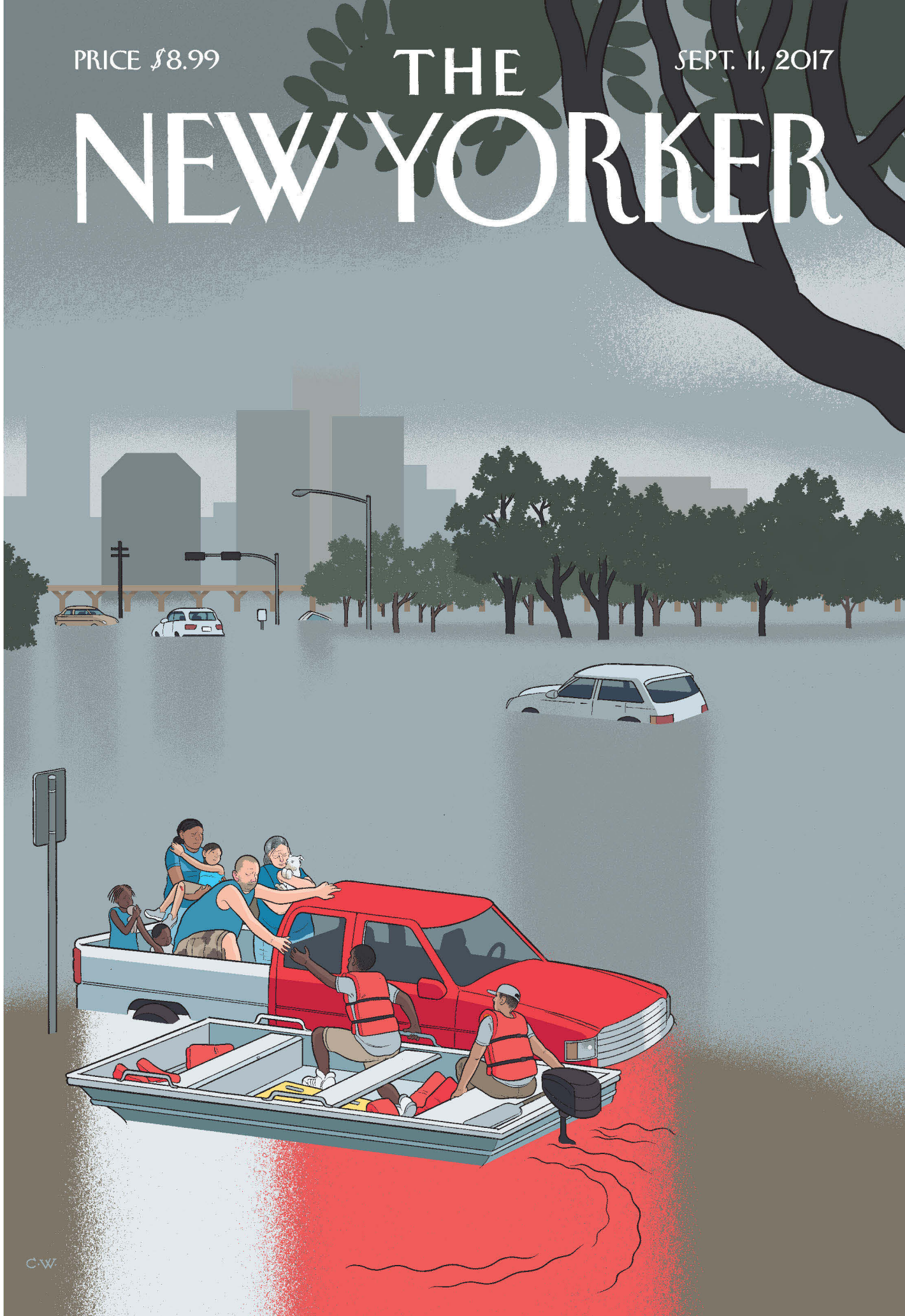


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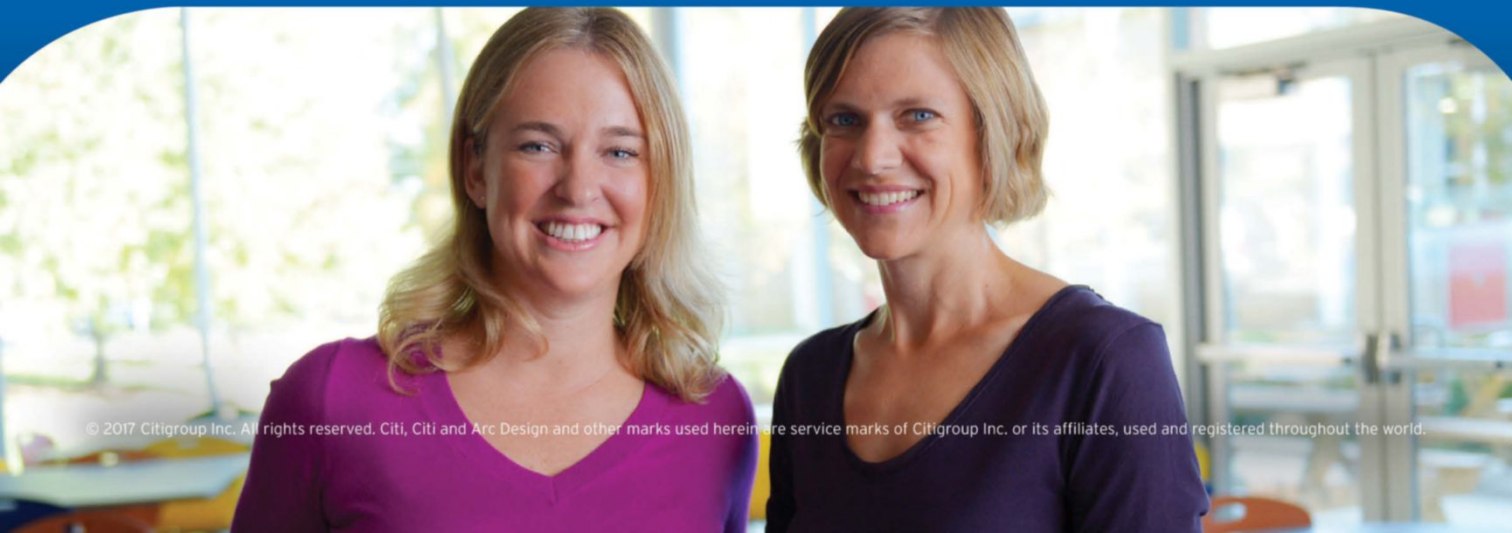
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Commentary and reporting on the government response to Hurricane Harvey, and the latest in Houston.

PHOTO BOOTH

Rebecca Mead on Robert Mapplethorpe's gifts to his lover and first male model, David Croland.

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FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: PHOTOGRAPH BY MIKE OSBORNE FOR THE NEW YORKER; PHOTOGRAPH BY NORMAN SEEFF

THE MAIL

ASSANGE AND WIKILEAKS

Depending on a reader's preconceptions, she or he will interpret Raffi Khatchadourian's article about the WikiLeaks founder, Julian Assange, a ghostly global activist hiding out in a foreign embassy, as a portrait of either a self-involved, two-faced traitor to his own ideals or a crusading hero of the populace ("Man Without a Country," August 21st). It's impossible, it seems, to have anything but the strongest reactions to Assange. For the Assange and Edward Snowden types of the world, is it worth it, in the end, to live in exile? And are they driven by righteous missions of exposure or by a desire to get credit for them?

Gino Cirignano
Playa del Rey, Calif.

For all of Assange's grandiosity, what has he actually done? He created a Web site that publishes compromising documents. This seems to be indicative not so much of genius or skill as of a willingness to flout the interests of state actors. It once appeared that WikiLeaks was born of bravery and principle, as a way of exposing the cycle of government tyranny, propaganda, and coverups. But information is power, and, thanks to Khatchadourian's access, we can see from Assange's own words that a hunger for power motivates him as well. Assange has become eerily similar to those whom he targets: deeply engaged in coverups and propaganda, conflating his personal failings with international conspiracy and persecution.

Avi Frey
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Assange's willingness to harm other people in the name of openness is striking. WikiLeaks documents have, Khatchadourian writes, "revealed the identities of teen-age rape victims in Saudi Arabia, anti-government activists in Syria, and dissident academics in China," but Assange says that criticism of these types of revelations are "nearly all bogus." He goes on, "In any case, we have to understand the reality that privacy is dead." Assange may believe in transparency for

other people, but he doesn't seem to want it for himself.

Arthur H. Goldgaber
South Orange, N.J.

When one empire disintegrates, another must take its place. The most recent and obvious historical example of this is when the British Empire was supplanted by the United States as the preëminent global power, in the nineteen-forties. When Assange says that "this could be the beginning" of the collapse of America's empire, he neglects to mention what state or power might succeed it. Why? Because there is no such empire on the horizon.

William Hall
San Francisco, Calif.

DRISCOLL'S AND YOUR FRUIT

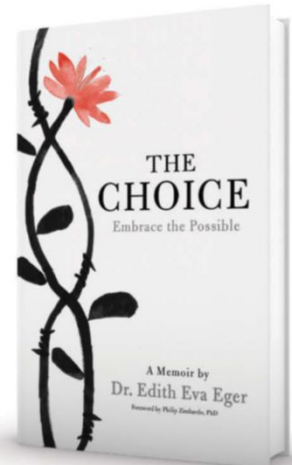
Dana Goodyear's article about Driscoll's and its strawberry empire barely mentions the thousands of farmworkers who pick these berries, other than to note, in a parenthetical, that the work is hard and that changes in minimum-wage and overtime laws have made labor more expensive ("Strawberry Valley," August 21st). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, however, farmworkers are some of the lowest-paid laborers in the country, with a median hourly wage of \$10.58. In recent years, farmworkers in the berry industry in Washington and Mexico have been fighting for better working conditions and against wage theft. As the seller with a third of the market, Driscoll's has tremendous power and the ability to improve the working conditions of the mostly migrant labor force that picks its berries. Indeed, the article's claim that stoop-labor jobs are hard to fill suggests that perhaps Driscoll's suppliers are not paying their farmworkers enough.

Molly Biklen
New York City

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

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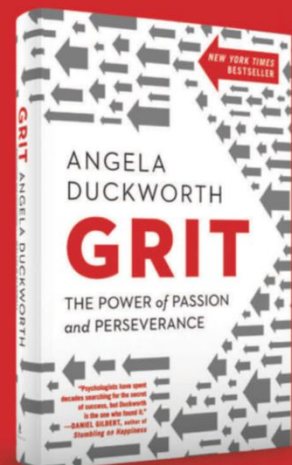
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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



One of rap's last true enigmas, **Del the Funky Homosapien** leaves a thumbprint on the few things he touches. After writing for the rapper Ice Cube, his cousin, in 1990, Del sketched his own wacky slacker style as an alternative to big-budget sounds, perfected on the blissed-out verses he lent to the Gorillaz for their 2001 trip-hop hit, "Clint Eastwood." The Oakland cult hero has since led an unhurried career of cherished offshoot projects and sporadic appearances; he materializes at Brooklyn Bowl on Sept. 12, before floating off again.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK MAHANEY

NIGHT LIFE

ROCK AND POP

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

Chris Cohen

Listen closely, because he sings softly; Cohen is a bit of a treasure. His comfort shines through his performances, and nods toward his show-biz background as the son of Kip Cohen, an accomplished record man and the former director of the Fillmore East, and the Broadway actress Lynn Cohen. His label boss at Captured Tracks, Mike Sniper, recently commented, "Whenever I get depressed about running an indie rock label in 2016, I can take solace in knowing I put out two Chris Cohen LPs." Those records, "Overgrown Path" and last year's "As If Apart," have a low-slung, wistful posture that continues to pull kids into dingy halls and college radio stations, and his autumn-air vocals evoke Arthur Lee and Ariel Pink in the best ways. (*Murmrr Theatre, 17 Eastern Pkwy., Brooklyn. murmrr.com. Sept. 9.*)

Lucy Dacus

It takes a kind of bravery to be humorless. On the drowsy indie number "I Don't Wanna Be Funny Anymore," this singer-songwriter from Richmond, Virginia, cycles through all the year-book superlatives she'd rather claim. "I'll read the books, and I'll be the smartest / I'll play guitar, and I'll be the artist," she declares. "Try not to laugh." Things unfurl a bit when she addresses the second person: "I get smoke in my eyes every time I try to look you in the eye," she sings on "Strange Torpedo," a middling image that may intentionally obfuscate the sentiment. But no matter her perspective at a given moment, she has a round, unhurried tone that voices indecisiveness well. Dacus performs in support of **Big Thief**. (*Music Hall of Williamsburg, 66 N. 6th St., Brooklyn. 718-486-5400. Sept. 11.*)

Goldie Awards 1st Annual D.J. & Beat Battle

In 1997, at the age of fifteen, Alain Macklovitch made his debut at the DMC World Championship, an international d.j. competition that recognized the best record wigglers and sample benders across a hugely ballooning community of turntablists. Performing as A-Trak, he stole the show that year, setting off a twenty-year career of producing and d.j.ing, as well as co-founding his own dance and hip-hop imprint, Fool's Gold. These days, turntable routines have mostly gone the way of the novelty voice-mail prompt, but producers and d.j.s still drive the sounds of popular music; Macklovitch hopes to give them a central hub with this inaugural event, in which eight d.j.s and eight producers will clash for bragging rights and the approval of judges including **Diplo**, **Mannie Fresh**, **Mija**, **Just Blaze**, and **Craze**. (*Brooklyn Steel, 319 Frost St., Brooklyn. goldieawards.vice.com. Sept. 7.*)

Half Waif

Nandi Rose Plunkett records and sings as Half Waif, when she's not playing with her beloved folk band, Pinegrove. Fans of Plunkett's solo material believe in her pop chops; throughout her latest

release, "form/a," the twenty-eight-year-old vocalist and producer offers cerebral, moody movements that build into splashing dance choruses. She works in shades of the traditional *bhajans* and Celtic pop music that she inhaled as a child from her parents (an Indian refugee from Uganda and an Irish-American), but it was her time as a music major at Kenyon College and, eventually, her immersion in the dense D.I.Y. community in northern New Jersey that expanded Plunkett's repertoire. Influences from these environments graze her sound, but ambling songs like "Frost Burn" still aren't easy to pin down. (*Alphaville, 140 Wilton Ave., Brooklyn. Sept. 12.*)

Of Montreal

This offspring of the Elephant 6 Recording Company, a collective of musicians that gave birth to several indie bands in the nineties, including Neutral Milk Hotel and the Apples in Stereo, has a catalogue of pop music eleven albums wide. Kevin Barnes, the act's front man and mastermind, thinks up quirky ways to serve catchy hooks. Tending toward psychedelic turf, his songs establish a place where flower power and vaudeville coexist. (*The Bell House, 149 7th St., Brooklyn. 718-643-6510. Sept. 8.*)

Queens of the Stone Age

This brainchild of the former Kyuss singer and guitarist Josh Homme emerged at the tail end of the nineties, with a beefy, hook-laden sound that encapsulated the best bits of punk, metal, and stoner rock and the dying embers of that decade's defining sound, grunge. Huge singles from its "Songs for the Deaf" record slingshot the band into MTV's orbit by 2002, and the album's dingy interstate-drive texture has proven ageless. Fifteen years and three albums later, the Queens have offered up "Villains," co-helmed by the pop auteur Mark Ronson, doubling down on the carny pop that helped the group first stick out. "The Way You Used to Do" is far from a return to old habits, but few would expect a step backward from this merry band of outsiders. (*Capitol Theatre, 149 Westchester Ave., Port Chester, N.Y. thecapitoltheatre.com. Sept. 6.*)

2 Chainz

As the genre has grown crowded, and the minimalist sound has been all but fully explored, trap music is undergoing the requisite period of self-reference that comes with saturation. Enter 2 Chainz, the winking sideman with a healthy amount of hit verses under his belt, elevated by close ties with Kanye West's G.O.O.D. Music imprint. The Georgia native's latest album, "Pretty Girls Like Trap Music," captures the moment in its campy title: songs like "Blue Cheese," with Migos, and "Good Drank," with Gucci Mane, are songs to Snapchat to, designed to sparkle like an expensive liquor bottle and laden with outlandish one-liners that play most appropriately after the kids are in bed. His show at Terminal 5 promises to feel more like a night at the club than a concert, cheaper drinks notwithstanding. (*Terminal 5, at 610 W. 56th St. 212-582-6600. Sept. 6.*)

Wiki

This Upper West Side native stepped out from his Ratking trio to deliver a solo full-length, "Lil

Me," at the end of 2015. The nasal-voiced twenty-three-year-old adores and abhors his city in equal measure, considering the "old blocks" he grew up on while wandering past the "new kids" who now share his sidewalks. Terse, frostbitten beats drag inventive new rhythms from grime and noise influences, and Wiki's thick, buoyant cadence keeps the subject matter from getting too heavy. His latest solo album, "No Mountains in Manhattan," turns the lens even farther inward, a colorful, technical clinic in the odd angled rhyming patterns of Cam'ron and Eminem from a post-Bloomberg vantage. He performs the new record at this home-town album-release show. (*Rough Trade NYC, 64 N. 9th St., Brooklyn. roughtrade-nyc.com. Sept. 11.*)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

The Will and Peter Anderson Quintet

Think of them as the jazz equivalent of the antique-seeking Keno brothers, twins who have staked a claim to the specialized territory they've now become identified with. The brothers Anderson are saxophone and clarinet virtuosos who delight in burrowing deep into traditional, swing, and mainstream jazz. Staunch defenders of the faith yet increasingly open to wider musical horizons, these siblings are works in progress worth attending to. (*Smalls, 183 W. 10th St. 212-252-5091. Sept. 9.*)

Ben Monder Trio

Monder may be decades younger than the visionary drummer **Andrew Cyrille**, but the venturesome guitarist found common ground with the older legend on the 2015 release "Amorphae." Joining them is the saxophonist **Tony Malaby**, a tough-minded improviser who will add poetic grit to the mix. (*Cornelia Street Café, 29 Cornelia St. 212-989-9319. Sept. 9.*)

Katie Thiroux

"Off Beat," Thiroux's sophomore release, makes good on the promise of a multitasking talent who swings her bass with a Mack-truck-powered lilt that would make her hero Ray Brown proud, and who transforms her smallish voice into a thing of delight (as on the Sinatra obscurity "When the Wind Was Green"). Thiroux's quartet is buttressed by the clarinet and saxophone ace **Ken Peplowski**. (*Birdland, 315 W. 44th St. 212-581-3080. Sept. 10.*)

Jeff (Tain) Watts

Paying tribute to Elvin Jones, the late genius of modern-jazz drumming whose name is indelibly linked with that of John Coltrane, the relentlessly propulsive drummer brings together veterans of Jones's bands, including the saxophonists **Sonny Fortune**, **Dave Liebman**, and **Ravi Coltrane**. He concludes the engagement with a trio featuring the guitarist **Kevin Eubanks** that will also honor Jones. (*Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St. 212-576-2232. Sept. 5-10.*)

Steve Wilson and Wilsonian's Grain

A trusted A-list sideman (Maria Schneider's orchestra, Chick Corea's Origin band) who knows just what to do when he takes command of the spotlight, the expressive alto and soprano saxophonist and flutist Wilson's own quartet is bolstered by such stalwarts as the pianist **Orrin Evans** (soon to be a member of the Bad Plus) and the bassist **Ugonna Okegwo**. (*Smoke, 2751 Broadway, between 105th and 106th Sts. 212-864-6662. Sept. 8-10.*)

MOVIES

OPENING

It An adaptation of the novel by Stephen King, about an evil clown who kills children. Directed by Andrés Muschietti; starring Jaeden Lieberher and Bill Skarsgård. *Opening Sept. 8. (In wide release.)* • **The Limehouse Golem** Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. *Opening Sept. 8. (In limited release.)* • **The Unknown Girl** Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. *Opening Sept. 8. (In limited release.)*

NOW PLAYING

Beach Rats

Eliza Hittman's second feature, like her 2013 debut, "It Felt Like Love," is set in southern Brooklyn, centered on an adolescent's sexual conflicts, and directed with a vigorous and tremulous intimacy. This time, the landscape is broader, the action rowdier. The story concerns Frankie (Harris Dickinson), a brash and smart-mouthed Sheepshead Bay teen-ager dissipating the summer with drugs, handball, and vaping, mostly in the company of three cronies he won't deign to call friends. He gets picked up at a Coney Island fireworks show by a girl named Simone (Madeline Weinstein), but he pursues the relationship with a callous halfheartedness. Frankie is secretly gay; he connects with men online and sneaks off to desolate roadside areas for furtive sexual encounters. But, when his pals detect hints of his secret life, he considers drastic and ugly action to keep it covered up. Hittman, working with the cinematographer Hélène Louvart, conjures a palpable sense of heat, both physical and emotional, pressing close to faces and bodies in brazen sunlight, humid shadows, and neon haze. Her vision of a homogeneous enclave's crushing insularity is as richly textured as her tactile sense of the allure and the danger of youthful energy.—Richard Brody *(In limited release.)*

Bushwick

Hordes of black-clad invaders roam the streets of Brooklyn, seeking not the finest ethically sourced coffee, as you might expect, but the overthrow of the United States government. Texas, we learn, has seceded, and other states have followed suit; clubbing together to pursue a new American freedom, they have brought their fight to Bushwick, only to be disconcerted when Bushwick, far from rolling over, fights back. Preposterous yet punchy, the film is directed by Cary Murnion and Jonathan Milott and shot in long and apparently seamless takes. (Peer closely, and you can see the joins.) Brittany Snow plays Lucy, a resident of the besieged neighborhood who teams up with a janitor called Stupe (Dave Bautista) in a bid to escape the mayhem. Bautista looms hugely in the frame, and it is oddly stirring to watch so bulky a figure emit such weary sighs, as if the chaos merely confirmed his long-held fears. The effects are scarcely special, and Bushwick locals will have many bones to pick, but somehow the movie gets to you, with its doomy political soothsaying. By chance or otherwise, it feeds on the current climate of civil strife.—Anthony Lane *(In limited release.)*

Columbus

The title of the visual artist and video-essayist Kogonada's intellectually passionate first feature refers to

the Indiana city that's home to a surprising abundance of modern architectural masterworks. Those buildings fire the imagination of his protagonist, a twentyish woman named Casey (Haley Lu Richardson), who's stuck in place. Spurning college to care for her mother (Michelle Forbes), who's a recovering drug addict, Casey works at the local library. When Jin (John Cho), an architectural historian's son, comes to town, he abets her outpouring of pent-up ideas and enthusiasms about architecture and tries to help her change her life. Richardson infuses her hyperalert performance with a rare dialectical ardor; her avid gaze at the city's landmarks is matched by Kogonada's own images, which capture the virtual libido of aesthetic sensibility. Filming Casey and Jin on location in the presence of the buildings that inspire them, he revels in the power of contemplative companionship—of looking, talking, thinking together—and unfolds the wonder of an artistic coming of age. With Rory Culkin, as Casey's ironic grad-student colleague, and Parker Posey, as Jin's longtime friend.—R.B. *(In wide release.)*

Exposed

This wild ride, directed by James Toback, stars Nastassja Kinski as Elizabeth Carlson, an unhappy college student who flees to New York and becomes a famous model. But her rise is tinged with cloak-and-dagger tension, starting with the opening se-

quence of a bomb attack in Paris, and the resulting thriller is also an exemplary tale of leveraging celebrity into politics. Harassed and abused by a professor (played by Toback), Elizabeth drops out of school and makes her way to New York (Toback savors the mean streets). Working as a waitress, she's spotted by a photographer, and her life changes—and then changes again when she's stalked by a concert violinist (Rudolf Nureyev) with a sideline in terrorist-hunting, for which he recruits her. Toback skips the details of Elizabeth's success in favor of the high-stakes maneuvers in its shadows, and, back in Paris, the director unfolds a breathtaking bag of tricks as the violence ratchets up. Tensely pendular tracking shots and deft full-circle pans mesh split-second action with a repressed romanticism; after a tautly efficient car chase, the inevitable conflagration yields a majestic, paranoid stillness. Released in 1983.—R.B. *(Quad Cinema, Sept. 8-10.)*

Girls Trip

This warmhearted, occasionally uproarious comedy doesn't quite sustain the heights of its performers' inspirations. Ryan (Regina Hall), a best-selling author, is chosen to deliver the keynote address at the Essence Festival, in New Orleans, and she invites her three longtime best friends to join her for a sentimental and hard-partying reunion. Sasha (Queen Latifah), a journalist who's now on the celebrity beat, has money trouble; Lisa (Jada Pinkett Smith), a nurse and divorced mother of two young children, is lonely; and Dina (Tiffany Haddish), an outrageously brazen pleasure-seeker, seems oblivious of the consequences of her actions. Meanwhile, Ryan learns that Stewart (Mike Colter), her

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husband and business partner, is having an affair with a younger woman (Deborah Ayorinde). These women's problems have substance even though their characters are thinly written, and the film's comedic flourishes offer a refreshing frankness about sex from women's perspectives. The view of middle-class African-American women's lives behind closed doors, despite its antic exaggeration, has a lived-in specificity. Malcolm D. Lee's direction doesn't offer much style or vigor, but Haddish delivers a wild yet precise performance of verbal and gestural fury that puts her at the forefront of contemporary comedy.—*R.B. (In wide release.)*

Good Time

A headlong new movie from Josh and Benny Safdie. The latter also stars as Nick, a shy soul with learning difficulties, who is dragged into crime by his brother, Connie (Robert Pattinson). They rob a bank; Nick is arrested, and Connie spends the rest of the film trying to spring him from custody, or to raise enough money—by any means, fair or foul—to bail him out. Much of the story unravels in the course of one night. Though Connie's adventures border on farce, as he hatches a plan to smuggle a patient out of the hospital and blunders around an amusement park, the mood remains sleepless and crazed, compounded by a nagging neon glow and the throb of the soundtrack. For the Safdies, restlessness comes with the territory, often to scatter-shot effect; this, however, is their most coherent work to date, largely because of Pattinson, whose energy drives the tale along. Connie is a thief, a sponger, and sometimes a real jerk, but you can't get him out of your head. With Jennifer Jason Leigh, as a weary friend who's seen it all before.—*A.L. (Reviewed in our issue of 8/21/17.) (In wide release.)*

I Do . . . Until I Don't

Lake Bell's impressively personalized rom-com—she wrote it, directed it, and stars in it—delivers a warmly satisfying resolution without showing how it gets there. She plays Alice, a thirty-five-year-old woman in Vero Beach who longs for city life. Her marriage to Noah (Ed Helms), her college sweetheart and a small businessman, is foundering as they struggle with fertility, sex, and finances. A British

documentary filmmaker (Dolly Wells) comes to town in search of unhappy couples whose stories would support her thesis that marriage should be for renewable seven-year terms, not for life. Among her recruits is a real-estate agent named Cybil (Mary Steenburgen), whose thirty-year marriage to Harvey (Paul Reiser) has devolved into an emotional slugfest; Alice wants into the film as well. As secrets bubble to the surface, new lies are born; Bell is hard-nosed and clear-eyed on the link between love and money, but she's vague on pain and emotional effort. Festering family resentments flip from calamity to cheer with a wave of the hand. The film's genial scenes for the cast of gifted comedians (which also includes Wyatt Cenac, Amber Heard, and Connie Shin) play more like showcases than like pieces in a drama.—*R.B. (In wide release.)*

Ingrid Goes West

Aubrey Plaza's fiercely committed performance nearly rescues this dubious contrivance from absurdity. The drama, directed by Matt Spicer, is the latest entry in the picturesque-mental-illness genre. Plaza plays the title character, a young woman whose violent outbursts lead to a spell in an institution. When Ingrid gets out, instead of receiving therapy and taking medication, she moves to Los Angeles in order to stalk an Instagram celebrity named Taylor (Elizabeth Olsen) and insinuate herself into Taylor's private life and social-media feeds. Ingrid manipulates Dan (O'Shea Jackson, Jr.), her new neighbor and quasi-landlord, for help with her schemes; indifferent to the pain she causes, Ingrid is speeding toward disaster and determined not to crash alone. Yet Spicer's empathetic view of Ingrid's tangle of misery is outweighed by his satirical critique of online stardom, Hollywood hustling, and conspicuous consumption; he presents Ingrid's maladies as the results of the social ills of the times. The action devolves into wan op-ed commentary. With Billy Magnussen, as Taylor's dissolute yet deeply loyal brother, and Wyatt Russell, as her trophy boyfriend.—*R.B. (In wide release.)*

Life of Riley

Alain Resnais's last film—which he made shortly before his death, at the age of ninety-one, in 2014, and

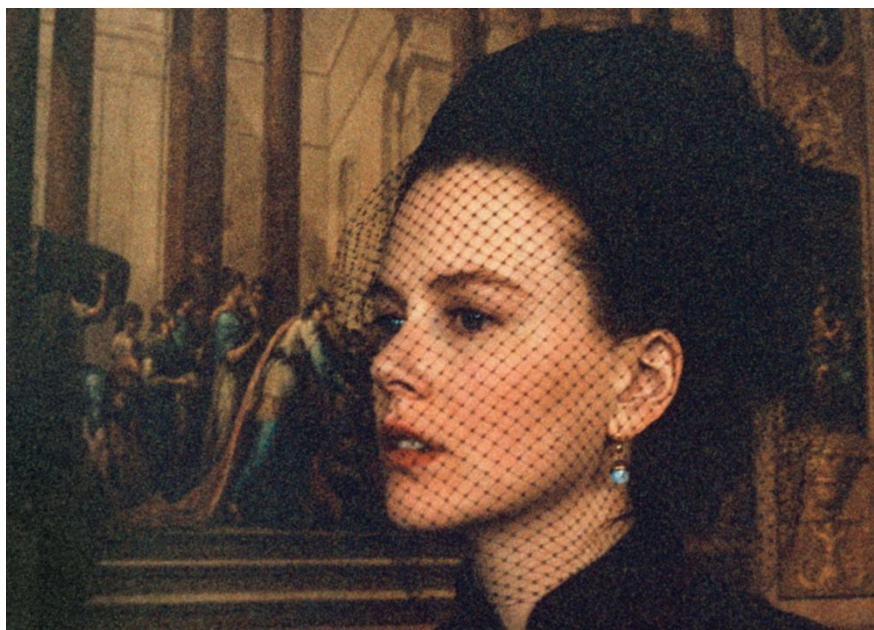
which was released posthumously—is one of the cinema's most lighthearted and free-spirited farewells. The protagonist, George Riley, a schoolteacher in York, England, remains offscreen, unseen and unheard throughout the story, which is all about him. (As such, he's a perfect stand-in for Resnais, and for all directors.) George is dying of cancer, and a quartet of his closest friends, plus his ex-wife, quickly reconfigure their lives in order to meet his needs, furnish his comforts, and, perhaps, even give his erotic batteries a final charge. Adapted from a play by Alan Ayckbourn, the movie is performed by a cast of French theatrical adepts, and the action proceeds theatrically as well, on sets of hanging tapestries. Theatre also plays a part in the story, when an amateur production for which George's friends recruit him begins to infiltrate their private lives. Resnais's cheerful artifice distills his characters' lifetimes of regret, frustration, and pain into an elegant envoi; in a minute-long monologue delivered by Sabine Azéma—Resnais's wife, now his widow—the director, famous for his manipulations of time, divulges the romantic secret at the core of his art. In French.—*R.B. (BAM Cinématek, Sept. 11, and streaming.)*

Logan Lucky

The new Steven Soderbergh film stars Channing Tatum and Adam Driver as Jimmy and Clyde—the Logan boys, from West Virginia, who, together with their sister, Mellie (Riley Keough), hatch a plan to rob a bank vault under Charlotte Motor Speedway. (Tatum savors the name as if he were sipping rye.) Also on the team are Joe Bang (Daniel Craig) and his brainless brothers (Jack Quaid and Brian Gleason). Joe is an expert bank robber, though clearly not that expert, given that he is in jail; Craig delivers, in the truest sense, a breakout performance, springing manically free from the bondage of 007. Soderbergh likewise brushes off the glamour that he conjured for "Ocean's Eleven" (2001) and its sequels, and revels in the rough and compromised lives of his protagonists, as he did in "Erin Brockovich" (2000) and "Magic Mike" (2012). The movie, part of which takes place during a NASCAR race, can't always resist the temptation to patronize, but, as the story proceeds, it builds up both a head of steam and an atmosphere of reckless good will. With brief but striking contributions from Katherine Waterston, as a medic, and Katie Holmes, as Jimmy's ex.—*A.L. (8/28/17) (In wide release.)*

Marjorie Prime

Michael Almereyda has long been eager to probe the dramatic potential of new technologies; in his "Hamlet" (2000), the ghost of the king appears to the grieving prince via CCTV. In Almereyda's new film, the whole plot is founded on a digital innovation of the near future. The dead, we learn, will be resurrected as computer-programmed holograms known as Primes, which allow the bereaved to converse with—and take some comfort from—near-flawless 3-D facsimiles of their loved ones. In an elegant beach house, Marjorie (Lois Smith) enjoys the company of Walter (Jon Hamm), a Prime of her late husband at his peak, in handsome middle age. Their reborn relationship (if that is what it is) causes understandable disquiet to Marjorie's daughter, Tess (Geena Davis), and Tess's husband, Jon (Tim Robbins), though it seems unlikely that they, in turn, will reject the chance to summon forth those they have lost. The movie, adapted from a play by Jordan Harrison, stays close to the sea, and the action—mostly talking—is confined to a few quiet rooms. But the moods change as swiftly as the weather, and the performers derive full value, and a surprising tension, from their uneasy dealings with the living dead.—*A.L. (8/28/17) (In wide release.)*



With the second season of Jane Campion's TV series "Top of the Lake" premiering Sept. 10-12, Film Society of Lincoln Center presents a retrospective of her films, including "The Portrait of a Lady."



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Patti Cakes

Jeremy Jasper's hardscrabble New Jersey fantasy has a heart—but an artificial one. It's the story of Patricia Dombrowski (Danielle Macdonald), a twenty-three-year-old woman who lives with her mother, Barb (Bridget Everett), an alcoholic, and her ailing grandmother (Cathy Moriarty). Patti—who's overweight and has long endured the nickname Dumbo—works as a waitress at a grim bar while dreaming of hip-hop stardom under the name Killa P. Although she can out-rap her fellow-locals in a street-corner contest, her musical partnership with Hareesh (Siddharth Dhananjay), a pharmacist who performs as Jheri, is going nowhere. But she eventually meets a taciturn loud-core anarchist who calls himself Basterd the Antichrist (Mamoudou Athie), a sort of musical genius, whom she lures into the group, sparking romance and success. There are hiccups along the way—debt, work, insult, injury, illness, death—and Patti's forceful, confident pugnacity takes some blows. She has to accept her family identity while attempting to forge an artistic one—and trying to reconcile with Barb, a former singer who put her own dreams aside. Jasper hits every note of sentimental manipulation in a tale that's as fleetingly affecting as it is insubstantial and mechanical.—*R.B. (In wide release.)*

To Sleep with Anger

In Charles Burnett's 1990 succès d'estime, Paul Butler is quietly heroic as Gideon, a man of the South transplanted to Los Angeles, who, with his wife, Suzie (Mary Alice), has raised two sons (Carl Lumbly and Richard Brooks) according to the standards of hard work and old-time religion. Danny Glover gives his best performance—both ticklish and upsetting—as Harry Mention, an old acquaintance from back home who finagles his way into Gideon's family and exposes its fault lines. With his be-guiling chivalry, Harry arouses Gideon and Suzie's nostalgia for the sure-footed courtliness that has all but disappeared from their fragmented, contemporary lives, then proceeds to unleash forces of discord that bring family antagonisms to a flash point. This eccentric comedy-drama is a truly folkloric film. Burnett and his cast tap depths of mystery, soulfulness, and glee.—*Michael Sragow (Metograph, Sept. 8 and Sept. 10, and streaming.)*

The Trial

The histrionic writhings of Orson Welles's 1962 adaptation of Kafka's novel—featuring Anthony Perkins, as the persecuted bank clerk Josef K., as well as Romy Schneider, Jeanne Moreau, Elsa Martinelli, Michael Lonsdale, Akim Tamiroff, and Welles himself, in full-throated fury, as the Advocate—join with a frenzy of Expressionistic images to bring the story's tormented universe to life. Welles's visual compositions, with their striated, high-contrast black-and-white photography and their sets (built in Paris's Orsay station) of a jaw-dropping grandeur, burst through the screen to evoke an oppressively incomprehensible system of edicts and constraints. And who better to reveal the system's evil genius than Welles, the golden boy turned Hollywood martyr? He plays the sybaritic attorney as, in effect, an imperious yet insecure director whose dialogue seems made for a megaphone, and turns Josef K. into a rebellious actor who defies the machine and needs to learn his lesson. Visual and textual allusions to Welles's entire oeuvre to date (starting with "K," for "Kane") and a concluding apocalyptic showdown in front of a bright and empty screen reinforce the suggestion of torments inflicted by the studio system on the innocent—on both sides of the camera and on society at large.—*R.B. (Film Forum, Sept. 6-7, and streaming.)*

CLASSICAL MUSIC



Trinity Church Wall Street presents, across two seasons, the complete works of Anton Webern.

High Art

The gemlike music of Webern, so rarely performed, retains its appeal.

"This is a song for you alone": such is the invitational opening line of the first of five songs set to Stefan George poems (Op. 3) by Anton Webern (1883-1945). It's one of thirty-one works in which the Austrian composer distilled his musical inheritance—an odd combination of post-Wagnerian Romanticism and medieval polyphony—into a bracing new style of crystalline compression that exerted a towering influence over modern composition after the Second World War. That influence has since waned, but this is no deterrent to the conductor Julian Wachner, whose annual "Time's Arrow" festival, at Trinity Church Wall Street, is mounting a two-season traversal of Webern's complete works. It begins with three days of concerts (Sept. 12-14) featuring the superb Choir of Trinity Wall Street and its associated new-music ensemble, NOVUS NY.

If the idea of Webern's "complete works" sounds daunting, it's not a matter of duration: even those who know little of Webern's compositions are aware that most of them are extremely short, haiku-like in their gnomic concentration. It is, rather, in the style of the music that the gauntlet is thrown down, for both performers and audience. The melodic lines

are jagged and disjunct, the language is proudly atonal, and the textures can take canonic counterpoint to a fetishistic extreme. The series of small-scale vocal works (Opp. 12-18) in which Webern gradually adapted the strict system of twelve-tone technique that he virtually co-invented with his revered teacher, Arnold Schoenberg—all of which are included in Wachner's first batch of concerts—reach a dizzying height of abstraction. These gleaming compositions fulfill the high-modernist beau ideal; they exist for themselves alone.

And yet there are many pieces that, within their rigorous confines, yearn for intimacy. Gestures of gentleness and warmth keep breaking into works like the First Cantata, with texts by the poet Hildegard Jone, who shared with Webern, an alpine enthusiast, an intense love for nature at its most pure; carefully chosen timbres of strings and percussion with solo brass and woodwinds caress as often as they collide. The Symphony has an Apollonian benevolence worthy of Satie; the Concerto for Nine Instruments and the Variations for Orchestra have drama and excitement to spare. Wachner's concerts, which also feature works by such Webern-loving kindred spirits as Sebastian Currier and Sofia Gubaidulina, will be difficult to ignore.

