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**Karen Russell** (*Fiction,* p. 60), a 2013 MacArthur Fellow, has published four books, including "Swamplandia!" and "Vampires in the Lemon Grove."

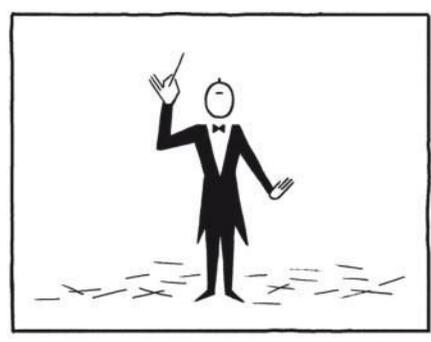
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**CULTURAL COMMENT**  
Debates and ideas about culture and the arts, including Alex Ross on Led Zeppelin's copyright trial.

**VIDEO**  
The artist Duke Riley sets loose two thousand pigeons, with L.E.D. lights attached, over the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

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RIGHT: EMILY RHYNE

# THE MAIL

## BREAKING THE CYCLE

Ian Frazier illustrates the town-by-town, city-by-city battle that is under way to diminish our reliance on single-use plastic bags (“The Bag Bill,” May 2nd). The very properties that make single-use plastic bags attractive are the same ones that cause environmental harm: they are light, flexible, extremely durable, and, above all, cheap. In theory, these bags can be recycled, although the fifteen-per-cent rate that Frazier quotes, which comes from the American Chemistry Council, is misleading. This number includes other kinds of recycled waste—not just the single-use shopping bags in question. Most experts agree that the actual rate for post-consumer shopping bags is dramatically lower. According to calculations using U.S. Environmental Protection Agency data, the national rate is less than three per cent. Furthermore, the bags cause major problems for even the most sophisticated recycling facilities. As someone with more than fifteen years of experience in the field of recycling, I can attest that a small fee has been shown again and again to be the most effective way to reduce their use, and the problems they create for recycling facilities and in the natural environment.

*James Ecker  
Brunswick, Maine*

## ABUSING THE SYSTEM

The inmate abuse that Eyal Press exposes in his article on the Florida correctional system is horrifying, and stems from a twenty-year-old law that is almost entirely unrecognized (“Madness,” May 2nd). I’m a civil-rights lawyer, and when I accepted my first inmate-death case, more than fifteen years ago, I assumed that instances of inmate abuse, maltreatment, and in-custody death were relatively rare. Soon, I was inundated with inquiries from grieving relatives of incarcerated people around the country who had died under unusual circumstances. Many victims have not been convicted of a crime of any kind, and are being held in county or municipal jails pending trial; many of them are

mentally ill. One of the primary reasons these deaths occur is the Prison Litigation Reform Act, passed by Congress in 1996 for the purpose of preventing courts from “micromanaging” correctional facilities and of curbing “frivolous” lawsuits. The Act vastly restricts the rights of prisoners to sue for relief, and deprives the courts of jurisdiction of hearing most alleged-abuse cases. As a result, inmates experiencing abuse are left without recourse to stop it. Since the law was enacted, lawsuits by prisoners have decreased dramatically even as the prison population has substantially increased. When courts don’t look at cases like the ones that Press mentions, people die.

*Edwin S. Budge  
Seattle, Washington*

According to the latest Bureau of Justice Statistics estimate, fifty-six per cent of inmates in state prisons and forty-five per cent of inmates in federal prisons have mental-health disabilities. But Press’s disturbing story makes it clear that jail is never an appropriate place to “treat” mental illness, especially when such treatment is solitary confinement and other forms of abuse. And yet, as a nation, we fail to fund and provide significant community-based mental-health services for people at risk of incarceration and for prisoners who have been released and are reentering society. This is particularly shameful because we know which services work: there is a broad consensus among mental-health experts that programs like Assertive Community Treatment (ACT), supportive housing, intensive case management, peer support, and mental-health-crisis services help keep people with mental illness out of the criminal-justice system.

*Emily B. Read  
Judge David L. Bazelon Center for  
Mental Health Law  
Washington, D.C.*

•  
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JUNE 15 – 21, 2016

# GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



For fifteen years, the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's **River to River Festival** (June 16-26) has been staging free events in public places. The current crop is strong on magnetic female performers. Okwui Okpokwasili (above) revisits Nigerian protest movements, in a Governors Island fort; Alicia Hall Moran sings about African-American finance, in Federal Hall; and the wraithlike Japanese dance legend Eiko indicts Wall Street.

PHOTOGRAPH BY PHILIP MONTGOMERY

# THE THEATRE



Transport Group revives the 1944 play, about a family of Norwegian immigrants in San Francisco.

## Better with Age

*"I Remember Mama" is reimagined with an all-female cast.*

GEORGE STEVENS'S GREATNESS as a filmmaker is in part attributable to his ability to clear sentimentality out of the way and focus on the emotional realism of his characters' lives. After directing Katharine Hepburn in the 1935 adaptation of Booth Tarkington's underrated, if a trifle treacly, novel "Alice Adams," Stevens went to work, in 1948, on "I Remember Mama." The piece began as a novel. Written by Kathryn Forbes and published in 1943, "Mama's Bank Account" describes how a family of Norwegian immigrants, the Hansons, make a life for themselves and their first-generation Norwegian-American children in San Francisco in the early twentieth century. Filled with evocative characters—Forbes wrote a great deal for radio, and her ear for dialogue is sweet and snappy—the book's occasional sentimental strain wasn't done away with in John Van Druten's 1944 stage adaptation. (Playing Nels, the Hansons' only boy, was a young actor named Marlon Brando.) But what family story isn't without its sentiment? In the black-and-white film of "I Remember Mama," Stevens beau-

tifully employs the closeup to dramatize intimacy and to evoke time past: the world was different then, and we see it differently because of his cinematography.

When I saw Transport Group's amazing revival of the play, in 2014, all these elements—what Stevens wrought, what Forbes wrote—were right there on the stage. Working from Van Druten's script, the twenty-five characters were played by ten veteran actresses, with the incomparable Barbara Barrie in the lead. The performers, all older than sixty, had faces that time had added to, not disfigured, and it was the experience that one saw on their faces and time-enriched bodies that gave their private moments such incredible depth, humor, and truth. Fortunately for us, the show is returning, again directed by Jack Cummings III, at Two River Theatre, in Red Bank, New Jersey (through June 26), with some members of the cast from Cummings's first iteration, including Barbara Andres and Lynn Cohen. The actresses take to the stage with the fervor of stars a third their age, in part because of Cummings's support and inventive staging, and because of their ability to relax in who they are now, while using the wisdom of age to inform their collective imagination.

—Hilton Als

### Minor Character

In the company New Saloon's riff on Chekhov, sixteen actors perform a mashup of different translations of "Uncle Vanya," from a standard 1916 version to the garbled results of Google Translate. (*Invisible Dog Art Center, 51 Bergen St., Brooklyn. 347-560-3641. Previews begin June 17. Opens June 20.*)

### Oslo

Bartlett Sher directs J. T. Rogers's play, which recounts how a Norwegian diplomat (Jennifer Ehle) and her husband (Jefferson Mays) orchestrated the secret talks that led to the Oslo Accords in the nineties. (*Mitzi E. Newhouse, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. Previews begin June 16.*)

### Out of the Mouths of Babes

Estelle Parsons and Judith Ivey star in Israel Horovitz's play, in which four women arrive in Paris for the funeral of a hundred-year-old man who loved them all. (*Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 866-811-4111. In previews. Opens June 19.*)

### Sense & Sensibility

In an encore run, Bedlam revives its minimalist staging of the Jane Austen novel, adapted by Kate Hamill and directed by Eric Tucker. (*Gym at Judson, 243 Thompson St. 866-811-4111. Opens June 17.*)

## NOW PLAYING

### An Act of God

David Javerbaum's semi-sacrilegious entertainment (which grew out of a humor book that grew out of a parody Twitter account) was a hit last summer, when it starred Jim Parsons as a cheeky, quick-to-smite, show-biz-veteran incarnation of the Almighty. Hark, it hath returned, to rake in some more manna from midtown. This time, Sean Hayes, another screwball sitcom star, dons the Lord's white robe and sneakers, bearing updated commandments ("Thou Shalt Separate Me and State") and a few Biblical clarifications (turns out it *was* Adam and Steve). Aside from some new references specific to 2016 A.D. ("Hamilton" mania, Melania Trump), Joe Mantello's production retains its crowd-pleasing vibe, with a decent hit rate of zingers to clunkers. "I made mankind in my image," Javerbaum's God explains helpfully. "And I am an asshole." (*Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.*)

### ANT Fest 2016

The annual festival of new work continues with "Showgasm," the comedian John Early's feisty variety show; "The Mary Jo Camel Show: Vitals," which reunites the cast of a fake medical series; and "Lulu Is Hungry," Claire Kiechel and Avi Amon's German-style cabaret about Frank Wedekind's famous heroine. (*Ars Nova, 511 W. 54th St. 212-352-3101.*)

### A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Gynecologic Oncology Unit . . .

Karla (Beth Behrs, of "2 Broke Girls"), a brash young comedian whose mother (Lisa Emery) is battling cancer, is practicing rape jokes at the hospital when in walks Don (Erik Lochtefeld), whose mother, also cancer-stricken, occupies the room's other half. Karla and Don squabble

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over tasteful bedside behavior; Karla pantses him; they wind up screwing in the bathroom. It's a meet-cute as only the playwright Halle Feiffer could imagine. (Her own mother, Jenny Allen, made a one-woman show about surviving ovarian cancer, "I Got Sick Then I Got Better.") Feiffer ("I'm Gonna Pray for You So Hard") has an abrasive streak that trickles onto her characters' tongues—they speak impolite truths, rendering the dialogue humorously bad-mannered, if at times contrived. Trip Cullman, directing MCC's production, just barely navigates the hard-hearted tone, though Karla and Don, of course, turn out to have been softies all along. (*Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-352-3101.*)

### Hadestown

Orpheus has the blues—to say nothing of folk, swing, ragtime, and jazz. The singer-songwriter Anaïs Mitchell and the director Rachel Chavkin have transmuted Mitchell's genre-hopping concept album into a spirited musical, relocating the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice to a backdrop of freight trains and shantytowns. Staged in the round, beneath the twisting limbs of a leafless tree, the world it conjures is both Depression-era and of the moment, with Orpheus offering the Sanders-esque slogan "Let the world we dream about be the one we live in now!" Damon Daunno lends his falsetto to the mournful Orpheus, while Patrick Page goes pure gravel for Hades and Amber Gray dances between them as a sexy, shrewd Persephone. There may be too many songs and a predilection for atmosphere over action, but Mitchell's ballads are lyrical and moving, David Neumann's choreography sly and sociable, and Chavkin's immersive staging heavenly. (*New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-460-5475.*)

### Hero's Welcome

Homecomings aren't happy in Alan Ayckbourn's latest play to appear in the "Brits Off Broadway" festival. When Murray (Richard Stacey), a celebrated soldier, returns from an unspecified war to the town he abandoned almost twenty years before, hoping to put down roots with his new wife (Evelyn Hoskins), his old friends aren't exactly pleased to see him. Ayckbourn, who also directs, punctuates his dark comedy with strained silences and reawakened resentments, as childhood friends open old wounds and battles on the home front are fought with both words and weapons. The seamless ensemble, which also performs Ayckbourn's 1974 piece "Confusions" in repertory, gives gripping performances as the characters discover that their hero might not be quite so heroic, and his youthful bride is not as innocent as she seems. (*59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.*)

### Himself and Nora

Casual theatregoers would be forgiven for initially mistaking this production for a Mel Brooks spoof. "Hitler on Ice"? How about "James Joyce: The Musical"? Indeed, Jonathan Brielle's pellucid chronology of Joyce's life and marriage is an almost farcical deviation from the writer's own free-associative, esoteric mythmaking. Much of what the musical has to say about Joyce's boozy neglect of those around him is contravened by stacy, anthemic uplift. Despite this, it proves a charming, sometimes poignant, study of opposites. Matt Bogart stars as a bawdy, brawny Joyce, and Whitney Bashor plays the put-upon Nora, whose earthy vitality and wit fuelled her husband's creativity. A tireless supporting cast of

three fills in a range of parts, including a taunting priest, the couple's troubled children, and the literary duo Ezra Pound and Harriet Weaver, who helped rescue Joyce from obscurity. (*Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane. 800-745-3000.*)

### I'll Say She Is

Few comedy teams are as deservedly beloved as the Marx Brothers, which is reason enough to celebrate this revival of their "lost" 1924 musical. Adapted by Noah Diamond, who also plays Groucho, the meagre plot follows the efforts of a society belle named Beauty (Melody Jane) to conquer existential ennui, with the spirited assistance of Groucho, Chico, Harpo, and the boringly handsome love interest Zeppo. The brothers orchestrate a series of inexplicable adventures, seeking thrills on Wall Street, on Broadway, and in a Chinatown opium den, all with the chirpy accompaniment of a sequined tap-dancing chorus. The material shows its age—casual racism, inane digressions—and the production is at times indulgently amateurish. But the original Marx Brothers were such comic geniuses, and these Marx impersonators give such committed performances, that hilarious chaos still ensues. (*Connelly, 220 E. 4th St. 212-352-3101.*)

### Indian Summer

Gregory S. Moss's comedy-drama is a wistful tale of summer lovin', mostly the unrequited kind. Daniel (Owen Campbell) has been plunked down at his widower grandfather's Rhode Island beach shack for the summer. Some teens might enjoy this, but Daniel, a loner who keeps his shirts buttoned up to his Adam's apple, isn't one of them. He attracts the aggression and interest of Izzy (Elise Kibler), a tanned and mouthy local girl with a muscled-up boyfriend (Joe Tippett). Under Carolyn Cantor's sympathetic direction, on a set that looks borrowed from Beckett's "Happy Days," the characters diffidently negotiate their love polygon. Moss's structure is loose, even baggy (as in recurring sequences in which characters detail their fantasies), but the play is sun-warmed by the performances, particularly Tippett's splendid turn as the lunkheaded, open-hearted Jeremy, who describes his spiritual practice as "a Christian-orientated martial art of my own devising." (*Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.*)

### The Purple Lights of Joppa Illinois

Ellis Shook (William Apps) isn't used to company. He spends the opening moments of Adam Rapp's drama nervously readying his apartment and himself: spraying room deodorizer in a choking arc, plucking lint from the carpet, anointing himself with Speed Stick. His teen-age daughter, Catherine (Katherine Reis), whom he hasn't seen since she was a baby, is about to pay a visit. Think of it as an antisocial call. The play continues Rapp's long-standing interest in how we live with who we are and what we have done. This is an occasionally moving work, and a far more mature one than Rapp's recent, juvenile "Wolf in the River." (These characters are clothed.) But it's also a dramatically equivocal piece, resorting to manic eruption before retreating to pallid Q. & A., a stylistic echo of Ellis's bipolar disorder. If only the script could down some lithium. (*Atlantic Stage 2, at 330 W. 16th St. 866-811-4111.*)

### Shining City

Conor McPherson's one-act chiller, set in Dublin, debuted in 2004 and ran on Broadway two years

later. The play's five scenes unfold in a small apartment doubling as a therapist's office for Ian (Billy Carter), who is trying to work out some serious issues of his own. There's a visit from his girlfriend, Neasa (Lisa Dwan), and one from a pickup, Laurence (James Russell). But the heart of the play is in his scenes with John (Matthew Broderick), who pours out deep, troubling, revealing stories. (His wife has died, but her ghost continues to haunt him.) McPherson has a gift for writing long speeches that raise the spectral out of the mundane (as in "The Weir" and "The Seafarer"), and Broderick, completely comfortable in his Irish accent and rhythms, gives a wonderful performance. Directed by Ciarán O'Reilly, the co-founder of the Irish Rep, in the company's return to its renovated Chelsea home. (*132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.*)

### Summerworks 2016

Clubbed Thumb's summer play festival continues with Olivia Dufault's "The Tomb of King Tot," in which a syndicated cartoonist deals with her wayward daughter, and Ethan Lipton's "Tumacho," a Western-inspired comedy with music, featuring Jeremy Shamos, John Ellison Conlee, and Celia Keenan-Bolger. (*Wild Project, 195 E. 3rd St. 212-352-3101.*)

### The Total Bent

Stew ("Passing Strange") once again brings his waggish, deconstructed brand of musical storytelling to a tale of a black man's coming of age. The electric Ato Blankson-Wood plays Marty, a slender young songwriter in Alabama during the Montgomery bus boycott ("This be the past and shit," he informs us), who has been writing gospel hits for his father, Papa Joe Roy (the serpentine Vondie Curtis Hall). Joe wants nothing to do with the civil unrest that has bewitched his son, reasoning, "Getting to sit next to a cracker on a bus ain't freedom." When a gawky Brit-pop producer (David Cale) comes along, promising Marty a shot at stardom, issues of musical appropriation and "Negro authenticity" are debated with winking metatheatrical self-knowledge. For better or worse, the show's second half all but gives up on narrative, taken over by blaring, exhilarating musical numbers, written and accompanied by Stew and Heidi Rodewald and staged with sizzle by Joanna Settle. (*Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.*)

### ALSO NOTABLE

**Bright Star Cort.** • **Cal in Camo** Rattlestick. *Through June 18.* • **Cirque du Soleil—Paramour Lyric.** • **The Color Purple** Jacobs. • **The Crucible** Walter Kerr. • **Eclipsed** Golden. *Through June 19.* • **The Effect** Barrow Street Theatre. • **The Father** Samuel J. Friedman. *Through June 19.* • **Fiddler on the Roof** Broadway Theatre. • **Fully Committed** Lyceum. • **Hamilton** Richard Rodgers. • **The Humans** Helen Hayes. • **The Iceman Lab** HERE. • **Incognito** City Center Stage I. • **Indecent** Vineyard. *Through June 19.* • **The King and I** Vivian Beaumont. • **Long Day's Journey Into Night** American Airlines Theatre. • **Peer Gynt** Classic Stage Company. *Through June 19.* • **School of Rock** Winter Garden. • **She Loves Me** Studio 54. • **Shuffle Along** Music Box. • **Signature Plays** Pershing Square Signature Center. *Through June 19.* • **Skeleton Crew** Atlantic Theatre Company. *Through June 19.* • **The Taming of the Shrew** Delacorte. • **Turn Me Loose** Westside. • **Waitress** Brooks Atkinson. • **War** Claire Tow.



# CLASSICAL MUSIC



## Nature Boy

*The music of Per Nørgård, long unheard in New York, gets its due.*

IF YOU'RE A composer from a small country without a long tradition of great classical music—say, Denmark—and you want to reach the kind of heights that the Germans and the French have summited for centuries, there are two radical approaches you might take. The first is that of Carl Nielsen: burrow into yourself until you hit gold, producing an irreducible, sui-generis style that communicates your essential self. The opposite way would be that of Per Nørgård: open yourself to the world and absorb anything you find interesting, but without ever forgetting where you came from.

Nørgård, born in 1932, is the current eminence grise of Danish composers, but he has never enjoyed a big presence in American concert halls. That will change, for a few days, at least, when Scandinavia House presents “Nørgård in New York” (June 16-18), a festival devoted exclusively to his music, organized by Garth Edwin Sunderland. Among the outstanding performers are the soprano Sarah Joy Miller (of City Opera’s “Anna Nicole”), the Momenta Quartet, and the Lost Dog New Music Ensemble, from Queens.

A musical beachcomber, Nørgård writes pieces that embrace not only the wonder of the natural world but also the stone-cold mathematical processes that give it order. He has a love for certain

free-spirited aspects of American culture—Hawaiian chant, the poetry of Whitman and Ginsberg (used in the vocal compositions “Seadrift” and “Plutonian Ode,” respectively), the minimalist music of Glass and Riley—and an enthusiasm for the work of the Swiss outsider artist Adolf Wölfli. But these exotic influences are channelled through the composer’s signature use of the “infinity series,” an integer sequence through which he organizes looping patterns of melody, harmony, and rhythm. The resulting music can sound at once naïve and visionary, maddeningly eccentric yet eminently sensible.

Other works find Nørgård swimming in musical currents closer to home. In the early, super-compact String Quartet No. 3, the influence of Nielsen is pulverized for easy ingestion; the recondite Quartet No. 5, from 1969, employs Ligeitean microtonality at length, but closes with an odd burst of Nordic whimsy. Yet to hear the more recent Quartet No. 10, “Harvest-Timeless”—which, along with several other works, will receive its U.S. premiere—is to experience the essence of Nørgård’s mature musical personality. A prevailing mood of bucolic lyricism is constantly challenged by slithering atonality and insistent, marchlike rhythms, only to fade off into mechanistic irrelevance. It could be a portrait of contemporary Europe: vaulted into a wild future, dragged back to an immemorial past.

—Russell Platt

## On Site Opera: “The Marriage of Figaro”

The immersive-theatre specialists bring Marcos Portugal’s lesser-known version of Beaumarchais’s play—the same one adapted by Mozart—to 632 on Hudson, a West Village triplex that will serve as Count Almaviva’s summer home in the production. Jesse Blumberg, Jeni Houser, and David Blalock head up the talented young cast for the work’s first North American performances; Geoffrey McDonald conducts, and Eric Einhorn directs. (632 Hudson St. 866-811-4111. June 15-16 at 7:30 and June 17 at 6:30 and 9.)

## Operamission: “Rinaldo”

The company logs the fourth entry in its ongoing effort to perform all of Handel’s operas. The countertenor Randall Scotting takes the title role of the Christian knight, and the soprano Christine Arand is the flashy sorceress who would seduce him, but Malia Bendi Merad gets the opera’s most famous tune, the lovely “Lascia ch’io Pianga.” The concert is conducted by Jennifer Peterson, Operamission’s director, who leads a full period band from the harpsichord. (*Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. June 16 at 7.*)

## ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

### New York Philharmonic

The Philharmonic’s annual round of free parks concerts, going strong for half a century, returns under the command of Alan Gilbert, a proud supporter. Three separate programs will be performed; the first, which will travel successively to Central Park’s Great Lawn; Cunningham Park, in Queens; and Van Cortlandt Park, in the Bronx, features Mozart’s dulcet Clarinet Concerto (with the orchestra’s principal, Anthony McGill) along with music by Rossini and Strauss (“Ein Heldenleben”). (June 15 and June 20-21 at 8.) • In a concert exclusively on the Great Lawn, Gilbert leads works by Beethoven (including the Symphony No. 3, “Eroica”) and Wagner (the Prelude and Liebestod from “Tristan and Isolde”). (June 16 at 8.) • A third program, only at Prospect Park, in Brooklyn, is a combination of the first two, with Gilbert repeating the Beethoven works and McGill returning for the Mozart concerto. (June 17 at 8.) (No tickets required. For details, see [nyphil.org](http://nyphil.org).)

### The Crossing: “The Fifth Century”

The veteran British composer Gavin Bryars, known for his associations with such fellow-iconoclasts as John Cage and Tom Waits, has written his latest major work—a forty-minute setting of words by the seventeenth-century English poet Thomas Traherne—for Donald Nally’s outstanding new-music choir from Philadelphia and for Prism, the noted saxophone quartet. Nally leads the New York premiere as part of a concert at Trinity Church, rescheduled from its original date, in January. (*Broadway at Wall St. crossing-choir.com. June 16 at 7.*)

## RECITALS

### Chelsea Music Festival

“Hear, Taste, See” is the motto of this enterprising festival, now in its seventh season, which brings audiences new sensations in the musical, culinary, and visual arts. This year, the festival honors Isaac Newton, whose famous encounter with

a falling apple took place in 1666. Among the concerts on the festival's final days is "Daydreams in Music," a program that nods to the special relationship that Albert Einstein had with his beloved violin; it features works by Shostakovich (the rarely heard Piano Trio No. 1 in C Minor) and Dutilleul, as well as a world premiere by Nicholas Namoradzze ("Gravity: Concertino for Double Bass and String Ensemble") and, naturally, a piece by Mozart (the Sonata for Piano and Violin in B-Flat Major, K. 454). (*Leo Baeck Institute, 15 W. 16th St. June 15 at 7:30. For tickets and full schedule, visit chelseamusicfestival.org. Through June 18.*)

**Composers Concordance**

Otto Luening (1900-96) was a professor at Columbia, a pioneer of electronic music, and a genial figure whose presence was highly valued in the throbbing New York music scene. Many of his instrumental works have a touching intimacy and wisdom; the pianists Jai Jeffries, Geoffrey Burleson, and Eduard Laurel will offer several of them (among works by other composers) in a concert at Faust Harrison Pianos, one of the last stores of its kind to survive the Midtown real-estate boom. (*207 W. 58th St. June 17 at 6:30. Tickets at the door.*)

**Bargemusic**

New music starts off the weekend at the barge, with the battle-tested Sirius Quartet delving into works by two of its members, Fung Chern Hwei and Jeremy Harman, as well as music by Purcell and thorny old Ives ("Arguments," from the String Quartet No. 2). On Saturday and Sunday, Johnny Gandelsman, of Brooklyn Rider—a fiercely expressive violinist known for his intrepid streak—joins three more admired ensemble players (the violinist John Marcus, the violist Max Mandel, and the cellist Raman Ramakrishnan) to perform classics by Mozart (the Quartet in C Major, "Dissonance") and Schubert (the grand, valedictory Quartet No. 15 in G Major). (*Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. bargemusic.org. June 17 at 8; June 18 at 8 and June 19 at 4.*)

**Collide-O-Scope Music: "Milton Babbitt at 100"**

The new-music ensemble, fancifully named but serious in intent, continues to celebrate the centennial of the late composer, one of the most brilliant (and funny, and foreboding) of America's musical minds. Such renowned works as "Arie Da Capo" and "None but the Lonely Flute" are offered in a concert that also includes pieces by Christopher Bailey, Lou Bunk, and the estimable Charles Wuorinen (the Trio for Flute, Bass Clarinet, and Piano). (*Tenri Cultural Institute, 43A W. 13th St. June 17 at 8. Tickets at the door.*)

**Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center**

After a week of coaching from several of the Society's master artists (including such luminaries as the pianist Leon Fleisher and the violinist Ani Kavafian), a group of exceptionally promising young musicians will take the stage at Alice Tully Hall to offer a concert of their own—favorites by Mozart, Schubert, Beethoven (the Piano Trio in B-Flat Major, "Archduke"), and Brahms (the Piano Quintet). Among the standouts are the pianist Jenny Chen and the violist Cong Wu. (*June 18 at 3. To reserve free tickets, which are required, call 212-875-5788.*)

**Yefim Bronfman**

The commanding pianist, joined by the violinist Guy Braunstein, wraps up his mini-series

of powerhouse Prokofiev concerts with a program that was originally scheduled for March. He performs four sonatas: two off the beaten path (the Piano Sonatas Nos. 5 and 9, both in C Major) and two that are well loved around the world (the Sonatas for Violin and Piano in F Minor and D Major). (*Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. June 18 at 7:30.*)

**Make Music New York**

It's back: the all-day, multi-genre festival of free performances, large and small, all over the city, in venues both familiar and unlikely. The classical events include a concert, by the International Contemporary Ensemble, honoring the centennial of Alberto Ginastera, at Central Park's Naumburg Bandshell; music by Earle Brown and Morton Feldman, played on four pianos in the middle of Cornelia Street; and Concerto for Buildings, in which Mantra Percussion literally play a block of buildings on Greene Street which, having hollow, cast-iron façades, resonate when struck. (*Various locations, June 21, all day. For a full schedule visit makemusicny.org.*)

**Washington Square Music Festival**

The cellist and conductor Lutz Rath is the long-time steward of this notable outdoor summer series, now deep into its sixth decade. The programming for this concert, typically idiosyncratic, offers tantalizingly obscure chamber works by Eisler (the Septet No. 2, an arrangement of his music for the Charlie Chaplin film "The Circus") and Borodin, along with a world-première work for trombone and strings by the star trombonist David Taylor, who performs in it. (*Washington Sq. Park. June 21 at 8. No tickets required.*)

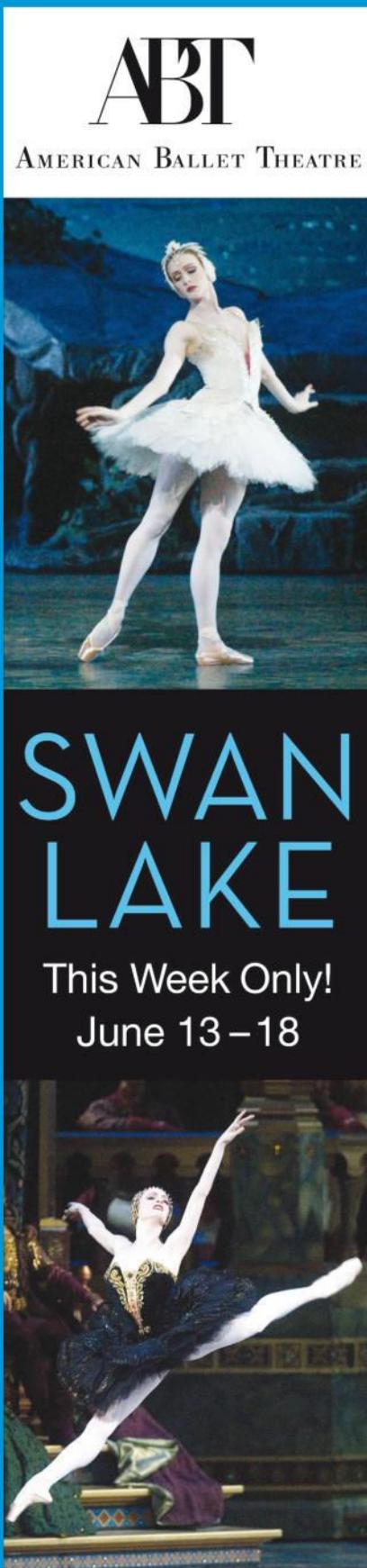
OUT OF TOWN

**Caramoor**

Music at this gracious Westchester estate starts up earlier than at Tanglewood, Caramoor's bigger, older competitor in the summer-festival business. New York's outstanding Orchestra of St. Luke's has been the house orchestra for decades, and it leads off the season with Rob Fisher conducting a program of Broadway showstoppers; the special guest is Kelli O'Hara—Rialto royalty—who in recent years has been expanding her portfolio from musical theatre into opera (at the Met and Carnegie Hall). The next concert at the Venetian Theatre is a tribute by the violinist Pamela Frank to her illustrious late father, Claude Frank. It includes examples of the kind of Germanic repertory at which Frank, a pianist, excelled—music by Schubert, Mozart (the Piano Quartet in G Minor), and Schumann (the Piano Quartet). The violinist hosts this Father's Day program, performed by the violinist Benjamin Beilman, the violist Ayane Kozasa, the cellist Peter Wiley, and the pianist Andrew Tyson. (*Katonah, N.Y. caramoor.org. June 18 at 8:30 and June 19 at 4:30.*)

**Music Mountain**

The Penderecki String Quartet, one of Canada's leading ensembles, makes an appearance at northwest Connecticut's chamber-music shrine (whose season is already under way). The fine violist Maurycy Banaszek joins it in a standard summer program of music by Haydn (the Quartet in D Major, Op. 20, No. 4), Mendelssohn, and Mozart (the String Quintet in C Major, K. 515). (*Falls Village, Conn. musicmountain.org. June 19 at 3.*)



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Gillian Murphy, Top photo by Rosalie O'Connor, Bottom photo by Gene Schiavone.

# ART

## MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

### Metropolitan Museum “Dream States”

The entire medium of photography can be considered oneiric—after all, even the most straightforward pictures hew closer to imagination than to reality. The curators Mia Fineman and Beth Saunders sifted through the museum’s extensive collection to find pictures (and one video) that suggest dreams, dreamers, and magic. The show opens with Adam Fuss’s enormous photogram of a puff of smoke, a hint of legerdemain that recurs in Oliver Wasow’s hallucinatory color images of U.F.O.s and related phenomena. Sleepers and other reclining figures populate pictures by Nan Goldin, Peter Hujar, Robert Frank, and Anselm Kiefer, who dabbed white paint on a portrait of Catherine Deneuve, which he shot while she was onscreen. Landscapes, whether hazy or precise, are what you make of them, but Darren Almond’s slow-motion video of a ride on an elevated train, projected upside down and backward, transforms something ordinary into a rabbit hole of reverie. *Through Oct. 30.*

### Guggenheim Museum “Moholy-Nagy: Future Present”

The high point of this powerful retrospective of the Hungarian-born painter, sculptor, photographer, filmmaker, designer, writer, teacher, and all-around modernizing visionary is a replica of his “Light Prop for an Electric Stage” (1930). It’s a sleek, motorized medley of rods, screens, perforated disks, and springs, set in a box with a circular cut in one side. The gleaming parts—a sort of industrialized synthesis of Cubist and Constructivist styles—reflect a play of colored electric lights inside the box. Moholy-Nagy took the original with him in 1934, when, after the Nazis’ ascent to power, he moved from Berlin to the Netherlands, and then to London, and, finally, in 1937, to Chicago, where he directed the New Bauhaus school. Two years later, he founded the School of Design (still part of the Illinois Institute of Technology), which the art historian Elizabeth Siegel writes in the catalogue was “his overarching work of art.” You would hardly know from this show that Moholy-Nagy shared an era with Picasso and Matisse. Perhaps chalk it up to the First World War, the Russian Revolution, and a fissure in Western culture between art that maintained conventional mediums and art that subsumed them in a romance with social change and new techniques. The former held firm in France; the latter flourished in Germany. Americans could thrill to both at once, as interchangeable symbols of the “modern.” It was in America, after Moholy-Nagy was diagnosed with leukemia (he died in 1946, at the age of fifty-one) that he began to abandon rigor in favor of delight, exposing the heart that had always pulsed within the technocratic genius. To be a student of his then must have been heaven. *Through Sept. 7.*

### Whitney Museum

#### “Human Interest: Portraits from the Whitney’s Collection”

As with the museum’s first outing in its new home, “America Is Hard to See,” this two-floor

show treats the collection as an epiphenomenon of the American character more than as an art-history lesson, which leads to an exhilarating call-and-response across time. A salon-style installation mixes early acquisitions by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, including Cecilia Beau’s 1902-03 charcoal drawing of the violinist Jan Kubelík, with a 1966 Sturtevant self-portrait as Duchamp and a knockout 1929 photograph, by Toyo Miyatake, of the avant-garde dancer Michio Ito, her au-courant bob obscuring her left eye. Questions of representation in America are never far from questions of race, and black figures appear as both subjects of the white gaze (in the photographs of Carl Van Vechten) and, crucially, as self-defined figures (notably in Carrie May Weems’s enduring self-portrait as a revolutionary) and cultural icons (a portrait of Huey Newton by the overrated Henry Taylor). In a glorious new self-portrait, the Nigerian-born Njideka Akunyili Crosby—among the smartest painters to emerge in recent years—combines motifs of “Western” modernism with African images and textiles, then places herself at the heart of it all. *Through February 2017.*

## GALLERIES—UPTOWN

### Ed Atkins

The British artist’s high-definition digital videos are grim but profound. The triptych “Safe Conduct” is a scale-shifting nightmare of bodily disintegration and airport security: brains and bones pass through the metal detector, and ears and limbs come loose as an Airbus takes to the C.G.I. sky. In “Hisser,” a sinkhole swallows a bruised, naked man and plunges him into a sea of white, where he moans apologies; there’s a moment when we watch our glum hero masturbate to a postcard of the Hellenistic masterpiece known as the Barberini Faun. Two thousand years ago, impassive marble took on life in an unknown artist’s hands; Atkins does the same with ones and zeros. *Through June 30. (Brown, 439 W. 127th St. 212-627-5258.)*

### Lillian Bassman

The great fashion photographer, who died in 2012, at the age of ninety-four, was largely unheralded until the mid-nineteen-nineties, when she resumed the career she’d abandoned twenty years earlier. This smartly edited survey includes pictures from the fifties that Bassman later revisited, in the impressionistic style that became her signature. But an overexposed black-and-white portrait from 1947—the earliest image in the show—reveals that Bassman was experimenting with soft focus and abstraction from the outset, always aiming for a look that was as sophisticated as it was romantic. *Through July 8. (Houk, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-750-7070.)*

### Elizabeth Colomba

The inaugural show at this new Harlem gallery is by the New York-based Martinican painter, whose opulent portraits of black women redress the erasures of women of color in nineteenth-century art history. At times, Colomba favors direct quotation; in one picture here, she

depicts a model who appears in a Marie-Guillemine Benoist portrait from 1800. At other times, she prefers channelling; she has clearly made close study of Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema. Colomba’s portraits of long-haired maidens can turn vaporous, but her best pictures—a portrait of a contemplative teen-ager with an arrow in her hand, a still-life with pineapple—are lush, ardent, and inspiring. *Through June 26. (Long Gallery, 2073 Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Blvd. at 124th St. 646-559-8368.)*

### Curran Hatleberg

The forty-seven color photographs in this impressive debut were taken over a period of six months in rural, run-down Humboldt County, California. But, despite this immersion, Hatleberg maintained the cool gaze of a curious passerby. Conventional portraits are rare. Instead, people seem to have wandered into the frame, oblivious to the camera. Trashed rugs carpet a clearing in the woods; a little girl picks roses from an untended bush, seen by a keen eye that’s both objective and tender. *Through June 18. (Higher Pictures, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 212-249-6100.)*

### “121 Street”

“Man on Scaffold,” a compelling 1976 wood-and-plaster sculpture by George Segal, dominates this inaugural uptown outing for an eclectic gallery with an eye for underappreciated modernists. The whited figure hauling a plank is one of several melancholy casts and bodily traces on view; others include a decomposed plastic body by the Polish artist Paweł Althamer and a stick of butter used as an ashray and photographed by his compatriot Alina Szapocznikow. Lenora de Barros, a key figure in Brazil’s art scene during the nineteen-eighties, pays tribute to Segal in a video performance, in which she vigorously brushes her teeth until white paste covers her face. *Through July 31. (Broadway 1602, 211 and 213 E. 121st St. 212-481-0362.)*

## GALLERIES—CHELSEA

### Felix Gonzalez-Torres

Twenty years ago, one of the greatest and most groundbreaking artists of the late twentieth century died in New York of AIDS-related causes. He was thirty-eight years old. This summer, three galleries—in New York, London, and Milan—mark the loss with a trio of shows co-curated by the artists Julie Ault and Roni Horn, who were his close friends. The Chelsea installment might be the most elegiac. One reason: Gonzalez-Torres was the first artist the gallery exhibited when it opened, in 1990. Another: the space is entirely empty. There are no physical objects in the show, just four selections of words and dates painted high on the walls. The artist called these his “dateline portraits,” and they list events that were significant to the four people whom they depict. (The order of events is not chronological; in the self-portrait here, the phrase “Red Canoe 1987” precedes “Bay of Pigs 1961.”) Absence is central to Gonzalez-Torres’s art. One of his most famous works is a pile of brightly wrapped candy; its weight equals that of the artist’s lover before he became wasted by AIDS. The candy is there for the taking; as the pile dwindles, each missing piece becomes a sugar-coated memento mori. (Experience the fleeting pleasure at the Met Breuer’s current exhibition “Unfinished.”) *Through June 18. (Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 212-627-6000.)*

# NIGHT LIFE

## ROCK AND POP

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

### The Cure

This year marks the fortieth anniversary of Robert Smith's new-wave mope-fest, and, with a catalogue bursting with rarities and obscure B-sides, the British act's discography can be daunting. Thankfully, the group has put together this new tour, presenting "37 years of Cure songs, mixing hits, rarities, favourites, and as yet unreleased tracks in a brand new stage production." The shows have, by all accounts, been jaw-dropping—a recent performance in Austin included thirty-five songs and five encores. The set list is constantly changing, but each night is planned with super-fans in mind, featuring audience favorites that haven't been performed in decades, like "Screw," from 1985's "The Head on the Door." The trip marks the band's first major tour of the states in eight years, including this three-night stand at the Garden. (*Madison Square Garden, Seventh Ave. at 33rd St. 800-745-3000. June 18-20.*)

### Florence and the Machine

The soaring chamber pop of the twenty-nine-year-old Florence Welch has escaped categorization since her band's debut album, "Lungs," which charted for twenty-eight weeks in her native U.K. The song "Shake It Out," from 2010, seemed to carry the tide of mainstream radio in its wake. And last year's album, "How Big, How Blue, How Beautiful," was revelatory: a quaking, knockout voice storming the center without bending to form, while casting baroque, literary imagery. Welch builds on the work of forerunners like Kate Bush and Björk, and she herself carves out new space for young upstarts like Grimes, who showcases her own smoldering, theatrical twist on radio pop as an opener for Florence and the Machine's arena summer tour. (*Barclays Center, 620 Atlantic Ave., Brooklyn. 800-745-3000. June 14-15.*)

### Just Blaze

As an in-house hit-maker for Jay Z's Rocafella label, Justin Smith stood out in a stable of young producers—including his peer and healthy rival Kanye West—for his ability to imbue meaning and subtext into his choice of musical samples. He scored a breakout with Jay Z's "Girls, Girls, Girls," in 2001. From the rich violins and the velveteen backing harmonies from Tom Brock to the playful guest vocals of the slapstick rap hookmen Q-Tip, Slick Rick, and Biz Markie, the track utilizes a spectrum of funk, R. & B., and hip-hop for a coquettish sendup of pop misogyny. This spring, Smith crafted the marching fight song "Freedom," a radical high point on Beyoncé's "Lemonade." Far matured from his earliest efforts, he's still nudging outsized stars to draw from untapped wells. (*SummerStage, Coffey Park, Richard and Verona Sts., Brooklyn. cityparksfoundation.org. June 15.*)

### Nosaj Thing

When he laid out his mission statement on his debut mixtape, in 2008, the rapper Kid Cudi leaned on a soft-rattling arrangement that sounded like Brian Eno and the Postal Service playing tic-tac-toe on an MPC machine. Cudi's "Man on the Moon (The

Anthem)," set to a Nosaj Thing instrumental called "Aquarium," exemplified a period of cross-pollination between the hip-hop and electronic scenes in Los Angeles, notably at venues like the Low End Theory. The producer, born Jason Chung, had to earn his place in the dense L.A. d.j. scene, but his drowsy, tech-sleek touch offered fans a bit more soul for their buck. He plays this Bushwick hall alongside the scene favorites **Rizzla** and **Obey City**. (*Market Hotel, 1142 Myrtle Ave., Brooklyn. June 17.*)

### Told Slant

Warped, wonderful sounds seem to pour from the scrappy Brooklyn collective the Epoch, whose mission states, simply, "We were grown together, and are growing still." The founding member Felix Walworth forges lovely, sparsely arranged music under the moniker Told Slant. Listening to Walworth's vulnerable lyrics, which recall the breathy verses sung by David Berman, of Silver Jews, can feel like unearthing a diary that's been stuffed under a mattress. Told Slant celebrates the release of their latest album, "Going By," with a full-band performance at Shea Stadium, alongside a bevy of talented friends and collaborators, including Girlpool's **Harmony Tividad** and the groups **Crying** and **Attic Abasement**. (*20 Meadow St., Brooklyn. liveatstadium.com. June 17.*)

## JAZZ AND STANDARDS

### Hal Willner

Who, in the past five decades, has this unclassifiable and delightfully twisted producer and sonic conceptualist not collaborated with? A random sampling of guests at this promising residency includes **Laurie Anderson**, **Terry Adams**, **Garth Hudson**, and **Lee Ranaldo**. (*The Stone. Avenue C at 2nd St. thestonenyc.com. June 14-19.*)

### Tom Harrell Quintet:

#### Seventieth Birthday Celebration

Life hasn't been easy for this respected trumpeter and composer, who has spent a long career dealing with the uncertainties of the jazz life, compounded by a diagnosed case of paranoid schizophrenia. The night of his birthday finds the tough and talented Harrell leading a quintet featuring familiar cohorts, including the saxophonist **Wayne Escoffery**. (*Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola, Broadway at 60th St. 212-258-9595. June 16.*)

### Ethan Iverson Quintet

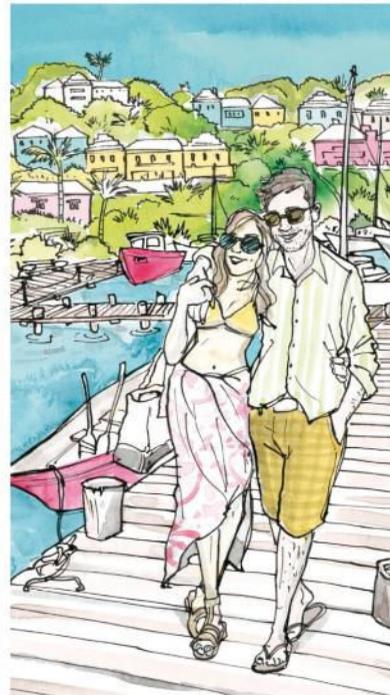
As a member of the Bad Plus, the pianist and composer Iverson keeps his eye trained to the future; as an obsessive jazz fan, he reveres his elders, seizing any chance to play with honored musicians. Here he tangles with the great tenor saxophonist Houston Person, a soulful stylist who, in old-school form, can grease a blues song or offer a warm-bath ballad. (*Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. 212-255-4037. June 14-19.*)

### Mario Pavone

Few jazz musicians are blessed with an artistic resurgence after the age of seventy, but the bassist and composer Pavone, who is seventy-five, has recently been enjoying a renaissance as an incisive post-bop bandleader. His ensemble finds room for distinctive younger improvisers, including the saxophonist **Tony Malaby** and the trumpeter **Dave Ballou**. (*Cornelia Street Café, 29 Cornelia St. 212-989-9319. June 14.*)

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# MOVIES



The director Joel Potrykus's drama *"The Alchemist Cookbook,"* starring Ty Hickson as a young man on a supernatural mission, screens June 16 at BAM.

