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A close-up portrait of actress Saoirse Ronan. She has dark, wavy hair and is looking slightly to her right with a serious expression. She is wearing a dark garment with a white, lace-like collar. The background is a dark, textured green.

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THE NEW YORKER

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SPOTS Luci Gutiérrez

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THE FRONT ROW

Richard Brody comments on scenes from Charles Burnett’s film “To Sleep with Anger,” from 1990.



PHOTO BOOTH

Peter Hessler writes about Davide Monteleone’s photographs of life on the border of Russia and China.



VIDEO

A dispatch from Twins Days, a festival for twins, held every summer in Twinsburg, Ohio.

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THE MAIL

MODERNITY AT THE MET

Calvin Tomkins, in his article on the revitalization of the Metropolitan Museum's Department of Modern and Contemporary Art, mentions the early death of Thomas Hess, who had been hired to run the museum's collection of contemporary art ("The Met and the Now," January 25th). My late husband, Thomas Hoving, was the museum's director until the late nineteen-seventies. He believed that Hess, who had been the editor of *ARTnews* and an advocate of the Abstract Expressionists, could bring a fresh emphasis on contemporary art to the museum's collection. He also felt that MOMA, since it focussed primarily on modern works, was not a true contemporary-art museum. He thought that the Met, as New York's historical-art museum, should take over MOMA's contemporary collection, leaving MOMA to focus on modern art. For Hoving, the contemporary could be illuminated by the historical.

*Nancy Hoving
New York City*

tive language, but when I think about "black mirrors" all I see are words that dehumanize children with developmental disabilities, describing them like something out of a horror movie.

*Amanda Vivian
San Francisco, Calif.*

In his piece, Shapin mentions Bruno Bettelheim, a German child psychologist who proposed the idea that autism was a response to emotional starvation. But this controversial theory was not his only contribution to history: Bettelheim, a Holocaust survivor, was one of the first people to inform the world of the functions of Nazi concentration camps, in the article "Individual and Mass Behavior in Extreme Situations," published, in the *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, in 1943. As he saw it, these functions were to terrify the German populace, train the Gestapo and the S.S. in casual cruelty, and study how to most efficiently crush the human spirit.

*Theodor Holm Nelson
Sausalito, Calif.*

UNDERSTANDING AUTISM

In Steven Shapin's review of "In a Different Key," by John Donvan and Caren Zucker, Shapin writes, "It's a searing experience to have a child who doesn't talk, who doesn't want to be touched, who self-harms, who demands a regularity and an order that parents can't supply, whose eyes are not windows to their souls but black mirrors" ("Seeing the Spectrum," January 25th). I'm autistic and have known many autistic kids and adults, and I can testify that none of us have black mirrors for eyes. Some people don't communicate through eye gaze, which is presumably what Shapin meant. Many of us don't make eye contact because it hurts us. Blind people don't make eye contact because they cannot see. People with other disabilities (such as Parkinson's disease) cannot control the motions of their eyes. I know that this is figura-

RUG RATS

Alex Ross, writing about Pierre Boulez, examines the conductor's legacy ("The Magus," January 25th). In 1973, I attended my first Rug Concert, Boulez's response to the conservatism of the New York Philharmonic. He removed the concert-hall seats, filled the hall with pillows, and situated the orchestra off-stage. The result felt more like going to a rock concert than to the symphony, and inspired a deep connection to some wild and crazy music by Purcell, Stravinsky, Webern, and Ravel.

*Jeff Bieber
Columbia, Md.*

•
Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. We regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter or return letters.



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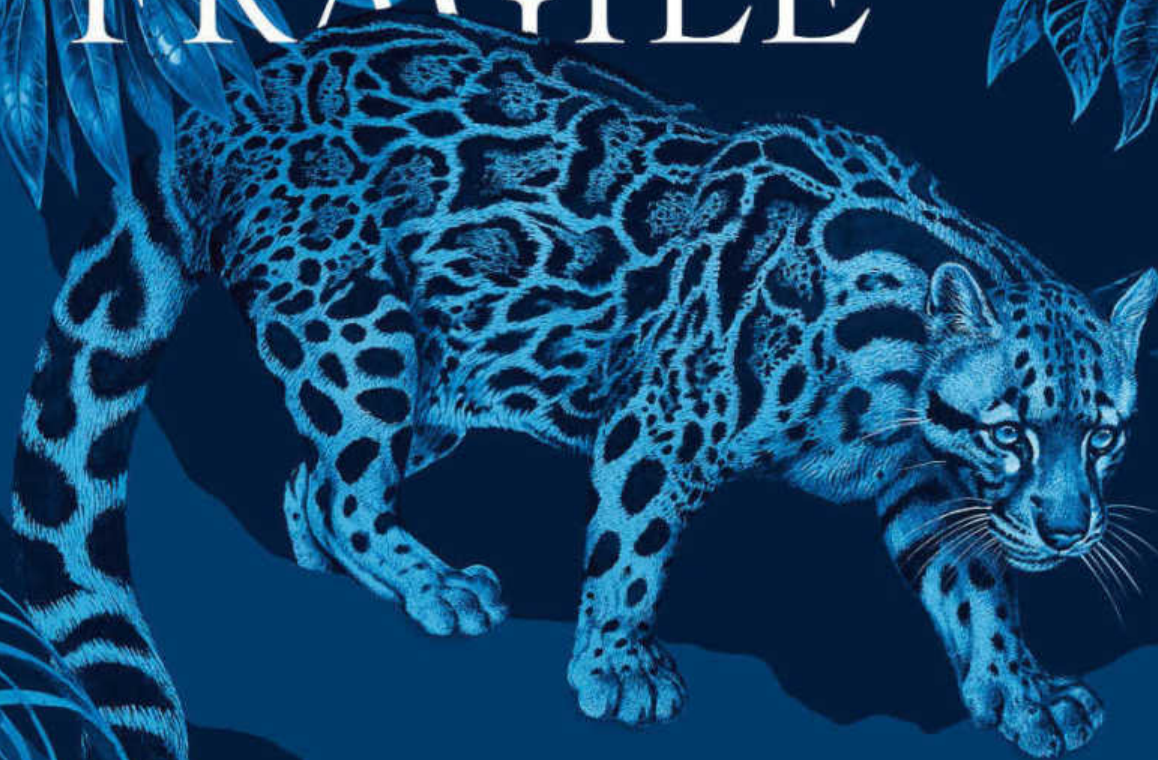
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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



“Beauty is truth,” wrote John Keats, and the curators of the **Cooper-Hewitt** clearly agree: beauty is the theme of its Design Triennial. Don’t expect Grecian urns when the show opens, on Feb. 12. The sixty-three participants champion innovation, from China’s Trace Architecture Office (TAO) to the Israeli jeweller Noa Zilberman, whose gold-plated “wrinkles” nestle in facial creases, to the American Haas Brothers, who teamed up with craftswomen in a South African township to create the beaded bestiary above.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDREW B. MYERS

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera

With operas like “La Traviata” getting a sexy, modernist twist at the Met, Puccini’s steamy “*Manon Lescaut*”—which has been playing at the house for thirty-six years in a rococo-accented production that looks decidedly antiquated—was due for an update. Richard Eyre’s new film-noir-inspired staging features Kristine Opolais, a star in the making, as the opera’s reckless seductress; Roberto Alagna, singing his first-ever performances of the role of Des Grieux, is replacing Jonas Kaufmann, who has withdrawn from the production. Fabio Luisi conducts. (Feb. 12 and Feb. 15 at 8.) • The director David McVicar, a purveyor of conservative but dramatically coherent productions, dominates the schedule this week with three shows in the running. The first is “*Il Trovatore*,” Verdi’s full-blooded opera of fire, madness, and circumstance. Angela Meade, a young Met favorite, leads the cast for a final run of performances, joining two respected veterans, Marcello Giordani and Dolora Zajick; Marco Armiliato. (Feb. 3 and Feb. 9 at 7:30, Feb. 6 at 8, and Feb. 13 at 1.) • Penny Woolcock’s gorgeous and smartly updated new production of “*Les Pêcheurs de Perles*” (“The Pearl Fishers”), a certified hit, marks its final performance this month, bolstered by an ace cast—including Mariusz Kwiecien (Zurga) and Matthew Polenzani (a magnificent Nadir). Amanda Wood-

bury replaces Diana Damrau in the role of Leïla; Antony Walker. (Feb. 4 at 7:30.) • Donizetti’s so-called Tudor Queens trilogy returns for its second installment, “*Maria Stuarda*,” in the David McVicar production. The opera’s most viscerally thrilling moment comes when Mary, Queen of Scots (Sondra Radvanovsky), and Queen Elizabeth (Elza van den Heever) lock horns for a blazing fourteen-minute showdown, complete with coloratura fireworks; Riccardo Frizza. (Feb. 5, Feb. 8, and Feb. 16 at 7:30 and Feb. 11 at 8.) • With their parallel plots of jilted lovers left out in the cold, the one-act operas “*Cavalleria Rusticana*,” by Pietro Mascagni, and “*Pagliacci*,” by Ruggero Leoncavallo, are a perfect double bill—particularly in McVicar’s production, which contrasts the grim fatalism of the former with the dashed optimism of the latter. The experienced cast includes Violeta Urmana, Barbara Frittoli, Yonghoon Lee, Marco Berti, and Ambrogio Maestri in the leading roles; Fabio Luisi. (Liudmyla Monastyrskaya replaces Urmana on Feb. 13.) (Feb. 6 at 1, Feb. 10 at 7:30, and Feb. 13 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

Met • Juilliard: “La Sonnambula”

With its emphasis on beautifully intricate singing, bel-canto opera tends to spotlight singers and not conductors, so there will be more attention than usual on the pit when the rising young maestra Speranza Scappucci leads Bellini’s wistful, pastel-colored work. All roles are

taken by singers from the Metropolitan Opera’s young-artist program and Juilliard’s Marcus Institute for Vocal Arts. (Peter Jay Sharp Theatre, Juilliard School. events.juilliard.edu. Feb. 9 and Feb. 11 at 7:30 and Feb. 13 at 2.)

American Lyric Theatre Alumni Concert

The essential contemporary opera lab, which has supported the development of works by emerging composers and librettists for a decade, offers the second in a series of concerts showcasing former beneficiaries of its program. The centerpiece is a preview of the opera “*Breaking the Waves*,” a work by Missy Mazzoli and Royce Vavrek—based on the film by Lars von Trier—commissioned by Opera Philadelphia. Among the vocalists is the captivating soprano Caroline Worra, a star of the Paul Kellogg era at New York City Opera. (National Sawdust, 80 N. 6th St., Brooklyn. nationalsawdust.org. Feb. 7 at 2:30.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic

The conductor Charles Dutoit and the pianist Yuja Wang—a commendable combination of experience and exuberance—dominate the first of the Philharmonic’s mid-February programs. Wang will be out front in the young Mozart’s Piano Concerto No. 9, “*Jeunehomme*,” a work of enduring lyrical freshness; Dutoit wraps up the concerts with the mature Respighi’s so-called Roman Trilogy, three extroverted tone poems saturated in orchestral color: “*Roman Festivals*” (which Toscanini and the Philharmonic world-premiered, in 1929), “*Fountains of Rome*,” and “*Pines of Rome*.” (Feb. 3-4 at 7:30 and Feb. 5-6 at 8.) • Semyon



This summer, the dynamic string quartet Brooklyn Rider’s founding cellist, Eric Jacobsen, will be replaced by Michael Nicolas, a long-admired figure on the New York scene. But the original foursome will still be intact for “*The Fiction Issue*,” a concert with the composer and singer-songwriter Gabriel Kahane at Williamsburg’s National Sawdust (Feb. 7) which also features Schubert’s Quartet No. 13 in A Minor (“*Rosamunde*”). (nationalsawdust.org.)

ILLUSTRATION BY SIMONE MASSONI

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CÉLINE

Bychkov, acclaimed for his recent work with the orchestra, returns for a plum assignment: Mahler's Sixth Symphony, a work of towering stature which the Philharmonic plays magnificently. (Feb. 11 and Feb. 16 at 7:30 and Feb. 12-13 at 8.) (David Geffen Hall. 212-875-5656.)

Tön: "Strauss, Watteau, & Nostalgia"

The international graduate-training orchestra of Bard College, conducted by Leon Botstein, appears on the Metropolitan Museum's "Sight and Sound" series in a concert that explores—in performance and discussion—the gentle links between Strauss, whose "Bourgeois Gentilhomme" Suite is derived from the incidental music he wrote for the Molière play, in 1912, and the world of Watteau, whose painting "The French Comedians" is part of the Metropolitan's collection. (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. Feb. 7 at 2.)

The Knights and Gil Shaham

The conductor Eric Jacobsen leads the dynamic Brooklyn chamber orchestra—with a special guest, the violinist Gil Shaham—in a program offering substantial works by Prokofiev (the Violin Concerto No. 2 in G Minor) and Beethoven (the Symphony No. 3, "Eroica"), with a bit of virtuosic fiddle fun by Sarasate ("Navarra," with the violinist Colin Jacobsen joining Shaham) in between. (BRIC, 647 Fulton St., Brooklyn. bricarts-media.org. Feb. 13 at 8.)

Cleveland Orchestra

Mitsuko Uchida, renowned throughout her career for her lucid interpretations of the Mozart piano concertos, collaborates with the paramount orchestra as soloist and conductor in two of his most popular, No. 17 in G Major and No. 25 in C Major. In between, William Preucil, the ensemble's concertmaster, will act as leader in another Mozart work, the Symphony No. 34 in C Major. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Feb. 14 at 7.)

RECITALS

New York Festival of Song: "NYFOS Next"

The festival's mini-series returns, offering something of a new-music lab on three consecutive Thursdays this month. Fresh off the success of his opera "Dog Days" at the Prototype Festival, the much talked about composer David T. Little curates an evening of songs by his friends Ted Hearne, Kate Soper, Jeff Myers, and Colin Read, centered around a preview of his new opera "JFK," which is headed to the Fort Worth Opera Festival in April. The festival's second slot is taken by the faculty, students, and alumni of the Manhattan School of Music, with a program of original music curated by Richard Danielpour and Susan Botti. (National Opera Center, 330 Seventh Ave. nyfos.org. Feb. 4 and Feb. 11 at 7.)

Mivos Quartet: Steve Reich

In a co-presentation of Bang on a Can and the Jewish Museum, the outstanding young ensemble takes up the minimalist icon's complete string quartets, including the Holocaust-themed "Different Trains" and "WTC 9/11," for string quartet and tape. (Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. thejewishmuseum.org. Feb. 4 at 7:30.)

John Brancy and Peter Dugan

The baritone and the pianist ignore the typical recital format—with its demand for alternating song cycles in English, French, and/or German—in favor of a spirited, imaginative pro-

gram that takes fantasy as its theme. The songs, by Schumann, Schubert, Grieg ("In the Hall of the Mountain King"), and Sibelius, among others, all have the peculiar sparkle of genius that can make fairy-tale creatures come to life. (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Feb. 5 at 7:30.)

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center

The Society continues its celebration of Beethoven's immortal string quartets, in the order in which they were composed, with the Op. 59 quartets, performed by the Miró Quartet (which offered a fresh and bold recording of these quartets in 2012), and with Op. 74, the "Harp," Op. 95, the "Seroso," and Op. 127 in E-Flat Major, performed by the Orion String Quartet, veteran artists of the Society and admired interpreters of the composer. (Alice Tully Hall. Feb. 5 at 7:30 and Feb. 16 at 7:30.) • Four longtime friends of the Society—the pianist Anne-Marie McDermott, the violinist Ida Kafavian, the violist Steven Tenenbom, and the cellist Peter Wiley—sometimes come together as the Opus One Piano Quartet. For this concert, they devote themselves entirely to works from distinguished American composers: Lowell Liebermann, Steven Stucky ("Rain Shadow"), Marc Neikrug, and Roberto Sierra ("Fuego de Ángel"). (Kaplan Penthouse, Rose Bldg. Feb. 11 at 7:30.) (212-875-5788.)

World Music Institute: L. Subramaniam

The revered violinist of the Carnatic classical-music tradition of Southern India performs in Gotham for the first time since 2006 in a concert at the 92nd Street Y. Descended from musical masters, Subramaniam (who has collaborated with such Western musicians as Yehudi Menuhin and George Harrison) is joined by his violinist son, Ambi Subramaniam, and the drummer Mahesh Krishnamurthy. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Feb. 5 at 8.)

"Seeing Music": Julian Rachlin

The compelling young violinist, not heard often in these parts, offers the next program in the 92nd Street Y's current project, a series of concerts combining sounds and images. Accompanied by the pianist Magda Amara, he performs four Beethoven violin sonatas (including the "Kreutzer," Op. 47) within a video and stage installation by the artist Clifford Ross, who has long looked to the power of moving water for inspiration. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Feb. 6 at 8.)

Orlando Consort

The famed British male vocal quartet comes to Carnegie's Weill Recital Hall to commemorate the four hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare's death with a program featuring music by Dunstable and Power (among others) that follows the lives of members of the English royal families whom the Bard immortalized in words. (212-247-7800. Feb. 8 at 7:30.)

Miller Theatre: Vox Luminis

Columbia University's early-music series presents the esteemed Belgian vocal ensemble in a program of Lutheran church music from lesser-known members of the illustrious Bach family, including J. S. Bach's predecessors Johann (his motet "Unser Leben ist ein Schatten"), Johann Michael, and the cousins Johann Christoph and Johann Ludwig. The concert culminates in Johann Sebastian's plaintive motet "Jesu meine Freude." (Church of St. Mary the Virgin, 145 W. 46th St. 212-854-7799. Feb. 13 at 8.)

NIGHT LIFE

ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors lead complicated lives; it's advisable to check in advance to confirm engagements.

Crazy & the Brains

On the surface, there isn't much that's immediately extraordinary about this local punk outfit. Their songs take the form of short, punchy New York Dolls tributes, and their only deviation from traditional rock instrumentation is the addition of Jeffrey Rubin, who hammers on a xylophone and a glockenspiel throughout every number. Somehow, though, they've tapped into a well-spring of shrewd revellers, and their sets usually devolve into mutant dance parties, well worth the cover price at this subterranean Greenwich Village night spot. (Le Poisson Rouge, 158 Bleecker St. 212-505-3474. Feb. 6.)

The-Dream

Savvy fans of Terius Nash's glistening take on R. & B. and pop have already locked down tickets for his Valentine's Day engagement. Beyond the radio staples he's released as The-Dream ("Rockin' That Thang," "Throw It in the Bag," "I Luv Your Girl"), Nash has served as the cunning songwriter behind historic pop knockouts such as Beyoncé's "Single Ladies (Put a Ring on It)" and Rihanna's "Umbrella"—transcendent singles that became cultural touchstones. With a stylistic breadth that stretches to the far edges of classic soul and futurist R. & B., Nash recalls the old masters of popular song who consistently found fresh ways to say "I love you." This week, "Shawty Is a 10" will go over as sweetly as a box of chocolates. (Bowery Ballroom, 6 Delancey St. 212-260-4700. Feb. 14.)

Fetty Wap

One of last year's most arresting pop figures appears in the flesh after dominating airwaves nationwide. After his first hit, "Trap Queen," it'd be easy to write off the native of Paterson, New Jersey, born Willie Maxwell II, as a one-off product of pop and rap's musical and commercial homogenization, occupying the low-stakes space Flo-Rida and Kid Ink enjoy. But Fetty kept coming back: "Again," "679," and the mammoth "My Way" all spilled over with inescapable harmonies and catchphrases that popped up everywhere from fast-food social-media accounts to the Kansas City Royals dugout. Success came speeding, even by the Internet's standards: his album suffered delays mainly to keep up with his prolific songwriting, and his omission from the Grammy's Best New Artist category was considered a snub by many fans. (Irving Plaza, 17 Irving Pl. 212-777-6800. Feb. 9.)

Seu Jorge

This Brazilian singer, guitarist, and actor grew up as Jorge Mário da Silva in Belford Roxo, a favela outside Rio. After his brother was killed, in 1990, in a battle between *favelados* and the police, Jorge decided to become a musician, a choice that prompted his uncle to kick him out of the house. Despite the hardship of living on the street, Jorge persisted in honing his nascent talents, especially his supple baritone voice and lyrical nylon-string-guitar playing. His big break came when he was cast as



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Broadway Theatre and Commercial District, photo: Stephen Schaefer Schafphoto.com. Text and design ©2016 J. Paul Getty Trust.



After two decades away from the dance floor, the seventy-five-year-old Italian d.j. and disco pioneer Giorgio Moroder plays a rare live set of classic disco and shimmering pop at Output.

Knockout Ned in "City of God," a searing Oscar-nominated portrait of favela life that was followed by a role as a Bowie-singing Brazilian sailor in Wes Anderson's film "The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou." Jorge's magical, melancholy Portuguese interpretations of hits like "Changes" and "Space Oddity" earned high praise from their creator, as well as giving Jorge an American beachhead. For this two-week run, he'll sail through harmonically adventurous, playful originals and covers shaped by samba, bossa nova, and other Brazilian styles. (Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St. 212-475-8592. Feb. 16-28.)

Giorgio Moroder

This Italian disco pioneer mapped the patterns of kick and snare drums that get bodies pulsing before many of today's working d.j.s were tall enough to reach the decks. From his string of hits with Donna Summer during disco's fever pitch ("Last Dance," "Hot Stuff") to helming the soundtrack for the nineteen-eighties hedonist classic "Scarface," Moroder's catalogue was already enviable. But it's his modern renaissance that speaks to the producer's true singularity. The dance-music mascots Daft Punk tapped him for their 2013 come-

back, "Random Access Memories," and the producers behind the controversial video-game series Grand Theft Auto asked him to score their sprawling, seedy digital world. Then there are his own releases, such as last summer's "Déjà Vu," which continue to surprise old fans and intrigue new ones. Moroder brings five decades of thump to this mid-size North Brooklyn club for a rare set of disco classics and forward-thinking electronic cuts. (Output, 74 Wythe Ave., Brooklyn. outputclub.com. Feb. 10.)

Todd Rundgren

At sixty-seven, the classic rocker Rundgren is showing no signs of slowing down, or losing his relevance, as the music industry shifts toward more electronic sounds. He started his career in the baroque-pop realm, back in the late sixties, then various mind-altering substances expanded his sonic palette into more psychedelic territory, yielding a slew of early-seventies hits, like "I Saw the Light." These days, Rundgren's embracing dance music, an odd choice for an aging rocker, but he still performs with a live band and logs time with Ringo Starr's act. (NYCB Theatre at Westbury, 960 Brush Hollow Rd., Westbury, N.Y. 516-247-5200. Feb. 5.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Evan Christopher and Ehud Asherie

Lovingly cradled by the clarinetist Christopher and the pianist Asherie, New Orleans anthems and prewar standards instantly lose their patina of age and shine anew. An unencumbered duo setting will highlight the beauty of Christopher's tone and the power of Asherie's mighty left hand. (Mezzrow, 163 W. 10th St. mezzrow.com. Feb. 9.)

Freddy Cole

Cole's latest album may be titled "Singing the Blues," but this veteran stylist would never willingly confine himself to an appointed genre. Getting a jump on Valentine's Day, the impeccable singer and pianist will paint the room in shades of bittersweet romance while exhibiting the elegant poise that has made him the gold standard of his trade. (Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola, Broadway at 60th St. 212-258-9595. Feb. 11-12.)

Kirk Knuffke and Frank Kimbrough Quartet

The cornettist Knuffke is no one's idea of a jazz superstar, but judging from his numerous appearances over the past few years his name seems to be on the lips of some of the most engaged musicians in town. His cohort here is the equally creative pianist Kimbrough; the bassist Jay Anderson and the drummer Matt Wilson join them. (Jazz at Kitano, 66 Park Ave., at 38th St. 212-885-7119. Feb. 13.)

Pat Martino Trio

Martino spent his formative years rolling in the groove with such soul-jazz keyboardists as "Brother" Jack McDuff and Don Patterson. Decades after establishing himself as a titan of modern jazz guitar, Martino still hasn't shaken the organ bug; his lean trio includes Pat Bianchi on keys and Carmen Intorre, Jr., on drums. (Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St. 212-576-2232. Feb. 3-6.)

Cécile McLorin Salvant

With a pinch of eccentricity to add spice to her vivid artistry, Salvant has grabbed the reins in the jazz vocal race. As slyly clever as she is affecting, she stocked her 2015 album, "For One to Love," with well-crafted original tunes and off-beat choices like Rodgers and Hammerstein's "Stepsister's Lament"—it's anyone's guess how her rendition of Burt Bacharach and Hal David's dated guide to marital bliss, "Wives and Lovers," will go down on Valentine's Day. (Appel Room, Jazz at Lincoln Center, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500. Feb. 12-14.)

Vanguard Jazz Orchestra 50th Anniversary

Posterity may have been the furthest thing from the minds of the composer, arranger, and flugelhorn player Thad Jones and the drummer Mel Lewis when they convened a jazz orchestra to play the Village Vanguard on February 7, 1966—their goal was to give worthy players a chance to bite into some challenging music on Mondays, when jazz clubs were traditionally closed. The original band established by Jones and Lewis—both sadly gone—has been through various permutations over the years, but a half century later the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, as it's currently known, still rattles the walls nearly every Monday. This performance also celebrates the release of "All My Yesterdays," an album that newly documents the 1966 opening night of the now legendary Jones and Lewis band. (Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. 212-255-4037. Feb. 1-8.)

EILEEN
FISHER

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ART



A video still of Cheryl Donegan's "Cellar Door," from her 2000 series "The Janice Tapes." She re-created several masks from the piece for her new show.

Anything Goes

The New York artist Cheryl Donegan exhibits pacesetting works at the New Museum spanning twenty-three years.

IN 1993, CHERYL DONEGAN staged a riot-grrrl update of Yves Klein's "Anthropometries." In the French artist's indelible 1960 hybrids of performance and painting, he directed nude women, slathered in blue, to act as surrogate brushes. Donegan directed herself; D.I.Y. is one of her trademarks. In the resulting video, we see the artist (in biker boots and her underwear) empty a can of green paint onto the floor, dip her derrière in the puddle, and leave imprints of it on a sheet of paper. When she adds a brushstroke—a stem—the image turns into a shamrock. A man walks into the frame and pours Donegan a pint of Guinness. As she lampoons a modern master, not to mention the long-standing cliché that painting is a drinking-man's club, Donegan also mocks the early-nineties obsession with sanctimonious identity politics. Her identity: a body-conscious Irish-American. The piece is hilarious but also in conflict, at

once feminist and politically incorrect.

A scant five minutes long, "Kiss My Royal Irish Ass (K.M.R.I.A.)" is now playing on the fifth floor of the New Museum, one of the earliest works in "Cheryl Donegan: Scenes and Commercials," an overdue, if overstuffed two-room exhibition, curated by the brilliant Johanna Burton, with Sara O'Keeffe and Alicia Ritson. For more than twenty years, Donegan's under-the-radar career has been hard to pin down but easy to pigeonhole (video artist), due to the sudden success of a few early tapes. Those works have been so widely circulated by hive-minded curators that they've left the mistaken impression of a one-trick pony. But, as this show makes clear, Donegan has been relentless over the years in her search for new approaches and materials, often staying one step ahead of the future. (In their humor, brevity, and camera-ready performances, for instance, her tapes anticipate YouTube.)

The main room of the show is a compressed career survey of videos (nine) and paintings (forty). Very few

of the latter make a stand-alone impact; one exception is a red-and-white spray-painted canvas whose rippling vertical image evokes both the stability of a postmodern building and the accident of a slipped gingham napkin. Donegan's willingness to experiment is never in doubt, from an absurd little painting of Karl Marx on a handprint turkey to a group of abject abstractions involving glitter and metallic tape (among other things) on cardboard. It's the interdependence of her two-dimensional works that exhilarates here. Well before the current vogue for network-related concepts began to dominate conversations about painting, Donegan was practicing what was about to be preached, treating her work as one interrelated system.

In an adjacent room, there's an installation of Donegan's recent digital projects, mostly forays into fashion. In a corner with a rack of clothing purchased online, bar-coded tags, and a scanner, it's tempting to identify a new tendency: Cheryl Donegan as a post-eBay artist.

—Andrea K. Scott

COURTESY ELECTRONIC ARTS INTERMIX



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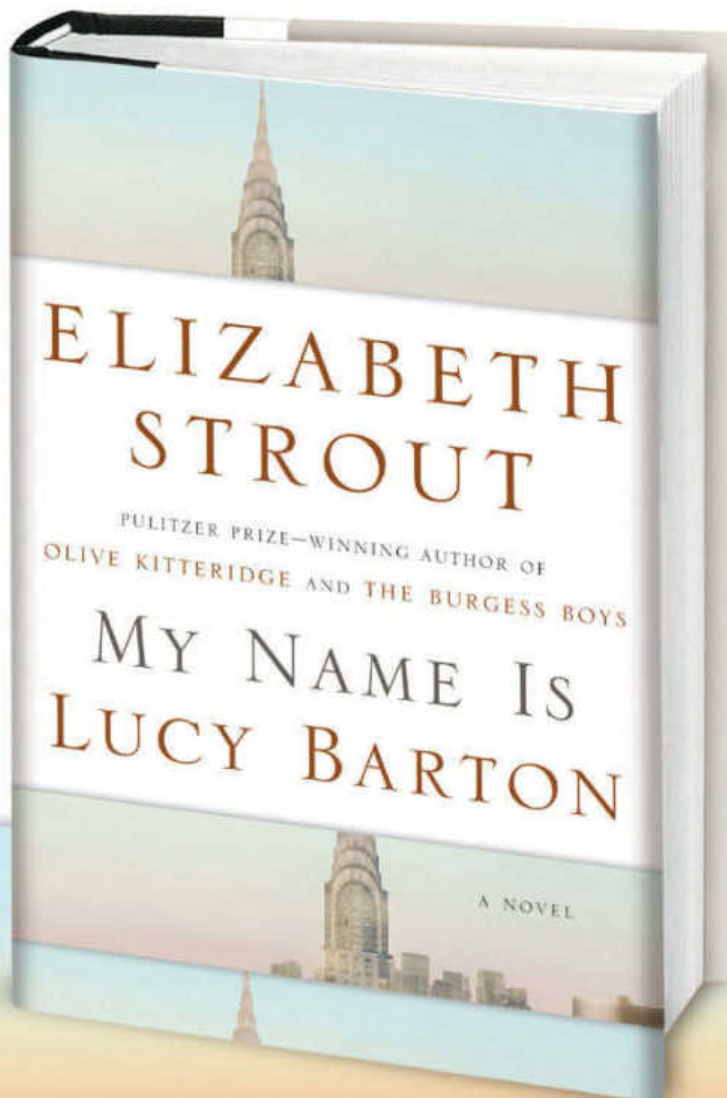
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MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Whitney Museum**"Flatlands"**

On the fifth floor, Frank Stella's abstract paintings swoop off the walls; in this ground-floor exhibition, five young realist painters find new possibilities in two dimensions. The best work comes from Caitlin Keogh, whose depiction of a headless mannequin with visible intestines pays homage to the Chicago Imagist Jim Nutt. By comparison, Orion Martin's glossy surrealism and Nina Chanel Abney's mashup of pinups and Stuart Davis glyphs feel rehashed. Jamian Juliano-Villani, whose wild work can thrill at large scale, looks lackluster in a small scene of anthropomorphized traffic cones. Mathew Cerletty, at thirty-five, the oldest artist in the group, shows landscapes as blandly generic as desktop backgrounds. The show borrows its title from E. A. Abbott's 1884 satire, in which a square asserts the existence of a third dimension and ends up in prison; it would have been nice to see a hint of such rebelliousness here. *Through April 17.*

New-York Historical Society**"Silicon City: Computer History Made in New York"**

We've got finance, media, business, culture: is it any wonder the Big Apple was once a tech capital, too? This agreeable, tightly packed exhibition includes early telephones, telegraphs, and punch-card machines, but computing really gets going in the late forties with the development of the Selective Sequence Electronic Calculator, a huge data-processing terminal that lights up like a pachinko machine. "New York," here, can feel like a shorthand for I.B.M. (headquartered in Westchester, and this show's lead sponsor); a model of Eero Saarinen's ovoid pavilion for the company at the 1964 World's Fair features an immersive promotional film, with here-comes-the-future shots of freight trains and skyscrapers, shot by Charles and Ray Eames. But if the geeks of the West Coast eventually edged out New York, the city still had them beat on nights out. For "9 Evenings," in 1966, Bell Labs teamed with icons of avant-garde performance—Robert Rauschenberg, Steve Paxton, Deborah Hay—history-shaping fusions of art and technology: digital art years ahead of the Internet. *Through April 17.*

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Yasuhiro Ishimoto

The American photographer first travelled to Kyoto's seventeenth-century Katsura Imperial Villa in 1954 to shoot in black-and-white and returned thirty years later, to work in color. Both series are on view here, in a show that reads as a meditation on restraint. The interior views tend to flatten into geometric patchworks of black-bordered tatami mats and screens, as if in a grisaille Mondrian painting. There are no people in sight and very few decorative objects, so what stands out is textures and surfaces—the elegance of bamboo latticework, the rigor of polished wood panels. *Through Feb. 20. (Blum, 20 W. 57th St. 212-244-6055.)*

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

John Arsenault

This witty and unexpectedly soulful memoir about the artist's stint working at a Bay Area

bar takes the form of portraits, self-portraits, and atmospheric still-lives. Leather was the official dress code, but not every patron obeyed it: one wears a plastic leopard head, another a beard and an elaborate nun's habit; others wear nothing at all. Arsenault surveyed the scene with an insider's fondness for eccentricity, and a diarist's attention to detail: a paper napkin peeling off a bottle that holds a pink rose, a hand holding a note that reads, "I used to be a woman." *Through Feb. 13. (ClampArt, 531 W. 25th St. 646-230-0020.)*

Janet Biggs

In the two video installations here, the artist is seen riding a horse standing up, receiving electric shocks, and visiting a subterranean cavern. Alternating with the stunts and drama are banal scenes of medical labs, brain scans, and the artist's distracted grandfather at a gem-and-mineral show. But Biggs's oblique imagery won't clue viewers in to her purported subject: impairments of the human mind and failures of memory. Footage of giant halite crystals in the Merkers salt mine, in Germany, where the Nazis once hid looted gold, while captivating, is unlikely to remind viewers of the crystalline proteins in the brain associated with Alzheimer's. *Through Feb. 13. (Tierney, 540 W. 28th St. 212-594-0550.)*

Coco Fusco

The newest project by the politically minded Cuban-American artist details the Castro regime's censorship of allegedly anti-Cuban writers. Fusco has gathered first editions of many of the books (including "Sartre on Cuba") and copies of memos calling for their suppression (all of which sign off with the word "Revolutionarily"). The show also has an extensive program of Fusco's films. Don't miss the grimly hilarious "The Couple in the Cage," from 1993, in which Fusco and a partner lampoon colonialism by posing as undiscovered natives of a forgotten island, only to find that passersby and media outlets believed the hoax was for real. *Through Feb. 6. (Gray, 508 W. 26th St. 212-399-2636.)*

Brittany Nelson

Oozing out of their frames, viscous and glittering, the largest works in Nelson's show suggest hot lava or tar. But the roiling abstractions are actually cameraless photographs. Ranging in size from three to six feet square, they balance earthy physicality with otherworldliness—we could be looking at views of the earth's core or outer space. The pieces hang alongside small tints of white blocks and boxes floating in voids—apparitions that deepen the mystery. *Through Feb. 20. (Morgan Lehman, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-268-6699.)*

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Alex Bag

Twenty years ago, Bag was an underground art star thanks to her lo-fi videos skewering pop culture, the art world, and representations of women (think Carrie Brownstein transported from Portland to Avenue C). Her new piece, "The Van (Redux)," stars Bag's brother as a sleazy Miami art dealer who boasts of his skills finding fresh talent "on the kindergarten circuit." He secures a residency for three children, all played by the artist's son, who sculpt with Play-Doh and paint with a light sabre in lieu of a brush. Zingers about zombie formalism, post-post-Internet art,

and speculative collectors may feel very familiar, but some critiques bear repeating. *Through Feb. 28. (Team, 47 Wooster St. 212-279-9219.)*

Jennifer Bartlett

Ten heavily worked pastels of interiors build on photographs that the artist took while she was a patient at New York-Presbyterian Hospital. The anxieties of illness are conveyed through shifts in scale and a queasy palette of blues, grays, and beiges. Walls with safety bannisters lurch forward, like the sets in "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari"; shadows cast from window mullions extend across the picture plane in bold black slashes. Often, there's a view of the Queensboro Bridge and the F.D.R. Drive. In the best of the pastels here, the East River appears as a tangled spume of violet and navy, as personal an impression as any of Monet's scenes of the Seine or the Thames. *Through March 20. (The Drawing Center, 35 Wooster St. 212-219-2166.)*

Cameron Rowland

Under the brand name Corcraft, the New York State Department of Corrections sells commodities made by prisoners—from lab coats to office furniture to barbecue grills—to other government agencies and nonprofit organizations. Entry-level wages were recently reported to be sixteen cents an hour. Rowland, a politically minded young artist based in New York, registered Artists Space as a Corcraft customer—it is number 91020000, which is the show's title—to procure the materials for this installation, a pointed critique of the correctional industrial complex. Six aluminum manhole extenders suggest a riff on minimalism. A particleboard office desk from the Attica line is more mundane. But every object here is a readymade fuelled by a reformer's agenda—Duchamp by way of Angela Davis. *Through March 13. (Artists Space, 38 Greene St. 212-226-3970.)*

MUSEUMS SHORT LIST

Metropolitan Museum "Wordplay: Matthias Buchinger's Drawings from the Collection of Ricky Jay." *Through April 11.* • **Museum of Modern Art** "Marcel Broodthaers: A Retrospective." *Opens Feb. 14.* • **Guggenheim Museum** "Peter Fischli David Weiss: How to Work Better." *Opens Feb. 5.* • **Whitney Museum** "Laura Poitras: Astro Noise." *Opens Feb. 5.* • **Brooklyn Museum** "This Place: Photographs of Israel and the West Bank." *Opens Feb. 12.* • **American Museum of Natural History** "The Titanosaur." *Through Jan. 1, 2020.* • **Asia Society** "Kamakura: Realism and Spirituality in the Sculpture of Japan." *Opens Feb. 9.* • **New Museum** "Anri Sala: Answer Me." *Opens Feb. 3.*

GALLERIES SHORT LIST

📍 **UPTOWN** **Larry Bell** Hauser & Wirth. *Opens Feb. 3. (32 E. 69th St. 212-794-4970.)* • **Mark Grotjahn** Gagosian. *Through Feb. 20. (980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 212-744-2313.)* • **Floss: Pino Pascali and Donald Moffett** Boesky. *Through Feb. 27. (118 E. 64th St. 212-680-9889.)* 📍 **CHELSEA** **Richard Aldrich** Gladstone. *Through March 5. (515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300.)* • **Will Boone / Pope.L** Rosen. *Through March 5. (525 W. 24th St. 212-627-6000.)* • **Gregory Crewdson** Gagosian. *Through March 5. (522 W. 21st St. 212-741-1717.)* • **Beverly Semmes** Inglett. *Opens Feb. 4. (522 W. 24th St. 212-647-9111.)*



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★ “MOVING AND POETIC.”

—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

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IN A RELATIVELY
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and the war that separates them.

THE THEATRE



"Thank God for Jokes" opens Feb. 11 at the Lynn Redgrave Theatre.

Punch Lines

Mike Birbiglia deconstructs the dangers of jokes, in a new one-man show.

NOT LONG AGO, the comedian Mike Birbiglia was on an airplane eating a chicken-salad sandwich on walnut-raisin bread, when a flight attendant informed him that a woman sitting nearby had a nut allergy. "Well, I won't feed them to her or, like, rub them on her face," Birbiglia replied. But the attendant insisted: "She'll have a reaction if there are nuts in the air." The comedian finished his sandwich in the bathroom.

Birbiglia tells this story in his new comic monologue, "Thank God for Jokes" (in previews at the Lynn Redgrave Theatre, opening Feb. 11), in which he weighs the ever-present dangers of going too far with humor. "At the Redgrave, for example, a hundred and ninety-seven people will go, 'Ha-ha, nuts in the air!'" he said recently, over a hot chocolate in Carroll Gardens. "And then three of them secretly will be, like, 'That's my life.'" Birbiglia is an unlikely guide through the minefield of offensive humor; in his previous solo shows, "Sleepwalk with

Me" and "My Girlfriend's Boyfriend," he honed the persona of a befuddled, conflict-averse beta male. But he's not as mild-mannered as he appears. In "Orange Is the New Black," his portrayal of a chummy middle-management type from a prison conglomerate became a queasy study of the banality of evil. (He based his performance on George W. Bush.) In "Thank God for Jokes," he recounts the kerfuffle that ensued when he hosted the 2012 Gotham Awards and roasted David O. Russell, who was one of the honorees. Still, he's no Ricky Gervais-style provocateur. "My goal is to take the audience as far as they will possibly go and still be on my side," he explained.

Ultimately, he went on, "we all have the right to tell jokes, and we all have the right to be offended by jokes, and those two ideas can peacefully co-exist." When he toured "Thank God for Jokes" in San Francisco, a kid with a lethal nut allergy asked him to autograph his EpiPen. Birbiglia asked the boy's mother if she'd ever had to inject him. "She said, 'Three times.' And I said, 'Wow, this kid almost died three times so I could tell that joke.'"

—Michael Schulman

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Blackbird

Jeff Daniels and Michelle Williams star in David Harrower's Olivier-winning drama, about two people who reconnect years after their relationship, which took place when he was forty and she was twelve. (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. Previews begin Feb. 5.)

The Body of an American

Dan O'Brien's play, directed by Jo Bonney for Primary Stages, recounts the true story of the playwright's friendship with a war photojournalist. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 866-811-4111. Previews begin Feb. 10.)

Buried Child

The New Group revives Sam Shepard's Pulitzer Prize-winning drama from 1978, directed by Scott Elliott and featuring Ed Harris and Amy Madigan as a rural Illinois couple with a family secret. (Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. In previews.)

Cabin in the Sky

Encores! stages the 1940 musical, in which the Lord's General and the Devil's son fight over the soul of a ne'er-do-well. Featuring Michael Potts, Chuck Cooper, LaChanze, and Norm Lewis and directed by Ruben Santiago-Hudson. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Feb. 10-14.)

Dot

In Colman Domingo's play, directed by Susan Stroman, a woman struggling with dementia gathers her three grown children for the holidays. (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303. Previews begin Feb. 4.)

Drunken with What

Target Margin kicks off its two-season exploration of Eugene O'Neill with this study of "Mourning Becomes Electra," directed by David Herskovits. (Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand St. 212-352-3101. Previews begin Feb. 11. Opens Feb. 15.)

Familiar

In Danaï Gurira's drama, directed by Rebecca Taichman, a Zimbabwean family living in Minnesota is torn about the observance of an African bridal custom. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Previews begin Feb. 12.)

Her Requiem

LCT3 presents Greg Pierce's play, directed by Kate Whoriskey, in which a high-school girl takes her senior year off to compose a requiem, concerning her parents. (Claire Tow, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. Previews begin Feb. 6.)

Hughie

Forest Whitaker and Frank Wood play a down-on-his-luck gambler and a hotel clerk, in Michael Grandage's production of the Eugene O'Neill drama. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. Previews begin Feb. 8.)

The Humans

Stephen Karam's disquieting family drama moves to Broadway with its original cast, including Reed Birney and Jayne Houdyshell. Joe Mantello directs. (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. In previews.)

Nice Fish

Mark Rylance stars in an adaptation of Louis Jenkins's book of poems, about two men on an

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Detail of *Disposition*
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NOW PLAYING

ice-fishing trip in Minnesota. Claire van Kampen directs the American Repertory Theatre production. (*St. Ann's Warehouse, 45 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779. Previews begin Feb. 14.*)

Old Hats

The veteran clowns Bill Irwin and David Shiner bring back their double act, directed by Tina Landau. (*Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529. In previews.*)

Pericles

Christian Camargo plays the wandering prince in Theatre for a New Audience's production of the late Shakespeare play, directed by Trevor Nunn and featuring music by Shaun Davey. (*Polonsky Shakespeare Center, 262 Ashland Pl., Brooklyn. 866-811-4111. Previews begin Feb. 14.*)

Prodigal Son

Manhattan Theatre Club premieres a play written and directed by John Patrick Shanley, about a teen-age boy from the Bronx who transfers to a private school in New Hampshire; the cast includes Robert Sean Leonard. (*City Center Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. In previews. Opens Feb. 9.*)

The Royale

Marco Ramirez's play, directed by Rachel Chavkin, tells the story of a black heavyweight boxing champion (based on Jack Johnson) in six rounds. (*Mitzi E. Newhouse, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. Previews begin Feb. 11.*)

Sense & Sensibility

Bedlam revives its minimalist staging of the Jane Austen novel, adapted by Kate Hamill and directed by Eric Tucker. (*Gym at Judson, 243 Thompson St. 866-811-4111. In previews. Opens Feb. 4.*)

Smart People

Kenny Leon directs Lydia R. Diamond's play, which follows four Harvard intellectuals on the eve of the 2008 Presidential election. (*Second Stage, 305 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422. In previews. Opens Feb. 11.*)

Smokefall

Unborn twins wax philosophical in this surreal family drama by Noah Haidle, directed by Anne Kauffman for MCC and featuring Zachary Quinto. (*Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-352-3101. Previews begin Feb. 4.*)

Tarzana

Radiohole stages a new piece inspired by comic books, David Lynch, and the seventies punk scene, with a script by Jason Grote. (*Performing Garage, 33 Wooster St. theperforminggarage.org. Feb. 11-14.*)

The Wildness: Sky-Pony's Rock Fairy Tale

The indie glam band Sky-Pony, led by the writer Kyle Jarrow and the Broadway actress Lauren Worsham, mounts this fantastical evening of music and storytelling, directed by Sam Buntrock. (*Ars Nova, 511 W. 54th St. 212-352-3101. Previews begin Feb. 16.*)

Women Without Men

The Mint produces Hazel Ellis's little-known play from 1938, set in the teachers' lounge of an Irish girls' school and performed by an all-female cast. Jenn Thompson directs. (*City Center Stage II, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. In previews.*)

The Burial at Thebes

The interment in question is that of Polyneices, son of Oedipus, recently slain in a losing attack against his home city. The new king, Creon (Paul O'Brien), has forbidden burial rites to the traitor, but Antigone (Rebekah Brockman), the warrior's sister, performs them anyway, claiming divine justice over that of the state. In 2004, the Nobel Prize-winning poet Seamus Heaney adapted Sophocles' tragedy in pleasing, accessible verse, combining high-flown Greek syntax with colloquial Irish phrasing. In his program notes, Heaney left no doubt that he was alluding to contemporary events, specifically President Bush's run-up to the Iraq war, and the director, Charlotte Moore, has encouraged O'Brien to play Creon as a clueless, somewhat haughty political animal. But a bit more of the raw passion Brockman brings to her Antigone might have made Creon's eventual fall even more pitiful and affecting. (*DR2, at 103 E. 15th St. 212-727-2737.*)

The Color Purple

In this musical version of Alice Walker's 1982 novel, Cynthia Erivo plays Celie, a poor, obscure, and blighted black woman living in the South in the early twentieth century. More or less sold off as an adolescent to Mister (Isaiah Johnson), Celie has no defenders, and thus no love, until Shug Avery (Jennifer Hudson), an itinerant blues singer, appears. It takes a director with John Doyle's visionary capabilities to dispense with the "Mamba's Daughters" aspect of Celie's story and, instead, exercise empathy, critical distance, and an openness to lives and cultures other than his own. By not falling prey to the story's periodic sentimentality, Doyle has created a theatrical world that's fresh, vital, and unexpected, and Erivo is central to his work: her Celie is not a noble survivor but a stubborn, intelligent force, who is well aware of her own wit and wariness. (Reviewed in our issue of 1/4/16.) (*Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.*)

The Glory of the World

Seventeen men gather in a tricked-out garage—outfitted for proceedings that are at turns casual, elegant, and raucous—to celebrate the centennial birthday of Thomas Merton, the writer and Trappist monk. The conflict among the partiers, articulated between dances, fights, and mating rituals (each achieved through beautifully stylized choreography), centers on interpretation: who, precisely, is the Merton on whom they lavish their love? As they file through real and imagined facets of his identity—Communist, Catholic, etc.—Charles Mee's dancery, ecstatic script leads them into an exploration of the meaning of manhood, especially in a culture inclined toward faint spirituality that would have been derided in Merton's mid-century American milieu. Between talky set pieces, the director, Les Waters, offers bursts of pure physicality, drawing attention to the silliness and power of the body, and reminds us that even stubborn ambiguity can be fun. (*BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Through Feb. 6.*)

I and You

Walt Whitman's poetry so joyfully embraced the strangeness of living that it still resounds in our national consciousness. It also, alas, tends to adorn inspirational greeting cards—and the latter territory is where Lauren Gunderson's drama resides. This teen-age two-hander follows the

world-weary, congenitally ill Caroline (Kayla Ferguson) and the painfully gracious Anthony (Reggie D. White), as they collaborate on an English-class assignment about Whitman. Anthony has volunteered to work with his homebound classmate, but when he arrives unannounced in her room it's an uphill battle convincing her to care—about nineteenth-century poetry and about him. Soon he succeeds, and convulsive fits of oversharing ensue. The contrived rhythm of this insta-bonding—delivered in what feels like teen-age dialogue written for adults—make the piece drag. By the time a late-breaking, soapy plot twist arrives, you may no longer give a yawn. (*59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.*)

Noises Off

Michael Frayn's 1982 farce within a farce is about the comedy of chaos, but it needs to run like clockwork to succeed. Fortunately, the Roundabout's production, under the shipshape direction of Jeremy Herrin, nails nearly every slamming door, flung plate of sardines, and pants-around-the-ankles pratfall. Herrin is helped by a crackerjack cast, including Campbell Scott, as the beleaguered director of a British sex comedy called "Nothing On." Andrea Martin, Megan Hilty, Jeremy Shamos, David Furr, Kate Jennings Grant, and Daniel Davis play the accident-prone actors (with Tracee Chimo and Rob McClure as hapless stagehands), whose missed cues and accumulating rivalries lead to catastrophe for "Nothing On" but hilarity for "Noises Off." It's almost a dance piece, if you can stop laughing long enough to sit back and appreciate its finesse. (*American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.*)

Sojourners

Mfoniso Ufodia's debut is the first in a projected nine-play cycle following a Nigerian family over forty years. It is set in Houston in 1978, where Abasiama (Chinasa Ogbuagu) and her husband, Ukpogon (Hubert Point-Du Jour), are struggling with her pregnancy, his college career, their finances, their cultural adjustment, and their marriage, which was arranged by their fathers back in Africa. When he goes on walkabout at a critical time, another Nigerian student, Disciple (Chinaza Uche), who is writing a thesis on his country's diaspora, and Moxie (Lakisha Michelle May), a prostitute looking for a way out, compete for her affections. It's a rich enough setup, but the exposition and historical context are awkwardly conveyed, the dialogue is stiff, and, as directed by Ed Sylvanus Iskandar, the performances skew loud and stereotypical. (*Peter Jay Sharp, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Through Feb. 13.*)

ALSO NOTABLE

Allegiance Longacre. *Through Feb. 14.* • **An American in Paris** Palace. • **The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time** Ethel Barrymore. • **Fiddler on the Roof** Broadway Theatre. • **Fun Home** Circle in the Square. • **Hamilton** Richard Rodgers. • **The King and I** Vivian Beaumont. • **Long Yarn** The Bushwick Starr. *Through Feb. 6.* • **Maurice Hines: Tappin' Thru Life** New World Stages. • **Misery** Broadhurst. *Through Feb. 14.* • **O, Earth HERE.** • **On Your Feet!** Marquis. • **Our Mother's Brief Affair** Samuel J. Friedman. • **A Ride on the Irish Cream** Abrons Arts Center. *Through Feb. 6.* • **School of Rock** Winter Garden. • **Skeleton Crew** Atlantic Stage 2. *Through Feb. 14.* • **Something Rotten!** St. James. • **Utility** Rattlestick. • **A View from the Bridge** Lyceum. • **Washer/Dryer** Beckett.

