

TADDLE CREEK

A man in a light-colored polo shirt with dark horizontal stripes and matching trousers stands in front of a brick building. He is smiling and looking slightly to the right. In the background, another person is visible, leaning against a wall. The entire image has a warm, orange-red color cast.

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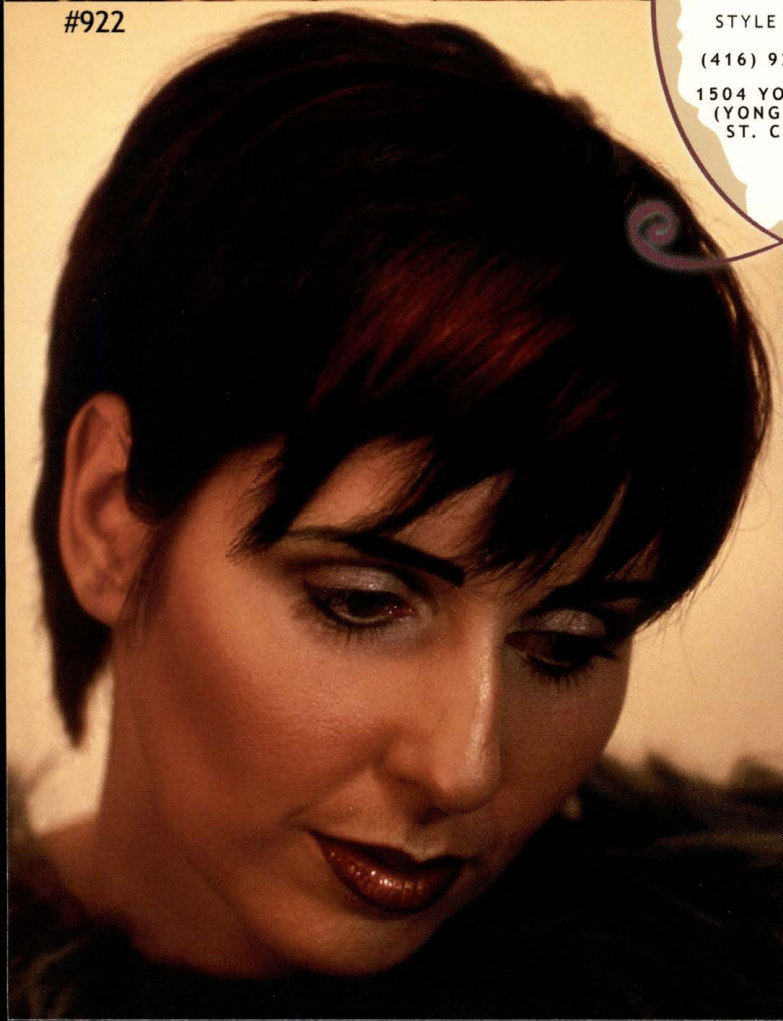
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TADDLE CREEK

VOL. X, NO. 2 • SUMMER, 2007

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M. Fred Tobias (1914–1991), circa 1955. Photographer unknown.

BUNK
FROM THE MAILBAG

A selection of letters from Taddle Creek's first decade.

September 6, 2002

GREETINGS FROM THE ANCIENT ONE,
I came upon your Web site during my travels on the net. My compliments on a job well done. I enjoyed the writings very much. I wish you great success in all your endeavours.

My name is Micheal Teal. I am a psychic/spiritual advisor/poet in Hamilton, Ontario. I am impressed with your magazine. May you achieve all in life you so desire. I wish you joy and prosperity.

Forever in peace,
MICHEAL TEAL
The Ancient One

October 21, 2002

DEAR SIR(S),

Here are some of my poems. I am from Toronto. Tell me if you like them, or would like to publish one, etc. They have all been copyrighted under my father's lawyer. I am an aspiring amateur writer and, even if you don't consider these poems eligible for publication, I strongly hope you find something in one of these poems that opens your heart and brightens your day.

WILL WYLIE

October 24, 2002

DEAR SIR(S),

I sent you some of my poetry? What is the situation with my poetry? Has it been examined? What are your thoughts? Also, just a reminder, I have had all my poems legally protected with my father's lawyer. I hope to hear back soon. Good day and Godspeed.

WILL WYLIE

May 12, 2003

DEAR WILL,

Thanks very much for your submission. Unfortunately, it's just not what the magazine is looking for right now. Please feel free to submit again in the future, however. Thanks for your interest.

TADDLE CREEK

May 12, 2003

FUCK YOU U LOW TALENT DIP-SHIT SCUM SUCKING BASTARD.

WILL WYLIE

June 23, 2005

I've enclosed here some poetry that I'd like to get published in your magazine. I have a lot more if your [sic] interested. My phone number and E-mail are there if you want to contact me.

BRODIE DAKIN

August 9, 2005

DEAR BRODIE,

Thanks very much for your submission. Unfortunately, it's just not what the magazine is looking for right now. Please feel free to submit again in the future, however. Thanks for your interest.

TADDLE CREEK

August 10, 2005

Ah yes, why would good poetry be in your rag. Rimbaud wasn't published at the first try. Neither was Henry Miller. Why should u pic [sic] up on something hip and honest. Good luck on your pathetic rag.

Yours truly,
BRODIE DAKIN

Taddle Creek so enjoys receiving letters from its readers. *Taddle Creek* especially enjoys receiving letters that don't yell at *Taddle Creek*. Please send *Taddle Creek* mail of any kind, be it about your submission, something you read in the magazine, something you read in another magazine, or anything else that's on your mind. *Taddle Creek* will happily run a regular letters page if enough letters are received to warrant doing so. A magazine just isn't a magazine without a letters page. Letters may be sent via E-mail to editor@taddlecreekmag.com, or by post to P.O. Box 611, Station P, Toronto, Ont. M5S 2Y4. ✉

TADDLE CREEK

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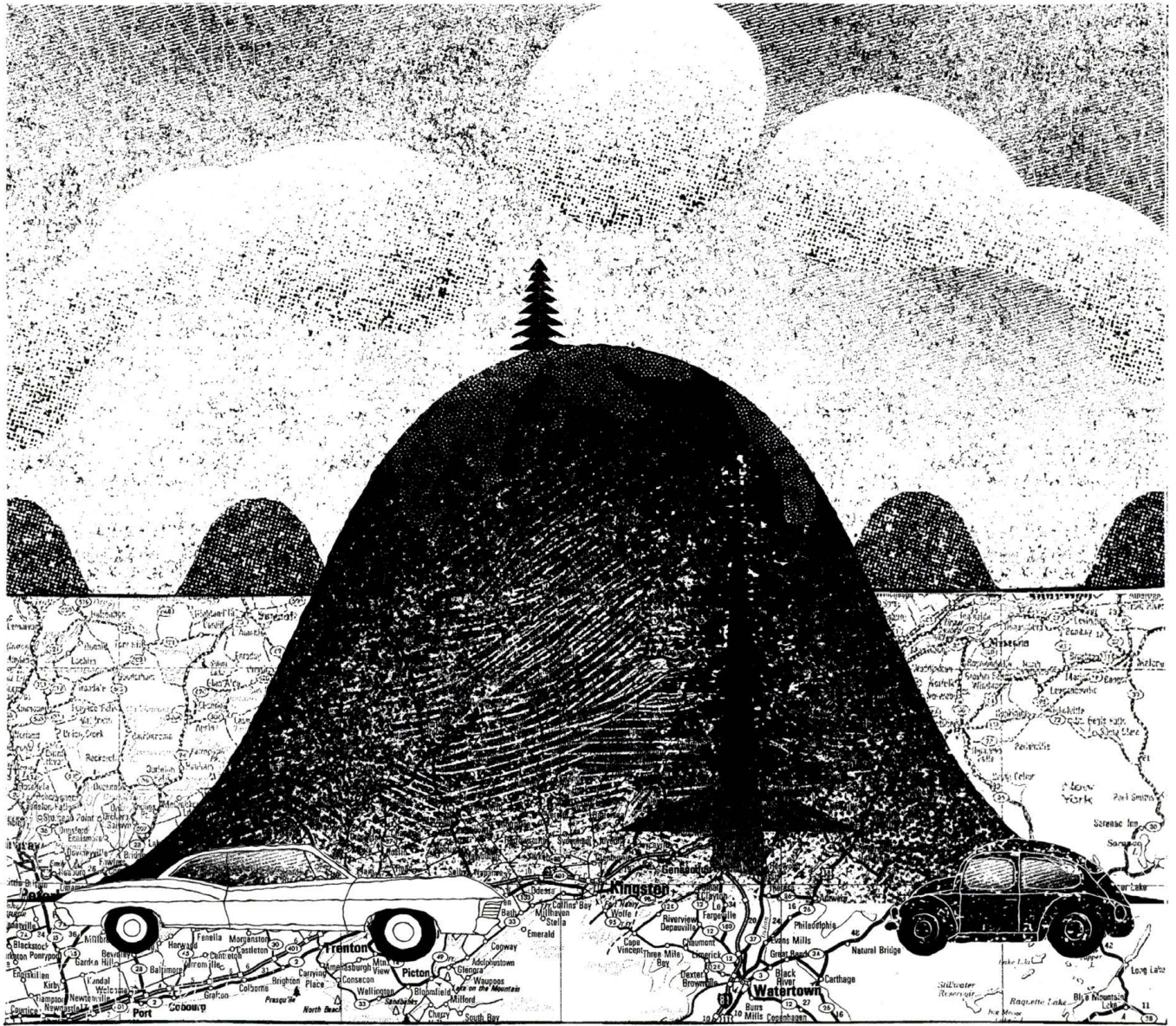
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BIG TRIP

BY SUSAN MOCKLER

The rattle of a faltering engine drew June to the front of the house. She pushed aside the curtain and peered out. Bud, a balding man in his early forties, was rummaging through the trunk of his rusted tan '67 Biscayne. His large belly was barely contained by a white cotton T-shirt with a peeling yellow decal of a leering happy face, a black tongue protruding out of one corner of its mouth. A few inches of soft white flesh covered in matted black hair was visible where the T-shirt ended and a

pair of tightly belted beige Bermudas began. Under one arm he carried a stack of shiny red books, under the other, a case of beer. A can opener glistening gold in the sunlight dangled from his belt loop, fastened with the twist tie from a green garbage bag.

Bud was not the sort of man June's mother usually dated. Mona preferred men with a little more polish. But over the past couple of months, he'd been edging more and more into their lives.

The doorbell rang. "Loser," thought

June. Turning away, she walked back down the hall and into the kitchen. "What to eat, what to eat." There was no doubt about it, June was gaining weight. Just when she was supposed to be blossoming into womanhood, growing tall and willowy like the heroines of the romance novels she'd read at her grandmother's house last summer, June had stopped growing up and had started widening out. She wasn't sure how it had happened. Even worse, her mother had noticed it too. For her thirteenth

birthday, Mona had given her *The Teen-Age Diet Book*, inscribing it, "My Dearest June, To help you be all you can be." One of the suggestions in the book her mother had particularly liked was to cut pictures of models from magazines and tape them to the refrigerator. Unbridled cravings could be reined in by these pouty, sultry *Cosmo* girls poised in accusation as you reached for a piece of pie or chocolate cake. "Remember girls," chided the book's author, "nothing tastes as good as being thin feels."

Mona told her she was lucky her complexion was good. "Peaches-and-cream skin," she called it. But it was clear to June as she tore the wrapping off the present that came with the book, a box filled with cosmetics, lotions, and creams, that the rest of her needed work. June had blinked back tears as she removed the gifts: a pink and white Remington Princess electric shaver, eyebrow tweezers for thinning and shaping, eyelash curlers, a wand of Cover Girl mascara to lengthen and thicken, and a jar of florescent green Dippity-do gel to add lustre to her dull, limp hair. Later that night she'd rammed the presents under her bed, then snuck into the kitchen and shoveled down a third piece of mocha almond fudge ice-cream cake that had been special-ordered for the occasion.

The doorbell continued buzzing, insistent now, short and long alternating rings. "Like that's going to help," June thought. Smiling to herself, she scanned the contents of the refrigerator. Carrot and celery sticks, brown at the ends, floated in murky water in an uncovered Tupperware bowl. A few shriveled oranges lurked behind the skim milk. She opened the freezer and removed a small container of chocolate ice cream she'd hidden in the back. As the door banged shut, the picture of Charlie's Angels that Mona had ripped from an old TV guide shook loose and floated to the floor. June stomped it with her foot. She grabbed one of the dirty spoons from the counter, rinsed it under the tap, sat down at the table, and began to eat.

"June!" Mona shouted. "Jesus, June! Where are you?" June kept eating. "Bud's here and I'm not ready. June, for God's sake, answer me!"

Mona's heels clicked fast and loud as she entered the kitchen. "Be there in a minute," she yelled in the direction of

PLUG INTO THE FAITHLESS

When you blow
your nose it's like
machine-gun rounds
going off, you know? And then
everybody knows, from the
corner store to
Room 109 in the hospital,
you've been crying.

God knows I don't wanna make
you cry,
but I ain't got much else to do,
except collect and preserve things: coffee
grounds and change, bus transfers, and
moist Ziploc bags, Super 7 lotto tickets.

And certain things, like tears, well,
you should keep to yourself.

Everyone here knows
which girls're
prepared to drink too much, are future-
obsessed, always talking about
their time, coming. Not like some folk—
waiting for Jesus is enough.
But not even Jesus would just sit around,
you're fond of saying.

Through Mum's curtainless window,
trees do nothing but sag brown tears,
dry in my hand when I
try to touch them. You laugh,
say, "You're a funny one,"
kiss my cheek,
would I take you out of here,
stop carrying so many dry tears?

the front door. "Didn't you hear me?
Jesus! You're not eating ice cream, are
you? It's ten o'clock in the morning!"

"Leave me alone. *Just leave me alone!*"

"What do you mean, leave you alone?
Are you even packed yet? We have to
get going. I don't know what's wrong
with you." Her mother ground out her
cigarette. "Get *moving*. Right now."

"I'm not going."

"You are going."

"No. I'm not."

"You are. Stop eating that goddamn
ice cream and pack your stuff."

"No."

"I mean it. Get in your room right now.

For Christ's sake, you're the one who's al-
ways bugging me to take you to Montreal."

June thought of the nights just after
her father had left, when she and her
mother would sit huddled over an old
school atlas, planning summer vaca-
tions they never took. They would
trace the pink and yellow highways
from London, around Lake Ontario,
along the St. Lawrence, to Montreal, the
most exotic Canadian destination they
could imagine. They had even written
to the chamber of commerce for city
maps and tourist brochures. The big
trip they would take one day, just the
two of them.

"You've got to lay it all out," you said,
one time.
"Everything on a card, baby."

"She's a gambling kinda lady,"
Mum says,
whenever I mention seeing you in town,
at work where you
shovel men into hazy graves.
"A poker habit. Not your kind, boy."

But I know your kind. My kind.
Certain things I keep to myself.

You will wait out the stars,
plug into faithless psychic hotlines and
newspaper horoscopes, a daily cross-
reference of
information: "Expect a bad-luck
stretch, gossipy co-workers, a secret
revealed." Ten years of a life
defined by Wal-Mart,
the perimeter of aisle shadows.

"Don't press your luck," is all I know
to say to
you these days, though you do not hear,
are empty going in
and out of elevators, my arms, and
office doors,
dreams that shift on tectonic plates.

Like everyone else here, you shift
between award shows
and murders, union strikes and spring.
And the stars, they don't move—
just sometimes, disappear.

—ADRIENNE WEISS

"Yeah. But not with him."

"Oh, so *that's* it. Not with him. Well,
Bud is the only way we can go. You're
lucky I have a friend like Bud who
wants to take us places."

"Bud's a pig. And he's also married.
I wonder how his wife feels about our
little trip."

"She's probably glad we're going, so
she doesn't have to. They don't really get
along, June. I've told you that before."

"Right."

Mona lit another cigarette. Her face
was red and puffy from the shower.
Beads of perspiration had formed on her
forehead and her eyes were bloodshot.
Her hair was rolled tightly in pink

cushioned curlers. She was wearing a
bra, panties, spice-coloured pantyhose,
and black pumps. June hated seeing her
like this. The fleshy intimacy filled her
with revulsion.

"Whether you like it or not, you're com-
ing with us. Go get packed. *Right now!*"

June stood up slowly, as if a huge wad
of bubble gum was reluctantly releasing
her from the chair, pink sticky strands
drawing her back.

The doorbell began ringing again. A
long constant drone.

"Oh *Christ*," Mona said, "Bud's still
at the door! Get going, June. Move,
please." Her mother shifted slightly as
June veered around her, trying to

make it through the doorway without
touching her.

June dragged her suitcase into the
living room. Mona and Bud were on
the couch, paging through one of the
books he'd brought in from the car.
When her mother saw her, she abruptly
withdrew her hand from the inside of
Bud's thigh. "Gross," June thought.

"Hey there, Junie," Bud said, grin-
ning, "all ready for our trip?"

"Like I have a choice," she answered.
"It's June, by the way. Just June."

"Watch it, June," Mona said, grab-
bing a beer from the case on the floor.
"Open this please, would you, Bud?"

June glared at her mother.

"We're just havin' a couple," Bud said,
"to get us going. Then I'll put some in
the cooler, you know, to have a few for
the road."

He wiped condensation from the bot-
tle with his T-shirt. "Here you go, Mona."
He turned to June. "I was just showin'
your mother some of the merchandise
I'll be sellin' at the convention."

Bud was in sales. He was a Hallmark
distributor. Cards for every occasion,
candles of all colours, ceramic figurines
with sentimental sayings littered his
car. He gave the red book to June.

"If you flip to the front there . . ."

She turned the book in her hands and
glanced at the title: *Family Traditions: A
Hallmark Guide to Creating Special Times*.
As she passed it back to Bud, some of
the black ink from the title smeared and
rubbed off on her palm.

"Your . . . *merchandise book* seems
kinda cheap," she said, wiping her hand
on her cut-offs.

"June!" her mother said.

"That's O.K., Mona. Junie here—I
mean June—is right. It's whatcha call
the lower end of the market. It's really
what's inside that counts. And it's pretty
special, I think. Pretty special, indeed."
He yawned without covering his mouth.
"Well, ladies, time to go. Or, *frappe le
chemin*, as they say in 'K'bec."

I put most of the stuff in the trunk,
June, so you'd have lots of room
there in the back. Well, we're all set,
ladies," Bud said, jangling his keys and
whistling as he slid into the driver's seat.

"Damn. I forgot something," Mona
said, opening the passenger door. "Back
in a flash."

As June climbed in, the vinyl upholstery of the seat was hot and stuck to the back of her bare thighs. The car reeked of stale cigarettes. She struggled with a handle and rolled down the window, wriggled in further, and settled in behind Bud.

