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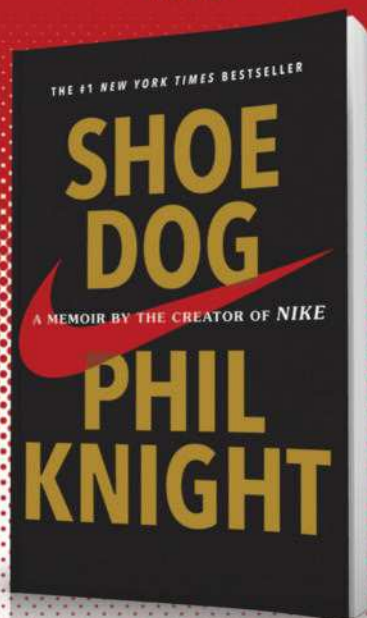
Gayle Kabaker "Jump!"

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Carrie Fountain (*Poem*, p. 43) has published two poetry collections, including, most recently, "Instant Winner." Her debut novel, "I'm Not Missing," will be out in July.

Ben Marcus (*Fiction*, p. 56) most recently published "The Flame Alphabet" and "Leaving the Sea: Stories." His latest book, "Notes from the Fog," is forthcoming in August.

Tyler Foggatt (*The Talk of the Town*, p. 18) is member of the magazine's editorial staff.

Thomas Mallon (*Books*, p. 64) is the author of, most recently, "Finale: A Novel of the Reagan Years."

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM



PODCAST

Eric Schlosser joins Dorothy Wickenden to discuss the perils of the new nuclear proliferation.



VIDEO

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THE MAIL

THE A.I. YOU KNOW

Tad Friend's giddy roundup of the farthest-out possibilities in artificial intelligence is a testament to the heated enthusiasms and fears of our time ("Superior Intelligence," May 14th). It's telling that most of Friend's examples of threatening, triumphant, or all-seeing A.I. come from aesthetic sources—movies, books, TV—where anything is possible. In actuality, self-conscious and self-directed A.I. is very far away, and may well not be possible at all. For A.I. to "extend meaning in the universe that gave life to us," A.I. itself must understand and experience meaning, and there is no real evidence of how it might develop this capability.

On the other hand, we have already constructed an omniscient, omnipotent, deathless A.I. that holds all of our fates in its power: God. It took millennia for us to build and shape it into something that extends meaning in our universe. It has caused wars and dictated peace, has won fierce allegiance, and can't be (or hasn't yet been) turned off. It is instantiated in works that for centuries have absorbed the thought, labor, and substance of humankind. We who are not members of the new clerisy are now waiting to see if the A.I. we fear displaces the A.I. we have.

*John Crowley
Conway, Mass.*

UNDERSTANDING HURSTON

Casey Cep does not fully explain the troubled history behind "Barracoon," Zora Neale Hurston's book about America's last slave, Kossola, which was published nearly nine decades after she wrote it (Books, May 14th). Part of the story is Hurston's complex relationship with her wealthy white patron, Charlotte Osgood Mason, who believed that native Africans held the key to restoring modern culture. Mason urged Hurston to work on Kossola's story in secrecy and to the exclusion

of other obligations, which may have contributed to the end of Hurston's friendship with Langston Hughes. Hurston's relationship with Mason also deteriorated. Mason stopped supporting her financially, but continued to send money to Kossola. Cep finds Hurston "barely visible" in "Barracoon," but the book was crucial to her life-long effort to celebrate black history, including attempts to recover the slave ship Clotilda, on which Kossola had been transported from Africa, and to erect a national cemetery for "the illustrious Negro dead," as Hurston wrote to W. E. B. Du Bois. Her desire to protect black history from "inconspicuous forgetfulness" (especially poignant given that she was buried in an unmarked grave) was part of the fierce black pride that guided her life and led to many misreadings of her complicated politics.

*Carla Kaplan
Davis Distinguished Professor of
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FREE TRADE AND THE POOR

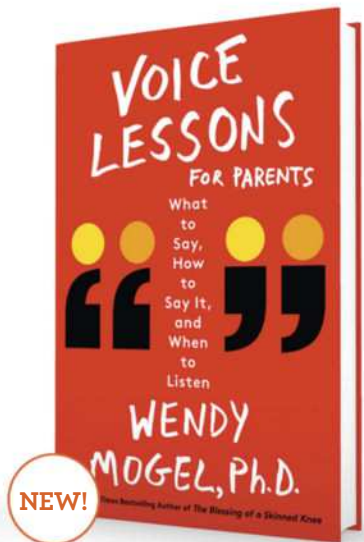
In Caleb Crain's essay about whether capitalism poses a threat to democracy, he discusses Robert Kuttner's views on the impact of free trade but leaves out a key consideration (Books, May 14th). Beyond the impact that free trade has on Americans, its benefits for the developing world should not be ignored. Hundreds of millions of people have been helped out of poverty by an American-led system of trade liberalization. Perhaps this will not convince American voters, but it should count for something.

