

TADDLE CREEK

VOL. XI, NO. 2 • SUMMER NUMBER, 2008

THE FICTION	
"Ultra" Sara Heinonen	
"Tart. Sweet. Crunchy. Crisp."	
"The Princess is Dead	
"Speaker" Gil Adamson	
"Aphids" Stuart Ross	37
THE OUT-OF-TOWNER	
"A Situation Comedy" Lee Henderson	38
THE ILLUSTRATED FICTION	
"The Grass Seed" Claudia Dávila	12
THE BROKH E	
THE PROFILE	2.0
R. M. Vaughan Sally McKay and Von Bark The Troubled adventures of a suffering trickster.	20
THE WAR OF THE WORDS DEPT.	
"Slim Curiosity"	34
The Varsity Chapbook was an elegant early step in Toronto's literary development.	
PEOPLE AROUND HERE	
My Town Restaurant	48
THE POEMS	
"Be Careful, It's My Heart" Patrick Rawley	
"Untitled, by Zelda Sayre" Adrienne Weiss	
"Pigeon III" Chris Chambers	29
"Reading Ma Jian on the Farm"	
"New Texas"	
"All You Need is Lorazepam"	4/

THE TADDLE CREEK TALKING MAGAZINE

Audio versions of every story in this issue, in downloadable MP3 format (www.taddlecreekmag.com/talk).

THE COVER

"Spending Warm Summer Days Indoors," by Michael Cho



. . . is really these assholes.

The Editor-in-Chief CONAN TOBIAS

The Associate Editor
ANDREW DALEY

The Copy Editor
KEVIN CONNOLLY

The Proofreader
JOYCE BYRNE

The Contributing Editors
ALFRED HOLDEN, ALEX MLYNEK

The Designer Conan Tobias

The Illustrator IAN PHILLIPS

The Contributing Artist John Montgomery

The Photographer
MARK LYALL

The Audio Producer

DAVE MACKINNON

The Web Host
THE WIRE

The Printer
POINTONE GRAPHICS

The Publisher
VITALIS PUBLISHING

Canad'ä



Canada Council for the Arts

Conseil des Arts du Canada



THE CONTRIBUTORS

Patrick Rawley ("Be Careful, It's My Heart," p. 9) lives in Christie-Ossington. His work has appeared in *This, Word, Dig,* and the anthology *The I.V. Lounge Reader* (Insomniac, 2001).

Adrienne Weiss ("Untitled, by Zelda Sayre," p. 11) lives in Parkdale. She is the author of the poetry collection *Awful Gestures* (Insomniac, 2001), and is currently pursuing an M.A. in English at York University.

Claudia Dávila ("The Grass Seed," p. 12) lives in Little Portugal. She works as an independent children's book illustrator and art director, and publishes the online comic *Luz: Girl of the Knowing*, a weekly strip about learning self-sufficiency and sustainability in the city to prepare for the coming oil crisis.

Chris Chambers ("Pigeon III," p. 29) lives in Niagara. He is the author of *Lake Where No One Swims* (Pedlar, 1999). He currently is putting the finishing touches on a new collection of poems.

Alexandra Leggat ("Reading Ma Jian on the Farm," p. 41) lives in Riverdale. She instructs creative writing classes at Brock University and writes a sports-themed blog. Her most recent collection is *Meet Me in the Parking Lot* (Insomniac, 2004), and her work appears in the anthology *I.V. Lounge Nights* (Tightrope, 2008).

Chris Michalski ("New Texas," p. 43) lives in Etobicoke. His poems and translations have appeared in *Prism International*, the *Antigonish Review*, the *Spoon River Poetry Review*, the *Marlboro Review*, Fire, and Puerto del Sol.

Evie Christie ("All You Need is Lorazepam," p. 47) lives in Downtown Toronto. Her first poetry collection, *Gutted*, was published in 2005 by ECW.

Dave Lapp (*People Around Here*, p. 48) lives near the Church-Wellesley Village. He teaches cartooning to children. His first book, *Drop In*, a collection of his *Window* mini-comics, will be published this fall by Conundrum.

Joyce Byrne (the proofreader) lives in Edmonton. Her mad skillz with spelling and punctuation earned her a special dispensation from *Taddle Creek* to continue as the magazine's proofreader after relocating from Downtown Toronto. She is on the masthead of a handful of awardwinning Canadian magazines, mainly because she is magic with numbers, too.

Ian Phillips (the illustrator) lives in Beaconsfield. He collects junk and runs Pas de Chance press. His book *Lost* was published in 2002 by Princeton Architectural.

Mark Lyall (the photographer) lives in Seaton Village. He works as a graphic designer for a Toronto marketing and communications firm.

Dave MacKinnon (the audio producer) lives in Little Italy. He is one half of the musical group FemBots, and in 2000 he produced the first Taddle Creek Disc of Laser-light Reflected Sound. FemBots' new album will be released soon.

Michael Cho (Cover) lives in Little Portugal, where he works as a cartoonist and illustrator. He is currently working on a graphic novel of short stories.

TADDLE CREEK (ISSN 1480-2481) is published semi-annually, in June and December, by Vitalis Publishing, P.O. Box 611, Station P, Toronto, Ont. M5S 2Y4 Canada. Vol. XI, No. 2, Whole Number 20, Summer Number, 2008. Submissions of short fiction and poetry may be sent to the above address, provided author resides in the city of Toronto. Please view guidelines at www.taddlecreekmag.com/submit before submitting. Subscription rates (four issues): In Canada, \$12. In U.S., \$32 (U.S. funds). Overseas, \$52 (U.S. funds). Canadian Publications Mail Agreement No. 40708524. PAP Registration No. 10688. Occasionally, Taddle Creek makes its subscriber list available to like-minded magazines for one-time mailings. If you would prefer your address not be shared, please contact the magazine. Taddle Creek acknowledges the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Publications Assistance Program and the Canada Magazine Fund toward its mailing, editorial, and production costs. The magazine also acknowledges the financial support of the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council. Taddle Creek is a member of Magazines Canada. Printed in Canada. © 2008 by Vitalis Publishing. All rights reserved. Rights to individual works published in Taddle Creek remain the property of the authors. No part of this periodical may be reproduced in any form without the consent of Taddle Creek or the individual authors. In the case of photocopying or other reproductive copying, a licence from Access Copyright, (800) 893-5777, must be obtained. To inquire about advertising, circulation, subscriptions, submissions, and single and back issues, write to the above address, E-mail editor@taddlecreekmag.com, or visit the magazine's Web site, at www.taddlecreekmag.com. Thanks, Jill Lawless.

THE MAIL

SHANG-A-LANG

I have to disagree with the letter writers Seed Cake and Sean Stanely (The Mail, Christmas). I love your snarky submission guidelines—they crack me up. I also love your index of fictional characters and your columns on grammar and usage. I wish you would do one on "wake," "woke," "awaken," "awoke," and "awakened." I never know how to use these words exactly and so I avoid them. I am a fan, is basically what I am saying.

Mostly, though, I have been meaning to write and say how much I loved, loved, loved Susan Mockler's story, "Big Trip," in the summer, 2007, issue. Just when the mother-daughter relationship almost has you in tears, the mother goes and changes the tape to the Bay City Rollers and invites the daughter into the front seat. Everything changes in the last three sentences. It just about killed me with its perfection.

JENNY HALL
Toronto

MID-LEVEL ROMANCE

In your tenth-anniversary issue I noted some unkind words on the letters page regarding mid-level marketing managers and their pointless obsession with geography (The Mail, Christmas). I have known more than a few mid-level marketing managers who are not without souls. While they do have an unseemly interest in their prospects' postal codes (an indication of affluence, or lack thereof), they also seek out particular psychographic/demographic segments based on education, gender, age, drinking preferences, sexual orientation, and what have you, resulting in hundreds of colourful, even romantic, names for demographic clusters.

TERRI FAVRO
Toronto

UMBRAGE, YOU SAY?

I take umbrage, yes *umbrage*, at your estimation of my book *I*, *Tania* as being the same girth as "a lengthy short story" (The Books, Christmas).

I, Tania, as many of its dedicated fans know, is more than 16,206 words in length. That is a very, very long short story. It behooves me (please note that I've now used the two words needed for

an official letter to an editor: "umbrage" and "behooves") to challenge *Taddle Creek* to come up with a contemporary guide as to what constitutes: a) a short story; b) a novella (or novelette); and c) a novel, and to present your findings to the industry as a whole, perhaps at a book fair or a soup kitchen—wherever you find the most publishing professionals.

Are you up to the challenge *Taddle Creek?*Brian Joseph Davis

Toronto

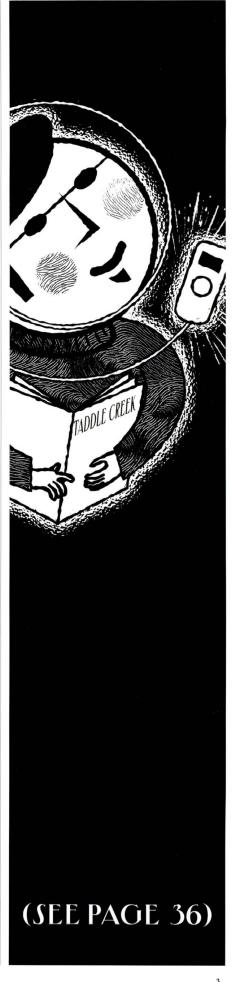
Surely most publishing industry professionals have a subscription to Taddle Creek, Brian, so why not discuss it right here?

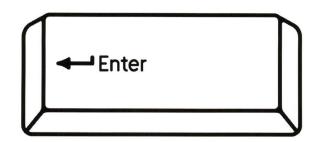
To be clear, what Taddle Creek actually said was: "With a few pages removed, {I, Tania} could easily be a lengthy short story." Could. With pages removed. (And, for the record, your book is closer to 15,826 words.)

So that should be the end of that. But since you're such a good friend of the magazine, Taddle Creek will accept your challenge, even though it really has no strong opinion on the topic. Taddle Creek does not care for labels, Brian. But the magazine had a quick look around for you and discovered, as expected, that there isn't really much of a consensus out there on this. To some, a novella has a minimum of fifteen thousand words. Others notch it up to seventeen-five. (Taddle Creek thinks 15,827 is as good a number as any, but . . .) On the other end of the spectrum, depending on whom you ask, a novel can begin at either forty thousand words, or fifty thousand. Some of the truly openminded writers out there will tell you the whole thing is just a state of mind, and that sounds good enough to Taddle Creek.

Don't get so hung up on labels, Brian. Let go of your story-length envy. Taddle Creek meant no offence. If it makes you feel any better, the magazine will publicly state, right here, right now, that I, Tania has the makings of a miniature novella. And yes, you can use that on the jacket of the second edition. You're welcome.

Letters to the magazine should include the writer's full name, address, and daytime phone number, only the first of which will be published. The magazine reserves the right to mock any nasty or especially silly letters. Due to the volume of mail received, Taddle Creek should have no problem responding to all letters in a timely fashion.





This Magazine's Great Canadian Literary Hunt

Celebrate over a decade of great Canadian writing-enter and win!

1st prize in fiction: \$750

1st prize in poetry: \$750

THISMAGAZINE

Presenting the best Canadian writing since 1966



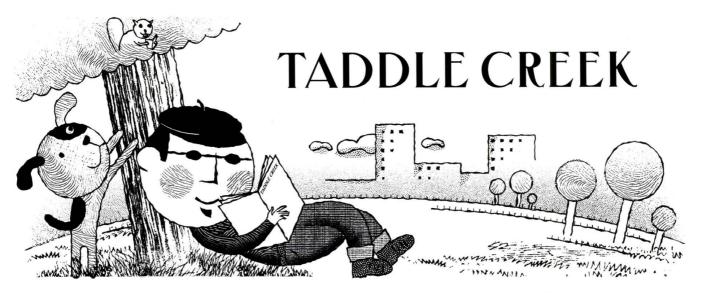
The Great Canadian Literary Hunt Rules of Engagement

- 1. Original, unpublished poems of up to 100 lines and short stories of up to 5,000 words by Canadian citizens or residents are eligible.
- 2. First prize in each category is \$750 plus publication in a special

literary supplement to the Nov/Dec 2008 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 2, 2008 and mailed to: THE GREAT CANADIAN LITERARY HUNT c/o This Magazine, 401 Richmond St. W., Suite 396, Toronto, Ontario M5V 3A8
- * This Magazine subscribers will have an additional year added to their subscription term.

For regular updates on The Great Canadian Literary Hunt or more information about *This Magazine*, visit www.thismagazine.ca



PROPER CAPITALIZATION

Taddle Creek just loves to capitalize words. In fact, it often has to restrain itself from capitalizing every word it sees. But restrain itself it does (and quite professionally so), resulting in a surprisingly liberal use of lowercase letters in its pages.

Proper nouns are another matter entirely, however, and the magazine is becoming alarmed at the increasing number of people who dare to lower-case them. Those who would do so most commonly defend their actions by claiming the words in question have become "common." *Taddle Creek* argues that, by definition, there is nothing common about a proper noun.

A proper noun is the name of an individual person, place, or thing, and is thus spelled with a capital letter. The name "Steve" is a proper noun, as is the name "Chicago." And, as discussed previously on this page, the World Wide Web is also a proper noun.

Words derived from proper nouns are also capitalized, such as "Chicagoan" (a resident of Chicago), and "Web site" (don't get *Taddle Creek* started).

While surely no one would argue for lower-casing the name of an individual person or place, matters get a little greyer when it comes to the "things" category. Take "Manhattan" (a drink comprised of whisky, vermouth, and

bitters, topped with a cherry, and named, either directly or indirectly, after the New York borough), "Chesterfield" (a type of couch, thought to be named for the Earl of Chesterfield), and "French fry" (a fried potato that may or may not have been developed by the French, but which takes its name from them nonetheless). All three words are derived from proper nouns, and for many years were capitalized without question. But open up a recent copy of the Canadian Oxford or Merriam-Webster's dictionaries and you'll see evidence of the trend to lower-case these fine words.

Why? Once again, because dictionaries have become followers instead of leaders: "If we notice that a word is being commonly lower-cased, we reflect that in our dictionary, even if that results in a certain amount of inconsistency," Lisa Devries, a lexicographer with Oxford University Press Canada, recently told the magazine.

Look no further than the letter F in *Oxford's* pages for a prime example of this: it's "french fry," but "French bread." Sure, more people probably eat French fries than French bread, but come on . . .

And how about that loveable friend to all, the teddy bear, named in tribute to the former U.S. president Theodore "Teddy" Roosevelt (ironically, a bear hunter). "Teddy bear" is lower-cased in *Oxford*,

but look one entry below and you'll find "Teddy boy," the Edwardian-style revival fifties youth with that wonderful haircut *Taddle Creek* so admires. *Oxford* upper-cases it, seemingly because it is no longer in common use. But really—no one says "Chesterfield" any more either. (*Webster's* lower-cases them both.)

The Canadian Press, in its style guide, takes matters to the extreme, lower-casing "Ferris wheel."

Many people confuse proper nouns with trademarks. And while trademarked names are still proper nouns, they are different in that they are legally registered entities, such as Kleenex or Dumpster. Thus, their capitalization is protected by law.

Taddle Creek likes that kind of law. Sadly, there is no law to protect the memories of the Earl of Chesterfield, King Edward VII, or George Washington Gale Ferris, Jr. Until there is, Taddle Creek will do its part to keep their memories alive in its pages, even if it means defying the dictionaries yet again.

—TADDLE CREEK

Every story in this issue has an audio counterpart, available as a free download from the *Taddle Creek* Web site, at www.taddlecreekmag.com/talk. Plug in your iPod and get downloading!

ULTRA

BY SARA HEINONEN

 ${
m R}$ on slouches in the swivel chair and presses the Play button with a socked toe. He has convinced Cassandra from Deli to come up and watch something unusual on the security monitor from the morning's power outage. The monitor shows Aisle 5 in infrared mode. Shelves of ketchup, cooking oils, Saran wrap made eerie by the lack of light and shoppers. Several seconds pass before a middle-aged woman with short brown hair appears pushing a loaded cart.

"So this was just after it happened?" Cassandra looks at Ron's neatly combed hair, detects a minty scent in the air.

"Just before they got the generator running. They'd already evacuated."

"Then what's she doing still inside?" "Hang on, just watch."

The woman abandons her cart and charges down the aisle and out of view. Ron hits a button to show Aisle 6, likewise deserted except for the sprinting woman. She stops at the laundry detergents, removes several enormous boxes from the bottom shelf, and crawls into the cavity. Her arms appear and reposition two boxes to fill the gap. And she's gone, only she isn't.

"O.K., that's weird."

"You haven't seen the best part." Ron reaches for Cassandra's waist but she twists away.

"You have thirty seconds to show me. I'm not even on break. I said I was going to the washroom."

"Patience, Cassandra. Keep watching."

T lay in bed listening to the incessant 上 and unusual squeaking of the cardinal that woke me. It seemed like a sign. I turned to look at Benny, half-asleep, with one arm shielding his eyes from a stripe of sunlight. "Since when have cardinals started sounding like two pieces of Styrofoam rubbed together?"

"How can you talk that way about a bird? Jesus, Barb, it's nature."

I got up and pulled on a T-shirt and shorts. What could a change in song signify? An environmental imbalance? Something about to happen? I felt com-

pelled to make an unscheduled inventory of my emergency provisions in the basement room where I store cans of tuna, beans, potatoes, soup, bottled water. Several shelves had been emptied. I shot back upstairs and Benny confessed that he and our son, Carson, had hauled off a few dozen cans to a community food drive. I would discuss the provisions issue with Carson later. On Saturday mornings he was usually teleconferencing for the two organizations he ran from his bedroom (world peace and the preservation of some bird species—not cardinals, thankfully). He was planning to spend that day making his birthday piñata (a combat tank to be whacked down from the basement ceiling, then burned on the driveway. The day before, when he'd tried to explain the underlying political statement, I had left the room, overwhelmed). He'd promised not to turn the party into something huge like the earthquake relief benefit in our living room that necessitated hiring an engineer (our home's structural load: maximum two hundred and fifty people, seated or standing still). Carson was turning eleven.