"This is for you," he said, handing her a pillow, "in case you get sleepy, want to take a nap."

June tucked it in beside her, against the hard edge of the door. The seat was long and wide, and even straightening her legs she could lie almost fully out.

A few minutes later Mona reappeared, hurrying down the stairs and flinging herself back into the front seat.

"There," Mona said, a little breathless.

"What's that?" June said, eyeing the ratty plastic bag Mona stored at her feet.

"Just something I wanted for the trip. Now," Mona said, settling into her seat, "we're all set."

As Bud pulled out of the driveway and headed for the 401, June remembered the car trips she used to take with her parents, back when they were still a family. They'd had a Volkswagen Bug, blue-grey, dotted with red rust. It was the car that had brought her home from the hospital when she was born, and the car her dad drove away in the day he left, more than two years ago now, just before her eleventh birthday.

Mostly, they travelled to her grandparents' cottage. Her parents were always late and always rushing and always in a bad mood. Her father would pack the back seat so there was only a small space remaining, just big enough for June. The cage that held her cat, Smokey, was right beside her. From time to time she would peek at him through the wooden slats to make sure he was still alive. Up front, her parents would argue about who was to blame for each wrong turn, about how long they would stay at her grandparents', and about other things she didn't understand.

She hated those trips, trapped in the back for six, sometimes seven hours at a time. But she loved it when they finally arrived—seeing her grandparents, riding in the motorboat, and wading into the cold, clear lake.

On route, her parents often stopped at legion halls of small towns they were passing through, towns like Orangeville and Fenelon Falls. June waited in the car, the window rolled down a crack,

THE NIGHTS WE SPEND WITH OTHERS

Are fewer and farther between loneliness and sacrament. My best friend gave her bottom half to a skinny bar-back last week, he crawled between her legs, two days drunk. Had to finish herself off, said, All the same, he was the best I've had in a while.

We're modestly sober, so our slim lists fatten when we've had a few—we recount duct tape and the ties that bound anything that moved. Open fists, strawberry sundaes, the strange ones, feeding like fawns 'til you knee them into place, and those who talk about their fathers until dawn.

Time alone makes a woman do things, think things that would scare you stiff. I led a married banker to my kitchen counter and left my mark with tooth and nail. A young man in Jerusalem, because he had a scar like a ribbon around his neck, or because he looked sideways, all eyelash, my way. And at the time I thought, I could love him.

Spend a night alone with me, wet my bottle, light us a smoke, promise not to look me in the eye—
There's no one I'd rather be with tonight.

—EVIE CHRISTIE

looking through picture books, glad for the quiet minutes with Smokey while her parents drank at the bar. She'd imagine the sour, salty taste and the cool smoothness of the pickled egg they'd bring her when they returned. Sometimes, she got two.

Bud was an idiot, June thought, but at least he and Mona didn't fight, and June had so much room back here, all to herself. Opening her knapsack, she sorted through the items she'd brought for the car ride: one bag of Fritos, two Mars bars, two cans of Orange Crush, and two books. She pulled out *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*, by Judy Blume. She'd borrowed it from Debbie, who'd read it as part of the mother-daughter group she attended with her mom. The group was sponsored by WomanPower, a feminist organization to which some of her friends' mothers belonged. June's mother was not a member. Mona and June had registered for the group, but had gone only once.

"I'm sorry," Mona had said after the first night, "I can't do it. I'm just too tired after work." June kept up with the group's reading list, and Debbie lent her the books.

June's other book for the trip was *The Happy Hooker*, by Xaviera Hollander. She had found the musty book in a box in the basement. She read it at night, under the covers, with a flashlight. During the day, she read Judy Blume.

June stared out the window as they drove east: past the flat farm fields near Thamesford, home of the Ingersoll cheese factory, and the cement works at Beechville. Her mother's shout pulled her back into reality.

"June! Bud's talking to you."

"Oh. Sor-ry!"

"I was just sayin', June, I have a little job for you. Same one I give my daughter, Chrissy, when we take a trip. See, I put the cooler down there by your feet? On your mother's side? On the floor?"

"Yeah . . ."

"Well, those travellers should be plenty cold by now. When I say, 'Beer me,' I want you to reach in there and pass one up front. By the way, I put a couple of extras in there for you too, Mona."

"Thanks, Bud. I may have just one."

"You gotta be careful, June. Pass them real low, between the seats. Otherwise, the cops might see and get the wrong idea," he said. "O.K.? You got it?"

"Yeah . . . I got it," she said, passing a beer up front. She ripped open her bag of Fritos and picked up her book.

June read and dozed as they headed east, past Toronto, Oshawa, Cobourg. They stopped at a rest station outside of Belleville to stretch their legs, "use the facilities, and chow down," as Bud put it. In the Esso restaurant, food was served cafeteria style. Mona and Bud waited with their trays by the hot plate, Bud chatting at length with the waitress, asking for her recommendation, the "specialty" of the house. June hung back, trying to pretend she wasn't with them. Didn't Bud notice the other people in line behind him, their shuffling feet and their exasperated sighs? June dawdled by the display case, faking interest in the tiny glasses of orange, grapefruit, and tomato juice, and the rows of desserts: cherry and lime Jell-O cubes with dollops of whipped cream, rice and chocolate pudding topped with maraschino cherry halves.

"June," Bud hollered, "come and give Betty here your order. She's sold your mother and I on the hot turkey sandwich. Should we make it three?"

Head down, June slunk over to join them.

"O.K.," she said. "Order me the sandwich. I'm going to go find a table." Anything, she thought, to get away.

"Good thinking, kiddo." Bud said. "We're right behind you."

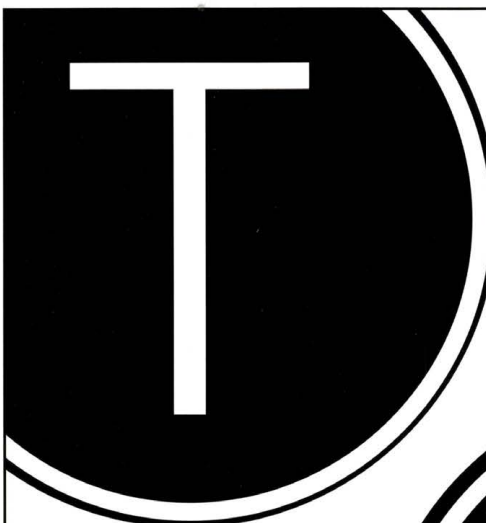
Bud dug into his meal with gusto. "That Betty was right on the money. Gravy tastes just like homemade."

"Does your *wife* make good gravy, Bud?"

"June!" Mona said sharply.

"Well, to be honest, June," Bud said slowly, "my wife really isn't much of a cook. In fact, I make most of the meals at our place."

"Well, I'm glad your enjoying your lunch," Mona said, reaching across the table and patting his hand. "I like to see



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a man eat. As for me," she said, lighting a cigarette, "I'm stuffed."

"But you barely touched it," Bud said. "Not hungry, Mona?"

"Just watching my waistline," Mona said, looking over at June.

June glared at her mother and shoved a forkful of French fries and gravy into her mouth. She chewed noisily, her mouth partly open.

"Your manners, June," Mona said. "Really!"

"Really!" June mimicked. "Really!"

Back on the road, Bud shoved a tape in the car stereo and turned up the volume.

"Oh God," June groaned, covering her ears, as "Are You Lonesome Tonight?" blared from the speakers.

"Don't like the King? My Chrissy is a big fan."

"Figures," thought June. "Can we please listen to something else?"

"We can see if I've got something more to your taste," Bud said. "Mona, rustle around in the glove compartment. There's a few tapes in there."

"I have something," June said, thrusting a cassette into her mother's hand. "Can we please hear that? Please?"

"Bay City Rollers?" Mona said, turning the tape in her hand. "No, June. We're not playing this."

"Can't say as I've heard of them," Bud said.

"They're some teenybop boy band June and her friends listen to. You wouldn't like them at all."

"They're great musicians," June said, her voice rising. How could her mother even say that? "You don't know *anything*."

"I know we're not going to listen to it," Mona said firmly. "Bud and I are big Elvis fans. It's his car, and we will enjoy the music he likes."

"But—"

"I don't want to hear another word." "I hate you! You ruin everything."

June flung herself across the back seat and turned on her side, facing away from them. She buried her head in the pillow, squeezed her eyes tight to stop from crying, and within a few minutes was sound asleep.

"Wake up, June!" Mona's voice startled her. "Wake up. We're almost there."

She sat up and looked out the window. She rubbed sleep from her eyes and brushed corn-chip crumbs from her lap.

"Where are we, Mom?"

"Dorval. About half an hour from Montreal. You know, Bud, this is the first time we've been outside Ontario, June and me. The very first time. Right, June?"

"Yeah. Hey, Mom!" June said, so caught up in the excitement she forgot to be mad. "Look. There's a sign in French."

"Where? Oh, I see it," she said, turn-

under her seat, pulling the ratty plastic bag onto her lap. She took out the atlas, the one she and June had pored over years ago. Its pages were crammed with creased city maps of downtown Montreal and tattered pamphlets highlighting attractions and sites.

"We still have that? Where'd you find it?" June had assumed that the atlas, like their plans, had long since disappeared.

"I've kept it tucked away," Mona said, smiling. "Just in case."

June leaned over the back of Mona's seat, breathing in the smoky perfumed scent of her mother. "Where are we gonna go first?"

"I'm not sure. Maybe to the old city?"

"Well, this is us here," Bud said, pulling up to the Howard Johnson's. The sign out front read, "WELCOME HALLMARKERS BIENVENUE."

Mona clicked open a compact. She applied red lipstick and dabbed powder on her nose. She passed a hairbrush to June. "Comb your hair, honey. You want to look nice for Montreal."

June gave her hair a few quick strokes.

Bud hopped out of the car and removed the case of red books and three other boxes from the trunk. He took out a "HI! IT'S BUD!" name tag and pinned it to his T-shirt.

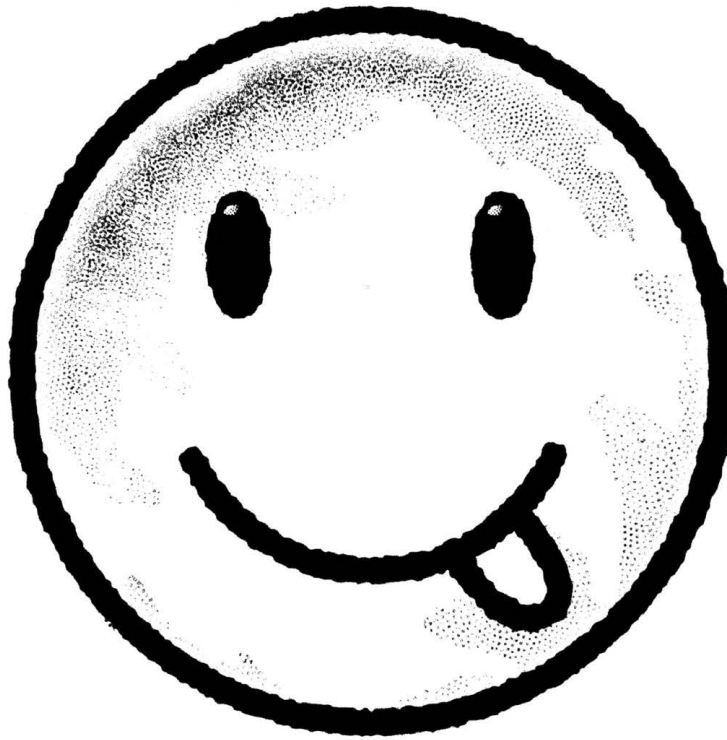
He slid out the suit bag he'd stored carefully across the luggage.

"Looks like I got all the necessities. Here you go, ladies," he said, tossing the keys to Mona.

"Come up here with me," Mona said to June, ejecting the Elvis tape and replacing it with the Bay City Rollers' *Greatest Hits*.

June climbed into the front seat as the first notes of "Shang-A-Lang" filled the car.

"Well, here we go, June," Mona said, starting the car. "Here we go." ♪



ing to her daughter. "So, Bud and I were talking, June. When we get to the convention, in about ten minutes, Bud'll have to go in and make an appearance. So, I thought, if you wanted, you and I, well, we could go right into downtown Montreal. Check things out. Maybe go into one of those sidewalk cafés? Have coffee in a bowl, like we saw that time on TV?"

"O.K." June said, "I guess that would be O.K." She didn't want to seem too eager, didn't want Mona to think she was completely forgiven, but June was thrilled.

Mona touched June's arm. "That's great, then. That's our plan." She reached

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

I, TANIA

Excerpts from the novel.

BY BRIAN JOSEPH DAVIS

The highest display of ostentatious wealth and avarice most socialists get to see is a lineup at the Olive Garden. Growing up a member of a media baron's family provided me a view into a world only dreamed of in the frothiest, most paranoid nightmares.

One day, while I was playing with my cats (Pufnstuf and Tapestry, if you must know), I overheard a conversation in the next room between my father and the head of his publishing division.

"Sir, you're going to love what marketing has come up with. As you know, the most popular paperbacks are the hospital romances and the soldier-of-fortune series. Combined, they're sixty per cent of the market. Marketing thinks they can grab the other forty per cent by *literally* combining the two—"

"Keep talking," my father replied.

"—into an *atrocious-romance series*. The gist would be: soldiers, mercenaries, national guardsman, etc., wreak havoc. Doctor A treats victims—passionately, altruistically. Nurse B falls in love with Doctor A, convinces him to enjoy life. We can mix it up, too. Sometimes it could be Stasi Agent A beats student leaders—passionately, altruistically—and then has to convince Nurse B that dissent must be crushed. And here's the cost-saving measure: real historical atrocity settings that can cut editorial time in half. We'll just rewrite newspaper reports from archives we already own. In thirty years they'll call it synergy."

"Real-life atrocities? Can you do that?"

"Try me"

"Hmm, O.K., the U.S. firebombing of Tokyo."

"In a city of ash," the executive intoned as he pantomimed batting flames out, "her heart smouldered while his went out to a hundred thousand dead. Could she steal the flame of his passion?"

After several non-committal hmms and clucks, my father threw out, "The Pinochet coup?"

"She was a Marxist nurse who wanted a new world. He was a C.I.A. agent who wanted to overthrow her heart. Will

Cupid get these two in his crosshairs?"

"The Spanish Civil War."

"She was a Catalanian communist republican with centrist leanings toward liberal democracy. He was a legitimist monarchist who wanted to break free of his ruffian Falangist friends. But in a country with six thousand dead priests, could they even find an altar?"

"The Russian Civil War."

"She was damaged goods. He was a doctor in a country of fifteen million dead, but poetry calmed his soul. It was a love caught in the fire of revolution and—"

"In a land of guns and ice, there is the great sound of battle and the greater silence of lovers. Blah blah blah. Cue 'Lara's Theme.' Already done."

I went to my room to practise bayonet moves with a pen, striking out the pig eyes of the David Cassidy poster above my bed. I would have much to teach my brothers and sisters when they came to rescue me several years later.

The kidnapping: late-night knock, door kicked in, rifle butt to Donald's head.

Donald ducking, running yellow. Take his billfold. Blindfold. Over shoulder. Into car.

Reader, you were read *that* part of the story every night of your childhood, to warn you away from strangers bearing petitions and organic couscous. But what you need to know is how I went from captive to general. It was easy. I'm rich. A process as entrenched as firm handshakes, weekends, defenestrated millionaires, fairy tales.

In the back seat of the car, I asked, "Where are you taking me?"

Without turning around, a man spoke with military cadence: "You have been taken prisoner by the Symbionese Liberation Army! We will use you to force your corporate-pig newspaper-baron liar father to feed every poor person in California! You will be treated in accordance with the Geneva Conven-

tion and guarded by a police informant, five academics, and a former homecoming queen! You will be taken to 1827 Golden Gate Avenue, Apartment 6, with a bright and sunny lounge that looks out over the street! Our neighbour is Rhonda, a pottery instructor! She watches our cat when we're gone! It is only five blocks away from F.B.I. headquarters! You are being driven there in a tan Chevrolet Impala! We will be taking the I-580 exit and turning left on the I-80 westbound, for twenty minutes!"

"How long will you keep me?"

"I can't tell you that! It's classified!"

Into closet. You heard that my captors were Marxist brainwashers. The reality was closer to a conversation I overheard between three women talking outside the door.

"Gabi, Zoya, make sure she doesn't leave this room until I come and get her."

"Don't leave the room even if you come and get her. Yes!"

"No, no. Until I come and get her."

"Until you come and get her, we're not to enter the room."

"No, no, no. You stay in the room and make sure she doesn't leave."

"And you'll come and get her."

"Right."

"So Zoya and I don't need to do anything, apart from just stop her entering the room."

"No, no. Leaving the room."

"Right, we'll stay here until you get back."

"And, uh, make sure she doesn't leave."

"What?"

"Make sure she doesn't leave."

"The prisoner?"