—Russell Platt

CONCERTS IN TOWN

New York City Opera: "La Fanciulla del West"

Since reëmerging last year, City Opera has presented worthy contemporary operas that have otherwise been denied a stage in New York, and has also waxed nostalgic by presenting canonical operas that marked milestones in the company's history. Puccini's Wild West fantasy, which opens the new season, falls into neither category: it's more closely associated with the Metropolitan Opera, where it had its world première in 1910. Still, as one of the Italian master's more adventurous works, it's a bold choice for a company looking for ways to continue intriguing its audience. Kristin Sampson, Jonathan Burton, and Kevin Short star in Ivan Stefanutti's production; James Meena conducts. *Sept. 6, Sept. 8, and Sept. 12 at 7:30 and Sept. 10 at 4. (Rose Theatre, Jazz at Lincoln Center, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500.)*

Resonant Bodies Festival

The three-day showcase, now in its fifth year, is devoted exclusively to contemporary vocal music. The second night's program explodes the boundary between performance and composition with three works: "Science Fair," an operatic homage to scientific study spearheaded by the mezzo-soprano Hai-Ting Chinn; "The River Also Changes," a new opera by the renowned vocal pioneer Joan La Barbara; and "A Solo Voice," Odeya Nini's ongoing project to explore new possibilities of vocal expression. For the final evening, the singers Mary Bonhag, Kamala Sankaram, and Kayleigh Butcher showcase works from more than a dozen composers. *Sept. 6-7 at 7:30. (Roulette, 509 Atlantic Ave., Brooklyn. resonantbodiesfestival.org.)*

David Del Tredici: "Many Hands"

The pianist Marc Peloquin, long an impressive advocate for modern composers, has a special relationship to the music of the neo-Romantic iconoclast David Del Tredici, a renowned pianist himself. Peloquin premières a work in tribute to virtuosity, "Many Hands," and reprises such favorites as "S/M Ballade" and a recent piece, "Late in the Game." *Sept. 7 at 8. (Thalia Theatre, Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400.)*

Festival of New Trumpet Music

Founded in 2002 by the adventurous trumpeter Dave Douglas and a clutch of like-minded fellow-artists, the festival known as "FONT" celebrates its fifteenth year with a customarily far-flung range of performers representing jazz, classical music, Balkan traditions, and more. Presented at Manhattan and Brooklyn venues, events include an opening celebration with the groove-oriented ensembles High and Mighty Brass Band and Slavic Soul Party; a starry FONT retrospective; two evenings devoted to new music by Keyon Harrold, a bright young St. Louis trumpeter with impressive credentials in jazz and hip hop; and two more featuring the collaborative big band Wing Walker Orchestra. *Sept. 8-14. (For exact times and venue details, see fontmusic.org.)*

Bang on a Can: "Artists at Noguchi"

The Noguchi Museum provides a suitably tranquil, contemplative setting for the violinists Trina Basu and Arun Ramamurthy, who specialize in a free-flowing, globe-spanning style inspired by Indian Carnatic and Western classical disciplines. They are joined here by the percussionist Rich Stein for a performance offered free of charge with museum admission. *Sept. 10 at 3. (9-01 33rd Rd., Long Island City. noguchi.org.)*

Jupiter Symphony Chamber Players

The hardy group, stocked with first-class freelancers, continues its mission to present works in the spirit of

the Romantic period. Contemporary works, however, begin the ensemble's new season: Lowell Liebermann's Fantasy on a Fugue of J. S. Bach and Arvo Pärt's "Da Pacem Domine" and "Fratres," in a program that also features music by Brahms (including the String Sextet No. 1 in B-Flat Major, Op. 18). *Sept. 11 at 2 and 7:30. (Good Shepherd Church, 152 W. 66th St. 212-799-1259.)*

Bargemusic

The catastrophic events of September 11, 2001, could be witnessed all too clearly from Fulton Ferry Landing, where the floating chamber-music series has been located for decades. The barge's annual tribute, offered free of charge, anchors this week's offerings; it features the series' director, the violinist Mark Peskanov, collaborating with the pianists David Bottoms and Rita Sloan in works by such composers as Bach, Barber, Beethoven, and Copland. *Sept. 11 at 7 and 8:30. (For full schedule, see bargemusic.org.)*

Miller Theatre: Argus Quartet

Miller's fall schedule of free "pop-up concerts" begins with the Miller début of this up-and-coming ensemble, which offers a program of new and recent works for string quartet by Ted Hearne ("For David Lang"), Kerrith Livengood, Garth Knox, and Andrew Norman ("Peculiar Strokes"). *Sept. 12 at 6. (Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. No tickets required.)*

an all-Beethoven program that ventures further afield than the canonical quartets. Surrounding the concert's centerpiece, the mercurial Quartet No. 16 in F Major (Op. 135), are an arrangement by Jeffery Briggs of the Piano Sonata No. 8 in C Minor (Op. 13, "Pathétique") and the hearty String Quintet in C Major (Op. 29), featuring the guest violist Vivek Kamath. *Sept. 10 at 3. (Falls Village, Conn. musicmountain.org.)*

South Mountain Concerts

This quietly distinguished series in the Berkshires continues to share the classical love after Tanglewood winds down. Next Sunday belongs to the Orion String Quartet, which along with the flutist Tara Helen O'Connor offers works by Beethoven's models, Mozart (the Flute Quartet in C Major, K. 285b) and Haydn (the Quartet in B Minor, Op. 33, No. 1), before moving on to Beethoven's model-busting behemoth of a work, the "Razumovsky" Quartet No. 2 in E Minor. *Sept. 10 at 3. (Pittsfield, Mass. 413-442-2106.)*

Maverick Concerts

Concluding the summer season at this arboreal oasis, the ebullient Shanghai Quartet opens with a heady pairing of Beethoven's String Quartet in F Minor (Op. 95, "Serioso") and Penderecki's Third Quartet ("Leaves of an Unwritten Diary"), the latter composed for this group in 2008. The pianist Orion Weiss performs Busoni's transcriptions of three chorale preludes by Brahms (Op. 122), and then joins the Shanghai in Dvořák's Piano Quintet No. 2 in A Major (Op. 81). *Sept. 10 at 4. (Woodstock, N.Y. maverickconcerts.org.)*

OUT OF TOWN

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Charles Burchfield (1893-1967) (Untitled) *The Freight Train*, detail

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THE THEATRE



In “*For Peter Pan on Her 70th Birthday*,” a woman returns to her home-town children’s theatre.

First Star to the Right

Kathleen Chalfant’s sure-footed gusto.

A number of years ago, I had the great good fortune to direct the legendary Kathleen Chalfant. It was not a full production but a staged reading. Still, during the day or two I worked with the seventy-two-year-old Oakland native, I learned a lot about what actors (or actors as great as Chalfant) need to make their characters real: suggestions that are listened to, and trust—trust that, when it comes down to it, strong performers know their characters as well as the writer who has created them.

Chalfant’s career has been long and varied. I think one of the reasons she’s endured in such diverse material (in addition to playing the nasty mother in the Showtime series “*The Affair*” for three seasons, she has appeared, in recent years, in such plays as David Grimm’s “*Tales from Red Vienna*” and Beth Henley’s “*Family Week*”) is that she didn’t have to transition from ingénue parts to mature roles. By the time she got started as an actress Off Broadway, in 1974’s “*Cowboy Pictures*,” she was already in her late twenties. (Prior to that, she had worked as the production coordinator at Playwrights Horizons.) Vanity is the curse of a lot of actors who use the art as a vehicle for their narcissism. I can’t imagine a less vain performer than Chalfant. She knows it’s her job to represent not herself but the inner life of her charac-

ters. Her style, so brilliantly displayed in shows ranging from “*Angels in America*” (she played Ethel Rosenberg and others in the original Broadway production) to “*Wit*,” is grounded in common sense and clear dramatic purpose. In the latter work, by Margaret Edson, which won the 1999 Pulitzer Prize for drama, Chalfant played Vivian Bearing, an English professor dying of ovarian cancer. As she lay in her hospital bed, you could see words from all the great poets dancing in Bearing’s memory; among the things death would rob her of was her ability to read verse. Drawing on her own experience—her brother, Alan Palmer, died of cancer—Chalfant’s performance remains one of those historic characterizations, like Laurette Taylor’s Amanda Wingfield: a twice-in-a-lifetime thing.

The sure-footed star trips the light fantastic (sort of) in “*For Peter Pan on Her 70th Birthday*” (in previews; opening Sept. 13), Chalfant’s thirty-ninth play in New York and her sixth at Playwrights Horizons, about a woman who returns to her home-town children’s theatre. Written by the irrepressible Sarah Ruhl, the play offers yet another role for Chalfant, lithe and handsome, to inhabit with her characteristic gusto and intelligence, all amounting, no doubt, to the kind of spectacle that draws Chalfant’s audience close, like the voice you remember hearing in school during story time.

—Hilton Als

Charm

Philip Dawkins’s play, at MCC, is inspired by Miss Gloria Allen, a black transgender woman who taught an etiquette class at a Chicago L.G.B.T.Q. community center. (*Lucille Lortel*, 121 Christopher St. 212-352-3101. In previews.)

A Clockwork Orange

Jonno Davies plays the ultraviolent teen gang leader in this British adaptation of the dystopian Anthony Burgess novel from 1962. (*New World Stages*, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. In previews.)

KPOP

Set at a Korean pop-music factory, this immersive musical has music and lyrics by Helen Park and Max Vernon, a book by Jason Kim, and direction by Teddy Bergman. Ars Nova presents, with Woodshed Collective and Ma-Yi Theatre Company. (*A.R.T./New York Theatres*, 502 W. 53rd St. 212-352-3101. In previews.)

Mary Jane

Carrie Coon stars in Amy Herzog’s new play, directed by Anne Kauffman, as a single mother in New York City caring for a chronically ill child. (*New York Theatre Workshop*, 79 E. 4th St. 212-460-5475. In previews.)

On the Shore of the Wide World

This new play by Simon Stephens (“*Heisenberg*”), directed by Neil Pepe and featuring Blair Brown, follows a family in Stockport, England, over nine eventful months. (*Atlantic Theatre Company*, 336 W. 20th St. 866-811-4111. In previews. Opens Sept. 12.)

One Night Only (Running As Long As We Can)

Monica Bill Barnes and Anna Bass perform this vaudevillian showcase, presented by WP Theatre with New Neighborhood, featuring frenzied athleticism and competitive spinning. (*McGinn/Cazale*, 2162 Broadway, at 76th St. 212-352-3101. Previews begin Sept. 9.)

The Rape of the Sabine Women, by Grace B. Matthias

Michael Yates Crowley’s dark comedy, directed by Tyne Rafaeli for the Playwrights Realm, is about a young sexual-assault survivor navigating lawyers, guidance counsellors, and Wikipedia. (*The Duke on 42nd Street*, 229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010. In previews. Opens Sept. 10.)

The Red Letter Plays: Fucking A & In the Blood

Suzan-Lori Parks modernizes “*The Scarlet Letter*” in two plays. “*Fucking A*” (opening Sept. 11), directed by Jo Bonney, recasts Hawthorne’s heroine as an abortionist trying to free her son from jail. “*In the Blood*” (opening Sept. 17), directed by Sarah Benson, centers on an impoverished mother of five desperately seeking help from friends and former lovers. (*Pershing Square Signature Center*, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529. In previews.)

The Treasurer

David Cromer directs a new play by Max Posner, about an aging mother (Deanna Dunagan) whose son (Peter Friedman) is forced to take over her finances. (*Playwrights Horizons*, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. In previews.)

The Violin

Peter Bradbury and Kevin Isola play two brothers who find a 1710 Stradivarius in the back seat of a taxi, in the Directors Company production of Dan McCormick's drama. (*59E59*, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200. *Previews begin Sept. 7.*)

NOW PLAYING**If Only**

Maybe it wasn't such a great idea for Mrs. Ann Astorcott (Melissa Gilbert) to invite Samuel Johnson (Mark Kenneth Smaltz) over when her husband (Richmond Hoxie) was out for the evening. It's 1901, and Mrs. Astorcott, a somewhat conventional white ninny, is wistfully reading her diary aloud to herself when Johnson, whom she hasn't seen in thirty-six years, lets himself in. He's that kind of guy: even when Mrs. Astorcott begs him to stop, he continues to try to find in her the open-minded, Lincoln-loving free spirit who fell for him when he was an injured black soldier during the Civil War. Though any play about the insidiousness of racism in America will pull on heartstrings in 2017, Thomas Klingenstein's "love story," directed by Christopher McElroen, is too stiff, stagy, and didactic to have any kind of impact. (*Cherry Lane*, 38 Commerce St. 866-811-4111.)

Inanimate

The heart wants what it wants, and sometimes it wants a can opener. Or a stapler. Or the glowing sign of a Dairy Queen. Nick Robideau's comedy-drama, warming the Flea's new home, shadows Erica (Lacy Allen), an unsociable thirty-year-old overwhelmed by her attraction to inanimate objects, an orientation known as object sexuality. In order to suggest the theatricality of Erica's desires, Robideau and the director Courtney Ulrich have various actors play the objects that affect her, like Dee (Philip Feldman), the lit-up D.Q. sign that flickers and buzzes at Erica's touch. (With his blue hair and Vans, Dee looks a lot more punk rock than his franchise affiliation would suggest.) Most of the human characters are fashioned in broader, more satirical strokes, and Ulrich's direction pushes every scene toward exaggeration. But Robideau shows fine sympathy for Erica and for her adamant belief that love really is a many-splendored thing. (*Flea*, 20 Thomas St. 212-352-3101.)

Prince of Broadway

The producer-director Harold Prince, who is eighty-nine, has had a Broadway career for the ages: after working for George Abbott on shows like "The Pajama Game" and "Damn Yankees," he became a hit-maker himself, with a résumé that spans from "Cabaret" to "The Phantom of the Opera." His oeuvre could be a lens for the history of the modern Broadway musical, but, curiously, this Manhattan Theatre Club revue, directed by Prince (with Susan Stroman), doesn't tell that story, or any. A cast of nine cycles through greatest hits—"Send in the Clowns," "Don't Cry for Me Argentina"—with varying success. (The highlight is Tony Yazbeck's furious tap rendition of "The Right Girl," from "Follies.") A few quoted platitudes from Prince connect the dots, but we hear astonishingly little about his life, his process, or his pivotal collaboration with Stephen Sondheim. The result is a "Best of Broadway" compilation disk brought tentatively to life. (*Samuel J. Friedman*, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

The Suitcase Under the Bed

Since 2010, the Mint, led by Jonathan Bank, the company's artistic director, has presented three odd and fascinating full-length plays by Teresa Deevy, a deaf Irish writer who had a brief but fruitful collaboration with Dublin's Abbey Theatre in the nineteen-thirties. This is an evening of four short plays (three of them never before produced), retrieved, as the umbrella title describes, from a spare room in Deevy's home, in Waterford. During the course of these brief but loaded works, enacted by a lovely ensemble of seven under Bank's direction, Deevy casts her eye on all strata of society. Love unexpected, unachieved, lost, or bargained for is at the core of these sketches, but always with a mysterious, not so wry twist that reveals something deep in the Irish, and the human, character. (*Beckett*, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

The Terms of My Surrender

Michael Moore's mostly one-man show (special guests make appearances) is filled with good will toward the audience, and lots of self-regard. Over two or so intermissionless hours, the liberal filmmaker talks about how our democracy ended up in the toilet, why Americans in general were ready for Trump, and why the folks on either coast weren't, and still aren't. Moore is a rousing, everyday kind of guy, filled with tremendous need—a need to be seen and heard. That's touching at first, as are the stories he tells about his activism, and how it has led, in some cases, to potential physical harm. But then Moore and the show run out of steam, because, for the most part, he's preaching to the converted. (*Belasco*, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

Woody Sez: The Life & Music of Woody Guthrie

Devised a decade ago by David M. Lutken, who plays Guthrie, in collaboration with the director Nick Corley and three other highly versatile performers (two of whom remain in the cast for this production), this outstanding biographical show about the radical American folk giant makes its New York City debut, and it couldn't have arrived at a better time. Simply as a revue of dozens of Guthrie's songs, it's superb: the orchestrations offer a delightful variety of approaches to the material, and all four cast members are rich singers who totally shred on their instruments and seem ready for anything after their years on tour. But it's also a politically invigorating and inventive reflection on Guthrie's life and times, whose echoes with our own are frequent but never forced. (*Irish Repertory*, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737. *Theatre Sept. 10.*)

ALSO NOTABLE

Anastasia Broadhurst. • **Bandstand Jacobs.** • **Charlie and the Chocolate Factory** Lunt-Fontanne. • **Come from Away** Schoenfeld. • **Curvy Widow** Westside. • **Dear Evan Hansen** Music Box. • **A Doll's House, Part 2** Golden. • **Groundhog Day** August Wilson. • **Hello, Dolly!** Shubert. • **In & of Itself** Daryl Roth. • **1984** Hudson. • **The Play That Goes Wrong** Lyceum. • **Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street** Barrow Street Theatre. • **War Paint** Nederlander.

ART**MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES****Whitney Museum**

"An Incomplete History of Protest: Selections from the Whitney's Collection 1940-2017"

This edifying exhibition, which opened on the eve of Boston's triumphant showing against a gathering of white supremacists, takes as a given the new relevance of protest art. The first work you encounter, Dread Scott's black-and-white flag, from 2015, is a near-replica of the banner that hung frequently between 1920 and 1938 from the window of the N.A.A.C.P. headquarters, on Fifth Avenue. "A Man Was Lynched Yesterday," it read; in his updated indictment, Scott inserts the phrase "by police." While this work stands alone, most of the others on view are grouped by social movement. One room is devoted to AIDS activism, including the heartrending agitprop of A. A. Bronson's billboard-size portrait, from 1994, of his emaciated friend Felix Partz surrounded by colorful quilts, taken several hours after his death. Elsewhere, quietly radical works by Mary Kelly and Howardena Pindell are installed alongside the Guerrilla Girls' blaring antitaxist posters. "Protest" is broadly defined by the show's curators, and abstraction looks surprisingly powerful. Senga Nengudi's "Internal I," conceived in 1977, is a taut, weblike arrangement of brown panty hose, which evokes flayed skin. Melvin Edwards's nearby sculpture, "Pyramid Up and Down Pyramid" (remade for the show

based on the 1969 original), is a chilling feat of minimalism: barbed wire strung across corners creates geometric volumes. In the wake of recent events in Charlottesville—and Donald Trump's appalling response—such works suggest the potential for new monuments that might replace malignant symbols of the Confederacy. *Ongoing.*

Museum of Arts and Design

"Studio Views: Craft in the Expanded Field"
Two Brooklyn-based alumnae of the museum's studio program are working on-site in the first phase of this two-part show. The third-generation Detroit native LJ Roberts is in the midst of compiling an extensive tribute to nomadic lesbian van culture, which she started in 2014, using a mechanical sock-maker and a Barbie knitting machine to mark the life-size outline of a van onto a quilted black background with hundreds of brightly colored cotton-stuffed tubes. In an adjoining room, furnished with a sewing machine, a worktable, and a loom, the Texas-born artist Sarah Zapata is busily creating textiles inspired by pre-Columbian artifacts found at the sacred Nazca site of Cuahachi, in present-day Peru. A beautiful indigo print of a woman in a fantastical hat and cowrie-shell earrings, by Xenobia Bailey, and a gray felt shovel, by Maria Hupfield, offer a preview of the next phase of the show. Easily overlooked but also worth visiting is a small exhibition of works chosen by the artists from the museum's permanent collection, which includes two handsome monochrome prints by the

Bauhaus great Anni Albers and a pair of intricately beaded tennis shoes by the Kiowa artist Teri Greeves. *Through Oct. 15.*

New Museum

“Paul Ramírez Jonas: Half Truths”

On paper, this pair of high-concept installations by the New York-based artist sound like didactic satires of authoritarianism, but, experienced in person, they’re absurdist, slyly political thought experiments about identity and imagination. In “Alternative Facts,” a teen-age museum apprentice writes a lie of your choosing on a large sheet of paper, which she then “notarizes.” (Posted above her worktable is the falsehood “I am a notary.”) Your lie is then posted on a wall, alongside hundreds of others, which range from the whimsical (“I own a sun”) to the political (“Hillary Clinton is President of the United States”) to the heartbreaking (on a recent visit, two entries read “I have a happy marriage”). In another project, the contents of visitors’ pockets are scanned and printed on stickers, to construct, with the visitors’ input and blank plastic cards, fake I.D.s. A mashup of your Starbucks card and a dry-cleaning

receipt may not get you into any bars, but until Ramírez Jonas’s show closes it will get you into the museum for free. *Through Sept. 17.*

Noguchi Museum

“Self-Interned, 1942: Noguchi in Poston War Relocation Center”

It’s tragically apt that this exhibition commemorates the signing of a racist and ill-conceived executive order: Roosevelt’s wartime edict that resulted in the mass internment of “people of Japanese ancestry.” Although Noguchi’s father was Japanese, the artist was exempt because he lived in New York, which was not designated, as was the entire West Coast, a “military area.” His relocation to an Arizona camp was voluntary—initially. Vitrines contain sobering documents from the sculptor’s archives; some of them outline his frustrated attempts to improve life for members of the displaced community through arts programming, while others record his own confounding detention in the desert. A selection of characteristically breathtaking art works from the period traces Noguchi’s move away from modernist figuration toward the austere, playful, biomorphic

abstraction that became his signature. The wall-mounted, not yellow “Yellow Landscape,” from 1943, with its graceful blob base and charming elements (wood, string, a fishing sinker), is a fine example of the latter style. It’s also a rare overtly political statement, its title referring to the “yellow peril” of paranoid, anti-Japanese sentiment. As he wrote in a missive from Poston, lamenting his country’s descent into homegrown Fascism, “To be hybrid anticipates the future. This is America, the nation of all nationalities.” *Through Jan. 7.*

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Jessica Dickinson

The abstract painter’s new show begins (or ends?) with a single painting—a vermilion monochrome, opaquely titled “Are: For,” from 2016-17. Its weathered, spackled surface appears old beyond its years, and bears traces of stencilled rectangles. The gallery is otherwise filled with eighteen works on paper, graphite rubbings that Dickinson calls “remainders,” which chart the red painting’s slow evolution—she made an imprint each time her composition underwent a major change in texture or structure. Strangely, the effect of these colorless documents is more bureaucratic than sensual, and none of the works on view, regarded on their own, have the appeal of the show’s over-all appearance at first sight. The initial puzzle of her elegant, sequential installation, with its implicit invitation to determine the mysterious relationship of its contrasting components, is the best part. Perhaps that’s the process-oriented artist’s intent. *Through Sept. 10. (Fuentes, 55 Delancey St. 212-577-1201.)*

Bill Owens

The septuagenarian photographer is best known for his black-and-white series “Suburbia,” pictures of his California neighbors taken in the early nineteen-seventies, which balance empathy with a keen sense of the ridiculous. This spare exhibition features Owens’s striking color work from the past decade. The rows of small white crosses set into the sand, in “Anti-War Protest, Venice Beach, CA,” echo the rows of bikini-clad mannequins in “Prada, Manhattan.” The grainy, frame-filling subject of “Tall Chocolate Cake” could almost pass for a pile of dirt or roast beef. In the portrait “Whitney,” a man stands with his back to a life-size bronze nude, while snapping the view from a balcony on his smartphone. (That image reappears in a concurrent exhibition of cell-phone photographs, the sale of which benefits the non-profit space.) *Through Sept. 19. (Carriage Trade, 62 Walker St. 212-343-2944.)*

Sara Rabin

The helter-skelter, salon-style installation of the Brooklyn-based artist’s show suits the understated aesthetic of her charming, well-observed, and, sometimes, perverse drawings. Her compositions tend to depict solitary characters in distinctly contemporary, urban situations; one favorite subject is people on the subway. The cartoony “Big Angry Baby on the F” shows a resigned mother with a tyrant in a stroller. In the poignant “Sleeping A Train,” a woman with earbuds and a head wrap leans against a dark window to rest. From the wonderful, tossed-off image of a half-nude figure taking a cell-phone picture of her reflection in a teapot to the darkly funny line drawing of a woman fellating a clown, Rabin demonstrates an appealing spontaneity, and a gift for shifts in subject and register. *Through Sept. 10. (Larrie, 27 Orchard St. larrie.nyc.)*



A detail from Kara Walker’s fourteen-foot-long ink painting on paper “U.S.A. Idioms” (2017), in her hotly anticipated show at the Sikkema Jenkins gallery. Opens Sept. 7.

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DANCE

“Dance Among Friends”

Robert Rauschenberg’s connections to dance were deep and long-standing, and, in conjunction with the Museum of Modern Art’s “Robert Rauschenberg: Among Friends” exhibition, some of his collaborations with choreographer chums are being performed in the sculpture garden. Esteemed alumni of Merce Cunningham’s company don the witty costumes of “Antic Meet” and the more rarely performed “Change-ling.” Members of Paul Taylor’s junior troupe squeeze into the creepy (and witty) faceless head-to-toe bodysuits of “3 Epitaphs” and mostly ignore the Duchampian bicycle wheel in the recently reconstructed “Tracer.” A pair of Trisha Brown dancers circulate to Rauschen-

berg sounds in the elegant (and witty) outfits he designed for “You Can See Us.” (11 W. 53rd St. 212-708-9400. Sept. 6.)

Dance Now Festival

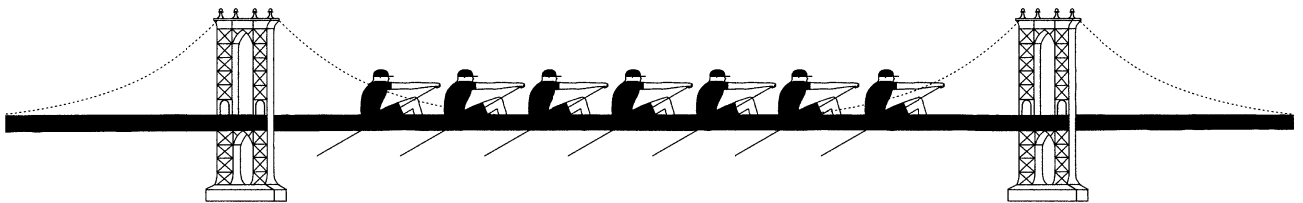
The format of this tightly packed four-night festival is not for the faint of heart; each soloist or group of performers has just five minutes to make an impression, and then it’s on to the next. Add to that a postage-stamp-size stage and a rowdy, cabaret-style setting. (Also: cocktails!) Each evening features ten quick takes—usually consisting of the germ of an idea to be developed in a longer piece—performed by a mix of downtown veterans and up-and-comers. The host is Deborah Lohse, always good for a

laugh. Performers include the dancer and choreographer Nicole Wolcott, a longtime collaborator of Larry Keigwin’s; the sinewy, smart Raja Feather Kelly; the creative tap ensemble the Bang Group; and the venerable Gus Solomons, Jr. (*Joe’s Pub*, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. Sept. 6-9.)

Faustin Linyekula

The Congolese choreographer—an extraordinarily supple mover, who approaches the traumatic material of his country’s history with wry matter-of-factness—is getting extra attention in this year’s Crossing the Line Festival, with three separate shows this month. The first is “Banataba,” a site-specific première at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It’s inspired by the museum’s holdings from the kingdom of Kongo but performed (by Linyekula and the South African dancer Moya Michael) in its sixteenth-century Spanish courtyard, the Vélez Blanco Patio. (*Fifth Ave.* at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. Sept. 9-10.)

ABOVE & BEYOND



Coney Island Film Festival

With its scrappy amphitheatre, historic bumper-car discos, and boardwalk sticky with margarita mix, Coney Island was in full swing this summer. Keep an eye on Coney Island through the fall, though, as offbeat events continue in cooler weather. Sideshows by the Seashore and the Coney Island Museum host their seventeenth annual film festival this week, offering original shorts, classic campy features, and live shows and serving food and drinks. The program includes a slate of comedies, horror flicks, and documentaries set in Brooklyn and beyond—don’t miss Saturday night’s Sideshow screening of “The Warriors” before your own moonlit subway ride back to home turf. (3006 W. 12th St., Brooklyn. 718-372-5159. Sept. 8-10.)

Tribute in Light

The attacks of September 11th have settled into history: heightened security measures have gone from being a temporary fix to a fixed way of life; political tremors have shaken out identity and border politics with the power to shape elections; and the city feels less in transition and more in suspension. Still, this memorial remains a constant—there are New Yorkers who have grown up in the glow of these twin beams, shown annually since 2002, and who will take history courses this fall which attempt to contextualize what many remember seeing with their own eyes. Millions of people within a sixty-mile radius can see the towers of light, which was the intention of the independent artists and designers who first staged

the memorial, under the direction of the lighting consultant Paul Marantz, the public-arts group Creative Time, and the Municipal Arts Society of New York. The beams will start up at dusk on the 11th and shine until dawn. (*mas.org*. Sept. 11.)

READINGS AND TALKS

Powerhouse Arena

“Mickey,” the fourth book by the thirty-one-year-old Chelsea Martin, wowed readers last year because of its unorthodox format: a series of short vignettes, which loosely (and humorously) described a recent breakup, dotted pages at various lengths and odd angles. In the millennial tradition of self-curation and identity branding, Martin reformats the idea of a memoir to be as fascinating aesthetically as it is anthropologically—she moonlights as an illustrator, with a degree from the California College of the Arts. In this summer’s “Caca Dolce: Essays from a Lowbrow Life,” she traces her journey from the sticks of the West Coast to the alt-intelligentsia, and her struggle to afford the degree that served in part as her ticket. The book mines deeply personal scenes from a riotously dysfunctional quarter-life; she recently admitted, in an interview, “I read from ‘Caca’ for the first time at this event yesterday and literally had to tune myself out, because I was so ashamed of myself for getting into a situation where I’m talking about this private awful experience in front of thirty strangers.” She appears in con-

versation with her fellow-author Chloe Caldwell. (28 Adams St., Brooklyn. *powerhousearena.com*. Sept. 6 at 7.)

Albertine

In 2007, three elementary schools in New York City adopted a dual-language program, in which families may opt for students to take half their course load in French. Fabrice Jaumont has helped spearhead the program, as a representative of the French Embassy, and continues to study the potential of bilingual education as a core tenet of modern learning. In his new book, “The Bilingual Revolution: The Future of Education Is in Two Languages,” he gathers firsthand accounts from parents and teachers and argues for the benefits of dual-language schools. He delivers a free talk based on his research and findings, in English. (972 Fifth Ave. *albertine.com*. Sept. 6 at 6:30.)

Brooklyn Historical Society

Eugene L. Armbruster was born in Germany in 1865 and died in Bushwick in 1943. The photographer and historian captured Brooklyn in one of its first transitions: from rural plots and cattle herds to a hub of industrial manufacturing. His photographs and scrapbooks, containing rare imagery of Kings County stretching back to the nineteenth century, were recently added to the collection of the Brooklyn Historical Society; the members Tess Colwell and Regina Carra share stories and imagery at this discussion of Armbruster’s work. (128 Pierrepont St., Brooklyn. *brooklynhistory.org*. Sept. 11 at 6:30.)

FOOD & DRINK



TABLES FOR TWO

Mettā

197 Adelphi St., Brooklyn (718-233-9134)

“To play with fire is a lovely thing,” the Argentine native Norberto Piattoni, the executive chef at this airy South American eatery, told a patron recently. Mettā, which sits on a leafy, unobtrusive corner in Fort Greene, has no signage, but outside its nearly floor-to-ceiling windows are geraniums, rosemary, and lavender. It would put one in mind of a greenhouse, if it weren’t for the open kitchen, which features an *asado* (a vertical fire basket), as well as a wood-fired *parrilla* (grill), *plancha* (griddle), and oven. Rarely has a restaurant been so transparent with its pyromania.

If you are lucky enough to score one of the seven seats along the ring of fire—*a.k.a.* the chef’s counter—you can admire up close the hanging hunks of lamb leg and pork shoulder, glistening ruby and gold above flames that are liberally fed with cherry wood, oak, and charcoal. Start with the lamb in the snack section, and listen to the good waiter’s advice and order at least two portions. The boat-shaped lettuce leaves that arrive may look skimpy, but they carry precious cargo: folded slices of lamb leg slow-roasted for seven hours and kimchee-esque collard greens, spiced with cayenne pepper, paprika, and coriander. One patron previously indifferent to lamb called the first

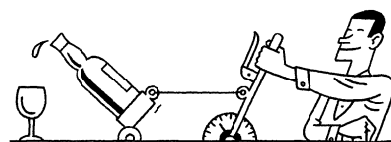
bite the “tippy-top of a roller coaster on a perfect summer day.”

At Mettā, it’s best to go bold. That means getting the beef-heart carpaccio, even if innards aren’t usually your thing, because its texture—at once tender and crisp-edged—pairs fantastically with zesty fermented garlic scapes. The dish is lightly charred in chili paste, which is a unifying ingredient on the menu, making cameos in everything from the lamb to the very fine fairy-tale-eggplant caponata. So is vinegar, which Piattoni, a veteran of San Francisco’s Bar Tartine—that famed house of fermentation and preservation—uses to acidify the funky, briny sour-cabbage-and-crispy-lamb soup and the freekeh risotto, spruced up with maitake and lion-mane mushrooms.

Is anyone allowed to leave an Argentine restaurant without feasting on at least one good slab of steak? Here, there is rib eye and tri-tip, but the clear winner is the marbled, bone-in short rib, which is criminally indulgent, chimichurri-dabbed bliss. “Is it true that only the Argentines and the Koreans know how to cook short rib?” Piattoni mused one evening. Sitting next to the blazing fire, a patron of Korean heritage took a slow sip of her cocktail, made of mezcal, beet shrub, and chive brine, leaned conspiratorially closer to the glowing embers, and said, “It’s because we are the only ones unafraid of the heat.” (*Entrées* \$22–\$29.)

—Jiayang Fan

BAR TAB



Salud

1413 Bushwick Ave., Brooklyn (347-365-7257)

On a broad and relatively barren swath of Bushwick Avenue, the asphalt rent with months of heat, Salud appears like sudden relief. Its patio—surrounded by strings of white lights, more lights curled in Mason jars, and a riot of flowers in steel boxes—gives it the look of an urban oasis. On offer to the thirsty: a panoply of beers, from chichi (Delirium Tremens, Brooklyn Brewery Black Chocolate Stout) to old standards (Modelo, P.B.R.). In summer, pitchers of red sangria, heavy, fruity, sticky, and sweet, adorn the tables; in the winter, coquito—Puerto Rican eggnog, made with cream of coconut and condensed milk—is mixed up by the gallon by the patient, deft-handed staff. There’s usually sports on the TV, but the broad array of neighborhood bargoers watch indifferently; there are conversations to be had in big, gossipy groups, cold beer to be sipped, flirtations to be advanced in sly increments. On a recent Sunday afternoon, a bachelorette party sat under a balloon shaped like a diamond ring, drinking peppery, beet-purple wine-enhanced Bloody Marys; “Despacito” was playing, its summery, ubiquitous rhythm causing feet to tap. With its mouthwatering Latin-American menu, the bar both embodies and defuses the tensions of this area of Bushwick: plaid-clad hipsters and neighborhood stalwarts alike can be seen eating *yuca* fries and *empanaditas*. The Three-Hit Wonder—possibly the best bargain brunch in the city—includes a mound of perfectly seasoned plantains topped with pickled onions, Dominican salami, fried cheese, and over-easy eggs whose yolks are rich and golden enough to awe a Midas. “NOT ENDLESS,” the brunch menu announces, about its specialty drinks—but then again, as summer wanes, what is?—*Talia Lavin*



KUMAIL NANJIANI



CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE



ANTHONY BOURDAIN



AI WEIWEI



ATUL GAWANDE



CARLY RAE JEPSEN



KEVIN YOUNG



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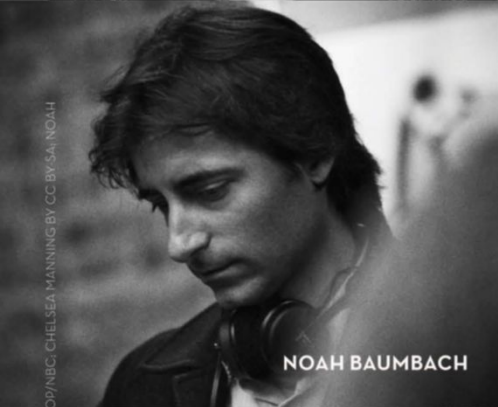
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PREET BHARARA



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NOAH BAUMBACH



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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT COMING STORMS

On August 29, 2005, at six-ten in the morning, Hurricane Katrina made landfall on the border of Mississippi and Louisiana, just east of New Orleans. Katrina had spent days wobbling over the Gulf of Mexico, and by the time it reached the coast it was classified as a strong Category 3 storm. As it pressed inland, its winds, which were clocked at up to a hundred and twenty-five miles an hour, pushed water from the Gulf westward into Lake Pontchartrain, and north, up a mostly abandoned shipping canal. The levees that were supposed to protect New Orleans failed, and low-lying neighborhoods were inundated. That day in Louisiana, at least six hundred and fifty people died.

Katrina was widely described as a “wake-up call” for a country in denial about climate change. President George W. Bush and his Vice-President, Dick Cheney, during their first term, had withdrawn the United States from a global climate agreement and dismissed the findings of the government’s own climate scientists. Now, a few months into their second term, the nation was facing just the sort of disaster that the scientists had warned about. Even if global warming hadn’t caused Katrina, clearly it had intensified the damage: with higher sea levels come higher storm surges. And, with sea surface temperatures rising, there was more energy to fuel hurricanes, and more evaporation, which inevitably produces more rain. “How many killer hurricanes will it take

before America gets serious about global warming?” the journalist Mark Hertsgaard asked at the time.

Last week, as Hurricane Harvey lingered over Houston, dumping so much water on the city that the National Weather Service struggled to find ways to describe the deluge, this question slogged back to mind. Again, climate change can’t be said to have caused Harvey, but it unquestionably made the storm more destructive. When Harvey passed over the western part of the Gulf, the surface waters in the region were as much as seven degrees warmer than the long-term average. “The Atlantic was primed for an event like this,” Kevin Trenberth, a senior scientist at the National Center for Atmospheric Research, told the *Guardian*.

Harvey was less lethal than Katrina; as of this writing, forty-six storm-related deaths have been confirmed.

But in financial terms the storm’s costs are likely to be as high or even higher. One estimate put the price of repairing homes, roads, businesses, and the petrochemical plants that line the Houston Ship Channel at a hundred and ninety billion dollars. And that estimate was made before storm-damaged plants started to explode.

As misguided as the Bush Administration was about climate change, Donald Trump has taken willful ignorance to a whole new level. The President has called climate change an “expensive hoax” dreamed up by the Chinese. After much posturing, he announced in June that he was withdrawing the U.S. from the Paris climate accord. With less fanfare, he has rolled back Obama Administration regulations limiting greenhouse-gas emissions from both old and new power plants and from oil and gas wells. (Regarding the wells, a federal appeals court recently ruled against the White House, saying that it could not simply suspend the regulations.) Trump also revoked a 2013 executive order directing federal agencies to prepare for the impacts of warming and tossed out a plan, issued the same year, that outlined steps that the U.S. would take to combat climate change.

Then, just ten days before Harvey hit, the President rescinded a 2015 executive order requiring public-infrastructure projects in flood-prone areas to be designed with sea-level rise in mind. This move is likely to have particularly unfortunate consequences for Houston, a city with no zoning code, where thousands of buildings



constructed on floodplains but lacking flood insurance are now filled with soggy debris. Last Monday, as rainfall totals in Houston were topping forty inches, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson told Congress that he was planning to eliminate his department's special envoy for climate change.

Many members of Congress share Trump's climate-change delusions, especially in the Texas delegation. Lamar Smith, a Republican who represents parts of San Antonio, chairs the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology. Smith has spent the better part of his career harassing climate scientists, and in a recent op-ed for the Daily Signal, a Web site sponsored by the conservative Heritage Foundation, he celebrated the effects of global warming, arguing that they were producing "beneficial changes to the earth's geography." At a town-hall meeting in April, Joe Barton, a Republican who represents parts of Fort Worth and is

the vice-chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, repeated the old denier canard that clouds are the cause of climate change. And, in June, House Republicans introduced a bill to prevent federal agencies such as the Department of Energy from considering the societal costs of carbon pollution when fashioning regulations. Among the co-sponsors were three Texas representatives.

Over the next few months, Congress and the President will have to agree on a package of federal assistance for Houston. (With typical bluster, Trump, visiting Texas last week, declared that he wanted a recovery effort "better than ever before.") In the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy, when Congress voted on two measures to provide aid to New York and New Jersey, twenty-three out of Texas's twenty-four Republican representatives voted against one of the bills, and eight voted against both. Most of the state's G.O.P.

lawmakers supported an amendment to the second bill that would have required spending cuts in other federal programs to offset the disaster aid.

Politicians from New York and New Jersey have been quick to say that they will not mess with Texas the way that Texans messed with them. "I'll vote 4 Harvey aid," Representative Peter King, a Republican from Long Island, tweeted during the storm. Lawmakers from the Northeast should vote for aid to Houston, but with conditions. In the place of spending cuts, they should demand that Texas lawmakers and the President face up to the facts. The earth is warming, fossil-fuel emissions are the major cause, and the results are going to be far from "beneficial." The U.S. needs to radically reduce its carbon emissions and, at the same time, prepare for a future in which storms like Harvey, Sandy, and Katrina increasingly become the norm.

—Elizabeth Kolbert

HOUSTON POSTCARD PRO BONO



Debra Wray Furrh, the advocacy director of Lone Star Legal Aid, evacuated to Texarkana last week when Hurricane Harvey struck. The Houston headquarters were closed. One colleague fled to Nacogdoches, and another was stuck at home, in Pearland. Lone Star, which offers free legal services to the poor from Waco to Galveston, has a special disaster-recovery unit that's weathered Katrina, Rita, Ike, and the yearly floods and fires since then. "We just stay real calm," Furrh said.

At nine-thirty on Monday morning, she was working the phones from a room at a Best Western when a colleague texted her with a question: "Is our building on fire?"

Furrh: "What's your source?"

The source was a legal intern who lived in an apartment building across the street, in downtown Houston, and had called the Fire Department. The flooding seemed to have caused an electrical

explosion. Windows had shattered, and flames and plumes of black smoke were lashing out.

Furrh made three quick calls. The first was to Lone Star's C.E.O., who happens to be her husband. He was in a satellite office, where a unit of lawyers were manning a crisis hotline. ("Hi, honey, are you sitting down?") Next up was Darren Gold, the building manager, in Houston. "Go see what you can see," she told him. He'd been waiting for the roads to clear so that he could recover clients' files, rescue the servers, and haul out boxes of materials for distribution at shelters across town. The last call went to Texas Rio-Grande Legal Aid, to see about fielding phone calls. "Once Houston went down, we went black, and there was no way for people to contact us," Furrh said.

When crises hit, the lawyers from Lone Star have answers to the overwhelming questions that follow the devastation: What if you lost your job because of the storm? (You have thirty days to file for unemployment.) How can you be sure that you're not getting scammed by a contractor? (Ask to see his registration certificate with the Texas Residential Construction Commission.) How do you file claims with FEMA? (Very carefully.)

Roslyn Jackson, Lone Star's supervising lawyer in Houston, was at home in Missouri City, twenty miles south, watching her yard fill up with water and texting her four managers. They were busy signing up staffers and volunteers for shifts at the shelters. "I've been through a lot of the high water, but nothing's happened like this," she said. "Employees kept calling to ask, 'What can I do?' We were getting texts until well after 2 A.M. I had to say, 'All right, everybody, we got to go to bed. We start again at seven.'"

