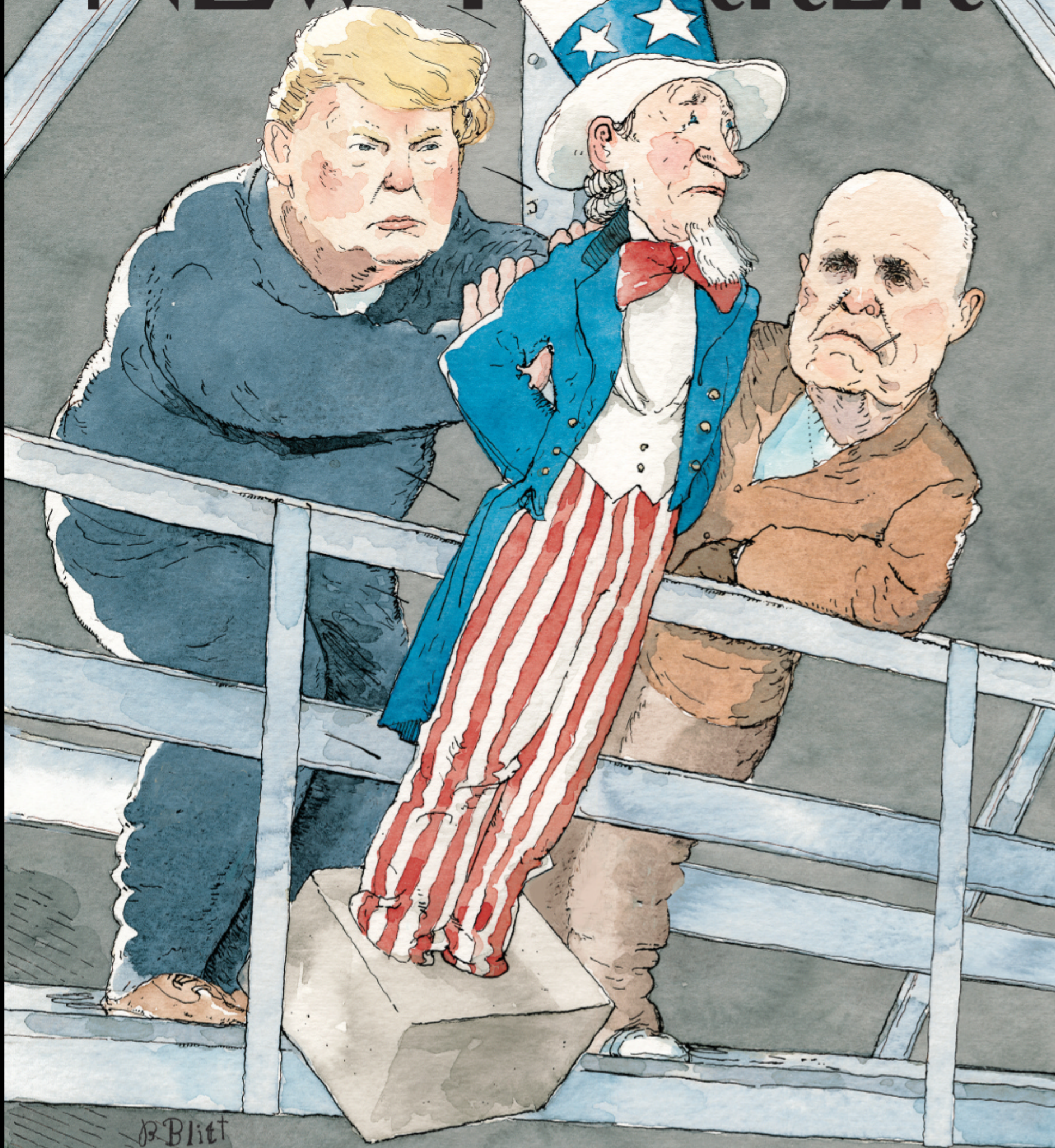


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THE NEW YORKER



A photograph of three women standing on a city street. The woman on the left wears a red and white checkered dress with a black belt and black shoes. The woman in the center wears a black dress with ruffled sleeves and black shoes. The woman on the right wears a gold sequined dress and black shoes. A pedestrian crossing sign is visible in the background.

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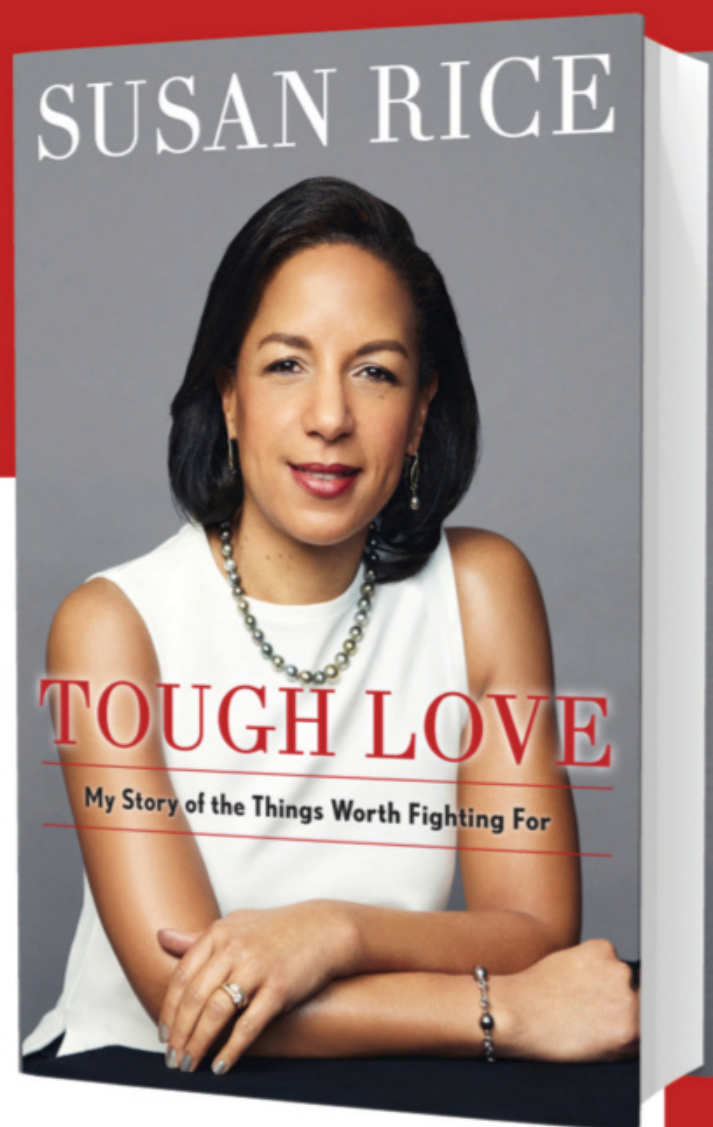
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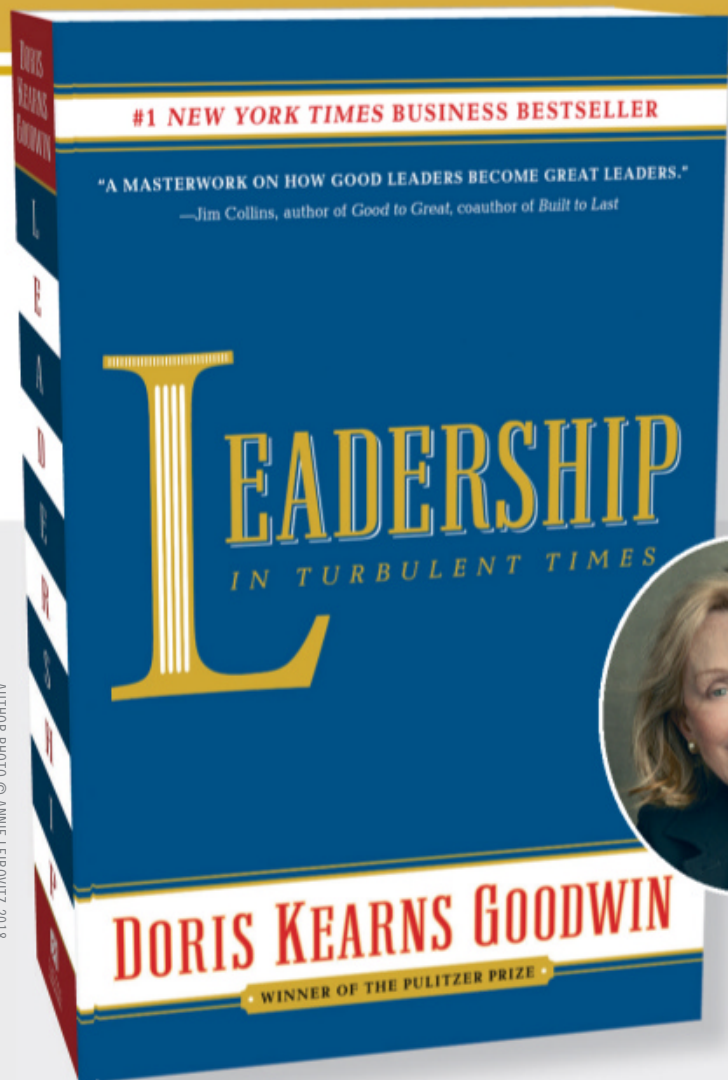
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OCTOBER 7, 2019

- 4 **GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN**
13 **THE TALK OF THE TOWN**
Steve Coll on the road to impeachment; Trump and Ukraine's TV-star President; plutocrat conferences; a taxonomy of hugs.
- PERSONAL HISTORY
Haruki Murakami 18 **Abandoning a Cat**
What I didn't know about my father.
- SHOUTS & MURMURS
Hallie Cantor 25 **Are You on the Apps?**
- ANNALS OF SHOW BUSINESS
Adam Green 26 **Belief System**
Modern mind reading with Derren Brown.
- A REPORTER AT LARGE
Rachel Aviv 34 **Show of Force**
What if your abusive husband is a cop?
- PROFILES
Dana Goodyear 46 **The Ends of the Earth**
Thomas Joshua Cooper's far-flung photography.
- FICTION**
Rion Amilcar Scott 56 **"Shape-Ups at Delilah's"**
- THE CRITICS**
THE CURRENT CINEMA
Anthony Lane 65 **"Joker."**
- BOOKS
67 **Briefly Noted**
Lauren Collins 68 **Duelling best-sellers in Norway.**
Dan Chiasson 72 **Fanny Howe's "Love and I."**
- THE ART WORLD
Peter Schjeldahl 74 **Richard Serra at Gagosian.**
- THE THEATRE
Alexandra Schwartz 76 **Florian Zeller's "The Height of the Storm."**
- DANCING
Jennifer Homans 78 **William Forsythe comes to the Shed.**
- POEMS**
Ciaran Carson 40 **"Angela Hackett, 'Lemons on a Moorish Plate,' 2013"**
Barbara Hamby 60 **"Ode on Words for Parties (American Edition)"**
- COVER**
Barry Blitt **"Whack Job"**

DRAWINGS Drew Panckeri, Maggie Larson, Julia Suits, Carolita Johnson, Roz Chast, Nick Downes, Benjamin Schwartz, Liana Finck, Amy Hwang, Emily Flake, Paul Karasik, Pat Byrnes **SPOTS** R. O. Blechman

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Haruki Murakami (“*Abandoning a Cat*,” p. 18) published his fourteenth novel in English, “*Killing Commendatore*,” last year.

Emily Flake (*Sketchpad*, p. 17), a *New Yorker* cartoonist, will publish “*That Was Awkward: The Art and Etiquette of the Awkward Hug*” this month.

Barry Blitt (*Cover*) is a cartoonist and an illustrator. His latest book, “*Blitt*,” is a collection of his illustrations for *The New Yorker* and other publications.

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Ciaran Carson (*Poem*, p. 40) is the author of, most recently, “*From There to Here*.” His new collection, “*Still Life*,” is forthcoming in October.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM



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Mark Mahaney’s photographs depict life in Alaska in the round-the-clock darkness of polar night.



THE NEW YORKER INTERVIEW

Philip Pullman on writing fantasy, hating Tolkien, and the journey from innocence to experience.

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THE MAIL

BEARING WITNESS

I read Zuzana Justman's *Personal History* about her experience in the Terezín concentration camp with interest and gratitude ("My Terezín Diary," September 16th). I was one of those fortunate German-Jewish children whose parents were able to arrange for emigration before the tragedies began. We moved first to France, a few months before Kristallnacht, and then to the United States, four months before the German occupation of France. Until recently, I did not consider myself to be a Holocaust survivor. But as the Holocaust recedes further into history—and as Holocaust deniers seek to rewrite that history, and white supremacy once again rears its ugly head—we, the survivors, are still here to bear witness and to make our voices heard. Your magazine's role in giving those voices an opportunity to speak is greatly appreciated.

Evelyn Spiegler
Forest Hills, N.Y.

ASSAD'S CHLORINE GAS

Dexter Filkins echoes a common misunderstanding when he, in his review of Samantha Power's memoir, calls Bashar al-Assad's deployment of chlorine gas in Syria "barbaric but not illegal" ("Damned if You Don't," September 16th). Under the Chemical Weapons Convention, which Assad reluctantly joined in 2013, the use of any chemical as a chemical weapon is banned. Yet, because chlorine has widespread nonmilitary applications, states are allowed to possess it, even after giving up their other chemical weapons. As a result, Assad has continued to have access to chlorine, though its use as a weapon remains just as illegal as that of any other chemical agent.

Philipp C. Bleek

Associate Professor, Nonproliferation and Terrorism Studies
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EDUCATION FOR ALL

Hua Hsu, in his review of Caitlin Zaloom's "Indebted: How Families Make College Work at Any Cost," characterizes "the idea of free college" as "once Bernie Sanders's fringe dream" (Books, September 9th). Sanders's idea is not as experimental in the American context as it may seem. Until 1976, the public colleges of New York City were tuition-free to city residents. Moreover, at some of the country's land-grant colleges, which were founded in the eighteen-sixties and offered affordable education to state residents, fees amounted to a few dozen dollars per term through the nineteen-fifties. When I was a student at U.C. Berkeley, in the sixties, I paid no more than ninety dollars each semester. Sanders's "fringe dream" would thus represent a return to equitable educational principles and policies from our past.

Gene H. Bell-Villada
Williamstown, Mass.

Hsu captures the anxiety of middle-class families over the cost of education, but barely touches on one of the factors motivating their financial sacrifices: the mythology of elite schools. Buying into the idea that getting into a particular school will make one better educated and more successful, many parents believe that any expense is worth entry into one school over another. The myth has given young people the skewed perception that not getting into a certain school is a lifetime mark of failure, and has trivialized the content of knowledge. Having studied and taught at both elite and non-elite American universities, I believe that breaking down this mythology is the greatest challenge we face in alleviating the cost of college education.

Bernard Dov Cooperman
College Park, Md.

•
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OCTOBER 2 – 8, 2019

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



The sci-fi fantasies of Japanese video games, the pulsing bodies of E.D.M. raves, the mystical spaces of Nigerian shrines, and the bygone music chain Tower Records all figure into the wildly ingenious new work of the young American artist Jacolby Satterwhite (pictured). On Oct. 4, **Pioneer Works**, in Brooklyn, opens “You’re at Home,” an exhibition of digital projections, performances, sculptures, and music by the artist, who recently directed an animated music video for the singer Solange.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ARIELLE BOBB-WILLIS

THE THEATRE

Kingfishers Catch Fire Irish Repertory

Inspired by historical events, Robin Glendinning's two-hander pits the former S.S. officer Herbert Kappler (Haskell King) against the Irish clergyman Hugh O'Flaherty (Sean Gormley). It's 1948 and Kappler is serving a life sentence in Rome, where he used to head the local Nazi police. But "pits" is perhaps too strong a word for the amiable, meandering conversation in Kappler's cell—it is rather startling that an encounter between a godless murderer and a priest, bitter foes during the war, could be so dramatically inert. The writing is at times distractingly modern (at one point, Kappler questions O'Flaherty's "little trope"), and Glendinning's play, directed by Kent Paul, never sets up an interesting moral dialectic between its two protagonists. In real life, Kappler ended up converting to Catholicism; the show does little to illuminate his reasons for doing so, or whether he was even sincere.—*Elisabeth Vincentelli (Through Oct. 20.)*

Mothers

The Duke on 42nd Street

In some hyperbolic version of suburban America, three mothers (Maechi Aharanwa, Jasmine Batchelor, and Satomi Blair) smilingly snipe at each other while watching their children play at a "mommy-baby meetup"; a foreign-born nanny (Tina Chilip) and an out-of-place father (Max Gordon Moore) look on from the sidelines. Take this scenario, picture it devolving to its most depraved extreme, and there's a good chance you'll accurately imagine the end point of this cynical satire. Directed by Robert Ross Parker for Playwrights Realm, from a script by Anna Moench, its shocks bring up intriguing ideas related to motherhood, tribalism, class, and the survival instinct, but they never rattle; the play's offhand absurdities feel indebted to the work of Young Jean Lee but lack her uncanny precision. Wilson Chin's minimal toy-blocks set works beautifully.—*Rollo Romig (Through Oct. 12.)*

Our Dear Dead Drug Lord McGinn/Cazale

Alexis Scheer's new play, presented by the WP Theatre and Second Stage, is very now: teen-age girls dealing with messy emotions; fast-flowing, smart-aleck dialogue; ritualized physicality expressed in a dance scene. To the mix, Scheer adds a glib morbidity. Her quartet of Miami high schoolers, united by their fascination with Pablo Escobar (already fifteen years deceased when the action is set, in 2008), graduate from an initial act of senseless cruelty into full-blown mania. Both Scheer and the director, Whitney White, are most at ease when the girls banter, in scenes the excellent cast handles with aplomb. But the show stumbles when it turns to an exploration of grief, remorse, and unmooring. The lurid, violent finale suggests the shamanistic fervor of a Dario Argento film touched with magical surrealism, but the show can't quite handle its jump into a different tonal and aesthetic universe.—*E.V. (Through Oct. 27.)*

runboyrun & In Old Age New York Theatre Workshop

"Runboyrun" and "In Old Age" are the third and the eighth installments in the playwright Mfoniso Udofia's "Ufot Cycle," an ambitious series of nine interlinked plays that build a family mythology. In "runboyrun," an exquisite work of theatre, Disciple Ufot (Chiké Johnson) is haunted by memories of Nigeria's civil war while his wife, Abasiama (Patrice Johnson Chevannes), struggles to connect with him. Udofia's script is effortlessly lyrical and rhythmic, but it's Loretta Greco's graceful direction and the superb performances (especially by Johnson and Chevannes) that coalesce to form a heartrending story about individual and national trauma. "In Old Age" (directed by Awoye Timpo) also features Abasiama, now older and haunted by the ghost of Disciple. Though capably performed, this work doesn't have the same spark or independent strength as the first; it's fashioned like an endpiece, chained to what has come before, and is more bold-faced but less effective in its sentimentality.—*Maya Phillips (Through Oct. 13.)*

Sunday

Atlantic Theatre Company

There's something uncanny-valleyish about the cohort of early-twentysomethings who gather,

in a New York starter apartment, for a boozy book-group session in Jack Thorne's new play, directed by Lee Sunday Evans. They sound like members of their generation, chatting about Ta-Nehisi Coates and toxic masculinity. (The book group itself began as a "post-ironic joke." Their selection: an Ann Tyler novel.) But, where some glint of soul should go, Thorne has inserted ennui with an undercurrent of cruelty to show his audience what's wrong with kids these days. Most of this group of five went to prep school together; Marie (Sadie Scott), a lonely book lover, is the odd one out. Thorne, who has said that he was inspired, in part, by last year's Aziz Ansari debacle, throws various au-courant noodles at the wall—an episode of unwanted kissing, bursts of interpretive dance—and relies on narration to illuminate his characters from without rather than within. His hero is Marie's older downstairs neighbor (Maurice Jones), an introvert looking to connect in all the wrong ways.—*Alexandra Schwartz (Through Oct. 13.)*

Why?

Polonsky Shakespeare Center

This production's nominal draw is that it's by Peter Brook, who co-wrote and co-directed it with Marie-Hélène Estienne, but its strongest asset is the idiosyncratic actress Kathryn Hunter. The diminutive performer immedi-

ON BROADWAY



David Byrne can be safely filed under "miscellaneous." Since establishing his surreal deadpan as the front man for Talking Heads, he has chased a head-spinning array of enthusiasms, from avant-garde soundscapes to bicycling advocacy. He wrote a disco opera about Imelda Marcos, followed by a rock musical about Joan of Arc. In 2008, he turned a Beaux-Arts building in lower Manhattan into a musical instrument, using an antique organ hooked up to electrical conduits and water pipes. So what's next? "**American Utopia**" is a Broadway incarnation of his 2018 album of the same name, which came out of a multimedia project titled "Reasons to Be Cheerful," conceived by Byrne as a "tonic for tumultuous times." The show (starting previews Oct. 4, at the Hudson) features choreography and musical staging by Annie-B Parson, a roving twelve-piece band in matching suits, and a model of a human brain.—*Michael Schulman*

ately captures our attention with her low rasp of a voice and her fluid, expressionist sense of movement. She's a perfect fit for a play about theatre itself. The lively first part offers overly whimsical generalities about the art form—some quick scenes are akin to acting exercises. The show then pivots to the tragic fate of the Russian director Vsevolod Meyerhold and his wife, the actress Zinaida Raikh: he was arrested and executed during the Stalinist purges; she was brutally murdered. Theatre may be a game of make-believe, Brook and Estienne seem to say, but one with such power that it becomes a matter of life and death.—*E.V. (Through Oct. 6.)*

NIGHT LIFE

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

Barry Harris

Village Vanguard

There are only a few active jazz musicians left who had the privilege of playing with Charlie Parker, and the pianist Barry Harris is one of them. The eighty-nine-year-old master has fashioned a style that calls on the keyboard language of the bebop pioneer Bud Powell, leavening its frenetic effect with his own easy approach. He's joined here by two expert associates: the drummer Leroy Williams and the bassist Ray Drummond.—*Steve Futterman (Oct. 1-6.)*

Ron Carter

Birdland

If Ron Carter had retired in the mid-seventies, after helping cement the sonic identity of the

now revered CTI Records, he'd still be recognized as one of the most substantial bassists in jazz history, having shared stages with a slew of legendary figures (including Miles Davis) and recorded with dozens more—but he didn't. He has since added thousands of recordings to his résumé and established a respected solo career. Week one of this monthlong stint features the exemplary instrumentalist fronting his Great Big Band.—*S.F. (Oct. 1-26.)*

Ladytron

Brooklyn Steel

The electronic-pop quartet Ladytron took its name from a song by Roxy Music, and it shares with that band a constitutional alignment with high fashion. In the two decades since its inception, Ladytron has never lost its stylized chill or its air of lightly ironic glamour. Yet, on its recent self-titled album, the musicians—who jelled in Liverpool but are now scattered across the globe—reflect our more sinister era. "We are sirens," the singer Helen Marnie coldly declares at one point, "of the apocalypse."—*Jay Ruttenberg (Oct. 2.)*

Daniel Miller

Bossa Nova Civic Club

Daniel Miller founded Mute Records, in 1978, to issue the New Wave synth landmark "T.V.O.D." b/w "Warm Leatherette," a seven-inch he'd recorded as the Normal. The label became his life's work: Miller's signings include Depeche Mode, Nick Cave, Erasure, and Wire, and, in the nineties, Mute distributed key Detroit-techno titles. On the decks, Miller is as liable to spin straightforward tech-house as he is to dip into his label's classics; this appearance, at the goth dance party Synthicide, suggests the latter.—*Michaelangelo Matos (Oct. 3.)*

Robert Glasper

Blue Note

Whether Robert Glasper has significantly altered the landscape of contemporary jazz is a question that can be bandied about all month long thanks to this ambitious residency. In a series of shows throughout October, Glasper—a glittering keyboardist who welcomes hip-hop, R. & B., pop, and other disparate genres into his musical open house—presents a collaboration with the rapper Yasiin Bey; pays tribute to such icons as Stevie Wonder, the producer J Dilla, and the late trumpeter Roy Hargrove; and hosts his own plugged-in and acoustic ensembles.—*S.F. (Oct. 3-Nov. 3.)*

Beach Fossils

Knockdown Center

The Brooklyn band Beach Fossils seemed to expand and transcend the subgenre of surf rock with its 2010 debut: hypnotic reverb and drowsy, distant guitars fused into a sound that made its memory-soaked songs feel as though they'd been recorded underwater. The group hasn't abandoned its lo-fi tendencies, but its recent album "Somersault," from 2017, finds the musicians breaking new ground again with fuller arrangements and crystalline, psych-rock-inspired melodies.—*Julyssa Lopez (Oct. 5.)*

Ghostly 20

Elsewhere

The Ann Arbor-born, Brooklyn-based record label Ghostly International celebrates twenty years with two events, held back to back, each with its own lineup. The early-evening bill is heavier on live sets, including that of the headliner, Gold Panda, who writes dance tracks suffused equally with glitch noises and melody. But the acts of the all-d.j. late-nighter are more enticing—especially Galcher Lustwerk, whose sardonic, semi-spoken lyrics over muffled beats have earned him a cult following, and the Toronto d.j. Ciel, a sharp and unpredictable house selector.—*M.M. (Oct. 5.)*

Immigrant Defense Project Benefit

Baby's All Right

Harsh policies targeting undocumented immigrants have inspired myriad artistic acts of solidarity. In that spirit, a few D.I.Y. experimentalists are joining forces to continue fighting injustice. This benefit concert for New York's Immigrant Defense Project includes Active Bird Community, a local trio known for its stirring indie rock; Nick Hakim, a D.C.-bred artist who makes otherworldly R. & B.; Sad13, the solo project of Speedy Ortiz's Sadie Dupuis; and the wry and whip-smart singer-songwriter Sidney Gish, from Boston.—*J.L. (Oct. 6.)*

Phil Collins

Madison Square Garden

Even in its eighties habitat, Phil Collins's signature style was rarely mistaken for hip, but his hits have definitely taken on a robust afterlife. Nowadays, if a New York driver decides to test the boundaries of his car stereo, the odds that he chooses a Collins song seem bizarrely high; onstage, the songs,

FUNKY R. & B.



For kids in the early two-thousands, the video game Guitar Hero granted an opportunity to become rock stars, transforming its players into overnight masters of the strings—or at least of those five colorful buttons. One member of that generation, **Steve Lacy**, first known for his work in the spacey R. & B. band the Internet, turned that fantasy into reality. The twenty-one-year-old musician has popped up on records by Kali Uchis, Kendrick Lamar, Solange, and Vampire Weekend, injecting them with retro-tinged funk. On his own, he configures his musical identity around warm, imaginative guitar and bass textures. "Apollo XXI," his hazy solo debut, from May, reconstructs sexual anxiety and liberation as groovy bedroom pop; fittingly, on Oct. 5, he brings the album to Harlem's storied Apollo Theatre.—*Briana Younger*

not the singer, are the main attraction. Is there another Madison Square Garden headliner whose fans are likely to identify his drumming more readily than they are his face?—*J.R.* (Oct. 6-7.)

Black Thought National Sawdust

The rapper Black Thought has enjoyed an esteemed and sprawling career—he fronts the decorated hip-hop group the Roots and has lent his acerbic lyricism to a bevy of other artists' tracks. It took him the better part of three decades to finally release his own solo records; "Streams of Thought Vol. 1" and "Streams of Thought Vol. 2," both from 2018, showcase his sharp wit and even sharper tongue. For this three-day exhibition of collaborative multimedia performances, he traces his lineage and his inspirations, from the late Amiri Baraka to KRS-One and Rakim.—*Briana Younger* (Oct. 8-10.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

Ensemble/Parallax National Sawdust

Salvatore Sciarrino's music can be unnervingly quiet—the violin bows scrape the strings, producing rasp as much as tone, and the percussion thumps at uneven intervals like something out of Edgar Allan Poe. Ensemble/Parallax and the mezzo-soprano Kathleen Roland present two of his pieces: "Infinito Nero" ("Black Infinity"), which draws on the medieval mysticism of the sixteenth-century nun St. Maria Maddalena de' Pazzi, and "Le Voci Sottovetro" ("The Voices Under Glass"), a more melodic work that reimagines the fractured beauty of Gesualdo's madrigals. Patricia Alessandrini's "Nachtgewächse," for chamber ensemble and live electronics, rounds out the program, which also features video art by Wolfgang Lehmann and David Webber.—*Oussama Zahr* (Oct. 4 at 7:30.)

Rhys Chatham/Glenn Branca Various locations

Rhys Chatham and Glenn Branca were collaborators early in their careers, discovering common ground in experimental-music and No Wave circles as they explored the ecstatic possibilities of electric guitars in massed phalanxes. They later parted ways, pursuing disparate sonic paths, but serendipity brings their work into proximity this week. Chatham presents a substantial premiere, "The Sun Too Close to the Earth," in two concerts at Issue Project Room. Elsewhere, Branca, who died last year, is remembered on what would have been his seventy-first birthday; his ensemble, now directed by his wife, the guitarist Reg Bloor, celebrates the posthumous release of his final recording, "The Third Ascension," at the heavy-metal venue Saint Vitus.—*Steve Smith* (Oct. 4-5 at 8; Oct. 6 at 7.)

"Porgy and Bess" Metropolitan Opera House

In the Met's new production of Gershwin's "Porgy and Bess," the director James Robinson leans into the opera's potential for spectacle, plac-

RECITALS



Pop-up events in unconventional locations have become de rigueur in a world seeking novelty. Still, the organizers of **Ladies First**—a performing-arts initiative curated and presented by women, now in its seventh season—have good reason to embrace spontaneity and stealth in their newest offering. "Honey-Traps," presented at the KGB Espionage Museum, on Oct. 3, is inspired by the lives and the exploits of historic women spies, including Josephine Baker, Anna Chapman, Judith Coplan, and Mata Hari. The museum's curator, Agne Urbaityte, serves as a guide through the forty-five-minute performance installation, leading audience members in close encounters with the musicians, dancers, and actors. The composers Milica Paranosic, Lynn Bechtold, Erin Rogers, Anna Veismane, and Ann Warren provide the music.—*Steve Smith*

ing a huge ensemble of choristers and dancers at the center of the action. The massed voices of the sixty-person chorus—in leisure, in mourning, or in prayer—are overwhelming, and Camille A. Brown's choreography gives the show a jolt. The tenement buildings of Catfish Row, designed by Michael Yeargan, are nothing more than wooden frames; these neighbors are so tight-knit that they may as well stare straight into one another's homes. In this setting, the principal singers step forward from the crowd, providing little windows into the big lives that make this community tick, including Ryan Speedo Green's virile Jake, Latonia Moore's heartfelt Serena, Denyce Graves's saucy, matriarchal Maria, Angel Blue's dusky and yearning Bess, and Eric Owens's noble Porgy. The conductor David Robertson taps into the drama, but not the swing, of Gershwin's score.—*O.Z.* (Oct. 5 at 1 and Oct. 10 at 7:30.)

"B&B Festival" Spectrum

Brian Ferneyhough, the standard-bearer of the New Complexity movement, is known for crafting scores of almost insurmountable technical difficulty. Brian Eno, after an initial splash in the art-rock band Roxy Music, has become indelibly associated with ambient music—subdued aural environments not expressly intended for live performance. What these iconoclasts share, a brave Brooklyn festival proposes, is the fervent, resourceful advocacy they have inspired and the

singular, striking beauty of their music. Highlights include the pianist Taka Kigawa playing Ferneyhough's "Lemma-Icon-Epigram" (Oct. 5) and the guitarist Kobe Van Cauwenberghe adapting "No Pussyfooting," created by Eno with Robert Fripp (Oct. 11).—*S.S.* (Oct. 5 at 7 and 8:30 and Oct. 11 at 7, 8, and 9.)

Jessica Pavone String Ensemble Roulette

Jessica Pavone, an improvising composer whose works often reflect her physical relationship with the viola, introduces her newest group: a quartet with a fellow-violist, Abby Swidler, and the violinists Erica Dicker and Angela Morris. The ensemble presents rough-hewn meditations from Pavone's new album, "Brick and Mortar," plus pieces featuring an additional complement of two cellos and two double-basses.—*S.S.* (Oct. 7 at 8.)

String Orchestra of Brooklyn Green-Wood Cemetery

The classical-music series "Angel's Share" only runs from May to October because the catacombs that it calls home, below Green-Wood Cemetery, become too cold for performances in late fall and winter. The String Orchestra of Brooklyn closes out the series' second season with a program of pieces united by grief, including Pergolesi's aching "Stabat Mater," with



One heartening aspect of the Joyce's current season, the first to be curated by its new director of programming, Aaron Mattocks, is its focus on live music. The thrill of Indian classical dance derives in no small part from the brilliant interplay between the dancer at center stage and the bank of musicians to her side. **Shantala Shivalingappa**, who performs at the Joyce, Oct. 8-12, is a Kuchipudi dancer, trained in Chennai, India, but based in Paris. Like all classical Indian dance, Kuchipudi is a deeply musical form, in which rhythm, melody, storytelling, and poetic allusion play important roles. With her lilting movements, Shivalingappa becomes both an instrument and an illustration of the meanings buried in the music itself.—*Marina Harss*

the soloists Kate Maroney and Molly Netter, and Pärt's mysterious "Fratres." It's a profound thematic choice given the setting—one that may well restore the emotional impact of Barber's familiar "Adagio for Strings," which wells with chest-bursting feeling.—*O.Z. (Oct. 8-10 at 7.)*

Large Furniture Areté Venue and Gallery

The bassists Greg Chudzik, Tristan Kasten-Krause, Evan Runyon, and Pat Swoboda have provided their low-end authority to such vital New York institutions as Wet Ink, Ensemble Signal, Exceptet, and Bearthoven, among others. For this event, they band together for a program of diverse contemporary compositions by Julia Wolfe, Veronika Krausas, Robert Honstein, and Larry Polansky.—*S.S. (Oct. 8 at 8.)*

DANCE

New York City Ballet David H. Koch

On the occasion of Merce Cunningham's centenary year—and the tenth anniversary of his death—New York City Ballet revives his "Summerspace" (Oct. 5, Oct. 10, and Oct. 12).

In the striking work, first performed here in 1966 (eight years after its creation), the dancers move through a field of colored spots while wearing similarly dyed unitards. This ingenious design scheme, conceived by Robert Rauschenberg, turns the dancers into something like a flock of butterflies moving in an infinite sea of color. The choreography—leaps and tilts and rapid changes of direction—also suggests animal movement; in a sense, "Summerspace" is as much a nature study as it is a dance. It will be interesting to see how the City Ballet dancers adjust to Cunningham's spare, utterly undecorative technique, as well as to the lack of connection between the steps and the music, which is by Morton Feldman.—*Marina Harss (Through Oct. 13.)*

BalletX Joyce Theatre

This ambitious, often excellent Philadelphia company shoots for a hit with its full-length ballet version of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's beloved "The Little Prince," now receiving its New York debut. Choreographed by Annabelle Lopez Ochoa, the dance is a bright picaresque for the downed pilot and prince from another planet, with colorful characters emerging from a set of white boxes. Stanley Glover steals the show as a slinky, bowler-hatted, Fosse-like snake, assuming a larger role than

in the book—a charming symbol of death. Peter Salem plays his sportive score, featuring banjo and harmonica, live.—*Brian Seibert (Oct. 1-6.)*

Fall for Dance Festival City Center

The middle programs of this year's festival, as inexpensive and as varied as ever, offer the most novelty. The companies Dyptik, from France, Malevo, from Argentina, and Skånes Dansteater, from Sweden, are all making debuts, though much of what they're bringing looks familiar. (Malevo appears to be a hair-metal version of Che Malambo, a sensation of the 2015 festival.) Mariinsky Ballet and Washington Ballet advance newbie choreographers—Alexander Sergeev and Dana Genshaft—and English National Ballet shows a going-to-war duet from "Dust," by Akram Khan. Excerpts of Mark Morris's "Mozart Dances" and the Alvin Ailey troupe's performances of Rennie Harris's "Lazarus" bookend the programs as dependable winners.—*B.S. (Oct. 1-6. Through Oct. 13.)*

Antonio Ramos The Chocolate Factory

Born and raised in Puerto Rico, Antonio Ramos has had a distinguished dance career in New York. His works tend to be flamboyant, in-your-face, and clever, with lots of nudity. In "El Pueblo de los Olvidados (Parte II)," performed by his company, Antonio Ramos and the Gang Bangers, he serves up a science-fiction allegory about the colonization of his native land. An alien species tries to exploit the island as a tropical resort, but some transgender hybrids offer hope of resistance.—*B.S. (Oct. 2-5. Through Oct. 12.)*

Monica Bill Barnes & Company Brookfield Place

Barnes has long trafficked in the absurdity of the everyday, sometimes bringing tongue-in-cheek and heart-on-sleeve dancing into unlikely places, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Usually, her casts are small, but in her new work "Days Go By" a large ensemble of actors, dancers, and others are seeded throughout the marbled Winter Garden in the Brookfield Place mall. Audience members, wearing provided headphones, listen to semi-obscure pop tunes as the performers (including Danny Pudi, from the TV series "Community") dramatize city life and how a day can get away from you. The show is free.—*B.S. (Oct. 3-6.)*

Washington Ballet Guggenheim Museum

At "Works & Process," Julie Kent and an ensemble of dancers from Washington Ballet present the company's newest commissions ahead of their unveiling, in Washington, D.C., later this month. The current crop of choreographers includes Jessica Lang and Annabelle Lopez Ochoa (two veterans of the ballet scene) as well as John Heginbotham, a former Mark Morris dancer. Heginbotham is the wild card here—his works tend toward the eccentric and the surreal, with elements of dance-theatre thrown in.—*M.H. (Oct. 6.)*

ART

Raúl de Nieves Company

DOWNTOWN A figure at once human and animal—trimmed with shaggy white fur and encrusted with glass beads and plastic pearls—greet visitors at the entrance of this shrinelike exhibition. Hybridity, opulence, and laborious process are all typical of the artist's approach, but the sculpture's pale color is an exception among the rainbow-hued works on view. De Nieves, who was born in Mexico and lives in New York, merges drag couture and devotional aesthetics to sketch out mythic narratives. Here, a phalanx of barnacled creatures (their titles include "Sanctuary," "Growth," and "Sexuality") are installed on mirrored plinths along the center of the gallery, suggesting affable but serious queer shape-shifters. A room-spanning canopy of tape, paint, and colored acetate achieves both a sublime stained-glass effect and drop-ceiling intimacy.—*Johanna Fateman (Through Oct. 20.)*

Amy Sherald Hauser & Wirth

CHELSEA The subjects of the eight strong oil portraits here impress with their looks, in both senses: striking elegance, riveting gazes. In six of the pictures, people stand singly against bright monochrome grounds. (The other two works are more complicated.) Sherald activates the double function of portraiture as the recognition of a worldly identity and, in the best instances, the surprise of an evident inner life. All of her subjects are African-American. Should this matter? It does in light of the artist's stated drive to seek "versions of myself in art history and the world." Race anchors Sherald's project in history. She represents it strategically, rendering the skin of her subjects grisaille, and thereby apostrophizing America's original sin and permanent crisis: the otherizing of the not white, regardless of gradations. Three years ago, Sherald was plucked from low-profile but substantial status as an artist when Michelle Obama chose her to paint her official portrait. On view at the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery, in Washington, D.C., it is a tour de force. Even so, it didn't prepare me for the more intense eloquence of the canvases here—I had a dizzy sensation at Sherald's show of ground shifting under my feet.—*Peter Schjeldahl (Through Oct. 26.)*

Tom Thayer Eller

DOWNTOWN In the winningly titled exhibition "Make a Pinch Pot Out of Your Mouth," this New Jersey-based master of the lo-fi profound, also admired for his eccentric, heartfelt music and animations, exhibits a new series of paintings—assemblages, really, made of oil, acrylic, ink, graphite, thread, burlap, aluminum, wood, string, and wire. They could easily double as puppet-show backdrops: three-dimensional figures hang on the walls and are affixed to the canvases' gummy surfaces. Slapdash production values rule (roughly cut corrugated-cardboard shapes and scraps of canvas are go-to

elements in these small compositions), but the apparent disarray belies the precision of Thayer's allegories. The spectral work "Carefully Into One's Mind" captures states of rumination with the image of a skull wearing an Elizabethan collar; it's elucidated by a diaristic text that reads, in part, "I looked like a tablecloth of snowflakes as I moved across the mysterious heavens of my empty head." The paranoid inferno of "The Sun Can Read Your Mind," featuring a dangling yellow marionette, comes with a warning: "this cosmic furnace has an interest in punishing you, so keep your mind still and empty."—*J.F. (Through Oct. 6.)*

Ping Zheng Lorello

DOWNTOWN These small, beguiling oil-stick drawings find an ideal context in Kristen Lorello's vest-pocket gallery. Zheng, who was born in China and now lives in New York, is inspired by nature; the subjects of her exacting, textured, and highly stylized compositions include night skies, distant hills, and geometric trees. "Fireflies in My Backyard" and "In the

Blue Light" both feature rippling grounds and central symmetrical forms resembling ghosts, tents, or portals. Elsewhere, mysterious biomorphic peaks and blobs are foils to glyphlike crescent moons. At times, the artist appears to make unabashed allusions to children's art: in "Sun + Flower," a perfect rainbow above a rectangle of blue water bridges the gap between two green mountains, as a blazing orb in a peach-colored sky sprouts spiky yellow petals. Thanks to its confident, meticulous simplicity, the weird picture works.—*J.F. (Through Nov. 9.)*