## The Best of the Fests

*Leading independent films get their New York premieres at BAM.*

BAMCINEMAFEST, THE EIGHTH edition of which runs June 15-26, is, in effect, the New York Film Festival for independent films. Few of the screenings in the BAM series are world premières; rather, the programmers scoop up notable movies first seen at other festivals.

The director Joel Potrykus specializes in monomaniacal loners on the wrong end of luck, and his third feature, *"The Alchemist Cookbook"* (June 16), which premiered in March, at South by Southwest, gives obsession metaphysical dimensions. Holed up in a trailer deep in the woods, Sean (Ty Hickson), a young man accompanied only by his cat, tries to master the art of alchemy. His weird science—intended to change base metals into gold—starts innocently enough, with chemistry and incantations. Then Sean turns to animal sacrifice, and, becoming ever more brutal and suffering from his solitude as well as from the diabolical strain of his efforts, he begins to crack.

Potrykus, wandering with Sean into disturbing psychological territory and absurd humor, displays a bold dramatic virtuosity: most of the movie features Sean alone, punctuated only by increasingly troubled visits from his cousin Cortez (Amari Cheatom), yet the dramatic tension remains high throughout. Whether plunging into Sean's delusions and terrors (including visitations from the Devil) with a meticulous realism, or unflinchingly observing Sean's self-mutilating exertions, Potrykus himself seems amazed by the ecstatic energy of Sean's madness.

Anna Biller's *"The Love Witch"* (June 24), a Maryland Film Festival discovery, is a metaphysical astonishment of another sort. A parody of Hollywood melodramas of the late sixties, it stars Samantha Robinson as a self-described love addict who uses spells to attract men and render them emotionally dependent. The costumes and furnishings, Biller's own handmade versions of the era's candy-coated extravagances, are as exquisitely arch and theatrical as the performances and the action, which—for all their comic exaggeration—echo with an uncanny symbolic power.

Zach Clark's *"Little Sister"* (June 17), despite its intimate scale, is one of the most far-reaching recent political films. The drama (which premiered at SXSW) is set during the 2008 Presidential campaign, and is centered on the Lunsford family of Asheville, North Carolina. The young woman of the title, Colleen (Addison Timlin), lives in a convent in New York, and is preparing to take her vows as a novice when she's summoned home by her mother (Ally Sheedy) to visit her brother, Jacob (Keith Poulson), a wounded and reclusive Iraq War veteran. Their intense bond energizes a complex web of dormant relationships—involving Jacob's girlfriend, Tricia (Kristin Slaysman), and Colleen's childhood friend Emily (Molly Plunk), among many others—and the agonized yet sweetly comic action yields profound tenderness and grandly humane passion. In its precise and rueful depiction of the private impact of public policy—in particular, the domestic ravages of war—*"Little Sister"* is an instant classic, a modern counterpart to the 1946 postwar drama *"The Best Years of Our Lives."*

—Richard Brody

## OPENING

**Central Intelligence** In this action comedy, an accountant (Kevin Hart) joins a C.I.A. agent (Dwayne Johnson) on a dangerous mission. Directed by Rawson Marshall Thurber; co-starring Amy Ryan and Aaron Paul. *Opening June 17. (In wide release.)*

## NOW PLAYING

**De Palma**

This new documentary, co-directed by Jake Paltrow and Noah Baumbach, is alluringly smooth and uncluttered, as if taking its cue from one of the tracking shots so beloved by its subject. The film consists of Brian De Palma—now aged seventy-five, and merrily expansive in his mood as in his girth—recounting his life and times. Even as he guides us through the mansion of his movies, he emphasizes that, when it comes to directors' careers, "We don't plan them out." There are bountiful clips, ranging from the rough energy of his apprenticeship to the florid choreography of his grander studio projects; if you seek a link between those phases, consider Robert De Niro, who starred both in "Greetings" (1968) and, as Al Capone, in "The Untouchables" (1987). There are moments when one craves more talking heads—a female voice, in particular, that might challenge the blithe assurance of De Palma's attitude toward women. Yet his gifts as a raconteur and the precision of his memory keep the film flowing. (So worried was Cliff Robertson, we hear, that Genevieve Bujold was stealing his thunder, in "Obsession," that he kept leaning over to throw her off balance. Nice guy.) It may seem perverse for Paltrow and Baumbach to start their tribute with a scene from "Vertigo," but, then again, who has been more devout than De Palma in paying homage to the glory of movies past?—*Anthony Lane (In limited release.)*

**The Fits**

Anna Rose Holmer's first feature is the apotheosis of the after-school special, in the best way. Most of the action takes place after school, in and near a Cincinnati youth center where the lean and muscular Toni (Royalty Hightower), who's about ten years old, trains as a boxer, mainly with her older brother, Jermaine (Da'Sean Minor). But all the other girls in the center are members of the Lionesses, an award-winning dance troupe, and Toni, admiring and envying their sense of belonging as they rehearse in the gym and exult in the hallway, decides to trade boxing for dancing. (The hard work of practice and the desire to excel are at the core of the action.) Soon after she joins the group, it's thrown into turmoil: one by one, the young dancers endure a seizurelike episode, and these fits—which have no discernible medical cause—become a sort of rite of passage, an experience of wonder as well as of fear. Holmer pares down the story to conjure contemplative moods; she films the children with poised observational tenderness and pushes, calmly but decisively, through practicalities to unfold fantasies and dreams. The movie's natural sweetness vibrates with mysteries.—*Richard Brody (In limited release.)*

**Genius**

This thin and staid drama is based on the true story of Maxwell Perkins (Colin Firth), Scribner's editor, and his relationship with the young novelist Thomas Wolfe (Jude Law). Arriving at Perkins's Fifth Avenue office one day in 1929, the volatile Southerner is delighted to learn that his novel will be published, but then confronts the editor's plan to reshape the lengthy text. Meanwhile, Perkins, living in Connecticut with his wife, Louise (Laura

Linney), a former actress whose talent he belittles, and their five daughters, lets his work with Wolfe interfere with his home life. When the book finally comes out, Wolfe's success goes to his head, leading to a break with his lover, Aline Bernstein (Nicole Kidman), a wealthy older woman who supported him in the lean years. Soon, Perkins's own time of reckoning comes. F. Scott Fitzgerald (Guy Pearce), Zelda Fitzgerald (Vanessa Kirby), and Ernest Hemingway (Dominic West) make appearances, and—with the exception of Linney—all the actors are miscast. John Logan's script is a jigsaw puzzle of clichés, and Michael Grandage's direction is antiseptic, but a few moments—showing Perkins aboard a commuter train, exulting at the literary voice in his head—conjure the editor's forceful devotion. Scenes of family life in Connecticut, though brief and undeveloped, suggest the core of a fine movie unrealized here.—*R.B. (In wide release.)*

**Nobody's Daughter Haewon**

The title and setup of the South Korean director Hong Sang-soo's ironically romantic drama are a scintillating ruse. Haewon (Jeong Eun-chaee) is a lithe, vivacious, yet unhappy young acting student. In anguish over her mother's departure for Canada, she calls a former lover, a married film director who is also her professor, for consolation. Their dormant spark is reignited, imperiling his marriage, his job, and her peace of mind. Telling the story through Haewon's diary entries, flashbacks, and dreams, Hong constructs the implicitly self-excoriating tale of drunken blunders and artistic frustrations with a mercurial intricacy. Impacted bitterness rises effervescently to the surface by way of sharp dialogue delivered in poised long takes—some running more than five minutes—punctuated by brisk zooms and pans that suggest the swift, assertive lines of etchings. With a discerning and tender eye for settings as well as for faces, Hong turns nondescript streetscapes into instant icons by the associations that his characters lend them. The straightforward story's crystalline complexity evokes inner depths with a light touch and conveys raging pain with a puckish glint. In Korean.—*R.B. (Museum of the Moving Image; June 19.)*

**Not Wanted**

Ida Lupino's first film as a director, from 1949, is a startling blend of compassion and invention. The subject is the era's absurd taboos regarding sex. Sally Kelson (Sally Forrest), a naïve nineteen-year-old night-club waitress, falls in love with Steve Ryan (Leo Penn, Sean's father), a tough-talking pianist with high-culture dreams, and loses her virginity to him. When Steve leaves town, Sally follows him, in vain, and rejects the earnest overtures of a tenderhearted, hardworking wounded war veteran (Keefe Brasselle). Then, she discovers that she's pregnant, and more trouble ensues. Lupino displays a documentary avidity for the details of work and play (as in a wildly ironic sequence involving a model railroad). She conveys Sally's unworlily, impractical passion with tender, intimate closeups and an intense, effects-driven subjectivity—a hallucinatory sequence in a hospital is a masterpiece of low-budget expressionism. An incongruous yet majestic chase scene, highlighting a photogenic array of Los Angeles locations, projects the intimate melodrama onto the world stage. With Dorothy Adams, as a mother from hell.—*R.B. (Film Forum; June 16.)*

**Now You See Me 2**

The Horsemen from the 2013 film return to right unredressed wrongs, thwart evildoers, and put on a good show, but this sequel, directed by Jon M. Chu, lacks even the deftness of the average party enter-

tainer. Eluding an F.B.I. agent (Mark Ruffalo) on their trail, three world-class vigilante magicians (Jesse Eisenberg, Dave Franco, and Woody Harrelson) come out of hiding, joined by a newly arrived Horsewoman (Lizzy Caplan), in an effort to prevent the launch of a data-stealing smartphone. Chaos ensues, and the agent turns to an imprisoned "magic debunker" (Morgan Freeman) to help chase the magicians across the globe to Macau, where they are in even more dangerous pursuit of even more dastardly villains. Hypnotizing, prestidigitating, or masquerading their way out of tight spots, they perform tricks that seem like C.G.I. simulations and stage hugely complex false-front operations with a wave of the hand. The movie offers neither the astonishment of the magicians' artistry nor a dramatic view of how they do it. One brief romantic scene between two pickpockets winks at the classic comedy "Trouble in Paradise," with none of its breathless eroticism or dramatic stakes.—*R.B. (In wide release.)*

**Warcraft**

Orcs are vast and rapacious hulks; of their many weapons, none are more lethal than their protruding underbites. In short, the last thing you need, if you inhabit the world of men, is an orc passing through a mysterious portal and trashing your peace of mind. Needless to say, that's just what happens in Duncan Jones's new movie, which is based on a video game. Azeroth, ruled by a valiant king (Dominic Cooper), is besieged by an army of invading orcs, among them the vicious Gul'dan (Daniel Wu) and the more reasonable Durotan (Toby Kebbell). Other names include Varian, Medivh, and Halforcen; one of the rare charms of this fantastical world is that most of the characters sound like medications, to be taken twice daily after meals. The problem, for Jones, is that his previous features—"Moon" (2009) and "Source Code" (2011)—turned on sympathetic heroes, whereas the new film is crowded and scattershot. We hang out with a young magician (Ben Schnetzer), an older magician (Ben Foster), and a resourceful warrior (Travis Fimmel), but neither their gifts nor their destinies detain us for long. Even acts of sacrifice, in the grand finale, feel morally weightless, designed largely to pave the way for a sequel. With Paula Patton, as a half-orc, risking a romantic smooch despite her disconcerting fangs.—*A.L. (In wide release.)*

**The Witness**

This extraordinary documentary looks at one of the most infamous of all modern crime stories—the 1964 murder, in Queens, of Kitty Genovese, while her screams were reportedly ignored by dozens of neighbors—through the focus of another genre, the personal documentary. Though its nominal director is James Solomon, its main character and virtual auteur is Bill Genovese, one of Kitty's three younger brothers, who was sixteen at the time of her murder. His on-camera investigation brings him back to the murder site in Kew Gardens, where he visits apartments, calculates sight lines, and interviews current and former residents about the crime. He also consults trial transcripts and police records and does meta-journalistic research involving reporters, editors, and producers responsible for the original accounts of the murder and later revisions of that story. What he discovers turns out to be at odds with the headlines. The film raises questions of present-day import regarding the penal system, police procedure, domestic violence, and journalistic ethics; it also offers a moving, complex vision of gay life in New York a half century ago. The movie's one reenactment—an ingenious experiment in forensics and social science—unites drama, journalism, and first-hand experience in a masterpiece of pure cinema.—*R.B. (In limited release.)*

# DANCE

## American Ballet Theatre

The A.B.T. "Swan Lake" isn't the finest you'll ever see, but it gets the job done. There are six swan queens to choose from, each with her own slightly different take: Gillian Murphy (bold), Isabella Boylston (vulnerable), Veronika Part (grand), Misty Copeland (glamorous), Hee Seo (limpid), and Maria Kochetkova (unflappable). The following week offers the season's only opportunity to see the Russian ballerina Diana Vishneva, who will play Juliet, to Marcelo Gomes's Romeo, on June 21 and the evening of June 25. • June 15 at 2 and 7:30, June 16-17 at 7:30, and June 18 at 2 and 8: "Swan Lake." • June 20-21 at 7:30: "Romeo and Juliet." (*Metropolitan Opera House, Lincoln Center. 212-362-6000. Through July 2.*)

## Jessica Lang Dance

A prolific choreographer of skillfully constructed dances that respectfully mesh with music and striking visual design, Lang has a company of excellent dancers but has yet to develop a voice of much depth or distinction. Ambition isn't what she lacks. Amid the New York premières on this program, "Thousand Yard Stare," boldly set to the profound adagio of Beethoven's String Quartet No. 15, takes on the trauma of war. "Sweet Silent Thought" plays with a Shakespeare sonnet. (*Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. June 14-19.*)

## Jane Comfort / "You Are Here"

In 2013, after decades of creating works notable for their integration of text, narrative, and movement, Comfort suddenly switched modes and made a pure-dance piece. She describes her new work—part of American Dance Institute's New York City season at the Kitchen—as an "ode to urban dwellers" and the ways that their private trajectories intersect in limited space. Once again, she is collaborating with the lighting designer Joe Levasseur, a master of tactile architecture built out of light and shadow. (*512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793. June 16-18.*)

## New Chamber Ballet

Miro Magloire, who has consistently put the least dance-friendly contemporary music to good use, has given himself a break by choosing Ravel—specifically, the Violin Sonata No. 2—for his new piece "Djazz." As always, the surroundings are bare—a spacious studio with even lighting, minimal costumes, and folding chairs for the audience. The live music and excellent dancers are the only luxury. Another work, by Constantine Baecher, is inspired by the complex line drawings of Mark Lombardi. (*City Center Studios, 130 W. 56th St. 212-868-4444. June 17-18.*)

## River to River Festival

Kicking off the dance selections in Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's festival of free performances, Dance Heginbotham applies its quirky sensibility and live-music commitment to the challenging arena of the Brookfield Place mall and its glass-vaulted Winter Garden. A surer bet is Eiko, the Japanese-born veteran, who brings the provocation of her fragile body to Governors Island and Wall Street. The sunny B-girl Ephrat Asherie collaborates with her jazz-pianist brother, Ehud. And Will Rawls, big and smart, revisits Balkan folklore and the duet form in a revision of "The Planet Eaters." (*For information, call 212-219-9401. June 17-21. Through June 26.*)

# ABOVE & BEYOND



## Mermaid Parade

Every June since 1983, the siren song of Surf Avenue on Coney Island draws even more freaks than usual, as aquatic revellers don fish-scale suits and seashell bras to celebrate the start of summer. The Mermaid Parade was created by Dick Zigun, the founder of the Coney Island Circus Sideshow, known locally as the Mayor. Each year, the parade crowns a King Neptune and a Mermaid Queen: past royalty includes David Byrne, Marty Markowitz, Queen Latifah, Lou Reed, and Laurie Anderson. Attendees can register to march in family-friendly or "artsy" clusters (for mermaids taking advantage of the city's leniency on toplessness), or cruise along in antique cars and custom-designed floats. (*Parade begins on Surf Ave. at W. 21st St. coneyisland.com/programs/mermaid-parade. June 18.*)

## AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

The auction houses roll out a few final sales before slowing down for the summer. The headliner at **Christie's** is the private collection of the comedienne Joan Rivers: it has been separated into two auctions, online (June 16-23) and in person (June 22), both containing an agglomeration of ornate baubles from Rivers's Upper East Side penthouse. The sale includes such items as a silver dog bowl engraved with the name of her beloved Yorkshire Terrier, Spike, by Tiffany; a pretty painting by Vuillard ("Dans l'Atelier"); and countless brooches encrusted with precious stones (particularly aquamarines). In a single-lot sale on June 16, the house offers a rare first edition of Lewis Carroll's "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland," one of only twenty-two copies in circulation. (*20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.*) • **Phillips** presents a final sale of jewelry, dominated by diamonds (June 17). (*450 Park Ave. 212-940-1200.*) • American manuscripts and books, including a lengthy correspondence between two nineteenth-century Brooklyn sweethearts, go under the gavel at **Swann**, on June 21. (*104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.*)

## READINGS AND TALKS

### Mast Books

The art-book publisher Morel has faithfully re-created and published one of the last notebooks of the storied poet, critic, and artist Rene Ricard. A relic of Warhol's Factory and a mostly disappeared downtown New York art community, Ricard was a widely celebrated and often controversial arbiter of culture for many decades; as a critic, he helped launch the careers of Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat. The notebook spans Ricard's varied talents and shows

his working process through intimate drawings and poems in various stages of completion. Mast launches the book with a reading of Ricard's poetry by **Luc Sante** and **Glenn O'Brien**. (*66 Avenue A. 646-370-1114. June 15 at 6.*)

### 92nd Street Y

The professional contrarian Stanley Fish is the author of more than a dozen books and a longtime columnist for the *New York Times*. He has a stated stance in nearly every cultural debate, and is clinical with his dissection of viewpoints opposing his own—that is, until he's moved to change his position and start from scratch. In "Winning Arguments with Stanley Fish: Strategies for Politics, the Bedroom, the Courtroom and the Classroom," the English and law professor will delineate the patterns in the great debates of our time, drawing from pivotal legal rulings, political campaigns, popular television shows, films, and even his own bouts of public correspondence. (*Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 92y.org. June 16 at 7.*)

### Greenlight Bookstore

Few American cities in the past century have experienced the peaks and valleys of Detroit, a pillar of American industrialism turned national symbol for a disoriented economy. The story of one local family's brewery provides a ground-level view of the city's struggles. Frances Stroh, in her memoir, "Beer Money," traces the rise and fall of her family's Stroh Brewery Company, disclosing years of wasteful spending, alcoholism, drug abuse, and senseless rebellion. During the Strohs' mid-eighties peak, *Forbes* estimated the company to be worth seven hundred million dollars, a fortune that is now all but entirely gone. The author reads from her book and speaks to Flavorwire's Jason Diamond, followed by a reception—with Stroh's on tap. (*686 Fulton St., Brooklyn. greenlightbookstore.com. June 16 at 7:30.*)

### Bryant Park

Kundiman, named after the genre of nationalist Filipino ballads, is an organization dedicated to cultivating and supporting Asian-American literature. Many young writers of Asian descent who have passed through the annual Kundiman Retreat, now held at Fordham University, have found their way to esteemed programs like the Iowa Writers' Workshop, and have published dozens of books and articles in celebrated literary magazines and journals. The organization invites the poets Janine Joseph and Jee Leong Koh, the author and professor Patrick Rosal, and the performer Franny Choi to an evening of poetry in Bryant Park's Reading Room. (*Between 40th and 42nd Sts. and Fifth and Sixth Aves. bryantpark.org. June 21 at 7.*)

# FOOD & DRINK



## TABLES FOR TWO

### Bar Omar

188 Grand St., Brooklyn (718-388-0411)

IN PARIS, ESPECIALLY on beautiful summer nights, Chez Omar still has a line out the door, almost forty years after it opened. The French-Algerian restaurant has a full bistro menu, but few people bother with it, because everyone comes for the same thing: dunes of couscous served with vegetable stew and expertly charred meat. Four months ago, Yasmina Guerda, the daughter of Omar himself, opened the first extension of her father's restaurant, promising Brooklyn the same dreamy offerings.

The Williamsburg space is cavernous, more reminiscent of a saloon than a French brasserie, with lazily spinning ceiling fans and sanded white wood. But Yasmina, who runs to the restaurant after her day job at the U.N., has in many ways stayed true to the Paris original: paper table covers, bistro chairs, and her great-grandmother's recipes.

An ideal meal starts with the *bastilla*, pulled chicken and almonds jammed into *brik* dough and fried until crispy, like a giant square spring roll. It's topped with a thick layer of confectioner's sugar, a touch that works so well you may recklessly wonder why more appetizers aren't frosted. For the main dishes, the bistro basics, especially the steak au poivre, are

dependably good, and the couscous is filling. But the tagine (lamb, chicken, or kefta) is the showstopper. Portioned for two, it arrives in a tall clay vessel, clutched between napkins. The waiter pauses for dramatic effect before rolling off the lid, letting steam billow out. If you ordered the lamb, swollen prunes, fat apricots, and egg-shaped potatoes hug two giant shanks sunk in a still-bubbling broth; the prunes collapse into a sweet, jammy mess the second they're touched. Shovel some of the fruit over meat pulled clean from the bone, add slivered almonds for crunch, and it's a perfect bite. Ending your meal with dessert is a must, and the *crème brûlée* is irreproachably classic. Shatter the shell of blistered sugar into pieces that look like stained glass and try not to smile.

On busy nights, the restaurant is full of homesick internationals. "This *méchoui* is more Lebanese than Algerian," one says, examining his rack of lamb. But, on some evenings, before the dinner rush hits, at a very European 9 P.M., you may find yourself the only patron. While half of the waitstaff dotes on you, the other half might be crowdsourcing the day's crossword puzzle. "Fifty Across, Cole Porter classic from 'Can-Can,'" a bartender calls out. "I LOVE PA\_I." Bar Omar does a brilliant job of filling in those blanks. (Dishes \$7-\$28; tagine for two \$36-\$39.)

—Becky Cooper

## BAR TAB



### Mr. Purple

180 Orchard St. (212-237-1790)

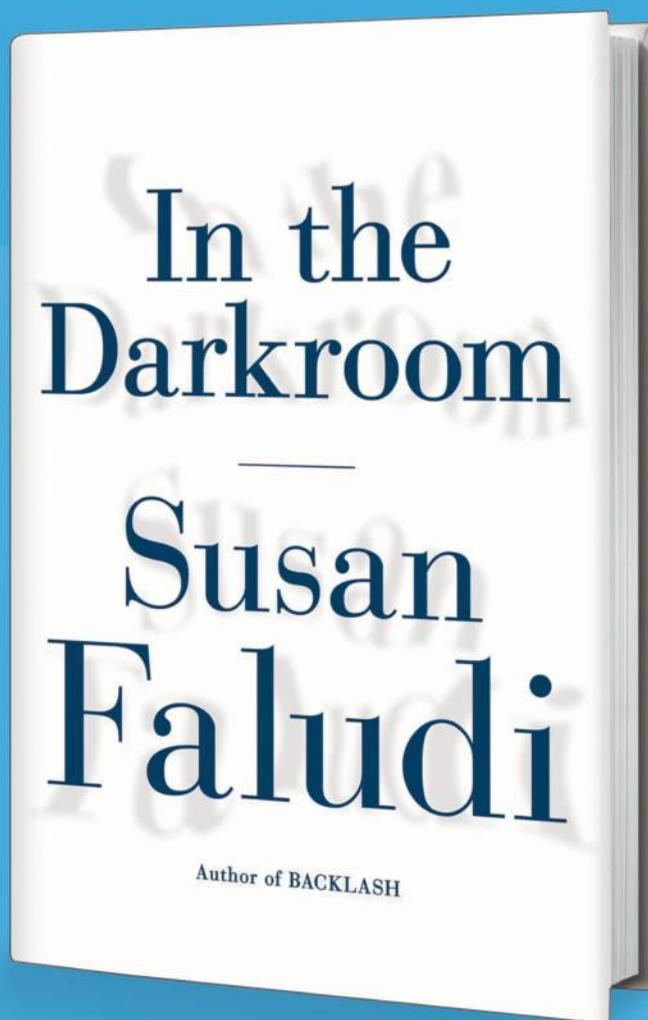
If you've ever longed to follow your Katz's pastrami-on-rye experience with an Elyx spritz, served poolside and al fresco, you're in luck. Mr. Purple, a rooftop bar fifteen stories above Ludlow and Orchard Streets, atop the Hotel Indigo, opened in November, amid controversy. Aiming for a kind of neighborliness, the proprietors named the bar after the eccentric L.E.S. icon Adam Purple, a community-garden activist with a dark past, offending locals and relatives alike. The luxury-on-Ludlow vibe is equally uneasy. The interior, meant to evoke an artist's loft, leads to two outdoor patios, with chaise longues, purple chairs, staggeringly gorgeous views, and a swimming pool. "This is horrible!" a neighborhood man said on a recent night, scowling. "It's like a disco bar in Thailand in 1995." Other patrons, shouting over the din of Calvin Harris, Shaggy, and "Hollaback Girl," seemed to disagree. Amid muscled security guards wearing earpieces and waitresses in minidresses and ankle boots, tourists and locals both looked perfectly content. A group of women spoke Mandarin on a couch; French men in thin European pants took pictures of the tiny, glowing pool, their scarves fluttering in the breeze; a young man told a young woman, proudly, "Sometimes this is my workspace." And how are the drinks? In an age of near-universal craft-cocktail excellence, they are mediocre, pricey, and boldly unsubtle, served in acrylic. The namesake drink is powerfully sweet, and includes tequila, allspice dram, and floating cranberries; the Rooftop Lemonade tastes like Capri Sun doctored by a flask. If you go, raise a glass of decent whiskey to another local icon: the Luna Lounge, the shabby and wonderful bar, formerly at this location, that doesn't live here anymore.—Sarah Larson

*"In the summer of 2004, I set out to investigate someone I scarcely knew, my father. I was in pursuit of an artful dodger, who skipped out on so many things. . . .*

*I was preparing an indictment, amassing discovery for a trial. But somewhere along the line, the prosecutor became a witness."*

"A powerful and absorbing memoir of a parent/child relationship."

—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review



"A moving and penetrating inquiry [and] a gripping exploration of sexual, national, and ethnic identity."

—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

"Penetrating and lucid.... [A] rich, arresting, and ultimately generous investigation of her father [that] becomes a complex act of forgiveness."

—*New York Times Book Review*, Cover Review

From the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and bestselling author of *Backlash*



## THE TALK OF THE TOWN

### COMMENT THE CHOICE

**B**EFORE THE EMERGENCE of Barack Obama, the idea of an African-American President was less a matter of political reality than it was the stuff of fantasy. With apologies to anticipatory figures from Frederick Douglass to Jesse Jackson, a black President resided for decades in the realm of popular culture, a figment of the liberal imagination.

There were many such exhibits. Take the stereotype-flecked movie musical, released during the Depression, called “Rufus Jones for President.” Ethel Waters, in the role of the protective mother, urges her little boy, played by seven-year-old Sammy Davis, Jr., to endure the taunts of the local bullies and aspire to greatness. “You’s goin’ to be President!” she tells him. “Me?” Rufus asks, incredulous. The mother falls into a reverie. She sees a crowd carrying placards that read “Down with the Reds, Put in the Blacks,” and the boy is soon dressed in a sharp suit, speaking before the Senate. Such films—all the way to “Head of State,” in which Chris Rock plays a local pol who ends up on Mt. Rushmore—mapped the yawning distance between the wish and its fulfillment.

For most of this nation’s history, the prospect of a woman in the Oval Office had also reposed in the realm of speculative fiction. In 1964, Polly Bergen starred in “Kisses for My President,” in which she played Leslie Harrison McCloud, the first female President. Naturally, her husband, played by Fred MacMurray, is the focus of the movie. The First Man wanders the White House, staring at paintings of Martha Washington and Abigail Adams, and wondering if he, too, will be depicted in such a portrait, wearing a bonnet. He especially resents the many hours during which his wife neglects him for matters of state. The natural order of things is restored only when President McCloud gets pregnant and resigns her office.



Now Hillary Clinton, having won primaries from New Jersey to California, has clinched the Democratic Party’s Presidential nomination. And the battle she faces is likely to be more bizarre than even “Mars Attacks!,” in which Natalie Portman, playing the President’s daughter, Taffy Dale, becomes the first female Commander-in-Chief only after the entire government is wiped out by alien invaders. Clinton will have to campaign with unwavering poise against the most dangerous and unpredictable variety of opponent—a demagogue who is willing to trespass every boundary of decency to win power.

Has a national election ever suggested a more vividly divergent choice? Hillary Clinton has been in the public eye for decades, and her ideology, her instincts, her mistakes, her victories, her intelligence and character, her resilience are as exposed as those of any candidate in recent memory. Donald Trump—gaudy real-estate brander, reality-show star, educational huckster—has been in the glare just as long, but as a bit player in the national phantasmagoria. Not anymore: with his puckered scowl and his preposterous narcissism, he clinched the Republican nomination with ease, serially vanquishing sixteen rivals rendered hapless by a campaign that made improvisation its organizing principle and fuelled itself on an unending stream of personal insult, racist wooing, and misogynist bile.

The current leadership of the Republican Party and most of its traditional funders show every sign of knowing that a pernicious buffoon has become their standard-bearer. And yet they have largely fallen into line. They dare not betray “the wisdom of their voters.” There’s Orrin Hatch, of Utah, with his reputation for integrity, telling his constituents that Trump “doesn’t have a prejudiced bone in his body.” There’s Paul Ryan, the self-advertised model of Republican probity

and deep thinking, allowing that, yes, Trump is guilty of “textbook” racism, but refusing to edge away from his squeamish endorsement. And there is Mitch McConnell, the Senate Majority Leader, providing this piece of moral discernment: “Well, what I am willing to say is that Donald Trump is certainly a different kind of candidate.” McConnell has hinted that he could rescind his support, but what are the odds?

Some members of the G.O.P. rank and file have expressed clear disgust for Trump, and the Bushes have announced their refusal to vote at all. Even the Party’s most ardent supporters in the press sense doom. “Have Republicans no shame?” Erick Erickson, the conservative blogger and broadcaster, wrote last week. “They’re handing their nomination to a gold-plated fraud who will cost the party not just its integrity and not just its soul but also its chances of winning for at least a generation.”

O.K., “at least a generation” might be overstating it. But, in a rational world, you would think that the table is set for Hillary Clinton to become the first woman President in the history of the republic. The electoral map, particularly in the battleground states, is leaning, at this

point, in the Democrats’ favor. Trump lacks a cohesive campaign apparatus, unless you count his tireless Twitter account.

In fact, Clinton’s supporters, and all those who reject Trump as some noxious combination of Father Coughlin and Ethelred the Unready, had reason to feel a surge of optimism last week. Her party’s most prominent surrogates—in particular the President, Joe Biden, and Elizabeth Warren—all issued unalloyed endorsements. Even Bernie Sanders showed signs of coming down from the sugar high of campaigning in front of adoring crowds and redeploying his impressive energies against Trump.

Yet, as Clinton herself has said, there is little room for complacency. If her concentration slips, if she falters in the debates or is upended by some ethical failing, if some event (a terrorist act, for instance) takes place that allows Trump to twist its meaning and rally voters to his banner of America First—if any of that happens, not only could the prospect of a female President remain a fantasy but power will be in the hands of a malevolent fraud. And then what? A disaster beyond the imagining of any screenwriter.

—David Remnick

## NEVER TRUMP DEPT. WHO FEEDS AMERICA?



EIGHTEEN MONTHS AGO, Donald Trump and the Spanish-born chef José Andrés made a deal: Trump was developing a luxury hotel near the White House and wanted Andrés to open a restaurant inside. Andrés signed on. But then, last summer, Trump got talking about building walls and accused Mexico of sending rapists to the United States. Andrés, a naturalized U.S. citizen, wanted out. Trump sued for breach of contract. Andrés countersued, arguing that Trump’s anti-immigrant rhetoric had “torpedoed” the restaurant’s prospects.

Unbowed, Andrés joined the I Am an Immigrant movement, and has spoken out against the Republican Presidential candidate’s policies, on Twitter and in person. “Who is going to be feeding America if we kick everybody that is feeding America out?” he said, not long ago.

One day last week, Andrés opened Minibar, his twelve-seat Washington restaurant, for lunch, for only the third time in thirteen years. A chef friend,

Quique Dacosta, was in from Spain, and the pair wanted to cook together. Dacosta, whose restaurant on the Costa Blanca has three Michelin stars, was on vacation, but, he said, “I had a junkie moment, like I had to cook.”

They prepared eighteen courses. The first: a rose, with pomegranate-and-rose-flavored apple shavings for “petals.” The fourth: a terrarium holding a “leaf” made of crispy black garlic, resting on a bed of Spanish moss. (Nevin Martell, a food writer in attendance, noted, “This place is an Instagrammer’s paradise.”) The sixth: a “pebble” made of whipped Parmesan with a cocoa-butter and black-truffle-oil shell. One woman tried to eat her towelette.

While guests spooned up rum-and-Coke foie gras, Andrés described his latest anti-Trump outing: a high-school commencement speech in which he obliquely compared Trump to Darth Vader, in a discussion about “the forces of inclusion and the forces of exclusion.” Later, back at his office, he said, “Maybe a wall *is* a great idea. Maybe to don’t do business with China *is* a great idea. Maybe every crazy idea *is* the best idea. But what is never a great idea is just being a firing squad of words, against anything that moves.”

After dessert (praline “peanut” shells filled with bourbon), Andrés swapped his chef’s coat for a T-shirt that read,

“MY SLOW IS YOUR FAST.” He and Dacosta strolled to a nearby farmers’ market. Dacosta snapped pictures of heirloom tomatoes.

“Can I steal a tomato?” Andrés asked, lifting one to his ear like a conch shell.

He halved it with a knife and slipped the blade under its skin, as if he were shucking an oyster. “Every recipe book says to discard the fucking seeds.” He slid the pulp off the knife into Dacosta’s mouth. “This is the best part,” he said. “¿Bueno?”

Dacosta nodded. They pressed on, sampling gazpacho from plastic ramekins (“It’s missing vinegar,” Dacosta observed) and sharing a bottle of cold-pressed apple, lemon, ginger, and



Donald Trump and José Andrés

cayenne juice. (“Really spicy!” he said.)

Fans stepped up for pictures and autographs. An elderly man who’d heard the commencement speech called out, “We are all immigrants!”

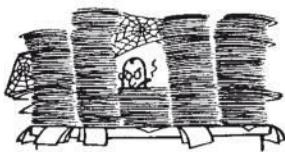
Andrés hollered back, “It was O.K.? The message? You liked it?”

At the edge of the market, Andrés pointed out a brick building. “The original Minibar used to be here,” he said. “Then I sold the building—did the deal of my life.” He laughed. “I sound like Trump, but you can make money in real estate.”

—*Nicholas Schmidle*

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## THE PICTURES GHOST EDITOR



AS SCOTT BERG HAS almost single-handedly rescued Maxwell Perkins from the anonymity he desired, Berg’s 1978 biography, “Max Perkins: Editor of Genius,” was a masterly look at a reticent Yankee who buried himself in manuscripts, wore a fedora everywhere, and deplored innovations—even as he discovered and published Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Wolfe. The glamour of these figures prompted a Hollywood studio to option the book. Then, Berg recalled hearing, “the head of Universal got to page 3 of the script and said, ‘This is about a *book editor*?’”

Thirty-eight years later, “Genius”—which makes Perkins an action hero who wields his red pencil like a scimitar—has just opened, at last. The other morning, Berg, now sixty-six, stood in front of Perkins’s old town house, in Turtle Bay. The writer was garden-party-ready, in pressed khakis, a pink shirt with rolled-up sleeves, and a striped magenta tie, with a blazer draped over his shoulders. In 1936, he said, Perkins’s wife painted the limestone exterior black, “and when people asked Max what that was all about, he said, ‘As far as I’m concerned, it’s because Roosevelt got reelected.’” Berg later became close with Perkins’s next-door neighbor Katharine Hepburn, and wrote a book about her, too. “They never spoke,” he said, “but Perkins would stare over at a bust of Hepburn on her second floor. It

used to kill him: What kind of woman has a bust of herself? I mentioned that to her, and she said, ‘That’s why he led a quiet life of books and I’m an actress!’”

As Berg retraced Perkins’s ten-minute walk to his office at Charles Scribner’s Sons, he pointed out the site of Manny Wolf’s Chophouse, where Perkins and Thomas Wolfe would dine. The film centers on the father-son relationship between Perkins, who had five daughters, and Wolfe, who yearned for a muse. Berg said that Colin Firth’s portrayal of Perkins as a repressed mensch was “beyond apt. I’d suggested he look at footage of the Watergate prosecutor Archibald Cox, who was Perkins’s nephew, for the family voice, which was sandy-throated and precise.” He added that Jude Law’s take on Wolfe as a verbose man-child was also accurate: “I found a letter from Wolfe to Max in which he said, ‘Generally, I do not believe the writing to be wordy, prolix, or redundant’—and I thought, Oh, yes, it is!”

Swinging a tote bag as he walked west, Berg said that when Wolfe wrote a book that detailed how Perkins had hewn his novels from dense forests of Wolfian prose, “Perkins begged him, in vain, not to publish it. Max always said that if editors were too well known the public would lose faith in writers, and that, above all, writers would lose faith in themselves. And that is *exactly* what happened to Thomas Wolfe.”

At Forty-eighth and Fifth, Berg said, “And here we have the famous Scribner’s bookstore, now a Sephora.” Next door, he rode the elevator to the fifth floor, where Perkins had the corner office. “When Perkins first arrived, the Scribner’s office still felt Dickensian,” he said. “When I arrived—they set me up with a little desk and a typewriter, so I could take notes from the archive—there weren’t men perched on stools over high desks, but it hadn’t advanced much.”

He stepped into an empty loft. “Oh, my God,” he said. “I am utterly disoriented.” He looked up at the H.V.A.C. snakework: “There was *nothing* exposed here, either architecturally or emotionally.” He pressed his nose to the mullioned windows, all that remained. “I’m trying to dope it out. Max’s office must have been over here, but how . . .” Positioning himself by the elevator, Berg paced the points of the compass, mut-

tering and scratching his head. “I feel like I’m in a dream,” he said. He asked a man who was working in the back about the old dispensation. “I don’t know anything about that,” the man said. “But it’s going to be a showroom for furniture refinishes.”

—*Tad Friend*

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## THE BOARDS FAMILY BUSINESS



THE PLAYWRIGHT AND actress Halley Feiffer doesn’t know how she got chronic Lyme disease, but she thinks it was from a tick on Martha’s Vineyard. Two years ago, she was acting in an Off Broadway play and could barely get through the second act. “Profound fatigue, profound brain fog. I couldn’t remember the word for, like, spoon. I couldn’t write,” Feiffer said recently. She was leaving a clinic on Park Avenue South, where, as part of her treatment, she’d just been injected with an antioxidant that makes her feel “like a superhero.”

Illness is the subject of her new play, “A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Gynecologic Oncology Unit at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center of New York City,” which MCC Theatre is producing at the Lucille Lortel. Feiffer has a knack for titles. One of her first plays, produced in 2013, was “How to Make Friends and Then Kill Them.” It was followed by “I’m Gonna Pray for You So Hard,” a black comedy about the dysfunctional, booze-soaked relationship between an aspiring stage actress and her father, a renowned Upper West Side playwright. This got some attention, since Feiffer is the daughter of the cartoonist and playwright Jules Feiffer. But Halley, who is thirty-one, is less interested in autobiography than in subverting her audience’s assumptions. “With almost everything I write, I’m inspired by an event or some part of myself that disgusts me, and I try to take that kernel and blow it up times ten billion,” she said.

Growing up, she revered her father, who would work all day in his studio, listening to jazz. “My most blissful childhood memories are playing a game I invented called Imagination, where I would

lie on the floor and throw a ball at a wall for five hours and create an entire fictional life,” she recalled over an almond-milk latte. “I had an entire family I created called the Moonstones, and I wrote basically a Russian novel about this family in my head. Before alcohol, that was, like, my drug.” By fifteen, she continued, “I was drinking myself to death without knowing that’s what I was doing. I sort of pretended I was Simone de Beauvoir with my friends in the kitchen.” (She got sober at twenty-four.)

During high school, she auditioned for Noah Baumbach’s film “The Squid and the Whale” and was cast as Jesse Eisenberg’s neglected girlfriend: her first major role, shot after her freshman year at Wesleyan. Fame—proximity to it, self-abasement in pursuit of it—became an enduring theme. In the 2013 film “He’s Way More Famous Than You,” which she co-wrote with Ryan Spahn, she played a narcissistic actress who desperately tries to land an A-list co-star for her comeback project. Her new play, about two strangers who meet in the cancer hospital where their mothers share a room, is another darkly comic distortion of real life. While Feiffer was in college, her mother, the writer Jenny Allen, was treated for ovarian cancer, an experience that Allen recounted in a one-woman play, “I Got Sick Then I Got Better.”

“She had a roommate on the other side of the curtain, and I had a quick thought, like, Wow, it would be so cool

if there was some cute boy, maybe her son, who I could flirt with,” Feiffer recalled. “And, as soon as I thought that, I thought, That is such a selfish thing to think, Halley.”

Feiffer’s parents divorced a few years ago; her mother lives on Martha’s Vineyard with Feiffer’s younger sister, and her father lives in East Hampton—“so now they both live in summer resorts full time,” Feiffer said. At a building in the theatre district, she took an elevator to a rehearsal room, where two actors were running a scene in which they compare their mothers’ parenting choices:

DON: My mom used to put me to sleep by telling me stories about all the men she’d pursued romantically before my dad.

KARLA: My mom used to put us to sleep by turning on “Law & Order.”

Truish? “We loved watching ‘Law & Order’ in my family,” Feiffer admitted. “Especially ‘SVU’; it was the only thing that all four of us agreed on.”

—Michael Schulman

## POSTSCRIPT FRANK MODELL

IN PERSON AND in his drawings, Frank Modell presented his friends and fans with different but companionable reactions—attention, concern, and an imminent expectation of delight. His gaze was mature and alert, but a wry smile often flickered near the corners of his mouth: something awaited. He was seriously,

invariably funny. Also boyish, even in his nineties. Women adored him—some of them all his life—but so did his male friends, without envy. Years ago, when my wife Carol and I were coming home after a party, she said, “Frank Modell is the most charming man in the world!”

“But what about me?” I said.

“Oh, you, too,” she managed.

His line was deft, and his ideas unpredictable; a unicorn on a unicycle, for instance. Also a man who is leaping from a burning building toward the firemen’s landing net cradling a large canvas in his arms. “I believe you’re right,” a male spectator says to his companion. “It *is* a Chagall.” And what could be better (as I once noted) than Frank’s turtlenecked downhill skier, his broken leg up on a hassock, who is being visited by his dog—a dog bringing a single slipper? It’s clear that the dog is more upset about the accident than the dolt in the chair.

Another dog of his, a puppy in a store window, grins hopefully at a passing mother and child while holding a sign in his teeth: “REDUCED.”

Starting in 1946, Frank contributed more than fourteen hundred cartoons to *The New Yorker*: a cartoon every other week for fifty years. There were some splendid covers as well, but not many of them, which is odd, because Modell kept painting all his life. His house in Guilford, Connecticut, is stuffed with his bright landscapes and studies, and artists keep popping up in his work. One of them sits outdoors before his easel in a landscape bearing paint-by-number digits. Another painter, a grouchy portraitist, faces his female subject but has posted a forehanded “QUIET PLEASE!” notice on the wall behind him.

These summaries don’t quite sum him up. The laughs in Frank’s drawings came swiftly and perhaps departed quickly. The *Times* obituary said “forgettable,” but let’s try “ephemeral.” Here I think of an elephant of Frank’s who is bringing flowers to his elephant wife or lady friend. “You remembered!” she says. Yes, we do.

For most of us, there’s an unspoken expectation of an accumulating reward for our life’s work—respectability, some op. cit.s, perhaps a bit of fame. But Frank’s cartoons and sweet life came without demand. The gift was joy, and shared laughter the only expectation.

—Roger Angell



“Obviously, some people here do not appreciate the gravity of our situation.”

## THE FINANCIAL PAGE THE CASE FOR FREE MONEY

IN THE MID-NINETEEN-SEVENTIES, the Canadian province of Manitoba ran an unusual experiment: it started just handing out money to some of its citizens. The town of Dauphin, for instance, sent checks to thousands of residents every month, in order to guarantee that all of them received a basic income. The goal of the project, called Mincome, was to see what happened. Did people stop working? Did poor people spend foolishly and stay in poverty? But, after a Conservative government ended the project, in 1979, Mincome was buried. Decades later, Evelyn Forget, an economist at the University of Manitoba, dug up the numbers. And what she found was that life in Dauphin improved markedly. Hospitalization rates fell. More teen-agers stayed in school. And researchers who looked at Mincome's impact on work rates discovered that they had barely dropped at all. The program had worked about as well as anyone could have hoped.

Mincome was a prototype of an idea that came to the fore in the sixties, and that is now popular again among economists and policy folks: a basic income guarantee. There are many versions of the idea, but the most interesting is what's called a universal basic income: every year, every adult citizen in the U.S. would receive a stipend—ten thousand dollars is a number often mentioned. (Children would receive a smaller allowance.)

One striking thing about guaranteeing a basic income is that it's always had support both on the left and on the right—albeit for different reasons. Martin Luther King embraced the idea, but so did the right-wing economist Milton Friedman, while the Nixon Administration even tried to get a basic-income guarantee through Congress. These days, among younger thinkers on the left, the U.B.I. is seen as a means to ending poverty, combatting rising inequality, and liberating workers from the burden of crappy jobs. For thinkers on the right, the U.B.I. seems like a simpler, and more libertarian, alternative to the thicket of anti-poverty and social-welfare programs.

