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THE NEW YORKER

THE FICTION ISSUE

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JUNE 5 & 12, 2017

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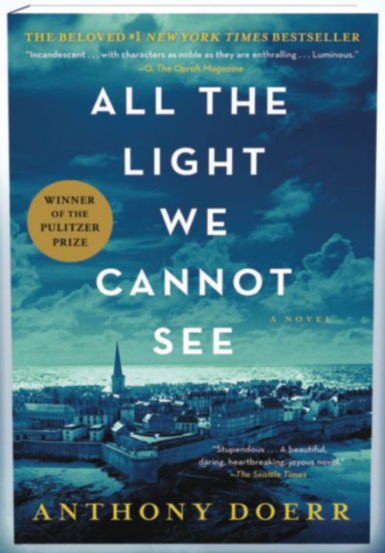

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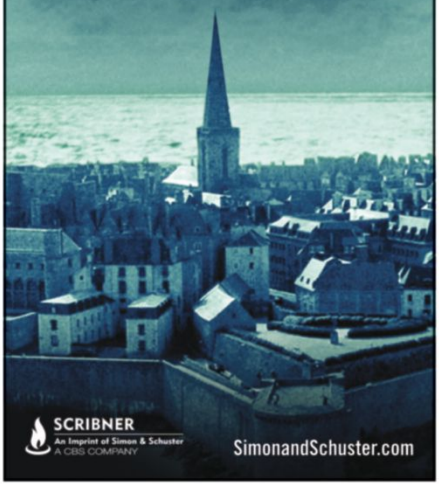

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CONTRIBUTORS

Curtis Sittenfeld (*"Show Don't Tell," p. 62*) has written five novels. She will publish her first short-story collection, "You Think It, I'll Say It," in 2018.

Will Mackin (*"Crossing the River No Name," p. 55*) retired from the Navy in 2014. His début short-story collection, "Bring Out the Dog," will be published next March.

Toni Morrison (*"The Work You Do, the Person You Are," p. 66*) has written twelve novels. She received the 1993 Nobel Prize in Literature.

Richard Ford (*"Make-Work," p. 58*) is the author of, most recently, the memoir "Between Them." He has written for *The New Yorker* since 1987.

Chris Ware (*"Business or Pleasure," p. 72*) has contributed twenty-three covers to the magazine. His next book, "Monograph," comes out in October.

Kaveh Akbar (*Poem, p. 69*) has a poetry collection, "Calling a Wolf a Wolf," forthcoming in September.

Sherman Alexie (*"Clean, Cleaner, Cleanest," p. 48*) is the author of twenty-six books, including the memoir "You Don't Have to Say You Love Me," which comes out in June.

Margaret Talbot (*"The Addicts Next Door," p. 74*) has been a staff writer since 2003.

Philip Roth (*"I Have Fallen in Love with American Names," p. 46*) has published twenty-nine novels. This fall, the Library of America will put out "Why Write?," his collected nonfiction from 1960-2013.

Jennifer Egan (*"The Dinner Party," p. 50*) has written several books. Her new novel, "Manhattan Beach," comes out in October.

Carlos Javier Ortiz (*Photographs, pp. 48, 55, 62*), a director, cinematographer, and documentary photographer, was a 2016 Guggenheim Fellow.

Akhil Sharma (*"The Night Shift," p. 80*) is the author of the short-story collection "A Life of Adventure and Delight," which comes out in July.

THIS WEEK'S COVER: "ENCHANTED FOREST"

A 360° drawing by Christoph Niemann.

Christoph Niemann expands this week's cover into a 360° scene. See it at **newyorker.com/go/enchanted-forest** in your browser, on a device, or with virtual-reality goggles. As an added bonus, look for hidden references to the On the Job series in the shadows.

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THE MAIL

WHAT MAKES A PARENT?

I read with great interest Ian Parker's article on the contentious custody battle between a separated gay couple, a case that has the potential to change the ways in which the courts define parenthood and family ("Are You My Mother?," May 22nd). For gay parents, parenthood necessarily requires an immense amount of planning. There is no accidental pregnancy. In my own experience, motherhood did not begin the moment my daughter was born. It didn't even begin nine months earlier, at her conception. In the case of Circe Hamilton and Kelly Gunn, it was Hamilton who first instigated the adoption, and Hamilton who continued to pursue it after she and Gunn separated. Hamilton acted as a mother during this time, while Gunn distanced herself from the process. This does not diminish the intensity of feeling Gunn has for the child, Abush. However, while Gunn describes her "instant connection" with him as having formed when she met him at Heathrow Airport, Hamilton had become connected to her child—if not to Abush specifically—many months earlier. I imagine that—like me stroking my pregnant belly—she did not need to see her child to be a mother.
Stephanie Li
Bloomington, Ind.

Interested parties, including Gunn and her lawyer, may be attempting to frame the dispute over custody of Abush as being about gay rights, but it's not. It's about money, and about how one wealthy would-be parent can manipulate the courts to grind down a less affluent parent. As an attorney, I am saddened by this case. As a gay adoptive parent—hell, as a parent, period—I find it deeply disturbing.
David Parker
Chapel Hill, N.C.

THE G.O.P. AND TRUMP

Jeffrey Toobin, in decrying the Republicans' failure to confront Donald Trump, voices his relief that we have so far avoided the catastrophe of having to rely on Trump in an international crisis or a national-security emergency (Comment, May 22nd). But the nation *is* in a state of emergency. While the public has been distracted by the F.B.I. and congressional investigations, Trump has decimated the State Department, and he refuses to fill dozens of positions, undermining our government's ability to respond to ordinary needs, let alone crisis-level exigencies. He is dismantling the E.P.A. and eviscerating environmental regulations. The Justice Department is rolling back the hard-won victories of decades of civil-rights struggle, and the Department of Education is abetting initiatives to destroy public schools. There is another reason, besides cowardice, that explains the Republicans' continued support of Trump: he is doing their dirty work, deconstructing a government they deem too costly and egalitarian.
Pat M. Gelb
Oakland, Calif.

HOW A SYNESTHETE SEES

I was excited to read Nicola Twilley's piece about how the new sensory-substitution devices that were developed to help the blind are also changing our understanding of sense perception and the brain ("Sight Unseen," May 15th). Twilley doesn't mention synesthesia—in which different senses are linked together—but it might hold further clues to sensory substitution. As a child with synesthesia, I "saw" the colors of flavors and odors. Others see shapes. I've often guessed that what I experienced was due to my visual sense dominating my other senses, even when inappropriate, but Twilley's article shows that this is not the case. Still, I wonder whether studying synesthesia could add to the growing body of knowledge about what it means to "see" or "hear."
Janet Guerrin
Lewes, Del.

•

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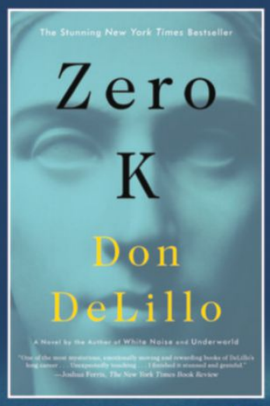

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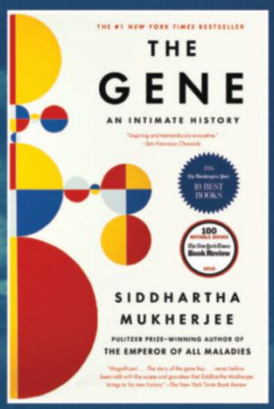

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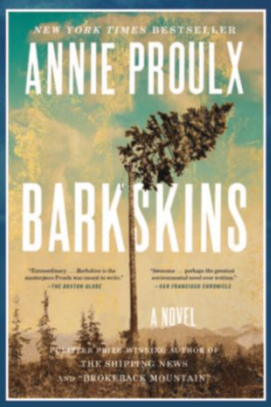

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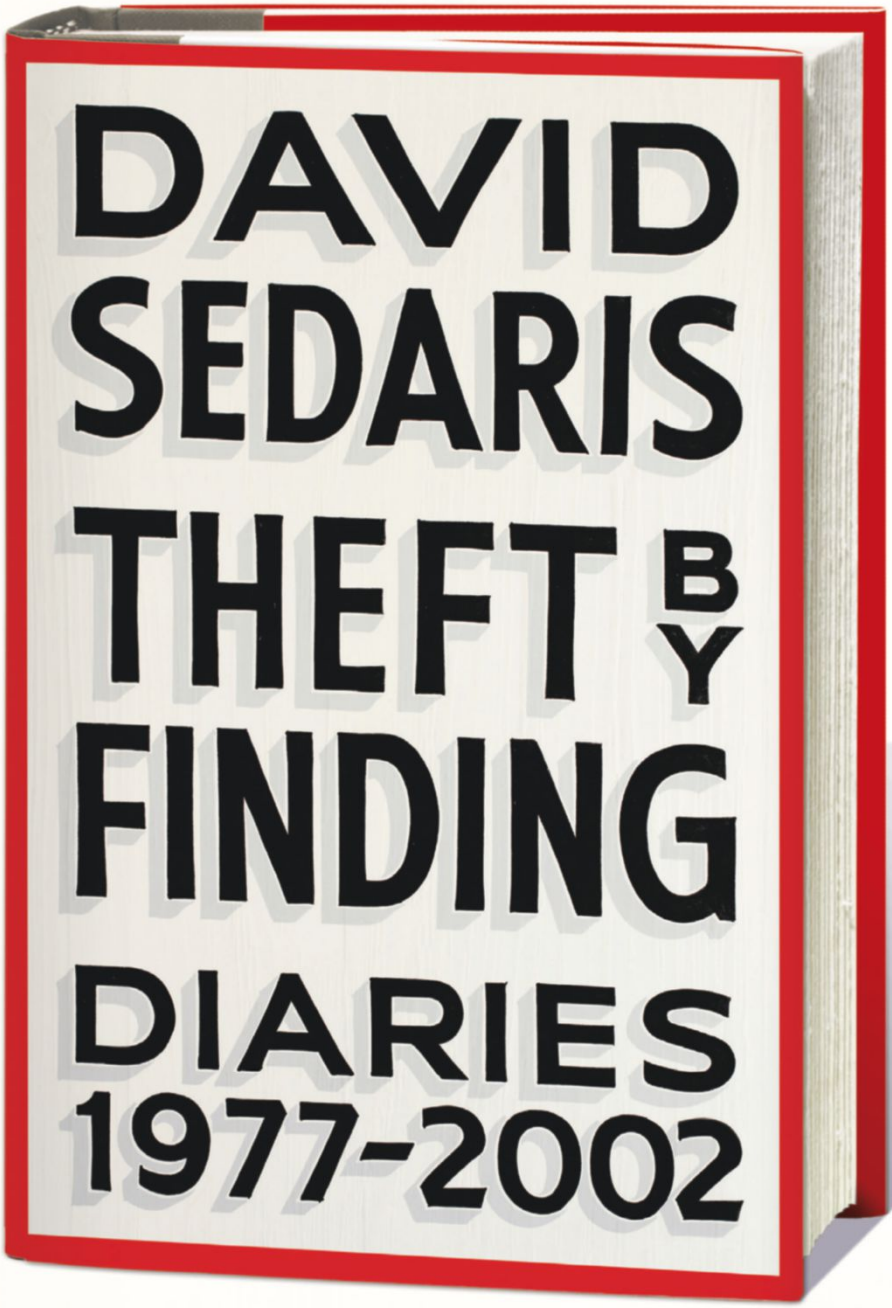

– A LIFETIME IN THE MAKING –

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

Opera that merges the personal and the political is a longtime transatlantic tradition that began with works by the German Kurt Weill and the American Marc Blitzstein. So is it all that surprising that the operatic adaptation of Tony Kushner's play **"Angels in America"** was undertaken by a European master, Peter Eötvös? First heard in Paris in 2004, this powerful work finally gets its New York première, in a limited run at Jazz at Lincoln Center, starting June 10, thanks to New York City Opera, which is rebounding smartly under its new director, Michael Capasso.

PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRISTAAN FELBER

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

New York City Opera: "Angels in America"
Tony Kushner's sprawling play, operatic in its extravagant theatricality, was convincingly condensed into a single evening of music by the esteemed Hungarian composer Peter Eötvös. This acclaimed English-language work, which premièred in Paris, in 2004, finally receives its first New York performances this week, thanks to the newly revivified City Opera, which offers it as the closing production of an impressive sophomore season. Andrew Garland, Wayne Tigges, and Sarah Beckham-Turner take the leading roles, under the direction of Sam Helfrich; Pacien Mazzagatti conducts. *June 10 at 8 and June 12, June 14, and June 16 at 7:30. (Rose Theatre, Jazz at Lincoln Center, Broadway at 60th St. nycopera.org.)*

New York Philharmonic: "Das Rheingold"
Alan Gilbert's final weeks as music director include several high-profile events. One is this offering of Wagner's opera, the intermissionless first chapter of the four music dramas that make up the titantic "Ring of the Nibelung"; it is especially welcome since the Met's most recent production of the set, a critical failure, is very much in storage. Eric Owens, one of the Met's bright spots in the role of Alberich, takes on the lead role of Wotan under Gilbert's baton; the cast for this "enhanced concert production" (directed by Louisa Miller) also includes such outstanding singers as Jamie Barton (Fricka), Christopher Purves (Alberich), and Kelly O'Connor (Erda). *June 1 and June 6 at 7:30 and June 3 at 8. (David Geffen Hall. 212-875-5656.)*

Amore Opera: "La Zingara"
The company presents the American première of a curio from Donizetti's Neapolitan period, a time when the popularity of Rossini and local tastes pushed him toward light comedy. Nathan Hull directs the production, and Douglas Martin conducts a full orchestra. *May 30 and May 31 at 7:30. (Riverside Theatre, 91 Claremont Ave. at W. 121st St. 866-811-4111.)*

The Crypt Sessions: "Elizabeth Cree"
This series thumbs its nose at detractors proclaiming the death of classical music by staging its shows in an actual crypt, at the accommodating Church of the Intercession, in Hamilton Heights. The Pulitzer Prize-winning team behind the opera "Silent Night"—the composer Kevin Puts and the librettist Mark Campbell—preview their new opera, a Gothic murder mystery based on a novel by Peter Ackroyd. Puts accompanies the mezzo-soprano Daniela Mack and the tenor Joseph Gaines; the performance includes a discussion about the work. *May 31 at 7. (Broadway at 155th St. deathofclassical.com.)*

Opera Lafayette: "Les Indes Galantes"
The operas of the French Baroque period can sometimes feel like museum pieces—all formality and high polish, with a focus on mythical characters—but Rameau's opéra ballet tells four stories of love in far-off lands. The Francophile company presents a semi-staged concert of excerpts from the first three acts, along with the fourth act in its entirety. *June 2 at 7. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. operalafayette.org.)*

"Shakespeare and Other Poets in Love"
With its rhythmic guitar parts, poetic lyrics, and wistful aching, the album "Passionate Pilgrim," from Oracle Hysterical and New Vintage Baroque, answers the question of what it would sound like if Ani DiFranco or Belle and Sebastian were to cut a record of Baroque-inspired folk songs. The two groups celebrate the release of the album's deluxe edition with a concert that also includes new arrangements of Britten's folk-song settings and a twenty-minute opera written by a member of Oracle. *June 3 at 7. (National Sawdust, 80 N. Sixth St., Brooklyn. 646-779-8455.)*

Eric Owens takes on the role of Wotan in the New York Philharmonic's production of Wagner's "Das Rheingold," one of several special events marking Alan Gilbert's final weeks as music director.

ILLUSTRATION BY LESLIE HERMAN

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic
A music director's final subscription program is always an opportunity to make a big statement. Alan Gilbert is no exception, and his three culminating concerts, held at a troubled time at home and abroad, are based on the theme of universality—a project that Gilbert will pursue after his Philharmonic tenure ends. The main part of each concert consists of Mahler's Seventh Symphony, with the ensemble's ranks expanded to include musicians from the philharmonic orchestras of Berlin, Cape Town, Israel, and Tehran (among others). The first two concerts also include bonus music: in the first, from Yo-Yo Ma and members of his Silk Road Ensemble, and, in the second, from the trumpeter Wynton Marsalis. *June 8 at 7:30 and June 9-10 at 8. (David Geffen Hall. 212-875-5656.)* • In a relaxed conclusion to his tenure, Gilbert leads the orchestra's traditional Concerts in the Parks for the last time as music director. The series kicks off at Van Cortlandt Park, in the Bronx, with a festive all-orchestral program that features three works central to the city and to the Philharmonic's history: Dvořák's "New World" Symphony, Bernstein's Symphonic Dances from "West Side Story," and Gershwin's "An American in Paris." *June 13 at 8. (Enter at Broadway near W. 251st St. No tickets required. For more information, see nyphil.org.)*

The MET Orchestra
Esa-Pekka Salonen leads the superb opera-house orchestra in a trio of concerts that blend vocal and instrumental glories—with a strong emphasis on the music of Mahler. In the first, Susan Graham and Matthew Polenzani are the guests in an all-Mahler program featuring selections from the song collection "Des Knaben Wunderhorn" along with the Symphony No. 1 in D Major. Karen Cargill and Stuart Skelton join the orchestra in the second program, offering Schumann's Symphony No. 3 ("Rhenish") as a hefty prelude to Mahler's "Das Lied von der Erde." And, in the third, the violinist Christian Tetzlaff and the mezzo-soprano Anne Sofie von Otter are featured in a program that includes two works each by Mahler and Sibelius—the former composer's "Blumine" and "Kindertotenlieder" and the latter's Violin Concerto and mystical, irreducible Symphony No. 7. *May 31 and June 6 at 8 and June 3 at 3. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800.)*

New Amsterdam Singers
The excellent avocational chorus, long under the skilled direction of Clara Longstreth, ends its season with a characteristic blend of Amer-

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ican music old and new: premières of pieces by Robert Patterson, Ronald Perera, Ben Moore, and Matthew Harris (Book VII of his "Shakespeare Songs"), along with classics by Copland, Fine, and Dominick Argento. *June 1 at 8. (St. Ignatius of Antioch Church, West End Ave. at 87th St. nasingers.org.)*

Moscow Virtuosi
The distinguished Russian violinist and conductor Vladimir Spivakov and his bespoke ensemble are regular visitors to New York, and admirers are familiar with the group's gusto and assurance. Here, though, much of the focus will be on a featured guest: the Russian soprano Hibla Gerzmava, who since 2012 has been a welcome presence at the Metropolitan Opera, most recently as Donna Anna, in "Don Giovanni." *June 7 at 8. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800.)*

Naumburg Orchestral Concerts
The long-established series, held at the scruffy-elegant Naumburg Bandshell, in Central Park, is a cherished part of every New York summer. The first of the concerts is offered by a fine group that very few Americans have heard: the Havana Lyceum Orchestra, under the direction of José Antonio Méndez Padrón. The pianist Simone Dinnerstein, who has just released an album with the ensemble, joins them in a program of music by Carlos Fariñas, Mozart (the Piano Concerto No. 21 in C Major), and Copland ("Appalachian Spring"). *June 13 at 7:30. (Central Park, enter at 72nd St. No tickets required.)*

RECITALS

Roulette: Meredith Monk
Monk, a distinctive composer-performer who has made an indelible impact on the new-music world, is the guest curator at Roulette this season. The first of three Monk-centric events illustrates her creative imprint, while two more demonstrate her broad range of interests. The M6, a vocal ensemble devoted to preserving and extending Monk's canon, combines essential early works ("Our Lady of Late," "Dolmen Music") with the première of an as yet untitled sextet. A program titled "Song Out! Folk 'n' Pop Fantasies" features four admired singer-songwriters—Ana Egge, Rachelle Garniez, Mimi Goese, and Suzzy Roche—in new songs by Dick Connette. And Ensemble Connect, a polished young chamber group, offers music by international composers working in the United States, including Esa-Pekka Salonen, Shulamit Ran, and Anna Clyne. *May 31, June 2, and June 8 at 8. (509 Atlantic Ave., Brooklyn. 917-267-0368.)*

Sara Davis Buechner
The enduring American pianist celebrates her thirty years as a Yamaha artist by offering an intriguing program that highlights Japanese music, with pieces by Yukiko Nishimura (Ten Études), Kouji Taku, and Yoshinao Nakada. Buechner will also perform Ibert's series of miniatures "Histoires," accompanied by the mime dancer Yayoi Hirano. *June 1 at 7:30. (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800.)*

Locrian Chamber Players
A vital and necessary concern founded in 1995, this ensemble (whose concerts are always free) adheres strictly to its policy of presenting works less than a decade old. Its latest program—an impressive one—includes "The Yellow Moon of Andalusia," a substantial song cycle by George Crumb, based on poetry by García Lorca, and two thematically complementary string quartets inspired by a flower (Toshio Hosokawa's "Blossoming") and a butterfly (Michael Gordon's "Clouded Yellow"), as well as premières by Carlton Wilkinson and David Macdonald. *June 2 at 8. (10th Floor Performance Space, Riverside Church, 91 Claremont Ave.)*

Bargemusic
Two estimable and persuasive advocates for modern music drop anchor at the Brooklyn waterfront, each bearing a robust program. Donald Berman, a Boston-based pianist and an esteemed Ives authority, performs selections by that composer (including "Hawthorne," from the "Concord" Sonata), pieces by Haydn and Kagel, and premières by Dániel Péter Biró and Scott Lindroth. Later, the violinist Rolf Schulte, accompanied by the pianist James Winn, offers a piquant mix of works by Schoenberg, Webern, Eisler, and Martino, culminating in Busoni's Violin Sonata No. 2 in E Minor. *June 2 and June 9 at 8. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. For tickets and full schedule see bargemusic.org.)*

Orchestra of St. Luke's: "Facets of Schubert"
The outstanding orchestra has held a chamber series at the Morgan Library & Museum for a decade, but now it is concentrating its efforts into a three-week festival that will bring interdisciplinary elements into play. The first of three events is centered around Schubert's "Trout" Quintet, preceded by a set of songs and instrumental music, with the soprano Ying Fang and the pianist Henry Kramer as guest artists; in addition, the composer Steven Mackey will talk about the art of writing for voice, in a discussion that begins forty-five minutes before the concert. *June 7 and June 9 at 7:30. (Madison Ave. at 36th St. 212-594-6100.)*

Chelsea Music Festival
Music, art, and good food come together in this ambitious yet casual festival, now well established under the leadership of Melinda Lee Masur and Ken-David Masur. This year's theme is "Measuring Time," and the composer-in-residence is Sebastian Currier, an intellectually stimulating composer well known as a frequent commissionee of the violinist Anne-Sophie Mutter. (This year's visual artist is Jonathan Rattner, and the featured chef is Allie Wist.) The opening-night gala, held at St. Paul's German Lutheran Church, is a capacious chamber concert that features the composer's "Clockwork" (1989), along with music by Miguel del Águila ("Clocks"), Telemann, and Beethoven (the Piano Sonata No. 22 in F Major). The performers (in addition to the Masurs) include the Verona Quartet and the harpsichordist Robert Fleitz. *June 9 at 7:30. (315 W. 22nd St. For tickets, schedule, and complete information, visit chelseamusicfestival.org. Through June 17.)*

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ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Museum of Modern Art
"Robert Rauschenberg: Among Friends"
While creating the universe, did God have in mind that, at a certain point, a stuffed goat with a car tire around its middle would materialize to round out the scheme? It came to pass, in New York, with Rauschenberg's "Monogram" (1955-59)—goat, tire, and also paint, paper, fabric, printed matter, metal, wood, shoe heel, and tennis ball—which is now on view in an immense retrospective of the protean artist, who died in 2008, at the age of eighty-two. Rauschenberg's work, in mediums that range from painting and photography to a big vat of bubbling gray mud ("Mud Muse," 1968-71), is uneven, and it lost point and drama in his later decades. For a great artist, he made remarkably little good art. But the example of his nimble intelligence and zestful audacity affected the thoughts and motives, doubts and dreams of subsequent generations, to this day. The heart of the show is the revolutionary period of the mid- to late fifties, when Rauschenberg, in league with Cy Twombly and Jasper Johns, took the measure of an art world dominated by Abstract Expressionism. His Combines—kitchen-sink mélanges of painting, sculpture, collage, and assemblage, including "Monogram"—absorbed that movement's aesthetic breakthroughs, in dispersed composition and eloquent paint-handling, while subverting its frequently macho pathos. So, too, did Johns's tenderly brushed "Flags" and Twombly's laconic scribblings. The show's lead curator, Leah Dickerman, has incorporated first-rate works by those artists, and others. Collaboration was a regular elixir for Rauschenberg. He was a performance artist, first and last. You respond to his works not with an absorption in their quality but with a vicarious share in his brainstorming excitement while making them. For a time, momentously, what he did caught a wave of history and drove it farther inland than could otherwise have been the case. *Through Sept. 4.*

"Gypsy Camp, Mazargues, Marseille" is among the photographs taken by Alessandra Sanguinetti in a sojourn to France, in 2016, on view at Aperture through June 29.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ALESSANDRA SANGUINETTI / COURTESY APERTURE

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Leidy Churchman
From a giraffe giving birth before a desert mountain range to a video still of a panel discussion, the American painter seems to choose his subjects at random. But pay attention and a through-line emerges, not a theme but a challenge to outdated ideas about appropriation and image circulation in the Internet era. To underscore his intentions, Churchman mixes framed reproductions of art works with his own paintings—which are themselves reproductions, after all. The small canvas "Juliana in Art" depicts an iPhone displaying a luminous nude portrait of the artist Juliana Huxtable. Adding an air of mystery to the painting's layers of mediation, the checklist informs us that this work was "co-made" by another figurative painter, TM Davy. Churchman's nonchalant diffusion of authorship feels astutely au courant but also genuine. *Through July 28. (Boone, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-752-2929.)*

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Llyn Foulkes
This selection of paintings by the L.A.-based master of satirical Americana and cunning optical effects includes renditions of Old Glory flying over a trash fire, two portraits of Walt Disney with Mickey Mouse bursting out of his bloody face, and several riffs on scenic postcards. The 1984 acrylic "The Splash," in particular, is a near-perfect feat of painterly self-consciousness, in which a few quick strokes of white look exactly like seafoam without looking any less like brushstrokes. The show spans four decades and includes recent work, but the most timely painting is a 1991 portrait of Clark Kent, wearing a suit and reading the paper, his Superman guise visible through an unbuttoned shirt. He sits under a thought bubble that reads "Where did I go wrong?" *Through June 24. (Zwirner, 533 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070.)*

Roxy Paine
The highlights of this American sculptor's uneven but enticing show are his dioramas, coups of deadpan verisimilitude. "Experiment" re-creates an empty bedroom, bathed in yellow light, as if seen by observers, represented by empty chairs, through a one-way mirror. (Paine was inspired by LSD experiments conducted by the C.I.A. in the mid-twentieth century, which were never photographed.) In "Meeting," a windowless room is outfitted with gray carpeting, acoustic tiles, and a circle of chairs—stacks of cups and a coffee urn suggest that it might be the site of a twelve-step get-together. Eight stainless-steel sculptures from Paine's ongoing "dendroid" series are also on view. The weakest of these branchlike objects flirts with kitsch, but the strongest example, which suggests a tree uprooted after a storm, complete with a tricycle ensnared in its branches, has intimations of disasters beyond human control. *Through July 1. (Kasmin, 293 Tenth Ave., at 27th St. 212-563-4474.)*

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Barbara Bloom
Each of the literary-minded conceptualist's distilled, sculptural vignettes incorporates a photograph—or, rather, begins with one. In-

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spired by the meandering, speculative structure of Roberto Bolaño's story "Labyrinth" (published, posthumously, in 2012), in which the author imagined the relationships of a group of French intellectuals—based on a vintage snapshot of them together in a café—Bloom likewise extrapolates from fragmentary evidence. But she does so spatially, with cool precision, in a series of chic, set-like arrangements. She embeds a picture of Véra Nabokov typing as her husband watches, another of Joan Crawford reading at a cluttered vanity, and portraits of Christine and Léa Papin, French sisters who worked together as maids and murdered their employer's wife and daughter, in 1933. Using mirrors, furniture, architectural details, and a gray-scale palette that echo the black-and-white photographs, Bloom "frames" her sources. The effect is ominously serene, part flight of fancy and part forensics. *Through June 18. (Lewis, 88 Eldridge St. 212-966-7990.)*

Daniel Buren
The gallery—driven from Chelsea by real-estate development—inaugurates its new Tribeca address with a site-specific piece by the legendary French conceptualist, known for his signature use of stripes. Buren has installed forty-four floor-to-ceiling rectangular columns, each painted in color on three sides and in black-and-white on the fourth. The monoliths fill the gallery—they even infiltrate the office—which isn't to say that they obstruct it. Instead, they inspire visitors to wander the space, seeking out surprising new vistas of orangey red, deep yellow, and powder blue. For a lagniappe, arrive on a sunny morning, when gels on a skylight cast the same colors onto a wall. *Through June 24. (Bortolami, 39 Walker St. 212-727-2050.)*

Laura Cottingham
The hilarious, no-budget, feminist film "The Anita Pallenberg Story," from 2000, pays homage to the brooding presence of the infamous Rolling Stones groupie, played by artist Cosima von Bonin. It's a gorgeous, if slow-moving, riff on the sexual politics and the economics of both rock stardom and the art world. It's also a lesbian paean to Warhol, Fassbinder, and Godard, directed by Cottingham, an artist and cultural critic, in collaboration with Leslie Singer. For this show, the film plays in the back of the gallery. Vibrant stills, showcasing the other ingeniously cast and styled nonactors (including the painter Nicole Eisenman, as Keith Richards, the photographer Patterson Beckwith, as David Bowie, and Cottingham herself, in the dual roles of Mick Jagger and Brian Jones), are installed at the entrance. The camp sensibility of the production—its messy performances, its stolen soundtrack—is a pleasure, and Cottingham's prescient critique of artists' arena-rock aspirations, and of the market's spectacular demands, holds up. *Through June 18. (Artists Space, 55 Walker St. 212-226-3970.)*

Charles Harlan
In 2013, the young Brooklyn-based sculptor removed the entire front wall of the gallery's former vest-pocket location, so that he could install a ten-foot length of steel pipe. This time, Harlan set his sights on a deteriorating twenty-two-foot sailboat, which belonged to the gallery owner's late stepfather. After having the boat cleaned, Harlan cut off its stern and bow; he stands them up here, like totems, about thirteen feet apart. The gesture feels at once violent and tender—a stoic attempt to grapple with losses too heavy to bear. Other pieces in the show include a wall of handsomely stacked firewood and a rowboat filled with oyster shells. *Through June 18. (JTT, 191 Chrystie St. 212-574-8152.)*

Robert Kinmont
The centerpiece of this delightfully eccentric show of recent work by the California artist, who turned eighty this year, is a waist-high copper box adorned with looping letters made from extremely narrow pipe, most of them spelling out the word "wait." The other pieces make clear what it is the artist is waiting for: copper signs on the wall read "Trying to Find Grandpa Bunk" and "In About Ten Years I Will Go Find My Father." A pair of pine boxes rest on the floor, one for Kinmont and one, titled "Mary's New Home," for his dog. Somehow, the mood isn't morbid but, rather, whimsically accepting of the inevitable: the Kinmont-shaped box is labelled "The Artist Dreaming." *Through June 24. (Alexander and Bonin, 47 Walker St. 212-367-7474.)*

THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Animal
In Clare Lizzimore's drama, directed by Gaye Taylor Upchurch, Rebecca Hall plays a woman who starts to experience creeping anxiety in her home. *(Atlantic Stage 2, at 330 W. 16th St. 866-811-4111. In previews. Opens June 6.)*

Bella: An American Tall Tale
Robert O'Hara directs a new pioneer-era musical by Kirsten Childs, about a wanted woman (Ashley D. Kelley) who flees out West, where her Buffalo Soldier awaits. *(Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. In previews. Opens June 12.)*

Cost of Living
Manhattan Theatre Club presents Martyna Majok's play, directed by Jo Bonney, which tells the parallel stories of an unemployed truck driver who reunites with his ex-wife and a doctoral student who hires a caregiver. *(City Center Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. In previews. Opens June 7.)*

The End of Longing
Matthew Perry wrote and stars in this comedy, directed by Lindsay Posner for MCC, in which an alcoholic, an escort, and other broken souls converge in a bar. *(Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-352-3101. In previews. Opens June 5.)*

Fulfillment Center
In Abe Koogler's play, directed by Daniel Aukin for Manhattan Theatre Club, Deirdre O'Connell plays a folk singer in the New Mexico desert who takes a job at a retail shipping center. *(City Center Stage II, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Previews begin June 6.)*

Ghost Light
Third Rail Projects ("Then She Fell") created this immersive piece, conceived and directed by Zach Morris and Jennine Willett, which invites audiences into the theatre's hidden corners. *(Claire Tow, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. Previews begin June 3.)*

The Government Inspector
Red Bull Theatre stages the Gogol satire, directed by Jesse Berger and featuring Michael Urie, in which the corrupt officials of a provincial town assume a new arrival to be an undercover inspector. *(The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010. In previews. Opens June 1.)*

Invincible
In Torben Betts's comedy, at the "Brits Off Broadway" festival, two Londoners who have moved to a small town during a recession get to know their next-door neighbors. *(59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200. Previews begin June 1. Opens June 13.)*

Julius Caesar
Oskar Eustis directs the Public's first free Shakespeare in the Park offering of the summer, featuring Nikki M. James (Portia), Elizabeth Marvel (Antony), Corey Stoll (Brutus), and John Douglas Thompson (Cassius). *(Delacorte, Central Park. Enter at 81st St. at Central Park W. 212-967-7555. In previews. Opens June 12.)*

Marvin's Room
The Roundabout revives Scott McPherson's 1990 comedy, directed by Anne Kauffman, in which two estranged sisters (Janeane Garofalo and Lili Taylor) reunite when one of them is diagnosed with leukemia. *(American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300. Previews begin June 8.)*

Master
The Foundry Theatre presents W. David Hancock's play, a collaboration with the visual artist Wardell Milan, about the widow and the estranged son of a black artist famous for his radical take on "Huckleberry Finn." *(Irondale Center, 85 S. Oxford St., Brooklyn. 866-811-4111. In previews. Opens June 5.)*

Napoli, Brooklyn
Three daughters in a traditional Italian-American family in nineteen-sixties Park Slope each has a secret, in Meghan Kennedy's play, directed by Gordon Edelstein for the Roundabout. *(Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300. Previews begin June 9.)*

Somebody's Daughter
Chisa Hutchinson's play, at Second Stage Theatre Uptown, is about an Asian-American

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teen-ager desperate for her parents' attention. *(McGinn/Cazale, 2162 Broadway, at 76th St. 212-246-4422. In previews. Opens June 6.)*

The Traveling Lady
In Horton Foote's play from 1955, directed by Austin Pendleton and featuring Karen Ziemba, a woman goes to Texas to reunite with her husband after his release from prison. *(Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 866-811-4111. Previews begin June 7.)*

Woody Sez: The Life & Music of Woody Guthrie
David M. Lutken devised this musical portrait of the Dust Bowl Troubadour, featuring songs like "This Land Is Your Land." Nick Corley directs. *(Irish Repertory, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737. Previews begin June 1. Opens June 8.)*

NOW PLAYING

Building the Wall
Inspired—or, more accurately, spooked—by Donald Trump's rhetoric, Robert Schenkkan wrote this dystopian two-hander in a week, just before the 2016 election. Set in 2019, the play possesses the unsettling chill of a plausible augury. Gloria (Tamara Tunie), an African-American academic, has landed an interview with a white prison contractor, Rick (James Badge Dale), now incarcerated for a crime whose scope the play slowly exposes. We hear about Rick's radicalization as he embraced Trump's xenophobia, and about a new reality where immigrants are held in detention centers. "What difference would it have made?" Rick says, after Gloria asks why he didn't quit. "Somebody else would have just taken my place." Schenkkan ("All the Way") may not be a great stylist, but the play is a terrifying portrait of what happens when human decency and the rule of law both disappear. *(New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)*

Can You Forgive Her?
The characters in Gina Gionfriddo's plays ("Becky Shaw," "Rapture, Blister, Burn") rarely get what they want. Her latest work lands the audience on that list of have-nots. An unfunny comedy, a pallid social satire, and an implausible drama, it stumbles onto the Jersey Shore in the midst of a relationship crisis for Tanya (Ella Dershowitz), an ambitious bartender, and Graham (Darren Pettie), a former party starter dazed by the death of his mother. The arrival of Miranda (Amber Tamblyn), a semi-prostitute with serious student-loan debt and a possibly murderous john, complicates the ménage. But Tamblyn's Miranda is a femme about as fatale as a summer cold. Under Peter DuBois's direction, the rest of the production feels wishy-washy, too, with the actors (including a restrained Frank Wood) delivering laugh lines for laughs that don't come and laboring after tension that never goes taut. *(Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303. Through June 11.)*

Derren Brown: Secret
Unlike most of his colleagues in the illusion and mind-reading business, Brown does not pretend that he has supernatural "mentalist" powers. He's very up front about using psychological manipulation, body language, and misdirection to bamboozle the audience—the ultimate trick is that, even forewarned, you still don't see him coming. For his U.S. début, the British magician turns the theatre into his playground. Some of the banter may not be quite as witty as Brown thinks it is, but no matter: after seeing the show, you may spend nights wondering how the heck he does what he does. The eventual reveal of the meaning behind the show's title comes at the end of a terrific, lengthy buildup that few will even recognize as such. We should count ourselves lucky that Brown uses his powers of suggestion for good, not evil. *(Atlantic Theatre Company, 336 W. 20th St. 866-811-4111.)*

A Doll's House, Part 2
Lucas Hnath's invigorating ninety-minute work, directed by Sam Gold, is an irresponsible act—a kind of naughty imposition on a classic, investing Ibsen's signature play with the humor that the nineteenth-century artist lacked. When Nora Helmer, Ibsen's protagonist, shut the door on her husband, her children, and her bourgeois life, it was left to the audience to wonder what would become of her. Here she is again, after so many years—fifteen, to be exact. Since leaving her husband, Torvald (Chris Cooper), Nora (Laurie Metcalf) has discovered her own voice and become a popular feminist writer under a pseudonym. (Condola Rashad, as Emmy, the daughter Nora left behind, is perfect in every way.) The ideas keep coming, fast and delicious. Although Hnath's Nora is free, she, like most of us, is still bound to the thing that we can leave behind but never fully divest ourselves of: family. (Reviewed in our issue of 5/8/17.) *(Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)*

Groundhog Day
Harold Ramis's 1993 film had it all: an inspired performance by Bill Murray, a sweet romance, and a premise that was both a vehicle for endless comedic variation and a spiritual brainteaser, akin to a Buddhist parable. After all, aren't we all repeating the same day over and over again, trying to find meaning in the banal? Credit this fine musical adaptation for not simply inserting songs into a ready-made formula but teasing out new ideas. The Australian musical satirist Tim Minchin wrote the catchy and cerebral score, his follow-up to "Matilda," with Danny Rubin, the original screenwriter, updating the script. As Phil Connors, the weatherman stuck in a time loop on February 2nd, Andy Karl doesn't re-create Murray's misanthropic euphoria—who could?—but gives the character his own sardonic stamp. And the director, Matthew Warchus, infuses the tale with clever theatrical flourishes, like a vertical car chase. *(August Wilson, 245 W. 52nd St. 877-250-2929.)*

Hello, Dolly!
In Jerry Zaks's fairly standard production of the 1964 musical, by Jerry Herman and Michael Stewart, Horace Vandergelder (David Hyde Pierce) is a sour, money-grubbing merchant from Yonkers. His two young assistants, Cornelius Hackl (Gavin Creel) and Barnaby

ILLUSTRATION BY HANNAH K. LEE

Sales of George Orwell's dystopian novel "1984" spiked in the wake of the 2016 election. A theatrical version, created and directed by Robert Icke and Duncan Macmillan, is in previews at Broadway's Hudson Theatre, after originating in England. The cast includes Tom Sturridge, Olivia Wilde, and Reed Birney.

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Irving Penn, *Rochas Mermaid Dress (Lisa Fonssagrives-Penn)*, Paris, 1950, platinum-palladium print, 1980. © Condé Nast | Promised Gift of The Irving Penn Foundation.

Tucker (Taylor Trensch), head into New York City, where they fall for two women: Irene Molloy (Kate Baldwin), a hatmaker on whom Vandergelder has set his sights, and her assistant, Minnie Fay (Beanie Feldstein). But the plot turns on Dolly Levi, the matchmaker, and the show offers ample opportunity for whoever plays the part to showcase her ability to convey pathos and defiance, grief and comedy. And who better than Bette Midler to give us all that? The role isn't necessarily tailor-made for her—she's infinitely more complicated and funny—but she has remade the character in her own image: as a scrappy trickster with needs and vulnerabilities. (5/1/17) *(Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)*

Indecent
Paula Vogel's revelatory play—her belated Broadway début—begins in Warsaw in 1906 and ends in Connecticut half a century later, but it's as intimate and immediate as a whispered secret. It tells the story of another play, Sholem Asch's Yiddish drama "God of Vengeance," which toured the theatres of Europe before coming to Broadway, in 1923, and causing a scandal, in part because of a passionate lesbian kiss. The cast was tried for obscenity, and Asch chose to distance himself from the work—all before Nazism overtook the play, its people, and the world it came from. Directed with poetry and polish by Rebecca Taichman, Vogel's play thrums with music, desire, and fear, and it's shrewd about the ways in which America isn't free, and about how art does and doesn't transcend the perilous winds of history. *(Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)*

The Little Foxes
Long dismissed as ripe melodrama, Lillian Hellman's 1939 play, about a Southern family rotten with greed and rancor, has a Greek tragedy's implacability and the taut plotting of film noir. Daniel Sullivan's production, for Manhattan Theatre Club, is traditional in every respect but one: Cynthia Nixon and Laura Linney take turns playing the imperious, steel-willed Regina Giddens—one of modern theatre's greatest creations—and the vulnerable, alcoholic Birdie Hubbard. While both stars play Birdie along the same lines, each brings very different shadings to Regina. Linney portrays the villainy with gleeful relish, while Nixon makes us fully understand how Regina's anger has been fuelled by decades of frustration. It's worth seeing the show twice, if you can. Hellman's incisive storytelling, her razor-etched insights into women's limited options in a patriarchal society, are largely good enough to withstand the scrutiny. *(Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)*

Oslo
J. T. Rogers's play, which has upgraded to the big stage at Lincoln Center, introduces us to the Rosencrantz and Guildenstern of the Middle East peace process: a married Norwegian couple who orchestrated the secret talks between Israelis and Palestinians which led to the 1993 Oslo Accords. Played by the exceptional Jennifer Ehle and Jefferson Mays, Mona Juul and Terje Rød-Larsen are tight-lipped diplomatic professionals, as cautiously neutral as their all-gray wardrobes suggest. (Bartlett Sher's staging is Scandinavian in its clarity.) Plying their guests with herring and waffles, they oversee colorful characters from both sides, who bond tentatively and tell jokes while haggling over Gaza. At nearly three hours, the play provides a journalistic service without having much to say, ultimately, about the conflict itself, aside from a "We Are the World" coda that shows how close we were, once, to peace. *(Vivian Beaumont, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200.)*

Present Laughter
This harmless production of Noël Coward's 1939 comedy about theatre, pretense, and lies should verge on farce—and does, at times—but the director, Moritz von Stuelpnagel, plays it safe when he shouldn't. Still, there are bright spots amid the dullness, and Kevin Kline, Kristine Nielsen, and Kate Burton are performers you look forward to seeing again and again. Kline plays the actor and rogue Garry Essendine; he can't remember who's loved him, but that doesn't matter, because he loves himself more. As his handy assistant, Monica Reed, Nielsen does what no one else does better: tries to make sense of another character's madness. And as Garry's wife, Liz, Burton is a model of good sense and strong character, poised and maternal. Each of these actors makes Coward's language sound fresh and contemporary while understanding that the play has nothing to do with naturalism. *(St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)*

Rotterdam
Alice, a skittish British expatriate, is finally ready to tell her parents by e-mail that she's a lesbian—but before she can hit "send" her partner of seven years comes out to her as a transgender man. A highly appealing cast of four, three of whom played their roles on London's West End, leaps with aplomb into this complication, the fallout from which the playwright Jon Brittain cleverly arranges over two major Dutch holidays. (The newcomer here, Ellie Morris, is spot-on as Alice's tempting twenty-one-year-old Dutch co-worker.) Brittain has a fine ear for how couples argue, and the director, Donnacadh O'Briain, is well attuned to the script's good humor. If the dialogue sometimes overexplains, this is never a simple "issue" play but a lively plunge into impossible questions. Among them: Is sexual orientation meaningful in the context of lasting love, or is it merely the mechanism that pulls lovers together? *(59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200. Through June 10.)*

Sojourners & Her Portmanteau
Mfoniso Udofia wrote these two plays, presented in repertory, as part of a projected nine-part saga about an extended Nigerian family in America. At the center of "Sojourners" is Abasiama (Chinasa Ogbuagu), a serious-minded and heavily pregnant university student in late-seventies Houston, surrounded by big talkers all jockeying to possess her, including her irrepressible husband, Ukpong (Hubert Point-Du Jour). The first thing you notice in Ed Sylvanus Iskandar's production is how beautifully all the design elements work in concert: Jiyoun Chang's imaginative lighting, Jeremy S. Bloom's perfectly calibrated sound design, and Jason Sherwood's turntable set. In the opening moments of "Her Portmanteau," which takes place decades later, the turntable becomes an airport baggage carrousel: an evocative image before any of the actors have appeared. When they do, their performances are deeply freighted with the events of the previous play. Ogbuagu returns as Abasiama's very American daughter, Jenny Jules takes a turn as Abasiama, and Adepero Oduye plays the child she bore in "Sojourners," now thirty-six and shot through with hurt. *(New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-460-5475. Through June 11.)*

Venus
Suzan-Lori Parks's 1996 play, revived for the Signature by Lear deBessonet, constructs and deconstructs Saartjie Baartman, a South African woman brought to Europe in the early nineteenth century and exhibited in a loincloth as the Hottentot Venus. Parks shows how the white male gaze turns an able-bodied girl into a freak, a spectacle, a sex object, and finally, after the flesh has been melted from her bones, a scientific curiosity. For all the play's looky-looky theatricality and audacious language, Parks's ultimate goal is to afford Baartman her own dignity and desires, to plumb the heart and the mind inside that body. Though deBessonet's production sometimes chafes against the script's stylistic variety, Zainab Jah, so ferocious in last season's "Eclipsed," gives a poignant, spirited performance, with John Ellison Conlee as her anatomist lover and Kevin Mambo as a baleful narrator. *(Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529. Through June 4.)*

The Whirligig
The individual elements of Derek McLane's scenic design for the New Group's tragicomedy are, for the most part, perfectly effective, such as the upstage wall of windows that evoke endless opportunities for eavesdropping. The exception is a tree branch on which two characters sit for much of the first act; for such a crucial piece of infrastructure, it's distractingly wobbly and unconvincing. Much the same could be said of Hamish Linklater's script: the dialogue, which revolves around a troubled young woman (Grace Van Patten) who has come home to die, is rowdy with life and wonderfully delivered by eight great cast members, including an understated Zosia Mamet and a Rabelaisian Norbert Leo Butz. But the plot is too clever for its own good, held together by the sort of tangle of coincidences that even Shakespeare could just barely pull off. *(Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)*

ALSO NOTABLE

Anastasia Broadhurst. • **The Antipodes** Pershing Square Signature Center. *Through June 11.* • **Bandstand** Jacobs. • **Charlie and the Chocolate Factory** Lunt-Fontanne. • **Come from Away** Schoenfeld. • **Dear Evan Hansen** Music Box. • **Ernest Shackleton Loves Me** Tony Kiser. *Through June 11.* • **In & of Itself** Daryl Roth. • **The Lucky One** Beckett. • **Miss Saigon** Broadway Theatre. • **Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812** Imperial. • **1984** Hudson. • **Pacific Overtures** Classic Stage Company. • **The Play That Goes Wrong** Lyceum. • **Seven Spots on the Sun** Rattlestick. *Through June 4.* • **Six Degrees of Separation** Ethel Barrymore. • **Sunset Boulevard** Palace. • **Sweat** Studio 54. • **Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street** Barrow Street Theatre. • **War Paint** Nederlander.

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NIGHT LIFE

Kai Campos and Dominic Maker produce stirring, ebullient dance tracks as Mount Kimbie.

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Step Out

Mount Kimbie brings a human touch to electronic instruments.

The loudest, fastest song on Mount Kimbie's 2013 record, "Cold Spring Fault Less Youth," is ironically titled "Slow." The rest of the album is a patient play—soft, taut melodies and drums that sound muffled, as if heard through a wall—but "Slow" crackles open with stomps of kick and snare drums and a throbbing, hazy siren, like a nuclear reactor or something out of a chase scene in a "Matrix" sequel. The British production duo specializes in the kind of agile, quiet electronic music favored by James Blake and the xx, developed in East London as a reaction to the frantic relentlessness of E.D.M.; if the genre pushes listeners over the edge, Mount Kimbie and its ilk dull those edges. But "Slow" isn't as much a departure as it is a distraction—just as its driving pulse settles into rhythm, a warm synth melody unfurls, optimistic and aching. There are absolutes hidden in the gray area between dance and soul music, the song suggests—the same hand that yanks you onto the dance floor can clutch your palm on the walk home.

Mount Kimbie is Kai Campos, from Cornwall, and Dominic Maker, from Brighton, a pair of producers and d.j.s who met at London South Bank University. They began making music together in the mid-aughts, as a sound called dubstep swept through the city. Many American fans are familiar with the robotic nu-metal compositions of Skrillex and Deadmau5 (and with the music in 5-Hour Energy ads), but dubstep's first form consisted of bass that swallowed its surrounding elements whole. In 2009, as the sound became festival fodder, Campos and Maker put out an E.P., "Maybes," that was celebrated for its delicate arrangement and its nostalgic infusion of British club textures. "Eyes about, ears open," the influential dance site Resident Advisor proclaimed, "Mount Kimbie are here."

But they didn't stay in one place too long. Their début album, "Crooks & Lovers," which arrived in 2010, expanded their use of samples and instrumentation, a style that was widely replicated by peers during a two-year break. In 2013, "Cold Spring Fault Less Youth" reëstablished the group as distinctly individual. Rich saxophones and organs stood in for synthesizers, drums jangled and twitched, and vocalists like King Krule gave the beats another sheet of voice. The album was stark and exciting, and it took on a second life as artists referenced its many nooks: Vince Staples evoked the foghorn tone of "Sullen Ground" on his breakout single, "Norf Norf," and "Blood and Form" was repurposed by Kid Cudi and Hit Boy on their collaboration "Scorn." Your favorite new-guard rapper has likely flipped through Mount Kimbie's catalogue for inspiration.

