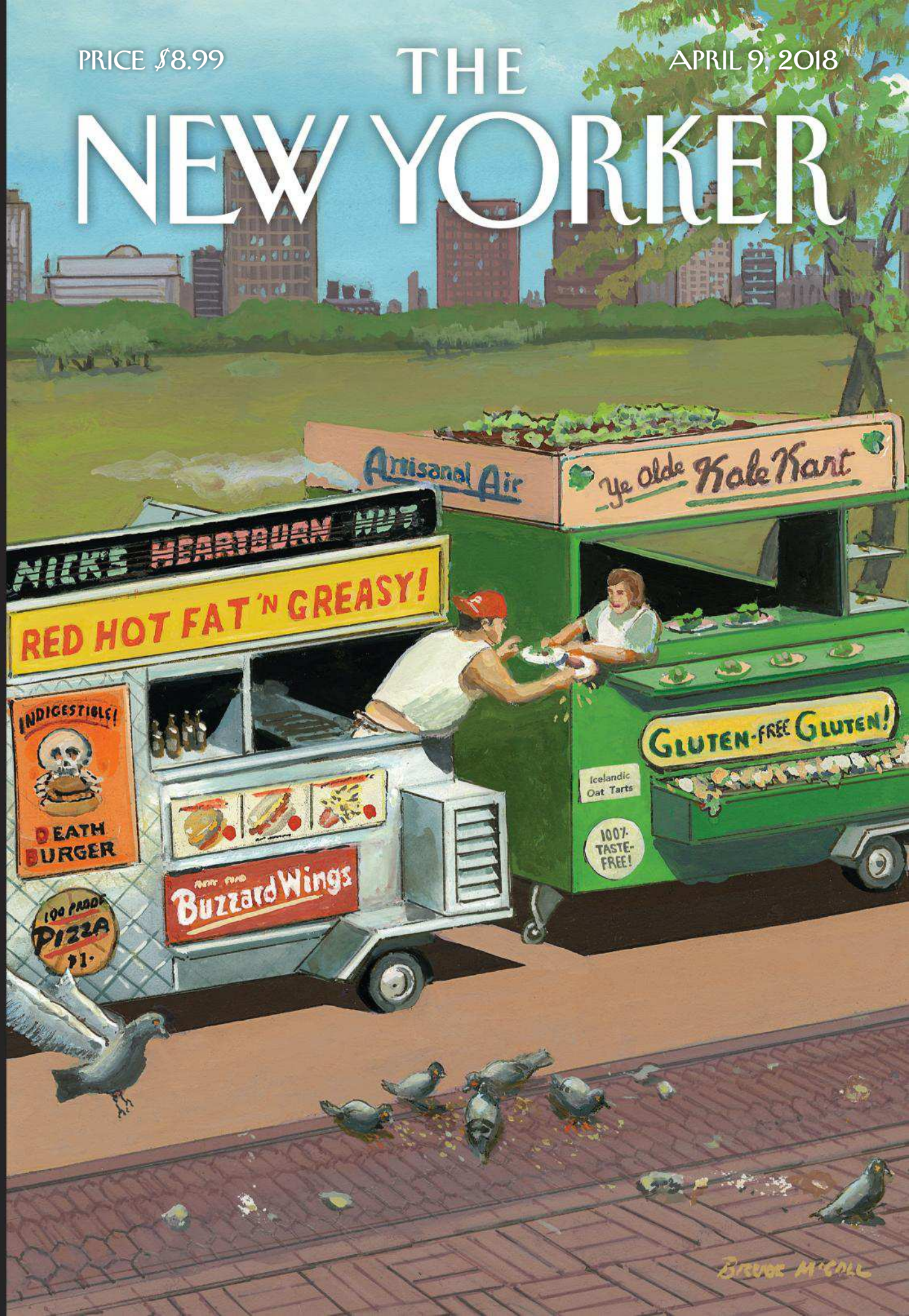


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THE NEW YORKER





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BEN BRANTLEY, *THE NEW YORK TIMES*

**“ANDREW GARFIELD IS MAGNIFICENT,
A MIX OF MORTAL TERROR, A DRAG QUEEN’S
BRAVADO AND PROFOUND CONSCIOUSNESS.
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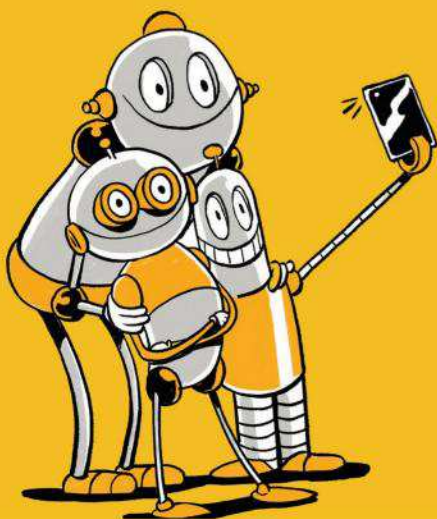
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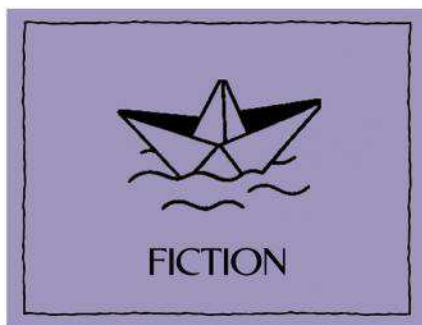
Hilton Als (*The Theatre,* p. 78), *The New Yorker's* theatre critic, won the 2017 Pulitzer Prize for criticism. He teaches writing at Columbia University.

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PODCAST

Mohsin Hamid joins Deborah Treisman to read and discuss *"The Book of Sand,"* by Jorge Luis Borges.



VIDEO

The latest episode of *"Obsessions"* investigates what is so captivating about cats.

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THE MAIL

JERRY BROWN'S LEGACY

Connie Bruck, in her Profile of California's governor, Jerry Brown, portrays him as a moderate in a sea of extremists ("California vs. Trump," March 26th). But, when it comes to oil production, he hasn't taken the middle road. Three-quarters of the oil produced in California is, barrel for barrel, as climate-damaging as Canada's notoriously dirty tar-sands crude, according to my organization's analysis. California is America's third-largest oil-producing state, and regulators there issue thousands of new drilling permits each year. Brown has not done enough to protect the millions of Californians who live, work, and attend school next to toxic drilling operations, and he has refused to ban fracking. Minimizing California's oil problem undercuts Brown's professed climate goals and puts our communities at risk.

Maya Golden-Krasner
Senior Attorney
Center for Biological Diversity
Los Angeles, Calif.

I was pleased that Bruck mentioned Nancy McFadden, Jerry Brown's executive secretary. Sadly, McFadden died just before the piece was published. She served Brown with great skill, having worked with him while she was in college, in the eighties, and again when he was governor. McFadden played an important role in the rise of one of America's most dynamic leaders.

James Rowen
Richmond, Calif.

REMEMBERING CARSON

Jill Lepore's article about Rachel Carson, ending as it does with the implied question "What if?," has been troubling me all day (A Critic at Large, March 26th). Had Carson lived long enough to write the book she contemplated, about the rising seas and the changing climate, might it have been able to reach people's minds and hearts? By the time global warming finally gained widespread attention, twenty-five years on, regulatory successes

had already helped clean up the most dangerous pollutants she wrote about. Gone were the poisoned rivers, and with them the gut-wrenching imagery that sustained widespread outrage. With the benefit of Carson's science and prescience, carbon dioxide might not have slipped through the regulatory shield that spared the living but left the future unprotected.
Stephen K. Hiltner
Princeton, N.J.

We were gratified to see that the Library of America's publication of "Rachel Carson: Silent Spring & Other Writings on the Environment" occasioned a fine piece by Lepore. She laments, however, that the collection, edited by Sandra Steingraber, "includes not one drop of her writing about the sea." Your readers will be glad to know that we share Lepore's high regard for Carson's sea books, and that our plan has always been to issue them in a companion volume.

Brian McCarthy
Associate Publisher
Library of America
New York City

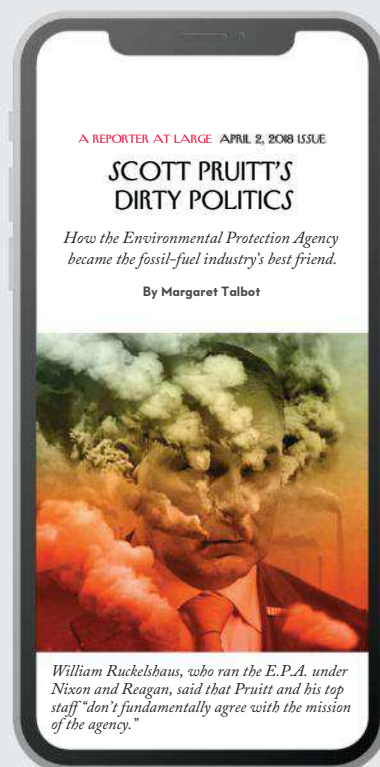
EXPOSING TRUMP

The magazine's coverage of the Trump Administration is deep and insightful, as are the many cartoons about, and caricatures of, this most odious President (Cover, March 26th). That said, the many representations of Trump that appear on your covers—most recently, Barry Blitt's impossible-to-unsee riff on a very naked President—have become wearying. Trump welcomes any attention, satirical or not, that keeps him in the lime-light. Your covers feed his narcissism, preach to the choir, and make us wary of opening the mailbox each week.

Aimee and Michael Link
Columbus, Ohio

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APRIL 4 – 10, 2018

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



The Migratory Bird Treaty Act, passed in 1918, is back in the news. The Trump Administration has proposed rolling back rules that discourage corporations from harming wildlife—for example, a company would no longer be fined for an oil spill. In **“Feathers: Fashion and the Fight for Wildlife,”** opening on April 6, the New-York Historical Society revisits the treaty’s origins, when crusading environmentalists successfully battled to regulate the fashion industry’s craze for plumed accessories, including the early-twentieth-century fan pictured here.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ADAM KREMER

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera

Visually enchanting yet musically thin, Phelim McDermott's new production of "*Così fan tutte*" sets the opera in a carnival-like milieu that evokes Coney Island in the nineteen-fifties, complete with sword swallowers and bearded ladies; he replaces the complicated sexual politics embedded in Mozart and Da Ponte's masterpiece with a mood of cheery and winsome nostalgia. Christopher Maltman, a well-travelled baritone, is a finely sinister Don Alfonso, and Kelli O'Hara, the magnetic Broadway star who takes the role of Despina, makes up for what she lacks in vocal color with abundant comic charm. Among the artists portraying the quartet of young lovers, Serena Malfi, who brings singing of sustained power and seamless elegance to the part of Dorabella, stands out best; David Robertson conducts. *April 4 and April 10 at 7:30 and April 7 at 8.* • **Also playing:** Franco Zeffirelli's crowd-pleasing production of Puccini's "*Turandot*" is back, with a cast that includes Martina Serafin, Marcelo Álvarez, Hei-Kyung Hong, and Alexander Tsymbalyuk; Marco Armiliato. (This is the final performance.) *April 5 at 8.* • At seventy-seven, Plácido Domingo continues to defy conventional wisdom and seemingly time itself as he takes on another Verdi baritone role—his eleventh in nine years—in this season's revival of "*Luisa Miller*," a bucolic tragedy based on Schiller's play "Love and Intrigue." The Met flanks him with two superlative artists, Sonya Yoncheva and Piotr Beczala, in the leading roles; Bertrand de Billy. *April 6 and April 9 at 7:30.* • A revival of Mary Zimmerman's staging of Donizetti's "*Lucia di Lammermoor*" features the skillful coloratura soprano Olga Peretyatko-Mariotti, as Lucia, and Vittorio Grigolo, as the volatile lover who drives her to insanity; Roberto Abbado. *April 7 at 12:30.* (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

Cutting Edge Concerts: "Big Jim & the Small-Time Investors"

As a music critic, the late Eric Salzman righteously resisted the calcification of classical music as a nineteenth-century genre; as a composer, he created work that embodied his belief in the communicative immediacy of the art form as it adapted to modern times. His only opera, a dark meditation on hubris, gets a posthumous stage premiere from the conductor and impresaria Victoria Bond; Justin Griffith Brown directs. *April 9 at 7:30.* (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic

Esa-Pekka Salonen, a vigorous veteran of the podium and of classical composition, conducts a nearly ideal program that combines the strength of tradition with the vitality of youth. The key-stone is Beethoven: not only the Symphony No. 3, "*Eroica*," but another vehement masterpiece, the Third Piano Concerto, featuring the subscription début of one of the most imaginative pianists in Europe, Benjamin Grosvenor. The concerts begin with the world premiere of "*Metacosmos*," a work by the strikingly talented young Icelandic

composer Anna Thorvaldsdóttir; the Saturday-matinee program offers a reprise of the "*Eroica*" along with a chamber piece by Salonen, "Catch and Release." *April 4-5 at 7:30 and April 6 at 8; April 7 at 2.* (David Geffen Hall. 212-875-5656.) • In a co-production of the Philharmonic and the 92nd Street Y, Grosvenor will also appear in an evening of chamber music at the Y with members of the Philharmonic's string section; the repertoire includes Brahms's Piano Quartet No. 1 in G Minor and Schubert's "Trout" Quintet. *April 10 at 7:30.* (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500.)

Clarion Choir: "Missa Papae Marcelli"

Palestrina's Mass, written to honor a Pope who reigned for only twenty-two days, is a masterpiece of the Italian Renaissance and one of the most seminal works in the history of music. Steven Fox's outstanding and stylistically versatile ensemble, joined by a consort of brass, performs it at an evocative venue, the Medieval Sculpture Hall of the Metropolitan Museum. *April 6 at 7.* (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949.)

American Composers Orchestra

At the start of the present season, this ensemble launched its Commission Club, essentially a crowd-funding model for supporting new works. Here, the first beneficiary, the versatile, inquisitive jazz pianist and composer Ethan Iverson, serves as the soloist in his "Concerto to Scale." The program also includes new works by Steve Lehman and Hitomi Oba and local premières by Clarice Assad and T. J. Anderson; George Manahan conducts. *April 6 at 7:30.* (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800.)

Choir of Christ Church Cathedral

After thirty-three years at the helm, Stephen Darlington is stepping down as director of this ancient Oxford choir, known for its outstanding boy choristers and for its liturgical rigor. A program of English devotional music ranging from Taverner to Walton ("The Twelve," which was written for the choir) makes for a fitting New York sendoff. *April 6 at 7:30.* (St. Thomas Church, Fifth Ave. at 53rd St. saintthomaschurch.org.)

Philadelphia Orchestra

The conductor Yannick Nézet-Séguin returns to Carnegie Hall with his orchestra, no fewer than four choirs, and an eclectic program that might be viewed as a trilogy of tributes. The opening work, Bernstein's "Chichester Psalms," honors its composer's centenary. "Philadelphia Voices," the latest of Tod Machover's novel "city symphonies" for live performers and sampled sounds, offers a nod to this storied ensemble's home town. And Mussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition," as arranged by Ravel, bears witness to the orchestra's long-standing tradition of lush, opulent sound. *April 10 at 8.* (212-247-7800.)

RECITALS

Bargemusic: Steven Beck Plays Debussy

The weekend at the floating chamber-music series is largely occupied by Beck, who has taken his place as one of the enduring talents of New York's piano panoply. In two concerts, he marks

the centennial year of the death of the French colossus, whose gently sensual but rigorously fashioned music was as influential on the course of modernism as the music of Schoenberg and Stravinsky. The first, a collaborative effort with the pianist Yalin Chi, features the "Six Épigraphe Antiques," for four hands, and Book I of the "Études," as well as pieces by Rameau, Chopin, and Dukas; Beck goes it alone in the second, which nestles works by Schumann and Franck (the Prelude, Aria, and Finale) among Book II of the "Études" and "L'Isle Joyeuse." *April 6 at 8 and April 7 at 6.* (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. For tickets and full schedule, see bargemusic.org.)

PUBLIQuartet: "Corigliano @ 80"

National Sawdust has been giving John Corigliano, a unique figure who spans the classical and film-music worlds, an extended springtime toast. PUBLIQuartet, a prominent and innovative young group that also likes to cross boundaries, takes the next bow, performing Corigliano's String Quartet No. 1—a longtime staple of American repertory—as well as pieces by two of his best-known protégés, Nico Muhly and Gity Razaz. *April 7 at 7.* (80 N. 6th St., Brooklyn. nationalsawdust.org.)

Miller Theatre: "Music for Fated Lovers"

Its title may recall that of a Frank Sinatra concept album, but this program by the noted Baroque chamber ensemble Les Délices, from Cleveland, concentrates on ancient stories of doomed love. The soprano Clara Rottsolk and the tenor Jason McSoots are featured in cantatas and operatic excerpts by Clérambault ("Léandre et Hérodre") and Rameau, part of a concert that also includes instrumental works by Rebel (the Trio Sonata "L'Immortelle") and Senaillé. *April 7 at 8.* (Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799.)

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center: Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio

For forty years, "KLR" has been a dominant group in the piano-trio class, a field that, due to its niche status in the American chamber-music scene, can only support a tiny collection of elite ensembles. Its New York appearances have been more rare of late; this one, under the Society's banner, finds the group presenting repertory standards by Mendelssohn and Beethoven (the "Archduke" Trio) as well as a recent work by one of its favorite contemporary composers, Ellen Taaffe Zwilich ("Pas de Trois"). *April 8 at 5.* (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788.)

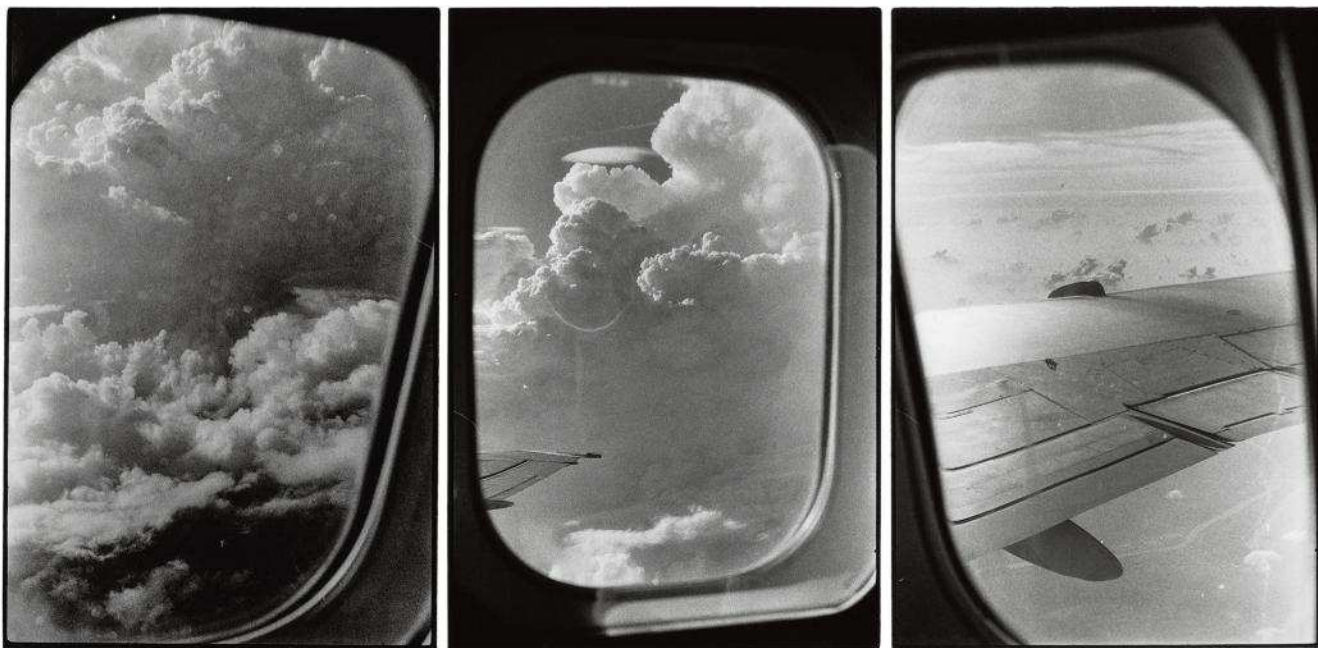
Bruce Levinston

This thoughtful pianist has enriched the instrument's repertoire considerably through the efforts of his organization, Premiere Commission. Here, he mulls issues of personal liberty and national identity in a program that places new pieces by David T. Little and Price Walden—commissioned to honor the opening of the Museum of Mississippi History and of the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum for the state's bicentennial—among sympathetic works by Chopin, Debussy, Janáček, and others. *April 9 at 7:30.* (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800.)

Artemis Quartet

The distinguished German ensemble (which boasts an American member, the violinist Anthea Kreston) comes to Zankel Hall to perform standards by Beethoven, Bartók (the Quartet No. 2), and Schumann (the Quartet in A Minor, Op. 41, No. 1). *April 10 at 7:30.* (212-247-7800.)

ART



Three untitled photographs, taken from airplane windows by Zoe Leonard in 1989, on view in the artist's survey at the Whitney through June 10.

Optic Nerve

Zoe Leonard provides radical, beautiful proof of the overlooked.

The spirit of “pics or it didn’t happen” isn’t unique to the social-media age. In 1900, the French novelist and activist Émile Zola wrote, “You cannot say you have thoroughly seen anything until you have got a photograph of it, revealing a lot of points which otherwise would be unnoticed.” Since the nineteen-eighties, the American artist Zoe Leonard has been offering evidence of the overlooked in strangely beautiful, unpretentiously intimate, and adamantly political work. A nuanced selection of her photographs, punctuated by her rescued-object sculptures and text, is on view in a powerful survey at the Whitney, curated by Bennett Simpson with Rebecca Matalon, of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and calibrated for the Whitney by Elisabeth Sherman.

The show is divided into seven parts, a constellation that includes a hundred-and-four-foot-long collection of vintage postcards of Niagara Falls; color shots of vanishing mom-and-pop shops, printed in the now obsolete dye-transfer

process; and a subversively entertaining archive of photographs of Fae Richards, a black lesbian actress from the nineteen-thirties, which is so lushly convincing you’ll be shocked to learn it’s a fiction. All these pictures are analog. The show’s only brush with the digital is Leonard’s “I Want a President,” a manifesto typewritten in 1992, which recently went viral on Instagram. It begins “I want a dyke for president” (Leonard spent years in the L.G.B.T. activist trenches), and later notes that “a president is always a clown: always a john and never a hooker.” Sound familiar?

Leonard’s survey also has a stealthy part eight. Excerpts from Linda Nochlin’s groundbreaking 1971 essay, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?,” are printed on walls throughout five floors of the museum’s offices, in locations that are visible to the public through glass. It’s an act of radical transparency. The exhibition proper, on the fifth floor, begins more opaquely, with modest untitled black-and-white closeups of rippling water, from 1988. At once banal and mysterious, they convey both surface and depth. Installed nearby is “1961” (titled for the year Leonard was

born), a row of fifty-six battered blue suitcases. The Guggenheim owns it, with the provision that new luggage be added every year she’s alive—a portrait of the artist as a memento mori.

Some of Leonard’s subjects go unnoticed because they’re mundane, the way nature becomes incidental in cities; eight pictures document trees, resilient survivors that have grown enmeshed with the metal fences around them. Other subjects are rendered invisible when society turns a blind eye. The AIDS epidemic in its early years had a profound impact on the artist, a high-school dropout from New York City who moved downtown and discovered her artistic home, just as the devastation was starting. One of her dearest friends, the artist David Wojnarowicz, died from H.I.V.-related causes, in 1992. It was to him that she originally dedicated the coruscating installation “Strange Fruit”—discarded peels of citrus, avocado, and bananas, their bruised skins painstakingly made whole again with sinew, zippers, buttons, and thread, over the course of five years. A work of art. A labor of love.

—Andrea K. Scott

COURTESY THE ARTIST/GALERIE GISELA CAPTAIN, COLOGNE, AND HAUSER & WIRTH

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Metropolitan Museum

"Golden Kingdoms: Luxury Arts in the Ancient Americas"

The sheer wealth on display in this show of pre-Columbian luxury goods is jaw-dropping—you can understand why the conquistadors thought they'd found El Dorado. Organized in a loose chronology, from the oldest group of gold objects discovered in the Americas—a set of glittering hammered-gold septum ornaments from Kuntur Wasi, in the Peruvian Andes—to a 1599 oil painting of a mixed-race Ecuadoran chieftain in a Spanish collar, the show also includes a gilded copper Moche head with spondylus-shell fangs; a white Mayan conch shell incised with a figure drawing highlighted in cinnabar; and nine bright blue-and-yellow wall hangings, preserved underground in ceramic pots for more than a millennium, made from hundreds of thousands of macaw feathers. But the real revelation is aesthetic. From the Peruvian Moche culture's rococo octopuses to a bilateral Cupisnique ceramic that merges two faces, each split down the middle, to a solid-gold Colombian pendant with a detailed face, tiny and grimacing, and a geometrically abstracted body, the pre-contact artists and artisans of what is now Latin America seem to have anticipated every important impulse of later Western art history. Yet a consistency of proportions and materials also maintains a clear family relationship among pieces made thousands of miles and millennia apart. *Through May 28.*

Met Breuer

"Like Life: Sculpture, Color, and the Body"

This is a mind-blowing show, hypercharged with sensation and glutted with instruction. A hundred and twenty-seven almost exclusively European and American renditions of human bodies, from very old to recent and from masterpieces to curios, elaborate the thesis that colored figurative sculpture has been unjustly bastardized ever since the Renaissance canonized a mistake made during its excited revival of antiquity. Great works in the exhibition range from an anonymous German's "Nellingen Crucifix," from 1430-35, and Donatello's "Bust of Niccolò da Uzzano," from the fourteen-thirties, to contemporary sculptures by Jeff Koons ("Michael Jackson and Bubbles," from 1988) and Charles Ray ("Aluminum Girl," completed in 2003). Crowd-pleasing curiosities include the "Auto-Icon of Jeremy Bentham," from 1832. Sitting on a chair, the realistic wax-faced figure, jauntily clothed and sporting a cane, contains the British philosopher's skeleton. To contemplate the displayed works is to fight off regarding them as discursive illustrations—an effect at once scholarly and populist, like that of a TED talk. *Through July 22.*

Museum of Modern Art

"Stephen Shore"

This immersive and staggeringly charming retrospective is devoted to one of the best American photographers of the past half century. Shore has peers—Joel Meyerowitz, Joel Sternfeld, Richard Misrach, and, especially, William Eggleston—in a generation that, in the nineteen-seventies, stormed to eminence with color film, which art photographers had long disdained. His best-known series, "American Surfaces" and "Uncommon Places," are both from the seventies and were mostly made in rugged

Western states. The pictures in these series share a quality of surprise: appearances surely unappreciated if even really noticed by anyone before—in rural Arizona, a phone booth next to a tall cactus, on which a crude sign ("GARAGE") is mounted, and, on a small-city street in Wisconsin, a movie marquee's neon wanly aglow, at twilight. A search for fresh astonishments has kept Shore peripatetic, on productive sojourns in Mexico, Scotland, Italy, Ukraine, and Israel. He has remained a vestigial Romantic, stopping in space and time to frame views that exert a peculiar tug on him. This framing is resolutely formalist: subjects composed laterally, from edge to edge, and in depth. There's never a "background." The most distant element is as considered as the nearest. But only when looking for it are you conscious of Shore's formal discipline, because it is as fluent as a language learned from birth. His best pictures at once arouse feelings and leave us alone to make what we will of them. He delivers truths, whether hard or easy, with something very like mercy. *Through May 28.*

Whitney Museum of American Art

"Nick Mauss: Transmissions"

Mauss refreshes the artist-as-curator tradition in his first solo museum show in the U.S., an engrossing constellation of art and archival materials relating to the overlapping, cross-pollinating worlds of modernist ballet and the avant-garde in New York, in the nineteen-thirties and beyond. Viewers first walk down a corridorlike installation of photographs notable for their pop-Surrealist glamour and homoerotic celebration of the male figure. Taken by George Platt Lynes, who became the official photographer of the New York City Ballet in 1934, these (unofficial) portraits of dancers, frequently en dishabille, were preserved by the sexologist Alfred Kinsey. The suite is a fitting prelude to the exhibition's illumination of alternate, queer artistic lineages. The diverse works on view include such treasures as Mauss's re-creation of a transparent gas-pump-attendant costume, designed by Paul Cadmus for the 1937 ballet "Filling Station"; winsome figures by the Polish-born modernist sculptor Elie Nadelman; a three-fold screen adorned with melodramatic watercolors by the set designer Eugène Berman; and a show-stopping, large-scale slide show of color photographs by the dance critic Carl Van Vechten, who for decades captured the personalities of his milieu with rapturous flamboyance. Daily performances in the gallery, choreographed in collaboration with sixteen dancers, complement Mauss's inspired installation. *Through May 14.*

Museum of Arts and Design

"Camille Hoffman: Pieceable Kingdom"

A painterly collage of brown vinyl and ocean-themed imagery covers the floor of this small show, which is an environmentalist cri de coeur. Starfish and smiling dolphins lend a playful air, while a nonbiodegradable mountain of colorful plastic—shower curtains, disposable tablecloths, shopping bags—threatens to spill out the window, suggesting a landfill. On the walls, semi-abstract landscapes that feel both topographical and expressionistic incorporate more found materials, from shredded medical records to beach-resort ads. The titular work riffs on the Edward Hicks painting "Peaceable Kingdom," of which he made several versions in the early nineteenth century. Hoffman reimagines it as warped, wrinkled, and layered with flotsam and jetsam—in one pointed passage,

a Whole Foods bag and a golf-course calendar threaten to edge Hicks's animals out of the picture. *Through April 8.*

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Anri Sala

The Albanian artist débuts two new works, the latest in his ongoing investigation of sound and vision. In the bombastic installation "The Last Resort," speakers hidden in a false ceiling repeatedly play the Adagio of Mozart's Clarinet Concerto in A Major. Reverberations from these speakers trigger drumsticks to play thirty-eight snare drums, which are affixed to the ceiling. Stronger, if less substantial, is a short video of the French musician Gérard Caussé, playing a soulful adaptation of Igor Stravinsky's "Elegy for Solo Viola" while being careful not to dislodge the snail perched on his bow. A dramatization of the labor, patience, and balancing act required of any good artist (not to mention any decent human being), it's a small masterpiece. *Through April 14. (Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160.)*

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Jay DeFeo

Among the seventy fascinatingly varied works on view in this decades-spanning show is an untitled piece, from 1973, that meets the barest definition of a collage—it's a single rose, cut carefully from a black-and-white photo, floating on a white background. With this breezy, refined gesture, the artist, who worked in the San Francisco Bay area until her death, in 1989, conjures her most famous painting, "The Rose," from 1958-1966, which, as a Sisyphian two-ton grisaille relief, could not be more different. Such was DeFeo's breadth. While this exhibition focusses on her savvy dalliance with Surrealism—her titles refer to works by Dali and Duchamp; in one small painting, a moth shellacked to an egg form evokes a bad dream—it also showcases her unique strain of abstraction. In delicate drawings and commanding earth-tone canvases, she presents fantastic, isolated machine forms, like details of Futurist compositions, in which gears or pistons resemble musculature. *Through April 7. (Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 534 W. 26th St. 212-744-7400.)*

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Milton Resnick

The esteemed American painter, who died in 2004, at the age of eighty-seven, is best known for very big, nearly monochrome canvases with densely textured surfaces. But he spent his last twenty years turning out more than seven thousand vivid, largely figurative works on paper. The generous selection on view—in a gallery directly across the street from Resnick's former home and studio, soon to open as a small museum—ranges from cheerful ("U + Me," in which a naked couple dance under a fried-egg sun) to portentous (a crepuscular untitled portrait of a pink creature emerging from a red mist). The Abstract Expressionist's return to the figure feels less like an ideological about-face than a pragmatic adoption of a new approach to color, exemplified by a striking picture that uses the simple shape of a fallen robin to press a tight bundle of flaming oranges and yellows against a background of muddy green. *Through April 25. (Abreu, 88 Eldridge St. 212-995-1774.)*

THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Carousel

Jack O'Brien directs a revival of the classic Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, starring Joshua Henry, Jessie Mueller, and Renée Fleming. (*Imperial*, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. In previews.)

Children of a Lesser God

Joshua Jackson and Lauren Ridloff play a teacher and a deaf custodian who meet at a school for the deaf, in Kenny Leon's revival of the 1980 romantic drama by Mark Medoff. (*Studio 54*, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-239-6200. In previews.)

Harry Potter and the Cursed Child, Parts One and Two

J. K. Rowling's tale picks up nineteen years after the novels end, in this play by Jack Thorne, staged by John Tiffany in two installments. (*Lyric*, 214 W. 43rd St. 877-250-2929. In previews.)

The Iceman Cometh

Denzel Washington stars in George C. Wolfe's revival of the Eugene O'Neill drama, set in a Greenwich Village saloon populated by dead-end dreamers. (*Jacobs*, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. In previews.)

King Lear

Gregory Dolan directs the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of the tragedy, featuring Sir Antony Sher in the title role. (*BAM Harvey Theatre*, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Opens April 7.)

Mean Girls

This musical version of the teen comedy has songs by Jeff Richmond and Nell Benjamin, direction by Casey Nicholaw, and a book by Tina Fey, who updated her 2004 screenplay. (*August Wilson*, 245 W. 52nd St. 877-250-2929. In previews. Opens April 8.)

The Metromaniacs

Red Bull Theatre stages David Ives's adaptation of the 1738 farce "La Métromanie," by Alexis Piron, in which a Parisian bard falls in love with a poetess in disguise. Michael Kahn directs. (*The Duke on 42nd Street*, 229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010. Previews begin April 10.)

Miss You Like Hell

Daphne Rubin-Vega plays an undocumented immigrant who goes on a road trip with her estranged sixteen-year-old daughter in this new musical by Quiara Alegria Hudes and Erin McKeown, directed by Lear deBessonet. (*Public*, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. In previews. Opens April 10.)

My Fair Lady

Lerner and Loewe's classic 1956 musical returns to Broadway, in a Lincoln Center Theatre revival directed by Bartlett Sher and starring Lauren Ambrose, Harry Hadden-Paton, and Diana Rigg. (*Vivian Beaumont*, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. In previews.)

Saint Joan

Condola Rashad plays Joan of Arc in the George Bernard Shaw drama, revived by Manhattan Theatre Club and directed by Daniel Sullivan. (*Samuel J. Friedman*, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. In previews.)

Summer

Des McAnuff directs a musical based on the life and work of the disco queen Donna Summer, with three actresses—LaChanze, Ariana DeBose, and Storm Lever—sharing the title role. (*Lunt-Fontanne*, 205 W. 46th St. 877-250-2929. In previews.)

This Flat Earth

Lindsey Ferrentino's new play, directed by Rebecca Taichman, follows two thirteen-year-olds in a seaside town that has suddenly become the

focus of national attention. (*Playwrights Horizons*, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. In previews. Opens April 9.)

Transfers

In Lucy Thurber's play, directed by Jackson Gay for MCC, two students from the South Bronx compete for a scholarship at an elite university. (*Lucille Lortel*, 121 Christopher St. 866-811-4111. Previews begin April 5.)

Travesties

The Roundabout imports Patrick Marber's Menier Chocolate Factory revival of the Tom Stoppard comedy, in which an old man recalls his encounters with James Joyce, Lenin, and the artist Tristan Tzara in Zurich in 1917. (*American Airlines Theatre*, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300. In previews.)

NOW PLAYING

Dinner with Georgette

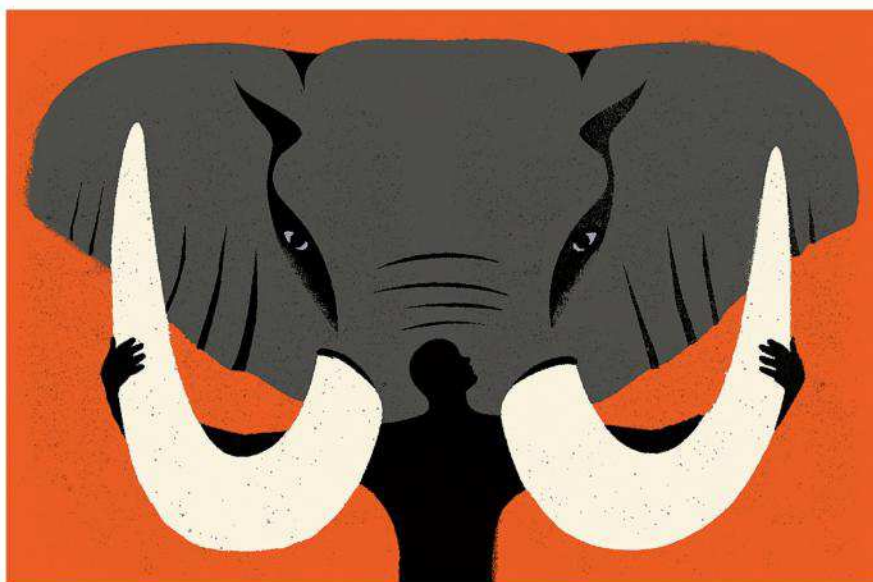
This new play by the author and composer Rick Burkhardt (a co-creator, with Dave Malloy and Alec Duffy, of "Three Pianos") starts like a madcap comedy set on a progressive Vermont campus. Jaker (Kennedy Kanagawa) and Balti (Ben Langhorst) are enjoying gay puppy love, while their friends Elena (Jessie Shelton) and Tricia (Gianna Masi) are a more established couple. The early scenes, full of rapid-fire digressions and direct addresses to the audience, are funny and charmingly tender. Elena agrees to pretend to be Jaker's girlfriend to appease his visiting grandmother. (They are "queering straightness," the theory-mad Tricia rationalizes.) Then the meta rom-com ends and the head-scratching begins, as the insecure Balti finds himself exploring the historical meaning of the closet in Las Vegas, or something. It's hard to tell what Burkhardt is trying to say, and you miss the show's beginning, when even Foucault made sense. (*Fourth Street Theatre*, 83 E. 4th St. 212-460-5475. Through April 7.)

Lobby Hero

Does anyone do awkward earnestness as well as Michael Cera? In Kenneth Lonergan's 2001 play (revived by Second Stage, inaugurating its new Broadway home), he plays Jeff, the night watchman at a Manhattan apartment building. His boss, William (Brian Tyree Henry), is a black man whose brother has been arrested for a horrible crime; Jeff gets sucked into the coverup and must decide whether to lie to two neighborhood cops, a macho sleazebag (Chris Evans) and a mouthy rookie (Bel Powley). In a "Law & Order" episode, Jeff would be the guy with three lines, but Lonergan expands this hapless Rosencrantz's story into a funny, provocative study of how difficult it is to weigh right and wrong. The ending may be too tidy—criminal-justice issues certainly haven't had much resolution since the play was written—but Trip Cullman's fine production, wonderfully acted and staged, doesn't miss a nuance or a laugh. (*Helen Hayes*, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

Pygmalion

A hundred and five years after its premiere, George Bernard Shaw's play remains a triumph, eliciting gasps and guffaws, thanks to this production by the experimental Bedlam company. There are some theatrical twists, including an opening Covent Garden scene performed in the vestibule, among the still-standing audience; some delicious part-doubling in the drawing room of Mrs. Higgins (Edmund Lewis); and, most notable, switching



Lynn Nottage ("Sweat") returns with "Mlima's Tale," at the Public, which follows the story of an elephant trapped in the underground ivory trade; Sahr Ngaujah ("Fela") plays the lead role.

the flower girl's Cockney accent to an Indian one. But it's the intricate, beautifully spoken dialogue that does the trick. As Eliza, Vaishnavi Sharma is magnificent—full of fight, vulnerability, intelligence, and feeling. Eric Tucker, as Henry Higgins (he also directs), is equally fine. For a phonetics expert, Higgins is shockingly tone-deaf when it comes to human interaction, a sexual and intellectual chauvinist of the highest order. But Tucker also shows the damage Higgins inflicts on himself. (*Sheen Center, 18 Bleecker St. 212-925-2812.*)

Rocktopia

The Web site for this amiably grandiose concert event includes a “study guide” to explain deep connections between the canonic classical works and the rock-radio staples mixed together in the show, created by the singing actor Rob Evan and the conductor and arranger Randall Craig Fleischer. Skip the guide. No sense in overthinking something enterprising tunesmiths have known for decades: Chuck Berry can roll alongside Beethoven quite nicely. Some of the improbable fusions in this orchestral pops concert-meets-“American Idol” mashup are subtle and canny, defying cynicism; others feel clumsy and forced. But the singing and playing throughout are proficient and often more. The singer Tony Vincent oozes glam-punk charisma, and the guitarist Tony Bruno projects rock-star assurance. Pat Monahan, the lead vocalist of Train and a featured guest through April 8, proves well suited to Led Zeppelin and Aerosmith, and, more surprisingly, to the climactic bars of Puccini's “Nessun dorma.” (*Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200.*)

The Winter's Tale

Theatre for a New Audience bills its latest production as a “tragicomedy,” appropriate for a play with a split personality. The late-Shakespeare work spends half its time in Sicilia, at a royal court seething with paranoia, accusation, and injustice, and the other half in Bohemia, a rustic land marked by sexuality, fertility, and openness. Speaking to our current social climate, the play also divides along gender lines: the action is driven by the abusive King Leontes (Anatol Yusef) and those who do his bidding; the victimized Queen Hermione (Kelley Curran) and her ladies stand honorably in opposition, speaking brave, eloquent truths. The director, Arin Arbus, struggles to find a satisfying synthesis for the two halves, however. The tragic aspects aren't moving, and, despite the presence of two of the theatre's finest comedians, John Keating and Arnie Burton, the joking is strained. This is the “Winter” of our discontent. (*Polonsky Shakespeare Center, 262 Ashland Pl., Brooklyn. 866-811-4111.*)

ALSO NOTABLE

Admissions Mitzi E. Newhouse. • **Amy and the Orphans** Laura Pels. • **Angels in America** Neil Simon. • **Bobbie Clearly** Black Box, Harold and Miriam Steinberg Center for Theatre. • **Bright Colors and Bold Patterns** SoHo Playhouse. *Through April 9.* • **Dido of Idaho** Ensemble Studio Theatre. *Through April 8.* • **Escape to Margaritaville** Marquis. • **Frozen** St. James. • **Good for Otto** Pershing Square Signature Center. • **Harry Clarke** Minetta Lane Theatre. • **The Low Road** Public. *Through April 8.* • **The Lucky Ones** Connelly. • **Milima's Tale** Public. • **Old Stock: A Refugee Love Story** 59E59. • **The Seafarer** Irish Repertory. • **Three Small Irish Masterpieces** Irish Repertory. • **Three Tall Women** Golden. (Reviewed in this issue.) • **Three Wise Guys** Beckett. • **Yerma** Park Avenue Armory.

TELEVISION



Tyler Jacob Moore, Bill Hader, and Rightor Doyle, in “Barry,” created by Hader and Alec Berg.

Acting Chops

Bill Hader's new show brings suspense to the half-hour comedy.

In “Barry” (HBO), Bill Hader is a hit man who lurches toward believing that he wants to be an actor. The premise might recall something as light as “Grosse Pointe Blank,” with John Cusack as a cutie-pie assassin, and indeed the show does get comedic mileage from juxtaposing the contract-killer life style with the mundane flavor of the straight world. Yet the ambitions of “Barry”—which Hader co-created with Alec Berg—also accommodate deathly seriousness. Hader's rubbery mien summons memories of the dolts, doofuses, and oddballs he played on “Saturday Night Live,” but here he upends expectations, draining some of the warmth and playfulness from his usual manner; there are moments when he can evoke the cold detachment of Alain Delon in “Le Samourai.”

Barry, we learn, is a Marine Corps veteran who served in Afghanistan, later found work as a contract killer, and is now searching again for “purpose”—a word that swells from his mouth often enough to become a theme. This sense of therapeutic mission might be unpalatably gooey were it not for the show's command of tone: its skill at combining earnest quests with wild-goose chases. It isn't above dabbling lightly in psychobabble; at one point, a conversation

between a crime boss from Chechnya and his Bolivian counterpart diverts to talk of “The Four Agreements: A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom,” an Oprah-approved guide to happiness. Initially, silliness balances sentimentality; later in the season, the series turns somber to confront its body count. And when, on assignment, Barry stumbles into an acting class, the show demonstrates its frequent generosity of spirit: it teases Barry's acting classmates but refuses to mock them, while Barry soaks up a special energy from the footlights. There is tenderness in Hader's performance of a wooden wannabe trying to access a constrained imagination, and there is goofiness, too. When Barry performs Alec Baldwin's motivational speech from “Glengarry Glen Ross,” he invests one of its famous lines—“Second prize is a set of steak knives”—with a feeling of amazement, as if he were promising a pony ride to a small child.

