loan you my copy.

They drove back south on Highway 11, Waites smoking in silence, before turning onto a narrow sideroad cut through the cedar swamp. Meltwater had sloshed onto the road, leaving icy patches. When they crested a hill above the swamp, Aaron began to find the surroundings familiar. A turn in the road as they climbed, the first farms overlooking the swamp; this was the way they had gone to his grandparents'.

—I think we're near where my dad grew up, Aaron said.

His memories of the farm consisted of isolated sensations and textures: his

FURNACE COAT

on the forty-second floor
the comptroller
sits with
a blowtorch
melting windows &
invitations to
the office party

on his desk
a memo from the boss:

my life is
a single burning
ice cube
dropped into punch

splashes my little yard of space-time

ashes
over my asbestos body

I have lungs like
desert islands
on one of them
a guy in an inner tube
praying to be saved

on the other
another guy in an inner tube
praying to the first

don't ask
which is which

on the soundtrack

grandmother's fat fingers as he helped her shell peas, the warm eggs he collected with his aunt, or sips from his grandfather's bottle of beer as he sat beneath the lawn chairs. He had no memory of his sisters there, but sensed his mother's presence in the way he could still feel the cool grass of the lawn against his leg. His sisters probably hadn't been born yet.

—Tough farming in these parts, Waites said. —Did you want to stop in and say hello?

—I don't know who lives there now, Aaron said. He mostly remembered his grandfather from the Castlereagh Oaks nursing home. Where his grandmother had gone he couldn't say.

I am singing

here
let me light
your birthday candles
I have matches

oh look!
here's my life
their little cover says,
"YOU TOO CAN GO TO COLLEGE"
but of course I can't
because
I just went

I was an ant farm
a pickle trainer
a philosophy of clowning auditor

my résumé
a maraschino cherry that
fits on my nose
is covered by ants

breathe
the instructors say
sit in class and
breathe

smoke fills the room
I am here
I think

I will have a life
close to the floor

—GARY BARWIN

—I had an uncle and an aunt. That's it ahead, I think.

Waites slowed as they approached a wooden farmhouse at the end of a tamarack-lined lane, its windows boarded up, the doors drifted in with snow, and the sun-blistered red paint showing many patches of wet, grey wood. The barn behind the house had collapsed, leaving jutting beams and mounds of blackened, rotten hay.

—For rent, Waites said. —Farmers are the poorest of the fucking poor. Anyone thinks he works hard should be a farmer for a week. Say, you're not part of the Stanhope clan, are you? They're from these parts.

—Who are they? Aaron asked. He had never known his mother's parents, and had

always assumed his mother was from town.

—Screwed up family, every one of them. Always getting into fights. Then one day, the son goes nuts, shoots his father and mother, chases after his sisters with an axe. When the cops came, he climbed a tree and shot himself. I was just a kid when it happened, but I remember playing Stanhope at school, climbing the tree and everything.

—I don't think so. I'd remember hearing about that.

—You sure? Waites asked. He was smirking at Aaron, his eyes unreadable behind the brown lenses of his glasses.

—Come on. I'm just fuckin' with you.

The van moved faster on the better road above the swamp. Stands of pine

and birch trees were reclaiming fields left fallow for too long. There were few farms in this area, and Aaron hadn't seen another car since they'd left the highway.

Waites was smoking again, which Aaron had determined meant they were nearing their destination. They turned onto a rutted lane through the pine woods, at the end of which was a clearing with two great mounds of snow standing beside a massive hole. A gravel pit, he realized.

—This is a nine-millimetre Beretta, Waites said, as he pulled a black pistol from beneath his seat. —You are not really seeing this gun, because I do not have this gun. Understood?

—Yes sir, Aaron said. —I got you.

—I got it in Michigan a few years ago. In the States, they understand that a man has a right to bear arms in his own defence. It's right in their constitution. Our new constitution I wouldn't use to wipe my ass. That goddamned Trudeau.

A chill had descended, winter reasserting itself after the warmer enthusiasm of midday. The wet snow creaked beneath their boots. Aaron followed Waites to the far end of the clearing, where they kicked snow off a wooden sawhorse. Then he helped dig through the snow for five rusted, bullet-holed tin cans.

—If a man's to defend himself, he's got to stay in practice, right? Waites said. —Here, take this. Get to know its weight. But be careful, it's loaded.

The pistol was heavier than Aaron expected, and slightly oily. Waites pointed out the trigger and the safety as they walked back to the van. When he was finished, Aaron quickly handed it back. The gun scared him.

—Feet about a foot apart for better balance, Waites said. —You'll be surprised by the kick this thing has. Arms like mine, right over the left. Watch now.

Waites fired off three rapid shots, wet firecracker pops that echoed off the mounds of gravel. One of the cans fell. Then he offered the gun butt-first to Aaron.

—How do I do this? Aaron asked. The gun was hot now, and the air stank of gunpowder. This was happening too fast.

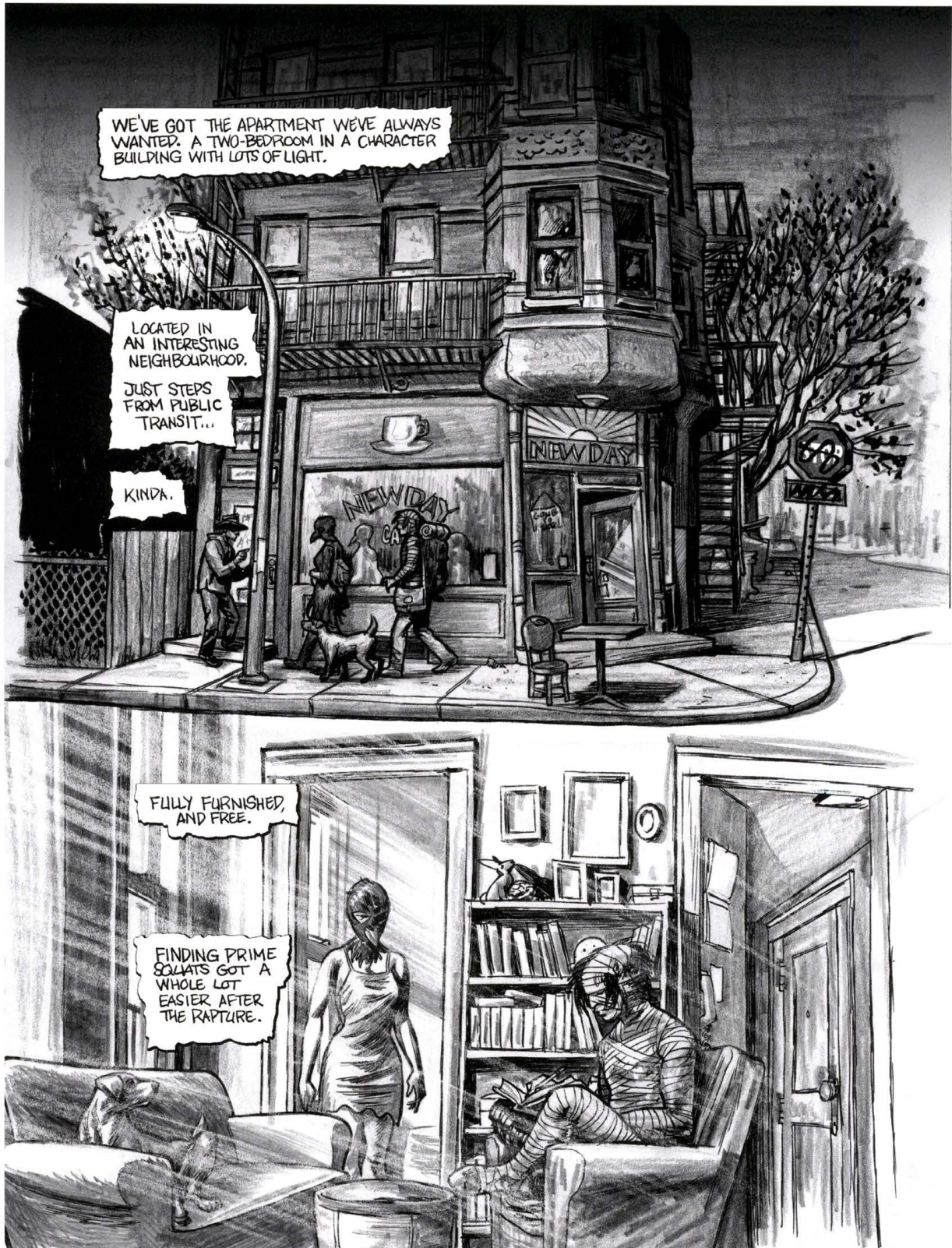
—Stand like I did, Waites said. —Aim. Then think of those ass-wipes who wouldn't give you a job. ☞