There are signs that the U.B.I. may be an idea whose time has come. Switzerland held a referendum on a basic income last week (though it lost badly); Finland is going to run a U.B.I. experiment next year; and Y-Combinator, a Silicon Valley incubator firm, is sponsoring a similar test in Oakland. Why now? In the U.S., the new interest in the U.B.I. is driven in part by anxiety about how automation will affect workers. Bhaskar Sunkara, the publisher of the socialist magazine

*Jacobin*, told me, "People are fearful of becoming redundant, and there's this sense that the economy can't be built to provide jobs for everyone." In the short run, concerns about robots taking all our jobs are probably overstated. But the appeal of a basic income—a kind of Social Security for everyone—is easy to understand. It's easy to administer; it avoids the paternalism of social-welfare programs that tell people what they can and cannot buy with the money they're given; and, if it's truly universal, it could help destigmatize government assistance. As Sunkara puts it, "Universal programs build social solidarity, and they become politically easier to defend."

The U.B.I. is often framed as a tool for fighting poverty, but it would have other important benefits. By providing an income cushion, it would increase workers' bargaining power, potentially driving up wages. It would make it easier for people to take risks with their job choices, and to invest in education. In the U.S. in the seventies, there were small-scale

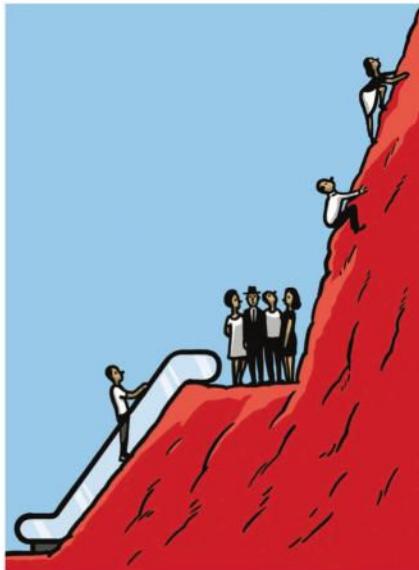
experiments with basic-income guarantees, and they showed that young people with a basic income were more likely to stay in school; in New Jersey, kids' chances of graduating from high school increased by twenty-five per cent.

Critics of the U.B.I. argue that handing people cash, instead of targeted aid (like food stamps), means that much of the money will be wasted, and that a basic income will take away the incentive to work, lowering G.D.P. and giving us a nation of lazy, demoralized people. But the example of the many direct-cash-grant programs in the developing world suggests that, as the Columbia economist Chris Blattman puts it, "the poor do not waste grants." As for the work question, most of the basic-income experiments suggest that the

disincentive effect wouldn't be large; in Manitoba, working hours for men dropped by just one per cent. It's certainly true that the U.B.I. would make it easier for people to think twice about taking unrewarding jobs. But that's a good consequence, not a bad one.

A basic income would not be cheap—depending on how the program was structured, it would likely cost at least twelve to thirteen per cent of G.D.P. And, given the state of American politics, that renders the U.B.I. politically impossible for the time being. Yet the most popular social-welfare programs in the U.S. all seemed utopian at first. Until the nineteen-twenties, no state in the union offered any kind of old-age pension; by 1935, we had Social Security. Guaranteed health care for seniors was attacked as unworkable and socialist; now Medicare is uncontroversial. If the U.B.I. comes to be seen as a kind of insurance against a radically changing job market, rather than simply as a handout, the politics around it will change. When this happens, it's easy to imagine a basic income going overnight from completely improbable to totally necessary.

—James Surowiecki



## OCCUPIED TERRITORY

*The Republican elite struggles over whether to resist Trump or capitulate.*

BY RYAN LIZZA



LAST MONTH, Donald Trump, the presumptive Republican nominee for President, and Paul Ryan, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, met at the headquarters of the Republican National Committee, two blocks from the Capitol. Ryan, the Vice-Presidential candidate in 2012, is widely regarded in the G.O.P. as a policy intellectual and has fashioned himself as the guardian of conservative ideology. Trump, one of the most opportunistic candidates in the Party's history, had just knocked out the last of sixteen Republicans who had, to varying degrees, campaigned on Ryan's ideas. In July, at the Republican National Convention, in Cleveland, Trumpism's vic-

tory over Ryanism will create a potentially humiliating moment for the Speaker, who will serve as the chairman of the Convention, which will formally nominate Trump. The candidate's visit to Party headquarters was akin to a general visiting a conquered territory. He was there both to survey the wreckage and to determine who, among the conquered, would prove loyal to his cause.

Outside the building, Representative Darrell Issa, a combative conservative ideologue from California, found his path blocked by several dozen activists from United We Dream, which advocates on behalf of undocumented young people. Some held makeshift

signs calling Trump a racist or associating him with the Ku Klux Klan or the Confederacy, but many held up professionally produced placards reading, "The G.O.P.: Party of Trump." Issa hopped a fence and raced up the street as if he were fleeing a crime scene. When a reporter ran after him, he ducked into a building.

The leader of the pro-Trump wing in the House, Chris Collins, of New York, was conducting an impromptu press conference on the sidewalk. Collins was the first of his colleagues to endorse Trump, switching his support from Jeb Bush, back in February. Now he criticized George H. W. Bush and George W. Bush, both of whom have said they would not vote for Trump or for Clinton in the general election. "How an elected official can message to America, 'Don't vote'—I find that embarrassing for them," Collins said. "These people are becoming irrelevant." Like other Trump backers, he argued, "One on one, Mr. Trump is a listener. He's not a talker. When he's got a group of people, he wants to know what's going on in other people's districts." If Ryan didn't endorse the nominee, Collins said, he would lose the Speakership. "I have spoken to very few members who have said that they're not on the Trump train."

And yet it was hard to swing a boom mike without hitting a skeptical Republican. Charlie Dent, of Pennsylvania, who is a leader of the faction of moderate House Republicans called the Tuesday Group, said, "Donald Trump has to convince many Americans, including myself, that he's ready to lead this great nation. He's got to do that. At this point, I haven't been persuaded."

Tom Cole, a Republican congressman from Oklahoma, earned a doctorate in British history before entering state politics. Cole has spent six years working with Ryan to fight the Tea Party wing in the House, opposing its government shutdowns and its destruction of Eric Cantor, the former Majority Leader, in 2014, and of John Boehner, Ryan's predecessor as Speaker, late last year. After Boehner's exit, with the Republican-controlled Congress in free fall, Ryan, under strong pressure from his colleagues, reluctantly agreed to take the Speakership.

For Ryan and Cole, Trump posed a different challenge. Insofar as Trump has

*One senator says, of Trump's win, "I'm still in the first stage of grief—denial."*

fixed political positions, he disagrees with a majority of House Republicans, including Ryan and Cole, on foreign policy, taxes, entitlements, trade policy, immigration, and the minimum wage. He repeatedly talks about a tax policy that would be less generous to the wealthiest Americans, allow the government to pay down the debt, and keep Social Security and Medicare solvent, although the plan he has presented would do none of those things. Cole said, "It's not as if the majority was created by Donald Trump. This majority was created much more by the views and vision that Paul Ryan laid out." Cole said that he respects what Trump has accomplished as a candidate: "It's an amazing achievement. I suspect, and I would hope, he respects what we did to win the majority."

But he also noted that "politics is a very pragmatic business." He went on, "The voters get to decide. They're the ones that make the choices around here, and they've made it. So, looks to me like that's a reality you adjust to and work with." He seemed relatively untroubled by Trump's statements that he would ban Muslims from entering the United States; deport eleven million undocumented immigrants; rewrite libel laws; reinstate the use of torture and kill noncombatants; and strengthen ties to Vladimir Putin while rescinding security guarantees made to our closest democratic allies.

After the meeting, Trump and Ryan issued a perfunctory statement declaring it "a very positive step toward unification," but Ryan declined to issue a formal endorsement. Trump had put countless Republican lawmakers in excruciating political predicaments. Senator John McCain, who told me last summer that Trump had "fired up the crazies," now needs Trump's voters to support his own reelection in Arizona—a state that Trump won by twenty-two percentage points in the primaries—and has said that he will support him. Marco Rubio, whose last days as a Presidential candidate were spent mocking the size of Trump's hands and the orange hue of his face, recently apologized for the personal attacks, and said that he would speak on Trump's behalf at the Convention. Governor Chris Christie, of New Jersey, another of Trump's opponents early in the campaign, has transformed himself into a sort of manservant, who

is constantly with Trump at events. (One Republican told me that a friend of his on the Trump campaign used Snapchat to send him a video of Christie fetching Trump's McDonald's order.)

Ryan, who went on to endorse Trump on June 2nd, was the last major hold-out. Tim Miller, a former spokesman for Jeb Bush, who has said that he can't support the nominee, told me, "It's noteworthy how few rank-and-file members have spoken up against Trump. I think that's a mistake that people are going to regret."

**A**S TRUMP ROSE to the top of the polls last summer, the Republican Party turned out to be more at odds with its constituents than anyone had realized. Since 1964, when Senator Barry Goldwater was the Republican Presidential candidate, there has been wide agreement about the meaning of conservatism. The Party stands for lower taxes, less government, deregulation, free trade, and austere budgets. The debate has been about how much of the welfare state to dismantle, not whether it should be done. It was taken for granted that the same anti-government zeal that had fuelled the Reagan Revolution, of the nineteen-eighties; the 1994 Republican takeover of Congress; and the 2010 Tea Party insurgency would continue to drive the Party.

But Republican Presidential candidates have lost the popular vote in five of the last six Presidential elections. After Mitt Romney's defeat, in 2012, the Republican National Committee assembled five political consultants and Party officials to study what had gone wrong. In March, 2013, the group released its findings, which the press immediately dubbed "the Autopsy Report." The national party, the report said, was "increasingly marginalizing itself, and unless changes are made, it will be increasingly difficult for Republicans to win another presidential election in the near future." The problem was especially acute among millennials and nonwhite voters. "Public perception of the Party is at record lows. Young voters are increasingly rolling their eyes at what the Party represents, and many minorities wrongly think that Republicans do not like them or want them in the country." The Party sounded "increasingly out of

touch" and was "driving around in circles on an ideological cul-de-sac." The report called for "a more welcoming conservatism" and favorably quoted a Republican committeewoman who said, "There are some people who need the government." But for the most part the authors didn't challenge the Party's neo-libertarian consensus about economics and the welfare state.

America's demographic changes made the project of reforming the Party more urgent. In 1980, when Ronald Reagan was elected to his first term, the electorate was eighty-eight per cent white and two per cent Hispanic. In 2012, as the report noted, when Romney was defeated, it was seventy-two per cent white and ten per cent Hispanic. The only recent Republican who seemed to understand the crisis was George W. Bush, who, by running a campaign that anticipated many of the Autopsy Report's recommendations, won at least forty per cent of the Hispanic vote in 2004. Romney, who recommended "self-deportation" for undocumented immigrants, won twenty-seven per cent of the Hispanic vote, the Party's worst showing since 1996.

"If Hispanic Americans perceive that a G.O.P. nominee or candidate does not want them in the United States (i.e. self-deportation), they will not pay attention to our next sentence," the report said. "It does not matter what we say about education, jobs or the economy; if Hispanics think we do not want them here, they will close their ears to our policies."

Party committees generally serve one purpose: by providing money, opposition research, voter data, and get-out-the-vote operations, they help candidates get elected. Especially in the case of contentious issues about which their own elected officials are divided, they rarely endorse legislation. But the R.N.C. was making a major policy recommendation. "We must embrace and champion comprehensive immigration reform. If we do not, our Party's appeal will continue to shrink to its core constituencies only." Comprehensive immigration reform sounds vague, but in Congress it had a specific meaning: a deal between Democrats and Republicans that included guest-worker programs, heightened border security, and

amnesty or a pathway to citizenship for many of the eleven million undocumented immigrants living in the United States.

By July, a bipartisan group of eight senators, including McCain, who believed he lost the 2008 race partly because of the Party's poor showing among nonwhites, and Rubio, who was preparing to run for President, had pushed a comprehensive immigration-reform bill through the Senate with fourteen Republican votes. Some of the consultants who wrote the Autopsy Report started laying the groundwork for the Presidential campaign of Jeb Bush, who, like Rubio, used the report as a campaign blueprint.

Then the immigration bill moved to the House, where a faction of conservative Republicans has been in a state of rebellion against its leadership since the election of 2010, when the Tea Party backlash against Obama helped Republicans win the House. If there was a single moment when the Party of Paul Ryan began to turn into the Party of Donald Trump, it may have been July 10, 2013, the day House Republicans held a special meeting in the basement of the Capitol to debate whether they should take up immigration reform.

Paul Ryan stood before one microphone and Tom Cotton, a thirty-six-year-old freshman congressman from Arkansas, stood before another. Ryan, who spoke first, argued for passing a version of the Senate bill, saying that re-

forming the immigration system would strengthen the economy, supplying U.S. companies with a steady number of immigrants to take jobs that other Americans didn't want. Cotton, who is tall and scrawny and loves partisan combat, delivered an unexpectedly sharp rebuke. He told me that he condemned the Senate bill for giving priority to "the illegal immigrant population" over the plight of "natural-born citizens and naturalized citizens who are out of work" and warned his colleagues that Republican voters were against immigration reform. Cotton was eyeing a Senate seat in deep-red Arkansas, where voters were strongly opposed to it. He led the House opposition to the Senate bill, and Boehner, then the Speaker, decided not to bring the bill to the House floor.

Cotton, who has said that he would not rule out becoming Trump's running mate, had a modest upbringing in the small town of Dardanelle before attending Harvard and Harvard Law School. He spent two years working as a law clerk in Houston and as a lawyer in Washington before joining the Army. In June, 2006, he sent an e-mail to the *Times* from Iraq, criticizing the reporters James Risen and Eric Lichtblau for an article they had written exposing a Treasury Department program to thwart terrorist financing. Cotton called for the reporters to be jailed for interfering with security operations and violating espionage laws. The *Times* didn't publish the letter, but it was posted on a conserva-

tive blog, and turned the young soldier into a minor hero on the right.

Cotton told me that the Autopsy Report, the Senate, and Paul Ryan had it all wrong. "There's no issue on which élites in both parties are more disconnected from the American people—in both parties—than immigration." The conclusions of the Autopsy Report have become an article of faith among the consultant and donor class, but Cotton laid out an alternative argument, citing data from exit polls and even margins of error. George W. Bush won his historic forty per cent of the Hispanic vote in 2004 almost without a mention of immigration. John McCain made immigration reform a centerpiece of his 2008 Presidential campaign and received thirty-one per cent of the Hispanic vote. Four years later, Romney talked about "self-deportation" and won twenty-seven per cent. "It didn't seem to hurt him nearly as much as you might've expected," Cotton said. "So, whatever it is that we can do to appeal to Hispanic voters, it would seem, is independent of what we do on immigration."

The corollary to this view of the effects of an anti-immigration platform is that Republicans can appeal to Hispanics with an economic message. "If you're a first-generation Guatemalan working in northwest Arkansas, legal, you're working for Tyson or something, maybe you're working for a landscaping company or something, maybe your wife is a nanny or something, you have the same concerns as the white guy living down the road from you," Cotton said. "By and large, you want a job that pays a decent wage and some benefits and some prospect for advancement. You want safety on your streets so you don't have to worry about crime against your family. You don't want radical terrorists to blow up the mall when you go shopping for back-to-school clothes for your kids."

Henry Olsen, a scholar at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, who is writing a biography of Ronald Reagan, argues that the Autopsy Report's recommendations badly understated the severity of the G.O.P.'s crisis. "The establishment approach to overcoming this problem is to do a little bit of tarring up, put on a nicer image, say you care a little bit more, talk more about poverty, and people will move over to your side



*"I'm halfway to my goal."*

and endorse your core agenda,” Olsen said. He cited polls showing that Latinos and millennials support Obamacare and a larger role for the federal government. “They like a whole bunch of things that the standard Republican platform is not for.” The early favorites in the 2016 Republican field were Autopsy Report candidates, especially Jeb Bush. Several of those favorites, including Marco Rubio, John Kasich, Chris Christie, and Scott Walker, were even mentioned in the report as models for the Party’s future. Then Trump jumped into the race and promised to build a wall to keep out Mexican rapists and provide more, not fewer, government services.

ON May 13th, the day after the Trump-Ryan summit, nine of the twenty Republicans who chair committees in the House released a statement pledging fealty to Trump and asking “all Americans to support him.” The man who organized the effort was Tom Price, the chairman of the Budget Committee. Price is a sixty-one-year-old orthopedic surgeon who represents a wealthy district in suburban Atlanta. In the Georgia primary, Marco Rubio won Price’s district, one of only two in the state not captured by Trump. Price is close to Ryan, and he is frequently mentioned as a candidate for a House leadership position.

Price has been committed to cutting taxes for the very wealthy, supporting international free-trade deals, and making deep cuts in Medicare and Social Security. How could he get behind Trump, who, in one of the few TV ads he has run this year, promised to “save Social Security and Medicare without cuts”? Like others in the Party who have made the endorsement, Price seems to have convinced himself that Trump will be malleable, and that Price will have more leverage than Republicans who wait. “I think we will work hand and glove, I really do,” he told me on May 16th. “When I talk to people who work closely with Trump, what they tell me is that behind closed doors he’s one of the best listeners they’ve ever worked for or with in their life. Which is kind of counterintuitive given what some of his public persona is.”

Price has turned into something of a Trump super fan, akin to Chris Chris-

tie. He even compared Trump to Reagan. He pointed out that the Reagan realignment took a few decades. “It took a Goldwater race in 1964 and then a Nixon appreciating that the Republican Party had a constituency broader than what had been conventional in the past,” he said. “And then the philosophical ideological nature of Reagan bringing together the three large groups”—fiscal, social, and national-security conservatives—“to prevail in 1980.” He added, “Mr. Trump is absolutely unconventional in how he came to this role and to this position.” Although the current upheaval “takes some digesting, both emotionally and intellectually,” given the state of the Party “that’s what absolutely must occur.”

In early May, as the margin in the polls separating Trump from Hillary Clinton tightened, more and more Republicans sounded like Price. The so-called Never Trump movement struggled to find a third-party alternative, after prominent anti-Trump Republicans, such as Mitt Romney and Senator Ben Sasse, of Nebraska, declined to run. Senator Susan Collins, of Maine, one of the last Republican moderates from New England remaining in Congress, supported Jeb Bush in the Presidential primaries. When the choice effectively came down to Ted Cruz and Trump, she had a slight preference for Trump.

“With Ted, I’ve seen over and over again his playing to outside groups rather than trying to work with his colleagues,” she told me on May 6th. “Those are words I probably should not say, since he’s going to come back and be one of my colleagues.” She said, “But I think, because I know Ted Cruz, and I don’t know and have never met Donald Trump, that with Donald Trump I hope he can minimize his weaknesses, change his approach, knock off the gratuitous personal insults, and draw on his strengths.”

Collins agrees with Price that Trump’s victory signals a historically significant political shift in the Party. Maine’s paper mills have been closing in the past few years, and she has become more skeptical about free trade than she used to be. “There’s a feeling that’s very strong in my state,” she said, that trade deals have benefitted large corporations and hurt working people. “I understand completely why that resonates.” Republicans

argue that free trade lowers consumer prices. “Well, if you no longer have a job, lower consumer prices don’t really do you a whole lot of good. You’d rather have the job.” She was unhappy with Ryan’s austere budgets, especially those which cut assistance to workers affected by free trade.

Collins told me that she was still not ready to endorse Trump, and asked me to call her before publication “if things change dramatically.” She said, jokingly, “If he says, ‘On Day One I’m going to drop a bomb on North Korea,’” she wanted a chance to respond. “I mean, with him, you just don’t know.”

Other Republicans have found the Trump candidacy more difficult to come to terms with. “I’m still in the first stage of grief—denial—like a lot of my colleagues,” Jeff Flake, a senator from Arizona, told me on May 4th. Flake, who has a strong libertarian streak, outlined the choices he was considering: “Find a way to get behind the nominee, or say ‘Still Never Trump’ and look for a third-party candidate, or go into the booth and make your own choice, or embrace Hillary, and say, ‘We’ll fight this four years from now.’” He went on, “Frankly, I don’t know where I am.” Several days later, his senior colleague in the state, John McCain, chastised members of Congress who did not support the nominee. Most Republicans could not imagine supporting a Democrat. “But, by the same token, trying to imagine supporting Donald Trump—a Donald Trump that doesn’t back away from some of the positions that he’s taken—I can’t fathom that, either,” Flake said.

I asked Flake what he hoped would happen in the Trump campaign. “I guess the dream would be for Trump to get to a mike today and say, ‘I was just kidding on all this stuff!’” he said. He laughed, then continued, “If he were to say, ‘No, I really can’t leave my business. I’m going to let the Convention choose somebody else’—now, that would be a dream.”

BEFORE SUPPORTING TRUMP, most Republicans must overcome doubts about his temperament, his ideology, his reckless statements, his questionable respect for the Constitution, and his potential to repel a generation or more of young and nonwhite voters. But, late last

month, former Trump skeptics and those who are holding out the possibility of support seemed to unite around the belief that defeating Hillary Clinton is more important than any long-term effects Trump may have on the Republican Party. Prominent House members who have been frustrated by Obama's willingness to use executive power on issues like immigration saw Trump as a useful instrument. Senator Collins and others were hopeful that Trump would somehow shed his most offensive behavior. Even people like Flake, who found supporting Trump unfathomable, wouldn't rule it out.

Charlie Dent told me that he remained unhappy with Trump's "lack of policy specificity, and the general tone and tenor of the campaign, and the never-ending statements that offend P.O.W.s, people with disabilities, Mexicans, Muslims, women, of course, the David Duke debacle"—a reference to Trump's initial refusal to reject the support of the former Ku Klux Klan grand wizard. Nevertheless, Dent said, "One thing I've learned in politics is never say never. I think that's probably good advice for Donald Trump: Never say what you'll never do."

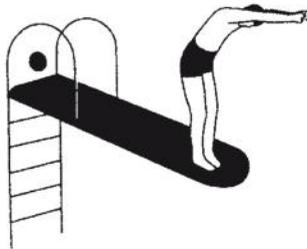
Still, there is a minority of the Party's officeholders who have concluded that the only principled response to Trump's candidacy is to declare that they will never support him. The most prominent example in the Senate is forty-four-year-old Ben Sasse, of Nebraska, who wrote an award-winning doctoral dissertation at Yale on conservative coalitions from the nineteen-fifties through Reagan's election. From 2010 until 2014, he was the president of Midland University, a small liberal-arts school in his home town of Fremont, Nebraska. Sasse served briefly in the Bush Administration, but for most of his career he was a management consultant, who spent more than a decade at Boston Consulting Group and McKinsey, advising large companies that were grappling with rapid technological change. "I'm drawn to stuff that's broken," he told me. "That's how I ended up here." The Senate race was his first political campaign.

In February, Sasse posted an open letter on Facebook in which he described the First Amendment as "the heartbeat of the American Constitution," and listed

the ways that Trump had threatened the American idea: his attack on libel laws, his support for the crackdown in Tiananmen Square, his praise of Putin, his call for an anti-Trump conservative journalist to be banned from television and fined by the F.C.C., and his push for "closing areas" of the Internet. "A presidential candidate who boasts about what he'll do during his 'reign' and refuses to condemn the K.K.K. cannot lead a conservative movement in America," Sasse wrote, believing that other Republicans would join him.

On May 4th, when Trump became the presumptive nominee, Sasse posted again on Facebook. "I've ignored my phone most of today, but the voicemail is overflowing with party bosses and politicians telling me that 'although Trump is terrible,' we 'have to' support him, 'because the only choice is Trump or Hillary,'" he wrote. Arguing that "there are dumpster fires in my town more popular than these two 'leaders,'" Sasse called for a third-party alternative, but, despite pleas from the Never Trump movement, he refused to run himself. "I have little kids, and I'm an engaged dad," he told me.

When I sat down with Sasse three weeks later, he was sick of talking about Trump. But he continued to describe both Trump and Clinton as unacceptable candidates. Many of his colleagues see Trump as "a lesser-of-two-evils choice," Sasse said. "I think if it's merely



a lesser of two evils then the American experiment has already lost. We live in a civic republic, and you have to be recognizing that voting is also an act of signalling about the ideal, about what America should be in twenty-five years. I don't want more candidates like Donald Trump. So I can't vote for him just because he's not Hillary Clinton."

The most prominent anti-Trump Republican in the House of Representatives is Reid Ribble, of Wisconsin, and

he is retiring this year. Ribble, the owner of a commercial roofing company, was an exemplar of the Tea Party class of 2010. Fed up with Obama's stimulus and health-care policies, he ran for office and defeated a Democratic incumbent. Despite the Tea Party's pugnacious reputation, Ribble, who attended divinity school, is soft-spoken, and is known in the House for his speeches about improving discourse between the two parties. He speaks earnestly of "Wisconsin nice," and is proud that the state voted against Trump in its primary. "Everything that I've been preaching about for five years he just blew away," Ribble told me on May 16th. "He appealed to the very worst, most base instincts of who we are as a people."

Ribble said that Trump was a direct threat to the low-tax, free-trade, entitlement-reform agenda that helped Republicans win the House. "What Trump is proposing is an economic disaster," he said. But his greatest concern was Trump's character. "Galatians 5 says, 'The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, meekness, kindness, patience, and self-control'"—those are "the things that matter to me," he said, and in his view Trump didn't exhibit any of them.

I asked Ribble what advice he had for Paul Ryan, also from Wisconsin, who was the most senior Republican still withholding support for Trump. He reminded me that a few days earlier Ryan had declared that he wanted "a standard-bearer who bears our standards." Ribble realized that Ryan, as the Speaker of the House and the chairman of the Republican National Convention, was in a difficult situation, but "you need to go back to the core principles that give you your own center in life," he said. "I just spoke about that verse in the Bible. Paul Ryan holds those same values."

TWO WEEKS LATER, on June 2nd, Ryan made his announcement that he would vote for Trump, in an op-ed on the Web site of his home town paper, the *Janesville Gazette*. He downplayed the policy differences between them, arguing that "we have more common ground than disagreement," and adopted Price's theory that Trump could advance the House's agenda. Close readers of the column pointed out that Ryan never used the word "endorse." "We're not playing word

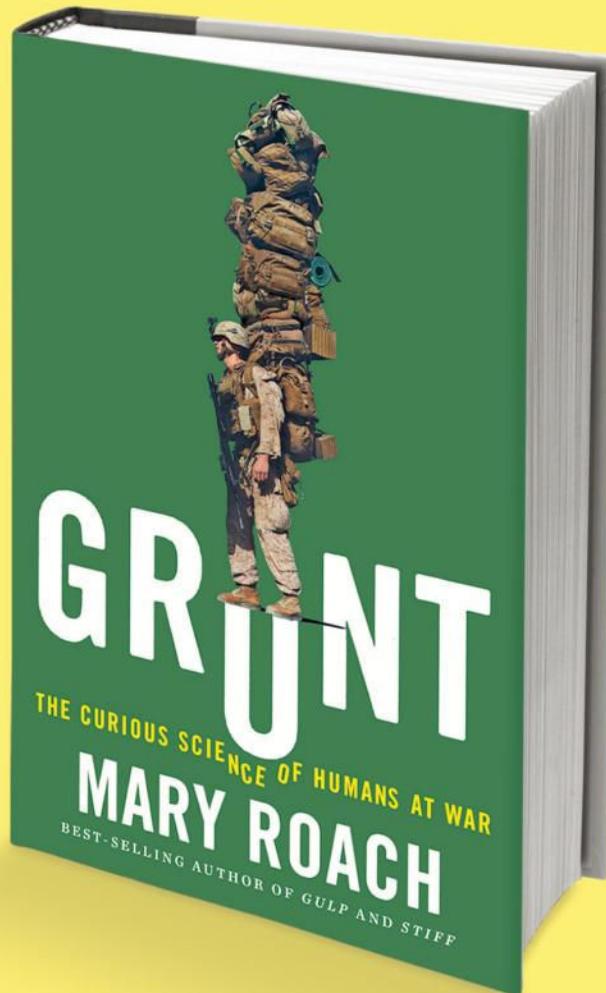
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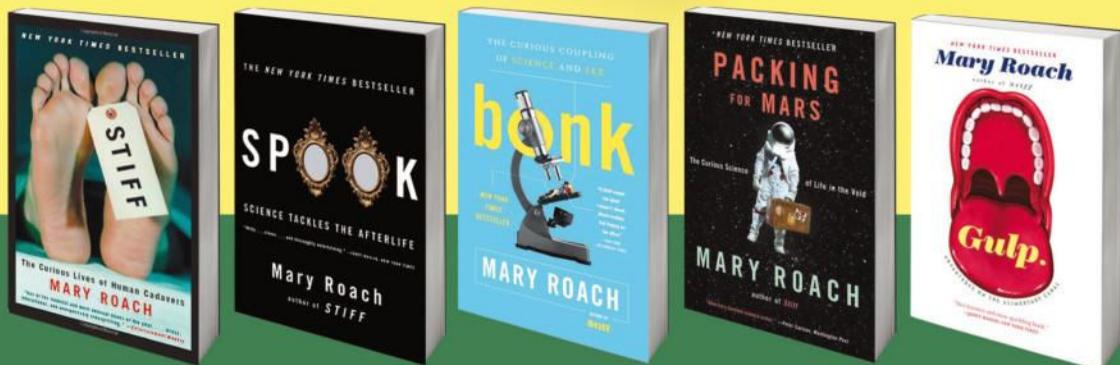
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games,” his spokesman clarified in a tweet. “Feel free to call it an endorsement.”

Ryan might have hoped that his statement would be overshadowed by a speech that Hillary Clinton delivered that day, condemning, in scathing terms, Trump’s foreign policy. Instead, the news turned to Trump’s comments about Gonzalo Curiel, the federal judge overseeing the case about whether Trump University was a fraudulent scheme. Trump repeatedly described the judge as “a Mexican” whose background made him unfit to preside over the case. (Curiel was born in Indiana to Mexican-immigrant parents.) Asked in one interview whether a Muslim judge would be similarly incapable of being fair, Trump said, “That would be possible. Absolutely.” Not only had Ryan won nothing from Trump before endorsing him; now he had to respond to one of the most incendiary comments of the campaign. Trump’s attack on Curiel, Ryan said, was “the textbook definition of a racist comment.” He strained to explain that, despite the racism, he was still backing Trump.

At one point, Trump’s candidacy seemed to represent an ideological challenge to the Party. His views on taxes, the size and role of government, immigration, and trade suggested that the Party could offer its struggling middle-class voters more than austere budgets, deregulation, and upper-income tax cuts. Not so long ago, it was popular in Republican circles to talk about “makers” and “takers,” and to note disapprovingly how many Americans—the takers—don’t pay federal income tax. In March, Ryan apologized for using such language. “There was a time that I would talk about a difference between ‘makers’ and ‘takers’ in our country, referring to people who accepted government benefits,” he said. “But, as I spent more time listening, and really learning the root causes of poverty, I realized something. I realized that I was wrong.”

Ryan’s speech was reported as an implicit rebuke to Trump’s campaign rhetoric, but it was also an indication that Ryan was moving closer to Trump, at least on the broad issue of being less hostile to the welfare state. Other ambitious politicians, like Tom Cotton, have turned to the issues that Trump

has emphasized. “The people who are truly hurting in today’s economy are working-class Americans,” Cotton said. He told me a story about a woman he met at a factory in Texarkana. “She sure as hell pays the payroll tax, and she pays our state income tax,” he said. “And she pays a property tax on her small home, and she pays excise taxes every time she picks up a pack of beer or a pack of cigarettes, and she pays sales tax every time she goes to buy groceries.”

Cotton has taken some steps in Trump’s direction with the way he talks about immigration and taxes. Ryan, who rose to prominence in the House by forcing his colleagues to support politically perilous cuts to Social Security, Medicare, and assistance to the most vulnerable, has lately tried to highlight anti-poverty solutions and some government programs, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, that he believes work well. Neither politician is challenging the core elements of the Party’s reigning economic philosophy, but Trump’s popularity could change that. Goldwater alienated as many voters as he attracted, and his opposition to civil-rights legislation turned generations of African-Americans away from the Republican Party. But by 1968 Richard Nixon had figured out how to borrow the more popular aspects of Goldwater’s agenda while shedding his more radical ideas, to win a majority.

**T**RUMP’S RACIST COMMENTS may prove ruinous for the Party. Last week, as Republicans scrambled to distance themselves from Trump after his comments on Curiel, I called Senators Flake, Collins, and Cotton again. Flake noted that he had just learned that Senator Mark Kirk, of Illinois, had retracted his endorsement of Trump. “The new Trump looks a lot like the old Trump,” Flake said. “I still hold out hope, I guess, that I can support him, but I don’t think it’s likely.” He pointed out that Trump was about to turn seventy. “It’s tough to change after thirty,” Flake said. “Let alone after seventy.”

Collins told me that Trump’s comment was “an order of magnitude more serious” than anything he’d previously said, including his “troubling insults toward individuals” and “his poorly

thought-out policy plan about banning Muslims from entering this country.” She then said that she has not ruled out supporting Hillary Clinton. “I worked very well with Hillary when she was my colleague in the Senate and when she was Secretary of State,” Collins said. “But I do not anticipate voting for her this fall. I’m not going to say never, because this has been such an unpredictable situation, to say the least.”

Collins said that on some issues she continues to agree with Trump. “For example, I do think we’ve had poorly negotiated trade agreements that have hurt manufacturing in this country and have cost thousands of Mainers their jobs,” she added. “On that issue, I think Donald Trump would be a far tougher negotiator than Hillary Clinton would be.”

Cotton still wouldn’t rule out being Trump’s running mate, but he also spoke against Trump’s attack on Curiel. “I certainly thought it was racially biased,” he said. “He shouldn’t make that kind of comment—he should retract it and get back onto the issues.” Cotton’s view was that Trump had a winning message. “He should focus on the issues that actually matter to Americans, like immigration,” he said. “Like the fact that the working class hasn’t had a raise in a very long time, and the fact that Obamacare premium rates are going up in state after state.”

Trump may be incapable of running a disciplined campaign against a Democrat—a campaign that sticks to that message without skidding off into racist diatribes. “If anybody was looking for an off-ramp, this is probably it,” Senator Lindsey Graham told the *Times* last week, referring to Trump’s Curiel remarks. If Trump is defeated, another Republican may prove able to resurrect aspects of his economic populism and his more generous view of the role of government, and combine them with the more inclusive language recommended by the Party establishment. If that happens—if Cotton, Ryan, or another canny young conservative becomes the Nixon to Trump’s Goldwater—then we will remember Trump for reintroducing overt racism into mainstream politics and for imbuing the Republican Party with a new economic populism. ♦

SHOUTS & MURMURS

# NORTH CAROLINA POLICE BLOTTER

BY HENRY ALFORD



**LOCATION:** *Marriott Hotel, women's bathroom, downtown Durham.*

**8:05 A.M.** Broad-shouldered Caucasian female, forties, entered facility and proceeded to commandeer entire sink area. First-degree manspreading.

**9:20 A.M.** Latina businesswoman, fifties, tried to sing Journey song "Don't Stop Believin'" but became hoarse during the high notes of the crucial "down the boul-uh-vaaard" section.

**9:34 A.M.** African-American female, thirties, entered stall and stood facing the commode for twenty-three seconds. Shoe-directionality offense.

**10:49 A.M.** Young Caucasian female's conversation with friend evidenced disinclination to engage in book clubs, emotional nuance.

**12:20 P.M.** African-American female, thirties, remained impassive during other patrons' squabble over the soap dispenser: possible strong, silent type.

**1:18 P.M.** Three Caucasian suspects, thirties, trafficking in elastic waistbands, dick jokes.

**10:48 P.M.** Two Caucasian females, twenties, entered facility wearing cargo shorts and proceeded to call each other "broseph." One of them expressed intention to attend an upcoming wedding wearing webby rubber Merrell athleisure footwear.

**LOCATION:** *Marriott Hotel, men's bathroom, downtown Durham.*

**8:10 A.M.** Inebriated Caucasian male, forties. Possibly sashaying.

**9:54 A.M.** African-American male, fifties, in V-neck T-shirt. Cleavage.

**10:03 A.M.** Caucasian male, thirties, with small, rambunctious child. Choreography.

**10:15 A.M.** Another thirties Caucasian male with small, rambunctious child. Father held helium-filled balloon—possible attempt to alter speaking voice.

**10:40 A.M.** Long-haired Caucasian male, thirties. Scratched own pectoral area, as if to regulate unruly bra strap.

**11:15 A.M.** Two middle-aged Latino businessmen conducted lengthy conversation unrelated to sports or to weather. First suspect laughed so hard that he held on to the other briefly. Ambiguous arm movements, emotions.

**1:13 P.M.** Caucasian male, forties, began talking with African-American male, thirties, at sink. First suspect pronounced Raleigh "Rah-LAY." Frenchiness.

**6:47 P.M.** African-American male, thirties, accidentally bumped into baby-changing station, causing it to open. Suspect responded with hockey-style body check to close it. Then baby-changing station unfolded fully. Officer asked, "What seems to be the problem, sir?" Suspect responded, "Damned thing won't close. People are gonna bump into it, bump-bump-bump." Officer responded that the bump was a dance move popular in discothèques in the nineteen-seventies. Suspect responded with sarcasm.

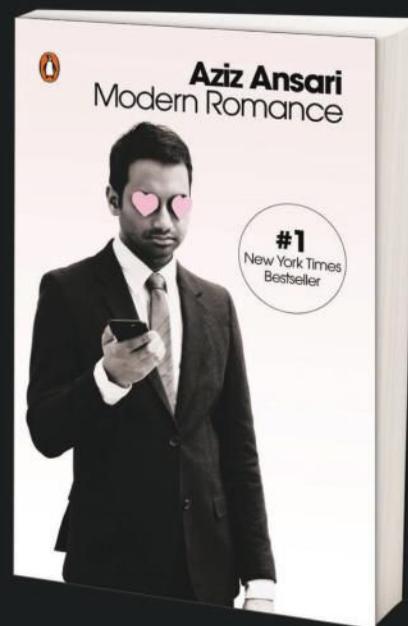
**10:45 P.M.** African-American male, thirties, lingered at sink. Hair care.

**11:03 P.M.** Caucasian male, fifties, examined own bald spot at sink. Wistfulness, hair care. ♦

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## CONFESSIONAL

On *“UNREAL,”* a former producer of *“The Bachelor”* satirizes her experience.

BY D. T. MAX



FOR THREE YEARS, Sarah Gertrude Shapiro worked as a producer on the reality show “The Bachelor.” Her task, as she recalls it, was to get the contestants to “open up, and to give them terrible advice, and to deprive them of sleep.” She sees it now as “complicated manipulation through friendship.” To insure that intense emotions were captured on camera, she sometimes misled contestants who were about to be rejected. “The night they were going to get dumped, I would go to the hotel room where they were staying and say, ‘I’m going to lose my job for telling you this, but he’s going to pick you—he’s going to propose,’” Shapiro said. After

the contestant left the set, disconsolate, Shapiro joined her in a limousine while the stereo played a song that the contestant had been primed to see as “‘their song’ for their love story with the Bachelor.” Shapiro kept jalapeños or lemons hidden in her jacket pocket—dabbing something acidic in her eye allowed her to cry on cue, which helped elicit tears from the contestant. “I’d have arranged with the driver to have the song play just until I got a shot of her crying—then cut the music so I could start the interview,” Shapiro explained. “They’d often tell us to drive up and down the 405 until the girls cried—and not to come home if we didn’t get tears, be-

cause we’d be fired.” In hindsight, Shapiro said, being fired “would have been a great solution to my problems.”

A decade later, “UNREAL,” a diabolically entertaining drama based on Shapiro’s experiences in reality TV, became a surprise hit on Lifetime. Shapiro, who is thirty-eight, constructed a scenario that teasingly mirrored “The Bachelor,” which airs on ABC. “UNREAL” chronicles the making of a show-within-a-show, “Everlasting,” in which twenty women compete for a handsome man’s hand in marriage. An oleaginous master of ceremonies narrates the process. In both “Everlasting” and “The Bachelor,” the hopefuls gather at a mansion whose brittle elegance feels claustrophobic; in each show, unrealistically fit women offer “confessions” in one-on-one interviews that feel staged. In the twentieth and most recent season of “The Bachelor,” the contestants included Amber, Becca, and four Laurens. In the second season of “UNREAL,” which began airing on June 6th, the “Everlasting” candidates included Brandi, Haley, and Dominique.

“UNREAL” focusses on the producers who pull the contestants’ strings, and Shapiro’s pleasure in the abhorrent gives the series its darkly comic tone. The stars of “UNREAL” are a caustic “Everlasting” producer named Quinn and her ambivalent deputy, Rachel, whose character clearly owes a lot to Shapiro. The relationship between Quinn, played by Constance Zimmer, and Rachel, played by Shiri Appleby, brings to mind that of Fagin and Oliver Twist. Rachel keeps trying to escape “Everlasting,” and Quinn thwarts her every time. She threatens Rachel with lawsuits, she lavishes her with praise, she threatens to expose a tryst. The first season ends, inevitably, with Quinn and Rachel alone together. “I love you, you know that?” Rachel says to her tormentor and best friend. “I love you, too, weirdo,” Quinn says. In Shapiro’s hands, Quinn—who has been denied her fair share of the show’s profits by venal male colleagues—and her protégée emerge as antiheroes, and beneath the giddy parody “UNREAL” offers a singular meditation on stardom, media mendacity, sexism, and competition among women. One of the nicest surprises about “UNREAL” is the sneaky way the contestants emerge as sympathetic—behind the scenes of

*Sarah Gertrude Shapiro’s show takes aim at sexism and competition among women.*

“Everlasting” one sees the humanity that the producers suppress onscreen.

One day in February, Shapiro sat with the show’s writers in an office on the Sunset Gower lot, in Hollywood, and began imagining the futures of Quinn and Rachel. Alex Metcalf, a supervising producer, explained to me that in a show’s second season “you have to raise the stakes.” The first season had wrapped its provocations around love triangles and other familiar soapy elements. Though “UNREAL” was subversive, it provided the pleasures of the genre it satirized: the fictional bachelor on “Everlasting” was as chiselled as the real ones on “The Bachelor.” This pleased the executives at Lifetime, which is best known for women-in-peril movies. In 2013, Shapiro, an unknown who lacked an agent, sold “UNREAL” to the network after a friend walked her into the office of a studio executive there. Shapiro presented a twenty-minute short that she’d made, “Sequin Raze,” which centered on a reality-show producer. She recalls her pitch for “UNREAL” as “A feminist working on ‘The Bachelor’ has a nervous breakdown.” Executives at Lifetime offered to buy the idea immediately. Afterward, Shapiro had second thoughts worthy of a victorious “Bachelor” contestant: “I was calling 411, asking, ‘Do you have the main number for HBO?’” She couldn’t reach any executives there—this is her story, anyway—and she proceeded with Lifetime. The first shot of the pilot episode—Rachel seen through the moonroof of a limousine, passed out on the car’s floor, wearing a “This Is What a Feminist Looks Like” T-shirt—caused a conflict with the network. It evoked an art film, not a sudsy entertainment. “I had to fight for it all the way through,” Shapiro remembers. “I told a lot of people to fuck off.” Lifetime wasn’t sure of the match, either: its head of research found the show-within-a-show conceit too dizzying.

Since then, the partners have grown more comfortable with each other. “UNREAL” has won a Critics’ Choice Award and a Peabody Award, and Lifetime is thrilled to have an acclaimed show that attracts a hipper audience. Shapiro wants to build on her success by aiming the series more directly at the kind of viewer who admires such challenging shows as “Girls” and “Transpar-

ent.” The studio has a more conventional ambition: Season 1 averaged 3.7 million viewers an episode—paltry numbers. Lifetime is determined to transform “UNREAL” into a ratings hit. “We’re seeing Season 1 as almost the pilot,” Nancy Dubuc, the C.E.O. of A+E Networks, which owns Lifetime, told me. Shapiro believes that she can accomplish both goals, and has transferred this desire to her alter ego. In the writers’ room, she described Rachel’s motivation in Season 2: “It’s really about ‘I’m savvy enough and smart enough that I know I have to give the network all the frosting and the froufrou and all the titties that they need, and in the process I’m going to slip them this super-important thing.’”

On whiteboards, Shapiro and her writers had sketched out a pointedly different trajectory for Season 2. This year’s bachelor was African-American—a dig at the fact that “The Bachelor” has never had one—and one of the contestants is a Black Lives Matter activist. Another is a Southerner who wears a bikini with a Confederate-flag pattern. The story line culminates in a tragic turn. Shapiro was proud to have found a way to insert the national debate about race into her seemingly lightweight show.

Lifetime executives had not objected to the race theme, but they pressed for more of what had worked last time: romantic complications for Rachel. To supervise the writers, they had brought in a showrunner named Carol Barbee. Shapiro has the reality-TV-show habit of thinking of people in epithets, and to her a showrunner is a Wubby—slang for a child’s security blanket. A Wubby is there, in part, to insure that scripts are written on time and that scenes won’t be too costly to shoot. Shapiro calls herself the Magical Unicorn—“the voice of the show, throwing up rainbows all over the board.”

Like everything to do with “UNREAL,” the studio’s notes had a meta component. Citing comments from Lifetime, an executive producer named Stacy Rukeyser told the writers, “I’d caution you against any pitch where Rachel doesn’t give a fuck about ‘Everlasting.’” It was essential to preserve the idea that Rachel is “super-invested, would do anything for the show.”