The time will come when my family will gush gratitude for my foresight. They will survive because of it. All I ask is that they respect my efforts to prepare for the emergency that will surely one day test our wits and resources. The newspaper on our doormat suggested that day had arrived—"ELECTRICITY GRID OVERBURDENED," "NO FORESEE-ABLE END TO MARATHON HEAT WAVE," "WORLD OIL SUPPLY PAST PEAK," "PROVINCE ON TERRORISM ALERT." After a quick, nutritious breakfast I was off to Ultra-Store, a five-minute drive away.

It took another five minutes to cross the parking lot past shoppers pushing huge rattling carts under a sky that was a vague whitish-grey composite of heat and smog, a sky with no suggestion of how the day should be spent. A whatever kind of sky, like the environment giving the finger right back at

us. The leaves of the puny trees were browning. The expansive sidewalk was a large griddle capable of cooking people before they could get inside to the food. The automatic doors, opening and closing, repeatedly sighed a one-note mantra, or was it a warning? Maybe a hymn. With an extensive restocking list, I was looking at minimum forty minutes in Ultra-Store, a grocery store gone mad. A loathsome place. An airport hanger with Spider-Man underwear, six flavours of pomegranate juice, marinated beef kabobs, fitted bedsheets, flaxseed oil, Tensor knee braces, citronella candles, Egyptian tomatoes, frozen nan bread, ant traps, novelty socks, forty types of deodorant, and starfruit from Indonesia. With brilliant lighting reaching into every corner. With no place to seek shade. I could only brace myself and shop.

My cell rang. Or played, rather, one of Carson's compositions that he programmed into it.

"Hello?"

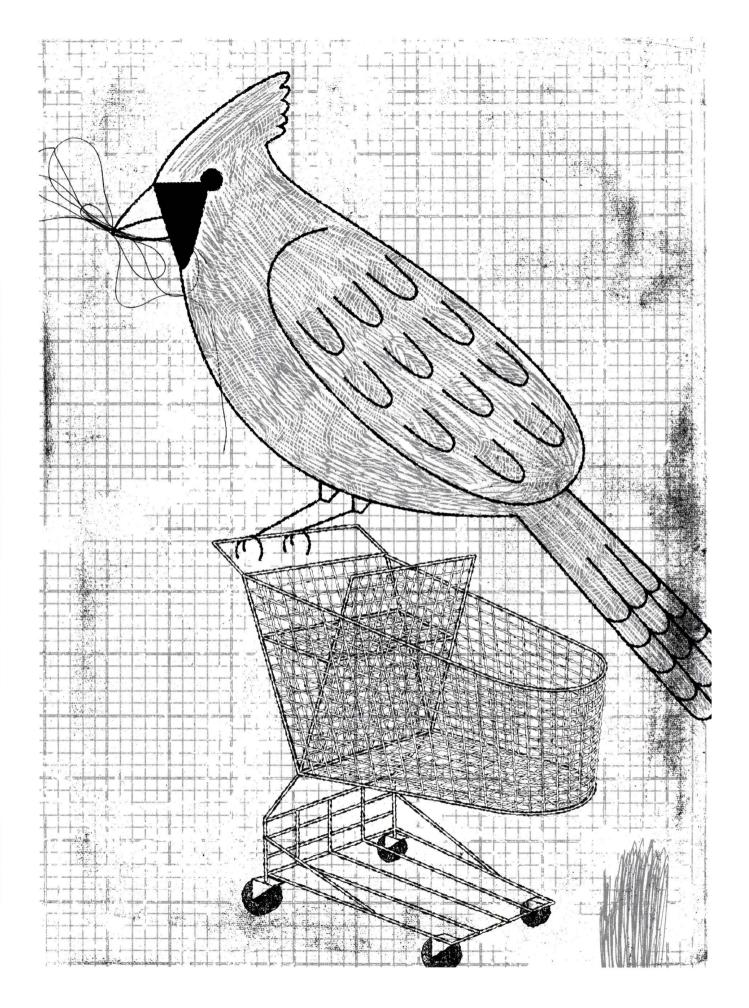
"Can you pick up a few things from our regular shopping list?" Benny calling.

Well, the cart will be full of restocking items, but I'll try to squeeze something in." He would recognize my pissed-off tone and its subtext: How dare he compromise our safety by decimating the provisions.

He said, "Bagged milk, one per cent," and hung up.

"Good morning, shoppers! Wondering what to serve for dinner? Pick up a box of breaded chicken bits from the freezer aisle. They're every bit as good as fresh!" The voice cut off and the store soundtrack resumed with a Madonna song Benny had sung badly at a karaoke bar on our honeymoon.

Approaching the bottled waters, I was distracted by a man staring at boxes of licorice. He looked vaguely familiar, maybe Joel Wallingford, who used to hang out with Benny and me at Scarborough College. At first I wasn't sure if it was him—the slackened chin and ₹



pouches under the eyes, the faded Roots T-shirt and cargo shorts. Joel used to gel his bleached hair into explosive shapes, wore wacky shirts and tartan pants. The guy turned and stared, caught, like me, looking ordinary in middle age.

"Barb?"

"Joel."

"Wow, you live around here? I've never seen you."

"I tend to keep a low profile."

"Ha ha!" His outburst earned the stares of several weary shoppers. "So, how're you doing? Man, it's got to be—what—fifteen years? What are you up to these days?"

"Just some geotechnical consulting. Dirt and aggregates, nothing special." I dismissed my life, flicked it away like lint from my shirt. All for his benefit. True that my home-based business had withered, or so Benny accuses, in reverse proportion to my burgeoning hobby: collecting information on humanity's progress toward self-annihilation.

"And how's Benny boy?"

The image of a charming young Benny popped into my mind, surprising me. Benny Morton, the moderate one, the one who eased Joel and me and others back from the edges of things. Like intriguing drug offers or arguments with sharp-tongued drunks in clubs. Benny, who led us back to our homes to sleep, or in my case, to bed. In our current marital state as distracted housemates, it was too easy to forget.

"You knew we finally got married? We have a son."

"Fantastic. Well, as you can see, I'm still standing. Still breathing." He sucked in a great gulp of air and, on the exhale, added, "Married too. Third time." He shrugged and looked around, as if to locate family members or a shopping cart or some other life accessory. "So this is fantastic running into you. We should get together. I'd love to see the Benmeister. Has he changed? What about his amazing hair?"

"Benny is still Benny, though with diminished hair." Recently, I'd trimmed his crazy halo of brown curls in an attempt to make it proportional to his bald spot. His hair as exuberant and generous as the man himself.

"Benny's the best. The best." Joel shook his head in awe.

I nodded, wanting a wrap-up—I still felt like strangling Benny, after all.

Joel's gaze drifted to my cart. "Man, Barb, you doing some serious cooking or what?"

"Just stocking up."

"Yeah? I should do that."

"Not enough people realize the importance of provisions."

"Provisions?" A giggle burbled out.

"Well, yes. You never know when something might happen." I was reluctant to get into it, but couldn't stop myself.

"You mean, like fifty people show up for dinner?" He was sniggering.

"No, something catastrophic. Like a collapse of the food distribution system, which is vulnerable, to say the least."

Joel indulged in a rippling laugh that rose in pitch and volume. Passing shoppers smiled at us as if they'd rather stand around with a goof like Joel—who once convinced me to skip a midterm soils test to hang out with the guitarist from the Meat Puppets—than get their shopping done and get the hell out of there.

Tears formed in his eyes. "Barb, you're



BE CAREFUL, IT'S MY HEART

it's Bing Crosby in blackface in a movie about Christmas it's everybody dancing and smiling like umbrellas ashtrays on every table it's clever people acting yokel, talkin' homesy it's everything corny and good old days it's stretching a rhyme, working a bit it's not my watch you're holding, it's my heart

it's home cooking and production numbers taxis and telegrams and New York over the holidays shiny shoes and hidden string selections and cigarettes fake-snow machines, empty dance floors, perfect choreography—boy meets girl, boy dances with girl

it's the manic smiles, the constant mugging for invisible cameras, it's the smugness and the white-bread the high-riding trousers, the pie-plate ties all that pomade, those demure manners, the hip lingo wasted on squares

it's a world of fairy tales without any dragons, but with plenty of evil queens, everyone is gay and that's not queer it's singing in the rain, dancing in the dark, till the clouds roll by me and my gal

who could ask for anything more?

—PATRICK RAWLEY

something. I'd better get going, but E-mail me, O.K.? Joel100@hotmail."

It would be O.K. when I got away from him. Carson's music played from my purse like a miracle.

"I'd better take this call."

"Don't forget: joel100@hotmail."

"Absolutely."

He bounced away on the balls of his feet.

It was Benny again.

"Jesus, Barb. Here's what I need for dinner: two pounds of stewing beef, onions, green pepper—"

"Whoa. You're making a stew when it's forty-five with the humidex." Surely if I laid the facts in front of him, he would see his folly.

"I'll turn on the air. I'm in the mood for hearty." Possibly a comment on my recent foray into beans and tofu: eating low on the food chain.

"Unbelievable." I rolled my eyes at a passing woman, desperate for a witness to my husband's inanity. "I will not fur-

nish you with the makings of an irresponsible meal. . . . You know damn well why not." I hung up.

Benny and I had an understanding about the air conditioner. If he turned it on, I'd leave the house in protest against burning coal to relieve us from excessive heat caused, in part, by burning coal. Carson was with me on this and could be counted on to don his "PULL THE PLUG ON WASTE" T-shirt, though he did remain in his cooled room. I'd been meaning to talk to him about that.

I made a sharp aisle turn and almost rammed my cart into Joel and the loaf of bread he carried. I managed a smile and kept going.

"Code 99 to the shipping dock."

I moved through the store, following my list and watching customers reach for things they probably hadn't come to buy. I watched their pace slow to the Valium tempo of the sound-track. If they weren't careful, they might forget to leave. I pushed my

cart, hearing the staccato beeps of the cash-out scanners layered over an irritating Tina Turner song, "What's Love Got to Do With It," I'd spent twenty years trying to forget.

I was reaching for a can of chickpeas when I felt a breeze on my neck, heard the squeal of a cart at my heel. Benny, with a red face and bulging eyes. He must have raced over. A Benny this pissed off was an unusual sight. I hesitated to break eye contact but had to see what was in his cart: three trays of stewing beef and a bag of brownies that wouldn't make it through the car ride home with him this stressed. He started grabbing cans of tomatoes like a delirious game-show contestant.

"I've got the air on and it's going to be the perfect temperature when I get back to make a humungous pot of stew. It's going to be simmering for *hours*." An elderly couple glanced up from their shopping list, frowning.

"Did you not feel the temperature out there? We are simmering, Benny. The world is on the brink of crisis and we need to be thinking of survival, not comfort. But go ahead. Cook a stew on the hottest day of the goddamn freaking millennium. I'm speechless—"

"Code 400 to the shipping dock." I looked around but no one was acknowledging the apparent escalation of codes.

"No, you're neurotic is what it seems to me. And you're making Carson neurotic too. I don't even know what the hell either of you are talking about half the time."

"I'm shopping to protect our family. Call that neurotic, then. And who's looking after Carson, by the way?"

"June is checking in on him after she cuts her grass. But you, Barb, you are really getting screwy."

"Screw you, Benny!" I turned, heart sinking into my gut, and met the horrified stare of a woman who was covering the ears of her toddler. Had we been yelling?

Benny stormed off with his cart, the drama hugely diminished by how long it took him to pass the rice, pasta, and boxes of Kraft Dinner. I headed the other way, not caring where to. I ended up in front of a fridge loaded with the Pepperettes sausage snacks Benny adores. His family's cardiac history being what it is, I only buy them for special treats.

THE TADDLE CREEK

INFORMATION
SUPERHIGHWAY
LOCATION ON THE
INTERNETWORK

DO

TADDLECREEKMAG.COM

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

SENDING YOUR FICTION OR POETRY TO TADDLE CREEK? THEN THE SUBMIT PAGE ON THE MAGAZINE'S WEB SITE SHOULD BE YOUR FIRST STOP. INCLUDES FORMATTING TIPS AND A LIST OF BANNED SUBJECT MATTER.

ON PUNCTUATION, TYPOGRAPHY & SUCH

NOW ON-LINE: ALL OF THE MAGAZINE'S GRAMMATICAL AND EDITORIAL STYLE RANTS. SUBJECTS INCLUDE THE EN DASH, LEAVING TWO SPACES AFTER A PERIOD, BI- VS. SEMI-, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF FACT-CHECKING FICTION. VISIT THE ARCHIVE PAGE (JUST ABOVE THE POETRY).

PEOPLE AROUND HERE

EVERY INSTALLMENT OF DAVE LAPP'S SLICE O' LIFE COMIC STRIP IS NOW AVAILABLE FOR ON-LINE VIEWING. SEE THE CAMERON HOUSE, THE GREEN ROOM, THE JET FUEL COFFEE SHOP, AND OTHER TORONTO LANDMARKS THROUGH DAVE'S EYES.

NOW WITH A NEW, EASIER-TO-READ ON-LINE TYPEFACE! "Hey, Barb. Benny's here too." Joel was beside me holding a kielbasa. "I bumped into him on his way in."

"We're fighting."

Joel put the kielbasa back like it was something he would have to earn first. He fixed me with a steady gaze. "Fighting is part of marriage. And it's O.K. As long as you keep the love flowing too. When you hold back on the love"—he pretended to pull his hair out—"it's hell."

"My marriage isn't the problem, Joel. The problem is that nobody seems to see the big picture."

"You're right. It's *all* about perspective." For a moment he stared at the display of plastic deck chairs beside the pasta fridge. "E-mail me, Barb. We should talk." He walked off with his bread.

I could hear little voices singing the alphabet out of synch and turned. Two girls in purple jackets were crouched beside the deli counter. They stopped at P and started over. Behind the counter, a young woman yawned and weighed a tub of potato salad with a blank expression. "Cassandra," her name tag read, the italicized letters suggesting a dynamic quality that wasn't apparent. She slapped a sticker on the lid and looked at the clock as she passed the tub to the customer. Imagining the tedium of her job, I considered my own relative freedom. Benny had done well with his hockey store, well enough for me to pursue my research. That got me thinking about Benny's good qualities: his unsinkable optimism, his tolerance of things he didn't agree with. Maybe I was being too hard on him. I picked up some Pepperettes and hid them in my cart.

I found Benny in the cookie aisle. "Remember your heart. You have to limit the saturates."

"Barb. Sweetie." He put the Decadent chocolate chip cookies back and reached for my hand. His eyes were damp. "That's what I need. I need you to show me you still care."

"I do, though. I always do."

"Good morning, shoppers! Be sure to visit our dairy section and sample our new Stringy Cheese flavours. Don't forget to pick up the Ultra-Pak and save."

"No, you're focused on practical things. Like that spreadsheet on survival strategies. You don't pay attention to me." "What kind of attention do you expect when you take off with half the provisions?"

"It was a food drive! I didn't take, I *gave.*" He shook his head as if to clear the subject away. "Barb, we have to keep the love flowing. Our love."

"So you bumped into Joel Wallingford too. What's with him?"

"He's a good guy. He cares about us, even after so many years. Right away, he's giving me advice."

"Let me know when he's got a solution for climate change, O.K.? I've got to finish up here. I still need proteins." I was about to leave but his eyes were still shiny. "So you're O.K., Benny? I'll see you back home?"

"You keep going, Barb. Proteins." I squeezed his hand and set off.

I was almost at canned tuna when a deafening boom shook the building. The vibration lasted several seconds. People gasped and stopped. The lights went out. The scanner beeps stopped. One long and uneasy moment of quiet followed before people began murmuring and a voice called instructions I couldn't hear. Everyone started rushing through the darkness toward the exits, abandoning their carts. I couldn't leave mine. I was frantic, wheeling it down aisles, looking for Benny, wanting to warn him about going out, about blindly following the others into an unknown situation outside. The store was emptying. I breathed shallow gulps of air, pushing the cart, trying to fight the urge to join the panic and leave. I needed to calm down. Figure out a plan.

I saw the detergents. A place to hide and regroup until I understood the nature of the threat. I'd phone Benny and check in on Carson. I shifted enough boxes out to make space and crawled onto the shelf. I tried my phone but there was no reception. It was dark and silent. No music, scanner beeps, price checks. No messages for shoppers. The boxes around me like gravestones.

Soon I heard the squeak of rubbersoled shoes and a voice, as precious as my own heartbeat, calling my name.

I could only manage a whisper: "Benny."

"Barb!" He was near, then pulling the boxes out, and leaning into my hiding spot. "Honey, what are you doing? They

UNTITLED, BY ZELDA SAYRE

You have such a beautiful back, it could make me cry. I want to kiss it all over, but then, I'd wake you, and you'd hate that, as much as you'd hate your back being kissed, stared at. A fire is in my belly, I long to say, long to write, but am unsure how that sounds should I say it out loud; how that reads should you read it and think me silly. I do not want to be thought of as silly, and do not think of myself this way. My passion a lonely, frightful thing I want you to fit in, simply. But then, you are not simply fit. No, you move beyond cities, beds, pretending there are secrets to your life. I drag your love behind me—it is silk, evaporating to dust, and you write stories out of that dust, in shades of me. My words you take for yourself. Now my hand reaches, madly, maddeningly close to your skin. But you do not move, and I am not sure what I love or hate more: this muscular back, the spine's crevices and particular strangeness, or the other side's face, and all its maligned, affected scorn.

—ADRIENNE WEISS

want everyone outside. I snuck back in when I didn't see you."

"Carson! I have to call."

"I already did. June's helping him paint the piñata."

"He shouldn't be outside. It's not safe."

"Barb. It's not what you're thinking. It was just a delivery truck. It rammed into the building, knocked down some wires. It damaged the generator. But everything's O.K."

This news didn't relieve me. I couldn't understand why.

"I'm so frightened."

"Don't be. It was just an accident."

"But I can't stop worrying."

"Let's share the worrying. We can worry together."

I reached out to stroke his cheek and the lights flicked on, only very dimly. A guitar solo began playing, a song I couldn't place.

"Hey, see? They have the generator going."

"Benny, only you would know to come find me here. Only you understand."

"This is good, Barb. We're really listening to one another, really talking. That's all that matters, right?" I stared at his face squeezed between detergent boxes and wanted to laugh. Benny smiled. "We should celebrate tonight. Have a special dinner."