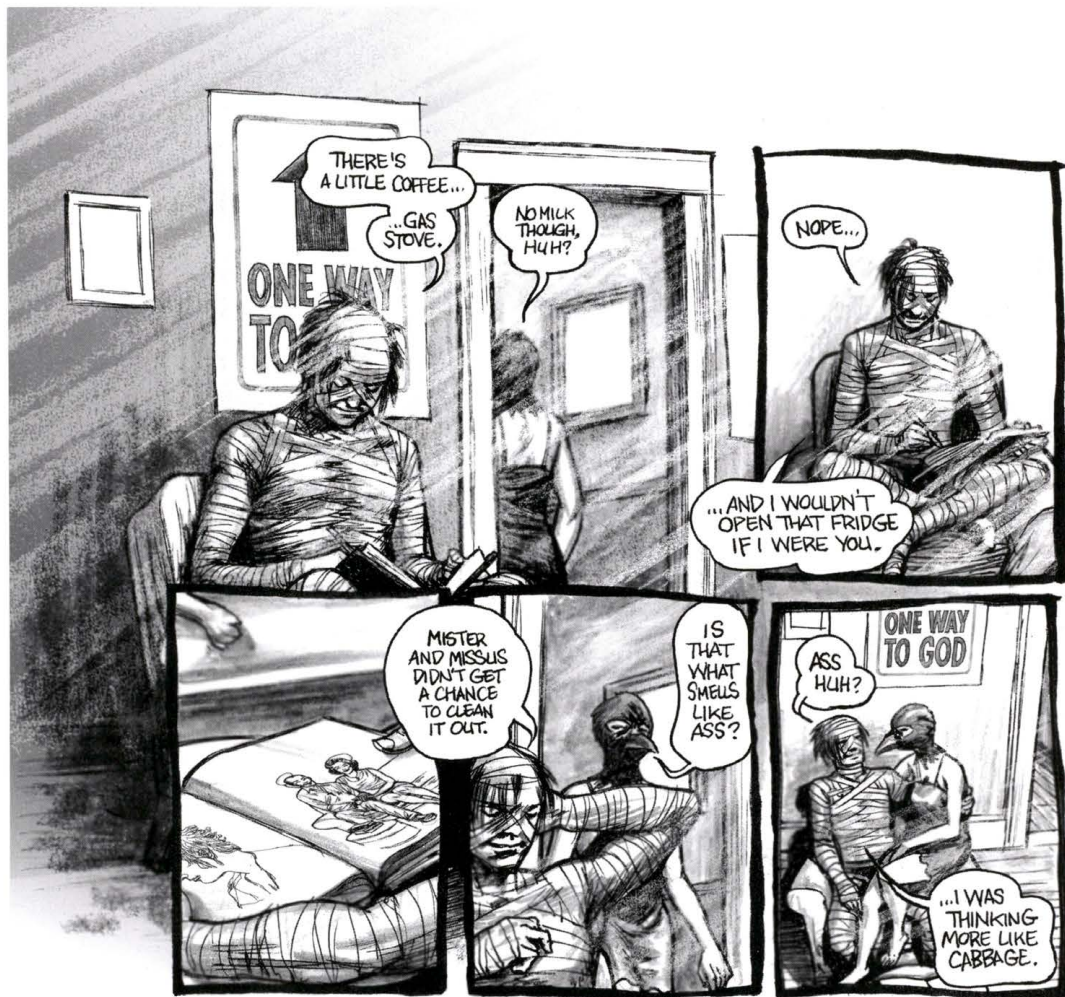
Andrew Daley is Taddle Creek's associate editor. The above is an excerpt from his first novel, to be published in 2007, by Tightröpe.

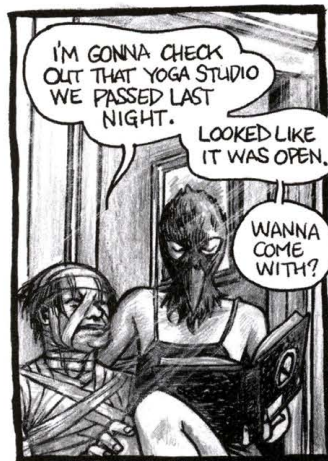
THEREFORE REPENT!

An excerpt.

BY JIM MUNROE AND SALGOOD SAM







THE OUT-OF-TOWNER

FOREIGN BODIES

BY DANIELLE EGAN

After Molly received the breast implant, she'd become lethargic, couldn't get through gnawing on her usual half-roll of toilet paper per day, and had lost interest in running on her wheel. Of course, the implant made running difficult, but Toby thought Molly's eyes had lost their gleam, too. Even her tail seemed limp, and she'd started biting it. Maybe she was suicidal like all of those Danish women he'd read about in *Archives of Internal Medicine*. The separation from the other rats probably didn't help, but Kate, Gertrude, and Beebe were doing fine post-op. In fact, Gertrude seemed more gregarious, and Kate's energy had increased, though she seemed extra fixated on cleaning herself and her cage; her heart rate was up, too. Molly's vital signs hadn't altered though, and since there were no boxes to tick for mood changes, Toby felt even more useless than usual. Maybe her malaise was linked to the specific implant type, but that's not something you're privy to as a blind clinical investigator. "Anyway," he thought, "the others keep things from me."

The whole rat colony vibe had changed since the girls came back implanted. The yet-to-be-modified rats seemed a bit paranoid, and sniffed the air with deeper and longer whiffs, as if they could smell their own impending doom. It freaked Toby out the way they'd line up along the cage wall nearest the girls, with their tiny paws wrapped around the bars, their noses quivering, eyes ogling. Some rats had become more aggressive, and one had even started nipping at others occasionally. Toby took their temperatures and other vitals for baseline information, and tried not to think about the Danish women. But they came to him, blond and sad, in pale flashes.

The Danish suicides bothered Deb, too. In fact, her whole life had changed since she'd read that study. In

just more than three weeks, she'd signed up for half a dozen Yahoo groups and accumulated quite a database of research materials, even confidential literature sent from the implant manufacturers to her boss. Deb felt she was on the verge of a breakthrough, but work kept getting in the way.

"Dr. Darling needs some letters typed," said Leah, the office manager, coming around the reception desk, which was like a mini fortress, allowing Deb time to minimize the windows to Medline and PubMed and maximize her game of solitaire before Leah got to her.

"He needs them A.S.A.P., and I'm swamped," she said, and proceeded to do some yoga-like back and shoulder stretches that showed off "the girls," as she called her double-D Perpetugels.

"How are you feeling?" asked Deb, going to her invisible doctor's clipboard.

"I'm fine," said Leah defensively. "You look tired. You could use some lip-stick."

"Maybe she's on to me," thought Deb. But Leah wasn't looking at Deb's computer, or her face for that matter, she was looking at her chest, with that bad-taste-in-her-mouth look. Here, people stared at small breasts—"mosquito bites," as Leah called them. Everything was ass-backwards if you asked Deb, though nobody asked her.

She was promised a fifty per cent discount on surgery when she was hired, and Deb thought it was a good deal at the time. Now, with her wisdom teeth poking through sideways, she'd rather have the dental coverage, though she was learning strange things about dentists, too. In fact, she'd lost faith in all doctors. But a twenty-four-year-old single girl with so many flaws and nobody to love can't trust anyone in this day and age, especially herself. "Day and age," she snorted. But, really, what with all the old ladies coming through this place, it obviously doesn't get any bet-

ter. Life must do terrible things to a person to make them *more* insecure as they get older. What a huge burn.

The letters were the boring kind—the ones to anti-aging trade shows or V.I.P. patients doing philanthropic work—asking Dr. Darling to donate his services to the odd charity "roadkill" surgeries. These occasional good deeds helped him sleep at night without drugs, and reminded him why he chose plastic surgery in the first place: to correct deformities and make people look *normal*, average, ordinary, common, even *natural*. He had entered college with his own burning desire to blend in, along with buck teeth and zero knowledge of female anatomy. (Dr. Darling's mother, a strict Methodist, hadn't breastfed her two sons.) But all of that changed when the birth-control companies starting sponsoring med-student parties, supplying free booze and case-loads of pills to the nurses. "Gyno rounds" soon became the code name for nights of drunken dorm-room debauchery. And he quickly realized there's no such thing as anatomical normalcy. Sure, Darling liked the sex, but all that fumbling around in the dark to get inside a woman was ultimately a much less alluring kind of power than enticing her to strip down naked in broad daylight.

What a very long time ago it seemed to a girl like Deb, who'd been on the birth-control shot for two years now. Deb thought, "Maybe I'll go off, since I've only had sex with four—no, five guys, two of them pre-shot. It can't be healthy anyway, never getting your period, can it? Maybe I'm just part of the experiment, the giant long-term clinical trial called modern life." Leah thought Deb's lack of a love life would change "pronto post-op," especially if she got lip injections at the same time. Leah never veered into ass-lipo territory, though, Deb would give her that. In fact, she rarely criticized anyone without

IAN PHILLIPS



cause, and often praised Deb's nose; it was probably the reason she got the job in the first place.

The V.I.P. buzzer rang, and since there was nobody in the waiting room, Deb buzzed open the secondary entrance door marked Private on both sides. A woman came in wearing a big, black mink coat, her face mostly obscured by bandages and dark sunglasses. Tears ran down her taut, fragile-looking, translucent cheeks, but they might not have been tears of sorrow. They could just as easily be eye-lift-related croc tears.

"Hi, Mrs. Yardmouth," said Deb. "How are you?"

"Terrible. I can't close my right eyelid."

"Oh, I'm sorry. Let me—"

"Sweetheart," said Dr. Darling, coming out from behind the Oriental screen where he often lurked, listening to the waiting-room gossip or the exhilarating sound of Deb's rapid typing. "You should be in bed." He gave Deb his comic-book grin as he guided Mrs. Yardmouth toward his office.

"I'm a monster!" Mrs. Yardmouth said, and really started crying, her tiny mink-cloaked shoulders heaving up and down as she scurried down the hall, her untied belt dragging behind her on the carpet.

Forty-two rats from the reproduction-and-fetal-development trial were on the day's "sacrifice" schedule. So many bits and pieces of their bodies had been removed for pathology testing, they weighed less than Toby's lunch bag. He placed them in the hazardous-goods bin en route to the lunchroom, where Victor sat reading a *Popular Science* magazine.

"How do you think they make the rat implants?" he asked Victor.

"Huh? Dunno."

"They'd have to have special tiny machines exactly like the normal machines to have the same . . ." He searched for the right word. "Integrity."

Victor just shrugged.

"Have you ever felt one?" He was about to add, "subcutaneously," but Victor beat him to it.

"Subcutaneously? No, never."

Toby thought about all the breasts he'd seen in his life. Some flashed vividly before his eyes, but the rest had been drowned out by other things,

WALKING UP THE TREBOVIR ROAD, THINKING YOU MIGHT NOT BE PREGNANT

In the beginning, an odd trickle of blood
and the tossing of pills into the river;

boiling black nights behind the heavy curtains,
I sweated dreams of your mother, landing and knowing.

Then the dams went up, and
the river gave no more pink.

The boy from Bombay loved us on those days;
he called to us from his newsstand.

"You two," he said, "you two especially,"
though we knew he meant just me, anytime.

We crossed as many bridges as we could find,
or I did alone, looking to draw fear through myself,

to make it something less than this under-droning,
just another event, a changing of names in fact.