MOVIES

Blood of the Beasts

At the Porte de Vanves, it's horses; at the Porte de Pantin, it's cows; and at the La Villette market, it's sheep, all killed for meat. Georges Franju's short 1949 documentary of the slaughterhouses of Paris summons these evocative names and picturesque neighborhoods to connect the romance of labor with the horror of spurting blood, twitching limbs,

AT THE GALLERIES



Happiness (finally) returns in the work of **Paul Chan**, whose digital videos from the early two-thousands were riots of color but who is now known as a virtuoso of darkness—one acclaimed piece, from 2009, is a punishingly long projection about the Marquis de Sade, composed of flickering shadows. Chan's inspired new show, "The Bather's Dilemma" (at the Greene Naftali gallery, in Chelsea, through Oct. 19), riffs on a more joyful Frenchman: the painter Henri Matisse. Figures stitched by the artist from bright nylon fabric move with choreographic precision, animated by electric fans—beautifully absurd hybrids of Matisse dancers and gas-station tube men. Chan has used this low-tech tactic before, to conjure despondence, but pleasure rules here. (A related exhibition, on the Lower East Side, surveys the polymorphic output of the now defunct Badlands Unlimited, a publishing house founded by Chan, in 2010.)—*Andrea K. Scott*

and desperate gazes. Beginning with children's play and lovers' trysts and ending with moody urban vistas, he connects the city's throbbing energy with the work of death. Introducing the laborers by name, Franju presents the tools and practices of their trade, from the knives and captive-bolt pistols to the flaying and gutting of the carcasses, with a hallucinatory attention to detail. These knackers, with their easy camaraderie and nonchalant vigor, are the living models of emblematic characters in novels and movies—one man even sings, in a suave baritone, Charles Trenet's classic "La Mer," as another whistles along. Franju evokes the collective brutality from which the refinements of culture are made.—*Richard Brody* (*Anthology Film Archives, Oct. 7, and streaming.*)

Downton Abbey

The screenplay of Michael Engler's film is by Julian Fellowes, the creator of the TV series from which the movie springs. (He also wrote Robert Altman's "Gosford Park" and won an Oscar for his efforts, in 2002; "Downton Abbey," whether on the big or the small

screen, could easily be mistaken for a parody of Altman's film.) We find ourselves in a servant-infested country house, overseen by Lord Grantham (Hugh Bonneville) and his invincible mother (Maggie Smith). Much of the action unfolds downstairs, where the butler, Barrow (Robert James-Collier), presides uneasily over the staff; must his predecessor, Carson (Jim Carter), return to steady the ship? The story turns on the visit of the King (Simon Jones), who brings with him a rival entourage, and the cast of the movie, likewise, jostle for dramatic prominence. Contenders include Elizabeth McGovern, Michelle Dockery, Joanne Froggatt, and Imelda Staunton.—*Anthony Lane* (*Reviewed in our issue of 9/30/19.*) (*In wide release.*)

The Laundromat

The new Steven Soderbergh film, short and sharp, is aimed at the worshippers of Mammon: specifically, those wealthy souls whose urge to hide their money offshore was exposed in the 2016 Panama Papers leak. Soderbergh's fictional adaptation of the true story introduces us to a typical victim—Ellen

(Meryl Streep), who is retired, bereaved, and having trouble with an insurance claim—and to a facilitator named Boncamper (Jeffrey Wright), who is based on the Caribbean island of Nevis. Atop the pile of swindlers are Ramón (Antonio Banderas) and Jürgen (Gary Oldman), who talk us through the evasive process, cheerfully revealing their financial sleights of hand like magicians explaining their tricks. The demonstration may be entertaining, but will the viewer's grasp of shell companies and their role in tax avoidance, for instance, be any firmer after the film than it was before? So enamored is Soderbergh of his various villains that his satire soon loses its bite.—*A.L.* (*9/30/19*) (*In limited release.*)

Saturday Fiction

This frenetic and paranoid thriller, by the Chinese director Lou Ye, is set in Japanese-occupied Shanghai during the week of the Pearl Harbor attack. With bitter irony seething in his blend of kinetic camerawork and silky black-and-white tones, Lou borrows the form of historical drama to expose the corruption and the terror of a modern surveillance state. Gong Li plays Jean Yu, a famous actress who returns to the city—where British and French zones remain protected—to perform in a play. But she has an ulterior motive, to inquire about her ex-husband, a captive of Japanese forces; she also meets a manipulative French diplomat (Pascal Greggory) from her past and a mysterious young fan (Huang Xiangli). The high-stakes deceptions of espionage threaten romantic and professional relationships alike. Binoculars, two-way mirrors, hidden microphones, and encrypted messages raise the tension of secret encounters; conflicting plots of collaboration and resistance give rise to public violence and turn the opening of a play into a political act of international import. In Mandarin, English, and Japanese.—*R.B.* (*New York Film Festival, Oct. 8-9.*)

The Whistlers

The dirty-cop trope gets an imaginative new workout in this sly and intricate crime drama by the director Corneliu Porumboiu. Its premise creeps up stealthily: a middle-aged Romanian man named Cristi (Vlad Ivanov) is ferried to one of the Canary Islands, but not for pleasure—gangsters are force-teaching him a local language that uses whistling in place of words, so that he and other whistling accomplices can be replanted in Bucharest to help spring a drug lord from jail. With elaborate flashbacks detailing Cristi's work as a police detective and his duplicitous dealings with colleagues, underworld figures, and family members, Porumboiu explores the intersections—and the political implications—of linguistics, memory, and espionage. The many characters' distinct perspectives on the action are multiplied by chilling views from surveillance cameras, prompting deceptive displays—including romantic ones—in which tipped-off targets fool those who are watching. The tale winks at echoes of classic movies, as evoked in showdowns at a cinémathèque and an abandoned studio. In Romanian, English, and Spanish.—*R.B.* (*New York Film Festival, Oct. 6-7.*)

IN REVIVAL



A dancer who launched her movie career by filming her colleagues, the director **Shirley Clarke** (pictured above), whose centenary is Oct. 2, made a series of artist-centered films, in the nineteen-sixties, that are among the most original and influential works of the modern American cinema. She's the subject of two retrospectives—a theatrical one, at Film Forum, through Nov. 5, and a digital one, on the Criterion Channel—that reveal the span and the depth of her achievements. Clarke, a white New Yorker who focussed on African-American culture and life, fused documentary, fiction, and metafiction in such features as "The Connection," about jazz musicians waiting in a loft for a drug dealer while being filmed by a documentarian, and "Portrait of Jason," in which she interviews Jason Holliday, a gay black cabaret artist and self-described hustler, in her apartment in the Hotel Chelsea. Film Forum also includes her rarely screened drama "The Cool World," from 1964, about a Harlem teen-ager in quest of a gun; Criterion offers Noël Burch and André S. Labarthe's documentary "Rome Is Burning" (1970), in which Clarke expounds her artistic philosophy.—*Richard Brody*

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TABLES FOR TWO

Lokanta

3116 Broadway, Queens

Hospitality takes many forms. At Lokanta, a Turkish restaurant that opened in April, it manifests, counterintuitively, in the blustery bearing of the chef and owner, Orhan Yegen. There are very few people who can make slightly grumpy, brusque confidence come across as alluring and even charming. Yegen, a veteran restaurateur who also owns Sip Sak, in Manhattan (the menus overlap significantly), is one of them, with a reputation that precedes him; the thrill of hearing his dramatic proclamations is one of the draws of his establishments. “If I was a normal person, I wouldn’t have come to this country,” he declared one evening in May, as he surfed around Lokanta’s dining room. “I’m not normal—I’m an artist.”

The other draw here is the food, which is, if not art per se, certainly artful. The vogueish approach to vegetables these days often involves doing very little to them, so it’s refreshing to find that Yegen’s faithful adherence to the traditions of his native country largely dictates the opposite. Cooked fava beans are mashed into a paste that is smooth but still chunky, sprinkled

with fresh dill and boldly seasoned with a flavor that’s familiar but at first difficult to place: cinnamon! This appears on the “small plates” (translation: meze) part of the menu, which also includes leeks that have been confited in olive oil until they fall apart into meltingly luscious sheets, served cold; tender braised artichoke hearts, topped with whole favas and more dill; and fluffy squares of what’s described as a pancake but is more like a kugel made with shredded zucchini and carrots.

Yegen puts equal effort into meat, particularly lamb. You might think that one restaurant does not need seven lamb entrées (of fifteen total), but Lokanta (which means “restaurant” in Turkish) proves you wrong. Glossy shreds of roasted lamb are spectacular mixed with warm rice, currants, caramelized onions, and allspice, then gently molded into a dome; tender, saucy hunks of braised lamb crown a bowl of beguilingly creamy eggplant purée, which takes on an almost stretchy texture thanks to the addition of dehydrated yogurt. As a special one recent night, ground lamb was formed into a log-shaped *adana* kebab, grilled until crispy and smoky, and served on an intoxicatingly oily slab of fried flatbread.

There is beef, too, rolled into rustic meatballs and served simply with potatoes, or sealed into dainty dumplings called *manti*, which are blanketed in a thick, garlicky yogurt sauce and drizzled with chili oil. Seafood is less successful. A pescatarian could be happy with expertly prepared if unexciting fillets of sea bass or salmon, but an intriguing-sounding

shrimp casserole with tomatoes and kasseri cheese (made of sheep’s and goat’s milk) is a rare miss, its scorching temperature giving way to surprising blandness. For dessert, return to vegetables: among the standard rice pudding and baklava, a dish of barely sweetened baked butternut squash, topped with whipped cream and chopped walnuts, stands out.

Lokanta is one of a small handful of Turkish restaurants in Astoria—a neighborhood that’s long been associated with Greek food but has, in fact, grown quite culinarily diverse—and one of relatively few in the city. Its most important distinction, however, may be the weekends-only breakfast menu. For years, I have searched in vain for a decent Turkish breakfast in New York, longing to re-create a dreamy morning I spent in Istanbul at an open-air café in view of the Bosphorus, noshing on a simple but seductive array of fresh bread, cheese with honey and marmalade, hard-boiled eggs, olives, cucumbers, and tomatoes.

Finally, here is a similar platter—plus baked eggs, clotted cream, flaky *gozleme* (which the menu calls “Turkish quesadillas”), and pastries, including braided sesame rings known as *simit*. There is no glittering turquoise strait to gaze upon at Lokanta, and the restaurant’s interior resembles nothing so much as a West Elm showroom, with tropical-leaf wallpaper and generic-looking gold tchotchkes. One Saturday morning, I felt transported nonetheless—and grateful to Yegen for being so sure of himself. (Entrées \$19–\$22.)

—Hannah Goldfield

BROADWAY PREVIEWS BEGIN FEBRUARY 7

“AS CLOSE AS MORTALS COME TO HEAVEN ON EARTH.”

CONOR McPHERSON is perhaps the finest English-language playwright of his generation. If you're a hard-core **BOB DYLAN** fan, you've heard these songs before. But, for me at least, they've never sounded quite so heartbreakingly personal and universal at the same time. You hear them ripening into new fullness.”

BEN BRANTLEY THE NEW YORK TIMES

GIRL FROM THE NORTH DULUTH, MINN. 1934 COUNTRY



WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY

CONOR McPHERSON

MUSIC & LYRICS BY

BOB DYLAN



THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT REASON TO IMPEACH

Many features of Trumpism—the cynical populism, the brazen readiness to profit from high office, the racist and nativist taunts—have antecedents in American politics. But Donald Trump’s open willingness to ask foreign governments to dig up dirt on political opponents has been an idiosyncratic aspect of his rise to power. At a press conference in July, 2016, when he was the presumptive Republican nominee for President, he invited Russia to get hold of Hillary Clinton’s e-mails and leak them to the press. This past June, George Stephanopoulos asked him what he thought his campaign should do now “if foreigners, if Russia, if China, if someone else,” offered information on his political opponents—accept it or call the F.B.I.?

Trump allowed that he might do both, adding, “If somebody called from a country—Norway—‘We have information on your opponent.’ Oh, I think I’d want to hear it.” (When the interview was released, Ellen L. Weintraub, the chair of the Federal Election Commission, felt obliged to point out that “it is illegal for any person to solicit, accept, or receive anything of value from a foreign national in connection with a U.S. election.”) We now know that, as Trump spoke to Stephanopoulos, he and Rudolph Giuliani, his personal lawyer, were deep in a vigorous effort to persuade the government of Ukraine to conduct investigations that might rake up some muck about Joe Biden and the Democratic Party.

Two bombshell documents made public last week—a record of a tele-

phone conversation between Trump and Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukraine’s President, and a whistle-blower’s complaint about that call—fully justify House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s decision, announced on Tuesday, to open an official impeachment inquiry. The documents describe a breach of Trump’s constitutional duties that is exceptional even in light of his record to date. During the telephone call, made on July 25th, he leveraged the vast disparity of wealth and power in the alliance between the United States and Ukraine to ask Zelensky to, in effect, aid his reelection bid. The complaint, filed on August 12th, by a person whom the *Times* has described as an intelligence officer, further recounts how U.S. national-security and foreign-policy officials who worked on issues concerning Ukraine became entangled in Trump’s scheme, and how this distorted and undermined their work on behalf of American interests. According to the complaint, once it be-

came clear how damaging the record of the call might be, Administration officials participated in a coverup, moving the memorandum of conversation—the contemporaneous documentation of the call—to a highly restricted computer system not intended for such materials.

The whistle-blower’s complaint is one of the great artifacts to enter Washington’s sizable archive of political malfeasance. In the second paragraph, its author distills Trump’s offense with bracing clarity: “I have received information from multiple U.S. Government officials that the President of the United States is using the power of his office to solicit interference from a foreign country in the 2020 U.S. election.” The author goes on to provide a revelatory narrative about the underlying facts of the case, one that complements investigative reporting previously published by the *Washington Post*, the *Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Bloomberg*, and other outlets.

The complaint’s lucidity and detail may help House investigators defend the integrity of their inquiry against the torrent of spin and lies that will surely continue to issue from Trump and his allies. When Washington scandals involving foreign affairs become politically contested, a timeworn tactic by those accused of wrongdoing is to befuddle the public; the unfamiliar names, tangled chronologies, and ambiguous meetings offer a way to distract non-obsessives from the heart of the matter. Already, Trump and Giuliani, on Twitter and Fox News, have fogged the record by repeating falsehoods and conspiracy theories. The story we can discern so far, however, retains a certain



straightforwardness, thanks to Trump's lack of subtlety.

Ukraine is enmeshed in a low-grade but persistent war with Russia, which began in February, 2014, after a popular revolution in Kiev that ousted President Viktor Yanukovich, a corrupt ally of Moscow. He fled to Russia, and Vladimir Putin ordered Russian forces to invade Ukraine. They seized Crimea, which Russia then annexed. Putin's motive was the reassertion of Russian power; the United States and Europe, stunned by his audacity, imposed sanctions and tried to shore up the post-revolutionary government in Kiev. In search of accountability, the new Ukrainian regime opened corruption investigations into the previous political order.

That April, Joe Biden's son Hunter, a lawyer, accepted a lucrative seat on the board of one of Ukraine's largest private gas companies, Burisma Holdings, which is controlled by a Ukrainian oligarch, Mykola Zlochevsky. Burisma became a subject of Kiev's investigations, although the extent, seriousness, and focus of the inquiry are unclear. Hunter Biden's decision to accept the board seat when his father was the Vice-President and Ukraine's crises were of international importance showed questionable judgment. Since 2014, the Kiev government has been a ward of America and Europe; the potential for real or perceived conflicts of interest should have been apparent to both Bidens. Still, according to Ukrainian officials, no evidence of wrongdoing by either Hunter Biden or Zlochevsky has been found.

In 2015, the United States and some of its European allies sought to oust Ukraine's prosecutor general, Viktor Shokin, because they believed that he had gone soft on corruption. That September, the U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine, Geoffrey Pyatt, denounced Shokin's failure "to successfully fight internal corruption." In December, Joe Biden went to Kiev and told Ukraine's leaders that the U.S. would withhold loan guarantees if they didn't get rid of Shokin; he was ousted the following March. One of Giuliani's aims has been to encourage Ukraine to examine whether Shokin was pushed out to protect Burisma—and, by extension, Hunter Biden—from a corruption probe. But the record indicates that Shokin was removed be-

cause he wasn't doing *enough* about Ukrainian corruption. Vitaliy Kasko, a Ukrainian former prosecutor, recently told Bloomberg, "There was no pressure from anyone from the U.S. to close cases against Zlochevsky." He added that the Burisma case "was shelved by Ukrainian prosecutors in 2014 and through 2015."

As it turned out, the American politician first affected by Ukraine's emboldened investigators was Donald Trump. Yanukovich had been a client of Paul Manafort, who became Trump's campaign chairman in May, 2016. That August, a Ukrainian law-enforcement unit released records showing that Manafort had received \$12.7 million in payments from the Yanukovich regime, and he resigned from the campaign. Trump apparently concluded that Ukraine was conspiring with Hillary Clinton and the Democrats to try to defeat him. For reasons that are not easy to fathom, he also came to endorse a conspiracy theory holding that Ukraine harbors a computer server used by the Democratic National Committee in 2016. "They're terrible people," Trump said privately of the Ukrainians as recently as May, according to the *Times*. "They're all corrupt and they tried to take me down."

This did not stop Trump and Giuliani from attempting to use the Ukrainians against Joe Biden. At the start of this year, they got wind of provocative allegations made by Ukraine's then prosecutor general, Yuriy Lutsenko. Ukraine was in the midst of its own raucous Presidential election, and Lutsenko, in the course of attacking his opponents in Ukrainian politics, alleged that Shokin had, indeed, been fired in order to protect Burisma. (Later, Lutsenko told Bloomberg that he had no evidence of wrongdoing by the Bidens.)

In April, Trump told Fox News that Lutsenko's allegations were "big" and "incredible," and that he thought Attorney General William Barr would find them interesting. That same month, Zelensky, a former television comic, won Ukraine's election in a landslide. In May, Giuliani announced that he would go to Kiev to urge the new government to investigate, among other subjects, the Bidens and alleged links between Ukraine and the Democrats. He would do so, he told the *Times*, "because that

information will be very, very helpful to my client." Soon after the story was published, Giuliani cancelled his trip.

It was a few days later that the whistleblower, according to the complaint, "heard from multiple U.S. officials that they were deeply concerned" that Giuliani was doing an end run around proper national-security decision-making, and opening a back channel between Kiev and Trump. Ukraine's leaders were also apparently worried that Trump's willingness to meet or talk with Zelensky, whose government cannot afford to lose American backing, "would depend on whether Zelensky showed willingness to 'play ball.'"

Around mid-July, according to the *Washington Post*, Trump ordered his chief of staff to hold back four hundred million dollars in military aid for Ukraine that had been approved by Congress. Then, on July 25th, Trump had the phone call with Zelensky that all the world can now review. According to the memorandum of conversation released by the White House (it is a cross between a transcript and a summary, and its completeness is uncertain), Trump began by mentioning how generous the U.S. is to Ukraine. "We do a lot," he said, and then noted, twice, that "the United States has been very, very good to Ukraine." Finally, he got to the point. "I would like you to do us a favor though," he said, and went on to ask Zelensky to speak with Giuliani and Barr about conducting investigations. "There's a lot of talk about Biden's son, that Biden stopped the prosecution, and a lot of people want to find out about that," Trump said. After the call, Giuliani flew to Madrid and met an aide to Zelensky. As Giuliani later told the *Post*, he said to the aide, "Your country owes it to us and to your country to find out what really happened."

Last week, the President and his allies made much of the fact that, during the call, Trump did not mention the suspended military aid or link its resumption to Zelensky's participation in the President's incipient dirty-tricks operation. (The aid was released this month, after bipartisan pressure from Congress.) Yet, according to the record of the call, Trump immediately followed a fulsome account of America's support for Ukraine with a request for investigations of Dem-

ocrats. Adam Schiff, the Democratic chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, called Trump's technique "a classic Mafia-like shakedown."

Historically, impeachment processes have been treacherous, tumultuous, and unpredictable; with Trump involved, this one can hardly be otherwise. Opinion polls suggest that, currently, Americans are about evenly divided on the question of impeachment, a complication for Democrats. Even if the House does eventually impeach Trump, it will require a two-thirds vote by the Republican-controlled Senate to remove him from office, and the Grand Old Party continues to lash itself to the President. The unlikelihood of Trump's removal means that the impeachment inquiry may become a part of the political arguments during the primary and general-election campaigns of 2020. The President may not welcome the prospect of being impeached, but he is already using the battle to defame Joe Biden, and to reprise his "witch hunt" mantra in rage-inflected ad-libs, while his reelection campaign is citing the inquiry in fund-raising solicitations. He and his allies are also testing their defenses and counterattacks, among them the contention that, if Trump is to be investigated over his conduct involving Ukraine, Joe Biden should be, too.

The Democrats swept the House in 2018 in large part by running a disciplined campaign emphasizing health care and the need to address economic insecurity among working and middle-class households—and by avoiding baiting the President. Pelosi's launch of a formal inquiry followed a surge in support for impeachment among moderate Democrats, some of them military and intelligence veterans, who said that they were shocked by the Ukraine revelations. Their change of mind is notable for its lack of obvious political reward.

During the summer of 1787, at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, delegates designed impeachment as a political process entrusted to Congress. The record of their debate shows they hoped that Presidents who were merely incompetent would be thrown out of office at election time, by the voters. Yet they also assumed that, occasionally, Presidents might be so corrupt and so ruthless that it would be damaging to

the republic to wait for the next election. William Davie, a delegate from North Carolina, raised an alarming scenario: if a rogue with no conscience gained the Presidency, he might "spare no efforts or means whatever to get himself reelected." In 1972, Richard Nixon proved his point. So, now, has Donald Trump.

—Steve Coll

COUNTERPARTS DEPT. SCREEN SAVIOR



In the first episode of "Servant of the People," Ukraine's smash-hit political satire, a schoolteacher in Kiev rushes around his crowded, messy apartment, desperate to make it to work on time, juggling irons and coffeepots. He's still on the toilet, pants down, when there's a loud banging at the door. It's the Prime Minister, with a surprising greeting: "Good morning, Mr. President." Our hero looks stunned: it's his chance to try to fix his broken country.

"Servant of the People," which premiered in 2015, has run for three seasons, plus a movie. At once daffy, scathing, and inspirational, the series is a smart genre-bender, mixing Ryan Murphy wackiness with Sorkinian uplift (minus the hubris), and Norman Lear sitcom beats with "Scandal"-esque twists. Its biggest impact, however, has been political: in a turn that, a few years back, would have seemed inconceivable, the show's star, Volodymyr Zelensky, leaped from the fictional Presidency into the real one. In 2018, employees of his production company, Kwartal 95, formed a political party—also called Servant of the People. A year later, he was elected President in a landslide, promising, in effect, to drain the Ukrainian swamp.

At that point, Zelensky received a congratulatory phone call from the other TV star who had been elected President: Donald Trump, formerly of "The Apprentice." Their relationship has since become more complicated. At a joint press conference last week, after Nancy Pelosi launched an impeachment inquiry into Trump, Zelensky joked, about meeting Trump for the first time, that "it's

better to be on TV than by phone." His deadpan cool, with wry comebacks, stood in contrast with Trump's gloomy solipsistic bluster. Then, as Trump urged Zelensky to "get together" with Vladimir Putin, the mood went sour, as Twitter began to post screen grabs of Zelensky's chagrined expression, suggesting that the scene be scored to the "Curb Your Enthusiasm" theme.

The premise of "Servant of the People" is simple and funny: one day, Vasyl Petrovych Holoborodko, a high-school history teacher, begins ranting about his country's broken elections, in which citizens must vote for "the lesser of two assholes." A student records the tirade, the clip goes viral, and fans crowdfund his campaign. When he wins, he's utterly unprepared, as are the local oligarchs, who try and fail to bribe him. The Prime Minister oversees his makeover, complete with a "Queer Eye"-ish squad of beauty coaches.

In the third episode, the new President freaks out when he realizes that the inauguration speech prepared by his han-



Volodymyr Zelensky and Donald Trump

dlers rips off the Gettysburg Address—something the Prime Minister insists is fine, since Ukrainians won't notice and Americans might be flattered. In a surreal twist, the ghost of Abraham Lincoln shows up. He urges Holoborodko to free Ukrainians from economic slavery and to "be yourself, Mr. President," so our hero—in a classic TV move—tosses the speech, explaining to voters that he'll follow a new model: "One should act in a way that doesn't evoke

shame when looking into children's eyes. Or their parents'. Or yours."

It's an ethic that's the exact inverse of Trump's embrace of shamelessness. But there are other eerie echoes of the moment, suggesting the fraught bridges between the two countries. In the Season 1 finale (spoilers!), Holoborodko goes on a talk show with the Prime Minister, participating in a debate on how to end corruption. Midway through, he reveals a black ledger listing participants in dirty Ukrainian deals—a ledger not unlike the one that landed Paul Manafort in prison. In a moment as theatrical as any boardroom ceremony in "The Apprentice," he has the studio turn off the lights for the big reveal: in the darkness, the Prime Minister's face and hands light up in bioluminescent green, stained from where he touched the dirty money.

After that season, the show evolved into more of an ensemble workplace sitcom—"Parks and Recreation," Kiev style, with a cabinet of outsiders finding clever ways to procure I.M.F. funding while passing reforms, against the will of scheming oligarchs. Despite having emerged from a kleptocracy, the show—which was originally conceived, in the early two-thousands, as a reality show, with ordinary people running for office—is a strikingly more idealistic, less nihilistic project than many American series of the same period, such as "House of Cards" and "Veep." Meanwhile, Zelensky himself has become an icon, playing the kind of guy who won't let even his own family get away with graft. In some ways, Zelensky and Trump are similar. They're both comedians, although Trump is more a stadium insult comic, whereas Zelensky has starred in rom-coms. Like Trump, Zelensky has appointed members of his company to official roles, and, like Trump, Zelensky has circumvented the mainstream press, communicating through Instagram, via slick self-produced videos—in which he is, on occasion, in costume as President Holoborodko or "interviewed" by the actor who played the Prime Minister.

In another way, however, their brands are opposites. On "The Apprentice," the bankrupt Trump was portrayed as a savvy, cynical super-boss, the object of worship to contestants. The entire point of "Servant of the People" is that Holo-

borodko is a humble man who, right away, admits to not understanding the policies that he needs to enact. He's worthy of praise precisely because he doesn't think he's all that—and when he tells the truth, as he explains to his students, it's because the truth is objective, available to all. He's bookish, too; he falls asleep studying Plutarch's "Lives" and has restless dreams in which philosophers bicker about socialism and autocracy. If he resembles anyone on the American scene, it's Elizabeth Warren, another former teacher running on a platform of fighting corruption, opposed by America's version of oligarchs.

Whether Zelensky is for real or not isn't something that can be determined by someone from outside the culture. But the actor turned President clearly intended, even before he ran, for his show to do more than entertain. In 2017, when the series was picked up by Netflix, he told *Cinema Escapist* that it was meant to speak to a post-Soviet generation, eager for "positive changes." Those offended by political satire, he said, "must have an Iron Curtain in their brains higher than the one in the Soviet Union!" (He added that every country has its own tradition of rude jokes: "For example, in the U.S., Trump is President: how can you not talk about it?") Notably, he kept a campaign promise that seems especially relevant: two days before his press conference with Trump, Zelensky signed a new law that, for the first time, created a way to impeach the Ukrainian President—himself included—for "high treason or other felonies." Afterward, he posted a video on Instagram, in which he urged citizens to pay their taxes and to "live in accordance with the law." There are all kinds of influencers.

—Emily Nussbaum

ONE WORLD DEPT. OASIS



Ordinarily, "high-level week" at the United Nations General Assembly, when heads of state converge on Manhattan's East Side, is a pageant of political power. But this year's gathering co-

incided with some explosive illustrations of the limits, and abuses, of that power. This past Tuesday, Britain's Supreme Court issued a rebuke of Prime Minister Boris Johnson, for an "unlawful" suspension of Parliament. Hours later, the U.S. House of Representatives launched its impeachment inquiry into Donald Trump. "The other one is the Israeli election," Aliko Dangote, Africa's richest man, pointed out, as he chewed a piece of salmon at a wobbly cocktail table. (There was no clear winner in Israel's most recent vote.) Dangote, a sixty-two-year-old Nigerian industrialist, was at the Plaza Hotel, in midtown, for the Bloomberg Global Business Forum, an alternative gathering that aspires to be a refuge from the political hurricanes outside. It's a successor, of sorts, to the Clinton Global Initiative, which used to hold an annual meeting alongside the U.N. General Assembly (known to wonks by one word: Unga). After the initiative shut down, in 2017, Michael Bloomberg started hosting a few hundred executives for a day. This year's event was titled "Restoring Global Stability." Seated across the table from Dangote was Henry Paulson, the former Treasury Secretary, who reached for a small cookie from a silver dessert tower. "They're talking about ideas, not politics," he said.

The select politicians in attendance knew the room. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, of India, said in his speech, "Today, there is a government in India that respects the business world and wealth creators." Between talks, the executives huddled in the Palm Court, the Plaza's restaurant, where concentric rings of security kept the world at bay. Even in the warm embrace of exclusivity, Paulson and Dangote attracted a stream of visitors: Christine Lagarde, the incoming president of the European Central Bank; Stephen Schwarzman and Larry Fink, the heads of Blackstone and BlackRock, respectively; and John Elkann, the Italian scion of the Agnelli car dynasty.

Between handshakes, a billionaire investor said, "The world is becoming a world of conferences. I go to about fifty each year, and I kind of wonder, How many of these can we go to? You always see the same people, and you always say, 'Let's have lunch, let's have dinner.' And, of course, you never have lunch, never have dinner." Today's masters of the uni-

verse jet around the globe on the conference circuit, like Presidential candidates touching down at state fairs. Functions like the Bloomberg forum offer a break from burdens like public scrutiny of their taxes and their defense of alleged monopolies. “I think, throughout the history of the world, there’s always a pressure, always people that don’t like wealthy people,” the investor went on. For one day, the Palm Court was an oasis, where executives could imagine a world without angry speeches denouncing millionaires and billionaires.

A guest with a buzz cut approached Paulson: “I heard you were an ex-wrestler in high school. That’s what Don Rumsfeld tells me.”

“Those days are long gone,” Paulson replied, politely, “though, when I’m making a big speech or something, I still shake my hands out.”

Paulson returned to his conversation with Dangote and Justin Smith, the C.E.O. of Bloomberg Media; they were already planning the next conference, a larger Bloomberg confab to be held in Beijing, in November. Smith recalled proposing the idea to Paulson in 2015: “I came in the middle of the winter, to your office in Chicago, and I said, ‘I think the world really needs something like this.’” Paulson was dubious at first. “People get asked to go to conferences all the time,” he told Smith. But he changed his mind, because the proposal emphasized substance, because Chinese leaders were receptive, and because C.E.O.s were ready to fly there. “If the Chinese believe all we’re trying to do is contain them, there is no incentive to find common ground,” he said. “That’s why it’s so important to be engaging them on some of today’s most important economic issues.” The event in Beijing, he said, is “not just a conference where people get together and spout, like they do at Davos and other places.”

The Beijing conference is called the New Economy Forum, a title choice that generated anxiety at the World Economic Forum. “W.E.F. is getting very, very worried about this sort of gathering,” Dangote said. “They kept asking, ‘Are you coming to Davos?’ ‘What are all these things about?’—you know? I said, ‘Look, joining the New Economy Forum does not mean that I’m not going to Davos.’”

—Evan Osnos

SKETCHPAD BY EMILY FLAKE SOME HUGS



USED TO BANG
IN COLLEGE
*My God, you still
smell the same*



THE “I DIDN’T
RECOGNIZE YOU AT FIRST” HUG
Time is a real bitch

THE FATHER-
DAUGHTER HUG
*Just give me
the car keys, Dad*



THE MOTHER-
SON HUG
*Like “Psycho,”
but make it fashion*



UPTIGHT WASPY RELATIONS
*The least emotional physical contact
between two people possible*

ABANDONING A CAT

Memories of my father.

BY HARUKI MURAKAMI



Of course I have a lot of memories of my father. It's only natural, considering that we lived under the same roof of our not exactly spacious home from the time I was born until I left home at eighteen. And, as is the case with most children and parents, I imagine, some of my memories of my father are happy, some not quite so much. But the memories that remain most vividly in my mind now fall into neither category; they involve more ordinary events.

This one, for instance:

When we were living in Shukugawa (part of Nishinomiya City, in Hyogo Prefecture), one day we went to the beach to get rid of a cat. Not a kitten but an

older female cat. Why we needed to get rid of it I can't recall. The house we lived in was a single-family home with a garden and plenty of room for a cat. Maybe it was a stray we'd taken in that was now pregnant, and my parents felt they couldn't care for it anymore. My memory isn't clear on this point. Getting rid of cats back then was a common occurrence, not something that anyone would criticize you for. The idea of neutering cats never crossed anyone's mind. I was in one of the lower grades in elementary school at the time, I believe, so it was probably around 1955, or a little later. Near our home were the ruins of a bank building that had been bombed

by American planes—one of a few still visible scars of the war.

My father and I set off that summer afternoon to leave the cat by the shore. He pedaled his bicycle, while I sat on the back holding a box with the cat inside. We rode along the Shukugawa River, arrived at the beach at Koroen, set the box down among some trees there, and, without a backward glance, headed home. The beach must have been about two kilometres from our house.

At home, we got off the bike—discussing how we felt sorry for the cat, but what could we do?—and when we opened the front door the cat we'd just abandoned was there, greeting us with a friendly meow, its tail standing tall. It had beaten us home. For the life of me, I couldn't figure out how it had done that. We'd been on a bike, after all. My father was stumped as well. The two of us stood there for a while, at a total loss for words. Slowly, my father's look of blank amazement changed to one of admiration and, finally, to an expression of relief. And the cat went back to being our pet.

We always had cats at home, and we liked them. I didn't have any brothers or sisters, and cats and books were my best friends when I was growing up. I loved to sit on the veranda with a cat, sunning myself. So why did we have to take that cat to the beach and abandon it? Why didn't I protest? These questions—along with that of how the cat beat us home—are still unanswered.

Another memory of my father is this: Every morning, before breakfast, he would sit for a long time in front of the *butsudan* shrine in our home, intently reciting Buddhist sutras, with his eyes closed. It wasn't a regular Buddhist shrine, exactly, but a small cylindrical glass case with a beautifully carved bodhisattva statue inside. Why did my father recite sutras every morning in front of that glass case, instead of in front of a standard *butsudan*? That's one more on my list of unanswered questions.

At any rate, this was obviously an important ritual for him, one that marked the start of each day. As far as I know, he never failed to perform what he called his "duty," and no one was allowed to interfere with it. There was an intense focus about the whole act. Sim-

The author in his garden in Shukugawa, Nishinomiya, in September, 1957.

ply labelling it “a daily habit” doesn’t do it justice.

Once, when I was a child, I asked him whom he was praying for. And he replied that it was for those who had died in the war. His fellow Japanese soldiers who’d died, as well as the Chinese who’d been their enemy. He didn’t elaborate, and I didn’t press him. I suspect that if I had he would have opened up more. But I didn’t. There must have been something in me that prevented me from pursuing the topic.

I should explain a little about my father’s background. His father, Benshiki Murakami, was born into a farming family in Aichi Prefecture. As was common with younger sons, my grandfather was sent to a nearby temple to train as a priest. He was a decent student, and after apprenticeships at various temples he was appointed head priest of the Anyoji Temple, in Kyoto. This temple has four or five hundred families in its parish, so it was quite a promotion for him.

I grew up in the Osaka-Kobe area, so I didn’t have many opportunities to visit my grandfather’s home, this Kyoto temple, and I have few memories of him. What I understand, though, is that he was a free, uninhibited sort of person, known for his love of drinking. As his name implies—the character *ben* in his first name means “eloquence”—he had a way with words; he was a capable priest, and was apparently popular. I do recall that he was charismatic, with a booming voice.

My grandfather had six sons (not a single daughter) and was a healthy, hearty man, but, sadly, when he was seventy, at eight-fifty on the morning of August 25, 1958, he was struck by a train while crossing the tracks of the Keishin Line, which connects Kyoto (Misasagi) and Otsu, and killed. It was an unattended railway crossing in Yamada-cho, Kitahanayama, Yamashina, in Higashiyama-ku. A large typhoon hit the Kinki region on this particular day; it was raining hard, my grandfather was carrying an umbrella, and he probably didn’t see the train coming around a curve. He was a bit hard of hearing as well.

The night our family learned that my grandfather had died, I remember my father quickly preparing to go to

Kyoto, and my mother crying, clinging to him, pleading, “Whatever you do, don’t agree to take over the temple.” I was only nine at the time, but this image is etched in my brain, like a memorable scene from a black-and-white movie. My father was expressionless, silently nodding. I think he’d already made up his mind. I could sense it.

My father was born on December 1, 1917, in Awata-guchi, Sakyo-ku, in Kyoto. When he was a boy, the peaceful Taisho democracy period was drawing to a close, to be followed by the gloomy Great Depression, then the swamp that was the Second Sino-Japanese War, and, finally, the tragedy of the Second World War. Then came the confusion and poverty of the early postwar period, when my father’s generation struggled to survive. As I mentioned, my father was one of six brothers. Three of them had been drafted and fought in the Second Sino-Japanese War and, miraculously, survived with no serious injuries. Almost all of the six sons were more or less qualified to be priests. They had that kind of education. My father, for instance, held a junior rank as a priest, roughly equivalent to that of a second lieutenant in the military. In the summer, during the busy *obon* season—the yearly festival to honor family ancestors—these six brothers would assemble in Kyoto and divide up the visits to the temple’s parishioners. At night, they’d get together and drink.

After my grandfather died, there was the pressing question of who would take over the priestly duties at the temple. Most of the sons were already married and had jobs. Truth be told, no one had expected my grandfather to pass away so early or so suddenly.

The eldest son—my uncle Shimei Murakami—had wanted to become a veterinarian, but after the war he took a job at the tax office in Osaka and was now a subsection chief, while my father, the second son, taught Japanese at the combined Koyo Gakuin junior and senior high school in the Kansai area. The other brothers were either teachers, too, or studying in Buddhist-affiliated colleges. Two of the brothers had been adopted by other families, a common practice, and had different last names. At any rate, when they met to

discuss the situation no one volunteered to take on the temple duties. Becoming the head priest of a large temple like that was no easy undertaking, and would be a major burden for anyone’s family. The brothers knew this all too well. And my grandmother, a widow now, was a strict, no-nonsense type; any wife would have found it difficult to serve as the head priest’s spouse with her still there. My mother was the eldest daughter of an established merchant family in Senba, in Osaka. She was a fashionable woman, not at all the type to fit in as the head priest’s wife in Kyoto. So it was no wonder she clung to my father, in tears, begging him not to take over the temple.

At least from my perspective, as his son, my father seemed to be a straightforward, responsible person. He hadn’t inherited his father’s openhearted disposition (he was more the nervous type), but his good-natured manner and his way of speaking put other people at ease. He had a sincere faith as well. He probably would have made a good priest, and I think he knew that. My guess is that if he’d been single he wouldn’t have resisted the idea very much. But he had something he couldn’t compromise on—his own little family.

In the end, my uncle Shimei left his job at the tax office and succeeded my grandfather as the head priest of Anyoji Temple. And, later, he was succeeded by his son, my cousin Junichi. According to Junichi, Shimei agreed to become the head priest out of a sense of obligation as the eldest son. I say he agreed, but it was more that he had no choice. Back then, the parishioners were much more influential than they are now, and they probably wouldn’t have let him off the hook.

When my father was a boy, he was sent to be an apprentice at a temple somewhere in Nara. The understanding, presumably, was that he would be adopted into the Nara priest’s family. However, after his apprenticeship he returned home to Kyoto. This was ostensibly because the cold had adversely affected his health, but the main reason seems to have been that he couldn’t adjust to the new environment. After returning home, he lived, as before, as his parents’ son. But I get the

feeling that the experience remained with him, as a deep emotional scar. I can't point to any particular evidence of this, but there was something about him that made me feel that way.

I recall now the expression on my father's face—surprised at first, then impressed, then relieved—when that cat we had supposedly abandoned beat us home.

I've never experienced anything like that. I was brought up—fairly lovingly, I'd say—as the only child in an ordinary family. So I can't understand, on a practical or an emotional level, what kind of psychic scars may result when a child is abandoned by his parents. I can only imagine it on a superficial level.

The French director François Truffaut talked about being forced to live apart from his parents when he was young. And for the rest of his life he pursued this theme of abandonment in his films. Most people probably have some depressing experience they can't quite put into words but also can't forget.

My father graduated from Higashiyama Junior High School (equivalent to a high school today) in 1936 and entered the School for Seizan Studies at eighteen. Students generally received a four-year exemption from military ser-

vice, but he forgot to take care of some administrative paperwork, and in 1938, when he was twenty, he was drafted. It was a procedural error, but once that kind of mistake is made you can't just apologize your way out of it. Bureaucracies and the military are like that. Protocol has to be followed.