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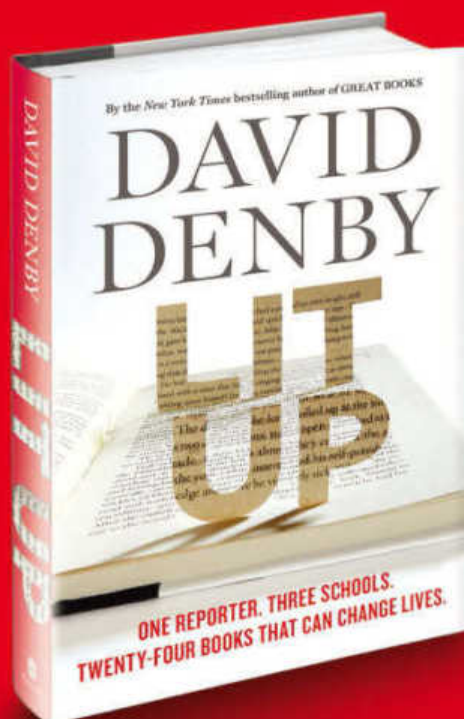
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DANCE



A documentary from the Dance on Camera Festival depicts Ted Shawn, who wanted to show that men could be beautiful, too.

Oversoul

The life of Ted Shawn, the founder of Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival.

"THE MEN WHO DANCED: The Story of Ted Shawn's Men Dancers and the Birth of Jacob's Pillow, 1933-1940," a thirty-minute film that will be shown on Feb. 14 at the Dance on Camera Festival, at Lincoln Center (Feb. 12-16), is a modest business with sometimes fuzzy footage, but it is an excellent illustration of the typical circumstances of early modern dance in America: communal, idealistic, and penniless. Ted Shawn (1891-1972) was a divinity student at the University of Denver when he was forced to take ballet lessons, to strengthen his legs, after a bout of diphtheria. Around that time, he also went to a vaudeville show and saw Ruth St. Denis, a riveting free-style dancer, in her Pharaonic spectacle "Egypta." He auditioned for St. Denis, hoping to join her troupe. She hired him as her partner and, a few months later, married him, though she was about twelve years older than he. Together they founded Denishawn, a company and

school that became hugely influential. Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey studied there.

After the demise of Denishawn, Shawn decided to establish an all-male company, to prove to the world that not just women, but men, too, could inhabit the world of ideal beauty associated with dance, and do so without any compromise of their masculinity. To that end, he bought an abandoned farm, called Jacob's Pillow, in Becket, Massachusetts, and collected a small group of young men, almost all of them innocent of any dance training. Like a lot of early modern dancers, he had firm beliefs about how dance, and beauty, emerged naturally from the human body. He also could not afford to pay trained dancers.

In 1982, eight of these men came together for a reunion at Jacob's Pillow, which now houses what is probably America's foremost summer dance festival. Interviews with them occupy a good part of "The Men Who Danced." They talk about the spartan conditions in which the group lived, rehearsing in the morning and chopping wood in the

afternoon. Their usual dinner, one man says, was what they called "carrot ring," chopped boiled carrots, molded into a ring. (That was the whole dinner.) Barton Mumaw, the company's lead dancer (after Shawn), says that the group was held together by a sort of "oversoul," produced by the men's constantly working together.

The film shows excerpts from dances Shawn made for the company, many of them stressing weight and strain, labor and combat, in keeping with the goal of persuading audiences that dance could be virile. They are a little camp, and also touching. Shawn didn't always bring people over to his side. Mumaw says there were times when people would warn them, "There are fifty guys out there who are going to come and break up the show." Such guys were not entirely mistaken in their suspicions. Shawn was homosexual. Mumaw was his lover during the lifetime of the troupe. This was never spoken of in the company, nor, indeed, is it mentioned in the film, which was released in 1985.

—Joan Acocella

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Justin Peck's new ballet, "The Most Incredible Thing," is the young choreographer's first foray into the realm of narrative. The story, by Hans Christian Andersen, involves a young artist who creates a wondrous clock that produces lifelike figures who act out various scenes, from Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden to the Seven Deadly Sins. Later, the company returns to a more familiar story, "La Sylphide," a nineteenth-century tale about a young dreamer who falls in love with a woodland sprite, and suffers the consequences; it's one of the oldest Romantic ballets still performed. Peter Martins, who danced it as a young man, set it on the company last year. It shares a double bill with George Balanchine's thrilling tribute to Russian Imperial classicism "Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No. 2," once known as "Ballet Imperial." • Feb. 3 at 7:30, Feb. 6 at 2, and Feb. 7 at 3: "Ballo della Regina," "Kammermusik No. 2," and "Tchaikovsky Suite No. 3." • Feb. 4 at 7:30 and Feb. 5 at 8: "Walpurgisnacht Ballet," "Sonatine," "Mozartiana," and "Symphony in C." • Feb. 6 at 8 and Feb. 9-11 at 7:30: "Polaris," "The Blue of Distance," "Common Ground," "Estancia," and "The Most Incredible Thing." • Feb. 12 at 8, Feb. 13 at 2 and 8, Feb. 14 at 3 and 7:30, and Feb. 16 at 7:30: "La Sylphide" and "Tchaikovsky Suite No. 2." (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-496-0600. Through Feb. 28.)

Robbinschilds

"Hex," the title of the latest work directed by Sonya Robbins and Layla Childs, refers both to a spell and to a six-sided shape. For this project, six notable dancer-choreographers, including Vanessa Anspaugh and Eleanor Smith, each created her own short dance before offering it to the scrutiny of the group—a process meant to highlight subtle forms of collective influence and authorship. (Gibney Dance: Agnes Varis Performing Arts Center, 280 Broadway. 646-837-6809. Feb. 3-6.)

Gemma Bond Dance

So far, the choreography that Gemma Bond has made—for New York Theatre Ballet and other small troupes—has resembled her dancing in the corps of American Ballet Theatre: adept, classy, not especially attention-grabbing, but lightly perfumed with charm. For her first stand-alone program, ten excellent dancers, mostly friends from A.B.T., perform four of her pieces. (Danspace Project, St. Mark's Church In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. Feb. 4-6.)

"Lyrical Dances for a Lost Generation"

Conceived by the stylish and sometimes eccentric choreographer Raja Feather Kelly, this is a showcase with a get-back-to-basics agenda. Eschewing abstruse concepts and multimedia effects, each of the dozen or so participating choreographers—a group distinguished by Melissa Toogood, Nicole Wolcott, and Cori Olinghouse, among others—picks a pop recording and dances to it for the love of dancing. (GK Arts Center, 29 Jay St., Brooklyn. 212-600-0047. Feb. 5-6.)

"Untapped!" / RAW Dance Company

This crew from Brisbane, Australia, is to tap dance what the Bad Boys of Dance are to ballet. The five guys—and their backup band—offer a testosterone-driven, energetic, rap-and-rock-infused rhythmic barrage, leavened by the group's irreverent Aussie edge. They don't just tap: they do flips, leap, shake their hips, and, for good measure, tell a few jokes. (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010. Feb. 5-21.)

"Alwin Nikolais Celebration"

With its trippy abstractions and beeping electronic scores, the dance-theatre of Alwin Nikolais was a nineteen-fifties vision of the future that the psychedelic sixties could embrace. In recent years, the Ririe-Woodbury Dance Company, of Salt Lake City, has been the principal keeper of the flame (not to mention the requisite props and costumes). The troupe returns to the Joyce with "Tensile Involvement" (1955), a classic piece featuring an entangling web of elastic ribbons, along with several works from the late seventies and early eighties. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Feb. 9-14.)

"Kathryn Posin Dance Company with Live Music by Meredith Monk"

Two veteran New York artists come together to open 92nd Street Y's Harkness Dance Festival, with a program of works by the choreographer Kathryn Posin. "Climate Control" is set to an excerpt from Meredith Monk's spare 1990 musical work "Facing North." Monk will perform the vocal duet—a conversation of sounds suggesting wanderers in the wilderness—with Theo Bleckmann, sharing the stage with Posin's dancers. Posin, a student of Louis Horst and Anna Sokolow, is a bit of a maverick, whose works combine the rigorous structure of ballet with the freedom of modern dance. Her crack team of dancers includes Amar Ramasar (on Feb. 11 only) and Megan Dickinson, formerly of the Pennsylvania Ballet. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Feb. 11-12.)

"Badke"

A collaboration between the Belgian companies Les Ballets C de la B and KVS and ten Palestinian performers, "Badke" is a centerpiece of this year's Live Arts Festival, which is broadening its focus, this time around, to a geographic region: North Africa and the Middle East. In this high-energy work, the traditional folk dance *dabke* collides with various pop forms and politics. The effect is that of a culture under pressure exploding. (New York Live Arts, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Feb. 11-13.)

LMnO3

The company name may be awkward—it's an acronym for the last names of Deborah Lohse, Cori Marquis, and Donnell Oakley—but these women, who met working for Doug Elkins, are charmers. Their awkwardness is usually intentional, and comic. The team's first evening-length work, "B.A.N.G.S.: Made in America," uses another acronym (one for remembering which adjectives precede nouns in French), along with silly outfits, to have fun with ideas of categorization and femininity. (Joe's Pub, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. Feb. 12-13.)

Dance on Camera Festival

The festival, now in its forty-fourth year, includes an engaging hodgepodge of documentaries, dance films, and experimental shorts. (There are nineteen features and thirty-six shorts in all.) Often, the biographical sketches are among the most interesting. "The Flight Fantastic" is centered on a family of Mexican trapeze artists called the Flying Gaonas, known for their flawless triple somersaults under the big top. "Our Last Tango" is an entrée into the nocturnal and highly ritualized world of tango, through the story of the Argentine *tanguero* Juan Carlos Copes, one of the dance's great lions. The film traces his relationship, on-stage and off, with the equally accomplished María Nieves Rego. (Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-875-5600. Feb. 12-16.)

MOVIES

OPENING

The Club Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Feb. 5. (*In limited release.*) • **Deadpool** An adaptation of the Marvel Comics story in the “X-Men” series, about a cancer patient whose experimental treatment endows him with superpowers. Directed by Tim Miller; starring Ryan Reynolds and Morena Baccarin. Opening Feb. 12. (*In wide release.*) • **Hail, Caesar!** Ethan and Joel Coen directed this comedy, set in the nineteen-fifties, about a Hollywood studio publicist who attempts to cope with a scandal. Starring Josh Brolin, Scarlett Johansson, and George Clooney. Opening Feb. 5. (*In wide release.*) • **Pride and Prejudice and Zombies** A horror comedy, based on the novel by Seth Grahame-Smith, about an invasion of the undead in early-nineteenth-century England. Starring Lily James and Sam Riley. Directed by Burr Steers. Opening Feb. 5. (*In limited release.*) • **Where to Invade Next** In this documentary, Michael Moore visits countries in Europe and compares their social policies to those of the United States government. Opening Feb. 12. (*In limited release.*) • **Zoolander 2** Ben Stiller directed and stars in this comedy sequel, about a fashion model who tries to thwart killers targeting celebrities. Co-starring Owen Wilson, Penélope Cruz, Kristen Wiig, and Will Ferrell. Opening Feb. 12. (*In wide release.*)

NOW PLAYING

Anomalisa

Has anyone previously employed stop-motion animation for the purpose of sadness? That, certainly, is the tone set by Charlie Kaufman and Duke Johnson in this new film, which finds Michael Stone (voiced by David Thewlis), a customer-service guru, flying into Cincinnati to give a speech. He takes a cab into town, checks into a hotel, meets up with an old flame, has sex with a new flame, and flies home to Los Angeles. So much for plot. From this humdrum material the filmmakers have fashioned something singular and strange, not least in its alarming uniformity; all the figures, regardless of age and sex, bear much the same face, and all of their lines are spoken by Tom Noonan. Just as we start to wonder if humanity has been factory-farmed, Michael stumbles upon an exception—Lisa (Jennifer Jason Leigh), who sounds different, and whose very existence, therefore, holds the promise of a new start. Is she for real, though? And will she last? The movie is stained with dour comedy, and there’s no mistaking the complaints that it levels against a consumer society; the dexterity of the animation is matched only by the fog of its ineffable gloom. With music by Carter Burwell.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 1/18/16.) (*In wide release.*)

The Big Short

Years before the financial crisis of 2008, early rumblings are detected by Michael Burry (Christian Bale), whose investment skills are in sharp contrast to his social unease. Unlike most of his peers, he spies the cracks in the housing market and wagers that, before too long, it will all come tumbling down. Word of his gamble inspires a

few more players to take the plunge, including a miserable hedge-fund manager (Steve Carell), a pair of greenhorns from out of town (John Magaro and Finn Wittrock), and our sly narrator (Ryan Gosling), who works at Deutsche Bank. These are just some of the unlovely figures who pace back and forth through Adam McKay’s new film, based on the nonfiction book by Michael Lewis. The movie pops and fizzles with invention, and even takes time out, now and then, to educate—screeching to a halt and summoning a celebrity (Selena Gomez, say, or Margot Robbie) to steer us through the economic verbiage. Everything you always wanted to know about credit-default swaps but were afraid to ask: it’s all here. So winning are these tactics, and so cheerfully headlong is the mood, that we’re hardly aware of rooting for a bunch of utter cynics who are poised to make tens of millions of dollars from the misfortunes of others.—*A.L.* (12/14/15) (*In wide release.*)

Bridge of Spies

The new Steven Spielberg film starts in 1957, with the arrest of a Soviet spy named Rudolf Abel (Mark Rylance) in Brooklyn. The man assigned to defend him is James B. Donovan (Tom Hanks), a local insurance lawyer—trusted, experienced, and thought unlikely to cause a stir. Yet Donovan turns out to be a stubborn soul, who fights against the

death penalty for his client and takes his argument all the way to the Supreme Court. Although such perseverance wins him few friends, endangers his family, and dismays his wife (Amy Ryan), it pays off when an American pilot is downed in Soviet airspace. Donovan is asked to travel to Berlin to get the pilot back, in exchange for Abel. As you would expect from Spielberg, the tale is securely told, with tautness and skill; what lifts it above some of his other historical dramas is a touch of comic friction—courtesy of a smart script written by Joel and Ethan Coen, in league with Matt Charman. Hanks, as limber as ever, is required to square off against the restrained Rylance, who makes Abel a witty and formidable foe. Somehow, his kinship with Donovan offers a brief glow of warmth amid the snows of the Cold War.—*A.L.* (10/26/15) (*In wide release.*)

Carol

One day in the nineteen-fifties, Carol Aird (Cate Blanchett), a wife and mother, is shopping for Christmas presents at a department store in Manhattan. She comes across a salesgirl, Therese Belivet (Rooney Mara), and they fall in love, right there. Todd Haynes’s film then follows the women as they meet for lunch, hang out at Carol’s home, embark on an aimless journey, and go to bed—conscious, all the while, of what they are risking, flouting, or leaving behind. Therese has a boyfriend (Jake Lacy), and Carol has a husband (Kyle Chandler) and a child, although the maternal instinct gets short dramatic shrift. That feels true to Patricia Highsmith, whose 1952 novel, “The Price of Salt,” is the foundation of the film. The



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fine screenplay is by Phyllis Nagy, who drains away the sourness of the book; what remains is a production of clean and frictionless beauty, down to the last, strokable inch of clothing and skin. Yet Haynes and his stars, for all their stylish restraint, know that elegance alone will not suffice. Inside the showcase is a storm of feeling. With Sarah Paulson, as Carol's best friend.—*A.L.* (11/23/15) (In limited release.)

The Club

The Catholic Church's minimal response to the sexual abuse of children by priests is the motor of Pablo Larraín's drama, set in a home for disgraced priests and one nun in a remote Chilean village. A local resident named Sandokan (Roberto Fariás) loudly and explicitly accuses a newly arrived priest (José Soza) of raping him when he was a child. After the priest's suicide, Father García (Marcelo Alonso), a Church official, arrives to put the house in order. But the priests and nun who live there—charged with a variety of offenses, from sexual depredation to baby snatching to complicity with the former military regime—have made the best of their unsupervised leisure and plot to resist the stern new rules. The core of the film is Father García's series of one-on-one interrogations of the house residents, whom he confronts with their offenses and who turn the tables on him to challenge his—and the Church's—claim to moral authority. (Along the way, the doctrine of celibacy is sharply questioned, too.) The tightly patterned story has a musical structure that underscores the drama's starkest, deepest conflicts. Only a clichéd view of the traumatized Sandokan vitiates the film's outraged power. In Spanish.—*Richard Brody* (In limited release.)

Creed

This stirring, heartfelt, rough-grained reboot of the "Rocky" series is the brainchild of Ryan Coogler ("Fruitvale Station"), who directed, wrote the story, and co-wrote the script with Aaron Covington. It starts in a juvenile-detention center in Los Angeles, where young Adonis Johnson is confined. He's soon adopted by Mary Anne Creed (Phylicia Rashad), Apollo's widow, who informs him that the boxer (who died before Adonis's birth) was his father. As an adult, Adonis (played by Michael B. Jordan) defies Mary Anne to pursue his own boxing career, moving to Philadelphia to be trained by Rocky Balboa (Sylvester Stallone), his father's rival. The burly backstory and weight of personal history don't stall the drama but provide its fuel. Coogler—aided by the cinematographer Maryse Alberti's urgent long takes—links the physical sacrifices of boxing and acting alike and binds Adonis's martial passion to his family feeling. (The focussed heat of Jordan's commitment meshes well with Stallone's wry, haunted serenity.) Adonis also finds sweet and mature romance with the rising singer Bianca (played with febrile passion by Tessa Thompson), who has physical struggles of her own. Coogler ingeniously turns the myth of bootstrap-tugging exertions on its head: without family and connections, the new star of the boxing ring wouldn't stand a fighting chance.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

Enthusiasm, or Symphony of the Don Basin

The vigor and horror of the Russian Revolution provide both the substance and the stylistic inspiration of Dziga Vertov's 1931 film. It begins with a historic transformation by means of mass media: a young woman's enlightenment thanks to a radio broadcast of a symphony orchestra. This cultural modernization is linked, by allusive ed-

iting, to another form of modernization—the desanctification of churches that occurs as Communists pillage icons, cut the crosses off domes, and topple steeples with a roaring mob violence. Vertov dramatizes these acts with jazzy imagery that includes multiple exposures and animation. He films with a wild, expressive energy, panning rapidly to follow the swinging clapper of a bell and depicting electric wires as ecstatic striations of the sky. Rapid industrialization under a five-year plan is filmed with high-contrast, abstract flamboyance and audacious optical manipulations. Vertov's love of pure geometric forms, as conjured by striking angles on train tracks and orderly ranks of Party members, contrasts painfully with a partisan sculptor's old-fashioned bust of Lenin; that contrast is the film's stifled tragedy.—*R.B.* (*Anthology Film Archives*; Feb. 4.)

The 5th Wave

Aliens are here, and they are taking over; in fact, we may not even notice them until it's too late, since they can resemble us in every way. Such is the politically charged foundation of J. Blakeson's film, which is adapted from the novel by Rick Yancey. The book was aimed squarely at young adults, and the movie is packed with them, starting with Cassie (Chloë Grace Moretz), who is busy enjoying high school in Ohio when—total bummer—the world begins to end. Soon she has nothing left but a gun, a Teddy bear, and a lost little brother (Zackary Arthur), whom she urgently needs to find. Along the way, she meets a former schoolmate, Ben (Nick Robinson), and makes out in the back of a truck with Evan (Alex Roe), who has a secret quandary that cries out to be shared; as a result, the final forty minutes of the film become so laughable as to be therapeutic. In order to save mankind, these kids must join a junior army and shoot grownups; if you'd removed the earnestness and added a touch of craziness and camp, the whole thing might have been fun. With Maria Bello, as a sergeant; with her powder-white skin, combat fatigues, and scarlet lips, she cuts the coolest figure in the movie.—*A.L.* (2/1/16) (In wide release.)

The Heartbreak Kid

Elaine May's anxious 1972 comedy is about two young New York Jews, Leonard Allen Cantrow (Charles Grodin), a sporting-goods salesman, and Lila Ina Kolodny (Jeannie Berlin, May's daughter), who meet in a singles bar and are soon wed. But on the first day of their honeymoon in Miami Beach, Len meets Kelly Corcoran (Cybill Shepherd), the porcelain shiksa goddess of his dreams, for whom he neglects—and prepares to leave—his bride. May directs with bristling restraint: the camera runs at length, keeping the characters trapped in the excruciating moment, and, with the central trio of typecast actors tightly held this side of parody, the humor oscillates between sour comedy and droll tragedy. According to May, it's a man's world; working with a Neil Simon script based on a novel by Bruce Jay Friedman, she captures the implausibly boundless sense of wonder, possibility, and entitlement of a time when even a self-proclaimed schmuck like Len Cantrow, endowed with little but the gift of gab, attempted daring feats of self-liberation.—*R.B.* (*Anthology Film Archives*; Feb. 12 and Feb. 14.)

Jane Got a Gun

After a troubled gestation, Gavin O'Connor's Western, set in 1871, hobbles onscreen at last. Natalie Portman plays Jane Hammond, whose husband, Bill (Noah Emmerich), returns badly wounded to their homestead in the New Mexico Territory. Hard

on his heels is a vicious gang, led by John Bishop (Ewan McGregor), who wants his pound of flesh. The task of stopping him falls to Jane, who reluctantly recruits Dan Frost (Joel Edgerton), a former lover, who is far from eager to help. Indeed, despite the title of the film, what matters is not the bearing of a weapon but the possession of a fully loaded grudge, and the action—such as it is—feels tempered and delayed by a curious diffidence, as if the characters would rather be elsewhere, doing something else. Even the landscape seems to shrink from grandeur. Although the eventual shoot-out has its explosive moments, it is preceded by a number of ill-advised flashbacks, and followed by a change of fortunes that no one, including Jane, can quite believe.—*A.L. (2/1/16) (In wide release.)*

Joy

Painful personal overtones resonate in David O. Russell's boisterous comic view—based on a true story—of an entrepreneur's conflict-riddled rise to success. Jennifer Lawrence stars as a divorced young mother on Long Island who's in a rut. Smart, creative, and handy, she works at an airport counter and copes with her divorced parents (Virginia Madsen and Robert De Niro), her father's new girlfriend (Isabella Rossellini), her bitter half-sister (Elisabeth Röhm), her ex-husband (Édgar Ramírez), and her supportive but ailing grandmother (Diane Ladd). Overwhelmed by a Cinderella-like burden of chores, Joy designs a new kind of mop, finds an investor, and is thrust into the predatory world of attorneys and executives. Russell, who wrote the script and co-wrote the story with Annie Mumolo, captures the magical moment when Joy's private inspiration finds public expression; the movie's best scene features Bradley Cooper, as a TV executive who shows Joy the ropes. The core of the film is Joy's mastery of the killer instinct, her deft plotting of bold confrontations. Russell's portrait of Joy stints on intimacy, but her self-realization in response to crises is thrilling. With Dascha Polanco, as Joy's best friend and savior.—*R.B. (In wide release.)*

Mad Max: Fury Road

The fourth chapter in the saga of Max and the best, even if you emerge with dented eyeballs. The loner's role that belonged to Mel Gibson now passes to Tom Hardy, who, as is only proper, gets little to say but plenty to do, most of it involving fire, dust, velocity, and blood. The time is the looming future, the landscape is dry and stripped of greenery, and, to cap it all, Max is a prisoner. Once escaped, he teams up with Furiosa (Charlize Theron), a one-armed and single-minded truck driver, who is carrying a cargo of young women—stealing them, in fact, from a masked tyrannical brute named Immortan Joe (Hugh Keays-Byrne), who uses them as breeders. The feminist slant of the movie comes as a welcome surprise, while the rampant verve of the action sequences is pretty much what admirers of George Miller, the director, have been praying for. Rarely has a filmmaker seemed less in need of a brake pedal. Luckily, his sense of humor remains undamaged, and his eye for extravagant design is as keen as ever; some of the makeup is so drastic that you can barely distinguish between human flesh and the bodywork of cars. The director of photography, keeping his composure in the melee, is John Seale.—*A.L. (5/25/15) (In wide release.)*

Ornette: Made in America

Shirley Clarke's 1985 documentary about the crucial jazz innovator Ornette Coleman joins an impressionistic portrait of the musician with

an informative overview of his life, work, and ideas. The film's fractured, collagelike composition is anchored by Coleman's 1984 visit to his home town of Fort Worth, where he received official tributes and performed his orchestral work with the local symphony and with his own band. Dramatized reconstructions of his youth, filmed performances from the sixties onward, and discussions with him and other musicians and associates (including William Burroughs and Brion Gysin) mesh with Clarke's diverse array of video manipulations and her flamboyant, rapid-fire editing, which break through the reportorial evidence to evoke the visions and fantasies from which Coleman's music arises. (His discussion of an earlier plan for sexual abstinence is as chilling as it is revealing.) Clarke relates Coleman's grandly transformative multimedia projects (including one involving satellite transmissions) to her own; his troubled effort to rehabilitate a Lower East Side building highlights the free-flowing connection of art and life.—*R.B. (Museum of Arts and Design; Feb. 5.)*

The Revenant

In the eighteen-twenties, a band of fur hunters is attacked by American Indians in the wooded wilds around the Missouri River. A few survivors start the long journey back to camp, first by boat (where the air of twitching vulnerability recalls that of "Apocalypse Now") and then on foot. One of them, Hugh Glass (Leonardo DiCaprio), is mauled by a bear and left for dead. Alone, he continues his pilgrimage—eating raw meat and fish, tumbling through rapids, and, for

want of accommodation, sleeping inside a dead horse. The sequence of hardships is so extreme and so unrelenting as to verge on the comical, but DiCaprio tamps down any hint of levity, as does the director, Alejandro González Iñárritu. Though Iñárritu's eye is as restless as it was in his last movie, "Birdman," the mood is chastened, and the merry-go-round has made way for a punishing regime. We are given gestures toward a plot: Glass is devoted to his son, Hawk (Forest Goodluck), and beset by a growling nemesis (Tom Hardy), who is almost as bearish as the bear. Such figures only compound the bitter mood, while a more promising character, a youth by the name of Bridger (played by the excellent Will Poulter), falls away. The cinematography, often radiant, and as crisp as ice, is by Emmanuel Lubezki.—*A.L. (1/4/16) (In wide release.)*

Room

A boy named Jack (Jacob Tremblay) celebrates his fifth birthday. He and his mother, Joy (Brie Larson), make a cake, but they cannot go out to buy candles. Other things, too, seem awry. Jack looks like a girl, with long hair, and he sometimes sleeps in a wardrobe, which he calls "Wardrobe." Slowly, we piece together their story: Joy has been kidnapped off the street and imprisoned for years in a soundproof shed by a man they know only as Old Nick (Sean Bridgers). Jack is his child, by Joy, whom he rapes at regular intervals. The first half of Lenny Abrahamson's movie, adapted by Emma Donoghue from her own novel, is extremely painful to watch, and sullen with routine; the second half, in which the

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captives plan a break for freedom, displays more spirit, and it also provides a welcome role for Joan Allen, as Joy's mother. But there is something pat about the movie's main conceit; Tremblay is startling, but you sense that the film is using a horrific plight (reminiscent of several real-life cases) to offer up a meditative study of childhood, and of just how much a child's view of things—first blinkered, then opening wide—can teach us. Does that lesson not come at far too great a cost?—*A.L.* (In limited release.)

Salesman

In this 1968 documentary, Albert and David Maysles and Charlotte Zwerin capture the quiet desperation of four travelling Bible salesmen on the road in New England and Florida, as well as that of the poor souls they besiege with their spiel. The foot soldiers, all pasty middle-aged men, go by the nicknames the Bull, the Rabbit, the Gipper, and the Badger; the latter, Paul Brennan, is the heart of the film. The filmmakers spend plenty of time with him in his car and record his insightful perorations about his job and his colleagues—and it is precisely his detachment, his ability to assess what he's doing, that renders him less successful and more frustrated in his ungratifying, predatory work. The Catholic Church, which lent its imprimatur to the overpriced tomes and provided the salesmen with their leads, has an unappealing offscreen role; but the onscreen villain is the hectoring sales manager, whose creed of total responsibility drives his staff to depressing self-punishment. The filmmakers, despite their rueful gaze, inspire empathy for all parties to this miserable commerce.—*R.B.* (*Museum of the Moving Image*; Feb. 13.)

Son of Saul

The first feature film by László Nemes confronts a subject that many people would prefer not to think about, let alone to cast in dramatic form. In death camps such as Auschwitz-Birkenau, the Sonderkommando were teams of prisoners who were forced to deal with other prisoners as they arrived—herding them into the gas chambers, sorting through their discarded clothes, and ferrying their bodies to the furnaces. A movie that staged all this in detail would not be watchable, or even defensible; what Nemes does, therefore, is to focus on one such assistant, a Hungarian Jew named Saul Ausländer (Géza Röhrig), whom we see in almost every shot. The film shows not the horror of the events around him but his reaction to them; his dark stare does the work on our behalf. There is a plot here—two separate plots, in fact, which might be thought excessive, although they crystallize the fervor and the despair of the inmates. First, there is an uprising and a breakout, against formidable odds. Second, Saul recognizes, among the dead, his own son, and much of the movie is driven by his quest for a rabbi to say the mourner's Kaddish for the child. Somehow, Nemes finds a balance: his exhausting movie pays its respects but also burns with rage.—*A.L.* (12/21 & 28/15) (In limited release.)

Spotlight

There are many ways in which the new Tom McCarthy film could have gone wrong. The subject could hardly be thornier: the uncovering, by an investigative team at the Boston *Globe*, of widespread sexual abuse by Catholic priests. The victims were children, but we meet them as adults, when they tell their stories. The movie, scripted by McCarthy and Josh Singer, resists any temptation to reconstruct the original crimes, and the

sole focus is on the progress of the journalistic task. The result is restrained but never dull, and, barring a couple of overheated moments, when a character shouts in closeup, we don't feel harried or hectorated. The film becomes a study in togetherness, both bad and fruitful; on the one hand, we get the creepy sense of a community closing ranks, while on the other there is the old-school pleasure of watching an ensemble in full spate. The reporters are played by Michael Keaton, Brian d'Arcy James, Mark Ruffalo, and Rachel McAdams; their superiors, by John Slattery and Liev Schreiber; and the lawyers, by Billy Crudup and Stanley Tucci, who, as usual, calmly pockets every scene in which he appears.—*A.L.* (11/9/15) (In limited release.)

Within Our Gates

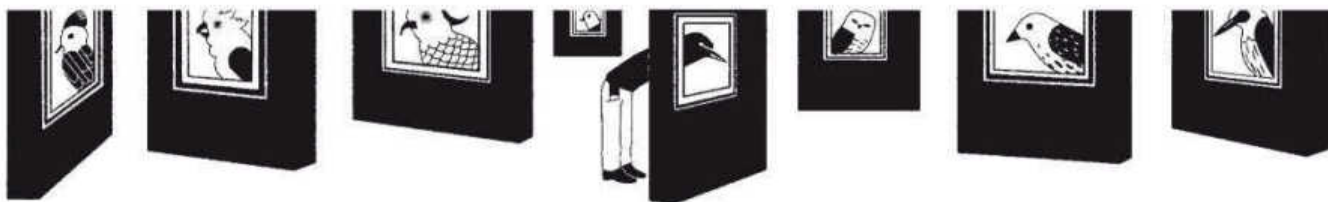
Oscar Micheaux's bold, forceful melodrama, from 1919—the oldest surviving feature by a black American director—unfolds the vast political dimensions of intimate romantic crises. Evelyn Preer stars as Sylvia Landry, a young black woman in a Northern town, who suffers a broken engagement. She heads home to the South and becomes a teacher in an underfinanced school for black children; travelling to Boston to do fund-raising, she meets an ardent doctor (Charles D. Lucas) and a white philanthropist, who help with the cause. With a brisk and sharp-edged style, Micheaux sketches a wide view of black society, depicting an engineer with an international career, a private eye with influential friends, a predatory gangster, devoted educators—and the harrowing ambient violence of Jim Crow, which he depicts unsparingly and gruesomely. Along with his revulsion at the hateful rhetoric and murderous tyranny of Southern whites, Micheaux adds a special satirical disgust for a black preacher who offers his parishioners Heaven as a reward for their uneducated submissiveness. Micheaux's narrative manner is as daring as his subject matter, with bold flashbacks and interpolations amplifying the story; a remarkable twist regarding Sylvia's identity, slipped in at the end, opens a nearly hallucinatory historical vortex. Silent.—*R.B.* (*Film Forum*; Feb. 15.)

REVIVALS AND FESTIVALS

Titles with a dagger are reviewed.

Anthology Film Archives The films of Dziga Vertov. Feb. 4 at 7:30: "Enthusiasm, or Symphony of the Don Basin." (†) • Feb. 6 at 4: "A Sixth of the World" (1926; silent). • Feb. 7 at 4: "The Eleventh Year" (1928; silent). • "Valentine's Day Massacre." Feb. 11 at 9:15 and Feb. 13 at 7: "Modern Romance" (1981, Albert Brooks). • Feb. 12 at 7 and Feb. 14 at 8:45: "The Heartbreak Kid." (†) **BAM Cinémathèque** The films of Michael Mann. Feb. 5 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30 and Feb. 7 at 4:30 and 9:30: "Thief" (1981). • Feb. 6 at 2, 5:30, and 9: "Heat" (1995). • Feb. 9 at 9:30: "The Keep" (1983). **Film Forum** "Pioneers of African-American Cinema." Feb. 14 at 1: "The Blood of Jesus" (1941, Spencer Williams). • Feb. 15 at 7: "Within Our Gates." (†) **Museum of Arts and Design** The films and videos of Shirley and Wendy Clarke. Feb. 5 at 7: "Ornette: Made in America." (†) • Feb. 12 at 7: "Love Tapes" (1977-2001, Wendy Clarke). **Museum of the Moving Image** "See It Big! Documentary." Feb. 5 at 7: "Woodstock" (1970, Michael Wadleigh). • Feb. 12 at 7: "The Last Waltz" (1978, Martin Scorsese). • Feb. 13 at 4:30: "Salesman." (†) • Feb. 13 at 7: "Gimme Shelter" (1970, Albert and David Maysles and Charlotte Zwerin).

ABOVE & BEYOND



Lunar New Year Parade and Festival

Sara D. Roosevelt Park is one of the Lower East Side's treasures, a bright stretch of green tucked into the shadow of Pace University High School. Residents of nearby Chinatown frequent the park for refuge from downtown's grit, and it will burst with even more color than usual for the annual Lunar New Year festival, as more than five hundred thousand fireworks float above elaborate choreographed performances and vendors serving a bevy of traditional dishes (Feb. 8). On Feb. 14 at 1, a parade will begin on Mott St. at Canal St., and snake through Little Italy and Chinatown, past the Manhattan Bridge, and back up toward the park, to ring in the Year of the Monkey. (Sara D. Roosevelt Park, E. Houston St. at Chrystie St. betterchinatown.com.)

Bloody Valentine's Weekend

Hudson Square's infamous haunted house opens its doors for a Valentine's Day engagement that's not for the fainthearted. Blood Manor's guests walk through twenty minutes of tightly choreographed chaos: groups of six navigate chilling sections of a haunted mansion, dodging zombified hosts through labyrinthine corridors. For three nights each year, the manor houses a Valentine's Day massacre that beats out its Halloween regimen by sheer novelty, serving as a fun alternative to tamer date-night plans. Dress appropriately: there's a chance of splatter. (163 Varick St. 212-290-2825. Feb. 12-14.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Given the contentiousness of the current political climate, we can all use reminders of our better nature. One place to look is the trove of American manuscripts and prints going up for auction at Swann on Feb. 4, which includes a first edition of "The Federalist Papers," in which Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay lay out their well-considered arguments in favor of the ratification of the Constitution. A sale of vintage posters on Feb. 11 offers such escapist pleasures as florid fin-de-siècle show posters—including one for "La Dame aux Camélias," starring Sarah Bernhardt—and alluring Art Deco ads for glamorous Alpine destinations. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.) • Doyle holds one of its periodic auctions of decorations from the Belle Époque (Feb. 10), an offering led by Tiffany lamps, elaborate silver, and bronze figurines. The sale also includes a session dedicated to a subject dear to dowagers and country yeomen alike: dogs in art. (175 E. 87th St. 212-427-2730.)

READINGS AND TALKS

"Muldoon's Picnic"

The fourth season of the talk series, hosted by *The New Yorker's* poetry editor, Paul Muldoon, fea-

tures guests including the band Rogue Oliphant and the writers Salman Rushdie and Glenn Patterson. Rounding out the evening with musical performances are the genre-blending composer and performance artist Laurie Anderson and the classical revivalists Miracles of Modern Science, who wring out new sounds from the violin, cello, mandolin, drums, and double bass. (Irish Arts Center, 553 W. 51st St. 212-757-3318. Feb. 8 at 7:30.)

"Happy Ending"

This musical series has recast the idea of a talk: guests, who have included Lena Dunham and Vampire Weekend, take the stage for wily improvisational stunts, while musicians lead group sing-alongs of beloved covers. This week, the founder and host Amanda Stern is joined by the indie novelist Samantha Hunt and the best-seller and Pulitzer Prize finalist Colson White-

head; the singer-songwriter Suzanne Vega will perform. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Feb. 10.)

Word Lovers' Valentine Publishing Panel

Susan Shapiro's "instant gratification takes too long" classes, taught at New York University, the New School, and in private seminars, task her students with writing and publishing a piece by the end of the course—for added incentive, attendees are encouraged to pay the fee with newly earned funds from published works. The author will gather an insightful group of gatekeepers to share trade secrets on breaking into the magazine and publishing worlds. Speakers include the *Times* editor Peter Catapano, the Beacon Press book editor Rakia Clark, and the *Rolling Stone* editor Jerry Portwood. (N.Y.U. Bookstore, 726 Broadway. 212-998-4678. Feb. 10 at 6.)



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FOOD & DRINK



TABLES FOR TWO

Llama Inn

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ERIK RAMIREZ, a former sous-chef at Eleven Madison Park, recently opened a quirky portal to Lima, Peru, at a boho-swanky restaurant wedged under the shadow of the B.Q.E. in Williamsburg. While Ramirez's roots in Manhattan's anointed temple of fine dining might strike fear in fans of the Peruvian-rotisserie-chicken chain Pío Pío (how can you elevate such perfection?), Llama Inn turns out to be fun, unusual, a little bit goofy, and extremely delicious.

The menu rides the waves of the Spanish, French, Amerindian, Chinese, and Japanese influences of the Peruvian melting pot. *Anticuchos*, the street snack of grilled skewered meats, included, on a recent night, perfect little bites of char-siu pork belly, topped with homemade pork rinds, and a wonderfully firm and fortifying beef heart. Fluke ceviche, with lime and red onion, was bright and assertive; red-snapper *tiradito*, sliced into thin pieces and topped with unctuous persimmon and lightly crunchy poppy seeds, was elegant, like fruity silk. Flouting the unspoken rule that quinoa is a bummer, Ramirez mixes it with avocado, thick hunks of bacon, caramelized bananas, and banana mayonnaise, resulting in a sort of improbably irresistible banana-bacon pudding.

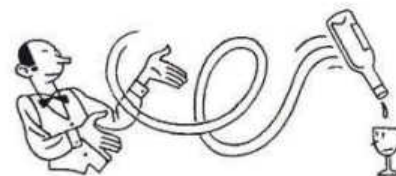
For those who believe that the cuisine of Peru starts at roast chicken and

ends at fried potatoes, Llama Inn has you covered. One of two large-format plates is a gorgeous brined, hickory-smoked, garlic-tinged bird, served chili-spiced skin intact, alongside a mountain of potato wedges roasted to a handsome crisp. The sauces on the side make it a party: a creamy queso-fresco concoction, a rich rocoto-chili crema, and a green aji-pepper sauce for a tiny bit of heat. A spectacular *lomo saltado*, a stir-fry of tender beef chunks in a thick soy-vinegar glaze, is showered with French fries and drizzled with more rocoto crema. As if that's not enough (it is), it's served with avocado, pickled chilis, and scallion pancakes, for making Chinese-Peruvian tacos.

As befits the neighborhood, much attention is paid to the cocktails. The El Chapo doesn't feel particularly louche, except that it's basically a goblet of tequila, with a hint of pisco and citrus ("Very spirit forward," the server offered optimistically); the Flying Purple Pisco, with purple-potato purée and frothed egg whites, is like a tiny lavender-hued soufflé. Pisco buzz aside, maybe the good vibes have something to do with the catwalk of tropical plants ringing the walls of windows high above the seats, or the earthy colors and fibres seemingly sourced from nature. Or maybe it's the feeling you get from all this lovely food prepared with unpretentious enthusiasm and home-town pride. (Plates \$4-\$48.)

—Shauna Lyon

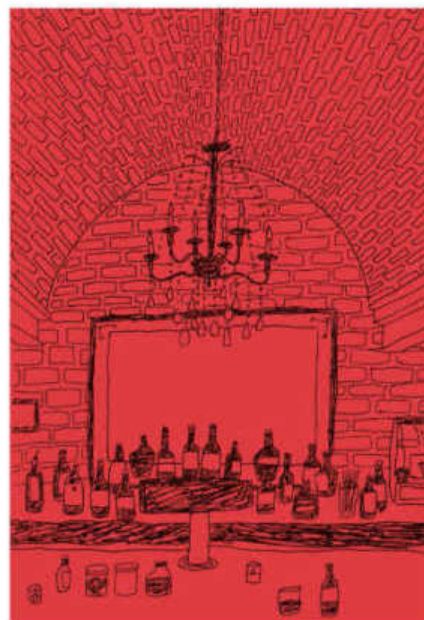
BAR TAB



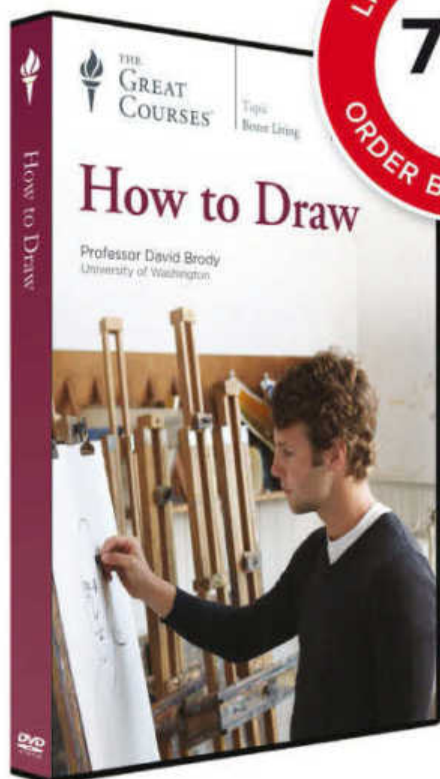
Berlin

25 Avenue A

One recent evening in Alphabet City, a clutch of twenty-somethings were looking for somewhere to grab a drink and, perhaps, a dance. "Berlin's the new cool place," one of them announced. "It's full of beautiful boys—and models." At the door, a behoodied man looked up from his iPhone. "It's really packed down there," he said. "Not sure if you guys are gonna get in." Then he stage-whispered into his handset, "I don't know them." Four or five nervous seconds passed. "O.K., you guys can go in." At the bottom of the stairs, in a barrel-vaulted watering hole, long lines of people waited for the bathroom from whence burst ebullient gaggles of young women and a madly coughing guy in a Thrasher hat. In the bar's main concourse, young women swaddled in Iris Apfel beads shuffled around with boys in punk jackets to the Ronettes and early Pulp. They gulped Jameson and talked in low, serious voices about "Downton Abbey" and the bar's co-owner, Jesse Malin, who also stewards 2009's favorite night spot, Cabin Down Below. A brand strategist said that the whole thing's like being at one of those gallery parties where more people turned up than expected, and noted, "The space is not properly equipped." Looking over at a cluster of guys in wide-brimmed beige hats, a *Vice* staffer shuddered: "Every time I see a hat like that, I get paranoid that I'm at work."—Nicolas Niarchos



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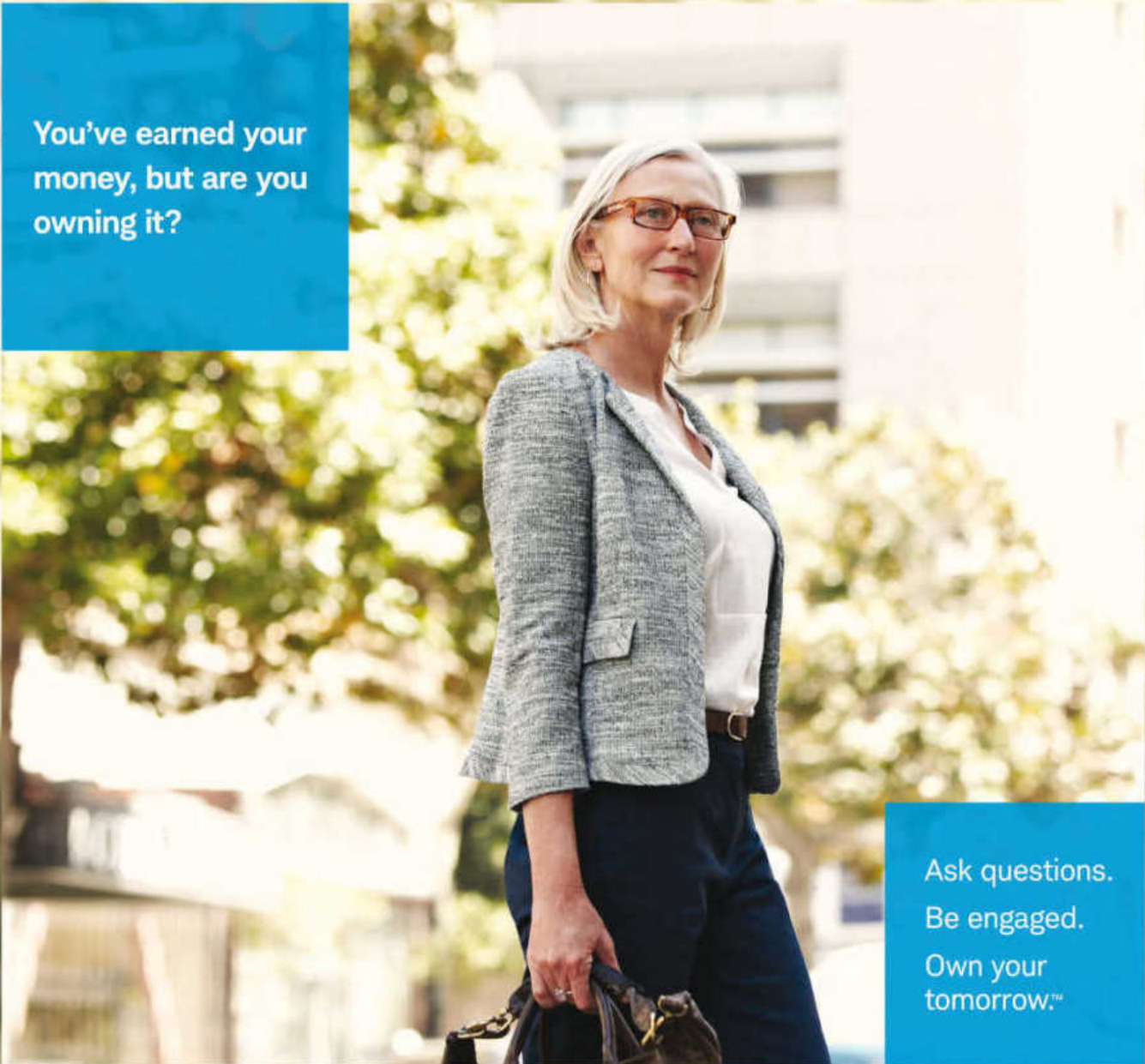
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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT LIVING ON THE EDGE

IT'S UPON us. About one half of one per cent of all registered voters in the United States—ninety-six per cent of them likely to be white, a hundred per cent certain to live in Iowa or New Hampshire—will now exercise their inalienable, God-given, legally mandated right to choose the Presidential nominees of the two parties. Since the advent of the New Hampshire primary and the Iowa caucus as we know them, in the nineteen-fifties and seventies, respectively, no one has been elected President without winning one or the other—except Bill Clinton, whose second-place finish in New Hampshire, in 1992, amid various scandals, was a victory over expectations, and proved that he was indefatigable. So is the political hegemony of these two smallish, non-representative states. If the Presidential-nominating process were an international sports competition, one would assume that top officials of both parties were taking envelopes of cash from town chairs in Durham and precinct captains in Waterloo. But, amazingly, all this out-sized clout comes free.

Direct primaries—the selection of candidates by voters instead of by party leaders—came into existence a hundred years ago. They were the inspiration of reformers who wanted to take power away from political machines and corporate interests, and return it to the people, who were believed to be wiser and more capable than the bosses, because they were less self-interested. The act of voting would turn ordinary people into good citizens. “The direct primary will lower party responsibility. In its stead it establishes individual responsibility,” George W. Norris, a Progressive senator from Nebraska, wrote in 1923. “It lessens party spirit and decreases partisanship.” In many ways, the Progressive era anticipated our own. The concerns about plutocracy, political corruption, technological change, and mass immigration were similar, and the reformers’ high-minded

cures were forerunners of today’s ideas for limiting campaign funds and drawing congressional districts in nonpartisan ways.

The struggle between bossism and reform never ends. As late as 1968, Vice-President Hubert H. Humphrey became the Democratic Presidential nominee without entering a single primary. (The Party then created a commission, led by Senator George McGovern, to democratize the process—one result was the Iowa caucus.) More recently, Republican Party leaders have had their way in election after election, with the nomination going to establishment candidates named Bush, Dole, McCain, and Romney, regardless of the populist eruptions of the moment. Perhaps 2016 will be different.

Now that we’re entering the frenetic, relentlessly tactical stretch of the campaign, it’s strange to think that the long months before Iowa and New Hampshire actually marked the substantive phase. Candidates had to show up for lengthy debates (even if their answers often ranged from the canned to the preposterous). Every now and then, they gave speeches and issued position papers on issues like tax reform and war in the Middle East (even if their ideas didn’t always stand up to fact-checking or common sense). And, because the candidates were spending so much time in just two states,

they had to face questions from actual voters. As a result of all this, we now have a reading of the American political temperature. What we’ve learned is that it’s burning a lot hotter at the grass roots than either party’s leadership seems capable of understanding.

Neither billionaire donors nor the Republican National Committee nor Fox News has been able to mute Donald Trump and his millions of supporters. Politico notes that “establishment Republicans have begun a ferocious round of finger-pointing over who is to blame for the party’s failure to stop Donald Trump.” Should Right to Rise, the hundred-million-dollar Bush Super PAC, have directed its dollars against Trump



instead of against Marco Rubio? Should Rubio have been more willing to criticize Trump, and Ted Cruz less willing to flatter him? Which is preferable: fear (Trump) or loathing (Cruz)? The latter, says a recent issue of *National Review* that was wholly and belatedly devoted to stopping Trump. Bob Dole sees it the other way around. The Party leadership expected the primaries to proceed as a kind of demonstration of democracy, with the result already in the bag. Shock is finally giving way to rage.