*Simon Lester
Falls Church, Va.*

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

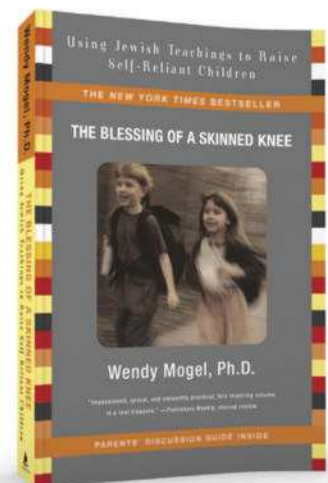
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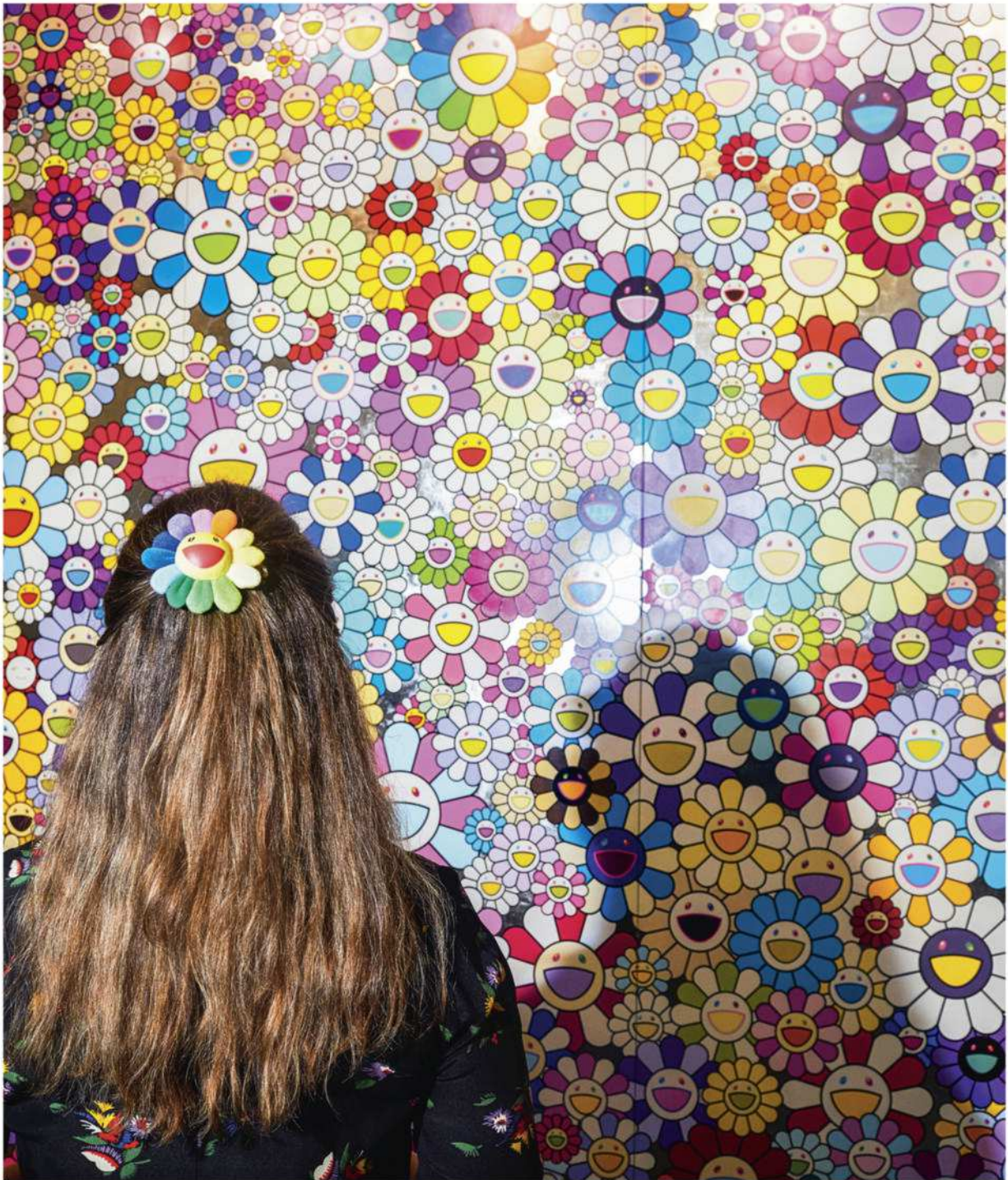
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MAY 23 – 29, 2018

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



The instantly recognizable art of **Takashi Murakami**, Japan's answer to Andy Warhol, has graced handbags, phone cases, skateboards, and album covers—in Moscow, it was recently even charbroiled onto a hamburger. Now his imagery is back in its natural habitat, hanging on walls at the Perrotin gallery. There are plenty of his signature *otaku* flowers, but also forays into art history, including homages to the British master of angst Francis Bacon and the Edo-period Japanese painter Soga Shohaku. Through June 17.

PHOTOGRAPH BY LANDON NORDEMAN

NIGHT LIFE

ROCK AND POP

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

Laurent Garnier and François K

This sharp bill features two Paris-bred dance-music mixers who paved the way for contemporary outfits like Daft Punk. Garnier, whose first residency was at the Manchester, England, club Hacienda in the late eighties, helped spearhead the early-nineties Parisian raves that set the tone for the city's house-music eruption. His long, rangy d.j. sets, which flit effortlessly between lavish vocals and brusque minimalism, are some of dance music's most storied; a 2013 set for Boiler Room, recorded at Amsterdam's famed Dekmantel Festival, has received nearly four million YouTube views. François K (for Kevorkian), who co-founded the afternoon party Body & Soul (still a going concern), had an even longer head start, though an ocean away. After moving to New York, in 1975, he was soon spinning disco and remixing dance records, spending much of the eighties working on tracks for the likes of Mick Jagger and Diana Ross. He's been back at the decks exclusively since 1990, concentrating on the looser grooves of pre-rave dance music. With the passing of David Mancuso, the founder of the influential disco club the Loft, François K may be our most vital link between the E.D.M. present and the disco past. (*Output*, 74 Wythe Ave., Brooklyn. outputclub.com. May 26.)

Rostam

An eclectic multi-instrumentalist and singer whose production credits include Charli XCX, Frank Ocean, and Carly Rae Jepsen, Rostam Batmanglij makes solo work that immediately identifies him as a former member of Vampire Weekend, the party band he co-founded with fellow Columbia University undergrads in 2006. It's not just the erudition on "Half-Light," his 2017 debut, that tells the tale. (The single "Bike Dream" has him reading this magazine while eying a love interest's painting of Antarctica.) In the Iranian-American's solo iteration, there are still plenty of diverse "riddims," but he goes for a type of grandeur akin to Bach or Brian Wilson, in contrast to his former mates' jumpy, multicultural immediacy. His songs are about personal vulnerabilities, boy-chasing, and being chased, with a vibrant dimension that some might interpret as a by-product of his relocation from N.Y.C. to L.A. (*Brooklyn Steel*, 319 Frost St., Brooklyn. 888-929-7849. May 24.)