My father belonged to the 20th Infantry Regiment, which was part of the 16th Division (Fushimi Division). The nucleus of the 16th Division then consisted of four infantry regiments: the 9th Infantry Regiment (Kyoto), the 20th Infantry Regiment (Fukuchiyama), the 33rd Infantry Regiment (Tsu City, in Mie Prefecture), and the 38th Infantry Regiment (Nara). It's unclear why my father, who was from Kyoto City proper, was assigned not to the local 9th Regiment but instead to the far-off Fukuchiyama Regiment.

At least this was how I understood it for the longest time, but when I looked more deeply into his background I found that I was wrong. In fact, my father belonged not to the 20th Infantry Regiment but to the 16th Transport Regiment, which was also part of the 16th Division. And this regiment wasn't in

Fukuchiyama but was headquartered in Fukakusa/Fushimi, in Kyoto City. So why was I under the impression that my father had belonged to the 20th Infantry Regiment? I'll discuss this point later.

The 20th Infantry Regiment was known for being one of the first to arrive in Nanjing after the city fell. Military units from Kyoto were generally seen as well bred and urbane, but this particular regiment's actions gave it a surprisingly bloody reputation. For a long time, I was afraid that my father had participated in the attack on Nanjing, and I was reluctant to investigate the details. He died, in August, 2008, at the age of ninety, without my ever having asked him about it, without his ever having talked about it.

My father was drafted in August of 1938. The 20th Infantry Regiment's infamous march into Nanjing took place the previous year, in December of 1937, so my father had missed it by nearly a year. When I learned this, it was a tremendous relief, as if a great weight had been lifted.

As a private second class in the 16th Transport Regiment, my father boarded a troop transport in Ujina Harbor on October 3, 1938, and arrived in Shanghai on October 6th. There his regiment joined up with the 20th Infantry Regiment. According to the Army's wartime directory, the 16th Transport Regiment was primarily assigned to supply and security duties. If you follow the regiment's movements, you see that it covered incredible distances for the time. For units that were barely motorized, and lacked sufficient fuel—horses were the main mode of transportation—travelling so far must have been extremely arduous. The situation at the front was dire: supplies couldn't get there; there was a chronic shortage of rations and ammunition; the men's uniforms were in tatters; and unsanitary conditions led to outbreaks of cholera and other infectious diseases. It was impossible for Japan, with its limited strength, to control a huge country like China. Even though the Japanese Army was able to gain military control of one city after another, it was, practically speaking, incapable of occupying entire regions. The memoirs written by soldiers in the 20th Infantry Regiment give a clear picture of how pitiful the



"All right, back to answering e-mails and sighing."

situation was. Transport troops were not usually directly involved in front-line fighting, but that didn't mean they were safe. As they were only lightly armed (usually with just bayonets), when the enemy attacked from the rear they suffered major casualties.

Soon after starting at the Seizan school, my father had discovered the pleasures of haiku and joined a haiku circle. He was really *into it*, to use a modern idiom. Several of the haiku he wrote while he was a soldier were published in the school's haiku journal; most likely he mailed them to the school from the front:

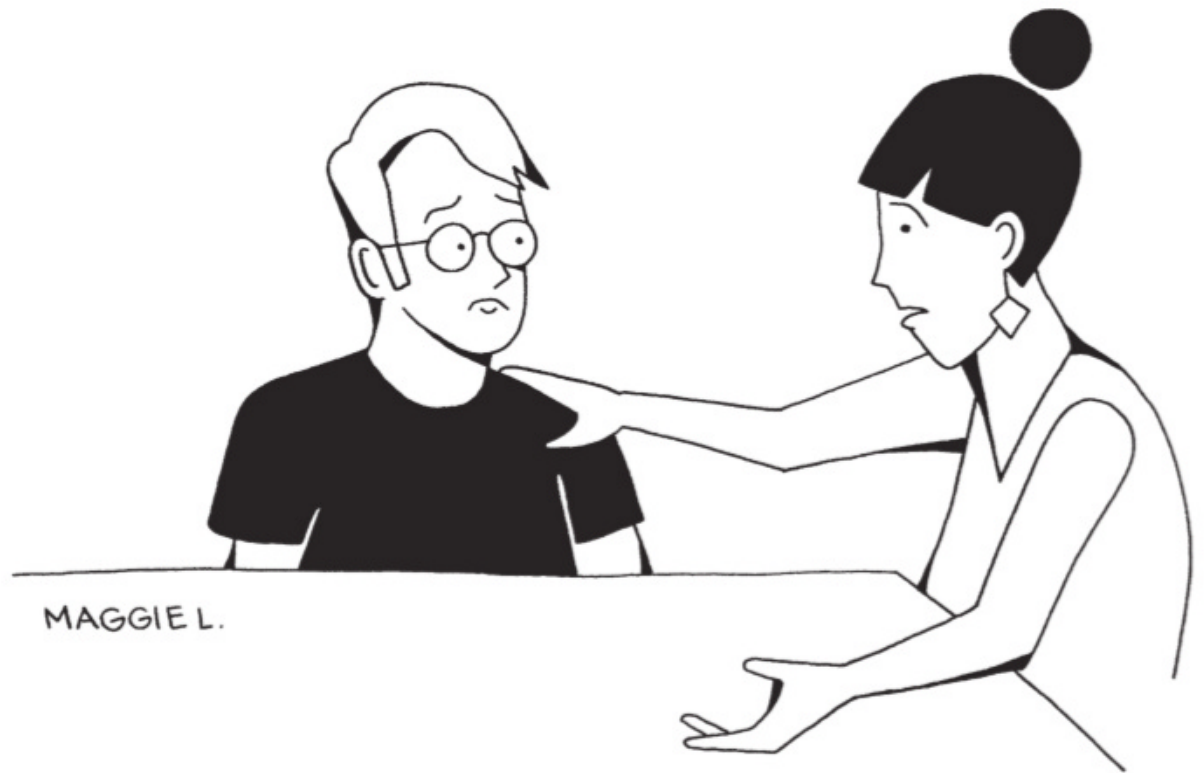
Birds migrating
Ah—where they are headed
must be my homeland

A soldier, yet a priest
clasping my hands in prayer
toward the moon

I'm no haiku expert, so it's beyond me to say how accomplished his were. Clearly, what holds these poems together is not technique but the open, honest feelings that underscore them.

My father had been studying, no doubt conscientiously, to become a priest. But a simple clerical error had turned him into a soldier. He went through brutal basic training, was handed a Type 38 rifle, placed on a troop-transport ship, and sent off to the fearsome battles at the front. His unit was constantly on the move, clashing with Chinese troops and guerrillas who put up a fierce resistance. In every way imaginable, this was the opposite of life in a peaceful temple in the Kyoto hills. He must have suffered tremendous mental confusion and spiritual turmoil. In the midst of all that, writing haiku may have been his sole consolation. Things he never could have written in his letters, or they wouldn't have made it past the censors, he put into the form of haiku—expressing himself in a symbolic code, as it were—where he was able to honestly bare his true feelings.

My father talked to me about the war only once, when he told me a story about how his unit had executed a captured Chinese soldier. I don't know what prompted him to tell me this. It happened so long ago that it's an iso-



"It's not you, it's the humidity."

lated memory, the context unclear. I was still in the lower grades in elementary school. He related matter-of-factly how the execution had taken place. Though the Chinese soldier knew that he was going to be killed, he didn't struggle, didn't show any fear, but just sat there quietly with his eyes closed. And he was decapitated. The man's attitude was exemplary, my father told me. He seemed to have deep feelings of respect for the Chinese soldier. I don't know if he had to watch as other soldiers in his unit carried out the execution, or if he himself was forced to play a direct role. There's no way now to determine whether this is because my memory is hazy, or whether my father described the incident in intentionally vague terms. But one thing *is* clear: the experience left feelings of anguish and torment that lingered for a long time in the soul of this priest turned soldier.

At the time, it wasn't at all uncommon to allow new soldiers and recruits to practice killing by executing captured Chinese soldiers. Killing unarmed prisoners was, of course, a violation of international law, but the Japanese military in that period seemed to take the practice for granted. Military units likely didn't have the resources to take care of prisoners. Most of these executions were performed either by shooting the prisoner or by stabbing him with a bayo-

net, but I recall my father telling me that for this particular execution a sword was used.

Needless to say, my father's recounting of this cold-blooded beheading of a man with a sword became deeply etched in my young mind. To put it another way, this heavy weight my father carried—a trauma, in today's terminology—was handed down, in part, to me, his son. That's how human connections work, how history works. It was an act of transference and ritual. My father hardly said a word about his wartime experiences. It's unlikely that he wanted to remember this execution or to talk about it. Yet he must have felt a compelling need to relate the story to his son, his own flesh and blood, even if this meant that it would remain an open wound for both of us.

The 20th Infantry Regiment, along with my father's unit, returned to Japan on August 20, 1939. After a year as a soldier, my father resumed his studies at the Seizan school. At the time, the draft meant two years of military service, but for some reason my father served only one. Perhaps the military took into account the fact that he had been enrolled as a student when he was drafted.

After his service, my father continued to enthusiastically write haiku. This one, written in October of 1940, was



*“Goodnight Twitter. Goodnight Instagram.
Goodnight Snapchat. Goodnight Reddit. Goodnight Tinder.
Goodnight Pinterest. Goodnight Facebook...”*

probably inspired by a good-will visit by the Hitler Youth to Japan:

They call out, singing
to bring the deer closer,
the Hitler Youth

Personally, I really like this haiku, which captures an obscure moment in history in a subtle, unusual way. There’s a striking contrast between the far-off bloody conflict in Europe and the deer (probably the famous deer in Nara). Those Hitler Youth, enjoying a short visit to Japan, may very well have gone on to perish in the bitter winters at the Eastern Front.

I’m drawn to this poem as well:

Anniversary
of Issa’s death, I sit here
with his sad poems

The world depicted is so calm and tranquil, yet there’s a lingering sense of chaos.

My father always loved literature and, after he became a teacher, spent much of his time reading. Our house was full of books. This may have in-

fluenced me in my teens, when I developed a passion for reading myself. My father graduated with honors from the Seizan school, and, in March, 1941, he entered the literature department at Kyoto Imperial University. It can’t have been easy to pass the entrance exam for a top school like Kyoto Imperial University after undergoing a Buddhist education to be a priest. My mother often told me, “Your father’s very bright.” How bright he really was I have no idea. Frankly, it’s not a question that interests me much. For somebody in my line of work, intelligence is less important than a sharp intuition. Be that as it may, the fact remains that my father always had excellent grades in school.

Compared with him, I never had much interest in studying; my grades were lacklustre from start to finish. I’m the type who eagerly pursues things I’m interested in but can’t be bothered with anything else. That was true of me when I was a student, and it is still true now.

This disappointed my father, who

I’m sure compared me to himself at the same age. You were born in this peaceful time, he must have thought. You can study as much as you like, with nothing to get in the way. So why can’t you make more of an effort? I think he wanted me to follow the path he hadn’t been able to take because of the war.

But I couldn’t live up to my father’s expectations. I never could will myself to study the way he wanted me to. I found most classes at school mind-numbing, the school system overly uniform and repressive. This led my father to feel a chronic dismay, and me to feel a chronic distress (and a certain amount of unconscious anger). When I debuted as a novelist, at thirty, my father was really pleased, but by that time our relationship had grown distant and cool.

Even now I carry around with me the feeling—or perhaps the dregs of the feeling—that I disappointed my father, let him down. Back in my teens, this made things uncomfortable at home, with a constant undercurrent of guilt on my part. I still have nightmares in which I have to take a test at school and can’t answer a single question. Time ticks away as I do nothing, though I’m well aware that failing the test will have major consequences—that sort of dream. I usually wake up in a cold sweat.

But, back then, being glued to my desk, finishing homework, and getting better grades on tests held far less appeal than reading books I enjoyed, listening to music I liked, playing sports or mah-jongg with friends, and going on dates with girls.

All we can do is breathe the air of the period we live in, carry with us the special burdens of the time, and grow up within those confines. That’s just how things are.

My father graduated from the School for Seizan Studies in the spring of 1941, and at the end of September received a special draft notice. On October 3rd, he was back in uniform, first in the 20th Infantry Regiment (Fukuchiyama), and then in the 53rd Transport Regiment, which was part of the 53rd Division.

In 1940, the 16th Division had been permanently stationed in Manchuria, and while it was there the 53rd Division

in Kyoto was organized to take its place. Most likely, the confusion of this sudden reorganization accounts for why my father was initially placed in the Fukuchiyama Regiment. (As I said, I was always mistakenly convinced that he'd been in the Fukuchiyama Regiment from the first time he was drafted.) The 53rd Division was sent to Burma in 1944, was in the Battle of Imphal, and, from December to March, 1945, was nearly decimated by the British in the Battle of the Irrawaddy River.

But quite unexpectedly, on November 30, 1941, my father was released from military service and allowed to return to civilian life. November 30th was eight days before the attack on Pearl Harbor. After that attack, I doubt that the military would have been generous enough to let him go.

As my father told it, his life was saved by one officer. My father was a pfc. at the time and was summoned by a senior officer, who told him, "You're studying at Kyoto Imperial University, and would better serve the country by continuing your studies than by being a soldier." Did one officer have the authority to make this decision? I have no idea. It's hard to conceive that a humanities student such as my father could be seen as somehow serving the country by returning to college and his study of haiku. There had to be other factors at work. Either way, he was released from the Army and was a free man again.

At least that was the story I heard, or have a memory of hearing, as a child. Unfortunately, it doesn't accord with the facts. Kyoto Imperial University records indicate that my father enrolled in the literature department in October, 1944. Perhaps my memory is cloudy. Or maybe it was my mother who told me this story, and her memory was faulty. And now there's no way to verify what's true and what isn't.

According to the records, my father entered the literature department of Kyoto Imperial University in October, 1944, and graduated in September, 1947. But I have no idea where he was, or what he was doing, between the ages of twenty-three and twenty-six, the three years after he was released from the military and before he entered Kyoto Imperial University.

Right after my father was released

from service, the Second World War broke out in the Pacific. In the course of the war, the 16th Division and the 53rd Division were essentially wiped out. If my father had not been released, if he'd been shipped off with one of his former units, he would almost certainly have died on the battlefield, and then, of course, I wouldn't be alive now. You could call it fortunate, but having his own life saved while his former comrades lost theirs became a source of great pain and anguish. I understand all the more now why he closed his eyes and devoutly recited the sutras every morning of his life.

On June 12, 1945, after he had entered Kyoto Imperial University, my father received his third draft notice. This time he was assigned to the Chubu 143 Corps as a pfc. It's unclear where the corps was stationed, but it stayed within Japan. Two months later, on August 15th, the war ended, and on October 28th my father was released from service and returned to the university. He was twenty-seven.

In September, 1947, my father passed the exams to receive his B.A. and went on to the graduate program in literature at Kyoto Imperial University. I was born in January, 1949. Because of his age, and the fact that he was married and had a child, my father had to give up his studies before completing the program. In order to make a living, he took a position as a Japanese teacher at Koyo Gakuin, in Nishinomiya. I don't know the details of how my father and mother came to be married. Since they lived far apart—one in Kyoto, the other in Osaka—most likely a mutual acquaintance had introduced them. My mother had intended to marry another man, a music teacher, but he died in the war. And the store that her father had owned, in Senba, Osaka, burned down in a U.S. bombing raid. She always remembered Grumman carrier-based fighters strafing the city, and fleeing for her life through the streets of Osaka. The war had a profound effect on my mother's life as well.

My mother, who is now ninety-six, was also a Japanese teacher. After graduating from the literature department of Shoin Women's School, in Osaka, she worked as a teacher at her

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alma mater, but she left her job when she got married.

According to my mother, my father in his younger days lived a pretty wild life. His wartime experiences were fresh then, and his frustration at the fact that his life hadn't gone the way he'd wanted it to made things hard at times. He drank a lot, and occasionally hit his students. But by the time I was growing up he'd mellowed significantly. He'd get depressed and out of sorts sometimes, and drink too much (something my mother often complained about), but I don't recall any unpleasant experiences in our home.

Objectively speaking, I think my father was an excellent teacher. When he died, I was surprised at how many of his former students came to pay their respects. They seemed to have a great deal of affection for him. Many of them had become doctors, and they took very good care of him as he battled cancer and diabetes.

My mother was apparently an outstanding teacher in her own right, and even after she had me and became a full-time housewife many of her former pupils would stop by the house. For some reason, though, I never felt that I was cut out to be a teacher.

As I grew up and formed my own personality, the psychological discord between me and my father became more obvious. Both of us were unbending, and, when it came to not expressing our thoughts directly, we were two of a kind. For better or for worse.

After I got married and started working, my father and I grew even more estranged. And when I became a full-time writer our relationship got so convoluted that in the end we cut off nearly all contact. We didn't see each other for more than twenty years, and spoke only when it was absolutely necessary.

My father and I were born into different ages and environments, and our ways of thinking and viewing the world were miles apart. If at a certain point I'd attempted to rebuild our relationship, things might have gone in another direction, but I was too focussed on what I wanted to do to make the effort.

My father and I finally talked face to face shortly before he died. I was almost sixty, my father ninety. He was in

a hospital in Nishijin, in Kyoto. He had terrible diabetes, and cancer was ravaging much of his body. Though he'd always been on the stout side, now he was gaunt. I barely recognized him. And there, in the final days of his life—the very final few days—my father and I managed an awkward conversation and reached a sort of reconciliation. Despite our differences, looking at my emaciated father I did feel a connection, a bond between us.

Even now, I can relive the shared puzzlement of that summer day when we rode together on his bike to the beach at Koroen to abandon a striped cat, a cat that totally got the better of us. I can recall the sound of the waves, the scent of the wind whistling through the stand of pines. It's the accumulation of insignificant things like this that has made me the person I am.

I have one more memory from childhood that involves a cat. I included this episode in one of my novels but would like to touch on it again here, as something that actually happened.

We had a little white kitten. I don't recall how we came to have it, because back then we always had cats coming and going in our home. But I do recall how pretty this kitten's fur was, how cute it was.

One evening, as I sat on the porch, this cat suddenly raced straight up into the tall, beautiful pine tree in our garden. Almost as if it wanted to show off to me how brave and agile it was. I couldn't believe how nimbly it scampered up the trunk and disappeared into the upper branches. After a while, the kitten started to meow pitifully, as though it were begging for help. It had had no trouble climbing up so high, but it seemed terrified of climbing back down.

I stood at the base of the tree looking up, but couldn't see the cat. I could only hear its faint cry. I went to get my father and told him what had happened, hoping that he could figure out a way to rescue the kitten. But there was nothing he could do; it was too high up for a ladder to be of any use. The kitten kept meowing for help, as the sun began to set. Darkness finally enveloped the pine tree.

I don't know what happened to that little kitten. The next morning when I

got up, I couldn't hear it crying anymore. I stood at the base of the tree and called out the kitten's name, but there was no reply. Just silence.

Perhaps the cat had made it down sometime during the night and gone off somewhere (but where?). Or maybe, unable to climb down, it had clung to the branches, exhausted, and grown weaker and weaker until it died. I sat there on the porch, gazing up at the tree, with these scenarios running through my mind. Thinking of that little white kitten clinging on for dear life with its tiny claws, then shrivelled up and dead.

The experience taught me a vivid lesson: going down is much harder than going up. To generalize from this, you might say that results overwhelm causes and neutralize them. In some cases, a cat is killed in the process; in other cases, a human being.

At any rate, there's really only one thing that I wanted to get across here. A single, obvious fact:

I am the ordinary son of an ordinary man. Which is pretty self-evident, I know. But, as I started to unearth that fact, it became clear to me that everything that had happened in my father's life and in my life was accidental. We live our lives this way: viewing things that came about through accident and happenstance as the sole possible reality.

To put it another way, imagine raindrops falling on a broad stretch of land. Each one of us is a nameless raindrop among countless drops. A discrete, individual drop, for sure, but one that's entirely replaceable. Still, that solitary raindrop has its own emotions, its own history, its own duty to carry on that history. Even if it loses its individual integrity and is absorbed into a collective something. Or maybe precisely because it's absorbed into a larger, collective entity.

Occasionally, my mind takes me back to that looming pine tree in the garden of our house in Shukugawa. To thoughts of that little kitten, still clinging to a branch, its body turning to bleached bones. And I think of death, and how very difficult it is to climb straight down to the ground, so far below you that it makes your head spin. ♦

(Translated, from the Japanese, by Philip Gabriel.)



ARE YOU ON THE APPS?

BY HALLIE CANTOR

So how's dating going? Are you on all the apps? There are so many now. I know, it's crazy!

Are you on the app where girls have to send the initial message, and then guys are only allowed to choose from twenty preapproved words for the first hour? That way they can't say anything overtly sexual or offensive until after you've spent an hour talking to them. My friend Amanda met her boyfriend on it.

I get it—it's tough out there. Dating seems so different now from the way it was when I was doing it. I was just reading somewhere that young people don't even go on real dates anymore. They just "slide" into one another's Blue Apron accounts, and if you "like" the same recipes as someone else then that person gets delivered to your house with your next meal-prep box. It sounds

convenient. But I wouldn't know—I've been with Seth for seven years, and we share a toothbrush!

I also heard that millennials aren't having sex as much. Like, kids don't "hook up" anymore—now they just do this thing where they lie down and kind of mash their elbows and legs together in an intertwined position and stay like that. Like eagle pose in yoga, but between two bodies? I think it started with the Amish.

It's so funny—yesterday, Seth thought I said "Sex?" and he got all excited, but I was actually saying "Seth?" because I was going to say, "Seth? Next time you dock the robot vacuum, can you make sure it actually docks? Because I went to use it and it hadn't been properly charged, so I couldn't. Thanks, sweetie."

Oh! Have you heard about the plant

dating app? It's, like, you earn a point every time you match with a person, and when you get enough points it reminds you when to water your plants. But it lets you see new guys only on days when you haven't watered your succulents, I think. I tried to get my single friend Eileen to let me swipe as her the other day, but I accidentally turned her into a monstera plant. And I'll never remember to water her. I'd forget my head if it weren't for Seth. Sorry, Eileen!

What's the name of that other app—the one where if someone doesn't respond to your message a freelance contract killer goes to his house and kills him for you? I forget the name, but, like, thank you, gig economy, am I right? LOL.

Really, don't listen to me. I'm such a boring old coupled-up person—I don't know anything. In my day, an app meant a bloomin' onion. Just kidding. Actually, Domino's does have that pizza-delivery-slash-dating app now, right? You swipe and then, if there's someone nearby who wants to date you, the person shows up within thirty minutes or your pizza is free.

It almost sounds kind of fun. Like a game. If you wanted, I could swipe for you for a while, just for fun. I mean, thank *God* I'm not on the apps, but it would be fun for, like, a day.

Are you on that one where you put your name, age, credit-card number, whatever on your profile and it matches you with other users who have bought the same paper towels and other household goods? And then you get the paper towels, too. It's sort of a dating app meets, well, a Web site where you buy paper towels. But you save money by getting them every week. Oh, my gosh, do you belong to Costco? It's made our lives a million times easier. Sometimes I look at Seth's body in bed and I feel like it's my body and I can't tell the difference. Ha ha ha. I'm so glad I'm not single anymore! Last week, I came home and heard him crying from the driveway, so I drove around the block a few times so I could keep listening to my podcast instead of comforting him! Fun.

But anyway. Who needs dating, you know? There's *so* much good TV right now. ♦

BELIEF SYSTEM

How Derren Brown remade mind reading for a skeptical age.

BY ADAM GREEN



In 2005, when I was visiting London, a magician friend told me that I had to see the English mentalist Derren Brown, who was appearing in the West End, in his one-man show “Something Wicked This Way Comes.” Brown had become famous for an astonishing ability to seemingly read the thoughts of his fellow-humans and to control their actions. In a series of TV specials, he’d reinvented a waning branch of magic—mentalism—for a new generation, framing his feats as evidence not of psychic powers but of a cutting-edge knowledge of the mind and how to manipulate it.

A few days later, I was sitting in a capacity audience at a theatre in Cov-

ent Garden. A slim, pale, vulpine man in his mid-thirties, with well-tended light-brown hair and a goatee, came onstage, dressed in a trim black suit and a black shirt. He looked more like the creative director of an advertising agency than like a mind reader, and seemed to take neither his spectators nor himself too seriously: when someone’s cell phone went off, he gave a look of mock alarm and said, “Don’t answer it. It’s very bad news.” Beneath his genially impudent manner lurked a suggestion of preternatural self-assurance and even menace.

Brown spent the next two and a half hours performing a series of increas-

ingly inconceivable set pieces, organized around the theme of how susceptible we are to hidden influence. He gave demonstrations of subliminal persuasion, lie detection, instant trance induction, and mass hypnosis, as well as manipulation of his own mental state to control his response to pain. To show that participants were selected at random, he hurled a stuffed monkey into the auditorium, and whoever caught it would come up onstage. (You can see a later performance of the show on YouTube.)

Early on, a woman in the audience was entrusted with a locked briefcase. For the finale, Brown held up a large envelope, which he said contained “a prediction of the future, about the decisions that you’re going to make”; clipped the envelope to a metal stand at center stage, where it remained in full view; and summoned the woman back up. He then tossed that day’s editions of ten assorted newspapers into the audience and asked her to pick someone who’d caught one of them. Next, he gave her and other audience members a series of choices, through which, eventually, page 14 of the *Daily Mail* was torn into dozens of pieces, and the woman selected a single word on one of them: “influences.”

Pointing out the number of papers he’d tossed out and the approximate number of words in each one, Brown said, “That’s 1.6 million different words that you had to choose from in this room, and you choose the word ‘influences.’ Is that fair?”

“Yeah,” she said.

“No!” Brown said in a stage whisper. “No, it’s not. It is not fair. It is inevitable.”

He went over to the stand where he’d left the envelope, opened it, and, giving the woman one end to hold, unfurled a long roll of paper that read, in large letters, “Influences.” The audience gasped and started cheering.

Brown held up a hand for quiet, saying, “Hold on a second. You’re all intelligent people. You’re going to be having a drink afterwards, or driving home, or up at four in the morning trying to work out how that worked. And you’ll think, Maybe it didn’t make any difference what she chose. Maybe all that happened is magic boy here switches a bit of paper at the end, hopes she goes

Brown maintains that he neither has nor believes in any kind of psychic power.

for that word, or something. It's a comfortable thing to think. But here's the point: if that is what happened and it didn't matter what paper you chose or what page, and all that was rubbish, then that word 'influences' wouldn't really be on page 14 of today's *Daily Mail*. And it is."

Brown unlocked the woman's briefcase and removed an envelope containing page 14 of that day's *Mail*, with the word "influences" circled in red. The audience roared and leaped to its feet. "Thank you all for coming—good night!" Brown said, taking a bow and starting to walk offstage.

But then he paused and again signalled for quiet. He explained that he had been exposing us to secret messages and that it thus made no difference who got selected for the final trick—anyone in the audience would have picked that word on that page of that paper. "Let me tell you what I've been doing," he said. "We've been filming little bits from the wings, little clips of the show."

There followed a montage of moments from that night, in which Brown gave verbal suggestions, sometimes via subtle mispronunciations or non sequiturs, that we had apparently absorbed subconsciously. In one clip, Brown set up a stunt that involved hammering a nail into his nasal cavity, saying, "Do you hammer *daily a number 14 mail* into your head?"

In another, he explained, "Because of the sorts of unconscious behaviors that we unconsciously *choose daily*"—and here he turned to the camera and winked—"male subjects tend to be . . ."

And in another he said, "Pain is a subjective thing, like when you're young and you *tear around influences*, and you cut yourself, and you don't really know that you're cut till you look down and see the blood."

"This is what you've been hearing without realizing you've been hearing it," Brown announced triumphantly. "That's why it was the *Daily Mail*, that's why it was page 14, and that's why it was the word 'influences.' Thank you for your attention, thank you for coming out tonight, and thank you for playing. Good night!"

This is what Brown does best: he takes an effect from the mentalism rep-

ertoire and generates from it an escalating series of climaxes that forces you to rethink everything you've just seen. Rather than diminish the mystery, Brown's revelation of his ostensible methods reasserts and deepens it. He has always maintained that he neither has nor believes in any kind of psychic power, and his emphasis on manipulating people with techniques from the outer frontiers of psychology gives an audience too sophisticated to believe in the paranormal something scientific-seeming to hold on to. Often, the explanations end up being even more perplexing than the feat itself. Whether one believes that he's actually doing what he claims or that he's simply cloaking sleight of hand and the like in brilliant theatrics, he seems to be drawing back the curtain and offering a glimpse into some uncanny realm. As Brown once told me, "People feel that they understand *something* about what I'm up to but not everything, which satisfies their rational side but leaves room for something more playful and subterranean."

In the U.K., Brown has been a household name for nearly two decades, thanks to dozens of TV shows, several stage shows, two Olivier Awards, and a number of best-selling books. Despite various forays into the U.S., including an Off Broadway run and Netflix specials, he remains relatively unknown here, but now he is making his Broadway debut, with the show "Secret." One of the producers, Thomas Kail, who directed "Hamilton," told me that he'd been obsessed with Brown for years. "He just kind of lifts you up and takes you away, showing you things that should not be, and yet they are," Kail said. "He tells you that it's not real, and then he does it."

Kail's words reminded me of something that had happened after the London show I saw. I'd been invited to say hello to Brown in his dressing room. Though clearly exhausted, he was courtly and chatty, but, as we talked, he sat down and started picking tiny shards of glass out of the sole of his foot. Earlier, he'd done a routine that involved walking barefoot across a carpet of jagged broken bottles without bleeding or feeling pain. As I stood in his dressing room, I wondered whether these glass splinters were really from earlier or if

he was just treating me to an extra layer of deception—what magicians call a "convincer." Fourteen years later, I'm still not sure.

I met up with Brown again for breakfast one summer morning last year in Southend-on-Sea, a down-at-the-heels resort town about forty miles east of London. Southend's points of interest include the world's longest pleasure pier and the Cliffs Pavilion, a sixteen-hundred-seat theatre where Brown was performing the final shows of a tour of the U.K. and Ireland. I was waiting for him to join me on the patio of his hotel, above an esplanade with a view of the Thames Estuary, which, at low tide, amounted to a vast expanse of muck dotted with grounded boats. As I sipped a weak espresso, I noticed a lanky man with graying hair pass by, do a double take, and stop. "Adam?" he said, in a mildly disreputable English accent. "I don't believe this. Good God, what are you doing here?"

I had no idea who he was, and as my mind frantically tried to place him I stammered something about being there for work, adding hopefully, "And you?"

"Well, I'm here for work, too, aren't I?" he said, hovering over my table. "I'm sure you've heard that Trump is coming to Southend as part of his visit—he's being made an earl, in recompense for all he's done—and I'm here covering it for the *New York Times*."

I stood up to discourage him from taking a seat, and he went on, "How did you make out with all those people, after I left you that night in New York? Did you go out for more drinks?" Sensing my confusion, he gave me a wounded look and said, "Don't tell me you don't remember me."

Just then, Brown emerged from the hotel, waved, and walked over to the table. This seemed to offend the man. "Excuse me," he snapped. "We're having a private conversation, and it's extremely rude of you to listen in."

"No, no, it's O.K.—he's a friend," I explained. "He's supposed to meet me, and—"

At this point, Brown and the man looked at each other and started laughing. Brown introduced me to Michael Vine, who has been his manager since the start of his TV career. Vine left, and

we sat down to order breakfast. I told Brown that I felt like one of the unwitting participants in his TV specials, who are often put through bewildering, elaborately constructed scenarios—part social-science experiment, part con game—designed to make them do things they ordinarily wouldn't, whether good (take a bullet for another person) or bad (push a man off a roof). He laughed and said, "It's a classic hypnotic technique—you induce confusion. You were so baffled by Michael that you were just trying to make sense of it, trying to find something that you could hang on to. And that makes you very responsive and suggestible."

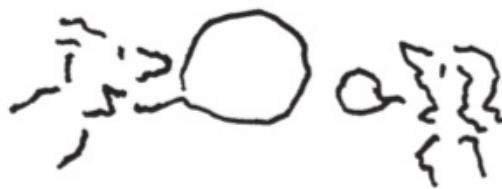
When Brown puts audience members into a trance, he often starts by introducing himself and then withdrawing his hand when they reach out to shake it. "They're coming up onstage and they're already a little bit baffled, looking for direction from me, and then when you drop something that's very automatic, like a handshake, it throws them into disarray," he explained. "When I interrupt the handshake, put my hand on their foreheads, and say, 'Look at me. Sleep. All the way down, all the way deep,' they just go with it."

Brown is now forty-eight. Since the first time I saw him, he has got rid of his goatee and, after years of progressively more indisputable hair loss, has shaved his head. "It's such a relief not having to labor over the intricacies and subterfuges of styling thinning hair and just say fuck it," he told me. Brown's winsome air and even keel can make him hard to read, though he has a distinctive tell—a kind of sudden myoclonic twitch of his head that he refers to as "my nod." It's the last vestige of a childhood plagued by involuntary tics, he told me, and indicates that he is feeling self-conscious, stressed, or anxious.

Off the clock, Brown neither reads anyone's mind nor, despite being a world-class card magician, performs tricks of any kind. He finds it embarrassing. He seems milder than his suave and commanding stage self—charming and scrupulously polite, with no aura of mystery or danger. Though watchful, he exudes no sense that he's scrutinizing your every unconscious action or trying to worm his way inside your head. He is articulate and erudite,

and he speaks earnestly but with an undercurrent of amusement—at himself and others—that bubbles up to flavor the sincerity.

When our food arrived, Brown, although he has eaten a light bulb onstage, found his poached egg and smoked haddock suspect. "This tastes very fishy," he said. "I'm not good enough with fish to know, but it tastes—how to put this?—very 'of the sea.' Is that a good thing?" For the next ten minutes or so,



Brown alternated between forging ahead with his breakfast—"It's fine, it's fine"—and pausing, a look of skepticism on his face. "I could just ask them to take it back, but that's a real insult, isn't it?" he said. "This is a very English situation."

In the opening monologue of Brown's New York show, he says, "My story was that I had a secret, a big, dark secret I couldn't possibly tell anyone. . . . I presumed that I was gay when I was fifteen, but I didn't come out till I was thirty-one. Which is a very long time to be avoiding the subject of sex. No one must ever know. Which is silly, because when you do eventually come out you realize no one gives a fuck. Truly, nobody cares. Which is a little disappointing, something of an anticlimax. All the things about ourselves that we think are so terrible—to other people, it's just a bit more information about us. We'd worry a lot less about what other people think of us if we realized how seldom they do."

Brown actually came out a bit later—at the age of thirty-five to his friends and family, and publicly a year after. Since then, he has come to understand the toll of having kept that particular secret for so long. "Before coming out, you work—unconsciously, but you work—to sort of divert attention from those parts of yourself that you don't want to expose," he told me. "And even when all that's sorted out it doesn't take much to bring it all rushing back, par-

ticularly if you're a magician, because you're doing something fundamentally dishonest."

The theme of Brown's show is that the stories we tell ourselves about who we are and how the world works distort our perception of reality. As a person, Brown may lament that human tendency; as a performer, he relies on it. To be distracted from what a magician is really up to, an audience has to believe the story that's unfolding. Brown's gift is for making that surface story believable and compelling. Though he's not the first mentalist to hint at scientific explanations for his abilities, what he has done better than anyone else in his profession is to turn the purported method into an observable drama. "I remember that, whenever I saw mentalism, it was always about 'O.K., think of a word and write it down.' Now I write something down and turn it around. 'This is the word you were thinking of.' Bam! End of the trick," Brown said. "The entire focus was on the revelation, and it always struck me as misplaced, because that's not the interesting part of the trick. The interesting part of the trick is, What are you doing to read that person's mind? So my contribution was to put more weight on the process, because—dramatically and theatrically and intellectually and everything-ally—that's what's interesting."

Unlike most magicians, Brown wasn't obsessed with the craft and its niceties as a child. His parents gave him a magic set one Christmas, but he can't recall whether he ever performed any tricks. Born in 1971, Brown grew up in Purley, a town in South London, which he describes as "the epitome of middle-class suburbia." Brown's mother, a former wedding-dress model, worked as a medical receptionist. She doted on her son. Brown had cooler relations with his father, who was a swimming and water-polo coach at the local secondary school. "He was sporty and manly and didn't have a lot of education," Brown said. "While I was bright and precocious and not sporty and liked to play dress-up with my nan's scarves."

At school, Brown got high grades without studying much, but he was ill at ease among his peers and was sometimes picked on. He spent most of his

time alone, obsessively drawing, devising Lego creations, or talking to an imaginary friend, Hublar, for whom his mother would set a place at the dinner table. “Derren was a complicated boy but just so lovely,” his mother told me. “We were worried about him, because we thought he was quite lonely.”

Though neither of Brown’s parents was religious, at the age of six he asked them if he could attend Bible classes. Later, he started going to church on his own, growing increasingly fervent. “I would be the insufferable one who would sit you down and give you all the proof of why God exists—a neat system that all makes sense,” he said. “My relationship with my father wasn’t great, and there’s God as this sort of father figure and the whole lovely network of certainties that comes with it. And, of course, as I got older there was the sexuality thing that I was hiding and not facing and hoping might go away. Having a big thing you can put up in front of you and say ‘That’s me’ is a very handy tool.”

At school, Brown fell in with a group of kids known variously as the Music-School Gang and the Poof Gang. “You were ostracized if you were part of that nerdy group,” he said. By the end of high school, other students had become more accepting, and Brown ingratiated himself with witty banter and by drawing caricatures of teachers. “It was all a bit much, born out of a desperate urge to impress, but the relief that I felt of not being trapped in that little group was immense,” he said. Brown scored among the highest grades in the country on his English, Politics, and German A-levels, despite not reading any of the assigned books. “I just got quite good at making it sound like I knew what I was talking about in essays,” he said.

After a gap year in Germany, Brown enrolled at the University of Bristol, to study German and law, and he took up ballroom dancing, which he had discovered abroad. (“It was an oddly cool thing in Bavaria.”) He competed on the collegiate Latin dance circuit, winning several trophies for cha-cha before retiring. “The sad thing is, it kills your desire and ability to dance in any other situation,” he said. “I dread weddings.”

Still attending church and struggling


to reconcile himself to his sexuality, Brown gravitated toward a group called Living Waters, which espoused a kind of gay conversion therapy based on Scripture, prayer, and a belief that male same-sex attraction stemmed from overcompensating for deficits in the father-son relationship. But, he said, “at some point I sort of realized, Nobody’s standing up there saying it’s worked for them—not really.”


During his first year at university, Brown saw a performance on campus by a hypnotist named Martin Taylor. In one routine, Taylor got a student to forget the number seven; when the student counted his fingers, he couldn’t understand why he had eleven. “You’re laughing out of amazement and disbelief and kind of empathizing with the confusion,” Brown said. “Almost right away I decided, I’m going to do that.”

He started amassing books on hypnotism and practicing on fellow-students. Soon he was performing on campus and at a nearby theatre. His mother recalled seeing one of those early shows.

“I was shaking, absolutely petrified,” she said. “I kept thinking, Oh, no. What if it doesn’t work? But he was able to put people under in a split second, and everybody loved it. There was a woman who heckled him, but he handled it with aplomb.” Another show was disrupted by a group of students from the university’s Christian Union. “They were casting demons out, exorcising the process that was happening onstage,” Brown said. “And that began—or, at least, fed into—a process of starting to question all of that, too.” After some reading and thought, he found that his faith “started to fall apart and seem a bit silly,” he said. “I became very atheist, with all the fervor of the righteous.”

If Brown had a new religion, it was getting up in front of a crowd. “It would make me look and feel impressive, which I adored, and give me a feeling of control,” he said. Alongside his study of hypnotism, Brown began to teach himself sleight-of-hand tricks with cards, and soon he was earning extra money by giving walk-around performances at





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“Go on without me—I’ll never make it.”

local restaurants. As graduation approached, he nervously told his parents that, rather than become a lawyer, as had been the plan, he wanted to be a magician. “We said, ‘Fine—whatever makes you happy,’” Brown’s mother told me. “I think he was quite surprised.”

After graduating, Brown stayed in Bristol. He went on housing assistance, moved into a tiny apartment, and eked out a living performing at restaurants. He claims never to have had any real ambition, but his mother remembers him telling her, “Mum, someday I’m going to be a millionaire.” His focus and intensity bordered on the fanatical. Brown’s friend Peter Clifford, a magician and an actor, remembers spending nine hours with him working on various methods for one card routine. “We’d work on something until I thought we’d exhausted every possibility,” Clifford told me. “And Derren would then go off and refine it even more.”

Early on, Brown affected a showy persona: long hair, blousy white shirts with billowing sleeves, leather vests, velvet pants tucked into knee-high boots, and Byronic capes. As his act grew in sophistication, he realized that his ap-

pearance hadn’t kept pace. He cut his hair, updated his wardrobe, and found that he was able to double his fees. He spent most of his twenties working the tables at a Turkish restaurant in Bristol, creating a signature style that blended urbane cheekiness with serious intention. Whether revealing that a man’s watch had vanished off his wrist and wound up in Brown’s sock, causing a woman’s wedding ring to float above his outstretched hand, or making a playing card dissolve into a shower of rose petals, Brown created effects that engaged his spectators emotionally and put more emphasis on their reactions than on his abilities.