That reminded me. "The stew, though. There's still the problem of your energy consumption. I can't abide by that."

"O.K., what about a barbecue. Beef

kebabs. Mmm."

"Lower, Benny."

"Sausages?"

"Lower."

"O.K., chicken. Forget tofu, Barb. There's no way I'm putting that stuff on the barbecue."

"All right, chicken."

"What do you say we have friends over?"

"You've already invited Joel."

"It'll be like when we were young. Like it used to be."

"That does sound kind of nice. Benny?" "What is it, Barb?"

"I could really use a cuddle right now."

Cassandra eyes the clock. "It's probably getting busy. I'd better go."

Ron fast forwards until some guy is on his hands and knees with his head between the Ultra-Paks. The store lights are partly on, affording a better view of his wide bottom.

"Who's that?" She's interested again.

"Who knows?" They watch as two slender hands reach out and grasp the man's arms. He backs away, helping the woman out and up to standing. They converge in a tight clinch, their mouths locking together.

Cassandra stares at the monitor. "That's new."

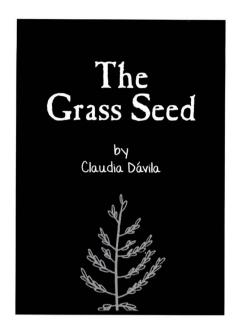
"You can bet the dweebs in Marketing would never expect consumer behaviour like this. Does it really surprise you, though? Some people can't control themselves with the lights off." Ron slaps the arm of his chair and swivels to look at her. "Well, that had to be worth a trip up to my lair, eh? Care to climb on and join me for a little spin?"

Cassandra isn't listening. Why should she pay attention to someone who reads gaming magazines in a darkened room with no clue about what it's like down there. He doesn't know how easy it is to slip into a robotic trance slicing greasy meats in the fake sunshine. There are times she wants to escape the counter and run like that woman did. Or drag her hands down the perfect displays, start an avalanche of gum, oranges, potato chips. When the truck crashed and the power went out-in that wonderfully unscripted moment when no one knew what to do. she felt a surge of excitement. Like the electricity was coursing through her instead of the store.

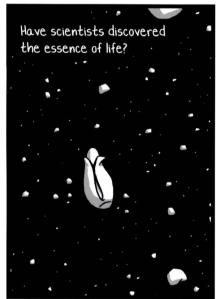
Cassandra opens the door. "Sorry, Ron. Gotta go. Gotta go serve the people."

When she hands over a tub of green coleslaw or a bag of limp ham, she'll look for a flicker of recognition in their eyes, a hint that they're also thinking about how ridiculous things have become. From now on she'll be watching more closely. Vo

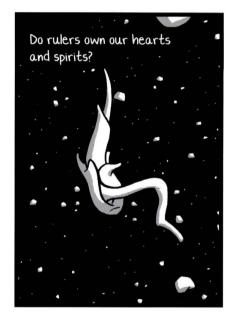
Sara Heinonen lives in Danforth Village. She is a landscape architect who designs gardens and writes fiction. Her work has appeared in This and Grain.





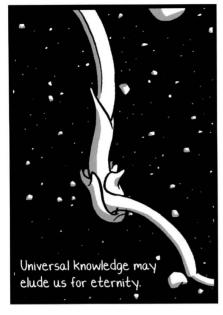
















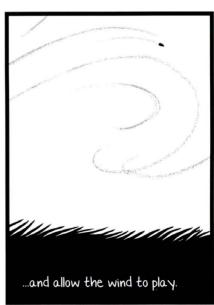




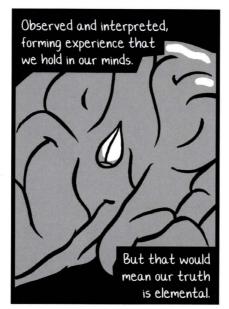


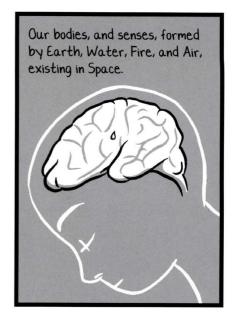


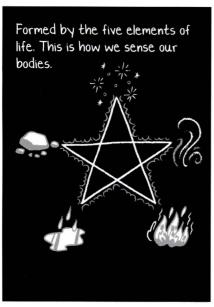


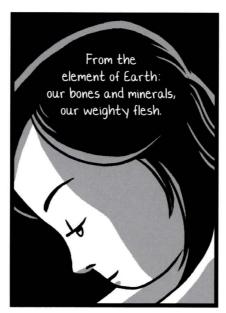


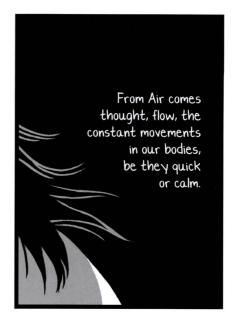




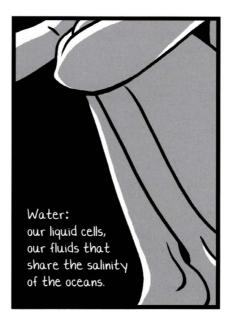


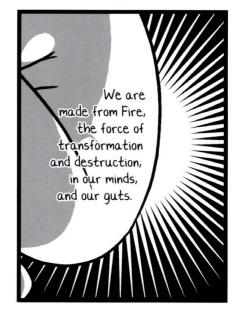


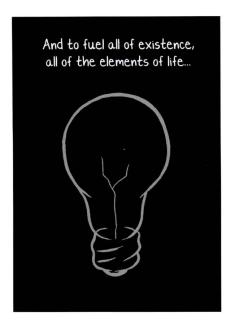


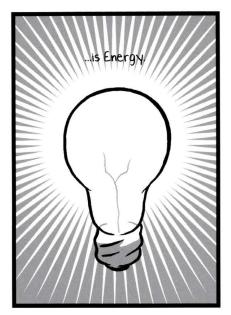


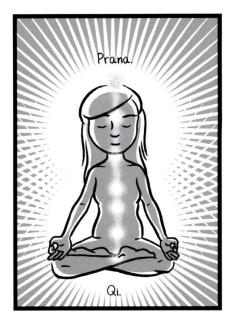


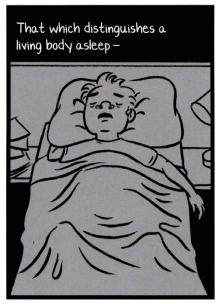












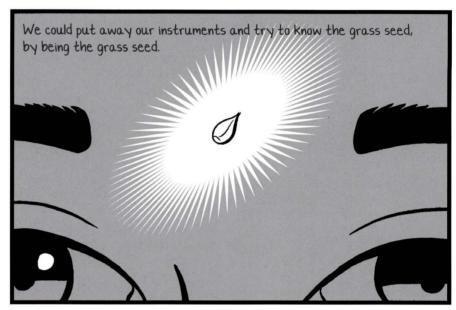


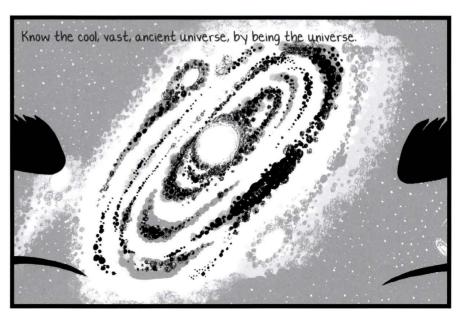


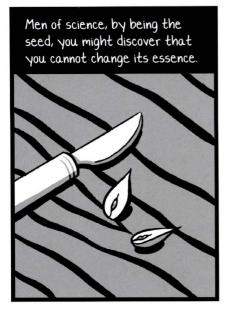








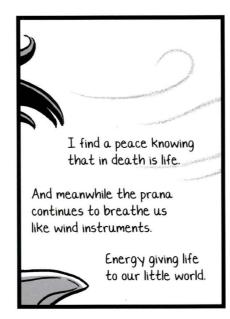












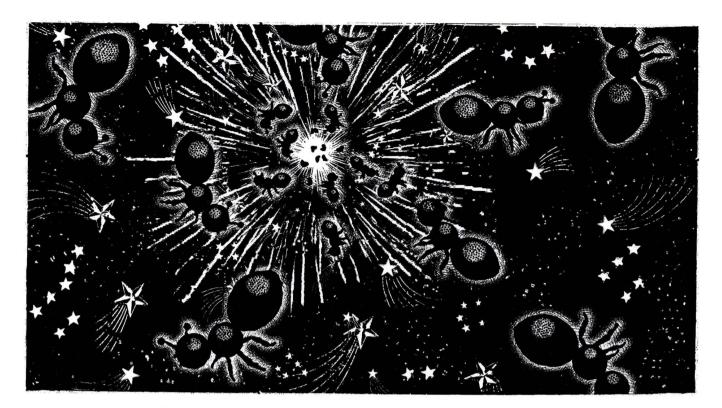












TART. SWEET. CRUNCHY. CRISP.

BY GARY BARWIN

e were sitting in a waiting room outside the big office. I'd brought a copy of a jazz magazine to read and it sat on my lap, unopened. She was around my age, mid-twenties, her dark hair tied back, her jeans and Tshirt plain and nondescript. Did you know that Chet Baker died by falling out of a window? she asked. Imagine, she said, the propped window, Chet's lank body draped sideways over the sill, a leg hanging over the edge as he gazes out at the Amsterdam street below. He's singing a tune in his sweet voice. Maybe it's "When I Fall in Love," because then he really did fall.

It might have been an accident, she said. Yes, there was heroin in his system and cocaine in the hotel room. So that might have had something to do with it. It wasn't likely murder because the door was locked from the inside. And a window only two storeys up wouldn't be a good choice to jump from, don't you think? He was kind of a worn-out angel, but he was making some of the best records of his career. Then he

pulped his head on the concrete. He already didn't have teeth and had had to learn to play trumpet all over again, except with dentures. After the fall, he couldn't very well play without a head. Though I suppose a few have tried, she laughed sweetly. And then added, suddenly serious, We lose people like that. Without warning.

We'd been sitting for a couple hours in the small waiting area, just a few chairs, a couple of worn magazines, and some kind of batiked fabric art from the seventies. I knew there was something I should have said when she became serious, but I hesitated, not knowing what, and then it was too late. I'd taken too long.

I thought of it later. Sponsor me in the gravity-a-thon. Sponsor me in the gravity-a-thon today, for I will remain pulled to the earth forever. You can sponsor me by the hour or the day. You can pay in one lump sum, which, considering my mass and shape, might be most appropriate. I will help hold things together. I will be pulled toward to the

centre of many things and this pulling will help. Things will stay together. They will remain clumped, pressed down like soil in the path of wide-hooved horses. The roads of the world shall not erode, and its mountains will not fly through the clouds.

But I too have my own force in the universe. I pull matter toward me. The sun. Jupiter. A raisin. Galaxies and superclusters. Ants. There is attraction. Far from home, the shape of a comet, and its path changes because of me. Even more if I eat this next sandwich or that apple.

And there is an attraction that flows between the stuff of everything. The citizens of the world, its fish, and its stones. Gravity flows between us like an aura that shakes hands, that clasps us together as a drowning swimmer and his rescuer tug at each other over the edge of the boat, as waves rise and fall, escaping from the ocean and returning, escaping and returning, as indeed the moon pulls the tides, a restless sleeper tugging on blankets, pulled by dreams.

And I will sponsor you also. I will sponsor you and you will sponsor me. We both will move toward the centre of the world. I will

pull you toward me and you will pull back. We will pull the living and the dead toward us. We are swimmers in an ocean of tide and undertow, an ocean of time and space.

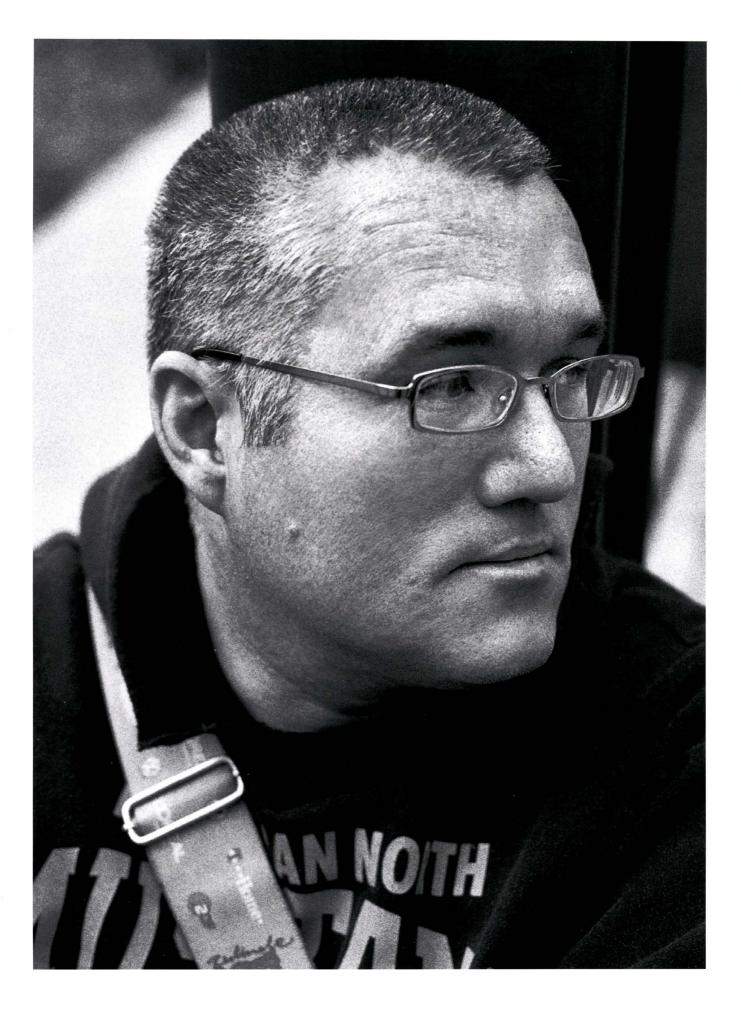
But, of course, it would have been typical of me to think of that. I'd have wanted to stand up in my superhero cape in the waiting room and make everything right, speaking not for the meaning, but for how the words fell trippingly on the tongue. Still, though, the sudden seriousness of her words stayed with me: We lose people like that. The words like a plaintive hole in space, like someone had erased a shadow, leaving nothing, not even the air.

I saw her again about a month later, walking down the stairs to the big office. Hi, I said awkwardly. Do you know which jazz composer has a middle name that's a shape? I don't know, Benny Square Goodman? she said with a scrunching of her right eye, like a kind of wink. Actually, it was Melodious Thunk, I said. Who? Thelonious Monk—his middle name was Sphere. The opposite of square, she said. Exactly. His own planet. Yes, I said. But they always say his music is so angular. O.K. then, a planet with lots of feet and elbows sticking out of it. That's some kind of strange gravity happening there. I guess, she said. And then was gone.

I continued up the stairs and sat down in the waiting room. After an hour or so, the door to the big office opened and I was asked to come in to another smaller waiting room, though with similar decor. There was a clipboard on the table beside my chair. There were forms to fill out, and I began. My name, my age, the town where I was born. The story of my childhood. My mother's maiden name. Grades I got in college. I wrote about apples that I liked at different times in my life. Tart. Sweet. Crunchy. Crisp. My first bicycle. What dental work I needed. My job, my investments, my new car. Retirement plans and the last tropical country I travelled to. And as I wrote, I remained fixed to my place in the chair. I was balanced perfectly between one thing and the next. I had gravity and there was gravity, but I did not fall. Vo

Gary Barwin lives in Hamilton, Ontario. His most recent book is Frogments from the Frag Pool (Mercury, 2005).





THE PROFILE

THE SUFFERING TRICKSTER

R. M. Vaughan's Troubled adventures.

BY SALLY MCKAY AND VON BARK

baving a heated argument with Baal. Astarte's clear eyes are flashing and her lovely cheeks are flaming. She is standing waist-deep in the cold ocean, holding a baby boy. The baby is laughing at Baal because Baal is silly and brutish and thinks he's God's gift to the gods. Baal doesn't like to be teased, and is trying to wring the baby's neck. Astarte shakes her fist at Baal and places the chortling baby in a floating wooden box, commanding the sea to keep him safe from harm.

R. M. Vaughan is a video artist, a playwright, a poet, a novelist, an art critic, and a journalist. Born in Saint John, he grew up in several small towns in southern New Brunswick—a hard and haunted province with a reputation for dispersing its talent to other regions.

Vaughan's first publication, a poem titled "Wishbone," appeared in 1989 in a New Brunswick—based magazine called the *Cormorant*. He moved to Toronto in 1991, and staged his first play at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre two years later. During the remainder of the nineties he contributed to various anthologies of poetry and prose, and published his first two collections of poetry, A Selection of Dazzling Scarves and Invisible to Predators, and his first novel, A Quilted Heart. These works are candid depictions of the gritty passions of conflicted male protagonists.

His second novel, Spells, a brutally compelling adolescent coming of age story with strange mystical overtones, was published in 2003. The Monster Trilogy, published the same year, is a compendium of three one-act theatrical scripts produced at Buddies—introspective monologues that explore the states of minds of rather different characters, especially the haunting Susan Smith Tapes, which was adapted into a short film by Jeremy Podeswa, featuring Kirsten Johnson. Vaughan's third collection of poetry, Ruined Stars, published in 2004, extends his previous poetic themes to explore other ideas and methods, such as in the manifesto parody "7 Steps to a Better Artist Statement."

Throughout this time Vaughan has worked constantly, and often controversially, as a journalist and critic for various publications, including the *Globe and Mail, National Post,* and *Canadian Art.* His candid skepticism regarding longheld dogmas of conceptual theory in current art discourse has earned him some predictable criticism. His detractors are often quick to dismiss his credentials as an analyst, despite the fact that he doesn't provoke an argument lightly.

"I'm from a rural village," Vaughan says. "I'm the only person in my family with a university degree. We weren't poor, but we were lower middle class, and I grew up in the middle of fucking nowhere. I didn't go to the University of Toronto, didn't come from a nice family. I'm not a member of the Anglican Church. I'm not supposed to have any kind of public forum, not supposed to speak at all. How very thin the surface is that we've painted over class divisions in this country. Given my upbringing, I'm supposed to be managing a Home Hardware in Moncton. I'm not supposed to be writing about art in a magazine or a newspaper."