The studio also asked the writers to expand the role of Jeremy. Played by a former Army Ranger named Josh Kelly,

Jeremy was a staple of Season 1: a cameraman with handsome-handyman features who was quick to doff his shirt and rescue Rachel from perils. He fit the aesthetic of Lifetime movies but was not Shapiro’s type. She does a good imitation of his irritating growl: “Hey, Rach!” She was proud of the fact that Season 1 had easily passed the Bechdel test. (The cartoonist Alison Bechdel has observed that few Hollywood productions depict women having conversations about anything other than relationships and men.) Jeremy, she told me, was “conceived as a one-season character.” Later, she e-mailed me: “I could not get on board with the idea of Jeremy being Rachel’s ‘Mr. Big’ (which was brought up).” Still, the studio had pushed for Josh Kelly to return. “They can ask you to do it, but they can’t make you,” she told me. Like Rachel, Shapiro frequently has to decide whether she is a bomb-thrower or an inside player with misgivings. In this case, she decided to play nice.

Barbee had joined Shapiro in the writers’ room. She was fresh from a phone call with the network. “Come on,” she said. “Let’s put on our big-boy pants and make a story for Jeremy.”

Shapiro stood up with a black marker. She has a slouch and brown hair pulled back in a mussed bun; she was wearing a woven leather belt with black shorts, black tights, and Acne black boots. “O.K.,” she said. “Let’s make a story for Jeremy.”

SHAPIRO WAS BORN in 1978 in Santa Barbara. She comes from what she calls an “intellectual hippie family.” Her father was an economics professor, her mother teaches special-needs children. “I had an imaginary horse that lived in the forest,” she recalls. “I pretended I was Russian royalty and couldn’t believe I had been sent to live with these peasants.” Her older sister was interested in ethnobotany—she is now an environmental economist at Duke—and Sarah used to eat plants she knew were harmless in front of other kids, to frighten them. “That was my trick,” she said, adding, “I feel like I never understood being a kid.”

Her parents divorced when she was thirteen, and during her first two years in high school her grades plummeted, she says, to “a 1.2 average.” Her boyfriend, a “hot seventeen-year-old” lifeguard who had predicted that they would

marry, dumped her. She had relationships with both men and women, some of them “bad experiences.” She gained weight, “not wanting to be looked at by men.” Assuming that she would not be admitted to a four-year college, she enrolled at Santa Barbara City College. Shapiro, who has a stable instability, graduated as the valedictorian. She then enrolled at Sarah Lawrence. Her hope was to study with the poet Mary Oliver, but she was not accepted into Oliver’s seminar. “I don’t think I cried in her office,” Shapiro recalls. “But I definitely cried after.” She never quite fit in at Sarah Lawrence. She took cinema-studies classes and discovered that the focus “was on Stan Brakhage and Maya Deren.” Her senior project was a film about “a gay man and a fag hag” who get kidnapped by a terrorist during a shopping trip. “The professor hated it,” she says. “It was too narrative.”

In 1999, her senior year, she became an intern at Killer Films, a production company that has made many films with gay themes, including “Far from Heaven.” She was asked to stay on, but she couldn’t afford to work there. “It was my introduction to the idea of indie film as trust-fund sport,” she says. It also forced her to confront a conflict: was she an innovator or a conformist? Ava Berkofsky, the cinematographer for “Sequin Raze,” and later Shapiro’s girlfriend, said of her, “She’s a very genuine mystery.” In 2000, Shapiro became an assistant to David LaChapelle, the fashion photographer. LaChapelle was, she says, mean and “hated feminists.” When she shared her

thoughts on Julian Schnabel’s “Before Night Falls,” LaChapelle said, “How dare you have an opinion!” (LaChapelle denies this.) He soon fired her. She wrote her own letter of recommendation: “I told him that I wasn’t going to let him fuck up my résumé.”

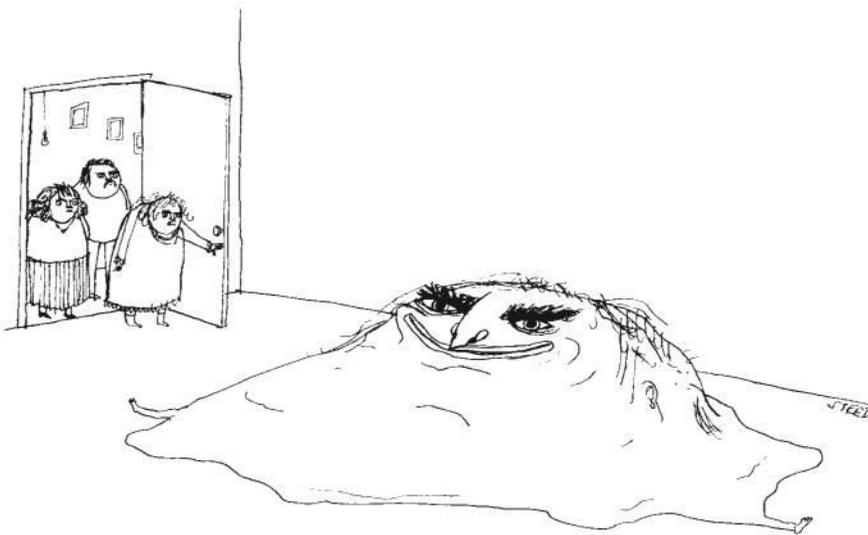
After 9/11, Shapiro moved to L.A., planning to devote herself to an arty rock band with her college friend Brendan Fowler, a visual artist, but she abandoned the idea. She describes this period in the language of a Hollywood pitch: “Aching loneliness, operatic jubilant mania, and the infinite, grasping need for connection.” In 2002, she got a job on “High School Reunion,” a reality show created by Mike Fleiss. Alumni gather twenty years after graduation and explore how their relationships and power dynamics have changed. Shapiro calls the show “pretty innocuous”: “The people had existing relationships. The Nerd was going to talk to the Prom Queen that he’d always been too afraid to talk to.” Shapiro was a hit on the set, encouraging the shy and seeding the kinds of social realignments the producers wanted. She says, “I’ve always been one of those people who people tell things to, a weird superpower.” Shapiro enjoyed the job—the show was shot in Hawaii, and she had real responsibility while still in her early twenties. In 2003, she was invited to work on another Fleiss creation: “The Bachelor.” It had a larger budget and audience. “It was supposed to be a big promotion,” Shapiro says.

But Shapiro, who had organized a women’s-rights club in high school, felt

uncomfortable with the “Bachelor” concept. “I told them I was a dyed-in-the-wool feminist,” she recalls. “They said, ‘Check your contract.’” She says that she went to a lawyer, who confirmed that it would be almost impossible to get her out of the contract, which was perpetually renewable. Shapiro, then twenty-three, put on her big-boy pants and reported for work.

“THE BACHELOR,” WHICH had its première in 2002, perfected a form that had been inchoate. Fleiss had made his mark in 1998, with “Shocking Behavior Caught on Tape”; its most infamous episode had a bartender stirring an unwitting patron’s Martini with his penis. Fleiss had also produced “Who Wants to Marry a Multi-Millionaire?,” which was cancelled after it was revealed that the millionaire had been served with a restraining order by his ex-fiancée. “The Bachelor” combined elements of the game show and the dating show with the humiliations and revelations of reality TV. It capitalized on the loosening of sexual mores and on the increasing anxiety that American women felt about their chances of marrying. Twenty-five women competed for one eligible man, and though the goal was a wedding, the approach was tawdry—an open bar insured that contestants were rarely sober, and the bachelor and his chosen mate spent the night in a suite outfitted with night-vision cameras. Despite such elements, “The Bachelor” trafficked in the iconography of old-fashioned romance: the contest took place in a mansion, and there were roses and evening gowns for the women. Lisa Levenson, the executive producer, who had worked on “General Hospital,” told *Vanity Fair* that the goal “was to raise the fantasy level.” Her producers recall Levenson’s using a term borrowed from “Queer Eye for the Straight Guy”: “zhuzh it up.” Shapiro says that it means “to pretty something up—to fluff someone’s sequin pillows.”

Not only did “The Bachelor” have a brilliant concept; it cost only a quarter of what it typically does to make a scripted show. “Fleiss was a populist idiot savant,” Shapiro says. “He was dumb enough to say the stupidest idea and then smart enough to pull it off.” But she missed her bohemian origins and tried



*“He’s still quite handsome, despite what happened.”*

to unify her two worlds. A college friend, Porochista Khakpour, was studying for an M.F.A. when Shapiro called and urged her to become a contestant, saying, "You'll be the Persian Barbie." Khakpour, who is now a novelist, recalls, "She was dead serious. According to her, I would make the show cooler." She declined.

Shapiro could see how shrewd "The Bachelor" was, but she hated that it objectified women and vaunted heterosexual romance. She especially disliked working in an environment that fetishized beauty. To rebel, she wore a "George Bush, Out of My Uterus" T-shirt, and jeans that exposed her butt crack. She says, "Since then, I've always been body positive, refusing to talk about myself as a sexual object that way—and am so adamant about it that I just don't even think I *have* a body."

The show lived off the intensity of the contestants' feelings, and to help the women focus on how much they wanted to be with the Bachelor the producers took away their phones and other links to the outside world. Levenson called it "the 'Bachelor' bubble." Shapiro had to help maintain the bubble. The ambitions and the frustrations of the contestants flowed freely, fuelled by the alcohol, and Shapiro found a dysfunctional home. She was oddly energized by the sordidness of her task. Hayley Goggin Avila, another producer, says, "It became a sport for her. She wanted those merit badges." Shapiro was a feminist sadist, punishing her unenlightened sisters.

The junior producers were trapped in their own bubble, working non-stop, their private lives erased. Senior staff played favorites; Goggin Avila recalls Levenson's handing hundred-dollar bills to whichever producer got her girl to cry first. Levenson had a collection of Prada bags and gave them to producers whose work pleased her. "She was better at manipulating us than we were at manipulating the contestants," Shapiro says. The competition among producers was Hobbesian: "If your girls got cut, you got cut." (Levenson declined to comment.)

After two years, Shapiro was promoted to field producer. "A friend said, 'Your parents must be proud of you,'" she recalls. "I said, 'My sister is at Yale and my brother is at Harvard, and my parents think I work in pornography.'"

This was an exaggeration—her parents mostly worried that the stress was overwhelming her. But even in her family's educated circles the program was a phenomenon. Shapiro says, "I'd be at these gatherings at my parents' house, and these intellectuals only wanted to talk to me about 'The Bachelor.' Instead of eating plants, I talked about 'The Bachelor.' It was my new trick."

Shapiro was startled to learn who was tuning in to a demeaning caricature of courtship. The show's viewers are overwhelmingly female, and many have annual incomes exceeding a hundred thousand dollars. Why did so many smart, wealthy women enjoy a show in which, in the words of the media critic Jennifer Pozner, "prospective princesses sit on their aimless, tiny behinds, fend off fellow ladies in waiting, and hope to be whisked off by a network-approved knight in shining Armani"?

There were things Shapiro liked about her job. She could fly anywhere in the world, for scouting purposes. (Contestants sometimes made whirlwind trips to Paris or Miami.) And she loved certain moments that she created onscreen. For a spinoff, "The Bachelorette," she had a couple riding on white Andalusian stallions arrive, at sunset, at a walk-in sand castle. "I got it built for free," Shapiro says. "I was famous for that."

Ultimately, Shapiro concluded that the contestants were not the only ones with Stockholm syndrome. "We were all sort of crumbling from the inside out," she says. "I was too tired and grossed out and depressed for a relationship." She drank heavily and behaved erratically. On a road trip with Fowler, her artist friend, she hopped out of the car at Pomona College and kissed a female undergraduate on the lips. The woman ran to a "rape box"—a campus alarm system—and pulled the lever. When a security officer arrived, Shapiro kissed him, too. Shortly afterward, Shapiro told her bosses that she had to quit, adding that she planned to leave California. She recalls, "They said, 'Who poached you?' And I said, 'No one poached me, but I'll kill myself if I stay.'" She was released

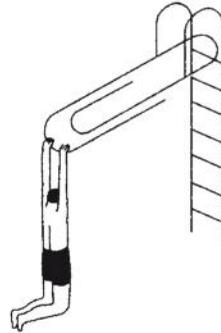
from her contract and fled to Portland, Oregon, planning to farm kale, sing folk songs, and re-start her life.

TWO WEEKS AFTER arriving in Portland, in March, 2005, Shapiro concluded that she had grotesquely miscast herself. "It was just a fantasy to get me out of L.A.," she says. "Being a folksinger is like talking to people who already agree with you." She did, though, record an album of her own songs. (Sample lyric: "Animals don't think about health insurance and cars / And when animals get lonely they don't go into bars.")

She took a job at the advertising firm Wieden+Kennedy and worked for such clients as Nike and Old Spice. It didn't surprise her to be back in a high-pressure job in the media world. "I've had outs at every turn," she said. "I can't stop. I get bored." She did well at the firm and liked Portland—she finally had the money and the leisure time to own a horse—but she found advertising sexist. She kept pitching herself as a director and getting turned down. "It would always be a twenty-four-year-old guy in a graphic T," she says. "Jim has ideas." Well, *I* had ideas, and also I'd directed." She notes, "Ad guys are the douchiest."

Shapiro worked at the firm for seven years and helped recruit Goggin Avila, her old "Bachelor" colleague. At lunch, they turned over their time on the show, focussing on the tricks they'd devised to get contestants to bare their souls. "It was like she was dealing with P.T.S.D.," Goggin Avila says. Shapiro realized that she desperately wanted to revisit the experience on film: "I felt that there were stories inside me and I would be killed if they didn't get out."

She was especially haunted by the memory of a lawyer who was rejected by Jesse Palmer, the Bachelor of Season 5. Shapiro was told to extract tears in an interview. "She wouldn't give me anything," Shapiro remembers. Her bosses were irritated, and the crew was going into overtime, but Shapiro says she "just couldn't get her to crack." At 4 A.M., Shapiro got nasty: "I asked her, 'Do you think he dumped you because you are fat?' I knew she had food issues." The



woman began crying and hyperventilating. “I made the cameras follow her to a minivan that was waiting to take her to the airport.” The next day, the contestant called Shapiro and accused her of ruining her life. Shapiro says, “I realized what I had just done, and looked at myself—I was wearing stretched-out size-16 Gap jeans, a puffy down jacket with streaks of nacho cheese and marshmallow goo, my hair was greasy, my skin was broken out, my walkie was hanging off my belt—and I just thought, Oh, my God, I’m a monster.”

In 2010, Shapiro, then thirty-one, showed Sally DeSipio, a Wieden+Kennedy executive, a script that she had just written: “Sequin Raze.” DeSipio admired it, and another female colleague got the firm to contribute financing and lend Shapiro its postproduction facilities. The firm also gave her a leave of absence so that she could attend the American Film Institute’s Directing Workshop for Women.

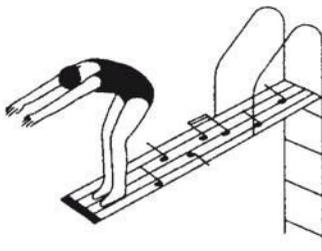
For “Sequin Raze,” Shapiro resurrected her middle name, putting symbolic distance between herself and the Sarah Shapiro who had worked on “The Bachelor.” The short closely tracks Shapiro’s most upsetting experience: a reality-show producer named Rebecca Goldberg (Ashley Williams) promises her colleagues that she can get an unusually composed contestant to cry, and succeeds by mentioning the contestant’s bulimia. Afterward, the other producers cheer as Goldberg scoops money off the control-room floor. As she walks off after this putative triumph, self-hatred distorts her face.

Within weeks, Shapiro had signed the contract to make “UNREAL.” Lifetime executives saw her as a promising talent who had been underrated because she was a woman. And they loved the idea of a story about competition among women in their industry. The network paired Shapiro with the veteran showrunner Marti Noxon, who had worked on “Buffy the Vampire Slayer” and “Mad Men.” Noxon helped Shapiro give her short the arc of a television season. “UNREAL,” Shapiro realized, had to be “one hundred per cent fiction,” even if “the truth of what it was like on ‘The Bachelor’ is baked in.” Noxon taught her to decode what network executives wanted, even when they couldn’t articulate it. “In the business, they call this ‘the note behind the note,’” a writer at “UNREAL” told me.

The characters of Rachel and Quinn emerged from “Sequin Raze.” New plotlines accentuated grim humor: Chet, the oafish franchise owner, turns out to have stolen the idea of the show from Quinn; a tabloid scandal engulfs the Suitor, as the bachelor of “Everlasting” is called; a field producer switches out a contestant’s antidepressants. Shapiro was eager to learn from Noxon. She says, “The biggest surprise to me was the amount of *story* you have to come up with, and how quickly the monster eats it—A story, B story, C story.” Shapiro tended to write subtext; Noxon knew that TV had to be explicit. In the pilot, Rachel is returning to “Everlasting” after a breakdown. Shapiro wrote the scene with sideways glances, skulking, and muttered chatter. Noxon instantly gave Rachel a memorable barb: “Be afraid, O.K.? Crazy’s back!” Shapiro says of Noxon, “She knows how to focus a scene.”

But their relationship grew difficult. Noxon, who was preparing another new show, “Girlfriends’ Guide to Divorce,” was often absent, and Shapiro felt that her supposed mentor favored the other project. “There were a couple of times that actors came up for ‘UNREAL’ and then were suddenly auditioning for ‘Girlfriends,’” Shapiro says. Lifetime gave final call on scripts to Noxon, which frustrated Shapiro.

Noxon says, “There was about as much drama behind the scenes as ended up on the screen.” She says of her dynamic with



Shapiro, “It really came down to voice—ways in which I edited and rewrote things that she would have left untouched.” Later, when the show was being promoted, Shapiro was surprised to see Noxon, who shares a co-creator credit with her, reappear for the press tour. Noxon says, “I don’t think I’ve had as contentious and fruitful a collaboration since I worked with Matt Weiner on ‘Mad Men.’”

By most accounts, the pilot turned out poorly. Conventional and overlit, it lacked

the intensity of Shapiro’s short. Shapiro felt that the director hadn’t trusted her vision. “He was trying to do me a favor,” she remembers. “He didn’t believe the studio wanted it made my way.” The studio could have backed out, but Nancy Dubuc, A+E’s C.E.O., agreed to a reshoot with a new director. The tone Shapiro wanted would slyly force women to confront their worst tendencies. One of her original pitch notes read, “When women set out to hurt each other, they usually wind up hurting themselves.” Liz Gateley, the executive now in charge of “UNREAL,” says that she’s read too many scripts with “overly perfect female characters,” adding, “You know, women are *complicated*. We’re emotional. We’re flawed. We’re ambitious.” The show fit the delicate needs of a network that both pandered to female viewers and took them seriously. You can watch “UNREAL” for the same destructive women-on-women behavior you see on “The Bachelor” or as a witty commentary on it. “UNREAL” is a favorite of reality-show producers. Michael Carroll, a onetime “Bachelor” producer, remembers discussing it with former colleagues and seeing “elements of ourselves in the characters.” (Chris Harrison, the host of “The Bachelor,” whose “Everlasting” avatar is preeningly vapid, didn’t like what he saw. He told *Variety*, “Nobody is watching that show. Why? It is terrible.”)

“UNREAL” may be most unsparing in its depiction of the unstable modern workplace. The employees at “Everlasting” fantasize about quitting their awful jobs, but can’t let go of the money and the power. In Season 1, the pressures on the producers lead to a contestant’s suicide; in Season 2, even worse will occur. All alliances are provisional; the more talk there is of work as a family, the more the characters have to watch their backs. Gateley notes, “The set of a reality show is clearly relatable to what everyone else deals with in corporate America. The person who’s your friend today is willing to jump over you to get a promotion the next.” Working on “Everlasting” is the only life most of the characters have; it is where they form the tight bonds that, in earlier times, they would have formed in their personal lives. Whenever Rachel threatens to quit, Quinn asks the same question as the viewer: “Where *to?*”

Like her characters, Shapiro does not excel at domestic relations. “I’m a runner,” she says. Lately, she has been seeing a man—a musician. She says that she prefers the “lack of drama” that comes with dating men. She and her boyfriend live near each other in L.A., and he rarely sleeps over. “He knows I have to write in the morning,” she says.

Marti Noxon returned for the beginning of Season 2, but soon left to focus on “Girlfriends’ Guide.” She recalls “UNREAL” as a “hard environment to work in.” Shapiro, reluctant to revisit the conflict, told me, “As a woman, being labelled difficult can end your career.” One of Noxon’s Season 2 pitches did get in: Rachel will go behind Quinn’s back to the network and try to take over “Everlasting.”

ONE WEEK IN April, Shapiro was in Vancouver, where “UNREAL” is filmed, to do prep work for the seventh episode, which she was directing. She hadn’t directed on a large scale since “Sequin Raze,” and she was very excited. The intricate logistics of the shoot didn’t faze her: she’d learned to get things done in advertising and on “The Bachelor.” Levenson was on her mind, she said: “I found myself saying, ‘Stop talking! Just figure it out!’ to someone, and that’s straight from her.”

When the episode was finished, she told me that she had engaged in a subtle act of gender revenge: she’d filmed the male actors in their underwear so insistently that they’d begun to ask her if they looked fat. “Quinn and Rachel just keep their clothes on,” she added. “I’m loving it!”

On the set of “UNREAL,” the line between genuine and fake is blurred. It’s never clear if you’re walking past a production assistant or an actor playing a production assistant, and the mansion’s décor—sheepskin rugs, French hood chairs—must give Shapiro flashbacks. I entered a control room with a wall of monitors and desks covered with baubles and Post-its. “I told them to make it messy and to show people eating,” Shapiro said. An “Everlasting” whiteboard looked like the one in the writers’ room in Hollywood: “More tits n ass”; “Tender moment before the kill”; “Encourage slut shaming.”

Shiri Appleby, the accomplished



*“They’re such a nice couple—we should really see them more often. I don’t mean that literally, of course.”*

actor who plays Rachel, was on the set that day, directing Episode 6. (With Lifetime’s support, Shapiro has used more female directors in Season 2. Nearly half the episodes were directed by women, and three students from the Directing Workshop for Women received training.) Appleby—who looks like a shorter, smaller Shapiro—told me that she had watched Shapiro issuing commands in order to capture that in her own performance. She showed me a tattoo on her wrist: “Money. Dick. Power.” This was another of Shapiro’s themes of the season—women acting like men. At a party, Rachel, newly in charge and high on cocaine and champagne, caps the evening with rough sex. “It’s like a guy celebrating a kill,” Shapiro says.

While Shapiro was in Vancouver, scripts were being revised. Shapiro had preserved the feminist emphasis and the racial conflicts. “It just felt like the most worthwhile thing to do with the platform I have,” she told me. The Wubbies, meanwhile, had insured that she and her writers would keep chronicling love and deceit on “Everlasting.” Rachel had a new lover, Coleman, who was more Shapiro’s type: a Brown graduate and a serious documentarian, an outlet for Rachel’s ambition to be taken seriously. “From the moment she kisses Coleman, she’s working on her clip reel,” Shapiro said. Quinn, of course, will stop at nothing to prevent Rachel’s departure. So there was the super-important thing and there was the froufrou.

Jeremy, the cameraman played by Josh

Kelly, had not been forgotten. Originally, Shapiro had dispensed with him by Episode 5, but his story line was extended. Rachel, having had enough of what Quinn calls her “coupon-cutting boyfriend,” casts Jeremy off, and he becomes dangerously angry. To everyone’s surprise, Kelly had helped his own cause by coming back from the winter hiatus forty pounds heavier and with facial hair. “We let him stay chubby, with his beard all fucked up,” Shapiro said. “He looked gnarly—less like a soap-opera actor.” The writers had written a scene for him in which he physically attacks Rachel, accusing her of trying to get him fired. According to Shapiro, Kelly had vigorously objected, feeling that the show was casting *him* off. “I just wanted to make sure that the writers were writing truthfully,” he says. Shapiro convinced him that the signature of “UNREAL” was complexity and that Jeremy was joining the ranks of the show’s antiheroes.

We watched dailies of the moment on Shapiro’s computer—some takes showed promise, some less. Shapiro said of Kelly, “All I can say is we employ a veteran, and he’s a good person.” Over all, she was pleased with how Season 2 had come together. “Integrating Jeremy was a small price to pay for having a black bachelor and letting Quinn and Rachel go all the way to darkness,” she said. Lifetime had turned out to be a suitable companion after all. “I have friends who sold their projects to HBO,” Shapiro said. “And those projects are still in development.” ♦

## HOME FREE

*How a New York State prisoner became a jailhouse lawyer, and changed the system.*

BY JENNIFER GONNERMAN

DERRICK HAMILTON'S LEGAL education began in 1983, when he was seventeen and in the jail for teen-age boys on Rikers Island. He'd been an enthusiastic student as a child—his family called him Suity, because he liked to wear a suit to school. But in high school he'd begun skipping classes and getting into trouble. At fifteen, he was charged with robbery and sentenced to sixty days in jail. The arrests continued, for petty larceny, assault, criminal use of a firearm. Then, in March of 1983, a bread deliveryman was fatally shot near Lafayette Gardens, the public-housing project in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, where Hamilton lived, and he was charged with the murder. He insisted that he had not done it, and entered a plea of not guilty.

His father, a livery-cab driver, hired a lawyer named Candace Kurtz to represent him, and she urged him to start studying in the jail's law library, so that he could better understand his predicament. Hamilton is now fifty, tall and heavyset, with a shaved head and a thin scar running down the right side of his scalp. "I took it seriously," he recalled recently, "because here's some stranger saying, 'Hey, listen. Get out of wherever you're at. Wake up, kid, this is real.'" He started spending time in the library, and eventually taught himself enough criminal law to become one of the most skilled jailhouse lawyers in the country.

But, in the fall of 1983, two months after Hamilton turned eighteen, a jury found him guilty. He was given thirty-two years to life for the murder and for an earlier, unrelated gun charge, and was sent to Elmira Correctional Facility, a maximum-security prison near the Pennsylvania border. There he earned a high-school-equivalency diploma and took a class on how to conduct legal research. In 1985, he was sent to Siberia, as inmates call Clinton Correctional Facility, which is twenty miles from the

Canadian border. In the law library there, he met a group of veteran jailhouse lawyers, one of whom gave weekly tutorials on criminal procedure.

There is no job description for a jailhouse lawyer. It's an occupation born of desperation: most prisoners cannot afford lawyers, and are eligible for a free attorney only for their first appeal. After that, they have to either learn the law themselves or find a jailhouse lawyer to help them. In state prisons, jailhouse lawyers typically lack law degrees—some never finish high school—but New York does guarantee access to a law library, which is run by inmate clerks.

The older prisoners in the Clinton law library gave Hamilton a job as a "counterman." At the time, Clinton housed about twenty-five hundred prisoners, and there was almost always a line at the library counter. Often, inmates asked for materials that might help them fight their convictions. "I would show the guy how to go to the point that relates to his case, so he didn't have to read the whole thing," Hamilton told me. "This way, he could get his answer and keep it moving." Prisoners also needed general legal advice, about divorce, power of attorney, paternity, child support. "You would learn so much at the counter," Hamilton said.

Like many of the men he helped, Hamilton was a father; by the time he was eighteen, he had three children by three women. He married the mother of his son, Davone, in 1987. By then, his father had hired another lawyer, George Sheinberg, to handle his appeal, and Sheinberg managed to get the murder conviction reversed. Hamilton went on trial again for the same crime, but soon after it began he pleaded guilty to manslaughter, and was released in 1989, after serving six years. He still maintained his innocence—he had entered an Alford plea, in which a defendant does not have to admit any guilt—but he considered

his punishment justified, given his earlier gun charge. "The six years was rightfully done," he said.

After his release, he returned to Brooklyn, to his wife and Davone, who was then five. He barely recognized his old neighborhood. The crack epidemic had taken hold: empty glass vials littered the sidewalks; friends' mothers were prostituting themselves to pay for their addiction; childhood friends had become dealers. He had six siblings, and one of his brothers had joined the trade. The most disturbing change was that his father was gone. A year earlier, he had been murdered near Lafayette Gardens.

To escape the chaos, Hamilton spent time in New Haven with an older half brother, who ran a talent agency there. But, six months after his release, Hamilton crossed the state line without his parole officer's permission, and was sent back to prison for a year. When he got out again, he was twenty-four, and he had the scar on his head—the result of a fight in the prison yard. The best way to stay out of trouble, he decided, was to leave town. He and his half brother came up with the idea of opening a hair salon in New Haven, with the help of a beautician they knew.

Two weeks before the opening, in March of 1991, police officers arrived at the salon, handcuffed Hamilton, and drove him to a local station house. There an N.Y.P.D. detective interrogated him about a murder that had occurred in Bedford-Stuyvesant on January 4th. Hamilton knew the victim, Nathaniel Cash, who was twenty-six and had recently left prison. He had been shot nine times, and someone at the scene named Hamilton as the killer. The detective, Louis Scarcella, then thirty-nine, reminded Hamilton of the actor Joe Pesci, as he swaggered about the room, brandishing a cigar. But what Hamilton remembered most clearly, he says, is that Scarcella told him that "he didn't



*Derrick Hamilton was wrongfully convicted of murder, and spent more than two decades trying to prove his innocence.*

care whether I did it or not, because I didn't serve enough time for my previous case, and I would be going back to jail."

**T**HE MURDER TRIAL took place in Brooklyn State Supreme Court, in July of 1992. It should have been easy to establish Hamilton's innocence. He said that at the time of the shooting he had been in New Haven, meeting with two women who worked at his half brother's talent agency—he was trying to help arrange auditions for their acts at the Apollo Theatre. The District Attorney's office had only one supposed eyewitness: Cash's girlfriend, Jewel Smith, a twenty-two-year-old mother of two, who had a number of arrests for shoplifting and was on parole. She had given conflicting versions of what happened, and then, a few days after Hamilton's arrest, she had gone to the office of George Sheinberg, who was again representing him, and signed a statement saying that Hamilton "was not there when Mr. Cash was shot."

When the trial began, however, Smith testified that she *had* seen Hamilton kill Cash. Detective Scarcella claimed that Smith was afraid of Hamilton, and the prosecutor argued that that was why she had earlier changed her story. The women from the talent agency had not been contacted in time to appear in court, and two other alibi witnesses who were scheduled to testify for Hamilton didn't show up. Sheinberg asked for more time to bring the witnesses in, but the judge, Edward M. Rappaport, denied his request. The jury voted to convict.

Soon after, on Rikers Island, Hamilton wrote a motion asking Judge Rappaport to set aside the verdict, based on new evidence. Jewel Smith had told a private investigator, hired by a friend of Hamilton's, that she had lied in court because Scarcella and other officials warned her that, if she didn't, they "would put me in jail" and "take my kids." (She had violated her parole by spending time with Cash.)

Judge Rappaport ordered a hearing, at which Scarcella and the prosecutor denied threatening Smith. Michael Vecchione, who represented the D.A.'s office,

admitted that Smith was "a person you cannot rely on," but he maintained that she had told the truth at the trial. After the hearing, Rappaport turned to the defendant. "I must say this, Mr. Hamilton. You're a hard advocate. You fight hard," he said. But, he added, "I call it the way I think it should be." He sentenced him to twenty-five years to life.

Several months later, Hamilton found himself in Attica, in western New York. Inmates considered it the most brutal prison in the state; nobody had forgotten what happened in 1971, when prisoners rioting against the horrific conditions seized control of the prison for five days. There he ran into Alvena Jennette, whom he had known in Brooklyn. Jennette said that he, too, was serving a sentence for a murder he did not commit. He asked Hamilton who had investigated his case, and, when he said Scarcella, Jennette shouted, "That's the cop who set me up!" He said that Scarcella had framed him and his two half brothers on murder charges, and all three were serving eighteen years to life. Hamilton recalled, "From that moment on, we knew something was terribly wrong."

**T**HE FULL SCALE of the problem of wrongful convictions began reaching the public only in the nineteen-nineties, when DNA evidence was introduced in criminal cases. In 1992, two former Legal Aid attorneys, Barry Scheck and Peter Neufeld, founded the Innocence Project, using DNA evidence to exonerate innocent prisoners. At the time, Scheck recalls, "the notion of hundreds, if not thousands, of people being wrongly convicted was considered unlikely if not impossible by both the public and many in law enforcement." Since then, DNA evidence has helped secure exonerations for more than three hundred people. But it exists in only a small percentage of cases, and without it there is almost no way for a prisoner to unequivocally prove his innocence. There was no DNA evidence in Hamilton's case, so, even as news of the exonerations spread through the prison system, the hope of clearing his name remained slim.

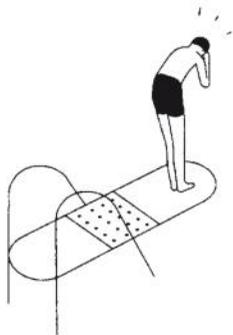
Nevertheless, he went to the law li-

brary every day, and in his cell he kept a copy of the thousand-page "Prisoners' Self-Help Litigation Manual." He collected affidavits from Kelly Turner and da'Vette Mahan, the women he said he had been meeting with at the time of Cash's death, and also one from a witness a friend had tracked down, who said that he had seen two other men shoot Cash. In 1995, Judge Rappaport granted Hamilton another hearing, but he didn't find the eyewitness credible. He also refused to allow the women to testify, even though one of them, Turner, was now an officer with the New Haven Police Department. His rationale was procedural: their names had not been on the original list of witnesses at the trial.

Each setback strained Hamilton's relations with his family. His wife had given birth to their second child after he was arrested, but they split up before the trial started. Three of his children visited him, but as they got older they blamed him for being in prison. "For years, I told my kids I was coming home," Hamilton said. "You become a liar in their eyes. They don't understand the legal process." His mother had kidney disease, and went to see him just twice. (She died in 2004.) Hamilton had got married a second time, in 1993, to another woman he had known in Brooklyn. That marriage also ended, but not before his wife had hired Scott Brettschneider, an attorney based in Queens, to file his appeal.

Brettschneider handled a dozen trials a year, mostly homicide and drug cases. In 1997, he and a colleague flew upstate to meet Hamilton, who brought piles of documents to their first meeting. "I had never seen a guy with so much paperwork in my life," Brettschneider recalls. "He had everything." They lost the appeal, but Hamilton stayed in touch, sending him copies of his pro-se legal work—papers he'd prepared himself—and asking his advice. In reply to one letter, Brettschneider wrote, "Keep fighting because it was apparent to me that something very wrong had occurred in your case."

**F**ROM THE MOMENT Hamilton entered the prison system, he began hearing about Jerry Rosenberg, known as Jerry the Jew, who was for many years the most renowned jailhouse lawyer in



the country. In 1997, Hamilton was transferred to Wende prison, in Erie County, and finally met him. In 1963, when Rosenberg was twenty-five, he was convicted for his role in the murder of two police officers, during the robbery of a tobacco store in Brooklyn. He was given a death sentence, which was later commuted to life. Rosenberg was an eighth-grade dropout, but he became a fixture in the law library at Attica, where he spent many years. During the negotiations in the 1971 riots, he served as the inmates' legal adviser. The attorney William Kunstler, who was called in as part of a team of civilian observers, said, "I'm up against the best. I'm up against Jerry the Jew."

Three years later, Rosenberg became the first prisoner in New York permitted to represent a client in court. Over time, he claimed to have assisted inmates in more than three hundred cases, and to have won most of them. In the law library at Wende, he and Hamilton discussed legal doctrine, but, Hamilton said, "Jerry at that time was burnt out on law. He was done with it." Rosenberg never managed to win his own release; he died in prison at the age of seventy-two, after being confined for forty-seven years.

Hamilton, too, had more luck with other prisoners' cases than he did with his own, since he could pick which ones to take on. He read trial transcripts, wrote motions, and sometimes persuaded a judge to grant an inmate a hearing. Although jailhouse lawyers are prohibited from charging prisoners for their services, many do. Payment can take the form of cigarettes, or even several hundred dollars deposited by an inmate's family into a jailhouse lawyer's prison account. Hamilton usually worked for no charge and preferred not to call himself a jailhouse lawyer, because so many had a reputation for exploiting fellow-inmates. "It's very disgraceful that guys are hustling other people out of commissary or their family's money and don't have the knowledge or expertise to do a good job," he said.

His first big victory as a jailhouse lawyer came on behalf of Julio Acevedo, in 1997. Acevedo was serving time for the murder of Kelvin Martin, known as 50 Cent, the notorious criminal after

whom the rapper 50 Cent reportedly named himself. When Acevedo was eighteen, he and a cousin worked as bodyguards for Martin. To explain his crime, Acevedo related an improbable-sounding story: members of a drug gang kidnapped him and his cousin, then told him that they would kill his cousin unless he killed Martin. So Acevedo shot Martin, in a housing project in Fort Greene. The jury had voted to convict Acevedo, and he was serving twenty years to life.

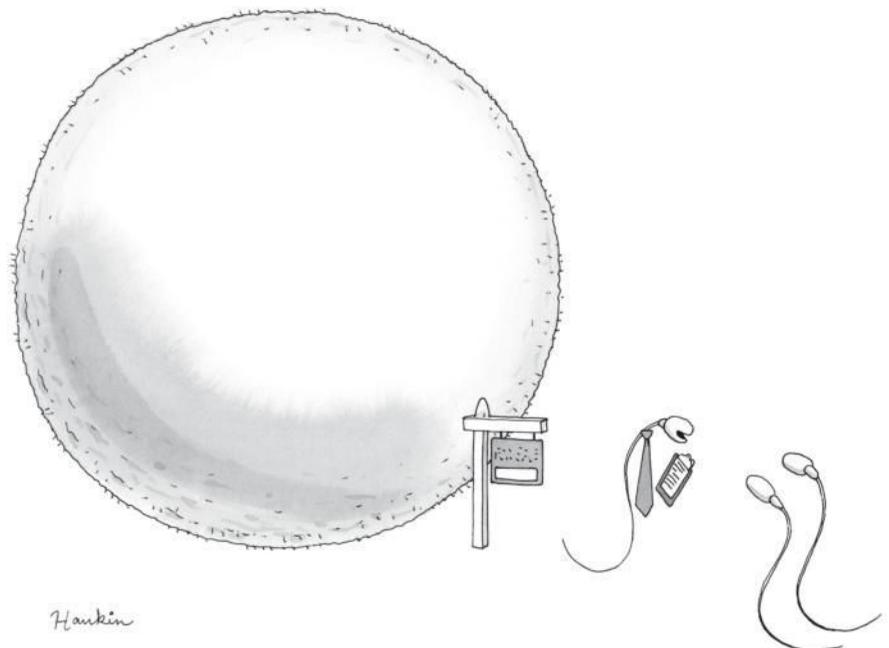
But Hamilton found trial testimony in an unrelated case, from a drug-gang enforcer turned government informant, in which he admitted on the stand to the kidnapping and to forcing Acevedo to shoot Martin. Hamilton wrote a motion, and Acevedo was released, after serving eight years.

**B**Y 2000, THERE were some four thousand inmates in New York State prisons held in solitary confinement. The early-nineteenth-century idea of solitary confinement as a means of rehabilitation had long been abandoned; now it was simply viewed as an effective way to maintain control over unruly inmates. Hamilton spent about ten years in solitary, confined to a cell for twenty-three hours a day. Sometimes officials said that he was a safety risk; other times, he was charged with break-

ing a prison rule. In the fall of 2000, after he had been transferred back to Attica, he was accused of smoking marijuana, which he denied, and was placed in the Special Housing Unit, or SHU, as solitary-confinement units are called in New York. He spent most of the next four years there.

In the Attica SHU, there were a hundred and sixteen cells. Among the other inmates were Mark David Chapman, who murdered John Lennon, and Colin Ferguson, who killed six passengers on a Long Island Rail Road train. Each cell measured eight feet by six feet, and the bars on the front of some cells were covered with Plexiglas. There was a desk in each cell, welded to the wall, but it wasn't large enough for Hamilton to spread out his legal papers, so he took his mattress off the metal bed frame, rolled it up, and sat on it, hunching over his bed, as he worked. When a guard slid a food tray into his cell, he ate beside his bed, like a lawyer eating at his desk.

Hamilton was not permitted to visit the law library, but he could have two law books delivered to his cell every day. Whenever he was denied something that he felt he was entitled to—the right to spend an hour outside each day, to be served a hot breakfast, to see a doctor—he filed a grievance with the prison. If that didn't work, he filed a



*"It's perfect for starting a family."*

claim in federal court. “The law saved my life,” he says. “That was the one thing I could become fixated upon every day when I woke up and when I went to sleep.” Typewriters were not allowed, so he wrote his claims in longhand, and his right middle finger was often swollen and painful from gripping a pen. There was also constant noise in the SHU, which made it difficult to concentrate.

In 2003, he wrote a twenty-two-page complaint, *Hamilton v. Conway, et al.*, which he filed in federal court. “Plaintiff is being tortured on a daily basis in Attica Correctional Facility Special Housing Unit,” he wrote. “Plaintiff is subjected to having to listen to loud banging all day and night” and to “screaming and yelling” and to “feces being thrown in plaintiff’s cell” by “mentally disturbed prisoners” who were housed near him. He argued that the noise violated the Eighth Amendment, which prohibits cruel and unusual punishment. He included affidavits from five other inmates. One wrote, “Attica Special Housing Unit sounded like a third world country being bombed.”

James Conway, Attica’s superintendent from 2002 to 2010, was the first defendant named in the complaint. Now retired, he remembers Hamilton well. “He was very respectful, very intelligent, very litigious,” Conway says. Whenever he passed Hamilton’s cell, he “would be doing legal work. He’d put his pen down, stand up, and we’d have a chat.” Conway started at Attica in 1972, when there was a single, ten-cell area for mentally ill prisoners, known as the “bug gallery.” By 2002, there were some four hundred men on the prison’s mental-health caseload, and about forty severely mentally ill inmates in the SHU. Sometimes they would lie “on their beds and bang their feet against the Plexiglas,” Conway said. “Just imagine that going on for hours and hours overnight.” He admits that Hamilton “had a legitimate complaint,” but adds, “I didn’t have a lot of solutions for the problem.”

By 2003, Hamilton was thirty-seven and had been confined for twelve years. At times, he became too depressed to work. His only reprieve was weekly visits with a woman named Nicole Esters. She had met him in 1990, when

she was twenty, and he was starting work on the salon. “For him, being a young black male coming from the projects, to even want to venture out of the five boroughs to try to start your own business, I thought it was just a remarkable thing to do,” she says. She believed that he was innocent, and she stayed in touch with him over the years, as other friends fell away. After his second marriage ended, they grew closer. Although she had two children and a full-time job as an accountant, she often drove six hours from New York City to Attica to see him.

They weren’t allowed to meet in a regular visiting room. Instead, Hamilton sat in a cage in the SHU visiting area, and they spoke through a grate and held hands through a slot at the bottom of it. Esters could tell that his time in solitary was changing him. He had been taking pills for cholesterol and high blood pressure, but she worried more about his psychological well-being. For one thing, he said the same thing over and over. When she asked him about this, he explained that, to be heard in the SHU, inmates had to repeat themselves, and it had become a habit. In a claim, he had demanded mental-health treatment, and Esters wrote in an affidavit, “He advises me the torture and noise level in segregation drives him more and more crazy every day.”

**I**N JANUARY OF 2005, Hamilton and Esters were married by a clerk in a visiting room at Attica. Two months later, he was transferred to Shawangunk prison, in Ulster County, eighty miles north of New York City. There he met Nelson Cruz, who was then twenty-four, and had been incarcerated since five days after his seventeenth birthday. He, too, had been convicted of fatally shooting a man in Brooklyn, and said that he was innocent. He was particularly eager to meet Hamilton. “Every time Derrick gets into a facility, everybody knows him,” Cruz said. “First thing that crosses everybody’s mind is: Freedom! Freedom! Freedom!” Hamilton says that he considered Cruz “a very respectful young kid who you could tell from the outset didn’t belong there.” He read the police reports from Cruz’s case, and

was amazed to learn that Louis Scarcella had worked on it. Hamilton believed Cruz and promised him, “I’m going to get you out of here.”

Every few years, Hamilton filed another motion in his own case, and when it languished in court he did something almost unprecedented: he called the judge’s chambers to try to expedite it, sometimes posing as a reporter for the *Daily News*, “to make the judge think someone important cared about my case.” As DNA evidence helped to secure the release of more innocent people, there were frequent news stories about wrongful convictions. Jewel Smith saw a television show on the topic, and in 2007 she wrote a letter to Governor Eliot Spitzer saying that “an innocent man is convicted in your state.” She explained that Scarcella had warned her during questioning that if she “wanted to leave the precinct and go home I had to identify Derrick as the person that committed the crime.” (The Governor’s office forwarded the letter to a state agency to investigate, but, in the end, nothing came of it.)

In May of 2009, after four years in Shawangunk, Hamilton was told that a group of inmates had threatened to kill him, and he was put in “involuntary protective custody,” known as I.P.C. “I’ve been in prison all these years,” he said, recalling how he laughed when he first heard the news. “Nobody ever protected me before.” I.P.C. is similar to other forms of solitary confinement, except that most prisoners sent to solitary are given a release date; a sentence to I.P.C. typically is indefinite.

Hamilton suspected that his new housing status had to do with the dozens of grievances he had filed. In one, he had alleged negligence in the death of Larry Davis, who had been Shawangunk’s most famous prisoner. (In 1986, Davis shot six N.Y.P.D. officers, but a jury acquitted him of attempted murder. He was later convicted in the fatal shooting of a drug dealer.) In February of 2008, a prisoner stabbed Davis in the yard. Hamilton said that he saw Davis shortly afterward, slumped in a hallway, and that officers left him there “for fifteen minutes to bleed out.” (An investigation by the State Commission of Correction mentions no wrongdoing by employees.)