Like TBS's “Search Party,” “Barry” expands the possibilities of the half-hour comedy, overhauling its conventions to encompass the nausea of thrillers and the mortal tension of thoughtful suspense. When the class presents a Shakespeare omnibus, lines from “Macbeth” drift in: life is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury. You've heard this speech before, but here it signifies the absurdist vision of a pleasurable fretful show.

—Troy Patterson

NIGHT LIFE

ROCK AND POP

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

Broken Social Scene

This Canadian indie-rock collective emerged from the depths of the Bush Administration in the early aughts—its noisy, utopian anthems worked as a salve for the political malaise that defined its millennial audience. What set the band apart was that its uplifting music felt earned, a winking challenge against apathy. This past year, the group released “Hug of Thunder,” its first album in seven years; while song titles like “Protest Song,” “Stay Happy,” and “Gonna Get Better” may send a few eyes rolling, Broken Social Scene remains full of conviction. (*The Wellmont Theatre, 5 Seymour St., Montclair, N.J. 973-783-9500. April 8.*)

Cro-Mags

By 1981, punk rock had run its course in New York City, succumbing to trappings of vogue that bested its potential for rebellion. One antidote was hardcore, a faster and more militaristic form of the genre that originated concurrently in D.C. and L.A. with the stated aim of out-punking the punks. At the heart of the New York contingent was the former Bad Brains roadie John (Bloodclot) Joseph and his fearsome hardcore group, the Cro-Mags. The band debuted in 1986 with its renowned long-player “The Age of Quarrel,” a mongrel breed of hardcore and thrash metal, which positioned Koch-era lower Manhattan as a dangerous hellscape of violence and hatred. No form of hardcore sounded as cynical and scary; more than thirty years later, the album still packs a punch. (*Knitting Factory, 361 Metropolitan Ave., Brooklyn. knittingfactory.com. April 7.*)

Deli Girls

Deli Girls put on one of the most jaw-dropping noise sets in the city, weaving jagged numbers together with stiff precision. The producer Tommi Kelly takes a knee behind knobby keyboards and guitar pedals spread across the floor, mashing up drum sounds like he’s tending a small garden; the vocalist Danielle Orlowski is all sneering energy, landing somewhere between rap and hardcore with each bark. On Bandcamp, you can click through a self-titled EP or an album, “Evidence”; both projects are dizzying visions of noisy club-punk that feels like the kind of material Kanye West would’ve seized upon back when he was wearing all black. They open for the wiry thrash-rapper **Juiceboxxx**. (*Secret Project Robot, 1186 Broadway, Brooklyn. secretprojectrobot.org. April 7.*)

Mitski

In her review of Weezer’s 2017 album, “Pacific Daydream,” this twenty-seven-year-old Japanese songwriter and guitarist cuts to the chase as well as she does on her records: “How do you keep writing pop songs when you stop having pop-song feelings?” In 2014, on her billowy folk-punk album “Bury Me at Makeout Creek,” Mitski was a soft-spoken mouthpiece for emo upperclassmen everywhere, with lines like “I want a love that falls as fast as a body from the balcony.” She followed it with “Puberty 2” and a proper flagship single, “Your Best Ameri-

can Girl,” about reckoning one’s self-identity in an imbalanced relationship. Mitski supports **Lorde**, another young pop scribe, on a well-earned arena tour. (*Barclays Center, 620 Atlantic Ave., Brooklyn. barclayscenter.com. April 4.*)

Superorganism

Take the name at face value, even if you haven’t heard the band’s sticky single “Something for Your M.I.N.D.” Based mainly in London but with members in Seoul, this eight-piece has earned praise from ear-to-the-ground glossies and performed on the BBC’s long-running show “Later . . . with Jools Holland.” Superorganism specializes in goopy indie pop, the kind of colorful songs that make campus spring weekends. Its members approach songwriting and production like major-label writing teams, but its sound is infused with a youthful guile that shows on tracks like “Everybody Wants to Be Famous” and “The Prawn Song.” (*Music Hall of Williamsburg, 66 N. 6th St., Brooklyn. 718-486-5400. April 5.*)

Yaeji

Last year, this d.j., producer, and vocalist broke out with an EP of house music and a distinctly New York City attitude. Growing up, she was shuttled between Korea and Queens, and she blends the two influences effortlessly in her productions, with the stainless precision of K-pop and the sardonic edge of downtown Manhattan. But her real expertise is in the d.j. booth: the twenty-three-year-old’s dance sets are electric and adventurous, whether she’s playing for swanky crowds at the top of the Standard or at moldy D.I.Y. venues on Brooklyn’s eastern edges. Have a look at the music video for “Raingurl,” where Yaeji bops through a warehouse rave wearing all white and thin-framed glasses; the neon dreamscape might come close to the scene at Elsewhere this week, where she invites a gaggle of friends to host a one-off party that will run well into the A.M. (*599 Johnson Ave., Brooklyn. elsewhere-brooklyn.com. April 7.*)

Chick Corea

Corea’s outsized love for his fellow pianist, composer, and bandleader Thelonious Monk stretches back at least to Corea’s breakthrough, in the late nineteen-sixties; hear his take on the Monk classic “Pannonica” on the deluxe version of Corea’s album “Now He Sings, Now He Sobs.” Joined by the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, Corea will once again go public with his adoration of a primary influence. (*Rose Theatre, Jazz at Lincoln Center, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500. April 5-7.*)

Renee Rosnes

The pianist Rosnes, one of the leading stylists of her generation, has retained core members of her earlier units—the bassist **Peter Washington** and the vibist **Steve Nelson**—while adding significant new ones: the drummer **Lenny White** and the saxophonist **Melissa Aldana**. The potent concentration of the leader’s compositions, as heard on her ambitious “Written in the Rocks” recording, from 2016, insures the group’s integrity. (*Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. 212-255-4037. April 3-8.*)

John Scofield

You never really know what direction this jazz-guitar avatar is headed; a recent venture found him teaming up with the all-star Hudson quartet to reinvent some nineteen-sixties rock classics. Wherever his fancy leads him, it’s certain that Scofield will exhibit the deliciously twisting lines and sweet-meets-nasty tone that are his calling cards. (*Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St. 212-475-8592. April 3-8.*)

Mark Soskin

He may be best known from his tenure with the saxophone titan Sonny Rollins, but the pianist Soskin has had a long and various career that has found him collaborating with celebrated artists ranging from George Russell to John Adams. The drummer **Adam Nussbaum** and the bassist **Doug Weiss** round out his plucky rhythm team. (*Jazz at Kitano, 66 Park Ave., at 38th St. 212-885-7119. April 6.*)

DANCE

Dada Masilo

This South African choreographer has made a name for herself by reinterpreting classic ballets from an African perspective. The first time she visited New York, in 2016, she brought her “Swan Lake,” which mashed up ballet steps, African movements, and various musical sources in an affable, unobtrusive, and anti-homophobic reshaping of the story. Now she returns with her “Giselle.” In Masilo’s version, the deceived heroine doesn’t protect her lover—she gets revenge. (*Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. April 3-8.*)

Jack Ferver

The downtown choreographer—a frequent explorer of queer themes—puts on a show with a little help from his friends. It just so happens that these friends are all talented men working at the highest levels of ballet (James Whiteside, of

American Ballet Theatre), modern dance (Lloyd Knight, of the Martha Graham Dance Company), and Broadway (Garen Scribner). Reid Bartelme, a rising costume designer and former Lar Lubovitch dancer, completes the quintet. There’s some talk, and some dancing. What Ferver’s approach lacks in structure it often makes up for in sly, campy wit. Here, he and his collaborators reflect on their own experiences as queer performers in highly gendered art forms. (*New York Live Arts, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. April 4-7.*)

Dance Theatre of Harlem

Among the most encouraging responses to the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., fifty years ago, was Arthur Mitchell’s decision to found this beloved company. Its recent history has been shaky, but this season is graced by a welcome revival: Geoffrey Holder’s 1974 work “Dougla.” That mixed-race Trinidadian wedding pageant,

with eye-popping costumes and live music, might just bring back some of the old spark. Also on the program: Balanchine's "Valse-Fantaisie," Christopher Wheeldon's "This Bitter Earth," and a new ensemble piece by Darrell Grand Moultrie called "Harlem on My Mind." (*City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. April 4-7.*)

Jane Comfort and Company

Four decades is a mighty long time to keep at work in the hardscrabble world of downtown choreography. This anniversary retrospective draws samples from across the years, some in archival video, some reproduced live. The pieces tend to be theatrical, their rhythmic wit often fresher than their predictable politics. With current company members joined by such illustrious alumni as David Neumann, the program is a big party. Mark Dendy's return for excerpts from his acclaimed performance in "Faith Healing," Comfort's 1993 take on "The Glass Menagerie," is sure to be a highlight. (*Ellen Stewart, 66 E. 4th St. 646-430-5374. April 5-8.*)

New Chamber Ballet

The choreographer Miro Magloire, who trained in musical composition in Germany before turning to dance, tends to use thorny music by twentieth-century composers like Berio and Boulez for his pieces. However, his spring program shows a softer side, with two works set to the music of the much gentler Debussy. Magloire's "Two Friends," set to Debussy's sweeping Violin Sonata, is a female duet fuelled by duelling emotions of friendship and conflict. The company's resident choreographer, Constantine Baecher, has created a new work (also for women), set to Debussy's familiar piano suite "Children's Corner." As always, Magloire's five dancers will be accompanied by live music. (*City Center Studios, 130 W. 56th St. 212-868-4444. April 6-7.*)

Eifman Ballet of St. Petersburg

In Boris Eifman's ballets, emotions are writ large, expressed in angular, physically extreme choreography, and often complemented by feverish dream sequences filled with writhing hyperflexible bodies. (The dancers, it must be said, are extraordinarily committed.) This season, the company brings back its 2005 production of "Anna Karenina," a portrait of a woman crushed under the weight of an oppressive, hypocritical society. Eifman reduces Tolstoy's story to the bare minimum, contrasting Anna and Vronsky's passion—cue the grasping, acrobatic pas de deux—with the pomp of St. Petersburg's moneyed classes. (*David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. April 6-8.*)

"Works & Process" / "Breaking Bread with Balanchine"

George Balanchine was not only a great choreographer but also a bit of a gourmand, known for preparing lavish meals for friends, particularly on Russian Easter. His culinary talents are the subject of the food historian Meryl Rosofsky's series at the Guggenheim. The evening will include insights on Balanchine and his cuisine from the former New York City Ballet star Edward Villella, the N.Y.C.B. doctor William Hamilton, and Jeanne Fuchs, who assisted in the composition of "The Ballet Cook Book," by the former ballerina Tanaquil Le Clercq. Jared Angle, Adrian Danchig-Waring, and other dancers from New York City Ballet will also perform ballet excerpts. (*Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3575. April 8-9.*)

MOVIES



"Weddings and Babies" stars Viveca Lindfors and John Myhers as partners in photography and love.

Work-Life Balance

After "Little Fugitive," Morris Engel traced his struggles as a filmmaker.

The techniques and styles of American independent filmmaking owe much to the work of Morris Engel and Ruth Orkin, which gets a one-day retrospective at Metrograph on April 8, the centenary of Engel's birth (he died in 2005). In 1952, Engel and Orkin, who worked as photographers, co-directed, with their friend Ray Ashley, the vastly influential independent film "Little Fugitive"; they married during the course of its production. Despite its acclaim (the filmmakers received an Oscar nomination for the story, and the film was later cited by François Truffaut as an inspiration for the French New Wave), the couple had trouble finding money for their second film, "Lovers and Lollipops." Engel also struggled to finance the 1958 feature "Weddings and Babies," which he made without Orkin's participation (she had returned to still photography), and which dramatizes the difficulties faced by a couple planning to marry and make independent films. It's a seminal entry in the now-familiar genre of an aspiring filmmaker's first-person story.

For "Weddings and Babies," Engel did his own cinematography using a handheld camera, made to his speci-

cations, that was outfitted to record synchronous sound—a major innovation that he deployed to substantial dramatic ends and that also plays an onscreen role in the story. The title refers to the storefront studio of a commercial photographer named Al (John Myhers), who runs it with his girlfriend, Bea (Viveca Lindfors). They've been together for three years, and Bea, who's about to turn thirty, is impatient to get married. But the thirty-four-year-old Al, who dreams of making films, sinks his bankroll—on which he and Bea could have started a household—into a new movie camera that, he says, will both help his business and launch his career in filmmaking.

Engel's technical and dramatic imagination rises to a frenzied pitch in a wrenching discussion between Bea and Al, in which she voices her frustrations with him and with her own life, and he responds with petulant and juvenile indignation. Lacerating domestic battles such as this one, filmed with the kind of confrontational intimacy that Engel's equipment enabled, would soon be a defining trait of independent filmmaking. Moreover, a pair of tragicomic scenes centered on the fragility of Al's equipment set a template for generations of self-dramatizing filmmakers.

—Richard Brody

NOW PLAYING

Blockers

The simple setup of this teen-centric comedy, directed by Kay Cannon, yields clever and hearty complications. Three suburban girls—friends since first grade, now high-school seniors—make a pact to lose their virginity on prom night; their parents get wind of the scheme and crash the party to thwart it. The confident Julie (Kathryn Newton) has a long-term boyfriend (Graham Phillips), the adventuresome Kayla (Geraldine Viswanathan) chooses a candidate (Miles Robbins) on a whim, and Sam (Gideon Adlon) is attracted to another girl (Ramona Young) but hasn't come out, and goes to the prom with a boy (Jimmy Bellinger). A boatload of parents and guardians get pulled into the action, but the principal trio is Julie's mother (Leslie Mann), Kayla's father (John Cena), and Sam's father (Ike Barinholtz), who bear their own emotional baggage and give the movie its comedic energy. There's plenty of rowdy sexual humor (Cena's athletic-coach character is the butt of much of it) that plays like counterpoint to the girls' exuberant, earnest striving toward maturity. The absurdity of the parents' intervention gets symbolic weight from the deftly destructive physical comedy that they have to endure. With Gary Cole and Gina Gershon, as randy neighbors.—*Richard Brody* (In wide release.)

The Death of Stalin

A scurrilous farce from Armando Iannucci, the creator of "Veep." It is set in 1953, at a pivotal point in the Soviet Union; Stalin (Adrian McLoughlin) dies at his dacha, outside Moscow, and an unseemly tussle to succeed him gets under way. The pretenders range from the cautious but ambitious Khrushchev (Steve Buscemi) to the feebly fumbling Malenkov (Jeffrey Tambor) to, most pitiless of all, Beria (Simon Russell Beale), the head of the N.K.V.D. The movie looks on with scorn as these three, plus the rest of Stalin's inner circle, who have walked for so long in the shadow of fear, jostle for power and try not to make the wrong move. The language is profane, the history inaccurate, and the tone never less than derisive; even the state funeral is an occasion for little more than muttered conspiracy and slapstick. No wonder Iannucci's film has been banned in Russia. Yet the comic outrage seems to fit the madness of the times that he describes, and Beale's Beria, in particular, crawls from the blackness of the humor as a creature of genuine evil.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 3/19/18.) (In wide release.)

Gemini

Heather (Zoë Kravitz) is a movie star living in Los Angeles, and Jill (Lola Kirke) is her personal assistant—a job whose limits are weirdly hard to define. The two women seem almost inseparable; Aaron Katz's film hangs out with them over the course of a night, as they drive around town, have drinks, see friends, and fend off paparazzi. The morning brings a corpse, and the stirrings of a serious mystery, yet Katz is never in a hurry, even as the plot quickens, and the mood remains cool, amused, and wholly resistant to hysteria. Even the detective (John Cho) who investigates the death seems to have time on his hands, though he's not the only one to hunt for clues. Jill, too, becomes something of a sleuth, not unlike the heroines of David Lynch's "Mulholland Drive" (2001). It doesn't much matter that the solution, when it arrives, is fairly unconvincing. What matters is Jill herself, who, in Kirke's composed performance, remains resolutely unglamorous and hard to fathom. With Nelson Franklin, as a film

director who appears to have lost every trace of human warmth.—*A.L.* (4/2/18) (In limited release.)

A Story from Chikamatsu

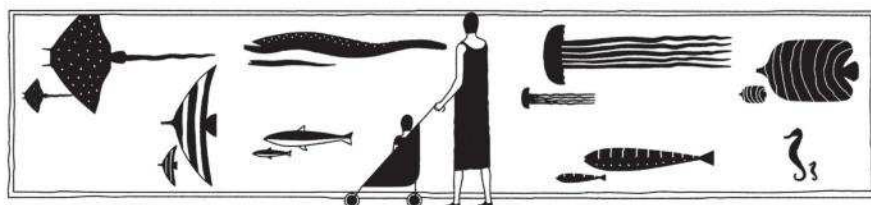
Kenji Mizoguchi's 1954 historical drama, based on an eighteenth-century play, condenses a wide array of injustices—as well as an extraordinary romantic power—into its brisk and wide-ranging action. The story, set in Kyoto, is centered on the scroll-making shop of a wealthy merchant named Ishun (Eitaro Shindo). His much younger wife, O-San (Kyōko Kagawa), was married off to him for his money, but when he refuses her family a loan, a devoted employee named Mohei (Kazuo Hasegawa) forges a letter of credit in Ishun's name—thereby arousing suspicion that he's having an affair with O-San, which is a capital offense punishable by crucifixion. Mizoguchi builds the drama on a grid of underlying pathologies, including Ishun's sexual harassment of a young woman who works for him (Yoko Minamida), the martial cruelty of the financially dependent samurai class, and the repressive moralism of a society that treats women like property. The tale morphs into a hectic, passionate flight for freedom as O-San and Mohei try to save their own lives and, in the process, discover their love for each other; Mizoguchi films their

devotion unto death with a fiercely defiant exaltation. In Japanese.—*R.B.* (Film Forum, April 6-12.)

Unsaney

The latest Steven Soderbergh film follows the misadventures of Sawyer Valentini (Claire Foy), who moved from Boston to escape a stalker named David Strine (Joshua Leonard), and now, in a new city, with a new job at a bank, plans to start afresh. Some hope. A medical appointment during her lunch hour does not go as expected, and she ends up being admitted to a psychiatric hospital. Worse still, Strine is working there as a nurse—or appears to be, from her distorted point of view. The distortion is plain to see; Soderbergh shot the movie on iPhones, largely with wide-angle lenses, and the space around his heroine stretches and curves in line with her terrified beliefs. The question of whether Sawyer's nemesis is locked in her imagination or roaming free in the tangible world is settled fairly early in the film—too soon, perhaps, for fans of paranoid cinema. Foy, often filling the frame and twitching with troubled nerves, gives her all to the unsavory role; she is complemented by the quieter performance of Jay Pharoah, as a fellow-patient who harbors suspicions about the entire facility. He's not wrong. With Amy Irving.—*A.L.* (4/2/18) (In wide release.)

ABOVE & BEYOND



Tartan Day Parade

Last year, the actor Tommy Flanagan, of "Sons of Anarchy" fame, suited up in his kilt and boots to lead a procession through midtown Manhattan for Tartan Day, an annual celebration of Scottish culture and heritage. This year is the twentieth anniversary of the parade; the singer-songwriter KT Tunstall will serve as the first solo female grand marshal in its history. On Saturday, she will lead bagpipe bands, drummers, and dancers up Sixth Ave., from 45th St. to 55th St. (nyctartanweek.org, April 7 at 2.)

Brooklyn Folk Festival

This week, for the tenth year running, folk, blues, bluegrass, ska, and Irish musical traditions are honored in Brooklyn. Thirty bands perform across three days; there are also vocal and instrumental workshops, square dances and swing jams, and an infamous contest in which participants compete to see who can toss a banjo the farthest into the Gowanus Canal. (*St. Ann's Church, 157 Montague St., Brooklyn. 718-875-6960. April 6-8.*)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Photographs abound in Gotham's auction houses this week. There is also a large art fair, "The Photography Show" (April 5-8), presented by the Association of International Photography Art Dealers at

Pier 94, on the West Side. In addition to booths offering works from ninety-six galleries from around the world, there will be a few special exhibits, including one curated by the pop star Elton John, entitled "A Time for Reflection." (*Twelfth Ave. at 55th St. aipad.com.*) • Christie's holds two sales of photographs on April 6, beginning with a private collection of images from the twentieth century. The top lots here are by Robert Frank and Diane Arbus, including a box of ten Arbus prints ranging from the more familiar ("Identical Twins, Roselle, N.J.") to the less known, including a domestic scene showing two relaxed and well-fed nudists hanging out in their living room. (*20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.*) • An auction of photographs at Sotheby's (April 10) from the collection of the beauty specialist Leland Hirsch—dubbed by some in the fashion industry as the Godfather of Hair Color—is unsurprisingly robust in fashion shots (by such luminaries as Ritts, Newton, and Avedon), but also includes a healthy quotient of images by Robert Mapplethorpe, Peter Beard, and others. A larger sale follows. (*York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.*) • Phillips holds a big sale (April 9) of photographic images, including reportage (Robert Capa's famous image of a Spanish Civil War soldier struck by a bullet), fashion (a couple of gobsmacking nudes of Gisele Bündchen, by Irving Penn), and painterly shots (by Evans and Atget). (*450 Park Ave. 212-940-1200.*)

FOOD & DRINK



TABLES FOR TWO

Krolewskie Jadlo

694 Manhattan Ave., Brooklyn
(718-383-8993)

If you're in northern Brooklyn and in the mood for Polish-American comfort food served in an inviting setting, you can do no better than Dziupla (Polish for "tree hollow" or "a car thief's hideaway"), on Bedford Avenue. If you're partial to something more traditional and overtly Slavic, head further north, to Karczma ("country tavern"), in the heart of Little Poland, where waitresses in folk dresses dole out bread bowls of white borscht and reflexively address locals in the language of their forebears. But if you are a true gourmand and enjoy abandoning all caution with respect to food, then put yourself at the mercy of Krolewskie Jadlo ("king's feast"), the sole medievalist eatery in the five boroughs.

All three establishments operate under the aegis of the Nobu-trained restaurateur Krzysztof Drzewiecki, but only Krolewskie Jadlo boasts life-size statues of cuirassed knights. Yet behind the mock solemnity of the décor—rust-stained scimitars, faux-candle chandeliers—is a seriousness of culinary intent. Your first course, whether you want it or not, will be a ramekin of lard, to be dispensed with Polish sourdough bread and salted cucumbers. Of the non-compulsory appetizers, there's beef tartare and goat-cheese pierogies, but the deep-fried "little bags

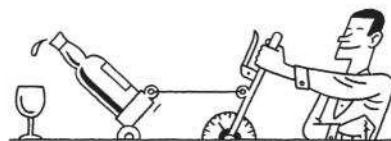
of pheasant" have perhaps the most character. Flavored with rosemary and thyme and rounded off with a tart black-currant sauce, the four accordion-pleated dumplings huddle on a field of lettuce, like portly bannerets parleying before battle.

For the main event, consider the fifty-two-dollar communal *koryto*. The long wooden trough arrives overflowing with enough meat—bacon, kebabs, kielbasa, blood sausage, grilled pork shoulder, and beer-baked hock—to pacify any band of mortals hubristic enough to attempt finishing it. The stuffed quail requires the sacrifice of two whole birds, and a comical quantity of buckwheat. Venison-and-walnut meatballs are wedded with black-truffle oil and foraged porcini mushrooms. Another dish resembles a sushi roll, except—in keeping with the spirit of epicurean derring-do—the filling involves dried plum and bacon, and the wrapping is a cut of wild boar.

Many of the offerings recall Greenpoint long before it was Greenpoint, when Keskachauge huntsmen stalked game on this land, when "free-range" and "organic" were the unexamined norm, not marketing tags aimed at a virtuous counterculture. But then dessert arrives and you snap back to the present, grateful for the Chantilly cream and generous sprinkling of powdered sugar atop your cherry-jam crêpe. Modernity, too, has its charms. (Dishes \$9-\$18.)

—David Kortava

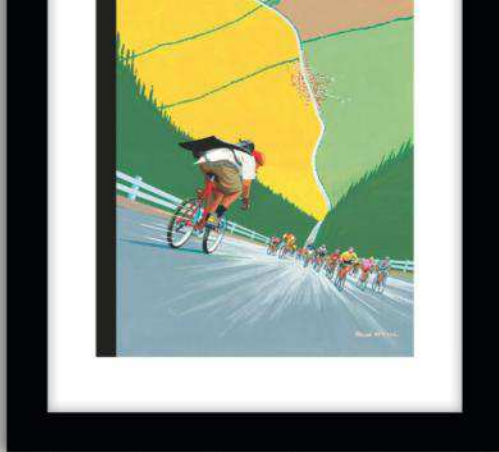
BAR TAB



Banzarbar

End of Freeman's Alley (212-420-0012)

It can be disorienting to slip down the familiar, twinkling alleyway that, since 2004, has led to Freeman's Restaurant, a woodsy-chic standard-bearer for hipness in the aughts (beards, mounted antlers, taxidermy), and be whisked up two flights of unfamiliar stairs, down a dim hallway, through two sets of doors, into a low-lit room filled with oil paintings and trendy young professionals. You feel as though you've played a round of dizzy bat upon being deposited into this twenty-seat jewel-box cocktail lounge, but perhaps it's fitting, given that the bar is inspired by nineteenth-century expeditions to Antarctica—a little wooziness only enhances the sense of sitting in a tiny drinking cabin of, say, the R.R.S. Discovery. Extend the effect by working your way through Banzarbar's list of six spectacular cocktails. The Message in a Bottle, with white miso, passion fruit, sherry, shochu, and rum, is subtle and complex, served with a massive ume plum on the side. For something punchier, try the refreshing Tour Through Khari, made with mezcal, turmeric, and curry leaves. Adventurous sailors once staved off scurvy by eating penguins, but the house specialty on this ship is kraken, the mythological giant octopus. Here the monster (Portuguese, around two pounds) comes whole, tempura-fried, and laid to rest on a bed of patatas bravas and lemon yogurt. On a recent Thursday night, a patron whose startup had just sold for millions of dollars asked about the identity of the handsome gentleman depicted in a portrait overlooking the bar. The bartender paused before admitting that she didn't know. "We think of him as our captain, though." She shrugged. "We just call him John." —Wei Tihou



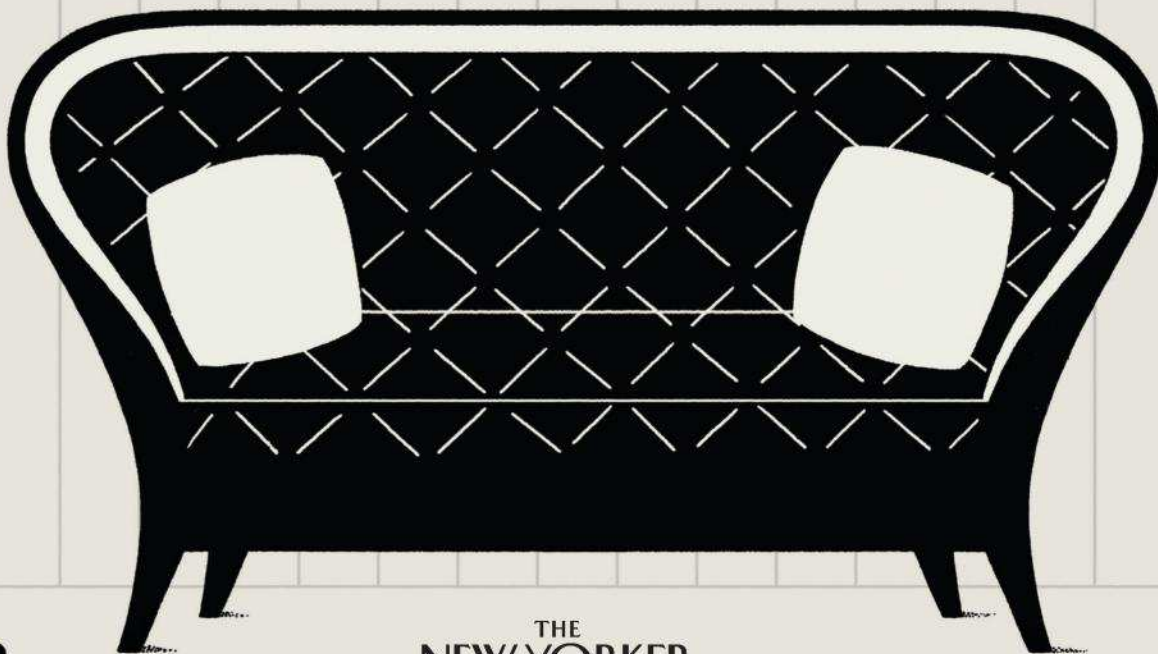
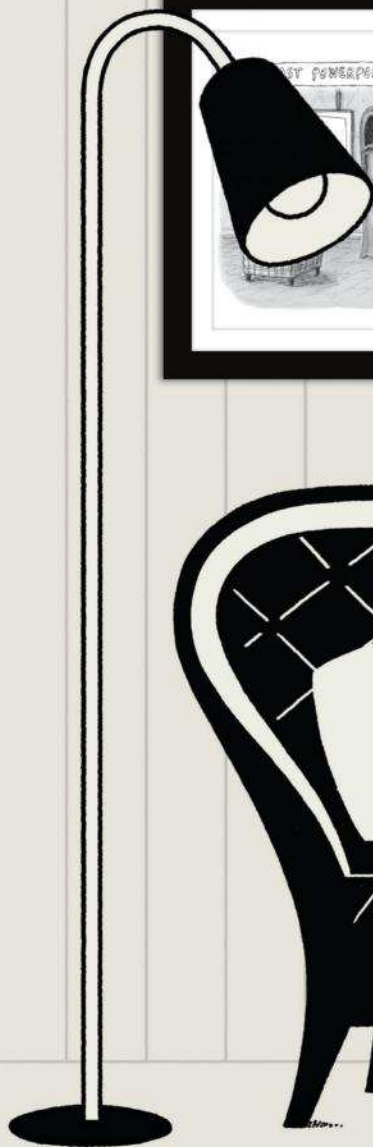
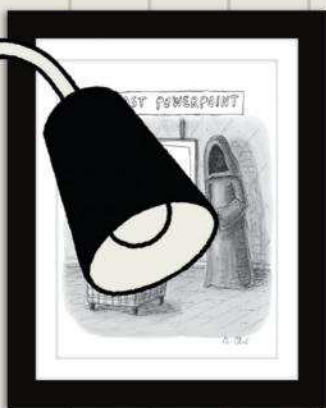
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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT DEATH OF A KING

Occasionally, a particular year transcends its function as a temporal marker to become shorthand for all the tumult that occurred within its parameters. 1968, a leap year, brought the Tet Offensive, the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., the student protests at Columbia University, the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy, the bedlam of the Chicago Democratic Convention, the Black Power salutes at the Olympics, the emergence of George Wallace as an avatar of white-resentment politics, and the triumph of Richard Nixon's Southern strategy. That's a great deal of history, even adjusting for the extra day in February.

We have not, in the past half century, had a year freighted with such emotional and historical heft, in part because we have not seen the convergence of so many defining issues—war, civil rights, populism, political realignment—in so short a timespan. Yet the singularity of 1968 does not diminish its pertinence to our present turmoil. This week, two events in particular are worth considering in tandem: one a cataclysm, the other a tragically predictive attempt to understand how such cataclysms occur.

On February 29, 1968, the bipartisan National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, known as the Kerner Commission, which President Lyndon Johnson had established to examine the causes of the racial riots that had punctuated the four previous American summers, released its report. Five weeks later,

King was shot dead on a balcony of the Lorraine Motel, in Memphis. Devastating riots broke out in several cities. Washington, D.C., where King had spoken four days earlier, exploded: four days of rioting resulted in thirteen deaths, as more than eight hundred fires burned in the city. Smaller conflagrations across the country were too many to number.

The Warren Report, which Johnson also established, in 1963, telescoped the vast implications of the assassination of John F. Kennedy down to the actions of a single individual. The Kerner Report, by contrast, critically rendered the failings of an array of institutions and social forces that had delivered the country to that moment of racial reckoning, beginning in the Colonial era and continuing through the formation of what were then called ghettos. The report stated, bluntly, that “what white Americans have never fully understood—but

what the Negro can never forget—is that white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it.” Notably, the commission delved into questions that might have seemed ancillary at the time but became matters of enduring concern, such as access to health care and the dearth of African-Americans working in the media, a situation that impacted the skewed way in which the riots were covered. But the report is best remembered for its warning that, barring corrective measures, the nation would continue on its path toward becoming “two societies—one black, one white—separate and unequal.”

King's assassination, on April 4th, in Memphis, where he had gone to support a sanitation-workers' strike, and the desolation that followed it, seemed an instant validation of that forecast. In his final speech, delivered the night before he died, King considered his mortality: he knew, he said, that he might not get to the Promised Land. It is often remarked that he seemed to predict his own death, but he was speaking from past experience. When he was a twenty-six-year-old pastor, leading the Montgomery bus boycott, his family's home was firebombed. At twenty-nine, he suffered a near-fatal stabbing in a Harlem department store. Right up to the instant he stepped out, at the age of thirty-nine, onto the balcony in Memphis, he lived under a pall.

The trauma of his death, resonant today even among those who were not yet born when he was alive, has both



mythologized him and obscured the difficulties of his final years. His opposition to the Vietnam War damaged his standing with the Johnson Administration. His campaign for housing and economic redistribution in the North met with ugly resistance. Younger activists criticized him for being more moderate than the times demanded. According to a 1966 Gallup poll, two-thirds of Americans viewed him unfavorably.

King did make a prediction, a year later, in his last book, *“Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?”*, about a backlash against the movement. It would be “nothing new” but, rather, a “surfacing of old prejudices, hostilities and ambivalences that have always been there.” He did not live to see the most fervid stretches of the Wallace campaign, or the success of Nixon’s law-and-order platform, but neither would have surprised him. He understood both the moment he was in and the many moments

that had informed it, as the Kerner Report had chronicled.

Many things that King may never have envisioned—the celebration of his birth as a national holiday, the explosive growth in black political representation, particularly the election of Barack Obama—have come to pass. But King and the authors of the Kerner Report would have recognized the ongoing concerns of poverty, the travails of American cities, and the plague of gun violence. The shooting death of the nation’s foremost proponent of nonviolence helped spur Congress to pass the Gun Control Act of 1968. A more moderate incarnation of the National Rifle Association tolerated a portion of the bill, which curtailed mail-order gun sales, but defeated a proposed national firearms registry. It is either damning irony or inspiring continuity—or, possibly, both—that the fiftieth anniversary of King’s death falls amid the largest anti-

gun-violence mobilization that we have seen since he departed.

The Kerner Commission feared that the United States would become two distinct societies, yet among the most striking aspects of the #NeverAgain movement is its young members’ ability to see a common predicament despite their different backgrounds—to acknowledge what King called the “inescapable web of mutuality.” Speaking at the March for Our Lives, in Washington, D.C., Jaclyn Corin, a student who survived the Parkland shooting, allowed that the incident had received so much attention due to the community’s affluence. “Because of that,” she added, “we share the stage today, and forever, with those who have always stared down the barrel of a gun.” She was then joined by a nine-year-old girl named Yolanda Renee, the granddaughter of Martin Luther King, Jr.

—Jelani Cobb

SOCIAL STUDIES CHAT ROOM



In 1727, when Benjamin Franklin was twenty-one, he and a few friends—among them a scrivener, a joiner, and two cobblers—formed a conversation club called the Junto. They met on Friday evenings at a Philadelphia alehouse. “The rules that I drew up required that every member, in his turn, should produce one or more queries on any point of Morals, Politics, or Natural Philosophy, to be discuss’d by the company,” Franklin wrote in his autobiography. The United States was not yet the United States, but already he sensed a civility problem. His solution: structured, secular chitchat, “conducted in the sincere spirit of inquiry after truth, without fondness for dispute, or desire of victory.”

Those were the days. “I don’t think anyone, anywhere on the political spectrum, thinks our civic discourse is in good shape right now,” Asha Curran said recently, around the time that a sitting President and a former Vice-President were publicly threatening to beat

each other up. Curran is the chief innovation officer at the 92nd Street Y, which is both a building on the Upper East Side and a nonprofit encouraging “American pluralism” and “participation in civic life.” She and her boss, who had recently read Franklin’s autobiography, started discussing discussion clubs. “We asked, ‘What does the modern version of a Junto look like?’” Curran said. It ended up looking like BenFranklinCircles.org, a Web site that offers a few printable conversation prompts and a video trailer. (“The concept is simple: you gather a small group to talk about big ideas.”) There are now about a hundred and fifty Ben Franklin Circles around the country—one at a homeless shelter in Detroit, one at the Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture.

A local citizen, seeking communion within a reasonable commute radius, joined a Circle on the Upper West Side. It was a Wednesday night, not a Friday, but the group continued the tradition of meeting at an alehouse. (Well, a “modern Mediterranean tavern,” with meze and eight-dollar I.P.A.s.) Convening the Circle—which was actually more of a Thin Parallelogram, owing to the restaurant’s long tables—was Klay Williams, of the Bronx, who wore a dark sports coat, an orange T-shirt, and a diamond

stud in each ear. He calls himself a “holistic lifestyle expert specializing in personal and professional development”—half life coach, half makeover consultant.

Each Circle discussion centers on one of Franklin’s thirteen virtues—a list of personal attributes worth striving for, one of Franklin’s many attempts at life coaching. The night’s theme was the second virtue: silence. “Is there any way you could turn the music down just a bit?” Williams asked the manager. A techno remix of Sade’s “Smooth Operator” throbbed in the background—or, really, the foreground. “I was planning to start off with a silent meditation,” Williams said. “But instead I think I’ll spark a discussion around ‘How can you get to a silent place when you’re surrounded by distraction?’”

The participants arrived: a freelance editor in her fifties; an opera singer, a university administrator, and a church fundraiser, all in their forties; a woman who was about to leave management consulting to become a midwife; and Williams’s boyfriend, a middle-school science teacher.

“We’re in a noisy spot, clearly, but just close your eyes quickly and ask yourself what silence means to you,” Williams said.

The administrator began, “I hate to start out negative—”

“Live your best life,” Williams said.

"Well, we're in this moment of #MeToo, where it's all about exercising freedom of speech and exorcising demons, so when I thought of silence it brought up negative connotations."

"I had the opposite thought," the editor said. "I went to introspection, peace, pausing to hear the world around me."

"There's a yin and yang," the opera singer said.

"A what?" the editor said.

"A *yin* and a *yang*," the singer shouted.

The women discussed the #MeToo movement, and the men at the table remained silent. When the manager passed by, Williams asked her, again, to turn down the music. "Already did, sweetie," she said. (Presumably, she had not been briefed on Franklin's seventh virtue, sincerity.)

The group ordered dinner. The consultant, who is Haitian-American, the administrator, who is Chinese-American, and the fund-raiser, who is African-American, debated whether Bruno Mars's music was a form of cultural appropriation. "Let's pivot back to our lived experience," Williams said. "In what ways have you felt silenced?"

"Silent?" the singer asked.

"Si-lenced," Williams said. "E-D."

"What scared me, after the 2016 election, was how many people—silently—supported this dude," the fund-raiser said. "Just, like, 'Yeah, I'm not gonna say a word about it, but I agree with him.' That made me reconsider a lot of things."

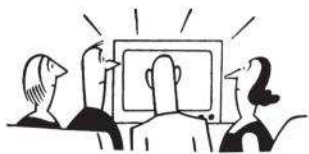
"So true," Williams said. He turned to his boyfriend and asked, "Can you expand on that?"

He couldn't—his mouth was full of Brussels sprouts.

"O.K.," Williams said, laughing. "You have the right to remain silent."

—Andrew Marantz

THE PICTURES TWO SISTERS



What connects Captain America and E. M. Forster? They seem unlikely bedfellows: the shield-toting defender of civilization, who is scared of nothing, and the donnish author of

"Where Angels Fear to Tread." Thanks to the actress Hayley Atwell, however, the link has been smartly forged. Having joined the Marvel Cinematic Universe as Peggy Carter, in "Captain America: The First Avenger" and then in two seasons of ABC's "Agent Carter," Atwell has now leaped back in time, from America in the wake of the Second World War to London in the years preceding the First. That is the setting for "Howards End," Forster's famous novel about culture, property, gaping class distinctions, and the narrative importance of umbrellas.

A four-part dramatization of the book will air on Starz, beginning on April 8th. The hub of the tale is the home of the two Schlegel sisters—parentless, dauntless, and brimming with a taste for experience. "There's a lack of judgment, and a lack of snobbery in them," Atwell said. She was in London, dressed in black and armed with a Forsterian cup of tea. "They're genuinely original thinkers. They don't seem to be mentally imprisoned by the limitations of that time, and they're not aggressive about their lack of opportunities."

She recalled how the director of the series, Hettie Macdonald, came across Schlegel-like figures in photographs from the Edwardian period. "They're blurred, because they're *action* shots," Atwell said. "You see these striding skirts, women smoking cigarettes, heads back, laughing." She plays Margaret, the older sister, who has been a de-facto mother to the younger one, the headlong Helen, played by the Australian actress Philippa Coulthard, and to their brother, Tibby (Alex Lawther). According to Atwell, "Margaret's slightly more realistic, and that's reflected in her ability to manage her emotions."

Those management skills are tested as the world of the Schlegels enters the orbits of two other families—the lowly Basts and the wealthier Wilcox clan, notionally headed by Henry (Matthew Macfadyen), the briskest of businessmen, but actually ruled by his indecipherable wife (Julia Ormond). Margaret is entranced. "She's a proper adult. She finds the differences between her and Mrs. Wilcox fascinating, and something to be explored and embraced," Atwell said, adding, "That, for me, was a wonderful experience—to know that our belief sys-

tems don't have to be rigid. I felt a lot more comfortable in the possibility that I was wrong. If I say something and someone challenges it, I'm very excited."

The same is true of Helen, who visits Howards End, the Wilcoxes' enviable house, deep in the countryside, and finds her modern ideas of progress and equality being torn to bits by Henry, over lunch. Far from being wounded, she relishes the thrill of the dispute. "It was *lovely*," she reports in a letter. Margaret goes fur-



Hayley Atwell

ther still, shockingly so, in bridging the gulf between Henry's male capitalist zeal and the early-model feminism of the Schlegels. She even takes him to a health-food restaurant. Her whole story, in fact, interrogates the norms of now: our proud divisiveness, the allergic reaction to offense. Atwell describes "Howards End" as "antisocial media."

The book was filmed for the cinema in 1992, with Emma Thompson as Margaret and Anthony Hopkins as Henry. Atwell, faced with a difficult scene in which, for once, Margaret's composure dissolves, sought advice. "I spoke to Emma Thompson about it. She has a rule that goes 'Only cry once in a film, for maximum impact. Decide where it's going to be. One weep, maybe two, but you have to be *very* clear about why you're doing it.' When I was younger, I was, like, 'Isn't acting just about how good I am at crying?'"

The TV series has two distinct advantages over the movie. One is the contribution of Kenneth Lonergan, whose screenplay for "Manchester by the Sea" earned him an Academy Award, and who

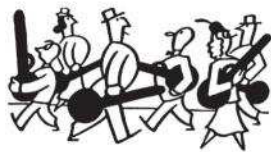
was persuaded to adapt the novel for the new show. “He does write humans well,” Atwell said. “As soon as I heard his name mentioned, it was a slam dunk.”

You can feel the Loneragan touch in the eagerness with which the Schlegels, like many close siblings, talk over one another. “There’s the overlapping, but there’s got to be the energy that comes with it, and the drive, and, unless the actors are on top of it, it’s very hard to keep up with what he’s actually asking of you,” Atwell said. “But, when you hit it, it’s *very* satisfying.”

The second bonus is the long form—four hours of watching in all. “I was changed in the making of this: it slowed me down,” Atwell said. “Even in the times when Margaret’s not speaking, there’s constant thinking going on, there’s a huge rich inner life that’s happening. She wants to be out there. She wants to connect.”

—Anthony Lane

TOOLS OF THE TRADE SPACE COWBOY



For more than three decades, the musician Steve Miller lived on a hilltop in Ketchum, Idaho, on a baronial estate that he built and perfected over the years, including creating a private network of cross-country-skiing trails. In the mid-seventies, he had taken the same obsessive approach to writing the hit songs that paid for the spread—“The Joker,” “Fly Like an Eagle,” and “Take the Money and Run.” This solid-gold period was an anomaly in Miller’s otherwise commercially marginal body of work steeped in Texas blues.