TDE Championship Tour with Kendrick Lamar

Lamar was a fifteen-year-old kid from Compton with a hot local mixtape when he met Anthony Tif-fith, a producer and hip-hop impresario in neighboring Carson, California, whose nickname graced a label, Top Dawg Entertainment. Fourteen years later, the two men have a number of reasons to bill the TDE tour as a victory lap. Not only is Lamar one of the most recognized rappers on the planet (with a fresh Pulitzer Prize under his belt), but his current road show gathers much of the talent that he molded into a cohesive entity for the soundtrack of "Black Panther," the highest-grossing movie of the year to date. That means that before Lamar

makes it to the stage with his fistful of hits—which will no doubt extend back to his landmark albums "good kid, m.A.A.d city" and "To Pimp a Butterfly"—there'll be sets by the rough-and-ready m.c. **Schoolboy Q** and the rising-star soulstress **SZA**, plus cameos by several other TDE labelmates, including **Ab-Soul**, **Jay Rock**, **SiR**, and **Lance Skiiwalker**. (*Madison Square Garden*, Seventh Ave. at 33rd St. 800-745-3000. May 29.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Sullivan Fortner

When you're an on-the-rise musician like the promising post-bop pianist Fortner, it never hurts to surround yourself with friends with clout. Adding muscle to his trio, the New Orleans-bred musician welcomes, on successive nights, the trumpeters **Roy Hargrove**, **Ambrose Akinmusire**, and **Peter Evans** and the saxophonist **Melissa Aldana**. It's an advance party for "Moments Preserved," Fortner's new album, which will be released on June 1. (*Jazz Standard*, 116 E. 27th St. 212-576-2232. May 24-27.)

Guillermo Klein y los Guachos

Ahead of the curve in the nineteen-nineties, when he initially convened his own large ensembles, this ambitious composer, arranger, pianist, and vocalist continues to thwart big-band conventions. Klein's music delights in shifting time signatures, rich tonalities, and arresting multicultural influences, attracting some of the most farsighted improvisers around, including **Miguel Zenon**, **Ben Monder**, and **Taylor Haskins**. (*Village Vanguard*, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. 212-255-4037. May 22-27.)

Christian McBride, Brian Marsella, and Anwar Marshall Play the Music of Hasaan

Already billed as "legendary" on the sole album he recorded, in 1964, the pianist Hasaan Ibn Ali

was an uncompromising musician from Philadelphia who was esteemed enough to commandeer a thorny trio session featuring the brilliant drummer Max Roach. Another Philly scion, the super bassist McBride, joins the pianist Marsella and the drummer Marshall to call attention to this ever-mysterious improviser and composer. (*The Stone at the New School*, 55 W. 13th St. thestonemusic.com. May 24.)

Leslie Pintchik Trio

A crafty, lyrically minded pianist, a compelling composer, and an inventive interpreter of standards, Pintchik also knows what constitutes a killer album title. "You Eat My Food, You Drink My Wine, You Steal My Girl" features her seasoned trio, which includes the bassist **Scott Hardy** and the drummer **Michael Sarin**, who also appear at this CD-release event. (*Jazz at Kitano*, 66 Park Ave., at 38th St. 212-885-7119. May 23.)

Rene Marie

Feisty and outspoken, Marie is no wallflower of a performer—electrifying a room is all in a night's work for her. Although her 2013 tribute to an earlier musical and social sparkplug, "I Wanna Be Evil: With Love to Eartha Kitt," garnered considerable attention, "Sound of Red," Marie's most recent recording, is a decidedly personal project offering original songs that confirm her aversion to stylistic pigeonholing. (*Birdland*, 315 W. 44th St. 212-581-3080. May 24-26.)