And now this heavy evening stroll from the off-licence,
with cans of lager for Katie's mother downstairs;

and for us, a precious steaming take-away
of curried lamb and vegetables, extra hot,

to celebrate the nurse's saying,
"Not you two, most likely not."

—JOHN DEGEN

mostly humiliations related to his performance or drunkenness at the time.

"I hear they get cold," said Victor, adding, "I'm more of an ass man myself."

"Molly's acting weird. I think she's suicidal."

Like those Danish women. Victor shot him a look.

"She's a rat, man. You need to get laid."

Leah kept piling on the work, so Deb had no time to do research or interrogate patients, all of whom seemed manically cheerful anyway, in their terry cloth sweatsuits (post-op, hoodies oozing cleavage) or stylish suits (pre-op, as if applying for a job—and indeed, Dr. Darling occasionally

rejected a patient). She wasn't even able to escape to Starbucks for lunch, because Dr. Darling ambushed her as she was tidying one of the consultation rooms filled with sculptures of headless goddesses with large breasts and wings—but no arms and, sometimes, no legs. Just off a particularly rough tits-and-ass procedure, he chattered about the weather, the whole time looking her up and down, thinking, "Shame about everything except her buccal fat pads, and of course, her nose: exquisite alar nasal cartilage." He felt covetous as usual. Only nature could make something like that. Ah, youth was wasted on the young, and he could already see the signs of age around her

infraorbital rims.

"I hear you've been saving," he said.
Deb nodded.

"Well, you've worked out wonderfully so far. Leah is very pleased with your skills, so I don't see why we can't waive the six-month waiting period." He looked at his watch, then her eyes: a rare look. Glabular lines appeared between her brows, and he saw hesitation there, too, which angered him. We must be decisive in life, whether in the O.R. holding a scalpel or elsewhere, we must take charge! Deb could tell he was frowning back by the way the outer edges of his eyebrows twitched.

"Why don't we do a consultation now? I have a few minutes." He tried to wink, but his eye wouldn't go, only the outer edge of his eyebrow. He could feel it quivering and thought, "Calm down on the Botox," and other fear-based thoughts that irritated him even more. So, he smiled at Deb with his big fluorescent white teeth and chiselled cartoon jaw, but it was the kind of smile animals make when they're backed into a corner. Closing the door gave him a rush of power, but rolling around the room on his medical stool to fetch a clipboard and a marking pen, he felt waddly and effeminate.

Deb just stood there feeling claustrophobic, feeling like an idiot, telling herself, "It's O.K., this is just research now." But it was hard to trust yourself around Dr. Darling. He was very persuasive, and preyed on suggestive types, even using neurolinguistic programming techniques.

"Oh, you can throw on a gown," he said, as if a gown was a very childish thing.

"That's O.K.," she said, and went to the examination chair and took off her sweater, then her cotton tank top. As he waddle-glided toward her, she turned a deep red right down her neck, mortified by the raised nipples, but what could she do? The rooms were purposely kept too cold.

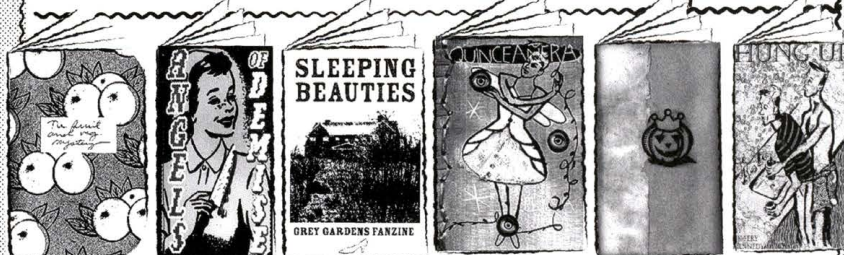
"Still thinking a C-cup," he said to her breasts, his mind racing with the usual initial thoughts of fraudulence verging on perversion, but his face intently blank of emotion.

"Ah, yeah, saline."

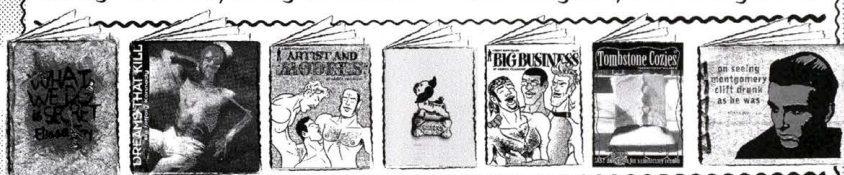
"I could get you the silicones you know. They do make exceptions," he

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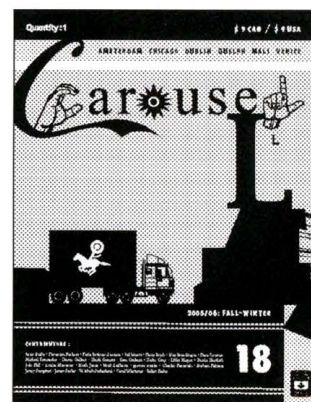
"A fetish house for people who still find the printed word and its casings a lovely thing to behold." – R.M. Vaughan, *THIS* magazine



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said, as if her breasts were special cases.

"That's O.K.," she said and fixed her gaze on the smooth marble breasts of the Venus de Milo as he started marking her chest with a blue marker. She couldn't help but shudder when he brushed the side of his hand over her nipple as he sectioned off her chest. Then two Polaroids, one for each of them. She felt the worst shame looking at herself mugging for the camera.

To maintain blind-trial standards, there were no corporate names on the boxes of tiny implants, just "SALINE," "SILICONE," "MIXED," and "PERPETUGEL." The only way for Toby to find out how these implants were made would be to ask his boss, and he might not even know; they made a point of keeping the research compartmentalized. Toby wasn't looking for trouble. He desperately needed this job to get his student loans paid down, so he just pocketed two adult-sized silicone implants (the saline ones were too soft and ripply). On the way home, he went to a boutique lingerie store to

purchase a bra, feeling like a complete perv eyeing the lingerie. It was torture making small talk with the fragrant, tanned, voluptuous cashier as she carefully wrapped a black bra in pink tissue paper and garnished it with bath beads.

But walking back to his apartment with the small pink bag with silky handles, he actually felt pretty manly, thinking, "People will think a beautiful wife is waiting for me at home." He pictured Brie St. Croix, his favourite porn actress, and threw on one of her DVDs, even before he'd taken off his coat. Rigging everything up took some of the lustre out of the whole thing, and when he saw his groping reflection in the TV, he knew there wasn't going to be any relief tonight. "This is no way to live," he thought, lying in bed with the sheets tight and his hands folded over his heart like a mummy. The rats came to him in his dreams, in tiny lace bras, trying to bite him.

Dr. Darling accosted Deb once more as she was putting on her jacket to go home. He had an urgent E-mail for her to send.

"I agreed to this thing months ago, but I'm going golfing in Maui this weekend," he said, handing over a folder. "Tell them my mother has suddenly fallen ill, and I have to go to her."

He bounced out of the office feeling great—no hematoma, no deep vein thrombosis, all's well in the world. "Note to self: get case of macadamia nuts for mother."

As Deb waited for her computer to reboot and looked at the New You trade show package, an idea started to form. She found a photo of Dr. Darling among the list of speakers and tried to find something endearing there. But no, it was too late for him. She pocketed the V.I.P. ticket and sent an E-mail marked Urgent to the show organizer, purposely dropping a letter in the address. A delivery notification failure bounced back immediately and she deleted the E-mail, feeling an intense rush of something like excitement. The idea had turned into a plan by the time she'd driven home, fed herself and her cat (with the same can of tuna), read all of the day's fifty-seven E-mails from the Survivors of Silicone (S.O.S.) forum,

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and got into the shower to scrub the blue marker lines off her chest. The blue ink trailed down her body in rivers, leaving a blue ring around the drain, and humiliation mixed with anger and righteousness in her heart. She climbed into her cold bed and thought, "Now, if only I can get through the next four days without Dr. Darling getting his hands on me again."

During the night, Molly tore out the contents of her chest and stomach with her tiny claws and teeth. When Toby arrived, she was dead, blood-soaked, curled up in the fetal position, stiff with rigor mortis, except for the sagging implant hump on her back.

"So, she did it, just like the Danish women," Toby thought. His boss showed absolutely no sensitivity, really couldn't have cared less, since this job was just a stepping stone to human trials, preferably in the more glamorous pharmaceutical field. Toby felt the eyes of all the other rats boring into his skull as he cleaned up the entrails and organs and took them, along with the rest of Molly, to the pathology lab.

"You should list her as a suicide," he said to Boris, who responded tersely, "There's no box for that."

Toby had gotten a look at Boris's wife's sizable breasts in the parking lot the other day and thought maybe they were fake, too, causing who-knows-what problems for her, for Boris, for their relationship. Toby thought about the last pair of breasts he'd actually seen in the flesh and they reappeared throughout the day, swinging just out of reach in front of his face.

The sky was pink and gold by the time he left the lab, winter coming too fast and still no hope of a life. As he exited the building, a blond woman approached and said, "You work at the Institute of Pathology."

She looked familiar.

"How did you know?"

He wore glasses too big for his face, and had bad skin. She'd pictured someone taller, darker and more handsome.

"Your tag."

He laughed awkwardly and briefly because she was glaring him down.

"I read your study. We need to talk," she said in a low voice.



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technology. simplified

Toby blushed. Even his colleagues didn't read the *Annals of Small Animal Research*, and they got free subscriptions. She was quite pretty, really, and had nice greeny-blue eyes with startlingly large pupils, and a beautiful nose. She reminded him of Julia Roberts, except for the height, and the body, and the rest of the face.

"I work for a cosmetic surgeon, and I need your help," she said, looking him in the eye. It made him think his fly was open. Nobody had looked him in the eye in a long time.

"I need documents. From the corporations, from lawyers, whatever you can find."

"I don't have access to those kinds of things. We just do animals, and they're not typically litigious."

She didn't even crack a smile, just took a sip of her rum and Coke and asked, "Do you have any friends who could help?"

"I don't have any friends. I just moved here this spring."

"I mean people at the human research labs, even cadaver researchers."

"She's not curious about me at all," he thought.