The Ketchum place could easily accommodate Miller’s four hundred and fifty guitars. “I had two humidified rooms,” he said the other day, during a visit to the Metropolitan Museum’s Department of Musical Instruments. “I had a hidden room next to the studio. I’d say, ‘Open, sesame,’ and a door would open, revealing a guitar forest of rare mahoganies and rosewoods. Should a particular song call for a Stratocaster, Miller could choose from no fewer than twenty-

six models custom-built for him by Fender, on the theory, he said, “that one of them is going to be really great.” His guitar addiction wasn’t his fault, exactly. At some point, Miller said, a friend told him, “‘If you sign them, they’re worth ten per cent more.’ That’s like telling a heroin addict, ‘You can do well with this.’”

Miller recalled that one day, around 2010, “I realized I was bored to tears with it”—meaning the Idaho high life. “I was hanging out with people who’d say, ‘We’re having a wine auction!’”

By then, the gangster of love, who is seventy-four, had met Janice Ginsburg, a musicologist from New York, and he was getting to know the city, where he’d never spent much time. The two got married in 2014 and moved into a place on Riverside Drive. The four hundred and fifty guitars did not.

Fortunately, the Met’s Department of Musical Instruments was situated just across Central Park. One day, Miller made a visit to discuss his collection with curators there.

“I’d worked with a lot of luthiers,” he explained. “I felt that was more noble. I was not just a consumer.” Perhaps the greatest of these was James D’Aquisto, of Greenport, Long Island (1935–1995), whom Jayson Dobney, the head curator of the Met’s Department of Musical Instruments, regards as an American Stradivarius. Miller got a private tour of the Met’s instrument collection, which is roughly ten times larger than his own.

“‘Here’s the first piano,’ they told me. You know, the first piano. ‘Want to play it?’ ‘Of course I want to play it!’ O.K., it

sounds terrible. It was the first one.”

“‘Here’s Segovia’s guitar.’ ‘Can I touch it?’ ‘No, absolutely not.’ And then these guys go around the corner, and I was standing there with Segovia’s guitar.” He still regrets not playing it. “Would alarms have gone off?” he wondered.

Miller ended up giving the museum one of his D’Aquisto acoustics, an archtop, first as a loan and then as a gift to the permanent collection. He is now on a visiting committee for the Department of Musical Instruments, which is decidedly more interesting to him than a wine auction.

When he was still getting settled in town, Miller went to Dizzy’s, in Columbus Circle, to hear Wynton Marsalis play. “I hadn’t seen any good jazz in thirty-five years,” he said. His mother, a former singer, and his father, a physician, were jazz and blues aficionados from Milwaukee, where Miller grew up; Les Paul was his godfather. Later, when the family moved to Dallas, T-Bone Walker would play guitar in his parents’ living room. “That kind of luck is just stupid,” Miller said.

After the set at Dizzy’s, Marsalis invited Miller and Ginsburg backstage. “He goes, ‘Steve Miller! I need you to help me with my blues ped-a-gog-y!’”

Marsalis, who runs Jazz at Lincoln Center, arranged for Miller to give a concert and talk centered on T-Bone Walker, demonstrating what Miller called “the way to work your way around the guitar, T-Bone style.” He added, “All jazz comes from blues. Blues first. But jazz guys don’t fuckin’ play blues.” Before long, Miller was invited to be on the board of Jazz at Lincoln Center, too.

“I walked in and said, ‘Jesus, this is a real fuckin’ board. That’s the guy who built the building. That’s the guy who raised the twenty million.’” And now there’s the guy who wrote “Ab-ra-ca-dabra/I wanna reach out and grab ya.”

At the Met, Miller was strumming his former D’Aquisto archtop, now on display in the André Mertens Galleries for Musical Instruments, which recently reopened after a two-year renovation.

As for the rest of Miller’s collection, while he maintains that “it’s time to let someone else play the guitars,” he still has three hundred and fifty of them remaining, in three different locations.

“Want to buy a guitar?”

—John Seabrook



Steve Miller

TIME TRAVEL DEPT.
BAREFOOT

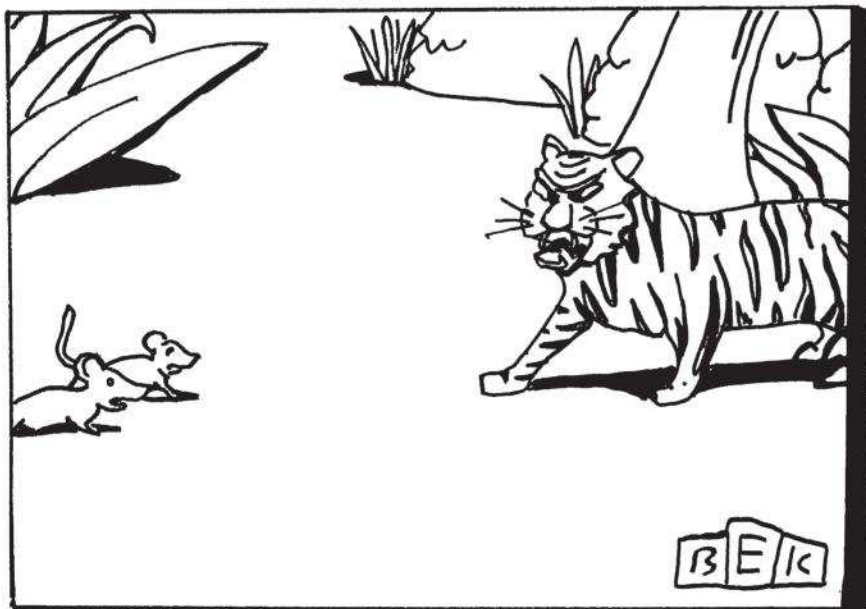


Near the end of “Carousel,” the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, the hero, Billy Bigelow, returns from the afterlife to check up on Julie, his wife, and Louise, the teen-age daughter he never knew. Louise appears on the beach, in a flowing dress, and dances a fifteen-minute ballet. When the show opened on Broadway, in 1945, Louise was played by Bambi Linn, a lissome nineteen-year-old. Linn turns ninety-two this month, and “Carousel” is back on the boards, at the Imperial Theatre. The other day, Linn was up from Pensacola and attended a matinée with her husband, a former ballroom dancer. Petite and zesty, she wore a red knit cap over her close-cropped hair. “I’ve been out of the theatre for so long,” she said, flipping through the *Playbill*. “I don’t know *any* of these people.”

After the show, Linn met the cast backstage. (“You know what’s so wonderful?” she told Renée Fleming, who sings “You’ll Never Walk Alone.” “Everyone enunciates, and I hear Hammerstein.”) Then she trudged, happily, through a snowstorm for an early dinner at Joe Allen. She was joined by Brittany Pollack, the twenty-nine-year-old ballerina playing Louise in the revival. “I thought of you in the audience the whole time,” Pollack told her.

“I was hoping you’d do a couple of jetés, but you didn’t,” Linn said. “I haven’t really seen the show since I was in it. So there were certain things that were not the same, but I came with an open mind. New show, new era!” In 2018, “Carousel” is a tricky prospect, since Billy beats his wife and, as a ghost, slaps Louise on the hand. “I never thought of it as domestic violence,” Linn said. “I never thought of Julie as a put-upon woman. She loved him, so she was willing to accept it. But I come from an era way back.”

Pollack said, “There’s the very famous line where Louise says, ‘Is it possible, Mother, for someone to hit you hard like that—real loud and hard—and not hurt you at all?’ In the original,



“I’m picking up a negative vibe.”

the mother responds, ‘It is possible.’ In our version, she just kind of stays quiet, and we leave the stage together.”

“Don’t you think they’ve gone a little overboard?” Linn said. “I see it all the time in supermarkets, when a kid is acting up and the mother gives ‘em a swat. That’s not cruelty, that’s ‘I care about you.’ See, I’m old-fashioned.”

They both ordered rigatoni. Linn, a Brooklyn native, started taking dance classes at six years old, and went on to study with Agnes de Mille. “She would get us in a circle and say, ‘It’s cold,’ and she’d have us walk around,” she recalled. “Then she’d say, ‘The sun is coming out,’ and so you’d blossom forth.” When Linn was sixteen, de Mille cast her in the chorus of “Oklahoma!” A year into the run, she heard that Rodgers and Hammerstein were adapting the Hungarian play “Liliom,” about a carousel barker. “So I went to the library and said, ‘There’s a role for me—I can play that daughter.’”

“I started when I was three,” Pollack said. (“Oh, you beat me!” Linn cut in.) “I grew up in New Jersey and did tap and jazz.” At seventeen, she got into the New York City Ballet. When her colleague Justin Peck was hired to choreograph “Carousel,” “he kind of brought me along with him.”

Since Louise doesn’t appear until the second act, there’s a lot of downtime. “I could go home in between shows,” Linn

recalled. “Also, across the street, ‘Annie Get Your Gun’ was playing, and I’d go over and watch the first act, with Ethel Merman.”

“I should go next door and watch the first act of ‘Hamilton!’” Pollack said.

“Louise is a free spirit,” Linn continued. “She was caught in a society that did not particularly like girls to be individuals. Do you feel that?”

“Yeah, I do,” Pollack said. “I love the solo at the beginning, because it’s so free. It’s nice to let go of your technique a little bit and just run around like a normal kid. And the whole pas de deux. Do you remember it being such a journey? Your emotions are all over the place.”

“Oh, yes,” Linn said. She recalled her dress: “It was blue, like the ocean. A blue-gray. I didn’t want anyone to think about what I was wearing. I wanted them just to see *me*.”

Pollack said, “Ann Roth is our costume designer. She’s amazing. They wanted a yellow dress, and they wanted a specific length.” Pollack dances barefoot, as did Linn seventy-three years ago. “There’s a line in the script, like, ‘There she is, running on the beach with her shoes off.’”

“That’s because of what I did,” Linn said. “I ran around barefoot, so they had to put that line in.”

“So it’s *your* fault!”

—Michael Schulman

ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

DAUGHTER OF PAKISTAN

Do Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy's documentaries shame her country or reform it?

BY ALEXIS OKEOWO



For Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy, anger is the most useful emotion. Anger was what motivated her to write for newspapers as a teen-ager and to make documentary films as an adult, and it is the reaction she habitually tries to provoke in audiences. Even when she is on camera, she cannot resist interrupting her own narration to register outrage at a particular injustice. Obaid-Chinoy is the best-known documentary filmmaker in Pakistan. Her films, which have won two Oscars and three Emmys, range from reportage on xenophobia in South Africa to an inquiry into the ethics of honor killings in Pakistan. “Anger is necessary for people to go beyond not

liking what they see,” she said. “I need enough people who watch my stuff to be moved, and to be angry, and to do something about it.”

On a recent afternoon in Karachi, where Obaid-Chinoy lives, she visited a girls’ school in Shireen Jinnah Colony, a slum, to talk to students and to show some of her films. A volunteer administrator at the school, Tanvir Khwaja, her head covered with a pink dupatta, welcomed Obaid-Chinoy into a vast auditorium decorated with silver and green stars, where rows of eager girls in lilac-hued hijabs sat whispering. Some were as young as eight, while others were in their last year of sec-

ondary school. Khwaja had warned Obaid-Chinoy that most of the girls came from a “very, very conservative background.”

Obaid-Chinoy, who is thirty-nine, wore a black shalwar kameez; her dark hair, streaked with gray, was pinned back. She is a natural reporter, watchful and carefully expressive, with a heightened impulse to gauge her companion’s mood; she has a habit of smiling quickly to offer reassurance during an uneasy silence. She is also unabashedly confident: at a party in Islamabad, I saw her tell a male guest, within moments of meeting him, that she was an Oscar winner. Soon afterward, she challenged another man, a politician, about his views on China’s business dealings with Pakistan. The politician smiled tightly and congratulated her on having her film about honor killings screened at the Prime Minister’s office. It was a shame, he added, that it showed the country in such a negative light.

Obaid-Chinoy is accustomed to this kind of mixed reaction to her work. Her critics in Pakistan have suggested that her films stoke outrage by confirming the prejudices of Western audiences. Obaid-Chinoy argues that these critics, many of whom are male, are in fact reacting against her own power as a woman, and against the misogyny she is exposing. The position of women in Pakistani society has been disputed since the country was established, in 1947. Muhammad Ali Jinnah’s vision for the republic involved a separation of religion and politics, the equality of all Pakistanis, and the nurturing of an intelligentsia. He spoke out against “the curse of provincialism,” and said in a speech, “It is a crime against humanity that our women are shut up within the four walls of the houses as prisoners.” In the decades since Jinnah’s death, in 1948, those in power, most notably General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, who ruled from 1977 to 1988, have eroded women’s rights, often in efforts to enforce a conservative, Islamic ideology. Although many Pakistani women attend college and pursue careers in the arts, law, and politics, they also face an entrenched patriarchy that dictates their choices when it comes to schooling, work, marriage, and self-presentation. Poor women have

“You have to keep shining a light on things,” Obaid-Chinoy said.

even less freedom. More than half of Pakistani women are illiterate, and many suffer domestic violence. They struggle to have their legal rights upheld, and face accusations of bringing dishonor upon their families if they report a rape or file for a divorce. Through her work, Obaid-Chinoy believes, she is combatting men's power to define women's lives.

Obaid-Chinoy listened as Khwaja introduced her as "the daughter of our country," then walked to a lectern onstage, smiling brightly. "When I turned twenty-one, I made my first film, and I always wanted to move forward the vision of Muhammad Ali Jinnah," she said. "Does anyone here know what he spoke about women?" Shouts came from the audience. "Exactly," she said. "Pakistan cannot progress without women.

"What can a woman do here in Pakistan? Can anyone tell me? Can she be a Prime Minister?" The girls shouted affirmation. "Can she be a doctor? Yes. Can she be a lawyer? Yes. Can she become a politician? Yes. So it means that women can do anything in Pakistan. Yes? Yes. Good. Among you, what do you want to do?"

A girl called out that she wanted to become a doctor.

"You will cure yourself and the others. Very good!" Obaid-Chinoy said. "And what about the others? Everyone here wants to be a doctor? Doesn't anyone want to become a lawyer? Don't you want to go in the business field?" The girls squirmed, giggling.

"Madam," she said, addressing Khwaja. "You have two hundred doctors sitting here."

Obaid-Chinoy's documentaries have tackled difficult issues like child sexual abuse and rape but have also taken as their subjects people who embody social progress—a female doctor who runs addiction clinics, a young advocate for girls' education. The didactic tone of her work is most evident in the programs she has made for Pakistani television. The films for which she is best known outside Pakistan, and for which she received international funding, are more intimate, driven by personal narratives. Occasionally, Obaid-Chinoy has refrained from having these documentaries aired on Pakistani television in order to protect her subjects, who

fear reprisal. In any case, she told me, "we don't have a culture of watching such documentaries here. It's not just my films, it's everyone's."

She is cognizant of what different audiences will sit through, and thinks deeply about the balance between informing viewers and disturbing them. This afternoon, she was aiming for a feeling of uplift—she wanted to make her audience ask, "What are the things girls can achieve?" She played two of her short films for the students, one about a girls' boxing club and the other about an all-female antiterrorism force, the Elite Commandos of Nowshera. The girls were rapt, cheering for the boxers and breaking into applause when the commandos, in hijab and body armor, practiced firing a rocket launcher. Afterward, Obaid-Chinoy told me, "You see how careful I have to be when I go to these things. It's always a fine dance. Some of these girls must be so brainwashed—I didn't want to show them misery. They already see it in their lives."

When Obaid-Chinoy was eleven, she pleaded with her father to allow her to attend Karachi Grammar School, in Saddar, the heart of the city. "No girls in our family go to coed schools," he told her, but eventually she wore him down. She is the eldest of six children, five girls and one boy; her brother is the youngest. "My father was always on the elusive chase for a son," she said. Her parents believed that girls should be educated and permitted to work, but they were also strict. Until Sharmeen left for college, she had to be home by nightfall.

Her maternal grandparents moved from India to Karachi shortly after Partition, inspired by Jinnah's democratic vision. Her father's parents migrated from India to Bangladesh, which was then East Pakistan, in 1947, and then, in 1971, during the Bangladesh Liberation War, fled to Karachi. Her grandfather worked for a shipping company. Sharmeen's father, Sheikh Obaid, began a textile firm, and the family lived in a spacious house in Defence, a wealthy enclave for the elite. Sheikh, who died in 2010, was a loud, warm man with a ribald sense of humor, and he and Sharmeen's mother, Saba, frequently hosted

business guests. Sharmeen and her siblings were accustomed to sitting down to dinners with buyers from Europe, Asia, and North America, and the family accompanied him on trips to the United States. Sharmeen grew up swimming at her parents' sports club and competing in tennis tournaments. On Sundays, if her father was not traveling, the family drove around the city to try new eateries.

One morning, as a driver took Sharmeen to school, they stopped at a traffic light, and a young girl pressed herself against the window, begging for money. "She had the most beautiful eyes, and wispy hair in front and a little bit of dirt on her," Obaid-Chinoy recalled. "Her hand was just stretched. She didn't ever say anything." For the first time, Sharmeen realized that the comforts she had always taken for granted were uncommon in Karachi. "I was sort of an angry child," she told me. "I asked my parents a lot of questions about things I saw around me and things that I read."

At home, she grew increasingly upset about the place of women in society. "I would often hear from my extended family, 'So-and-So couldn't finish her studies and was married off,'" she said. A girl in her neighborhood play group was engaged at sixteen and had a child less than two years later. "I realized that we accept things for women because that's just the way they are," Obaid-Chinoy said. "It made me question what my rights are, and what I will be 'allowed' to do. And that became such a troubled word for me. Why should I be 'allowed' to do something? Shouldn't it just be taken for granted that I would be studying, or going to work?" One afternoon in the family's kitchen, a female relative told Saba that she was unlucky to have so many girls. Obaid-Chinoy retorted that her mother was actually very lucky; her mother quickly removed her from the room. Obaid-Chinoy's classmate and friend Masoomah Hilal recalled, "If anyone messed with us, she would be the first one to stick up for her friends. And she was extremely focussed. If there was something she wanted to do, she would find a way to do it."

Saba, a quiet, intelligent woman, had wanted to be a journalist, but she married at seventeen and stayed home to



"I think we made a lot of progress today."

care for the children. When Sharmeen was fourteen, Saba suggested that she channel her outrage into writing for local newspapers. Saba's uncle, who worked as a journalist at the *News*, encouraged Sharmeen to write opinion pieces about the rights of girls to go to school and of citizens to vote; later, she wrote investigative pieces for the newspaper *Dawn*. Obaid-Chinoy recalled one article about a government office that sold passports to Afghan refugees, and another about students who smoked weed—a taboo subject that shocked the parents. Obaid-Chinoy's most memorable story was about the sons of wealthy feudal lords at schools in Karachi who ran a bullying ring: they went to parties with guns and, if they weren't allowed inside, fired them into the air. They would beat up students, tear their clothes, drive them around for hours, and shave their heads before releasing them. "I went undercover and named and shamed them," Obaid-Chinoy said. The morning the article came out, her father shouted for her to come downstairs. Her family's name, interspersed with profanities, had been spray-painted across their front gate and down the street for blocks, presumably by the boys

she had written about. Obaid-Chinoy was energized. Her father, she recalled, told her, "Amplify that voice. Speak the truth, and I will stand with you."

Students at Obaid-Chinoy's high school often went to college abroad, but her father insisted that she stay in Pakistan. She ended up at Greenwich University, in Karachi. "Boy, did I make the lives of my teachers hell," she said. "I was always challenging them. I just wanted out." Two years later, she applied to Bryn Mawr and Mount Holyoke, among other colleges in the United States, hoping that her father would at least allow her to attend a single-sex school. He still resisted, though, so she went on a "hunger strike." "For forty-eight hours, I pretended not to eat," she recalled. He relented, and Obaid-Chinoy transferred to Smith College, where she majored in economics and government. ("My father called me every single day," she said, laughing.) After graduating, she had planned to work for the United Nations, but her priorities shifted during her senior year, after the 9/11 attacks. "Suddenly, everyone was an expert on Pakistan and Afghanistan," Obaid-Chinoy said. With Westerners newly interested in

Pakistan, she saw an opening. "The idea was to bring stories from there to here," she said.

On a trip to Karachi in 2001, during the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, Obaid-Chinoy noticed Afghan refugee children living on the streets. She felt sure that images of them would make an immediate impression on Western audiences. "I didn't know how to use a camera," she said. But she did know how to use an audio recorder, and on her next trip she conducted interviews, which became part of a proposal for a documentary film. She sent it to eighty organizations, without success. In April, 2002, a few weeks before graduating, she sent an unsolicited pitch to the president of the television production company at the *Times*, William Abrams. He responded within minutes, inviting her to meet. Obaid-Chinoy bought her first suit and went to New York. Ann Derry, who was the head of editorial programming at NYT Television, recalled, "She had no experience as a filmmaker, but she had amazing access, and she was so persuasive."

With funding from the *Times* and from Smith College, Obaid-Chinoy returned to Karachi that summer and put together a production team; her partner was a schoolmate, Mohammad Ali Naqvi, who had taken film classes at the University of Pennsylvania. Derry encouraged Obaid-Chinoy to film a nightly video diary, which they later used to provide narration. "She had an incredible sense of character and compassion," Derry said. (Derry also recalled that the sound in the earliest footage was garbled and the film had to be reshot.) The film, "Terror's Children," about Afghan refugee children scavenging and begging in Karachi, won an Overseas Press Club award.

Between 2002 and 2009, Obaid-Chinoy made a series of films tackling such subjects as the limited freedoms of women in Saudi Arabia, the Taliban's growing influence in Pakistan, the rape and murder of Aboriginal women in Canada, and illegal abortion in the Philippines. These films had the feel of prime-time news reports, animated less by narrative or aesthetic

appeal than by Obaid-Chinoy's charismatic presence onscreen. In "Reinventing the Taliban?," made in 2003, she walks through Peshawar as men stare in curiosity. "I'm probably the only woman around," she announces while exploring a rough neighborhood. At one point, she tries on a burqa—"My God, you can't even breathe in here," she says—and enters a local college, where she criticizes the Taliban before a group of men praising the militants. "Is the whole world wrong when they say that the Taliban regime is repressive?" she asks one man. "They used Islam as a front for their own ideas of what's right and wrong."

For Obaid-Chinoy, the Taliban represented a betrayal of national possibility. "There was a lot of anger during those interviews," she said, referring to her conversations with members and supporters of the Taliban. "It almost felt like I was watching how these people wanted to destroy the Pakistan I grew up in. It was my way to unmask them."

Ed Robbins, who worked with Obaid-Chinoy on "Reinventing the Taliban?," recalled that, on one shoot, an "open truck filled with guys carrying guns went by as she crossed the street, and all of them started shooting their guns in the air." She was fearless, he said. She hadn't told her dad where they were going, and when he eventually found out he sent a security guard to accompany them. "She knows how to be deferential to some of these older men, but yet still be very forceful," Robbins said. "She has an easy laugh and is very charming, so they become intrigued with her. She'll have her hands up and start yelling at some big dude. If someone is being rude or something, she will not hold back."

In the film, Obaid-Chinoy interviews a Taliban supporter named Khurshid Alam.

"The Taliban were good people," Alam says. "Someone just misinformed you about them."

"Maybe they were good people, but what they did to women was wrong," Obaid-Chinoy responds.

"I guess it was a little wrong," Alam concedes.

"Thank God you agree with me," Obaid-Chinoy says.

Alam demurs. "I agreed with you so

that you would not get angry with me, not because I actually agree with you," he says.

Obaid-Chinoy described her presence in her first thirteen films as "accidental," an artifact of the diaristic approach of "Terror's Children." But, she noted, "being emotionally involved was important for my stories. You can tell when I'm upset. You can tell how my voice changes depending on who I'm talking to. It was a quality that I could exploit to get stories from people, because of the connections I formed. I understood the nuances of the language." The first-person format soon revealed its limitations, however. "In the early years, it was the emotions that pushed my journalism, but a lot of time the stories became about me, about what I was experiencing," she said. She began to recognize the value of finding the right characters. "You can have the best story in the world, but if you cannot eloquently convey it you cannot draw people in," she said. "If your smile is infectious—those are the people I like, because I know when people watch them they will be moved by the issues that we are trying to talk about."

One afternoon, Obaid-Chinoy visited an addiction clinic in Peshawar. Although it was situated in an alley off a busy main road, it was a serene place, with intricately tiled floors and an airy courtyard. In an empty office, she set up an audio recorder to interview a former patient of the clinic, a man in his fifties who now worked as a counsellor. Tall and thin, with a kind face, he told her that he had aspired to be a doctor, until, he said, "on the day of my wedding a friend gave me a cigarette with heroin in it." As Obaid-Chinoy gently asked questions, he spoke with growing emotion. Every time his colleagues and relatives sent him to rehab, he relapsed. He got into debt, and ended up living on a riverbank with other addicts, fleeing across the water whenever the police showed up; some of his friends had drowned in the periodic raids, he said. I was writing notes when I noticed Obaid-Chinoy bouncing in her seat, trying to get my attention. She tilted her head toward her subject, her eyes wide, to

direct my gaze: she had got him to cry.

Obaid-Chinoy is adept at coaxing people to share their stories. "When women in Pakistan speak about personal matters like honor killing and rape, it's hard for them, because a lot has to do with family honor," Aleeha Badat, a producer who has worked with Obaid-Chinoy, told me. "They don't even get permission to come and speak on camera, because their families just don't allow it. But she has a way of making you feel safe, and like whatever we're doing is for your benefit." The message Obaid-Chinoy tried to convey, Badat went on, was: "Yes, you've been through a horrific experience, but that doesn't mean your life is over. With your help, we can do something about it and stand up to the men in your life."

"Saving Face," for which Obaid-Chinoy and Daniel Junge, her co-director, won an Oscar in 2012, is the first of her documentaries in which she does not appear onscreen. The film follows Mohammed Jawad, a plastic surgeon who treats women who have been disfigured by acid attacks. (According to Pakistan's human-rights commission, there had been hundreds of such attacks in the previous five years, many of them perpetrated by men against current and former wives and lovers.) The acid-attack victims belong mostly to the lower class, as distant from Obaid-Chinoy's experience as the girl begging at the car window, but she creates an intimacy with them and their families. The rage is still there, however muted. During filming, the husband of one victim maintained that most of the women in the burn unit had inflicted their own injuries. Obaid-Chinoy recalled, "The cameraman was telling me, 'Please breathe, please breathe.'"

Her next major documentary, "A Girl in the River," released in 2015, investigated the case of a young Punjabi woman whose father shot her in the head and then, with her uncle, dumped her in a river, because she had eloped with a man of whom they did not approve. In the previous three years, there had been more than two thousand honor killings in Pakistan, most of which went unpunished. The woman, whose name was Saba, survived, and began telling her story, talking first to

a local news outlet and to the BBC and then to Obaid-Chinoy. “When we got there, she was almost directing us,” Obaid-Chinoy said: “‘You should speak to my mother-in-law. At 6 p.m., my husband is going to come after work. Speak to this doctor—he was my first surgeon.’ She had a lot of strength, and wanted us to get the complete story.” After the attack, Saba’s father and uncle were arrested, and Saba had to decide whether to “forgive” them. (By Pakistani law, honor killings can be absolved if the victim, or her family, forgives the perpetrator.) The film follows Saba as she painfully makes the decision to pardon her relatives, pressured by people all around her: her dad, who is unrepentant; male elders in her neighborhood, who insist that she has violated the norms of the community; her mother, who offers sympathy but will not defy her husband’s judgment.

The film is Obaid-Chinoy’s most visually striking, featuring interview scenes intercut with moody shots of the city. “It’s more sophisticated,” another filmmaker told me. “She let the story tell itself. I think she’s learning that people can hang themselves.” At one point, Obaid-Chinoy interviews Saba’s father through the bars of his jail cell. “Whatever we did, we were obliged to do it,” he says. “Why did she leave home? I labored and earned lawfully to feed her. . . I have my honor and pride. I couldn’t bear that. If you put one drop of piss in a gallon of milk, the whole thing gets destroyed!”

At the end of the film, Saba reconciles with her mother, and we learn that she is pregnant; she hopes to have a daughter. For Western viewers, it’s a gratifying, redemptive ending. The screenings to packed audiences at the United Nations headquarters and the Asia Society in New York were usually followed by discussions about women’s rights in Pakistan; an article in London’s *Independent* said that the film “could help bring an end to honour killings in the country.” Obaid-Chinoy won a second Oscar for the documentary in 2016.

But activist filmmakers open themselves to speculations of whether their art succeeds in creating change—a complex determination, in this case. After

the Oscar nomination, Obaid-Chinoy said, the topic of honor killings became nightly news in Pakistan. The Prime Minister at the time, Nawaz Sharif, said that he would enact a bill that had been proposed a year earlier, to make honor killing punishable by death or by a sentence of more than a decade in prison, with no possibility of forgiveness, and the film was screened at his office. In October of 2016, the bill became law, although critics note that, in the case of capital punishment, the judge can reduce the sentence if the victim or the victim’s family offers forgiveness. “I mean, filmmakers are not magicians,” Obaid-Chinoy conceded. “I thought, Should I be critical of the government because it watered down the bill, or should I applaud them for passing the bill?” In the end, she chose to “cautiously applaud.”

She later gave a talk about the film at Women in the World, an international conference where attendees pay hundreds of dollars to hear speakers on pressing women’s issues. Onstage, she was interviewed by Cynthia McFadden, an NBC News correspondent. Obaid-Chinoy said, “Saba’s singular voice, the fact that she had the courage to speak out, has changed the law for honor killings in Pakistan.” As the crowd applauded warmly, McFadden responded, “I would say two singular voices, wouldn’t you? Saba’s courage—and your courage, in telling this story.”

The honor-killing legislation was one of several laws passed on the issue



at the urging of other prominent Pakistani activists; none of the laws have had much effect on people’s practices. “She’s one of the few Pakistani women who have a say in what is often an entirely white and entirely Western conversation,” Rafia Zakaria, a Pakistani writer, said. “But this trickle-down moral change is never going to happen. So the question becomes, Is your

goal to end honor killings, or to participate in the existing global conversation on honor killings? The problem is, at the ground level you’re not changing cultural and social attitudes.” Saba later told reporters that her family were deeply “disturbed” by “A Girl in the River,” and perceived it as another blow to their honor. Last year, Saba left the country with her husband and children.

In 2016, Obaid-Chinoy, hoping to introduce her films and those of others to people who had never been to a movie theatre, started a mobile rural cinema that travels to remote villages. The screenings drew hundreds, but the audience was not always convinced. To Obaid-Chinoy’s dismay, when she screened “A Girl in the River” male viewers often cheered for Saba’s father. (Sometimes she held separate screenings for women inside trailers.) She often surveyed her audiences to see what they had taken from the film. “You have to keep shining a light on things, even if nobody changes their mind while watching the film,” Obaid-Chinoy said. “There will be somebody who will think twice about what a woman goes through, or about killing a woman.”

Still, her critics argue that she aims to please foreign audiences with stories of Eastern backwardness. Jude Chehab, a Lebanese-American filmmaker, told me that Obaid-Chinoy’s work “primarily showed the evils in the region,” and generally fell in line with U.S. foreign policy. “If she were to make a documentary on, let’s say, the U.S. drone attacks in Pakistan, would she be as celebrated by the West?” Chehab said. “It just feels like she’s sticking to the same images that everyone already has.” “A Girl in the River,” she believed, should have given its audience a deeper cultural context for honor killings, spending more time with the subjects before delving into the actual crime.

Obaid-Chinoy argues that her work is meant for both Pakistani and Western audiences. People in Pakistan often do express their support. On a flight from Karachi to Islamabad, several men stopped Obaid-Chinoy and offered praise, and, at the Karachi airport, an airline attendant recognized her and

waved her through check-in with a smile. Nevertheless, she told me, “we’re a society that brings people down. We don’t celebrate our heroes, we don’t trust the veneer, we throw stones at them.” She mentioned Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani schoolgirl who was shot by extremists for attending school and became the youngest recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, whom some Pakistanis criticize for exposing the country’s worst qualities to foreigners. Obaid-Chinoy saw herself as similarly maligned. “Everything in this country is a conspiracy theory,” she said. “So, Sharmeen is successful? It’s because of a Jewish conspiracy, or an Indian conspiracy, or an American conspiracy. Not because she works hard and actually does things that have an impact.” The people who said that she showed only the negative aspects of Pakistan, she went on, were mostly conservative and religious, or “trolls,” who hadn’t bothered to see her work. “Hiding these issues is not going to make them go away,” she said.

Obaid-Chinoy married the Pakistani executive of a manufacturing company in 2005. They live with their children in Defence, not far from where she grew up. Their house, spacious and decorated with the tasteful minimalism of a boutique hotel, is guarded by security, and staffed by two Filipino women who serve as nanny and housekeeper.

Obaid-Chinoy often travels abroad for film projects and for speaking engagements. When she is in Karachi, she is a reluctant but admired presence in the city’s social scene. One evening last August, we left her house and headed downtown for the opening of a new cultural center. She was dressed, as usual, in a black shalwar kameez, and was carrying a blue pebbled-leather tote. Although Obaid-Chinoy often professes to be indifferent to what others think, she takes pains to avoid controversy: she rarely talks about her husband or her family and seldom appears with them in public, and she normally declines interviews with local media. “Everyone is looking at what I’m wearing, what I’m doing, so that they can say I’m a liberal”—too aligned with looser Western morals and values—she said. “I don’t usually like going out at



“It seems we’ve been accused of hacking.”

night, because when I look at the pictures next morning I look like crap,” she added, laughing.

The gallery was in a tiny second-floor walkup, with green walls, fairy lights, and a view of the city’s congested historical center. Obaid-Chinoy greeted some journalist and architect friends, and told them about the upcoming opening of the National History Museum, whose holdings had recently been curated by the Citizens Archive of Pakistan—an organization that she helped found and that seeks to preserve a national record through oral history, photographs, and newspaper clippings. “For this one, I don’t need to ask the Americans,” she joked.

When Obaid-Chinoy was ready to leave, we got back into her car, a sturdy S.U.V. Her escort stood by with his

pistol drawn as Obaid-Chinoy entered the vehicle, then took up his post in the front seat. She had increased her security in 2015, after a co-founder of the Citizens Archive, the human-rights activist Sabeen Mahmud, was murdered; at least two other female activists have been killed in Karachi in the past five years. “I do not let any of that deter me, but I would be stupid to say that danger does not lurk,” she said. During my visit, a young employee at the museum had called Obaid-Chinoy as she drove to a shoot, and reported that intelligence agents had stopped by the museum. Obaid-Chinoy erupted. “It’s not subversive activities!” she told the employee. “You cannot give information to the intelligence agencies. I know my rights!”

Obaid-Chinoy’s ambition usually

supersedes her worries. Since 2011, she has run SOC Films (the name is taken from her initials), which hires young college graduates to work on creative features and educational films that inform women of their rights where divorce, sexual harassment, property inheritance, and filing police reports are concerned. The company often loses money, but she doesn't mind. "The goal is breaking even and doing projects that challenge everyone," she said.

In 2012, Obaid-Chinoy set out to make the country's first full-length animated film, a superhero movie in which a group of Pakistani kids fight to save their home, the Town of Light, from thugs. She hoped the film would provide children with new, non-Western role models. "Nobody wanted to give me money," she said. She had to make most of the film, paying for it herself, before investors would commit funds. The film, called "Three Brave Ones," came out in 2015 and was a commercial success in Pakistan; a sequel was released the following year. Obaid-Chinoy now directs an animation studio, the first one in the country to be run by a woman. Her lead producer, Kamran Khan, who is in his thirties and wears graphic T-shirts, said that former colleagues discouraged him from working there, complaining about the villainous men in Obaid-Chinoy's films and claiming that she didn't even live in the country. "I've never seen a woman like her in Pakistan," he said. "I don't know when she sleeps." This year, HBO Films will release a documentary, co-directed by Obaid-Chinoy, on the financial exploitation of college athletes, which she describes as "the dream of college education and college sports, and the reality."

A few of Obaid-Chinoy's friends wonder if she will eventually run for office. "She now sees herself as having the back of all women in Pakistan," Masoomah Hilal told me. During my visit, a female member of Parliament, Ayesha Gulalai, accused the Pakistani politician and former professional cricketer Imran Khan of sexual harassment. (He has denied the claim.) Public opinion was virulently against her; she was called a liar and a gold digger. Obaid-Chinoy seemed to take the affair personally. "The benefit of the doubt in

this country is always given to a man," she said.

The Pakistani novelist Mohammed Hanif has agreed that criticism of Obaid-Chinoy reflects the patriarchal outlook that permeates Pakistani society. "Even in these educated circles, men, at best, are patronizing about women," he said. "Sharmeen's work should be available in Pakistan for a wider audience, and then we can have a debate about the merits of her work. Here people are quick to judge her as a panderer without actually watching her work, out of misplaced ideas of nationalism and national honor. Otherwise, it's just like saying, 'Sharmeen is so ambitious.' Well, show me a filmmaker who isn't."

On the afternoon that Obaid-Chinoy visited the addiction clinic in Peshawar, she joined Parveen Azam Khan, the doctor who opened the center, in 1993, as she travelled to another clinic. Today, she runs several facilities that provide free treatment. Khan, who is seventy-nine, has an elegant bearing and an assured manner of speaking that suggests that she is unaccustomed to being interrupted. Obaid-Chinoy was interviewing her for a book project on "grassroots heroes"; she had profiled Khan before, for a series on community leaders that she made for Pakistani TV. SOC describes one of these projects—the six-part "Ho Yaqeen," or "To Have Faith"—as an attempt to tell "the stories of individuals who have spearheaded efforts for a brighter Pakistan."

In the interview with Khan, Obaid-Chinoy needed to elicit a scene that would personalize the issue of drug addiction. According to the United Nations, Pakistan has among the highest rates of heroin addiction in the world. But people often remain silent about drug use, even when it affects family and friends. This afternoon, Obaid-Chinoy had something particular in mind. She told me that Khan's two sons had both died mysteriously at the age of twenty-nine, ten years apart.

"Dr. Parveen," Obaid-Chinoy said. "You've been doing this for a very long time. Is there anything in any of the clinics, any story, that has a very dra-

matic arc to it? You know, there was some addiction, recovery, and some sort of resolution."

Khan was evasive. Many people came through the clinic, she said, and while it was hard to keep track of all the patients, it had been rewarding to help them. Obaid-Chinoy urged her to be more specific. "Out of all the children . . ." Khan said, and thought for a moment. "Their stories are all very touching and very motivating. I can't think of any special one."

Obaid-Chinoy reminded her of a boy, abandoned by his family because he was H.I.V.-positive, who left the clinic and became a drug dealer.

"Oh, yes," Khan said. "We tried to bring him back into treatment, but he refused. He said, 'I have no life, anyhow, so, this way, I feel very important, and I'm looking after myself.' We're still working on him." She returned to broader concerns. "Eighty per cent of the global opiates come from Afghanistan, and it's a very porous border," she said. "We just can't seem to stop it."

"I completely understand the geopolitics," Obaid-Chinoy said. "But as somebody who has devoted her life to rehabilitating anyone who has been affected by drugs—this boy came in, he spent time, you tried to reconcile him with his family. Not only did he go back on the streets but he became a drug dealer. How does that make you feel? Does that make you feel a little hopeless?"

"The fact that he was H.I.V.-positive made things more complicated," Khan said, in the tone of a clinician consulting her notes. "But, again, we have so many like this."

The car turned onto a street densely edged with trees. In the dappled light, Khan suddenly began to talk about her sons. They were "handsome, brilliant," she said softly. "My sons had everything in life—they had the best of education." She was silent for a moment. "You can't dwell on it, because it's too painful. This work is the only way I can deal with life."

As we neared the clinic, another question occurred to Obaid-Chinoy. "Do you think that, while you're saving people, they're also saving you?" she asked.

"You're so right," Khan said. ♦



HEADLINES YOU MAY HAVE MISSED

BY BOB ODENKIRK

So much has happened since Donald Trump took office that we've all started skipping over news stories that aren't about him and his antics. In the spirit of public enlightenment, here are some of the headlines—international, national, local, and extremely local—that you have likely overlooked.

“GRAND CANYON GONE”

The Grand Canyon collapsed and is no longer a canyon. It was some kind of earthquake-windstorm combination that caused the canyon's sides to crumble and collapse in a great avalanche of rocks and dust. What's left is a slight downward slope that stretches for miles and then rises again, almost imperceptibly. Three hundred and ninety-two people lost their lives. You are familiar with at least ten of them. Two were your cousins, and they had texted you pictures of themselves standing on the rim, waving.

“ALL OUT OF FISH”

Three weeks from now, the world's final piece of high-grade sushi will be consumed; after that, there will be only farm-raised catfish. Regular alerts have been issued, warning against overfishing and poisoning the ocean with poison, and

this is a situation that clearly could have been avoided, but... enjoy your farm-raised-catfish sushi.

“GRANDDAUGHTER BORN”

Your first granddaughter was born three months ago. At four pounds two ounces, she was small, but she showed her strength fairly quickly, and is now doing well. This happened on a Presidential-tweet-storm day, so you were preoccupied. The baby has been home for ten weeks. Her name is either Eileen or Ellen. You should visit her.

“NEIGHBOR SLAIN”

Your elderly neighbor was murdered right in front of you in broad daylight. You were cleaning the gutters while wearing a pair of Bluetooth headphones that were tuned to the BBC, listening to measured condemnations of United States policy from dignified European politicians. Meanwhile, about thirty feet away, a man wearing a hockey mask used a machete to mince old Mrs. Samuelson to bits as she returned from the store with a bag of parakeet treats. She screamed at the top of her lungs, but no one—including you—heard her. The police knocked on your door to ask if you'd seen anything, but you were inside with the TV on at top

volume, shaking your head, so they moved on to the next house.

“PHANTOM SUPER BOWL”

The Super Bowl happened again. You missed it. Seriously, you missed a Super Bowl. Think about that. The Chicago Bears miraculously beat the New England Patriots, 76–3. The halftime show was a supergroup of holograms: Jimi Hendrix, Kurt Cobain, and Tiny Tim. You missed all of it.

“CAR TROUBLE”

Your car has been making a *scree-scree-scree* noise for the past three months, and there's a scent of shaved metal wafting through the vents, but you are usually too engrossed in conservative talk radio to notice. The smell has to do with your brake pads. Doesn't matter—just keep driving and ranting at the dashboard, and soon this problem, and all your problems, will end.

“SPRINGSTEEN MISSING”

Bruce Springsteen is missing. He left his compound in New Jersey to buy some tube socks, and security-camera footage indicates that he got lost in a Costco. It had been more than three decades since he'd been in a store of any kind, and, wanting to avoid a scene, he wore a baseball cap pulled low and a high-collared jacket. He's been gone for weeks now, and shoppers are being asked to keep an eye out for him. He looks like Bruce Springsteen, but with a salt-and-pepper beard.

“METEOR HEADED FOR EARTH”

A giant meteor, once thought to be headed toward Earth's atmosphere, has now shown itself to be headed straight for your house. It's picking up speed. This would have been international news during any other Administration, but it has so far been covered only in the back of the Science section of the *Times*. But you haven't got past the Op-Ed page in months, have you?

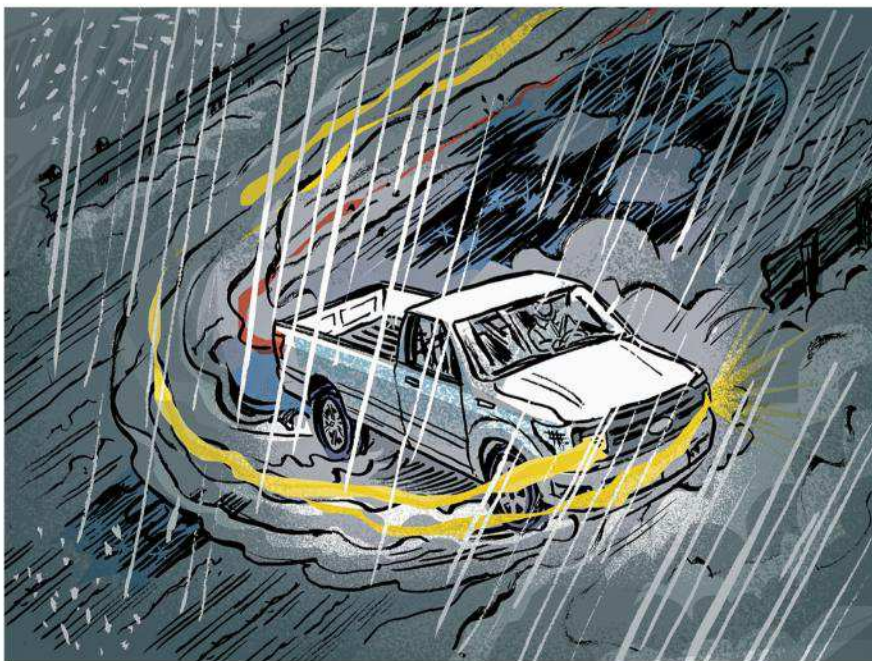
“CLOCK TICKING”

In personal news, your medical tests came back positive—the doctor gives you six months without treatment. It's time to turn off the TV, put down the newspaper, and open your mail. Then again, the test results came back five months ago. It's already too late. ♦

SIX SKITTLES

The danger of black ice.