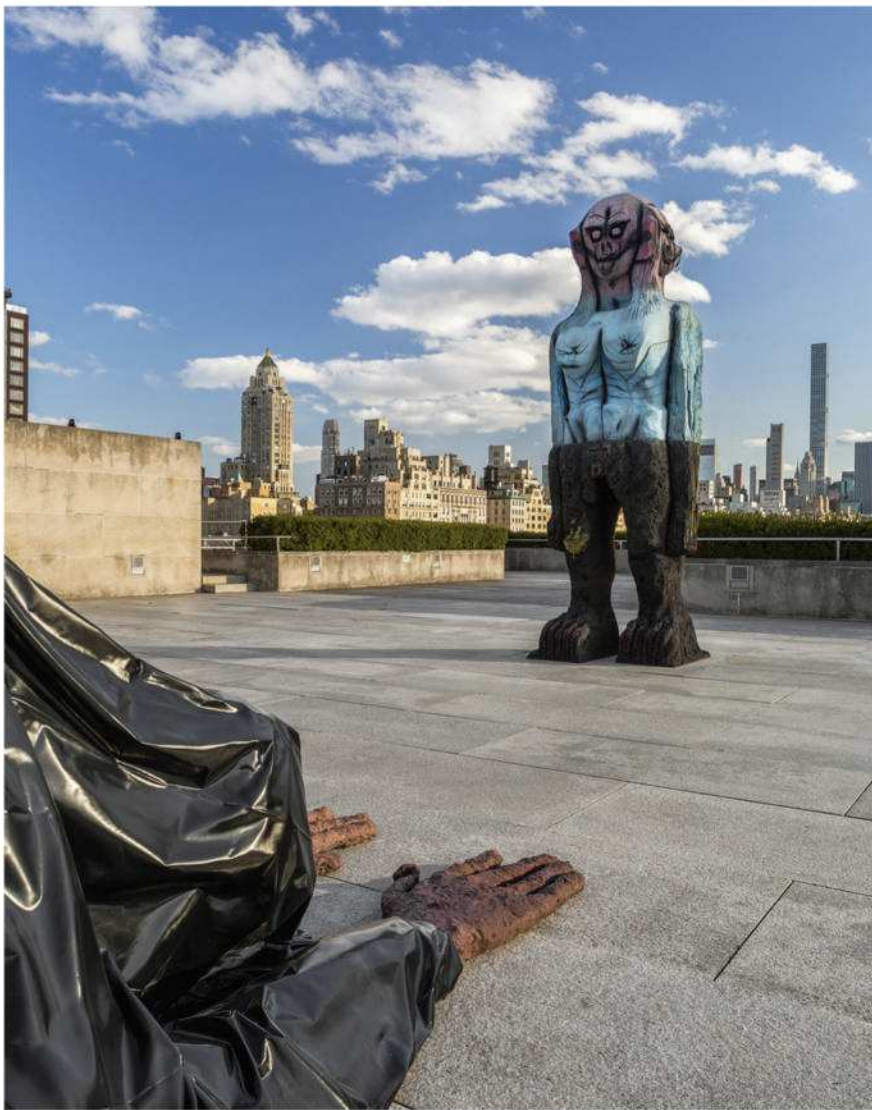
Vision Festival

Moving across the river to Brooklyn once again, the Vision Festival remains steadfast in its commitment to exploratory jazz and the still active pioneers of the genre; the wide-ranging roster includes **Oliver Lake**, **Matthew Shipp**, **Roscoe Mitchell**, **Mary Halvorson**, **Fay Victor**, and the festival co-organizer **William Parker**. This year, the intrepid showcase celebrates the pianist and composer **Dave Burrell**, featured on opening night in various ensembles, including a reunion with another crucial free-jazz cohort, the saxophonist **Archie Shepp**. (*Roulette*, 509 Atlantic Ave., Brooklyn. 917-267-0363. May 23-28.)



The tenor saxophonist Archie Shepp reunites with the pianist and composer Dave Burrell on opening night of the Vision Festival, which takes place at Roulette, May 23-28.

ART



"We Come in Peace" upends convention, though its roots reach from ancient India to Rodin.

Alien Resurrection

Huma Bhabha's cinematic bronze sculptures land on the roof of the Met.

In a classic episode of "The Twilight Zone," a woman has surgery to correct her appearance. The twist is that she's a Hitchcock blonde in a world where the norm is a face so contorted that it looks Cubist. In Huma Bhabha's spare, striking installation on the roof of the Met—a pair of monumental figures, one prostrate, either in prayer or in fear, and the other a battle-scarred, five-faced warrior-golem—she similarly flips the script on conventions of

beauty, while injecting figurative traditions (Eastern and Western, ancient and modern) with a dose of pulp science fiction.

The title of Bhabha's exhibition is "We Come in Peace," a line adapted from the cult-classic movie "The Day the Earth Stood Still," which concerns an extraterrestrial landing in Washington, D.C. Bhabha also arrived in the United States as an alien, an art student from Karachi who earned an M.F.A. at Columbia, in 1989. "I'm from a broken place, living in a breaking world," she once told an interviewer, commenting on her childhood in post-colonial Pa-

kistan and the war-torn world post-9/11. (The artist relocated from Manhattan to Poughkeepsie in 2002.) Her aesthetic reflects this sense of fragmentation, valuing the cobbled-together over the monolithic.

The characters on the rooftop are bronze, cast from molds of sculptures the artist made in her studio using low-grade materials. Bhabha carved the twelve-foot-tall alien-monster-god from Styrofoam and cork; the cast is finished with a pan-gender patina of pink, blue, and scorched earth, and a demonic face where it ought to have genitals. Graffiti-like marks of red, green, and yellow flicker at its heels, the colors of a Rastafarian flag: one love; maybe they do come in peace after all. The eighteen-foot-long supplicant was fashioned from unfired clay, with two outstretched hands extending from a shroud of black plastic, at once a burqa, a body bag, and a collected bundle of trash. In lieu of feet, the piece has a tail, an assemblage of lumpen clay, perhaps an allusion to the demonization of the destitute and the displaced.

Bhabha's show is a triumphant coda to "Like Life," the museum's deep dive into polychrome sculpture at the Met Breuer. For all their political and pop-cultural resonance, her works most strongly sound a call-and-response with their predecessors. Some ancestors in attendance: the tenth-century Indian statue of "Chamunda, the Horrific Destroyer of Evil," its head ringed by skulls, and the bronze hands that Auguste Rodin cast for his *mise en scène* of a monument "The Burghers of Calais" (see both inside the museum). Another is Picasso's "She-Goat," from 1950, with its body made of salvaged debris, in the garden at MOMA. With its backdrop of crane-topped skyscrapers, Bhabha's postapocalyptic tableau joins the ranks of Robert Smithson's "ruins in reverse." Or think of the artist as the un-Jeff Koons, replacing the mirrored escapism of his "easyfun" with a roughness that also reflects.

—Andrea K. Scott

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ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Whitney Museum

"Grant Wood: American Gothic and Other Fables"

This retrospective of the Iowan painter fascinates as a plunge into certain deliriums of the United States in the nineteen-thirties, notably a culture war between cosmopolitan and nativist sensibilities. But any notion that Wood—who died in 1942, of pancreatic cancer, on the day before his fifty-first birthday—is an underrated artist fizzles. "American Gothic" is, by a very wide margin, his most effective picture (although "Dinner for Threshers," from 1934, a long, low, cutaway view of a farmhouse at harvesttime, might be his best). Wood was a strange man who made occasionally impressive, predominantly weird, sometimes god-awful art in thrall to a programmatic sense of mission: to exalt rural America in a manner adapted from Flemish Old Masters. "American Gothic"—starchy couple, triune pitchfork, churchy house, bubbly trees—succeeded, deserving the inevitable term "iconic" for its punch and tickling ambiguity. The work made Wood, at the onset of his maturity as an artist, a national celebrity, and the attendant pressures pretty well wrecked him. Why Wood now? A political factor might seem to be in play. Although the show was planned before the election of Donald Trump, it feels right on time, given the worries of urban liberals about the insurgent conservative truculence in what is often dismissed—with a disdain duly noted by citizens of the respective states—as flyover country. *Through June 10.*

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Math Bass

The Los Angeles painter's rebuslike canvases use familiar forms—a pylon, a zigzag, a thought bubble, an alligator's gaping jaws—to construct crisp abstractions. Precisely executed in velvety gouache, the paintings have a flat, graphical quality that recalls signage (and also the American modernist Stuart Davis), but slight shifts in scale and arrangement alter the pictorial space just enough to imply a story. The narrative mood is heightened by sound: speakers are positioned throughout the show, emitting a lyrical litany of the names Bass has assigned to her characters. *Through July 27. (Boone, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-752-2929.)*