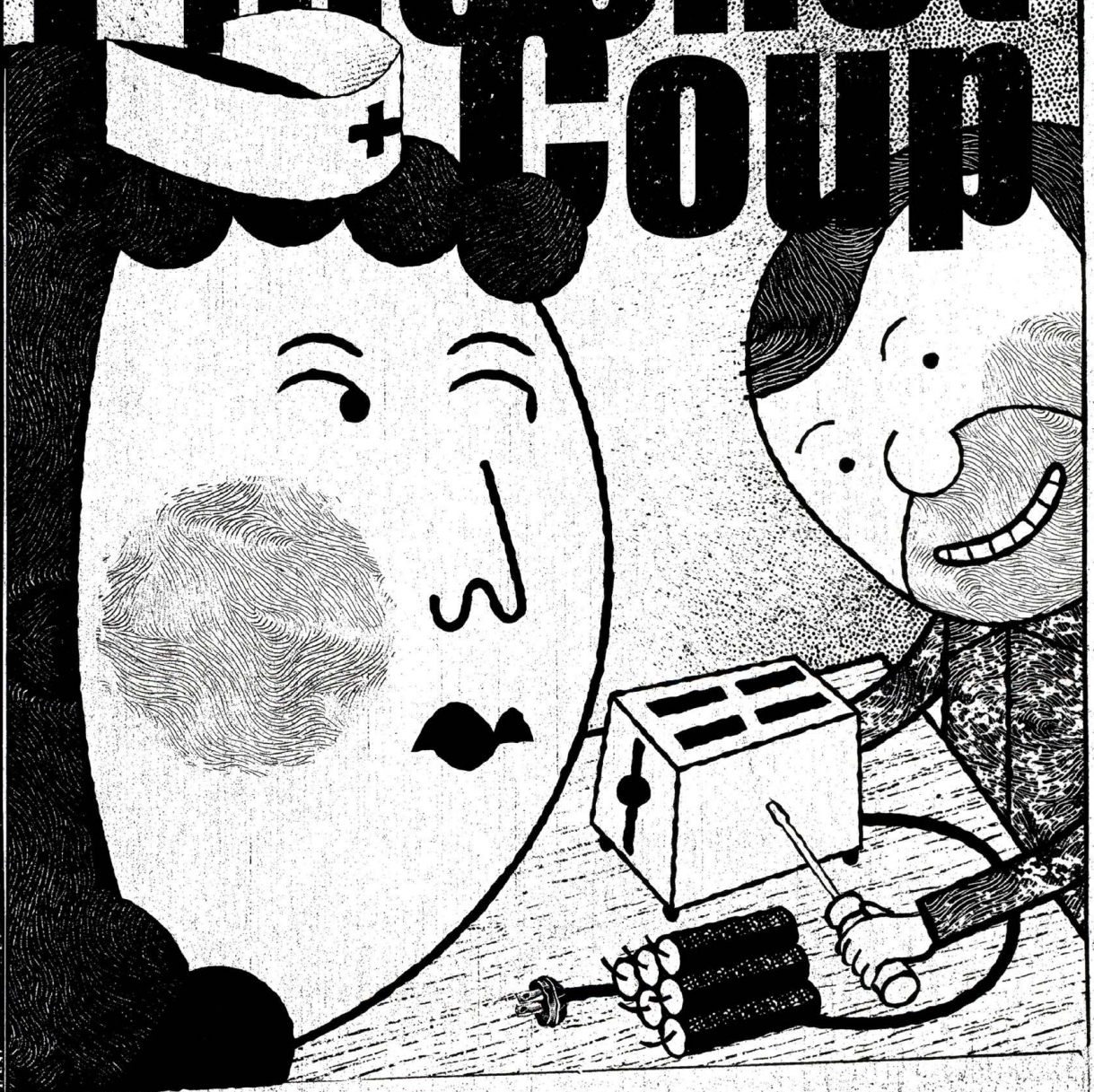
"Yes, make sure she doesn't leave."

"Oh, yes, of course. I thought you meant Zoya. You know, it seemed weird, having to guard her when she's a comrade and all."

After I was let out of the closet (they came asking for my help with the reel-to-reel tape machine—it wasn't plugged in), I saw how small and squalid the apartment was. On the wall, a large banner

She was a Marxist nurse who wanted a new world.
He was a C.I.A. agent who wanted to overthrow her
heart. Will Cupid get these two in his crosshairs?

The Pinochet Coup



The Pinochet Coup

Reprinted from News

with the S.L.A.'s symbol. Insignificant, but effective. My "captors" were no more than self-taught commies from suburbia—all buzzwords—tired fatigues. Simple characters.

They were in terrible shape, my bears, with much starchy porridge in those early days, and vile, dumb, damaged Teko screaming, "Eating pork is like, for pigs," as if it were a pleasant, smart, together thing to say. Taking over this unit would be easy.

One morning, while I dismantled a toaster (its wires are fantastic triggers for pipe bombs), Cinque came and asked, "What are you doing?"

"Making a bomb."

"A ba?" raising a shocked hand to his mouth.

"No, not a ba, a bomb."

Sitting down, he said, "We are not one cell of hundreds. They," pointing to the slumped, passed-out soldiers of the people's army, "said they had friends who could help out—nutritional charts, taxes, book deals, some new uniforms—but I don't see them. I keep asking,

'Where are these friends?' and I don't see them." He was an embarrassed parent.

We went to the living room to talk to the rest. "And who is the S.L.A.?" I asked Cinque.

"Refuse, found in waterfront communes."

"Shanghaied?"

"Just lost, drunken men," Cinque said, "who don't know where they are and no longer care."

There was a muffled exchange from the passed-out bodies.

"Where are we?"

"I don't care!"

Interested, I moved along and asked Cinque, "And these?"

"These are lost, drunken women who don't know who they are but *do* care. And these are women who know where they are and care, but don't drink."

Again, hungover croaks.

"I don't know who I am."

"And I don't drink!"

Cinque crouched down to Yolanda.

"Do you care?"

"No."

Cinque looked up at me. "Put her on guard duty and give her a drink."

"What do you drink?" I asked her.

"I don't care."

Concerned, I asked, "How is their understanding of theory?"

"These men," Cinque said, "feel the pig emptiness of fascist America before they understand it."

Inevitably came the murmurs.

"I feel pig emptiness."

"I don't understand fascist America."

That night, Cinque made me second-in-command. We went to work on the announcement of my coming-out ball.

But first, like my comrades, a new name. It had to be chosen in honour of a woman who revolted before me, and, as the members of the heiress class who took up armed struggle is not as small a group as one would think, it wasn't easy to narrow down.

With her elegant cigarette filters, Rothschild heiress Baroness Nica de Koenigswarter could be found in the early sixties gossiping at many a back-alley meeting of the Algerian National Liberation Front.

The Movimiento Comunal Salvadoreño only began in earnest after Francesca Hilton, resplendent in pearls and Yves Saint Laurent mosquito net, was spotted trudging



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MORNING OBSERVATION NO. 49

After a night of *Thin Man* games (I'll take five more—line them up right here!),

I've discovered that mornings aren't so witty when you don't own

a proper dressing gown and I am, in fact, not Nora, or Myrna,

my mouth too dry for a pithy retort, my mouth too dry to say pithy.

—KATHLEEN OLMSTEAD

through the jungle with Sandinistas.

The I.R.A. was a mess of tweed until Consuelo Vanderbilt introduced sharp black berets to their look.

Anne Morgan, daughter of J. P. Morgan, used her equestrian skills to teach Pancho Villa's raiders better jumping techniques.

P.F.L.P. hijacker Leila Khaled was a hopeless unknown until Mellon heiress Cordelia Scaife May snuck several scintillating items about Khaled into the society columns.

Cereal heiress Marjorie Merriweather Post was known to visit Fusako Shigenobu, the exiled leader of the Japanese Red Army, in Jordan.

And what was Sacco and Vanzetti's untellable alibi for the robbery and murders they were falsely charged with? They were receiving guns from Geraldine Rockefeller Dodge, who at the time was separated from Marcellus Hartley Dodge, scion of the Remington Arms Company, but fully married to her nascent anarchism.

In the end, I chose the name Tania. It was also the name taken by Haydée Tamara Bunke Bider, who had spied her way inside all the mansions of Bolivian aristocracy. When she lost her cover, she joined the guerrillas.

Teko, Yolanda, and I found a motel in Anaheim, just outside of Los Angeles. The streets were an open pharmacy, strewn with broken beer bottles, methadone boxes, used condoms, used

pregnancy tests, rubbing alcohol flasks, cotton swabs, diapers, Bengay tubes, hosiery, Wet-Naps. Scattered here and there were echinacea capsules, Visine, Visine Triple Action, disposable Bic razors, and several different lines of L'Oreal cosmetics.

We took our room, Teko kicking a stray Ace bandage out from underfoot. For three days we watched the news reports. Again. Again. Again. Yolanda was on the bed, in shock, struggling to come up with something witty to say about nearby Disneyland.

"Leave it to a pig to glorify . . . a duck? Pirates? Swiss mountains? No, that's not right."

"You know, Tania, Walt was a Leninist," Teko said.

"I thought he was a Nazi pedophile."

"You mean he only molested Nazis?"

"No, Teko. I meant a Nazi, as well as a pedophile."

"That's just what they want you to think. Dig this. What's outside our room?"

"An infinitely expansive and vast public toilet?"

"Anaheim, exactly. Nightclubs, strip joints, and second-generation hot-dog vendors. Why? Disney fucking land. No, no, follow this. It's heavy. An ex-girlfriend of mine used to work at Disney Corporate. Walt spent all his time trying to create this utopia, and what happens? Parasites drawing the blood out of his vision. So what does Walt do? Disney fucking World! The world rebuilt without pain and suffering and ghettoes. What do you get when you

make an acronym out of 'Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow?'" "EPCT."

"No, you gotta count the 'O.'"

"Ohh-kay, I see. And—"

"And so Walt uses dummy corporations and fronts to buy twenty-seven-thousand acres of land in Florida. Once the property was his, he started a huge lobbying campaign, which continued after his death, *just like Lenin*. They got exemptions from state, county, and local authorities. So now there's a buffer zone, *just like Czechoslovakia*, to work as a physical and political border to protect his vision."

"Teko."

"Yes?"

"I just don't care."

"You really hate me, don't you, Tania?"

"Oh no. I don't like you very much though."

"Tania?"

"What do you want?"

"You're generous to a fault."

"Not to yours."

"You're wonderful. There's malevolence in you, Tania."

"Now I'm getting self-conscious. It's funny. I—"

"Malevolence that comes out of your eyes, in your voice, in the way you stand there, in the way you walk. You're lit from within, Tania. You've got fires banked down in you, Molotovs and burning cop cars."

"I don't seem made of ice to you?"

"No, you're made out of flesh and blood. That's the blank, unholy surprise of it. You're the golden girl, Tania. Full of force and terror and tactics. You destroy—passionately, altruistically—but there's more to life than that. Hey, you've got tears in your eyes."

"Shut up, shut up. Oh, Teko. Keep talking, keep talking. Look at me with those stupid blue eyes. Talk, will you?"

Teko and I made love while inconsolable Yolanda searched for a successful end to her aphorism.

"A deer? A cricket? Chipmunks? Dalmatians? An elephant? A marionette? Teacups? Dwarves? A pixie?" ☞

Brian Joseph Davis is an artist and writer living in West Symbia (a.k.a. Parkdale). He is the author of *Portable Altamont* (Coach House, 2005). His next book, *I, Tania*, will be published this fall by ECW.

PROFILE

SURVIVING SUBURBIA

Elyse Friedman followed her lucky star to a successful career as an author, poet, screenwriter, and, maybe someday, artist.

BY SUZANNE ALYSSA ANDREW

Last June, when Elyse Friedman was looking through her closet for something to wear to the National Magazine Awards ceremony, she didn't realize the event was such a glitzy affair. "I probably looked like a Club Monaco sales clerk, because I was wearing black pants and a white shirt," Friedman says. "I was afraid all those editors were going to hand me their empty wine glasses."

Although nominated twice in the fiction category, for stories published in two different magazines (including this one), Friedman had no idea she would end up being her own toughest competition. "I fully expected [the author] Wayne Johnston to win, so it was a surprise," says Friedman of her first-place finish that evening. Remembering the event's champagne and sparkling dresses, she grins widely as she adds, "It was my Oscar moment."

It may not be her last. In addition to having written two novels and a collection of poetry, Friedman is also a seasoned and formally trained screenplay writer. "You have to make [screenwriting] visual," she says. "Whatever's going on in a character's head in fiction has to be made cinematic." Screenplays must also fit into a rigid, three-act structure. Yet connecting the prescribed plot points required of scripts has added muscle to Friedman's prose. As a result, she has become an expert storyteller whose work, influenced by the visual emphasis and linguistic economy of screenplay style, offers plot-driven, slyly satirical escapades through cities and suburbia.

Describing her work as comedy with a serious underbelly, Friedman writes with the dramatic-edged humour characteristic of her favourite movies: *Harold and Maude*, *The Apartment*, and *Annie Hall*. And because Friedman often fuels her work with tales from her years of wanderings en route to establishing her writing career, her characters constantly veer into unpredictable territory. Fried-

man's fiction is particularly enjoyable because, like film, it contains something too often elusive in what is considered "serious" literature: entertainment.

Friedman was born in Toronto, in 1963, and raised in North York—then a still-growing city of its own on Toronto's northern border—together with her older sister, Robyn, and younger brother, Danny. When the Friedman children were small, their father, Otto, was a furrier who, to their delight, did most of his work in the basement. When Friedman was a child, her mother, Annette, who had worked as a legal secretary for seventeen years, went back to school to study law. Mature students, especially ones with families, were considered such anomalies at the time that the *Toronto Star* published her photo upon graduation. "It was amazing," Friedman says. "Now that I have a kid, I realize how hard it must have been for her. Had I only known then, I would have behaved differently."

Friedman's childhood was neither happy nor unhappy. "We were kind of weird," she says of her family. "I wasn't ever very fond of suburbia, and I always felt we were out of place there." Yet in her first novel, *Then Again*, Michelle, her like-minded protagonist, makes an uncanny discovery while revisiting her suburban childhood neighbourhood: "Most of the families appeared quite normal on the surface—2.8 children, Pontiac, barbecue—but there was some serious strangeness going on behind all those double-paned windows and avocado green front doors."

Friedman finished Grade 9 at Zion Heights Junior High, but started Grade 10 half-heartedly. She regularly escaped with her boyfriend, who had access to a van through his job refilling office snack trays. While her brother transformed from a problem child at age thirteen by discovering his musical talent and enrolling in the Claude Watson

School for the Arts, Friedman stalled, and meandered through what would have otherwise been her high-school years. Although she dropped out part-way through Grade 10, she eventually enrolled in an alternative study program and fulfilled her Grade 13 graduation requirements when she was seventeen.

That same year, her family moved downtown, to Toronto's Annex neighbourhood, where Friedman began to flourish. The Annex of the early eighties was filled with Hungarian restaurants and very few cafés—more bohemian (as in eclectic) and far less trendy (as in moneyed) than it is today. "It was a weird thing to do at the time," says Friedman. "But it somehow seemed like the right place for us." Friedman soon fled the nest and moved into an apartment, with two roommates, papering over the windows of a tiny sunroom and calling it home. She then attended the media arts program at Sheridan College, where, in an early bid to become a director, she made a few short films. Yet her student finances were such that immediately after finishing her program she needed to find a steady job. Although a few paltry unpaid production-assistant internships were available, she had no luck finding paid work in the film industry.

Like Michelle in *Then Again*, Friedman took a job as a "slide rat" at a corporate communications company, cleaning trays of slides for visual presentations, a task she describes in her novel as so mind-numbing "a child of four could do it. A dyslexic chimpanzee could pull it off." As if that soul-destroying job wasn't enough to deal with, her mother became seriously ill, passing away when Friedman was twenty-two, an event she remembers as the "most horrible thing in the world." Friedman revisits this tragedy with a steady hand in *Then Again* when Michelle's family assembles around their mother's death-bed: "It is terrible and torturous. Exhale . . . Now



wait and watch and listen for the in-hale," she writes. "Wait and wait too long too long . . . Then, just as you're about to leap from your chair, it comes in a short gasp."

Although Michelle lasts less than a year in what she calls the "golden handcuffs" of her corporate job, Friedman herself stayed shackled for a decade, gradually working her way up the ladder to slide-show producer. Eventually, in an attempt to fulfill her desire to write, she began authoring presentations and other projects of the same ilk. But drafting an annual report for the Four Seasons hotel chain didn't fit at all with the kind of writing she aspired to. The corporate jobs on her résumé made it impossible for her to shift gears in Toronto and be taken seriously as a writer with any modicum of creativity. Though she was able to find some low-paying work for the youth network YTV, her applications for more engaging, better paying writing gigs were ignored. While she began to accept fewer corporate projects, it wasn't until 1992, nearing the age of thirty, that she finally found the resolve to quit completely.

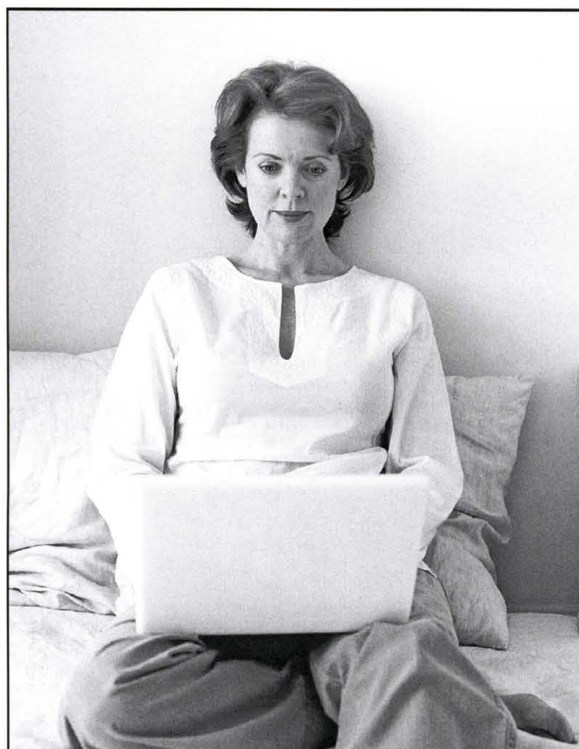
That year, wanting to escape from Toronto for a while, Friedman and her boyfriend at the time decided to move to Winnipeg. She responded to a job posting for *Brand X*, a new CBC radio show based in the city, with a humorous recorded segment about a recently released cookbook of Elvis Presley's favourite recipes, and became the first contributor hired. Writing and producing up to five segments a week for the show, which eventually evolved into *Definitely Not the Opera*, Friedman was finally doing what she wanted to do. Living in Winnipeg also acted as a creative stimulant—like Toronto, there was a significant amount of artistic culture, but the theatre, arts venues, and artists in general in Winnipeg were much more accessible. After three restorative years on the Prairies, Friedman abandoned Portage and Main for the mean streets of Yonge and Bloor, returning to Toronto to nurture her fiction-writing talent at the Humber College School for Writers. Later, she would also study screenwriting at the Canadian Film Centre, where she would meet a number of the writers, producers, and direc-

tors she continues to work with in the film industry today, including her future partner, the writer-director Randall Cole.

Although she has occasionally had to regress, accepting corporate writing gigs to pay the bills, "I haven't done that, I'm happy to say, for years now," Friedman says. "It's my fondest wish to never have to again."

It was through the mentorship element of the Humber College program that Friedman was paired with the man she would come to call her "lucky star," Paul Quarrington. A Toronto-based writer renowned for his book and screenplay *Whale Music*, and the Giller-nominated novel *Galveston*, Quarrington was very encouraging of Friedman's work and urged her to write her first novel. She wrote a manuscript in eight months and gave it to Quarrington, who immediately took it to his agent. A deal was secured with Random House, and *Then Again* was published in 1999, and eventually nominated for the Trillium Book Award.