The year is 1965. We picture baby R. M. in his floating wooden box, washing up on the north shore of the Bay of Fundy. He is an irrepressible, round-cheeked burbling creature, spewed up out of the cold Atlantic.

"I do not remember my birth," says Vaughan, now forty-three. "It was probably not a nice situation. I'm adopted. I believe I was a single woman's baby and there was probably a lot of shame attached to my birth for her. I can't imagine what it would have been like in 1965 to be a knocked-up woman in rural New Brunswick."

Tormented by a psychologically disturbed father who was also an extravagant and compulsive liar, Vaughan navigated his childhood in the company of Taffy, a big orange cat and the "great pet" of his life. Taffy lived to be twenty-one years old.

Vaughan attended the University of New Brunswick–Saint John and got himself a bachelor's degree in English. After a brief and unsuccessful stint at the University of Ottawa, he moved to Montreal in 1989, working the contemplatively Zen job of shaving beaks in a decoy duck factory. He also worked shifts at a high-end magazine store with a large porn collection. Sick of retail, he eventually went back to U.N.B. in Fredericton, earning a master's in English, and started writing plays.

The year is 1991. We picture a strapping young R. M. Vaughan floating up the St. Lawrence Seaway (against the current) in a velvet-lined coracle, an irrepressible round-cheeked bundle of contradictions, skimming gleefully across the choppy waves of Toronto's inner harbour like a gift (or a curse) from the dark capricious gods of the Atlantic provinces.

In 1991, the one-man theatre power-house Sky Gilbert became aware of Vaughan's work through his submissions to Buddies in Bad Times, and convinced the young writer to move to Toronto.

"Sky has been very influential," Vaughan says. "He's helped me in practical ways-money, access to resources, connections—but also in artistic ways. He helped me learn how to write a play, and how not to. He's good at saying what doesn't work. And also how to survive the ups and downs. I'd written a play about Marcel Proust and the critics even liked it, but nobody was coming. I was thirty-one at the time, and I thought my career was over. Sky said, 'Honey you've written an hour-and-fifteen-minutelong play about a French novelist that nobody reads any more. It's non-linear and poetic, and it's full of drag queens. And you think the bus tour is coming to this show?' Basically, he taught me that if you're gonna make weird shit, don't expect mass audiences."

Theatre is a painful profession, Vaughan contends: "You put all this work into it, and put on a show, and wake up the next morning to find that some reviewer has shit all over it. But you are expected to just carry on—the show is only going to run for three weeks anyway. If any of those people who've freaked out about art reviews I've written had endured even half of what I've endured as a theatre artist, they would all have killed themselves years ago."

R. M. Vaughan complains. Sometimes he complains publicly, like the time in 2006 when he wigged out half the artists in the country with an article in Canadian Art cynically examining an exhibition of Vancouver photo-conceptualist art on display in Antwerp, blowing the whistle on a Belgian curator who openly expressed his feelings that much of the show was "boring."

Vaughan also complains about more personal matters: "I hate the bear culture here in Toronto. It's superconservative and very femme-phobic. Everyone has to pretend they're some kind of construction worker or truck driver. I cannot stand it. It's like being at a fucking N.R.A.

rally, except they all want to suck each other's cocks. It's fucking stupid."

People who never complain are often keeping pain a secret. Vaughan is an artist who addresses pain as a great big piece of the human pie. The Monster Trilogy is arguably his most successful play. It has been staged in Winnipeg, Atlanta, Toronto, and Victoria, and this fall will be translated for audiences in Vienna. The play consists of three excruciating monologues, open-eved character studies of ordinary people in the throes of extreme psychic torment. A right-wing cop agonizes over whether the psychopathic crimes of a distant relative mean that she has passed the "kill gene" on to her son. A pious reverend turns the gruesome snowmobile death of a local teenager over and over in her mind, exposing her own desperate death wish in the process. And, in a seemingly psychic feat of empathic narrative, Vaughan channels the character of real-life childkiller Susan Smith, who drowned her own two sons, telling police they'd been kidnapped by a black man.

In Vaughan's version of her story,

Smith is in jail, making tapes for Oprah, Barbara Walters, and Jerry Springer:

Miss Walters, I liked the way you described the candles folks left by the lake-you said they was like "tiny sparks of life for two tiny lives that were snuffed out early," and that is so true. My babies went to God like birthday candles, special and bright and just the right size, but only on for a minute before the wish comes and puts out the flame. I think if you ever came here to see me you and me would get along real good—we both got sensitivities.

It is hard to follow R. M. Vaughan into this woman's mind. Her pain is fogged by a haze of inarticulate shame that envelopes the audience like a stinging ocean mist. But she's still alive, and being alive, is still engaged with the world; still trying to get on TV, still worried about how she looks on camera, still making excuses, and still in love with her children.

"There's no point in writing about unpleasant people without empathy," says Vaughan. "Otherwise they're just cut-out characters. Are you familiar with Othello? Iago's only any good if you like himthat's what makes him really dangerous."

INTRODUCING... FULLY AUTOMATED INSTANTANEOUS

ON-LINE **OUOTES** point-one.com

- Now getting your quotes on SCANS, PREPRESS, PRINT, STOCK & IN-HOUSE BINDERY, is easy and FAST. Just register on-line and we'll e-mail you the log-in password to your secure individual account file.
- Fill in your job specifications and you've got your quote...instantly. Drop-down screens & prompts make it foolproof...and you can make as many changes as you like... today...tomorrow... or next year.
- · For on-line training, call Matt or Keith and we will be happy to guide you through your estimate.



PointOne Graphics Inc.. 14 Vansco Road Etobicoke ON M8Z 5J4

Tel: 416.255.8202 • Fax: 416.255.6917

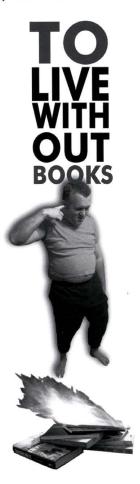
Toll Free: 1-866-717-5722

22 TADDLE CREEK Vaughan's dark empathy spills over into his current day job, writing a celebrity Q. & A. column for the *Globe and Mail*, happily negotiating the ins and outs of big entertainment P.R. machinery.

"I might make fun of [the celebrities] at times, but underneath that I have a lot of respect for anyone who does creative work, because I do it myself. I don't consider myself a pure journalist—such things don't exist anyway. I've made art, I've put things up for public scrutiny. I know what it's like to be shit

awkwardly amongst books and paint-brushes. Vaughan and Mitchell produced a parody campaign, featuring photos of Vaughan lounging about with his belly hanging out, abject and dissolute. The sad-sack banners and buttons were shown in a Queen Street window at Paul Petro Multiples in 2006, and again at the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art the following year.

"I just looked at those dancing underwear models and thought, This is nothing to do with how I make anythingative Cities whose citizens work with ideas, are intensely mobile, and insist on a high quality of life." The theory is very simple: Today's industries need smart workers, and smart people like interesting cities. So cities that are interesting will attract industry. Increased tourism is, of course, an added bonus. With industry and tourism as the motivating factors, it is perhaps not surprising that there is a large disconnect between the culture plan and the actual artists that are being used as bait. Toronto is trying







From Live With Out Culture, 2005.

on by critics; I know that rather intimately. I like to be playful and tease."

Vaughan's art projects are often autobiographical, bittersweet and funny-sad with a touch of self-mockery. One of his most playful and teasing projects is *Live With Out Culture*, created in collaboration with the journalist and author Jared Mitchell. In 2005, the City of Toronto financed a massive promotional campaign called Live with Culture, featuring outdoor banners of ballet dancers and other artists depicted cavorting

sitting in sweat pants and stained T-shirt making some piece of crap nobody wants," Vaughan says. "This has nothing to do with the artists I know or their practice."

Toronto's Live with Culture project is a part of its official *Culture Plan for the Creative City.* The plan is peppered with quotes from the urban thinker Richard Florida and seems to have wholeheartedly embraced his "creative class" construct: "The Culture Plan recognizes that great cities of the world are all Cre-

to become as interesting as its "competitors"—Milan, Montreal, Chicago, and San Francisco. To many practicing local artists, it seems unlikely hanging banners from lampposts on Bay Street is going to do the trick.

"To be fair to the City," Vaughan adds, "they sincerely thought it was a successful campaign and didn't get why it would be laughable. I guess in a way I'm making fun of someone's innocence. But this is what happens when culture is determined by bureaucrats who've never

SUMMER NUMBER, 2008 23

made a piece of art in their lives and have absolutely no connection to the community they're supposed to represent. It all comes back to that goddamn Richard Florida. I leave it at that because Ithe writer and performer\ Darren O'Donnell is doing way better work about the foolishness of the Florida era. His last book. [Social Acupuncture], is great about how stupid that creative-class bullshit is."

oes the trickster suffer? We picture a contorted R. M. Vaughan, laughing and crying as he steers a shaky wooden raft through a torrent of whirlpools; eddying, drifting, and plunging back into the fray.

Being a hard-wired whistle-blower is far from easy. "It takes a toll," Vaughan says. "It takes a toll on your psyche, on your energy. But I know that, because I like to be in trouble, I will probably do it again. I don't know whether or not my new book will cause a shitstorm, but if it does, I think I have better strategies for managing it."

In 1998, Vaughan was sexually abused by his psychiatrist. He complained to the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario. The doctor's licence was suspended following a tribunal, but only for five years. Vaughan's latest book of poems, Troubled, released this spring by Coach House, deals directly with the affair.

"I wasn't going to write the book, but the day they gave him his licence back I sat down and started it. It was a really difficult book to write. The only way I could do it was with poetry, not because it's too painful, but because it is such a muddy situation, I wouldn't have been capable of writing it in an analytical way. I had to do it through images and writing about sensations.'

Vaughan acknowledges that making this document a book of verse rather than a marketable, Oprah-appropriate doorstop memoir might have cost him the funds to purchase a property in southern France.

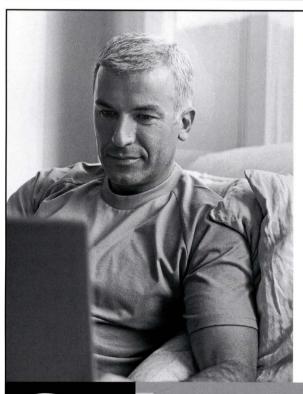
"The book is not a J'accuse," he says. "The starting point is more like, how did I do something so stupid? I'm trying to figure it out, with full blame put where it should be. One of my editors described it as a bizarre act of forgiveness."

The book includes copies of correspondence between Vaughan and the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario. The name of the psychiatrist has been blacked out. "It's not for legal reasons," Vaughan says. "All the documents are public. But I didn't want it to be too much about a specific person. People wouldn't be able to identify with the art of the book it if it was all about naming names."

Vaughan only found out that the psychiatrist's licence was being reinstated when he got a phone call from the Toronto Star asking for comment. He sent a letter of protest to the college. They wanted him to get involved again, but he had had enough.

"I just said, 'No. I've lost faith in you people. Your whole system is set up to protect doctors. I give up.' I already went through a whole year-long process during the tribunal. It was humiliating and degrading. I did it because I thought I was doing the right thing, but now he's out again making his two hundred grand a year, and he's going to be fine. The system is fucked and that's another reason I wrote the book."

Vaughan now has a new approach to doctors. Even when setting up an



Creative Writing

Continuing Education at George Brown College

Follow your dream to write a play or a novel, or just get your stories down on paper for your own enjoyment. Taught by published writers, these courses give you practical hands-on experience with a focus on your own manuscript. Courses are offered in the evenings and on-line.

- Biography and Memoir Writing NEW
- Dialogue Writing • Expressive Writing
- Introductory Creative Writing
- Novel Writing
- Poetry Writing
- Playwriting

- Romance Writing
- · Short Story Writing
- Writing for Children
- . Writing for Film and TV
- Writing Mysteries
- Writing Non-fiction for Children

Registration for fall classes starts after July 9. For more information, visit us at

coned.georgebrown.ca/writing

Questions? Call 416-415-5000, ext. 2092, or e-mail cequest@georgebrown.ca

appointment with a nutritionist, he is careful to take control and set boundaries. He wants others to be aware that adopting the role of a skeptical customer is just as important when shopping for health care as it is when purchasing a new fridge or car.

"I think about what was done to my father. He was on every imaginable psychologically generated medication. We found pills stashed all over the house when he died. Health care is an industry, and like all industries, it needs to perpetuate itself. Everyone should be aware of that."

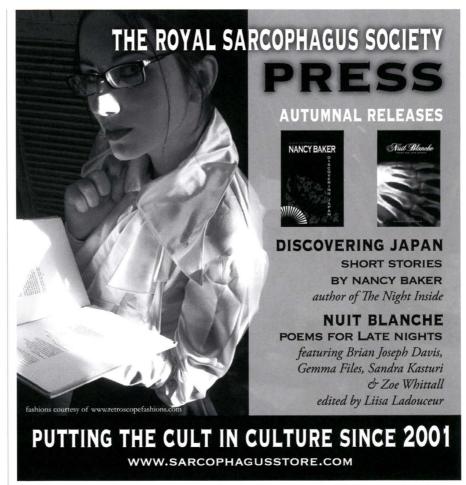
Vaughan is not worried that launching his new book will dredge up the humiliations of the past. Through writing, he has settled matters in his own mind, and now sounds calm and confident.

"It's just something that happened to me, and I've taken as much responsibility as I should for how I was complicit. The bottom line is that I was in a weakened state, in the middle of a complete mental breakdown. Psychiatry is supposed to be a safe space where you can go to someone and say, 'I think I'm in love with you,' and they have the training to know that you're not in love with them, that you're just so weak you're clinging to a rock. Their job is to say, 'No, you're not.' It's not their job to say, 'Why don't you come over to my house and we'll have sex.' When he entered into the relationship with me, that's when my complicity stopped. I chart how I got there in the book."

Vaughan is done with psychiatry. "I did go to a couple of shrinks afterwards. But I'll never go back. Now I realize that there are aspects of me that are unfixable, and that's O.K. It's O.K. to have things that can't be fixed."

The year is 2008. Next week is the launch for Troubled. We picture the dashing adult R. M. Vaughan arriving at the soiree in a white and golden chariot, a troubled, cleareyed, hunk of a man bedecked in feather boas. We will push through the adoring crowds and grab him gently by the ears, kissing each one of his perfect, handsome cheeks.

Sally McKay lives in Little Italy. She is an artist, writer, and curator who has been known to make things up about Phoenician gods and goddesses. Von Bark also lives in Little Italy. He is a writer who is descended from a race of giant amphibians.





SUMMER NUMBER, 2008 25

THE PRINCESS IS DEAD

BY HEATHER HOGAN

↑he sun had begun to set, but still his wife carried on. Andrews sulked in his backyard and poked at a clump of crabgrass with the toe of his slipper. He derived a perverse pleasure from his otherwise unblemished lawn. It had been touch and go for a few years in the late eighties. The children had been lax in the training of the family dog, but he had put an end to that by installing a patch of gravel at the side of the house, below the eaves, where the dog was confined twice daily by means of a short lead tied to a stake in the ground. Once the dog had thoroughly relieved itself on the gravel under Andrews' watchful eye, it was released and permitted the run of the yard without posing any risk to the lawn.

His next-door neighbour, Domingas, liked to watch the whole production over the fence with an amused look, and say, "You've got it all under control, don't you, boss?"

Andrews would give a curt nod, proud of his ingenuity, but not wanting to

Now, beneath the deepening lilac of a suburban twilight, his lawn served as a salve for his nerves, which had been left raw by the wailing of his wife, Maureen, who sat glued to the television watching the CBC's coverage of what appeared to be the sudden and-according to Maureen-globally devastating death of Princess Diana. A glance over his shoulder through the family room window reassured Andrews that he was better off in the yard, despite the growing darkness. Maureen was perched on the edge of the sofa, sodden tissue clutched in one hand and the phone receiver in the other, while the light of the television shone on her wet cheeks. Maureen's lap cradled Delphinium, her indignant blue-point Siamese. Watching his wife of twentynine years wail into the phone at Godknows-who about the death of a woman she'd never met, and for whom she'd shown minimal interest over the years, Andrews felt a stirring within him that signalled despair. It felt as though there were a drain deep inside of him that would empty him out into a bewildering nothingness from which there would be no return. And so, when Andrews heard the hum of the garage-door opener, he beat a path across his lawn and through the side gate to greet and be distracted by whichever of his children had arrived home from wherever it was they'd gone.

Out front of the house, Andrews stood smiling behind the bent rear bumper of his car as his son, Charles, manoeuvred it into the garage. Charles braked when the windshield was just shy of the tennis ball Andrews had suspended from the ceiling on a length of twine for Maureen.

"It's not my fault I can't see over the hood," she'd snapped at him on the day they'd learned the sensors on the automatic garage-door opener were not as sensitive to obstructions as they'd been led to believe.

Andrews had sucked on his toothpick and searched within himself for an appropriate response to the situation. One side of his rear bumper hung from the car by a bent piece of metal. The other side rested on the concrete floor. They'd been unable to reverse the closing door once it had knocked off Andrews' bumper, so it was stuck at knee level.

"My car," Andrews had finally said.

"Your car?" said Maureen. "That could have been my head! Think about that!" Andrews thought about it.

"I've got to call Rita," Maureen had said, as she shuffled around the car and past Andrews to the door that led into the house. "She's not going to believe this. I could have been killed.'

The door slammed shut behind Maureen. A few minutes passed, and then the light on the automatic door opener had flicked off, leaving Andrews in the dark, his calves bathed in the orange glow of the street light out front.

ndrews pulled his gaze up from the **A**reattached bumper and watched Charles slide effortlessly out of the car door and swing it shut behind him in one fluid motion. There was no popping of joints, no groaning as he lifted his weight up and out, and no sign of exertion. Andrews felt proud, as though this physical ease was something Charles had learned from him, although he knew very well that wasn't the case. Andrews had never been fluid at anything.

Charles saw his father standing behind

"Hey," he said nonchalantly and made for the door.