The band returns to the city on June 13, for a set at Warsaw, in Greenpoint, and can be counted on to shift shapes once again on its upcoming, yet to be titled album. A recent single, "We Go Home Together," featuring Campos and Maker's longtime collaborator and friend James Blake, is all muddy blues, far from the duo's frostbitten early cuts. Electronic music has mutated since their teen-age days clubbing around London, and, thankfully, they've adapted along with it.

—*Matthew Trammell*

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ROCK AND POP

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

Barbès Benefit
The list of shuttered New York music venues threatens to grow even longer with the possible closure of Barbès, a beloved Park Slope mainstay. Opened in 2002 by Olivier Conan, a Paris native, Barbès services an essential New York musical community that does not fit neatly into rock, jazz, or avant-garde, but often touches on all of them, as well as on many underappreciated world-music styles. Conan, who moved to New York in 1984, worked a variety of odd jobs and played cuatro in the Mexican-themed Las Rubias del Norte and the French-tinged Bébé Eiffel. Wanting to make a home for eclectic groups like his own, Conan opened the club on credit cards and self-admitted naïveté. Maintaining what was always a threadbare operation grew more difficult over the years, as gentrification drove up Conan's rent, bills, and debts. Earlier this month, he reluctantly sent out a fund-raising plea and set up a benefit concert. "It feels funny, because it's an admission of failure," he said by phone last week. "But at the same time the response has been overwhelming—people are saying, We care about this community." The benefit lineup showcases the club's musical diversity—and its importance. It includes the Balkan brass band **Fanfare Barbès,** the **Jazz Passengers,** the Moroccan ensemble **Innov Gnawa,** and the noirish trio **Big Lazy,** among others. *(Drom, 85 Ave. A. 212-777-1157. June 9.)*

"Downtown Trip"
The live-wire creative energy of downtown Manhattan in the seventies and eighties birthed No Wave, the youth movement that found artists, musicians, and filmmakers channelling the area's static energy into something electric—and often blisteringly loud. Linchpins of the scene included the duo Suicide, who experimented with early electronic sounds, James Chance and the Contortions, the spatial wanderers DNA, and Teenage Jesus & the Jerks. Some forty years after their heyday, many of these luminaries will come together for one night in Brooklyn, during the Northside Festival. The inimitable writer and performer Lydia Lunch will host the event, which features **Martin Rev,** half of Suicide (his bandmate, Alan Vega, died last year); **Craig Leon,** who produced Suicide's self-titled album, in 1977; the jittery post-punkers of **Bush Tetras;** and **Ikue Mori,** of DNA. *(The Hall at MP, 470 Driggs Ave., Williamsburg. 718-387-4001. June 9.)*

Dreamcrusher
Prolificness is a D.I.Y. badge of honor. From Lil B to Alex G, artists who go it alone are doubly respected for going at it a lot: self-releasing hundreds of songs and dozens of albums is an expression of obsessive inspiration and near-involuntary dedication. Luwayne Glass, a noise producer, has delivered at least twenty-six projects as Dreamcrusher, with material going back as far as 2006—lovers of experimental music may gorge to their limits. If the Wichita native's politics are implied sonically—hard music for hard times—they plainly drive Glass's provocative visual art work and his constellation of social-media output. *(Trans-Pecos, 915 Wyckoff Ave., Ridgewood. thetranspecos.com. June 3.)*

Freddie Gibbs
Gibbs has enjoyed acclaim since his name began to grace marquees outside his home city of Gary, Indiana, but it has come at some personal cost. After bowling over fans and critics alike with "Piñata," a brawny rap album from 2014 produced entirely by Madlib, Gibbs toured the globe, putting his nuanced, no-nonsense music in front of countless crowds. But last June he became embroiled in a sexual-assault case, and was held in Austrian and French jails for four months. He was ultimately exonerated. He has not performed in New York since he was fired at outside a show in Williamsburg, more than two years ago. Following these incidents, Gibbs has released a concise dagger of a record, "You Only Live 2wice," and has hinted at another collaboration with Madlib. He is joined this week by Queens favorite **Remy Banks,** from the rap group World's Fair. *(Highline Ballroom, 431 W. 16th St. 212-414-5994. June 12.)*

Give and Protestor
Washington, D.C.,'s brand of hardcore punk is distinct for its melody and its maturity as well as for the fiercely straight-edge life style that it promotes. The bands Give and Protestor, both of which hail from the nation's capital, embody these two different sides. Give jams out rhythmic, moving songs, such as "Voodoo Leather," and Protestor's 2015 début album, "No Identity," is filled with earnest and hoarse proclamations of the genre's sobering philosophy. The latter celebrates its second album, "Hide from Reality," this week; supporting are the New York punks **Krimewatch,** who have been thrashing their way across the country for the better part of a year, and the oddball trippers of **Super Natural Psycho.** *(Sunnyvale, 1031 Grand St., Brooklyn. 347-987-3971. June 2.)*

Oddisee
This producer and rapper split his youth between Sudan and Washington, D.C., and his curiosity about the world is evident in his music. It reverberates with go-go, jazz, and hip-hop instrumentals, and is anchored by a humanity that comes with staying open to different experiences: "I think I'm in the middle of a palm heavy globe / Everybody trying to steal what I already own / But, oh, in this life we are all but alone / The feeling that you are is a problem condoned," he sings on the track "Things," released last December. His latest album, "The Iceberg," tackles social issues like xenophobia and sexism through personal anecdotes rather than abstract platitudes: "I make more than my sister / 'Cause I was born as a mister," Oddisee admits on the grooving "Hold It Back." As its title might imply, "The Iceberg" is a work that, while dazzling on the surface, possesses a depth that can be discovered only with repeated dives. *(Highline Ballroom, 431 W. 16th St. 212-414-5994. May 31.)*

Kamasi Washington
This tenor saxophonist from Los Angeles is in town for the annual Northside Festival, co-headlining with **Dirty Projectors.** Washington's début studio album, "The Epic," features winding free jazz in the sixties spirit of John and Alice. (Hear the "Acknowledgement" reference on Washington's "Final Thought.") It was released on the independent L.A. label Brainfeeder, home to many musicians, producers, and d.j.s who stray from jazz's stricter traditions. The record was warmly reviewed, and it found new fans among listeners who discovered the composer through his work with the knotty producer Flying Lotus (the founder of Brainfeeder) and the Grammy-winning hip-hop wunderkind Kendrick Lamar. *(McCarren Park, Bedford Ave. and N. 12th St., Brooklyn. northsidefestival.com. June 8.)*

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Alexis Cuadrado: A Lorca Soundscape
The poet Federico García Lorca, a tragic victim of the Spanish Civil War, has been an inspiration for contemporary artists of all stripes, from Leonard Cohen to the Brooklyn-based bassist and composer Alexis Cuadrado, whose ambitious Lorca Soundscape project draws on the volume "A Poet in New York," in which Lorca took measure of the Depression-era metropolis. The singer **Claudia Acuña** and the saxophonist **Miguel Zenón** join this mixed-media ensemble. *(Jazz Gallery, 1160 Broadway, at 27th St., Fifth fl. 646-494-3625. June 2-3.)*

Steve Davis
Hard bop, in all its virile glory, has a hold on Davis, a supremely adept trombonist for whom the idiom is now as natural as his heartbeat. Celebrating the release of his new album, "Think Ahead," he's gathered equally bop-smitten peers—including the saxophonist **Jimmy Greene,** the bassist **Nate Reeves,** and the drummer **Lewis Nash,** along with a venerated elder pianist, **Larry Willis**—to stir up the action. *(Smoke, 2751 Broadway, between 105th and 106th Sts. 212-864-6662. June 2-4.)*

Chico Freeman
For many promising artists, as youth passes, so does critical attention, and in jazz only the strong survive. The spotlight that focussed on Freeman back in the late seventies, when he was in his late twenties, may have receded, but this still resourceful saxophonist—here at the helm of a tight quartet—soldiers on. *(Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola, Broadway at 60th St. 212-258-9595. June 7-8.)*

Javon Jackson
A champion of the rugged tenor-saxophone tradition of such modern masters as Sonny Rollins, John Coltrane, and Joe Henderson, Jackson has, in the course of a committed three-decade career, carved out his own identity as a bountiful improviser. His meat-and-potatoes quartet includes the pianist **Jeremy Manasia.** *(Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. 212-255-4037. May 30-June 4.)*

Joe Morris
Exposure as a teen-ager to the rough-and-tumble free jazz of late-era Coltrane set the guitarist Morris on a path that, decades on, he has yet to swerve from. His residency at this spartan venue (which plans to relocate to more comfortable digs at the New School) finds the crafty, at times surprisingly lyrical player interacting with a host of like-minded musical adventurers. *(The Stone, Avenue C at 2nd St. thestonenyc.com. May 30-June 4.)*

Nicki Parrott
Parrott, a formidable mainstream bassist and singer of considerable charm, has discovered a sweet spot in the repertoire of the late vocal legend Blossom Dearie, as revealed on her enchanting new album, "Dear Blossom." Her effervescent trio includes the neo-swing guitarist **Frank Vignola.** *(Birdland, 315 W. 44th St. 212-581-3080. June 6-7.)*

Vision Festival
Avant-garde jazz has found a bastion in this annual celebration of knotty improvisation, farsighted composition, and social activism, now in its twenty-second year, thanks to the tenacity of the artistic director Patricia Nicholson Parker. The multi-instrumentalist **Cooper-Moore** is the featured celebrant; other inventive musicians include **Charles Gayle, Tomeka Reid, Joe McPhee, Matthew Shipp, Hamid Drake,** and **William Parker.** *(Judson Memorial Church, 55 Washington Square South. artsforart.org. Through June 3.)*

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Mother's Day

Joan Crawford's offscreen life, in "Mommie Dearest."

The director Frank Perry, working with his first wife, Eleanor Perry, and other screenwriters, is distinguished mainly by his skill at eliciting enticingly florid yet intimately vulnerable performances from actors. It's no surprise that he made one of the best films about a Hollywood star that the industry has yet produced: "Mommie Dearest," from 1981, which screens June 4 and June 6 in the Quad Cinema's retrospective of the Perrys' work.

It's the story of Joan Crawford's life and career, from 1939 to the time of her death, in 1977, seen from the perspective of her daughter Christina, whose memoir Frank Perry adapted, with three other screenwriters. Faye Dunaway stars as Crawford; the action is centered on Crawford's home life—in particular, on the troubled relationship that the actress had with Christina, whom she adopted in 1940. The film emphasizes the fierce, frightening intensity of Crawford's offscreen character, largely a product of her own hard childhood, and it brings out a simple and powerful idea: actors can't give onscreen what they don't already possess within themselves.

In the case of Crawford, the furies of her performances are matched by her domestic rages; she cleans her house ferociously and disciplines Christina with equal ferocity. She wants to give her daughter the advantages and the pleasures that she herself never had, but she also wants to teach Christina to "compete" as she did, and so subjects her to strict rules and harsh punishment. The most famous example of this is the notorious incident when Crawford beat her daughter with a wire hanger. The movie's version of the event continues with Crawford inflicting further cruelties in a state of theatrical, self-dramatizing possession—emphasized by her Kabuki-like mask of cold cream.

Perry never shows Crawford on the set, and never has Dunaway impersonate any of Crawford's emblematic performances; rather, Dunaway, portraying the star in her private life, captures Crawford's oblivious brutality and relentless intensity, her passionate yet controlled and rock-hard presence that's as terrifying when it's maintained as it is explosive when it breaks. The real-life Crawford's greatest performances have often been mistaken for camp, and Dunaway's own deeply empathetic performance here—miraculously channelling Crawford's manner and power—suffered the same fate.

The movie catches Crawford's desperate efforts to maintain her youthful looks for the sake of her career, as well as the state of fear and dependency in which studios kept even as great a star as Crawford. One of Perry's co-writers, Frank Yablans, was both the film's producer and a former studio head; scenes of backroom intrigue between Crawford and the head of M-G-M, Louis B. Mayer (played by the insinuating character actor Howard Da Silva)—in which Mayer flaunts his absolute rule with a velvet bonhomie—have a quietly dreadful ring of authenticity.

For all the ordeals that Christina (played, as a child, by Mara Hobel and, as an adult, by Diana Scarwid) is shown to bear, Perry depicts her as strong and discerning. She is seen as having learned the lessons of endurance and competition that her mother had hoped to impart—and the writing of her memoir comes off as a crucial part of her struggle.

—*Richard Brody*

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OPENING

Beatriz at Dinner Salma Hayek stars in this drama, as a holistic healer who becomes a guest at her wealthy client's dinner party. Directed by Miguel Arteta; co-starring Chloë Sevigny and John Lithgow. *Opening June 9. (In limited release.)* • **It Comes at Night** Reviewed in Now Playing. *Opening June 9. (In wide release.)* • **Megan Leavey** A drama, based on the true story of a Marine corporal (Kate Mara) who worked with the K-9 unit in the Iraq War. Directed by Gabriela Cowperthwaite. *Opening June 9. (In wide release.)* • **My Cousin Rachel** Rachel Weisz stars in this adaptation of a novel by Daphne du Maurier, about a woman whose relative suspects her of murder. Directed by Roger Michell; co-starring Sam Claflin and Holliday Grainger. *Opening June 9. (In limited release.)* • **Wonder Woman** Patty Jenkins directed this DC Comics adaptation, starring Gal Gadot as a superheroine who tries to end the First World War. Co-starring Chris Pine and Robin Wright. *Opening June 2. (In wide release.)*

NOW PLAYING

An Actor's Revenge
In 1963, the Japanese star Kazuo Hasegawa made his three-hundredth movie, playing the same double role he did in 1935: a Kabuki female impersonator and a self-styled Robin Hood. On a stage that looks like a glittering ribbon—it outscopes CinemaScope—Hasegawa's actor character, Yukinojo, plots his revenge on the men who drove his parents to despair, insanity, and suicide. Two of these villains, a merchant and a former magistrate, have shown up for Yukinojo's opening night in Edo, with the ex-magistrate's daughter in tow. She falls for the exotic actor's androgynous charms, and Yukinojo realizes that if he wins her heart he can wreak havoc on the ex-magistrate's household. Hasegawa's performance as the actor is a marvel of sexual ambiguity. (He's also charming and funny as the robust bandit.) Throughout, the director, Kon Ichikawa, succeeds in making all the world a stage, mixing theatrical and cinematic devices with earthquake intensity. Colors slice into the dark backgrounds of the nocturnal scenes like lights flashed at night through the floor of a glass-bottomed boat. In Japanese.—*Michael Sragow (Anthology Film Archives, June 9.)*

Alien: Covenant
Ridley Scott returns to the feud between monster and human that he inaugurated in "Alien" (1979). The new work takes place long before the events described in that film, though *after* the gloomy shenanigans of "Prometheus." In short, we have a saga on our hands. On board the good spaceship Covenant, all is not well: after the captain's death, the devout but ineffectual Oram (Billy Crudup) takes charge. He and his crew, including Daniels (Katherine Waterston) and a serene android named Walter (Michael Fassbender), land on an unfamiliar planet, only to realize that hostile creatures have beaten them to the punch. The stylized goriness of what ensues is unprecedented for Scott, yet the plot, torn between different characters and writhing with a surfeit of beasts, lacks the clean lines of the first movie, and there is a doomed attempt, in the final reel, to ape the muscular thrills of James Cameron's "Aliens" (1986). If anyone commands the scene, it is Fassbender, playing two roles, who follows in the robotic footsteps of earlier synthetic men; even he, however, suffers beneath the burden of the backstory. Was the alien not scarier, and more implacable, when we knew nothing of its origins?—*Anthony Lane (Reviewed in our issue of 5/29/17.) (In wide release.)*

Beauty and the Beast
Back from the drawing board, into live-action, comes yet another version of the tale. Disney has taken its own animated film from 1991 and, at vast expense, tried to keep it real—or, in the case of the actors, half-real. Emma Watson, whose determined air is not matched by her singing voice, plays the book-loving Belle. She takes the place of her father (Kevin Kline) as the prisoner of the Beast (Dan Stevens), who in turn is held captive by a magic spell. Moping and short-tempered, he dwells in his castle, attended by living objects—the clock (Ian McKellen), the teapot (Emma Thompson), the full-throated wardrobe (Audra McDonald), and so on. Belle's task, of which she seems all too aware, is to fall for the Beast and thus restore his proper nature, as a handsome and slightly boring prince. The songs from 1991 are reheated and dished up anew, together with a batch of fresh numbers, by Alan Menken and Tim Rice; the resulting movie, though stuffed with wonders, is forty-five minutes longer than its predecessor and much less dramatically lean.—*A.L. (3/27/17) (In wide release.)*

Bless Their Little Hearts
Billy Woodberry's only dramatic feature to date, from 1983, looks deeply into the life of one family in Watts and plots its crisis in three dimensions: race, money, and gender. Charlie Banks (Nate Hardman), first seen in an employment office, has been jobless for a decade and does day labor when he can get it. His wife, Andais (Kaycee Moore), is the family's main support, but, when it's time to give their three lively and helpful young children their allowance, she slips the coins to Charlie, for him to dole out as the nominal head of the household. Working with a script and cinematography by Charles Burnett, Woodberry crafts a passionately pensive realism—nearly every scene of action is matched by a long one in which characters, in observant repose, look back and see themselves reflected in society's mirror. Bruised by struggle, Charlie seeks comfort with a former girlfriend; Andais has it out with him in a terrifying scene of domestic apocalypse, a single claustrophobic ten-minute take in which a lifetime of frustration bursts forth.—*Richard Brody (IFC Center.)*

Cluny Brown
Ernst Lubitsch's last completed film, from 1946, looks back to the prewar year of 1938 to take stock of the postwar world and to show how it got that way. The story concerns Adam Belinski (Charles Boyer), a Czechoslovakian professor and anti-Fascist, who takes refuge in London and then is invited to an English country manor, where his liberal ironies shake up the staid household. He bonds with the title character (Jennifer Jones), one of the maids—a plumber's nubile niece who likes nothing better than to unblock stopped-up drains with "one good bang." (That's just one of the movie's many gleefully risqué allusions.) Belinski's story, in Lubitsch's telling, reflects that of so many smart European refugees. Their cultured and freethinking ways inspired stopped-up England—and, as things turn out, the United States, too—to unblock itself and take up the fight against Hitler and for sex, not least by producing effervescently ribald entertainments, such as this one, for the benefit of spirited yet constrained young women. With Reginald Owen as an upper-class fop who knows Hitler as the author of an "outdoors" book, "My Camp."—*R.B. (Film Forum, June 2 and June 10.)*

The Commune
The Danish director Thomas Vinterberg has often turned to group studies—dramas that seem like anthropological experiments, bringing people together and noting the ways in which they form bonds and pull violently apart. That was the case with "The Celebration" (1998) and "The Hunt" (2012), and it happens again with his latest film, set in the nineteen-seventies. An architect named Erik (Ulrich Thomsen) inherits a large house in Copenhagen. His first impulse is to sell, but his wife, Anna (Trine Dyrholm), and their teenage daughter, Freja (Martha Sofie Wallstrøm Hansen), think otherwise, and a new plan is hatched. The place becomes a haven for friends and strangers, as well as a testing ground for the idealistic liberties of the age; when Erik falls for a student named Emma (Helene Reingaard Neumann), she is invited by Anna to join them in the communal home. By Vinterberg's standards, the drama feels meek; there's a regrettable subplot about an ailing child, and a surprising number of characters linger in the margins. Yet Dyrholm's performance is as tough and as truthful as ever, not least when Anna takes to the bottle and starts to crack. In Danish.—*A.L. (In limited release and streaming.)*

Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2
The return of the ragtag outfit that made such an unexpected impression in 2014—here was a Marvel movie that presumed, if only in fits and starts, to spear its own pretensions. The crew in the sequel is pretty much unchanged: Peter Quill (Chris Pratt), who is way too goofy to deserve his title of Star-Lord; the mint-green Gamora (Zoe Saldana) and her semi-robotic sister (Karen Gillan); the enormous Drax (Dave Bautista), a stranger to the social graces; a thieving and sadistic critter named Rocket (voiced by Bradley Cooper); and Baby Groot (voiced by Vin Diesel), formerly a tree. New to the scene is Ego (Kurt Russell), whose name, it must be said, is a ready-made spoiler—he likes to flaunt his own planet in the way that other guys show off their sports cars. The director, as before, is James Gunn, but, as the plot grinds onward, with its compound of the flimsy and the over-spectacular, and as the finale drags on forever, you sense that the genial balance of the first film has been mislaid. When the biggest laughs arise from a small piece of computer-generated wood, where does a franchise go next?—*A.L. (5/15/17) (In wide release.)*

Hermia & Helena
The fanciful twists of this romantic roundelay by the Argentinean director Matías Piñeiro keep the Shakespearean promise of the title. It's centered on a Mulberry Street apartment that serves as an "institute" for one artistic fellow at a time. The story begins with a Buenos Aires artist named Carmen (María Vil-

lar), who's ending her fellowship in the vain hope that the program's manager, Lukas (Keith Poulson), a standoffish ex-rocker, will leave with her. She's replaced by a longtime friend, Camila (Agustina Muñoz), who's translating "A Midsummer Night's Dream" into Spanish. Camila has a boyfriend back home and an ex in Brooklyn (played by the filmmaker Dustin Guy Defa), but she's also in love with Lukas. Piñeiro keeps the action swinging freely between New York and Buenos Aires with bold subplots and puckish flashbacks, the shimmering mysteries of tenuous friendships and the breathless melodrama of family secrets. Filming cityscapes and intimate gestures with avid attention, adorning the dialogue with deep confessions and witty asides, Piñeiro conjures a cogently realistic yet gloriously imaginative vision of youthful ardor in love and art alike. Co-starring the filmmakers Mati Diop and Dan Sallitt.—*R.B. (Film Society of Lincoln Center and Metrograph.)*

It Comes at Night
This modest science-fiction thriller brings the hands-on vigor of independent filmmaking to a high-concept premise, but the results are insubstantial and impersonal. It's set in a near future where the human race is threatened by a highly contagious and incurable disease. One family—mother (Carmen Ejogo), father (Joel Edgerton), and teen-age son (Kelvin Harrison, Jr.)—has taken refuge in a sealed-off house in the woods. Another family—mother (Riley Keough), father (Christopher Abbott), and toddler (Griffin Robert Faulkner)—comes to them for help. The two families cohabit warily until the spectre of infection causes alarm. The director, Trey Edward Shults, who previously made "Krisha," a frenziedly realistic tale of family turmoil, relies on the threat of imminent death to reveal both the best and the worst aspects of family bonds. The cinematography by Drew Daniels, with its bold low-light effects and eerily gliding camera work, maintains a mood of dread, and Shults deftly manages the glances and the gazes of silent fears and unspoken longings. But the film builds its tension through artificial silences that keep the characters as blank as chess pieces.—*R.B. (In wide release.)*

Lions Love (. . . and Lies)
Filming this docu-fiction in Los Angeles in June, 1968, the week of California's Democratic primary, the French director Agnès Varda catches the era's epochal violence and cultural exuberance, high hopes and bitter outcomes. She films in the home of the actress Viva, who plays at a ménage à trois with the playwrights James Rado and Gerome Ragni ("Hair"), listening to them chat and josh, watching them relax in bed and swim naked in the back-yard pool. But the inchoate stretch is crystallized by the arrival of a house guest—the real-life director Shirley Clarke, who's there to meet with a producer about making a Hollywood movie. As Clarke's project collapses, Varda (playing herself) directs her, onscreen, in a suicide attempt that Clarke doesn't want to make. Meanwhile, TV broadcasts carry the news of the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy along with a report, from New York, that Andy Warhol (who was Viva's friend and mentor) has been shot. Varda remains restrained and attentive in the presence of outrage and heartbreak, frivolity and frustration. Her film is more than a time capsule of events and moods—it's a living aesthetic model for revolutionary times.—*R.B. (BAM Cinématek, May 31-June 13, and streaming.)*

The Lovers
This bittersweet romance thrusts its fertile and clever dramatic framework into the foreground and leaves it undeveloped. Mary and Michael (Debra Winger and Tracy Letts) are long-married and long-frustrated suburban cubicle jockeys, and both are having affairs. Mary is seeing Robert (Aidan Gillen), a writer; Michael is seeing Lucy (Melora Walters), a dancer; and each is waiting for the right moment to tell the other that the marriage is over. But the impending visit of their son, Joel (Tyler Ross), a college student, puts a crimp in their plans; while waiting to separate, Mary and Michael suddenly rekindle their relationship—in effect, cheating on their lovers with each other. Winger is commanding in action and in repose, and Letts invests his role with gruff energy, but they and the other actors exert themselves in a void—none of the characters have any substance beyond their function in the story. The writer and director, Azazel Jacobs, offers a few visual grace notes that resonate beyond the plotlines, but his script is devoid of imagination. With Jessica Sula, as Joel's girlfriend, Erin, whose quandaries go utterly unaddressed.—*R.B. (In wide release.)*

Snatched
In this leaden comedy, Emily (Amy Schumer), a retail clerk with delusions of glamour, plans an exotic vacation in Ecuador with her musician boyfriend. When he dumps her, she coaxes her mother, Linda (Goldie Hawn), who's divorced and solitary, into joining her on the trip. Happily enticed by a romance-novel-type hunk at the hotel bar, Emily persuades Linda to come with them on a back-road adventure that results in a kidnapping by local bandits. Spirited away to Colombia and left to their own devices, the women try to escape, leading to a series of tribulations that are meant to furnish comedic situations. But the director, Jonathan Levine, has no feel for comedy. Schumer fires off some asides of sharp obliviousness, but the humor, which may have seemed to fly in a script conference, sinks without a trace. Only one mercurial stunt, involving two retired American operatives (Wanda Sykes and Joan Cusack), has any glint of wit. With Ike Barinholtz, as Emily's agoraphobic brother, Jeffrey, and Bashir Salahuddin, as the State Department officer whom he badgers into action.—*R.B. (In wide release.)*

Stage Fright
Alfred Hitchcock's theatre-centered mystery, from 1950, shows how good actors get away with murder. Marlene Dietrich plays Charlotte Inwood, a star of the London stage, who recruits her caddish boyfriend, Jonathan Cooper (Richard Todd), to help conceal her husband's suspicious death. Jonathan, in turn, recruits his steadfast young girlfriend, Eve Gill (Jane Wyman), a student at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, to help him slip out of

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town. Eve decides to take matters into her own hands and launches a private investigation, but when a handsome detective, Wilfred (Ordinary) Smith (Michael Wilding), is put on the case her affections begin to waver. As deceptions and disguises pile up, the layers of mystery grow thicker, and the lurid symbolism of material objects is thrust to the fore. In the portrayal of Eve's father, an urbane and audacious seaman dubbed Commodore (Alastair Sim), Hitchcock conjures a deep-rooted, irony-rich complicity of father and daughter that seems borrowed from the films of Howard Hawks and suggests the inner compass that helps to guard against chasing the wrong man.—*R.B. (Metrograph, June 3, and streaming.)*

Wakefield
This drama is adapted from a short story by E. L. Doctorow (originally published in *The New Yorker*) that is itself adapted from a story by Hawthorne. Unfortunately, the writer and director, Robin Swicord, displays too little originality for the film to seem like anything but a dutiful copy. Bryan Cranston stars as Howard Wakefield, a New York corporate lawyer who lives in a sumptuous suburban house with his wife, Diana (Jennifer Garner), and their twin teen-age daughters. One night, coming home during a power outage, Howard chases a raccoon from the attic of the house's detached garage and decides to stay there. He takes up clandestine residence in the attic and settles in for days, weeks, months, living as a furtive scavenger and watching with binoculars as Diana copes with his disappearance. Howard recalls, in flashbacks, the stresses of their marriage, and he bemoans, in voice-over, the constraints of his comforts and responsibilities. But his clichéd life is rendered in clichés; his feral survivalism and his extended solitude are grossly oversimplified and underimagined.—*R.B. (In limited release and video on demand.)*

War Machine
This satirical drama is based on the late Michael Hastings's book "The Operators"—expanding on his 2010 profile, in *Rolling Stone,* of General Stanley McChrystal, then in command of U.S. forces in Afghanistan. Brad Pitt, growling and chewing his words, stars as General Glen McMahon, a fiery but scholarly officer whose commitment to victory in Afghanistan is matched only by his unrealistic definition of it. Craving good publicity, McMahon—a political player and a skillful administrator, a hands-on warrior and a master tactician—lets a journalist, Sean Cullen (Scoot McNairy), follow him around. Then Sean's report is published; it turns out to be an inside view of backroom manipulations, drunken revels, and freely vented contempt for President Obama, and results in McMahon's dismissal. Along the way, the writer and director, David Michôd, contrasts the dangers faced by soldiers in the field with the empty rhetoric of officers, such as McMahon, who place them in harm's way. The grim absurdity is reinforced by Sean's knowing, ruefully ironic narration, which channels Hastings's own voice, but the comedic exaggerations—led by Pitt—lessen its impact. The most moving drama involves McMahon's wife, Jeannie (Meg Tilly), whose sacrifices take place outside the spotlight.—*R.B. (In limited release and Netflix.)*

DANCE

American Ballet Theatre
The company presents two chestnuts and an oddity. "Le Corsaire" is an exoticized pirate caper famous mostly for its swashbuckling male choreography. "Giselle," on the other hand, is a Romantic-era gem, its two acts exhibiting a perfect balance of storytelling and pure dance. Misty Copeland will perform the title role at the May 31 matinée, squired by the company's new Danish cavalier, Alban Lendorf. Those interested in something a little less conventional might look to "The Golden Cockerel," Alexei Ratmansky's staging of the Pushkin folk tale, with a puppet-theatre feel and richly colored designs, by Richard Hudson, in the style of the Russian primitivist painter Natalia Goncharova. • May 31 at 2 and 7:30: "Giselle." • June 1-2 at 7:30 and June 3 at 2 and 8: "The Golden Cockerel." • June 5-6 and June 8-9 at 7:30, June 7 at 2 and 7:30, and June 10 at 2 and 8: "Le Corsaire." • June 12-13 at 7:30: "Swan Lake." *(Metropolitan Opera House, Lincoln Center. 212-477-3030. Through July 8.)*

"Radical Bodies"
Fifty years ago, the New York début of Anna Halprin's "Parades and Changes" provoked a court summons for indecent exposure. The innocent ending of that work, in which naked young people tear paper, will be reprised in the Hunter College theatre, where it originally caused a scandal. The magically equable and in-the-moment Simone Forti also improvises one of her "News Animations," on a program that includes Yvonne Rainer's 1969 "Chair/Pillow." It's all in conjunction with a revelatory exhibition, at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts (through Sept. 16), that connects Halprin's West Coast innovations with the East Coast radicalism of Forti, Rainer, and Judson Dance Theatre. *(Kaye Playhouse, Park Ave. at 68th St. 212-722-4448. May 31.)*

RIOULT Dance NY
Since founding his company, in 1994, Pascal Rioult has earned a reputation for interpreting canonical works of classical music with old-fashioned modern dance. Before all that, though, when he was a teen-ager in France, he danced to other sounds in his basement, and his new piece returns to those days. "Fire in the Sky" is set to hard-rock tracks by Deep Purple. Will it be "Smoke on the Water" or more "what was he smoking"? *(Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. May 31-June 4.)*

"Edges of Light"
In the years since Colin Dunne took over for Michael Flatley in "Riverdance," he has charted a course away from flashy spectacle, trying to purify Irish step dancing by crossing it with stripped-down avant-garde theatre. Here, the charismatically casual former step-dancing champion teams up with musicians similarly interested in maintaining Irish tradition without being fusty: Maeve Gilchrist, David Power, and Tola Custy. *(Irish Arts Center, 553 W. 51st St. 212-757-3318. June 1-3.)*

David Gordon and Pick Up Performance Co(s)
Recently, Gordon transformed hundreds of artifacts from his five-decade career into an exhibition at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts that was itself a marvellous work of art. In "Live Archiveography," he converts his archives into his signature mix of scripted theatre and dance, playfully blurring the line between life and art. Alumni of previous Gordon productions return, too, including, of course, Gordon's regal wife, Valda Setterfield. The show kicks off a month-long festival at the Kitchen, produced by the performing-arts incubator Lumberyard. *(512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793. June 1-3.)*

Ivy Baldwin Dance
For the decade that Lawrence Cassella danced in Ivy Baldwin's works, he was a singular presence: giving, vulnerable, funny. In 2015, he died, at thirty-eight. His spirit and his absence are behind "Keen [No. 2]," a ritual of grief. Mostly slow and severe, with idiosyncratic touches and an excellent all-female cast, it dares both sculptural spareness and the overtly emotional expression of wailing. Part of the "Joyce Unleashed" series, presented by the Joyce, Abrons Arts Center, and the Chocolate Factory. *(Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand St. 212-598-0400. June 1-4 and June 9-11.)*

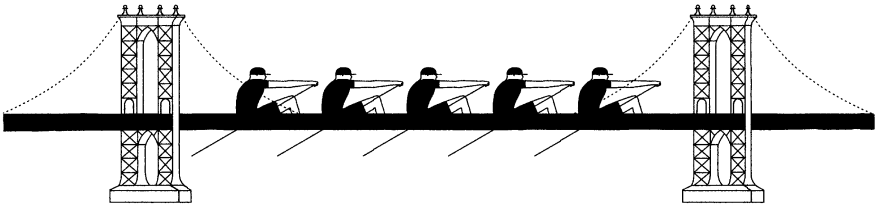
Kyle Marshall Choreography
A standout dancer, most notably as the cool, conflicted Othello in Doug Elkins's "Mo(or)town/Redux," Marshall presents his first stand-alone program as a choreographer. His trio "Colored" looks at the beauty of blackness and the challenge of using black bodies in abstract dance. *(Actors Fund Arts Center, 160 Schermerhorn St., Brooklyn. kmchoreography.com. June 2-3.)*

Eifman Ballet of St. Petersburg / "Red Giselle"
The Russian choreographer Boris Eifman has built a huge following, particularly in Russia, entranced by his acrobatic and emotionally extreme style. In his 1997 portrait of the legendary Russian ballerina Olga Spessitseva, he finds a subject well suited to his operatic approach: a great but fragile artist's descent into madness. The metaphor of "Giselle"—the tale of a young woman who dies of heartbreak and becomes a troubled spirit—is a central plot device. (Spessitseva was famous for her depiction of Giselle.) The recorded score consists of bits of Tchaikovsky, Schnittke, and Bizet. *(City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. June 2-4 and June 9-11.)*

Cirkus Cirkör
An influx of refugees strains the European Union—what to do? Send in the acrobats? "Limits," by this well-established Swedish nouveau-cirque troupe, presents a parallel between today's embattled European body politic and a circus performer learning a new trick: both need to become more flexible. Whatever the merits of the analogy, the novel stunts divert—more contortion, juggling, and high-flying action. *(BAM Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. June 7-10.)*

Jody Sperling/Time Lapse Dance
In "Book of Clouds," Sperling, a choreographer skilled in antique theatrical magic, teams up with the composer and visual artist Omar Zubeir and the visual artist Amy-Claire Huestis to create a performance installation about the sky. Huestis's hand-painted magic-lantern slides projected onto Sperling's swirling drapery should be something to see. *(Baryshnikov Arts Center, 450 W. 37th St. 866-811-4111. June 7-10.)*

ABOVE & BEYOND



Live at the Archway
The Archway, in Dumbo, is a seven-thousand-square-foot park that sits beneath the southern end of the Manhattan Bridge. It was used, by the Department of Transportation, for storing scrap metal before its conversion, in 2007, to a public space for performances and events. This summer, the Archway hosts a weekly series of free performances and interactive art installations, presented in a pop-up gallery called the Space Station. At 6 P.M. each Thursday, starting June 8, musicians and dance troupes will perform salsa, Italo dance music, Afrobeat, Japanese pop, and more. The opening evening features the Colombian-fusion group **Los Cumpleaños** and an all-female Brazilian drum line, **FogulAzul.** *(The Archway, Water St. between Adams St. and Anchorage St. June 8-Sept. 28.)*

BookCon
This annual convention offers access to a trove of authors, publishers, and other figures steeped in the world of books, as well as presenters in the media and entertainment industries. For two days, guests can take in live podcast recordings, Q. & A. panels, and special screenings. The lineup includes a roundtable on "shipping," the fan-fiction trope of playing imaginary matchmaker with characters from books, TV shows, and films; a presentation from Bill Nye, the Emmy-award-winning mascot for science who resurfaced this year, with two new television series; and a conversation between the actor and comedian Kevin Hart, whose book "I Can't Make This Up" comes out the following week, and the morning-show shock-jock Charlamagne Tha God. *(Javits Center, 655 W. 34th St. thebookcon.com. June 3-4.)*

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Chic lamps, side tables, and sconces galore flood the auction houses this week. **Sotheby's** opens with a sale devoted to ornate glass by the Tiffany Studios from the collection of the dealer Carol Ferranti, and then moves on to a more general sale of furnishings and decorative items (both on June 6). On June 8, it presents Old Master paintings, including a large group of Italian *vedute*, or "views," a common eighteenth-century genre. These include Venetian scenes by Canaletto (pristine, luminous) and Guardi (more tactile and earthy) and a majestic panoramic view of Messina as seen from the hills, by Vanvitelli. *(York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.)* • The natural world is well represented at **Christie's** sale of design objects (June 7), which includes several sheep ("Moutons de Pierre") and a reindeer ("Grand Wapiti"), by the French sculpture duo François-Xavier Lalanne and Claude Lalanne; a polar bear ("Ours Blanc"), by François Pompon; and flora-inspired art-nouveau lamps in various shapes and sizes, by Tiffany and Gallé. *(York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.)* • **Phillips'** design sale (June 6) is well stocked with mid-century and more recent objects, like an archaic-looking bronze-colored ceramic sculpture by the Shimonoseki-born artist Akiyama Yo, and an elegant, Mondrian-esque cabinet ("Cabinet de Curiosité"), in brightly colored acrylic, by Shiro Kuramata. *(450 Park Ave. 212-940-1200.)*

READINGS AND TALKS

LMHQ
If there is a core insight in the podcast boomlet, it may be that, as much as we enjoy tweeting, texting, watching, writing, reading, and snapping, no Internet-born form has supplanted the potency of conversation—it takes little more than two fascinating people and two microphones to strike a cultural nerve. Kathy Tu and Tobin Low launched "Nancy," this spring, to discuss their lives as queer Asian-Americans. In their first public talk about the show, with BuzzFeed's Saeed Jones, the duo discusses how they aspire to bring new perspectives to the L.G.B.T.Q. dialogue, approaching the subject from a more human, and less political, angle. Episodes have wrestled with topics such as the "fear of being butch" and the subtle queerness of the "Harry Potter" books. *(150 Broadway, 20th floor. lmhq.nyc. June 1 at 6.)*

Town Hall
David Byrne's book "How Music Works" pays off in the first dozen pages: his discussions of the choral acoustics in early cave settlements and the communicative utility of drum patterns across open plains will restructure how you hear guitars and snares. He stages a talk and a performance based on the book, which will include music, magic, theatre, dance, science, and comedy. As with most Byrne projects, the gig promises to sidestep convention, but its roots in a sociological and ethnographic study of music should anchor its whimsical format. *(Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 212-840-2824. June 1 at 8.)*

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While the in crowd is chasing, and paying dearly for, the latest celebrity artists, you might consider Marsden Hartley's paintings.

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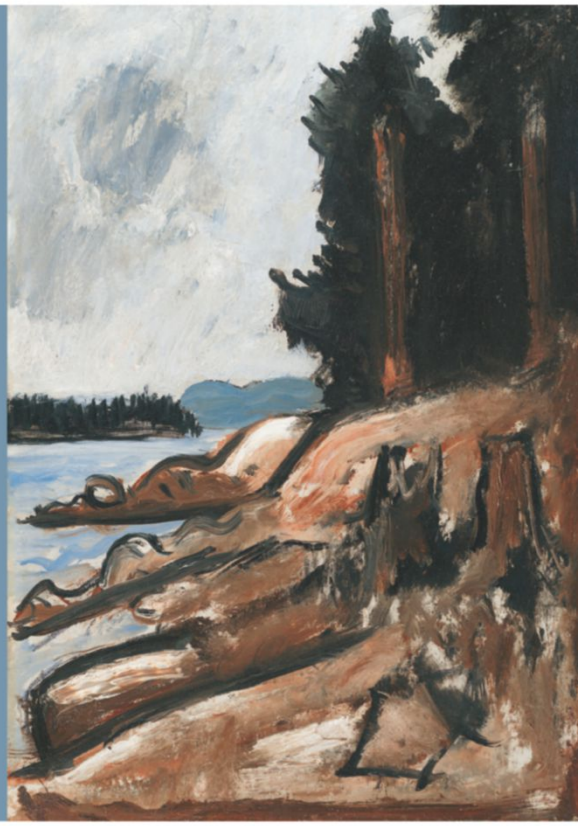

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FOOD & DRINK

TABLES FOR TWO

Atla

372 Lafayette St. (atlanyc.com)

At the world-class restaurant Pujol, in Mexico City, Enrique Olvera reinvents Mexican classics with elements that are largely unfamiliar on this side of Trump's dream wall: chicatana ants (with corn, mayo, and chili), maguey worms (mixed with salt, for mezcal cocktails), "mole madre" (a three-year-old mole sauce). On his flashy arrival in New York, with the upscale Cosme, in 2014, Olvera generally skipped the bugs but kept up his reputation as an innovator, with uni tostadas, bone-marrow salsa, duck carnitas, and a now famous corn-husk meringue. Atla, a chic new all-day café, in NoHo, takes a totally different tack: on a menu devised by Olvera and his head chef, Daniela Soto-Innes, nothing costs more than twenty dollars, and locals are placated with familiar favorites like avocado toast and guacamole.

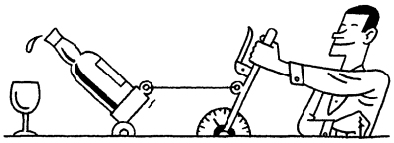
But beware, for this is not your average guacamole. After the great pea-guacamole controversy of 2015, it takes cojones to add mint to an otherwise innocent, chunky scoop, which arrived, one afternoon, dramatically hidden under an elephant-ear-size purple-corn chip. The avocado toast, which employed some very sweet cherry tomatoes, was just as delicious as any of the hundred others around town. Perhaps because everyone's doing steak tartare, it appeared here, too, inexplicably mixed with cubed carrots and potato, spilling out of a Cubanelle pepper.

There's something curious happening with the sauces, red and green, in the eggs ranchero, the chilaquiles, and the chicken enchiladas—they're ladled on copiously, like soup. Good thing they're delicious and spoon-worthy, especially the red one on the chilaquiles, bright with tomato and raisins and spiked with the lingering heat of chipotle. A nopal salad features cuts of fresh and charred cactus, slimy but tamed with a lovely tangle of mâche. Fish is the star of the menu, in the delicate flounder Milanese, lightly fried to a tender crisp, and in a small but mighty Arctic-char tostada. Thick curls of raw pink fish sit atop a schmear of fresh cheese on a crunchy blue-corn tortilla, showered with capers, serrano pepper, and cilantro: a Mexican lox and bagel.

In the morning, have a café con leche, with or without cinnamon, and a *concha* pastry, akin to a Wonder Bread roll with a sugar-crisp angel-food topping. Atla's cool graphics and smooth terrazzo surfaces belie its laid-back, friendly vibe. The other night, after 10 P.M., the place was full of downtowners drinking expert micheladas and margaritas with (wormless) salt and noshing on guac (with mint), while "Sweet Home Alabama" played on the stereo. It was pretty close to being home in Anywhere, U.S.A. *(Dishes, $8–$19.)*

—*Shauna Lyon*

BAR TAB



Grand Army

336 State St., Brooklyn (718-422-7867)

The head bartender of the exceptionally pleasant Grand Army—airy yet cozy, well stocked but unpretentious, on a leafy residential corner—is Damon Boelte, a self-described "dude from Lone Wolf, Oklahoma, who rides choppers and plays in a country band." He's got a Gandolfian beard and collects turquoise. As it turns out, he's also a big fan of the wholesome television dramedy "Gilmore Girls" (quirky small town, motormouthed mother-daughter duo), which emboldened scores of nerdy brunettes to embrace their inner Rorys. Boelte's "Gilmore Girls" fandom sparked something else: a themed seasonal cocktail menu, on offer until later this summer. " 'Gilmore Girls' is very inspiring," Boelte explained. "There's an episode called 'Cinnamon's Wake,' and it's when they have a wake for the cat, Cinnamon. How can you not make a cocktail based on that? It's already got an ingredient in the name!" Past menus have been built around "old trains and railroads," the state parks of Oklahoma, and Scandinavian black metal. One recent evening, two "Gilmore" fanatics sampled a Late Night at Luke's: cachaça, Bruto Americano, sweet vermouth; more like a Christmassy nightcap than New England diner fare. The Hep Alien was vegetal and ginny. An expert mused about incidents of drunkenness in the fictional town of Stars Hollow: "Lorelei used alcohol for justifying bad decisions she would have made anyway; Rory, to reveal her true snicklefritz self." The millennial waitress weighed in: "A lot of girls my age are really into the show. Nobody cares about 'Seinfeld' anymore." The expert, compulsively connecting the dots, pointed out that a scene from the "Seinfeld" finale was shot on what would become the "Gilmore Girls" set.—*Emma Allen*

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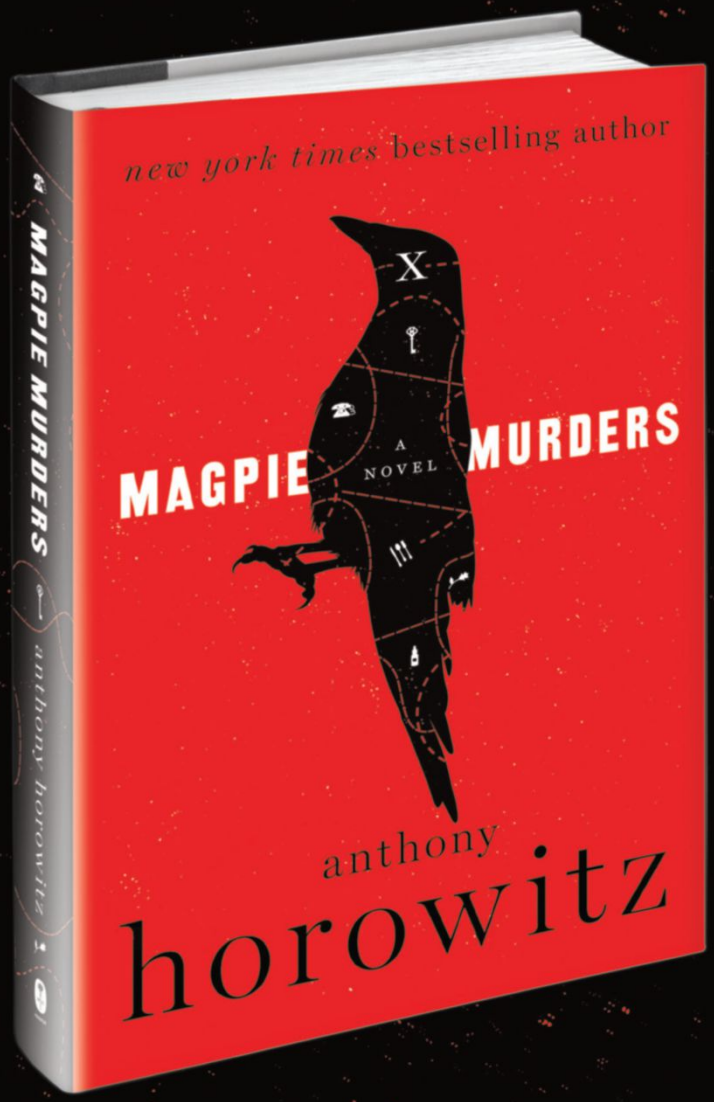

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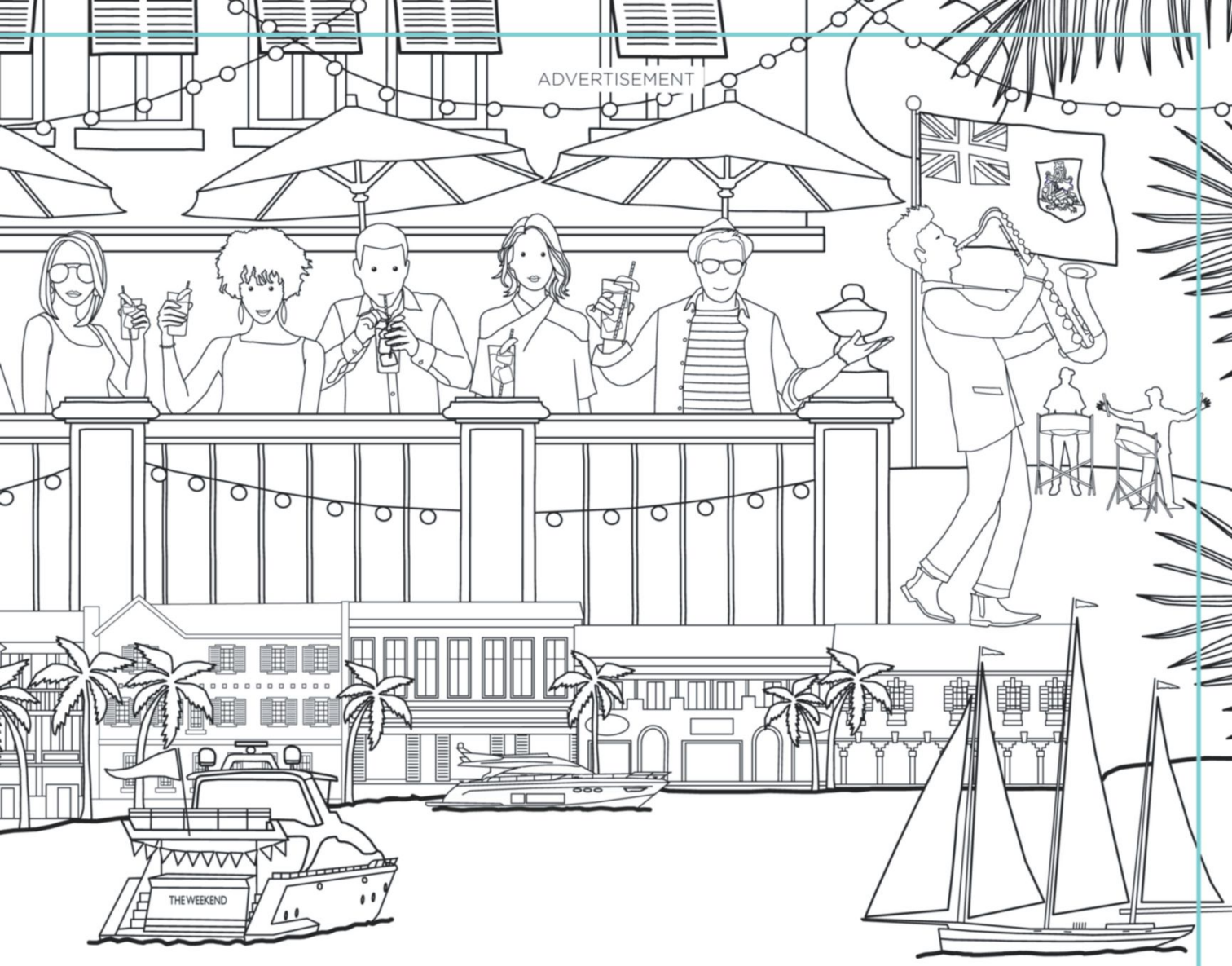

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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
THE STRATEGY OF TRUTH

Roger Ailes died recently, at the age of seventy-seven, during a week when the ground shook beneath a stumbling Donald Trump. The two men were in many things near: in age and appetites, in temper and coarseness. They were also in many things far apart: in intelligence and energy, in talent and purpose. Ailes was formidable, Trump brittle. Ailes's decline began last summer, when he was forced out of Fox News. Trump's fall, if he falls, is still to come. And yet at times it has seemed as if the two men were Humpty and Dumpty, tumbling off a wall that they'd built together, to divide one half of the country from the other.