BY JOHN SEABROOK

*On a highway, black ice is made lethal by the addition of speed and surprise.*

I placed the last of the presents on the passenger's seat of the truck and climbed in behind the wheel. Rose, my nine-year-old daughter, still p.j.'d and warm from bed, was bundled up on the right-hand side of the back seat, iPad in hand, nudging Foxy the dog over toward the middle. Luggage I'd ordinarily put in the bed of the pickup was inside the cab instead, because freezing rain was forecast for New England.

My wife, Lisa, came out to help Rose with her seat belt. I gave her a quick, gotta-go kiss through the driver's-side window—she was planning to head up with our son, Harry, later that day—and we were away on schedule. The B.Q.E. was actually moving; the Hutch was a dream. We would have plenty of time once we got to Vermont to find a Christmas tree in the woods for the others to help decorate when they arrived.

"Outstanding, Private!" I said, glancing in the rearview. But Rose, watching "Moana" with headphones on, couldn't hear me.

Bluetoothlessly, I d.j.'d with my iPhone, which Lisa, when riding shotgun, ordinarily prohibits for safety reasons. We waited until after New Haven to stop for a drive-through breakfast, because the Berlin, Connecticut, exit has a McDonald's next to it, along with a Mobil station where I went afterward to fill the tank. It was raining lightly, and was noticeably colder than in Brooklyn. I was glad to be in a four-wheel-drive truck—a Ford F-150, one of America's most popular vehicles—which usually stayed on the farm in Vermont.

As I was going inside for the washroom key, Rose asked for Skittles. I looked appalled—candy at this hour?—but bought her a bag anyway. "Early Christmas present," I said, tossing it over the seat as I jumped into the truck and started off again.

At Hartford, we changed to Interstate 91. The freezing rain started in Massachusetts, just north of Holyoke. An icy fog clung to the sides of the highway in the swampy area around Am-

herst. I recalled a haunting line of Emily Dickinson's from some long-ago college course: "A chilly Peace infests the Grass." I saw a car spun out in the median near Greenfield. New York plates. Flatlander.

The first black-ice warning was on a highway message board just inside the Vermont border. Northerners know to fear black ice, but its deadly nature is not widely understood by people from more temperate regions, and figurative language doesn't help. The ice isn't actually black (Key and Peele do a funny bit on the racializing of this particularly sinister hazard); it only looks that way on asphalt. Black ice means any thin, clear coating of ice, without the trapped air bubbles that render thicker ice cloudy. If you take an ice cube from the tray and look at the bottommost layer, it will be clear. Black ice often forms at night, when the dew point is near freezing and the cold pavement turns moisture to ice.

On a highway, black ice is made lethal by the addition of speed and surprise. All at once, you lose control of both steering and brakes, and become the passenger in a two-ton object now driven by the physics of inertia and friction, with a front-row seat to your own demise. For the victims, black-ice accidents resemble Alpine falls: a silent slip, and a terrifying slide into the abyss.

Dan Robinson began his career in weather videography by chasing tornadoes, working out of West Virginia. As a side project, he collected footage of crazy spins on black ice; the video is catnip to local news. These days, ice is practically his main gig. (He also works in I.T.) His footage, available on YouTube, looks as if it should be set to bloopers music. Eighteen-wheelers suddenly come down with the wiggles, like segmented caterpillar pull toys.

Robinson realized that while freezing rain is by far the deadliest weather hazard out there, including the threat posed by tornadoes, the way accident data are collected and classified doesn't reflect that fact. Federal Highway Administration data show that from 2005 to 2014 there were, on average, 1,836 deaths and 136,309 injuries per year due to snow and ice, three times more than the numbers generated by any other weather hazard. But most state police departments don't list freezing rain as

a cause or identify the kind of ice involved, so the danger of black ice goes unquantified.

I learned to drive in Vermont, and have encountered black ice on secondary roads before. But that day on I-91 I had fallen into a different kind of hazard, a “heuristic trap.” The phrase is from a 2002 paper by Ian McCammon, who sought to explain why avalanches are often triggered by knowledgeable back-country skiers who should know better. Their experience actually hurts some skiers, the author argued, by making them overconfident and willing to disregard ordinary safety precautions. Likewise, on the highway, a driver from Miami coming up for the winter holidays who has never encountered black ice before may be more likely to slow down than a driver like me, who grew up with it.

My heuristic trap was compounded by overconfidence in the F-150’s AdvanceTrac system, Ford’s version of the anti-lock braking system, or A.B.S., installed on all newer cars and trucks. In my truck, each wheel has its own sensor, as does the steering column, and if the onboard computer detects one or two wheels spinning faster than the others, it reduces the power to the wheels getting traction. But if no wheels have traction, A.B.S. won’t work. Only metal-studded winter tires will help in that situation. Traction systems get vehicles started on slick surfaces, and help control them at lower speeds, but they can also deceive drivers into thinking that the road is less slippery than it really is. Only when they try to brake do they understand the danger—at the moment when it’s too late.

By Exit 6, Rockingham, traffic was down to one lane. A Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) snowplow, with flashing orange lights, was spraying brine on the road. After Exit 7, Springfield, the highway climbed a long, snowy hill for a couple of miles. Snow mixed with the freezing rain in the higher elevation. At the top of the ridge was a tea-colored cliff, made by a road cut.

Ahead, a long line of cars was stuck behind a white truck doing fifty. No one wanted to pass, because the left lane hadn’t been brined (and because fifty was really fast enough). After some minutes, I was fed up. I’ve got a truck, bro. So I pulled out to pass.

It took longer to get by the cars than

I thought it would, and as I drew level with the truck—a propane truck, it looked like, although its icy spray was striking my windshield hard—I was going downhill. I pressed the accelerator to get past it, steered gently right, and took my foot off the gas—my worst mistake, other than passing in the first place. The weight transfer from deceleration lightened the F-150’s rear, and pickups are already front-heavy, relative to cars.

I felt my back end start to yaw—rotate clockwise, turning us south. It was too slippery, and my speed was too great, for AdvanceTrac to help. I tried to turn the wheel into the skid—“Look where you want the car to go”—but I felt only the terrible looseness in the steering column that indicated no control.

Our rear end continued its lazy rotation until, still under a second into the event, on the right side of the windshield, glowing in the clear ice forming on the glass, I saw the propane truck’s headlights, shining toward us.

“Oh, Rose, we’re sliding!” I called out, sounding apologetic, because it appeared that I’d killed us. Still absorbed in the movie, however, Rose didn’t hear me or notice the oncoming headlights, or realize the danger we were in, because everything was occurring in silence, on ice.

Ernst Patnoe, forty-eight, started out as a mechanic in Vermont Transportation’s Middlesex garage, in one of VTrans’s eight maintenance districts, where he fixed and prepped plows. After eight years of that, Patnoe got his own plow route, and worked his way up to garage supervisor, then to general manager, and now he is the over-all administrator for VTrans’s maintenance staff—five hundred workers—and two hundred and fifty plows, in sixty-five facilities across the state.

Patnoe is based in VTrans’s new transportation-management center, outside Montpelier. The staff has access to data sent from a network of road sensors. Those embedded in the road surface record pavement and subsurface temperatures; infrared “grip sensors” are beamed onto the road surface from nearby poles. Algorithms crunch the data the sensors produce to make predictions that the operators in the management center can use to send alerts to any message board in the state, like the one I saw. But with

black ice, Patnoe said, “once the grip sensors tell us it’s slippery, it’s usually too late.” The ice is already weaponized.

The weather I was driving through makes black ice relatively easy to predict. However, “say it’s about ten degrees, a beautiful day,” Patnoe said, “and the sun is out. And the road surface is frozen. So the sun will pull that moisture out, and next thing you know you have black ice, especially on a high-speed road.” The friction from the tires of the eighteen-wheelers melts the ice; a spindrift of snow blows over the road and liquefies; the water spreads and freezes. “It’s really hard to put a science behind it, and I’m no scientist, but you just do not know where the sun is going to pull that frost,” Patnoe said. “We have some known trouble spots. But let’s just say, out of the blue, a whole road freezes up—pulls frost for miles. Then we need to be reactive.” That’s too late for the driver who gets there before the salt truck.

Mine was garden-variety black ice. It formed the same way that the clear ice on my windshield formed. Even at higher elevations, where raindrops could be five degrees below freezing, they don’t crystallize into sleet or snow, which would be less slippery; instead, they remain in a liquid, “supercooled” state, until they “nucleate”—become ice—on striking anything hard, such as the road surface or a car.

“Warm ice” is the term used by Professor Erland Schulson, of Dartmouth College’s Thayer School of Engineering (Exit 21, Hanover, New Hampshire), for ice that is close to melting. That is the state of “most ice we encounter in the world,” he explained, when I visited his office. Melting ice with a thin layer of water on top of it is as slippery as the natural world gets—“nothing slipperier than that,” the professor said; hard frozen ice is much less slick.

Schulson teaches Thermodynamics and Kinetics in Condensed Phases, which he described as “a course about transformations between states.” Because supercooled rain is a liquid that really should be a solid, it is of particular interest in the classroom. What’s going on at the molecular level that prevents the transformation from occurring as it should?

Schulson, whose research focusses on microstructures in ice, drew a big circle, signifying a raindrop, on a pad of paper

he found amid the clutter on his desk. Then he drew little squiggles inside the circle, indicating a “crystalline array” of ice starting to form within.

“Freezing rain exists in liquid form at below zero degrees Celsius,” he said. “So zero can’t be a real freezing point. Better to turn it around and say ice has a melting point, which is zero degrees, no question.”

Schulson explained that as soon as H₂O molecules begin to organize into a nucleus they form a surface between the crystalline structure and the liquid. That surface, like all surfaces, has an energy. But as long as the cluster is too small to be stable and the liquid area around it is large, then, according to thermodynamic law, the area-per-unit energy of the water (that is, the ratio of the surface area around the array to the energy density of the array itself) will be lower than that of the array. And, because inertia favors a lower energy state, the array quickly disappears.

“It’s all about minimizing energy,” added Don Perovich, another Thayer professor, who had joined the conversation. Before coming to Dartmouth, Perovich, who specializes in sea ice, worked at the Army Corps of Engineers’ Cold Regions Research and Engineering Laboratory, also located in Hanover; a former colleague there, Kathleen Jones, researches the problem of freezing rain on power wires, among other things.

Schulson went on, “Even though it seems that with this region”—he pointed

to the nucleus—“the energy should be lower than in the randomly organized water molecules around it,” that is not the case until the array reaches a certain size, at which point, because “the surface-energy barrier to nucleation is no longer important,” the liquid becomes solid.

I asked, “Can we say the apparently clear boundary between solid and liquid is not quite as clear when we look closely at what’s going on?” I was remembering “Hamlet”: “O! that this too too solid flesh would melt.”

The scientist corrected my poetic thinking.

“You can’t be half solid and half liquid,” Schulson replied. “It’s one or the other.”

Did the professors have a solution for the problem of black ice on roads?

“To tell you the truth, I try not to be the first person on the road in the morning,” Perovich said. “Because you really can’t see it.”

As the F-150 continued its graceful arc in front of the propane truck, I felt calm and exceptionally alert. My eyesight seemed to be functioning at a much higher level of intensity than normal as it took in the smallest details of my environment. I saw the intricate ice formations on the metal armature of the passenger’s-side windshield wiper, and the three-dimensional effect in the colorful wrapping of the gift box next to me.

Not only could I see with vastly greater granularity than normal, I had

time to ponder what I saw. My mind, it seemed, was making more time, as needed, so that the information flowing in could be processed into thought and memory and turned into actionable intelligence.

We were now sliding backward at about fifty-five miles per hour, while also drifting slightly east, because that was the last steering move I had made before losing control. I studied the vectors as though they’d been drawn in marker on the windshield. It appeared that our present course and speed would carry us across the path of the propane truck before it hit us, and we would slide off the east side of I-91 North, facing south, where there was a width of shoulder, and also, I noted with newly enhanced peripheral vision, a snowy, uphill bank that would absorb the impact on my side of the truck. At this point, about two seconds had passed since I had lost control.

The question was, would we hit a guardrail first? If we did, which seemed likely, as we were in mountainous terrain, we’d bounce back into the road and be struck by the cars behind the truck. And yet, although our lives, as well as the lives of other travellers, depended on this point, it appeared to my mind merely a matter of fact-checking. Either there was a guardrail or there wasn’t. Whether we lived or died as a result seemed to be of no greater consequence.

Turning to look out the back, I removed my hands from the wheel altogether. Muscle memory balked at this, and was swiftly overruled—steering could only interfere, at this point, with the path we were already on. I met the dog’s eyes first, and saw that they were two shades of brown, and how the red part in the droopy corner was wrinkled and blackish. My mind seemed to settle itself with these details.

As my gaze swung up to the rear window, passing over Rose (now smiling at a scene in the movie), my peripheral vision caught a guardrail, but I couldn’t judge its distance because my center vision was unexpectedly occupied by a metallic square on Rose’s lap that looked like the tongue of an unbuckled seat belt. Her seat belt was unbuckled. She must have undone it when I went to get the Skittles.

That stopped time completely, and



“And he’s a nutritional-support animal, too.”

I was replaying the memory of tossing the bag and saying “Early Christmas present” when we hit.

In Ambrose Bierce’s short story “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge,” Peyton Farquhar, a Southern planter, is lured into a trap by a Yankee scout and caught trying to sabotage a railroad bridge. Sentenced to hang from it, the condemned man, neck “in the hemp,” peers down at the swirling waters below, troubled by an unidentified clanging sound—“a sharp, distinct, metallic percussion like the stroke of a blacksmith’s hammer upon the anvil.” Bierce, who had known terror as a Union soldier at the Battle of Shiloh and elsewhere, dryly informs the reader, “What he heard was the ticking of his watch.” Farquhar’s eyesight has grown similarly acute; after his seemingly miraculous escape from the gallows, Bierce’s hero notices, on the far shore of the river, “the individual trees, the leaves and the veining of each leaf—saw the very insects upon them: the locusts, the brilliant-bodied flies, the gray spiders stretching their webs from twig to twig.”

In 1892, two years after Bierce’s story first appeared, in the San Francisco *Examiner*, Albert Heim, the Swiss geologist (not Aribert Heim, the Nazi), published “Notizen über den Tod durch Absturz,” or “Remarks on Fatal Falls,” the first empirical study of the unique psychophysiological state of seemingly imminent death, in the yearbook of the Swiss Alpine Club, after delivering a lecture on the subject to the club. The paper was based in part on Heim’s own experience of a nearly seventy-foot fall in the Alps, more than twenty years earlier, when he was a student, the protégé of the great Swiss geologist of the day, Arnold Escher von der Linth. As he fell, Heim noticed both a distortion of time and high-level mental processing. He reflected on a lecture on Alpine geology he was to give in five days. “I thought of taking off my glasses and throwing them away so that the splinters from them might not injure my eyes,” he writes.

Over the years, as Heim spoke with others who had also survived potentially fatal falls—not only Alpinists but workers who had fallen from scaffolding—he found that their experiences closely resembled his own. “Mental activity be-

came enormous, rising to a 100-fold velocity of intensity,” he goes on. “The relationships of events and their probable outcomes were overviewed with objective clarity. No confusion entered at all. Time became greatly expanded. The individual acted with lightning-quickness in accord with accurate judgment of his situation” and exhibited an absence of “paralyzing fright of the sort that can happen in instances of lesser danger”; instead, he felt “calm seriousness, profound acceptance, and a dominant mental quickness and a sense of surety.” Heim, a talented artist and writer, inclines toward mysticism in the second half of his paper—he sees roseate clouds and feels inner peace, and experiences what would today be called a panoramic life review, a highlight reel of one’s own Olympics. He undermines his scientific objectivity somewhat at the end of his paper when he says that his experience gave comfort to his mother, who had lost two of her other sons to fatal climbing accidents. He wanted her to know that they felt no pain in their deaths.

Heim did, in fact, deliver his geology lecture five days after his fall. At only twenty-three, he was chosen to be von der Linth’s successor as professor of general geology at the Swiss Polytechnic, in Zurich. He became a celebrated scientist, publishing more than four hundred scholarly papers, and practicing muscular outdoor geology. He married Marie Vögtlin, the first female physician in Switzerland, and over the course of their long, busy life together they campaigned against alcohol and tobacco, bred Swiss mountain dogs, and touted the societal benefits of cremation, among other enthusiasms.

Albert Einstein was a student at the Swiss Polytechnic, matriculating at age seventeen, in 1896. He graduated four years later. He attended Heim’s lectures (on the geology of mountain ranges, among others), and remembered them in later life as “magical”; he was less kind about his physics professor. Einstein’s first paper on special relativity, “On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies,” was published in 1905, and it included the theory that time is not a constant flowing stream but a kind of web that can expand and contract relative to the motion of the perceiver. In theory, we all move in our own time. Whether Ein-

stein heard Heim’s lecture on his fall (“Time became greatly expanded”) is unknown, but is not unlikely. Einstein later said that the theory of special relativity was inspired by his watching window-washers from his desk at the Patent Office in Berlin, where he worked, and imagining the sense of weightlessness a worker would feel if he fell from atop his ladder. That brought what Einstein called “the happiest thought”—that acceleration alters the effects of Newton’s laws of gravity, which led to the idea that at the speed of light, energy and mass become interchangeable. In theory, this too too solid flesh does melt.

When Heim died, at the age of eighty-eight, in 1937, “Remarks on a Fatal Fall”—now considered the founding text of a vast literature of near-death experience (or N.D.E.)—went unmentioned in every major scientific obituary. (Most of Heim’s theories about geology turned out to be wrong; he insisted that tectonic thrust was not the reason for the formation of the Alps.) Another thirty-five years passed before the paper was translated into English and published, in *Omega*, a journal of thanatology, by Russell Noyes, Jr., a psychiatrist at the University of Iowa. Noyes compared Heim’s findings with more recent crisis experiences that he had collected himself, such as that of a young man who was travelling in a car going sixty miles an hour when the steering failed, and who reported that his “mind was working rapidly and reviewed information from driver’s education that might bear on what I should do to save myself.” Another accident survivor said, “My hearing was especially sharp. If someone knocked their teeth together it sounded like a crash.”

Serious research followed Noyes’s early work—more than thirty scholarly articles on near-death biological states were published in the later seventies and eighties. But Raymond Moody’s best-selling “Life After Life” (1975), which established the term “near-death experience,” moved the fledgling science firmly into the paranormal, striking publishing gold that keeps producing forty years later, as evidenced by the recent mega-best-seller “Proof of Heaven,” by the neurosurgeon Eben Alexander. However, by shifting the focus of N.D.E. research away from the study

of rare liminal moments of mortal danger that occur in the lives of healthy people toward sick people in hospitals who die on the operating table and come back, Moody moved near-death research from the science of heightened experience within everyday life to shakier, speculative ground—the afterlife.

“The Handbook of Near Death Experiences” (2009) summarizes the common themes Moody observed in many N.D.E.s:

Feelings of peace and quiet; hearing noises such as buzzing and windlike sounds; a sensation of being out of the body; passing through a tunnel; meeting other individuals such as deceased friends; encountering a being of light; having a life review; reaching a border that, if crossed, meant the NDErs could not return to life; and finding that they had returned to their physical bodies.

Part of the problem is that serious N.D.E. researchers can’t realistically reproduce the sort of experience that Heim had in the mountains—and that I was having in my truck—because, unlike me, study subjects know they aren’t really going to die. Therefore, experimenters came to lean heavily on medical settings, because the subjects do think they’re dying (even when they aren’t), and because instruments are available to measure subtle changes in neurochemistry as the transformation from life to death takes place.

But, instead of giving near-death research scientific credibility, medicalizing the experience greatly muddled the boundaries of what an N.D.E. actually is. According to “The Handbook,” by the early two-thousands almost a third of all Americans had experienced one. Kevin Zadai, a minister in Destrehan, Louisiana, had an N.D.E. in a dentist’s chair in which he not only met Jesus but learned to play the saxophone from him.

We all get at least one near-death experience, sooner or later. So why not have your first N.D.E. while you can still learn and profit from it? That’s the American way of near-death.

We missed the guardrail by about twenty yards, or three-tenths of a second at our speed—a lifetime. Still pointing south, we slid across the shoulder and contacted the snow-covered earthen bank with the driver’s-side mir-

ror, the stem of which absorbed the initial impact. The rest of the truck pivoted and whacked very hard into the bank, causing more than ten thousand dollars’ worth of damage along the body and frame—bending the anti-intrusion bars inside both front and back doors, pancaking the panelling, smashing the door handles, the gas cap, the left tail-light, and the rear fender.

Inside the cab, however, there was nothing more than a big, snow-softened *whump*. The airbag didn’t deploy; it didn’t need to. We slid backward down a snowy concrete drainage ditch, coming to a gentle stop behind the guardrail we had narrowly missed, where we were now shielded from another driver who might hit the same patch of black ice. A trained stuntman who had practiced that move ten times couldn’t have executed it any more deftly. But I had taken my hands off the wheel, and was turned backward; I was still looking at Rose’s face when she glanced up, pulled off her headphones, and said, “What’s wrong?”

And then I saw it. It was the most extraordinary thing. There were six Skittles lying on the seat next to my daughter. A red, a yellow, a blue, and three purples. The whump had knocked them out of the bag. I had never seen color until I saw it in those Skittles. Their everyday perfection was somehow dumbfounding.

“Are you O.K.?”

A man was up on the roadway, which was now level with the side windows,

When I am touched, brushed, and measured, I think of myself
As a painting. The artist works no matter the lack of sleep. I am made
Beautiful. I never eat. I once bothered with a man who called me
Snack, Midnight Snack to be exact. I’d oblige because he hurt me
With a violence I mistook for desire. I’d get left hanging
In one room of his dim house while he swept or folded laundry.
When you’ve been worked on for so long, you never know
You’re done. Paint dries. Midnight is many colors. Black and blue
Are only two. The man who tinted me best kept me looking a little
Like a chore. How do you say prepared
In French? How do you draw a man on the night shift? Security
At the museum for the blind, he eats to stay
Awake. He’s so full, he never has to eat again. And the moon goes.

—Jericho Brown

bending over the guardrail to address me.

I put down the window but found that I couldn’t speak. I nodded. He looked at me curiously, in a way that made me wonder later what he had seen in my face.

“You’re at Mile Marker 46.4,” he said, pointing to the small green sign next to the road with those numbers on it, in white.

“Did you see what happened?” I managed to croak.

But he was gone. It was not a spot to linger.

I called 911, reported that no one was hurt; they connected me to the Vermont State Police, who requested a tow truck. Then I called Lisa.

“We’re off the road,” I said, and instead of crying out in terror or gratitude I just laughed. I was so overjoyed to be stuck in a ditch.

Benny’s Tow Service came from Chester and fished us out with a hook and a winch. The truck was drivable, and we reached the farm with enough light left to go out and find a tree.

“Everybody aims a vehicle these days,” Ernie Patnoe said. “Not a lot of people drive anymore.” Our vehicles offer us an ever-expanding array of Internet-connected entertainment and semi-autonomous driving options that make long-distance highway driving much less boring than it used to be. But onboard entertainment and cruise control, to say nothing of texting while

driving, are, Patnoe believes, the reason that, in spite of all the highway-safety innovations he has seen in his career, the number of fatalities on Vermont's roads has barely gone down.

"Our plow trucks—with flashing orange lights!—have been struck multiple times this winter in major crashes," he said. "Full-speed crashes, not braking crashes."

Patnoe's boss, VTrans's Maintenance and Operations Bureau director, Scott Rogers, added, "We've often joked that the way we could improve highway safety in the winter is just not plow. Go back to rolling the roads. Then people would go slow."

I came down with the flu a day after the accident. As I lay in bed with a fever, revisiting Mile Marker 46.4 with Google Maps, I felt I was in a strange sort of shock—the shock of something that was supposed to happen, but didn't. Big, family-sized boxes of shock and grief had already been shipped out from my brain, only to be refused delivery by my body, and a voice coming over the blower was shouting, "All I know is somebody has to pay for this stuff!"

The guilt that had been completely absent during the experience came down on me hard. Parenting 101—always check the seat belt. Had we hit the guardrail, one of the suitcases in the cab could easily have broken Rose's neck. Another twenty yards the other way, maybe we hit the propane truck, it rolls and explodes, killing not only the driver but everyone behind him, and Rose is covered with fire and screaming. . . . My mind would usually dissolve to gray at that point.

I had no panoramic life review, no tunnel, no roseate clouds, no reunions with relatives (thank goodness), nor meet-ups with beings of the light, and no unwelcome return to the body. Neuroscience has a pretty good explanation for what happened in my head during those several seconds. A close encounter with extreme danger led to abnormal neuroelectric activity in the limbic system and temporal lobes of my brain, which sent signals to my adrenal medulla, located on top of the kidneys, and told them to secrete adrenaline. Just as people seem capable of superhuman strength under life-and-death situations, so adrenaline

can produce extraordinary feats of perception like mine.

Calm alertness in the face of extreme danger, time distortion, and not caring about the outcome can all be explained by depersonalization, or detachment from self, a well-known concept in psychology, which Noyes himself came to embrace as an explanation for some N.D.E.s. Although depersonalization is considered a personality disorder, there are certain situations, such as the one I was in, where it could make the difference between life and death.

The traction system of social life is good at getting us going, and keeping us on the road, but it fails when we hit the figurative black ice—death—as eventually we all do. It may be true, as Buddhism teaches, that only when we calmly accept that everything ends, including our selves—"profound acceptance," in Heim's phrase—can we see the miracle of this world for what it really is.

The ending of "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" shocked me as a young reader. Not only is there the twist, but the author plays a cruel joke on poor Peyton Farquhar: his hallucinatory dash to freedom and his wife's tender embrace end with a stunning blow on the back of his neck—the rope is still there, after all—and then he is dead. In fact, his escape has been an N.D.E.

I, too, had been "in the hemp," yet had somehow got out of it. Did the rope break? Or would the stunning blow come only when I returned to the spot where the occurrence occurred?

It was nine Saturdays after the accident when I forced myself to go back to Mile Marker 46.4. I'd driven up from Brooklyn the day before in a rental car. My truck had had a long wait for its appointment in the shop, which was to be the following Monday. "Seems like a lot of people had problems with their trucks on the ice this winter," said Alan Stoddard of Formula Collision in Montpelier, explaining the wait. I had unpacked in a daze on the day of the crash, parked the truck on the farm, and not been in it since the holidays.

On Saturday morning, I tried to bring the dog along for support, but she wouldn't get in the rental, a Chevy Suburban. "ICE," flashed a light as I pulled out of the driveway. The A.B.S. had

sensed my wheels spinning and relayed a message to the dashboard.

A Finnish startup called EEE Innovations, working with licensed technology developed by the Finnish government, is testing and installing a crowd-sourced system of ice detection that would gather data from individual vehicles' A.B.S. computers, use an algorithm to collate them with weather and altitude, and send warnings to vehicles approaching the area. The system, currently installed on about forty trucks, will be much more widely deployed in Finland next winter, and could in theory work here as well.

It was a warm, sunny day in late February. On the half-hour drive, I felt myself slowly panicking. Where had the calm I'd felt during those moments of crisis nine weeks earlier gone? Instead, I was a mess of thought, guilt, and what-ifs. *A chilly Peace infects the Grass.*

I got on I-91 North at Springfield, Exit 7, and drove up the long hill with the tea-stained cliff at the top. Cresting it, white-knuckling the wheel now—how had I ever let it go?—I saw the swale where I had hit the black ice, and then the straightaway we'd spun along, as time slowed down and stopped. I pulled over at the spot where we'd left the road, and got out at Mile Marker 46.4. The snow had melted enough to expose the bank we'd hit, and most of the drainage ditch we'd slid down.

I wasn't stopping long. The universe might realize it had the place right but the date wrong if I waited until, as Dickinson also wrote, Death "kindly stopped for me."

But I saw something in the snow-melt, and I slid down to fetch it. It was the left tire flap from my truck, torn off, with the dealer's name on it.

Two days later, ahead of my appointment at the body shop, I was cleaning up the truck when I noticed that there were only five Skittles on the seat. Their color and wondrous contours had faded; they were more of the gummy gunk I was always scraping out of the back. I thought about saving them, but that didn't make sense. They were just Skittles, after all.

I was sure there had been six, however, so I asked Rose.

She shrugged. "Oh, I ate one on the way home." ♦

THE ASCENT

A Saudi prince's quest to remake the Middle East.

BY DEXTER FILKINS

A few days after Donald Trump was inaugurated, Jared Kushner sat down to decide how to reshape the Middle East. During the campaign, Trump had promised a sweeping transformation of the region. Steve Bannon, Trump's senior aide and ideologist at the time, told me recently, "Our plan was to annihilate the physical caliphate of ISIS in Iraq and Syria—not attrition, annihilation—and to roll back the Persians. And force the Gulf states to stop funding radical Islam." The Middle East initiative, Bannon said, was one of the few points of agreement in an otherwise fractious White House. "Jared and I were at war on a number of other topics, but not this."

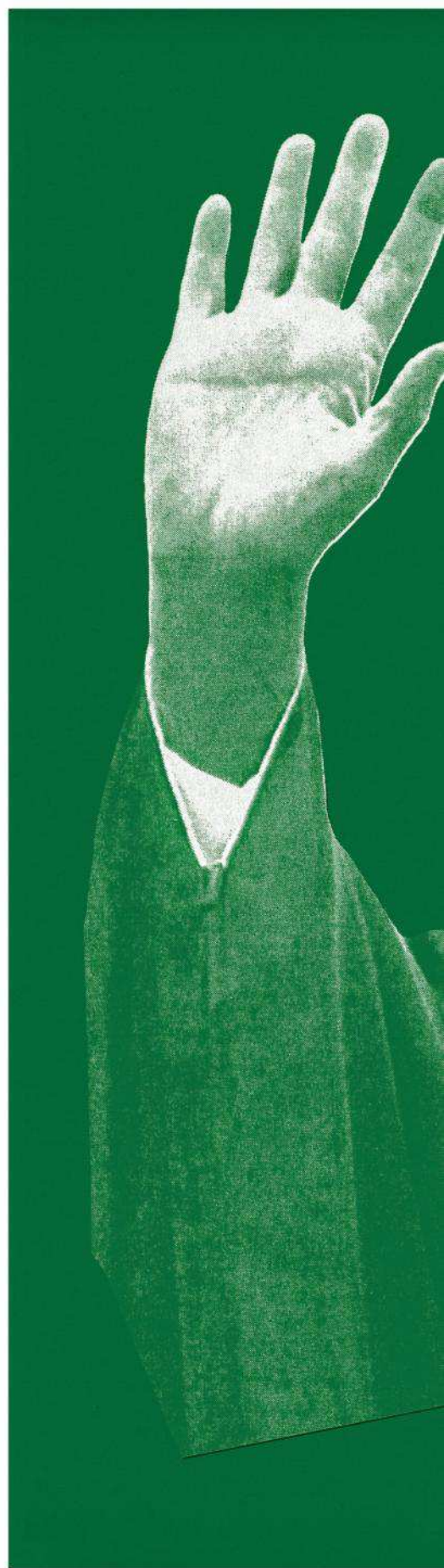
Kushner, Trump's son-in-law, was put in charge of policy for the region. He had no experience in diplomacy or in Middle Eastern politics; at thirty-six, he had spent his working life managing New York and New Jersey real-estate projects and running the New York *Observer*, a fading tabloid. But a former senior defense official who worked with Kushner told me that he had been educating himself on the fly. "He's not a scholar on this stuff," the official said. "His knowledge is gained from talking to movers and shakers in that part of the world. You can read a lot of books but never get the type of education you get from talking to the Kissingers and Petraeuses of the world."

In a conference room at the White House, Kushner met with aides from the National Security Council. "We took out the map and assessed the situation," the former defense official said. Surveying the region, they concluded that the northern tier of the Middle East had been lost to Iran. In Lebanon, Hezbollah, an Iranian proxy, controlled the government. In Syria, Iran had helped save President Bashar al-Assad from military disaster and was now bolstering his political future. In Iraq, the

government, nominally pro-American, was also under the sway of Tehran. "We kind of set those to the side," the official told me. "We thought, So then what? Our anchors were Israel and Saudi Arabia. We can't be successful in the Gulf without Saudi Arabia."

That meant reversing the approach supported by Barack Obama, who, unlike previous Presidents, had kept the Saudis at arm's length, objecting to their repressive internal policies, their treatment of women, and their aggressive posture toward Iran. Obama, in effect, hoped to create a kind of balance between Riyadh and Tehran. In March, 2016, he told the journalist Jeffrey Goldberg that the unsteady condition of the Middle East "requires us to say to our friends as well as to the Iranians that they need to find an effective way to share the neighborhood and institute some sort of cold peace." Trump and Kushner wanted no such détente. "Everything we could do to strengthen our relationship with the Saudis, we were going to do," the former defense official told me. Above all, that meant forming a new alliance with Saudi Arabia's deputy crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman—known in the White House and throughout the Middle East as M.B.S.

Bin Salman, though only thirty-one, was already one of the most powerful people in the kingdom. The son of the current monarch, he was the minister of defense, chairman of the committee that charted the kingdom's economy, and second in line to the throne. In a country long ruled by aging kings, M.B.S. was young, tall, and transparently ambitious. He wanted to wean the kingdom from its unsustainable addiction to oil and to diversify its economy. And he promised to end the long-standing arrangement of Saudi domestic politics, in which the royal family, and its myriad princes, bought



M.B.S., like his ally Jared Kushner, is young,



ambitious, and determined to change the balance of power in the region. "They want to break it up," a former official said.

ILLUSTRATION BY MATT DORFMAN

off political opposition by allowing radical Islamists to propagate their creed and even to carry out terrorist acts abroad. M.B.S. was uncompromising in foreign policy, describing the mullahs who presided over Iran as akin to Nazis. The question for many analysts around the world was whether he represented genuine reform or was merely using the language of reform to consolidate power.

As Kushner grappled with the complexities of Middle East politics, he and M.B.S. began a conversation by telephone and e-mail. “They became close very fast,” a former American official who sees M.B.S. periodically said. “They see the world in the same way—they see themselves as being in the tech-savvy money world.” Kushner followed up with a visit to Riyadh, the first of three such trips; the two men stayed up nearly until dawn, discussing the future of their countries.

As Kushner knew, M.B.S. was involved in a messy battle over succession to the throne, which American security officials warned might destabilize the kingdom. And M.B.S. had his own ideas about how to remake the Middle East. But, Bannon told me, the message that he and Kushner wanted Trump to convey to the region’s leaders was that the status quo had to change, and in the more places the better. “We said to them—Trump said to them, ‘We’ll support you, but we want action, action,’” Bannon said. No one seemed more eager to hear that message than the deputy crown prince. “The judgment was that we needed to find a change agent,” the former defense official told me. “That’s where M.B.S. came in. We were going to embrace him as the change agent.”

When Mohammed bin Salman was growing up, in Riyadh, he lived in a walled palace complex the size of a city block, sharing a mansion with his five brothers and his mother, Fahda, one of his father’s four wives. (Each wife had a mansion of her own.) For most of his childhood, his father, Salman, was the governor of Riyadh and a likely future king. The family’s home, in the Madher neighborhood, had a staff of about fifty, including servants, gardeners, maids, cooks, and drivers.

Each weekday, the staff ferried the young prince to class, at a prestigious academy called the al-Riyadh Schools. On weekends, the servants sometimes escorted him and his classmates into the desert, where they erected large tents and lit bonfires under the stars. His fellow-students would gather around him and recite poems of praise, calling him Kareem—the generous one—for sponsoring the lavish parties. The young M.B.S. would smile at the encomiums, especially if they came from a son of one of Riyadh’s better families. “He treated everyone well, but even then he was aware of everyone’s status,” Mahboob Mohammed, a Pakistani who worked on the staff of one of M.B.S.’s cousins, told me. “Prince Salman always knew he was special.”

Still, even for the young Salman, the future was cloudy—due, in no small part, to the uncertain line of royal succession in the House of Saud. Since 1953, the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, one of the world’s last surviving absolute monarchies, has been ruled by six brothers, all sons of King Abdul-Aziz al Saud. Abdul-Aziz is the central figure in modern Saudi Arabia, having united the kingdom in 1932, after a series of wars. In the forties, he opened the country to large-scale oil production by Western companies and, after meeting President Franklin Roosevelt on an American destroyer in the Red Sea, struck an alliance with the United States, which has endured ever since. The Saudis guarantee access to oil; the U.S., in return, guarantees Saudi Arabia security from foreign enemies.

Abdul-Aziz was a prolific father—he bragged of having “married no fewer than a hundred and thirty-five virgins,” and he sired at least forty-two sons and fifty-five daughters. Since his death, in 1953, royal succession has been determined on the principle of agnatic seniority, whereby a king’s younger brother is preferred over his sons. In 2015, when his successor King Abdullah died, his brother Salman ascended to the throne; another, younger brother, named Muqrin, became crown prince. Muqrin, the son of a Yemeni concubine, was Abdul-Aziz’s last surviving son.

As the generation of Abdul-Aziz’s sons neared its end, tensions arose over who would be the first member of the

next generation to become king. Saudi kings, though absolute in their authority, have traditionally ruled by consensus among the brothers; their sons, in turn, are placed in key positions across the government. Any one of Abdul-Aziz’s hundreds of grandsons could feel entitled to the throne.

Salman, during forty-eight years as governor of Riyadh, had earned a reputation as a ruthlessly efficient executive. “He was the family enforcer—he kept people in line, and he had a file on everyone,” Rashid Khalidi, a professor of history at Columbia, told me. Less than a year after becoming king, he removed his brother as crown prince and sent him into retirement; he elevated his nephew Mohammed bin Nayef to succeed him, and made his own son, Mohammed bin Salman, deputy crown prince.

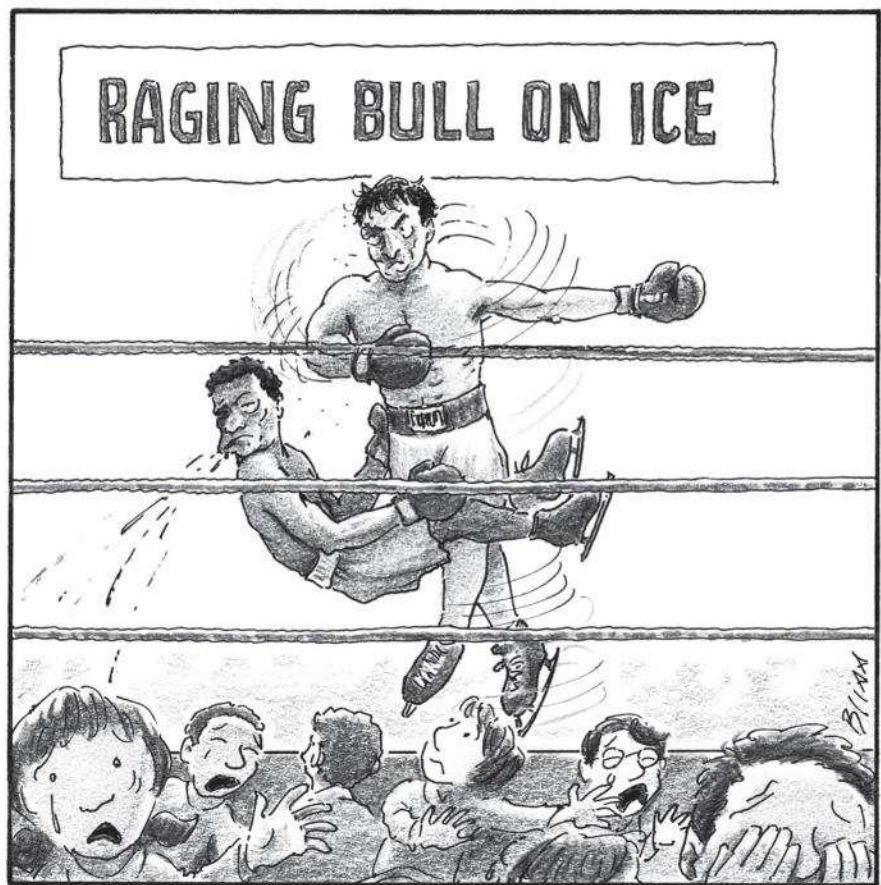
Displacing a crown prince was an unprecedented move, but in many respects bin Nayef was a solid choice for a successor. For years, he had served as interior minister. After the attacks of September 11, 2001, he had presided over a vicious fight with Al Qaeda, in which his security forces tortured and killed suspected insurgents. In 2009, the group retaliated by sending a suicide bomber to kill bin Nayef, who suffered damage to one hand and lasting pain from his injuries. Bin Nayef forged close relationships with American officials. “He was the go-to person on counterterrorism,” a senior counterterrorism official in the Obama Administration told me. For King Salman, the choice of bin Nayef was politically astute for another reason: his only children were two daughters, which meant that his ascension would be less threatening to others, because no one in his bloodline could succeed him.

The selection of M.B.S. as deputy crown prince promised less stability. At twenty-nine years old, he was younger than many of his rivals but undeniably King Salman’s favorite. Joseph Westphal, the U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia from 2013 to 2017, told me that whenever Salman introduced M.B.S. to a stranger he said, with evident pride, “This is my son.” Westphal recalled watching a video recorded when M.B.S. was a teen-ager, in which Salman visited an industrial plant with two of his sons, Faisal and M.B.S. Faisal, who is

fifteen years older, walked passively, while M.B.S. asked questions and scribbled notes incessantly; Salman watched him and beamed. “He was in key meetings all the time—never interfering, just taking notes, but always switched on,” Westphal said of M.B.S. “I saw right away that this guy was going to be more than just a silent adviser to the King.”

M.B.S. gives the impression of being comfortable with Western mores. In meetings with American women, he shakes their hands and looks them in the eye, which not every Saudi official will do. Once, during a meeting at the home of Secretary of State John Kerry, M.B.S. spotted a grand piano, walked over, and began playing the “Moonlight” Sonata. His favorite diversion is Call of Duty, the video game. But his English is halting, and among his brothers—he has nine—he is unusually bound to Saudi Arabia. “M.B.S. is unlike his brothers, several of whom were educated in the West and one of whom has a doctorate from Oxford,” a longtime friend of M.B.S. told me. “If you look at them and you talk to them, they are basically soft. And there is this quality to M.B.S.—the guy’s not soft. He has a lot of charisma. He’s a lot like Bill Clinton. He makes you feel like you’re super important when you’re talking to him. He really puts on a charm that is unmistakable.”

As M.B.S. grew into adulthood, he brazenly used his status to enrich himself. In his teens, according to people who know him, he visited a series of wealthy businessmen and asked them to put money into his personal investment fund. In a matter of weeks, he raised thirty million dollars. “He’s the son of Salman,” M.B.S.’s friend told me. “It’s not like anyone was going to say no.” According to a story that circulates in Riyadh, M.B.S. demanded that a Saudi land-registry official help him appropriate a property. After the official refused, he received an envelope with a single bullet inside. The episode earned M.B.S. the street name Abu Rasasa, or “father of the bullet.” “The story is true,” the friend said. “I think that M.B.S. realizes that he went too far toward some people in those days, and he has tried to make amends.” (A spokesman for the Saudi Embassy denied the story, but largely declined to



coöperate with fact-checking for the rest of the article, describing it as full of “old, incorrect rumors.”)