"No, I'm sorry. This is all pretty new to me. I didn't even plan to be doing this kind of thing," he said.

"So you won't help, then?" she said, and started pulling out her wallet, even though the last thing she wanted to do was leave.

"No, wait. I didn't say that."

"Don't leave me," he thought, thinking about the sad rig hidden in his closet. "Please don't leave me to my own devices."

He told her about Molly, and an intense sadness came into his eyes, magnified by too-thick lenses. He had these nice, brown, trustworthy eyes and was kind of attractive, even if he was a bit thick in the middle and had pock-marked skin. She told him about the women from S.O.S.

"What if the illnesses are unrelated?"

"I think about that, too. But what about the rats?"

"Yeah, they can get capsular fibrosis and malignant tumors. But that's already been documented. Nobody's hiding that information."

"Yes, your study was really thorough. But which implants were the worst?"

"I'll have to look at the data, but I think the Perpetugels are the worst. Of course, it's hard to tell whether the pathologies are caused by the implant material itself, or simply foreign-body responses. That can happen with anything: a splinter, a synthetic hip, a pierced ear. The body wants to get rid of it, and when it can't, it just walls it off from everything else. It's really pretty incredible actually."

Deb thought about the horrible photos she'd seen and frowned him down.

"Giant lumps, leakages, D.N.A. mutation, *mould*. Incredibly disgusting if you ask me."

"Of course, yeah. But you have to remember, there are levels of toxicity even in the controls. There are always acceptable risks."

Her big eyes narrowed. "If it was your sister, would it be acceptable?"

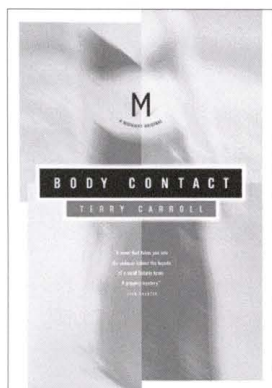
"I don't have a sister."

"Girlfriend?"

"No girlfriend."

Deb blushed, and so did Toby.

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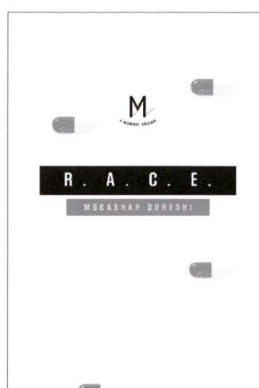


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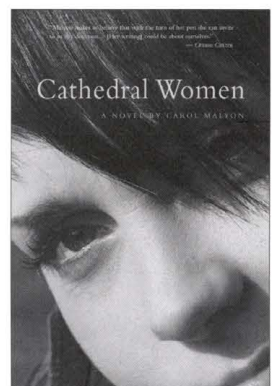
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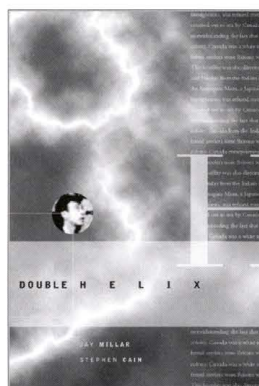


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"Brother?"

"Yeah, two. I'm in the middle."

"So, one of them has testicular cancer and has his balls removed, and then he's offered fake balls." She felt oddly erotic saying these things to a virtual stranger, and it was a bit of a thrill.

"I didn't know they did that." He was thinking about sex, too, of course, and wondering what her breasts looked like, but she hadn't even taken off her jacket.

"They do."

"Then, I would tell him to say no."

"So, you'll help?" He really was quite attractive, and what a strange life he must have. She wished she'd worn a nicer outfit, put on some lipstick, been less harsh.

"Yes," he said, thinking similar insecure and shallow thoughts.

"Good. We'd also like to have some implanted rats for the presentation. I'll drive you back to your office so you can get your car."

"I don't have a car."

No car was a major strike against him, but he had such beautiful long hands, and he really seemed to care about those rats.

Toby flossed twice, carefully, and even trimmed his pubic hair getting ready for their Friday night rendezvous at Deb's place. So, it was a shock when a bald, elderly woman answered the door. There were seven other women in the living room, including a transsexual wearing giant pumps. They went apeshit when he opened the cardboard boxes and introduced Kate, Gertrude, and Beebe. Some clucked motherly words, others looked horrified, and one woman's eyes filled with tears, but none of them wanted to touch the freakish-looking rats. One of the S.O.S. members had purchased a divided cage, so Toby transferred them and put a toilet-paper roll in each of their sections.

"Big crowd," he said during a rare moment alone with Deb, in the kitchen. She looked so beautiful, and he wanted her terribly. When he caught her eye, something electric passed between them. Deb wanted him, too. Who cared about the weight, the skin, the lack of car, the looming unemployment. Certainly the dangerous nature of the situation, the potential for arrest and imprisonment fed the fire, but

maybe no desperate, single, lonely, horny person needs much stoking. Idealism can be exploited just as easily as low self-esteem; maybe they even went hand-in-hand.

The electric moment passed when Toby brought out the regular-sized implants. It put Deb in a gloomy mood, thinking about Dr. Darling's blond-knuckled hands on her breasts. These unwanted images had even infected her bedtime fantasies, which typically starred Spanish tennis player Rafael Nadal. Now, Toby had also entered the mix, and what with all the excitement and these ghoulish surprise appearances by Dr. Darling, she'd endured two virtually sleepless nights in a row.

"Tomorrow the shit hits the fan," said Georgette, who would pose as Dr. Darling the next day, since she had an Adam's apple. The group went over the game plan and finished putting together the PowerPoint presentation with the latest documents from Toby's lab. Then they talked about their varied health problems and commiserated with each other about bad husbands who'd left them, and bad doctors—sometimes you couldn't tell which was which. Some of the details were downright horrendous, and it wasn't the ideal place for a love story to begin, but it actually made Deb and Toby intensely curious about seeing each other's unmodified bodies. They just wanted to get in each other's pants.

When they took their clothes off, they laughed nervously at first, and so closed their eyes to each other and themselves so that they could get to it. But when their eyes eventually locked, they became very solemn and careful with each other. It's scary to be needy and have nowhere to hide it. After, with the sheets pulled up to their chins, they listened to the girls in the living room, gnawing, pawing, and drinking from their water bottles.

"What are we going to do with them after tomorrow?" Deb whispered.

"I don't know," Toby whispered back, but they were both really thinking, "What will become of us?" ☞

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CONTRIBUTORS

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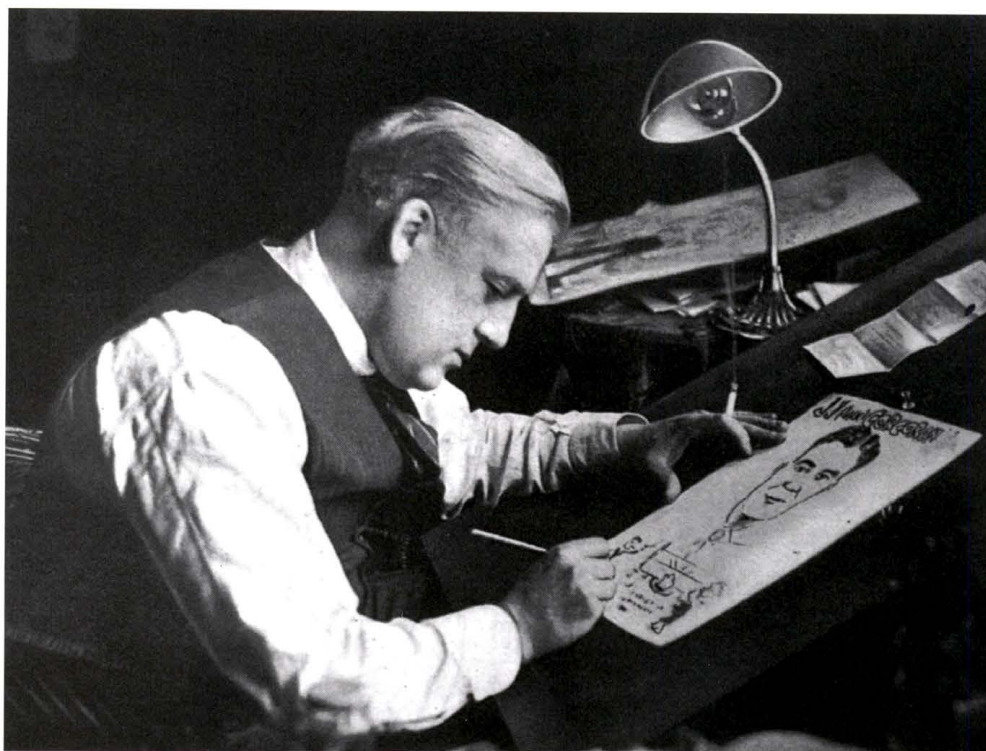
Jim Munroe ("Therefore Repent!," p. 24) lives in the Annex. He is the author of *An Opening Act of Unspeakable Evil* (No Media Kings, 2004). *Therefore Repent!*, a graphic-novel collaboration with Salgood Sam, will be published in 2007.

Salgood Sam ("Therefore Repent!," p. 24) lives in Montreal. His independently produced anthology, *Revolver* (Spilt Ink, 2004), garnered him a nomination for best emerging talent at the 2005 Doug Wright Awards.

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GALLERY

THE ART OF SPORT

Remembering "Canada's greatest cartoonist."

ILLUSTRATIONS BY LOU SKUCE

It was probably no more shocking to fans of the sport then than it is today, yet, on November 27, 1934, the *Toronto Daily Star* saw fit to run the headline "WRESTLING STAGE-MANAGED, OFFICIAL SAYS," in screaming capital letters, from one side of its front page to the other. The sporting world's worst-kept secret was leaked during a bribery scandal, when the local wrestling promoter Jack Corcoran, owner of the Queensbury Athletic Club, was accused of knowing the outcomes of his matches before the first head was locked. Corcoran's reputation survived the scandal (he denied wrestling was anything but legitimate), and fans chose to continue to turn a blind eye—or simply not care—that their favourite pastime was more an entertainment than a sport.

