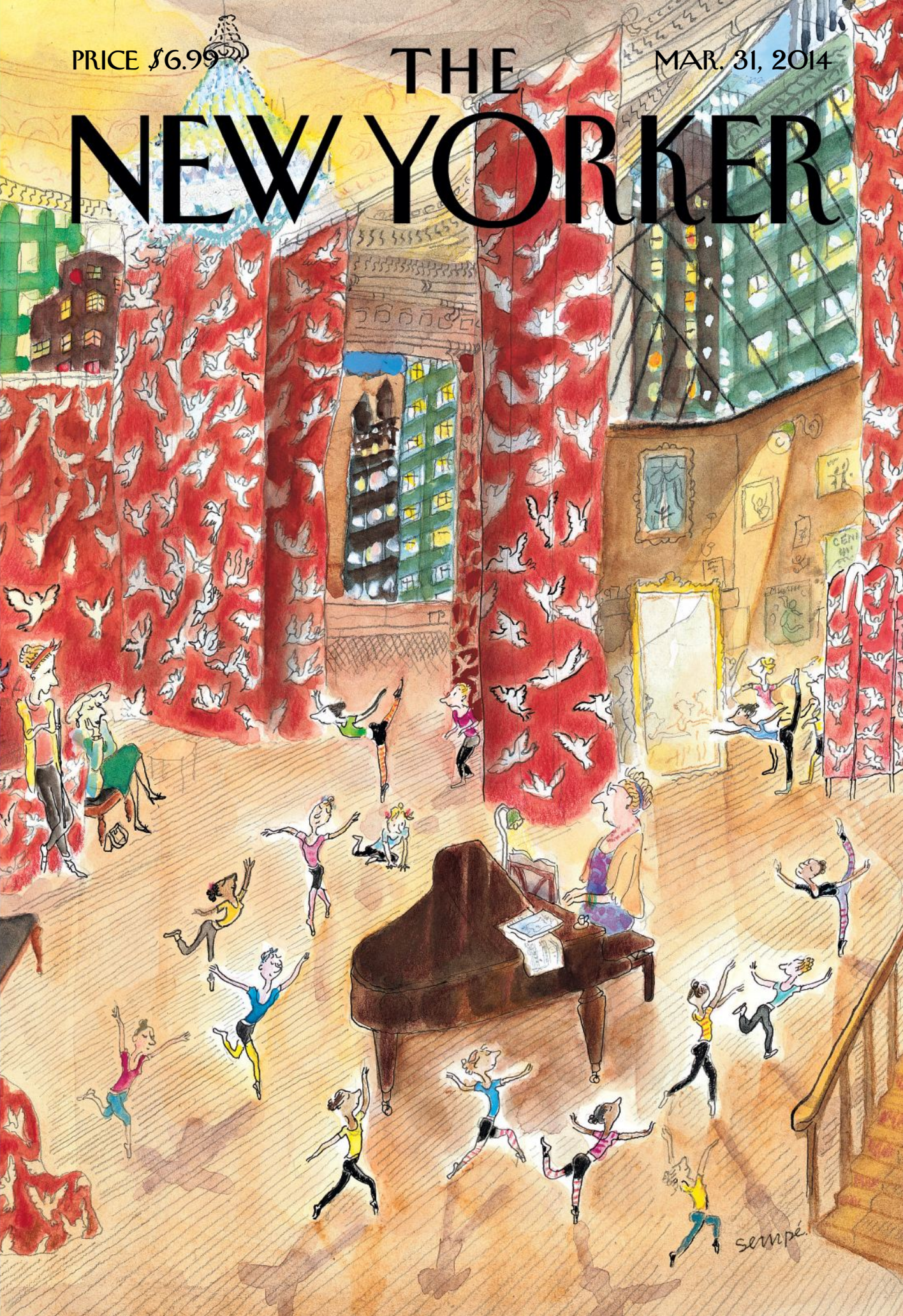


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THE NEW YORKER

MARCH 31, 2014

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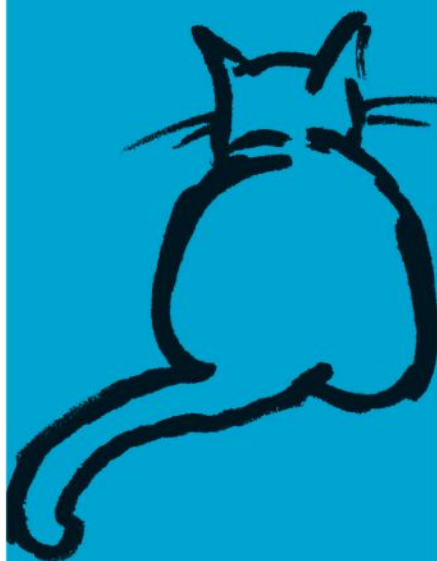
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Sharon Olds reads a poem by Rodney Jones on the Poetry Podcast.

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Daily news analysis by Adam Gopnik and others.

POETRY

Readings by Tadeusz Dąbrowski and John Skoyles.

TELEVISION

Emily Nussbaum on the new season of "The Americans."

VIDEO

Nicholas Thompson on his friendship with Svetlana Alliluyeva.

PODCASTS

Malcolm Gladwell talks to Sasha Weiss about what went wrong in Waco. On the Political Scene, Jon Lee Anderson and Steve Sestanovich discuss Ukraine.

BOOKS

An excerpt from Jenny Offill's "Dept. of Speculation."

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THE MAIL

RENEWED ENERGY

I am involved in the ATLAS experiment at CERN's Large Hadron Collider, in Geneva, Switzerland, which is similar in scale to that of ITER ("A Star in a Bottle," by Raffi Khatchadourian, March 3rd). My team recently started discussing how to fund our next, even larger project, and whether it is socially responsible to do so. Our situation is very different, as our quest is to understand how the universe is structured, what we are made of, and how it all fits together. If, how, and on what time scale this will lead to practical applications cannot be answered at this time. The case for fusion energy does not need to be made, however; we cannot burn carbon-based fuels for centuries, and it seems unlikely that solar, wind, tide, and other renewables will get us enough energy, even if we drastically improve our usage efficiency. The science is not in doubt, and the technology seems to be within reach. The first question, then, is why it took worldwide negotiations in order for ITER to receive twenty billion dollars in funding to be spent over many years, to get the project under way, when yearly military spending is at least seventy-five times that. The second, more interesting one is why the energy industry doesn't seem to be pursuing this area of research. Companies like BP, Exxon, and others have the means to pursue such a project, and get a head start when the oil market inevitably declines. They could still be refilling our cars fifty years from now, but with cheap, cleanly produced electricity. If, that is, we haven't found a way to use the Higgs boson to build the transporter. *Gustaaf Brooijmans, Associate Professor Department of Physics Columbia University New York City*

FIT TO GOVERN

Jill Lepore's Comment (March 10th) on the history of women running for President and public opinion on that subject includes the sentence "In 1937, Gallup's pollsters began asking a question they

have asked, in one form or another, ever since: 'Would you vote for a woman for president?'" I will always remember standing in the reference section of my college library in the early nineteen-nineties, working on a paper for a class in public opinion, when I read the first version of this question in the Gallup Poll reports. It read, "Would you vote for a woman for president if she were qualified in every other respect?" I fell into a stunned reverie as I tried to imagine a time when such a question could be asked with a straight face. Gallup changed the wording after three years, but it will be better when there is no longer a need to ask the question at all.

*Kristen Smith
Winterville, Ga.*

PLEASANTRIES ASIDE

Roz Chast's bittersweet story about her parents' decline rings painfully true for those of us who are "of a certain age" and have lost both our parents ("Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant?" March 10th). Many of us who have gone through this life-altering experience without the aid and support of siblings or close family have endured in isolation most of the awkward moments and feelings of guilt and helplessness that Chast portrays so vividly, and even with humor. The emotional distance between Chast and her aging parents rings especially true. It was my experience and is probably more prevalent in contemporary American society than most would care to admit, further complicating the arrangements and choices that need to be made at the end of life in this era when life can be easily, but not always wisely, extended far beyond its meaningful limit.

*Sandra Paci
New York City*

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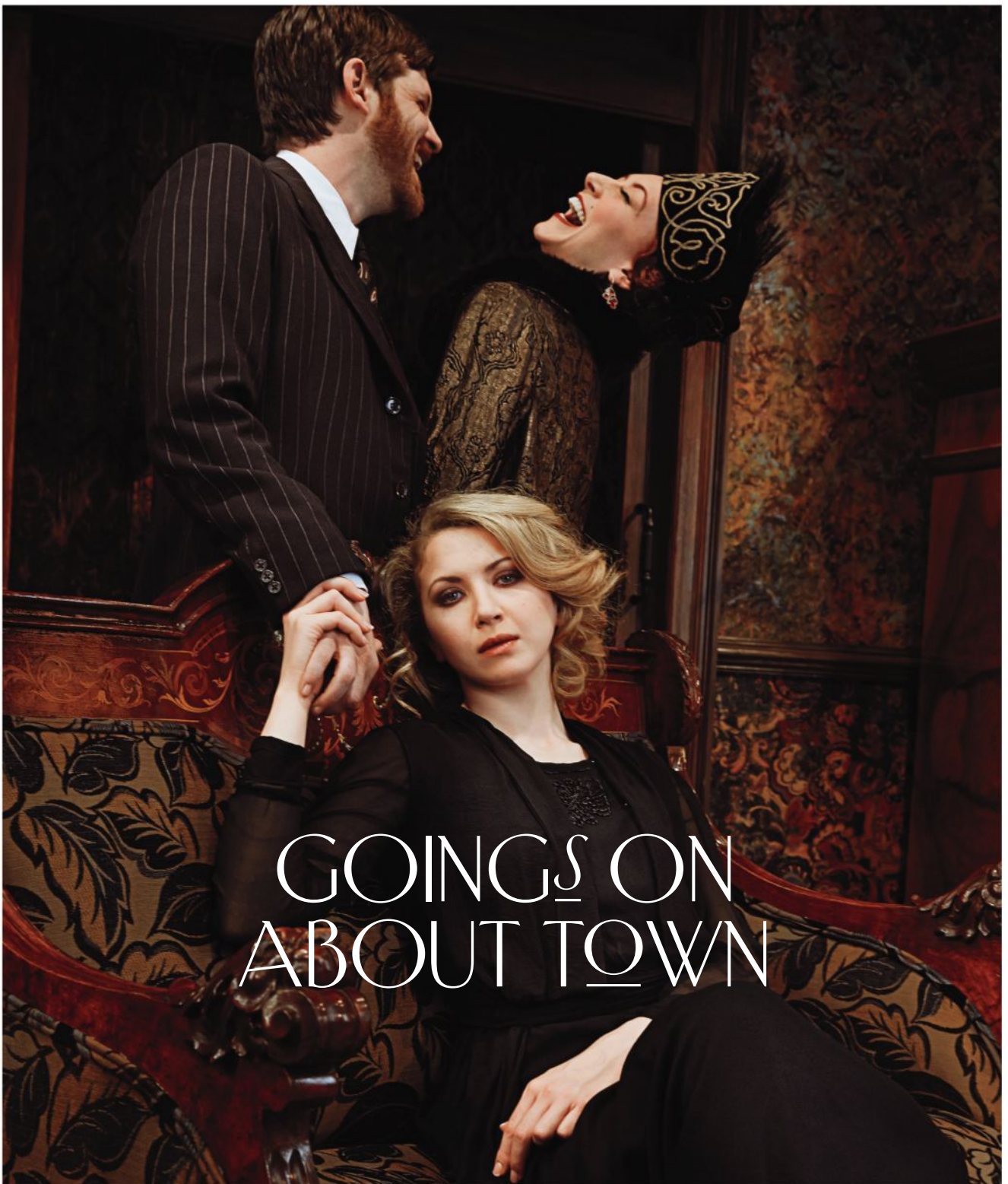
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Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux, *Ugolino and His Sons* (detail), 1865-67, Saint-Béat marble. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Josephine Bay Paul and C. Michael Paul Foundation Inc. Gift, Charles Ulrick and Josephine Bay Foundation Inc. Gift, and Fletcher Fund, 1967.



GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

MARCH/APRIL
2014

WEDNESDAY
26TH

THURSDAY
27TH

FRIDAY
28TH

SATURDAY
29TH

SUNDAY
30TH

MONDAY
31ST

TUESDAY
1ST

NINA ARIANDA CATAPULTED to fame with her first role out of college, as Vanda in David Ives's "Venus in Fur," at Classic Stage Company in 2010; when the show moved to Broadway, the following year, she won the Tony. Arianda holds an audience with more than her odd-pretty Ukrainian looks; her seductive power lies in her catenation of bold intelligence, shy vulnerability, and classic comic timing. After popping up in a few small film roles (see if you can find her in Woody Allen's "Midnight in Paris"), she returns to center stage, alongside Michael Esper and Tina Benko, in David Grimm's "Tales from Red Vienna," for Manhattan Theatre Club. Arianda stars as a First World War widow who turns to the world's oldest profession.

ART | NIGHT LIFE
FOOD & DRINK
ABOVE & BEYOND | DANCE
MOVIES | THE THEATRE
CLASSICAL MUSIC

PHOTOGRAPH BY YELENA YEMCHUK

ART



MUSEUMS SHORT LIST

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

"The Passions of Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux." Through May 26.

MOMA PS1

"Maria Lassnig." Through May 25.

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

"Italian Futurism, 1909-1944: Reconstructing the Universe." Through Sept. 1.

WHITNEY MUSEUM

"2014 Whitney Biennial." Through May 27.

BROOKLYN MUSEUM

"Witness: Art and Civil Rights in the Sixties." Through July 6.

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Museum of Modern Art

"Robert Heinecken: Object Matter"

Perhaps the most influential American artist you've never heard of, Heinecken—who founded one of the country's first photography programs, at U.C.L.A. in 1963—died in 2006, and his reputation continues to grow. The works in this dense, shrewdly edited retrospective anticipate those of Richard Prince, Martha Rosler, and countless other artists who make pictures by means of appropriation instead of with cameras. The show includes a few more or less

straightforward photographs, early works, often of nude women, seen cropped and rearranged as panoramic landscapes, puzzles, or small constructions. But Heinecken's subsequent oeuvre drew almost exclusively from the mass-media image bank. Simultaneously mining and subverting popular culture, from pornography to photojournalism, Heinecken would collage his images into issues of *Time* or *Woman's Day*, then slip them back into newsstands. At times, Heinecken's focus on the female form verges on the obsessive, but his best work sustains the power of innovation. Through Sept. 7.

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Jed Devine

Best known for his small, handsome black-and-white photographs (a choice group of them is in a side gallery here), the New York photographer

switches to color in an engaging series of still-lives. Fruit, utensils, and plates of half-eaten food are arranged on art books, magazines, and other printed matter. A few of the pictures are disarmingly simple: placed atop a reproduction of a Renaissance portrait, the hole in a slice of bread becomes a keyhole for a maiden to peer through. Others orchestrate chaos; one layered work combines images by Matisse and Picasso, a hard-boiled egg, and some poker chips. Through April 12. (Benrubi, 41 E. 57th St. 212-888-6007.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Nancy Burson

In the eighties, Burson collaborated on a computer program that used morphing technology to create uncanny composite photographs. As frontal as mug shots, the pictures are relics of the age before Photoshop, but their ghostly, out-of-focus layering remains oddly unsettling. If Burson couldn't resist a few obvious gimmicks (pictures that imagine the common ground between a lion and a lamb, or a dog and a cat), her human composites remain fascinating. She blends races and sexes, as if forecasting the advent of new norms, but a merger of ten white male executives from Goldman Sachs offers a counterpoint by predicting more of the same. Through March 29. (ClampArt, 531 W. 25th St. 646-230-0020.)

Rudolf Stingel

If you believe in the romance of painting for painting's sake, then the six black-and-white mountain landscapes by this Italian artist, whose photo-realism resolves into pointillist confusion when seen up close, may leave you cold. If you think the medium has exhausted itself, you'll appreciate the conceptual inclusion of scratches and flares from the paintings' source photographs, or the footprints and debris that accrete on their surfaces. Stingel, of course, sees it both ways, and his faith in painting and doubts about it—his dogged commitment to a medium he endlessly deconstructs—have rarely fused with so much intensity. Through April 19. (Gagosian, 522 W. 21st St. 212-741-1717.)

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Molly Lowe

A hundred-odd soft, fleshy sculptures hang from the ceiling or on freestanding PVC pipes as if at a Surrealist morgue or a rush-hour subway in Hell. The vaguely humanoid forms recall Hans Bellmer's contorted dolls and the pencil-drawn perversions of Pierre Klossowski, but Lowe also includes little eyeballs on the suspensory strings, as if the parts were not independent but merely dislodged from their bodies. Lowe also slips little bits of personality into her macabre installation, from hair and scars to a Cupid tattoo. Through March 29. (Geiss, 76 Grand St. 212-625-8130.)



A photograph by Todd Hido, in his exhibition "Excerpts from Silver Meadows," at the Silverstein gallery.



NIGHT LIFE

ROCK AND POP

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

Allah-Las

Three-fourths of this L.A. group met at Amoeba Music, the massive record store on Sunset Boulevard, where they studied up on the earliest incarnations of garage rock. The group hews to the genre's conventions—such as cramming as much guts and passion as possible into three and a half minutes or less—while burning its own path, with brooding, lonesome songs, tightly restrained surf-inflected musings on girls and freedom. (Rough Trade NYC, 64 N. 9th St. 718-388-4111. roughtradenyc.com. March 27.)

Childish Gambino

The comedian, writer, and rapper Donald Glover, under his hip-hop alias, delivered a whirlwind tour of his psyche on “Because the Internet,” his second album, which came out late last year. The release is a playful and introspective self-portrait, and it has a revealing title. “Sorry, I’m just scared of the future,” he says on the album’s single “3005,” and it’s not hard to see why. He’s called this outing the Deep Web Tour, after the often illegal and frequently unsearchable depths of the Internet, and he announced it in January by tweeting a link to a spoof adult Web site. (Hammerstein Ballroom, 311 W. 34th St. 800-745-3000. March 29.)

Dale Earnhardt Jr. Jr.

This Detroit indie-pop act traffics in confident harmonies that invoke the breezy sounds of eighties soft rock, and Paul Simon himself advised the band on a track from its latest album, “The Speed of Things.” They are joined by **Chad Valley**, Hugo Manuel’s one-man dance party. Manuel is from Oxford, England, and is peripherally related to the city’s Blessing Force scene, a loose collective of artists, writers, and dance-pop musicians carving out a place for themselves in a city best known for churning out guitar-rock royalty like Ride, Supergrass, and Radiohead. (Webster Hall, 125 E. 11th St. 212-353-1600. March 26.)

Typhoon

Kyle Morton, the front man of this sizable ensemble from Portland, Oregon, spent his childhood battling Lyme disease. His condition became so severe that at the age of sixteen he underwent a kidney transplant. Morton, who is now in his late twenties, has talked candidly about how that experience has influenced his songwriting, and mortality, sickness, and loss are all major themes on “White Lighter,” the act’s second full-length album. Despite this, the mood of the music is far from depressing, and larger-than-life symphonic arrangements—featuring horns, strings, choirlike vocals, and thundering percussion—make for orchestral pop that brims with life and hope. (Webster Hall, 125 E. 11th St. 212-353-1600. March 27.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Fabian Almazan Rhizome Project

Best known for his tenure with the trumpeter Terence Blanchard, this pianist and composer is intent on inclusion, blending modern jazz, Latin folk music, and classical strains. His current ensemble, performing music from its new album, “Rhizome” (named for a Jungian concept about endurance, as symbolized by the subterranean structure of a plant), unites his vigorous trio with a string quartet and the guitarist and singer **Camila Meza**. (Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St. 212-576-2232. March 27-30.)

Bill Charlap

Although it’s been far too long since he’s released a new album, the pianist, a modern mainstream giant, always has a stockpile of imaginative and meticulously arranged material to draw on. His

longtime trio mates—**Peter Washington**, on bass, and **Kenny Washington**, on drums—could not be more in synch with Charlap’s manicured swing. (Birdland, 315 W. 44th St. 212-581-3080. March 25-29.)

Pat Metheny

One of the most satisfying ensembles that Metheny has put together, the Unity band is a sleekly modern post-bop group that neatly balances the venerable guitarist’s undulating lines against those of the quicksilver saxophonist **Chris Potter** and the sharply etched rhythms of the bassist **Ben Williams** and the drummer **Antonio Sanchez**. On their most recent album, “Kin,” a new group member steps aboard, **Giulio Carmassi**, a multi-instrumentalist and vocalist whose contributions add still more layers of textural color. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 212-840-2824. March 28.)

WINDHAM CAMPBELL PRIZES

The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University congratulates the winners of the 2014 Donald Windham-Sandy M. Campbell Literature Prizes

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Prizewinners each receive \$150,000 to support their writing. Awards will be conferred at a ceremony and literary festival at Yale University on September 15, 2014.

WINDHAMCAMPBELL.ORG



FOOD & DRINK

BAR TAB WALLFLOWER

235 W. 12th St.

There are perks to being at Wallflower: chief among them is drinking a Calvados-and-cider cocktail with a polka-dotted straw from a little soda bottle in which it has been carbonated. If only the over-all experience were as fizzy. The cocktail list is heavy on brand names and obscure ingredients (bergamot juice, allspice dram) and inevitably requires smartphone-assisted navigation, yet the resulting creations are often one-note.

Mother's Milk, made with kaffir lime and oolong-tea-infused Avuá Prata Cachaça, Thai coconut milk, and lime juice, was like the final stage of a juice detox: creamy, frothy, and not much else. The food options are disconcertingly refined for a place that encourages serious drinking: there are some sandwiches, but one's made with foie gras, and another with brandade. If you feel like eating a carrot-and-black-trumpet-mushroom salad with your second tequila cocktail, you're in luck, and perhaps it's the right call—the windows frame an obnoxiously bright Equinox gym, where Lululemoners reading *Us Weekly* on the elliptical pedal through the night in silent rebuke.

—Amelia Lester



TABLES FOR TWO

NARCISSA

21 Cooper Sq. (212-228-3344)

ANDRÉ BALAZS, the real-estate developer and hotelier behind the Chateau Marmont and the Standard—with his golden tan and chiselled features, tastefully unbuttoned shirts and glamorous companions—does not look like a man who owns a cow. But there she is: Narcissa, her moony eyes staring blankly from a sepia-toned photo hanging next to the bar of the restaurant that Balazs named for her, on the ground floor of the Standard in the East Village. And there's Balazs, his carefully mussed hair glistening in the incandescent light as he glides between two dining rooms that evoke a very rich and stylish person's idea of a farmhouse, all sleek blond wood and subtle lace curtains and bespoke canvas chair covers.

There's nothing remotely rustic about the crowd, many of whom seem to be V.I.P.s, chatting matter-of-factly about meetings at the Vatican and photo shoots in Qatar; on a recent evening, a "clothier consultant" had dropped his business card in the bathroom. But when it comes to the food, the grange concept rings true: according to the Web site, Narcissa the cow "presides over" Balazs's farm in the Hudson Valley, which is the main source of the vegetables, herbs, and eggs on an elegant but accessible menu from the chef John Fraser, of Dovetail, on the Upper West Side.

Narcissa the restaurant could be called Carrot, considering the absolute reverence Fraser shows the root, swaddling a bundle in a mushroom-sunchoke pâté and flaky pastry for a sweet, earthy Wellington, and battering others to make fat, golden fries, served with a jalapeño-tofu dip. Fraser kneels at the altar of the beet, too, judging by how long and lovingly he roasts them in his open kitchen's rotisserie oven, until their exteriors are charred and their interiors rival the consistency of tender steak, well deserving of the creamed-horseradish accompaniment.

Fraser's just as talented with animals, which is made particularly evident by a mound of Dungeness crab meat scattered with chopped hazelnut, blood orange, and basil, and by a juicy "lacquered" duck breast, its scored, fatty skin rendered crisp and almost candy-sweet, tempered by a dusting of dried herbs. The carrot returns for dessert, in wedges of cake that look Seussian, squiggled with cream-cheese frosting and adorned with poppy seeds, parsnip chips, and golden raisins. A citrus salad, served over tapioca pudding and under an orange-blossom granita, is a symphony of temperatures and textures, and perfectly embodies the careful line Fraser walks between virtue and indulgence. As a server described the house blends of herbal tea, also grown on the farm: "Good, and good for you."

—Hannah Goldfield

Open every night for dinner. Entrées \$20-\$48.

ILLUSTRATION BY MORGAN ELLIOTT

ABOVE & BEYOND

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

The books in **Sotheby's** "Modern Library" auction (April 1) include a signed copy of "Lolita" presented by Nabokov to Henry James's nephew; a copy of William Faulkner's war parable "A Fable," inscribed by the author to his mother; and a first edition of "On the Road" in which Jack Kerouac admits that he is, in fact, Sal Paradise. Another book sale the same day contains just two lots, consigned by the Indiana Historical Society: complete editions of Audubon's "Birds of America" and "Viviparous Quadrupeds of North America." In the evening, the house presents a group of photographs from a private collection that includes works by Man Ray, Edward Weston, László Moholy-Nagy, and others. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) • **Barry Friedman** must have been born with the collecting bug; according to the veteran Chelsea-based gallerist, who announced his retirement from the business last year, he began acquiring treasures—four-leaf clovers—at the age of four. Later, he graduated to elegant Art Deco and Art Nouveau decorative objects and furniture, Pre-Raphaelite and symbolist art, modernist photographs, and glass art (among other things). The three-day sell-off at **Christie's** (March 25-27) reflects the variety and distinction of his taste, with lots that range from a naïf portrait of a girl with flowers in her hair, by Tamara de Lempicka, to a stainless-steel rocking chair in the shape of a giant cedilla, by the American twentieth-century designer Wendell Castle. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) • **Phillips** presents a sale of photographs on April 1, with a large selection of works from between the wars (including a striking shot of the modern dancer Willem Gerard Van Loon caught mid-leap by the German photographer Ilse Bing) as well as more recent images, by Vik Muniz and Hiroshi Sugimoto, such as the latter's re-creation of Vermeer's "The Music Lesson." (450 Park Ave. 212-940-1200.)

READINGS AND TALKS

WordTheatre

The Los Angeles-based nonprofit returns on March 27 at 7 with the actors Linus Roache and Vincent Piazza reading stories about adultery by Donald Antrim and David Means, both of whom will be on hand to discuss their work. Upcoming authors in the series include Andre Dubus III, Elizabeth Strout, Amy Bloom, and James Salter. (NeueHouse, 110 E. 25th St. For tickets and more information, call 310-915-5150, or visit wordtheatre.com.)

"Brooklyn Voices"

The lecture series, organized by St. Joseph's College and Greenlight Bookstore, presents Deborah Feldman, whose latest memoir, "Exodus," is a follow-up to "Unorthodox," her 2012 account of growing up in and eventually leaving a Hasidic community. She will discuss her work with the writer Mark Jacobson. (Tuohy Auditorium, St. Joseph's College, 245 Clinton Ave., Brooklyn. 718-246-0200. March 28 at 7:30.)

DANCE



Cirque du Soleil / "Amaluna"

In this new mega-production, the successful musical-theatre director Diane Paulus offers a take on the feminine mystique. In a plot inspired loosely by "The Tempest," a wizard conjures an elaborate ceremony to celebrate her daughter Miranda's coming of age. The show explores themes of love (romantic, maternal, and lustful), heroism, and female solidarity, in the usual spectacular Cirque manner. "Amaluna" includes puppetry, impossible-looking feats on uneven bars, and the construction of an eye-catching floating mobile. Seventy per cent of the cast, and all of the band, is made up of women. (Citi Field, 123-01 Roosevelt Ave, Queens. 800-450-1480. March 25-27 at 8, March 29 at 4:30 and 8, and March 30 at 1 and 4:30. Through May 18.)

Paul Taylor Dance Company

In the final week of the sixtieth-anniversary season, the rotating repertoire includes one performance each of the new pieces: "American Dreamer," which expresses and undermines the nostalgic beauty of Stephen Foster songs, and "Marathon Cadenzas," which imagines a dance marathon from the Depression. One notable return, after a few years' absence, is "Private Domain," a 1969 masterwork of impersonal eroticism concealed and revealed by panels

and portals. (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-496-0600. March 26-27 at 7, March 28 at 8, March 29 at 2 and 8, and March 30 at 2 and 6.)

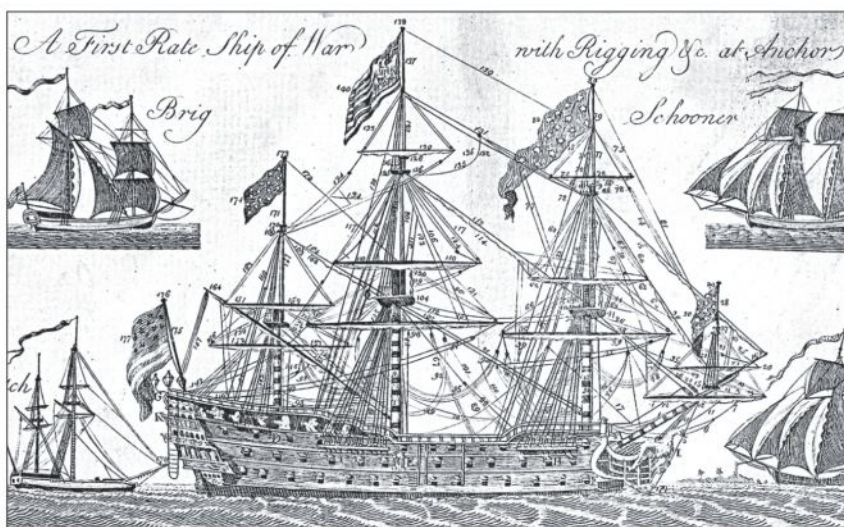
ABT Studio Company

Conceived as a stepping stone between school and a professional career, the studio company consists of fourteen dancers between the ages of sixteen and twenty. (A.B.T. dancers who have passed through include Isabella Boylston and Herman Cornejo.) At Pace, they perform a new work by the always witty Larry Keigwin, "Studio," as well as Antony Tudor's evergreen "Continuo," set to Pachelbel's Canon, and a series of ballet excerpts. (Michael Schimmel Center for the Arts, Pace University, 3 Spruce St. 866-811-4111. March 28 at 7:30.)

Wendy Osseman Dance Company

Osseman has been making eccentric and original work since the nineteen-seventies. In her new piece "Vestigal," four women—including Osseman and the lucid former Cunningham dancer Cori Kresge—act as if their human bodies were newly acquired. Skip LaPlante plays a live score on instruments made from trash. (Theatre for the New City, 155 First Ave., at 10th St. 212-868-4444. March 28-29 at 8 and March 30 at 3.)

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"Frenzy" (1972) is devoted to the absence of sexual happiness in "normal" life.

IN A FRENZY

Hitchcock's forgotten masterpiece, at Film Forum.

FILM FORUM'S COMPLETE HITCHCOCK RETROSPECTIVE reaches a suitable climax on its last day (March 27) with a showing of "Frenzy," the director's fifty-second movie. Released in 1972, "Frenzy" has been partly forgotten, put into half-shadow by the extraordinary popularity of "Psycho" (1960) and the extraordinary renown of "Vertigo" (1958), a movie that, in a recent international poll of eight hundred and fifty writers, academics, distributors, programmers, and critics, displaced "Citizen Kane" as the greatest film ever made. With its sharp-edged shower and its dried-up corpse, "Psycho" is a loony pop-gothic horror movie, and I've never taken it very seriously. "Vertigo" is in a different league, and it prepares us for the very real—and quite different—virtues of "Frenzy." At the heart of "Vertigo" is the perverse longing of a middle-aged San Francisco man, Scottie (James Stewart), for the face, hair, and body of a vague, plush beauty played by Kim Novak. When she dies, he re-creates her, altering the clothes and hair of a woman he meets to turn her into a simulacrum of the first. Part of what's so fascinatingly perverse about the film is that Scottie has a beautiful and caring chum (Barbara Bel Geddes) who adores him, and whom he never regards with even a trace of sexual interest. The entire fable suggests that men, once they are no longer green, need some

sort of obsession to get aroused—that male sexual passion by its very nature is fetishistic in some way, and that ordinary love and deep disturbance are not so far apart.

"Vertigo" dissolves the actual San Francisco into the heavy symbolic density and visual intricacy of a voluptuous dream: the tempo is slow; the dominant motifs are steep hills, tall trees, towers, a bouquet of pink roses. We succumb with almost masochistic pleasure. Fourteen years later, when Hitchcock returned to his native London, he wanted us wide-eyed and awake. If "Vertigo" is dream, "Frenzy" is reality. Much of it is set in Covent Garden, the crowded fruit-and-vegetable market then at the heart of London. As far as we can see, the entire town is mesmerized—either fascinated or disgusted, and often both—by a serial killer who tries to rape women and then strangles them with a necktie. The killer is a genial-seeming lunatic. But nearly everyone in "Frenzy," it turns out, is a little crazy, the victim of a generalized sexual misery that Hitchcock creates as the suggestive background to the crimes. The movie's hapless hero, Richard Blaney, a former R.A.F. squadron leader, is played by the young Jon Finch, who is unusually handsome, with a slender figure and a gently molded chin. Blaney stirs rage among most women, perhaps because he's attractive but weak; he's not good enough to want, and they are drawn to him anyway, an infuriating conundrum. The detective in the case (Alec McCowen) puts up with his wife's pretentious cooking every night, a way for them both to divert attention from a dead marriage. "Frenzy," with its piles of peaches and lettuces, its constant drinking, is a masterpiece devoted to appetite in all its varieties—but it is most seriously devoted to the perversion of sexual happiness in murder and to the absence of sexual happiness in "normal" life.

—David Denby

NOW PLAYING

Enemy

A brief and perplexing fable, starring Jake Gyllenhaal and Jake Gyllenhaal. He plays two bearded men, both living in Toronto, who find themselves to be identical, down to their handwriting and scars. In other hands, such uncanny doubling could have—and often has had—a funny side, but the director, Denis Villeneuve, who made the even glummer “Prisoners,” is in no mood to amuse. The light is low and scummy, the buildings unfriendly and hard, and neither man can decide how to treat his opposite number: seek, evade, or destroy? And what about the fact that one of them first saw the other in a movie: does that enthralling coincidence not merit further investigation? (After all, we are watching a film ourselves.) Gyllenhaal does a careful job of distinguishing the two heroes, one more aggressive, the other shy; their respective partners are played by Mélanie Laurent and Sarah Gadon (who has done strong work for David Cronenberg), though both female roles seem perilously thin. The movie sticks to you, however, and the ending is strange and sudden enough to make you revise, or interrogate, all that has come before. Based on a novel by José Saramago. —*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 3/17/14.) (In limited release.)

The Grand Budapest Hotel

In Wes Anderson's new movie, the past becomes visible in stages, as if seen through the wrong end of a telescope that gets repeatedly extended. The movie is a kind of pastry-chef fantasia, set in a fictional country in some hapless corner of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire. The chief character is the hotel concierge Gustave H., played by Ralph Fiennes as a man of intricate sexual tastes—he's homosexual but sleeps with elderly bejeweled ladies staying at the hotel. The opéra-bouffe plot serves as a strand of bright golden wire on which Anderson hangs innumerable encounters, scampering chases, and an archly decorative style of commentary. The director likes to cozy his visual imagination; he devotes himself to the rectangular hotel lobby, and to closets, prison cells, cable cars, train compartments and their adjoining windows and doorways. He handsomely boxes himself in, perhaps as a way of avoiding the coarse physical vitality that has been central to so many great movies. With Jude Law, F. Murray Abraham, Tilda Swinton, Tony Revolori, and, in the movie's best bit, Bill Murray, Bob Balaban, and other savory actors, as masterful Old World concierges making haughty demands into ornate telephones. —*David Denby* (3/10/14) (In limited release.)

Hide Your Smiling Faces

Testosterone rises like mist on an early-morning lake in Daniel Patrick Carbone's grimly determined, prettily picturesque first feature. A bunch of boys ranging in age from near-teen to just adolescent, living with their families in a hilly and watery deep-country summer-house community, get together to wrestle, swim, and goof around, which they do moodily and smolderingly. A plot point is set when one of them snatches his father's gun and, after surrendering it, remains tempted by its proximity—as is his older brother. When a friend is found dead at the base of a high bridge, the stakes of their roughhousing ways become even more serious. The atmosphere grows dense with intimations of homosexual desire; pent-up rage is ready to explode with the slightest spark, and it does so with a blatantly theatrical flourish. The physical tumbles of lean bodies and the emotional fumbblings of maturing souls take place in landscapes framed for postcards; the portentous drama, underlined and calculated details, could serve as a travel brochure. —*Richard Brody* (In limited release.)

It Felt Like Love

Eliza Hittman's first feature bracing insight and intimacy to the story of a teen-ager's sexual awakening, aided by the nuanced, yearning performance of Gina Piersanti, as Lila, a nerdy Brooklyn high-school student. Lila spends the summer hanging out at Coney Island and other nearby playlands with her much cooler best friend, Chiara (Giovanna Salimeni), whose boyfriend, Patrick (Jesse Cordasco), is always around. Tantalized by the seeming ubiquity of sex, the virginal Lila seeks to narrow the experience gap, passing from fantasy to the fumbling pursuit of Sammy (Ronen Rubinstein), a swaggering college student who toys with her. With a sure sense of place, Hittman moves the action from sidewalks and subways to marshlands suggestive of idylls and mysteries, and lightly sketches Lila's complex bonds with her widowed father (Kevin Anthony Ryan) and the boy next door (Casey Prime). Keeping the camera daringly near her actors' bare skin and depicting the confident caste of people at ease with their bodies, the director portrays her protagonist as a permanent outsider. Lila's intelligence and sensibility make her crushingly aware of her predicament—she's condemned by physical and social awkwardness to pleasure mixed with humiliation and desire crossed with aversion. —*R.B.* (In limited release.)

Jodorowsky's Dune

A fascinating and depressing documentary about a visionary director and his impossible dream. Alejandro

Jodorowsky, who more or less invented the cinematic head trip with the early-seventies classics “El Topo” and “The Holy Mountain,” decided to adapt Frank Herbert’s “Dune” as his first studio film. Backed by the French producer Michel Seydoux, he put together his dream team—a cast that included his teen-age son Brontis (whom he put through two years of full-time martial-arts training), Salvador Dali, and Orson Welles and a design staff that included Dan O’Bannon (“Dark Star”), the illustrator Chris Foss, and the painter H. R. Giger. But Hollywood producers, while impressed by the detailed plans, were put off by the freewheeling director himself, and the project went unrealized. The documentary, by Frank Pavich, is an engaging and poignant portrait of Jodorowsky, now eighty-five, whose exuberant, cantankerous, and philosophical presence sets the tone. But the great reveal—the peculiarly potent influence that Jodorowsky’s unmade film seems to have had on the Hollywood mainstream—makes the intricate tale of might-have-beens all the more infuriating. Nostalgia for the golden seventies takes another blow. —*R.B.* (In limited release.)

The Ladies Man

In his second feature as director, Jerry Lewis also stars as Herbert H. Heebert, a high-strung and wounded young man who seeks a secular sanctuary from sex and ends up in Hollywood, as a handyman in a women's boarding house. Herbert has a mother complex to rival Norman Bates's and is equally tormented by desire—but, posing no danger to anyone but himself and the furniture, Lewis's alter ego delivers a suave and swinging lesson in sublimation. The house where Herbert lives and works is one of the greatest and most influential sets of all time, a colossal dollhouse-like cutaway, in buttercream-frosted colors, that Lewis fills with a choreographed throng of activity à la Berkeley and Tati. In one scene, Herbert ends up tangoing with George Raft; in another, an off-limits room erupts in an impossible, Minnelli-style explosion of musical ecstasy. In the end, the movie exalts everyday people's modest modes of pleasure, but, along the way, Lewis reveals the madder music within that they whistle while they work. Released in 1961. —*R.B.* (Museum of the Moving Image; March 29.)

The Missing Picture

Working with clay figurines posed in dioramalike landscapes, the director Rithy Panh bears witness to the Khmer Rouge's destruction of Cambodian society in the nineteen-seventies, which he lived through as an adolescent. When the capital, Phnom Penh, was completely emptied in 1975—except for officials who turned a high school into a torture

OPENING

CESAR CHAVEZ

A bio-pic about the labor organizer, starring Michael Peña. Directed by Diego Luna. Opening March 28. (In limited release.)

FINDING VIVIAN MAIER

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening March 28. (In limited release.)

HIDE YOUR SMILING FACES

Reviewed in Now Playing. Opening March 28. (In limited release.)

MISTAKEN FOR STRANGERS

A documentary about the rock band the National, directed by Tom Berninger, the brother of the lead singer, Matt Berninger. Opening March 28. (In limited release.)

NOAH

Darren Aronofsky directed this version of the Biblical story, starring Russell Crowe as the patriarch and Jennifer Connelly as his wife. Opening March 28. (In wide release.)

THE RAID 2

Gareth Evans directed this action film, about a police officer in Jakarta who confronts gangsters within the police force. In Indonesian. Opening March 28. (In limited release.)

ALSO NOTABLE

Anita: In limited release.

Divergent: In wide release.

Guilty of Romance: Film Society of Lincoln Center.

REVIVALS AND FESTIVALS

Titles in bold are reviewed.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

“Auteurs Gone Wild.” March 26 at 6:45: “Edward, My Son” (1949, George Cukor). • March 26 at 9:15 and March 30 at 4:30: “A Countess from Hong Kong” (1967, Charlie Chaplin). • March 27 at 7 and March 29 at 9: “You and Me” (1938, Fritz Lang). • March 29 at 5:15 and March 30 at 9: “Broken Lullaby” (1932, Ernst Lubitsch). • March 29 at 7: “The Saga of Anatahan” (1953, Josef von Sternberg). • March 30 at 7: “A Woman of Paris” (1923, Chaplin).

BAM CINÉMATEK

“New Voices in Black Cinema.” March 28 at 2: “Homecomings” (2013, Christine Turner). • March 28 at 6:45: “Unsound” (2013, Darius Britt). • March 28 at 9:45: “The Girl Is in Trouble” (2012 Julius Onah). • March 29 at 6:45: “1982” (2013, Tommy Oliver).

FILM FORUM

The films of Alfred Hitchcock. March 26 at 1, 5:20, and 9:50: “The Trouble with Harry” (1955). • March 26 at 3 and 7:30: “Family Plot” (1976). • March 27 at 2, 4:30, and 9:30: “Frenzy” (1972). • March 27 at 7:15: “The Manxman” (1929). • The films

of François Truffaut. March 28 at 1, 3:15, 5:30, 7:45, and 10 and March 29 at 2:50: "The 400 Blows" (1959). • March 29 at 1, 5:30, and 7:30: "Shoot the Piano Player" (1960). • March 29 at 9:40: "Breathless" (1959, Jean-Luc Godard). • March 30 at 1:20, 4:10, 6:45, and 9:20 and April 1 at 10: "Jules and Jim" (1962). • March 31 at 1, 3:45, 6:35, and 9:30: "The Soft Skin." • April 1 at 1, 3:10, 5:20, and 7:45: "Confidentially Yours" (1983).

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

"New Directors/New Films." March 26 at 6:30: "The Strange Little Cat" (2013, Ramon Zürcher). • March 28 at 6:30: "Trap Street" (2013, Vivian Qu). • March 29 at 5:30: "The Story of My Death."