At the time of *Then Again's* début,



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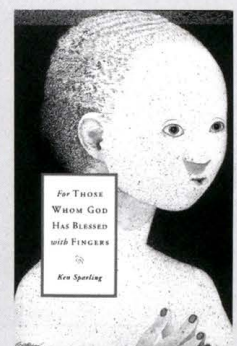
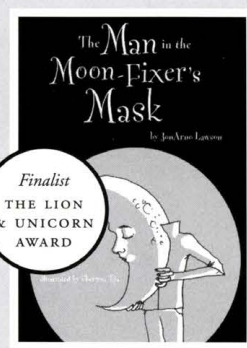
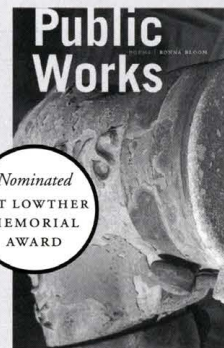
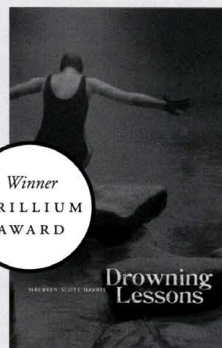
Quarrington described Friedman as the most gifted student he'd ever had. "As soon as I started reading Elyse's stuff I knew she was the real thing," he says today, adding that while he feels writers can be coached, they can't be taught to be creative. "She's the kind of writer that I admire and aspire to be, in that she can be funny, but she's also got serious intentions."

Then Again is the story of two sisters who return to their suburban childhood home for a "blast from the past" party at the request of their wealthy brother, who has restored the house to its nineteen-seventies splendor, complete with green linoleum floors and actors hired to play their parents. Writing about a family very similar to her own, Friedman clearly enjoyed the opportunity to embellish. "I do not have a crazy billionaire brother," she says, but adds that after being away for so long, she has developed "a strange nostalgia for the suburbs." She was particularly interested in exploring how, even as adults, siblings revert to their childhood roles, a dynamic that, in the novel at least, proves to be very funny.

Unlike *Then Again*, whose cover boasts a bold, capitalized type emblazoned over the doubled image of a glowing young woman standing on a lawn, Friedman's follow-up, *Waking Beauty*, is sandwiched between a delicate white and pink cover with soft italicized lower-case type and a sleeping blond be-lying what's inside. Published in 2004 by Three Rivers Press, a U.S. Random House imprint, *Waking Beauty* was marketed as a chick-lit book. Friedman rolls her eyes at the label. "Don't get me started," she says. "Because the premise had to do with beauty, they decided they were going to try and make a whack of dough on it." Friedman vociferously objected to the novel's cover design, but says her publisher forged ahead with its marketing campaign anyway. Readers expecting comfortably fluffy chick lit found exactly the opposite, while fans of *Then Again* were repelled by the girly cover.

Aside from a feel-good prologue that reads like it should be a movie trailer voice-over read by Cameron Diaz, *Waking Beauty* features the signature snappy prose, quick pacing, and sardonic one-liners Friedman wielded in *Then Again*. Carefully interspersed dark moments

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are not candy coated, and chick-lit conventions are spurned. Girl gets guy, not because he loves her for who she is on the inside, but because, for reasons unknown, she turns from overweight and ugly to thin and beautiful overnight. Friedman had the idea for the book while vacationing at a resort in Cuba, where she observed how one family interacted with their painfully ugly teenaged daughter. The teen's body language and inability to have fun with other children suggested her whole life was ruled by her looks. "Even her parents were having trouble loving her," Friedman says.

While writing *Waking Beauty*, Friedman was pouring her own urban angst and everyday frustrations into a collection of poems, titled *Know Your Monkey*, published by ECW in 2003. With riffs on everything from screenwriting to sex, laundry to naturopath patients, the collection resonates with clear writing and sly, startling observations. With a nod to Friedman's former life, for example, one poem describes a frustrated real estate copywriter who torches his portfolio and at the last minute, throws his

socks into the fire too. The collection garnered a bronze Book of the Year Award from *ForeWord Magazine* shortly after its release, and that same year, Friedman's short story "Truth" was selected as a Journey Prize contender and later appeared in the annual anthology *Best Canadian Stories*.

Having escaped the corporate writing mills to eke out a career writing short stories, poems, novels, plays, and screenplays that led the poet and critic Lynn Crosbie to label her "Canada's Hot Plot Queen" in the *Toronto Star*, Friedman's days of struggling to break into the writing industry are over. Her writing nemeses are now lack of time and energy. Both have been in short supply since her son, Max, was born, in 2004. Though she and Cole share parenting duties, the unpredictability of their artistic lives and the constant juggle of multiple projects leaves them both exhausted. At the time she was interviewed for this story, Cole was shooting a movie, her three-year-old was attending part-time preschool, and Friedman was simultaneously working on securing a book deal for her latest fiction

project, writing a screenplay of *Waking Beauty* for a Canadian production company, and rewriting a major screenplay she penned for a Hollywood film. Perhaps inspired by the memory of her indefatigable mother, Friedman is holding up, humour intact.

Although Friedman's family life keeps her busy, she has discovered raising a child also has its creative moments. She can now recite Axel Scheffler's *The Gruffalo* and several Dr. Seuss favourites from memory. And she has also been telling her son a series of what she describes as unpublishable stories about an out-of-control child named Ziggy, who is an amalgam of all the naughty traits Max might possess if he could get away with it. Born with her family's creative genes, Friedman says Max is "already a weird kid," admitting that if there's any karma, she's due for some payback for her teenaged rebellion. Yet she's looking forward to helping Max find his own creative outlet early on, and seeing where it takes him.

Friedman also says healthy competition with Cole helps keeps her creativity

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YOU KNOW, FOR KIDS

Two underground gurus look to the next D.I.Y. generation.

sharp. Though the couple give each other feedback on their work, Friedman admits they also get territorial about ideas. Her National Magazine Award-winning short story, "The Soother," is about a man who likes being treated as an infant. "We were watching *Sextv* one night and there was a segment on adult babies," she says. "I called dibs."

Constantly working from screen to page, and page to screen, Friedman seems always to be plotting her next story.

So far, Friedman's National Magazine Award is her biggest literary coup. At the award ceremony, Friedman again crossed paths with Quarrington, who, it turned out, was one of the fiction judges. Even though submissions are judged blind, Friedman recognized the glimmer of her lucky star. "Everything good that happens to me in the literary world has something to do with you," she told him with admiration.

Friedman's award-winning stories will appear again this fall along with other works, including a novella, in her new collection. As a result of her experiences publishing *Waking Beauty*, Friedman this time chose a Canadian press, House of Anansi, which she fully believes will market her work in a way that honours the content.

In any case, Quarrington, among others, is waiting expectantly for Friedman's next book. "She's the kind of writer whose easel and palette will keep getting bigger," he says. Quarrington's painterly description is apt. With her long struggle to become a writer behind her, it may seem odd, but Friedman's win-the-lottery fantasy is to have an art studio packed with canvasses and paint in her home to muck around in. "I'm a terrible painter, but I love to do it," she admits. "There's something really satisfying about creating something and not using your brain. It's all gut."

For a weird kid who escaped both suburbia and the cogs of corporate culture to become an author, poet, and film writer, adding artist to Friedman's résumé doesn't seem like a stretch at all. ▽

Suzanne Alyssa Andrew lives in Dufferin Grove. Her fiction has appeared in *Kiss Machine* and *Draft*, and she is currently working on a collection of short stories. Her story "Extreme Ironing" appeared in the summer, 2006, issue of *Taddle Creek*.

It's 10 A.M., and in a Parkdale café, Hal Niedzviecki is trying to get his one-and-a-half-year-old daughter, Elly, to stop climbing onto the table. It's not the only kids' table the pop-culture critic and new father has been spending time at recently.

For more than a decade, the thirty-six-year-old has been championing alternative voices, in the form of magazine and newspaper articles, TV and radio shows, and books. But his latest book, *The Big Book of Pop Culture: A How-to Guide for Young Artists*, is expressly designed with teens and pre-teens in mind. Part primer, part manual, the book covers everything from the evolution of pop culture to how to make a zine.

Niedzviecki doesn't see any direct connection between his new book and his recent state of fatherhood, however. Instead, he says, *The Big Book of Pop Culture* is the natural progression of his work as a cultural activist.

"My book is a very modest attempt to fight the prevailing view of why people make culture in our society, which is for fame and fortune and to be on TV," he says. "That's a powerful ideology in our society, and something I think is a diseased idea of what culture is. Kids are the most vulnerable to this concept, and they get sucked into this world."

Niedzviecki isn't the only alternative voice with an eye on the next generation. Emily Pohl-Weary, the co-founder of the zine-turned-magazine *Kiss Machine*, has also been writing with a younger audience in mind recently. Last fall, she published her first book for young adults, *Strange Times at Western High*, the first in a series of misadventures following the spunky teenaged sleuth Natalie Fuentes.

Like Niedzviecki, Pohl-Weary says the move to writing for children was a natural next step in her career. Fuentes was born when Annick Press—which also

published *The Big Book of Pop Culture*—asked Pohl-Weary if she'd ever considered writing for a younger audience.

"Annick Press is a pretty special petri dish, in that they've encouraged me to cultivate an original, urban kind of girl hero who likes underground culture and back alleys more than the traditional teen-girl obsessions," says Pohl-Weary.

While these indie writers may have grown up enough to start writing for kids, are the kids ready for them? "I

don't know about all of children's literature, but it seems to me that the most popular books aimed at teen girls reflect the kinds of things we're seeing on TV and at the movies: fashion-focused, boy-obsessed, high-school soap operas," says Pohl-Weary. "A couple of reviewers have mentioned that it's a relief to discover a smart, strong, sixteen-year-

old girl who thinks for herself, and that makes me proud."

Of course, if more kids start participating in independent culture, there is the possibility it might grow until it becomes the mainstream. In some sense, says Niedzviecki, that's already happening through blogs and YouTube.

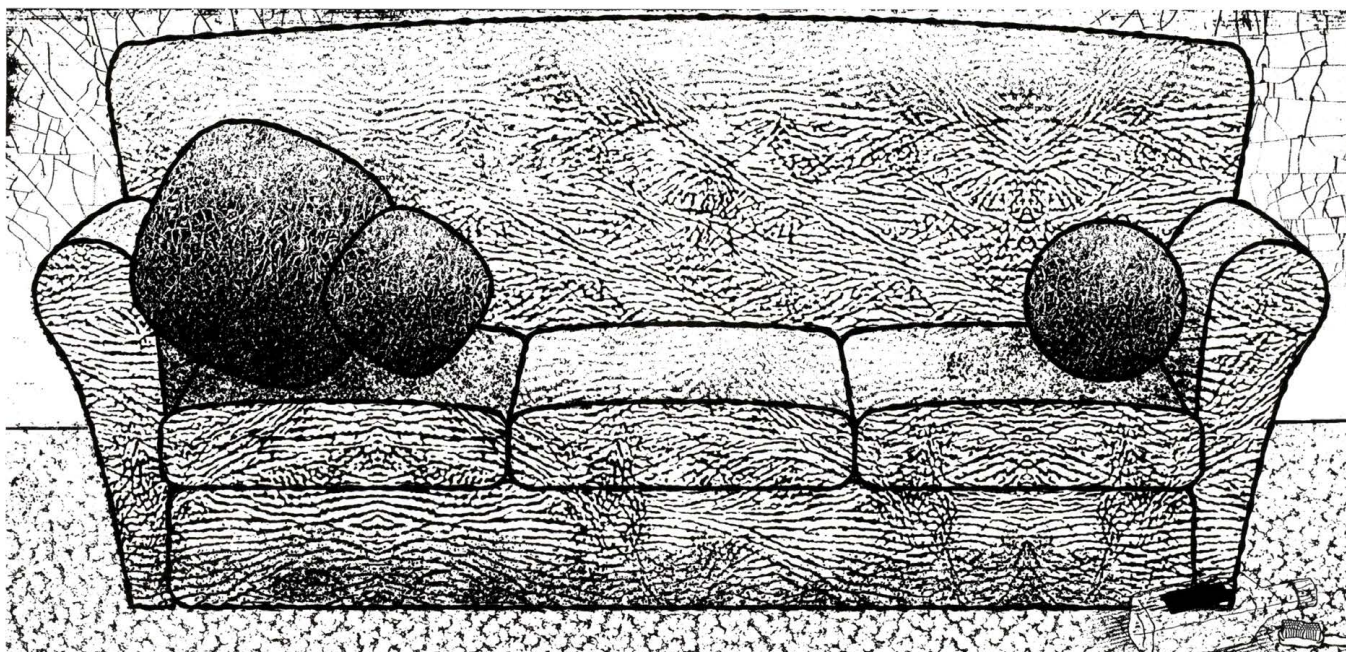
"For that trend to be meaningful in terms of people restating their relationship to culture, there has to be some intention behind it besides a desire to be noticed," he says. "Young people can learn from indie culture creators of the past and present that there is history and philosophy behind self-expression, and those indie pop-culture creators who might resent the influx can learn that valid cultural expression isn't rooted in outmoded concepts of 'cool' and 'underground.'"

And while his daughter may yet be a little too young for tattoos and hair dye, Niedzviecki intends on letting her explore pop culture however she sees fit.

—REBECCA CALDWELL



Emily Pohl-Weary.



THE OUT-OF-TOWNER IF YOU LIVED HERE . . .

Excerpts from The Warhol Gang.

BY PETER DARBYSHIRE

Trotsky moves apartments every year. Usually it's because the credit agencies find him and want him to pay for his furniture. But sometimes it's because he wants to live in other people's homes.

He always keeps copies of his keys. He lets himself back into his old apartments months later. No one ever changes the locks. He wanders around the apartments, looking at how the new tenants have furnished them.

He sits on the couches and lies on the beds. He turns on the computers and goes through the files until he finds the hidden porn stashes. He makes himself something to eat and does the dishes.

He never sees any sign he's ever lived in any of these places.

He goes back to one of his old apartments, over a convenience store, and finds it turned into an art gallery. Paintings line the walls where he had hung photos. The bedroom is a sound installation. The room is empty of everything besides several speakers on poles that play the sounds of different people breathing. He listens to each of them for a long time.

In some of the apartments, he takes photos from their frames and takes them home. He puts them in his own frames.

One day when Trotsky is in one of his old apartments, the new tenant comes home.

Trotsky is standing in the bathroom, brushing his teeth with her toothbrush, when he hears the lock turning. He steps into the bathtub and pulls the shower curtain closed as the door opens. He still has the toothbrush in his mouth.

He listens to her move around the apartment, opening and closing cupboards in the kitchen, making herself a cup of tea. The toothpaste is burning his mouth now, so he gets down on his hands and knees and spits it into the drain. When he gets back up, he doesn't know what to do with the toothbrush. He sticks it in his pocket.

While he's standing there, the woman comes into the bathroom. She sits on the toilet and pees. Trotsky holds his breath. She reaches into the tub and turns on the water, but she doesn't pull

back the curtain enough to see him.

Trotsky waits until she goes into the bedroom and then gets out of the tub. He dries his feet on the mat so he doesn't leave tracks. She's left the bathroom door open, and he peeks out. She's getting undressed in the bedroom, her back to him. He goes down the hall, but instead of leaving, he steps into the kitchen. Her tea is still on the counter, and he takes a sip. He tastes her lipstick on the cup.

When she gets into the shower, Trotsky goes into her bedroom. She has the same Ikea bed as he does. He listens to her singing in the shower as he looks into her laundry basket at the clothes she was just wearing. He goes into her closet. He pushes past the hanging clothes, into the back. He sits down behind some boxes. He waits.

The woman comes out of the shower, wrapped in a towel. She drops the towel on the laundry basket and puts on pyjamas she pulls from the dresser. She goes into the kitchen and comes back with her tea and a magazine. She climbs into bed and reads, sipping from the tea every now and then.

Trotsky can taste the tea again. He smells her on the clothes in her closet. He wants to reach out and touch her.

When she turns out the light, he waits for what feels like an hour before he moves. Her breathing is deep and regular at this point. He moves out of the closet slowly, listening after each step. He stands beside the bed and listens to her breathe some more. He closes his eyes and tries to imagine what she's dreaming.

He takes her toothbrush with him when he leaves.

Trotsky lets himself into another one of his old apartments, and this time waits for the new tenant to come home. The closet is too small to hide in in this apartment, so he lies behind the couch instead. He's not there long before he hears the door open and close.

"Hello?" a man says.

For a moment Trotsky thinks the man knows he's there. He wonders how. But the other man doesn't say anything else. Instead, he goes into the kitchen and begins going through the cupboards.

Trotsky peeks around the corner of the couch and watches him. The other man wears a postal uniform. He has a postal bag slung off one shoulder. As Trotsky watches, he takes a bottle of Scotch from a cupboard and drops it in his bag, then an espresso maker from the counter.

When the other man goes into the bedroom, Trotsky gets up and follows him. He looks around the door frame and watches him empty the dresser drawers onto the floor, then drop a jewellery box into his bag.

When the mailman opens the closet door, Trotsky steps into the room.

"What do you think you're doing?" he asks.

The mailman spins around and stares at Trotsky.

"I didn't think you were home," he says.

"I'm not," Trotsky says.

"I'll put it all back," the mailman says.

Trotsky watches the mailman as he puts the jewellery box back on the dresser, and picks up the clothes from the floor and shoves them back in their drawers.

"I don't normally do this," the mailman says.

"Neither do I," Trotsky says.

He follows the mailman into the kitchen and watches him put the Scotch

back in the cupboard and the espresso maker back on the counter. Then they just stand there. Trotsky's not sure what to do next.

Then they hear the sound of a key in the lock.

They both dive behind the couch. The mailman has to lie on top of Trotsky for both of them to fit. Trotsky can smell the sweat on him, and he can barely breathe from his weight. The mailman shakes his head at Trotsky as the tenants walk in.

The tenants are a man and woman. They're laughing about something, and then they stop. Trotsky thinks maybe they've seen some sign of him and the mailman. He tries to think up something to say.

It's not what you think.

He's the robber.

I was just here waiting for you.

Then he hears the sounds of the man and woman kissing.

He peeks around the corner of the couch and sees the man has the woman up against the hallway wall. He unbuttons her shirt and runs a hand over her breast. He drops his head to her other breast, and then the mailman drags Trotsky back behind the couch. He shakes his head at Trotsky again and draws a finger across his throat. Trotsky doesn't know if the mailman is threatening him or trying to tell him what will happen to them if they're caught.

The man and woman go down the hall, to the bedroom. Trotsky and the mailman stand up when they hear the bed start to knock against the wall and the woman cry out. The mailman goes back into the kitchen and puts the espresso maker in his bag again.

"What are you doing?" Trotsky whispers, following him.

"I don't know who you are," the mailman whispers back, "but you're not who I thought you were."

"I get that a lot," Trotsky says.

When the mailman goes to put the Scotch in his bag again, Trotsky lets himself out. He sits on the steps at the front of the building and calls the police on his cellphone. He wants to report the burglary, but when the operator answers, he can't think of anything to say. ▽

Peter Darbyshire lives in Vancouver. He is the author of the novel Please (Raincoast, 2002) and the books editor of the Vancouver Province.

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?