In 1935, Corcoran published *Corcoran's Wrestling Guide*, a program featuring il-

lustrated biographies of some of the day's wrestling talent, drawn by Lou Skuce. A strip and editorial cartoonist, Skuce became something of an international celebrity throughout the thirties and forties, achieving a level of fame unthinkable for a newspaper illustrator today. Indeed, it's hard to imagine a strip artist like Gary Larson, or even a graphic novelist like Art Spiegelman, appearing, as Skuce did, in advertisements for the contemporary equivalent of Buckingham cigarettes or Plymouth automobiles. In the early thirties, the Tambllyn chain of drugstores even offered a free Lou Skuce comic scribbler with every twenty-three-cent purchase of Minty's toothpaste.

Corcoran's guide showcased Skuce's talents as a fine illustrator, top-notch cartoonist, and talented letterer all at once. Skuce, who specialized in sports

cartooning, drew every wrestler with an elegance and grace that made each one look like a champion—even cultural stereotypes like Matros Kirilenko, "the Terrible Cossack," with his *ushanka* fur hat; and Jim Clinkstock, shown in full Cherokee headdress.

Although forgotten today, by 1951, the year he died, Skuce was being billed as "Canada's greatest cartoonist." Perhaps fittingly, given his association with professional wrestling, he was remembered at the time not just as a cartoonist, but also as an entertainer, having made frequent public appearances, often at children's shows, with his Cartoonoscope, a projector that enlarged his drawing board onto a screen for audiences to watch him draw in real time—lest there be any cries of stage-managing.

—CONAN TOBIAS

BORN IN HOLLAND - 1909
EDUCATED IN A MILITARY ACADEMY -
IS AN EXPERT HORSEMAN -

FRANKIE HART

THE DUTCH
ADONIS'S
INSPIRATION
IS A SWEET
CANADIAN
WIFE -

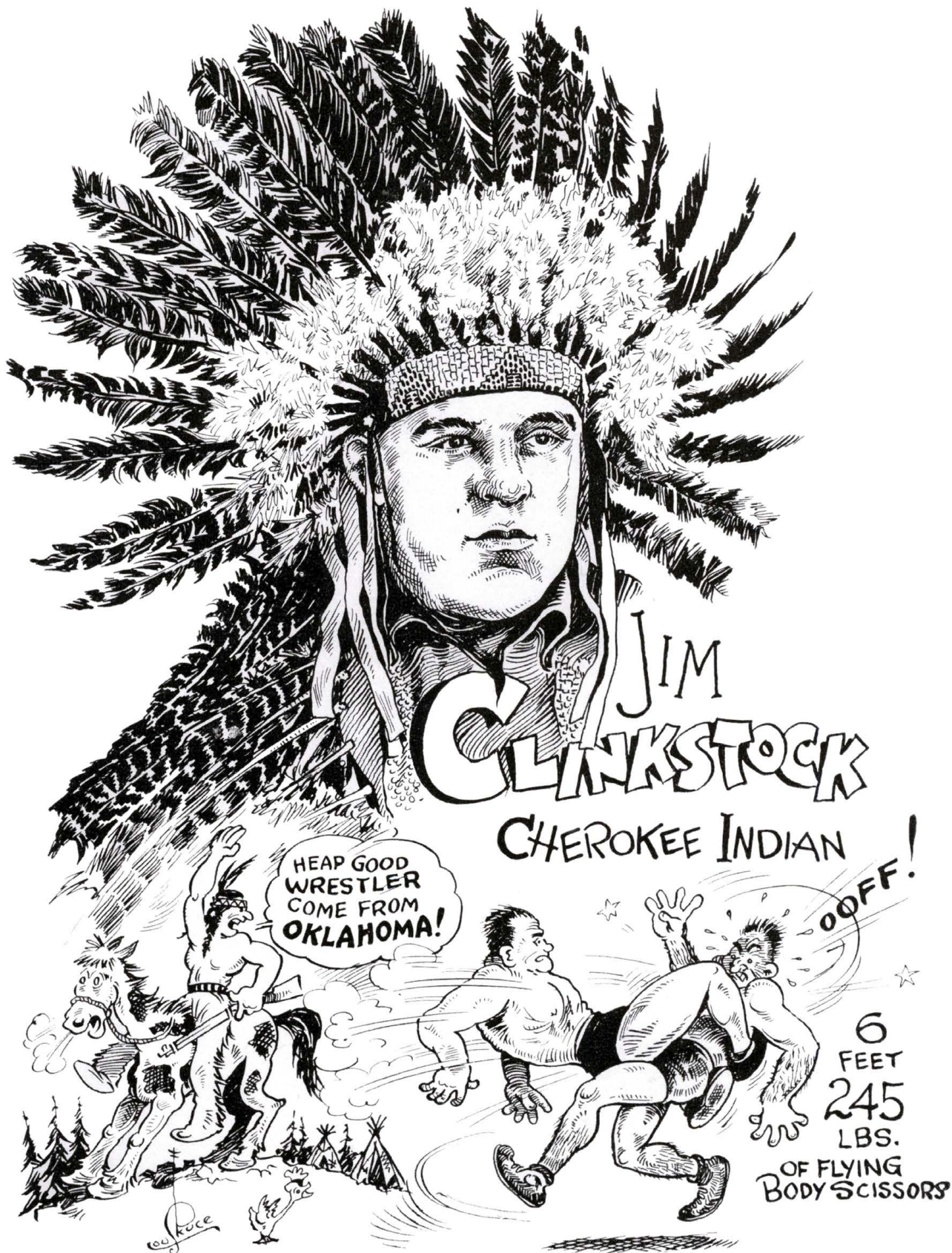


COMING FROM
THE LAND OF
THE DYKES
FRANKIE
IS AN
EXCELLENT
SWIMMER

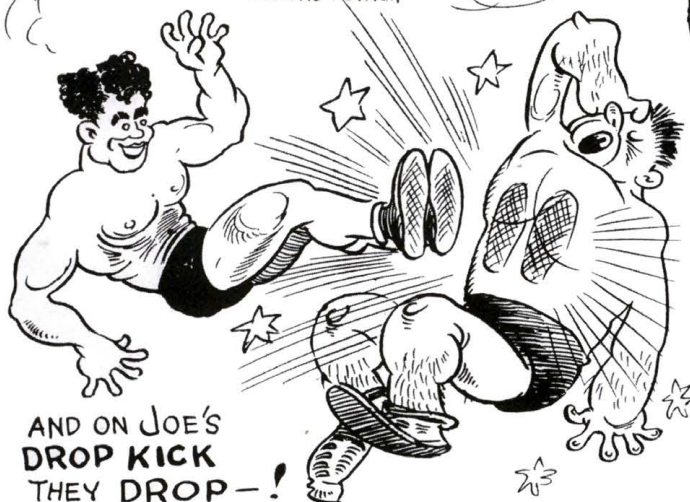
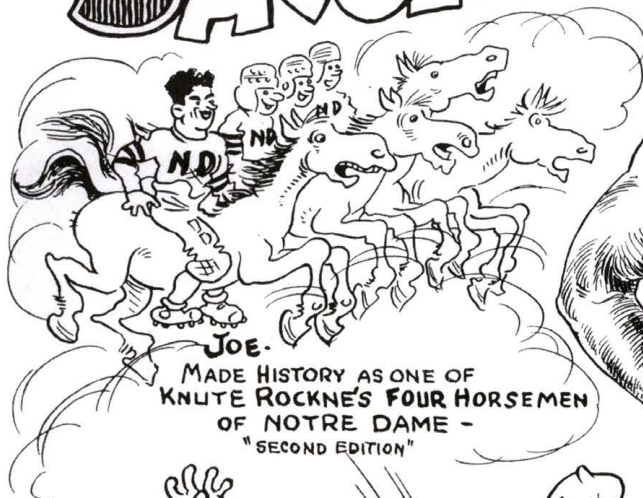
THE
FLYING
DUTCHMAN
SHOWS
SPEED-
STRENGTH
AND
STRATEGY
IN
MAKING
AND
BREAKING
HOLDS

A GREAT
LITTLE
GYMNAST

Stucco



"JUMPING" JOE SAVOLDI



BORN -
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AGE 24



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THE FIRST
MAN TO BEAT
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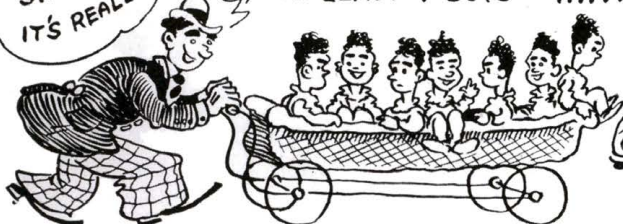
GOOD
AT ALL
TRACK
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SPORTS
ALSO
TENNIS!