Democrats are more used to choosing outsiders, like Jimmy Carter and Barack Obama. But the long-shot campaign of Bernie Sanders is the opposite of those insurgencies—it has nothing to do with personality or biography and everything to do with issues. Sanders’s persistently surprising popularity shows that the Democratic establishment grasped the deep alienation of its voters no better than its Republican counterpart did. The energy of this campaign has been generated on the margins, by two kinds of Americans: younger, better-educated, more urban ones on the Democratic side; older, more working-class, whiter ones on the Republican side. As with the Progressives and Populists of a hundred years ago, both groups harbor a sense that their country has been taken away from them. Neither has traditionally been oppressed, which makes the sense of disenfranchisement all the more acute, and they assert increasingly extreme views

against the powers they see concentrated against them—big business, big government, big media, big globalization.

That was the original purpose of direct primaries—to force the parties to answer to the voters. But Senator Norris was mistaken about one thing: the voters turn out to be more partisan than the bosses. Primaries drive politicians toward the extremes, and neither side is willing to acknowledge the legitimacy or, in a sense, the existence of the other. Sanders Democrats cheer his proposals for higher taxes, single-payer health care, and free college education without demanding that he explain how he’ll get those proposals through a highly ideological Republican Congress. Trump just tells his faithful to give him the power and he’ll make everything right, and they believe him. Cruz sneers about “New York values,” as if support for gun control and abortion rights weren’t majority views in America.

These disruptions have troubled the former New York mayor Michael Bloomberg enough to make him consider an independent candidacy. He disapproves of partisan primaries. An aide told the *Times* that Bloomberg thinks that Americans are seeking “a non-ideological, bipartisan, results-oriented vision.” He would spend at least a billion of his own dollars to find out. Nothing about the campaign so far suggests that he would get much of a return on the investment.

—George Packer

PARIS POSTCARD DOG’S DINNER



THE LATEST stage in the decline of French civilization began in the summer of 2009 at a Thai restaurant in Los Angeles. Arash Derambarsh, a book editor and criminology student in Paris, was visiting his twin brother, Sia, who was in California working in film production. Derambarsh ordered chicken curry. It arrived in a bowl big enough to mix a cake. “After that long flight, I couldn’t eat it all,” Derambarsh recalled. “So my brother asked me, ‘You want a doggy bag?’ I thought, Is he talking about ‘Reservoir Dogs’? My brother said, ‘No, Arash, here in the United States, when someone can’t finish his meal he takes it home in a doggy bag and eats it at 2 A.M.’”

Derambarsh was sitting in a café in the Seventh Arrondissement of Paris, steak and potatoes steaming in front of him. In 2014, he added local politician to his professional portfolio, winning a seat on the city council of the Paris suburb of Courbevoie. (In 2008, in what Tech-

Crunch called “probably the biggest hoax in the history of Facebook,” he managed to convince much of the French media that he had been elected the president of Facebook, but this was the real deal.) His issue is *le gaspillage alimentaire*—food waste. *Le Monde* recently called him an “hyperactiviste” for the cause. Two weeks earlier, a law for which he had lobbied tirelessly—petitioning lawmakers and posing with cast-off carrots—went into effect, requiring French restaurants that produce more than ten metric tons of food waste a year to recycle their scraps. Last year, Derambarsh successfully promoted a measure obliging supermarkets to donate unsold food to charity. The recent legislation merely suggested that restaurants offer to-go containers to clients, but word had circulated, instantly becoming urban legend: doggy bags *à l’américaine* were now mandatory in France.

“The literal translation is *sac à chien*,” *Sud-Ouest* explained, in a tutorial. “It’s a bag in which the client of a restaurant wraps up the food that he hasn’t finished, in order to serve it to his dog once he gets home. This practice is very well known in Anglo-Saxon and Asian countries, but still in the embryonic stage in France. Of course, if you don’t have a dog, you can also consume the remains

of your most recent meal yourself.” Judging from the comments section, diners were not entirely won over. “Impossible for me, I’d be too ashamed,” one wrote. Another declared, “The ‘mutt bag’ in which you mix starter, main course, and dessert?? If I give him that, my dog is going to bite me!!!”

Derambarsh acknowledged that, among his countrymen, the doggy bag suffered a stigma: “People think it means that you’re hungry or you’re poor.”

The proprietor of the café—belly, suspenders, glasses on a cord—sidled up to the table. He knew Derambarsh, a regular. He said that he had overheard a snippet of the conversation.



"Between us, it's not real, this law," he whispered.

An American fond of takeout vessels in all their forms—pizza boxes, oyster pails, aluminum-foil swans—asked how many doggy bags he'd given out.

"One, since the beginning of the year," he said. "Without doubt, foreigners." He paused for the punch line. "And it was salad that they took. Fuck, *salad!*"

Derambarsh couldn't help taking the debate to the adjacent table, where a distinguished-looking woman was eating (a salad) by herself.

"What do you think?" he said.

"I adore the U.S. and I adore doggy bags," she answered.

She was a professor of English, it turned out, who'd seen her first doggy bag (barbecued ribs) on a pier in San Francisco around 1979. "It didn't exist *chez nous*," she recalled. "Americans are pragmatic, but the French are very conservative."

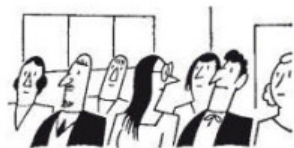
In addition to being tacky, the doggy bag, its opponents argue, devalues the work of the chef. A person who puts his leftovers in a hot car might get food poisoning. Consider tartares, seafood, chocolate mousses, dishes with mayonnaise! Restaurateurs could be sued. To combat such worries, the Ministry of Agriculture has come up with a name change: *le gourmet bag*, "a new appellation, more prestigious and *gourmande*."

"The doggy bag won't change the world, but the supermarket law will," Derambarsh asserted. He said that he would like Barack Obama to pass the same law in the U.S.

Derambarsh ordered an espresso. He didn't ask for a doggy bag. His *entrecôte* was history. Neither did the American, who had cleaned her plate down to the last caper.

—Lauren Collins

HOMECOMING SONIA FROM THE BRONX



SONIA SOTOMAYOR, Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, says that she prefers to be called Sonia from the Bronx. Chances are nobody who meets her ever dreams of calling her

anything so informal. When she came back to her native borough last week for an Evening of Conversation at the Bronx Defenders, a nonprofit organization on East 161st Street that provides attorneys for about half the indigent defendants in the Bronx, the executive director, Robin Steinberg, greeted her and nearly fainted to see her, live and in person. The Justice wore mostly black—black capelike coat with dark imitation-fur collar, black dress, and an unbuttoned black below-the-knee sweater with two horizontal white stripes. Her face and hands stood out as in an old, mostly dark painting.

The Bronx Defenders provides help for its clients not only in criminal cases but in all kinds of situations that involve encounters with bureaucracy. When a person gets arrested, he or she might also lose child custody, food stamps, housing, etc. The organization takes what it calls a holistic approach to fixing its clients' problems. Two hundred and fifty people, most of them young, do this work. The Justice walked through the offices, with an entourage. A woman named Ashley Guzman shook her hand. Guzman had spent the day trying to find better housing for a homeless woman who was about to get an operation. The Justice smiled and leaned toward Guzman and asked what her job was. "I'm a legal advocate," Guzman replied. "Legal advocate," the Justice repeated. Then, with a penetrating gaze, she said, "What does that mean?" Guzman explained, and the Justice listened, nodding.

An audience of a hundred and fifty invitees—students, lawyers, a city councilwoman, Bronx Defenders staff and clients—waited in a nearby reception area for the Q. & A. session. "It will just be a minute. We are getting the Justice miked," Steinberg told the assembly. Then Sotomayor appeared, to huge applause. During Steinberg's intro, the Justice sat in an armchair on a small dais and rested her hands at the ends of the chair arms, judge style. But when she began to talk, in an unmistakable Bronx accent, she moved and gestured and made jokes and ended by walking around in the audience right up to anyone who asked

her a question. She told about a "Perry Mason" episode she saw as a girl, and how impressed she was when Hamilton Burger, the D.A. who lost every week, said he was proud of doing the right thing when the guilty were convicted and the innocent set free. That made her interested in becoming a district attorney, and early in her career she did become one, after a chance encounter with the Manhattan D.A. at the time, Robert Morgenthau, on a cheese line at a reception. "You may have your career all planned out, but when a chance comes you have to be flexible enough to jump."

She said that her confirmation hearings were a horrible experience and really got her down, but she discovered a lot about the rest of the country during her one-on-one interviews with senators. "I learned what a big issue water rights are out west," she said. "That's not something we think about in New York." Sotomayor said that after she won confirmation, and Elena Kagan followed her, President Obama asked Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, "Are you happy with the two sisters I brought you?" Ginsburg replied, "I'm very, very happy. But I'll be even happier when you give me five more."

To a question about whether she had a mantra she used for empowerment, Sotomayor answered that she is not a religious fanatic, but sometimes in her job she says "Oh, my God, help me!" and means it. Sometimes one of her colleagues drives her crazy. If certain colleagues are acrimonious in their minority opinions, she makes allowances, because she knows they're unhappy that they lost, and they are passionate about their beliefs. She tries to get along with all her colleagues, even the ones she usually disagrees with, because "we're going to be there for a long time."

Most of the people at the event had never seen a Supreme Court Justice in person before. At a dinner for thirty-five guests afterward, the Justice went around the table and talked to each person. A man who had once met a Justice's brother asked whether she remembered the first Justice she ever met. "What an interesting question!" Sotomayor said. "Hmm. Let me think." She crossed her arms and looked off into the distance, and everyone in

the vicinity held their breath in the presence of such an amazing quality of thinking. (Answer: Chief Justice William Rehnquist, many years ago, at a law-related social gathering.)

—Ian Frazier

DEPT. OF ENTHUSIASMS SLEIGHT OF NO HANDS



AS THE Blizzard of '16 approached the city gate, Ricky Jay, the sui-generis conjurer, scholar, storyteller, actor, antiquarian collector, and incorrigible perfectionist, knew what not to do. A couple of weeks earlier, he and his wife, Chrisann Verges, had arrived from Los Angeles at their pied-à-terre on the Upper West Side. They'd been all over town, and the only remaining item of business before heading home was the opening party, a few days later, of "Wordplay: Matthias Buchinger's Drawings from the Collection of Ricky Jay," at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The more Fargo-like the view from the living-room window, the more determined Jay was to stay put until it felt safe to summon Uber.

On an icy, windy morning last winter, a misstep on Lafayette Street had left him with a fractured rib and, more consequentially, a fractured right wrist.

The timing could have been worse, but not much. He was far behind schedule on "Matthias Buchinger: 'The Greatest German Living,'" a biography-slash-collecting memoir-slash-catalogue. With no choice but to persevere, he did, sometimes dictating, otherwise typing with two fingers, as the wrist healed. Two surgeries, one titanium plate, and seven screws later, the book has just been published, and Jay is back to polishing his sleight-of-hand chops. Old dictum, new iteration: as with a magical effect, when snow clouds materialize nothing should be left to chance.

Buchinger himself never experienced the luxury of a broken wrist. Born near Nuremberg in 1674, he congenitally lacked hands and feet. One of his arms terminated just below the elbow, the other above where an elbow should have been, and his legs stopped at mid-thigh. He was twenty-nine inches tall yet manifestly a giant. Somehow—Jay's biography, though it comes as close as any source to explaining the how of how, still leaves a reader at the intersection of belief and disbelief—he did magic (specialty: cups-and-balls), played several instruments (dulcimer, trumpet, flute), trick-shot with pistols, demonstrated exquisite ball control at skittles, danced the hornpipe on his leather-encased stumps, married four times, and sired fourteen children (proof, as Jay noted in "Learned Pigs and Fireproof Women," of "one fully operative appendage").

None of this is incidental, but what makes the Met show beguiling is its focus on Buchinger's breathtaking gifts as a calligrapher—more to the point, a micro-calligrapher. Among the twenty-six works from Jay's collection, for instance, is an engraving based upon a self-portrait, approximately eight by twelve inches, from 1724. Hidden within the curls of Buchinger's periwig are seven complete Psalms and the Lord's Prayer. The words are barely legible without a magnifying glass. Jay has uncovered no evidence that Buchinger used one himself.

One recent morning, Jay guided some friends through the gallery. Freyda Spira, the show's curator, had included seventy-odd works, spanning eight centuries, by other artists who deployed letters and words. A couple named Bob and Susan Halpern ("This just caught our eye on the way to the Egyptians") studied a page of fourteenth-century Hebrew calligraphy, and Jay accompanied them across the room to three drawings by a contemporary Israeli artist, Jacob El Hanani, whose densely inscribed Hebrew micrography rivals Buchinger's infinitesimal Biblical passages. (El Hanani, however, has hands.) After holding a magnifying glass a few inches from one El Hanani piece, Bob Halpern said, "I can't see bubkes."

Time for lunch. In the Members Dining Room, Jay found a table that allowed him to sit with his back to the wall, and, as he studied a Buchinger-themed tasting menu, Thomas Campbell, the Met's director, stopped by. "Ricky, hi," Campbell said. "Your show is a runaway success."

"How nice," Jay said.

"Sorry to interrupt you," Campbell said. "I'll be seated right over here, eavesdropping on your conversation."

The first course arrived—smoked sturgeon with crème fraîche and caviar—followed by skate schnitzel with red cabbage, juniper, and quince. After a couple of bites, Jay said, "It's the best skate schnitzel I've ever had. Not that I can say I like it."

He took a pencil-thin breadstick from a basket. "Buchinger loved these," he said, and dipped it in a green broccoli-rabe pesto. "It's not a very good breadstick. But as a writing instrument it has possibilities."

—Mark Singer





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LAST MONDAY was all too typical of this year's stock-market mayhem. Although a rally at the end of the previous week had raised investors' hopes, the major indexes opened down and slid lower as the day progressed. By the market's close, the S.&P. 500 had dropped 1.56 per cent, leaving it down eight per cent on the year. But there was something odd. The slide had not been occasioned by bad news on the corporate front; earnings reports were generally good. Nor was it a reaction to trouble in China, which has been a major source of anxiety for investors; the Shanghai index had finished up. Rather, the decline was a response to just one fact: the price of oil had fallen more than five per cent, to just above thirty dollars a barrel. These days, as oil goes, so goes the stock market.

Since December, there's been a nearly ninety-per-cent correlation between oil prices and stock prices. When oil has dropped, stocks have followed, and when oil prices have stabilized, stocks have tended to rise. This is historically unusual, and it's confusing, too. There are only a few parts of the stock market where cheap oil is legitimately bad news—oil producers and suppliers, obviously, and also banks that have lent money to American shale-oil drillers. For most companies, though, cheap energy is a boon. It lowers operating costs and gives consumers more money to spend. Yet even companies that reap huge benefits from cheap oil are currently taking a beating. Airline stocks have tracked the price of oil almost perfectly, even though cheap oil saved the four major American carriers more than eleven billion dollars last year.

So why does the market see cheap oil as a curse rather than as a blessing? There are a couple of reasons. First, investors fear that oil prices are telling us something important about the state of the global economy. The idea is that oil is cheap because global demand—and, in particular, demand from China—is weak. This sounds plausible, but the oil market is an incredibly cloudy crystal ball. Take the summer of 2008. At the time, the global economy was already in recession, thanks to the bursting of the housing bubble. Yet, week after week, oil prices kept climbing, peaking at a record hundred and forty-seven dollars a barrel. Oil prices revealed nothing at all about future demand, which was about to collapse; they were disconnected from what was happening in the global economy. One could tell a similar story about 1986, when oil prices tumbled by almost seventy per cent in the space of four months. Was that decline a harbinger of

an economic downturn in the U.S.? No: the U.S. economy continued to motor along for years afterward.

The folly of reading too much into oil prices is that they are tremendously volatile, often driven more by the industry's internal dynamics than by the economy at large. Boom-and-bust cycles are common in the industry, as it goes from overproduction to steep cuts and back again. The most plausible explanation for the drop in oil prices over the past nineteen months, in fact, has nothing to do with weak demand. As Ethan Harris, the co-head of global research at Bank America Merrill Lynch, points out, "Over this entire period, global oil consumption has been growing at a solid pace, with no sign of a slowdown." Instead, prices have fallen because of a huge increase in supply, thanks to various factors, including the boom in shale-oil production in the U.S., the revitalization of Iraq's oil industry, and, most recently, the lifting of sanctions on Iran.

Investors aren't just worried that oil is the canary in the global coal mine, though. They're also worried that low oil prices are, in themselves, hurting the U.S. economy. For instance, as oil prices have plummeted, shale-oil drillers have sharply reduced their investments, and that has hit places like North Dakota and Oklahoma hard. These setbacks are real, but they should be seen in proportion. Even after the shale revolution, the U.S. is still very much a net consumer of oil, importing five million more barrels of oil a day than it exports. That means that the drop in oil prices has amounted to a windfall for consumers—one that Harris estimates saved them a hundred and ninety billion dollars over the past six quarters. In other words, cheap oil means Americans have an extra ten billion dollars in their



pockets every month. And that's translating into higher consumer spending: an October study by the JPMorgan Chase Institute found that consumers spent around seventy to ninety cents of every dollar they saved from lower gas prices. Harris told me, "The negative impacts of low oil prices are very visible—the collapse of investment, the struggling companies—while the positive impacts are very subtle." But that doesn't make the benefits less significant. As Harris says, "The long-run story is clear: the U.S. is better off with low, rather than high, oil prices."

In fundamental terms, then, the stock market's oil obsession is hard to justify. The problem is that, once a pattern gets established in the market, it can take on a life of its own. After all, if you think that everyone else is planning to sell when oil prices fall, then you're probably getting ready to do so yourself. That's especially true during periods of uncertainty about the state of the economy. At such times, the herd instinct takes over. The oil market is far more noise than signal. But right now it's the only sound that investors seem able to hear.

—James Surowiecki

BECAUSE SOMEDAY

I'll have time to read more
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COVER STORY

The head scarf, modern Turkey, and me.

BY ELIF BATUMAN



IN 1924, a year after founding the Turkish Republic on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the country's new leader, abolished the Ottoman Caliphate, which had been the last remaining Sunni Islamic Caliphate since 1517. Having introduced a secular constitution and a Western-style civil and criminal legal code, Atatürk shut down the dervish lodges and religious schools, abolished polygamy, and introduced civil marriage and a national beauty contest. He granted women the right to vote, to hold property, to become supreme-court justices, and to run for office. The head scarf was discouraged. A notorious 1925 "Hat Law" outlawed the fez and turban; the only acceptable male headgear was a Western-style hat

with a brim. The Ottoman Arabic script was replaced by a Latin alphabet, and the language itself was "cleansed" of Arabic and Persian elements.

At the time, my grandparents were either very young or not yet born. Only my mother's father was old enough to remember throwing his fez in the air on the Sultan's birthday. My parents were born into a secular country. They met in Turkey's top medical school, moved to America in the nineteen-seventies, and became researchers and professors. Both were, and continue to be, passionate supporters of Atatürk. I grew up hearing that if it hadn't been for Atatürk my grandmother would have been "a covered person" who would have been reliant on a man for her livelihood.

Instead, she went to boarding school, wrote a thesis on Balzac, and became a teacher. I felt grateful to Atatürk that my parents were so well educated, that they weren't held back by superstition or religion, that they were true scientists, who taught me how to read when I was three and never doubted that I could become a writer.

My father grew up in Adana, not far from the Syrian border. His family was Alevi—part of Turkey's Shia minority—and one of his earliest memories was waking up to hear his grandfather reciting the Koran in Arabic. My father experienced his first religious doubts at the age of twelve, when he discovered Bergson and Comte in an Adana bookstore, and read that religion was part of a primitive and pre-scientific state of civilization; he has been an atheist since his teens. My mother grew up in Ankara, Atatürk's capital. Her father, one of the civil engineers who helped to modernize Anatolia, was politically a staunch secularist and privately a devout Muslim (though not a proponent of head scarves, which nobody in the family wore). In grade school, my mother read what the Koran said about skeptics—that God would close their eyes and ears—and got so depressed that she didn't get out of bed for two days. Her parents told her that God was more merciful than she thought, and that people who did good would go to Heaven on the Day of Judgment, regardless of what they believed. I have always known my mother as an agnostic, less certain than my father that the universe hadn't been created by some great intelligence. But she would get even more annoyed than my father did when she thought that people were invoking God to do their jobs for them—for example, when she saw a bus with a sticker saying "Allah Protect Us."

Both my parents always told me that, in order to be a good person, it was neither necessary nor desirable to believe in God; it was more noble and efficient to do good for disinterested reasons, without thoughts of Heaven. Nothing in the milieu where I grew up, in New Jersey in the eighties and early nineties, contradicted the idea I formed of religion as something unnecessary, unscientific, provincial—essentially, uncool. For a long time, I thought there was an

immutable link between coolness and positivism. I thought this was the way of the world. Then came identity politics and, in Turkey, the rise of the Justice and Development Party (A.K.P.), a center-right party with Islamist roots. Its charismatic leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has been the head of state since 2003, after the A.K.P. won its first landslide victory

Suddenly, it was the secularists who seemed stodgy: racist, authoritarian, elitist, and slavishly pro-Western. The *Times* started referring to them as “the secular elite.” In 2007, the *Times* reported that a protest of the A.K.P. by hundreds of thousands of Turkish secularists was motivated in part by a “fear” of the life styles of their more religious compatriots—by “snobbish” complaints that “religious Turks were uneducated and poor” and that “their pesky prayer rugs got underfoot in hospital halls.” It’s difficult to imagine the *Times* reporting in an equally condescending manner about the elitism of Americans who oppose the Christian right. The Western view of Erdoğan eventually soured, especially after the Gezi protests of 2013; he was criticized for alleged corruption and for increasingly authoritarian tactics toward journalists and opposition parties. But for a number of years all my American liberal friends who had any opinion at all on Turkey were pro-Erdoğan. They thought it had been unsustainable for Turkey to repress and deny its religion for so long—that the people had finally spoken out.

Many spoke warmly of the anthropologist Jenny White, an important scholar of modern Turkey whose book “Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks” characterizes the pro-Atatürk Kemalist culture as one of “militarism, hostility, suspicion, and authoritarianism” rooted in “blood-based Turkish ethnicity.” Muslim nationalism, by contrast, has sought to replace “historically embattled Republican borders” with “more flexible Ottoman imperial boundaries” and to “privilege Muslim identity and culture over race.” In the A.K.P.-sympathetic world view, the Ottomans, whom Kemalists had blamed for selling Turkey to the British, enjoyed a vogue as models of enlightened Muslim multiculturalism.

I could see that every slight to Kemalism was a knife in my parents’ hearts.

For my part, I wasn’t sure what to think. Unlike them, I was educated in America. To me, as to most Americans, it seemed a tiny bit weird that nearly every public building in Turkey had a picture of Atatürk on the wall. I also knew that, in order for the Turkish Republic to succeed, millions of people had been obliged to change their language, their clothes, and their way of life, all at once, because Atatürk said so. I knew that people who had been perceived as threats to the state—religious leaders, Marxists, Kurds, Greeks, Armenians—were deported, exiled, imprisoned, tortured, or killed. I knew that, even at the start of the twenty-first century, there still weren’t enough checks on the military, and that women who wore head scarves were subject to discrimination, barred from certain jobs and universities.

Furthermore, when I thought about my own family, something about White’s critique of Kemalism felt familiar: the sense of embattlement and paranoia. Kemalism, not unlike Zionism, drew much of its energy from the fact that there could easily have been no Turkish state. At the end of the First World War, the victorious Allied powers assumed control over nearly all Anatolia; they divided some of it up into British and French mandates, and parcelled much of the rest out to the Greeks, the Armenians, and the Kurds. Before Atatürk was a lawmaker, he was a military commander, the leader of the Turkish War of Independence; and, from a military perspective, all those people and nations were anti-Turkish (as were the Arabs, who supported Britain in the First World War). My parents always dreamed of a post-nationalist world; as a small child, my mother prayed to Allah every night that the United Nations would be formed and there would be no more countries or wars. At the same time, I remember being warned as a child that there were anti-Turkish people in the world, people who held old grudges and could cause problems. For a while, Erdoğan really did seem to be trying to counter this kind of adversarial thinking—to open up business and diplomatic relations with Turkey’s neighbors, to lift the taboos on mentioning the “Kurdish issue” and the Armenian genocide. Under the A.K.P., a Kurdish-language channel debuted on

Do you control your emotions or do your emotions control you?

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Detail from White, *Time with Living Life Differently: Rubin Museum of Art, gift of the Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996.30.1 (p.44) 5.21.16 © 2016 Whitney Museum of American Art*

Turkish national television; in 2009, Erdoğan went on the air and expressed good wishes in Kurdish. This would have been unthinkable a short time earlier.

IN 2010, I moved to Istanbul, where I taught at a university and reported for this magazine for three years. I found that, much like America, Turkey was polarizing into two camps that were increasingly unable to communicate with each other. There was a new dichotomy I had never heard of before: the “white Turks” (Westernized secular élites in Istanbul and Ankara) versus the “black Turks” (the pious Muslim middle and lower-middle classes of Anatolia). The black Turks were the underdogs, while the white Turks were the racists who despised them. Jenny White writes, “The term ‘Black Turk’ is used by Kemalists to disparage Turks of lower-class or peasant heritage, who are considered to be uncivilized, patriarchal, not modern, and mired in Islam, even if they have moved into the middle class.” Erdoğan proudly declared that he was a black Turk.

The black and white breakdown was difficult for me to understand. My mother’s family—fair-skinned Ankara professionals who once had a chauffeur and a gardener—clearly fit the “white” profile. My father’s relatives in Adana were generally less educated and darker-complexioned. His father owned a store that sold textile dye to shepherds. There was a brief time when my father wore a mustache. Yet my father had written the essay in praise of Atatürk in his high-school yearbook, his sisters were pro-choice, none of the women in his family wore head scarves except to do housework, and I had never heard any of them express the remotest hint of nostalgia for the Ottoman past. I had heard relatives on both sides of my family worry that, if Atatürk’s reforms were undone, Turkey could end up “like Iran.” So who were my father’s family—also white Turks?

In Istanbul, I became careful about how I talked, careful not to sound—not to *be*—Orientalist or Islamophobic. One evening, while I was hanging out at my apartment with a Turkish friend, our conversation was interrupted by the call to prayer, which was amplified by loudspeakers. In my apartment, as in most

points in the city, you could hear the competing calls from several mosques going off at the same time, five times a day. Often, when I was walking around the city, I liked hearing the call to prayer. Some people were really good at it. (My mother had often told me that when her father was a boy he had such a beautiful voice and knew the prayer so well that he would fill in when the regular muezzin was sick.) Still, when I was at home with the windows closed, working or trying to have a conversation, the sound of amplified male voices extolling Islam always felt somehow invasive. “I know I sound like an asshole, but I really get mad sometimes,” I confessed to my friend. “Oh, no, are you an Islamophobe?” he said playfully. He advised me to think of the imam as “a singer, like Michael Jackson.”

BECAUSE I spoke Turkish imperfectly, smiled a lot, and often travelled alone, I got a lot of lectures from men, particularly taxi-drivers. Some were secularists; others, those with the most religious paraphernalia in their cars, didn’t try to make conversation. That still left many outgoing, casually Muslim driv-

If a friend calls out to you late at night from beneath your window
Never send him on his way. And if you’ve sent him away and still
Insist on rigid rules, regain your composure after a moment
And run to the window and shout his name: “Come, Merhav!
Come back! I’ve got some corn cooking! Come eat something.”
And he’ll placidly retrace his steps and gladly accept
The key you toss down from your window,
Will come upstairs to the first floor and will be impressed
By the large pictures on the walls.
He’ll sit and wait for you to slip into a clean shirt and you’ll put on
The movie in the kid’s room and your baby daughter
Will rush to the kitchen and come back with a red pepper for him.
He’ll decline the warm corn and say he’s already had dinner.
In the meantime your husband will chat with him about Tai Chi
And pour him a glass of cold sweet pineapple juice.
You’ll return to the living room
And go out to the balcony and light a cigarette and sip
A cold beer. You don’t yet realize
That this is a sublime moment in your life.
One of the most sublime you’ll ever know.

—Hagit Grossman

(Translated, from the Hebrew, by Benjamin Balint.)

ers who took the time to explain to me how great the head scarf was—how it was “actually a beautiful thing.” For a woman to cover her head, they said, was in fact a feminist gesture, because it made clear she was demanding respect. There weren’t the same misunderstandings as with a woman whose head was uncovered.

I usually didn’t reply, especially if the driver seemed at all excitable, because when those drivers started to argue they would stop watching the road, and a lot of the cabs didn’t have seat belts. But once, when a driver pressed me particularly jovially for an opinion, I said something like “I think all women should be respected. It shouldn’t depend on their hair.”

The driver replied that I was absolutely right, that of course women should be respected, and that the head scarf was the best way for women to remind men of this necessity for respect. Men, after all, were worse than women: they could sometimes forget themselves, and then unfortunate things could happen, “even”—he said in a hushed voice, adding that he didn’t like to mention such things in front of me—“even rape.”

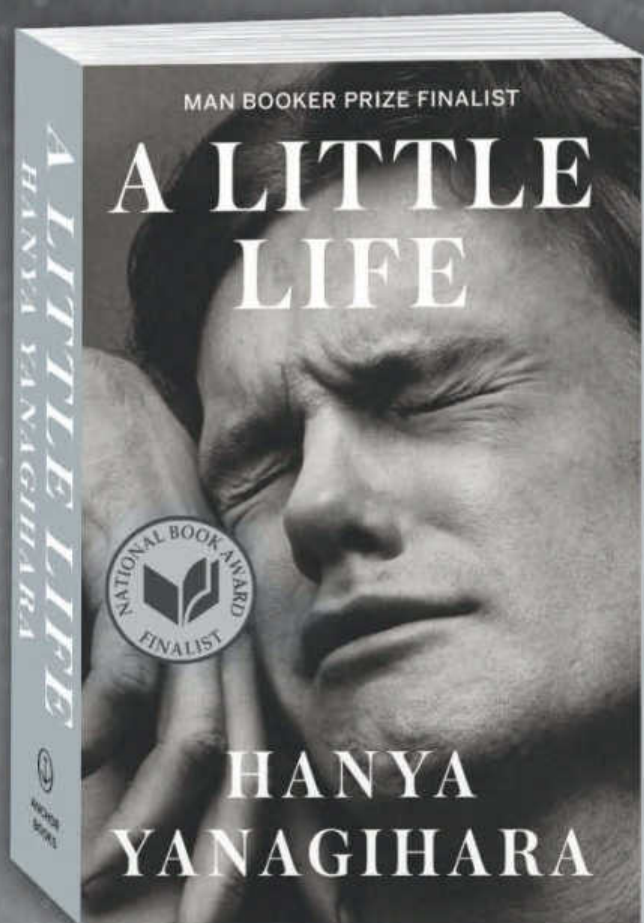
I replied, in my simplistic Turkish, that to me this sounded like a threat: either cover your head or rape can happen. The driver protested in ornate phrases that nobody was threatening anyone, that to speak of threats in this situation was unfitting, that he could tell from my smiling face that I was a good and trusting person, but that the world was an imperfect place, that some men were less like humans than like animals, and that it was best to send clear signals about what one was or wasn't looking for. Then he left me at the fish restaurant where I was going to meet some literature professors.

If it had been just the two of us in the taxi in a political vacuum, I wouldn't have begrudged the driver his opinions. It was his car and his country, and he was driving me where I wanted to go. I knew that my limited Turkish, which felt like such a handicap, was in his eyes a marker of privilege—a sign that I could afford to travel and live abroad. Often, the second question drivers asked, after the invariable “Where are you from?,” was “How much did the plane ticket cost?”

But the cab wasn't in a vacuum; it was in a country where the head of state, whose wife wore a head scarf, repeatedly urged all women to have at least three children, preferably four or five. Erdoğan opposed abortion, birth control, and Cesarean section. He said that Islam had set out a clear position for women, but that you couldn't explain it to feminists, because they “don't accept the concept of motherhood.” The longer he stayed in office, the more outspoken he became. In 2014, he went so far as to describe birth control as “treason” designed “to dry up our bloodline.” No matter how hard I tried to be tolerant—no matter how sympathetic I felt toward Muslim feminists who didn't want to be “liberated” from the veil, and who felt just as judged by the secularist establishment as secular women felt by the Muslim patriarchy—I could never forgive Erdoğan for saying those things about women. And, because he said them in the name of Islam, I couldn't forgive Islam, either.

IN THE fall of 2011, I travelled to southeastern Anatolia to report on a newly discovered Neolithic site that archaeologists thought might have been the world's first temple. The site, Göbekli

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 **ANCHOR BOOKS**



"Your appointment's been cancelled. You took too long filling out those forms."

Tepe, was near the city of Urfa, a Muslim holy destination, believed to be the birthplace of Abraham. (The town, near the Syrian border, is now one of the points through which foreign fighters pass in order to join ISIS.) I seemed to be the only unaccompanied woman at my hotel. When I told the clerk I was staying for six days, he almost had a heart attack. "Six days?" he repeated. "All by yourself?" When I asked about the hours of the steam bath, he said it was for men only—not just at that time of day but all the time. I took the elevator up to my room, filled with the depressing knowledge that there would be no alcohol in the minibar. All the time I was in Urfa, whenever I saw any member of the hotel staff in the halls or the lobby, I always received the same greeting: "Oh, you're still here?"

I had a hard time finding a taxi to take me to the archeological site. In the end, the hotel receptionist called a driver he knew: a surly guy with no meter, who charged an exorbitant fifty-five dollars round trip, and sighed and muttered under his breath the whole way. He didn't answer his phone when I called him to pick me up, and I ended up having to

hitchhike. Thinking that life might be easier if I had my own car, I made an appointment for six the next evening at a Europcar location supposedly on Urfa's 749 Street. I got so lost that, by seven, I was still wandering up and down a mysterious stretch of road that seemed to start out as 771 Street and then to become, without any visible change, 764 Street. I had walked several times past the same convenience store, catching the attention of a bread-delivery man.

"Are you looking for something?" the deliveryman asked. I showed him the address. He showed it to another guy. They debated for a long time whether there was or was not a 749 Street. A third guy came out of the store and joined in the conversation. I waited for a few minutes, but it was clear that they were never going to agree, and, anyway, the Europcar was already closed. I thanked them for their help and walked back to the city center to get something to eat.

Most of the restaurants in Urfa had a sign that said "family restaurant," meaning there was one room that was for men only and one "family room," where women were allowed. The one I chose had its family room on the roof. There

were two or three families sitting up there, with children. The remaining tables were empty. I sat at a table for four people, in a corner. The families had a lot of requests, and I was unable to get the waiter's attention. I had been sitting there for several minutes when I got a phone call from a friend in Istanbul. When I started talking, in English, two of the women at a nearby table turned and stared at me, open-mouthed. I thought that maybe they thought I was being rude for talking on a cell phone.

"I'll call you back," I told my friend.

Even after I hung up, the women didn't stop staring. I tried smiling and waving, but they neither waved back nor looked away. The waiter, who still hadn't taken my order, was standing in a corner gazing up at a ceiling-mounted TV. I gave up and went back to my hotel room, where I ate tahini rolls while reading about the Neolithic Revolution.

THE MAIN tourist and religious sites in Urfa—an ancient castle, numerous mosques, a cave where Abraham may have been born and suckled by a deer for ten years, and a lake of sacred carp believed to mark the spot where Nimrod tried to burn Abraham alive (God turned the cinders into fish) are all in or around a shady green park, with fountains and rosebushes. I went there every day to escape the heat. Women had to wear head scarves at the holy sites, so I bought one at the market and always kept it in my bag. It was soft, gauzy, spring green, with a pattern of tiny intricate vines and leaves.

One day, when I had been visiting Abraham's cave, I forgot to take the scarf off. Walking back through the park, I almost immediately felt that something was different. I passed two beautiful young women in scarves, walking arm-in-arm and laughing about something. When I looked at them, they looked right back into my face and met my eyes, still smiling, as if we were all in the presence of a great joke. I realized that no young women had met my eyes or smiled at me in Urfa till then. As I walked on, I felt a rising sense of freedom, as if for the first time I could look wherever I wanted and not risk receiving a hostile glance. So I kept the scarf on. And then I went back into the city.

This isn't a scientific study; I didn't try it multiple times, or measure anything. All I have is my subjective impression, which is this: walking through the city with a head scarf was a completely different experience. People were *so much nicer*. Nobody looked away when I approached. I felt less jostled; men seemed to step aside, to give me more room. When I went into a store, a man held the door for me, and I realized that it was the first time anyone had reached a door before me without going in first and letting it shut in my face. Most incredibly, when I got to a bus stop shortly after the bus had pulled away, the departing vehicle stopped in the middle of the street, the door opened, and a man reached out his hand to help me in, calling me "sister." It felt amazing. To feel so welcomed and accepted and safe, to be able to look into someone's face and smile, and have the smile returned—it was a wonderful gift.

How long can I keep wearing it? I found myself thinking, as the bus lurched into motion and cars honked around us. The rest of the day? Forever?

I wondered why it hadn't occurred to me sooner to try wearing a head scarf—why nobody ever told me it was something I could do. It wasn't difficult, or expensive. Why should I not cover my head here, if it made the people who lived here feel so much better? Why should I cause needless discomfort to them and to myself? Out of principle? What principle? The principle that women were equal to men? To whom was I communicating that principle? With what degree of success? What if I thought I was communicating one thing but what people understood was something else—what if what they understood was that I disapproved of them and thought their way of life was backward? Did that still count as "communicating"?

I found myself thinking about high heels. High heels were painful, and, for me at least, expensive, because they made walking more difficult and I ended up taking more taxis. Yet there were many times when I wore heels to work-related events in New York, specifically because I felt it made people treat me with more consideration. Why, then, would I refuse to wear a head scarf, which brought a similar benefit of social acceptance, without the disadvantage of

impeding my ability to stand or walk?

And yet, when I thought about leaving the scarf on for the rest of my stay, something about it felt dishonest, almost shameful, as if I were duping people into being kind to me. Those girls who smiled into my eyes—they thought I was like them. The guy who helped me on the bus—he thought I was his sister.

At that point, another thought came to me, a kind of fantasy, so foreign that I could barely articulate it even to myself: *What if I really did it?* What if I wore a scarf not as a disguise but somehow for real? I was thirty-four, and I'd been having a lot of doubts about the direction my life was taking. I had had an abortion the previous year, with some reluctance, and everything—every minor defeat, every sign of unfriendliness—still hurt a little extra. I had never felt so alone, and in a way that seemed suddenly to have been of my design, as if I had chosen this life without realizing it, years earlier, when I set out to become a writer. And now a glimmer appeared before me of a totally different way of being than any I had imagined, a life with clear rules and duties that you followed, in exchange for which you were respected and honored and safe. You had children—not maybe but definitely. You didn't have to worry that your social value was irrevocably tied to your sexual value. You had less freedom, true. But what was so great about freedom? What was so great about being a journalist and going around being a pain in everyone's ass, having people either be suspicious and mean to you or try to use you for their P.R. strategy? Travelling alone, especially as a woman, especially in a patriarchal culture, can be really stressful. It can make you question the most basic priorities around which your life is arranged. Like: Why do I have a job that makes me travel alone? For literature? What's literature?

THESE THOUGHTS recently came back to me when I read "Submission," the latest novel by Michel Houellebecq, a satire set in a 2022 France ruled by democratically elected Islamic moderates. The Islam in "Submission" is largely a fantasy designed, by Houellebecq, to

appeal to someone just like Houellebecq, with lavishly funded universities, fantastic meze, freely flowing French and Lebanese wines, and multiple teen wives for every intellectual who converts to Islam. But the political rhetoric of the movement's leader, Mohammed Ben Abbes, is well reasoned and coherent, bearing a certain resemblance to Erdoğan's actual platform, and presented with a frankness and lucidity that made me understand the logic of the A.K.P. in a way I never had before.

Internationally, Ben Abbes seeks to transform Europe into a Mediterranean and North African union of Muslim states: a program similar to the "neo-Islamism" of Ahmet Davutoğlu, the A.K.P. prime minister. Domestically, Ben Abbes supports entrepreneurialism, family businesses, and the free market; socially, he seeks to bolster Muslim education and to encourage women to be stay-at-home mothers, while continuing to tout the supreme value of democratic rule. I had never understood how all these goals were related, or even compatible. How could someone who opposed feminism—who was O.K. with half the population being less educated than the other half—be in favor of democracy? How could a democratic constitution not be secular? How could it be compatible with any of the Abrahamic faiths, with anything that came out of that cave in Urfa? I had always assumed that Erdoğan was being insincere about

something: either he was just pretending to care about democracy or he was just pretending to care about Muslim family values—or, as my relatives said, he was pretending both about democracy and Islam, and the only thing he really cared about was building more shopping malls with Gulf money.

Reading "Submission," I saw that there is, in fact, a logical consistency in the Islamist moderate free-trade platform. Democracy, like capitalism, is a numbers game, and "family values" is a machine that boosts the population. As one Houellebecq character puts it:

Couples who follow one of the three religions of the Book and maintain patriarchal values have more children than atheists or agnostics. You see less education among women,



less hedonism and individualism. And to a large degree, this belief in transcendence can be passed on genetically. Conversions, or cases where people grow up to reject family values, are statistically insignificant. In the vast majority of cases, people stick with whatever metaphysical system they grow up in. That's why atheist humanism—the basis of any “pluralist society”—is doomed.

The atheist humanists in Houellebecq's 2022 are doomed, not just to extinction but also to uncoolness. The 1968 movement in Europe, much like the Kemalist revolution in Turkey, was once youthful and countercultural, and then it won, and itself became an old and crumbling establishment. Ben Abbes, Houellebecq writes, gets no trouble from “the last of the *soixante-huitards*, those progressive mummified corpses—extinct in the wider world—who managed to hang on in the citadels of the media.” The outnumbered, irrelevant zombies, still naïvely believing themselves to be the defenders of the downtrodden, are so “paralyzed” by the Muslims’ “multicultural background” that they don’t even put up a fight.

Houellebecq's narrator, François, is a middle-aged professor of French literature—a specialist in the novels of Joris-Karl Huysmans. Huysmans's “Against Nature” (1884), widely considered a masterpiece of the decadent movement, tells the story of a dissolute aristocrat who devotes his life to aesthetic pursuits, such as eating all-black meals and hanging around with a giant jewel-encrusted tortoise. These activities fail to bring him happiness, even as they seem to exhaust the possibilities of the decadent novel. Huysmans converted to Catholicism after writing “Against Nature.” The parallels between François and Huysmans's hero are clear. François, too, has devoted his life to aesthetic pursuits: reading, watching television, chain-smoking, drinking supermarket wine, and dating undergraduates. He, too, finds these indulgences empty and exhaustible: literature stops seeming interesting, and sex gets more difficult every year. In much the same way that Huysmans converted to Catholicism, François converts to Islam.

When the Muslim government subsidizes a Pléiade edition of Huysmans and commissions François to write an

introduction, he does some rereading and realizes, for the first time, that “Huysmans's true subject had been bourgeois happiness, a happiness painfully out of reach for a bachelor.” That was all Huysmans ever wanted: not the all-black meals, not the jewel-encrusted turtle, but simply “to have his artist friends over for a pot-au-feu with horseradish sauce, accompanied by an ‘honest’ wine and followed by plum brandy and tobacco, with everyone sitting by the stove while the winter winds battered the towers of Saint-Sulpice.” Such happiness is “painfully out of reach for a bachelor,” even a rich one with servants; it really depends on a wife who can cook and entertain, who can turn a house into a home.

This is the cost of bourgeois happiness, in Houellebecq's Islamic utopia: the independence of women. It's fascinating to see how Houellebecq rises to the challenge of making female domestic enslavement seem palatable in the novel, not just to the Islamo-curious François but also, to some extent, to the women of France. For example, early in the novel, François looks up two of his exes, successful single women in their forties; these scenes suggest, not implausibly, that the penalties of aging, and the psychic toll of dating and singleness, are even harder for women than for men, and that they aren't really balanced out by the joys of a career in, say, wine distribution or pharmaceuticals. François subsequently visits a female ex-colleague who has retired to domestic life pending the Islamization of the university. “To see her bustling around the kitchen in an apron bearing the humorous phrase ‘Don't Holler at the Cook—That's the Boss's Job!’, . . . it was hard to believe that just days ago she'd been leading a doctoral seminar on the altogether unusual circumstances surrounding Balzac's corrections to the proofs of *Beatrix*,” he observes. “She'd made us tartlets stuffed with ducks' necks and shallots, and they were delicious.” In a later passage, set on a train, François contrasts the visible stress of a Muslim businessman, who is having a clearly harrowing phone conversation, with the high spirits of his two teen wives, who are solving puzzles from the newspaper. Under the “Islamic regime,”

François realizes, women—or “at least the ones pretty enough to attract a rich husband”—live in an eternal childhood, first as children, then as mothers, with just a few years of “sexy underwear” in between: “Obviously they had no autonomy, but as they say in English, *fuck autonomy*.”

Houellebecq's vision of an Islamic state, for all its cartoonishness, has a certain imaginative generosity. He portrays Islam not as a depersonalized creeping menace, or as an ideological last resort to which those disenfranchised by the West may be “vulnerable,” but as a system of beliefs that is enormously appealing to many people, many of whom have other options. It's the same realization I reached in Urfa. Nobody has everything; everyone is trading certain things for others.

I DIDN'T WEAR the scarf again, after that afternoon. I couldn't explain it rationally, but it didn't feel right. I stuck to my original strategy of smiling and ignoring social cues—the American way. “In the vast majority of cases,” as a French intellectual once said, “people stick with whatever metaphysical system they grow up in.”

In the course of multiple trips to the site, the surly taxi-driver gradually opened up, especially after I complimented him on the skill with which he avoided hitting pedestrians at the last possible second. “That was nothing,” the driver said, and told me about the time he had managed not to run over an old man who was walking right down the middle of the road as if it were the sidewalk, and who, in response to the driver's honking, simply stood where he was and shouted, “Pretend I'm a tree.”

“How can you reason with someone like that?” the driver demanded, adding that when he drove in Urfa he conducted himself according to logic and not according to the traffic laws, because the rate of survival for someone who followed traffic laws had dropped to zero per cent.

We pulled up at the hotel. “So you're still with us,” the receptionist said, not unhumorously, when I walked in.

“Of course,” I replied. “What person who has come to Urfa would ever want to leave?” ♦

OFFICIAL AGENDA FOR YOUR SICK DAY

BY HALLIE CANTOR

8:00 A.M. Orient yourself to the idea of waking up with the preliminary goal of sussing out whether what you're feeling is normal alarm-clock-induced grogginess or actual illness.

8:15 A.M. Table the issue by hitting Snooze.

8:30 A.M. Synthesize the available data points: you're achy all over, you can't breathe out of your right nostril, it hurts to swallow, and your head weighs about

utes longer than it usually does, because you are so sick that every tiny action feels like a herculean task.

9:15 A.M. Perform the same e-mail and social-media checks you do every morning at work. But today you're doing them in pajamas!

10:00 A.M. Take this opportunity to touch base with all the TV shows you don't have time to watch when you're healthy. Each show will require no more than



ten thousand pounds. Reach consensus that you are, in fact, sick enough to stay home. Snooze again in celebration of your decision.

8:45 A.M. Draft an e-mail to your supervisors letting them know that you won't be coming in. Debate merits of phrasing it as "taking a sick day" versus "working from home today." If you write "working from home," you won't have to use a vacation day. But will everyone know that "working from home" actually means sleeping? Maybe you can do that thing where you just wake up every hour to send an e-mail so they think you've been at your computer the whole time.

9:00 A.M. Send e-mail. Next order of business: enjoying some guilt-free, luxurious, healing sleep.

9:01 A.M. Agenda updated to reflect new data: you can't sleep.

9:02 A.M. Relocate from your bed to the couch. This will take about twenty min-

ten minutes, because that's how long you're currently capable of paying attention to anything.

11:30 A.M. Consult minutes from previous days off and weekends to determine whether it's always this hard for you to relax. If you're using a whole vacation day for this, shouldn't you be having a better time? Aren't you capable of just *existing* in a state of physical discomfort without obsessing over how miserable you feel?

12:00 P.M. Lunch break. Seamless some soup and try to look extra sick when it arrives, so the delivery person doesn't think you're just lazy.

12:15 P.M. Acknowledge that you're weirdly lonely right now and that you miss everyone at the office.

12:20 P.M. Break out into several small discussion groups on Gchat to remedy this issue. Overwhelming trend: everyone is insufficiently compassionate about your possibly fatal ill-

ness. You no longer miss them. Jerks. **12:30 P.M.** Teleconference in your mom for sympathy. When she demands that you list your symptoms, tell her it doesn't matter; it's probably a virus. After she hangs up, wait ten minutes while she calls your nearest relative who's a doctor, repeats your symptoms, then calls you back to tell you that it's probably a virus.

1:00 P.M. Devote the next four hours to fitfully drifting in and out of sleep.

5:00 P.M. Conclude napping portion of the day by waking suddenly from a fever dream, newly certain that the discomfort of being sick is your punishment for some crime you don't remember committing, possibly in a past life. Also, it's dark out now.

5:10 P.M. Reassess your state of health. Resolved: you still feel like shit.

5:20 P.M. Spend twenty minutes looking for a thermometer. How do you not have a thermometer? You have several specific memories of buying thermometers.

5:40 P.M. Settle for feeling your forehead with your hand. It seems warm, but maybe that's just because your hand is cold. Conduct due diligence by randomly feeling a bunch of different surfaces in your apartment to try to compare them with your forehead.

6:00 P.M. Break for cold leftover soup.

6:40 P.M. Reflect on how annoying it is that you never think to buy tissues until you're so sick that you can't go out to buy tissues.

6:45 P.M. After achieving unsatisfactory results from wiping your nose on your pajama sleeve, limp to the bathroom and get the roll of toilet paper.

6:50 P.M. Now your nose is red and chafed from wiping it with toilet paper.

7:00 P.M. Develop a three-pronged, forward-looking action strategy of (a) swallowing whatever expired cold medicine you find in the bathroom cabinets, (b) circling back to reevaluate your health tomorrow morning, and (c) resolving to go to work no matter how terrible you feel, because you honestly can't face another whole day this boring and existentially miserable.

7:30 P.M. Hold internal vote: Is it late enough to go to sleep yet?

7:31 P.M. Reach unanimous decision: Yes. ♦

LETTER FROM MILWAUKEE

FORCED OUT

For many poor Americans, eviction never ends.

BY MATTHEW DESMOND

ARLEEN BEALE'S latest eviction began with a snowball fight. It was January of 2008, and Milwaukee was experiencing its snowiest winter on record. Arleen's son Jori and his cousin were cutting up, packing powder tight and taking aim at the passing cars on Arthur Avenue. One jerked to a stop, and a man jumped out, chasing the

happen if she waited any longer to leave. Her first eviction had taken place sixteen years earlier, when she was twenty-two; she figured that she had rented twenty houses since turning eighteen. First, the landlord would summon the sheriff, who would arrive with a gun, a team of movers, and a judge's order saying that her house was no longer hers.

would pile everything onto the sidewalk: mattresses; a floor-model television; her copy of "Don't Be Afraid to Discipline"; a nice glass dining table and a lace tablecloth; the meat in the freezer.