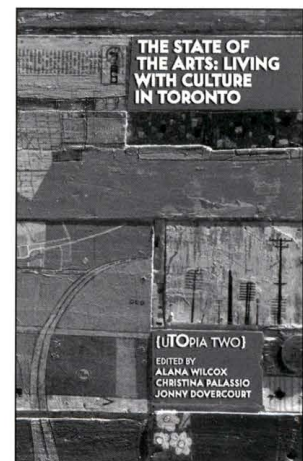
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SOMETIME NEXT SUNRISE

BY HAL NIEDZVIECKI

Disaster is imminent. Mom is driving. The Dad's blood pressure rising. We can all feel it. Veins in our temples. Pulsing.

Turn there! The Dad stabs at the green highway sign announcing the next exit.

We're not going that way, I say.

Turn! There! the Dad ignores me like I've wet myself and he's too disgusted to even acknowledge it.

I'm thirty-three years old.

Mom resolutely forging forward.

Get in the right lane, The Dad orders. This is the exit. Nancy! Do you hear me? This. Is. The. Exit.

We're going the regular way, I say.

There! The Dad's eyes bulging out of his head as we shoot past his turnoff.

We pass it.

You're *passing* it!

We were never going that way, I point out.

Rainy puts her hand on my leg. Squeezes. Shut up? or Be strong? or Your family is crazy?

That was the exit, the Dad mutters. Goddamn it.

We just want to get there, I say.

Fuck! the Dad pronounces.

Simon, Mom says.

The Dad shrouds his face in the map.

Rainy unpacks. She understands these holidays with my parents are something we have to do: keep up appearances, be good people. We—and they—are all good people. But really it isn't about good or bad, requirement or respectability. It's a symbiosis, an ingrained truth we spend all our time avoiding. Their life is my life. They haunt me because they are me, my memory, my self, a living ghost smothering me in its ample, ever-present bosom.

Rainy is done unpacking.

You could be nicer, she says. To your dad.

He's crazy, I say. He practically went psychotic when we didn't stop at that chicken place. *And* he told us to fuck off. Remember?

We could have stopped there.

Did you see his face when I told him you didn't like chicken? I thought he was gonna have a frigging heart attack!

I laugh. Rainy turns away. Her father died of a heart attack.

From our balcony on the twelfth floor, I scan the beach with the Dad's binoculars. Beach is a swathe of sand packed between high-rise condos and the grey-green Atlantic. People shroud the silt, splayed out like retired centerfold models—used to displaying themselves and their accoutrements. Science experiment cellulite creeps across the sand, overwhelms bathing-suit bottoms, threatens to encompass even the spreading scope of the sky. Everywhere I look, white fleshy skin bloats toward the waning sun.

I scan for teenage girls in string bikinis. But instead I find the parents in my scope. They're negotiating with the umbrella boy. I freeze, unable to look away. Mom gesticulates, the Dad talks loudly. I can see his lips flapping. Armed with meticulous instructions and an ample tip, the umbrella boy will no doubt be eagerly staking out our prime territory sometime next sunrise. The parents complete their transaction. The Dad shades his forehead with a hand and gazes rapaciously out at the sea, as if challenging it to an eat-off. Mom looks the other way, her eyes comparing condos for placement, value, amenities, pool size. I see her poke the Dad and they both turn toward our building, pointing and waving.

What are they waving at?

Me, I realize.

Suddenly, I'm sweating in the sea air. I can actually see the Dad's lips forming words: Hi, son! Over here, son! The entire mass of beach-bound sun worshippers stirring from their slumber to see what that crazy old guy is going on about. The Dad's yelling drowned out by the recurring arrival of the tide. My parents gesticulate frantically, their hands over their heads. An eternity passes. I pretend not to notice. I pretend to linger

on the tight buns of a sun-kissed adolescent whose flesh has not yet turned corporeal and corrupted by a steady diet of light beer and reality TV. Where is she? Splaying her charms to the last of the late day's heat.

Rainy says I'm ungrateful. Rainy says I'm an asshole. Rainy says I'm lucky to have parents who care about me.

The Dad wants ribs but I insist on all-you-can-eat crabs.

But the rib place is the best! the Dad half-heartedly protests.

Simon, Mom says, the kids want *seefood*.

Mom decides we'll walk the six blocks to Joe's All-You-Can-Dismember Crab Hut. Mom is always trying to get the Dad to walk places. The Dad and I both hate walking.

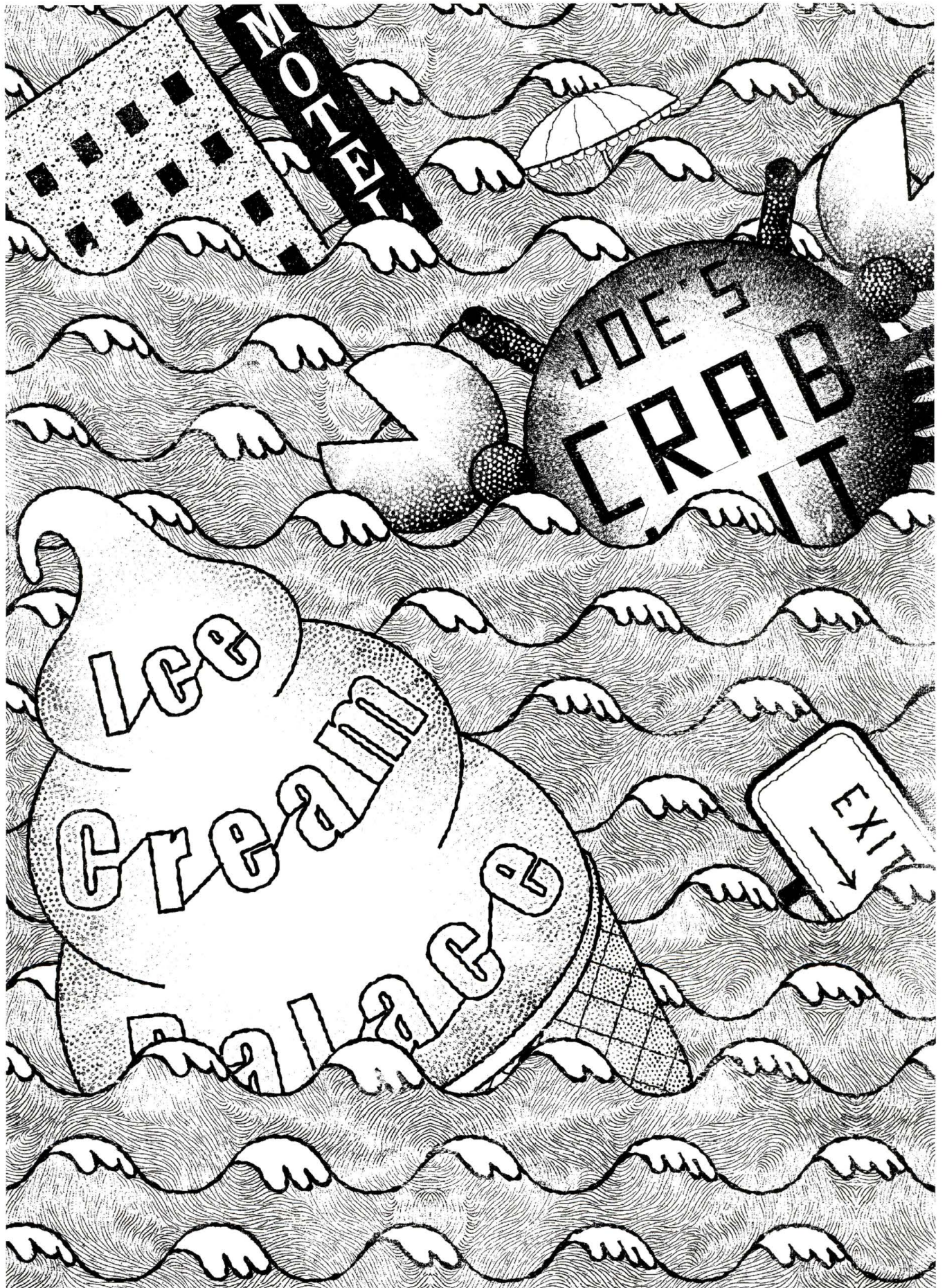
Two blocks in, I realize why nobody walks in Ocean Town. It's like going for a pleasant evening stroll on the shoulder of a highway during a rush-hour traffic jam. Three lanes each way, the main drag separates the premium beachfront high-rises from the restaurants and less premium motels. In order to stave off the ocean's looming uncertain surety, every other possible surface has been paved over, made solid and irrefutable.

Why are we walking?

It's good for you, Mom says.

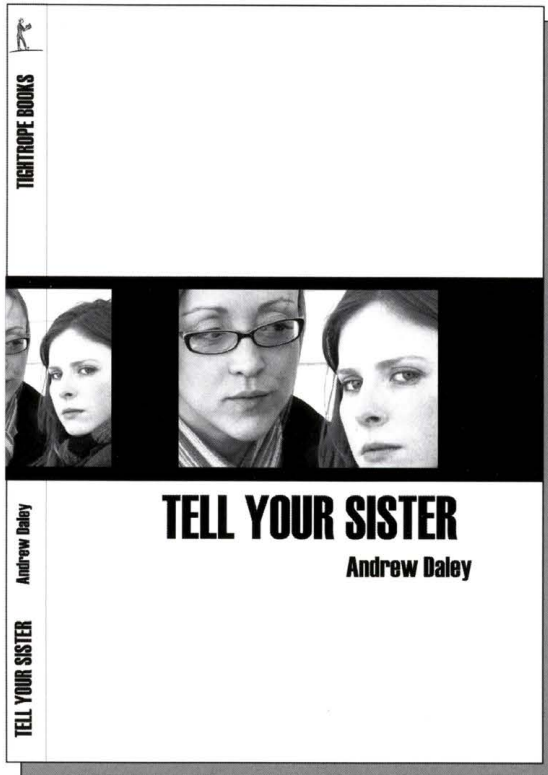
C'mon, wimp. The Dad punches me hard in the shoulder. Get some exercise. For a change.

Rainy keeps trying to escape my grip on her arm. The air is exhaust saucing stolid chunks of turgid traffic-wake breeze. Cars pull in and out of giant family-style restaurants. The vehicles are oblivious to us, lone pedestrians gingerly stepping past the yawning maws of parking lots. In order to show everyone what I whiner I am, the Dad is making a big display of enjoying this promenade. The Dad doesn't seem to notice that we are the only people walking. That the sky is pollution grey. That he is perpetually on the verge of veering off



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the sidewalk into oncoming traffic.

The Dad runs enthusiastic commentary on the local flora.

Look, Nancy, a bathing-suit place!

Mmm . . . Rainy, Ice Cream Castle!

Hey, son, Tequila Mockingbird! It's a bar. Should we try it? What d'ya think? Wanna try it?

Sure, I mutter. Rainy catches me in this moment of distraction. Pulls out of my suddenly flaccid grasp, surges ahead to join the aggressively normal: my power-striding mother on a permanent ladies' walkathon for breast cancer and orphans.

Rainy has escaped. Left alone, I feel like dangling legs, the view from the shark's perspective. The Dad as Jaws. Huffs to catch up. Immobilizes his prey by hooking a weighty, hairy, moist arm around my shoulders.

How are things going, son?

Good.

Yeah? How's work?

Good. Fine. You know.

Sure. Sure. What about with Rainy?

Good. Things are good.

Hey. Great. The Dad scans the horizon. Hey, he says after we've taken a few steps. We should try that bar. That one we passed with the funny name. You wanna try that bar?

I am ambling strip of little-used sidewalk. I am running shoe come untied.

The Dad reels me in. Asks the dreaded question.

What's wrong? he wants to know.

It's on my skin. On every pore. Can't breathe. Grainy humid air. Grown men covered in hair. Father and son. Peninsula jutting into the sea, paved over and turned into a giant seafood restaurant. Every single dish comes with a plastic thimble of melted butter. My parents. They don't know me. Boo hoo. They pay for everything, and everything is a relative concept. Asking me what's wrong—it's like sending a hypochondriac to the doctor for a checkup.

Everything.

And nothing.

I lurch out of his grip.

There it is, I say. Joe's.

Do they have it? The Dad wants to know. The all-you-can-eat?

Of course, I say.

The crab-and-shrimp bonanza costs \$26.99 per person. Along with endless catches of crustaceans, it includes

FROM MY SPELL DIARY

a blue pen and ragged cap, for the impression of his teeth, dipped in new sweet wine
a brown switch of goldfish weed, because he pet-names his plants, bound in white thread
for constancy coins from his cottage couch, thrown three times onto red silk copper constellations a tin Eiffel Tower from his desk, hung with electrical wire
above a live wick one prescription note, shoved down the front of my pants & rubbed to sweet pulp inside my legs the lowest of charms
thumbprint, left, from sticky cover of *Maclean's* (hopefully his) cut five times, ridge to centre & boiled for tea (the "Roman cure," last hope of fading virgins and fatties)
nineteen paperclips, straightened to shivs, silver minnows nine for each shoe
& one to cut with

—R. M. VAUGHAN

single servings of crab bisque, corn on the cob, deep-fried chicken breast, and French fries. (The parents are on some kind of complicated diet; they ignore the corn and fries but consume freely of chicken and bisque.) I succumb totally, rip little legs off little crabs and use my own ample lips—like father, like son—to suck out flecks of juicy white meat. The spices make me sweat. Rainy, long since finished with a reluctantly ordered crab-cake sandwich, wipes my brow with a paper towel.

Nurse! I growl intermittently. Rainy swabs forehead. The Dad loves this. He chortles over shrimp mounded high as the blurred night. Nurse! Ha! Nancy! Nurse!

Rip and suck. Suck and rip. I am primitive man in air conditioning. Another crab. Then another. Rainy is a good sport. Wipe! I say. The Dad laughs. I am lost in the moment. Lost in translation. Are we bonding? Is this what fun is like? *More crabs!*

Finally Mom says, Don't you think you've had enough? She says it without conviction, torn between her motherly instinct to feed and her sense that I am engaging in excesses beyond the normal, beyond what she would want the neighbours back home to be privy to.

You're gonna make yourself sick, Rainy points out.

I look at the Dad to see his reaction. He surprises me with a gentle, rueful, shake of his head, delicate disappointment conveying what we both are thinking: women do not understand gorging.

Leave the boy alone, the Dad says.

Mom shrugs. I motion to the waitress: *More crabs!*

Rainy says, You know . . . it was kinda . . . *hot*. You eating like that.

Hot? Like *hot* hot?

Hot.

And being my nurse bitch?

Yeah. Kinda.

Rainy, I think, is drunk on the sun. Unlike me, she loves the heat, can lie prone for hours, the only sign that she is alive being her uncanny ability to flip every forty-five minutes, as if following a recipe for Perfect Bronzed Glazed Girl. She is perfect.

I watch her flip from my slump under a Russian-beach-boy umbrella. Third flip. Two hours and fifteen minutes gone by. The breeze a constant requiem. Never cool enough to cool. The sun eyeing me. Since about halfway to the first flip, I've been forced under the umbrella grove, a toadstool patch of sizzling shade strewn with parental bathing-suit bulges and a wide array of beach necessities, from cold diet drinks

to six different varieties of sunscreen (S.P.F.s 4 to 400) to a paddle game no one will ever use. The parents read self-improvement paperbacks and doze, but are acutely aware of my every gesture. Behind designer sunglasses they study me for signs—evidence that I love them, or at least love myself; that I am going crazy or getting sane; that I will impregnate Rainy and give them perfect grandchildren; or that I will leave Rainy and take up with a transgendered dwarf. Anything is possible, the worst is inevitable. I am their son, a mystery. This is their week to unravel me.

They're doing a good job.

I bound out of rented shade and over to Rainy.

Who reveals to me how hot I am when I pig out.

Instantly, I slick. Sweat gluing my chest hairs together, sweat coursing over my pilose paunch, the sand rubbing its grainy bits between the hot tight gaps of my toes.

Really? I squint at her through the blinding sunshine. You thought I was . . . sexy? But weren't you kinda . . . grossed out?

I *was*. But, for some reason . . . Rainy trails a hand up my bare leg.

We could mosey up to the condo, I say.

We could . . .

Rainy is long, tight, seems fragile but is tougher than all of us. Likes it hard from behind.

Afternoon delight, I say.

Mmm . . .

Let's go, I say.

O.K.

Rainy stands up, pulls on a T-shirt. I wait, crouching in the scalding sand, for my hard-on to diminish.

C'mon, big boy. Crab boy.

Rainy pincers me with claw fingers. I squirm, giggle. I can feel the parents watching, thinking, Are they going to get married? Are they going to have babies?

My cock withers.

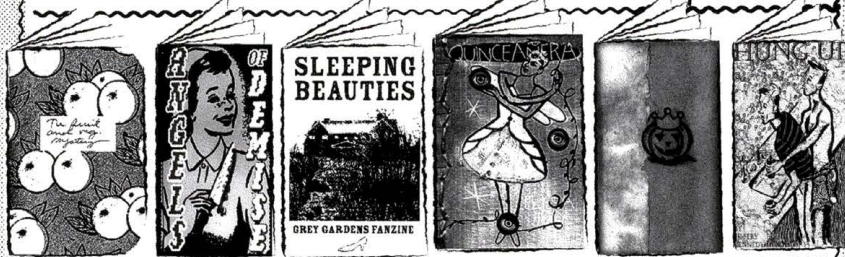
We're gonna go up, I call over to them. Get some lunch . . . or something.

Would you like anything from the condo? Rainy asks politely.

Simon, Mom says loudly. The Dad has a bit of a permanent buzzing in one ear. Legacy of exposure to heavy machinery before they got around to the concept of earplugs. Mom talks to him like he barely speaks our language.

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Simon! The kids are going upstairs. Do you want something!

I stand behind Rainy, close enough to touch her. She wears a purple one-piece. Smooth back flowing down to the gentle curve of her ass. I can feel myself getting hard again.

C'mon, I say. Let's go.

You going for lunch? the Dad says, finally stirring.

Yes, says Rainy.

Sure. What the hell. The Dad heaves himself out of an umbrella-boy-supplied recliner. I'll come too.

When I take the Dad to a restaurant, he always tells me about a restaurant he knows that serves the exact same kind of food as the place we are in—only much better. Afterwards, my mother always slips a hundred dollars in my jacket pocket. Rainy frowns, thinks I'm weak because I always make a big show of buying dinner, then let Mom give me more money than the dinner cost.

But her father is dead, and mine is alive. When I take from my parents, I am reaffirming that they are alive, that they are strong and I am weak, and nothing will ever change, and all of us will live forever. What do I really want? Stasis or seniority? Their death or my own perpetual junior adulthood?

The Dad is restless. What d'ya wanna do tonight, kids? he keeps asking. There's a new mall they put in right over the bridge. Wanna check it out? Or how about we drive to Duney Beach, that great boardwalk they have there. With the fudge place. Nancy? What d'ya say? Wanna go to Duney? C'mon! We'll all go!