Over time, Brown found himself more and more drawn to mentalism and started developing his credo of letting audiences see what the process of mind reading looked like in action. He got his break in 1999, when he received a call from Michael Vine—the man who fooled me at the hotel in Southend. A magician and juggler turned talent manager, Vine had formed a TV production company with an actor and comedian, Andrew O’Connor. The pair told Brown that they were looking for a mentalist to front a new show on Channel 4. O’Connor remembers that

Brown seemed completely uninterested, but they persuaded him to come to London for a meeting.

Mentalism differs from other magic in a significant way: no one believes that it’s truly possible to overcome the laws of physics and, say, make a leopard vanish from a cage, but lots of people believe that it’s possible to divine someone’s thoughts, to see the future, or to communicate with the dead. Hunger for proof of a world beyond our own fuelled the rise of spiritualism in the mid-nineteenth century, and then the birth of mentalism as a form of popular entertainment. Early performers, such as the Fox sisters and the Davenport brothers, sought to pass themselves off as genuinely psychic, but, among the famous stage mentalists of the twentieth century, any claim to supernatural powers was generally soft-pedalled. Joseph Dunninger worked to debunk fake mediums; Chan Canasta and David Berglas were both coy about whether their “experiments” were genuine or mere trickery; the Amazing Kreskin calls himself simply “an entertainer.”

After Kreskin’s heyday, in the nineteen-seventies, mentalism’s popularity went into decline, and by the mid-nineties Vine thought that it was overdue for a comeback. He and O’Connor had noted how the American illusionist David Blaine had made magic feel more contemporary and cool. O’Connor went to Channel 4’s head of entertainment and asked, “If I could find you a mind-reading David Blaine, would you buy that?”

Vine and O’Connor got the go-ahead, but finding the right mind reader proved to be a challenge, and they spent two years auditioning candidates from all over the world. The only one who felt right was Andy Nyman, an actor who supported himself between gigs by performing mentalism; he turned them down, because he wanted to focus on his acting career, but he agreed to work on the show behind the scenes if it ever went into production. Vine and O’Connor were about to give up when someone Vine managed suggested that they consider his friend Derren Brown.

When Brown came to London to meet Vine and O’Connor, they took him to dinner, and, once the check had

been paid, he said, “Would you like me to show you something?” After lighting a cigarette, he spread out a deck of cards and asked O’Connor to remember one of them and to repeat it over and over in his head. First, Brown named the card O’Connor was thinking of; next, he demonstrated that the card O’Connor had chosen wasn’t in the deck; finally, starting to cough, he revealed that the cigarette in his mouth had transformed into O’Connor’s card, rolled up and smoldering. “It was like the ground opened up and swallowed me,” O’Connor recalled.

“Mind Control,” the show that Nyman, O’Connor, and Brown devised—they have since collaborated on nearly all of the stage shows—debuted at the end of 2000 and quickly generated buzz. Brown’s approach caught a moment: neuroscience, “mind-hacking,” evolutionary psychology, and neurolinguistic programming were in the air. His explanations for his feats allowed him to slip under the radar of viewers’ skepticism, tapping into technocratic belief systems in order to produce a deeper credulity. “Mind Control” and its sequels borrowed the fragmented structure of Blaine’s street-magic specials, following Brown around as he performed such feats as subliminally influencing a betting-window cashier at a dog track to pay out on a losing ticket and convincing dancers in a night club that they’d been touched by invisible hands. His breakthrough came with his 2003 special, “Russian Roulette,” during which he performed the game of chance on live TV, generating headlines and controversy while earning a reputation as a kind of bad boy with extraordinary powers.

O’Connor recalled, “Michael Vine would literally get calls from people going, ‘We are pitching to a government, we’re bidding for a billion-dollar contract, and if Derren will come to the meeting and use his techniques, if we’re successful, we’ll give him a million dollars.’” Vine would try to explain that it didn’t really work like that, just as a magician who puts a woman in a box stage left and has her walk out of a box stage right may not actually be able to render air travel obsolete. O’Connor went on, “They’d go, ‘Oh, of course that’s silly, but can he please come to

the meeting and influence the people so that we can get the contract?’”

As his act has evolved, Brown has gradually tempered his claims about psychological manipulation. These days, he says that he uses a combination of “magic, suggestion, psychology, misdirection, and showmanship,” not to mention “the power of the well-placed lie.” But he still regularly has to disabuse people of their belief in him. “There’s plenty of people that think that I’m genuinely psychic and just won’t admit to it,” he told me. He cited a moment after a show in which he announced that there was no such thing as spirit mediums and then went on to tell people impossibly specific details about their dead relatives, all the while assuring them that the whole thing was bullshit. “I went out to sign autographs at the stage door, and a girl said, ‘My grandmother died recently. Can you put me in touch with her?’ And I said, ‘Well, you realize what I was doing wasn’t real. I wasn’t actually doing it.’ And she said, ‘Oh, no, no, no, I know you’re not really doing it, but are you able to put me in touch with her?’”

Brown lives in a four-story town house in London, with his boyfriend of almost four years. He asked me not to identify the exact neighborhood, or his boyfriend’s name and occupation, because of stalkers. Early in Brown’s career, a woman became convinced that she was married to him and turned up



one afternoon at his mother’s door to complain that he was an abusive husband. Not long before, Brown had come out to his mother. “It was a very confusing day for my mum,” he told me.

His house is decorated with leather club chairs, paintings, photographs, marble busts, magic memorabilia, bookshelves with secret doors built into them, and a large and lovingly curated collection of taxidermy. Brown has been a collector since he first started making

money. (He’s at pains to stress that he buys only animals that died of natural causes.) He used to be a regular presence at auctions, becoming well known in taxidermy circles, though now he mostly fields e-mail inquiries from dealers. When I first walked in, a giraffe (from the neck up), a swan, and the mounted head of a unicorn seemed to give me the eye. A pair of stuffed dogs and a dog bed off to one side struck me as a nice touch, but then two dogs who were very much alive—Doodle, a beagle mix, and Humbug, a Tibetan terrier—ran in. A parrot flew into the room, past a taxidermied piglet with wings that was suspended from the ceiling, and alighted on Brown’s outstretched finger. This was evidently an everyday domestic scene, but the moment had a disorienting, shivery vibe that felt very Derren Brown. He told me, “I’ve always been interested in creating things that look and feel kind of real, and I love the idea of people not being quite sure how real what they’re seeing is.”

At home, Brown likes to relax by painting (he’s had a number of gallery shows) and cooking elaborate meals. On tour, he spends his days wandering with a Leica through whatever city he’s in, shooting street scenes, or in cafés writing. He published his first book for the conjuring community in 2000, and a second the next year. He has also published three books for the general public: a look at the quirks of human cognition; a memoir built around the card routines he performed in his pre-fame days; and “Happy: Why More or Less Everything Is Absolutely Fine,” a survey of Stoic philosophy and how it applies to the way we live now. By Brown’s reckoning, writing “Happy” helped him move through his own life with more equanimity, and many of the tenets of Stoicism—that we are disturbed not by what happens to us but by how we react to what happens, that we should let go of the things we can’t control—have found their way into his performances.

Brown is starting to plan a follow-up to “Happy,” which he thinks may focus on the tension between our relationships with other people and our need for self-realization. Whether listening to a partner vent frustrations or performing mentalism for a theatre full of strangers, the secret, he believes, is to

take the focus off ourselves and make the moment about the other person or people. “Emerson made the comment ‘My giant goes with me wherever I go,’” Brown said. “I really love that image of this sort of big lumbering giant standing behind us. Not just because I have one myself but because everyone has one. And it is the things that we feel separate us, our own insecurities, that generally turn out to be the things that connect us, because they’re the very things that we share. Which is how a psychic can so easily sound like she knows about you, or an author can essentially be writing about himself, but it feels as if he’s writing about you.”

When I had dinner with Brown and his boyfriend at an outdoor table at their local Italian restaurant on a warm summer night, the conversation turned again to relationships and the consolation of philosophy. Brown told me that when a former partner broke up with him in 2014, after seven years together, he had been in the middle of writing “Happy” and was steeped in the Stoic mind-set, which seemed to cushion the blow. “The breakup was relatively amicable and light and easy,” Brown said. “And I remember feeling quite proud that I’d dealt with it all extremely well.” A few months later, though, when a guy he’d met on Tinder broke things off, Brown, as he put it, “totally went to pieces.”

For a long time, he remained puzzled by his reaction. “I fell apart over the little breakup that followed the big breakup, totally out of proportion to what it was—a decidedly un-Stoic response,” he said. “But I’ve thought about it since, and it makes sense. It’s the bit that takes you by surprise when you’ve dealt with this thing over here and put all your attention on that, and then something else sneaks in from the outside.” A thought seemed to occur to him, and he added, “Which is kind of what I spend my life doing.”

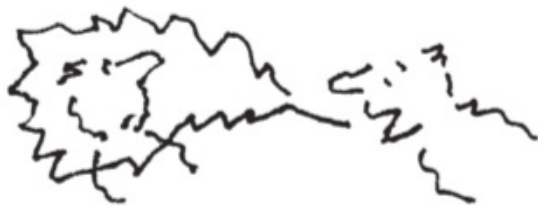
Early in his career, Brown would astonish members of his audience by telling them things about themselves that he couldn’t possibly have known. He did this with a technique called cold reading, much used by psychics and mediums. “They throw out statements about you, sometimes guesses based on what they observe about you,” he ex-

plained. “And sometimes based on probabilities, or sometimes just general statements that could apply to almost anybody.” The technique works because of so-called confirmation bias, our tendency to latch on to evidence that supports our beliefs while ignoring evidence that contradicts them. Brown no longer does cold reading and, in his shows, has ridiculed psychics and discredited their techniques. Despite having studied these techniques extensively, he mentioned to me that he had never gone to see a psychic himself. But when I told Brown, while we were in Southend, about a few I’d consulted over the years, he became curious. We searched online and settled on a clairvoyant named Chrissy Bee, who does readings and Reiki healings out of her house.

Chrissy had a kind, maternal face and a head of tight brown curls, which, along with acid-washed mom jeans and a floral-print short-sleeved shirt, gave her the appearance of a seaside pensioner, though her bare feet and a pair of esoteric-looking amulets around her neck alluded to her profession. She smiled at Brown and said, “You must be Darren.”

“It’s Derren, actually,” Brown said. “With an ‘e.’”

The name seemed to mean nothing to Chrissy, who ushered us inside and asked us to take off our shoes so as not to track in any negative energy. After introducing us to her dog and showing



us framed photos of its two predecessors, which, she told us, “are in spirit now,” she led Brown upstairs for his reading. Earlier, Brown and I had decided that it would seem peculiar for me to sit in on his reading, so I gave him a digital recorder and was left to wait in the living room with piped-in New Age music and the July issue of the magazine *Fate & Fortune*. Porcelain figurines, stuffed dolls, crystals, chalices, and talismans covered every surface.

On the recording of Brown’s session, Chrissy said that she wasn’t a fortune-teller—“They don’t exist”—and explained her method as being like a radio with bad reception: “I give you everything that I get, but it’s like a puzzle that we both put together between us.” After leading Brown through a guided meditation, she began her reading, which involved tarot cards, angel cards, chakra cards, and messages from the spirit world. She told Brown that she saw two past lives, one in which he was a warrior in ancient China and one, more recently, in which he was an artist. “You might not have been fully fulfilled as an artist,” she said. “But you was in France, and you was an amazing artist. And what they showed me was you had one of those cravat things on. So I don’t know what year it was, but it was very artistic, very Noël Coward-ish. Does that make sense?”

“Yeah, absolutely.”

“So I don’t know what you do for a living, but are you working with that creative energy this lifetime? Are you expressing it?”

“Yeah, I am.”

“Right. So that’s where they want you to go. So that’s that.”

A little later, she said, “Someone’s just touched me on the head, and I’ve got a gentleman here who’s trying to connect with you. He’s put a cross up as well, in blue. Is there anyone in spirit or on the earth plane, please, who is currently in your life that’s either to do with hospitals or doctors?”

“Um, my father.”

“Right, so this gentleman will be connected with your father on the other side. Does your dad not always express his feelings? Does he try and white-wash over things?”

“He’s not well at the moment.”

“Stiff upper lip sometimes, but he doesn’t always open up?”

“Yeah.”

“O.K., well, he needs to. Because he needs a lot of healing at the moment. Has there been any communication breakdowns around the family? If not with you lot, with him and his father?”

“No, I think it’s more that he’s not well, and he’s finding it depressing. It’s difficult. But he’s good at always putting a happy face on.”

“Yes, that’s it.”

Exploring a different tack, Chrissy said, “Right, you like nice things. So this is, like, artistic and everything, in your garden, so to speak. This could also represent beautifying the home, like moving, decorating, renovating. Are you doing anything like that? Are you thinking of doing anything like that? Or have you recently?”

“Thinking of moving, yes.”

“Oh, right, so that’s there as well. And it’s beauty, it’s beautifying.”

After the session was over, we chatted with Chrissy in her living room. She seemed taken with Brown and asked about his work, which he described as “sort of mind reading, but from a magician’s perspective.” When she found out that he was performing at the Cliffs Pavilion, she was thrilled, having last been there to see the late comedian Ken Dodd. “He’s in spirit now, isn’t he? Another one that’s gone,” she said. “So you’re just doing your magic, then? And it’s like subliminal hypnosis?”

“Yeah, it’s hypnosis and suggestion and mind reading and so on,” Brown explained. “But it’s definitely rooted in stuff that I could stop the video and point out, ‘See, I’m doing *that*, and I’m doing *that*.’”

Chrissy’s face fell for a moment, but she pressed on, asking, “So, obviously, you must be interested in the mystical side of things, mustn’t you?”

“I’m interested in how it sort of blurs into other things and other people’s take on it,” Brown said. “And sometimes you end up at a similar point.”

“The mind’s an amazing thing, really, isn’t it?” Chrissy said. “I personally believe that consciousness has got nothing to do with the mind. I mean, I’ve been out of my body three times. Unfortunately, I haven’t got control over it—it happened involuntary with me. But, with what you do, do you feel that the consciousness has nothing to do with the mind?”

“Oh, I think we get a little too caught up in the self being *this*,” Brown said, indicating his body. “And I think actually the self is something that naturally extends into our relationships with people and out into the physical world.”

Before we left, Chrissy asked Brown to pose for a picture with her, and then she said, “I’m so sorry I didn’t know who you are. But that’s good, really, I

think, isn’t it? It allows me to be more myself, and that’s all I ever can be. I’m not really into telly.” She sighed. “To me, I’m in the world but not of the world, if that makes sense. To me, it’s all the mystical stuff that’s real.”

“That there are things more important than us,” Brown said, speaking in the soothing, measured tone he uses when putting someone into a hypnotic trance. Chrissy stood up and grasped Brown’s hand, her eyes glistening. “It’s the divine, isn’t it?” she said. “Everything comes from source, and everything goes back to source.”

As soon as we were outside, Brown started analyzing Chrissy’s reading. She hadn’t been specific enough to have employed so-called hot reading (using information secretly obtained beforehand). She certainly had been using cold reading, but he felt that she sincerely believed in her abilities. “She did refer to moving house and in the same breath ‘a lot of decoration, a lot of interior décor.’ So maybe she was picking up on a slightly gay vibe from me,” he said. “If I was not who I am and had not been a step back from it, I might have gone, ‘Fuck! Amazing!’”

He went on, “What role is she filling? On a basic level, we all like a bit of guidance and a bit of advice. But I think, more deeply, we all yearn for something that will kind of magically relieve our sense of isolation, and she’s giving a lot of what we sort of want from our loved one.”

A few days later, he was still thinking about Chrissy and her reading. “She had an aspiration for something beyond herself, which is wonderful, isn’t it?” he said. “We all have it. I have it. And my rational, sort of cosmopolitan version may give me a snooty feeling of superiority sometimes over somebody’s more suburban version, which is just very unpleasant of me. It’s easy to be amused by, or put in brackets, somebody’s attempts at transcendence that are different from our own, but we’re all trying to find that thing that’s bigger than ourselves. I really liked when she said, ‘I’m in this world but not of this world.’ It’s lovely. I felt really sort of warm toward her, and you could sort of imagine people going back and having a chat. Though a little bit of ectoplasm would have been appreciated.” ♦



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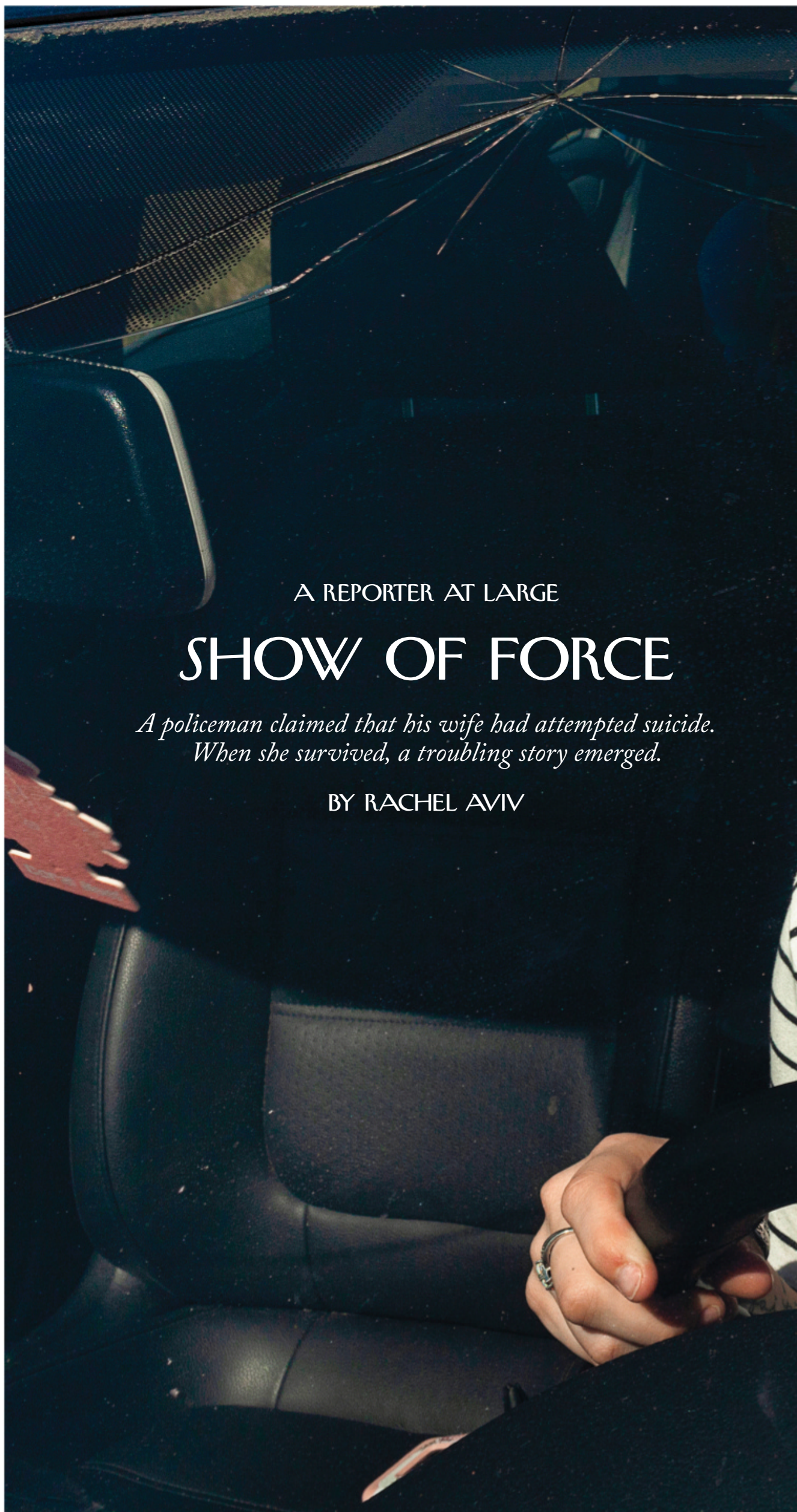
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Jessica Lester's friends persuaded her to date Matthew Boynton, a boy in the eleventh grade, by saying, "If you don't like him, you can always break up." He was the grandson of the sheriff of Spalding County, where they lived, an hour south of Atlanta, and his friends were football players and cheerleaders. Jessica thought that Matthew, who was baby-faced but muscular, looked rich; he wore Ralph Lauren boots and collared shirts from Hollister. Jessica, who was in tenth grade, was less popular. She wore hand-me-downs and liked to take nature photographs. Her parents had abandoned her when she was three, along with her sister and brother, and she grew up on a farm with her mother's adoptive parents. "I guess she felt like 'Matthew could have picked anybody, and for some reason he picked me,'" her sister, Dusty, said.

Jessica had pale-green eyes, a melodic voice, and blond hair that hung down her back like a slab of wood. In the spring of 2013, when she was sixteen and had dated Matthew for a year, she took her grandparents into the kitchen, closed the door, and told them, apologizing, that she was pregnant. Jessica's grandparents, who are Baptist, were willing to help her bring up the child, but Jessica decided to settle down with Matthew, her first boyfriend. Her aunt Kathy, who lives on the farm, said, "With Jessica's family background, there was probably just a feeling of 'Oh, I've finally found someone who loves me.'"

Jessica and Matthew moved into a house across the street from the sheriff, Wendell Beam, and his wife. Jessica was the kind of intuitive mother who predicts a baby's danger—a fall, a spilled drink, a choking hazard—a few seconds before it happens. But she felt isolated. She finished her high-school coursework online, and almost never saw her friends or family. She said that Matthew told her she wasn't related to them by blood.

For their son's first Christmas, Matthew took Jessica to her grandparents' house—the first time she'd seen them in months—but before she opened her presents he told her that they had to leave. When Jessica graduated from high school, her grandparents held a party for her and projected a movie on the side of their barn. Shortly after the movie started, Matthew said that it was time to go. "The



A REPORTER AT LARGE

SHOW OF FORCE

A policeman claimed that his wife had attempted suicide. When she survived, a troubling story emerged.

BY RACHEL AVIV

Jessica Lester started dating Matthew Boynton when she was fifteen. After they were



married, her grandmother said, "it was almost like her personality got squished out of her."

rest of us enjoyed her graduation party,” Martha, her grandmother, said.

Matthew’s childhood dream was to work in law enforcement—a career inspired by his grandfather, who had helped bring him up following his parents’ divorce. After high school, he worked as a jailer at the Pike County sheriff’s office before being hired as a patrol officer in Griffin, the largest city in Spalding County. In his personnel file there, a supervisor described him as “fiercely loyal” but “stiff and unwilling to bend.” Another officer described him as “the type who wants to make ten arrests a day if he could.” A senior officer privately advised Matthew, “Lighten up a little bit, man.”

That mentality spilled into his home life. Twice, Matthew called the police on Jessica, for yelling or cursing or poking his chest. According to a police report, Jessica was “very reserved and appeared to be upset.” She said that the officers recommended that she not yell at Matthew.

In December, 2014, Jessica had a brief affair and got pregnant again. Her family wondered if this was her way of escaping the relationship. But Matthew said that he’d raise the child as his own. They decided to get married. Jessica could never quite explain why—there was no proposal, just an understanding that there was too much momentum to break up. Martha worried that Jessica had “lost her feistiness. It was almost like her personality got squished out of her.”

Her aunt Denise, a public-school teacher, said that, at the wedding, “there was just this sadness in her eyes, like, ‘I’m done.’” She had the demeanor of a child who had promised herself not to cause trouble or draw attention to her own feelings. Jessica and Matthew left their wedding reception, which her family hosted, after less than an hour. Matthew wore a titanium wedding ring with a blue stripe, to signify that he was in law enforcement.

They rented an apartment in Griffin, in a complex of beige two-story buildings surrounding a swimming pool. But the sheriff still loomed large in their relationship. Matthew asked Beam to phone him in the morning to wake him up. Jessica didn’t have her own credit card or car, so if she needed something from the supermarket she texted Matthew, who either took her to the store

himself or asked Beam or his wife to deliver the item. When Matthew drove his patrol car, he would often take the keys to his truck, a Chevrolet Avalanche, so that Jessica couldn’t use it.

Denise was on a science-curriculum committee with Matthew’s stepmother, Amy, a teacher in the same district. A few months after the wedding, Denise and Amy went out for lunch. Denise said that Amy confided that Matthew had once hit her and that their relation-



ship was strained. “She became dead serious—I’d never seen her so serious,” Denise said. “She said we needed to know what kind of kid he was. She said, ‘Do me a favor. I want you to make sure that Jessica is going to be O.K., because he’s going to hurt her.’”

In the spring of 2016, less than six months after the wedding, Jessica discovered that Matthew was having an affair with Courtney Callaway, a dispatcher at the Spalding County sheriff’s office, a mile away from the Griffin Police Department.

“If you don’t want to be with me anymore,” Jessica texted him, “I’m not going to stay here and play house.” Matthew, who had begun spending his free days with Callaway, told her, “It’s not gonna work for us. I already know it won’t.”

Jessica’s grandmother made an appointment with a lawyer who could help her file for divorce. In a composition notebook, Jessica documented the times she assumed Matthew had been with his girlfriend, and she jotted down notes for the lawyer. “Difference between non-contested & adultery divorce?” she wrote. “*Most important to me.* Custody (full?).” She and the boys planned to move into her sister Dusty’s house on Friday, April 15th, and the next week she would begin working at a chiropractor’s office. “She had both of the boys packed and ready to go,” Dusty said.

Jessica had to wean her baby before

starting the job, so on Thursday night she and Matthew drove to Walmart, to buy formula. At the store, they got into a fight, and when they left Jessica said she didn’t want to get into the car. Matthew called a Griffin police lieutenant for advice. “She’s a grown lady,” the lieutenant told him. “You can’t force her into the truck.” (Matthew refused to comment for this story.)

From her porch, Jessica’s neighbor Megan Browning saw Jessica and Matthew return home. A half hour or so later, Browning was lying in bed when she heard a gunshot. Unnerved, she went out to the porch, where she heard another. Not long afterward, she saw Matthew walk briskly to his truck.

He drove to a nearby Waffle House to have a late dinner with a fellow Griffin police officer. On his way, at 12:54 A.M., he said, he received a text from Jessica: “I can’t do this anymore. Take care of” the children. “Please tell them I love them everyday. I have been suffering for a while now and no one has noticed. Here lately I have not been able to recognize the person I see in the mirror. This is not the first time I have had suicide thoughts. I love you and the boys.”

A minute later, Matthew responded to a joke from Callaway. “Haha I’m sorry I didn’t think about that lol,” he wrote. Then he called E.M.S. “Can you please dispatch a unit out to my location?” he said calmly. “In reference to my wife.” He explained that she was having suicidal thoughts and “she told me to take care of the boys. So I’m trying to hurry up and get back home, just to make sure that nothing is going to happen to them.”

Six minutes later, Matthew reported on his police radio that he had heard two gunshots as he was walking up the stairs to his apartment. He had looked in the master bedroom, and when he didn’t see the baby, who typically slept there, he ran outside. “I didn’t know if it was an active scenario,” he later told investigators. “I was scared to death, because I couldn’t find him, that she would shoot me, shoot him, and then kill herself.”

Eleven Griffin police officers arrived at the apartment complex. With their guns drawn, the officers checked every room in the house. The older boy was asleep in his bedroom, and the baby was in his own room, crying in his crib. The officers found Jessica in her bedroom

closet, unconscious and lying on her side, her head on a bloody pillow. She was wearing fluffy slippers. On a shelf by her head was the notebook documenting Matthew's infidelity. Matthew's service gun was under her stomach.

Jessica's grandparents live on two hundred acres of farmland in Pike County, a twenty-five-minute drive from her apartment. A fence separates their house from an open field, where nine cows and two donkeys graze. Just before 2 A.M. on April 15th, Wendell Beam asked the sheriff of Pike County to send officers to the house. Two deputies woke Jessica's grandparents and told them that Jessica had committed suicide, using Matthew's gun. "No, that doesn't ring right," Martha told them. Four of her grandchildren had taken target-shooting classes together, but Jessica had refused to participate. "Jessica would not touch a gun," she said. "She did not want to have anything to do with it."

Dusty and her husband drove to Jessica's apartment. The first officer she saw in the parking lot was Beam. The sheriff's department does not respond to incidents inside the Griffin city limits, and he was the only one from his office there. Dusty asked him where Jessica was, and he said that she had been taken by helicopter to Atlanta Medical Center. He did not explain why he'd earlier sent word that Jessica was dead. Dusty approached a group of Griffin police officers and asked whether Matthew had shot her sister. "She loved those kids more than anything, and she knows how it feels to grow up without a mom," she said. "She wouldn't have done that to them." The officers told Dusty she needed to either calm down or leave the property.

The police asked for assistance from the Georgia Bureau of Investigation. Early that morning, Matthew was interviewed by Chris DeMarco, a G.B.I. agent who lived near Spalding County and had worked with Beam on several cases over the years. DeMarco told Matthew that his clothes might need to be collected as evidence. "Absolutely," Matthew said. "I didn't try to brush off anything. I didn't try to wash my hands—nothing." He sounded like an eager student. "I didn't think about getting any other clothes."

G.B.I. agents canvassed the apart-

ment complex and discovered that Megan Browning and her fiancé and a couple that lived next door to Jessica were the only neighbors who had heard gunshots. Both couples said that the shots occurred around 11 P.M.—not at 1 A.M., when Matthew had reported them. One of the neighbors said that, not long before he heard the gunshots, he also heard "some banging, like she was banging on the door or something."

Browning, who sometimes socialized with Jessica and Matthew, cried throughout her interview. "I hope he goes to jail for this shit," she said. She wanted to elaborate on what she'd witnessed, but the agents left after eight minutes and never came back.

On a hospital-admission form, Jessica was described as a "19 year old reported to have shot herself in the right skull." But Vernon Henderson, a trauma surgeon for more than two decades, who treated Jessica, wrote that her injury "did

not fit with that description"; neither of her hands had "any evidence of any gun-powder stippling." And her wound was on the top of her skull, which suggested that she would have had to hold the gun above her head, pointing downward—"a very unusual direction in which to point the gun at one's self with the intention of committing suicide," Henderson wrote. Indentations in the walls of Jessica's closet suggested that one bullet had been shot at an upward angle—it entered the wall near the top of the closet—and another bullet hit the wall near the floor. Her neurosurgeon, Paul King, told me, "It seemed most likely that someone else shot her."

Jessica had an intracranial-pressure monitor inserted into her brain, to measure swelling, and she was put in a medically induced coma. Matthew's father and stepmother visited the next week. "Amy fell to pieces," Denise said. "I hugged her and said, 'It's going to be O.K.' And she said, 'No,' and looked at





Matthew's wedding ring had a blue stripe, to signify he was in law enforcement.

her husband.” (Amy did not want to comment for this article, explaining in an e-mail, “I have tried to remain neutral in this very serious situation.”)

Matthew and the boys temporarily moved in with Courtney Callaway, the dispatcher he was dating. In Jessica's first three weeks in the hospital, he visited her once, accompanied by Beam, who wore his uniform and carried his gun. “I made sure that I had another party with me, to insure the accusations wouldn't be made,” Matthew said later.

After the visit, Matthew, who had been placed on administrative leave, was interviewed again by DeMarco. “The chief would eventually like to get his officer back, as well as his service weapon back,” DeMarco told Matthew. “So we're going to try to expedite this as fast as possible, and, when I say expedite, I mean the next few weeks.” DeMarco

assured Matthew that his phone, which had been seized during the investigation, would be returned. “That's what I told your—That's what I told the sheriff today,” he said.

Shortly after Jessica was hospitalized, her aunt Kathy took a photograph of a C-shaped bruise on the back of Jessica's head, and she shared it with the G.B.I. agents, asking them to investigate how Jessica had been injured there. She suspected that there had been a physical altercation leading up to the gunshots. Although it's possible that Jessica's head hit the wall after she shot herself, there was no blood on the wall or on the clothes in the closet. Only the pillow under her head was bloody. A G.B.I. summary of an interview with King, the neurosurgeon, noted that he called the circumstances of her injury “suspicious,” but the agent who conducted the interview failed to record

the conversation; he hadn't charged his audio recorder. King told me, “You'd think it would have been simple enough to put bags on her hands and test them for gunshot residue. I was wondering why, but then it came to pass that her husband was a police officer and his granddaddy was the sheriff, so I understood.”

Matthew and Callaway broke up a few weeks later. In an interview with the police, she said that she found him intimidating. “I know that he's a police officer, and I'm not really anybody,” she said.

In early May, after three weeks in a coma, Jessica began to regain consciousness. She silently surveyed the walls, where her family had taped pictures of her sons. A few days later, Kathy noticed Jessica crying. She was watching a cartoon about a lion. “Something had happened to the mama lion's cubs,” Kathy said. “They were hurt.”

“Where's my baby?” Jessica asked, once her breathing tubes were removed. A nurse told her she'd been in an accident. “Like a car accident?” she asked. The nurse didn't answer.

Jessica's recovery was so swift that people at the hospital called her the “miracle child.” Although her skull had been fractured, neither bullet had penetrated it. Less than a week after Jessica emerged from her coma, DeMarco and another G.B.I. agent, Jared Coleman, interviewed her as she lay in her hospital bed. It was the first time anyone had spoken with her at length about the night of her injury. “Cases like this—we don't usually have someone to talk to like you, because you're not here,” Coleman told her.

“Right,” she said, nearly whispering. Her voice was hoarse from the breathing tubes, and she seemed childlike and dazed, as if her only goal was to accommodate the agents as quickly as she could. She said that all she could remember about that night was that she'd gone to Walmart.

The G.B.I. agents asked if she had ever handled Matthew's gun.

“No, I can't even get it out of the case,” she said. She wasn't sure how to unlock the safety lever on the holster. “He asked me to go get it out before, and I told him, ‘You're going to have to.’”

“Have you ever had any thoughts about hurting yourself?” Coleman asked.

"No. Never," she said. "Especially because of my children." She started crying. "I've never, ever wanted to hurt myself before."

"Do you think Matthew was incapable of doing this?"

"Honestly, I don't know," she said. "That's something that y'all would have to figure out."

The G.B.I.'s theory of Jessica's shooting depended on her being suicidal, but she gave no indication of being depressed. Although the hospital had placed her under constant observation after she was admitted, the precautions were removed after she regained consciousness. Had she attempted suicide, it would have been standard for the hospital to provide psychiatric care. But a psychiatrist who assessed her for depression apparently saw no need to give her a diagnosis or refer her for treatment. A second psychiatrist thought she had "appropriate mood and affect; appropriate judgment and insight." Her surgeon, Henderson, wrote that she was "a very positive person who is embracing the opportunities that a new lease on life afforded her by her recent recovery." He went on, "She has a sense of humor and has a gentle and calm personality. She speaks lovingly of her children and the need to and desire to see them."

After Jessica had been in the hospital for a month, her doctors tried to transfer her to a rehabilitation program, but she didn't have insurance, so she was discharged to the care of her grandparents. She walked with a limp and struggled with headaches, short-term memory lapses, ringing in her ears, and numbness on the left side of her body. Three days after she left the hospital, a deputy from the Pike County sheriff's office delivered a Family Violence Protective Order. Jessica could not come within three hundred yards of Matthew or her children. According to the order, which Matthew had petitioned the court to issue, "probable cause exists that Family Violence has occurred in the past and may occur in the future." Jessica was ordered to have a psychological evaluation.

At a family-court hearing that June, Matthew asked that the protective order be extended for a year. Matthew, who had been restored to patrol duty, carried

a new service gun and wore his uniform, and was accompanied by Beam. "We have an individual that is a parent that attempted to take her own life," his lawyer, Lance Owen, told the judge. "Somebody that shoots himself in the head means business. And if she's capable of attempting to take her own life, there's a chance that she might do something to these children."

Matthew testified that Jessica's grandparents were "not blood-related," and could not be trusted with the children. "The fact that they don't believe that she did this to herself—I think they're not taking it seriously," Owen said.

"Have you spoken to her doctors about what they believe is the cause of her head injuries?" Jessica's lawyer, Bree Lowry, asked. Henderson, the surgeon, had written Lowry a letter stating that "whatever investigation there was done into this event in no way reflected our observations in the emergency room."

"I'm only concerned with the G.B.I. reports," Matthew said.

Lowry wanted to put witnesses on the stand who would testify that Matthew had been psychologically abusive. "We believe he is a danger to her," she told the judge, Tommy Hankinson. "One witness"—Jessica's neighbor Megan Browning—"would like to speak to you anonymously in chambers, because she is afraid."

Judge Hankinson seemed to find the idea so novel as to be humorous. "I don't think I've ever had that one before," he said. "Is she gonna wear a mask or—"

"I think we've got the right to confront and cross-examine anybody that's gonna be offering testimony," Owen said.

"Good for you, Mr. Owen," Hankinson replied. "I'm glad to know there's still advocacy in the practice in the courts of the Griffin Judicial Circuit." No one ended up testifying about Jessica and Matthew's marriage.

In the past thirty years, the criminal-justice system has become more responsive to domestic violence, but family courts have been largely insulated from this cultural change. In an analysis of more than two thousand family-court opinions from the past decade, Joan S. Meier, a professor at George Washington University Law School, found that, in sixty-four per cent of cases, courts did not accept the story of a mother who

said she or her children had been abused by her husband, even when evidence corroborated the claim. "There is an unwillingness to believe, as if it's just preferable not to know this about our culture," Meier told me. She has found that courts are rarely willing to hear evidence about a form of abuse called "coercive control"—a crime in England—which describes the process by which people are dominated, sometimes to the point that they are no longer free agents and cannot make decisions without a partner's permission. "The idea that domestic violence is bad for kids still has not sunk in—it sometimes barely makes a dent in a case," she said. Few states mandate that custody evaluators have domestic-violence training; judges often characterize the allegations as mudslinging and focus not on their veracity but on which party appears to be the better parent. "The judges are very swayed by their own reactions to each person," Meier said. She found that, when a mother accused a father of domestic abuse or child abuse, she lost custody to the father in twenty-eight per cent of cases. When the roles were reversed, fathers lost custody in only twelve per cent of cases.

Hankinson briefly paused during the hearing to see if any statutes said that attempted suicide was a form of child endangerment. He didn't find any, and dismissed the protective order. But he granted full custody to Matthew. Jessica could see her children for only four hours on Sunday afternoons. Owen proposed that Beam supervise the visits. "Sheriff Beam can carry a weapon," he said. "I don't know what she is capable of, Judge."

Jessica's family agreed to pay a hundred dollars every Sunday so that her visits could be observed by another armed law-enforcement agent. At the judge's recommendation, they also arranged for a psychological evaluation. Jessica's only diagnosis was "acute stress disorder," which, the evaluator wrote, occurs "when an individual is exposed to actual or threatened death." The evaluator added that her "symptoms are normal and to be expected through circumstances such as hers."

Two months later, Jessica was hired as an assistant teacher at a child-care center in Griffin. Ashley Dunn, the lead teacher in Jessica's classroom, said, "We were all, like, 'You can do an awesome

ANGELA HACKETT, "LEMONS ON A MOORISH PLATE," 2013

We'd been talking about how back in the day we'd nothing much of anything,
Though what there was to wear—the uniform!—was too big. The sleeves
Drooped well below the fingertips. It gave you room to grow into. Years loomed.
Day after day, summer after summer, days were immeasurably longer then,
And the one tin bathful of hot water did the several children one after the other.
Then it seemed in no time at all you were into your teens. Because your birthday
Fell a week before Christmas—December the 18th—you'd have to make do
With the merest token of a family present. A set of bath salts, maybe, or a bar
Of lemon soap the simulacrum of a lemon, and we tried to remember
If such a thing came wrapped in tissue paper like the fruit itself, or was it
See-through cellophane? Then to summon up the names of yesteryear—
Yardley's April Violets; Morny White Heather; Lenthéric Tweed! It's the 1960s,
And I see myself wondering what would be appropriate to buy for my mother,
Dazzled by the cornucopian Christmas window display of the chemist's shop.

All this, believe it or not, was apropos of Angela Hackett's painting—
Because when looking at a thing we often drift into a memory of something else,
However tenuous the link. Five years and more—ever since I bought it
For your birthday—it's been hanging on our bedroom wall, pleasing us
To look at it from time to time to see different things in it. Only now has it
Occurred to us to talk about or of it at this length, the lemons—three of them—
Proceeding in an anticlockwise swirl from pale lemon to a darker yellow
To an almost orange, tinged with green—degrees, we speculate, of ripeness
Or decay. You know how lemons, if left too long in the bowl, one or two from time

job working with ten two-year-olds but you can't see your own kids?" On weekends, Dunn sometimes asked Jessica to babysit for her own children.

In September, 2016, the G.B.I. closed its case, concluding that Jessica's wounds were self-inflicted. Her DNA had been found on the gun, which was to be expected—she had been lying on it. Neither Matthew nor Jessica had been given a gunpowder-residue test. The agency deferred to its chief medical examiner, who spent ninety minutes on the case and never examined Jessica. He concluded that Jessica had shot herself in the head, though he indicated that his assessment would have been more definitive had there been a photo of Jessica's wound before she'd had surgery. The G.B.I.'s report never mentioned the picture of Jessica's bruise that Kathy had given the agents.

The agents who wrote the report seemed indifferent to the dynamics of Jessica and Matthew's marriage, as if the subject were a private matter that didn't merit discussion in an official investigation. They recorded interviews with eight

Griffin police officers, some of whom Matthew considered good friends; one informed the agents that Matthew "was telling me how she kind of acts crazy sometimes when she don't get her way." The G.B.I. did not record any interviews with Jessica's family or friends.