The measure of the world they made lies in its distance from the world into which they were born, when the question of whether democracy could be defended without violating the freedoms on which it rests was a matter of pained debate. Ailes was born in Ohio in May, 1940. Weeks later, President Roosevelt gave a commencement address in Virginia. "Every generation of young men and women in America has questions to ask the world," he began. "But every now and again in the history of the Republic a different kind of question presents itself—a question that asks, not about the future of an individual or even of a generation, but about the future of the country." He was arguing against America Firsters, who wanted the United States to be an island, a vision he declared to be a nightmare, "the nightmare of a people lodged in prison, handcuffed, hungry, and fed through the bars from day to day by the contemptuous, unpitying masters of other continents."

Roosevelt had been trying to gain support for entry into the war in Europe, but he knew that it was possible to push too hard. In 1917, to marshal support for another war, Woodrow Wilson had created a propaganda department, a fiction manufactory that stirred up so much hysteria and so much hatred of Germany that Americans took to calling hamburgers "Salisbury steaks" and lynched a German immigrant. John Dewey called this kind of thing the "conscription of thought." It was a horse's bit crammed into the people's mouth. The bitterness of that experience determined a new generation of journalists to avoid all manner of distortion and error. In 1923, when Henry Luce and Briton Hadden founded *Time* (their first name for it was *Facts*), the magazine hired a small army of women to check every fact. ("Add Fact Checking to your list of chores," the founder of *The New Yorker* instructed an editor, not long afterward.) In 1929, Luce hired as an editor of his new magazine, *Fortune*, a poet named Archibald MacLeish. He had fought in the First World War, then lived in Paris, where he wrote poems about places where lay "upon the darkening plain/The dead against the dead and on the silent ground/The silent slain—." He worked at *Fortune* until 1938. F.D.R. appointed him Librarian of Congress in 1939.

"Democracy is never a thing done," MacLeish said. "Democracy is always something that a nation must be doing." He believed that writers had an obligation to fight against fascism in the battle for public opinion, a battle that grew more urgent after the publication, in 1940, of "The Strategy of Terror," by Edmond Taylor, the Paris bureau chief for the Chicago *Tribune*. Taylor reported firsthand on the propaganda campaign waged by Nazi agents to divide the French people, by leaving them uncertain about what to believe, or whether to believe anything at all. (In "Mein Kampf," Hitler had written that most people "are more easily victimized by a large than by a small lie, since they sometimes tell petty lies themselves but would be ashamed to tell big ones.") Taylor called propaganda "the invisible front." Roosevelt decided that he could delay his assault on that front no longer. In October, 1941, he issued an executive order establishing a new government information agency, the Office of Facts

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

and Figures. He appointed MacLeish to head it.

"The duty of government is to provide a basis for judgment," MacLeish insisted, "and when it goes beyond that, it goes beyond the prime scope of its duty." Under his leadership, the office mainly printed pamphlets, including "Divide and Conquer," which explained how foreign agents weaken a nation's resolve by undermining confidence in institutions like elections and the press, and by raising fears of internal enemies, like immigrants and Jews. Still, some reporters suspected that the agency was nothing more than a propaganda machine, the wartime conversion of fact to fiction. MacLeish was worried, too. In April, 1942, he spoke at a meeting of the Associated Press. To counter the strategy of terror, he proposed a new strategy:

> That strategy, I think, is neither difficult to find nor difficult to name. It is the strategy which is appropriate to our cause and to our purpose—the strategy of truth—the strategy which opposes to the frauds and the deceits by which our enemies have confused and conquered other peoples, the simple and clarifying truths by which a nation such as ours must guide itself. But the strategy of truth is not, because it deals in truth, devoid of strategy. It is not enough, in this war of hoaxes and delusions and perpetuated lies, to be merely honest. It is necessary also to be wise.

Critics called MacLeish naïve: winning a war requires deception. F.D.R., to some degree, agreed. In June, 1942, he replaced the Office of Facts and Figures with the Office of War Information. MacLeish left, and the agency drifted. Much of the staff resigned in protest. When a former advertising director for Coca-Cola was hired, a departing writer made a mock poster that read, "Step right up and get your four delicious freedoms. It's a refreshing war." In 1946, the year that Donald Trump was born, MacLeish published a poem called "Brave New World," about Americans' retreat from the world: "Freedom that was a thing to use / They've made a thing to save / And staked it in and fenced it round / Like a dead man's grave."

A lifetime later, Barack Obama greeted Roger Ailes at the White House. "I see the most powerful man in the world is here," Obama said. "Don't believe what you read, Mr. President," Ailes answered. "I started those rumors myself." Other rumors that Ailes helped start include Trump's charge that Obama is not an American. Also: science is a hoax, history is a conspiracy, and the news is fake. It's not always possible to sort out fact from fiction, but to believe that everything is a lie is to know nothing. Ailes won't be remembered as the man who got Trump elected President; he will be remembered as a television producer who understood better than anyone how to divide a people. And Trump's Presidency, long after it ends, will stand as a monument to the error of a strategy of terror.

—*Jill Lepore*

DIASPORA DEPT.
SUPER FANS

In the Trump era, political performance, like so much else, is in the eye of the beholder. Liberals see an Administration in a tailspin. But Trump's base sees it differently: a recent Pew survey showed that, among Republicans, the President's approval rating is eighty-two per cent.

A similar dynamic exists when it comes to Rodrigo Duterte, the President of the Philippines, whom Trump recently invited to the White House. American newspapers describe a murderous strongman who has ordered thousands of extrajudicial killings as part of his "war on drugs." But to Trump, and to many Filipinos, Duterte is a hero. In a phone call, Trump congratulated him for doing an "unbelievable job on the drug problem." As Joann Carman, the president of the Filipino Social Club of New York, said recently, "Trump and Duterte, they are a little bit alike, no?"

Carman was at D'Haven, a restaurant and dance hall in Woodside, Queens, getting ready to preside over the presentation of the contestants in the Mrs. Philippines-USA pageant. It is open to Filipino-born club members, provided that they have been married at least once. "Blurred Lines" blared from speakers; families danced and swarmed a buffet table laden with bam-i and pork afritada. The dress code was "Hawaiian."

Carman, who is sixty-two, wore a blue muumuu and had pinned an orchid in her hair. A former Mrs. Philippines-USA, she moved to New York in 1984, from Davao City: "It's where our President once served as mayor!" When she was young, she said, it had been a crime-infested city. "Thank God for Duterte," she went on. "Now you can finally walk around without fear of being raped and mugged."

Edita Gialanella, who was Mrs. Philippines-USA in 2006, chimed in: "Believe me, he cleaned up the city," she said, swaying in a long pink hula skirt.

The conversation was interrupted by the singing of national anthems. "The Star-Spangled Banner" prompted about half as many hands-on-hearts as its Filipino equivalent, "Chosen Land." ("'Tis our joy, when there be oppressors / To die because of thee.") Carman whispered, "I think everyone is impatient to get back to dancing."

The contestants were arriving. First came Lin Cheung, who was fidgeting with her top. "It's an old bathing suit that I glued plastic flowers on," she said, patting down a gardenia. "I didn't want to order a new top, because what if it doesn't fit and falls off while I'm dancing?" Lin is a mother of four; she came to the United States eight years ago from the province of Cebu. Nodding at a little girl nuzzling her waist, she added, "This is the youngest one, Kissy. I had her with my white husband."

Next, Andrea Simon joined the group. She has been a U.S. citizen since 2011, but followed the Philippines election closely. "I prayed for Duterte to win," she said, adjusting an uncoöperative coconut-shell bra. "It's not like he's killing innocent people. They are criminals, and get what they deserve." Carman compared him to a "tough but good" father.

How did they feel about Trump?

"I prefer Duterte," Simon said. Lin noted that both men are "control freaks."

"And they are dirty-mouthed," someone added. (Duterte reportedly called President Obama a "son of a whore.")

Nilda Trinchetta, Mrs. Philippines-USA 2014, raised a fist and said, "Everyone supports Duterte because of his iron hand." Americans don't understand, she

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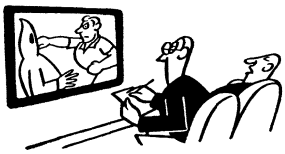
added, "because they don't know what it's like to live there." She nudged a man in the buffet line: "Hey, what do you think of Duterte?"

Allen Cuyugan, who used to work as a journalist in Manila, said, "If he were to call right now and give me an order, I would do it!"

The pageant-goers thought it was sensible for Trump to invite Duterte to the White House. "They will negotiate peace," Matt Matematico, a retired Con Edison worker, said. He is a U.S. citizen, but he didn't vote in the last election: "Both choices were horrible."

—*Jiayang Fan*

THE PICTURES
HORROR SHOW



The actor Danny McBride looked around the Jekyll & Hyde Club, in the West Village, and said, "This is where the New York bankers do all the big deals, huh?" It was shortly after noon, and the putatively scary horror-themed restaurant—skeletons in top hats, chattering mummies—was empty. "I worked in places like this in Los Angeles," the actor continued, "and I recognize that disgusting stale-beer stink."

A waiter dropped by and delivered a rapid spiel: "There's-going-to-be-a-crazy-guy-walking-around-don't-make-too-much-eye-contact-and-you-should-be-fine." Unconcerned, McBride ordered a Caesar salad with chicken, then suggested that the menu was a missed opportunity: "The names should be more horror-infused, more 'The Creature from the Black Lagoon' Wings." He snickered genially.

In Ridley Scott's new film, "Alien: Covenant," the latest installment of the actually scary horror franchise about aliens who burst from the bellies of spaceship crew members, McBride plays a jaunty Southerner named Tennessee. The forty-year-old actor, who grew up in Virginia, is known for his gallery of overconfident Southern men-children. "The movies were making fun of a 'Hee Haw' South that didn't really exist anymore," he said. Beginning with his irrepressibly cocky Kenny Powers, in the HBO series "Eastbound & Down," which he co-created with Jody Hill and Ben Best, McBride wanted, he said, "to make fun of a South where you could learn an ancient martial art like Tae Kwon Do in a shopping center next to a tanning salon." However, he added, "After 'Eastbound,' every script I would get was, like, 'You're an asshole.' I'd fallen down the asshole well."

A curly-haired man sauntered up and introduced himself as Dr. Ghoul. He wore a lab coat with a rubber hand peeking from its pocket, and he spoke with a vaguely Transylvanian accent.

"We've been waiting for you," McBride said, leaning back expectantly.

Dr. Ghoul grinned and said, "That's a very seductive way of putting it. 'Here, drink this beverage. Don't worry what I put inside of it.' " McBride laughed. Dr. Ghoul asked why he didn't dunk his lemon and lime slices in his club soda. McBride jerked his head toward the kitchen and said, "Those slices sit back there in a dish for days."

"Have you been back there?" Dr. Ghoul asked, sounding less and less mad-scientist-y. "That's *exactly* what it's like." Then he moved on—other diners had trickled in—promising to return in eight and a half minutes.

McBride ate a few bites of his salad, pushed it away, and said, "When I met with Ridley, he said that in 'Alien' films, because these characters rapidly start getting their guts ripped out, he wanted actors who can quickly convey identifiable types. And I thought, Oh, shit, I hope he doesn't want Kenny Powers—because it's Ridley Scott, so I'll have to do it. But he said he saw Tennessee as an homage to the character Slim Pickens played in 'Dr. Strangelove'"—a Southerner, and something of a child, but not an asshole.

Danny McBride

McBride is co-writing the forthcoming reboot of "Halloween," and he said he'd learned that "horror is very similar to comedy, the same mathematics and engineering, except that, instead of punch lines, you're figuring how to place your 'jumps.'" McBride is a member of the Writers Guild, the Directors Guild, and the Actors Guild, and now he hopes to join the Producers Guild. His company is co-producing "Halloween," and, he said, "we're also producing 'Shitheads,' with Tracy Morgan and Luke Wilson." What makes them shitheads? "They're just shitheads, plain and simple."

Dr. Ghoul returned, and McBride chided him for being late. "How do you know?" Dr. Ghoul asked.

"From the length of the shadows coming in the entrance," McBride said.

"Oh, sure, you have a sundial out there."

McBride asked if any other characters would be visiting. "It's just me, 24/7," Dr. Ghoul replied.

"Because what would be hilarious," the actor suggested, "is if every hour Frankenstein walked out, ran into a tray, and knocked over a bunch of drinks."

"So you don't find me sufficiently hilarious?" Dr. Ghoul said. He stalked off in a pretend rage.

"He's gotta be an actor, right?" McBride observed, sympathetically. "Someone told me early on: if you're going to try to make it in Hollywood, take a day job that doesn't make you want to kill yourself. I could do this job, just fucking with people all day. I'd maybe be a Teen Wolf, with boy clothes on but a wolf face. I'd metamorphose, that'd be my thing."

Dr. Ghoul, who indeed turned out to be an actor, named Hunter West, returned again. "So what's on the schedule for you guys?" he asked.

"We're thinking about hitting Planet Hollywood and then the Rainforest Café," McBride said. He stood to go, declaring, "Good work today!" On his way out, he held the door for an entering couple and said, "Welcome to Jekyll &

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Hyde! We hope you enjoy your dining experience!"

"He doesn't work here!" Dr. Ghoul called from the back. "He's barred for life!"

—Tad Friend

DEPT. OF BEAUTIFICATION
HEAVY

The sculptor Joy Brown creates enormous bronze humanoid figures, and, on a recent Monday night, nine of them arrived in the city on flatbed trucks, to be installed on the Upper West Side. The bodies, zaftig and bald, stand as high as eleven feet tall. Each weighs well over a thousand pounds. They're like Teletubbies that grew up, chilled out, lost their headgear, and took up nude sunbathing. New Yorkers would awake to find them encamped on the medians of Broadway, from West Seventy-second Street to 166th, as if giants had stomped into town overnight and found a nice place to rest.

"Tell you what, this got more attention than the Wienermobile," the driver, Mike Jennett, said as he disembarked from his truck at Seventy-second Street, around 10 P.M. "I could've drove here naked and nobody would've noticed."

Four sculptures loomed on the flatbed, wearing tie-down straps. Their facial expressions were serene and inscrutable, suggesting absorption in the spectacle of Gray's Papaya. People out walking their dogs or lugging grocery bags stopped to ask, "What are they?" But mostly the gathering crowd held up cell phones, to document the moment.

A forklift arrived. It trundled over to a piece called "One Leaning on Another," which depicted a seated adult, with a child crawling up its back. The sculpture was raised by its straps and swung gently onto the street. The forklift moved toward the Seventy-second Street subway station, the bronze dangling like a mutant pendant. Traffic stopped as the phone zombies followed.

Brown, a tall woman in her sixties, wearing jeans and Merrells, followed the forklift. She grew up in Japan and apprenticed with a master potter there. She now lives and works in Kent, Connecticut. The pieces begin as small clay models, and Brown oversees their final fabrication in Shanghai. The Broadway Mall Association, a nonprofit that maintains the parklands along the boulevard, had arranged for the exhibition. Deborah Foord, a board member, explained that Brown's pieces were perfect for the sites because they're "big enough to be seen, but too heavy for anyone to walk off with."

Brown's friends and relatives had come to watch the installation. Many were artists from the Kent area, who, once a year, use Brown's anagama kiln. "We all fire with her," Don Mengay, a potter who had taken the train from Beacon, said. "In the pottery world, she's like the Earth Mother to all of us."

The forklift stopped near the south entrance to the subway. "This is a great place for it," Brown said. "It needs a little something." The operator rotated the sculpture to face Sleepy's. Customers exiting Trader Joe's now had a view of two bulbous bare bums. The moment the straps were off, people were all over the figure—cuddling in its lap, stroking its feet. A barefoot woman in a long orange cloak caressed one mammoth calf.

The Seventy-ninth Street mall received "Sitter with Head in Hands," which looks like a big bubble man who sat down to figure out what to do next. An energy consultant, passing by with her dinner date, a corporate attorney, wondered if the figures had anything to do with a sculpture in the Time Warner Center, at Columbus Circle, whose exposed penis passersby rub for luck. The answer was no. Brown's pieces are penisless. Before walking off, the woman's date said, "Homeless guys will be peeing on that in no time."

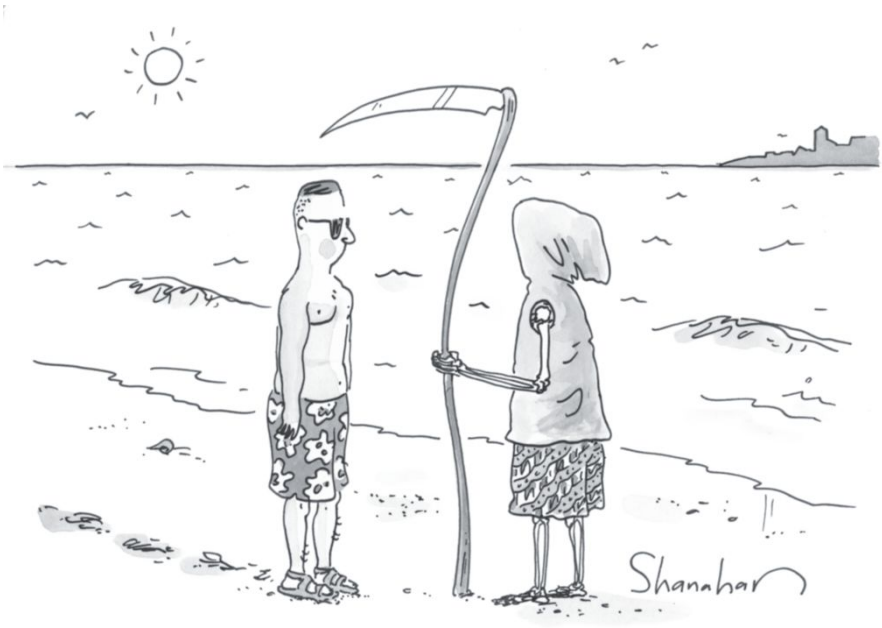
A fellow wearing headphones and a heavy cross pendant spotted the figure and crossed the street hollering, "Yes! Yes!" He stopped at the median and, sensing an audience, waved his cigarette, addressing the phone cameras: "When do you tape art? When do you film it? When do you capture it? *Is* it art? Is *everything* art?" He winked and moved on.

The sculpture rested on a steel base, but something about the dimensions felt wrong. When someone suggested setting the figure flush by the curb, Foord said, "No. Then we'd lose some of the butt crack." A bigger concern involved tripping. The base stayed.

The group caravanned north, to Ninety-sixth Street. A lone passerby stopped to watch the crew unload "One Holding Small One," which suggested a parent cradling a toddler. "Is this forever?" he asked. Until November, he was told.

By then, it was after one in the morning. As the forklift advanced, Brown's sister, Carol, looked at the yews bordering the plaza and said, "Stick it in the bushes, like Sean Spicer."

—Paige Williams



"And then I thought, Why not live a little?"

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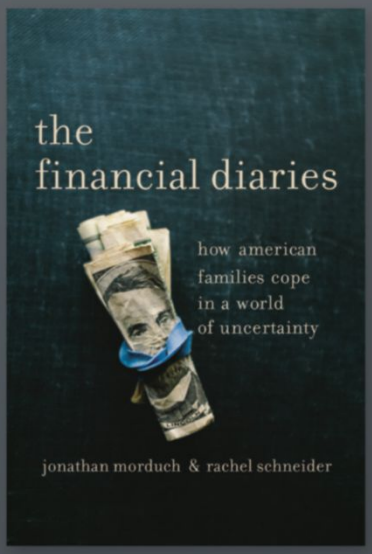

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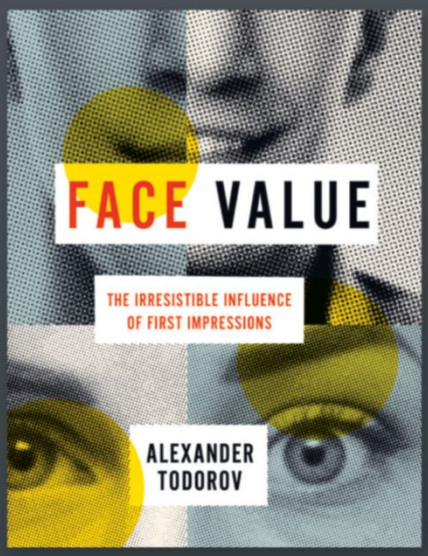

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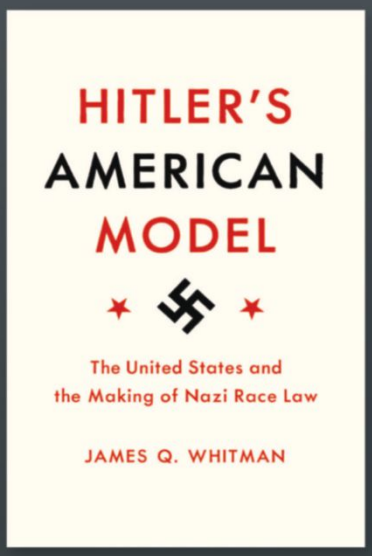

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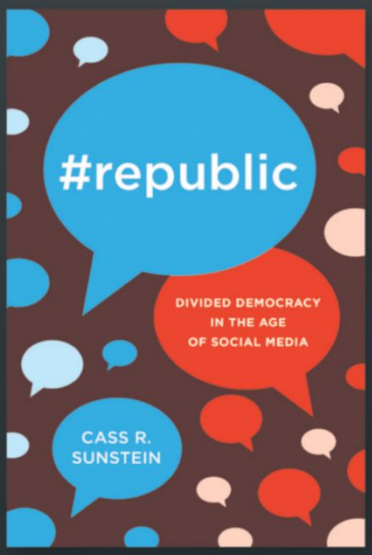

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THE FINANCIAL PAGE

NO MORE MR. NICE GUY

In December, 2015, a new startup called Juno entered the ride-hailing market in New York City with a simple proposition: it was going to treat its drivers better than its competitors, notably Uber, did theirs—and do "something that was socially responsible," as one of Juno's co-founders, Talmon Marco, told me last fall. In practice, that meant drivers would keep a bigger part of their fares and be eligible for a form of stock ownership in the company. But, on April 26th, when an Israeli company named Gett announced that it was buying Juno for two hundred million dollars, that changed. The merged company is dropping the restricted stock plan for drivers, and those who already hold stock are being offered small cash payments, reportedly in the hundred-dollar range, in exchange.

Juno's founders had adopted the language of a doing-well-by-doing-good philosophy that has spread in the business world in recent years. Some call it conscious or socially responsible capitalism, but the basic idea is that any business has multiple stakeholders—not just owners but employees, consumers, and also the community—and each of their interests should be taken into account. The idea arose in response to an even more powerful principle: the primacy of investor rights. In a new book, "The Golden Passport," the journalist Duff McDonald lays much of the blame for that thinking at the feet of a Harvard Business School professor named Michael Jensen, whose "agency theory," developed in the nineteen-eighties, sought to align the interests of managers with those of the company's investors. (Gordon Gekko spoke eloquently on its behalf in the movie "Wall Street.") This alignment led to huge stock-option pay packages for top corporate managers and, McDonald argues, provided an intellectual framework that justifies doing anything (within the law) to increase a company's stock price, whether that be firing workers or polluting the environment.

In this philosophical tension, the investors-above-all doctrine seems to have triumphed over the more inclusive approach. "I think what's recent is maybe being so completely blatant about it," Peter Cappelli, a professor and labor economist at Wharton, said. When American Airlines agreed to give raises to its pilots and flight attendants in April, analysts at a handful of investment banks reacted bitterly. "This is frustrating," a Citigroup analyst named Kevin Crissey wrote in a note that was sent to the bank's clients. "Labor is being paid first again. Shareholders get leftovers." Jamie Baker, of JPMorgan, also chimed in: "We are troubled by AAL's wealth transfer of nearly $1 billion to its labor groups."

Those comments were mocked online, but similar sentiments are everywhere in the financial establishment. Both Costco and Whole Foods—whose C.E.O., John Mackey, wrote the book "Conscious Capitalism"—have been criticized by Wall Street investors and analysts for years for, among other things, their habit of paying workers above the bare minimum. Paul Polman, who, as C.E.O. of the Anglo-Dutch conglomerate Unilever, has made reducing the company's carbon footprint a priority, recently fought off a takeover bid from Kraft Heinz, which is known for its ruthless cost-cutting.

Newer platform companies have also encountered the phenomenon. An app called Maple, which made the nearly unheard-of decision to offer health benefits and employee status to its food-delivery people, folded in recent months. Etsy, which allows craftspeople to sell their goods online, and which became known for its employee perks, has lost most of its stock-market value since it went public, in 2015; hedge-fund investors have been pushing the company to reduce its costs and to lay off employees. In the case of Juno, according to a person familiar with its operations, the founders sold the company and agreed to cut its driver stock awards because they couldn't find new investors to finance its growth. "They were stuck from an expansion perspective, and this was what had to give," I was told. "It came with some huge compromises."

Many factors contributed to the troubles of these companies, but Cappelli notes how "vociferously the investment community seems to object to being nice to employees. It's a reminder that, in the corporate world, things are constantly yielding to the finance guys—whether they know what they're doing or not."

This fixation on short-term stock gains is inherently unstable, Cappelli said. "The interesting thing is always to ask them, 'What's the value proposition for employees? Why should these people work only for the interest of the shareholders? How are you going to get people to work hard?'" He went on, "I don't think they have an answer."

When I called a Juno driver named Salin Sarder to ask about the latest developments, he was surprised to learn that the Juno stock-grant program had been cancelled, and blamed his ignorance on the fact that he hadn't checked his e-mail. (The company has not made a public statement and did not respond to my inquiries.) He was, on the other hand, pleased to learn that the new Juno-Gett would be honoring the favorable commission rate Juno had been offering, at least for a few months. He also had a few thoughts about the app-economy business model favored by Silicon Valley investors. "If you are a millionaire and all around you is poor, you have no safety," Sarder, who comes from Bangladesh, said. "Happiness is there when everyone has happiness."

—*Sheelah Kolhatkar*

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LIFE AND LETTERS

I HAVE FALLEN IN LOVE WITH AMERICAN NAMES

Shaping a writer.

BY PHILIP ROTH

The author (front), at age ten, with his family, in Newark, New Jersey, in 1943.

COURTESY THE AUTHOR

The writers who shaped my sense of my country were mostly born in America some thirty to sixty years before me, around the time that millions of the impoverished were leaving the Old World for the New and the tenement slums of our cities were filling up with, among others, Yiddish-speaking immigrants from Russia and Eastern Europe. These writers knew little about the families of youngsters like myself, a rather typical American grandchild of four of those poor nineteenth-century Jewish immigrants, whose children, my parents, grew up in a country that they felt entirely a part of and toward which they harbored a deep devotion—a replica of the Declaration of Independence hung framed in our hallway. Born in New Jersey at the start of the twentieth century, my mother and father were happily at home in America, even though they had no delusions and knew themselves to be socially stigmatized and regarded as repellent alien outsiders by any number of their anointed betters, and even though they came to maturity in an America that, until the decades following the Second World War, systematically excluded Jews from much of its institutional and corporate life.

The writers who shaped and expanded my sense of America were mainly small-town Midwesterners and Southerners. None were Jews. What had shaped them was not the mass immigration of 1880-1910, which had severed my family from the Old Country constraints of a ghetto existence and the surveillance of religious orthodoxy and the threat of anti-Semitic violence, but the overtaking of the farm and the farmer's indigenous village values by the pervasive business culture and its profit-oriented pursuits. These were writers shaped by the industrialization of agrarian America, which caught fire in the eighteen-seventies and which, by providing jobs for that horde of cheap unskilled immigrants, expedited the immigrant absorption into society and the Americanization, largely by way of the public-school system, of the immigrant offspring. They were shaped by the transforming power of the industrialized cities—by the hardships of the urban working poor that were inspiring the union movement—as much as by the acquisitive energy of the omnivorous capitalists and their trusts and monopolies and their union busting. They were made, in short, by the force that has been at the heart of the national experience since the country's inception, and that drives the national legend still: relentless, destabilizing change and the bewildering conditions that come in its wake—change on the American scale and at the American speed. Radical impermanence as an enduring tradition.

What attracted me to these writers when I was a raw reader of sixteen, seventeen, and eighteen—I am thinking of, among others, Theodore Dreiser, born in Indiana in 1871, Sherwood Anderson, born in Ohio in 1876, Ring Lardner, born in Michigan in 1885, Sinclair Lewis, born in Minnesota in 1885, Thomas Wolfe, born in North Carolina in 1900, Erskine Caldwell, born in Georgia in 1903—what drew me to them was my great ignorance of the thousands of miles of America that extended north, south, and west of Newark, New Jersey, where I was raised. Yes, I had been born to these parents, in this time, with their struggles, but I would volunteer to become the child of those writers as well, and through my immersion in their fiction try to apprehend their American places as a second reality that was, to an American kid in a Jewish neighborhood in industrial Newark, a vivifying expansion of his own. Through my reading, the mytho-historical conception of my country that I had developed in grade school, from 1938 to 1946, began to be divested of its grandiosity and to unravel into the individual threads of American reality the wartime tapestry that paid moving homage to the country's idealized self-image.

Fascination with the country's uniqueness was especially strong in the years after the Second World War, when, as a high-school student, I began to turn to the open stacks of the Newark Public Library to enlarge my sense of where I lived. Despite the tension, even the

ferocity, of antagonisms of class, race, region, and religion that underlay the national life, despite the conflict between labor and capital that accompanied industrial development—the battle over wages and hours that was ongoing and at times violent, even during the war—America from 1941 to 1945 had been unified in purpose as never before. Later, a collective sense of America as the center of the most spectacular of the postwar world's unfolding dramas was born not just out of chauvinistic triumphalism but out of a realistic appraisal of the undertaking behind the victory of 1945, a feat of human sacrifice, physical effort, industrial planning, managerial genius, and labor and military mobilization—a marshalling of communal morale that would have seemed unattainable during the Great Depression of the previous decade.

That this was so highly charged a historical moment in America was not without its impact on what I was reading and why, and it accounted for a good deal of the authority those formative writers had over me. Reading them served to confirm what the gigantic enterprise of a brutal war against two formidable enemies had dramatized daily for almost four years to virtually every Jewish family mine knew and every Jewish friend I had: one's American connection overrode everything, one's American claim was beyond question. Everything had repositioned itself. There had been a great disturbance to the old rules. One was ready now as never before to stand up to intimidation and intolerance, and, instead of just bearing what one formerly put up with, one was equipped to set foot wherever one chose. The American adventure was one's engulfing fate.

The country's biggest, best-known city lay twelve miles east of my street in Newark. You had only to cross two rivers and an expansive salt marsh by bridge, then a third broad river, the Hudson, via a tunnel, to leave New Jersey and reach what was then the most populous city on Earth. But because of its magnitude—and perhaps because of its proximity—New York City was not the focus of my youthful brand of postwar nativist romanticism.

In the 1927 poem whose famous final six words are "Bury my heart at Wounded Knee," Stephen Vincent Benét had spoken as much for a Roosevelt-reared Jewish boy like me as for a wellborn Yale graduate like himself with the poem's guilelessly Whitmanesque opening line: "I have fallen in love with American names." It was precisely in the sounding of the names of the country's distant places, in its spaciousness, in the dialects and the landscapes that were at once so American yet so unlike my own that a youngster with my susceptibilities found the most potent lyrical appeal. That was the heart of the fascination: as an American, one was a wisecracking, slang-speaking, in-the-know street kid of an unknowable colossus. Only locally could I be a savvy cosmopolite; out in the vastness of the country, adrift and at large, every American was a hick, with the undisguisable emotions of a hick, as defenseless as even a sophisticated littérateur like Benét was against the pleasurable sort of sentiment aroused by the mere mention of Spartanburg, Santa Cruz, or the Nantucket Light, as well as unassuming Skunktown Plain, or Lost Mule Flat, or the titillatingly named Little French Lick. There was the shaping paradox: our innate provincialism made us Americans, unhyphenated at that, in no need of an adjective, suspicious of any adjective that would narrow the implications of the imposingly all-inclusive noun that was—if only because of the galvanizing magnum opus called the Second World War—our birthright.

A Newark Jew? Call me that and I wouldn't object. A product of the lower-middle-class Jewish section of industrial Newark, with its mixture of self-characterizing energies and social uncertainties, with its determined, optimistic assessment of its children's chances, with its wary take on its non-Jewish neighbors, the progeny of this contiguous prewar Jewish community rather than of Newark's prewar Irish, Slavic, Italian, or black sections . . . sure, "Newark Jew" describes well enough someone who grew up, as I did, in the city's southwest corner, the Weequahic neighborhood, in the nineteen-thirties and forties. Being a Newark Jew in a largely working-class city where political leverage accrued through ethnic pressure, where both historical fact and folkloric superstition sustained a steady undercurrent of xenophobic antipathy in each ethnic precinct, where the apportionment of jobs and vocations often divided along religious and racial lines—all this contributed enormously to a child's self-definition, his sense of specialness, and his way of thinking about his discrete community in the local scheme of things. What's more, attuning my senses to the customs peculiar to each city neighborhood had to have alerted me early on to the perpetual clash of interests that propels a society and that sooner or later would provoke in the incipient novelist the mimetic urge. Newark was my sensory key to all the rest.

A Newark Jew—why not? But an American Jew? A Jewish American? For my generation of native-born—whose omnipresent childhood spectacle was the U.S.A.'s shifting fortunes in a prolonged global war against totalitarian evil and who came of age and matured, as high-school and college students, during the remarkable makeover of the postwar decade and the alarming onset of the Cold War—for us no such self-limiting label could ever seem commensurate with our experience of growing up altogether consciously as Americans, with all that that means, for good and for ill. After all, one is not always in raptures over this country and its prowess at nurturing, in its own distinctive manner, unsurpassable callousness, matchless greed, small-minded sectarianism, and a gruesome infatuation with firearms. The list of the country at its most malign could go on, but my point is this: I have never conceived of myself for the length of a single sentence as an American Jewish or Jewish American writer, any more than I imagine Dreiser and Hemingway and Cheever thought of themselves while at work as American Christian or Christian American or just plain Christian writers. As a novelist, I think of myself, and have from the beginning, as a free American and—though I am hardly unaware of the general prejudice that persisted here against my kind till not that long ago—as irrefutably American, fastened throughout my life to the American moment, under the spell of the country's past, partaking of its drama and destiny, and writing in the rich native tongue by which I am possessed. ♦

(Adapted from an acceptance speech for the National Book Foundation's Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters, delivered on November 20, 2002.)

FICTION

CLEAN, CLEANER, CLEANEST

BY SHERMAN ALEXIE

The used condoms stopped bothering Marie after a while. At least the people were being safe during their motel sex. She was Catholic and didn't believe in abortion. But she was more flexibly Catholic than strictly Catholic, so she did believe in birth control—pills, devices, procedures. That's good science, she thought. And God created everything, including science. One of God's other names is Big Bang. Sometimes, when she prayed, she said "Dear Big Bang," and she was half certain that God enjoyed the inside joke. Nobody was allowed to be fully certain about God. And she'd never trusted anybody who claimed to be certain about God. You cannot be confident and faithful at the same time, she thought.

Marie's fear of used hypodermics had lessened over the years. She got needle-stuck once when she was pulling off a pillowcase. The next day, she went to the free clinic and got tested for H.I.V. For days, Marie prayed. Then her prayer received a response: negative is sometimes a good thing. She rarely saw a needle after crack and crystal meth became more popular and cheaper than any other drug. You could shoot up meth, but it seemed that most people snorted it. Or smoked it. And accidentally started fires in small motel rooms. But the needles were starting to reappear. She felt sorry for those addicts—for any addicts. They ended up looking like starving ravens. Like scarecrows after a brush fire. Like the babies born when starved ravens conceived with burned scarecrows.

After so many years, Marie didn't even mind cleaning up people's feces and urine. She had discovered that it was vital to say "feces" and "urine" instead of using cruder terms for the messes that people left in the toilet. Or on the toilet. Or in the general vicinity of the toilet. Or sometimes not even in the bathroom at all. "Feces" and "urine" were medical terms. She was a motel maid, but it helped to think like a doctor or a nurse. It helped to think that she was *helping* other people.

On a Tuesday morning, she knocked on the door of Room 213. A corner room. Larger than standard. With two big windows instead of one. Twenty dollars more a night. The guest had been there for a few nights and was supposed to check out by eleven. She knocked again.

"Housekeeping," she said. Then she said it louder: "Housekeeping."

There was no response, so she passkeyed the door, pushed it open, and took a step back. That was a learned self-defense behavior. You didn't enter the room until you had a clear idea of what was waiting for you. On TV, the cops acted the same way when they opened strange doors.

Check your corners, the TV cops always said to one another.

"Housekeeping," Marie said again. There was no echo. The rooms were too small for echoes.

There was nobody in the living area. Nobody in the unmade bed. Nobody sat in the little wooden chairs at the wooden table. Nobody was squeezed into the doorless closet. But the bathroom door was shut, so there

PHOTOGRAPH BY CARLOS JAVIER ORTIZ

could be somebody in there. She listened for the sound of the shower or the toilet or the sink.

A few years earlier, in Room 122, a naked guest had walked out of the bathroom as she was making the bed. They'd both yelped in surprise. And then she'd laughed and laughed, because he had the biggest penis she had ever seen. She couldn't stop laughing as she fled the room and hurried to the main office.

Blushing, she'd told the front-desk clerk, Evie, what had happened. Evie had been a maid for years before she got promoted.

"How big *was* it?" Evie had asked.

"I don't know," Marie had said. She knew she'd have to tell her priest, Father James, about that moment. She hadn't sinned, not really, because she hadn't wanted to do anything with that penis except laugh at its absurdity. But she'd wanted Father James to absolve her if she needed absolving.

"About fifteen years ago," Evie had said, "I walked in on a guy with a huge one. It looked like a skateboard with two wheels missing."

"Oh, Evie," Marie had said. "You've got the Devil in you."

"That I do," Evie had agreed.

As she stood in the doorway of Room 213, Marie laughed at the memory. She missed Evie, who had quit one day and said she was moving to Arizona. She'd sent a postcard from Reno that said, "Halfway there!" But there'd been no word from her since. Marie kept that postcard in her purse. She saw it whenever she reached for her wallet or her keys.

"Housekeeping," Marie said for the fourth time. No response. So she knew there was nobody in the room. The guest was gone. He was a clean one. Almost all the garbage was in the wastebaskets. The toilet was flushed. The sink had been wiped down. The used wet towels were piled in the shower instead of tossed onto the floor. A one-dollar bill, folded into an origami crane, had been left on top of the TV. A small gratuity. There were no human or animal body fluids splashed on the floors, walls, or ceiling. None that were obvious, anyway.

But the guest had left takeout food in a Styrofoam container on the wooden table. A mostly eaten hamburger and fries.

More than anything, Marie hated to clean up food. That's why she had never worked at a restaurant. It's why she rarely ate at restaurants. A table full of greasy dishes and half-empty water glasses and coffee cups made her nauseated. In particular, she hated the smell of old cooked onions.

Dear Big Bang, she'd thought more than once, if I am going to Hell, then I hope Hell doesn't smell like old onions.

In her Bible-study group, she'd referred to Satan as Old Onions so much that some of her fellow-parishioners had started doing the same. She'd even heard Father James say it once or twice.

Old Onions. She hated Old Onions.

But she needed her job. She believed in her job. So she picked up the Styrofoam container, held her breath against the smell of the onions, and tossed it into the garbage bag hanging off the side of her cart, then sprayed disinfectant into the bag to kill some of the odor.

And then she cleaned the room.

First, she picked up the dirty towels and shoved them into the laundry bag hanging from her cart. She draped clean towels over the thin metal rod. The towels had been washed, yes, but they were so old and threadbare that they'd forgotten how to be towels. Those towels had dementia. And that thin metal rod had been pulled out of the wall so often by clumsy guests that it barely supported the weight of the towels. But no matter—she still draped the towels with an eye-pleasing symmetry. Then she sprayed minty soap into the sink and the shower, did a quick wipe with her hand towel, and ran hot water to wash the soap down the drain. She sprayed the toilet bowl, flushed, and repeated the process. She didn't have to scrub at any stains because of the departed guest's good manners. She knew she'd only cleaned the surface of things, but the soap's strong minty smell would make it seem as if she'd cleaned more thoroughly.

The illusion of clean.

She'd once used that phrase when she'd been talking to Father James about her job, and he'd said that the phrase accurately described humans as well.

After she was done with the bathroom, she quickly dusted the small chest of drawers, TV, two nightstands, two lamps, and chairs and table, plus the chandelier hanging over the table.

That chandelier was only a paper-covered light bulb hanging on an electrical cord. But saying "chandelier" was almost like saying "feces" and "urine."

Then she dragged in the vacuum and quickly ran it over the carpet. A while back, she'd convinced the motel's owner, Naseem, to put the beds on wooden platforms. It was expensive, she knew, but it would save time and money for Naseem because the maids wouldn't have to vacuum under the beds. And it would save the maids from the inevitable horrors they found beneath those beds.

It took her only fifteen minutes to clean that room.

That was good, because a mother and father with four kids had checked out of Room 144. The youngest kid, a toddler in a polo shirt, had taken off his pants and underwear—had gone full Porky Pig—then squatted and pushed out a public feces on the sidewalk in front of the soda machine. So Marie was deathly afraid of what that family might have done in the privacy of their room. She dreaded the marathon of cleaning that likely awaited her.

In the beginning, there was Marie, Agnes, Rosa, and the other Rosa. Agnes was a drunk. She got fired for stealing from the guests. Rosa No. 1 married her high-school sweetheart and moved away; Rosa No. 2 was undocumented and quit after she heard rumors about an immigration sweep of local businesses. The sweep didn't happen. Not that time.

Then there was Olga, who'd come from Russia to marry an American. He'd claimed to be a millionaire, but it turned out he'd had only enough money to pay for Olga's visa and her plane tickets. She'd married him anyway, because she believed that American lies were a little better than Russian lies. But she had to take a job, any job, to help with expenses. She got pregnant. They couldn't afford to pay rent and take care of a baby, so they moved to Oregon to live with his parents.

Then there was Evie, who worked hard, was Marie's friend for many

ON THE JOB BY JENNIFER EGAN

THE DINNER PARTY

One February day in 1988, I emerged from the subway on Lexington Avenue to find that East Sixty-eighth Street, where I'd recently begun working as a private secretary to a countess, was overrun by fire trucks and acrid with the stench of smoke. "The street is closed," a fireman told me, as I tried to enter the block. Then, among the retracting ladders and dripping cornices, I noticed a head thrust from the window of a grand prewar apartment house. A guttural voice reached the fireman and me: "Let her through! That's my secretary!"

I was twenty-five, and had moved to New York the previous fall in the hope of becoming a writer. By the time I found my way to the countess, I had already cycled through enough temporary jobs to know how lucky I was to land part-time work that kept me in frozen yogurt and paid the rent on my fifth-floor studio walkup.

Being a private secretary to the countess meant, in some sense, becoming her. At 1 P.M. each weekday, I lost track of my own life when I stepped into her tiny marble foyer, its table laden with embossed invitations from displaced European royalty. The foyer opened onto a living room, a dining room, and a parlor with sponge-marbled walls and tables smothered with brocade and studded with curios. Through a narrow door, the finery gave way abruptly to a rudimentary kitchen and a wisp of a bedroom, hardly large enough to hold the twin bed where the countess slept. She was newly widowed, an American-born writer of what she charmingly called "faction": embellished tales of her experiences as an agent for the O.S.S. during the Second World War and, later, for the C.I.A. A striking beauty with an earthy, straightforward manner, she had married a Spanish count and spent most of her adulthood in Spain, numbering among her friends the Baron Guy de Rothschild, Salvador Dali, the Duchess of Windsor, and Jacqueline Onassis.

Becoming the countess was not as difficult for me as you might think. Both of us were tall and slender, raised as Catholics, and febrile with nervous energy (in her mid-sixties, she attended a daily ninety-minute aerobics class). Years of living as a grandee had encouraged in the countess an imperious short-temperedness that I recognized, chillingly, as evidence of a volcanic impatience, which we also shared. My handwriting resembled hers, and this helped me to forge her signature in copies of her first book—a surprise best-seller that had brought her fame and a hefty contract for two more volumes. I answered her fan mail, carrying on prolonged correspondences in her name—and, I liked to think, her voice. I handwrote invitations to the small dinners she held at her apartment and tallied replies from other private secretaries whose telephone voices I came to recognize. Most thrilling were my occasional private encounters with eminences she knew: delivering a book to Lady (Slim) Keith, grouchy and bedridden by then; telephoning Harold Brodkey (whom the countess thought handsome and once invited to dinner) and having him answer breathlessly, with no idea who was calling, "Is it you?"

On the day of the fire, the countess had planned a dinner in honor of Nancy Reagan, then the First Lady and a close friend. Several others in their circle, including Mike Wallace, Malcolm Forbes, and Betsy Bloomingdale, were expected. The fire, although it had been in the basement, had left the whole building without power. The countess's walls and upholstery reeked of smoke, and opening the windows only filled the rooms with chilly wind. Some hostesses might have cancelled a dinner party under such conditions, but not the countess. I spent several hours trying to vanquish obstacles and reassure the Secret Service, whose agents telephoned with rising concern. I called the office of Donald Trump, another guest, to inquire about borrowing a generator.

Although the countess told me often how much she liked and admired me, I was unmistakably a servant. In this I resembled Fernando, one in

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

a series of butlers she brought from Spain to serve her meals, his grave, mustachioed face worthy of a painting by Velázquez. And, like Fernando, I was subject to the countess's lacerating critiques. Garlic, which I loved, was "low class" and, according to her, oozed from my pores for days after I ate it. The "miserable" bouquet of flowers I bought for one of her house guests with the small funds she'd given me for the purchase provoked a paroxysm of rage that left me in tears. My cowboy boots were coarse; I hid my figure in unflattering clothes. My spelling was atrocious. And so on. I had a morbid dread of her anger, but my willingness to absorb it was essential to our symbiosis.

I've forgotten how the countess persuaded the Secret Service that her building was safe for the First Lady to dine in. I've forgotten how the dinner was cooked. I know that it was served by candlelight, which created a singular intimacy. A near-disaster involving an errant flame and a feathered cuff only added a frisson to the evening.

I witnessed none of this. To the countess's ire and bafflement, I refused her request that I stay through the evening to help with coats and the dinner service, citing unbreakable plans. Now, almost thirty years later, I'm more incensed than she was: what, in my rudimentary life, could have been more interesting than the spectacle of that dinner party? I can't recall. All I remember is my visceral wish to escape—a feeling I had often during my more than two years as her private secretary, until an N.E.A. grant finally allowed me to quit. Before the guests began to make their tentative way up the countess's dank service stairs, I slipped out in my worn cowboy boots and resumed being myself. ♦

years, and vanished over the horizon.

There was a black woman and a white woman, their names lost to time, who started on the same day and both quit immediately after walking into a room and finding a dead bull snake sliced into thick pieces and arranged in weird patterns on the carpet.

There'd been five animal sacrifices in the motel over the years.

Seven people had died at the motel. Four from heart attacks, two from overdoses, and one when a woman drunkenly fell over the second-floor railing and landed head first on somebody else's minivan.

There had been ten or twelve or fifteen or twenty-three college students who'd worked there over the years. Most of them lasted only a few weeks. Some lasted a few months, and then quit the job and school at the same time, and walked away into sad lives. But two girls, Karen and Christine, kept working while they earned their bachelor's degrees—Karen in 1991 and Christine in 2000—and then moved on to better jobs in better cities. Marie had attended both of their graduation ceremonies. She never saw Karen again, but she'd bumped into Christine—home for Christmas with her parents—in the local mall one day, and they'd had a long visit over coffee. Christine had married a man, divorced him, and then married a woman named Ariel.

"She's my soul mate," Christine said.

Marie was somewhat uncomfortable with Christine's new lesbian life. But she shrugged it off and congratulated her old friend. Marie believed that her own sins were exactly the same as everybody else's sins.

One of the maids was a man. Hector. He sang loudly and cleaned the rooms more slowly than any maid ever. He lasted for six years, then called one morning and quit without warning.

But at least he called.

Over the years, thirty or forty women had quit without saying a word. Many of them never bothered to return their maid uniforms or pick up their last paychecks. Marie feared that some of those women might have been disappeared by the men in their lives. But most of them just didn't care about being responsible. Some of those women were as nocturnal and untrustworthy as rats. Marie had been slapped, punched, kicked, and bitten by former maids. Her purse had been stolen three times. And her car stolen once.