On Tuesday morning, the highway was finally passable, and Darren Gold drove to the office. "It wasn't like how we left it," he said. Water from the fire hoses covered the floor, and there was soot everywhere. "We're trying to stay on pace with the disaster. We need to get back to the people who were affected by the storm." It didn't occur to him that he and his colleagues were victims, too. He loaded three boxes of informational flyers onto a dolly and went outside, where a volunteer packed them into his car and drove to the George R. Brown Convention Center. Ten thousand Houston residents were seeking refuge there. Lone Star employees set up a stall by stacking a piece of discarded plywood onto two

cardboard boxes, and they were up and running, ready to receive clients.

Lone Star's resident expert on disaster recovery is Sandra Brown, who's also the proud co-author of a Power-Point presentation called "Mo' Disasters, Mo' Problems: Providing Legal Assistance in the Aftermath of a Disaster." In the days since Harvey, Brown and her colleagues have been training volunteer lawyers throughout the city, visiting shelters, and taking calls. "If only I could stand on a mountaintop, I'd say, 'Register for FEMA! You have sixty days!'" she said. "I was never prouder of Houston than after Katrina," when evacuees came to Houston and the city took them in. "But I might have to revise that soon. The response to Harvey is the story of everybody. Everyone's pulling their weight."

Brown is preparing for the long haul. "The next phase will be appealing FEMA denials," she said. "They say it takes about ten years to do a recovery from a major disaster." A few months ago, she finished up a project related to Hurricane Ike, which hit in 2008.

—Jonathan Blitzer

GRAVEN IMAGE DEPT. DOPE



After the Charleston church massacre, in 2015, Georgia leaders quietly removed two holidays from the official state calendar—Robert E. Lee's birthday and Confederate Memorial Day—and commenced a modest redesign of a specialty license plate bearing a Confederate emblem. But the most divisive Confederate monument in the state—and the largest in the world—remains carved into Stone Mountain, a massive, isolated chunk of rock twenty miles east of Atlanta that protrudes from the piedmont's arboreal green like a sore gray thumb.

Robert E. Lee, Jefferson Davis, and Stonewall Jackson, astride their horses, occupy nearly two acres of sheer mountainside. One of the largest bas-relief sculptures on earth, the monument took decades to complete, with the help of the K.K.K. and local politicians, and is protected by Georgia law, as "a tribute to the

bravery and heroism of the citizens of this state who suffered and died in their cause." It's also the centerpiece of a summer laser show. "I remember going to see the show with my dad, in the nineties, and thinking it was awesome," Mack Williams, a thirty-six-year-old animation director living in Queens, said recently. "Growing up a white kid in Southeast Georgia, I had no idea the carvings could be considered symbols of racism."

A friend introduced Williams to OutKast, the Atlanta rap group, when he was a teen-ager. "ATLiens," released in 1996, remains one of his favorite albums. Williams eventually moved to New York, where, in July of 2015, he read in the news that the N.A.A.C.P.'s Atlanta chapter was calling for the removal of the Stone Mountain carving. "I understood their motivation," Williams said. "But I was, like, Let's not blow it up. If nothing else—and this is easy to say as a white dude—it's a monumental engineering and artistic feat, to have this humongous carving on a mountainside. I told a friend, 'Why don't we just add OutKast to kind of balance it out?' Everyone loves OutKast."

The next morning, Williams created a petition at MoveOn.org. The text reads, in part, "By no means do we wish to erase or destroy the current carving, which, regardless of its context, is an impressive and historic work of art. We simply wish to add new carvings, of Atlanta hip-hop duo OutKast, to the mountainside. There's plenty of room. I believe that Daddy Fat Sacks and Three Stacks"—two of the rappers' sobriquets—"should be carved riding in a Cadillac (as is their wont). This will help the new carving blend nicely with the Confederates who are on horseback."

"I tried to make it clear that it was mostly a joke and, you know, I was sticking my thumb in the eye of people who'd take offense," Williams said. He went on, "There's obviously worthier folks to add to the mountain." He named Martin Luther King, Jr., and John Lewis. "But I think OutKast would piss off the right people." A local reporter saw the petition and interviewed Williams about it. Williams had made a mockup of an image of OutKast, in a Cadillac, beside the generals. "In hindsight, I wish I'd spent more than an hour on Photoshop, because the petition took off," he

said. It's since been viewed more than a hundred thousand times.

"The MoveOn people eventually contacted me," Williams said, "and were, like, 'When are you presenting this to the Governor? We want to make sure our people are there to help.' I was, like, 'First of all, I'm in New York. Second of all, I may not like the Governor of Georgia,



Confederates and OutKast

but I respect the office enough not to waste his time talking about two dope boys in a Cadillac."

Around that time, according to Williams, a member of OutKast called him. "I was in Blackshear, Georgia, at my grandmother's ninetieth-birthday party," he said. "I'm, like, 'I've got to step out to talk to Big Boi, Grandmother.' Big Boi was supernice. He loved the idea. I never did hear anything from André 3000, though."

Since the white-supremacist rally in Charlottesville last month, Williams's petition has been viewed hundreds more times, by supporters and detractors alike. Gripes are predictable: "u are crazy. what's ur problem. Get over it!!!," one comment reads. Another: "That petition about the rappers is stupid and it only shows your a redneck getto guy." Others quibble about Williams's choice of rappers. "Some commenters are, like, 'It should be Gucci Mane or T.I.'!" Williams said. (On August 18th, Big Boi retweeted a story about removing the carvings, which at least one candidate for governor has endorsed.)

"The petition was ahead of its time," Williams said. "But now I read the text I wrote about how the monument is

worth keeping, and, after the events of the last few weeks, I'm thinking we should probably just blow it off the side of the mountain altogether."

—Charles Bethea

THE PICTURES LOVE ALL



On September 20, 1973, the former tennis champ Bobby Riggs rode by rickshaw into the Houston Astrodome, wearing a yellow Sugar Daddy jacket. Across the court, Billie Jean King was carried on, Cleopatra style, by a bevy of bare-chested hunks. Riggs was fifty-five; King was twenty-nine. At the net, King handed Riggs a squirming piglet—code for male chauvinist pig. In the stands were more than thirty thousand spectators, the largest crowd ever at an American tennis match.

Hyped as the "Battle of the Sexes," the hundred-thousand-dollar winner-take-all showdown began as a publicity stunt, but it soon became a referendum on women's lib. Four months earlier, Riggs—past his prime and said to be saddled with gambling debts—had walloped Margaret Court, then the No. 1 women's-tennis player, after boasting that no woman could beat him. King reluc-

tantly took up the challenge, while Riggs brayed that women belonged "in the bedroom and the kitchen." On the big day, King beat him, 6-4, 6-3, 6-3, as some ninety million people watched.

Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris were teen-agers at the time, but neither tuned in. They are now married film directors, best known for "Little Miss Sunshine." Their new movie, "Battle of the Sexes," out this month, stars Emma Stone as King and Steve Carell as Riggs. The film is well timed. John McEnroe, now fifty-eight, recently said that Serena Williams would rank "like 700 in the world" if she played on the men's circuit. (Williams responded, "Respect me and my privacy as I'm trying to have a baby. Good day sir.") And there's the inevitable post-election thrill of watching a qualified woman cream a male braggadocio.

"It is wish fulfillment," Faris said the other day, sitting with Dayton in the living room of their house, in the Pacific Palisades. Their Boston terriers, Louie (two years old, rambunctious) and Daisy (twelve, blind), alternately growled and licked at each other on the shag carpet. "Speaking of 'battle of the sexes!'" Faris said, before Dayton ushered the dogs outside.

The couple joined the project after Danny Boyle, who developed it, was pulled away to do "T2 Trainspotting." "We were particularly intrigued by Billie Jean's private life, and how at this moment, when the world was watching, she

was having her first lesbian relationship," Dayton said.

"And, at the same time, she was fighting for equal pay for women," Faris said. The film sidesteps a long-circulating theory that Riggs threw the match in order to pay off debts to the Mob. In 2013, ESPN laid out a convoluted tale, involving an assistant golf pro who claimed to have overheard Mafia guys discussing the scheme. (King responded, "I was on the court with Bobby, and I know he was not tanking the match.") "It was one of the first things we looked into," Dayton said. They tracked down Riggs's right-hand man, Lornie Kuhle, and, Dayton said, "he made it really clear that it was ridiculous to suggest that Bobby would throw the match."

Both soft-spoken California natives, Dayton and Faris met at U.C.L.A. in 1979. Faris, a dance major who was on the student-arts committee, had to program Thursday nights at the coffee-house where Dayton worked. "I thought he was kind of strange," she recalled. "He was wearing, like, a polka-dot shirt and maroon pants—"

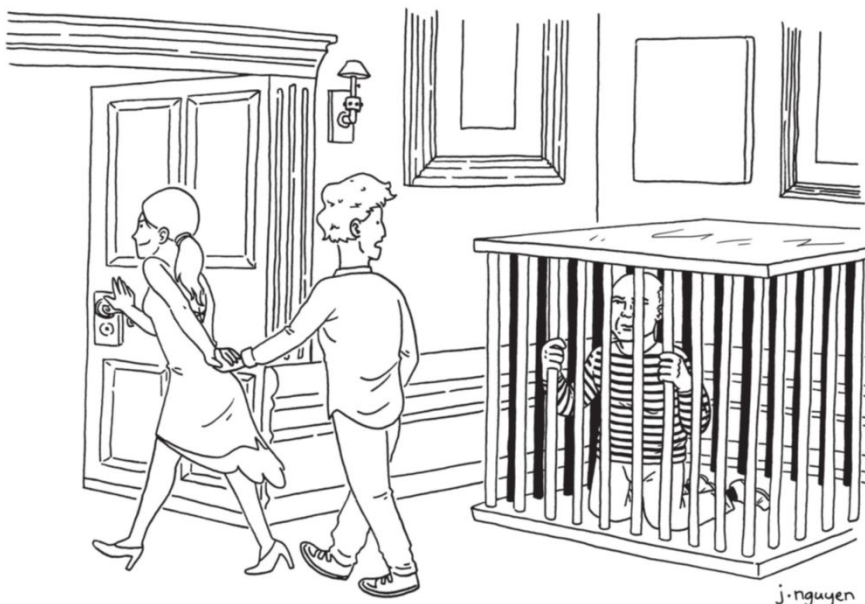
"—which at the time was high fashion," Dayton lobbed back.

After graduation, they got jobs co-directing the MTV docuseries "The Cutting Edge." That led to steady work directing music videos for the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Janet Jackson, and the Smashing Pumpkins. Their relationship was strictly business, until one night Dayton confessed his attraction after a Screamin' Jay Hawkins concert. "We spent the night together, just making out," Dayton said.

"I don't think our kids have heard this story!"

Not long afterward, they were filming an interview with David Lynch, who asked, "Are you guys married?" Faris recalled, "I'm sure we both blushed. Nobody on our crew even knew we were going out. It's like he *knew*." They married in 1988, while producing "The Decline of Western Civilization Part II: The Metal Years." "Partly why I was attracted to Jonathan is because he's not a typical male."

"We fight all the time, but it's not really man versus woman," Dayton said. "We have kind of a rule that whoever's most passionate wins. Fights burn bright and then are extinguished." If the couple



j. nguyen

"You have a Picasso?"

get competitive over anything, it's pickleball, a simplified form of tennis. Lately, they've been playing with Elisabeth Shue (Riggs's wife in "Battle of the Sexes") and her husband, the director Davis Guggenheim, who have a court next to their house in Venice Beach.

"We play men against women," Dayton said.

"That's our battle of the sexes—Lisa and I against Davis and Jonathan," Faris said. "We haven't won yet, though." She shooed away Louie, who had sneaked back inside. "I don't know if it's typical of male dogs, but he's definitely more work."

—Michael Schulman

DEPT. OF INGÉNUES COMIC



Last summer, reposted images of a girl-about-town, drawn in Sharpie, began proliferating on Instagram. Invariably, the girl is wide-eyed and frantic—because of an unreturned text, a hankering for vodka, or an imminent bad choice. ("Me debating who I should go home with," reads the caption of one cartoon, an ex-boyfriend in one thought bubble, a slice of pizza in another.) The drawings appear daily on the Instagram account But Like Maybe, a "Cathy" for our device-driven times. One imagines its creator, Arianna Margulis, sipping a pink drink on a flamingo floaty—this summer, she posted an image with her character doing just that. Ah, the good life of a young artist, a hundred and forty-five thousand Instagram followers and counting.

Life on dry land is kind of, like, different. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, Margulis works as a shop assistant at an Upper East Side boutique, rearranging tableaux of three-thousand-dollar handbags. The store, Hayward House, is owned by Marin Hopper, the daughter of Dennis Hopper and Brooke Hayward, and Hopper's husband, the film producer John Goldstone. "Sometimes I'll be up here late, sitting on the floor, drawing, putting some bags out," Margulis said the other day at the store, which occupies two floors of a town house, where the owners live. A reedy thirtyish blonde, she wore a puffy

green jacket with "But Like Maybe" scrawled on the back and a tan cowboy hat. "Then Marin will call me down to her apartment and be, like, 'Are you hungry? Can I feed you?'"

Hopper and Goldstone found out about their employee's side hustle only when their teen-age daughter came running in one day holding up her iPhone; she'd just figured out that Margulis was behind her favorite Instagram account.

"I was, like, 'What are you talking about?'" Goldstone said. He and Hopper took a closer look. "Then I was, like, 'This is fucking awesome. It's so hilarious and smart and unusual.' I told Arianna, 'You have this hidden talent!'" Hopper and Goldstone immediately decided that their shop's luxury wares might benefit from a bit of scribbly patina. They asked Margulis to doodle on reproductions of Dennis Hopper's black-and-white photographs—blue squiggles on a young Paul Newman, cartoony Hayward handbags draped around naked women—which they are considering selling next season. "As much as my father was very specific about how he liked his pictures printed and never cropped and da-da-da, I know that he would be excited to see her spirit and youth come through—like a young Banksy!" Hopper said. "We're thinking of continuing it as limited editions, or on T-shirts. It could be fabulous!"

Margulis said, "To which I'm, like, 'Really?'"

"She's an inspiration to us," Hopper went on. "I feel so lucky, and I'm always going, 'Please, don't ever leave!'" The newest plan was for Margulis to Sharpie on a white Hayward bag and wear it to Fashion Week.

After work, Margulis walked to the No. 6 train to head down to her East Village walkup. Born in Michigan, she moved to Manhattan after college, seeking a career in fashion and Mr. Right. She admits to being something of a stalker. "The guys who ran *should* have run away from me," she said. "If I got some creepy, drunk, confessional love poem via e-mail at 3 A.M., I'd probably run, too."

Two years ago, after a boyfriend dumped her because she interfered with his meditation schedule, Margulis started sketching furiously, and uploaded snapshots of her work to Instagram. Although she has a jaundiced view of the dilem-

mas of the modern single woman—"Siri, will he text me?"—her avatar is ever hopeful, always up for another night out, a sprinkle-covered doughnut, or a two-hundred-dollar bathing suit that she can't afford. (The day after Trump's election, she slung her arm around the Statue of Liberty, held a pink drink aloft, and declared, "We are going to be O.K.")



Arianna Margulis

The floors of Margulis's tiny apartment slant slightly downward. Airplane bottles of tequila sit atop a loudly humming refrigerator. "I joke that Mickey is always around," she said, surveying the corners. "I think, for now, he's hiding."

Margulis calls her yearly earnings from her comic "margarita money." (It's in the thousands.) Last year, a small press published a short run of But Like Maybe comic books. More recently, Capitol Records recruited her to take over its Instagram account in order to chronicle the MTV Video Music Awards. And Creative Artists Agency signed her, with the goal of bringing But Like Maybe to television. "The dream is that the show would be the big payoff," she said. She has incorporated sponsors like Smirnoff vodka and a dating app called Huggle into her strip, but she's turned down other deals in the name of artistic integrity.

Margulis has been in a stable relationship for a year now, and she's experiencing life on the other side of the dating divide. "I've had all these old boyfriends coming out of the woodwork, texting me, 'Is this one about me?'" she said. "I'm, like, 'Totally.' Like, 'Yeah, remember? Asshole.'"

—Sheila Marikar

PERSONAL HISTORY

FINAL CUT

A family moviemaking tradition comes to an end.

BY CALVIN TRILLIN



Sometime in the early eighties, when my wife, Alice, and I and our daughters were about to leave New York for Nova Scotia, where we spent our summers, I was asked this question, point-blank: “Is it true that in Nova Scotia you lock people in your barn and make them watch your home movies?”

“You’re close,” I replied.

But I would submit that there’s more to the story. The term “home movies” conjured up in those days the rough equivalent of today’s cell-phone videos on Facebook or YouTube: the toddler making his unsteady way across the back yard, the new kitten doing something excruciatingly adorable with the old dog. The movies being shown in our barn had

plots—not terribly believable plots, I’ll admit, but plots nonetheless. There were costumes—some white lab coveralls, for instance, and a 7 UP deliveryman’s shirt and a pair of nurse’s scrubs and a witch’s hat and a Bad Boys Bail Bonds T-shirt that bore the motto “Because Your Mama Wants You Home.” There were actors—our daughters, Abigail and Sarah, and neighboring kids and the kids of guests. Adults appeared briefly in bit parts, often doing something humiliating, in the tradition of physical comedy that scholars of the dramatic arts can trace from the ancient theatre to, well, “America’s Funniest Home Videos.” The adults’ most sustained appearance, in “It’s So Crazy It Just Might Work,” was a

There were never any compliments on the production values of the films.

series of painfully untalented hopefuls trying out for a talent show—acknowledged in the credits as “a supporting cast of oppressed grownups.”

Also, it’s a bit harsh to say that the audience was locked in the barn. It’s true that we invited people to our barn every summer to see the movie we’d made the previous summer—or maybe the movies we’d made the previous two or three summers. Refreshments were served. People were free to leave. They might not be invited back the next summer, of course, but they were free to leave. We were confident that nobody would, in fact, leave. For one thing, refreshments were served. For another, many of those in the barn had appeared in our previous summer’s movie themselves. That made the gathering something like one of those Hollywood premieres that include the movie’s stars in the audience. Those watching Manford Blacksher as a South Shore fisherman do a showstopping rendition of “By God Those Tourists Are Some Dumb” (sung to the tune of “The Lady Is a Tramp”), for instance, would have included Manford Blacksher himself. Also, Manford Blacksher’s parents.

So I’m not going to claim that those in attendance were in our barn because they had reason to believe that they were about to be exposed to a brilliant piece of cinema. We were never complimented on our production values. Sometimes a scene would be inexplicably dark, so that you couldn’t tell for certain which character was talking—or maybe even which characters were in the scene. Sometimes the wind blowing through the microphone made the dialogue difficult to understand. Sometimes mumbling made the dialogue difficult to understand. Sometimes the accompaniment for a song, emanating from a cassette tape recorder hidden in a nearby bush, could not keep the singer precisely on key. Sometimes a movie that ran fifteen minutes or so seemed much, much longer; one viewer’s remark about “It’s So Crazy It Just Might Work” was that it “tested the boundaries of eternal.”

The summer movies began when my daughters, who are in their forties now, were six and three. We were in the West of England, visiting our friends the Jowells, who have a farm in Somerset. For those early movies, we had

PHOTOGRAPH: COURTESY BRIAN LEE (BOYS)

only a silent Super 8 camera. On a cassette, I'd record narration that was often out of synch with the action on the screen. In other words, I was what passed for the screenwriter, and took the abuse associated with that lowly calling. Eventually, we bought a sound camera. In either case, Alice was the cinematographer, handing over the camera now and then when she was needed for a bit part. In what I'm tempted to call postproduction, she would do some editing with two film spools and a razor blade and Scotch Tape. One of the most intense disagreements of our marriage occurred during editing, over the question of whether to include frames showing a sheepdog in a chase scene that featured a herd of sheep. I can't remember who was on which side. I can't remember why, in the spirit of a Hollywood screenwriter who knew his place, I didn't just give in.

The plot of our first movie was simple: a golden egg, belonging to a haughty princess (played by Josi Jowell, then seven or eight) and being guarded by her dumb stableman, is stolen by a robber with a foxlike grin (Josi's little brother, Danny). As it turns out (spoiler alert), the egg was laid by the dumb stableman, a character played by Jeffrey Jowell, a law professor who happened to have in his cinematic bag of tricks a wicked chicken imitation. (Lest I leave the wrong impression of Jeffrey, I should mention that when he was knighted, some years later, suggestions that he do his chicken imitation when he was presented to the Queen fell on deaf ears; the man has a serious side.) I played a police constable. Alice played a nurse. Jeffrey's wife, Francie, played a French maid named Giscard d'Estaing. My daughters were folded into the plot as "two lovely little girls." Was I concerned about reviewers criticizing me for that obvious bit of typecasting? For our movies, the only reviews that count are by parents.

The sound camera led to musicals—first in Somerset (a musical sequel to "The Golden Egg") and then, summer after summer, in Nova Scotia. Ordinarily, I lifted tunes from Broadway. I turned "Doin' What Comes Natur'ly" into "Stealing Is Quite Nice Indeed" (sung by the robber with the foxlike grin, of course), and I turned "Always True to You in My Fashion" to "Uncle

Max's Kids Are Gross, Creepy, Dumb, and Yucky." During a summer when we were visited by people capable of composing original tunes, I wrote the lyrics for the title song of "If There's No Nova Scotia in Nova Scotia, There Can't Be Any French Fries in France."

Eventually, the girls got too old to be in kids' movies. We weren't through, though. For each daughter's wedding, Alice and I had the films transferred to VHS tapes, hired a professional editor to stitch together clips, and made a documentary to be shown at the party held on the night before the ceremony—a further confirmation that parents will never run out of ways to mortify their children. Abigail's film presented itself as an episode of a television show called "Eye on the Law," investigating whether her movie career might prove an obstacle to her elevation to the Supreme Court. Would she be accused of practicing situational ethics, for instance, in agreeing to help the robber with the foxlike grin steal the golden egg in order to pay the mortgage on her poor mother's wretched little farm? Or would she be redeemed in the eyes of the law-and-order crowd by her swan-song performance as Hercule Poirot's niece, a detective carrying on the family tradition by solving the murder in "Yech: A Marvellous Mushroom Murder Mystery Musical Movie"?

Sarah's documentary was in the form of a tribute by the American Film Institute's Embarrassing Baby Picture Division. It talked about her range of roles. As a lovely little girl asking for help to get a knot out of her shoelace in the golden-egg musical, she had lured the dumb stableman away from the egg with a line that became a catchphrase in our family when asking for an inconvenient favor—"You're so strong and I'm so small." As an Upper East Side hostess named Melissa Gelt, who has "a little man" for every ingredient that earns a place on her elegant dinner table, she had sung "I've got a man who bakes a loaf that's worthy of my riches. / I've got a man for fish and such a cute man for knishes."

After those documentaries were made, we figured, all we had to do was wait patiently for our daughters to raise children old enough for speaking roles, and then start again. But for Alice that

was not going to happen. She died in 2001, six months before our first grandchild was born. I still take out the movies occasionally and watch her—as the nurse, or as one of the hapless grownups trying out for the talent show, or as the poor mother with a mortgage on her wretched little farm. Just bit parts.

The grandchildren did come along—the arrival of each of them bringing joy that was tinged by sadness at the thought of what Alice was missing. In not many years, our daughters had produced what was potentially an expanded core cast—two girls for Abigail, two boys for Sarah. We still gathered every summer at the old Nova Scotia house; for our family, it was what people in the Midwest, where I come from, call the home place. It was the place where, every summer, Sarah made applesauce daily with apples from the same tree and where Brian, Abigail's husband, was so persistent in the hunt for chanterelles that we were forced to compare him to a truffle-sniffing dog. A multigenerational home place has pleasures that I hadn't foreseen when we bought the house. There can't be many summertime activities more satisfying than foraging for wild blueberries with your grandchildren in the same place you foraged for wild blueberries with your children. A lot of land, mostly untended woods, came with the old house, and Alice, an only child who had grown up in chancy financial circumstances, used to fantasize about someday having something that resembled a family compound. I used to tell her that she'd read too much Edith Wharton, but my grandchildren do sometimes talk about where on the property each of their cottages will be.

By the time those grandchildren were old enough to handle speaking roles, Sarah's husband, Alex, had acquired a video camera that would enable him to edit the footage on a computer and post the finished product on a Web site. He was prepared to take over as director and cinematographer and editor. My job was simply to furnish a script and prepare myself to see it trampled on by both director and actors. Thanks to the Internet, our movies could now be accessed with a couple of clicks on the computer—a great

convenience, although I must say that I miss those movie nights in the barn.

Except for a group song at the end of each movie, we gave up musicals—partly because, as a family with no musicians, we found it difficult to provide effective accompaniment. Our plots varied widely. We made a movie about attempts to replace the old fishermen's houses in a village like ours with a Justin Bieber-themed shopping mall. We made a movie about a dispute over a new motto for a South Shore village—"Art Colony by the Sea" versus "Slime Eel Capital of the World." (With the depletion of the groundfish stock on the South Shore, there was a brief attempt in our village to make up for the loss of cod and haddock by catching slime eels, which don't look any better than they sound, and shipping them to Korea.) We made a movie about beach access. (Friends of ours live on a beach where we often go clamming, and when we march across their yard carrying clamming equipment we always chant, "The beach belongs to the people.") But, like the sequel-meisters who run Hollywood studios, we came back regularly to our most dependable franchise—the golden egg.

In all of the sequels, my older grandson, Toby, played the robber; he had developed an effective foxlike grin, perhaps from years of watching Danny in

the role. My older granddaughter, Isabelle, often played the proprietor of a snooty inn. A couple of the other parts were cast against type. In an early sequel, my youngest grandchild, Nate, not yet five, played a Mob enforcer who, in questioning people about the egg, used phrases like "unless you want your face rearranged" and "unless you're looking for a knuckle sandwich." Isabelle's little sister, Rebecca, played a U. S. marshal who always got to the dock just in time to see the robber's boat pull away. That was because I liked the way Rebecca delivered a line that she had originated as an evil witch in her first movie: "Rats! Foiled again!" I had liked that line even better before she'd managed to assume complete control of her "r"s, but you can't fight progress.

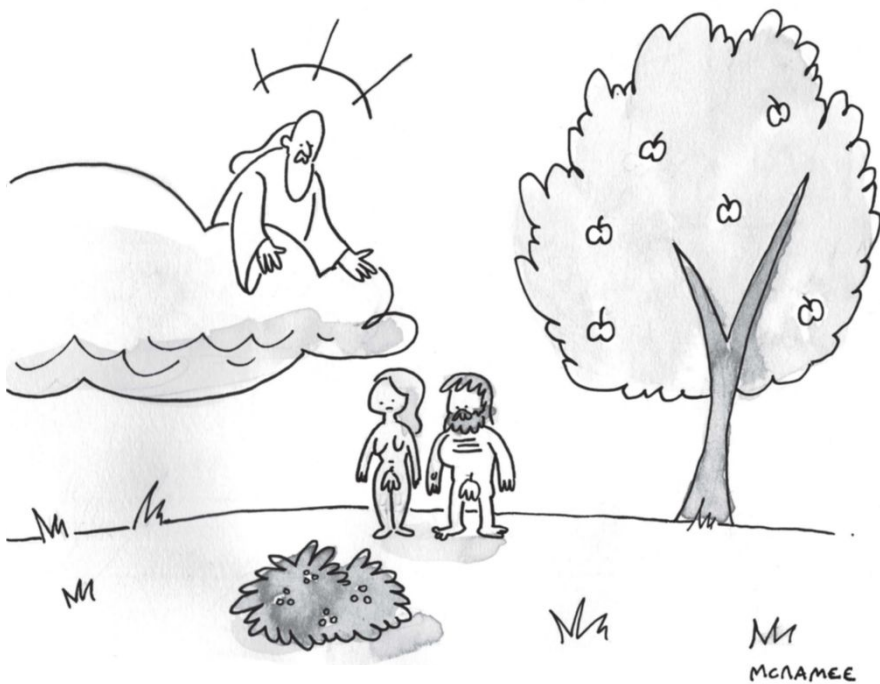
There was a U.S. marshal in those movies because someone had given me a U.S.-marshal baseball cap. I also happened to have, as souvenirs from a bar mitzvah, three red-and-blue yarmulkes bearing the University of Kansas Jayhawks logo, so three rabbis from Kansas were among the snooty inn's guests. Mao Zedong made a brief, Hitchcock-like appearance in many of our movies as a result of my having come away from a photo shoot in Chinatown with a life-size cardboard cutout of the Chairman. In other words, our movies

have always been what a film-studies major might call prop-driven. During what I'm tempted to call preproduction, one or two of my grandchildren and I would take out the prop bin (too full by now to close properly) and do an inventory—an inventory that often altered the plot of the movie.

Someone would go through the bin while someone else would tick off the inventory list: Several fake noses. Even more fake mustaches. A couple of pounds' worth of costume jewelry. A few fake beards (making the Kansas rabbis appear even more rabbinical). A selection of horrifying masks. Two sets of grotesque teeth. Two rubber chickens (not the sort served at political dinners; two chickens made of rubber). An extendable fork. A duck call (to lure the rubber chickens close enough to be shot out of the sky with a Super Soaker water gun). A policeman's hat, and three badges of varying sizes. A tiny noise machine capable of emitting twenty-four sounds, including glass breaking, applause, and a burp. And, of course, after twenty or thirty other items had been ticked off, the golden egg.

This summer, when my granddaughter Isabelle and I went through the prop bin, we were particularly pleased that the golden egg—a rather large plastic egg that had originally held some sort of toy—was safely in hand. Over the winter, it had been decided that another golden-egg sequel would be appropriate for this summer. Why? Because there was general family agreement that this would be our final movie. Isabelle had turned fifteen. My grandchildren were aging out. Any lingering doubts about that ended when they made a movie of their own, on an iPad—a sort of issue-advocacy commercial arguing that the barn, where three of them had been stashed, should be equipped with Wi-Fi. I have to say that I admired the production values.

Driving through Maine this July toward the Nova Scotia ferry—past our favorite clam shack, past the outlets where we used to top up the girls' school wardrobes on the way back to New York in the fall—I was mindful of the fact that I wouldn't be making precisely that trip again. I had reached the age at which one's children begin sentences with the



"But feel free to eat of the shrub of delusion."

**THERE WAS
NO STANDARD
TREATMENT FOR
CARL'S CANCER.**

**SO WE
CREATED ONE.**

**MORE
SCIENCE.
LESS
FEAR.**



Carl Verdi was enjoying his hard-earned retirement, spending time with his wife and baking treats for his grandkids. Then, he was diagnosed with a complex pancreatic and biliary cancer. At MSK, Carl's care team created a custom treatment plan, starting with intensive chemotherapy. Once the tumors had shrunk, his surgeon, Dr. William Jarnagin, performed an advanced surgical procedure to remove them.

The surgery was a success, and Carl's been cancer free for over 5 years. He's back to enjoying life and making pumpkin cake for his family.

SEE CARL'S STORY AT [MSKCC.ORG/CARL](https://mskcc.org/carl)



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phrase “You are no longer allowed . . .” This phase of selective prohibition began a few years ago with my adventure on an exceedingly long, steep slide near Abigail’s house, in San Francisco. Another visitor to the slide had presented my grandchildren and me with some waxed paper; sitting on it, she said, would enhance the experience. When I gave that a try, I found myself hurtling toward the bottom at a speed I later estimated to be between sixty and sixty-five miles an hour. My landing didn’t seem to cause any injuries, but I understood for the first time what the football announcer means when he says something like “Manning was shaken up on that play.”

When we returned to Abigail’s house from the slide, she said, “You are no longer allowed to go down slides sitting on waxed paper.”

“How about not on waxed paper?” I asked

“No slides,” Abigail said. That is the sort of hard-nosed attitude I’ve been up against.

I’m grateful for my daughters’ concern, of course, and I’m grateful that they turned out to be the sort of people who remain good-humored about being referred to by me as “the nursing staff.” After some protracted negotiations with the nursing staff this spring, it was agreed that this would be the last time that I made the long drive from New York to Nova Scotia by myself, instead of taking a plane to Halifax and renting a car. With the encouragement of the nursing staff, I would also be getting rid of the boat that Alice and I and our girls (about as many people as the boat could hold) utilized to go on island picnics—the boat that has often appeared in our movies, delivering characters to the dock or facilitating their escapes. Though small, the boat is so heavy that extracting it from the water means having to organize the sort of event inspired by Tom Sawyer’s fence-painting scheme. My daughters and their husbands have little interest in the boat; they manage to move about in the water, on kayaks or canoes or paddleboards, without the benefit of an outboard motor.

Of course, there would be no prohibition against writing a script for the final movie. Remarkably, Danny Jowell, the original robber with a foxlike grin—

now Daniel S. S. Jowell, Q.C., a barrister in London—was coming to North America with his family, and he had agreed to be in the movie. Paul Newman going from being the young pool shark in “The Hustler” to being the seasoned mentor to the pool shark Tom Cruise in “The Color of Money”? That was one option I was considering.

There were pressures, of course. What screenwriter hasn’t experienced pressures? Even before I left New York, Rebecca had written that she wanted a part that was small but pivotal—the sort of cameo Marlon Brando might have done late in his career. My grandsons had made one non-negotiable demand (another spoiler alert): at the end of the movie, someone had to eat the golden egg, probably scrambled. I had always assumed that the egg was made of solid gold, but who am I to say? Toby took it for granted that he had a lock on the robber part. I’d decided to cast Danny as Lord Chumly of Snarf. He is suspected of being the original robber by the daughter of our first movie’s haughty princess. This even haughtier princess (Danny’s daughter, Helen) considers the Chumlys “dreadfully common—the sort of people who run their own baths.” I had to write scenes for Danny’s (and Lord Chumly’s) sons, Leo and Alexander. Leo was given the task of helping the robber regain his foxlike grin—lost from the trauma of losing the golden egg in a poker game. Alexander, who’s three, was assigned to say, whenever the script called for his comment, “Absolute rubbish.” While attending to all these pressures, of course, I was conscious that I was writing our final movie—a sad thought tempered by the realization that I had just about run out of golden-egg plots.

Banned from the set? That’s putting it rather strongly, but Alex and I did agree that it would make sense for me, as the screenwriter, to view the process through the unedited footage. I found that the Jowell kids followed the script admirably. I can’t say the same for their father. Danny, who had inherited his own father’s talent for mimicry, insisted on doing his major speech in a Vito Corleone voice, even though he was supposed to be a member of the English nobility, and even though there was already a Mob boss in the movie.

Danny’s unscripted deviation (what he later referred to as “a matter of artistic interpretation”) conjured up the most serious fear haunting any screenwriter whose script is being trampled on—the fear that the trampler might have improved the movie.

It had also been agreed that the final movie should contain scenes that hearkened back to our earlier efforts, even if we were the only people who understood the references. I thought of it as auto-homage. So Nate again talked about rearranging people’s faces. Rebecca got back into her black hat and cape to reappear as the evil witch, a small role pivotal to the plot, although I insisted that she also appear in her U.S.-marshal costume to end the movie with her patented “Rats! Foiled again!” The tune of the closing song was lifted from the same Broadway show as the song that closed the first golden-egg musical, “Guys and Dolls.” Its penultimate lines were “Ate the egg? That’s still groovy / ‘Cause this is our final movie.”

But was it? My grandchildren and I discussed this as we went through the bulging bin of props and costumes, deciding what to keep and what could be discarded. Conceivably, if the grownups committed another atrocity as serious as not providing Wi-Fi, the kids could use costumes and props for a second issue-advocacy commercial. But that’s not what they seemed to have in mind, as we decided, say, that the lab coveralls could be disposed of and that one rubber chicken was enough. They talked about making movies with their own children. “I can totally see my kids in that,” Isabelle said, as I held up a tailcoat. A couple of days before, Rebecca, the grandchild most interested in writing, told me that she would be the screenwriter, with Toby’s son as the robber with the foxlike grin. She said that the only problem was figuring out how to feature a golden egg that had already been eaten.

I told her that we’d never been strict about continuity, at least when it came to moviemaking. Also, there was nothing to prevent her from beginning with a movie that had nothing to do with the golden egg.

She nodded. “Maybe I’ll just start from scratch,” she said. ♦



JARED KUSHNER'S HARVARD ADMISSIONS ESSAY

BY MEGAN AMRAM

Dear Harvard, How are you? I hope you are well! My name is Jared Kushner, and I would like to go to you. As an example of how smart I am, here is some money.

I heard from my daddy and my friends' daddies that you are a big house for smart, good boys. I am a good boy! I am nice and my face is very smooth. Would you like a hundred-dollar bill? It has Benjamin Franklin on it! He is silly, because he only has hair on the sides, not on the top. Here are some of him!

Here are some facts about me: I am Jared. I am more than six feet tall, which is funny, because feet are on your legs, not how tall you are! That always makes me laugh. My favorite color is green, like money. My favorite shape is rectangle, like money. I also

like round, which is like some kinds of money that poor people use for littering in fountains.

When I was a kid, which was last year, I got mad that there was no sixty-nine-dollar bill, so my daddy paid the U.S. Treasury to make one special for me. I showed it to all my friends and we all laughed and then I gave it to our maid because I was bored with it. She cleaned it and gave it back to me so that I could throw it away.

I am a good student. I got straight D's in high school. "D" is the first letter in the alphabet. At first, the teachers said "A" was the first letter, but my daddy paid the teachers to teach us a new alphabet song so that I wouldn't feel bad about my grades. It worked! In school, my favorite classes were recess and lunch. I did very good on the SAT because I filled in every single bubble, even the

ones for my name, which was a trick question. I am so smart! For me, tests are as easy as D-B-C!

I am good at after-school activities, such as sports and allowance. I was on the basketball team in high school. My daddy gave the referee money so that I didn't have to dribble and could just carry the ball. All the other good boys were jealous, but only my daddy loved me enough to pay the referees so that I got to carry the ball and use a ladder. Ladder dunks are worth fifty points.

My daddy is also so good at games. Daddy and I like to play a game called hide-and-go-seek, which is where we tape money to ourselves and go to the Cayman Islands and hide the money all around. We are so good that no one ever finds it! Daddy said we were there to put the money in the laundry, which is funny because after we buried the money it was so much dirtier and sandier than before. My daddy is so silly sometimes!

Harvard, I would like to go to you so that I can be big and strong someday, like all my daddy's friends. They are so cool and impressive. They wear ties all the time to keep their shirts from falling off. My daddy is so rich that he can buy any building he wants, even the Empire State Building or the moon. Here are some things I want to be when I grow up: a fireman, an astronaut, a business boy, a fire truck, a thousand-dollar bill. If you would like some more money, here is some more money!

I do not want to be mean, but if you do not let me into you something bad might happen. My daddy is very nice but when he is mad he can be very scary. One time when he got mad he made a lady go to my uncle's house to kiss my uncle even though the lady wasn't my aunt! Yuck!

Anyway, thank you for letting me into Harvard! I am so excited to go in you. When I arrive, I would like four dorm rooms, a parking space for my Range Rover, a girlfriend, a girlfriend for my Range Rover, a pony, a Range Rover for my pony, three opals, and the ocean. I have been a good boy and I deserve it!

Love,

Jared Kushner, grade 12, age seventeen and a half. ♦

OUT OF BOUNDS

In Somalia, a women's basketball league tries to stay on the court.

BY ALEXIS OKEOWO

Aisha got her first call from the terrorists when she was fourteen. It was 2013, and she was at home, in Mogadishu, Somalia, when an unknown number appeared on her phone. She picked up. The man on the other end told her that Islam does not allow women to play sports, or to wear shirts and pants. It was immodest and indecent, he said. His voice was harsh and menacing. He told her that he was going to kill her if she didn't stop playing basketball. The next day, another man called to say the same thing.

Aisha changed her phone number three times, but the calls kept coming, and she became convinced that someone at the mobile-phone company was giving out her contact information. After a while, Aisha began to argue with the callers, telling them that she was going to do whatever she wanted. When they threatened to kill her, she responded that only God was permitted to be in control of people's souls. She was just a teen-age girl, but even she knew that—unlike these supposedly pious men. Then her mother started getting calls, from men who warned that she was going to lose a daughter. Trying to appeal to her faith, they told her that basketball was *haram*—forbidden. Her mother was worried, and wanted Aisha to stop playing.

Aisha had first picked up a basketball only recently, but she had taken to it quickly. Her phone filled with photos and videos of the basketball player she most wanted to emulate: a famous American athlete named LeBron James. She had seen James on the Internet and found him mesmerizing. “He is black and tall and a really nice player,” she said. He was

powerful and agile, endlessly clever. She wanted to have that kind of magic.

In a way, she felt destined for the game. Her mother, Warsan, had played when she was younger. Her father, Khaled, had worked as a referee in Somali basketball leagues, and she had gone to his games. “To see women and men playing, it was



Aisha considers herself devoted to both Islam and the game.

inspiring,” Aisha recalled. She began joining pickup games in tan-dirt lots around her house with kids who lived in her neighborhood. She didn't know what she was doing, but she didn't care; it was exciting just to hold a ball. “I always wanted to play basketball, but I was afraid that I wouldn't find girls who would want to play with me,” she said. Not long after, a coach named Nasro Mohamed, a former teammate of her mother's, asked if she was interested in playing regularly.

Mohamed got Aisha together with seven other girls to start practicing.