JAPAN SOCIETY

"A Tribute to Donald Richie." March 29 at 3: "The Emperor's Naked Army Marches On." • March 29 at 6: "The Ceremony" (1971, Nagisa Oshima).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

"New Directors/New Films." March 26 at 9: "The Story of My Death." • March 29 at 4: "Trap Street" (2013, Vivian Qu).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

"See It Big! Comedies." March 28 at 7: "Annie Hall" (1977, Woody Allen). • March 29 at 4:30: "The Ladies Man." • March 29 at 7: "M*A*S*H" (1970, Robert Altman). • "Harold Ramis Triple Feature." March 30 at 2: "National Lampoon's Animal House" (1978, John Landis). • March 30 at 4:30: "Groundhog Day" (1993, Ramis). • March 30 at 7: "The Ice Harvest" (2005, Ramis).

center—Panh and his family were among the deportees shipped in cattle cars to labor camps (his brother, a rock musician, was immediately executed). With meticulous direction that seems to bring the film's little dolls to life, he tells the story of his parents' death and recounts the dehumanizing horrors that he, among other survivors, endured. Panh conjures his childhood by superimposing the colorful figurines onto black-and-white archival footage of the city in earlier, thriving times; he analyzes propaganda footage put out by the Khmer Rouge to reveal depravities lurking beneath the guise of progress and revolution. With a tribute to Ang Sarun, a cameraman who paid for his images with his life, and bitter recollections of China's support for the regime and Western receptivity to its slogans, Panh honors the Khmer Rouge's victims while staging the agony and responsibility of memory itself. In French.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

Nymphomaniac: Vol. I

The first part of Lars von Trier's sex epic is a pornographic work of art—obsessive, repetitive, at times remarkably eccentric, but never simple-minded or dull. A middle-aged bachelor, Seligman (Stellan Skarsgård), sees a torn and bruised woman, Joe (Charlotte Gainsbourg), lying in a dark alley; he brings her back to his flat, gives her tea, and gently asks to hear her story. Devoting her life to nothing but sensation, Joe is a kind of fantasy figure whose exploits inevitably shatter social convention. As she relates her sexual history (which we see in flashback), Seligman asks questions, argues with her about her sense of guilt and self-loathing, and takes off into odd, arresting speculations, which provoke her to fresh memories. From the beginning, the

material is meant to be not a slice of life but something told—interpreted, varied, recast. In its playful dirtiness, the movie seems like a descendant of eighteenth-century libertine texts such as "Thérèse Philosophe." The model Stacy Martin plays Joe's youthful self (without much affect), and Shia LaBeouf, looking more unformed than ever, plays her brutal first lover.—*D.D.* (3/24/14) (In limited release.)

The Soft Skin

François Truffaut's 1964 drama of adultery and its repercussions is a masterwork of erotic frenzy, humiliation, and self-loathing. Just as his own marriage was breaking up, he filmed (in his family's apartment) the story of Pierre (Jean Desailly), a married middle-aged editor and celebrated author who, on a lecture tour in Lisbon, meets Nicole (Françoise Dorléac), a young stewardess with whom he embarks on a furious affair. As Pierre takes ever deeper risks and practices ever deeper deceptions on his proud, handsome wife, Franca (Nelly Benedetti), the plot spirals into Hitchcockian suspense, which Truffaut evokes with a kind of visual music, featuring tense and rapid camera moves, desperate point-of-view shots, and frozen gestures. But the movie's most Hitchcockian aspect is Desailly, who has the famous director's doughy profile and frustrated air. It's as if Truffaut, who was then working on his book of interviews with Hitchcock, saw his own real-life passions merge with those of the older man and experimented, onscreen, with a Hitchcock who plays the lead in his own movie and is jolted out of his own life. In French.—*R.B.* (Film Forum; March 31.)

The Story of My Death

Though quiet in tone and contemplative in manner, Albert Serra's historical drama, set in a Swiss villa and a Balkan estate, far from royal courts and teeming cities, brings exotic passions of the eighteenth century to furious life. An unnamed aristocrat getting on in years, periwigged and pomaded, speaks with a connoisseur's insight and a scientist's skepticism on matters of love and politics, society and nature. Anticipating a revolution in France, discussing the sexual license of the Catholic Church, unfolding the art of seduction, this quasi-Casanova—played with dialectical intensity and spidery focus by Vicenç Altaió—outlines the subjects for his planned memoir. Meanwhile, he uninhibitedly pursues carnal pleasures, underlining erotic glee with crazed laughter and desperate tears. But along with his obsessive attention to bodily functions there will be blood, and his curiosities fuse the empirical with the vampirical. Filming in spare settings

dominated by velvety light and hidden sounds—wind and birdsong, footfalls and the crunch of chewed food—Serra creates poised, highly pressurized images on the verge of shattering with the force of mystery and desire. In Catalan.—*R.B.* (MOMA, March 26; Film Society of Lincoln Center, March 29.)

Veronica Mars

A devoted cult of around ninety-two thousand people Kickstarter-funded this return engagement of the wisecracking detective from the TV series, which ran from 2004 to 2007. Kristen Bell energetically reprises her role as the brainy sleuth, along with most of the show's original cast (Enrico Colantoni, as her dad; Jason Dohring, as Logan, her hometown ex; the adorable Percy Daggs III and Tina Majorino, as her devoted pals; and the excellent Ryan Hansen, as the ultimate moronic surfer dude). The film begins nine years after Veronica has left her slightly seedy Southern California beach town for life in New York (the charming Chris Lowell, who's also in the series, plays her new boyfriend). While interviewing for a job at a law firm, she finds out that bad boy Logan is implicated in a murder and goes home to solve the crime. The show's creator, Rob Thomas, directed the ideal boilerplate plot to percolate the series' much missed banter—snappy, but with a marshmallow center—into a thoroughly involving mystery, with well-plotted twists and turns to entertain even those who have never seen the series. The film is an obvious labor of love for all concerned, and the good times are infectious.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

Le Week-End

In Roger Michell's new film, written by Hanif Kureishi, a middle-aged British couple (Jim Broadbent and Lindsay Duncan), married for thirty years, take the train to Paris, determined to have a good time and resigned to the fact that, in all probability, they won't. They seem riven with bickering, and yet, at the same time, the sheer habit of argument serves to bind them together. Pleasure is grabbed on the go, in glimpses of the city and in helpings of food and wine; no less intermittent, but more awkward, is the movie's farcical strain, which twice finds husband and wife running out without paying the check. It's easy to tire (if not despair) of them, but both lead actors are in fine sparring form, and the story is rescued and revived, just in time, by a delectable cameo from Jeff Goldblum. He plays an American in Paris—hopelessly pleased with himself, and eternally foolish, yet very hard to dislike. He could almost use a movie of his own.—*A.L.* (3/17/14) (In limited release.)

OF NOTE THE EMPEROR'S NAKED ARMY MARCHES ON

Kenzo Okuzaki, one of the few survivors of the Japanese Army's fight to the death on New Guinea, returned home and went mad with antisocial rage, killing a real-estate broker, shooting pachinko balls at Emperor Hirohito, and publishing pornographic depictions of him, which got Okuzaki a total of thirteen years in jail. After his release, in the nineteen-eighties, Okuzaki became a one-man truth squad. With the director and cinematographer Kazuo Hara in tow, he barged into the homes and workplaces of former officers from the doomed campaign and compelled them—sometimes violently—to answer his questions about the execution of several soldiers from the outfit. The stories he extracts from the officers are shocking, as is the film's underlying premise: the failure of the Japanese government to bring these and other wartime atrocities to light. It took a madman to face the horrors that were swept under the rug, and Hara coolly observes the compromised inquisitor on his righteous mission, parsing the chaotic events with a visual clarity that illuminates the story's complexities and raises the drama to a high aesthetic order. Released in 1987. In Japanese.—*Richard Brody* (Japan Society; March 29.)

THE THEATRE



OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Casa Valentina

Manhattan Theatre Club presents a world premiere by Harvey Fierstein, directed by Joe Mantello. Set in 1962, the play involves a group of heterosexual men who convene in the Catskills to share their predilection for dressing as women. Starring Reed Birney, John Cullum, Gabriel Ebert, Lisa Emery, Patrick Page, Larry Pine, Tom McGowan, Nick Westrate, and Mare Winningham. Previews begin April 1. (Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

Hedwig and the Angry Inch

Neil Patrick Harris stars in the Broadway premiere of a musical based on the 1998 Off Broadway production, about a transgender East German chanteuse. John Cameron Mitchell wrote the book, and Stephen Trask wrote the music and lyrics. Michael Mayer directs. Previews begin March 29. (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

Violet

Sutton Foster stars in this musical, with music by Jeanine Tesori and a book and lyrics by Brian Crawley, based on the short story "The Ugliest Pilgrim," by Doris Betts, about a young woman who is disfigured in an accident and journeys to Oklahoma in the hope that a televangelist will heal her. Leigh Silverman directs. Previews begin March 28. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

Your Mother's Copy of the Kama Sutra

The world premiere of a comedy by Kirk Lynn, in which a couple agree to share intimate details about their sexual histories with each other. Anne Kauffman directs. Previews begin March 28. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

NOW PLAYING

Adoration of the Old Woman

The Oscar-nominated screenwriter José Rivera's magical-realistic drama, directed by Patricia McGregor, is set in the near future. Vanessa (Carmen Zilles), a disaffected seventeen-year-old from New Jersey, is sent by her mother against her will to live with her ancient great-grandmother (Socorro Santiago) in Puerto Rico, a month before an election that will decide whether the island will become the fifty-first state or gain its independence. It's not surprising that Rivera is a screenwriter: the conceit behind this drama—that

an alienated American kid could grow into a woman with deep connections to the earth after falling in love with a budding revolutionary (José Joaquín Pérez) and his country—is too large for INTAR's tiny stage. With only two hours to work with, Rivera spends too much time explaining and not enough time showing. (500 W. 52nd St. 212-352-3101.)

Aladdin

Disney adapts the 1992 film for the stage, with music by Alan Menken, lyrics by Howard Ashman, Tim Rice, and Chad Beguelin, and a book by Beguelin, under the crowd-pleasing direction of Casey Nicholaw ("The Book of Mormon"). No Taymoresque craftiness here: just a sultan's share of gag lines, earworms, and Orientalist glitz. Most of the laughs come from Don Darryl Rivera's Iago (formerly a parrot, now a squawking human). And there is one honest-to-goodness showstopper, "Friend Like Me," performed with motormouthed gusto by James Monroe Iglehart, as the Genie. Where Robin Williams's Genie imitated Peter Lorre, Iglehart's does Oprah: "You get a wish! You get a wish!" But the most telling line in Beguelin's script comes from our hero (Adam Jacobs), scheming with his fellow street rats: "It's simple, guys. We gather a crowd, sing, dance, put on a little show. And then people give us money." (New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 866-870-2717.)

Appropriate

In Branden Jacobs-Jenkins's comic drama, Frank (Patch Darragh), Bo (Michael Laurence), and Toni (Johanna Day)—three liberal, neurotic, middle-aged siblings, none of whom like each other—arrive, with their families, at their late father's Arkansas plantation to get it ready for auction. Things quickly go from dysfunctional to devastating, though, when they find among their father's things a photo album filled with pictures of lynched black people. This is a sprawling, Shepadesque play (eight characters on a set that's two stories high) that slyly approaches its huge subject, the far-reaching effects of sadistic and murderous white supremacy in America. Under the direction of Liesl Tommy, Day's wounded, unforgiving character dominates the stage, and it's too bad: out of an artful crew of American crazies, she's the least interesting. But Jacobs-Jenkins and his expert cast take care with the many familial relationships, and the young playwright has found a way to teach without preaching, leaving

the ending, true to life, wide open. (Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

Beauty and the Beast

In this autobiographical reimagining of the classic fairy tale, directed by Phelim McDermott, the burlesque performer Julie Atlas Muz plays Beauty, and her husband, Mat Fraser, a British actor whose mother's thalidomide use left him with abruptly shortened arms, plays Beast. It's a killer concept, and the performers (cleverly abetted by a pair of "puppeteer slaves," Jonny Dixon and Jess Mabel Jones) have mountains of earthy appeal, but the juxtaposition of memoir and myth inspires less insight than it should: their anecdotes about their lives and their romance feel too determinedly upbeat; their incessant nudity doesn't cover up the impression that they're going only skin deep. As a celebration of bodies, it works, but it's a missed opportunity that they didn't find more to say about disability, too. (Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand St. 212-352-3101. Through March 30.)

Fast Company

When the desperate eldest brother (Moses Villarama) of Blue (Stephanie Hsu), a fledgling con artist, steals a million-dollar comic book that Blue feels rightfully belongs to her (even though she stole it herself), she enlists the rest of her family—each a more accomplished grifter than the next—to get it back. Carla Chang's new comedy (directed by Robert Ross Parker for Ensemble Studio Theatre, in partnership with Ma-Yi Theatre) is not, as it would like to be, about the screwy family values developed among criminals; instead it's a series of sitcomlike skits, one very much like the next, each describing, superficially, a different kind of con. (549 W. 52nd St. 866-811-4111.)

The Real Americans

The young playwright Dan Hoyle's smart, entertaining, funny, insightful, and surprising one-man show, in which he plays a variety of eccentric characters—male, female, right-wing, left-wing, young, old, gay, straight, atheist, and Christian—is based on encounters he had when he left his liberal hipster bubble in San Francisco and travelled around the Midwest and the South in a van. He thought he'd eat a lot of pie but instead got an earful from a bunch of ignorant Americans, angry at the "Muslim" in office who they feel destroyed our country. Considering the wacky, extreme views that are coming out of Hoyle's mouth as he dons a variety of hats and takes on wildly diverse physical lives, his view of Middle Americans is compassionate and ultimately hopeful, without being at all soft. Charlie Varon directs, for Culture Project; in repertory with Mike Albo's "The Junket." (Lynn Redgrave Theatre, 45 Bleecker St. 866-811-4111.)

ALSO NOTABLE

ACT ONE

Vivian Beaumont

ALL THE WAY

Neil Simon

BEAUTIFUL—THE CAROLE KING MUSICAL

Stephen Sondheim

BEYOND THERAPY

Beckett

THE BOOK OF MORMON

Eugene O'Neill

BULLETS OVER BROADWAY

St. James

BUYER & CELLAR

Barrow Street Theatre

CABARET

Studio 54

DINNER WITH FRIENDS

Laura Pels

FATHER COMES HOME FROM THE WARS (PARTS 1, 2 & 3)

Public. Through March 30.

A GENTLEMAN'S GUIDE TO LOVE AND MURDER

Walter Kerr

HAND TO GOD

Lucille Lortel. Through March 30.

HEATHERS: THE MUSICAL

New World Stages

HELLMAN V. MCCARTHY

Abingdon

IF/THEN

Richard Rodgers

KING LEAR

Polonsky Shakespeare Center

LADY DAY AT EMERSON'S BAR & GRILL

Circle in the Square

THE LIBRARY

Public

LONDON WALL

Mint

MATILDA THE MUSICAL

Shubert

LES MISÉRABLES

Imperial

MOTHERS AND SONS

Golden

OF MICE AND MEN

Longacre

A RAISIN IN THE SUN

Ethel Barrymore

THE REALISTIC JONESES

Lyceum

RED VELVET

St. Ann's Warehouse

ROCKY

Winter Garden
(Reviewed in this issue.)

SATCHMO AT THE WALDORF

Westside

A SECOND CHANCE

Public

STAGE KISS

Playwrights Horizons

TALES FROM RED VIENNA

City Center Stage I

THE THREEPENNY OPERA

Atlantic Theatre Company



SubCulture, on Bleecker Street, offers friendly competition to (Le) Poisson Rouge.

SUBLIME SOUNDS

An inviting living room for music downtown.

SINCE ITS OPENING, in 2008, the West Village music club (Le) Poisson Rouge has boldly redefined the New York concert experience, replacing the ostensibly stuffy feel of a mainline classical venue with a relaxed atmosphere, often with table seating, more akin to that of a jazz event. This was all healthy, and inevitable, catching up with the tastes of a younger generation for whom musical styles—classical, folk, world music, whatever—are arranged on a spectrum, not in a hierarchy.

Yet those “stuffy” older places have their advantages—like good acoustics, which L.P.R. lacks. The bulk of the venue’s schedule is taken up by non-classical groups, and for contemporary classical artists that likewise use amplification, this isn’t much of an issue. But for shows with

“unplugged” ensembles such as string quartets or solo pianists, the space is completely without resonance—and the continual food and drink service, not to mention the hubbub at the bar, can be annoying. It’s concerts like these that can make you feel that while L.P.R. is a great place to *be*, it’s not always a great place to *listen*.

SubCulture, another underground venue on Bleecker Street, has recently emerged as a complement to L.P.R., if not a corrective to it. The young founders, Marc and Steven Kaplan, who are brothers, announce their intentions silently: the walls of the opening corridor are lined with reproductions of newspaper clippings, handbills, and photos that conjure up an Olde New York that stretches from the heyday of the Yiddish theatre to that of CBGB, and the entrance is adorned with a frieze in which a long tree root seems to reach down through a patch of earth thick with transistor radios, turntables, and outdated computer keyboards. The irony is teasing, but the message is clear: the best aspects of the traditional concert experience will be updated, not discarded.

The space itself, in which brick walls and mellow lighting offset the rolling concrete vault of the ceiling, is a shoebox that makes room for some hundred and fifty patrons. A pathway between the two sections of seats—comfy, padded, with drink holders attached—leads straight to the bar, which is open before and after the concert, but which is usually closed during classical shows.

SubCulture’s over-all atmosphere is living-room convivial, not nightclub crush. “We’ve been compared to L.P.R. because of our common diversity of artists, but Steven and I come out of a concert-going background, not a club background, and our business models are very different,” says Marc Kaplan. “We’re focussed above all on providing a great acoustic environment for music that will limit distractions.” The sound is somewhat sweeter in the front section than in the slightly elevated mezzanine, but even at the back of the bar there is enough warmth and clarity to showcase the strengths of a variety of artists.

It’s a mark of the venue’s success that the Kaplans have been able to quickly forge relationships with such organizations as the New York Philharmonic and the 92nd Street Y, which have collaborated in presenting two of the Phil’s “Contact!” concerts of new music there (featuring such stars as Esa-Pekka Salonen and Yefim Bronfman). Clearly, the brothers are exercising a strong curatorial hand; this week offers a concert by the acclaimed Cypress String Quartet on April 1, but broad-minded listeners can return later in the month to hear the inimitable Andrew W. K.’s pop-driven “Grand Piano Party” rock the house. (45 Bleecker St. subculturenewyork.com.)

—Russell Platt

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera

The tenor Javier Camarena is the breakout success of the Met's current revival of Bellini's "*La Sonnambula*." With melting phrases and exhilarating high notes, he steals some of the spotlight from the soprano Diana Damrau, who is surpassingly lovely in her debut in the role of the virginal bride who sleepwalks herself into the wrong man's bed and a whole lot of scandal. The conductor, Marco Armiliato, more than compensates for the absurd plot by bringing out the score's pastoral colors and seductive bel-canto lyricism, reminding audiences why the company would bother to revive Mary Zimmerman's problematic production. (Taylor Stayton replaces Camarena on April 1.) (March 29 at 1 and April 1 at 7:30. These are the final performances.) • **Also playing:** Zeffirelli's production of "*La Bohème*"—the ultimate crowd-pleaser—is a useful way for the house to bring fine young artists to public attention. Vittorio Grigolo, who recently gave a winning solo recital at the house, anchors the cast as Rodolfo; joining him are two débutantes, Anita Hartig and Jennifer Rowley, along with Massimo Cavalletti, in his first Met performances as Marcello; Stefano Ranzani conducts. (March 26 at 7:30 and March 29 at 8.) • In 1970 alone, the title role in "*Andrea Chénier*," one of the great verismo warhorses, was taken up at the Met by Richard Tucker, Carlo Bergonzi, and a young Plácido Domingo. Now Marcelo Álvarez is set to portray the French Revolution firebrand, joined by three more company veterans, Patricia Racette, Željko Lučić, and the estimable conductor Gianandrea Noseda. (March 28 and March 31 at 7:30.) • The tenor Lawrence Brownlee, one of the many Met stars who got their start by winning the company's **National Council Grand Finals**, hosts this year's concert, with the soprano Susanna Phillips (another laureate) as guest artist and Marco Armiliato conducting the Met Orchestra. (March 30 at 3.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

Joshua Bell and Academy of St. Martin in the Fields

Bell, a violinist of effortless technique and considerable all-American charisma, has served as the august London chamber orchestra's music director since 2011. His deeply Romantic program features two works: Brahms's Violin Concerto and Beethoven's Symphony No. 3, "*Eroica*," which he will lead from the concertmaster's chair. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-721-5600. March 26 at 8.)

Orpheus Chamber Orchestra

The always impressive conductorless chamber orchestra teams up with

an extraordinary soloist, Christian Tetzlaff, in a Hungarian-themed program offering vibrant works by Kodály and Bartók (the *Divertimento* for Strings), along with a novelty, the Violin Concerto No. 2, "*In the Hungarian Style*," by the violinist Joseph Joachim, better known to history as a wondrous virtuoso and a close friend of Brahms. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. March 29 at 7.)

Musica Sacra: Meredith Monk and Jocelyn Hagen

Music by these two distinctive Americans is the focus of the renowned choir's latest concert, conducted by Kent Tritle. Hagen's oratorio "*Amass*" uses strings, guitar, and percussion to add texture to settings of texts by Saint John of the Cross (among others); Monk, a compelling and singular vocal performer, joins the singers in a selection of pieces that includes excerpts from her opera "*Atlas*." (Alice Tully Hall. lincolncenter.org. March 31 at 7:30.)

RECITALS

Paul Lewis

Lewis, a poetic pianist with reserves of strength, offers a piquantly diverse recital at Zankel Hall that features music by Bach (arranged by Busoni), Beethoven (including the "*Moonlight*" Sonata), and Mussorgsky, in addition to some fabulously strange late Liszt. (212-247-7800. March 26 at 7:30.)

S.E.M. Ensemble:

Christian Wolff

The eightieth birthday of this resilient, self-taught American modernist, a close ally of Feldman and Cage, anchors three concerts by Petr Kotik's group, which glories in the legacy of the New York School. In this program, two works by Wolff are included along with pieces by such composers as Xenakis and Ligeti (the magisterial Trio for Horn, Violin, and Piano). (Roulette, 509 Atlantic Ave., Brooklyn. roulette.org. March 26 at 8.)

(Le) Poisson Rouge: Diana

Damrau / Terry and Gyan Riley

The stylish downtown music club has become a natural home for both celebrity recitals and scruffier alt-classical events. Damrau, currently leading the cast of "*La Sonnambula*" at the Met, drops by for a frothy program of songs and arias by Lehár, Johann Strauss II, Gershwin, and Lerner and Loewe; three nights later, the California minimalist legend Terry Riley (at the keyboard) and his gifted guitarist son will jam as only they can. (158 Bleecker St. lprnyc.com. March 27 and March 30 at 7:30.)

"Kronos Quartet and Friends"

As part of its fortieth-anniversary celebrations, the iconic American string quartet, hugely influential for generations of performers and composers, comes to Carnegie Hall

to collaborate with a collection of favorite artists, including the guitarist Bryce Dessner, the pipa player Wu Man, and the Brooklyn Youth Chorus; the program, unsurprisingly, traverses the world, embracing music by Dessner, Aleksandra Vrebalov, Omar Souleyman, Laurie Anderson, and Philip Glass, as well as a world première from Terry Riley ("*The Serquent Risadome*"). (212-247-7800. March 28 at 8.)

Miller Theatre

"Composer Portrait": Jean-Baptiste Barrière

The computer-music composer and multimedia artist, who led the Parisian music fortress IRCAM for fifteen years (and who happens to be the husband of Kaija Saariaho), is being fêted by Columbia University with three events—including this concert, performed by such expert players as the flutist Margaret Lancaster and the percussionist Nathan Davis, which includes the influential electronic work "*Chrède*" (1983) in addition to three world premières. (Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799. March 29 at 8.)

Yefim Bronfman Chamber

Music Concert

The pianist, a collegial chamber-music player and new-music advocate as well as a commanding soloist, joins members of the New York Philharmonic in an intimate concert; the repertoire is by Schubert, Bartók ("*Contrasts*"), and Brahms (the Piano Quintet). (92nd St. Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 92y.org. March 30 at 3.)

Parthenia

New York's enduring consort of viols gathers to perform music at the heart of its repertoire: the fifteen Fantasias by Henry Purcell. (Church of St. Luke in the Fields, 487 Hudson St. 212-866-0468. March 30 at 4.)

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center

Songs by Ives are seldom heard in concert, but songs by his great contemporary Bartók are even rarer. Dawn Upshaw teams up with a longtime colleague, the pianist Gilbert Kalish, to perform a selection by each of them, part of a program that finds Kalish collaborating in Elgar's Piano Quintet with the excellent young Amphion String Quartet (which will also perform Berg's fiercely expressive Quartet, Op. 3). (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788. March 30 at 5.)

OF NOTE NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC

Gustavo Dudamel, in town recently to lead his Los Angeles Philharmonic at Avery Fisher Hall, returns to the same room to conduct our own distinguished orchestra. The program is tightly fused, and without intermission: it begins with Claude Vivier's "*Orion*" (1979), a work inspired both by the Requiem Mass and by Bergman's film "*The Seventh Seal*," and concludes with the totemic Ninth Symphony by the profoundly Catholic Anton Bruckner. (212-875-5656. March 27 at 7:30 and March 28-29 at 8.)



GOINGS ON ONLINE

Visit our Web site for more events around town, including the new Broadway play "*The Velocity of Autumn*," with Estelle Parsons and Stephen Spinella, and David Ives's reworking of Jean-François Regnard's 1708 farce, "*An Heir Apparent*," at Classic Stage Company. Also, concerts by Lady Gaga at Roseland, which is closing after her run there, and a residency at the Stone by the adventurous jazz drummer Jim Black.



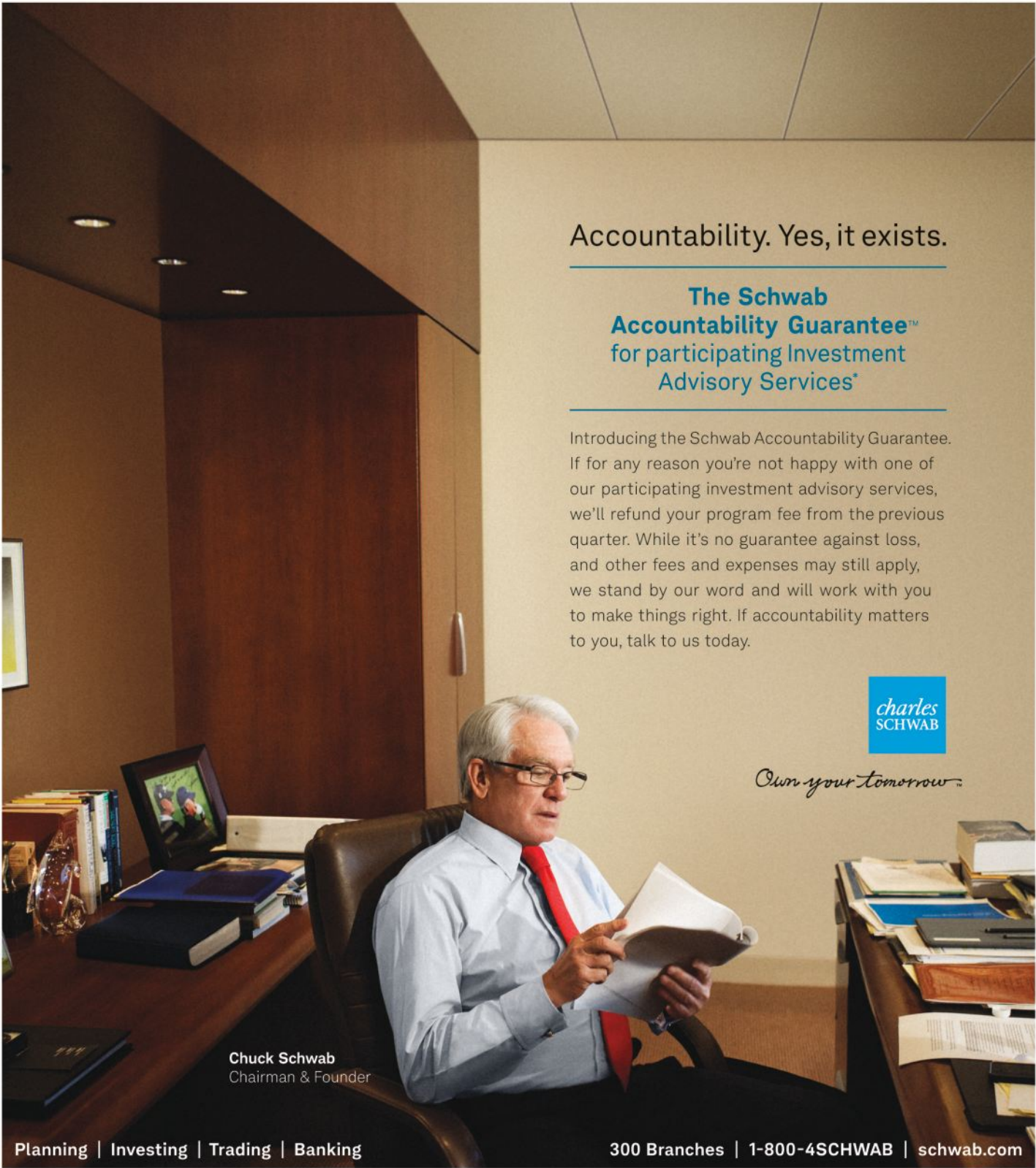
FRONT ROW

Richard Brody discusses the François Truffaut retrospective playing at Film Forum.



DVD OF THE WEEK

A video discussion of Paul Fejos's "*Lonesome*," from 1928, in our digital edition.



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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT TERMS OF CRISIS

Annexation has an ugly sound, owing to an unhappy past. The term describes, among other tragedies, Saddam Hussein's attempt, in 1990, to swallow Kuwait whole, as the nineteenth province of Iraq; Indonesia's invasion, in 1975, of East Timor; Morocco's absorption, the same year, of Western Sahara; and Israel's declaration, after the 1967 war, of East Jerusalem as part of a united capital. The German word for it is *Anschluss*. Like most coerced unions, annexations come wreathed in clouds of lofty, dishonest language—key themes are popular will, historic grievance, divine providence—but they almost always happen at the end of a gun.

Vladimir Putin's speech at the Kremlin last week, asking a compliant Duma to ratify Crimea's self-declared status as a new Russian republic, was a memorable example of annexation rhetoric. Putin opened with the baptism of Prince Vladimir in ancient Khersones, railed against years of humiliation by the West, warned of consequences for unnamed "national traitors" inside Russia, and moved the audience to tears on behalf of his people's hearts and minds, where "Crimea has always been an inseparable part of Russia." A few of his points had merit: it's true that the United States, like other great powers, ignores international laws when they get in the way, and it should have been foreseeable that Russia would view the expansion of NATO as a challenge to its interests. Other parts of the speech were blatant falsehoods—for example, the charge that Russian-speaking Ukrainians were under threat from hordes of neo-Nazis, and the claim that "Russia's armed forces never entered Crimea." When Putin thanked his Ukrainian brothers for refraining from shedding blood, he neglected to mention that they had been disarmed by Russian special-forces troops.

The annexation of Crimea is now what Putin calls "an accomplished fact." It won't be undone for a long time, if ever. The referendum was illegal under Ukrainian and international law and was held in far from free circumstances,

but the result probably reflected the majority will. More to the point, the U.S. and Europe won't risk the effort to reverse the annexation, because they have minimal interests in Crimea, while Russia, with great interests, will risk almost anything to keep it. But the fate of the rest of Ukraine and of the other former Soviet republics, along with the future of relations between Russia and the West, remains very much unresolved. Any American policy needs to begin with an understanding of what the crisis is and what it isn't.

Ukraine is not Czechoslovakia. For some American hawks, the year is always 1938, and Munich and appeasement are routinely invoked whenever there's an act of aggression anywhere in the world. John McCain and Hillary Clinton both pointed to the superficial analogy between Crimea and the Sudetenland—annexation in the name of ethnic reunification. Before the referendum, pro-Ukrainian protesters in Kiev held up signs depicting Putin with Hitler's black bangs and toothbrush mustache. All this inflates Putin's importance far beyond his deserts. He may want Russia to lead a new Eurasian Union, but he doesn't dream of world conquest; Russia has plenty of nuclear weapons, but its conventional military forces are ill prepared for a long occupation of Ukraine.

Nor is the crisis a revival of the Cold War—a comparison

drawn both on the right, by McCain, in a *Times* Op-Ed, and on the left, by Stephen F. Cohen, in *The Nation*. That conflict divided the world into two camps, in a titanic struggle of ideas, with countless hot wars fought by proxies of the superpowers. The messy Ukraine crisis is what the world looks like when it's not divided into two spheres of control. Putin stands for the opposite of a universal ideology; he has become an arch-nationalist of a pre-Cold War type, making mystic appeals to motherland and religion. He loves to challenge the supposed bullying of the West, but he does so with scarcely any support



beyond Russia and the twenty million Russian speakers who live in former Soviet republics. He was warmly congratulated after the annexation by his friend Bashar al-Assad, of Syria, but a United Nations resolution condemning Russia's actions won the approval of every Security Council member except China, which abstained (perhaps thinking of its own separatists in Tibet), and Russia itself.

It's essential for the U.S. and Europe to prevent Putin from going farther and reversing the hard-won independence of former Soviet republics. Moscow is actively trying to destabilize cities in eastern Ukraine, following the familiar strategy of whipping up fear and chauvinism among Russian speakers. The Western countries should use all the non-military tools at their disposal—money, diplomacy, political support, trade inducements that build on the political accord signed last Friday, poll monitors—to insure that Ukraine doesn't collapse into chaos before the Presidential elections on May 25th, and that the vote is fair. Ukrainian leaders are wisely making space for pro-Russia politics and promising a degree of federalism under a new government. Ukrainians shouldn't feel compelled to choose, for the sake of safety and identity, between Russia and the West—that's what Putin wants.

A successful election in a stable Ukraine is half the battle against Putin's aggression. The other half is deterrence. It would be naïve to take Putin at his word that Russia has no designs on

territory outside Crimea. He needs an atmosphere of continuous crisis and grievance to maintain support at home, to distract his own public from the corruption, stagnation, and repression that are his real record as a leader. Deterrence can be designed to expose Russia's weakness: non-lethal military aid to Kiev, escalation of sanctions against Putin's cronies, and the ultimate threat of financially targeting Russia's energy sector. But no strategy will work if the U.S. and the European Union don't act together, and America can no longer simply expect Europe to follow its lead. That was a different era.

Is all this Barack Obama's fault, as Republicans in Congress and former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice have asserted? It's true that the Administration seems caught off guard whenever a thug somewhere fails to act according to international norms. Putin no doubt views the President as weak, especially after Obama needed Russia to get him out of a jam of his own making over Syria's chemical weapons—and, like any bully, Putin finds weakness provocative. But Crimea was a long time coming. In 2008, when George W. Bush was President, Putin, after voicing many of the resentments that the world heard last week, invaded the Republic of Georgia and all but annexed two predominantly Russian-speaking territories without even bothering to hold a referendum. An autocrat like Putin plays his own game, and always finds his own excuses.

—George Packer

INK HAIKU HERMAN



Haiku has been called the original Twitter, treating the vicissitudes of life in seventeen syllables: “Wrapped in my work;/all the while the wheat is growing/ever taller.” The author of that poem is Herman Van Rompuy, the former Belgian Prime Minister, who now leads the European Council, which comprises the heads of each of the twenty-eight member states of the European Union. (He is a bit like the President of the Presidents of the E.U.) In 2010, Van Rompuy published “Haiku,” a book of poems. Recently, he released a second collection, “Haiku 2,” which features hooting owls, bobbing daffodils, and a “solitary oak,/rammed into the field, single,/no likes around.” It makes you wonder if the executive branch doesn't get a little lonely. “Dealing with the world of man increases one's longing for Paradise,” Van Rompuy writes, in the book's foreword. Now we understand/why George W.

Bush painted / himself in the bath.

Before Paradise, Brussels: one recent afternoon, Van Rompuy was sitting in a reception room in the Council's headquarters, drinking an espresso, while around him Europe's leading bureaucrats debated the regulation of aromatized wine products and dealt with an outbreak of swine fever in Lithuanian boars. Shards of painted porcelain were arranged on a nearby wall—an art work representing the creation of Europe. (Van Rompuy's contribution to the genre: “A wreath made of stars/surging on a blue sea/united forever.”) Van Rompuy wore a pin-striped suit, brown shoes, and a brown striped tie. “Haiku starts with a feeling of longing,” he said. “You don't change because you come to haiku. You come to haiku because you have changed.”

These were tense days, just before President Viktor Yanukovich fled Ukraine and Russian troops seized Crimea. When asked later about the role that poetry had played in Kiev's Independence Square—protesters waved portraits of the nineteenth-century poet Taras Shevchenko—Van Rompuy said, “I wouldn't be surprised if this struggle and this tragedy had not inspired people there.” He added, citing Milton, “Poetry and art are often related to the feeling

of ‘Paradise Lost,’ to pain or suffering.”

Van Rompuy wrote his first haiku in 2004, inspired by a child's ball that had landed in his garden. “A haiku usually starts with an experience that can be very trivial,” he said. “The furthest you can go is that it's in some way melancholic, but it's not tragic.” Hence a lament for the sort of freedom of movement that even the Schengen Agreement cannot guarantee: “On our planet / there always is a sunny spot. / Still we stay put.”

In keeping with the cooperative aims of the European project, Van Rompuy's poems are presented in French, English, German, and Japanese, along with the original Dutch. The translations are serviceable, and syllable counts sometimes suffer in the process: “Every year again / the chunky bush straightens itself. / Easter everywhere.” As a political poet, he is neither as lofty as Lamartine (“Suspend your trek O Time!”) nor as on message as Jimmy Carter (sample title: “Why We Get Cheaper Tires from Liberia”). Kai Falkman, a former Swedish diplomat who now heads the World Haiku Association, said of Van Rompuy's efforts, “They are not terribly outstanding. His spirit is rather withdrawn—maybe because of his job he wanted to express himself obliquely.” Falkman

contrasted Van Rompuy's poems with those of Dag Hammarskjöld, whose hundred and ten haiku ("The boy in the forest / Throws off this best Sunday suit / And plays naked") were published posthumously: "Hammarskjöld's poems are dramatic, soul-searching, colorful, religious, whereas Van Rompuy's verses are quiet, caring, expressing wonder and prudent doubts." Van Rompuy's style may soon evolve. "After leaving this high office, I will be able to devote myself even more to haiku," he said recently, at a conference of the Haiku International Association. "The real Haiku Herman is still to come!"

Anyway, Van Rompuy believes that equilibrium favors both his art and his statecraft. "In the European Council, they are all Prime Ministers, and they have to fight to stay in position, so in some way they have their own ego," he said. "I'm putting it very mildly, yeah?" Discretion is an asset in politics, he said, even if "balanced people are less charismatic."

"Charismatic"! There was the fighting word, the volta in Haiku Herman's composition. On February 24, 2010—the day of Van Rompuy's first speech in the European Parliament—the British right-wing politician Nigel Farage savaged Van Rompuy, saying that he had "the charisma of a damp rag and the appearance of a low-grade bank clerk." (Farage added that Belgium was "a noncountry.") Farage's attack—at nineteen beats, a sort of monster haiku—had stung. Now, it seemed, Van Rompuy was striving for another image. It sounded almost like a Twitter bio: Herman Van Rompuy. President of the European Council, haiku poet, not a damp rag.

—Lauren Collins

BLOOD BROTHERS PEP TALK



In 2010, Matt Berninger was a rock star, and his younger brother, Tom, lived in their parents' basement in Cincinnati. Today, Matt is still a rock star—he's the front man of the lamentation-inclined band the National—and Tom lives in Matt's garage, in Venice, California. In the intervening period, Matt hired

Tom as the band's assistant tour manager, trying to get him out of the house and out of his decadelong funk. A few days ago, over pints of Guinness in Hell's Kitchen, the brothers agreed that Tom sucked at the job. "I was the wrecking ball in the world of indie-rockness," Tom said. He was fired after eight months. But he'd brought a camera on the road, and when he went home he felt there might be a film in his nearly two hundred hours of footage of boredom on the bus and Matt being a testy genius and Tom getting



Tom and Matt Berninger

shitfaced and losing the V.I.P. list and conducting left-handed interviews:

TOM: You are way more famous than any of my friends.

MATT: That's . . . O.K. . . I, um . . . (long pause)

Tom moved in with Matt and his wife, Carin (a former editor at this magazine), and after two years of false starts and despair the underlying story finally emerged. This week marks the début of "Mistaken for Strangers," Tom's affecting documentary about an angsty singer and his artless brother.

Matt, who is forty-three, is tall, bearded, and chiselled, and he wears interesting glasses. His brother, thirty-four, has an identical beard but is shorter and portlier and less groomed, as if a sculptor started carving a copy of Matt and then lost interest. Tom, now at loose ends, said he was contemplating making another documentary about becoming a would-be actor. "I filmed my audition class in L.A.," he said. "I did an old scene from 'Law & Order,' where I'm getting interrogated

because I raped and murdered a girl—I shook her too hard and killed her. I say, 'I didn't even know my own strength!'"

Matt laughed and said, "You don't want to be the goofball failure fuckup in the next thing you do, right?"

"Of course not," Tom said. "Only that's my brand now a little bit—lovable comic relief."

"What Mom says is true—you always underestimate your potential," Matt said. "People aren't laughing at you—I mean, occasionally, yes—they're admiring something beautiful you made about jealousy and family dynamics."

"You gave me the confidence to show how lost I am," Tom said. "Your first three albums were totally ignored, but you kept at it, you were willing to be made fun of by a lot of people because your music is so depressing, by all those people who tell me, 'I can't stand the National—'"

"Not *that* many people made fun of us," Matt said, amused. He eyed his brother's sweaty forehead. "You're worried that this is your high point."

"Oh, certainly," Tom said. He ordered another Guinness.

"It might be," Matt said. "But people are giving *me* notes to give *you* when I'm on tour. They recognize themselves in you, your vulnerability. I recognize myself in you."

"Yeah, but I always feel late to the game," Tom said. "Look at Taylor Swift! She's twenty-four—"

"You are never going to be better than Taylor Swift at what she does," Matt counselled. "You are not going to be a country-pop-star ingénue. You're not going to be known as a documentary filmmaker, either. When people see this movie, they're not seeing the next Errol Morris. But—"

"Then where does it take me? I'm not necessarily a director, I'm not necessarily an actor—"

"Yeah," Matt said. "I doubt that you're going to be Meryl Streep. But you're also not just Chris Farley—you have that special thing where you're guileless and real." He leaned in: "What you really need to do is get out and start dating. Do all the shit that makes you anxious. Remember that *nobody* is good at meeting people in bars—"

"You met your wife at a bar!" Tom cried.

"But I was terrible at talking to her!"

Matt replied. “And that’s *why* Carin liked me. Failure is a badge of honor. Be willing to get out there again and fail. It’s like the end of ‘The Graduate’: He goes to the church, he stops the wedding, he gets the girl. And *then* there’s a minute or so afterward, where they’re both on the bus: Now what? You’re about to have that ‘Now what?’ of the rest of your life.”

“Is this how it should feel?” Tom asked. “Being an adult?”

“Yes,” Matt said. “If you’re waiting for anxiety and fear and self-doubt to go away, you’re going to wait forever.”