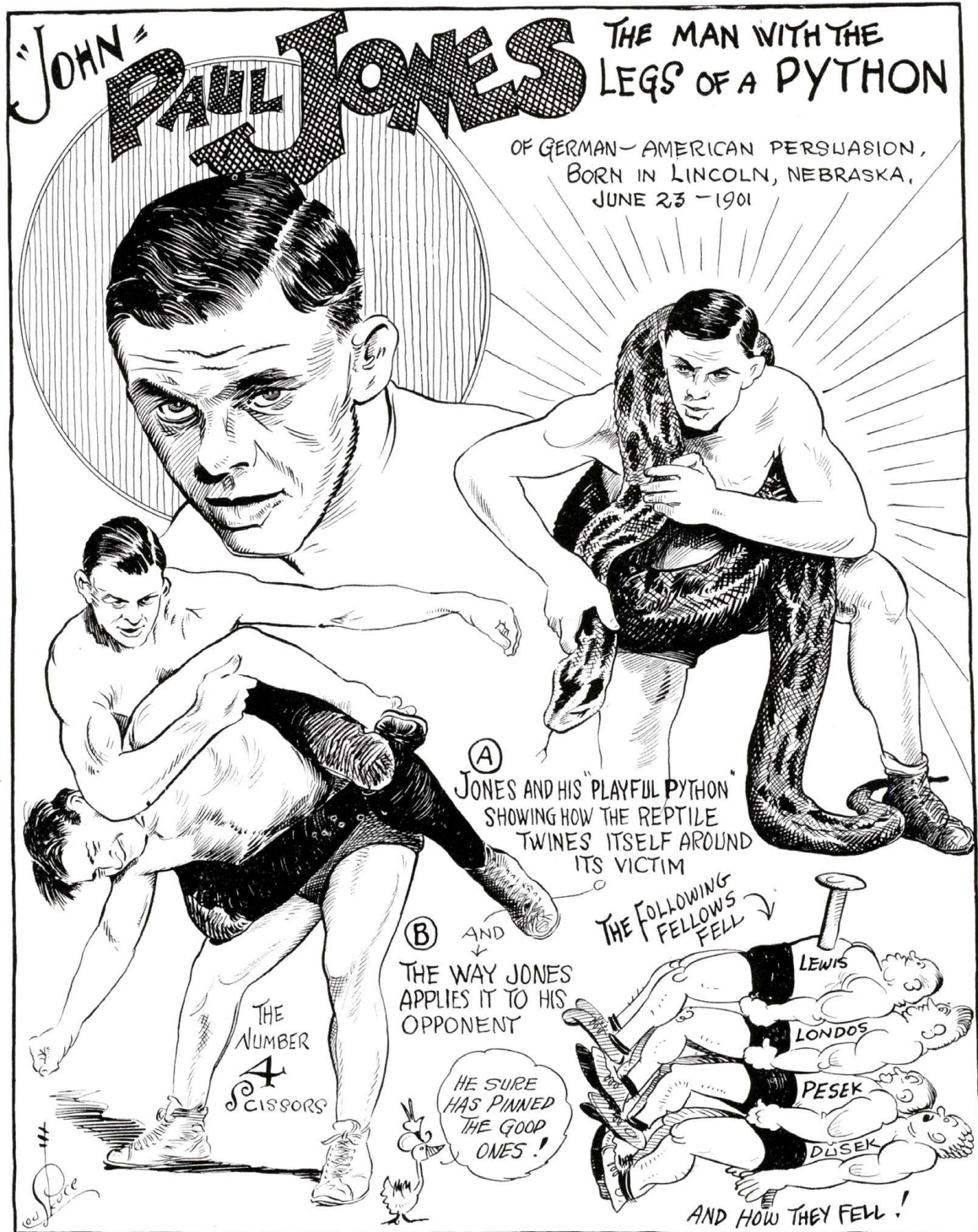


Joe

I NO LIKADA
FISHIN' OR
SHOOTIN' -
IT'S REALLY CRUEL!

BUT - IS AMBITIOUS
TO BE THE DADDY OF
AT LEAST 7 BOYS - !!!!!!!





ED "STRANGLER" LEWIS

THE
DADDY
OF 'EM
ALL -

HAS WON
MORE THAN
3500
MATCHES -

WRESTLED
IN EVERY
COUNTRY
IN THE
WORLD -

DEFEATED
JIM
LONDOS
14
TIMES

DEVELOPED HIS WONDERFUL
HEAD-LOCK BY CONSTANT
TRAINING WITH PATENT BLOCKS

GOSH!
HIS NECK
IS SO WELL
DEVELOPED
HE HAS TO
HAVE HIS
TIES
TAILORED
TO FIT -

MR
FAN

ED -
IS WILLING
TO TAKE ON
THE WORLD IN
THE RING OR AT
THE BRIDGE TABLE

Peace

FRENCH BRAIDS

An excerpt.

BY JENNIFER LOVEGROVE

"You have to hold still," snaps Leonora, yanking a strand of Emily's dark brown hair for emphasis.

"I am! Just quit pulling so hard!"

"Do you want me to finish the other one or not?" Leonora leans over Emily, braiding her hair before the meeting.

"Yes," Emily pouts, her eyebrows furrowed and face scrunched up, insistent. "Just get it done. I'll stop squirming."

Emily doesn't know anyone else who knows how to do French braids, not even their mother. All the most stylish and best-looking kids at school and at the district assemblies have French braids, and Emily has wanted them all year. She just hadn't known it would take this long, or be this painful.

"Good, because I have to start over. The first one's no good."

Emily howls at this and stands up, shakes her arms and legs in a dramatic show of exasperation, then sits back down in front of Leonora.

"This is taking forever. I want to read while you do my hair."

"No. You move your head too much when you read."

Emily starts to whine some more, and Leonora cuts her off, barking, "You're the one who wanted French braids so bad. Now just shut up and hold still. If you're good, I'll tell you a story."

"O.K." Emily closes her eyes, takes a deep breath, folds her hands on her lap, and exhales loudly. "Go. I'm ready."

Emily loves stories, especially mysteries like the Trixie Belden books, or even Nancy Drew, though Trixie is better. At the Kingdom Hall meetings, she likes the sisters' talks because they are like little plays, conversations that tell a story. Some of the ladies are better at it than others, of course, and sometimes a sister is so nervous to be up onstage before the entire congregation, she forgets what she is supposed to say, turns red and sweaty, mumbles incoherently, and just reads awkwardly from the papers in front of her. It's embarrassing, and when Emily is old enough to give a talk, she is going to be the best at it. Everything

will be memorized and emphasized properly, and very original, not just pretending to be out in door-to-door service like most of them do.

Hers will be different, better. Mr. Laurence says that Emily is "tremendously industrious," and Emily agrees with that. She is "diligent," another word she learned during her library shift.

Leonora parts Emily's hair with a sharp comb, and divides it into sections using the pointed end.

"Ow! You don't have to stab me in the skull, you know!"

"Shut up," Leonora says, as she tugs another chunk of Emily's hair into the braid. "I think I've got it now." Emily cringes but stays quiet, growing accustomed to the yanks and pokes and the throbbing of her scalp.

"What about my story?"

"I'm thinking of one." Leonora stops working on Emily's hair and paces around the room, flexing her fingers and cracking her knuckles.

"You owe me for this. It's painful work, you know."

"It hurts me, too. But it'll look really good, right?" Emily stretches halfway out of the chair, trying to see her hair in Leonora's full-length mirror on the back of her door.

"Sure. Just hold still now and I'll tell you a story. But you can't tell anyone else, O.K.?"

"O.K."

"I mean it. No one, including Mom and Dad."

"I promise."

"You better. Or I'll never do your hair again."

"I promise!"

"Promise and swear to God? For real?"

"Yes!"

"And stay out of my chair."

"I will, I will!"

"O.K.," began Leonora. "This is a story about some kids who go camping in the woods."

"What kids? Who?"

"It doesn't matter! Just some kids—fictional kids, made up—no one you know."

"O.K. Can I give them names?"

"No! You can shut up so I can tell the story and finish your hair."

"O.K. Sorry, Leonora." Emily bites the insides of her lips to keep from talking.

"So these four kids, teenagers, set out with their backpacks and tents and sleeping bags to go camping. None of their parents know where they are. They all said they were sleeping over at each others' houses, and then took off to the woods. They hike and hike until it gets dark, and then they realize that no one remembered to bring a flashlight. Of course, they get separated and lost, and only Bill and Marla are left, so they set up their tent—"

"They're sleeping in the same tent?" asks Emily. "Are they married?"

"No, of course not. It doesn't matter."

"Are they worldly?"

"I don't know! Maybe. It's just a story."

"O.K." Emily tries not to wonder if they're Jehovah's Witness kids, like them, or worldlings; if they're going to get in trouble, or if they do this all the time.

"So they get into the tent, and pretty soon it gets really cold, and Bill pulls a Thermos out of his pack and tells Marla to drink some, that it'll make her warm."