Paul Bonet

The most surprising show in town gathers whisperingly subtle abstract design-drawings by a little-known French bookbinder, who died in 1971 and specialized in small editions of books by authors from Balzac and Baudelaire to Valéry and Malraux. Bonet subordinated text to complex geometric or biomorphic linear networks that feel less limned than breathed onto paper. His style can suggest unravelled Art Nouveau verging on understated Art Deco. But, really, it's sui generis, expressing a sensitive, searching, and first-rate visual intelligence, quietly audacious and hauntingly fine. *Through June 16. (Galerie Buchholz, 17 E. 82nd St. 646-964-4276.)*

Dan Colen

The latest expedients of an artist who is always keen to impress include one realistic sculpture,

of a lissome blonde playing with a stuffed rabbit. But the main event is three series of big paintings: silk-screened images of deluxe garments or fabrics, seen piled or draped; branches of dead trees painted in purple against disconsolately blue skies, collectively titled "Mother," for some creepy reason; and oils of dense purple clouds with light rays behind them, which share the title "Purgatory," while suggesting grape pudding. Colen's ambition—vaguely naughty, aggressively grand—churns on. *Through June 23. (Lévy Gorvy, 909 Madison Ave., at 73rd St. 212-772-2004.)*

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Doug Aitken

Forty-five years ago, the American engineer Martin Cooper stood on a sidewalk in midtown Manhattan and made the first public call on a cell phone. Today, according to a U.N. study, more people own mobile phones than they do toilets. For his mesmerizing video installation "New Era," Aitken filmed Cooper, who is now eighty-nine, reminiscing about his invention in a piece that finds the sweet spot between rumination and spectacle. Aitken has constructed a mirrored, hexagonal room housing three projections from the same eleven-minute loop. The moving images aren't in synch, and the effect is disorienting, with viewers shifting position to take it all in. The result is a crowd of people glued to the screens, at once hypnotized and acting out the A.D.H.D. of the digital age. *Through May 25. (303 Gallery, 555 W. 21st St. 212-255-1121.)*

Tony Cokes

The syncopated riffs of the post-punk band Gang of Four greet visitors as they step off the elevator and into this show by the veteran video artist, a media-studies professor at Brown. L.E.D. panels flash text in a palette of red, white, and blue, but don't let the patriotic color scheme fool you—Cokes is an inveterate antiestablishmentarian. "Evil 35: Carlin/Owners" transcribes a tirade by the comedian George Carlin; another work pairs quotes by Trump—about sex and power—with a song by the Pet Shop Boys. The artist's signature collisions of televisual aesthetics, pop music, and language are striking for their lessons in the restrained use of imagery to comment on cultural invisibility. *Through June 9. (Greene Nafatali, 508 W. 26th St. 212-463-7770.)*

Charles Gaines

In a cumulative, grid-based process, as painstaking as needlepoint, Gaines layers colorful, pixelated silhouettes of a dozen famous thinkers about identity—Aristotle, Karl Marx, bell hooks—to form a kaleidoscopic, composite portrait. "Faces 1: Identity Politics," as the new series is titled, echoes Gaines's works from as long ago as the nineteen-seventies, when the influential Conceptualist began to use arbitrary rules to make abstract photographs, casting doubt on the logic of representation. In an adjacent room, Gaines treats his subjects more coyly, translating an essay by James Baldwin and a speech by Martin Luther King, Jr., into musical scores, seen as graphite renderings of sheet music and heard in a recording of a spare piano performance, which may frustrate visitors hoping to glean a trace of the works' radical origins. *Through June 9. (Cooper, 521 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105.)*

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Sarah Peters

A dozen charming talismanic bronzes—of satyrs, shadow puppets, and female figurines—by the New York sculptor line the entrance to her show and offer a taste of her cross-cultural remixing. But her tantalizingly synthetic vision really hits home in the six large, brass-colored bronzes in the main room, which compress millennia of sculptural modes, from ancient Egyptian to Greco-Roman to Constantin Brancusi. Stylized heads sport cascades of wavy hair and full beards, which double as their own pedestals. Note the finely modelled curls of "Char-ioteer," a female bust with empty eye sockets; they assume the role of coiffure on the top of her head, but suggest wheels at the sculpture's base. *Through June 2. (Van Doren Waxter, 195 Chrystie St. 212-982-1930.)*

Borna Sammak

Few artists are tracking the Internet's erosion of our sense of reality with more verve than this young Brooklyn artist, who works, according to his C.V., "between the Food Bazaar on Manhattan Avenue and the Western Beef on Metropolitan." Whether it's a contorted sofa, inspired by a digital rendering of a more conventional design, or an eight-foot-tall pair of flip-flops, made of vinyl and canvas, Sammak's objects suggest that the permeable membrane between real and virtual is less cause for concern than fodder for funny. Two paintings, made by applying hundreds of T-shirt decals to canvas—especially the dense blue composition of overlapping marlins, trout, and corny mottoes—prove that image overload can be beautiful, too. *Through June 17. (JTT, 191 Chrystie St. 212-574-8152.)*

Josh Smith

Were Smith an Olympic diver, his event would be the belly-flop: degree of difficulty negligible, but style points off the chart for amplitude of splash. Here, twenty-six paintings of a sliced watermelon, all three feet high by four feet wide, deploy a miscellany of coloristic and tactile means to perfectly dippy ends—huge blue seeds on red, for instance, or tiny ones in brown on pink, applied thickly or thinly, with decorative borders. Can Smith be serious? He can! You need only value flat-out, downright, inexcusable painterly pleasure. *Through June 17. (Presenhuber, 39 Great Jones St. 212-931-0711.)*

"The Earth Is Flat"