One of the crazier maids had robbed Naseem at gunpoint. She went to prison for four years.

One of the saddest maids had been assaulted and strangled by a serial killer. He was caught after thirty years of killing poor women and led police to undiscovered bodies so they wouldn't lethally inject him.

There were drug addicts and alcoholics and women who dowsed their cleaning rags with disinfectant and huffed those poisonous and intoxicating fumes into their lungs.

There were illegal and legal immigrants, though Marie didn't care about their status. Every refugee is a precious child, she thought.

There were maids of every race. Of every color. Of every religion.

At least a dozen women, Muslims, had worn head scarves while they worked.

Marie suspected that one maid, an Italian woman who had to be taught how to use a vacuum, was in the federal witness-protection program.

There were women who cried often but would never explain their tears.

There were women who never stopped talking about their aches and pains.

Over the decades, Marie had worked with two or three hundred women. She'd liked half of them, had hated at least fifty of them, and had truly loved maybe a dozen.

And then there was Evie, the most beloved, who had transubstantiated into a postcard from Reno. How does a friend, maybe your best friend, leave you like that?

"Father James," Marie had once confessed, "God is mysterious, sure, but sometimes I feel like people are even more mysterious."

During her second year at the motel, Marie had fallen in love with the owner's son, Amir, who was only twenty. He was Pakistani, and knew how to fix any machine.

Marie was fascinated by the thick

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Rembrandt, *Abraham Entertaining the Angels* (detail), 1646, oil on oak panel, 6 3/8 x 8 3/8 inches, private collection; photo courtesy The Metropolitan Museum of Art

black hair on the back of Amir's hands and fingers. One day, as they ate lunch together in the supply room, she impulsively reached out with both of her hands and softly stroked the hair on his.

They sneaked into Room 179, the only one whose door was not visible from the main office, and therefore the room that was rented out the least, and they kissed for a few heated minutes.

He tried to push her onto the bed. But she shook her head.

"I'm so sorry," Amir said, and backed toward the door. "I am sorry I kissed you. I am sorry if I have offended you. And your husband."

Amir was a kind man, so he remained kind even as he was being rejected. But she had not been clear about her reason for saying no, and he had misinterpreted her denial.

"It's O.K., it's O.K.," she said. "I meant I don't want to mess up the bed."

So she grabbed a towel from the bathroom and put it on a wooden chair. Then she quickly took off all her clothes. She had never been that bold. She'd had sex with three men in her life, but never in a bright room in the middle of the day. And she'd never stood so naked and exposed in front of any man, let alone one who was still fully dressed.

"Please," she said. "Take off your clothes and sit on the towel. On the chair."

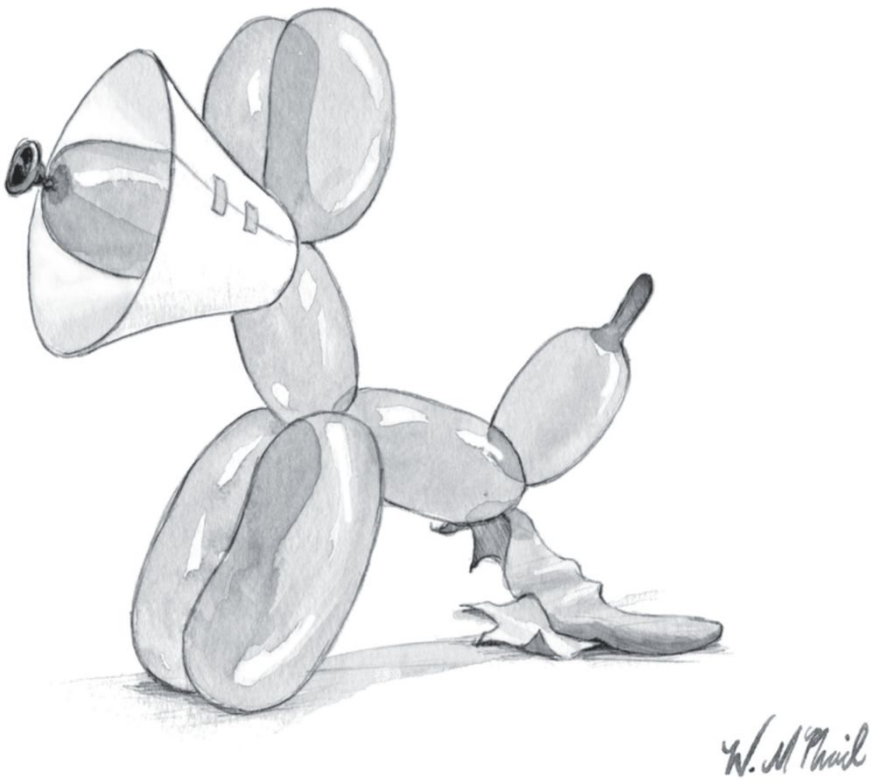
He did as he was told. He sat and she straddled him.

They met like that for six consecutive days. Then Marie had her day off. When she returned to work, she learned that Amir had suddenly travelled back to Pakistan to live with his father's parents. She was relieved.

"This is unexpected," Naseem said. "My son's mother, she is a white American like you. We divorced after Amir was born. But she has always been good to me. And him. I thought Amir only wanted to be American. I am very sad that he left."

Marie worried that Naseem knew she'd been having sex with his son. But he probably didn't. After all, Amir was a very handsome man who'd always dated young and pretty brown women—Pakistanis, and also Muslims from other countries, and Asian and African women, too. Even a few Mexican girls, including other maids. But Marie was ten years older than Amir. And she was white and plain.

Later, when she'd finally confessed



to Father James, he'd surmised that Amir had undertaken a religious journey.

"I think he was living completely inside his body," Father James said. "And now he wants to live inside his spirit."

"Amir and I committed adultery," Marie said. "Can I be forgiven?"

"Yes," Father James said.

So Marie performed her Act of Contrition. She received penance. She was pardoned and thus learned the amount of love required to pardon others. She nearly forgave herself and hoped that Amir had completely forgiven himself.

But Marie never told any of this to her husband, even though she'd promised Father James that she would admit to her betrayal.

Eventually, her silent guilt became flesh and blood and transformed into a new organ inside her body. At first, it caused her great and constant pain. But after fifteen years her pain had become as present but unnoticeable as her kidneys and her liver. And then, after Naseem had sold the motel and also moved back to Pakistan, her pain became vestigial.

The new owner kept Marie on as a maid. And she was never again unfaithful. But she had never congratulated herself on being her better self for all those years. She believed that she didn't deserve her own grace.

Marie's knees and ankles hurt because she had so often squatted and kneeled to clean the floors.

Her feet hurt because she stood for most of the day. And she'd never owned a good pair of work shoes. She'd always promised herself that she would buy a better pair of shoes with the next paycheck.

But "with the next paycheck" was like saying "Dear Big Bang."

Her lower back hurt because of all the times she had carried the vacuum and heavy bags of clean and dirty towels, and had thrown garbage and recycling and compost into the dumpsters in the alley behind the motel.

One day, she'd twisted her back so severely that she'd collapsed in pain on the sidewalk.

At the free clinic, she learned that "back spasms" was the fancy way to say "torn muscles."

Once or twice a year since then, she'd torn her back again. But she'd missed only a few days of work because of her bad back. She'd spend one day in bed, recovering, and then she'd force herself back to cleaning, because she'd read that an injured back heals best during activity.

She'd slowly gained weight, three or four pounds a year. Not much, until you add it all up one morning and discover that you're a two-hundred-pound woman.

Getting obese overnight, she thought. That's the great American magic trick.

The extra weight didn't help her back. She went on dozens of diets. She failed. That was O.K. She didn't look any bigger than most of the women and men she saw every day. She belonged.

Her hands hurt.

Arthritis.

Carpal-tunnel syndrome.

And the recurring rashes caused by the soaps and disinfectants and window cleaners.

Her skin itched and burned.

She tried wearing gloves at work, but that only made her rashes migrate from her hands to her wrists, forearms, and elbows.

Some mornings, she woke with hands so stiff that she could not make fists. She could not hold her coffee cup or toothbrush. She'd submerge her hands in hot water and flex and flex and flex until her fingers worked properly again.

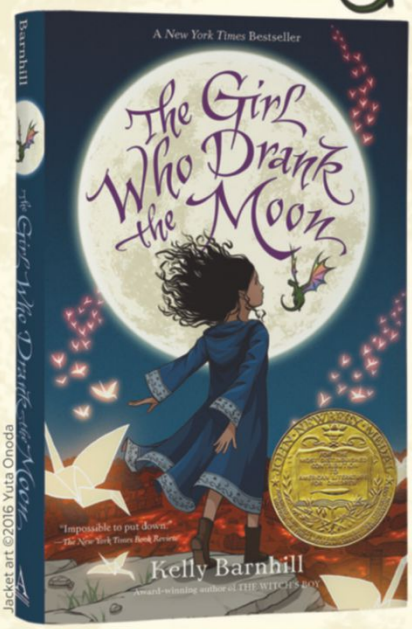
"It's hard work," she'd said to Father James. "But it's not like working in a coal mine."

"Maybe it is," he'd said.

One slow day, as she filled in for the new owner at the front desk, Marie used the motel computer to search for Evie.

She typed in Evie's full name and "Reno, Nevada" and found nothing. She added the words "missing" and "obituary" and "death" and found nothing. Then she typed in

SUMMER'S MOST ENCHANTING READ



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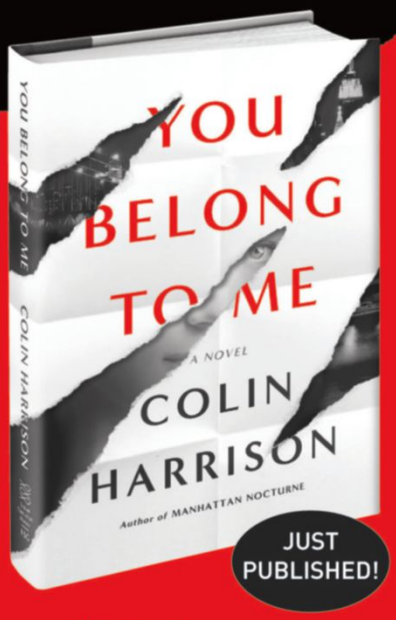

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Evie's name and "housekeeper" and "Arizona."

And there she was, smiling in an employee photo. She worked at a retirement home in Flagstaff.

It had been quite a few years, but Evie still looked exactly like Evie.

"You're alive," Marie said to Evie's photo.

Below Evie's photo was an e-mail address and a phone number.

"I could call you right now," Marie said to the photo.

Marie thought about distance and time. She remembered reading once that Cleopatra had lived closer in time to the building of the first Pizza Hut than to the building of the Great Pyramid of Giza.

Everything is temporary, Marie thought.

Then she wiped tears from her eyes, closed the browser window containing Evie's photo, and turned to greet the new guests who'd walked into the motel office.

On her last day of work, at age sixty-three, Marie was given a peculiar honor.

"You only have to clean one room," the new owner said. Marie still thought of him as the new owner eleven years after Naseem had sold the motel.

"But I want the last full shift," she said. Why? Because she needed that sense of completion. Because she wanted to use that last bit of money to buy herself a retirement gift. A new watch, perhaps, now that she didn't have to worry about ruining it with soap or water or cleaning fluids.

"I'll pay you full shift for cleaning one room," the owner said. "That is my gift to you."

So she took her time. Rummaged through the clean towels and sheets to find the newest and cleanest.

She scrubbed the toilet, sink, and shower with bleach. And then she picked a few wildflowers from a sidewalk crack, placed them in a plastic cup half filled with water, and set that on the bathroom windowsill.

Then she dusted, sprayed, and cleaned all the wooden furniture. She polished the wood. It was too cheap and old and battered to sparkle. But a dim star is more visible than a dark star.

Marie vacuumed the room, pushing hard until you could see the brush patterns in the carpet. It would be obvious to the next guest that the carpet had been thoroughly vacuumed.

There would be visual evidence.

She cleaned the windows. That took a long time, because the windows had rarely been cleaned. No guests had ever complained about the dirty windows, because this was the kind of motel where the curtains were rarely opened.

Marie wiped down the walls.

And, finally, after three hours of cleaning, she stood on a wooden chair and scrubbed a small stain off the ceiling.

Then Marie stepped out of the room and locked the door behind her.

In the employee bathroom, she changed out of her maid uniform and put on her favorite purple blouse and bluejeans.

The owner gave Marie her last paycheck in cash. Two weeks' worth of money. Six hundred dollars.

Then she got into her car. It started on the fourth try.

She drove home to her husband. He was sitting on their couch watching the midday news. He'd retired from his job at the hardware store a few months earlier.

With Social Security and Medicaid and Medicare and good luck, Marie and her husband would survive.

"Do you want a beer?" she asked her husband.

"Only if you're getting one for yourself," he said.

She grabbed two Budweisers from the fridge. Then she and her husband watched the weather report together.

October was on the way. It would be warm during the day and cold at night.

That makes perfect sense, Marie thought.

Then she kissed her husband on the cheek and waited for the rest of her life to happen. ♦

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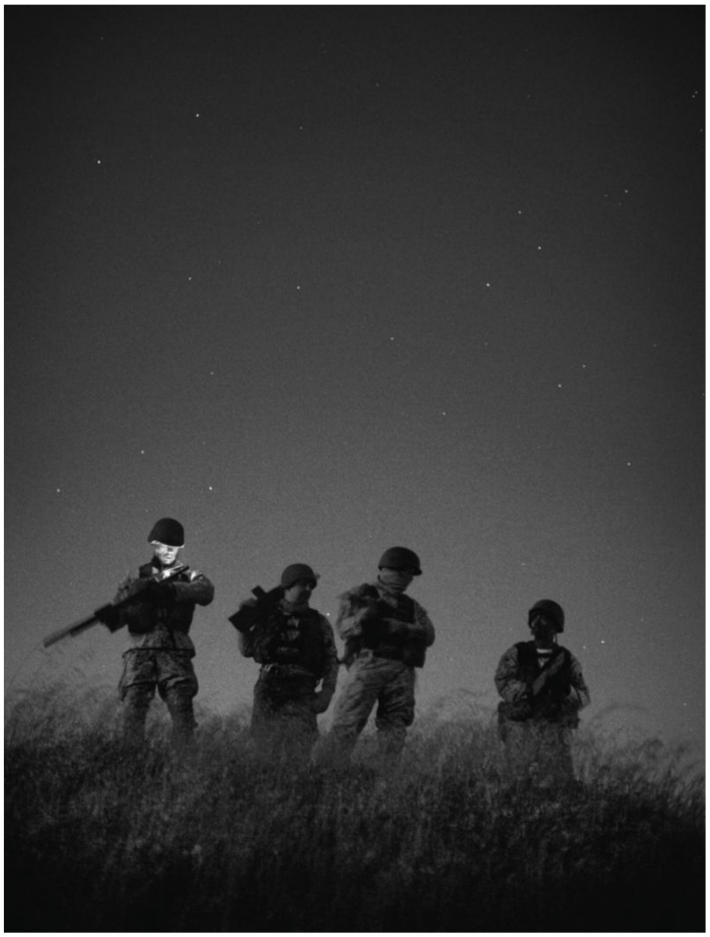
FICTION

CROSSING THE RIVER NO NAME

BY WILL MACKIN



Khost, Afghanistan: One rainy night, in March, 2009, we crossed a muddy field to intercept a group of Taliban who'd come out of the mountains of Pakistan. They were walking west. We were patrolling north to arrive at a point ahead of them, where we'd set up an ambush. The field was actually many fields, inundated by snowmelt and rain. Piles of rocks, laid by farmers, demarcated the flooded borders. Every so often we'd come across evidence of what had once grown in those fields: an island of blighted corn stalks, a soybean shoot—as perfect as a laboratory specimen—floating in a shin-deep lake. Someday, I figured, the sun would come out, the land would dry, and the farmers would be back to re-stake their claims. That night, however, they'd taken shelter on higher ground, and that entire miserable stretch of Khost was ours.

Electric rain streaked straight down in my night vision. Cold rose from the mud into my bones. It squeezed the warmth out of my heart. My heart became a more sensitive instrument as a result, and I could feel the Taliban out there, lost in the darkness. I could feel them in the distance, losing hope. This was the type of mission that earlier in the war would have been fun: us knowing and seeing, them dumb and blind. Hal, walking point, would have turned around and smiled, like, Do you believe we're getting paid for this? And I would have shaken my head. But now Hal hardly turned around. And when he did it was only to make sure that we were all still behind him, putting one foot in front of the other, bleeding heat, our emerald hearts growing dim.

We made steady progress through the rain until we came to a river. The river looked like a wide section of field that had somehow broken free, that had, for unknown reasons, been set in motion. In fact, the only way to tell river from field was to stare at the river and sense its lugubrious vector. But to stare at the river for too long was to feel as if it were standing still and the field were moving.

Hal called on our best swimmers, Lex and Cooker, to cross first. They removed their helmets and armor. They kept their rifles and pistols. Cooker tied a loop at the end of a hundred feet of rope and clipped the loop to the hard point on Lex's belt. He hooked himself onto the rope behind Lex, and they set off.

Lex and Cooker waded into the icy water. Long waves purled off their knees. Dark voids streamed from their waists. A third of the way across, they lay in the water and side-stroked. Their heads popped up and down on the surface. Their exhalations wove together in thick paisley clouds. The rope sank and oscillated in the current. Hugs tied on another hundred feet. Lex and Cooker crawled onto the opposite bank—forty yards across, and another twenty downriver—steaming from exertion and cold.

"Pair up," Hal said.

With the rope now anchored at either end, the rest of us would cross wearing all our gear. The first pair—Hugs and Polly—carried the helmets and armor that Lex and Cooker had left behind. They clipped themselves to the rope and walked out. Hand over hand, they pulled themselves across the river, then heaved themselves onto the

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far shore, where they unclipped and joined the anchor. Hal and I were next. Hal hooked himself to the rope ahead of me and marched out into the river.

As far as I knew, the only thing in the world that scared Hal was water. Which was why he'd joined the Navy, and become a SEAL—to conquer that fear. And, for the most part, he'd been successful. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, he was able to overcome his trepidation by sheer force of will. But there remained that one per cent, wherein the invincible core of Hal's fear would reassert itself.

The last time I'd seen this happen was September of 2004, on the Atlantic Ocean, in the middle of the night. We'd tracked down a freighter fifteen miles off the coast of Virginia, steaming east. Crouched in our High-Speed Assault Craft, or HSAC, we'd closed in on the massive freighter's starboard quarter, just aft of the island, for a mock raid. It was a training mission; the hijackers on board the freighter were actors, and the rounds in our assault rifles were paint. But everything else was real: the crescent moon, the twenty-foot waves, the darkness between the waves, and the way the moonlight played on their quivering peaks.

The freighter's gigantic engines were throbbing, their heat shining through the thick steel hull. Waves that flattened along the skin of the ship were re-forming perfectly in its wake, as if the freighter weren't there. Meanwhile, Lex, at the HSAC's helm, was bringing us in on a shallow angle, weaving through crests and troughs. Cooker, standing at the bow with the caving ladder hooked to a pole, was raising that pole toward the freighter's bulwarks. At twenty feet and closing, I could hear the hiss of the waves slipping down the freighter's skin. At ten feet, I could hear the sucking sound of wave troughs disappearing under the ship. That was when Hal yelled, "Stop!"

Lex cut the throttles to idle. Cooker retracted the pole. We all lay down in the HSAC, anticipating Hal's call for an emergency breakaway, followed by a banked turn and a high-powered retreat over the waves. Instead, Hal remained silent, allowing us to drift away from the freighter. When I looked up at Hal standing in the HSAC in the moonlight, I saw that his usual infectious calm had been replaced by something spookier and more insular. It was as if he'd realized that our fight against the hijackers of the world would never end, so why continue? Five seconds later, though, he came to his senses. He ordered Lex to chase down the freighter. He directed Cooker to hook the caving ladder onto the bulwarks. And we followed him up the side of the ship, ascending through waves that enveloped us in their cool velocity and threatened to sweep us out to sea.

Later, when I asked Hal what had caused him to yell "Stop!" that night, he said that something hadn't felt right. His answer had seemed credible enough, because nothing ever felt right.

The trek across the slick and forsaken field in Khost, for example. Or my heart's reception of the Taliban's mounting despair. Or the river, whose water smelled like rust and whose eddies trapped phosphorescent galaxies of undissolved fertilizer. The river didn't appear on any of our maps. So, to anyone not standing on its ill-defined banks or wading out against its wily current, that river didn't exist. If we were ever going to turn back, this would have been the time to do it.

But I followed Hal into the river—up to my knees and then my waist—to a spot about halfway across, where the current felt stronger at my feet than at my chest. The bottom kept shifting, and a dark crease formed on the river's surface immediately downstream from us. That was where Hal froze.

"We need to move upstream!" I called.

Hal gripped the rope with both hands. "Right!" he shouted, without moving. Then he disappeared below the surface.

Standing my ground, I absorbed Hal's weight on the tightening rope. Then the bottom gave out, and I went under.

It was as if I'd sunk into a black well. Still attached to the rope, I bumped into Hal. The current pushed us together, back to back, holding us submerged. We fought to unhook ourselves

while the rope twisted. Hal bucked as if he were trying to break out of a straitjacket. His screams were silent, but I felt them in my lungs, and I watched the silver bubbles rise from his mouth.

Times before, when I'd thought I was going to die—like during that ambush in Marjah, on my first deployment, or, two deployments later, when our helo's tail rotor was shot off over Shkin—I'd wanted to cringe and whimper at the coming end. Instead, I'd looked to Hal and seen him radiating calm, a calm that had transferred to me so wholly that I wouldn't have known the difference had I passed to the other side.

Now Hal had run out of air. He clawed at me in an attempt to propel himself to the surface. In that way, he created enough slack in the rope for me to unclip.

I sank directly to the bottom of the murky hole and kicked off, but fell short of the surface. Sinking again, I drifted downriver. My armor, my weapons, felt weightless in the numbing cold. I floated through Hal's wake: cascades of shear and compression, acceleration and stall. I looked up at the surface, trying not to panic. In a twist of glowing fertilizer, I saw the Virgin Mary.

Doubters, listen: if she can appear at an underpass in Chicago, if she can appear in the bruise on a woman's thigh at an E.R. in El Paso, then she can appear in a whirlpool of diammonium phosphate, spinning on the surface of an unnamed river in Afghanistan.

Light emanated from her peaceful, benevolent face. Golden roses lay at her feet. She and I communicated telepathically.

"Am I saved?" I asked, bubbles tickling my lips.

"No," Mary said.

"How come?" I asked.

"Saving you would require a miracle, and you've already used yours," she said, not unkindly.

The miracle in question had occurred the morning of Saturday, December 8, 1984, on a football field in Deptford, New Jersey, during a playoff game for the Group III State High School Championship. I was a second-string junior, and not a day had passed since that I hadn't thought about it, or about the events leading up to it, beginning with the dinner at Coach Z.'s house the night before the game.

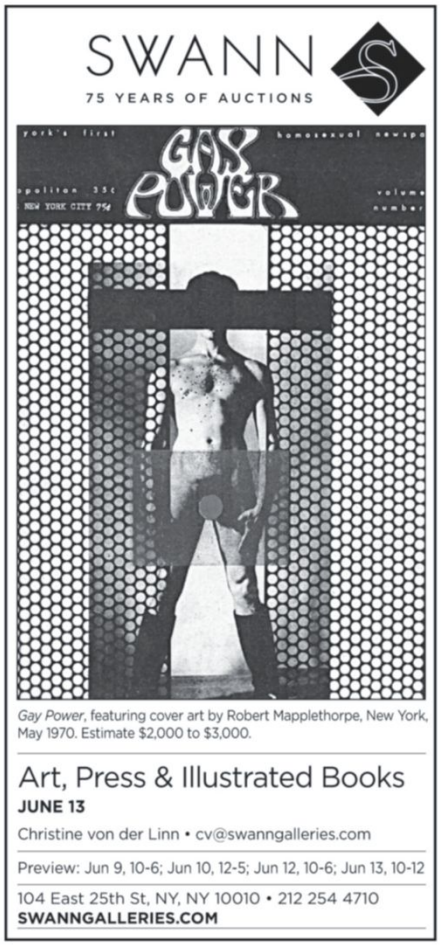
Coach Z. lived in Ocean City, New Jersey, in a gray duplex on the bay side of the island, between an ice factory and a grass strip from which banner-towing Cessnas lifted off in summer. He'd grown up in Ocean City, gone to Ocean City High School, played cornerback for the Red Raiders, and been assistant coach for a decade before becoming head coach. "In all that time," Coach Z. said, during the speech that he delivered over a spread of baked ziti prepared by Mrs. Z., "I've never seen a team this good, this big-hearted, this brave. Never one as touched by destiny." And with that Coach Z.'s voice cracked, and he began to weep.

I had to resist the urge to laugh. I looked away and counted backward from a hundred, so as to avoid insulting a man whose only fault had been to stare failure in the face and carry its weight for the rest of us. Luckily, Maz, our team captain, stepped in and said, "Let's win this one for Coach Z.!" And everybody cheered "Coach Z.!" in response, over and over.

Amid the ruckus, I laughed without fear of reprisal. Coach Z. laughed, too, while wiping away tears. And I took the opportunity to get something else off my chest. To Maz, who was standing ten feet away, I shouted, "I'm in love with your girl!" He didn't hear me. To Gunner, our quarterback, who was standing right next to me, I hollered, "I'm in love with Maz's girl!" Gunner yelled back, "Join the club!" Then the cheering died down, and we ate ziti.

Maz was a fullback, the type who preferred to block so that others might score. He was a born leader and an all-around good guy, the likes of whom I wouldn't encounter again until I met Hal, years later. Maz, like Hal, made me feel as though I were part of something larger than myself. And, like Hal, he made me want to be a better person.

Back then, I had this wooden baseball bat, driven through with heavy nails, that I called the Morningstar. Nights, I'd sneak out the back door



ON THE JOB BY RICHARD FORD

MAKE-WORK

In the summer of 1967, I took a job working for the Neighborhood Youth Corps in Little Rock. It was not a job I wanted—just one I could get. I was living in my mother's apartment. She had assured me that I was welcome there. But I would need to work and bring in money if I meant to stay. I had worked at some job, been gainful at some mode of employment, every single day since I was twelve. Not to work, not to have a job, and to be idle was an unrecognized human state in my family. We were working people.

That summer I was twenty-three. I had a second-rate college degree. I'd just spent a difficult year teaching junior high and coaching baseball in inner-city Flint, Michigan. I was, I believed, spiritually "fatigued" and needing time to rest and reflect. I'd have been happy to stay home and read Flaubert. But that was not on offer, as the saying goes.

The name Neighborhood Youth Corps might summon up visions of clean-cut boys in spruce khaki uniforms, standing at attention on a parade ground while a government official reads a proclamation dispatching them to do what needs to be done for the good of all. The Corps may even have been intended to work that way when Lyndon Johnson made it a showcase program of the Great Society, by which poverty and social injustice would be eradicated from our land.

In Arkansas, however, the Neighborhood Youth Corps was a piñata from which those same government officials meant to get their mitts on a shower of federal dough, a laughably infinitesimal portion of which was earmarked to provide low-income (read: black) kids with "work experience," which would—it was dearly hoped—keep them in school and out of the state's hair. It was the summer of the Detroit riots and nine months before the murderous spring of '68. Trouble was hotting up again in Dixie.

My job—to the extent that it could be defined—was to tutor twelve decidedly un-uniformed teen-age boys in the complex art of manual brush clearing, performed under the tormenting summer sun of central Yahoo. The state of Arkansas, it seemed, owned a lot of vacant land in Little Rock, which, surprisingly, it wasn't using. Over time, this land had succumbed to sucker weeds and briars and red-brush saplings, all of which, it was determined, badly needed clearing. Or, at least, could be cleared—by someone. Use of the land wasn't contemplated. Only clearing it. Much work done in the world is like this—virtually meaningless. Make-work.

Though not for me make-work. I was management—tasked and poorly paid to get down among 'em and impart the skills of swing-blade, of scythe, of axe and hatchet, of shovel and "come-along." All things I knew about. My "men," a dozen skinny black kids between sixteen and eighteen, took a skeptical view of how these lessons would be put into practice. They stood in a lank group around me, coolly observing me as I waded into the thickets and sweatily set the scythe or the sickle or some other vicious instrument into motion. I was demonstrating the skills. "See," I said, looking fitfully up at them out of the dense bosk. "Make short strokes. Aim for the base of what you want to cut. Conserve your energy. Focus your efforts. Don't flail. Be careful of who's behind you." (All sound advice for most occupations.) "Now," I said, wiping stinging sweat out of my eyes and gaping. "Who's ready to try it?" Hardly any of them were, a fact that they expressed by mutely continuing to watch me. One, sometimes two—the younger boys—would step forward as if their feet hurt, take whatever implement I was holding out to them, and merely stare at it, as though it were a weapon they were better off not having in their hands. Now and then, they'd try a tentative swipe with the blade or an awkward down-cut with the axe. Then they'd laugh and look around at their buddies, roll their eyes, and hand the job back to me for more demonstration.

These were not stupid boys. They weren't being paid much, if anything. Only helped. The fact that I had a job that depended on them and was intended to keep them out of mischief and assure social justice and cure poverty conferred no mission on their lives. At their tender ages, they had already seen things—many things—that I hadn't. They recognized hard, pointless, idiotic toil when they saw it. Possibly their fathers were practicing it that same hot summer day. All of it might come to them soon enough. But, until then, this was fine work for me to do.

And in that way the summer of '67 passed: with me down in the underbrush, showing these black kids how work was done, while they calmly looked on, waiting for their futures to arrive. ♦

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

of my parents' house on the mainland and carry the Morningstar along fire roads through the Pine Barrens. This was during the casino boom, when new developments seemed to spring up weekly. Finding one, I'd stroll its winding streets, and I'd admire the houses set back in woods, with moths orbiting porch lights, the smell of wild honeysuckle, and the *tic-tic-tic* of midnight sprinklers. Along the way, I'd pass perfectly good mailbox after perfectly good mailbox.

I'd destroy one of those mailboxes with the Morningstar. Then I'd destroy the next mailbox, and the next. And if, between mailboxes, I came across a parked car, I'd bash its taillights and shatter its windshield. And, at the end of all this, I'd look down the street at what I'd done with some satisfaction. I'd feel as though I'd put in a good night's work.

The next morning, however, I'd be ashamed. Like the people who I knew were cursing me—waking up to find their mailboxes mangled, their taillights bludgeoned, their windshields caved in—I'd wonder, Who would do such a thing, and why?

Maz's girl was a cheerleader, of course, and, therefore, present at Coach Z.'s house the night before the big playoff game in Deptford. Because she'd helped Mrs. Z. in the kitchen, I figured that she was the one who'd burned the cheese on top of the ziti just the way I liked it. I figured that it was some sort of secret communication between the two of us. Imagining what that might mean made the muscles of my jaw seize with desire.

Her name was Natalie, Nat for short. She was wearing a tiny blue dress and white heels.

After the ziti, everyone drifted into the back yard. Coach Z. was already out there, jingling change in his pocket, looking up at Cassiopeia. Seeing him lost in thought made me want to laugh again, which made me wonder again what the fuck was wrong with me. So I turned around and walked the other way, through Coach Z.'s house. Right outside the front door, I ran into Nat, standing on the porch with those legs. She looked cold.

"Can you give me a ride home?" she asked.

"Sure," I said.

Nat lived on the north end of the island, in a development called the Gardens, where there were no mailboxes. Where, I supposed, letters and packages floated down under little rainbow parachutes. The Gardens had reflecting pools, lemon groves, and footbridges. It had terraces, verandas, and pavilions. As we drove past these things, Nat seemed not to notice. At a four-way stop, she leaned over and kissed me.

We drove past her house, across the wooden drawbridge at the north end of the island, and onto the sandbar where the White Deer Motel stood. The eponymous deer, made of cement and painted white, had lost an antler. The room cost ten bucks. The bed was cupped and creased like a fortune-teller's palm. Nat and I spent the next few hours generating what felt like an interstellar transmission. One that explained, via tiny modulations, who we were, what music we liked, what languages we spoke, and all that we knew about the universe up to that point.

We held hands as I drove her home. When I dropped her off, it was still dark. I parked at the far end of the school lot and watched the sunrise from inside my car. Condensation fogged the windshield. I wiped a spot clear so that I could see the locker-room door. At 6:30, Coach Z. unlocked that door and propped it open with a dumbbell. Maz's blue pickup arrived a few minutes later, followed by Gunner's Firebird. Soon everybody was showing up. I entered the locker room with the crowd. I wanted to yell what had happened with Nat. I wanted to shout that love conquers all. Instead, I donned my sour pads and red jersey in silence. I laced up my cleats. And I carried my white helmet onto the bus that would deliver us up the Black Horse Pike to Deptford.

It was a defensive game, as predicted, scoreless at halftime. At the beginning of the third quarter, Deptford sacked Gunner in the end zone

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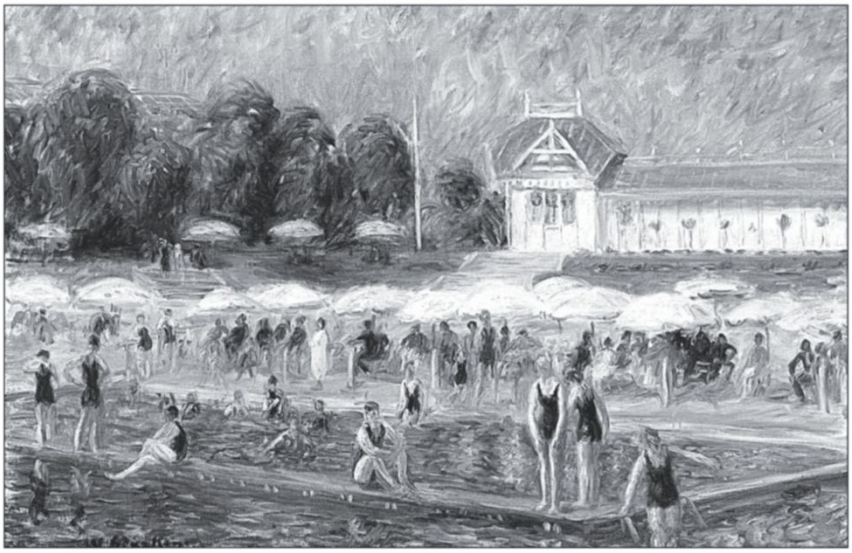

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for a safety. With three seconds left in the game, the score was still 2–0, Deptford, with us on offense deep in our own territory. Nat was cheering as if this were the most important thing in the world. As if she'd forgotten all about what we'd done the night before. Out on the field, there seemed to be some confusion in our huddle. Maz called a time-out.

Coach Z. brought everybody in—offense, defense, special teams, and second string. "Listen to Maz," he said. Maz, crouching at the center of the huddle, talked us through a trick play while drawing arrows in the grass. Looking over the huddle, I saw Nat. She raised a sign with Maz's number written in glitter. She cheered her beautiful fucking head off. I looked past her to the distant end zone. The sun broke through the clouds and shone down on the uprights like something holy.

Seriously, it was like a picture on the cover of a program for the funeral of a kid who had played football his whole life and loved the game and died in a tragic accident much too young, and now here you were, stuffed into a coat and tie, sitting in a church pew, looking at that picture, as if you were supposed to imagine the dead kid on this field in the sky, scoring touchdowns left and right. Only, the sunbeams shining through the clouds over that football field on a cold Saturday morning in Deptford, New Jersey, in 1984, were real, and I heard the voice of God.

"You want a miracle?" God asked.

The huddle broke with a loud, sharp clap. Our team took the field. Coach Z.'s knees flexed under the weight of our imminent defeat.

"Please," I said to God.

"All right," He answered. "But just this once."

So it happened. The curtain was pulled back. A giant, heavenly finger poked around among the cogs, and the curtain slid back into place. Some skinny kid, whose name I forget, was sprinting down the sideline, headed for pay dirt. No one was even close to him. Nat, crying tears of joy, hugged the other cheerleaders, girls whose purity she'd called into question as we lay naked at the White Deer. My heart buzzed like a tuning fork. A chubby ref with his whistle in his mouth jogged on a diagonal after the skinny kid, who was still all alone.

"You remember, right?" the Virgin Mary asked me.

"Of course," I said, a little surprised that she hadn't just read my mind.

Then the Holy Spirit that had infused that twist of undissolved fertilizer on the surface of the river vanished. And, with it, Mary's warmth and light and the golden roses at her feet. I was left to drown, numb with cold, without regrets. Then I bumped into a rock and snagged on another. I crawled onto the river's far shore, and I was saved.

Lex splashed up to me. "Shh," he said, because I was heaving loudly, and we were close, theoretically, to the Taliban patrol. Lex whispered into his radio, "It's F.S.," which stood for Fuckstick, which was what Hal called me, usually just joking around. "He's O.K."

Lex splashed away, downriver. I stood, readjusted my goggles, and saw what was happening: my teammates on either side of the river, anchoring the rope. Others in the river, hooked to the rope, diving and surfacing. Still others walking up and down the banks with their rifles pointed at the surface, sparkling creases, eddies, and points where the dark water parted around rocks. Hal must have unclipped, too.

I turned to face the field, which was no less shitty on that side of the river, though the rain had stopped. My goggles clicked and whirred, trying to bring the darkness into focus. I walked into that darkness, half expecting to find Hal walking the other way. Like he had that night in Marjah, after we'd been separated by the ambush. Or that day in Arizona, during our HALO refresher, when nobody had seen his chute open, and we were all looking in the sagebrush on the windward side of the drop zone for his body, and he'd popped out on the leeward side, carrying his chute like a pile of laundry. Eventually, I stopped walking and just stood in the mud, allowing its cold to rise into me.

I felt the Taliban out there still, their hearts transmitting something

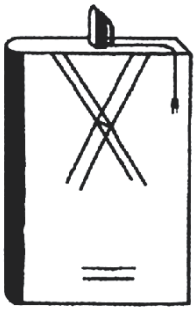
more elemental than despair. Something more akin to chaos.

Digger had taken over in Hal's absence. I heard him, over the radio, making the report back to Higher.

"Roger," Higher said.

That's it? I thought. Fucking *Roger*?

I wanted to get on the radio and tell Higher that a guy like Hal doesn't just fall in a river and die. But then I was afraid that saying those words might make them true. Perhaps that was why Higher hadn't said anything, either. We were in this gray area, status-wise, where nobody'd thrown out an M.I.A. or a DUSTWUN. Where no one at Higher had directed anyone to open Hal's dead letter to figure out who his next of kin were and what their wishes might be, as far as notification went. Hal's ex-wife, Jean, for example—at her desk on the third floor of the insurance building—who wanted her dad to break the news. Or Hal's son, Max, in high school, in an unidentified classroom, with or without the friends he might have wanted by his side. The letter containing that information remained sealed in a box, with everyone else's.



"Say intentions," Higher asked Digger.

As Digger considered his options, it started raining again, in reverse it seemed, as if the rain were coming up from the ground to fill the clouds.

"I'm gonna leave a squad here to search and take the rest to intercept," Digger radioed back.

I was relieved when Digger put me on the intercept. The river was dizzying, even with my back to it. I wanted to distance myself. I wanted to make it a thing I could look back on.

Digger called Lex, whom he was putting in charge of the rescue effort. Lex looked at Digger the way he used to look at Hal. As if he had no idea what came next.

"Let me know," Digger said.

Then we walked away from the river, northbound. The sounds of the rescue, already quiet, fell away, and the heat signatures of the rescuers dimmed. Soon enough, behind us was no different from in front of us. The clouds refused to break. Rain wired the air in bright filaments.

The Taliban appeared in the east at first, as a low cluster of stars. Then as phantoms. Then as men with heat rising off their backs like creeping flames. They walked in a shapeless formation, bunching up and stretching out, because without night vision they couldn't see one another. They couldn't see themselves.

All we had to do was stand perfectly still, in a line parallel to their direction of movement, at a range of no more than thirty yards, and wait for them to walk right in front of us. Then wait for Digger's sparkle, which would be our signal to open fire.

This wasn't our first time running an intercept on a Taliban patrol across a muddy field at night. In fact, it was our seventh. During the course of our previous six intercepts, we'd developed and refined this tactic. The enemy would walk right in front of us, and Hal would choose one man. Not the leader, he had explained, whose mind had been made up. And not the dumb-ass in the back, either, who'd never know any better. But a man in the middle. A man who understood what was happening well enough to have doubts. A man who, having walked this far through darkness, cold, and rain, was no longer sure where he ended and the night began.

Such confusion registered on night vision. When Hal found this man, he would light him up with sparkle. The man wouldn't know, because the sparkle was infrared; it operated on a frequency that the naked eye couldn't detect. So, as far as Hal's chosen man or any of the other Taliban knew, they were still walking in the dark. They were still on their way to their destination. Meanwhile, Hal's sparkle would reflect off the man's wide-open eyes and shine back out like some special knowledge.

That would be the man we'd spare. That would be the man who'd drop to his knees in the mud and, in the cloud of gun smoke, raise his hands in surrender. That would be the man who'd tell us who he was, where he'd come from, and why. ♦

THIS EVER NEW SELF
THOREAU AND HIS JOURNAL

JUNE 2–SEPT 10

The Morgan Library & Museum

Madison Ave. at 36th St.
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This Ever New Self: Thoreau and his Journal is organized by the Morgan Library & Museum and the Concord Museum, Concord, Massachusetts. Made possible with lead funding from an anonymous donor, generous support from the Gilder Foundation, and assistance from the Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation.

Benjamin D. Maxham (1821–1889), *Henry David Thoreau*, 1856, daguerreotype. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; gift of an anonymous donor.

PHOTOGRAPH BY CARLOS JAVIER ORTIZ

FICTION

SHOW DON'T TELL

BY CURTIS SITTENFELD

At some point, a rich old man named Ryland W. Peaslee had made an enormous donation to the program, and this was why not only the second-year fellowships he'd endowed but also the people who received them were called Peaslees. You'd say, "He's a Peaslee," or "She's a Peaslee." Each year, four were granted. There were other kinds of fellowships, but none of them provided as much money—eighty-eight hundred dollars—as the Peaslees. Plus, with all the others, you still had to teach undergrads.

Our professors and the program administrators were cagey about the exact date when we'd receive the letters specifying our second-year funding, but a rumor was going around that it would be on a Monday in mid-March, which meant that, instead of sitting at my desk, I spent most of a morning and an early afternoon standing at the front window of my apartment, scanning the street for the mailman. For lunch, I ate a bowl of Grape-Nuts and yogurt—Monday nights after seminar were when I drank the most, and therefore when life seemed the most charged with flirtatious possibility, so I liked to eat light on those days—then I brushed my teeth, took a shower, and got dressed. It was still only two o'clock. Seminar started at four, and my apartment was a ten-minute walk from campus. I lived on the second floor of a small, crappy Dutch Colonial, on the same street as a bunch of sororities and the co-op, where I occasionally splurged on an organic pineapple, which I'd eat in its entirety. I was weirdly adept at cutting a pineapple, and doing so made me feel like a splendid tropical queen with no one to witness my splendor. It was 1998, and I was twenty-five.

I was so worked up about the funding letter that I decided to pack my bag and wait outside for the mailman, even though the temperature wasn't much above freezing. I sat in the mint-green steel chair on the front stoop, opened the paperback novel I was in the middle of, and proceeded to read not more than a few sentences. Graduate school was the part of my life when I had the most free time and the fewest obligations, when I discussed fiction the most and read it the least. But it was hard to focus when you were, like a pupa, in the process of becoming yourself.

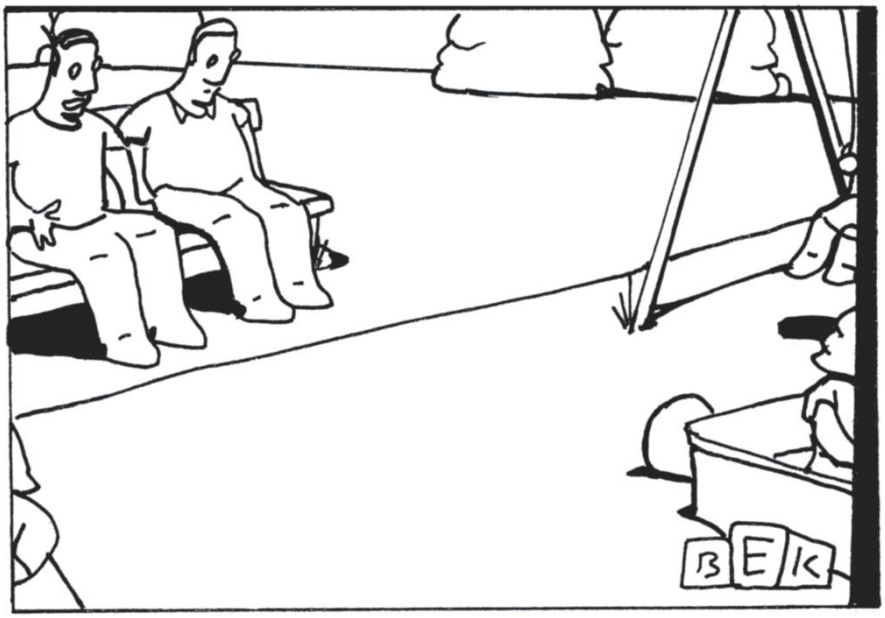
My downstairs neighbor, Lorraine, emerged from her apartment while I was sitting on the stoop, a lit cigarette in her hand; presumably, she'd heard my door open and close and thought that I had left. We made eye contact, and I smirked—involuntarily, if that mitigates things, which it probably doesn't. She started to speak, but I held up my palm, standing as I did so, and shook my head. Then I pulled my bag onto my shoulder and began walking toward campus.

Lorraine was in her early fifties, and she had moved to the Midwest the same week in August that I had, also to get a master's degree but in a different department; she told me she was writing a memoir. I'd moved from Philadelphia, and she'd moved from Santa Fe. She was dark-haired and wore jeans and turquoise jewelry—I had the impression that she was more of a reinvented Northeastern Wasp than a real desert dweller—and was solicitous in a way that made me wary. I wanted to have torrid affairs with hot guys my age, not hang out with a fifty-two-year-old woman. In early September, after sleeping at Doug's apartment for the first time, I'd returned home around eight in the morning, hung over and delighted with myself, and she'd been sitting on the front stoop, drinking coffee, and I'd said good morning and she'd said, "How are you?" and I'd said, "Fine, how are you?" and she'd said, "I'm thinking about how the English language lacks an adequate vocabulary for grief." After briefly hesitating, I'd said, "I guess that's true. Have a nice day!" Then I'd hurried inside.

It was likely because I was distracted by Doug, and our torridness, that I hadn't paid much attention at first to Lorraine's smoking. I could smell the smoke from my apartment, and one day I even pulled out my lease, to check if it specified that smoking wasn't permitted either inside or out—it did—but then I didn't do anything about it.

In the fourth week that Doug and I were dating, his work and mine were discussed in seminar on the same day. Mine was discussed mostly favorably and his was discussed mostly unfavorably, neither of which surprised me. The night before, while naked in Doug's bed, we'd decided to give each other feedback ahead of time. As he lay on top of me, he said that he liked my story, except that he'd been confused by the beginning. I then delivered a seventeen-minute monologue about all the ways he could improve his, at the conclusion of which he stood up, went into the other room, and turned on the TV, even though we hadn't had sex. I believed that a seventeen-minute monologue was an act of love, and the truth is that I still do, but the difference between who I was then and who I am now is that now I never assume that anyone I encounter shares my opinion about anything.

The next night, most people went to the bar after class; it was only eight o'clock when Doug said that he had a headache and was going home. I said, "But getting criticism is why we're in the program, right?" He said, "Having a headache has nothing to do with the criticism." Three hours later, leaving the bar, I walked to his apartment. I knocked on his door until he opened it, wearing boxers, a T-shirt, and an irked



"We liked it—it's one of those kids' movies that's also good for stupid adults."

• •

expression. He said, "I don't really feel like company tonight," and I said, "Can't I at least sleep here? We don't have to do it. I know you"—I made air quotes—"have a headache."

"You know what, Ruthie? This isn't working."

I was astonished. "Are you breaking up with me?"

"Obviously, we jumped into things too fast," he said. "So better to correct now than let the situation fester."

"I don't think 'fester' is the word you mean," I said. "Unless you see us as an infected wound."

He glared. "Don't workshop me."

It's not that I wasn't deeply upset; it was just that being deeply upset didn't preclude my remarking on his syntax. I walked to my own apartment, and I spent a lot of the next week crying, while intermittently seeing Doug from a few feet away in class and at lectures and bars.

Also during that week, I knocked on Lorraine's door and told her that I could smell her cigarette smoke in my apartment and was respectfully requesting that she smoke elsewhere. She was apologetic, and later that day she left a card and a single sunflower outside my front door—when I saw the sunflower, I was thrilled, because I thought it was from Doug—and, judging from the smell, she continued to smoke enthusiastically. I left a note for her saying that I appreciated the flower but would be contacting our landlord if she didn't stop. On Saturday, I returned home at one in the morning to find her sitting outside in the mint-green chair, enjoying a cigarette; I suspect that she'd thought I was asleep. She giggled and said, "This is awkward," and I ignored her and went inside. The next day, I e-mailed our landlord. After that, I'm pretty sure that Lorraine neither smoked as much on the property nor completely stopped, and I continued to ignore her. That is, I said no actual words to her, though, if she said hello, I nodded my head in acknowledgment.

Another month passed, and one afternoon a commercial airplane crashed in North Carolina, killing all forty-seven passengers and crew members. The next day, Lorraine was sitting in the mint-green chair reading the newspaper when I left the apartment, and she said, "Have you heard about the plane crash?" and I said, "Yes," and kept walking, and I had made it about ten feet when she said, "You're a fucking bitch." I was so surprised that I turned around and started laughing. Then I turned around again and walked away.

Once more, a single sunflower appeared outside my door, along with another note: "That outburst is not who I am. I admire you a lot." I had already repeated to my classmates the story of my middle-aged turquoise-jewelry-wearing neighbor telling me I was a fucking bitch, and the note left me queasy and disappointed. In the next five months, right up to the afternoon that I was waiting for my funding letter, I interacted with Lorraine as little as possible.