Arleen was thirty-eight, with pecan-brown skin and world-weary eyes. She had supported her children over the years by working, as well as by relying on welfare. When Jori's father left her, she had a cleaning job at Mainstay Suites, by the airport. In despair, she quit and began receiving welfare. Later, she found work wiping tables and mopping up spills at the Third Street Pier restaurant, but, after her mother died, she left that job, too.

When Arleen was evicted from her



An eviction in Milwaukee in December. Often, landlords turn to informal methods to get families to leave.

boys to Arleen's apartment, where he broke down the door with a few kicks. When the landlord found out about the property damage, she decided to evict. Arleen had been there with her sons—Jori was thirteen, Jafaris five—for eight months.

The day they had to be out was bitterly cold, but Arleen knew what would

Then Arleen would be given two options: "truck" or "curb." "Truck" meant that her things would be loaded into an eighteen-footer and checked into bonded storage. She could get everything back after paying three hundred and fifty dollars. Arleen didn't have the money, so she would have opted for "curb," which meant that the movers

apartment on Arthur Avenue, she was receiving a stipend from Wisconsin Works, a family-aid program—a reduced amount, because she wasn't working. The sum, in 2008, was the same as when welfare was reformed more than a decade earlier: \$20.65 a day, \$7,536 a year.

Arleen took her sons to a homeless

shelter, where they stayed until April, when she found a house on Nineteenth and Hampton, in the predominantly black inner city, on Milwaukee's North Side, where she'd grown up. There was often no running water, and Jori had to bucket out what was in the toilet. But Arleen loved that the rent was only five hundred and twenty-five dollars a month, and that the house was set apart from others on the block. "It was quiet," she remembered. "It was my favorite place."

After a few weeks, the city found the house "unfit for human habitation." Arleen moved into a drab apartment complex deeper in the inner city, on Atkinson Avenue, which she soon learned was a haven for drug dealers. She feared for her boys, especially Jori, who was goofy and slack-shouldered and would talk to anyone. They endured four summer months there before their caseworker at Wraparound, a social-services agency, found them a bottom duplex unit on Thirteenth Street and Keefe.

To avoid embarrassment, Arleen and the boys walked their things over to the new place at night, pushing the larger items, like the sun-faded floral-print love seat, on top of a wheeled garbage can. At the house, she held her breath and tried the lights, smiling with relief when they came on. She could live off someone else's electricity bill for a while. There was a fist-size hole in a living-room window, the front door had to be locked with an ugly wooden plank dropped into metal brackets, and the carpet was filthy, the dirt ground in. But the kitchen was spacious and the living room well lit. Arleen stuffed a piece of clothing into the window hole and hung ivory curtains.

The rent was five hundred and fifty dollars a month, utilities not included—the going rate for a two-bedroom apartment in one of the worst neighborhoods in America's fourth-poorest city—and would take eighty-eight per cent of Arleen's six-hundred-and-twenty-eight-dollar-a-month welfare check. Maybe she could make it work, at least through the winter.

There was a knock at the door. It was the landlord, Sherrena Tarver, a short black woman with bobbed hair and freshly done nails, loaded down with

groceries. (Names have been changed.) She had spent forty dollars of her own money on the food and picked up the rest at a pantry. She knew Arleen needed it. Arleen thanked Sherrena and closed the door. Things were off to a good start.

EVEN IN the most desolate areas of American cities, evictions used to be rare enough to draw crowds. Eviction riots erupted during the Depression, though the number of poor families who faced eviction each year was a fraction of what it is today. In February, 1932, the *Times* published an account of community resistance to the eviction of three families in the Bronx, observing, "Probably because of the cold, the crowd numbered only 1,000."

These days, evictions are too commonplace to attract attention. There are sheriff squads whose full-time job is to carry out eviction and foreclosure orders. Some moving companies specialize in evictions, their crews working all day long, five days a week. Hundreds of data-mining companies sell landlords tenant-screening reports that list past evictions and court filings. Meanwhile, families have watched their incomes stagnate or fall as their housing costs have soared. Today, the majority of poor renting families spend more than half their income on housing, and millions of Americans are evicted every year. In Milwaukee, a city of fewer than a hundred and five thousand renter households, landlords legally evict roughly sixteen thousand adults and children each year. As the real-estate market has recovered in the wake of the foreclosure crisis and the ensuing recession, evictions have only increased.

But there are other ways, cheaper and quicker than a court order, to remove a family. Some landlords pay tenants a couple of hundred dollars to leave by the end of the week. Some take off the front door. Nearly half of the forced moves of renting families in Milwaukee are "informal evictions," which, like many rentals, involve no paperwork, and take place in the shadow of the law. Between 2009 and 2011, more than one in eight Milwaukee renters were displaced involuntarily, whether by formal or informal eviction, landlord foreclosure, or building condemnation. In 2013, nearly

the same proportion of poor renting families nationwide was unable to pay all of their rent, and a similar number thought it was likely that they would be evicted soon.

For decades, social scientists, journalists, and policymakers have focussed on jobs, public assistance, parenting, and mass incarceration as the central problems faced by the American poor, overlooking just how deeply housing is implicated in the creation of poverty. Not everyone living in a distressed neighborhood is associated with gang members, parole officers, employers, social workers, or pastors. But nearly everyone has a landlord.

A FEW MONTHS before Arleen moved into the Thirteenth Street duplex, Sherrena Tarver wound her way through the North Side, listening to R. & B. with her window down. Most middle-class Milwaukeeans zoomed past the inner city on the freeway. Landlords took the side streets, typically not in their Saab or Audi but in their "rent collector," some oil-leaking, rusted-out van or truck that hauled around extension cords, ladders, maybe a loaded pistol, plumbing snakes, toolboxes, a can of Mace, and other necessities. Sherrena usually left her lipstick-red Camaro at home and visited tenants in a beige-and-brown 1993 Chevy Suburban with twenty-two-inch rims, which belonged to Quentin, her husband, business partner, and property manager. He used a screwdriver to start it.

Some white Milwaukeeans still referred to the North Side as "the core," as they did in the sixties, and if they ventured into it they saw street after street of twenty-four-hour day-care centers, fading murals, and corner stores with "WIC Accepted Here" signs. Deindustrialization had crippled cities across the Rust Belt, and Milwaukee was among the hardest hit; by 2000, its population had fallen below six hundred thousand, down from more than seven hundred and forty thousand at its peak, in 1960. It showed. On a typical residential street on the North Side, a few single-family homes remained, owned by older folks who tended gardens and hung American flags. But most of the other dwellings were sagging duplexes or four-family apartment buildings with

chipping paint and bedsheet curtains, next to vacant lots and empty houses with boarded-up doors and windows.

Sherrena saw all this, but she saw something else, too. Like other seasoned landlords, she knew who owned which multifamily house, which church, which bar; knew the neighborhood's vicissitudes of life, its shades and moods; knew which blocks were drug-soaked and which were quiet. She had a keen sense of the ghetto's value and how money could be made from a property that looked worthless to people who didn't know any better.

It wasn't easy. Once, an evicted couple shoved socks down the sinks and turned the water on full blast before moving out. A disgruntled mortgage customer tossed a homemade bomb through Sherrena's office window. The month before she met Arleen, someone had been shot in one of Sherrena's buildings. A few days after that, the city shut down one of her properties because a tenant had been caught stealing electricity. Sherrena remembered meeting the woman, who had said she was fleeing an abusive boyfriend. She had decided to rent to her and her children even though the woman had been evicted three times in the past two years. There's me having a heart again, she thought.

When people asked why she went into real estate, Sherrena talked about "long-term residuals" and "property being the best investment out there," but there was more to it. She shared something with other landlords: an unbending confidence that she could make it on her own without a company to fall back on, without a contract or a pension or a union. She had an understanding with the universe that she could start out with nothing and, through her own gumption and intelligence, come back with a good living.

Sherrena had bought a home in 1999, when prices were low. Riding the housing boom a few years later, she refinanced and pulled out twenty-one thousand dollars in equity, then refinanced again. She used the cash to buy her first rental property: a two-unit duplex in the inner city, where housing was cheapest. Rental profits, refinancing, and high-interest loans from private real-estate investors helped her buy more. She learned that the rental

population comprised some upper- and middle-class households who rented out of preference or circumstance; some young and transient people; and most of the city's poor, who could not buy a home or gain access to public housing, because there wasn't enough of it. Landlords operated in different areas of the city, focussing on certain kinds of tenants: whites or immigrants, poor families or college students. Sherrena decided to specialize in renting to the black poor.

Four years after buying her first rental property, she owned thirty-six units, all in the inner city. She began carrying a pair of cell phones with backup batteries, reading *Forbes*, and accepting appointments from 9 A.M. to 9 P.M. She also started a credit-repair business and an investment business. She bought two fifteen-passenger vans and launched a company that, for twenty-five to fifty dollars a seat, transported girlfriends, mothers, and children to visit their incarcerated loved ones upstate. Sherrena had found her calling: inner-city entrepreneur.

ARLEEN DIDN'T mind Thirteenth Street. There was a bodega owned by Arabs on one end of her block and a bar frequented by old men on the other. She could walk Jafaris to school. She could have done without the crack addicts who'd recently moved into the abandoned house next door, but a little farther down the street a girl was learning to play the violin.

Arleen's house was built in the Greek Revival style: two stories of sandstone block with twin columns supporting an awning over the front door. A pair of picture windows, adorned with peaked pediments, faced the street from above the porch. But the house had deteriorated over the years. One column base was settling, causing the awning to slope sideways. The columns, the porch, and the window pediments had been painted ash gray, and an imposing iron-barred outer door had been installed.

But, inside, Arleen's new apartment was coming along. The previous tenants had been evicted and had vacated in a hurry, leaving behind a large armoire, a dresser, a bed, and a refrigerator. There was even more in the basement: dishes, clothes, an upholstered chair. Arleen put

it all to use, rearranging the furniture and stacking the dishes next to her nice porcelain plates, which she'd been given long ago by a domestic-violence shelter. She unpacked a stereo and listened to old-school hip-hop tracks—her favorite being 2Pac's "Keep Ya Head Up"—while she worked on the apartment. In the kitchen, she hung a drawing of black farmers hoeing a row. In the basement, she'd come across rollers, brushes, and a five-gallon container of white paint. She lugged everything upstairs, tied a wrap around her head, and gave the walls a fresh coat.

Jafaris scavenged the basement, too, transforming mop handles, discarded tools, and dog leashes into tanks and helicopters locked in battle. He and his brother had grown used to churning through different apartments, neighborhoods, and schools. In the seventh and eighth grades, Jori had attended five schools; when the family was homeless he often skipped class to help Arleen look for a new place.

If Arleen had a housing voucher or a key to a public-housing unit, she would be spending only thirty per cent of her income on rent, which would mean the difference between stable poverty and grinding poverty, between planting roots in a community and being batted from one place to another. Two decades ago, when she was nineteen, she had rented a subsidized apartment for a hundred and thirty-seven dollars a month. She was grateful to be out of her mother's house, making decisions on her own. But, when a friend asked Arleen to give up her place and move in with her, she decided to say yes, walking away from the subsidized apartment and into the private rental market, where she had remained ever since. Once she left public housing, it was next to impossible to get back in. "I thought it was O.K. to move somewhere else," she recalled. "And I regret it, right now to this day. Young!" She shook her head at her nineteen-year-old self. "If I would've been in my right mind, I could have *still* been there."

The list of applicants for Milwaukee's rent-assistance program was notoriously stagnant. One day, Arleen stopped by the Housing Authority and asked about it. "The list is frozen," she was told. On it were more than thirty-five hundred

families who had applied for assistance four years earlier and were still waiting for placement. It could have been worse. In larger cities, like Washington, D.C., the wait for public housing was counted in decades. Three in four American families who qualified for housing assistance received nothing: the amount of government aid didn't come close to meeting the need.

If Arleen wanted public housing, she would have to save roughly six hundred dollars to repay the Housing Authority for having left the subsidized apartment years before without giving notice; then wait two to three years until the list unfroze; then wait another two to five years until her application made it to the top of the pile; then pray that the person with the stale coffee and the heavy stamp reviewing her file would somehow overlook the eviction record that she'd accumulated while trying to make ends meet in the private housing market on a welfare check.

PRESS 1 to leave a voice message." Sherrena pressed 1. "Arleen, this is Sherrena calling. I'm calling to find out if you had your rent. Remember we agreed that you were going to pay a little bit over to get caught up with the three-twenty you owed for—" Sherrena stopped herself from finishing the sentence with "your sister's funeral costs." She went on, "Um, I will be expecting the six hundred and fifty. Go 'head and give me a call."

Arleen didn't regret what she had done. Usually, when there was a funeral, she couldn't even afford to buy Jafaris new shoes and would just polish his best ones. But this was her sister—in the spiritual sense, if not the biological one. She would have been ashamed of herself if she hadn't pitched in. She split her welfare check between Sherrena and New Pitts Mortuary.

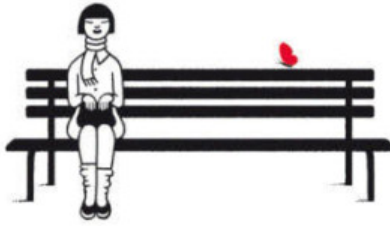
Sherrena felt bad when she heard about Arleen's sister. It was November, and Arleen had been living on Thirteenth Street for less than two months. She made her tenant a deal. Arleen could stay if she paid six hundred and fifty dollars for three months to make up the lost rent. Even if Arleen signed over her entire welfare check each month, she would still be short. But Sherrena was betting that Arleen

could put in a few calls to family members or nonprofit agencies and ask for help.

Sherrena and Quentin were in the Suburban when Arleen called at the beginning of the next month. After a quick conversation, Sherrena hung up and looked at her husband. "Arleen said her check didn't come."

Quentin kept his eyes on the road. "Story of thy life," he said.

Arleen had told a half-truth. She had



received a check, but not for six hundred and twenty-eight dollars. She had missed an appointment with her welfare caseworker, having forgotten about it. A reminder notice was mailed to Atkinson—or was it Nineteenth Street? When Arleen didn't show up, the caseworker "sanctioned" her by decreasing her benefit. Arleen could have given Sherrena her reduced check, but she thought it was better to be behind and have a few hundred dollars in her pocket than be behind and completely broke.

Sherrena saw herself as a charitable businesswoman, providing housing to the destitute. "I don't discriminate against crackheads, because those crackheads need a place to stay," she'd say. Still, evictions were a regular part of her job. She didn't hesitate, but she also didn't reach mechanically for the pink papers. "It's kind of hard to put somebody out," she admitted. In September, Sherrena had learned that one of her favorite tenants—Lamar, a double amputee and a single father—had fallen behind. "I'm gonna have a hard time doing this," she told Quentin, when eviction began to seem necessary. "I love Lamar. But love don't pay the bills."

After thinking things over, Sherrena decided that the funeral and the subsequent welfare sanction had put Arleen too far behind: eight hundred and seventy dollars. It was time, she said, to "let go and move on to the next tenant." She filed the eviction paper-

work and received a court date of December 23rd. It was the last eviction court before Christmas, and Sherrena knew the Milwaukee County Courthouse would be packed. The court used to take a break from evictions at Christmastime, but that was discontinued in 1991, after a landlord persuaded the American Civil Liberties Union to argue that the practice was an unfair religious celebration. Many parents chose to take their chances with their landlords rather than face their children empty-handed on Christmas morning. A new tenant had already asked Sherrena if a portion of her rent money could be returned so that she could buy gifts. "You gotta have a house to put the Christmas tree and presents in," Sherrena told her. "You've been knowing Christmas was coming eleven months ago."

EVICTION PROCEEDINGS took place in Room 400 of the Milwaukee County Small Claims Court, the busiest courtroom in the state. Sherrena scanned its long wooden pews for a seat, waving at landlords she recognized. At the back of the room, landlords were offering tenants stipulation agreements: they wouldn't be evicted if they caught up on the rent. Toward the front, where the bailiff sat, lawyers in pin-striped suits and power ties waited in a reserved space. They had been hired by landlords. Everyone in the reserved space was white.

Two clerks at a large wooden desk announced the day's cases and took attendance. Most of the names called went unanswered. Roughly seventy per cent of the tenants summoned to Milwaukee's eviction court didn't come. The same was true in other major cities. Some tenants couldn't miss work or couldn't find childcare or were confused by the whole process or couldn't care less or would rather avoid the humiliation. When a tenant didn't show up and her landlord or a representative did, the clerk applied three quick stamps to the file—indicating that the tenant had received a default eviction judgment—and placed it on top of a growing pile. The sound of eviction court was a soft hum of dozens of people sighing, coughing, murmuring, and whispering to children, interspersed with the cadence of a name, a pause,

and three loud thumps of the stamp.

Sherrena wondered if Arleen would come. Most of her tenants didn't, and she preferred it that way. She had learned that it didn't matter how much kindness she had shown a tenant: "all that stuff goes out the window" during a hearing. Still, Sherrena had called Arleen that morning to remind her about court. She didn't have to, but she had a soft spot for Arleen.

The courtroom was full of black women, surrounded by children of all ages. In a typical month, three in four people in Milwaukee's eviction court were black, and three in four of those were women. One female renter in seventeen from the city's poorest black neighborhoods was evicted through the court system each year, twice the number for men from the same neighborhoods, and nine times that for women from the poorest white areas. Women from black neighborhoods made up less than ten per cent of Milwaukee's population but nearly a third of its evicted tenants. If incarceration had come to define the lives of men from impoverished black neighborhoods, eviction was shaping the lives of women. Poor black men were locked up. Poor black women were locked out.

"Sherrena," someone whispered. Arleen had poked her head into Room 400.

Sherrena stepped into the hallway and walked up to Arleen, who was wearing a red hoodie. "Girl," Sherrena said, "I got to get you up outta this house or get my money. Genuine.... I mean,

'cause I got bills. I got a bill to show you right now that's gonna take your eyes outta your head." She reached into her files and handed Arleen a tax bill for a property of hers that the city had condemned. It listed delinquent storm-water and sewer charges, fees for the board-up, and additional charges, totaling \$11,465.67. Arleen stared blankly at the bill. The amount was more than her annual income.

As Sherrena reclaimed her seat, she remembered her first eviction. Nervous and confused, she had gone over the paperwork a dozen times. Everything went her way, giving her the power to have sheriff deputies remove the family in question within ten days. Soon afterward, she filed another eviction suit, then another. When filling out the court papers, Sherrena learned to put "et al." after a tenant's name, so that the eviction judgment covered everyone in the house, even people she didn't know about. She learned that commissioners frowned on late fees in excess of fifty-five dollars, and that dragging slow-paying tenants to court was usually worth the \$89.50 processing fee, because it spurred many of them to find a way to catch up. Plus, she could add the processing fee to their rent bill.

Time passed. The lawyers had gone home; their cases were called first. Finally, two hours after arriving at the courthouse, Sherrena was summoned. She had drawn Commissioner Laura Gramling Perez, a white woman in a dark pants suit and pearls, with a mili-

tary posture and a broad, open face. Arleen waited while she and Sherrena settled another matter in her office.

"Any luck with that invoice?" Gramling Perez asked.

The day before, Sherrena had asked Gramling Perez to approve a claim of five thousand dollars which she had brought against an evicted tenant. Each eviction case had two parts. The first "cause of action" dealt strictly with whether a tenant would be evicted. Next came the second and third causes of action, which dealt with what was owed to a landlord: unpaid rent, court fees, and other damages. Most tenants who were sued for eviction were taken to court twice, once for the eviction and then for the debt. But even fewer tenants showed up for their second hearing, which meant that landlords' claims for what was owed them usually went unchallenged.

Suing a tenant for back rent and court fees was straightforward. Landlords were allowed to charge for unpaid rent, late fees that the court found reasonable, and double rent for each day that tenants remained in the home after their tenancy had been terminated. Things got murkier when tallying up property damages. Sometimes Sherrena guessed an amount on the ride over to eviction court: "How much should I put for the back door? One-fifty? Two hundred?" Sometimes she added on an extermination fee, even though Quentin would take care of it himself. Gramling Perez was now asking Sherrena to provide evidence that would justify suing an ex-tenant for the maximum amount allowed in small-claims court.

"What I'm trying to get from her doesn't even scratch the surface of what she did to the property," Sherrena replied, presenting photos of a trashed unit and the same bill she had shown to Arleen.

"I need something else," Gramling Perez said.

Sherrena pushed back but got nowhere. "I'll never get that anyway," she said, finally.

Gramling Perez reduced Sherrena's charges to \$1,285. That money judgment joined those of eight other eviction cases that Sherrena had initiated earlier that month, which totalled more than ten thousand dollars in estimated lost rent and damages. Sherrena, who netted an equivalent amount each month after



"I won't have kids until gay men are able to give birth in every state."

her bills were paid, knew that receiving a money judgment and actually receiving the money were different matters. Beyond withholding tenants' security deposits, landlords had limited recourse when it came to collecting. Sherrena could try to garnish wages, but only for former tenants who were employed and living above the poverty line. She could garnish bank accounts. But many of her former tenants did not have bank accounts, and, even if they did, state benefits and the first thousand dollars were off limits.

WHEN HER turn came, Arleen decided to sit next to Sherrena at the commissioner's desk. The two women looked for a moment like old friends or even sisters, with one reflecting life's favor. Without lifting her eyes from Arleen's file, Gramling Perez said, "Your landlady is seeking to evict you for unpaid rent. Are you behind on rent, Ma'am?"

"Yes," Arleen replied.

Gramling Perez looked at Sherrena and asked, "Are you willing to work something out?"

"No," Sherrena answered. "Because, the thing is, she's too far behind. See, I let her slide when the sister passed away or whatever. She didn't pay all her rent that month. And now it's another whole month has passed."

"Do you have minor children at home?" Gramling Perez asked Arleen. She was one of the commissioners who sometimes subscribed to the court custom of giving tenants two extra days in the home for each dependent child.

"I'll be out before the first," Arleen said. "New Year's at the latest."

"But, see, that goes into the beginning of rental period again," Sherrena interjected.

"So you're willing to do a stipulation if she's gone before the first?" Gramling Perez asked. She knew that Arleen would have to leave, but she was trying to spare her the blemish of another eviction. The Housing Authority counted evictions and unpaid debt as strikes when reviewing applications, and landlords turned away applicants with recent evictions, which were displayed free of charge on a government Web site. But Arleen's record was not as extensive as it should have been. Through the years, she had given landlords different names; nothing exotic,

just subtle alterations. Now "Arleen Beal" and "Erleen Belle" had eviction records. The court clerks, like many landlords, never stopped to ask for identification.

Gramling Perez asked Sherrena if she would dismiss the eviction if Arleen moved out voluntarily by the thirty-first.

"But what about the other money that she owes me?" Sherrena asked. A dismissed eviction judgment could mean a dropped money judgment as well.

"Well, my point is that you maybe give up a couple hundred dollars so you don't lose these tenants who are coming in January." Gramling Perez knew that Sherrena could pocket Arleen's security deposit, leaving an unpaid rent balance of around three hundred and twenty dollars. Turning to Arleen, she said, "In exchange for an agreement that she won't go after you—"

Arleen interrupted: "I'm not trying to be in her money."

Sherrena leaned forward in her chair. "I don't want to dismiss *anything*. I really don't.... I mean, I'm tired of losing out on *every single*—" She began slapping the table with each word.

Arleen looked at Gramling Perez. "I mean, I'm not trying to stay. I mean, I understand what she's saying. That's her place."

"I understand," Gramling Perez said.

"I'm not trying to be there."

"I understand." Gramling Perez shuffled the papers in Arleen's file and said nothing more.

Arleen thought of all the problems with the Thirteenth Street apartment: the broken window, the sporadic hot water, the grimy carpet. "I would say something, but I'm not even gonna go there. I'm all right," she said. That was her defense. A lawyer would have fought much harder, likely to a different end. When tenants have legal representation, their chances of keeping their homes increase dramatically. A program that ran in the South Bronx from 2005 to 2008, for example, provided legal assistance to more than thirteen hundred families and prevented eviction in more than eighty-five per cent of the cases, saving New York City hundreds of thousands of dollars in estimated shelter costs. But, unlike in criminal court, in civil court the poor have no right to appointed counsel. Arleen was on her own.

Gramling Perez looked at Arleen.

"Here's the deal. Ma'am, you're getting to move out voluntarily by January 1st," she said. "If you don't do that, if you don't move out, then your landlord is entitled to come back here without further notice, and she can get a writ of eviction. And then the sheriff will come."

OUTSIDE THE courthouse, a gentle snow was falling. Sherrena had agreed to give Arleen a ride home. In the car, Sherrena paused to rub her neck, and Arleen lowered her forehead into the palm of her hand. Both had splitting headaches. Sherrena attributed hers to how court had gone. She was still fuming that Gramling Perez had reduced her money judgment. Arleen's was from hunger. She hadn't eaten all day.

"I don't want to be putting you and your babies out in the cold," Sherrena told Arleen as the car moved slowly through the slushy streets. "I wouldn't want nobody to do me like that.... Some of them landlords, they get away with murder down there. But there's some like me, who get in front of the commissioner, and she say whatever's on her mind, and that's the way it's gonna go.... She knows this system is screwed. It's all one-sided."

Arleen stared out the window and watched the snow settle noiselessly on the iron lampposts, the ornate dome of the Public Library, the Church of the Gesu's Gothic towers.

"And some of these tenants," Sherrena was saying, "they nasty as hell. They bring roaches with 'em. They bring mice with 'em. And who gotta pay for it? Then you pouring grease down the sink from your fried chicken, you pouring the grease down the sink, and I gotta get a plumber out again."

The car turned down Center Street, passing a church where Arleen sometimes picked up gift baskets at Thanksgiving and Christmas. She had always aspired to have her own ministry like that, to be the one handing out food and clothing.

"So, Arleen," Sherrena said as she pulled up in front of the house on Thirteenth Street, "if you ever thinking about becoming a landlord, don't. It's a bad deal. Get the short end of the stick every time."

Arleen stepped out of the car and turned back to Sherrena. "Merry Christmas," she said. ♦

IN SEARCH OF FORTY WINKS

Gizmos for a good night's sleep.

BY PATRICIA MARX



IT'S 2:49 A.M., more or less my bedtime, and I'm about to put on my Sleep Shepherd hat, a device designed to help the wearer go gentle into unconsciousness (\$149.99). The hat is a stretchy black beanie, but where you might normally find a pompom there's a plastic box the size of a Triscuit. If I were an alien, this would be the port through which I'd receive my instructions from the mother ship. The box has an on-off switch, and I'm going to turn it on so that the mechanism can commune with my head.

The hat measures activity in my cerebral cortex through three sensors sewn into the fabric—one covering each ear and a third handling the forehead. There are also built-in speakers that emit pulsing tones mimicking the frequencies of

my brain waves. Gradually, the rhythm will slow down and, supposedly, so will my brain, entrained as if by a hypnotist. The noise sounds like the tone you'd expect to hear before a nuclear disaster. It's supposed to be soothing, and, truth be told, I don't mind it. The hat was invented by Michael Larson, a mechanical engineer at the University of Colorado. Larson told me, over the phone, that he came up with it to treat his daughter, who had an autoimmune disease that prevented her from getting enough deep sleep. The contraption apparently did the trick.

In my case, it's hard to say whether it was the hat or causes non-millinery that ushered me into dreamland each of the nights I wore it: I always woke up

to find the hat on the floor. But I don't really have insomnia. Every so often, I will resort to counting sheep—actually, I count divorced couples I know, and sometimes, at 5 A.M., couples who should get divorced—but, in general, I do not want to fall asleep ever. I have spent my life staying up later than I should. As a child, I was convinced that turning in meant missing out on illicit fun. I tried to train myself to sleep with my forearm upright, my head propped on my palm, so that if my parents walked by my room they'd see that I never slept and therefore didn't need a bedtime. My favorite TV show, I used to say, was "The Late, Late, Late, Late Show." When I got older, I liked being up at night because it seemed more productive to work when nobody was calling or e-mailing, and by work I mean Netflix. Besides, I'd always thought, What's the big deal about being tired as long as your job doesn't involve flying a plane—or, I suppose I should add, responsibilities like getting dressed?

Unfortunately for me, regularly spending a chunk of the nighttime in a state of suspended consciousness and drool turns out to be a gigantic deal. According to scientists I spoke with, the quality of your slumber has more repercussions on your happiness, intelligence, and health than what you eat, where you live, or how much money you make. Not to be a downer, but chronic sleep deprivation, which Amnesty International designates a form of torture, has been linked to diabetes, cancer, high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, learning difficulties, colds, gastrointestinal problems, depression, execution (the sleep-starved defense minister of North Korea is rumored to have been shot after dozing in the presence of Kim Jong-un), world disasters (the Challenger explosion, the Three Mile Island meltdown), and non-disasters (the drop in the polls of Donald Trump, who is reported to get only three or four hours of shut-eye a night).

Many scientists have come to believe that while we sleep the space between our neurons expands, allowing a cranial sewage network—the glymphatic system—to flush the brain of waste products that might otherwise not only prevent memory formation but muck up our mental machinery and perhaps eventually lead to Alzheimer's. Failing to get enough sleep is like throwing a

party and then firing the cleanup crew.

A National Institutes of Health study showed that twenty-five to thirty per cent of American adults have periodic episodes of sleeplessness and twenty per cent suffer from chronic insomnia. On the advice of sleep doctors, fatigue-management specialists, and know-it-alls on wellness blogs, these tossers and turners drink cherry juice, eat Atlantic perch, set the bedroom thermostat between sixty-seven and seventy degrees, put magnets under the pillow, curl their toes, uncurl their toes, and kick their partners out of bed, usually to little avail. According to a study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, four per cent of Americans reported having taken prescription sleeping pills in the previous month, and an additional who-knows-how-many use anti-anxiety medications like Valium and Klonopin. Never mind that some studies suggest that a pill can extend your sleep by as little as three minutes a night and reduce the time it takes to nod off by only eight to twenty minutes.

Evidently, it was ever thus. The ancient Romans smeared mouse fat onto the soles of their feet, and the Lunesta of the Dark Ages was a smoothie made from the gall of castrated boars. Charles Dickens apparently believed it was necessary to position himself in the precise center of a bed that faced exactly north, while the Glasgow *Herald* advised the worried wakeful to lather up their hair with yellow soap before bedtime, wrap their heads in napkins, rinse in the morning, and repeat every night for two weeks. In 1879, a Canadian medical journal recommended hemlock. Presumably, no repeating was required.

Lately, a dreamy abundance of gadgets, fancy pillows, expensive masks, and other non-sex-purposed bedroom paraphernalia have entered the marketplace. They promise a refreshing sleep, or, if that fails, at least an accounting of how much you snore. There would not be enough nights in the wild dark yonder for me to try all these products personally, but fortunately the anguish of others can be a journalist's good fortune. A bunch of friends, sick and tired of staring at the ceiling, waiting for their mental power switches to flip off, signed on to sample sleep aids and keep diaries during their trials. As if stalled every night in

the waiting room of the world's slowest doctor, these insomniacs had regularly passed their nights memorizing the arrangement of notes on a guitar fretboard, nurturing grudges, hating themselves, thinking about world peace, pretending to be in a submarine, and worrying, Is it Alzheimer's, or worse?

We will begin with the photonic devices, but first some background. Unless you live in a drawer underneath a lot of socks, your sleep patterns are cued by light and its absence. Photoreceptors at the backs of your eyes pick up light and send corresponding electrical signals to the suprachiasmatic nucleus, in your brain. (If you are not a great speller, you can call it the internal clock.) This master timekeeper regulates and synchronizes a host of other physiological systems, such as temperature and blood pressure, making sure that they all operate on the same roughly twenty-four-hour cycle, known as the circadian rhythm. In an ideal world, by which I mean an un-ideal world without recessed lighting and iPads, the sun sets, it becomes dark, and, presto, your pineal gland starts to release the sleep-inducing hormone melatonin (and a few other hormones). During daylight hours, melatonin production is reduced. Exposure to light, especially to the blue light of digital devices, discombobulates the clockwork.

As Mussolini mythically did for the trains, so Re-Timer light-therapy glasses can supposedly do for your sleep-wake cycle (\$299). These white plastic-framed visor goggles, which call to mind a pair of welding glasses designed by Fellini, shine a faint blue-green light into your eyes in the service of winding your inner timepiece, treating jet lag as well as winter doldrums. Do they work? Meg, who is routinely awakened in the middle of the night by worries big and small, wore the glasses at home for the recommended thirty minutes a day for a week and then during a flight to the Philippines. The sight of her, she said, unsettled both the family dog and flight attendants. Finding herself getting tired earlier and sleeping through the night, she plans to keep using the glasses, although, she told me, in a year "they will have been relegated to that place in my apartment where the shiatsu back-massager cushion is stored, along with a lot of foreign coins."

Inside the Glo to Sleep therapy



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the arts.
So she gave.**

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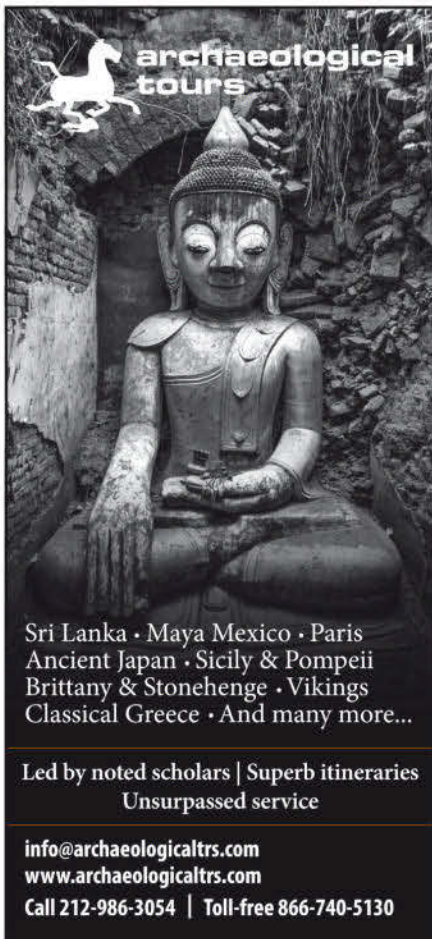
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mask—a pair of battery-operated black-out glasses—are four luminous blue hatched lines. Don't get up; they are not emergency exits. They are “points of glo” (\$39.99). According to the Glo Web site, if you meditate on them as their radiance fades to black (within ten to thirty minutes) you will be able to “switch off your mind!” This is good because, as we also learn, from Amazon, “sleep is a safe, natural and effective way to help you get the sleep you need.” A bedtime-challenged friend named Sarah used the mask for about a week, but confessed that she might not be the best judge, since she also dipped into her usual cornucopia of soporifics—melatonin, magnesium, B₆, calcium, 5-hydroxytryptophan, ashwagandha root, magnolia bark, *Passiflora incarnata*, chamomile tea, *Ziziphus jujuba*, and hot baths—making me wonder if her problem with sleep was that she had no time for it.

On most nights, Sarah found the mask calming: “I would think about how the floating lights looked like blue sleeping pills, and that reminded me that I was supposed to think about nothing.” Other times, she found the thick foam of the mask stifling and hot. Her husband tried a less fancy model (\$29.99). “Bob said, ‘There are no lights!’” Sarah reported. “This led to one of us doing something we almost never do: reading instructions. I think that reading instructions of any kind might solve my sleep problem.”

The NightWave Sleep Assistant, a black cube the size of a bottle of sleeping pills, shoots a pulsing circle of blue light onto your ceiling, in a sort of Dan Flavin version of the Sistine Chapel (\$49.95). As you watch this visual metronome, you are supposed to harmonize your breathing to its beat until you conk out. According to my friend Peter, who tested it, “Unless you are lying on the upper mattress of a bunk bed at Camp Wananawandakanda, there is no way in hell that the blue light can ever show up on the ceiling. It’s just too far away.” Perhaps Peter lives in a house with cathedral ceilings, because Megan, who occasionally suffers sleep paralysis (a scary disorder that causes you to feel conscious even though your body is temporarily immobilized as in REM sleep), found the blue light so tranquillizing that she says she’d recommend it to restless friends.

But isn’t blue light the kind that we’re

supposed to avoid in the dusky hours? Yes. It’s been demonstrated that blue photons suppress melatonin more than any other color does. This short wavelength is copiously emitted by digital devices and TVs, which mess up your internal clock. By phone from Australia, Keith Wymbs, the co-owner, with his wife, of the NightWave Sleep Assistant, defended blue: “The logical and scientific colors are red and amber. Technically, they affect body rhythms the least, but, based on feedback from early users, blue was found most soothing.” Similarly, Troy Anderson, of Glo to Sleep, told me, “We tried the mask with a red light, but both genders liked blue, because it was natural and clean.”

Yes, a display of flashing red lights could make you think that the police are arriving, but according to Fred Maxik, a scientist who designed illumination to help astronauts sleep in space, the real reason that so many companies go blue is that it is energy efficient and therefore cheap. As the founder of Lighting Science, Maxik has developed a line of white L.E.D.s that keep your circadian rhythms in sync. Here is a snippet from the sleep diary of Susan, who is prone to staying up until three in the morning listening to podcasts. She tested the Good Night bulb, which has less blue light than traditional lighting (\$39.95): “I turned on the light. I watched 15 minutes of the latest terror news before turning it off and then I fell asleep. I slept until 2:00 (also nearly unprecedented), listened to a nice podcast about jihadi terrorists, and went back to sleep until 6:00. A really big sleep stretch for me.”

“THOSE WHO snore the loudest always fall asleep first,” Mr. Anonymous told me, which must mean that Mrs. A. makes a racket like a leaf blower with engine trouble. (A few years ago, it was reported that Tom Cruise slept in a soundproof room called the Snoratorium so that his wife could get a good night’s rest, a problem that later sorted itself out in a different way.) The SnoreMasker Pro is a pair of little white-noise machines tucked inside earplugs (\$399.95). It promises to insulate you “from virtually all sound up to 70 decibels—about the sound level of a loud alarm clock.” The two pinkish plastic plugs could pass for Barbie’s prosthetic dream hearts. Before

operating them, you must insert a lentil-size battery into each and then attach foam ear tips—an almost impossible task unless your fingers are as small as Ken's.

When Mr. A. inserted the Snore-Masker Pro, he said that it sounded as if he were standing under a waterfall, and that, remarkably, he could not hear anything else. The Web site warns, "When you first try using your SnoreMasker Pro to sleep with your snoring bed partner, you need to make sure he or she understands that you cannot hear them talking to you. Some people might get mad, thinking their partner is just ignoring them, even though this isn't the case." Mrs. A. was

more mature than that. Plus, she was out cold. Mr. A. said that, within minutes, it sounded as if he were standing under the waterfall with someone snoring. The next night, he tried a similar earplug, the T1-100 White Noise Sleep Aid and Tinnitus Masker, manufactured by the New Sound Company (\$389). It performed great, if you like to fall asleep while listening to the loud whooshing of a Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade balloon being deflated by someone snoring. The good news was that the alarm clock was irrelevant, because Mr. A. had been up for hours.

The Dreammate Sleep Inducer is a plastic watchlike item that you strap on thirty minutes before bedtime (\$59.95). It sends out faint electrical pulses, which are supposed to jolt you into a state of calm and also stimulate three acupuncture points on the inside of your wrist, which trigger the release of melatonin. According to the Web site, it "obeys the Meridian Theory of Chinese Medicine." Steve, who tried it out for me, said that it did not help him sleep. "But I sort of like the way it feels when it vibrates and gives me tiny shocks on the inside of my wrist," he said.

I persuaded my friend Jane, who wakes up every morning at three-thirty, to try out the Bulletproof Sleep Induction Mat (\$49.95). She is a fan of acupuncture, and the mat, roughly the size of a flattened porcupine, is similarly covered with short spikes—almost ten thousand of them, clumped onto rows of one-inch disks. Dave Asprey, the entrepreneur who came up with the idea for the mat, explained the

logic of managing anxiety by causing it. "Have you ever seen what happens with a puppy when you pick it up?" he asked, over the phone from Vancouver Island. "It struggles and then gives up and melts into your arms." In the same way, when you lie down on the mat, "your inner dialogue says, 'Oh, my God, I'm going to die,' but then your body realizes complaining isn't going to help, and it says, 'Be quiet and calm down,' and you melt. You roll over, toss the mat off the bed, and sleep soundly."

Or your inner dialogue could say, as Jane's did, when she awoke in the middle of the night as usual and lay on the mat, "It was agony. I didn't relax into it, and I didn't see the point, and all the non-pressure points in my back screamed at me, 'Why are you doing this to us?'"

COMPARED WITH the Sleep Number i8 smart bed I tried recently, my bed is an ignoramus (\$4,799.97 to \$8,549.97). My twentieth-century box spring just lies around, unequipped to inform me each morning over WiFi how well I slept the night before. The Sleep Number bases its report on the usual metrics, such as heart rate and body movement. That's not its only trick: Have you ever tried to find a comfortable position in bed and concluded it was impossible unless you got rid of your shoulder? The air-filled Sleep Number minimizes pressure on your body parts by letting you adjust the firmness of your side of the mattress, while your bedfellow can use his own remote control to inflate or deflate his half of the bedscape to his liking. What's more, our remotes allowed us to elevate the head and foot sections of our respective territories, providing all the fun of a hospital bed without having to be sick.

If you are hoping to excel at sleeping, you'll need a high-performance pillow, Eugene Alletto, the C.E.O. of Bedgear, told me. (His observation that "many people have never been fitted for a pillow" was not exactly a shock to me.) You'll also want sheets and a mattress protector made from "climate-control fabric." Bedgear is one of several new companies that sell technologically advanced bed accessories. My friend Marshall's Pillow ID—based on a Web questionnaire



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concerning his size, sleep position, and type of mattress—pegged him as a perfect candidate for the Dusk 2.0, a spongy cushion with a crimson border made from “nature’s most durable support material, derived from the frothed milk sap of natural rubber trees,” as opposed to fake rubber trees (\$162). He took it to his mother’s house in the Hamptons, where the cacophony of nature tends to keep him up. After a week with Dusk 2.0, he said, “It’s the kind of pillow I like, mostly because it’s cold and firm. I also like that it is red and distinctive.”

On the other hand, there is Pillo 1, a large, bouncy, latex-foam model from a company called Hall Innovations (\$199). With a scooped-out hollow for your skull, the Pillo 1 would make perfect packing material for a cantaloupe. But, as a sleep aid, it disappointed my friend Penny: “I woke up that first morning with an acute pain in my neck, so I wasn’t willing to be a volunteer for this pillow anymore.” The directions indicate that, because it can take from three to four weeks to “break in” (whether it is the pillow or you that is broken in is unclear), you should use it at first for only one or two hours a night. Isn’t that like waking the patient to give her a sleeping pill?

Finally: relief for large-breasted women who like to sleep on their stomachs is here. It’s called the Billow Pillow, a large fan-shaped cushion with an indentation in the middle (\$200).

Roz, who met one of the criteria, took it to bed. “It’s really big,” she said. “I wasn’t sure how it ‘went.’ Figured it out. Head on the high part, boobs in the sort of depressed part under that.” She wasn’t a fan: “I like a smallish, soft, malleable pillow. This one was not at all moldable. I felt like my head was being bent at an unpleasant angle to the rest of my body.”

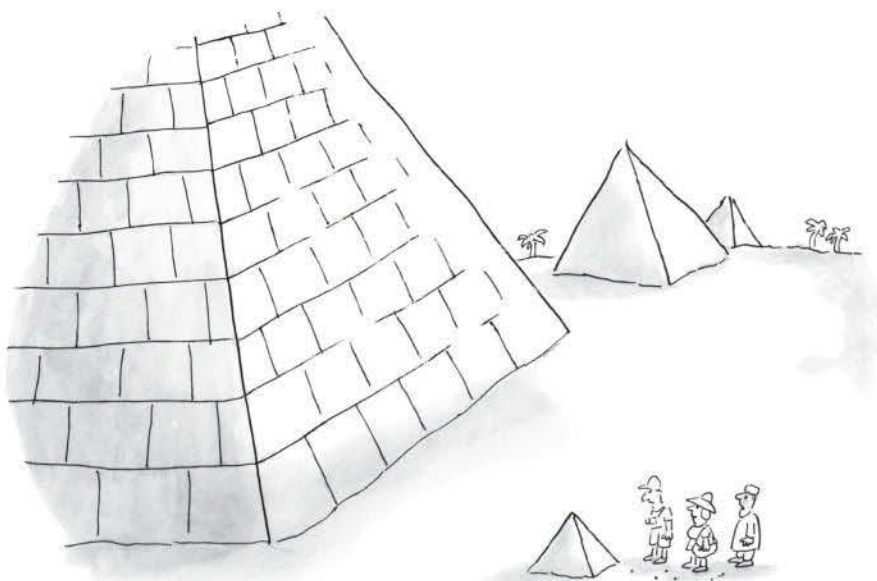
Picture an outsized balaclava designed by Claes Oldenburg for E.T. and made from swatches of gray Teletubbies. That’s what the Ostrich Pillow looks like (\$99). Meant to be worn over the entire head and neck, it is stuffed like a beanbag chair and has an opening for the nose-mouth region, if breathing’s your thing; there are two holes to tuck your hands into should you want to lean forward onto, let’s say, an airplane tray table. The pillow claims to make napping possible anywhere—your desk, the dinner table, the Davos World Economic Forum—provided you don’t mind a sweaty head, extreme hat hair, and possibly being an unsuspecting crime victim. My friend Joan used it during a massage but sacrificed a few minutes of her hour trying to get the masseuse to stop laughing.

BEFORE YOU get too cozy, consider this: although too little sleep can be deadly, too much of it can be even more deadly. A meta-analysis of sixteen studies involving around 1.4 mil-

lion subjects suggests that someone who sleeps more than eight or nine hours a day has a thirty per cent higher mortality rate than the person who sleeps seven to eight hours. Why, then, do we believe that eight hours of sleep is ideal? Jim Horne, the former head of the Sleep Research Center in Loughborough, England, told me that the fallacy originated with a study in 1913—of school-age kids. “There is no evidence that we sleep fewer hours than our parents and grandparents did, or that we are any more sleep deprived,” Horne said. “It’s simply that they kept private matters to themselves.”

It’s not my place to call anyone a liar, but are you positive that you were up all night? We have data to show that you—I mean self-professed poor sleepers—often overestimate the extent of nighttime wakefulness. These days, you can wear on your wrist the Basis Peak Ultimate Fitness and Sleep Tracker, a chunky gizmo that Dick Tracy might like (\$199.99). It takes note of not just calories burned and sweat levels (*ew!*) but also your tosses and turns and absences from bed. Using a technique that involves shining L.E.D. light into your capillaries and assessing the rebounding waves with optical sensors, it also measures the duration of each sleep phase (light, deep, and REM). In general, Basis Peak has received positive reviews from tech magazines for accuracy, especially for its heart monitor. “As for the sleep thing, I think it might be mostly bullshit,” said my friend Billy, who used the tracker for two weeks and ended up with wildly fluctuating “sleep scores” that he couldn’t explain. “It thought I slept for eleven hours one night, which can’t be true, and then twenty-three minutes another night, which also can’t be true.” But he couldn’t really see the point of knowing how much he slept anyway.

“The first thing you have to know about these devices is that they are anti-conjugal,” Victoria e-mailed from Washington, D.C. For several weeks, she and her boyfriend, David, tried two sleep-tracking gadgets. She used the Beddit Smart Sleep Tracker, whose sensor is lodged in a thin strap placed discreetly under the top sheet (\$149); he used the S+, by ResMed, which picked up his sleep vibes via a transponder



“He died young.”

that sits next to the bed (\$149.99). The high-tech S+ looks like something that might pick up and report fluctuations in the Shanghai stock exchange. The Beddit, Victoria reported, recorded “many fewer hours of sleep than I would swear that I actually slept.” She might have sabotaged the readings, though, by migrating toward David in her sleep. (Beddit recommends placing the sensor an unromantic six inches from the center of the bed or your partner.) Victoria’s attitude toward sleep is binary (“either I did it or I didn’t”); she had no use for the data Beddit provided about her respiration, heart rate, amount of snoring, and so forth.

David is a connoisseur of the unconscious, though, and revelled in the granular data disgorged daily by the S+. Victoria said, “David woke me up during his second week of S+ sleeping with a jubilant ‘Honey, I did it! I got a sleep score of ninety-eight!’” Although David is a little uncomfortable with the ongoing relay to ResMed headquarters of what goes on in his bed, he feels that the device has prodded him to prioritize getting better sleep. “When I wake up to a high S+ rating,” he e-mailed, “I know I’m going to feel pretty good that day.”

COGNITIVE BEHAVIOR therapy for insomnia (C.B.T.-I) is like the tough teacher in high school—she gives a lot of homework but you end up better for it. This pragmatic approach to combatting insomnia focuses on changing the behaviors and anxieties that keep you up. Several studies suggest that it is a more effective remedy than soporific drugs. A review that looked at data from twenty clinical trials found that C.B.T.-I cut the time it took the average subject to drift off to sleep by about twenty minutes and increased sleep duration by almost thirty minutes. But you have to work at it: subjects keep a sleep journal, practice relaxation techniques, and learn to be less anxious about their anxiety. Exhausted yet?

John, who is prone to waking at 4 A.M., enrolled in the five-week Conquering Insomnia program, which is taught online by Dr. Gregg Jacobs, a sleep specialist at the Sleep Disorders Center at the University of Massachusetts Medical School (\$39.95). Jacobs provides person-

alized weekly feedback based on a patient’s reports. John said that he found the program “helpful but not life changing,” and that he learned a lot of new fun facts, such as that the most restorative sleep occurs during the first four or five hours of the night, and whatever else you manage is a bonus. “The two main takeaways,” he said, “are less stress about not getting a full night of sleep and a new focus on getting up at around the same time each morning.”

An eight-hour stretch of sleep may not even be natural. In his book “At Day’s Close: Night in Times Past,” the historian Roger Ekirch cites more than five hundred references from diaries, court records, medical papers, and literature, demonstrating that our pre-industrial ancestors slept in two discrete parcels of time. After what a character in “The Canterbury Tales” called the “firste sleep,” you awoke around midnight for an hour or so, and might engage in, say, tending the fire, brewing ale, fooling around, committing petty larceny, praying. Then you would sleep again until dawn.

For coffee drinkers who overdo it, there are morning-after pills that contain rutacarpine, an alkaloid that may speed up the rate at which your body breaks down caffeine. Or you could skip the caffeine and drink lettuce tea, a remedy for restlessness, including restless-leg syndrome. (It’s all over the Internet, so it must be true.) Dennis, who takes three naps a day, is always up for another (“Sleeping is so cool—it prepares you for the afterlife”), so he tested this remedy. Twenty minutes a day for three weeks, he boiled romaine lettuce to make his daily gallon of tea. At the end of Week Two, he got so weary boiling lettuce that he took a morning nap. Case closed.