"I wouldn't go in there if I were you," said Andrews.

Charles paused on the step and turned to face his father with a weary expression.

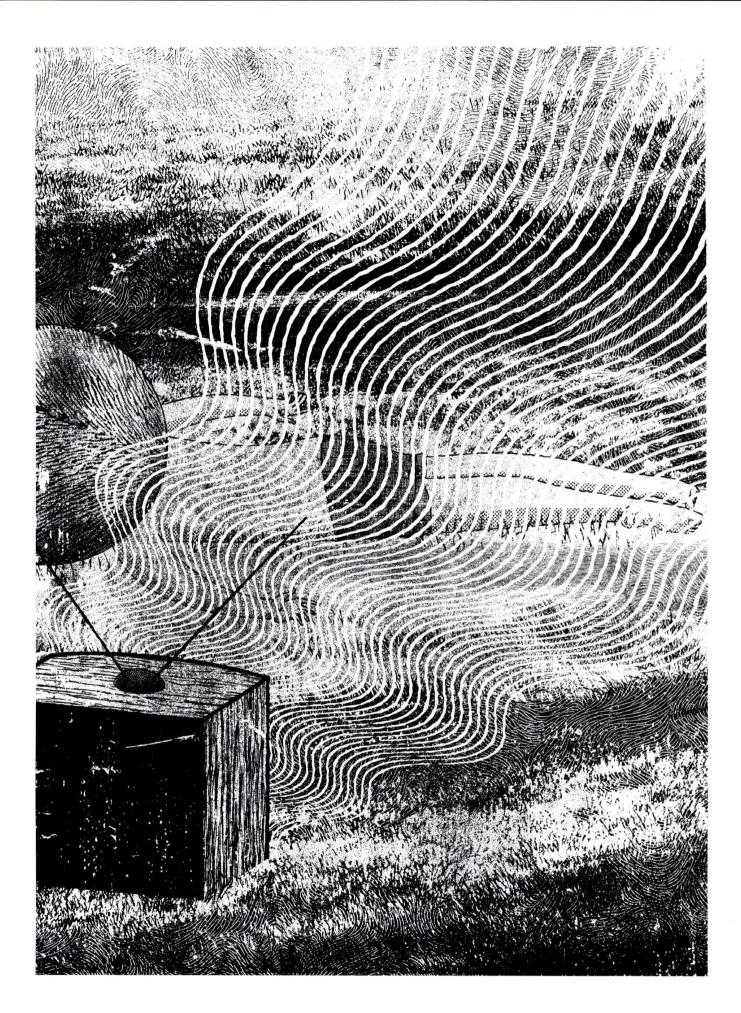
"Your mother's in there having a bird over some car accident."

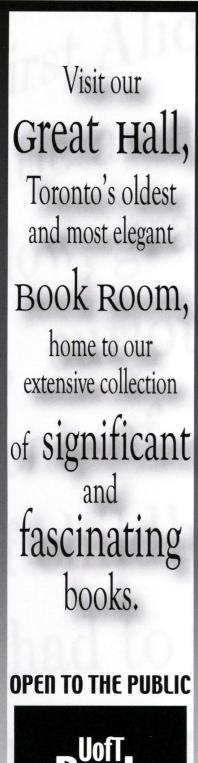
"You mean Princess Di?" Charles' face came to life. "Are they showing pictures of it?" He turned and disappeared into the house.

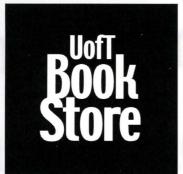
"People die in car accidents every day!" Andrews called as the door slammed shut behind Charles. "Every day," he muttered to himself.

Andrews sighed and looked down the street, knowing that any number of people could be watching him from behind their sheers. He knew this because when he wasn't tending to his lawn, he spent much of his time watching his neighbours from behind his own expanse of sheers. He enjoyed this secret knowledge as each neighbour pulled up in a car that revealed his or her shortcomings. Rust marks, bald tires, filthy windows, crudely plagiarized handicap signs, and dashboards obscured by outdated parking tickets. Rear windows crammed with bleachedout tissue boxes, stuffed animals, stained pillows, and abandoned action figures. None of it surprised Andrews in light of the deplorable state of their lawns.

Of particular significance on his mental scale of poor car hygiene was Domingas, who had to park his dilapidated foreign car in the driveway because his garage was filled with his wife Rita's wholesale beauty-supply inventory. Domingas apparently didn't mind Rita's annexing of the garage with her reeking pink boxes. 불 Rather, when Andrews had teased him ₹







www.uoftbookstore.com 214 College St. 416-640-7900 about it, Domingas said he was proud of his wife's entrepreneurial spirit. This was driven home on Saturday mornings when Andrews's station behind the sheers was more often than not blighted by a showy exchange between the couple after they'd loaded up the trunk of the car with pink boxes. Domingas would kiss Rita on her cheek before she got into the car, and as Rita reversed down the driveway, she would flutter her fingers through the windshield at Domingas. Domingas would then kiss the fingers of his hand and flutter them back at Rita.

The only thing more disturbing to Andrews than this public display of affection was his fear that Maureen would one day catch sight of the Saturday Morning Domingas Ritual. Not only would she erroneously conclude that he enjoyed watching other people's private moments through the sheers, but in her quest to turn her life in to a carbon copy of everyone else's, Maureen would very likely demand that Andrews also begin fluttering his fingers at her in public.

The thought made Andrews shiver, and he surfaced out of his reverie to find that he was still standing in the doorway of his garage, clad only in his housecoat and slippers. He smacked his palm against the garage-door opener, ducked out of the garage beneath the lowering door, and returned to the privacy of his backyard.

Andrews eyed the wooden bench Maureen had forced him to place at a ridiculous angle against the back corner of their fence. He never sat there because from that perspective, one could see all the rear bedroom windows of the houses on either side of his, and he would therefore feel as though he was on display. He tended instead to stick close to the deck that ran beneath the kitchen and living-room windows. But it was almost completely dark now, and the wooden bench looked more comfortable than the ornate wrought iron furniture Maureen had purchased for the patio, so Andrews wandered over and sat down.

"I don't see what all the fuss is about."

The voice echoed his thoughts, but was not his, and Andrews jerked his head up and around to find Domingas glaring over the fence toward the light of Andrews' family room window.

"Domingas! You scared me."

"It's not like she'd have thought twice about that woman a day ago when she was still alive."

Andrews watched with incredulity as Domingas jutted his chin at Andrews' window.

"Ask me, that woman needs a hobby or something. Keep her mind engaged."

Although he was in complete agreement with Domingas, Andrews knew a line had been crossed, but the obligation to defend Maureen's honour made him uneasy. The hypocrisy would be difficult to swallow.

"Come again?" he said.

"Look at that," Domingas said. "You'd think absolutely nothing in the world could have hit closer to home."

Andrews reluctantly swiveled around on his bench to peer through his window, and saw that Maureen had been joined on the couch by Rita Domingas. The pair sat dabbing at their eyes with tissue from the box positioned on the sofa between them. Andrews's relief at his misunderstanding was so immediate he was afraid he'd whimpered out loud. He glanced back at Domingas. Domingas was scowling at the window.

"At least your wife's parents are British," Andrews said. He rummaged in the pocket of his housecoat for a jujube he recalled leaving in there earlier.

"What's that got to do with it?"

"You'd think Maureen was a direct descendant the way she's carrying on. Jujube?" He held out a lint-encrusted candy toward Domingas.

"No thanks."

"But she's Canadian for three generations back," Andrews continued as he picked fluff from his candy. "And before that, Irish. Irish *Catholic*, even."

They fell silent, Domingas scraping the palm of his hand up and down the scruff on his cheek, Andrews chewing thoughtfully on his jujube.

"Your lawn's looking fine, boss," said Domingas.

"There's some crabgrass over there by the air-conditioning fan. I'll have to get at it in the morning before it spreads."

"Thing is, Rita hasn't let me touch her in six years."

Andrews choked on his jujube and tried to be subtle as he wretched into the palm of his hand.

Domingas continued. "We used to be at it all hours of the night and day when we were trying to have kids, but when we gave up on that, she gave up on everything."

PIGEON III

The pigeons chose to go mute to be with us. They lost the chortle overnight upon learning we could abide their presence but not that obscene, infernal cooing.

The where we were!
The time you stayed out overnight.
I made myself sick to imagine where you were.
Why settle for less—unless you mean cooing . . .

Say your wife is a pigeon and she flies away. Doesn't come back until just before night. That's it.

That's what you get.

That's what she leaves you. That's what she leaves you.

Spend the night
Spend the night tracking her
wandering through a hail of maple leaves
in your dreamy birdbrain unconscious

Maybe you wait around thinking she's just gone. Be gone maybe an hour or two.
She can't tell you—you pigeons!

Spruce up the nest.

Maybe fly around in circles with the others.

Maybe make love when she returns.

Then you'll know.

You know your wife. Your beautiful wife. Maybe she'll fly off again tomorrow just after night leaves the sky.

—CHRIS CHAMBERS

A light went on in Andrews' kitchen window. He felt inexplicably saved. After a moment they heard an electric whirring noise.

"Maureen," said Andrews. "She's into the daiquiris."

"That wholesale gig was the best thing that ever happened to me. Rita leaves the house every Saturday morning and then I'm free until one. I've met someone, Andrews."

Andrews turned to stare slack-jawed

at Domingas, his wet jujube still cupped in the palm of his hand. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the kitchen light go off. He felt abandoned, adrift, caught in a riptide of Domingas's deception.

"I wonder how long two people can go on living like this," Domingas said.

Andrews remembered his jujube. He carefully put it back into his mouth and then wiped the palm of his hand on his housecoat.

"How old's your boy now, Andrews?

Seventeen?"

"That's right," Andrews said, wary.

"I bet it never occurs to him that he could end up like this."

"Like what?"

Domingas scratched at his whiskers and then sighed. "Never mind," he said. "Anyway, I'm leaving. Tonight. Rita doesn't know yet. Just thought I'd say goodbye."

"You're kidding," said Andrews, stunned. "Take care, boss," said Domingas, and then he walked away.

"Sure. I mean, you too."

▲ s he listened to his neighbour's **A** footfalls fade away, Andrews gazed up at the window of Charles's bedroom. It was dark but for the erratic blue light of the television. In the living room, Maureen sat back in the sofa, legs crossed. She sipped a daiquiri and cackled with Rita, while the footage that had moments ago rendered her psychotic with grief went unnoticed. As he sat there contemplating the lacklustre Saturday mornings of his near future, it slowly dawned on Andrews that the contrived and empty gestures of another man's dead marriage had been the only source of intimacy in his adult life. He would miss them. He would miss them like he missed every other illusion that had once sustained him: the meaningfulness of life, the institution of marriage, and the consolation of having had children. Andrews realized that when Domingas had wondered aloud how two people could live like this, he'd been referring to them—to Domingas and Andrews.

In the backyard, Andrews removed his housecoat and folded it neatly on the bench beside him. Then, with some effort, he lowered himself, groaning and wincing, first on to his knees and then his belly, so that he was lying face down in cool, damp grass. It was prickly against his cheek, but he didn't mind. He ran his fingers back and forth though the springy turf, and deeply breathed in its earthy scent. It was the scent of final destinations—something Andrews had not yet lost faith in. He closed his eyes and steeled himself as best he could, determined, as he was, to stay the course. Vo

Heather Hogan lives in the Annex. Her fiction has appeared in This and Sub-terrain.

THE CITY

A BETTER (SUB)WAY?

The T.T.C. is forgetting its history—in more ways than one.

BY ALFRED HOLDEN

oronto's transit commissioners are restless to renovate the subway system-not to make it run better, but to spruce up the stations. For justification they can conveniently point to their own neglect: makeshift alterations and repairs are everywhere, signage is a mess, and it seems like eons since the tunnelwashing train has passed through.

When things get old and dirty, it's hard to see their integrity; yet for its age, integrity is the one thing much of Toronto's subway still has in spades. Take the Bloor-Danforth line, which survives much as it was built, in the nineteen-sixties. Beneath the dirt, a powerful, minimalist modernity still shines. From end to end, original tiles, typeface, signs, lighting, railings, terrazzo, and other details are slightly worse for wear, but look better than the renovations and alterations made since.

I remember the redo of the original Yonge line, in the nineteen-eighties. Pallets of thick, heavy tiles were plunked down on subway platforms while crews got to work with crowbars, glue, and grout. After a few weeks of chipping, the new tile took the place of the original Vitrolite glass. Eglinton became the only station where the original 1954 design was retained, with the help of materials salvaged from closed areas of the station, and from the ravaged Queen station to the south.

The years have not been kind to the renovated portions of the Yonge line. I have not heard much praise for the pukey pea-soup coloured tile on the walls of Dundas station, the brown mottled tile adorning College and King, or the unfortunate choice of lettering that marks Queen. High-profile Union is a mess: the original (and rugged) terrazzo floors were replaced with tile that has cracked and chipped, and is now lousy with patches, and a troublesome metal cladding system that covered the walls has had to be removed.

On the face of it, the

On the face of it, the recent makeover

of Museum station, in fancy Egyptianand-sundry mode, suggests an attempt to do better. The original artist drawings show the excitement of the Royal Ontario Museum brought underground. But unlike those renderings, the final product is marred by prominent, ugly intrusions, including overhead conduits, the ugly sodium lighting of the Designated Waiting Area, and portions of the old tile simply covered over with paint (already chipping). And while even the eighties redesign of the Yonge line covered entire stations, Museum's new decor doesn't extend beyond its platformthe stairs and upper level still fitted with the original yellow tiles.

So there is an ominous sense of déjà vu as transit commissioners attempt to assuage public discontent over the dirt with promises of fancy new stations.

But multi-million dollar stage-set redesigns aren't the only options. What about restoration, instead? The term describes putting something back into its original condition, which in the case of subways has its advantages. The design work is already done; the decision validates the original as iconic, and the system's integrity as understood. As the urban planner George Kapelos wrote in the Globe and Mail a generation ago, when the unfortunate retiling on Yonge began, "Someone should point out to the TTC that when the line was first built, it was designed. That means that thought was given to uniformity of station design, to materials and graphics. What is happening now doesn't respect that at all."

We don't dare build infrastructure so ambitiously today, so why not preserve the achievement? Vo

Alfred Holden lives in the Annex. He is the editor of the Toronto Star's Sunday Ideas section. He also contributed to the books Concrete Toronto (Coach House, 2007) and uTOpia: Towards a New Toronto (Coach House, 2005).











HIGH PARK

EXIT
HIGH PARK AV.
QUEBEC AV.
AND BUSES
PARKVIEW GDNS.



SPEAKER

BY GIL ADAMSON

For some reason today, if I play a CD, I blow a fuse. I have no idea why. It wasn't this way yesterday . . . I think. I put on Oasis real quiet because I know my neighbour's home, and I listen for a minute or so, not long, before—kablooey. Pitch fuckin' black. Lucky for me they're breakers instead of real fuses, or I'd be wandering into the Korean store five times today.

"Again?" he'd say.

"Yup," I'd say.

"Why don't you learn? I mean, listen..." he'd start reasoning with me, like he has a number of times before—I think it's his fallback position, to act like he's reasoning with a kid. He'd say, "You already spent two dollars and fourteen cents times three. That's what—six, seven bucks?"

"I know. But I can't see why a CD should cause me to blow a fuse."

This gets him. He didn't know all I was trying to do was listen to a little music.

"You, what, play music? And this blows a fuse?"

"You got it," I say.

"Well, *that* shouldn't happen." He looks at the floor. "Are you sure you don't have the stove on?"

"Nope."

"A heater?"

"No."

"Whatever," he says and hands me another little package from the perforated pressboard behind him. "That'll be two-fourteen."

Anyway, that didn't happen.

I'm down in the basement with a flashlight. Superstalker. Night killer. I'm crouching for no reason. It's not like the ceiling is really low, but it seems like people should crouch in basements. There might be cobwebs or electrical wires dangling down to touch my face. Fuse box, with one little switch showing orange. I snap it back on and my whole apartment lights up, I can see the light flooding down the back stairs. When I run back up, the stereo is spinning up to play the CD again. The little

servo motor is whirring, and then the L.E.D. display counts up the number of tracks. I stamp across the floor to turn it off before it starts playing again. But I hit the volume button by mistake, slide the little plastic bar way up, and I hear a kind of sigh from the huge crowd before the first track totally detonates.

I mean, if you hate Oasis, fine-substitute something else. I understand. If you like Mclusky, bully for you. Close your eyes, pretend you're me, and imagine an infinitely bright dot in the form of Mclusky. That's what it was like. The roof basically shook, which shows that I was smart when I decided to buy those speakers. Snowy the white cat can't get under the couch fast enough. He's like a little luge car at the end of its run, shooting in banked arcs across the living room rug and under the couch. A spectacular vanishing act. And I'd appreciate it if I wasn't in mortal pain, watching a throbbing tunnel of sound burning a hole through me. I wrench the sound off. It just keeps ripping the air. I'm completely helpless, grimacing, the apartment is bouncing.

It reminds me of something my father used to say: "Fuck the neighbours." Anyway, I'm kind of wishing my father was around, with his heavy forearms and his Kirk Douglas chest, when my neighbour knocks on my door, knocks on the door, scurries round to peek through the front window and wave at me. Darren. He makes this "What are you thinking?" gesture, like a peevish old man, because that's the kind of guy he is. You do the slightest thing wrong, he huffs, he shrugs, he rolls his eyes. I've wondered about him. I mean he's none too manly, to be honest.

Anyway, I wave back, I'm on my hands and knees now, waving to him to come and help me because I can't turn the friggin' thing off. I'm pushing the button over and over. It goes in and out. On. Off. The music keeps on roaring, loosening plaster, jingling plates in the cupboard. Darren is beside me. We have our palms over our ears. I look into his

white, angry face.

"Help!" my mouth says. Darren's expression changes completely.

We're out on the porch sipping beer. The CD's on infinite rotation. It's early evening. By now, we should have figured out some solution. That's clear enough, because everyone on the street has come out onto their porch, everyone who walks past on the sidewalk gawks at us with a look of disbelief. Their faces say, "Why hasn't anyone called the cops?" If I were my father, which I am not, I would say, "Got a problem? You wanna talk to me?" And the skinny man in overalls on his way to the night shift would say, "I didn't say anything." Which is true, without question. But my dad's never been one to let social graces get in the way.