Although police departments have become more attentive to officers' use of excessive force against civilians, the same scrutiny has not been applied to their potential for violent behavior at home. In the nineteen-nineties, researchers found that forty-one per cent of male officers admitted that, in the previous year, they'd been physically aggressive toward their spouses, and nearly ten per cent acknowledged choking, strangling, or using—or threatening to use—a knife or a gun. But there are almost no empirical studies examining the prevalence of this sort of abuse today. Leigh Goodmark, the director of the Gender Violence Clinic, at the University of Maryland's Carey School of Law, speculates that one reason for the dearth of research is a reluctance to fund a study that will bring attention to an uncomfortable dilemma: that, as Goodmark says, "those policing the crime and those

committing it are often the same person."

At the Griffin Police Department, concerns about domestic violence have apparently been so slight that in 2018 the department hired an officer whose personnel record showed that he had recently been accused by his child's mother of threatening her with a gun. In many other cities, domestic violence seems to be treated as similarly insignificant. This year, an independent panel found that the typical penalty for New York City police officers found guilty of domestic violence—some had punched, kicked, choked, or threatened their victims with guns—was thirty lost vacation days. In nearly a third of cases, the officers already had a domestic-violence incident—and, in one case, eight—in their records. In the Puerto Rico Police Department, ninety-eight police officers were arrested for domestic violence between 2007 and 2010; three of them had shot and killed their wives. Only eight were fired.

Last summer, the sheriff of Los Angeles County, Alex Villanueva, articulated a common justification for not considering domestic violence as a concern: in defending his decision to employ a

To time will show a blush of green, a dimple or a bruise of bluish green
That overnight becomes a whitish bloom? So we think Angela Hackett's lemons
Might be on the turn. Though it's possible the green tinge might be an echo
Of the two limes I haven't mentioned until now, nestled in against the lemons
On the indigo-and-white Moorish plate, all of which complicates the picture.

It gave us pause for thought. How long does it take, we wondered, for a lemon
To completely rot? We imagined a time-lapse film, weeks compressed
Into seconds, the lemon changing hue, developing that powdery bloom, then
Suddenly collapsing into itself to leave a shrunken, pea-size, desiccated husk—
The flesh evaporated, breathed into the atmosphere as it transpires.
And that is why on the 26th of March, 2019, we set up the lemon experiment.
On the avocado-and-aubergine-colored Moroccan saucer we bought in Paris
We set a fresh lemon and a banana, whose peel, we are led to believe, releases
Ethylene gas and hence ripens any other fruit with which it comes into contact.
We wanted to see with our own eyes the end of the life cycle of the lemon.
I write this on the 6th of April. The banana has gone black except at the tips.
The lemon looks as fresh as ever. We've just been for our daily walk around
The Waterworks. Ducks are kicking up a racket. A blackbird sings
From a blackthorn bush. And as we enter into Glandore from the Antrim Road
How clean and fresh and green are the newly sprung leaves of the chestnut tree!

—*Ciaran Carson*

deputy who had been accused of stalking and physically abusing his ex-girlfriend, he told a local reporter that it was “a private relationship between two consenting adults that went bad.” The violence was seen as unrelated to job performance, an activity that could be understood only within the context of a relationship.

But the factors that lead to abuse at home—coercion, authoritarianism, a sense of entitlement to violence—are also present in the work that police officers do on the streets. It should not be surprising that domestic abuse appears to predict excessive use of force—a link that scholars have suggested should alter the way that departments respond to both kinds of aggression. The Citizens Police Data Project, in Chicago, analyzed the records of Chicago cops between 2000 and 2016 and found that officers accused of domestic abuse received fifty per cent more complaints than their colleagues for using excessive force. Philip Stinson, a professor of criminal justice at Bowling Green State University and one of the few scholars who has studied the issue, reached a similar

finding: one in five officers arrested for domestic violence nationwide had also been the subject of a federal lawsuit for violating people's civil rights.

The Griffin Police Department had not received any complaints about Matthew's use of force, but Darrell Dix, a former lieutenant, told me that he and some of his colleagues worried that Matthew had a domineering and “one-dimensional” approach to his work, which could provoke “fights and scuffles.” “He had not learned that there is a human side of this, too,” Dix said. “It was ‘I'm going to lock people up. I'm going to do it my way.’”

Jessica's shooting was the subject of hushed conversations among Wendell Beam's staff at the Spalding County sheriff's office. “In all my years in law enforcement, when someone shoots himself in the head it's one and done,” Jessica Whitehouse, a deputy there at the time, told me. There's no second shot. “Everyone said, ‘Beam's grandson will get off,’” she went on. “‘Nothing will happen to the kid.’”

Before being elected sheriff, in 2011,

Beam had worked in the sheriff's office for thirty-seven years. He had a reputation for being kind and personable but also passive, indecisive, and resistant to change. When female officers told him that they were afraid of the patrol-division captain, David Gibson, whom Beam had promoted, he did nothing. Gibson routinely said to female colleagues, “Shut your cock garage.” He told a secretary that she should wear a cowbell around her neck, so he'd always know where she was.

Gibson had worked in the sheriff's office for twenty-eight years, and he cultivated an aura of invincibility. He claimed to have personally insured Beam's election. He spoke about how he gambled with a mythical figure known in the sheriff's office as the Wood Chipper, because, supposedly, he had used such a device to kill a woman. A deputy named Misty Piper said that, after Gibson repeatedly pressured her to have sex with him, she acquiesced, because she felt that, if she defied Gibson, she would meet a similar fate. Twice, she later testified, Gibson choked her. In 2012, Piper complained to Beam, and he said he'd look



"Of course, it was through my efforts that we landed that account, but did I get any credit? Ha! Don't make me laugh."

into the accusations, if she put them in writing. "And then I started thinking, Well, why did I even come to you?" she said. "I'm not well connected with anyone." She decided to resign instead.

The following year, Gibson put a female colleague in a headlock and held a Taser against her temple. "Get off of me!" she screamed. A male sergeant saw the exchange and told Beam, who provided Gibson with what he called "undocumented counselling." Two years later, Gibson slapped a secretary on the back of the head, telling a male officer, "I'm gonna show you how we take care of these secretaries." Although the secretary complained to Beam about Gibson's behavior, Gibson was never disciplined.

In late 2014, Whitehouse, one of the youngest deputies in the sheriff's office, scheduled a meeting with Beam to say that Gibson's treatment of female cops was demeaning. She told me that, for female officers in many parts of the

South, "there's no in-between—you can't just be a human in uniform." They were made to feel that their presence contaminated the ethos of the department. "If you perceive yourself as being country and rough, then you're a dyke," she said. "If you do wear makeup and fix your hair, you're a whore."

Beam asked Whitehouse to meet him at a park on the outskirts of Griffin. Whitehouse didn't understand why she was being directed to "basically a hiding spot." She recorded the conversation on her phone, so that investigators could look for clues if she disappeared. "He had control of Spalding County," she said, referring to Gibson. "He *was* Spalding County. Anybody that went against him would be eliminated." Whitehouse said that Beam seemed concerned, but he said that she'd have to write down her complaint. Like Piper, Whitehouse was afraid to follow through. Beam dropped the matter. "I figured she was

going to retract her statement," he said later. (Beam refused to talk to me.)

After several months, a male officer told a captain in Internal Affairs that he didn't understand why Whitehouse's complaint had been ignored. At the recommendation of the captain, and with Beam's approval, an outside agency investigated Gibson and concluded that he was a "predator." In the spring of 2015, Beam allowed Gibson to retire, keeping his pension. The secretary whom he'd slapped in the head was asked to type his resignation letter. "It was like he was spitting in my face," she said. (Through his lawyer, Gibson told me that the headlock-and-Taser incident was "all in good fun"; most of the other allegations were "untrue and are otherwise embellished.")

After Gibson left, citizens came forward to say that they, too, were terrified of him. One woman said that he would drive to her house and shine the lights of his patrol car into her windows. Then he would "handcuff me and put me on the hood of his patrol car and have oral sex with me," she wrote in a statement. "I was going to report this, but, like he said, who will they believe?" Another woman, who used methamphetamine, said that sometimes Gibson followed her as she drove. He would flash his lights and pull her over, and force her to have sex with him. She was sure that if she didn't comply he would arrest her.

As it became clear that Gibson's activities could be criminal, the G.B.I. looked into the allegations. In an audio-recorded conversation, an agent expressed disbelief that Beam had let Gibson's behavior continue for so long. "Why is he getting so much protection and coverage?" the agent said. "This blows my mind."

In December, 2016, Jessica filed a report with the Griffin Police Department, saying that Matthew hadn't returned her belongings. After she came out of her coma, Denise had had to buy her new clothes. Jessica was still missing her orthodontic retainer. Matthew signed a sworn statement promising that he no longer had anything of Jessica's.

Matthew was now dating Shelby Willey, a young mother who had recently separated from her husband. They moved in together in January, 2017, and as they

were packing Willey discovered that Matthew had a large gym bag full of women's clothes, along with a retainer with "Jessica" printed on its case. When Willey asked Matthew about it, she said, he told her he intended to burn the bag, which Jessica had packed one night when she was planning to leave him. Willey had seen a copy of Matthew's sworn statement in his car, and she was disturbed that he was "lying straight to everybody's face," she later told the police. (She and Callaway, Matthew's ex-girlfriend, couldn't be reached for this story.)

In a private Facebook message, Willey complained to a friend that Matthew's demeanor was "emotionless but very authoritative." She had learned about Jessica's shooting after probing stories were published by Sheila Mathews in *The Grip*, a free newspaper in Spalding County, and aired on the Atlanta television station 11Alive, reported by Brendan Keefe. When she asked Matthew about the shooting, "nothing adds up," she wrote to another friend on Facebook. "It's always different. It's always more exaggerated every time." She felt uncomfortable that Matthew told Beam "every detail of his life," but that the conversations "were all confidential."

In May, 2017, they broke up. Willey contacted Jessica on Facebook and warned her that Matthew was not taking good care of the children; they were subsisting, she said, on cheese puffs, Fudge Rounds, corn dogs, and Mountain Dew, and sleeping at odd hours. "It breaks my heart!" she wrote. "I'll go ahead and tell you that the boys deserve more structure and more care and love which I'm almost positive YOU have." By then, the boys were spending half their time with each parent, switching houses on Fridays.

Willey wanted to help Jessica because she was scared of Matthew, too. "It felt like he was just a ticking time bomb," she told the police. "He never let me go anywhere without me sharing my location with him." She said that, when they talked about what happened to Jessica, "he laughs about it. He thinks it's funny. And he said, 'It's a damn shame she didn't do it right the first time.'" She added, "He doesn't refer to her as, like, human. Like, he talks about her as if she's nothing."

As Willey was moving out of Matthew's house, she again came across the gym bag of Jessica's clothes. She notified

a local truck driver named Will Sanders, who had a reputation as a freelance investigator. Sanders was forty-three years old and the son of a former Republican state representative; he considered himself a happy beneficiary of the "good-old-boys system," he told me, and did not do his work in pursuit of political reform. "It's just a hobby," he said. "It interests me on a psychological level." He had conducted his own canvass of Jessica's apartment complex; retraced Matthew's journey to the Waffle House, timing the drive with a stopwatch; and got permission from the new tenants of Jessica and Matthew's apartment to inspect the holes in the closet. He had filed nearly a hundred Open Records Act requests about Jessica's shooting, and he shared what he learned with Jessica's family, as well as with *The Grip*. Jessica's grandmother, Martha, said that initially she had trusted Wendell Beam, whom her husband had known for years, and the G.B.I.'s investigative process. "I've always been such a firm believer in our justice system," she said. "I would fight you tooth and nail defending it." But, after receiving thousands of documents from Sanders, Martha stopped driving through Griffin, because she was afraid. Sanders said, "I think the city thought this would be business as usual, until a local reporter and a loser truck driver got involved."

Sanders offered Willey a hundred and twenty dollars to sneak into Mat-



thew's utility closet and get Jessica's bag. She agreed, and in May, 2017, Sanders dropped off the bag at the Griffin Police Department.

Matthew was called in for questioning. At first he lied, but within fifteen minutes he acknowledged that he'd known about Jessica's bag all along. "Why did you write the damn state-

ment?" a sergeant asked him. "You know you can't give a sworn statement and lie on it." Crying, Matthew set his body armor, badge, and police radio on the table in front of him, and agreed to resign from the department.

In July, he was charged with two felonies: making false statements and violating his oath of office. Philip Stinson, the professor at Bowling Green, maintains a database of officers who have been arrested around the country, and he said that, in response to the Lautenberg Amendment, a federal provision that was passed in 1996 and prohibits people convicted of domestic violence from owning firearms, cops accused of domestic violence are often charged with lesser offenses, as a kind of "professional courtesy," so they can continue working. "That's the game here," he said. Jessica found it darkly funny that it was a missing retainer, and not her brain injury, that ultimately led to Matthew's arrest.

Mike Yates, the chief of the Griffin police, told me in an e-mail that Matthew's case had nothing to do with domestic violence. "We will not be swayed by hearsay, false rhetoric or sensationalism in a manner that would cause harm to the innocent," he wrote.

In April, 2018, nine months after Matthew was charged, Jessica called the Spalding County district attorney's office to ask why Matthew's case hadn't been presented to a grand jury. She was told that, to prove that a crime had been committed, the district attorney needed to establish that the oath of office had been administered to Matthew. But a Griffin city official said that the document couldn't be found. Mathews, the publisher of *The Grip* and its only reporter, submitted an Open Records Act request to the magistrate's court, where judges swear in new officers. Within three hours, she received a copy of Matthew's official oath, which the D.A.'s office had been trying to find for six months. The next day, Yates texted the D.A. to say that he had the original document.

Matthew's case was presented to a grand jury in July, 2018. Under Georgia law, police officers, unlike civilians, have the right to make a prepared statement at the end of a grand-jury hearing. There is no public record of the proceeding, but the grand jury chose not to indict Matthew either for making false statements

or for violating his oath. Four months later, he was hired as a reserve officer in Braswell, Georgia, a community of four hundred people.

Jessica's grandparents wrote letters to the G.B.I., the governor, the city manager, and the district attorney to request that the investigation into Jessica's shooting be reopened. By then, Beam's reputation had been muddied by the Gibson investigation, and he had been voted out of office. Jessica's grandparents hoped that this development would help their case. The new sheriff, Darrell Dix, the former lieutenant in the Griffin Police Department, told me that when he unlocked the doors to the sheriff's office on his first day on the job, January 1, 2017, he found nine industrial-sized trash bags full of shredded papers. Jail trustees—model inmates who did menial jobs at the sheriff's office—told him that they'd spent two weeks destroying paperwork, at the previous administration's instruction. "They had wiped stuff off the computers," Dix said. "They had even taken notebooks off shelves and shredded the documents."

Dix was one of the Griffin police officers present the night that Jessica was shot. "I don't doubt the findings of the G.B.I.," he told me. But, he said, "there are a lot of questions out there—both in favor of Jessica and in favor of Matthew—that could be answered, but I just don't think the G.B.I. is going to do it." He believes that "the only two people who know the answers are Jessica and Matthew," and Jessica will never be a reliable source, given her traumatic brain injury, and Matthew's account can't be trusted. "I guarantee you he won't a hundred per cent say what happened," he said. (Matthew's lawyer said, in an e-mail, "The ultimate aim of both the GBI's investigation and the grand jury's inquiry was to find the truth. And in both instances, he was cleared of wrongdoing.")

That Matthew had found himself in a troubled relationship did not surprise Dix. "Bad decisions," he said. "Hard-headed. Wouldn't listen to anybody."

No one responded to Martha's letters. She concluded that she'd chosen the wrong tactic. "At the time, I was well known in my field by people who had some clout"—she worked in hospital risk management and had friends in law en-

forcement—"and what we should have done is pulled some strings," she said. She felt she needed men in power on her side if she were to challenge a culture in which men let other men get away with what they please.

Will Sanders, the truck driver, reached a similar conclusion. In July, 2018, he criticized Yates on the department's Facebook page for denying Sheila Mathews, *The Grip's* publisher, access to public information—behavior that, Sanders said, was part of a pattern of intimidating female reporters. Yates had lost his previous job, in 2014, as chief of the police department in Jonesboro, Arkansas, after he called a local reporter "smelly" and said that dealing with her was "like trying to pick up a dog turd by the 'clean end.'" She resigned, citing the "level of stress and anxiety created by a public official who commands a small army."

Within two hours of Sanders's Facebook comment, Yates informed Sanders that his private Facebook messages would be made accessible to "any persons interested in the entire scope of your actions, activities, motives and history." He added, "This material will be released in the interest of transparency and context." The department had obtained the messages a year earlier, as part of the investigation into Jessica's gym bag. (The purposes of such a sweeping request were never clear. To obtain the search warrant, a lieutenant submitted



a sworn statement explaining that there was probable cause that Sanders had been involved in two commercial burglaries; later, the lieutenant said that this was the result of a cut-and-paste error.)

Sanders deleted his Facebook account, his primary method of communicating with sources and reporting his findings. He had once assumed that if he dug deeply enough he would understand not only Jessica's shooting but the reasons that David Gibson had been

protected for so long. Although Gibson had been indicted on fourteen charges, he was allowed to plead guilty, in June, 2017, to only two, for violating his oath of office, and he was granted first-offender status. After he serves a three-year sentence and finishes his probation, his record will be wiped clean.

For a time, Sanders thought that the source of Gibson's power might be connected to the Dixie Mafia (a gang based in the South), or a gambling ring, or some hidden knowledge that afforded him a lifetime of leverage over Beam. But now he resorted to a more mundane theory about the culture of power. "My mama told me stories about going to lunch with my father and his friends in the sixties," he said to me. "The men would sit down, and the women would stand behind their men. When the men wanted tea, they just shook their glasses."

Even Gibson's lawyer, Phil Friduss, seemed at a loss to explain whether Gibson had controlled the county, as so many people believed. "I *hope* those stories went too far," he said, referring to the notorious Wood Chipper. The inability to pinpoint the source of Gibson's dominance—and of Beam's capacity to shield other men—seemed only to feed the drama and paranoia. Eleanor Attwood, a lawyer representing six women who filed civil suits against Gibson, warned me to do all my reporting when the sun was out.

Sanders said that he no longer goes anywhere unarmed. If he has to drive to downtown Griffin, he cleans and vacuums his car, so he can easily see if someone plants drugs or contraband. For a while, he put clear tape on the doors of his house and car, so he would know if anyone had sneaked inside. Jessica gave him her old cell phone and notebook, and he keeps them in a safe at a location that he won't disclose, along with a shrink-wrapped box containing all the documents he collected. "My dream is that, one day, the Feds show up and say, 'We want the notebook,'" he said. But otherwise, he said, "I'm done—I'm out. They have won. I hold up the white flag."

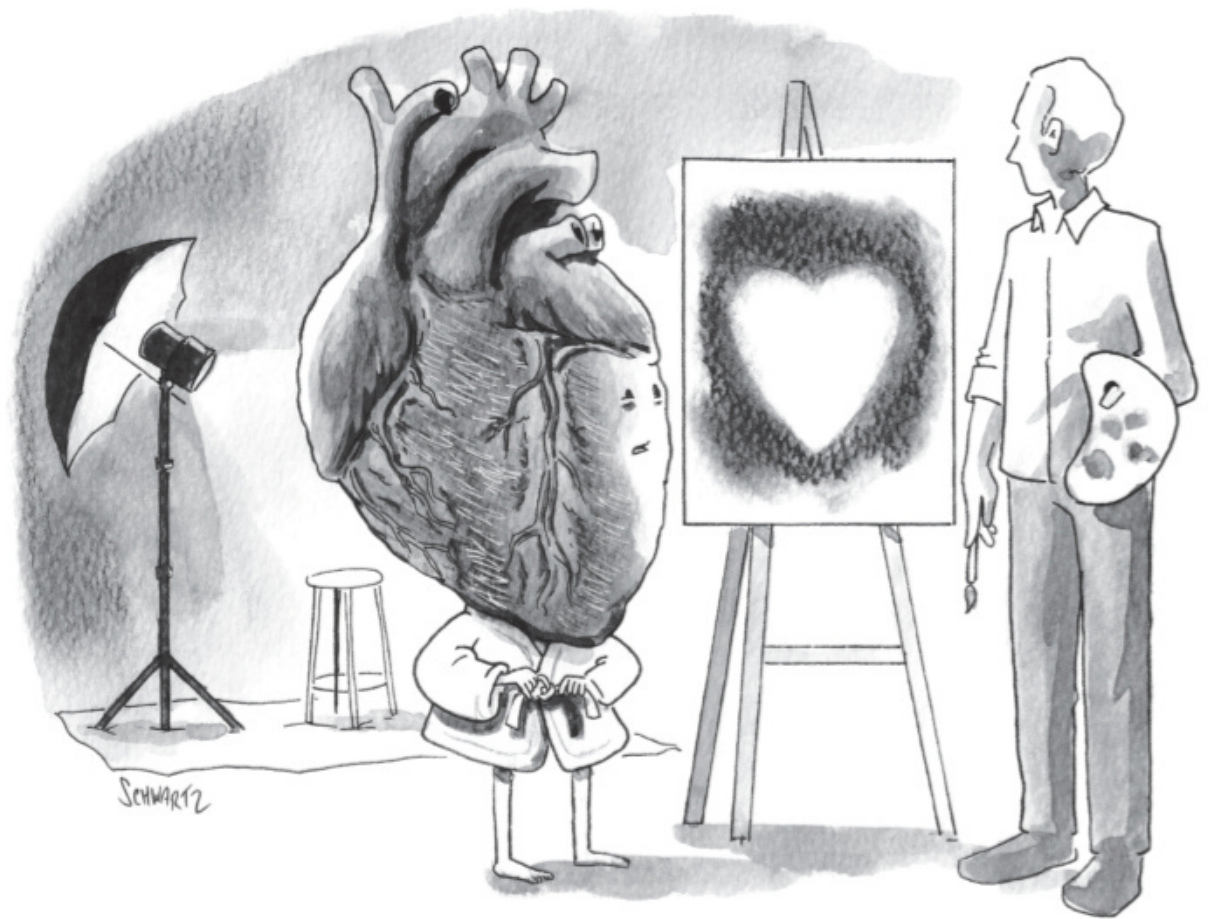
Jessica's older son often cried and clung to her when Matthew picked him up on Fridays, and in the summer of 2018 he complained that his father had hurt him. Jessica reported what he

said to child-protective services, who helped arrange for the boys to see a child psychologist. The psychologist wrote, of the older son, "I asked him if he has been happy or sad. He said, 'Sad.' When asked, how come, he stated, 'because daddy scares me.'" He went on to say, "Daddy was up the hill and hurt me in his house."

The sheriff's department in Pike County, where Matthew was living, investigated whether there had been abuse, but Matthew denied the allegation and the department did not find any concrete evidence. During the investigation, Jessica's sons were permitted to stay with her full time. In the spring of 2019, child-protective services closed the case and recommended, based on reports submitted by the children's psychologist, who had seen the boys for twenty-five sessions, that they no longer spend time with Matthew. "The boys expressed fear of having any potential contact with their biological father," the psychologist wrote. Matthew is challenging the ruling in court. Jessica told me, "I'd probably go to jail before I'd put the boys back in a situation where Matthew could even think about doing anything to them."

She now lives two hours north of Griffin, with her fiancé, Jacob Boyack, a high-school classmate, in a small yellow house with black shutters and an American flag hanging from the front porch. Jessica and Jacob have a son together, and their living room and kitchen are arranged like a nursery school, with a poster displaying the ABCs, a whiteboard, and wooden coat hangers shaped like trucks. Jessica is placid and effortlessly polite, warm without being intimate. When I visited them in August, Jacob mentioned that one of the boys had recently done a spin in the living room and called it a "pirouette." Jessica seemed more energized by the comment than by anything else we discussed.

Martha was initially skeptical when Jessica got involved with another man who assumed the role of protector. Gradually, though, her concerns dissipated. Jacob is gentle and jovial, articulating emotions that Jessica herself struggles to name. She has a tendency to brush over painful experiences. When I asked about her mother, who lived



"Oh, O.K. I can sort of see it."

nearby, she said, mildly, that she had tried to reconnect with her several times over the years, but her mother didn't seem interested. "She's just a piece of shit," Jacob clarified.

When I asked Jessica why she never left the house when she lived with Matthew, she explained, "We lived in an apartment complex with a playground. So there was really no need for me to leave. There was a pool there, too."

"You find plenty of reasons to leave now—I know that," Jacob teased her. Occasionally, Jessica still reflexively asked Jacob for permission to do things like visit her grandparents or go to the store. "I'm, like, 'You don't have to ask me,'" he said. "You are your own person. You do whatever you want to do." The lead teacher at the day care where Jessica worked had also found her unnecessarily deferential. "It was like she needed permission for everything," she said.

Jessica still has occasional migraines, weakness in her left foot, and lingering amnesia about the night of her shooting. She could now recall that after she returned from Walmart she went to her closet to put her shoes on, because she needed to walk the dog. That is where her memory ends. She believes that she

and Matthew must have fought in the closet, and she never made it outside. In the police body-cam videos, the dog is still wearing his leash.

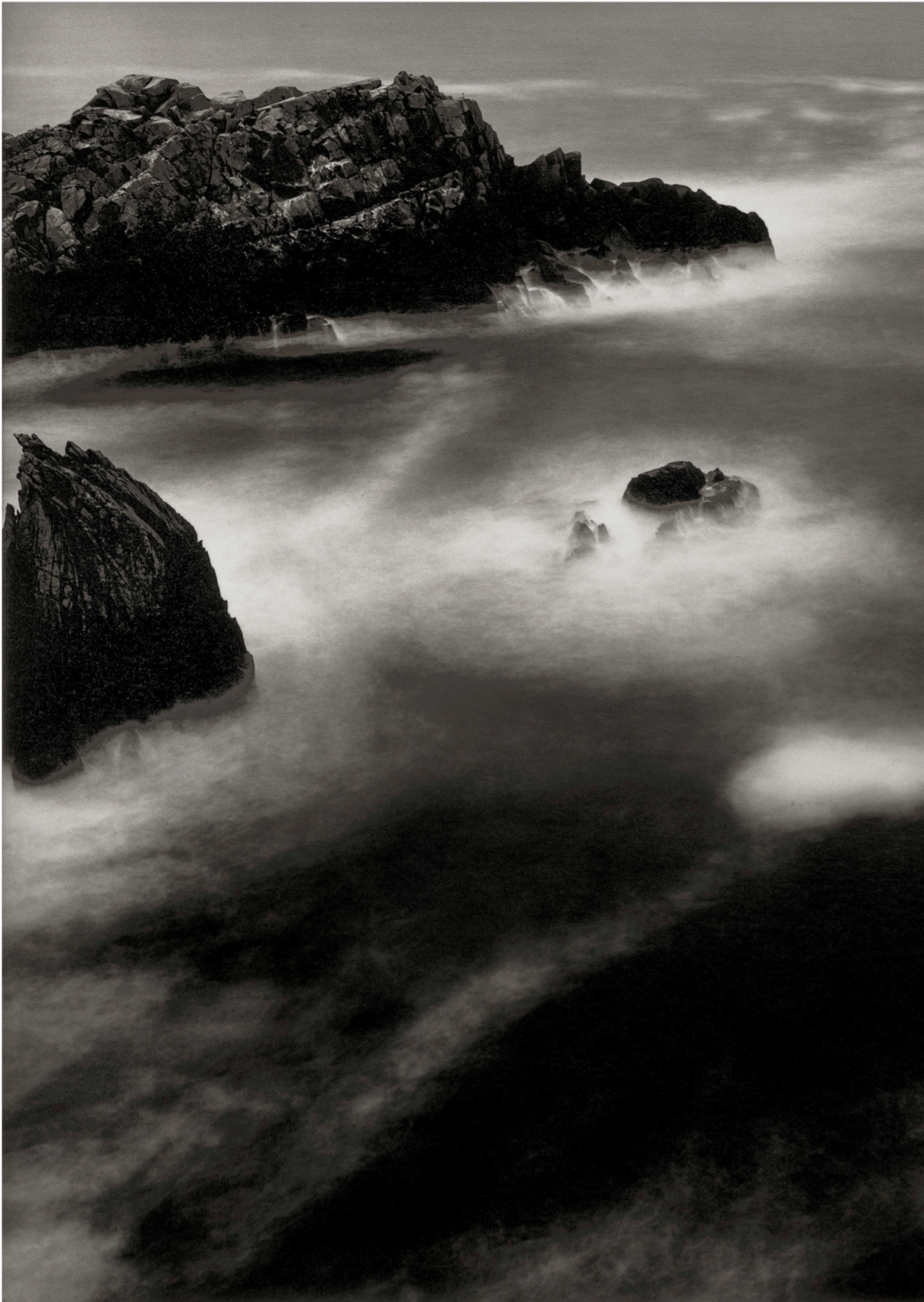
Like many docile, self-effacing women, Jessica has some hidden pockets of pride, and one of them is her skills as a writer. She's offended by the idea that she would have composed something as syntactically messy as the suicide text she is alleged to have written. "There are too many useless words thrown in," she said. "I would have written, 'I can't do this anymore comma.'" She said she would have put a period after the line about taking care of the boys, rather than letting one sentence run into the next. "I would have written 'suicidal thoughts,' not 'suicide thoughts.'"

She told me that she couldn't imagine using a cliché such as "I have not been able to recognize the person I see in the mirror."

"I don't generally even look in the mirror," she said. "I mean, I walk past it. But I never look in it."

"I don't think the text was quite that literal," Jacob said.

"I would have picked something different," Jessica went on. "A different metaphor." ♦



Cooper's project "The Atlas of Emptiness and Extremity" documents a three-decade attempt to traverse the perimeter



PROFILES

THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

Thomas Joshua Cooper risks his life to photograph the world's remotest places.

BY DANA GOODYEAR

of the Atlantic basin—an exile's long search for home. He says that the process creates a "peculiar kind of ecstatic joy."

PHOTOGRAPHS BY THOMAS JOSHUA COOPER

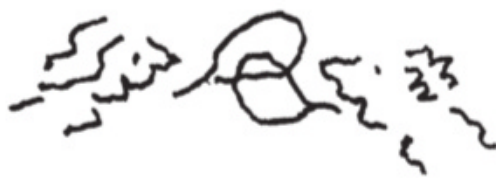
For thirty-two years, Thomas Joshua Cooper has been working on a project that he calls “The Atlas of Emptiness and Extremity,” a collection of some seven hundred black-and-white photographs that he makes from remote, forbidding, largely unpeopled, all-but-forgotten outcroppings, on five continents and at both poles, along the perimeter of the Atlantic basin. He sets his camera in places with names like Cape Frigid on the Frozen Strait, the Lighthouse at the End of the World, Finisterre—places infused with human awe of the unknown and with the yearning of explorers embarking on a journey from which they will likely not return. “I thought maybe I could learn something by standing on the continental edges of the source of Western civilization and trying to imagine, with my back to the land, what happened when the carriers of the culture went over the edge of the map,” he told me. Another time, he said, “Emptiness and extremity are what I was searching for, with the firm belief that it’d kill me or transform me.”

Part Cherokee and part Jewish, Cooper was born in California and has lived in Scotland since the nineteen-eighties. In images that are romantic and psychologically severe—the angular grandeur of rock and the terror of the ocean, befuddled by clouds, fog, and breaking waves—the “Atlas” documents an exile’s search for home. He looks for what he calls “indications”—rocks or wave patterns that form arrows, pointing him in the right direction—and avoids horizons, preferring pictures from which there is no clear escape. “He is part of the conceptual-art tradition of artists traversing space to create sculpture,” Michael Govan, the director of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and a champion of Cooper’s since the early nineties, told me. “He is also one of our greatest formal photographers. He captures the *motion* of the environment, which is near-impossible to do.” In late September, the “Atlas” had its debut, at LACMA, in an exhibition called “The World’s Edge.” At Cooper’s request, the show opened on the five-hundredth anniversary of Magellan’s departure for his trip around the globe.

In Cooper’s photographic epic about exploration, colonization, migration, and homecoming, he is both narrator and protagonist. “In making the Atlas pic-

tures, I may unintentionally become the first person in the world to circumnavigate the boundless coastal perimeter of land-surfaces harbouring the entire Atlantic Ocean,” he has written. He says that a senior cartographer of the “Times Comprehensive Atlas of the World” once told him that he was the first to see many of these places and, because of global sea rise, would likely be the last. “In the life of your children, most of those edges will be underwater,” he told me.

Seventy-three, tall and lumbering, with fair hair turned white and a goaty scruff of beard, Cooper is a kisser of hands, who calls both men and women “sir.” Like a kindly adult out of Roald Dahl, he’s often enthused to the point of inarticulacy. People he admires are “absolute gobsmackers.” He expresses happiness with rapid claps; moved, he thumps his chest with a closed fist; when truly overwhelmed, he says, “Fu-u-u-u-uck.” From the outset, Cooper was unfit for the physically arduous task he assigned himself, which requires that he spend months at sea in small craft, hurl himself from dinghies onto slick rock faces, inch along cliffs, dangle over abysses. He has fallen into quicksand; tumbled from peaks; sailed into a cyclone; been shot at, searched, and detained; had his dinghy swamped among hunting leopard seals. “I get seasick,” Cooper told me. “I’m frightened of water—I can’t stand this shit. In fact, I don’t really know how to swim. I swim like a rock.” He is blind in his right eye, and his glasses fog. In books, which he publishes upon completing segments of



his itinerary, he thanks the chiropractors who help patch him together at the journey’s end. He thought the “Atlas” would take seven years; it has taken more than four times that long.

Mentally, though, Cooper is unflinching. “I’m an invisible person, never had an audience,” he told me. His work, when it has been seen at all, has mostly been displayed in small galleries and group

shows. “But I’m unstoppable,” he said. “I can’t do anything but make things.” In setting the parameters of his project, Cooper made a series of vows: to work exclusively outdoors, to make only a single exposure in each place, and to pursue his vision at the expense of all else. “It wasn’t melodramatic,” he told me. “It allowed me to realize that, whatever it cost me to get to a place, I was willing to pay the price. If I said to myself, ‘I am already dead,’ then I had nothing to worry about. I’m free. I no longer have any fears. Only the joy, the peculiar kind of ecstatic joy of making things at the point where nothing else is left.”

“I trespass whenever possible,” Cooper told me, walking by a “No Trespassing” sign and approaching a rusty, broken-down barbed-wire fence. It was a sunny morning, on a palisade overlooking the Pacific, part of a twenty-five-thousand-acre ranch at Point Conception, in Santa Barbara County. As a coda to the “Atlas,” Cooper had decided to make a series of photographs along the coast where he was born, on a three-week road trip between Oregon and Tijuana. (The Pacific pictures will be exhibited at Hauser & Wirth, in Los Angeles, in late October.)

Cooper clutched his camera, wrapped in a dark cloth, as he stiffly traversed the fence. His wife, Kate Mooney, who has practical gray hair and a deflationary wit, choreographed. She researches and helps plan Cooper’s voyages, and serves as a living compass for her directionally challenged mate. “Right foot, right foot, left foot, over,” she said. “The next piece of barbed wire, and then over again. Well done.” He walked down a path to the eroded edge of the cliff. The ocean below was marbled like a steak. A train whistled in the distance, and Cooper turned to wave. “Heart-beat, heart-beat, heart-beat,” he said.

Cooper’s camera, a five-by-seven-inch field camera, is a wooden box that was built in 1898. He refers to it as his “baby” and says, “She and I are going to go into the fire together.” In recent years, the materials required for the “Atlas” have become increasingly scarce. He has bought the last of the film developer that he prefers, the last of the fixer, and the last of the paper. “Analog photography’s disappearing,” the artist Richard

Learoyd, who uses a homemade camera obscura, told me. “You have to change and adapt to that. He doesn’t adapt.”

Working with an old, unwieldy instrument slows Cooper down, which is a primary intention of his process. Awkward, fragile, heavy (the rig, including tripod and film, weighs some sixty pounds), the camera has been lugged to the literal ends of the earth. “There are areas in South America where they see me with the camera and tripod and they say, ‘Oh, you’re the Yank that does the impossible shit,’” he told me. Made from nineteenth-century wood, the camera is particularly vulnerable to the influence of salt water. More than once, protecting it has threatened to kill him. I have the distinct impression that this is how he’d like to go. “Death or picture,” he likes to say.

At Point Conception, Cooper established the tripod where the dirt began to fall away and disappeared under the dark cloth to check the composition. He frames his images from the outside in. “My whole practice is edges,” he says. “Edge of the world, edge of the picture, edge of land and sea.” I heard muffled laughter: he liked what he saw. Emerging, he closed his eyes and began muttering to himself. Later, he told me that he was asking for a blessing. “I refuse to take anything from anyone or anything, ever, so I ask permission,” he said. “Then I feel less like a thief.” (Repeatedly, he told me that he does not “take” or “shoot” pictures. He says, “You shoot something, it dies. You take something and you’re usually taking it against the will of the thing that is being removed.”) With his eyes still closed, he depressed a plunger, initiating the exposure, a minute and thirty seconds long.

A man in olive-green work pants and a matching shirt approached with a clipboard. “Ranch security,” he said briskly. “Sir, I need you to pack it up and leave immediately.”

“Could I have one minute?”

“No, you need to leave now.”

“I’m really sorry. You couldn’t give me a minute?”

“You’re not supposed to *be here*,” the guard said. “It’s posted. You don’t even have permission to be on the property photographing.”

Cooper began to wheedle, stalling. “I didn’t mean to bother anybody,” he



“So, what inspired you to study engineering, get married, find a job, move to the suburbs, have a couple of kids, and grow old?”

said. “Come look at what I’m looking at. Come look—*look, look, look, look*. Give me one minute. Have a look.”

The guard was steadfast, miffed. “It doesn’t matter whether you’re photographing for the Blue Room or the Lincoln Bedroom at the White House,” he said. “You need to respect private-property rights. There’s rules.” Cooper didn’t move. “You know, I’m about to lose it, sir,” the guard said. “I’m going to call the sheriffs and you’re going to get a twelve-hundred-dollar fine.”

Cooper waited a moment longer, as the exposure finished, and then said, “Thank you very much! Would you like to look? It’s not much, but it might make you smile.” The guard remained unsmiling. “I’m not trying to be silly,” Cooper said. “We’re from Scotland.”

“You’re Scottish?” the guard said, almost under his breath. “So am I.” Cooper apologized again; the guard apologized for doing his job. Then he asked about the camera. He, too, was an “analog redneck,” he said. He offered to carry

the camera back to the car. “I’m Scottish-Chickasaw, believe it or not,” the guard said. “I was born in Oklahoma.”

“I bow to you, sir,” Cooper said, bowing. “That’s where my grandparents are buried.”

By the time we left, he and the guard were singing “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” which was written by a formerly enslaved member of the Choctaw Nation, and making plans to see each other in Los Angeles, at the opening of Cooper’s museum show.

When Cooper was six, his family moved for two years to the Standing Rock Reservation, in South Dakota, where his father, Duahne, or D.W., was employed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. His mother, Nancy Roseman, was known on the reservation as Fancy Nancy, because she ordered dresses from San Francisco. At Thomas’s bedtime she recited poems in Japanese and Mandarin, languages she had learned as a child, when her father, a



Cooper refers to his camera, a wooden box made in 1898, as his “baby.” At times, protecting it has threatened to kill him.

naval officer, was stationed on the Yangtze. She and D.W., who was one-sixteenth Cherokee, met in Honolulu; he was also an officer in the Navy, and they married under a sabre arch. Cooper says that D.W. was at Pearl Harbor, served in numerous major naval battles in the Pacific, and fought in Korea, but still, upon discharge, was not permitted to use the rest room in many places in the United States.

Life at Standing Rock was a child’s fantasy. Weekly, the Lakota elders told the children stories; at the end of the sessions, one of them would talk about vision, fiercely pronouncing upon the difference between “the eye that sees and the seeing eye.” Thomas was white-white, a towhead with a patched eye. As the lone cowboy, being chased by his Indian friends, he learned stealth. On his right hand, he bears a scar, which he says he got when he was inducted into the Oglala

Sioux and given an Indian name, Tecumseh. When I asked Thomas’s brother, David, who is younger by twelve years and works for the Forest Service in Chico, California, if he, too, had an Indian name, he laughed. “Thomas definitely likes to romanticize, and that’s wonderful,” he said. “I’ve got a lot of friends that are Indians, and I wouldn’t blend in.”

Some years ago, Mooney made a Cooper family tree, starting with Reuben Cooper, a Portuguese Jewish metal merchant who came to the United States in the seventeenth century. At some point, the Coopers married into a Cherokee family in the Southeast. “The Coopers are so intermarried—that’s the polite way of putting it—that they have their own genealogist in South Carolina and North Carolina to make sure they’re not intermarrying again,” Mooney told me. The Cherokee part of the family was forced west, to Oklahoma, on the Trail

of Tears. After making the tree, she says, “I thought it was such a load of rubbish that I made Thomas take a DNA test.” The results were surprising. “The Rosemans and the Coopers believed themselves to be entirely different, one better than the other. It turns out that both were part Cherokee, part Jewish.”