Tom drank up. Then he laughed softly and said, “We have this conversation at least once every two weeks.”

—*Tad Friend*

FAN POWER OCCUPY THE KNICKS



Earlier this month, a group of Knicks fans, exhausted by their team’s ineptitude—most recently, seven straight losses—decided to stage a protest before an upcoming game. “I feel like I’m in a damaged relationship,” Michael Brown, one of the protest’s organizers, told the *Times*. The abusive partner was James

Dolan, the C.E.O. of Cablevision and the owner of the Knicks, who has been accused for years of meddling in the team’s basketball affairs, to ill effect, and then refusing to explain his decisions. In a perfect world, Dolan would sell the team, but the group settled for more practical demands, which they published on Facebook: that Dolan be more open, and that he leave the team’s coaches and managers to do their jobs. Momentum built—Whoopi Goldberg mentioned the protest on “The View”—and organizers expected as many as five hundred people. “It reminds me of Occupy Wall Street,” Brown, a thirty-eight-year-old parking attendant from the Bronx, said, several days before the protest. “March 19, 2014, is going to be remembered by sports fans for a long time.”

By last week, however, the movement was in jeopardy. The Knicks had launched a counteroffensive: first, the team started winning—six games in a row—and then management scheduled a happy hour for season-ticket holders at Madison Square Garden, to coincide with the protest. Finally, the day before the rally, Dolan held a press conference to announce the hiring of Phil Jackson, a basketball deity, as the team’s new president. “This rally is meaningless,” one fan wrote on the group’s Facebook page. “You got Dolan’s attention. . . . Take your spouses to dinner or something.” Another online commenter

said that the rally now felt like holding the Boston Tea Party on July 5, 1776.

Last Wednesday, before that night’s game, against the Pacers, Brown sat in a Roy Rogers across from the Garden, making final preparations. “It was kind of deflating,” he admitted, of Dolan’s press conference. “They took the wind out of our sails.” He wore a blue sweatshirt and blue-and-orange sneakers. He was joined by another protester, Bob Harris, a fifty-six-year-old basketball fan from Greenwich in a Knicks Starter jacket, and they walked across the street to inspect the site. Police officers were setting up barricades to accommodate two hundred people, but the crowd looked sparse.

“Are those protesters?” Brown said, pointing to some men leaning against a wall.

“I think they might be scalpers,” Harris said.

“Well, it’s cold!”

“Maybe Dolan controls the weather—he’s got enough money.”

“At least it’s not raining.”

It started raining, but, slowly, a crowd of disgruntled Knicks fans began to form. “It’s nice to know you’re not suffering alone,” Chase Johnson, a liquor-store clerk from New Jersey, said. Anthony Samaroo, an airline employee from Chicago, had flown in to attend the protest. Several fans were selling shirts—“Knicks, Don’t Kill My Vibe”—while others chanted “Dolan sucks,” which caught the attention of Norman Siegel, the former head of the New York Civil Liberties Union. Siegel had come both as a supporter of the cause—“I want a championship!”—and as a protector of the First Amendment. “I would prefer ‘Down with Dolan,’” he said. “But I’m here to make sure no one gets arrested for yelling ‘Dolan sucks.’”

By six-thirty, the crowd was in the double digits, and Brown walked to the front of the group wearing a plastic sheep’s mask. He held up his fist and yelled, “Mike check,” a tactic cribbed from Occupy. He started to explain both the meaning of the mask—the sheep (Knicks fans) had realized that they outnumbered the wolf (Dolan)—as well as a revised agenda. “We’re here to let James Dolan know we’re going to give him a chance,” he said, to confused looks. “On three, I want everybody to chant, ‘Dolan!’”

Silence.

“You guys got real quiet,” Brown



“That’s my uncle Peter—notice how the eyes follow your breasts wherever you go.”

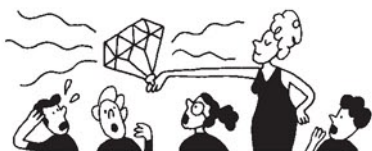
said. "O.K. One . . . two . . . three . . ."
"Dolan!"

A beat, then, from the crowd, "Sucks!"

An hour before tip-off, the cops shut down the rally: the protesters didn't have tickets—scalpers were asking for more than a hundred dollars—so they watched the game at a bar on Tenth Avenue. (The Knicks won.) They rejected the thought of switching allegiance to the Brooklyn Nets, even though Nets tickets were selling for eight dollars that night: a Russian oligarch as an owner seemed only a slight upgrade from a cable-company executive. "I don't think it's gonna make much of a difference," Harris said, of the protest. "Maybe Dolan looked down at us from a window up there, but you have to hit him on the bottom line—people have to stop going to games. But they won't." He thought for a minute, then added, "I tell you what, if he gave me tickets for the game tonight, I'd switch sides in a heartbeat."

—Reeves Wiedeman

DEPT. OF BLING STONER



Honey Florem Peach Frutti is not the alias of a porn star. It is the name of a bracelet by the French jewelry designer Victoire de Castellane. The bracelet looks like a succulent flower with twenty carats' worth of yellow, pink, and orange sapphires and eight free-shape diamonds. It would definitely jazz up a black sweater, even more so if you paired it, on your other wrist, with its fraternal twin, Honey Florem Red Frutti: yellow gold, with ruby and sapphire reproductive organs. In case you didn't know, flowers have sex. And the women for whom Castellane designs her jewels are, one infers, no shrinking violets on that score. Her work celebrates carnal pleasure.

The designer is a Parisian in her early fifties. Since her youth, she has projected the aura of an elegant rag doll: gangly limbs, limp Buster Brown bangs, bright eyes in a pert face—part vamp, part ingénue. On a recent evening, dressed in black, on gladiator booties with a five-inch heel, she was greeting guests at the opening of her first New York show,

"Precious Objects," at the Gagosian Gallery, on Madison Avenue. The avenue had been closed to traffic for security reasons, though not to thwart jewel thieves: President Obama was in town on a fund-raising trip. You couldn't help thinking that the First Lady, who is fond of bold fashion statements, would have preferred Castellane's Vitam Industria Abstract Sugar, a domed ring with a gargantuan diamond embedded in thirty smaller stones, to the blue workout jacket that her husband bought her that day at a Gap on Forty-second Street. But the President might have drawn the line at endorsing a show inspired by delirium: magic mushrooms, fairy dust, coca and opium, psychedelic animation, the strobe lights of a disco, the Brothers Grimm, smoke from a crack pipe. One of Castellane's bracelets, Cana Bisextem Now, represents the glowing roach of a joint, surrounded by singed cannabis leaves of green-lacquered gold, with diamonds, emeralds, garnets, and jasper. Its setting is meant to evoke a Vietnamese jungle clearing: the palm trees have been flattened by turbulence from a helicopter searching for an illicit pot plantation.

You might suppose, from this description, that Cana Bisextem Now is lurid in its excess. You might also think as much of its price tag. (The collection ranges from \$135,000 to \$800,000.) Yet Castellane's work registers as sublimely trippy. "It's an escape from convention to a wonderland where the boundaries between nature and artifice are blurred," she said. "Drugs, though, are just a metaphor for me—a symbol of imaginative intoxication. I like going to extremes with scale, imagery, and materials, but I don't need help to get there."

Castellane's pedigree extends to the Almanach de Gotha as well as the jewelry world. Her paternal ancestors received their title in the tenth century, and her great-grand-uncle was the Belle Époque bon vivant Boni de Castellane. Victoire, the child of divorced parents, was raised by her grandmother. "I was a sad little girl who took refuge in shiny things," she said. "I loved playing with my grandmother's rings, which looked enormous on my little hand, and they gave me a taste for exaggeration. A jewel is a personage for me, invested with romance and emotion. I idealized my mother, and I think, unconsciously, my

jewels are gifts for her. She owns some," she added wistfully, "but she doesn't often wear them."

Castellane, who was an indifferent student, had no formal training in her métier. "I would have liked to be a surgeon or a psychoanalyst," she said. "But I can't do anything else." She started her career, in the nineteen-eighties, as a studio assistant, occasional runway model, and muse to Karl Lagerfeld, at Chanel. He recognized her talent and promoted her. She oversaw the design of Chanel's costume

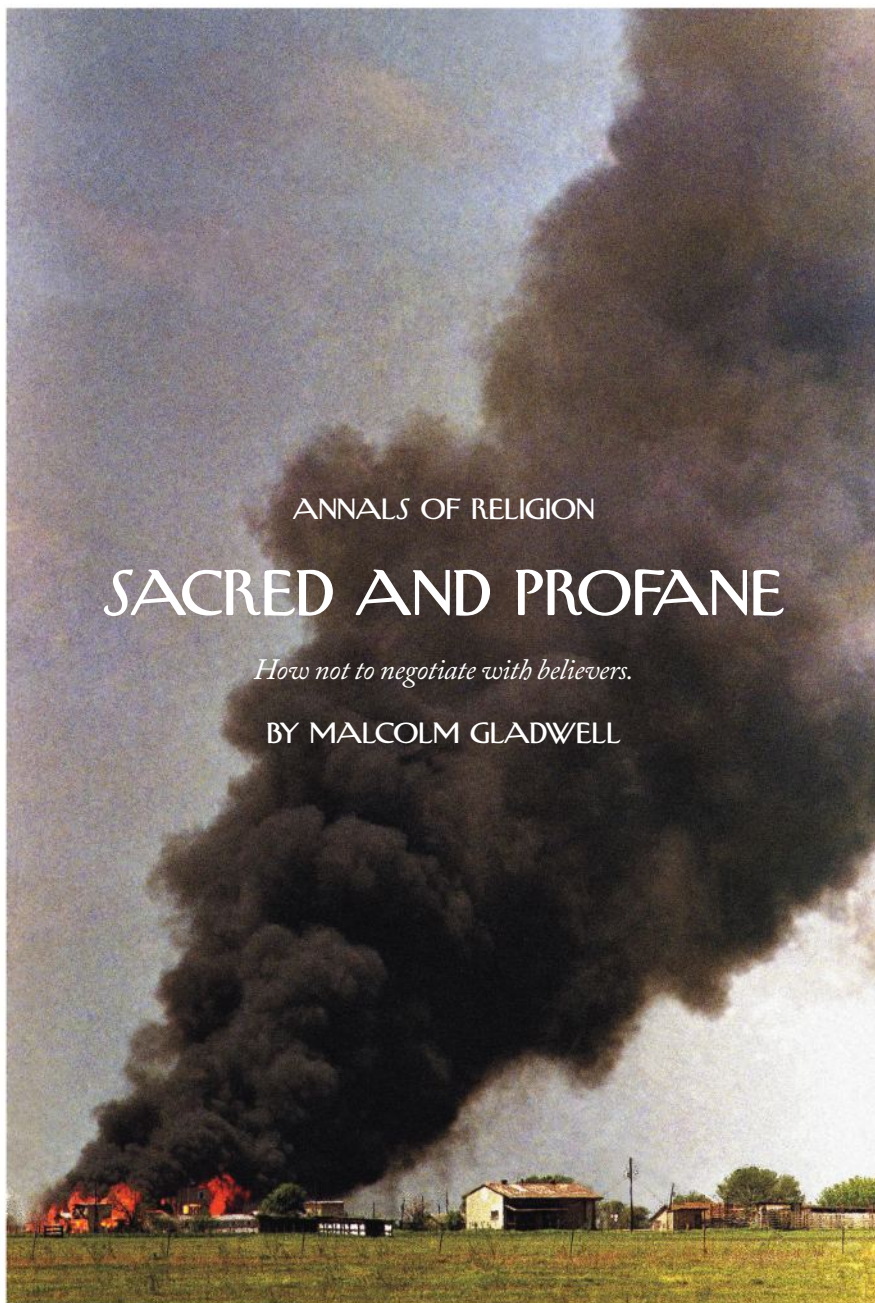


Victoire de Castellane

jewelry for fourteen years. In 1998, she was hired as the creative director of fine jewelry at Christian Dior. Since 2007, she has designed an independent collection every few years, and her first show was at the Musée de l'Orangerie. Scouts find her exceptional gems; she sculpts their settings in wax; the gold or silver is often lacquered with ten to twelve layers of synthetic resin, a few microns thick, in graffiti colors; and each "ludic plaything" rests on a biomorphic pedestal. "It becomes an object of contemplation when you are not wearing it," Castellane explained.

The gallery was filling slowly. Guests who had braved the police barricades were rewarded with champagne. A few were further rewarded by the chance to try on a jewel. The artist obliged photographers by modelling a necklace: Opium Velourosa Purpra. Out of its vitrine, the poppy, a source of heroin, violence, and depravity, looked so floppy and sweet that you might have mistaken it for a silk flower. "I can't take preciousness too seriously," Castellane said.

—Judith Thurman



ANNALS OF RELIGION

SACRED AND PROFANE

How not to negotiate with believers.

BY MALCOLM GLADWELL

At Waco, the F.B.I. treated a community's religious claims as a mere distraction.

When Clive Doyle was a teen-ager, in the nineteen-fifties, he and his mother met an itinerant preacher outside their church, in Melbourne, Australia. He was a big, gruff Scotsman named Daniel Smith. The Doyles were devout Seventh-Day Adventists. But Smith was the follower of a self-proclaimed prophet named Victor Houteff, who became an Adventist just after the First World War and parted ways with the Church a decade later. The Doyles listened to Smith's account of the Houteff teachings until the small hours of the morning and were impressed. "We were taught that if someone comes with a

message based on the Bible, instead of trying to fight it, instead of trying to put it down or trying to prove it wrong, we should study the Bible to perceive whether the message is true," Doyle writes in his autobiography. "Study to see if it's so."

The Houteff group held that those in the mainstream Seventh-Day Adventist Church had lost their sense of urgency regarding the Second Coming and would soon face the judgment of God. To the Doyles, however, this presented a problem: where did it leave Seventh-Day Adventists who hadn't heard the Houteff message? The Doyles knew, for example,

that no one had taken the Houteff teachings to Tasmania, off Australia's south coast. So, in 1958, Doyle quit his job as an apprentice in a cabinet shop, and he and his mother took the overnight boat to Tasmania, where they spent a month trudging around the back roads of the island, going from one Seventh-Day Adventist church to the next. "My mother had borrowed the biggest suitcase she could find," he writes. "We had packed it full of books because we thought: They're going to want to know what we believe, so we'll give Bible studies . . . and we'll use the Bible to prove our points. I was just a teenager lugging this huge suitcase all over the island. It weighed a ton."

The Doyles were neither wealthy nor well educated. Clive Doyle's mother worked in a garment factory. His father had left before he was born. Doyle once came home from Sunday school and solemnly greeted his mother with: "You've shaken hands with a servant of the Lord." He writes, "I was two or three years behind everybody. I was never in the 'in' crowd in school." He and his mother were religiously committed, and indifferent to what others thought of them. Matters of religious doctrine, in their view, required action and commitment. In Tasmania, Doyle was looking for people who wanted to "actually get down to the nitty-gritty" and study the Scriptures with him. That search would end up consuming Doyle's life, leading him clear across the world to a religious retreat founded by Houteff, just outside Waco, Texas. The group that Doyle joined was called the Branch Davidians. Their retreat was called Mount Carmel, and the most famous of its leaders was a young man named David Koresh.

"A Journey to Waco," Doyle's memoir, is an account of what it means to be a religious radical—to worship on the fringes of contemporary Christianity. Doyle takes the story from his childhood in Australia through the extraordinary events of 1993, when some eighty armed agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms raided the Mount Carmel community, in an effort to serve a search and arrest warrant on Koresh, on suspicion of violating federal firearms rules. "I want you all to go back to your rooms and stay calm," Doyle recalls Koresh saying, as federal agents descended on Mount Carmel. Doyle goes on, "I could hear David's steps going down

the hall toward the front door. . . . Then all of a sudden I heard David say: 'Hey, wait a minute! There are women and children in here!' Then all hell broke loose—just a barrage of shots from outside coming in. It sounded like a bloodbath."

In the resulting gun battle, four A.T.F. agents and six Davidians were killed. The F.B.I. was called in. The Davidian property was surrounded. An army of trained negotiators were flown to the scene, and for the next fifty-one days the two sides talked day and night—arguing, lecturing, bargaining—with the highlights of their conversations repeated at press conferences and broadcasts around the world. The Waco standoff was one of the most public conversations in the history of American law enforcement, and the question Doyle poses in his memoir, with genuine puzzlement, is how a religious community could go to such lengths to explain itself to such little effect.

"If people read this account, they will at least gain a different perspective on who David Koresh was, where he was coming from, who we were, and why we believe the way we do," he begins. "Most people think 'cult' about us and think we are people who were brainwashed and deceived. They think our church members don't know what they're doing or where they're going. Hopefully, my story can open their eyes."

The Branch Davidians belonged to the religious tradition that sees Christ's return to earth and the establishment of a divine Kingdom as imminent. They were millennialists. Millennial movements believe that within the pages of the Bible are specific clues about when and how the Second Coming will arrive. They also rely on what the Biblical scholar James Tabor calls "inspired interpreters," prophets equipped with the divine insight to interpret those clues and prepare their followers to be among God's chosen. Mormonism began, in the nineteenth century, as a millennial movement; its "inspired interpreter" was Joseph Smith. Jehovah's Witnesses began as a millennial movement, as did the Pentecostal Church.

Of all mainstream contemporary American churches, though, the Seventh-Day Adventists have the strongest millennial tradition. The Church—which has around eighteen million adherents worldwide—was formed by followers of

the early-nineteenth-century evangelist William Miller, who prophesied that the world would end in 1843. During the next century, the Adventist community produced one "inspired interpreter" after another. Ellen G. White laid down the foundations of the Church in the eighteen-sixties. Victor Houteff broke away to start the Davidian movement at Mount Carmel, and after he died, in 1955, the movement splintered again, creating the Branch Davidians, headed by Ben and then Lois Roden. Doyle came to Mount Carmel during the Roden era and stayed with the group as it underwent its final iteration, under the leadership of David Koresh.

David Koresh was born in Houston in 1959, to a fifteen-year-old single mother. He arrived at Mount Carmel at the age of twenty-two, pulling up to the retreat in a yellow Buick—another in the long line of disenchanted Seventh-Day Adventists in search of a purer church. Koresh was not slick or charismatic, in the conventional sense. He was thin, with long wavy dark hair and a gentle manner. He was good with engines and guns, and he played in a rock band. His formal education was limited. His vocabulary was full of words of his own invention. He wore dirty jeans, T-shirts, and sneakers, and, after study sessions, would gather some of the other young men and head into Waco, as another survivor's memoir, by David Thibodeau and Leon Whiteson put it, to "kick back, swallow some suds, play some tunes."

When it came to the Bible, however, he was without peer. Doyle had heard Koresh's predecessor, Lois Roden, speak and had "wrestled" with her message. But, the first few times he heard Koresh speak, he was convinced that "this was of God." Koresh, he writes, "made scripture come alive. He showed that all of the prophets in the Bible were writing more for our day than for their own time." Koresh would speak of obscure Old Testament kings like Ahaz and Hezekiah as if they were household names. He didn't preach. He threw out theories and ideas—inviting argument and discussion.

To the Branch Davidians, who walked and talked and dreamed about the Bible, this was intoxicating. "We thought of Mt. Carmel as a training ground and haven," Doyle writes. By the early nineteen-nineties, the community consisted of about a

hundred and fifty people—many of them sleeping in spartan dormitories. Doyle continues, "A lot of them came with their heads in the clouds or with cameras, thinking they were tourists, if it was their first time. David straightened them out pretty quick." Koresh told them, "You should come here to learn, that's why you came. If you want to do those other things, you might as well leave now and go have your fun. . . . But if you are here to study, you need to get your priorities straight." There were Bible studies at night, and smaller group studies during the day. As another Branch Davidian put it, "Lots of times, maybe he would say, 'I am tired of giving Bible studies to you guys. I wish you would learn Bible studies.' So everybody would hang around. And he'd say, 'What is it that you want? More Bible study?' And everyone would run and get their Bibles and come down. We might sit there for fifteen, nineteen hours, ten hours, six hours. It would depend, it was never a bore."

Koresh's focus, like that of many millennialists, was the Book of Revelation—in particular, the difficult passages concerning the Seven Seals. There God is described as holding a scroll, locked by seven seals, on which is written prophecies about the end of time. "Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?" the passage asks. The answer given is "the Lamb." But who was the Lamb? The question was a crucial one for the Branch Davidians, because they believed that whoever unlocked the seals and revealed the secrets written on those scrolls would set in motion the end of time. In "Armageddon in Waco," a book of essays about the Davidian conflict, James Tabor writes:

In Isaiah 48:14 we read, "The LORD has loved him: he will do his pleasure on Babylon, and his arm shall be on the Chaldeans." Koresh would ask, who is the "him," here, who is the "arm of Yahweh," who is to destroy Babylon? The text goes on to say, "I, even I, have spoken, yea, I have called him: I have brought him, and he shall make his way prosperous . . . and now the Lord GOD, and his Spirit hath sent me." Psalm 80:17 states "Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself." Who is this man of God's right hand?, Koresh would ask. He would painstakingly take his followers through these and other related sections of Scripture, repeatedly asserting that this mysterious figure could not have been Jesus of Nazareth, who fulfilled none of these prophecies.

Koresh's answer to the puzzle was simple: *he* was the Lamb. That's why he was

so good at making sense of the Seven Seals. This exalted station was how he justified his most controversial practice—taking numerous “spiritual wives” from among the daughters and wives of his followers. At least a couple of these “wives” were reportedly as young as twelve and thirteen, in a state where the legal age of marriage with parental consent was fourteen. Psalm 45 speaks of a great king, anointed by God, who marries many princesses and creates a mighty dynasty that will one day command the world, and Koresh argued that his “spiritual wives” had been taken in fulfillment of that prophecy.

Koresh’s status as “the Lamb” also explains the nature of the Branch Davidians’ relationship to him. The F.B.I., to justify its decision to bring about a sudden and violent end to the siege, believed that the Branch Davidians were dangerously in the thrall of Koresh; it feared a catastrophic act like the mass suicide, in 1978, in Guyana, of the cult leader Jim Jones and his followers in the People’s Temple. But the Davidians *weren’t* like the People’s Temple. Doyle’s memoir emerged from an oral-history project conducted by the religious-studies scholar Catherine Wessinger, who maintains that the People’s Temple was an example of the “fragile” subset of millennial groups: defensive and unstable, and willing to initiate great violence in response to an outside threat.

The Branch Davidians, however, were far from fragile. They engaged freely and happily with the world around them. Doyle went to California periodically to work for an audiotope-dubbing company and make money. Other Davidians started small businesses around Waco. Wayne Martin, a prominent member of the community, was a Harvard Law School graduate with a legal practice in town.

They did not worship Koresh, the way you would a deity. He was just the latest of many teachers, in a religious tradition that dated back half a century. “I’m just a messenger of the truth,” Koresh would say. “I’m like a Dixie cup that God will crumple up and throw away when he’s done with it.” Or, as his deputy, Steve Schneider, put it, “All of these places talk about a man in the last days that’s a sinner. He can do one thing, open up the words of the book, open up the Seven Seals. Can’t do any

miracles, doesn’t raise the dead, heal the sick, isn’t a psychic but . . . if people have questions about life and death, eternal life, no matter what the question is, he will show it in context from the book.”

There is a telling moment during the siege when Schneider is talking to an F.B.I. negotiator about an undercover A.T.F. agent who used the name Robert Gonzalez. The A.T.F. believed that the Branch Davidians—who ran a small business selling weapons at gun shows—had converted a batch of firearms from semiautomatic to automatic without the proper permits. Gonzalez’s job was to infiltrate the Davidian community and look for evidence. (He found none, a fact that—along with the A.T.F.’s bizarre decision to serve a warrant on Koresh by force, rather than arresting him on those numerous occasions when he ventured into town—loomed large in the many Waco postmortems.) Here is Schneider and a negotiator talking about what happened after the Davidians realized that Gonzalez was not who he said he was:

F.B.I.: Why didn’t you have a confrontation [with Gonzalez] and say look, I just . . . don’t appreciate you being here?

SCHNEIDER: Well . . . because here’s a possible guy, here’s a soul maybe, here’s someone like myself—

F.B.I.: Yeah. But he wasn’t there to have his soul saved, right?

SCHNEIDER: Well, who knows, though? You never can tell.

F.B.I.: Wait a minute. I know . . . I worked under cover years and years ago and I wasn’t there to have somebody save my soul.



The F.B.I. agent expected that the Davidians, like a fragile cult, would turn paranoid and defensive in the presence of a threat. He didn’t grasp that he was dealing with a very different kind of group—the sort whose idea of a good evening’s fun was a six-hour Bible study wrestling with a tricky passage of Revelation. It was a crucial misunderstanding, and would feed directly into the tragedy that was to come. The agent

continued: Did the Branch Davidians realize that Gonzalez, as a government investigator trained to uncover criminal evidence, was an unlikely prospect for conversion?

SCHNEIDER: I realize that. . . . [But], still, we love people so much, you give them the opportunity. . . . Even if it’s one out of a million, even if it’s that, whatever it might be, he’s still a person that was made, created by an authority above himself and we loved the guy. I mean . . . we spent enough time with him where we really do appreciate the man’s character and personality.

At one point during the siege, Koresh made a home video. He is sitting down, wearing a white tank top. He was wounded in the raid and looks worse for wear—thin and unkempt. Next to him is a young woman. On both their laps are small children, and Koresh announces that he wants to introduce the world to his family: “These children that I have are for a reason, and unless we really have the ear and the eyes to open ourselves up and understand the prophecies in a lot of the Seven Seals the explanation would seem almost foolish.”

A young boy with long blond hair comes into the frame. Koresh introduces him as Cyrus. He waves at the camera. Then a young girl climbs onto Koresh’s lap, followed by a boy named Bobby and a girl named Holly—and then, one after another, come a parade of toddlers and babies, accompanied by two other young women, one of whom looks no older than sixteen.

“This is my family, and no one is going to come in on top of my family and start pushing my family around. It is not going to happen,” Koresh declares. He puts on a pair of aviator sunglasses. “You come pointing guns in the direction of my wives and my kids, damn it. I’m going to meet you at the door every time.”

Doyle says very little about Koresh’s sexual practices in “A Journey to Waco,” even though his own daughter, Shari, became one of Koresh’s spiritual wives at the age of fourteen. In other memoirs of Davidian survivors, the issue is treated with similar reticence. But Koresh’s behavior seems to have been controversial even within Mount Carmel. It was discussed at length during Bible study. Some people left the Church over it. In a separate interview, Doyle recalled that, at first,

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"I wondered, I asked, is this God or is this horny old David?" But, in the end, he and the other Branch Davidians who stayed accepted the logic of it: if Koresh was indeed the Lamb, then it followed that he was entitled to the privileges promised to the Lamb in prophecy. It seems not to have mattered that this conclusion was at odds with virtually every social convention of modern life. No one became a Branch Davidian if he required the comfort of religious orthodoxy. One of Koresh's predecessors, George Roden, had multiple wives as well, arguing his case in an essay on the Mosaic law of polygamy. Roden's mother, Lois, had advanced an innovative argument that the Holy Spirit was feminine. From the movement's beginnings, the point of being a Davidian was to be different.

The second, more serious problem with the way the F.B.I. viewed the Branch Davidians was the fact that the agents could not accept that beliefs such as these—as eccentric as they were—were matters of principle for those within Mount Carmel. During the siege, two of the leaders of the F.B.I. team referred to Koresh's theology as "Bible-babble" and called him a "self-centered liar," "coward," "phony messiah," "child molester," "con-man," "cheap thug who interprets the Bible through the barrel of a gun," "delusional," "egotistical," and "fanatic." For another essay, published in "Armageddon in Waco," the religious scholar Nancy Ammerman interviewed many of the F.B.I. hostage negotiators involved, and she says that nearly all of them dismissed the religious beliefs of the Davidians: "For these men, David Koresh was a sociopath, and his followers were hostages. Religion was a convenient cover for Koresh's desire to control his followers and monopolize all the rewards for himself."

In the government's eyes, the Branch Davidians were a *threat*. The bureau trained spotlights on the property and set up giant speakers that blasted noise day and night—the sound of "rabbits being killed, warped-up music, Nancy Sinatra singing 'These Boots Are Made for Walking,' Tibetan monks chanting, Christmas carols, telephones ringing, reveille." Doyle writes, "I got to where I was only getting about an hour or two of sleep every twenty-four hours."

Outside the Mount Carmel com-

plex, the F.B.I. assembled what has been called probably the largest military force ever gathered against a civilian suspect in American history: ten Bradley tanks, two Abrams tanks, four combat-engineering vehicles, six hundred and sixty-eight agents in addition to six U.S. Customs officers, fifteen U.S. Army personnel, thirteen members of the Texas National Guard, thirty-one Texas Rangers, a hundred and thirty-one officers from the Texas Department of Public Safety, seventeen from the McLennan County sheriff's office, and eighteen Waco police, for a total of eight hundred and ninety-nine people. Their task, as they saw it, was to peel away the pretense—Koresh's posturing, his lies, his grandiosity—and compel him to take specific steps toward a resolution.

That is standard negotiation practice, which is based on the idea that, through sufficient patience and reason, a deranged husband or a cornered bank robber can be moved from emotionality to rationality. Negotiation is an exercise in pragmatism—in bargaining over a series of concrete objectives: *If you give up one of your weapons, I will bring you water*. When this approach failed, the F.B.I. threw up its hands. In bureau parlance, the situation at Mount Carmel became "non-negotiable." What more could the bureau have done? "I guess we could have fenced it off and called it a federal prison," Bob Ricks, one of the lead F.B.I. agents during the siege, said last year in an interview.

But, as the conflict-studies scholar Jayne Docherty argues, the F.B.I.'s approach was doomed from the outset. In "Learning Lessons from Waco"—one of the very best of the Mount Carmel retrospectives—Docherty points out that the techniques that work on bank robbers don't work on committed believers. There was no pragmatism hidden below a layer of posturing, lies, and grandiosity. Docherty uses Max Weber's typology to describe the Davidians. They were "value-rational"—that is to say, their rationality was organized around values, not goals. A value-rational person would accept his fourteen-year-old daughter's polygamous marriage, if he was convinced that it was in fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. Because the F.B.I. could not take the faith

of the Branch Davidians seriously, it had no meaningful way to communicate with them:

F.B.I.: What I'm saying is that if you could make an agreement with your people that they're walking out of there and you could—

KORESH: I am not going to tell them what to do. I never have and never will. I show them out of a book what God teaches. Then it's for them to decide.

F.B.I.: David, these kids need their parents, and we want everybody to be safe. How about the women? Can—you let them come out of there? . . .

KORESH: Yeah, but the thing of it is that if they wanted to, they, they could.

F.B.I.: Well, I, I think they feel like they can't because you don't want them to.

KORESH: No, no, no, no. Let's stop that now.

To the F.B.I. agent, Mount Carmel was a hostage situation, and the purpose of the "negotiation" was to get the man behind the barricade to release some of his captives. But Koresh saw his followers as his students. They were there of their own free will, to learn the prophecies of Revelation. How could he release people whom he was not holding in the first place?

On another occasion, the Davidians asked the F.B.I. to bring milk for their children, and the bureau insisted that some of the children be released before the supplies were handed over:

F.B.I.: We got the milk for you . . . we'll bring the milk down. We'll drop it off. . . . In return, we want four of your kids to come up, and we're going to give you the milk for the kids.

This is how negotiations are supposed to work: tit for tat. But what proposal could have been more offensive and perplexing to a Branch Davidian? The bureau wanted to separate children from their parents and extract them from the community to which they belonged in exchange for *milk*. "That doesn't make any sense," a Davidian named Kathy S. tells the negotiator. But the negotiator thinks she means that the terms of the deal aren't good enough:

F.B.I.: Listen. I'll, I'll get the milk to you for two kids.

Again, Kathy S. reacts angrily, and the negotiator gives up. He thinks the problem is that he's saddled with someone who just isn't reasonable:

F.B.I.: Kathy, perhaps we're wasting each other's time. All right? Put somebody else on.

K.S.: I mean, all you want, all you want to do is bargain?

F.B.I.: Kathy!

K.S.: Are you going to bargain with human lives?

F.B.I.: Kathy! I've told you what we'll do and, and if that's not agreeable to you, perhaps we're wasting one another's time. All right? . . . Why don't you put somebody else on, please?

K.S.: Look . . . there are babies here that need the milk. Are you that inhumane that you can't just send us the milk for not sending out kids, or sending out David, or sending out women?

F.B.I.: Our concern, our concern is for those children first and foremost and the rest of you also. All right? The children—

K.S.: So, your concern is that these babies get fed the milk they need?

F.B.I.: Kathy.

K.S.: It doesn't sound like you are concerned.

Even at the beginning of the siege, in the first call that Koresh made after the A.T.F. attack, the fundamental misunderstanding between those inside and those outside Mount Carmel was plain. Koresh telephoned Larry Lynch, in the local sheriff's office, and—while the battle outside raged—insisted on talking about the Seven Seals:

KORESH: In the prophecies—

LYNCH: All right.

KORESH: it says—

LYNCH: Let me, can I interrupt you for a minute?

KORESH: Sure.

LYNCH: All right, we can talk theology. But right now—

What Lynch means is that *right now* there are dead and wounded bodies scattered across the Mount Carmel property and a gunfight is going on between federal agents and Koresh's followers. For those who don't take the Bible seriously, talking about Scripture when there is a battle going on seems like an evasion. For those who do, however, it makes perfect sense:

KORESH: No, this is life. This is life and death!

LYNCH: Okay.

KORESH: Theology—

LYNCH: That's what I'm talking about.

KORESH: is life and death.

It is useful to compare the Branch Davidians with the Mormons of the mid-nineteenth century. The Mormons were vilified in those years in large part because Joseph Smith believed in polygamy. But the Cornell historian R. Laurence Moore, in his classic book "Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans," points out that the moral hysteria over the Mormons was misplaced. The Mormons were quin-



"I'm working harder than I ever have, but all I get out of it is larger and larger paychecks."

tessential Americans. "Like the Puritans before them, the Mormons linked disciplined labor with religious duty," Moore writes. "Mormon culture promoted all the virtues usually associated with the formation of middle-class consciousness—thrift, the denial of immediate gratification, and strict control over one's passions." Polygamy, the practice that so excited popular passions, was of little importance to the Church: "First, the vast majority of nineteenth century Mormons did not practice polygamy, and many of them found it distasteful, at least as a way of conducting their own lives. Second, those who did practice plural marriage scarcely exhibited the lascivious behavior made familiar in anti-Mormon literature. Plural wives were commonly the widowed or unmarried sisters of the original wife."

So why were nineteenth-century Americans so upset with the Mormons? Moore's answer is that Americans thought the Mormons were different from them because the Mormons themselves "said they were different and because their claims, frequently advanced in the most obnoxious way possible, prompted others

to agree and to treat them as such." In order to give his followers a sense of identity and resilience, Joseph Smith "required them to maintain certain fictions of cultural apartness." Moore describes this as a very American pattern. Countless religious innovators over the years have played the game of establishing an identity for themselves by accentuating their otherness. Koresh faced the same problem, and he, too, made his claims, at least in the eyes of the outside world, "in the most obnoxious way possible."

The risks of such a strategy are obvious. Mainstream American society finds it easiest to be tolerant when the outsider chooses to minimize the differences that separate him from the majority. The country club opens its doors to Jews. The university welcomes African-Americans. Heterosexuals extend the privilege of marriage to the gay community. Whenever these liberal feats are accomplished, we congratulate ourselves. But it is not exactly a major moral accomplishment for WASPY golfers to accept Jews who have decided that they, too, wish to play golf. It is a much harder form of tolerance to accept an

outsider group that chooses to *maximize* its differences from the broader culture. And the lesson of Clive Doyle's memoir—and the battle of Mount Carmel—is that Americans aren't very good at respecting the freedom of others to be so obnoxiously different. Many Mormons, incidentally, would say the same thing. When the Mormons settled in Nauvoo, Illinois, local public opinion turned against them. Joseph Smith was charged with perjury and adultery, then arrested for inciting a riot. While he was in custody awaiting trial, in 1844, an armed mob stormed the prison and shot him dead.

Not long after the Waco siege began, James Tabor, the Biblical scholar, heard David Koresh on CNN talking about the Seven Seals. Tabor is an expert on Biblical apocalypticism and recognized the Branch Davidians for what they were—a community immersed in the world of the Old Testament prophets. He contacted a fellow religious scholar, Philip Arnold, and together they went to the F.B.I. “It became clear to me that neither the officials in charge nor the media who were sensationally reporting the sexual escapades of David Koresh had a clue about the biblical world which this group inhabited,” Tabor writes, in an essay about his role in the Mount Carmel conflict. “I realized that in order to deal with David Koresh, and to have any chance for a peaceful resolution of the Waco situation, one would have to understand and make use of these biblical texts.”

Arnold and Tabor began long discussions with Livingstone Fagan, a Branch Davidian who had been sent out of Mount Carmel early in the siege to act as a spokesman. Fagan was a Jamaican-born Brit, and one of the community's scholars—a man known for greeting others with the very English “Hello, Livingstone Fagan here. Shall we study?” Fagan helped Tabor and Arnold understand that Mount Carmel's adherents thought they were living through the “fifth seal”—a late stage in the end of time, during which believers are asked to suffer through a round of bloodshed, to “wait a little season,” and then to suffer a second round.

This was why the Davidians wouldn't leave. They had been through the first round of violence, with the initial A.T.F. raid. Now they were doing as they believed the Bible compelled them to do—waiting.

“We were fascinated by the way in which the literal words of this text dominated the entire situation,” Tabor writes. But they also saw the peril ahead—the promised second round of bloodshed. “Might they not provoke a violent end to things simply because they felt it was the predetermined will of God, moving things along to the sixth seal, which was the great Judgment Day of God?” Tabor asks.

Koresh needed another way to make sense of the prophecies in the Book of Revelation, so that a violent end was not preordained. Tabor and Arnold made a tape—a long, technical discussion of an alternative reading of Revelation—aired it on the radio, and sent it to Koresh. Koresh listened and was persuaded. He had been called a liar, a child molester, a con man, and a phony messiah. He had been invited to treat his children like bargaining chips and his followers like hostages. But now someone was taking his beliefs seriously. “I am presently being permitted to document in structured form the decoded messages of the seven seals,” he wrote back. “Upon the completion of this task, I will be freed of my waiting period. . . . As soon as I can see that people like Jim Tabor and Phil Arnold have a copy, I will come out and then you can do your thing with this beast.”

Inside Mount Carmel, Doyle writes, there was rejoicing. Soon they would all come out together, and the ordeal would be over. The F.B.I., however, remained skeptical. “Then what's next?” one of the agents in charge allegedly said. “He's going to write his memoirs?” The negotiators quizzed Koresh, again and again:

F.B.I.: Now listen. Let's get back to the point in hand. This ah—you know—the writing of the seals. Ok. You've got to do that in there, and its gonna take you *x* amount of time. But—just tell me this, David—are you saying that when you finish that manuscript—

KORESH: Then I'm not bound any longer.

F.B.I.: No. But see, that doesn't answer the question.

KORESH: Then I'll be out—yes—definitely.

F.B.I.: I know you'll be out. But that could mean a lot of things, David.

KORESH: I'll be in custody in the jailhouse.

The negotiator doesn't believe him. The conversation goes on—and on:

F.B.I.: I know—I know that some point in time that's true. But I'm getting from you—I'm asking you, “When that is finished, are you telling me that you are coming out the next day, or two hours after you send that out or what?”

That conversation took place on Friday, April 16th. Doyle says that he thinks Koresh would have finished the manuscript within two weeks. The F.B.I. waited three days. By the morning of April 19th, the Feds had had enough. The F.B.I.'s tanks rumbled up to the Mount Carmel buildings, and punched holes in the walls with their mechanical arms. Some four hundred cannisters of CS gas—which can be flammable under certain conditions—were shot into enclosed spaces lit by candles and Coleman lanterns. Walls were rammed, sending huge chunks of concrete crashing down on those huddled inside. Doyle says that he crouched on the chapel floor, between the pews, trying to escape the tear gas. Someone yelled that a fire had started. He and a group of nine or ten people had been clustered in a passage at the back of the chapel when, suddenly, he says, everything turned black. He was hit by a wave of unbearable heat, and fell to the floor. He prayed to God for a miracle. He saw a hole in the wall, and crawled toward it.

Outside, the F.B.I. agents manning the loudspeaker system were chanting: “David, you have had your fifteen minutes of fame. [Koresh] is finished. He is no longer the Messiah.” Doyle continues, “I looked at myself. My jacket was melting all over me and smoking. The skin was rolling off my hands. It was not blistering, it was just rolling off. I turned around and looked at the hole, and it was a big mass of flames. The thought that went through my head was: No one is coming out of there now.”

In the fire, Koresh and seventy-three others perished, including twenty-five children. Doyle writes:

I came out the little driveway on the side of the building and got onto the main driveway that ran along the front of the building. As I turned the corner . . . one of the agents outside a tank started screaming at me to come over to him. My left ankle was all blistered, the skin was rolling off my hands, and my face was burned down the right side of my neck where the mask had been. I guess I took the mask off after I got out. It was kind of melting onto my face. . . . He was cussing me out, telling me if I made a false move he was going to blow my so-and-so head off. But he said: you're gonna remember this day for the rest of your life. I thought: at least that is a true statement. ♦

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A conversation with Malcolm Gladwell.

WHAT I'VE LEARNED

BY JENNY ALLEN

I am certainly not going *back into the house* where something bad or creepy has happened to me already.

I am never going to a *carnival* or a *fair*, particularly if there is *happy calliope music* playing.

You will not find me owning, or spending any time with, a *ventriloquist's dummy*, or the kind of *doll that "walks" and "talks."*

the-station rule, and find myself in the box being brutally interrogated by the police, I will certainly not be dumb enough to *accept refreshments*, particularly a *can of soda*. How many times do we have to learn that a can of soda is a transparent effort to get DNA from saliva?

If someone *poisons my dog* or other pet and *leaves its corpse* on my front

know that the guys who did it will force the priest who molested them as children—who has to do everything they say so they won't tell on him—to hide my corpse under the parish house, depriving my loved ones of the small comfort of *having a body to bury*.

Speaking of bars, I am never going into a cocktail lounge with a *giant fish tank*. I will end up falling into it somehow, and having to swim around in my clothes, surprising and amusing the patrons but disgracing and humiliating myself.

I am never going to trust any contemporary artist, or anyone in the *down-town art scene*. They are snooty and always think they're so great, which makes them think they can get away with anything, including murdering people. If there is a murder, everyone knows that the artist or the la-di-da gallery owner did it, and I do not want the murdered person to be me.

I am never going to remain sitting or standing next to anyone who is *coughing innocently*. There are no innocent coughs, only ones that signal *imminent pandemics*. I am going to be particularly wary of getting anywhere near *coughing children*, as their cute looks will make me think, wrongly, that they could not possibly be incubating a new kind of plague.

Vis à vis allowing people to wire me to machines that will implant ideas in my subconscious by *manipulating my dreams*: Will I do this? No, thank you, I will not. I know that the end result will be my inability to tell the difference between my dreams and my real life, and I have enough trouble with this already.

Exception: if the idea that is being implanted involves my diving into a *giant chocolate cake* or having *intimate relations with George Clooney*, I will do this.