It was, obviously, a reflection of how agitated the funding had made me that I'd sat on the stoop. As I walked to town, I began composing in my head a new e-mail to my landlord. I would, I decided, use the word "carcinogenic."

Because there were still ninety minutes before seminar, I stopped at the bookstore. I ran into a classmate named Harold, who had recently said in seminar that everything I wrote gave off the vibe of ten-year-old girls at a slumber party. In the store, Harold told me that the funding letters weren't arriving today. His mail had already been delivered, and so had that of a guy named Cyrus, who lived next door; neither of them had received letters, and the newest intelligence was that the letters would be sent on Wednesday and probably arrive Thursday. Then Harold held up a paperback of "Mao II" and said, "If DeLillo isn't the ombudsman of American letters right now, I'm at a loss as to who is."

"I've actually never read him," I said. Harold's expression turned disapproving, and I added, "Lend me that when you're finished and I will."

"It's not mine," Harold said. "I just come in here and read twenty pages at a time. But seriously, Ruthie—not even 'White Noise'?"

On Friday, a guy in his forties who wasn't famous to the general population but had a cult following among my classmates and me—a distinction I didn't then understand—was coming to speak, and some second-years who lived in a house across the river were hosting the after-party. The funding letters *still* hadn't arrived, or at least this was what I thought when I met my friend Dorothy for dinner at five-thirty at a Thai restaurant; we were eating early so that we could get good seats at the event, which would take place in a campus auditorium. But, when I sat down, Dorothy said, "I got a Franklin. Did you get a Peaslee? I'll set aside my jealousy and be happy for you if you did."

In fact, I hadn't received any mail at all, after another exhausting day of stalking the mailman. When I told Dorothy this, I added, "Or do you think Lorraine stole my letter?"

"Yeah, probably," Dorothy said.

"No, really," I said.

"No," Dorothy said. "I bet it's there right now. Should we skip dinner and go see?"

Even though I'd left my apartment fifteen minutes before, I considered it. Then I said, "I've wasted this entire week waiting, and I'm sure I didn't get a Peaslee, anyway. But if I don't check I can pretend I got one until after the party tonight. Like Schrödinger's cat."

"Ha," Dorothy said, then her features twisted, her eyes filled, and she said, "I don't mind teaching Comp next year, but the past few weeks have just been such a mindfuck. It's like a referendum on our destinies." I adored Dorothy, and her eyes filled with tears in my presence several times a day, and probably several times out of it, too. A lot of the people in our program were nakedly emotional in a way that, in childhood, I had so successfully trained myself not to be that I almost really wasn't. Before entering grad school, I had never felt normal, but here I was competent and well adjusted to a boring degree. I always showed up for class. I met deadlines. I made eye contact. Of course I was chronically sad, and of course various phobias lay dormant inside me, but none of that was currently dictating my behavior. I also didn't possess a certain kind of feral charisma or mystery, and I didn't know, though I wondered a lot, if charisma correlated with talent. That's why Dorothy was right, that funding *did* feel like a referendum.

In the auditorium, Dorothy and I found seats toward the front, next to Jeff and Bhadveer, whom we referred to, unbeknownst to them, as our fake boyfriends. Jeff was tall and plump, and Bhadveer was medium height and skinny, and the four of us were all single and hung out often. In lieu of a greeting, Jeff said, "I'm not going to ask what funding you guys got, and I don't want you to ask me, and, if it's something you feel compelled to discuss, go sit somewhere else." Dorothy had entered the row before me and she glanced back and raised her eyebrows, and I mouthed, "*Rhetoric*?" and she nodded. This was the worst funding, besides none, which a handful of students did in fact receive. Or maybe Rhetoric was even worse than nothing, because, if you got nothing, you could find another job, but with Rhetoric you had to teach five days a week for sixty-four hundred dollars a year. Aloud, Dorothy and I said, "Sure," and, "No, that's cool."

The auditorium filled, which meant that about five hundred people turned out to hear the man with the cult following, who was a graduate of the program. He was wearing an untucked shirt, baggy jeans, and beat-up hiking boots, and halfway through his reading, when he stumbled over a line he had written a decade earlier, he said, "Fuck, man, I need a drink," and about seven minutes after that a guy from my program passed a six-pack of beer up onto the stage, and the man yanked off a can, popped it open, and guzzled. He said, "That's the stuff," and the audience applauded enthusiastically. I found the man brilliant and wrote down three of his insights, but the beer bit made me uncomfortable in ways it would take between two days and twelve years to pinpoint.

After the talk, in the building's crowded lobby, I was standing with Jeff when I spotted Lorraine about twenty feet away. "Eek," I said. "Can I hide behind you? I see my weirdo neighbor."

"The smoker?" Jeff asked.

"Yeah, it's that woman in the black leather trenchcoat."

"The smoker is Lorraine? She tutors with me at the Writing Center. She's kind of bonkers."

"Exactly."

"You know about her daughter, right?"

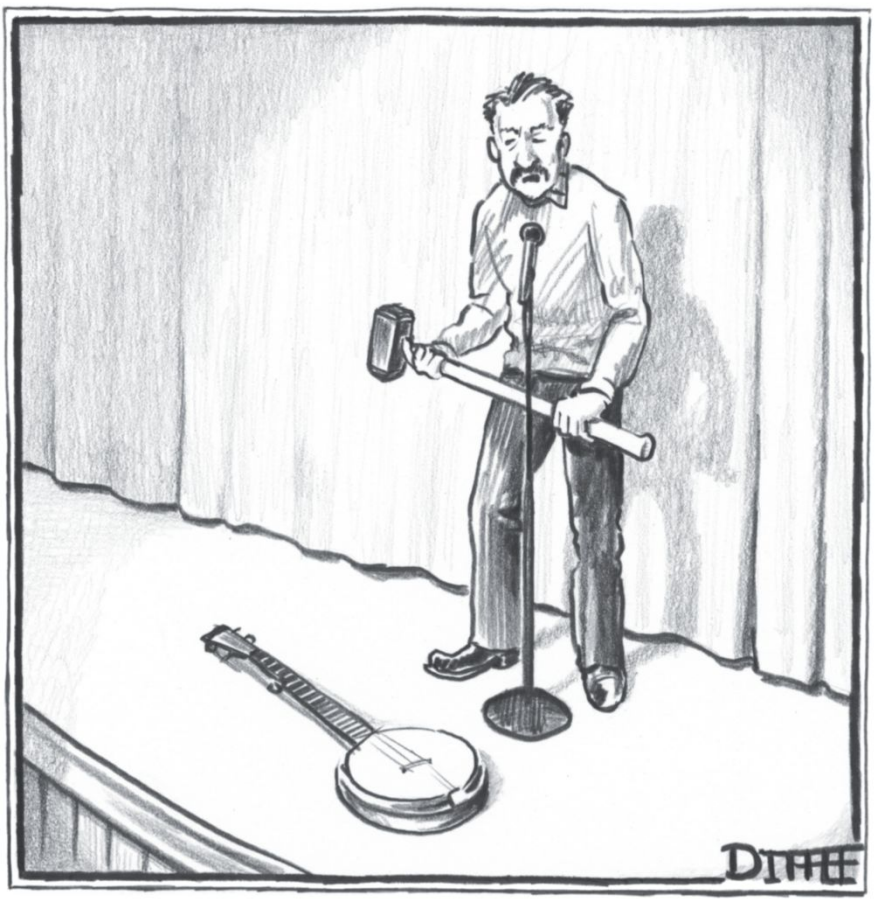
"Should I?"

"She had a teen-age daughter who died of anorexia. And not even that long ago—like two years?"

"Jesus," I said. "Maybe I *am* a fucking bitch."

"After that, I'd smoke, too."

"I already said I feel bad." There was a pause—the lobby was still crowded and buzzing—and I said, "Obviously, that's a horrible tragedy. But aren't her daughter's death and her blowing



"And now a request from the audience."

ON THE JOB BY TONI MORRISON

THE WORK YOU DO, THE PERSON YOU ARE

All I had to do for the two dollars was clean Her house for a few hours after school. It was a beautiful house, too, with a plastic-covered sofa and chairs, wall-to-wall blue-and-white carpeting, a white enamel stove, a washing machine and a dryer—things that were common in Her neighborhood, absent in mine. In the middle of the war, She had butter, sugar, steaks, and seam-up-the-back stockings.

I knew how to scrub floors on my knees and how to wash clothes in our zinc tub, but I had never seen a Hoover vacuum cleaner or an iron that wasn't heated by fire.

Part of my pride in working for Her was earning money I could squander: on movies, candy, paddleballs, jacks, ice-cream cones. But a larger part of my pride was based on the fact that I gave half my wages to my mother, which meant that some of my earnings were used for real things—an insurance-policy payment or what was owed to the milkman or the iceman. The pleasure of being necessary to my parents was profound. I was not like the children in folktales: burdensome mouths to feed, nuisances to be corrected, problems so severe that they were abandoned to the forest. I had a status that doing routine chores in my house did not provide—and it earned me a slow smile, an approving nod from an adult. Confirmations that I was adultlike, not childlike.

In those days, the forties, children were not just loved or liked; they were needed. They could earn money; they could care for children younger than themselves; they could work the farm, take care of the herd, run errands, and much more. I suspect that children aren't needed in that way now. They are loved, doted on, protected, and helped. Fine, and yet . . .

Little by little, I got better at cleaning Her house—good enough to be given more to do, much more. I was ordered to carry bookcases upstairs and, once, to move a piano from one side of a room to the other. I fell carrying the bookcases. And after pushing the piano my arms and legs hurt so badly. I wanted to refuse, or at least to complain, but I was afraid She would fire me, and I would lose the freedom the dollar gave me, as well as the standing I had at home—although both were slowly being eroded. She began to offer me her clothes, for a price. Impressed by these worn things, which looked simply gorgeous to a little girl who had only two dresses to wear to school, I bought a few. Until my mother asked me if I really wanted to work for castoffs. So I learned to say "No, thank you" to a faded sweater offered for a quarter of a week's pay.

Still, I had trouble summoning the courage to discuss or object to the increasing demands She made. And I knew that if I told my mother how unhappy I was she would tell me to quit. Then one day, alone in the kitchen with my father, I let drop a few whines about the job. I gave him details, examples of what troubled me, yet although he listened intently, I saw no sympathy in his eyes. No "Oh, you poor little thing." Perhaps he understood that what I wanted was a solution to the job, not an escape from it. In any case, he put down his cup of coffee and said, "Listen. You don't live there. You live here. With your people. Go to work. Get your money. And come on home."

That was what he said. This was what I heard:

1. Whatever the work is, do it well—not for the boss but for yourself.
2. You make the job; it doesn't make you.
3. Your real life is with us, your family.
4. You are not the work you do; you are the person you are.

I have worked for all sorts of people since then, geniuses and morons, quick-witted and dull, bighearted and narrow. I've had many kinds of jobs, but since that conversation with my father I have never considered the level of labor to be the measure of myself, and I have never placed the security of a job above the value of home. ♦

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

smoke into my apartment completely separate?"

Jeff shrugged. "Maybe not to her."

There had been some question as to whether the after-party would still happen, in light of so many people mourning their second-year funding, but word circulated in the auditorium lobby that it was on. Before we walked over, Dorothy, Jeff, Bhadveer, and I stopped at a convenience store.

"I'm not drinking tonight," I told Dorothy.

She was closing the glass door of a refrigerator, and she frowned and said, "Why not?"

It was the way that the man with the cult following had opened the beer onstage combined with my new knowledge of Lorraine's daughter, and I would have told Dorothy this under different circumstances—I told her everything—but it seemed like too much to get into, with Jeff and Bhadveer waiting at the cash register. I said, "So I don't throw myself at Doug."

"But if you don't drink you won't throw yourself at anyone else, either."

"Let's hope," I said. Doug and I had barely spoken since the first week of October. Following our breakup, we'd communicated only through typed critiques of each other's work—our professor required the critiques to be typed—and Doug's to me were one intellectually distant paragraph under which he wrote, "Best, Doug," which always made me think, How can someone who came inside me sign his critiques "Best"? My critique to him after our breakup was three single-spaced pages, and, in the sense that my comments concerned his story, they were impersonal, but in the sense that his story was autobiographical and he knew that I knew this—he'd told me about the fishing trip with his stepfather that it was based on—they were not impersonal. ("I think this would be a lot more compelling if the protagonist showed greater self-awareness and took responsibility for his role in the boat sinking.") After that, I didn't write him any critiques. I wasn't going to knowingly give him bad advice, but I didn't want to bestow on him another act of love. Or I *did* want to bestow on him acts of love—all I wanted was to bestow—but it was too painful to do so when my ability to edit his work was probably the thing he liked and hated most about me. Also, he'd begun dating an undergraduate named Brianna.

It was dark out, and on the bridge across the river I ended up walking next to Bhadveer, about fifteen feet behind Dorothy and Jeff. "Can you fucking believe it about Larry?" Bhadveer asked.

"Wait, is Larry a Peaslee?"

"Yeah. Remember that piece of shit he wrote about the Nazi soldier?"

"And who else is one?" I asked.

"You mean besides the guy who has two thumbs and loves blow jobs?" Bhadveer had made fists and was pointing with his thumbs at his face.

"*You* got one?" I said.

"If you're trying to conceal your surprise, try a little harder. Did you get one?"

"I haven't actually seen today's mail, but I doubt it."

"I bet you were in the running," he said, which seemed both chivalrous and like something he wouldn't have said if he weren't a recipient.

"Thanks for the vote of confidence."

"Well, at least one Peaslee has to be female, right?" he said. "And there aren't that many of you." This was true. Of our cohort of twenty-two, seven were girls or women or whatever we were supposed to call ourselves and one another—I myself was inconsistent on this front.

I said, "So you, Larry, and two we don't know."

Program parties were often weird—sometimes they took place at a farmhouse that a group of students rented a few miles out of town, and sometimes attendees did acid, so it wasn't that uncommon for, say, a twenty-three-year-old poet who had grown up in San Francisco and graduated from Brown to be found wandering in his underwear in a frozen cornfield—and I could tell as soon as we arrived that this party was going to be extra weird. A second-year named Chuck was standing by the front door, holding a Pez dispenser topped by a skull, and as people entered he offered them a candy, saying, as it landed in their palms, "Memento mori." By some mixture of intuition and strategically looking around, I knew immediately that neither the man with the cult following nor Doug was there.

In the kitchen, as Dorothy waited to set her six-pack in the refrigerator, the girl-woman in front of her, whose name was Cecilia, abruptly whirled around and hissed, "Can you please get the fuck out of my space bubble?"

Dorothy and I joined a conversation in progress among five people, and it soon emerged that one of them, Jonah, was the third Peaslee. Jonah's mother had starred in a popular nighttime soap opera in the eighties, and, to a one, Jonah's stories featured autoerotic asphyxiation, which I'd been unfamiliar with and had to have explained to me by Dorothy. But Jonah's autoerotic-asphyxiation descriptions were artful, and the news that he was a Peaslee didn't offend my sense of justice.

The group of us speculated about who the fourth Peaslee was, and the consensus was Aisha, who was one of two black people in the entire program, and who was in her late thirties and had formerly been an anesthesiologist. She rarely came to parties, which I respected. I couldn't stay away from them—what if something juicy happened and/or Doug was in the mood to reunite? It was also technically possible that the fourth Peaslee was a woman named Marcy, who was in her early thirties, married, and had a two-year-old kid who was always sick. However, it was widely understood that Marcy was a terrible writer; more than once, I'd heard the suggestion that her acceptance into the program had been a clerical error.

I was in the living room, perched side by side on a windowsill with Bhadveer, when three girl-women converged in a group hug that lasted, and I'm not exaggerating, five minutes. These were the only women in my year besides me, Dorothy, Aisha, and Marcy. There was a fair amount of space around them, so that everyone along the room's periphery bore witness to the hug, which I assumed was part of the point. In the first few seconds of the hug, I thought, O.K., for sure none of you are Peaslees, which gave credence to the Aisha theory—or could it be me? Was there any chance? *Should* I leave to go check my mail?—and as the hug approached the thirty-second mark I thought, For God's sake, we get it, you're strong females who support one another, even when the system has screwed you, and after a full minute I was grimacing and I hated

all three of them, even though under normal circumstances I hated only one, who was very performatively virtuous and often insisted on telling you about the meaningful conversations she had had with janitors or homeless people or about the healthy, nourishing whole-wheat bread she'd baked that afternoon.

Bhadveer said, "I'm trying to determine whether observing group hugs makes me more or less uncomfortable than participating in them."

"If you were participating, at least you could cop a feel," I said.

"I like the way you think, Flaherty." Bhadveer always called me by my last name. Then he said, "Are Genevieve and Tom in an open marriage?" Genevieve was a second-year poet, and Tom was her husband, who worked a normal-person job, possibly in I.T.

"Not that I know of," I said. "Why?"

"Because she's totally macking on Milo tonight. Look." Now that Bhadveer pointed it out, I saw that, across the room, Genevieve and a first-year named Milo were sitting extremely close together on a couch, talking intensely.

I said, "Is her husband here?"

"By all indications, no."

I scanned the room, and beyond it the front door, which every minute or two opened to admit more people.

"Doug isn't here, either, if that's who you're really looking for," Bhadveer said.

"Have you heard that everyone thinks the fourth Peaslee is Aisha?"

Bhadveer made a scoffing noise.

"Why not?" I said.

"Other than because her work sucks?"

I was genuinely surprised. "Aisha's work doesn't suck. Anyway, Larry's work sucks, and they gave him a Peaslee."

"I'm not saying she's dumb," Bhadveer said. "She got through medical school. She's just not a good writer."

I furrowed my brow. "Is the subtext of this conversation racial?"

"It wasn't, but it can be if you want. Enlighten me, oh suburban white girl." He took a sip of beer and added, "Aisha is gorgeous, right?"

I nodded.

"Great literature has never been produced by a beautiful woman."

I stared at him for a few seconds. "That's ridiculous."

"Name a book. I'll wait."

"Virginia Woolf was a babe." Of the many foolish things I said in graduate school, this is the one that haunts me the most. But I didn't regret it immediately.

Bhadveer shook his head. "You're thinking of that one picture taken when she was, like, nineteen. And it's kind of sideways, right? To obscure her long face. Why the long face, Virginia?"

I named a writer who had finished our program two years before we arrived, who was rumored to have received a half-million-dollar advance for her first novel. "Have you seen her in real life?" Bhadveer asked, and I admitted I hadn't. He said, "She does the best with what she has, but she's not beautiful." Then he added, "Don't take this the wrong way, but there tends to be an inverse relationship between how hot a woman is and how good a writer. Exhibit A is George Eliot."

"That's literally the dumbest idea I've ever heard," I said.

"It's because you need to be hungry to be a great writer, and beautiful women aren't hungry. Go ahead and contradict me."

"Joan Didion," I said. "Alice Munro. Louise Erdrich." But providing counterexamples felt distasteful rather than satisfying. I stood. "I could pretend that I'm going to refill my cup, but really I just want to get away from you."

As I walked out of the living room, the group hug finally broke apart.

The man with the cult following had arrived and was surrounded by a crowd in the dining room. I stood near a platter of program-sponsored cheese. I could get no closer to him than eight feet, not that I would have tried to speak to him directly, anyway.

"It's tin lunch pails at Yaddo," he was saying. "The picnic baskets are at MacDowell."

Someone nudged me. "I heard he likes getting blown by young women," Bhadveer murmured. "Maybe you should volunteer."

"Why would I do that?" I murmured back.

"Because then he'll help you get published."

"First of all," I said, still murmuring, "I would never give a blow job to a man in his forties. Well, not until *I'm* in my forties. Or at least my late thirties. Second of all, you seem really obsessed with blow jobs tonight."

"Flaherty, I'm always obsessed with blow jobs."

I rolled my eyes. "You should thank me for setting you up for that."

Bhadveer tapped his beer bottle against my plastic cup of water. "Thank you."

Was I imagining it, or had the question just arisen of whether I'd ever give a blow job to Bhadveer? Was he semi-ineptly flirting or simply sharing his sincere thoughts?

I said, "Are you already hammered?"

"Yes," he said, but it was hard to know which narrative this information supported.

We were quiet, and I began listening again to the man with the cult following, who was describing a recent dog-sled trip in Alaska he'd written about for a men's magazine.

"Wait," I murmured to Bhadveer. "Clarice Lispector."

Bhadveer looked momentarily confused then shook his head. He said, "Clarice Lispector was nothing special."

"Doug isn't coming tonight," Dorothy said. "I just heard from Harold that he's afraid you got a Peaslee, and he doesn't want you rubbing it in his face."

"Wow," I said. "How flattering and insulting."

"I was on my way to tell you it's O.K. for you to drink after all when I suddenly realized how to fix my story. I should shift it all to the omniscient point of view. Don't you think? Then I can include the innkeeper's backstory, and people won't be distracted wondering how the servants know all those details about him." Dorothy had been working on the same story since August. It was set in Virginia in 1810, it fluctuated between twenty and twenty-six pages long, and every sentence in it was exquisite. As a whole, however, it lacked momentum. Several times, she had revised it significantly, and it always turned out equally exquisite

WHAT USE IS KNOWING ANYTHING IF NO ONE IS AROUND

What use is knowing anything if no one is around
to watch you know it? Plants reinvent sugar daily
and hardly anyone applauds. Once as a boy I sat
in a corner covering my ears, singing Quranic verse

after Quranic verse. Each syllable was perfect, but only
the lonely rumble in my head gave praise. This is why
we put mirrors in birdcages, why we turn on lamps

to double our shadows. I love my body more
than other bodies. When I sleep next to a man, he becomes
an extension of my own brilliance. Or rather, he becomes
an echo of my own anticlimax. I was delivered

from dying like a gift card sent in lieu of a pound
of flesh. My escape was mundane, voidable. Now
I feed faith to faith, suffer human noise, complain
about this or that heartache. The spirit lives in between

the parts of a name. It is vulnerable only to silence
and forgetting. I am vulnerable to hammers, fire,
and any number of poisons. The dream, then: to erupt
into a sturdier form, like a wild lotus bursting into

its tantrum of blades. There has always been a swarm
of hungry ghosts orbiting my body—even now,
I can feel them plotting in their luminous diamonds

of fog, each eying a rib or a thighbone. They are
arranging their plans like worms preparing
to rise through the soil. They are ready to die
with their kind, dry and stiff above the wet earth.

—*Kaveh Akbar*

and equally lacking in momentum.

"Sure," I said. "I don't see why not."

"I'm going to go try."

"Now?"

Dorothy nodded.

In another life—if I were still in college—I would have protested. But here it was understood that work, in whatever fashion and on whatever schedule you managed to produce it, took precedence over everything else. This is the lesson of graduate school I am most grateful for. "Want to get breakfast tomorrow?" I said. "You can tell me how it went."

"Definitely," Dorothy said. "But call me tonight when you get your mail. No matter what time it is, call me."

"Bhadveer said he thinks Aisha is too beautiful to be a good writer," I said. "He was just expounding on how great literature has never been written by a beautiful woman."

Dorothy made a face. "Aisha's not beautiful," she said.

There was a line outside the first-floor bathroom, so I went upstairs and opened the door to one of the bedrooms that I knew had a bathroom. A standing light in the bedroom was on, and atop the mattress Genevieve and Milo—the married second-year poet and the first-year who wasn't her husband—were lying with their limbs entangled, making out. If I'd been drinking, I probably would have apologized and backed away. But being sober when everyone else seemed increasingly drunk was like wearing a cape that made me invisible. Surely it didn't matter if I quickly peed adjacent to Genevieve and Milo's foreplay?

Indeed, they barely looked up, and insofar as they did I'm not sure they recognized me. Genevieve and her husband soon got divorced, and eventually she and Milo married, and later they became born-again, and now they have six—six!—children. Although I haven't seen either of them for years, I have the sense that I was present at the big bang of their family, except for the fact that I'm guessing their family doesn't believe in the big bang.

At the bottom of the staircase, I saw Bhadveer again. "Arundhati Roy?" I said. I no longer had any idea if I was joking.

His expression was dismissive. "Don't pander."

Around midnight, the party started dwindling. Some people were dancing to "Brick House" in the living room and a participant in the group hug was crying in the kitchen, but a steady stream of guests were leaving. The knowledge that I wouldn't be hungover the next morning was so pleasing that at intervals I actively savored it, like a twenty-dollar bill I'd found in my pocket. Really, why did I ever drink?

I was talking to Cecilia, she of the space bubble, when one of the people who lived in the house, a woman named Jess, approached me and said, "Is it true you're sober?"

When I confirmed that I was, she asked if I'd drive the man with the cult following to his hotel. She said, "You can take my car, and I'll pick it up tomorrow."

In the living room, she introduced me to him. She said, "Ruthie will be your chauffeur."

He bowed clumsily.

Jess's car turned out to be a pale-blue Honda sedan with a plastic hula-girl figurine hanging from the rearview mirror. I wondered, of course, if the man would try to elicit a blow job. But from our first seconds alone together I could tell he wasn't going to, and I was both relieved and faintly, faintly insulted. Other than the fact that I was driving, the situation reminded me of when I was in high school and got rides home from dads after babysitting.

"Are you a first- or second-year?" the man asked as I turned onto the street that ran along the park.

"First," I said.

The man chuckled a little. "Dare I ask if you're a Peaslee?"

Because I didn't want to bore a successful writer with the details of my unreceived mail, I said, "I'm not. Peaslees didn't exist when you were in the program, did they?"

"No, they did," he said. "It was only fourteen years ago that I graduated from here. And I was a Peaslee. Not to boast." The man had written six books, more than one of which had been nominated for major prizes. His work had been translated into many languages, and he was a tenured professor at a prestigious school in California. As we crossed the river, he chuckled again and said, "Fourteen years probably sounds like a long time to you, doesn't it? Someday, it won't."

The car was silent—I did and didn't believe him—and he said, "Do you like the program?"

"I love it," I said. "I mean, some people are annoying. But even the annoying ones—they're usually annoying in interesting ways."

"Are you familiar with the narcissism of small differences?"

"I can probably infer what it is, but no."

"Freud stole the concept from an English anthropologist named Ernest Crawley. It explains the infighting among groups whose members have far more in common than not. I've always thought that if any two students in the program were co-workers at a big company, they'd become close friends. They'd be thrilled to find another person who cares about what they care about, who thinks about things instead of just sleepwalking. But when you're in the program there's such an abundance of kindred spirits to choose from that those same two people might be mortal enemies."

I thought of the performatively virtuous woman from the group hug and then of Bhadveer. After tonight, was Bhadveer on my shit list or were we about to start dating?

"Are you a good writer?" the man asked.

I laughed. "That's a totally subjective question."

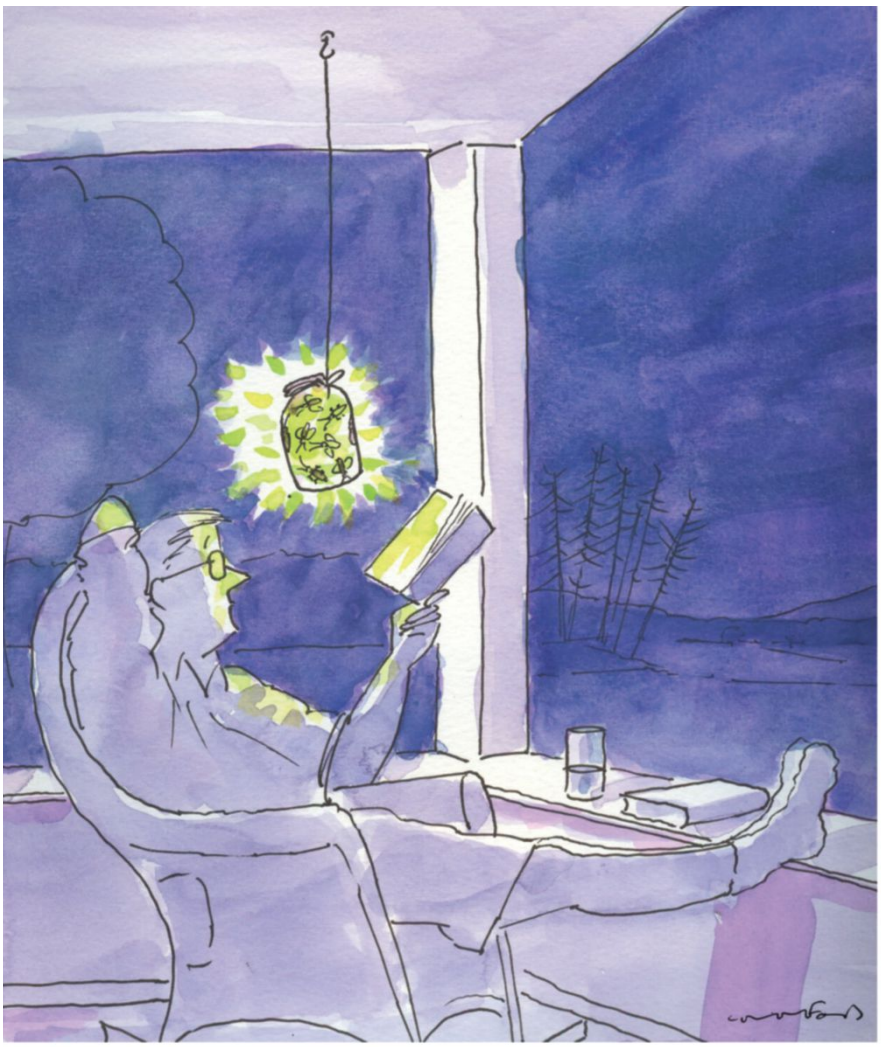
"Do you think you're a good writer? Would you enjoy your work if someone else had written it?"

"Yes," I said. "I would."

"That's important. Hold onto it. Oh, and don't marry anyone from the program. If you do, you'll both end up cheating. Hell, if you're a writer, you'll probably cheat on whoever you marry. But you might as well decrease your odds."

Being the driver was making me feel like a kind of program ambassador, and it was in this capacity, as I stopped at the last light before the hotel, that I said, "Is there anything you need that you don't have?" I meant a toothbrush, but as soon as I said it I wondered if I'd offered him a blow job.

He seemed sad, though, and not lecherous, when he said, "Sweetheart, there aren't enough hours in the day to tell you all the things I need and don't have."



Since I didn't own a car, it felt strange to park in front of my own apartment; it was distracting enough that there were maybe three seconds when I wasn't thinking about my funding letter. But by the time I unlocked my mailbox, which hung on an exterior wall of the house, my hands were shaking.

The envelope was by itself, the only mail I'd received. It was white, with the address of the program embossed in black in the upper left corner. "Dear Ruth," the letter started. "For the 1998-99 academic year, we are pleased to offer you a Ryland W. Peaslee Fellowship in the amount of $8,800."

I screamed, and then I realized what I'd done, which was to scream at one in the morning. Also—really—I thought that now I'd probably never give Bhadveer a blow job. Giving a blow job to a Peaslee, it turned out, wasn't the best I could do, the closest I could get.

In the almost twenty years that have passed since that night, I have written—have had published—seven novels; all except the first two were best-sellers. As it happens, my novels are considered "women's fiction." This is an actual term used by both publishers and bookstores, and means something only slightly different from "gives off the vibe of ten-year-old girls at a slumber party." Several times a year, I travel to speak to

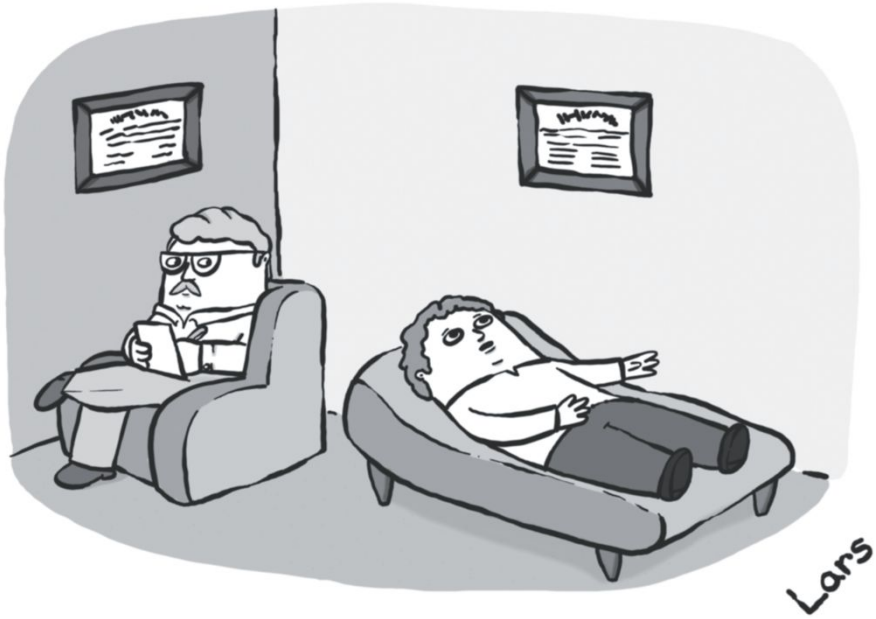
auditoriums of five hundred people, no more than a handful of whom are men. On occasion, none are men.

While I'm sure I've sold more books, it's Bhadveer who has attained the status we all believed ourselves to be aspiring to back then—his novels are prominently reviewed, he wins prizes (not yet the Pulitzer, though no doubt it's only a matter of time), he's regularly interviewed on public radio about literary culture. He's the kind of writer, I trust, about whom current students in the program have heated opinions; I'm the kind of writer their mothers read while recovering from knee surgery. To be clear, I'm mocking neither my readers nor myself here—it took a long time, but eventually I stopped seeing women as inherently ridiculous.

A few years ago, by coincidence, Bhadveer and I both gave readings on the same night in Portland, Oregon. His was at an independent bookstore, and mine was at a library, and we were staying at the same hotel. We hadn't kept in touch, but I'd asked my publicist to reach out to his publicist to see if he'd like to get a drink, which we did in the hotel bar. Bhadveer had grown into a handsome man—he was no longer skinny but seemed very fit and also trendily dressed—and I found his company almost intolerable. He name-dropped the magazine editors who courted him and the famous people who were fans of his work and the festivals he'd attended in China and Australia. (I didn't say that I, too, had been invited to all the international festivals, though I hadn't gone, because my children were still young then.) He went out of his way to convey that he hadn't read my books, which is never necessary; writers can tell by a lack of specificity. I felt sad at how much I disliked him. I also felt sad that he called me not Flaherty, not even Ruthie, but just Ruth.

At the end of an hour, during which he consumed three Old-Fashioneds and I had one glass of red wine, he said, "It's funny that no one other than us is at all successful, isn't it? Besides Grant, obviously."

Both Bhadveer's career and mine are overshadowed by that of someone who was a virtual nonentity in graduate school, a very quiet guy who went on to write screenplays for which he's twice won an Oscar. He then started directing movies as well, movies that are violent, stylized, and enormously popular; if there are any women in them, they're usually raped and often decapitated. This is all bewildering to me, because in graduate school I was under the impression that Grant admired my writing, my slumber-party fiction, more than any of my other male classmates did. Though we almost never spoke, his typed critiques were unequivocally complimentary and encouraging. It's for this reason that, despite his misogyny-flavored mega-success, I wish him well.



"I guess I want what everyone wants—a billion dollars for being a jerk."

• •

In the hotel bar, I said to Bhadveer, "Well, Harold has that collection, right? And Marcy has two novels."

"That have sold, what, twelve copies combined? I gave Harold a blurb out of pity, but I couldn't get through the first story."

I tried to decide whether to be nice or honest, then said, "Yeah, neither could I."

"Think about it," Bhadveer said. "Jeff's not a writer. Dorothy's not a writer. Your boy Doug's not a writer. Aisha's not a writer."

"You know the experiment in the seventies with the blue-eyed and brown-eyed students?" I said. "I sometimes wonder if we're like that."

"But Jonah and Larry were Peaslees with us, and neither of them is a writer."

As I said, this was a while back. It took months to determine how I wished I'd replied, which is: Yes, you can say whether people have published books. But you don't get to say whether they're writers. Some of them are probably working on books now that they'll eventually finish and sell; some of them probably haven't written fiction for years and might never again. But the way they inhabit the world, the way they observe it—of course they're writers.

On that long-ago night when I opened the letter at one in the morning, perhaps thirty seconds passed between my scream and Lorraine's door opening. She hurried out in a white silk slip and matching bathrobe and said with alarm, "Ruthie, are you O.K.?"

I extended the letter toward her. "I got a Peaslee! I'm a Peaslee!"

Lorraine hesitated, and I was startled. Was it possible that even inside our university, across the small divide of two similar programs, the significance of the Peaslee didn't translate?

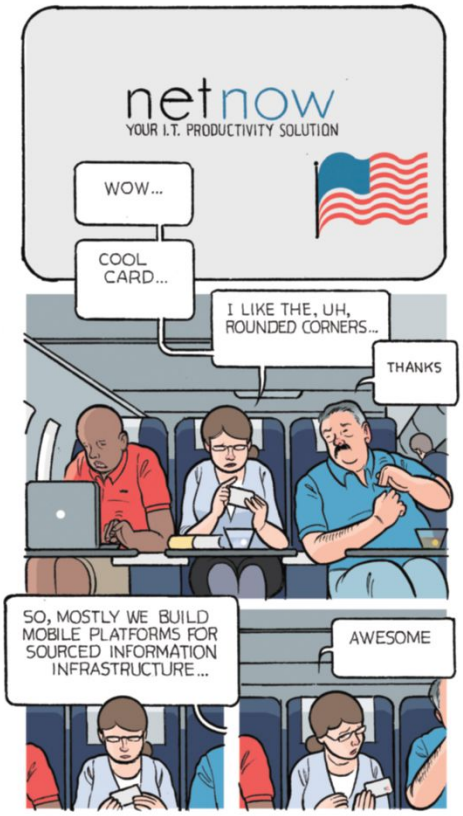
"The fellowship!" I added. "I got the best kind of fellowship for next year!"

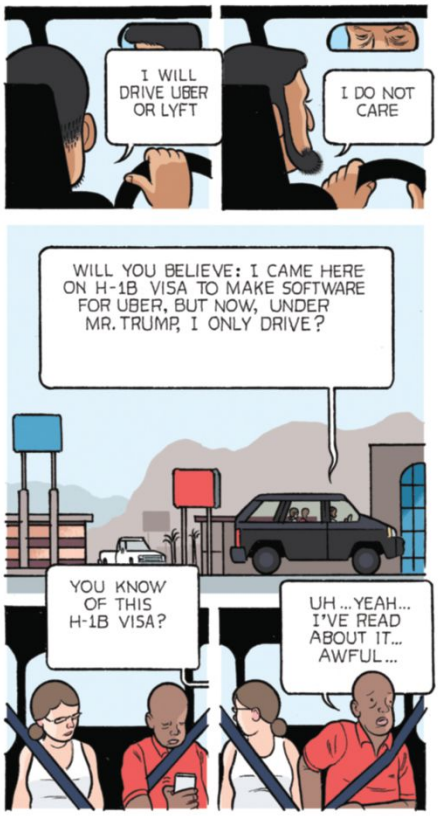
"Oh, Ruthie, how wonderful," she said, and she stepped forward and hugged me tightly. ♦

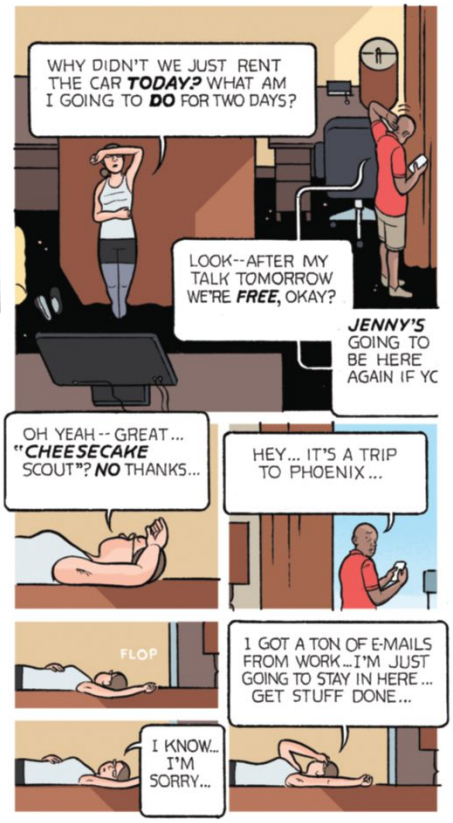
NEWYORKER.COM
Curtis Sittenfeld on reluctantly writing fiction about an M.F.A. writing program.

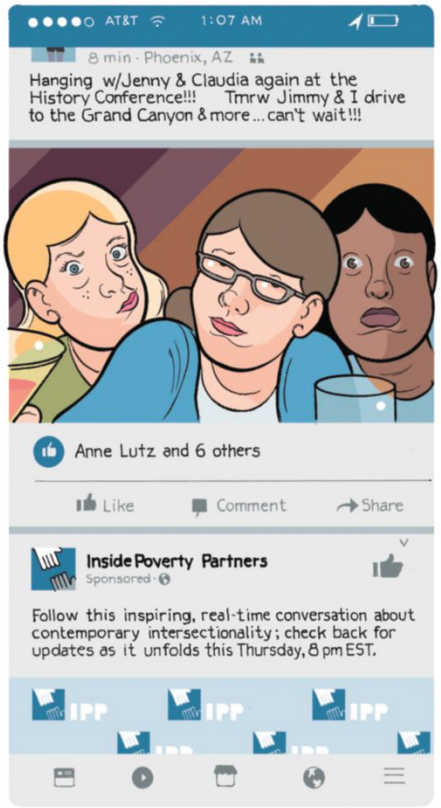
ON THE JOB BY CHRIS WARE

BUSINESS OR PLEASURE








AT&T 1:07 AM
8 min · Phoenix, AZ
Hanging w/Jenny & Claudia again at the History Conference!!! Tmrw Jimmy & I drive to the Grand Canyon & more ... can't wait!!!
Anne Lutz and 6 others
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Comment
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Inside Poverty Partners
Sponsored
Follow this inspiring, real-time conversation about contemporary intersectionality; check back for updates as it unfolds this Thursday, 8 pm EST.
IPP

mom AND
dad AND me (15? 16 YEARS OLD?)
WAS IT driving...
THAT ONE vacation WE TOOK
only one TIME
ONE STUPID boring
dad SUCH A DOUCHE
couldn't AT ALL drive
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arguing
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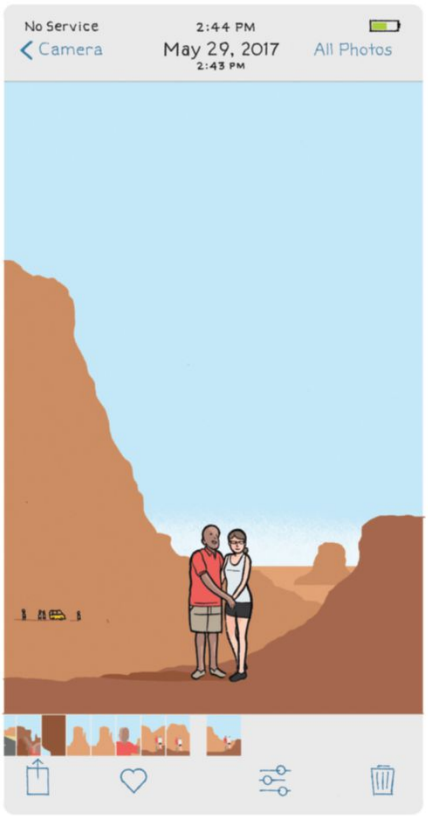
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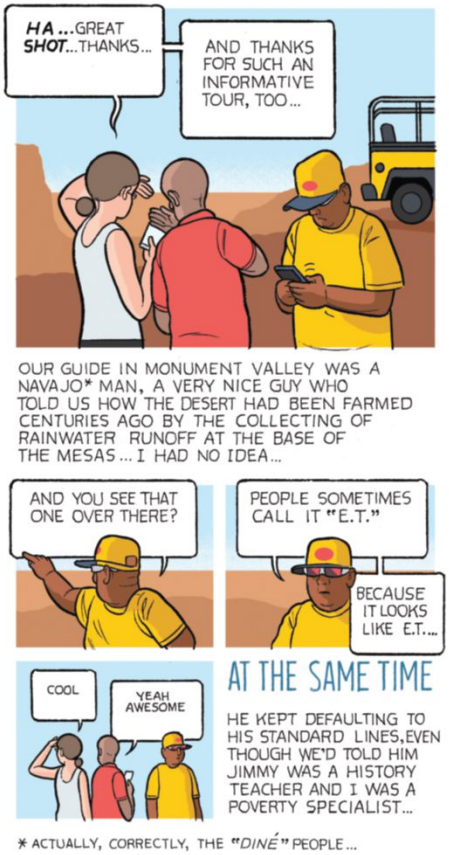
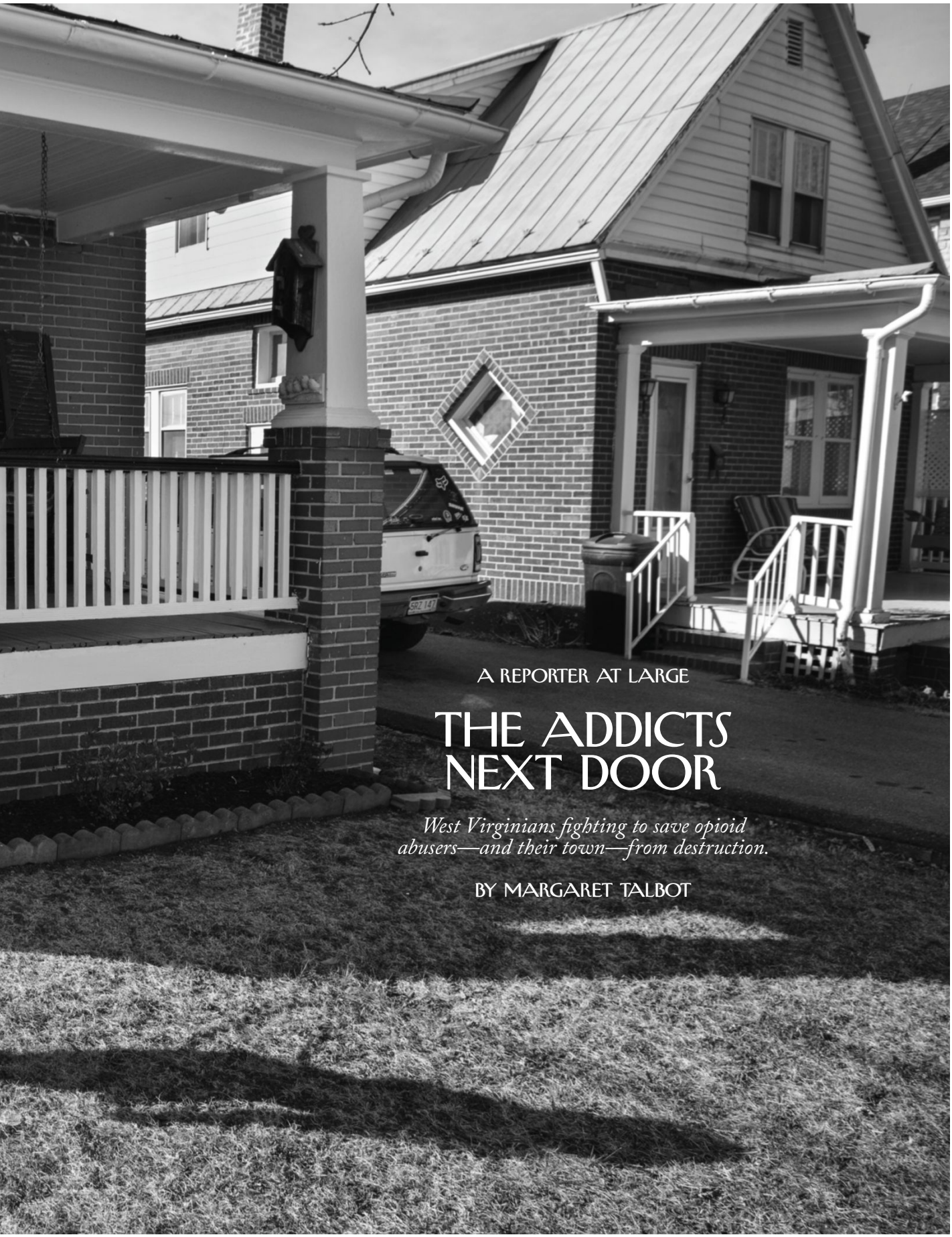

HA...GREAT SHOT...THANKS...
AND THANKS FOR SUCH AN INFORMATIVE TOUR, TOO...
OUR GUIDE IN MONUMENT VALLEY WAS A NAVAJO* MAN, A VERY NICE GUY WHO TOLD US HOW THE DESERT HAD BEEN FARMED CENTURIES AGO BY THE COLLECTING OF RAINWATER RUNOFF AT THE BASE OF THE MESAS... I HAD NO IDEA...
AND YOU SEE THAT ONE OVER THERE?
PEOPLE SOMETIMES CALL IT "E.T."
BECAUSE IT LOOKS LIKE E.T....
COOL
YEAH AWESOME
AT THE SAME TIME
HE KEPT DEFAULTING TO HIS STANDARD LINES, EVEN THOUGH WE'D TOLD HIM JIMMY WAS A HISTORY TEACHER AND I WAS A POVERTY SPECIALIST...
* ACTUALLY, CORRECTLY, THE "DINÉ" PEOPLE...

BUT... WAS THERE A NAVAJO... OR A DINÉ NAME FOR IT? SOME SORT OF HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE, OR--?
HE STARED
AT US FOR, LIKE, A REALLY LONG TIME...
THEN, HIS EYES SEEMED TO SLIGHTLY NARROW BEHIND HIS SUNGLASSES, AND HE TURNED...
AND THAT ONE OVER THERE
PEOPLE LIKE TO CALL IT "SNOOPY"...
BECAUSE IT LOOKS LIKE SNOOPY...

Jacey Chalmers, whose father died from a heroin overdose, lives with her grandmother, in Martinsburg. Down the street is a couple with



A REPORTER AT LARGE

THE ADDICTS NEXT DOOR

West Virginians fighting to save opioid abusers—and their town—from destruction.