This judicious mix of archival material and works by seven artists investigates the seductive appeal of falsehoods. The Argentinean artist Horacio Zabala's heartbreaking 1972 drawing "Apariciones/desapariciones" uses maps of the earth with selected continents removed to stand in for people "disappeared" by the Perón regime. A bright-yellow polyester cast of a Lourdes Madonna statue by Katharina Fritsch and four shiny golden monochrome paintings by Henry Codax question the nature of value and authenticity, while a framed series of Russian-produced Facebook ads from the depths of the 2016 election, including a supposed photograph of Hillary Clinton shaking hands with Osama bin Laden, are a sobering reminder that fake news has very real consequences. *Through May 27. (Carriage Trade, 277 Grand St. 646-863-3874.)*

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

Center for Contemporary Opera: "Backwards from Winter"

In Douglas Knehan's monodrama for soprano and electric cello, a woman tells the story of the devastating loss of her lover in reverse, from the grief of winter to the first blush of passion in spring. This is not the first time the composer has turned to the natural world as a metaphor for lived experience; the sounds of nature course through the orchestral pieces on his latest album, "Unfinished Earth," with a primitive force and a melodic insistence that recall Stravinsky. Jennifer Williams directs the world premiere of this ninety-minute work. *May 25 at 7:30. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400.)*

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic

Semyon Bychkov leads the Philharmonic in two grand works—Berio's uproarious "Sinfonia," featuring the vocal ensemble Roomful of Teeth, and Strauss's towering "Alpine Symphony"—at its Lincoln Center home. Then, for its popular free Memorial Day concert, the orchestra heads to Morningside Heights, where David Robertson conducts Vaughan Williams's "Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis" and Saint-Saëns's Symphony No. 3, with Kent Tritle at the organ (tickets will be distributed starting at 6). *May 24 at 7:30, May 25 at 2, and May 26 at 8; May 28 at 8. (David Geffen Hall; Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. 212-875-5656.)*

The Sebastians

For many, Bach's Brandenburg Concertos represent the peak of the Baroque maestro's instrumental output, but his orchestral suites, with which the composer put his mark on a popular French form, should not be overlooked. The Sebastians, a period-instrument group that plays with verve and vigor, presents the first two, alongside Brandenburgs No. 1 and No. 5. The group's director, Daniel Lee, gives a pre-concert demonstration of the violino piccolo (a child-sized string instrument that allowed Bach to write for the highest registers) at 6:45. *May 24 at 7:30. (Good Shepherd-Faith Presbyterian Church, 152 W. 66th St. sebastians.org.)*

Ekmeles

This notable vocal ensemble is much praised for its exacting control, a capacity that is essential for music involving microtonality (the use of intervals smaller than those customary in Western traditions). Here, the singers perform Stockhausen's "Stimmung"—an overtone-rich 1968 meditation for amplified sextet—and Christopher YOUNG's "End Words," a 2017 work in which six live voices blend with a six-channel electronic part derived from hours of Ekmeles samples. *May 26 at 8. (St. Peter's Church, 346 W. 20th St. ekmeles.com.)*

New York Youth Symphony

Though Samuel Barber was a Yankee, his setting of James Agee's lyrical "Knoxville: Summer of 1915," heard twice this week, is an exquisite evocation of Southern childhood. This

performance features the splendid and much discussed young soprano Julia Bullock. The orchestra, whose members' ambition and proficiency belie their youth, also plays Gershwin's "Cuban Overture," Ravel's orchestration of Mussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition," and "Slant," a world premiere by Peter Shin. *May 27 at 2. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800.)*

RECITALS

Israeli Chamber Project

This refined collective of distinguished young Israeli performers offers an evening of mellifluous works by Schubert and Barber. In addition to chamber music involving piano, strings, clarinet, and voice, the program includes Aribert Reimann's transfiguration of Schubert's "Mignon-Lieder" and an arrangement, by Yuval Shapiro, of Barber's "Knoxville: Summer of 1915," both featuring the luminous soprano Sarah Shafer. *May 24 at 7:30. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. merkinhall.org.)*

"Theme and Variations"

The Jewish Museum honors John Corigliano, a musical magpie whose work often refracts material collected from others, with a recital celebrating his eightieth birthday. The pianist Daniel Gortler presents a selection of pieces that explore the idea of thematic transformation, including Beethoven's solemn Sonata No. 30 in E Major and Corigliano's "Fantasia on an Ostinato" (which draws on the German composer's Symphony No. 7). Music by Mendelssohn (his "Variations Sérieuses") and Schumann (the "Symphonic Études") rounds out the program. *May 24 at 7:30. (Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. 212-423-3337.)*

Thomas Bartlett and Nico Muhly

In 1941, Colin McPhee, the Canadian composer and musicologist, recorded his ground-

breaking duo-piano transcriptions of Balinese gamelan music with the English composer Benjamin Britten. Here, Bartlett, an expressive singer-songwriter, and Muhly, a versatile composer, similarly take to paired keyboards to perform "Peter Pears: Balinese Ceremonial Music"—a set of original songs, based on McPhee's transcriptions and named after the famed English tenor who was Britten's muse and partner—with members of Ensemble LPR. *May 24 at 8:30. (Le Poisson Rouge, 158 Bleecker St. lpr.com.)*

Bargemusic: Donald Berman

The eminent pianist, a compelling advocate for contemporary works, presents a recital rich in fresh sounds, offering the world premiere of Elena Ruehr's "Summer on the Lakes, in 1843" and the first local accounts of pieces by Eric Moe and John Aylward. Completing the program are Bach's Fantasy and Fugue in A Minor, selections from Ives's "Concord" Sonata, and his "Varied Air and Variations." *May 25 at 8. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. bargemusic.org.)*

New York Philharmonic Ensembles

Philharmonic members emerge from the rank and file to present a rangy collection of chamber works. Included are a trio sonata by Vivaldi; Penderecki's Duo Concertante, for violin and double bass; Reinecke's Trio for Piano, Oboe, and Horn; and Brahms's passionate yet restrained Piano Trio No. 1 in B Major. *May 27 at 3. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. merkinhall.org.)*

International Contemporary Ensemble

This outstanding new-music group has often championed the music of Anna Thorvaldsdóttir, an Icelandic composer who is known for her spare, arresting works. Here, the pianist Cory Smythe plays three of them, including the eerie "Scape," for prepared piano. He sits amid the audience, who in turn will be encircled by ten of his colleagues. Together, they play "Aequilibrium," a piece for piano, wind, and strings which reflects the grandeur of its composer's island home. *May 27 at 4. (National Sawdust, 80 N. 6th St., Brooklyn. nationalsawdust.org.)*



At ninety, the Scottish composer Thea Musgrave remains prolific. On May 27, at the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, the New York Virtuoso Singers present a selection of her vocal and dramatic works.