In addition to being deputy crown prince, M.B.S. was appointed to positions that gave him vast powers over foreign and domestic policy. He was named defense minister, head of the kingdom’s economic-planning council, and chief of Aramco, the national oil company and the central pillar of the country’s economy. In the seventy years since Saudi Arabia began exporting oil at scale, it has grown into the largest economy in the Middle East, with a welfare state whose benefits include free education and health care, along with subsidized food, electricity, and housing. But the economy relies overwhelmingly on oil; the country exports almost nothing else, and imports almost everything else, from food to freshwater. The welfare state was built on the expectation that the price of oil would remain at historic levels of at least a hundred dollars a barrel. It is now about sixty-two dollars, and is widely predicted to keep

falling. “If you are the guy driving the Saudi bus, my advice would be to get off it as soon as you can,” Jan Stuart, an energy economist in New York, told me. The former defense official put it even more starkly: “In five to seven years, at current trends, they’re broke.”

The economic pressures on the Saudi state are likely to get worse. Close to seventy per cent of the population is under thirty years old. Every year, the government pays for as many as seventy thousand young people to study in the United States. Those students return home wanting jobs and, often, at least some of the freedoms that they enjoyed in the West.

To address these concerns, M.B.S. devised a plan, called Vision 2030, for a vast transformation of the Saudi economy and society. Working with consultants from McKinsey & Co., he set quantifiable goals to be met in the next decade. The new order would encourage entrepreneurship and foreign investment, and privatize state-owned industries, including the oil business. The workforce would

be augmented by a growing number of women, along with nonprofit organizations and civic-minded volunteers. To publicize the plan, M.B.S. travelled to China, to Russia, and to the U.S., where he met with an array of tech executives, including Mark Zuckerberg. At a gathering of prominent venture capitalists at the Fairmont Hotel, in San Francisco, M.B.S. spoke bluntly about Saudi Arabia's prospects. According to one attendee, he said, "In twenty years, oil goes to zero, and then renewables take over. I have twenty years to reorient my country and launch it into the future."

The attendee said, "My jaw was on the floor. The meeting had the dynamic of a tech startup. He's throwing the harpoon."

M.B.S.'s appointments also allowed him to display his apparently irrepressible ambition. In April, 2016, when President Obama paid his final visit to Saudi Arabia, he and King Salman sat facing each other, with their aides grouped around them. Obama's advisers noticed

that, each time the President spoke, Salman, who was eighty, paused before answering, while M.B.S., several seats to his left, typed on an iPad. When M.B.S. finished, the King read from an iPad of his own and then responded to Obama. "The chances of that being a coincidence are quite low," a former national-security official told me.

At another meeting, Obama upbraided King Salman for arresting dissident bloggers and for executing Shiite protesters, complaining that these practices made it difficult for him to defend the Saudis in the United States. According to several former American officials, M.B.S. rose abruptly from his chair to convey his displeasure to Obama. "Suddenly, he was standing up and saying, 'You don't understand our judicial system—we can get you a briefing,'" the former national-security official said. "It was very strange."

When King Salman named bin Nayef crown prince, some Saudis speculated that the King envisioned him as

a sort of caretaker, running the government until M.B.S. could be installed. "I don't think Salman ever intended to make bin Nayef king," a prominent Saudi analyst told me. "I think he was just waiting for the moment when M.B.S. was ready." But bin Nayef was a popular figure, and bypassing him would have aroused resistance within the royal family. Outwardly, M.B.S. and bin Nayef worked smoothly together. M.B.S. adhered carefully to royal protocol; at meetings with foreign leaders, he sometimes asked bin Nayef's permission to speak. In 2016, Joseph Westphal asked M.B.S. who he thought would succeed King Salman. "He said, 'We have a crown prince, and historically the crown prince always becomes the king,'" Westphal told me.

Under the surface, though, tensions grew, as M.B.S. maneuvered to reduce his rival's power. His directorship of the economy and of the military allowed him to crowd out bin Nayef's daily duties. In the name of streamlining the government, he eliminated a council of advisers who answered to bin Nayef, depriving him of most of his professional staff. A former American official who maintains contacts in the region told me, "M.B.S. was literally signing orders in the King's name."

Saudi Arabia sees itself as the center of the Islamic world: the king is customarily known as the "custodian of the two holy mosques," the sacred sites in Mecca and Medina. But, as M.B.S. gained power, he was aided by an ally from outside the kingdom: Mohammed bin Zayed, of the United Arab Emirates. Bin Zayed, or M.B.Z., is the crown prince of Abu Dhabi, the most politically important of the country's seven emirates. Flush with revenue from oil and from the booming city-state of Dubai, M.B.Z., the country's de-facto leader, has helped build the Emirates into a kind of Middle Eastern Singapore: rich, efficient, and authoritarian.

M.B.Z., fifty-seven, is a former military helicopter pilot, with a modest bearing that belies his influence throughout the Middle East. "If you sit down to talk to M.B.Z., he's going to whisper, and he's going to be very respectful and very polite," Richard Clarke, a counterterrorism adviser to Presidents



Obama and George W. Bush, told me. “You really have to get into his confidence over many years before he will raise his voice. And then he’ll argue with you.” He is unabashedly pro-American in a region teeming with anti-American sentiment; he has purchased billions of dollars’ worth of American weapons and has often been called on to advance U.S. prerogatives. In 2003, the U.A.E. volunteered to send a small contingent of troops to assist in Afghanistan, the first Arab country to do so; fifteen years later, they are still there.

Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E., which share a border, are both hereditary monarchies, dominated by Sunnis, and their interests often align. In foreign affairs, Saudis prefer to see the U.A.E. as their junior partner, but, in many respects, it is M.B.Z. who drives the policy. From early on, he opposed bin Nayef’s rise, in part because of an unresolvable dispute between the two men. In a 2003 U.S. diplomatic cable, published by WikiLeaks, M.B.Z. was quoted comparing bin Nayef’s father to an ape, suggesting that he provided evidence that “Darwin was right.” The former American official with contacts in the region told me, “After that, there was no possibility of a relationship between M.B.Z. and bin Nayef.”

More important, M.B.Z. saw M.B.S. as a younger version of himself: smart, energetic, and eager to confront enemies. As M.B.S. was being groomed for power, the Gulf states were feeling increasingly vulnerable. When the Arab Spring erupted, in 2011, it forced out dictators in Tunisia, Egypt, and elsewhere. Leaders in Saudi Arabia and the Emirates were terrified that their monarchies would soon follow. The emergence of ISIS further alarmed them, and the two countries supported proxies to fight against its incursions in Syria and in Libya. But their most decisive intervention came in Egypt, the Arab world’s most populous country, where the long-time strongman Hosni Mubarak was ousted by a popular uprising. In June, 2012, Egyptian voters delivered the Presidency to Mohamed Morsi, of the Muslim Brotherhood. For the Saudis and the Emiratis, it was a nightmare.

The Brotherhood, founded in 1928, is the world’s largest Islamist movement, with hundreds of millions of followers.

It has inspired Islamist political parties throughout the Sunni Muslim world, including branches in Jordan, Syria, and Bahrain. In Egypt, security services had savagely repressed the Brotherhood for decades. After the Arab Spring, though, it emerged as the country’s most organized political force.

“When Morsi got elected, the Saudis and the Emiratis went into overdrive,” a former senior American diplomat told me. According to several former American officials, M.B.Z. and Bandar bin Sultan, the director of Saudi intelligence, began plotting with others in their governments to remove Morsi from power. Egypt’s generals were already organizing against him. Bandar and M.B.Z. reached out to the Egyptian defense minister, General Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, and promised twenty billion dollars in economic aid if Morsi were deposed. (The Emirati Embassy did not respond to requests for comment.) They also began financing an anti-government movement in Cairo, built around an ostensibly independent youth group called Tamarod. As the coup took shape, Bandar and Sisi used Mohammed Dahlan, a Palestinian confidant, to carry messages and money to collaborators in the Egyptian military. The former diplomat said that the foreign support was crucial to the coup: “For Sisi to move like that, he needed a promise that he would succeed.” In July, 2013, the Egyptian military forced Morsi from power, and soon afterward it orchestrated a crackdown on suspected Brotherhood supporters, detaining at least forty thousand people. “It was terrible, terrible,” the diplomat told me. “What the Saudis and the Emiratis did was unforgivable.”

As M.B.S. gained influence in the kingdom, he and M.B.Z. built a close relationship. “They talk on the phone all day to each other,” Clarke told me. The two royals share a view of geopolitics. M.B.S. has referred to the Muslim Brotherhood and its allies as “forces of evil,” and, like M.B.Z., he considers Iran his country’s great enemy. The rivalry dates to the time of the Safavid Empire, which swept out of Persia in the fifteen-hundreds and ruled much

of the Arab world for two centuries. In recent years, Saudi and Emirati officials have watched in alarm as the Shiite regime in Iran has established an increasingly dominant presence throughout the region. “The Nazis and the Iranian regime are ideologically very similar,” Thamer al-Sabhan, the Saudi minister for Gulf affairs, told me. The Iranians were assembling “a new

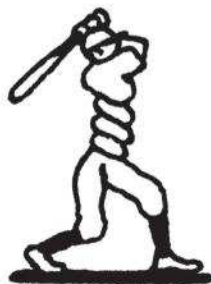
Islamic army that relies on chaos and aggression,” he said. “They don’t want to weaken Saudi Arabia—they want to take over the region altogether. Their only speed bump is the kingdom.”

In 2009, the Obama White House began negotiating with the Iranians to limit their nuclear program.

Saudi and Emirati leaders viewed any outreach to Iran as dangerously misguided. An American national-security official recalled visiting the Emirates in 2011 to meet M.B.Z. He told me that he was instructed to wait on a dock on the Persian Gulf; eventually, M.B.Z. pulled up in a speedboat, wearing shorts, flip-flops, and a Bass Pro Shop hat. “He read us the riot act,” the official recalled. “He told us that we were naïve about the Iranians, and that we were giving away the whole region to them. That was always what the Emiratis and the Saudis said—we were naïve. We thought they were reckless.”

After M.B.S. was named defense minister, the tension with the Obama Administration intensified, particularly over another conflict with Iran—this one in Yemen, which borders Saudi Arabia to the south. Yemen is a poor country, perpetually beset by internal violence. For three decades, Saudi Arabia had spent millions of dollars a year subsidizing tribal leaders there, in order to buy a little peace. In recent years, the country had fallen into civil war, and, after a ceasefire brokered by the Saudis fell apart, a Shiite-dominated rebel group known as the Houthis had swept into the capital and forced the President to flee. Saudi leaders were deeply suspicious of the Houthis, whom the Iranians periodically supplied with weapons.

In March, 2015, the Saudis and the Emiratis informed the White House



that they were preparing a military intervention in Yemen. “M.B.S. told us he wanted us with them, but that they were going anyway,” a former State Department official told me. For years, the Obama Administration had been telling the Saudis that they had to carry more weight in the region; now, it seemed, M.B.S. was calling their bluff.

The Administration declined to directly join the campaign, but, soon after the war began, Tony Blinken, the Deputy Secretary of State, flew to Riyadh to meet with M.B.S. “He told me his goal was to eradicate all Iranian influence in Yemen,” Blinken said. He was taken aback; to purge Iran’s sympathizers from the country would require a bloodbath. “I told him, You could do many things to minimize or reduce Iranian influence. But eliminate it?” After M.B.S. sent Saudi forces into Yemen, the Emiratis circulated celebratory photomontages online, in which M.B.S. looked on sternly as lions and fighter jets menaced his foes.

As the war increased M.B.S.’s influence in Saudi Arabia, he began pushing more aggressively to become crown prince. In the summer of 2015, Adel al-Jubeir, the Saudi foreign minister, was dispatched to Nantucket to see Secretary of State Kerry, who was vacationing at his house there. Jubeir wanted to know whether Kerry would support M.B.S. if he pushed bin Nayef aside, according to a former Obama Administration official who was briefed on the meeting. “M.B.S. was trying to play Kerry,” the official told me. “He wanted us on his side.” Kerry said that the Administration wasn’t going to take sides. At about the same time, the official told me, bin Nayef was reaching out to John Brennan, who was then the head of the C.I.A., to seek support against M.B.S.

Inside the Obama White House, fears grew that the struggle for succession would turn violent. As defense minister, M.B.S. controlled the Army; as interior minister, bin Nayef controlled the country’s vast internal security forces. “You had the possibility of the princes going to war with each other, with tanks in the streets,” the former official said.

In Washington, M.B.Z. undertook a campaign to help establish M.B.S. as

the next Saudi king. “The Saudis and the Emiratis have the most effective lobbying operation in Washington,” Ben Rhodes, Obama’s deputy national-security adviser, told me. “I would say they are more responsible for the image of Obama as being soft in the Middle East than anyone else. They trashed us all around town.” Rhodes described Yousef Al Otaiba, the U.A.E.’s Ambassador to the United States, as especially capable. Otaiba, an urbane man with a shaved head and a wardrobe of immaculately tailored suits, meets often with America’s financial and political élites, sometimes arriving by private jet. Otaiba extolled M.B.S. to a range of powerful ex-officials, including David Petraeus, the former general who is now at the investment firm Kohlberg Kravis Roberts, and Tom Donilon, who served as President Obama’s national-security adviser. In discussions with members of the Obama Administration, he described his client in prophetic terms. “M.B.S. is going to be king for fifty years,” a former senior White House official recalled him saying.

Otaiba also appears to have helped organize a series of op-eds promoting M.B.S., in which he demonstrated unusual influence over prominent Washington figures. “I know you have a P.R. firm,” Frances Townsend, former President George W. Bush’s counterterrorism adviser, wrote to Otaiba, as she proposed an article favorable to M.B.S. “Let me know if there is someone I should work with that might provide a draft for me to begin from.” The former American official with contacts in the region said that Otaiba’s work was part of a larger effort, in which the Emiratis hired other lobbyists on M.B.S.’s behalf. (Otaiba denied this.) “All these public-relations firms that were promoting M.B.S. in the United States were paid for by Abu Dhabi,” the official said.

Bin Nayef, alarmed by what he saw as foreign interference, wrote to King Salman to warn him. (The letter was given to me by the former American official.) “We are facing a dangerous conspiracy,” he wrote. “An Emirati plot has been exposed to help aggravate the differences within the royal court.” He added, “Bin Zayed is currently plan-

ning to use his strong relationship with the United States President to achieve his intentions.”

In December, 2016, M.B.Z. flew to New York to meet with President-elect Trump, Kushner, Bannon, and Michael T. Flynn, who had been appointed national-security adviser. It’s customary for foreign leaders to notify the American government when they travel to the U.S., but M.B.Z. did not do so. The meeting has since reportedly captured the interest of Robert Mueller, the special counsel investigating Russia’s interference in the 2016 election, who is looking into allegations that Emirati lobbyists funnelled millions of dollars to Trump-campaign donors.

M.B.Z. arrived at the meeting, in the Trump Tower penthouse, with an entourage of about thirty people. He was dressed in combat boots and jeans, and some of his men were armed. For most of the first hour, he and the Trump aides engaged in a relatively conventional discussion of Middle East policy, but the talk grew more animated as the two sides realized that they shared a common fixation on Iran. The meeting evolved into a planning session on how the Trump White House would confront the Iranian regime in the Gulf.

A few weeks later, just after the Inauguration, Kushner began advocating a new outreach to Saudi Arabia. In his plan, Trump would visit Riyadh for a summit of fifty-five Muslim-majority countries. “Jared was the engine for all this,” the former defense official said. In a single gathering, Trump could introduce himself to the Muslim world, reestablish America’s relationship with Saudi Arabia, put Iran on notice, and communicate to everyone present how the Administration felt about M.B.S. “The whole establishment was opposed to it—State, D.O.D., Treasury, everyone,” the former defense official said. There were concerns about endorsing M.B.S. and rupturing the relationship with bin Nayef. “The fear was: You can’t engage with M.B.S. You can’t be doing this stuff, because that’s going to upset things. It might show favoritism. We’ve got a partner. Let’s stick with stability.”

At a meeting, aides raised reservations about the summit. “We go around

the room like this for an hour or so," the official said. "And Jared stood up and said, 'All right—I understand this is ambitious. But we won't know if the Saudis will deliver unless we really test them.'"

The summit, in May, 2017, was Trump's first overseas trip as President. The Saudis treated him as a fellow-monarch, spending an estimated sixty-eight million dollars on festivities, including a ceremony in which Trump and a group of royals danced, with swords in hand, to a traditional chant. In meetings, Bannon told me, Trump was blunt about American aims: "No. 1, Trump said to them, Stop funding Islamic terrorism. No more fucking games." At the summit, the Saudis, the Qataris, and others promised to fight extremism, and the Saudis agreed to pay for a jointly run counterterrorism center. The United States announced that it would sell the Saudis some hundred and ten billion dollars' worth of arms. A Pentagon official later said, "When completed, it will be the largest single arms deal in American history." Like the pledge to fight terrorism, these agreements were non-binding, but Bannon maintained that Trump had produced a decisive change in Saudi policy.

In the American press, the summit was noted largely for its pageantry, which culminated in the opening of the counterterrorism center, where Trump, King Salman, and Sisi posed in a huddle around a luminous globe. (The late-night host Stephen Colbert cracked, "Fellas, if I may, you need to work on your not-looking-like-supervillains skills.") But, in the months that followed, a series of dramatic events suggested that the attendees had quietly made a number of major decisions. Trump declared that the U.S. would move its Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to East Jerusalem, something that no American President had attempted since Israel occupied the West Bank, in 1967. M.B.S. leapfrogged over bin Nayef to become crown prince. And the Gulf monarchies, led by Saudi Arabia, entered an open confrontation with Qatar.

The first sign of conflict came on the evening of May 23rd, when a series of unusual quotations began to crawl across the bottom of television screens tuned to the official news agency





"We're doing everything we can to make him comfortable, short of dressing up as male doctors."

of Qatar, a tiny, thumb-shaped emirate on the Persian Gulf. "Iran is an Islamic power in the region that cannot be ignored," one said. " Hamas is the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people," another said. The statements would have been unremarkable, except that they were attributed to Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, the Emir of Qatar. For a royal in the Gulf, any open endorsement of Iran is explosive.

Thani claimed that the remarks were fakes, planted onscreen by hackers working for enemies of Qatar, but they prompted a stern reaction. Saudi Arabia's most prominent news network aired coverage—widely understood to have been personally overseen by M.B.S.—that attacked the Qatari leadership. ("Doha has lost its mind," a prominent intelligence official said.) In a statement on June 5th, the Saudi government accused Qatar of "dividing internal Saudi ranks, instigating against the state, infringing on its sovereignty, adopting various terrorist and sectarian groups aimed at destabilizing the region." The same day, Saudi Arabia and the Emirates, along with Bahrain, announced that they were blockading Qatar and breaking off diplomatic relations. The moves were effectively acts of war.

The Gulf countries that joined the blockade had long accused Qatar of financing terrorism and revolution across the Middle East and of align-

ing itself too closely with Iran. In 2013, they were divided by the crisis in Egypt, with Qatar providing financial support for the Morsi government and the Saudis and the Emiratis backing the Army. Saudi and Emirati leaders complain about Qatar's sponsorship of the Muslim Brotherhood and of Hamas, the Palestinian group that rules Gaza and whose roots are in the Brotherhood; they also resent the popularity of its state-funded television network, Al Jazeera, which is often sharply critical of the Gulf monarchies. M.B.S. has spoken dismissively of Qatar as a nagging problem that can, with sufficient resolve, easily be fixed. "Qatari behavior toward the Arab countries is motivated by psychological problems," he said. "One Saudi minister could solve the whole Qatari crisis."

The U.S. government has a complex relationship with Qatar, which has often been willing to facilitate difficult diplomatic maneuvers. Although the United States lists Hamas as a terrorist organization, a former American diplomat told me that after the group's leader, Khaled Meshal, was forced to flee the Assad regime, in 2012, American diplomats asked the Qataris to take him in. Since then, he has lived in a compound around the corner from the U.S. Ambassador's residence. The Qataris also host a de-facto embassy for the Taliban, where U.S. diplomats can speak

with Taliban officials; Bo Bergdahl, an American soldier who had been captured by the Taliban in Afghanistan, was released through negotiations conducted there. Perhaps most important, Qatar is the site of Al Udeid Air Base, the U.S. military's principal forward base in the region, which houses some eleven thousand military personnel and hundreds of combat aircraft. The Qataris funded its construction and continue to pay most of its operating costs. "All of these things, we have done at the request of the Americans or in coordination with them," Qatar's foreign minister, Mohammed bin Abdulrahman, told me.

Nevertheless, after the blockade began, President Trump tweeted his support, writing, "During my recent trip to the Middle East I stated that there can no longer be funding of Radical Ideology. Leaders pointed to Qatar—look!" (The former American diplomat suggested that his enthusiasm was partly motivated by ignorance: "I am convinced that Trump didn't know that we had a military base in Qatar. He had no idea.") Other senior officials expressed horror. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Secretary of Defense James Mattis were on a trip to Australia when the crisis broke, and were taken by surprise. "Tillerson was very upset," a senior State Department official told me. "He couldn't believe that the Saudis and the others would try something like that." Tillerson began working to ease tensions. Mattis called the Saudis and urged them to stand down. "Mattis told M.B.S., 'It's not the time for a war,'" a former senior Pentagon official told me. "The phone call didn't go very well." American officials became so worried about the possibility of a military clash that they sent a drone to monitor the border.

In the days that followed, the Saudis and their allies imposed conditions that appeared designed to reduce Qatar to a vassal state; in order for the blockade to be lifted, the country would, among other things, have to close Al Jazeera and sever relations with Iran. American officials concluded that M.B.S. and M.B.Z. were preparing to overthrow Qatar's government. "They have made it clear, privately and publicly, that their intention was to replace the Emir," the former American diplomat told me. "I think they were going

to invade.” Qatar presented an almost irresistible target: though its population is barely three hundred thousand, it controls one of the world’s largest natural-gas fields and has a sovereign wealth fund worth an estimated three hundred billion dollars. “If you look at it from a financial perspective, invading Qatar makes a lot of sense,” the diplomat said. The government of Turkey, which had a military base in the capital, sent a new detachment of soldiers.

Behind the scenes, there were indications that the plan had been approved at the summit in Riyadh. As the blockade was getting under way, a senior American official received a telephone call just before midnight from Yousef Al Otaiba, the Emirati Ambassador, who told him what was happening. “I was very angry,” the official told me. “I tried to talk him out of it.” When the official complained that the State Department had been given no notice, Otaiba suggested that he’d already announced it to the Administration. “I’ve informed the White House,” he said. A former American intelligence official told me it was inconceivable that the Saudis or the Emiratis would have acted without approval from the U.S. “I think it’s pretty well understood that the White House gave the green light,” the official told me. (A senior Administration official denied this.)

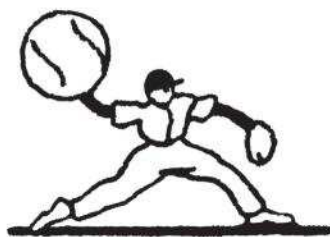
American diplomats knew almost nothing about what was happening between the White House and the Gulf monarchies. More than a year into Trump’s term, he still has not named an Ambassador to Saudi Arabia. “Nobody knows what happened in Riyadh, because there were no diplomats in the room,” the former American diplomat told me. At a speech several months after the crisis in Qatar erupted, Bannon told an American audience, “I don’t think it was just by happenstance that, two weeks after that summit, we saw the blockade.”

Some Qataris speculate that Kushner endorsed the blockade partly out of frustration over a failed deal with his family’s real-estate firm. In April, a month before the summit, Qatar’s finance minister, Ali Sharif al-Emadi, flew to New York to examine new investment opportunities. He and his entourage rented a suite at the St. Regis

Hotel, cleared away most of the furniture, and received a long line of American businessmen who were looking for funding. According to a financial analyst with knowledge of the meeting, among the hopefuls were Kushner’s father, Charles, and his sister Nicole. They came seeking money to rescue the family’s signature property, 666 Fifth Avenue—a forty-one-story tower in midtown Manhattan, which generates gallingly low returns and carries a mortgage, due next February, of \$1.2 billion.

Charles Kushner has maintained that the Qataris requested the meeting, and that he attended out of politeness but was too wary of conflicts of interest to accept funding. The financial analyst, however, said that Kushner pitched a huge renovation of the property, which included bringing in retail stores and converting offices to residences, and hosted a follow-up meeting the next day at 666 Fifth Avenue. “He asked for just under a billion dollars,” he told me. The Qataris declined, citing dubious business logic. “They could have bought the building—believe me, they have the money,” the analyst said. “They just didn’t think it would ever pay off.” The analyst worried that refusing the deal had a political cost. “Here’s a question for you: If they had given Kushner the money, would there have been a blockade? I don’t think so.”

As the conflict wore on, op-ed writers and social-media posts kept up a



drumbeat against Qatar. Many of them came from a curious source: the SCL Group, the parent company of the political-research firm Cambridge Analytica. (Before the election, Bannon was a vice-president of Cambridge Analytica, which was financed by Robert Mercer, the billionaire investor and Trump supporter.) SCL had been retained by the Emirati government; this was not known at the time, because the firm did not declare to the U.S. government that

it was working for the U.A.E. until the following month.

Eventually, U.S. intelligence analysts determined that the Qataris had been telling the truth: the televised statements attributed to Emir Thani had been fabricated by hackers hired by the United Arab Emirates. “The hacking was a pretext for us to be attacked,” bin Abdulrahman, the Qatari foreign minister, told me. Other indications emerged that the crisis had been premeditated. Last summer, Otaiba’s e-mails were hacked. Financial documents found among them showed that Emirati officials had, through a bank in Luxembourg, plotted a campaign of financial warfare aimed at causing Qatar’s currency to crash.

Qatar remains under blockade by the allied countries in the Gulf. The blockade has inflicted deep losses on the economy and forced leaders to find alternative sources of food and consumer goods. But the Qataris are rich enough to endure without too much hardship, and they have emerged from the crisis as objects of sympathy. In June, Mattis approved a deal to sell Qatar twelve billion dollars’ worth of American-made F-15 fighter jets. At a subsequent gathering, Tillerson reassured regional officials that Qatar was a “strong partner and longtime friend of the United States.”

On the evening of June 21st, viewers of Al Arabiya, the Saudi state news channel, witnessed a surreal scene: M.B.S., his face shrouded by a red-and-white checked kaffiyeh, strode up to his rival bin Nayef, theatrically kissed his hand, and dropped to his knees. Before M.B.S. could explain himself, bin Nayef declared his fidelity to his cousin: “I pledge allegiance to you, through the best and the worst.” M.B.S. stood up and, furiously shaking bin Nayef’s hand, offered his own affirmation: “We will always seek your guidance.” The film clip, twenty-four seconds long, was intended to announce that M.B.S. had peacefully succeeded bin Nayef as the next king of Saudi Arabia.

In fact, the transfer of power was anything but amicable. The night before, according to Saudi and American sources, bin Nayef had been summoned to a meeting with King Salman. At the palace, guards surrounded him, confiscated his phone, and demanded that he

abdicate. Bin Nayef refused. According to the former American official with contacts in the region, he was forced to stand for several hours, which, because of lingering injuries from the suicide attack, caused excruciating pain. One source told me that the guards threatened to announce that bin Nayef was addicted to painkillers, an allegation that the former American official dismissed: “I really doubt he did anything like that.”

As dawn neared, bin Nayef agreed to surrender his position. M.B.S. installed a new interior minister, a relative believed to be loyal to him. Bin Nayef was confined to his house, where even some of his most powerful American friends, including the former C.I.A. directors George Tenet and John Brennan, were not able to reach him. M.B.S.’s way to the throne was finally clear.

In the months that followed, M.B.S. pushed a sweeping reform agenda, decreeing, among other things, that women be allowed to drive. The Saudi state has long ruled through an alliance with the standard-bearers of the Wahhabi creed, who, in exchange for their loyalty, were given permission to disseminate stringent and antiquated doctrines. M.B.S. drastically scaled back funding for the spread of Wahhabism abroad, which many experts believe to be responsible for encouraging terrorism and virulently anti-Western ideas. “All we are doing is going back to what we were—moderate Islam that is open to all religions and open to the world,” M.B.S. told a gathering at the Ritz-Carlton in Riyadh, in October. “We will not waste thirty years of our lives in dealing with extremist ideas. We will destroy them today.”

These moves drew widespread, if not unanimous, praise in the West. Thomas Friedman, the influential foreign-affairs columnist for the *Times*, described visiting M.B.S. and returning convinced that his reforms, if they succeed, “will not only change the character of Saudi Arabia but the tone and tenor of Islam across the globe.” Friedman wrote that the young crown prince had kept him up until one-thirty in the morning, discussing national renewal until he pleaded exhaustion. “It has

been a long time,” he wrote, “since any Arab leader wore me out with a fire hose of new ideas for transforming his country.” The column inspired outrage among critics of Saudi Arabia. The *Al Jazeera* journalist Mehdi Hasan called it “an embarrassment.” At a Brookings Institution event a few days later, Friedman responded brusquely. “I got news for you—the entire Arab world is dysfunctional right now,” he said. “And so when I see someone who is having the balls to take on the religious component of that, to take on the economic component, to take on the political, with all of his flaws . . . I wanna stick my head up and say, ‘God, I hope you succeed.’ And when you do that the holy

hell comes down on you. Well, ‘Fuck that’ is my view, O.K.?”

As M.B.S. was being debated in the Western media, he began to systematically eliminate any potential opponents of his rule. In the next several months, Saudi police enforced a crackdown on what remained of the country’s independent press and pro-reform groups, arresting human-rights activists, pro-democracy organizers, and prominent journalists. “Most of the clerics he is arresting are not the hard-line clerics but the reformers—because they are popular,” Jamal Khashoggi, a Saudi journalist who recently fled to the U.S., told me.

Soon after becoming crown prince, M.B.S. had asked Western and Saudi banks to help assemble a financial picture of the country’s wealthiest men. On November 4th, he sent police across the country to arrest scores of people, including more than a dozen members of the royal family, on allegations of corruption. It was a breathtaking assault on the most powerful class of Saudis, who had enriched themselves, often with bribes and kickbacks facilitated by links to the royal family. M.B.S. warned, “Anyone who is involved in corruption will not be spared, whether he is a prince, a minister, or whoever he is. If there is enough evidence against him, he will be held accountable.”

Some two hundred detainees were brought to the Ritz-Carlton in Riyadh—a domain for princes, but not usu-

ally for princes under arrest. Among them were the country’s leading plutocrats, including a dozen senior princes, the owner of one of the country’s major television networks, the head of the national guard, and Al-Waleed bin Talal, a major shareholder in Citibank, 21st Century Fox, Apple, and Twitter, who has a net worth of seventeen billion dollars. Many were rattled by their first encounter with any restrictions on their lives. Ali Shihabi, who runs a pro-Saudi think tank in Washington, spoke to several detainees, and told me that everyone endured the same protocol: They were told to remove their clothes and were given a uniform and a medical exam, during which they were asked if they were taking any prescription drugs. Then they were led to guarded rooms, where the doors had been removed, along with the mirrors and anything else that they might use to harm themselves. “They could watch TV, order room service,” Shihabi told me. “They just couldn’t leave.”

Then the interrogations began, with police and investigators presenting the detained Saudis with purported evidence of their misdeeds. A figure was usually arrived at—under coercion—and, once the detainees paid up and signed a nondisclosure agreement, they were free to leave. “There was no due process of any sort, no courts, no judges, no warrants—none of that,” a Western diplomat told me. Many wealthy Saudis who were not targeted in the crackdown frantically moved their money out of the country, the beginning of a capital flight that totalled millions of dollars a month.

While M.B.S. was preaching austerity to his countrymen, he seemed unwilling to restrain himself. In 2015, while vacationing in the South of France, he had bought a yacht, the *Serene*, from a Russian vodka tycoon, for five hundred and fifty million dollars. He bought a château west of Paris, with a cinema and a moat with a submerged glass chamber for viewing carp. And, last November, he reportedly spent four hundred and fifty million on “*Salvator Mundi*,” the Leonardo da Vinci portrait of Jesus Christ. A spokesman for the royal family dismissed the reports, saying that a distant relative of M.B.S. had bought the painting; it was meant to hang in the newly opened



Louvre Abu Dhabi, where the crown prince's friend M.B.Z. had recently welcomed the first visitors.

In the Saudi and the Western media, M.B.S. described the arrests as a crack-down on corruption, which, he claims, has recovered more than a hundred billion dollars for the state. "He was sending a message that the old era was over, that corruption would no longer be tolerated," Bernard Haykel, a professor of Near Eastern studies at Princeton who has often met with the crown prince, told me. M.B.S. seems happy to have amplified his message, even if it was through brutal interrogations. At least one prominent Saudi died, in unclear circumstances. According to a Saudi with knowledge of the events, Ali al-Qahtani, a retired Army general, died of a heart attack after being subjected to harsh treatment during interrogation in the Ritz. (The Saudi government has denied abuse.) A detainee also told the Saudi that Amr al-Dabbagh, a former senior official with the Saudi Investment Authority, was subjected to electric shocks at the hotel. Some of those who had been inside the Ritz-Carlton reported that the captors spoke English to one another, which raised the possibility that M.B.S. had recruited foreigners to help him.

Haykel defended the detentions, saying that without them Saudi Arabia would continue on its unsustainable path. "M.B.S. knows that the system is incapable of reforming itself," he said. "Why? Because the system as it presently stands has lots of royals and hangers-on and businessmen who are feeding at the trough and will never agree to disenfranchise themselves." Even so, it seems clear that M.B.S.'s campaign functioned at least as much as an attack on those who might constitute a threat to his rule. Many of those arrested were relatives of previous kings—young men who considered themselves possible heirs to the throne, or at least to some aspect of the kingdom's power. The most telling arrest was that of Prince Miteb bin Abdullah, the head of the national guard and a son of the late King Abdullah. By removing Miteb, M.B.S. gained effective control over all three of the country's security branches: the Army, the interior ministry, and the national guard.

"He can do whatever he wants now," Khashoggi, the Saudi journalist, said. "All the checks and balances are gone."

In late October, Kushner paid an unpublicized visit to M.B.S., his third trip to the kingdom since the election. Though Kushner was supposed to focus on a plan for peace between Israel and Palestine, he had evidently decided that the more pressing goal was to unite the region against Iran.

Soon after Kushner departed, M.B.S. held a meeting with Mahmoud Abbas, the leader of the Palestinian Authority, to discuss the prospects for peace in the Middle East. According to a former Obama Administration official, the Saudis presented a plan that was radically favorable to Israel. It would recognize Israel's claims to Jerusalem and ratify nearly all of its settlements in the West Bank, offering the Palestinians only limited autonomy in areas under their control. A senior Palestinian official told me that Arab leaders have been applying intense pressure to Abbas, apparently in cooperation with the Trump Administration: "The whole idea is to settle the Jerusalem issue, so the White House can build a united front against Iran." But, he said, "if Jerusalem is on the table, we will never do it."

Around the same time, M.B.S. summoned Saad Hariri, the Lebanese Prime Minister, to Riyadh. Hariri got the call

as he was preparing for lunch with Françoise Nyssen, the French minister of culture, but he was not in a position to ignore M.B.S. Hariri was a Saudi citizen, and his construction company, Saudi Oger, which was deeply in debt, had done millions of dollars' worth of projects for the Saudi state.

M.B.S.'s relationship with Hariri had deteriorated because of the ongoing proxy war with Iran. Since the Saudis and the Emiratis intervened in Yemen, nearly three years earlier, things had gone disastrously wrong. The Houthis still occupied the capital, and Iranian elite commandos and operatives from Hezbollah were training new rebel fighters. Even more pressing, the Iranians had smuggled in missiles, which the rebels were using to bombard Saudi Arabia. In an effort to stop the missiles, the Saudis and the Emiratis blockaded Yemeni ports, which intensified the humanitarian disaster. More than ten thousand people have died, and hundreds of thousands more are facing famine and outbreaks of cholera.

Adding to M.B.S.'s anxiety was Hezbollah's position inside Lebanon. Since the Lebanese civil war ended, in 1990, Saudi Arabia had given the country billions of dollars to help it rebuild, only to watch as Hezbollah grew into the strongest party and the dominant military force. For several years, the American and the Saudi governments had teamed up to build a Lebanese Army



"Maybe we don't let him see the other golden animals."

as a counterweight. In 2016, a year after M.B.S. took over as defense minister, he cancelled three billion dollars of military aid, concluding that it was a waste of money. "He felt like every dollar he sent to Lebanon was supporting Hezbollah," the former American official who sees M.B.S. periodically told me.

The Saudis hoped that Hariri would be able to confront Hezbollah. He was a Sunni, and an experienced politician, who had served as Prime Minister from 2009 to 2011, when he fled to Paris, largely out of fear that Hezbollah was preparing to kill him. (His fears were not unfounded. In 2005, his father, Rafik, another Saudi-backed Prime Minister, was killed in a car-bomb attack, for which a U.N. tribunal has indicted four members of Hezbollah.) In 2016, after two years of parliamentary deadlock, in which the country operated without a head of state, he returned and took office.

But Hariri was unable to thwart Hezbollah, even as M.B.S. pushed him to take a tougher stand. The breaking point came in early November. As the rebels continued to fire missiles across the border, Ali Velayati, a senior Iranian leader, flew to Lebanon and met with Hariri. According to the former American official, Velayati said that Iran intended to continue asserting itself in the region. Afterward, Hariri posed, smiling, for a picture with him. When word reached M.B.S., he was enraged. "He felt like he had to do something," the official said.

When Hariri was summoned to meet M.B.S., he expected a warm reception from the royal family. "Saad was thinking that all his problems with M.B.S. would be solved," an aide to Hariri told me. Instead, in Riyadh, he was confronted by police, who took him into custody. According to two former American officials active in the region, he was held for eleven hours. "The Saudis put him in a chair, and they slapped him repeatedly," one of the officials told me. (Hariri's spokesman denied this.) At the end, in a surreal video that was played on Saudi television, Hariri, looking exhausted and drawn, read a resignation speech, claiming that he had fled Lebanon to evade an Iranian plot to kill him. Hariri, who is usually soft-spoken, declared that "Iran's hands in the region will be cut off"—a statement that convinced many Lebanese

THE ORCHARDS

There were problems to be solved then,
decisions to be made. Now we walk and walk

through the orchards, the Cannery Orchard,
the Nursery Orchard, the Black Cherry Orchard.

We walk to the river, the far boundary,
high and wide, deep and brown, a ganglia

of branches tumbling, shooting down the rapids,
then caught by the branch of a downed tree. There's

a man sitting on a bench aiming a long lens,
an old couple walking who stop to pet

our young dog. The Nursery Orchard makes me
think of how the decisions quieted, moved on,

how long ago I'd take those tests in secret,
and, never the right color, I thought it was him.

Later I found out it was both of us, and, oddly,
that made it better, our decision made. The young

trees in this orchard were grown for transplant,
or maybe they just took cuttings, because now

that the speech had been written by someone else.

It was unclear who would become Lebanon's new Prime Minister; according to Lebanese and Western officials I spoke to, M.B.S. had tried to enlist Hariri's brother, Bahaa, who spends much of his time in Monaco, to take the position. A senior American official in the Middle East told me that the plot was "the dumbest thing I've ever seen." But there were indications that M.B.S. had coordinated his moves with the Trump Administration, possibly at the summit in Riyadh. A former senior intelligence official who is close to the White House told me that M.B.S. had received a "green light" to remove Hariri. (A senior Administration official denied this.) "It's disruptive," the intelligence official told me. "The status quo in the Middle East doesn't work. They want to break it up."

Western officials, caught off guard by Hariri's detention, rallied to save him. Tillerson released a statement, saying, "The United States supports

the stability of Lebanon and is opposed to any actions that could threaten that stability." Emmanuel Macron, the French President, visited M.B.S. and pressed him to release Hariri. According to a Western diplomat with knowledge of the exchange, M.B.S. opened the conversation by threatening to cut off trade with France unless Macron stopped doing business with Iran. Macron gently replied that a country like France was free to trade with whom-ever it wished. "Macron handled it very well, and M.B.S. backed down," the diplomat told me.

Ultimately, the plan collapsed when most of the Lebanese political establishment protested Hariri's captivity. Two weeks after he had arrived, Hariri was on a plane, going first to meet with officials in Paris and Cairo, and then on to Beirut, where he basked in sympathy. "The whole country is unified around him," a senior Hezbollah leader told me.

Several days after his return, I went to see Hariri in Beirut. He lives in the Beit al-Wasat neighborhood, inside a

they're as gnarled as the tree in the meadow
they call the Wedding Tree, which was split

in a storm, its fallen branches scattered
around the still living base. It's the Goat Orchard

I keep wondering about, though—did the goats
run there the way the dogs do now

in their endless loops? Last night I saw a photo
of goats standing in the branches of a tree they climb

to eat its nuts. At first they looked much too heavy
to ride the branches, ten of them standing

in the same tree, and then they looked as light
as horned birds. So, yes, the decisions lessen

but the problems remain, the one about the heart,
the way it rises. The one about finding your way to it

as if walking in a maze of so many orchards
each one needs a name.

—*Maxine Scates*

high-walled compound of exquisitely restored villas with views of the Mediterranean; a few doors down sits the Maghen Abraham synagogue, destroyed during the civil war and rebuilt with the help of Hariri's family. Despite the grand surroundings, he seemed less a returning hero than an exhausted former prisoner. "I don't want to talk about what just happened," he said, slumped behind his desk. "M.B.S. was right, O.K.? What he is trying to do is right."

In March, M.B.S. began a two-week tour of the U.S., in which he travelled to New York, Boston, Houston, and Los Angeles, seeking investments and attempting to build good will. News stories had begun to spread about M.B.S.'s relationship with the White House, including one in which he reportedly said that Jared Kushner was "in his pocket." Still, at a meeting in the White House Cabinet Room, Trump and Kushner received him warmly. "Saudi Arabia is a very wealthy nation," Trump said afterward, in the Rose Garden. "And they're

going to give the United States some of that wealth, hopefully, in the form of jobs, in the form of the purchase of the finest military equipment anywhere in the world." That same day, the Senate blocked a resolution to limit U.S. involvement in the war in Yemen.

In Saudi Arabia, too, M.B.S. is encountering little resistance. "Working for M.B.S. is a blessing," Mohammad al-Shaikh, the Saudi minister of state, told me. "He's just gifted." Shaikh spoke of ambitious ventures throughout the country: a hundred and ten miles of subway track being dug under Riyadh; a megacity, called Neom, to be constructed on the Red Sea coast. The cost would be tremendous, he acknowledged, but he said that it would be offset by efficiencies in government, achieved by a newly formed agency called the Bureau of Capital and Operational Spending Rationalization. He described the changes as a kind of enlightened revolution. "It's a choice," he said. "It's not the Arab Spring. This is the leadership deciding that we have

a huge potential we need to unlock."

But, as sweeping as M.B.S.'s economic and cultural reforms may be, he has expressed no interest in liberalizing the country's political system. Indeed, the model that seems to best conform to his vision is China, with its dynamic economy, literate population, and authoritarian rule. Experts on the Saudi system, including those who admire M.B.S., say that his efforts are being carried out with one overriding goal: to preserve the House of Saud.

As M.B.S. neared the end of his first year as crown prince, his position seemed secure. He had eliminated or silenced nearly all potential opposition to his rule. He replaced the generals in charge of the war in Yemen and pushed ahead with his plans to privatize Saudi Arabia's oil industry.

At the same time, the waves of arrests created a climate of fear in which even the tamest criticism of the government was labelled disloyal. His purges of rivals, and his creation of what amounted to a cult of personality, appeared designed to place on M.B.S. the entire burden of governing and to leave the country's institutions enfeebled. His rapid modernization and anti-corruption initiatives, whatever their motivations, seemed sure to inspire legions of enemies. Still, his supporters in both Washington and Riyadh feel that, whatever his faults, the alternative would be worse.

In the White House, Kushner's power has been diminished, as his security clearance was revoked amid a series of scandals. But the appointments of Mike Pompeo as Secretary of State and John Bolton as national-security adviser presage an even more hawkish era, in which there will be few constraints on M.B.S.'s regional ambitions. "No one would have thought that the Saudi leader could take on the royal family, the clerical establishment, and the country's most powerful businessmen, but he did," a former American official who has dealt with M.B.S. told me. "But success at home convinced him he could get away with the things he did abroad. M.B.S. has always had a combination of vision, hubris, and arrogance, all of which are now playing out. What troubles me about M.B.S. is, he learns from his successes, but not his failures. That's the danger." ♦

TAKING THE WHEEL

Can Uber's new leader turn the scandal-plagued company around?