Hamilton fought the decision to place him in I.P.C. At an administrative hearing, he sat at a table, his wrists cuffed behind his back. He called inmates to vouch that he had no enemies. They testified that he was a “caring type of dude,” who was “cool with everybody, young, old, all nationalities,” and that he had a “very good reputation for helping people out with their cases.” Nevertheless, he lost the hearing.

One day, in August of 2009, during the hour that he was let out of his cell, Hamilton happened to see a CNN

November 2nd, he wrote a letter to the prison’s superintendent. “The only way out of the torture you have subjected me to is suicide,” he said. “Death will be a welcomed companion compared to what you’ve subjected me to the last seven and a half months.”

That morning, while a prison counsellor stood nearby, Hamilton shouted from his cell, “I want out of here. You are either going to carry me out or I am walking out!” He swallowed a handful of pills from his medicine supply, and was taken to a local emergency room,

convicted, and each had met Hamilton years earlier in other prisons. When they heard that he was in the SHU, Shakur recalls, “Danny went to the superintendent and told him, ‘You have a guy there who’s really good at the law. We need him in the law library.’” After several months, Hamilton was given a “time cut,” and moved to a regular cellblock.

Nelson Cruz had also transferred to Auburn, and was housed two cells away. He told Hamilton that he, Shakur, and Rincon often met in the library to work on their cases. They called themselves the Actual Innocence—or A.I.—Team. (“Actual innocence” is a term used in post-conviction claims.) Rincon had been imprisoned for a 1991 quadruple murder in Manhattan, and Shakur was serving time for a 1988 double murder in Bushwick. As it turned out, Louis Scarcella had also been the detective on Shakur’s case. He testified at Shakur’s trial that he had confessed to him—a claim that Shakur had been denying for more than two decades.

To join the A.I. Team, a prisoner had to show his court documents to the others, who decided if he had a plausible case. Richard Rosario, then thirty-seven, was serving twenty-five years to life for a 1996 street murder in the Bronx. He claimed that he had been in Florida at the time, and he had a dozen alibi witnesses. The A.I. Team decided to admit him, and eventually there were ten members.

The camaraderie helped lift Hamilton out of his depression. Many mornings, Cruz woke to hear Hamilton calling, “Put that coffee on! Let’s go! Let’s go! It’s time to work!” Cruz made “prison coffee,” using a hot pot to heat the water and a sock to filter the brew, which he poured into a thermos and sent to Hamilton on a “line,” made from a sheet. “All day long, you’d hear the typewriter,” Cruz told me. “He’d shut it down about twelve o’clock, twelve-thirty. At seven in the morning, you’d hear it again.”

IN THE SPRING of 2010, Hamilton wrote a letter to Jonathan I. Edelstein, a lawyer in Manhattan who focuses on post-conviction cases. He followed it with copies of his latest motion and brief, and the affidavits that he had



*Hamilton after his exoneration, in 2015, with his wife, daughter, and brother.*

report on Troy Davis, a prisoner on Georgia’s death row, who had been convicted of killing an off-duty police officer. Davis maintained his innocence, and many of the prosecution’s witnesses had recanted. The case had gone to the Supreme Court, which had just ordered the district court to hold a hearing to determine “whether evidence that could not have been obtained at the time of trial clearly establishes petitioner’s innocence.” It was precisely the kind of hearing that Hamilton had been trying to get for more than fifteen years. He realized, “This is the case that’s going to change a judge’s ability to procedurally bar innocent people.” He had a motion pending, and to buttress it he started work on a brief citing the Davis decision.

But Hamilton was growing increasingly despondent about his indefinite confinement in I.P.C. On

then transferred to a psychiatric unit at another prison. A supervisor wrote in his medical record that Hamilton “is adamant” that if he were sent back to Shawangunk “he will kill himself.”

TWO WEEKS LATER, he was moved to Auburn Correctional Facility, in central New York, and was sent straight to solitary. Officials at Shawangunk had filed misbehavior reports, claiming that he had staged the suicide attempt in order to get out of I.P.C. Despite statements from the Shawangunk counsellor—who said that Hamilton was “pacing back and forth” and “in a suicidal state” before swallowing the pills—he was sentenced to a year in the SHU.

Shabaka Shakur and Daniel (Fat Danny) Rincon were jailhouse lawyers who worked in the Auburn law library. They, too, claimed to have been wrongly

obtained fifteen years earlier from his alibi witnesses in New Haven. Edelstein replied:

Dear Mr. Hamilton:

Thank you for your letter of May 27, 2010. I reviewed the materials you presented to me and, frankly, they made me sick. I've been in this business a long time and I'm used to seeing people screwed by the system, but I couldn't believe the way the court used a procedural dodge to avoid even looking at the Turner and Mahan affidavits. I really think you should go to the media with this, because people should be outraged that clear evidence of innocence was just thrown in the garbage.

Edelstein, then thirty-eight, had worked his way through John Jay College and Fordham Law School. His office was on Madison Avenue, but it consisted of one cramped room, which he shared with a partner, Robert Grossman. They had no receptionist, and stored their files in the hallway. Edelstein gets letters from prisoners nearly every day, but Hamilton's pro-se work stood out. "He was able to write a coherent and persuasive argument," Edelstein says. "By pro-se standards, that's Shakespeare. Or, to use a more professionally correct analogy, that's Clarence Darrow." In his letter, Edelstein commended Hamilton for citing the Troy Davis ruling in his brief, and he offered to write an amicus brief that Hamilton could submit to the court.

Hamilton had previously considered going to the media, and now he asked Nicole to organize a protest outside the Brooklyn State Supreme Court. On the morning she chose, a snowstorm hit, and only six friends and relatives turned up. But their signs, reading "Free Derrick Hamilton!," caught the attention of Oren Yaniv, who was a court reporter for the *Daily News*. Two months later, he wrote a story that appeared under the headline "INMATE, LOCKED UP FOR 20 YEARS FOR BROOKLYN MURDER, SAYS HE'LL BE SET FREE IF WITNESSES TESTIFY."

By then, Hamilton was eligible for parole. Prisoners seeking parole are typically expected to show remorse, but Hamilton filed another lawsuit, arguing that the parole board should consider his evidence of innocence before making its decision. Edelstein wrote to the board on his behalf, declaring, "I am totally convinced that he is innocent of the shooting of Nathaniel Cash, and

would stake my name and reputation that this is so." Hamilton submitted a package of documents, including the *Daily News* story and another letter from Jewel Smith.

On October 18, 2011, Hamilton appeared before two parole commissioners. "Mr. Hamilton, you've given us a lot to think about," one of them, Christina Hernandez, told him. "If, in fact, you're incarcerated for something that you did not commit, I hope that you're successful in your appeal." Seven weeks later, Hamilton was released, after nearly twenty-one years. Nicole drove to Auburn to pick him up, and on the way to Brooklyn they stopped in Albany, so that he could see his son, Davone, who was now twenty-eight.

BROOKLYN HAD GONE through another transformation. The crack houses were gone; the number of homicides had dropped by three-quarters since 1991; and Hamilton's childhood neighborhood was gentrifying. Across the street from Lafayette Gardens, on the corner of Franklin and Lafayette Avenues, there had been a bodega called Mary's, where Hamilton used to buy Bon Ton potato chips and Mountain Dew. Now in its place was Dough, a bakery serving hibiscus and tropical-chili doughnuts, with mocha-java coffee.

Hamilton moved in with Nicole, who was working for a cosmetics company. He was about fifty pounds heavier than when he entered prison, with sore knees, weaker eyes, and two missing teeth. ("There's no such thing as a root canal in prison," he says.) It wasn't easy to readjust to normal life. He rose every morning at five, and paced the rooms. He ate his meals in five minutes, as he had in the mess hall, in case an officer decided to take his food away. It felt strange to share a bed with his wife. "At times, you jump up wanting to fight because nobody is supposed to be in your bed," he said. One night, while they were sleeping, he punched Nicole in the head. "He said, 'I'm sorry. I had a dream I was fighting in the rec yard,'" she told me.

It helped to spend time with his children—now all in their twenties, with jobs and homes of their own—and to get to know his five grandchildren. In October of 2012, Hamilton

## SHOWCASE

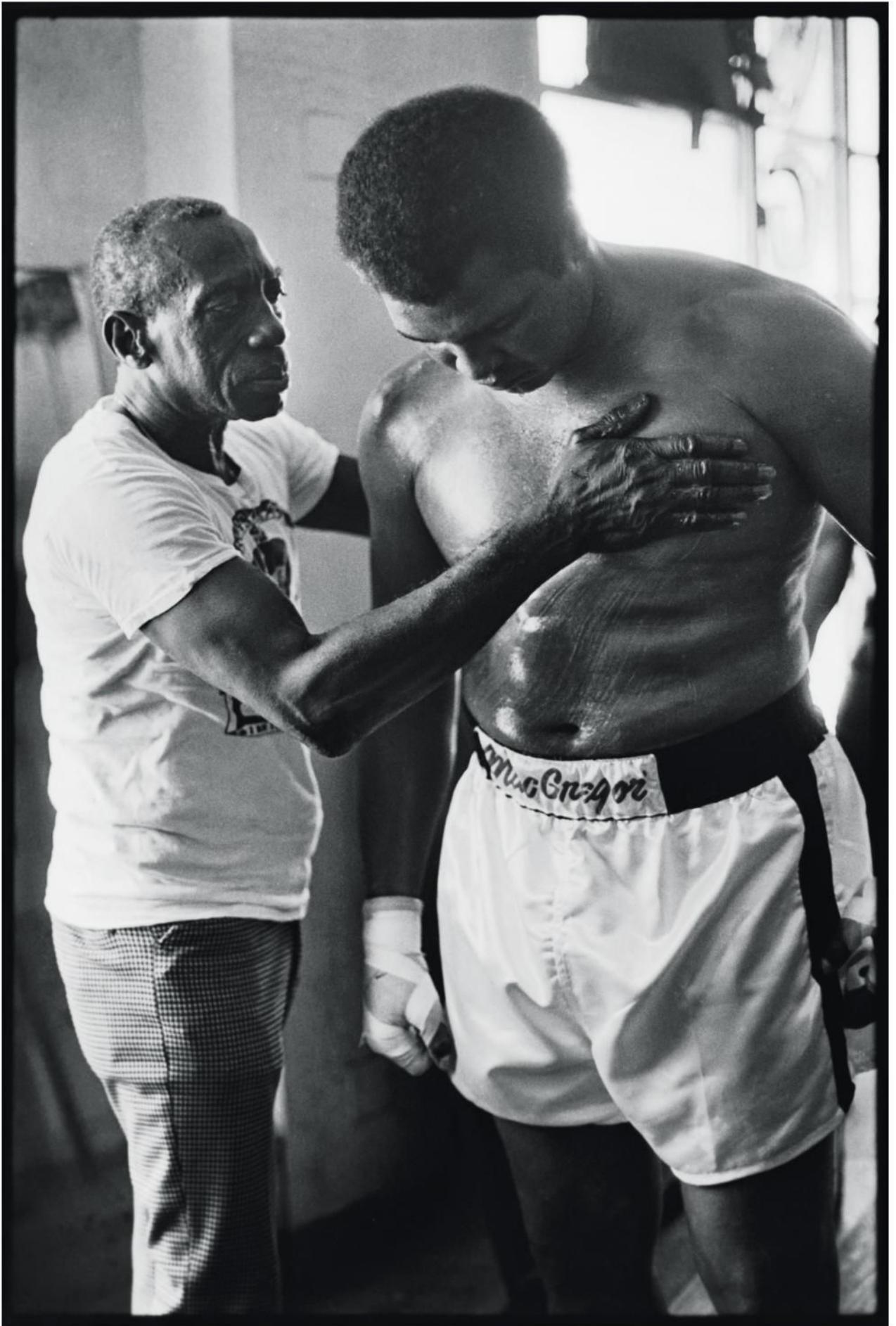
# UNRETIRING

MUHAMMAD ALI UNDERSTOOD that one of the requirements of an icon is to let the iconographers through the door. He happily greeted photographers in his gym, his dressing room, his mosque, even his hotel room, where he held court for reporters and posed in bed, naked. And in the days after his death we returned to the myriad images of Ali in his glory: scowling in triumph and looming over the fallen Sonny Liston; shadowboxing underwater; peeking under the toupee of his adenoïdal Boswell, Howard Cosell.

Ali, the most extraordinary athlete of the past century, was ordinary only in his refusal to stop. Like his idols Joe Louis and Sugar Ray Robinson, he ached for the action and the adulation. As he told a friend, "There's nothing like the sound of the crowd when you come down that aisle and they're yelling 'Ah, Ali!' You'd give your life to hear it." And so, after a couple of idle years, Ali arranged to fight Larry Holmes, his old sparring partner. It was his last fight of consequence, and here, as he is attended by his masseur, Luis Sarria, he's still magnificent, but thicker, lacking his usual exuberance. It's 1980, and he's thirty-eight. His vanity demanded that he dye his graying hair black.

For ten rounds, Holmes cuffed Ali around the ears and banged his guts. Ali had no reply. The most terrifying moment came when Holmes hit him with an uppercut and then, as Ali cowered against the ropes, covering the top of his head, landed a terrible blow to the kidney. Lloyd Wells, a member of Ali's entourage, told the writer Thomas Hauser that Ali screamed in pain. "I never will forget that as long as I live," Wells said. A few years later, the three-time world champion was diagnosed with Parkinson's. His second life, as a silenced, immobilized symbol of peace, had begun.

—David Remnick



CONTACT PRESS IMAGES

PHOTOGRAPH BY LORI GRINKER

and Nicole had a daughter, whom they named Maia. When Nelson Cruz called from prison, Hamilton told him, “It’s beautiful out here.”

Unlike many people who leave prison, Hamilton had skills that made him employable. Scott Brettschneider, who had represented him in the late nineties, hired him as a paralegal, and he was often at the courthouses, filing papers and meeting with clients, with Maia strapped to his chest in a baby carrier. “He could pass the bar exam,” Brettschneider says. “This is somebody who educated himself in jail to the point where his knowledge is so much more extensive than that of most of the lawyers I deal with on a daily basis.”

In early March of 2013, Hamilton got a panicked call from Julio Acevedo, whom he had helped get out of prison sixteen years earlier. The night before, Acevedo had been driving a friend’s car in Williamsburg, and smashed into a livery cab. A young Orthodox Jewish couple in the back seat were killed. Hamilton persuaded Acevedo to turn himself in, then went to meet him with two police officers. Acevedo was charged with manslaughter, and hired Brettschneider to represent him.

The case generated a lot of outrage, and Frances Robles, a reporter for the *Times*, was assigned to write about it. She met with Brettschneider and Hamilton to discuss the case. Afterward, Hamilton told her his own story. When Robles called him back a few days later with more questions, he mentioned Louis Scarcella, and gave her the names of some other men whose cases the detective had handled.

SCARCELLA HAD RETIRED in 1999, after twenty-six years on the force, as a highly decorated detective. But in 2011 the Brooklyn D.A., Charles J. Hynes, had started a Conviction Integrity Unit, which decided to reinvestigate the case of David Ranta, who had been convicted of a fatal shooting in Williamsburg in 1990. Scarcella had testified that Ranta had confessed to him; Ranta claimed that the statement was fabricated. The reinvestigation concluded that he had been wrongly convicted, and he was released on March 21, 2013, after twenty-three years in prison.

Robles hadn’t heard of Ranta, but,

## FOURTEEN

She is still mine—for another year or so—  
but she’s already looking past me  
through the funeral-home door  
to where the boys have gathered in their dark suits.

—Marie Howe

after talking to Hamilton, she had begun looking into other cases that Scarcella had handled, including that of Alvena Jennette, who had been the first to alert Hamilton to the detective’s tactics. Jennette had been released in 2007, after serving twenty-one years, and Hamilton and Robles went to see him at his mother’s house, in Crown Heights. By that time, Hamilton says, “he didn’t want anything to do with the criminal-justice system. I had to tell him, ‘Look, man, this is somebody who is going to investigate this. Let us see your evidence.’” Jennette went into his basement and returned with a plastic garbage bag full of legal documents.

On May 12, 2013, the *Times* published a front-page story about Scarcella, co-written by Robles, which mentioned Jennette and Hamilton, and detailed a long history of alleged misconduct, including falsifying confessions and coercing witnesses. In at least six murder cases, including Jennette’s, the article said, Scarcella had relied on the same alleged eyewitness, a prostitute with a crack addiction. The D.A.’s office had announced plans to review every homicide case that Scarcella had worked on, focussing on those which had gone to trial and ended with a conviction. The review eventually expanded to seventy-one cases. When the *Times* asked Scarcella about Hamilton’s allegations, he said, “He can drop dead. The man is an out-and-out liar.”

That fall, in the election for Brooklyn District Attorney, Kenneth P. Thompson, a former federal prosecutor, defeated Hynes, who had held the office for twenty-four years. Thompson overhauled the Conviction Integrity Unit, renaming it the Conviction Review Unit and increasing its staff from two prosecutors to nine. It was allotted an annual budget of \$1.1 million, which made it the

largest such unit in the nation. In his first year, Thompson exonerated ten men, including Jennette and his two half brothers. One of them, Robert Hill, was still incarcerated, and was released. The other, Darryl Austin, had died in prison in 2000.

IN JANUARY, 2014, Hamilton won his most significant legal victory: a landmark case, known as *People v. Hamilton*. It had begun with the brief that Hamilton wrote after learning of the Supreme Court’s ruling in the Troy Davis case. Davis lost his evidentiary hearing, and was executed by lethal injection on September 21, 2011. That day happened to be Hamilton’s forty-sixth birthday, and he took it as a sign that he should keep fighting. Edelstein and his partner, Grossman, refined Hamilton’s argument, and Edelstein argued the case in court. They won: for the first time in New York history, the Appellate Division of the State Supreme Court had decided that a defendant convicted of a crime who has a plausible claim of innocence is entitled to a hearing to present his evidence.

*People v. Hamilton* went even further than the Davis decision, by stipulating what should happen after an evidentiary hearing: if a defendant can show “clear and convincing” evidence of his innocence, his conviction will be overturned. Barry Scheck says, “If there’s strong evidence you didn’t commit the crime, there must be a constitutional right to vacate your conviction.” He added, “And that’s what’s been established in the Hamilton case in New York State.”

Before Hamilton got his evidentiary hearing, the D.A. asked him to appear in Brooklyn State Supreme Court. On January 9, 2015, Mark Hale, the prosecutor in charge of the Conviction Review Unit, stood up and told the judge

that the “sole eyewitness against Mr. Hamilton at trial”—Jewel Smith—had been “unreliable, untruthful, and incredible in her testimony.” Hale added, “The District Attorney has determined the conviction against Mr. Hamilton cannot stand.”

After twenty-four years, Hamilton had cleared his name. He walked out of the courtroom, with Maia in his arms and Nicole at his side. The *Times* ran a photograph, under the headline “WRONGLY CONVICTED MAN WAS HIS OWN BEST ADVOCATE.” When a reporter from the *Post* asked Hamilton about Detective Scarcella, he said, “I think prison is a nice way of dealing with men like that.”

Scarcella has never been prosecuted for his alleged malfeasance; the statute of limitations for perjury is five years. Not long after Hamilton was exonerated, he filed two lawsuits—one against New York State, in the Court of Claims, the other against the city, the N.Y.P.D., Scarcella, and others, in federal court. The litigation is ongoing and the defendants have denied all allegations. “I never did anything wrong in my life,” Scarcella told the *Staten Island Advance*. Now sixty-four, he lives on Staten Island, and collects a pension from the city.

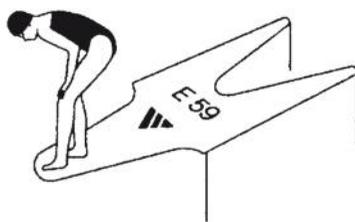
HAMILTON CURRENTLY LIVES IN New Jersey, with Nicole and Maia, and works in a small office that he shares with another paralegal. Since his victory in *People v. Hamilton*, he has received many more requests for help. Letters from prisoners cover his desk, and his cell phone rings constantly. The calls that trouble him most are those from inmates whom he knows personally and believes to be wrongly imprisoned. “When you know a guy is innocent, if you have any decency or human elements in your being, it’s almost impossible for a good person to just forget,” he said. “And that is my dilemma.”

He and Brettschneider knew that they couldn’t handle all the work on their own. “We needed attorneys with money and attorneys with time,” Hamilton told me. They needed to pay investigators to visit old crime scenes, track down witnesses, and collect affidavits. Soon after leaving prison, Hamilton had met Ilya Novofastovsky, a

civil attorney with an interest in wrongful convictions. Novofastovsky runs the Novo Law Firm, in Manhattan, and Hamilton urged him to start the Novo Innocence Project. Hamilton helps manage the project, and Brettschneider agreed to join the team.

Every week, Hamilton, Brettschneider, Novofastovsky, and another lawyer or two from the firm sit around a conference table in Novo’s offices. On a recent Tuesday afternoon, everybody wore a suit and tie except Hamilton, who had on a sweater, jeans, and sneakers. Shortly after 5 P.M., he asked, “You ready? Let’s get into the cases.” The lawyers glanced at the Case List Summary Report, a five-page document listing thirty-seven clients or potential clients. Most were still in prison; almost all had been convicted of homicide. Hamilton knew twenty-one of them.

It quickly became clear that he has his own way of evaluating a case’s merits. He vouched for one of the inmates: “I’ve known the guy for a very, very long time, and he’s always maintained his innocence.” He recognized a key witness in another case as a longtime crack addict: “He might say anything anytime anywhere.” He remembered another man from Shawangunk: “One of my criteria is: If a guy is innocent, he would spend more time in the law library. This guy never went to the law library. Not once.” His conclusion: “We shouldn’t have this case.” The meeting ended at



eight o’clock. Hamilton was slumped in his chair, rubbing his head. “At times,” he said, “it gets very fatiguing.”

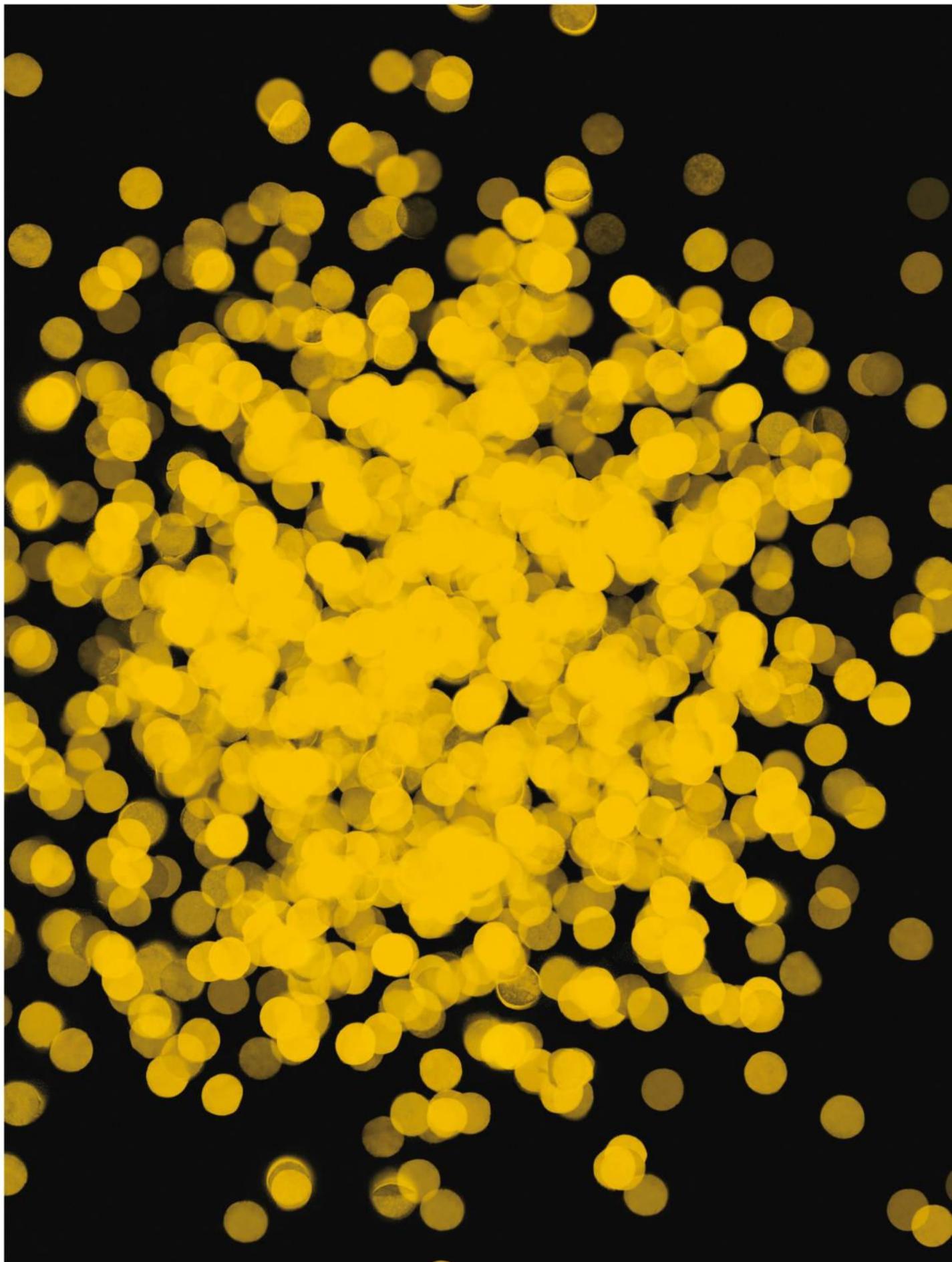
ONE OF THE best days that Hamilton has had since leaving prison was June 4th of last year, when a judge dismissed the charges against Shabaka Shakur, from the A.I. Team, making him the eighth person investigated by Scarcella to have his murder conviction vacated. The judge had cited a “reasonable

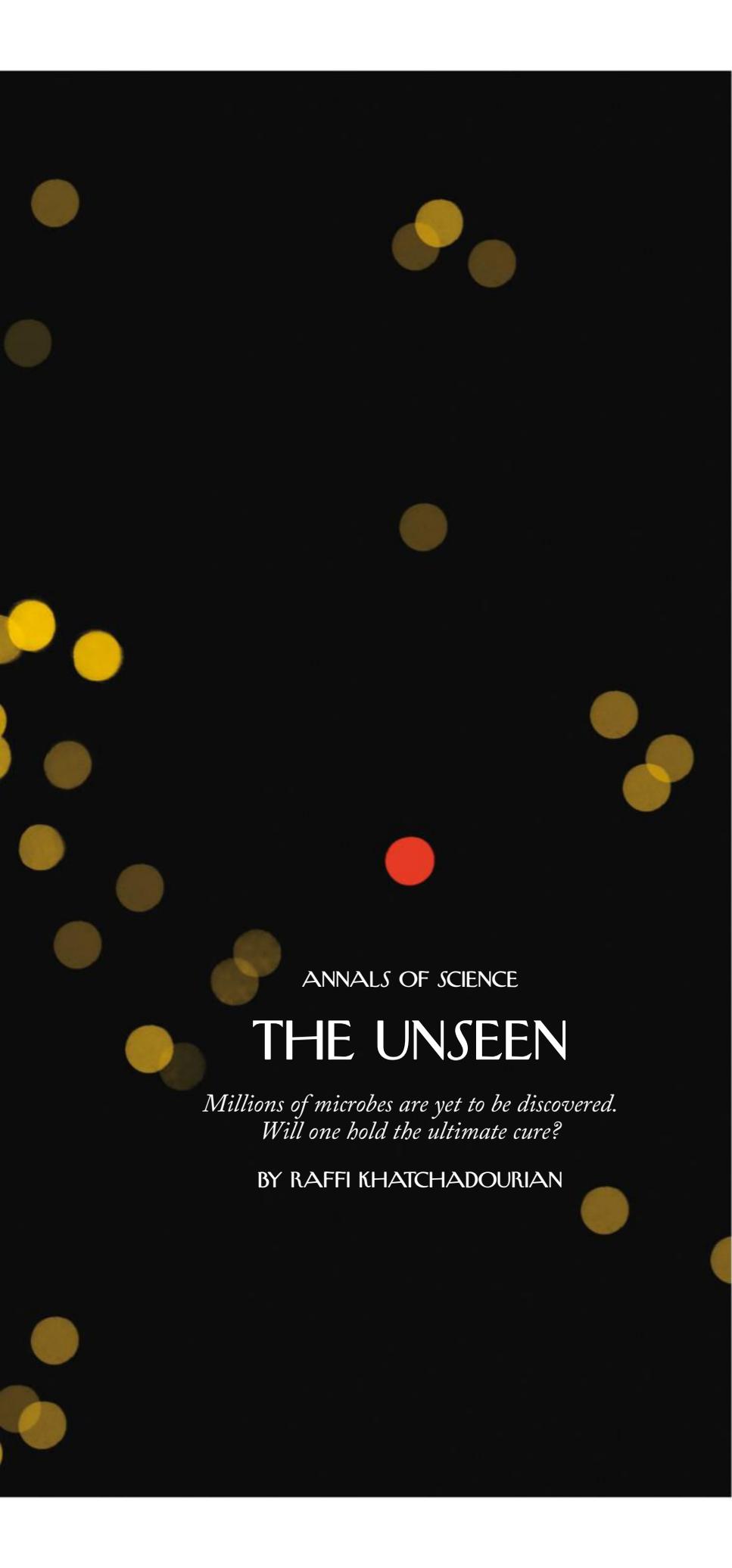
probability” that Scarcella had fabricated Shakur’s confession to the killing of two men in Bushwick, and ordered a new trial; the D.A.’s office declined to prosecute Shakur again. Two attorneys, Leah Busby and Ron Kuby, had helped Shakur with his case, and Shakur is now a paralegal in Kuby’s office. “Derrick and I broke the mold,” Shakur told me. “There’s a saying that real good jailhouse lawyers get everybody else out but themselves, but we were able to get other people out, and we were able to get ourselves out.”

Still, the other members of the A.I. Team remained in prison. Daniel Rincon is in Five Points, near Auburn. Nelson Cruz is now in Green Haven, in Dutchess County. He and Hamilton have spoken every week or two since Hamilton was released, and Brettschneider has taken Cruz on as a client. Cruz recently became ill with Bell’s palsy, which paralyzed the left side of his face, but he is recovering and waiting for the Conviction Review Unit to finish investigating his case. Then, one morning in March, Hamilton spotted a headline in the *Daily News*: “BRONX DA MOVES TO TOSS 1996 MURDER CONVICTION OF MAN WHO SERVED ALMOST TWO DECADES BEHIND BARS.” The prisoner was Richard Rosario, from the A.I. Team.

Hamilton immediately drove to the Bronx. In the County Hall of Justice, he paced the terrazzo floors, greeting people he knew: Rosario’s attorneys, a TV reporter, a man from New Jersey who had been exonerated. Hamilton hadn’t worked on Rosario’s case since he left Auburn, but Rosario had called him many times, and he knew that Rosario’s attorneys had cited *People v. Hamilton* in their brief. “Richie is getting out!” Hamilton said, to no one in particular. “This is a good, good, good day.”

Finally, Rosario was led into a third-floor courtroom. Reporters filled the jury box, and, for a few minutes, the only sound was the clicking of photographers’ cameras. Hamilton sat in the back row, watching as an officer removed Rosario’s handcuffs. One of his lawyers spoke for a few minutes, then the judge declared, “You are hereby released.” Everyone clapped, and the crowd filed out into the hallway. Soon, Rosario appeared, in a new suit and tie, clasping his wife’s hand, looking slightly dazed. Hamilton called out, “Richie Rich, baby!” Rosario spun around. “Derrick Hamilton!” he shouted. The two men slapped hands and embraced. ♦





ANNALS OF SCIENCE

## THE UNSEEN

*Millions of microbes are yet to be discovered.  
Will one hold the ultimate cure?*

BY RAFFI KHATCHADOURIAN

ONCE A YEAR, when Slava Epstein was growing up in Moscow, his mother took him to the Exhibition of the Achievements of the National Economy, a showcase for the wonders of Soviet life. The expo featured many things—from industrial harvesters to Uzbek wine—but Epstein, who began going in the nineteen-sixties, when he was eight or nine, was interested primarily in one: the Cosmos Pavilion, a building the size of a hangar, with a ceiling shaped like a giant inverted parabola. Space fever was running high in the city. Since 1961, when Yuri Gagarin orbited the globe, unmanned vessels had been launched toward Mars and Venus. Beside the expo's entrance, the towering Monument to the Conquerors of Space depicted a probe swooping up to the heavens.

The Pavilion displayed futuristic technology—Vostok rockets and Soyuz orbiters—but Epstein was less interested in the glories of advanced thruster design than in the glories of space. He wanted to devote himself to astronomy. When a textbook that he found on the topic began with algebraic formulas, he prodded his older brother to explain them. During high school, he enrolled in classes in physics and math at Moscow State University. His parents disapproved of his desired career: because he is half Jewish, Epstein would face harsh Soviet quotas limiting Jews in the study of physics, a field deemed relevant to national security. He ignored his parents. But after his first lecture the professor invited him for a walk, and affirmed what they had been saying all along. “Don’t do it,” he warned. “You’ll never get in.”

Soviet Russia may have been a fatalist’s paradise, but from a young age Epstein felt that he was hardwired for optimism. He convinced himself that what is truly important in science is the ability to connect ideas, no matter the field, and so he took up biology. Rather than telescopes, he would use microscopes, which he began taking with him on trips to the White Sea, near the Arctic Circle, to study protozoa along the shore—research that could be conducted with minimal state interference. Over time, he grew interested

in even smaller, more ancient forms of life: bacteria.

Studying microbes inevitably causes a reordering of one's perceptions: for more than two billion years, they were the only life on this planet, and they remain in many ways its dominant life form. Estimates of the number of bacteria—5,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000—are higher than for all the stars, and Epstein noticed that when he stained his microbes with fluorescent dyes and placed them under a microscope they looked just like constellations in deep space. To a remarkable extent, the microbial cosmos was less explored than the actual cosmos: precisely how the organisms evolve, replicate, fight, and communicate remains unclear. Nearly all of microbiology, Epstein eventually learned, was built on the study of a tiny fraction of microbial life, perhaps less than one per cent, because most bacteria could not be grown in a laboratory culture, the primary means of analyzing them. By the time he matured as a scientist, many researchers had given up trying to cultivate new species, writing off the majority as “dark matter”—a term used in astronomy for an inscrutable substance that may make up most of the universe but cannot be seen.

For years, the microbial dark matter weighed on Epstein: how could such a vast and primordial form of life evade basic analysis? Was it possible to design an instrument that could probe the bacterial universe, as the rockets in the Cosmos Pavilion had probed space? About fifteen years ago, he came to believe that it was more than possible—it was simple. If such a device worked, it could not only help solve a great scientific mystery but also have profound practical importance.

The near-universal presence of bacteria in nature—from the deepest layer of the Earth's crust to the upper atmosphere—is reflected in their protean applications. They can be used to make industrial foods, to engineer perfumes, to produce fuel or to clean it up. More than half the cells in the human body are microbial, and many of them exist as biological dark matter, too; learning how they function could offer countless insights into human longevity. For decades, microbes had been a source of

essential pharmaceuticals: chemotherapies, blood thinners, and drugs crucial to organ transplants. From just the one per cent of bacterial life that scientists had been able to cultivate, researchers had derived virtually every antibiotic used in modern medicine.

At the time that Epstein began to consider how to gain access to the microbial dark matter, the search for new antibiotics had more or less come to a halt, while well-known pathogens, such as staph, tuberculosis, and enterococcus, were increasingly resistant to the available drugs. A small number of researchers warned that the rise of “superbugs” posed a looming public-health crisis of unprecedented proportions—a possible return to a pre-modern medical age, when common infections were deadly and simple surgeries were often too life-threatening to consider. What would access to even one per cent more of the bacterial universe mean? Perhaps millions of lives could be saved.

EARLIER THIS YEAR, I travelled to Boston to visit Epstein at Northeastern University, where he is a professor. I found him outside his office, on the street, smoking. Epstein regards smoking—a near-lifelong habit—as a voluntary vice; his true addictions, he says, are travel and tango. At fifty-seven, he is trim, with a shaggy hair style that conjures both past and future: either the ragged look of a medieval peasant or an android from “Blade Runner.” He has the manner of a nineteenth-century adventurer-scientist—a generalist with a wandering intellect who can begin a conversation talking about the evolutionary oddity of sexual reproduction and end up discussing his trip to the Erta Ale lava lakes, in Ethiopia.

His office used to be a disastrous mess, he said; he had cleaned it recently, but it still housed an eclectic compendium. There was a book on Arabic grammar, a copy of “The Little Prince,” a cuneiform tablet, a boomerang, a pack of Soviet filterless *papirrosa* cigarettes. There were large photos that he had taken and printed: crashing waves off the Scottish coast; Gaudi's Casa Batlló, luminous and seductive at night. “He organizes his research in the most faraway lands,” a friend later told me. “I don't know how he man-

ages to do science with all that travel.”

In 2004, Epstein obtained a million-dollar grant from the National Science Foundation to open an observatory in Venezuela, concentrating on microbes in an ocean trench a mile undersea. He told me, “What we discovered was a new class of ciliates”—a form of protozoa. “Not a new species. Not a new genus. A new *class*—the first in half a century. Well, it didn't make headlines on CNN, but in the world of protistology that is as stunning as it gets.” Still, what seemed to excite him more was an expedition he had made into the Venezuelan rain forest to live with the Yanomami, the largest isolated tribe in South America.

In Epstein's office, we were surrounded by Yanomami artifacts, which hung on the walls alongside African spears, arrows, and satchels. He is a connoisseur of primitive technology—simple yet highly effective tools. He was wearing a bracelet made from metallic beads, which, he explained, he had got while living among the Himba people, in Namibia. “I noticed many of them wearing something made out of these beads,” he said. “I asked, Where do you get them? Oh, they say, there are people we know who make iron out of rocks. *What?* So I started digging, and here is what I learned: there's a tribe—no road, no nothing, reachable by at least three days on horses. I will go one day. These guys found a way to make iron from iron ore, probably before the Europeans came.” He looked at his bracelet, given to him by a Himba elder. “This is made by the same technology that your ancestors, my ancestors, everyone's, were once using. It was made ten years ago, or twenty years ago, but it is like a time machine.”

Microbiology is, in its way, a form of time travel—a field of study that can elucidate the earliest traces of human evolution. If you wind back the clock of life to its beginning, you arrive at a moment, roughly four billion years ago, when the planet was newly formed, and the Age of Microbes was dawning. By human standards, Earth was a forbidding place: the seawater more than a hundred degrees Fahrenheit, the atmosphere a toxic blend devoid of oxygen. Single-celled bacteria didn't mind. They

grew in massive colonies, undersea and in deep soil, breathing in lethal gases and reshaping the planet. That our atmosphere is twenty-one per cent oxygen is a bacterial artifact: the emergence, three and a half billion years ago, of cyanobacteria—a blue-green slime capable of photosynthesis—triggered the Great Oxygenation Event, creating an atmosphere resembling our own, and modulating Earth's temperature, making it more widely habitable. The Age of Microbes has persisted to the present day without interruption. Not only do bacteria outnumber humans but they outweigh us, too, by a factor of a hundred million. Civilization is only a tweak to their landscape. "If *Homo sapiens* disappears, cities will be gone and fields will become rain forest again, but life as such will not change," Epstein told me. "If microbes disappear, then everything is gone—no New York, no rain forest."

For millennia, humans were blind to microbial life. Bacteria were discovered in the seventeenth century, but the golden age of microbiology did not begin for another two hundred years. Because bacteria are so small—some are one ten-thousandth the size of a red blood cell—they could not be studied individually, so it was necessary to cultivate lots of them. And the colonies had to be kept pure: mixed populations would inevitably generate mixed results.

The petri dish, invented in 1887, provided an elegant solution, allowing scientists to parse the complexity of nature by examining one colony at a time. But, as scientists began to domesticate microorganisms in the laboratory, they noticed that not all bacteria responded to their efforts in the same way. Some grew as easily as weeds; others were extremely stubborn. A tremendous number did not grow at all. As early as 1911, one researcher estimated, by counting bacteria on a microscope plate, that the cells that wouldn't form colonies outnumbered those that did by a hundred and fifty to one. In an attempt to get better results, researchers revised the growth medium in which bacteria are cultivated, compiling thick recipe books. To the typical medium—a nutrient-rich gelatin called agar, derived from sea-

weed—they tried adding blood, chicken bouillon, urine. They added oxygen, took it away. They altered temperature. Still, the microbial weeds continued to dominate. In 1985, this baffling phenomenon was given a name, the Great Plate Count Anomaly. But, perhaps because the one per cent of the microbial world that could be cultivated was so immense, few microbiologists gave it serious thought.

EPSTEIN DID NOT learn about the anomaly until after he migrated to Massachusetts, in 1989, but the idea resonated immediately. In his own way, he had been living in a vast petri dish—the Soviet experiment—where he had found it impossible to thrive. As a child, he secretly listened to Voice of America at his parents' dacha; later, in college, he grew close to dissident students, who exposed him to samizdat. Epstein imagined his future taking one of two paths: either a life of political nonconformity, in the manner of Sakharov, or exile. After graduating, he could not secure work in the academy; a professor privately explained that the K.G.B. disapproved of his social milieu. Through a friend, Epstein found a job ten time zones away, in Kamchatka, where he manned a lone microbial-research station on the Bering Sea. He hiked. He avoided bears. And, dreaming of exile, he memorized seven thousand English words from an old dictionary, with no

sense of how they fit together. When the Soviet authorities permitted a wave of Jewish emigration, he and his wife, Lena Kashevsky, fled with their two children. Epstein turned over his raw data to a contact at the Dutch Embassy, who smuggled it out via diplomatic pouch.

The family landed in a walkup in Cambridge, where Epstein bartered for rent by helping to fix up the building. His wife, who had also studied biology, found a job in a Harvard laboratory. For Epstein, with his limited English, reentering academia was impossible at first, and he half-considered becoming a contractor. While fixing driveways, he listened to NPR, the language flowing by in an undifferentiated stream. Over time, the words revealed themselves, until one day he realized that he was listening to the news.

As Epstein gained his footing, he sought out unsalaried academic postings, hoping that he could find grants to re-start his scientific work. For a time, he left his family to live in a university lab in Milwaukee. Gradually, he found his way to Northeastern, and he learned about the problem of uncultivable bacteria. "It's not necessarily thought of as big by many people," he told me. "But imagine that you are taking a course in microbiology. You're preparing yourself for the final exam, and you are using a textbook. You open it and see that ninety-nine per cent of





the words are blacked out. All that you can read is a random one per cent. What are the chances you will pass? That's where we are in microbiology, so how much bigger can it be?"

Epstein questioned the prevailing assumption that the Great Plate Count Anomaly was tied to growth media—to simply finding the right nutrients. Too often, he thought, humans assumed that microbial ecology was merely a Lilliputian version of the world that they could see. "A remarkable thing about microbes—and it is only remarkable from our anthropocentric point of view—is the coöperation among them," he told me. "We in the macroscopic world need organic material as food, and oxygen to oxidize it, to get energy. You, a cow, a giraffe—we're all the same. We may not be in each other's way if one eats fish and the other grass, but little coöperation is possible, considering our metabolic needs." Bacterial metabolism, on the other hand, is staggeringly diverse: some microbes eat ammonium, some eat hydrogen; some breathe sulfates, some breathe iron. Often, microbes are interdependent:

what is waste for one is essential for another. "At some point, it becomes almost philosophical," he said. "Perhaps the coöperation that evolved for four billion years in the microbial world has not evolved in the macroscopic world because it is younger. Maybe in two billion years we will find it to the same degree."

Epstein had gone to Milwaukee at the invitation of a friend at the University of Wisconsin, Ken Neelson, who was researching bacteria that live symbiotically with lantern-eye fish in the Red Sea. The bacteria develop colonies in a special cavity beneath the fish's eye, but only after generating a dense cluster of ten million cells will they glow, helping their host lure prey. Neelson was curious: were the microbes somehow taking a census of themselves? It turned out that they were, using chemical signals. When the bacteria were let loose in seawater, the census failed, and they refused to glow.

For Epstein, such research underscored that context in microbiology was everything: the lantern-eye bacteria were highly sensitive to where they

were and who was with them. Clearly, more than nutrition was defining their behavior. Once you acknowledged that microbial ecology was so delicately interconnected, the assumption that one bacterium could thrive alone in a dish began to seem odd. Researchers were trying to force microbes to grow under conditions dictated by the rules of the macroscopic world, when, perhaps, the key was to submit to the small.

"My thoughts were all over the place," Epstein told me. "But what I realized was that, while I and other people were wondering how to get access to this 'dark matter,' all of us were thinking in the wrong way. Here is what I mean. Suppose I take a bacterium from soil, and I put it in a petri dish, and it forms a colony. We would call it cultivation, of course. Now, suppose I take the same bacterium, but halfway to the lab I change my mind and return it to the environment. What would that bacterium do? It would form a colony. Would we call that cultivation? Well, it is, no matter how you look at it." Even if most researchers dismissed the idea—because, unlike pure colonies in a lab, bacteria in nature become hopelessly intermingled—such a colony would still be growing. "So what is the lesson here?" Epstein said. "Oh, the lesson is really important. The problem is not cultivation. It is how to separate one growth from another growth."