Being well rested is important, but if you have a high-minded value system there is something even more crucial: looking well rested. So I tried the Eye Slack Haruka (\$44.99), a new device from Japan that works like a vibrator for the cheekbones. You lean back, place the two boomerang-shaped pieces of pink plastic under your eyes, and wait as they jiggle away your under-eye bags in just three minutes a day. To my great surprise, they worked. My fat pouches disappeared—or, rather, they seem to have migrated southward an inch. In their place? An eye infection I lost sleep over. ♦

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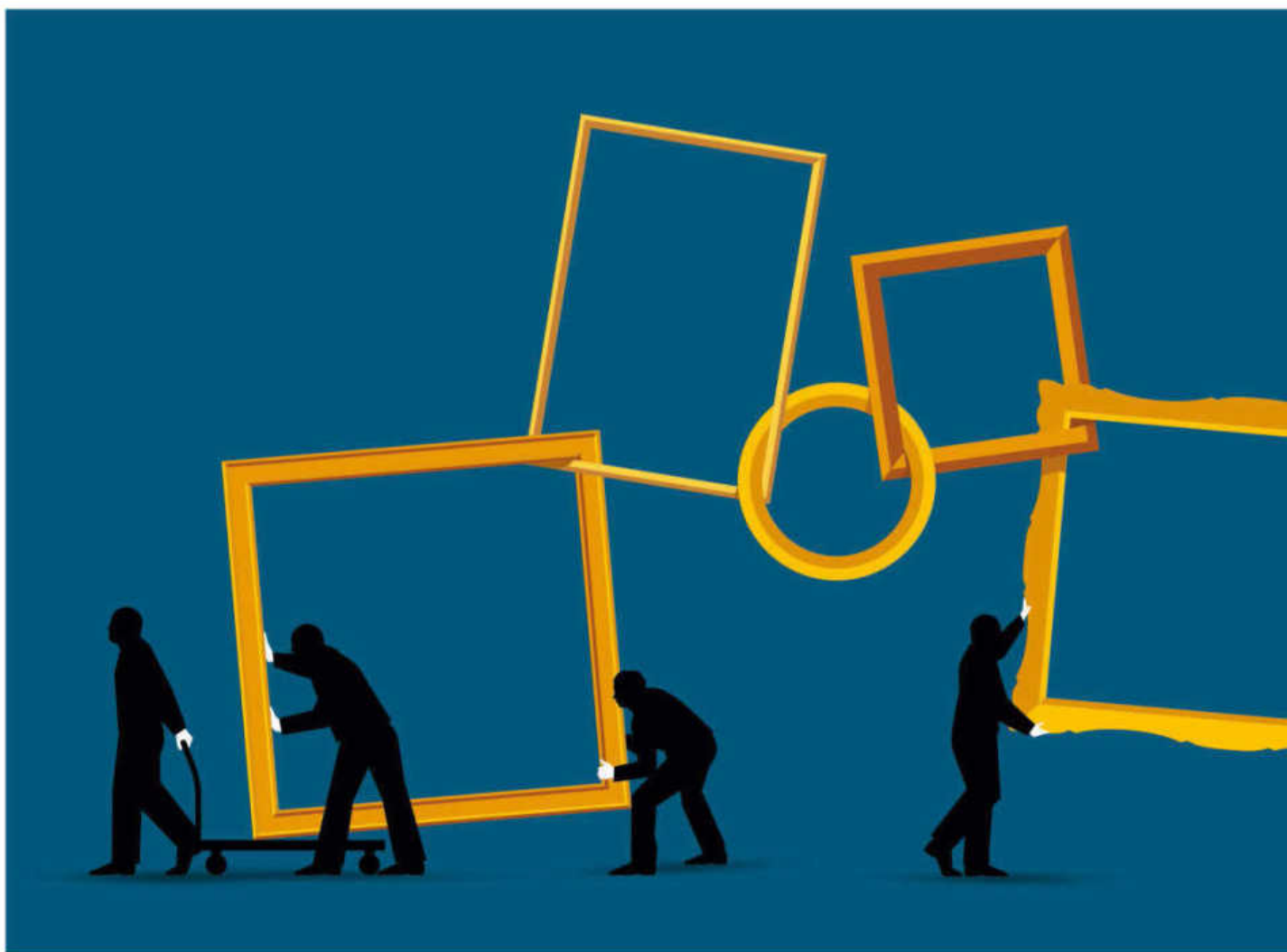


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A REPORTER AT LARGE

THE BOUVIER AFFAIR

How an art-world insider made a fortune by being discreet.

BY SAM KNIGHT

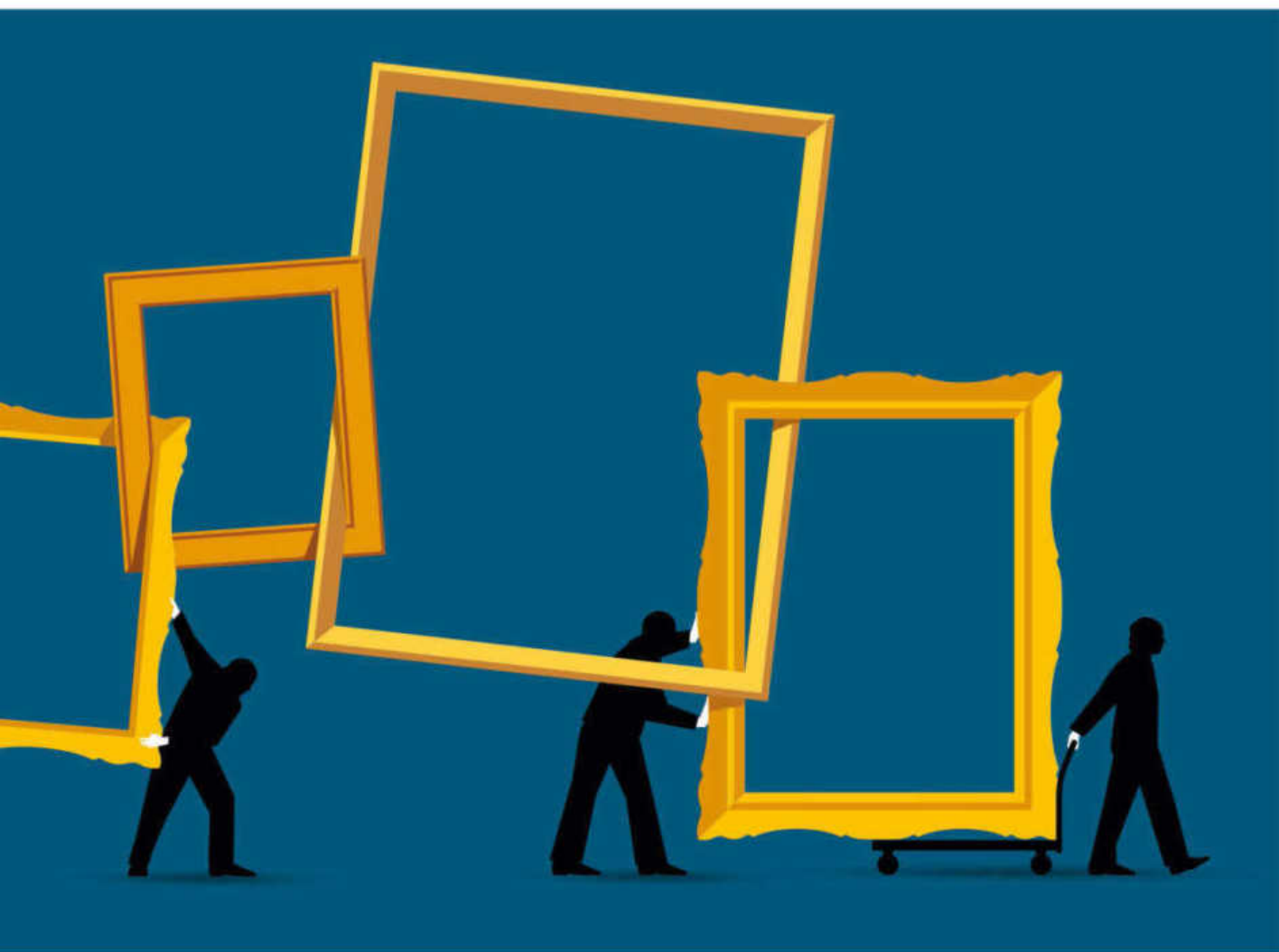
THE GENEVA Freeport, which may be the world's most valuable storage facility, consists of seven beige warehouses and a large grain silo in La Praille, an industrial zone a short tram ride from the city's lakeside panorama of banks and expensive hotels. One recent morning, rain was falling on the chain-link fence that runs through the property, and snow was visible on the mountains to the south. Iris scanners, magnetic locks, and a security system known as Cerberus guard the freeport's storerooms, whose contents are said to be insured for a hundred billion dollars, but the facility re-

tains a blue-collar feel. There were signs to the showers. Men stood around in aprons and smoked. Everything about the place tells you to look the other way.

The freeport began, in 1888, as a group of sheds near the waterfront. It was one of countless similar spaces around the world, where customs authorities allow duties and taxes to be suspended until goods reach their final destination. In time, however, the Geneva Freeport became legendary. It grew very large, and its official status—the freeport is eighty-six per cent owned by the local government—and kinship with the opaque traditions of Swiss banking made it a

storage facility for the international élite. Under the freeport's rules, objects could remain in untaxed limbo, in theory, forever. Treasures came and they did not leave. A generation ago, these goods were cars, wine, and gold. More recently, they have been works of art.

Yves Bouvier was among the first to see the potential of the freeport as an adjunct to the art market. A blond, compact man of fifty-two, Bouvier is the owner of Natural Le Coultre, a moving and storage company and the largest tenant in the complex. For more than a hundred years, the firm shipped everything from citrus fruit to industrial machinery; during



the First World War, Natural Le Coultre supplied prisoners of war with Red Cross food parcels. Since 1997, however, when Bouvier took over the firm from his father, it has handled only paintings and sculpture. Bouvier refurbished the company's premises at the freeport, which include two showrooms, and encouraged a framer to open a workshop in the building. Since 2013, Natural Le Coultre has rented more than twenty thousand square metres in storage space and has had well over a million objects in its care.

Every item passes through a single packing room, where it is unwrapped, photographed, and studied for damage. On the morning I visited, a Bob Dylan painting had arrived, along with a Picasso bronze from Greece. There were hammers hanging in order of size, and a stack of crates containing works by Léon Pourtau, a minor Impressionist. Ramon Casais, who has worked in the freeport for the past thirty years, agreed to show me a corridor of locked storeroom doors

only after he had gone ahead to make sure there was absolutely nothing to see.

Specialist logistics companies, like Natural Le Coultre, are the quiet butlers of the art world. They operate deep inside it but are not quite of it. When an artist has made a sculpture out of butter, or scalpels, or half a passenger jet, it is up to a shipper to get it from Hong Kong to Miami in the same condition as when it left, and to make no fuss. To do their work, shippers must know many things. They are given records of private sales and the names of collectors, in order to navigate customs. In the course of a typical day, stopping by the homes of dealers and the back rooms of galleries, they learn who answers the door and the phone number of the assistant, and see the other pictures on the walls. The shippers' professional indifference means that they are often in the room at moments of extreme commercial sensitivity. "Imagine that I am in Basel and I need to show a client a painting," Thomas Seydoux, a dealer

and a former chairman of Impressionist and modern art at Christie's, told me. "Ninety-nine per cent of the time, you are going to show it with a transit agent."

This intimacy means that, once you find your shipper, you tend to stick with him. Relationships last for decades, built on trust and a sense, usually unspoken, of absolute limits. In sixteenth-century Venice, diplomats were instructed to employ illiterate valets, who would be unable to read any secret documents they were asked to carry. A transit agent "should by default be a blind man," Seydoux told me. "That is the very nature of his job." Everything works fine, as long as people stay within their allotted roles. Seydoux said, "You can't win somebody's trust by saying you are blind and then open your eyes."

YVES BOUVIER started handling art in his late teens. He worked at Natural Le Coultre during his vacations, earning money in order to ski. When I asked him recently to describe himself



"You have to get up early tomorrow, too? We have so much in common!"

as a child, he replied, "Turbulent." He grew up in Avully, a small village on the border with France. He had a sister, who was born disabled and later died. As a boy, Bouvier was withdrawn. He spent most of his time outdoors, where he was brave—reckless, almost—when it came to physical activities. "Any kind of sport that was extreme, he liked," Tony Reynard, a friend of Bouvier's since he was twelve, told me. He skied like a maniac and raced go-karts on the roads at night. He dreamed of opening a bar and ski shop in the mountains.

Bouvier's father, Jean-Jacques, started as an apprentice at Natural Le Coultre in 1953. In 1982, he was able to buy the company. Yves, having dropped out of college, joined him, and brought his appetite for risk to the unlikely domain of freight. Bouvier combines a Calvinist reserve with a delight in doing the unthinkable. "If you tell me it is not possible, I will say, O.K., I will do it," he told me once. He took on spectacular jobs—the transport of an eighty-five-ton industrial furnace, a U.B.S. office move in Geneva—but was also drawn to what was fragile, beautiful, and expensive. Bouvier speaks an imperfect, gestural English, but he explained that becoming a shipper allowed him to immerse himself in "the feeling and the difficulty of art." He

had no formal training, just what passed through his hands. "It started with the touch," he said. "You have all the panoply: small, huge, it's with value, with no value. You have everything, so you learn."

Shipping also introduced Bouvier to the complicated lives of the rich—their taxes and their divorces—and the other ancillary trades that help the art world go around: restorers, framers, hired experts, operators of tiny galleries in Paris clinging on from sale to sale. He realized they all had needs of their own. When he took over the running of Natural Le Coultre from his father, at the age of thirty-four, Bouvier sold off the company's general moving business and specialized in art. Unlike other shippers, however, he never considered stopping at logistics.

Quietly, he began his own forays into the marketplace. "I was in the shadows," he said. The first picture that Bouvier bought was a small gouache by Max Ernst from an auction house in Geneva. (He has a collection of twentieth-century furniture and design.) Alongside his work at Natural Le Coultre, he started to dabble, making himself useful to the people he knew. Bouvier financed purchases that dealers couldn't afford on their own. He sorted out cash flow and bills. He became adept at setting up offshore com-

panies—Diva, Blancaflor, Eagle Overseas—to enable galleries to buy specific works and mask the identity of other investors in a transaction. Bouvier is an opportunist. Pitch him and he will decide if he is in or out. "It is always a question of what I will earn on the deal," he said.

Within a few years, Bouvier was buying and selling pictures on a serious scale, interacting almost solely with other dealers. "When you buy, it is always to sell," he said. "You always have the buyer before you have the seller." On August 16, 2000, he bought a Paul Gauguin landscape, "Paysage aux Trois Arbres," from Peintures Hermès, a Swiss gallery associated with the Wildenstein family of art dealers, for \$9.5 million. Two weeks later, he sold the picture to Mandarin Trading, a Bahamas-based art fund, for \$11.3 million, making a profit of sixteen per cent. Mandarin Trading later sued the Wildensteins for fraud, alleging that it was the victim of a scam to inflate the value of the painting. The case was dismissed in 2011. I once asked Bouvier what drew him to particular propositions. "In the mountains, it was the same," he replied. "I go in the place which is the most complicated, the most risky place."

DMITRY RYBOLOVLEV, a Russian oligarch, first met Bouvier in August, 2002, during a visit to the Geneva Freeport to pick up a painting by Marc Chagall. Rybolovlev was in his late thirties and worth nearly a billion dollars. He had moved his wife, Elena, and young daughter to Switzerland in 1995, after acquiring control of Uralkali, a state-owned potash-mining company, at the age of twenty-nine. He then went back to Russia, where he spent eleven months in custody after being accused of ordering the contract killing of a rival. (He was later cleared of all charges.)

Rybolovlev spoke no English, no French, and no German. When he and Elena arrived in Geneva, they felt isolated, but they soon befriended a Bulgarian publisher named Tania Rappo, who was the wife of Elena's dentist. Rappo was fifteen years older than the Rybolovlevs, tall, gregarious, and fun. She was working on an encyclopedia at the time, but she quickly became the Russians' all-around helper and confidante. She secured access to the city's sports clubs, introduced them to friends, and helped

them to buy an apartment in Paris.

The Rybolovlevs lived in Cogny, one of Geneva's smartest neighborhoods. Their mansion had picture lights on the walls, which had been installed for the previous owner's art collection. When the Rybolovlevs decided to buy paintings to go under the lights, Rappo brought them to Christie's, but they asked her to look for works herself. "I said, 'Listen, I am not very good,'" Rappo told me. "I knew it was quite a tricky world." Still, after several months of work, Rappo arranged the purchase of the Chagall painting "Le Cirque," for six million dollars. When the painting arrived at Natural Le Coultre's facility at the freeport, Rappo went with the Rybolovlevs to see it.

Bouvier was waiting. He introduced himself as the head of Natural Le Coultre and took them to the showroom. The Russians had no idea that, as part of his other dealings, Bouvier had also been an intermediary in the Chagall deal, which had been a messy transaction, involving several middlemen. According to Bouvier, Rybolovlev arrived in a bad temper. The Chagall lacked an authenticity certificate—a document, typically signed by an art scholar, that guarantees that a work is real. Rybolovlev was afraid that he might have been ripped off.

Bouvier tried to calm him down. "I knew this painting," he told me. "It was a good painting." Even though he was ostensibly just in charge of the storage facility, he offered to help. "I will find the certificate for you, and I will be quiet," he said. When the Russians left, Bouvier picked up the phone and called the previous owner of the Chagall. He got the certificate a few days later and called Rappo. He asked her to set up a proper meeting with the Rybolovlevs at their house in Cogny. This time, Bouvier told me, he offered them his services more generally. He could protect them during their adventures in the art market, he promised. And he could also find them art. "I have the information," he said. "I can sell you paintings."

According to Bouvier, the nature of his relationship with the Rybolovlevs was clear from the beginning. Although he had seldom worked with private clients before, he would be their dealer. He would also take care of all their art-related logistics. Building a collection involves a thousand small, complex tasks: storage,

shipping, condition reports, restoration, making copies, framing, due diligence, insurance. For these services, Bouvier would charge an extra two per cent of the purchase price of any painting he sold them. Privately, he promised Rappo that, if he ever sold Rybolovlev anything, he would give her a commission, for introducing him in the first place.

He was aware that the proposal was audacious. Major buyers typically build collections through several dealers and auction houses, knowing that they will be charged the maximum the market can bear. To protect their interests, many also employ an art adviser or consultant, who works for them and is paid a retainer or a commission—in the region of five per cent—on the works that they acquire. Very rarely are all these roles performed by one person.

"It is not usual," Bouvier said. "But it is not forbidden." Other art dealers told me that they have heard of similar arrangements but that they don't last long. Collectors gossip as much as anyone else, comparing commissions, double-checking prices. The Rybolovlevs, for their part, seemed impressed. According to Rappo, Rybolovlev turned to her outside the freeport after their first meeting and said, "This is the man we need." (He denies this.) A year later, in August, 2003, the shipper sold the oligarch Vincent van Gogh's "Paysage Avec un Olivier," for seventeen million dollars.

THE RELATIONSHIP between art dealer and collector is particular and charged. The dealer is mentor and salesman. He informs his client's desires while subjecting himself to them at the same time. The collector has money, but he is also vulnerable. Relationships start, prosper, and fail for any number of reasons. It is not always obvious where power lies. Over time, each one can convince himself that he has created the other.

The first four paintings that Bouvier sold to Rybolovlev were covered by contracts drawn up by Lenz & Staehelin, one of Switzerland's largest law firms. The contracts listed Bouvier, through a Hong Kong-based company named M.E.I. Invest, as the "Seller" and Mikhail Sazonov, who was the director of Ry-

bolovlev's family trusts, as the "Buyer." Personal invoices from Bouvier, covering what he called his *frais habituels*—his usual costs—arrived separately.

To Rybolovlev, Bouvier personified the idea of a colorless Swiss professional. "I would not call him a great personality," Rybolovlev told me. "But he was calm, discreet, and intelligent." We were speaking on the phone. Rybolovlev was in Miami and his lawyer, Tetiana Bersheda, was in Monaco, translating. Rybolovlev had worked with bankers in Geneva for years, and he projected the same image onto Bouvier. He called him his *predstavitel'*, Russian for "representative," in the art world, and thought of him like the other professionals—accountants, boat skippers—whom he employed. Operating through Bouvier and M.E.I. Invest offered the Russian valuable discretion in the art market. Access to the oligarch was strictly controlled. "Besides his lawyer and his hairdresser, I don't think he sees normal people at all," Rappo once told me. Rybolovlev assumed that the two-per-cent fee was Bouvier's commission. He was impressed by Natural Le Coultre's premises in the freeport, which put Bouvier in contact with the owners of expensive art works. "He had insider information," Rybolovlev said. "He knew the collectors without intermediaries. He knew what was where."

Bouvier needed a translator to speak with Rybolovlev, but he had a sense of his personality. "He was a person quick in the decision, I feel that," Bouvier told me. There were artists the Russian admired, like Modigliani and Monet, and those he could not stand, like Dali. Having a buyer of his magnitude enabled Bouvier to operate at a higher level of the art market, but it did not change the way he did business. "It is not an old man in Russia drinking vodka," Bouvier said. He set out to make as much money as possible. "For me, I will be clear," he told me. "If I buy for two and I can sell for eleven, I will sell for eleven."

He went after sensational paintings. In October, 2004, Bouvier acquired "Les Noces de Pierrette," by Picasso, which, at \$51.3 million, had set a record for the artist when it previously sold, in 1989. The washed-out, Blue Period



masterpiece had been bought by a Japanese real-estate developer, who wanted to put it on display at a racetrack. But the developer went bust, and the painting had changed hands several times as collateral for loans, depreciating in value. Bouvier bought the work from the Manhattan art dealer William Acquavella and sold it to Rybolovlev for \$43.8 million. His two-per-cent fee would have been nearly nine hundred thousand dollars. Rappo's cut came to just under \$2.5 million.

IN HIS day job, Bouvier remained the president of Natural Le Coultre. Hidden behind company names and, often, dealers working on his behalf, he tended to disguise his role in transactions. "To be invisible is the best way to make business," he said. Rybolovlev was a huge client, but in the early years his purchases were sporadic. Bouvier works constantly, and he becomes restless unless there is something new to occupy him. "Relaxing is the same as working," he says.

In 2004, Bouvier launched an art fair in Moscow. The following year, fifty thousand people came, and there was a gala in the Kremlin. Tania Rappo was the fair's vice-president. The logistics required helicopters and dawn convoys of trucks through Red Square and drew on all of Bouvier's organizational flair. Friends noticed that he had also sharpened his image. Bouvier never used to wear suits, but now he bore the trappings of an international businessman, wearing tailor-made shirts with his initials, "Y.E.B.," and numerals on the cuffs showing the year and the season each shirt was made.

The Moscow World Fine Art Fair never turned a profit, but it widened Bouvier's network, and it impressed Rybolovlev. "The fair was like a brushstroke to his portrait," the Russian said. "It demonstrated that he had connections." It also deepened Bouvier's relationship with Rappo. According to Rybolovlev, Rappo soon became a constant advocate for Bouvier's services, claiming that he was the best-connected man in the art business. Rappo's endorsement—she was the godmother of Rybolovlev's younger daughter, Anna—helped give Bouvier extraordinary access to the family. He joined the board of Elena's foundation and was invited to birthday parties in Hawaii and the Greek islands. Bouvier, who has a

longtime partner in Geneva, usually travelled alone. He paints these occasions as grim, commercial obligations. "If there is a social party of your client, you will go," he said. Rybolovlev thought that he was doing his staid art adviser a favor. "I thought that he had a rather boring life in Switzerland," he told me.

The income from his dealing enabled Bouvier to expand his storage facilities. For several years, he had been looking

provide. But Bouvier's development in Singapore carried within it two ideas. The first is that freeports will become hubs in the sixty-billion-dollar international art market, destinations in themselves—places for scholars, restorers, insurers, art-finance specialists, consultants, and dealers. The second idea is that the ultra-rich don't want just another warehouse. "If you buy a painting for a hundred million, what do you want? You



Yves Bouvier worked in shipping, a field based on trust and unspoken limits.

to build a freeport outside Europe similar to the one in Geneva. In 2005, he settled on Singapore. In 2008, Bouvier decided to base himself in the country as well. The Singapore Freeport, which required new legislation to be passed by the national parliament, opened in 2010. Bouvier put Tony Reynard, his childhood friend, in charge. The freeport, which abuts the city's international airport, is an over-engineered hybrid of vault and temple. It cost Bouvier a hundred million dollars to build. At first, no bank would finance it. "They thought we were loonies," Reynard said.

A freeport offers few tax advantages and scarcely any security features that a standard bonded warehouse cannot

want to feel well," Bouvier said. "Why else do people travel in first class?"

In Singapore, Bouvier specified each component, from the fire-resistant walls, coiled through with steel, to the height of the doors: three metres, to admit the largest contemporary installations. "I chose everything," he said. "The door handles. I'm obsessive about that." He used a lighting artist named Johanna Grawunder, whose work he collects, and commissioned an enormous sculpture, "La Cage sans Frontières," by the Israeli artist and designer Ron Arad, to stand in the atrium.

The opening of the Singapore Freeport, and its immediate success—Christie's took a space—brought Bouvier international attention. The facilities

tapped into a fascination with the tastes and financial shenanigans of the one per cent. Bouvier opened a second, slightly smaller freeport in Luxembourg, in September, 2014, and *The Economist* noted his role in the development of “Über warehouses for the ultra-rich.” He made plans to replicate the model in Dubai and to act as a consultant for a vast new project in Beijing.

Bouvier’s rivals in the art-logistics trade watched, fascinated and somewhat bemused. Art shippers are unshowy folk. They didn’t understand why Bouvier and Natural Le Coultre were making such a fuss over their warehouses. One rival, who visited the Singapore Freeport and saw the Arad in the atrium, told me, “If a client of mine walked into my office and saw a five-million-dollar sculpture, he would assume I was charging him too much.” Others couldn’t work out where Bouvier was getting the money. Natural Le Coultre’s profits had historically been a few million dollars a year. “Of course, we wondered,” one told me. “We are not billionaires. And to build freeports you need to be a billionaire.”

RYBOLOVLEV WAS the billionaire whose money was building the freeports. From 2008 onward, his life and finances became increasingly unsettled, but the net result was that his spending on art dramatically increased. That year, he and Elena separated. According to Bouvier, Elena had always been conservative. With her out of the way, Rybolovlev seemed to have fewer inhibitions. Through a network of trusts, he bought Donald Trump’s mansion in Palm Beach, Sanford Weill’s apartment on Central Park West, and the island of Skorpios, in Greece, which used to belong to Aristotle Onassis. And he pressed forward with his art collection.

Rybolovlev had other reasons to spread his money around. In late October, 2008, the oligarch was summoned to Moscow, where he was told that a government investigation into an accident at his potash company, Uralkali, was being reopened. Uralkali had previously been cleared of any liability after an incident, in 2006, in which a mine in the Ural Mountains flooded with brine and a huge sinkhole opened in the ground. The fresh investigation caused Uralkali’s stock to plummet. The company paid

two hundred and fifty million dollars in compensation, and the inquiry recalled the authorities’ pursuit of other state-owned assets that had been questionably acquired in the nineteen-nineties.

The pressure persuaded Rybolovlev that his assets were no longer safe in Russia. In June, 2010, he sold his controlling stake in Uralkali for an estimated five billion dollars. This sudden influx of cash brought its own complications, however. By this time, every one of Rybolovlev’s financial maneuvers was being scrutinized by his estranged wife and her lawyers. The oligarch instructed Bouvier to find him “mobile assets.”

He went to work. Between 2003 and 2007, Bouvier had sold the Russian six art works. Between 2008 and 2013, he sold him twenty-eight. He summoned every hunch, every contested inheritance, every paid informant, every whispered tax problem gathered from two decades operating inside an art market that had never paid him much attention. “If nobody knows you, you take all the information,” he told me. “It is to be like an octopus.”

Rybolovlev had a taste for Modigliani nudes, for example. Bouvier knew that Steve Cohen, the New York hedge-fund manager, had one of the finest, “Nu Couché au Cousin Bleu,” but also that he had no plans to sell. In November, 2011, however, Bouvier learned through an informant that Cohen had just bought four Matisse bronzes from Sotheby’s in a private sale for more than a hundred million dollars. Approaching Cohen through Lionel Pissarro, a dealer in Paris, Bouvier managed to buy the Modigliani, for \$93.5 million.

In 2013, he secured a Gustav Klimt masterpiece, “Wasserschlangen II,” that had been seized by the Nazis. The day after lawyers concluded a lengthy dispute over its ownership, Bouvier sold it to Rybolovlev for a hundred and eighty-three million dollars. He bought a Gauguin that had not been sold since the Second World War and a lost Leonardo da Vinci, “Salvator Mundi,” that had been sensationally rediscovered. On its display at the National Gallery in London, the da Vinci became one of the most talked-about pictures in the world. According to Rappo, Rybolovlev wanted it for the wall of his study. Bouvier brought the painting to the Russian’s apartment in

New York, where, Rybolovlev told me, he experienced a profound emotional reaction—“a vibration”—in its presence. He bought the picture for \$127.5 million.

EVERY TRANSACTION at the top end of the private art market involves a chain, a cast of characters that stretches from the buyer to the seller: finders, agents, lawyers, lenders. It is rare for the principals to know everyone involved, and it can be improper to ask. Bouvier was a master at making chains—short, long, simple, or twisted, depending on the deal. If he knew that a seller would prefer an approach from an auction house, he would send someone, usually from Sotheby’s. Otherwise, Bouvier would send an intermediary. Often this was a Corsican named Jean-Marc Peretti, who was investigated for running an illegal gambling circle in Paris in 2009. Bouvier is attracted to outsiders in the art world. “The best people are just good businesspeople—they are butchers,” he said. Bouvier helped Peretti open a gallery in the freeport in Geneva and trusted him to carry out the most sensitive transactions. (Peretti declined to speak with me.)

When a deal with the seller was in sight, Bouvier would then agree on his own price with Rybolovlev, which was often tens of millions of dollars higher. He conducted these negotiations via e-mail, in French, with Mikhail Sazonov, Rybolovlev’s adviser. Over the years, these e-mails became increasingly familiar, but Bouvier always maintained a crucial legerdemain—suggesting that he was acting on the Russian’s behalf to secure the best deal possible from the seller, rather than that he was the one selling to Rybolovlev. “I just got a super and last price of 14 million euros, because the seller had an opportunity to invest,” he wrote of a Toulouse-Lautrec that he obtained in February, 2013. “It’s done at 25,” he wrote of a late Picasso, “Joueur de Flûte et Femme Nue,” which he bought in Paris in October of 2010.

Bouvier told me that such blurring of who exactly owns what, and when a transaction occurred, is commonplace in the art market. When you walk into a gallery, you never know what the dealer is selling on consignment, what he owns outright, or how prices have been arrived at. “It is not lying,” he said. “There is always

a part of the story which is true.” But Bouvier was ruthless in exploiting what was left unsaid. “Joueur de Flûte et Femme Nue,” which Bouvier sold to Rybolovlev for twenty-five million euros, he had bought the day before for just three and a half million. He made a sixty-million-dollar profit on the Klimt.

Bouvier did not explain to me how he handled the cash flow for his transactions, but dealers often grant clients a few months to settle large invoices. As soon as a sale was agreed with Rybolovlev, an invoice would usually go out from M.E.I. Invest to one of two Rybolovlev family trusts, Accent Delight or Xitrans Finance, both based in the British Virgin Islands. The Russian paid fast. Bouvier insisted that he always bore the financial risk for all his transactions, if only for a short time. “If I can switch it in one minute,” he said, “I am the happiest man in the world.”

He believed that he was building a magnificent collection. Great dealers are judged on the quality and the personality of the works that they acquire. In 2011, as a surprise for Rybolovlev, Bouvier commissioned Joachim Pissarro, a leading scholar of Impressionism and twentieth-century art, and the brother of Lionel, the Paris dealer, to write a catalogue of the collection.

And there were moments of exultation. For years, Bouvier had dreamed of buying Mark Rothko’s “No. 6 (Violet, Green and Red),” an abstract column that the artist painted in 1951, while working at Brooklyn College. The painting was on the cover of the catalogue raisonné, an official inventory of Rothko’s work, and had been owned by the Moueix family, a French wine-producing dynasty, for decades. One day, Rybolovlev saw the image on the catalogue and told Bouvier that he would do anything to acquire the painting. Through Peretti, Bouvier had been quietly cultivating the Moueix family for years, buying their wine and lesser works from their collection, in the hope of one day securing the Rothko.

In early 2014, Bouvier learned that they might be willing to sell. Years earlier, he had flown to the family’s château, in Bordeaux, to view the painting, which was kept in a little-used living room, where the light was blocked out by heavy curtains. In the early nineteen-

fifties, Rothko began experimenting with powdered pigments, solvents, and egg to lend extra force to the colors in his canvases. He wanted viewers of his pictures to feel as if they were inside them. When Bouvier drew back the curtains, the painting seemed to explode in front of his eyes.

The Rothko arrived at the Geneva Freeport in June. Bouvier went to see it on his own. He had the painting placed next to a window, to enjoy the natural light. “It is impossible for people to imagine this kind of deal,” he told me. Bouvier had every reason to feel euphoric. The Moueix family had agreed to sell “No. 6 (Violet, Green and Red)” for eighty million dollars. He had sold it Rybolovlev for a hundred and eighty-nine million. There was Peretti’s cut to worry about—some five million—and the usual commission for Rappo, but Bouvier was about to earn a hundred million dollars on a single sale.

BARELY ANYONE knew about Bouvier’s dealings: a handful of gallery owners across Europe, his lawyer, and Sotheby’s private-sales department. His staff at Natural Le Coultre noticed the art works stored on his account but insist that they were never told more. Their boss was rarely in the office; Bouvier travelled constantly, investing. He controls more than forty companies, which cover a bewildering range of interests, from R4, a new complex of galleries on the site of an old Renault factory in Paris, to Smartcopter, an idea for developing a low-cost helicopter. His manner discouraged conversation. Reynard told me that he never inquired where the money for the Singapore Freeport was coming from. “It is a question you don’t ask,” he told me. “Because you know that he will not answer.”

But the transactions that Bouvier was orchestrating were the source of furious gossip in the art world. Rybolovlev had become known as a top buyer, despite his efforts to keep a low profile. Who was helping him, though, was a mystery. Seydoux, the Geneva dealer, met Rybolovlev once but never managed to forge a relationship. “We tried desperately,” he said. “Nobody knew who really had access to him.”

On March 9, 2014, the *Times* published a piece of industry gossip about the sale of da Vinci’s “Salvator Mundi”

the previous year. Quoting Anthony Crichton-Stuart, a London-based dealer, the article reported that the painting had sold privately for between seventy-five and eighty million dollars. Crichton-Stuart was merely repeating rumors that he had heard, but the article unwittingly revealed the scale of Bouvier’s profit margins: he had sold the da Vinci to Rybolovlev for almost fifty million more.

Bouvier read the article the day that it appeared. No one called from Rybolovlev’s office. He remembered the oligarch’s delighted reaction to the painting, and that he had been willing to pay even more. Bouvier also had other things on his mind. The Luxembourg Freeport was nearing completion, and he was attempting to close the deal on the Rothko. For the first time, Rybolovlev was proving a somewhat awkward client. He paid the first twenty million dollars in cash but wanted to sell other works from his collection to fund the rest of the purchase. The decision dismayed Bouvier. Selling works at the top end of the art market is just as delicate as buying them. He pleaded for patience. During the summer, Rybolovlev fell seriously ill. He was treated for cancer, and suffered post-surgery complications. “I was at a near-unconscious state,” he told me. Bouvier agreed to take a Modigliani sculpture, “Tête,” and to knock sixty million dollars off the price of the Rothko. But it still left him far short of the figure they had agreed on.

Rybolovlev recovered, and, a few months later, on November 22, 2014, he turned forty-eight. He invited Bouvier, as usual, to celebrate his birthday, and during the afternoon, at his penthouse in Monaco, the two men discussed his collection. The price of the da Vinci came up. Rybolovlev asked whether he had paid too much. He didn’t ask about Bouvier’s profit, just whether he had overpaid. Bouvier told me that he offered to ask an expert to appraise the painting’s value. He was confident that it was worth more than a hundred million dollars. Rybolovlev promised to settle up on the Rothko by the end of the year, but he didn’t understand why his middleman seemed unwilling, or unable, to sell works as easily as he bought them. “This made me wonder if everything had been clean,” he said.

That night, Rybolovlev threw a party at the Yacht Club de Monaco. Since 2011,

the Russian has been the owner of A.S. Monaco, the local soccer team, and the party began after that evening's match, a 2–2 draw with Caen. Bouvier was stuck at a table far from the host, who chatted with the Prince. There was bad striptease. (Rybolovlev denies this.) Bouvier stepped out onto the terrace. Rappo was there, and she thought that he seemed upset. Rybolovlev came out as well, and she asked him what had happened. "Tell him not to worry," the Russian said, indicating Bouvier. "We're still friends."

THE END of the year came. Bouvier was still waiting for his money. Rybolovlev was on vacation in St. Barts, in the Caribbean. On December 30th, he was at a lunch for around ten people at Eden Rock, a beachside hotel. A mutual friend had invited Sandy Heller, a New York art consultant who was vacationing on the island. Heller's best-known client is Steve Cohen, the hedge-fund manager and collector. Heller had never met Rybolovlev, but there were rumors that Cohen's Modigliani nude, which he had sold in 2011, had been bought by the Russian.

By way of conversation—and speaking through Rybolovlev's girlfriend, who translated—Heller mentioned the purchase. "We miss it to this day," he said. Rybolovlev was startled to encounter someone on the other end of one of his art transactions. He asked, in front of the table, "How much did you sell it for?"

The question was unusual. Private sales are bound by confidentiality agreements. But Heller seemed moved by the Russian's unease. A guest at the lunch told me that Rybolovlev was "like a baby standing in traffic" during the conversation. Heller sent a message to Cohen, asking permission to tell Rybolovlev the sale price—\$93.5 million—and he relayed it to the Russian the following day. Rybolovlev had bought the painting from Bouvier for a hundred and eighteen million dollars.

Rybolovlev didn't speak at first. For twelve years, he told me, he had believed that Bouvier was his agent, acting on his behalf in the art market and paid well for his services. Bouvier's two-per-cent charge on the roughly two billion dollars that Rybolovlev had spent on art since 2003 came to forty million. The idea that Bouvier might be mak-

ing a huge margin on each and every painting struck him as a breathtaking con. Rybolovlev thought about calling Tania Rappo, but he hesitated, wondering how much she knew. On January 9, 2015, Bersheda, Rybolovlev's lawyer, filed a criminal complaint in Monaco against Bouvier and "all participants," accusing the dealer of fraud. The complaint included extracts from Bouvier's e-mails and cited the sales of the da Vinci and

the "seller would be suicidal" if Rybolovlev didn't pay soon, even though he had settled his own affairs with the Moueix family months earlier. That evening, Rybolovlev and Rappo met at his apartment in Monaco. According to Rappo, he asked for her opinion on what he should do. Bersheda secretly recorded the conversation. A meeting with Bouvier was arranged for the twenty-fifth.

It was a Wednesday. Bouvier flew by



Dmitry Rybolovlev, a Russian tycoon, called Bouvier his "representative."

the Modigliani, on which Bouvier was accused of making around seventy million dollars in "undue" profits.

Unaware, Bouvier carried on as before, tracking paintings, trying to close the gap on the Rothko. Joachim Pissarro's catalogue, prepared in secret, was almost ready. The Russian began to move his collection out of Natural Le Coultre's storerooms in Singapore and Geneva. Bouvier assumed that this was because of the divorce. On February 21st, he sent Sazonov, Rybolovlev's adviser, an eight-page e-mail outlining potential sales from the collection, but he demanded full payment for the Rothko by the end of the month. Adopting his habitual language, Bouvier warned that

private jet from Geneva. The meeting, at the Belle Époque, an apartment block overlooking the water, was at 10 A.M. Bouvier arrived early. It was a beautiful morning, and he walked around the marina, looking at the boats. (Bouvier owns a thirty-five-metre motor yacht, which he sails around the Mediterranean.) When he walked into the lobby of the Belle Époque, there were eight figures dressed in black. One of them showed a Monaco police I.D. and asked if he was Yves Bouvier. When he nodded, another officer put him in handcuffs and led him back outside, into an unmarked car. No one spoke.

Bouvier's first thought was that he had been caught up in a larger raid on

Rybolovlev. He was taken to Monaco's main police station; he assumed he would be out by lunchtime. At 1:13 P.M., he was led into an interview room for the first time and asked to name his profession. "Businessman," he replied.

He learned that he was under investigation for fraud and money laundering. In the weeks after Rybolovlev's complaint, H.S.B.C. had revealed to prosecutors in Monaco that Bouvier and Tania Rappo had a joint bank account in the principality. According to the police, this suggested a possible conspiracy to launder the proceeds of the art sales. Over the years, Rappo's commissions had amounted to more than a hundred million dollars. H.S.B.C. later admitted that this was a mistake: the name on the account was Jacques Rappo, Tania's husband, but Tania was drawn into the investigation. She was arrested in her apartment. Two policewomen walked in while she was having a massage.

Rappo saw the name of Rybolovlev's daughter and trust beneficiary Ekaterina on the warrant. "I had an interior calm," she told me. A year earlier, almost to the day, Elena Rybolovleva had been arrested in Cyprus for allegedly stealing a diamond ring that Rybolovlev said belonged to him. The charges were dropped, but Rappo had interpreted the incident as an act of intimidation to hasten the completion of the couples' divorce. (It was settled in October, for an undisclosed sum.) "I don't know for what reason," she said. "I just knew he was making some sort of blackmail."

Bouvier and Rappo were questioned for three days. When Bouvier was confronted by the apparent duplicity in his e-mails, he replied that they were "just a commercial game." But he began to comprehend the scale of the accusations against him. Based on the margins that they knew about, and a valuation of the collection, Rybolovlev's lawyers claimed that their client had been ripped off to the tune of \$1,049,465,009. That Friday, in a form of confrontation that is standard under French police procedure, Bouvier and Rybolovlev, with their lawyers and translators, came face to face. Rybolovlev repeated his assertion that Bouvier had always presented himself as his agent. He claimed that, when they first met, Bouvier had asked him to invest a few million euros in his businesses.

"How could he then buy a painting for twenty million euros?" the Russian asked.

According to Bouvier, Rybolovlev avoided eye contact for the entire conversation, except at one moment. "But, Yves, these markups are worth a Boeing," he said. Later, Bouvier reflected on this. "I think in his head the problem was not that Bouvier made money—it was that he made too much money," he told me. He said that, at the end of the confrontation, with the room still crowded, he offered to buy the Modigliani. "I am ready to pay," he said. "I am still ready to deal." Rybolovlev walked out.

BOUVIER WAS released on a ten-million-euro bond the following day. He went to a hotel and ordered a bottle of Cos d'Estournel, an expensive Bordeaux. He was convinced that the Russian had not expected him to make bail. Because Monaco is so small, and the risk of flight is so high, suspects in criminal cases are often detained for weeks at a time. Bouvier understood his arrest as a kind of shakedown. "The strategy was to make a trap," he said, "and then he comes three months later and says, Give me fifty or a hundred million and I do it, to get out." Like Rappo, he remembered what happened to Rybolovlev's ex-wife in Cyprus.

Instead, the Russian broadened his legal assault. On March 12th, he sued Bouvier in Singapore, demanding a worldwide freeze on the dealer's as-



sets, as well as on Rappo's. The court granted the injunction, and ordered Bouvier to hand over the Rothko. He was hit by a similar suit in Hong Kong. A month later, allegations surfaced in Paris that two Picasso portraits that Bouvier had sold to Rybolovlev in 2013 had been stolen from their previous owner, Catherine Hutin-Blay, the artist's stepdaughter. Bouvier was hauled to court for that as well. Rybolovlev has since handed the paintings to the French po-

lice. Bouvier denies any wrongdoing.

Around this time, I spent a day at the Luxembourg Freeport. The building is made of sixty-five hundred tons of concrete. Heavy doors are locked with six-digit codes. David Arendt, the manager, put a brave face on the trouble massing around his main investor. The chairman of the freeport, an associate of Bouvier's in Paris named Olivier Thomas, had been questioned a few days earlier about the Picassos. I asked Arendt when he had learned that Bouvier was an art dealer. He replied, "On February 26th, when I read it in the *Daily Telegraph*." Alain Mestat, an art-finance specialist based in the freeport, sat stunned in a showroom. "It's like the black swan," he told me. "Not expected." In the bowels of the building, I glanced into one of Natural Le Coultre's storerooms and saw a heap of crates marked "Fragile" and bound for Singapore. A man inside saw me and closed the door.

Art shippers whom I spoke with for this article were staggered by what Bouvier had done. The idea of using the information they have soaked up over the years, their tactile knowledge, to trade works themselves was anathema. They seemed to enjoy their unthought-of role in the art world, and to be happy to stay there. But they admitted that there was very little to stop Bouvier. In an unregulated market, the only forces holding people back are cultural norms and long-term commercial reason: if I am not trusted by my peers and customers to behave in the way they expect me to, my business will fail. Bouvier's calculation was different: in a market powered by insider information, the man who knows everything is king. He opened his eyes and saw.

Dealers, in general, have been angrier, and awestruck. The top end of the private art market is a small place, yet Bouvier was almost unknown. When I showed Daniel Katz, a major London dealer, the list of works that Bouvier had sold to Rybolovlev and the prices he got for them, Katz nearly fell off his chair. "The Russian has been tucked up to the eyeballs," he said. Dealers tend to have two problems with Bouvier. One, he was a shipper, and shippers don't deal. "I'd consider it a terrible conflict of interest," Larry Gagosian told the *Times* in September. A Swiss dealer told me, "I

would never, ever show a work at Natural Le Coultre, because I would say, That information is being recorded. How is that going to be used?"

More troubling, Bouvier has also traduced the idea of what an art dealer should be. He exploited every ambiguity of what is supposed to be a gentlemanly trade. Whether his conduct amounts to fraud will likely turn on the opaque phrasing of e-mails and the doubtful credulity of an oligarch, but the damage to the art market lies in Bouvier's effrontery, the crassness of his gains. One evening in Geneva, I met Marc Blondeau, who used to run Sotheby's in Paris and helped to build the collection of François Pinault, the luxury-goods magnate. We sat in his office—an early Renoir on an easel behind me—and he told stories of the paintings he had bought and sold. "When you sell to a collection," he said, "it is like you place your child in a nursery." Blondeau told me that great dealers leave their mark: they shape taste, influence markets, sell to museums. Bouvier didn't do that. He didn't have a gallery. He worked mostly on his BlackBerry. "You cannot call him an art dealer," Blondeau said. "You call him a trader."

I went to see Bouvier the following day. We met at the offices of Natural Le Coultre. A painting commissioned for the firm's hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary, "Transport Through the Ages," hung above the reception desk. Bouvier insists that he never used confidential information from his logistics business to buy and sell paintings. None of the thirty-five works that he sold Rybolovlev were in storage with Natural Le Coultre. "I have the information not because I am a shipper," he said. "It is because I am clever."

I asked if he was upset by the rest of the art market's disavowal of him since his arrest. "All these people think they are the best one," he said. "Now they know the small Bouvier is better than them." With his mastery of hundred-million-dollar private sales, his knowledge of logistics, and his network of freeports, Bouvier sees himself as a truth-teller, able to say what others cannot. "I know everything that is good and everything that is bad in the art business, everything that should change," he told me. "When Mr. Gagosian said there was



"I would have made the gore sickening in a different way."

a conflict—first, I never go inside the safe. And Mr. Gagosian, when he produces an artist, he is an insider like me. The price goes up. It is bullshit. It is a market with no rules. Don't say that it is Mr. Bouvier with no rules."

We spent all day talking. Bouvier believes that the lawsuits are beginning to turn his way. Last August, the Court of Appeal in Singapore unfroze his assets, including the Rothko. A court in Hong Kong did the same. The civil suits continue, as does the criminal inquiry in Monaco, but Bouvier is preparing to seek damages for the injury done to his business by Rybolovlev. Rappo has launched suits of her own in Monaco, alleging improprieties in the police investigation. As he spoke, Bouvier kept four Nokias and a BlackBerry within reach at all times. When one of them rang, he would turn it over, to see which realm of his dealings the inquiry was coming from. He reminded me, in a not entirely unlikable way, of an animal busy in carion, like a jackal.

We went out for lunch. Bouvier put on dark glasses. We ate in a private room at the Hotel Kempinski, one of the fanciest hotels in Geneva. Bouvier ordered a Coke Zero and a dish of grilled venison called "The Hunting Product." He spoke of Rybolovlev's paranoia, with its

roots in the chaos of post-Soviet Russia, and how he could never have deceived a man like that for more than a decade. "If I tricked him," he said, "I'm not only the best art dealer in the world, I'm also a genius. I'm Einstein."

When we got back to the office, someone had brought in folio-size proofs of Joachim Pissarro's catalogue of the Rybolovlev collection. The chapters were bound in gray boards and tied with black ribbons. It is uncertain that the book will ever be published now, and less likely that Rybolovlev's masterpieces will ever be shown together. Rybolovlev told me that he feels "a complicated energy" when he thinks about his paintings. He laughed when I asked him where they were.

The catalogue lay on the table. It was going to be the proof of Bouvier's capacities as an art dealer: his greatest project, realized tirelessly and in the dark, and suddenly presented to the world. Instead, his skill has been revealed at the moment of his undoing. I told Bouvier I had a feeling that he might win his legal battle with Rybolovlev but never recover his good name. He looked at me. "That will be my next challenge," he said, and he kept staring at me—his eyes are a mixture of blue and dark green—until I dropped my gaze. ♦

PUTIN'S DRAGON

Is the ruler of Chechnya out of control?

BY JOSHUA YAFFA

THE CENTER of Grozny, the capital of the Russian republic of Chechnya, is unrecognizable to anyone who saw it during the country's two most recent wars against Russia. The First Chechen War, which began in 1994, was a war of nationalist resistance—Chechnya had declared independence from Russia when the Soviet Union disintegrated—and ended two years later, after a Russian bombing campaign killed thousands of civilians and left the city in ruins. The Second Chechen War, which the Russians launched in 1999, in an effort to curb not only Chechen separatism but the threat of militant Islam, wound down a decade later, with special operations carried out deep in the craggy, wooded hills of the Caucasus. These days, the rubble is gone. The city's skyline is punctuated by the glass towers of Grozny-City, a collection of skyscrapers that house offices, luxury apartments, and a five-star hotel. Grozny is quiet and bland, with well-paved boulevards running through its center; there is still a faint air of menace—men in black uniforms stand with automatic rifles on many street corners—but the city's flashier attractions, like a man-made lake with a light show, seem whimsical and family-friendly.

In 2011, Chechnya's leader, Ramzan Kadyrov, who rules the republic as his own private fiefdom but remains unquestionably loyal to Russia's President Vladimir Putin, showed off the Grozny-City complex at his extravagant thirty-fifth-birthday party. Hilary Swank and Jean-Claude Van Damme appeared onstage—for unspecified fees—to watch an acrobatics show and a concert. Asked where the money for the celebration came from, Kadyrov told reporters, "Allah gives it to us."

The skyscrapers loom over the Akhmad Kadyrov Mosque, named for Kadyrov's father and predecessor, who was assassinated in 2004. Known as "the Heart

of Chechnya," it was built by Turkish artisans, and opened in 2008. A vast hall lit by Swarovski crystal chandeliers holds ten thousand worshippers, and the mosque is ringed by manicured gardens and fountains decorated with colored lights.

One morning in November, I stood in a large square across from the mosque, waiting for a concert to begin. A young Grozny local had given me directions tinged with sarcasm: "Let's meet in front of the Kadyrov Mosque, on Kadyrov Square, at the intersection of Kadyrov Prospect and Putin Prospect." The concert had been organized by the Kadyrov administration in honor of National Unity Day, a Russian public holiday that, given the two wars over as many decades, is not without irony for Chechens.