BY SHEELAH KOLHATKAR

The Indian city of Gurugram, which in Hindi means “village of the guru,” is a technology-and-business hub twenty miles south of New Delhi, reached by highways filled with auto-rickshaws, exhaust-spewing buses, and the occasional immovable cow. The city’s glass high-rises contain dozens of multinational corporations, including Pepsi, Google, and Microsoft. On a recent morning, a white S.U.V. pulled up in front of the building housing the largest Indian office of the ride-hailing company Uber, and out climbed Dara Khosrowshahi, the company’s new C.E.O.

In Uber’s minimalist lobby, Khosrowshahi was greeted by two local staff members, who led him through a traditional Hindu lamplighting ceremony called an *aarti*. The ceremony, which banishes negativity and invites in light and optimism, is intended to mark an auspicious beginning. Khosrowshahi smiled as he lit ghee-soaked wicks on a bronze lamp surrounded by rose and dahlia petals. A female Uber employee dabbed a red *tilak* dot on his forehead and handed him a bouquet of flowers. In a black blazer, white dress shirt, and slim-fitting jeans, he looked like a corporate executive who had just escaped from a New Age retreat.

A few minutes later, Khosrowshahi was ushered into the cafeteria to meet with a group of Uber’s India-based employees. He seemed weary. He had been in India a little more than twenty-four hours, and had flown in directly from a two-day trip to Japan, where he visited Toyota plants and lobbied government officials to let Uber expand in the country. Although Uber is losing money in India, it is growing rapidly, and Khosrowshahi’s frenetic schedule involved numerous meetings with Indian politicians and regulators, including one that evening with the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi. Local pol-

icy experts had been briefing Khosrowshahi on his talking points. He was advised to refer to Uber’s drivers as “micro-entrepreneurs”—a term that, as Uber India’s chief business officer put it, “warms a politician’s heart.”

In the cafeteria, the president of Uber India asked Khosrowshahi a series of parlor-game questions:

“If you could go back in time, what would you tell your twenty-two-year-old self?”

“To get the hell out of investment banking sooner,” Khosrowshahi said.

“What’s the last book you read?”

“Oof, it was, uh . . . I can’t believe I’m saying this. It was ‘Fire and Fury,’ the Donald Trump book.” People laughed.

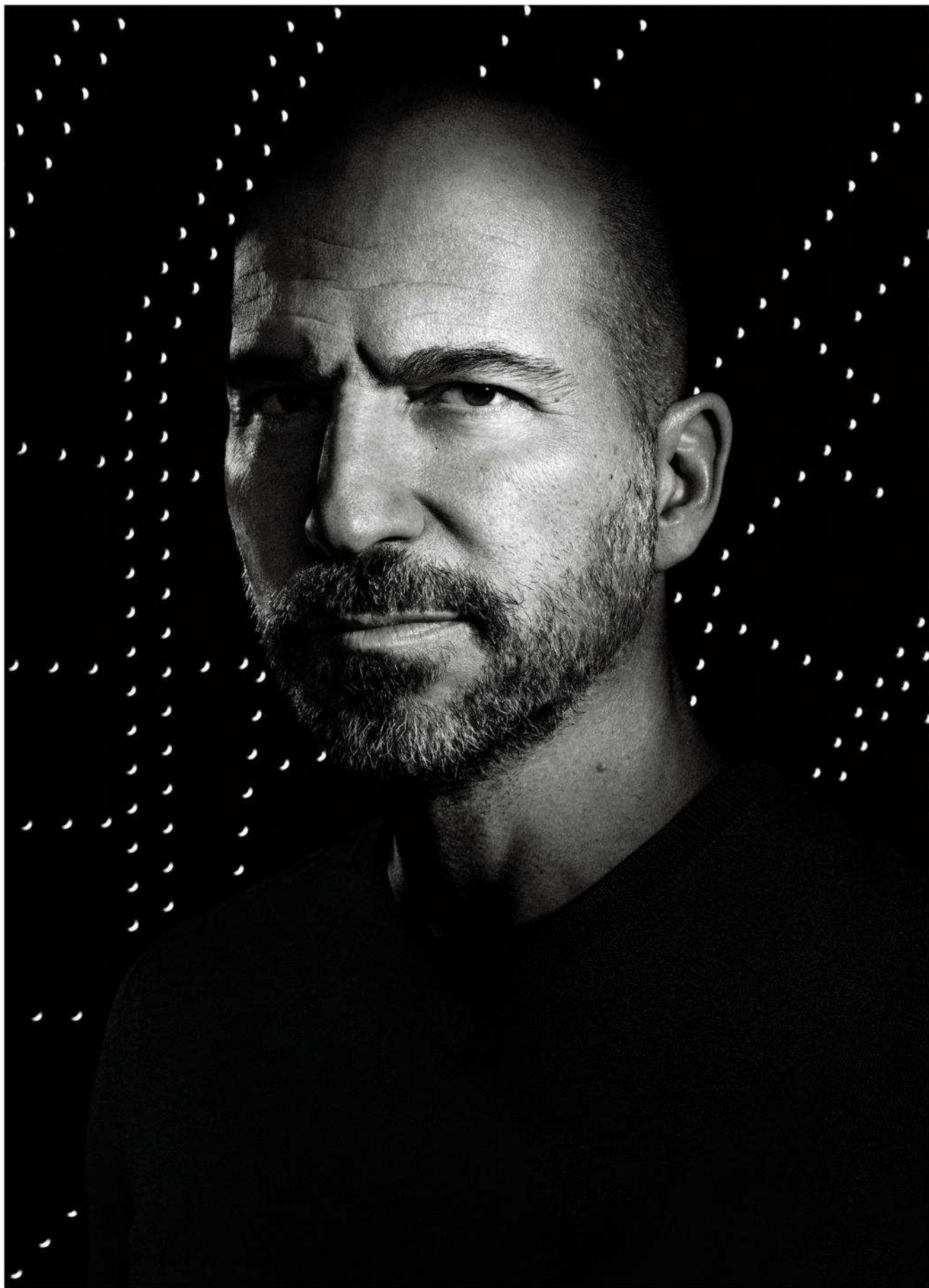
“This is my first time in India,” Khosrowshahi, who is forty-eight, remarked when it was his turn to address the crowd. He had been denied a visa when he was the C.E.O. of the online travel company Expedia—because, he theorized, of his Iranian heritage and Muslim name. Clearly, he said, “Uber has more pull.” There was enthusiastic applause.

Khosrowshahi talked about Uber’s future, including its plans to go public in 2019 and its goal of growing to between twenty and thirty times its current size. Then his voice became somber. “The company brought me on board because of a lot of things that happened in the past,” he said. “We were probably trading off doing the right thing for growth, and thinking about competition maybe a bit too aggressively, and some of those things were mistakes.” He didn’t need to list the mistakes, many of which had been widely publicized. “Mistakes themselves are not a bad thing,” he went on. “The question is, do you learn from those mistakes? 2017 has been a really tough year, but this is going to result in us being a better company.”

Last August, when Khosrowshahi accepted the C.E.O. job, he inherited

one of the most successful, and most scandal-plagued, companies in Silicon Valley. Uber had been expanding aggressively, in part by treating obstacles—whether competing ride-hailing companies or government regulations—as inconveniences to be bulldozed over. In many respects, the strategy worked. Just seven years after Uber offered its first black-car ride, in San Francisco, it had become one of the world’s best-known brands, and one of the largest privately held companies, valued by investors at seventy-two billion dollars. Uber now has eighteen thousand employees and currently operates in seventy-three countries. In addition to its ride-hailing service, it offers takeout food delivery (Uber Eats), and its engineers are developing vertical-liftoff aircraft (Uber Elevate) as well as driverless cars—a project that is consuming vast resources, and that encountered a major setback in March, when a pedestrian in Arizona was killed by one of Uber’s autonomous vehicles.

Since joining the company, Khosrowshahi has played the role of flatterer, diplomat, negotiator, and salesman. He was selected by Uber’s board in part because of his personality: agreeable, unthreatening, comfortable with the kind of corporate talk that investors find reassuring. Uber’s previous C.E.O., Travis Kalanick, had built the company into an extraordinary success. Under his leadership, it also acquired a terrible reputation, as the embodiment of a strain of Silicon Valley culture that values results above all else. Khosrowshahi’s visit to New Delhi was, among other things, a visit to the scene of one of the worst episodes in Uber’s history. In 2014, a female passenger accused her Uber driver of rape. Afterward, Kalanick reportedly speculated that the assault was staged by a rival Indian car-hailing service called Ola, and an Uber manager obtained the victim’s confidential medical records. (The manager was



When Dara Khosrowshahi applied to become Uber's C.E.O., Barry Diller warned him, "That's a very dangerous place."

PHOTOGRAPH BY PARI DUKOVIC

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subsequently fired, and Kalanick denies the reports.) It turned out that the driver had been reported for inappropriate behavior several times, and Uber had failed to do anything.

Last summer, a group of investors pushed Kalanick out of the C.E.O. role. Uber is under federal investigation, with five different lines of inquiry. Numerous civil lawsuits have also been filed against the company, involving gender discrimination, complaints from drivers, and a large data breach in 2016, which the company concealed. The dramatic decline of Uber's reputation has shaken Silicon Valley, which likes to think of itself as a force for good, even when confronted with evidence to the contrary. Nick Beim, a partner at the venture-capital firm Venrock, told me, "This particular company was so far out on the spectrum. It has cast such a shadow over Silicon Valley." At the same time, Uber's continued financial success has reinforced the idea that ruthlessness will be rewarded. "Is it O.K. to condone unethical behavior if you make a lot of money?" Beim asked. "It shouldn't be, but that's the looming question Silicon Valley needs to take a stand on."

Uber's board hopes that Khosrowshahi will be able to repair the company's image. "He is a relationship guy," David Krane, the managing partner of GV, formerly Google Ventures, which invested in Uber, told me. "He is much more patient." Arianna Huffington, who is on Uber's board, brought up Marcus Aurelius, the Roman emperor: "He dealt with plagues and invasions

and betrayals, and he always managed to remain imperturbable." She has joked with Khosrowshahi that he shares the same qualities.

Khosrowshahi is now tasked with transforming this unwieldy, ambitious enterprise into a more traditional company, without sacrificing the attributes that made it successful in the first place. An Uber investor told me, "One of the words that was common parlance at Uber was 'fierce.' I love that word. But it can absolutely be taken too far." The question, he said, is "How does Dara preserve the positive aspects of the culture and change the aspects that are in desperate need of changing while still competing fiercely?"

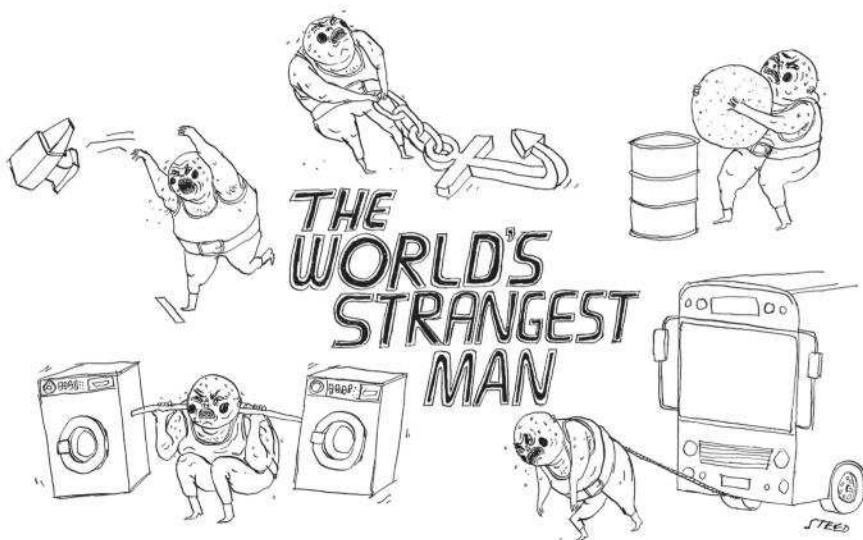
The idea for Uber originated with a few young tech entrepreneurs who wanted a more efficient way to hail taxis in San Francisco. In 2008, a Canadian software programmer named Garrett Camp began working on the concept of using a smartphone to summon a town car, and he went into business with his friend Kalanick, who had co-founded two file-sharing startups. (The first, called Scour, which facilitated file-sharing of movies and music, was sued for copyright infringement and went bankrupt.) Uber initially focussed on black-car limo service, but Kalanick soon adopted the model of the company's chief competitor, Lyft, allowing drivers to use their own vehicles to transport passengers.

From the start, Uber's business was predicated on breaking rules. Taxi ser-

vice in most cities was tightly controlled, and the company, instead of attempting to persuade regulators to let it operate, chose to ignore many of the regulations. As a result, Uber was in a combative stance at all times. (Kalanick once said, "We're in a political campaign, and the candidate is Uber and the opponent is an asshole named Taxi.") On the day, in 2010, when Kalanick was named C.E.O. of the company, which was initially called UberCab, a cease-and-desist letter arrived from San Francisco's transit authority and the California Public Utilities Commission, claiming that the new company was clearly a taxi service and therefore fell under their jurisdiction. According to Brad Stone's book "The Upstarts," Kalanick simply dropped the word "Cab" from the company name and otherwise dismissed the letter.

As the company expanded to other locations, including New York, Seattle, Chicago, Boston, and Washington, D.C., it employed the same strategy: avoiding contact with local authorities until after the service had launched. Guerrilla teams were sent into foreign cities, beginning with Paris, in 2011, and London, in 2012, where they followed a similar script. In many places, users greeted Uber enthusiastically. But the company's arrival also prompted street protests from taxi-drivers, lawsuits from regulators, and accusations of tax avoidance. Uber was fined and banned around the world. In France, its executives were arrested for running an illegal service. In Seoul, Kalanick was indicted in absentia.

In spite of the controversies, Uber was admired by investors in Silicon Valley and on Wall Street, many of whom thought the business exemplified industry disruption. In February, 2011, the venture-capital firm Benchmark became Uber's lead investor, providing twelve million dollars in financing, at a company valuation of sixty million dollars, and a Benchmark partner named Bill Gurley joined Uber's board. Two years later, the valuation, at least on paper, had increased to \$3.5 billion. Rarely has a stake in a private company increased in value so quickly, and other investors took note. Over time, TPG, Menlo Ventures, First Round Capital, Lowercase Capital, Goldman Sachs, Fidelity, and SoftBank vied to become Uber investors.



Kalanick pitted potential investors against one another and, when taking money, dictated transaction terms that gave him an unusual amount of influence, including effective control of a majority vote on the board. A dynamic formed in which the co-founder had leverage over the people providing him financing, meaning that Uber had nearly unlimited access to capital and relatively few constraints on its actions.

In September, 2015, Kalanick arranged a corporate retreat in Las Vegas. Employees were treated to parties and musical performances by Beyoncé and the d.j. David Guetta. The centerpiece of the retreat was a whimsical presentation in which Kalanick, dressed in a lab coat, introduced fourteen cultural values that he had developed with Jeff Holden, Uber's chief product officer, who had joined the company after a long tenure at Amazon. According to one attendee, Kalanick offered lengthy disquisitions on the values, which included such phrases as "superpumped" (one of Kalanick's favorite words), "meritocracy and toe-stepping" (the best ideas should win, and people shouldn't be held back by concerns about offending their colleagues), "let builders build" (don't try to restrain high performers), and "al-ways be hustlin'."

January of 2017 marked the beginning of an awful year for Uber. The company had grown preposterously fast. Eric Meyhofer, the head of Uber's Advanced Technologies Group, told me, "We went from zero to seventy billion dollars in seven years. Ford went from zero to seventy billion in seventy years." (He described working at the company as akin to riding "a lit rocket with your head out of the window.") Yet Uber lacked the infrastructure of an established business. There was no chief financial officer or chief operating officer, which was unusual for a firm of such size operating in a heavily regulated industry. On January 27th, the company found itself in the midst of a public-relations disaster after President Trump issued a sweeping immigration ban, which prompted spontaneous protests across the country, including one at John F. Kennedy International Airport, in New York. A taxi union announced that, in solidarity with the protesters, its cabs would not pick up

passengers at the airport. Uber told riders that it would suspend surge pricing, which increases fares during times of high demand. The public interpreted the move as an attempt to undermine the taxi strike. (Uber insists that this was a misunderstanding.) A "Delete Uber" campaign started on social media, and two hundred thousand people wiped the app from their phones.

Around the same time, Uber hired a new head of human resources, Liane Hornsey, who came from Google. Hornsey said that when she informed professional contacts about her new position, she "got this really weird vibe back." People told her that Uber had a bad reputation, and said, "Oh, they really need you." Hornsey's initial impression was that many employees seemed anxious and overworked. Kalanick had promoted the idea of internal competition, with different teams battling against one another on the same project, which led to secrecy, lack of cooperation, and animosity among employees. "There was no sense of trust, no sense of 'We're building this together,'" Hornsey said.

Problems of gender discrimination weren't as immediately obvious. "There was some stuff in the data that said it was laddish," Hornsey said. "But it didn't punch me on the nose." Then, on February 19th, a former Uber engineer named Susan Fowler posted a memo online, alleging a disturbing pattern of sexual harassment that Uber's human-resources department had failed to address. The memo came out on a Sunday, and Hornsey was in the car with her husband when she first read it. She was stunned. An emergency meeting was convened, during which Kalanick and the most senior women at the company—Hornsey; Rachel Holt, Uber's head of North America; and Rachel Whetstone, the head of public and government relations—discussed what to do. Huffington, the only woman on the board, participated by phone.

The tone of the meeting was grave. "I didn't hear any question of 'Should we fight this, is this wrong, is this not true?'" Hornsey said. "I just heard, 'Bloody hell, if this is true, we need to get serious.'"

The company hired Eric Holder, the former U.S. Attorney General, who is now a partner at Covington & Burling, to lead an external investigation into Uber's culture. Another law firm, Perkins Coie, was retained to investigate the Fowler allegations and other accusations of misconduct. Two days later, Huffington, who was acting as a sort of in-house corporate therapist, proposed

an addition to Uber's cultural values: "No brilliant jerks allowed."

The negative news continued to accumulate. On February 23rd, Waymo, the autonomous-driving unit founded by Google, filed a lawsuit against Uber, alleging that it had stolen confidential information

pertaining to lidar, a laser-based scanning technology. On February 26th, a high-ranking Uber employee was dismissed after the company discovered that he had left his previous job, at Google, over a sexual-harassment claim. Two days later, just as Uber was preparing to announce measures intended to repair its relationship with drivers, *Bloomberg* posted a dashboard video that showed Kalanick riding in the back of a luxury Uber black car, partying with two young women. In the video, Kalanick gets into an argument with the driver after he complains about Uber cutting rates and making it hard to earn a living. The argument escalates, and Kalanick angrily tells the driver, "Some people don't like to take responsibility for their own shit. They blame everything in their life on somebody else!" Three days later, the *Times* reported on a secret internal Uber program called Greyball, which gave law-enforcement agents and government officials a fake version of the Uber app to impede investigations of the service. Then reports emerged about another covert program, called Hell, which Uber had used to identify drivers who were working for Lyft and lure them away.

Lyft's corporate image, including its puffy pink logo, was more welcoming than Uber's, and the company was notably scandal-free. As riders defected from Uber, Lyft went from underdog to formidable competitor, raising \$1.7 billion and growing its share of the



American market to more than thirty per cent. Morale among Uber employees, meanwhile, was low. Wayne Ting, a former general manager of Uber in San Francisco, who is now Khosrowshahi's chief of staff, told me, "I think in 2017 a lot of us were learning about some of the stuff that was happening from the media. It was shocking, it was inexcusable." Ting described the year leading up to Kalanick's departure as an "out-of-body experience." "It prompted a lot of reflection," he said. "Do I want to stay? What are the things I need to see change in order for me to want to stay?"

One former Uber employee told me that people in the San Francisco office were concerned—but not for the reasons the headlines implied. "The elephant in the room was whether the business model even works," he said. Uber was spending billions of dollars to subsidize rides in order to keep rates low and passengers coming back. Its competitors were doing the same thing. The only way Uber could become profitable was to both increase the volume of rides and raise the price of each one. But as long as Lyft or another rival was offering discounts, increasing fares was impossible, because consumers would simply switch to the cheaper app. And as long as venture capital continued to flow into ride-hailing, Uber's rivals would continue to offer discounted rides. "How do they reduce the subsidies for the rides and not lose volume is the big math puzzle," the former employee told me. In 2017, Uber grew substantially, but it also reported \$4.47 billion in losses.

In early June, Uber announced the results of the two investigations into workplace misconduct. The company had fired twenty employees and placed thirty-one others in training or counselling. On June 11th, the Uber board, including Kalanick, gathered to hear a presentation on the findings of Holder's team, which had reviewed three million documents and interviewed two hundred current and former employees. The report painted a harsh picture of the company and recommended forty-seven changes, including restructuring the board of directors to make it more independent and restricting alcohol and drug use at company events. A compliance consultant described the report as "one of the most remarkable discussions

of a complete workplace culture disaster that has ever been rendered for a multi-billion business. If you changed some of the business and legal language, you might well think you were reading a report on Animal House."

The week before the board meeting, Kalanick's parents had been in a boating accident. His mother had died and his father had been seriously injured, and Kalanick was grief-stricken. The board discussed whether Kalanick should take a leave of absence, to mourn as well as to relieve the barrage of negative publicity. According to a person familiar with the meeting, at one point David Bonderman, a board member and a co-founder of the investment firm TPG, told Kalanick, "Travis, frankly, I cannot imagine this company without you, and I cannot imagine this company *with* you." The board asked Kalanick to take an open-ended leave. In the meantime, the company would be managed by a committee of sixteen executives. Nine days later, two partners from Benchmark surprised Kalanick by handing him a letter from a group of investors asking him to resign immediately and threatening to publicly campaign against him if he did not. It wasn't clear what had changed since the board meeting, but Kalanick complied and stepped down.

Khosrowshahi sometimes wears a T-shirt with the words "We Are All Dreamers" printed across the front. He often speaks of his experience finding asylum in America after his family fled Iran, in 1978. When Trump issued his executive order on immigration, Expedia joined other technology companies in a declaration of support for a lawsuit that the State of Washington had filed against the ban. Since then, Khosrowshahi has made his contempt for the President's policies clear. In August, amid controversy over Trump's response to violent protests in Charlottesville, Khosrowshahi wrote on Twitter, "I keep waiting for the moment when our Prez will rise to the expectations of his office and he fails, repeatedly."

Khosrowshahi's family led a prosperous upper-class life in Tehran until the Iranian Revolution threw the country into chaos. A wealthy uncle lived in New York, and the Khosrowshahis, after escaping temporarily to the South of

France, where the family had vacationed in the past, immigrated to the United States and moved into a three-bedroom condominium in Tarrytown. Shortly after they arrived in the U.S., fifty-two American diplomats were taken hostage in Tehran, a crisis that lasted more than a year and created a surge of anti-Iranian sentiment in America. The family watched from across an ocean as their manufacturing business, which produced consumer and pharmaceutical goods under brands licensed from Western countries, was nationalized by the new Islamic government.

Khosrowshahi's parents put their remaining resources into their children's education, enrolling Khosrowshahi and his two brothers at Hackley, the prep school that their cousins attended. Khosrowshahi was in the fifth grade, and spoke less than perfect English. "It was a tough adjustment at first," he told me. "But we knew how to play soccer. My brothers were total soccer gods within the school. And that was our in to being socially accepted." Khosrowshahi was drawn to the sciences, and his father encouraged him to become a doctor. In Iran, Khosrowshahi explained, "the heroes of the world were the engineers or the doctors." When he was in his early teens, his father returned to Iran to take care of his own father, who was ill. He was arrested by the government and detained for six years. Khosrowshahi's mother, left to care for three teen-age boys, took a job as a salesperson at a high-end women's-clothing boutique in Manhattan—the sort of store she had previously frequented as a client. "I think there was this undercurrent within my family, which was that we had lost everything," Khosrowshahi told me. In his first address to Uber employees, in August, he put it more bluntly: "There's this chip you have on your shoulder as an immigrant that drives you."

Herb Allen III, the president of the investment bank Allen & Co., was a classmate of Khosrowshahi's and used to join the family for dinners—warm, boisterous affairs that often ended with board games or charades. "They were the most family-oriented family I ever met," Allen said. "It wasn't just that you had to live up to your own potential. You were wearing the jersey of the whole family, and you were expected to behave

in a certain way. You had to make the most of yourself.”

Khosrowshahi attended Brown University, where he studied bioelectrical engineering and immersed himself in Dungeons & Dragons, the role-playing game. “I was this odd combination of geek squad and at the same time hanging out with the jocks,” he said. He joined a fraternity of water-polo players and got so tired of hearing people mispronounce his name—“Dara What?”—that he began introducing himself as Darren K. “It sounds like a porn star, I know,” he said.

After graduating, Khosrowshahi took a job as a junior investment banker at Allen & Co., where one of his brothers was also working. At the end of Khosrowshahi’s first year, he received a twenty-thousand-dollar bonus and an all-expenses-paid African safari. Allen & Co. was known for its expertise in advising big media companies, and Khosrowshahi soon began working with Barry Diller, who was running QVC and attempting a hostile takeover of Paramount. The deal never went through, but Diller was impressed by Khosrowshahi and recruited him to work for IAC, Diller’s holding company. Seven years later, in 2005, Diller’s company Expedia was competing with a second generation of online travel businesses and looking for a new chief executive, and Diller asked Khosrowshahi to take the position. “He’s the quintessential example of someone who we immediately saw had talent—raw talent,” Diller told me. “We believe in throwing people into the water, and hopefully having them sink a little. And that process is a kind of window into their real character. He had no experience of any kind operating anything, and we threw him into that water. And he more than mastered the job.”

Expedia grew significantly while Khosrowshahi was running it, going from \$2.1 billion in revenue in 2005 to \$10.1 billion in 2017. (Its main competitor, Priceline, grew much more during the same period.) Khosrowshahi was well liked—the words “nice” and “wholesome” came up a lot in reference to him—and the company was regarded as a stable and satisfying place to work, with a high percentage of women and other underrepresented groups on staff.



“We capitalize ‘Internet’ out of respect for its power.”

In August, 2017, when Khosrowshahi called Diller to tell him that he was pursuing the Uber job, Diller tried to talk him out of it. Diller and his wife, Diane von Fürstenberg, were friends with Kalanick, and Diller knew that the situation at Uber was fraught. “I said, ‘Oh, my God, Dara, you must be out of your mind,’” Diller told me. “That’s a very dangerous place.” In the end, he advised Khosrowshahi during the three weeks of negotiations.

On August 10th, Benchmark took the remarkable step of suing Kalanick, in effect cannibalizing its own investment. The lawsuit accused him of committing fraud to “entrench himself on Uber’s Board of Directors and increase his power over Uber for his own selfish ends,” and of secretly clearing the way for his return. The Uber board was divided into pro- and anti-Kalanick factions, and this split was reflected in the C.E.O. search. The search had converged on two candidates, Jeffrey Immelt, a former C.E.O. of General Electric, and Meg Whitman, the C.E.O. of Hewlett-Packard. Both were celebrity chief executives who had run sprawling corporations. Kalanick and his allies favored Immelt, who had expressed respect for tech-company founders and indicated that he would want Kalanick to remain deeply involved. The other

group, led by Benchmark, was pushing for Whitman, with whom the venture-capital firm had a long relationship. There was no faction lobbying for Khosrowshahi. He told me that he saw his candidacy as “a bit of a lark—I was always the third, unknown candidate.”

One of the most pressing questions for the candidates was whether Kalanick would try to continue running Uber from the shadows. At the end of August, when Khosrowshahi gave a formal presentation before the Uber board in San Francisco, Kalanick was seated directly across from him. Khosrowshahi had made a set of PowerPoint slides, and, when he came to the slides addressing questions of governance, the atmosphere grew tense. A slide about Kalanick read “There cannot be two C.E.O.s.” “I was very clear that we needed separation, that if I came in I’d need to be recognized as a leader. We’d have to push Travis away,” Khosrowshahi told me. “Travis is not active with the company at all anymore.” (At the end of March, Kalanick announced that he had bought the real-estate startup City Storage Systems and would join the company as C.E.O. He remains a member of Uber’s board.)

The following morning, Immelt inexplicably announced that he was dropping out. Suddenly, Khosrowshahi was

a contender, if for no other reason than that the anti-Whitman votes needed a candidate. The board members gathered again, in a meeting room in the San Francisco Four Seasons Hotel, and began voting in a secret-ballot process that involved texting their decisions to a corporate headhunter. After the first round, the results were evenly split, with four votes for Whitman and four for Khosrowshahi. The voting dragged on through much of the day. Two of the board members were overseas, dialling in from remote time zones. The rest were stuck in a single room, like deadlocked jurors. Eventually, Benchmark said that it would be open to dropping its lawsuit against Kalanick if Whitman became C.E.O. Some of the board members reacted unfavorably to the pressure tactic and changed their votes. Huffington convinced the group that, whatever the results, it should announce a unanimous verdict for the winning candidate.

Khosrowshahi and Diller spoke several times as they waited for the results. Rumors had started to circulate that Whitman had been selected. Diller tried to console Khosrowshahi, and the two were on the phone when Diller received an e-mail. It was from Kara Swisher, the executive editor of the tech Web site Recode. The e-mail read “It’s Dara.” Diller asked Khosrowshahi, “Are you sure no one’s called you?”

Forty minutes later, Khosrowshahi was in his car on the way to buy groceries for dinner when he got a call from Huffington. “I have some good news and I have some bad news,” Huffington said. “Which do you want first?” Khosrowshahi told her he wanted the good news.

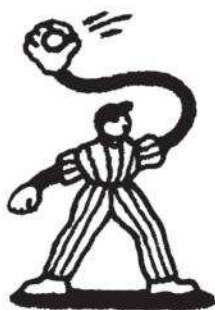
“The good news is, we picked you to be the next C.E.O. of Uber,” she said.

“What’s the bad news?” Khosrowshahi asked.

“It’s leaked already.”

On a rainy afternoon, I joined Khosrowshahi, his wife, Sydney Shapiro, and their five-year-old twin boys at their weekend home on Whidbey Island, forty-five minutes north of Seattle. (Khosrowshahi also has a teen-

age daughter and son from a previous marriage.) The three-bedroom retreat, surrounded by giant fir trees and situated on twenty-three acres overlooking Puget Sound, is decorated in a style that Shapiro describes as “eighty-year-old grandma rock star,” filled with oil portraits and taxidermy and flickering candles. Uber board members have cited Khosrowshahi’s status as a family man as one element of his appeal, and a welcome contrast to Kalanick’s good-time-bachelor persona. Khosrowshahi has been commuting every week to San Francisco from the family’s primary home, in Seattle, and admits that it’s been a challenge. During an interview for CNBC in New Delhi, a young man asked him how he balances



work and family, and he laughed. “Right now, work is winning, unfortunately,” he said. “My family is not that happy about it.”

As we sat down to a meal of roast chicken and vegetable soup at a long table in the kitchen—the boys ate pasta with butter—Shapiro told me that when they met, ten years ago, on a blind date, Khosrowshahi arrived wearing a suit and driving a rented Volvo. “I was, like, he’s the C.E.O. of Expedia, he’s going to be this arrogant, egocentric, just . . . *douche*,” Shapiro said. She had been working as a preschool teacher, and was wary of the fact that Khosrowshahi had just gone through a divorce. Shapiro, who is tall and graceful and wears ripped jeans and concert T-shirts, said that Khosrowshahi surprised her. “He had so many questions for me, and he was funny,” she said. She told me that, when the Uber job came up, she immediately knew Khosrowshahi was right for it, even though he was skeptical about his chances. She started looking at California real estate while he was still interviewing. She also encouraged him to dress in a more tech-friendly style, which today generally consists of jeans and a sweater.

“I wore a suit in Brazil,” Khosrowshahi acknowledged. He had recently visited the country, Uber’s second-largest market, to persuade Brazilian lawmakers not to pass legislation that

would have imposed substantial new regulatory requirements. “I’ll wear one if we really have to apologize,” he said. Khosrowshahi has had to do a lot of apologizing since taking the job. Last September, he issued an open apology to the city of London, which had declined to renew the company’s license after finding it “unfit” to run a taxi service. In November, he apologized to the public after revealing that Uber hadn’t disclosed the 2016 hack, which had compromised the personal information of fifty-seven million riders and drivers.

One of Khosrowshahi’s first acts as C.E.O. was to create a new list of cultural values, which he developed by soliciting ideas from employees. (The endorsement of “toe-stepping,” he wrote on LinkedIn, was too often “used as an excuse for being an asshole.”) No. 4 now reads “We Do the Right Thing. Period.” He announced that in 2018 the company would focus on improving driver and rider safety. He’s hired experienced executives, including Barney Harford, the former C.E.O. of Orbitz, and Tony West, a former Justice Department official and chief legal officer of Pepsi.

Khosrowshahi is also trying to position Uber to go public, in part by making more careful decisions about which ideas to pursue. In late March, the company agreed to sell its business in Southeast Asia to Grab, a local competitor, in order to free up resources for Uber’s other divisions. The news was not welcomed in certain corners of the company, where employees worry that Khosrowshahi may lack the drive necessary to achieve Uber’s most ambitious goals. Khosrowshahi is set to make a hundred and twenty million dollars if he meets certain objectives, including taking the company public in 2019 at a valuation of a hundred and twenty billion dollars. One former employee, who expressed admiration for Khosrowshahi, told me, “If I’m Dara, my performance metrics are: Fix the board problems, fill out the executive ranks, bring liquidity to the investors by moving toward an I.P.O., and grow the company.” He continued, “Now, that’s a lot. But I think Travis’s mission was, like, let’s make this a five-hundred-billion-dollar company. Let’s invest in

flying cars, let's change how people eat, let's change how people get around. They might sound the same, but those are very different things."

A former Uber executive pointed out that, after eight years of existence, Facebook had killed off most other social networks and Google had built a near-monopoly in online searches. Uber, on the other hand, eight years after launching, "hasn't won yet." Under Kalanick, Uber sold its businesses in China and Russia. Many European countries, meanwhile, are seen as too hamstrung by regulations to be profitable. And Uber India, the former executive told me, "is in a dogfight with the local competitor." That leaves Uber fully operational mainly in North and South America. "We're in a highly competitive business," he said. "It's not time to change the culture to the point where people will start complaining about the snacks in the kitchen. It's time to keep the aggression on."

The fear that Silicon Valley companies will be overtaken by foreign competitors is part of a larger debate in the industry. In January, Michael Moritz, a partner at the venture firm Sequoia Capital, published a controversial editorial in the *Financial Times*, arguing that American businesses, in their eagerness to offer work-life balance, are at risk of losing out to Chinese tech firms, where "the pace of work is furious," the offices are spartan, and "nobody complains about missing a Little League game or skipping a basketball outing with friends." The Indian Minister of State for Civil Aviation made a similar argument to Khosrowshahi during a meeting in New Delhi, suggesting that Uber build an engineering center in India. Local engineers, he said, worked for less than engineers in San Francisco, and they wouldn't complain about putting in long hours or demand on-site massages and organic food.

After the dinner on Whidbey Island, Khosrowshahi stacked the dishes in the sink while Shapiro took the boys upstairs for a bath. Then we wandered down the hall to a cozy library with a stuffed white peacock in the corner and a rosewood table where Khosrowshahi works on the weekends. He stretched out on a velvet sofa and talked about

one of his most painful professional experiences—in 2008, after the financial crisis hit, he was forced to hold a town-hall meeting at Expedia to announce layoffs. "It was a really emotional moment for me, personally," Khosrowshahi said, as the family's cat, Moshe, gnawed on his foot. "Even though I was the one responsible for the firings, the company saw that it hurt." He felt that showing vulnerability had made the process easier. "Management is about a contract, which is, you manage me because you're higher up on the level and you pay me and do my review," he said. "Leadership is about the heart."

Like many technology companies, Uber has been sued by a group of female engineers claiming that they were paid less than their male counterparts. (On March 27th, the company agreed to settle the case.) At Expedia, Khosrowshahi made a point of hiring executives who "didn't look like me," and developed programs to increase the number of women. "I'm way too early at Uber to really start driving this," he said. "But we'll get to it."

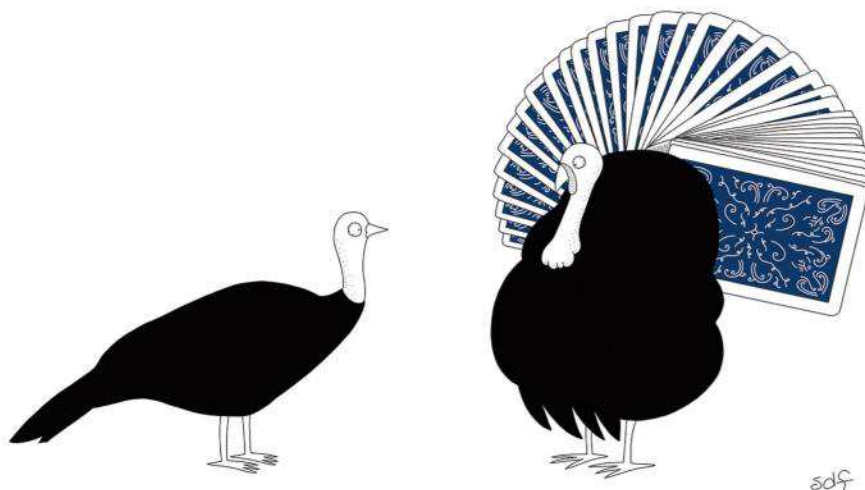
Silicon Valley has a reverent attitude toward founders, who still lead many of the industry's largest businesses, including Amazon and Facebook. Simon Rothman, a partner at the venture firm Greylock Partners, told me that the culture of a company often reflects the personality of its founder. "Here's an analogy: If you have parents, their DNA is in you," he said. "If someone else raises you, you'll be different, but you won't be radically different. I think the longer a founder stays at a company, the longer

it will take to change the culture at that company."

According to the founder-as-culture theory, changing Uber is going to be a lot more complicated than simply switching out some of its slogans. When I asked Khosrowshahi about his impression of Uber's culture before he took the job, he said, "I thought it was completely effed up. I was amazed at how one bad thing could come to light after another." But, he added, the staff was eager to change. "I believe that, if you have a great product, a lot else can take care of itself," he said.

Technology venture capitalists tend to fall into two groups: those who invested in Uber, and those who didn't and are bitter about it. All are acutely aware of the cautionary tale of Apple, which pushed out its co-founder Steve Jobs in favor of John Sculley, a professional C.E.O. who ran it with little distinction until Jobs returned to rebuild the company. Many told me that somebody—a board member or an investor—should have taken a more active role in guiding Uber as it adjusted to the responsibilities of a large enterprise. One name came up often: that of Bill Gurley, the board member and Benchmark partner.

Gurley is six feet nine inches tall, and his outsized proportions contribute to his reputation as an eminent figure in Silicon Valley. He has a deep, bearish voice and a Texas accent, and he seems to collapse himself like a telescope when he comes through a doorway. (He testified in court recently in the Waymo suit against Uber, and





"And coming up on the right is another area ruined by the likes of you."

the judge joked that he was the tallest witness who had ever been in the courtroom.) When I sat down with Gurley to talk about what had happened at Uber, he said, "The two questions my firm gets the most that relate to this subject are 'I can't believe you did this' and 'Why didn't you do it sooner?'"

Gurley said that he spent months encouraging Kalanick to hire an experienced C.F.O. He likes to tell startup founders, "You're not gonna win by having a more innovative finance program, you're not gonna win by having a more innovative legal program, you're not gonna win by reinventing H.R. They're areas where experience carries a lot of weight." Uber was weak in all three, and Kalanick never found his "Sheryl," the grownup in the room exemplified by Sheryl Sandberg, whom Mark Zuckerberg brought in four years after starting Facebook. Gurley jumped up and started scribbling on a whiteboard to show the "cacophony of events" that led to the coup against Kalanick. Two other Silicon Valley success stories—the software company Zenefits and the blood-testing venture TheraNOS—had recently experienced public scandals and looked likely to go out of business, and, in the spring of 2017, Gurley became worried that Uber could

meet a similar fate. Benchmark had invested twelve million dollars in Uber, and that stake had grown to be worth approximately \$8.5 billion. It was a lot to potentially lose. Gurley also received an e-mail from the founder of another company he'd backed—Katrina Lake, of Stitch Fix, the online clothing retailer that recently had a successful I.P.O. Gurley recalled, "It basically said, 'I really enjoy working with you, but I can't stand the fact that you're associated with that guy.'"

Gurley told me that Silicon Valley investors, even ostensibly powerful ones, can no longer rein in the young, mostly male tech founders, who often have voting control over their companies. "Venture capitalists that serve on boards have gotten more and more deferential and, I would say, have become more cheerleaders than actors," he said. He attributed the change to "a phenomenon that was absent from the rest of recorded history: access to unlimited capital." Benchmark's competitors had been using its role in the coup to criticize the firm to other startup founders. "You don't want to take *their* money, look what they did to the founder of Uber," Gurley said. "I bet that conversation has happened a hundred times." Although Kalanick's ouster had created "a lot of broken glass," Gurley

didn't regret it. "I'm confident that history will look kindly upon what we did," he said.

Every day, Uber interacts with millions of customers and millions of drivers, and a visit to the company's thirty-thousand-square-foot driver center in Queens gives a sense of how byzantine the logistics of these interactions are. Hundreds of people, many of them immigrants, arrive each morning to register to drive for Uber. They take out auto loans, sign up for medical exams, and get help with New York's onerous licensing system. The street outside is clogged with black cars double- and triple-parked, and a Doughnut Plant on the ground floor advertises a chai-and-samosa-doughnut special for eight dollars.

Uber has been criticized for taking advantage of its drivers, who work without job security or benefits, and whose commissions the company has reduced more than once. Shortly before Kalanick's departure, Uber realized that this was a strategic mistake—the company needed to attract drivers, rather than repel them, if it wanted to continue to grow. Many riders, meanwhile, felt increasingly uncomfortable using the app, which had come to symbolize gig-economy exploitation. Courting drivers is now a priority at the company, which refers to them as "driver partners."

During his trip to India, where drivers have periodically gone on strike for days to protest falling wages, Khosrowshahi met with a small group of drivers to solicit feedback. Several complained that Uber's maps of Delhi failed to reflect the spontaneous detours that spring up on local roads. A portly driver in a white dress shirt suggested that the company offer a voice-only interface, since many people in India can't read or write. Finally, a driver said, "For partners who've spent a long time with Uber, is there a way to help them save money and plan for old age? Some way we can be incentivized for being the longest-term drivers, just like you have for employees?" Khosrowshahi nodded in agreement. "This is a theme not just in India but everywhere in the world," he replied. "We've been thinking too short-term."

In fact, Uber's long-term plan is one in which drivers, with their costs and complications, will have a diminished

role. The company has been running autonomous-vehicle pilot programs in four cities and also testing driverless long-haul trucks. Several companies, including Google and General Motors, are racing to develop their own autonomous-driving technology. Uber's program, the Advanced Technologies Group, which began in 2015, was one of the first to launch, and this year its vehicles reached a milestone of three million miles driven autonomously. The division now has more than fifteen hundred employees, most of whom work in a former factory on the waterfront in downtown Pittsburgh. The space was lavishly retrofitted with an eighty-foot glass wall, reclaimed-wood tables, ceiling-mounted fireplaces, and seventy kinds of modernist chairs. Each room has a name drawn from Formula One racing.

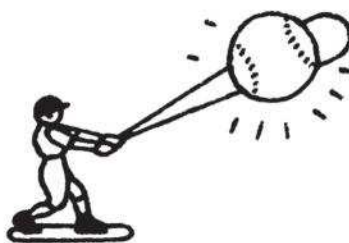
To Kalanick, the autonomous-driving unit was the jewel of the company. When Khosrowshahi took over, he considered closing the program, since it could potentially cost billions of dollars. He decided not to close it after talking to Eric Meyhofer, the head of the division. "If you walk around here—this isn't five people in a garage building some little robot car," Meyhofer, who co-founded Carnegie Robotics, at Carnegie Mellon, before joining Uber, told me. "This is all about building autonomous ride-sharing, at scale, as a product. This is our future." The question now, Meyhofer said, isn't whether the company can make a self-driving vehicle but whether it can make one quickly and cheaply enough to solve Uber's revenue problems.