"My music too loud for you?"

"What?"

"Ha ha. Want me to turn it up?"

"Not my business, man."

"Is that right?" my dad says.

"Your house, your life." The skinny fellow hurries on, his head down.

"Fuck," Dad says, watching him go, "every cocksucker's got an opinion. How tiresome is that?" And he looks tired, too. He shakes his head. "Maybe we should flip that breaker off."

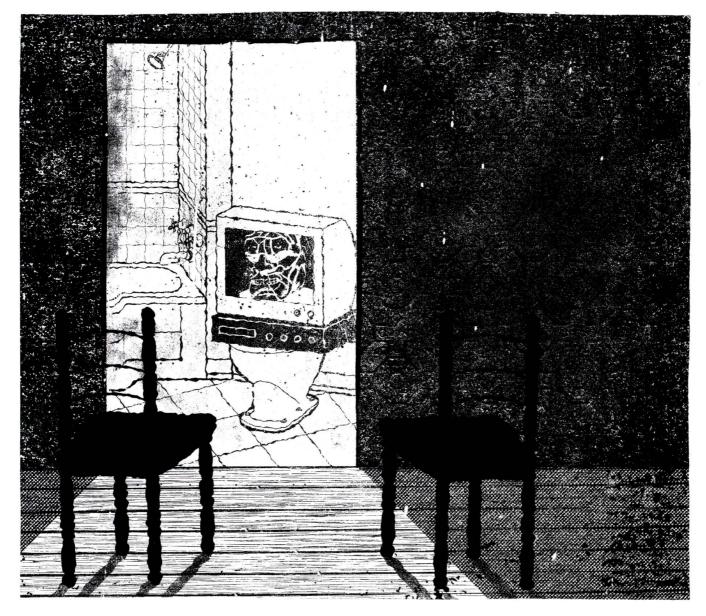
Like me, maybe you forgot about the breakers . . . then again, maybe not.

I discover that the breaker in question controls practically my whole apartment: stove, fridge, living room light, bedroom light. When we snap it off, the place goes black, the CD chokes and passes out, and the only thing unaffected seems to be the bathroom. Darren and I wander the suddenly peaceful apartment, drawn toward the light of the bathroom. Darren pokes around in the cabinet; he plugs the hair dryer into the outlet and turns it on. It whines to life. So, the outlet works too. He snaps it off and raises his eyebrows at me.

"What?" I say.

"You blow-dry your hair?"

"Yes I do."



"Oh."

"What?"

"I'm not saying anything. I'm not."

It's midnight. We have the TV and VCR sitting on the toilet lid, plugged into the bathroom outlet, and we're watching *The Thing*. The hall is dark, the bedroom is dark, the living room is dark, the kitchen is dark, and the fridge is peeing on the floor. All my food is spoiling. We've dragged two chairs into the hall and we're sitting there. Snowy is on Darren's lap, purring and being coy.

Darren says, "Got any treats for this guy?" Snowy has always had wicked radar for the sucker in the room.

ਬੈਂ "Is he mean to you?" Darren whispers ₹ to the cat. "Is he?" Snowy is ecstatic. "Will you two watch the friggin' film!" I say.

We agree that Kurt Russell is pretty macho, but possibly he's too macho. Maybe he's the Thing itself. Maybe soon a bunch of hissing red whips will come out of him and he'll burst open. Latex Kurt Russell. That's what I'm hoping for. Darren, who has seen the movie already, says the text supports that interpretation. See, this is exactly what I mean about Darren. He says things like that, and frankly, it gets you wondering about him.

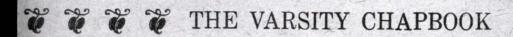
"I have some Jim Beam somewhere," Darren says, putting the cat down, and I swear to God, he does this amazing vaudeville thing, walking backwards over his chair so it ends up flat on its back, and he just keeps going down the dark hallway, Snowy scooting after him.

I'm sitting there, watching the screen on pause; Kurt's tough, bearded face is in the foreground and behind him it's all snow and ice and blackness. Kurt's in a lonely world in there.

I can hear Darren upstairs, the soft movement of his feet on the thick carpets and rugs he puts down for quiet. Maybe I should put rugs down. Up till now, I've been a very quiet neighbour. Things change every day.

I wonder how much a rug or two would cost. You can't put things off for too long in this life. It's like my dad used to say, "You gotta go your own way, kid. Live your own life. So fuck Darren. Let's go. Press Play." Do

Gil Adamson lives in the Danforth Village. Her first novel, The Outlander, was published in 2007 by Anansi.



EDITED BY John Robert Colombo



Toronto/THE RYERSON PRESS

THE WAR OF THE WORDS DEPT.

SLIM CURIOSITY

The Varsity Chapbook was an elegant early step in Toronto's literary development.

BY CONAN TOBIAS

Perusing the shelves of a used bookstore isn't always about finding something you need. Many of us enjoy the thrill of finding something we don't need or even didn't know we needed. This could include a remaindered copy of a recent best-seller, an under-priced first edition, or a piece of local literary ephemera, like a chapbook, journal, or event program.

Unfortunately, the latter group is becoming especially hard to find, as independent booksellers trade their highoverhead-low-profit shops for virtual storefronts on the Web, or just get out of the business altogether. Big-box stores offer us books at sizable discounts, and Web sites like Amazon, AbeBooks, and eBay provide access to almost any edition of any title we might want. The way we shop for books has changed, and the discovery of an interesting item we weren't looking for has become a casualty.

I first came across The Varsity Chapbook about eight years ago while flipping through the box of slim curiosities Ianet Inksetter, the owner of Annex Books, used to keep on her counter, before moving her business on-line, in 2007. As a graduate of the University of Toronto and a former staff member of its Varsity student newspaper, the book caught my eye. It had a publication date of 1959, and contained thirty poems, some by names I recognized—Jay Macpherson, James Reaney, John Robert Colomboand many more by writers I'd never heard of. I purchased the book for five dollars and went on my way.

I occasionally still flip through The Varsity Chapbook. At five-by-seven-anda-half inches, it's much more handsome than the photocopied eight-and-a-halfby-eleven pieces of paper folded in two that are considered chapbooks today. (A chapbook is a small booklet of poetry or stories, usually self-published. Its name is taken from "chapmen," the peddlers is taken from chapmen, who initially sold them.) Its pages are book quality, and the card-stock cover has the added touch of a French fold (a sheet double the necessary size, folded twice at right angles to each othersort of a double cover).

Finding such an interesting piece of Toronto history by chance once is rare, yet I have inexplicably come across copies of The Varsity Chapbook for sale twice more since my Annex Books find. Last year, I recognized the name of one of its contributors, Alexander Leggatt, on Taddle Creek's subscriber list. I contacted him to see if he was the same Alexander Leggatt, and received the following note in return: "Yes, it's me. Two things I'm curious about: why did you ask . . . and how on earth did you come by a copy of the Varsity Chapbook?"

Toronto's literary scene in 1959 wasn't as robust as it is nearly a half-century later. Book launches were usually small, invitation-only affairs, and reading series were still such a novelty that they garnered attention in the daily news. Most of the activity was taking place on university campuses, and writers such as Margaret Atwood and Gwendolyn MacEwen were just starting to define what would become modern "CanLit." Like almost everything at the time, the literature and poetry of Toronto were considered second-rate compared to that of Montreal.

One of the more sizable presses publishing poetry in Canada was the Ryerson Press. Founded in 1829 by the Methodist Church, the Ryerson Press had a history of publishing everything from denominational material to trade books to fiction. The press's editor since 1922 had been Lorne Pierce, a Methodist minister. Pierce's determination to restore Ryerson's reputation as a major publisher of Canadian literature helped launch the careers of several noted Canadian authors and poets, including Frederick Philip Grove and Dorothy Livesay. In 1925, he launched a noted series of poetry chapbooks that, unfortunately, was often noted for its varying degree of quality. Pierce's desire to develop a large Canadian list had its downside: Ryerson had to accept some manuscripts that weren't very good.

John Robert Colombo was also publishing poetry in 1959, but on a smaller scale than Ryerson. His imprint, the Hawkshead Press, released broadsides and other small publications by Colombo and others. (In 1961, Hawkshead would publish Double Persephone, Atwood's first collection of poetry.) Colombo transferred to the University of Toronto in 1956, after two years of undergraduate studies at Waterloo College (now Wilfrid Laurier University). By 1959, he was a student in the university's School of Graduate Studies, and active in the student press, writing for various newspapers, and editing Jargon, U. of T.'s first campus-wide literary journal. Soon, he also began organizing events at the Bohemian Embassy, a loft on St. Nicholas Street operated by the writer Don Cullen, presenting readings, jazz, theatre, and comedy.

'John was an entrepreneur, to put it mildly," says Leggatt, now sixty-seven and retired from a teaching career at U. of T.

"I'd heard a rumour that the Ryerson chapbooks were going to be discontinued. They'd run out of poets," Colombo told me when I contacted him recently to put an end to my curiosity surrounding The Varsity Chapbook. "I wanted to meet Pierce, so I came in out of the blue and suggested not only a collection focusing on a group rather than a single poet-which was a departure that he hadn't thought about-and second, that it survey the Toronto scene."

Pierce was intrigued, but insisted Colombo wage a literary battle and couple his book (which would end up featuring work by U. of T. students and faculty) with another featuring poetry from McGill University in Montreal.

Colombo wasn't keen on pitting the poetry merits of U. of T. and McGill against each other, still he agreed and



set out to find an editor for the rival publication. Within weeks he met Leslie Kaye, a McGill arts graduate, at a literary event and recruited him for the job. The war was on.

The Ryerson poetry chapbooks were designed in-house and looked anything but modern in 1959. Covers often featured line drawings that would not have been out of place in the nineteen-twenties or earlier, and many of the books looked rigid and formulaic in design. Colombo wanted his chapbooks to have a more contemporary feel, and asked to bring in his own designer, Harold Kurschenska, a fellow Kitchener, Ontario, native who was working as a compositor for the University of Toronto Press and a few years earlier had founded a small imprint of his own, Purple Partridge.

"Harold had a great deal of taste—no training, no education, but loved type," says Colombo.

The design of Kurschenska's two identical chapbooks is quite plain (his work on *Jargon* the previous year is much flashier), and yet it is this simplicity that makes them elegant. Their covers, aside from title and editor's name, contained nothing more than a line of fleurons and the Ryerson Press logo. The interior design was not radically different from the press's previous chapbooks, yet the placement and choice of type brought the series years ahead from where it had been.

Ryerson chapbook Nos. 189 (Varsity) and 190 (McGill) were published in December, 1959, and sold for one dollar each. They were reviewed not only in the student press (the Varsity newspaper alone announced the release at least three times), but also in the dailies of both cities and in several national journals—something no chapbook publisher could hope for today. The reviewers took Pierce's bait and chose sides—usually McGill's.

"The Varsity Chapbook fails to fulfill the hope of its editor that it 'will shatter, once and for all, the illusion that, of Canadian universities, only McGill is producing its quota of top-flight poets," read a review in Canadian Literature, quoting Colombo's preface. Desmond Pacey, writing in the Canadian Forum, took a somewhat more creative stance, likening the battle to a hockey game, pointing out that, while Varsity consisted of work largely from students, Kaye had stacked McGill with more established poets, such

as Leonard Cohen and Phyllis Webb. "It is hardly a fair contest," he wrote. "It's like putting a good professional team against a group of simon-pure amateurs bolstered by one or two old pros."

Varsity and McGill were the last Ryerson chapbooks overseen by Lorne Pierce. He retired in 1960 and died the following year. Although his successor was encouraged to let the series end, it survived for a while longer, but soon folded. By 1970, the press was hemorrhaging money, and was sold to the Canadian arm of the U.S. publisher McGraw-Hill.

Colombo's faith in Kurschenska, who died in 2003, was well-placed. The *Toronto Star*, in an otherwise underwhelming review, called *Varsity* and *McGill* "more pleasantly and gracefully designed than has generally been the case with Ryerson chapbooks." Kurschenska had a distinguished career (he designed Marshall McLuhan's *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, the book that popularized the concept of the global village), with most of his working years spent at the University of Toronto Press. This past March, the Communication Designers of Toronto named him one of "Toronto's Design Pioneers."

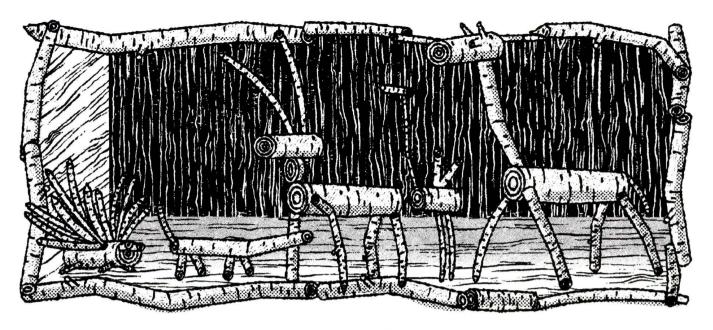
Now seventy-two, John Robert Colombo has long been regarded as Canada's Man of Letters. His youthful entrepreneurship never faded, and he has published countless poetry collections, reference works, and anthologies—*The Varsity Chapbook* being the first.

"I was quite pleased that I had managed to do something in a traditional way that was contemporary in feel," says Colombo. "That's what I've been trying to do all my life. It was a step in my career—a very minor one. Is it a significant one? Not as far as the public's concerned. But it is to me."

Montreal's literary scene wasn't ready to capitulate to Toronto in 1959, but even then, Toronto was starting to produce a strong team of "old pros" that would rival, and arguably best, Montreal's in the years to come. The Varsity Chapbook didn't give McGill poets any reason to be worried, but it may have been the unheralded first shot in a larger battle. Vo

Conan Tobias lives in the Annex. He is Taddle Creek's editor-in-chief, and contributed a chapter to the essay collection uTOpia: Towards a New Toronto (Coach House, 2005), which was nominated for the Toronto Book Award.





APHIDS

BY STUART ROSS

hen they let me go, I didn't know the language of the place where I was, nor did I know the name of the place. And the shoes I was wearing: black canvas sneakers with white laces. I didn't know where they had come from.

My knees and ankles ached, because I'd been kneeling for so long. It felt good to walk, even if I didn't know where I was walking. A woman wearing a white raincoat and a red kerchief came walking toward me, then walked right by me. Soon it happened again, but this time with a young man. These were other people.

Amid the rows of houses that lined the road was what appeared to be a store. It had signs outside and a smiling chipmunk cut out of thin wood. Before they let me go, they'd stuffed some paper money into my pocket, so I walked into the store. I said to the man at the counter that I was thirsty. He had a very thin black moustache and no eyebrows. It was like he had taken his eyebrows and stuck them under his nose. He frowned when I spoke.

I drew one of the bills from my pocket with one hand and pointed to my mouth with the other. I licked my lips.

The man swept his own hand through the air in front of him, and I

looked around his store. The shelves were lined with animals constructed out of twigs. I saw giraffes and gazelles and flamingos and porcupines, but I didn't see any water.

The man stepped around the counter and took my arm. He led me back out to the street and pointed toward the crest of a hill. With his slender hand flat, he made the motion of a fish leaping and said something I didn't understand. Then he turned his hand as if to slice something, and slalomed it through the air between us. This was a fish swimming. Then he held an invisible ladle to his mouth, puckered his lips, and slurped.

Over the hill there was a river. I could drink from the river.

On my way up the hill, I passed dozens more houses but I saw no more people. The people were all in their houses. Before I knelt in the dark, I had been in a house. I wanted to knock on their doors, knock on the doors of these other people who were inside, and tell them they weren't safe.

As I approached the top of the hill, I could see dark clouds hovering above the road, which was by now made only of dirt. My black canvas sneakers were turning grey. It wasn't long before I stepped into those frenetic clouds, and I

realized they were swarms of aphids. They burrowed into my hair and ricocheted off my cheeks. They played in my eyelashes and among the follicles in my nostrils. I could only squint now, because the aphids wanted to swim on the surfaces of my eyeballs, but down the other side of the hill I could see a river that wound and curved like a child's crayon scribble on a piece of paper.

When I'd had enough of playing, I stepped from the clouds of aphids and felt the pain in my ankles again as I walked slowly downhill. At the side of the river, I tried to crouch, but couldn't bend my knees. The water was cool and clear, the river bed adorned with colourful round pebbles.

I puckered my lips and sucked as hard as I could, but I couldn't draw the water up to my mouth. It was down there. I was up here. I stood beside the river. The sun never went down. Do

Stuart Ross lives in a housing co-op near Christie and Dupont streets. He is the author of numerous collections and chapbooks, most recently the poetry collection Dead Cars in Managua (DC Books, 2008). Some of his poems were recently turned into songs for the CD An Orphan's Song: Ben Walker Sings Stuart Ross.

THE OUT-OF-TOWNER

A SITUATION COMEDY

BY LEE HENDERSON

Their kitchen window faced the power lines that sent all the energy to all the people in their neighbourhood. In the morning, the power lines gleamed as if the electricity stored within them was radiating out in a dramatic display of technological advancement. An old man careened down a hill, begging for mercy. He thought there was a giant bee inside his head.

Ha ha ha ha.

Cliff rubbed his short beard and started in on his breakfast of coffee and toast. Soon he would set off in his family-size sedan to his office, in the even more outskirtish suburban industrial area where the public television station he worked for was located. His son, Jasper, was already seated at the kitchen table, sharpening his switchblade on a whetstone. Mallory, Cliff's daughter, was in the shower, and had been in the shower for nearly one half-hour. And his wife, Gwen, was still in bed.

It's my birthday tomorrow, Jasper told his father.

Yes, I know that. Would you like me to buy you something you can stick that weapon into?

Jasper rolled his eyes. He folded the knife back inside the handle and kicked his chair away from him. He took a pair of mirrored sunglasses from the pocket of his leather jacket and ate a bite of his father's toast. Written in whiteout on the back of Jasper's jacket were the words "SON OF FUCK."

Have fun at school today, Cliff said.

Oh sure.

Sure what?

Sure sure. That's what.

What does that mean?

Jasper left a trail of cement dust in his wake as he squealed out of the driveway in his muscle car.