The officials onstage issued wooden pronouncements on Russia's many achievements. The crowd was mostly university students and bused-in state employees. Security guards prevented anyone from leaving until Kadyrov had spoken. "He wants to see that this big crowd of people has gathered for him—all voluntarily, of course," the Grozny local said. But Kadyrov didn't show—"If he doesn't feel like it, he doesn't come." He delegated speechmaking duties to Magomed Daudov, a former rebel fighter who switched to Moscow's side in 2004 and is still known by his nom de guerre, Lord. Daudov, who is now the speaker of Chechnya's parliament, said, in a mumbly monotone, that Putin "demonstrates an excellent command of events and has the ability to respond appropriately to the challenges of our time." Kadyrov, the "national leader" of the Chechen people, "understands well that only unity can provide a basis for the further rebirth and development of the republic."

Kadyrov is thirty-nine. He has a thicket of reddish-brown hair growing into a pointy beard sculpted in the



Ramzan Kadyrov, whom Vladimir Putin



chose to govern Chechnya, has brought the war-weary region into the Russian fold—but at what price to Putin?

PHOTOGRAPH BY ALEXANDER GRONSKY

Chechen manner, and a guttural voice with the bass-amped rumble of a heavy truck. His squat, muscular frame reflects the amount of time that he spends on his physical-training routine. He is a skillful and popular politician, one of the few in modern Russia, where nearly all officials tend to be charmless functionaries. “Kadyrov’s rule rests on propaganda, fear—and real popularity,” Gregory Shvedov, the editor of Caucasian Knot, a news Web site, told me. “He is like the Chechen Putin.” Over the years, Kadyrov has tried out various personalities: the merciless warrior in fatigues who leads special operations to kill anti-government rebels; the jolly Caucasus baron who spars with Mike Tyson and shows off his private zoo; the family man and observant Muslim who has banned alcohol, ordered that women wear head scarves in public buildings, and boasts that his six-year-old son has memorized the Koran.

Kadyrov has more than one and a half million followers on Instagram. This fall, he posted a video of himself in which, kneeling on a sandy beach, he grabs a hissing python, talks quietly to it, and tosses it away. The snake, he wrote in the caption, “symbolizes the forces of evil that have taken over huge territories of the globe where hundreds of millions of people suffer.” The next day, he posted a photograph of himself discussing the preservation of Chechen traditions with a circle of ministers. “A people who have lost their national dances, rhythm, and music cease to be a nation,” he explained. He can be brutal and severe. In 2009, he told captured rebel fighters on local television, “You want to kill people? You kill my comrades, I’ll kill your father, your brother, all your pets.” But he can also appear genuine, even sensitive—another rarity in Putin-era politics. In November of last year, Kadyrov seemed sincerely moved by a meeting with a Chechen teen-ager whose father disappeared during the Second War. “You and I share the same sorrow,” he said, alluding to his own father’s death. He seized the boy by the arm and said, “When you told me how your father had been taken from you, I swear to Allah all I could do was cry.”

In 2011, Terek Grozny, the local soccer team, of which Kadyrov is the honorary president, announced that it had hired the Dutch coach Ruud Gullit. Gul-

lit headed to Grozny with Tom Sauer, a young Dutchman, as his Russian translator. Sauer told me of driving around Grozny with Kadyrov behind the wheel of a luxury sedan as his bodyguard cradled a gold-plated AK-47. Once, after Gullit told Kadyrov during practice that the club hadn’t paid the players the bonuses they were owed, Kadyrov sent some of his men to his car to fetch bags filled with rubles. Sauer had dinner with Kadyrov several times. At one meal, he told Sauer that he had himself participated in the mission to kill the rebels who planned the attack against his father. “It’s not that people are scared of him,” Sauer said. “I would say: respectfully fearful.”

LONG BEFORE the recent wars, Russians and Chechens harbored a mutual antagonism. In the Russian imagination, Chechnya, a thousand miles south of Moscow on the edge of the Caucasus mountains, is a place of violence, home to a people who are to be feared and ultimately subjugated, yet awarded the respect one gives to a valiant enemy. Throughout the nineteenth century, the tsar’s army waged a prolonged campaign against guerrilla fighters in the mountains. In “The Cossacks,” Tolstoy, who served as a young military officer in the Caucasus, depicts the Chechens as fierce warriors, and has a Chechen fighter tell a Russian adversary, “Your men slaughter ours, ours butcher yours.”

After the Bolshevik Revolution, Soviet power held the promise of modernization, and, with time, many Chechens joined the Communist system as professors, doctors, and state functionaries. Yet just as many remained hostile to the Russian state. During the Second World War, countless Chechens fought on the Soviet side against the Nazi invaders; others seized the moment to try to overthrow Moscow’s rule. In 1944, Stalin, using the pretext of perceived collaboration with the Germans, ordered the deportation of the entire population of Chechnya—half a million people—to the distant steppes of Kazakhstan. They remained there until 1957, when Nikita Khrushchev allowed them to begin to return home. Most Chechens have a grandfather or grandmother brought up in exile; many of the deportees died of

cold and hunger. “Chechens remember everything,” Khassan Bayiev, a widely respected Chechen surgeon, who now lives in Boston, told me. “We know who is who—when Stalin died, the whole country was weeping, but we were dancing the *lezginka*.”

When Chechnya declared independence, in 1991, Dzhokhar Dudayev, a former general in the Soviet Air Force with a trim mustache and a taste for fedoras, returned from Estonia and seized power. In 1994, Boris Yeltsin instigated the First Chechen War—what the head of his security council predicted would be a “small victorious war” to retake the region. During the next two years, more than five thousand Russian soldiers and more than fifty thousand Chechen civilians died. Dudayev himself was killed by Russian guided missiles when his satellite phone revealed his location. A negotiated political settlement brought the fighting to a close, and the region received the trappings of statehood but without formal recognition. A period of outright banditry ensued. Kidnapping became an industry. The nationalists who had led Chechnya during the war lost influence to violent Islamists. In 1999, Moscow launched a new campaign, overseen by Vladimir Putin, then the Prime Minister, who ascended to the Presidency with tough talk against those he labelled “terrorists.” He said, “We’ll waste them in the outhouse.”

Russian forces captured Grozny and other main cities, but Russian soldiers kept dying in high numbers. Even more politically dangerous for Putin, Chechen militants carried out terrorist attacks in Moscow and other Russian cities. In 2002, after Chechen terrorists took more than seven hundred hostages at a Moscow theatre, it was obvious that the Kremlin’s strategy would have to change.

The solution was a policy of “Chechenization,” under which the Kremlin would cede much of the political and military responsibility to its proxies in Grozny. If there was to be a war, let it be among Chechens. The Russians settled on Kadyrov’s father, Akhmad, to carry out the policy. A former chief mufti of separatist Chechnya, he had supported the call for jihad against the Russians during the First Chechen War, only to switch sides and declare allegiance to Moscow in the Second. “He sincerely believed

that he was saving the Chechen people from certain death,” Ilyas Akhmadov, who served as the foreign minister of Chechnya’s short-lived separatist government, told me. The elder Kadyrov considered radical Islam, in the form of the Wahhabi practice that was seeping into the country, as urgent an enemy as Russia, and was ready to make a tactical alliance with Moscow to destroy it. Despite Akhmad Kadyrov’s defection, Akhmadov remembers him as “an energetic and brave man, with a great deal of personal courage.”

In 2003, with Chechnya once again incorporated into the Russian state, the elder Kadyrov was elected President of the republic, in a vote held under military occupation. Seven months later, he was dead, killed by a bomb blast at a Grozny stadium as he watched Russian soldiers on parade. Later that day, Ramzan, who was twenty-seven, was summoned to meet with Putin. Until then, Ramzan’s main interests, besides heading his father’s personal militia, were boxing and weightlifting.

In the meeting with Putin, which was televised nationally, Kadyrov’s blue nylon tracksuit set him apart amid the Kremlin’s pompous formality. Alexey Chesnakov, who worked in Putin’s administration at the time, said that a bond seemed to form between the two men that night. “Putin thought of Kadyrov the father as a person with whom he reached a particular political agreement—their relations were honest and businesslike but ultimately political,” Chesnakov said. “But he relates to the son with a certain warmth.” With Putin’s blessing, Kadyrov claimed the throne that had been granted to his father.

Just after the assassination, Anna Politkovskaya, a courageous journalist who wrote for the small, Moscow-based opposition newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*, went to interview Ramzan in the family’s home village of Tsentoroy, a place she described as “one of the unsightliest of Chechen villages, unfriendly, ugly and swarming with murderous-looking armed men.” The two had a frosty meeting, and it ended with Kadyrov calling Politkovskaya “an enemy of the Chechen people” and declaring that she “should

have to answer for this.” (She was murdered in the stairwell of her apartment building in Moscow in 2006; multiple trials have produced murky and inconclusive results, and those implicated in the killing include three Chechen brothers and a retired F.S.B. officer. Kadyrov has denied any involvement.) In an article about the encounter with Kadyrov, Politkovskaya called the situation in Chechnya “an old story, repeated many times in our history: the Kremlin fosters a baby dragon, which it then has to keep feeding to stop him from setting everything on fire.”

AFTER THE Unity Day celebration, I made my way to a café off the square, where I shared a pot of tea with Timur Aliyev, an adviser to Kadyrov. (Despite multiple attempts, I was unable to secure a meeting with Kadyrov himself.) For years, Aliyev was one of Chechnya’s most respected independent journalists. In 2008, he quit reporting and took a job in Kadyrov’s administration. “I once believed in this image of him as a brutal guy,” Aliyev told me. “But then I got a chance to meet him.” In their conversations, he found himself impressed by Kadyrov, and was struck by his “high ethical qualities” and “high religiosity.” Aliyev went on, “He thinks of himself not just as the head of the Chechen republic but as a person who looks after the well-being of each individual.”

I asked about Kadyrov’s cult of personality. News broadcasts often lead with visits he’s made to local schools and gyms; in Grozny, I heard plenty of stories of citizens appealing to Kadyrov through messages on Instagram, and in many cases Kadyrov himself would show up the next day to fix some small problem or cajole an incompetent official into action. This was all positive, Aliyev said. “If we take the personal aspect out of this system, it stops being effective.” As for a day when Kadyrov no longer rules, Aliyev told me, simply, “I hope this time never comes.”

Since 2001, to keep the peace, the Russian government has flooded Chechnya with cash, including at least fourteen billion dollars for postwar reconstruction. Today, more than eighty-five per cent of Chechnya’s budget comes from Moscow. Another untold sum comes from an



Kadyrov has 1.6 million followers on Instagram.

opaque fund named after Kadyrov's father, which is financed by business owners and public employees—who are informally required to pay a portion of their income to the fund—and by Chechen oligarchs paying tribute to Kadyrov. The fund, in turn, disburses money for everything from repairing local hospitals to sending Chechens to Mecca for the hajj. Chechen officials have said that donations to the foundation are voluntary, but a staff member at a public institution in Grozny told me that as soon as the workers' salaries are deposited they get a call from a superior, asking for around thirty to fifty thousand rubles, or four to six hundred dollars. "One time, he explained it was for organizing a big soccer match," the person said. "Other times, he doesn't give any explanation at all." The fund, an indulgence granted to no other Russian governor, frees Kadyrov from complete financial dependence on the Kremlin.

Since succeeding his father, Kadyrov has wrested power not just from the Russian generals and intelligence officers who once oversaw Chechnya but also

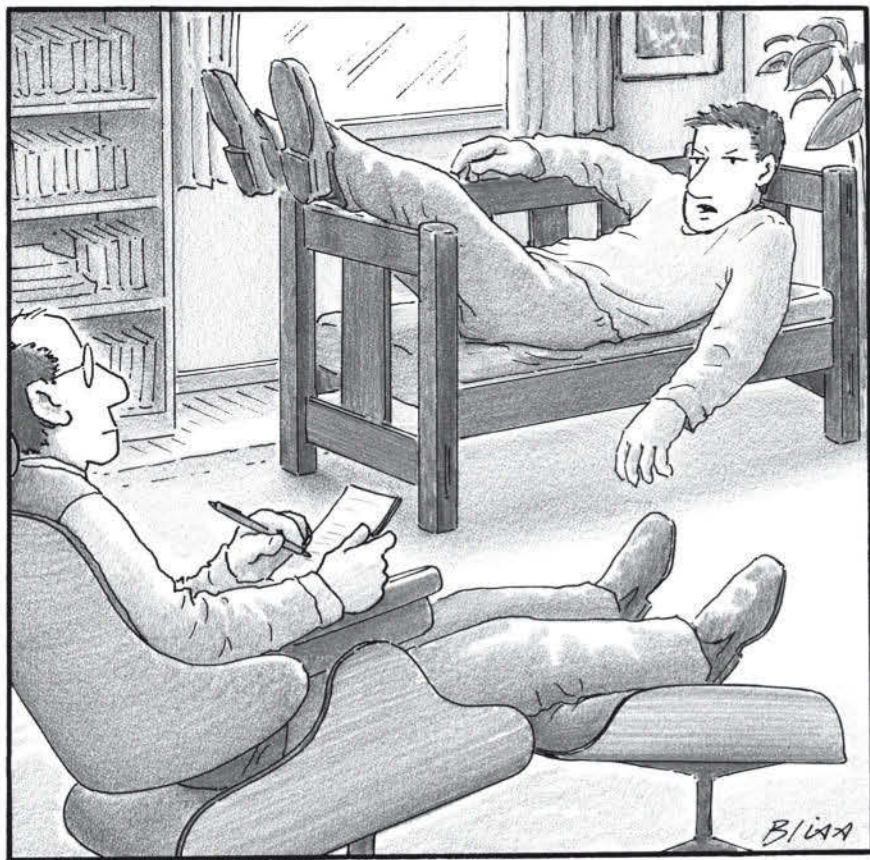
from internal rivals hailing from other prominent Chechen clans. In this, he resembles Putin, who built what has been called a "vertical of power" across the whole of Russia under his centralized authority. Chechnya is far smaller and more homogenous, so Kadyrov's power is even more pronounced. Putin has eliminated opponents largely through political trickery and co-optation, reserving outright force for rare occasions. Kadyrov prefers blunter, unmistakably violent means.

For many years, Kadyrov's chief rivals were the Yamadayev brothers, who had powerful patrons in Moscow. In 2008, Ruslan Yamadayev, a member of the Russian parliament, was shot and killed in his car, outside the Russian White House, the chief office of government administration in Moscow; in 2009, his younger brother Sulim was killed in the parking garage of a luxury apartment tower in Dubai, where he was living under an assumed name. A Dubai court tried and convicted two men, including an Iranian who worked as a stable hand for Kadyrov—Kadyrov keeps racehorses in Dubai—for carry-

ing out the assassination. Dubai police testified in court that Adam Delimkhanov—Kadyrov's closest ally, enforcer, and heir apparent—provided the killers with the murder weapon, a gold-plated 9-mm. pistol, and they put him on the Interpol wanted list. Delimkhanov denied involvement. He is a deputy in the Russian parliament, and maintains an unblemished legal record in Russia—though he once got into a fistfight with another deputy inside the parliament building in Moscow and a gold-plated handgun fell to the floor beside him. A third Yamadayev brother, Isa, published an open letter in a Moscow newspaper in 2009, claiming that Kadyrov had tried to kill him, but he reached an apparent truce with Kadyrov the next year. The end of the Yamadayev brothers as a political force left Kadyrov with nearly unchecked power. "These were strong guys with connections to the F.S.B.," the successor agency to the K.G.B., Alexey Malashenko, an expert on the Caucasus at the Carnegie Moscow Center, told me. "But it turns out that even the F.S.B. couldn't defend them, because Kadyrov isn't protected by the F.S.B., or by the state writ large, but by Putin himself."

Over the years, various enemies of Kadyrov's have turned up dead. In 2009, Umar Israilov, a onetime Kadyrov bodyguard who had been given asylum in Austria, was shot dead on a street in Vienna. In Chechnya, he had been captured as a rebel fighter, and ended up in a torture chamber effectively under Kadyrov's control. As the *Times* reported, Israilov said that Kadyrov "amused himself by personally giving prisoners electric shocks or firing pistols at their feet." As Israilov told it, he was saved by agreeing to join Kadyrov's security forces, but his father urged him to desert, and he fled to Western Europe. After a year-long investigation, Austrian officials alleged that Kadyrov had ordered Israilov to be abducted; he was shot when the operation went awry, they said. Kadyrov denied any role in the killing.

In London, I spoke with Akhmed Zakayev, once the prime minister of Chechnya's separatist government. For several years beginning in 2008, Kadyrov sent emissaries to try to convince Zakayev that he should come home. Zakayev rebuffed the offer. "You are traitors," he instructed an intermediary to tell



"Next session, I get the Eames and you get the Stickley."

Kadyrov. He heard later that Kadyrov had shouted, “My main goal in life is to kill Zakayev!”

In 2012, Britain’s security forces detained a Chechen man based on MI5’s suspicion that he had flown to London to assassinate Zakayev, on orders from Kadyrov. (Kadyrov’s spokesman denied the allegations.) Zakayev now lives under British state protection. We met for tea in London. He told me, “Certain people know where I am, where we are sitting, with whom I’m talking, how I arrived here, and how I will depart.” He said that over many centuries Chechen tradition has favored a consensus among families, with no one clan holding absolute power. “A feudal system has been forced on us, in which a new caste has appeared in Chechen society,” he said of Kadyrov and his inner circle—one that is above all other clans, and above the law.

“I’m the boss,” Kadyrov told a televised meeting of Chechen officials in 2011. “And no one else but me, understand? Ramzan—and that’s it. No other names in this region. There is only one name—Kadyrov.”

RUSSIAN FEDERAL troops are practically invisible in Chechnya, confined to a single base east of Grozny. The uniformed men with automatic rifles in the capital and in smaller towns are Chechen forces, not Russian, and their loyalties lie with Kadyrov, not with Moscow. Between twenty and thirty thousand men are estimated to serve in units under Kadyrov’s unofficial control. As Kadyrov has accrued power, Moscow has come to matter less and less in Chechnya. “Federal law does not work at all,” Svetlana Gannushkina, a human-rights activist who often works on cases in Chechnya, told me. “But, at the same time, there is no homegrown Chechen system of law. So what is there, then? One thing, just one law, which can be formulated in two words: Ramzan’s order.”

Kadyrov’s militias have enabled him to crush Chechnya’s Islamic insurgency, which is likely his most important achievement in Putin’s eyes. Last year, just fourteen people were killed in violence related to the lingering insurgency, compared with eighty-two in 2012 and ninety-five in 2011. Igor Kalyapin, the head of the Committee Against Torture, a Russian legal-

aid N.G.O., told me that Putin and the security officials around him operate under the assumption that success in the war against Islamic terrorism in the Caucasus—one of the signal achievements of Putin’s Presidency, and a pillar of his popular legitimacy—couldn’t have been accomplished by strictly following the law. “They think that to keep the peace with legal methods is impossible. So that’s why you have *kadyrovtsy*”—the militiamen loyal to Kadyrov—“who terrorize the population, who kidnap and, yes, torture people. But it’s not possible to do it any other way.”

After a rare terrorist attack in downtown Grozny, in December, 2014, which left more than a dozen officers in Chechnya’s security forces dead, Kadyrov responded with a punitive campaign against the relatives of suspected militants. “If a rebel kills a policeman or another person, his family will be immediately expelled from Chechnya with no right to return, and his house will be razed to the ground,” he told his security officials. The homes of several families were burned down in the middle of the night.

Such collective punishment is illegal in Russia, and, as the house burnings gained media attention, Putin was forced to respond. At his annual year-end press conference, he said, “Everyone must obey Russian law.” Even if families knew that relatives were involved in terrorism, he said, “that does not give the right to anyone to vigilante justice, including the head of Chechnya.” Nevertheless, more homes were destroyed in the following days. Chechen families consist of dozens or hundreds of people in an extended clan, so it’s never difficult to find someone to pressure or intimidate. “The misfortune of one person becomes the misfortune of a whole family,” a human-rights activist explained.

Kadyrov’s forces represent a convenient instrument for the Kremlin: obedient, battle-hardened troops who can be counted on for messy missions. Fighters identifying themselves as *kadyrovtsy* popped up in eastern Ukraine throughout 2014, where they took part in decisive battles in support of pro-Russian rebels. A former officer of Sever (“North”), a

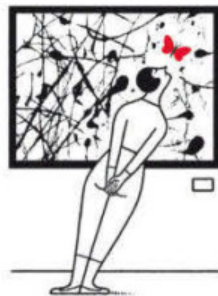
Chechen special-forces unit under Kadyrov’s informal authority, told me that he once recognized another retired member of the unit in a YouTube clip filmed in Donetsk, the capital of rebel-held eastern Ukraine. Onscreen, a Chechen gunman tells the camera that he has come to “defend the interests of the Russian Federation.” The former officer told me that when he saw the video he exclaimed, “Oh, he’s one of ours!”

More recently, Kadyrov has offered his fighters to Putin for use in Syria, where Russia is bombing rebels but has not launched a full-scale ground operation. He proposed sending Chechen special forces, saying in a radio interview,

“If our request is granted, it will be a celebration for us.” Another member of Sever, still active in the unit, told me that when the Afghan warlord Rashid Dostum visited Chechnya, last October, Kadyrov ordered members of the republic’s armed units to attend an impromptu rally. With Dostum at his side, Kadyrov wanted to know who was willing, if asked, to fight in Syria. Every soldier stepped forward. “We are waiting for the call,” the Sever officer told me. “If Putin says to Ramzan, ‘Get your army together,’ we are ready.”

In December, 2014, Kadyrov summoned thousands of armed men from Chechnya’s various security forces together in Grozny’s soccer stadium. He delivered a rousing speech. “We say to the entire world that we are combat infantry of Vladimir Putin,” he said. Russia may have its regular military, but “there are tasks that can be solved only by volunteers, and we’ll solve them.” The rally both proved Kadyrov’s unique loyalty and reminded Putin of Kadyrov’s strength: if the Kremlin were to reconsider its bargain with Kadyrov, tens of thousands of armed men might have something to say about it.

KADYROV HAS fashioned Chechnya in his own image. The republic is now governed by diktats inspired by Sharia jurisprudence and Kadyrov’s personal interpretation of *adat*, a traditional Chechen code of behavior. In 2010, after vigilantes drove around Grozny firing paintballs at uncovered women, Kadyrov said



that he wanted to “give an award” to the men. He has displayed a contradictory attitude toward honor killings, condemning the practice while placing it within Chechen tradition. “Here, if a woman does not behave properly, her husband, father, and brother are responsible,” he said in a 2008 interview. “According to our tradition, if a woman fools around, her family members kill her. . . . As a President, I cannot allow for them to kill. So let women not wear shorts.” Last November, the Kadyrov administration issued an order requiring all Chechen police officers to read three hundred thousand prayers to the Prophet Muhammad in the course of the month.

Early one morning in Grozny, I sat in an office off the cavernous main hall of the Kadyrov Mosque with Usman Osmaev, the republic’s deputy mufti, who is thirty-eight. He praised Kadyrov and his amalgam of religion and government. “He needs correct Islam; we need a correct state,” Osmaev said. “What he has achieved is that we have returned to our roots: in religion, *adat*, culture.” When it came to how such prescriptions were enforced, Osmaev told me, in the span of one sentence, that “nothing is forced,” but, even so, in matters like dress and behavior “the only requirement is that people follow the mentality of the Chechen people.”

One of the more sensitive subjects is polygamy, given that it is unequivocally prohibited by Russian law, but Kadyrov and other Chechen officials have repeatedly come out in favor of the practice. In 2011, Kadyrov told a Russian newspaper reporter that he was looking for a second bride, but couldn’t find a woman beautiful enough. “If you have love, then you can take up to four wives,” he explained, citing Sharia law. Last May, a fifty-seven-year-old district police chief took a Chechen teenager—she was said to be seventeen—as his second wife. The ceremony became a short-lived sensation in Russian politics, and Kadyrov weighed in, calling it “the marriage of the millennium.”

When I asked Osmaev about polygamy, he replied, “O.K., so there is only one official stamp in your passport—but, in actual fact, please get married a second, third, fourth time. A man has a right to live with as many girls as he wants.”

Kadyrov’s government may be en-

tirely illiberal, and far from purely faithful to Islamic or even Chechen tradition, but, given the sense of trauma and dislocation after twenty years of conflict, it has many elements that are welcomed by the population. Hardly a day passes in Grozny without a dance performance by a local troupe or an athletic competition featuring Chechen sportsmen. One night, I spoke to a woman who is a remaining representative of Grozny’s intelligentsia, a once thriving social class that was largely lost when the city was destroyed. “We were in a difficult position after two wars, spiritually and morally dead,” she told me. “And, while we should keep in mind all the negative parts of his character, in terms of the spiritual aspect Kadyrov has put an end to our decline.” She went on, though, to say that the state could do only so much, and that it would be up to Chechens themselves to rebuild their culture—a tall order, given the state’s degree of intrusion into everyday lives. “Ramzan on his own isn’t culture; it’s just a forced choice, to require this, ban that, build something here, and then declare this culture,” she said. Some traditions were returning, others were being lost—often both at the same time. “When I was a young girl, my grandfather made me wear a head scarf,” she said. “I was afraid of him. He explained to me, ‘You are a Chechen girl, and so you will wear a head scarf.’ But today we don’t have such grandfathers, and instead their role is played by the Department of Spiritual and Moral Education.”

Magomed Khambiev was once the minister of defense in the separatist government, in charge of Chechnya’s rebel forces. He is fifty-three, with a taut, weathered face and wisps of silver hair. During the Second Chechen War, he stayed loyal to the separatist cause long after Kadyrov’s father switched sides. But his commitment to fighting Moscow—which, by the early aughts, meant battling Kadyrov’s forces, too—caused problems for his family. In 2002, an older brother was kidnapped and never seen again. Other relatives were frequently hauled off for questioning and pressured into revealing his whereabouts. In 2004, according to human-rights activists, Chechen security forces arrested at least forty of Khambiev’s relatives—including women and old people—and held them hostage. “I could see the end was near,” he said.



"Should I become an enemy to my own family? Every step I took was a further risk to them." He joined Kadyrov. At first, he thought of his decision as a defeat and a sign of great weakness.

But Khambiev came to believe in the state that Kadyrov was building. "Ramzan said to me, 'Think about it—I am giving you the chance to live in peace.'" Khambiev decided that Kadyrov was right, that the smarter path lay in reaching accommodation with Moscow, rather than remaining its perpetual enemy. "We couldn't win independence by force—to continue down that road would be to destroy the Chechen people. But, here and now, I live how I want, in my own state, with my own President." Khambiev now heads a committee on law enforcement and security in Chechnya's parliament, a body wholly subservient to Kadyrov. With obvious pride, he explained to me that Kadyrov has willed into being a Chechen state that surpasses what he and other rebel commanders once fought so hard to achieve. "The Russian generals wanted to be bosses here, for me to stay on my knees and beg and sob before them," he said. "Well, it turns out they lost and I won. We Chechens have become rich, and proud, and independent from them."

IN FEBRUARY, 2008, Oleg Orlov, the board chairman of a Moscow-based human-rights organization called Memorial, received an invitation from people close to Kadyrov to speak with him about Memorial's activities in Chechnya. He went, thinking that it would be a chance to explain the group's work to Kadyrov and perhaps gain a measure of protection for staff members in the organization's Grozny office. Several colleagues, including Svetlana Gannushkina, the human-rights activist, accompanied him. In Grozny, they waited for hours, until, just before midnight, two cars came to pick them up and deliver them to one of Kadyrov's residences. Sirens blaring, they drove along an empty road that had been cleared of traffic and passed through a wrought-iron gate flanked by a pair of bronze lions. "It was like some kind of Babylon," Orlov said.

They walked into an enormous foyer, bare except for a billiard table and a display case with a collection of rare weapons: antique sabres, ornate pistols, an engraved machine gun. When Orlov sat

down with Kadyrov, he tried to raise some of the issues that Memorial was working on in Chechnya—forced disappearances, torture, extrajudicial executions—while avoiding outright confrontation. That proved difficult. Kadyrov presented himself as Chechnya's "chief human-rights defender"; he didn't seem to understand the purpose of independent bodies like Memorial. "If there is an issue, tell me—I can solve anything," he said to Orlov. "He wanted to give the impression of a person who gets joy from helping Chechnya, who truly thinks about Chechnya, and who lives a difficult life," Orlov said.

The conversation, Orlov recalled, continued like this for some time, until, in the middle of the night, Kadyrov "began to talk about emotional things, what a blow the death of his father was, how important his father was to him." According to Gannushkina, a former mathematics professor who is now in her seventies, as the meeting dragged on Kadyrov seemed more and more like "a lonely person—not the Ramzan of today but Ramzan as a child." At a certain point, she said, Kadyrov promised to build a house for her in Chechnya and love her as his own mother. She added, "He also told me some personal, intimate things that I don't think it would be right to repeat."

The next day, Kadyrov met with Orlov and Gannushkina again. This meeting was broadcast on Chechen television. Kadyrov proposed the creation of a municipal human-rights council for Grozny and named as its head Natalia Estemirova, a respected and courageous activist who worked in Memorial's Grozny office. "Just like that, like a tsar and a god, he decided and made it happen," Orlov said. As Orlov came to understand, Kadyrov thought that the move would bring Estemirova's activities under his control.

The arrangement didn't last long. Estemirova continued to investigate abuses carried out by Chechen security forces. A month later, she gave an interview to federal television in which she criticized Kadyrov's policy of requiring women to wear head scarves in public buildings. She was called in to see Grozny's mayor, and then Kadyrov showed up and announced that he was dissolving the Grozny human-rights council. As Estemirova later told Orlov, Kadyrov warned her, "Think

about the consequences—think about yourself, about your daughter."

In July, 2009, Estemirova travelled to the village of Akhkinchu-Borzoi. She spoke with locals about a killing in which armed men had dragged a man suspected of being involved in the militant underground to the center of the village and shot him dead. She published her findings in a press release for Memorial. Orlov told me that an official close to Kadyrov summoned the head of the Grozny office, Estemirova's boss. "Do you understand what you are printing—do you remember what happened with Anna Stepanovna?" the official said, referring to Politkovskaya. He went on, "Keep in mind the exact same thing could happen with Natasha Estemirova." Memorial told her to leave the republic. The day before her flight, she was kidnapped outside her apartment. Her body was found later that day in a field off a highway.

Orlov declared at a press conference the next day that Kadyrov bore responsibility for the murder. Kadyrov phoned him and vehemently denied it, and subsequently filed a criminal complaint for slander. In a Moscow court, he testified that Orlov's claims were a "big black mark for the Kadyrov family—I have four daughters and three sons, and they should all get married." In 2011, the judge found Orlov not guilty. (Kadyrov had won an earlier civil case against Orlov, and was awarded \$2,410 in damages.) Orlov told me recently that he doesn't necessarily believe Kadyrov issued a clear order; it's possible that his language was indirect—"Solve the problem," say. But, given the prevailing situation in Chechnya, he said, Kadyrov's subordinates would interpret such language as instructions to act.

The Grozny office of Memorial remains open, but few victims of abuse come to ask for help, and those who do file claims withdraw them once their families come under pressure. "People tell us, quite frankly, 'You can't even defend your own people,'" Orlov said. "What can we say, really? They are right."

LAST YEAR, on February 27th, Boris Nemtsov—a former deputy prime minister, who had become one of Putin's best-known opponents—was walking on a bridge near the Kremlin when an assassin approached from behind and shot him. Some days later, Putin told a meeting

of high-ranking law-enforcement officials that “the brazen murder of Boris Nemtsov right in the center of the capital” was a “shame and tragedy” that the country must not tolerate.

Putin’s moral outrage may have been a cynical performance, but his anger appeared genuine. “He was obviously stunned,” Gleb Pavlovsky, a former political adviser to Putin who left the Kremlin in 2011 and became a critic of it, told me. “As a political assassination, this is direct interference in the politics of the federal center, and, what’s more, right under Putin’s nose.” He went on, “If you can do something like this just outside Spassky gate”—a Kremlin landmark, whose spire overlooks the bridge where Nemtsov was killed—“then maybe you could do this *inside* Spassky gate as well.”

The arrests came relatively fast: in the first week of March, the F.S.B. detained five suspects. All were ethnic Chechens; two were arrested in Moscow, and three in Ingushetia, a small republic bordering Chechnya. Security forces said that as they moved in to arrest another suspect in Grozny he blew himself up with a grenade.

Attention quickly focussed on the alleged triggerman: a decorated thirty-three-year-old Chechen officer named Zaur Dadaev, a former deputy commander of Sever. The timing of Dadaev’s departure from Sever was curious: his resignation letter was dated December, 2014, but it was processed on February 28th, the day after Nemtsov’s murder. At first, investigators implied that Dadaev and his suspected accomplices were enraged by Nemtsov’s support for the French cartoonists at *Charlie Hebdo*, but that theory fell apart after it came to light that his killers had begun trailing him in the fall of 2014, months before the attack in Paris. “Dadaev doesn’t really have his own motives; he’s not a bird of very high altitude, as we say,” Vadim Prokhorov, Nemtsov’s lawyer, told me. “It’s clear that he takes orders from someone else.”

Nemtsov’s supporters, including his family, immediately pointed to Kadyrov and his inner circle. Two days after Dadaev’s arrest, Kadyrov took to Instagram in Dadaev’s defense. “I knew Zaur as a genuine patriot of Russia,” he wrote. Dadaev was one of the “most fearless and brave warriors in his regiment . . . gen-

MESSENGER STAR

The tree is dead, in my neighbor’s yard,
the branches empty of leaves and the owl’s nest
naked and derelict it seems. We sat with

our winter picnic and watched for the pair
who haunted our block. The male much smaller
and loud, calling his dominion just after dark.

The female usually close by. They seemed like
glamorous friends, distant but always there.
I’d seen one only once during the day.

I stood at the curb, talking to the handyman, when
the female owl came low out the alleyway flying
soundless, so close I could see her eye

in her pale face, the beak curved and clear,
but her eye, a killer’s, make no mistake, told me
if by any chance of size or opportunity she would.

I will not think this was some kind of portent,
that she was a harbinger of all that followed.
The handyman, always I paid him more

and more, too shy was he to ask his worth, whispered,
what’s wrong, bird? I see how this owl could be
seen as a sign. In fact, I was shaking afterward.

My vegetables would bolt that spring, a dear friend
showed how empty she saw my love, and another
died from drinking beyond what his body wanted

uinely devoted to Russia, ready to give up his life for his motherland.”

Putin’s mood was hard to read. Orkhan Djemal, a journalist with extensive sources inside Chechnya, told me he had heard that for days Putin wouldn’t take Kadyrov’s calls, which caused Kadyrov to panic. Kadyrov apparently managed to smooth relations with Putin, but the fact that people even tangentially related to Chechnya’s political elite had been arrested on murder charges marked an unprecedented moment in Putin-era politics. “The arrests may seem modest, but it’s actually a revolution—they are a genuine achievement for investigators, and a blow to Kadyrov,” Elena Milashina, who covers Chechnya for *Novaya Gazeta*, said. Since Politkovskaya’s death, Milashina has become one of the most deeply committed reporters covering the region.

On December 30th, Russian investigators named the alleged organizer of the crime: Ruslan Mukhudinov, a low-ranking officer in the Sever unit. No one knew where he was, and the indictment was issued in absentia. Yet, all along, the Russian press, citing law-enforcement sources, had pointed not so much to Mukhudinov as to his senior officer, Ruslan Geremeyev, for whom Mukhudinov worked as a driver. Other suspects detained with Dadaev told investigators that Geremeyev had spent time during the weeks before the killing at the Moscow apartment where the hit team was staying. Dadaev and Geremeyev were close after many years in Sever, and the day following the murder they drove to the Moscow airport together and flew back to Chechnya, according to airport surveillance photos.

Geremeyev has deep connections to

and then he drank again. Higginson said of Poe's
face, it had *the look of oversensitiveness which when
uncontrolled may prove more debasing than coarseness.*

That bird was roused terribly from sleep, no doubt,
as big as a stump and flying. A bat in daytime has
a different eye, naked and frightened, I once found
five under a wall clock on the porch and they were blinking
and slow to scatter. Their guano had choked the battery.
Poe recited poems drunk, revenge?—he'd say

that he had written them when he was ten and maybe
this was fear, because some of us only grow more
vulnerable; there is less ease as we near the end.

A singular music wrote Higginson of Poe's voice
when he recited "The Raven." What's wrong, bird?
We spread out blankets on the dry grass and our laps,

and ate our food, pulled from a faded blue train case
I found years ago, with a diamond-shaped mirror.
The game and the feeling was that we were on

a journey. The child saw her first, at the top of the neighbor's
dead tree, one that would fall on our roof and end
in legal action. We could not see her mate; she was alone,

so sharply drawn by streetlight we could see her horns.

—Connie Voisine

the Chechen political elite: he is related to both Delimkhanov, Kadyrov's closest ally, and another high-ranking Kadyrov associate who represents Chechnya in the upper house of Russia's parliament. Over the past year, investigators have twice tried to issue an indictment against Geremeyev, only to be rebuffed by their boss, the powerful head of the country's Investigative Committee—he refused to sign the warrant, according to a report published last month by *RBK*, a Russian daily. More than that, investigators can't even talk to Geremeyev: leaks from the security services imply that he fled to the United Arab Emirates, then quietly returned to Chechnya, where requests summoning him for questioning have got nowhere. Clearly, Putin could have Geremeyev arrested if he wished; the fact that he hasn't suggests that stability in Chechnya is more important to him.

One night toward the end of my time in Grozny, I paid a visit to Shakhruði Dadaev, Zaur Dadaev's older brother. Shakhruði, who is sixty and raises sheep, lives in a large, immaculately clean house that would be the pride of any Chechen extended family. He set out a tray of fruit and candies, made a pot of strong black tea, and had me sit in a far corner facing the door, the seat of honor for guests in a Chechen home. Zaur is the youngest of four brothers, Shakhruði told me. Their parents returned to Chechnya in the nineteen-fifties, when Khrushchev cancelled Stalin's deportation order. After serving for several years with Russian federal forces, Zaur joined Kadyrov's personal guard, and in 2006 he enlisted in Sever. "That was a time when not everyone wanted to join," Shakhruði said. "Now that Kadyrov is President, there is some order and quiet, but back then

it was dangerous. You didn't know who was shooting at whom."

Zaur Dadaev proved himself as a fighter, and in 2010 was awarded a medal for leading an assault against a group of militants. He rose to become Sever's deputy commander, and was known as a strong leader, a former Sever fighter told me: "If he found himself in a group of ten guys, the other nine would wait for him to do something." Another Sever member, still active in the unit, told me that few on the unit's base now talk of Dadaev. "Everyone has forgotten about him; it's as if he never existed."

In Chechnya, I heard several versions of why Dadaev left Sever for Moscow: he wanted to get a law degree or open a café, or maybe find work as a driver or security guard. No one heard much from him until, in early March, a few days after Nemtsov was killed, he returned to Grozny. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary. "He was in a great mood—he was the same Zaur as always, same laugh," one of his Sever colleagues told me. He hadn't even changed his cell-phone number. No one who knew Dadaev thought that he could be involved in gunning down Nemtsov. "We have a rule: if a person is walking away, you don't shoot them," an officer from Sever told me. "To kill someone like that would be a great disgrace. Zaur is a smart guy, not dumb, and you'd have to be an idiot to go for something like this."

Shakhruði, in his living room, showed me two letters he had received from his brother in jail. "Everything is fine, by the will of the Almighty," Zaur wrote in June. "I didn't do anything against the law. Everything I said after I was arrested I said under pressure. It was dictated to me—the pressure was serious, not a joke." The next month, he wrote again, "Don't worry, brother, my conscience is clean, not only before you and our relatives but before all of Chechnya." Shakhruði grew more animated as we spoke. Chechen tradition would never allow such a thing, he said; he was the elder in the family, and Zaur hadn't consulted him—he never would have got himself mixed up in such a plot without checking with him first. "I don't believe that he did this," Shakhruði told me. "For me and our whole family, it is a shame even that there are rumors that my brother could

have shot an unarmed man in the street.”

In the months since the murder, Kadyrov has said little about Nemtsov or the detained suspects. When I asked a high-ranking official in the Chechen security forces about the case, he waved off any suggestion that there was cause for worry. “If a particular person commits a crime, it doesn’t matter who this person was in the past or what kind of medals he received—he should be arrested, tried, and punished,” he said.

In Russia, how you see the plot is determined largely by how you think Putin’s state works. The fact that Dadaev carried himself with apparent nonchalance after his return to Chechnya from Moscow, for example, showed either that he had nothing to hide and had been set up or that he operated with impunity, certain that those who ordered the crime would cover for him. Many other mysteries loom. Were Kadyrov and his clique involved and, if so, did they act without Putin’s permission, thinking that they would please the President? Or had Putin ordered the hit? Investigators are conspicuously avoiding these questions. The lack of information has led to a flourishing

trade in conspiracy theories. The murder, it is said, could be anything from a plot by the security services to discredit Kadyrov to an attempt by Kadyrov to compel Putin to rely on force alone in propping up his rule.

A trial will begin sometime this spring, but in a case like this a courtroom is an unlikely place for new facts to emerge. “I have the sense that the highest authorities in Moscow know full well who carried out this murder and where these people are—they are getting the full picture from investigators,” Olga Shorina, a longtime employee and confidante of Nemtsov’s, told me. Yet she doesn’t expect to learn much herself. “The regime wants all conflicts between its component parts to be resolved in private.”

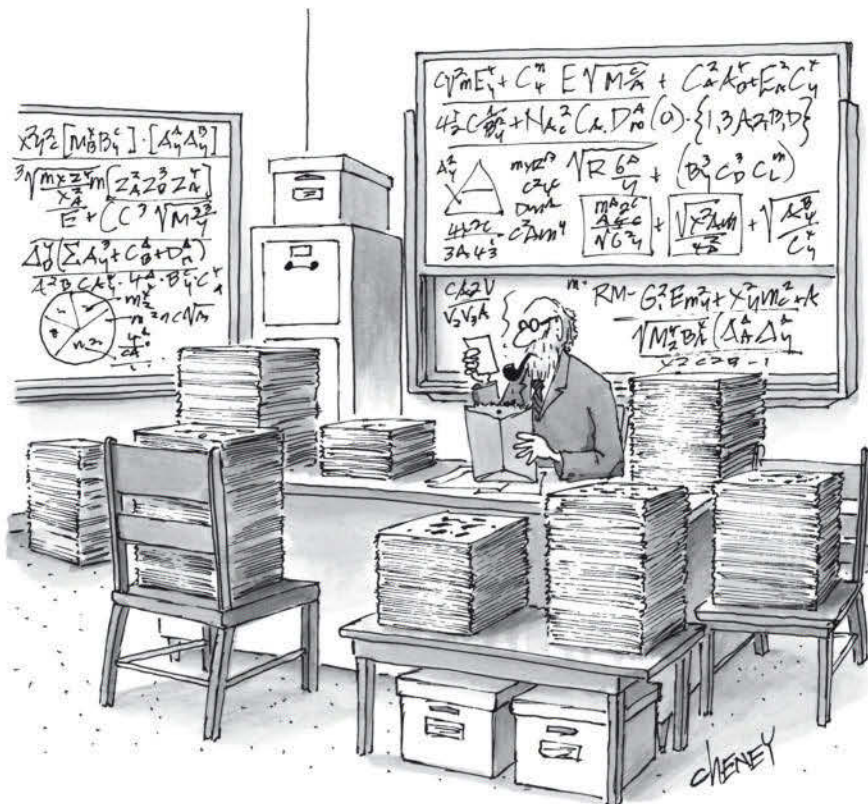
AFTER MORE than a decade of Kadyrov’s rule, Chechnya has become Russia in miniature, a concentrated tincture of all its habits and instincts and pathologies, with Kadyrov worshipping Putin and consistently enacting the darker urges and impulses of the system that Putin has created.

At the same time, Chechnya argu-

ably serves as both a testing ground and a harbinger of what Russia is becoming. “Chechnya is Russia’s avant-garde,” Varvara Pakhomenko, an analyst who covers the North Caucasus for the International Crisis Group, told me. “What we see in Chechnya now we may soon see in the whole of Russia.” She mentioned the decay of the rule of law and an increased use of torture, to say nothing of a shrinking space for civil-society groups and anyone who takes public action outside the state’s increasingly paranoid control. “You can’t allow one enclave to exist outside the law,” Pakhomenko said. “If you let one arm rot, the infection spreads to the whole body.”

In January, Kadyrov attacked Russia’s liberal opposition, saying that its leaders were traitors, who “should be treated as enemies of the people”—a Stalin-era locution—and “tried to the fullest extent for their subversive activities.” A scandal erupted in Moscow political circles, and Putin’s human-rights ombudswoman—whose position is a thankless, largely impotent one, but with a relatively high profile—said that Kadyrov’s “statements are not only pointless but also harmful, because they render a disservice to the President and cast a shadow on the country.” Even the speaker of Russia’s parliament, a thoroughly obedient body, suggested that Kadyrov had spoken in error. Some days later, Kadyrov responded with an editorial in *Izvestia*, a pro-Kremlin daily, in which he called the country’s opposition “jackals, who are dreaming of destroying our state,” and, in another grim echo of the Soviet past, suggested that they be sent to a psychiatric hospital in Chechnya.

Many in the beleaguered opposition thought that Kadyrov was trying to deflect attention from the Nemtsov investigation; others believed that, in a time of shrinking budgets for Russia’s regions, he was trying to simultaneously impress and frighten the Kremlin, in order to make sure that federal money keeps flowing to Grozny. Whatever the explanation, Kadyrov had become a political figure of national significance. If Putin isn’t always pleased by his more strident expressions of aggression and intolerance, he surely finds something useful in his role as the bogeyman of Russia’s political system, and, in any case, he lacks the ability to control Kadyrov’s

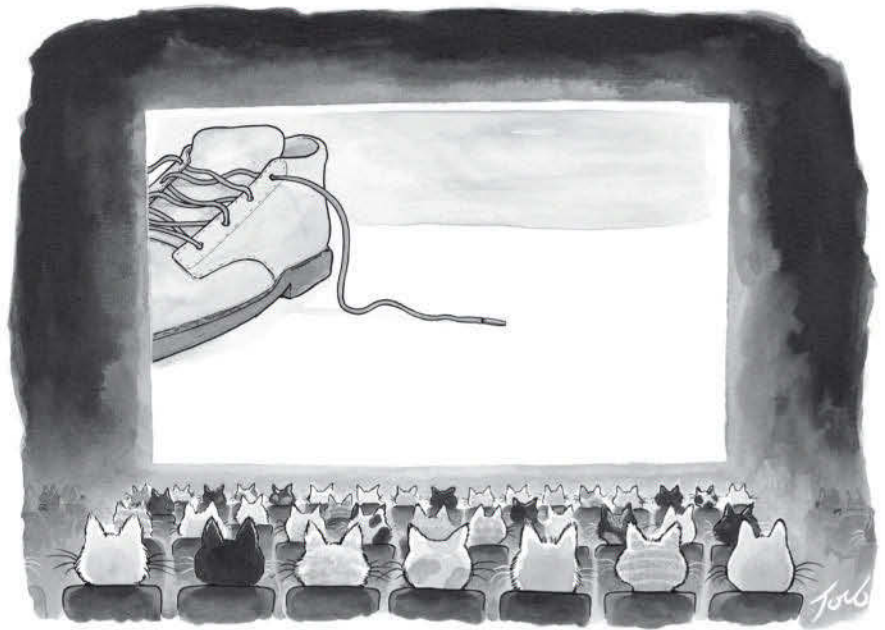


“Thank you for submitting the enclosed formula, which proves and solves the unified field theory. Unfortunately, it does not suit our needs at the present time.”

every move. Alexei Venediktov, the editor-in-chief of Echo of Moscow, an independent radio station, thinks that for Putin Kadyrov is a way to show that, “anytime he wants, like Freddy Krueger, he can put on a clawed glove, a glove covered in spikes, and use it as a weapon.” Last month, Venediktov was among those singled out for criticism by Kadyrov and his deputies; the station increased his personal security detail. On January 22nd, the administration in Grozny put together a large demonstration in the center of the city in support of Kadyrov; his allies railed against Venediktov and Gannushkina and others from the stage. Venediktov told me, “Just like anyone with unlimited power, who faces no borders at all, he tries to expand his influence as much as possible.”

As the Nemtsov case had already made clear, Kadyrov has no shortage of enemies, whether among the liberal opposition or F.S.B. generals, but he has managed to play on his image as Putin’s dragon, wielding as much power over his master as vice versa. Even if relations between Putin and Kadyrov indeed reach a state of crisis, Pakhomenko said, ultimately “the Kremlin believes that the current situation is better than what could happen if it changes anything.” Indeed, Putin seems little inclined to risk altering his relations with Kadyrov, or even to scold him openly. In late January, Putin made his first comments in the wake of Kadyrov’s public clash with the country’s liberals, saying that Kadyrov “works effectively” and that he and his father deserve “thanks” for what the region has become today.

If Putin were to admit that Kadyrov has become too dangerous or too costly, he would be conceding the failure of his own policy. He rose to the Presidency on the basis of having pacified Chechnya and neutralized the threat of terrorism, and now he can’t abandon Kadyrov any more easily than he could abandon the narrative of his own rule. But that may be beside the point, Gleb Pavlovsky, the former Putin adviser, said. “The Kremlin isn’t interested in laws—it itself doesn’t follow them. It’s interested in reality, and from its point of view reality means the use of force and the transfer of money.” On this score, Kadyrov hasn’t done anything to abrogate his end of the bargain.

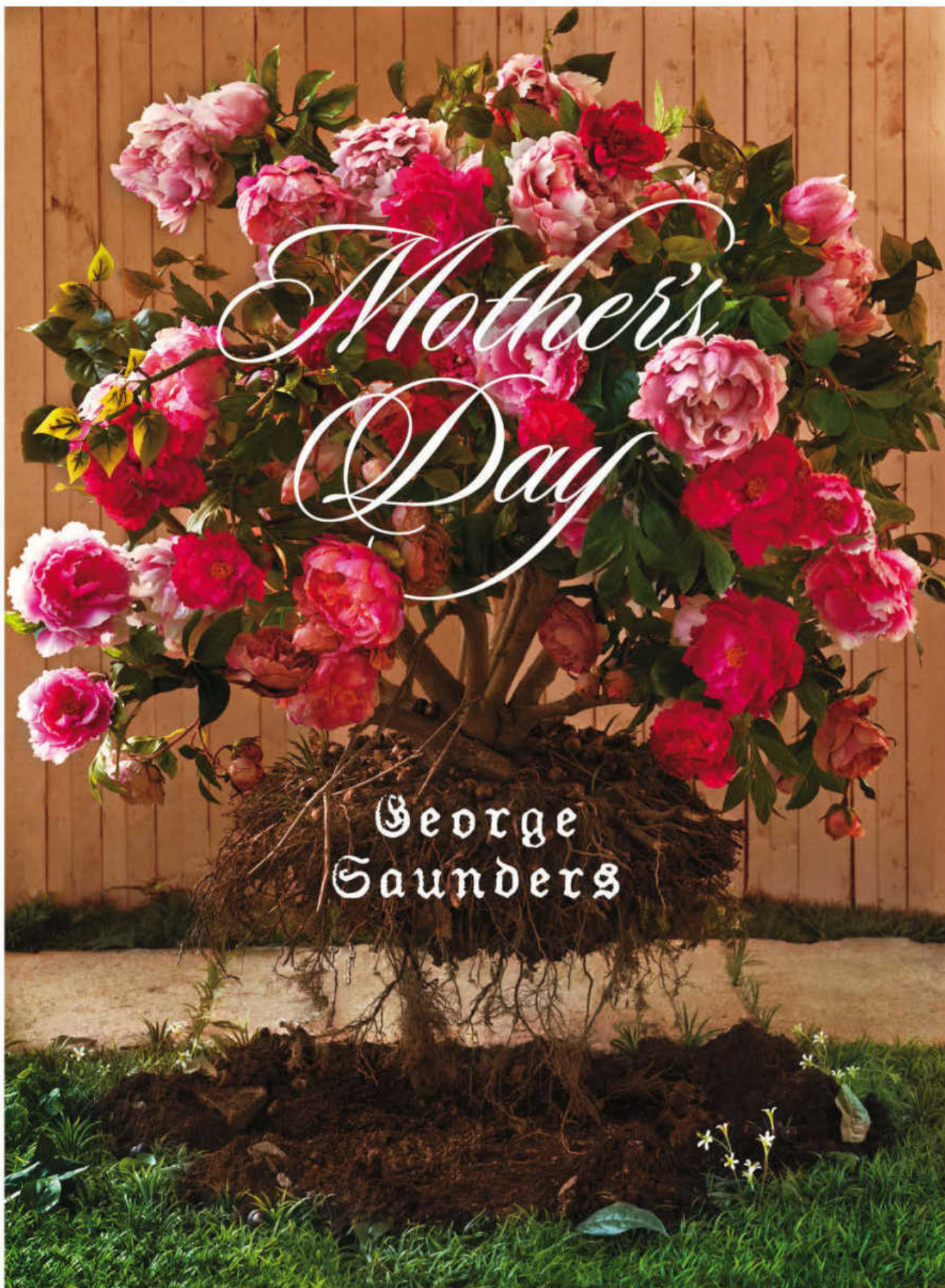


The more paranoid in Moscow’s opposition circles see Kadyrov as a potential successor to Putin. That’s highly unlikely—preposterous, even—but Kadyrov has made himself an irreplaceable part of the political system. Nikolay Petrov, the head of the Center for Political Geographic Research, said that, whatever turn the Russian political system takes in the future, Kadyrov will have to be accounted for, and could perhaps play a decisive role. “Kadyrov has the potential to be a tsar-maker,” Petrov said. “Not because he has more men at his disposal than, for example, the minister of defense, but because his men—tens of thousands of them—will carry out his orders without thinking twice. If the minister of defense tells his troops to storm the Kremlin, he can’t be sure that all of them will actually do it. But Kadyrov can.”