BY MARGARET TALBOT

five adopted children whose parents were addicts. Across the street, a woman lives with her two nephews; their mother is an addict.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY EUGENE RICHARDS

Michael Barrett and Jenna Mulligan, emergency paramedics in Berkeley County, West Virginia, recently got a call that sent them to the youth softball field in a tiny town called Hedgesville. It was the first practice of the season for the girls' Little League team, and dusk was descending. Barrett and Mulligan drove past a clubhouse with a blue-and-yellow sign that read "Home of the Lady Eagles," and stopped near a scrubby set of bleachers, where parents had gathered to watch their daughters bat and field.

Two of the parents were lying on the ground, unconscious, several yards apart. As Barrett later recalled, the couple's thirteen-year-old daughter was sitting behind a chain-link backstop with her teammates, who were hugging her and comforting her. The couple's younger children, aged ten and seven, were running back and forth between their parents, screaming, "Wake up! Wake up!" When Barrett and Mulligan knelt down to administer Narcan, a drug that reverses heroin overdoses, some of the other parents got angry. "You know, saying, 'This is bullcrap,'" Barrett told me. " 'Why's my kid gotta see this? Just let 'em lay there.' " After a few minutes, the couple began to groan as they revived. Adults ushered the younger kids away. From the other side of the backstop, the older kids asked Barrett if the parents had overdosed. "I was, like, 'I'm not gonna say.' The kids aren't stupid. They know people don't just pass out for no reason." During the chaos, someone made a call to Child Protective Services.

At this stage of the American opioid epidemic, many addicts are collapsing in public—in gas stations, in restaurant bathrooms, in the aisles of big-box stores. Brian Costello, a former Army medic who is the director of the Berkeley County Emergency Medical Services, believes that more overdoses are occurring in this way because users figure that somebody will find them before they die. "To people who don't have that addiction, that sounds crazy," he said. "But, from a health-care provider's standpoint, you say to yourself, 'No, this is survival to them.' They're struggling with using but not wanting to die."

A month after the incident, the couple from the softball field, Angel Dawn Holt, who is thirty-five, and her boyfriend, Christopher Schildt, who is thirty-three, were arraigned on felony charges of child neglect. (Schildt is not the biological father of Holt's kids.) A local newspaper, the Martinsburg *Journal*, ran an article about the charges, noting that the couple's children, who had been "crying when law enforcement arrived," had been "turned over to their grandfather."

West Virginia has the highest overdose death rate in the country, and heroin has devastated the state's Eastern Panhandle, which includes Hedgesville and the larger town of Martinsburg. Like the vast majority of residents there, nearly all the addicts are white, were born in the area, and have modest incomes. Because they can't be dismissed as outsiders, some locals view them with empathy. Other residents regard addicts as community embarrassments. Many people in the Panhandle have embraced the idea of addiction as a disease, but a vocal cohort dismisses this as a fantasy disseminated by urban liberals.

These tensions were aired in online comments that amassed beneath the *Journal* article. A waitress named Sandy wrote, "Omgsh, How sad!! Shouldnt be able to have there kids back! Seems the heroin was more important to them, than watchn there kids have fun play ball, and have there parents proud of them!!" A poster named Valerie wrote, "Stop giving them Narcan! At the tax payers expense." Such views were countered by a reader named Diana: "I'm sure the parents didn't get up that morning and say hey let's scar the kids for life. I'm sure they wished they could sit through the kids practice without having to get high. The only way to understand it is to have lived it. The children need to be in a safe home and the adults need help. They are sick, i know from the outside it looks like a choice but its not. Shaming and judging will not help anyone."

One day, Angel Holt started posting comments. "I don't neglect," she wrote. "Had a bad judgment I love my kids and my kids love me there honor roll students my oldest son is about to graduate they play sports and have a ruff over there head that I own and food, and things they just want I messed up give me a chance to prove my self I don't have to prove shit to none of u just my children n they know who I am and who I'm not."

A few weeks later, I spoke to Holt on the phone. "Where it happened was really horrible," she said. "I can't sit here and say different." But, she said, it had been almost impossible to find help for her addiction. On the day of the softball practice, she ingested a small portion of a package of heroin that she and Schildt had just bought, figuring that she'd be able to keep it together at the field; she had promised her daughter that she'd be there. But the

"Just imagine the hole is world peace and the sand traps are nuclear Armageddon and the club is your ability to deal calmly and rationally with complex situations."

heroin had a strange purple tint—it must have been cut with something nasty. She started feeling weird, and passed out. She knew that she shouldn't have touched heroin that was so obviously adulterated. But, she added, "if you're an addict, and if you have the stuff, you do it."

In Berkeley County, which has a population of a hundred and fourteen thousand, when someone under sixty dies, and the cause of death isn't mentioned in the paper, locals assume that it was an overdose. It's becoming the default explanation when an ambulance stops outside a neighbor's house, and the best guess for why someone is sitting in his car on the side of the road in the middle of the afternoon. On January 18th, county officials started using a new app to record overdoses. According to this data, during the next two and a half months emergency medical personnel responded to a hundred and forty-five overdoses, eighteen of which were fatal. This underestimates the scale of the epidemic, because many overdoses do not prompt 911 calls. Last year, the county's annual budget for emergency medication was twenty-seven thousand dollars. Narcan, which costs fifty dollars a dose, consumed two-thirds of that allotment. The medication was administered two hundred and twenty-three times in 2014, and four hundred and three times in 2016.

One Thursday in March, a few weeks before Michael Barrett responded to Angel Holt's overdose, I rode with him in his paramedic vehicle, a specially equipped S.U.V. He started his day as he often does, with bacon and eggs at the Olde Country Diner, in Martinsburg. Barrett, who is thirty-three, with a russet-colored beard and mustache, works two twenty-four-hour shifts a week, starting at 7 A.M. The diner shares a strip mall with the E.M.T. station, and, if he has to leave on a call before he can finish eating, the servers will box up his food in a hurry. Barrett's father and his uncles were volunteer firemen in the area, and, growing up, he often accompanied them in the fire truck. As they'd pull people from crumpled cars or burning buildings, he'd say to himself, "Man, they *doing* stuff—they're awesome." When Barrett became a paramedic, in his twenties, he knew that he could make a lot more money "going down the road," as people around here say, referring to Baltimore or Washington, D.C. But he liked it when older colleagues told him, "I used to hold you at the fire department when you were a baby."

Barrett's first overdose call of the day came at 8 A.M., for a twenty-year-old woman. Several family members were present at the home, and while Barrett and his colleagues worked on her they cried and blamed one another, and themselves, for not watching her more closely. The woman was given Narcan, but she was too far gone; she died after arriving at the hospital.

We stopped by a local fire station, where the men and women on duty talked about all the O.D. calls they took each week. Sometimes they knew the person from high school, or were related to the person. Barrett said that in such cases you tended "to get more angry at them—you're, like, 'Man, you got a *kid*, what the hell's wrong with you?'"

Barrett sometimes had to return several times in one day to the same house—once, a father, a mother, and a teen-age daughter overdosed on heroin in succession. Such stories seemed like twisted variations on the small-town generational solidarity he admired; as Barrett put it, even if one family member wanted to get clean, it would be next to impossible unless the others did, too. He was used to O.D. calls by now, except for the ones in which kids were around. He once arrived at a home to find a seven-year-old and a five-year-old following the instructions of a 911 operator and performing C.P.R. on their parents. (They survived.)

Around three o'clock, the dispatcher reported that a man in Hedgesville was slumped over the steering wheel of a jeep. By the time we got there, the man, who appeared to be in his early thirties, had been helped out of his vehicle and into an ambulance. A skinny young sheriff's deputy on the scene showed us a half-filled syringe: the contents resembled clean sand, which suggested pure heroin. That was a good thing—these days, the narcotic is often cut with synthetic painkillers such as fentanyl, which is fifty times as powerful as heroin.

The man had floppy brown hair and a handsome face; he was wearing jeans, work boots, and a black windbreaker. He'd been revived with oxygen—he hadn't needed Narcan—but as he sat in the ambulance his eyes were only partly opened, and his pupils, when I could catch a glimpse of them, were constricted to pinpoints. Barrett asked him, "Did you take a half syringe? 'Cause there's half a syringe left." The man looked up briefly and said, "Yeah? I was trying to take it all." He said that he was sorry—he'd been clean for a month. Then he mumbled something about having a headache. "Well, sure you do," another paramedic said. "You weren't breathing there for a while. Your brain didn't have any oxygen."

The man's jeep sat, dead still, in the middle of a street that sloped sharply downhill. A woman introduced herself to me as Ethel. She had been driving behind the man when he lost consciousness. "I just rolled up, saw he was slumped over the wheel," she said. "I knew what it was right away." She beeped her horn, but he didn't move. She called 911 and stayed until the first responders showed up, "in case he started to roll forward, and maybe I could stop traffic—and to make sure he was O.K." I asked if the man's jeep had been running during this time. "Oh, yeah," she said. "He just happened to stop with his foot on the brake." Barrett shared some protocol: whenever he came across people passed out in a car, he put the transmission in park and took their keys, in case they abruptly revived. He'd heard of people driving off with E.M.T. personnel halfway inside.

The sky was a dazzling blue, with fluffy white clouds scudding overhead. The man took a sobriety test, wobbling across the neat lawn of a Methodist church. "That guy's still high as a kite," somebody said.

We were driving away from Hedgesville when the third overdose call of the

day came, for a twenty-nine-year-old male. Inside a nicely kept house in a modern subdivision, the man was lying unconscious on the bathroom floor, taking intermittent gasps. He was pale, though not yet the blue-tinged gray that people turn when they've been breathing poorly for a while. Opioid overdoses usually kill people by inhibiting respiration: breathing slows and starts to sound labored, then stops altogether. Barrett began preparing a Narcan dose. Generally, the goal was to get people breathing well again, not necessarily to wake them completely. A full dose of Narcan is two milligrams, and in Berkeley County the medics administer 0.4 milligrams at a time, so as not to snatch patients' high away too abruptly: you didn't want them to go into instant withdrawal, feel terribly sick, and become belligerent. Barrett crouched next to the man and started an I.V. A minute later, the man sat up, looking bewildered and resentful. He threw up. Barrett said, "Couple more minutes and you would have died, buddy."

"Thank you," the man said.

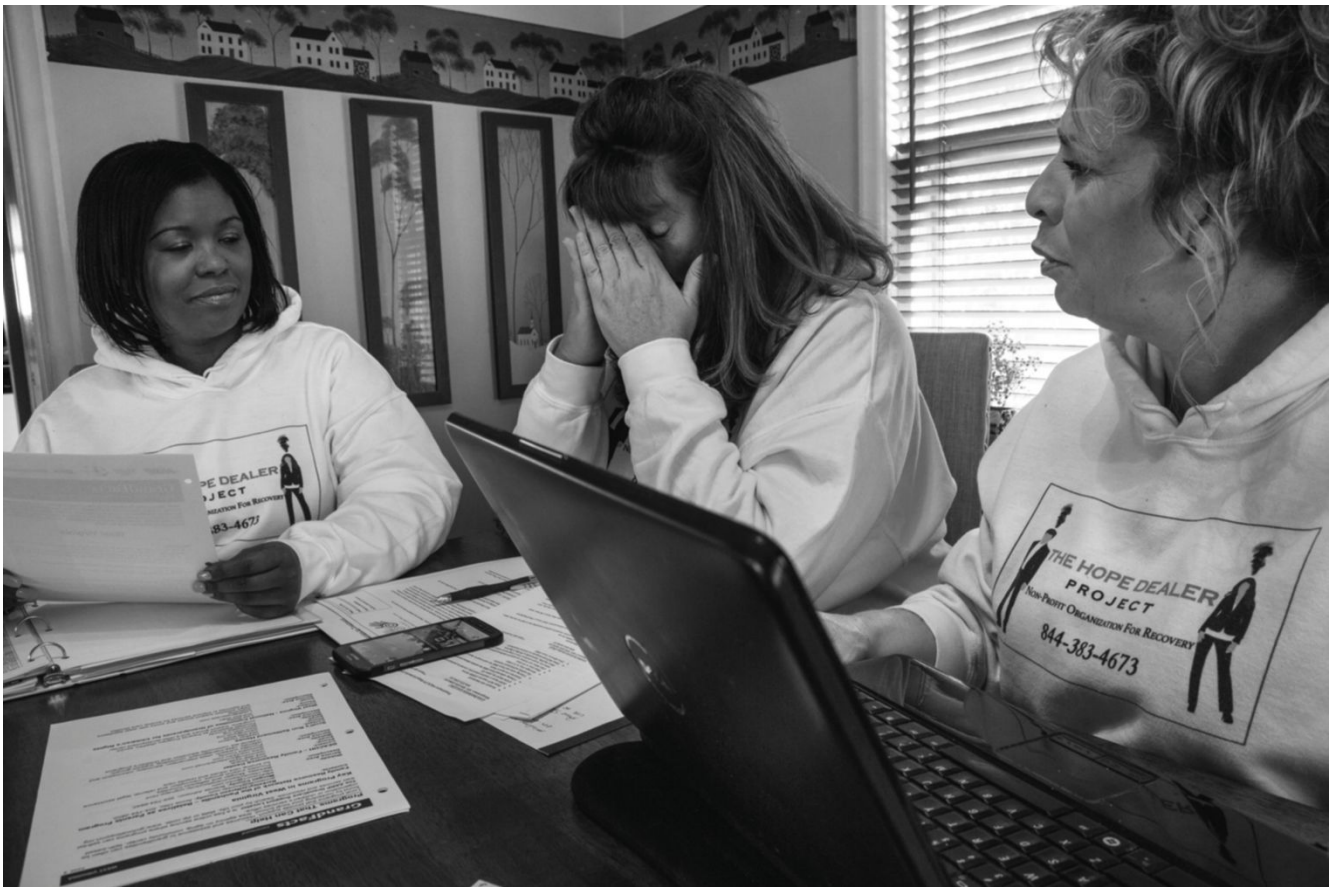
"You're welcome—but now you need to go to the hospital."

The man's girlfriend was standing nearby, her hair in a loose bun. She responded calmly to questions: "Yeah, he does heroin"; "Yeah, he just ate." The family dog was snuffling at the front door, and one of the sheriff's deputies asked if he could let it outside. The girlfriend said, "Sure." Brian Costello had told me that family members had grown oddly comfortable with E.M.T. visits: "That's the scary part—that it's becoming the norm." The man stood up, and then, swaying in the doorway, vomited a second time.

"We're gonna take him to the hospital," Barrett told the girlfriend. "He could stop breathing again."

As we drove away, Barrett predicted that the man would check himself out of the hospital as soon as he could; most O.D. patients refused further treatment. Even a brush with death was rarely a turning point for an addict. "It's kind of hard to feel good about it," Barrett said of the intervention. "Though he did say, 'Thanks for waking me up.' Well, that's our job. But do you feel like you're really making a difference? Ninety-nine per cent of the time, no." The next week, Barrett's crew was called back to the same house repeatedly. The man overdosed three times; his girlfriend, once.

It was getting dark, and Barrett stopped at a convenience store for a snack—chocolate milk and a beef stick. That evening, he dealt with one more O.D. A young woman had passed out in her car in the parking lot of a 7-Eleven, with her little girl squirming in a car seat. An older woman who happened on the scene had taken the girl, a four-year-old, into the store and bought her some hot chocolate and Skittles. After the young woman received Narcan, Barrett told her that she could have killed her daughter, and she started sobbing hysterically. Meanwhile, several guys in the parking lot were becoming agitated. They had given the woman C.P.R., but someone had called 911 and suggested that they had supplied her with the heroin. The men were black and everybody else—the



Tara Mayson, Tina Stride, and Lisa Melcher run the Hope Dealer Project, which helps addicts find a spot in rehab.

overdosing woman, the older woman, the cops, the ambulance crew—was white. The men were told to remain at the scene while the cops did background checks. Barrett attempted to defuse the tension by saying, "Hey, you guys gave her C.P.R.? Thanks. We really appreciate that." The criminal checks turned up nothing; there was no reason to suspect that the men were anything but Good Samaritans. The cops let the men go, the young woman went to the E.R., and the little girl was retrieved by her father.

Heroin is an alluringly cheap alternative to prescription pain medication. In 1996, Purdue Pharma introduced OxyContin, marketing it as a safer form of opiate—the class of painkillers derived from the poppy plant. (The term "opioids" encompasses synthetic versions of opiates as well.) Opiates such as morphine block pain but also produce a dreamy euphoria, and over time they cause physical cravings. OxyContin was sold in time-release capsules that levelled out the high and, supposedly, diminished the risk of addiction, but people soon discovered that the capsules could be crushed into powder and then injected or snorted. Between 2000 and 2014, the number of overdose deaths in the United States jumped by a hundred and thirty-seven per cent.

Some states became inundated with opiates. According to the Charleston *Gazette-Mail*, between 2007 and 2012 drug wholesalers shipped to West Virginia seven hundred and eighty million pills of hydrocodone (the generic name for Vicodin) and oxycodone (the generic name for OxyContin). That was enough to give each resident four hundred and thirty-three pills. The state has a disproportionate number of people who have jobs that cause physical pain, such as coal mining. It also has high levels of poverty and joblessness, which cause psychic pain. Mental-health services, meanwhile, are scant. Chess Yellott, a retired family practitioner in Martinsburg, told me that many West Virginians self-medicate to mute depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress from sexual assault or childhood abuse. "Those things are treatable, and upper-middle-class parents generally get their kids treated," he said. "But, in families with a lot of chaos and money problems, kids don't get help."

In 2010, Purdue introduced a reformulated capsule that is harder to crush or dissolve. The Centers for Disease Control subsequently issued new guidelines stipulating that doctors should not routinely treat chronic pain with opioids, and instead should try approaches such as exercise and behavioral therapy. The number of prescriptions for opioids began to drop.

But when prescription opioids became scarcer their street price went up. Drug cartels sensed an opportunity, and began flooding rural America with heroin. Daniel Ciccarone, a professor at the U.C.-San Francisco School of Medicine, studies the heroin market. He said of the cartels, "They're multinational, savvy, borderless entities. They worked very hard to move high-quality heroin into places like rural Vermont." They also kept the price low. In West Virginia, many addicts told me, an oxycodone pill now sells for about eighty dollars; a dose of heroin can be bought for about ten.

A recent paper from the National Bureau of Economic Research concludes, "Following the OxyContin reformulation in 2010, abuse of prescription opioid medications and overdose deaths decreased for the first time since 1990. However, this drop coincided with an unprecedented rise in heroin overdoses." According to the Centers for Disease Control, three out of four new heroin users report having first abused opioids.

"The Changing Face of Heroin Use in the United States," a 2014 study led by Theodore Cicero, of Washington University in St. Louis, looked at some three thousand heroin addicts in substance-abuse programs. Half of those who began using heroin before 1980 were white; nearly ninety per cent of those who began using in the past decade were white. This demographic shift may be connected to prescribing patterns. A 2012 study by a University of Pennsylvania researcher found that black patients were thirty-four per cent less likely than white patients to be prescribed opioids for such chronic conditions as back pain and migraines, and fourteen per cent less likely to receive such prescriptions after surgery or traumatic injury.

But a larger factor, it seems, was the despair of white people in struggling small towns. Judith Feinberg, a professor at West Virginia University who studies drug addiction, described opioids as "the ultimate escape drugs." She told me, "Boredom and a sense of uselessness and inadequacy—these are human failings that lead you to just want to withdraw. On heroin, you curl up in a corner and blank out the world. It's an extremely seductive drug for dead-end towns, because it makes the world's problems go away. Much more so than coke or meth, where you want to run around and *do* things—you get aggressive, razzed and jazzed."

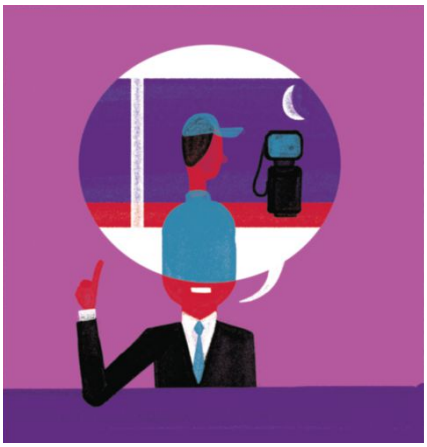
Peter Callahan, a psychotherapist in Martinsburg, said that heroin "is a very tough drug to get off of, because, while it was meant to numb *physical* pain, it numbs emotional pain as well—quickly and intensely." In tight-knit Appalachian towns, heroin has become a social contagion. Nearly everyone I met in Martinsburg has ties to someone—a child, a sibling, a girlfriend, an in-law, an old high-school coach—who has struggled with opioids. As Callahan put it, "If the lady next door is using, and so are other neighbors, and people in your family are, too, the odds are good that you're going to join in."

In 2015, Berkeley County created a new position, recovery-services coördinator, to connect residents with rehab. Yet there is a chronic shortage of beds in the state for addicts who want help. Kevin Knowles, who was appointed to the job, told me, "If they have private insurance, I can hook them right up. If they're on Medicaid—and ninety-five per cent of the people I work with are—it's going to be a long wait for them. Weeks, months." He said, "The number of beds would have to increase by a factor of three or four to make any impact."

West Virginia has an overdose death rate of 41.5 per hundred thousand people. (New Hampshire has the second-highest rate: 34.3 per hundred thousand.) This year, for the sixth straight year, West Virginia's indigent burial fund, which helps families who can't

ON THE JOB BY AKHIL SHARMA

THE NIGHT SHIFT



There was no reason for the investment bankers who interviewed me to hire me. I knew nothing about finance and wasn't even really clear as to what bankers did; all I knew was that they wore snazzy suits and looked coolly impatient. My reason for wanting to be a banker was simple: I was a student at Harvard Law School, and I figured that, instead of working very hard as a corporate lawyer, I might as well work the same amount in finance and make even more money. Many of my fellow-students appeared to be thinking the same thing; as I remember, almost a third of the people I knew who were graduating in my year applied to become bankers.

To interview with the less prosperous investment banks, we waited in the then mangy hallways of the Sheraton Commander Hotel, in Cambridge. For the bulge-bracket firms, like Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley, we met in hospitality suites at the Charles and tried to hide our anxiety. When I am nervous, I become giddy and happily talkative. In the hospitality suites, I stationed myself by the sushi platters and offered advice on what was especially delicious. If there was an open bar at some expensive restaurant during a recruiting event, I'd gleefully debate with the bartender whether I should drink the Johnny Walker Blue or some rare Talisker.

The fact that I knew nothing was immediately clear. After a few interviews in which I saw my interlocutor flick his eyes over my résumé and register that I had no relevant experience, I decided to start lying.

I began telling interviewers that throughout high school and much of college I had worked night shifts at 7-Elevens and gas stations. I came up with this lie because I was Indian and was used to being seen through stereotypes—used to being asked if I spoke English or if I was studying to be a doctor. The reason I chose this particular lie was that people love the hardworking-immigrant-who-makes-good narrative. It allows them to feel that they live in a benign, meritocratic world, and to believe, in a back-channel way, that they are deserving of their success. Also, bankers work bone-crunching hours. In my night-shift history, my interviewers would see evidence that I was a tireless employee.

During the interviews, as I told my story, I would almost pop out of my chair with nervous exultation. I had a gift for inventing details. I'd discuss how scary it was to work nights at a 7-Eleven, how a group of young men would come in and begin stealing and I'd be afraid to confront them. Or I'd describe how many layers of clothing I had to wear as a gas-station attendant during the winter; how hookers would hang out at the gas station to solicit customers; how my clothes smelled of hot dogs by the end of a 7-Eleven shift; how, around four in the morning, the alcoholics showed up to buy beer because they had run out of liquor at home. I knew that what I was offering my interviewers was pain porn, but playing my audience—especially playing them with a stereotype that had caused me anger and hurt in the past—filled me with delight. I was so excited as I told my stories that I sometimes even half believed them.

Before the lies, the people who interviewed me had rarely revealed what they felt; now they laughed and sighed along with what seemed like recognition, almost as if they were seeing their own hardships in my tales. That was the sort of self-pitying, self-aggrandizing wretches we were.

I started getting callbacks. I was flown to New York for daylong interviews, in which eventually I would come up against someone who didn't care about my time at 7-Eleven. All that this man—it was invariably a man—quite reasonably cared about was whether I could make his life easier by getting work done. He'd ask me what method of valuation could be best massaged to show an earnings-accretive merger in a financial model. He'd ask about the difference between financial and tax accounting. Usually, the sort of person who asked such questions was an associate or a junior vice-president, who worked closely with the nitty-gritty of financial modelling. Inevitably, that person would tell the powers that be, "Hey, this guy is an idiot!," and I would be rejected.

Finally, one day, I was in New York for a series of interviews and the junior vice-president I was supposed to see was called into a meeting. I knew right then that I would be offered the job. When I got the call, I accepted on the spot. I was smart enough to understand that I had got lucky. "Do you know when I get the signing bonus?" I asked. ♦

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

afford a funeral pay for one, ran out of money. Fred Kitchen, the president of the West Virginia Funeral Directors Association, told me that, in the funeral business, "we know the reason for that was the increase in overdose deaths." He added, "Families take out second mortgages, cash in 401(k)s, and go broke to try and save a son or daughter, who then overdoses and dies." Without the help of the burial fund, funeral directors must either give away caskets, plots, and cremation services—and risk going out of business—or, Kitchen said, look "mothers, fathers, husbands, wives, and children in the eye while they're saying, 'You have nothing to help us?'"

Martinsburg, which has a population of seventeen thousand, is a hilly town filled with brick and clapboard row houses. It was founded in 1778, by Adam Stephen, a Revolutionary War general. The town became a depot for the B. & O. Railroad and grew into an industrial center dominated by woollen mills. Interwoven, established in the eighteen-nineties, was the first electric-powered textile plant in the U.S. The company became the largest men's-sock manufacturer in the world, and at its height, in the nineteen-fifties, it employed three thousand people in Martinsburg. The Interwoven factory whistle could be heard all over town, summoning workers every morning at a quarter to seven. In 1971, when the mill closed, an editorial in the Martinsburg *Journal* mourned the passing of "what was once this community's greatest pride." In 2004, the last woollen mill in town, Royce Hosiery, ceased operations.

It's simplistic to trace the town's opioid epidemic directly to the loss of industrial jobs. Nevertheless, many residents I met brought up this history, as part of a larger story of lost purpose that has made the town vulnerable to the opioid onslaught. In 2012, Macy's opened a distribution center in the Martinsburg area, but, Knowles said, the company has found it difficult to hire longtime residents, because so many fail the required drug test. (The void has been filled, only partially, by people from neighboring states.) Knowles wonders if Procter & Gamble, which is opening a manufacturing plant in the area this fall, will have a similar problem.

The Eastern Panhandle is one of the wealthier parts of a poor state. (The most destitute counties depend on coal mining.) Berkeley County is close enough to D.C. and Baltimore that many residents commute for work. Nevertheless, Martinsburg feels isolated. Several people I met there expressed surprise, or sympathy, when I told them that I live in D.C., or politely said that they'd like to visit the capital one of these days. Like every other county in West Virginia, Berkeley County voted for Donald Trump.

Michael Chalmers is the publisher of an Eastern Panhandle newspaper, the *Observer*. It is based in Shepherdstown, a picturesque college town near the Maryland border which has not succumbed to heroin. Chalmers, who is forty-two, grew up in Martinsburg, and in 2014 he lost his younger brother, Jason, to an overdose. I asked him why he thought that Martinsburg was struggling so much with drugs. "In my opinion, the desperation in the Panhandle, and places like it, is a *social* vacancy," he said. "People don't feel they have a purpose." There was a "shame element in small-town culture." Many drug addicts, he explained, are "trying to escape the reality that this place doesn't give them anything." He added, "That's really hard to live with—when you look around and you see that seven out of ten of your friends from high school are still here, and nobody makes more than thirty-six thousand a year, and everybody's just bitching about bills and watching these crazy shows on reality TV and not *doing anything*."

The Interwoven mill, derelict and grand, still dominates the center of Martinsburg. One corner of it has been turned into a restaurant, but the rest sits empty. Lately, there's been talk of an ambitious renovation. A police officer named Andrew Garcia has a plan, called Martinsburg Renew, which would turn most of the mill into a rehab facility. Todd Funkhouser, who runs the Berkeley County Historical Society, showed me around one day. "Martinsburg is an industrial town," he said. "That's its identity. But what's the industry now? Maybe it will be drug rehab."

In the past several months, I have returned to Martinsburg many times, and spoken with many addicts there. I learned the most about the crisis, however, from residents who weren't drug users, but whose lives had been irrevocably altered by others' addiction.

Lori Swadley is a portrait and wedding photographer in Martinsburg. When I looked at her Web site, she seemed to be in demand all over the area, and her photographs were lovely: her brides glowed in afternoon light, her high-school seniors looked polished and confident. But what drew me to her was a side project she had been pursuing, called 52 Addicts—a series of portraits that called attention to the drug epidemic in and around Martinsburg. It was clear that Swadley had a full life: her husband, Jon, worked with her in the photography business, and they had three small children, Juniper, Bastian, and Bodhi. Her Web site noted that she loved fashion and gardening, and included this declaration: "I'm happy that you've stumbled upon our little slice of heaven!" The 52 Addicts series seemed like a surprising project for someone so busy and cheerful.

We met one day at Mugs & Muffins, a cozy coffee shop on Queen Street. Swadley is thirty-nine, tall and slender, and she looked elegant in jeans, a charcoal-colored turtleneck, and high boots. She and her husband had moved to Martinsburg in 2010, she told me, looking for an affordable place to raise children close to where she had grown up, in the Shenandoah Valley. Soon after they arrived, they settled into a subdivision outside town, and Swadley started reading the Martinsburg *Journal* online. She told me, "I'd see these stories about addiction—whether it was somebody who'd passed away, and the family wanted to tell their story, or it was the overdose statistics, or whatever." Many of the stories were written by the same reporter, Jenni Vincent. "She was very persistent, and—I don't know what the word for it is—very *in your face*," Swadley said. "You could tell she wanted the problem to

be known. Because at that time it seemed like everybody else wanted to hide it. And, to me, that seemed like the worst thing you could do."

It turned out that thirteen of Swadley's friends had died of opioid overdoses. I said that it seemed like an extraordinarily high number, especially for someone who was not an addict. She agreed, but there it was. All thirteen were young men—Swadley had met most of them when she was in her early twenties, and she had been a tomboy back then. The first time she heard that a friend had died, she had been photographing a wedding for some mutual friends. They were sitting around a bonfire at the end of the day. When Swadley spoke of a crazy horror film that she and a guy named Jeremy had made in high school, somebody mentioned that he had recently died, from a heroin overdose. Swadley felt like she'd been punched in the gut. She threw up, and wrecked her car on the way home.

At the time, Swadley was hanging out with her old crowd in bars and restaurants every weekend. One by one, the group dwindled. Many of them—"the preppy boys, the hippie boys"—got into heroin eventually, she said. They tried to help one another, but "we were in our twenties—we had no clue." She'd call rehab places on friends' behalf and have to tell them that the price was staggering, and that in any case it might be six months before they could be admitted. As the overdoses piled up, she was appalled to find that sometimes she had trouble keeping track of which friends were dead.

The funerals had a peculiar aspect. "The parents didn't want anyone to know how it had happened, and they tried to keep the friends out," she said. At the services for one friend—a sweet, goofy guy with shaggy blond hair—Swadley and her friends got close enough to the casket to see that his hair had been shorn, so that "he looked clean-cut." She went on, "It was clear that his mother didn't want us there. It was understandable—she didn't know if any of us had been supplying him."

One day, Swadley decided that she needed to write down all thirteen names, before she forgot one. In January, 2016, she started photographing addicts in recovery. In her introduction to the series, on Instagram, she wrote about her friends who had died and about Martinsburg's lack of rehab centers. She found the town's culture of denial enraging.

For the first few portraits, Swadley reached out to her subjects, but soon people started coming to her. She took their pictures, asked them about their lives, and told their stories in a paragraph or so. There are now two dozen images in the series.

In one of the portraits, an E.R. nurse hugs her daughter, Hope, from whom she'd been estranged. They had reconnected at the hospital, when the nurse saw Hope's name listed as a patient in the emergency room. Swadley photographed a Martinsburg woman named Crystal, who'd been hit by a car one night when she was walking to her dealer's house; Crystal was now clean, but she was confined to a wheelchair. A woman named Tiffany posed holding a snapshot of her younger sister, Tabby. Both women had started off on pills—Tabby had developed a problem after a gallbladder operation left her with a thirty-day supply of meds—and then became heroin addicts. Tiffany had received treatment, but Tabby had fatally overdosed while she was waiting for a rehab bed. Swadley took the portrait in a park where Tiffany had once begged Tabby to stop using. When I called Tiffany, she told me that she had recently lost a second sister to heroin.

Swadley hopes that her photographs will someday be displayed all around town—in coffee shops, restaurants, perhaps the library. She wants a public reckoning with the stories she's collected. "The whole point of this project is to show naysayers out there that people do recover," she said. "They are good people. I want to show people they deserve a chance. I want it in people's faces, so they see that it could be their neighbor, or their best friend."

One day, Swadley told me about a local effort against heroin addiction, called the Hope Dealer Project. It was run by three women: Tina Stride, who had a twenty-six-year-old son in recovery; Tara Mayson, whose close friend had gone through periods of addiction; and Lisa Melcher, whose son-in-law had died of an overdose, and whose thirty-two-year-old daughter, Christina, was struggling to overcome heroin addiction. All three had known addicts who wanted to get clean but had no place to go. Last fall, like carpool moms with a harrowing new mission, they had begun driving people to detox facilities all over the state—any place that could take them, sometimes as far as five hours away. The few with

WADE IN THE WATER

One of the women greeted me.
I love you, she said. She didn't
Know me, but I believed her,
And a terrible new ache
Rolled over in my chest,
Like in a room where the drapes
Have been swept back. I love you,
I love you, as she continued
Down the hall past other strangers,
Each feeling pierced suddenly
By pillars of heavy light.
I love you, throughout
The performance, in every
Handclap, every stomp.
I love you in the rusted iron
Chains someone was made
To drag until love let them be

Unclasped and left empty
In the center of the ring.
I love you in the water
Where they pretended to wade,
Singing that old blood-deep song
That dragged us to those banks
And cast us in. I love you,
The angles of it scraping at
Each throat, shouldering past
The swirling dust motes
In those beams of light
That whatever we now knew
We could let ourselves feel, knew
To climb. O Woods—O Dogs—
O Tree—O Gun—O *Girl, run*—
O Miraculous Many Gone—
O Lord—O Lord—O Lord—
Is this love the trouble you promised?

—*Tracy K. Smith*

private insurance could get rehab anywhere in the country, and the Hope Dealer women were prepared to suggest options. But most people in town had Medicaid or no insurance at all, and such addicts had to receive treatment somewhere in the state. Currently, the detox facility closest to Martinsburg is about two hours away.

Stride works full time at the General Services Administration, in Washington, but spends up to twenty-four hours a week giving rides to drug users. The other two focus on reaching out to addicts and families. Stride noted, "I have to talk to the addict, or the client—that's what we try to call them—all the way to that detox center. Because they're sick. And we pass hospitals all the way, and they're begging, 'Just take me there—they can help me!' But they really can't, the hospitals."

When Stride and her client arrive at a detox facility, nurses are waiting at the door. At that point, Stride said, "they're, like, 'What do you mean, you're *leaving* me?'" She went on, "They're scared, because now it's reality. They know they're not going to get their dope or their pills. For them to walk in those doors, that takes a lot. They're heroes to me."

After five to ten days in detox, patients are released. "When our clients get clean and the drugs are out of their system, they believe they're O.K.," Stride said. "And they're not. That's just getting the poison out of their bodies. So we try to explain to them, 'No, you need to go through rehab, and learn *why* you are using, and learn how to fight it.' Some will do it. Some won't. And then our issue becomes how we're going to find them a bed in rehab. If beds are all full, a lot of times they come back here to Martinsburg, because they have nowhere else to go." Stride tries to keep those clients under constant watch. "That addict brain is telling them, 'You know what you need, and it's right here—go get it.'"

Stride usually drives clients to a detox center immediately after picking them up. But once she had to keep a woman overnight at her home, because a bed wasn't available until the morning. She told me, "All I said was 'Please, don't rob me. I'm here to help you. But I guess if you *are* gonna rob me there's not a whole lot I can do about it.' This young lady had to go through the night—she was so sick, she didn't sleep. I tried to stay up, but I knew I had to drive four hours to the detox place, and four hours back. So I slept some. We were up at 4 A.M., and at the detox place at eight. And she's doing good now—she calls me to touch base sometimes."

The Hope Dealer women and I met near an apartment complex that Melcher manages, and drank mochas that she had bought at McDonald's. Melcher, who is fifty-three, with abundant blond ringlets and a warm, husky voice, told me that she loved flower arranging and refinishing old furniture—activities that would be occupying her days more often if there weren't a heroin crisis. Stride, who is forty-seven, wore her hair in a ponytail and had curly bangs; Mayson, who is forty-six, had long, sparkly nails.

At one point, Stride said, "Please don't think I'm rude," as she picked up her phone to read a text.

"He's in!" she cried. "He made it!"

The women cheered.

They had spent the previous day working on behalf of a woman and her twenty-one-year-old son, a heroin addict. He had private insurance, so they had signed him up for rehab in New Hampshire. "We had a plane ticket ready, and they were ready to go to the airport," Stride said. "I left them, and then the mother called me and said, 'My son's lips are blue—he's overdosed. What do I do?'" Stride became teary. "And I said, 'Call 911. I'm coming right back over.'"

Stride went on, "So he was in the hospital, and then his mom reached out to me late last night and said, 'He's been released.' First question I asked is 'Where is he?,' because we're afraid he's going to run. And she said, 'Instead of putting him on a plane, can we drive him? Because I want to know he makes it.' And I said, 'Yes, you can.' So they are driving eight hours to take him to his detox. Detox was good to go—so we know for the next seven to ten days he's safe." After that, the man was set to go to Florida, to attend a thirty-day program that Stride respected.

Melcher said, "Praise God, he made it," and the women all nodded.

Mayson, who works at the Department of Veterans Affairs and has two adult children, said that the Hope Dealer women had become like sisters. When one of them has a hard day, she can count on one of the others to tell her to rest and recharge—or, as Melcher often says, to "*breeeathe*."

As mothers, they felt that they had a particular ability to communicate

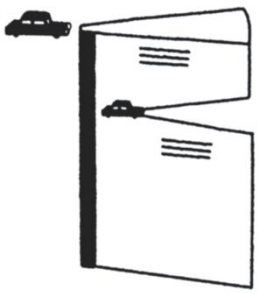
with women who needed help with their addicted children. Stride said, "I remember when I first found out my son was an addict. I was devastated. I didn't know who to turn to, who I could trust. And I worked and worked to find my son a place, and that's rough. Hearing 'No' or 'We can't take him today, but we can take him a week from today.' 'No, you need to take him *now*. My son's gonna *die.*' So now, when moms reach out to us, we're, like, 'We've got this.'"

Melcher said, "When you're in that space? Oh, my gosh, you can hardly breathe, you're a cryin' mess."

Stride nodded and said, "So when we come in and say, 'Mom, we're gonna take care of your child,' I don't care if that child is fifty years old—you see a relief."

On May 21st, I received an e-mail from Melcher, informing me that Christina, her daughter, had fatally overdosed on heroin. Christina, she said, had completed rehab several times, and had been clean for ninety days before relapsing. Melcher refused to hide the fact that Christina had "lost her battle with addiction," but added, "When a child passes away, the last thing a mother wants to say is that the child was an addict." Melcher plans to continue her volunteer work, in honor of Christina's "beautiful but tortured life."

John Aldis doesn't look like a maverick. He's seventy-one, white-haired and pink-cheeked, with a neat mustache, half-rimmed spectacles, and a penchant for sweater vests and bow ties. You could imagine him being cast as the Stage Manager in a production of "Our Town." But two years ago Aldis became the first doctor in West Virginia to offer free public classes to teach anybody—not just first responders and health professionals—how to reverse overdoses with Narcan.



Aldis is a family practitioner with a background in public health and tropical medicine. His mother taught nursing, and his father was an obstetrician. "We never made it through the second feature at the drive-in," Aldis recalled. "He would always be summoned over the loudspeaker to attend a birth." There was no question in Aldis's mind that he would become a doctor, too. He spent most of his career in Asia and Africa, as a U.S. Navy physician and as a medical officer with the State Department. He retired in 2001. He and his wife, Pheny, a medical technologist, bought the house where he'd lived as a small child, in Shepherdstown. They filled it with art and antiques, acquired two Jack Russell terriers, and prepared for a quiet life filled with visits from their two daughters and the grandkids.

But Aldis soon became aware of the opioid epidemic in the Eastern Panhandle—several people he'd hired to work on his house were "good fellows" who were also addicts. "When I started to see it, I could not look away," he told me. He took a job at the New Life Clinic, in Martinsburg, where he could prescribe Suboxone, one of the long-term treatments for opioid addiction. He found it enormously frustrating that addicts were often urged to quit heroin cold turkey or to stop taking Suboxone (or methadone or naltrexone, the other drugs used to treat addiction and counteract withdrawal symptoms). In his view, this was wholly unrealistic. Most addicts needed what is known as medication-assisted treatment for a long time, if not the rest of their lives. He found the work at the clinic the most satisfying he'd done since graduating from medical school, forty-six years earlier. Patients struggled, and many of them failed, but when one of them told him, "Doc, I talked to my mom for the first time in three years yesterday," that was, Aldis said, "just the greatest thing."

Aldis is generally a forbearing man, but he can be dismissive of people who don't share his sense of urgency. As he wrote to me in an e-mail, "The lack of understanding of medication-assisted treatment among otherwise reasonably intelligent people at all levels of our community is astounding and (for me) completely unacceptable."

In 2015, West Virginia University's Injury Control Research Center, along with several state and county agencies, started investigating ways to make naloxone—the generic name for Narcan—more widely available, in the hope of saving people in the throes of an overdose. Aldis attended a talk on the subject by the center's deputy director, Herb Linn, and afterward he told him, "Let's not study this anymore. Let's just start a program." Linn recalls, "I told him, 'Just do it! You could actually prescribe it to your patients.'"

Aldis taught his first class on administering Narcan on September 3, 2015, at the New Life Clinic. Nine days later, a woman who'd attended the class used Narcan to revive a pregnant woman who had overdosed at a motel where they were both staying. During the next few weeks, Aldis heard of five more lives saved by people who'd attended the class.

In his seminars, Aldis addresses why addicts' lives are worth saving. That might seem self-evident, but at this point in the opioid epidemic many West Virginians feel too exhausted and resentful to help. People like Lori Swadley and the Hope Dealer women and John Aldis must combat a widespread attitude of "Leave 'em lie, let 'em die." A community sucked dry by addiction becomes understandably wary of coddling users, and some locals worry that making Narcan easily available could foster complacency about overdoses.

William Poe, a paramedic, told me, "The thing about Narcan is that it kind of makes it O.K. to overdose, because then you can keep it in your house and keep it private. And a lot of times *we're* the wake-up call. I remember one time, we had a kid who had O.D.'d, and we had him in the ambulance. A call came over the radio—someone about his age had just died from an overdose. And the kid was, like, 'I'm so glad you guys brought me back.'" It was humiliating when an ambulance showed up at your house and carted you out, pale and retching, but it also might push you to change. Then again, Poe mused, when most of your neighbors—not to mention your mom and your grandma—already knew that you used heroin, shaming might have little effect.

This past winter, I watched Aldis teach two classes in Berkeley Springs,

an Eastern Panhandle town, at a storefront church between a convenience store and a pawnshop. The bare trees on the ridge above us were outlined like black lace against the twilight. Inside, a few dozen people, mostly women, sipped coffee from Styrofoam cups in an unadorned room with a low ceiling, tan carpeting, and rows of tan chairs.

Aldis touched briefly on what an overdose looks like, but acknowledged that the attendees probably already knew. ("Oh, Lord, yes," a woman behind me said.) He demonstrated how to spray Narcan up a patient's nose—take-home kits come in atomizer form—and announced that at the end of class he'd be writing prescriptions, which those in attendance could get filled at a pharmacy. If they had Medicaid or private insurance, the kit would cost only a few dollars; if they didn't, it could cost anywhere from a hundred and twenty-five to three hundred dollars. At the first meeting I attended, in November, a few women began to cry when they heard that. At the second, in January, Aldis had some good news: the state had agreed to provide a hundred and eighty free kits.

Aldis told me that he'd like to see Narcan "inundating the community." It carried no potential for abuse, and couldn't harm you if someone gave it to you mistaking some other medical emergency for an overdose. "They ought to be selling this stuff next to the peanut butter in the Walmart," he liked to say. And free supplies of Narcan should be everywhere, like fire extinguishers: "kitchen cabinets, your purse, schools, gyms, shopping malls, motels."

Aldis had been invited to Berkeley Springs by Melody Stotler, who ran a local organization for recovering addicts. She said to the class, "Unfortunately, there are people in this community who don't understand addiction, who don't think Narcan should be out there."

"They say we're enablers," Aldis put in. "Somebody who has a heart attack—are we enabling them by giving them C.P.R.? 'But their cholesterol's too high! We shouldn't have saved his life!'" People laughed ruefully.

Aldis introduced Kathy Williams, a former patient of his and the mother of two little girls. She had twice saved people with Narcan. One time, while she was driving, she spotted a car on the side of the road, and a man lying on his back next to it. The other time, a neighbor in her apartment complex knocked on her door and said that a guy was overdosing in the parking lot. "So I grabbed my Narcan kit, and I ran out there," she recalled. She saw a woman tending to a man. "What had happened was that these two had stopped at Kmart. She went in to pick up her layaways, and when she came out he had just done shooting up, and said, 'Please take me home.' Well, he was overdosing from Kmart all the way. By the time I got there, he was in the back of the car, completely blue, and I had another guy help me pull him out—a neighbor, 'cause where I live, I been there almost thirty years now, and I know everybody. A couple people saw me running, and they started running, too, because they said, 'Kathy's running—something must be going on.' We gave him two doses of Narcan, and by the time the E.M.T. got there his eyes were just starting to flicker, and I really thought we were too late." The man began to stir.

A woman named Tara, who was at the January meeting with her teen-age stepdaughter, told me that she had revived a guy who lived in the trailer park where she did some babysitting. He'd refused to go to the hospital, even though he was "puking like he was possessed." I asked Tara—who was thirty, and had a soft, kind face—if the man had said anything to her after she saved him. "Every day, the next four days after that, he thanked me every time,"

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"You're the first person I've met who didn't become a pastry chef after suffering a nervous breakdown working in a corporate job."

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she told me. "He also said it was stupid and he'd never do that again, which wasn't true, because he was arrested for driving under the influence of heroin a few weeks ago. Nodded out in the McDonald's parking lot. Someone called the police."

Tara wasn't judging. She was a recovering addict herself—seven years now. She was studying to be a medical assistant.

Jason Chalmers loved his children, that was for sure. He crawled around on all fours, pretending to be a pony, to amuse his daughter, Jacey, and her younger brother, Liam. He submitted to Jacey whenever she wanted to cover his face with makeup. When Jacey was six months old, Jason wrote a letter to his grandparents in which he described the "absolute, overwhelming" love that he felt for his daughter. "It's not for or about me any more," he wrote. "That's probably for the best because I never did well with myself. She deserves a father who's going to love her unconditionally and so help me God, I'm going to do it. Maybe she's the answer to why I'm still here."

Liam was born in 2009. His mother, Angie, had struggled with an opioid problem, and had taken Suboxone to combat it during her pregnancy. She told me that she also "might have used" heroin "a couple of times." At the hospital, Jason felt that something was amiss with his son. His mother, Christine Chalmers, recalled, "He says, 'Mom, this baby is in withdrawal. They can't release him—he's in terrible pain. If we take him home, he's going to scream and scream and scream, and we won't have anything to help him.'" (Suboxone can cause withdrawal.) "So we called the doctor and, by golly, they checked him over, and he was in total withdrawal. He was on morphine for two solid weeks in the hospital."

Jason, who grew up in Martinsburg, was a heroin addict for most of his life, a fact that puzzled his family almost as deeply as it saddened them. He grew up in an attractive, wooded development on a country road, with horses and dogs, and a kindhearted mother. His grandparents lived in the development, too, and Jason and his two siblings waited for the school bus together on a wooden bench that a neighbor had carved for them.

There were glimmers of an explanation here and there. Jason's parents had divorced when he was eight, and he was a shy, anxious kid; when he was twenty-five, he was given a diagnosis of obsessive-compulsive disorder. His older brother, Michael—the publisher of the Shepherdstown *Observer*—told me, "If you gave us a bag of Reese's peanut-butter cups when we were kids, Jason would eat fifty of them. I'd eat five. I would've *liked* to eat fifty, but I was, like, 'Nah, I'll eat five.'" Maybe, Michael suggested, this was evidence that Jason had a genetic predisposition for addiction. But who knew, really?

In high school, Jason was "smart, good-looking, and athletic," Michael recalled, but he became the "king of the stoners." He barely got his diploma. It was the beginning of a self-destructive pattern. Jason did things while he was on drugs, or trying to get drugs, that filled him with shame; to blot out those feelings, he'd get high again. He got into using heroin, then into selling it. A friend's father was a dealer, and Jason went to work for him, driving up to New York to procure drugs and driving back to Martinsburg to sell them. He introduced heroin to a girlfriend—a good student who had a scholarship to an excellent university. She dropped out, overdosed, and died. He got a tattoo of the girlfriend's initials next to a dove, and a tattoo of Jesus, and a tattoo that represented his addiction: a desperate-looking demon with a gaping mouth. He went to jail dozens of times (drug possession, credit-card theft) and had a series of nearly fatal overdoses. In 2002, he stole his grandfather's checkbook and emptied his bank account. Christine urged her father to press charges, both because she felt that Jason had to be held responsible and because she felt safest—and could actually sleep at night—when he was behind bars. He lied to her, and stole from her, and after using heroin he would pass out on her deck, in her garage, at the end of her driveway.

Jason did not go to college, and he could not keep a job for long; he worked for a few weeks at a mini-mart, but got fired when his background check came in. He'd get clean in jail, and write contrite letters to his family. Then he'd return to Martinsburg and start hanging out again with his addict friends. Michael moved to Chicago to start a career as an advertising copywriter, and their sister, Antonia, went to work for

the school system. Jason, now in his thirties, was stuck—walking everywhere because he couldn't get a driver's license, and showing up at his mother's house in the middle of the night to beg for milk and cereal.