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

THE THEATRE



In "Finding My Voice," at Café Carlyle, Kathleen Turner tells stories and sings standards.

Voice Lessons

Kathleen Turner comes to the Carlyle.

You pick up the phone knowing it's Kathleen Turner, yet the voice still comes as a shock: gravelly and dry and as deep as a sinkhole, it could be mistaken for Harvey Fierstein's. She's calling from London—fifteen minutes early, so she can "scurry off and do some shopping"—where she's performing a stage memoir called, cheekily enough, "Finding My Voice." A slimmed-down version comes to the Café Carlyle May 22–June 2, featuring anecdotes from her stage and screen career punctuated by standards.

"I've never really sung professionally and never really considered it, because I don't like musicals per se," she says, "and because there are very few if any musical leads that are bass-baritone." But here's how it happened: five years ago, Arena Stage, in Washington, D.C., asked her to star in "Mother Courage and Her Children," in which her character had six songs. "And I loved doing it. I loved doing the damned numbers!" So she and the two guys who helped her with the damned numbers—Andy Gale and Mark Janas—developed a solo act, which she premiered last September, at Philadelphia Theatre Company.

The cabaret impresario Michael Feinstein asked her to bring it to San Francisco, and then some London producers called. Turner says, "They asked the question 'Could you be more political?' I said, 'Ohhh, yes.'"

Since her film debut, in the 1981 erotic thriller "Body Heat," Turner has played vamps, serial moms, God, and Jessica Rabbit. But she has never played herself until now. "It is odd not having a character to channel yourself through," she says. (Theatregoers will remember her indelible Martha in "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?," on Broadway in 2005, in which Turner and the character seemed to channel each other.) Gale and Janas helped her comb through the Great American Songbook, looking for numbers that would illuminate her recollections. When she recalls falling in love with the theatre as a girl, she sings "It's Only a Paper Moon" ("It's only a canvas sky/Hanging over a muslin tree"); recounting life on the road, she sings a ditty called "Sweet Kentucky Ham" ("You figure what the hell/you can eat in your motel"). "Let's Fall in Love" is right at the top of the show," she says. "It's, like, Oh, come on, let's just do this. I'm going to charm the hell out of you, and you're going to like it."

—Michael Schulman

The Beast in the Jungle

John Kander and David Thompson wrote this dance-theatre piece, directed and choreographed by Susan Stroman and inspired by Henry James's 1903 novella, about a man convinced he has a terrible destiny. (*Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303. Opens May 23.*)

The Boys in the Band

Joe Mantello directs a fiftieth-anniversary revival of the seminal gay drama by Mart Crowley, starring Jim Parsons, Zachary Quinto, Matt Bomer, and Andrew Rannells. (*Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. In previews.*)

Conflict

The Mint presents Miles Malleon's play from 1925, about a young woman in London who sleeps with a Conservative Party candidate for Parliament. (*Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. Previews begin May 25.*)

Dan Cody's Yacht

In Anthony Giardina's play, directed by Doug Hughes for Manhattan Theatre Club, a Boston schoolteacher gets an unexpected financial proposal from a student's father. (*City Center Stage I, at 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. In previews.*)

Fairview

Sarah Benson directs a new play by Jackie Sibbles Drury ("We Are Proud to Present . . ."), a deconstruction of a naturalistic family drama. (*SoHo Rep, 46 Walker St. 866-811-4111. Previews begin May 29.*)

The Great Leap

In Lauren Yee's play, based on an incident from her father's life, a young man in San Francisco's Chinatown talks his way onto a college basketball team bound for Beijing in 1989. (*Atlantic Stage 2, at 330 W. 16th St. 866-811-4111. In previews.*)

Peace for Mary Frances

The New Group presents Lily Thorne's play, directed by Lila Neugebauer and featuring Lois Smith as a nonagenarian born to Armenian refugees who is ready to die at home. (*Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Opens May 23.*)

NOW PLAYING

Bump

The most interesting character in Chiara Atik's play about the joys and jitters of impending motherhood turns out to be a man. After his pregnant daughter, Claudia (Ana Nogueira), tells him about the horrors of difficult births—she spends too much time on the Internet—Luis (Gilbert Cruz) starts tinkering in his garage. And, presto, the endearing car mechanic comes up with an obstetrics gizmo that could change the lives of women. (The invention is inspired by the real-life Odón device.) The entire show could have focussed on Claudia and Luis's affectionate relationship, yet Atik also takes us to an online forum for pregnant women and a Colonial house where a midwife helps a first-timer. Directed by Claudia Weill (of the 1978 cult feminist movie "Girlfriends"), "Bump" is a feel-good show whose main ambition appears to be drawing "awww"s from the audience. (*Ensemble Studio Theatre, 545 W. 52nd St. ensemblestudiotheatre.org.*)

THE THEATRE

Dance Nation

Clare Barron is a young scenarist and actress, not yet thirty-three, but on the strength of this intermissionless, hour-and-forty-five-minute piece she's on her way to becoming a significant playwright. And that's because theatre is in her bones. The story concerns a small group of amateur pre-teen female dancers (and one dude) who want to win Tampa Bay's Boogie Down Grand Prix, but at great expense to themselves, and to the group. Friendships are challenged, bodies are damaged, and male approval is striven for as the performers, led by their unsmiling dance teacher, Pat (the wonderfully cast Thomas Jay Ryan), deal with stereotypical female behavior, often without questioning it at all. The director, Lee Sunday Evans, has assembled a fabulous cast of various ages to play the dancers, whose dreams are less life-affirming than life-distorting. (*Playwrights Horizons*, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

The Gentleman Caller

According to Philip Dawkins, Tennessee Williams was an aggressive, confident flirt back in 1944, even before his first hit, "The Glass Menagerie." This new two-hander takes place as that play was about to premiere in Chicago, and Dawkins ("Charm") imagines a pair of encounters between Williams (Juan Francisco Villa) and William Inge (Daniel K. Isaac), then an arts critic in St. Louis. The two men circle each other in an increasingly dense fog of booze, but their relationship is overwhelmed by Dawkins's torrent of biographical and literary references and sassy repartee. At times the show, directed by Tony Speciale, overheats so much that it feels like a long-lost play by Charles Ludlam's Ridiculous Theatrical Company. "You're too bitch for my tastes," Inge tells Williams, who replies in mock offense, "Bitch? Moi?!" As Blanche DuBois never said, Oy gevalt. (*Cherry Lane*, 38 Commerce St. 866-811-4111. Through May 26.)