ON MY last day in Grozny, the city was celebrating another public holiday, this one honoring the police and the Interior Ministry. Hundreds gathered at the city’s main concert hall for a ceremony led by Kadyrov. Just before two in the afternoon, he arrived in a black Mercedes S.U.V.—he was driving himself—and parked it in the square outside the hall. He jumped out and was saluted by Chechnya’s interior minister and his deputies, along with a group of young Chechen cadets. His chief bodyguard, a Chechen fighter nicknamed Patriot,

stood watching, dressed in fatigues and wraparound sunglasses, with a machine gun held tight against his chest. As is usual these days, Kadyrov was wearing an olive-green overshirt, a form of traditional Chechen dress that he has made popular among his retinue and has required male public employees to wear to the office on Fridays. His beard had grown long.

Inside the hall, a troupe of Chechen women in flowing red dresses performed a traditional dance that was lyrical, almost mournful. A speaker announced a charity project initiated by Kadyrov’s mother and sponsored by the Kadyrov fund: the families of officers killed in the fight against militants would receive a payment of fifty thousand rubles. The interior minister then presented a new award, “For distinction in the struggle against terrorism and extremism,” and announced that its first recipient would be Kadyrov. Kadyrov took the stage and delivered a speech in memory, as he explained, of those Chechen troops who had been killed or injured while on duty. “We remember what has come before,” he said, alluding to the destruction of the two wars. “We couldn’t walk around the city, we couldn’t say openly that we were Chechens. Thanks to Akhmad-Haji Kadyrov and Vladimir Putin, all that has changed.” Afterward, he got back in the driver’s seat, and his motorcade followed him down Putin Prospect. ♦



DESIGN BY ELANA SCHLENKER

THE TREES along Pine Street that every spring bloomed purple flowers had bloomed purple flowers. So what? What was the big deal? It happened every spring. Pammy kept saying, "Look at the flowers, Ma. Ain't them flowers amazing?" The kids were trying to kiss up. Paulie had flown in, and Pammy had taken her to Mother's Day lunch and now was holding her hand. Holding her hand! Right on Pine. The girl who once slapped her own mother for attempting to adjust her collar.

Pammy said, "Ma, these flowers, wow, they really blow me away."

Just like Pammy to take her mother to lunch in a sweatshirt with a crossed-out picture of a machine gun on it. What about a nice dress? Or pants suit? At least this time Pammy and Paulie hadn't been on her about the smoking. Even back when Pammy was taking harp, even back when Paulie's hair was long and he was dating that Eileen, even after Eileen slept around and Paulie shaved his head, whenever Paulie and Pammy came over they were always on her about the smoking. Which was rude. They had no right. When their father was alive they wouldn't have dared. When Pammy slapped her hand for adjusting her collar, Paul, Sr., had given her such a wallop.

The town looked nice. The flags were flying.

"Ma, did you like your lunch?" Pammy said.

"I liked it fine," Alma said.

At least she didn't have an old-lady voice. She just had her same voice, like when she was young and nobody had looked better in a tight dress going for cocktails.

"Ma, I know what," Pammy said. "How about we walk up Pickle Street?"

What was Pammy trying to do? Cripple her? They'd been out for two hours already. Paulie'd slept late and missed lunch. He'd just flown in and, boy, were his arms tired. Paul, Sr., had always said that after a trip. Paulie had not said that. Paulie not having his father's wit. Plus it looked like rain. Black-blue clouds were hanging over the canal bridge.

"We're going home," she said. "You can drive me out to the grave."

"Ma," Pammy said. "We're not going to the grave, remember?"

"We are," she said.

At the grave she'd say, Paul, dear, everything came out all right. Paulie flew in and Pammy held my hand, and for once they laid off the smoking crap.

They were passing the Manfrey place. Once, in the Nixon years, lightning had hit the Manfrey cupola. In the morning a portion of cupola lay on the lawn. She'd walked by with Nipper. Paul, Sr., did not walk Nipper. Walking Nipper being too early. Paul, Sr., had been a bit of a drinker. Paul, Sr., drank a bit with great sophistication. At that time, Paul, Sr., was selling a small device used to stimulate tree growth. You attached it to a tree and supposedly the tree flourished. When Paul, Sr., drank a bit with great sophistication he made up lovely words and sometimes bowed. This distinguished-looking gentleman would appear at your door somewhat sloshed and ask, Were your trees slaggard? Were they gublagging behind the other trees? Did they need to be proddered? And hold up the little device. In this way they had nearly lost the house. Paul, Sr., was charming. But off-putting. In the sales sense. The efficacy of his tree stimulators was nebulous. Paul, Sr., had said so in his low drunk voice on the night that it had appeared most certain they would lose the house.

"Mother," he'd said. "The efficacy of my tree stimulators is nebulous."

"Ma," Pammy said.

"What?" Alma snapped. "What do you want?"

"You stopped," Pammy said.

"Don't you think I know it?" she said.

"My knees hurt. Daughter dragging me all over town."

She had not known it. She knew it now, however. They were opposite the shop where the men used to cut pipe. Now it was a Lean&Fit. The time they nearly lost the house, Paulie had come to their bed with a cup of pennies. He was bald these days and sold ad space in the PennySaver. Pammy worked at No Animals Need Die. That was the actual name. Place smelled like hemp. On the shirts and hats for sale were cartoons of cows saying things like "Thanks for Not Slamming a Bolt Through My Head."

And as children they'd been so bright. She remembered Paulie's Achievement Award. One boy had wept when he didn't get one. But Paulie'd got one. Yet they'd

turned out badly. Worked dumb jobs and had never married and were always talking about their feelings.

Something had spoiled Paulie and Pammy. Well, it wasn't her. She'd always been firm. Once, she'd left them at the zoo for disobeying. When she'd told them to stop feeding the giraffe they'd continued. She'd left them at the zoo and gone for a cocktail, and when she returned Pammy and Paulie were standing repentant at the front gate, zoo balloons deflated. That had been a good lesson in obedience. A month later, at Ed Pedloski's funeral, when, with a single harsh look, she'd ordered them to march past the open coffin, they'd marched past the open coffin lickety-split, no shenanigans.

Poor Ed had looked terrible, having been found after several days on his kitchen floor.

"Ma, you O.K.?" Pammy said.

"Don't be ridiculous," Alma said.

In the early days she and Paul, Sr., had done it every which way. Afterward they'd lie on the floor discussing what colors to paint the walls. But then the children came. And they were bad. They cried and complained, they pooped at idiotic random times, they stepped on broken glass, they'd wake from their naps and pull down the window shades as she lay on the floor with Paul, Sr., not yet having done it any which way, and she'd have to rise exasperated, which would spoil everything, and when she came back Paul, Sr., would be out in the distant part of the yard having a minuscule perschnoggle.

Soon Paul, Sr., was staying out all night. Who could blame him? Home was no fun. Due to Pammy and Paulie. Drastic measures were required. She bought the wildest underthings. Started smoking again. Once, she let Paul, Sr., spank her bare bottom as she stood in just heels at the refrigerator. Once, in the yard, she crouched down, schnockered, waiting to leap out at Paul, Sr. And, leaping out, found him pantsless. That was part of it. The craziness. Part of their grand love. Like when she'd find Paul, Sr., passed out on the porch and have to help him to bed. That was also part of their grand love. Even that time he very funnily called her Milly. One night she and Paul, Sr., stood outside, at a window, drinks in hand, watching

Paulie and Pammy wander from room to room, frantically trying to find them. That had—that had been in fun. That had been funny. When they finally went back in, the kids were so relieved. Pammy burst into tears, and Paulie began pounding Paul, Sr., so fiercely in the groin with his tiny fists that he had to be sent to—

Well, he certainly had not been sent to sleep in the garden shed in the dark of night. As he always claimed. They would not have done that. They had—probably they'd laughed it off. In their free-spirited way. Then sent him to bed. For hitting. After which, probably, he'd run out and hidden in that shed. Rebelliously. They'd searched and searched. Searching and searching, heroically, they'd finally found him in the shed, sleeping naughtily across a fertilizer bag, tears streaking the dirt on his—

Why had he been crying when he was supposedly hiding rebelliously?

That was all a long time ago.

She wasn't getting in the fricking time machine about it.

Sky was black now over the library.

If Pammy got her caught out in the rain she would honest to God tear Pammy a new one.

One Fourth of July, Paul, Sr., had groped her in the mums. He'd liked that. He'd been craving more wildness. O.K., pal, here it is. That did the trick. Around the time of the groping-in-the-mums one ceased hearing the name Milly, ditto Carol Meninger, ditto Evelyn Whoever. One briefly ceased hearing those names and smelling those strange perfumes during that fleeting victorious period of victory-by-wildness. Where had the kids been that magical Fourth of July? Somewhere happy with sparklers, probably. Two sparklers had approached. Then paused. Then departed pronto. Well, that would teach them to spy. That would teach them that adults needed their private time.

"Behold, kiddies," Paul, Sr., had slurred drunkenly into her bare back. "Welcome to your painful eyeful."

Soon after that wild Fourth came another near-loss-of-house. All wildness ceased. In the absence of wildness the names/perfumes resumed.

No. A person misremembered. They'd worked shoulder-to-shoulder to save the house, and the entire question of names/perfumes had permanently receded, both of them finding it humorous that anyone could possibly think that Paul, Sr., would even consider—

She was so tired.

Stupid Pammy.

Inconsiderate Pammy.

"Home," she said.

Up ahead, across Pine, sweeping her walk—was that?

It was.

Debi Hather. Good God. Was she ever old.

The strange trashy girl in high school. Big hippie. Tiny head, curly hair, no chest. Look at her over

there, still weird: Asian blouse, pants with ties at the ankles, bird-skinny. Who did she think she was, Gandhi or whoever? Mrs. Gandhi?

Hippie Grammie?

Sweeping like a banshee in front of that same tiny former carriage house she'd lived in since she was a girl. With her oddball parents. Mandy and Randy. Both had limps. Different limps. When they walked down the street it was like a freaking dance party.

Now, hang on a *briefen* short second there, Eisenstein, Paul, Sr., said in her mind. Let's poise a hyperthetical: Say you were born to gimps and grew up in a tiny house, and never had *und potten* to piss in. Mightn't you have turned out a strange lost gal with twelve or so marriages behind you and a tragic run-away daughter?

No, she answered. I wouldn't have.

You know that for a certainty? Paul, Sr., said. Well, maybe I'm just dull. Perhaps I fail to grasp your immensely higher logic. Maybe, having lived a perfect life, you've got all the answers.

Don't.

Do not.

Do not defend that one there.

I merely pose the query, he said.

He was bearing down on her in that way of his, not even giving the other person a chance to—

Wong or white, snook? he said. Clock's ticking! Answer, please!

Well, how should she know? Who she'd be if she weren't her? Why would

you want to even know that? It didn't amount to anything.

"Ma, you want to go over, say hi?" Pammy said. "She's an old friend, right?"

"Well, she's old," Alma said. "But she's no friend of mine."

"Ma, God," Pammy said.

"We never had nothing to do with her," Alma said. "Big hippie. Never meant nothing to us."

Not much.

Not much she hadn't.

ZOWIE! HERE came Alma Carlson. Up Pine. Daughter in tow. Pammy or Kimmie or whoever. She'd seen the son, Paulie, at Wegman's yesterday, arms full of flowers. For Alma (!). Not sure how *that* worked: Mean Old Thing (Alma) gets Mother's Day flowers; Nice, Generous Mom (her, Debi!) gets—

Lord, what a face: shrivelled apple. Drawstring purse pulled tight.

When was God or whoever going to lower the boom? On a meanie like that? Or did she just get to live out her life, mean as all getout? Oh, God, Schmod, she, Debi, wasn't a big believer in God or Hell or any of that male-based crap. She'd been no angel herself, having done (yes) a few drugs in her day, and also she didn't exactly love the idea of showing up at the pearly gates or whatnot and having St. Whoever look her up in his book and go, Whoa, hey, I was just sitting here tabulating the number of guys you had in your life, and, yikes, can you wait here a second while I go check with God on what the limit is?

Sweep, sweep.

(Why did we use that word when the actual sound was more like *sweep*?)

Sweep, sweep.

Because, O.K., yes, she'd loved men. And they'd loved her. Back in the day. For her? It was a form of joyous overflow. Like that art guy on TV who loved to paint so much that sometimes his wife got peeved, and he'd go, holding up his brush, "Joyous overflow, Ruthie! Mea culpa!" She'd been like that. But with sleeping with guys. Ha! She'd enjoyed every last one of them. Even the sleazes. Especially the sleazes! That salesman from Ohio! With his little blindfolds? What had *that* been about? Did he carry them everywhere? Apparently! But, God bless him, that was just *him*, that was his *thing*. Everyone had a thing, or several



things, and her view was, if you loved the universe (which she did, or liked to think she did, or, anyway, sure *tried* to), you had to love *all of it*. Even Mr. Ohio (Tom? Tim?) with his little blindfold case. Where was he now? He'd been like fifteen years older than her. So he'd be . . . what? In a home? Dead? Having his own interesting conversation with St. Whoever? Re the blindfolds? Re the not exactly stopping when she'd asked—

But even that—you learned something from everything. Or, at least, she did. What she'd learned from Mr. Ohio was—

Well, she wasn't sure.

Don't date guys from Ohio.

Ha.

What a hoot.

Sweep.

Tim/Tom from Ohio had been followed by who? Whom? Carl, then Tobin, then the Lawrence/Gary combo. After that it got blurry. Lord, what a roster! She'd really lived. Had not discriminated between tall/short, nerdy/cool, married/not married, whatever. No blockages. No hangups. If you're interested in me, I thank you for that, I bow to that part of you that bows to me, let's get it on. Ha. No, really, she recanted exactly *none* of it. Why recant openness to the moment? Bring it! Even now, bring it! Open, open, open! She ought to run across Pine and give Alma a hug. That would freak the old bitch out.

But no. If she'd learned anything in her life it was: you had to accept people the way they were.

Like Vicky. Her daughter. Whoever Vicky had been at any given moment, she, Debi, had accepted it. When Vicky wanted to be a bookworm and wear those big cloddy boots and memorize everything about the French Revolution and always be tidying up the house and scrubbing the toilets and whatnot, she'd been like, Go for it, kiddo, I accept you. When Vicky wanted to mow the lawn because the parade was this weekend, and the whole town would see how long their grass was (as if *that* were a thing), have at it, *amiga*, even though you're only like eight, reach way up and dig in with your cloddy boots and push that big heavy mower, I won't be embarrassed about it at all.

Whatever Vicky had wanted to be, that had been fine with her.

Only wouldn't it have been cool if what Vicky had wanted to be was a less subservient, more out-there type of girl, so self-assured that nothing ever threw her? Somehow she'd got stuck with the wrong kid. Which made for some tension. Vicky was so *uptight*. Everything had to be *perfect*. Like once Vicky brought over this nice young guy, Rob, and she, Debi, made them mac-and-cheese, but there was no milk, as she'd been getting the runaround from Phil, or maybe it was Dennis, and was a little distracted and hadn't been to the store in a week or two, so she made it with strawberry yogurt, and the kids declined to eat it, and she pointed out (just being honest) that they must be a couple of pretty privileged humans if they were turning up their noses at what would pass, in ninety per cent of the world, for a fucking *feast*, and at the F-word Rob (the son of *surgeons*) had blanched or blushed or whatever (basically looked like he was about to throw up and/or fall over from shock), and Vicky had started stuttering, and all that time Vicky—she remembered this in particular, this detail being so classically *Vicky* (big self-sabotager)—had kept her *retainer* on, like a harmonica holder. With a boy over! What was *that* about?

So, yes: tense. Tense between them. Tenser and tenser. Finally, senior year, Vicky had pulled this really skillful tension-release move. Of bolting. Running off. With that little punk Al Fowler and his stringbean cousin. Al came back a few months later, said they'd left her in Phoenix, she was being a total bitch.

Two weeks after that, a postcard: "Ma I'm fine don't try to find me."

And that was that.

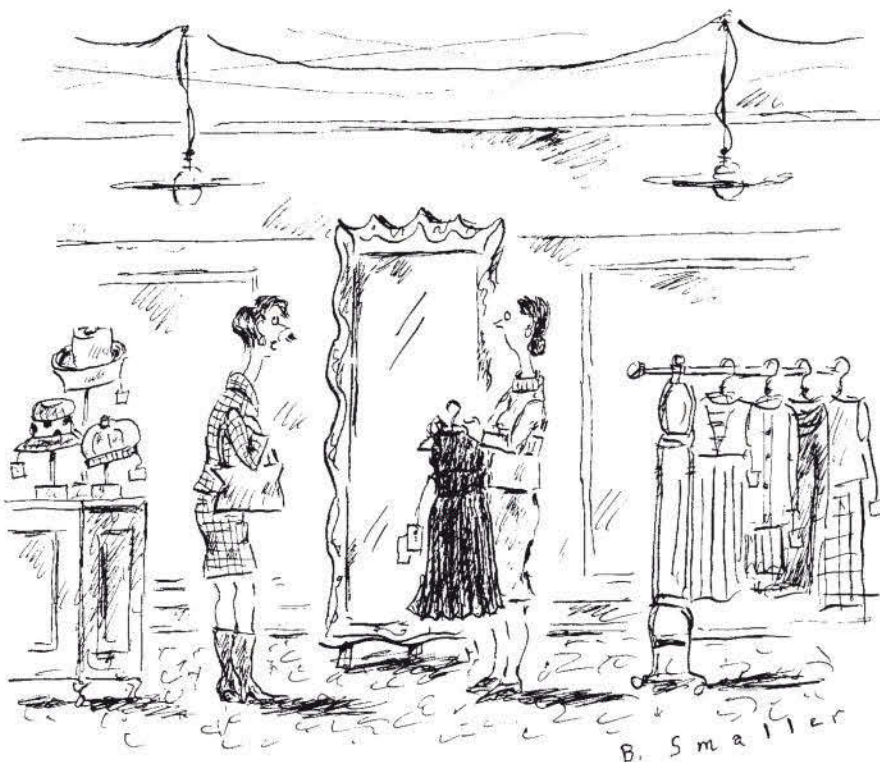
Thirty-two years ago.

Not a word since.

Sweep.

It was what it was.

But you know what? Actually? She felt good about it. She did. She'd raised an independent young woman. A young woman so intent on getting what she needed she hadn't even bothered to say goodbye. To her own mother. That was bold. That was awesome. She'd raised a warrior princess. Because if Vicky *had* said goodbye Debi would have tried to talk her out of it. She'd loved that kid so much. She would have said, like, O.K., look, agreed, I'm a mess, there are too many men in my life, I'm not always available to help you with—whatever, algebra or whatnot—but give me another chance, and I'll be more



"It's black, but it's not New York black."



"Send in the clowns!"

focussed on *you* and *your* needs, and will totally disavow who *I* am (a person always trying to say *yes* to life) and will do my best (hereby resolved!) to start saying *no* to life, and very fakely pouring myself into that constricting mold you seem to prefer me in ("Perfect Robotic Mother"), so that nothing I do will ever challenge you in the least or make you step even an inch outside your tiny restrictive comfort—

Alma was paused now across the street. Glaring at her. As if stuck.

What's up, kid? What do you want? A bow? A salute? A wave?

Here you go, pal.

Care to wave back, Your Majesty?

No?

Fine.

Far be it from her to judge. Anyone. At any time. To judge was to dominate. To place yourself above another. Which she refused to do. Some would. Many did.

Not her.

Although wouldn't it be a hoot when Alma kicked the bucket and St. Whoever was like, Why so mean? Why so proud? Why such a hypocrite? Did you not find life beautiful? Where was your *heart*? Why did you squander your precious life force trying to possess, control, *interfere*?

And Alma, newly dead, would stand there, stunned, like, I'm having a realiza-

tion right now. Who was correct? Debi. Who was wrong? Me, Alma. Then they'd show the movie of her life, and Alma would see what a fuckhound Paul was and that would really drive it all home.

Would she, Debi, be standing nearby, inside Heaven, looking on, amused? No. Because she was going to outlive Alma.

Ha.

No. Let's say she was dead. She'd be like, I knew you in life, Alma. Do you remember me?

Gosh, Debi, hi, I do, Alma would say. And I am so sorry. I was always a super-snoot to you.

Yes, you were, she'd say. But I forgive you.

And St. Whoever would look over, all impressed, like, Wow, even though she always treated you like crap, you are being totally cool to her right now.

But then again you fucked my husband, Alma would say. Like a gazillion times. According to that movie I just now watched. Even when I was in the hospital having Pammy.

Does that come as a surprise to you? St. Whoever would say. About your husband?

It does, yes, Alma would say. I lived in a state of self-imposed blindness, never seeking truth.

That's too bad, St. Whoever would say. That's some bad juju right there. What is the greater sin, do you think,

adultery or standing in the way of true love?

I don't know, Alma would say.

Standing in the way of true love, St. Whoever would say.

But he was my *husband*, Alma would say.

Well, marriage is just a shallow cultural tradition, St. Whoever would say. At least, it is to us up here.

She fucked him and fucked him, Alma would say, all crestfallen. Right under my nose. And I never knew.

And yet here I am in Heaven, Debi would say. Think about it.

Ha. That had all just popped out.

The creative mind, wow.

Especially hers.

Well, Paul had deserved better. Than Alma. He was so sweet. You got the feeling that, in being a fuckhound, he was just acting on his true nature. He took so much joy in it, flattered you so sincerely after, never ignored you in public, like so many did, but always lit up when he saw you and sometimes even gave you a wink, with Alma standing right there, which was weirdly delicious, because Alma (she had to admit it) had always had this sort of *glamour*, being one of the older girls and (oh, she could give her this much) really pretty. One time, at some sort of yard party, Paul had given Debi that wink and they'd snuck off to a pool shed or some such, and afterward, when he rejoined Alma, who was (as she so often was back then, ha ha) looking worried, Paul put his hand right on Alma's ass while giving her, Debi, a second wink, and Alma had brightened so sweetly at his hand on her ass, as if it really *meant* something to her, that, thinking of that pathetic little brightening now, she, Debi, felt a twinge of sisterhood, as in "Men are pigs, sister, are they not?," although, at the time, not so much, because she'd just been dumped by either Derek or Clive, and that second wink (which meant, as she took it, "*Das Wifen* has no clue how bondingly naughty it was for you to go down on me just now while sitting on that tub of chlorine") had just made her really, really happy.

Could that guy ever talk! "I am maximally ardent *pour toi*," he'd said. She'd written that one down. In her Krazee Jernel. Those were the days! You did

whoever, then wrote about it in your Krazee Jernel.

How could Alma not have known? What a fucker Paul had been? Literally? Debi, Linda, Milly K., that Iranian gal, both Porter sisters, Mag Kelly, Evelyn Sonderstrom. And those were just the ones she personally knew about! Everyone knew. How could Alma not know? You'd walk around town and there'd be tall pale nerdy Paul sneaking out of some house, or leading some gal (her, Debi, ha, guilty as charged) around back of St. Jude's for a quickie, humming "Kumbaya" ironically. A few days after that, he'd sent her a bracelet. Nice bracelet, actually. Still had it. She should donate it. To a women's shelter. Jesus, who had she *been* back then? Doinking a married guy? Behind a church?

No, you know what? She loved that woman. *Praised* that woman. That woman she'd been: authentic, spontaneous, never thought twice. About anything.

Just *leapt*.

Sometimes it was so frustrating! To have been born in the wrong time! In the future, she was pretty sure, people would be open and free, and fuck whoever they wanted, and live communally, all responsibilities shared, and if you dug cooking and cleaning and whatnot you'd do that, or if you were more creative, and felt more authentic hanging out with others, offering counsel re their problems, smoking a little hash to go deeper, you'd do that. Nobody would own anything or anyone. Everyone would do exactly what he liked and nobody would gossip about anyone or look down on anyone or consider anyone slutty, and all the houses would be exactly the same size, and if someone started to build some fancy addition, *bang*, everyone would be right there, going, *No you don't, we are all equal here*, and if the person made a fuss about it, they'd simply—well, there'd be some sort of council. That would very fairly and systematically bring that elitist down. To their level. Make her live in a smaller house. For penance. And some of that wiser subgroup who had chosen to give counsel and smoke hash might symbolically take over the oppressor's house. Just temporarily. And her husband. Until she was genuinely sorry. And if the elitist resisted, and refused to be genuinely sorry (as judged by them, the wiser subgroup), she could stay in that

much smaller house until she relented, while the wiser group gathered outside, taunting her, enacting a sort of virtuous blockade, until she was nearly dying of hunger and—

It was so unfair. She'd loved Paul and Paul had loved her, but she'd never got to live with him for even a single minute, and then he'd broken it off, and she'd had to drive by his house every day on her way to that stupid receptionist job, watching that ugly new addition go up (and up and up), and sometimes there'd be Alma, standing cross-armed amid the framing, smugly smoking.

And yet.

Who'd triumphed? Who was happy? Who was happy right now? Was Alma? She didn't look very happy.

She, Debi, was happy.

Happy in this moment, just as it was. Wind picking up, clouds dark over the Rec, left heel out of her slipper: perfect.

Game, set, match: Debi.

Life was harsh, people said. But no. She disagreed. Life was wise. Life *compensated*. The love of your life broke it off, and many years passed, and your kid ran off, and that about killed you, but then, laid low, you were forced to take stock, see what had been good in your life, see what had been best, and when your answer was "Paul. Paul was the best thing that ever happened to me," you drifted back to him, sought him out, sort of lured him back into it, into you, and what did you get? The happiest year of your life. Of both your lives. He said so. "I've never been so happy. That's the truth." His exact words. So she had that. Then he died. Just her luck.

She couldn't exactly show up at Chasen-Winney for visiting hours, so she'd snuck out to the grave a few days later, bawling her eyes out. Then here came Alma. As always. The Interferer, the Truncator. In that sweet red Granada that Paul had just bought her. For her birthday. Ouch. Off she, Debi, had scurried, through the woods, ruining her new black pumps, because (who knew?) there was a *swamp* back there, eventually stumbling out, like some sort of dispirited ghost, at Wendy's, where she'd had a milkshake, clay-red mud pooling up around her wrecked shoes, that moping kid looking over at her, like, Lady,

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it's weird that you're crying in Wendy's. Please leave, so I can clean your shit up.

And then she'd had to call Carl from work to drive her back to the graveyard to get her Dart.

The end.

Alone ever since.

Sweep.

"MA, JEEZ, wave back," Pammy said. "You're acting nuts."

I don't believe I will, Alma thought.

"She's just some old lady,"

Pammy said. "Why hurt her feelings? Anyways, that's what I think."

"That's because you don't know shit about anything," Alma said. "Look at you. What have you ever done?"

The breeze was suddenly cold, and leaves were skittering around.

Oh, great. Now Pammy was mad. Boo-hoo. Pammy was touchy. Dainty. Who knew why? She'd always treated Pammy-Putt square.

Ha. Pammy-Putt. She'd almost forgotten they used to call her that. Pammy-Putt. With the pigtails. At the end of one pigtail a pink tie and at the end of the other a yellow. Because Pammy-Putt wanted it like that. Little Pammy-Putt, standing on the footstool, confidently directing the pigtailling. She hadn't thought of that in—she could smell that kid's head now. Sort of sweet. Cloverish. Where had that smell gone? Where had that confident little gal—

Once, Pammy-Putt came home from second grade asking what a *laughingstock* was. And what was a *philanderer*? Who'd said those things? Alma demanded. Who'd been telling those filthy lies? She'd had a few nips. So was forceful. Pammy wouldn't cough up a name. So she'd had Pammy stand on one foot awhile. Then Pammy-Putt got her mouth good and scrubbed with soap for disobeying a direct—

The church bells at St. Caspian's rang once, twice, three times.

Now here came the rain. Perfect. Stupid Pammy. Eight blocks from home. Her knees were shot. What's the plan, Pam? You carrying me? Pammy had a bad back. Pammy wasn't carrying shit.

Some little hail-thingies came bouncing up off the sidewalk.

Pretty.

Ouch. Not pretty.

Hey! Damn! What the—

"Ma, we better run for it," Pammy said.

Run? You run. I can't, dummy, I haven't run in—

Then she was. Running. Kind of. Behind Pammy. God, the shuffling funny way they ran now. The hail stung her arms like wasps. Wasps coming straight down. A lemon-sized hail-thingie smashed on the sidewalk in front of them like a snow cone.

Holy crap, if that hit a person?

Pammy had her sweatshirt off now and was holding it up. Over Alma's head. Lord, what a kid. Standing there in her bra, bare pink arms up. So her ma wouldn't get zoinked. Hair full of the smaller-size hail-thingies, like the plastic beadlets on them old Catholic—

She felt a rush of tenderness for Pammy.

Something clipped Pammy in the head, and a red mini-divot appeared at her hairline. Pammy seemed stunned. Too stunned to move. A tree? By the Ubernicks'. She pushed Pammy over by the tree. That was better. No, it wasn't. The hail was cutting right down through the branches now. A shower of snapped branches crashed down on the Ubernicks' fence: one, two, threefourfive. Jesus, they had to get out of here. One more branch came down, caught her on the shoulder. Hey, that hurt, clown! Like the time Karl Metz had whacked her with that hammer.

Someone was calling her name.

From across the street.

The hail-thingies bouncing off Debi's black umbrella looked like sweat flying off a cartoon-guy's head when he was supposed to be worried. Paul, Sr., had once shown her a porn like that. A cartoon porn. The one Paulie later found. Guy so worried, watching his wife have at it with a big sailor or—

It wouldn't do. Wouldn't do having Debi help. Or would it? It might. It wouldn't. Paul had liked that one too much. Of all of them, he'd liked her best and stayed at her longest and gone back to her way after all the others were done. It was humiliating. That he should stay

longest with the trashiest, strangest of all, always speaking kindly of her, as if he actually might—

Old man. Stupid old man. Old man in love. Old man so happy, in his boxers, in front of the fan, telling her all about it, like she was supposed to be happy, happy for him, happy for—

She waved Debi off.

We don't need you, slut. We won't have you.

She leaned against the Ubernicks' fence. Dirty fence. Someone should paint it.

"Ma?" Pammy said, trickle of blood running down her face. "You O.K.? Ma?"

She pushed Pammy off. She couldn't breathe. When pushed off, Pammy stayed off. Pammy was like that. Sweet but weak. No bounceback. You could push her right off.

The fence gave way. The ground came up. Ouch. Cheap fence. She ought to sue those stupid Uber—

She was on the ground now, severed bike pedal huge in her sight, ant crawling along it. The fence was up. Still up. Hadn't given way. Only she had. Why the hell was she on the ground?

Oh, God, something with her heart, something with her—

THE CHURCH bells at St. Caspian's rang once, twice, three times.

Rain coming. What a drag.

She'd be stuck inside all day.

Across Pine, the Denisons' sunflowers were bending in the breeze. Alma and what's-her-name were standing hunched over like a couple of lady trolls. Mom troll and daughter troll, out on the troll town. On Troll Mother's Day. How nice. How sweet. How weird.

One last *sweep*.

Here it came.

Let it rain! Jesus, what a deluge! Bring it! Yes! Gorgeous! Memo from Mother Nature: I can be one crazy dame. Don't piss me off, I shall instantaneously make Pine Street a river and back up the gutters and cast forth (whoa! dang!) a torrent of tiny pinging crystals, which you humans call "hail," but which I, Mother Nature, call "my wondrous display," which shall resound or rebound to the music I play, such that they shall—whoa! dang! fuck!—ricochet up off the rain-slick black street and come



bouncing back as high as your waist, falling alike on the lowly and the—

Walnuts!

Golf balls!

Sheesh!

Damn!

How was Alma doing over there? Not great. Getting pounded. Ha! There you go, kid. There's an example of world-serving-as-teacher. Try snooting your way out of this one, Your Majesty.

From somewhere came the sound of a parade, that distant-drum sound, which was weird, because wouldn't it have been cancelled? On account of the hail? Only it wasn't a parade; it was the sound the biggest hailstones yet made smashing down on (yikes!) the Ubernicks' Fiesta, the Neillys' trash can, which—oof!—tumped over (as if knocked unconscious) and rolled directly out onto Pine.

Pammy or Cammie or whoever had her shirt off now and was making a tent of it, over Alma.

Over her mother.

Kind of sweet, actually.

Oh, hell's bells, hang on, somewhere in this mess she must have a—

She stepped in, grabbed Dad's duck-handled umbrella from the rack, stepped out.

Because who was she? She was Debi. Who was Debi? Debi was generous, a generous soul. She was known for that—she gave and gave and reached out to others, no matter how badly they'd treated her, even a meanie like Alma, who (yes, O.K., she admitted it) she'd often wished dead, so that she might have a decent chance at the man she loved and a real house and all the things you were supposed to get in this world—but, no, she didn't wish Alma dead anymore, because she, Debi, was *love*, was *forgiveness*, was *goodness*, was *light*; where there was need there was Debi, which was why she was about to do what she was about to—

She stepped out, umbrella up, yelled across.

Wait.

Wait a minute.

Had Alma waved her off?

She had. Oh, my God. You have got to be kidding. What nerve! What balls! Still queen? Peasant girl still too lowly? To come fetch you, Your Highness?

Stick it, Alma.

Let this be a lesson to you.

There is some shit I will not eat.

Because she, Debi, was also a person who had the wisdom to let the world teach the evil ones a lesson while she stood calmly by, watching/trusting the cosmos.

She stepped back inside, slammed the door, shot the umbrella into the stand, retreated to the middle room, Mom and Dad's old room, angrily pulled her tax things from the file cabinet, sat shuffling the forms uselessly around, thinking of how strange it was (beautiful, really, a mysterious unsought blessing) that, after a lifetime of being everybody's joke (easy lay, jilted lover, discarded mom), she was finally (in the eleventh hour) learning to frigging stand up for herself.

She stayed in there about fifteen minutes, fuming, getting absolutely nothing done, until she heard the first ambulance arrive and leapt to the window, heart in her throat, and watched as, without even trying the shocking-paddles, they pulled the sheet up over Alma's head and loaded her in.

Debi's mind lurched forward, sputtered, went (momentarily) quiet.

ALMA GOT hold of a fence slat. To pull—pull herself out. Of this. Pain. Something new was happening now. The tightness in her chest was worse. Jesus. Like labor with Paulie. Then it went past that, to labor with Pammy, and she was giving birth to something bigger than Pammy, out her chest.

God, oh God.

Pop! is how she would have described it had she still been able to describe.

Pop.

A number of little beings came now. God, get back. You didn't know whether to pet them or kick them. As they gazed up at her intently, she saw they were saying, *Careful, girlie, careful.*

Then their boss-being came: a man.

Paul, Sr.

Looking so handsome.

"Did you finally wake up, dear?" she said. "And love the right person? The one who knew you longest and understood you best?"

Looking at him, she saw the answer was no.

Still no.

The little beings condensed into two. Boy and a girl. Paul tapped them on the head and they turned into babies. Who stood cowering beside Paul. Giving her the stink eye. Like he was guarding them. From what? From her? In a pig's ass! It was his fault! He never let us be a family!

"Now will you accept me as I am?" Paul said.

What? What a crock! How about you accept *me* as *I am*? Treat me nice. Like a wife. A real wife. Forsake all others. Love just *me*. Is that too much to ask?

She saw it was still a no and always would be.

It hurt. So much. Again. Well, if he wanted a fight, she knew how to fight. She liked it. She was good at it. She'd



"It is not you. It is we."



make him pay. The way she always had. You'd think he'd know that by—

She looked down. Her hands were glowing. Glowing red.

"This has nothing to do with him," the girl baby said. "How do *you* want to be?"

How could that baby talk so well? She was like a little genius. In a diaper. And what did she mean? It had everything to do with him. He'd done it all. Turned everything bad. Before Paul had messed with her, she'd been a smiling little dear sniffing lilacs on graduation day, swinging her diploma by one corner. It was Paul. Paul who'd made her hands this way. She went to wipe her eyes and started her hair on fire.

No problem.

Didn't hurt.

Much.

Now Paul was gone. The babies looked lost. She should pick them up. She went for the boy. His eyes got wide at her hot hands. He toddled away. She went for the girl. She toddled away. It was like when you dropped a piece of paper on a windy day and it grew a mind bent on eluding you. She stood still. The babies drifted back. They wanted

her. But she had the hand problem. She went for the boy. Who toddled away. She went for the girl. Who toddled away.

Then it happened again.

And again.

For like a hundred years.

A stump appeared. At some point.

At least now she could sit.

She sat trying to figure it out.

It seemed she was meant to admit that she was wrong. But she wasn't. If she was wrong about this, there was no right.

Maybe she could fake it.

"O.K., O.K.," she said aloud. "I was wrong. The whole time. About everything."

Hands still hot.

The stump began rising. Lifting her above the babies. Then: a terrible bark-cackling. The beings were back. With big old teeth.

Here they came, scrambling hyena-like across a vast plain.

Real baby-eaters.

Lord, so fast. She'd have to hoist the babies up. She reached down, grabbed the boy, singed his little arm.

How to do it, how to do it, how to get her hands to cool?

"Whose fault was it?" the girl baby asked.

"His!" Alma cried. "His, his, his!"

Her arms went hot right up to the elbows. Big bully! Whoever'd made her this way, unable to lie, was jerking her around now because she wouldn't lie.

The hyena-beings were closing in, all meat-breath and yellow teeth.

"Whose?" the girl baby said. "Whose fault?"

"I don't know," she cried desperately. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I really don't! Mine? My fault?"

"No," the girl baby said.

What the hell? Fine, forget the babies, she'd keep the hot hands. She was what she was. No one could blame her. As long as she was Alma, she'd be mad. She had a right. Did she *want* to be mad? No. What she wanted to be was her, younger. Her, non-mad. Her, not yet mad. Pre-Paul. Smelling lilacs, swinging that diploma. No, even before that: so young she wanted nothing yet, liked nothing, disliked nothing. No, before that: before she was even Alma, because Alma would always find Paul, love Paul, and Paul would always be Paul.

It came to her, and then was happening: it would be fixed when she stopped being Alma.

Her arms and hands went cool and pale, perfectly normal.

She reached down, hauled the babies up.

"Who do you *want* to be?" the girl baby whispered into her ear as the stump rose just high enough to keep them safe from the hyena-beings bark-cackling below.

It was like waiting at the top of the Alpine in that little wooden car, unable to believe that what was about to happen was about to happen, and then, even as you thought, God, oh God, this cannot possibly—

"NOBODY EVEN close to home in there," the paramedic named Henry said to the paramedic named Claire.

Which was rude, Claire thought. But actually, no, it was fine: the daughter was out of earshot, sobbing against a tree. ♦

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George Saunders on taking four years to write a story.

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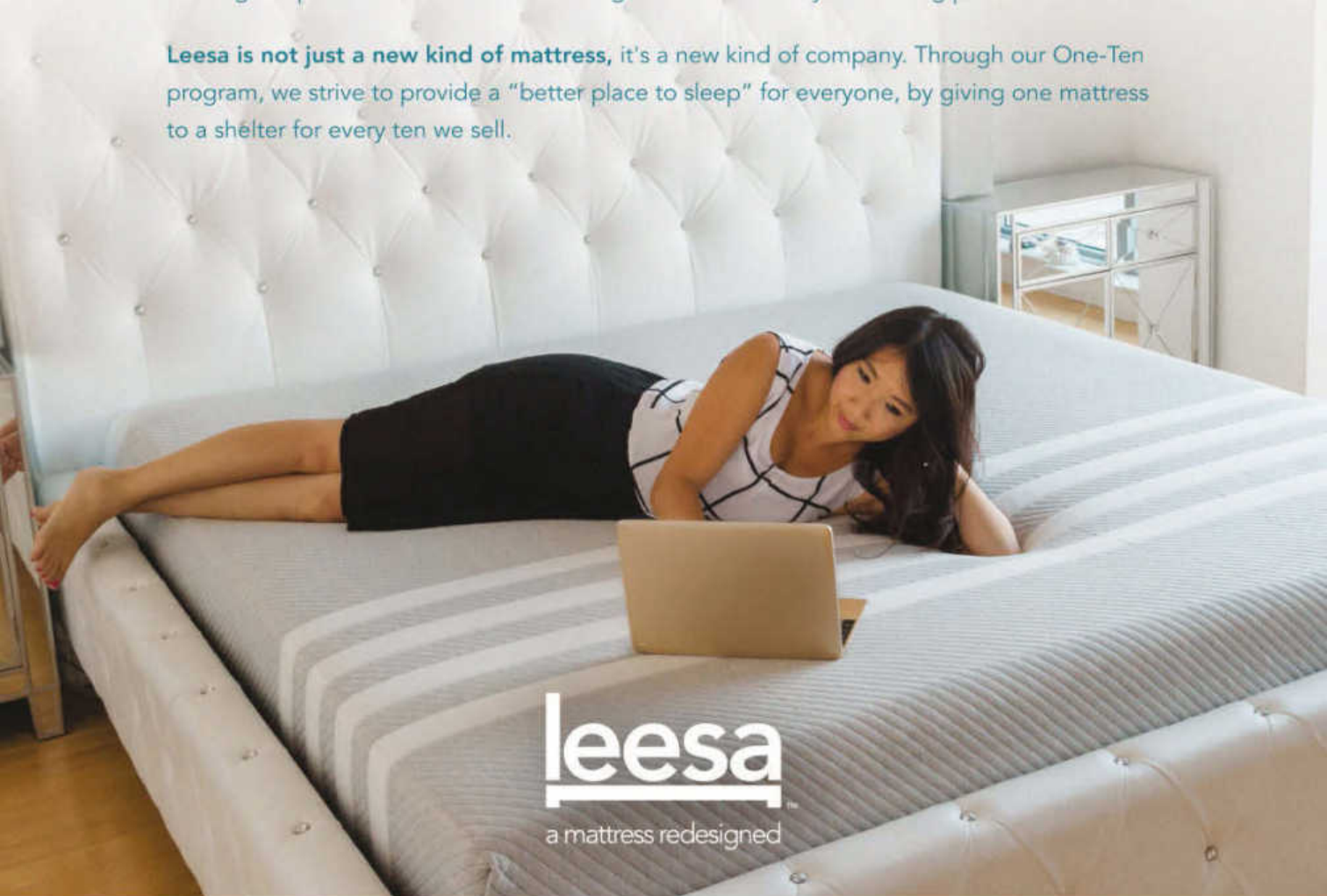
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THE CRITICS



POP MUSIC

HIDDEN WONDERS

Sia's response to stardom.

BY CARRIE BATTAN

SIA FURLER, the forty-year-old Australian artist who goes by her first name, is a pop star, but other labels are equally appropriate. She is both an industry veteran and a newcomer to stardom, a background figure and a ubiquitous force. She's also a prankster and a provocateur, a peddler of cheap gimmicks and high-minded performance art. In the past two years, while making the rounds of talk shows, she hid under an oversized wig. She invited collaborators to serve as proxies onstage, and perform a series of dances to her hit "Chandelier." Often, a tiny teenager named Maddie Ziegler danced while Sia, nearly out of sight, belted her song. If you were to watch these performances on mute, you might think you had happened upon a public-access broadcast of an interpretive-dance recital rather than a song with more than a billion YouTube views.

This marked a new phase in Sia's long history of shape-shifting. She began her career, in the nineties, as a vocalist in the acid-jazz band Crisp, before joining the British electronic group Zero 7. With a sharp ear for melody, a soulful voice, and a knack for bridging genres, she began releasing experimental solo records in 1997. For the next decade, she experienced patches of success. In 2005, buoyed by a song called "Breathe Me," which appeared in the series finale of the HBO show "Six Feet Under," Sia went on a long tour of the United States. She decided that road life, and her increased visibility, didn't suit her: she took drugs and drank heavily, and she struggled with promotional obligations. By the time she released her 2010 album, "We Are Born," she was ready to make a change.

She got sober, and abandoned her solo recording career to focus on writing songs for other pop stars. The plan was to exploit her musical gifts without the pressures of publicity.

The line between the front and the back of the house in pop can be a tricky one to cross—very few people manage it, in either direction—but in recent years it's been difficult to avoid hearing Sia's music. She has written for Katy Perry, Britney Spears, Beyoncé, and, most notably, Rihanna. Their collaboration "Diamonds," a high-drama minimalist ballad, reached No. 1 on the *Billboard* charts in 2012 and has sold millions of copies. Sia has said that the song took about twenty minutes to write, the words tumbling from her mouth involuntarily. Perhaps unsurprisingly, taken at face value, they can seem nonsensical—"Shining bright like a diamond/We're beautiful like diamonds in the sky"—but when delivered with enough vigor they feel profound.

Sia continued to write music with big-name artists in mind. But when she came up with a song about drowning sorrow in excessive partying, which she planned to send to Rihanna, she couldn't bear to give it away, so she recorded it herself. This was "Chandelier," a triumphal burst of emotion and orchestral arrangements. It achieved anthem status, putting Sia on the charts for the first time and earning her four Grammy nominations—the exact situation that she had hoped to avoid. The song was the lead single on "1000 Forms of Fear," the 2014 album that made her famous. "It turns out I am ambitious," she told Howard Stern. "And I do want a No. 1 record." But this time she took stronger self-pro-

TECTIVE measures. She began wearing the wigs, along with paper bags over her face, in a symbolic effort, she said, to hide from Internet commenters and widespread attention. Of course, there is nothing like anonymity to generate interest in an artist—just ask Elena Ferrante, if you find her—and Sia's disguises brought her fame as much as they insulated her from it, as she surely must have known they would. (Someone who appears on "Saturday Night Live," as Sia has, can't be entirely uninterested in notoriety.)

You might assume that an eccentric artist who writes mainstream hits for others would use her own album as a place for experimentation. But Sia's new record, "This Is Acting," shows a mastery of formula rather than a rebellion against it. Sia today is reminiscent of Lady Gaga early in her career—there's a similar cultivation of outlandish affectations while making straightforward work. Many of the songs on "This Is Acting" were written for pop stars but never found the right home. And yet Sia inhabits them just as comfortably as any of her collaborators. "This Is Acting" is the Platonic ideal of a modern pop album: like Adele, Sia writes sturdy, direct songs whose power derives from force rather than flourish.

Which is not to say that Sia's music feels anonymous. She is one of the most distinctive and acrobatic vocal performers working today, her high-register rasp instantly recognizable. Her songs sit somewhere between balladry and modern dance-pop. Everything is in service of a larger-than-life chorus, each song a vehicle for anthemic catharsis. She is wiser and more world-weary

ABOVE: GUIDO SCARABOTTOLLO; OPPOSITE: PHOTOGRAPH BY JAMES DAY



Though some of Sia's biggest hits have been written for others, her high-register rasp is instantly recognizable.

ILLUSTRATION BY IAN WRIGHT

THE NEW YORKER, FEBRUARY 8 & 15, 2016

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than the girlish Katy Perry, more impassioned than the ice-cool Rihanna, more demure than the slinky Beyoncé. Sia is a balladeer at heart, and she is at her best when she uses her voice as her primary tool.

IN THE case of contemporary pop, there is near-constant debate over who deserves the credit—the people who write and produce the work or the artists who perform it—and whether or not the structure generates any meaningful art. But perhaps we should look at pop music less as a product of individual artistry than as a reflection of the collective consciousness of the audience. Together, writers, producers, and performers expend most of their energy calculating a way to connect to that consciousness. Sia's chief talent is understanding what audiences want.

What does her work tell us about the inchoate, generalized desires of pop listeners? Mostly, that we like to feel a sense of triumph over adversity, real or imagined. Torment and victory are the two constant presences on recent albums, and every song can be distilled to a simple line that would befit a Facebook status update about feeling a little better than you once did: *I'm alive, I'm alive. I'm unstoppable today. One million bullets could come my way. Reaper, don't come for me today. This too shall pass, we're right where we're meant to be.* These lyrics would be overwhelmingly cheesy if they weren't also powerful, affecting, and impossible to resist. In April, Sia will play at the Coachella festival; it will mark her first large-scale live performance in half a decade. Maybe she'll show her face, or maybe she won't. The people in the crowd probably won't be too concerned—they'll get their fix of uplift either way. ♦

Constabulary Notes from All Over

From the Wilmette (Ill.) Beacon.

A Fannie May Candies store employee reported that between 7:47–8:04 p.m., an elderly couple entered the store at 1515 Sheridan Road, and attempted to steal a box of chocolates by concealing it in a bag. When the employee found the hidden box and confronted the couple, the male subject pushed the employee, and the couple left the store. The male offender was identified as an 82-year-old from Winnetka.

ON TELEVISION

NOT-GUILTY PLEASURE

The calculations of "American Crime Story: The People vs. O. J. Simpson."

BY EMILY NUSSBAUM



The series feels hot-wired with modern parallels, extending beyond the Simpson case.

“WE ARE Kardashians,” Robert Kardashian (David Schwimmer) tells his four children, who bounce in a booth at L.A.’s ChinChin restaurant, giddy that their dad has been recognized from his appearances on cable news, sticking up for his friend O. J. Simpson. “And in this family being a good person and a loyal friend is more important than being famous. Fame is *fleeting*. It’s hollow. It means nothing at all without a virtuous heart.”