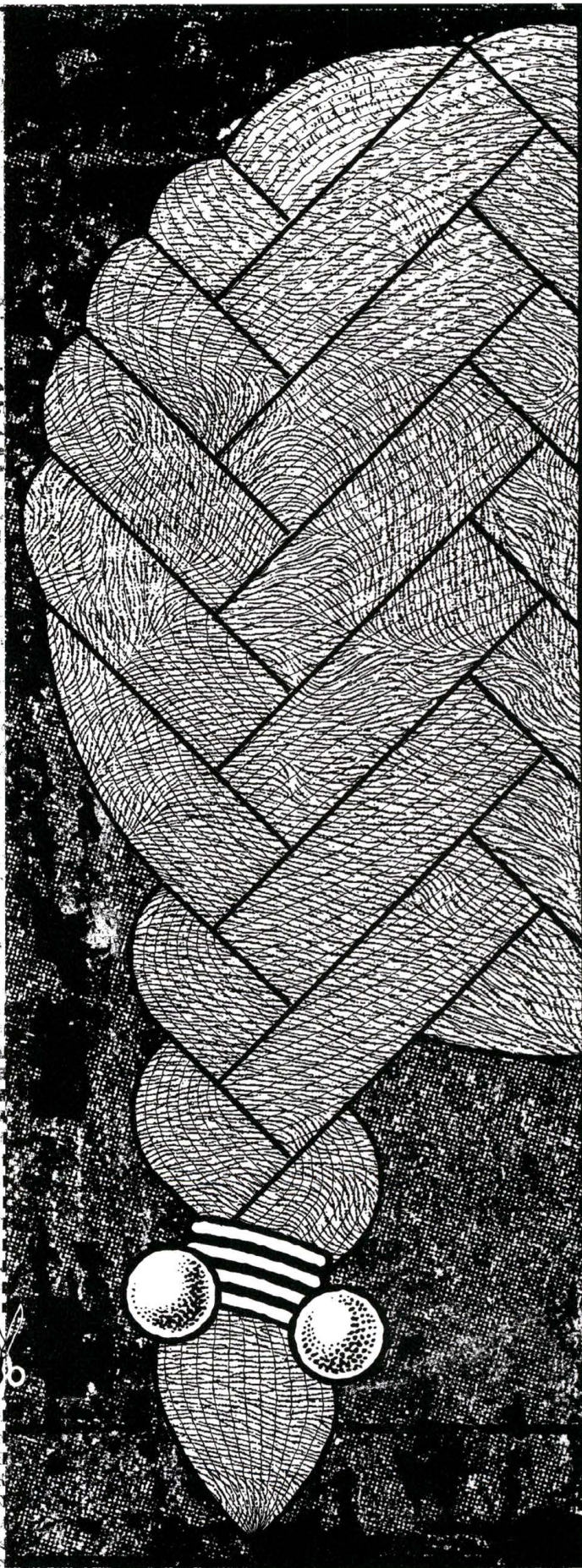
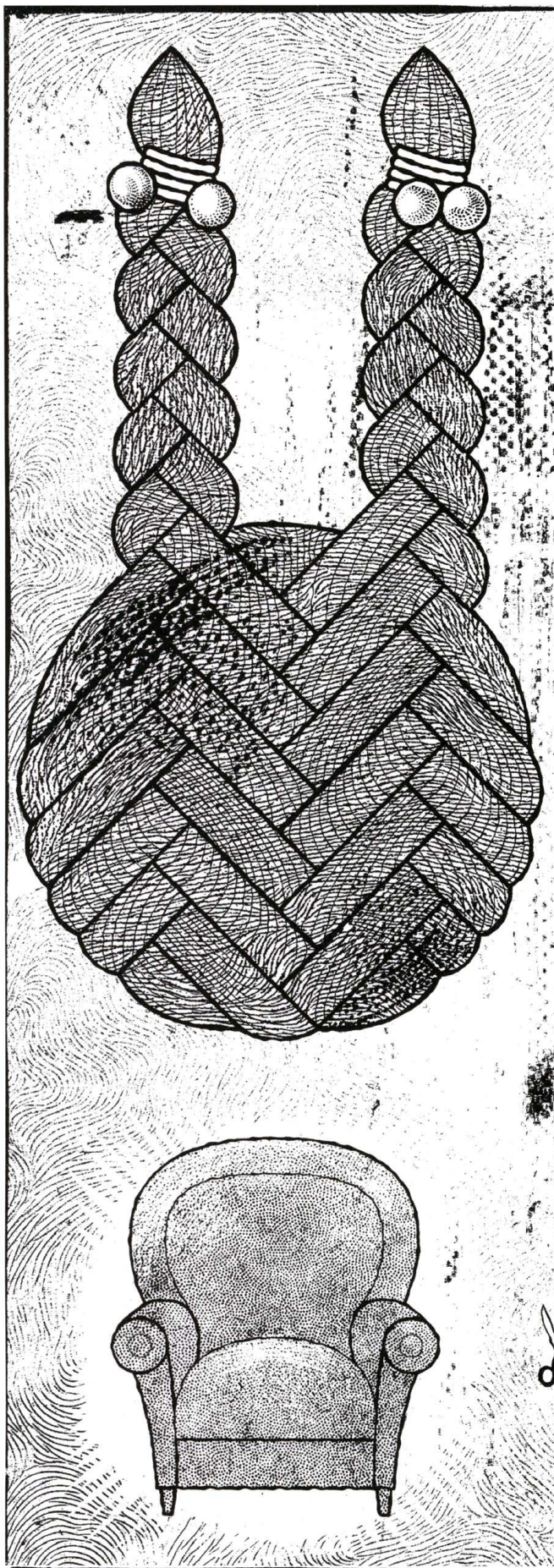
"Like a magic potion?"

"Sure, like a magic potion," Leonora laughs. So it warms her up and she's happy, but Bill says he's still cold, and Marla should warm him up."

"Doesn't the potion work on him?"

"No. It doesn't work on him. If you interrupt me one more time, I won't tell you the rest of the story." Leonora's fingers are still pulling and weaving Emily's hair.

"I guess the stuff she drinks only works on girls. Anyway, Marla and Bill have to huddle together under the blanket to keep from getting hypothermia, which their friends now have, and are dead, but Marla and Bill don't know that yet. So they're rubbing each others' arms and legs and stuff to stay warm, and Marla is still feeling really good and hot from the drink, and pretty soon, Bill says if she doesn't want him to get



hypothermia, she has to keep him warm all over, not just his hands. She has to press all of her body heat onto him, from head to toe . . .”

Leonora pauses and sighs, and Emily concentrates on resisting the urge to ask more questions. This is not the kind of story she likes. She prefers mysteries, or something with knights and dragons, and although the magic potion is appealing, the story, so far, is disappointing. She has decided that the main characters must be worldly, because the idea of Bill and Marla warming each other up in a tent definitely sounds immoral. Emily hopes their father is not listening at the door.

“Then Bill tells Marla that in order to save him from dying of hypothermia, she has to warm him up under his clothes, including his underwear, too—”

“Gross!” shrieks Emily. “Does she do it anyway?”

“She has to. He’s the only one left who knows how to get out of the woods and back home, so she can’t let him die.” Leonora puts the final elastic around the bottom of Emily’s braid and pronounces both her hair and the story finished.

“Let me see the back!”

Leonora angles another mirror in front of Emily so that she can see the back in the mirror on the door. Emily reaches up toward her head, amazed at the shininess and perfection of her very first set of French braids.

“Don’t touch it! You’ll wreck it!” Leonora says. “Hold on.” She gets a bottle of hairspray from her dresser and sprays it all over Emily’s head.

“Yuck!” Emily coughs, “Stop!” The aerosol is viscous and sticky, and smells like bug spray. She spits some into a tissue.

“O.K., you’re done. Go away.”

Emily stands in front of the mirror, turning from side to side, admiring her hair. Then she looks at Leonora.

“That wasn’t a very good story, you know.”

“Whatever.”

“I think it was immoral.”

“I don’t care what you think. You don’t even know what ‘immoral’ means!”

“Yes I do.”

“What then?”

Emily doesn’t answer. She knows it’s wrong, sins of the flesh, no intercourse before marriage. She’s heard that at the

meetings before, but she can’t explain exactly what it means. She decides she will look up “intercourse” in the big dictionary during her next library shift.

“See? You don’t know!”

“Marla shouldn’t have touched him. She could have found her way home in the morning.”

“Well, she did it anyway, and she liked it.” Leonora doesn’t look at Emily. She is studiously applying blue eyeliner beneath her green eyes.

“You’re going to get in trouble.”

“Oh yeah? What for?”

“Saying stuff like that.”

“No I’m not. Because you promised to Jehovah that you wouldn’t tell. And you aren’t going to break a promise to God, are you? And risk being destroyed at Armageddon? I don’t think so. Now go away.”

Confused, Emily goes to her bedroom. Leonora has been baptized for a couple of years and, until now, has never talked about immoral stuff. It could be a trick, something to get Emily in trouble. She decides not to tell, in case that’s exactly what Leonora wants, but she’s still angry with her,

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TWO THIRTEEN-LINE POEMS ON HOW WE NEED A NEW POEM

But only a good one. Hammer, mine the day.
Have other poems dropped like depth charges
to break something loose, picture a tight-lipped
brigadier, reciting a roll call, "Acorn, Akhmatova,"
loaded—fired against the circle of whiteness
surrounding the city—reload—and again.
And old women, helping the effort, walk
the streets beating pans to flush out a poem,
report that an old Chinese man looked into
Wah Fook Seafood Trading and smiled, lifted
the stick of an arm and waved gently like a king.
I need something more, comes the reply, more than
police cruisers sailing the streets like sharks.

The young man on the street corner is always there,
growing the thin film of hostility on the inside
of his frame, that much extra weight in a bucket—
heart stamping each day like a blown tire,
not speaking because he knows his voice would sound
like an angry dog—his pet rats lined up on his arm
even seem frightened, as though on a sinking ship,
the sign reading, "OUT OF WORK, OUT OF HOME, PLEASE
HELP. THANK YOU." Nobody from the passing
stream stops to think if he were God, quietly there,
even a dollar would get you into heaven.
He knows, instead, the fussing crow wing
of a broken umbrella, waving him away.

—ALEX BOYD

for real." At twelve, her sister was seven
years older than Emily, and much bigger.
Emily loved her *Transportation*
colouring book, and had just learned
that "transportation" meant all the different
ways to get away from home.
There were cars, of course, and buses,
bicycles, airplanes, helicopters, and
trains—which were her favourite because
they were giant machine snakes and you
could ride inside of them.

Emily did not get out of the chair until
Leonora handed her back the pieces of the
shredded colouring book. Eventually, tearing
up novels and magazines became Leonora's
offensive strategy of choice against Emily.

Tonight, Emily sits alone in Leonora's
chair for a full ten minutes before anyone
notices. Her mom, sipping from her

usual lidded coffee cup, shakes her head.

"You're asking for it," she says.
"Leonora's not going to be happy, and I
don't have time to protect you. I have to
finish getting ready for the Kingdom Hall."

Emily doesn't care. There's nothing
Leonora can do. This time, she is much
older and smarter, and she does not have
anything with her that Leonora can ruin.
She sits with her arms crossed in front
of her chest and her ankles crossed on the
footrest.

"What do you think you're doing?"
Leonora has flounced down the stairs
and into the living room. Her blue
painted nails are tapping on the armrest.
Emily says nothing, just hums to herself
and looks straight ahead, like no one is there.

"Get out of my chair."

"No," Emily says this time. "It's my chair, too, you know."

"No it's not, it's mine. Now get up." She is getting louder, leaning into Emily's face. Emily can feel the wet air from her mouth.

"Now!" Leonora's face reddens and her eyes narrow.

"Gross." Emily turns her head away and says, "Say it, don't spray it."

Leonora clears her throat.

"This is your last chance," she says, and counts to three.

As Emily sits rigid and staring straight ahead, a warm gob of slime hits her cheek and slides toward her chin. She wipes it on her sleeve and looks at Leonora.

"Pig." She doesn't get up from the chair.

Leonora stomps out of the living room, and the bathroom door slams shut. Emily squirms and grins in the chair, trying not to laugh out loud. She folds her arms behind her head and closes her eyes. While Leonora sulks in the bathroom, Emily pretends she is at the beach, lying on a towel under the warm sun, the waves quiet behind her.

As she stretches languidly in the chair, trying to take up as much space as possible, there is a sudden tug, hard, on the side of her head. Leonora is pulling her right braid.