Mogadishu was once a beautiful place, with pale, handsome government offices, mosques, and grand homes, all angling for proximity to the white beaches at the edge of the Indian Ocean. Now, after more than two decades of civil war and lawlessness, the buildings are riddled with bullet and shell holes, or crumbling from neglect, or newly built and characterless; the streets, where sand pools in the cracks, are filled with soldiers and policemen.

Aisha grew up in Suuq Bacaad, a neighborhood of low bungalows behind gates with bright, peeling paint. Her father had four wives and divided his time between them, but he managed to be with Aisha enough for her to feel loved. Her family wasn't rich, but had enough money to get by. “My parents really worked hard to make sure that I had everything I needed,” she recalled. Aisha had two brothers and a sister, and she took it for granted that each member of the family would look out for the others. Even her neighborhood functioned like a clan: she played hide-and-seek with other children, some of whom were as close to her as siblings.

Warsan ran a café and a business that sold gold. She was tall and gentle, and never hit her children, as other mothers in the neighborhood did. She understood Aisha's passion for basketball, because she'd once had the same need to play. Khaled supported Aisha, too, visiting her on the court and urging her to take the game seriously. Somalia has a club league, in which hundreds of girls and women play on eight teams in Mogadishu and several more in other parts of the country; the best players are recruited for the national team. “My father told me, ‘Either leave basketball or aspire to be a professional,’” Aisha said. For Aisha, the best part of the day was going with her friends to a neighborhood court. In school, she was easily distracted. “I was not good with the teachers,” she said. “I never stopped talking

and telling jokes. I annoyed everyone.” When she was in the eighth grade, she stopped going to school altogether. Her parents were upset; they had both gone to university and prioritized education for their children. They tried to force her to go back, but Aisha refused. “I didn’t feel like it was necessary for me to continue,” she told me. And, anyway, there was a civil war raging, and the future was impossible to predict.

Somalia ceased to be a coherent state in 1991, when its dictator, Siad Barre, was deposed by rebel militias. Barre, who had taken power in a military coup two decades before, had treated opponents brutally, but had also attempted to modernize the country. He moved to end the lineage-based clan, which traditionally defined politics in Somalia, by imposing a nationalist form of socialism. He codified a written form of the Somali language, which had been exclusively oral, and introduced a countrywide literacy program. His government promoted women’s rights, enabling women’s basketball to flourish; the national team played at the Pan Arab Games, and travelled to Iraq, Jordan, and Morocco.

A decade of lawlessness followed Barre’s fall, until the Islamic Courts Union, a group of Sharia courts backed by militias, assumed power. They took a harsh view of crime: thieves’ limbs were amputated, adulterers were stoned, and murderers were executed. Sports were declared satanic acts, and Somalis caught watching games on television were arrested; girls couldn’t go to stadiums to watch basketball, handball, or track and field, let alone compete in them. But, as the country reacted to the uncertainty with increasing conservatism, the Sharia courts had popular support. After a U.S.-backed Ethiopian invasion disbanded them, in 2006, a faction of their militias called al-Shabaab, or “the Youth,” rose up in response. It was even more extreme than the courts: when its members caught Somalis involved in sports, they sometimes killed them.

For five years, al-Shabaab fought bloody skirmishes for control of Mogadishu and the surrounding regions. Soldiers from the African Union, a continental organization, battled against them, with help from Somali clan militias. The

United States, eager to fight terror but reluctant to send in its own troops, provided aid to the A.U. soldiers’ home countries and often ignored their human-rights abuses. Finally, in 2011, the coalition took back control of Mogadishu.

But the militants just went underground, vying with government forces neighborhood by neighborhood. (The U.S. has also conducted a clandestine campaign through Special Forces and private contractors.) Somalis still endured terror attacks near their homes and at their weddings and funerals. Government officials allegedly paid off clan militias and al-Shabaab leaders to keep their positions, and to stay alive. Drone strikes and indiscriminate neighborhood raids left young people distrustful of the government. The Islamic State has attempted to gain influence, with insurgents trying to establish outposts on the coast.

For ordinary Somalis, the terrorists and the military were both menaces, not to be trusted. Last year, a friend took me to an outdoor restaurant in Mogadishu called Beach View, which al-Shabaab had attacked a few months before. Militants drove a car filled with explosives into the adjoining hotel, and then ran into the restaurant, shooting. Patrons hid under the tables and in the kitchen; some fled to the beach, only to die on the sand. At least twenty people were killed. But when I visited there was no sign of mourning. People crowded the tables, laughing, eating seafood, taking selfies. Past the balcony, children played on the beach and, out at sea, families were piled into wooden boats for sunset rides. While they lasted on this earth, Somalis would not be denied the few pleasures it had to offer them.

Aisha divided her time between her mother’s house and her sister’s house, in a neighborhood targeted by al-Shabaab because it contained a police station. When I visited her there, my driver was nervous, and said that he wouldn’t wait longer than a few minutes; he soon left without me. The house was bright blue, with a courtyard that had turned muddy from steady rain overnight. On the porch, Aisha’s cousins were braiding their hair, pulling on head scarves, drinking tea. A faint, melodic call to prayer came from outside the gate. The room where Aisha slept was off the porch. Dim and drowsy,

the room had one window with half-open blue shutters; a crookedly hung drape blew in a weak breeze. Two mattresses with the sheets pushed aside were on the floor, and we settled on top of them.

Aisha was seventeen, with an expressive face and a gold nose ring so tiny that it took a few long looks to notice it. She described herself as “always happy,” and she had a compulsive need to say what she thought and felt. She talked constantly, in a scratchy, high voice, while gesturing with her hands; at practice, her coach regularly threatened to kick her out if she didn’t stop talking. She was slight, and I observed that she seemed small for basketball. “There are a lot of players who are short and really good,” she said. “The playing should be from your heart and not dependent on how tall you are.” She had a game that night, and she offered to point out a girl who was tall but didn’t know how to shoot.

When Aisha started playing, she didn’t have the right clothes or shoes. Nasro Mohamed, her first coach, helped her get the equipment, and she was grateful. “When you have the kind of passion I have for basketball, everything else is kind of blurry,” she said. If she didn’t have money to take a minibus to the court, she asked neighbors for help or called teammates to see if anyone could pick her up. “I go beyond everything just to get to the court,” she said.

Nasro Mohamed, who was in her late forties, had fair skin and mirthful eyes behind glasses with hot-pink frames. She had grown up in southern Somalia and come to Mogadishu as a teen-ager to play for a team called Jeenyoo, one of the best at the time. “We would go from our houses to the basketball court wearing shorts and Afros—and then we would go home around midnight still wearing whatever we wore to the court,” Mohamed told me. Now, she said, “people take religion as everything. They tell you to cover yourself, force it on you.”

During the fighting, Mohamed left for the United Arab Emirates. When she returned, in 2012, she got involved again with women’s basketball, which was struggling. “I came back and took about thirty girls and trained them,” she said. It was not easy to protect the girls. “A lot of girls want to play, but they’re scared,” Mohamed said. “If you don’t wear the hijab, people will start talking on the street, and

you always have to be alert because at the court you don't know who could kill you because you're wearing trousers."

Aisha's former teammate Amaal began playing with the encouragement of a friend, a lively, well-liked girl named Faiza. One day, before a game, al-Shabaab militants arrived at Faiza's house. They took her to an empty lot and tortured her, cutting her body and face with shards of glass, shaved her head, and then left her to die. "It made me really scared for my life," Amaal recalled. "You put your life in danger in this country because of the thing that you love."

When Amaal joined Mohamed's group, she was apprehensive, but she went to the gym to work out every morning, and then met up with the others in the afternoon. "It made me stronger," Amaal said. "I used to be at the house doing nothing—I never had any friends. Basketball lets me know more about myself. I'm around women who are passionate, who are my friends." She hid that she played, even from relatives and friends, because she didn't know whom she could trust. She was still piecing her life back together: her family had lost its house during the fighting and moved into a refugee camp. But Amaal was determined. "To have a dream and wear pants and a shirt and hold a basketball—there's nothing stronger to me," she said. "To think about what I want for myself and to do it."

Once Aisha had learned the fundamentals from Mohamed, she flitted among teams in the club league. She played with single girls, married women, mothers, students. They were mostly in their teens and early twenties, and they talked and joked like sisters. Aisha's teammates were energetic and scrappy, a mix of experienced players and novices. In a game I saw, one short girl kept stealing the ball to take shot after shot, missing nearly all of them, with a wide grin on her face. When a player on the other team made a three-pointer, she went over to congratulate her. Aisha, by contrast, had a pugilistic intensity; she was constantly moving and scheming. She was a center, the most physical position on the court.

On a team called Heegan, Aisha made friends with two outgoing, adventurous girls named Salma and Bushra. One evening, after practice, the three of them

hailed a tuk-tuk, one of the yellow rickshaw taxis that crash through Mogadishu's streets, and told the driver their destination. On the way, the driver took a wrong turn and then stopped. Aisha leaned forward and asked him where he was going. He told her that something was wrong with the vehicle, and that he was calling for help. Another man approached, holding a gun. "You girls are infidels," the man told them. "You're playing sports and walking on the street wearing pants." He aimed the gun at Salma, and she jumped up and lunged for the weapon. But he fired and the bullet grazed Bushra's leg. The girls managed to call over a policeman. After they breathlessly told him what had happened, he took the men to jail.

Later, the police had a press conference announcing the arrest of the man with the gun; he had admitted to planning several bombings in the city. Aisha watched the announcement on television. "He is still in prison today," she said with satisfaction. But there were others, all over the city, who shared his views.

Mogadishu is a hard place to go unnoticed; there are always eyes watching you as you make your way through the city. In sidewalk cafés, men gather to talk and argue at all hours, drinking tea, smoking hookah, and chewing khat. Women linger nearby, selling food from stalls. They all keep watch on the street, observing passersby and the events of the day. They can be friendly, willing to offer help if a car bomb goes off. Or they can be hostile. People in Mogadishu speak of spies—neighbors, colleagues, friends, family—who report to al-Shabaab.

Women have learned where in the city to cover themselves with burqas, and where to pretend that they don't play sports, in order to leave with their lives. The girls in the league played in pants and shirts, but many wore niqabs to and from the court, shielding their faces to show piety and to keep from being recognized. Aisha refused to wear one. "I don't care," she said. "I just show my face."

When I met Aisha, she was playing for a club team called O.F.C. Late one afternoon, at her sister's house, she was getting ready for practice. In her bedroom, Aisha looked like the embodiment of a feminine Somali woman, wearing a

long floral skirt, a pale blouse, and a dark floral-print head scarf. She then walked across the room to rummage through a red suitcase. She stripped off the skirt, the blouse, and the head scarf, and replaced them with a red cotton tank top and a sky-blue jersey with the number ten on the back. (She was already wearing matching track pants under her skirt, as she usually did.) She retied the head scarf, knotting it like a bun, instead of letting it drape around her shoulders in the traditional way. Next, she pulled on a floor-length skirt and a mustard-yellow jilbab, which covered her head but left her face exposed. She was ready to make her way to the court to play ball.

We drove through a labyrinthine market in Hamar Weyne, a quarter of narrow streets lined with ancient crenellated walls. People filled the market, talking, haggling at stalls, pulling battered carts loaded with animals and cargo for sale. We arrived at a facility with an outdoor court, enclosed by peeling pink cement walls. Aisha's teammates were scattered through the place, shooting hoops, running on treadmills, and lounging on benches, gossiping. Aisha pulled off her skirt and jilbab and roamed the grounds. Although the girls weren't much safer here than anywhere else in Mogadishu, they were loud and carefree: this court was home.

One of the girls, Khadro, was visiting from New York, staying with her grandmother for the summer. She played basketball at home, and an uncle in Mogadishu had suggested that she join a local team while she was in town. She was amazed, she told me, at the girls who played despite all the strictures.

Her uncle, a boisterous man with a round belly, had come to watch the practice, and he started talking to Aisha. "Heegan is no joke," he said, referring to her old team, a rival of O.F.C. "They actually own this court."

"O.F.C. is getting better," Aisha countered. "It is better."

He offered a compliment—"I like your shirt"—and then went back to needling her. "Heegan is taking everything. It's the best in soccer, handball, all the sports."

"The Heegan soccer team is not that great," Aisha yelled. "They're in fourth place!" Her voice rose to a shriek. "O.F.C. is the No. 1 team! This ground belongs

to me!” The girls laughed as the man retreated. Aisha picked up a ball and started dribbling, drawing some of the other girls into an impromptu game. Before long, her shouts could be heard through the court.

One morning, I was with Aisha at her sister’s house. She usually cooked breakfast for the family: *lahob*—crêpes rolled with butter and honey—or sometimes camel liver with bread, a traditional meal. A few times a week, she also attended a technical school, not far from her house, to take computer classes. Mostly, though, she practiced: twice a day, six days a week. Occasionally, there were games. Friday, the holy day, she had off.

She considered herself devoted to Islam. She had memorized the Quran, and her uncle had a library of Islamic books, most of which she had read. “Praying and reading the Quran and going through these books gives me the feeling of being connected to God. It gives me the feeling that, on Judgment Day, I will not be judged because I missed my prayer or anything else, *Inshallah*,” she explained. But it didn’t make sense to her that God would care about girls playing basketball if they tried to be faithful and good.

Despite the extremists’ attempts to repress women, Aisha and her friends found ways to feel normal. In her circles, she said, “people speak what they feel.” When she was sixteen, her team travelled to Galkayo for a game, and on the way through the Mogadishu airport a young man asked if he could call her. Aisha thought he was handsome, and, though she didn’t give him her number, they later connected on Facebook, and she began to consider what romance might mean for her future. A lot of boys she had met wanted her to stop playing and get married. “I believe that I can manage to be married *and* play basketball,” she said. “There are girls who married and have kids who still play on my team.” She started going to the beach with the young man, and he visited her at home and talked with her mother over tea. Like her father, he supported her playing, and he came to her games. Now, when Aisha’s phone buzzed with calls from other boys, she usually silenced the phone with a smile. She wasn’t interested.



Some of the women in Aisha’s life were less encouraging. When she stayed at her sister’s house, the neighbors always told her that girls’ playing basketball was against Islam. Aisha’s grandmother said that she should stay inside, away from the men with guns. But she didn’t listen. “We need to go after our dreams and what we want for ourselves,” she said.

One evening after practice, she and five teammates were leaving a court in Hodan District—known as a dangerous place, where shootings and attacks were common. Aisha was on the phone with her mother, who was asking her to pick up milk and cooking oil on her way home. As the players walked, a black sedan stopped alongside them, and the driver asked if they needed a ride—a common occurrence in Somalia. Aisha didn’t recognize the man; he wore his beard long, and had on a white *qamis*, a linen robe. One of the girls asked him to drop them off down the road. Aisha wedged herself into the back seat with her friends.

After a few minutes, the driver pulled over, and then turned around to tell the girls that he knew who they were, what they were doing, everything about them; he named the neighborhoods where they

lived. Aisha felt pricks of fear spread through her. “I know that you all are playing basketball,” he said. They shook their heads furiously and said that they had nothing to do with the sport. “I’ve been watching you play basketball,” he said. “All of you.”

The man’s phone rang, and he got out to take the call, locking the car behind him. The girls, panicking, pounded on the doors, but they wouldn’t budge. The man came back and rolled down a window so that he could watch them as he talked. Aisha pushed herself through the open window and fell onto the ground. Looking desperately around her, she picked up a big stone. She told the man that if he didn’t let them leave, she would throw the stone at the windshield. “I know I’m crazy, but I had to do something,” she told me. “If we stayed scared, this guy would kill us.” The man said, “Now you want to destroy my car? I wasn’t going to harm you. Calm down.” He unlocked the doors, and the girls scrambled out.

Aisha hailed a tuk-tuk and they got in, sitting tightly next to one another to feel safe. On the way home, they reported to the police that a man from al-Shabaab

had threatened them. Aisha told no one else. “I had to hide it from my family so that they wouldn’t stop me playing,” she said. She was sure that if her parents found out they would send her to stay with her aunt in Ethiopia or, worse, keep her at home.

Many of the players and coaches complained that the officials who oversaw sports in Somalia didn’t do more to help female athletes. The men’s club teams had uniforms, regular games and practices, and space to play. The women’s teams had none of that. The men’s national team travelled around the continent to compete. The women’s team hadn’t left the country since 2011, when it went to Qatar for the Pan Arab Games, and placed fourth out of twenty-two countries. It was the only tournament the women had played since the civil war began, two and a half decades before.

Duran Ahmed Farah, the president of the Somali Olympic Committee, suggested that the problem was finding safe places. “We have to avoid risks as much as we can,” he told me. “Culturally, it’s not easy for girls to play sports outside. The boys can play soccer on the streets, but it doesn’t look good to a community if girls are playing sports outside.” Only two stadiums still stood in Mogadishu after the war; African Union soldiers had taken over the larger one, Mogadishu Stadium, and until recently used it as a military base. But Somalis had found ways to play sports on the streets, in vacant lots, on the beach, and in open-air courts that they built themselves.

The sports ministry blamed the spreading influence of al-Shabaab. “Families are putting a lot of pressure on girls,” Osman Aden Dhubow, the deputy minister, told me in his office. “Before, girls could play freely, dress how they wanted, they had their training facilities, they had finances. They don’t have that now. They don’t have the right coaches. Everything is at the wrong time.” I asked Dhubow and a colleague when the women’s teams would have their next game, and it took them several minutes to figure it out. The girls had so many constraints: their teams shared the few courts with the men’s teams, which evidently had priority, and there weren’t enough female ref-

erees, which complicated putting on games. When I asked how the sport could be made more accessible to girls, the officials said that the country had bigger issues to deal with, such as education and health.

Not long afterward, I met Abdulkadir Moalin, who helped run the basketball federation, which managed both the men’s and the women’s teams. We were at Wiish Stadium, near the city’s corniche, where families gathered, jumping away from waves as they broke over the seawall. Sitting on concrete bleachers, Moalin, a stout man with a salt-and-pepper beard, tried to explain why the girls so seldom travelled to compete. The members of the federation were unpaid volunteers, he said, and they had to recruit sponsors to pay for the teams’ travel expenses. It was a “false impression” that all the money seemed to go to the men. “Different people, different opinions,” he said, shrugging. “There are no resources at all!” Becoming agitated, he abruptly changed the subject to the United States. “How many women Presidents have you had?” he asked.

Aisha’s coach on O.F.C., Mulki Nur, was quiet and unassuming, but her loose, muted jilbab couldn’t hide her height and strong build. At practice, when she demonstrated how to grab a rebound, she was authoritative. Nur had played for the national women’s team in the eighties, during the team’s prime. “All I wanted was to play basketball around the world,” she told me, her face brightening. “I loved it, and I was proud of what I was doing.”

During the fighting, Nur coached girls until she started receiving death threats. “I was being chased by the militants,” she said. “The security level then was very bad, and it would have been easy for them to get to me.” She fled Somalia, leaving her ten children in the care of her husband. She was caught crossing into Sudan and eventually returned home, where she resumed her work with basketball. “I believe that women should be free,” she said. “They should have their full freedom.”

In 2015, several girls in the league had a chance to enter a tournament in the United Arab Emirates, but the federation balked. Moalin told me that it was difficult to travel with a Somali pass-

port—and, of course, there was no money. “Some people in the federation do want to improve women’s basketball,” Aisha told me. “But others do not want any improvement for us. They just want us to keep playing by ourselves.” She had played at an event promoting women in sports, and when federation officials suspended her for not notifying them first she had managed to get the decision overturned.

Aisha was finding other ways to assert herself. A local radio station held singing contests for young people, and she liked to participate, performing songs that told stories about Somalia. Her mother didn’t like it, but she was resigned to her daughter’s stubbornness. Aisha had recently thrown a party at a hotel that became an illicit club at night. She and her friends drank and danced to Somali and American pop music, and she held her boyfriend. It was risky—militants sometimes targeted clubs with explosives—but Aisha usually found a way to do what she wanted.

“Conflicts can be opportunities,” Shukria Dini, a Somali-Canadian scholar of women’s issues in Somalia, said. “Yes, women lost a lot of rights, but also women became extremely creative, and made something out of the disaster. Conflict actually emasculates men, and it shifts the traditional social structures. The women take over new roles of responsibility. Seventy to eighty per cent of Somali households rely heavily on women’s income, and this has enormous potential in terms of women being the primary decision-makers.”

The older Aisha became, the more she argued with relatives. She had recently pointed out to her brother-in-law that her mother, in addition to playing basketball, swam competitively before the war, wearing a bathing suit. “Women used to go without the hijab and represent Somalia internationally while wearing almost nothing,” she said. “We shouldn’t say now that Islam doesn’t let us play.” Aisha thought it was good that Somalis were more in tune with their religion, but she didn’t think anyone should control how women carried themselves. “It should be their choice, not someone forcing them or telling them what to do,” she said.

But not everything in Aisha’s life was subject to her will. One afternoon in

April, 2016, her brother Abdi left classes at the university where he was studying engineering and headed home. It was a hot, bright day, the kind that squeezed you tired. Abdi stopped at a pharmacy to buy medicine for their mother, who has diabetes. Two men were arguing nearby, and the dispute turned into a gunfight. Her brother was hit by a stray bullet, and he died soon after. Aisha was bereft; of all her siblings, he was the one she felt closest to. He understood her moods and her temperament, and he was often the peacemaker of the family. "He was happy," Aisha said. "He supported me and stood up for me." When I told her that I was sorry, she shrugged, and suggested that it was foolish to expect more. "This is life," she said. "No one stays alive forever."

And so, as much as Aisha loved Somalia, she thought about leaving all the time. Many of her friends and teammates had immigrated to Europe through Libya. "I want to leave this country," she told me, even if it meant getting into an overcrowded, rickety boat and taking her chances on the sea. "It's not safe here. Anything can happen to you." For now, she would keep playing basketball. "I can't act like I'm weak," she said. "Weakness puts me in more danger. So I need to act strong and tough. I tell them I am going to do whatever I want—whatever they are against."

Late last year, Aisha heard that Somalia was planning its first nationwide women's basketball tournament, in the city of Garowe, in the Puntland region, where al-Shabaab was weaker. She couldn't stop talking about it. Women were coming from all over the country to play; a filmmaker named Hana Mire, who is working on a documentary about Somali women's basketball, was accompanying the team. But, just before Christmas, a group of influential clerics called the Somali Religious Council released a statement calling basketball "un-Islamic" and a "threat to their faith." The council's spokesman warned girls like Aisha not to show their "body and beauty" for men to see. On Facebook, Aisha said, the clerics encouraged people in Garowe to cut the girls' throats.

Aisha, wearing an electric-yellow-and-black athletic shirt and pants, boarded the plane with trepidation. "I was afraid

of what they were saying. All of my teammates and I were afraid," she said. But she was distracted by the thrill of being on a plane, peering through the clouds at her receding home town and then landing in a new place—the city of Bosaso—less crazed and tense than Mogadishu. The team piled in a van and drove to Garowe, almost three hundred miles away, singing Somali pop songs, sticking their hands out the windows, and shouting at people they passed.

At their hotel, the players met the competing teams. "It was an amazing feeling. I didn't even know these other girls existed," Aisha said. There was a beautiful, expansive court, with a pale-green surface, that was theirs to use; for the next week, day and night, they could just play basketball.

The religious leaders had said that the players were going naked, and being sinful, so the girls decided to show that they could be pious on the clerics' terms and also defiant. They played in hijab, along with the usual long pants and shirts. It was hot and uncomfortable, but Aisha thought that if wearing a hijab kept them safer at such an important moment, she would do it—this time.

Security guards stood at the entrance to the stadium, frisking everyone who entered, but the atmosphere in the stands was festive. The crowd was full of women: younger, older, holding babies, wearing jilbabs in an array of colors. It was the first basketball game for many of them, and they cheered for both teams, refusing to pick a side. An elderly woman yelled until she grew hoarse. During the opening game, after the first half, the crowd rushed the court, thinking that it was already over.

Each night of the tournament, the teammates gathered in a hotel room and sang more pop songs, jumping on the beds and screaming the words, to keep their energy high. After a series of challenging games, the team won second place. Aisha was more confident than ever in her playing, and she wanted to transfer to Horseed, the best team in the league. Playing in the tournament had given her a rarefied feeling: for once, she didn't have to think about her family, or her boyfriend, or her neighbors, and what they would think of her choices. She decided that she would hold on to the feeling as long as she could. ♦



Simone Dinnerstein

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THE INVASION EQUATION

Will a tumor spread? That may depend as much on your body as on your cancer.

BY SIDDHARTHA MUKHERJEE

Over the summer of 2011, the water in Lake Michigan turned crystal clear. Shafts of angled light lit the lake bed, like searchlights from a U.F.O.; later, old sunken ships came into view from above. Pleasure was soon replaced by panic: lakes are not supposed to look like swimming pools. When biologists investigated, they found that the turbid swirls of plankton that typically grow in the lake by the million had nearly vanished—consumed gradually, they could only guess, by some ravenous organism.

The likely culprits were mollusks: the zebra mussel and its cousin the quagga mussel. The two species—*Dreissena polymorpha* and *Dreissena bugensis*—are thought to have originated in the estuarine basins of Ukraine, notably that of the Dnieper River. In the late nineteenth century, cargo ships, travelling from the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea, had dumped their ballast water into the Great Lakes, contaminating them with foreign organisms.

At first, the mollusks seemed like relatively innocuous guests. Then things took a turn. By the mid-nineties, they were hanging from ship keels, turbines, and propellers in bulbous, tumorlike masses, encrusting docks and piers, clogging water pipes and sanitation systems, and washing ashore in such numbers that, on some beaches, you could walk on a solid bar of shells. Eventually, the water clarity began to increase, the effect at first picturesque and then eerie.

By 2012, the *Dreissena* population in parts of southern Lake Michigan had reached a density of ten thousand per square metre. By one estimate, there were nine hundred and fifty trillion mussels in the lake, its bottom a crackling carpet of calcium. By 2015, the density was fifteen thousand per square metre—more mussels, by weight, than all the fish in the lakes. Billions of dollars in damage had accumulated. Ships and boats had to be

decontaminated, and water-cleaning equipment dismantled and stripped. Dire warning signs (“DON’T MOVE A MUSSEL!”) were placed throughout the lake system, yet the invaders—the quaggas, ultimately, in the greatest numbers—continued to spread.

What made the mussels such malignant invaders? Some of their aggression is a feature of their biology. The *Dreissena* are champion breeders, each churning out more than a million eggs a year. Yet in the basins and the deltas of Ukraine these mussels seldom reach even a fifth of their peak density in the Great Lakes. They rarely invade depths below thirty metres, clump on boats, clog marine equipment, or form calcified masses. They are, in short, a relatively docile species—restricted, perhaps, by the quality of the water, by their natural predators and pathogens, by the shallowness of the river basin, or by factors we haven’t yet identified.

Solving the quagga conundrum requires cracking two halves of a puzzle. Half the story lies in the mussel’s intrinsic biology—its genes, its morphology, its nutritional preferences, its reproductive habits. The other half involves the match between that biology and the environment. It is a basic insight that an undergraduate ecologist might find familiar: the “invasiveness” of an organism is always a relative concept. The Asian carp—another fierce aggressor in American waters—is not particularly invasive in parts of Asia. The Japanese knotweed, now colonizing the cherished gardens of the English, is hardly known as a weed in Japan. An aggressor in one environment is a placid resident in another. The meek are only circumstantially meek; when conditions change, they might suddenly inherit the earth.

One evening this past June, as I walked along the shore of Lake Michigan in Chicago, I thought about mussels, knotweed, and cancer. Tens of thousands of

people had descended on the city to attend the annual meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology, the world’s preeminent conference on cancer. Much of the meeting, I knew, would focus on the intrinsic properties of cancer cells, and on ways of targeting them. Yet those properties might be only part of the picture. We want to know which mollusk we’re dealing with; but we also need to know which lake.

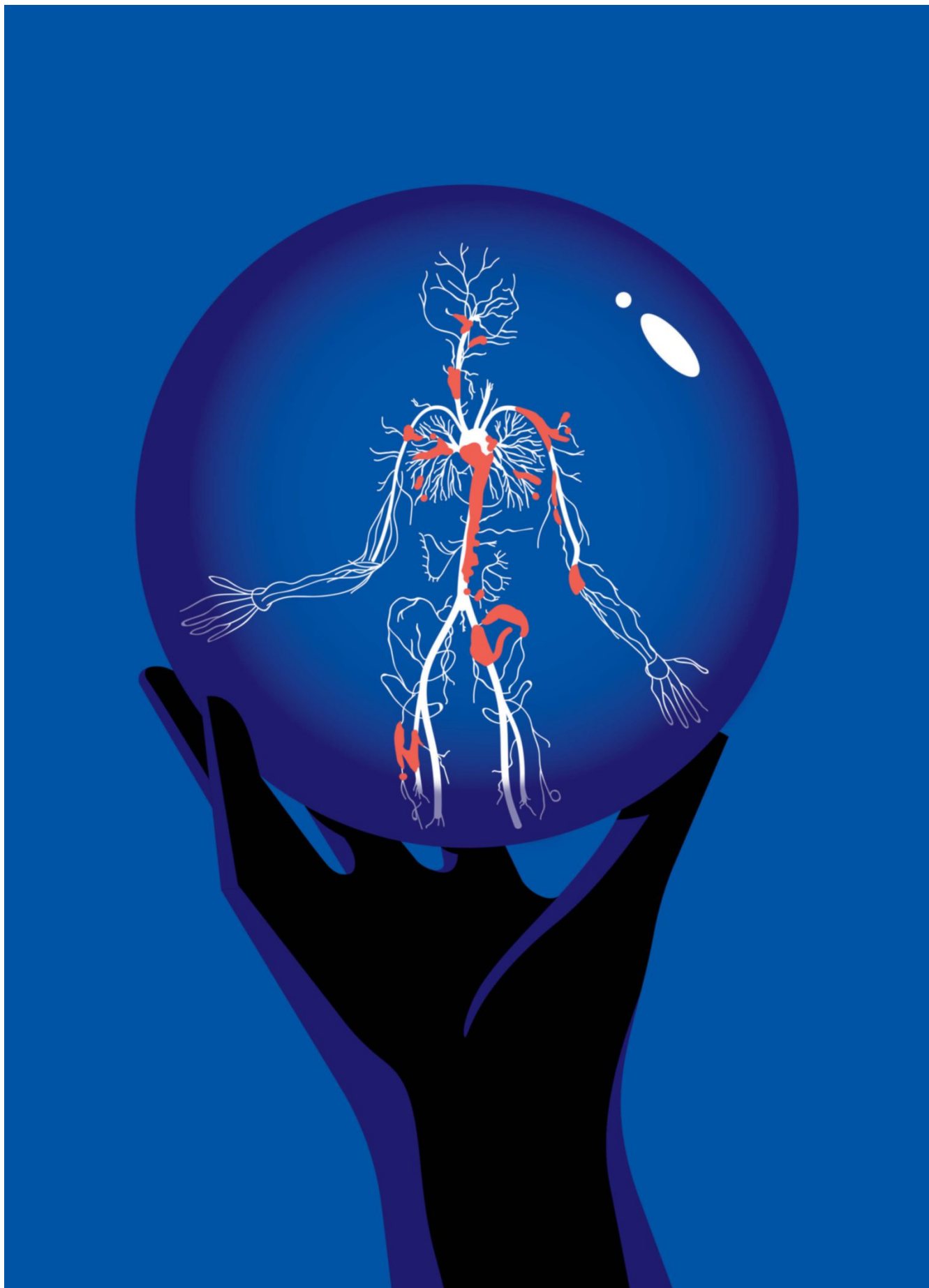
A few weeks before the ASCO meeting, at Columbia University’s hospital on 168th Street, I met a woman with breast cancer. Anna Guzello, a supermarket cashier from Brooklyn, had noticed a small lump in her left breast a few months earlier. (I’ve changed some of her identifying details.) A mammogram then revealed a hazy, spidery mass, and a biopsy confirmed that the tumor was malignant.

Guzello had a total mastectomy of the breast—a simple lumpectomy would not have sufficed, given the size and the location of the mass—and planned to have surgical reconstruction. On an afternoon in May, she came to see Katherine Crew, a breast oncologist at Columbia, to discuss the next steps in her treatment.

Crew’s office, on the tenth floor of the hospital, is a small, square, sparsely furnished room. The light from a fluorescent desk lamp was flickering, and Crew switched it off. She wanted no distractions. Guzello, her hair coiled into a tight bun, leaned forward, frowning intently, as Crew drew pictures and wrote notes on a sheet of paper.

“Can you read my writing?” Crew asked. “You can keep the notes and always come back with questions.” Her tone was gentle, but it was as if the weight of every word were multiplied.

Guzello nodded. She drummed her fingernails on the table, producing a staccato, military sound—*click-click-click*—a



We've tended to focus on the cancer, but its host tissue—"soil," rather than "seed"—could help us predict the danger it poses.



"The peasants are mercilessly ridiculing you online."

nervous tic that seemed to calm her.

"First, the good news," Crew said. "There's no visible cancer left in your body."

The surgeons had removed the tumor, with wide margins on all sides. The lymph nodes in the armpits—a frequent site of cancer metastasis—also contained no sign of cancer. In oncology parlance, Guzello would be classified as N.E.D.: "no evidence of disease."

But that's a squirrely phrase: "evidence" refers to the state of our knowledge, not the state of the disease. Breast-cancer cells could have escaped and settled in Guzello's brain, spinal cord, or bones, where they might be invisible to scans and tests. Women with complete mastectomies and "no evidence of disease" can relapse with metastatic breast cancer months, years, or even decades after the removal of the primary cancerous mass. Patients who succumb to cancer generally die of these metastases, not of their primary tumors. (Notable exceptions are brain cancers, which can kill patients by occupying the skull, and blood cancers, in which the cancerous cells are inherently metastatic.)

"So we treat with medicines to decrease the chance of metastasis—the growth of cancer cells in sites outside

the breast," Crew told Guzello. She explained that the medicines came in three main categories: cell-killing chemotherapy; targeted therapies, like Herceptin, that specifically go after the products of misbehaving genes in cancer cells; and estrogen-blocking pills, which are typically prescribed for five or ten years.

Guzello moved her hands over her hair, her lips tightening. The hormonal pills were fine. But she balked at the cell-killing chemotherapy.

"If I don't have those metastases, then I'll be taking risks for no reason," she said. The nails drummed on the table again. The risks were substantial: hair loss, diarrhea, infections, a small possibility of permanent numbness that would leave her hands feeling as if she were wearing leather gloves, yet exquisitely sensitive to cold. The chemotherapy protocol meant that she would be yoked to an I.V. pole at an infusion center for several hours once a week, for nearly half a year. She had a mother with a severe disability to care for, and few vacation days. Was there any way to know whether she was likely to suffer metastasis? "Then I'd be able to assess the risks and benefits more realistically," Guzello said.

The question has echoed through oncology for decades. We aren't particularly

adept at predicting whether a specific patient's cancer will become metastatic or not. Metastasis can seem "like a random act of violence," Daniel Hayes, a breast oncologist at the University of Michigan, told me when we spoke at the ASCO meeting in Chicago. "Because we're not very good at telling whether breast-cancer patients will have metastasis, we tend to treat them with chemotherapy as if they all have potential metastasis." Only some fraction of patients who receive toxic chemotherapy will really benefit from it, but we don't know which fraction. And so, unable to say whether any particular patient will benefit, we have no choice but to over-treat. For women like Guzello, then, the central puzzle is not the perennial "why me." It's "whether me."

There are deep roots to the idea that a cancer's metastases depend on local habitats. In 1889, an English doctor named Stephen Paget set out to understand cancer's "primary growth and the situation of the secondary growths derived from it." The son and nephew of prominent English doctors—his father, James Paget, was one of the founders of modern pathology; his uncle was a Cambridge professor of medicine—the younger Paget might have been burdened by the deadweight of inherited wisdom. Cancer, in Paget's time, was thought to diffuse from its primary site like a malignant inkblot. Surgeons, believing this "centrifugal theory"—cancer's stainlike, outward spread from a central mass—advocated ever-widening surgical extirpations to eliminate cancer. (This theory would form the intellectual basis for William Halsted's "radical" mastectomy.) But when Paget collected the case files of seven hundred and thirty-five women who had died of breast cancer, he found a bizarre pattern of metastatic spread. The metastases didn't appear to spread centrifugally; they appeared in discrete, anatomically distant sites. And the pattern of spread was far from random: cancers had a strange and strong preference for particular organs. Of the three hundred-odd metastases, Paget found two hundred and forty-one in the liver, seventeen in the spleen, and seventy in the lungs. Enormous, empty, uncolonized steppes—

metastasis—stretched out in between.

Why was the liver so hospitable to metastasis, while the spleen, which had similarities in blood supply, size, and proximity, seemed relatively resistant? As Paget probed deeper, he found that cancerous growth even favored particular sites within organ systems. Bones were a frequent site of metastasis in breast cancer—but not every bone was equally susceptible. “Who has ever seen the bones of the hands or the feet attacked by secondary cancer?” he asked. Paget coined the phrase “seed and soil” to describe the phenomenon. The seed was the cancer cell; the soil was the local ecosystem where it flourished, or failed to. Paget’s study concentrated on patterns of metastasis within a person’s body. The propensity of one organ to become colonized while another was spared seemed to depend on the nature or the location of the organ—on local ecologies. Yet the logic of the seed-and-soil model ultimately raises the question of global ecologies: why does one person’s body have susceptible niches and not another’s?

Paget’s way of framing the issue—metastasis as the result of a pathological relationship between a cancer cell and its environment—lay dormant for more than a century. There were exceptions. The pioneering metastasis researcher Isaiah J. Fidler, working at the National Cancer Institute during the nineteen-seventies and eighties, started to study “cross-talk” between tissue and tumor. A tumor, Fidler showed, is made of a heterogeneous mixture of millions of cells, only a fraction of which are equipped to leave the primary tumor, form an exploitative alliance with the “soil” of another organ, and initiate metastasis. In the same period, Mina Bissell, working at the University of California, Berkeley, and then at the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, began scrutinizing the microenvironments in which tumors formed—or didn’t—as she looked for factors that enabled or disabled the growth of cancer in various organs. Context, she found, was critical.

Yet oncology as a whole remained dominated by a simpler model. When I was a medical student in Boston, I spent an evening in a frigid deli on Boylston Street memorizing the list of bone-metastasizing cancers (breast, lung, thyroid, kidney, prostate) using the unsavory mnemonic “B.L.T.

with kosher pickle” and coming up with a mental image of how metastases might form. Cancer “disseminated” via blood vessels, “attacked” the organs, and began to sprout and flourish there. As I rotated through the cancer wards in the late nineties, doctors reinforced this idea. “This tumor is invading the brain,” one surgeon murmured to another in an operating room. (By contrast, who ever said that the cold catches you?) Subject, verb, object: cancer was the autonomous actor, the aggressor, the mover. The hosts—the patients, their organs—were the hushed audience, the afflicted victims, the passive onlookers.

This language reflected an almost ontological commitment. It persisted even when research paradigms shifted. “Cancer is a genetic disease at its core,” the M.I.T. cancer biologist Robert Weinberg says. For decades, accordingly, biologists have looked for gene mutations that enable some aspect of cancer cells’ aberrant growth, metabolism, regeneration, or behavior. In the late eighties, a number of cancer biologists, Weinberg most prominently among them, threw themselves into finding such genes for metastasis—met genes, in effect. Might a breast-cancer cell, say, acquire a mutation that allowed it to unmoor itself from the breast and colonize the brain?

Despite a decades-long search, the met genes never materialized. “We looked and looked again, but we never found any,” Weinberg told me. Occasionally, mutations were detected in cancer metastases that were different from the primary tumor, but no mutations emerged as singular drivers of metastasis. Starting in the late nineties, cancer geneticists tried another approach. Mutations in cancer cells don’t act in isolation; they can turn dozens, even hundreds, of other genes on and off. And those patterns of activation and repression can make an enormous difference—in the way that similar keyboards can produce wildly different sounds. (A caterpillar has the same genome as the butterfly it turns into, just as your liver cells have the same genome as your brain cells.) Instead of hunting for individual mutations, researchers looked for patterns of gene reg-

ulation—so-called “gene-expression signatures.” These patterns were used to develop predictive tests, which were rapidly shepherd into clinical trials.

For some variants of breast cancer, the tests turned out to be useful. Widely used gene-expression assays, such as MammaPrint and Oncotype DX, have helped doctors identify certain patients who are at low risk for metastatic spread and can safely skip chemotherapy. “We’ve been able to reduce the overuse of chemotherapy in about one-third of all patients in some subtypes of breast cancers,” Daniel Hayes said.

Hayes is also grateful for the kind of genetic tests that indicate which patients might benefit from a targeted therapy like Herceptin (those whose breast cancers produce high levels of the growth-factor receptor protein HER2) or from anti-estrogen medications (those whose tumors have estrogen receptors). But, despite our advances in targeting tumor cells using genetic markers as guides, our efforts to predict whose cancers will become metastatic have advanced only slowly. The “whether me” question haunts the whole field. What the oncologist Harold Burstein calls “the uncertainty box” of chemotherapy has remained stubbornly closed.

In 2001, Joan Massagué, a cancer biologist at New York’s Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, came upon a scientific paper that radically changed his thinking about metastasis. Originally from Barcelona, Massagué—with his salt-and-pepper hair, his customary button-down shirt with an open collar—resembles a diplomat after embassy hours. He had spent years studying cell biology, elucidating mechanisms of gene regulation that might prime breast cells to travel to the bone instead of to the brain. Then came a crucial piece of evidence, buried in an obscure journal and published nearly three decades earlier. Researchers at the National Institutes of Health had implanted a sac of breast-cancer cells into the ovarian pedicle of a female rat. The cells grew to form a bean-size tumor. The researchers then cannulated a large vein that was draining the tumor and siphoned blood



from the vein every few hours in order to count the number of cancer cells that the tumor was shedding.