Even now, the only places Cooper will not trespass are lands belonging to indigenous people. In making the “Atlas,” he has retraced sections of the early explorers’ journeys: enacting a twenty-four-hour vigil that Magellan made before leaving Portugal; standing in the spot of Columbus’s first landfall in the Bahamas. But embedded in the work is a critique of what Cooper calls the “conniving, disruptive, venal, and murderous” impulses of colonization, the slaughter that followed in the explorers’ wake, or that they themselves perpetrated. In a moody, scumbled photograph called

“‘Erasure’—The Beginning of Conquest and Destruction, Native America Loses the European Cultural Battle,” Cooper shows the beach in Veracruz where Cortés commenced his Aztec campaign. Obliterating sea foam bisects the image: the time before and the time after.

“These guys went into the unknown willingly, and they suffered for it,” Cooper says. “They have to be despised, but to insist that you can do something that nobody has detailed before you—Jesus Christ, that’s admirable. I’m amazed by Magellan, because he was a superior sailor. Agog at Drake, who was a serious S.O.B., because to have survived the Drake Passage is incomprehensible. Ultimately, though, it’s all bad. Drake creates the opportunity for globalization and the homogenization of culture at the great expense of anything that is extreme and unbending.”

Among the very few pictures of the United States in the LACMA show are two relating to Cooper’s Cherokee family: a river they crossed in their journey west on the Trail of Tears—where Cooper fell into a sinkhole and lost his boots—and the Oklahoma homestead of his father’s tribal grandparents. Patrick Lannan, the president of the Lannan Foundation, which has funded the majority of the “Atlas,” says, “There’s an indigenous sensibility. His pictures evoke a memory of a world that hasn’t been harvested yet. He admires the explorers, the risks they took and all of that, but he also recognizes what they brought with them. His feet are in both worlds.”

Moving on from Standing Rock, Cooper’s family made its way to D.W.’s next job, tending an elk herd for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on a preserve in Wyoming. Nancy and D.W. lived in a one-room cabin, while Thomas and his sister, Leslie, shared an Army-issue pup tent. D.W., whom Cooper describes as “more or less nonverbal,” hunted for the family’s food, bringing Thomas with him. “If it takes more than two bullets, you’re a bad shot,” D.W. told his son. “If I miss, we don’t eat.” Cooper says, “He was really spare, and that sparseness had an effect on me.” Cooper’s father trained him on a .22 at six, a shotgun at eight, and a range rifle at twelve. “I was blind as a bat, but I always knew where the target was,” Cooper says. “It confounded

my father. I could hit what I was aiming at.” After he turned thirteen, he shunned violence, refusing to hunt or target-shoot again. “It aggravated the hell out of my old man,” he says. “My mother wasn’t that happy about it, either.”

Eventually, the family settled into a conventional middle-class existence, in a suburb of Arcata, in Humboldt County, California; Cooper remembers that his mother baked a lot of pie. When he was sixteen, she died of a heart attack, brought on by a combination of alcohol and sleeping pills. He can barely talk about it still. “Fuck, I’m a kid,” he said. “I tried to give her mouth-to-mouth.” Nancy was not yet forty, and rumors of suicide dogged the family.

After her death, Cooper left home, scrapping together odd jobs in sawmills. He enrolled at Humboldt State University, where, he says, he befriended the painter Morris Graves, helping him in the garden at the Lake, Graves’s home and studio deep in the redwoods. At that point, Cooper wanted to be a poet, and thought he’d make a living as a rural postman, writing in the afternoons. After taking a photography course, to fulfill a graduation requirement, he asked Graves if he knew any artists making photographs. “The art is in the thinking and the feeling and the seeing and the making,” Cooper recalls Graves telling him. “Not in the medium.”

Graves introduced Cooper to the photographer Imogen Cunningham, who hired him as a studio assistant. (She made a portrait of him: a young man with a pouf of cidery blond hair, intent but faraway.) Cooper says that when he applied to graduate school for photography, in New Mexico, Graves wrote a recommendation, in the form of an acrostic that spelled A-R-T-I-S-T. He was admitted, in the fall of 1970, and promptly got suspended, for punching a teacher who made fun of him.

During this period, Cooper briefly worked as a substitute teacher for eighth graders at a barrio school in San Luis Obispo County. In his art work, he was flummoxed, hating everything he made. One day, a friend drove him past an old apple farm. A hand-painted sign read, “See Canyon.” Cooper told me, “I thought, I’ll make pictures here. If I can’t start in See Canyon, then I’m fucked.” He set out on April Fools’ Day. After

hiking eight miles to the canyon’s end, he still didn’t have a picture. Beginning to despair, he went over a little ridge, looked back, and saw a fallen tree, silvery white, on a stream bank, pointing toward an old farmhouse: an indication. Recalling the experience, he once said, “The predictive nature of the name of this place, See Canyon, taught me several important artist’s lessons. The first was to relax into trying to see a place, be at ease if possible in the place, but attend to it well and very carefully. Secondly, be prepared to change your mind and to see what you do not expect to see or did not want to see.” He made the first of his vows about where he would work (outside) and how he would work (with austere economy, one image per site).

As Cooper experimented, he wrote a series of solicitous letters to Ansel Adams, the preëminent landscape photographer of the time, whose pictures of Yosemite and other Western sites solidified a conservation movement. Soon, he began to visit. “He tucked me under his wing,” Cooper says. “The deal was, if I arrived at five, it was drinks. If I arrived at seven, it was dinner. I had to do the dishes after dinner, and I always had to spend the next day helping him in the darkroom. I was itinerant for a while. Being fed was a good deal. Being offered a drink was a better deal.” He slept rough, in a sleeping bag outside Adams’s house.

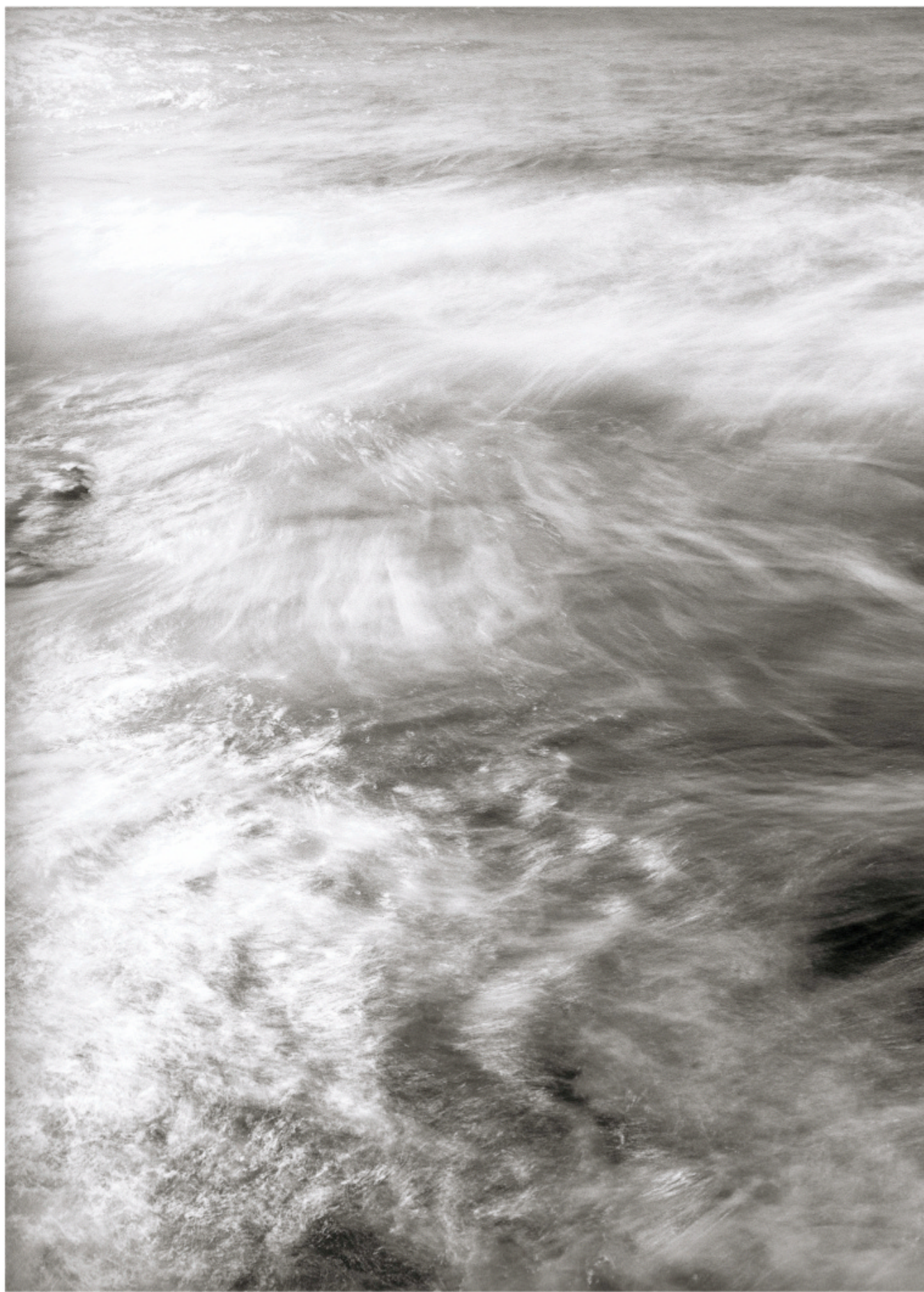
Adams encouraged Cooper’s work, but thought that his camera, a 35-mm., was limiting. A few years earlier, Cooper had bought his five-by-seven camera, in Arcata, from the elderly son of its original owner; it had been sitting on his mantel, a provocation. When he presented it for Adams’s approval, Cooper recalls, “he said, ‘It’s perfect, it’s perfect. This is the biggest camera that a normal person that’s interested in the rectangle can carry.’” In a letter to Adams from 1972, Cooper reminisces about showing him pictures of “the natural world as I felt it.” Adams, he writes, told him that he was “on his way.”

Despite the mentorship, Adams, a populist who made beautiful pictures to encourage tourism to the national parks, is not the father of Cooper’s project. According to Richard Learoyd, “Adams was chasing his own version of the photographic picturesque. It was a

language that was understood, and he was using it. With Cooper, he's not using the language of the picturesque—he's using the language of discovery and abstraction." Darius Himes, the international head of photographs at Christie's, says, "You look at most of Cooper's pictures and don't know where you are, and it's definitely not a place you want to go visit."

"I saw the picture over Kate's shoulder," Cooper said. "She probably saw it right away." We were at Rincon, a beach south of Point Conception, where Cooper had spent the previous hour moving pieces of whitening driftwood around on the sand, like an elephant burying bones. Mooney was sitting on a bench, with her eyes closed, face tipped toward a hazy sky. "Thank Christ—I was starting to worry," Cooper said, when the image revealed itself. "It's always there, you just have to be patient." He trudged past the bench and into a copse of cypress trees, whose branches looked like upswept umbrellas on a windy day. There was a John Deere tractor, which he avoided, and a downed tree trunk, which attracted him. "My pictures are not about the specifics of geography," he says. "They attempt to be about what it's like to stand in a very specific place."

Cooper has lived in Scotland since 1982, when he was hired to establish the photography department at the Glasgow School of Art, where he is still on the faculty. He met Mooney, a silversmithing student seventeen years younger than he, playing table tennis in the yard outside the photography building. Mooney says, "He invited me to see his collection of daguerreotypes, and I moved in." Cooper's experience of the courtship was more tormented. "I was thunderstruck," he says. "She was young, sweet, and didn't want an old dog around." He contemplated leaving Scotland for good, returning to America. Hoping for clarity, he took his camera to northwest Scotland and stood in the sea. "I was in the water about an hour, and I thought, O.K., fuck this, I can't figure out what else to do. Finally, I saw this picture looking toward Scotland, and thought, I know what to do now." That sea picture, empty of humans but charged with human emotion, began the "Atlas" and his relationship with Kate. "So the 'Atlas' and



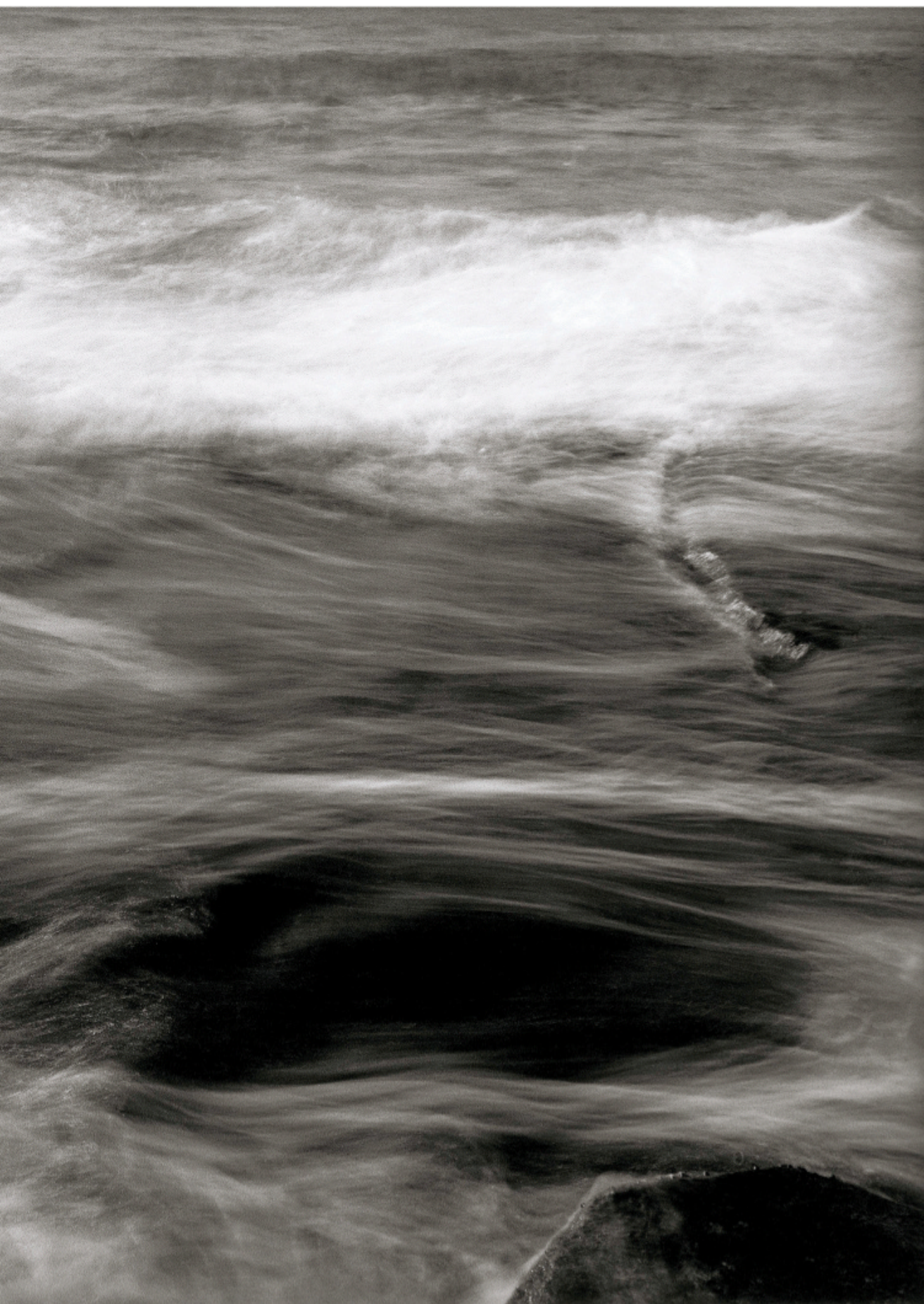
"My whole practice is edges," Cooper says. "Edge of the world, edge of the picture, edge of

my dear sweetheart are entirely intertwined," he told me.

Cooper and Mooney have two daughters, Laura Indigo, who is twenty-four, and Sophie Alice, who is twenty-one. When Laura was two weeks old, Cooper left their home, in Glasgow, on a long voyage, setting a pattern that would persist. "I missed the entirety of my children growing up," Cooper told me. "I was in the field for eighteen years."

As an undergraduate, Cooper had come across Theodore Roethke's poem "The Abyss," and it stayed with him:

"How can I dream except beyond this life? / Can I outleap the sea— / The edge of all the land, the final sea?" In the early two-thousands, he began making excursions to what he calls, after Roethke, the Far Field: the extremities of continental Europe and Africa, looking west, toward the setting sun and the unknown. "The cardinal points are always, historically, metaphors," Cooper says. "West is the area of promise for Westerners—follow the sun. The allure of the north—it's the gate to Heaven, as native people say. The fear of the south starts with Captain



the land and sea.” In Brazil, a wave nearly swept him off a cliff as he pressed the shutter.

Cook. The east is always behind you; you know where you came from.”

With the support of Harry Blain, a London gallerist, Cooper engaged Jason Roberts, a polar explorer, who has also produced expeditions for David Attenborough, and headed to the northernmost point in Europe, the Svalbard archipelago. Roberts told me, “I was, like, What the hell do they want to take some guy to this place for? Do they seriously know how complicated and costly it is?” (Cooper’s trips can cost upward of three hundred thousand dollars each.) By now,

Roberts has guided or overseen numerous expeditions for Cooper, to the frozen ocean of the North Pole—where storms press the pack into “screw ice” and the wind forms sculpted ridges called sastrugi—and to the parallel universe at the extreme south. “I would always send pictures to his girls, saying, ‘Your bonkers father, look at what he’s doing now. He’s at the North Pole, to take one photo. Then he’ll go all the way to the South Pole to take one picture,’” Roberts told me. “It’s really quite funny to take a lot more photos than he ever takes.”

Listening to Cooper’s plans, Roberts often thought, “Dude, you don’t like sailing boats, so why the fuck are we sailing to Antarctica?” On one trip to the South Pole, he and Cooper were caught for three weeks in a blizzard on the continental ice shelf. According to Cooper, as the snow persisted, the camp filled up with scientists, sportsmen, and explorers, and jokes started to fly about who would get eaten first. “I’m the only fat person in the God-damned crew,” Cooper told me. “They’re all looking at me and smiling slightly lasciviously.” The wind was blowing sixty to eighty miles an hour, a whiteout. Travelling to the mess tent and the latrine required hooking in to ropes. After thirteen days in the tent, Cooper, feeling stir-crazy, decided to go out and make a picture. “I figured it would take six people,” he told me. “Two to hold me, two to hold the camera, and one to hold the dark cloth. I stood facing into the wind and made a picture of whiteness—it’s nothing but pure white.”

“You might say he’s a madman, but you have to respect him for dedication,” Roberts says. “I would have given up a long time ago if I was that uncomfortable.” But, he allows, “when things go bad, he can be a moody bugger.”

Several years ago, at the North Pole, Cooper broke through the ice, with a thirty-five-pound tripod on his back. One edge of the rupture held, and he heaved himself out of the water. Afterward, he returned to the spot to make his photograph: a white ice field, riddled with melt holes, like a sweater ravaged by moths. He said, “I’m up to my neck in the Arctic Ocean and I thought, Well, fuck, if I go down, that’s the end, no one will know. Bye-bye! I got out, and I made the picture, which is how I solve all my dilemmas.”

Not everyone, of course, believes that a photograph is worth dying for. In 2008, Cooper undertook an arduous journey to a place whose name, he felt, was summoning him: Prime Head, at the tip of the Antarctic Peninsula, north of Exasperation Inlet, Cape Disappointment, and Cape Longing. He engaged a captain, Greg Landreth, and his wife, Keri Pashuk, to take him on a fifty-four-foot motorized sailboat called Northanger. (He might have paid closer attention to that name.) From the start, there were tensions. Cooper recalls that Landreth



"It's a good deal. You're getting twenty more teaspoons of sugar for a quarter."

greeted him by saying, "Any mistake you make is likely to kill someone. You're a green, unproven man, and I can barely stand to be in your company." Conditions were dangerous, and Cooper had laid out a daunting itinerary: seventy Antarctic sites in seventy days, with Prime Head as his ultimate goal. Landreth says that it was his responsibility to stay alert to all present and future conditions to keep them safe. Cooper, on the other hand, he said, "would stay in his cabin, sequestered, till it was time to go and take his photo. Then off we'd go and land on this horrific wave-swept platform and he'd do his thing, and then he'd disappear again and not want to be noticed or bothered."

They sailed through the austral summer; autumn lasted a week, and winter hit. Supplies ran low. Prime Head is surrounded on three sides by what sailors call "uncharted dangers," places in which, according to maritime custom, potential rescuers are not expected to respond to a Mayday signal. For three weeks, they maneuvered slowly toward Prime Head up the Bransfield Strait, a waterway between the South Shetland Islands and the Antarctic mainland, clogged with brash ice and calving icebergs. The

final two weeks they spent in the twelve-foot-long dinghy, towing Northanger and depth-sounding as they went.

According to Cooper, Landreth refused to proceed, causing Cooper to invoke his rights as the charterer to commandeer the boat. (Landreth strongly disputes Cooper's account. "I'm the owner of the boat," he told me. "I certainly would've noticed.") "He went colossally berserk, and he said, 'I'm putting you off,'" Cooper told me. "I said, 'Great, where the fuck are you going to put me off? We're seventy-five miles from the nearest research base. It'll take us three weeks to get there, and by then we could get to Prime Head and back.'" Finally, Cooper says, Landreth relented. They were in a freezing fog, but Cooper could see on the map that nearby was an uncharted island, and he wanted it. Landreth allowed him to chart the island, which he called Catherine Island, in Kate's honor. Catherine Island is one of three previously unidentified Antarctic locations that Cooper mapped on the journey to Prime Head; another is LISA Rock (an acronym of "Laura Indigo Sophie Alice"), a protrusion near Cape Herschel that is said to have sunk five boats. He submitted both to the

U.K.'s Hydrographic Office, in the hope that they would be considered, as he says, "new knowledge."

At Catherine Island, Cooper conceded that he had to abandon Prime Head. "The wind is up and the fog is up and I can't see thirty feet," he told me. "I said, 'This is as far as we can go.' The captain said, 'Thank Christ,' and we prepared to pack up the equipment into the dinghy. Just then, it got calm and the fog rose, and we could see Prime Head Point half to three-quarters of a mile away. It was calm as fuck, and we said, 'We have to try this,' and we made a dash for the headland." Facing a two-hundred-and-fifty-foot ice wall, Cooper saw bedrock, the thin black line that means the great ice continent is melting, and felt his heart leap. He made his picture—"Uncharted Dangers, Clear"—at the end of a sea ledge, in a survival suit, chest-deep in the Antarctic water. He believes that he was the ninth person to set foot on Prime Head, and that Landreth was the tenth. More people have stood on the surface of the moon.

Laura recalls that when she and Sophie were little they would paint their father's toenails before a trip. He'd come home thirty pounds lighter, fish white, with flakes of pink polish still at the tips of his grown-out, crabbed nails. He'd empty his pockets of shells and rocks and other things found at the edge of the Atlantic—and, later, perfumes from duty free—before disappearing into the darkroom.

Until Cooper develops a negative, he is not exactly sure what he will find. Once, he discovered that a whale had breached during an exposure, while his eyes were closed. He excluded the picture from the "Atlas"; animals are beside the point. Another time, he realized that he'd accidentally marred the negative, resulting in a flamelike black presence at the edge of the image. That one was a happy accident, as the picture was made at a place in Tierra del Fuego called Cabo del Espíritu Santo.

Printing requires total concentration—fifteen hours a day, a week per print. (Mooney packs him lunch.) From contact sheets, Cooper makes eight-by-ten study prints, which help him to decide which to enlarge. Working in darkness, he adds light by overexposing, and inhibits it chemically, an idiosyncratic

variant of the rigidly scientific developing system codified by Ansel Adams. (Govan, the director of LACMA, says that comparing Adams's printing process to Cooper's is like comparing Bach to Glenn Gould.) Then Cooper immerses each finished print in selenium- and gold-based toners, layering reds and blues. Even those who have watched the process up close find it baffling. Richard Learoyd, who worked as his studio assistant for a time, says, "It's like having somebody with big fat fingers trying to make a watch. It's like a walrus trying to post a letter in a letter box." Cooper throws out most of what he makes. Patrick Lannan told me that one six-week trip that the foundation funded, at a quarter of a million dollars, yielded eighteen images. One of the things Cooper hates most about photographs is that they can be infinitely reproduced.

Cooper dedicates most of his books to the hearth-warming triad of wife and daughters. But Laura says that she knew intuitively, even as a girl, that the work had nothing to do with them. When she mentioned this to her mother, Mooney replied, matter-of-factly, "He's looking for his mom." The book LACMA produced for the exhibition contains a stoic epigraph by Mooney—"There is no exploration without exile"—and a searing essay by Laura on the painful condition of being left behind. I asked Laura what she saw in her father's work. "I see someone that's very lost," she said. "The pictures are his loss for words."

"Let's go forward," Mooney said. "Rincon, Mugu, Dume." On the seat beside her was the "California Atlas and Gazetteer" and a blue binder she had prepared for the trip, labelled "Capes of California." We headed south along the Pacific Coast Highway. "This looks like the end of the earth," Mooney said, as we neared Point Mugu. "We must be going in the right direction."

At Point Mugu, a conical hunk of rock where car commercials are often filmed, Cooper set up on a crumbling asphalt promontory, with one toe of the tripod hovering midair. It was late in the day, and the surfaces were beginning to glisten. Scallops of white surf surged against the pocked foot of a rock covered in seagulls. He scared the birds away, asked permission, and opened

his mouth—*A-ha-ha-ha*, wordless joy.

There was only one more stop on the day's itinerary, at Point Dume, in Malibu, where Cooper and Mooney were having dinner with Michael Govan, who had arranged a place for them to stay the night. Govan, who helped conceive the Capes of California trip, has been trying to bring Cooper's "Atlas" to completion and into the museum for many years. "There was a point fifteen years ago when I thought, This artist will be known after he's gone," he told me recently. Cooper, too, has been straining to finish the last stretch of his Atlantic journey, as both his health and the coastline have deteriorated. For nearly a decade, he has been trying to get to Zenith Point, the northernmost spot on the Canadian mainland. In 2012, he was poisoned by his anti-nausea medication, which prevented him from urinating for four days; near death, he was treated at a hospital on Saint-Pierre, a tiny French island in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and then medevacked home. In 2014, bad weather got in the way. In 2015, bad luck. Cooper's plan for the six-week excursion covers nearly six thousand miles and involves a single-engine airplane with skis and tundra treads, man-pulled sleds, and guns to fend off polar bears. At the moment, it seems, everyone has decided that it is too expensive, that Cooper is too old, and that he cannot be allowed to die in the frozen north alone with his camera. It's not clear that he agrees.

At Point Dume, Govan's wife, Katherine Ross, had organized dinner and



was waiting at the house. First, though, Cooper wanted to see the point. By the time we arrived at the beach, the sky was smudged, a seventies-eyeshadow palette, bruised mauve to midnight blue to ochre. Feathery smoke-colored clouds drifted past a crescent moon. Mooney coughed. It had been a very long day, and she was nursing a flu.

But Cooper could not resist. "This

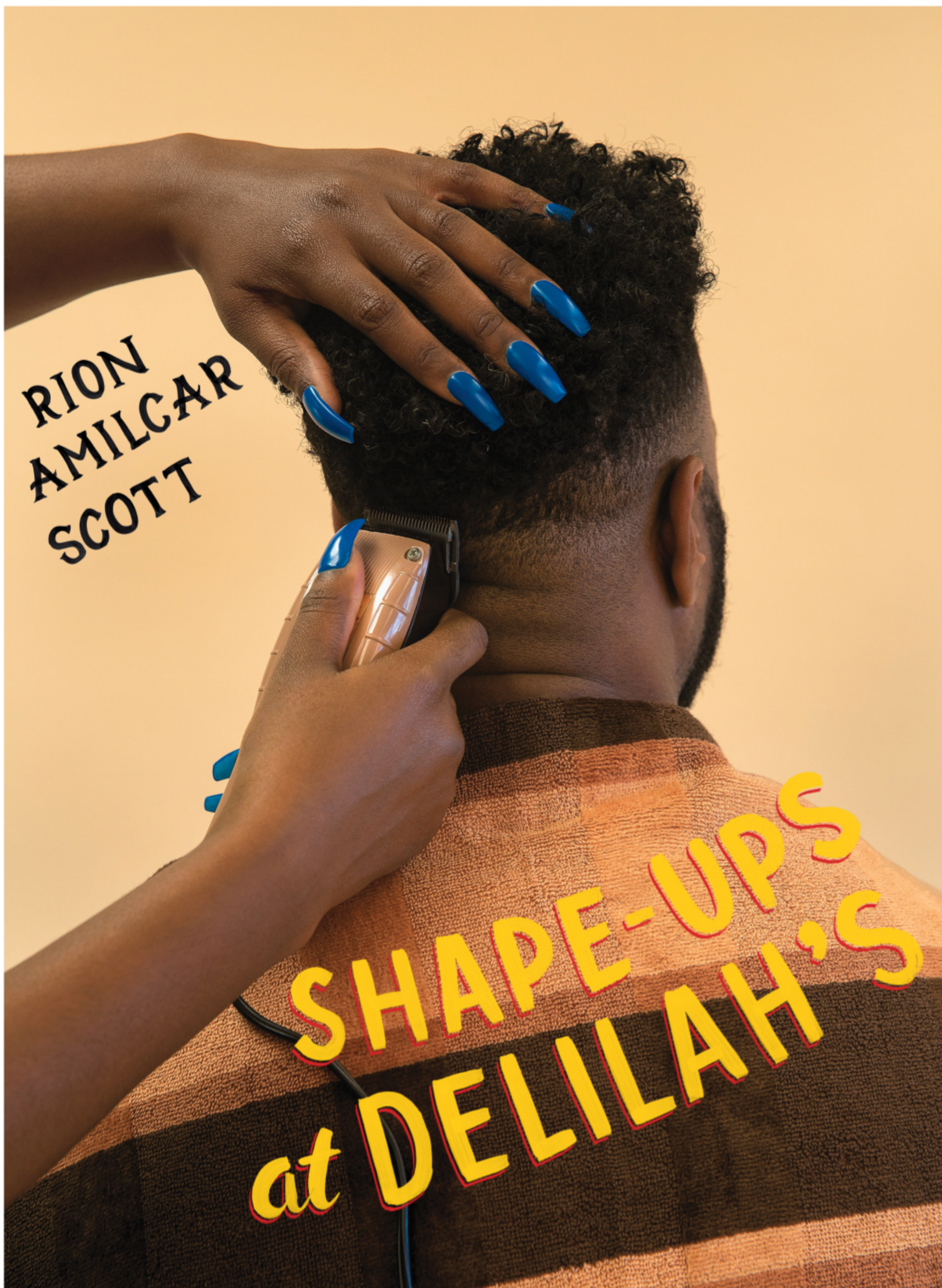
is a weird thing to be doing, but I think I am going to do it," he said. "See if I get lucky." He addressed the moon—"Oh, you're a pretty one. Strange, soft penumbra of your light"—then spoke to himself. "Now we see the impossible!" he said. "Hooray! Oh, crazy old man. Crazy, crazy Stupid Bastard Syndrome. Oh ho ho." He said the exposure would probably take two and a half hours. Mooney grunted (the dinner, her flu). Oblivious, Cooper said, "We may end up making it three."

He set up his tripod in the sand, flush with the concrete bumpers of the parking lot. He took out a negative and blew on it, to clean dust off and breathe life in. He hit the plunger, and the waiting in the dark began.

The parking lot was empty except for one other car, at the far end. When I walked past it to use the bathroom, I heard a man inside screaming, "*Whore! Whore!*" I speed-walked back to the group, and the car pulled around after me. The windows were down and cacophonous music blared. The driver, sweaty and amped, got out. Seeing Mooney and me, he yelled "Whores! Get off my beach." He approached Govan, and spat in his face. "How motherfucking stupid to try to shoot the fucking moon!" Cooper stood facing the tripod, protecting his baby.

The man returned to the car, backed up, then drove into Cooper's legs. Cooper growled and held his place. The man pulled backward a few feet and then hit him again. I tried calling 911, but the call dropped, and then, because my hands were shaking, so did the phone. The third time he approached, Cooper stood steadfast, body between the madman and his camera, eyes on the moon and the sea. Death or picture. He bellowed, "No-o-o!" Finally, the man drove away. When he was gone, Mooney pointed at the sky. "There's no moon now," she said wryly. A dark cloud had blotted it out.

When a sheriff's deputy showed up, twenty minutes later, he was incredulous. Why hadn't Cooper moved out of the guy's way? Cooper said, "He was trying to knock the camera over, and he had to kill me to do that." Mooney said, "You have to wonder who is more insane." Cooper's picture of Point Dume—"Unexpected Dangers," a variation on a theme—is black with a harsh white flare. ♦



RION
AMILCAR
SCOTT

SHAPE-UPS
at DELILAH'S

TYPOGRAPHY BY TAMARA SHOPSIN

The night after Jerome's brother turned up on a Southside sidewalk, bloodied and babbling in and out of consciousness, Tiny took Jerome's hand, sat him on a stool, wiped tears from his cheeks, draped a towel over his shoulders, and whispered, Relax, baby, you can't go to the hospital like that. Your brother'll wake up to that damn bird's nest on your head and fall right back into another coma. For the next two hours, Tiny sheared away Jerome's knotty beads until his head appeared smooth and black, with orderly hairs laid prone by her soft, smoothing hand. Back when they met, she'd told him she cut hair, said she was damn good, too. Jerome had nodded, smiled a bit, as if to say, *How cute*, and changed the subject. But now, the way his eyes danced in the mirror, the joy that broadened his face, it all said, *Where in the hell did a woman, a W-O-M-A-N, learn to cut like that?* She circled him as she did her work, looking at every angle of his head. She lathered up the front and went at it with a straight razor so that his hairline sat as crisp and sharp as the bevelled edge of the blade that cut it. Tiny imagined slicing her finger while sliding it across the front of his head; her imagined self then smeared the blood all over Jerome's face. After she finished and had swept the fine hairs from his shoulders and back, Jerome and Tiny collapsed onto the floor, spent, as if they had just made love for hours. On a bed of Jerome's shorn hair, they slept into the early morning.

A year to the day after Jerome's brother got out of the hospital, Jerome showed up at the only place he'd ever found comfort, on the doorstep of the woman he no longer loved and who, by agreement, no longer loved him. When Tiny opened the door that night she snorted and looked him up and down, this man she had been comfortable not seeing or speaking to for the past several months. Before she could complete her condescension, Jerome spoke: My mother is dead.

Tiny's face grew tender with sadness and disbelief. She opened her arms and called for Jerome to rest his head on the soft roundness of her chest. But he breezed by her, eyes on the floor, and

crumpled onto the couch. His face was so fallen she barely recognized him; sadness so chiselled into his cheeks and his brow that Tiny couldn't imagine anything softening the rock of his face, so she sat and said nothing. She thought of how much she had loved Jerome's mother—but that wasn't the truth, simply one of those things people tell themselves when someone dies. The woman, Tiny realized, was just a proxy; it wasn't for Jerome's mother that she had once held an unshakable love but for Jerome himself. She opened her arms wide again and pulled him tightly to her body. His head nestled itself between her breasts. It felt wrong, terribly, terribly wrong. Jerome trembled in her arms. He wept and sniffled. Tiny brushed her lips against his cheeks, and then she stopped.

I'm sorry, Jerome, she said. I want to end all that pain you're carrying, but I can't do what you want me to do.

Damn it, he said. My mother just died. Is it that hard for you to break out your clippers and make me look presentable? Is your heart that full of ice for me? I got a funeral to attend. God damn it, my little brother was doing better, now I can't find him and you not trying to help me. My brother is God knows where, doing God knows what drugs, in God knows how much pain, and you can't offer me this simple kindness?

No, Tiny whispered. No. I can't.

Still, she walked into her bathroom, whispering, No, as she grabbed the clippers, the razor, the rubbing alcohol, and a towel. She draped the towel over his shoulders and, in silence, she cut his uncombed locks. They both whimpered and sniffled a bit, avoiding each other's eyes. When the tears blurred Tiny's vision, she didn't stop; instead, she let the salty drops drip onto Jerome's head as she cut from memory, her smoothing hand rubbing the tears into his scalp.

It took her double the time of her most careful cuts, four whole painful hours. When she finished, Jerome thanked her and left, wiping his cheeks. I'm crying, he said, 'cause of my mom, but also 'cause this haircut is so god-dam beautiful.

Tiny nodded, hoping that Jerome would never return. After she shut the

door, she sat in the hallway sobbing into the night, until she felt as useless as piles and piles and piles of dead hair.

Tiny had started cutting hair almost on a whim. She had found her father's old clippers at the bottom of a dusty box beneath the sink in a seldom used bathroom in the basement. Her father used to zug crooked lines and potholes into his three sons' hair when they were young and not yet vain. Soon her older brothers no longer allowed the maiming, so someone buried the clippers under piles of stuff. When Tiny stumbled on the clippers, she realized she had grown tired of her perm. The time had come to shave it all off and let her natural hair grow long. She'd shape it and twist it, braid it and maybe lock it, as her mother had, but whenever her hair grew she felt the urge only to trim it into what everyone called "boy styles": a faded-in Mohawk, or just a fade, or a Caesar, or a temple taper. It changed every two weeks. Soon Tiny began to choose her lovers based partly on the shape of their heads, what styles she could carve on their domes. When their heads no longer intrigued her, she would lose interest. These days, her hair grew long enough to keep in a simple ponytail, and that was how she wore it. She no longer had any interest in her own hair, just other people's.

Nearly a year to the day after Tiny watched the folds at the back of Jerome's freshly cut head bob out her door for the last time, Tiny's Hair Technology opened up, on River Way. The Great Hair Crisis was raging on with no visible end. Every single barbering Cross Riverian man somehow losing his touch, the ability to deliver even a decent shape-up. Afros had abounded within the town's borders since that moment in '05 when all the clippers and cutting hands began shaving ragged patches into heads. It had been ten years of this wilderness, this dystopia. Men with beautiful haircuts became as mythical as the glowing wolves—lit up like earthbound Canis Majors—that are said to walk the Wildlands. Sonny Beaumont, Jr., once Cross River's greatest barber, now looked like a haggard old troll; he was about forty-five years old, and resembled a wrinkled set of intertwined wires covered in the thinnest, baggiest brown flesh. There would never again be any good days for

Sonny. Even decent haircuts stayed frozen in his past, and all he was capable of now were messes—carefully, carefully carved messes. His remaining customers patronized him only out of loyalty—poisoned nostalgia for the perfect cuts they'd once received—and false hope.

All those Cross Riverian Afros left one to ask, Who cursed Cross River? A shop opened up on the Northside—a decent shop—only for the owner to die of a heart attack mid-cut. The two remaining barbers opened shops of their own, and eventually murdered each other in a gunfight over customers and territory. Kimothy Beam closed his business, Mobile Cutting Unit, after his haircut van flipped during a police chase. He served three months and hung up his clippers for good when the authorities turned him loose. There was a long scroll of such mishaps: haircutting men, always men, driven from the business and, in some cases, from this world, through some misfortune. That's not going to be me, Tiny thought. The simple science of haircutting gets down into one's bones, into the soul of a person. She watched the peace settle over her customers after a good cut. They'd walk out into the world, where the noise would start again, but that moment at the end of a fresh cut—from the crack of the cape, as she

removed it from a patron's shoulders, to the door—was pure, pure magic.

Tiny no longer cut her lovers' hair for free. They'd have to pay like anyone else. After Jerome, she'd loved Cameron, and then Sherita passed through her life, and then Bo and Jo, and Katrina, and De'Andre and Ron. They all fell out of love with her when they realized she wouldn't use her magic on them. And that was fine with her; it was easy for Tiny to fall out of love with them, too. Jerome seemed so long ago. She hadn't even loved him best.

In the scheme of things Tiny's Hair Technology is just a footnote, but it would be even less than that had the shop not opened during such desperate times. A shop of lady barbers? Who had ever heard of such a thing? It was Tiny and Claudine and Mariah at first; later, a whole cast of lady barbers passed through. No one expected anything but another business popping up and then shuttering within a couple of months. There had been five in three years in that location. Folks in the neighborhood had taken to calling it the Wack Spot, a dingy cardboard box of a structure tucked away at the edge of an unimpressive side street. Behind the building stood knotted trees that stayed bare no matter the season.

The jutting branches resembled skeletal fingers, so the building appeared always on the verge of being snatched into an abyss. The Wack Spot was salted earth; no successful business could sprout from the ruined soil. There was the roti shop that never seemed to have any roti. Then there was Ice Screammers (later Sweet Creamers, and, as a last ditch, Sweet Creamers), a soft-serve spot run by a surly guy with an eyepatch. For the previous several months the Wack Spot had housed an adult bookstore that, much to the dismay of the surly ice-cream peddler, retained the final name of the soft-serve spot. It was common knowledge that only a witch spouting the most forbidden of spells could make the Wack Spot work, and Tiny figured she would be that witch, conjuring the pitchiest black magic from the back of her spell book.

When Jerome walked into the shop, shortly after it opened, he was still tall and fine, though scruffy—he appeared to be trying to grow a beard, but had managed only wild crabgrass patches along his cheeks.

Woman, cut my hair, he said with a smirk.

Tiny spun her chair and dashed herself onto it. She loved to hear the lumpy springs whine beneath the heft of her backside.

Hello, Jerome, she said. Can I help you with something?

All this formality now?

She didn't respond, tried to make her eyes blank as if she'd never seen him before. She couldn't hide everything, though; as she glanced at him she flashed a twinkle he took for a bit of residual love.

This is boring me, he said. I just want a cut. One of your perfect little tight cuts.