"This is your last chance, for real this time," Leonora says. "Get out of my chair!"

Emily doesn't budge. There is a flash of silver near the corner of her eye, and something cold against her ear. Then the swish and clang of steel jaws, the unmistakable opening and closing of the scissors.

"Ha," Emily laughs, "I'm not scared of you."

She knows Leonora wouldn't cut her up, not with Mom and Dad home, and about to come downstairs to leave for the meeting at any moment.

She pushes her chin out further and again says, "It's my chair, too."

"You asked for it." Leonora yanks her hair again. Emily hears one quick snip, and she is left with just one braid. ✕

Jennifer LoveGrove lives in North York, but is still a Parkdalian at heart. She writes poetry and fiction, edits the literary zine Dig, and makes dirty soap called Soap Scum. She is the author of I Should Never Have Fired the Sentinel (ECW, 2005) and The Dagger Between Her Teeth (ECW, 2002).

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.)

● *Good Meat*, by Dani Couture (Pedlar, 2006; \$20). Pedlar publishes such nice books, and Dani's is one of its nicest-looking yet. You just can't beat a duotone cover for *Taddle Creek's* money. Unfortunately, this collection doesn't include the magazine's favourite poem of Dani's, "Dawn of the Dead, Revisited," originally published in these pages. One might argue that a poem about a zombie movie doesn't fit with a book of food-based poems. Hello? Zombies eat brains. Is that any more sickening than the poem "Mystery Meat," included in this collection? *Taddle Creek* thinks not. More zombies, please.

Types of Canadian Women, Volume II, by K. I. Press (Gaspereau, 2006; \$19.95). K. I. Press's books just keep getting cooler. *Types of Canadian Women, Volume II* is more of a response to the 1903 Volume 1 than a long overdue follow-up. Whereas the first book was an illustrated biographical dictionary of notable Canadian women of the day, Press's book collects poems inspired by the "boring" original. The collection is presented with a good-natured sense of humour about itself and its subject matter, something especially refreshing in the world of poetry. *Taddle Creek* anxiously awaits Volume 3.

● *You Speak to Me in Trees*, by Elana Wolff (Guernica, 2006; \$15). Elana Wolff keeps a low profile, but she's extremely consistent in both her output and her quality, and this, her third collection of poems, is as delightful as the others, if not more so. It's not always easy to find Guernica books, so if your local bookseller doesn't have this one in stock, tell them to reorder Guernica No. 151.

● *Technicolored*, by Jason Guriel (Exile, 2006; \$14.95). Given this book's film theme, *Taddle Creek* was sure zombies were going to show up at some point,

but, alas, Jason is more a fan of the arty classics. That said, if you like old-school Hollywood, you'll like this collection—even if you don't like poetry.

● *A Thousand Profane Pieces*, by Myna Wallin (Tightrope, 2006; \$14.95). An early *Taddle Creek* contributor, from the magazine's Annex years, Myna Wallin has been churning out the chapbooks for some time now. Here at last, her début collection—a sexy new book of poems from a sexy new publishing house.

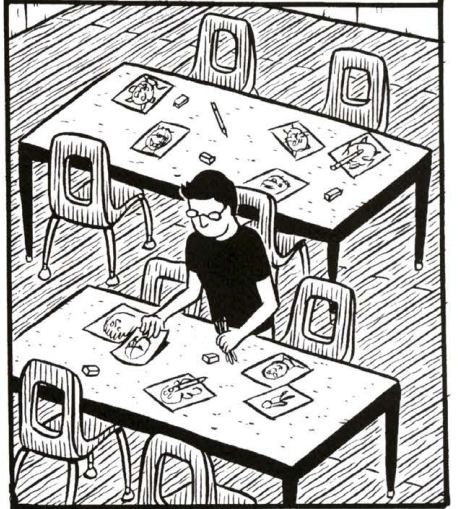
● *The Uninvited Guest*, by John Degen (Nightwood, 2006; \$20.95). John Degen swore up and down this wasn't a book about hockey. Given the hockey-heavy excerpt *Taddle Creek* ran two issues back, the magazine simply didn't believe him. Upon reading the first few chapters of the book, *Taddle Creek* was sure it had caught John, if not in a lie, then in a serious case of denial. Long story short: if you keep reading, you'll eventually see it's really not a book about hockey. Who knew?

Like Alex Boyd, whose début book of poems didn't quite come out in time to get mentioned in this issue, John is a founding contributor of *Taddle Creek* who dabbled in prose many years ago. John went on to great success in the world of poetry—notably in his 2002 National Magazine Award nomination for a poem appearing in a certain literary journal of some renown. But here he has returned to the world of fiction. *Taddle Creek* is thankful for this, otherwise this entire column would be about nothing but poetry, and the magazine often has a hard time coming up with funny things to say about poetry collections. (This time around was especially trying. Thankfully it had that flash about zombies.)

A side note: *Taddle Creek's* records show that, with his poem found on page 30 of this issue, John stands alone as having made the most contributions to the magazine in its nine-plus years. But don't get too comfy, John Degen—Stuart Ross, Paul Vermeersch, Elana Wolff, and Chris Chambers are all only one submission behind, and the magazine has it on good authority that Chambers is after your crown.

PEOPLE AROUND HERE. AVENUE ROAD. ART SCHOOL.

ONE FALL DAY A FEW YEARS AGO I WAS CLEANING UP AFTER MY CARTOONING CLASS.



I LOOKED UP AND SAW A GIRL AROUND TWELVE YEARS OLD, BLACK HAIR PULLED BACK INTO A PONYTAIL, SHORT SLEEVED BLACK DRESS, SITTING DOWN IN FRONT OF THE OLD FIREPLACE, HOLDING A WHITE CUP.



IRRITATED, I LOWERED MY HEAD FOR JUST A SECOND..... TO COMPOSE MYSELF...

GRUMBLE~ DARN KIDS COMING IN HERE EARLY FOR THE NEXT CLASS AND I'M NOT EVEN DONE CLEANING UP YET!!... GRRR... C'MON DAVE, BE POLITE...



OH, IS THERE ANOTHER CLASS COMING IN HERE...



I HAD SPOKEN ALOUD TO AN EMPTY CHAIR!

FROM THE TIME I'D LOOKED UP, SAW HER, LOOKED DOWN, LOOKED UP AGAIN AND SPOKE HAD TAKEN MAYBE THREE SECONDS...



... SHE COULDN'T HAVE GOT UP, WALKED ACROSS THE ROOM AND LEFT WITHOUT ME SEEING OR HEARING HER AT ALL!

I'VE TOLD THIS STORY TO LOTS OF KIDS... ONE MOM WAS CONCERNED BECAUSE HER SON HAD BEEN SCARED.

BUT IT'S SUCH A BORING GHOST STORY. IT'S JUST A GIRL WITH A CUP...

THAT'S WHY HE WAS SCARED. IT'S SO ORDINARY IT'S BELIEVABLE.

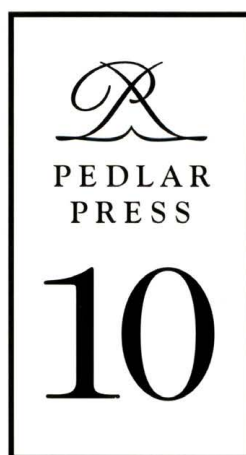
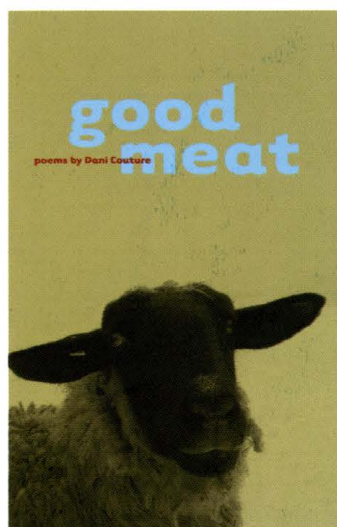
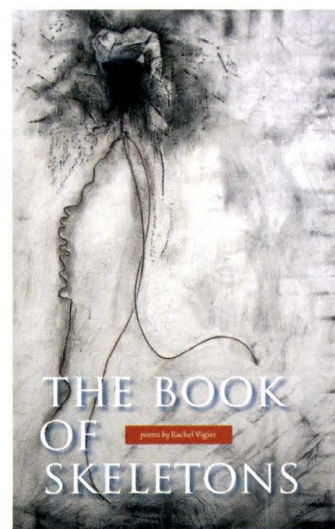
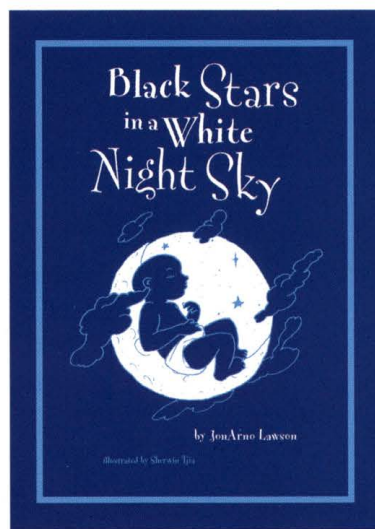
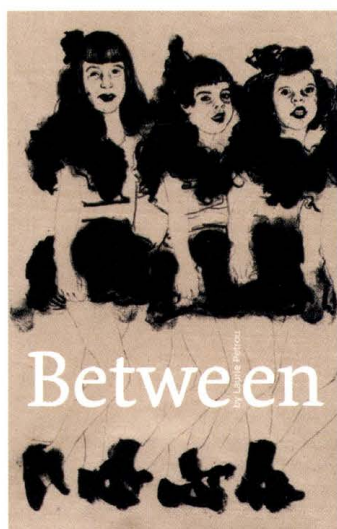


I DON'T KNOW WHAT I SAW... I'VE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE THAT BEFORE... I'VE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE THAT SINCE. I DON'T CARE IF GHOSTS EXIST OR NOT.



... BUT! IF I'M EVER IN THAT ROOM TELLING THAT STORY, I ALWAYS LEAVE JUICE AND COOKIES IN FRONT OF THE FIREPLACE... JUST IN CASE!

• DAVE LAPP '06 •



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