The results baffled the investigators. On average, they found, the tumor was sloughing off twenty thousand cancer cells into every millilitre of blood—roughly three million cells per gram of tumor every twenty-four hours. In the course of a day, the tumor molted nearly a tenth of its weight. Later studies, performed with more sophisticated methods and with animal tumors that had arisen more “naturally,” confirmed that tumors continually shed cells into circulation. (The rate of shedding from localized human tumors is harder to study; but available research tends to confirm the general phenomenon.)

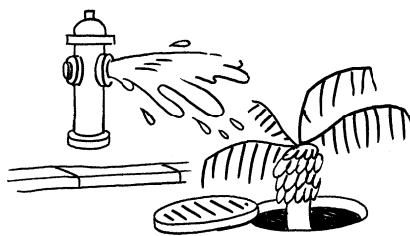
“We imagine metastasis as a *going* problem,” Massagué told me. “Mets go to the bone. Mets go to the brain.” He punctuated the air with his fingers at each verb, his face flushed with excitement. “And—yes, yes—*going* is important, because we need to find what allows cells to break away from the tumor and enter the blood and the lymph nodes. But if primary human tumors shed cells continually, and if every cell is capable of forming visible metastasis, then every patient should have countless visible metastatic deposits all over his or her body.” Anna Guzello’s breast tumor should have stippled her brain, bones, and liver with mets. Why, then, did she have no visible evidence of disease anywhere else in her body? The real conundrum wasn’t why metastases occur in some cancer patients but why metastases don’t occur in all of them.

“The only way I could explain the scarcity of metastasis,” Massagué said, “was to imagine that an enormous wave of cellular death or cellular dormancy must restrict metastasis. Either the cells shed by the tumor are killed, or they stop dividing, becoming dormant. When tumor cells enter the circulation, they must perish almost immediately, and in vast numbers. Only a few reach their destination organ, such as the brain or the bone.” Once they do, they face the additional problem of surviving in unfamiliar and possibly hostile terrain. Massagué inferred that those few survivors must lie in a state of dormancy. “A visible, clinical metastasis—the kind that we can detect with CAT scans or MRIs—must only

occur once a dormant cell has been reactivated and begins to divide,” he said. Malignancy wasn’t simply about cells spreading; it was also about *staying*—and flourishing—once they had done so.

In the spring of 2012, while Massagué and others were searching for sleeper cells, Gilbert Welch, an epidemiologist at Dartmouth, was preoccupied with a different problem: the unfulfilled promise of early detection. Early-detection programs aimed to catch and eliminate cancers that were otherwise destined to become metastatic, but a huge ramp-up in screenings for certain cancers hadn’t yielded comparable benefits in the mortality statistics. Welch was trained as a statistician as well as a physician, and when he recites numbers and equations his voice rises to a booming pitch, as if he were a televangelist moonlighting as a math teacher. To illustrate an extreme version of the problem, Welch told me the story of an epidemic—that wasn’t. In South Korea, starting about fifteen years ago, doctors began to screen aggressively for thyroid cancer. Primary-care offices in Seoul were outfitted with small ultrasound devices, and doctors retrained themselves to catch the earliest signs of the disease. When a suspicious-looking nodule was found, it was biopsied. If the pathology report was positive, the patient’s thyroid gland was surgically removed.

The official incidence of thyroid cancer—in particular, a subtype termed



papillary thyroid cancer—began to soar across the nation. By 2014, thyroid-cancer incidence was fifteen times what it was in 1993, making it the most commonly diagnosed cancer in the country. It was as if a “tsunami of thyroid cancer,” in the words of one researcher, had suddenly hit. Billions of Korean wons were poured into treatment; tens of thousands of resected thyroids ended up in surgical buckets. Yet the rate at

which people died from thyroid cancer remained unchanged.

What happened? It wasn’t medical error: observed under the microscope, the questionable nodules met the criteria for thyroid cancer. Rather, what the pathologists were finding wasn’t particularly pathological—these thyroid cancers had little propensity to cause illness. The patients had been not misdiagnosed but overdiagnosed; that is, cancers were identified that would never have produced clinical symptoms.

In 1985, pathologists in Finland assembled a group of a hundred and one men and women who had died of unrelated causes—car accidents or heart attacks, say—and performed autopsies to determine how many harbored papillary thyroid cancer. They cut the thyroid glands into razor-thin sections, as if carving a hock of ham into prosciutto slices, and peered at the sections under a microscope. Astonishingly, they found thyroid cancer in more than a third of the glands inspected. A similar study regarding breast cancer—comparing breast cancer incidentally detectable at autopsy with the lifetime risk of dying of breast cancer—suggests that a hyperzealous early-detection program might overdiagnose breast cancer with startling frequency, leading to needless interventions. Surveying the results of prostate-cancer screening, Welch calculated that thirty to a hundred men would have to undergo unnecessary treatment—typically, surgery or radiation—for every life saved.

“The early detection of breast cancer via mammography saves women’s lives, although the benefit is modest,” Daniel Hayes told me. But equally important is the question of what to do with the tumor we’ve detected: can we learn how to identify those cancers which need to be treated systemically with chemotherapy or other interventions? “It’s not just early detection that we want to achieve,” Hayes went on. “It’s early *prediction*.”

For Welch, the fact that diagnoses of thyroid cancer or prostate cancer could soar without a corresponding effect on mortality rates was a warning: a little knowledge had turned out to be a dangerous thing. Cancer-screening campaigns had expanded the known reservoir of disease without telling us if, in any particular case, treatment was necessary. Early detection helped us with

SAFE TRAVELS

Every time Gulliver travels
into another chapter of “Gulliver’s Travels”
I marvel at how well travelled he is
despite his incurable gullibility.

I don’t enjoy travelling anymore
because, for instance,
I still don’t know the difference
between a “bloke” and a “chap.”

And I’m embarrassed
whenever I have to hold out a palm
of loose coins to a cashier
as if I were feeding a pigeon in a park.

Like Proust, I see only trouble
in store if I leave my room,
which is not lined with cork,
only sheets of wallpaper

featuring orange flowers
and little green vines.
Of course, anytime I want
I can travel in my imagination

but only as far as Toronto,
where some graduate students
with goatees and snoods
are translating my poems into Canadian.

—Billy Collins

when and *what* but not with *whether*.
And there was an element of mystery.
Why did some cancers spread and kill
patients, while many remained docile?

One day in March, 2012, Welch flew to Washington to attend a conference on cancer metastasis. It was a gusty, gray morning—“the hotel was nondescript, the food unremarkable”—and Welch, dangling the requisite nametag on a forlorn lanyard, found himself in a room full of cancer biologists, feeling like an alien species. “I study patterns and trends in cancer in human populations,” he told me. “I take the one-hundred-thousand-foot view of cancer. This meeting was full of metastasis biologists looking at cancer cells under the microscope. I couldn’t tell what any of this had to do with population trends in human cancer—or, for that matter, why I’d even come to this meeting.”

Then, coffee jolting in his hand, he saw a slide on the screen that made him sit up and take notice. It depicted the infestation of mussels in Lake Michigan. The speaker, Kenneth Pienta, an oncologist from the University of Michigan (and now at Johns Hopkins), had heard about the quagga crisis, and been struck by the seeming parallels with cancer. Rather than viewing invasiveness as a quality intrinsic to a cancer, researchers needed to consider invasiveness as a pathological relationship between an organism and an environment. “Together, cancer cells and host cells form an ecosystem,” Pienta reminded the audience. “Initially, the cancer cells are an invasive species to a new niche or environment. Eventually, the cancer-cell-host-cell interactions create a new environment.” Ask not just what the cancer is doing to you, Pienta was saying.

Ask what you are doing to the cancer.

By talking about cancer in ecological terms, Pienta was, in the tradition of Paget and Fidler, urging his colleagues to pay more attention to the soil. A woman with a primary tumor in her breast was caught in a pitched but silent battle. Oncologists had spent generations studying one possible outcome of that battle: when the woman lost, she succumbed to metastasis. But what happened when cancer lost the battle? Perhaps cancer cells tried to invade new niches, but mainly perished en route, as a result of the resistance mounted by her immune system and other physiological challenges; perhaps the select few that, singly or in clusters, survived the expedition ended up languishing in forbidding tissue terrain, like seeds landing on a salt flat.

Welch was captivated. We had to be alert to the differences between the ram-paging quagga mussel and the endangered purple-cat’s-paw mussel—but what about the differences between the Great Lakes and the Dnieper? Evidence suggested, for example, that most men with prostate cancer would never experience metastasis. What made others susceptible? The usual approach, Welch knew, would be to look for markers in their cancer cells—to find patterns of gene activation, say, that made some of them dangerous. And the characteristics of those cells were plainly crucial. Pienta was arguing, though, that this approach was far too narrow. At least part of the answer might lie in the ecological relationship between a cancer and its host—between seed and soil.

In 1992, an Australian high-school teacher in his late fifties was diagnosed with melanoma. The malignancy began as a streak of black—a cancellation sign extending from his left armpit across the torso. A few weeks after the diagnosis, though, the borders of the tumor began to change. One edge turned gray; another shrank. “He had a classic spontaneous regression—typically a sign that the cancerous lesion was being controlled by the immune system,” David Adams, the man’s son, told me. The primary melanoma was surgically resected, and no metastasis was ever found. One of his father’s friends, also in his fifties, was not so lucky: by the time his primary

melanoma had been discovered, his brain was sprinkled with visible mets.

David Adams went on to train as a geneticist and a physiologist in Sydney, before joining the Sanger Institute, in Cambridge, England. There he leads a group studying the biology of melanoma. Originally from Tamworth, a small out-back town in New South Wales (“hot, flat farming country, right in the middle of Australia’s melanoma belt,” he says), Adams now lives ten thousand miles away, in a quaint English village, speaks with a mild Cantabrigian accent, and drives a gently distressed compact car to work. He has, in short, gone native—a matter of soil over seed, you might think—but he hasn’t forgotten his father’s case; it’s what has driven his scientific career. What had made a melanoma regress in one host and turn aggressive in another? Adams knew of a strange series of melanoma cases, occasionally reported in the medical literature, involving donated kidneys. They fit a pattern. A patient—call him D.G.—is diagnosed with a melanoma, and successfully treated with surgical resection.

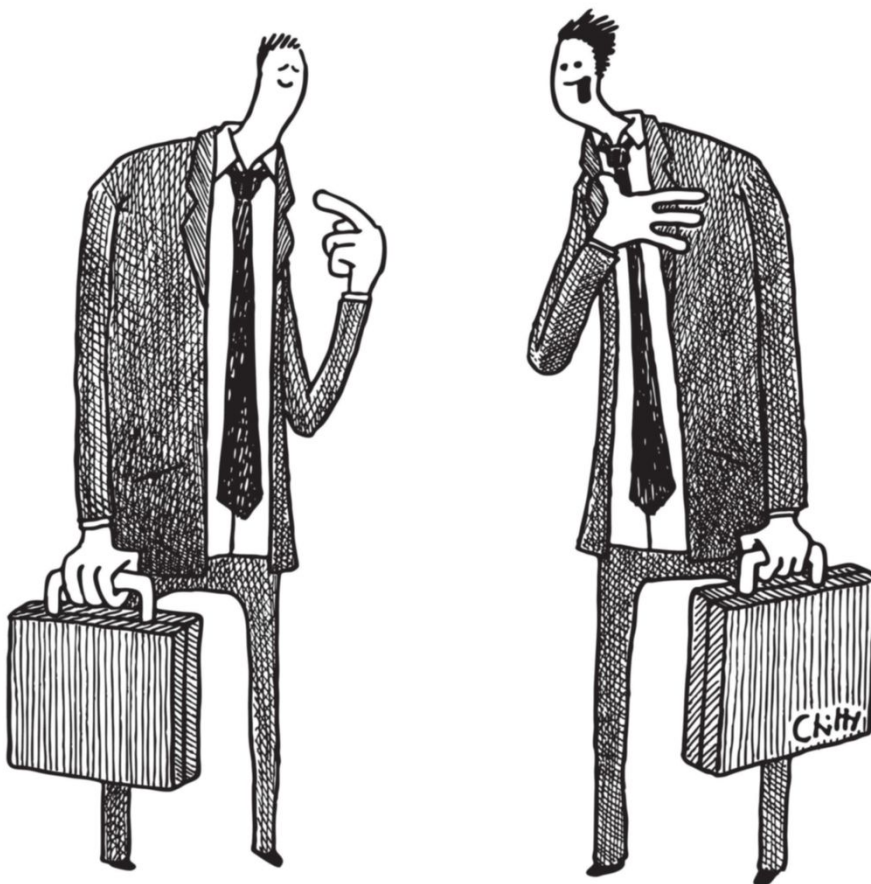
Years later, D.G., now deemed perfectly healthy, donates a kidney to a friend. The friend is prescribed routine immune suppressants to prevent the rejection of the kidney. A few weeks later, however, the recipient begins to sprout hundreds of black pinpricks of melanoma in the kidney. The melanoma, bizarrely, has come from D.G.’s cells. The donated kidney has to be removed. Meanwhile, the donor—like some Dorian Gray of transplantation—remains uncannily healthy, with no sign of melanoma in his body.

Here, too, Adams realized, the original host environment played a crucial role in restricting metastatic growth. The donor’s melanoma cells must have been sitting dormant in the donated kidney, akin to the phenomenon of dormancy that Massagué had found in mice. When the “soil” changed, and the dormant cells arrived in an immune-suppressed recipient, the cancer began to grow. “The immune response in the donor must have been restricting the metastatic cancer’s growth,” Adams told me.

In 2013, Adams began to conceive

an ambitious experiment to identify cancer-suppressing host factors. “Just a few yards from my office, there is an animal vivarium filled with hundreds of genetically altered mouse strains,” he said. “Researchers were using these strains to study the effect of these gene variants on the heart, or on the nervous system. I thought I would ask a somewhat different question: If we implanted these strains with the same cancer, which strains would permit the metastases to grow, and which ones would suppress metastatic outgrowth?”

It was an ingenious inversion of a classic experimental strategy. For decades, biologists have been altering a cancer cell’s genes and injecting the cells into a few standardized strains of mice. The “different cancers into same strain” experiments have allowed cancer biologists to observe how alterations in cancer genes might affect their growth, metabolism, and metastasis. But what effects might variations in the host’s genome have? Adams’s “same cancer into different strains” experiment switched the locus of attention from seed to soil.



“No kidding—I get up impressively early, too!”

In New York and Boston, meanwhile, researchers such as Joan Massagué and Robert Weinberg were also investigating “host factors.” In a suggestive experiment, Weinberg and his colleagues studied a cohort of mice whose lungs they had sprayed with thousands of dormant cancer cells. Some mice were exposed to an inflammatory stimulus—the kind that might occur during pneumonia, say—and only in those did the “micro-mets” wake up and turn aggressive. It called to mind a fascinating, if overlooked, experiment that Mina Bissell had done back in the nineteen-eighties. Researchers had known for generations that if you injected a chick’s wing with a certain cancer-causing virus a tumor would grow there. Bissell showed that, when you injected one wing and injured the other, this other wing would grow a tumor, too. On the other hand, if you injected a chick while it was an embryo, there would be no tumor at all. “Back then, it was fashionable to think of cancer only as an oncogene-driven automaton,” Bissell told me. “But here the automaton could be switched on and off by its local environment.” It wasn’t just the seed that mattered; changing features

of the soil could affect whether it would ever germinate.

Massagué and his students were making advances of their own, notably in an experiment in which they depleted various types of immune cells in mice that carried dormant cancer cells. Some of these cell types belong to the “adaptive immune” system, which learns to identify new pathogens and to target them when they next appear. (The adaptive immune system, associated with T cells and B cells, is why vaccines work, and why people seldom get chicken pox more than once.) But the most striking effect occurred when the experimenters depleted another type of cell, the “natural killer,” or NK, cell. These cells belong to our “innate immunity”—they can’t learn anything new but arrive preprogrammed to destroy sick or aberrant host cells. Massagué’s team had implicated these cells as crucial surveyors and controllers of cancer metastasis.

Adams’s particular interest was in host genes, rather than cell types, that might affect metastasis. In early 2013, Louise van der Weyden, a postdoc in Adams’s lab who also happens to be his wife, created a suspension of mouse melanoma cells—a coffee-dark slurry—and injected it into a few dozen mouse strains. Some weeks later, she counted the number of visible mets in the lungs for each strain and rushed the data to Adams’s office.

Even within that small cohort, Adams recalled, the differences were obvious. Some of the mice had developed hundreds of mets—a fusillade of black pinpricks. In still others, the lungs had visibly blackened with metastasis. Yet some mice had developed just a few mets. Adams has a photograph of those mouse lungs above his desk. “Here was the same cancer exerting such different effects in different host environments,” he said.

Two years later, van der Weyden had inoculated eight hundred and ten mouse strains with the melanoma cells and scrutinized the physiology of metastasis in each. Fifteen strains were either moderately or extremely resistant. Twelve of those fifteen strains had gene variations that affected immune regulation, again suggesting the potent role of that system in a cancer’s ability to spread and invade. Even within the resistant group, one mouse strain stood out. Exposed to the dose of cancer cells used in the study,

normal mice developed about two hundred and fifty mets. Mice of this resistant strain, however, developed only fifteen to twenty mets on average. And some of these mice hardly developed any mets at all; their lungs looked pristine and uncolonized even two months after the exposure.

Was this resistance to metastasis peculiar to melanoma, which is a type of cancer well known to provoke an immune response? Adams and van der Weyden tested three other types of cancer: lung, breast, and colon. In all of them, the mouse strain was resistant to the formation of metastases. Notably, the strain carries a variant in a gene called *Spns2*, which, through a cascade of events, increases the concentration of immune cells, notably NK cells, in the lungs—the very cells that Massagué’s lab had identified as a powerful restrictor of metastasis.

David Adams’s father never suffered a recurrence of melanoma; he died from prostate cancer that had spread widely through his body. “Years ago, I would have thought of the melanoma versus the prostate cancer in terms of differences in the inherent metastatic potential of those two cell types,” Adams said. “Good cancer versus bad cancer. Now I think more and more of a different question: Why was my father’s body more receptive to prostate metastasis versus melanoma metastasis?”

There are important consequences of taking soil as well as seed into account. Among the most successful recent innovations in cancer therapeutics is immunotherapy, in which a patient’s own immune system is activated to target cancer cells. Years ago, the pioneer immunologist Jim Allison and his colleagues discovered that cancer cells used special proteins to trigger the brakes in the host’s immune cells, leading to unchecked growth. (To use more appropriate evolutionary language: clones of cancer cells that are capable of blocking host immune attacks are naturally selected and grow.) When drugs stopped certain cancers from exploiting these braking proteins, Allison and his colleagues showed, immune cells would start to attack them.

Such therapies are best thought of as *soil* therapies: rather than killing tumor cells directly, or targeting mutant gene products within tumor cells, they work on the phalanxes of immunological predators that survey tissue environments, and alter the ecology of the host. But soil therapies will go beyond immune factors; a wide variety of environmental features have to be taken into account. The extra-

cellular matrix with which the cancer interacts, the blood vessels that a successful tumor must coax out to feed itself, the nature of a host’s connective-tissue cells—all of these affect the ecology of tissues and thereby the growth of cancers.

Cancers, like mussels, proliferate in congenial habitats, and, like mussels, they

can create microenvironments that help them resist predators. Seed therapies kill cells—something like spraying a lake with a mussel poison. Soil therapies, by contrast, change the habitat. When I asked Adams about the kind of clinical trial that excited him because of its therapeutic potential, he discussed an unusual study in which patients who are diagnosed with a primary melanoma—such as his father—will donate blood so that researchers can identify their genetic markers and their immune-cell composition. By studying how they fare over time, we might learn which patient populations are particularly susceptible or resistant to certain cancers. We’d have a better sense of which patients need aggressive treatment. And we might learn something about *how* to treat them—how to alter a susceptible patient’s immunological and histological profile to resemble that of a resistant one.

“Cancer is no more a disease of cells than a traffic jam is a disease of cars,” the British physician and cancer researcher D. W. Smithers wrote in *The Lancet*, in 1962. “A traffic jam is due to a failure of the normal relationship between driven cars and their environment and can occur whether they themselves are running normally or not.” Smithers had overstepped in his provocation. The uproar that ensued was clamorous and immediate; Smithers complained that he had been “lacerated by Occam’s razor.” By arguing that cellular *relationships* were



responsible for cancer's behavior, he had committed the cardinal sin of multiplying the factors that oncologists had to consider. "To deny the importance of cells in tumor growth would be like denying the importance of people in some problem in sociology," he later clarified. Cancer cells were a necessary condition for disease but not a sufficient one. His real aim was to get beyond oncology's obsession with its internal-combustion engine—the cellular automaton and its genes—and only after his death has the field started to come to grips with his message.

You ride the subway one morning. The train is delayed at Fifty-ninth Street, and a man in a Yankees cap sneezes on you. At work later that week, you feel the chill entering you quietly, on little cat feet. You take a cab home, now sniffing, cursing the C line and retracing your steps: the culprit with the cap; the empty seat that should have raised suspicion; that slightly moist steel bar you should never have touched. What you do not think about are the six other passengers, sitting nearby, who also got sneezed on. None of them are sick.

This is medicine's "denominator problem." The numerator is you—the person who gets ill. The denominator is everyone at risk, including all the other passengers who were exposed. Numerators are easy to study. Denominators are hard. Numerators come to the doctor's office, congested and miserable. They get blood tests and prescriptions. Denominators go home from the subway station, heat up dinner, and watch "The Strain." The numerator persists. The denominator vanishes.

Why didn't the denominators get sick? The pathogen exposure was the same; the hosts were different. Yet even the term "pathogen" is misleading. A pathogen is defined by its ability to be, well, pathogenic. That's not an inherent attribute, however; it's a relationship, an interaction with the host. Ruslan Medzhitov, an immunobiologist at Yale, has spent much of his life studying host-pathogen interactions. "You can inject the same virus into different hosts and get vastly different responses," he

says. It's the soil that determines the nature of the illness.

And that returns us to the problem with the early-detection paradigm. Suppose we could install tiny sensors in people which would regularly scan their blood to find circulating tumor cells, conducting an ongoing "liquid biopsy." We'd be catching cancers earlier than ever before. But, as with the doctors in Seoul, we might also end up overtreating more cancers than ever before. That's because circulating tumor cells might augur metastatic cancer in some patients, while in others the mets never seem to take hold. Why don't the mets take hold? The old answer was: the cancer wasn't the right kind of guest. The new question is: should we be looking, too, for the right kind of host?

A few months ago, a forty-year-old woman came to my office in a state of panic. She had had a hysterectomy as a treatment for endometriosis. Pathologists, examining her uterus postoperatively, had found a rare, malignant sarcoma lodged in the tissue—a tumor so small that it could not be seen on any of her preoperative scans. She had consulted a gynecologist and a surgeon, both of whom had recommended an aggressive procedure to remove the ovaries and the surrounding tissue—a scorched-earth operation with many long-term consequences. Once these tumors spread, they had reasoned, there's no known treatment. Patients diagnosed with these sarcomas tend to have a sobering prognosis, with most surviving only two to three years after the symptoms appear.

But that's a completely different scenario, I said to her. In her case, the tumor was detected incidentally. There were no symptoms or signs of the cancer. If we sampled ten thousand asymptomatic women, we have no idea how many such malignancies would be found incidentally. And we have no clue how those tumors, the ones found incidentally, behave in real life. Would the alliances formed between the woman's tumor cells and her tissue cells enable widespread metastatic dissemination? Or would these encounters naturally dampen the growth of the tumor and prevent its spread? Nobody

could say. We err toward risk aversion, even at the cost of bodily damage; we don't learn what would happen if we did nothing. It was a classic "denominator" problem, but my response seemed supremely unsatisfactory.

She looked at me as if I were mad. "Would *you* sit and do nothing if someone found this tumor in you?" she asked. She decided to go ahead with the surgery.

Anna Guzello went in the opposite direction, as I recently learned when I checked back with her oncologist, Katherine Crew. Guzello had agreed to take the estrogen-blocker tamoxifen. But she refused chemo, and even Herceptin, despite being HER2-positive. Frustratingly, though, Crew wasn't in a position to say with any confidence what was going to happen.

For decades, our standard explanation for those who make up our "denominators"—i.e., people who meet the criteria of the diagnostic test, who are at risk for a disease, but who may not actually have it—was stochastic: we thought there was a roll-of-the-dice aspect to falling ill. There absolutely is. But what Medzhitov calls "new rules of tissue engagement" may help us understand why so many people who are exposed to a disease don't end up getting it. Medzhitov believes that all our tissues have "established rules by which cells form engagements and alliances with other cells." Physiology is the product of these relationships. So consider our internal-denominator problem. There are tens of trillions of cells in a human body; a large fraction of them are dividing, almost always imperfectly. There's no reason to think there's a supply-side shortage of potential cancer cells, even in perfectly healthy people. Medzhitov's point is that cancer cells produce cancer—they get established and grow—only when they manage to form alliances with normal cells. And there are two sides (at least) to any such relationship.

Once we think of diseases in terms of ecosystems, then, we're obliged to ask why someone *didn't* get sick. Yet ecologists are a frustrating lot, at least if you're a doctor. Part of the seduction of cancer genetics is that it purports to explain the unity and the diversity of cancer in one swoop. For ecologists, by contrast, everything is a relationship among a complex assemblage of factors.



I talked to Anthony Ricciardi, Professor of Invasion Ecology at McGill University, in Montreal. Ricciardi, a biologist, grew up on the banks of Lake Saint-Louis, which bulges out from the St. Lawrence River—the route through which the mussels metastasized to the Great Lakes. “I was familiar with much of what was living in that lake, having played in it as a child and later studied it as a student,” he told me. “And I had never seen a zebra mussel before. Then, one day in June, 1991, while I was working on a research project, I turned over a rock and there was one of them attached to it. It took me a few seconds to recognize what it was. And then I found a few more. That’s when I had a premonition of the invasion to come.”

I asked him why those freshwater mussels went into hyperdrive when they came to our lakes. “You’ve got to understand the dynamics of invasion ecology,” he said. “It’s a series of dice rolls. Most organisms introduced into a new environment will fail, often because they arrive in the wrong place at the wrong time. Vast, vast numbers will die. Piranhas were dumped into the lake for years, but they can’t establish, because the temperature isn’t right for them. People will release marine species like flounder, but the salinity isn’t right for them.” His language, even his tone, was eerily reminiscent of Joan Massagué’s; he might have been describing the waves of cellular death during the establishment of metastasis. “There isn’t one factor but a series of factors that determined how and why the mussels took hold,” he went on.

“But, over all, would you say the temperature of the water was the key?” I asked.

“The water temperature’s a factor. The water chemistry would also have contributed.”

“So a combination of the temperature and the salinity?”

“But also the calcium content. That’s absolutely important.”

I added that to my list of drivers: “Temperature, salinity, calcium . . .”

“And the fact that there weren’t any well-adapted predators. The native fish in these lakes will hardly touch the mussels. Neither will most ducks.”

“Ducks?”

He sighed, as if tasked with explain-



ing an immensely complex theorem to a child. “There are many contributing factors, although some of these factors are clearly more important than others. There are probabilities attached. It’s all context-dependent.”

And so it went. For a cancer geneticist like me, it was an exercise in frustration. Every time I tried to pin down a principal cause for the *Dreissena* invasion, I was presented with another contender. Disheartened, I gave up.

Perhaps we all gave up. Considering the limitations of our knowledge, methods, and resources, our field may have had no choice but to submit to the lacerations of Occam’s razor, at least for a while. It was only natural that many cancer biologists, confronting the sheer complexity of the whole organism, trained their attention exclusively on our “pathogen”: the cancer cell. Investigating metastasis seems more straightforward than investigating non-metastasis; clinically speaking, it’s tough to study those who haven’t fallen ill. And we physicians have been drawn to the toggle-switch model of disease and health: the biopsy was positive; the blood test was negative; the scans find “no evidence of disease.” Good germs, bad germs. Ecologists, meanwhile, talk about webs of nutrition, predation, climate, to-

pography, all subject to complex feedback loops, all context-dependent. To them, invasion is an equation, even a set of simultaneous equations.

Still, at the ASCO meeting this June, on the shore of Lake Michigan, I was struck by the fact that seed-only research was increasingly making room for research that also sifted through soil, even beyond the excitement surrounding immune therapies. Going further and embracing an ecological model would cost us clarity. But over time it might gain us genuine comprehension.

Taking the denominator problem seriously beckons us toward a denominator solution. In the field of oncology, “holistic” has become a patchouli-scented catchall for untested folk remedies: raspberry-leaf tea and juice cleanses. Still, as ambitious cancer researchers study soil as well as seed, one sees the beginnings of a new approach. It would return us to the true meaning of “holistic”: to take the body, the organism, its anatomy, its physiology—this infuriatingly intricate web—as a whole. Such an approach would help us understand the phenomenon in all its vexing diversity; it would help us understand when you have cancer and when cancer has you. It would encourage doctors to ask not just what you *have* but what you are. ♦

A MUSLIM COP'S TRIAL

After an officer questioned the force's tactics, his life began to erode.

BY RACHEL AVIV

When Bobby Farid Hadid, an Algerian merchant marine, was twenty-three, he discovered that a pay phone in a train station near the Algerian shore was broken. He could call anywhere in the world free. He dialed the country code for the United States, followed by ten random numbers. Sheilla Jean-Baptiste, a young Haitian-American in New York, picked up the phone. "Hello, America?" Hadid said.

They both spoke French. They discussed their ages, their jobs, and their races. Hadid described himself as "light." Jean-Baptiste said she was black, and asked if that was O.K. She was eager to "make a friend from far away," she said. Hadid began sending her postcards and calling her from ports around the world.

They corresponded for four years, and in 1994 Hadid applied for a visa to America, where he hoped to find work. Two marines on his company's boat had been assassinated by Islamist insurgents, and he no longer felt safe in the shipping industry. He didn't know English, but he said that "it sounded like music to me: the rhythm, the way they pronounce the 'h' sound using their throats."

A week after arriving in America, Hadid, who was Muslim, met Jean-Baptiste at her parents' home. "He had one of the most welcoming faces," Jean-Baptiste said. "He wanted to know about every little thing—who, what, why?" Within a month, they married. To understand her husband's upbringing, Jean-Baptiste, who was Catholic, began reading the Quran.

Hadid rented a pushcart and sold hot dogs at Thirty-ninth Street and First Avenue. A few people mocked his accent, slipped him fake money, or threw buns at him, but for the most part Americans were "open-minded, funny, beautiful," he said. After working as a vender for a year, he was hired by Pitney Bowes to repair copy ma-

chines. On his days off, he drove a cab. At night, he lay in bed replaying the events of his day, thinking, What did I do today—did I achieve something?

On September 11, 2001, four of his colleagues at Pitney Bowes died in the attacks on the World Trade Center. Hadid watched the television for hours, crying. He thought, I have to protect this beautiful country of ours. I want to move this country forward, even if it's just by a millimetre. He enrolled at the training academy for the New York City Police Department, which was seeking Arabic speakers. As a child, he had hidden under his bed when he heard police sirens, but now the N.Y.P.D. sounded like "paradise on earth—the money, the shield," he said. He became an officer in July, 2002, at the age of thirty-five. On the wall of the couple's living room, in Astoria, Queens, he hung a two-foot photograph of the Twin Towers.

Jean-Baptiste was skeptical about his new career, but, she said, "I kept my opinion to myself." His friends were less discreet. "The N.Y.P.D. is against minorities," one told him. "Why are you going against your own community?" Hadid explained his reasoning by describing American traffic court. "Even the person who gets a parking ticket can confront the cop in front of a judge," he told them. "That's democracy, that's freedom. In this country, you can fight anyone."

Hadid thrived within the police hierarchy. The captains and lieutenants, whom he always called Cap and Lou, felt to him so superior that they seemed otherworldly. He was promoted from monitoring traffic at the foot of the Manhattan Bridge to translating and transcribing wiretaps, and then to the vice team. In 2005, he was one of only forty officers to receive a nearly perfect score on the department's language exam, earning the title "master linguist" in Arabic and French. A year later, he



After September 11, 2001, Bobby Hadid thought,



I want to move this country forward. Becoming a police officer sounded like "paradise on earth," he said.

PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRISTAAN FELBER

won a meritorious commendation from the commissioner for infiltrating a high-end prostitution ring. He dressed in a suit and a tie, exaggerated his accent, and persuaded a madam to lead him to a room where twenty Japanese teenagers were being held. "He brings to the Police Department a special talent," a supervisor wrote.

In 2007, Hadid was promoted to the rank of detective and approved for a top-secret security clearance. He became a member of the Joint Terrorism Task Force, a cell of investigators and analysts who work with the F.B.I. "I think I fulfilled my American dream," he said. He had a jolly, exuberant presence, and he easily cultivated confidential informants. He warmed them up by chatting about shared holidays and wedding rituals. In Algeria, he had taught himself a dozen Arabic dialects by watching movies with subtitles. In an evaluation that year, he was described as "an accomplished linguist who utilizes his Arabic language skills to the benefit of all" and "maintains the highest level of Police Ethics."

Hadid often prayed during his lunch breaks. His family had never been particularly religious—his sisters didn't cover themselves, and, aboard the marine ships, he used to drink and gamble—but Jean-Baptiste had converted to Islam four years into their marriage and now wore a hijab. When she began studying the Quran, he decided to reread it. They had three sons who went to Islamic Sunday school, and he wanted to be able to answer their questions. "It was embarrassing that I come to America, and they end up showing me my religion," he said. "That's my ego." He tried to adhere to the five pillars of Islam, but only when they didn't interfere with his work. He explained his approach by repeating a French saying: *Il faut suivre la mode ou quitter le pays*—"You have to follow the fashion or leave the country."

After five years on the force, Hadid was asked to work as a French interpreter on his first homicide. The body of a young Sicilian waiter, Angelo Guzzardi, had been found in a dumpster in

Brooklyn a few days before 9/11. The case had gone cold.

Hadid flew to France with two Brooklyn detectives, whose parochialism made him self-conscious. "They could not even use the bathroom without me," he said. Working alongside French officers at the Paris Police Prefecture, they interrogated a Congolese-Frenchman, Marien Theophile Mbossa Kargu, who had shared an apartment with Guzzardi in Brooklyn during the last week of his life. Kargu had drawn suspicion after he falsely told friends that Guzzardi had died in the Twin Towers. For nine hours, Kargu insisted that he knew nothing about his roommate's death.

The next day, the detectives interviewed Kargu's girlfriend, Leïla Grison, who had lived in Brooklyn with Kargu and Guzzardi. She was half Algerian. Hadid told her in French that he, too, was Algerian. Her son was biracial. Hadid had biracial sons, too. "I was using everything I had," he said. The detectives gave her coffee, food, soda, and cigarettes, but she wouldn't talk.

After three hours, Hadid tried what he called his "last resort," focussing on *hannana*, an Arabic word for the love a mother feels for her child. "I am giving you my word right now," he told her. "If you tell me exactly what happened, I promise you are going to spend tonight with your son." She started crying and asked for another cigarette. Then she began speaking more slowly. "I could feel it in her voice," Hadid said. "She is tired and wants to get it over with." She confessed that her boyfriend, who was angry at Guzzardi for giving her cocaine, had inadvertently killed him in a fistfight while she was at the laundromat. When she returned to their apartment, Kargu was on his knees, sobbing. "It was an accident," he told her.

As soon as Kargu learned that his girlfriend had given him up, he confessed, too. He said that he had tried CPR and then contemplated calling the police, but his "mind went in circles." He said, "The fact of being black and to have caused the death of a white man—this created a panic inside of me."

He wrapped Guzzardi in a garbage bag and then dropped the bag in a dumpster. Kargu and Grison flew home to Paris that night.

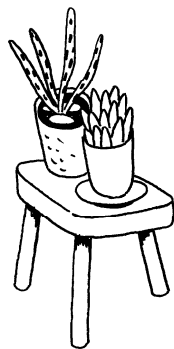
After the confessions, Hadid and the detectives stepped out of the interrogation room and hugged one another. Hadid told them, "You got your collar." They stood on the copper roof of the police station, overlooking the Seine, and took photographs. In one, Hadid wears a black suit with a wide red tie, and his gold shield hangs from the pocket of his blazer. He looks triumphant and a little cocky.

The next day, Hadid's colleagues flew back to New York, and Hadid stayed in France to visit his sister, who lived in Lille. At her house, he received a call on his cell phone from Grison, who was crying. "Please, can we just talk for few minutes?" she said. He reluctantly agreed. "I felt obligated to talk to her because of what she did, helping us to not only solve the case but to put the father of her son behind bars," he said.

Just before leaving for the U.S., Hadid met with Grison for twenty minutes at an outdoor café in Paris. Hadid was accompanied by his cousin and her son, who played nearby while they talked. Grison felt remorse for betraying her boyfriend, and she asked whether he would be extradited to America. When Hadid said that he couldn't talk about the case, she began crying again. "You did the right thing," he told her. "You have a tranquil conscience now."

A few weeks after Hadid returned to New York, Grison e-mailed him to wish him a happy New Year. Hadid showed the e-mail to Jean-Baptiste, who was sitting in the living room with two of their sons. "My whole family wishes you the same," he wrote in response. "Very good year full of happiness, prosperity, good health and overall lots of success and good hope in this life."

Hadid and the other two detectives were awarded Certificates of Appreciation by the Brooklyn District Attorney's Office, and Detectives of the Month by *The Gold Shield*, a publication of the N.Y.P.D. union. A few weeks after he returned to New York, Hadid was promoted to sergeant. "I



was very proud of that,” he said, “and I felt that I could never do enough to say, ‘Thank you, the United States, and God bless you. Thank you.’” He fantasized that, after twenty years with the force, he’d get a job in politics, maybe even end up as an aide in the White House. Once, when he and another sergeant were on Thirty-ninth Street, he said to him, “Can you believe the guy standing next to you used to sell hot dogs on this block?”

A month after he returned from France, he was summoned to the office of David Cohen, the deputy commissioner for the department’s Intelligence Division. Formerly the deputy director of the C.I.A., Cohen was appointed after 9/11 to “protect New York City from another terrorist attack,” he said. Under his direction, the Intelligence Division began treating the Muslim faith as a cause for scrutiny. The division’s new Demographics Unit sent confidential informants to infiltrate mosques, as well as cafés and bodegas, and to collect the names and license-plate numbers of congregants at religious services; video cameras were sometimes installed outside the mosques. The rationale for the surveillance was outlined in a report, “Radicalization in the West,” published by the Intelligence Division, which suggested that sites where Muslim men congregate could be “incubators,” encouraging people to embark on a path from “preradicalization” to “jihadization.” “Indicators” of radicalism included “growing a beard” and “becoming involved in social activism.” One of the sites that the N.Y.P.D. targeted was a mosque near Hadid’s apartment, where he had prayed for more than ten years.

Cohen said in a deposition that he was impressed by Hadid’s “good record of comportment,” and his “valuable experience on terrorism-related issues,” adding that “those reasons were connected to our interest in building and sustaining a counterterrorism intelligence program.” He wanted Hadid on the Citywide Debriefing Team, a secret arm of the division that was created under Cohen’s watch and that operated out of the same building as the Demographics Unit, in Chelsea. Hadid hadn’t known it existed.



“Before we begin, I’d like to tell you about the parking space I got this evening.”

Hadid and another sergeant, Frank Garcia, were tasked with supervising a team of eight officers, who interviewed arrestees at precincts, at central booking, and in their homes, gathering intelligence on “travel routes, trends, patterns, tactics, techniques and procedures which may have a nexus to terrorism as well as information on criminal activity,” as one department report put it. The people they interviewed were often immigrants, who had been arrested for petty offenses, like possession of marijuana, driving without a license, or disorderly conduct. The detectives wrote detailed chronologies of their lives, including the names and phone numbers of their relatives, and documented the contents of their wallets or pockets: bank statements, business cards, scraps of paper containing a MySpace password.

At the end of the interview, the arrestee was usually asked to become a confidential informant. “They said, ‘We’re going to send you to bodegas, to mosques, to places where your people hang out, and all you have to do is listen,’” Hadid told me. Occasionally, detectives would promise to help the arrestees with their immigration status. “They said yes because of the fear

and the pressure,” Hadid said. They were referred to a different unit, and Hadid never heard from them again.

On his new desk, Hadid placed English, Arabic, and French dictionaries, the N.Y.P.D. patrol guide, a small statue of Bob Marley, and the Quran. Against the wall of his cubicle, he propped a copper-plated picture of Al-Aqsa Mosque, in Jerusalem. Hadid said that he was approached by four analysts from the Intelligence Division who asked to look at the picture. He was happy to chat about the mosque. “It’s one of the holiest sites in Sunni Islam,” he told them.

Every few weeks, the Citywide Debriefing Team was told to focus on a “country of concern.” The nations were chosen by examining what the “current threat picture looked like,” Thomas Galati, the commanding officer of the Intelligence Division, said in a deposition, explaining that they were trying “to find those people that were radicalized towards violence.” One week, the team was instructed to debrief people from Tunisia. “This is one of my areas of expertise,” Hadid told his supervisor. “Do you have anything more specific? Do we know what we

are looking for?" Hadid said that his supervisor replied, "Any Tunisians."