Well, I'm busy now. Jerome looked about the empty shop. Mariah, Tiny said, should be here in a few. Would you like me to make an appoint—

I don't want a cut from some-damn-body named Mariah! I want you. No one makes me look as good as you do.

Tiny turned her head, reached for a magazine, and pawed through the pages with the bored, languid movements of a cat. How's your brother? she said, finally.

Dude is doing great. Jerome smiled a little. Just great. It took Mom to die, but you should see him. Designer suit every day. This fucking little Dick Tracy hat. Looks fly on him. I'm proud of the



"I told you to listen to the climate science."

guy. He needs a haircut, though. If you do it good to me—the haircut, I mean—I’ll recommend you.

How’d you even hear I was over here?

You think niggas not gon’ talk about a new shop full of lady barbers during the Hair Crisis? Now, you gonna cut me, or what?

I’m sorry, Jerome, but I have a few things to do now—

I’m trying to give your failing business some work.

Like I said, Jerome, Mariah—

You’re just going to repeat your bullshit over and over, huh? I already know how you do. Thought you would have matured by now, Tiny. Wanna take the little-girl route? Gotcha. It’s fine.

Jerome jutted out his lips, did a quick head nod, and watched his ex-lover as if silence could break her. Don’t worry, bitch, he continued, sweeping a stack of magazines to the ground and walking out the door. You’ll get yours. See you real soon.

After weeks of barber-chair emptiness and a floor sadly clean of shorn hair, Tiny arrived one morning to find a line of men—many sporting unkempt dandruff bushes—waiting outside.

I thought you opened at ten, called the first desperately uncombed man in line to a chorus of grumbles. It’s nearly noon!

You guys been here since ten? Tiny asked. As she unlocked the door, the men dazed her with numbers. Six in the morning, one said, his voice trembling with a mixture of embarrassment and pride.

I been here since five-fifty-five, a man whose hair was cut into an asymmetrical field of black said. He held the hand of a boy who looked everything like a little Jackson 5 Michael Jackson except for the gopher hole shaved into the center of his head.

But . . . but, it’s a school day, Tiny said.

And? the father replied. I take him out of school when he got a doctor’s appointment, too.

When she finished with the first man, he strutted out to cries of admiration and even applause. His hair—once dangerously overgrown—now glittered. Tiny slapped the chair with the cape and cried, Next up!

A tall Eritrean man with curly hair and a tall—shorter than the Eritrean, but still tall—man with an oblong head

scrambled for the seat. As they tussled, a short dark-skinned man with salt-and-pepper hair and the twisted but unbecoming grin of a mischievous child strolled to the barber’s chair. A Ghanaian guy they called Doc pointed and laughed. Don’t forget to get the booster seat for my man, he said.

Quiet, you fool, the short man replied.

You folks rowdy, Tiny said with a smile. Don’t make me have to call the



police to keep things quiet in here. How’d y’all even hear about my shop?

The short man grinned and pointed to the tall Eritrean.

I heard from Doc, the tall Eritrean said.

That first guy you cut today, Doc said. That loudmouth. I heard from him.

Hmm, Tiny grunted. He said someone I never even heard of told him.

All I know, the short man said, is that the Great Hair Crisis is over!

That day, Tiny cut as if possessed, head after head, each cut better than the last. She ignored the non-stop talk, the chatter about sports and politics and the proper way to beat young children. After hours of clutching the vibrating clippers, her hand trembled. Men kept coming, though. Man after man. Each with a different story as to how he’d learned of Tiny’s shop. Mariah showed up midafternoon to pick up the slack. The first man she cut approached her chair hesitantly, but when she finished he looked in the mirror and turned his head this way and that.

She better than Tiny!

Watch it! Tiny called, not taking her eyes off the head she was trimming.

As Mariah’s customer walked out, a man with dark glasses and a shining silver mane stomped in. He clutched a thick Bible so old it looked as if the pages had begun to sprout hair. He held his book aloft and cried, *And Delilah said to Samson, Tell me, I pray thee,*

wherein thy great strength lieth, and wherewith thou mightest be bound to afflict thee. That’s from Judges 16:6. You men here giving away your strength, and for what? A nice haircut? Wrong is wrong is wrong is wrong in the eyes of the Lord.

Get out of my damn shop, Tiny called. Now! Get out!

Dale! the Bible man called to the customer in Tiny’s chair. I’m surprised at you. Real surprised. Your wife know you in here giving away your power?

Rev. Kimothy, Dale said. I . . . I . . . I’m tired of coming into your church looking like I just stumbled in off the street.

Kimothy? Tiny asked. Kimothy Beam who had the Mobile Cutting Unit?

I found God in prison, and you must be Delilah—that’s who you are.

I’ll be that, Rev.

Dale stood from the chair, half of his head shaved close, the other wild and unshorn. He held a fistful of twenties in his outstretched hand. I’m sorry, Tiny, he said. Real sorry.

That’s right, Rev. Kimothy said. Sorry as snake shit.

Naw, Tiny said. You sit your monkey ass down and keep your money. You ain’t telling no one Tiny did that to your head. Sit and you can rest your eternal soul in Hell, Rev. Kimothy shouted. Dale stood paralyzed, looking back and forth between his reverend and his barber, until some guys from the back of the shop made Dale’s decision easier, snatching Rev. Kimothy by his arms and tossing him onto the sidewalk as he struggled and screamed, Lady barbers! Whoever heard of such a thing? The Devil, that’s who! You gon’ burn! You gon’ burn! You gon’ burn!

Even as Dale sat back down in the barber’s chair, three Afroed men slipped quietly out the door.

Bunch of bitches, Mariah mumbled, staring into the sharp lines she had trimmed into her customer’s head. Bunch of little pussy-ass bitches.

This has been some day, Tiny muttered into Dale’s hair. Some day.

Late one night—say, nearly eleven—a man in a beautiful cream serge suit and a white panama hat came in just as Tiny finished her last head, a woman whose husband had recommended

the shop. Tiny's feet ached from standing, and she could feel her eyelids hanging heavy like curtains falling over her eyes. Ordinarily she would have turned the cream-suited man away, but he had pushed through a line of protesters out front. Rev. Kimothy and his new legion of followers had grown relentless. Fighting through those fools just to get a haircut, especially at this time of night, was a level of dedication that deserved a reward, Tiny thought. She glanced at him, didn't take him in much. She yawned.

Tiny's life was now love and hatred falling on her in equal measure. Accolades and applause, followed by bricks wrapped in Bible verses sailing through her window at night. The woman stood and stared into a handheld mirror, admiring her new fade from all angles. This shit right here fine, she said. Sonny trash now. From now on, you my barberess.

The Barberess. What a title. Tiny had thought about changing the shop's name. That old name had grown stale. Barberesses, maybe. Maybe. It would look beautiful out front in red and white, Tiny thought.

Wow, you sure are deep in thought, Tiny heard a voice say. She looked up and the woman and her fade had left. The man with the cream suit took her place in the chair. He held the panama hat in his lap. It took Tiny a half second to recognize the face. It seemed to have aged since she'd last seen it. Jerome's patchy beard had turned into a choppy bush, but it was definitely him, and this realization made Tiny close her eyes for what seemed to her like a long minute or two.

You thinking about what you gon' do with all this mess, huh? he said, pointing to the unkempt pikes of locks jutting from his scalp. I never, never, ever take off this hat for any reason nowadays, unless I'm home or something. Got a new attitude, a new style, Tine. The hat allows me to conduct business without looking like a vagrant, but it's havoc on me, I tell you. Havoc. This thing itches and flakes. My bush, I mean. These amateurs around here worse than they ever been. I'm ready to give anything a try, even a woman barber who ain't you. Jerome chuckled. Mariah here? I'll wait for Mariah if you want me to.

ODE ON WORDS FOR PARTIES (AMERICAN EDITION)

Why do we have so many words for parties, a slew of them once you start looking: shindig, bash, meet-and-greets, raves, blowouts, barbecues, and more tepid functions, receptions, luncheons, and do's of all kinds, though, let's face it, most people have no clue about how to throw a party, like the friend who was complaining because her husband wanted to have lots of food at the brunch they were planning, but she knew people didn't go to parties to eat, and Marsha and I had to break it to her that brunch was the combination of two meals, so her guests were expecting to eat double, and you can't believe the shock on her face, but her husband put out a great spread and everyone ate and talked, though we've all been to those parties with the bowl of dead chips and the onion dip that looks like cat vomit on the driveway, actually not that good, but my sister throws a fabulous party, because she's a great cook and has an army of wine bottles that never stops marching, and her garden is verdant, and she has a pool, which some people end up in at the end of the night. What would be the word for that kind of party—Vinocoolpool Party? And the other one might be a Kittydip Party. And guests! They can ruin a party, too. Think of the Music Nazis who make their way through the world with their one-upmanship, and your collection of Van Morrison and Jimi Hendrix is so uncool compared with the Mud Stumps and Echo Park, but only before they caved and became famous and were no longer cool. Then there are the couples who are glued at the hip, twins conjoined by church and state, or the bloviators, or the drunks who can turn a party into a Godzilla-stomps-Tokyo apocalypse, like the time the guy with the Ponderosa belt buckle slid chest first in a dance move and put a gouge three feet long in my hardwood floor, and I hadn't even invited him; he was my hairdresser's friend. That party was over. I wanted everyone out of my house. Or what about the people who live

I've seen worse on you, Tiny said, combing out the coils. The prongs of the pick made a *plink, plink, plink* music. You better give me a big tip, making me revisit your big head.

When Tiny had finished, she took a straight razor and cleaned up the sprigs from Jerome's cheeks and chin. She placed a warm, wet towel on his face. When she removed the towel, she nearly jumped back in fright. With his beard and sideburns trimmed, the smile Jerome flashed took on a sinister edge; he grinned as if he had already poisoned her and was just waiting for her to die.

How you work this magic, huh, babe?

There's that evil look again, Tiny re-

plied. Like you the Devil come to burn me right here where I stand.

No, Jerome said. No. Of course not. I haven't gotten a proper haircut in I don't know how long. And you did something divine up there, Ms. Tiny. I just want to know what you got that them fools lack.

Tiny sighed. Look at my eyes, she said. I'm tired. I'm half'sleep. I don't have the energy to talk to you anymore tonight.

I must be half'sleep, too, 'cause even when you was cutting me back in the day I thought it was a fluke. I thought it was 'cause you loved me. You clearly don't love me now. You hate me, as a matter of fact, but you still the best cut around. You cut other people's hair perfectly, too. You can't be in love with all

in the middle of nowhere, and you know that on the way home you'll end up in Hades or a ditch, if you're lucky, what would you call those? Suburban-Hell Parties? Hansel-and-Gretel-Lost-Weekend Parties? I often try to talk my husband into pulling over so we don't crash, but he reminds me that we're just setting ourselves up for the serial killers who roam lonesome highways looking for poets, and what would you call that concatenation of events? Zodiac-After-Party-Stab-Fest? Post-Bash-Head-Bash? You can see that when I'm not going to parties I'm watching too many true-crime shows, which make you mistrust your fellow human beings in the most basic way, and yet we continue to throw parties, which is an interesting choice of verbs, and English is full of them—throw a party, pitch a fit, pitch a tent, pitch a no-hitter, pitch in, pitch-black, and that's what the road is like now, and I'd give anything to be at that Kittydip Party two blocks from my house, with the Einstein Brains blaring on the sound system so I can't hear the guy talking about how he prepares petri dishes for his research or the woman who is describing an airline-ticket fiasco that wouldn't even be interesting if it had happened to me, but I guess that's life—a continuum between darkness and *mala folla*, a Spanish phrase that describes an indifference so profound it can't be bothered with scorn, but I remember one of the best parties ever was a wine tasting put together by an Australian father and son and by the end everyone was dancing to "Tutti Frutti" and screaming drunk and in love with the world and I danced with a roly-poly lawyer named Booter, whom I never saw again, and the hangover the next day was a small price to pay for that crazy mix of Little Richard and Cabernet, and there was food, yeah, but who remembers what.

—Barbara Hamby

them people. How a woman cut hair like this, huh?

Men barbers got some kind of secret? Tiny said. They grip the clippers with they dicks or something?

I guess not. He chuckled again and looked down, shifted in his seat. You know, I bought this fancy suit from my brother.

How he doing?

He good, he good. He off that stuff. Not owing no thugs no money no more. He don't be off disappearing no more. He good. I helped him apply to his new job selling these things at the haberdashery. Nigga had no experience selling anything—anything legal, that is. No experience being good at selling anything. None. I helped him 'cause I

couldn't lose nobody else after you and then my mother. I buy a lot of fancy suits with his discount. So do he. Getting high off your own supply is not a big deal when you selling suits, it turns out. But look, Tiny. My brother says I'm a fool for coming here.

Damn right.

You owe me, though.

How you figure?

You see that? Jerome pointed to the fools outside pacing with signs reading *Delilah! Repent!* and *Bitches Ain't Shit (at Cutting Hair)!* You don't think that mess organized itself, do you? You think Rev. Kimothy's dumb ass put all this together by himself?

You telling me you behind this mess?

She scrunched her face for a second and then straightened her brow. Jerome, I knew you could be a goddam bastard, but—

Hold on, Ms. Tiny, Jerome replied. It's not even like that. I was mad at you when you turned me away, but I was still proud, so I told every nigga I know about this shop. Thought Rev. Kimothy would be interested, since he used to cut hair. Figured he'd tell his congregation, and he did. It's just that he told them to meet him out front to protest this *new Delilah*. Got to admit, though, Rev. Kimothy's dumb ass is good for business.

Is he, though? I had a full shop before he started his nonsense. Now I got a hassle of men outside my door at all hours. Tiny sucked her teeth. She looked to the floor, shaking her head. Y'all men something else, boy. Something else. I don't respect Rev. Kimothy or any of them stupid-ass niggas outside, but I can't be mad at you for their dumb shit.

Yeah . . . He trailed off. But, look, you gotta tell me your secret.

Secret?

Every lady barber in here know how to do something extra special with her clippers.

You can't be this much of an idiot, Jerome. There is no secret. Secret is I get a good night's rest before I cut. Now I'm tired and don't know if I can work magic tomorrow. That's my secret. I got another secret: I'm going home. I'll come early to clean up before the day get started. I need my beauty rest.

Let me walk you, Tine.

No thanks. I'm done with you again.

Gotta be careful, sis. All those fools out here—

Tiny turned out the lights and pushed open the door. With the black of the sky as a backdrop, and the bright bluish-white glow of the street light hovering above like a low-hanging moon, the faces of the men who rushed Tiny appeared to her as hovering, disembodied fright masks. The shouting sounded like sharp, high winds battering her eardrums. Tiny tensed and clutched her hands to her chest before she stumbled and nearly fell backward. She caught a glimpse of one of the signs. It featured an obscene drawing and read *I Like My Hair Like I Like My Junk, Raw and Uncut*. The man who held the placard had a bush that sat



"I'm concerned about his memory. He keeps asking, 'Who's a good boy? Who's a good boy?'"

atop his head like a woollen black cube. His face looked grotesque and plastic. Jerome shoved the forehead of the block-headed man and snatched at Tiny's arm. He pushed his way through the protesters, who had suddenly quieted, offering no resistance, giving Tiny and her guardian space to escape into night's darkness.

When they got to her house, Tiny looked up into her protector's eyes and examined his freshly shaved face. Stray hairs dotted his cheeks and his forehead like black snowflakes. She looked away.

That was quite impressive, she said.

Well, he replied. I told you to let me walk you. You gon' to let me walk you tomorrow?

Jerome's face hovered over hers, a different sort of fright mask, fearful instead of terrifying. This time she didn't turn away. Maybe, she said.

Look, Ms. Tiny, you owe me.

I hope this isn't your corny way of trying to get a kiss or something, 'cause we too old to be speaking in riddles.

You can kiss me if you want, Jerome said. I'll take that. But what I really want is the secret. How y'all lady barbers cut like that, huh?

Tiny kissed his cheek. That's not so wrong, is it? she asked herself.

A lady barber's got to keep her se-

crets, she told him. What if I give away my secret and the result is you can't get no more good cuts, huh?

I'll take the chance.

There is no secret, 'Rome—how's that for a secret? She watched his eyes as they began dimming in sadness. I cut with love. That's it. Tiny said this because she assumed that was what Jerome wanted to hear. His eyes grew sadder still; they rimmed with an unbearable melancholy that she had seen before. Tiny looked down. She wanted it to stop.

Lye, she said. It's lye. Red Devil Lye. That's the secret. Makes the hair manageable. Mix in some eggs and potatoes and you got good old-fashioned conk juice. That's the shit I be spraying on your head. Makes anyone with a little skill cut with magic. Even a lady barber.

I knew I felt my head burn a little, Jerome said. I knew it. I'ma keep this secret close to my heart, Tine. Jerome blathered with joy as Tiny walked slowly into her house.

Tiny woke one morning with the urge, just a throbbing and unrelenting urge, to change the name of the barbershop to Delilah's. She hired a woman to paint a new sign, and the woman worked at it all day. Tiny hung it after the last customer left. When Je-

rome met her at the shop that night he took a look at the sign and said, You're such a troublemaker. This was after Claudine had left for good, unable to handle the crowds, the hatred, the men who shouted vile threats and called her bitch, as if it were the name her mother had given her. Tiny understood. She welcomed a rotating cast of women, each a better barber than the previous one. The new woman would claim Claudine's chair and then disappear after a week or so, afraid of the angry men outside. And with "Delilah's" on the front of the window, no one called her Tiny anymore. Tiny became D. As the new name took hold, she smiled secretly, especially when Mariah bought her a black apron emblazoned with a bright-red "D."

Each morning brought a new influx of men. A madness of men. So many men. Since there were more men than seats, the men gladly stood. Men bursting out of the little shop, sometimes pouring onto the sidewalk. Everywhere Tiny turned she saw men. Men who had previously protested, once yelling, now quiet as sheep. Sheep-men walking upright to be shorn. These men said things like *Real men, Tiny, real men can admit when they wrong*. But, really, it was that they'd observed other men, their friends who were now shining, beautiful men because of their perfectly cut heads. Tiny and Mariah and whoever took the third chair couldn't cut fast enough to keep up with all those men.

Tiny could scarcely understand the uptick, until one day Dale burst into the shop, his eyes wild, pupils dilated, his head covered in a cap of soft black silk.

Them nig—uh, dudes up the hill done gone crazy!

Say, bruh, a man from the back called. I think you got on your wife's bonnet.

Yeah, another voice called. This nigga wearing hair underwear!

You clowns laugh, Dale said. Did you know that the idiots up the hill started putting lye in people's hair without any goddam warning? Pardon my language, but that shi—stuff burned so bad I ran to the damn—pardon me—Cross River and stuck my head right in!

Dale uncovered his head; the once coarse grains of his hair were now straight and wavy. The nig—guy, the darn barber, Sonny, said it makes the

hair easier to cut. D, you ever hear anything so stupid?

Mariah and Tiny exchanged glances as Dale took a seat to wait.

Jerome arrived that night just as the shop was closing. Unfallen tears rested in the corners of his eyes. The shop sat empty except for Tiny and Mariah. When he walked through the door, Tiny turned and pretended to straighten the hair products on the table behind her chair.

Why is there no trust between us? he said. After all I did for you? All our walks.

Mariah swept, trying to look away from Jerome's sad, dim eyes while suppressing a smile.

Go somewhere, Tiny said. You fools believe anything.

Yeah, Mariah said. Red Devil Lye? Everyone knows we lick our razors just before every cut.

Mariah! Tiny called.

Don't mind me, Mariah said. I'm half 'sleep.

Look, Jerome, Tiny said. I don't want you in my shop no more. At all. Go. You're not different. You're not welcome. You can't seem to grow up. You're the same goddam fool I didn't want to be with anymore.

But our walks—

You can get a head start. Go on.

Jerome didn't argue or fight; he simply backed out of the shop, slowly, with a strange feline walk.

Late in the afternoon the next day, a man with a tuft of spongy and unruly hair sat in Mariah's seat and called for his hair to be cut into a high-top fade.

You want it tall, right? Mariah asked.

Yeah. But please don't do nothing weird. I almost had to knock Sonny out this morning. I caught the nigga licking his clippers like some kind of goddam animal.

Back when they were together, Jerome never found out how she'd gained the name Tiny, but another man did, over a perfect haircut one afternoon while Jerome was elsewhere looking the other way. The illicit haircut was something else Jerome never found out about, and so that particular betrayal was not

even why they broke up. And why should it matter that she cut another man's hair, huh? Why does a haircut become an intimacy simply because Tiny's a woman? Such absurdity. But then that whispered story. Surely that was an intimacy. Or perhaps she spoke so freely, so easily, because she knew she'd never see this man again. This man who smiled at her when she passed him at the bus stop. She couldn't bear his smile, because the animal atop his head made him look defective. Every man around her during the Great Hair Crisis had become a ruined sculpture. She felt like a lapsed superhero, all that power she shrank from wielding, all that responsibility she shirked day after blessed day. Let me cut your hair, she said to the man, as an act of charity. Shortly after that, she cut another man. And another man. They grew as indistinguishable as strands of hair in her memory. One man told the next about Tiny. And she accepted them into her house, warning them all that she'd cut them only once. One time and no more—that way, she could control the flow of hair-blighted men and she could tell herself that by seeing these men only once she wasn't betraying Jerome.

She cut their hair and never saw them again, and usually during the shape-up she'd whisper the source of her name and they'd all miss the point and ask the source of her power.

One man, though, managed to slip in a second time. He was a small man



with a reddish Afro. He hunched as he walked and scrunched himself into a ball as he sat. His voice sounded like a high-pitched strain, and both times his hair had grown wild and unkempt. Balls of white lint coiled into his curls. Tiny had to wash his hair to soften it in order to move the clippers through his knots. As he bent over the sink in the back of Tiny's basement with the water and lather dripping through his naps, she told him, as she usually told the men,

about her name. When I was small, she said, I was tiny. She chuckled, as she always did. The youngest and the tiniest one in the family. But that's not why they call me Tiny. I been a big girl ever since, like, fourteen, but it's like no one could see that. When someone felt disrespected, they'd say something like, *You must think you talking to Abigail or some shit?* That's me, Abigail. Abby. Disrespecting me was nothing to them, I guess. Like disrespecting a bug or something. Tiny. Inconsequential. Eventually, I told folks to stop calling me Abigail, Abby, all that shit—

Before Tiny could finish, the man looked up at her with glowing eyes and finished for her: *Told 'em to call me Tiny and no one ever asked why.* It's a beautiful story. You told me last time. He laughed as if he had carved out some sort of victory.

Last time? She looked at his head and suddenly remembered. Uh-uh. I told you my rule then, I told you when you came in the door today. One-time-only deal. Dry your head, and then you gotta go.

You can't do that to me, Abigail. He smiled wider. You can't do that to Cross River. Too many heads in crisis. Uh-uh, you gon' cut this. He snatched at her wrist. Come on, Abby. Just give me a little trim. He chuckled a mean, mean little chuckle. Make magic.

The small man let go of Tiny's wrist and sat with his back to her. Just a Caesar today, he said, so confident he was that Tiny would cut his hair with little fuss. And he was right. It was easier to start shearing his nappy kinks than to keep arguing. Her hand shook as she trimmed, though. She rushed the tricky parts she would usually have moved through with precision and care. The sooner she finished, the sooner she'd never have to see him again. Tiny cut with disgust, watching the stubborn dirt and dandruff as if they had left indelible splotches on her, forever staining her soul.

When the small man stood and looked into the mirror, he said nothing at first, and then he balled his fists.

What is this trash? he screamed. You did this on . . . You did this 'cause I wouldn't leave!

No, I—

Of course you did. This is worse than one of Sonny's cuts.

You want your money back? Tiny

tried to joke, but that seemed to make the small man even more angry. It's the curse, Tiny said, still trembling in fear. The Hair Crisis, she said, it comes for every barber in Cross River eventua—

You think I'm a fool, bitch? The man snatched at Tiny's shoulders. All I wanted was a good haircut for once. Is that too . . . Tell me your secret, Abby. How come the Crisis ain't come for you, huh?

I don't have a secret, she said, showing the man. Please leave.

The small man raised his right fist as if about to throw a punch. The gold bracelet on his wrist, the gold chain around his neck, they both jangled. Tiny raised her arms and flinched to curl away from the blow, but the small man lowered his fist with a snort and a chuckle. He tossed the towel that lay around his neck before stomping up the stairs and out of Tiny's house.

The next day, when Jerome came for his weekly cut, Tiny's hand trembled as if still trimming the small man's red bush. She could feel the heaviness of his fingers at her shoulders and her wrist.

What in the fuck is this? Jerome said, peering into the mirror.

I don't know what's wrong, Tiny lied. It's the curse.

For the rest of the week, Jerome remained sullen, only frowning at Tiny or grumbling her way. She wanted to tell him what had happened, but that would be a long story, beginning with the first man she cut behind his back.

Or perhaps it would begin with her name and how her family made it into a curse, how they made her into a small, tiny thing. She imagined him laughing at her, sneering and calling her Abigail the next time she accidentally cut jagged marks into his head. Two, three weeks of bad haircuts made Jerome into a different man. If there was a fight to be picked, he picked it like some naps.

One day after a particularly bad haircut, Jerome fingered the slanted frontier that was now his hairline as they ate Chinese food. Tiny's clippers had pushed it back so much that Jerome's forehead now looked like an eroding coastline. Tiny asked Jerome to pass her a packet of soy sauce.

Get it your damn self, Jerome barked, standing sharply from his seat. Got me

out here looking like George Jefferson. I was the dude with the good haircuts! Who the fuck am I now?

He stomped out the door, hunched and scarred like the small man. Tiny watched his disappearing form with sad eyes, vowing to never cut another man's head. Tiny held firm to her promise no matter how many men knocked and cried and pleaded. She remained firm until that night Jerome returned to her doorstep several months later with tears in his eyes.

After that, she vowed to never again give up her power. To never again freely give away something as precious as a haircut.

Tiny swept the hair of her last couple of customers into woolly piles late one night. She rubbed her clippers, razors, and combs with alcohol even as she felt her eyelids forcing themselves shut. She enjoyed the solitude, though she stumbled through the shop with her eyelids low, sleep trying to ambush her. The one thing she couldn't allow herself was a seat. To sit down would be to fall asleep and make herself vulnerable to an opportunist, one of Rev. Kimothy's legion out there, always looking to catch her slipping so they could do her harm. Tiny grasped the broom again and went at some hair clumps she'd missed, and as she swept she heard the flat slap of an open palm against the window. Without looking up she waved the interloper away. The noise persisted. She slowly turned to the entranceway. Jerome stood at the window waving. A sharp pang of irritation ran through Tiny, but also relief. At least it wasn't another head to cut. At least it wasn't a protester. Any annoyance Jerome was about to cause would not end in her destruction. When she opened the door she noticed he wore that same serge suit. The same panama hat. Dirt stains now ringed the hat's brim and the jacket's wrists.

D! he exclaimed, stretching his arms out as if preparing to strangle her. D! Why is there no trust between us?

Look at my eyes, Tiny said. I'm half 'sleep.

Please, please, please, please, D, please tell me your secret.

Tiny sighed. She just wanted to sleep. This man in front of her looked so an-

guished that it sent sharp pains shooting through her joints.

It's piss. She dashed these words off halfheartedly, surprising even herself with the sting of her sarcasm.

Piss? You mean you pee on your clippers?

No, silly. That would be ridiculous. I soak all my clippers, my combs, everything I have . . . I leave them all to soak overnight in jars of piss.

Really? True this time?

Yep. That's my secret.

Yes, Jerome said. That makes so much more sense than all that other stuff you told me.

Does it? Tiny said, and then she sighed again. Of course it does.

Tiny looked at Jerome with sad, tired eyes. She forced a smile onto her lips. She wanted to say, *No, fool, what do you take me for?* But to point out his gullibility now would be a true act of cruelty. If only Jerome knew how to read the crooked tilt of her lips. Her face was a book he could never truly comprehend. These men, she realized, would believe anything. They preached logic and reason but followed only magic. Things would always be like this. Always and forever. As long as she lived and cut hair. Tiny felt more exhausted than she had ever felt before, like weights had attached themselves to her eyelids, her limbs, her neck, everywhere. After Jerome left, she locked the door and walked through the protest and into darkest night, never to be seen in Cross River again.

It was better this way. Perhaps Tiny sensed the horrors that hovered on the horizon. Sonny sitting alone every day in an empty shop surrounded by endless jars of his own piss. Soon would come the hair cults. The Cult of the Licked Razor. The Cult of Red Devil Lye. The Cult of Blood. The Cult of Piss.

But then there were also the Children of Delilah, the barbers, the barberesses, sprouting all over town like new growth and shining like the brightest points of light, like the finest, most luxurious hair, smoothed with a slick sheen of grease, growing faster than any havoc the Hair Crisis could cause, faster than any curse could possibly curse. ♦

THE WRITER'S VOICE PODCAST

Rion Amilcar Scott reads "Shape-ups at Delilah's."

THE CRITICS



THE CURRENT CINEMA

NO LAUGHING MATTER

“Joker.”

BY ANTHONY LANE

At the beginning of “Joker,” Arthur Fleck (Joaquin Phoenix), seated in front of a mirror, hooks a finger into each corner of his mouth, and pulls. Up, then down: a grin, a grimace. We are meant to think of the masks, comic and tragic, that were worn by the actors in ancient Greek drama. Over the next couple of hours, those two moods will

be welded together, until we can’t tell the light from the dark.

Arthur is a clown, and a would-be comic, but he’s really not funny at all. So badly does he bomb at a comedy club that footage of his set is replayed on television. That’s the joke. He lives in Gotham City, which, as everybody knows, equals New York City minus the

peace and the pastoral bliss. The year, by my reckoning, is 1981, since “Blow Out” and “Zorro: The Gay Blade” are advertised on cinema marquees. Other highlights include a garbage strike. Arthur works for a clown agency, and one of his jobs is to stand on the street in a red nose and a green wig, holding a promotional sign for a local store. When

Following Jack Nicholson and Heath Ledger, Joaquin Phoenix wears the supervillain’s greasepaint, in Todd Phillips’s film.

some kids grab the sign, he gives chase, his enormous shoes clomping on the sidewalk. Another clown lends him a gun, for safety's sake, but it drops out of Arthur's costume, clattering to the floor, while he's entertaining children in a hospital ward and singing "If You're Happy and You Know It." A tough gig for Arthur, who says, "I haven't been happy one minute of my entire fucking life."

And there you have it. "Joker" is a miserabilist manifesto. It's directed by Todd Phillips, who co-wrote it with Scott Silver, and whose previous films, from "Road Trip" (2000) and "Old School" (2003) to the "Hangover" triptych, have delighted in the imperishable idiocy of the American male, and in his stubborn plans to dodge the draft of adulthood. Arthur Fleck, you might say, represents a nasty new twist on this theme. He still shares an apartment with his aging mother, Penny (Frances Conroy); their relationship is close but tense—he washes her hair while she takes a bath—and he must search for confidants elsewhere. As well as befriending, or imagining that he has befriended, a single mother (Zazie Beetz) who lives in his building, he meets with a social worker (Sharon Washington), appointed by the city, who monitors his medication. We learn from her that Arthur has been institutionalized in the past, and he carries a card that he shows to people when they flinch away from him. It reads "Forgive my laughter: I have a condition."

But what condition? Could it be pseudobulbar affect, which is neurological in origin and gives rise to uncontained laughing and crying? Under stress, Arthur certainly breaks into a hyena's cackle, which stops as abruptly as it starts; he also weeps, and, in closeup, we follow the tracks of the tears on his clown's white-painted face. (I haven't seen such artful drips since 1971, when Dirk Bogarde's hair dye melted, along with his soul, at the end of "Death in Venice.") The film, however, takes no serious interest in *what* might be wrong with Arthur. It merely invites us to watch his wrongness grow out of control and swell into violence, and proposes a vague connection between that private swelling and a wider social malady. "Is it just me, or is it getting crazier out there?" he asks. Guess what: it's both!

"Joker" is not plotted so much as crammed with mangy incidents. Like animals, they come in two by two. By a charming coincidence, for example, two major scenes take place in public toilets. There are also two extended subway sequences: one in which Arthur uses his gun for the first time, and another in which, pursued by police, he ducks in and out of the carriages, as if in homage to "The French Connection" (1971). Most important of all, we get two father figures. One is Murray Franklin (Robert De Niro), the host of a TV talk show, under whose wing Arthur dreams of finding shelter and approval. The other is Thomas Wayne (Brett Cullen), a wealthy brute who is running for mayor of Gotham. (He has a young son named Bruce. Get it?) Thirty years ago, Penny Fleck worked for him, and Arthur hopes to exploit that distant link, though Wayne has nothing but scorn for the Flecks of this fragmented world. "Those of us who have made something of our lives will always look at those who haven't," he declares, "and see nothing but clowns."

Trailing clouds of controversy, "Joker" descends upon us. The online discussion has mounted from the rampant to the manic, undeterred, or perhaps exacerbated, by the fact that nobody, apart from critics and festivalgoers, has actually seen the movie. (Emotions run high when people are low on facts.) In one corner are those who crave a masterpiece: a film that will unearth a new psychic intensity in the domain of the comic book, ideal for our distended times. In the opposite corner are those who fear that Phillips and Phoenix may give license to all the lonely people out there—in particular, to any messed-up white guys who feel wretchedly uncherished and would welcome a tutorial in the art of lashing out.

What is agreed upon, among those who *have* seen "Joker," is the prowess with which Phoenix holds it all together. His face may get the greasepaint, but it's his whole body, coiled upon itself like a spring of flesh, from which the movie's energy is released. He's so thin that, when he strips to the waist and bends, his spine and shoulder blades jut out from the skin; is he a fallen angel, with his wings chopped off, or a skeleton-

in-waiting, halfway to the grave? Francis Bacon, I think, would have stared at Arthur with a hungry eye.

The trouble is that Phillips, too, is in thrall to his hero, unable to avert his gaze, or his camera, from the lurid spectacle. The same was true, you could argue, of earlier Jokers—Jack Nicholson, in "Batman" (1989), or Heath Ledger, in "The Dark Knight" (2008), whose features cracked in tandem with his mind. But those were supporting roles, whereas Arthur is the main attraction. No longer is he forced to be part of the scenery; he *is* the scenery, and such is the strenuous effort of Phoenix's performance that it becomes exhausting to behold. Get a load of me, he seems to say, and the load is almost too much to bear. Now and then, other actors, less worked up, pass across the stage: Bill Camp as a detective, for example, or Brian Tyree Henry as a hospital clerk, both wonderfully weary, like visitors from Planet Normal. I must admit, they come as a relief.

Here's the deal. "Joker" is not a great leap forward, or a deep dive into our collective unconscious, let alone a work of art. It's a product. All the pre-launch rumblings, the rants and the raves, testify to a cunning provocation, and, if we yield to it, we're not joining a debate; we're offering our services, unpaid, to the marketing department at Warner Bros. When Dalí and Buñuel made "L'Âge d'Or" (1930), they wanted to start a riot, and they succeeded, but "Joker" yearns for little more than a hundred op-ed pieces and a firestorm of tweets. With ticket sales, naturally, to match.

The evidence for this daring scheme is everywhere you look, in Phillips's film, and everywhere you listen. Nicholson's Joker may have danced and pranced to the sound of Prince's "Partyman," but Phoenix gyrates, on a steep flight of steps, to "Rock 'n' Roll Part 2," a 1972 hit by Gary Glitter. It used to be popular with sports teams, rousing the crowds at N.F.L. and N.H.L. games, before Glitter was convicted, in 1999, of possessing child pornography, and, seven years later, of sexually abusing minors, in Vietnam. Since then, understandably, the song has tumbled out of favor. Do you believe that the decision to revive it, for "Joker," is anything but a studied choice, nicely crafted to

offend? Please. I happen to dislike the film as heartily as anything I've seen in the past decade, but I realize, equally, that to vent any inordinate wrath toward it is to fall straight into its trap, for outrage merely proves that our attention has been snagged. Just ask the President of the United States.

"Joker" has its own political poise. Lest it be accused of right-wing inflammation, allowance is made for issues more congenial to the left. Cuts to welfare, we are told, will soon block Arthur's access to therapy and medication, and the movie's plea for the downtrodden to be given their rightful say harks back to Frank Capra and Chaplin. In one bizarre scene, the nabobs of Gotham, in tuxedos and gowns, are even treated to a special screening of "Modern Times." Why should Phillips nod to a film of 1936, if not to stake his claim as a legate? No less brazen are the references to Scorsese, and to his probing of urban paranoia—in "Taxi Driver" (1976) and again in "The King of Comedy" (1982), where De Niro played a reckless proto-Arthur, fixated on a talk-show host.

"Joker" peaks in chaos and conflagration, ignited by Arthur's crimes. Earlier, he slew three fellows in suits on the grimy subway: a fell deed that was taken by the have-nots as a call to arms against the haves. Now the city swarms with a mob of the frustrated, all sporting Joker masks and wreaking indiscriminate revenge. Arthur smiles indulgently upon them, like a wolf surveying its pups, then climbs onto the hood of a smashed vehicle and glories in the applause. (You can sense the movie congratulating itself.) We're not far from the flaming climax of "White Heat" (1949)—another Warner Bros. shocker, with James Cagney as, yes, a mother-stricken murderer named Arthur, beset by psychiatric problems and laughing his way to perdition. Back then, the *Times* was dismayed: "Let us soberly warn that 'White Heat' is also a cruelly vicious film and that its impact upon the emotions of the unstable or impressionable is incalculable." No such worries for Phillips's movie; its impact is solemnly calculated to the final inch. I was expecting something called "Joker" to be fun. More fool me. ♦

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Richard Brody blogs about movies.

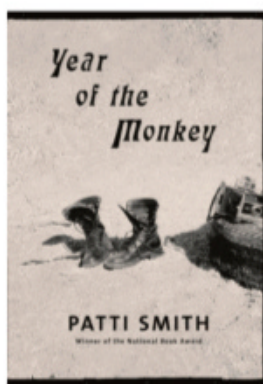
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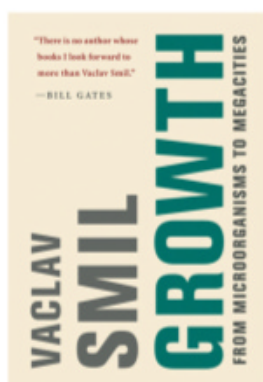
The Dutch House, by Ann Patchett (*Harper*). This warm intergenerational saga transplants fairy-tale tropes into a mid-century mid-Atlantic setting. The house of the title, in the Philadelphia suburbs, is the childhood home of Maeve and Danny, who are banished from it by a spiteful stepmother, after their mother leaves them and their father dies. Former members of the house's domestic staff watch over them like fairy godmothers, but the siblings must depend on each other for support through angsty college years, the vicissitudes of adulthood, and the sudden reappearance of their mother, after more than thirty years. Through it all, the house exerts an almost magical pull, drawing the siblings back to contemplate its influence; it is, Danny says, "the hero of every story, our lost and beloved country."



A Pure Heart, by Rajia Hassib (*Viking*). Set in the aftermath of Egypt's Tahrir uprising, this novel follows two sisters as they navigate complicated geopolitics and their own differences. Fayrouz, nicknamed Rose, emigrated to the United States after marrying an American journalist, and is now a Ph.D. student in Egyptology. By contrast, her younger sister, Gameela, is "the only covered woman in the entire family, rebellious in her conservatism." Rose cannot understand Gameela's devotion; Gameela cannot understand how Rose could leave Egypt, and becomes ever more passionate about helping her country as the revolution's promise dwindles. After Gameela dies, in a suicide bombing, Rose struggles to unearth the secrets of a sister she never truly knew, who emerges as a fascinating enigma, full of contradictions.



Year of the Monkey, by Patti Smith (*Knopf*). In this lucid dream of a memoir, the punk icon and poet chronicles the span from New Year's Day, 2016, to early 2017. A friend dies; Trump's Inauguration approaches on a cloud of dread; Smith's birthday arrives, and she wryly laments, "Seventy. Merely a number but one indicating the passing of a significant percentage of the allotted sand in an egg timer, with oneself the darn egg." Dreaming and waking life converge, with whimsical and ominous results: thousands of empty candy-bar wrappers, "like feathers after a molt," stoke speculation about cults and conspiracies. Smith sees mystical connections everywhere—and, floating along on the drifts of her words, the reader does, too.



Growth, by Vaclav Smil (*M.I.T. Press*). This monumental study explores how things grow not only in the world of biology but also in human systems—economies, technologies, cities—and posits a synergistic relationship between the two realms. Smil questions whether our biosphere is capable of supporting even the growth that economists, data scientists, and techno-optimists regard as "sustainable," and argues that such experts fail to consider the "dynamic link" between nature and civilization in their calculations. Smil is no catastrophist, but his conclusions—that infinite growth on a finite planet is impossible, and that much depends on curtailing or reversing certain trends—are no less chilling for their sobriety.

NOTES ON A SCANDAL

A Norwegian novel divided a family and captivated a country.

BY LAUREN COLLINS



Remember how divisive reality television was, before it became just television? In Norway, an intense debate is taking place about *virkelighetslitteratur*, or “reality literature,” a putatively fictional strain of writing that draws on identifiable characters and events. Critics of reality television complained that it was overproduced; the argument against reality literature is that it is insufficiently artificial, exposing and misrepresenting people who never consented to be a part of it. The country’s most flagrant transgressor of the code of plausible disclaimability is Vigdis Hjorth, whose prickly, persuasive novel “Will and Testament” came out in Nor-

way in 2016, and has just been published in English, by Verso. Earlier this month, the translation, by Charlotte Barslund, was long-listed for the National Book Award for Translated Literature.