Day 5 or Day 25. No time for time. The Dad is perpetually agitated. He even watches cable like a man possessed. Chased. Every channel a possible portal to escape through. Every channel a lie, a failure, a nowhere exit.

Hey, Rainy, what d'ya say? Sound good? O.K., let's do it!

Cocktail hour. I am drinking beer on the balcony. Sunset dripping all over the ocean. Rainy sits in a living room armchair, staring into space. Rainy's like that. She can just disappear into her own little world.

The Dad thinks she's bored. Thinks she needs entertainment, needs a new bathing suit, needs an ice-cream sundae.

A LIST BEFORE DEPARTURE

I will put all my clothes in boxes, address them to myself
with old-fashioned labels and perhaps forget to keep any

for the journey. I will dismantle the room
for broken chairs with great potential,

fished out of the garbage, but leave untouched the cellar.
In building the house, I had left a room for looking

glasses, one for art, a room for a pile of fire. The stoneware lamp,
taken from the junk man for two wiggly glassed windows,

I will bring to light the way, the plug trailing limply
behind. I will leave the flour, the frozen butter

awaiting transformation, the rolled oats;
I do not wish to make things for a time.

I will claim to have only run away from home, overcome
with lichens from crawling through the old soft fences

of Ontario border farms. Like other women
who have successfully lost their minds, I will exist

on raspberries, thief new eggs from their nests, and find
my night fears quelled by gentler rural bogeymen, their absence.

—KATIA GRUBISIC

We should go on an outing, for swimwear, for a bucket of Basher's Famous French Fries—everything comes in bucket size here.

How about putt-putt? the Dad announces. His earnest red face filled with optimistic expectation. He's latched onto Rainy. Senses her reluctance to disappoint.

That would be . . . nice, she murmurs. Hey! Rainy's in for putt-putt!

Will you relax, I say, coming in from the balcony. Will you just relax?

The Dad ignores me.

We can putt-putt then get fries, he says.

Nobody wants to putt-putt, I say.

Rainy's off in space. Her head lolled to one side, brown curls spilling on a bare brown shoulder poking out of a tank top. Weird toothy half-grin like she's high or something.

Or something.

I'm not talking to you, the Dad explains. I'm talking to Rainy. You can stay here and rot.

Leave the kids alone, Mom says.

So no one wants to do anything? The Dad whirls on me. You? You came all this way just to sit on your fat ass? He spits a little as he yells. It's Grade 9 and I just brought home a bad report card.

I take a sip of beer and return to the balcony. In my mind. That's what I do. I am calm and cool and disaffectedly disinclined to be affected.

No. Plan A is not working. Plan B explodes out of me, chain-reaction minefield tread on by a herd of wild horses.

You know what? Everyone is sick of this shit of yours! Just because you cannot chill the fuck out, doesn't mean that we have to go fucking putt-putt!

Stop that! Mom says from the kitchen.

You don't want to go anywhere, the Dad gushes. Mr. His Highness just wants to sit on his fat ass and drink beer!

Simon. Just leave them alone for God's sake.

You're all against me! The Dad has turned beet red, like the sunburnt beach-backs that coat the coast. I don't need this crap, he pronounces. I don't need this . . . *bullshit!*

I feel as if I'm losing the argument.

Or something.

Simon—

Dad—

But the Dad stomps out of the condo. Slams the door behind him.

The next day, Mom sends us on a trip to the nearby state park while she negotiates a truce. She dangles the key to the S.U.V. like a get-out-of-jail-free card.

A miracle! Four hours alone! I wave away Mom's insistent offer that we take her cellphone. Grab the keys.

C'mon, I call to Rainy. Let's go.

I have to pack up our stuff.

Forget it!

Rainy is gathering hats, towels, books.

Fuck, I say. Will you *come on!*

In the S.U.V. Rainy is quiet. Looks out the side window at the awesome array of passing fast-food franchises.

What? What is it?

You're rude, she says. You're just . . . rude.

What are you talking about? I'm not rude.

You are. You're a rude person. You're worse than your father.

Fine, I say. Good. It's all my fault now.

The park beach is famous for its wild ponies. Once a year, they push them toward the fenced-in state line and cull the herd. One day, the ponies are a hundred, the next day, they are eighty. The brochure does not say what happens to the captured ponies.

Rainy thinks it's better if you just get along. Rainy doesn't see the point in not getting along. I once tried to explain it to her. Reactionary rebirth. Hate as love. She had no idea what I was talking about. Her dad died when she was a teenager. Anyway, it's different for girls. Sometimes we go to her father's grave. She cries. I stand there.

As we pull into the park, I say, O.K., watch for ponies. You see any ponies?

Whatever, Rainy mutters.

The park beach is nearly empty. The sky unblemished by development. Blue and exhausting. Missing something. I trail behind Rainy as she stalks

the beach. The water here is cold and sharp, the waves small but insistent, like the distant rumble of a lightning storm slowly approaching. Rainy collects shells, oohing and ahhing all little-girlly, pointedly ignoring me. Sweat rolls down my inside arms. Rainy is slim, energetic, a sun-nymph sand-mermaid in a tattered one-piece.

Dad is right. She needs a new bathing suit.

I want her. I want her completely. Why does she stay with me? Without her I am someone else.

Hey, I say. Hey, Rainy. Can we . . . just . . . sit down here?

She blinks at me.

I'm sorry, O.K.? I just . . . I'm trying to—

Your father is a very unhappy man, she says.

No, he's—you think so?

You have to be nice to him.

I—O.K. Yeah.

Sweat beading on my upper lip.

Rainy kisses me. Her mouth hot and forgiving. Like it's possible. To be forgiving.

I'm going swimming, I say.

In there?

We look at the ocean. The waves weaving tiny kamikaze multiples.

Why not? The horses do it.

You're not a horse.

I make a made-up pony noise and canter into icy water. Waves encompass me, push me down, then buoy me up on the peaks of their salty depths.

The deal has been brokered.

I will take the Dad to Tequila Mockingbird for a father-son rapprochement. Then everyone will meet at the rib place for dinner.

Rainy hugs me goodbye. Be nice, she mutters in my ear.

The Dad's been reading up on Tequila Mockingbird. As profiled in the latest edition of the *Ocean Town* freebie, *Ocean Town Living*.

They've got fifty different types of tequila! he tells me. He claps his hands. He does that when he's excited.

Cool, I say.

We take stools at the bar.

It's still happy hour. We order buck-fifty bottles of Mexican beer to sip while we peruse the tequila menu.

The best are one hundred per cent

pure agave, the Dad says.

What's agave?

It's like, cactus, the Dad says.

Huh.

Tequila, the Dad tells me conspiratorially, is the new Scotch.

Huh.

To please the Dad, I randomly pick a fourteen-dollar tequila. Hundred per cent pure blue agave from the foothills of the San Somewhere. Smoky with a hot-sour effervescence that evokes civil war, Pancho and Lefty, burro dung—cactus!

The Dad tops me with a rare eighteen-dollar vintage, aged twenty-six years in a fermenting adobe barrel lined with rattlesnake skin.

Don't tell your mother, he says, producing a fifty-dollar bill.

And two more beers, I add.

The bartender compliments our choices, free pours huge servings into ceramic goblets reserved for the higher-end orders.

Cheers, I say.

We cheers. Our goblets thunk.

I gulp an ounce and a half, barely making a dent.

Online, the basics still apply your expectations are just much higher



plan



design



build



secure



edit



sell



market



host

theWire.ca

content management
ecommerce * marketing
search engine optimization
website development

So? the Dad says.
It tastes like tequila, I say. Only better, I quickly add.

Mine doesn't taste like tequila, the Dad says.

What does it taste like?

Try it.

We exchange goblets. Why not? His disease is mine too.

Wow, I say. Yours is great!

It tastes like tequila.

Yeah. The Dad is clearly happy.

Here. I hand him back his drink.

No. You have it. I'll drink yours.

Naw. You picked better. You have it. It's yours.

We re-exchange.

The Dad orders up a happy-hour snack of lobster quesadillas.

So . . . the Dad says.

I gulp at both my drinks. Me and the Dad. Alone at last.

Feeling it now. The urge to run. In my thighs, in my chest.

Be nice, Rainy tells me. I take a deep breath.

So . . . uh, yeah, I say. So . . . uh . . . how ya doing? I mean, you've kinda been, you seem a little . . . *stressed*?

Ah, he says. It's, I dunno. It's . . . I'm on these pills. Your mother, she wanted me to try these pills.

What pills?

Ah, you know. For depression and stuff.

You're depressed?

Ah, well . . .

Hey, no biggie, I say. I mean, me too, right? Must run in the family.

You too?

I do the double-drink dance.

So, um, what do you mean . . . stuff?

Ah, the Dad sighs. Like, anxiety and crap. I've been getting, the doctor says . . . agitated.

Huh.

I don't know. I don't think it's working.

No?

You think it's working?

C'mon Dad. You're all right. Just a little . . . hyper.

The doctor said they would take a while. To kick in.

So they'll take a while. Stick with them. See what happens. You should stick with them.

I dunno. The Dad gloomily swirls his goblet. Doesn't drink.

Afternoon alcohol. The bar fills up, floods with scorched couples, Macarena music, empty piñata shells swaying

from the ceiling, stirred by the air conditioning.

Maybe I should try them, I say hazily. Those pills.

You? What do you need them for?

I'll do it for you. Right? Like father, like son. Ha.

I slurp at my beer.

Stop talking like an idiot, the Dad says.

I catch the bartender, motion for another.

The Dad says, It was hard for me. When I was a kid.

Like in Russia and stuff?

He nods. Your grandmother. My ma. She was one tough lady.

Yeah, I agree. You miss her?

He doesn't answer. Looks away. Looks back at me.

I just want to be happy.

You will be, Dad. C'mon. You will be.

Quesadillas arrive. We eat.

Last day of vacation. The sun again. Umbrellas and deck chairs set a few feet back from the encroaching tide. Rainy lies on her front. Soon, I'm guessing, she'll flip. Eyes shrouded in sunglasses. Soaks up the sun, precise in her relentless restfulness. Most of the time, I have no idea what she's thinking.

I'm alone in the shade. Parents on a stroll down the beach.

It's hot. Hottest day yet. The air swirls in ripples. Behind, the concrete bakes, cracks, crumbles. In front, the ocean, afternoon placid, end in sight.

I break camp, stride by Rainy, who gives no sign of noticing my existence. Crouch in the tide, the returning waves sucking my feet into the sand.

Gradually, I go deeper. Walk in until I can't touch bottom anymore.

I'm floating.

I close my eyes, let the waves take me toward the distant horizon.

Sure, why not?

Close your eyes.

Drift away. ☽

Hal Niedzviecki lives in Little Portugal. He is the author of The Program (Random House, 2005), Hello, I'm Special: How Individuality Became the New Conformity, (Penguin, 2004), and Ditch (Random House, 2001). He is also the co-founder and fiction editor of Broken Pencil magazine. His work has been appearing in the magazine since 1997.

CONTRIBUTORS

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Evie Christie ("The Nights We Spend with Others," p. 6) lives in Downtown Toronto. Her first poetry collection, *Gutted*, was published in 2005 by ECW.

Kathleen Olmstead ("Morning Observation No. 49," p. 13) lives in Sussex-Ulster. She has made films. She has written books that can (hopefully) be found in the Young Adult section of your local bookstore. Her writing has appeared in *Fireweed*, *Vice*, and *Kimera*. She loves *Taddle Creek* best.

R. M. Vaughan ("From My Spell Diary," p. 25) lives in Rua Açores. He is at work on a new novel and a new play, and this fall his video work will be the subject of a mini-retrospective, sponsored by the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, in Buffalo, New York.

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GALLERY

WE ARE AMUSED

The Victorian of the Month Club brings aristocracy to the bourgeoisie.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY KRISTI-LY GREEN

Of all the objects people choose to have show up in their mailbox once a month, works of literature may be the most common. But mail-order clubs have become significantly more adventurous with their offerings since book-of-the-month subscriptions started popping up close to a century ago: pies, beer, panties, barbeque sauce, and *Dean Martin Show* DVDs are but a few of the things people look forward to receiving every four weeks.

The Web has allowed these clubs to expand in ways that are less consumable, and more artistic and fun. Michael J. Colitz, Jr., a patent attorney based in Tampa Bay, Florida, has been sharing his Wacky Patent of the Month with the public for more than a decade. This to That, a Web site offering adhesive advice, presented its preferred Glue of the Month for several years. Numerous sites offer Font of the Month subscriptions to

type-conscious designers. And a defunct site based in the U.K. once offered up monthly photos of electricity pylons.

In an effort to indulge her fascination with all things Victorian, the Toronto-based illustrator and author Kristi-Ly Green joined the fray in January, 2006, when she sent her first Victorian of the Month mailing to about twenty people. Consisting of a drawing and brief, colourful biography of a randomly selected personality from the era of the Crystal Palace, Jack the Ripper, and the Married Women's Property Act, Green's list now reaches a small but devoted audience.

"I had a show of drawings called *Irregular Slubs*, in 2005—pen and ink drawings mixed with collage—of Victorians, and I got a lot of addresses in the guest book," Green says. "I just decided to keep going."

Partially inspired by Monkey Mondays, a free weekly subscription of mon-

key illustrations by Rob Elliott, an artist living in Kincardine, Ontario, Green settled on a less breakneck pace. "I think the perfect number of Victorians you need is one a month," she says. "I got an E-mail from one woman I didn't know asking if she could have two Victorians a month. I had to say no. One is enough to tide most people over."

To date, Green's Victorians have included Edgar Allan Poe, the Brontë sisters, and Josephine Butler (above). Her inaugural Victorian was, unsurprisingly, Queen Victoria, Britain's longest-serving monarch, for whose reign the 1837 to 1901 era is named.

"Cinch belts, dark shadows, flickering fireplaces, widow's weeds—what's not to love about the Victorian era," says Green. "Plus, it's nice to subscribe to things. You come home and it's just there waiting."

—CONAN TOBIAS



The nurse Florence Nightingale.



Edgar Allan Poe, author of "The Raven."



The acrobat and trapeze artist Miss La La.



The cookbook author Isabella Beeton.



Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, the French painter, physicist, and (one) inventor of photography.

SHIT BOX

BY CARY FAGAN

I am trying to balance the *New York Review of Books* on my lap while eating Kraft Dinner from a plastic bowl. Well, not actually Kraft Dinner, but a no-name imitation with cheese that is so intensely, unreal orange it is almost fluorescent. I am struggling through an essay about the Armenian genocide that refers to several new books and also the film by Atom Egoyan. I used to know Atom when Candice and I went to a lot of Toronto parties and openings. I hadn't quite figured out what I was going to do—make films, write poems, or create some new cross-disciplinary form to capture the paradox of our late-capitalist, terrorized, hyper-erotic, Starbucks lives.

What I actually became was a pharmaceutical rep.

I roam from medical office to doctor's office with my square, leather sample case, meeting doctors and suggesting to them that they prescribe our antidepressant, our anti-inflammatory, our analgesic drug, our contraceptive pill, our alternative to Viagra (no hot flashes, no seeing blue). I load them up with free samples to hand out to patients—"candy," we call them. My territory is the northern outskirts of Toronto—Markham, Thornhill, the 905 arc over the city, which I traverse like a voyageur for the good of the distant mother country, a massive German pharmaceutical corporation. The job was supposed to be temporary: Candice was already working as a lawyer for the province, and I felt bad every time we went to a restaurant and she took out her Visa. What I think happened, what I can reconstruct from certain painful flashes of memory, is that Candice was affected by watching me return every evening in my cheap Moores suit and clutching my *Death of a Salesman* sample bag. She started to imagine me in twenty years' time. Receding hairline. Paunch. Not bothering to loosen my tie before heading for the liquor cabinet to pour myself a stiff one. It caused her to have panic attacks. And now I haven't seen Candice for three months.

The Forty Winks Motel has a blinking neon eye on its sign. I am staying here because it is convenient to my work territory, because the weekly rate is cheap, because I will never run into anyone I know, and because the sheer crumminess of my present life will force me to make some decisions. As motel rooms go, this one could be worse. No smell of mould, roach killer, or someone else's semen. The hot plate, provided—illegally—by the motel for an extra four dollars a day, is set up in the bathroom, the only counter space. The bedroom windows don't face the highway out front, but look behind to a new subdivision going up on former farmland. Rows of townhouses disappearing into the vanishing point.

My first week living here, I drove into Toronto, crashing at my friend Aaron's place. Aaron and I go back to high school, but Aaron has a serious girlfriend now who is eight years older and has a kid, and Aaron let me know, in an embarrassed, throat-clearing way, that it wasn't really convenient to have me around. I understood that, of course, and I was totally cool about it, so the next Saturday I stayed at Walt's. Walt is single and has never been known to go on a date, but he has three large dogs who were not pleased about having their sofa taken over. Every so often during the night, I could hear a low growl from behind the kitchen door. All that Walt and I ended up doing was watching the ball game while eating Pizza Pizza. Sitting in the dark room, the television flickering and the air heavy with dog flatulence, it occurred to me that all our interesting friends had belonged to Candice.

Which only made me think about how much I missed her. I will not pretend that it was a mutual breakup. Candice said that she didn't love me anymore and that it had taken her weeks of talking with her therapist and the support of all her friends to get up the courage to leave. She said that I was a

wonderful person, but that she just couldn't be the person she wasn't anymore and that she had to save her own life. Tears, nose-blowing. There wasn't much left for me to do but join her chorus of friends and congratulate her for finding the courage to dump me.

I wake up in a sweat, a blade of light crossing my face, grope for the dollar-store alarm clock to see why it hasn't rung. But even as I do I realize that it's the weekend. A plunging in my stomach. Oh Jesus, I cannot believe I feel sickened by the idea of Saturday. Because I don't know what I could possibly do with myself.

A grinding outside. I push back the curtain to see a backhoe tearing up the earth in front of the new townhouses. Even though the workers are still finishing the interiors, carrying in sheets of drywall and squares of parquet flooring, the trees and shrubs and grass have arrived in the back of three dump trucks. Instant neighbourhood.

I reach for my cellphone and start to punch in the code for Candice's number.

I hit the Off button and put the phone down again. Candice is over, and I know it. I am not the sort to make useless, grovelling phone calls, and besides, I already have. On the other side of the wall, the television goes on and I hear whispers and moans. Somebody is watching a porn flick at seven in the morning. I get up, take a shower, shave and dress, put up coffee in the Little Bachelor drip machine, open a snack pack of Frosted Flakes. I sit on the edge of the bed, crunching letters, when I hear "Ode to Joy" reduced to the electronic chimes of my cellphone.

"Mitch, I've finally got you."

"Hey, Mom."

"I've been trying for two days. I was going to call the apartment, but you said not to."