In 2008, Jason wrote to his grandparents, "If I was a gambling man, which if you look at my track record my whole life has been a gamble, I'd have to say there's not enough time left in the world to make good on the pain I've caused." He observed, "Damaged people can be dangerous because they know they can survive, but for some reason they don't know quite how to live."

Christine Chalmers had struggled financially to raise three children as a single mother. But in 2002, when Jason was twenty-six, she was doing well as a real-estate agent, and she sent Jason to a monthlong rehab program in Colorado that cost ten thousand dollars. She recalled, "I went after a couple of weeks, for parents' weekend, and you know what? It was so worth it. He'd been on heroin for ten years at this point, and it was the first time in all that time I saw him like my boy. He says, 'It's like a new world, Mom—I can see things, I can smell things, I can feel things.'" She paused. "I thought, You know what? If I never have anything else, he had a month, and I had a weekend, and he was my boy."

On April 28, 2014, Jason fatally overdosed. He was thirty-seven. His death did not come as a surprise: he had started telling Christine that the worst part of overdosing was waking up.

After an overdose death, an autopsy is usually performed. Because of the epidemic, coroners in West Virginia are often backed up. It took two weeks before Jason's body was returned to the Chalmers family. Afterward, Christine thought about how consumed she had been by her attempts to save Jason and, later, to protect his children from him. One day, Michael and Antonia had been cleaning up Jason's apartment, and they brought over to Christine the contents of his kitchen cabinet. Christine told me, "There were a couple of cans of peas, and I had never served peas—I didn't like them. And I said, 'I didn't know Jason liked peas!' There's your boy, your baby, and you never knew he liked peas. Such a simple thing. But I started crying, because I thought, What did we know about him as a *person*?"

When the man who sold Jason his final dose of heroin went on trial, Christine testified. "But, you know, from that point on I have felt terrible about it," she said. "The guy got ten years. And in some sense his life was saved, because he would have ended up the same as Jase. But when I look at him I know he'd just done the same things Jason did. I mean, who knows who Jase sold to? Who knows who lived or died because he sold to them?"

Christine, who is now sixty-four, and works full time as a secretary in the Berkeley County government, has found herself raising Jacey, who is in the third grade. (Liam lives with his mother, in another state.) One of the biggest collateral effects of the opioid crisis is the growing number of children being raised by people other than their parents, or being placed in foster care. In West Virginia, the number of children removed from parental care because of drug abuse rose from nine hundred and seventy in 2006 to two thousand one hundred and seventy-one in 2016. Shawn Valentine, a foster-care coördinator in the Martinsburg area, says that although the goal is to reunite children with their parents, this happens in "less than twenty-five per cent of the cases we are involved in." A major reason is that parents often can't get access to recovery programs or medication-assisted treatment, because of waiting lists and financial obstacles.

Valentine said, "I had a six-year-old once tell me that he had to hold the stretchy thing on his mom's arm. What would happen if he just didn't want to do that? He told me, 'Well, she would smack my head down, so that powdery stuff got all over my face.'"

Christine and Jacey live in Martinsburg, in a pretty bungalow with a porch swing and a glider, and a front door with bright-yellow trim. Down the street, there's a couple with five adopted children whose parents were addicts. Across the street, a woman named Melissa lives with her elderly father and her youngest sister's two little boys. Their mother was a heroin addict, and lost custody of the kids two years ago. At the time, Melissa, who is a medical technician at a nursing home, was working and living in Maryland—she is divorced, and her own children are grown. She rushed home to Martinsburg to care for her nephews, whom I'll call Cody and Aiden.

One afternoon, I sat talking with Melissa and Christine on Christine's

"Before you say anything, let me tell you which TV shows I don't want spoilers on."

front porch, while Jacey and the boys ran around in a ragged, laughing pack. Christine served some brownies that she had baked. Melissa recalled that, when her sister lost custody, her nephews' caseworker told her that Aiden, who was then a toddler, would be quickly adopted, but that eight-year-old Cody, who bore more obvious signs of trauma, would probably languish in foster care. Melissa said that she couldn't stand to see them separated. "I was, like, 'What choice do I have?'" she said.

Christine patted her on the knee. "Good girl," she said.

Jacey kept a close eye on Aiden, who kept wandering over to the neighbor's yard, where there was a new Chihuahua puppy.

Christine said, "The sad thing about it is there are so many of these kids."

"Yes!" Melissa said. "Aiden's pre-K teacher told me forty per cent of the kids in her class are being raised by somebody other than a parent."

"That means forty per cent have been found out," Christine said. "Who knows what's going on with the other parents?"

Jacey is a bright, curious kid, with pearly pink glasses and a sprinkling of freckles. The first time I met her, she catalogued her accomplishments in gymnastics. "I can do a handstand, a round-off, I'm working on my back handspring," she said. "I can do a front flip. I want to try a back flip, but it's kinda hard. I still have a lot more ahead of me."

Christine has been honest with Jacey about Jason's addiction, in the hope that it will keep her from ending up on a similar path. But it would be hard to keep the truth from Jacey: she remembers finding her father's needles, and she remembers him getting high. He often dropped into a state of suspended animation—still standing, bent over at the waist, head dangling near his knees. Jacey told me that she and Liam used to think it was a game: "It was, like, he's dead, but he's also alive. You could tap on him and talk to him—he'd just be snoring there. But you could also feel that he was breathing. We would put our hands up to his nose and we could feel the air coming in and out."

Last fall, Jacey won a statewide poster-making contest, called "Kids Kick Opioids," that was sponsored by the West Virginia attorney general's office. Jacey's poster—one of two thousand entries—included a photograph of Jason, in a backward baseball cap and baggy shorts, holding a grinning Liam on one hip and Jacey on the other. She had written a little passage about how much she missed him after he'd "died from taking drugs," and how she wanted to "hug and kiss him every day." She wrote, "It is very sad when kids don't have their daddy to play with."

Christine said of the poster, "I think Jason would have wanted it. Jason wanted so badly for people not to follow him."

At one point, Jacey was lying on the porch floor, drawing a rainbow with some colored pencils, when Christine said she thought that it was wrong to send opioid addicts to prison.

Jacey piped up. "Yeah, but they should take them away from their home town. Also, get them help."

"Yes," Christine said. "Long-term help. A month is not enough."

"But take them away from, say, Martinsburg," Jacey said, looking down at her rainbow. "Maybe take them across the world."

Recently, Martinsburg has begun to treat the heroin crisis more openly as a public-health problem. The police chief, a Chicago transplant named Maurice Richards, had devised a progressive-sounding plan called the Martinsburg Initiative, which would direct support services toward children who appeared to be at risk for addiction, because their families were struggling socially or emotionally. In December, Tina Stride and several other local citizens stood up at a zoning meeting to proclaim the need for a detox center. They countered several residents who testified that such a center would bring more addicts, and more heroin, to their neighborhoods. "I'm here to say that's already here," a woman in favor of the proposal said. "It's in your neighbor's house, in the bathroom at Wendy's, in our schools." She added, "We're talking about making America great again? Well, it starts here."

That night, the Board of Zoning Appeals voted to allow a detox center, run by Peter Callahan, the psychotherapist, to occupy an unused commercial building in town. People in the hearing room cheered and cried and hugged one another. The facility will have only sixteen beds and won't be ready for patients until December, but the Hope Dealer women were thrilled about it. Now they wouldn't have to drive halfway across the state every time an addict called them up.

John Aldis, who was sitting next to me during the vote, breathed a sigh

"Take heed! For your journey is filled with long delays and unexpected service changes!"

of relief. He said later, "It's like that Winston Churchill quote: 'This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.'"

This spring, Berkeley County started its first needle-exchange program, and other efforts are being made to help addicts survive. The new app that first responders are using to document overdoses allows them to input how many times a patient is given Narcan; when multiple doses are required, the heroin tends to be adulterated with strong synthetics. Such data can help the health department and law enforcement track dangerous batches of drugs, and help warn addicts.

Some Martinsburg residents who had been skeptical of medication-assisted treatment told me that they were coming around to the idea. A few cited the Surgeon General's report on substance abuse, released in November, which encouraged the expansion of such treatment, noting that studies have repeatedly demonstrated its efficacy in "reducing illicit drug use and overdose deaths." In Berkeley County, it felt like a turning point, though the Trump Administration was likely to resist such approaches. Tom Price, the new Secretary of Health and Human Services, has dismissed medication-assisted treatment as "substituting one opioid for another." It was also unclear how most addicts would pay for treatment if the Affordable Care Act was repealed.

Martinsburg residents, meanwhile, tried to take heart from small breakthroughs. Angel Holt, the mother who'd overdosed at the softball practice, told me that she and her boyfriend had stayed clean since that day, and she was hoping to regain custody of her children. She'd been helped by the kindness of an older couple, Karen and Ed Schildt, who lived in Thurmont, Maryland. A year earlier, the Schildts had lost their twenty-five-year-old son, Chris, to a heroin overdose. They were deeply religious, and when they heard what happened to Angel Holt and Christopher Schildt they decided to reach out to them. The fact that their son had the same name as Holt's boyfriend surely meant that God had put the couple in their path. Karen texted Holt words of encouragement almost daily.

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In February, I spent an afternoon with Shawn Valentine, the foster-care coördinator, who introduced me to Shelby, her twenty-five-year-old daughter. Shelby had become addicted to opioids at twenty-one, when she was depressed and waitressing at a Waffle House. Her coworkers always seemed to know how to get their hands on pills. When the meds got too expensive, Shelby turned to heroin.

Shelby, Valentine, and I were sitting in Valentine's kitchen, along with Shelby's sweet fifteen-year-old brother, Patrick. Shelby said, "People don't realize what the brain goes through when you're addicted—it's like a mental shutdown. Everything is gray. You have these blinders on." As she described it, the constant hunt for heroin imposed a kind of order on life's confounding open-endedness. Addiction told you what every day was for, when otherwise you might not have known.

For close to a year, Shelby had been in a program in which she put a dissolvable strip of Suboxone on her tongue every day, and attended group and individual therapy. (The word "assisted" in "medication-assisted treatment" indicates the primacy of the need for recovering addicts to figure out why they are drawn to opioids.) Shelby said that Suboxone helped curb her craving for heroin, without sedating her. "There are triggers," she said. "But the urge to run a hundred yards down the street and try to find my ex-dealer and pay him, then shove a used rig in my arm real quick? That's gone."

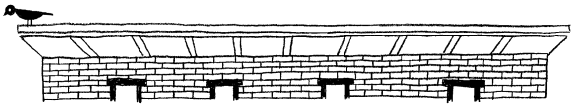
She can now be trusted not to sell treasured things for drug money: her little brother's video-game console, her mom's four-leaf-clover necklace. Her long auburn hair, which she used to wash and comb so seldom that her mother once spent four hours trying to untangle it, is now silky and soft.

Valentine told me that, if Shelby had to be on Suboxone all her life, "I'm absolutely on board with that." She turned to Shelby. "Whatever it takes for you to be a healthy, productive human being."

Recently, Shelby's mother told her, "O.K., I'll let you take the truck without me, to take your brother to the movies." Shelby recalled, "I was almost, like, 'Pinch me, wake me up—this can't be true.' Because without her truck there's no working. That's how she makes her living. She said, 'Here's a piece of trust. Don't throw it away.'"

Shelby and her brother drove to the mall and saw a horror movie. It was not a very good one, they agreed, but it didn't matter. They headed home in the dark, and the moment they got there Shelby placed the keys to the truck in her mother's hand. ♦

THE CRITICS



A CRITIC AT LARGE

THE OTHER SIDE OF SILENCE

Rereading W. G. Sebald.

BY JAMES WOOD

I met W. G. Sebald almost twenty years ago, in New York City, when I interviewed him onstage for the PEN American Center. Afterward, we had dinner. It was July, 1997; he was fifty-three. The brief blaze of his international celebrity had been lit a year before, by the publication in English of his mysterious, wayward book "The Emigrants." In a review, Susan Sontag (who curated the PEN series) had forcefully anointed the German writer as a contemporary master.

Not that Sebald seemed to care about that. He was gentle, academic, intensely tactful. His hair was gray, his almost white mustache like frozen water. He resembled photographs of a pensive Walter Benjamin. There was an atmosphere of drifting melancholy about him that, as in his prose, he made almost comic by sly self-consciousness. I remember standing with him in the foyer of the restaurant, where there was some kind of ornamental arrangement that involved leaves floating in a tank. Sebald thought they were elm leaves, which prompted a characteristic reverie. In England, he said, the elms had all but disappeared, ravaged first by Dutch elm disease, and then by the great storm of 1987. All gone, all gone, he murmured. Since I had not read "The Rings of Saturn" (published in German in 1995 but not translated into English until 1998), I didn't know that he was almost quoting a passage from his own work, where, beautifully, he describes the trees, uprooted after the hurricane, lying on the ground "as if in a swoon." Still, I was amused even then by how very Sebaldian he sounded, encouraged thus by a glitter in his eyes, and by a slightly sardonic fatigue in his voice.

During dinner, he returned sometimes to that mode, always with a delicate sense of comic timing. Someone at the table asked him if, given the enormous success of his writing, he might be interested in leaving England for a while and working elsewhere. (Sebald taught for more than thirty years, until his death, in 2001, in Norwich, at the University of East Anglia.) Why not New York, for instance? The metropolis was at his feet. How about an easy and well-paid semester at Columbia? It was part question, part flattery. Through round spectacles, Sebald pityingly regarded his interlocutor, and replied with naïve sincerity: "No, I don't think so." He added that he was too attached to the old Norfolk rectory he and his family had lived in for years. I asked him what else he liked about England. The English sense of humor, he said. Had I ever seen, he asked, any German comedy shows on television? I had not, and I wondered aloud what they were like. "They are simply . . . indescribable," he said, stretching out the adjective with a heavy Germanic emphasis, and leaving behind an implication, also comic, that his short reply sufficed as a perfectly comprehensive explanation of the relative merits of English and German humor.

Comedy is hardly the first thing one associates with Sebald's work, partly because his reputation was quickly associated with the literature of the Holocaust, and is still shaped by the two books of his that deal directly with that catastrophe: "The Emigrants," a collection of four semi-fictional, history-haunted biographies; and his last book, "Austerlitz" (2001), a novel about a Jewish Welshman who discovers, fairly late in life, that he was born in Prague but had avoided imminent extermination by being sent, at the age of four, to England, in the summer of 1939, on the so-called Kindertransport. The typical Sebaldian character is estranged and isolate, visited by depression and menaced by lunacy, wounded into storytelling by historical trauma. But two other works, "Vertigo" (published in German in 1990 and in English in 1999) and "The Rings of Saturn," are more various than this, and all of his four major books have an eccentric sense of playfulness.

Rereading him, in handsome new editions of "Vertigo," "The Emigrants," and "The Rings of Saturn" (New Directions), I'm struck by how much funnier his work is than I first took it to be. Consider "The Rings of Saturn" (brilliantly translated by Michael Hulse), in which the Sebald-like narrator spends much of the book tramping around the English county of Suffolk. He muses on the demise of the old country estates, whose hierarchical grandeur never recovered from the societal shifts brought about by the two World Wars. He tells stories from the lives of Joseph Conrad, the translator Edward FitzGerald, and the radical diplomat Roger Casement. He visits a friend, the poet Michael Hamburger, who left Berlin for Britain in 1933, at the age of nine. The tone is elegiac, muffled, and

ABOVE: BRIAN REA

Comedy isn't usually associated with Sebald, but an eccentric sense of playfulness runs through his four major books.

ILLUSTRATION BY SETH

yet curiously intense. The Hamburger visit allows Sebald to take the reader back to the Berlin of the poet's childhood, a scene he meticulously re-creates with the help of Hamburger's own memoirs. But he also jokily notes that when they have tea the teapot emits "the occasional puff of steam as from a toy engine."

Elsewhere in the book, Sebald is regularly provoked to humorous indignation by the stubborn intolerability of English service. In Lowestoft, a Suffolk coastal town that was once a prosperous resort and is now impoverished and drab, he puts up at the ghastly Albion hotel. He is the only diner in the huge dining room, and is brought a piece of fish "that had doubtless lain entombed in the deep-freeze for years":

> The breadcrumb armour-plating of the fish had been partly singed by the grill, and the prongs of my fork bent on it. Indeed it was so difficult to penetrate what eventually proved to be nothing but an empty shell that my plate was a hideous mess once the operation was over.

Evelyn Waugh would have been quite content to have written such a passage. The secret of the comedy lies in the paradox of painstaking exaggeration (as if the diner were trying to crack a safe, or solve a philosophical conundrum), enforced by Sebald's calm control of apparently ponderous diction ("operation"). It is the same at the guest rooms of the Saracen's Head, in Harleston, where the mirror makes the occupant look "strangely deformed," and all the furniture seems to be tilting, so that the narrator is pursued even while asleep "by the feeling that the house was about to fall down."

In "The Emigrants," Sebald lovingly seizes on eccentric British materials and contraptions. The narrator and his wife dine at the home of Dr. Henry Selwyn, the food pushed into the dining room on "a serving trolley equipped with hotplates, some kind of patented design dating from the Thirties." Later in the book, Sebald tells the moving story of how, in 1966, he gave up Germany for England. He was a twenty-two-year-old graduate student, who had studied in Germany and Switzerland, and was now on his way to take up a junior teaching job in the German department at the University of Manchester. He arrives in the city of Manchester in the early morning. As his taxi rolls past "rows of uniform houses, which seemed the more run down the closer we got to the city centre," Sebald reflects on the fate of this mighty place, one of the engines of the Victorian age, now more like "a necropolis or mausoleum." The narrator is met at the door of his small hotel, called the Arosa, by its owner, Mrs. Irlam, who is wearing a pink dressing gown "that was made of a material found only in the bedrooms of the English lower classes and is unaccountably called candlewick." (That "unaccountably called candlewick" is a nice example of how Sebald and his English translators often contrived to make of his prose a strange, homeless melody, neither quite English nor quite German but some odd mixture of the two.)

Mrs. Irlam is a kindly soul, and quickly brings him, "on a silver tray, an electric appliance of a kind I had never seen before," called a "teas-maid." This was an ungainly machine, popular at the time, that contained a clock and an electric kettle; it could wake you up with morning tea. Sebald approaches this cozy English object with mock-solemn gingerliness, as if he were an anthropologist presenting one of his exhibits. He places a large photograph of the relic at the center of his page, and notes that the lime-green phosphorescent glow of the clock face was familiar to him from childhood:

> That may be why it has often seemed, when I have thought back to those early days in Manchester, as if the tea maker brought to my room by Mrs. Irlam, by Gracie—you must call me Gracie, she said—as if it was that weird and serviceable gadget, with its nocturnal glow, its muted morning bubbling, and its mere presence by day, that kept me holding on to life at a time when I felt a deep sense of isolation in which I might well have become completely submerged. Very useful, these are, said Gracie as she showed me how to operate the teas-maid that November afternoon; and she was right.

How quickly, in this passage, he turns from amusement to something approaching desperation. Sebald's talent for repression—for sounding out the repressions of others and for dramatizing his own—is a central element of his writing. When he tells us that the first weeks and months he spent in

"Any moment now, Sire, they'll get outrage fatigue."

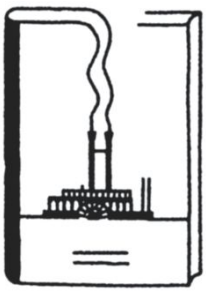
Manchester were "a time of remarkable silence and emptiness," he simultaneously discloses and hides what must have been an intensely lonely period.

It is hard to imagine how reduced and straitened life in northern England still was in the nineteen-sixties; the war dragged a long, gray shadow. Manchester was an unfamiliar city to Sebald. He had applied for the teaching job at the city's university largely because he was keen to get out of his native country, and because he had liked the classes given by an Englishman, a former Manchester professor, at his German university, Freiburg. (While at Manchester, he also earned a graduate degree in German literature.) Sebald did not stay at the Arosa Hotel, as his lightly fictionalized account has it, but was housed by the university in a single room in a semi-detached nineteen-thirties house. After a couple of weeks there, he moved to another single room, in a tall, red brick, turn-of-the-century house about three miles outside the city center. A black-and-white photograph of this building, reproduced in "Saturn's Moons," a book collecting various reminiscences about Sebald, has a sooty northern grimness that makes it hard to imagine a color version of it. A colleague of his describes the room as "dark, dingy, and freezing cold." It contained nothing more than a bed, a table, and a chair. At night, mice ran along the curtain rail.

The contrast with Sebald's childhood landscape must have been acute. He was born in 1944, in a village in the Bavarian Alps, not far from the Austrian and Swiss borders, and today about two hours by car from Munich—a region of lakes, rivers, and mountains that loom over daily life like natural cathedrals. Sebald's father was away, fighting in the German Army; he didn't return till 1947, having spent about two years in a French P.O.W. camp. In his study of the Allied bombardment of the German cities, "On the Natural History of Destruction" (published in German in 1999 and translated into English by Anthea Bell in 2003), Sebald juxtaposes this remembered paradise with the inferno all around it:

> I know now that at the time, when I was lying in my bassinet on the balcony of the Seefeld house and looking up at the pale blue sky, there was a pall of smoke in the air all over Europe . . . over the ruins of the German cities, over the camps where untold numbers of people were burnt . . . there was scarcely a place in Europe from which no one had been deported to his death in those years.

Elsewhere in this book, he writes strikingly about how, after the war, Germany preferred not to examine its crimes but to repress "the well-kept secret of the corpses built into the foundations of our state, a secret that bound all Germans together in the postwar years, and indeed still binds them." In interviews, he often said that a large reason he didn't settle in Germany in 1966 was his awareness that postwar academic life there was as compromised, and as secretive, as life in the home. His work obsessively returns to the idea that, as Walter Benjamin famously put it, every document of civilization is also a document of barbarism. In "The Rings of Saturn," Sebald describes at length the murderous machine of Belgian colonialism in the Congo, and depicts Brussels, with its "distinctive ugliness," as "a sepulchral monument erected over a hecatomb of black bodies." In "Austerlitz" (translated by Anthea Bell), the novel's protagonist, Jacques Austerlitz, learns that the brand-new French national library he is working in, the Bibliothèque Nationale, stands over the old Austerlitz-Tolbiac depot, an enormous clearing house "to which the Germans brought all the loot they had taken from the homes of the Jews of Paris." Thus the whole sordid business, he continues, "is buried in the most literal sense beneath the foundations" of the library.

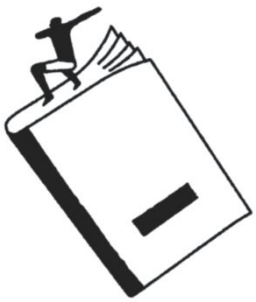


By most accounts, the young Sebald was an unassuming presence at Manchester. When he was not teaching or writing his master's thesis, he visited junk shops and walked a great deal, taking photographs of the city's disused factories and cleared slums. At the University of East Anglia, whose School of European Studies he joined in 1970, and where he spent the rest of his life, he taught well-liked classes on Kafka, German cinema, nineteenth-century German fiction, and twentieth-century European drama. But many of his colleagues were only faintly aware of his creative work. The university was well known for its graduate creative-writing program, then one of the few in Britain, but only toward the end of his life, when his fame was inescapable, did he teach in the program. On December 14, 2001, near Norwich, he lost control of his car, swerved in front of a truck, and was killed.

He was fifty-seven, and his sudden death came as a desolation. There was to be no more work from a writer who had rapidly established himself as one of the most deeply serious and ambitious contemporary authors, whose fraught intelligence had reckoned, and self-reckoned, with the gravest questions of European history, and who had fearlessly founded a new literary form—combining essay, fiction, and photography—in order to probe those questions in new ways. The loss was acute not only because of his work's undoubted seriousness but also because the playful side of Sebald's originality made him a consumingly interesting and unpredictable artificer. You wondered what he would do next, what odd precarious success he would come up with; his books were such strange hybrids. Writing and illustration have long coexisted (Sebald admitted to me that he admired Stendhal's histrionic autobiography, "Vie de Henri Brulard," which combines Stendhal's words with his drawings). But few writers have used photographs in quite the way Sebald does, scattering them, without captions, throughout the text, so that the reader can't be sure, exactly, how the writing and the photographs relate to each other, or, indeed, whether the photographs disclose what they purport to. Roland Barthes's great essay on photography, "Camera Lucida"—a book that greatly influenced Sebald's work—is relatively conventional, by contrast. Where Barthes's photographs are captioned and faithfully reproduced, Sebald's photographs have a fugitive, offbeat atmosphere. They are anti-illustrative, not least because many of them are low-quality snaps, dingy, hard to decipher, and often atrociously

reproduced. Sebald plays with this unreliability in "The Emigrants," when he includes a photograph of himself standing on a beach in New Jersey, probably taken by his uncle in late 1981 or early 1982. Is it really Sebald? All you can do is stare and stare. The image is so poor—the author's face little more than a generic blur—that the reader, too, is left standing on shifting sand, where all surety is tidally erased and replaced.

And then there is the oddity of Sebald's prose. If you don't care for his writing, you can feel that he's just a postmodern antiquarian, a superliterate academic who stitched together a pastiche of his many nineteenth- and twentieth-century influences, and infused the result with doomy melancholy and unease. The Anglo-German poet Michael Hofmann accused Sebald of "nailing literature on to a homemade fog—or perhaps a 19th-century ready-made fog." There may be something in that complaint. Probably the most frequent sentence in all of Sebald is some variant of "Nowhere was there a living soul to be seen." Wherever the Sebaldian narrator finds himself, the landscape is uncannily unpeopled. He may be walking down an Italian street, or arriving in Lowestoft, or describing Edward FitzGerald's childhood home, or driving through Manchester in the early morning, or meeting Jacques Austerlitz on the promenade at Zeebrugge. Rarely is there a single "soul" to be seen—and the slightly antique locution of "soul" (*Seele*, in German) is almost invariably used.



Sebald's work can put you in mind of Diderot selling his library to Catherine the Great: he seems to be downloading everything he has ever read. There is the ghost of the nineteenth-century Austrian writer Adalbert Stifter (the menaced but curious traveller, afoot in a strange, forbidding landscape); of Walter Benjamin (the elaborate analogies and formal diction); of Thomas Bernhard (the tendency toward insistent, comic exaggeration); of Peter Handke; and, above all, of Kafka. As with Kafka's protagonists, the Sebaldian narrator is easily thrown off balance by what should be ordinary negotiations: booking a hotel room, driving down the New Jersey Turnpike, sitting in a London railway station, taking a train in Germany. As in Kafka, too, there are an unusual number of physically odd, deformed, or dwarfish figures. In "The Emigrants," Dr. Henry Selwyn is looked after by a housemaid called Elaine, who wears her hair "shorn high up the nape, as the inmates of asylums do," and who has the disquieting habit of breaking into "strange, apparently unmotivated, whinnying laughter."

There are times when Sebald seems to be overdoing the gothic pastiche. In "Vertigo," the Sebald-like narrator spends some time wandering around Vienna, then takes a train to Venice. Everything is odd and unsettling. The narrator appears to be only a step from a nervous breakdown, but the neurasthenic sensitivity is gestural, unearned, a bit melodramatic. Lying on his hotel bed in an Italian town, waiting for room service, he feels himself becoming colder and stiffer, "so that when at length the waiter arrived with the red wine and sandwiches I had ordered, I felt as if I had already been interred or laid out for burial, silently grateful for the proffered libation, but no longer capable of consuming it." In "The Rings of Saturn," the atmosphere at Amsterdam's Schiphol airport strikes the troubled narrator as "so strangely muted that one might have thought one was already a good way beyond this world." What the reader might take on faith if encountered in Büchner's "Lenz" (a novella that Sebald taught at Norwich, which provides a garish account of a man's fall into madness) is a little stagy when it concerns merely an academic who happens to be doing a bit of book research in Italy, or passing through an ordinary European airport.

Yet Sebald also extracts from this self-conscious antiquarianism something unaccountable: a mysterious contemporary stillness, an otherworldliness of the present. His very prose functions like an old, unidentified photograph. Consider this troublingly lovely description, from "Austerlitz," of the German Army entering Prague:

> Next morning, at first light, the Germans did indeed march into Prague in the middle of a heavy snowstorm which seemed to make them appear out of nowhere. When they crossed the bridge and their armored cars were rolling up Narodní a profound silence fell over the whole city. People turned away, and from that moment they walked more slowly, like somnambulists, as if they no longer knew where they were going.

Who is speaking? It is characteristic of Sebald that what we are reading here is not ascribed directly to the narrator. Jacques Austerlitz, on the hunt for his origins, has travelled to Prague, where he tracks down Vera Ryšanová, who was his nursemaid in the nineteen-thirties. So in this passage Austerlitz is recalling, to the book's narrator (back in contemporary London), what Vera told him about the German occupation of that city—a chain of at least three storytellers (Vera-Austerlitz-narrator/Sebald), and more decades. This perhaps accounts for the smothered, recessed diction. The prose has Sebald's usual formality, along with his strain of almost pedantic exaggeration ("and from that moment they walked more slowly"). It is powerful because it is both real and unreal, at once a vivid picture and a frozen allegory. Sebald is describing a collective death, a falling away; the people in this word picture, like the felled trees he describes in "The Rings of Saturn," are as if caught in a kind of swoon. There are people here, but they are in the process of becoming unpeople.

Sebald's landscapes are often places like this, where the living have disappeared into death, or where they have fallen into the obscurity of death even while still alive. "The Emigrants," which is probably his best book, is a set of stories about people who have fallen in this way, as if having been dispossessed by history. The book is closer to documentary than is any of his other creative work. Names and some details have been changed, yet the written lives of its characters follow very closely their actual biographical contours. Sebald told me that ninety per cent of the photographs in the book "are what you would describe as

authentic, i.e., they really did come out of the photo albums of the people described in those texts and are a direct testimony of the fact that these people did exist in that particular shape and form."

The book opens with Dr. Henry Selwyn, whom the narrator and his wife encounter in 1970, on the grounds of a country house in Norfolk. A retired physician, Selwyn appears to live like a patrician hermit, having largely abandoned the big house for a stone folly he has furnished in his garden. Sometime after encountering Sebald and telling him his life story, Dr. Selwyn commits suicide. Paul Bereyter, a character based on one of Sebald's childhood teachers, is another late-life suicide, and Sebald sets out to discover the reasons. Bereyter, it emerges, was one-quarter Jewish, and under Nazi law was banned from teaching in the mid-nineteen-thirties, just as he was embarking on his cherished career. A woman he courted, Helen Hollaender, from Vienna, was doubtless deported, "probably to Theresienstadt in the first instance." Bereyter never fully recovers from these terrible deprivations.

The third story concerns one of Sebald's great-uncles, Adelwarth, a German immigrant who worked as a valet in the United States, and whose life, as an immigrant and a closeted homosexual, bore immense strains. Uncle Adelwarth ends up in an Ithaca asylum. The fourth story, "Max Ferber," probably the most fictive of the tales, is based on the life of the British painter Frank Auerbach, who, at the age of seven, was sent from his native Germany to Britain, and whose parents died in the Holocaust.

Sebald's quiet, bashful, mysteriously subaqueous prose brings alive the paradoxical combination of drift and paralysis that has afflicted these lives. These men hid their wounds, but their lives have been stained with the effort of that subterfuge. Sebald is generously adept at making these wounds speak. Dr. Selwyn, for instance, appears at first to be an eccentric English gentleman—at one moment, he fires a rifle from the window of his house, a rifle, he explains, that he needed in India when he worked there as a young surgeon. But, in the course of little more than twenty pages, a new revelation emerges. First, there is the oddity of the doctor's isolation in the garden folly. (The narrator and his wife rent rooms in the big, empty house.) Then there is the erotic and emotional deadness of Selwyn's marriage to Elli, a wealthy Swiss heiress. At dinner one evening, Selwyn speaks about the time he spent in the Alps, just after he had graduated from Cambridge, in 1913. This was when he developed an intense fondness for his mountaineering guide, a much older man of sixty-five. There is the suggestion, faintly implied but discernible, that Selwyn's admiration was probably love.

"Just pretend it's immersive theatre."

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A year or so later, when Sebald has moved out of Selwyn's house, the two men meet again, and Selwyn tells the author the rest of his story. He was a Lithuanian Jew, who left for England in 1899 and changed his name from Hersch Seweryn. For a long time, he concealed his "true background" from his wife, and now wonders whether the failure of his marriage had to do with "revealing the secret of my origins, or simply the decline of love." We realize that Selwyn's life has been structured by repression, mimicked in this regard by Sebald's writing, which is similarly structured by omission. When Selwyn talks about revealing "the secret of my origins," he officially means his Jewishness, but perhaps subconsciously he also means his homosexuality?

Sebald has been an extremely influential writer (Teju Cole, Aleksandar Hemon, Edmund de Waal, Garth Greenwell, and Rachel Cusk have all learned from him), and no more so than in the way he writes about whole lives. Released from the formulas of falsity that contaminate much realistic fiction—drama, dialogue, the pretense of "real time," the cause-and-effect of motive—the writer proceeds like a biographer who sees everything after it has happened. Sebald understands that a life is an edifice, which we build partly to hide its foundations. And the difference between an edifice and a ruin may be hard to detect. Of course, even the godlike biographer cannot "see everything"; perhaps all he can see of a life, at first, is the beginning and

the ending. The form of a life is only a frame. Dr. Selwyn told the author only what he could bear to tell, in a narration honeycombed with elisions: we know little, truly, of even a close friend's interiority.

Because we are not God, our narration of another's life is a pretense of knowledge—simultaneously an attempt to know and a confession of how little we know. Most conventional fiction, with its easy, inherited confidence, conceals the epistemological difficulty of this task; the concealment is what we find consoling about even quite demanding fiction. Sebald makes the unreliability of this labor a central element of his writing: it is why the stories in his books, like the one Vera tells Jacques Austerlitz about the Germans entering Prague, tend to be passed along chains of narration, a narrative flow of traffic that produces the characteristic repetitive formulation "said Austerlitz," or even "as Vera had told me, said Austerlitz," or my favorite: "From time to time, so Vera recollected, said Austerlitz, Maximilian would tell the tale of how once . . ." The point of these chains—which resemble those columns of Berliners passing along buckets of rubble just after the war—is that the reader is necessarily at the very end of them. Dr. Selwyn tells his repressed tale to the narrator, who then passes a slightly less repressed version on to us. Likewise with Vera to Austerlitz. Sebald's attempt at decipherment must become, in part, ours: we are trying to puzzle this material out, just as Sebald, the fanatical author-researcher, is.

This effort of retrieval can be felt whenever we stare at one of Sebald's dusky, uncaptioned photographs, and it is not coincidental that photography plays the largest role in the two Sebald books that deal centrally with the Holocaust, "The Emigrants" and "Austerlitz." In a sense, retrieval is the very theme of "Austerlitz," whose protagonist grows up thinking of himself as a Welsh boy named Dafydd Elias, only to discover as a teen-ager that he is a wartime refugee whose true name is Jacques Austerlitz. Even then, it takes many years before Jacques Austerlitz learns exactly how he came to England and where he came from, and this journey of recovery consumes the entirety of Sebald's dense novel. In the early nineteen-nineties, Austerlitz travels to Prague and learns from Vera that he was put on a train for London in 1939, and that his mother was sent to Theresienstadt. Later, he discovers that his father, who escaped to Paris, was last heard of in the French internment camp of Gurs, from where many Jews were deported to Auschwitz.

Theodor Adorno once suggested that the dead are at our mercy, and memory their only rescuer: "So our memory is the only help that is left to them. They pass away into it, and if every deceased person is like someone who was murdered by the living, so he is also like someone whose life they must save, without knowing whether the effort will succeed." This sounds like an expression of survivor's guilt, but Adorno wrote these words before the war, in 1936. Commenting on Mahler's "Kindertotenlieder" (a song cycle set to some of Friedrich Rückert's poems, which mourn the death of the poet's two children), Adorno makes the argument that the dead can be thought of as our children—we mourn not only their absence but everything they had not yet become. Just as we wait for children to return home (one of Rückert's most famous lines is "Often I think they have only gone out"), so we await the return of the dead. From his student days onward, Sebald was a deep reader of Adorno, and the passage might be an epigraph for all Sebald's writing. What animates his project is the task of saving the dead, retrieving them through representation. That paradox is most acute when we look not at words about people but at photographs of people, since they have a presence that words cannot quite capture. As Roland Barthes writes in "Camera Lucida," photographs declare that what you're looking at really existed, and as actuality, not as metaphor.

But what happens when a *novelist* inserts into his text uncaptioned photographs of ambiguous veracity? Barthes says that photography incarnates "the presence of the thing," but what can that mean when it comes to a photograph whose authority we doubt, and that we encounter in a text that is a hybrid of document and fiction? Like "The Emigrants," "Austerlitz" is full of uncaptioned black-and-white photographs—of Wittgenstein's eyes; the prison at Breendonk, in Belgium, where the Nazis tortured the Jewish resistance fighter Jean Améry; Liverpool Street station, where the young children of the Kindertransport first arrived in London; human skeletons; what appears to be an old staircase inside a prewar apartment building in Prague; the deserted town center of Theresienstadt; still photographs from a famous propaganda film, made by the Germans to convince the outside world that Theresienstadt was a model community for the Jews; the Bibliothèque Nationale; and, notably, a photograph of Jacques Austerlitz as a small boy, the picture supposedly handed to Jacques by Vera, his childhood nursemaid in Prague. This image, of a fair-haired child dressed as a page boy, in cape and knickerbockers, adorns the cover of the American edition of Sebald's novel.

Some of these pictures are what they purport to be (Wittgenstein's eyes, the Bibliothèque Nationale). In the case of others, one can't be sure—that staircase, for instance, could be from any number of prewar apartment buildings, from anywhere in Europe. And what does it mean to stare at a photograph of a little boy who is "supposed" to be Jacques Austerlitz, when "Jacques Austerlitz" is nothing more than a fictional character invented by W. G. Sebald? Who is the actual boy who stares at us from the cover of this novel? We will probably never know. It is indeed an eerie photograph, and Sebald makes Austerlitz say of it:

> I have studied the photograph many times since, the bare, level field where I am standing, although I cannot think where it was. . . . I examined every detail under a magnifying glass without once finding the slightest clue. And in doing so I always felt the piercing, inquiring gaze of the page boy who had come to demand his dues, who was waiting in the gray light of dawn on the empty field for me to accept the challenge and avert the misfortune lying ahead of him.

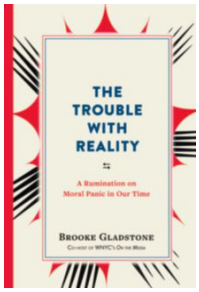
The boy does seem to be demanding something from us, and I imagine that this is why, when Sebald came across the photograph, he chose it. Presumably, he found it in a box of old postcards and

snapshots, in one of the antique shops he enjoyed rummaging through. In 2011, while working on an introduction to "Austerlitz," I had a chance to examine the Sebald archive—manuscripts, old photographs, letters, and the like—at the Deutsches Literaturarchiv, in Marbach am Neckar, and there I found the postcard that bears the boy's image. Eager for a "clue," I turned it over. On the reverse side, there was nothing more than the name of an English town and a price, written in ink: "Stockport: 30p."

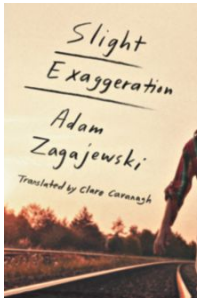
Scandalously, where documentary witness and fidelity is sacred, Sebald introduces the note of the unreliable. Not, of course, because he disdained the documentary impulse but, rather, in order to register that he himself, who was not Jewish and had only an indirect connection to the Shoah, was merely a survivor of the survivors—and even then only in a figurative sense. And also perhaps to register that the novelist who writes, of all outrageous things, fiction about the Holocaust cannot have a comfortable and straightforward relation to the real. For there I was, standing in a German library, searching for clues, peering intently at a photograph of a boy whose name will likely be forever lost, and replicating the very gesture of decipherment that the fictional character Jacques Austerlitz describes in Sebald's novel.

Sebald has some beautiful words in "Austerlitz" about how, just as we have appointments to keep in the future, it may be that we also have appointments to keep in the past, "in what has gone before and is for the most part extinguished." We must go there, he writes, into the past, in search of places and people who have some connection with us, "on the far side of time, so to speak." That last phrase puts me in mind of a famous passage from "Middlemarch," in which George Eliot says that if we were truly open to all the suffering in the world it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we would die "of that roar which lies on the other side of silence." Most of us, she finishes, manage to live by wadding ourselves with stupidity. We survive only by ignoring the faint but terrible roar. In his great work, Sebald visited that far side of time which was also the other side of silence. He could not ignore it. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

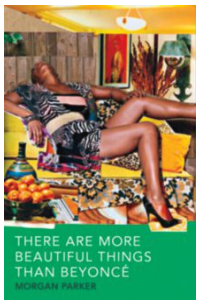


The Trouble with Reality, *by Brooke Gladstone (Workman)*. This brisk piece of media criticism, by the host of WNYC's "On the Media," draws on philosophy and literature to show the extent to which the American press has been ill-equipped to deal with a major political figure—Donald Trump—who creates a parallel reality rather than working within the realm of consensus. The book's main concern isn't dishing out platitudes but providing a battle plan for individuals anxiously "watching the edifice of reality collapse." Instead of "spiking your cortisol levels" by dwelling on President Trump's tweets or on the Administration's "ceaseless cascade of lies," Gladstone recommends protest and "preserving your outrage," because, ultimately, "facts are real and will reassert themselves eventually."



Slight Exaggeration, *by Adam Zagajewski, translated from the Polish by Clare Cavanagh (Farrar, Straus & Giroux)*. In this book-length sequence of fragments and miniature essays, the renowned Polish poet combines stories from his life with reflections on music, literature, and twentieth-century Europe's "black hole of war." Displaced at an early age by shifting borders (he was born in 1945, in Lwów, which became part of the Soviet Union in 1946), Zagajewski wrestles with the burden of history borne by the writer, who must "experience rapture and recollect horror simultaneously." Neither naïve nor cynical, Zagajewski concludes, convincingly, that writing is "completely impossible"—and yet it must emerge "from reality, from a dimension that seldom reveals itself."

The Impossible Fairy Tale, *by Han Yujoo, translated from the Korean by Janet Hong (Graywolf)*. This début novel sketches the barbaric politics of elementary school with terrifying clarity: loyalties won and dissolved over hair ties, the instinctive violence of small humans barely cognizant of consequence or remorse. In the novel's second half, a girl, known only as The Child, whose mother adds to the schoolyard cruelties by beating her and leaving her unfed, begins to pay menacing visits to Yujoo's writerly alter ego, demanding to know why she was forced to inhabit such a macabre story. "It was your plan to have me atone for the sins I didn't even commit," The Child accuses. The narrative turn is both exuberantly postmodern and in dead earnest, questioning the use of suffering as an aesthetic device.



There Are More Beautiful Things Than Beyoncé, *by Morgan Parker (Tin House)*. This singular poetry collection is a dynamic meditation on the experience of, and societal narratives surrounding, contemporary black womanhood: "I do whatever I want because I could die any minute. /I don't mean YOLO I mean they are hunting me." The book, Parker's second, responds to the work and the lives of women like Carrie Mae Weems, the Hottentot Venus, Michelle Obama, and Beyoncé Knowles-Carter. Her language is by turns worshipful and profane, her tone colloquial and confessional. Ranging from orderly couplets to an itemized list titled after Jay Z's "99 Problems" to lines interrupted by gaping white space, these exquisite poems defy categorization.

BOOKS

CIVIL WARS

Arundhati Roy returns.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

Arundhati Roy's "The Ministry of Utmost Happiness" (Knopf) is a book that people have been waiting twenty years for. In the late nineteen-nineties, when Roy was in her thirties, she did some acting and screenwriting—she had married a filmmaker, Pradip Krishen—but mostly, she says, she made her living as an aerobics instructor. She had also been working on a novel for five years. In 1997, she published that book, "The God of Small Things." Within months, it had sold four hundred thousand copies and won the Booker Prize, which had never before been given to a non-expatriate Indian—an Indian who actually lived in India—or to an Indian woman. Roy became the most famous novelist on the subcontinent, and she probably still is, which is a considerable achievement, given that, after "The God of Small Things," she became so enmeshed in the politics of her homeland that, for the next two decades, she didn't produce any more fiction.

Roy's second novel, coming twenty years after the first, is steeped in her politics.

Now, finally, the second novel has come out, and it is clear that her politics have been part of its gestation. "The God of Small Things" was about one family, primarily in the nineteen-sixties, and though it included some terrible events, its sorrows were private, muffled, personal. By contrast, "The Ministry of the Utmost Happiness" is about India, the polity, during the past half century or so, and its griefs are national. This does not mean that Roy's powers are stretched thin, or even that their character has changed. In the new book, as in the earlier one, what is so remarkable is her combinatory genius. Here is the opening of the novel:

> At magic hour, when the sun is gone but the light has not, armies of flying foxes unhinge themselves from the Banyan trees in the old graveyard and drift across the city like smoke. When the bats leave, the crows come home. Not all the din of their homecoming fills the silence left by the sparrows that have gone missing, and the old white-backed vultures, custodians of the dead for more than a hundred million years, that have been wiped out. The vultures died of diclofenac poisoning. Diclofenac, cow aspirin, given to cattle as a muscle relaxant, to ease pain and increase the production of milk, works—worked—like nerve gas on white-backed vultures. Each chemically relaxed milk-producing cow or buffalo that died became poisoned vulture bait. As cattle turned into better dairy machines, as the city ate more ice cream, butterscotch-crunch, nutty-buddy and chocolate-chip, as it drank more mango milkshake, vultures' necks began to droop as though they were tired and simply couldn't stay awake. Silver beards of saliva dripped from their beaks, and one by one they tumbled off their branches, dead.

This is *l'heure bleue*, beloved of poets, but now it is filled with bats and crows, like a haunted house. We get ice cream—butterscotch-crunch, nutty-buddy—but it is made out of poison. The birds have silver beards, like Santa Claus, but that's because they're drooling, in preparation for dying. And what kind of birds are they? Vultures, which live by eating the dead. This paragraph is a little discourse on industrial pollution, but it is also an act of irony, almost a comedy. At the same time, it is very sad. Once we've eaten our ice cream

PHOTOGRAPH BY BHARAT SIKKA

and died, there won't even be anyone to clean up the spot where we fell. All the vultures will have died before us.

As the book begins, in what appears to be the nineteen-fifties, Jahanara Begum, a Delhi housewife who has waited for six years, through three daughters, to get a boy baby, goes into labor, and soon the midwife tells her that her wish has come true. She has a son. That night is the happiest of her life. In the morning, she unswaddles the baby and explores "his tiny body—eyes, nose, head, neck, armpits, fingers, toes—with sated, unhurried delight. That was when she discovered, nestling underneath his boy-parts, a small, unformed girl-part." Her heart constricts. She shits down her leg. Her child is a hermaphrodite.

Jahanara thinks that maybe the girl-part will close up, disappear. But month after month, year after year, it remains stubbornly there, and as the boy, Aftab, grows he becomes unmistakably girly: "He could sing Chaiti and Thumri with the accomplishment and poise of a Lucknow courtesan." His father discourages the singing. He stays up late telling the child stories of heroic deeds done by men, but, when Aftab hears how Genghis Khan fought a whole army single-handedly to retrieve his beautiful bride from the ruffians who have kidnapped her, all he wants is to be the bride. Sad, alone—he can't go to school; the other children tease him—he stands on the balcony of his family's house and watches the streets below, until one day he spies a fascinating creature, a tall, slim-hipped woman, wearing bright lipstick, gold sandals, and a shiny green shalwar kameez. "He rushed down the steep stairs into the street and followed her discreetly while she bought goats' trotters, hairclips, guavas, and had the strap of her sandals fixed."

That day, and for many days, he follows her home, to a house with a blue doorway. He finds out that her name is Bombay Silk, and that her house—called the House of Dreams—shelters seven others like her: Bulbul, Razia, Heera, Baby, Nimmo, Gudiya, and Mary. All of them were born male, more or less, and all of them want to be women, or feel that they already are. Some have had their genitals surgically altered; others not. They make their living mainly as prostitutes. Aftab thinks that he will die if he can't be like them. Finally, by dint of running errands for them, he gains entry into their house. The following year, when he is fifteen, they let him move in. He becomes a full member of the community, and changes his name to Anjum. His father never again speaks to him—or to her, as we should say now. Her mother sends her a hot meal every day, and the two occasionally meet at the local shrine: Anjum, six feet tall, in a spangled scarf, and tiny Jahanara in a black burqa. "Sometimes they held hands surreptitiously."

To American readers, no subject could seem more timely. Transgender people and the issues surrounding them are in the news nearly every day. (And this is not the first important novel about a hermaphrodite in recent memory. Jeffrey Eugenides's "Middlesex," published in 2002, won the Pulitzer Prize and has sold four million copies in the United States.) In India, *hijras*—people who, though biologically male, feel they are female, and dress and act as women—constitute a long-recognized subculture. They have certainly been subject to persecution, but they are now edging their way toward acceptance, as a "third sex." They have the right to vote in India (as of 1994) and Pakistan (2009). In 1998, India's first *hijra* M.P., Shabnam (Mausi) Bano, forty years old, took her seat in the state assembly of Madhya Pradesh.

That is what they are legally. As for how they function poetically in "The Ministry of Utmost Happiness," Indian storytelling, from the Mahabharata onward, has tended to favor fantasy, transformation, high color. *Hijras* contribute to this tradition. People who are defending their right to be women, not men, do not, as a rule, wear pinstriped suits. They wear golden sandals and green-satin shalwars. In Roy's House of Dreams, they also paint their nails and sing songs from Bollywood movies. They are fancy; they are fun. At the same time, they are the book's ruling metaphor for sorrow. "Do you know why God made hijras?" Anjum's housemate Nimmo asks her one day. "It was an experiment. He decided to create something, a living creature that is incapable of happiness. So he made us." Think about it, she says. What are the things regular people get upset about? "Price-rise, children's school-admissions, husbands' beatings, wives' cheatings, Hindu-Muslim riots, Indo-Pak war—*outside* things that settle down eventually. But for us the price-rise and school-admissions and beating-husbands and cheating-wives are all inside us. The riot is *inside* us. Indo-Pak is *inside* us. It will never settle down. It *can't*."