Hi, Mallory, Cliff said, as his daughter walked into the kitchen. She opened up the door to the backyard deck and

stood there motionless, her towel wrapped around her. She was still sopping wet from the shower. When damp, her brown hair looked ink black.

What are you doing? Cliff asked.

Studying the air for weather disturbances. Anomalies. Aberrations.

Earlier in the week Mallory had purchased a copy of *Twister* at McDonald's along with a Happy Meal. Watching the film's computer-generated tornadoes seemed to have affected her. Her consciousness had altered, the way a child's first nightmare can break them free of solipsism. Cliff felt kind of proud of her.

She removed a jar of grape jelly from the fridge and a spoon from a cabinet. She sat down next to her father and fed herself the jelly.

That's almost the most disgusting thing I've ever seen you do.

What's the most, Dad?

That day you were eating grape jelly like that after your wisdom teeth were removed and your mouth was so numb from the novocaine that you didn't realize there were these huge purple braids of spit hanging off your chin. You couldn't feel your lips.

Mallory rolled her eyes. That's a joke? Is your brother involved with some sort of cult?

They're called gangs, Dad.

I'm not up on my lingo.

Where's Mom?

The ulcer is giving her trouble. She was up all night moaning and groaning.

The smell of aluminum hung in the kitchen air. Cliff finished his coffee and left for work.

Mallory decided that instead of going to school she was going to ball up in a corner and tremble all day.

Gwen was, in fact, not in bed, but on the floor with her legs akimbo. She ground her teeth together and squeezed the metal trunk of the lamp beside her.

I must be pregnant, she surmised. This feels like labour. She recalled her secret intimacies with Rosy as contractions blinked the muscles of her abdomen.

Mallory, she screamed, come up here! Mallory came up the stairs and into her mother's room and saw her on the floor. Her mother was a short woman with striking black and white eyes.

Why are you doing that? she asked, when she saw her mother's position.

I'm giving birth.

Doesn't that involve doctors and hospitals usually?

Gwen let out a shrill sound and then suddenly something appeared from her vagina. Mallory had never seen a newborn baby before, but she was confident this was unusual.

It was a thumb.

Along with a placenta and half a litre of murky liquid, Gwen had given birth to an ordinary, adult-sized thumb. The thumb had a hard thumbnail and all the crinkles and marks that are expected of an aged thumb. It lay there on the floor between her legs. The cuticles needed pushing back.

What is it, she asked her daughter, a boy or a girl? She wiped an arm's length of sweat off her brow.

Mallory replied, It's a thumb.

Ha ha ha ha.

Gwen let her hand slide along the banister while looking straight ahead blankly. She came to the kitchen and yanked a string, causing the venetian blinds to shoot up and away from the window. Sunlight shone through her white nightie. She shook her legs.

Mallory called from a corner, I think Dad is depressed.

Why?

His eyes look all droopy, I don't know. Well, don't tell him about this thumb.

Why not?

Because. He's depressed.

She opened her hand and considered the thumb she was holding.

Jasper kicked the asses of a few losers. Don't mess with me, he said to the losers, and struck matches off their faces. I'm in a gang! And it's my birthday tomorrow!

One of the ass-kicked losers replied, You used to be our friend!

Jasper's fellow gang members drank cola and leaned against a brick wall. The girl members hooked their clawed fingers into the white shirts of the boy members. One girl, whose platinum-blond hair was tied up into a ponytail, blew Jasper a kiss that landed on his cheek.

Pow! Jasper said.

They sped off down the street.

A t around 1 P.M. Mallory crept out from her hiding place, between the philodendron and the bougainvilCliff looked through his day planner. The ceiling to his office was full of small holes, and a vent seemed to pump out air by the looks of the red plastic ribbons that flapped endlessly from the grate. Cliff often thought of his office as being below ground, even though it wasn't. When employees passed by his door they looked at him out of the corners of their eyes like the guilty patrons of a freak show.

Cliff's boss poked his head in and said, Big meeting tomorrow, Cliff-o. Show some balls!

Gwen listened to Rosy on the telephone. The occasional vehicle passing, an eighteen-wheeler, a motorcycle, accompanied his slow, heavy breathing. She sat on the couch, and held the thumb.

and was out the door.

Cliff watched her drive away and squeezed the crotch of his jeans.

Upstairs, Mallory was flushing her eyelashes down the toilet.

Jasper had been home in his room all afternoon, having been rudely expelled from school for lighting a fire in the palm of his hand. He answered the phone when it rang.

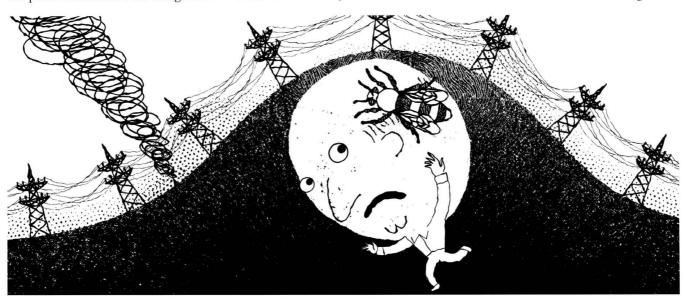
Mallory came out into the hallway, hoping the phone call was for her.

Jasper, is that you? the voice on the other end asked. It was the platinum-blond gang member.

Yes. What is it, baby?

Some new kid wants to join our gang. What's he look like?

He's got a big chin. No one likes him. We need an initiation. Something that'll



lea, went to the living room, and put her copy of *Twister* into the DVD player. A charge of static leapt from the television screen as she polished it free of dust. Right off the bat, a terrified family is running for their cellar! She grabbed the arm of the sofa, watching intently, emphatically, as kitchens, cars, and fathers got vacuumed into the fluxing air. White spikes from the tornado's internal electrical storms attacked the earth. She's right there with them.

eanwhile, in the cool comfort of darkness, Rosy read the brittle, yellowed pages of a medical journal. He slid his fingers along the crests and kinks in the vein patterns of a human body. It could have been him in that picture, he thought. So transparent.

The breathing continued, stirred with low moans. Sensual.

Ha ha ha ha.

On one side of their house the sun still shone vaguely, and on the other side, the moon crept up into the blue sky. Cliff came in through the front door and kicked his shoes off into a closet. A tangle of dust and hair was stuck to a screw on the heat vent. He greeted his wife by kissing her on the cheek. Her skin tasted of pear.

Let's have sex right now, Gwen.

I'm going out to buy a turkey for Jasper's birthday dinner.

Buy some of that delicious boxed stuffing too. I just can't get enough of that. Gwen put on a pair of plastic sandals scare him off. Got any ideas?

Just then Mallory put her ear to her brother's door.

Yes, Jasper said. On the evening of my birthday, we must all perform a satanic suicide pact. At exactly 8 P.M., we must all remove our switchblades and slice vertical lines up our left and right arms until we die.

Mallory moved away from the door, stunned and shaken by her brother's remarks. She blinked her bare eyelids and raced downstairs.

Jasper continued on the phone, How does that sound?

Mallory came to her father, who was hunched over the fireplace sifting through the soot. She startled him by calling out and he sucked in a gulp of the hearth's carbon flakes. He coughed and rubbed his sooty hands across his face, making him appear to be half in shadow.

What is it? he said, expelling puffs of black smoke from his mouth.

I just overheard Jasper talking to one of the members of his gang on the phone about a suicide pact.

A suicide pact? I don't like the sounds of that.

At 8 P.M. on Jasper's birthday they're all going to kill themselves with their switchblades in some kind of a satanic gang suicide pact.

Sounds like I was right.

Right about what?

They are a cult.

Dad. This is serious.

I know. You're right. What can we do? Where are your eyelashes?

Gwen drove the family-size sedan along a gravel road, past a babbling brook outside of their suburb. She was outside of the city limits, and the trees and the sky opened up to her like lips. With the windows down the air came in and blew her hair around, and the smell of freshly laid manure and pesticide swam up her nostrils. The sunset

was magnificent, as amber as a street-light, yet it did nothing for her, because she was racked with guilt. Every time she saw the thumb rolling around beside her on the passenger seat, she felt all the more a sinner. Did Cliff drive me to it? she thought. Was it me or him that drove me to love Rosy? Finally, she stopped the car at the edge of a long, deep ditch full of lush overgrowth. Briar and bramble vied for domination among seeded dandelions and wildflowers. She stepped away from the vehicle and began to climb into the thickening hair of the ditch.

She found her way through the weeds with a pair of sewing scissors she had brought, cutting a path to a rusted and long-forgotten storm drain.

An echoey voice came from within the drain. Gwen, it said.

The storm drain lay ahead of her, its rippled aluminum entrance poking out from overgrown earth, its innards cloaked in absolute darkness.

Again, like from a fairy tale or adolescent hallucination, a voice came from within the drain. Gwen, it said.

She followed the voice into the drain.

She could also hear the comforting sound of water dripping onto tin.

Now louder, the voice encroached upon her. Gwen, yoo-hoo, it said.

In the dark she came upon a pair of arms that tightened around her chest, holding her possessively.

You smell of tar, the smell of the urban, said the voice, now directly against her ear. The two bodies held each other, delicately feeling one another's skin in the dark.

I have something to show you, Rosy. All righty, said Rosy.

A match was lit and put to the wicks of a few candles, and suddenly a thousand shadows appeared, flickering and dancing. Calcite stalactites and stalagmites had become no less than teeth inside the storm drain's maw. Gwen looked over to her lover, who could not return her gaze because he was terribly bashful.

I don't find your disfigurement grotesque, Rosy, you don't have to be shy around me. Gwen took his soft wet hand. She could see every vein beneath his skin. His eyes were surrounded by millions of these veins, resembling the tree roots that hung through the cracked ceiling of the storm drain. Behind Rosy



PWAC has given me great exposure, professional mentoring and, best of all, work that pays!

Kathleen Rake, PWAC (Vancouver)

You enjoy writing. You do it well. You've been published, perhaps in this very magazine. You think you'd like to make a living with your writing. That's where we come in.

Professional Writers Association of Canada protecting the rights and careers of freelance writers

info@pwac.ca

www.pwac.ca

www.writers.ca

join today

READING MA JIAN ON THE FARM

The Tibetan widow Crushes bones and feeds them to vultures In order to bring peace to the dead

The weeping Buddha dries my tears

I run barefoot through the apple orchards A wild dog follows me

The Ceremony of Empowerment Sways in the predator's favour

The young girl quivers within

Two white rings hover round a black goat's eyes It stands on its hind legs waiting

For the woman who feeds it To feed it

The pony is smaller than the goat And hands me its hoof like a paw

A Chinese scholar Loses his way in the mountains

Imagines dinosaurs in the swaying river Then drowns

The weeping Buddha is full of my sorrows

The belly of a young girl is slit Her insides offered to the moon

The moon turns the other cheek It's tired of sacrifice

Ma Jian drinks beer in a London pub He can never go home

The weeping Buddha stops weeping

Everything's fed up with sacrifice

—ALEXANDRA LEGGAT

and Gwen lay stacks of books, mostly non-fiction, and hanging haphazardly were inexpensive framed reprints of the works of Caravaggio and Pontormo. A water-stained mattress was raised off the ground on a U-Haul trailer. Gwen

felt the map of Rosy's ear as he kissed her breasts and collarbone.

I gave birth to this thumb this morning. You did?

I think it's ours, said Gwen and rolled her eyes guiltily.

Holy crap, I'm a father, said Rosy. Ha ha ha ha.

Cliff poured Mallory and himself glasses of cola and they sat at the kitchen table and drank. The wood blades of the kitchen fan cut the air above them. Mallory and Cliff took sips of their colas.

Good cola, Cliff remarked.

What are we going to do? We can't let Jasper kill himself.

I know. I have to admit, Mallory, this really gives me the heebie-jeebies.

More scared than the time I thought I was pregnant with the child of a pro wrestler?

Let's not compare.

They could hear Jasper in the living room sharpening his switchblade.

Gwen came in the front door with a turkey in a bag. She had left the thumb for Rosy to look after, and he had put it in a silk-lined box usually meant for expensive jewellery, and had fashioned the thumb its very own little pillow on which to rest its fingerprint.

Gwen asked her son, Where's your dad?

In the kitchen with Mallory, drinking cola and looking earnest.

Gwen walked across the living room with the turkey in the bag and opened the door to the kitchen. Neither Cliff nor Mallory saw or heard her.

Well, she heard Cliff say, we can't tell your mother that we know.

Why not? Mallory said. We can't keep it a secret.

Think of her ulcer. If we can somehow deal with this without her knowing, it will save her the stress. They mulled this over. Suddenly Mallory realized she was now keeping one secret from her mother and another from her father. A thumb and a suicide. She took a sip of her cola.

Gwen closed the kitchen door quietly. She turned and looked to her son and whispered to herself, What am I going to do? They know about Rosy.

Inside the kitchen, Cliff continued, We'll have to find a way of stopping Jasper from committing suicide without her knowing.

Gwen stood beside the door to the kitchen and spoke loudly to her son, Hi, Jasper! I'm home now from getting the turkey for your birthday dinner! Now

SUMMER NUMBER, 2008

I'm going to put it in the freezer! In the kitchen!

O.K., Mom, Jasper said and rolled his eyes.

Cliff and Mallory heard this, changed their posture and attempted to look casual. Gwen came in and the three of them greeted one another calmly and collectedly. Gwen stuffed the turkey in the freezer and then stood there. The three of them smiled.

Well, Gwen said and yawned, I'm tired. Good night.

Good night.

Good night, Mom.

She ran upstairs and quickly dialed the number of Rosy's pay phone. On the seventeenth ring Rosy picked up.

Rosy.

Gwen.

Rosy, Cliff knows. He knows all about us. I think he might do something drastic. Something primal.

There was a pause, and then Rosy replied, That doesn't sound very good.

Later, in bed, Cliff leaned over Gwen and kissed her chin. The digital numbers of their clock read ten-thirty.

He felt for his penis inside his pyjamas.

Remember how we used to scream each other's names out, like two people searching for each other in a storm, while we had sex?

Yes

Well, I can't do that tonight.

Gwen could not turn to look at him. She thought of infidelity.

Why not? she asked.

I've got a lot on my mind, Cliff said. I understand.

In the field near the power lines an old man collapsed. His dog tugged helplessly on the leash hooked around his owner's hand.

Ha ha ha ha.

The next morning, Cliff awoke with more than the normal feeling of dread. He went to the bathroom to have a cool shower and, as he passed the mirror, saw an enormous hematoma on his forehead. He stopped and returned to look at his reflection again. The sound of the bathroom vent hummed in his ear. He carefully put a finger to the bruise-

coloured bulge on his forehead, almost as if he did not believe it to be real. But when he touched it, a sharp prick of discomfort went straight back into his brain. His head began to throb. The hematoma pulsed erratically against the rhythm of his heartbeat.

Gwen came into the bathroom and saw his head. What is that? she said.

I don't know.

Did you hit your head on anything? No.

Maybe you should see a doctor.

You can't trust doctors, Gwen. They make grown men and women wear paper nighties. That's not right-minded.

Jasper was already seated in the kitchen sharpening his switchblade when Cliff came down in his pyjamas for his morning coffee and toast. A glint off the blade caught his attention; the hematoma pulsed.

Cliff stuck two slices of bread in the toaster.

It's my birthday today, he told his father without looking up from his knife.

I know that. Happy birthday.

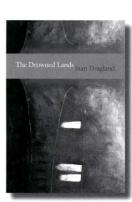
Thanks.



Nerve Language

Shortlisted
2007
GOVERNOR
GENERAL'S
AWARD





FOUND poems by Souvankham Thammavongsa ISBN 978-1-897141-14-4 \$20

NERVE LANGUAGE

poems by

Brian Henderson

Brian Henderson Sara Tilley

ISBN 978-1-897141-13-7 ISBN 978-1-897141-20-5

\$20 \$22

Skin Room

a novel by

a novel by Stan Dragland 18BN 978–1–897141–1

isbn 978–1–897141–19–9 \$22

THE DROWNED LANDS



TORONTO

42

NEW TEXAS

After Luis Felipe Fabre.

jack mendoza, bible salesman, widower, fifty-seven years old, never learned to play the violin.

no one knows if the sky would come crashing down on us if he ever took that ten-gallon hat off, but lord knows we're not about to ask him.

in this infernal town men melt like blocks of ice. and you with your black suit and bow tie—jack, are you on your way to a funeral? could it be your own?

you don't sweat any more, jack. if you keep this up you'll turn into a cactus.

ding-dong, ding-dong.

jack mendoza sells bibles in a land where everybody's already got one.

—CHRIS MICHALSKI

Don't you have any other hobbies? Do you want me to teach you fly fishing?

Jasper said, I'd rather kill myself than learn to fly fish.

No fly fishing then! Me too. Ha ha. I stay as far away from that harmless sport as I can.

Jasper rolled his eyes.

Have you ever thought of carrying around a spoon?

A spoon?

They can come in handy. When you need to eat soup. Or dig small holes.

I eat soup with my switchblade. I dig holes with my switchblade.

Is this a plea for attention? Cliff came over behind his son and gave him a hug. Get off me.

We can spend the day together if you'd like. The toast popped up.

What the hell is on your head?

It's a carbuncle. Pay it no attention. Now, what's the plan today, birthday boy?

I'm leaving.

No, wait.

Cliff listened to his son rev off down the street, rock 'n' roll music fading away with him. Then there was nothing but the various electrical hums to keep him company. He felt deserted. He ate his toast dry. He drank the entire pot of coffee. By the time Mallory came to the kitchen for breakfast, he was shaking.

What's that?

A bump, he said. People get bumps. When Cliff had left for work Gwen came down and sat beside her daughter.

I know, Gwen said.

Know what?

That Cliff knows.

Oh, Mallory said. Knows what?

I heard you tell Cliff last night, about the thumb. What's he planning to do? No. Nothing.

Fine, Gwen said and stood up, ruin our family.

Jasper slouched in the gravel beneath an overpass and listened to the thrum of the cars passing above. Beside him, the platinum-blond gang member was applying rose-red lipstick. She turned and regarded Jasper with gangish affection. She combed his hair with her hand.

Happy birthday, Jasper, she said, and kissed him.