"Candice has a lot of stress at work right now. She's really on edge."

"Poor girl. She's too dedicated for her own good."

"Yeah, that's just what I tell her. How's Winnipeg?"

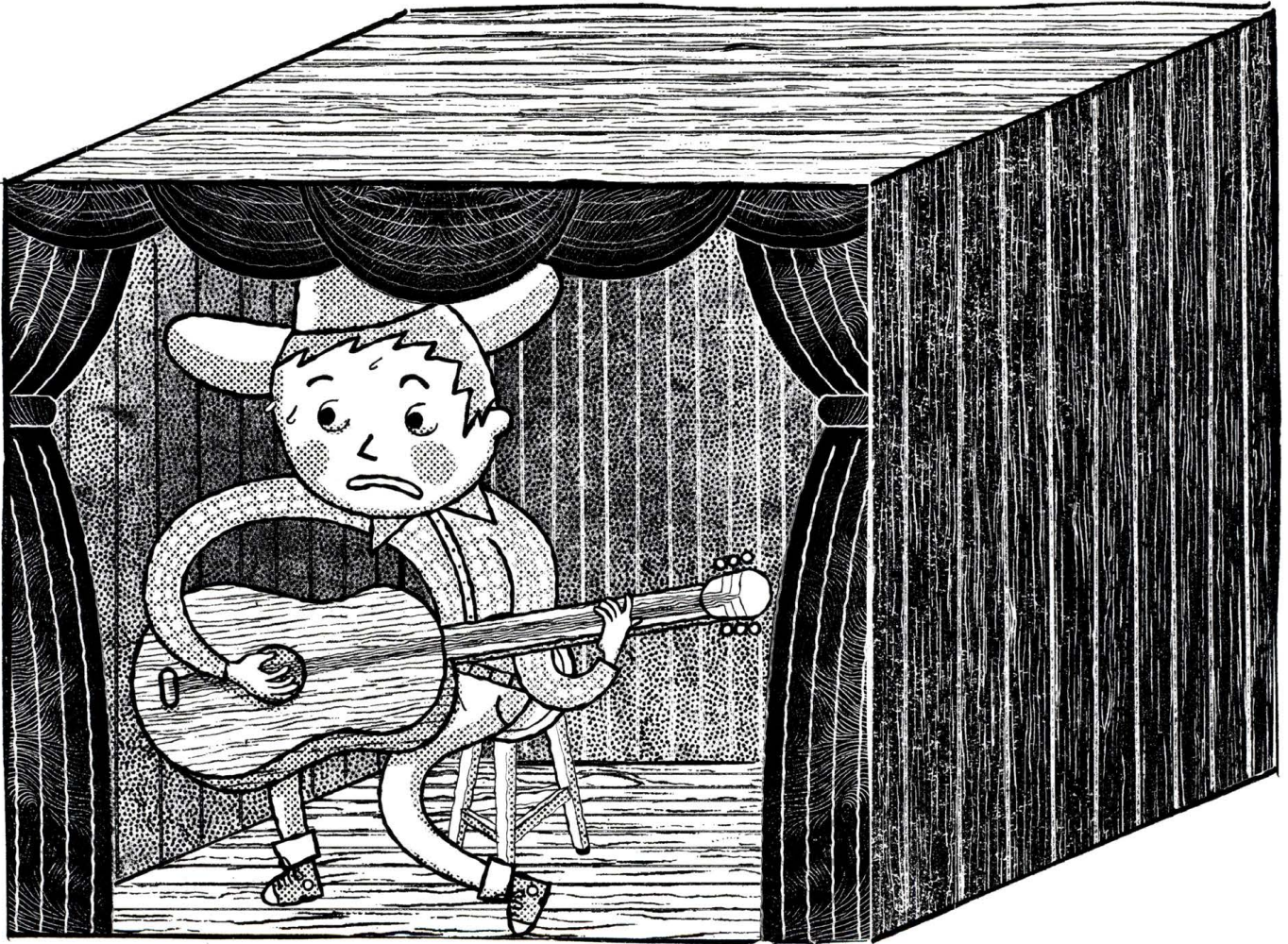
"Mosquitoes already. Marnie Hoffman's aunt got West Nile. She's paralyzed. It's like one of the ten plagues. The rabbi was saying . . ."

I take a sip of coffee. My mother did not go to synagogue regularly before my father died. It was Candice, a lapsed Anglican, who encouraged her to do so as a way to a new social life. My mother said that if it wasn't for Candice, she

little kid making faces at me through the window.

Back in the car, I pull onto the highway too quickly, cutting off the driver behind me, who leans on his horn and gives me the finger. I fiddle with the radio, then snap it off again. It is a bright day, perfect early summer weather, but I'm too lethargic to wind down the window. Without thinking, I turn into the drive of the Treasure Barn, my tires flinging up stones. The car comes to a

alarming rack of checked suits. Rusting rakes and shovels, imploding sofas, bicycle wheel rims, mounted deer antlers. The woman behind the desk, or rather inside a U-shape made from old jewellery display cases, looks up from her crocheting and smiles. I wonder if that's a real gold tooth she has, or just a fake for the weekend tourists. I decide that I must buy something, no matter how inferior or useless. And then something catches my eye.



would have jumped into the grave after my father.

"Are you going to come at the end of June like you said?"

"I said maybe. It really depends on Candice's work. Listen, there's something I've got to do. I'll talk to you later."

"When?"

"Soon."

"You tell that doll not to work so hard."

In fact, I really do have something to do. My laundry. And when that's finished, I stand by my car outside the Laundromat, trying not to look at the

halt beside a couple of rain barrels made into begonia planters. Along with the usual rocking chairs outside are white-and black-faced lawn jockeys, several poorly carved wooden ducks, and an old baby carriage full of used videos. There's a sign on the door, in wood type, saying, "Open" in reverse letters, and I wonder if that means the place is actually closed, but the door swings in when I push it.

Through the filter of dust suspended in the air I see dressers from the nineteen-fifties too ugly to be kitsch, an

A guitar, and not much of a guitar either. A cheap steel-string with the stencilled image of a bucking bronco on its flat top. It looks as if somebody had started to scrape off the bronco with a penknife and gave up after removing a hind foot. I pick it up from the broken chair where it lies, put the fraying macramé strap around my neck, and strum a G chord. At least, I think it's a G chord. Of course, the guitar is out of tune, but the neck looks straight so I take it up to the counter.

"I was wondering how much you

want for this," I say.

The woman peers at it over her reading glasses. "That's a Martin. Two hundred dollars."

"It isn't a Martin. It's a *Marvin*. I'll give you twenty-five bucks."

"A hundred."

"Twenty-five."

"I got a case for it. Eighty."

"I'll take the case. Forty."

She sizes me up: a city slicker who thinks he can put one over on a country bumpkin. "You got cash?"

I know a few chords, or think I do, because when I get back to the motel room and try to play, I find that my memory isn't too good. Or maybe I don't remember how to tune properly, but whatever the reason, all I get out of that shit box is a godawful noise. And I'm only banging on it for a couple of minutes before the porn addict next door starts pounding his hand on the wall because I'm ruining his appreciation of *New Jersey Housewives*. So I take the guitar and go down the hall and out the back door of the motel. I'd planned to sit at the picnic table, but it turns out to be covered in bird shit from the seagulls who seem to have gotten lost, so I keep walking, over the collapsing link fence, through flaming stalks of goldenrod, to the first lawn of the new subdivision. Nobody seems to be working today, and the little bulldozer has been left behind. I walk up the path to the third townhouse—third seems like a good spot—and sit down on the front

steps since there's no actual porch. I strum my chords again and try to pick out a scale, but the truth is I don't know what I'm doing and give up. I stand up, and on a whim, try the front door of the townhouse. And lo and behold, it opens.

I've never been inside an un-lived-in house before, and it's a strange feeling, both spooky and alluring. This one looks just about finished, the walls painted white, the baseboards and sockets in, the oak-veneer kitchen cupboards installed. The only incongruity is a toilet, squatting in the centre of the dining room, like a work by Duchamp. The banister is still wrapped in plastic. Upstairs, the bedrooms are small but the master bedroom has an ensuite bath. Aha, the bathroom is missing its toilet, thus the one downstairs.

Back on the ground floor, I put down the lid of the toilet and sit. I wonder who will live here and what their story will be. They will eat and laugh and bicker around the kitchen table, watch television in the den, play Monopoly in the basement. The kids will dare each other to enter the dark furnace room; the parents will wait until Saturday night to have sex.

Or maybe such lives don't exist anymore. I know they once did; that's what I fled from in the first place.

On Monday, I use my cell to phone Long and McQuade, in Toronto. I order an electronic tuner, a set of Martin strings, a capo, a dozen Fender picks, and three instruction books. The bill

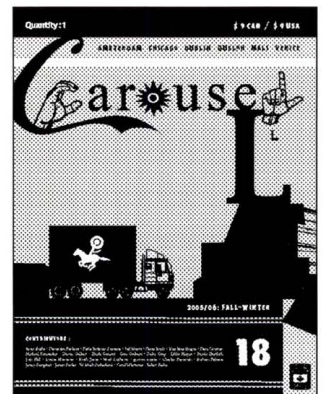
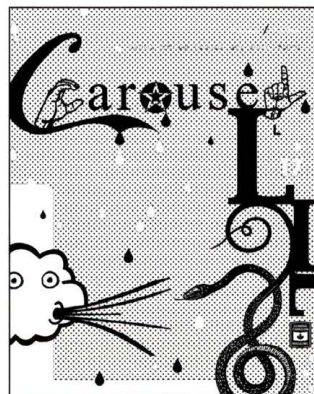
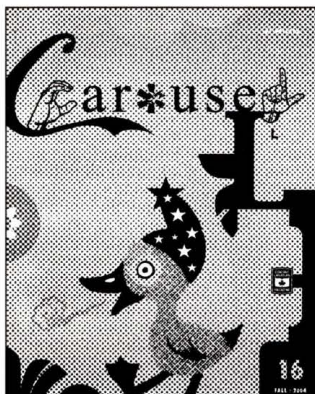
comes to more than twice what I paid for the guitar.

On Friday when I come in, Fred, the motel owner, looks at me with the placidity of a man who knows that time is an illusion and hands me the package from Long and McQuade. Walking quickly to my room, my sample case in one hand and the package in the other, I fantasize about telling Candice that I have taken up the guitar, as if somehow this might impress her, the way I had hoped to impress girls when I was twelve. The fantasy is somewhat spoiled by my knowing that Candice would be confirmed in everything she thinks about me, but I'm too full of expectation to let that get me down. On my bed, I unwrap the goodies and lay them out, everything just so cool. The first thing I do is change the crappy strings. It takes me a good forty-five minutes, puts me in a total sweat, and three times I lance the tip of a finger with the sharp end of a string.

Next, I tune up, checking one of the instruction manuals. Every Athlete Drinks Gatorade Before Exercising. Finally, I take one of the fake tortoiseshell picks, smooth and pleasing to the touch, find my G chord, and strum. To my amazement, the room expands with sweet fullness. Turns out even a shit box of a guitar has music sleeping inside it. I strum hard and faster, but when I get a decent rhythm going, when I'm starting to feel good and thinking I could play this one chord into eternity, the porn addict next door starts pounding

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HEAVY WITHOUT HEAVY RAIN

It doesn't matter what I'm listening to as I pull over to the wrong side of the wet road to better listen before parking underground. Radio shot when you walk by—under an umbrella, your solid hand on the back of a coat—blue raincoat—your solid hand in the middle of her back moving her forward, your long back to me. I feel the thick of my stomach curdle brick, holding me there, here, dry anchor, doppelgänger, seen through rain's veil. Post funeral. Your life without me.

—CATHERINE GRAHAM

on the wall again.

I take the guitar out back, along with the instruction book and a warm beer. I head for the townhouse I now like to think of as my own. I am vaguely dismayed by a Sold sign on the one next to it, but I march right inside mine, calling out, "Honey, I'm home!" and sit on the toilet in the dining room. With the instruction book open on the floor I practise these little four-bar exercises. After about ten minutes, the fingertips of my left hand start to get sore, so I skip the next seven pages of exercises and plunge right into the first song, "On Top of Old Smoky." Dang, I've always wanted to play that ol' classic. I make my way haltingly through it, pausing for a swig of Blue, the work-man's beer.

"Candice, babe," I say aloud, "it does not get better than this."

Today I have seven appointments with doctors serving the suburban Chinese community from shopping-mall clinics. I like these doctors, first- or second-generation Canadian, and less arrogant and dismissive of parasites who feed on their underbellies. Plus, at lunchtime I have my choice of Chinese restaurants.

Back at the motel I change into jeans, grab a beer and my guitar, and head out back toward my townhouse. But crossing the street, I hesitate; someone is at the house on the other side of mine, pounding another Sold sign into the ground. All I can see is that she is wear-

ing a sweater and a knit skirt too warm for the weather, stockings, and heels. I decide to lay the beer down at the roadside and continue on. She is straightening the sign as I come up the walkway. East Indian or Pakistani, pretty but thin, with a beaky nose and a premature streak of silver in her hair.

"Hello there," she says, reaching out. I have to switch the guitar over to take her enthusiastic, real-estate agent's handshake. "Beautiful houses, aren't they?"

"Yes, I've been admiring them," I say, not altogether disingenuously. "It looks like they're starting to sell."

"More than half are already gone. The agents are too busy to put up the signs. Everything will be finished in two months. I find it so exciting when a new community begins. It's like instant happiness."

"So who is moving in?"

"Very nice people, lovely people. Mostly from Bombay. Originally, I mean."

"Really."

"The builders have some connections there. And there are a lot of Indian people living on the other side of the highway. Maybe you've seen the Hindu temple. It's quite handsome."

"Do you represent this one as well?" I ask, pointing to my house.

"Yes, I do. Would you care to take a look? It has an ensuite master bathroom."

"I know. I mean, I've been inside. The door wasn't locked."

She frowns. "The tradespeople can be so irresponsible. Did you see the basement? Unfinished but very easily done.

It would make a good playroom for children. Do you have any kids?"

"No. Not yet, anyway."

"It's best to get into the market as early as you can. In housing, prices are always going up. Of course, it is more than an investment. It is your home. Do you know what mortgage you are able to carry?"

"I'm not really sure. I mean, I haven't worked out the fine details."

"What kind of down payment can you make?"

I think of the money from my grandfather's estate, which was invested in blue-chip funds. I haven't touched it except for taking Candice to Cuba last winter.

"I've got about sixty thousand dollars," I say, although actually it's closer to forty.

"That's quite good. Better than most who buy here. With the low interest rates, you would have only nine-hundred-dollars-a-month mortgage, plus the tax, heating, and other usual bills. Could you manage that?"

"If I was careful."

"It is good to be careful, I think," she says, and smiles. I've never seen a lovelier smile. I'm convinced she really wants me to be happy. "I must tell you that several families have come to see this house in the past two weeks. It won't last long. Here, let me give you my card."

She snaps open her purse, takes out a card, and hands it to me, just as her cell-phone starts to ring. I nod to her, but she is already too involved in a conversation about plot surveys to notice, and I retreat back across the road, swiping up my beer as I go.

I consider telling every doctor I visit of the various symptoms I have been experiencing lately. Depression, punctuated by fleeting moments of desperate exhilaration. On my last call of the day I give in and confess to a family physician called "Doctor Dan" by his patients. Without a word he takes his pad, writes a prescription, and hands it to me.

Rexapro. "This is one of our competitor's products," I say.

"I think it will suit you better."

"Ours has fewer contraindications."

"This one is more generally effective, a wider umbrella."

"Really?" I'm disappointed. Our vice-

president had said that ours worked the best for the most people.

"You know what their rep gave me?" Doctor Dan asks. "A cappuccino machine. Makes pretty good foam."

Back at the ranch, I tuck the prescription into the Gideon Bible in the drawer by the bed. After the usual sumptuous dinner, I head out for a night on the town. Along the strip of highway, cars sliding past, their lights receding in the dark. It takes me no time to reach Bob's Place, and although it's early in the week, there are a dozen Harley-Davidsons gleaming in the lot. I climb the chipped cement steps and open the door. The music that has been vibrating through the glass windows now blasts me in the face along with the rank smell of beer. In the dark I can just make out the bikers at their tables, big guys with greying ponytails, leather vests or jackets, beefy hands around their mugs. Also a few women who match them in bulk and smoke-scarred voices when they laugh. I wonder if they're pissed off about tattoos becoming so popular. The band is crowded into the far corner, thrashing away at some Rush song as if they're playing Maple Leaf Gardens. Most of the bar stools are empty and I pull myself onto one. The bartender, a woman my mother's age (although I doubt my mother would show that amount of cleavage), gives me a friendly smile as she wipes down the bar.

"What can I do you for?"

"I'll have a Blue."

"You got it."

The band takes a break. Only when they come down to join the bikers do I realize they're not young guys. I don't think the bikers are Hells Angels, at least it doesn't say so on their jackets. The beer is so cold it hurts my teeth. Suddenly, I have to pee, and find the john down the hall from the grease-stinking kitchen. It reeks of piss and marijuana. I relieve myself, decide against touching the sink, and head back to the bar, where I down half my beer. My hands are trembling, God knows why, and I slip my right hand into my pocket for some change to jangle, but instead my fingers touch the smooth side of a pick. I must have put it in my pocket after practising. I bring out the pick and press it into my palm

UTOPIA

Late twenty-first century. Scientists discover longevity's hinge, the sleep hormone melatonin, a treasure trove of anti-wane buried in the pineal gland.

First subjects to react: insomniacs. Given supplements to realign circadian rhythms, they exhibit side effects of cell regeneration, an increase in long-term potentiation, memories of inconsequence given the force of real-time experience. Most describe the sensation as an excitation in the brain, the welcome resurgence of circulation that comes with shaking out pins and needles in a limb. Theorists liken the new consciousness to autism with none of the overload. Poets write of wholeness, the womb, self as a mansion with infinite rooms. Drug companies profit. Philosophers reaffirm the death of God in all His forms.

On her fortieth birthday, Meredith is deemed memory-worthy, celebrates with a party,

so that I can feel its rounded corners. I place it on the bar and admire its triangular shape, like it's one of those basic forms of nature.

"You play guitar?" the bartender asks, spotting the pick while she taps a beer.

"Just started really."

"We got an open-mic night on Mondays. We could use a fresh face. What's your name?"

She is already taking a clipboard down from a nail beside the shelf holding the hard stuff. I say, "Mitch."

"What's that, a nickname?"

"It's short for Mitchell."

"O.K., Mitch, you're on for next Monday. The eighth slot. We start at about seven-thirty. You get a free beer."

"All right," I say.

"You want another?"