Considered in this way, the problem was far simpler. If it could be solved, then perhaps microbiologists—like anthropologists travelling to rain forests to observe isolated tribes—could study bacteria where they were already thriving. Epstein became obsessed with the idea. One day, he was relaying it to Michael Sherman, a biochemist from Russia who teaches at Boston University. Sherman said that he knew another researcher who was thinking along the same lines: a microbiologist from Moscow State who had moved to Tufts. Offering to make an introduction, he said, "You should meet."

THE TWO MEN, it turned out, had met already—in a way that could make sense only during the Cold War. The other scientist was known in Moscow as Alexei Nikolaevich Glagolev.

His real name was Kim Lewis; he was born in New York in 1953.

Epstein had occasionally run into Lewis in the Soviet academy, but how Lewis had ended up behind the Iron Curtain was a story that he learned only later. Lewis's parents had divorced when he was two, and his mother, in a fit of idealism, had decided to involve herself in the Communist project. She moved to Russia, and remarried in Moscow, where Lewis gained a new family, new citizenship, a new identity. "Nobody knew that I was American, apart from the K.G.B.," he told me.

At Moscow State, Lewis studied under a professor who had carved out a small zone of academic freedom. "I was doing very well, science-wise," Lewis said. "I had two papers in *Nature*." Like any good Soviet citizen, he understood how to navigate the privations of Communism—when thieves stole the front seats of his car, he replaced them with folding chairs. But, on a deeper level, he found assimilation impossible. "One evening, I visited Kim at his apartment," Sherman recalled. "There were several pounds of peanuts on the counter, which he was mixing with butter, in a blender, into a gooey mess. I asked, 'What is this?' And he said it was peanut butter. To me, it was inedible. But Kim told me that love for it comes from mother's milk—that every American child has a peanut-butter sandwich for lunch—and he had to maintain his Americanism in this foreign land."

In 1984, at the age of thirty-one, Lewis began trying to leave. He applied several times for an exit visa, but in each instance the Soviet Union rejected his application. Eventually, he held a press conference with four other Americans stranded in Russia, hoping that publicity would advance his cause. "I just can't take it here any longer," he declared. "We consider ourselves hostages, and we ask the American government not to forget its hostages in Moscow." Lewis lost his job, as did his wife. "We became refuseniks," he told me. "It took us three years—and, ultimately, help from President Reagan—to get out."

When Lewis finally returned to the United States, his predicament differed from Epstein's. He spoke En-

glish fluently, and he had already built an accomplished career. Echoing his personal experience, his research began to explore questions of adaptation—how organisms survive hostile environments. He helped discover how some bacteria used microscopic pumps to purge themselves of antibiotics, and he unravelled a paradox involving biofilms: groupings of microbes that are often deadly and impervious to medication, even though in isolation they are easily eradicated.

"I am generally attracted to old, unsolved problems," he told me. By the time Lewis met Epstein, he was pondering the Great Plate Count Anomaly, too. "By simply counting cells—what was done a hundred years ago—one did not truly know the diversity of organisms that was missing," he told me. But advances in DNA analysis made it possible to determine just how varied bacteria were: one microbe could be as different from another as a hippopotamus was from a daisy.

Like Epstein, Lewis believed that, if the anomaly could be reframed as a problem of bacterial isolation, then it could be circumvented. The hard part had been reformulating the question—but that was a habit that he had developed from Soviet life. "We had limited resources, and had to think long and hard about a problem," he told me. "We couldn't do just random descriptions of complex systems—taking them apart, putting them together again."

Epstein, too, had grown accustomed to ingenuity born out of limitation. In Moscow, unable to find a job, he had obtained a license to sell "fine art," and, applying a lenient definition of the term, cast zodiac pendants out of gypsum for sale at weekend markets. The pendants were crude—"nothing beautiful about them"—but they were novel, in a place that craved novelty. He corralled friends into the venture, hired police as security, and, "at the end of a day, we would go to an apartment and sort suitcases of money."

Epstein liked to work with his hands, and he was unafraid of trial and error. While collaborating with Lewis on a device to sequester microbial colonies

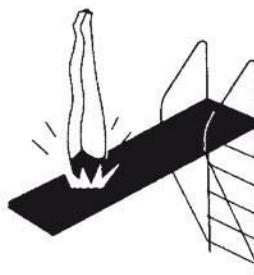
in nature, he became the chief tinkerer. At first, the two scientists tried a Slide-A-Lyzer—a small permeable box used in laboratories to separate proteins from other chemicals. They thought they could place bacteria inside, then embed them in soil. As Epstein put it, "The cells will never leave, other organisms will not crawl in, but chemical diffusion would provide everything that is naturally available in the field." With no funding, though, they could not afford enough Slide-A-Lyzers to run experiments, so Lewis called the manufacturer and explained that they were hoping to turn the device into the successor to the petri dish. The manufacturer donated hundreds of them, and even threw in a little development money.

Epstein tested the device in marine sediment at a research station in the Massachusetts Bay—experiments that, he recalled, involved trudging in mud with rubber boots, cutting his hands on mussel beds, and enduring "late fall rains that, with wind, feel brittle on your skin." Quickly, it became clear that the chamber would not work: microbes pushing up against the exterior ate right through. "That membrane happens to be a really good food," he told me. "So we incubate, we remove, and we have only a frame."

Returning to Northeastern, Epstein hunted for new material, rummaging through laboratory drawers, and scanning scientific catalogues. He settled on

a membrane made from polycarbonate. "Microorganisms are not interested in it," he said. "You can visualize it as a plastic bag, like from the supermarket, with tiny holes." Unlike the Slide-A-Lyzer, it did not come in a premade structure, so the two men tried

to design a framework made from plastic and screws. "Nothing was really working," Epstein told me. "We were not engineers. One day, I was at Kim's office. It was late, and we kept going over different scenarios, and Kim says, 'Slava, enough is enough.' He goes to his door, locks it, and says, 'You and I are not leaving until we have a solution.' This happened on a day that I had a date with my wife, who does not tolerate one minute of lateness." With the clock



ticking—Epstein had forty minutes—an idea emerged, one so simple that to render it as a blueprint would require not much more than drawing a circle: simply glue the membrane to each side of a metal washer about the thickness of a quarter. Bacteria in agar could easily be sandwiched between the layers.

Within a few weeks, the system was cultivating novel colonies in the Massachusetts Bay; astonishingly, some bacteria even thrived when relocated to a petri dish. “All the hopes that we were holding up at that point became reality,” Epstein told me. Without a team of grad students dedicated to the project, Epstein and Lewis channelled their excitement into lab work. Epstein took photos, and sent a few to Michael Sherman, who had trained as a microbiologist with Lewis. “Slava asked me, ‘What do you think these are?’” Sherman recalled. “I thought they were some kind of Martian structure, nothing similar to anything I’d seen in nature. I said, ‘I don’t know. Is it from a sci-fi movie?’ And he said, ‘No, these are colonies. These are really beautiful, new forms of life.’”

WHEN EPSTEIN FIRST considered the microbial dark matter, he paid little heed to its practical uses. “I was a fairly snobbish academician who looked down on biotechnology,” he told me. “My interest in the Great Plate Count Anomaly was ninety-nine per cent academic; it was a big intellectual challenge.” But during his collaboration with Lewis he began to meet people in the pharmaceutical industry who had been searching for bacteria that produced novel antibiotics. The problems that they encountered struck Epstein as surprisingly complex, and his snobbery dissipated.

The word “antibiotic”—a Latinate term meaning “life-negating”—suggests a misleading confidence about how these chemicals work in nature. “We actually don’t know,” Epstein told me. The conventional theory is that they are weapons, deployed in a primeval struggle among microorganisms. Long before humans began making use of them, evolutionary pressure caused some bacteria to mutate and develop resistance to attacks from others. Those defenses in turn promoted the

evolution of new forms of weaponry.

Epstein is skeptical of this theory. For one thing, no one has ever measured concentrations of antibiotics in nature which are lethal to bacteria. He is open to the notion that these chemicals might be for signalling, and that they seem like weapons because of how we use them. As an illustration, imagine if curious Martians sampled the air around pedestrians in New York City and determined that some people were coated in aromatic compounds. And suppose they isolated those compounds and, as an experiment, dumped tons of them, at a hundred million times the concentration, into Madison Square Garden on a packed night. They might conclude from the resulting mass casualties that cologne is a tool of violence. In Epstein’s view, human researchers may hold a similar bias toward microbial life. “The default hypothesis should be that this or that molecule is used in coöperation rather than in fighting, because that is what dominates among microbes in the first place,” he told me. He mentioned a recent experiment, in which researchers found that a chemical used by a microbe called *P. aeruginosa* to conduct a census of its colony could also be used, in significantly higher doses, as an antibiotic.

Kim Lewis believes in the weapons theory, and most people who work on antibiotic resistance do, too. There may be no observational evidence for it, but there are important clues in DNA. Not long ago, researchers discovered genetic mutations in bacteria that were frozen in the Yukon thirty thousand years ago. The adaptations appeared to indicate antibiotic resistance, raising the question: Why would evolution select for those defenses unless there was something to defend against?

If antibiotics are indeed weapons, then humans are latecomers to an aeons-old arms race, whose rules remain opaque to us. “It is absurd to believe that we could ever claim victory in a war against organisms that outnumber us by a factor of  $10^{22}$ , that outweigh us by a factor of  $10^8$ , that have existed for a thousand times longer than our species, and that can undergo as many as five hundred thousand generations during one of our generations,” several scientists argued in a recent

paper. The arsenals in question took bacteria billions of years to develop. “In contrast, antibiotics were not discovered by humans until the first half of the twentieth century.”

Even for the pioneers of antibiotic research, the forbidding odds were apparent. As Sir Alexander Fleming, who discovered penicillin, in 1928, noted, “There is the danger that the ignorant man may easily underdose himself and by exposing his microbes to nonlethal quantities of the drug make them resistant.” During the Second World War, penicillin was used widely, and it did not take long for resistant bacteria to spread. But many new drugs were being discovered, particularly from easily cultivatable species of actinobacteria. In 1943, there was streptomycin, the first cure for tuberculosis, and on the heels of that came chloramphenicol, chlortetracycline, neomycin, erythromycin. The rush of discovery gave the impression that nature contained an infinitely deep trove of new medicines. In 1962, a Nobel-winning immunologist went so far as to declare “the virtual elimination of the infectious diseases as a significant factor in social life.” Antibiotics became omnipresent. In industrial farming, they were used to hasten animal growth and to shield plants from pests; in medicine they were often overprescribed or incorrectly prescribed. Microbes, meanwhile, kept evolving. Bacteria do not pass genetic information just to their progeny; they also pass it to neighbors, across species—even to potential victims. In a sense, this shared catalogue of genes evolves as if vast heterogeneous masses of microbial life were one superorganism.

In the nineteen-eighties, the war started to seem much less winnable. Few new antibiotics could be found among cultivatable microbes, and the tools of modern genetics proved unable to pry many new drugs from uncultivable ones. As costs rose and results diminished, most of the largest pharmaceutical companies shuttered their antibiotic-discovery programs. The fear now is that the aging war chest will be rendered totally ineffective. Already there are strains of tuberculosis and gonorrhoea, among other

pathogens, that are resistant to virtually every drug in the medical arsenal. By conservative estimates, there are now seven hundred thousand fatalities from antibiotic-resistant bacteria in the world each year.

In desperation, hospitals have begun to revive old antibiotics that were discarded because they were too toxic. One such drug, colistin, was set aside for decades because its side effects included kidney damage and neurotoxicity. Today, it is a last line of defense against the hardest of pathogens—though probably not for long. In 2012, the World Health Organization recommended that it be administered under strict regulation, but farmers around the world continued to use the drug liberally, particularly in China, where it was given to livestock by the ton. In 2013, researchers in China discovered colistin-resistant *E. coli* in the intestine of a pig, and a few weeks ago a similar strain was found in a patient in Pennsylvania—prompting the head of the Centers for Disease Control to declare that “the end of the road isn’t very far away for antibiotics.”

The consequences of a “post-antibiotic world” are difficult to quantify, but a study commissioned by the British government predicts that, if trends continue, annual fatalities from drug-resistant microbes could exceed ten million by 2050, eclipsing those from cancer. Many key advancements in modern medicine could be reversed. As one researcher noted recently, “A lot of major surgery would be seriously threatened. I used to show students pictures of people being treated for tuberculosis in London. It was just a row of beds outside a hospital—you lived or you died.”

ON A CLEAR Boston morning, Epstein picked me up at my hotel in his Mini Cooper and drove me to NovoBiotic Pharmaceuticals, in Cambridge. He and Lewis founded the company in 2003, after their success with the washer. By the time the two émigrés became entrepreneurs, Lewis had moved from Tufts to Northeastern, where he established the Antimicrobial Discovery Center. Epstein, meanwhile, tinkered with the technology. The washer was productive but in-



*“It started out as my itemized deductions, but it’s turned into a novel.”*

efficient. Among other things, its interior was enormous relative to microbial life, making it hard to sort out colonies growing inside. “Imagine looking for a coffee cup inside a skyscraper,” he told me.

With the help of his father-in-law, who works at Argonne National Laboratory, Epstein designed an upgrade: a plastic chip with three hundred and eighty-four holes in it, each hole a tiny isolation chamber for one bacterium. He called it the iChip. The design was far more sophisticated, the production far more expensive, yet the results were mixed. The iChip made it possible to grow colonies in the soil from only a single cell. But, after a few uses, scratches compromised the integrity of the chambers, so Epstein built a more primitive version, using the perforated base of a pipette stand, which was cheap enough to throw away when it became worn.

In the Mini Cooper, we headed down a leafy suburban road, to an office park. NovoBiotic is housed in a building about as distinctive as a cardboard box. Fifteen people work there. Although it is a for-profit enterprise, most of its budget comes from the National Institutes of Health. Rules at Northeastern prevent Epstein and Lewis from spending more than a day a week at the company, and the office they share there looks it. We made camp between two desks supporting a mess of journals, until Amy Spoering, the director of biological research, arrived to show

me around. Spoering—quick to smile and precise in manner—had been a grad student in Lewis’s lab but abandoned her postdoc to join NovoBiotic. “I just knew I needed to do this,” she told me. “It’s like the Wild West of microbiology.”

To avoid the legal complications of sampling from public lands, NovoBiotic uses social media to solicit friends, and friends of friends, to send in dirt from their yards. (Because a gram of soil can contain fifty thousand species of bacteria, this methodological informality is not especially limiting.) Researchers isolate bacteria from the dirt, place them in growth media, and incubate them in bins filled with their native soil. Originally, they focussed on uncultured species of actinobacteria, which had been a plentiful source of antibiotics. But, even as they discovered new life, they kept running into the old arsenal.

Now the company focusses on the strange stuff. Spoering showed me notes she had made in 2011, on soil that had been dug up in rural Maine. The dirt contained conventional-looking colonies: “yellowish, centered, ruffled on surface with a light dusting of spores.” But there were also exotic life forms; one colony grew in bulbous structures that, over time, became concave. “The bulbousness was definitely something that piqued my curiosity, and also the way that it was sticky,” she said. “This is going to sound crazy, but, if you’ve touched ten thousand isolates with a

toothpick, at some point you get a sense of how sticky things can be. This one looked like it should have broken apart really easily. When you touched it, it actually stuck to itself and held together.”

A DNA analysis confirmed the organism’s novelty: the genetic difference between the bacterium and its closest known relative was three per cent—comparable to the variation between humans and mice. The microbes, it turned out, were a species of proteobacteria, named for Proteus, the shape-shifting Greek god. Even though there are more species of proteobacteria than of any other form of bacteria, very few antibiotic drugs had been derived from them. But the sample from Maine was secreting a deadly compound. When researchers placed the microbes on plastic coated with staphylococcus, clear circles formed around them: a zone in which no staph could survive.

Subsequent experiments revealed that the secretion was lethal to many pathogens—including strep pneumonia, anthrax, and tuberculosis. But excitement at NovoBiotic did not grow until it was clear that the active compound had a unique mass, suggesting that it was an antibiotic no one had discovered before. While chemists rushed to figure out what the molecule

was, Spoering and her colleagues tried to figure out how it killed. The standard test is a kind of microbial murder mystery: an antibiotic is used again and again, until bacteria in the victim colonies mutate, developing resistance. The mutant DNA is then studied, and the changes that allow survival reveal how the victims were slaughtered.

As the researchers began the test, they faced an unexpected problem: they could not breed mutants. All they could find beneath the microscope was the debris of bacteria that came into contact with the mysterious chemical and exploded. Nothing survived. Had the compound been acting like detergent—indiscriminately killing living tissue—this might have explained the microscopic carnage, but in tests with mammalian cells it was nontoxic. The chemical targeted only microbial life. “It was actually very vexing,” Spoering told me. “We knew we had something odd.” As the team ruled out possible explanations, frustration gave way to the elated suspicion that the improbable was true: the drug they had discovered was resistant to resistance itself. “At that point, I realized what we had in our hands,” Lewis said. He directed his university lab to start working on the new microbe, which he named

*Eleftheria terrae*, combining the Greek word for freedom with the Latin for earth.

BY EXPLORING JUST a fraction of the microbial dark matter, a small team had discovered a potentially revolutionary drug—quickly accomplishing what large pharmaceutical companies had been unable to do for years. After the compound’s structure was identified, it was given a code, Novo-25, and later a name, teixobactin. NovoBiotic brought in other laboratories, which helped work out how the compound kills: it interferes with lipids that sustain the cell wall of certain bacteria. In tests with animals, the drug demonstrated efficacy, but NovoBiotic was unable to secure grants to develop it into a marketable drug. Although pharmaceutical companies typically guard their early research, the scientists at NovoBiotic decided to announce their progress with a paper in *Nature*, hoping to generate interest and investment. “We would never have published if we had been able to get funding to move forward,” Spoering told me.

In *Nature*, the research was presented under a triumphant headline: “A New Antibiotic Kills Pathogens Without Detectable Resistance.” The discovery and the iChip technology were heralded, but there was also skepticism about the implication that microbes could never adapt to the new drug. Some unconvinced scientists sent the company detailed ideas on how to cultivate mutants. (They were all tried, and they failed, Spoering told me.) Others initiated tests of their own. But Lewis told me that he remains confident that no one is going to produce a strain of tuberculosis, or a similar pathogen, that is resistant to teixobactin. “The fact that the producing bacteria are proteobacteria is key,” he said. *Eleftheria terrae* has a tough, second outer membrane, protecting itself from the compound it produces. “That’s its own mechanism of resistance, and the target organisms—staph, enterococcus, TB—don’t have it.” It would be unrealistic, he argued, to expect the targeted bacteria to develop such a profound adaptation by natural selection, or by borrowing the DNA for such a defense from other microbes. “You can



“You know, if we didn’t walk this way we might get close enough to eat someone.”

borrow one or two proteins, but to borrow an entire membrane genetically? The equivalent would be if you or I developed wings.”

Gerry Wright, an antibiotics researcher at McMaster University, told me that the history of microbial evolution demanded humility. Perhaps, he speculated, pathogens will evolve to secrete enzymes that degrade teixobactin before it even reaches them. “I have no knowledge of how difficult it would be, but evolution is impossible to beat,” he said. And yet he did not want to undervalue the discovery. In his view, whether teixobactin works forever—or even at all—is almost irrelevant: “As long as that discovery is not just an incredible stroke of luck, then we can spend the next several years as a community trying to find new compounds, and who knows what we will find.”

On the day that I visited NovoBiotic, Spoering was focussing on another candidate drug: Novo-28, drawn from soil from Nevada. Under a microscope, she showed me its unusual morphology—like raindrops frozen on a pane of glass. “Isn’t it beautiful?” she said. “If you let it grow for another week, it will have a hint of pink color. If you let it sit on a plate for a month, it will go mauve.” In the fermentation room, machines swirling racks of beakers in steady gyrations had just made forty litres of Novo-28, for experiments. Near a life-size cutout of David Hasselhoff on a surfboard, a technician was using a glass still to separate Novo-28 from fermented bacterial broth. The chemical appeared to focus, laser-like, on multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis, while leaving beneficial bacteria in the human body unscathed. Because of TB’s extreme resistance, patients must now take a cocktail of harsh, broad-spectrum drugs for months. Novo-28 promised a quicker, less taxing cure.

“We are still very early on,” Spoering cautioned. Even teixobactin will need years of additional investment and testing—the same steep climb as for any new drug. “I am clearly a crazy optimist—working here at all,” Spoering said. “Huge pharmaceutical companies have gotten out of this business. They’re not stupid. It is really hard—not only to find new compounds but then getting them to clinical trials. Then you have to recruit patients with antibiotic-resistant

infections who are not too sick from something else, so you can prove the compound works. But it’s not even that you have to prove it works—you have to prove it works better than everything else on the market. Then, once you get to market—people are used to paying not very much for antibiotics. Pharmaceutical companies say, ‘Why would we spend all this money to develop something that can cure somebody in ten days, when we can spend this money for a disease or condition where people have to take a drug for the rest of their lives?’ But the reason I am here is that the science is incredible—the promise is amazing.”

We found Epstein back in his office, hunched at his laptop—a scraped-up MacBook that he calls Roo, after the tiny kangaroo in “Winnie-the-Pooh.” Like Spoering, he was preoccupied by the forbidding costs of drug development, and by the limits of a tiny company like NovoBiotic. As an example, he mentioned pathogens like *E. coli*, which also have second membranes, making them impervious to teixobactin. Such microbes are among the most resistant, and the deadliest. To find new antibiotics for them, he said, NovoBiotic’s annual research budget would have to increase from three million dollars to thirty million: “Otherwise, the odds are not there.”

Still, Epstein did not share the apocalyptic sense about antibiotic resistance. “I’m sure we will find a way to deal with the problem,” he told me. This wasn’t just his native optimism, he said: “Optimism implies belief in a happy outcome. I do not *believe*—I know it’s possible.” Other researchers had already begun discovering new compounds with the iChip idea, among them academics from Ningbo University, near Shanghai. “The provincial government is investing tens of millions of dollars in biotechnology,” Epstein told me. “They are building an institute at the university—fifty, sixty million dollars. Grants are available for asking.”

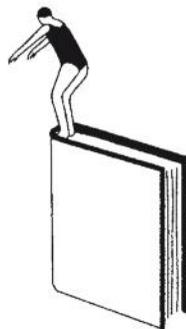
Epstein will begin collaborating closely with the Ningbo team later this year. Certainly, joining with the Chinese, masters of scaling up, is a way to expand. Whether he will stay focussed is another

matter. Amid the maelstrom of invitations, inquiries, and grant proposals, he was still wrestling with a theory to explain the Great Plate Count Anomaly. He had trips lined up—Washington, New York, Moscow, Argentina (where he planned to forgo sleep, so he could tango four hours a day). A multinational corporation was seeking his input on skin care. And he had even returned his attention to space.

That last one he explained over lunch at a Japanese restaurant. Epstein does not eat in the middle of the day (a habit borrowed from the Yanomami), but out of decorum he ordered sashimi as he spoke of the possibility of life on other planets. Microbes could well be as prevalent across the cosmos as

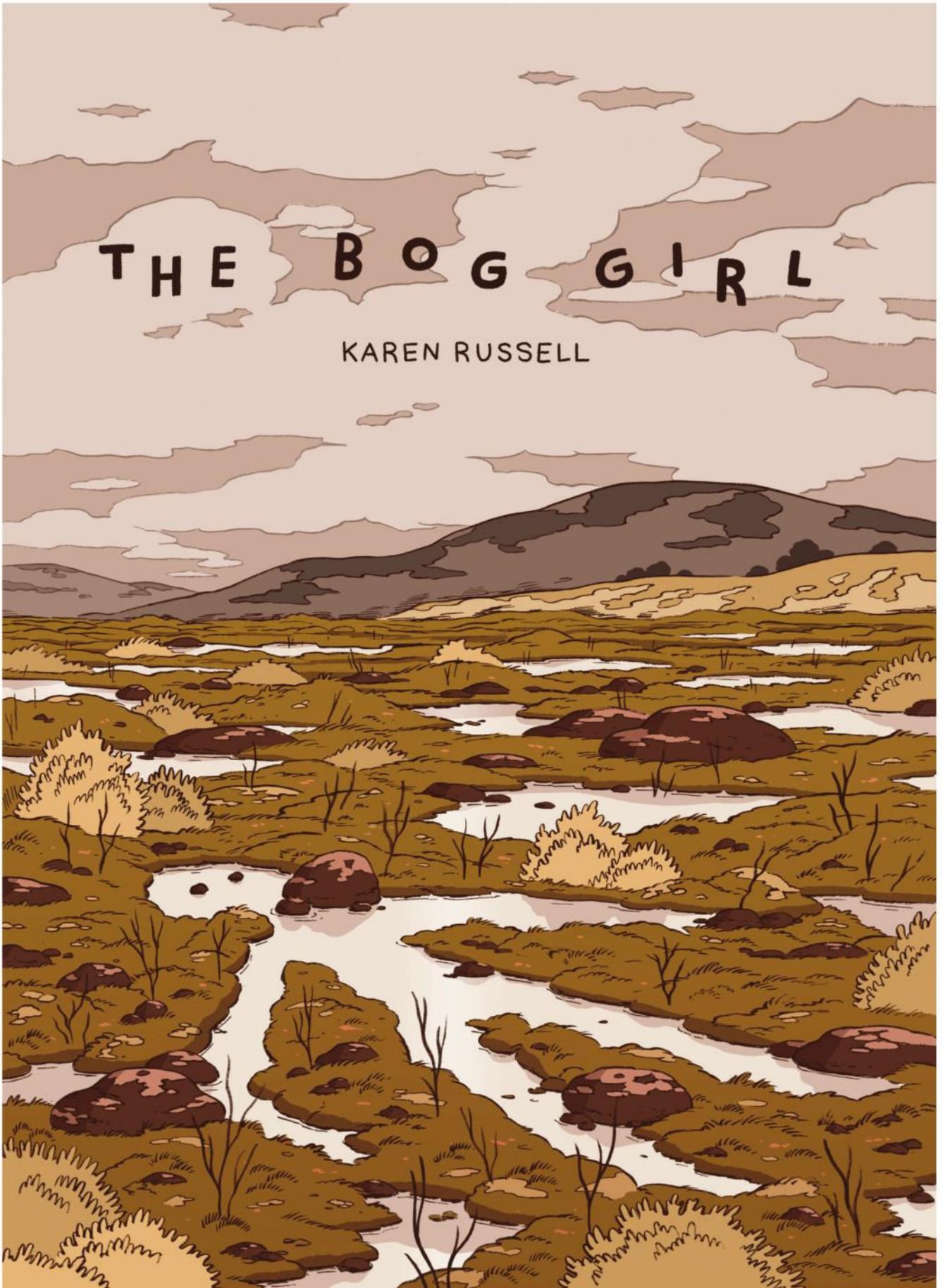
they are here—a universal biological constant—and it upset him that the astrobiological search for them was not more sophisticated. “The way we’ve looked for life in these places, or are planning to look, is pathetic,” he said. “We’re looking for chemical signatures”—organic molecules that living matter on Earth tends to produce. “So we are going to look for those on Mars? Come on! Who tells you that organisms have to have that? Is that the best we can do?” He lowered his voice. “Well, maybe, if we can’t send a microbiologist there. So I was thinking: Is it possible to cultivate organisms without a microbiologist?” Then he nudged some papers beside my plate. “That is Gulliver,” he said, proudly.

They were diagrams for his latest invention, an iChip upgrade, with as many as a hundred thousand chambers, that could trap microbes and analyze them. “You put nano-sensors inside, and they gather information. Do they respire? Do they ferment? Do they communicate? All of that is transmitted to your iPhone. You are just on a yacht in Hawaii.” As he rattled off details, he brightened, until he ended where he’d started, as if concluding a proof. “Now, tell me—at which point is a microbiologist needed?” he exclaimed. Already, gazing through his telescope at night, he envisions the device exploring the solar system. He was leaning in and grinning. “Can you do it on Mars? How do you like it?” ♦



# THE BOG GIRL

KAREN RUSSELL



**T**HE YOUNG TURF-CUTTER fell hard for his first girlfriend while operating heavy machinery in the peatlands. His name was Cillian Eddowis, he was fifteen years old, and he was illegally employed by Bos Ardee. He had celery-green eyes and a stutter that had been corrected at the state's expense; it resurfaced whenever he got nervous. "Th-th-th," he'd said, accepting the job. How did Cillian persuade Bos Ardee to hire him? The boy had lyingly laid claim to many qualities: strength, maturity, experience. When that didn't work, he pointed to his bedroom window, a quarter mile away, on the misty periphery of the cutaway bog, where the undrained water still sparkled between the larch trees. The intimation was clear: what the thin, strange boy lacked in muscle power he made up for in proximity to the work site.

Peat is harvested from bogs, watery mires where the earth yawns open. The bottom is a breathless place—cold, acidic, anaerobic—with no oxygen to decompose the willow branches or the small, still faces of the foxes interred there. Sphagnum mosses wrap around fur, wood, skin, casting their spell of chemical protection, preserving them whole. Growth is impossible, and Death cannot complete her lean work. Once cut, the peat becomes turf, and many locals on this green island off the coast of northern Europe still heat their homes with this peculiar energy source. Nobody gives much thought to the fuel's mortuary origins. Cillian, his mother, and several thousand others lived on the island, part of the archipelago known to older generations as the Four Horsemen. It's unlikely that you've ever visited. It's not really on the circuit.

Neolithic farmers were the first to clear the island's woods. Two thousand years later, peat had swallowed the remains of their pastures. Bogs blanketed the hills. In the Iron Age, these bogs were portals to distant worlds, wilder realms. Gods travelled the bogs. Gods wore crowns of starry asphodels, floating above the purple heather.

Now industrial harvesters rode over the drained bogs, combing the earth into even geometries. On the summer morning that Cillian found the Bog Girl, he was driving the Peatmax to-

ward a copse of trees at the bog's western edge, pushing the dried peat into black ridges. True, it looked as if he was pleating shit, but Cill had a higher purpose. He was saving to buy his neighbor Pogo's white hatchback. Once he had a car, it would be no great challenge to sleep with a girl or a woman. Cillian was open to either experience. Or both. But he was far too shy to have an eye-level crush on anyone in his grade. Not Deedee, not Stacia, not Vicki, not Yvonne. He had a crush, taboo and distressing, on his Aunt Cathy's ankles in socks. He had a crush on the anonymous shoulders of a shampoo model.

He had just driven into the western cutaway bog when he looked over the side of the Peatmax and screamed. A hand was sticking out of the mud. Cillian's first word to the Bog Girl required all the air in his lungs: "Ahhhhhhfuuuuuck!"

Here was a secret, flagging him down. A secret the world had kept for two thousand years and been unable to keep for two seconds longer. The bog had confessed her.

When the other men arrived, Cillian was on his knees, scratching up peat like a dog. Already he had dug out her head. She was whole and intact, cocooned in peat, curled like a sleeping child, with her head turned west of her pelvis. Thick, lustrous hair fanned over the tarp, the wild red-orange of an orangutan's fur, dyed by the bog acids. Moving clouds caused her colors to change continuously: now they were a tawny bronze, now a mineral blue. It was a very young face.

Cradling her head, Cillian lost all feeling in his legs. A light rain began to fall, but he would not relinquish his position. Every man gathered was staring at them. Ordinarily, their pronged attention encircled him like a crown of thorns, making him self-conscious, causing red fear to leak into his inner vision. Today, he didn't give a damn about the judgments of the mouth-breathers above him. Who had ever seen a face so beautiful, so perfectly serene?

"Mother of God!" one of the men screamed. He pointed to the noose. A rope, nearly black with peat, ran down the length of her back.

Murder. That was the men's consensus. Bos Ardee called the police.

But Cillian barely heard the talk above him. If you saw the Bog Girl from one angle only, you would assume that she was a cherished daughter, laid to rest by hands that loved her. But she had been killed, and now her smile seemed even more impressive to him, and he wanted only to protect her from future harm. The men kept calling her "the body," which baffled Cillian—the word seemed to blind them to the deep and flowing dream-life behind her smile. "There is so much more to you than what they see," he reassured her in a whisper. "I am so sorry about what happened to you. I am going to keep you safe now."

After this secret conversation, Cill fell rapidly in love.

Cillian was lucky that he met his girlfriend on such a remote island. When these bodies are discovered in Ireland, for example, or in the humid Florida bogs sprinkled between Disney World and Cape Canaveral, things proceed differently. The area is cordoned off. Teams of experts arrive to excavate the site. Then the bog people are carefully removed to laboratories, museums, where gloveless hands never touch them.

Cillian touched her hair, touched the rope. He was holding the reins of her life. Three policemen had arrived, and they conferred above Cillian, their black boots squeezing mud around the bog cotton. Once it had been determined that the girl was not a recent murder victim, the policemen relaxed. The chief asked Cillian a single question: "You're going to keep her, then?"

**G**ILLIAN EDDOWIS WAS on a party line with her three sisters. She tucked the phone under her chin and took the ruby kettle off the range, opening a window to shoo the blue steam free. In the living room, roars of studio laughter erupted from the television; Cillian and the Bog Girl were watching a sitcom about a Canadian trailer park. Their long silences unnerved her; surely they weren't getting into trouble, ten feet away from her? She had never had cause to discipline her son. She wouldn't know where to begin. He was so kind,



*“Be a darling and bring the seltzer when you come.”*

so intelligent, so unusual, so sensitive—such an outlier in the Eddowis family that his aunts had paid him the modern compliment of assuming that he was gay.

Voices sieved into Gillian’s left ear: “You want to warn them,” Sister Abby said.

“But, Virgin Mother, there is no way to warn them!” Sister Patty finished.

“We were all sixteen once,” Cathy growled. “We all survived it.”

“Cillian is *fifteen*,” Gillian corrected. “And the girlfriend is two thousand.”

Abby, who had seen a picture of the Bog Girl in the local newspaper, suggested that *somebody* was rounding down.

A university man had also read the story of the Bog Girl’s discovery. He’d taken a train and a ferry to find them. “I’ve come to make an Urgent Solicitation on Behalf of History,” he said. He wanted to acquire the Bog Girl for the national museum. The sum he offered them was half of Gillian’s salary at the post office.

In the end, what had happened? Christian feeling had muzzled her. How could she sell a girl to a stranger? Or pretend that she had any claim to her,

this orphan from the Iron Age? Gillian told the university man that the Bog Girl was their house guest, and would be living with them until Social Services could locate her next of kin. At this, all the purple veins in the man’s neck stood out. His tone sank into petulant defeat. “Mark my words, you people do not have the knowledge to properly care for her,” he said. “She’ll fall apart on you.” The Bog Girl, propped up next to the ironing board, watched them argue with an implacable smile. The university man left empty-handed, and for a night and a day Gillian was a hero to her son.

“So she’s just freeloading, then? Living off your dime?” Cathy asked.

“Oh, yes. She’s quite shameless about it.”

How could she explain to her sisters what she could barely admit to herself? The boy was in love. It was a monstrous, misdirected love; nevertheless, it commanded her respect.

“The Bog Girl is a bad influence on him,” she told her sisters. “She doesn’t work, she doesn’t help. All day she lazes about the house.”

Patty coughed and said, “If you feel that way, then why—”

Cathy screamed, “Gillian! She cannot *stay* with you!”

It was gentle Abby who formulated the solution: “Put her back in the bog.”

“Gillian. *Do it tonight.*”

“Who’s going to miss her?”

“I can’t put her back in the bog. It would be . . .”

Silence drilled into her ears. Her family had a talent for emitting judgment without articulating words. When she was Cillian’s age and five months pregnant with him, everyone had quietly made clear that she was sacrificing her future. She’d run away to be with Cillian’s father, then returned to the boglands alone with a bug-eyed toddler.

“I’m afraid,” she confessed to her sisters. “If I put her out of the house, he’ll leave with her.”

“Oh!” they cried in unison. As if a needle had infected them all with her fear.

“Do something crazy, stupid . . .”

Silently adding, *Like we did.*

“**N**OW, BE HONEST, you little rat turd. You know *nothing* about her.” His uncle put a finger into his peach iced tea, stirred. They were seated on a swing in the darkest part of Cillian’s porch. Uncle Sean was as blandly ugly as a big toenail. Egg-bald and cheerfully unemployed, a third-helpings kind of guy. Once, Cillian had watched him eat the sticker on a green apple rather than peel it off. Sean was always over at the cottage, using Gillian’s computer to play Poker 3000. He smeared himself throughout their house, his beer rings ghosting over surfaces like fat thumbs on a photograph. His words hung around, too, leaving their brain stain on the air. Uncle Sean took a proprietary interest in anything loved by Cillian. It was no surprise, then, that he was infatuated with the Bog Girl.

“I know that I love her,” Cill said warily. He hated to be baited.

Uncle Sean was packing his brown, shakey weed into the rosy crotch of a glass mermaid. He passed his nephew the pipe. “Already, eh? You love her and you don’t know the first thing about her?”

What did he know about her?

What did he love about her?

Cillian shrugged, his body crowding with feelings. "And I know that she loves me," he added, somewhat hastily.

Uncle Sean's pink smirk seemed to paste him to the back of the wicker seat. "Oh?" His grin widened. "And how old is she?"

"Two thousand. But she was my age when they put her in the bog."

"Most women I know lie freely about their age," Uncle Sean warned. "She may well be eleven. Then again, she could be *three* thousand."

Gillian, plump and starlit, appeared on the porch. A pleasant oniony smell followed her, mixing with the damp odor of Sean's pot.

"Are you smoking?"

"No," they lied in unison.

"Tell your . . . your *friend* that she is welcome to eat with us." With a martyred air, Gillian lifted her kitten-print pot holders to the heavens. Cill smiled; the pot holders made it look as if she approved of the situation—two big thumbs-up! His poor mom. She was so nervous around new people, and the Bog Girl's silence only intimidated her further. She was insecure about her cooking, and he knew she was going to take it very personally when the Bog Girl did not touch it.

Dinner was meat loaf with onions and, for Sean, a thousand beers. It was not a comfortable meal.

Gillian, stirring butter into the lima beans, beamed threats at her son's new girlfriend: You little bitch. Crawl back into your hole. Stay away from my son.

"Biscuit?" Gillian asked. "Does she like biscuits, Cill?"

The Bog Girl smiled her gentle smile at the wall, her face reflected in the oval door of the washer-dryer. Against that sudsy turbulence, she looked especially still.

Three drinks in, Uncle Sean slung an arm around the Bog Girl's thin blue shoulder, welcoming her into the family. "I'm proud of my nephew for going after an older woman, a *mature* woman . . . a cougar!"

Cillian fixed his uncle with a homicidal stare. Under the table, he touched his girlfriend's foot with his foot; his eyebrows lifted in apology.

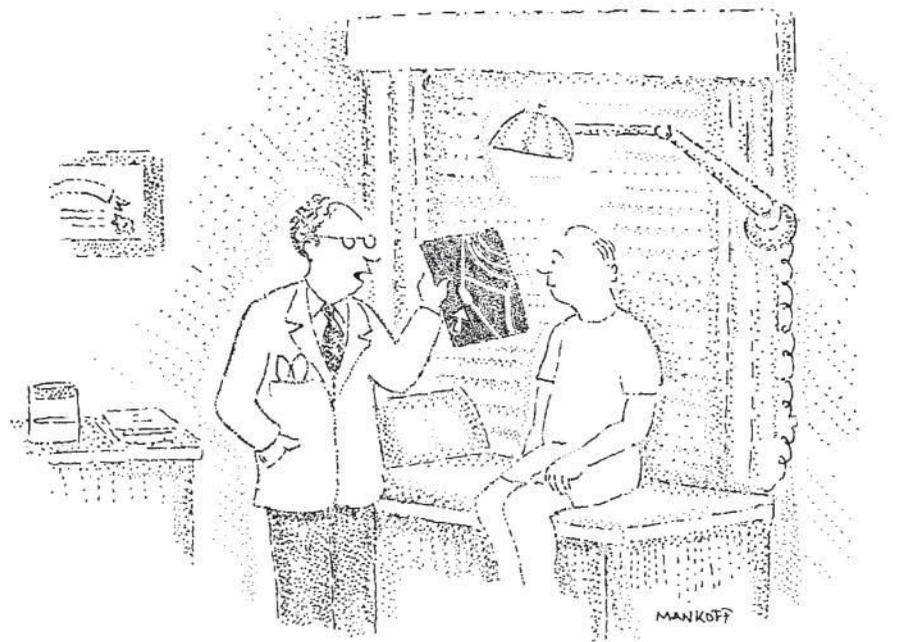
His mother shot up with her steaming cauldron of beans, giving everyone another punitive lima ladle and removing the beer from the table. Their dog, returning from her dusk mouse hunt, came berserking into the kitchen, barking at a deranged pitch. She wanted to play tug-of-war with the Bog Girl's noose. "Puddles—*no!*" Cillian's vision was swimming, his whole body overheating with shame. He relaxed when he stared into the Bog Girl's face, which was void of all judgment, smiling at him with its mysterious kindness. Once again, his embarrassment was soothed by her infinite calm. His eyes lowered from her smile to the noose. *Of course, she's seen far worse than us*, he thought. Outside the window, insects millioned around the porch light. The bog crickets were doing a raspy ventriloquy of the stars; perhaps she recognized their tiny voices. Soon Uncle Sean was snoring lightly beside the pooling gravy, face down in his big arms. Cill sat slablike in the moonlight. The Bog Girl smiled blindly on.

FOR THE FIRST two weeks, the Bog Girl slept on the sofa, the television light flickering gently over her. That was fine by Gillian. She wasn't about to turn an orphan from the Iron Age out on the street.

Then, on a rainy Monday night, without warning or apology, Cillian picked up the Bog Girl. He cradled her like a child, her frondy feet dangling in the air. Gillian, doing a jigsaw puzzle of a horse and colt in the kitchen, looked up in time to see them disappearing. She felt a purple welt rising in her mind, the revelatory pain called wonder. Underneath the shock, other feelings began to flow, among them a disturbed pride. Because hadn't he looked *exactly* like his father? Confident, possessed. He didn't ask for her permission. He did not lie to her about what he was doing, or hide it, or explain it. He simply rose with the Bog Girl in his arms, nuzzling her blue neck. The door shut, and he was gone from sight. Another milestone: she heard the click of the lock.

"Good night, son!" she cried after them, panicked.

She could not reconcile her knowledge of her sweet, awkward boy with this wayward, confident person. Was she supposed to go up there now? Pound on the door? Oh, who could she call? Nobody, not even her sisters, would take a call about *this* problem, she felt quite certain. Abby's son, Kevin, met his girlfriend in church. Cathy's son, Patrick, has a lovely fiancée who teaches kindergarten. Murry's girlfriend is in



"That's the racist bone in your body you claimed you didn't have."

jail for vehicular manslaughter—but at least she’s alive!

In the morning, she watched the mute, hitching muscles of his back as he fumbled with the coffeepot. So he was a coffee drinker now. More news. He kissed his mother’s forehead as he left for work, but he was whistling to himself, oblivious of her sadness, her fear, completely self-enclosed in his new happiness. It’s too soon for this, she thought. And: Not you, too. *Please, please, please*, she prayed, the incomplete prayer of mothers who cannot conceive of a solution.

That evening, she announced a new rule: “Everyone has to wear clothes. And no more locked doors.”

**T**HAT SATURDAY, CILLIAN took the ferry three hours to a mainland museum. Twelve bog bodies were on display, part of a travelling exhibition called “Kings of the Iron Age.” The Bog Girl had met his family—the least he could do was return the favor. Cill sneaked into a tour in progress, following a docent from sepulchre to sepulchre. Under the glass, the Kings of the Iron Age lay like chewed taffy. One man was naked except for a fox-fur armband. Another was a giant. Another had two sets of thumbs.

Cillian learned that the bogs of the islands in the cold Atlantic were particularly acidic. Pickled bodies from the Iron Age had emerged from these deep vats. Their fetally scrolled bodies often doubled as the crumpled maps of murders. They might have been human sacrifices, the docent said. Left in the bog water for the harvest god. Kings, queens, scapegoats, victims—they might have been any of these things.

“From the contents of his stomach, we can surmise that he last dined on oat gruel. . . .”

“From the forensic analyses, we can surmise that she was killed by an arrow. . . .”

“From the ornaments on this belt buckle, we can surmise that these were a wealthy people. . . .”

*What?* No more than this could be surmised?

The docent pointed out the dots and stripes on the potsherds. Charcoal smudges that might be stars or ani-

## STEER YOUR WAY

Steer your way through the ruins of the Altar and the Mall  
Steer your way through the fables of Creation and the Fall  
Steer your way past the Palaces that rise above the rot  
Year by year  
Month by month  
Day by day  
Thought by thought

Steer your heart past the Truth you believed in yesterday  
Such as Fundamental Goodness and the Wisdom of the Way  
Steer your heart, precious heart, past the women whom you bought  
Year by year  
Month by month  
Day by day  
Thought by thought

Steer your path through the pain that is far more real than you  
That has smashed the Cosmic Model, that has blinded every View  
And please don’t make me go there, though there be a God or not  
Year by year

mals. Evidence, she said, of “a robust culture.” Cillian took notes:

“THEY HAD TIME TO KILL. THEY LIKED ART, TOO.”

Back on the ferry, he could admit to his relief: none of the other bog bodies stirred any feeling in him. He loved one specific person. He could see things about the Bog Girl to which this batty docent would be totally blind—for example, the secret depths her smile concealed. How badly misunderstood she had been by her own people. She was an alien from a planet that nobody alive could visit—the planet Earth, in the first century A.D. She felt soft in his arms, bonelessly soft, but she also seemed indestructible. According to the experts, a bog body should begin to decompose rapidly when exposed to air. Curiously enough, this Bog Girl had not. He told no one his theory but polished it inside his mind like an amulet: it was his love that was protecting her.