You should come to my birthday party tonight and meet my parents. Then you'll know why I'm so bad.

Gwen stood at the lip of the storm drain and peered into the dark-

ness. A bird pecked at the berry of some bush and then fell to the ground dead. Finally, a figure began to emerge from the heavy veil of the drain.

I'm afraid, spoke Rosy, still within the shadow.

Come to me, Rosy, said Gwen, and waved for him to approach.

As gentle as water rippling, Rosy's membranous body exposed itself to daylight. Under his skin, the veins glittered like threads of red and blue silk. It did him no good to squint, since the sun went right through his eyelids, but it's only natural to want to squint in sunlight, so he tried. He raised an arm to shade his face, but the sun went straight through his arm too. Gwen held him, loved him more than she thought even possible. A crazy kind of emergency love, saved for occasions just like these. She kissed his clear lips. They wept together in the flora of the ditch.

Cliff and Mallory watched the television all afternoon. Death's presence at the birthday party felt unavoidable. Mallory had insisted they watch Twister, but Cliff told her he didn't like that kind of movie, that he'd rather just watch plain old television. The hematoma on his forehead had grown twice as large since the morning, and was now ripe and shiny.

Dad, Mallory said, I have to tell you something.

Shoot.

But the telephone rang and Cliff answered it. It was his boss.

Cliff, where the hell are you?

I'm sick. I told your secre—

Sick! You're a fucking puss! His boss hung up.

What is it? Cliff asked his daughter as he tugged at his hair.

Nothing, I guess.

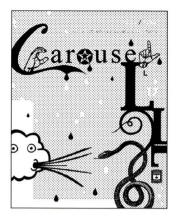
You need a new pair of socks, the TV said.

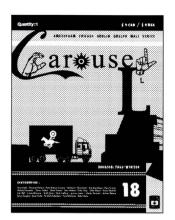
A dull reflection off the living room window hung over the television screen like a ghost. Sitcoms, cop shows, infomercials, rock videos, biographies, soap operas, cartoons, made-for-TV movies, awards ceremonies, family dramas, documentaries, the news, the sports, the weather, and sitcoms, and even more sitcoms. Someone tripped down a flight of stairs and a live television audience laughed madly.

SUMMER NUMBER, 2008 43









▶ 4 issues, \$25. **Subscribe today.**

"...Carousel is a delicious paper treat created with care for the tasteful reader with a ravenous appetite for contemporary culture."

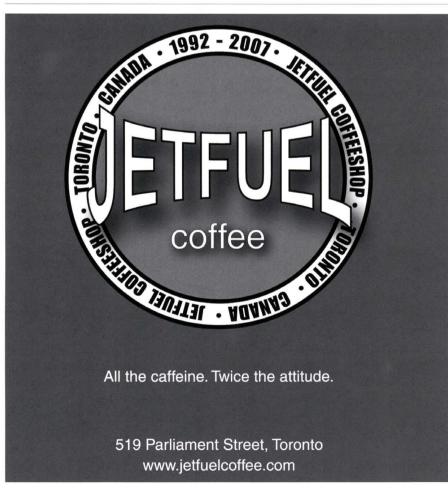
— David Morand (Naked Air Literary Review)



carouselmagazine.ca/subscribe.html



?: carouselbook@yahoo.ca



Ha ha ha ha.

A t the birthday dinner that night, the turkey came out of the oven hot and golden, its liquefied fat bubbled and spat in the pan. Gwen put the pan on the kitchen counter and took the turkey from it. Rosy stood beside her trembling and cupping his digit offspring in his hands.

Gwen said, we've got to be *honest* about this. The whole affair.

She placed the turkey on a white oval plate and took the plate to the dining room table. She smiled at her family. It was seven-thirty.

Hey, I don't have a knife, Jasper said, and looked under his napkin. His bare arms made Cliff flinch.

Who needs a knife?

You've got one, Dad.

Cliff threw his knife behind him, Who needs it! His hematoma throbbed.

I do! And I can't find my switchblade either.

I threw it away.

What?! Why?

I thought I'd get you a nicer one. That one was so dull and unintimidating.

No it wasn't.

Yes it was.

Gwen stood at the door to the dining room and said, Before we start to eat, I have a surprise guest I want to introduce.

Me too, Jasper said.

What?

Jasper stood up and went to the living room. The family looked at one another. Jasper brought back with him the platinum-blond gang member.

This is my fiancée, he said. We're engaged to be married.

Mallory and Cliff exchanged glances. Jasper and his fiancée sat down. They held hands under the tablecloth

Cliff took the knife from the fiancée's place setting and said, Like husband like wife!

Gwen then said, wringing her hands, Maybe you already know about my guest. She opened the door to the kitchen. This is Rosy.

Rosy, Cliff whispered. He and Mallory were confused. The chandelier above the table seemed to quiver. The electricity coursing through the house was audible. In came Rosy, his skin glimmering like waxed fibreglass.

A monster! Cliff exclaimed. Mallory velped.

Rosy cringed behind Gwen. Please don't hurt me, he said. No one moved. Cliff's carbuncle protruded from his forehead. All was silent as Rosy, looking polygonal under the chandelier's light, made his way to a place at the dining room table. Cliff promptly removed all the knives from the table and tossed them on the floor behind him. It was sevenforty, Jasper was due for satanic suicide in twenty minutes. Gwen stared at her lap.

Jasper said, I'll cut the turkey then, and reached for the big serrated knife. Cliff lurched from his seat.

No!

Yes!

No!

It's my birthday!

They each grabbed the handle, leaning this way and that over the dinner table as they fought. Rosy cowered each time the knife swung over his head. To him, the family seemed forever moving, expanding and contracting monstrously, as vivid and intense as neon.

I won't have dessert if there is any, said the platinum-blond gang fiancée.

Finally, Cliff was able to separate the carving knife from his son's hands. They stood across from one another, breathless and upset. Cliff waited a moment.

He said to his son, First pickings, how's that?

First pickings? Who cares? I wanted to carve that bird. That was the whole point.

Why don't you spoon out the mashed potatoes instead.

The whole family, Rosy, and the platinum-blond gang fiancée ate in silence, with only spoons and forks. They raised shreds of turkey to their mouths and chewed. Mallory and Cliff watched Jasper with the intensity of sharpshooters, almost daring him to attempt his suicide. They could hardly contain themselves as the minutes passed toward eight; it was now five-to.

Aren't you going to say something, Cliff, Gwen shrieked. Rosy lifted his head.

What?

Cliff. Aren't you going to say something? She was trembling.

Was I? He looked to Mallory. She shrugged at him and turned her attention back to Jasper. Gwen glared at her daughter.

No, Cliff said, I was just eating.

Although no one was paying any attention, it was possible to watch Rosy's dinner travel down his oesophagus and into his stomach, where it was visibly digested by gobs of acid.

At exactly 8 P.M. Jasper went for the knife to carve himself some more turkey.

Ha ha ha ha.

Mallory saw her family as a tornado. How a tornado can pick up objects and toss them anywhere it wants, how they frantically and carelessly destroy landscapes, how they drop from the sky, filled with electricity, and can tear the roofs off houses and expose them like secrets. Her family was spiralling like a tornado at a great speed,

dangerous and impossible to predict, spinning faster and faster, sucking people into their sick familial vortex. She believed that if she were to stay very still as the eye of it dropped down on her, she might escape alive.

At 8:01 P.M. the carving knife was embedded in Gwen's flank. Rosy was screaming like a monster. Jasper's platinum-blond fiancée was on the floor covered in mashed potatoes and peas. In desperation, Cliff had been forced to grab the carving knife by its serrated blade and the teeth had bit into his hand. He saw no alternative as he watched his son scoop the knife off the table to presumably slaughter himself.

Cliff's carbuncle was now gigantic.

I won't let you! Cliff screamed over and over as he and his son fought.

The table kicked back toward Jasper and the bowl of mashed potatoes catapulted into his fiancée's face. Fragile girl. She collapsed on the floor in paroxysms, her limbs bouncing and kicking electrically.

The momentum of Cliff keeling over the felled table plunged the knife into his wife's abdomen, just to the side of her womb. She screamed. Then Rosy screamed like a monster. Jasper burst into childlike tears as his mother spiralled toward the dining room wall with blood quickly drenching her blouse.

Rosy rose from his place at the tipped table, reached forward for Cliff's throat, and began to strangle him.

I love your wife, Rosy growled. You

TROUBLED

Coach House Books www.chbooks.com

Coach House: your one-stop source for terrific T.O. lit

Troubled

poetry by RM Vaughan

People fall in love with their therapists all the time. But what happens when the therapist not only loves you back, but also acts upon it? *Troubled* is RM Vaughan's poetic account of his true-life patient/psychiatrist relationship gone horribly wrong.

Girls Fall Down

a novel by Maggie Helwig

People are collapsing all over the streets of Toronto. As hazmat teams scour the streets for the poisoning's source, photographer Alex and his ex-lover Susie-Paul reunite to search for her missing schizophrenic brother. It's both a thriller and a poignant love story from acclaimed author Maggie Helwig.

Blert

poetry by Jordan Scott

The bright, taut, explosive poems in Jordan Scott's *Blert* are a spelunk into the mouth of the stutterer. Often aimed full-bore at words that are difficult for the stutterer, Scott's poems replicate the act of stuttering, the 'blort, jam and rejoice' of grappling with the granular texture of words.

SUMMER NUMBER, 2008 45

bastard! Look what you've done.

Cliff choked, What?

With one hand Rosy strangled Cliff and with the other he displayed the thumb.

See this? Rosy continued. This is the product of our love! Your primal rages won't erase that, not in a million years, mister!

Rosy, Gwen muttered from her twisted position on the floor, her hands dripping with fresh blood. Although she was lapsing into shock, she was still conscious enough to register and be quite moved by Rosy's exclamation of love.

Cliff squeaked, I don't understand. I'm just trying to save my son from killing himself.

Mallory was curled up in a corner being very still.

Rosy said, Your son? He was still strangling Cliff.

Kill myself? Jasper said. I'm not going to kill myself.

Your son? Rosy repeated.

Then Cliff's hematoma burst.

Jasper was wiping away the frothed spit and mashed potatoes from his fiancée's lips, trying to stuff a napkin into her mouth.

Don't bite your tongue off, baby, he cried.

Rosy had one last chance to scream like a monster.

A noxious black-turquoise smoke poured thickly from the hematoma crater on Cliff's forehead. The smoke moved slowly through the air, seeming to grow and bubble up like awakened yeast. No sooner had it escaped from Cliff's carbuncle than it enveloped Rosy's head. Rosy coughed, and everyone watched the smoke pollute his nostrils, mouth, and lungs. There was a silence. Rosy took his hands from Cliff's throat with the slowness and gravity of a doomed gesture.

He gasped and fell away from Cliff and onto the floor. The adult-sized thumb rolled away from Rosy's hand and across the dining room. Rosy became dead.

Ha ha ha ha.

Cliff stared at his bloodied hands. Good God, Cliff said, I think I can see bone. His shirt sleeves were dark red. Don't die, Jasper whimpered. His platinum-blond fiancée's breathing was shallow, her face very pale. There was a pea wedged in her nose.

Mallory did not move.

Gwen pulled the carving knife from her side and dropped it beside her with little effort. A new gush of blood came from the open wound.

The chandelier was swinging back and forth above them, and the glass jewels that hung from it tinkled like the chimes in a dream sequence. Food was everywhere. Cliff found he still had a piece of turkey in his mouth that he had not finished chewing, so he did that now.

Gwen, Cliff said, there's a thumb on the floor. Is that mine?

It's my baby!

Jasper looked up at his father. My fiancée needs an ambulance!

So do I, Gwen shrieked. So does Rosy! Rosy was dead. The chandelier had almost stopped moving. Jasper was performing some misguided form of C.P.R. on his fiancée, which did not seem to be reviving her.

Phone 911 somebody.

THIS ISSUE TALKS! Tune into www.taddlecreekmag.com/talk to download a free audio version of every story in this issue.

ALL YOU NEED IS LORAZEPAM

"You could be richer and thinner," says the mirror; but your tits don't sag yet, my girl (and what an ass). Don't waste another diet cola day with clip-show-porn beat-offs and Tyra.

Oh go on, be too sad to kill yourself.

Try on your Brownie uniform, aim your gun (and say, "Pow!"), and think, if it fits this snug, your ghost would be much too fat.

Be oh so beautiful. Remember when you gave up cigarettes? That was a laugh. Go on, get a pack. Disturb an old boyfriend.

Maybe a fight will do you some good, princess.

Think about gin and candy and take three pills, or watch a song-and-dance picture about being in love and find that you just don't have the time. Your days are too full for that, doll.

—EVIE CHRISTIE

Calm down, Jasper. Let me get my bearings.

Cliff! Call 911!

Call 911, Cliff repeated. He looked around the room at the disorder. Something had gone very wrong this evening, he thought, but he couldn't pinpoint the moment when things turned sour. Had his wife said "baby"? He saw Mallory in the corner, huddled up and shivering, her eyes as white as plates.

Mallory, he said, phone 911 for your family.

I can't, she said.

Why not? Cliff was perplexed. And dizzy, he felt dizzy.

I can't move, Mallory said. I'm too afraid.

Afraid? What's making you afraid? This.

Oh, Cliff nodded. He surveyed the dining room again, and looked down at Rosy, who seemed to be turning into mud. He picked the thumb up from the carpet.

This isn't mine.

Cliff, it's my baby. Gwen reached out from across the room. Cliff looked down at the thumb and then to his wife.

You had this with Rosy here? Yes. She could barely admit it. Why didn't you tell me?

He went over to his wife and knelt down on the floor beside her. She was bleeding, he was bleeding. There was a lot of blood. He brushed some hairs from her face and gave her a small kiss.

I think I understand, he said and gave her the thumb. I'm always so busy, is that it?

Ha ha ha ha.

doused with antiseptic and wrapped in thick gauzy bandages by a young ambulance driver with a crooked moustache. The same treatment was applied to the peculiar cavity on his head. The ambulance driver's partner attended to Gwen's stomach wound, putting a few layers of gridded fabric and cotton under a big Band-Aid. The paramedic told her the knife had only tucked under the first few layers of skin. No one noticed Rosy. He looked like just another spilled plate of food, a huge bowl of rice pudding or something.

Mallory watched them clean her parents' wounds. She felt the eerie contentment one feels from following the advice

of a premonition. Her body was restless for the first time she could remember, and she walked through the living room as the paramedics aided her family.

The family watched them raise Jasper's fiancée onto a thin bed with wheels and roll her to the front door.

My fiancée, Jasper said, and leaned on his father and began to sob. Cliff held his son and patted his shoulder with his bandage mittens. They stood like this for a long time, and the longer they stood, the harder Jasper held to his father. His tears were long coming.

Sometimes the worst things make the most sense, he told his son.

You were trying to save me from something I wasn't even going to do.

A miscommunication.

The paramedic with the crooked moustache turned back and addressed Gwen. So, do you want to press charges? I mean, do you want us to call in the police?

No, Gwen told them, it was all in a whirlwind. A big accident.

She lied and said that when Jasper's fiancée had keeled over convulsively, they all panicked and wounds resulted. She had the thumb hidden in her fist.

Looks like a lot of good food got wasted. What can you do? Cliff said, and shrugged.

The ambulance people nodded and waved goodbye. Cliff, Gwen, Mallory, and Jasper went to the window and watched the ambulance skid out of their driveway and shoot off into the dark toward the hospital, while its siren laughed endlessly and its red lights spun through the neighbourhood, narrowly missing an old man holding his head while teetering down the street. The orange street lights hummed calmly in the cold summer night, the heavy purple clouds were lit by the white beacons from the airport, and the engines in the power stations continued to generate electricity. Vo

Lee Henderson lives in Vancouver. He is the author of the award-winning short story collection The Broken Record Technique (Penguin, 2002) and the upcoming novel The Man Game (Viking). He is also a contributing editor to the art magazines Border Crossings and Contemporary. His fiction has been featured twice in The Journey Prize Stories (M. & S.).

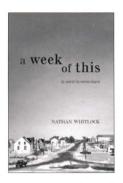


misFit / `mis-fit also mis-`fit/

n. Canada's hottest emerging writers

MISFIT





A Week of This a novel in seven days

by Nathan Whitlock

misFit fiction • hc • \$26.95 978-155022-815-1

"A portrait of people in a small town so intimate that it feels like you are under the covers with them. Like Tom Perrotta's *Little Children*, Whitlock examines the horror and grace of suburban life."

- Heather O'Neill, author of Lullabies for Little Criminals



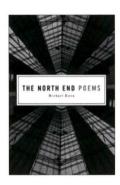
by Brian Joseph Davis

misFit fiction • tp • \$19.95 978-155022-782-6



The year is 1975. A radical far-left group has kidnapped a young woman from one of America's richest families. She joins their cause and is eventually arrested and convicted of armed robbery.

"An insanely funny first novel...innovative and truly bizarre." – Zoe Whittall, *Now Magazine*



The North End Poems

by Michael Knox

misFit poetry • tp • \$16.95 978-155022-817-5

Channeling the beliefs, passions, fears, friends, and fights of Nick Macfarlane, a young steeltown warehouse worker, Knox creates the kind of hardscrabble, blue-collar world that exists everywhere. Benders and punchups, beaters and punchclocks, provide the means to explore notions of masculinity.

Also by Michael Knox

Play Out the Match

poetry • tp • \$16.95 978-1-55022-723-9

"One of the ballsiest debut collections in recent memory...these poems crackle with masculine energy and a cocky swagger."

Quill and Quire



Augustine in Carthage And Other Poems

by Alessandro Porco

misFit poetry • tp • \$16.95 978-155022-818-2



Equal parts crude and charming, locker-room macho and sensitive, these poems are always singularly marked by formal ingenuity and stylistic élan. Includes translations of Italian poetry, re-mixes of classic English poems, performance pieces, tender love poems, and a short pornographic novel.

Also by Alessandro Porco



The Jill Kelly Poems

poetry • tp • \$16.95 978-1-55022-687-4

"Porco is a genuine guerilla poet who turns the weapons of pop culture, its stylized forms of rhetoric, back on themselves to truly liberating effect."

- Vancouver Sun



DO ONE THING REALLY, REALLY WELL.