On a damp, unseasonably warm day in January, I climbed into the back of a Volvo XC 90 at the Advanced Technologies Group headquarters. The vehicle was one of Volvo's luxury models, with supple leather interiors. It was equipped with a ninety-thousand-dollar lidar unit on the roof, sixty-four lasers, eight cameras, and a stack of liquid-cooled computer hard drives in the trunk, which emitted a gentle hum. My autonomous-vehicle operator, who raced motorcycles in his spare time and spoke with the calm, even tones of a kindergarten teacher, told me, "Once you see what the car can do, you'll be absolutely amazed." His job was to sit with his hands hovering under the steering wheel,

ready to take control if anything went wrong. "You're driving the car in your mind," he said. "You're just not using your hands." He and the other operators had been tested on a racetrack to see if they could handle emergency maneuvers, such as making a sharp turn at sixty miles an hour.

He summoned a route on a dashboard iPad—the cars drive on preprogrammed maps, effectively following virtual tracks like trains—and pushed a silver button on the dashboard to snap the car into autonomous mode. The vehicle took over, moving smoothly forward. "Now I literally have to do nothing," the operator commented while waiting to turn at a red light. "But, if this idiot here decides to pull out in front of us, then I may take over." There was a white Toyota in the opposing lane, and, sure enough, it jumped forward to make a left turn in front of us just as the light turned green. "That's what's called a Pittsburgh Left," the operator said. He explained that the car collected information about every aspect of the ride and sent the data back to Uber's engineers. "Let's say we got into an accident. We would have complete video evidence of everything," he said. "The car doesn't get tired, it doesn't get angry, it doesn't drink . . . it's just always going to do the right thing."

Each time a pedestrian appeared in front of us, he or she showed up in blue on the iPad, which reflected what the



car was "seeing." The vehicle could monitor hundreds of pedestrians at a time, the operator said, and had been programmed to be extra cautious around them. As we moved through Pittsburgh's construction-filled streets, however, the operator jumped in with surprising frequency, taking over when a person in a parked car unexpectedly opened a door, or when passing through school safety zones, where the vehicle automatically slowed to fifteen miles

an hour. The operator told me that the car sometimes got into awkward situations, such as when other drivers motioned for it to go ahead, and the car couldn't pick up on the signal. At one point, a node in the trunk's hardware stack crashed, and we had to pull over to reboot. Such occurrences, my operator assured me, were rare.

On March 19th, Uber's entire self-driving pilot program was put on hold after a test vehicle in Tempe, Arizona, killed a forty-nine-year-old woman named Elaine Herzberg. The next day, Arizona police released a video of the collision. The eerie nighttime footage showed the car gliding into Herzberg at around forty miles an hour as she walked across the street with her bike. The vehicle operator, who was visible in part of the video, glanced down for a few seconds, possibly at the dashboard iPad, and then looked up too late. The operator's face twisted into an expression of shock. When I reached Khosrowshahi by phone shortly afterward, he seemed disheartened, and disarmed by the intense scrutiny that comes with his new job. He told me that the autonomous division had been working toward offering driverless-car service by the end of the year, and that there would inevitably be "bumps and bruises" along the way. "What happened last week was truly tragic," he said. "We've clearly taken a very, very big step back." He is closely reexamining Uber's work in autonomous vehicles.

While I was in Pittsburgh, Meyhofer told me that, like other parts of Uber, the autonomous-vehicle group was under immense pressure. Getting to the technology early was a matter of survival for the business, he said—something that Kalanick, in his obsession with rivalries and short-term results, understood intuitively. Even though a lot had changed, the pressure was still there, in part because so much had been invested already. "The problem is, if someone builds this technology and puts it on a ride-sharing network, their cost competitiveness will be stronger than ours. And if someone else does that, and we don't have it, how long can we survive?" Meyhofer said. "So you're racing this ghost. And no matter what you do it's not enough. Dara doesn't impose pressure like that, but he doesn't need to. It's the reality of the business we're in." ♦

T H E
S T A T E
O F
N A T U R E



Camille Bordas

I slept through the burglary. I considered lying about this to the cops when I went to report it, but you don't lie to the police. It's like doctors: they can't help you if you lie to them. I mean, I don't always tell my doctor the whole truth, but that's because my doctor happens to be an old friend—some things are just too embarrassing to tell your friends.

One cop asked if I was unemployed, since I had been taking a nap on a Thursday morning.

"I'm an ophthalmologist," I said. "My schedule varies a lot."

She looked at my glasses suspiciously, as if they contradicted what I'd just told her, as if an ophthalmologist were required to have perfect vision. I wear contacts when I work, because patients tend to feel the same way.

I told her everything that had been stolen. Most of my living room and a bit of the kitchen were gone: laptop and flat-screen, of course, sound system, but also the Eames chair, the four Hans Wegner Wishbone dining chairs, the two Moroccan rugs I'd brought back from Fez, the two pieces of jewelry I always put on the marble side table (gone as well) when I came home, the china. I didn't care much for the china, and I never used it—it was a gift my parents had received on their wedding day, and the marriage had failed—but I knew it was worth something.

"And an optometrist's case," I said. "An antique from the thirties."

"Does that have any kind of resale value?" the cop asked.

I said that all the trial lenses had been in mint condition, that someone might pay a thousand, twelve hundred, maybe, but that mostly it was of sentimental value, since it had been my grandfather's. I'd never met my grandfather, but I omitted that part.

"That's a widely varied set of items," the cop said, reading over her list. "Either the guy knew exactly what he was going to find or he was pleasantly surprised."

Out of curiosity, I asked if people often slept through burglaries. I hadn't taken a pill, by the way—I'm just a heavy sleeper. People are always amazed at my ability to fall

(and stay) asleep at parties, through construction in the building, at condo meetings. I'm convinced that this corresponds to some ancient tribal trait, some remnant of a time when human activity around you meant safety, that it was safe to sleep, that someone was looking out for the group. My mother says that it's a nice thought, but that I shouldn't trust "human activity" to mean "friendly activity," I should be more wary, have less faith in people. I guess the burglary would prove her point—but then what? There aren't any pills against sleeping too well.

"It happens," the cop said. "Not often, but it happens."

I wondered if they had come into the bedroom. How long they'd watched me sleep before deciding it was safe to carry on. The cop had used the singular, but I pictured two burglars, minimum, what with all the heavy lifting. Mostly, it was worse to imagine only one guy.

When I came home, my cat, Catapult, gave me hell and followed me around from room to room to make sure that I wouldn't miss any of her grievances.

"You could've summoned some of that bitchiness earlier, when they came in to steal your bed," I told her. The blue Moroccan rug had been her favorite napping surface. "It's a bit late to make a federal case of it now."

Catapult screamed louder whenever I spoke, so I didn't argue with her any further. Also, yes, I talk to my cat. I think the weird thing is not to talk to your pet. Or to expect your pet to answer you. Or to talk to your pet when someone else can hear. I'm not insane. I know the cat matters to me and only to me, so I won't talk about Catapult too much, only when relevant to the story. In fact, maybe I can reveal all of Catapult's arc right now and be done with it: Catapult was not screaming because she missed her fluffy Moroccan rug. (She could sleep on anything, even atop the cast-iron radiator, when it wasn't burning hot, her body sagging into the crenels.) She was pissed because we no longer had a TV. It took me some time to accept it, but that's what it

was. Catapult missed Netflix and Larry David, and that was the long and the short of it.

I was late to my 3 P.M. appointment, because the locksmith thought that I was interested in his life story. It was, in fact, somewhat interesting—his father murdered by his mother, lots of travelling—I just didn't need all the details. As I walked the patient into my office, my secretary handed me his file. I'm usually able to read a patient's file and still catch, out of the corner of my eye, what kind of state he's in, but I got nothing from Mr. Simmons. It was like having a log wearing glasses in my peripheral vision.

In his file I had noted, "State of nature guy." I remembered him.

"Mr. Simmons," I said. "Coming in to see if your eyesight's remained stable enough the past twelve months for you to try Lasik?"

"That is correct," he said.

"Remind me again why you want Lasik so badly?"

I didn't need to be reminded. I just enjoyed hearing it.

"I don't want to depend on glasses anymore," Simmons explained. "They make you look weak, and I don't want to look weak. I want to be ready and have perfect vision when the world collapses—or just the banking system—and we have to go back to the state of nature."

"Right!" I said. "The state of nature."

His eyes shone behind his glasses when I said the words. It had to have been his dream since childhood.

"Also," he said, "I hunt. Glasses get in the way. It would be nice to be able to see my prey better."

I prepared the phoropter with his current prescription.

"Can you read the second-to-last line for me?" I said.

"E-R-Y—"

"Don't squint."

"O.K.," he said after a few seconds, and started breathing heavily. "I can't. I can't read it without squinting. Is that bad?"

"Don't worry," I said. "Just relax. Tell me more about returning to the state of nature, how you see it."

I made changes to the lenses while he spoke.

"I think I'd be pretty good at the state of nature," he said. "And it'd be best for

everyone, I believe. Fairer grounds on which to judge a person's worth."

"You mean like sheer strength?"

His forearms and shoulders hinted at a steady regimen of lifting, pulling, possibly boxing. The rest of him didn't scream tough guy, though. More like I.T. guy. But that was probably a balance he cultivated.

"I mean like intelligence, ability to garden," he said. "Good sense of direction will be a plus, too."

I pictured him opening jars for his mom, scaring men away from his sisters by rolling up his sleeves—happy to do it.

"I guess I wouldn't last very long, then," I said, and asked him to read from the top.

"I'm sure you have some useful skills," Simmons said, which I thought was a little condescending. I mean, I'm a doctor, after all, so, yeah, I'd hope someone would want me on his team, if the time came to make teams. "Females have a tendency to self-deprecate," he went on, "but we'll all have a role to play in the new society."

I don't think he believed that. I think what he meant was "All who make it will have a role to play," and was only politely pretending that I'd make it.

"And, if nothing else," he added, "your eyesight is good."

When I gave him his new prescription, I almost apologized.

"Maybe next year," I said. He was so disappointed.

On his way out, he pointed at the framed poster I had hung by the door, a black-and-white version of the "Giant Steps" album cover.

"Didn't Coltrane beat his wife?" he asked me.

"Not that I know of, no," I said.

He didn't seem to believe me. He didn't seem to believe that beating one's wife was too different from any other personality trait, either. He'd asked in the same tone someone else might have asked, "Wasn't Coltrane the one who taught his cat to use the toilet?" (And, no, that was Mingus.)

At my mother's that Sunday—we did lunch every Sunday—I talked about Catapult's still mysterious anger and the locksmith's tragic childhood. My mother shared her general suspi-

cion of locksmiths. Certainly, she said, they must have a copy of every single key to every single lock they'd ever installed, or a magic key to all doors, and they entered people's homes to steal small items whose absence wouldn't be noticed for a while; worse, perhaps the locksmiths didn't steal anything, just took naps on beds that weren't theirs,



drank out of people's favorite cups, shit in their toilets. Only other locksmiths ever had a clue.

"In your case, though, it's not a locksmith who did the deed," my mother said. "Obviously. We're looking at someone who knows about old optical equipment. Did you tell the police that?"

My mother was glad about the burglary, in a way. She got to use all the knowledge that she'd gleaned from reading crime novels for the past forty years.

"Maybe a former optometrist," she said, blowing her nose and folding the Kleenex neatly over the result. "Or a failed one."

Her building had implemented a new waste-sorting policy the previous month, and we'd mostly been talking about that, so my burglary provided a welcome change of topic, at least. Just as I was thinking this, though, my mother asked which bin used tissues should go in.

"I've been wondering for days," she said. "Can snot be recycled?"

"When in doubt, throw it in the gray bin," I said.

My mother doubted a lot. The gray bin was always full.

"I can put you in touch with my friend Rita for next week," she said.

"What's next week?"

"Well, like, every Sunday, honey, there's the flea market on Pinto Square."

"And why would I go there with your friend Rita?" I'd never heard of Rita.

"Don't tell me you don't know about this!" my mother said. "Everyone who's been burglarized goes to Pinto Square

to see if their things resurface. People call it the *Thieves' Market*. You never heard that? China, lamps, small furniture—lots of stolen property ends up there. I'm surprised the cop who filed your complaint didn't tell you to go there first thing."

"I guess I didn't look desperate enough to get my stuff back," I said.

And I wasn't. Insurance had me covered, and I'd been thinking about getting rid of the TV for a while anyway—I just wasn't sure how to dispose of it responsibly.

"Oh, you're getting that case back," my mother said. "It's all I have left from your grandfather."

"I thought the watch you're wearing was his. And the desk in the library."

She simply ignored this.

"Next Sunday," she said. "9 A.M. sharp." She gave me Rita's number.

Rita, to my surprise, was young. I didn't know where my mother made her friends these days. She'd had a bad fall a few years earlier, and since then she'd decided to limit her outings to what was strictly necessary, a category that didn't include socializing. Rita said that she was an "apartment therapist," which didn't help me imagine how they might've met. My mother didn't even believe in therapy for people.

Rita had told me to bring pictures of the stolen items, but I'd never taken pictures of things, never really taken pictures in general, so I'd pulled images of similar objects from the Internet and printed them at the office.

"I guess these will work," Rita said, and she sat on the ground to cut the images out and tape them (she carried scissors and tape in her purse) into a notebook deformed by dozens of other similar pasteups. My mother had told me that Rita had started coming to the market after having been burglarized herself, years before, and that, giving up on finding her own things, she'd realized she knew how to navigate the place, and could be of help to the newly burglarized.

"How does it work?" I asked Rita. "Should I pay you for every Sunday you spend looking, or only when you find something?"

"Didn't your mom tell you?" she said. "I do this for free."

Free things make me suspicious. “Now, you’re probably thinking a free service can’t possibly be worth much,” Rita said. “But I’m actually pretty selfish in doing this. I just can’t stand knowing that people are suffering while I could help them. There’s a lot of suffering here. Your mother told me you were home when they did it? I was home, too. You’re lucky you weren’t assaulted. I was. But, anyway, I can lighten the burden of others by showing them around, and that’s payment enough. There’re more than three hundred venders here—it can be overwhelming at first—but most of the stolen stuff that enters the market actually ends up on the same twenty to twenty-five tables, so we’ll start with those.”

“You know which venders are most likely to resell stolen property, and you don’t tell the police about it?”

“The police know as much as I do,” Rita said. “And it’s not like the venders are the actual burglars.”

“Still, they could lead you to them.”

“Arresting a couple of venders will not make the number of burglaries drop, I can tell you that much. The guys would just find new ways to sell their stash, like on the Internet, and good luck finding anything there. See, it has a sort of convenience, a thieves’ market. People know where to go when they’ve been robbed. It gives them hope. It keeps things local. And I don’t know if you’ve heard, but local is the future.” She closed the notebook, where she’d taped pictures of my almost-things under a dramatic “MISSING” headline. “Globalization can only go so far before everything goes to shit. All civilizations go through the same stages before they collapse and break up into smaller groups, you know? I read a very interesting article about it.”

“How many stages are there?” I asked.

“Nine,” she said. “We’re on the eighth.”

We started looking. Rita introduced me to a dozen venders. She gave them only my first name, because they didn’t need to know my story—anyone who was there with Rita had the same story. She stopped on occasion to compare a picture in her notebook with something on a table. No match for me, or for anyone else.

I asked about her job, what it was that an apartment therapist did.

“It’s just interior decoration,” Rita explained. “Basically. Except not for people who just moved in and are all happy about it and have a vision, but for people who’ve come to hate their place, who feel trapped, who’ve lost all connection to it. I try to make them like it again, to find the right color for their walls, objects they can truly bond with.”

“Would you say you’re a good apartment therapist?”

She thought about it.

“Clients are usually satisfied,” she said. “But some of them relapse after a while. Start accumulating shit and hating everything again. They can’t help it. It’s the eighth stage I was just telling you about. After abundance and apathy: dependency and bondage.”

We weaved through the tables, talked about humanity’s impending doom some more, and were offered coffee by a Malian national who sold mostly authentic West African masks and textiles. Akkram was his name. Akkram noticed I had cat hair on my sweater and asked many questions regarding Catapult. “How is she taking the burglary?” he asked, and I said that she complained a lot. “Poor baby,” Akkram said. “It must be hard, not being able to speak, in moments like these.”

Rita looked through her purse for a stevia packet for her coffee, and while doing so extracted a plastic whistle. She handed it to me.

When I asked what it was for, Rita said that it was a rape whistle.

“It’s just a whistle,” I said.

“Sometimes the simplest things,” Rita said, and didn’t finish her sentence, or didn’t believe sentences needed verbs.

We didn’t find my things, and no one raped us. Rita said not to worry, that it was rare for objects to resurface in the first couple of weeks after a robbery. I was a little annoyed at not having been told this before, having got up early on a Sunday only to face such low odds.

When I entered my mother’s apartment, she was in motion—a rare phenomenon. When not at work, she usually moved only from reading in bed to reading on the couch.

“Photographic paper,” she said. “Can

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it be recycled as regular paper?" She held a large manila envelope bursting at the seams.

"I wouldn't think so," I said. "Isn't it full of chemicals?"

"Your father used to take so many landscape photos," she said, laying the envelope on top of the overflowing gray bin. "I don't get it. Some are nice and all, but it gets pretty repetitive pretty fast. I'm only keeping the pictures with people in them. And then I'll keep the best ones of you in a special envelope."

"Why would you do that?"

"I just want to know where they are. If there's a catastrophe and I have to flee. People never think to pack pictures in a catastrophe. I mean, except in the movies, of course, and even there they have to waste crucial time finding them. They're just not part of the go-bag essentials."

"What's with everyone planning for a major catastrophe these days?"

"Don't you watch the news?"

"Of course I don't watch the news," I said.

"Well, that's smart," my mother conceded.

I asked what kind of catastrophe she was preparing for.

"I don't imagine anything in particular," she said. "Nuclear attack, epidemic, riots . . ."

"Where would you go?"

"Or it could just be that I have to go to the hospital in an emergency."

"Are you ill?"

"No," she said. "Not yet."

I tried to think of what I would put in a go-bag, but I blanked. All I could think of was underwear, pens, eye drops. A very sad list.

"The thing is," I said, "you should probably take your go-bag everywhere with you. Catastrophe might strike while you're out shopping. There might not be time for you to come home to pick up your stuff—there might not even be a home for you to come back to."

"I know that," she said. "Don't you think I know that? That's why my fanny pack is a reduced version of my go-bag. Essence of the essential. Come to think, I'm going to have to pick a single picture of you and slide it in there."

The fanny pack my mother was referring to was a purple tartan monstrosity that my parents had given me to take on some science-class trip in middle school. It had rained the whole time and I'd never worn it. She'd found the fanny pack when sorting through my stuff, during the couple of weeks she'd spent bored at home with her broken leg, right after her fall. *Such a great invention*, she'd said on the phone that day. *Do they still make them or was it just a nineties thing?* I told her that the only two people I'd seen rock-

ing fanny packs in the past ten years had been jazz musicians. *Well, they know what's up, I guess. It's perfect for a night about town. Could carry cigarettes, Mace . . . even a short novel, maybe? For the subway ride?* I told her she could keep the fanny pack, because that seemed to be the reason she'd brought the whole matter up, and she'd been wearing it ever since. She didn't walk around conspicuously *sporting* the fanny pack (*That's how you get mugged*, she said) but concealed it under her sweaters. After her fall, she started wearing ample sweaters, not the lousy kind you see on depressive people but sweaters of well-shaped amplexity, made of pretty wools. The way they draped over her waist and hips, you would never suspect there was a purple fanny pack under them at all times.

"Is Dad O.K. with you tossing all the pictures he took?"

"Of course. He said he trusted me to do the sorting, and to scan all the ones I deemed essential and send them to him, so he can have them for his own go-bag."

I assumed my father had merely been polite. I couldn't imagine him packing a go-bag. He already lived in the middle of nowhere, the exact sort of place that refugees would flood to in case of a major catastrophe. I guess maybe that's the one scenario, though, in which he'd feel the need to flee. He didn't like people much anymore.

My parents divorced the year I went away to college. Not out of love for anybody else. Neither of them remarried or even dated afterward—not that I know of. They'd just had enough of living with each other, though not with *each other* so much as with *anyone*, I think. They're a pair of loners who became attached just long enough to raise a third one. I know people, grown men and women, whose parents worry that they still haven't found "the one," or even just "one." My parents never broach the topic. They know it's not for everybody.

"Can I take a look?" I asked, but I'd already retrieved the manila envelope from the gray bin.

After lunch, my mother went back to the novel she was reading, and I went through the photographs at the kitchen table. Lots of trees, indeed;



"He should never have spoken to me in such a partisan fashion."

lots of closeups of flowers. The West, the Midwest, Mexico. I noticed that the room had got dark at some point, and I thought time had flown, the sun had set, but it was just clouds, nearly black clouds that wouldn't go away anytime soon. I turned the lights on, and the rain started. The light made me think of my father, how sad he'd made me on weekend nights, always working at that same table. He was a lawyer, but often he did all sorts of things for his clients that had nothing to do with the law, like their taxes, their correspondence. He helped out his friends and their friends, too, wrote recommendation letters for them, dealt with their D.U.I.s, things like that. When I was a teen-ager, he made a big deal of setting up the attic with a state-of-the-art stereo system and a nice leather chair. He said that he needed a place to relax after work, but, because he was never done with work, he never went up there. There was always something extra he could do for someone. Maybe it was during one of those evenings, as he was solving a stranger's problems under the pasty kitchen lights, listening to his music on a Discman, that he first devised his plan to become a hermit. I don't blame him. He had to do it. He was too nice to people. They would have eaten him alive if he'd stayed in a well-populated area. The stereo, the records, and the club chair were the only things he took in the divorce. It all seemed right to me now: him alone, finally listening to his records; my mother alone, reading; me alone, sorting through landscape photographs of trips I hadn't taken.

I selected two photos and threw the rest away again. In one, you can see my parents' shadows ending right at the edge of some orange canyon; in the other, there's that sequoia tree in the Giant Forest which has a hole in it the size of a house.

Rita would've kept looking for my things with or without me, but it felt wrong knowing that she was at the market alone, so I always went with her. Every week, we met at Akkram's table for coffee. Akkram always inquired about Catapult. He's the one who said that what she missed was TV.

"I fully sympathize with your cat here," he told me. "I don't know what I would do without my shows. And, mind you, I see actual people every day, *lots* of them, and I still need the fake stories. Your Catapult is home alone most of the time. The people on TV were a big part of her social life."

"But I leave the radio on for her when I go to work," I said.

"Not the same," Akkram said. "Can't see the faces. For all your cat knows, the voices are in her head, and she thinks she's going crazy."

After three months of going there every Sunday, I was starting to know all the venders. I noticed, also, the freshly burglarized, carrying pictures of their missing property. Some came to Rita, some preferred to look on their own. Since I'd met her, Rita had found nine stolen items, negotiated their prices, and delivered them back to their original owners. They reimbursed her, of course, but also often offered extra compensation and invited her in for coffee (sometimes champagne), which she systematically refused. She didn't do this for a reward—or, rather, her reward was to have found the item. There was a flap at the back of her notebook where she kept a stack of white stickers that said "Found!" in red letters. Her favorite thing was to peel off a sticker and paste it above the picture of the object in question, obliterating the "MISSING." It was hard to tell when Rita was happiest, looking or finding. It was obvious that she would still be doing this in forty years (assuming the world didn't end first), rummaging through piles of objects that didn't yet exist, that hadn't yet been invented.

One morning, I saw a vase that my father had brought home from a trip to Mexico. A woman was holding it up in the sunlight for inspection. Her T-shirt said "Best Mom Ever." I wondered how other mothers felt when they saw such a T-shirt. I could've asked Rita (she had a daughter) but didn't. I pointed at the vase instead.

"That vase was my father's," I said.

"Are you sure?" Rita said. "I didn't know your dad had been burglarized."

"He wasn't. We just gave all his stuff to charity after he left. About twenty years ago."

"I'm so sorry. Your mother never mentioned it."

"Oh, he hasn't vanished or anything," I said. "He has a phone and all, somewhere in the woods. My mother and him still talk."

I knew by then that my mother and Rita had met at the hospital—my mother's fall having occurred the same day Rita had been assaulted by her burglars. They didn't see much of each other, but they spoke on the phone often, according to my mother, and I found it strange that she had never mentioned my father.

"My dad's not big on owning stuff anymore," I told Rita. "So it's weird to see something of his."

I saw Simmons then, my state-of-nature patient, looking at a display of knives, two tables up. I was wearing my glasses and didn't want the secret of my bad eyesight revealed, but the moment I thought this our eyes met. Of course. I can't tell for sure what happened then—I'm not the best at reading people, and it all went too fast for deep analysis anyway—but I think he panicked. He broke eye contact right away and disappeared into the crowd.

"Do you want to get it?" Rita asked me, her thoughts still on my father's vase.

I said I didn't, and Rita bought it herself.

"Just in case you change your mind," she said. "You'll know where to find it."

The woman in the "Best Mom Ever" T-shirt, who'd previously coveted the vase, was now wondering if she'd made a mistake in discarding it.

"Why doesn't your daughter ever come here?" I asked Rita.

"She's better at home with her dad," Rita said. "This place is too depressing. You can't bring a kid here."

It felt rude to note that there were tons of families walking around.

"And I don't want her to see me as this loser," she added.

"What loser? You're not a loser."

"Honey, of course I'm a loser. You're a loser, too, by the way. We're all here looking to pay a *second time* for stuff we already owned. I mean, we can't let go of things—things!—that it took a stranger a minute to take away from us and profit from. *They're* the winners. The market was nicknamed for them,



"What I don't get is how one minute we're a symbol of new life and the next minute we're a sandwich."

not us. If someone was writing an essay on the Thieves' Market, *they* would be the thrill. We'd be interviewed, maybe, for color, for laughs. But we're the losers here. Losers A to Z."

She was smiling while saying this, but her eyes still teared up.

"I thought you'd given up on finding your things," I said. "I thought you weren't really looking anymore."

"Well, I'm not," she said. "Not really. But it's always somewhere in the back of my head. You never know when things will resurface."

I thought about buying my father's vase back from her immediately, so she could at least feel, in that moment, that we shared the burden of loserdom, but then I didn't. I didn't even want my own things back.

On Mondays that winter, I had been taking shifts at the E.R., for ocular emergencies. After my shift, I'd got in the habit of heading to the Cave, a jazz club a few blocks from the hospital. The music wasn't great there (they

rarely saved the best lineups for Mondays), but the pours were generous. Simmons was at the bar when I came in that Monday, and at first I thought it was a weird coincidence—two chance encounters in just two days—but he'd been waiting for me, he said. I couldn't remember mentioning working at the E.R. to him, or going to the jazz club afterward, but maybe stalking was part of the training he'd devised to insure his survival. Or maybe he'd called my office. Maybe my secretary had given him my schedule.

"I owe you an explanation," he said. "About what happened yesterday. I shouldn't have run away like that. That was cowardly. Let me buy you a drink."

What had caused Simmons to run away from me at the market hadn't been my wearing glasses but his not wearing his. He thought that I'd noticed, even though, in the course of examining patients, I end up seeing them without their glasses more often than with.

"I went to see another ophthalmol-

ogist," Simmons explained, "and he said it was O.K. to get Lasik, even though my vision hadn't been stable for twelve months, and you know that's what I always wanted to hear, so I went for it. I felt wrong proceeding against your advice, and I'm sorry. But, well, not that sorry, because it worked! I have perfect vision now. I mean, near-perfect."

"Congratulations," I said. I didn't tell him to enjoy it while it lasted.

"You're not mad that I didn't follow your medical opinion?" Simmons said. "I felt really guilty—"

"I'm happy for you," I said. "Now you can just relax and wait for the world to collapse."

"Thank you," he said. "In the meantime, though—and don't tell my girlfriend this—I feel like getting the surgery is the best decision I've ever made. I shot six ducks in a day last week. Personal best."

He'd confessed to having got Lasik and to having a girlfriend before I'd even ordered a drink. I didn't really see a reason for us to hang out anymore, but I still pounded my Scotch, and ordered a second one.

We talked about the different ways he was preparing for the state of nature (he knew how to build a fire with just sticks, and not only how to shoot but also how to make his own bow and arrows), and over the third drink I mentioned my father, and his self-sufficient life in the woods. Simmons asked me for his e-mail. I asked him if his girlfriend, whom he'd referred to as K., was looking forward to the state of nature as much as he was.

"She says she has to get laser hair removal before it happens, and then she'll be all set," he said.

"She doesn't think pants will still be easy to come by?"

"I think it's for her own comfort."

"What's her name again?"

"K.," Simmons said.

"I mean her whole name."

"Katie."

"What's Katie short for?"

"Probably Katherine, don't you think? Or Kaitlin?"

"Don't ask *me*."

"I guess her mother is Russian, though. Could be Katia."

"Or Ekaterina," I said.

"Wow! You think?"

He had to pee, and while he was in the bathroom I thought about how K. would probably not become his wife—not until death did them part, at least—and about how no one ever stayed together forever and how unsad that was.

The jazz trio that had been playing since we'd come in wrapped up its first set. The bass player grabbed a mike and said, "Guys, we'll take five, be back in fifteen," which was a joke you got the feeling he'd made every night of his performing life. It still got a couple of laughs. The drummer got up from behind his toms, and, sure enough, he was wearing a fanny pack. I was drunk enough that I flirted with him when he stood by me at the bar. One thing I know about jazz musicians is that they can never believe it when someone who's not a jazz musician talks to them.

"Where do you buy a fanny pack these days?" I asked the drummer.

"Well, this one has a very special history," he said.

Before he could launch into it, I told him that I wasn't too interested in the history of things, in general. He said something about how objects ended up saying a lot about our souls, actually, how our relationship to them was also part of our humanity, etc. The sentimentality of his speech might not have disturbed me so much if he'd been less earnest, if he'd just assumed that cheap psychology was how one picked up women at bars, but he seemed to believe every word he spoke.

"Like," he said, his ponytail brushing against his cheek as he leaned forward, "it's no accident that the first thing you wanted to talk to me about was my fanny pack. Fanny packs must mean something special to you. Mine made you think we might have a connection."

"My mother wears one," I said, and I understood something then, all at once. Why my mother wore a fanny pack. The real reason she'd become friends with Rita, what had brought them close, at the hospital. There had been clues—her shutting herself up in her apartment, the can of Mace, the silent quotation marks she seemed, more and more, to place around the word "fall," when she mentioned her "fall."

The drummer kept talking while I tried to write a message to my mother, apologizing for having only now come to understand what had happened to her. Letting her know that we could talk about it, if she wanted, or that we could also never talk about it, but that, in a way, her sending me to Rita might've meant that, deep down, she was ready to talk about it now, with me, or so it seemed. It couldn't be that she just wanted a stranger to give me a rape whistle, could it? Well, actually ... maybe it could? Maybe I was overstepping? Probably, I thought. Probably overstepping. If my mother had wanted me to know she'd been assaulted she would've said something, she would've been direct. I couldn't just send her a text about this in the middle of the night. Actually, I could, but I shouldn't. Or maybe I should? And, in fact, no, I couldn't, either. There wasn't any cell reception in the club. I'd tried to send the message, but the delivery had failed. If that wasn't a sign that I shouldn't send it, it was at least a guarantee that I wouldn't send it until later.

"That guy's creepy," Simmons said. He'd got rid of the drummer while I'd been typing. "Did he bother you? Are you all right?"

"Let's get out of here," I said.

We went to the CVS across the street to buy some Alka-Seltzer, in anticipation of our separate hangovers, and because we were drunk we looked at every item in the store that was more than three different colors at once. Simmons tried some juggling balls and I compared two different fanny packs. He told me just to go with my gut. I chose the one that had the most pockets, and he offered to buy it for me. "Could come in handy one day," he said.

At the register, I picked up a DVD of the third season of "The Walking Dead" to watch on my computer with Catapult. We hadn't seen the first two seasons, but I didn't think she'd care. Simmons said that it wasn't the most realistic, as far as survivalist works of fiction went, that it was still too bathed in American puritanism, too shy in coming to terms with the speed at which morality would disappear in the event of a zombie apocalypse, but that there was still some useful information to pick up from the show.

"If anything, it teaches you to do exactly the opposite of what the characters do."

On the sidewalk, we divided the contents of the Alka-Seltzer box and I put my twenty-four packets in my new fanny pack.

Simmons hailed a cab for me, but I said I preferred to walk.

"You're not walking home drunk in the middle of the night," he said. "Not on my watch."

I told him that I'd done it before, that I was a responsible adult, that I had a whistle.

"Nonetheless," he said, "you should be more careful."

"I *am* careful," I said.

"Well, you should be more afraid, then."

I accepted the cab, and before he closed the door on me Simmons said he would see me next year, for his checkup, if I still wanted him as a patient. I didn't tell him that his eyesight would likely start deteriorating again before then.

I was so dizzy in the car that I told the driver to drop me off a couple of blocks before my building. I needed to walk the rest of the way, no matter what Simmons thought. It was freezing out, and it hurt to breathe, but everything stopped spinning, at least, and I had more balance now, and being aware of my balance made me aware of the stillness all around me, and the silence. I don't love silence much. It's too easy to break. It's one of the reasons I don't visit my father in the woods too often. I can't fall asleep there.

I can't tell you why I blew the whistle. Nothing was threatening, only the possibility that the silence might be broken, and I guess that I may have had this idea that if I was the one to break it it would be all right, or not as bad. What would be all right, though? What would be not as bad? I don't know. I didn't blow the whistle to get attention, or at least I don't think I did. I didn't really think about it. All I know is that I blew it, and nothing changed. No one came. ♦

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Camille Bordas on burglaries, loneliness, and spelling problems.

THE CRITICS



BOOKS

RIDING THE WAVES

Feminist awakenings and personal reckonings in Meg Wolitzer's "The Female Persuasion."

BY ALEXANDRA SCHWARTZ

Women are supposed to help women tell other women's stories, or so Jill, a character in Meg Wolitzer's 2008 novel, "The Ten-Year Nap," ardently believes. After flunking out of academia—her feminist dissertation, "Women's Unheard Voices in Antebellum America," bombed with her male adviser—she goes to work at the New York offices of a small film-production company, where she options a piece of historical fiction about a schoolteacher's erotic adventures on the Canadian frontier. Jill's boss, Selby Rothberg, is a woman, too—a workaholic woman, granted, with no private life and an abusive management style. But Jill and her colleagues take a forgiving view of Selby's aggression, which they consider a symptom of circumstance:

Of course Selby needed to vent, they all said; of course she needed catharsis. They could understand this. Men still dominated the industry even then, decades after feminism had been established, though women were coming up through the ranks with a kind of stealth now, as if not wanting anyone to notice how much power they were gathering, until one day it would be too late, and women would have *taken over* Hollywood, producing and directing an entire slate of sensitive films about strong, interesting female characters like Willa Cather. Until that day in the utopian middle distance, stealth was the main tactic.

Ten years later, Jill's idea of women furtively infiltrating the house of male cultural authority like ninjas, or wood lice, is as funny as ever—she would be gratified by Frances McDormand's "inclusion rider" Oscar speech—but nearly as dispiriting, too. Wolitzer's "utopian middle distance" must refer to the same vague point in time as the current pop-

ular feminist slogan "The future is female": not so near the tarnished present as to be patently ridiculous, but not so far off as to be cause for despair. Every generation of American women hopes to enter the promised land of true equality, but, as Jill discovers, the odds aren't great. Selby Rothberg, abandoning all pretense of solidarity, pulls the plug on Jill's Canadian-ladies project, and on all other company projects geared toward predominantly female audiences. "THE YOUNG MALE DEMOGRAPHIC IS ESSENTIAL," she announces by fax from Los Angeles. "IF WE DON'T HAVE THAT, PEOPLE, WE ARE FUCKED."

Wolitzer knows of what she writes. In 2012, she published an essay in the *Times Book Review* called "The Second Shelf," in which she complained that books about women's lives are often treated as a niche, trivial genre, shunted to a separate section of the bookstore, much as women used to be hustled off to the drawing room after dinner so that men could smoke cigars and talk seriously of the world. Wolitzer, at that point the author of ten novels, had recently been asked by a male guest at a party to describe her books. When she answered—"Contemporary, I guess. . . . Sometimes they're about marriage. Families. Sex. Desire. Parents and children"—he quickly passed her off to his wife. (To him, I would recommend "The Wife," Wolitzer's 2003 novel about a talented writer forced to abandon her creative life to minister to her husband's.) VIDA, an organization devoted to women in the literary arts, had just determined that nearly three-

quarters of the authors reviewed in the country's major critical outlets were men, and Wolitzer placed some of the blame for this insulting marginalization with the marketing decisions of publishers. Too many books by women, she felt, were given cutesy covers decorated with shoes and wildflowers, while prominent male authors got the bold colors and "jumbo, block-lettered masculine typeface" that mark a publication as an event.

The following year, Wolitzer came out with her eleventh novel, "The Interestings," which follows six friends who meet in the seventies at an artsy summer camp in New England called Spirit-in-the-Woods and remain bound to one another deep into adulthood. The book was a hit, and not just because its cover featured eye-catching, multicolored stripes and commanding sans-serif lettering. At her best, Wolitzer is an irresistibly charming novelist, a keen, affectionate examiner of society. Like Nora Ephron, who made her directorial debut with an adaptation of Wolitzer's novel "This Is My Life," she's something of a tumbler, a joke-cracker with a when-life-gives-you-lemons pragmatism that sweetens her satire's tart edge. At the start of "The Interestings," there is a short passage in which Wolitzer gives us the whole fifty-year marriage of Edie and Manny Wunderlich, the crusty owners of Spirit-in-the-Woods, seen through Manny's eyes. He recalls the evening, in 1946, when he met his future wife, a modern dancer leaping around a Greenwich Village party in a bedsheet; he recalls the first time they made love, the



Wolitzer's novel examines the mottled legacy that second-wave feminism has left for American women now coming of age.



acrobatic Edie nearly crushing his neck in her enthusiasm. “The only part that now remained of that slight, flexible girl was the cheese-grater texture of the heels of her feet,” Manny thinks. This is comic and poignant, but it’s not sentimental. The Wunderlichs are familiar types; many of us are, whether or not we like to admit it. Yet, in a page and a half, Wolitzer convinces us that their lives are fully theirs, vivid and particular to them.

“The Interestings” is an ambitious, decades-spanning novel, and it touches on plenty that is grave: cancer, cults, autism, depression, the 2008 financial crisis. But its true subject is talent and success, and what it means not to have quite enough of either when your friends are blessed with an abundance of both. This predicament of adulthood—the clot of jealousy, loyalty, resentment, and love felt toward dear old friends you could never live without and sometimes want to kill—is a decidedly universal theme. Maybe that’s why “The Interestings” was seen as more than a “women’s book.” Maybe the culture had moved a step closer to

enlightenment. Either way, the novel found its public, and Wolitzer’s friends joked that she was “a thirty-year overnight success.”

Wolitzer’s new novel, “The Female Persuasion” (Riverhead), arrives at a very different time for American women writers, and for American women. The improbable success of Elena Ferrante’s Neapolitan novels (which happen to boast the kind of froufrou jackets that Wolitzer deplored) has helped usher in a variety of works of literary fiction about female friendship marketed to the mainstream. *VIDA* has turned its attention to intersectional issues involving race and gender identity. Meanwhile, “The Female Persuasion” is being promoted as a major literary event, anointed “a feminist blockbuster” (by *Kirkus*) and “this era’s Great American Novel” (in the modest estimation of its publisher). Wolitzer’s cover once again features eye-catching, multicolored stripes, though this time they are arranged into a geometric, pudental V. In her “Second Shelf” essay, she argued that there was an advantage

to being a writer, like Toni Morrison, Doris Lessing, and Joyce Carol Oates, who came to prominence during the heyday of the women’s movement, when “men were actively interested in reading about the inner lives of women (or maybe some just pretended they were) and received moral kudos for doing so.” It must feel like a major stroke of luck that “The Female Persuasion,” which examines, among other things, the mottled legacy that second-wave feminism has left for American women now coming of age, arrives in the midst of the most prominent popular feminist movement in decades.

Fittingly, the novel’s plot is set in motion by a #MeToo moment *avant la lettre*. It is 2006, and Greer Kadetsky has just started her freshman year at Ryland College, a middling institution in southern Connecticut. Brainy, bookish, and shy, with a dyed-blue streak in her mousy brown hair that suggests “the possibility of boldness,” Greer grew up in a working-class town in Massachusetts, where she and her boyfriend, Cory, were at the top of their public-school class. Cory, the son of Portuguese immigrants, is now at Princeton on a full ride; Greer was accepted to Yale, only to discover that her checked-out hippie parents had neglected to complete the financial-aid forms in time. On her first Friday night at Ryland, Greer finds herself at a frat party, where she is targeted by Darren Tinzler, a bro in a backward cap, who, in classic campus-predator form, appraises her drunkenness and gets her into a corner:

He reached out in a proprietary way and rubbed the collar of her shirt between his fingers, and she was startled and didn’t know what to do, because this wasn’t right. His other hand ran experimentally up her shirt, and Greer stood in shocked suspension for a moment as he found the convexity of her breast and encircled it, all the while looking her in the eye, not blinking, just *looking*.

She jerked back from him and said, “What are you doing?”

But he held on, giving her breast a hard and painful squeeze, twisting the flesh.

Wolitzer homes in on a phenomenon that has featured in so many #MeToo stories: the sudden paralysis that grips the body as the mind reels, trying to make sense of a brazen violation even as it happens. Greer’s mouth

goes dry and her face burns. With the party carrying on around her, she feels “like Icarus drowning in the corner of the Bruegel painting they’d studied on the very first day of class.”

The fact of having frozen compounds the humiliation of the harassment itself, but what, Greer wonders, could she have done? “She wasn’t one of those girls who seemed to be everywhere, hands on hips, those girls who were described in certain movies and books as being ‘spitfires,’ or, later on, ‘kickass,’” Wolitzer writes. “Even now, at college, there were girls like this, fuck-you confident and assured of their place in the world. Whenever they came upon resistance in the form of outright sexism or even more generic grossness, they either vanquished it or essentially rolled their eyes and acted as if it was just too stupid for them to acknowledge.” Wolitzer is here conjuring the Cool Girl, made famous by Gillian Flynn’s “Gone Girl,” that mythic creature whose enviable indifference to feminine codes of behavior is itself a deliberate expression of femininity, one calculated to impress men and intimidate other women. But what Wolitzer’s heroine lacks in breezy self-assurance she makes up for in moral mettle. Unsurprisingly, Darren Tinzler turns out to be a serial aggressor; Greer, encouraged by her new friend Zee Eisenstat, an outspoken lefty lesbian from Scarsdale, joins forces with his other victims and prevails on the college to hold a disciplinary hearing. After Darren apologizes for his “repeated misunderstanding of social cues,” the committee recommends that he seek counselling with an impulse-control therapist, and that is that.

The absurd unfairness of this outcome lights a spark of indignation in Greer. It is still glowing a few weeks later, when Zee brings her to a talk given by Faith Frank, a women’s-movement veteran and the founder of *Bloomer*, a magazine with a reputation “as the scrappier, less famous little sister to *Ms.*” Faith made her name with “The Female Persuasion,” a 1984 manifesto that “essentially implored women to see that there was a great deal more to being female than padded shoulders and acting tough. Corporate America had tried to get women to behave as badly as

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men, Faith Frank said, but women did not have to capitulate. They could be strong and powerful, all the while keeping their integrity and decency.”

This message is about as retro as shoulder pads, and by the time Faith, now sixty-three, shows up at Ryland, she is widely seen as a historical has-been—still an inspiring speaker, still sexy and svelte in her signature suède boots, but far removed from her powerhouse years in the public eye, when viewers could tune in to PBS to watch her eviscerate chauvinistic Norman Mailer types. Peddling her wares on the college-lecture circuit, Faith aims to convert exactly the kind of Cool Girls who consider themselves to be post-feminist, or, at the very least, post-label. Sisterhood is still powerful, she tells the Ryland crowd. Women must unite to push for equality; don’t let the bastards grind you down. In 2006, this is pretty familiar stuff, but Greer has never heard anything like it, and she receives Faith’s words as a revelation. Screwing up her courage after the lecture, Greer follows Faith into the bathroom, and after a chat about misogyny and injustice comes away with something of more concrete use: Faith Frank’s elegant, embossed business card.

A favorite theme of Wolitzer’s is the question of how, by whatever combination of advantage, obstacle, will power, encouragement, and chance, we get to wherever we’re going, and, much like “The Interestings,” “The Female Persuasion” is a novel about growing up. Greer’s encounter with Faith Frank sets the course that carries her into adulthood. After graduating, she moves to New York to work at Loci, a new feminist organization that Faith has founded to address “the most urgent issues concerning women today.” Wolitzer keeps her sights on the rest of her young cast, too, and as the novel advances we follow the idealistic Zee as she struggles with a Teach for America-type job in Chicago, and witness Cory’s stint as a consultant cut short by family tragedy. They’re good eggs, these millennials, each earnestly trying to figure out what it means to build a meaningful life.