**B**Y AUGUST, THEIR rapport had deepened immeasurably. They didn’t need to say a word, Cill was discovering, to perfectly understand each other. Falling in love with the Bog Girl was a wonderful thing—it was permission to ignore everyone else.

When school started, in September, he made a bespoke sling and brought her with him. His girlfriend, propped like a broomstick against the rows of lockers, waited for him during Biology and Music II, as cool and impassive as the most popular girl the world has ever known.

Nobody in the school administration objected to the presence of the Bog Girl. Ancestral superstitions still hovered over the islanders’ minds, exerting their quiet influence, and nobody wanted to be the person responsible for angering a visitor from the past. Soon she was permitted to audit all of Cillian’s classes, smiling dreamlessly at the flustered, frightened teachers.

One afternoon, the vice-principal called her into his office and presented her with a red-and-gold badge to wear in the halls: “VISITING STUDENT.”

“I don’t think that’s really accurate, sir,” Cillian said.

“Oh, no?”

“She’s not a visitor. She was born here.” In fact, the Bog Girl was the island’s oldest resident, by at least nineteen hundred years. Cillian paused. “Also, her eyes are shut, you see. So I don’t think she can really, ah, study. . . .”

“Well!” The vice-principal clapped his hands. He had a day to live, quotas

Month by month  
Day by day  
Thought by thought

They whisper still, the injured stones, the blunted mountains weep  
As he died to make men holy, let us die to make things cheap  
And say the Mea Culpa, which you've gradually forgot  
Year by year  
Month by month  
Day by day  
Thought by thought

Steer your way, O my heart, though I have no right to ask  
To the one who was never never equal to the task  
Who knows he's been convicted, who knows he will be shot  
Year by year  
Month by month  
Day by day  
Thought by thought

—Leonard Cohen

to fulfill. "We will be studying *her*, then. She will give us all an exciting new perspective on our modern life and times— Oh my! Oh dear." The Bog Girl had slumped into his aloe planter.

Cillian put the badge on her polyester blouse, a loaner from his mother that was vintage cool. Cillian—who never gave a thought to his own clothing—enjoyed dressing the Bog Girl for school in the morning. He raided his mother's closet, resurrecting her baby-doll dresses. The eleventh-grade girls organized a clothing drive for the Bog Girl, collecting many shop-lifted donations of fall tunics and on-trend boots.

Rumorsprawl. Word got around that the Bog Girl was actually a princess. A princess, or possibly a witch. Within a week, she was eating at the popular girls' table. They'd kidnapped her from where Cillian had positioned her on a bench, propped between two book bags, and taken her to lunch. Already they had restyled her hair with rhinestone barrettes.

"You stole my girlfriend," Cillian said.

"Something *awful* happened to her," Vicki said reverently.

"So bad," Georgette echoed.

"She doesn't like to talk about it,"

Priscilla said, looping a protective arm around the Bog Girl. The girls had matching lunches: lettuce salads, diet candy bars, diet shakes. They were all jealous of how little she ate.

How had Cill not foreseen this turn of events? The Bog Girl was diminutive, wounded, mysterious, a redhead. Best of all, she could never contradict any rumor the living girls distributed about her.

"She was too beautiful to live!" Priscilla gasped. "They killed her for her beauty."

"I don't th-th-think," Cill said, "that it happened quite like that."

The popular girls adjusted their leggings, annoyed. "No?"

Cillian was dimly aware that other tables were listening in, but the density of the attention in no way affected him. "I am hers, and she is mine," he announced. "I have dedicated myself to learning everything about her."

A sighing spasm of envy moved down the popular girls' table—what boy alive would say this about them? A miracle: nobody mocked Cillian Eddowis. They were all starving to be loved like this. The popular girls watched him avidly as he ate a grilled cheese and waffle fries, his green irises burning. Between bites, his left

hand rose to touch the Bog Girl's red braid, tousling it like the pull-chain of a lamp.

GILLIAN COULDN'T HELP it: she was heartbroken. The past that was most precious to her had filtered right through her son. The songs she'd sung to him when he was nursing? The care with which she'd cut the tiny moons of his fingernails? Their 4 A.M. feedings? Erased! Her son had matured into amnesia about his earliest years. Now her body was the only place where the memories were preserved. Cillian, like all sons, was blithe about this betrayal.

"There is so much about yourself that you do not recall," Gillian accused him after dinner one night. Cillian, writing a paper about igneous rocks at the kitchen table, did not look up.

"When you were my boy, just a wee boy," Gillian said in a voice of true agony, "you used to be terrified of the vacuum cleaner. You loved your froggy pajamas. You used so much glue on your art projects that your teachers—"

"Quit it with these dumb stories, Ma!"

"Oh, you find them dumb, do you? The stories about how I had to raise you alone, without a penny from your father—"

"You're just trying to *embarrass* me in front of her!"

The Bog Girl smiled at them from the amber armchair. Her leather skirt was outrageously short, a donation from tall Bianca. Decorously, Cillian had draped the cable guide over her lap. Bugs spun in her water glass; mosquitoes and dragonflies were always diving into the Bog Girl's food and drink, as if in strange solidarity with her.

Cillian drew himself up triumphantly, a foot taller than his mother. "You don't want me to grow up."

"What? Of course I do!"

But Cill was ready with his rebuttal: "You gave us rhyming names, Ma!"

This was true. Gillian and Cillian. She'd come up with that plan when she was a teen-ager herself, and pregnant with a nameless otter, some gyring little animal. A rhyming name had seemed just right then; she couldn't have said why, at seventeen. Had Cillian been a

girl, she would have named her Lillian. “You’re so young, you can’t know . . .”

But what did she want to tell him?

Her body seemed to cave in on itself then, becoming smaller and smaller, so that even Cillian, fortified behind the wall of his love, noticed and became alarmed. “Ma? What’s wrong?”

“It’s changing all the time,” she murmured ominously. “Just, please, wait, my love. Don’t . . . *settle*.” What a word! She pictured her son sinking up to his neck in the reddish bog water.

She was hiccupping now, unable to name her own feelings. Without thinking, she picked up the murky water glass, drank from it. “Your potential . . . all the teachers tell me you have great potential.”

*Just come out and say it.* “I don’t want you to throw your *life* away on some Bog Girl!”

“Oh, Ma.” Cill patted her back until the hiccups stopped. Her face looked crumpled and blue in the unlit room, hovering above the seated Bog Girl. For a second, they might have been sisters.

**T**HE BOG GIRL floated, thin as a dress, on the mattress. Barrettes, pink and purple, were scattered all over the pillow. She smiled at Cillian, or beyond him, with her desiccated calm. Downstairs, Gillian was making breakfast, the buttery smells threading through his nostrils like an ox ring, tugging him toward them. But when she called up for him he was barely in the room. He was digging and digging into the peat-moss bog again, smoothing her blue cheeks with both hands, spading down into the kingdom that she comes from.

“Cillian! The bus is coming!” It should have taken him twenty seconds to put on pants. What was he doing in there? Probably jacking off to a “meme,” whatever that was, or buying perfume for the Bog Girl on her credit cards.

“Coming, Ma!”

Cillian was always learning new things about his girlfriend. The longer he looked at her, the more he saw. Her face grew silty with personality. Although she was young when she disappeared into the bog, her face was plowed with tiny wrinklins. Some dream or mood had recurred frequently enough to hammer lines across her brow. Here were the ridges and the

gullies her mental weathers had worked into her skin.

Cill studied the inflorescences on her cheeks. Her brain is in there, the university man had said. Her brain is intact, preserved by the bog acids. Cillian spent hours doing this forensic palmistry, trying to read her mind.

“**W**ILL YOU HAVE a talk with him?” Gillian begged Sean. “Something is going really, really wrong with him!”

“First love, first love,” Sean murmured sadly, scratching his bubonic nose. “Who are we to intervene, eh? It will die of natural causes.”

“Natural causes!”

She was thinking that the poor girl had been garroted. Her bright-red hair racing the tail of the noose down her spine. You could not survive your death, could you? It survived with you.

**I**N MID-OCTOBER, A stretch limousine pulled up to the cottage to take Cillian and the Bog Girl to the annual school dance. A techno-reggae song called “Bump de Ass!” filled the back seat, where half a dozen teenagers sat in churchlike silence. The Bog Girl’s reticence was contagious. Ambulance lights sparkled through the tinted windows, causing everyone to jump, with one exception: Cillian Eddowis’s date, the glamorous foreigner, or native—nobody was sure how to regard her.

Since acquiring his far older girlfriend, Cill had begun speaking to his classmates in the voice of a bachelor who merely tolerates children. “Carla,” he said, clearing his throat. “Would you mind exhaling a little closer to the window? Your smoke is blowing on us.”

Two girls started debating whether or not a friend should lose her virginity in a BMW that evening. What was the interior of the car like? This was a very important question. The girl’s boyfriend was a twenty-six-year-old cocaine dealer. Prior to the Bog Girl’s arrival on the scene, everyone had found his age very impressive. The dealer boyfriend had been unable to accompany the girl to the school dance, so she had taken poor Eoin, her sophomore cousin, who looked near fatally compressed by his green cummerbund. The twenty-

six-year-old would be waiting for her in the BMW, post-festivities. Should she deflower him?

“Wait. Uh. I think he’s deflowering you, right? Or maybe you’re deflowering each other? Who’s got the flower?”

“Just do it, and then lie about it.” Carla shrugged. “That’s what I did.”

“My advice,” Cillian said, in the unfamiliar voice, “my advice is, wait. Wait until you find the person with whom you want to spend all your earthly time.” The Bog Girl leaned against his shoulder, aloof in her sparkly tiara. “Or until that person finds you. If that’s this guy, well, kudos. But, if not, wait. You will meet your soul mate. And you will want to give that person every molecule of your life.”

The attempted conversion of the high-school gymnasium into an Arabian-themed wonderland had not been a success. Cill and the Bog Girl stood under a palm tree that looked like an enormous toilet brush, made of cellophane and cardboard tubes. Three girls from the limo came up and asked to dance with Cillian, but he explained that his girlfriend hated to be left alone. All were sulkily respectful of her claim on him.

The after-party was held in an old car-parts warehouse on the west side of the island, where everything was shut or abandoned; the population of the island had been declining steadily for three decades. The music sounded like fists beating at the wall, and the floor was so sticky that Cillian had to lift and cradle the Bog Girl, looping her silver dress around one arm. Cillian had never attended an after-party before. Or a party, for that matter. He surveyed his former tormenters, the seniors, with their piggish faces and their plastic cups. Some were single, some had girlfriends, some were virgins, some were not, but not one of them, Cillian felt very certain, knew the first thing about love.

Eoin the sophomore came over, his date nowhere to be seen. He was breathless in the cummerbund, in visible danger of puking up Bacardi. He rolled a bloodshot eye in Cill’s direction, smiling wistfully.

“So,” he said, “I’m just wondering. Do you guys—”

Cillian preempted the question: “A gentleman never tells.”

It was a phrase he’d once read in a

men's magazine, while waiting to get a root canal. In fact, his mother needn't have lost so much sleep to this particular fear. At night, Cillian lay beside the Bog Girl, barely touching her. A steady, happy calm radiated from her, which filled him with a parallel euphoria.

Cillian carried the Bog Girl onto the dance floor, her braided noose flung over his shoulder. And even Eoin, minutes from unconsciousness, could hear exactly who the older boy believed himself to be in this story: Cillian the Rescuer.

"Oh, damn! Wise up! She'll make you wait forever, man!" The lonely laugh of Eoin died a terrible death, like a bird impaled on a spike.

AT 3 A.M., the lights were still on. Uh-oh, Cill thought. Mom got into the gin again.

Drinking made her silences bubble volubly. He almost got the hiccups himself, listening to her silences. Oh, God. There was so much pain inside her, so much she wanted to share with him. Cillian and the Bog Girl tried to tiptoe past her to the staircase, but she sprang up like a jack-in-the-box.

"Cillian?" She looked child-small in the dark. Her voice was tremulous and young, and her slurring reminded him of his own stutter, that undead vestige of his early years. His mother sounded like a sleepy girl, four or five years old. Her feet were bare, and she rose onto her stubby toes to grip his arm. "Where are you coming from?"

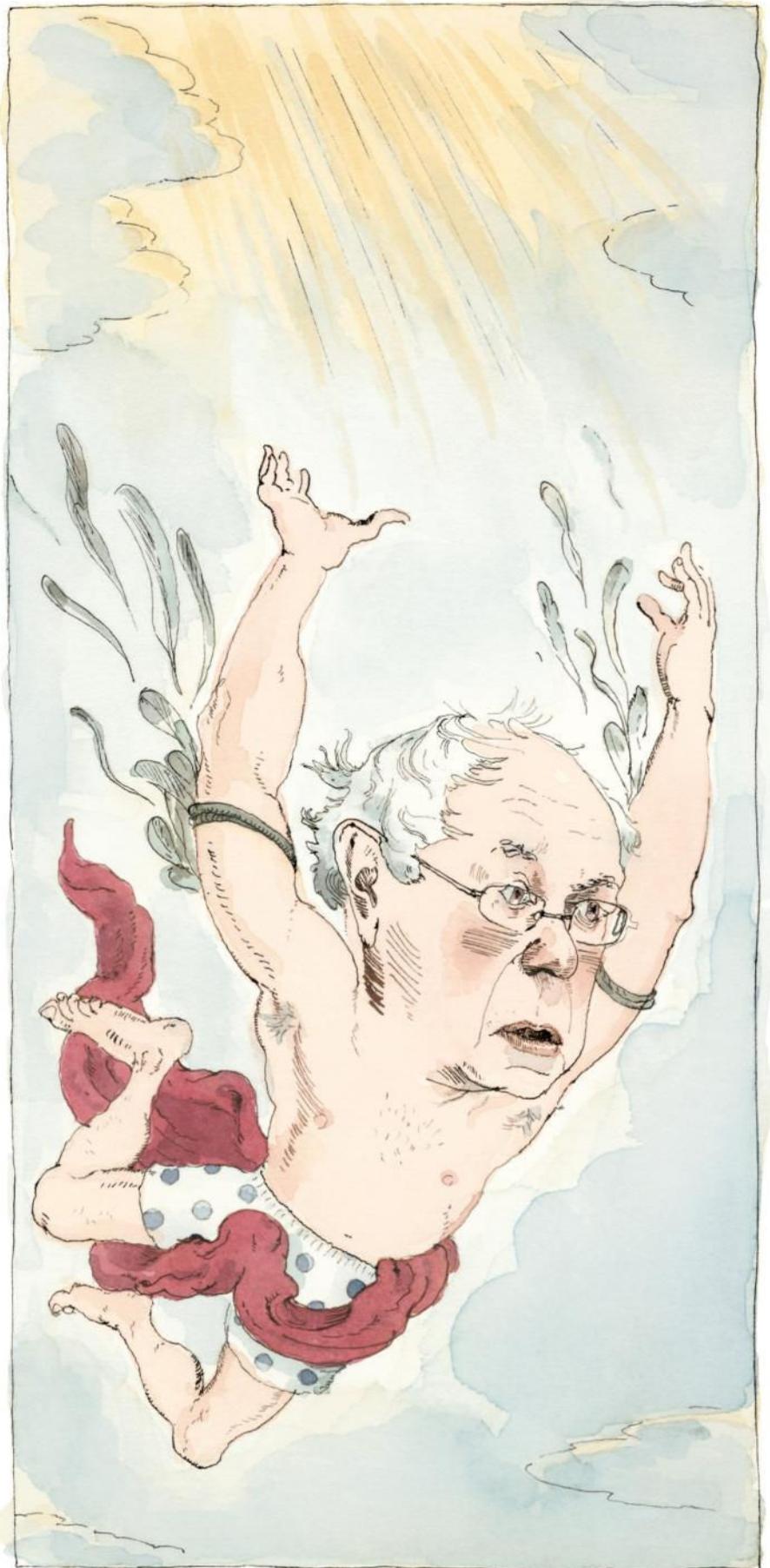
"Nowhere. The dance. It was fun."

"Where are you going?"

"Aw, Mom. Where do you th-th-think?"

"Good night!" she called after him desperately. "I hope you had a good time! You looked so handsome! So grown up!"

BY EARLY WINTER, the Bog Girl's stillness had begun to provoke a restlessness in Cillian, a squeezed and throbbing feeling. He was failing three subjects. His mother had threatened to send him to live with Aunt Cathy until he "straightened out." He didn't care. Waiting for the bus in the freezing rain, he no longer dreamed about owning a car. He knew what he would





*"I've become so good at dating—relationships that used to take months now last a matter of days."*

do with the summer money he'd earned from Bos Ardee: run away with her.

He'd flunk out of school and take the Bog Girl with him to the mainland. She'd be homesick at first, maybe, but they'd go on trips to urban parks. It was the burr of peace, the burr of happiness, goading him on to new movement. Oh, he was frightened, too.

In his fantasy life, Cillian drew the noose tighter and tighter. He imagined, with a strange joy, the narrow life they would lead. No children, no sex, no messy nights vomiting outside bars, no unintended pregnancies, no fights in the street, no betrayals, no surprises, no broken promises, no promises.

Was the Bog Girl a co-signer to this fantasy? Cillian had every reason to

believe so. When he described his plans to her, the smile never left her face. Was their love one-sided, as the concerned and unimaginative adults in his life kept insisting? No—but the proof of this surprised no one more terribly than Cillian.

One night in mid-December, lying in bed, he felt a cobwebby softness on his left cheek. It was her eyelashes, flicking over him. They glowed radish-red in the moonlight. Cillian swatted at his face, his own eyes never opening. Still sunk in his dreaming, he grunted and rolled over.

*Cillian.*

*Cillian.*

The Bog Girl sat up.

With fluttering effort, the muscles

of her blue jaw yawned. One eye opened. It studied itself in the dresser mirror for a long instant, then turned calmly back toward Cillian. Very slowly, her left arm unhinged itself and dropped to the plaid bedspread. The fingers curled around the blanket's edge, and drew it down. A blush of primal satisfaction colored the Bog Girl's cheeks as the fabric moved. She tugged more forcefully, revealing Cillian curled on his side in his white undershirt. Groaning in his sleep, he jerked the covers back up.

"Cillian," she said aloud.

Now Cillian was awake—he was irreversibly awake. He blinked up at her face, which was staring down at him. When they locked eyes, her frozen smile widened.

"Mom!" he couldn't help screaming. "Help!"

The Bog Girl, imitating him, began to scream and scream. And he could see, radiating from her gaze, the same blind tenderness that he had directed at her. Now he was its object. Something truly terrifying had happened: she loved him back.

For months, Cillian had been decoding the Bog Girl's silences. He'd peered into her dreams, her fears, her innermost thoughts. But her real voice was nothing like the voice that he'd imagined for her—a cross between Vicky Gilvarry and Patti LaBelle. Its high-pitched ululations hailed over him. In the kitchen, the dog began to bark. The language that she spoke was no longer spoken anywhere on earth.

He stumbled up, tugging at his boxers. The Bog Girl stood, too. The past, with its monstrous depth and span, reached toward him, demanding an understanding that he simply could not give it. His mind was too young and too narrow to withstand the onrush of her life. An invisible woods was in the bedroom with them, the scent of trees multiplying. Some mental earthquake inside the Bog Girl was casting up a world, green and unknown to him, or to anyone living: her homeland. Her gaze drove inward, carrying Cillian with it. For an instant, he thought he glimpsed her parents. Her brothers, her sisters, a nation of people. Their cheeks now beginning to redden, every one of them alive again inside her village. Pines rippling seaward. Gods,

horned and faceless, walking the lakes that once covered Cillian's home. Cillian was buried in water, in liquid images of her; he had to push through so many strata of her memories to reach the surface of her mind. Most of what he saw he shrank away from. His mind felt like a burned tongue, numbly touching her reality.

"W-w-who are you?"

"Heartbreak" is the universal diagnosis for the pain that accompanies the end of love. But this was an unusual breakup, in that Cillian's mind shattered first. The love that had protected him began to fall away. Piece after piece of it clattered from his chest, an armor rusting off him. *What are you?*

The Bog Girl lurched toward him, her arms open. First she moved like a hopping chick, with an unexpected buoyancy. Then she seemed to remember how to step, heel to toe. She came for him like an astronaut, bouncing on the gray carpet. The only English word she knew was his name.

Almost weightlessly, she reached for him. For wasn't she equally terrified? There was no buoy other than this boy, who had gripped her with his thin, freckled arms, bellying her out of the peat bog and into time.

Cillian hid behind the dresser.

Her fingers found his hand, threaded through his fingers.

He screamed again, even as he squeezed the hand back.

Her words rushed together, a thawing waterfall, moving intricately between octaves; still the only word he understood was his name. Perhaps nothing he had said to her, in their six months as a couple, had been comprehended. Cillian worked the levers in his brain, desperately trying to find the words that would release him.

"Unlock the door," his mother's beautiful voice called.

Cillian was frozen in the Bog Girl's grip, unable even to call out. But a moment later he heard the key turning in the lock. Gillian stood in the doorway in her yellow pajamas. With a panoramic comprehension, she took in what had happened. She knew, too, what must now be done. If she could have freed these two from the embrace herself, she would have done so; but now she understood the challenge.

The boy would have to make his own way out. "Take her home, Cillian. Make sure that she gets home safely."

Cillian, his eyes round with panic, only nodded.

Gillian went to the Bog Girl, helping her into a sweater. "Put a hat on. And pants."

His mother shepherded them downstairs and onto the porch, switching on every yellow bulb as they moved through the cottage. It was the warmest December on record, rain falling instead of snow, the drops disappearing into the rotted wood. Cillian carried the Bog Girl to the edge of the light before he understood that his mother was not coming with him.

"Let her down gently, son!" his mother called after them.

Well, she could do this for him, at least: she held a lantern steady across the rainy lawn, creating a gangplank of light that reached almost to the larches. She watched them moving toward the inky water. The Bog Girl was howling in her foreign tongue; at this distance, Gillian felt she could almost understand it.

Oh, she hoped their breakup would stick. She had divorced Cillian's father, then briefly moved into his new house; it had taken years before their affair was truly over. You had to really cultivate an ending. To get it to last, you had to kneel and tend to the burial ground, continuously firming your resolution.

This was a bad breakup.

A quarter mile from the cottage, under a bright moon, Cillian and the Bog Girl were rolling in the mud, each screaming in a different language. Their screams twined together, their hands reaching for each other; it was during this undoing that they were, at last, truly united as a couple. His flashlight rolled with them, plucking amphibious red and yellow eyes out of the reeds. "It's over. It's over. It's over," he kept babbling optimistically, out of his mind with fear. Her throat was vibrating against his skin. He could feel the echo of his own terror and sorrow, and again his mind felt overrun by the lapping waves of time. She clutched

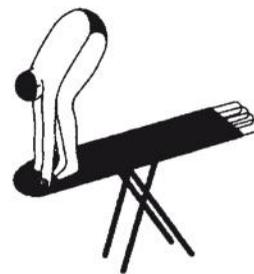
at the collar of his T-shirt, her body covered in dark mud and cracked stems of bog cotton, blue lichen. At last he felt her grip on him loosen. Her eyes, opaquely glinting in the moonlight, liquid and enormous, far larger than anyone could have guessed before their unliking, regarded him with what he imagined was a soft surprise, and disappointment. He was not who she'd expected to find when she opened her eyes, either. Now neither teen-ager needed to tell the other that it was over. It simply was—and, without another sound, the Bog Girl let go of Cillian and slipped backward into the bog water. Did she sink? It looked almost as if the water were rising to cover her. Her cranberry hair waved away from her scalp. As he watched, her body itself began to break up.

Straightening from where he was kneeling on the ledge of mud, he brushed peat from his pants. His arms tingled where her grip had suddenly relaxed. The clear rain drenched his clothing. The bog was still bubbling, pieces of her sinking back into the black peat, when he turned on his heel and ran. For the next few days, he would be quakey with relief; he'd felt certain, watching her sink away, that he would never see the Bog Girl again in this life.

But here he was mistaken. In the weeks and years to come, Cillian would find himself alone with her memory, struggling to pay attention to his droning contemporaries in the cramped classroom. How often would he retrace his steps, wandering right back to the lip of the bog, peering in?

Each dusk, with their primitive eloquence, the air-galloping insects continue to speak the million syllables of her name.

"Ma! Ma! Ma!" That night, Cillian came roaring out of the dark, piston-ing his knees as he ran for the light, for his home at the edge of the boglands. "Who *was* that?" ♦



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# THE CRITICS



POP MUSIC

## RECLAIMING ROCK

*Mitski uses the tropes of indie rock to make something novel.*

BY CARRIE BATTAN

LIKE MANY SKILLED lyricists, the twenty-five-year-old singer-songwriter Mitski doesn't like her words to be taken too literally. In April, when she released "Your Best American Girl," her most straightforward indie-rock single to date, some music blogs assumed that the song was a provocation, designed to position Mitski as a female corrective to the predominantly male world of D.I.Y. rock music. "Your mother wouldn't approve of how my mother raised me/ But I do, I think I do," she sings, not quite defiant. "And you're an all-American boy/ I guess I couldn't help trying to be your best American girl."

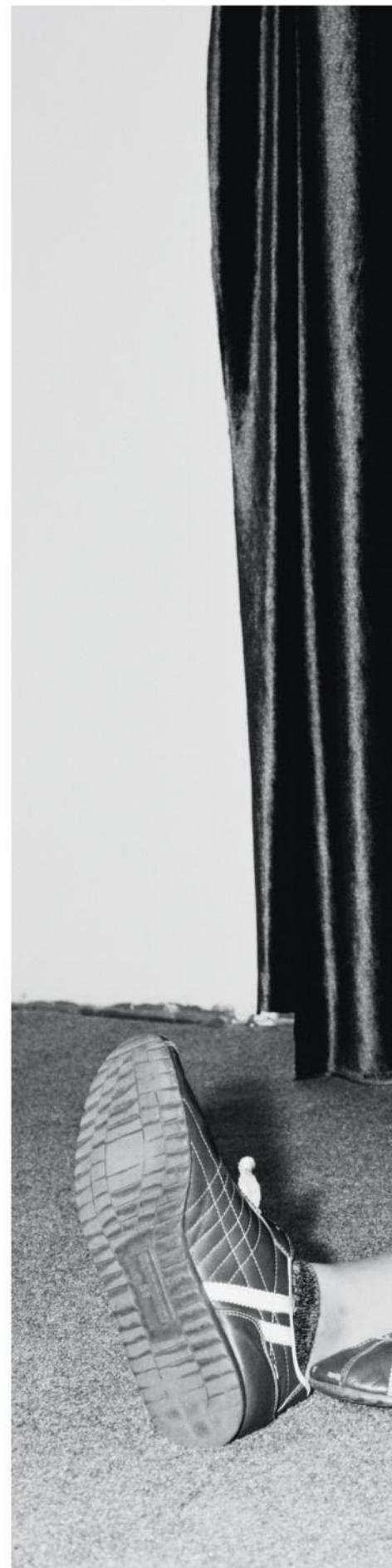
Mitski took to Facebook. "A lot of reviews have agreed on the narrative that she wrote this song to 'stick it to the white boy indie rock world!' but I wasn't thinking about any of that when I was writing it," she posted. Then she made a concession to the armchair psychologists. "Yes in the musical composition I used tropes from 'white indie rock' of my adolescence," she wrote. "But I used those tropes to accentuate the point that . . . I would never ever fit [in]." (Also like many skilled lyricists, Mitski is better at translating her experience into song than she is at defending her motivations on social media.)

Born into a Japanese-American family, Mitski Miyawaki spent her childhood moving around the world. After graduating from high school, in Turkey, she occasionally got into mischief with her friends. Early one morning, in a slightly drunken haze, and never having played much music before, she sat down

at a keyboard and wrote her first song, "Bag of Bones." The lyrics contain what today sounds like a mission statement: "Let's shake this poet out of the beast." Mitski felt that she'd discovered something important about her future, and yet was struck by the sensation that it wasn't a happy moment. "I was fucking doomed," she wrote on Facebook in 2014, perhaps intuiting the complications that arise from turning one's life into art. But feeling doomed is a kind of perverse gift for Mitski, who understands the perils of contentedness and the possibilities within despair.

In 2010, Mitski moved to New York, where she studied film at Hunter College before transferring to SUNY Purchase to pursue music composition. She recorded her first two albums, "LUSH" and "Retired from Sad, New Career in Business," as end-of-term projects during her junior and senior years, respectively. These records, which made use of dozens of SUNY Purchase student musicians, put a discordant twist on her musical training. Light on drums and guitar, they often showcase Mitski's vocals against spare piano or string arrangements, occasionally working in some horns. The songs are wispy and high-drama, like the score to a piece of moody, experimental theatre. But they also demonstrate a simple melodic sweetness that puts Mitski in the company of the better female pop singer-songwriters of the past two decades. She shares DNA with a broad spectrum of artists, ranging from Fiona Apple to Adele—artists who produce songs that cut to the heart of shared

*Guitar music can seem constitutionally stale or nostalgic. Today, young women may be indie rock's greatest—if not its only—source of vitality.*



ABOVE: MIGUEL PORLAN



PHOTOGRAPH BY MATTHEW TAMMARO

emotional experience, and who write a good hook, too.

Once out of school, Mitski picked up a guitar. Her 2014 album, “Bury Me at Makeout Creek,” was louder and more traditional than anything she’d written before, drawing from the punk and garage rock that laid the foundations for indie rock. Her new album, “Puberty 2,” continues this progression. The album references the past, but it’s a modern project, in lockstep with what many of her indie-rock contemporaries are doing today: writing snappy, concise songs with smart lyrics and walling them off with varying amounts of fuzz.

You could argue that these traditions—or tropes, to borrow a word from Mitski—are fundamentally male, rooted in a brashness and a defiant sense of irony embraced by legions of all-male bands. And yet she is one of countless female rock singers who have adopted them. This spring alone has offered a distinctive sampler, from the dioramic storytelling of Frankie Cosmos’s “Next Thing” to the adrenaline-shot shoegaze of Japanese Breakfast’s “Psychopomp” and the feminist punk frenzy of Mish Way, whose band, White Lung, released the excellent “Paradise” last month. Once perceived as curios—and presumed to have descended from the riot-grrrl movement—female-fronted rock acts now dominate regional (and online) rock scenes. Impassioned and often armed with a confessional, lyrical specificity, these women book huge tours and festivals and generate critical acclaim. In the world of guitar music, which can seem constitutionally stale or overly nostalgic, this shift in perspective toward the female counts as innovation. Today, young women are indie rock’s greatest—if not its only—source of vitality, a development that gives women newfound incentive to pick up a guitar. Mitski might not have fit in with the indie rock of her adolescence, but she fits in nicely with that of her adulthood.

THERE IS A tendency to champion today’s young female rock singers for their rawness and vulnerability, but on “Puberty 2” Mitski often keeps herself at a calculated distance. She can sound deadpan, like a ghost visiting

her experiences past and future and assessing them from a wary perch. “I was so young when I behaved twenty-five/Yet now I find I’ve grown into a tall child,” she says on “First Love/Late Spring,” from “Bury Me at Makeout Creek.” An omniscient narrator of her own life, she bends and folds time cleverly. (“Puberty 2” is not a sequel, but it may be a comment on the everlasting nature of growing pains.) Inside the belly of despair, on “Fireworks,” Mitski predicts how she’ll feel in the future. “One morning this sadness will fossilize/And I’ll forget how to cry,” she sings. “I will go jogging routinely/Calmly, and rhythmically.” She may not like being analyzed, but her lyrics invite close readings, examinations that reveal submerged meanings.

Feelings are handled like third parties or inanimate objects. The album opens with “Happy,” which presents happiness as something that can muddle experience as much as soothe it: “Happy came to visit me/He bought cookies on the way/I poured him tea and he told me it’ll all be O.K./Well I told him I’d do anything to have him stay with me.” Later in the song, Mitski grows ambivalent toward her house guest. Walking into her kitchen, she notices all the empty cookie wrappers. “Oh, I have to clean,” she says, sighing. On “Thursday Girl,” she floats through a party, silently pleading for someone, anyone, to refuse her—“Tell me no/Tell me no/Tell me no/Somebody please tell me no”—before admitting, “I’m not happy or sad/Just up or down/And always bad.” Here Mitski sounds content with being doomed.

Even if Mitski isn’t trying to stick it to the imagined indie-rock Man, “Puberty 2” affirms that she is a blossoming indie-rock star. But, when you survey Mitski’s four studio albums, a more diverse constellation of antecedents emerges. There are hints of the jagged experimentalism of Xiu Xiu’s Jamie Stewart, coupled with the plaintive melodic purity of radio-friendly singer-songwriters from the nineties, like Jewel and Michelle Branch. Also traces of jazz-lounge singers, and Julie Andrews circa “The Sound of Music,” as well as “Criminal”-era Fiona Apple, sometimes on the same song. Experienced in sum, Mitski’s music sheds the baggage that

accompanies associations of genre or era. She can be situated only within her own emotional landscape.

WHEN CHANCE THE RAPPER released his sprawling mixtape “Acid Rap,” in 2013, he seemed like a lyrical counterweight to drill music, the punishing street rap that dominated his home town of Chicago. Today, Chance is the tentpole of a flourishing cohort of like-minded young rappers and producers, who demonstrate a lyrical agility and a savvy political consciousness. One of the most captivating of them is Joey Purp, a twenty-two-year-old rapper who gracefully navigates playfulness, furor, and sobriety. On “iii-Drops,” his new “project,” as he calls it—the new guard is wary of inherited terms like “mixtape” and “album”—he raps about seducing a stewardess one moment and witnessing Chicago’s gun violence the next.

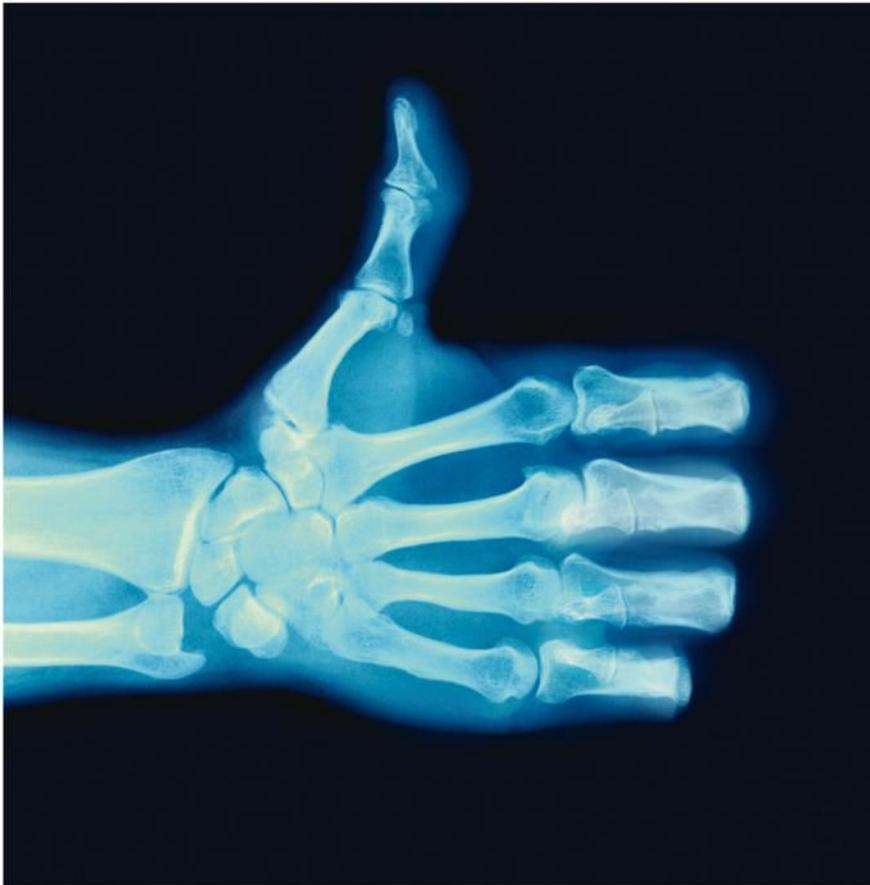
These artists are also openly wrestling with the legacies of their idols. On his album “Coloring Book,” released last month, Chance enthusiastically accepted the torch from Kanye West, raised in Chicago. West is his God, and “Coloring Book” revels in the jubilant gifts of the Holy Spirit. Joey Purp has a more complicated relationship with sound and authority. “iii-Drops” is heavy on soul and littered with triumphant horns, but there is an abrasiveness lurking. There’s ancestral skepticism, too: “These niggas old/They carbon-dated/These niggas fossils,” he raps on “Photobooth.” His breakout, “The Purple Tape,” from 2012, embraced psychedelic languor, but “iiiDrops” is all punch.

“Winner’s Circle” features a hook from Vic Mensa, another young Chicagoan who, like Chance, has been tucked snugly under West’s wing for most of his career. Together, Joey Purp and Mensa grapple with their desire to rise above the torments of Chicago without betraying the city: “Chi-pain, Chi-pain, Chi-pain,” Mensa sings. He, too, is in a period of turbulent ascendance, which he explores on his brand-new EP, “There’s Alot Going On.” On the eponymous final track, he details his experience riding the tides of influence between West and Jay Z, who last year signed Mensa to his entertainment firm, Roc Nation. “I was feeling so psychotic with the whole world excited for me and my idols saying I got it,” Mensa raps, a weary young soul with timeworn problems. ♦

## WHAT IT IS LIKE TO LIKE

*Art and taste in the age of the Internet.*

BY LOUIS MENAND

*Figuring out what people will like has become a big business.*

THE SUBJECT OF Tom Vanderbilt's "You May Also Like" (Knopf) is taste, the term he uses for whatever it is that guides our preference for chocolate over vanilla, taupe over beige, "The Bourne Supremacy" over "The Bourne Ultimatum," and Artur Schnabel and Joseph Szigeti's recording of Beethoven's tenth violin sonata over Vladimir Ashkenazy and Itzhak Perlman's rendering of the same work. Vanderbilt's widely admired previous book, "Traffic," examined a dangerous and complex activity that people pay about as much attention to while they're doing it as they do to washing the dishes: driving a car. Making sense of driving was tough. Not nearly as tough, however, as taste.

Vanderbilt's premise is: "We are strangers to our tastes." He doesn't mean that we don't really like what we say we like. He means that we don't know why. Our intuition that tastes are intuitive, that they are just "our tastes," and spring from our own personal genome, has been disproved repeatedly by psychologists and market researchers. But where tastes do come from is extremely difficult to pin down. Taste is not congenital: we don't inherit it. And it's not consistent. We come to like things we thought we hated (or actually did hate), and we are very poor predictors of what we are likely to like in the future.

We have trouble articulating the reasons that we prefer the Schnabel to the Ashkenazy, or decide on the locally for-

aged fresh spring porcini mushrooms with roasted Sebastopol peaches, almonds, and crispy tempura—no, wait!, I'll have the gâteau of Hudson Valley Moulard duck foie gras with roasted Chioggia beets, Brooks cherries, and Sicilian pistachios served with toasted brioche (thirty-dollar supplement). Just don't ask me why.

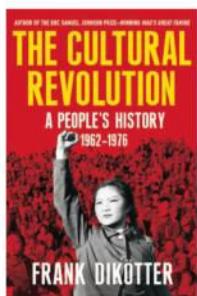
Maybe "toasted" trumped "foraged." Likes and dislikes can be triggered by random associations and can form in a split second. We make choices before we've had time to weigh the options. Vanderbilt tells us that the median amount of time spent looking at a work of art at the Met is seventeen seconds. Shopping for clothes, we say, "Oh, I *love* that!" before we have the first coherent idea about what it is that makes us love it.

And we are ridiculously, pathetically, embarrassingly suggestible. Cues that are barely liminal affect our preferences (which is why advertisers pay for product placement in films and TV shows). So do the choices we observe others making, the "I'll have what she's having" syndrome. We are also self-suggestible. "We seem to have a preference that we prefer our preference," as Vanderbilt puts it. "There is a greater chance we will like something when we expect we are going to like it." He calls this "a virtual law of liking."

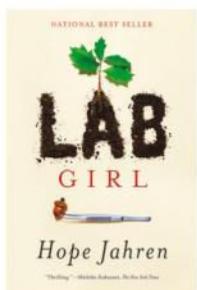
Vanderbilt is an intelligent writer, and there is a lot of interesting material in "You May Also Like," but he has dived into a fathomless sea. He opens with an epigraph from Nietzsche, "All of life is a dispute over taste," which pretty much sums up the problem. What does not, on some level, involve taste? Most of a day's idle conversation is a sequence of thumbs-up, thumbs-down assertions expressed with varying degrees of sincerity and conviction. "Nice weather we're having." "I love your new haircut." "This coffee is suboptimal." "These are the best Sebastopol peaches I have ever eaten outside Sebastopol." We don't put a lot of thought into these judgments. They're virtually automatic. Everything we experience gets an emoji.

And any action that entails a choice also entails a preference—what to read, what to wear, which brand of superglue to buy. Vanderbilt cites a researcher who estimates that people typically make two hundred food decisions a day. We try to find work we like, entertainment we like,

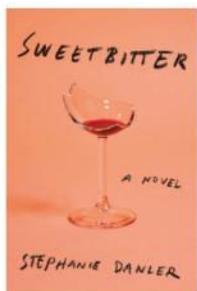
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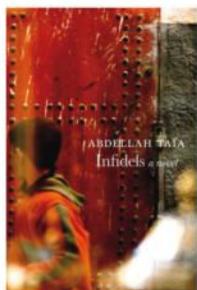
**The Cultural Revolution**, by Frank Dikötter (*Bloomsbury*). Drawing on previously classified documents and on memoirs by individual citizens, this history of China's most infamous social movement shows how a program based on denouncing reactionaries escalated into a witch hunt that took millions of lives and ruined millions more. Books were burned, Mongols tortured, "bourgeois" art confiscated, bourgeois pet cats slaughtered, students banished to the countryside to be reeducated by the peasantry. Kitsch objects embodying the cult of Mao proliferated. The decade-long upheaval so terrorized the population that some people killed themselves rather than even risk denunciation. The book is often crushingly grim, but Dikötter also relates many stories of resilience and subterfuge, of ordinary people who paid lip service to "empty slogans" and tried to get on with their lives.



**Lab Girl**, by Hope Jahren (*Knopf*). This memoir by an acclaimed geobiologist describes her path to success in a notoriously male-dominated field. Growing up as the daughter of a science teacher, she was captivated by the subject early on, but navigated social situations with exaggerated girlishness, "grooming myself and gossiping" and fearing that a woman is "something less than a man." Though the book presents itself as fiercely feminist, its tone is often condescending: "I look at an awful lot of leaves. I look at them and I ask questions.... Now *you* ask a question about *your* leaf. Guess what? You are now a scientist." More rewarding are chapters on what trees teach us about time and on Jahren's unconventional relationship with her lab partner.



**Sweetbitter**, by Stephanie Danler (*Knopf*). This bildungsroman set in the New York restaurant scene takes place in the course of a year during which the protagonist grows from naïve provincial escapee to self-actualized expert in the industry. A murky triangle arises—both romantic and familial—involving the protagonist, an experienced and entrancing older server, and an unwinnable bartender. Danler deftly captures the unique power of hierarchy in the restaurant world, the role of drug and alcohol abuse, and the sense of borrowed grandeur that pervades the serving scene. Above all is the familiar and irreconcilable New York City quandary: "*It is ludicrous for anyone to live here and I can never leave.*"



**Infidels**, by Abdellah Taïa, translated from the French by Alison L. Strayer (*Seven Stories*). This novel by a Moroccan writer resident in France recounts the brutal life of a young gay Muslim who becomes a jihadi. Brought up by a prostitute in a conservative milieu in Morocco, the boy takes up with an older, European-born Islamic militant and moves to Belgium. Against the charged backdrop of debates about homosexuality's place in Islam and Islam's place in the West, the novel's chief success is its dramatization of the hypocrisies of the pious. Addressing his mother, Taïa's protagonist prophesies, "Maman, one day you'll be stoned to death by the very same people who creep to the house each night to ask for your forgiveness and a bit of pleasure."

people we like, shoes we like, political candidates we like. We want to sit at the best table, take the most scenic route, watch the funniest late-night talk show. Finally, there are what we think of as higher-order preferences, the astute critical appraisals we come up with when discussing the latest Don DeLillo novel or the new production of "Elektra."

Understanding how traffic works is made exponentially more complicated by the fact that it's not just one person who is barely paying attention; all the drivers on the road are barely paying attention, and they're also reacting to each other. The same is true of taste. The reason stuff you don't like is out there is that other people do like it. The continuously shifting array of "like" arrows emanating from you is reproduced billions of times across the planet and configured differently each time. Vanderbilt points out that someone who says, "I don't want Thai food. I had some yesterday," is forgetting that in Thailand people eat Thai food every day.

You can aggregate tastes, but only so far. Once you start lumping—once you declare that all  $x$  prefer  $y$ —you create the condition for splitting, since there will always be at least one  $x$  who is determined to stand apart from the herd. "Tastes can change when people aspire to be different from other people," Vanderbilt says. "They can change when we are trying to be like other people." Somewhere in America, there is a college professor who will never buy a Prius. The outlier is not extraneous to the type; the outlier is essential to the type. The outlier marks a boundary. Tastes are, by definition, things not universally shared.