I think you may be able at this point to guess my position on *camping in the woods* with friends. Camping in the woods with friends would be like my sending out engraved invitations that say, "Come and get me, crazy people. I'm just here in front of the campfire, listening to my friends tell scary stories about crazy people in the woods, and laughing off the stories, so that when you do get me it will serve me right." No, no sir, *nyet*. No camping. Not going. ♦



If I become an astronaut, am I leaving the spaceship under any circumstances? No, I am not—not to fix anything on the outside of the spaceship while tethered to it by one *not-that-strong cord*; not to explore the terrain of the planet we land on, a dusty place that looks like it has *no life-forms* but surely will have, ones that *do not wish me well*.

If I get arrested for something, in no way am I accepting the arresting detectives' invitation to "*just go down to the station*" with them to "*have a chat*." Everybody knows what happens when you go down to the station to have a chat—they put you in "the box," and grill you for hours, and before you know it you have confessed to some horrible crime you didn't commit—and yet so many people go anyway. Not I. If they want to have a chat, we will go directly to *my lawyer's office*, with my lawyer doing all the talking.

If I forget my no-going-down-to-

porch, I will not mistake this for an isolated, freak event, and will instead know that it is merely the beginning of a cascade of *progressively more awful* events.

I am never going to go into a *parking garage* at night. Correction: I am never going to go into a parking garage, period. Ditto any apartment building's *basement laundry room*.

If I find that *pieces of furniture* have relocated themselves around my house, I will not "Gaslight" myself by thinking, Oh, maybe I forgot I moved them, when it's all too obvious that they have been moved by *paranormal activity*.

I am never going into a *raffish bar*, especially one with a name like *O'Malley's* or *O'Anything's*. Nothing good will happen to me in there, and whatever does happen to me will probably happen in the disgusting ladies' room.

If I am reckless and go in anyway and the worst happens (i.e., I'm killed by the Westies or some other gang), I will

MY FRIEND, STALIN'S DAUGHTER

The complicated life of Svetlana Alliluyeva.

BY NICHOLAS THOMPSON

*In a childhood game, she would issue orders to her father. He'd answer, "I obey."*

On April 21, 1967, Svetlana Alliluyeva, the daughter of Joseph Stalin, bounded down the stairs of a Swissair plane at Kennedy Airport. She was forty-one years old and wore an elegant white double-breasted blazer. "Hello there, everybody!" she exclaimed to the crowd of reporters on the tarmac. "I am very happy to be here."

Svetlana immediately became the Cold War's most famous defector. She was the only living child of Stalin, who had died in 1953, and she had been known as "the little princess of the Kremlin." Until a few months earlier, she had never left the Soviet Union. But, at Kennedy, she talked of the freedom and opportunity that she expected to find in America. She was coquettish

and funny. She spoke fluent English. The *Times* published more than a dozen stories about her arrival. The C.I.A. official who first interviewed her noted in a memo that "our own preconceived notions of what Stalin's daughter must be like—just didn't let us believe that this nice, pleasant, attractive, middle-aged hausfrau could possibly be who she claimed to be."

Svetlana later wrote, "My first impression of America was of the magnificent Long Island highways." The land was vast, and the people smiled. After half a lifetime of Communism, she felt "able to fly out free, like a bird." A few days after her arrival, she gave a press conference at the Plaza Hotel that was attended by four hundred reporters. One

asked if she planned to apply for citizenship. "Before the marriage it should be love," she responded. "So if I will love this country and this country will love me, then the marriage will be settled."

George Kennan, a former ambassador to the Soviet Union and one of America's foremost experts on Russia, had helped her to defect, and she settled in Princeton, where he lived. In the fall of 1967, with Kennan's help she published "Twenty Letters to a Friend," which described her family's tragic history through a series of letters to the physicist Fyodor Volkenstein. The message of the book, it seemed, was that being one of Stalin's relatives was nearly as terrible as being one of his subjects. Two years later, she published "Only One Year," a memoir about the months before and after her decision to flee the Soviet Union. In *The New Yorker*, Edmund Wilson wrote breathlessly that it had "the boldness and the passion of 'Doctor Zhivago.'" The books sold well, and they made her rich. The K.G.B. gave her the nickname Kukulushka, which means "cuckoo bird."

But the public's fascination with Svetlana didn't last long. She began to decline interviews, and the press started to lose interest in her: her defection was special, but her presence was not. She kept writing, but her work no longer found publishers in the United States. The fragments of information that emerged suggested that her life had become lonely and unpleasant. In 1985, *Time* published a story in which she was described as isolated, overweight, vindictive, imperious, and violent. "Her ultimate quarrel was with her father, whom she fatefully resembled," the author wrote.

By the time the Cold War ended, Svetlana had almost completely disappeared from public view. In the next twenty years, the *Times* published only one story about her, a five-paragraph squib, in 1992, declaring that she "is living in obscurity in a charity hostel."

In 2006, while researching Kennan and the Cold War for a book, I decided to write to Svetlana Alliluyeva. According to Wikipedia, she lived in Wisconsin, and a public-records search turned up someone with her name. It seemed unlikely that the letter would reach her, and, if it did, that she'd respond, but, a week later, a thick envelope arrived,

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holding six tightly folded pages marked “personal and confidential”:

I have to apologize—first of all—for the handwritten letter—my truly conservative aversion to all machinery (including Internet, TV, microwave oven, etc. etc. . . .). I know how bad is my crochety handwriting—bad for all young ones, so bad for secretaries too. Alas—this is all I can do for you and for anybody!

She was eager to discuss Kennan:

I’d love to answer all your Qs about the Ambassador G. F. Kennan—truly the Great American. He so generously had helped me in 1967. He—then—wanted me to lecture on political modern history in Princeton, N.J. . . . but I’d declined. Political history was what indeed my father would love to see me excel in.

She had made some bad decisions, she wrote, and now she was confined to a home for elderly women:

However much has been told—and written—about me—all lies and libels! . . . Next April (22nd) will be my 40 years in USA which started with 2 best-sellers, and now came to the quiet life on a monthly check from SSI—thanks be to FDR for the Welfare! . . . I am still here in USA—as a guest after all 40 years—never quite “at home” here.

We began a correspondence about Kennan, who helped formulate America’s early Cold War policy of contain-

ment and then became one of its most eloquent critics. My book was called “The Hawk and the Dove,” and he was the dove. I had been researching it for a year and a half, and hadn’t yet met anyone who had observed Kennan’s personality as astutely as Svetlana had.

I wrote to her about twice a month, and eventually I started to ask about her life, too. Sometimes she replied in a chaotic cursive. At other times, she typed, annotating the text with underlining, insertions, and sketches of herself pushing a walker, which she referred to as her “four-wheel drive.” She had a vexed relationship with her caps-lock key. A year after we began corresponding, I went to visit her.

Svetlana, who was then eighty-one years old, lived in a senior citizens’ center in Spring Green, Wisconsin, a town of sixteen hundred people. When we met, she was dressed in baggy gray sweatpants and sunglasses, which she wore because of a recent cataract operation. She was short and compact, and her once red hair had turned white and had started to thin. Scoliosis had given her a hunch, and she used a cane. She showed me her one-bedroom apartment on the second floor,

and the little desk by a window where her typewriter stood. Her bookshelf included old *National Geographic* videos, maps of California, Balinese batiks, Hemingway novels, and the Russian-English dictionary that her father had used.

Svetlana was welcoming, and she spoke with the energy of someone who hadn’t told her story in a long time. After a few hours, she wanted to take a walk. I offered my arm as we approached the stairs, but she brushed it away. We headed down a quiet street, to a garage sale, where a man in a Harley-Davidson T-shirt was selling a small cast-iron bookshelf. He asked Svetlana if she wanted to buy it. She couldn’t, she said. She had only twenty-five dollars until the first of the month, when her welfare check came. But maybe he could stash it for her until then?

The man protested, but she persuaded him. Then we started to walk away. “*Sprechen Sie Deutsch?*” the man called out. She trudged onward, without looking back. “People think that I have a German accent, and I usually say, ‘Yes, I had a German grandmother,’” she said, breaking into a laugh.

In the early eighteen-nineties, when Svetlana’s German grandmother, Olga, was a teen-ager, she climbed out of a window in her home in Georgia to elope. Olga’s daughter, Nadya Alliluyeva, when she was sixteen, ran off with Joseph Stalin, a thirty-eight-year-old seminarian, poet, and family friend who had become a revolutionary leader.

Stalin had a son, Yakov, from a previous marriage, and he and Alliluyeva had two more children, a boy named Vasily and Svetlana, who was Stalin’s favorite. Throughout her youth, they played a game in which she would send short letters to him, bossing him about: “I order you to take me to the theatre”; “I order you to let me go to the movies.” He would write back: “I obey,” “I submit,” or “It will be done.” He called her “my little housekeeper,” and signed off, “From Setanka-Housekeeper’s wretched Secretary, the poor peasant.”

Nadya died when Svetlana was six—from appendicitis, she was told. But when Svetlana was fifteen she was home one day reading Western magazines to practice her English and came across an article about her father, which noted that Nadya had committed suicide. Olga confirmed it, and told Svetlana that she



“I think we need a border fence between Fantasy Land and Sexual-Fantasy Land.”

had warned Nadya not to marry Stalin. In "Twenty Letters to a Friend," Svetlana wrote, "The whole thing nearly drove me out of my mind. Something in me was destroyed. I was no longer able to obey the word and will of my father."

The following year, Svetlana, too, fell in love with a thirty-eight-year-old man, a Jewish filmmaker and journalist named Aleksei Kapler. The romance began in the late fall of 1942, during the Nazi invasion of Russia. Kapler and Svetlana met at a film screening; the next time they saw each other, they danced the fox-trot and he asked her why she seemed sad. It was, she said, the tenth anniversary of her mother's death. Kapler gave Svetlana a banned translation of "For Whom the Bell Tolls" and his annotated copy of "Russian Poetry of the Twentieth Century." They watched the Disney movie "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" together.

Svetlana had a premonition that the relationship would end badly. Her brother Vasily, she told me, had always been jealous of the attention she received from their father, and he now told Stalin that Kapler had introduced her to something more than just Hemingway. Stalin confronted Svetlana in her bedroom: "Take a look at yourself. Who'd want you? You fool!" He then yelled at Svetlana for having sex with Kapler while there was a war going on. The accusation was false, but Kapler was arrested and sent to the Vorkuta labor camp, in the Arctic Circle. It was the first time, Svetlana told me, that she realized that her father had the power to send someone to prison.

Svetlana enrolled at Moscow State University, where she met and then married a Jewish classmate named Grigory Morozov. It was the only way she could escape the Kremlin, she believed, and her father, preoccupied with the war, grudgingly approved. "Go and marry him, but I will never meet your Jew," she told me that he said. Their first child, Iosif, was born just as the Nazis surrendered. Morozov wanted many more children, but Svetlana, who had literary ambitions, wanted to finish school. Iosif's birth was followed by three abortions and a miscarriage. "I was a pale, sickly, green woman," Svetlana told me. She divorced Morozov and then followed her two acts of romantic rebellion with one of obedience, mar-

rying Yuri Zhdanov, the son of one of her father's closest confidants. But, she said, "by the time I became a married adult, my father had lost all interest in me." In 1950, just before the Korean War broke out, she gave birth to a girl named Yekaterina. Svetlana found her new husband cold and uninteresting, and she soon divorced him. She finished school, and she began a career lecturing and translating books from English into Russian.

In March, 1953, Stalin had a stroke. Svetlana wrote, "The death agony was horrible. He literally choked to death as we watched. At what seemed the very last moment, he suddenly opened his eyes and cast a glance over everyone in the room. It was a terrible glance, insane or perhaps angry, and full of the fear of death."

His suffering, she wrote, came because "God grants an easy death only to the just." But she still loved him. As his body was removed for autopsy, she wrote, "It was the first time I had seen my father naked. It was a beautiful body. It didn't look old or as if he'd been sick at all. . . . I realized that the body that had given me life no longer had life or breath in it, yet I would go on living."

That June, Aleksei Kapler returned from the Gulag. A year later, he and Svetlana happened to attend the same writers' conference. "There was very bright light in the foyer," Svetlana told me, smiling and closing her eyes, as she often did when retreating into memory. "We just walked into each other."

His hair had turned white, but she thought this only made him more handsome. Although Kapler was married, they soon became lovers. "It's a miracle that I can call you," he would say. To her, it was a miracle that he had forgiven her for her father's crimes. Svetlana wanted Kapler to divorce his wife, but he wanted only an affair. Never one to concede defeat, Svetlana confronted Kapler's wife one night at a theatre. "That was the end of my second marriage, the end of that second part of my life with Sveta," Kapler later told the writer Enzo Biagi.

The third part started in 1956, when Svetlana was at Moscow State University, teaching a course on the hero in the Soviet novel. That year, Nikita Khrushchev delivered the so-called "secret speech," a four-hour lecture in which he detailed Stalin's crimes. After the speech,

Kapler's third wife—the poet Yulia Drunina, whose work Svetlana described to me as "mediocre"—suggested that he give her a sympathetic call. Svetlana and the couple exchanged visits and attended parties together. But Svetlana, who couldn't bear to see Kapler with another woman, sent him a nasty letter about his wife. He replied in anger, and they never saw each other again. Fifty-two years later, Svetlana told me that Kapler remained the one true love of her life.

In 1963, Svetlana was thirty-seven years old and living with her children in Moscow. The family she'd grown up with was gone: her older half brother, Yakov, had died in a German prisoner-of-war camp, and Vasily had recently drunk himself to death. She had changed her last name to Alliluyeva, because she could not tolerate the sound of "Stalin." In October, she had her tonsils taken out and was recovering in a Moscow hospital when she met Brajesh Singh, a short Indian man, who had just had nasal polyps removed. He was a Communist who had come to Moscow for medical treatment. The two convalescents began to talk about a book by Rabindranath Tagore that Svetlana had found in the hospital's library.

Singh was the most peaceful man Svetlana had ever known. He protested when the hospital wanted to kill the leeches they had used in his treatment, and he opened windows to let flies escape. When she told him who her father was, he exclaimed "Oh!" and never mentioned it again.

They spent a month together in Sochi, by the Black Sea, before Singh had to return to India. A year and a half later, after delays from the Soviet and the Indian bureaucracies, Singh returned to Moscow. He and Svetlana filed papers to get married, but the next day she was summoned to her father's old office in the Kremlin to meet with Alexei Kosygin, the Soviet Premier. The marriage was immoral and impossible, Svetlana recalled him saying: "Hindus treat women badly."

Singh had long suffered from respiratory problems. When he died, in 1966, Svetlana insisted that she be allowed to take his ashes back to India. It was her first trip outside the Soviet Union and, she said later, the one moment in her life when she felt blissful. When I visited her in Wisconsin, she pulled out some

black-and-white photographs and laid them on her cluttered glass coffee table: Singh's family's large white house, surrounded by cacti the height of trees; a sparse bedroom with large windows, flowing drapes, and a wooden bed; a man on a camel on the banks of the Ganges. "India had really tremendous impact on me—on my thinking, on my everything," she told me.

On March 6, 1967, two days before Svetlana's return flight to the U.S.S.R., she packed her suitcase and sneaked over to the American Embassy, where she announced that she was Svetlana Alliluyeva, Stalin's daughter. "*The Stalin?*" one of the diplomats asked. Robert Rayle, the C.I.A. official in India who handled her case, told me that the agency had no record of her existence, but the Americans decided to spirit her out of the country before the Soviets realized that she was missing. That night, Svetlana took the first available flight, which happened to be heading to Rome. A few days later, she was flown to Geneva. "She is the most completely coöperative defector I have ever met," Rayle wired to Washington. At one point, Rayle told me, the C.I.A. administered an I.Q. test; Svetlana's score was "off the charts."

Iosif and Yekaterina, twenty-one and sixteen, were left at the Moscow airport, waiting for their mother. Three days later, she sent them a long letter. Soviet Communism had failed as an economic system and as a moral idea. She couldn't live under it. "With our one hand we try to catch the moon itself, but with another one we are obliged to dig out potatoes the same way it was done a hundred years ago," she wrote. She urged Iosif to study medicine and Yekaterina to continue to pursue science. "Please, keep peace in your hearts. I am only doing what my conscience orders me to do."

When Iosif responded, in April, he wrote:

You must admit that after what you have done, your advice from afar to take courage, to stick together, not to lose heart, and not let go of Katie, was, to say the least, strange. . . . I consider that by your action you have cut yourself off from us.

After Svetlana settled in Princeton, she began hearing from Olgivanna Lloyd Wright, the widow of Frank Lloyd Wright. She urged Svetlana to visit the Taliesin Fellowship, the com-

munity dedicated to his memory, which had outposts in Wisconsin and Arizona. Olgivanna told her that she had a daughter, also named Svetlana, who had died in a car crash twenty-three years earlier. Svetlana Alliluyeva thought that perhaps Olgivanna would remind her of her own mother.

In March, 1970, Svetlana arrived in Scottsdale, a warm city that smelled of orange blossom. On her first day at Taliesin West, the Wright compound,



she was summoned to a formal dinner, where she found herself at a long, polished bright-red table. Olgivanna, it turned out, believed that Svetlana was a reincarnation of her daughter. Her hope was that this new Svetlana would marry the previous one's widower—Wesley Peters, a tall man in a sand-colored tuxedo and a ruffled lavender shirt, who was seated beside her.

Svetlana was immediately taken with Peters, a handsome architect best known for having led the construction of the Guggenheim Museum a decade earlier. The next day, the two went for a drive in his Cadillac. "I suddenly felt complete security and peace near this man," Svetlana said. Three weeks later, they were married.

Svetlana and Wes lived together contentedly for a short time in his apartment in the compound in Scottsdale, and then in Spring Green, Wisconsin, where the Wright fellowship relocated for the summers. She told me once that he was the first man with whom she had enjoyed sex. But life at Taliesin, Svetlana wrote, required complete subservience to Olgivanna. Residents were expected to flatter her, to confess their sins to her, and never to challenge her. Three months after Svetlana's arrival, she wrote to Kennan, "I feel sad, that again—as long ago in my native cruel Russia, I have to force myself to silence, force myself to false behavior, to hide my true thoughts, and to bend my head down before the fist

of false authority. All that is too damn sad. But I shall survive."

At the age of forty-four, Svetlana became pregnant. Olgivanna found children distracting and difficult. According to Svetlana, she worried that they would disrupt her communication with the dead, and she demanded that Svetlana have an abortion. Svetlana refused, and, in May, 1971, she gave birth to a daughter, whom she named Olga, after her maternal grandmother. Her third child came more than two decades after the two she had left behind—and with whom she no longer had any contact. Soon after Olga's birth, Svetlana moved out of the compound. Wes, whose devotion to his work exceeded his devotion to his wife, chose to stay behind. "Boy, what I had to endure in my lifetime," Svetlana wrote to me. "But, surely, a dictator-Father was somewhat more 'normal,' in my view, than this woman-dictator."

For the first forty-five years of Svetlana's life, money wasn't a problem. Her father hadn't used it, didn't need it, and didn't care about it. In her youth, Svetlana was taken care of by the state. When she first came to America, she was made wealthy by her books. But she spent too much on herself, Olgivanna demanded money to finance Taliesin, and Wes was a spendthrift. After they married, Svetlana paid off his vast debts. Then she gave him money to start an ill-fated cattle farm. After Svetlana and Wes agreed to divorce, her lawyer, Walter Pozen, Kennan's son-in-law, spent a year working on a settlement. One day, his phone rang in the middle of the night.

"I don't want to sign the agreement," he recalls her saying. She was still in love with Peters and had no desire to take anything from him.

"You can't buy him back," Pozen snapped. Svetlana hung up. She didn't get her money, and it was five years before she spoke to Pozen again.

After Taliesin, Svetlana returned to Princeton. Men continued to fall for her, but her life was unsettled in every way. She started to move around constantly: from New Jersey to California and back again. "Mom used to move around every year, sometimes twice in a year," Olga told me. "She always had to be in a new place by November, when her mother died." Her friends kept abandon-

ing her, Svetlana wrote, so she “had to go on blindly alone. Again I made mistakes, led by estate agents, by a stray conversation, by various moods.” Then, in the early eighties, in part because she believed that she could find a better school for Olga, Svetlana moved to England.

She and Kennan continued to write to each other regularly. But, in the late seventies, her tone changed. She was angry that Kennan hadn’t sufficiently promoted her books, and that the lawyers he hired had assigned the copyright of the English version of “Twenty Letters” to Priscilla Johnson McMillan, its translator. Svetlana believed that all she needed to do in order to make money was print more copies, and that not having the copyright prevented her from doing so.

To each rant, Kennan responded with restraint and, eventually, Svetlana would apologize. But then she would, once again, remind Kennan of what she considered to be his many flaws:

April 28, 1976

Dear George, you are unhappy—and this is very obvious—because you constantly betray yourself.

You constantly do not allow yourself to be yourself. You’ve put yourself—and all your life—into the pattern of (pardon me, please!) that deadly Presbyterian Righteousness which looks “good” only in pronouncements from the pulpit.

Sept. 5, 1977

Anyway, I did not cry over someone’s letter for many years, yet yours put me to tears. I know that nobody in the whole world is able to understand my strange life better than you do; and no one really cares. But for some strange reason, you do.

Aug. 4, 1979

How sad, indeed, that after all these years which we have all begun together, friendships are shuttered, and even memories of the past seems to differ so much. . . . Good-bye, George. I feel sorry that you have associated yourself with my name for such a long time.

Jan. 27, 1983

They tricked me. . . . I thought I am receiving an advance. IN FACT I sold ALL MY RIGHTS to my own book. . . . You NEVER wanted to listen to truth, because you only liked to hear pleasantries of all sorts. I tried desperately with many various lawyers to get my rights back—because damn it I AM THE AUTHOR.

Olga was eleven before she learned who her grandfather was. One day, paparazzi showed up at her school in England and an administrator had to smuggle her out in her car, hidden under blankets. That night, her mother

explained it all. “It was a lot to process,” Olga told me. “But there was always a lot to process with Mom.”

The next year, Svetlana was at home in the apartment that she and Olga shared, near the Cambridge University Botanic Garden, when the phone rang.

“Mama, is that you?” a man said in Russian. It was Iosif, calling for the first time in fifteen years. Svetlana froze, and then told him how much his voice had changed.

“You, too—you speak like a foreign tourist,” he said.

They talked for a few minutes, and then he said, “Call me whenever you want!” To Svetlana, this implied that the new Soviet leader, Yuri Andropov, had approved the phone call. “I knew my son too well to imagine this was just his courageous intention,” she later wrote.

They talked from time to time, and Svetlana began to think about returning to the Soviet Union. Iosif, who was now a cardiologist, and Yekaterina, who was a geologist, each had a child. Olga could meet her half siblings and her cousins. “The more my mind realized what a shock my trip to the U.S.S.R. would be for everyone, the more my heart insisted on it,” she wrote.

In October, 1984, she met Iosif at the Sovietsky Hotel, in Moscow. She passed through the revolving doors, and he

strode across the wide marble floor to greet her. But everything seemed tense and awkward. Svetlana noticed a woman she considered to be ugly and old, and was startled to learn that it was her son’s wife. Iosif refused to engage with his American-born half sister. At dinner, Svetlana held her son’s hand in hers, but it felt alien. “It used to be long and slim, with beautiful fingers, a refined hand,” she wrote in “A Book for Granddaughters,” an unpublished account of this period, which she sent to me. “Now the fingers have become plumper and shorter—is such a thing possible at all?”

Yekaterina, working in Kamchatka, didn’t come. A few months later, she sent a single-page letter to her mother, declaring that she “never forgives,” that she “never could forgive,” and that she did “not want to forgive.” “Then, in language worthy of a *Pravda* editorial, I was accused of every kind of mortal sin against the beloved motherland,” Svetlana wrote. The letter ended with the Latin “*Dixit*”—“She has spoken.”

The Soviet leaders boasted of Svetlana’s return, but she was miserable there. When approached by reporters on the street, she swore at them in frustration. At a formal press conference, she seemed ill-tempered and ill-mannered. “In those cold autumn days of 1984 in Moscow, I felt as if I was sinking into





"Where once there was one sandwich—now there are two!"

dark waters—as it is sometimes in a nightmare,” she wrote. Even the architecture seemed grimly oppressive. Olga remembers that her relatives were disappointed that she and her mother hadn’t returned with suitcases full of VCRs and international perfume. A month after her arrival, during a sleepless night, Svetlana had a vision of Georgia, her parents’ birthplace. Soon afterward, she and Olga flew to Tbilisi.

She felt more at ease there, but her father haunted her in a new way. “My greatest burden lay in the need of everyone to tell me ‘what a great man’ my father was: some accompanied the words with tears, others with hugs and kisses,” she wrote. “It was a torture for me. I could not tell them how complex were my thoughts about my father.”

Olga felt the same way. “It was like I was made out of cotton candy; everyone was just swooping me up and nurturing me,” she said. “People were crying at the sight of my mother and me.”

The affection was oppressive, and within a year Svetlana decided that she

needed to leave the Soviet Union. The purpose of her visit had been to reunite with her family, but Yekaterina was hostile and Iosif hadn’t written to her since she left Moscow. She asked the new General Secretary, Mikhail Gorbachev, for permission to depart. He was amenable, as long as Svetlana met with one senior hard-liner. So she headed to the familiar corridors of the Central Committee building to see Comrade Yegor Ligachev. “Your problem has been solved by the General Secretary,” Ligachev said. Then he raised his forefinger: “But—behave!” As she left, he added, “The Motherland will survive without you. The question is: will you survive without the Motherland?”

In 2008, I read online that Iosif had died of a heart attack, at the age of sixty-three. A few days later, I spoke to Svetlana on the phone and she joked that she expected to eventually die of heart failure. I realized that she must not have known about her son’s death, so I called Olga, who now goes by a different name, and lives in Portland, Oregon, where she sells

antiques, vintage clothes, and scented candles. She thanked me for calling and told me to keep writing letters to her mother, adding, “She’s a sweet, gentle, vulnerable woman who is followed around by demons.”

The second time I visited Svetlana, in the spring of 2008, she had moved to Richland Center, another town in Wisconsin. A few months before, an N.Y.U. student named Lana Parshina had visited her in Spring Green to videotape her for a class project. Svetlana had agreed, she told me, because she thought that Parshina looked as if she could be her grandchild. But, soon afterward, Svetlana became convinced that Parshina worked for Russian intelligence—why had Parshina wanted to do the interview in Russian? why had she travelled to Moscow soon after the conversation?—and that Vladimir Putin now had video of her Spring Green apartment. Svetlana was scared; it was time, she thought, to move on. (Parshina, who still works on films, and who is an American citizen, told me that Svetlana’s suspicions were “very sad.”)

I stayed in Richland Center for a weekend, asking Svetlana questions about Kennan. At eighty-two, she was slower and more forgetful. On Sunday afternoon, I took her to lunch at a diner called the Center Café, and she wore an elegant scarf—a present from the children of the nanny who had taken care of her in her youth, she said. When we had finished eating, she stood to hobble out to the car. A heavyset woman held the door for her and started to talk in a thick Wisconsin accent about how she was good at opening doors for the elderly, because she had two parents in nursing homes. Svetlana walked swiftly ahead to escape the conversation. “Goodbye, and whatever,” she muttered.

Over the years, Svetlana and I had grown closer, and she began to give me advice—lots of it. I shouldn’t go into politics, she told me over and over. When my first son was due, she insisted that I stay away from the hospital. I should avoid the pain, and wait for him to be shown to me, clothed and clean. She told me to slow down: “Do not overwork—!!!! EVER!!!!” When I wrote to tell her that I was going to Russia to do some reporting

on a secret Soviet nuclear device, she panicked: "DO NOT GO!" Putin would kidnap me. I would be turned by Russian spies. "Be careful with plump, drinking Russian women—PLEASE!! You just do not know how far they might go, out of that stupid 'Russian patriotism.' But I know."

At one point, she exploded in a letter: "While I am still breathing (with difficulty, lately) PLEASE leave me alone!" She continued, "You do not want to cause me the final stroke, do you, Nick?" But the tantrums passed quickly. After one rant about how the copyright of the English version of "Twenty Letters" had been assigned to Priscilla Johnson McMillan, I called McMillan. She was surprised to learn that she had the copyright, and said that she would happily return it. Svetlana was delighted when I showed her the forms indicating the re-registration at the Library of Congress, under her name.

In May, 2009, I read a book by Sergo Beria, the son of Lavrenti Beria, Stalin's sadistic secret police chief. The book described Svetlana's youth and included the declaration that she had wanted to marry Sergo. I knew to be cautious when asking anything related to Lavrenti Beria, whom Svetlana considered to be at the center of her family tragedy. Nadya had called him a "dirty man," and banned him from the house. When she died, Svetlana wrote, Beria "got my father's ear, who after my mother's suicide did not trust anybody and was a ruined man." In her telling, Nadya's death led to Beria's rise, which led to many of the horrors for which her father was blamed.

Still, she had just asked me to send her more questions, and the stories told by Sergo were both colorful and plausible. (He quoted Svetlana once as saying, "Really, it's impossible to love men. You have to treat them as the bees treat the bumblebees.") So I decided to ask about Sergo and her youth.

A letter soon arrived, describing Beria's "accursed family" and denouncing me. "It is a pity that the dirty waters of what is called 'American culture'—namely American journalism—swept over your head," she wrote. "You certainly could do much better in the more honorable field—say Arts. . . . Good-bye, dear Nicholas, and I hope that your life will NOT be devoted to Politics. What a waste of human resources."

I wrote to apologize. A few days later, I received an envelope containing my unopened letter and a short note: "All your letters will be returned the same way, as this one (enclosed), unopened and unread." She added, "I am trying to sever our correspondence in the most polite fashion."

Two months later, she wrote again:

Dear Nicholas,

I am writing this to apologize for what I regard as impermissible rudeness, and totally bad manners. I am the one always to dislike those; but in old age and high b/pressure such things happen often. Every doctor can testify to that.

Yet doctors or not, I dislike such outbursts, and want here—belatedly perhaps—to say: I am very, very sorry.

There is a very coarse Russian folk-saying, to which I hesitate to find English equivalents: but I will try. It goes like this: "Do not touch the shit—it won't stink." In this context of ours it means—do not touch the PAST, it would not stink. . . .

You are not alone—everyone who talked to me here in USA, from G. Kennan to all the ladies and all the journalists—looked at me ONLY through this prism: my father's life. AS if I never had a mother! Her inability to exist in these absolutely political waters caused her suicide. I have survived much, much longer—may be because her sad lesson taught me a lot. To be more patient, may be, than she was. . . .

Whatever it is, it does not give me the right to be rude. This is why I am writing this: to apologize.

I wrote back with a new request: Tell me about your mother. This time, she replied. But it was not an easy subject. "Twenty Letters to a Friend," though dedicated to her mother, contains no tender memories. She remembers her mother spanking her and her father rushing to comfort her. "I cannot recall her kissing or caressing me ever," she wrote. In the one letter from her mother that she had saved, she was scolded for her behavior: "When Mama went away, her little girl made a great many promises, but now it turns out she isn't keeping them." At one point, Svetlana wrote, her mother had declared that she was bored by "everything, even the children." Years later, Svetlana told Olga that her mother had drawn a tattoo of a black square over her heart and told her that "this is where the soul is." It was the spot in which she shot herself.

Now, though, Svetlana wanted me to think about her mother's politics. Nadya

was an early feminist who should never have married Stalin. The act that defined her for history—her suicide—should be regarded as an act of political courage, not of maternal abdication:

They were such different creatures—but there could be other solutions other than suicide. Yet at this time—1920-ies, early 1930-ies, suicide was very much "en vogue," so to say, to express opposition to what was going in Russia.

She concluded:

And more and more she had become "the First Lady" of the country, more life was becoming impossible for her. . . . Please—please, try to see her not as she was presented but the real Nadya—the fighter, in her own way.

With that, her letters became warm again. I wrote less frequently, though. My book was done, and I had fewer questions. In June, 2011, she began to write about death:

I hate to have a stroke, and pray to Almighty to give me heart-attack, instead; at least it is quick. BUT I was always some kind of a sinner, so my plea would hardly be considered up there.

A few months later, the phone rang. It was Olga. Her mother, who was eighty-five, had colon cancer and was in the hospital. She wanted to hear from people and to exercise her brain. Olga asked me not to mention my children. The topic seemed to distress her mother. I sent a letter, but didn't hear back.

When Olga realized that Svetlana was close to death, she wanted to visit, but

Svetlana had requested that her daughter not see her die, and that she not be allowed to view the body. Svetlana, Olga told me, had been haunted her entire life by the sight of her mother lying in an open coffin.

Svetlana died that November. She had told me several times that this was the hardest month for her. It was when everything started to get cold, and when her mother had killed herself. Svetlana had told me that she expected to die at the age of eighty-five. I said that Kennan had been fatalistic, too. He was sure that he would die at fifty-nine, but he'd lived to the age of a hundred and one. She responded, "Well, he lived the way he wanted to. I don't live the way I want to." ♦



Kobe Bryant and a business associate have a running bet on the staying power of the pop stars Katy Perry and Justin Bieber. Bryant, who wears self-discipline like a badge, has long favored the more predictable Perry's odds, and found in Bieber's recent tabloid episodes hints of a looming implosion: talent spurned. As he and the associate walked into the dining room at the Four Seasons, in downtown Miami, in late January, the associate, a Belieber, mentioned that Bryant had been giving him a hard time about it for years. He seemed almost ready to concede. That morning, elsewhere in Miami, Bieber had been caught drag racing and booked for driving under the influence.

Bryant was a child star, too. In 1996, fourteen years before LeBron James earned infamy by announcing, "I'm going to take my talents to South Beach," young Kobe stroked his chin theatrically for the cameras in the gymnasium at Lower Merion High School, outside Philadelphia. "I've decided to skip college and take my talent to the N.B.A.," he said, with a pair of shades perched above his brow and a thin mustache sprouting above his upper lip. He had reason to be cocky: Lower Merion's games attracted ticket scalpers. A few weeks later, he took the singer Brandy to his senior prom. He needed his parents to co-sign his first contract with the Los Angeles Lakers, that summer, and he was still living with them when, the following February, he won the slam-dunk contest at the N.B.A. All-Star weekend.

Bryant is now thirty-five, and staying power is seldom far from his mind. The Lakers, a fading dynasty, were in town to play James's Miami Heat, ascendant royalty. The night before, Bryant had attended a college game between Duke, a school he once considered attending, and the University of Miami, and had the "very humbling experience," as he put it, of hearing his name chanted by the student crowd. Bryant has logged more N.B.A. minutes, including the post-season, than all active players, and ranks fifth in the all-time clock punchers' leaderboard. Very few of those minutes have come lately. Last April, in the fourth quarter of a game against the Golden State Warriors, Bryant ruptured his left Achilles tendon. He told me that the pain was so immediately intense that

THE SPORTING SCENE

THE FOURTH QUARTER

Kobe Bryant confronts a long—and possibly painful—goodbye.

BY BEN McGRATH

"People say, 'Father Time is undefeated,'" Bryant said. But "people don't understand when



they talk about Father Time, and they look at my injuries. They're equating that to others who have come before me."

PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRISTOPHER MORRIS

it was as if someone were holding a blowtorch to the back of his head, but his first instinct was to try yanking the recoiling tendon back down with his fingers. He then insisted on taking his foul shots—both of which he made, in spite of precarious balance, tying the game—before limping to the locker room, acquiescing to surgery, and vowing to rehab more quickly than anyone believed possible. The same Achilles injury ended the career of Isiah Thomas. Only Dominique Wilkins recovered from it well enough to remain an All-Star. Wilkins was two years younger than Bryant at the time of his hobbling, and had pestled the joints in his knees, elbows, and ankles for about half as many minutes.

Bryant committed to a restorative diet of bone soup and tweeted his recovery process amply. By early June, he was walking without crutches. In July, he told the *Los Angeles Times* that he was “far, far ahead” of schedule. He sat on a stage in August, with Jimmy Kimmel, in front of five thousand paying guests, and dangled the possibility that he’d be ready for opening night, at the end of October. Not quite. He made his triumphant return to the Staples Center, where the Lakers play, on December 8th, against the Toronto Raptors, whom he once lit up for eighty-one points—a modern record. This time, he scored nine points and committed eight turnovers in a losing effort, for which he gave himself an F.

“Seven months, he came back from the Achilles,” Gary Vitti, the Lakers’ head trainer, said. “But, theoretically, twelve months is better than seven months.”

“I was kind of hoping that he would take that year—take a whole year before he tried to come back,” Jeanie Buss, the team’s president and co-owner, said.

Those remarks were made with the benefit of hindsight, after Bryant had broken his left knee. That second injury—a fracture in the lateral tibial plateau—occurred on December 17th, during a victory over the Memphis Grizzlies. The heroic comeback had lasted six games.

Now, in Miami, Bryant confessed that what had been diagnosed initially as a six-week setback was likely to take longer—a rare instance of his underperforming expectations. “It’s been slow,” he

said, after easing his six feet six inches into a booth at the restaurant. “It’s a weird injury, because I can walk around completely normal, but the fracture is still there.” He was dressed in a gray warmup suit that featured a Y-shaped logo—his own, meant to evoke the sheath of a samurai sword—and had on his feet a pair of his new signature sneakers, Kobe 9s, high-tops that resemble boxing shoes. A hood over his shaved head partially obscured a “haircut” for



which Nike, his chief sponsor, had reportedly paid more than eight hundred dollars, and there was a hint of nasal in his usual baritone. He had woken up with a stomach ache, he said, and politely declined a waiter’s attention. “I’m good with the liquid crack,” he said, clutching a Starbucks cup.

It was the eighth anniversary of Bryant’s eighty-one-point night against the Raptors, and in a few hours he’d be down at court level, speculating, with the kind of graciousness that often eluded his younger self, about the possibility of someone like Oklahoma City’s Kevin Durant eclipsing his mark. (“He’s a phenomenal scorer,” Bryant said of Durant, who had recently tallied fifty-four. “He can do virtually everything.”) But here he dwelled a little longer on the battle scars as a source of motivation. He pointed to a lump of scar tissue that remains on his right index finger and recalled, of 2009, “The finger fracture, that was a bear, man, because I had to play essentially the whole year with a splint on.” He’d been forced to abandon his lifelong habit of using both index and middle fingers to follow through on his shots—at no apparent cost to his accuracy. “About 2000, 2001, I started getting really bad tendinitis in my knees, just having jumper’s knee, and then I tore cartilage in my knee in 2003,” he went on, referring to his right knee—the intact one, sometimes called his “cyborg knee”—for which he began travelling to Germany

several years ago, to seek experimental stem-cell therapy. “Shoulders as well. I’ve had shoulder surgeries before.”

Magic Johnson had recently joined the chorus of Lakers fans calling for Bryant to give up on the idea of returning before next fall, but Bryant was still indulging the possibility that he might be ready to suit up for the All-Star Game—it would be his seventeenth—in February. “There’s a contingent of people that say, ‘Father Time is undefeated,’” Bryant said. “‘You won’t be able to do it. Blah blah blah.’ So part of me is saying, ‘Well, I know where *your* threshold is. So if this had happened to you, you’d probably quit, right?’” He added, “That’s the thing that I think people don’t understand when they talk about Father Time, and they look at my injuries. They’re equating that to others who have come before me.”

Bryant’s singular career can be quartered, broadly speaking. First, there were the years with Shaquille O’Neal, highlighted by the three-peat, a succession of championships that came almost too easily, in 2000, 2001, and 2002. The two were, in O’Neal’s estimation, “the greatest one-two punch ever—little man, big man—in the history of the game.” And they hated one another. For Bryant, an obsessive who prides himself on a kind of basketball virtuosity (“As far as one on one, I’m the best to ever do it,” he has said), O’Neal represented an affront to the game itself: a giant so physically dominant around the rim that his indifference to mastering something as elementary as free throws was rendered maddeningly inconsequential. (Not that it stopped other teams from trying to exploit the weakness: “Hack-a-Shaq” was coined to describe a common defensive strategy that consisted of deliberately interfering with O’Neal, based on the expectation that he wouldn’t make his foul shots.) “It used to drive me crazy that he was so lazy,” Bryant told me. “You got to have the responsibility of working every single day. You can’t skate through shit.” O’Neal was a clown, and beloved for it, while Bryant, who once told *Newsweek* that he didn’t believe in happiness, remained aloof. “I was stubborn as a fucking mule,” he said. Bryant shunned reporters whom he saw talking to O’Neal. O’Neal, in turn, refused to accept help

from the same trainers who taped Bryant's ankles. Their desperate coach, the Buddhist, bookish Phil Jackson, wound up consulting a therapist, and at one point recommended that O'Neal read "Siddhartha."

Then came the sullen years, after O'Neal was shipped out of town, over the objections of Jackson, who preferred the giant clown to the "uncoachable" mule. Management favored the mule, and dismissed Jackson, too, at least for a while. Free of O'Neal's shadow, Bryant became the most polarizing star in the sport—perhaps in all sports. This period was marked by enormous individual accomplishments—not just the eighty-one-point outburst but four consecutive games in which he scored at least fifty—and little in the way of team success to match. Opposing teams designated "Kobe stoppers," or dedicated shadows, to frustrate the Lakers' lone weapon. He was the Black Mamba, a nickname he gave himself after watching Quentin Tarantino's "Kill Bill," in which the snake, known for its agility and aggressiveness, was used as a code name for a deadly assassin. "I read up on the animal and said, 'Wow, this is pretty awesome,'" Bryant recalled. "This is a perfect description of how I would want my game to be."

The adoption of an alter ego was a way of coping, Bryant now admits, with the fallout from his arrest for sexual assault, in a Colorado hotel room, in the summer of 2003. The charges were later dismissed, and a civil settlement was reached with the alleged victim, but Bryant struggled with the perception that he was damaged goods. "After the Colorado incident, I had every major sponsor drop me, except for Nike," he told me. "So I'm sitting there thinking, What am I going to do now? My vision was to build a brand and do all these things." (Bryant was *born* a brand, named after the Kobe beef at a Japanese steak house in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania.) "Now everybody's telling me I can't do it," he went on. "The name just evokes such a negative emotion. I said, 'If I create this alter ego, so now when I play this is what's coming out of your mouth, it separates the personal stuff, right?' You're not watching David Banner—you're watching the Hulk."

O'Neal, who won a fourth championship with the Miami Heat, in 2006,

seemed to get the best of the simmering feud when, in the summer of 2008, he appeared onstage at a night club in New York and celebrated the Lakers' recent loss to the Boston Celtics in the finals. "You know how I be, last week Kobe couldn't *do* without me," he free-styled, and then alluded to a police report from the Colorado investigation, in which Bryant was said to have lamented that he didn't bribe his extramarital conquests with hush money, the way O'Neal did. "Kobe ratted me out, that's why I'm getting divorced," O'Neal continued. "He said Shaq gave a bitch a mil—I don't do that, 'cause my name's Shaquille. I love 'em but don't leave 'em. I got a vasectomy, now I can't breed 'em. Kobe, how my ass taste?" The crowd at the club joined a smiling O'Neal in repeating the zinger several times in unison while he bent over and flaunted his Barkleyesque rump.

In retrospect, though, 2008 marked the beginning of Bryant's maturation, a phase that coincided with the arrival of a new big man, Pau Gasol, to complement Bryant's drifting improvisation. A seven-foot Catalanian with wild hair, Gasol redeemed Bryant's penchant for excessive shooting by gathering rebounds so

effectively that the chunked fadeaways and leaners could almost be considered passes. Thus was born a new statistical category, the "Kobe assist," meant to credit missed shots that seemed more than randomly to beget success. An intellectual rather than a rival alpha male, Gasol preferred opera to rap—he even read Roberto Bolaño's nine-hundred-page novel "2666," a gift from Jackson—and enjoyed Bryant's cleverness and sarcasm, as well as his efforts to speak Spanish with him on the court. They won two championships together, in 2009 and 2010, bringing Bryant's ring count to five, surpassing O'Neal's.