“Will and Testament” was a sensation in Norway, a best-seller and the winner of the Norwegian Critics Prize. Already one of Norway’s preëminent authors, Hjorth, who has written more than twenty novels, became a media fixation, having marshalled her prodigious gifts to suggest—or to lead people to believe that she had suggested—that her father had raped her when she was five years old. Hjorth’s narrator’s name is Bergljot, not Vigdis, and although she matches

up with the author in conspicuous ways, Hjorth has said that the novel is not autobiographical. Still, she has become the biggest Scandinavian literary story of the past twenty years, except for maybe Karl Ove Knausgaard, with whose work hers has been compared, sometimes superficially. Like Knausgaard, Hjorth is writing against repression, against the taboo on telling things as they really are. But he urges us to look at dead bodies; she forces us to regard bleeding souls.

Bergljot’s trauma lives as a secret that she keeps from herself. She grows up, marries a “nice, decent man,” produces three children, and plugs away at a dissertation on modern German drama while trying to write a one-act play. Eventually, she leaves her husband; her parents aren’t thrilled, but they chip in to keep her afloat. When Bergljot’s father helps renovate her bathroom, she worries about him having a key to her new house, but she doesn’t dare ask Dad—that’s what she calls him—to give it back. The reader isn’t sure what’s stopping her, and Bergljot probably isn’t, either. She exists in a vague state, batting away doubt and fear like pop-up ads from her psyche. Then, one Sunday morning, her pain hits its target. She can’t move, talk, stand. She suffers several more attacks before discovering their source: “I went to the Mac and read my text, and there it was, in between all the other words, and I had a shock, I was floored, and at one fell swoop I turned into someone else, forever changed into another by this moment of truth.” It isn’t until much later in the book that Bergljot reveals what, exactly, those words are: “He touched me like a doctor, he touched me like a father.” She has effectively written a diary that she never meant to read.

The main action of “Will and Testament” takes place decades after this episode. Now a drama critic, Bergljot has broken with her parents, who have “entered into a conspiracy to save their reputation,” and with her two younger sisters, Astrid and Åsa, who believe that her memories of abuse have been cooked up in psychoanalysis. Within the clan, Bergljot has undergone a sort of downward mobility, becoming “an outcast who threatened the family honour.” An older brother, Bård, has also absented himself from the scene, citing paternal neglect. The siblings bring to mind a broken

Vigdis Hjorth’s account of abuse ignited debate over the ethics of “reality literature.”

chain of paper dolls, one pair displayed on the refrigerator door and the other stuffed in the back of a drawer. "If you didn't know your parents had two other children, you'd think it was a normal happy family," Bergljot's grown son remarks, after an evening at his grandparents' house. (They are the kind of people who throw birthday parties for adults.) Monstrous men don't create art as often as they do fractured families.

The filial conflict flares up again when Bergljot's father announces his intention to split his estate equally among his four children, with the exception of two cherished vacation cabins, which will go to the favored sisters. Bård and Bergljot raise hell—knowing they are being bought off, they refuse to offer themselves on the cheap. Then Dad dies, leaving no clear heir to the most valuable asset of all: control of the family story.

For years, the family has functioned as a closed circuit. Bergljot would fire off an accusation, and it would bounce from relative to relative, then return to her in unchanged form. There was nowhere for it to go, no way to alter its energy. The book's claustrophobic atmosphere is exacerbated by the use of letters, e-mails, and text messages—sometimes directly quoted, sometimes paraphrased, occasionally mediated beyond all sense. In sharing them, Bergljot is doing the same thing we're doing when we send a friend a screenshot: trying to break open a drama by drawing a new person into it. "Will and Testament" is a gut-wrenching novel, but it is also a gossipy one, which begs to be read in an old-fashioned, judgmental manner. Right and wrong, good and bad, are applicable modes of assessment here. The reader, furnished with primary documents, has the opportunity to take a side. In fact, to be a moral person in the zero-sum world of this novel, she must.

Throughout "Will and Testament," the plot is interrupted by short, cerebral chapters in which Bergljot meditates on life in the abstract, as opposed to reality in its particulars. She quotes the philosopher Arne Johan Vetlesen's work on truth-and-reconciliation processes and ruminates on the Balkan crisis—cases through which she is seeking truth, her own alongside the universal. Bergljot's

friends are studies in solidarity, too. They serve as a gallery of character witnesses, attesting to her ability to maintain long-term bonds of love.

She cleaves so quickly and so closely to one equally troubled acquaintance, Klara, that the reader's disastrous-friend antennae bristle in anticipation. Klara, seemingly a classic pot-stirrer, insists that Bergljot stop seeing her family. Yet Klara turns out to be a canny, patient tactician for her friend's best interests. After Bergljot's father's death, she counsels, "Now it's three against two and that's new, they weren't prepared for that but they're still the majority, and they have each other." Whether Klara is in affirming mode or egging-on mode, her most important attribute is that she is steadfast in her allegiance to Bergljot, adding one more number to her side of the field.

Bergljot is settling scores with herself as much as with anybody else. She is striving, in the Kierkegaardian tradition, to create a majority of one. It's a solitary quest of detours and traps, including the fear that, as both narrator and character, she has somehow got the story all wrong. An inveterate phone-talker, Bergljot tells her tale as one would in conversations with a friend, doubling back on earlier versions as though to retrieve some crucial detail that might prove her claim once and for all, vacillating among indignation and dark humor and self-doubt. These stops and starts illustrate the painful circularity of Bergljot's problem: people don't believe her because she's a basket case, but she's a basket case because people don't believe her.

Bergljot's story can get blurry. Sometimes it's been twenty years since she cut off contact with her family; other times it's fifteen, and she still interacts with them sporadically. She doesn't try to pave over the holes in her testimony, instead allowing them to exist as natural features of a turbulent emotional landscape. Nor does she tamp down her reactions. There is a certain audacity in saying, "I heard the email notification from my iPhone on the seat next to me, an act of war, was my guess," and asking people to take you seriously. Many readers, repelled by Bergljot's grandiosity, won't. But, in my eyes, Bergljot saves herself from melodrama by being honest about her tendency toward it.

Hjorth is fearless on the complicated bonds between survivors and abusers, who hold power over them in the form of answers. Bergljot says, astonishingly, that as a young mother "I still had a small amount of contact with my family for the sake of my children." Years later, it doesn't seem to occur to her that she doesn't have to go to her father's funeral. An abusive parent is the alpha, the omega, and the person who teaches you the alphabet.

When Bergljot reenters the fray, she does so in a headlong way that hardly protects her vulnerabilities. At the outset of the inheritance dispute, she gets up the nerve to e-mail Astrid, an expert in human-rights law and thereby "a kind of officially good person," about the cabins. Astrid responds with a litany of dispassionate facts. Bergljot says, "I felt that I was threatening her with an axe, she reacted as though I was waving a plastic knife in the air." Hjorth seems to be suggesting that rectitude can be the enemy of justice, and that neutrality can be a form of self-dealing. Proudly objective parties can't satisfyingly adjudicate the most violent disputes, because they have a bias against the emotional effects of conflict.

The book's turning point occurs when Bergljot, desperate to jolt her relatives out of their complacency, decides to read aloud her accusations at a meeting with the entire family, in the presence of their accountant. After so much mediated confrontation, she has to work herself up to this act of exposure ("Just see it through, because it's absolutely crucial, this is about your life," she tells herself), but she barely makes it through a paragraph before the family revolts. "Now is not the time or the place," Astrid chides, deleting Bergljot's speech as though it were one of her late-night e-mails. Later, Bergljot launches into a self-examination:

After my bombshell twenty-three years ago, I chose to withdraw, to heal myself, to seek professional help. Should I have called Astrid with the physical details, pleaded my case with a skeptical sister who loved her parents and had every reason to, who had a great relationship with her parents, who wanted a happy family, should I have called her and shared my open wounds, exposed my nakedness, so painful, so shameful, so intimate, so difficult to talk about outside the psychoanalyst's consulting room, tell her things I hadn't told anyone other

than my psychoanalyst, not even my friends, my boyfriends or my children because it hurt too much and was too physically intrusive, because I didn't want my nearest and dearest to have such images of me in their heads?

One senses that these are not rhetorical questions. Bergljot is trying to calculate the acceptable ratio of disclosure to damage.

In 2017, Vigdis Hjorth's younger sister, Helga Hjorth, published her first novel, "Free Will." A lawyer in Oslo, Helga is ostensibly the *levende model*—"living model"—for Astrid, the maddeningly evenhanded sibling in "Will and Testament." In Helga's novel, a family is torn apart when the narrator's histrionic writer sibling makes false allegations of incest in one of her books. In the press, Helga explained that she felt badly used by her sister's novel, and that

she had written her own as a rebuttal. If a family in denial is a closed circuit, this was the feedback loop reactivated.

Helga Hjorth claimed that her sister had invaded her parents' and her privacy, by reproducing verbatim intimate conversations, letters, and e-mails. (Vigdis has said that she got permission to use such documents.) A Norwegian newspaper, in gumshoe mode, ran an article showing that a funeral program mentioned in "Will and Testament" was nearly identical to the one commemorating the Hjorth father, down to the reproduction of a sentimental poem by his wife. The implication: we tell ourselves stories in order to live, we call them novels in order to not get sued. But the argument that the literary part of reality literature is a legal veneer doesn't fully square. If the parts of "Will and Testament" that can be fact-checked es-

entially stand up, then the novel must offer freedoms other than fabrication. These could be as simple and necessary as the right of omission, or of not having to keep typing the names of the siblings who make you sad.

"Free Will" also became an immediate best-seller in Norway. (It has not been translated into English.) The phenomenon of an author ultimately making money from a sibling's interrogation of her possibly ill-gotten inheritance, the ledger forever out of whack, is absurd in a way that one imagines Vigdis Hjorth could appreciate. Still, she has upheld her sister's right to have written the novel. The rules of reality literature seem akin to those of Twitter: if you're going to @ somebody, don't be surprised if she claps back.

Reading "Will and Testament" in Barslund's excellent translation, without access to Helga Hjorth's story, is the closest one can come to separating the *scandale* from the *succès*. Bergljot is far from a reckless narrator. In fact, she is remarkably alive to the plight of her family members, locating the loneliness in them even as they have marooned her with her unbearable past. In a way, she respects her uncommunicative sister, Åsa, and her father's discipline in freezing her out of his life. Intransigence is at least a form of acknowledgment. "Dad's crime was greater, but purer, Dad's self-inflicted punishment was harsher, his reticence, his depression more penitent than Mum's fake blindness," Bergljot says.

Hjorth seems to have formulated from her experiments with living models a model for living, in which exposure—of the self and of others—serves a larger purpose. In "A House in Norway" (2014), her only other book to be translated into English, the narrator, a textile artist, strives to depict "those who had the courage to speak against power when they found it necessary, regardless of the cost, who protested though they were regarded as mad, everyone who didn't just want a head start for themselves but progress for the many." The narrator reserves her greatest admiration for those who are willing to be both the speaker and the subject, the heroine and the wretch—"those who turned the scrutinizing spotlight on themselves," and let it burn. ♦



"And then I'm, like, whoa, I have superpowers. Why am I wasting my time at the gym?"



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WALKS OF LIFE

Beginnings and endings in the poetry of Fanny Howe.

BY DAN CHIASSON



“Wherever I step I am stepping into a place that was just finished at the moment I arrived,” the American poet Fanny Howe wrote, a decade ago, in “The Winter Sun: Notes on a Vocation.” This temporal dilemma, which skews past and future, has preoccupied her sixty years of work: “If I freeze here, one foot poised to go forward, to land on the path, I will at least be living in the present and the past will know it.” Writing poetry has been her way of knowing, and of knowing that she knows. Her latest collection, “Love and I,” is further proof of this knowledge. Pragmatic but blessedly naïve—she calls herself “gullible”—

Howe’s poetry takes a line-by-line approach to managing existential fear. Her work calls to mind a child’s tactics of self-soothing, like whistling in the dark.

Howe is an experimental writer nevertheless fascinated by her own belatedness. Her father worked for a time as Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.’s clerk. Her mother, an Irish actress and playwright, performed under Yeats’s direction at the Abbey Theatre, in Dublin. (One of Howe’s sisters is Susan Howe, another profoundly original American poet; they may be the most important sibling duo in American poetry.) Shortly after Howe was born, in 1940, her family moved

from Buffalo to a railroad flat near Harvard Square, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. They made regular Sunday visits to the baronial quarters of Fanny’s grandfather Mark Antony DeWolfe Howe, an arbiter of everything old Boston, who lived in the heart of primordial, purple-paned Beacon Hill. There she was struck by “tables and chairs and objects brought from China generations before,” an ivory pagoda, crystal finger bowls, and Victorian storybooks full of illustrations of “curly-haired children in pinafores, stone walls, golliwogs, leaping figures with scissors following them to cut off their thumbs, and gardens containing pale but specific flowers.”

In another poet of Howe’s background—Robert Lowell comes to mind—this aristocratic, late-Victorian milieu might have provoked claustrophobia, yet an aura of wonder pervades Howe’s writing. It is evident in that description of her grandfather’s Victorian children’s books, as well as in her lovely evocation of his stutter, which “riveted” her, because it sounded as though “his voice wanted to turn into a musical instrument.”

Since new in Howe’s work means late, “Love and I” is, in a double sense, Howe’s latest volume. It hurries to join a long and illustrious career, which, besides poetry, includes novels, stories, memoir, and short films. Approaching eighty, Howe, in “Love and I,” is now revisiting the earliest formative impressions of preconscious childhood, when “everything seemed like something else.” The opening of “1941” is a snapshot of her birthplace:

On a cold day near Lake Erie
I was in a double bind.
The snow was like a lamb
Shorn in the upper circle.

The scene is part memory, part dream, assembled from the rudiments of identity just this side of nonexistence. “Zero and One sat on either side of me,” she writes. Howe’s poems assert that there is no meaning to be tracked back to an original cause: “No big bang, no beginning.” They knock “meaning” off its rational basis and into the realm of hunch and intuition. They must be read not “with a spyglass / But with a wild guess / And only three words: ‘You never know.’”

Howe’s poems suggest tidy trajectories, then swerve toward nonnarrative insight.

Howe prefers the clarity of misunderstanding to the blur of certainty. Like stained glass, her poems await illumination, but it is important not to flood them with a klieg light. They dwell in puzzles and games: “Zero and One” brings to mind computer code, and also, via tennis, unlocks her title, “Love and I.” But, although she delights in creating puzzles, she seems wary of solving them: “A central contradiction, once discovered, / Leads to collapse or evolution.” Metaphor is one method of resolving, even while exposing contradiction. Rhyme, which Howe scatters throughout the book, provides another. But there’s nothing here like that line in Frost about a cellar hole “closing like a dent in dough.” Metaphors sometimes clinch thinking; Howe’s tend to scatter it.

“Love and I” is a book about the frayed beginnings and endings of a person’s life, when consciousness provides no chaperon. It is full of excursions—a plane trip, a bus ride, a subway journey—that tempt us with their tidy trajectories (from then to now, here to there), only to swerve toward nonnarrative insight along the way. Many of her latest poems are titled with dates—“1941,” “1995,” “2016”—but poetry is hardly a source of linear order. Entering a person’s life at fluky intervals, it is, she believes, a “preoccupation” with “no motive, cause, or final goal”—a “vocation that has no name.” She writes poems “in the middle of children, crowds at train stations, airports, motels, bus depots, in offices and schoolyards.”

It is marvellous to think of these works as having been made not in some bower but in the midst of life. The basis of Howe’s poetry is watchfulness, as from a train window. This passive, open state, a little like prayer (Howe is Catholic, and has written movingly about her faith), modulates surprisingly into politics. Here is the opening of “2011”:

On the last bus from Dublin to Limerick
Raindrops pelted the landscape
And held little photos
Of aluminum crutches in each drop
Rolling down the glass.

The view changes to “buildings

built / On phony loans,” filled with “pharmaceuticals / And cheap hospital / Industry styles and ghost estates.” With each pause and line break, the poem drifts farther and farther from the interior life that its opening seems, in classic lyric fashion, to summon. When poets look out the window, they are supposed to see a projection of their mood; here, as Howe puts it, “everywhere I look, my thoughts grow wild.”

The necessity of reimagining time even as time runs out gives this book its urgency. These poems are partly about facing old age without a partner. The title “Love and I” suggests old companions who have grown abstract, almost allegorical in their relations to one another, like functions in a math problem. “Time was vertical,” Howe writes. “Is, and past perfect.” In “Destinations,” Howe conjures the image of a hotel or an apartment building where life takes place in many stages on many floors:

Downstairs, cries of lust.
Up here, a requiem mass
And light to lead the clouds home
To the past.

In another arresting formulation, time is “a long and everlasting plain, / You can pass across it any which way you turn.” But elsewhere Howe is stranded and lost on that temporal plain, looking for her own search party:

Someone help me find an animal
Who will rescue me from
Being a solitary
And more like my friends the wrens
In an evergreen shrub: to be clear
Would be wonderful.

She wants “a sigh without the ghostly gasps / That accompany passion.” The touching passage that follows is Howe at her saddest and funniest. In her old age, she is an explorer holding out for the right savior—a dog with valor but without drool:

Find me instead
More like the breathy Saint Bernard.
But a little dog.
A cask of brandy hanging at her neck.

The syntax forces us to consider “me” also as the direct object: the “little dog” feels like a self-portrait. Howe, in a lifetime of being stranded, has always been her own rescue party. ♦



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HEAVY

The sculpture of Richard Serra.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

Great sculptors are rare and strange. In Western art, whole eras have gone by without one, and one at a time is how these artists come. I mean sculptors who epitomize their epochs in three dimensions that acquire the fourth, of time, in the course of our fascination. There's always something disruptive—uncalled for—about them. Their effects partake in a variant of the sublime that I experience as, roughly, beauty combined with something unpleasant. I think of the marble carvings of Gian Lorenzo Bernini in Rome: the Baroque done to everlasting death. A feeling of excess in both form and fantasy may be disagreeable—there's so much going on as Daphne morphs into a tree to escape Apollo, or a delighted seraph stabs an ecstatic St. Teresa in the heart with an arrow. But try to detect an extraneous curlicue or an unpersuasive gesture. Everything works! Move around. A newly magnificent

unity coalesces at each step. You're knocked sideways out of comparisons to other art in any medium or genre. Four centuries of intervening history evaporate. Being present in the body is crucial to beholding Bernini's incarnations. Painting can't compete with this total engagement. It doesn't need to, because great sculpture is so difficult and, in each instance, so particular and even bizarre.

Richard Serra, with current shows at three branches of the Gagosian gallery, is our great sculptor, like it or not. I say relax and like it. His new work consists, at one gallery, of a nearly twenty-foot-high, nearly hundred-foot-long elongated S shape of two-inch-thick weatherproof steel (sealed by its patina of softly textured rust) and, at another, of standing steel cylinders that differ in proportion of height to breadth but share the condition—so we are told and can only believe—of weighing fifty

tons apiece. All the works were forged in Germany and shipped to Newark, and the two segments of the S shape spent the trip on deck. This likely explains the blooming orange surfaces of the plates on sides that were exposed to sun and the gloomy striations on the other sides, as yet uncured. The third show is of "drawings"—rather a frail word for diptychs and triptychs of large sheets of heavy paper bearing thick black shapes in paint stick, ink, and silica. Hardly pictorial, they are about as amiable as the front ends of oncoming trucks. Apropos the sublime, there's possible unpleasantness galore about Serra's sculpture: gross materiality, bombastic scale, and perhaps the all-time aesthetic quintessence of passive aggression. You can't not think of the artist's willfulness. He has seemed at times an Ayn Randian (though leftist) figure of the creator as a law unto himself. I would dislike him if I could build a case from the visible evidence equal in strength to my itch to dislike him. But beauty kicks in. Again, shift your viewpoint. There is a Beethoven-like majesty to the way the forms track, bend, concentrate, and release the space that they share with you. Your movement in their vicinity is a kind of dance that you can't refuse or repress. Clear your mind. Let your



Serra's "Nine," from 2019. The sculptor's work raised the stakes of minimalist confrontation.

body tell you what's happening. Then your mind may start up again, pondering the work's significance. How can anything so preposterous feel matter-of-fact? How can it stun while coming as no surprise?

Serra is the straight-line consummator of Minimalism, the aesthetic revolution that, in the nineteen-sixties, redefined what sculpture is and what it does. Rather than offer objects for contemplation—as Bernini or Rodin or even expansive modernists such as Giacometti and David Smith did—minimalist artists induce acute self-consciousness, making us aware of where we are in a given space and how our sensations alter as we move. There's no right vantage point. Minimalism ratified in art a mid-century shift to the sprawling new world of superhighways, airports, corporate plazas, malls, and big-chambered contemporary museums. For the viewer, it is “theatrical” and “in his way,” as the formalist critic Michael Fried put it, in an amazing essay from 1967, “Art and Objecthood,” in which his bull's-eye attacks on the movement constituted an unintended appreciation. Boxes by Donald Judd, tiled metal plates on the floor by Carl Andre, and fluorescent fixtures by Dan Flavin irradiate rather than occupy space. Judging the work is complicated by a nagging consciousness that, as in a game of tag, the “it” is you. The inside-out aesthetic spread to many arts, notably music and dance, and remains a tacit lingua franca of curated exhibitions to this day.

Serra arrived smack in the dawn of the movement, graduating from Yale's School of Art and Architecture with an M.F.A. in 1964, and entering New York's seething downtown art world. He was born in San Francisco in 1938, to a Spanish-American father and a mother who had Russian-Jewish immigrant parents. Serra's experience of heavy industry at the city's docks, while his father worked there as a pipe fitter, affected him for life. With the truculent personality of some physically strong, emotionally hypersensitive people, he swaggered into action by ladling molten lead into junctions of gallery walls and floors. It was a way of moving beyond the finished objects

of the first-generation minimalists by making things—ragged lengths of lead, pulled out into rooms—whose subject was the making of them. Did the cool effects secrete hot rage? You could think so, in ways encouraged by the disquieting presence of Serra's “prop” sculptures, weighty metal elements that leaned together, mutually supported by only gravity: not actually precarious but sure seeming so. Those were, and remain, terrific as more than representations of the real—they are realities, raising the stakes of minimalist confrontation. Almost by the by, they are elegant, too. Serra's follow-up was an engagement with outdoor sites which established his greatness as much by what he refrained from doing as by what he did.

The minimalist intoxication with existing space spurred other artists of the late sixties and early seventies into the wild: Michael Heizer, with “Double Negative” (1969), excavations of two mesas in Nevada; Walter De Maria, with “Lightning Field” (1977), four hundred stainless-steel poles evenly spaced in New Mexico; and Robert Smithson, with “Spiral Jetty” (1970), the eponymous shape, in rocks and dirt, which extends into the Great Salt Lake. Earthworks, as they were termed, were an overshoot, functioning as art mainly by way of documentation or dedicated tourism. (In person, I found “Spiral Jetty” disappointing as sculpture—distinctly not quite big enough for the scale of its setting—though glorious as a subject for photographs that will grace every art-history book forever.)

Serra kept his evolution to gigantism primarily in town and in art parks, where it could relate to existing structures and tended landscapes. The works, rather than complementing their settings, oppose them, with right-angled forms in nature and sinuous ones against angular architecture. Pieces by Serra command public spaces in cities from Berlin to Pittsburgh. Most involve ship-size steel slabs, curved or torqued and very long or tipped together and soaring. Some form corridors and enclosures that can feel mazelike, though their footprints are rationally simple enough. They poetically rhyme exquisite engineering with brute materiality, élan with solemnity. They jolt you awake.

What is “public art”? It is a phrase composed of two nouns. Serra failed epically with regard to one of them in 1980, with “Tilted Arc,” a commission by the U.S. General Services Administration for the plaza of the Javits Federal Building, near the Brooklyn Bridge in Manhattan. The hundred-and-twenty-foot-long, twelve-foot-high leaning slab looked graceful when viewed from its ends but faced anyone emerging from the building with a grim wall, and, in effect, cancelled any other use for the plaza. Federal workers petitioned against it. The furious controversy, leading to the removal of the sculpture, in 1989, helped scuttle a period of lavish funding for art by national and state agencies, which were being advised by art-world panels. The G.S.A.'s Art in Architecture program survives, but not its former deference to the avant-garde. The event now seems an early harbinger of today's catastrophic ruptures in the national body politic. (For the record, I deemed the installation a mistake and, in print, sided with the unhappy workers.) But it also illustrates, by overbalancing, the dynamic of the sublime—the affront, the seduction—that Serra usually keeps in splendid tension.

Serra says that his new cylindrical works are about weight. Lightness he leaves to other artists. What do we understand of weight? I mean, beyond heavy, very heavy (a convertible sofa with the steel bed inside it which I once helped carry up several flights of stairs), incredibly heavy (more than the sofa), and incomprehensibly heavy (budgeable only by immense machinery, if at all). Where do you stop along the increments of that scale? The fifty-ton criterion for Serra's “Forged Rounds,” as the cylinders are titled, owes to a weight limit for trucking across the George Washington Bridge, Serra has said. Therefore: as heavy as possible. There's something profoundly satisfying—gravity as gravitas—about keeping company with the new Serras, as of being entrusted with a home truth of your and, for that matter, anything's earthly existence. The sensation might be a tuning fork to gauge the degree of fact in other aspects of a world awash in pixelated illusions. How real is real? How real are we? ♦

MEMORY PLAY

Florian Zeller's latest look at the losses of dementia.

BY ALEXANDRA SCHWARTZ



The theatre is a paradoxical place to go in search of empathy. While the actors are up there, working to make us feel, through their acute particularity, what it is to be human, we are down here, elbow to elbow with fidgeting, gum-chewing, symphonically coughing specimens of our own kind. The divide can seem vast—one ringing phone can be enough to make you want to cancel everybody, everywhere—and theatre-makers try to bridge it in all sorts of ways. They deconstruct the stage and break the famous fourth wall, enlisting audience members to participate in the action, to varying degrees of success. (I'm thinking of the radically confrontational ending of Jackie Sibblies Drury's recent "Fairview"—and also, with pity, of the outraged theatregoer I saw complaining to an usher at Jeremy O. Harris's "Daddy," after one of that production's numerous displays of simulated swimming-pool coitus left her soaked.) Or they may simply let the story lead, and trust in the power of performance to guide us.

Jonathan Kent's restrained staging of "The Height of the Storm," by the French playwright Florian Zeller (a Manhattan Theatre Club production that has arrived at the Samuel J. Friedman after a heralded run in London), is as traditional as they come. The ac-

tional ending of Jackie Sibblies Drury's recent "Fairview"—and also, with pity, of the outraged theatregoer I saw complaining to an usher at Jeremy O. Harris's "Daddy," after one of that production's numerous displays of simulated swimming-pool coitus left her soaked.) Or they may simply let the story lead, and trust in the power of performance to guide us.

Atkins and Pryce form a portrait of codependency in "The Height of the Storm."

tion is set in a grand, slightly shabby home in a suburb of Paris; the house lights are kept down, the audience members stowed safely in their seats, asked only to watch and listen. It is the play itself that lurches and rocks us, adding our expectation of narrative coherence in order to take us inside the sort of experience that can't be grasped with the mind alone.

That experience belongs to André (Jonathan Pryce), an elderly writer in rapid mental decline. He stands in his kitchen, where the walls are painted a robin's-egg blue, looking out at a bare tree in his garden. His adult daughter Anne (Amanda Drew) is speaking, though he doesn't seem to notice her. There was a big storm in the night. Did he hear it? It kept her awake, but she's been having trouble sleeping anyway, because of "all this." It seems that Anne, pragmatic and weary, has come to help her father organize his affairs. There is interest in publishing his diaries, if he agrees. Then, there's the matter of the house, which may not be "what the situation calls for." Anne has asked a real-estate agent to come by and have a little chat about selling. At this, André comes alive. He has an unstoppable tremor in his right hand, but when provoked he can still boom with Old Testament fury. And yet he seems to be in a state of confused denial—about, we presume, the recent death of his wife of some fifty years, Madeleine, whom Anne speaks of in the past tense.

Suddenly, here is the missing woman herself, briskly returning from a round of grocery shopping with Anne's flighty sister, Élise (Lisa O'Hare). Have we misunderstood? Madeleine (Eileen Atkins) doesn't seem to be a ghost; her daughters speak to her as if nothing were out of the ordinary. At the sight of her, André comes alive again, if differently than before. He laughs and preens; his eyes shine as he teases his "little scorcher," though Madeleine swats away his flirtatious displays. She has lunch to prepare, and André seems to be coming unstuck again. He can't remember what day it is, and Anne's gentle answer—"Today, Dad"—tells us how far gone he really is. Or does it? As her mother chops onions, Anne again discusses the matter of the diaries,

only now it is her father whom she speaks of in the past tense, before bursting into tears of grief. Is this an alternative scenario, in which André, not Madeleine, is the dead parent? Or have Anne and Madeleine adopted this callous way of speaking about someone who is present in body but absent in mind—as if he had vanished altogether?

No clear answers are given during this intermissionless, eighty-minute piece. Like André, who is sure of himself one moment, befuddled and pitiful the next, we are plunged into a shadowy, fearful place where reality, memory, and imagination mingle indiscriminately. Motifs are repeated in ways that contradict rather than amplify; the pauses between acts don't so much reset the action as muddle it, and us, further. (Hugh Vanstone's subtle lighting design does provide some clues as to who is flesh and who is figment.) The moments of greatest lucidity, like a quiet, companionable conversation between husband and wife at the kitchen table, may prove to be the most delusional, if they are, as increasingly seems to be the case, wishful fantasies that André uses to moor himself. But fantasy is not a bad place to go when reality proves unbearable. From the outside, dealing with dementia is a heartbreaking, exasperating task. I cringed, watching last year's production of Kenneth Lonergan's "The Waverly Gallery," to see the middle-aged Ellen (Joan Allen) blow her top when her mother, Gladys (the glorious Elaine May), asked, yet again, if the dog had been fed, but it was impossible to feel superior in the face of her exhaustion and sorrow. From the inside, Zeller's unstable, flickering play suggests, losing your mind may not be the worst that you can suffer. It's the effort to hold on to it that will bleed you dry.

This is familiar territory for Zeller, whose play "The Father," mounted on Broadway in 2016, featured Frank Langella as André, an egotistical man in the grips of dementia. (Like Lonergan, Zeller was inspired by his grandmother's struggle with the disease.) As this iteration of André, Pryce is magnificent, funny, and ferocious in his flashes of sanity, devastating in his anger and weakness. Atkins's Madeleine—

dry, crisp, and remote—is more of a cypher, the consummate great man's wife. (Kent has her mark her domestic authority by speaking in the quiet, calm voice of a person used to being heeded, and you may find yourself craning forward to hear her.) Together, the pair form a portrait of codependency in the extreme; their daughters are hardly more than disappointed, disappointing interlopers in this closed union. Time and again, Madeleine points out that André could never survive without her to cook for him and run his life. More painfully, André begs Madeleine to promise that she won't die before him, which raises the morbid question of whether, overburdened by her husband's slippage, she decided to do just that—especially once a mysterious, vampish younger woman (Lucy Cohu), who may or may not be a long-ago lover of André's, arrives on the scene.

These people—the devoted, resigned wife, the sultry old flame—are types, which is not in itself a problem; types are what people often are. (The same is true of the children; ambitious Anne, we learn, wanted to be a writer but, intimidated by her father's example, "did nothing." You can't blame her.) But so is the life style that they inhabit. From the books that line the living-room walls, the hanging planter, and the out-of-date stove in Anthony Ward's scenic design, we know that the family is bourgeois but not stuffy, well off but not extravagant, and, since nothing is said about the nature of André's work, he could be any kind of writer—a French one, you must remind yourself. (Christopher Hampton's translation is perfectly fluid, but it feels silly to make these two great veterans of the English stage speak of "Saint-Pierre" and a "Madame Armanet"—emphasis on the first syllable, Brit style—when the action could be transposed anywhere.) Universality and generality are cousins, not twins. As wrenching as "The Height of the Storm" frequently is, Zeller has a tendency to slide toward the latter, striking a note of chic, existential despair. "They say life is short, but it isn't true. It's terribly long," Madeleine says. "But, when it does end, it can only be a deliverance." Maybe so, but Zeller is just forty. He has time to change his mind. ♦

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INSIDE THE MACHINE

William Forsythe shows what ballet is made of.

BY JENNIFER HOMANS



William Forsythe's "A Quiet Evening of Dance"—which I saw at the Venice Biennale earlier this year, and which comes to New York's Shed arts center on October 11th for two weeks—concludes with a joyful balletic piece to music by the eighteenth-century composer Jean-Philippe Rameau. It is the kind of dance we rarely see anymore, one that leaves audiences elevated, energized, overcome by the sheer pleasure of movement and music. Who would have expected this from an American choreographer who has spent the past four decades in the trenches of the European avant-garde, deconstructing ballet's fundamental premises? Forsythe's tendency to push

his dancers to physical extremes, and his use of electronic sound scores by his long-time collaborator Thom Willems—to say nothing of his taste for German *Tanztheater* and French post-structuralist thought—have led some critics, especially in this country, to dismiss his work as a violent and pretentious attack on the body and on balletic form.

As a Balanchine-schooled dancer in the eighties, when Forsythe was becoming established, I saw things differently. Forsythe, who knows ballet as well as anyone, was breaking its stultifying orthodoxies without forgoing technique or full-bodied dancing. His companies, based in Frankfurt and Dresden, were

always refreshingly informal and collaborative, and his highly trained dancers often had strange, quirky bodies. Forsythe is intellectually voracious—a kind of theory scavenger, who, over the years, has drawn from fields including philosophy, physics, semiotics, and the visual arts. In 1987, for the Paris Opera Ballet—the highest precinct of classicism, where ballet took shape, in the seventeenth century—he made "In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated," a relentless dance to a propulsive score by Willems, in which the young Sylvie Guillem moved in shockingly new ways: body pitched at swerving angles; arms, legs, hips, head oriented through multiple spatial planes; executing point work that pushed her supple body ever farther in the physical contradictions that she and Forsythe had devised. If this was an attack, it was coming from the inside.

In 1994, Tracy-Kai Maier, Forsythe's wife and one of his most versatile classical dancers, died, from cancer, at the age of thirty-two. Partly in response to this tremendous loss, Forsythe has said, his work turned in new directions. His dances reflected an even deeper dive into theory, and an expansion of his inquiry into the language of movement. Does it have first principles? What are its grammar and its rules? In the years that followed, he and his dancers opened up the machine and took it apart: time, space, text, voice, sound, music, costume, light, and the proliferating possibilities of movement through every limb were examined and reimaged in an impressive flow of new dances.

"One Flat Thing, Reproduced" (2000) was a gripping piece for fourteen dancers and twenty metal tables, set to music by Willems—although, Forsythe once showed me, since the dance has a structure independent of music, it also works to Beethoven. For "Decreation," in 2003, he worked with Dana Caspersen, a magnetic performer with a compact body and a spine misshapen by scoliosis, on what she has called "a language of indirectness and fragmentation," in which they sent the "eyes in one direction, jaw in the other, rib cage in one direction, hips in the other." Some of his dances took on a dark political edge, as in "Three Atmospheric Studies," in 2005, with its allusions to the Iraq War and to Lucas Cranach's painting "Lamentation Beneath the Cross."

In "A Quiet Evening of Dance," Forsythe discovers a new classicism.

What had begun with ballet was becoming a powerful theatre of the absurd.

At times, Forsythe could be maddeningly obtuse. He lost me with “Sider” (2011), in which the dancers wore headphones and listened to an audio track drawn from the rhythms of Elizabethan tragedy while we were hearing a score by Willems. But I never found him nihilistic. At the end of one of his most disorienting pieces, “I don’t believe in outer space” (2008), which included a virtuoso Ping-Pong match with no ball or table, Caspersen danced a duet that left her talking about what you lose when you die. “No more of this,” she said, as she gestured to her partner’s elbow, knee, chest—a bow to the mortal body but also to the elemental daily work that had occupied Forsythe and his dancers for so long. It was a dance, Forsythe said, about his own absence. He was turning sixty. In 2015, he dissolved his company to focus on his international career and moved his base to rural Vermont.

Now Forsythe is turning seventy, and he has recently made several dances that draw directly from ballet. A return to classical certainties with the mellowing of age? Perhaps. But “A Quiet Evening of Dance” was not made for a ballet company. Forsythe has worked with almost all of the dancers in its small cast—two women and five men—for years, on some of his most experimental pieces; one of the men is the hip-hop dancer Rauf (RubberLegz) Yasit, also a past collaborator.

“Quiet Evening” is a show in two acts. The first is a dance as close to theory as I have ever seen. It is a physical disquisition on the origins of ballet, except that

it is composed largely of reconceived fragments from Forsythe’s past, as well as a new dance to music from 1951 by the avant-garde composer Morton Feldman. Forsythe is not just reconstructing Baroque steps; he’s using them as material, pulling ballet’s original elements through his own imagination. The second act is the result. Playfully entitled “Seventeen/Twenty One”—a reference not to the year 1721 but to the seventeenth and the twenty-first centuries—it constitutes a new kind of classicism, made from elements of the old.

The first act takes us inside the machine. In a series of sketches, Forsythe presents a range of ideas to be fully investigated. One is a whimsical duet of arms; another lays out the mechanics of hands moving to and from knees. (Ready, go: hands to knees, hands crossing knees, knees turning in and out, this hand, that hand, both hands to hips; it goes on.) Forsythe is interested in movement that comes from movement, not from music, so much of the act is performed in silence—or, less convincingly, to birdcalls. The many iterations can be fascinating, but they can also be boring, a bit like the long hours dancers spend in rehearsal and the tedium that can accompany invention. Do we really need all this? We do. Forsythe is edging his way from everyday gesture to a ballet vocabulary. Soon the feet turn out, the line takes shape, the familiar positions emerge. In a clever reversal, we arrive at balletic steps using Forsythe’s own methods: classicism born of deconstruction.

But this is not ballet like you have seen before. As the music begins, three men fly onto a brightly lit stage in a full-tilt dance. Their movements are

wide, open through the chest, with deep épaulement, but they are also torqued and knotted, the limbs working in rhythmic counterpoint. The dancers have what one of them described to me as “swing,” an ease through the hips and joints that makes it all look perfectly natural. We see them walk straight into complex sequences of movements as if they were picking up a conversation on the street, a point emphasized by the presence of Yasit, whose braided break-dance moves fit right in.

Everyone is dressed in bold solid colors—T-shirts, casual pants, arm-length gloves. On their feet are colored socks pulled over sneakers, an ingenious layering that gives the dancers a broad physical gamut, from ballet to street. The slippery sock gains traction from the sneaker, and there’s enough support from the rubber to give the extra lift of a toe shoe. It is footwear that folds traditional gender roles into a single, androgynous style. Still, it is mostly the men who hold the stage, as they did in Rameau’s time. At first, I couldn’t figure out why the five men stood out when the two women were so good, too, and then I realized that the men move the way Forsythe moves. This mirroring comes from years of working together, making the ballet a kind of self-portrait in absentia.

By the end of the evening, when the dancers all rush forward in a line—last beats, hint of a bow, pull back, curtain—we have stopped thinking. We thank Forsythe and his dancers for showing us how they got there, but, in an irony that he surely intended, once they have arrived we don’t really care. We just want more dancing. ♦

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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Danny Shanahan, must be received by Sunday, October 6th. The finalists in the September 23rd contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the October 21st 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



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THE FINALISTS

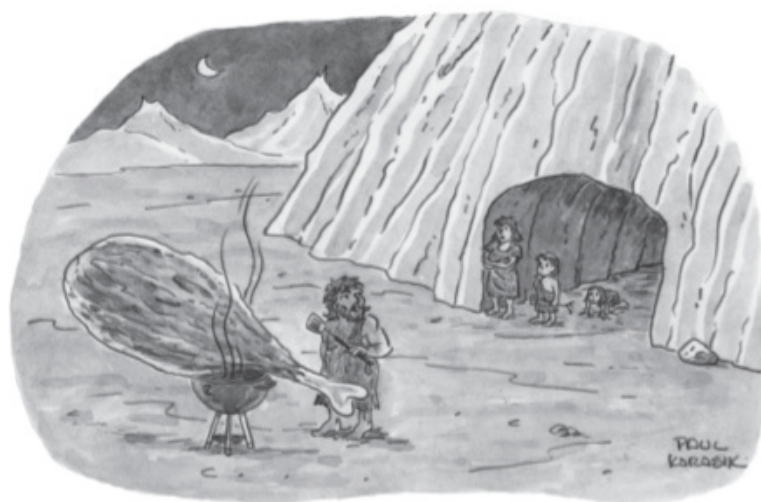


“I'm trying to see it from your point of view.”
Ashley Lieberman, Lexington, Mass.

*“If this shows up in National Geographic,
we'll never hear the end of it.”*
Nathan Skillern, Lafayette, Colo.

“I always knew we'd wind up together.”
Adam Wagner, Santa Monica, Calif.

THE WINNING CAPTION



“I don't tell you how to gather.”
Joel S. Saferstein, Washington, D.C.

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