**I**N SHORT, TASTES are overdetermined, the upshot of many influences, and underdetermined, susceptible to change at, for example, the sight of the word "toasted." Some combination of inputs including, but not limited to, reasons, hunches, bodily needs, past experiences, unconscious desires, social pressures, mystic chords of memory, and price point is behind every preference; they are weighted differently in almost every case; and they are highly malleable. It takes very little for me to swap out the porcini mushrooms for the duck foie gras, but it takes *something*, and trying to nail down that something plunges us into an infinite

regress of reasons and reasons for reasons. We are in the flux, the very *je ne sais quoi* of existence. You might as well try to write a book about thought. As Nietzsche suggested, you might as well try to write a book about life.

Vanderbilt is intrepid; he is also fair. He desperately wants to find a non-circular account of preferences, something better than “People like this kind of thing because this is the kind of thing that they—or people around them, or people who are supposed to know—like,” but he has to admit defeat. There is no place outside the swirling galaxy of taste formation on which to rest a philosophical lever. “Taste is like traffic, actually,” he acknowledges, “a large complex system with basic parameters and rules, a noisy feedback chamber where one does what others do and vice versa, in a way that is almost impossible to predict beyond that at the end of the day a certain number of cars will travel down a stretch of road, just as a certain number of new songs will be in the Hot 100.”

VANDERBILT IS NOT afraid to get into the theoretical thickets with Kant and Hume and Pierre Bourdieu, but he is much more interested in the practical side of the business. For taste today is a big business. The science of preferences dates back to the origins of the advertising and public-relations industries, but the Internet has provided it with a vast new field of operations. Compared with television, which basically had advertisers throwing tomatoes at barns labelled, for example, “Women eighteen to thirty-four,” the Internet is a precision instrument—as we all know from the lists, ads, and pop-ups on our screens that seem to know who we are and what we might be of a mind to pay for.

And they do know, sort of. Vanderbilt talked to a number of people whose job is to come up with the algorithms, derived from the staggering amount of data collected from clicks, that produce a taste fingerprint for every consumer using a Web site or an app. He finds that, in the past several years, online marketing strategies have become extremely sophisticated.

With television, even after we purchased the Kellogg’s Frosted Flakes or Popeil’s Pocket Fisherman or whatever product was sponsoring our show, we kept seeing commercials for it. That was a

waste of our time and, much more important, of the advertiser’s dollars. Algorithms aren’t supposed to generate recommendations for products we’ve already bought (though we still see a lot of these). They also aren’t supposed to recommend products simply because millions of people have bought them. Netflix once made this mistake, which is why you were constantly being invited to watch “The Shawshank Redemption” (and probably did a few times before catching on to the game). Pandora can’t have “I Got You Babe” turning up on every playlist.

Netflix learned, further, that recommendations shouldn’t be based on what viewers say they watch, since people over-report the number of foreign films and documentaries they claim to enjoy after a delicious foie gras paired with a fun little Riesling. So the company now tries to figure out what we want to watch based on what we actually have watched. And not only does Netflix know what we have watched; it knows whether we watched the whole thing, and, if we didn’t, exactly where we stopped. Pandora works similarly. It’s like having a personal shopper with psychic powers *whom you cannot replace*.

Vanderbilt also looked into the Internet spectacle known as “customer reviews.” This is, let’s face it, an open sewer. Once, when venturing out to buy a much needed tube of superglue, we went into the store, eyeballed the packaging, and made a guess that the niftier presentation, combined with the most plausible price, correlated with the gluiest glue. (A lot of us still buy wine this way.) On the Web, we have instant access to the unsolicited opinions of hundreds of superglue buyers (mostly pseudonymous, one of the worst things about the Internet, IMHO), from the adhesives wonks who post “read more” commentaries on molecular compounds to the one-star hot-heads on permanent caps lock and to hell with spell-check.

We don’t want to, but we often find ourselves identifying with the hotheads. We want to know, if things go wrong, just how bad it could be. I believe it was Tolstoy who observed that all five-star reviews are the same, but every one-star review is vicious in its own way. This gives a single sufficiently radioactive bad review a blackball effect—

which is, of course, the most fervent hope of the person who posted it.

Customer reviewing is the land of “lay expertise,” a treacherous domain. Vanderbilt quotes the food writer Ruth Reichl: “Anybody who believes Yelp is an idiot. Most people on Yelp have no idea what they’re talking about.” Customer reviews appear to be governed by a combination of pack mentality and “My water glass wasn’t refilled promptly!!!” narcissism. Reviews tend to be asymmetrically bimodal; they form a J-shaped distribution, with many high ratings, a smaller number of low ratings, and not much in between. The higher number of high ratings may reflect “positivity bias.” Studies show that if the first review is a rave subsequent reviews are more likely to be positive. If you are selling a product online, it makes all the sense in the world for you to have a friend post a positive review the instant the page goes up. We can often tell—shopping for books on Amazon, for example—when someone has taken this wise precaution.

One explanation for the low proportion of mid-range ratings is that the tiny fraction of customers who bother to write reviews do it because they had either an exceptionally good experience or an exceptionally bad one—which is, by statistical definition, not the experience you are going to have. Reliability is also compromised by the phenomenon of ratings inflation, the result of allowing sellers to review buyers as well as vice versa, as happens on services like eBay and Uber. It’s all a mess. But, assuming the wisdom of crowds, it’s probably not that much more untrustworthy than the advice of the salesman in the store, and it beats staring at the label.

THE ENGINEERED NATURE of the online experience makes Virginia Heffernan’s argument, in “Magic and Loss” (Simon & Schuster), that the Internet is “a massive and collaborative work of realist art” a little puzzling. The Internet is the Truman Show. We’re not seeing reality, or even a simulacrum thereof. We’re seeing what the algorithms want us to see. We can browse elsewhere, we can turn the digital page, but, the moment we arrive, construction of a new personalized stage set gets under way.

Heffernan is a former *Times* television

critic who has worked in and around the online world almost since the beginning. She started using computers back in the days of Dungeons and Dragons, and she became fascinated by the pantheistic aura that surrounds electronic communication—the sense that a collective consciousness is being formed out there in the ether. This fascination is still with her; it's the “magic” in her title.

But the pantheistic moment was back when computing meant staring at blinking cursors and waiting endlessly for a line of teletype to start appearing, like Matthew Broderick in “WarGames,” and it was before virtually all of commerce moved online and the Web became the digital mall without borders that it is today. It was also before people spent half the day online doing work and errands. For most people, the Internet is a disenchanting place.

Still, Heffernan believes that we are living through a revolution. “The Internet is the great masterpiece of civilization,” she says. “As an idea it rivals monotheism.” And: “If it's ever fair to say that anything has ‘changed everything,’ it's fair to say so about the Internet.” Analog is dead. To understand the new regime, she argues, we need a new aesthetics, “a new hierarchy of values.” This is what she proposes to provide.

She doesn't, really, and her book (thankfully) is more like an essay than like a treatise. Heffernan is smart, her writing has flair, she can refer intelligently to Barthes, Derrida, and Benjamin—also to Aquinas, Dante, and Proust—and she knows a lot about the Internet and its history. She is good company. But she has trouble extracting an aesthetics from the mishmash of information, entertainment, commerce, and distraction that is the Internet.

A lot of the Internet, and especially popular Web sites like Wikipedia, YouTube, and Twitter, is just ugly. Heffernan's point is that the ugliness doesn't keep us away, so there must be something compelling us to go on them. It might be the sensation that sites like those are incomprehensibly large, that we can never exhaust them. Ultimate unreadability is part of the aura of the Internet itself, the “postmodern sublime,” to use a term that Heffernan avoids. I can't see all the books in a library at the same time, but I can go outside and look

at the building. The Internet is a building that you can never look at.

What makes digitalization different from earlier changes in media, and the reason it is not wrong to call it a revolution, is that a single technology is promising to absorb a huge number of existing technologies, from paper, vinyl, and celluloid to clocks, maps, newspapers, radios, cameras, telephones, lecture halls. If it can be coded, it will end up on the Web or in an app. This is going to entail, Heffernan argues, some loss: for one thing, the three-dimensionality of certain experiences—acoustic, theatrical, and even palpable, as with the physical book. On a screen, experience is dematerialized and flattened out. But, she says, “we're officially through the looking glass, everyone; we might as well stop to smell the music and hear the new air.”

THE INTERNET WON'T replace everything, of course, and one day something will replace the Internet. By then, we will all be used to it—the analog world will have gone the way of the typewriter and the milkman—and we, or our children, will miss it when it's gone. For Vanderbilt is able to identify two factors that have repeatedly been shown to have a significant influence on taste. One is social consensus; the other is familiarity. We get attracted to things that we see other people are attracted to, and we like things more the longer we like them.

Heffernan is more comfortable with sliding standards for art and taste than Vanderbilt is. Vanderbilt is distressed that taste proves to be so fickle. “The picture I have presented of taste is hardly reassuring,” he concludes. But his picture *is* reassuring. If tastes were not easily changeable, if people could like only what they have always liked and could never develop a taste for something different, the species would have trouble surviving. One famished humanoid eats an oyster and does not immediately drop dead. Other, merely hungry humanoids observe this and think, Totally gross, but what the heck, and they eat some oysters, too. A social consensus grows that oysters are not just edible; they're tasty. The species advances.

The malleability of taste has a similar adaptive utility when it comes to a

subject that is largely missing from Vanderbilt's book: mate selection. (How about the algorithms for sites like eHarmony and Match.com?) We're drawn to possible mates for multiple reasons, from the intellectual to the pheromonal, but who will mate with whom is as unpredictable as traffic and as inexplicable as a preference for “The Bourne Supremacy.” We surprise even ourselves. If our preferences were fixed in advance, most of us would never find a mate. Having found one, though, familiarity helps lock the choice in place, which is why humans can remain with the same partner for a long time. We like what we've liked.

The way the story is usually told, it was in the eighteenth century that, for various unrelated reasons—sociological, religious, philosophical—it seemed important to distinguish personal likes and dislikes from disinterested appreciation. This is when Kant and Hume enter the picture, and when the category of the aesthetic (Heffernan's subject) gets carved out from the larger category of taste (Vanderbilt's). Aesthetic appreciation is supposed to be shared; it's not supposed to depend on the background or the prejudices of the audience. The idea is based on the experience of natural beauty, which does seem predicated on an affinity between the mind and certain external forms. Why can't works of art appeal to the same affinity?

Of course, aesthetic appreciation does have to be learned. A person who went to see “Elektra” having never heard Western music before would either be bored to death or run screaming from the opera house. And appreciation for art arguably develops in the same way as any other taste. Someone says, “Giotto. I like what he's doing with perspective,” and a consensus builds that a certain style of painting is worth looking at. The fact that we need time and help to like a work of art doesn't mean we don't “really” like it. It's just one more thing that has entered our lives to become an object of pleasure, edification, and disputation. We can philosophize about it if we want, but we should enjoy it for as long as it lasts. ♦

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### Block That Metaphor!

*From the Boston Globe.*

“If there's something amiss, or if there's any bit of smoke, we're on it like a cheap suit,” Kaprielian said.

# Heavy Metal<sup>SM</sup>



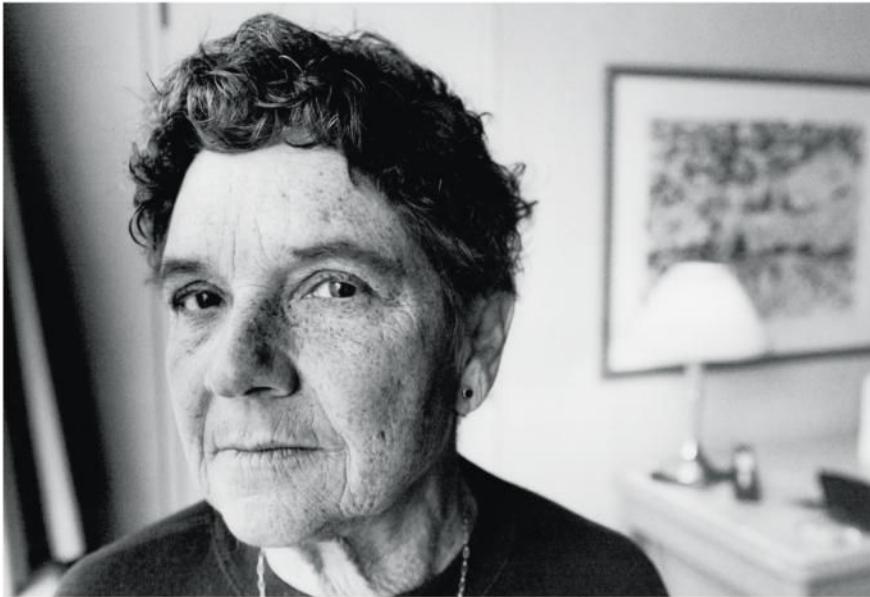
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## BOUNDARY CONDITIONS

*Adrienne Rich's collected poems.*

BY DAN CHIASSON

*Rich devised her own constraints; the fifties formalist remained inside her.*

“ONE RAINY DAY in the spring of 1960, the San Francisco poet Robert Duncan arrived at my door,” Adrienne Rich wrote in her essay “A Communal Poetry.” Duncan was a daemonic bard with a Homeric attitude, who often wore a black cape and a broad-brimmed hat. Rich made him tea while trying to comfort her sick son, who moved between the high chair and her lap; Duncan, whom Rich cautiously admired, “began speaking almost as soon as he entered the house” and “never ceased.” Later, driving him to Boston in the rain, Rich realized that her car was on empty and pulled into a gas station. Throughout it all, Duncan, the oracle, was still talking about “poetry, the role of the poet, myth.” Apparently, Rich’s “role” was to make tea for him, and to keep things like sick children and empty gas tanks from interrupting the great man’s groove. Rich concluded, generously, that Duncan’s “deep attachment to a mythological Feminine” made it hard for him to manage “so unarchetypal a person as an actual strug-

gling woman caring for a sick child.”

Rich, who died in 2012, had these kinds of run-ins with literary men throughout her life. Her father was an eminent doctor and a professor at the Johns Hopkins medical school, who made her copy out verses from Blake and Keats from an early age, and graded the results; her mother, who had studied in Vienna to be a concert pianist and a composer, put aside her art to raise the family. Rich’s sense that she was the benefactor of her mother’s sacrifice and the object of her father’s fixations never left her. (Her mother died in 2000, at the age of a hundred and three.) Rich’s first book—“A Change of Life” (1951)—was published when she was just out of Radcliffe. It was chosen for the Yale Younger Poets prize by W. H. Auden, who contributed a slightly creepy foreword: the poems are, he said, “neatly and modestly dressed, speak quietly but do not mumble, respect their elders but are not cowed by them, and do not tell fibs.” Rich’s three children were born within a four-year span in the late

fifties; in those days, she wrote, “women and poetry were being redomesticated.” Even Randall Jarrell, the best poetry critic of the era, proclaimed her work to be “sweet,” and wrote that Rich seemed “to us” to resemble “a princess in a fairy tale.” An unidentified poet friend, visiting her in the nineteen-eighties for the first time in years, expressed the abandonment felt by many male poets and critics, first-string *bon-hommes* who had admired her early work and had counted on her to add some depth to the literary bench. “You disappeared!” her friend said. “You simply disappeared.” Women could also be unkind. Elizabeth Hardwick, a formidable feminist in a different key, declared, “I don’t know what happened. She got swept too far. She deliberately made herself ugly and wrote those extreme and ridiculous poems.”

Rich’s refusal to be an archetype of femininity made her an archetype of feminism, a courageous trade but one that confronted her with aesthetic challenges virtually unprecedented in American poetry. Perhaps no American poet who started in the mode of accommodation so abruptly broke ranks, inventing for herself a new kind of discipline whose ethical rigors demanded fresh forms. The challenge was to make poems that crystallized her political commitments—especially to women’s consciousness and power—but did not blunt their own artistic force. Many poets of the time, influenced by Rich, decided that the idea of art was a mere bourgeois confection. Rich never did. It was too late; she had learned its uses. There was always, inside her, the fifties formalist, brought up, as she put it, “within the circumference of white language and metaphor.” Her models were Anne Bradstreet and Emily Dickinson, brilliant women with domineering fathers, who wrote poems that acted necessarily as both expression and concealment, and whose achievement was timed to detonate in the future, when the world had prepared for them a fit audience.

RICH’S “Collected Poems: 1950–2012” (Norton) confronts us everywhere with what she called “the war/poetry wages against itself.” She grew as a poet by self-repudiation, redefining

motherhood and disowning, with real pain, her delegated roles as wife, mother, straight woman, and privileged white American. Her stands against various forms of oppression were also stands against roles so deeply ingrained as to seem, to her, essential. She never affirmed anything without first condemning its opposite, and although she saw life in these polar terms, she located the antipodes within herself. "Between extremities/Man runs his course," wrote Yeats, whose politically inclined lyricism substantially influenced Rich's work. The key to Rich's genius, in fact, is Yeats's famous aphorism, maybe the best thing anybody ever said about the art: "We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry."

It has been argued that, beginning in the sixties, Rich's conscience turned her poems into a form of evangelism, an adjunct to her politics, which branched out from women's rights to black power, indigenous rights, and environmentalism. This book ought to put that notion to rest. Her early formalism is sometimes channelled cunningly, as in "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers," the best-known poem from her first book. Aunt Jennifer is embroidering a needlepoint panel, where "Bright topaz" tigers "do not fear the men beneath the tree." Her fingers are "fluttering through her wool," and the "massive weight of Uncle's wedding band/Sits heavily upon Aunt Jennifer's hand":

When Aunt is dead, her terrified hands will lie  
Still ringed with ordeals she was mastered by.  
The tigers in the panel that she made  
Will go on prancing, proud and unafraid.

The terms here are clear enough: an oppressive uncle, a sainted aunt, the awkward shunting of Aunt Jennifer's genius and anger into forms that are wordless, restrictive, and domestic. The needlepoint erases its maker; the poem about the needlepoint, though borrowing its formal idioms, restores Aunt Jennifer and her pain. Poetry can express both the maker and the artifact, and measure the ratios of irony between the one and the other. And yet the poem comes a little too close to embodying the idea it seems to be dismissing: that poems should coolly express the costs

of women's depredations but maintain their own "prancing," elegant distance from violence and terror.

"Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" suggests the habit of metaphor in Rich's early work, where aunts and tigers equally are planed flush into symbols. Rich soon turned against this kind of facile literary transformation, which seemed to exempt her from the violent subordination she expressed. When, in 1993, her second volume, "The Diamond Cutters," was reissued in "Collected Early Poems: 1950-1970," she altered some of the pronouns, which had made men seem "universal" and women merely "personal," and appended this extraordinary note to the title poem:

Thirty years later I have trouble with the informing metaphor of this poem. I was trying, in my twenties, to write about the craft of poetry. But I was drawing, quite ignorantly, on the long tradition of domination, according to which the precious resource is yielded up into the hands of the dominator as if by a natural event. The enforced and exploited labor of actual Africans in actual diamond mines was invisible to me and, therefore, invisible in the poem, which does not take responsibility for its own metaphor. I note this here because this kind of metaphor is still widely accepted, and I still have to struggle against it in my work.

The poem on its own is negligible, instructing a human "intelligence/So late dredged up" to master the primordial stone, which "may have contempt/For too-familiar hands." The stone is language, the diamond is a poem: as in a model kit, all the pieces come labelled and the instructions are easy to follow. Rich could have suppressed the poem or allowed it to settle into obscurity. Instead, she made it a founding lesson in her own education, and in ours: the "struggle" against metaphors that were aesthetically seductive but politically corrupt was to be conducted in plain view of her readers, the poem and the poem's cancellation given equal airtime.

In "Natural Resources," a later poem that was, I think, intended to repudiate "The Diamond Cutters," a female emerald miner, "laboring beneath/the ray of the headlamp," "breathing in pain," embodies Rich's struggle with metaphor, its splendors inseparable from its dangers:

The miner is no metaphor. She goes  
into the cage like the rest, is flung

downward by gravity like them, must change  
her body like the rest to fit a crevice

to work a lode  
on her the pick hangs heavy, the bad air

lies thick, the mountain presses in on her  
with boulder, timber, fog,  
slowly the mountain's dust descends  
into the fibers of her lungs.

This later strategy is central to Rich's mature poetry, which works against the effects it conjures as it brings us into the tug-of-war between literary aptness and actual pain. The metaphor, then, "is no metaphor"—though, of course, it was chosen by Rich, shaped by Rich, and immersed in a poem where metaphor is crucial and probably inevitable. It would be naïve (and Rich occasionally was naïve in just this way) to think that a poet could simply project onto our imaginations the misery of an emerald miner without calling up any literary dimensions. Even the word "miner" carries a recent provenance in Sylvia Plath's "Nick and the Candlestick," whose speaker, carrying a candle down a dark hallway, declares, "I am a miner." And so Rich's choice of language is riddled with danger, the danger of aestheticizing suffering; since, as the poem paradoxically suggests, more is at stake here than the success of a poem.

Rich's work of the nineteen-sixties made her name, especially "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law" (1963), a book whose content was groundbreaking but whose style lagged a little behind that of precursors like Robert Lowell's "Life Studies" and contemporaries like Plath's "Ariel." By the early seventies, Rich had built a body of work that could withstand her own raids upon it, a thrilling achievement that made her a natural for long, trenchant sequences, the individual sections sometimes qualifying, sometimes even warring against, one another. The conflicts were not, of course, limited to the page. In 1970, Rich's husband, the economist Alfred Conrad, killed himself near their home in Vermont. The poet Hayden Carruth, a close friend, identified the body. Rich and Conrad had recently separated; she was living with the children in a small rented apartment. There were infidelities on both sides, and Conrad had confided to Carruth that he felt Rich

“had lost her mind.” Rich came out as a lesbian in the mid-seventies, and the tradition of castigating her in gendered terms—“strident” is a word that crops up a lot—again went into full swing. She was blamed by some for Conrad’s suicide, almost as though her refusal to sacrifice her own life, as Plath and Anne Sexton had done in similar straits, had somehow ended his.

The poems of this period are Rich’s most fully achieved, though to say so goes against their grain. In 1974, Rich received the National Book Award, for the collection “Diving Into the Wreck,” and, in a statement co-written by her and the other nominees, Audre Lorde and Alice Walker, rejected the very premise of “ranking and comparison,” accepting the award “on behalf of all women.” The poetry in that volume finds a language both clandestine and explosive, the result of a torqued and defiant relationship to English, which twined violence and beauty in ways Rich could not disentangle. It was “the oppressor’s language,” she wrote, and

“yet I need it to talk to you.” The title poem is Rich’s vertical reimagining of the catalogues of Whitman, which had combed the surface of life for unrepresented people and vocations, enumerating the contraltos and jour printers and duck shooters. But women’s lives had been more or less scrubbed from the public scene, hidden in the dangerous “wreck” of the patriarchy. To find her sisters, Rich says, she “read the book of myths, / and loaded the camera, / and checked the edge of the knife-blade” before making her descent:

I came to explore the wreck.  
The words are purposes.  
The words are maps.  
I came to see the damage that was done  
and the treasures that prevail.  
I stroked the beam of my lamp  
slowly along the flank  
of something more permanent  
than fish or weed

the thing I came for:  
the wreck and not the story of the wreck.

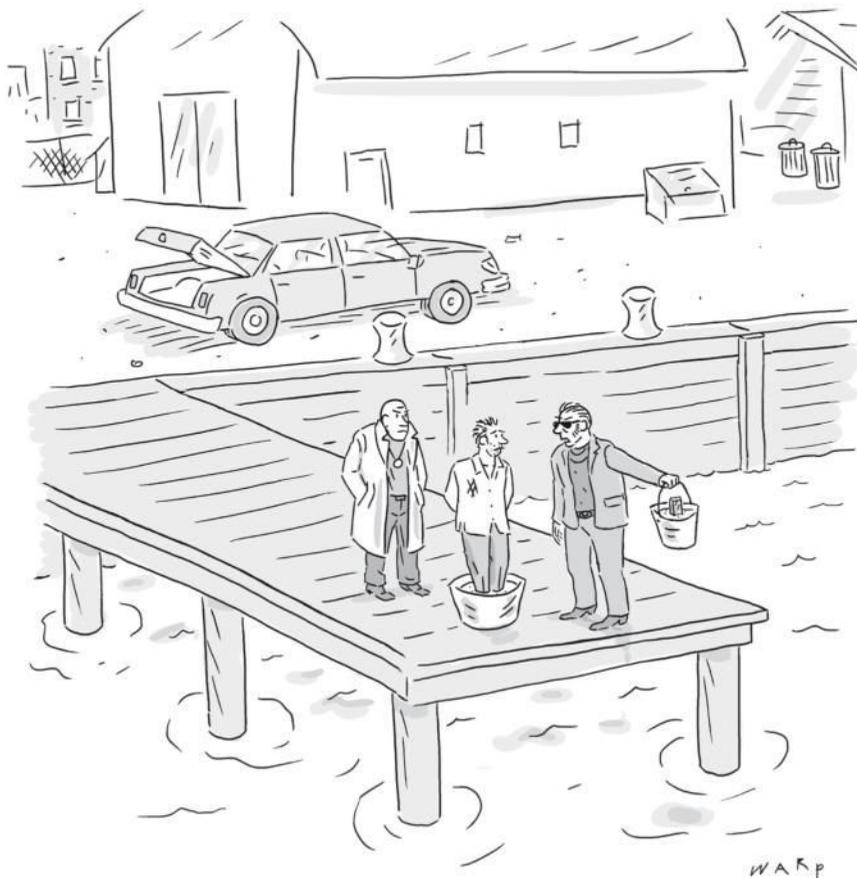
The metaphor here is porous: divers carry lamps, but poets carry words as “maps” and “purposes,” and this

speaker, the diver-poet dead set on making it back alive, has both. The poem’s astonishing final stanza introduces a deliberately troubled syntax to show how Rich, as a unique individual and as a representative of all women, is both singular and plural:

We are, I am, you are  
by cowardice or courage  
the one who find our way  
back to this scene  
carrying a knife, a camera  
a book of myths  
in which  
our names do not appear.

Pronouns matter, as once again the culture seems ready to acknowledge. They matter because, as here, a plausible “we” has to be based on the inclusion of every type of individual. The work is never done; “Diving Into the Wreck” shows us how, in order to “make it new”—the old Poundian imperative—the language had first to be made just. The politics in Rich’s poems, though “brief and local,” were nevertheless universal: a way of refreshing lyric so as to preserve its imaginative power and its utility. Rich wanted a “common language”—literary enough to last, yet urgent enough for all readers to feel the power and change the culture. Juggling those pronouns—I, you, we—she was allowing the tensions implicit in such a project to puncture the surface.

READING MORE THAN a thousand pages of Rich’s poetry, you come to appreciate her vision of herself as a work in progress, a palimpsest on which traces of her earlier lives and manifestations are still visible under the surface of the latest forms. The fifties poems were praised by men and, later, deprecated by Rich, in much the same terms; her “Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law” finds a new candor but hews to the period, confessional style. Only with “Diving Into the Wreck” and “The Dream of a Common Language” (1978) does the extraordinary stylistic tension of her most accomplished poems emerge. Those books and the ones that followed made Rich’s name as a feminist intellectual, but they are still not as well known as they should be. Hardwick’s judgment of them as “extreme” and “ridiculous”—and others’



*“But first we’re going to watch your phone die.”*

judgment of them as worthy, noble, and necessary but aesthetically negligible—has long been in the air. You can find plenty of movement clichés, if that’s what you want to find. But you also encounter poems with a compass of devastation unrivalled in American poetry of the era, like “A Woman Dead in Her Forties,” a poem about a woman who died of breast cancer:

Your breasts/ sliced-off The scars  
dimmed as they would have to be  
years later

All the women I grew up with are sitting  
half-naked on rocks in sun  
we look at each other and  
are not ashamed

and you too have taken off your blouse  
but this was not what you wanted:

to show your scarred, deleted torso

I barely glance at you  
as if my look could scald you  
though I’m the one who loved you

I want to touch my fingers  
to where your breasts had been  
but we never did such things.

This is an important revision of all the poems about women’s bodies by men, and an unprecedented expression of complex desire within time—I would touch your body where I might have touched it, had we been free to touch. But the thrill of the poem (it goes on for several pages) is in its interplay of forensic precision and loving delicacy. Rich knew that only a great poem could undo the mortal erasures so bleakly enumerated here.

There are hundreds of remarkable poems in the new collection, and the culture is still catching up to them. Rich’s work, which once seemed to turn its back on a predominantly male canon, now operates as a brilliant oppositional guide to it. I was especially struck by her debt to Wallace Stevens, whom she read and loved for her entire life; to Whitman, whose unfinished project of inventorying America Rich took up so memorably; and to Dickinson, whom Rich wrote back into the feminist canon with her groundbreaking essay of 1976, “Vesuvius at Home.” Her whole career was



*“Now I have a question for you.”*

devoted to testing ways to “break through this film of the abstract//without wounding myself or you,” as she wrote in “Cartographies of Silence” (1975), a poem about a lesbian affair and about the role that women’s voices play in an environment where secrecy and code have of necessity taken on their own forms of power and beauty. That was, roughly, the advantage that Dickinson’s profoundly circumscribed life had over Rich’s, whose boundaries were rapidly disintegrating. Boundaries and poetry are, of course, innately connected.

Part of Rich’s genius was to draw her own boundaries, to devise her own constraints; and so, as in “A Woman Dead in Her Forties,” she invented forms, a syntax, a pacing, and a shorthand that represented, in language, the ethical scrutiny she brought to language. Every word is considered, every formal mechanism sounded for its political utility. And yet her last books are full of gorgeous evocations of Vermont and California, lonely

lyrics that earned their right to evacuate the world and listen to what was left. Here are the opening lines of “Ever, Again”:

Mockingbird shouts *Escape! Escape!*  
and would I could I’d

fly, drive back to that house  
up the long hill between queen

anne’s lace and common daisyface  
shoulder open stuck door

run springwater from kitchen  
tap drench tongue

palate and throat  
throw window sashes open screens down

breathe in mown grass  
pine-needle heat

manure, lilac unpack  
brown sacks from store.

The late poems offer some of the metaphysical satisfaction we feel when we reach the final poems of Stevens. If there is quiet and peace here, it’s the calm after a great storm subsides. ♦

## THIS IS AMERICA

*A Stuart Davis retrospective.*

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL



*Davis's "Egg Beater No. 4" (1928): a concerted effort to transcend Cubism.*

THE EBULLIENT PAINTINGS of Stuart Davis, surveyed in a retrospective aptly titled "In Full Swing," at the Whitney Museum, rank either at the peak of American modern art or a bit to the side of it, depending on how you construe "American" and "modern." (And perhaps throw in "abstract," a touch-and-go qualifier for an artist who insisted on the essential realism of even his most abstruse forms.) Davis, who died in 1964, at the age of seventy-one, laid heavy stress on both terms. The beginning of his career overlapped with the first generation of American modernists—Marsden Hartley, Charles Demuth, Georgia O'Keeffe—and the end of it with Abstract Expressionism and Pop art. He was a polemicist and a happy warrior for modernity as the heart's blood of what he called, invoking the nation's definitive poet, "the thing Whitman felt—and I too will express it in pictures—America—the wonderful place we live in." In the Whitney catalogue, the art historian Harry Cooper, the show's co-curator,

quotes a previously unpublished list of self-exhortations that Davis wrote down in 1938. The first item: "Be liked by French artists." The second: "Be distinctly American."

Seeing no contradiction between patriotism and radical politics, throughout the nineteen-thirties Davis all but set aside studio work, dismissing leftist demands for proletarian themes in art, to engage in labor-organizing activism. The one overtly political work in the show, "Artists Against War and Fascism" (1936), a gouache of uniformed officers beating a protester, is formally ingenious and rather pretty. Newness in art held precedence for Davis in all weather, and, like other leftist painters of the time, he adopted the belief that artistic progress is somehow inherently revolutionary.

Davis is best known, and rightly esteemed, for his later, tightly composed, hyperactive, flag-bright pictures, with crisp planes and emphatic lines, loops, and curlicues, often featuring gnomic words ("champion," "pad," "else") and

almost always incorporating his signature as a dashing pictorial element. Their musical rhythms and buttery textures appeal at a glance. If the works had a smell, it would be like that of a factory-fresh car—an echt American aura, from the country's post-Second World War epoch of dazzling manufacture and soaring optimism. But, in this beautifully paced show, hung by the Whitney curator Barbara Haskell, Davis's earlier phases prove most absorbing. They detail stages of a personal ambition in step with large ideals.

Beginning in 1921, collage-like paintings of tobacco packages, light bulbs, and a mouthwash bottle wrestle with Cubism in what amounts to proto-Pop art. Four "Egg Beater" paintings, from 1927 and 1928, memorialize a concerted effort to transcend Cubism, and even to challenge Picasso, with rigorous variations on a tabletop array of household objects. The thirteen months that Davis spent in Paris, starting in 1928, yielded flattened, potently charming cityscapes in toothsome colors. Back home, he fed his semi-abstracting campaign with motifs from summer sojourns in Gloucester, Massachusetts: signs, boat riggings, gas pumps. His sporadic output in the thirties ran to murals. The rioting shapes and hues of the more than fourteen-foot-long "Swing Landscape" (1938), made for a government-funded housing project in Brooklyn, leap beyond the compositional order—contained and balanced—of French predecessors, chiefly Fernand Léger. They jostle outward, anticipating the "all-over" principle that Jackson Pollock realized, with his drip paintings, a decade later.

Davis was born in 1892 in Philadelphia, the first child of artists who had studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. His father, Ed, working as a newspaper illustrator, became involved with the budding Ashcan-school illustrators-turned-painters, led by the charismatic Robert Henri. (A star of that cohort, John Sloan, became an early mentor and lifelong friend of Stuart's.) The family moved to East Orange, New Jersey, in 1901, as Ed bounced between jobs. Stuart, at sixteen, persuaded his parents

to let him quit high school and enroll in Henri's art school, in Manhattan. He also began frequenting bars in Newark and Hoboken, where he commenced his habits as a prodigious drinker and a passionate jazz buff. As he later recalled, "You could hear the blues, or Tin Pan Alley tunes turned into real music, for the cost of a five-cent beer." In 1910, after less than half a year of formal study, he showed realist work, with other members of the Henri circle. Two years later, he was illustrating for the socialist magazine *The Masses*. He had five watercolors in the 1913 Armory Show, which was, he later told a curator at the Museum of Modern Art, "the greatest single influence I have experienced."

Around that time, New York's modernizing art world, small as it was, developed factions. The most sophisticated was that of the group that formed around Alfred Stieglitz's 291 gallery, founded in 1905, which showed the European new masters and emphasized photography. More eclectic was the Whitney Studio Club, established in Greenwich Village in 1918 by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney. Davis gravitated to the latter, which took on painters from the disbanded Henri school and whose most talented member was Edward Hopper. A stipend from Whitney and her director, Juliana Force, rescued Davis from poverty in the nineteen-twenties, and Whitney's purchase of two of his paintings funded his trip to Paris. This history lends special resonance to the new show, at the museum that bears Gertrude Whitney's name. It rhymes with a peculiarly geographical quality—national, even municipal—of Davis's cosmopolitan enterprise.

Willem de Kooning called Davis one of the Three Musketeers of the New York art scene in the thirties, along with the Ukrainian émigré John Graham and the mercurial Armenian Arshile Gorky—men who glamorized the lives of a tiny, impecunious avant-garde that was besieged by philistinism and reaction. A rare figurative painting in the Whitney show, "American Painting," begun in 1932 and not completed until 1954, reflects the jape, working cartooned images

of Davis, Graham, Gorky, and de Kooning into a hectic abstraction inscribed with the Duke Ellington line "It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing."

But Davis's strenuous Americanism incurred limits. One of them registers in the pedantic positivism of his theoretical writings, which impose a strained opposition of the "objective" (good) against the "subjective" (bad), as art's proper orientation. He was fond, to a fault, of the phenomenological idea of "the percept"—the flash point in the mind where perceptions take form, an instant short of full consciousness. The somewhat wearying effect is a forced sunniness, as against the emotional currents in the paintings of Hartley and, certainly, of Hopper. There's no trace of Davis's lived vicissitudes in his work. He was devastated when, in 1932, his first wife, Bessie Chosak, died after a botched abortion. But, within weeks, he was at work on a chipper mural for the men's lounge at Radio City Music Hall: orchestrated virilities of smoking, card playing, motoring, horse racing, sailing, and a barber pole. His anguish may explain his dislike of the title that an adman gave it: "Men Without Women."

In the forties, Davis's drinking reached a crisis level, which sharply reduced his productivity but still had no evident effect on his style. A painting that was key to the evolution of his late period, "The Mellow Pad," begun in 1945, remained upbeat even though it took him six years to complete. Sobriety, following a collapse of his health in 1949, launched him on his prolific last phase, which accounts for more than half of the work in the Whitney show. His joyous art finally became authentic to a life of worldly success and domestic contentment with his second wife, Roselle Springer, and a son, whom they named George Earl, after the jazz musicians George Wettling and Earl Hines. The show concludes with a work left unfinished, festooned with masking-taped guidelines, on the day of Davis's death. The night before, after watching a French film on television, he lettered "FIN" on the canvas, and went to bed. ♦

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ON TELEVISION

## CROWNING GLORY

*The sneaky radicalism of "Call the Midwife."*

BY EMILY NUSSBAUM



THE MOST RECENT season of “Call the Midwife” began with bloody fingertips. Thirteen minutes into the opening episode, a woman in labor groaned in distress, and the nurse-midwife, Patsy, used a gloved hand to check her progress. As Patsy explained that her patient’s baby had “got himself into a bit of a pickle,” two of her fingers hovered in the lower left corner of the screen. They were stop-light red, an alarm set against the scene’s demure cream-and-yellow backdrop.

The image felt like a metonym for the series, which, for five seasons, has waved a flag of provocation against a background of tender, socially conscious, occasionally gooey humanism, an opiate combination that has made it a secret addiction for

many women of my acquaintance. On the surface, the series offers two potent forms of woozy hindsight: nostalgia for postwar London, with its cobblestoned streets full of bicycles, and for the cozy, old-fashioned genre of the medical procedural itself. Yet this soothing cup of tea is spiked with Fireball. Week after week, “Call the Midwife” delves into female reproductive experience with grit and specificity, politicizing matters more often left personal, and vice versa. It treats invisible women—old women, poor women, homely mums—as rich wells of drama. Within its vintage frame, it manages to be both a blazing op-ed for socialized health care and a subdued meditation on the search for meaning by

doubting Christians. Most notably, it’s an unparalleled tearjerker, triggering more sobbing attacks than the first fifteen minutes of “Up.”

Based on a memoir by Jennifer Worth and airing on PBS, “Call the Midwife” focussed, in its early seasons, on a newly trained midwife, Jenny Lee (Jessica Raine), who was living at Nonnatus House, the home of an Anglican religious order, in the late nineteen-fifties. Jenny left after the third season, but her voice lives on, in Vanessa Redgrave’s crackly, soaring narration, as an elderly Jenny, who reminds us, maybe slightly too often, that love is the answer. Without its ingénue, the show widens its lens, becoming truly communal, a portrait of a utopian subworld of aging nuns and single women, boarding together and sharing meals, their lives devoted to easing the conditions of a poverty-ridden London neighborhood called Poplar. For a while, the fabulous Chummy (played by Miranda Hart, whose series, “Miranda,” is also worth seeking out) was the standout; more recently, there has been smart exploration of the inner life of the brittle flirt Trixie (Helen George), now newly sober. But as with any medical procedural, from “Dr. Kildare” to “Grey’s Anatomy,” the focus is on new cases, which arrive each episode, with patients whose struggles often reflect the midwife’s own.

These singular plots cohere into a broader dialectic, as the show traces the shift from midwife-assisted home birth toward modern hospital science, with gains and losses. Pain-relieving gas emerges in Season 2, and in Season 5, set in 1961, the birth-control pill is legalized. More wrenching, babies begin to be born with malformed bodies, poisoned by the experimental drug thalidomide.

The thalidomide plot has been a fascinating turn for “Call the Midwife,” a series that is full of tragedy—from stillbirth to illegal abortion—but which also relies on the implicit reassurance that, in Jenny’s narration, a future exists where even the worst events are gauzy memories. Closure is harder to feel in this case, because it’s a story about progress gone sour. The writers planted the story last season, when Dr. Turner—a local practitioner married to a former nun—began prescribing the drug to treat morning sickness. In that sequence with the bloody fingers, a mother named Rhoda Mullucks

*Childbirth punctuates the show in the way that violence does on other series.*

gives birth to her third child, Susan, who has shrivelled arms and legs, ending in lobster-like hands and feet. The disorder is called phocomelia, but no one knows how to treat it or prevent it—a troublingly relevant story in the age of Zika. Miraculously, Susan lives. And slowly, over the season, it becomes apparent that this birth is part of an ominous pattern, one that quickly overwhelms families with few resources to care for children who are viewed by a frightened public as monsters.

The phocomelic babies are portrayed using clever effects, but “Call the Midwife” is uninterested in clinical details for their own sake—the sort of surgical spectacular that dominates the icier medical-history series “The Knick,” which takes a surgeon’s (and, not coincidentally, a director’s) view of the world. Together, the two shows form a yin-and-yang vision of medicine—and of television, too. Instead, the focus is on capturing, through nuanced performances and simple scripts, a family confronting a frightening reality. Rhoda refuses to institutionalize her daughter, then wrestles with guilt and depression; her husband, defeated, withdraws. The midwives wrestle, too—and the doctor hunts for answers, unaware that he’s a culprit.

In the season’s most wrenching sequence, a baby is born in the local hospital with no arms, no legs, and no genitals. The head nun, Sister Julianne, is present during the delivery, and she hears the doctor say, “Oh, God, another one.” In the antiseptic chaos of the hospital, the nun doesn’t, at first, know where the infant has gone. When she pushes open a door, she finds the child exposed, lying

near a window, cold air pouring in. She cries out in horror and cradles the newborn as it dies, praying for it—a scene of such devastation that it could curdle into bathos. It never does. For all its simple formal outlines, “Call the Midwife” takes tragedy seriously, dwelling in the promise that medicine might treat human suffering as something essentially spiritual, not merely mechanical.

**S**TILL, THE TRUE originality of “Call the Midwife” might be in those repeated scenes of labor, which punctuate the show in the way that violence or sex does on other cable series. Childbirth is “Call the Midwife”’s version of a torture scene on FX, or a torrid three-way on Showtime, or a beheading on HBO. It’s the raw, relentless physical scenario that makes the viewer cringe; but, also, it’s what fans look forward to, because it’s cathartic to see—breaking a taboo, showing you something uncontrolled that you are not ordinarily allowed to observe. This quality is intensified by the remarkable way that these scenes are performed, as arias of physical extremes, with varying positions, and an unusual bluntness about how the female body operates. By now, we all know the shorthand for TV childbirth: a mother with wet, matted hair, “just one more push!,” and out. Not here: in one bravura six-minute sequence, a young wife (played by Celeste Dowdell) has a terrifying solo home birth. We watch her buckle through escalating contractions, then hemorrhage, kneeling and rocking, while a nurse talks her through it by telephone. The expression on her face as she passes through transition—the final crisis before pushing

the baby out—was illuminating: a simulation of a kind of pain that many women have endured but rarely talk about, a portal to a primal experience.

In certain ways, this refusal to evade the funk and mess of female anatomy reminded me of breakthroughs in comedy, like a funny-disgusting bit on “Broad City,” in which Ilana uses “period pants” to distract airport security, or the geriatric-genital jokes of “Getting On.” In the upcoming season of “Orange Is the New Black”—another series with a proprietary blend of crudity and humanism—one episode revolves around the women’s desperate need for sanitary napkins, which the privatized prison has deemed “nonessentials.” These are gross-out scenarios, but they’re also normalizers: what is “hard to watch” on television inevitably depends on who’s watching.

For American viewers, the most shocking thing about “Call the Midwife” may be its portrait of a system in which even the poorest women not only have their births paid for but also get repeated loving home visits afterward, including training in breast-feeding and treatment for postpartum depression. It’s an odd comparison, but the show, in its cultish appeal to a female audience, shares something with “Law & Order: SVU,” another series that provides a soothing vision of a government agency that offers women empathy and aid at their rawest moments. The plots in “Call the Midwife” can seem fable-like. But, beneath its sepia tones and gentle ways, the series is a safe place for dark truths, among them the many ways in which birth can be a terror, something that no one is designed to go through alone. ♦

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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 Will McPhail, must be received by Sunday, June 19th. The finalists in the May 30th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the July 4th issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit [contest.newyorker.com](http://contest.newyorker.com).*

### THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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### THE FINALISTS

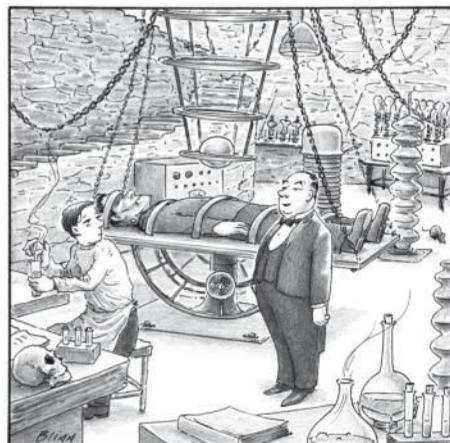


*“Take the picture, damn it, take the picture!”*  
Larry Roberts, Pasadena, Calif.

*“See, right there! You did it again! You're bending your elbow.”*  
Alan Briere, Henderson, Nev.

*“I'm sorry I said you had small hands.”*  
Sue Bloom, Northridge, Calif.

### THE WINNING CAPTION



*“Will the gentleman be alive for dinner, sir?”*  
Herb Keneally, Cherry Hill, N.J.

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