As his body broke down, Bryant became a more efficient player, refining his volume game with better shot selection and distribution, and people began to speculate that he might stick around long enough to surpass Kareem Abdul-Jabbar as the league's all-time leading scorer. He even flirted with a new nickname, suggested by his friend the adman Brian Ford: *Vino*, which he sometimes appended as a hashtag in his tweets. (Bryant still plays a volume game when it comes to hashtags.) Like wine, the idea went, Bryant was getting better with age.

"Last year was the best basketball

THE SPRATS



P. Chaw

I've played in my entire career," Bryant said. "I've never worked so hard in my life to prepare for a game, in film study, quarterbacking on the floor, putting everybody in the right position, and then having to take care of my body. It was literally no life, because my body was hurting so much. I had to ice-bath, stretch, massage, elevate my legs, stretch, and then go out and play. But the results were irrefutable." He added, "It doesn't stop. That's what I'm saying. It becomes life, you know? To be at that level, that's what you have to do."

The final phase, which Bryant has taken to calling "the last chapter" but which we might as well call the fourth quarter, began suddenly, with the Achilles injury, and was given a handy framing device last fall, when Bryant signed a two-year contract extension with the Lakers. It will expire in the summer of 2016. "Twenty years is a long time, man," Bryant said, adding that he was "fairly certain" that that would be it. "The challenge also has to shift to doing something that a majority of people think that us athletes can't do, which is retire and be great at something else." He noted, "Giorgio Armani didn't start Armani until he was forty. Forty! There's such a life ahead."

The extension, for nearly fifty million dollars, marked a small pay cut from Bryant's annual thirty million, but it was enough to maintain his status as the league's best-compensated player, a distinction he has owned since 2009. The new contract has been described in the press—outside of Los Angeles, anyway—as "terrible," "crippling," and "insane." And those were the reactions before Bryant got injured again. "You pay players more often than not for what they've done for you, not what they're going to do," Mitch Kupchak, the Lakers' general manager, acknowledged. The idea was to insure that Bryant retires as a Laker—an iconic figure forever associated with a single team, perhaps the last of his kind, owing to the strictures of basketball's salary cap and its collective-bargaining agreement. You could even see the timing of the transaction, just a few weeks ahead of Bryant's abortive comeback, as shrewd. The Lakers spared themselves the awkward possibility of visiting indignity on their captain by low-balling him, as the

Yankees did with the aging Derek Jeter, on the ground that nobody else would want him. That ego, at that price?

Like the Yankees, the Lakers are a family business whose patriarch recently died, leaving the franchise in control of his less assured children. Jerry Buss, better known to employees as Dr. Buss (he had a Ph.D. in chemistry), bought the team in 1979, using a fortune he had amassed in Southern California real-estate development. It was the beginning of the Magic Johnson era and, with it, a flashy, up-tempo style of play that came to be called Showtime. Buss sought to re-create at the Forum, where the Lakers then played, the atmosphere at his favorite Santa Monica night club, the Horn. Borrowing from the Dallas Cowboys cheerleaders, he introduced the Laker Girls, and hired a house band to perform during breaks in the action. Courtside seats were made available to Hollywood heroes, like Jack Nicholson, pushing the less star-powered media scribes out of view. The coach, Pat Riley, wore his hair slicked back, like Michael Douglas. As for Buss, "he was a marketing genius," Kupchak, who played center and power forward on those early-eighties Lakers teams, said. "He always enjoyed going to a game and being entertained."

Dr. Buss was eighty when he died, in February of 2013, from complications related to cancer. (Bryant spoke at his funeral, and recalled Buss telling him, around the time they met, "I want you to be a Laker for life.") Management of the franchise is now split between Jeanie Buss and her brother Jim: Jim, the vice-president, tends to the basketball side, and Jeanie oversees the business. Complicating matters further, Jeanie is engaged to Phil Jackson, the on-again, off-again coach who is responsible for all five of the Lakers' recent championships—and who nearly returned last season, for a third stint. A deal seemed all but finalized until, suddenly, Jim Buss balked, apparently acceding to the wishes of his dying dad. Instead, the Lakers hired Mike D'Antoni, an offensive-minded strategist whose high-flying style with the Phoenix Suns had led the *Times*, in 2007, to call the Suns "this decade's incarnation of the Los Angeles Lakers' Showtime."

Mitch Kupchak had begun planning

for this moment years earlier, and arranged to have most of the other Lakers' contracts terminate at the end of this season, to allow for maximum flexibility in restocking for one last run at a championship before Bryant retires. (Maximum flexibility is a relative concept, given that Bryant's extension accounts for nearly half of the team's salary-cap allotment.) Several of this season's Lakers are signed to one-year deals, and may not be back again. The official roster, as featured in the team's media guide at the start of the season, boasted three likely Hall of Famers, in Bryant, the point guard Steve Nash, and Pau Gasol. Nash, at forty, is the oldest player in the N.B.A., and has suffered from recurring nerve damage in his back and in his legs. He has played scarcely more often than Bryant. Gasol is thirty-three, and still effective, but troubled by bad knees. And no amount of planning can have prepared the front office or the coaching staff for the plague of injuries that have afflicted even the scrubs and reclamation projects. Bryant downplayed the Lakers' ten-and-nine start, before his return, saying, "It's not like we were gangbusters before," but in fact that represents the season's high-water mark, the last time the Lakers were above .500.

The Miami game, a loss, came in the middle of an annual two-week trip the Lakers build into their schedule to make way for the Grammy Awards, which take place at the Staples Center. Bryant, though limited in his rehabbing activities to a stationary bike, accompanied the team throughout the Grammy Trip, as it is known, and found a welcome bit of slack in his schedule, for a change, which he used to begin catching up on the formal education that he missed. While the Lakers were visiting the Celtics, he dropped in on a couple of classes at Boston College, the first in international marketing and the other in banking. "Finance is always very interesting," he said later. At the University of Miami, he joined a marketing-management class, where seniors were reviewing a case study on the launch of the Ford Fiesta. (Students posted pictures of Bryant wearing a backpack.) "I'm seeing the language of things that I've been doing for years," he told me, referring to his sneaker line.

The N.B.A. requires injured players to address the media at least once before returning to practice, but Bryant, who has always enjoyed setting his own rules and standards, decided to speak more frequently while on the road, engaging in what one Lakers beat reporter termed “legacy building.” Ever conscious of his rep—his brand—he stood for questions in Chicago, Boston, Miami, and New York, while skipping lesser media towns like Orlando and Toronto. “If I’m going to do this shit, you can’t keep asking me the same questions,” he complained, early in the Miami scrum, the first I observed live, but then he indulged plenty more. Told that he looked “svelte,” he replied, deadpan, “I don’t know what that means. Didn’t go to college.”

Aside from a few weeks of practice, and those six games in December, Bryant was approaching a full year without really playing basketball. He’d become a fan, like the rest of us, and the new perspective inspired a wave of nostalgia, as he considered how much the game had changed since he entered the pros, as a teen-ager. The N.B.A. tweaks its rules more assiduously than its rival leagues, always seeking the perfect balance to suit a growing audience. A couple of such alterations, introduced more than a decade ago, struck Bryant as regrettable, even as he understood them philosophically. These were allowing a zone defense—a staple of European and amateur American basketball—instead of requiring constant man-to-man coverage; and the limits placed on “hand-checking,” a defensive action used to impede offensive flow. “I think what they’ve done has been very smart, in terms of how they’ve been able to make it such a global game,” Bryant told me. “I mean, that’s really what’s at the crux of it: a lot of big players in Europe weren’t post players”—brawny men who establish residence five feet from the hoop and play primarily

with their backs turned to it. “They were skill players. So once the N.B.A. opened up the game, and allowed the zone in, now it made the game more appealing on a global scale.” He cited Dallas’s Dirk Nowitzki, a German, and Pau Gasol as welcome beneficiaries of this corporate globalization.

Still, the game wasn’t as aggressively physical as it had once been. (“Makes me

along with himself—were no longer as useful. “I don’t care if you hand-check us with *three* hands,” he said, speaking now in New York, at Madison Square Garden. “If there’s nobody behind you, you’re not going to stop us. So the zone cripples some of the top scorers.”

It wasn’t just the rules that had changed. The statistical revolution that swept into Major League Baseball shortly after the turn of the twenty-first century had arrived, with a few years’ delay, in the N.B.A., bringing a greater emphasis on three-point shooting from the corners and on finding openings near the basket, for high-percentage attempts. As a result, teams were reshuffling their depth charts in favor of mobility over size. “Small ball,” Bryant (and others) called it. The kind of versatile player, like Bryant, who could shoot well from anywhere on the court was no longer so highly prized, because twenty-foot jumpers were a low-percentage gamble, by definition. “I’ve always been more interested in the creative side of the game, like how things happen, why things happen, as opposed to just the numbers,” Bryant told me. “Numbers have never felt fun to me.”

The fact that the Lakers, under the progressive regime of Coach D’Antoni, were themselves playing “small ball” was lost on no one. But, for a sportswriter,

covering the Lakers requires, first and foremost, covering all things Kobe, and so Bryant’s leisurely pre-game bull sessions occupied the bulk of reporters’ attention, sometimes keeping them pinned in the bowels of the arenas, transcribing tweetable quotes (“New York’s a beautiful place, don’t get me wrong, but it’s colder than shit out here”), long after tip-off. “It feels kind of wrong, not even watching the game you’re here to cover,” ESPN’s Dave McMenamin admitted, one afternoon. Then again, the game that day pitted the Knicks against



Bryant rupturing his left Achilles tendon in a game last April.

nauseous,” he said in Chicago. “You can’t touch a guy.”) And he felt that the current conditions made it too easy for the merely good to appear transcendent. Ball handlers were no longer as responsible for creating their own space in which to maneuver, and an effective pull-up jump shot and decent athleticism now enabled someone like Toronto’s mildly heralded Terrence Ross, say, to score fifty-one points in an evening. By contrast, the varied tricks of naturally gifted scorers—Bryant included the Knicks’ Carmelo Anthony and Durant in this category,

the Lakers, both at least ten games below .500. The last time they'd played one another under such mutually uncompetitive circumstances was in 1960. The question of primary relevance to a Lakers fan was whether Anthony, whom Bryant has called his best friend in basketball, could be persuaded to opt out of his Knicks contract this summer and sign with Los Angeles. Doubtful, was the consensus, in spite of Bryant's weather-based pitch: "You know, it's palm trees and beaches, obviously a little bit more appealing." After headlining for so long, Anthony might bridle at accepting a supporting role.

Bryant and his wife, Vanessa, have two daughters, Natalia and Gianna, who are eleven and seven, and interested in soccer. Fatherhood has given Bryant an opportunity to consider the nature-nurture debate in terms of competitiveness, a subject of consuming interest. Natalia, he says, is "competitive but in a respectful way," whereas Gianna is "insanely, insanely competitive—like, mean." He recalled playing Candyland with her when she was three, and confronting the inevitable question of whether or not to let her win. "You know, it's my move," he said. "She obviously can see that I can win, so she'll know that I'm not-winning on purpose. Then what's that teaching? So I just play the game, I win—and the kid goes

ape shit. She knocked the board over. 'Baaaaaaa!' I was, like, 'Shit, the kid's like me. Damn it.'" He flashed a toothy smile, as disarming as his glare—celebrated by fans online as the Kobe Death Stare. He added that he'd faced a similar situation with Natalia, several years earlier. She responded by giving him the silent treatment for two days and then asking for a rematch: a slower burn. "Maybe you can learn it later," he said, referring to the quicker fuse of Gianna. But his suspicion is that "it's not taught."

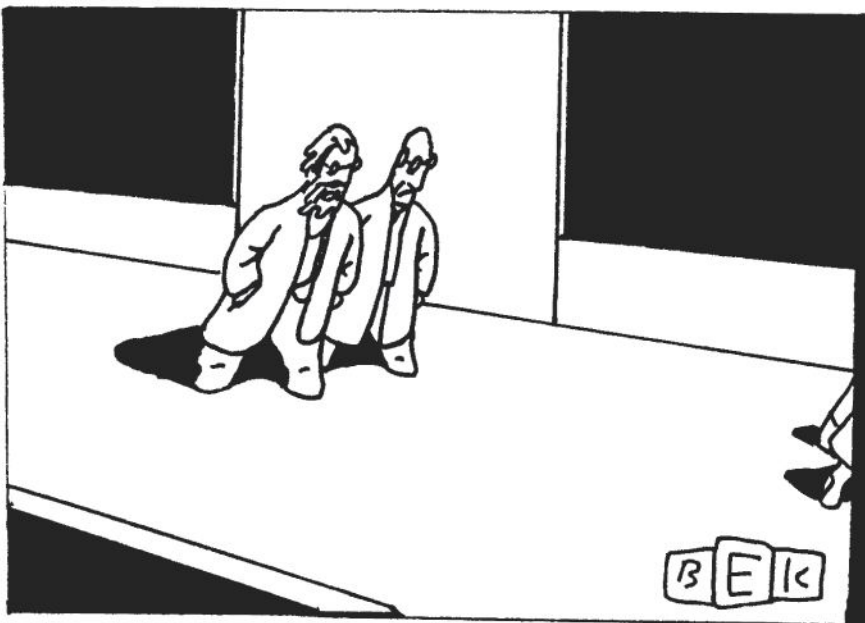
"It's a rough way to be," Bryant said, of his and Gianna's temperament. "Because all you care about is that end result and winning. It's hard for people to put themselves in that state of mind, because, as humans, we always want to have a safety net." He went on, "When you put all your eggs in that one basket, it can be absolutely devastating."

Bryant believes that you can count on "three fingers, maybe" the number of players currently in the N.B.A. who burn as intensely as he does. "I'm not going to name names for these kids," he said, when I asked who they are. "It's not fair to them." Identifying kindred spirits, whether in the business world or in other sports that he watches, is a favored pastime of Bryant's, one that he occasionally commemorates on social media with the hashtag #differentanimalSamebeast. "You can feel it in a person's energy," he said, and mentioned that, when he meets

such people, he is apt to sit with them and discuss the subject for hours, uninterrupted. He felt an overwhelming sense of camaraderie when, watching the football playoffs, in January, he saw the Seattle Seahawks cornerback Richard Sherman deliver his now infamous victory rant to Fox's Erin Andrews. ("When you try me with a sorry receiver like Crabtree, that's the result you gonna get!" Sherman shouted. "Don't you *ever* talk about me.") "What you saw in Richard Sherman was the truth of athletes at the highest, highest, highest level," Bryant said, and brought up, as a similar example, the speech Michael Jordan gave at his Hall of Fame induction ceremony, in 2009: a sad, drawn-out spectacle of score-settling, name-calling, and false humility. "It made everybody uncomfortable, but that's him, right?" Bryant said of Jordan. "So when you see Sherman kind of just let it out, that's been inside him from Day One. This is why he's the best at what he does, because that's how he feels. Now, when other people see that, it scares the shit out of 'em, right? But for people that understand that—like, I see him, I'm all, 'Yeah, oh I think that every day.'"

Given the questionable frequency with which white commentators had used the word "thug" to describe Sherman, in the aftermath of the interview, I suggested that part of what scared people was the idea of an angry black man, with dreadlocks. But Bryant was unconvinced. "Even if it's a white athlete that exploded like that," he began, and mentioned Johnny Manziel, the Texas A.&M. quarterback who is expected to be picked high in the first round of the N.F.L. draft, in May. "The kid's mercurial. If he did something like that, he'd get a lot of shit, too." Bryant laughed. "That was the ugliness of greatness," he said. "That's what that is to me."

Then, speaking in the language of a marketing case study, he went on, "What Sherman represents is something bigger than a kid from Compton that went to Stanford, that's an All-Pro cornerback." Alluding to Larry Bird, he said, "It speaks to the same kid from French Lick, Indiana, that's a Hall of Famer, playing for the Boston Celtics, you know what I mean? That drive to overcome obstacles in your life, it's consistent across the board. It just happens to have the face of a kid from



"I'm starting to wonder if my story is ever going to be uplifting."

Compton that went to Stanford.” I could almost picture the Nike commercial unspooling from his mouth, and wasn’t overly surprised to see a picture turn up, two and a half weeks later, on Bryant’s Instagram account, showing Bryant with his arm around Sherman. Caption: “On my Nike set with the champ @RSherman_25 #differentanimalSamebeast.”

As a rookie, Bryant speculated that fans were drawn to him because he was “an underdog,” and “people like to see people succeed against the odds.” A strong sense of overcoming obstacles—injuries, doubters—has remained with him throughout. But his perspective is complicated somewhat by the fact that he grew up well-off and with pro-athlete genes on both sides of his family. His mother’s brother, Chubby Cox, played briefly for the Washington Bullets. His father, Joe Bryant, was known as Jellybean, a nickname acquired on the playground courts of Philadelphia, where he developed a flashy style that he came to feel was underappreciated in the pre-Showtime-era N.B.A., during eight years with the home-town 76ers, the San Diego Clippers, and the Houston Rockets. (Kobe’s middle name, Bean, is a nod to this.) When Kobe was six, the Bryants moved to Italy so that Joe could continue his career in the European professional leagues. They remained there seven years, as Joe thrived. (Bryant once told *Sports Illustrated* that he remembered hearing the fans sing, in Italian, “You know the player who’s better than Magic or Jabbar? It’s Joseph, Joseph Bryant!”) Kobe had to read a Latin version of the Iliad. “And do presentations on it, in Latin, at nine years old, know what I mean?” he said of his Italian schooling. “That’s growing up a little differently.”

Bryant found the social adjustment difficult, re-assimilating as a black teenager used to speaking Italian, in the Philadelphia suburbs, where his parents resettled. “Combine that with blacks having their own way of talking, and I really had to learn two languages in order to fit in,” he once said. “Kids are cruel. It’s always been hard.”

He still thinks about it. “Honestly, I pinch myself sometimes, because I’m a kid who grew up in Italy, came back to Philadelphia—suburban school on the Main Line—and here I am shooting a

movie or having dialogue with Mars Blackmon,” Bryant said, referring to the Spike Lee character from “She’s Gotta Have It.” Lee, who initially wanted Bryant to play the role of Jesus Shuttlesworth in “He Got Game” (he was played instead by Ray Allen), later settled for shooting a vérité documentary with Bryant, “Kobe Doin’ Work,” which was released in 2009. “I’m not supposed to *be* here, you know?” Bryant added, offering an unusual twist on the familiar aw-shucks trope. “It’s pretty fucking cool.”

“There is a bigger issue in terms of being an African-American athlete, and the box people try to put you in because of it,” he told me. “And it’s always a struggle to step outside of that.” When I brought up LeBron James posting online a photo of the Heat players dressed in hoodies, with their heads bowed, in solidarity with Trayvon Martin, as a political expression, Bryant seemed nonplussed. “I won’t react to something just because I’m supposed to, because I’m an African-American,” he said. “That argument doesn’t make any sense to me. So we want to advance as a society and as a culture, but, say, if something happens to an African-American, we immediately come to his defense? Yet you want to talk about how far we’ve progressed as a society? Well, if we’ve progressed as a society, then you don’t jump to somebody’s defense just because they’re African-American. You sit and you listen to the facts just like you would in any other situation, right? So I won’t assert myself.”

Jim Brown, the ex-running back and political activist, said on the Arsenio Hall show a few months ago that if he were to convene another summit of black athletes, like the one in Cleveland, in 1967, with the Celtics great Bill Russell and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (then Lew Alcindor), among others, in support of Muhammad Ali’s decision to refuse the draft, he wouldn’t invite Bryant. “He is somewhat confused about culture, because he was brought up in another country,” Brown said, and Bryant responded by tweeting, “A ‘Global’ African American is an inferior shade to ‘American’ African Americans?? #hmm. that doesn’t sound very #Mandela or #DrKing sir.”

The European upbringing also accounts for Bryant’s sense of himself as a prematurely old-school basketball player, an issue of increasing importance to him

now, as he embraces his role as a self-described “elder statesman,” who “communicates to these kids how the game should be played.” Isolated in the central Italian town of Rieti, in the mid-nineteen-eighties, he was cut off from the world of Amateur Athletic Union basketball, in the United States, which was increasingly geared toward showy feats of athleticism. “You know, Bill Russell and Jerry West, they were going overseas and doing basketball clinics,” he said, referring to the ex-Laker whose silhouette is immortalized in the official N.B.A. logo. “So they were teaching coaches over there how to think the game, how to play fundamentally sound. I was a by-product of all that. When we came to practice, guess which drills we were doing? We were doing Red Auerbach’s drills”—from the fifties and sixties, in other words—“thinking the game sequentially. I just came up at the right time and learned to play the right way because of it. So when I came back to America all I had to do now was put the icing on the cake, in terms of the flash and the imaginative things.”

In spite of a reputation as a loner, persistent from his early years, Bryant now takes seriously the idea of leadership, and reads up on the subject. (Phil Jackson gave him “The Tao of Leadership.”) “What I found out, particularly on this team, this year, is most of these guys don’t know how to take care of themselves,” Bryant said. “They’re willing learners, but most kids don’t grow up with that kind of structure, or that kind of thinking—which needs to be changed as well, and that’s a whole ‘nother conversation. The way our kids grow up, learning the game of basketball, learning sports as a whole—we have some work to do in that area.”

“Sometimes I wonder what the message is that Kobe’s sending to the young guys,” Mitch Kupchak said, and mentioned that he was reading a biography of Ted Williams, who reminded him in certain ways of Bryant. “It’s like Ted Williams trying to help a guy in the minor leagues. There’s just no connect.” Kupchak went on, “Like a lot of guys like him, they’ve accomplished so much doing things a certain way, and a lot of times they feel that they know the only way to do it. I’d love for him to one day be a coach, just to try it for a

year, whether it's at the D-league level, or if his daughters play high-school basketball. And then, like, everything will crystallize to him—like, Holy mackerel! What was I thinking?"

Leading by example may remain Bryant's most effective option. Eric Avar, the creative director of Nike, described a fishing trip on which he accompanied Bryant a few years ago, and which "kind of evolved into a 'Stand by Me' moment." They left from the coast of Newport Beach, California, where the Bryants live, on "a fishing boat slash yacht—it was a nice fishing boat," and proceeded sixty miles out into the Pacific. "Kobe likes these adventures," Avar said. "We had seen a lot of dolphins and whales and sharks, so this notion of just swimming with sharks or whales, it kind of elevated to that." Bryant pointed to the bowsprit, and said, "If I jump, will you jump?" Avar agreed. "So he just took his shirt off and hopped right over," Avar continued. The boat's size was such that swimming around to the stern, to get to the ladder, took some time, and Avar, at least, couldn't suppress the images of shark fins in his mind. "You couldn't get back onto the boat fast enough," he recalled.

"That's where Kobe's competitive response kicked in," Avar went on. Bryant pointed next to the second deck, roughly twenty feet above the water. "So we jumped off of there," Avar said. "And then, as we're getting back onto the boat, I can see him looking up, and there's the radar tower up top, and I was, like, Oh no, he won't do that. And, sure enough, he starts climbing to the top, and there's just this little platform, and now you're in the middle of the boat, so not only is it a thirty-foot drop to the water but you have to clear the bottom deck, because the radar's mast is in the middle of the boat. And he went first, and he was all wet, so for me, climbing up, it was, like, slippery, and the little platform was slippery, and my heart was beating, and he's down in the water, and he's saying a few things to me that I won't repeat. But I knew I had to jump, so I jumped—and it was a long way down."

Bryant's history of friction with teammates extends beyond Shaquille O'Neal to include, more recently, the center Dwight Howard, who signed with the Houston Rockets last summer after

clashing repeatedly with Bryant. (Bryant responded on Twitter by unfollowing Howard—"Some people think that's petty, but, whatever, that's how I am," he explained—and Howard has since posted a picture of himself dunking over Bryant's head.) But when I arrived in Los Angeles, in February, and ventured into the Lakers' locker room, I found an atmosphere of playful respect, born of mentoring through intimidation. "He'll try you," Jordan Farmar, a guard who had recently returned from playing in Turkey, said of Bryant. "He'll try everybody at one point or another. Just ask Nick."

Nick Young, a.k.a. Swaggy P., a shooting guard and sometime small forward, emerged from the trainers' room, and caught only the tail end of the exchange. "Whatchou doing?" he asked Farmar.

"Talking about Kobe, man. Talking about how he punked you!"

"Fuck Kobe!" Young said, and then laughed. "No, I love Kobe. That's my dog."

Young later elaborated. "Everybody says he's an asshole and all that. He is. But he's—he's a good one, for some reason, you know? And he don't mind being called that! That's one of the things he told me. He said, 'Everybody focusses on being friends on the court. On the court you ain't supposed to be nobody's friend.'"

"I grew up with role models that were assholes," Bryant said, echoing Young's point. "I mean, you know, in a very competitive, fun way. But they were assholes! You know Michael, his tongue was sharp as a whip. Bird? Sharp, and I mean, like, personal. They were nasty. Barkley was

People exchange words, words exchange people. Every day *love* plays with another tongue, with other lips, and wears thongs underneath its habit. *The worst that can happen*—says the word—*is to get stuck to things, that's as boring as a conversation after sex with someone you don't know and do not want to know*. Sometimes *person* bumps into a person, *death* into a death, *cat* into a cat. Then they clamp their mouths shut and end up in the dictionary forever.

—Tadeusz Dąbrowski

(Translated, from the Polish, by Antonia Lloyd-Jones.)

nasty. I grew up around these guys, so when I talk trash to somebody I'm going for the jugular. These younger generations, it freaks 'em out a little bit."

Bryant told the Los Angeles *Daily News* that it bothered him to see Young and others start playing cards on the team plane without first doing their "homework"—i.e., film study, a long-standing priority of Bryant's. When I asked Bryant if he was ever tempted to play cards with the guys, he replied, "It's not good for team dynamics. I can't be barking at 'em all day on the practice court and then demolish 'em at a card game, and talk shit to 'em in a card game, too."

Young, who did a memorable Black Mamba impersonation at his locker for a local TV broadcast, in January, was granted the honor of being the first person to wear the Kobe 9s in a game. "They sold out once I put 'em on my feet, you know?" Young joked. "So I need to talk to Kobe about giving me a little percentage."

Michael Jordan, likely the most important American athlete since Muhammad Ali, has been criticized for failing to exert his vast influence on any cause greater than footwear. His Jordan Brand, at Nike, is still worth more than a billion dollars, and, even in his middle age, Jordan travels on a private jet that's painted to resemble a sneaker. He owns the Charlotte Bobcats, a middling franchise, and, according to a recent *ESPN* magazine portrait of His Airness at fifty, he stays up late most nights watching Westerns that he's already seen.

Bryant attended Jordan's fiftieth-birthday party last year, and believes that his "big brother," as he has called Jordan, is "happy with the challenge that he has in Charlotte," while noting, with uncharacteristic diplomacy, that they have "different interests." On the court, Jordan's legacy has long haunted Bryant. "That's the guy he wanted to play like, that's who he wanted to play against, that's who he wanted to be better than," Mitch Kupchak said, and added, "I know six is the big number for him," a reference to Jordan's superior ring count. Yet Bryant's ambitions are greater, and it is easier to imagine him adjusting to the off-court life gracefully. Phil Jackson, who coached both men, told me, "Their competitive level on the floor is very similar, but, off the floor, I don't think Kobe really has the same issues." Alluding to Jordan's gambling history, Jackson said, "I doubt if you'll see Kobe piling up debts on the golf course." Bryant doubts it, too. Not long ago, a reporter teased him about the possibility of finally settling the Jordan debate once and for all, with a game of one on one. "In twenty years, when you guys are both on the senior golf circuit, you might step into the gym and do it," the reporter suggested, but Bryant cut him off. "I don't play golf," he said.

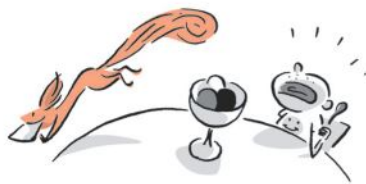
Bryant's refusal to take up golf is a point of pride, related to the box he resists being confined to, as an African-American athlete. He told me, "I get questions all the time: 'What are you going to do when you retire?' As if I had no life, no talent outside of playing basketball. It absolutely drives me crazy. 'You just going to golf all day?' I'm, like, 'No. Who the fuck said that?' It's maddening."

The European childhood inspired in Bryant a sense that there is "a much bigger world out there," as he put it to me, and, as an adult, he travels widely in the summers, both as an extension of his brand (doing promotional work for Lenovo in Manila, say) and in order to expose Natalia and Gianna to different cultures. "We'll just kind of set up camp in one particular city," he said. "Take 'em to the Louvre, expose 'em to art." Last year, he visited Brazil, Dubai, and China—where his jerseys have outsold those of Yao Ming, the country's first N.B.A. star. (A statue of Bryant stands in the city of Guangzhou.)

"I love watching, reading, listening

to people who have done great things," Bryant said. Asked to name some examples, he warned me that the list was "a mile long," and then proceeded down the road: "Walt Disney, to Oprah Winfrey, to Jay-Z, to a serial entrepreneur like Mike Repole, to Michael Rubin, to Evan Williams. It just goes and goes and goes and goes." Repole—I had to look this up—created Vitaminwater, and Rubin is the C.E.O. of an e-commerce company called Kynetic. Williams co-founded Twitter. "President Clinton, you know, we spent some time together the other day, and had a chance to kind of talk in the back about business and how he goes through the process of delegation and structure," Bryant continued. "And that's without even getting into the Michael Jacksons of the world, the Michelangelos of the world, the Da Vincis of the world, the Warhols of the world. We're surrounded by people who do incredible things, and the information is right there for us to learn from them."

Those last few names represent some of the "muses" behind Bryant's latest product launch, which you could be forgiven for assuming is something grander than athletic shoes. His cause, for now, is footwear, too, but do yourself a favor and Google "Kobe" and "building a system," and then watch the video of Bryant and Eric Avar, the Nike creative di-



rector, discussing a safari that Bryant once took in South Africa:

BRYANT: Our guide is driving us around, and he's showing us the animals, like, a gazelle. I want to see predators! And it kind of clicked: it was like, well, this is what I do in my profession. You got to hunt or be hunted. So I said, you know, I want to really incorporate that in the line.

AVAR: We took inspiration from looking at sharkskin, at snakeskin, and also the pattern of a leopard, and kind of fused all of those together, and that's kind of how we came up with, you know, this pattern.

BRYANT: Which is crazy! I gave the inspiration and stuff, but then you took it someplace else by coming up with its own skin!

"I enjoy crafting the story of things and products," Bryant told me. "I just

have a passion for it, for marketing and all that stuff. Some entertainers love to draw. Kanye, he's an incredibly creative person. He loves art, and he loves design. There's certain things that we do, but the thing that's consistent is the control of your business." Bryant's fanatical control of his business is such that he filed a lawsuit last year to prevent his mother from auctioning off high-school keepsakes and other memorabilia.

With Kobe, there's always 'why,'" Gary Vitti, the Lakers' trainer, said one day, in his office at the team's practice facility, in El Segundo. "So if I say, or if anybody says, 'We're going to do this,' then the question is, 'Why?,' and you have to explain it to him, not only in an anatomical but in a kinesiological way." Vitti said that although many players around the league were becoming more interested in understanding body function and recovery methods, Bryant was unique in this respect. While the rest of the Lakers had gone low-carb, and were eating only grass-fed beef (no "wannabe cows," as the center Robert Sacre put it), Bryant, unsatisfied with the locker-room spread of kale chips, gherkin pickles, and almond-butter paste, had hired a nutritionist from the U.S. Olympic Committee to monitor his levels more closely. "Kobe is totally involved in his approach to basketball, whether it be the medical aspect or the athletic aspect or the actual, fundamental aspect," Vitti continued. "Those three different entities, he's as well versed as any player, I think, that's played any game, ever."

Outside Vitti's window, Pau Gasol lay stretched out on a table, resting his groin, which had recently received a PRP shot, or platelet-rich plasma therapy. "They take your blood and spin it down in a centrifuge," Vitti said, explaining that the goal was to extract the platelets, in order to inject them at the site of an injury, thereby spiking the inflammation and triggering the body's natural therapeutic response. "Some people think it doesn't work. Depends who you read."

PRP therapy, Vitti said, was often confused with Orthokine and Regenokine, rarer forms of treatment invented by a doctor in Düsseldorf, and I was reminded of the strange moment during Bryant's onstage conversation with

Jimmy Kimmel, last summer, when the former All-Pro receiver Terrell Owens stood up in the front row and asked Bryant to “share with the audience and the millions of people that are watching today how cutting-edge technology and science has played a big part in your recovery. . . . Think about stem-cell research, Regenokine, cryotherapy—these are not P.E.D.s, by the way.”

“Save it for the grand jury,” Kimmel joked.

“The Germany thing actually started in terms of us hearing about it from Laker fans that came out of Hollywood,” Vitti went on. “In particular, it was Karen Silver, who’s the wife of Joel Silver—big-time movie producer, you can look him up. Her and Ari Emmanuel, you know who he is: Endeavor. They kept saying to me, ‘How come you’re not sending these guys to Germany?’” The treatments, which are not F.D.A.-approved, are similar in that they involve a centrifuge, but, instead of focussing on platelets, they isolate an antagonist of an arthritic agent called interleukin. Bryant’s right knee—the unbroken one—had been degenerating, to the point where he hardly had any cartilage left, so they figured, why not. “And he had a tremendous response,” Vitti said. Bryant travelled to Düsseldorf in each of the past three off-seasons for sessions with Dr. Peter Wehling. Alex Rodriguez is a Wehling client, too, a referral from Bryant, and Peyton Manning has sought European medical relief for his creaky neck—now sometimes known as his “bi-onic neck.”

As Vitti was explaining the difference between Orthokine and Regenokine (which adds stem cells to the mix), Bryant appeared in the window, followed by his protégé Nick Young, who had come down with a bum knee of his own. “Is it something that we’re doing?” Vitti wondered, as he considered the mounting injuries that had left his team with too few players left to scrimmage at practice. “Kobe comes down wrong, and has a tibial-plateau fracture. Steve Blake is behind a pick and puts his arm out as a guy’s running by, the guy hits his arm, and he tears his ulnar collateral ligament. It’s a baseball pitcher’s injury! So it’s a complete fluke. Jodie Meeks goes for a jump shot, comes down on somebody’s foot, rolls his ankle. Pau

Gasol strains a flexor muscle in his toe, we strap his toe down, now he changes the mechanics, now his pelvis shifts, and the load goes to his adductor—and he strains his adductor. Xavier Henry runs into somebody, and he gets knocked off balance, and he comes down in an awkward position. How’s *that* related to anything?” Vitti’s best guess was a kind of chaos theory, that the contemporary game had become too fast, and that the run-and-gun systems espoused by coaches like D’Antoni introduced too many possibilities for things to go wrong. “They’re constantly on that precipice of being in control, just a thread under being out of control,” he said. “Now, you look back at our triangle offense”—Phil Jackson’s system—“and don’t get me wrong, I’m not saying it should be played that way or this way, but it’s a very controlled pace.”

As Vitti escorted me out, he brought up the fact that Bryant often arrives, by helicopter, at the arena late for games now that he’s no longer playing. “I haven’t yet had a chance to give Kobe shit about this,” he said. “I’ve heard every excuse in the book for why players are late: my grandmother passed away, my car broke down, I got a flat tire, my kid’s sick. How’s this? ‘My helicopter got fogged in.’ Pretty good, isn’t it?”

The Lakers won three games in all of January. For a game in Cleveland, against the lowly Cavaliers, in early February, they dressed only eight players, and fielded a starting lineup of names—Kelly, Johnson, Sacre, Blake, Farmar—that only serious fans would recognize as belonging to professional athletes. In the second quarter, having nonetheless established a sizable lead, they lost a bench reserve to a twisted knee. So then there were seven. The fourth quarter brought foul trouble. Chris Kaman, the backup center, managed to rack up six violations in just fourteen minutes of filling in for Robert Sacre, who already had four fouls of his own. Kaman, having been ejected from the game, decided to take advantage of all the empty space on the bench, and he lay down for a nap. Then Jordan Farmar went lame (cramping calf), and retreated to the sideline for an ice pack. Six minutes remained. Sacre, back in the game after Kaman’s ejection, committed

another foul—and then one more. Now what? The Lakers, it seemed, were left with just four men against the Cavs’ five, like a hockey team playing shorthanded.

Not so fast. A little-noticed passage on page 15 of the N.B.A. rulebook states, “If a player in the game receives his sixth personal foul and all substitutes have already been disqualified, said player shall remain in the game.” For this, at least—for the most peculiar moment in the N.B.A. this season—we have the Lakers to thank.

Showtime it wasn’t, but there were some positive takeaways from the game. For instance, hewing to their small-ball formula, the Lakers set a franchise record by sinking eighteen three-point shots. And they won, ending a seven-game losing streak, although any victory now held dubious value, given that they had fully joined the futility chase, an annual counterpoint to the playoff race, in which teams compete for the dishonor of finishing low enough in the standings to qualify for a so-called lottery pick in the amateur draft. Jeanie Buss was concerned that one of the game’s most lasting images was of Kaman prone, post-ejection, and asked me if I’d noticed Bryant’s incredulous reaction, which pleased her, as an indication that someone still cared. (“Kaman goes to sleep on the bench—it’s, like, when big brother is not around, you start doing crazy shit,” he said.) “We’re the Lakers!” Buss said, seeming almost to fight back tears. “Not, like, the Bad News Bears. We’re not the lovable losers, where the only luck we have is bad luck.”

They were no longer certain of selling out the Staples Center—even Jack Nicholson was missing games—and, late in the fourth quarter, most nights, the home crowd would begin to chant, “We want Phil! We want Phil!” referring to Jackson, the Zen master.

The relationship between Bryant and Jackson is perhaps not so different from that of other mules and mentors. But it is much more public, in part because Jackson has long maintained a side business as a best-selling author, sharing more than the ordinary amount of dirt.

“Was I surprised?” Jackson wrote, in “The Last Season,” of hearing the news from Colorado, involving the alleged assault. “Yes, but not entirely. Kobe can

be consumed with surprising anger, which he's displayed toward me and his teammates."

And: "Kobe was unhappy with the type of plane that was selected; he wanted one with higher status."

Or, in "Eleven Rings": "It was easy to mistake Kobe's worldliness and intense focus for maturity."

And: "I had a dream about spanking Kobe and giving Shaq a smack."

Bryant once threatened to sue Jackson for slander, when the coach mentioned an erroneous rumor to a newspaper columnist, about Bryant's having dogged it in the early stages of high-school games, so that he could play hero in the closing minutes. Bryant also told me, speaking of Jackson, "It's no fault of any other coaches—he's just the best coach to have ever coached any profession, in any era."

He said, "I still don't know how the hell he managed to deal with me and all this energy, but he did, and we have an incredible relationship now, because of it." He added, "He's impacted my life beyond measure, not just as a basketball player but also as a person, how I am with my family, how I am with my kids: patience, compassion."

The warm feeling is reciprocated in the Buss-Jackson household, where Bryant's nickname has become a fond family joke. "What happens now is, if somebody makes Phil mad, I'll be, like, 'Watch out for the Gray Mamba,'" Jeanie Buss said. "Or sometimes, if my dog is barking too much at the delivery guy, I'll be, like, 'Careful of the White Mamba.'"

This all made it only more devastating when, earlier this month, a day after the Lakers had lost "not just a game but their dignity," as the *Los Angeles Times* put it, in a forty-eight-point drubbing at the hands of their arena-mates the Clippers, rumors leaked that Jackson was considering an offer to become president of the Knicks.

Two weeks ago, the Lakers made official what was becoming increasingly obvious, as successive knee scans revealed limited progress in the healing fracture: Bryant would not be returning to the court this season, after all. A press conference was arranged, and a "smoldering" Bryant, according to



"Sit tight, chief—I'll take you out where the big swords are."

the *L.A. Times*, made his first public remarks in almost a month. "I feel like killing everybody every time I go to the arena," he said. "I'm just on edge every time." A trade of the thirty-four-year-old point guard Steve Blake at the deadline, in late February, had inspired this Twitter rant from Bryant: "Not cool with @SteveBlake5 being gone AT ALL. One of my closest teammates and psycho competitor." He had also lost patience with the front office's wait-and-see approach to rebuilding. "Oh, yeah, let's just play next year and let's just suck again," he said, sarcastic.

"I think we have to start at the top, in terms of the culture of our team," Bryant said, and then singled out the Buss children. "You got to start with Jim and Jeanie and how that relationship plays out." He was alluding to the common gripe among Lakers fans that Jim Buss was the obstacle standing in the way of rehiring Jackson. "Then it goes down to the coaching staff and what Mike is going to do," Bryant went on. And then, more ominously: "What they're going to do with Mike."

Magic Johnson, who had appeared on the "Tonight Show," earlier in the winter, and complained that D'Antoni didn't understand defense ("The teams run the same play, Jay, on us. We haven't stopped it yet—uh, duh!"), joined Bryant in expressing his displeasure, on

Twitter. "I love Jim & Jeanie Buss, but we need Phil Jackson to be the face of our great organization," Johnson wrote. For a brief moment, there was hope again in Lakerville, as the two biggest stars in franchise history seemed to be waging a joint campaign to force emergency action. In New York, at the *Daily News*, there was talk of a developing "bicoastal soap opera."

But when I spoke to Jackson, the day after Bryant's and Johnson's last-ditch pleas, he made it clear that any notions of his rejoining the Lakers had ended with the decision to hire D'Antoni. "I think that the die is cast, so to speak," he said. "Even the spectre of my being around is difficult. It'll be a little bit of a relief to get away."

Thinking ahead to a new gig in Manhattan (it was made formal at the Garden last Tuesday), Jackson said he was precluded from discussing the possibility of reuniting with Bryant until Bryant became a free agent, in a couple of years. But he said, "He just wants to play *for* something. He doesn't want a farewell tour for Kobe Bryant." He added, "I owe him a book, which I keep meaning to drop off."

"The whole town is just in mourning," Magic Johnson told me. Referring to Bryant, he said, "He spoiled us big time, this dude. Now we're seeing what might happen when he's gone in two years." ♦

JOY RIDE

Susan Stroman puts "Bullets Over Broadway" on Broadway.

BY JOHN LAHR

By nine-thirty in the morning on Martin Luther King Day, a blustery Arctic wind had emptied West Forty-second Street of most pedestrians, but on the neon-lit fourth floor of the New 42nd Street Studios the mood was the opposite of frigid. It was the first day of work on a musical adaptation of Woody Allen's 1994 movie "Bullets Over Broadway," a high-spirited story of gangsters, showgirls, and theatre, set in Manhattan in 1929, just before the crash. (The show opens at the St. James, on West Forty-fourth Street, on April 10th.) Susan Stroman, the show's director and choreographer (Allen wrote the book), had arrived early for a ten-o'clock call and was inspecting a miniature model of the set, designed by Santo Loquasto. Two weeks before, she had taken two dance assistants to a rehearsal studio and, using them more or less the way a sculptor would use clay, had danced all the characters and "worked out the landscape of movement and all the set changes." "So I absolutely know how the show moves," she said. Nonetheless, she was feeling a kind of parental anxiety. "When it's just me and my assistants dancing and singing in a room, there's no nervousness. It's just art pouring out of you. But now you have the responsibility of passing that on to the actors and also protecting them and being there for them. So there's an extra energy."