When no country of concern had been designated, Hadid said that the detectives reviewed a list of the arrests made in New York City in the past twenty-four hours. "They'd look for Muhammad, Abdul, Daoud, Akbar, Hussain," Hadid said. The arrestees were sometimes questioned for up to four hours. Hadid said one detective insisted that if a person was looking forty-five degrees to the left he was lying about the details of his life. "Some of them cried," Hadid said. "They got very shaky. They were just in shock." Muslim arrestees were frequently asked to reveal the mosque where they prayed, and on which days; the schools their children attended; the airline they took when they arrived in America; how often they returned to their homeland; the jobs and addresses of family members back home; whether they'd gone on pilgrimage to Mecca or fasted on Ramadan. A Palestinian-American, arrested for an improper left-hand turn, felt compelled to tell Hadid and another detective that he was hoping for peace in the Middle East, and that he wished people would "know the true nature of Islam." In the report of his debriefing, the Palestinian-American is described three times as "nervous" and five times as "evasive." Hadid said, "Inside, I was laughing. I mean, come on, we are supposed to be fighting terrorism."

Once, Hadid said, after his team interviewed a parolee at his home in

Queens, a detective filed a debriefing report that drew attention to an Arabic video, "The Message," resting on the man's television stand. The movie, which was nominated for an Academy Award in 1978, chronicles the birth of Islam and stars Anthony Quinn. "It's a beautiful movie," Hadid told the detective, laughing. "What's the big deal?" The detective told him that the movie is about Muslims killing one another. "I have the movie," Hadid said. "You should interrogate me."

Hadid tried to participate in as few debriefings as possible. "What they were doing was wrong—it was completely stupid," he said. "I was not going to go there and be part of that." He spent more time in his office, in Chelsea, reviewing the debriefing reports filed in the past few months. "I like to read, and when I read I study—I go into depth," he told me. Of nearly six hundred reports filed in the past year, he was alarmed by how many reports focussed on Muslim men, when only three per cent of New Yorkers are Muslim. In the files, he came across a report about one of his neighbors, who had recently complained about being detained at J.F.K. airport. Hadid became worried that, as a result of the reports in the Intelligence Division's database system, people's names were being flagged when they travelled. Two members of the Citywide Debriefing Team were stationed at J.F.K., where they assisted with T.S.A. inspections and researched travellers'

histories, reservations, and payment methods. Hadid advised his detectives not to file debriefing reports unless they had information about illegal activity, a policy consistent with the department's Patrol Guide.

Often, the detectives ignored him. The Citywide Debriefing Team documented all their interviews, regardless of whether the reports contained intelligence. "We had to generate them to show that we were working," Frank Garcia, the other sergeant overseeing the team, said in a deposition. In an e-mail with the subject line "The Numbers game again," Garcia told the officers, "We must play the game."

Rumors circulated that Hadid had been denied a top-secret security clearance, which was not true. Donald Powers, the commanding officer of the Intelligence Division's Investigations Unit, said in a deposition that he heard Hadid "had only been granted a secret clearance, not a TS clearance," and interpreted it as "some type of warning." He assumed that there had been "derogatory information" in Hadid's record, he said, because "there is usually a negative reason why you're not granted that." A memo summarizing a private meeting between a lieutenant and a sergeant in the Intelligence Division noted that Hadid "refused to give up his Algerian citizenship and voted in the last Algerian elections." (Hadid had retained his citizenship—"I'm not going to forget my roots," he said—but he hadn't voted in the elections.)

After Hadid had been with the unit for five months, seven senior officers in the Intelligence Division held a meeting about him. According to a memo that outlined the conversation, the group discussed whether he was travelling in the city alone, without a partner, while on duty. There was also concern that Hadid's office was "in close proximity to the Analytical Shop," where confidential paperwork was kept. The memo said, "Hadid disappeared on Fridays to attend prayer service."

Cohen ordered the Investigations Unit to start an internal probe of Hadid. An integrity-control officer, William Brosnan, "will conduct surveillance," a memo said. In a deposition, Cohen explained that Brosnan would investigate



"Someone dropped me as a baby."

“if there is a pattern of departures at a certain time, certain day—whatever it is—and simply monitor Sergeant Hadid’s movement at roughly those times to see where he goes.” Cohen said, “If Sergeant Hadid gets in another car, starts it up and drives away, then Lieutenant Brosnan on surveillance follow him.”

In the years after the World Trade Center attacks, Muslim officers found themselves promoted to prestigious units because of their linguistic and cultural knowledge. A 2005 article in the *Wall Street Journal* announced that the N.Y.P.D. was “reaching out to immigrants” who want to take “Islam back from terrorist groups.” But their newly elevated status could also make them look like interlopers. In a 2008 lawsuit, a Muslim Egyptian officer in the Intelligence Division’s Cyber Unit complained that his colleagues told him that Muslims had no place in law enforcement, and that they should be operating hot-dog carts instead. Mohsin Aftab, a Muslim officer from Pakistan who worked in the Demographics Unit in 2005, told me that after he expressed doubts about the purpose of eavesdropping on mundane conversations between Muslims he was transferred. “I asked simple questions, like ‘Why do we have to do this report?’” he said. “They sent me packing. My heart was broken.” He said, “I did not get support from fellow-Muslims, because everyone is so scared of losing their jobs.”

The N.Y.P.D.’s Internal Affairs Bureau, which at the time had a staff of seven hundred and fifty people and a two-million-dollar budget, seemed especially attentive to the activities of Muslim and Arabic-speaking officers. The bureau investigates officers who have fallen under suspicion, using surveillance and sting operations called Integrity Tests. Charles Campisi, who ran the Internal Affairs Bureau between 1996 and 2014, wrote in his memoir, “Blue on Blue,” published this year, that the “prospect of a terrorist infiltration of the NYPD ranks isn’t just some vague, half-formed nightmare on my part.” He asks, “How hard is it to imagine that there could be an NYPD cop out there who’s willing to cross to the other side? . . . Or a cop who could use the trust built up over the course of years

to penetrate the NYPD’s world-class intelligence and counterterrorism apparatus?” Preventing this outcome, he writes, requires “constant, proactive Internal Affairs or counterintelligence monitoring,” as well as adherence to “the old admonition: If you see something, or hear something, or even just suspect something, then say something.”

One officer, who was teaching himself Arabic, was reported to the Internal Affairs Bureau after his supervisor saw him browsing luggage on an Arabic Web site. The bureau spent a year surveilling and investigating him, and staged an Integrity Test in which a man posed as an imam.

Mohamed Abdelal, an officer born in Egypt, came under suspicion in 2008, after he tried, on his day off, to visit a jailed Egyptian businessman, who had embezzled money from a friend of Abdelal’s. A sergeant at the jail alerted the Internal Affairs Bureau. “Everything going on in our country, unfortunately these are signs and things that we look out and prepare ourselves for,” the sergeant said at Abdelal’s administrative trial. “It’s not profiling, it’s nothing. It’s just putting one and one together equals two.”

For a year, Abdelal said, undercover I.A.B. agents monitored his home; investigated his family, his friends, and his father’s business, a travel agency, and consulted with Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and the Secret Service about his movements. (The N.Y.P.D. denies investigating his family.) He was also subjected to two Integrity Tests by an undercover officer with a fake Arabic name. Abdelal told me, “They were trying to do a gotcha—to show I was part of a sleeper cell or something. They dissected everything about my life.”

Once, when Abdelal was spending the day with a college friend, a dentist visiting from Ohio, he noticed that a man wearing a black T-shirt and carrying a small black duffelbag appeared to be following them. Abdelal and his friend entered different stores, to see if the man would do the same. After the man followed them in and out of a Baskin-Robbins and back into a cigar shop, Abdelal began video-recording him with his phone. “Is there a reason you’re following us?” he asked. The man stared straight ahead, chewing gum, and

said nothing. “I just want to know,” Abdelal continued. “You got to keep up if you’re going to follow us.” Silent, the man kept chewing.

No new information emerged from I.A.B.’s probes. The department charged Abdelal with improperly identifying himself at the jail visit and failing to seek approval from his commanding officer. For this, along with a few other minor violations, he was terminated from the department. The deputy commissioner of trials, however, wrote that “none of these, even in combination, would ordinarily justify termination.”

Abdelal told me, “It’s very hard to lose your job at the N.Y.P.D. unless you have committed a crime,” adding, “Even cops who have done heinous things—they still got to keep their jobs.” (The officer who was responsible for Eric Garner’s death is still on the force.) Abdelal continues to be haunted by the idea that someone is watching him. “There’s always this feeling of ‘Who’s following me? Who’s recording me?’” he said. When he learned that Muslim civilians were being surveilled by the N.Y.P.D. at mosques and cafés, he wasn’t surprised. He said, “The department was doing the same thing on the outside as the inside.”

Hadid was transferred out of the Intelligence Division in May, 2009, after only a year. An audit of his e-mails and an investigation by the integrity-control officer had revealed a discrepancy between the number of debriefings that Hadid had reported and the number of reports filed in the Intelligence Division’s database system. He was accused of asking officers to falsify debriefings, a charge he denied. “The investigation reveals at a minimum that Sergeant Hadid has failed to supervise his subordinates,” David Cohen wrote in a memo. The F.B.I. was instructed to shut off Hadid’s security clearance.

He was put on the midnight patrol shift in the 115th Precinct, in northern Queens, which has a sizable Muslim population. He worried that residents there would recognize his face from the debriefings. The move from plainclothes to uniform felt like a demotion, but he still took pride in the work. In an evaluation performed in 2010, his supervisor



With the boss unhappy, several members of the White House family—Priebus, Scaramucci, Flynn, Manafort, Bannon, Spicer—have



fallen like so many casualties in a Cagney flick.

wrote, “Sergeant Hadid consistently reflects a high level of integrity and professionalism. He carries out department policy in an exemplary manner.”

But Hadid felt as if something had shifted: he had lost the department’s trust. Hadid said that when he called in sick one day—for the first time in seven years—a lieutenant from his precinct paid a surprise visit to his house and asked to see his cough medication. Then he was subjected to an Integrity Test. An officer called him, pretending to be a journalist, and asked him about a local crime. Hadid passed the test: he directed the journalist to contact the public-information office.

In October, 2010, officers from the Paris Police Prefecture flew to Brooklyn for Kargu’s murder trial. Hadid invited the French detectives to his house for dinner. His mother, visiting from Algeria, made couscous for them.

Hadid had never testified in court before. The clerk instructed him to raise his hand and swear to tell the truth. He left his hand in the air until the clerk, smiling, told him that he could put it down. When Hadid is nervous, he has to play phrases in his mind twice, first in Arabic and then translated into English, a strategy that he resorted to during his cross-examination. Kargu’s defense attorney, William Martin, spoke rapidly, asking Hadid about seemingly unrelated subjects; at times, neither of them seemed to understand what the other was saying.

“Do you have a wife that’s black?” Martin asked.

“Yes, I do, very proudly,” Hadid said.

“Very probably?” Martin said, mishearing. “You’re not sure?”

“Very proudly, right.”

Martin questioned Hadid about Leïla Grison, asking why they had talked about the death penalty.

“About what?” Hadid asked.

“The death penalty.”

“To whom?”

At one point, Martin said, “You indicated that the last time you had communication with her—correct me if I’m wrong—was at or around the time she was in French custody, correct?”

“That is correct,” Hadid said. “Yes, sir, I said that.” Hadid had never said that, but he was so flustered that he

said he was acting like a “donkey wearing blinkers.”

Martin then confronted Hadid with his e-mail to Grison, which ended with the sign-off *Je vous embrasse et à plus*. The phrase translates as “I kiss all of you and see you later.” According to Joanna Dezio, who designed the test used to evaluate the proficiency of French court interpreters in the U.S., the phrase is equivalent to saying, in English, “Best to all of you, later.”

Martin began referring to Hadid as Hot Lips Hadid, and implied that Hadid was trying to steal Grison from her husband. “Your lips get hot, and you start thinking about that which you should not think about,” he said. “If you’ve got the hots for the man’s wife, do you think there’s a motive for him to lie, for him to add certain facts, for him to eliminate certain facts?” Martin later acknowledged that he had no evidence of an affair, but, like any seasoned defense attorney, he worked with what he had to damage the credibility of the prosecution’s witnesses. (When Grison was told she’d been accused of having an affair with Hadid, she said, “Wrong! Never!”)

Hadid’s mother and wife were cooking in the kitchen when Hadid got home that evening. “He stomped into the house,” Jean-Baptiste said. “He was about to explode. When we heard what happened in court, we said, ‘Oh, please. How can they even think something like that?’”

Kargu was convicted of manslaughter. Soon afterward, the N.Y.P.D.’s Internal Affairs Bureau began an investigation of Hadid that hinged on Martin’s suggestion of an affair. The department contacted the Homeland Security Inspector General’s office and obtained all of Hadid’s travel records since 1998. “There have been travels to Mexico, Morocco, Canada,” Jason Siragusa, a sergeant in Internal Affairs, wrote. Siragusa interviewed the two other detectives who had worked on the Kargu case in Paris, and they reported that they never saw Hadid speak to Grison alone. The bureau sent subpoenas to Microsoft and to Hotmail for Hadid’s e-mail records, and Siragusa obtained logs of all the calls to and from Hadid, his wife, and their oldest son. Siragusa estimated that he spent roughly a hundred hours

trying to determine whether Hadid and Grison had had a relationship. Beyond the one e-mail exchange, he concluded, "I would have to say that I do not have any evidence of that." Charles Campisi, the chief of the bureau, told me, "We couldn't prove a personal relationship, but we knew there was something personal going on. Can't really prove that."

On April 8, 2011, just before midnight, Hadid arrived at the 115th Precinct and signed in at the front desk. As he wrote "PFD"—present for duty—he became aware of two lieutenants in plainclothes standing on either side of him. They asked him if he was carrying a gun. "No, no—I have kids," Hadid said. They escorted him upstairs to his locker, removed his service weapon, emptied the magazines, and counted the bullets. Then they told him that he was being stripped of his gun, badge, and uniform.

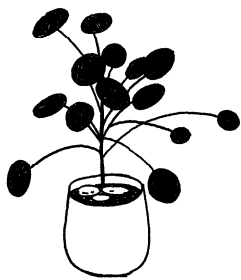
The lieutenants would not disclose the reason. That night, Hadid and his wife lay in bed trying to figure out what he'd done wrong. Hadid had once borrowed a colleague's service car and parked it near his house; during the night, it had been hit by another car. He was responsible for damaging department property. "I told him that can be the only thing," Jean-Baptiste said.

Four days later, he learned that he'd been indicted for perjury. Perjury indictments typically include the statements that led to the charge, but Hadid's police-union lawyer, Andrew Quinn, said, "That didn't happen in this case, for reasons I do not understand." Hadid was given no information about when or how he had lied.

He was reassigned to the VIPER (Video Interactive Patrol Enhanced Response) unit in the Van Dyke housing project, in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn. VIPER is the N.Y.P.D.'s netherworld, a holding cell for those who have fallen into disfavor. Hadid's new colleagues included officers who were being investigated because they'd been accused of domestic violence, taking bribes, or injuring suspects. He said that officers laughed when he explained why he'd been sent to VIPER. "A relationship in Paris?" one cop told

him. "That's going to be all cleared out."

Hadid and twenty other officers sat in a room with some thirty closed-circuit-television systems trained on courtyards, elevators, lobbies, and playgrounds in the housing complex. If they observed residents doing anything that might be suspicious, Hadid said, they zoomed in on the image. They were not permitted to go outside and interact with the public, so when they thought an arrest was warranted they called a local precinct. Once, on his break, Hadid heard other cops laughing about how another officer had zoomed in on a couple having sex on a rooftop. Hadid didn't understand why the N.Y.P.D.



"trusted crooked cops watching cameras."

Hadid said that as he waited for his trial he kept getting disciplined for minor violations, such as allowing an officer to sign in two minutes late without notifying his superiors. For the first time in his career, he was told that he couldn't take a day off for the Muslim holiday Eid al-Fitr until he submitted a signed letter from the mosque in his neighborhood. (Abdelal, the Egyptian-American officer who was fired in 2013, said that when he asked for a day off for Eid al-Fitr, whose date depends on the lunar calendar, his supervisor said, "What are you, a bunch of werewolves?")

Kargu's defense attorney, Martin, told me that he was shocked to learn that Hadid had been indicted for perjury. He has been a lawyer for more than thirty years, and he said that there had been instances when he brought prosecutors evidence that certain cops were lying. "The D.A.'s office couldn't care less," he said. "Quite frankly, cops know they will get a free pass. Why are they prosecuting Hadid when he's done nothing different than what they all do?" He added, "He is now being subjected to what his Muslim brothers are subjected to."

Three days before his trial, in October, 2012, Hadid learned that his indictment concerned eight words from Kargu's trial—his reply ("That is correct. Yes, sir, I said that") to Martin's question about his last exchange with Grison—and five words from a pretrial

hearing: he had indicated that he had not translated for the Brooklyn detectives who were interviewing Grison, a nonsensical statement, since he had already made it clear that he had.

Hadid waived a jury trial. The judge told him, "Obviously, at the heart of this is what your relationship was with Ms. Grison and whether you concealed that relationship." A perjury conviction requires false testimony that is deliberate.

Melissa Carvajal, the Assistant District Attorney who had prosecuted Kargu, took the witness stand. She testified that Hadid had "flown to France twice" and that he and Grison had "a romantic relationship." Her knowledge, she said, was based on a conversation she overheard between Kargu and Martin during a recess at trial. She said that at the trial she'd also seen papers on Martin's table, which she assumed were additional e-mails between Hadid and Grison.

"I saw a lot of paperwork," she said.

"And you never read any other e-mails, correct?" Quinn, Hadid's lawyer, asked.

"Right, but they were in French. So I don't speak."

"Could you even see that they were e-mails, or was it just a folder with paperwork?"

"It was notes, right," she said. "I could not say what they were."

He went on, "And you were told that my client flew twice to France to meet with Ms. Grison?"

"Yes."

"Has anyone in the Brooklyn D.A.'s office or the New York City Police Department done any investigation to determine whether or not there is any truth to that allegation?"

"No, I have no idea," she said.

Martin said that he received a call from the District Attorney's Office in the middle of the trial. "They were trying to find out if I had any extra information which would lead to something more," he said. Martin said that he couldn't help.

After Carvajal's testimony, Hadid came to court with his U.S. and Algerian passports, which showed that he had not been to France since 2007, when he was working on the Kargu case. The Assistant District Attorney proposed that he had entered through a neighboring country.

In his closing statements, Hadid's lawyer complained, "The foundation of this indictment—that my client had a romantic relationship with Leïla Grison—is built on an overheard conversation between a guy who is accused of murdering somebody," he said. "It is outrageous that my client gets indicted based on that, with no effort, zero effort, to corroborate whether or not any of it is true." The Internal Affairs Bureau had made extensive and unsuccessful efforts to corroborate the relationship, but the investigation was never disclosed.

The judge, Alan Marrus, accepted the prosecution's claim that Hadid and Grison had exchanged several e-mails, and concluded that "the perjury in this case represented an intent to conceal a personal relationship." He found Hadid guilty of one count of perjury in the first degree, a felony. The next day, the *New York Post* ran an article with the headline "COP IS GUILTY OF AMOUR."

The Assistant District Attorney argued that Hadid should spend a year in prison. "He is still claiming innocence, which indicates that the defendant has no remorse," she said. The judge sentenced him to five years of probation. He was dismissed from the N.Y.P.D.

Hadid tried to get a license for a food cart, so that he could sell hot dogs again, but, with a felony on his record, the city's Department of Health wouldn't grant one. His license to drive his cab was suspended for the same reason. Jean-Baptiste, a preschool teacher, had been laid off in 2010 and hadn't found another job. Their monthly mortgage payments accumulated, until a collection agency placed a lien on their house. Hadid stopped sending money to his family in Algeria, but he was too ashamed to tell them why; he worried that his parents would think he'd become selfish. He looked for televisions on the sidewalk or in the garbage, fixed them, and tried to resell them. His family went on food stamps.

His closest friend from Algeria, who now lived in Queens, asked friends for donations for Hadid but kept his pitch vague, because he assumed that people in the neighborhood would feel less generous if they learned that Hadid had worked for the N.Y.P.D. (The friend asked me not to use his name, because

he was afraid that if he was publicly associated with Hadid his name would somehow be flagged by law enforcement.) The friend said that his community had little sympathy for Muslim cops, ever since the Demographics Unit's surveillance of Muslims had been exposed by the Associated Press, in 2011. The Demographics Unit shut down in 2014, and, a month later, an article in the *Times*, by Joseph Goldstein, disclosed the existence of the Citywide Debriefing Team, suggesting that the N.Y.P.D. still appeared to be profiling Muslims.

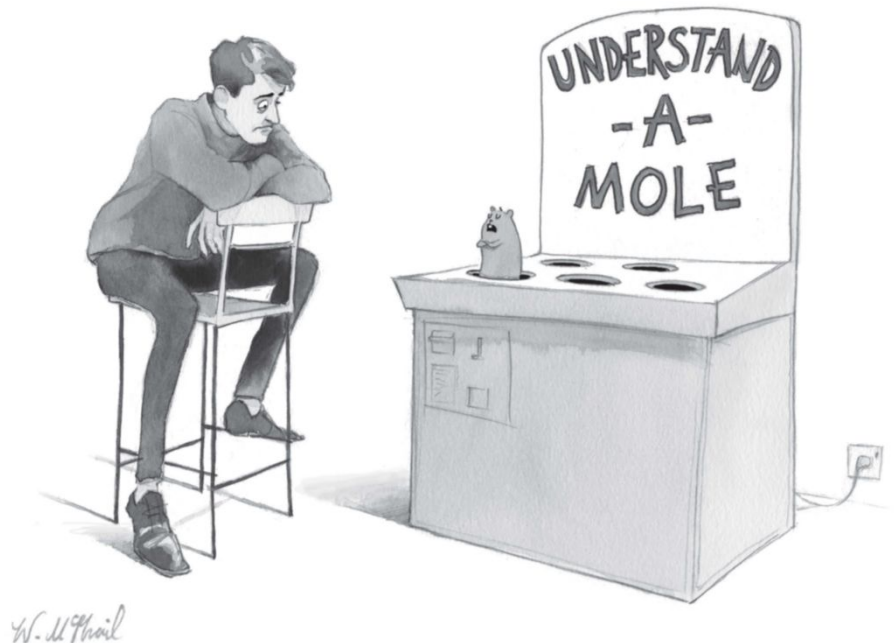
Hadid had by then become so convinced of the N.Y.P.D.'s omnipotence that he was under the mistaken impression that it had retaliated against the editor of the *Times* article by having her sent to a new post in Afghanistan, to silence her. He struck me as an optimistic and stable person, so I was surprised to learn that he thought the N.Y.P.D. controlled other industries. When his wife told him, "It's just in your mind," he no longer believed her. Like Abdelal, long after he'd been fired he was afraid that Internal Affairs officers were listening to his calls. Every time he spoke on the phone, he said, "I felt like I was talking to them."

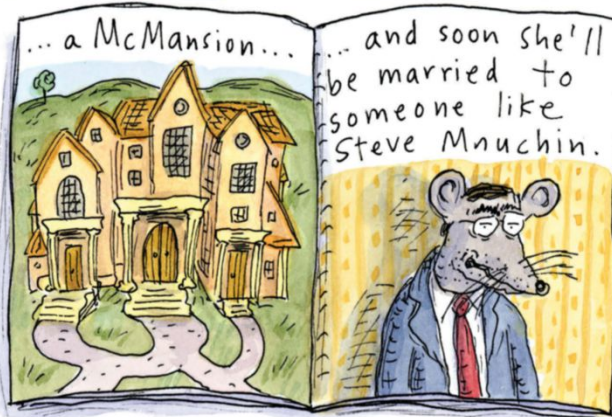
In late 2014, the appellate division of the New York State Supreme Court vacated Hadid's conviction. "The prosecution failed to prove that Hadid intentionally made a statement he did not

believe to be true," the judges wrote in a unanimous decision. The court dismissed the underlying indictment, ruling that the evidence against Hadid was legally insufficient. "Hadid's statement was a mistake," the judges wrote.

Hadid requested that the police department reinstate him, but he received no response. He filed a lawsuit against the N.Y.P.D. and the Brooklyn District Attorney's Office, arguing that he had been the subject of a "malicious prosecution." The city maintains that there was probable cause for Hadid's indictment, and that his "conduct raised so many doubts about his judgment, reliability, trustworthiness, and personal integrity." In a deposition last year, David Cohen said that Hadid lost his position in the Intelligence Division because of "performance issues that were severe enough to warrant his departure." He also dismissed the idea that detectives in the Citywide Debriefing Team looked for Muslim- or Arabic-sounding names. "I don't know what an Arabic-sounding name is," he said. "Who knows what an Arabic-sounding name is?"

Hadid's supervisor, Hector Berdicia, told me that Hadid was a "problem child," and said that when Hadid worked at the Citywide Debriefing Team he had an affair with a Moroccan F.B.I. informant who was a waitress—an accusation that doesn't appear in any of the internal-affairs records I reviewed. I met





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the woman in question. She had never been an informant; she worked at Europa Café, where Hadid and other officers in his unit sometimes went on their lunch break. She has a husband and three children and was offended that anyone would mistake her conversations with Hadid at the diner for something illicit. She had immigrated from Casablanca in 2003 and occasionally asked Hadid questions about schools in New York and the English language. “Let me tell you something, one of the things about us—I’m talking about Arabs—maybe we help each other in a different way,” she said. “Not everybody

does that here in America.” She added, “I was so proud to see someone from my culture make it as a cop.”

Hadid’s lawsuit was dismissed last winter, primarily because prosecutors are entitled to absolute immunity. He is currently appealing, but proving a case of retaliation or discrimination is often doomed; rather than a smoking gun, there tends to be an accumulation of adverse events and subtle stereotypes that shape a career. In a workforce with so many guidelines for conduct, rules can be selectively enforced, and small violations can become a pre-

text for punishing other wrongs. I reviewed all the disciplinary orders in the N.Y.P.D. between January, 2012, and April, 2016, and found disparate punishments for the same violation. Hadid’s main offense—associating with someone who engaged in criminal activity—resulted in the termination of only eight per cent of guilty officers; for the majority, the punishment was lost vacation days; for a few, the punishment was an “instruction.”

In the past three years, four federal discrimination lawsuits have been brought against the N.Y.P.D. by Muslim officers. Last winter, a Muslim officer

sued the city after fellow-officers allegedly tried to rip off her hijab and referred to her as a “terrorist” who might “detonate on patrol.”

Luna Droubi, a lawyer who filed a class-action complaint last year on behalf of officers who have beards for religious reasons and have been penalized for growing them, told me that there was a “massive influx of Muslim officers who joined the N.Y.P.D. to help fight a branch of their religion that they disagreed with. But they’ve lost the energy to fight the battle, because they have to fight the battle of being Muslim on a day-to-day basis in their own work.”

Masood Syed, the officer who initiated the lawsuit, told me that he often gets “this disgusted look” from his supervisors and colleagues because he has a beard. They seem to be asking, “Why can’t you assimilate? Assimilate or quit,” he said. (He was dismayed recently when he saw a red “Make America Great Again” hat in a display case at a police-training facility in the Bronx.) A Muslim detective who has been on the force for more than ten years told me that when he talks to his wife on the phone in Arabic other officers look at him as if he were communicating in some sort of dangerous code. “I request that Muslim cops be treated like everybody else,” he said. “If we had any intention of being terrorists, we would never have joined the N.Y.P.D.”

The department’s new leadership has worked to repair its relationship with Muslims, and two lawsuits challenging the department’s surveillance of Muslims have led to court-mandated reforms: the department is prohibited from investigations motivated by race, religion, or national origin, and a civilian representative will now monitor the way that the department gathers counterterrorism intelligence. John Miller, the deputy commissioner for Intelligence and Counterterrorism, told me that previous administrations did a “very lousy job explaining themselves. There is a narrative that is attached that will not un-attach now.” He said he recognizes that “you can’t take a decade of mistrust and wipe that out on the idea that there’s a new sheriff in town and everything is going to be all right.” Putting away “the baggage we are carrying from the old narrative,” he said, is more

difficult in an era in which stereotypes about Muslims are reinforced by the country’s President. He went on, “If there was a group that suffered from this more than the others, it would be that small but really important Muslim community within the N.Y.P.D.—the nearly one thousand Muslim officers who had to answer to their communities.”

Hadid has applied for nearly a thousand jobs, most of them with the city. Last winter, the Department of Corrections called back. Hadid was so nervous that on the day of the interview he woke up at 3:48 A.M. “Two questions were playing in my head all morning,” he told me on the way to the interview: “Were you ever arrested? Were you ever convicted?”

In his car, in the parking lot, he rehearsed his responses. “Unfortunately, yes, there were some circumstances,” he said in a robotically professional tone. “I was falsely accused of having an affair in Paris.” He paused. “When I say that, they are going to look at me like—” He scrunched his face. In his pocket, he had a folded letter from the clerk of the New York Supreme Court certifying that “the above action was dismissed and all pending criminal charges related to this action were also dismissed.” He held it as if it might disintegrate. “Do you think I should keep the letter in my pocket or in my briefcase?” he asked me. He also wondered if he could segue from the Paris story to a discussion of his “multicultural skills,” as he called them.

He emerged from the interview elated and breathless. He had detailed responses to every question, drawing on a decade of experience. But, as the days passed and there was no follow-up call, he felt foolish for having suggested to his children that he might get the job. It was his sixth interview with the city that had gone great, it seemed, followed by no response. He wondered if his name had somehow been flagged. “Maybe they are thinking, If he’s so qualified, why does he look so desperate?” he said.

Last winter, when it became clear that he would not soon get a job, Hadid began driving a cab again. He leaves his house at 4:30 A.M. and rents a taxi at a garage two blocks away. It

costs a hundred and forty dollars to rent the car for a twelve-hour shift; he doesn’t start making money until the afternoon. He packs provisions in his backpack: a box of Honey Bunches of Oats, tea biscuits, Moroccan bubble gum, three Naproxen pills for back pain, and a bag of Clancy’s corn chips. He tries not to drink more than one bottle of water each day, so that he doesn’t have to waste time going to the bathroom.

He has become preternaturally attuned to the figure of a white woman between the ages of sixty and eighty stepping into the street and looking both ways. He usually spends at least three hours a day with an empty cab, often after delivering a passenger to the airport. He has little desire to play dominoes in the airport lounge with the other cabdrivers, most of whom are men who have recently come to America and express faith that with hard work their careers will rise, their lives will improve, and they will feel that they belong. He cleans his car or reads a book. He made better money when he drove a cab in the nineties, before the advent of Uber. But he still prefers to work than to stay at home. “Even if I only get a dollar, I still get to talk and listen to good people,” he said. He has learned how to greet passengers in Spanish, Haitian Creole, and Mandarin, in addition to Arabic, English, and French.

Conversations in his taxi almost always begin the same way: compliments about his English and then a question about how long he’s been driving a cab. Hadid explains that he began driving twenty years ago, stopped for fifteen years, and returned. Then he tries to “give them their silence,” he said. “I understand that—I respect that. I put them exactly where they want to go.”

But people sometimes press for details, and Hadid happily obliges. It doesn’t take much to get him going, as long as he feels that the passenger is old or disillusioned enough to understand. He tells the story of his career and its devolution. When the ride is over, he thanks the person for listening. “Maybe they think I’m cuckoo, or some bullshit garbage Muslim,” he said. “But, when I talk to them, at least I feel that they have a little understanding, a little feeling, of what happened to a Muslim cop.” ♦



F.A.Q.s
ALLEGRA
GOODMAN

Phoebe found the house almost unchanged. Same furniture, same couch cushions worn out in the same old places, practically the same stack of magazines. Phoebe's parents, Melanie and Dan, looked just as they had when she left them, and so their new coffeemaker startled her.

"Where did that come from?"

"Your mother bought it."

"The old one broke," Melanie said, defending herself. Of course, Phoebe saw that the new machine stood right where the scrap bucket had been. All composting had ceased the minute she went to college. *Sweetie, it smelled so bad* had been Melanie's excuse.

And yet Phoebe's parents had planted vegetables with her when she was little. They had hired a handyman to build a chicken coop in the back yard. The coop stood empty now, just a few downy feathers blowing in the wind. Beginning of freshman year, a fox had killed the hen named Scout. Weeks after that, Scout's sister, Carrie, had disappeared. During spring semester, the last chicken, Mrs. Dalloway, had passed. Sometimes Phoebe questioned the level of care Mrs. Dalloway had received from Melanie and Dan. They had reverted so quickly to supermarket eggs.

"I'll carry those," Dan said.

"No, that's O.K." Phoebe shouldered her backpack and dragged her giant duffel upstairs. Nervously, her parents followed, weighted down with unasked questions. Was the boyfriend really history? Was Phoebe done homesteading? Could she register for school again?

"Let me help you get that through the door." Dan picked up the bottom of the duffel and squeezed the bag sausage-like through the doorframe. Phoebe was already inside, gazing at another alien acquisition, an elliptical trainer in the middle of her room. "We can move it." Dan had opposed the purchase, predicting, correctly, that it would gather dust. Dan had knee problems, so he never exercised.

"We'll take it down to the basement," Melanie said. She had installed the trainer in Phoebe's room because she felt closer to her there. Two birds. She'd missed her daughter, and she was trying to lose weight. Missing trumped

motivation, however, and after several minutes of exercise Melanie usually ended up lying on Phoebe's bed.

When Phoebe turned on the machine, she heard a trilling sound like bells.

"WELCOME " she read on the small screen. "HOW OLD ARE YOU?" Phoebe typed "100."

Without blinking, the machine asked "HOW MUCH DO YOU WEIGH?"

Once again, Phoebe typed "100."

"I got you rice milk," Melanie said. "And oat cakes," she added hopefully. Phoebe looked so thin. Her long blond hair had lost its spring and trailed down her back; she'd tied it with a repurposed rubber band.

Melanie opened the closet door, revealing bins of clothes and toys, boxed board games and puzzles, including the Great Barrier Reef and the Solar System. On the top shelf lay Grandma Jeanne's violin in its brown-cloth-covered case, but no one mentioned it.

Dan said, "We can consolidate these boxes."

Melanie said, "I'll get more hangers."

"Hey, it's almost midnight. Don't you have work tomorrow?" Phoebe ushered her parents out into the hall.

She was so tired she didn't even brush her teeth. She undressed completely and slipped between clean sheets.

Phoebe did not come down the next morning.

"Is she O.K.?" Melanie asked.

"What do you mean? She's exhausted, obviously." Dan spoke as though Melanie had missed the point entirely, although he was just as anxious. He hovered in the kitchen while Melanie washed dishes. Then he followed her upstairs, where the two of them waited in the hallway, each willing the other to knock first. Their daughter was home safe, but silent. They felt such joy and dread.

At last Melanie called, "Phoebe?"

No answer.

"Let her rest," Dan said.

Reluctantly, they left for work in separate cars. Dan drove to Progressive Insurance, and Melanie headed for New Jersey Medical. At ten o'clock, she texted Phoebe: *I left you granola.*

At noon, she texted her again: *Did you get some sleep?* Then at one: *Phoebe? Are you there?*

Still no answer. Was Phoebe really sleeping? Her bedroom had been preternaturally still. Not a rustle, not a breath had escaped the cracks around the door. What if she had done something? Taken something? Drugged herself to disappear?

Melanie was getting ready to drive home when Phoebe texted: *Yes.*

Thank God. Melanie felt grateful and foolish. Now she could go about her day. Then she wondered, Did yes mean of course I'm here; leave me alone? Or was it a broader affirmation? Yes, oh yes, granola with flaxseeds, rolled oats, dried cranberries. Yes, I have returned.

The first few days, Phoebe listened to music with her headphones on. She said she was unpacking, but she never did hang up her shirts or fill her dresser drawers.

When she had the energy, she pulled clean clothes from her suitcase. At night, she left her dirty laundry on the floor. After she had worn all the shirts and underwear she owned, she did the wash. Then she rigged up a clothesline in the back yard. Dan saw her from the kitchen window, tying one end of a nylon rope to the back porch and the other to the crab apple. She made a neat job of it; she'd even found a tub of clothespins. Methodically, she hung her clothes up on the line. After that burst of activity, she drifted back inside and slept.

"Obviously, she needs it," Dan reasoned.

"I don't know," Melanie said.

They remembered how much she used to sleep when she returned from summer camp, but this was different. After a week at home, she still couldn't stay awake.

Melanie worried about mono, ticks, and Lyme disease. She kept saying, "I think we should take you in." But Phoebe said no.

"What did he do to you?" Dan was always blaming Phoebe's ex.

"Oh, come on," Phoebe said, because did he really think she would tell him anything about her boyfriend?

"Could you be pregnant?" Melanie

asked, when she got Phoebe alone.
“Mom!”

Melanie was always looking for a diagnosis; Dan had to find someone to blame.

Each day, Phoebe waited in her room until they left for work. Then she would come down and sort the pictures on her phone. Photos from college; photos from the farm and her year off. This took a long time, because she studied each one before she made it disappear. Once, she ventured into the back yard. She checked the empty coop. She rolled her bike out of the garage and pumped up the tires. Then she rolled it back inside.

She felt disembodied, ghostly. She lived like Emily Dickinson. Yeah, right. She wished! No poems came to her, although she had the recluse part down. Phoebe watched little children play across the street, and imagined lowering a basket of gingerbread as Dickinson had done. Of course, she'd get arrested. Food from strangers, nut allergies. She practiced flitting behind blinds instead.

At dusk, her parents returned like chattering birds. The house was small, with thin walls and one narrow upstairs hallway, so Phoebe heard all the arguments. How long would this go on? Could she reënroll past August? She should have been starting junior year. Should they pay for the fall semester? No! Obviously not, Dan declared. Not if she isn't taking classes. Well, then, what should they do? What should they say? Phoebe had spent sophomore year living with Chris, and now they weren't together. But what did it mean? And what would happen next? Phoebe was frighteningly calm. She said nothing, did nothing, wanted nothing. Melanie thought Phoebe should see somebody. Dan said, Great, rush her into therapy.

Listening in bed, Phoebe remembered how her parents had fought when she was little. Once, her father had told her mother, “If you're that unhappy, *leave*,” and Melanie had driven off in the car. She'd returned an hour later. She'd only gone as far as Edison.

From an early age, Phoebe had kept the family together. Melanie was tired; Dan was out of patience. Therefore, Phoebe had worked as

hard as possible. Math, poetry, physics, and violin had filled her days—especially violin. In high school, she had practiced at least three hours a day. Now, as her parents snapped at each other, she thought of ways to reassure them. She would apply for internships. Teacher training? Arts administration? She would draft a five-year plan. The trouble was getting out of bed. Most days, she managed, but she didn't always make it down the stairs.

True to character, Dan lost it first. He turned to Phoebe at dinner and said, “All right, you've been here almost two weeks.”

Melanie interrupted, “This is her home, Dan.”

“You've been sleeping, what, twelve, fourteen hours a day?”

Melanie said, “You can see that she's run-down.”

Dan continued speaking to Phoebe. “What you're doing isn't healthy, and it isn't fair.”

“What do you mean, ‘fair’?” Melanie demanded.

“It's not fair to the rest of us! From now on we're having some house rules. First of all, no pajamas at the table.”

Melanie protested, “She's not wearing—”

“She wore them yesterday. Second of all.” Dan paused to think of his second point. “No sleeping more than ten hours. You have got to pull yourself together!”

Melanie left the table.

Late that night, Phoebe heard a clattering of dishes in the kitchen as Melanie took Dan to task. “You don't just tell someone to pull herself together.”

Dan said, “I'm not walking on eggshells while my twenty-year-old daughter regresses.”

“She's not regressing. She's recovering.”

“She's growing *down*!”

Lying in bed, her feet rooting around underneath the covers, Phoebe imagined herself a misfit carrot, a fingerling potato.

“She doesn't drive; she doesn't even ride her bike. She was more capable at twelve. At ten! I'm calling her on it.”

“You know that doesn't work.”

“Oh, now you're speaking from experience?”

Melanie's voice wobbled. “I know it doesn't work.”

“So what would you suggest?”

The next night at dinner, Phoebe told her parents she was sorry. She was really, really sorry.

“Don't apologize,” Dan said. “Don't sit there apologizing to the world. Get up and do something.”

Phoebe said that she would wash the dishes. When she was done, she sat with Melanie on the couch, while Dan leaned back with his laptop in the reading chair.

Emboldened, Melanie hugged Phoebe. “You're great.”

This was lame, so Phoebe didn't answer.

“Breaking up is hard, but you'll get through this,” Melanie said.

Embarrassed for her mother, Phoebe patted Melanie on the shoulder.

Melanie hesitated. Then she said, “We've got Uncle Steve and Aunt Andrea coming over with the boys on Friday night, O.K.?”

“Why are you asking? Are you asking her permission?” Steve was Dan's brother and lived only three miles away.

“I'm not asking.”

“That's what it sounded like.”

“I wasn't asking a question. Even if I was!”

“Oh, my God,” Phoebe said. “Stop.”

Immediately the bickering ended. Bright-eyed, expectant, her parents turned toward her. Their daughter had come alive again.

Were they expecting a major speech? A manifesto? Phoebe had nothing.

“I just wanted to give you the heads-up,” Melanie said.

“It's fine,” Phoebe said. Uncle Steve and his family wouldn't make her feel better or worse. Phoebe barely remembered what grades her cousins were in.