Is there a force more caustic, and more propulsive, than mere irony? If so, that’s the substance flowing through “American Crime Story: The People vs. O. J. Simpson,” on FX, an addictive, miraculously well-cast dramatization of the 1995 murder case, created by Scott Alex-

ander and Larry Karaszewski, and produced by Ryan Murphy and his longtime production partner Brad Falchuk, among others. The series, like the book it’s based on—“The Run of His Life,” from 1997, by my colleague Jeffrey Toobin—is unambiguous about Simpson’s guilt in the murder of his ex-wife, Nicole Brown Simpson, and her friend Ron Goldman. But this is no dutiful nineties period piece (and, yes, I know that’s a horrifying phrase, whatever your age). Instead, the series feels hot-wired with modern parallels, which extend far beyond those baby Kardashians. Without ever mentioning the links, the creators evoke the Cosby scandal and Black Lives Matter, the debate about Hillary’s “likability” and Obama’s legacy, the rise of

reality TV and the expansion of cable news. It’s a tasty Proustian cronut that makes you remember the events of not only 1995 but 2015.

As one might expect of a Ryan Murphy production, particularly one done in collaboration with the writers of “Ed Wood,” “American Crime Story” is filled with dark humor, including a few camp touches. The show’s poster depicts O.J. with his hands, one wearing the notorious leather glove, over his eyes. The sixth episode is titled “Marcia Marcia Marcia.” The Beastie Boys’ “Sabotage” pounds over the Bronco chase, L.L. Cool J’s “Mama Said Knock You Out” over the not-guilty plea. Yet the series is not, in the first six episodes sent to critics, crude or cartoonish but ideologically and emotionally nuanced, with each episode providing a shift in perspective, as if turning a daisy wheel of empathy. This is in contrast with the more brutalist style of the book, which ripples with disgust at the players’ cynicism. (“Shamelessness is a moral, rather than a legal, concept,” Toobin writes, in a typical parenthetical.) In a signature move, the creators have turned Robert Kardashian, a sycophantic dope in Toobin’s telling, into a near-hero, a gloomy Sancho Panza with Christian faith. Yes, his close friend was a homicidal narcissist. But, when you commit a double murder, Kardashian (as equipped with Schwimmer’s hangdog Ross Geller gaze) is definitely the guy you’ll want by your side, baffled when you flunk the polygraph test.

Murphy and his collaborators strip the story to its elements, from the time that the bloody-footed Akita dragged a neighbor over to the corpses of Brown Simpson, who had been nearly decapitated, and Goldman, stabbed multiple times. Visually, the show is pure Los Angeles, bright and dynamic, with the cameras observing with amused theatricality the pomp of elaborate L.A. houses, their kitchen islands as big as Mustique. The series’ real strength, however, is its panoply of eccentric, and almost universally delightful, performances. The most outrageous of these is by John Travolta, as the litigator Robert Shapiro, one of the few characters who come in for a real beating. Travolta plays Shapiro as an Easter Island head of fatuousness, with Spock

eyebrows and pursed lips, trailing famous names like bread crumbs. Connie Britton shoplifts scenes as Nicole's friend Faye Resnick, drawing her first line like an aria of decadence: "She was my *personal angel*. I wouldn't have gone to rehab if it weren't for her." As Simpson, Cuba Gooding, Jr., captures the football star's gasbag egotism but falls short of the regal charisma that drew people to him. Less showy performers hit their mark harder, especially Steven Pasquale as a terrifyingly self-controlled Detective Mark Fuhrman, all "yes, ma'am" and bigotry behind the eyes.

Still, the heart of "American Crime Story" is its daring humanization of a trio of lawyers who were so filleted in the media that they're now remembered primarily in satirical form, through imitations on "Seinfeld" and late-night TV: the prosecutors Marcia Clark (the one with the haircut) and Christopher Darden (who made O.J. try on the bloody glove in court), and the defense attorney Johnnie Cochran ("If it doesn't fit, you must acquit"). On "American Horror Story," Murphy's other anthology series, Sarah Paulson has a diva-glam intensity, but her Marcia Clark is a more life-size figure, vulnerable beneath her matte lipstick and beauty mark. A fiery advocate for victims of domestic violence, Clark is guilty less of arrogance than of excessive purism: she's so certain she's got the goods on O.J. that she keeps taking the higher ground, dumping key witnesses when they make deals with tabloids and refusing to cut jurors based on race, even when her consultant warns her that black women hate her. As the case drags on, Clark's confidence crumbles, degraded by tabloid gossip about her looks, her sex life, her divorce, and her child-custody battle. In one pungent sequence, Clark gets that famously awful haircut, then drifts past a firing squad of gawkers, like Carrie at the prom, as her face quivers with recognition that she's become a dirty joke. She longs to be an avenging angel, but the world sees only a dowdy bitch.

Courtney B. Vance gives a layered, subtle performance as the master showman Johnnie Cochran, Clark's most powerful antagonist—a quiet take on a bold man. My memories of Cochran are of a

huckster, a preacherly clown, like "Seinfeld"'s Jackie Chiles. In the book, Toobin portrays him as brilliant but also monstrous, a strategist who could work racial grievance into a plate of cookies. The show grants him more gravitas, mainly by emphasizing the complex intersection of his private and public selves. There's a flashback to Cochran getting pulled over by the cops, with his daughters in the car, for driving in a white neighborhood. He's as much an observer as he is a talker, standing back as the "dream team" snipes at one another like the Real Litigators of Beverly Hills. Cochran is a master of code-switching, when it comes to the media: he dismisses the Simpson case as "a loser" to a producer, then unctuously offers sympathy when the cameras blink on.

But it's clear that, like Clark, Cochran wants justice, except from a different angle. Police brutality is not an abstraction to him; from a certain perspective, any force that hires a cop as dirty as Fuhrman has basically framed itself. Some of the best scenes take place in Cochran's mansion, where he and his wife relax, freed from the eyes of white people, making sexy jokes and polishing his banter. "A blunders-in-blue operation," he suggests, and then, frowning, hits on a better phrase: "Contaminated. Compromised. And corrupted!" "Oh, baby," his wife says, laughing. "That's it! That is *it*. Mmm-hmm. It has a *flow*, honey." Alone among the ensemble, Cochran enjoys the greatest power of all: he knows exactly how to play himself.

FROM THE vantage point of 2016, it is far easier, for a person like me, to understand why Simpson was acquitted (and the case was about nothing if not such demographic calculations). The Rodney King acquittal and the L.A. riots were just three years before; Fuhrman reportedly collected Nazi medals, lied about using racial slurs, and bragged about torturing suspects. Why *wouldn't* a black jury believe that he planted evidence? It didn't matter that O.J. barely thought of himself as black, or that he'd palled around with cops, hosting them at Brentwood pool parties, or that he had a history of beating Nicole. Identity can function as a game of rock-paper-scissors. In Judge Ito's court, two decades ago, race beat gender.

Many of the sharpest scenes in "American Crime Story" explore the sticky interaction of race, fame, and class. When Clark's boss tells her that they're holding the trial downtown, she cracks, "Doesn't Simpson deserve a jury of his peers? You know, rich, middle-aged white men?" Lawyers on both sides invoke, in sober tones, "the downtown dialect" and "optics," code for skin tone. In one of Cochran's most brilliant manipulations, he stages Simpson's mansion for visiting jurors, removing nude portraits of white girlfriends, subbing in the Heisman trophy and Afrocentric art, along with the Norman Rockwell painting "The Problem We All Live With." ("It's on loan—from the Cochran Collection," he jokes.) A trenchant sequence (directed by John Singleton) features a dinner party that the *Vanity Fair* journalist Dominick Dunne hosts for his white high-society friends, at which he regales them with seamy tidbits about the case. Midway through one of Dunne's anecdotes, the table goes silent. The waiter has arrived, and he is black.

For all its jauntiness, the show is respectful about the crime, and includes a painful scene involving Goldman's father, who raves, devastated, at how his son has been turned into "a footnote to his own murder." But the creative team's most unusual choice is in pinpointing a less typical object of sympathy: Christopher Darden, the young African-American prosecutor, engaged in a flirtation with his boss, Marcia Clark. As played with gentle warmth by Sterling K. Brown, Darden lacks both Clark's righteousness and Cochran's canny control. When he's promoted for his "optics," he becomes perfect prey for Cochran's mind games, then gets cast in the press as an Uncle Tom. In one confrontation, the lawyers clash over whether the N-word should be allowed on the stand. Only after Cochran has shredded Darden's argument does he murmur an aside, one that only his opponent can hear: "Nigga, *please*." In Darden's failures, "American Crime Story" finds not incompetence but a buried tragedy, about the confines of identity and the isolation of being forced to pick a team, then stick with it, at any cost. He'd be an invisible man, if it weren't for all the cameras. ♦

A CRITIC AT LARGE

THE WAVES

The brotherhood of Madlib.

BY HILTON ALS



Making the past matter in the present is just one aspect of Madlib's genius.

I DON'T KNOW why, exactly, but whenever I hear anything by or featuring Madlib, the protean, forty-two-year-old, Los Angeles-based self-described "d.j. first, producer second, and m.c. last," I start thinking about black male fraternity, a subject that Madlib keeps coming back to directly and indirectly in his work, which is jumbled, cinematic, and layered in tone and style. Madlib has some sixty albums

to his credit; in the past five years alone, he's released thirteen and helped produce five. His collaborators on these projects, for the most part, have been men of color who, not unlike Madlib, are serious goofballs or smart knuckleheads, artists who aim to pervert hip-hop's early stance—what Michele Wallace called the myth of "Black Macho"—while embracing their own deep nerdiness. The 2014 Madlib

album "Piñata" (originally titled "Cocaine Piñata"), featuring the vocalist Freddie Gibbs, is a trancelike and jumpy ode to consciousness. On the title track, the rapper Mac Miller outs himself as a bookworm (Madlib is also an inveterate reader), while fronting about the kind of sex you know that dweeb isn't having:

My endorphins are morphin', absorbin'
energy
Original copy, A Tale of Two Cities gets
read to me
Reading Emerson novels, eating some
Belgian waffles
Some powder go up my nostrils, my dick
going down her tonsils . . .

In January, Kanye West released his first Madlib-produced track, "No More Parties in L.A." (It will be included on his album "Waves," which is set to come out this month.) The song sounds like nothing that West has ever been part of; it has a depth beyond his bombast and a soulful mellowness that dials him down—a bit. Featuring Kendrick Lamar, "No More Parties" samples work by Walter (Junie) Morrison, of the seventies funk band Ohio Players, as well as Ghostface Killah's 2000 track "Mighty Healthy." The intro is courtesy of Johnny (Guitar) Watson's 1977 tune "Give Me My Love," and the bridge comes from Larry Graham's 1980 song "Stand Up and Shout About Love." Making the past matter in the present is just one aspect of Madlib's genius, as is pushing hip-hop's more commercially minded performers to move beyond the fans and the record-company executives and listen to themselves.

BORN OTIS Jackson, Jr., in Oxnard, California, Madlib is the son of musicians: his father was a singer and a jazz and soul session musician; his mother was a songwriter and a piano player. The Jacksons were as interested in the history of black music as they were in performing it; soul music had a lineage, a family—some of whose members turned up in Madlib's own back yard. Jon Fad-dis, the jazz trumpeter and educator, is Jackson's uncle. "Dizzy Gillespie would come by, eating gumbo," Jackson told Andre Torres, in *Wax Poetics*, in 2013. "It was crazy. My grandparents were friends with all of them. Dee Dee Bridgewater, all of them, they'd come through." Black sounds—the sonic landscape of the African-American diaspora—were

both alive and archival. At home, Jackson immersed himself in his father's record collection, but he had no real desire to make or perform music—at least, not in a traditional way. He'd "fiddle" at the piano and tried to learn to play the drums, but none of it took. What fascinated him was how a record was made.

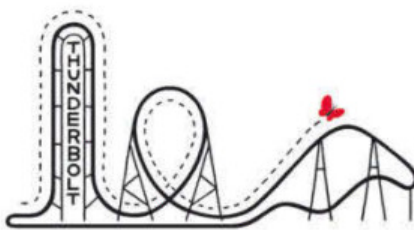
As the son of a black man who cared—and stayed—Jackson spent his formative years outside the tired Negro narrative of the absent or abusive father. A hallmark of his style as a producer is his incredible, nearly paternal concern for the artists he's showcasing. (He has three children of his own.) When he was invited by Blue Note Records to dig into the company archives for his 2003 remix album, "Shades of Blue," Madlib paid special homage to Horace Silver's "Song for My Father," from 1965, doubling back on certain phrases and elegant riffs without obscuring Silver's melodic line—or his sentiment.

While Otis, Sr., schooled the future beat master in the music of the past, an older brother, Pete, introduced him to the sounds of the younger generation—early hip-hop. "The first record I heard was 'Rapper's Delight,' sorry to say," Jackson told Torres. Writing in this magazine in 2004, Sasha Frere-Jones drew a distinction between the shiny sound-booth finish of corporate hip-hop—Kanye, Dr. Dre, and others—and the stubborn individualism of artists like Madlib, who stick to their samples instead of paying musicians to compose for them. (Madlib uses turntables and analog recording devices in an age of digital everything.) "Rapper's Delight," with its cheery populism, isn't something that Madlib would ever sample in his work, except, perhaps, as a joking comment on his past. Still, that song and others alerted him to the world of producers and beat makers, including early greats like Too Short, Roxanne Shanté, and DJ Pooh, who didn't so much create beats as reimagine or feel them, scratching and rapping lyrics that linked the past to the present.

Hip-hop grew out of an independent spirit and a love of community. On the East Coast, in the seventies and early eighties, block parties were a form of social entertainment, an alternative to the dominant genres of disco and stadium rock. You didn't need a building to house rap; it could be produced outdoors, and feed off the energy of the crowd. Drum

machines, samplers, and so on were no longer the province of studio engineers; they were now mass-produced and could be bought on the cheap. Plus, you didn't need a trained voice or show-biz glitz to perform a rap song. The lyrics weren't restricted, as popular music has always been, to stories of love or fun. Most of the rappers Madlib admired when he was growing up sang about black male alienation and life inside or outside "the system"—but what if you didn't feel doomed by your blackness or your masculinity or your dreams? The hip-hop producer and sample czar Prince Paul, a native of Long Island who is best known for his work with De La Soul and RZA, put forth a story that was about black manhood, too, but one that stressed the humor and the ridiculousness of it. (Think early Ishmael Reed, with a beat.) Madlib, who is six years younger than Paul, has always got off on the absurdity of being a walking target, but to that he adds an understanding of the gamble that is black life, in which expectations are dashed—or repressed.

In elementary school, Jackson hooked up with his classmates Jack Brown (the future Wildchild) and Romeo Jimenez (now DJ Romes) to form a pop-locking group. In high school, in the late eighties, the three became Lootpack, and Jackson soon took on the stage name Madlib. Lootpack's version of West Coast rap—with mental gunplay in place of firearms—went nowhere fast; they couldn't get record companies interested. (In



1995, Jackson's father financed Lootpack's first EP, "Psyche Move.") Eventually, the band caught the attention of the L.A. producer and d.j. Peanut Butter Wolf, who ran the Stones Throw label, and in 1999 he put out their first studio album, "The Anthem." On it, Madlib not only scratches and samples other vocalists and sounds; he also gives us a jazz flutist playing a mellow tune—a nod, no doubt, to the legend Bobbi Humphrey. The sound isn't smooth. The samples

bump up against the rap, and each communicates a distinct message: Lootpack would not be bought or sold. On the album's title cut, Madlib raps:

Most people nowadays talk about representin'
They strictly smokin' Phillies, actin' ill,
gettin' bent, and
The ways of the industry mad shady
tinted . . .
Whether you in Texas, L.A., or Trenton
Alaska, Nebraska, Japan ya have ta
Know the difference from a fake m.c. to
a real m.c.

IT WAS as Quasimoto, a "fake," or invented, m.c., that Madlib started to attract a wider audience, at least among the hip-hop cognoscenti. In 2000, Stones Throw released "The Unseen," Madlib's jazzy, spaced-out, and on-point evocation of his alter ego's inner life. Quasimoto, who sounded as if he'd inhaled a healthy dose of helium, was amped up in a way that Madlib was not. Madlib has said that he developed the voice because, at that point in his career, he didn't like rapping as himself; his voice was too deep and he sounded tired. "When it comes to my own lyrics, I have to think about it more than Quas does," he explained in a 2005 interview. "He brings ideas, and then I come with it."

The record starts with what sounds like a public-service announcement, or a warning. "Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to violence," a man says, his voice pinched and reserved. He continues, as sampled sinuous rhythms gather behind his speech like snakes, "While violence cloaks itself in a plethora of disguises, its favorite mantle remains sex." That's when dirty-minded Quasimoto steps in; right away we know, from his delightful creepiness and need, that he's an id, ready to force his message down our throats with a laugh.

Quasimoto is not unlike the characters Prince Paul created in his amazing 1999 hip-hop opera, "A Prince Among Thieves." In a 2014 interview, Madlib pointed to the influence that another Prince Paul-produced album—De La Soul's prickly, hippie "3 Feet High and Rising" (1989)—had on him. "That's kind of where my whole style for Quasimoto came from," he said. But Quasimoto isn't a crew, like De La Soul. A latter-day Ignatz, he revels in life's jokes, getting blunted or twisted by bad vibes, and unwinding through wit. (Madlib

said, probably jokingly, that Quasimoto is the only guy he doesn't get along with.)

One guy Madlib more than got along with was the late beat master, rapper, and remixer James Dewitt Yancey, or J Dilla. Born in Detroit in 1974, J Dilla, like Madlib, formed a band in high school—Slum Village—that was committed to exploring hip-hop's roots while addressing contemporary matters. The group developed a following in Detroit's underground hip-hop scene. Dilla also became sought after as a remixer and a producer, working with artists like Janet Jackson, Common, Busta Rhymes, and the Roots, whom he made sound both different and like themselves. In 2001, Peanut Butter Wolf put Madlib and Dilla together; it didn't take Madlib long to realize that Dilla—the son of an opera singer and a jazz bassist—was a kind of brother in music. “Dilla was a John Coltrane-type dude,” Madlib told an interviewer in 2010. “He was always on a higher level. He inspired my music to become looser and more soulful.”

Erykah Badu, who has made some of her best work with Madlib, described the way the two artists worked: “They’re so serious about what they are doing. They make beats all day long. That’s what they do. All. Day. Long. Don’t even save them, just put them onto a CD. They give out these CDs, volume No. 1 to No. 5, up to No. 121.” In 2003, the duo released their first album, “Champion Sound,” on which half the songs were produced by Madlib and half by J Dilla; each artist raps, but only on tracks produced by the other. There’s a great warmth to the record, and Madlib’s work has a new kind of interiority—less sonic thicket and more sunlight. Plus, there’s a more professional sheen; J Dilla’s product had the kind of high finish that Madlib can rarely be bothered with.

After “Champion Sound” came out, J Dilla moved to L.A. and he and Madlib began performing together. But J Dilla died, of a rare blood disease, in 2006, three days after Stones Throw released “Donuts,” his masterpiece. Reviewing the record on Pitchfork when it was reissued, several years ago, Nate Patrin wrote:

As an album, it just gets deeper the longer you live with it, front-to-back listens revealing emotions and moods that get pulled in every direction: mournful nostalgia, absurd comedy, raucous joy, sinister intensity.

Madlib’s 2006 release “Beat Konducta Vol. 1-2: Movie Scenes,” which samples dialogue from films and from artists such as Richard Pryor—Madlib has said that the album is a soundtrack to the movie in his head—shares that intensity and has a similar sense of fun, as if the sonic world were being remade not according to or in reaction against hip-hop but according to Madlib. “Beat Konducta Vol. 3-4: Beat Konducta in India” came out in 2007, and fuses Bollywood music and dialogue with hip-hop beats to create a deliciously mad score for a movie you definitely want to see. In 2009, Madlib released “Beat Konducta Vol. 5-6: A Tribute to . . .,” an epic composed of dense miniatures, his response to the loss of Dilla.

YOUNG BLACK masculinity finds its elders—if they want to be found. As Quasimoto, Madlib rapped about “listening to Sun Ra / Early George Benson on down to Hampton Hawes.” In 2000, he started his own jazz group, Yesterdays New Quintet, for which he is the producer, arranger, and engineer. (Rumor has it that all the members of the group are actually Madlib playing under various aliases.) To listen to albums such as the powerful, eclectic “Slave Riot,” from 2010, is to hear the artists that Madlib grew up on, including the legendary jazz bandleader Weldon Irvine. (Irvine wrote the lyrics for the seminal song “To Be Young, Gifted and Black,” in 1969, and lived long enough to be part of Mos Def’s solo debut, “Black on Both Sides,” in 1999. Two years after Irvine’s suicide, in 2002, Madlib released the album “A Tribute to Brother Weldon.”)

One also hears Irvine’s voice, asking not to be forgotten, on “Madvillainy,” Madlib’s justly celebrated 2004 collaboration with the London-born rapper MF Doom. The record’s phantasmagoria underlines Doom’s metaphor-laden examination of the black male body as target and familiar unfamiliar. But the low-tech nature of the sound and the style are Madlib’s. As Madlib says, “The equipment doesn’t matter, it’s the vibe you put into it. If the music sounds good, music sounds good.” When Madlib talks about hip-hop and its myriad forms within the form, he’s usually also talking about himself. “I’m with the times,” he has said, “but I want to have the past in my shit, too. Past, present, and future is where I’m at.” ♦



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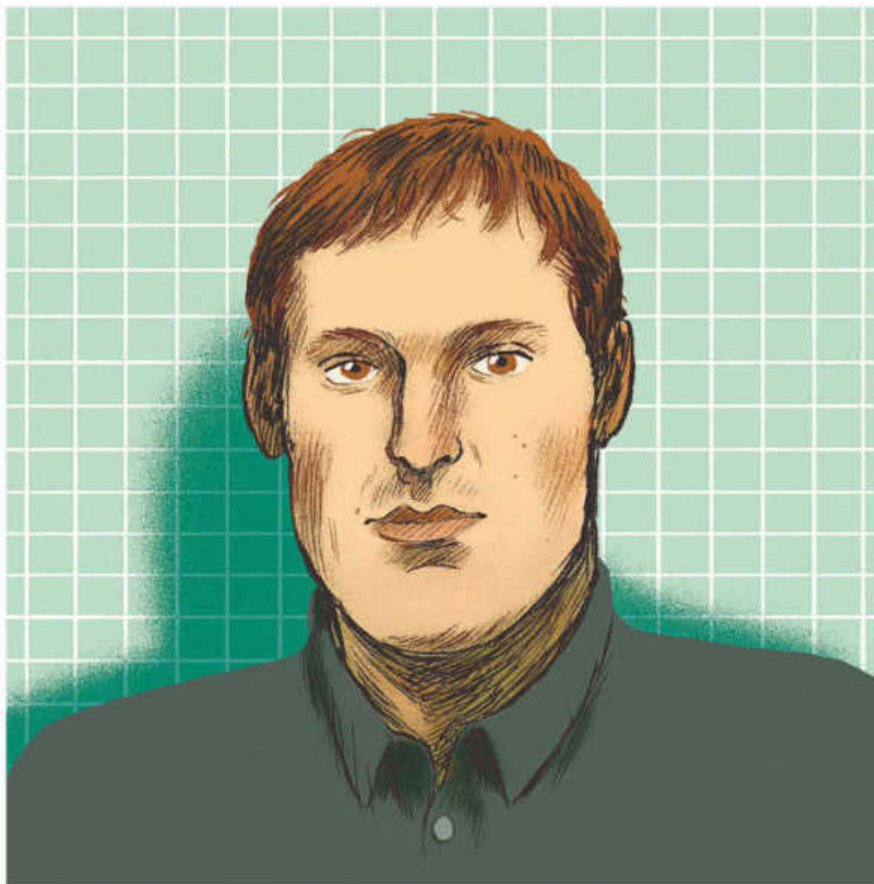
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UNSUITABLE BOYS

Novels about Americans looking for love in Europe.

BY JAMES WOOD



In Garth Greenwell's debut, an American is obsessed with a Bulgarian hustler.

ABOUT A third of the way through Garth Greenwell's first novel, "What Belongs to You" (Farrar, Straus & Giroux), there occurs one of those moments that have become formulaic in contemporary fiction-making: the protagonist is summoned home; his father is ill, "gravely" so, and wants his son to come back, despite the fact that they have not spoken in years. Such requests are a device, part of the machinery whereby one character is forced to reckon with homecoming, and thus forced to interact with another character; often, this brings an entire family together. This particular protagonist, who is the novel's narrator, is a young American who has been teaching at an American school in the Bulgarian capital, Sofia.

His father is back in the States, and convention promises a lovingly described return, full of sweet struggle, savory ambivalence. We have all read these customary fictions. (Reader, I wrote one.)

Greenwell resists the consolations of custom. The narrator walks out of the school, holding a paper copy of the e-mail that brought him the news. He wanders through Sofia, remembering the painful series of events that resulted in his father's banishment of him. What he recalls is vivid and hurtful; he has a full larder of grievance. When the narrator was a child, his father divorced and remarried; he has been chronically unfaithful. But the sharper memory has to do with the father's response to the discovery of his son's homosexuality. As a

schoolboy in a Southern Republican state (so we surmise; the state is unspecified), the narrator got close to another boy, who is referred to simply as "K." The two became tender friends, united in their shared solitude, politics, and love of books. The narrator essentially fell in love with K. but was young enough to be still working out the gravity of his feelings for his friend, and whether those feelings were likely to be reciprocated. One night, the two boys embrace, touch each other's naked torso, sleep next to each other. But they go no further than that, and the next morning K., who is feeling unwell, seems to put a new distance between the two of them. A few weeks later, as if to punish the narrator, K. announces that he has a girlfriend. In an extraordinary and almost unbearable scene, K. asks the narrator to come over to his house, and makes him watch as he and his girlfriend have sex. The narrator understands that he is being used in a triumphal lesson: "I was there not as guard but as audience. I was there to see how different from me he was." Walking in Sofia, the adult narrator remembers this early pain, and remembers, too, how his father came to read his diary, and how violently he responded to the revelation of his son's sexuality: "You disgust me, he said, do you know that, you disgust me, how could you be my son?"

In Sofia, the narrator has reached an area of scrubby ground near Soviet-style apartment blocks. He decides that he will not return to America: "I wouldn't answer, I wouldn't see my father again, I wouldn't mourn him or pour earth on him." He balls up the paper and throws it into a little urban stream that flows unexpectedly close to the apartments.

This long swerve from and around convention, which takes about forty pages, offers as good an example as any of the originality and power of Garth Greenwell's slim novel. Instead of returning to America, the writer stays inside the narrator's head: the walk through Sofia is essentially an extended stream of consciousness (which ends when the narrator tosses his memories into a real stream). It is rare to find a first-time novelist who's so sure of what to choose and what to abjure; the novel has enough social detail to do its work, but very little by the standards of contemporary

realism. We don't know the narrator's name, or where or when, exactly, he grew up. We don't discover much else about his father; K. doesn't appear again; there is no superfluous backstory. The novel contains no direct dialogue, only reported speech; scenes are remembered by the narrator, not invented by an omniscient author, which means that the writing doesn't have to involve itself in those feats of startup mimesis that form the grammar, and gamble, of most novels. In an age of the sentence fetish, Greenwell thinks and writes, as Woolf or Sebald do, in larger units of comprehension; so consummate is the pacing and control, it seems as if he understands this section to be a single long sentence.

Rhythm, order, music, and lucid exposition: there is undeniably a mandarin quality to the way that Greenwell narrows the frame of his inquiry and then perfectly fills this reduced space. But if the novel's formal control has a rare delicacy there is nothing at all hermetic about the story the narrator tells, which has a bitter urgency. Not long after his arrival in Sofia, the narrator encounters Mitko, a handsome young Bulgarian hustler. He pays him for sex, a transaction that inaugurates a relationship of profound imbalance. On the one hand, the narrator has a greedy sexual hunger for Mitko, and may indeed be in love with him; his neediness for someone who appears likely to abandon him seems helplessly bound up with the trauma of his father's abandonment. On the other hand, the narrator enjoys a freedom and a privilege that Mitko, who is a poor drifter and who seems "more or less homeless," can only dream of. The asymmetry stains their relationship. The narrator begins to bridle at Mitko's repeated requests for money and assistance. He tells the Bulgarian that he doesn't want to be one of his clients. But Mitko is a wily manipulator, motivated at times, perhaps, by genuine affection for the narrator, and at other moments by a durable instinct for self-protection. He tells the narrator that he is a special friend, that their relationship is about more than sex; but he does so with clumsy threats, pointing out that a mark of his affection is the fact that he has not stolen things from him. The narrator asks him to leave.

In one way or another, both literally and symbolically, Mitko—the only char-

acter in the story to be given a name—is always announcing to the narrator, "You owe me." Greenwell subtly lays bare the tormenting dynamic of a relationship structured by inequality. The two men speak in Bulgarian, which means that the narrator, whose Bulgarian is poor, can't always understand Mitko, and expresses himself basically, without "any of my usual defenses." Sometimes the narrator wants to "save" Mitko; sometimes he recoils from him, or is menaced by him. Always, he desires him. He concludes that Mitko has never been anything other than "alien" to him, because love is not merely "a matter of looking at someone . . . but also of looking with them, of facing what they face."

Once again, the novel inhabits conventional motifs in order to renovate them. Stories about hustlers or prostitutes are commonplace in both straight and gay fiction. But Greenwell tells a new story about client and prostitute. Mitko and the narrator violently part company, but are brought back together when the Bulgarian turns up one night at the narrator's pleasant apartment to tell him that he has syphilis, and that the narrator should probably get himself tested. For the narrator, the news revives memories of the AIDS era, when he was growing up: "Disease was the only story anyone ever told about men like me where I was from, and it flattened my life to a morality tale, in which I could be either chaste or condemned." But he seems to find it hard to escape the morality tale. He remembers getting tested for H.I.V. when he was young, and being given the all-clear, and feeling almost "disappointment. . . . Maybe it was just that I wanted the world to have meaning, and that the meaning I wanted it to have was chastisement."

The reader can't help making a connection with the narrator's earlier story about K., who felt ill the morning after the two boys first embraced. When the narrator's father drove K. home, the car smelled of "foulness"—K. had thrown up, and the odor still clung to him. In the rearview mirror, the narrator's father was watchful, as if he suspected something. But the narrator felt that K. was turning against him, allying himself with the father: "In that foul air I felt him identify me as foulness. It was as though he felt my father was health and I con-

tagion, and I was at once bewildered by this and unsurprised."

Greenwell knows what he is doing, and knows the long history of the implied relationship, both resisted and exploited by gay writers, between homosexuality and disease or disability: the section about the syphilis revelation is entitled "Pox." Greenwell's novel is brilliantly self-aware, and may be animating the ghost of J. R. Ackerley, whose father died of syphilis, and whose novel, "We Think the World of You," concerns a gay middle-class narrator and the love he has for an elusive working-class man. "What Belongs to You" is fairly explicitly about shame, punishment, and disgust, among other things. What is unusual is not the presence of these themes but the book's complicated embrace of "foulness," and a barely suppressed longing for punishment, a longing embodied in the narrator's relationship with Mitko. Greenwell's novel impresses for many reasons, not least of which is how perfectly it fulfills its intentions. But it gains a different power from its uneasy atmosphere of psychic instability, of confession and penitence, of difficult forces acknowledged but barely mastered and beyond the conscious control of even this gifted novelist.

DARRYL PINCKNEY'S second novel, "Black Deutschland" (Farrar, Straus & Giroux), too, sends its gay narrator abroad, and it, too, has a watchful apprehension of its literary antecedents. Jed Goodfinch, a young, middle-class black Chicagoan, has come to West Berlin in the early nineteen-eighties. Jed, like the German city, is full of self-conscious historicity. He is in search of Christopher Isherwood's Berlin, of course, and also in search of a distinguished, pre-made identity—"that person I so admired, the black American expatriate." Much of the comedy and poignancy of the picaresque story has to do with Jed's failure to rise to the challenge of this rather exalted notion of identity. Unlike Isherwood, Jed is not obviously a writer. Unlike his Chicago cousin Ruthanne, nicknamed Cello, a brilliant classical pianist who now lives successfully in Berlin with her wealthy German husband and their four children, and who, while growing up in Chicago, "represented Negro Achievement," Jed droops with woe. A young man, he's

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already a fuck-up emeritus, a former addict and alcoholic, fresh from rehab. In Berlin, he is largely unsuccessful in love, squandering his affections first on a German, Manfred, who is straighter than he is gay, and then on a French West African man who leaves him for someone else. The one element of his life that sparkles, at least intermittently, is that he has wangled his way into a job with West Berlin's celebrity architect and theorist, the gaudily named N. I. Rosen-Montag.

Pinckney's narrator, who has tinctures of another fictional Chicago dreamer, Augie March, is engaged in that great comic picaresque struggle, which is to bring the busy inside of his head into workable alignment with objective reality: "I'd lived my life camping out in other people's stories, waiting for my own to begin, but unable to get out of the great head and into my actual." He doesn't achieve that, but history forces a kind of reconciliation, for Jed's sojourn in West Berlin spans the nineteen-eighties, so that we begin the book in a city set apart for fantasy and self-projection and end it as the Wall comes down, with the actual forcing its brutal way onto the streets. The city whose main business had seemed to be culture and partying—"the floating island of neon and pleasure deep inside Communist territory," "the free zone of staying up all night," a place stuck in "the golden age of chain smoking"—is changing, and our flailing hero must leave to find another arena.

Where Greenwell rations his effects, Pinckney scatters, cuts, digresses. The text frequently jumps back to Jed's childhood and adolescence in Chicago, moves forward to West Berlin, and then back again to recall Jed's parents and siblings. Jed breaks off to muse on historical parallels. There are frequent riffs on great black figures, like Du Bois, Armstrong, James Brown, Ella Fitzgerald, and these function a little like the European masters of thought and action invoked in "The Adventures of Augie March," at once private goads and ironic measures of present failure. The Berlin part of Jed's story can seem shapeless, even incoherent in places, though it is never without charm. Sometimes one has the sense—this is the very opposite of Greenwell's novel—of a stream of consciousness without a stream. Or perhaps it is

a consciousness that is missing: Jed can seem an amorphous witness, never quite present in his own sentences. The book's form, like its prose, is ambitious, risky, and takes a little getting used to. Pinckney evidently wants to enact and embody some of the Dada-like surreality of West Berlin, and needs his quick jump cuts: "Stravinsky had three face-lifts, Hayden said." Or: "Manfred pressed my left hand flat between his hands and said that I had a Balzac thing going with coffee." Or: "No fact ever killed off a myth, they say. Cello was boiling eggs." Sentences expand, even at the cost of some strain, in order to absorb as much of Berlin as possible: "I had no trouble seeing the justice of Manfred's criticisms when we discussed Rosen-Montag over cigarettes by the Hansa warehouse slated to become a children's clinic."

The novel is full of wondrous things—several genial character portraits, funny and exact depictions of West Berlin (bars, hippie communes, radical tyranny, bourgeois bohemianism), beautiful evocations of Chicago ("I could feel Lake Michigan. You could feel all of the Great Lakes and their conspiracies of ice crystals and surface winds"). Despite the gravity of Jed's burdens and dilemmas (race, success, sanity, America, Germany), the book's tone is comic, pleasingly spry, and the prose breaks naturally into witty one-liners: "Manfred had a type: the most attractive woman in the room." Or this piece of perfected wisdom: "One of the surprises of growing up was finding out what things had been about." Jed's charismatic, self-involved parents—his father busy running a declining black newspaper, his mother off doing charitable works—are tenderly drawn (and have a stronger fictional vitality than its watchful narrator). Chicago is a city full of people "who could not get away." Berlin, by contrast, belongs to those who have just arrived, to the young. It is a place where—like this novel—time can be manipulated, "either stretched or discounted," because no one, or no one in Jed's crowd, ever goes to sleep. It exists for experiment and self-fashioning, an expansion and easement all the more precious to a young, gay African-American who has been denied that freedom at home. Even if, especially if, it is just the freedom to fail. ♦

LUXE ET VERITAS

Frederick Seidel's poems of age and experience.

BY DAN CHIASSON

IF THE id had an id, and it wrote poetry, the results might sound like “Widening Income Inequality” (Far-rar, Straus & Giroux), Frederick Seidel’s sixteenth collection. The title borrows a current meme, while also suggesting Yeats’s apocalyptic poem “The Second Coming” (“Turning and turning in the widening gyre / The falcon cannot hear the falconer”). Seidel’s satanic refinement is expressed in poems at once suave and vengeful, their garish pleasures linked to the many splendid goods—Ducati motorcycles, bespoke suits, Italian shoes—that they describe. To encounter a poem by Seidel is therefore to be co-opted into his Ricardo Montalban aesthetic of creepy luxury. American poets like to think of their art as open, democratic, all-embracing; few aside from Seidel have imagined the lyric poem to be an exclusive haunt of self-flattering, hedonistic élites. Seidel is securely on the winner’s side of the widening wealth gap; the implication, if we’re reading him, is that so are we. He is the Phi Beta Kappa poet of doomsday, happily escorting the world’s fortunate to a well-appointed abyss, then cannonballing in alongside us.

Whenever Seidel publishes a book, a portion of his readers recoil in offense, while others celebrate his courage and cunning. The dispute arises from passages like the following:

I live a life of appetite and, yes, that’s right,
I live a life of privilege in New York,
Eating buttered toast in bed with cunty
fingers on Sunday morning.
Say that again?
I have a rule—
I never give to beggars in the street who
hold their hands out.

The “buttered toast” and “cunty fingers” come courtesy of the English novelist Henry Green, who was quoting an old butler’s musings on life’s great pleasures. There’s something predatory about both the undisclosed allusion and the “life of privilege” it’s made to illustrate. With their deeply literary brand of shock, these lines orchestrate a specious conflict be-



Encroaching death gives Seidel’s blasphemy a ballsy élan.

tween two inadequate responses. You can take the bait and say, “What a jerk! Wow—that thing about the fingers!” Or you can mount a kind of A.P. English defense of them: the speaker isn’t Seidel at all but a “character named Frederick Seidel,” as the critic Richard Poirier put it, “that has little to do with who he really is.” Robert Browning didn’t kill Porphyria in “Porphyria’s Lover.” T. S. Eliot

wasn’t the one “pinned and wriggling on the wall”—that was Prufrock. The louche vampire who sniffs his fingers and spurns the poor isn’t Frederick Seidel—even though, as we learn elsewhere, this “character” who has so little to do with Seidel lives in Seidel’s apartment, socializes with his friends, and shares his tastes in wine, shoes, and motorcycles. In photo shoots, Seidel stands in his Upper West Side living room, dressed up like “Frederick Seidel,” surrounded by décor whose provenance we have come to know from his poems. The troubling power of this work isn’t its distance from its author but its stifling proximity.

Every time I read Seidel, I’m bowled over by the brilliance of individual lines and images, and baffled by the narrow culvert through which he has forced such an enormous and unruly gift. His style favors successive tremors of bile and animus, often crudely rhymed so as to suggest doggerel or ad copy:

I’m looking at a video of my
goddess,
One of a library of videos of
love I have—
Her performing for the iPad,
bursting out of her bodice,
And entering my eyes with
some sort of sex salve.

That’s an old man looking at porn, and it makes you wish that Philip Larkin or W. H. Auden had lived to see the Internet and plot his own libido on its continuum of sublimity and sleaze. In the stanza that follows, Seidel allows his fully fledged Lothario persona to take the reins:

In my astronomy, I lick her cunt
Until the nations say they can’t
make war no more.
Her orgasm is violent.
I get the maid to mop the floor.

As on many writers’ computers (Seidel, always ready with the product placement, tells us he works on a MacBook Air), the blank page is one of many overlapping windows, existing alongside material with vastly disparate moral meanings: porn, “astronomy,” shopping, the news of “nations” and “war.” As for the maid, she’s a prop designed to underscore the idea that

BRIEFLY NOTED



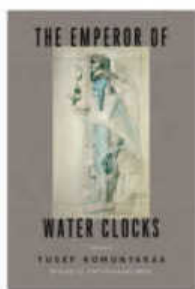
The Portable Veblen, by Elizabeth McKenzie (Penguin Press). In this novel, a recently engaged couple in Palo Alto—a medical researcher, Paul, and rudderless Veblen—navigate the difficulties of family, new money, war, and ethical disagreement. The book alternates between Paul's and Veblen's perspectives, in a way that highlights the similarities and divergences of their backgrounds. Though the novel at times recalls the scope of Jonathan Franzen's family epics, it is far quirkier; Veblen becomes obsessed with (and converses with) a squirrel. McKenzie is particularly good at making relationships seem real—attuned to the way that inside statements like “I can't wait to go to Tacos Tambien as soon as you're better” can be as meaningful as an affirmation of love.



Mrs. Engels, by Gavin McCrea (Catapult). Friedrich Engels, the father of Communism and wealthy friend of Karl Marx, appears to some disadvantage in this incisive novel narrated by Lizzie Burns, his common-law wife. Illiterate, religious, and from a working-class Irish family, Burns has actually experienced the proletarian existence about which Engels can only pontificate. As she recalls many scarring scenes from her former life, she teeters between accepting her husband's formulations and coming to understand her past on her own terms. The novel outlines a number of radical dislocations—in geography, nationality, class, and even love. If a woman cannot trust her reality, she can hardly trust her husband or herself, and “is there a loneliness more lonely than mistrust?”



Animals, by Emma Jane Unsworth (Europa). This inviting British novel begins with a hangover: “You know how it is. Saturday afternoon. You wake up and you can't move.” However, instead of Bradley Cooper or Jay McInerney, we have two bright, bantering women, Laura and Tyler. Living in a parent-funded apartment in Manchester at the sad end of an extended adolescence, they look for stimulation in a stolen jar of drugs hidden in the freezer. But the narrator, Laura, acquires a sober, stable fiancé and is forced to make a choice. Perhaps, she thinks, she and Tyler carry on their shenanigans “so that peace, when it comes, feels like enough.” Unsworth's story is more complex than an ode to the party or a call to responsible adulthood, and her characters shine with humanity.



The Emperor of Water Clocks, by Yusef Komunyakaa (Farrar, Straus & Giroux). Komunyakaa's fifteenth poetry collection unfolds in a world of rich sensations, laden with mythological and Elizabethan imagery. His “Ode to the Oud” sets the songlike tone: “Gourd-shaped muse swollen / with wind in the mulberry,” he implores it, “tell me everything you're made of.” The figures in his poems—court jesters, kings, and sailors—speak in language studded with eccentricities and archaisms. But some of the more memorable poems here are highly topical. “Ghazal, After Ferguson,” with its refrain of “the streets,” is a protest song with a lightning bolt at its center. Other poems center on “Gaddafi's pistol” and the “tear gas & machine-gun fire” of the Arab Spring in Tunisia. They bring the ludicrous extravagance of absolute power into brilliant focus.

this Seidel person is one despicable dude. Seidel often saves his ugliest gestures for the coup de grâce.

HOW DOES a poet end up writing these kinds of poems? Seidel began his career in the early sixties, the era of confessional poetry, but he had nothing except his own perceived uncouthness to confess. He was born to a wealthy Jewish family in 1936. “I'm from St. Louis and Budweiser,” he writes in “The End of Summer,” and “from the Seidel Coal and Coke Company,” which supplied fuel for Budweiser's furnaces:

I remember the brick alleys behind the
massive houses.
Palaces and their stables (turned into
garages) lined the outside of a long oval.
At each end was a turreted guardhouse
above the iron gates.
These were the famous St. Louis private streets.

At Harvard, he learned to mimic “the bloated drawl of the upper class,” as he put it in an earlier poem, “On Wings of Song.” He was already off and running: he visited Ezra Pound at St. Elizabeths Hospital and Eliot in London. He conducted *The Paris Review's* interview with Robert Lowell, who then helped choose his first book, the off-puttingly titled “Final Solutions,” for a prize sponsored by the 92nd Street Y; scandalized, the institution refused to grant it. Seidel's poems have always found new ways to startle, learned from poets whose lives ratified the desperation they expressed on the page. He borrowed his imbalance from Lowell, John Berryman, and, especially, Sylvia Plath, whose poems' occasional comparisons of her personal trauma to the atrocities of the Holocaust influenced Seidel's many blasphemous poems about the camps. He jacked up the schizoid factor, substituted homicide for suicide, and, by showing how easily mania could be impersonated, undercut the authenticity of the suffering writers whose ills had commanded sympathy. The confessional poets inadvertently oozed privilege with every assertion of their pain. Often, just the interiors in Lowell and Plath stole the show. If you read those poems fresh from the provinces, as Seidel—and as I—first did, you would have gladly traded your sanity for Lowell's “whole house” on Boston's Marlborough Street.

The idea that the self doing the speaking in poems and the self it speaks about are two distinct characters, indentured warily to one another, is not new: it can be found, in various forms, in Rimbaud and Fernando Pessoa, Borges and Elizabeth Bishop, and many others. But Seidel comes by the notion honestly. He grew up seeing his last name on blue coal trucks circling the streets of St. Louis; this prepared him for the uncanny experience of “walking down to Eighty-second Street / To Barnes & Noble to buy my own book”—the self-estrangement that writers feel when their own name is the one on the cover.

Every poet creates a second self and then, watching it thrive, grows to resent it a little. The surprise is when, as with Seidel, this other being is made to so closely resemble the first, and then disavowed as a fiction. The pitiful “old man at my computer pecking away, cooing spring” is nevertheless assembling the voice that mocks him, “talking to himself again” as he “strolls down Broadway in the rain,” or talking to “Fred Seidel,” who invites him to his own funeral, in a poem written in the kind of bubble-gum Yorkshire dialect that suggests a rural ditty:

An' it wur a funeral,
It wur a grand funeral,
Thur wur sum what laff'd o'er his grave
And sum wot danced o'er his grave,
But I scribed me eyes out o'er grave
Of me owd pal Fred Seidel.

This is old York grieving for New York: the imagination, freed from the constraints of the body and history, is a country bumpkin, the subject of a lord or duke whose death liberates it

but deprives it of its function. What will a verbal talent this relentless do without its target, its “owd pal Fred Seidel”?

Increasingly, Seidel's poems are about old age, its indignities described in detail worthy of an Italian *giallo*. He has had, or fears he has had, or imagines he has had, a stroke; he thinks about his prostate; his sexual performance suffers; on one occasion (it is described in two poems) he ejaculates blood and fears the worst. Encroaching death gives some of Seidel's blasphemy a kind of ballsy élan, as he puts his mortal money where his outrageous mouth has always been. The horror in these poems seems real, not hyped. And Seidel's nastiness seems, in this work, a necessary defense against fear, rather than a shock tactic that has escalated as his readers' interest has dwindled. It is better to be lonely than to die: this is the bracing news these poems deliver.

“Widening Income Inequality” includes many occasional poems, as well as poems dedicated to—and mainly intelligible to—famous friends. But it does have one truly moving poem, “Remembering Elaine's,” about the legendary Upper East Side hot spot. At his best, Seidel reminds me of a poet who sounds nothing like him, Frank O'Hara. Both are poets of the New York night; both are name-droppers and coterie poets. The natural drift of such talents tends toward elegy, as their circle of interlocutors and secret-sharers shrinks over time:

Many distinguished dead were there
At one of the front tables, fragrant talk
everywhere.

Plimpton, Mailer, Styron, Bobby Short—
fellows, have another drink.
You had to keep drinking or you'd sink.
Smoking fifty cigarettes a day made
your squid-ink fingers stink.

Here we have Seidel's *ubi sunt* poem, pondering where the titans go when the dawn breaks. But it finds an unusual angle, marvelling at the fact that more of them didn't die sooner, and wondering why Seidel was spared:

Unlucky people born with the alcoholic gene
Were likely to become alcoholics. Life is
mean
That way, because others who drank as
much or more didn't
Succumb, but just kept on drinking—and
didn't
Do cocaine, and didn't get fucked up,
and just didn't!

A night like this one at Elaine's—at any bar—is a series of potential deaths successfully evaded until time runs out. “Life is mean” because fate, in the form of alcoholism and addiction, rewards the undeserving and condemns the worthy. Seidel's elegy has some of the plastered sweetness of a woozy toast. His rhymes locate us temporally, punctuating lines that, like the nights they describe, lack an internal imperative to come to an end. Seidel's poems often employ this combination of strong rhyme and loose or nonexistent meter. It's a method that non-poets use when called upon for an impromptu poem, one that can feel like a stunt. But there's grief in it, and mortal comedy, and a covert humanism doused in vinegar:

Aldrich once protested to Elaine that his
bill for the night was too high.
She showed him his tab was for seventeen
Scotches and he started to cry. ♦

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Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Michael Crawford, must be received by Sunday, February 14th. The finalists in the January 25th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the February 29th issue. The winner receives a signed print of the cartoon. Any resident of the United States, Canada (except Quebec), Australia, the United Kingdom, or the Republic of Ireland age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



“ ”

THE FINALISTS



“My two other wishes were ironically misinterpreted, too.”
Roy Googin, New York City

“Your cheeseburger is on the loading dock.”
Ken Buxton, Ridgewood, N.J.

“You want to sell mustard? Here's how you sell mustard!”
Val Coleman, Sandisfield, Mass.

THE WINNING CAPTION



“Marge, I think you ordered from the wrong Amazon!”
Andrew Josephson, Moorestown, N.J.

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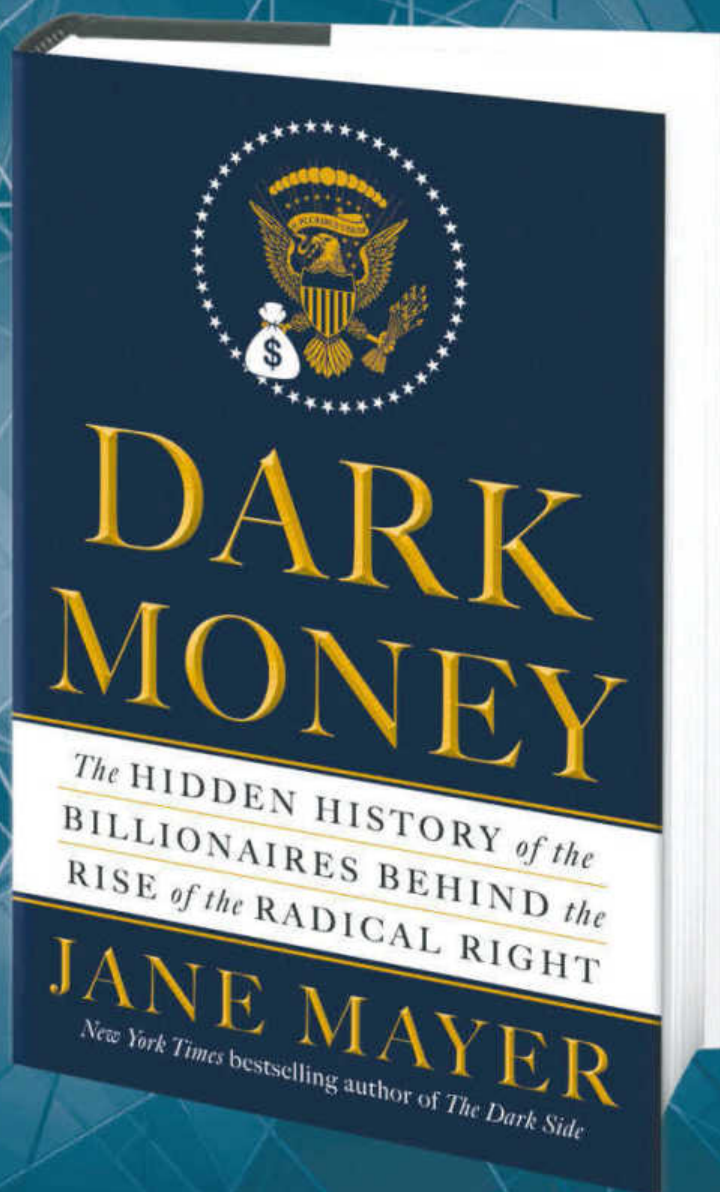
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