A stickler for research, Stroman had prepared a twelve-page information packet for the dancers who had been called for Day 1. In the packet was a glossary of terms, including "Greenwich Village," "bohemian," "Prohibition," "gangster," and "flappers," along with citations for the show's visual influences. To give the cast a taste of the playground of New York in the twenties, Stroman had inserted a couple of pages from the May 23,

1929, issue of *The New Yorker*: "A Conscientious Calendar of Events Worth While." Because "Bullets Over Broadway" is also set in Woody Allen's world, there were thumbnail explanations of references to Kant, Rousseau, Spinoza, Schopenhauer, and Aristotle. The handouts sat on a Formica table at the entrance to the rehearsal hall, beside a set of black script binders, fanned out flamboyantly like a royal straight flush. Chairs had been arranged in two semicircular rows around the director's table, and Stroman's show Bible—a folder, fatter than a quarterback's playbook, that held her script, her notes, her scene-by-scene breakdown of the cast's exits and entrances, the traffic plan of each musical number, and her e-mail exchanges with Allen—stood on a music stand, in front of the empty seats: the Book of Broadway, from which Stroman would soon begin to preach the gospel of good times.

Stroman, who is fifty-nine, has blond hair, a round open face, high cheekbones, and a ring-a-ding smile. "She puts joy on the stage because it's in her nature," Hal Prince, who hired Stroman to choreograph his brilliant 1993 revival of "Show Boat," said. "She is a shiny person." Being sensational is Stroman's business. The credo attributed to her childhood idol, Fred Astaire—"Do it big, do it right, and do it with style"—is hers, too. She has choreographed such long-running hits as "Crazy for You," a musical featuring the work of George and Ira Gershwin (1992; four years, 1,622 performances, and the first of five Tony Awards), and Mel Brooks's "The Producers" (2001; six years, 2,502 performances). From 1994 to 2003, she choreographed Alan Menken and Lynn Ahrens's "A Christmas Carol" spectacular, which packed the Paramount Theatre at Madison Square Garden every

"I'm really happy when I'm immersed in the art of it all—immersed in the music, the dance, the visual. Tapping into joy—it saves you," Stroman said.





PHOTOGRAPH BY PARI DUKOVIC

year. She was also the first woman to choreograph and direct a full-length performance at New York City Ballet. An homage to silent films, “Double Feature” (2004), two fifty-minute dances set to the music of Irving Berlin and Walter Donaldson, remains among the most popular programs in the repertory.

Stroman’s appearance on the scene, in the nineties, revitalized Broadway storytelling after a dismal decade dominated by dance-challenged British musicals. Where Jerome Robbins’s dances had brought athleticism and line to Broadway, and Bob Fosse’s had brought iconoclasm and style, Stroman’s choreography offered wit and raise-the-roof rambunctiousness. The secret to her musical game is transitions—how people enter and exit, how the characters interact with the set, how the story is told through the swift shifting of spatial and emotional gears. For the song “Slap That Bass,” in “Crazy for You,” for instance, the chorines became bass fiddles, and in the show’s sensational first-act finale the miners of Deadwood, Nevada, learned rhythm from Broadway showgirls, who pulverized their prospecting pans and were swung around on mining picks. For “Springtime for Hitler,” in “The Producers,” Stroman invented pigeons with swastikas on their wings, and in “Along Came Bialy,” in the same show, a crowd of lusty old coots danced through Little Old Lady Land with their walkers. Even in last year’s “Big Fish,” an adaptation of the Tim Burton movie, which failed to please the critics, Stroman, who directed and choreographed, managed a couple of unforgettable moments, including a circus fantasy, during which three behemoth elephants shook their backsides and tap-danced. “There’s a part of her, a secret well of joy, that she doesn’t let the world touch,” Mel Brooks said. “It’s there in her work.”

At the New 42nd Street Studios, Stroman was dressed in her director’s uniform: black shoes, black pants, black tunic. Her clothes, like everything else in her life, are designed to make her more effective at her job; she strategically plays down her looks and plays up the “worker bee,” as she describes her style. “You can’t think about

yourself when you get dressed. You can only think about what you’re working on here,” she said. Even her nickname, Stro, by which she is almost universally known on the Rialto, conjures up a kind of hail-fellow, de-feminized image, which for years she encouraged by wearing a baseball cap and a ponytail.

Pondering the stage picture that ends the first act of “Bullets,” Stroman reached into the model set, pulled out a plastic cup full of characters, and fished out a figurine of Olive, a showgirl who longs to be a Broadway actress and gets her gangster sugar daddy to buy her a starring role in a lame Broadway play. Then Stroman picked up a toy-size crimson-and-gold railroad car and put it on the set. “Over here is the end of Act I,” she said. “A big train comes on and we see the principals in each window. At the end, of course, girls are tapping on the very top of the train. Then there’s a girl hanging off the back in an Art Deco pose. Just wonderful.”

Toting water bottles and scripts, the ensemble began to clatter into the room. Stroman excused herself. “I’ve got to go hug everybody here,” she said. When the cast were settled in their seats, she stood to rally the troops. “Happy New Year! What’s better than starting it with a Broadway show?” she said. One at a time, the performers gave their name and the number of Stroman shows they’d done. Before they were sent off to sing through the score, Stroman instructed them on the inspirations for the dance movements they’d be perfecting over the next three months. “You know, when I say to you to make this more turned in, this way, more like a stick figure—that’s based on John Held’s photos and cartoons of that time,” she said, holding up a John Held, Jr., cartoon of two knock-kneed Charleston dancers from her information packet. She continued, “On page 4, there are a lot of Erté images. I know we always say to the ladies, ‘You’re hitting an Erté pose.’ So that’s what you’re hitting when you see that. Also the Vargas girls, the famous Vargas girls from the twenties. You know, in ‘Tiger Rag,’ when you’re sitting on the floor, there are a lot of poses there that are based on the Vargas girls. The whole



show is immersed in that time period, choreographically.” Then it was time for the ensemble and the musical director to go to work. Stroman left them to it.

Room 7-B, on the seventh floor of the New 42nd Street Studios, is dedicated to Stroman’s late husband, Mike Ockrent, a British director, who died of leukemia in 1999, at the age of fifty-three. His motto, “Rehearsal is the best part,” is emblazoned, along with his name, on a plaque beside the door. When Stroman works on the seventh floor, before the start of every day she runs her fingers across the deeply indented letters of his name. “It feels like a sculpture in your hands,” she said.

The two met in 1991 and collaborated on “Crazy for You,” which Ockrent directed. “When Mike left to go back to London, I swear I didn’t feel anything or know anything,” Stroman said, as the “Bullets” chorus, down the hall, belted out “I’m Sitting on Top of the World.” “He was my director at that time. He went to London—” She broke off. “I’m going to cry,” she said. She wiped her eyes, then continued, “He called a couple of weeks after we’d opened and said he had to come back. I said, ‘Why is that?’ In my mind, I was thinking there was a problem with the understudies, or why else was he coming back? He said, ‘I have to come back because I’ve fallen in love with you.’ I thought, Well, let’s start dating. We’ve been through a tech together, so now I know everything about this man.”

Intimacy requires equality; Stroman and Ockrent teamed up when both were in their artistic prime, and each had expertise to offer the other. The curly-haired Ockrent, who had studied physics at the University of Edinburgh, was well spoken, well read, and well informed; his sophistication and encouragement pitched Stroman’s professional ambitions higher. “He was her Henry Higgins,” said David Thompson, who wrote the book for five of Stroman’s musicals, including “The Scottsboro Boys” (2010), her bold, minimalist experiment with social comment. “Mike got Stro to start looking at what the theatre could be from a different perspective, to look at herself as a bigger artist.” For her part, Stroman made Ockrent laugh. Throughout their time together, he left mash

notes for her around the house. "I know I made him happy," Stroman said. "I was an American girl who was kind of curious, a little bit loud, in his mind, funny and optimistic."

The pair were married in 1996, and Stroman, who had lived in a dark basement apartment on the Upper West Side, found herself in a penthouse on Fifty-seventh Street, configured around a cozy farmhouse-style kitchen to cater to Ockrent's culinary inclinations. (To this day, Stroman rarely applies heat to food. "I order in well," she said.) One day, Mel Brooks knocked on the door, launched full voice into a rendition of "That Face"—"That face/that face/that fabulous face!"—danced down their long corridor, jumped on the sofa, and said, "Hello, I'm Mel Brooks." By the end of the meeting, he had hired Stroman to choreograph and Ockrent to direct "The Producers." In the middle of their planning, however, Ockrent fell ill. "He was very determined—it was not like the kind of thing where he knew that he was on a fast track out," Thompson said, recalling how he and Stroman had smuggled a cake into Sloan Kettering for Ockrent's birthday. "And then he died. I think the surprise of it upended Stro's world." After that, Stroman said, "I didn't feel like working, and Mel came over, kind of stormed in. And he said, 'Look, I really want you to direct and choreograph this.' And he said, 'You'll cry in the morning, and you'll cry at night. But when you're with me during the day you will laugh. And that will save you.' It did." After Ockrent's death, Stroman bought a bench in Central Park, on Literary Walk, near the statue of Robert Burns, whose birthday they had celebrated every year. In commemoration of their New Year's wedding, the bench's plaque refers to Burns's most famous song: "Dear Mike, 'We'll tak' a cup o' kindness yet, for Auld Lang Syne.' Love, Stro."

In 2005, Stroman directed and choreographed a movie version of "The Producers," working with the seasoned Hollywood editor Steven Weisberg, who had edited such films as "Men in Black II" and "Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban." Three years later, Weisberg came to New York for a job and asked her out to dinner. "After the third time, I thought, I wonder why he's asking me out for these meals," Stroman said. "I'm

not going to make another movie. I'm only involved in the theatre. And then he walked me home and planted a big kiss on me. And he said, 'You're not the boss of me anymore. So now we can have a real relationship.'"

Weisberg was tall and handsome, with a lively interest in literature and jazz. Two years later, he moved into Stroman's penthouse. Stroman playfully referred to him as "an old hippie." "He was laid back and not precise," she said. "Very different from me, and very different, of course, from Mike." Weisberg would occasionally overlook Stroman's birthday or turn up late for dinner—forgivable lapses—but after he almost drove her into oncoming traffic and lost important footage in an Avid editing suite, she took him to see a neurologist. Tests revealed that tragedy had found her again: at fifty-five, Weisberg had early-onset Alzheimer's. "Once he was diagnosed, we got closer," she said. "I think because I realized that all those times that he would forget Christmas, or New Year's, or my birthday, it had nothing to do with his not loving me."

Over the next couple of years, various film friends stayed at Stroman's apartment to help her take care of Weisberg. "I know that those last years with me were wonderful years for him. I made them

wonderful. But it was clear he needed something more," she said. Last September, during the vexed production of "Big Fish," Stroman moved Weisberg back to Los Angeles, into an assisted-living accommodation, with twenty-four-hour care, where he could be supported by his Hollywood network. "It was devastating to say goodbye," Stroman said, looking down at her hands. "As of about last week, he doesn't remember me."

In many of Stroman's musicals—"Crazy for You," "Contact" (1999), the 2000 revival of "The Music Man," and even the film "Center Stage" (2000)—song and dance are dramatized as redemptive: they resuscitate dead communities and resurrect the downcast. What was petrified now flows. Contriving a schedule that allows her to stay as much as possible in "the ecstatic moment," as she calls it, Stroman has turned to the musical as her own Rx for heartbreak. Her dance card for the next year includes "Little Dancer," a Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty musical (at the Kennedy Center, in October); "Take Five, More or Less," a ballet set to the music of Dave Brubeck (at the Joyce, also in October); and "The Merry Widow," at the Metropolitan Opera (starring Renée Fleming, opening New Year's Eve). "I'm really happy when I'm immersed in the art of it



"Casual dress hasn't yielded the results we'd hoped for."



"Careful—some of our children's firearms are manufactured in plants that also process nuts and nut products."

all—immersed in the music, the dance, the visual. Tapping into joy—it saves you," Stroman said.

Stroman has been tapping into joy since the age of five, when every night, for at least an hour before dinner, her father, Charles—an appliance salesman during the week and a pianist at local watering holes on weekends—sat at the upright in the den of the family's modest house, on the outskirts of Wilmington, Delaware, and worked his way through the American songbook, while Stroman danced on the linoleum floor. Sometimes her soft-spoken Irish-Catholic mother, Frances, would come out of the kitchen to sing along. Musical talent ran in the family. Charles's mother, Ella, was also a fine pianist, who for years accompanied the silent films at the Loews Theatre in Wilmington. And Stroman's brother, Corky, who was eleven years older and the self-proclaimed "black sheep" of the family, was already touring with his own trio when Stroman was a girl; he ran a night club in Puerto Rico for years.

As a salesman, Charles traded on his ability to instill confidence. "The only thing you really need to make it is a bottle of Listerine and a thesaurus," he told Stroman. He burnished his life story with tall

tales, in which he was the hero of every improbable escapade. "Everything was a sale. Everything was big and grand and outrageous," Debbie Bouma-Moore, Stroman's best friend since her teen-age years, recalled. "If he told me a story, I would have to assume that it was false." A child of the Depression, Charles took pride in being self-made. "He had talent, but he never had the dream of becoming a professional musician," Stroman said. "He wanted to have a home, to send a daughter to college." (Stroman majored in English at the University of Delaware, graduating in 1976.) Still, he encouraged her to take chances. "What's the worst that can happen?" was his mantra. (He was less supportive of Stroman's younger sister, Debbie, who wasn't as musical. "He doted more on Susan, almost as if he knew she was going to be successful," Debbie said. "He actually pushed me around a bit and called me some foul names.")

From an early age, Stroman visualized music. "I imagined it filled with a cast of people and costumes and lights," she said. "I would dance and make up songs and stories and play characters. I was that kid. If I hadn't become a choreographer and a director, I would have just gone crazy with the visions." Although she was taking

dance classes by the age of six, her focus was on creating, not performing. When Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers movies came on television, the family would sit mesmerized on the sofa, Stroman recalled, "as if we were watching gold pour out of the television set." Even then, she recognized that music supported choreography. "I knew that when Fred Astaire turned or jumped in the air, so did the orchestra," Stroman said. She also understood "how he would structure his dance steps almost like a story, with a beginning, a middle, and an end."

At John Dickinson High School, Stroman donned the blue-and-white school colors as a baton twirler, adept at toss turns, double and triple turns, around-the-world, and choreographed her crew for halftime shows. "I think that's why I'm so good with props," she said. "I can catch the baton behind my back and everything." At home, she cocooned herself in dreams of movement, covering her bedroom wall with a decoupage of phrases and photographs, so firmly affixed that the entire wall had to be removed when the family sold the house, in the eighties. Between images of Fred and Ginger dancing "Pick Yourself Up," Rita Hayworth on a giant piano keyboard, Degas's "Blue Dancers," and dancing ducks, Stroman pasted up such quotations as "Life is a cabaret," "I have a place where dreams are born, and time is never planned," "Feeling groovy," and, from Martha Graham, "All that is important is this one moment in movement. Make the moment important, vital and worth living. Do not let it slip away unnoticed and unused."

The summer before their senior year of college, Stroman and Debbie Bouma-Moore took a trip to San Francisco, where they were going to house-sit. They arrived in style, in a black Cadillac Eldorado convertible that a local car company needed delivered to the Bay Area, but soon ran out of money. "All we had left in the house was bread and jello that we put on the bread," Bouma-Moore said. Walking along Fisherman's Wharf, Stroman noticed the many buskers working the busy sidewalks: a trumpet player; a man in a refrigerator box, billing himself as "the Human Jukebox," who'd sing a song if you put a quarter in a slot. "I thought, O.K., we could do this," she said. "We went from musician to musician. Nobody wanted us," Bouma-Moore recalled.

Finally, they came upon a man playing a guitar with a drum on his back, cymbals on his knees, and a harmonica in his mouth. "How would you like two blondes dancing in front of you?" Stroman asked him. The girls went back to the house, put on their tap shoes, and worked up five routines "that could go with any song he could possibly play," Stroman said. Performing under the sobriquets Lindsey and Sunny—Bouma-Moore's nickname for Stroman—they earned around eighty dollars a day. Their act became so popular with tourists that the police were frequently called to clear the sidewalk, and local entrepreneurs made buttons featuring their beaming faces. At the end of the summer, they were spotted by scouts for the "Tonight Show," who flew them to L.A. and planted them in the audience for a talent segment. Tap-dancing in the aisle to the tune of "Little Brown Jug," Stroman won a steak dinner and her first national attention.

In March, 1977, at twenty-two, Stroman drove from Wilmington to New York for her first professional audition: she was one of three hundred dancers competing for three places in a revival of Vincent Youmans's 1927 musical "Hit the Deck," which was being produced by Goodspeed Musicals, in East Haddam, Connecticut. By then, Stroman was choreographing at community theatres in Wilmington and teaching at a local dance studio. "It wasn't enough. I was itching for something more, and it wasn't coming to me," she said. Stroman, who had been to New York only once before, found Times Square frightening. "I was a goon magnet walking down the street," she said. "I remember being amazed at the number of dancers in the rehearsal space." That night, she saw "Pippin," her first Broadway show. She returned home, not expecting anything to come of the audition. The next week, she got the job. She sold her red Opel GT and, that June, set off to start her life in show business, at a hundred dollars a week.

Stroman's departure was "a huge struggle," according to Corky. "My parents were afraid that 'real' show business might hurt me," Stroman said. "They saw that music did not help my brother. When he left town, he strayed down the wrong path." But, she added, "when you dance off the stage you are always leaping into darkness.

I needed to take this leap into darkness for real." After Goodspeed, Stroman made a beeline for Manhattan, rented a one-bedroom ground-floor apartment on West Eighty-first Street for two hundred and thirty-five dollars a month, and then went home to pick up her things. The last item she loaded into her U-Haul was her father's small red piano.

Within six months, Stroman was touring as a dancer with the national company of Kander and Ebb's "Chicago," directed by Bob Fosse, and starring Gwen Verdon, Chita Rivera, and Jerry Orbach. For interested cast members, Orbach held a weekly acting class, where he preached the gospel of stage focus, which became Stroman's credo, too. "You have to remain in character when you're singing and dancing and acting, throughout the whole piece," she said. Perhaps the best example of her fierce concentration is "Trading Places" (1983), a showcase at the Equity Library Theatre, which Stroman devised with Jeff Veazey, her lanky dance partner of four years. In the heart-lifting piece, Stroman and Veazey play two film-obsessed fans who re-create the work of famous dance teams—Astaire and Rogers, Danny Kaye and Vera Ellen, and others—in synch with projections of the originals. "Jeff and I would work at Jeff's studio apartment," Stroman said. "We danced on a piece of plywood that he kept under his bed. We would work out all the dance steps in a very small space. When we were able to understand the steps, we would rent a studio and dance through it."

Stroman keeps on her laptop a three-minute clip of their rendition of "Begin the Beguine," dancing in exuberant tandem with Astaire and Eleanor Powell. Projected onto two screens against a starry backdrop, Astaire and Powell tap nonchalantly into view. After thirty seconds, Stroman and Veazey skitter onto the stage and fall into breezy lockstep with the dancers above them. With the full skirt of her bias-cut dress billowing, Stroman is every bit Powell's poetic equal, living both the joy of the dance and an almost platonic ideal of movement. Eventually, the music falls away, and the dancers dare each other in rhythm. With taps, claps, and dynamic changes of volume, the synchopation builds to a pinwheeling finale, whose thrilling commotion concludes with Stroman and Veazey on the same

beat and in the same silhouette as Astaire and Powell. An extraordinary exhibition of concentration and control, "Trading Places" got Stroman and Veazey booked to demonstrate teamwork at many industrial shows. (Stroman had already begun to earn about eight hundred dollars a week choreographing shows for Ford, MetLife, and I.B.M., among others.) From Veazey, Stroman said, she learned about partnering. "There's a push and pull when you partner, almost like a rubber band," she said. "You become one, really, when you dance together." But in 1988 Veazey died of AIDS, at the age of thirty-three. "Jeff's death hit me hard," Stroman said. She gave up performing: "I did not want to dance with anyone else. It was time to get on the other side of the table."

Stroman had already begun the transition by choreographing, in 1987, an Off Broadway revival of Kander and Ebb's 1965 musical "Flora the Red Menace," for her friend the director Scott Ellis. (David Thompson rewrote the book.) Ellis and Stroman had first met as performers in "Musical Chairs," a 1980 Broadway flop. "It was springtime, and we would sit on the stoop of the stage door of the Rialto and lament about how much we wanted to make the move to create for the theatre," Stroman said. A few years later, at Ellis's instigation, they plucked up the courage to approach Kander and Ebb and got permission to downsize "Flora" by staging the Communist love story as an amateur production at a W.P.A. Federal Theatre in the nineteen-thirties. The staging won "Flora" a new following. "We became this little family," John Kander recalled. "And then they had an idea of doing a revue of our songs." The revue, titled "And the World Goes 'Round," which opened Off Broadway in 1991, ran for more than four hundred performances. "Flora" had brought Stroman to the attention of Hal Prince, who then hired her to choreograph "Don Giovanni" at New York City Opera. Liza Minnelli saw "And the World Goes 'Round," and put Stroman in charge of the choreography for her show "Stepping Out at Radio City," which was directed by Fred Ebb. In Radio City Music Hall's plush lobby Stroman met Mike Ockrent for the first time. "It was a combination of the comedy in 'And the World Goes 'Round' and the show-biz extravaganza of Liza's show that made him think I would be right for

‘Crazy for You,’” Stroman recalled. “He asked me right then and there if I would choreograph his show.”

Before the opening-night party for “Crazy for You,” on February 19, 1992, Thompson and Ellis went over to the *Times* office to see if they could get an early copy of the review. “We went to the party, and I knew I had this thing in my hand that was going to change Stro forever,” Thompson said. “I handed her this paper and just stepped back as she read.” The show was reviewed by Frank Rich, who began this way:

When future historians try to find the exact moment at which Broadway finally rose up to grab the musical back from the British they just may conclude that the revolution began last night. The shot was fired at the Shubert Theater, where a riotously entertaining show called “Crazy for You” uncorked the American musical’s blend of music, laughter, dancing, sentiment and showmanship with a freshness and confidence rarely seen during the “Cats” decade. . . . The miracle that has been worked here—most ingeniously . . . by an extraordinary choreographer named Susan Stroman and the playwright Ken Ludwig—is to take some of the greatest songs ever written for Broadway and Hollywood and reawaken the impulse that first inspired them. . . . Ms. Stroman’s dances do not comment on such apparent influences as Fred Astaire, Hermes Pan and Busby Berkeley so much as reinvent them. Rather than piling on exhausting tap routines to steamroll the audience into enjoying itself, the choreographer uses the old forms in human proportion, to bring out specific feelings in the music and lyrics. . . . Short of George Balanchine’s “Who Cares?” at the New York City Ballet, I have not seen a more imaginative choreographic response to the Gershwins onstage.

“It burned through the party,” Thompson recalled. “It just burned through the night.”

Stroman’s particular directorial gift—her ability to fill an empty space not just with people but with story—was there in embryo in “Crazy for You.” Her transition to director-choreographer, however, came seven years later, after a meeting with Lincoln Center Theatre’s artistic director, André Bishop. Bishop had seen all of Stroman’s work in the nineties and had been impressed. “The dances that she did had a narrative, and the dancers had characters,” Bishop said. “There was depth to them. There was an attention to detail in those dances that I had rarely seen in Broadway choreography.” He offered Stroman a commission.



Months earlier, Stroman and Ockrent had found themselves in a dive in the meatpacking district that was a pool hall by day and a swing-dance club by night. At one in the morning, the place was a scrum of black-clad dancers. “Into this sea of dark fashion stepped a girl in a yellow dress,” Stroman recalled. “You couldn’t help but notice her: it was a very bold color to wear at night—lemon yellow—the same color you find on a traffic light. When she wanted to dance, she would step away from the bar and some man would ask her to dance.” Stroman continued, “I was obsessed with watching her. I knew she would change some man’s life that night.” From that single image, Stroman developed “Contact.” The dance was too short for an evening, so she added “Swinging,” a sexy capriccio based on Fragonard’s “The Swing,” and “Did You Move,” about a woman rebelling against the control of her abusive husband. The triptych, titled “Contact,” which the *Times* called “an endorphin rush,” became Lincoln Center Theatre’s longest-running production at the time. Neither a ballet nor a musical, “Contact” was sui generis, a novelty that was first billed as a “dance play.” Although it had about five minutes of dialogue, its stories were told almost entirely in movement to recorded music. (The American Theatre Wing invented a “Special Theatrical Event” category after “Contact” won four Tonys.) “When the show was a hit, I went back downtown to find the club,” Stroman said. “It had been demolished. So the girl and the club had disappeared—like Brigadoon.”

Stroman, however, was now uniquely visible as a female director-choreographer on Broadway.

Stroman had never met Woody Allen when the producers called her, in April, 2012, to see if she would be responsive to his material. “People who knew her told me she was a pleasure to work with, very creative, and had a wonderful sense of humor,” Allen said. “She had worked very well with Mel.” Allen had scuppered all previous proposals to turn “Bullets Over Broadway” into a musical. “He hates the new music for shows, the new composers,” his sister, Letty Aronson, one of the lead co-producers for “Bul-

lets,” explained. “So I said, ‘Look, we can use the existing music of the time.’” Then, according to Allen, “a light bulb went off.” Allen and Stroman worked together on the fifth floor of his Upper East Side town house. “We would take the stairs, because he won’t go in the elevator,” Stroman recalled. “We worked in the children’s playroom. We sat on children’s chairs at a low children’s table.” Stroman’s knowledge of the American songbook and her expertise at juggling music and dialogue made Allen a believer. “I would be rattling off songs that I thought only I would know, but she knew them all, and knew songs that I didn’t know,” he said. “She was ultra-meticulous about wanting to make sure that every song advanced the plot.” The musical of “Bullets” has a straighter story line than the film and, because of the song and dance, is also more dynamic. “My wife prefers this to the movie,” Allen told me.

On the morning of January 23rd, the nine principals made their first appearance in the “Bullets” rehearsal room for the meet and greet, a ritual of Broadway that is a cross between a kaffeeklatsch, a pep rally, and a shareholders’ meeting. (“I’ll see you at the meet and greet, but I hope I don’t have to meet or greet anybody,” Allen had e-mailed Stroman beforehand.) Well-dressed investors picked their way through the rows of wooden chairs toward a lavish smorgasbord of breakfast foods. Producers hobnobbed with actors. Theatre owners chatted with leggy chorines in full makeup, with high heels and bright smiles. Zach Braff—who plays the aspiring playwright forced to cast a gangster’s tootsie in order to finance his play, only to discover that her minder, a galoot called Cheech (Nick Cordero), is the one with the genuine literary gift—wandered the room with practiced nonchalance, in a Detroit Tigers baseball cap. Stroman mingled and beamed and posed for a photographer. Success was in the air: the musical’s story was tight and tested, the songs were classics, cleverly massaged, and Stroman, the doyenne of Broadway dazzle, was at the helm. “When it works, it’s like the oil business,” the producer Roy Furman said to the nabobs from the Jujamcyn Theatres, which owns the St. James. The word “gusher” was heard.

When Allen arrived, looking as if

he'd walked out of an Orvis catalogue—brown pants, olive work shirt, tan all-weather brogans—Stroman ushered him toward the model of the set and talked him through her box of scenic tricks. Allen listened intently with head bowed and hands clasped behind his back. “She knows the field much more than I know it,” he'd told me earlier. “I could do it in the movies, but she's the one on the stage. It's really Susan's show, ninety-five per cent.” He bent to scrutinize the set as Stroman explained how it would transform from one scene to the next: the sprung furniture that would allow would-be lovers to bounce Chagall-like across the stage for “Let's Misbehave”; the Erté proscenium, with niches for “living sculpture”; the revolving stage, which would be used to recreate the gangsters' rampage through the theatre at the finale. “That never would have occurred to me,” Allen said. Then, after a few minutes of being passed around to various high rollers like nuts at Christmas, he politely took his leave. Stroman stayed behind to address the crowd.

“I couldn't be more excited about the design,” she said, as Santo Loquasto and the costume designer William Ivey Long flanked her. “We're going to just show you some things in tandem—I'll do interjections—but I'm going to pass it off. Hit it, Santo!” Stroman's openness turned the occasion from a business chore into an entertaining instrument of consensus. After Loquasto and Ivey Long had done their part, she turned the spotlight on the chorus. When she got on the subject of gangsters, she pointed to a strapping young dance-ensemble member in the third row—Casey Garvin, whose grandfather's uncle was Michael (Trigger Mike) Coppola, of the Genovese family. “I looked him up. He was Lucky Luciano's hit man,” Stroman said. Casey smiled, swivelled in his seat, and nodded to the applauding audience. “He's got a very secure job,” Stroman said. Then she sent the producers and investors back to their bagels and badinage, and she went back to work.

An hour later, the food and formalities finished, the chorus girls, now in tap shoes and clutching prop daisies, stepped toward the director's table, where Stroman sat. “I'm Mary!” “Annie!” “Jeannie!”



“Pace yourself, honey. You're only three.”

“Rose!” “Betty!” “Daisy!” “Olive!” they called out, and began to sing:

We'll be glad when you're dead, you rascal you.
We'll be glad when you're dead, you rascal you.
When you're dead in your grave
No more women will you crave.
We'll be glad when you're dead, you rascal you.

As the dancers belted out the number and worked their routine, Stroman scrutinized the line, seeming to listen as much with her body as with her ears. Her shoulders moved to the rhythm; her hands kept up their own semaphore. Stroman is a taskmaster—“She's in my pantheon of fanatics, guaranteed,” Ivey Long, who has collaborated with her on twenty-eight shows, said—but she is exacting without being persecuting. At one point, she moved into a corner of the room with her arms crossed, shuffling her feet as she imagined a new step. At the end of the number (“We'll be gay and merry / At your obituary”), the chorines were meant to exit blowing kisses. Stroman, back in her seat, leaned forward. “Kiss with the middle finger,” she said. For a few minutes, the dancers tried to perfect their mordant farewell. Stroman stopped them again. “Blow it off your hand,” she said, standing up to demonstrate. “No, not

here—get it way out here. Five, six, make a kiss. Flat, yeah, so the kiss flies right out of your hand.” Next, she attended to the chorus's wagging fingers as they scolded the rascal with “You know you done us wrong, you rascal you.” “Some of you have just gone down and then gone down, down, down,” she said, letting her pointed finger droop. “Don't just go down. My finger goes up, up. Take your whole arm with it. My hand's going to move a little bit, but my focus is on my finger.” Then, getting in front of the mirror with her dancers, Stroman said, “We're looking down this way, so out, out, step, hit it!” The dancers reran the moment. “Looking good,” she said. “Better, better!”

“You Rascal You” is a night-club routine performed at Nick's Place, which is owned by Nick Valenti, the palooka whose girl wants to be a star. Valenti is played by the hulking Vincent Pastore, better known to the universe as Big Pussy, in “The Sopranos.” Pastore, who carries with him his own saturnine atmosphere, was leaning against a wall, watching the rehearsal and rolling an unlit cigar between his thick fingers. He seemed bemused at the hubbub of Stroman's blocking. She waved him over as two thugs practiced rushing across the room with a fedora-clad dummy lying face down on a gurney under

a bloodstained sheet. "You are the set change," Stroman explained to Pastore, whose face was a mask of puzzlement. "As soon as the music stops, I say the line?" he asked. "Yes," she said, putting her arm through his and steering him toward the piano. "It's a musical. Wait for the music," she said. The pianist played the scene in: the corpse was rushed across the room, and Pastore waited for the music to stop, and then, in his deep, sludgy voice, announced, "He tripped!" The room exploded with laughter. "Love it!" Pastore beamed. "All right!"

On February 1st, a week after the meet and greet, the production was temporarily thrown off balance by what the producers began to refer to as "the Situation." Allen's estranged daughter, Dylan Farrow, published an open letter on the *Times* Web site, repeating allegations of sexual abuse by Allen that had first been raised at the time of a 1992 custody suit. The piece came out on a Saturday, and that Monday morning Stroman convened the cast. "We never go into the personal lives of those around us," she recalls saying. "We don't know anything about personal lives—we only know about talent. We're here to put on a show, and we're here to talk only about the show." Stroman never broached the subject with Allen. "We have no small talk. He's never asked me anything about my personal life, and I wouldn't ask him anything about his," she said. "For us, this collaboration has always been about the work. This is my

work. This is William Ivey Long's work and Santo Loquasto's work. This is the work of the actors. This is the work of an entire team of people who love what we do." Nevertheless, Farrow's letter set off a wave of media scurrility that cast a long shadow over the prospects of Allen's latest movie, "Blue Jasmine," at the Academy Awards, as well as over the Broadway opening of "Bullets." Ultimately, Cate Blanchett's performance in "Blue Jasmine" won her the Best Actress Oscar, and the "Bullets" box-office was also unaffected. On February 7th, Allen published a rebuttal in the *Times*, which Stroman said calmed "any kind of fear that anyone might have had." In the early days of the brouhaha, she asked the producers about advance ticket sales. "I was told they were steady and growing," she said. "After that, I stepped on the gas."

At the St. James Theatre five weeks later, Stroman sat on a blue padded bench stretched across the armrests of several seats in Row H; this allowed her to see over the large slanted director's table in front of her, where yellow Post-it notes were lined up like rows of corn. "Tonight we're running Act II with music," she said, pulling her hair high above her head with both hands.

The theatre was only two city blocks from the rehearsal room, but it had taken five laborious tech weeks to get the fun machine of "Bullets Over Broadway" up and running there. Stroman, who keeps a hawk-eye on every produc-

tion detail, had even kept watch over me, issuing periodic e-mail bulletins:

Woody . . . loved the new numbers. He even left smiling. I had to laugh at one scene—when I asked him about changing a line—he started to cough—I asked him if he wanted some water (which was sitting in front of him) and he said in his Woodyish way, "No, let me struggle. I like to struggle."

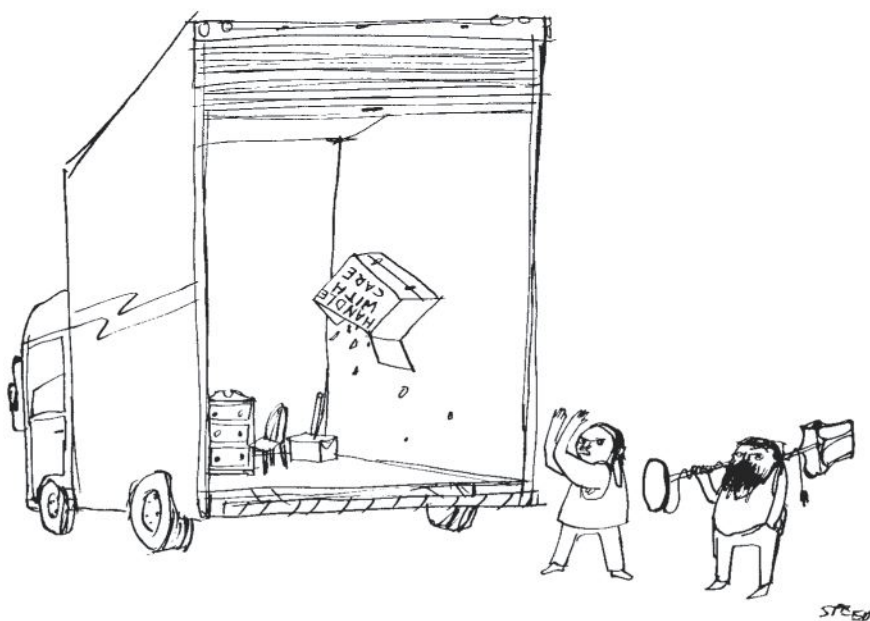
Can you tell I've been up since 5:30? Just excited about the tech. Can't wait to get there. As each set unfolds, it's like . . . a big present rolling towards you downstage.

I am heading to the sitzprobe now. That is the first time the cast hears the orchestrations and meets the band. . . . I talked Woody into coming. . . . I bought some Snickers bars. He always loves to have a Snickers bar when he visits.

The sitzprobe was amazing. I was going to try to find another word, but I can't. . . . I am sure I am the first and only person to tear up at "Tiger Rag"! When those opening chords were played, the past two years of meetings and ideas and collaboration came flooding into my brain. Now there was a musical where there never was a musical before. Woody was very happy. He would spontaneously applaud, but quietly under the table.

As the designers fiddled at their computers, Stroman studied the show curtain, which bore an image of high-stepping chorines, their tilted bodies jousting with slide trombones. "When the curtain comes up, I have the girls in the same pose," she said. "I was inspired by Santo." She drifted down to the lip of the stage to consult with her musical supervisor, Glen Kelly, and with Marin Mazzie, who plays Helen Sinclair, a diva who is trying to manipulate the playwright, David Shayne (Braff), into beefing up her role. Sinclair's seduction of Shayne is performed to the Bessie Smith belter "I Ain't Gonna Play No Second Fiddle"; to give the vamp more drive and drama, Stroman upped the tempo and adjusted Mazzie's delivery, instructing her to give a lusty sigh at Braff's touch. Where Mazzie had sung "'Cause Mama don't sing/And Mama don't swing/For a man who won't let her play lead," she was now down and dirty: "'Cause Mama don't Uumph/And Mama don't Unnh/For a man who won't let her play lead." There were whoops of approval from out front.

Stroman, according to Kelly, "rules by niceness." She also rules by being extraordinarily organized. Her office, which is on the tenth floor of her apartment building, is decorated entirely in black and white, a startling tabula rasa, with a white Formica desk, stacked with legal pads and pencils, at its center. "I wanted the room to have no



"They just put that to make you handle it with care."

show posters or anything in it that would take my mind off the particular project I was doing,” she said. Everything is arranged so that she has to think only about dance: “Having things organized—water bottles lined up, surfaces clear and clean—is about keeping distractions to a minimum so I can stay focussed. I feel like I lose time and energy if I have to rummage for a pencil or a cup of tea.” Likewise, when she gives notes the emphasis is on eye contact, on making her ideas felt without the impediments of paper and pen. As she speaks, the associate director, Jeff Whiting, stands just behind her with a wedge of index cards, like a quiz-show host. When Stroman has covered a point, Whiting fields the note and hands her the next card. After the session, he copies her notes in a legible hand and slips them under the actors’ doors. On a hard day, an actor may get as many as ten cards under the door.

The day of the first preview—March 10th—was uncharacteristically warm, the kind of sudden release after a long winter freeze that is always good for comedy. “It’s an omen,” Allen recalled thinking as he left his house that morning. For the pre-show tune-up that afternoon, he sat to Stroman’s left at the director’s table. Stroman, who looked tired, set out two Snickers bars for him, as if to say that it was going to be one of those days. The previous night’s dress rehearsal, in front of an invited audience, had been a disaster: because of a faulty stage elevator, the show had had to stop for twenty minutes. “It was ragged,” she said. “We lost what little audience we had.” Worse, the company had missed its chance to calibrate the show to the audience’s reactions. For the actors and the crew, the preview that night would be their first real test.

Slumped in his seat, Allen watched as Stroman adjusted the lighting on the bullet-riddled corpse as it was wheeled through Nick’s Place. Over the mike to the lighting designer, Donald Holder, Stroman requested “a low glow, as if we’re heading somewhere but we don’t know where yet.” She added, “I want the club later.” The fix worked: now, as the corpse was wheeled offstage, the night club loomed into view, a surprise for the audience. “The fluidity with which she makes things go from scene to scene is amazing,” Allen said. “I would be so lost. For me, it would be like a day at the Strategic Air

Command.” When Allen had a query, he leaned over to Stroman with the tact of a butler. “I’m not suggesting this, but did anyone feel that the first act is too long?” he said. “Yes,” Stroman replied with no hint of defensiveness. “Is there anything that can be done about it?” Allen asked. “I’m doing it now,” she said, showing him some nips and tucks in the script. “You go in and carve,” she said. “Cuts are always good,” Allen said later. “Good riddance!” With only an hour left to tweak before the



cast had to get ready for the evening’s performance, Allen’s main concern was the balance of story and song. “I want to try to bring the book a little more forward,” he said. “The music is a little loud, and so the audience misses some of the lines.”

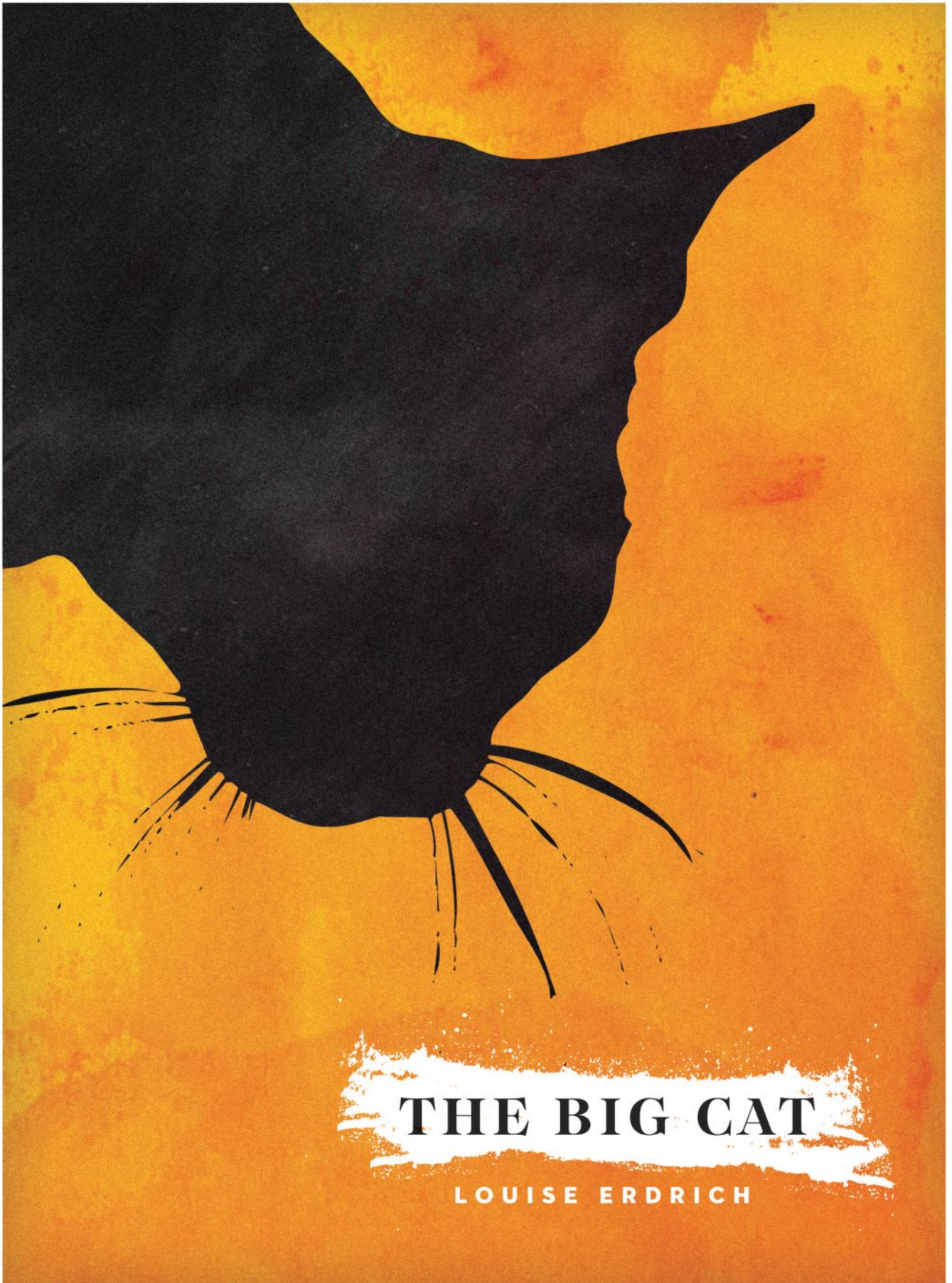
At 7 P.M., the weather was so mild that the Naked Cowgirl was posing for photos in a black bikini at Forty-fourth and Broadway. A line had already formed under the marquee of the St. James. Onstage, the actors were gathered in a circle around the two lead producers, Aronson and Julian Schlossberg, who told them to “win one for the Gipper.” Stroman worked her way up the aisle to her catbird seat in the back row. After the fiasco of the dress rehearsal, she was nervous for the actors. “I want them to be able to tell the story without worrying about anything else,” she said. Allen had also arrived early, accompanied by a towering young female Italian assistant—a sort of sequoia of solicitude. “*Voodee*, the doors are opening,” the assistant said. For a moment, Allen panicked, uncertain whether to take his aisle seat or to bolt to a private room up in the mezzanine. “*Aaah!*” he dithered, then hightailed it up the stairs, returning to join Stroman at curtain time.