On Friday night, Phoebe watched her aunt and uncle through the living-room window. It seemed a long time since she'd viewed people up close. Approaching the house, they looked familiar and awkward all at once, like animals who had learned to walk on their hind legs. Andrea carried a bottle of wine. Steve had brought a wedge-shaped pillow for his back. In the entryway,

Nate and Zach crowded in behind their parents.

"We're looking at colleges," Andrea told Phoebe. "You can tell Nate about Michigan!"

Melanie and Dan exchanged looks, but Phoebe didn't take offense. She was watching her younger cousins—huge, laconic, grazing the light fixtures. Zach brushed against a side table and knocked over a glass paperweight, but he was quick and caught it with one hand.

"Good save," said Nate, who did not ask Phoebe about Michigan.

The three kids sat together at one end of the table, and it was peaceful there. Zach and Nate devoured Melanie's brisket, while Phoebe picked at her wild rice. The adults did all the talking, discussing dehumidifiers. They spoke about material things, but they kept their eyes fixed on the children. Not that anybody made comparisons. Just that the boys had grown so much, and Phoebe looked—crushed. What was she wearing? Nobody asked, but Melanie knew what her sister-in-law was thinking. Phoebe's post-consumer dress was faded blue, and nearly shapeless. Not a dress but an apology for one. Oh, why? Melanie wailed silently.

"Good to be home?" Andrea asked Phoebe. "Nice and quiet?"

Phoebe said, "I keep busy."

Dan could not conceal his surprise.

Melanie tensed, but Andrea saw an opening. "How do you like the violin?"

For a moment, Phoebe didn't know what her aunt was talking about. Then she remembered Jeanne's instrument, unopened in her closet. "I don't know," she said. "I quit."

"What?" Steve said slowly. His sons had not received anything from their grandmother when she died the year before. Supposedly, the whole point was that Phoebe played an instrument.

"She'll play again," Dan said.

Poor Dad, Phoebe thought. Never say die! The South will rise again!

"When did you quit?" Steve asked.

"Like, a year ago."

Even her cousins stared now, absorbing this news. They had grown up with Phoebe's recitals and family concerts. Her music endless, wordless, intricate. All their lives they'd settled down to listen.

Slowly, Andrea said, "Well, that's a shame."

Phoebe knew what she meant; the instrument was worth a lot of money. "Maybe someone else should have it—"

"Oh, no you don't," her father cut her off.

Melanie said, "Jeanne wanted you to have that violin."

"She wanted somebody to play it," Steve corrected.

"It was Jeanne's wish," Melanie said, and that was the last word.

The others settled into their chairs. Dan furious, Steve and Andrea not angry but surprised and disappointed. O.K., smoldering.

That night the violin kept Phoebe awake. She'd barely noticed it before, but now she sensed it in the closet, neglected, suffering. Jeanne's gift seemed to her a wounded thing. Her closet, her room, her house could not contain the blood gushing from that violin. Blood soaked the carpet, stained the walls. Even so, she didn't scream; she didn't move. She couldn't wake her parents. Instead, she watched the window, waiting for the sky to brighten.

Daylight wouldn't come. The sun would not rise. She turned on the light and stole from her bed. Softly she opened the closet door and took down the sealed casket. Then softly, softly she carried the case downstairs, scanning cabinets and pantry shelves. The kitchen was too cluttered, the mudroom damp and cold. She sank into the couch and rocked slightly, clutching Jeanne's unopened gift. Her parents found her there in the morning, asleep. The violin sat mildly on the coffee table.

"Oh, sweetie," Melanie said. Phoebe opened her eyes and sat up as her mother told her: "They upset you."

"They had no right," Dan began.

But Phoebe cut him off. "They were fine. Everything's fine."

"Everything is not fine," Dan told her. "Look at you."

She tried to look at herself sitting on the couch in sweatpants and an Interlochen T-shirt. She was clutching her knees to her chest. True, she was shaken, but the night was over, and her guilty conscience had calmed again.

Melanie was afraid to leave Phoebe in the house all day.

"There's nothing to worry about," Phoebe told her mother.

"Prove it," Dan said.

"I'm going for a walk," Phoebe said.

"Walking where?" Melanie asked.

"Just to get some exercise."

As soon as her parents left, Phoebe pulled on a clean shirt and combed her hair and walked out, blinking, into the sunlight. Then she felt awkward because she didn't have anywhere to go. Nothing to do, no bags to carry. She retreated to the house and took Jeanne's violin, carrying it like a briefcase to the end of the street and then around the corner. A Rutgers shuttle bus stopped there, and she climbed aboard. The bus was free, half-full of students. Phoebe chose a window seat and took the bus from one campus to another. Busch, Livingston, Douglass. She watched trees rustling near the Raritan and saw one or two scarlet leaves in all the green. It was the first week in September.

The next morning, after her parents had left for work, Phoebe headed out again, carrying her violin. She got home just after three, and sat in the kitchen gazing at all the groceries Melanie had bought in her honor. Oats and nuts and grains and sprouted-wheat berries and unsweetened coconut piled up in bags on the kitchen counter. Nobody really ate them. Her dad skipped breakfast. He was supposed to watch his cholesterol, but he didn't. Her mother nibbled grainy Icelandic chocolate, which she kept in a shoebox in the cabinet above the fridge.

Phoebe preheated the oven and mixed all the grains and nuts, along with the coconut and some pieces of crystallized ginger, and toasted everything on a pair of cookie sheets. The result was a lot of lumpy granola, which she divided into snack-sized bags.

"This is for you." She handed her mother a little bag that night. "And



this is for you," she said, handing one to her father.

"This is awful," her father told her.
"Dan," Melanie said.

"I didn't like your tone of voice," Melanie told him later, when they were alone.

"What tone?"

"Your sarcasm and your hostility."

"That's the way I talk," he said.

"That's my natural voice. The hostile one is you."

"I was just—"

"Listen to yourself!"

The next morning, Phoebe took a campus bus again. She got off at Knight Library and sat on the steps. She didn't have a library card, but, carrying her instrument, she might have been an undergraduate. She liked the possibilities. She could have been a music student; she could have been a tourist; she could have been travelling. The leaves were turning, but it was still warm. She sat on the library steps and felt the end-of-summer sun.

When she got home, she showed Melanie an article about cruciferous vegetables. "Phoebe?" Melanie began. She didn't finish, but she was asking, Are you really eating wheat berries? Are you feeling better? What did "better" mean?

Phoebe's parents were seeing someone in Edison, a psychologist recommended by a colleague of Melanie's. The doctor counselled them to wait patiently and allow Phoebe to lead the way. But where was Phoebe leading? She liked to turn off all the lights in the house. Her parents would sit in the living room at night, and Phoebe would turn off all the lights around them. Could we not sit in the dark? her father said. She kept the violin in the living room now, but she never played it. She liked to rest her bare feet on the closed case.

Melanie asked if she would go with them to Edison. Phoebe said no thank you. Melanie asked if Phoebe would like to take lessons with her old teacher. She answered cheerfully: "Not really."

She took the train to the city, boarding with her violin. The train rattled through Brunswick and Rahway and Elizabeth. Gazing out the window, Phoebe saw black benches and vistas of chain-link fence.

When she reached Penn Station, she thought about walking around, maybe visiting the Egyptian tombs at the Met. She bought a MetroCard and entered the subway, but she didn't go anywhere. She sat on a bench on the platform and watched people arriving in great drifts, then sinking away again.

A young woman and two small boys were struggling to carry a stroller with a sleeping baby down the stairs. Phoebe jumped up to help. She picked up the crosspiece of the stroller and together with the mother and the children they got it to the bottom of the stairs. Everybody thanked her, as the baby slept on. "No problem," Phoebe said. She sauntered back to her bench. The violin was gone.

How could that be? It wasn't true. The whole thing was a dream—the station, the woman with her stroller and her children. Phoebe stood bewildered, looking up and down, but, of course, she wasn't dreaming. She was an idiot. That was how fast she lurched into self-loathing. Seriously? Seriously? Had she left Jeanne's gift on a bench? Had she fucked this up, too? At which point she realized that she had returned to the wrong bench. Her violin was one bench over, with a police officer hovering.

"Do not leave bags unattended," he intoned, even as she snatched the instrument. She clutched Jeanne's case to her chest and ran away, ashamed to look at him.

As soon as she was out of sight, she knelt down, unzipped the case, unfolded a piece of green velvet, and took out Jeanne's violin to check for injuries.

There were two bows in the case, and Phoebe tightened one and started tuning. She closed her eyes and listened to the *whoosh* and the roar of trains, the tide of people all around her. No one stopped, and no one looked as she played scales. Mercifully, no one could hear as she blundered through folk songs and riffs and scraps of Bach—the music she had known. Her fingers were thick, the bow scratchy. After a few minutes, Phoebe replaced the instrument in its case.

The next day, she returned. Once again, she took the train all the way into the city. This time she didn't even make it to the subway. In the station, there was a guy playing an amplified

acoustic guitar, so she drifted farther down. The passing commuters drowned her out. Unamplified, her music could not carry, and that was such a relief. Nobody heard, and nobody cared.

Scales, arpeggios. She practiced until her hands grew warm. One by one, she played folk songs she had learned at five—"The Irish Washerwoman," a Hanukkah medley. Snatches of Vivaldi returned to her. Bits of Corelli.

She was embarrassed to find three dollars and change in her violin case. She had not exactly earned the money. Her first thought was that someone had felt sorry for her.

She wanted to give the cash away. She looked for the guitarist, but he had disappeared. The morning crowds had thinned and it was lunchtime now. By the station clock she saw that she'd been playing for two hours.

She took her cash and went to a doughnut shop on the concourse to buy some water. She should have brought her own. She was against disposable water bottles, but she was so thirsty that she bought one anyway.

"Anything else?" the cashier asked.

Phoebe gazed at the racks of muffins, crullers, doughnuts, cronuts. "Just one of those."

"The glazed?"

"Yeah, that one," she said.

She had read that, nutritionally, doughnuts had no redeeming value; that they were literally nothing, just empty calories, but as sugar melted on her tongue the pillowy doughnut filled her. She had eaten real food for so long, she had forgotten how good nothing tasted.

She began spending any money thrown her way on cheap treats in the station. A cookie or a cup of supersweet hot chocolate. She earned only a few dollars, just disposable income, good for a cruller or a candy bar. Even so, she enjoyed considering how to spend the cash.

She was rusty. She almost returned a five-dollar bill. She was ridiculously overpaid. Therefore, she began working through a Bach partita, deliberately. This is practice, she decided, even though she was playing in public. And this is practice and this is practice. She practiced her Bach over hours and days

until she got some of it back, the double stops and the cascading phrases. Then, right after a train announcement, she decided, Now I *am* performing. She stepped into her music and her heart pounded; she felt a strange stage-fright. No mistakes! This was her recital, although she told no one.

She tried to perform at least once each day. She would set up and practice until her left hand grew warm, playing at half speed, working over one passage at a time. In slow motion, she would play each phrase. Safe in all the noise around her, she would do her work until she decided she was ready. Then she would begin. Two or three people would gather.

She tried the cream doughnuts, the jelly-filled, the chocolate sprinkles. She purchased orange soda. She went to the greasy pizza place and bought calzone. At home her mother said, "A healthy young woman can't live on almonds!"

Her father said, "I don't understand what you do all day."

"I'm thinking," Phoebe said.

They looked at her. "What are you thinking about?" her mother asked nervously.

"Right now?" Phoebe deflected the question. "I'm thinking about you."

They were touched, but they weren't satisfied. "We want you to be safe," her mother said.

"I want you to take public transportation," Phoebe said. "You don't need two cars!" She showed her parents the bus schedule. From where they lived, her father could get to the office on two buses. Her mother could take one, if she walked 1.9 miles—and that would be exercise!

Of course, her parents didn't listen. They argued late at night instead. Dan was tired of Phoebe's dogmatism. Melanie thought Phoebe seemed more herself. "I think she's doing better!" Melanie insisted on this point, until Phoebe began cleaning out the closets. All through the weekend, she gathered piles of old coats, forgotten shoes, great stacks of T-shirts, games, and toys. "I'm not sure," Melanie began, and then she said, "No, not the puzzles!" She snatched back the Solar System.

"Thank you," Dan said. "Yes," he cheered softly, when a Y.M.C.A. van pulled up to cart everything away.

Two days later, Melanie returned

home to find Phoebe sitting on the couch with a young man! A high-school friend? A new acquaintance? Melanie didn't recognize him, but he and Phoebe were talking eagerly. It took Melanie a moment to see that they were working through some papers on a clipboard. Phoebe had contacted this guy for a free estimate on solar panels for the roof.

"They'd barely cost you anything," she told her parents at dinner.

This time Melanie was the good one, studying the paperwork. Dan was recalcitrant and wouldn't look, even after Phoebe took a magnet and posted the estimate on the refrigerator. He said solar was ridiculous, because their roof was all the wrong angles. Even so, he didn't throw the estimate away. It's a process, Phoebe thought, as she took the rattling, swishing morning train. "Little by little," she told herself, arriving at the station. She had got her parents composting again, although Dan told her straight out: No new chickens.

Melanie thought that Phoebe's eyes looked brighter. Dan was afraid she had a manic look. Both her parents sensed a shift. They studied Phoebe's face, her battered shoes, her hands. Melanie thought she saw the beginnings of callouses, the old grooves on Phoebe's fingertips. "Are you playing again?" she asked, and, when Phoebe didn't answer, she was sure of it.

It couldn't last, this secret life, this music in plain sight. One morning she heard a man calling her name.

"Phoebe?" It was her Uncle Steve, standing there in disbelief, holding his coffee and bagel. He had meetings in the city, and, inevitably, even in the crowd, he'd found her. "What are you doing here?"

What does it look like? Phoebe thought, but she said, "Just practicing."

This was the end. She knew that Steve would tell immediately.

Even before she arrived home, her parents pounced. On the train, her phone lit up with questions. Where was she? Was she really busking in Penn Station? Was it true? Was it safe? Was she O.K.?

That night they sat her down and asked what was happening, and how long this had been going on. Their words were anxious, but their voices

were eager. Initiative! Hadn't Dan predicted that Phoebe would return to music? Hadn't Melanie said don't rush her? Well, that's what she'd been thinking, anyway. Drifting off to sleep, Phoebe heard rueful laughter, a wistful conspiracy to follow her.

For two days, she evaded them. She played near the escalators—ready to run. She tried a spot outside, but it was getting too chilly. The cold wasn't good for Jeanne's violin. Phoebe retreated to her usual place and decided that she would enjoy her last few hours.

Sure enough, on the third day, while playing Bach, she opened her eyes and saw two phones held high—her parents filming. They'd found her, tracked her down at last! She bent into the music, but they saw everything, loose coins in her open case, a bag of—were they gummy worms? Turning away, Phoebe missed her parents' wide eyes. Really? And she had them eating pumpkin seeds?

Phoebe fought on, as far as memory would take her. To be honest, she had played better at fourteen. As a child, she had been quicker, sweeter. Where she was patchy now, she had been sure and true. She had sounded deeper, although she'd felt the music less.

Even so, she had Bach in her hands. Her parents heard that, despite the trains. Phoebe finished her partita with a flourish, and her father punched the air. Her parents whooped and clapped, so that people turned around, even in their hurry.

"Stop. You guys!"

"What?" Melanie asked, all saintly, unconditional.

"Good job, sweetie," Dan said.

Phoebe just shook her head.

One more piece, Dan and Melanie pleaded, as she packed up the violin. Just one more. But it was time, past time, to go home.

"Come on."

"Where to?" her father asked.

"Let's get lunch," Melanie suggested.

They were all set for a day out in the city, but Phoebe had to tell them no. She had to pack, and figure out her housing, not to mention classes. "Winter break," she promised. She loved her parents, but she couldn't take care of them forever. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM

Allegra Goodman on the anxieties of growing up.

THE CRITICS



BOOKS

AFTER THE FLOOD

Jesmyn Ward's "Sing, Unburied, Sing," a haunted novel of the Gulf Coast.

BY VINSON CUNNINGHAM

In the late summer of 2005, the novelist Jesmyn Ward, a native of the Mississippi Gulf Coast, lived through Hurricane Katrina. After fleeing her grandmother's flooding home, Ward and her family weathered the worst violence of the storm huddled in trucks spread across an otherwise empty field. "I saw an entire town demolished, people fighting over water, breaking open caskets searching for something that could help

them survive," she said in a 2011 interview with *The Paris Review*.

Images like these, lately evoked again by the flooding of Houston after Hurricane Harvey, altered the course of American politics. Katrina was the definitive display of the unaccountable incompetence of the Bush Administration—and a stroke of racial catastrophe visible enough to catalyze, however subtly, the election of the first black President. Much

as the 2008 financial crisis scrambled our political economy—yielding the Zuccotti Park occupiers who went on to wave signs for Bernie Sanders, as well as the intractable Tea Partiers-turned-Freedom Caucusers—Katrina radically reconstituted our understanding of race, place, and inequality. Activists and theorists who, since the nineteen-sixties, had insisted that the legacy of slavery and white supremacy was the interpretive key to

All Ward's novels are set in a fictional Mississippi town and shadowed by the long aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

America's history now had a contemporary tragedy to point to as the proof of their case. As it does every generation or so, the idea of America as a vast conspiracy gathered fresh plausibility, and began, gradually, to make its way into the mainstream. Nine years later, in 2014, the killing of Michael Brown, in Ferguson, Missouri, gave national prominence to the Black Lives Matter movement; the young activists who led the protests had been weaned, politically, on pictures of an avoidable flood. Katrina brought into being a generation of justified pessimists.

It also helped create Jesmyn Ward's art. Ward's vocabulary tends toward the epic; she alludes to the Old Testament and Greek mythology with equal frequency and intensity; for her, Katrina is comparable in significance to the Egyptian captivity or the aftermath of the Trojan War. Only one of her books, "Salvage the Bones" (Bloomsbury), which won the 2011 National Book Award for Fiction, takes Katrina as its primary subject, but the storm lingers, ghostlike, in the others, operating as a grand, whooshing metaphor for the vulnerability—physical, emotional, environmental—of the residents of rural Bois Sauvage, the fictional Mississippi-coast town in which all her novels are set. In "Salvage the Bones," a father struggles to fortify his home against the coming hurricane, but fails to notice the rise of quieter waters:

his young daughter—the narrator, a bookish girl named Esch—is hiding a pregnancy; his son steals to feed the pit bull he is training to fight; his children are going hungry, foraging for eggs in the yard. The father's single-mindedness is a product of memory: he witnessed Hurricane Camille, which wrecked the coast in 1969, and therefore understands Katrina as part of a foreordained sequence. For this modern-day Noah, the radio spouts warnings like an oracle. Ward tells the story with a tense patience, marking day after day; when the storm comes, overturning everything, it feels like a fatal relief. At least the waiting's over.

"Salvage the Bones" expands our understanding of Katrina's devastation, beyond the pictures of choked rooftops in New Orleans and toward the washed-out, feral landscapes elsewhere along the coast. Ward's regionalism, grounded in rurality and in poverty, gives us the images—often beautiful, always barely hiding danger—that recur throughout her books: shushing pines; skin and garments red with mud; animals wild, domestic, or waiting for the slaughter. Siblings stand at the end of a road after the storm and look at the coast. All the remembered details—"the gas station, the yacht club, and all the old white-columned homes that faced the beach, that made us feel small and dirty and poorer than ever when we came here with Daddy"—

have been ripped away and washed into the sea. "Not ravaged," Esch thinks, "not rubble, but completely gone."

"Ain't nothing left," somebody says.

Ward's third novel, "Sing, Unburied, Sing" (Scribner), takes place after Katrina, and the storm is named only once, almost passingly: one character, white, lives in one of the famous post-disaster "Katrina cottages" conferred by the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency. But just as these pastel-hued structures—eventually found to contain harmful levels of formaldehyde—serve as semipermanent monuments to the storm, "Sing, Unburied, Sing" has the haunted quality of an afterlife; its characters seem stranded in an epilogue.

Jojo, thirteen, the most consistently perceptive of the novel's trio of first-person narrators—a group that also includes his mother and a child who died decades before—is, like Esch, a laconic, prematurely self-sufficient kid. Jojo's mother, Leonie, is indifferent, and his father, Michael, is serving out the final days of a prison sentence. Both tend more closely to their vices than to their son or their three-year-old daughter, Kayla. Like other neglected children, Jojo calls his parents by their first names. His filial respect goes, instead, to his grandfather, Pop, whose every mannerism he imitates. The book opens with blood: Pop is slaughtering and skinning a goat to barbecue for Jojo's birthday, and Jojo insists on helping, "so Pop will know I'm ready to pull what needs to be pulled, separate innards from muscle, organs from cavities. I want Pop to know I can get bloody." As he plays the butcher's assistant, he watches, and so, Ward seems to say, must we:

Pop slits. The goat makes a sound of surprise, a bleat swallowed by a gurgle, and then there's blood and mud everywhere. The goat's legs go rubbery and loose, and Pop isn't struggling anymore. All at once, he stands up and ties a rope around the goat's ankles, lifting the body to a hook hanging from the rafters. That eye: still wet. Looking at me like I was the one who cut its neck, like I was the one bleeding it out, turning its whole face red with blood.

The episode is of a piece with Ward's treatment of animals elsewhere. She is unsentimental, and sometimes brutal, about the necessity of their deaths, but



"Kid, you're gonna have to make a choice."

also presents them as quasi-mystical portals between the world of human affairs and the indifference of nature. This sense is deepened in “Sing” by Jojo’s ability to divine the meanings of animal noises: it’s soon clear that his brief, telepathic connection with the goat is more than fancy. He remembers a day when, left at home by Leonie, he spent his time in the woods: “When the horse Pop keeps bowed his head and shimmied and bucked so that his sides gleamed like wet red Mississippi mud, I understood: *I could leap over your head, boy, and oh I would run and run and you would never see anything more than that. I could make you shake.* But it scared me to understand them, to hear them,” he says. By book’s end, he hears—and sees—much more, and much worse.

While the magical element is new in Ward’s fiction, her allusiveness, anchored in her interest in the politics of race, has been pointing in this direction all along. It takes a touch of the spiritual to speak across chasms of age, class, and color. Further complicating communication in “Sing” is a set of intra-familial racial dynamics: Leonie is black and Michael is white, and her passionate attraction to him—forsaking all others, Jojo foremost—has much, it seems, to do with their racial difference. Leonie has mixed, almost tortured, feelings about whiteness. Her best friend, Misty, is white, and there are glimmers of jealousy about, for instance, her hair: “It was one of the things she did that she was never conscious of,” Leonie says, “playing with her hair, always unaware of the ease of it. The way it caught all the light. The self-satisfied beauty of it. I hated her hair.” Jojo has to drag his white father across species in order to understand him. “Michael is an animal,” he says. “I know what he is saying.”

Racial mixture is a preoccupation of Ward’s—perhaps inevitably, given the Spanish, French, and West African ethnic history of the Gulf. She often notes the tawny skin or yellowish hair of her black characters. Leonie and Michael’s relationship sharpens her focus on this subject; so does the novel’s portrayal of hybrid religious belief. Jojo’s “sight” is inherited from his grandmother, Mam, who, though dying, keeps her faith in “the Mothers”: the Virgin Mary and Mami Wata, a deity, customarily associ-

ated with water, venerated across many religious cultures of the African diaspora. Mam uses roots and leaves as medicine; when she was young, she could hear voices “humming” to her their applications. Pop, meanwhile, is a kind of pantheist, devoted above all to “balance”—between life and death, stillness and motion, and, one assumes, black and white. “Sing, Unburied, Sing” has a fairly straightforward plot. It is a novel of the road. Jojo, Leonie, Kayla, and Misty shuttle crookedly toward the prison from which Michael will be released, and where Pop, long before, lived out a nightmare. But its echoes of Pop and Mam’s values—synthesis, veiled things uncovered for good—make it rich, sometimes unbearably so.

The signal characteristic of Ward’s prose is its lyricism. “I’m a failed poet,” she has said. The length and music of Ward’s sentences owe much to her love of catalogues, extended similes, imagistic fragments, and emphasis by way of repetition, as well as to her tendency to cluster conjunctions, especially “and.” The effect, intensified by use of the present tense, can be hypnotic. Some chapters sound like fairy tales. This, and her ease with vernacular language, puts Ward in fellowship with such forebears as Zora Neale Hurston and William Faulkner; Bois Sauvage, with its watchful children and desiccated vistas, is a kind of duskier Yoknapatawpha. The tone and atmosphere in “Sing, Unburied, Sing” call out, too, to Toni Morrison—particularly “Beloved,” whose most sorrowful revelations are echoed in the climax of “Sing.” As in Faulkner and Morrison, portentous sentence rhythms are the sign of the seriousness of Ward’s subject, and of the trauma through which her characters have passed and will, inevitably, pass again. There’s love here, but little laughter.

Some lines—like these, from Jojo’s memory of a story told by Pop—feel overworked: “*The dream of her was the glow of a spent fire on a cold night: warm and welcoming. It was the only way I could untether my spirit from myself, let it fly high as a kite in them fields.*” Because of their mutual musicality, the three narrators often sound quite alike. Still, Ward’s tone is darkly appropriate to its purposes, and its origins. Lyricism slips in and out of favor in American writing; the “plain style” of our Puritan past—with its insistence that quick comprehensibility is

a pathway to democracy, and to the divine—is always with us. But there is a counter-tradition whose banner has often been carried by black women, including Morrison, Alice Walker, Gayl Jones, and, now, Ward.

Again, region and religion matter: the Catholicism of the Gulf, tinged with aspects of African-derived belief, acts in “Sing” as a refutation of Protestant clarity. Frankness, here, is a lie. There’s a quality of the gothic at work: the elements of the novel—sudden violence, black spectres, an interminable past—are reminiscent of Melville’s great story “Benito Cereno,” in which Catholic mystery and African presence come together uncannily.

The criticisms that this sort of writing is open to—that it is overly emotional in its appeal, and too didactic—resemble many of the objections raised, by conservatives and liberals alike, to the tone of much post-Katrina activism, in Ferguson and beyond. Ward’s lyricism seems inextricable from the politics that emerged from the storm.

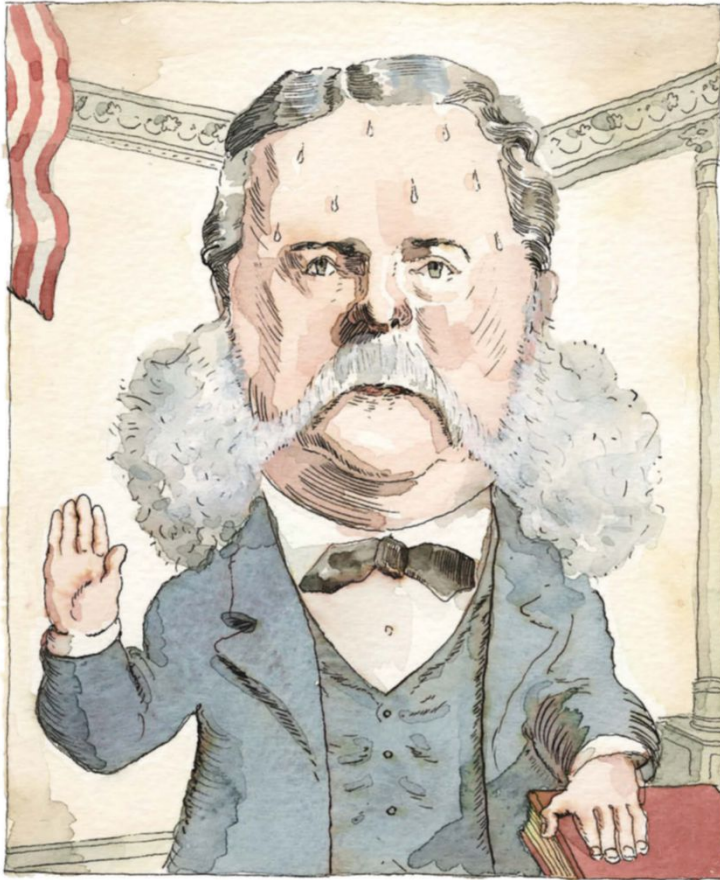
In 2013, Ward published a memoir, “Men We Reaped,” which details the deaths of five beloved young men, including her younger brother. She tells the story in reverse chronological order, boy after boy in bleak succession; it feels like a gruesome detective story: how did this happen, and who to blame? The losses are, on the surface, unconnected—car accidents, suicides, senseless murders—but each, under Ward’s grieving eye, seems to flow from the same wellspring. Nothing in the larger society is designed to protect these poor black Southern kids, and so, from the beginning, they are doomed.

In “Sing, Unburied, Sing,” Ward describes a chorus of the lost, “women and men and boys and girls,” perched in a tree, singing an awful song about their deaths. They won’t let go until something—but what?—gets solved. The book’s most moving illumination of danger and exposure is one of its least supernatural. Jojo, whom Ward clearly loves, is alone in the back yard, still hearing the animals. Nobody’s home; the structures that should make him safe have been washed away. “I didn’t see the jagged lid of the can rising from the earth,” he says. “It sank deep.” He bleeds. ♦

LEAST LIKELY TO SUCCEED

The small victories of Chester Arthur.

BY THOMAS MALLON



Early in 1881, before entering the White House, James Garfield recorded a peculiar dream about the Vice-President-elect, who would end up succeeding him before the summer was over. In “Destiny of the Republic” (2011), a surprise best-seller about Garfield’s assassination, Candice Millard explains that it was a dream

in which Chester Arthur drowned. [Garfield] and a close friend, General David Swaim, had escaped a sinking ship, only to watch Arthur, who was lying on a couch, very pale and obviously ill, disappear under the surface of the water. “I started to plunge into the water to save Arthur,” Garfield wrote, “but Swaim held me, and said he cannot be saved.”

Most nineteenth-century Vice-Presidents were too insignificant to get on

a President’s calendar, let alone into his subconscious, but Garfield’s dream betrayed an anxiety about the political hack who had been chosen to balance the Republican ticket he headed. After Arthur’s unexpected ascent to the White House, it became, according to one American diplomat, “a common saying . . . among those who knew him best, “Chet” Arthur president of the United States! Good God!”

A familiar question then arose, as to whether Arthur could somehow—to use latter-day political parlance—pivot, shed his crookedness, and begin to act “Presidential.” Eight months into Donald Trump’s Administration—already longer than Garfield’s—speculation about

Given Arthur’s shady reputation, his Presidency was a fair-to-middling miracle.

whether he might rise to the occasion has long since been discontinued. But for Arthur, another New York baron whose suspect character and surprising elevation spurred much public outcry, the story is different—a political fairy tale, contrary to Garfield’s dream, of partial but astonishing redemption.

Scott S. Greenberger’s new biography, “The Unexpected President” (Da Capo Press), mentions the whiff of birtherism that still clings to Arthur, who probably entered the world in Vermont on October 5, 1829, though some who were later desperate to prevent his succession spread rumors of a Canadian or even Irish nativity. Before Arthur’s arrival, his father, William, a teacher and law student, had been caught up in New England’s Second Great Awakening and became a Baptist minister—spell-binding, more or less itinerant, and fiercely abolitionist. Greenberger opens with a scene of William Arthur and six hundred antislavery activists inside an upstate New York church in 1835. They are waiting for a mob, led by the local congressman, to storm the premises.

Young Chester inherited some of his father’s emotionalism and none of his moral fervor. (Years later, his parents would actively disapprove of his high-and-loose living.) Like a surprising number of nineteenth-century American statesmen, he spent his undergraduate years as a big man on the little campus of Union College, in Schenectady, New York. He pursued a classical curriculum and delivered a graduation address on “The Destiny of Genius.” He lacked the second of those nouns for sure, and even his “destiny” could be better described as a matter of freakish fate. (Some would later call him “His Accidency.”) But he left college, Greenberger writes, with “soaring ambitions.” After a couple of schoolteaching stints—weirdly, the young James A. Garfield succeeded *him* as an instructor at Vermont’s little North Pownal academy—he went to New York to study law.

In 1855, he won a judgment for Elizabeth Jennings, an African-American schoolteacher who had been roughly thrown off a segregated New York streetcar. “For years after,” Greenberger notes, “the Colored People’s Legal Rights Association celebrated the anniversary of the verdict.” And yet one

gets no sense that the case felt momentous for Arthur. When he went out to “Bleeding Kansas,” two years later, it was more for the money and the adventure than for any zeal to vote the territory into the Union as a free state. He was, in any event, soon called back to New York by the death of his fiancée’s father, Commander William Lewis Herndon, a sudden national hero who had gone down with his merchant ship after saving scores of women and children during a storm off Cape Hatteras.

Pre-Civil War New York—plush with great hotels and emporia, bursting with immigrant energy and rife with gangs—was tootling like a giant calliope when Arthur climbed aboard it for good. Patrons were essential, and he found two terrific ones: the wily old Thurlow Weed, known as the “dictator” of, first, New York State’s Whigs and then of its Republicans, a man whose smooth continuity derived from his sense that the spoils of office were more basic to politics than any position on the issues; and Edwin Morgan, a good-looking big businessman whom Weed made governor in 1858. With the outbreak of the war, Arthur’s “purely ornamental” job on Morgan’s staff turned consequential, involving as it did the acquisition of goods and supplies for many of the Union regiments which the Governor was now pledged to raise.

“General Arthur,” as he would be known for most of his life, proved an organizational whiz, his prominence a source of both pride and annoyance to his Confederate-sympathizing wife, Nell, from Fredericksburg, Virginia. When his job ended, early in 1863, with the Democrats’ capture of New York’s statehouse, Arthur succumbed to the allure of the revolving door, operational in politics a few decades before its appearance in architecture. Arthur “had become an expert in supplies, contracts and military law,” Greenberger writes. “Many people with similar skills and experience were making fortunes. Arthur set out to do the same.”

Arthur found his place in the Republicans’ non-radical wing, running the party machine’s “assessment” (i.e., kickback) operation, in which beholden political appointees returned a portion

of their salaries. Arthur brought to this semi-subterranean world of cronies, cash, and cigars a bonhomie that gradually edged toward dissipation. The expensive clothes he craved were soon enveloping a comically swollen figure. Silas Burt, a Union College contemporary and an early good-government reformer—the Nick Carraway figure in any novelized version of Arthur’s story—was appalled. So was Nell, to a degree. But her own social ambitions left her more complicit than disapproving.

The Republican machine was entirely concerned with its own perpetual motion. By the eighteen-seventies, its central mechanism, the New York Custom House—a giant mouth for a manna of skimmable import duties—came under the control of Senator Roscoe Conkling. This figure of cruel and empty charisma became in some historical sense wedded to Arthur. Handsome and dandyish (no description fails to mention his “Hyperion curl”), Conkling, a fitness fanatic, had women swooning for him in the Senate gallery and pages fleeing from him on the floor. He possessed a brutal wit but no humor, a tremendous magnetism, and an aversion to being touched. He famously dallied with Kate Chase Sprague, the daughter of Lincoln’s Treasury Secretary and the wife of a Rhode Island politician who threatened to shoot him. But, as David M. Jordan, his biographer, argues, “Conkling was too enamoured of himself” to succumb to any romantic martyrdom.

Conkling had a handful of principles (racial tolerance, a touch of feminism) that he fitfully displayed, but his essential politics consisted of personal feuds, especially the one he had with his fellow-senator James G. Blaine, who had once mocked his “turkey-gobbler strut.” Most of the machine’s men saw public life as a checkerboard of toys and lucre, but Conkling regarded it as a prizefighting ring in which foes were to be bloodied and then pulped. In 1876, both he and Blaine failed to get the Republican nomination to succeed Ulysses S. Grant. Ohio’s governor, the pacific Rutherford B. Hayes—Conkling called him “Granny”—secured it on a seventh ballot, and went to the White House after an Electoral College dispute that makes the election of

2000 look like a civic model. The Republicans soon split into Conkling’s “Stalwarts”—pro-patronage and eager, after a decent interval, to restore the pliable, obviously corrupted Grant—and Blaine’s more reform-minded “Half-Breeds,” their name one that Conkling no doubt relished.

Arthur, meanwhile, had in 1871 been appointed collector of the Custom House, a position described by Greenberger as “the most lucrative job in the entire federal government.” Well liked by the place’s minions, he supplemented Conkling’s brutal cut and thrust with his own emollient manner. His preselected employees never had to worry about the exams they sat as a matter of form. “Asked to name the three branches of the US government,” Greenberger writes, “candidate Charles F. Meserole answered, ‘the army and the navy.’” He passed. At home in his brownstone on Lexington Avenue (it’s still there), the new collector and his wife entertained even more grandly than before: “French servants wearing black swallowtail coats and pants, with immaculate white vests, cravats, and gloves were ‘as active as a set of monkeys’ in fetching food and drink.”

The party ended with President Hayes, who embraced reform on the first day of the single term to which he promised he would limit himself. A federal commission soon exposed the Custom House’s drolly named procedures. “Hatchets” were bribes paid by merchants; disembarking passengers who hoped to avoid scrutiny offered “bones.” Once the commission issued its report, superfluous employees (among them Herman Melville) were cashiered, and “assessments” were ended. (Custom House employees had sometimes paid them in an office on Hanover, or “Hand-Over,” Street.) Hayes succeeded in getting Arthur out of the collector’s job, but failed at replacing him with Theodore Roosevelt, Sr. Conkling killed the nomination, twice, in the Senate committee he controlled.

Chester Arthur often gets lost in biographies of himself. He is eclipsed by the sulfuric glower of Conkling and the shining personality of Garfield. Until his last years, it’s hard to see his life from his own point of view,

because he so often refused to have one, suppressing it in order to continue enjoying the feathers that others put into his nest. Greenberger's short new book has a good deal of bounce and some genial, colorful overwriting ("The putrid carcasses kept bobbing to the surface"), but its author can seem nearly as dependent on his more definitive predecessor, Thomas C. Reeves, as Arthur was on Conkling. To say, as Greenberger does, that Reeves's "Gentleman Boss" (1975) is "an invaluable roadmap" is not so much fulsome as inadequate. Greenberger forgivably tells the same tales as Reeves, but in places "The Unexpected President" closely mimics its antecedent with scant paraphrase and nary a quotation mark. Greenberger is not an academic historian—his previous book, written with the former senator Tom Daschle, was "Critical: What We Can Do About the Health-Care Crisis"—and his description of Lincoln's "steady upward trajectory" in politics hardly gives the sense that he is steeped in the period.

Whether one sticks with Greenberger or returns to Reeves's more thoroughgoing account, Arthur's story attains a sudden, wild velocity from the moment he arrives with Conkling, "striding arm in arm" (same phrase, both books), at the Republicans' June, 1880, Chicago Convention. Arthur was probably, in fact, leaning on him. Stripped of the collectorship, he was also now a grieving widower: in January, Nell, his pampered and neglected wife, had died from a sudden case of pneumonia contracted while her husband was away in Albany, wheeling and dealing.

The Stalwarts managed to prevent Blaine from getting the nomination, but Conkling's *bête noire* was vanquished by a dark horse, not by Grant. The appealing Representative James A. Garfield, a bright, up-from-nothing war hero, had glimmers of Lincoln about him, without the spookiness. Through some back-channel miscommunications by Garfield's lieutenants, the candidate's need to mollify Conkling's faction resulted, absurdly, in a proffer of the Vice-Presidency to the dismissed collector of the Custom

House. Hayes's Treasury Secretary, John Sherman, wrote, in amazement of Arthur's sudden prominence, "He never held an office except the one he was removed from."

Conkling, still in a tantrum over Grant's loss, told Arthur he was not to accept the nod; for one thing, Garfield was bound to lose in the fall. But Arthur experienced a rare vertebrate moment, and told his benefactor, "The office of the vice-president is a greater honor than I ever dreamed of attaining. . . . In a calmer moment you will look at this differently." He was still wearing his Grant button when he shook hands with Garfield and the delegates; he wept during the friendly reception he received back in New York. Conkling didn't do calmer moments, but he soon enough granted Arthur an almost unique forgiveness. The deposed collector was permitted to use all his old organizational talents in New York, whose electoral votes put Garfield over the top in November. The Ohioan probably owed his Presidency to Arthur as much as vice versa.

After his moment of self-assertion in Chicago, Arthur reverted to his clubbable ways, tipsily bragging about the machine's questionable tactics when reporters were present during a victory dinner at Delmonico's. Once in Washington, he even moved in with Conkling. The two were soon making war on the President-elect,

with Arthur present as Conkling dressed down Garfield the day before the Inauguration. Conkling had his reasons: the Cabinet contained no Stalwarts, and Blaine was now Secretary of State. Then the President appointed William H. Robertson, not a reformer but a Conkling foe, to the collector's job. Thwarting this nomination proved to be harder than blocking Roosevelt's. Conkling theatrically resigned his Senate seat, certain that the New York State legislature would reelect him right away, but the plan backfired—no matter that Arthur, in grotesque revolt against his own President, went up to Albany to rally the Conkling forces. A Thomas Nast car-

toon had him shining Conkling's shoes.

This was roughly the situation on July 2, 1881, when word reached the two men just before they got off a steamboat in New York—no doubt arm in arm—that Garfield had been shot by Charles Guiteau, a man crazed with the desire for a patronage job. After shooting the President in the back, he proclaimed, "I am a Stalwart, and Arthur will be President."

Garfield, brutalized by the incompetence of his chief physician, hung on for more than two months. Arthur's first instinct was to sequester himself with Conkling, but he ended up spending much of this period by himself, a lonely widower often weeping inside his Lexington Avenue brownstone. His sense of inadequacy and shame impelled a transfiguration that was less political than psychological. What Reeves calls Arthur's "deeply emotional, even romantic" nature came to the surface as he attached himself, mentally, to Garfield's agonies. "As the President gets better, I get better too," he told Blaine during some weeks of false hope. By the time the worst came to pass—he was reported "sobbing like a child" at the news of Garfield's death—his summer of agitation, as Greenberger makes clear, had put him back in touch with the better angels of his nature and his more honorable, pre-machine résumé.