"I've got to get up early for work." I take out my wallet and put down a bill and some change. Outside the door, the night air caresses my face, the black star-filled sky sprawls above me. Going down the cement steps I hear grunts, and coming round the building, see a couple of bikers beating up some guy,

each taking a punch at him in turn, hauling him up for another. I realize the guy is the lead singer in the band. They let him drop in the dirt and walk past me as they go back into Bob's Place. The singer is up on one knee, spitting blood. I head back down the highway.

On Friday the product reps have a conference at the airport Delta. The star reps are all men in their fifties who never wanted desk jobs. The crowning moment of the day occurs in the conference theatre, where a sleek video advertisement showing sunsets and mountain vistas and waterfalls is projected on the huge screen. And then the name Sopora, our new sleeping pill. The Canadian vice-president of marketing walks out to a standing ovation, our fists punching the air.

I get back to the motel about eight, pulling onto the gravel lot. It isn't as dark as it was a week ago; spring is moving into summer. I drop my crap, throw off my jacket and tie, and pick up the guitar from its case. While listening to the vice-president's speech I sud-

customary for the preliminary prescription.
 She jokes that she's always had
 a fear of the dark, secretly hopes
 she's making the right decision. Presents
 include double-lined blinds, infra-vision
 lenses, novelty scrapbooks and photo albums—
 empty, of course, more for the symbolism,
 curios of recall. "Seriously, though,"
 she says, "I will be remembering you all."
 Rubs her son's hair, kisses his brow,
 downs the first pill to applause, well-wishers
 slightly in awe at the birth
 of another eternal. Meredith
 has joined a populace who deny the past
 its place. A permanent state
 of life-before-their-eyes stockpiles
 sentience until they feel old
 beyond their years. By fifty, Meredith's ego
 has outlived her body threefold. She's
 awake no more than two hours a day,
 increasingly weary of supplying
 the store in her brain. Time
 bows. Seasons pass. In a last act,
 her son parts the curtains before she,
 satiated, relinquishes her grasp
 on an average lifespan.

—MATTHEW TIERNEY

denly decided what song I wanted to perform at the open mic: Leonard Cohen's "Bird on the Wire." I'd loved the song when I was sixteen. It was so melancholy and cool, and it implied that the singer had experienced a lot of sex and that there would be more in his weary future, but that he would always be moving on. Plus, I could still remember the words.

It takes me a full hour to figure out the key and the chord changes. Finding the A, D, and E chords aren't too hard. It's the B minor that takes me so long, but when I get it, the melody falls into place. I can't imagine what it must feel like to create something so yearning, so egotistical, so perfect. I sing and play it over and over, trying to keep in time, make the changes cleaner. When I finally go to bed, the tune goes round and round in my head.

Saturday morning and I am standing on the steps of the townhouse, wearing a jacket and tie with my jeans and running shoes. It is a stunning day, the sun bright, and buds opening on the

spindly trees that have been planted and those still with their roots bundled in burlap. Two blocks down I can see a moving van backed up and two men hefting out a box-spring mattress. The truth is, I wanted to stand here holding a bouquet of flowers, something modest like daisies, but didn't have the nerve. So, empty-handed, I watch as Shanti Bhaskar, the real estate agent, pulls up in her Ford Escort and waves to me as she gets out. To my surprise, she isn't wearing her real-estate agent's outfit, but jeans and Converse runners, and she looks really great.

"Hi, Mitch," she says, like we're friends, "I'm really glad you called. This whole section is selling out much faster than we anticipated. I know there's another agent in my office showing this one today. Shall we go in?"

"Sure," I say as she comes up. "Of course, I'm not quite ready to decide."

"I understand," she says, touching my arm. "It's a problem. You see something you like, you want to take some time over it. But if you do, you'll lose it. You need to accelerate the whole internal

process."

Well, I couldn't decelerate any more than I already have. She opens the door and ushers me in. "So," I say, "any chance you're thinking of buying one around here for yourself?"

"I already bought last year," she laughs. "In the subdivision just south. I wasn't sure that I was ready either, but my husband really pushed it. A good thing too, they're already reselling at ten percent higher."

Only now do I see the ring on her hand. Stupidly, I hadn't looked. Inside the house, the toilet is gone from the dining room and the plastic has been removed from the rails. Shanti turns and smiles gently as she looks at me with her brown eyes, as if she knows everything I'm thinking, as if my own skin is as cheap and transparent as Saran wrap.

"I have tried in my way to be free," I say quietly.

"I'm sorry?"

"It's from a Leonard Cohen song."

"Oh, right. 'Bird on the Wire.' Great song."

Monday. Open mic tonight. I pull into my gravel spot, throw myself out of the car, fumble with the key to open the motel room, yank the guitar out of its case, and start to practise. I fuck up totally. Calm down, calm down. I put the guitar onto the spongy armchair, take off my suit, and step into the shower. I decide not to shave again, but dress in jeans, lumberjack shirt, untucked, sneakers. I heat up a can of Campbell's Chunky beef soup and, taking the pot, perch on the bed looking out the window to the townhouses across the way. The street lights are working now, casting overlapping circles on the street and the little front lawns. I eat a few spoonfuls before putting down the pot and taking up the guitar again. But now the time is already gone, and I put the guitar in its case, wondering why I don't just chicken out. I go out the door and walk along the highway, holding my guitar case, like the figure on the cover of some pathetic folk record.

The parking lot of Bob's Place has half the usual number of motorcycles parked out front, Monday not being the most popular night of the week. Inside, I have to let my eyes adjust to see three young guys already setting up their

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FUNERAL

The first time he rides in a limousine is four days after he dies. His car is spotless—screw-you dignified—reflecting the casualty he leaves behind.

She wears green to spite him. No one looks at the lines she cut into her hands. Denial stays unopened in the clutch of his letters. Tiger lilies press to her side. Never given, *flowers are for funerals*.

A man stumbles, fiddles with the latch on the limo's back door. She moves to the side. Nothing happens. But oh, does she miss and regret.

—SANDRA RIDLEY

Fenders and a small drum kit. I make my way to the bar, where the bartender is filling ketchup bottles.

"Hey there," she says. "No. 8 on the list, right?"

"I think so."

"You want a Blue? On the house."

"Thanks."

"I remember what everybody drinks. It's just a memory thing I have. Even if you don't come in for three months, I remember. Not that it's going to do me any good, with the place shutting down."

"What do you mean?"

She slides the beer in front of me, a line of foam slipping down the cold glass. "Going to be a Valu-Mart here. Groceries and shit. For the new subdivision. And a half-mile down the road there's going to be a mall with six movie screens—Hey!," she shouts to the band suddenly. "Why don't you stop messing around with the damn mics and start playing?"

But the band takes another few minutes. The lead singer does this weird snake motion while he sings, and then their three songs are over and two women in suede vests are already coming up. One has a regular guitar and the other a Dobro, and they sing two Loretta Lynn songs and sound all right, like they've been playing in crummy Nashville honky-tonks for years. Louder applause from the bikers. The bartender slides over to me.

"You're on next, honey."

"But I'm No. 8."

"Well, No. 3 has pussied out and No. 4 is changing his strings, so I'm slipping

you in. You go and rock this place, tiger."

It takes a total refutation of all my instincts to get myself to pick up the guitar case and carry it across the room. It knocks against the arm of a biker, who shoves me back hard. By the time I reach the stage I am shaking like a man pulled out of an icy river. I pull the macramé strap over my head, take the pick from my pocket, and perch on the stool. The glare from the small spotlight turns the audience dark and menacing.

"Get the fuck on with it."

Which they actually are.

My cellphone is chiming on the night table by the motel bed as I unlock the door. I take my time putting down my case, dropping the keys, walking over to pick up the phone. The numbers pulsing on the little screen are Candice's. I stare at them as if I'm looking at the winning numbers of a lottery ticket I've already thrown away.

"Hello?" I say tentatively.

"Mitch. I've been phoning all night." I can hear the shakiness in her voice, but also the annoyance. "I need to talk to you. Come over."

"It's midnight. I'm a forty-five-minute drive away."

"It's kind of important, Mitch."

"It's over then, the new thing?"

"I was an idiot. No, not an idiot. I mean, I understand myself better now, what I had to put myself through."

"Us. Put us through."

"Yes, us. I need you, Mitch."

"I just played a song," I say.
"What?"

"In a bar. A biker bar, if you can believe it. I got up with a guitar and sang 'Bird on the Wire.' When I got down again, the bartender, this older woman, she had tears in her eyes. She said to me, 'Bob used to sing me that song.'"

"Mitch, I don't know what you're talking about."

Atulip bulb looks like a little onion, like you could bite into it. I put one into each of the small holes I've dug with a spoon and pat down the earth. It's too late for them to bloom this year, but they'll come up next spring.

On the next lawn, two young boys are tussling over a soccer ball. Their names are Daya and Rajif. Some older kids have made a ramp out of a sheet of plywood and some blocks left by the construction company and are taking turns jumping on their skateboards. It is an absolutely beautiful morning, like the sun has risen for the first time over the world.

I hear my name, and look up to see Mrs. Kankipati crossing the street with a plate in her hands. She is a handsome woman, with greying hair and large brown eyes, whose husband is an importer who flies to Kashmir every six weeks.

"Mitch, I just made some pakoras," she says. "I think you will like them."

"Oh, I love pakoras."

"But in the restaurant it isn't the same. You try one of these."

She holds up the plate and I take one. It is almost too hot to hold, and leaves oil on my fingers. It is savoury and delicious. "Amazing, Mrs. K."

"You need a wife to cook for you. Maybe a nice Indian girl. What do you think?"

"I need to learn how to cook. Then I'll bring you over something."

We both laugh, and she puts the plate down on the grass and retreats back to her own house. I return to my gardening, knees pressing into the still-new grass, the smell of the earth in my nostrils. The cries of seagulls and the steady hum of traffic from the highway remind me of the ocean. ▽

*Cary Fagan lives in Hillcrest. He is the author of four novels, including *The Animals' Waltz* (Lester, 1994) and *The Mermaid of Paris* (Key Porter, 2003), and two books of stories. He also writes books for children.*

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.)

● *Tell Your Sister*, by Andrew Daley (Tightrope, 2007; \$18.95). After ten years of publishing exclusively in *Taddle Creek*, Andrew is moving on with this, his debut novel. *Taddle Creek* remembers publishing Andrew's first short story like it was yesterday. And though he strayed once and published a story in *Kiss Machine*, *Taddle Creek* gladly forgave him and welcomed him back. "Summerland," "Sunken Treasure," "Prosperity" . . . so many fine stories. And now, *Taddle Creek* must share Andrew with the world. Don't let the girly title fool you—Andrew's book is manly to a big, manly T (yet also touching enough that sensitive types of both genders will enjoy it). Good luck, Andrew. Don't forget *Taddle Creek!* Especially since you're still on staff.

● *I Cut My Finger*, by Stuart Ross (Anvil, 2007; \$15). After a lengthy gap since his last full-length collection of all-new material, Stuart Ross is back. Stu's last couple of books looked good, but *I Cut My Finger's* cover and overall design aesthetic truly capture the bizarre mood of Stuart Ross. A damn-fine book in every sense of the word. (If you buy it at This Ain't the Rosedale Library, try to get a free Band-Aid out of them.)

● *All in Together Girls*, by Kate Sutherland (Thistledown, 2007; \$12.95). Speaking of lengthy absences, *Taddle Creek* was but a gleam in a typesetter's eye when Kate Sutherland last published a collection of short stories (1995's *Summer Reading*). Is it any wonder she launched her book in conjunction with Stu? Which reminds *Taddle Creek*: Kate and Stu are running a fab reading series, called Fictitious. Young as it may be, in *Taddle Creek's* opinion it's already one of the finest series in town. (Free snacks!)

● *Songs for the Dancing Chicken*, by Emily Schultz (ECW, 2007; \$16.95). Every once in a while a poetry collection

comes along that makes *Taddle Creek* swoon, and this is certainly one of them. In part a love letter to alleviate Emily's mad crush on the filmmaker Werner Herzog, *Songs for the Dancing Chicken* is a delight, from its charming smaller-than-a-45 size to its groovy cover still from Herzog's *Stroszek* (*Taddle Creek* really wants to rent office space in that town). What's not to love about a guy obsessed with midgets who hypnotizes his actors, *Taddle Creek* asks?

● *Making Bones Walk*, by Alex Boyd (Luna, 2007; \$15). *Taddle Creek* has a soft spot for Alex, given that he not only appeared in the magazine's debut issue, but is in fact the author of the very first piece of fiction ever to grace its pages. (The only articles that came before it were Alfred Holden's fine essay on *Taddle Creek*—the creek, not the journal—and a very bizarre editor's note that future historians of the magazine should most certainly ignore.) But none of that clouds *Taddle Creek's* judgment when it says rush out and buy this debut collection by the host of the I.V. Lounge, Toronto's best reading series. (Nothing against Fictitious. It's great too. Again: free snacks.)

The State of the Arts: Living with Culture in Toronto, edited by Alana Wilcox, Christina Palassio, and Jonny Dovercourt (Coach House, 2006; \$24.95). Even though no *Taddle Creek* staff members were involved in this, the second volume of Coach House's *uTOpia* series, there are still plenty of interesting things to read and look at within its pages. Whereas the first volume of *uTOpia* was a general Toronto love-in, this follow-up focuses specifically on the city's arts scene. As with the original, not every essay contained within is equally solid, but the editors have wisely made sure their contributors run the gamut on what defines art in twenty-first-century Toronto. *Taddle Creek's* personal faves: Kate Carraway's "The Secret Capitalist," and the second-last panel of Brian McLachlan's illustrated "\$5," which frighteningly reminds the magazine of a certain art director it knows: Pay full price for once in your life, cheapskate!

PEOPLE AROUND HERE · ON THE SUBWAY ···· DAVE LAPP '07.



SHE'S BEEN POOPING AROUND THE HOUSE FOR MONTHS...



I'VE ISOLATED HER IN THE ROOM UP-STAIRS TO MAKE HER POOP IN HER BOX...



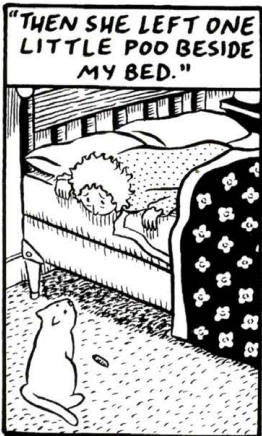
WHAT DO I DO IF SHE WON'T POOP IN HER BOX?!... KEEP HER LOCKED UP?!



I THINK BELLA IS IN SOME KIND OF DISTRESS...



I HEARD HER CRYING, SHE WAS CRYING DOWNSTAIRS, SHE HAD ONE DRY, HARD LITTLE POO.



"THEN SHE LEFT ONE LITTLE POO BESIDE MY BED."



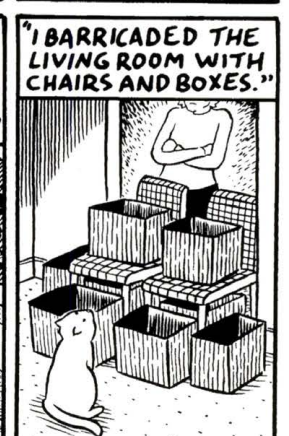
I DIDN'T HAVE THE HEART, I DON'T HAVE THE HEART TO PUT HER DOWN.



"I'VE TRIED PLACING HER LITTER BOX NEAR WHERE SHE'S BEEN LEAVING HER POOPS, BUT SHE JUST POOPS BESIDE IT."



"I'VE TRIED LAYING TINFOIL OVER THE DINING ROOM CARPET, BUT SHE POOPS BETWEEN THE GAPS!"



"I BARRICADED THE LIVING ROOM WITH CHAIRS AND BOXES."



"I BRUSH HER EVERY DAY AND GIVE HER HAIRBALL CONTROL PILLS."



"CAN'T PICK HER UP AND PUT HER OVER THE LITTER BOX... I'VE TRIED THAT, IT DOESN'T WORK."

PLEASE, FOR THE LOVE OF GOD POO IN THE BOX!



"THE NEIGHBOURS RUBBED THEIR CAT'S NOSE IN IT, THEN SPANKED THE CAT! CAN'T DO THAT WITH CATS."

BAD CAT! BAD CAT!



"I'VE DONE EVERYTHING I CAN POSSIBLY THINK OF."



"I'M ALMOST AFRAID TO LOOK IN THE LIVING ROOM... OLD DRIED POO WAITING FOR ME BENEATH THE CURTAINS, BEHIND THE COUCH, UNDER THE PIANO BENCH..."



"MY WHOLE LIFE IS ABOUT WORRYING..., HUNTING FOR POOP, CLEANING UP POOP, FUSSING, AND SO ON."



"WEEK BEFORE I WAS SO DEPRESSED, I WAS JUST GOING TO PUT HER DOWN..."

sniff why? why? why?



"...SIGH, BUT SHE'S MY RESPONSIBILITY AND I LOVE HER DEARLY."

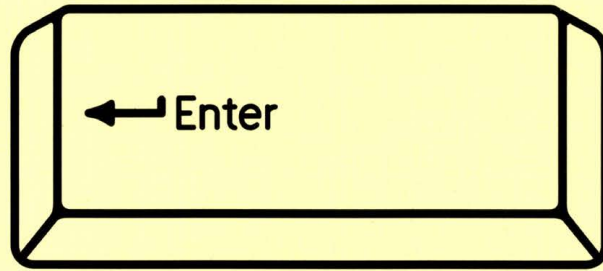
OH! OH! YOU POOPED IN THE BOX!! YOU'RE A GOOD LITTLE PUSSY WUSSER! GOOD LITTLE PUSSY WUSSER!



"I DIDN'T KNOW HOW EMOTIONALLY ATTACHED YOU COULD GET TO ANIMALS."



"MY LIFE IS PATHETICALLY NARROW."



This Magazine's Great Canadian Literary Hunt

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2. First prize in each category is \$750 plus publication in a special literary supplement to the Nov/Dec 2007 issue. Second and third prize in each category is a lovely *This Magazine* prize pack, plus publication in the literary supplement.
3. Entry fees: \$20 for one short story or two poems. Entry fee includes a one-year subscription to *This Magazine**. Each additional entry is \$5. Entry fees must be paid by personal cheque or money order payable to This Magazine.
4. Entrant's name MUST NOT appear on the manuscript itself. All entries must be accompanied by a separate cover sheet with entrant's full name, address, postal code, telephone number, email address, submission title(s) and category.
5. To receive a list of winners, please include a self-addressed stamped envelope. Manuscripts will not be returned. Winners will be contacted by telephone.
6. Entrants agree to be bound by the contest rules. Judges' decisions are final.
7. **Entries must be postmarked no later than July 1, 2007** and mailed to: THE GREAT CANADIAN LITERARY HUNT c/o This Magazine, 401 Richmond St. W., Suite 396, Toronto, Ontario M5V 3A8

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