The cheering began with the show’s first beat, as a spray of machine-gun bullets spelled out the show’s title in white lights, and it never really stopped. Mazzie belted, Braff squirmed,

Cordero menaced, Pastore was dopey and deadly, and even Trixie the Pomeranian got her laughs on cue. The sight gags, which had been miniature notions a month earlier, were now huge comic realities: the dancing hot dogs in “I Want a Hot Dog for My Roll,” the sprung chairs that lent surreal hilarity to “Let’s Misbehave.” Stroman’s signature piece of showmanship was “Runnin’ Wild”—the rollicking finale to Act I, in which all the ricocheting characters and their desires came together, as the chorus girls skittered around the stage in black hot pants and red conductor caps and tap-danced on top of the railroad car.

During the performance, Stroman occasionally leaned over and put her head in her hands, as if embarrassed. But it was shock that she was feeling. “I couldn’t believe the roar of the audience,” she said later. “I think we did our job.” At the finale, the cast launched into “Yes! We Have No Bananas,” a goofy anthem for the evening’s caprice and a song that rejects the negative: instead of admitting defeat at the lack of bananas, the number celebrates all that *does* exist—scallions, onions, tomatoes, potatoes, and, this being Broadway, blintzes, knishes, and chopped liver, too. As the actors congaed around the stage, the gleeful song played both as a refusal to suffer over loss and as gratitude for all that remains. At the curtain call, Allen rushed up the stairs toward his private room, but paused at the top. There, alone in the low amber light, he bent over the balustrade to gaze at the crowd standing to applaud. For a full minute, he studied the jubilation, then finally slipped away.

At midnight, Stroman was still there in the quiet auditorium, deconstructing the performance, figuring out cuts and light changes for the next day’s rehearsal. There was a month to go before “Bullets Over Broadway” had its official opening: time to find even more momentum, more laughter, more delight. Stroman, who has “shaken the hand of grief,” as Ivey Long put it, long ago dedicated herself to banishing gravity from the stage. For the audience and for herself, “Bullets” was a joy ride. “I try to choose joy,” she said. “It’s not easy. But even if we have no bananas we all have to keep going.” ♦



THE BIG CAT

LOUISE ERDRICH

The women in my wife's family all snored, and when we visited for the holidays every winter I got no sleep. Elida's three sisters and their bombproof husbands loved to gather at her parents' house in Golden Valley, an inner-ring suburb of Minneapolis. The house was less than twenty years old, but the sly tricks of the contractor were evident in every sagging sill, skewed jamb, cracked plaster wall, tilted handrail, and, most significantly, in the general lack of insulation that caused the outer walls to ice up and the inside to resound.

Every night the sounds were different. Helplessly cognizant, I formed mental scenarios while drifting in and out of sleep. One memorable night, I tossed and turned in a metalworking shop. From the far end of the second-floor hallway came the powerful rip of my mother-in-law's rough-cut saw. From below, on the living room's foldout couches, the intermittent thrum of welders' torches—a wild hissing as the sisters' noses sparked and soldered invisible objects. Beside me, Elida's finishing touch: the high-pitched burr of a polisher perfecting a metal surface. Elida was slight, and she dressed in precise, quiet colors. She sat with her hands folded, wore clear nail polish and almost undetectable makeup. You would never have imagined that such a stark little person could produce such sounds.

Ambien, earplugs, two pillows over my head—nothing could shut the noise out. I lay awake stewing, even though I knew I should feel sorry for them. The sisters and their mother had visited sleep clinics, endured surgery, blown their CPAPs off their faces, tried every nose strip and homeopathic remedy that existed. It wasn't that they liked to snore but that they were incurable. I think they took comfort in solidarity, though. Elida admitted that she loved sleeping in that noisy house, and sometimes they snored in unison—which was terrifying.

One subzero vacation morning, my daughter, Valery, ran her finger across the ice-furred downstairs living-room wall and asked, "What is this, Daddy?"

"Snores," I said, blue with tiredness. "All the snores from last night have stuck to the walls."

Later, after her mother and I had divorced, Valery wistfully recalled that moment as the first time she'd realized how alive with sound the night was—and that

all the noise emanated from the women in the family. Later still, she asked her mother at what age she'd begun to snore, and asked me if that was the reason we'd split up. Valery was worried for her own future. I assured her that snoring had had nothing to do with the divorce, which was amicable but also unavoidably painful. I laughed and hugged Valery. I even told her that I had adored her mother's snores. I had never adored them, but I had adored Elida, almost to the point of madness, from the first time we met.

We found each other in Hollywood, as Minnesotan expatriates always do, common sense driving them together—though to leave the Land of Ten Thousand Lakes for a thirsty city built on a desert may speak of some interior flaw. For Elida, it was the compulsive lure of film editing. In my case, the shame of acting. Although I auditioned endlessly and always had work, my parts generally lasted between six and twelve seconds. I rarely had a line. But I had Elida, her intense green stare, her Nordic pallor, even after years of sunlight, her slender, gliding walk, and the dark swerve of her severe haircut. She was mine.

When Valery turned twelve, I was cast in a supporting role in a movie that got a lot of attention. It could have been my fabled break. But Elida suddenly panicked over how unhappy Valery was in high school and decided that the schools in Minneapolis were more nurturing. We moved back. I had to accept the fact that my film career was over. I'd worked steadily and spoken a line or two, given many a meaningful glance, tripped villains, sucker-punched heroes, spilled coffee on or danced around movie stars in revolving doors. I had appeared in dozens of films, TV episodes, commercials. But Elida hadn't been doing well, and both of us got better, more reliable jobs back home.

Elida loved the minuscule: the hundreds of tiny decisions that together produce a great flow of scenes. She applied this love of detail to her new vocation, planning corporate events. I also loved the small, when it consisted of learning to say lines a dozen different ways, with different tonal qualities, inflections, and gestures. In my new job, as a fund-raiser for a vibrant local theatre company, I perfected the gestures and tones that I hoped would coax donations to my organization.

For my birthday that year, perhaps to console me for the life I'd given up, Elida somehow managed to clip and splice together a half-hour movie of my bit parts, which she set to eerily repetitive music. Shortly after she gave me that gift, which she titled "Man of a Thousand Glimpses," we parted. I moved out of our downtown condominium, near nurturing DeLaSalle High School.

For the first couple of months after leaving Elida, I bolted out of work at exactly 4 P.M. I drove to my tiny apartment impatiently, hungrily, addicted not to a new relationship but to sleep itself. Deep rest was a drug. Waking from relaxed oblivion, I vibrated with an almost tear-inducing pleasure. Why shoot up, I wondered, when just by depriving the body of uninterrupted sleep for twenty years you can have ecstasy with no side effects? Except, it might be said, for Laurene.

It took no time at all before I was sleeping the entire night beside a woman whom I feared I had married too quickly because she slept like a drunk kitten.

From the beginning, I had to consciously keep myself from referring to Laurene in casual conversation as "my current wife." Though it was taken as a joke, I knew better: it was a slip. Laurene Schotts was the daughter of the owner of an immensely successful Midwestern sporting-goods chain with outlets in the ex-est of the exurbs throughout the tristate area. She was also a lover of the theatre arts. At the annual gala dinner for my theatre company, which Elida organized pro bono the year we parted, Laurene spoke between the salad and the entrée. Her flattering words of thanks to our supporters, which screened a plea for still greater largesse, impressed me with their genuine, awkward grace.

Laurene revelled in that sort of gala, where people bid on donated items—the use of time-shares in warm countries, fur coats, ski packages, signed books, hand-painted scarves. Scarves draped our chairs, and we took superb vacations. Laurene was blond, social, generous, and loved to barbecue. Elida was dark, wayward, introverted, frugal, and usually a vegetarian. Laurene could drink a whole bottle of cold Pinot Gris between 5 and 6 P.M. Elida might sip one murderous, snore-inducing glass of Côtes du Rhône between eleven and midnight.

After the divorce, Elida and I met once

a month to discuss Valery. We had agreed to do this early on, even when it hurt to see each other. Every time, after we had wincingly established where Valery's college tuition would come from, or whether she needed a new therapist, after Elida had confided the latest news of Valery's boyfriend, who we both hoped would turn out to be simply "experience," we would conclude the hour with a cheerful goodbye, perhaps saying "That wasn't so bad!" or even "Good to see you!" We laughed in relief. We hugged, patted each other on the back, sometimes drank a cup of tea before the drive home. We never kissed, not even on the cheek. Our divorce had been agreeable and final. Our post-divorce meetings were lingering, tedious, and self-congratulatory.

Once Laurene and I were married, however, the meetings with Elida became more difficult. The boyfriend had turned into a problem—we suspected an addiction. We also began, without any warning, to fight. It would start with some obscure thing and progress to even more obscure things. By the end of our meetings, Elida and I were worn out. Then, after one particularly difficult session, still upset as we were saying goodbye, Elida, instead of hugging me, stuck out her hand. I took her hand and held onto it until she met my eyes. Her glare pulled me to her, and I shocked us both by kissing her studious, pale lips. We jumped apart, as though scorched, and turned away. We didn't speak of it.

Our next meeting was set up by e-mail, and I found myself walking eagerly toward Nick's, a restaurant off Loring Park, which was quiet and decorous by day, with leather booths and gauzy curtains that let in glowing white rafts of winter light.

Elida was sitting at the third booth in, and raised a hand as I entered, then put a tissue to her eyes. She had been crying, a rare event. It usually meant, frighteningly, that she'd had some breakthrough realization about me that she'd repressed for years. Warily, I asked her what was wrong. She told me that Valery had started snoring. Her boyfriend had left her, thank goodness, but now Valery was refusing to believe that her mother's snoring hadn't precipitated our divorce.

"Of course it didn't!"

"Maybe not. We had other issues."

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I did not lead my life
although my life followed me,

not in lockstep or formed flight
but in the second line,

calling me new names,
Mr. Danke Schoen,

Dr. I'm Sure It's Nothing.
A parade of sorts

because isn't life
just one person after another,

a whispering campaign
of family sayings:

"At the top of the mountain,
keep climbing,"

"Who doesn't? Twenty good years. One bad year. A thousand little issues came home to roost."

"I thought, you know, because of those good years we might still get back together," Elida said. "Until Laurene. She doesn't snore, right?"

I admitted as much.

"Ah." Elida turned to look out the window, and her dark glinting hair swung sorrowfully alongside her cheek. "The first time we spent the night together."

"St. George Street."

"I warned you I snored. I'd already been to the specialists and had surgery, which only made it worse. It's almost a relief to sleep alone now. At least I'm not blasting a man out of bed."

"I never minded."

I thought of the couch in Los Feliz that had wrecked my back. The walk-in closet with a floor pallet in our Minneapolis condominium. I'd adjourned to these lonely sleeping venues on most nights. I did mind, but her fixed gaze shook my heart.

"Last month you kissed me."

"I did."

We grew perplexed, ate in silence, each secretly examining the other's face from time to time. I was very conscious of the

drama of the situation. Any former actor would have been. Elida sussed that out.

"You're trying on expressions," she said, laughing.

It was true. Various expressions crossed my face, but none felt right. The elements wouldn't meld. My eyes would express affection while my mouth was tense. Surprise would lift an eyebrow while my upper lip worked cynically. Embarrassment smote me. At least that was real. I put my face in my hands and tried to breathe, but my hands covering my mouth made me hyperventilate. When I looked up, Elida was signing the credit-card slip. She folded her napkin.

"Don't get up," she said. "From now on, let's do a phone call. Or e-mail."

"I really hate e-mail," I said, "for personal stuff. Please sit down. We can solve this."

She sat down. Irrationally elated, I ordered a bottle of wine.

"This is a bad idea," Elida said.

"Why? We can talk. How are the rip-saw and the welders?" Elida knew my nicknames for her mother and sisters.

"Ha!" She clinked my glass. "What was I again?"

"The polisher!"

"I don't really mind that," she said. "It's

and "Thunder's the promise,
fulfillment's the rain."

Behind me, red-headed girls from Chelsea
whose collars match their cuffs,

a trip to Itchycoo Park,
and the cats Mirabelle and Edward

who wake me at dawn
though both are dead.

Yes, it rained
but there were not a lot

of tears, only a very large one
breaking over everything.

Dogs barked but the parade
went on, and a life followed me

though I did not lead my life.

—*John Skoyles*

in my line of work, really. I miss you. Maybe we should have an affair where we see each other only by day and never sleep together, you know, at night."

She was speaking whimsically, but we proceeded to do exactly that. We were extremely happy for ten months. To be sure, I felt bad about lying to Laurene, but she noticed nothing. She made few demands, seemed happy enough with my company, and continued to barbecue, even in December. Meanwhile, Valery had left for college, and Elida and I were meeting in our old condominium, overlooking the poisoned brown waters of the Mississippi.

Then one afternoon we were dressed, sipping tea, looking out at the river, when Valery dropped her suitcase inside the door. She was astonished to see us sitting there. She gaped silently for a moment, then clumped down the hall in her big snow boots.

Elida gave me an oddly insolent look. You can live with a person, have an affair with a person, and still suddenly see an unfamiliar flash, like the belly of a fish in the shallows, there and gone. She had known exactly when our daughter would arrive home.

Valery screamed when she saw the untucked covers on our bed, the scattered

pillows. She clumped back into the living room.

"How long has this been going on?"

We told her. She began to sob.

"All this time? How selfish! Mean! I could have had you both together. Instead, I've been trying to get used to you apart. I was facing the facts and then..."

She pressed her mittened hands to her temples as if to keep her head from flying apart. We all started crying and, for a while, felt miserable. Then Elida snorted, and we burst into hysterical laughter.

It was decided that I would come clean and leave Laurene Schotts. Elida and I would remarry. Although it was strange, the idea gave me an enormous sense of rightness. Things were falling into balance. My elation continued all the way back to Laurene's and my house on Interlachen Boulevard, in Hopkins, facing the golf course. A beautiful stone house, with creamy painted walls, a wet bar in the basement, and a vast screening room for movie-viewing parties. Sitting in my car and looking up the flagstone walk, I thought of the pallet on the floor of the condominium's walk-in closet. I would regret leaving this lavish, comfortable house, bought with Laurene Schotts's money. I

would regret leaving Laurene, too, the silent comfort of her presence every night.

Laurene pitched a majolica vase, then a framed photograph of us in Peru. She threw a few other breakable objects at the wall and, at last, hefted a crystal unicorn she'd had since the age of ten.

"You'll regret throwing that," I said. "Please don't. I'm so sorry!"

"Dad was right!"

Tears rolled down her face onto her collar, wetting her throat.

I was stricken. I couldn't stop apologizing. Never before had I seen her truly upset or sad.

"Dad was right," she said again. "He said you were after the money. He didn't trust you—a former bit-part actor. He begged me to make you sign a pre-nup, but I said, 'No, you're so wrong! He's the one!'"

Because I had little money, and because money hadn't figured into my first marriage, except for the problem of not having it, I was until that moment unaware that this had even been discussed. I put it out of my mind and didn't think about it until a month later. I had moved out of Laurene's house into a studio apartment. I continued to see Elida only during the day. I wasn't quite ready for the walk-in closet.

"Are you crazy?" Elida said, putting down her tea cup one afternoon, after I'd told her the proposed terms of my divorce. "That family is worth more than a hundred million! You could get a settlement. They'd never even miss it."

I waved her off, but every time I thought about how handy, how fantastic it would be to have money I wavered. With my nonprofit salary, I could barely afford to soundproof Valery's old bedroom. I told myself that I'd keep my pride and sleep on the closet floor. I'd walk away without a cent. But I didn't, of course.

We bought the condominium next door and removed two walls. This gave us an easy path into a large room, where I set up a huge screen. Before it, we arranged several couches of immense size and comfort. I slept there in grateful quiet. I didn't take Laurene for that much, comparatively speaking, and the Schotts family was relieved. Still, they hated me enough to threaten for a while to get me fired.

One night, Elida surprised me by playing the montage of clips she'd made for my

birthday years earlier. It was worse, somehow, seeing it on that giant screen bought with Laurene's money. There I was, my trivial works captured for the ages. I hadn't noticed, when I first viewed the movie, that Elida had made of those fleeting cameos and set pieces a sort of narrative.

"Man of a Thousand Glimpses" started out with crowd scenes, me here, me there, the nice-looking, unobtrusive bystander reading a newspaper, glancing up at the sound of a gunshot, the man crossing a street, exiting a bakery, jumping into his car, uncoiling a hose to water his lawn. Next, a better man appeared, somewhat older, more heroic: I ran toward a river with a child in my arms; I was a soldier dragging his buddy to safety; I lowered a dog in a basket from a burning building, addressed people through a bullhorn, rushed into waves, and dived toward despairing arms. After that, I became a good father, inflated bicycle tires, opened refrigerator doors, lay back smiling in my late-night-shopper's easy chair, had my waist measured, drove several carloads of screaming kids to sports matches. Small wonder I then got a pounding headache, clutched my jaw, my leg, my heart, wincing in agony. Next there came a turning point, which had been much applauded at the first viewing: I smoked a cigarette in a cheap motel, a beautiful woman silhouetted in the shower behind me. Afterward, ruined, I poured myself drink after drink, ordered a third Martini, fell off a barstool, crawled under a table and licked a woman's ankle. I sank even

lower—stuck a gun in a teller's face, took cash from the drawer of a fast-food register. I palmed an apple from a pile, stole a moped, a diamond bracelet, a newspaper. These crimes kept me tossing in bed. I stared at ceilings, my eyes luminous, hollow with glare, haunted by ghosts, by women, by hallucinations. Sleepless, I got clumsy. I was hit by a car, crushed by a falling girder, devoured by a live volcano, axed, mauled, infected with bubonic plague. I was identified several times, in liverish-green morgue light, by stricken, dignified women. It was shocking the way I just kept on dying, physically, then mentally. A wreck of a man, I leaped from a bridge, a window. I parked on train tracks and drank deeply from a flask. I smiled at the swiftly approaching lights and laughed soundlessly.

The End.

Elida left. I played the movie over and over. How dark was my narrative! Why had Elida killed me off, instead of letting me rescue dogs at the end? This downward trajectory gave me a moral chill. I decided that I had not only wasted my life but had acted ignobly in taking money from Laurene. Although Elida and I had made Valery happy, and I'd thought I was contented with Elida, I knew now, as I'd known before, the nature of her true feelings for me.

I destroyed the movie. It would be years before anyone noticed that my long-ago birthday gift had disappeared and I was once again dispersed into the confetti of B movies, failed TV sitcoms, and

clumsy commercials. No one would ever have the cruel patience to assemble my life glimpse by glimpse again.

When the holidays came around, I insisted that we stay at the house in Golden Valley. Why not? I had already counted a million holes in a million ceiling tiles.

The first night at Elida's parents' house, we all had a mirthful, loving dinner, then did the dishes together. Elida's relatives had easily absorbed me back into the family, where my role, though peripheral, was also vital, because I was Valery's father.

After we turned in and Elida fell asleep beside me, I lay on my back waiting. It usually took her an hour or so to really get going, but her sisters and her mother had already begun. Valery and a girl cousin had sneaked a bottle of wine into their sleeping bags and were now drifting off next door.

The real snoring hit with abrupt ferocity. The orderly, mechanical regularity of the metalworking shop had been abandoned. Now it was more like a pack of wolves snarling over a kill. I closed my eyes. On my mental screen I saw lions driving the wolves—or hyenas, maybe—into the veld. On a hill overlooking the bloody feast, a baboon whooped. For many hours, I elaborated on the vivid images that accompanied the soundtrack: a lioness worrying the leg off a carcass, two others fending off a male, raking his ribs with teeth and claws, while their cubs mock-fought nearby. At last, I dropped off.

In the deepest part of the night, I woke. Although Elida's snarls had calmed to the loud, gurgling purr of a big cat digesting prey meat, I came to in a sick sweat, shaking. Perhaps my imagined scenario had triggered some terror from my evolutionary past. I had dreamed that I was the hunted animal, thrown to earth, being eaten alive. The tearing of my flesh, the snap of jaws wrestling at my bones, the blissful lapping as my throat opened—all this seemed absolutely real to me. It took some time for me to understand that Elida's body had not been satiated on mine, that she wasn't purring because she'd swallowed my heart. ♦



"You still working on charging that phone?"

NYR.KR/THISWEEKINFICTION

Louise Erdrich on "The Big Cat."

Canada is America's largest oil supplier

CANADA

2.4 million barrels per day

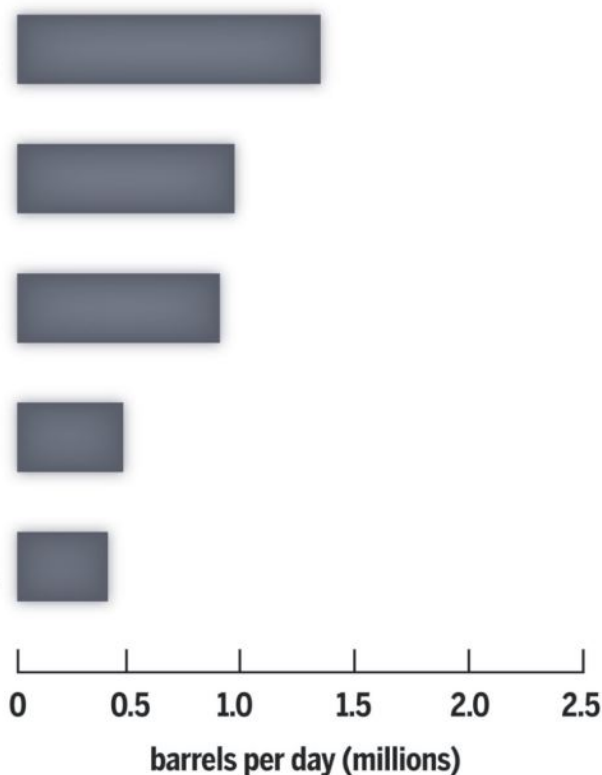
SAUDI ARABIA

MEXICO

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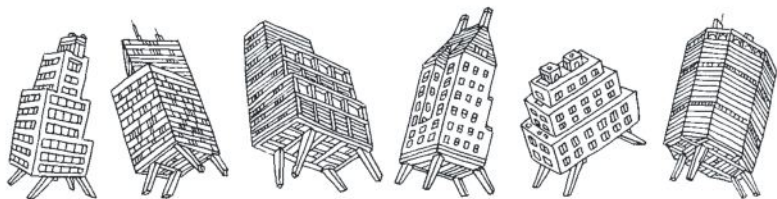


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THE CRITICS



ON TELEVISION

CHANGE AGENTS

Breaking code on “The Americans” and “Silicon Valley.”

BY EMILY NUSSBAUM

When it comes to “The Americans,” FX’s eighties spy drama, you gotta start with the wigs. There’s the Vamp. The feathered Farrah. The Clark, a nerdy number that resembles a flattened cairn terrier. There’s the Handyman’s Ponytail, the Blond Meringue, and the Klute—all stored, presumably, in some magnificent wig safe in a house outside Washington, D.C., where Philip and Elizabeth Jennings have lived for nearly twenty years, in a marriage that was brokered by the K.G.B.

The wigs are splashy fun—at times, they’re as over the top as anything in “American Hustle”—but they’re not a superficial element of the series. “The Americans,” now in its second season, is a show about human personality as a cruel performance, even (and sometimes especially) with the people we claim to love. It’s about marriage as much as it is about politics. And its unpretentious visuals—from those goofy bangs to the no-frills, low-budget camerawork—are a gift to the viewer. Without this hint of aesthetic distance, the story might be too sad to watch.

Matthew Rhys and Keri Russell play the Jenningses, who grew up in the Soviet Union before being paired, in their early twenties, and sent to the United States. They’ve built a Potemkin marriage, bringing up two American children and pretending to work as travel agents. In reality, they are spies (they seem to have exceptionally flexible babysitters): they seduce “assets,” listen in for radio codes, and threaten vulnerable targets. For years, the couple got on well enough, repressing layers of re-

sentment and secrets—among them, the fact that Elizabeth was raped when she was twenty by her K.G.B. trainer. In the pilot, Philip learns about this traumatic history and kills the man who, decades earlier, raped his wife; his act at once bonds the pair and nearly wrecks them. They look at each other and feel a jolt: after all these years, are they strangers?

Of course, this sort of crisis in a decades-long marriage is hardly reserved for the K.G.B. Just across the street, the F.B.I. agent Stan Beeman (the wonderful Noah Emmerich) is dealing with his own, perhaps more intractable marital issues, having recently emerged from years undercover. He can barely talk with his wife and son, and he’s fallen into a passionate affair with his asset Nina, who works at the Soviet Embassy. As the show progresses, we weave back and forth between opposing ideologies and varied couples, with the Russians scheming inside the plush *rezidentura* and the Americans fighting back from the spare F.B.I. headquarters; our sympathies can’t settle on anyone. Philip and Elizabeth are murderers who are trying to destroy America. Stan and Nina are somehow lovers, victims, and perpetrators all at once: last season, he blackmailed her into being a double agent, but now she’s begun informing on him to her Russian bosses. Inside the *rezidentura*, she types up their sex life in official reports, like some pornographic Scheherazade, spinning tales to save her own head.

Perhaps the strangest marriage in the show is the one that should be the biggest sham—that of Philip Jennings and Mar-

tha (Alison Wright), an F.B.I. secretary whom he spent last season seducing, quite tenderly, so that she would bug her boss’s office. At the end of the first season, he “married” her, wearing his Clark wig, as she stood beaming, carrying a small bouquet. By their side was Elizabeth, in a bouffant hair style and glasses, playing the role of her husband’s sister. Like so much of “The Americans,” that moment should have felt absurd, but it was heartbreaking. Although Martha is a dupe, she’s also the one honest person in the ensemble, and her imaginary marriage has evolved into a funny, disturbing facsimile of a genuine one, in which everything Philip says seethes with anxious, angry half-truths. “This isn’t my home,” he argues, trying to leave for another mission, as she begs him for a long-promised lazy morning in bed. “I’m like an intruder,” he says.

Season 1 was very good, but a few plots curdled, and it had some weak performances. This season is an exciting step up: the plots have a stark poetic symmetry, echoing themes without overexplaining them. When another spy couple and their daughter are murdered, and their corpses are found by their son, the Jenningses are forced to confront their own family’s vulnerability. Yet, episodes later, Elizabeth is threatening a father by pronouncing the name of his child, while Philip kidnaps a Russian-Jewish expatriate with a young son. As spies, they are deadly compartmentalizers, yet as parents they are disoriented and outmatched. When their daughter, Paige, begins to keep her own secrets, Philip and Elizabeth are too upset to face their hypocrisy: they’ve raised their kids to be their cover story.

The show’s trickery has an added layer: we’re watching actors give brilliant performances as actors who give brilliant performances. In one of this season’s most fascinating sequences, Elizabeth manipulates a virginal naval cadet to get classified information. At first, it seems to us, her other audience, that she’s unable to pull off the seduction of someone so vulnerable. “I’m really blowing this,” she whispers, tearful, as they embrace—and then she rushes away, trailing excuses. At home, when Philip asks about the case, she says, “Piece of cake.” It turns out that she’s setting a trap for the soldier. She’s *playing* a woman who was raped, to make her target feel protective, so he’ll steal classified files. There’s a palpable com-



The eighties spy drama “The Americans” is sexier than many pay-cable shows, in part because it’s about life as role-play.



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plexity to this, because she's duped us, too. As the viewer knows, Elizabeth's rape didn't make her skittish: if anything, it steeled her as a true believer (having sacrificed so much, she has to believe it's worth it, unlike Philip, who has considered defecting). And yet, as much as Elizabeth is playing a role—a shy classical-music fan in a pale-pink sweater—she's also describing her real-life assault, and then playacting a new outcome, in which she is open and fragile, and a man comes to her rescue and comforts her.

This focus on performance makes the show a highly satisfying showcase for its actors, particularly the Welsh actor Rhys, a shape-shifter who snaps with unsettling ease from sad-eyed puppy to sneering enforcer, and the show's hidden gem, the hypnotically beautiful Annet Mahendru, as Nina. Because the show is on FX, there's little nudity, but it's sexier than many pay-cable series, in part because it's about life as kinky role-play, in part because it suggests such unnerving questions about human intimacy. Even for skillful seducers, there's a level at which doing is the same as being. To be a great actor, "you've got to be honest," as George Burns once put it. "And if you can fake that, you've got it made."

Several strong new comedies are on air this spring. There's the raunchy "Inside Amy Schumer," entering its second season on Comedy Central, a sketch show that is a perfect showcase for Schumer, whose persona is basically Miss Piggy on Tinder: she does skits about herpes and military rape, and man-on-the-street interviews about sexting, all of which work way better than this summary makes them sound. There's IFC's fourth season of "Portlandia," which cluster-bombs its tiny targets. And there's HBO's "Doll & Em," a sour, "Extras"-like satire of Hollywood narcissism, starring Emily Mortimer and her real-life friend Dolly Wells.

But if you're looking for pure laughs, and a fresh subject for television, the best option may be HBO's "Silicon Valley," directed by Mike Judge. For anyone with even passing experience of the tech industry, this show is a high-grade Proustian pot brownie. Thomas Middleditch plays Richard, a meek corporate coder who works at Hooli, a Google-like company; in his off-hours, he develops programs in an entrepreneurial "incubator." When he hits

on a data compressor whose potential he barely recognizes, he finds himself a pawn in the battle between a Peter Thiel-esque V.C. (Christopher Evan Welch) and a sinister Steve Jobs-like C.E.O. (Matt Ross). Suddenly, his roommates are vying for points, and his obnoxious marketer landlord is mentoring him on how to be a boss: "You're being a complete tool right now. I need you to be a complete asshole—do you understand the difference? If you're not an asshole, this company dies."

The show is well structured, with blunt but effective sitcom beats, and, refreshingly, it isn't an "Entourage"-tinted fantasy. Although the names of all the greats (Brin! Musk! Zuckerberg!) are on everyone's lips, the characters know how those stories end—with a jackpot and a sheaf of bitter lawsuits. The pilot nails both the Darwinian grimness of Silicon Valley—where even a liquor-store clerk complains that his app hasn't been funded—and the way it gets packaged in phony do-gooder-ism. At Hooli, the walls feature slogans like "It takes change to make change." When a marketer trips on mushrooms, he finds himself muttering, in a panic, "Making the world a better place. Making the world a better place." The physical details are just right: the billionaire in toe-separating sneakers; the Perplexus-brand globe that a programmer picks up and begins rattling as he talks; the control-freak hippie who stands in a filthy kitchen screaming, "Who ate my fucking quinoa?"

Middleditch is perfectly cast as Richard, whose diffidence hides a prickly intelligence, and Welch is excellent as the quavery, goony-eyed Peter Gregory, who, like the real Peter Thiel, creates a fund for young people who agree to skip college. ("Maybe I should reenroll and drop out again, try and get the money," Richard theorizes.) At its best, the show echoes not only Judge's cult film "Office Space" but the late, great Starz sitcom about Los Angeles, "Party Down," another portrait of a one-industry town spiked with self-hate. A coder suddenly realizes, about the app he's worked on for months, "I made a perverted, sexist, useless thing." Even rich people can't get their beautiful creations to work right. In a moment of excitement, a billionaire calls out to his voice-recognition software, "Play John Lennon's 'Imagine!'" "Cuing John Wayne in a mansion," the voice responds. "Not found." ♦

FORCES OF DIVERGENCE

Is surging inequality endemic to capitalism?

BY JOHN CASSIDY



In the stately world of academic presses, it isn't often that advance orders and publicity for a book prompt a publisher to push forward its publication date. But that's what Belknap, an imprint of Harvard University Press, did for "Capital in the Twenty-first Century," a sweeping account of rising inequality by the French economist Thomas Piketty. Reviewing the French edition of Piketty's book, which came out last year, Branko Milanovic, a former senior economist at the World Bank, called it "one of the watershed books in economic thinking." *The Economist* said that it could change the way we think about the past two centuries of economic history. Certainly, no

economics book in recent years has received this sort of attention. Months before its American publication date, which was switched from April to March, it was already the subject of lively online discussion among economists and other commentators.

Piketty, who teaches at the Paris School of Economics, has spent nearly two decades studying inequality. In 1993, at the age of twenty-two, he moved to the United States to teach at M.I.T. A graduate of the elite *École Normale Supérieure*, he had recently completed his doctorate, a dense mathematical exploration of the theory behind tax policies. Plenty of bright young Eu-

ropean scholars move across the Atlantic, of course, and many of them end up staying. Piketty was not to be one of them. "It was the first time I had set foot in the United States," he recalls in the introduction, "and it felt good to have my work recognized so quickly. Here was a country that knew how to attract immigrants when it wanted to! Yet I also realized quite soon that I wanted to return to France and Europe, which I did when I was twenty-five. Since then, I have not left Paris, except for a few brief trips."

Part of Piketty's motivation in returning home was cultural. His parents are politically engaged Parisians who took part in the 1968 riots. When he was growing up, his intellectual role models were French historians and philosophers of the left, rather than economists. They included members of the *Annales* school, such as Lucien Febvre and Fernand Braudel, who produced exhaustive analyses of everyday life. Compared with this scholarship, much of the economics that Piketty encountered at M.I.T. seemed arid and pointless. "I did not find the work of U.S. economists entirely convincing," he writes. "To be sure, they were all very intelligent, and I still have many friends from that period of my life. But something strange happened: I was only too aware of the fact that I knew nothing at all about the world's economic problems."

In Paris, he joined the French National Center for Scientific Research, and, later, the *Écoles des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales*, where some of his heroes had taught. The main task he set himself was exploring the hills and valleys of income and wealth, a subject that economics had largely neglected. At first, Piketty concentrated on getting the facts down, rather than interpreting them. Using tax records and other data, he studied how income inequality in France had evolved during the twentieth century, and published his findings in a 2001 book. A 2003 paper that he wrote with Emmanuel Saez, a French-born economist at Berkeley, examined income inequality in the United States between 1913 and 1998. It detailed how the share of U.S. national income taken by households at the top of the income distribution had risen sharply during the early decades of the twentieth century, then fallen back during and after the

If current trends continue, Thomas Piketty sees "potentially terrifying" consequences.

Second World War, only to soar again in the nineteen-eighties and nineties.

With the help of other researchers, including Saez and the British economist Anthony Atkinson, Piketty expanded his work on inequality to other countries, including Britain, China, India, and Japan. The researchers established the World Top Incomes Database, which now covers some thirty countries, among them Malaysia, South Africa, and Uruguay. Piketty and Saez also updated their U.S. figures, showing how the income share of the richest households continued to climb during and after the Great Recession, and how, in 2012, the top one per cent of households took 22.5 per cent of total income, the highest figure since 1928. The empirical work done by Piketty and his colleagues has influenced debates everywhere from Zuccotti Park, the short-lived home of Occupy Wall Street, to the International Monetary Fund and the White House; President Obama has said that tackling inequality and wage stagnation is our foremost challenge.

The question is what's driving the upward trend. Piketty didn't think that economists' standard explanations were convincing, largely because they didn't pay enough attention to capital accumulation—the process of saving, investing, and building wealth which classical economists, such as David Ricardo, Karl Marx, and John Stuart Mill, had emphasized. Piketty defines capital as any asset that generates a monetary return. It encompasses physical capital, such as real estate and factories; intangible capital, such as brands and patents; and financial assets, such as stocks and bonds. In modern economics, the term “capital” has been purged of its ideological fire and is treated as just another “factor of production,” which, like labor and land, earns a competitive rate of return based upon its productivity. A popular model of economic growth developed by Robert Solow, one of Piketty's former colleagues at M.I.T., purports to show how the economy progresses along a “balanced growth path,” with the shares of national income received by the owners of capital and labor remaining constant over time. This doesn't jibe with modern reality. In the United States, for example, the share of income going to wages and other forms

of labor compensation dropped from sixty-eight per cent in 1970 to sixty-two per cent in 2010—a decline of close to a trillion dollars.

Piketty believes that the rise in inequality can't be understood independently of politics. For his new book, he chose a title evoking Marx, but he doesn't think that capitalism is doomed, or that ever-rising inequality is inevitable. There are circumstances, he concedes, in which incomes can converge and the living standards of the masses can increase steadily—as happened in the so-called Golden Age, from 1945 to 1973. But Piketty argues that this state of affairs, which many of us regard as normal, may well have been a historical exception. The “forces of divergence can at any point regain the upper hand, as seems to be happening now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century,” he writes. And, if current trends continue, “the consequences for the long-term dynamics of the wealth distribution are potentially terrifying.”

In the nineteen-fifties, the average American chief executive was paid about twenty times as much as the typical employee of his firm. These days, at Fortune 500 companies, the pay ratio between the corner office and the shop floor is more than two hundred to one, and many C.E.O.s do even better. In 2011, Apple's Tim Cook received three hundred and seventy-eight million dollars in salary, stock, and other benefits, which was sixty-two hundred and fifty-eight times the wage of an average Apple employee. A typical worker at Walmart earns less than twenty-five thousand dollars a year; Michael Duke, the retailer's former chief executive, was paid more than twenty-three million dollars in 2012. The trend is evident everywhere. According to a recent report by Oxfam, the richest eighty-five people in the world—the likes of Bill Gates, Warren Buffett, and Carlos Slim—own more wealth than the roughly 3.5 billion people who make up the poorest half of the world's population.

Eventually, Piketty says, we could see the reemergence of a world familiar to nineteenth-century Europeans; he cites the novels of Austen and Balzac. In this “patrimonial society,” a small group of wealthy rentiers lives lavishly on the fruits of its inherited wealth, and the

rest struggle to keep up. For the United States, in particular, this would be a cruel and ironic fate. “The egalitarian pioneer ideal has faded into oblivion,” Piketty writes, “and the New World may be on the verge of becoming the Old Europe of the twenty-first century's globalized economy.”

What are the “forces of divergence” that produce enormous riches for some and leave the majority scrambling to make a decent living? Piketty is clear that there are different factors behind stagnation in the middle and riches at the top. But, during periods of modest economic growth, such as the one that many advanced economies have experienced in recent decades, income tends to shift from labor to capital. Because of enmeshed economic, social, and political pressures, Piketty fears “levels of inequality never before seen.”

To back up his arguments, he provides a trove of data. He and Saez pioneered the construction of simple charts showing the shares of over-all income received by the richest ten per cent, the richest one per cent, and, even, the richest 0.1 per cent. When the data are presented in this way, Piketty notes, it is easy for people to “grasp their position in the contemporary hierarchy (always a useful exercise, particularly when one belongs to the upper centiles of the distribution and tends to forget it, as is often the case with economists).” Anybody who reads the newspaper will be aware that, in the United States, the “one per cent” is taking an ever-larger slice of the economic pie. But did you know that the share of the top income percentile is bigger than it was in South Africa in the nineteen-sixties and about the same as it is in Colombia, another deeply divided society, today? In terms of income generated by work, the level of inequality in the United States is “probably higher than in any other society at any time in the past, anywhere in the world,” Piketty writes.

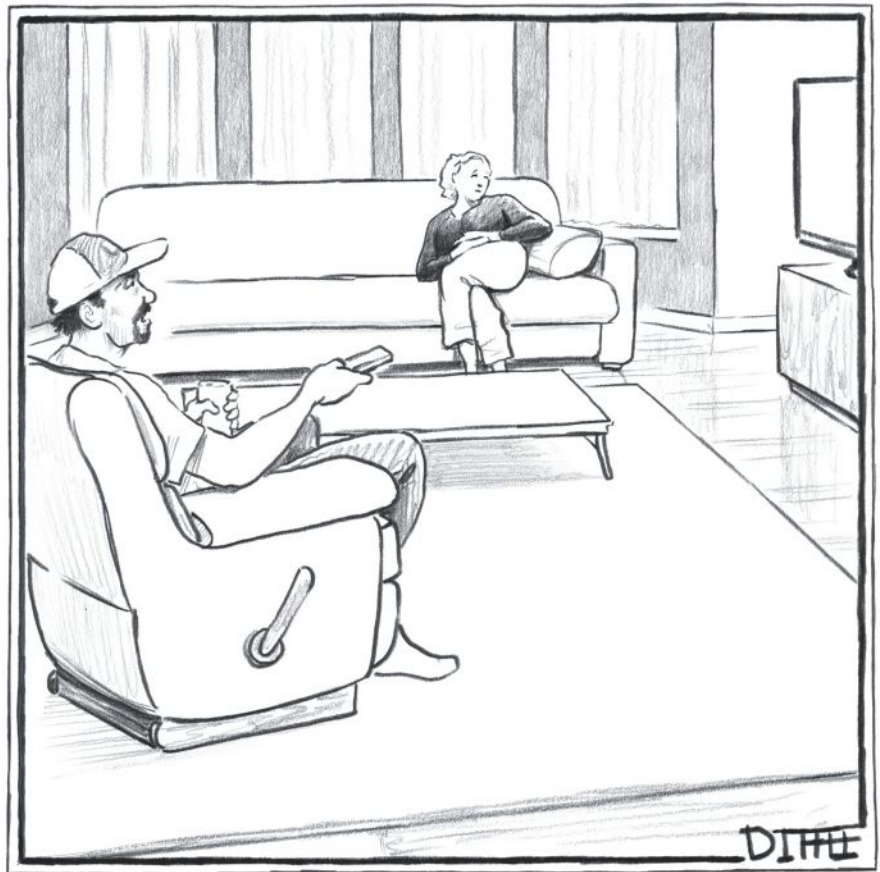
Some people claim that the takeoff at the very top reflects the emergence of a new class of “superstars”—entrepreneurs, entertainers, sports stars, authors, and the like—who have exploited new technologies, such as the Internet, to enlarge their earnings at the expense of others in their field. If this is true, high

rates of inequality may reflect a harsh and unalterable reality: outsized spoils are going to go to Roger Federer, James Patterson, and the WhatsApp guys. Piketty rejects this account. The main factor, he insists, is that major companies are giving their top executives outlandish pay packages. His research shows that “supermanagers,” rather than “superstars,” account for up to seventy per cent of the top 0.1 per cent of the income distribution. (In 2010, you needed to earn at least \$1.5 million to qualify for this elite group.) Rising income inequality is largely a corporate phenomenon.

Defenders of big pay packages like to claim that senior managers earn their vast salaries by boosting their firm’s profits and stock prices. But Piketty points out how hard it is to measure the contribution (the “marginal productivity”) of any one individual in a large corporation. The compensation of top managers is typically set by committees comprising other senior executives who earn comparable amounts. “It is only reasonable to assume that people in a position to set their own salaries have a natural incentive to treat themselves generously, or at the very least to be rather optimistic in gauging their marginal productivity,” Piketty writes.