The change was aided by an unlikely, one-sided correspondence with a young Manhattan invalid named Julia Sand. The out-of-the-blue letters she sent Arthur were encouraging, frank, scolding, and firm: she was certain that, if he let himself, he could ride the whirlwind instead of reaping it—could travel, as Greenberger points out, toward the sort of redemption his father used to preach. She wrote:

Do what is more difficult & more brave. Reform! It is not the proof of highest goodness never to have done wrong—but it is a proof of it, sometime in one's career, to pause and ponder, to recognize the evil, to turn resolutely against it & devote the remainder of one's life to that only which is pure & exalted.

Sand came to call herself Arthur's "little dwarf," a court fool permitted to speak truth to power, but she more often sounds like the noble Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come. Arthur kept



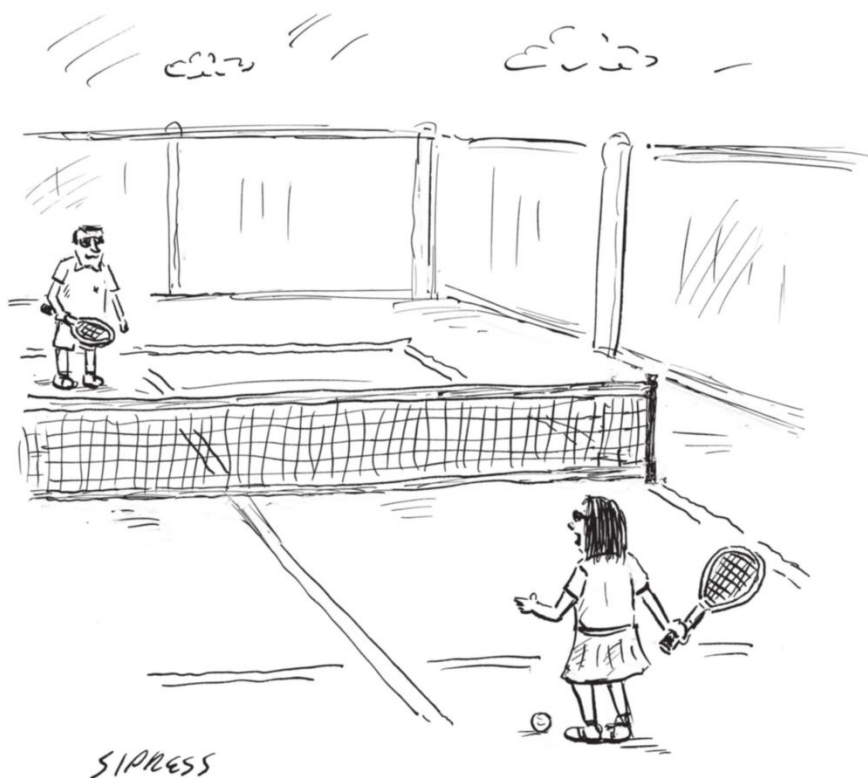
her letters in a “special envelope” that would not be rediscovered until 1937. They continued to arrive throughout his Presidency, with advice that he avoid “half measures” and “smash” the machine he had driven for so long.

If the “Julia letters” exhibit a good deal of political and moral sagacity, they are also underpinned by a sad sort of longing. The idea of them is so charming that it’s easy to overestimate their effects. Both Greenberger and Millard prove susceptible to this; Reeves rather restrains himself. Arthur did surprise Sand, once, with a visit, but the occasion was spoiled for her by too many family members horning in.

One can also inflate Arthur’s transformation itself, and yet the creditable over-all record of his Presidency is undeniable. No visionary, he adopted a cautious, day-by-day approach to the job; assembled a competent Cabinet; and allowed his Secretary of State to pursue what Reeves calls a “formidable” and “expansionist” foreign policy. Frederick Douglass praised his support for civil rights, which included increased funding to black schools. He also revitalized the Navy and thoroughly redecored the White House. (He didn’t call it a “dump,” but few Washingtonians would have objected to that description.)

Most noteworthy, perhaps, was Arthur’s support for civil-service reform. It was not quite a matter of Nixon going to China: the off-year elections of 1882 revealed a public thoroughly converted to the idea. But his signing of the Pendleton Act, through which merit began to displace politics in federal hirings, still had a vast and healthy irony to it. More important, he afterward chose not to go looking for loopholes but to implement it with considerable vigor.

He refused to make Conkling Secretary of State, and if he did offer him a seat on the Supreme Court it was because, Reeves argues, he felt “honor-bound” to give something to his by then thoroughly humiliated patron. He also knew there was a good chance that Conkling would turn it down: the Senator had refused to take the Chief Justiceship from Grant. In the end, he refused Arthur, too, and treated the President with rage when Arthur decided to keep Robertson in the collector’s job. He took to calling his onetime subordinate



“Can you please just say ‘Fault,’ Gerald, and quit adding ‘is not in our stars but in ourselves’?”

“the stalled ox of the White House.”

There is much that remains regrettable about Arthur’s tenure, including the Chinese Exclusion Act, a bill that he initially vetoed, with Sand’s support, only to sign later in a slightly revised form. But the net record is a fair-to-middling miracle, carried out by a man who for much of his short term was dying, in considerable discomfort. Bright’s disease, a kidney ailment, left Arthur prone to nausea, depression, and lassitude while he was in the White House. He never had any serious prospect of being nominated, in 1884, for a term of his own—the honor went to Blaine, completing Conkling’s belittlement—but his closely held awareness of his ill health made him urge supporters to desist from any efforts on his behalf. He retired to the New York brownstone, where he burned many of the papers from his machine years, an act of both shame and pride: he knew that the squalor they depicted had also been the prelude to something semi-splendid. He was dead at fifty-seven. The obituaries were respectful, and

Abraham Lincoln’s eldest son was one of his pallbearers.

In Chester Arthur, the public had an *homme moyen sensuel*, a man ensnared by a more than ordinary chance to fulfill his ordinary appetites. (As his Tammany Hall contemporary George Washington Plunkitt supposedly put it, “I seen my opportunities and I took ‘em.”) When Garfield lay dying, Julia Sand warned his impending successor:

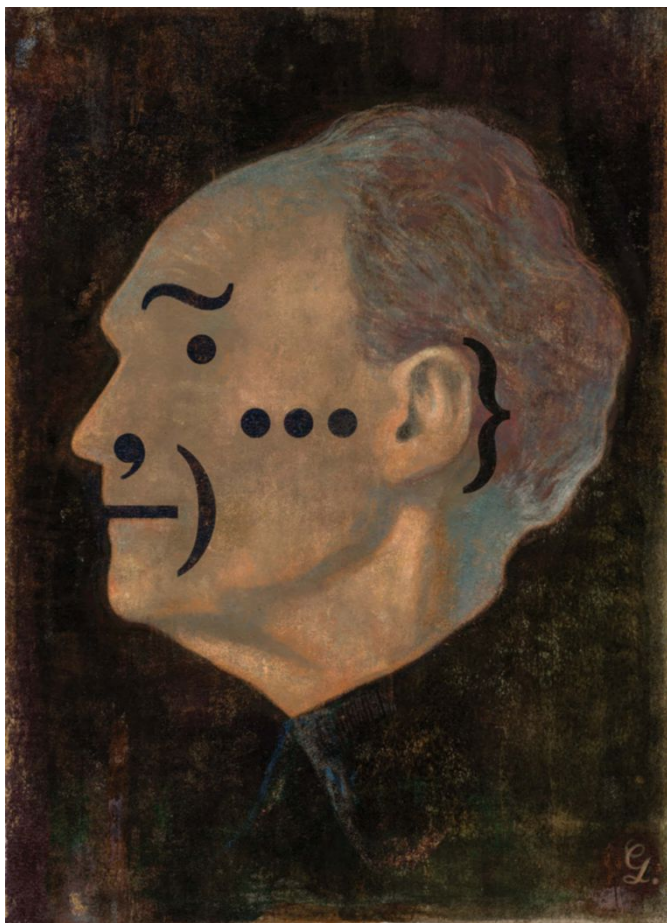
Now your kindest opponents say: ‘Arthur will try to do right’—adding gloomily—‘He won’t succeed, though—making a man President cannot change him.’

Her own view was different—“Great emergencies awaken generous traits which have lain dormant half a life”—and it comported with the experience Arthur was already having. Guiteau’s bullet had done him a sort of collateral repair instead of damage. His story takes on a wistful contemporary glamour, as half the latter-day citizenry—no, more than half—experiences a new, burning desire for rule by mental health and, if need be, by mediocrity. ♦

GOLDEN BOY

Frank Bidart's song of the self.

BY HILTON ALS



No matter how you slice it, gay children with straight parents are born to people who are not their type. Growing up in a milieu that doesn't reflect their desires, queer kids can't help questioning their difference and what it means, in relation to Mom and Dad's more socially acceptable union—even if that marriage happens to fail. (“Always that same old story—/Father Time and Mother Earth, /A marriage on the rocks,” James Merrill wrote, in “The Broken Home.”) Standing both inside and outside the parental home, or their fantasies of it, gay and lesbian poets, such as Elizabeth Bishop, Audre Lorde, Ronaldo V. Wilson, and Frank Bidart,

can become astute sociologists of the ways in which people respond to gay difference and to difference in general.

Writers, for the most part, put into words what they see and hear in the world, and what Bidart saw, heard, and absorbed as a boy growing up in California during the Second World War is one of the tales that he tells vividly, gruesomely, and beautifully, in his important new collection, “Half-Light: Collected Poems 1965-2016” (Farrar, Straus, & Giroux). Made up of the seventy-eight-year-old author's eight previous volumes of verse and a new sequence—the bold and elegiac “Thirst”—“Half-Light” is both

the culmination of a distinguished career and a poetic ur-text about how homophobia, doubt, and a parent's confusing love can shape a gay child.

From Bidart's 2013 poem “Queer”:

Lie to yourself about this and you will forever lie about everything.

Everybody already knows everything

so you can
lie to them. That's what they want.

But lie to yourself, what you will

lose is yourself. Then you
turn into them.

For each gay kid whose adolescence

was America in the forties or fifties
the primary, the crucial

scenario

forever is coming out—
or not. Or not. Or not. Or not. Or not.

The collection is a fraught song of the self, composed of subtleties and exclamations. It's both funny and astute of Bidart to say that his gay adolescence in the forties and fifties *was* America; what teenager doesn't feel that he or she *is* the world or at the center of it? In his poems, Bidart presents a queer self who resents being looked at through straight eyes, even as he demands that we all witness his voice, at least on the page. His style is marked by a kind of calm hysteria, or a calm that alternates with hysteria, as he struggles with the things that the straight world and his formerly closeted and frightened self think should remain unsaid. And then he says them twice.

Bidart grew up Catholic, in Bak-ersfield, the son of a prosperous potato farmer, Frank Raymond Bidart, and his wife, Martha. Bidart's father was, according to his son, energetic and melancholy; he drank and chased women. His mother was resentful and dreamed of other lives—the ones she saw in movies. (Los Angeles, the dream capital, was about two hours away.) Film, particularly American film, was the one art that Bidart remembers having access to in his home town. A sensitive only child, from an early age he was an inveterate moviegoer. (His 2008 poem “Marilyn Monroe” describes the roots

In Bidart's poetry, empathy, like hope, is an act of the imagination.

of the actress's ambition with great understanding: "Poor, you thought being rich is utterly/corrosive; and watched with envy.") And he saw his parents' lives unfold like a film, the backdrop of which was the macho-cowboy ranching culture of Bakersfield. "It was a culture that was intolerable to me," Bidart said, in a 1996 interview with Ashley Hatcher. "I knew very early that I wanted to get out of Bakersfield. I'm sure a lot of this had to do with my mother, who always wanted to get out and never did. She was scathing about the dominant value systems and dominant ways of thinking, but never escaped them."

One means of escape for Bidart was school. Enrolling at the University of California at Riverside, in 1957, he thought he would be an actor or a director, before settling into English. At Riverside, he fell under the spell of T. S. Eliot and other modernist poets. It was "The Cantos of Ezra Pound" that showed Bidart what a poem could be: unlimited in scope, mind-blowing in its dance with the mind. "The Cantos' are very brilliant and they're also very frustrating," he told the poet Mark Halliday in 1983. "But they were tremendously liberating in the way that they say that anything can be gotten into a poem...if you can create a structure that is large enough or strong enough, anything can retain its own identity and find its place there."

It took Bidart years to understand that anything that went through him could be included in a poem, and, if it came to it, a poem could take on any shape, even one that matched the contours of his own difference. One of the hallmarks of his writing is the way it looks on the page and, by extension, sounds: he capitalizes individual words that underscore what was stressed in the preceding line, or he cuts a statement of fact in half, letting it float into the white space of doubt, even as other voices are introduced—voices that are separate from but inseparable from the author's "I."

In graduate school, at Harvard, Bidart attended a poetry workshop taught by Robert Lowell, in whose poems history, politics, and the personal converged in deep and controlled meditations on all that could not be controlled, including the poet's struggle with manic depression. In a recent

e-mail exchange, Bidart described to me his association with the older writer:

He was, of course, brilliant to listen to in class. Fairly often I didn't agree with his judgment about new work, but his way of thinking about the alternatives of how a line could be put together—the practical intricacies and options of how it could be written—was dazzling. I was in the presence of a master, one I could argue with in my head. One could also argue with him in person. He invited graduate students back to his rooms at Quincy House to see his new work. He had a lot of new work: he had begun to write the unrhymed sonnets. I liked much of them and had very specific moments that I didn't think were quite right. I knew my response would be useless unless I was candid. He was eager for this. He liked to quote Auden to the effect that the best reader is someone who is crazy about your work, but doesn't like all of it. That fit me.

Here was a father figure with whom Bidart could communicate without trepidation. He told me, "Once, I asked him something that involved Jean Stafford"—Lowell's first wife—"and then said, 'Maybe that's too personal.' He replied, 'We *are* personal.'" Lowell's friendship, Bidart says, was "healing," after a youth spent with a father of whom he wrote, in the extraordinary title poem of his first book, "Golden State" (1973):

When I was a child,
you didn't seem to care if I existed.

...

—you finally
forgave me for being your son, and in the
nasty
shambles of your life, in which you had less
and less
occasion for pride, you were proud
of me, the first Bidart
who ever got a B.A.; Harvard, despite
your distrust, was the crown;—but the way
you eyed me:

the *bewilderment*, unease:
the somehow always
tentative, suspended judgment . . .

—however *much* you tried (and, clearly,
you *did* try)

you could not remake your
taste, and like me: could not remake
yourself, to give me

the grace
needed to look in a mirror, as I often can
now, with some equanimity . . .

Bidart's poem "Confessional," from "The Sacrifice" (1983), is a kind of companion piece to "Golden State," one that addresses his relationship with his mother, toward whom he admits

he was "predatory"—"pleased to have supplanted my father/in my mother's affections, and then/pleased to have supplanted my stepfather." This pleasure had its price, though: "I was the center of her life,—/and therefore,/of her fears and obsessions." A devout Christian, in the poem Bidart's mother tells her son that it is their duty "to divest ourselves/of the love of CREATED BEINGS." A refrain of the poem is "THERE WAS NO PLACE IN NATURE WE COULD MEET." The eternal question for the gay boy: where to find natural common ground with his straight mother, whose body he does not desire but may identify with? Does this amount to rejection or a powerful form of acceptance?

Through Lowell, Bidart met Elizabeth Bishop, with whom he did find a more natural meeting ground. Lowell and Bishop became muses of a sort for Bidart. He told me that he didn't expect the older poets to understand his prosody, "how I made lines and the relation between my lines and space on the page and common speech." And he knew that "imitating them would have been death for me as a writer." Lowell and Bishop were less teachers than parents of his own choosing, who encouraged him to become the artist he couldn't be back home. "I knew that knowing them—and the fact that, in some sense, they had needed me, an eager kid from Bakersfield obsessed with poetry and art, in their life—was the most unlikely gift," he told me. "How on earth had it happened?" He added, "I had such conflicted relationships with my real parents. Then I had been given, miraculously, the chance to be the 'good son' rather than the 'bad son.'"

Still, every family can be alienating, despite, or sometimes because of, the love its members feel for one another. "I adored them, and they knew it," Bidart wrote. "There were moments of great pain—but knowing them, and being useful to them, was the greatest privilege of my life. Now it's over, and not over."

Bidart published "Golden State" after his father had died, in 1967, but several years before Lowell's death, in 1977, and Bishop's, in 1979. (The poets provided the only two blurbs on the

original dust jacket.) In the title poem, Bidart writes about his father's death:

To see my father
lying in pink velvet, a rosary
twined around his hands, rouged,
lipsticked, his skin marble. . . .

Ruth, your last girlfriend, who wouldn't
sleep with you
or marry, because you wanted her
to pay half the expenses, and "His drinking
almost drove me crazy—"

Ruth once saw you
staring into a mirror,
in your ubiquitous kerchief and cowboy hat,
say:

"Why can't I look like a cowboy?"

You left a bag of money; and were
the unhappiest man
I have ever known well.

. . .

It's in many ways
a relief to have you dead.

I have more money.

The poem asks a number of questions: Has death made Bidart's father a woman, rouged and lipsticked? His cowboy drag—did he wear it for himself or to convince the women in his life of his masculinity, and thus of their own femininity? Now that the father is dead, his son has money—and thus masculine power, at least in those women's eyes.

Bidart's second collection, "The Book of the Body" (1977), is dominated by women in trouble: Bidart's mother and a breakdown she had; Ellen West, a turn-of-the-century anorexic psychiatric patient; the "feminine" side of Bidart, which is also breaking down, breaking apart. The book is wild in both imagery and language, full of fury and incredulity; reading its descriptions of love and bodies is like trying to see flowers through bullet-riddled glass—the beauty on the other side of damage. In a way, "The Book of the Body" is tougher than "Golden State," more ruthless and freer in its exploration of what constitutes the truth in autobiography—or in "confessional" poetry—and in its understanding of the ties that bind us to previous generations, although all those bodies and histories are the last thing we want to be tethered to as we struggle to liberate ourselves, even, sometimes, from ourselves. When Bidart reads, he sometimes gives the impression that he wants his body to meld with the poem, which

seems to liberate him, too. In a wonderful essay about him, April Bernard recalls attending a reading when she was a student at Harvard, in the seventies:

I am not sure now whether I was able to appreciate the poetry as such; what I did appreciate—and was bewitched and alarmed by in almost equal measure—was Bidart's astonishing performance. With complete concentration on the words he was saying . . . he paced and swooped and writhed as he read, somewhat nasally, and with aggressively flattened American vowels. . . . When the next day I read his poems . . . I saw those "dynamics" for reading made explicit in the typography on the pages, and was able to hear his voice again in my ear.

"The Book of the Body" can be viewed as a script for that kind of bewitching and alarming performance. In it, Bidart views his mother's collapse through the prism of his own transformations. He writes, in "The Arc":

When I wake up,
I try to convince myself
that my arm
isn't there—
to retain my sanity.

Then I try to convince myself it is.

Later:

I used to vaguely perceive the necessity
of coming to terms with the stump-filled,
material world,—

things, bodies;
CRAP—

a world of accident, and chance—;

but after
the accident, I had to understand it

not as an accident—;

the way my mother,
years before locked in McLean's,

believed the painting of a snow-scene above
her bed
had been placed there by the doctor to make
her feel cold.

How could we *convince* her it had no point? . . .

It had no point,—

it was there
without relation to my mother. . . .

Art always has a point, of course: to make the imagined world real to the viewer, to change the mind and remake the body. But how to remake the body as it lies dying? AIDS is one

of Bidart's great subjects. He came to maturity during the AIDS crisis, and his poem sequence "The First Hour of the Night" was published, in his fourth collection, "In the Western Night: Collected Poems 1965-1990," nine years after the disease was first reported. Like Thom Gunn's important collection "The Man with Night Sweats," which came out two years later, "The First Hour of the Night" helped find a language for the unspeakable. Where Gunn's voice was measured and mature, Bidart entered deeply into the science fiction that was AIDS—the eeriness of its effects on the living, all those gay men who wanted to be close to someone, but how?

In "By These Waters," he writes about tricks who are martyred by their johns' desire:

What begins in recognition,—
. . . ends in obedience.

The boys who lie back, or stand up,
allowing their flies to be unzipped

*however much they charge
however much they charge*

give more than they get.

When the room went dark, the screen lit up.

By these waters on my knees I have wept.

In this world, empathy, like hope, is an act of the imagination. What feels real—or concrete—is the ineffability of contradictory emotions.

"*I hate and—love*. The sleepless body hammering a nail nails itself, hanging crucified": the two lines that make up "Catullus: Excrucior," in "Desire" (1997), are the work of a man who is trying to purge himself of Catholicism, of his own physical existence, of the shame of having survived AIDS, if only barely. The emotional scars of survival are gouges in Bidart's skin, leaving him with the question: Why didn't he die, too? "For the AIDS Dead" (2013), in its entirety:

The plague you have thus far survived.
They didn't.
Nothing that they did in bed that you didn't.

Writing a poem, I cleave to "you." You means I, one, you, as well as the you

inside you constantly talk to. Without justice or logic, without

sense, you survived. They didn't.
Nothing that they did in bed that you didn't.

In an e-mail, Bidart told me that “In the Western Night” had “exhausted something basic about the way I made poems: the extremely heavy punctuation; the way the thrusts and urgencies of the voice determined almost everything.” He continued:

I had fallen in love with [the writer and artist] Joe Brainard. I wanted to make a poem for him that was quieter, that grew out of a music and movement that were more intimate. I literally typed “A Coin for Joe” for hours almost every day for months, on and off for two years. I had to find a way to put it down on the page that was different from any way I had found before. Somehow in this arduous process my prosody changed. . . . As the years passed I felt that some of my old poems were, in spots, too “à haute voix,” too declaimed to the balcony.

Bidart's love for the younger Brainard, who died of AIDS-induced pneumonia in 1994, at fifty-three, was not reciprocated—at least, not in the traditional way. But Brainard and Brainard's ghost became part of Bidart's family. Staying loyal to that love, or to that ghost of love, not only helped to make a poem; it helped to make the poet. From the 1997 poem “In Memory of Joe Brainard”:

In the end, the plague that full swift runs by
took you, broke you;—

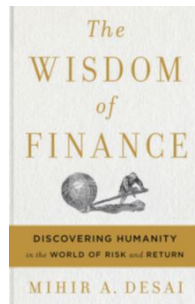
*in the end, could not
take you, did not break you—*

you had somehow erased within you not only
meanness, but anger, the desire to punish
the universe for everything

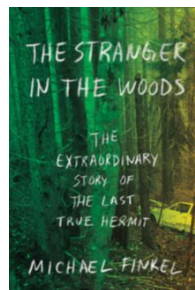
not achieved, not tasted, seen again, touched—;

The only love worth saving ends where it began, and always begins—in the imagination. But true emotion demands a dialogue, and, like James Merrill's extraordinary work “The Changing Light at Sandover,” Bidart's poems are a kind of séance, one in which he tries to invoke and communicate love, even if that love can no longer be achieved, tasted, seen, touched. The poems that Bidart wrote for his lost ones are a testament to the conversations he holds in his head, written with force from the confines of a limitless gay body. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED



The Wisdom of Finance, by Mihir A. Desai (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt). This accessible book attempts to show that economic theories can illuminate other areas of our lives. Probabilistic thinking may help us to deal with life's risks and randomness, and diversification can improve our relationship portfolios. Some analogies are labored, but Desai, a Harvard economist, is an omnivorous reader, referring to Trollope and Hammett amid explanations of such concepts as leverage and options theory. The book's final question may be its most important: “If the ideas of finance are so life-affirming, why does everyone hate it?” But Desai, who avoids topics like the 2008 financial crash and rising income inequality, offers no convincing answer.



The Stranger in the Woods, by Michael Finkel (Knopf). Seeking an anonymity so extreme that it was nearly an erasure, Christopher Knight lived in the woods of Maine as a hermit for twenty-seven years. His isolation lasted nearly as long as Robinson Crusoe's, and Finkel delights in revealing the ingenuity involved: water-resistant flooring made from old magazines and electrical tape; “churchlike” walls of tarp and garbage bags. Knight's independence was both romantic and banal. Never more than three minutes from civilization, he lived off Devil Dogs poached from nearby cabins. While the story invites comparisons with “Walden,” Knight himself dismisses Thoreau as “a dilettante,” telling Finkel, “I will admit to feeling a little contempt for those who can't keep quiet.”



Who Is Rich?, by Matthew Klam (Random House). The protagonist of this novel is a struggling cartoonist and illustrator in his forties, married, with two children. At an arts conference in a scenic seaside town, where he teaches annually, he resumes an affair he began the previous summer with Amy, a rich, neglected housewife who attends the conference. The eroticism between these characters is febrile, weighted with guilt and mutual disgust, and complicated by their extreme economic disparity. They are not ready to leave their lives—they love their children and love to hate their difficult spouses—but each wants something from the other. Klam uses this impossible dynamic to probe the entrapment and the alienation of middle age.



Fierce Kingdom, by Gin Phillips (Viking). Taking place over three chaotic hours, this novel follows a woman who is visiting a zoo with her four-year-old son when they are caught up in a shooting. The narrative offers a fine-grained account of her thoughts as she tries to stay hidden from an unknown number of shooters with uncertain motives. Strategizing over every move with brutal pragmatism, she is forced to weigh helping the most vulnerable potential victims against the overriding instinct to keep her son safe. She must also decide when to placate him and when to teach him to protect himself. By introducing the threat of violence, the book amplifies everyday domestic concerns, producing a kind of crystallization of the experience of parenthood.

CORNERED AT THE PARTY

The National's beautiful claustrophobia.

BY AMANDA PETRUSICH

*The band has always sung about regret, but the new album has an elegiac feel.*

Plenty of bands address the extravagance and the ferocity of youth, but far fewer sing about being grownup. Since 2001, the National, an indie-rock group from Ohio, has given voice to a particular kind of midlife melancholy: what it means to have a good job and a reliable partner, and nevertheless feel choked and despairing. This might seem absurd at first—privilege is privilege, after all—but the emotional depth of the band’s work says something about the size of those disappointments. To have so much and still feel grief is an existential torment all its own.

The National is made up of the vocalist Matt Berninger and two sets of brothers: Aaron and Bryce Dessner, and Scott and Bryan Devendorf. Though

they all grew up around Cincinnati, the band formed after its members moved to New York. “Sleep Well Beast,” which will be released this week, is the National’s seventh full-length album, and its first since 2013. Over the years, the group has adroitly lampooned its reputation as a collection of sad sacks. Shortly before the National’s previous record, “Trouble Will Find Me,” came out, the band played the song “Sorrow” (“Sorrow found me when I was young/Sorrow waited, sorrow won”) continuously for six hours at MOMA P.S. 1, in Queens. That project, “A Lot of Sorrow,” was conceived by the Icelandic artist Ragnar Kjartansson, but it required the National to acknowledge some of the comedy inherent in its gloom. Berninger

knows when and how to make a weird joke: “I’m walking around like I was the one who found dead John Cheever,” he sings on “Carin at the Liquor Store,” a new song about being destroyed by love.

Lyrically, “Sleep Well Beast,” like much of the National’s discography, dwells on the impossibility of human relations: how hard it is for two people to want the same thing, in the same way, for longer than just a moment. Maybe, Berninger ventures, defeat in this arena is not a failure of character or of generosity but simply the cost of a meaningful entanglement. He seems to believe that our needs are too mercurial, and our compromises too imperfect; every relationship, romantic or otherwise, inevitably spirals toward the same stalemate. “It’s nobody’s fault, no guilty party,” he sings. “We just got nothing, nothing left to say.”

This gives the record an elegiac feel. Berninger has always written cleverly and frankly about nostalgia (“I am secretly in love with/everyone I grew up with,” he offered on “Demons,” from “Trouble Will Find Me”), but now he seems to be reckoning with how inert and immovable feelings of regret and longing are. Something significant has been lost—but what can he do about it? Mostly, he tries to forget, to wait it out, to blur the edges a little. “Until everything is less insane, I’m mixing weed with wine,” he sings on “Walk It Back.”

Berninger’s wife, Carin Besser (a former editor at this magazine and, presumably, the subject of “Carin at the Liquor Store”), is credited, with Berninger, as a co-writer of the album’s “lyrics and melodies,” an arrangement that, admittedly, complicates some of its lovelorn narratives. It would be simple to presume that Berninger was merely lamenting the state of his marriage—successful rock singers aren’t known for making excellent husbands. It’s knottier to think of these songs as stories that the couple is telling together. Through this filter, “Sleep Well Beast” becomes a stranger and more dynamic document, about the commitments we make to each other, and about how we choose to yield to them. “The day I die, the day I die, where will we be?” Berninger wonders. The use of “we” implies a kind of infallible devotion. It’s romantic, in a backward way: the idea that two people could become so hopelessly

entwined that, even when the relationship falters or fails, they remain spiritually coupled. “Carin at the Liquor Store” is the record’s saddest song, and its most haunting. “I wasn’t a catch, I wasn’t a keeper,” Berninger admits. He is full of shame, indignation, and self-loathing—all the cold comfort of the recently rejected. “So blame it on me, I really don’t care.” What this sounds like is: I am sorry you don’t love me enough.

If that seems devastating, well, it is. The band isn’t peddling catharsis this time around, or offering solutions—“Let’s just get high enough to see our problems,” from “Day I Die,” is possibly the worst advice I’ve ever heard. It’s simply suggesting a new way to metabolize heartache.

In the almost sixteen years since the National made its debut, Aaron Dessner has become a sought-after producer, working with acts like Frightened Rabbit, Sharon Van Etten, and Local Natives. With his brother, he has also curated and produced several notable compilations, including “Day of the Dead,” for which they corralled more than seventy artists to cover songs by the Grateful Dead. He recently built a studio, Long Pond, near his home, in upstate New York. The bulk of “Sleep Well Beast” was recorded there, with some additional sessions in Los Angeles, Paris, and Berlin. Dessner’s production is meticulous, and allows for expanses in which a note or an idea can properly linger. Synthesizers, horns, and strings drift in and out of these songs in perfect arcs.

“Sleep Well Beast” features more electronic beats than the band’s previous albums, but Bryan Devendorf remains a visionary and inventive drummer. The National has always leaned heavily on its rhythm section to give its songs a frantic edge. Devendorf is at his best when he has room to make idiosyncratic choices, which often turn out to be transformative. On “The System Only Dreams in Total Darkness,” a song about alienation, his drumming reminds me of cockroaches scattering after the kitchen lights are flicked on—it makes a nervous song feel fully paranoid.

Fans of the National have had plenty of time to acclimate to Berninger’s voice, a heady, lumbering baritone, yet it’s worth reiterating its singularity. Listening to

it, I often think of a deep-sea diver, weights slung low on his hips, being tugged toward the ocean floor. Berninger uses his instrument in artful and elegant ways. In the past, he has periodically broken into ragged screams, as on “Abel” and “Mr. November,” from “Alligator” (2005). On “Sleep Well Beast,” he explores his mumble: “I better cut this off, don’t wanna fuck it up,” he gabbles on “Walk It Back.” When he briefly moves into a higher register, often on a song’s chorus, it can feel ecstatic. On “Turtleneck,” a political song that recalls the baggy alt-rock of the nineties—somewhere between the Violent Femmes and the Pixies—he sounds breathless and wobbly, until he finally lets go and yelps.

Berninger writes frequently of a suffocating claustrophobia, particularly when he’s been cornered at a party. Across records, his most consistent yearning is for solitude, or time in some private place with one other person. He’s often plotting his own jailbreak—delivery from the crowd—or cajoling someone to sneak off with him. “Meet me in the stairwell in a second, for a glass of gin/Nobody else will be there then,” he sings on “Nobody Else Will Be There,” the spare, tense song that opens “Sleep Well Beast.” It’s a misanthropic impulse that’s inherently at odds with his line of work, which gives it a funny kind of urgency. “I’d rather walk all the way home right now than to spend one more second in this place,” he sings on the wintry bridge of “Day I Die.”

In July, the National played two intimate shows at Basilica, a former glue factory near the Hudson River in upstate New York, close to Dessner’s studio. With the band now based in several cities, this was as close to a home-town gig as it could get. The musicians set up on a circular stage in the middle of the room. Strangers were clutching one another.

While performing, Berninger is an inscrutable and arresting presence. He’s not still, exactly, but, even without the dark suit jacket he often wears, there’s something staid and almost professorial about the way he looms onstage. This makes sense—he’s briefly embodying the heavy, reverberating sadness of these songs. The work is hard and serious. For anyone who has ever found herself mired in this sort of situation—apathy mixed with deep hunger—Berninger’s echoing of it can feel like a public service. ♦

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INQUIRING MINDS

"The Unknown Girl" and "The Limehouse Golem."

BY ANTHONY LANE

If you want to do a cop's job, but you're not a cop, what are your options? Sherlock Holmes called himself a "consulting detective," on the strength of which he was repeatedly invited by members of the police force to assist them in their duty and, in so doing, to demonstrate that they were dithering fools. Father Brown, in G. K. Chester-

on her doorstep, but nobody hires or compels her to investigate, and the police explicitly warn her off, reminding her that she is on their turf. By dint of her profession, however, she is someone to whom people turn in confidence, revealing not merely their physical symptoms but also, wittingly or otherwise, the roots of their anxieties; individual



In the Dardenne brothers' film, a doctor investigates a murder on her doorstep.

ton's stories, attended both to the souls of the living and to the puzzle of the mystifying dead. The two were not unconnected. "Has it never struck you that a man who does next to nothing but hear men's real sins is not likely to be wholly unaware of human evil?" he once inquired.

More recently, we've had the newspaper cartoonist played by Jake Gyllenhaal, in "Zodiac" (2007), who without any training comes weirdly close to unmasking a serial killer, and now Jenny Davin (Adèle Haenel), in "The Unknown Girl," a new film by Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne. She is a young doctor in the Belgian town of Seraing, on the outskirts of Liège, and she doesn't set out to be a sleuth. A murder occurs

bodies and faces become a kind of confession, in Jenny's eyes, as if she were a secular disciple of Father Brown. When she interrogates one of her patients, for example, he denies any knowledge of the case, but even as he does so she notices the pulse in his temple beating a little faster. A day or so afterward, he comes to see her of his own accord. "Tell me what you know and you'll feel better," she says.

Near the start of the film, we find Jenny working late, in the company of her intern, Julien (Olivier Bonnaud). Having watched him freeze in panic when a child has a fit in the waiting room, she offers some steely advice: "Learn to make a good diagnosis. If the patient's suffering moves you, you

make a bad one." A buzzer sounds to indicate that someone is outside, calling at the medical practice after hours, but she tells Julien to pay no heed. Upset by her attitude, he walks out.

If you had to guess which detail from these scenes would trigger the rest of the story, you would probably point to the bond—awkward, unromantic, yet closer than that of mentor and pupil—between Jenny and Julien, or else to the kid with convulsions. But no. It's all about the buzzer. The person at the door was not sick; as CCTV footage shows, a young woman was clamoring for help. Getting no reply, she ran away, and her body was soon found nearby at the foot of a concrete slope beside the River Meuse. She had a head wound and bruised wrists, suggesting a struggle. Jenny has no legal case to answer, since she was not obliged to respond at that time of day, but her conscience is riven, and, with her usual clarity, she lays out the brutal facts: "If I'd opened the door, she'd be alive, like me."

For more than two decades, and certainly since "Rosetta" won the Palme d'Or at Cannes, in 1999, the Dardenne brothers have been telling their downbeat tales of damaged lives. The result is more like a sheaf of witness statements than like a chorus of outcries, and, if the Dardennes share the social commitment of Ken Loach, say, they lack his accusing wrath. Their style is famously plain, with no musical score to lull or to cajole us, and a reluctance to quicken the action with cuts; if the camera is confronted with two people talking, it tends to sweep back and forth between them, as our gaze would naturally do if we were in the room. But all styles, even the most unadorned, tend to stiffen into mannerism, and lately the Dardennes, as though wary of that risk, have begun to pep up their spartan realism with a dash of suspense. The heroine of their previous film, "Two Days, One Night" (2014), had a single weekend in which to plead and pester her way out of redundancy, and, in "The Unknown Girl," Jenny drives along in pursuit of a small yellow scooter. Holy moly, a Dardenne car chase! Purists may flinch, but the rest of us are already looking forward to the brothers' next film, "Fast & Furious: Showdown

in Seraing,” in which only Vin Diesel and his matte-black Corvette can get the lonely single mother to the welfare office before it closes for lunch.

Jenny has no deadline, driven as she is by nothing more—or nothing less—than her own guilt, and by the thought that the deceased, who has yet to be identified, may have to be buried without a name. That is an ancient misgiving, yet the movie is itchy with the paraphernalia of today; information about the killing seeps through cell phones, entry phones, and computer screens, and you come to dread yet another buzz at the door. Stand back to inspect the plot and you’ll realize just how heavily it relies on coincidence, with a large proportion of the suspects and their relatives being linked to the medical practice. But then, in a country with a functioning health-care system, a good doctor, like a good cop, *will* be plugged into the local community. Also, here’s the thing about a Dardenne film: you don’t stand back.

Goodness is not the easiest of themes to dramatize. Unlike courage or compassion, it doesn’t come with an instruction manual. All the more credit, therefore, to the Dardennes, who have striven more than many filmmakers to bring good deeds to life. They did it in “The Kid with a Bike” (2012), where one woman took up the cause of the troubled kid in question, and they do it again here. Jenny is tall and severe, dressed in simple tops and jeans, with her hair in a ponytail, and it’s no accident that our very first view of her is in profile, as if on one side of a coin. As for Adèle Haenel, far from milking the role, she gives almost nothing away. She rations

her smiles, and her most efficient method for coercing people to talk is to *stare* them into the truth. You think afresh of the film’s title and wonder, Who is more unknown here, the nameless victim or the inscrutable doctor? Yet her patients clearly love her: gifts are proffered; a song is sung for her during a house call; and, when one poor fellow, diabetic and overweight, frets about paying his gas bill, she calls social services and fixes the problem on the spot. As a temporary detective, Jenny makes a string of inquiries, while demanding next to nothing for herself—not, at least, until the movie’s end, when, after some hesitation, and with her sorrowful task completed, she requests a hug. The audience in the cinema collapses, and the case is closed.

No film in which Bill Nighy appears can ever be discounted. Rakish, dapper, not quite ruined, quavering with half-concealed amusement, courteous toward a fallen world, and somehow both urbane and faintly spectral, he could have stepped straight out of a Sargent portrait. I can imagine him in spats. What a pleasure it is, then, to see him in a frock coat and a spotted necktie, stalking the London streets. In “The Limehouse Golem,” set in 1880, he plays Inspector Kildare of Scotland Yard, whose career as a detective has been held back, it is whispered, because he is “not the marrying kind.” The role was originally to have been played by Alan Rickman, who died last year—a passing as hard to accept as that of Severus Snape—and Nighy was cast instead. Rickman’s Kildare would have been more insidious, perhaps, with a deeper drawl,

and more likely to be suspected of the crimes that he was deputized to solve. Nighy, as sensitive as a seismograph, approaches them with a shudder.

A failed playwright named John Cree (Sam Reid) lies poisoned, to the dismay of his wife, Lizzie (Olivia Cooke). She is a star of the music halls, where much of the movie unfolds. Kildare thinks that Cree may have taken his own life after ending a host of others—that he could be the slayer known as the Limehouse Golem, who has been slicing throats, apparently at random, across the East End. All this sounds rich in sensation, a quality much prized by the Victorians, but the movie, adapted from the novel by Peter Ackroyd and directed by Juan Carlos Medina, is, alas, rarely as poised as its leading man. It feels at once crammed and sketchy, riddled with flashbacks and framing devices, and woefully light on frights. Still, there is plenty to bait any connoisseur of bookish in-jokes, not least the copy of Thomas De Quincey’s essay “Murder, Considered as One of the Fine Arts” that is found, defaced with savage ravings, in the British Library. To deepen the joke, other suspects include such regulars at the library as the novelist George Gissing (Morgan Watkins), the celebrated comic Dan Leno (Douglas Booth), and Karl Marx (Henry Goodman). Each is briefly envisioned as the maniac, and, if you have always wanted to watch somebody’s head being sawed off by the master of dialectical materialism, now is your chance. It might not come again. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM

Richard Brody blogs about movies.

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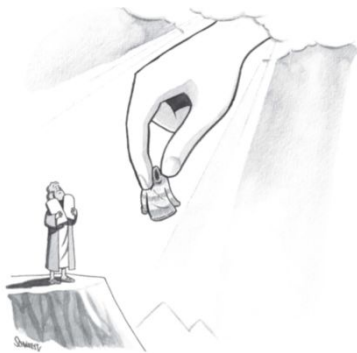
Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Teresa Burns Parkhurst, must be received by Sunday, September 10th. The finalists in the August 28th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the September 25th issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



“ ”

THE FINALISTS



“Not a commandment. Just a suggestion.”
Michael Crowley, Washington, D.C.

“Thou shalt not machine wash.”
Aubyn Shettle, Dallas, Texas

“It's a Christmas sweater. Someday you'll understand.”
Gene Krzyzynski, Tonawanda, N.Y.

THE WINNING CAPTION



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Rob Gregory, Chicago, Ill.

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