But the core of the novel is Greer’s coming of age, and the role that Faith

Frank plays in it. In a long flashback, Wolitzer shows us how Faith arrived at her politics. The daughter of over-protective parents from Bensonhurst, she left the claustrophobia of home for Las Vegas, where she worked as a cocktail waitress and went to bed with musicians and blackjack dealers until her roommate had a nearly fatal back-alley abortion, which initiated a feminist awakening. It’s a familiar generational story of a mid-century consciousness raised, though one of the novel’s nice comic ironies is that the roommate goes on to become a rabidly anti-choice senator from Indiana, made far more politically powerful by her own brand of political radicalization than Faith could ever hope to be made by hers.

At Loci, Faith is a model of empathetic female mentorship, in corrective contrast to Selby Rothberg of “The Ten-Year Nap.” She’s also a little vain, and Wolitzer pokes delicious fun at the foibles of a career speechifier in her grande-dame phase who can’t quite turn off the well-modulated profundity, whether she’s out at a bar with her colleagues—“The world is so enormous, but if you have places where they know what you like to drink, then all is well”—or on her way to the salon to get her highlights touched up: “If I added up all the time I’ve spent in such places, I could probably have traveled the world. Done something much more significant than sitting in a chair being passive and wearing a plastic cape like a superhero of nothing.”

Faith’s younger employees eat up her chic self-deprecation, even as evidence mounts that she may no longer be the feminist warrior she once was. Loci is supported by a venture-capital guy whose professed interest in the feminist cause also provides cover for his questionable business ethics. Over time, the work that Faith does there comes to seem aimed mainly at empowering wealthy women to open their checkbooks to her. Wolitzer gamely parodies Loci’s Lean In-style conferences, with their celebrity keynote speakers and well-connected audiences, but the sheer corporate dullness of the place starts to sap the novel of its vitality, and Greer of her idealism. Elsewhere, she knows, women of her generation are forging scrappy feminist ventures of their own,

trying to articulate what matters to them and to their world. Frequent mention is made of Fem Fatale, an irreverent Jezebel-type Web site that “had shifted away from personal essays and was embracing a radical critique of racism, sexism, capitalism, and homophobia.” Part of that critique is aimed at Faith Frank: “Time to give another pep talk to straight white middle-class women,” the site chides. So why does Greer stay so loyal? At an office retreat at Faith’s country house, Greer slices her thumb while helping to cook, and as her boss bandages her up she contemplates her charisma:

The light touch of this powerful woman was profound. So too was her choice to use her power in this tender way. Maybe that’s what we want from women, Greer thought as her thumb pulsed and percolated with blood. Maybe that’s what we imagine it would be like to have a woman lead us.

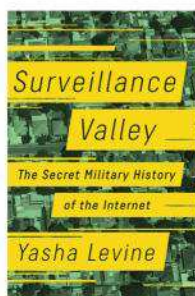
It’s not quite clear whether Wolitzer is satirizing this kind of pabulum or sympathizing with it. Refreshing though it is to encounter a literary model of genuine female mentorship and encouragement, her tale of a millennial woman’s feminist awakening comes to seem blinkered and strangely incurious. Greer in her mid-twenties seems hardly less naïve, or better informed, than she was at eighteen. When she thinks of an alternative to patriarchy, can she imagine nothing more radical than a glorified version of maternal caregiving? There is an obvious, odd omission here. Though Wolitzer extends her novel into 2019, acknowledging the Trump era, too cutely, as “the big terribleness,” nowhere does she mention the woman whom Trump ran against. Faith, who has traded her youthful activism for corporate pragmatism and establishment bona fides, has more than a dash of Hillary in her, and maybe Wolitzer felt that a dash sufficed. It is nonetheless awkward for this realist novel about women and power to trim reality in a way that neatly excises the woman who has served as our national lightning rod for conversations, good, bad, and ugly, about women in power during exactly the period that it purports to examine.

The risk for a novel that tries to capture the Zeitgeist is that the Zeitgeist

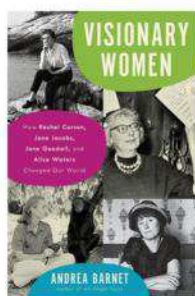
is liable to shift at any moment. Indeed, the timeliness of Wolitzer's subject, initially such a boon to the novel, ultimately deals it a major blow. The events of the past few months, and the fierce discussions about feminism that they have engendered, have proved to be far more electrifying and complex than anything that Wolitzer depicts here. Surpassed by the present that it aims to depict, the novel feels amiable and mild by comparison, already quaintly out of date. This is particularly clear when it comes to the question of generational conflict among women. Young people demand action, and sweeping societal change, as young people must; older people preach caution, and incremental advances, as older people do. We know that Faith and Greer are destined for a falling-out, but when conflict does at last arise it is over a question of corporate negligence—a narrative technicality, and a sorely missed opportunity for the book to explore more revealing differences between a movement's standard-bearers and their protégés, who must embrace them to learn, and reject them to grow.

"One person replaces another," Greer reflects, close to the end of the novel. She has written her own book, "Outside Voices," a popular manifesto in which she recounts how she learned to speak up for herself and encourages other women to do the same. It's a best-seller. She now has a baby daughter, lives in a Brooklyn brownstone that she has bought on the strength of her book advance (in the name of solidarity, suspend your disbelief), and is considering starting her own foundation. She has become, in essence, a thirty-one-year-old version of Faith, a polished young spokeswoman for women's personal empowerment. You want to congratulate her on her success, and also roll your eyes. A hopeful mood has settled over the novel; there is a sense that the female future is bright, at least for Greer, which isn't to say that all is well. Darren Tinzler, for one, is running a revenge-porn Web site and ruining women's lives. Greer despairs of his ever being brought to justice, but she shouldn't give up hope. If reality can serve as any model for fiction, he may yet get what's coming to him. ♦

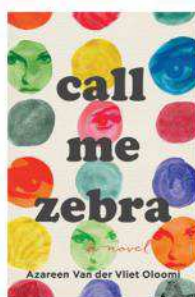
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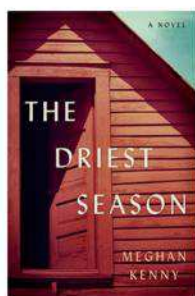
Surveillance Valley, by Yasha Levine (*PublicAffairs*). This polemical history argues that the U.S. military's role in the development of the Internet indelibly shaped the system into a powerful tool of government surveillance. Starting in the late sixties, efforts to monitor enemy combatants abroad and dissident groups at home spurred data-collection efforts such as the Cambridge Project and CONUS Intel, the latter of which led to congressional hearings on privacy. Levine traces this legacy through a vast range of technological endeavors today, and calls out big tech firms as arms of the surveillance apparatus. His tone is often contentious, but, amid increasing dismay about technology's influence on contemporary life, such forceful questioning is salutary.



Visionary Women, by Andrea Barnett (*Ecco*). "Revolutions are sometimes sparked by unexpected characters," according to this collection of biographical sketches, which demonstrates a surprising convergence in the ideas of Rachel Carson, Jane Jacobs, Jane Goodall, and Alice Waters. As a postwar generation of women found themselves stranded in the suburbs, Barnett's subjects all rejected the time's hypermasculine, technology-obsessed ethos, in which "nature existed to serve humankind's needs"; instead, they saw people as an integral part of nature. Barnett's vivid portraits demonstrate that the struggles were not without cost. Carson was dismissed as a "spinster" and a "bird and bunny lover." During the McCarthy era, Jacobs was investigated by the Loyalty Security Board.



Call Me Zebra, by Azareen Van der Vliet Oloomi (*Houghton Mifflin Harcourt*). In this novel, Zebra, an Iranian exile, uses literature to grapple with the historical ructions that define her life. As a child, she flees the Iran-Iraq War with her parents and witnesses the death of her mother. Her father instills in her a potent sense of their family's commitment to keeping literary knowledge alive in a hostile world. After his death, she begins an affair with an Italian philologist, but wards off his affections by intellectualizing her grief. "Despite my gentle reminders that *love is a deadly poison*, you remain stubbornly prone to sentimentality and clinginess," she tells him. In a story that might otherwise be self-serious, Van der Vliet Oloomi resists the standard redemption arc, infusing her protagonist with a darkly comic neuroticism.



The Driest Season, by Meghan Kenny (*Norton*). Set in drought-ridden Wisconsin during the Second World War, this novel centers on a teen-age girl, Cielle, whose father hangs himself in the family barn. Her mother must make the death look like an accident in order to save their farm from a landowner who claims that suicides forfeit property rights, and Cielle is enlisted to help hide the truth. While she seeks to understand her father's motives, the family is beset by mounting catastrophes, which eventually give way, somewhat soporily, to happiness. Kenny uses the extremes of rural life in a time of shortage and sadness to depict what it means to survive.

MUSICAL EVENTS

RENEWAL

Augustin Hadelich and the Detroit Symphony defy routine.

BY ALEX ROSS



It was, at first glance, an ordinary week in the life of an American orchestra. In late March, the Detroit Symphony gave three performances with the veteran conductor Jukka-Pekka Saraste and a younger but well-travelled violinist, Augustin Hadelich. The program followed a familiar template: an opener (Sibelius's "Pohjola's Daughter"), a concerto (Britten's Violin Concerto), and a symphony (Beethoven's Seventh). Music critics, myself included, often object to this business-as-usual approach. Yet, having spent a couple of days with the orchestra, I wouldn't call the proceedings routine. Detroit is no ordinary city; it is recovering from a

grim past and undergoing a startling transformation. The orchestra, likewise, is rebounding: a bitter strike in 2010 and 2011 had many observers wondering whether it could survive. And Hadelich is a singularly gifted, characterful musician who has a flair for bringing older music into the present tense.

I met Hadelich for dinner before his first performance of the Britten, which took place the next morning, with a second one slated for that evening. The schedule was challenging for him, not so much technically as emotionally. "This is a great concerto—not a conventional virtuoso piece," he told me. "The feelings in it are rather dark

and complex. It was written at the end of the Spanish Civil War, as a kind of lament. I would say it is evening music—not something you want to wake up and play! So tomorrow will use up all my adrenaline. But I also like the idea of living and breathing Britten's music all day, really exploring it."

Hadelich, who turns thirty-four this month, is of German parentage but was raised on a farm in Tuscany. When he was a teen-ager, he suffered severe burns in a fire, but after a long recovery he was able to resume playing. He has lived in New York since attending Juilliard, and speaks elegant, lightly accented English. I first heard him at Marlboro Music, the summer gathering in Vermont, in 2008, when he was one of many young musicians receiving guidance from Marlboro's elders. In the past decade, he has entered the upper echelon of the violin world; he has made a vital, intensely musical recording of Paganini's Caprices, a peak of the repertory, for the Warner Classics label. Yet he still spends much of the year travelling to orchestras across America, revisiting cities where he received early attention: San Diego, Milwaukee, Madison, Fort Worth. "Some of my friends in Europe, or even in New York, are still quite snobby and don't know how really good these orchestras are," he said.

For Hadelich, touring is a rather monastic existence. "Ninety per cent of the time, I'm thinking about the performance, about Britten," he said. "It's almost as if I were pretending I'm not in a different city. If I'm not at the rehearsal, I'm at the hotel, practicing and going over notes from past performances. Whenever I play a piece, I make notes about what worked and what I might do differently." What to eat, and when to eat, are important questions. "If it's a morning concert, I eat the night before, making sure to get a lot of carbohydrates," he said, gesturing toward his meal, a plate of spaghetti. "If it's an evening concert, I have a big lunch. I need food in my system, but it's not good if I've eaten right before I walk onstage."

When Hadelich first came on the scene, he was noted for his pinpoint brilliance and for his sweet, cultured, almost old-fashioned tone. It was as if a Golden Age violinist had jumped out of the grooves of a 78-r.p.m. record. In

Performing Britten's Violin Concerto, Hadelich says, uses up "all my adrenaline."

recent years, he has been emphasizing more modern fare: the brooding concertos of Britten and Shostakovich; the avant-virtuoso works of György Ligeti and Thomas Adès. Hadelich told me, “I do not want to be—you say ‘pigeon-holed,’ yes? If I have success in a certain city with Beethoven or Sibelius, and I am invited back, I might say, ‘What about Britten?’ Detroit is quite adventurous, and there was no problem with this. Plus”—he gave a knowing smile—“there is Beethoven on the program if anyone is afraid of Britten.”

Orchestra Hall, the Detroit Symphony’s home, is in the Midtown neighborhood, on Woodward Avenue. The hall was built for the orchestra in 1919, and has exceptional acoustics—a near-ideal balance of clarity and warmth. The ensemble had to abandon the hall at the end of the thirties, for financial reasons, at which point the building experienced a second heyday, as the Paradise Theatre, a famous jazz venue. By the seventies, the hall was on the verge of being demolished when Detroit Symphony musicians led a campaign to save and renovate it. In 1989, when the orchestra moved back in, the Cass Corridor, as the immediate area is known, was run-down, depopulated, and crime-ridden. The orchestra now finds itself at the heart of a bustling hipster enclave, with a Whole Foods across the street and a pour-over coffee place up the block.

Less than a decade ago, the Detroit musicians seemed implacably at odds with the management, which had proposed a thirty-per-cent pay cut. The upbeat temperament of Leonard Slatkin, who has been the orchestra’s music director since 2008, helped heal these internal wounds. He will step down at the end of this season; the search for a successor is ongoing. After the labor crisis, musicians and management found common ground in a mission to reconnect with the city. They anointed themselves the “most accessible orchestra on the planet,” and have gone some ways toward justifying that superlative. Tickets are cheaper than at other orchestras; my press seat, on the left orchestra aisle, would have cost twenty-five dollars. Neighborhood concerts reach into underserved communities. Most

strikingly, the Detroit offers free Webcasts of its concerts—an initiative that seems obvious but that few other orchestras have tried. (The Berlin Philharmonic has its Digital Concert Hall service, but access costs a hundred and forty-nine euros a year.) Anne Parsons, the Detroit’s president and C.E.O., told me, “We’ve gone from three thousand viewers on average to around seventy-five hundred—in one case, thirty-five thousand. It’s brought great young musicians to us—they can see what we’re doing. I was sure that, by now, everyone else would be doing it. I’ve stopped wondering and haven’t looked back.”

Erik Rönmark, the orchestra’s general manager and vice-president, has helped to forge its artistic vision. He is a Swedish-born saxophonist who co-founded the ensemble New Music Detroit. He has pressed for more new music and for a stronger representation of female and nonwhite composers and conductors. The 2018-19 season includes twelve living composers, five of them women; two major symphonic pieces, John Luther Adams’s “Become Ocean” and Andrew Norman’s “Play,” are featured. There is no lack of Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, and Mahler, but Detroit’s commitment to new music places it in the vanguard, well ahead of its wealthier counterparts in Chicago, Cleveland, Boston, and Philadelphia.

Detroit’s resurgence has yet to do much for its arts journalism: I was the only critic in attendance at these concerts. Mark Stryker, the longtime classical and jazz critic of the Detroit *Free Press*, took a buyout last year, and no one else regularly reviews classical events. This is a sad state of affairs, since the orchestra’s work deserves to be chronicled. More than thirty musicians have joined the ensemble since the strike, regenerating its sound. Wei Yu, the principal cellist, formerly of the New York Philharmonic, filled the hall with mournful beauty at the start of the Sibelius. The Beethoven, under Saraste’s decisive direction, had a gritty punch.

The main event was, however, Hadelich’s performance of the Britten concerto. Dressed in black with an upturned collar, the violinist looked a bit like a young officer in a period film, about to go off to war. The solo part is ferociously demanding, but not neces-

sarily in a way that conveys fireworks to the audience. “For some reason, Britten decided to throw in every extended technique he could think of,” Hadelich told me. “Double-stops everywhere, double-stop harmonics, lots of octaves, left-hand pizzicato. Parts of the second movement are only borderline playable. At the end of the piece, he seems to want you to stay on the G string even when the line goes extremely high.”

Over three performances—I saw the first two in the hall, the last on the Webcast—Hadelich plumbed the work’s difficulties and ambiguities, finding subtly different solutions each time. At the morning show, Saraste kept to a fairly strict tempo, limiting Hadelich’s ability to tug at Britten’s free-floating lines; yet the second movement had an anxious, sweaty force. That evening, a more languid atmosphere prevailed in the orchestra, allowing Hadelich to savor the Spanish rhythms that course through the score. To judge from the Webcast, the final rendition was the most polished in the series, but each had its virtues. Hadelich said, “I’m aiming at consistency in technical terms, but, when the music calls for you to be free and rhapsodic, it can’t be the same each night.”

At all three performances, the ending of the Britten had a darkly enchanting effect. Over thirty-three slow bars, Hadelich and the orchestra attempt to find their way to a hopeful closing chord of D major. Hadelich eventually lands on F-sharp, the clinching note of the D-major triad, but, by the time the orchestra has joined him there, he seems to have lost faith in that note, and keeps falling back to F-natural. Ultimately, he trills between the two notes while winds and brass hold the bare fifth D-A. All fade to silence. It is impossible not to think about the fact that Britten finished the concerto in the summer of 1939, as the world trembled on the edge of catastrophe.

For an encore, Hadelich performed the Sarabande from Bach’s D-minor Partita. “After such an ending, you couldn’t play, say, Paganini,” he later told me. “The Sarabande is one of the saddest pieces I know, and there is the connection with the key of D.” In this pairing, Bach supplies the resolution that Britten withholds: for now, the major key remains out of reach. ♦

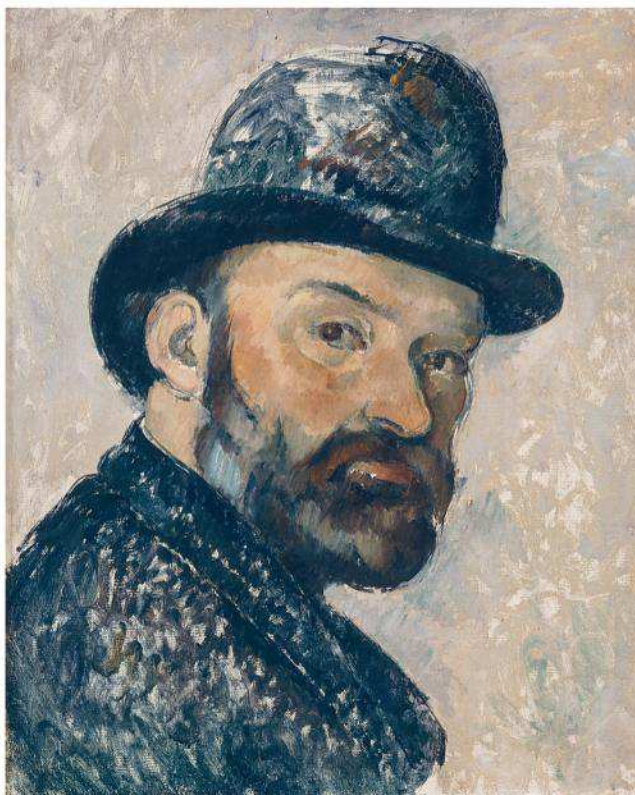
HIGH ANXIETY

Paul Cézanne's portraits.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

When things fall apart, you can see what they're made of. "Cézanne: Portraits," a retrospective of some sixty portraits by Paul Cézanne, at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., is the most instructive show of the artist I've ever seen, because it's so lurchingly uneven. Wonderments consort with clunkers, often on the same canvas: credible figure and woozy ground, or vice versa. Portraiture was the genre most resistant to Cézanne's struggle—the inception of "difficulty" as a notorious feature of modern art, needing specialist explanation—toward new ways of transposing the world's three dimensions into the two of painting. There are about a hundred and sixty portraits among the thousand or so paintings that he made between around 1860 and his death, of pneumonia, in 1906. They lack the knitted density of his landscapes and figure groups and the stunning integrity of his greatest works, the still-lives with apples like succulent cannonballs. Those apples prompted D. H. Lawrence, in a classic essay from 1929, to hail Cézanne for establishing like no other artist a recognition that "matter actually exists," independent of human self-regard. That essay—recommended to me by the distinguished curator John Elderfield, who, together with Mary Morton and Xavier Rey, co-curated the National Gallery show—vivifies the ascetic passion of Cézanne: an awkward man of turbulent, half-strangled emotions, known to pause for twenty minutes between one brushstroke and the next, who set benchmarks of rigor and authenticity for artists ever after.

Lawrence saw Cézanne as striving to objectify the "appleyness"—the thing in itself—of people, too, yet without much success because, the writer decided, they were beyond his ken. He came closest, Lawrence believed, in the twenty-eight or so portraits of his lover, Hortense Fiquet, whom he met in 1869 and married seventeen years later, "making the universe slip uneasily about her," Lawrence wrote, her presence not

*Cézanne's "Self-Portrait with Bowler Hat," from 1885–86.*

static but "come to rest." But not even there, Lawrence thought, could Cézanne entirely overcome convention—Hortense still being somewhat of an image as opposed to sheer quiddity. Lawrence's summary judgment of Cézanne is pretty severe: "After a fight tooth-and-nail for forty years, he did succeed in knowing an apple, fully; and, not quite as fully, a jug or two. That was

all he achieved." But Lawrence allowed—or ranted, in the way that he had of pounding any given nail until the hammer broke—"I can think of nobody else who has done anything." I'd assess the artist more charitably. But precisely by faltering in an obsessive quest, Cézanne's portraits tell me the most about him—while precious little about his subjects. He had strange, and strained, perceptions of others. But he kept having at them: Hortense and their son, Paul; himself, in the mirror; certain family members and friends; the occasional model; and farmhands, workers, and servants at his banker father's estate, in Aix-en-Provence, where Cézanne spent most of his life, and which he inherited in 1886.

None of the portraits were commissioned. Cézanne's family wealth freed him from the art-world scramble. In the eighteen-sixties, he made an abortive run at fame in Paris with crudely vehement works—privately including wacky erotica, perhaps influenced by Gustave Courbet but mainly expressing stymied lust—in palette-knife-slathered paint. Examples in the show from his time in Paris include small, sportive portraits of an uncle and, from 1866, a life-size, heroically clunky one of his father reading a leftist newspaper—which the starchy patriarch would not have liked. Cézanne himself tended toward the right, embracing pious Catholicism in his last decade, and though not overtly anti-Semitic, like Degas and Renoir, nevertheless siding with them in the Dreyfus Affair. Despite stalwart support from his boyhood friend Émile Zola, until

the two became estranged, in the eighties, Cézanne made next to no headway in a Parisian scene that found him a delectable target for ridicule. He did not have a solo show in the city until 1895, when he was fifty-five and a mighty influence on younger painters. (He loathed one of them, Paul Gauguin, whom he accused of stealing his style.)

After 1870, Cézanne largely stopped

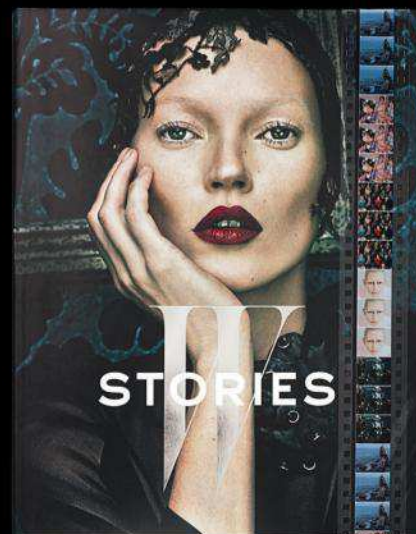
painting portraits for a number of years, a period during which he was mentored by the avuncular Camille Pissarro in refinements of the techniques of open-air Impressionism. (His relations with others in the cohort were touch and go; the urbane Manet deemed him distressingly uncouth.) Cézanne absorbed the movement's commitment to optical truth while gradually eliminating its blushes of light in favor of defining objects with patches of close-toned color, alternately warm and cool. He then increasingly holed up on his family's estate. There he pursued a radical ambition, saying, "I want to make of impressionism something solid and lasting, like the art in the museums." This entailed wedding sight to touch, alert for any hints of solidity in rocks and buildings, apples and heads, as—bit by bit, stroke by stroke, with hope but no compromise with respect to overall coherence—they met his gaze. Each daub can seem to record a discrete look, at a moment isolated in time. Sometimes the eyes in a portrait peer in different directions, evidence of the discontinuous process. Picasso and Braque adapted the effect to create Cubism: visual reality fragmented in fealty to how our eyes take it in before our brains compose the illusion of having seen it whole.

But Cézanne didn't want a system, which would have become just another habit of picture-making. Allergic to cliché, he made one-man war on conventions. Now it's hard to register this fact, after generations of art experts have folded him into one or another scheme of progressive modernism. Lawrence noted the distortion with reference to the formalist theories of the Bloomsbury critics Roger Fry and Clive Bell: "the critics stepped forth and abstracted his good apple into Significant Form, and henceforth Cézanne was saved." You must fight through what you are supposed to think of the work to what it looks like: indeed difficult, and rather weird in its compulsive attentiveness to details that don't add up; they multiply. As a result, with the exception of the more postcard-congenial of his still-lives, or his sun-drenched Mediterranean views, or his late, monumental scenes of bathers—and despite some smoldering and

now and then combusting glories of color—Cézanne's fate has been to be revered more than enjoyed.

Once, at the Metropolitan Museum, I counted dozens of people clumped in front of several paintings by van Gogh while one or two or none paid a whole room of Cézannes cursory attention as others walked through with passing glances. I empathized. A glance at his work warns of slow going ahead. That's because he didn't paint for the pleasure of other people but for his own, always elusive satisfaction. I'm used to feeling lonely when looking at his work—as humanly unconsidered as Hortense, who, through hours and days and years, displays not the slightest flicker of happiness. In a few small portraits from around the time of their wedding, she looks a mite distraught. (I believe it.) At best, wearing a red dress in several gorgeous paintings from 1888–90, she radiates a sort of alien majesty—appleyness, more or less. Cézanne's most ambitious portrait, of a supportive art critic, Gustave Geffroy, from 1895–96, is unfinished. After months of regular sittings, the artist had strongly rendered the bookshelves and other objects in Geffroy's office but despaired of ever resolving the face and hands. Only the rustic men in his late works flash much in the way of personhood; I suppose because he could comfortably condescend to them.

Cézanne's art tells no stories, so we are left to invent stories about it. I love the one by Lawrence, though it overbears in projecting the writer's sensualist ethos. Less helpful, albeit grand, is "Cézanne's Doubt" (1945), a famous essay by Maurice Merleau-Ponty that applies existentialist and phenomenological theories to the artist's procedures. Most on target is and, I think, always will be Picasso, who, in 1935, cited "the drama of the man." He said, "What forces our attention is Cézanne's anxiety." Cézanne made his troubles our troubles. For the better part of a century, this could be taken as a challenge to modernizing progress in art. That myth is defunct now. The National Gallery show traps us in the present tense of efforts to get something right—an absoluteness not just of seeing, but of being—which happens not to be possible. ♦



by Stefano Tonchi

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BROAD

Edward Albee takes on motherhood in “Three Tall Women.”

BY HILTON ALS



If, for some perverse reason, you feel the need to see female minstrelsy at work, by all means check out “Three Tall Women” (in revival at the Golden, directed by Joe Mantello). Written by Edward Albee and first staged in New York in 1994—it won that year’s Pulitzer Prize for drama—the play, in this incarnation, stars an English actress I’ve longed to see onstage for all of my viewing life: Glenda Jackson. Now eighty-one, the legendary actress still possesses the energy and the clarity that characterized her greatest film and television performances. It’s unlikely that I’ll ever forget her as the bewildered but staunch lover in “Sunday Bloody Sunday” (1971) or as Elizabeth I in the BBC miniseries “Elizabeth R” that same year, not to mention as Hedda Gabler in Trevor Nunn’s 1975 film version of Ibsen’s play. Jackson, a two-time Oscar

winner, is a gift that Mantello doesn’t so much squander as fail to unwrap. As in much of his directorial work, Mantello reconfigures the script to emphasize the fire-and-brimstone moments that he thinks Broadway audiences will respond to: it’s very easy to choose between right and wrong. No matter the intellectual intent or subtleties of a given script, in all the stage work of his that I’ve seen he insists on wagging a finger at the characters’ moral failings.

“Three Tall Women” is one of Albee’s most interesting late works; it bristles with unresolved and unresolvable guilt and, finally, with hatred undone. Albee’s earliest plays, such as “The American Dream” (1961), lampooned the American family, and all families that felt they should be protected by the status quo—or by their wealth. Because the women

in Albee’s scripts are often the dominant dramatic force, the writer was accused of portraying men in drag. A facile reading of the current production of “Three Tall Women” would be that Albee was a misogynist, but that would be reductive: what if the person you were supposed to love the most was detestable, and happened to be a woman?

In his thirteenth full-length play, Albee wasn’t seeking revenge against women, or, specifically, against his mother, whose contemptuous vitriol dogged him throughout his life. Adopted by Reed and Frances Albee when he was two weeks old, Albee was a child of privilege: Reed’s family owned a chain of theatres around the country. Poor but socially ambitious, Frances had grown up longing for the kind of life that Reed could provide: horses, servants, a grand but tasteful place to live. A baby was part of the deal. In piece after piece, Albee questioned or, more precisely, challenged the role that having a child plays in a heterosexual woman’s idea of herself. (Albee, who was gay, rarely wrote gay characters, and one senses that he needed the distance he felt from the straight world in order to speak.) Frances wanted to have it all—marriage, money, motherhood—but she couldn’t, or wouldn’t, bear the emotional responsibility of mothering anything except her resentment, especially when it came to her milquetoast of a husband and her sharp-tongued son.

The power of so many of Albee’s plays, from the underproduced “Tiny Alice” (1964)—a mysterious three-act comedic drama about a corrupting rich widow and the Church—to “Three Tall Women” and “The Play About the Baby” (2001), lies in his attempt to record, without indicting, the horrible sound of his mother’s lullabies: songs about his queerness, his ineptitude, and his failures, supercilious and electric with self-importance and malice. Everything hateful in the world, Albee seems to say again and again, begins with the discrepancy between who we say we are and who we turn out to be.

A (Jackson), the widow at the center of “Three Tall Women,” is having none of this. Sitting upright in a straight-backed chair, her mouth a red gash, she knows who she is because she has ended up here, hasn’t she, rich enough to afford B (Laurie Metcalf), her caretaker, and C (Alison Pill), a lawyer who has come

Pill, Metcalf, and Jackson play one woman at different stages of her life.

to look after her affairs? A is consumed by memory; she is the only pure thing in a world that she has always known to be vile. Who cares that she is anti-Semitic and racist, she is a paragon of—truth? A doyenne of upper-class respectability? Well, now she's incontinent, and sometimes she can't remember everything, but when she's energized by loathing she recalls that her husband loved tall women, and that she could never have oral sex with him, just never could, and how, once, he put a diamond bracelet on his "pee-pee" and she wanted the bracelet but could not bring herself to put that thing in her mouth to get it.

Often overlooked in Albee's work is his engagement with class and his view of marrying up as a form of prostitution. A had no such qualms; her ambition didn't leave time for morals. And, as she shuffles back and forth to the bathroom with B's help while C asks questions about her finances, the action grows broader and the laughs get closer together: these usually tremendous actresses are playing to some kind of recorded laugh track in Mantello's mind—a laugh track that wouldn't be so glaring if Metcalf, in particular, weren't so wedded to it. Indeed, Metcalf, a performer whose verve I was excited about in last season's "A Doll's House, Part 2," relies so much on the tics she developed thirty years ago for the sitcom "Roseanne"—nonchalance, a certain rueful distance—that she actually helps Mantello steer the play away from its deeper implications, which have to do with how we forgive those who made us, even if what they made was a target at which to aim their life's disappointment.

Part of what I loved about Jackson before I ever saw her—I first heard her on a recording of Peter Brook's "Marat/Sade" when I was a boy—was her voice. It's one of the great instruments of the English-speaking stage, full of what Norman Mailer called (in reference to Truman Capote) "snide rustlings and unforgiving nasalities." Jackson provided perhaps my first experience of a woman who didn't smile to appease men's fear; she was interested in that fear. Mantello draws on Jackson's staunchness, but her characterization, like that of the other actors, comes not from inside—or the inside that Albee has supplied—but from previous performances, Glenda Jackson in tough Glenda Jackson roles.

Usually a mindful star, she is exploited here for her intelligence, and for her distrust, which has always been part of her style: her performances cut through the smoke and mirrors of "acting" to show us something true and brutal about life and the spilled blood of history. But how much depth can she bring to a production that favors the flash of show biz over the complications of the flesh?

In the second half of the play, it becomes clear that A, B, and C are one woman—A—but at different stages of her life. Mantello has directed the actresses to play their roles as though they were, respectively, a sadistic, castrating drama queen, a dour, bitter spinster, and a disgruntled majorette. Thus they parade around Miriam Butcher's rather overdone set like angsty marionettes, which the director uses to distract us from a story that Albee wrote from the heart, complete with fractious questioning, technical finesse, and plain old talent. C refuses to believe that she'll end up like A, dissolute and despising her own child. Pill overdoes it with the wide-eyed innocence, and, in any case, how can we believe that her character is innocent in a play about cynicism and its ultimate release? As A recalls her life with her detested son, her eyes flash with superiority; after all, she's a mother, the greatest role onstage and off. But what if you have a son like A's, an Albee stand-in, who yells "Fake!" and "NO!" when the truth fails to reveal itself to his mother. Clearly, A couldn't take that. If she actually listened to his or anyone's contradictions, she wouldn't know who she was.

The play ends not with A embracing her visiting son in a warm hug of forgiveness but with her various selves joining hands and exhaling. The dying breath is the start of life, or, at least, of freedom for the artist. In "Three Tall Women," Albee was also able to explore, indirectly, his own three selves: the queer son, the man longing for love, and the writer, expressing it all on the page, which is another form of love. Dramatists put their words and their hearts in their characters' mouths, and, when Jackson and the other actresses raise their hands, we want to raise ours, too, but in praise of Albee, who, as a boy in the gilt-edged fakery of his adoptive home, learned the power of bearing witness to the truth, and then speaking it. ♦

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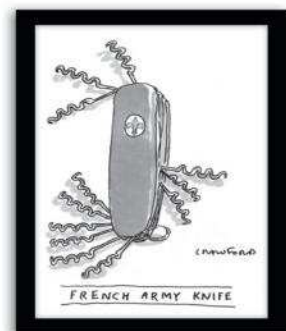
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REALITY HUNGER

"Ready Player One" and "Lean on Pete."

BY ANTHONY LANE

Three months after delivering "The Post" in time for Christmas, Steven Spielberg is back with another parcel, bearing the label "Ready Player One." Nothing will ever match his uncanny—and, you might say, disturbing—transition from "Jurassic Park" to "Schindler's List" within a single year, but it's still quite a hop from "The Post,"

in Columbus, Ohio. What the wider society is like, what it labors at, and how it feeds itself are questions that never vex the film, although we do see pizzas being ferried by drone. All that most people, including Wade, want to do is strap on a headset, ditch their ponderous existence, and enter a virtual realm, known as the Oasis. It is wild, weight-



Steven Spielberg's futuristic film revolves around a vast virtual-reality game.

a soaring liberal anthem in praise of print, to "Ready Player One," a film in which nobody gives the faintest sign of needing or wishing to read. The screenplay, by Zak Penn and Ernest Cline, is based on Cline's novel of the same name, but there ends any connection with the written word.

It is 2045, years after "the bandwidth riots," and Wade Watts (Tye Sheridan), an orphan in his late teens, lives with his aunt Alice (Susan Lynch). What *is* it with aunts? Peter Parker has one. James has two before he finds the Giant Peach. I guess nephews and nieces feel semi-detached, without the tug of close ties, and thus more eligible for adventure. Wade and Alice dwell in the Stacks, a shantytown of piled-up trailer homes

less, limitless, and devoid of genuine pain. (If somebody cuts you, money pours out of the wound.) Any resemblance to a heroin high, let alone an opioid epidemic, is entirely coincidental.

The Oasis was conjured up by a woolly-haired genius called Halliday (Mark Rylance), who died seven years ago, bequeathing an infuriating game. Anyone can take part in it, and, until now, everyone has failed to complete it, including Nolan Sorrento (Ben Mendelsohn), the head of a malignant corporation. The aim is to earn three magic keys and, having collected the set, to win a glowing Easter egg and thereby to assume command of the Oasis. Is this the best that Cline and Spielberg could dream up? And, given that we hope from

the start that Wade will be the victor, what has changed since Willy Wonka yielded control of his chocolate factory to Charlie Bucket?

Well, unlike the sprightly Mr. Wonka, Halliday is dead, but no matter, for he remains alive in the shape of his digital avatar, a gnomish graybeard by the name of—give me strength—Anorak. Within the Oasis, avatars are *de rigueur*. You'd never be so dumb as to reveal your actual name, and, besides, you get to adopt a new gender, a new body, and even, in cases of extreme timidity, a new species. Wade, who, for a Spielberg hero, strikes me as a little blockish and numb, has created an alter ego called Parzival, suggesting an implausible passion for medieval German romance literature. Or for Wagner, perhaps, except that Parzival doesn't look like a knightly tenor. He looks like an extra in a Duran Duran video from the pit of the nineteen-eighties. Thus do we approach the movie's holy grail.

James Joyce once confessed, with puckish pride, that "Finnegans Wake" would "keep the professors busy for centuries," and a similar challenge is issued, to eminent scholars of pop culture, by "Ready Player One." The task of freezing every frame and probing it for Reagan-era trivia may not consume them for a hundred years, but it should fill their leisure hours until, say, the release of "Avengers: Infinity War," on April 27th. In the quest for the first key, for example, players must compete in a road race, hurtling along virtual streets in virtual cars of their own choosing. Parzival has a DeLorean, from Robert Zemeckis's "Back to the Future"—a thumpingly obvious tribute that is compounded, later on, when he and a fellow-avatar, Art3mis (Olivia Cooke), evade trouble by deploying a special doodad that allows them to reverse time by sixty seconds. The name of that doodad? The Zemeckis Cube.

By far the boldest revisiting comes when a bunch of avatars, led through the Oasis by Wade, follow a clue from Halliday's past—it's a long story—and find themselves stranded inside "The Shining" (1980). Many of its infamous images are loaded straight into the new film: the identical twins, the axe-head splitting the door, the elevator that opens to unleash a blood-dimmed tide—in

which, on this occasion, one of Spielberg's more lumpen characters slithers and slips, purely for a laugh. I have no idea, first, how he was granted permission by the Stanley Kubrick estate to stage such a rude invasion, and, second, whether it should be greeted as homage or as outrage. Hard-core Kubrickians, I suspect, will view it with eyes wide shut.

There is an attempt to offset these online antics with a threat from the physical world, involving Sorrento, but the balance between high technology and low sublunary guile, so finely achieved by Spielberg in "Minority Report" (2002), is all but absent here. His attention is riveted, instead, on the poetry of brands and icons (did I not catch a glimpse, in the shadows, of the police box from "Doctor Who"?). Nothing is stranger, in this very strange film, than the mystical power with which pop culture is endowed; one vital riddle can be solved only by somebody versed in the works of John Hughes. If Spielberg is being nostalgic, it's less for his own childhood (he grew up in the fifties) than for the childhoods that he helped transform—for the epoch that was so effectively colonized by his films, and by those of his contemporaries. An old clip in the archives of the Oasis finds Halliday in a wistful mood. "Why can't we go backward for once?" he asks, adding, "Bill and Ted did."

And yet, truth be told, I would trade the whole of "Ready Player One" for the scene in "E.T." in which Elliott shows his "Star Wars" action figures to his friend from outer space: "This is Greedo, and then this is Hammerhead, see, this is Walrus Man, this is Snaggletooth,

and this is Lando Calrissian, see, and this is Boba Fett." In essence, he is doing what Wade does, parsing the minutiae of fictional places and plots, except that Wade does so in a dangerously thin dramatic atmosphere, whereas Elliott has an enraptured audience of one; what we focus on is the expression on E.T.'s face, as he ponders the habits of the human. This intimate calm is alien to the new film, which Spielberg whips along at so rampant a pace, and whose every crevice he stuffs with such fevered detail, that it's as though his mission, at the age of seventy-one, were not merely to recapture but to redouble the zest of youth. I saw the film in IMAX, and a week later I'm still waiting for the safe return of my optic nerves, but it was the meagre emotional charge that shocked me most. Toward the end, as in many Spielberg movies, there are tears, but, for once, they feel unearned. From what, apart from sheer sensory exhaustion, do they spring? In a closing homily, we are told that "reality is the only thing that's real." I wouldn't even go as far as that.

A meeting between Wade Watts and Charley Thompson (Charlie Plummer), the hero of "Lean on Pete," would be fraught with interest. Both are in their teens. Both are motherless, and bowed down by burdensome lives. And both seek a way out, though nothing could be less virtual, or more beggared of thrills, than the path that Charley chooses. Often, it doesn't seem like a choice at all.

At the start, he shares a house in Portland, Oregon, with his father, Ray (Travis Fimmel), a cocky loser who swiftly fades from the picture, leaving his son

alone. Charley, who already has a casual job with Del (Steve Buscemi), a local horse trainer, now becomes his full-time dogsbody, or nagsbody—cleaning the stables, driving the truck, or walking Lean on Pete. Pete, as he is commonly known, is a five-year-old horse of gentle disposition, bred to run short courses at a sprint. When Charley watches him race, on a scruffy dirt track, with a few spectators idling behind ropes, it's the first time that we see the kid crack a smile. For Del, however, Pete has reached the end of his usefulness and should, as it were, be sold for scrap: a prospect so horrifying to Charley that one night, with the horse in tow, he flees.

Not everything in "Lean on Pete," which was made by the British director Andrew Haigh, rings true. Buscemi is the least grass-fed of actors, meant for the rat-run of city streets, and, if I didn't quite believe in him as a country guy, I believed even less in Chloë Sevigny as a cynical jockey with a set of broken bones. But Plummer, who recently played the kidnapped John Paul Getty III, in "All the Money in the World," grounds and tethers the movie, as an unclaimed soul with barely a dollar to his name. When he speaks, he tends to glance down or aside, lacking the confidence to hold somebody's gaze. The story drifts with Charley, in and out of peril, and becomes a doleful picaresque; as his face grows hollow and besmirched, we desperately want him to survive. And where is he headed? Across country, to try to find—you guessed it—his aunt. ♦

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Richard Brody blogs about movies.

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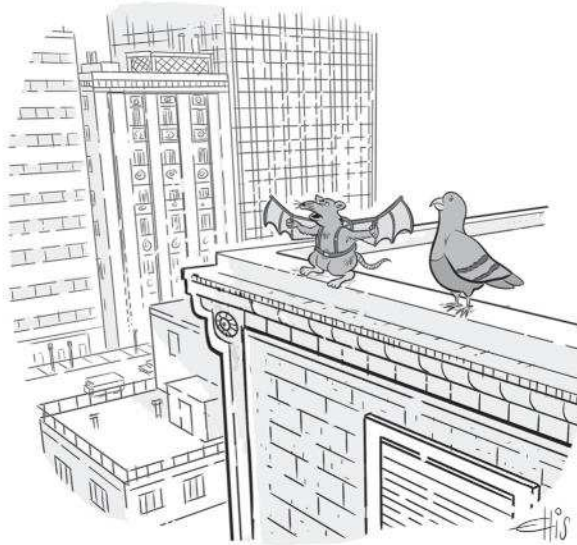
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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

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 Ellis Rosen, must be received by Sunday, April 8th. The finalists in the March 26th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the April 23rd issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

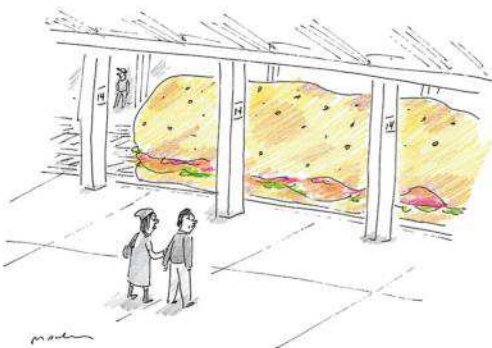
THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



“

”

THE FINALISTS



“We can take this and transfer to the B.L.T. at Forty-second.”
Craig Troyer, Denver, Colo.

“It's more amazing that it arrived on schedule.”
Allen Gallehugh, New York City

“They did say it would take a hero to fix the M.T.A.”
Michael Harmon, Short Hills, N.J.

THE WINNING CAPTION



“I was hoping taxes would go first.”
Natan Leyva, McLean, Va.

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