Anjum will not contradict Nimmo, her elder, but in time she finds out for herself. On her eighteenth birthday, a big party is held in the House of Dreams. *Hijras* come from all over the city. For the occasion, Anjum buys a red "disco" sari with a backless top:

> That night she dreamed she was a new bride on her wedding night. She awoke distressed to find that her sexual pleasure had expressed itself into her beautiful garment like a man's. It wasn't the first time this had happened, but for some reason, perhaps because of the sari, the humiliation she felt had never been so intense. She sat in the courtyard and howled like a wolf, hitting herself on her head and between her legs, screaming with self-inflicted pain.

One of her housemates gives her a tranquillizer and puts her to bed.

That is the last orgasm of her life. She has genital surgery, but her new vagina never works right. Sex is the least of her problems, though. Nimmo had said that for most people Hindu-Muslim riots and the Indo-Pakistani war were outside matters, things that happened in the world, whereas for *hijras* conflict was an internal condition, and ceaseless. Accordingly, what the *hijras* in this novel represent, more than anything else, is India itself. With Partition, in 1947, Roy writes, "God's carotid burst open on the new border between India and Pakistan and a million people died of hatred. Neighbors turned on each other as though they'd never known each other, never been to each other's weddings, never sung each other's songs." The consequences of that terrible event form the main story of "The Ministry of Utmost Happiness."

But this is not a tale that can be told by Anjum. Although she's a perfect emblem of India's predicament, she is too vulnerable, too marginal, to take Roy's story where it needs to go. I think

Roy may have been reluctant to see that. She stays with Anjum too long, and allows the *hijra's* story to devolve into anecdotes. Some are wonderful, but they pile up, and they all carry much the same package of emotions: sweetness and recoil, irony and pathos. Finally, however, Roy takes a deep breath and changes her main character. Just as she started the book with the birth of Anjum, she now stages another nativity. "Miles away, in a troubled forest, a baby waited to be born. . . ." The first part of the novel ends with those words.

In a 2014 interview for the *Times Magazine*, Roy told the novelist Siddhartha Deb that she was always rather annoyed with the people who, however well meaning, expressed regret that she hadn't "written anything" since her first novel. "As if all the nonfiction I've written is not writing," she said. Suzanna Arundhati Roy, born in 1959 in Shillong, a small town in India's northeast, grew up strong-minded, and had to. Her mother was a Syrian Christian from Kerala; her father was the manager of a tea plantation, and a Hindu and a drunk. Because of their differing backgrounds, their marriage was frowned on; its ending was even less approved of. When Roy was two, her mother, Mary, took her two children and returned to her family. But, in India, daughters who insist on choosing their own husbands are not necessarily welcomed home when the union doesn't prosper. Mary Roy and her children lived on their relatives' sufferance. Roy told Siddhartha Deb that her mother would send her and her brother into town with a basket, and the shopkeepers would put in it whatever they could spare on credit: "Mostly just rice and green chilies." The mother was chronically ill, with asthma. Later, she started a school and was busy there. Her children were on their own, and, still bearing the stigma of their parents' divorce, often found their companions among lower-caste neighbors.

When Roy was sixteen, she left home for good, soon landing in an architectural college in Delhi. Much of the time, she lived in slums, because that was all she could afford. After graduating from college, she hung out with her boyfriend for a while in Goa, where they would make cake and sell it on the beach. Among the poor, Roy told Deb, she learned to see the world from the point of view of absolute vulnerability: "And that hasn't left me."

Indeed, that is what occupied her during the years when, to her fans' disappointment, she was not writing novels. Journalists are always telling us about the interesting play of contrasts in the "new India": billionaires walking the same sidewalks as beggars, Bentleys driving down roads alongside ox-carts. Side by side, business and charm, the modern world and the old world. But, as Roy has argued in the eight books she has brought out since "The God of Small Things," the two aren't separate. The new India was built on the backs of the poor. One of her first targets, in a widely circulated 1998 essay, "The End of Imagination," was the nuclear tests India carried out that year. To many Indians, these were occasions of pride: their country was a player at last. To Roy, the nuclear program was a sign that the government cared more about displays of power than about the appalling conditions in which most of its billion citizens lived.

Her next subject was the series of dams that the government was constructing in the states of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. Again, the project was hailed as part of the new India, and again it was the poor who paid. Farm families were broken by debt, and thrown off their land. (By 2012, a quarter of a million farmers were reported to have committed suicide, and those are only the fatalities that were recorded. A common method was by drinking pesticide.) After the dams, Roy took on the 2002 Gujarat massacre, in which around a thousand people were killed, most of them Muslims suffering at the hands of Hindu nationalists. (India's current Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, who was Gujarat's Chief Minister at the time, has been criticized for looking the other way as this took place.) Next, Roy denounced the paramilitary attacks on the tribal peoples of central India, whose land, rich in minerals, the government wanted. (She spent close to three weeks tramping through the forests with Naxalites, Maoist defenders of the tribes, and reported on this in her 2011 book, "Walking with the Comrades.") She later denounced the military occupation of Kashmir, where the largely Muslim population is trying to secede from India.

These books—most of them were collections of previously published essays—were really all about one subject: modern India's abuse of its poor. The country's new middle class, Roy writes, lives "side by side with spirits of the netherworld, the poltergeists . . . of the 800 million who have been impoverished and dispossessed to make way for us. And who survive on less than twenty Indian rupees a day." Twenty rupees is thirty cents.

Roy is a good polemicist. She writes simple, strong expository prose. When she needs to, she uses words like "stupid" and "pathetic"—indeed, "mass murder." She checks her facts; most of her books conclude with a fat section of endnotes, documenting her claims. Many people on the right hate her, of course, and not just for her skill in argumentation. There is a Jane Fonda-in-Vietnam element here: although Roy, unlike Fonda, grew up poor, to many she looks like a fortunate person. She may have sold cake on the beach when she was young, but that sounds a little bit like fun.

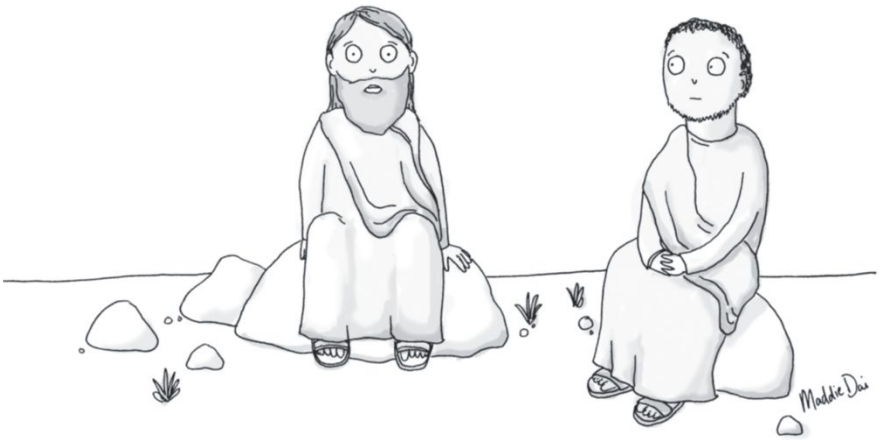
This problem often comes up when the rich plead on behalf of the poor. The less rich say, Well, why don't you give your money away? That, of course, is not a solution. And, in fact, Roy has given a lot of money away—for example, all her prize money. She certainly has no financial difficulties. "The God of Small Things" has sold more than six million copies. But should only the poor be allowed to argue for the poor? If so, the poor would be in much worse trouble than they already are.

In the long second section of the novel, once Roy leaves Anjum and goes out into the great world you see what she learned in her twenty years of activism. And above all in Kashmir, where most of the latter part of the book takes place, we are shown horror after horror. People bash one another's skulls in, gouge

out one another's eyes. Bodies are everywhere, hands tied to feet behind their backs, and they are covered with cigarette burns, which means the person was tortured. In some scenes, Roy kills us quietly. Here is the Indian Army's "liberation" of the town of Bandipora: "The villagers said it had begun at 3:30 P.M. the previous day. People were forced out of their homes at gunpoint. They had to leave their houses open, hot tea not yet drunk, books open, homework incomplete, food on the fire, the onions frying, the chopped tomatoes waiting to be added." Elsewhere, Roy just lets everything be as appalling as it was. Dogs wander through hospitals, looking for arms and legs severed from diabetics. That's dinner.

Our new main character is Tilo, the illegitimate child of an Untouchable man and a Syrian Christian woman, who, to cover her sin, consigns her newborn to an orphanage and then goes back and adopts her. Tilo is one of a group of Kashmiri independence fighters. She may or may not have married one of the others, Musa. In any case, she has a steamy night with him on a riverboat. After Musa is gone—the authorities are after him—Tilo, too, goes on the run. She has a baby with her, not hers; it was born in the forest to another resistance fighter. With this baby, she gets into a truck, driven by her friend Saddam Hussain (not that one), with a dead cow in the back. The animal burst from eating too many plastic bags in a garbage dump.

They go to live in a new place, a graveyard where, the story having circled round, Anjum now lives. Anjum has converted the cemetery into a guesthouse, with roofs and walls enclosing the burial plots. The guests lay out their bedding among the graves. Tilo and the baby have a room with a vanity (Lakmé nail polish and lipstick, rollers, etc.) and, under the ground, the body of the woman who was the neighborhood's longtime midwife. They are welcomed with a feast—mutton korma, shami kebab, watermelon—which they share with the homeless people who live on the edge of the cemetery, in a nest of bloodied bandages and used needles. They also save food for the police, who will soon come and will beat up everyone if they aren't given something. Tilo and the baby settle in. Tilo misses Musa, but "the battered angels in the graveyard that kept watch over their battered charges held open the doors between worlds (illegally, just a crack), so that the souls of the present and the departed could mingle, like guests at the same party."



"Everyone wants to know what Jesus would do. No one ever asks how Jesus is feeling about his complicated relationship with his father."

• •

Roy's scenes of violence are hallucinatory, like the chapters on the Bangladeshi independence movement in Salman Rushdie's "Midnight's Children," or the union-busting at the banana plantation in García Márquez's "One Hundred Years of Solitude." She's often said to have learned from Rushdie, and she may be a little tired of hearing that, because it is to García Márquez (who surely influenced both of them) that she tips her hat, describing post-colonial India as "Macondo madness." In fact, all three writers are practicing variant forms of magic realism, which, for each of them, is, among other things, a means of reporting on political horror without inducing tedium. In Roy's case (Rushdie's, too, I would say), the effort is not always successful. At times, between the things flying this way and that—who is this new narrator who is talking to us, telling us that he needs to go to a rehab center?—you lose your bearings. Roy knows this, and apologizes. In Kashmir, she writes, "there's too much blood for good literature." Confusion is not the only problem, though. The tone is too even: sarcastic, sarcastic.

You feel the need for some large-scale salvation, some great cleansing, which, when it comes, of course can't really do the job. In the last scene of the book, Anjum, unable to sleep, goes for a midnight stroll in the city, taking the baby, now a toddler, with her. They wind their way through the people sleeping on the pavement. They pass a naked man with a sprig of barbed wire in his beard. The child says she has to pee, and Anjum puts her down. When the little girl was done, she "lifted her bottom to marvel at the night sky and the stars and the one-thousand-year-old city reflected in the puddle she had made. Anjum gathered her up and kissed her and took her home."

After the tortures and the beheadings, this is a little too cozy. I expect someone to pop up, any minute, and say, "God bless us, every one!" But maybe, if I'd been to North India recently, I'd be grateful for a little sweetness, if only reflected in a puddle of urine. The conflict is still going on. Roy's narrator says that aspiring Hindu politicians in Kashmir have themselves filmed beating up Muslims and then upload the videos onto YouTube. The Indian government—the real one, not Roy's version—recently banned most social media in order to crack down on dissent. But you can sample videos that predate the ban. In one, soldiers beat a man while their colleagues hold him down. Musa says that, in Kashmir, "the living are only dead people, pretending." ♦

BOOKS

NO, WE CANNOT

The new pessimism comes of age.

BY JILL LEPORE

Here are the plots of some new dystopian novels, set in the near future. The world got too hot, so a wealthy celebrity persuaded a small number of very rich people to move to a makeshift satellite that, from orbit, leaches the last nourishment the earth has to give, leaving everyone else to starve. The people on the satellite have lost their genitals, through some kind of instant mutation or super-quick evolution, but there is a lot of sex anyway, since it's become fashionable to have surgical procedures to give yourself a variety of appendages and openings, along with decorative skin grafts and tattoos, there being so little else to do. There are no children, but the celebrity who rules the satellite has been trying to create them by torturing women from the earth's surface. ("We are what happens when the seemingly unthinkable celebrity rises to power," the novel's narrator says.) Or: North Korea deployed a brain-damaging chemical weapon that made everyone in the United States, or at least everyone in L.A., an idiot, except for a few people who were on a boat the day the scourge came, but the idiots, who are otherwise remarkably sweet, round up and kill those people, out of fear. Led by a man known only as the Chief, the idiots build a wall around downtown to keep out the Drifters and the stupidest people, the Shamblers, who don't know how to tie shoes or button buttons; they wander around, naked and barefoot. Thanks, in part, to the difficulty of clothing, there is a lot of sex, random and unsatisfying, but there are very few children, because no one knows how to take care of them. (The jacket copy bills this novel as "the first book of the Trump era.")

Or: Machines replaced humans, doing all the work and providing all the food, and, even though if you leave the city it is hotter everywhere else, some huffy young people do, because they are so bored, not to mention that they are mad at their parents, who do annoying things like run giant corporations. The runaways are called walkaways. (I gather they're not in a terribly big hurry.) They talk about revolution, take a lot of baths, upload their brains onto computers, and have a lot of sex, but, to be honest, they are very boring. Or: Even after the coasts were lost to the floods when the ice caps melted, the American South, defying a new federal law, refused to give up fossil fuels, and seceded, which led to a civil war, which had been going on for decades, and was about to be over, on Reunification Day, except that a woman from Louisiana who lost her whole family in the war went to the celebration and released a poison that killed a hundred million people, which doesn't seem like the tragedy it might have been, because in this future world, as in all the others, there's not much to live for, what with the petty tyrants, the rotten weather, and the crappy sex. It will not give too much away if I say that none of these novels have a happy ending (though one has a twist). Then again, none of them have a happy beginning, either.

Dystopias follow utopias the way thunder follows lightning. This year, the thunder is roaring. But people are so grumpy, what with the petty tyrants and such, that it's easy to forget how recently lightning struck. "Whether we measure our progress in terms of wiredness, open-mindedness, or optimism,

Liberal and conservative dystopias do battle, in proxy wars of the imagination.

ILLUSTRATION BY DANIEL ZENDER

the country is moving in the right direction, and faster, perhaps, than even we would have believed," a reporter for *Wired* wrote in May, 2000. "We are, as a nation, better educated, more tolerant, and more connected because of—not in spite of—the convergence of the internet and public life. Partisanship, religion, geography, race, gender, and other traditional political divisions are giving way to a new standard—wiredness—as an organizing principle." Nor was the utopianism merely technological, or callow. In January, 2008, Barack Obama gave a speech in New Hampshire, about the American creed:

> It was a creed written into the founding documents that declared the destiny of a nation: Yes, we can. It was whispered by slaves and abolitionists as they blazed a trail towards freedom through the darkest of nights: Yes, we can. It was sung by immigrants as they struck out from distant shores and pioneers who pushed westward against an unforgiving wilderness: Yes, we can. . . . Yes, we can heal this nation. Yes, we can repair this world. Yes, we can.

That was the lightning, the flash of hope, the promise of perfectibility. The argument of dystopianism is that perfection comes at the cost of freedom. Every new lament about the end of the republic, every column about the collapse of civilization, every new novel of doom: these are its answering thunder. Rumble, thud, rumble, ka-boom, KA-BOOM!

Autopia is a paradise, a dystopia a paradise lost. Before utopias and dystopias became imagined futures, they were imagined pasts, or imagined places, like the Garden of Eden. "I have found a continent more densely peopled and abounding in animals than our Europe or Asia or Africa, and, in addition, a climate milder and more delightful than in any other region known to us," Amerigo Vespucci wrote, in extravagant letters describing his voyages across the Atlantic, published in 1503 as "Mundus Novus," a new world. In 1516, Thomas More published a fictional account of a sailor on one of Vespucci's ships who had travelled just a bit farther, to the island of Utopia, where he found a perfect republic. (More coined the term: "utopia" means "nowhere.") "Gulliver's Travels" (1726) is a satire of the utopianism of the Enlightenment. On the island of Laputa, Gulliver visits the Academy of Lagado, where the sages, the first progressives, are busy trying to make pincushions out of marble, breeding naked sheep, and improving the language by getting rid of all the words. The word "dystopia," meaning "an unhappy country," was coined in the seventeen-forties, as the historian Gregory Claeys points out in a shrewd new study, "Dystopia: A Natural History" (Oxford). In its modern definition, a dystopia can be apocalyptic, or post-apocalyptic, or neither, but it has to be anti-utopian, a utopia turned upside down, a world in which people tried to build a republic of perfection only to find that they had created a republic of misery. "A Trip to the Island of Equality," a 1792 reply to Thomas Paine's "Rights of Man," is a dystopia (on the island, the pursuit of equality has reduced everyone to living in caves), but Mary Shelley's 1826 novel, "The Last Man," in which the last human being dies in the year 2100 of a dreadful plague, is not dystopian; it's merely apocalyptic.

The dystopian novel emerged in response to the first utopian novels, like Edward Bellamy's best-selling 1888 fantasy, "Looking Backward," about a socialist utopia in the year 2000. "Looking Backward" was so successful that it produced a dozen anti-socialist, anti-utopian replies, including "Looking Further Backward" (in which China invades the United States, which has been weakened by its embrace of socialism) and "Looking Further Forward" (in which socialism is so unquestionable that a history professor who refutes it is demoted to the rank of janitor). In 1887, a year before Bellamy, the American writer Anna Bowman Dodd published "The Republic of the Future," a socialist dystopia set in New York in 2050, in which women and men are equal, children are reared by the state, machines handle all the work, and most people, having nothing else to do, spend much of their time at the gym, obsessed with fitness. Dodd describes this world as "the very acme of dreariness." What is a dystopia? The gym. (That's still true. In a 2011 episode of "Black Mirror," life on earth in an energy-scarce future has been reduced to an interminable spin class.)

Utopians believe in progress; dystopians don't. They fight this argument

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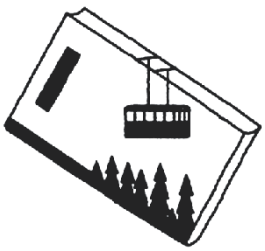
out in competing visions of the future, utopians offering promises, dystopians issuing warnings. In 1895, in "The Time Machine," H. G. Wells introduced the remarkably handy device of travelling through time by way of a clock. After that, time travel proved convenient, but even Wells didn't always use a machine. In his 1899 novel, "When the Sleeper Awakes," his hero simply oversleeps his way to the twenty-first century, where he finds a world in which people are enslaved by propaganda, and "helpless in the hands of the demagogue." That's one problem with dystopian fiction: forewarned is not always forearmed.



Sleeping through the warning signs is another problem. "I was asleep before," the heroine of "The Handmaid's Tale" says in the new Hulu production of Margaret Atwood's 1986 novel. "That's how we let it happen." But what about when everyone's awake, and there are plenty of warnings, but no one does anything about them? "NK3," by Michael Tolkin (Atlantic), is an intricate and cleverly constructed account of the aftermath of a North Korean chemical attack; the NK3 of the title has entirely destroyed its victims' memories and has vastly diminished their capacity to reason. This puts the novel's characters in the same position as the readers of all dystopian fiction: they're left to try to piece together not a whodunnit but a howdidithappen. Seth Kaplan, who'd been a pediatric oncologist, pages through periodicals left in a seat back on a Singapore Airlines jet, on the ground at LAX. The periodicals, like the plane, hadn't moved since the plague arrived. "It confused Seth that the plague was front-page news in some but not all of the papers," Tolkin writes. "They still printed reviews of movies and books, articles about new cars, ways to make inexpensive costumes for Halloween." Everyone had been awake, but they'd been busy shopping for cars and picking out movies and cutting eyeholes in paper bags.

This spring's blighted crop of dystopian novels is pessimistic about technology, about the economy, about politics, and about the planet, making it a more abundant harvest of unhappiness than most other heydays of downheartedness. The Internet did not stitch us all together. Economic growth has led to widening economic inequality and a looming environmental crisis. Democracy appears to be yielding to authoritarianism. "Hopes, dashed" is, lately, a long list, and getting longer. The plane is grounded, seat backs in the upright position, and we are dying, slowly, of stupidity.

Pick your present-day dilemma; there's a new dystopian novel to match it. Worried about political polarization? In "American War" (Knopf), Omar El Akkad traces the United States' descent from gridlock to barbarism as the states of the former Confederacy (or, at least, the parts that aren't underwater) refuse to abide by the Sustainable Future Act, and secede in 2074. Troubled by the new Jim Crow? Ben H. Winters's "Underground Airlines" (Little, Brown) is set in an early-twenty-first-century United States in which slavery abides, made crueller, and more inescapable, by the giant, unregulated slave-owning corporations that deploy the surveillance powers of modern technology, so that even escaping to the North (on underground airlines) hardly offers much hope, since free blacks in cities like Chicago live in segregated neighborhoods with no decent housing or schooling or work and it's the very poverty in which they live that defeats arguments for abolition by hardening ideas about race. As the book's narrator, a fugitive slave, explains, "Black gets to mean poor and poor to mean dangerous and all the words get murked together and become one dark idea, a cloud of smoke, the smokestack fumes drifting like filthy air across the rest of the nation."

Radical pessimism is a dismal trend. The despair, this particular publishing season, comes in many forms, including the grotesque. In "The Book of Joan" (Harper), Lidia Yuknavitch's narrator, Christine Pizan, is forty-nine, and about to die, because she's living on a satellite orbiting the earth, where everyone is executed at the age of fifty; the wet in their bodies constitutes the colony's water supply. (Dystopia, here,

is menopause.) Her body has aged: "If hormones have any meaning left for any of us, it is latent at best." She examines herself in the mirror: "I have a slight rise where each breast began, and a kind of mound where my pubic bone should be, but that's it. Nothing else of woman is left." Yuknavitch's Pizan is a resurrection of the medieval French scholar and historian Christine de Pisan, who in 1405 wrote the allegorical "Book of the City of Ladies," and, in 1429, "The Song of Joan of Arc," an account of the life of the martyr. In the year 2049, Yuknavitch's Pizan writes on her body, by a torturous process of self-mutilation, the story of a twenty-first-century Joan, who is trying to save the planet from Jean de Men (another historical allusion), the insane celebrity who has become its ruler. In the end, de Men himself is revealed to be "not a man but what is left of a woman," with "all the traces: sad, stitched-up sacks of flesh where breasts had once been, as if someone tried too hard to erase their existence. And a bulbous sagging gash sutured over and over where . . . life had perhaps happened in the past, or not, and worse, several dangling attempts at half-formed penises, sewn and abandoned, distended and limp."

Equal rights for women, emancipation, Reconstruction, civil rights: so many hopes, dashed; so many causes, lost. Pisan pictured a city of women; Lincoln believed in union; King had a dream. Yuknavitch and El Akkad and Winters unspool the reels of those dreams, and recut them as nightmares. This move isn't new, or daring; it is, instead, very old. The question is whether it's all used up, as parched as a post-apocalyptic desert, as barren as an old woman, as addled as an old man.

Utopia is a planned society; planned societies are often disastrous; that's why utopias contain their own dystopias. Most early-twentieth-century dystopian novels took the form of political parables, critiques of planned societies, from both the left and the right. The utopianism of Communists, eugenicists, New Dealers, and Fascists produced the Russian novelist Yevgeny Zamyatin's "We" in 1924, Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World" in 1935, Ayn Rand's "Anthem" in 1937, and George Orwell's "1984" in 1949. After the war, after the death camps, after the bomb, dystopian fiction thrived, like a weed that favors shade. "A decreasing percentage of the imaginary worlds are utopias," the literary scholar Chad Walsh observed in 1962. "An increasing percentage are nightmares."

Much postwar pessimism had to do with the superficiality of mass culture in an age of affluence, and with the fear that the banality and conformity of consumer society had reduced people to robots. "I drive my car to supermarket," John Updike wrote in 1954. "The way I take is superhigh,/ A superlot is where I park it, / And Super Suds are what I buy." Supersudsy television boosterism is the utopianism attacked by Kurt Vonnegut in "Player Piano" (1952) and by Ray Bradbury in "Fahrenheit 451" (1953). Cold War dystopianism came in as many flavors as soda pop or superheroes and in as many sizes as nuclear warheads. But, in a deeper sense, the mid-century overtaking of utopianism by dystopianism marked the rise of modern conservatism: a rejection of the idea of the liberal state. Rand's "Atlas Shrugged" appeared in 1957, and climbed up the *Times* best-seller list. It has sold more than eight million copies.

The second half of the twentieth century, of course, also produced liberal-minded dystopias, chiefly concerned with issuing warnings about pollution and climate change, nuclear weapons and corporate monopolies, technological totalitarianism and the fragility of rights secured from the state. There were, for instance, feminist dystopias. The utopianism of the Moral Majority, founded in 1979, lies behind "The Handmaid's Tale" (a book that is, among other things, an updating of Harriet Jacobs's 1861 "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl"). But rights-based dystopianism also led to the creation of a subgenre of dystopian fiction: bleak futures for bobby-soxers. Dystopianism turns out to have a natural affinity with American adolescence. And this, I think, is where the life of the genre got squeezed out, like a beetle burned up on an asphalt driveway by a boy wielding a magnifying glass on a sunny day. It sizzles, and then it

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smokes, and then it just lies there, dead as a bug.

Dystopias featuring teen-age characters have been a staple of high-school life since "The Lord of the Flies" came out, in 1954. But the genre only really took off in the aftermath of Vietnam and Watergate, when distrust of adult institutions and adult authority flourished, and the publishing industry began producing fiction packaged for "young adults," ages twelve to eighteen. Some of these books are pretty good. M. T. Anderson's 2002 Y.A. novel, "Feed," is a smart and fierce answer to the "Don't Be Evil" utopianism of Google, founded in 1996. All of them are characterized by a withering contempt for adults and by an unshakable suspicion of authority. "The Hunger Games" trilogy, whose first installment appeared in 2008, has to do with economic inequality, but, like all Y.A. dystopian fiction, it's also addressed to readers who feel betrayed by a world that looked so much better to them when they were just a bit younger. "I grew up a little, and I gradually began to figure out that pretty much *everyone* had been lying to me about pretty much *everything*," the high-school-age narrator writes at the beginning of Ernest Cline's best-selling 2011 Y.A. novel, "Ready Player One."

Lately, even dystopian fiction marketed to adults has an adolescent sensibility, pouty and hostile. Cory Doctorow's new novel, "Walkaway" (Tor), begins late at night at a party in a derelict factory with a main character named Hubert: "At twenty-seven, he had seven years on the next oldest partier." The story goes on in this way, with Doctorow inviting grownup readers to hang out with adolescents, looking for immortality, while supplying neologisms like "spum" instead of "spam" to remind us that we're in a world that's close to our own, but weird. "My father spies on me," the novel's young heroine complains. "Walkaway" comes with an endorsement from Edward Snowden. Doctorow's earlier novel, a Y.A. book called "Little Brother," told the story of four teen-agers and their fight for Internet privacy rights. With "Walkaway," Doctorow pounds the same nails with the same bludgeon. His walkaways are trying to turn a dystopia into a utopia by writing better computer code than their enemies. "A pod of mercs and an infotech goon pwnd everything using some zeroday they'd bought from scumbag default infowar researchers" is the sort of thing they say. "They took over the drone fleet, and while we dewormed it, seized the mechas."

Every dystopia is a history of the future. What are the consequences of a literature, even a pulp literature, of political desperation? "It's a sad commentary on our age that we find dystopias a lot easier to believe in than utopias," Atwood wrote in the nineteen-eighties. "Utopias we can only imagine; dystopias we've already had." But what was really happening then was that the genre and its readers were sorting themselves out by political preference, following the same path—to the same ideological bunkers—as families, friends, neighborhoods, and the news. In the first year of Obama's Presidency, Americans bought half a million copies of "Atlas Shrugged." In the first month of the Administration of Donald ("American carnage") Trump, during which Kellyanne Conway talked about alternative facts, "1984" jumped to the top of the Amazon best-seller list. (Steve Bannon is a particular fan of a 1973 French novel called "The Camp of the Saints," in which Europe is overrun by dark-skinned immigrants.) The duel of dystopias is nothing so much as yet another place poisoned by polarized politics, a proxy war of imaginary worlds.

Dystopia used to be a fiction of resistance; it's become a fiction of submission, the fiction of an untrusting, lonely, and sullen twenty-first century, the fiction of fake news and infowars, the fiction of helplessness and hopelessness. It cannot imagine a better future, and it doesn't ask anyone to bother to make one. It nurses grievances and indulges resentments; it doesn't call for courage; it finds that cowardice suffices. Its only admonition is: Despair more. It appeals to both the left and the right, because, in the end, it requires so little by way of literary, political, or moral imagination, asking only that you enjoy the company of people whose fear of the future aligns comfortably with your own. Left or right, the radical pessimism of an unremitting dystopianism has itself contributed to the unravelling of the liberal state and the weakening of a commitment to political pluralism. "This isn't a story about war," El Akkad writes in "American War." "It's about ruin." A story about ruin can be beautiful. Wreckage is romantic. But a politics of ruin is doomed. ♦

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KEVIN'S GATE

The joyful final days of "The Leftovers."

BY EMILY NUSSBAUM

In 1966, at an event protesting the Vietnam War, Anne Sexton read, in a quiet voice, "Little Girl, My Stringbean, My Lovely Woman," a meditation on her daughter's eleven-year-old body. As Adrienne Rich recalled it, Sexton's poem stood out from the men's "diatribes against McNamara, their napalm poems, their ego-poetry." By evoking, indirectly, war's victims, the poem reframed the question of what makes art political.

Right now, it's hard for TV viewers not to see duplicates of civic turmoil everywhere, in satire and melodrama, in sitcoms and superhero fantasies. People joke that "Veep" is a documentary; maybe "The Americans" is, too. But Damon Lindelof's "The Leftovers," in its third and final season on HBO, is a different sort of show of the moment: it reflects global anarchy, but soulfully, through an aesthetic side door, as Sexton's poem did. It's about a world crisis—the aftermath of the Sudden Departure, in which two per cent of the world's population disappeared, without explanation—but it's not a thriller. It's not a science-fiction show, either, despite supernatural elements; it's not a puzzle narrative, like "Lost," Lindelof's previous show. It's stranger: a deep dive into something like the social chaos that the Hopi refer to as *koyaanisqatsi*, a life out of balance. It shows us intimate grief—midlife divorce, a child's death, mental illness—lit by the flare of worldwide cataclysm. It's about the apocalypse, taken personally.

The first season, which was adapted from a novel by Tom Perrotta, struck many viewers, not unreasonably, as a huge downer. It was gorgeous and ambitious, but watching could feel like listening to Portishead while on codeine, recovering from surgery. (Which I've done; it has its charms.) A switch flipped in the sixth episode, a wrenching, witty gem called "Guest," which focussed on Nora (played by Carrie Coon), a woman who lost her entire family in the Departure. "Guest" had a dreamlike plot—Nora, who works for the Department of Sudden Departure, realizes that her identity has been stolen—that felt newly confident, imagistic and musical. In the second season, the show levelled up again, injecting dark humor and a rude visual playfulness, much of it the contribution of directors like Mimi Leder. Now, in Season 3, "The Leftovers" has become the everything bagel of television, defying categorization. It's at once intimate and epic, giddy and gloomy, a radical emotional intoxicant. It's still a hard sell. You try telling people that a drama about dead children and suicidal ideation is a hilarious must-watch, then get back to me. But, as an online acquaintance put it, it's gone from a bummer to "a bummer *party*."

The final season is set seven years after the Departure. The characters are mostly still living in Jarden, Texas, a spiritual-seeker tourist trap. There's the suicidal town chief of police, Kevin Garvey (Justin Theroux); Nora, now his long-term girlfriend; Kevin's ex-wife, Laurie (Amy Brenneman), who, with her new husband, John (Kevin Carroll), runs a con game to comfort mourners; and the preacher Matt (Christopher Eccleston), who is writing a new New Testament, with Kevin in the lead role. The Guilty Remnant, a cult that followed around the survivors, has been wiped out by a

Kevin Garvey, the chief of police, dies and is resurrected multiple times.

ILLUSTRATION BY RUNE FISKER

government drone strike. But there are rumors that a new disaster is on the way: a second Flood. Soon, our characters are off to Australia, on a shambolic road trip, hunting gods and gurus.

A set of bizarre plots center on the characters' often desperate search for faith. There's a popular theory, which leaps virally from person to person, that Kevin must die and be resurrected, to prevent the apocalypse. (He's already died and been resurrected multiple times.) There's a sinister team of Dutch scientists who offer mourners a chance to join their loved ones, aided by Mark Linn-Baker, playing himself, the one member of the sitcom "Perfect Strangers" not to Depart. One episode features what may be HBO's only non-gratuitous orgy, on a ferry of kinky cultists who worship a hyper-fertile lion named Frasier.

False prophets clearly fascinate Lindelof; "Lost"'s best arc, the life story of the wannabe prophet John Locke, was all about whether being conned by your dad set you up to be conned by God. "The Leftovers" is full of grifters, too, among them Kevin's father, Kevin, Sr., a manipulative narcissist with a prophet's beard. There's also a bully who calls himself God, and who hands out business cards like a put-upon celebrity. The slipperiness of perception is everyone's pitch: when conspiratorial thinking pervades the world, doors open for storytellers, a theme that, in the age of Pizzagate, feels very modern. And yet the show itself never feels like a con. For all its baroque contours, its wild musical score (this year, the selections range from A-ha to "Avinu Malkeinu"), it never feels ironic or gimmicky. Its central motif is feverishly sincere: the key figure of Kevin, who keeps on dying and coming back to life, our own personal Jesus.

In an era of TV tough guys, Kevin is fascinatingly atypical. He's reactive rather than active, a labile, intensely emotional man who is shredded by his own inability to discern what's real. Defined by his relationships, he jumps from a divorce into a rebound relationship. His is by far the most objectified body on the show: his abdomen is treated almost as a special effect, and the camera lingers on Theroux's perplexed eyebrows as though they were a landscape of misery. He's a fetish figure of sensitivity. In "The Leftovers"' penultimate episode, "The Most Powerful Man in the World (and His Identical Twin Brother)," we get not one Kevin but two: a fragile man imagining the burden of power.

The episode, directed by Craig Zobel, is a bookend to "International Assassin," a standout episode from Season 2, which was also directed by Zobel. Like that one, "The Most Powerful Man" is packed with absurdist humor—and, in a rarity for the show, it addresses politics directly. In "International Assassin," Kevin, who had taken a lethal dose of poison, woke up in an alternate universe, maybe Heaven, maybe a hallucination, although it resembled a luxury hotel. He entered through a bathtub. Then, step by symbolic step, he came to terms with the angry spirit of Patti, a Guilty Remnant leader, who killed herself in front of him. In this mirror universe, though, Patti was running to be President of the United States—and Kevin had to assassinate her.

"The Most Powerful Man in the World (and His Identical Twin Brother)" repeats these motifs, then torques them. Kevin dies again and becomes an assassin again. He's seeking closure for a different relationship, after an ugly breakup with Nora. The episode starts in a bathtub. But this time the scene is a real-life memory: Kevin and Nora soaking, flirting, the lovers as twins, at the height of their love. They're bantering about death, about how they should handle each other's corpse. Kevin insists that he be stuffed; Nora says that's fine, as long as she can put a beard on him. "I'm the one who has to have sex with that abomination," she jokes. It's a tender reverie that frames what follows: a dream about the end of intimacy, folded into one about the end of the world.

After the leap, Kevin discovers that his afterlife now has an even more absurd twist: this time, he is both an assassin and the President—his goal is to kill himself. As if in some supernatural thriller, Kevin stalks this bearded second self, using his "unique biometrics" (his penis) to unlock the Presidential bunker. Then he commits suicide, in a brazenly literal metaphor, by clawing the nuclear fail-safe key from his twin's chest, to the upbeat pop of "God Only Knows." "We give the people what they're too chickenshit to do themselves," Patti, who in this reality is Kevin's Defense Secretary, explains. "What they elected us for. We give them what they want. And they want to die."

It's a scene that is "The Leftovers" in a nutshell, erasing the line between personal and global annihilation, presenting war as a kind of cosmic nervous breakdown. The episode climaxes in a dazzling, almost soothing silvery vision of missiles falling over Melbourne—part "Dr. Strangelove," part "The Last Wave." But it also includes Kevin confiding to his twin, "We fucked up with Nora," as if they were having beers together. There's a sense, here and elsewhere, that the show is a phantasmagoric meditation on the terror inherent in having a family at all, not because you might lose them but because you almost certainly will. As a Louis C.K. routine about marriage put it, *best*-case scenario, you watch your best friend die and you're left alone.

Kevin's dream-death is only one of endless images of suicide on "The Leftovers": Nora has a prostitute shoot her in the chest, shock therapy after she loses her children; Kevin pulls plastic bags over his head, then tears them off at the last minute; Laurie appears to drown herself, accidentally on purpose. On another show, this obsession might seem grotesque, self-indulgent. But the power of "The Leftovers" is its capacity to embrace taboo impulses without judgment: to show radical faith, extended mourning, or hallucinatory paranoia not as pathological but as human, deserving of a gentle eye. The show is full of tenderness for every character who imagines seizing some control, even if that means writing his or her own ending.

Critics haven't seen the finale yet, but for once the landing doesn't seem to matter. "The Leftovers" could end with an hour-long monologue about how critics misread "Lost" and I'd be satisfied. In daily life, hearing someone else's dream is a burden, but here it's a gift. Or maybe it's more that "The Leftovers" itself has felt as absorbing as a dream, the art you flee into during hard times. It's not real, but you want to stay as long as you can. I'll be grieving when we wake. ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

LINES IN THE SAND

"Baywatch" and "Letters from Baghdad."

BY ANTHONY LANE

Dwayne Johnson, Zac Efron, and Kelly Rohrbach star in Seth Gordon's movie.

There are so many things you can do with a beach in the movies. You can clear it by shouting, "Shark!" You can storm it in the face of German guns. If you're Steve McQueen, you can race around it in an orange dune buggy. If you're Elvis, you can stand on the sand, in little white shorts, and pluck at your ukulele. And, if you're Gérard Philipe, in "Une Si Jolie Petite Plage" (1949), the saddest of all beach films, you can mooch along the strand, in the rain, with a face like rolling thunder.

Then there is "Baywatch," where no rain falls. The television series started in 1989 and, after a hiccup, ran for most of the following decade, earning "a wider audience on the planet Earth than any other entertainment show in history," according to a *Times* report, in 1995. "Baywatch" aired in more than a hundred and forty countries and was dubbed into many tongues: a triumph of metamorphosis, since the dialogue was only just recognizable as English in the first place. There were three attempts to promote the show from the small screen to the big, including "Baywatch: Hawaiian Wedding" (2003), whose plot is anyone's guess, but, tragically, all three swam straight to video. Now, however, we have the real deal, which bears the naked title of "Baywatch." How can it hope to fill the trunks of the original?

The role of Mitch Buchannon, head lifeguard and lord of all he surveys from his watchtower, passes from David Hasselhoff to Dwayne Johnson, who rescues a kite surfer from certain death before the opening credits are complete. Kelly Rohrbach steps into the part of C. J. Parker, Mitch's thoughtful sidekick, although Pamela Anderson, in the eyes of some experts, has never truly vacated it. New recruits to the squad include the beaming Summer Quinn (Alexandra Daddario) and Ronnie Greenbaum (Jon Bass), who is tanless, tubby, and good with computers. Asked where he acquired his skills, he replies—wait for it—"Hebrew school." In one sequence, which goes on as long as a Mahler adagio, Ronnie's genitals get trapped in the slats of a sun bed. You'll just die.

The narrative is a complex mechanism. On the one hand, there is the villainess, Victoria Leeds (Priyanka Chopra), who is a drug dealer *and* a property developer: double bad. On the other hand, there is Matt Brody (Zac Efron), surely no relation to the noble Chief Brody, in "Jaws." Matt has two Olympic gold medals in swimming; he blew a third, in the relay, by barfing in the pool, and has since hit rock bottom. Only by working in a team can Matt's ravaged soul be redeemed, although I like him most when he points out—correctly—that the lifeguards aren't proper police officers and should stop behaving as if they were. And I like Mitch most when he returns fire, peppering Matt, who is young and pretty, with a barrage of snarky vocatives. "Hey, Fresh Face!" "Where you from, One Direction?" We also hear "Troubled Youth," "Bieber," and, my favorite, "Baby Gap," though everything turns a bit weird when Matt is addressed as "High School Musical"—which is, of course, where Efron made his name.

Can a movie ironize itself to death, snipping away at its own reasons for existence until there is nothing left? "Baywatch" certainly skirts that risk, as when Matt listens to his pals at lunch and remarks, "Everything you guys are talking about sounds like an entertaining but far-fetched TV show." The sight of C.J. running in her swimsuit, in slow motion, is followed by the line "Why does she always look like she's running in slow motion?" The plan, I guess, is to make the audience feel momentarily smart, with a jolt of knowingness, the only hitch being that the film itself is as mindless as anything produced in the Hasselhovian era.

The rule of the game, I accept, is that two-thirds of all Hollywood movies released after mid-May should be aimed at fourteen-year-old boys, but "Baywatch," if you study the frequency of breast jokes, was made *by* fourteen-year-old boys. One possibility is that Seth Gordon, who is listed as the director, got a nasty case of sunburn, poor guy, and had to stay away from the set. That would explain a lot, except there's not enough sun; the continuity is so inept that we get whisked directly from a bright and glorious day, in one shot, to another that looks gray and morose. Thank heaven

ILLUSTRATION BY BENDIK KALTENBORN

for Dwayne Johnson, whose foot-wide smile will not be switched off, and who saves the life of the movie. Whether it deserves to be saved is another matter.

There is a celebrated photograph, taken in Giza, Egypt, in 1921. In the background are two pyramids and the Great Sphinx, keeping itself to itself. In front, mounted on camels, is a row of people, including a trio of, let us say, notable characters. On the left is Winston Churchill, coolly sporting a pair of smoked shades that resemble 007's snow goggles in "Spectre." On the right is a small, trim figure, gazing down, as shy as Churchill is pugnacious, and clad for the heat in a three-piece suit and a stiff collar: T. E. Lawrence, also known as Lawrence of Arabia. Between them is a woman, half smiling at the camera, wearing a hat and—can this really be true?—what appears to be a fur stole around her neck. Her name is Gertrude Bell, and she is by no means the least of the three.

The picture shows up in a new documentary about Bell, "Letters from Baghdad," directed by Sabine Krayenbühl and Zeva Oelbaum, both of whom are based in New York. Much of it consists of archived material: diary entries, correspondence, newsreel footage and other cinematic records, plus many evocative stills—Bell was, among her other accomplishments, a fine photographer. If her reputation lingers, it is thanks to the almost comical breadth of those accomplishments, and to her grappling with issues that continue to bedevil us today.

She was born in 1868, into a British family of great industrial riches. (That cushion of wealth should not be forgotten, as you ponder the brio of her escapades.) Her mother died when Gertrude was three, and it was her father, Sir Hugh Bell, of whom she was enduringly fond, and to whom she sent hundreds of absorbing letters. She was educated at Oxford, where she was one of the first women to take a first-class degree in modern history. After college, she travelled widely—twice around the world, and up so many Alps, displaying such nerve in apocalyptic conditions ("You set your teeth and battle with the fates")—as to earn the veneration of her guides. But the trip that established the pattern of Bell's existence was made to an uncle in Tehran, in 1892; thus began her fixation on the Middle East. Again and again, she returned there, traversing desert lands, mapping unfamiliar provinces, learning Arabic and Persian, writing books about her experiences, and working at archeological sites. Indeed, her final achievement, before she died, in 1926, was to found an archeological museum in Baghdad—the one that was ransacked, in the wake of the American invasion, in 2003.

No film could hope to encompass so multitudinous a life. Werner Herzog directed a bio-pic of sorts, "The Queen of the Desert" (2015), starring Nicole Kidman, yet Bell, despite her peregrine impulse, lacks the untamable quality that Herzog craves in his protagonists. Her briskness and her breeding are more aptly captured by Tilda Swinton, who supplies the voice of Bell in "Letters from Baghdad." The title is unenticing and inaccurate, since much of the movie covers her deeds elsewhere: a pang-laced love affair with a married man who was killed at Gallipoli; detention in the fabled city of Ha'il; or her posting to Cairo, in 1915. There, with the honorary rank of major, she served alongside Lawrence in the Arab Intelligence Bureau, using her intricate grasp of tribal customs to foment an Arab uprising against Turkish rule. She and her colleagues labelled themselves the Intrusives.

Still, her roving did lead her to Baghdad, from where, beginning in 1917, she was instrumental in what we would call nation-building: composing an official "Review of the Civil Administration of Mesopotamia" (1921), and, in essence, defining the borders of modern Iraq. The parallels with events at the start of this century are plain to see, yet the movie, to its credit, does not belabor them. Nor does it plunge into the debate as to whether Bell, for all her learned love of the region ("I never feel exiled here; it is a second native country"), and despite her misgivings ("How can we, who have managed our own affairs so badly, claim to teach others to manage theirs better?"), was doing much more than upholding the colonialist cause. Scholars of Bell will be exasperated, but "Letters from Baghdad" is not for them; it is for viewers who may know nothing of her, and for whom the basic shape of her exploits will be astounding enough. You emerge from the film with a divided heart: thrilled to hear of a woman who, ignoring the dictates of the age, filled her days to overflowing, yet ashamed to measure your own days and to find them, by comparison, hollow and bare. Is it too late to follow Gertrude Bell's example? First, hire your camel. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM
Richard Brody blogs about movies.

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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

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 Maslin, must be received by Sunday, June 11th. The finalists in the May 22nd contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the June 26th issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

" "

THE FINALISTS

"Shall I keep reading?"
Porter Abbott, Northport, Mich.

"I'm more of a rat person."
Farley Helfant, Toronto, Ont.

". . . and here come the bees."
Josh Nozick, Winnipeg, Man.

THE WINNING CAPTION

"So when are you two taking the plunge?"
William Anderson, St. Louis, Mo.

Wear a part of history.

"The March"
Abigail Gray Swartz, February 6, 2017

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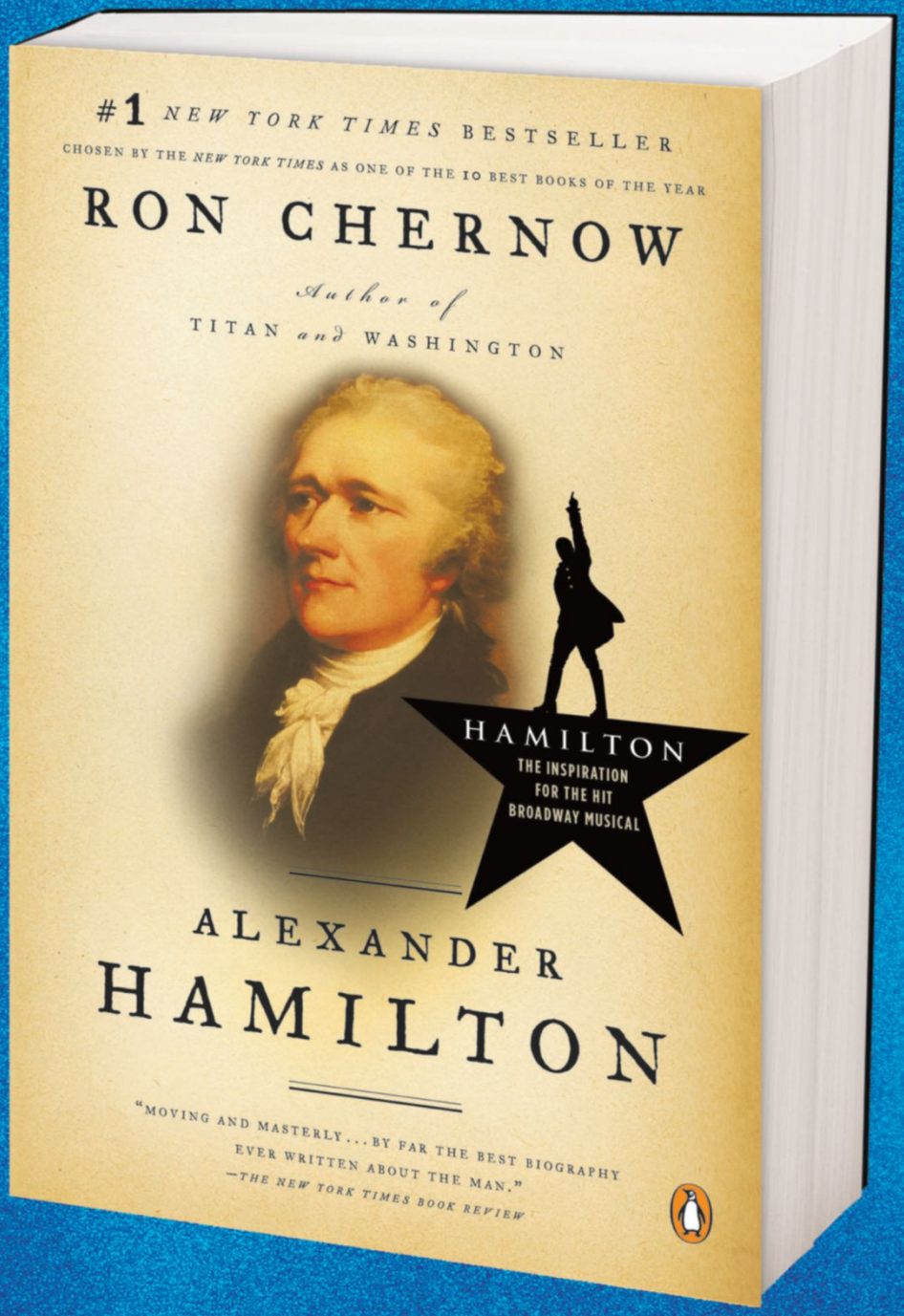

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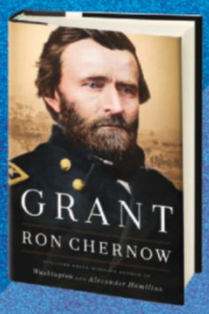

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