Many C.E.O.s receive a lot of stock and stock options. Over time, they and other rich people earn a lot of money from the capital they have accumulated: it comes in the form of dividends, capital gains, interest payments, profits from private businesses, and rents. Income from capital has always played a key role in capitalism. Piketty claims that its role is growing even larger, and that this helps explain why inequality is rising so fast. Indeed, he argues that modern capitalism has an internal law of motion that leads, not inexorably but generally, toward less equal outcomes. The law is simple. When the rate of return on capital—the annual income it generates divided by its market value—is higher than the economy’s growth rate, capital income will tend to rise faster than wages and salaries, which rarely grow faster than G.D.P.

If ownership of capital were distributed equally, this wouldn’t matter much. We’d all share in the rise in profits and dividends and rents. But in the United



“You wanna watch the Hunting Channel or the Gathering Network?”

States in 2010, for example, the richest ten per cent of households owned seventy per cent of all the country’s wealth (a good surrogate for “capital”), and the top one per cent of households owned thirty-five per cent of the wealth. By contrast, the bottom half of households owned just five per cent. When income generated by capital grows rapidly, the richest families benefit disproportionately. Since 2009, corporate profits, dividend payouts, and the stock market have all risen sharply, but wages have barely budged. As a result, according to calculations by Piketty and Saez, almost all of the income growth in the economy between 2010 and 2012—ninety-five per cent of it—accrued to the one per cent.

That’s a pretty shocking figure. Piketty calls the tendency for inequality to rise during periods when the rate of return on capital is higher than the economy’s rate of growth “the central contradiction of capitalism.” Of course, the logic can also run in reverse. If the rate

of growth exceeds the rate of return, wages and salaries will grow more rapidly than income from capital, and inequality will fall. That’s what happened in much of the twentieth century. The problem, Piketty argues, is that this state of affairs is unlikely to be maintained. “A concatenation of circumstances . . . created a historically unprecedented situation, which lasted for nearly a century,” he writes. “All signs are, however, that it is about to end.”

How convincing is all this? The standard account of economic development—often attributed to Simon Kuznets, a Harvard economist who popularized it during the nineteen-fifties—has inequality rising during the early stages of industrialization but then falling steadily as incomes converge and over-all living standards rise. Piketty is certainly right to emphasize that there was nothing natural or inevitable about the income compression that occurred

in the middle of the twentieth century. It was the product of global conflict and domestic political struggles. In Europe, two World Wars and the progressive tax policies that were needed to finance them did enormous damage to the old estates and great fortunes: many rich people, after paying their income and inheritance taxes, didn't have enough money left to replenish their capital. During the postwar era, inflation ate away at their savings. Meanwhile, labor-friendly laws enabled workers to bargain for higher wages, which raised the proportion of income that labor received. And the task of rebuilding after the wartime destruction made for the rapid expansion of G.D.P. This helped to keep the growth rate above the rate of return on capital, fending off the forces of divergence.

In the United States, the story was less dramatic but broadly similar. The Great Depression wiped out a lot of dynastic wealth, and it also led to a policy revolution. During the nineteen-thirties and forties, Piketty reminds us, Roosevelt raised the top rate of income tax to more than ninety per cent and the tax on large estates to more than seventy per cent. The federal government set minimum wages in many industries, and it encouraged the growth of trade unions. In the decades after the war, it spent heavily on infrastructure, such as interstate highways, which boosted G.D.P. growth. Fearful of spurring public outrage, firms kept the pay of their senior executives in check. Inequality started to rise again only when Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan led a conservative counter-revolution that slashed tax rates on the rich, decimated the unions, and sought to restrain the growth of government expenditures. Politics and income distribution are two sides of the same coin.

Piketty takes some well-aimed shots at economists who seek to obfuscate this reality. "In studying the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it is possible to think that the evolution of prices and wages, or incomes and wealth, obeys an autonomous economic logic having little or nothing to do with the logic of politics or culture," he writes. "When one studies the twentieth century, however, such an illusion falls apart immediately. A quick glance at the curves describing income and wealth inequality

or the capital/income ratio is enough to show that politics is ubiquitous and that economic and political changes are inextricably intertwined and must be studied together."

That's more than mere rhetoric. By insisting that economic laws always take shape through social norms, values, and political choices, Piketty would rescue his discipline from the aridity of abstraction and return it to the richer model of political economy that its best nineteenth-century practitioners pursued. Certainly, it's hard not to be impressed by his history and his methodological assault on theorists who believe that economics can be reduced to a pure science. But is his futurology too pessimistic? The Kuznets curve, mapping inequality over time, is a bell curve: inequality peaks and then declines. Piketty would replace it with a U curve. Are we really condemned to return to the social structure of "Mansfield Park" and "Le Père Goriot"?

A more upbeat possibility is that the rate of G.D.P. growth will approach, or even exceed, the rate of return on capital. If it does, the coming decades could look more like the middle of the twentieth century than like the nineteenth century. To be sure, the past half decade, with many advanced countries mired in slumps, doesn't augur well for an extended period of higher growth. But recessions are cyclical. Over the long term,



innovation and increasing productivity are what drive growth. With the rise of the Internet, biotechnology, robots, and other scientific advances, it is at least conceivable that productivity growth will shift to a permanently higher rate, and that G.D.P. will rise with it.

A second possible escape route is for the return on capital to fall, closing the gap with the growth rate. That's what traditional economic theory would predict. As the stock of physical and

financial capital gets bigger, the principle of diminishing returns suggests that the rate of profit and interest should decline. Adam Smith and other classical economists said that this would happen; Marx referred to it as "the most important law of political economy." Some economists believe that it is already taking place. For the past decade or so, long-term interest rates have been unusually low, leading Ben Bernanke, the former Fed chairman, to bemoan a "global saving glut." A future of slow growth and ultra-low interest rates wouldn't be a particularly dynamic place, but it wouldn't necessarily involve further increases in inequality.

Another thing that Piketty doesn't adequately consider is the possibility that inequality, in some of its dimensions, is not rising at all. His book largely focusses on Europe and the United States. At the global level, substantial progress has been made in dragging people out of destitution, and extending their lives. In 1981, according to figures from the World Bank, about two in five members of humanity were forced to subsist on roughly a dollar a day. Today, the figure is down to about one in seven. In the early nineteen-fifties, the average life expectancy in developing countries was forty-two years. By 2010, it had risen to sixty-eight years. "Life is better now than at almost any time in history," Angus Deaton, a Princeton economist, wrote in his 2013 book, "The Great Escape: Health, Wealth, and the Origins of Inequality." "More people are richer and fewer people live in dire poverty. Lives are longer and parents no longer routinely watch a quarter of their children die."

That's great news, but it doesn't necessarily mean we're making gains on income inequality. Deaton himself points out that, for all the progress that has been made in poverty reduction and health, the gap between rich and poor countries remains cavernous. "In spite of the achievements of the fast growers, there has been little or no narrowing of income inequality between countries," he wrote. "For every country with a catch-up story there has been a country with a left-behind story."

Still, some people would argue that wage stagnation and rising inequality in the developed world are an acceptable price to pay for the benefits experienced

by the worst off. Piketty doesn't really address this question. He glosses over China's success, during the past three decades, in lifting hundreds of millions of people out of extreme poverty. He spends more time detailing the fact that, during that interval, income inequality has been sharply rising in China, and in other developing countries, too. Yet the global picture may complicate his own account of inequality in the developed West. He doesn't seriously consider the argument that globalization—and the rise of nations like China and India—is at once holding down wages and pushing up the profitability of capital, boosting inequality at both ends.

Given that inequality is a worldwide phenomenon, Piketty aptly has a worldwide solution for it: a global tax on wealth combined with higher rates of tax on the largest incomes. How much higher? Referring to work that he has done with Saez and Stefanie Stantcheva, of M.I.T., Piketty reports, "According to our estimates, the optimal top tax rate in the developed countries is probably above eighty per cent." Such a rate applied to incomes greater than five hundred thousand or a million dollars a year "not only would not reduce the growth of the US economy but would in fact distribute the fruits of growth more widely while imposing reasonable limits on economically useless (or even harmful) behavior."

Piketty is referring here to the occasionally destructive activities of Wall Street traders and investment bankers. His new wealth tax would be like an annual property tax, but it would apply to all forms of wealth. Households would be obliged to declare their net worth to the tax authorities, and they would be taxed upon it. Piketty tentatively suggests a levy of one per cent for households with a net worth of between one million and five million dollars; and two per cent for those worth more than five million. "Or one might prefer a much more steeply progressive tax on large fortunes (for example a rate of 5 to 10 percent on assets above one billion euros)," he adds. A wealth tax would force individuals who often manage to avoid other taxes to pay their fair share; and it would generate information about the distribution of wealth, which is currently opaque. "Some people think that the world's billionaires

have so much money that it would be enough to tax them at a low rate to solve all the world's problems," Piketty notes. "Others believe that there are so few billionaires that nothing much would come of taxing them more heavily. . . . In any case, truly democratic debate cannot proceed without reliable statistics."

Economists can debate whether such a wealth tax would reduce incentives to invest and innovate, or whether it would be punitive enough to make a real dent in inequality. A more immediate problem is that it isn't going to happen: the nations of the world can't agree on taxing harmful carbon emissions, let alone taxing the capital of their richest and most powerful citizens. Piketty concedes as much. Still, he says, his proposal provides a standard against which to judge other proposals; it points to the need for other useful reforms, such as improving international banking transparency; and it could be introduced in stages. A good place to begin, he thinks, would be a European wealth tax that would replace the property tax, which "in most countries is tantamount to a wealth tax on the propertied middle class." But that may be utopian, too. If the European Union moved ahead with Piketty's proposal, it would produce a rush to tax havens like Switzerland and Luxembourg. Previous efforts to introduce wealth taxes at the national level have run into problems. Spain, for example, adopted a wealth tax in 2012 and abolished it at the start of this year. In Italy, a wealth tax proposed in 2011 never went through. Such difficulties explain why governments still rely on other, admittedly imperfect, tools to tax capital, such as taxes on property, estates, and capital gains.

In the United States, the very idea of a new wealth tax looks like a nonstarter politically, as would the notion of raising the top rate of income tax to eighty per cent. That's not a knock on Piketty, though. The proper role of public intellectuals is to question accepted dogmas, conceive of new methods of analysis, and expand the terms of public debate. "Capital in the Twenty-first Century" does all these things. As with any such grand prognostication, some of it may not withstand the test of time. But Piketty has written a book that nobody interested in a defining issue of our era can afford to ignore. ♦



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MOTHER COURAGE

Jenny Offill's "Dept. of Speculation."

BY JAMES WOOD



There is a remarkable moment in Elena Ferrante's novel "The Lost Daughter" when the narrator, a middle-aged professor of literature, recalls a scene from her married life. She has just quarrelled with her husband, and wants to run from the house, "forget it and forget everything." Her two young daughters enter the kitchen. One of them, Bianca, picks up an orange and a knife, hands them to her mother, and asks her to peel the fruit. Make a snake, she says. The girls sit in front of their mother, quietly expectant. "I felt their gazes longing to tame me," the narrator recalls,

but more brilliant was the brightness of the life outside them, new color, new bodies, new intelligence, a language to possess finally as if

it were my true language, and nothing, nothing that seemed to me reconcilable with that domestic space from which they stared at me in expectation. Ah, to make them invisible, to no longer hear the demands of their flesh as commands more pressing, more powerful than those which came from mine.

As often in Ferrante's pleasingly austere writing, a savage ambivalence hangs over domestic life. Home, family, maternity are actually embraced and ideally escaped.

I thought of Ferrante while reading Jenny Offill's second novel, "Dept. of Speculation" (Knopf). Some of Ferrante's interrogations find new expression in Offill's original book: a young mother and ambitious writer, com-

mitted to her daughter and to her writing, tries to find energy and ambition for both; she must claim for writing the authority of necessity that usually attends parenthood. Art-making, unlike the great bourgeois panoply of family life, comes without society's automatic sanction, and is in some ways hostile to it. Offill's novel offers a kind of resistance report from within occupied territory.

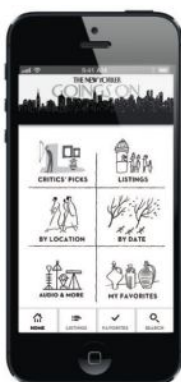
But that description at once melodramatizes and banalizes "Dept. of Speculation." It's a novel that's wonderfully hard to encapsulate, because it faces in many directions at the same time, and glitters with different emotional colors. If it is a distressed account of a marriage in distress, it is also a poem in praise of the married state. If it brutally tears apart the boredom and frustrations of parenthood, it also solidly inhabits the joys and consolations of having a child. If it laments the work not done, the books not written, the aspirations unfulfilled, it also represents work well done, a book written, the fruit of aspiration. (It has been fifteen years since Offill published her first novel, and one of the teasing metafictional motifs here concerns the narrator's apparent inability to write a second book.) It is often extremely funny, and often painful; earnestly direct but glancingly ironic, even whimsical.

One reason for this prismatic variousness has to do with the novel's form. Offill's narrator, who is nameless, speaks to us in very short, double-spaced paragraph dispatches, as if we were riffling through the pages of her private diary. Many of these paragraphs link with their successors, so that a continuous narrative is not hard to construct; but some are opaque, eccentric, so that we experience deliberate discontinuities and obstructions. Despite the amount of white space between the discrete units of text, the effect is familiar: it is a blocky stream of consciousness—a stream of interruptions, perhaps. The form allows, as sensitive fictional or dramatic monologue usually does, for a managed ratio of randomized coherence. The waywardness and unreliability of the mind's contents compose a narrative of that mind before our eyes. (Think of Lydia Davis's short stories, or

Offill can make you feel that you are riffling through a private diary.

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David Markson's novel "Wittgenstein's Mistress"; one of Offill's influences may have been Renata Adler's "Speedboat," which has a similar form, though longer paragraphs.)

A picture emerges, in big dots: Offill's narrator is curious, witty, intellectual, literary, insomniac, and rawly honest both about others and about herself. She is invigorating company, but won't go out of her way to make herself charming or genial. She is thin-skinned, fatigued, and full of embattled chagrin. In short, she is alive:

Three things no one has ever said about me:

You make it look so easy.

You are very mysterious.

You need to take yourself more seriously.

She lives in New York, falls in love, and gets married. But her plan "was never to get married. I was going to be an art monster instead. Women almost never become art monsters because art monsters only concern themselves with art, never mundane things. Nabokov didn't even fold his own umbrella. Vera licked his stamps for him." The "art monster" lament is a recurring theme. In a way, it is the novel's true subject, and a steady source of pain: thwarted aspiration, a sense of life as a slow lapse from high ambition. The narrator was twenty-nine when she finished her first book, and now the head of the department where she teaches creative writing is asking her where the second one is. The writer who can't write her own book is sent an appropriate comic curse: she accepts a job as a ghostwriter for a wealthy man who wants to write a history of the space program. "It's going to be a big book," he tells her. As you might expect, the project goes nowhere; the man is unhelpfully, and comically, invested in "his own aggrieved story of almost but not quite making it into orbit." Later, he becomes fixated on the Voyager spacecraft and the so-called Golden Record—a gold disk that captured many sounds of the world, an aural time capsule sent into space in 1977 to give aliens a comprehensive idea of human life. The narrator gets her revenge by mocking the rich man as an "almost astronaut," perhaps uncomfortably aware

that she herself could be called an almost writer: her own ghost.

There has been no second book, big or small, partly because life got in the way: marriage, teaching, a child. Offill describes with acuteness the mother's fierce connection and bemused alienation, as she comes to terms with the novelty of this small, separate being. In the early months, the baby is difficult—a screamer, calmed only by trips to Rite Aid. She's a "devil baby"; the screaming "like a car alarm was perpetually going off in my head." The narrator is exhausted, frazzled, intemperate, bored. When someone on the subway intones the phrase "sleeping like a baby," "I wanted to lie down next to her and scream for five hours in her ear." And beyond the usual daily irritation and tedium is a more lingering sadness at the gradual dissolution of old intensities once taken for granted:

My best friend came to visit from far away. She took two planes and a train to get to Brooklyn. We met at a bar near my apartment and drank in a hurry as the babysitter's meter ticked. In the past, we'd talked about books and other people, but now we talked only of our respective babies, hers sweet-faced and docile, mine at war with the world. We applied our muzzy intellects to a theory of light. That all are born radiating light but that this light diminished slowly (if one was lucky) or abruptly (if one was not). The most charismatic people—the poets, the mystics, the explorers—were that way because they had somehow managed to keep a bit of this light that was meant to have dimmed. But the shocking thing, the unbearable thing it seemed, was that the natural order was for this light to vanish. It hung on sometimes through the twenties, a glint here or there in the thirties, and then almost always the eyes went dark.

I have quoted this single-paragraph entry in full, because one of the strong pleasures of "Dept. of Speculation" lies in the lapidary separateness of each paragraph (even as the paragraphs cumulatively overcome their isolation to make a narrative). The longer entries are like hanging story fragments, reminiscent at times of Lydia Davis's short texts:

A boy who is pure of heart comes over for dinner. One of the women who is dabbling with being young again brings him. He holds himself stiffly and permits himself only the smallest of smiles at our jokes. He is ten years younger than we are, alert to any sign of compromise or dead-ending within us. "You are not allowed to compare your imagined

accomplishments to our actual ones," someone says after the boy who is pure of heart leaves.

The tone can be oblique and a little mysterious. In what way is the boy "pure of heart"? How, exactly, is the woman who brought him "dabbling with being young again"? (Notice how the phrase itself nicely keeps this woman at arm's length.) And are those words about imagined and actual accomplishments said mockingly, ruefully, or amusedly?

The narrator's discovery that her husband is having an affair precipitates a crisis we have somehow been expecting. Rage, shame, revenge at first dominate. But the narrator is always swerving away from customary formulations into the eccentric and the sharply personal. And Offill puts some distance between the rawness of the emotion and the reader by switching her protagonist's "I" to a blank or even slightly arch third person, "the wife":

Afterwards, the wife sits on the toilet for a long time because her stomach is twisting. . . . The longer she sits there, the more she notices how dingy and dirty the bathroom is. There is a tangle of hair on the side of the sink, some kind of creeping mildew on the shower curtain. Their towels are no longer white and are fraying along the edges. Her underwear too is dingy nearly gray. The elastic is coming out a little. Who would wear such a thing? What kind of repulsive creature?

The wife may rage and cry, but at least she has resources, her intelligence and her wit: "At night, they lie in bed holding hands. It is possible if she is stealthy enough that the wife can do this while secretly giving the husband the finger." She buys a book on coping with adultery, and, predictably, exhausts its bromides. The book instructs her to "say affirmations of some sort each day, about yourself or your marriage." Since she doesn't like the ones on offer, she invents her own:

Nerves of Steel
No favors for fuckers

Throughout the book, there have been intimations of mental turmoil, inner struggles. Before she was married, the narrator had travelled to Capri, where she wondered "what it would be like to live somewhere so beautiful. Would it fix my brain?" Offill's first novel, "Last Things" (1999), which also told a story of marital abandonment and turmoil, dealt with similar preoccupa-

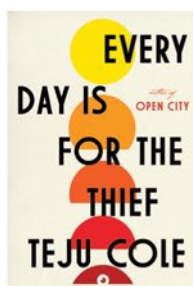
tions. “Last Things” was more conventional, but, like “Dept. of Speculation,” it uses insouciance and indirection to keep pain in check. (Offill achieved this by deploying, as her narrator, a little girl; through her eyes, we watch the antic life and hectic breakup of her parents’ marriage.) In “Dept. of Speculation,” the narrator’s marital anguish intensifies her uneasy relationship with suicide. She visits a student, Lia, in a hospital in Westchester. Lia has “bandaged wrists,” and can’t sleep unless she is drugged. She waits for first light, watching the window. “This is how the wife gets through the nights too, but she doesn’t tell her this.” At the limit of her distress, the narrator seems ominously close to collapse or self-harm: “The wife wants to go to the hospital. But she does not want to have gone to the hospital. If she goes, she might not come back. If she goes, he might use it against her. But when she is alone, the objects around her bristle with intent.” We watch the narrator go to the brink of despair, teeter, and then recover—though it seems unlikely that the mind we have encountered in the course of the novel will be able to find an easy peace. The art monster will only ever be at bay.

“Dept. of Speculation” is all the more powerful because, with its scattered insights and apparently piecemeal form, it at first appears slight. Its depth and intensity make a stealthy purchase on the reader. Unlike the Golden Record’s large global statement, or the almost astronaut’s “big book,” Offill’s brief book eschews obvious grandeur. It does not broadcast its accomplishments for the cosmos but tracks the personal and domestic and local, a harrowed inner space. It concentrates its mass acutely, pressing down with exquisite and painful precision, like a pencil tip on the white of the nail. ♦

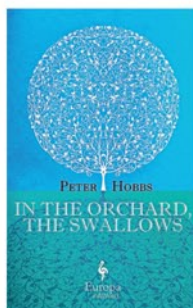
CONSTABULARY NOTES FROM ALL OVER
From the Placerville (Calif.) Mountain Democrat.

Robert Davis, 32, was arrested March 23 after allegedly stealing some steaks, shrimp, rib-eye roasts, and hot dogs from Safeway in Cameron Park. Witnesses said they saw Davis make several trips into the store and empty the stolen items from under his coat into the back of his 1994 Nissan pickup. He was ultimately arrested at a bar near the store where witnesses said he was trying to invite women to a barbecue.

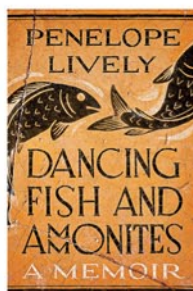
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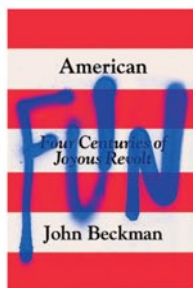
EVERY DAY IS FOR THE THIEF, by Teju Cole (*Random House*). In this slim novel, previously published in Nigeria, a man travels from the U.S., where he lives, to visit family and friends in Lagos, his childhood home. Accompanied by the author’s photographs, the narrative consists of digressive accounts of random encounters around the city, which is viewed with both the curiosity of a foreigner and the intimacy of a native. The narrator is infuriated by local corruption—the threat it poses to everyday activity and to the serenity he needs to work. Yet he also feels pity for American writers, who “must hoe the same arid patch for stories.” In Nigeria, “the pungent details are all around me.”



IN THE ORCHARD, THE SWALLOWS, by Peter Hobbs (*Europa*). The narrator of this fable-like tale has been released from prison in Pakistan after fifteen years and recuperates with the help of a benevolent stranger. Every day, he visits the orchard of his family home, an idyllic place where he fell in love as a teen-ager. The novella is addressed to his love, because “love must be shared, or else it is just madness.” In beautiful, unadorned prose, Hobbs ruminates on love as it exists in our memory. But the story, moving back and forth in time, ultimately feels somewhat distant. “Time softens all griefs,” Hobbs writes. Perhaps. Yet the power of literature, one hopes, is to render them anew.



DANCING FISH AND AMMONITES, by Penelope Lively (*Viking*). The author, eighty years old and with more than fifty books behind her, provides a “view from old age” in this engaging but uneven memoir. Lively takes readers through childhood in Egypt, life in a cold and isolating English boarding school, the Blitz, and the social change wrought by the feminist movement. A final section dwells on objects in her home that “articulate something of who I am”: fossils found on a beach in Dorset, which show an abiding interest in paleontology and archeology; an eighteenth-century needlepoint sampler, which points to a fascination with the intimate details of women’s lives through history. Lively’s writing shines brightest when her discursive remarks demonstrate the methods and preoccupations that have shaped her fiction.



AMERICAN FUN, by John Beckman (*Pantheon*). This freewheeling history argues that fun—defined as the collective participation in “jokes, mock trials, parties, troublemaking, dancing, protests, fights”—is the cornerstone of American identity, and has done more than religion or law to keep the peace. Beckman considers several famous moments when Americans came together to rabble-rouse for a cause. He considers the “forefather” of American fun, Thomas Morton, who founded a radically inclusive colony just north of puritanical Plymouth; the Boston Tea Party; eighteenth-century elections held by slaves and free blacks to choose their “kings”; and the counterculture of the nineteen-sixties. The book suffers from claims of exceptionalism and an over-broad thesis, but the anecdotes richly demonstrate how Americans have often blended defiance and wit in the pursuit of liberty.

DOWN FOR THE COUNT

Alex Timbers takes on "Rocky."

BY HILTON ALS



The new musical “Rocky” (at the Winter Garden) is an immense spectacle. But it’s a spectacle of waste. Based on the 1976 movie, which starred Sylvester Stallone as the eponymous working-class hero, the show centers on Rocky’s struggle to love and hope in Philadelphia’s dirty world of boxing. Stallone wrote the scripts for the original film and all five sequels, and although this show borrows little from the later movies, the oversized production—directed by Alex Timbers, with a book by Stallone and Thomas Meehan, and music and lyrics by Stephen Flaherty and Lynn Ahrens, respectively—has the unvanquished air of being part of a franchise, a canned commodity destined to sell and sell.

The film, which was shot in just

twenty-eight days, on a million-dollar budget, was one of the great sleeper hits of all time: the little movie that could grossed two hundred and twenty-five million dollars, made Stallone a star, and won the Academy Award for Best Picture. Unabashedly sentimental but not without its moments of real vulnerability, “Rocky” is one of those movies which flow through us, reminding us that we’re all part of the family of man and discouraging us from looking too closely at why we react so positively to triteness. To insure that audiences will leave the theatre filled with the same empty calories they consumed almost forty years ago, Stallone and Meehan have pretty much transplanted the original screenplay to the stage. But what

works in film often feels reductive in the theatre. While film is fluid—forward motion, wrapped in light—the stage is a solid, fixed in front of us; whatever you put on it has to stand there with the irrefutable weight of fact. Stallone and Meehan work with Timbers to reduce that solidity. Saturated with image after image, the Broadway version of “Rocky” takes on a kind of Game Boy jitteriness, a hyperactivity that distracts us, for a time, from any possibility of criticism.

You know the story: It’s 1975, and the pale-skinned, black-haired Rocky Balboa (Andy Karl) is barely scraping by in Philadelphia. He’s a boxer, but he’s getting long in the tooth and isn’t much of a contender for anything. Rocky pays the rent by working as the muscle for a loan shark, but he is too nice to really hurt anyone. What he most enjoys is hanging out in his small, cluttered apartment with his two turtles. He picked them up at a pet store, where the bespectacled, socially awkward Adrian (Margo Seibert) is a salesclerk. Adrian’s older brother, Paulie (a too operatic Danny Mastrogiorio), is a friend of Rocky’s; Paulie works as a meat packer, and sometimes, when he’s drunk, he’s filled with bitterness and recrimination. His words can have a bloody effect; they demean and demolish the innocent Adrian, robbing her of the sense that she’s worth loving at all. Adrian’s occasionally plucky but mostly beaten-down affect—she’s no contender in the boxing ring of love—is what makes Rocky fall for her. Her insecurities mirror his own and draw out his chivalrous nature. He’s a poetical dude with excellent delts. (The romance at the center of “Rocky”—aside from Rocky’s romance with his own sensitivity—is a variation on the shy, tender love that Paddy Chayefsky depicted in his 1955 Oscar-winning screenplay for “Marty.”)

Rocky works out at a small gym downtown, which is run by Mickey Goldmill (Dakin Matthews). Back in the day, Mickey was a fighter himself; now he coaches hungry up-and-comers who turn up their battered noses at the sight of Rocky—he’s a loser, and who wants to be associated with that? But Rocky is lifted out of professional obscurity when the undefeated heavyweight champion Apollo Creed (played joyously and attractively by Terence Archie) comes to town. Creed is slated to fight Mac Lee Green at the Philadelphia Spectrum on New Year’s

Andy Karl as the down-and-out boxer who rises to a champion’s challenge.

Day, 1976—the day that marks the beginning of the American Bicentennial—but Green has injured his hand. As promoters and managers scramble for a replacement, Creed points to the last guy anyone would choose: Rocky, who also goes by the nickname the Italian Stallion. For Creed, it's all about advertising; he likes the way Rocky's moniker will look, alongside his name, on a marquee in our nation's cradle of freedom. In any case, Rocky accepts the challenge. He trains hard. (The show's completely undistinguished score retains the movie composer Bill Conti's famous "Gonna Fly Now" workout number, and, in the performance I saw, it got the biggest hand of the evening.) In the end, Adrian gives herself up to Rocky's love, and by the time Apollo and Rocky finally meet in the ring the outcome hardly matters to us: Rocky has already triumphed.

When the movie "Rocky" came out, it was said that the 1952-56 World Heavyweight Champion, Rocky Marciano, was an inspiration for Stallone's character. At one point in the show, we see the ghost of Marciano shadowboxing, and it's one of the musical's few moments that are touching without being exploited for that very reason. Instead, Timbers leaves well enough alone and allows the scene to be an homage, one that harks back to the glory days of fighting and carries echoes of A. J. Liebling's vivid description of Marciano's presence in the world and in the ring. Writing in this magazine in 1952, Liebling spoke of Marciano as a fighter with a "trace of intellection." He went on, "Marciano isn't a hard man to keep in a good humor.... His face, like his body, is craggy...and almost always, when he is outside the ring, has a pleasant asymmetrical grin on it. It is the grin of a shy fellow happy to be recognized, at last, as a member of the gang in good standing."

Karl manages to incorporate some of that feeling into his performance—when someone says something crappy that makes his lovely smile disappear, you want to pick it up off the floor for him. So it's a pity that he doesn't have much interpretive work to do; he's sketching on top of Stallone's sketch of Marciano, down to Marciano's New England accent and the movie Rocky's little black hat. But how could he do anything else? Stallone's version is too deeply imprinted on our collective imagination. It doesn't help that the line between Rocky and Stallone was

blurry in real life—at least, when it came to the fight for recognition. (Or that it was purposefully blurred by people trying to capitalize on the movie's success: after "Rocky" came out, a soft-core porn flick starring a young Stallone was unearthed and re-billed as "The Italian Stallion.") Karl has to play to all this, and he does so willingly—he's a sweet star, and he understands how his body works in a scene. But, no matter how much he flexes, he can't change the musical's emotionally cheap structure. In any case, this show—more of a "happening"—isn't about character or motivation; it's about sets. And if you don't have enough craft and personality to survive a scene change—which Seibert doesn't—you're toast.

Timbers, like Karl, has to contend with the simulacrum problem—that is, the challenge of making something new out of something tried and tested. In the past four years, Timbers, who is thirty-five, has directed two Off-Broadway shows that transferred to Broadway, carrying with them a degree of intelligence that is rarely exhibited at theatres above Fourteenth Street: "Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson" (2010) and "Peter and the Starcatcher" (2012). Those shows had a kind of intimacy that Timbers can only sneak into "Rocky." His direction of the women in the cast is especially negligible: he builds a grownup, sweatier Boys Town. Timbers has made Seibert so recessive that her portrayal feels like a faded pencil drawing—we can see her, but we can't quite make her out. And, because he isn't able to be fully himself here, he borrows too much from the work of other directors and designers, including David Cromer's deep, dark stage pictures, Samuel Leve and Jean Rosenthal's historic designs for Orson Welles's 1937 production of "Julius Caesar," Gordon Craig's ideas about symbolism in theatre, and the cinematographer Gregg Toland's Expressionist lighting in films ranging from "The Long Voyage Home" to "Citizen Kane." What we see onstage may be someone's vision of the Philadelphia underworld, but it's not Timbers's. His best work is about the destruction of forms, which he leaves splayed before us, to our horror or delight. Here, instead, he takes on the unenviable task of resuscitating a monster, rank with the scent of its own cravenness, with the cold calculation of its sentimental heart. ♦

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CANDID CAMERA

"Finding Vivian Maier" and "The French Minister."

BY ANTHONY LANE



Tall, awkward, and heavily shod, Vivian Maier was a nanny. Born in 1926, she never married, and had no children. Much of her working life was spent in Chicago. Toward the end, alone and truculent, she lived in Rogers Park, on the southwestern corner of Lake Michigan. A neighbor recalls her eating cold corned-beef hash out of a can. Maier had cared for many children, some of whom remembered her with fear, others—the majority—with gratitude and wonder. Once known, she was not easy to forget, but to the wider world she remained invisible. She died in 2009, and left no heirs.

She did, however, leave a legacy. A trove of her belongings—she hoarded almost every document, receipt, and tchotchke that came her way—was moved to a storage facility. Other boxes of stuff wound up at auction, even before her death, and it is here that “Finding Vivian Maier,” a documentary by John Maloof and Charlie Siskel, picks up the thread. In

2007, Maloof bid, more or less at random, for a box of negatives, which he looked at, neglected for a while, returned to, scanned, and put on Flickr. He knew the photographer’s name, but that was all; a Google search had drawn a blank. Then, in 2009, he found her obituary in the Chicago *Tribune*, and learned that she had died a few days before. From there, his quest began, to spectacular effect. Google “Vivian Maier” today, and you will get more than a million results. For many people, the discovery of her work has been one of the great unearthings of the age, although what she would have made of the excavation is open to debate. She might have been appalled by the fuss, or quietly gratified, or both. Or she might just have told us to stop chattering, brush our teeth, and go straight to bed.

So, what does her work consist of? Well, Maloof ended up with a hundred thousand negatives; thousands of rolls of undeveloped film, in color and black-and-

white; and a hundred and fifty 8-mm. and 16-mm. films. Maier also liked to interview local people about current affairs, and to record them on audiocassettes. We hear some poor guy being quizzed in a supermarket on the question of Richard Nixon. At this point, the image of Maier crosses the border into eccentricity and compulsion, and into the unfunny sadness that patrols those zones. One employer went up to her room (which was normally kept locked), and found shoulder-high piles of old newspapers. There was just enough space to squeeze between them, as if you were walking through the trees of a printed forest. Such obsessive conduct is no guarantee of artistry, still less of quality control. For every Joseph Cornell, confined to Flushing by shyness and by the need to care for a disabled brother, and constructing his boxes in that lonely redoubt, there are countless souls whose energy is frittered away, not brought to order or fruition, by the rage to amass.

Cornell built a reputation, along with the boxes; they were exhibited in galleries, and dealers represented him. Maier, though, made no effort to display her wares. It was the taking of pictures, not the showing of them, that consumed her. Had she been a zoologist, she would have captured wild animals, brought them home, installed them in cages, and never opened a zoo. In short, she meets the criteria of a genuine unknown—the creator in our midst whom we pass by, and whose story we then devour, as if to atone for missed opportunities and lost time. The closest recent equivalent is Irène Némirovsky, who died in Auschwitz, in 1942, and whose novel “Suite Française” was not published until 2004, by which time her name had faded away. But here’s the rub: the Némirovsky biography was so stark, and the emergence of her book so exciting, that she was hauled up to a pinnacle—as a kind of emergency classic—where she did not really belong.

Will that turn out to be the case with Maier, too? Have we been carried away? In the film, Mary Ellen Mark compares her to Robert Frank, Lisette Model, Helen Levitt, and Diane Arbus, and the praise sounds comically high, yet the comparisons are well grounded. I would even add a touch of Weegee. (Whether Maier ever saw the work of her peers is not something, sadly, into which the movie delves.) Maier’s eye was extraordi-

A Maier self-portrait from 1957, one of many photographs discovered in Chicago.

narily true—at once cool and sympathetic, with an instinctive sense of her subjects' place within the frame, and of the dignity that such a place bestowed. The frame was square, because, for many years, she used a Rolleiflex, a beautiful twin-lens device that you focus at waist level, leaving your gaze free to meet that of others. She would tramp the streets with a camera around her neck, dragging her charges in tow. There were trips to slums and stockyards; a mother once reprimanded her for exposing the children to the wrong part of town, but, as far as Maier was concerned, there was no right part. There was just town, and the lives that it held and broke. Her finest shots were casual, unposed portraits of the wretched, the distracted, and the confused. In the memory of one woman whom she helped to raise, Maier was cruel and overbearing; but look at the images that she took of crying children, and ask yourself who, outside the realm of war photography, had such a clear, Dickensian grasp of young distress.

"Finding Vivian Maier" pays a faithful tribute. Maloof is a brisk and modest guide, though, in terms of self-effacement, no match for his heroine. (She took many self-portraits, but in half of them she appears as no more than a shadow.) As for her background, his sleuthing turns up a pile of surprising facts, which I will not disclose. But there are also lots of gaps. We are told, in passing, of children who grew up in Maier's care and then, when she was elderly, paid for her accommodation; perhaps she was not quite the friendless loner that the film suggests. Moreover, when she was a child, she and her mother lived with a woman named Jeanne Bertrand, a por-

trait photographer of note, who may have inspired Vivian or taught her the rudiments of the trade. Yet Bertrand is not mentioned in the film. It is as though the refrain of Maier's solitude must be strengthened at every point, rather than softened or undercut. Even as this fine documentary unveils the "mystery woman," as she once described herself, it remains intent on the molding of her myth.

Most telling of all is the social attitude that the movie enshrines, and that you hear in the testimony of those who knew Maier in their youth. On the whole, they feel warmly disposed toward her, and all of them are pensive and polite, but none can quite believe that art, of a serious nature, was going on under their noses, and that the hired help, of all people, was responsible. They might almost be talking of a crime. The implication—and this was mid-twentieth-century America, not nineteenth-century Britain—is that Vivian Maier knew her mind, but somehow not her place. Near the start of the film, Maloof himself asks, "Why is a *nanny*?" he pauses for a brief laugh—"taking all these photos?" To which the only possible reply should be: Why not?

The title of the new Bertrand Tavernier film, "The French Minister," does not deceive. Most of it is set in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in Paris: a noble institution, where all manner of ignoble activity unfolds. Arthur Vlamincq (Raphaël Personnaz), a tyro with unpolished shoes, becomes a speechwriter to the Foreign Minister—the majestic Alexandre Taillard de Vorms (Thierry Lhermitte), who hails him with the words, "Comment ça va, Camarade?" Anybody

who treasures the Gallic weakness for abstract nouns will find much to feast on in the Minister's harangues, with their distant flavor of revolution: "Legitimacy! Unity! Efficiency!" he cries. Lhermitte, with his sapphire eyes, used to be a whippy young fellow, but he has swelled into middle age, and he falls on this succulent, puffed-up role as if it were a chocolate éclair.

The plot revolves around Arthur's attempt to write a speech that will be delivered by his boss at the United Nations. This simple task is enriched by the Minister's whim for recruiting friends and supporters—a poet, a philosopher, even his own father—to add their improvements. The movie feels uneasy whenever it leaves the office for high-level trips to Africa and New York; Tavernier is at his happiest and most nimble in the jungle of the ministry, where the doomy, door-slamming approach of Vorms is made to sound like the T. rex in "Jurassic Park," and where every back is asking to be stabbed. Wickeder of all is the casting of the in-house temptress, who praises Arthur's work to his face and then destroys it in front of other people. (A colleague excuses her fickleness as "an amorous gesture.") Her governing principles are clear: Treachery! Disunity! Lingerie! She is played by Julie Gayet, who was in the news recently as the woman to whom the real French President, François Hollande, was paying regular visits on his little scooter. And her character is called Valérie, which is the name of the partner whom Hollande was allegedly spurning for Mme. Gayet. This is not life imitating art. This is art going to bed with life and staying there for the rest of the afternoon. ♦

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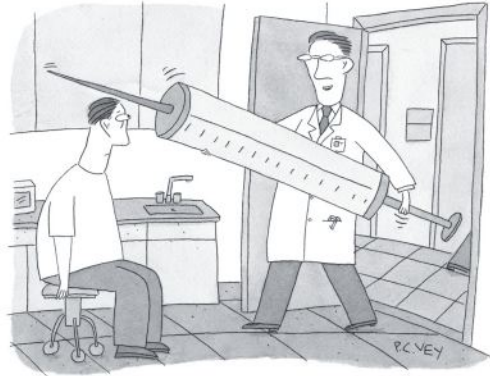
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

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 Joe Dator, must be received by Sunday, March 30th. The finalists in the March 17th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the April 14th issue. The winner receives a signed print of the cartoon. Any resident of the United States, Canada (except Quebec), Australia, the United Kingdom, or the Republic of Ireland age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"Why does this never happen on the way to work?"
Brett McArthur, Lincoln, Neb.



THE FINALISTS

"You will feel a thing."
Brent McCafferty, Great Falls, Mont.

"Which arm do you want to keep?"
Trevor Baine, Washington, D.C.

"Yeah, but the lollipop is amazing."
Roberto Tercero, Los Angeles, Calif.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

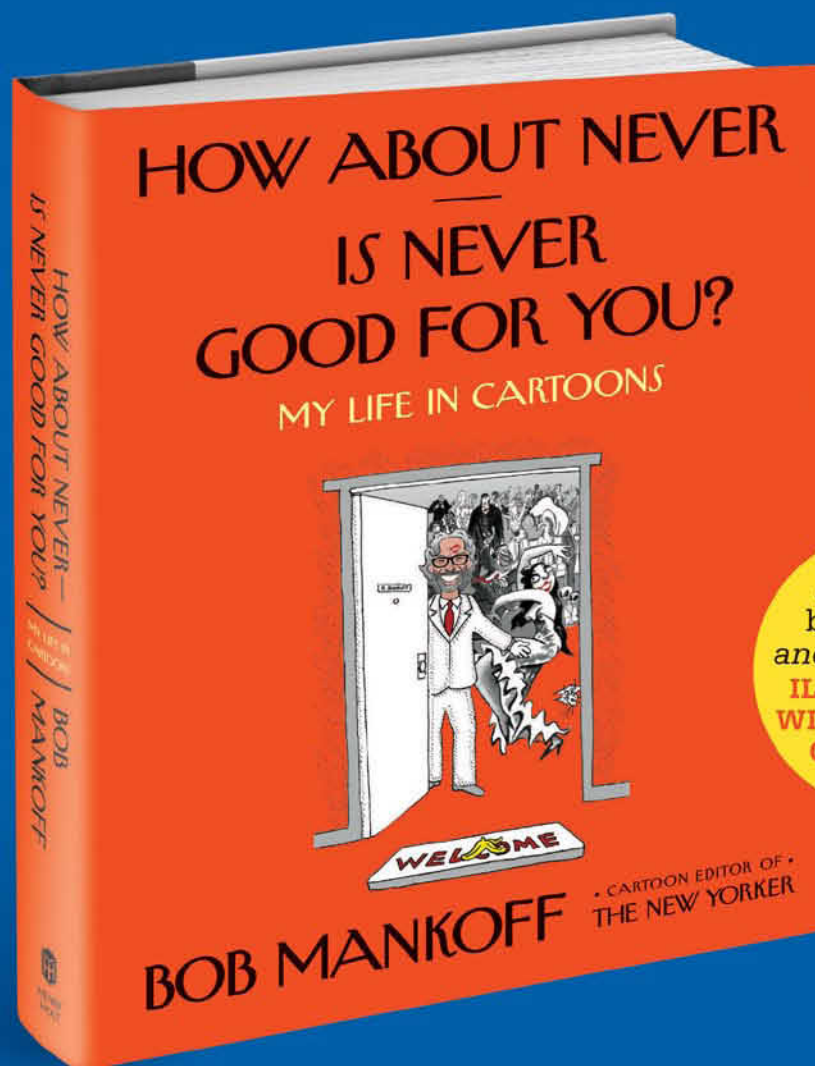


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