Long Day's Journey Into Night

Those who know Lesley Manville only as Cyril, the ice-cold sister-consigliere in "Phantom Thread," may be stunned to see her as the bundle of nerves known as Mary Tyrone, the fragile matriarch in Eugene O'Neill's family drama. Hooked on morphine since the birth of her younger son, Edmund (Matthew Beard), Mary clings to the past, which she uses—along with dope and self-delusion—to cloud out the present, like the fog rolling in over the Long Island Sound outside. Her husband, James (Jeremy Irons), and older son, Jamie (the potent and sardonic Rory Keenan), prefer booze to dull the pain of living, but that can't stop their recriminations from surfacing as night falls. Sir Richard Eyre's production (imported from the Bristol Old Vic) gives Manville a jewel-toned stage on which to fall apart beautifully, with a precision that even Cyril would envy. (*BAM Harvey Theatre*, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Through May 27.)

Operation Crucible

On a cold night in 1940, the Luftwaffe blitzed Sheffield, targeting English steelworks that manufactured airplane engines and bomb casings. Seventy or so civilians sheltered in the Marples Hotel; when the hotel took a direct hit, only a few men, holed up in the bottling cellar, survived. This event inspires Kieran Knowles's brisk and muscular "Brits Off Broadway" drama, about four steelworkers trapped in a lightless basement as

the bombs start to fall. "It were worse because you couldn't see aught, you had to imagine it," one character says. Not that Knowles leaves much to the imagination. Though the dialect-thick writing is often heavy-handed, it still conveys the horrors of the attack. The play is ultimately about the limits of the camaraderie, but, under Bryony Shanahan's direction, the performers—Knowles, Salvatore D'Aquila, Christopher McCurry, and an especially fine James Wallwork—come together to conjure a world as it shatters. (*59E59*, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

Paradise Blue

The year is 1949. Blue is a talented and tormented trumpeter, and Paradise is the name of the jazz club he owns on a prime plot in Black Bottom, the foremost African-American community in Detroit at a time when the city is still mostly white. The local government wants to buy Blue out for an "urban renewal" project (which in real life would eventually destroy the neighborhood), and everyone who relies on Paradise wants either to buy the club or to talk Blue out of selling it. Part of Dominique Morisseau's trilogy of Detroit-based plays, Ruben Santiago-Hudson's charming and often incisive production zips along with the spirit and verve of the music that imbues it, offering a rich slice of postwar African-American life, not least in Neil Patel's spot-on set and Clint Ramos's delectable period costumes. (*Pershing Square Signature Center*, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

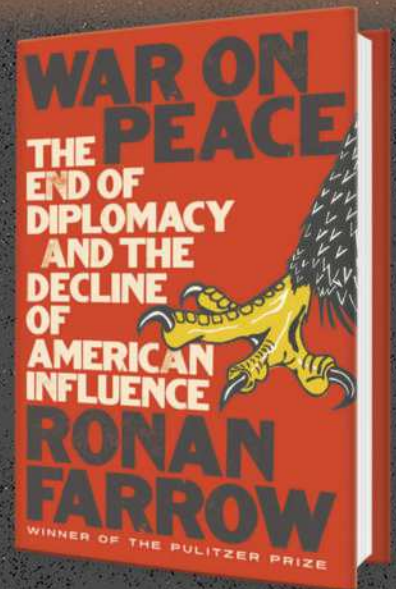
Twelfth Night

"Twelfth Night" was the most produced Shakespeare play in the United States last year. In New York, we return to Illyria with enough regularity that theatregoers can compare multiple versions: the Fiasco company's take, for instance, was just a few months ago, and yet another will be in Central Park this summer. For now, it's the director Maria Aitken's turn, for this Acting Company and Resident Ensemble Players co-production. Sadly, she does not summon the ingenuity and visual wit that she brought to "The 39 Steps." Most lacking is the trouble that should be born of the excitement and fear of falling for the wrong person—the wrong sex, even. Only Susanna Stahlmann's Viola suggests a soupçon of the required playfulness and confusion. Though occasionally enlivened by Joshua David Robinson's lovely rendition of the songs, the show mostly shuffles from one scene to another. Just another op'nin' of another "Twelfth Night." (*Polonsky Shakespeare Center*, 262 Ashland Pl., Brooklyn. 866-811-4111. Through May 27.)

ALSO NOTABLE

Angels in America Neil Simon. • **A Brief History of Women** 59E59. Through May 27. • **Carousel** Imperial. • **Children of a Lesser God** Studio 54. Through May 27. • **Frozen** St. James. • **Harry Potter and the Cursed Child, Parts One and Two** Lyric. • **The Iceman** Cometh Jacobs. • **Light Shining in Buckinghamshire** New York Theatre Workshop. • **Mean Girls** August Wilson. • **Milma's Tale** Public. • **My Fair Lady** Vivian Beaumont. • **Saint Joan** Samuel J. Friedman. • **The Seafarer** Irish Repertory. Through May 24. • **Summer** Lunt-Fontanne. • **Summer and Smoke** Classic Stage Company. Through May 25. • **Three Tall Women** Golden. • **Travesties** American Airlines Theatre.

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MOVIES

NOW PLAYING

Avengers: Infinity War

Behold, the latest monster of a movie to lumber forth from the Marvel stables. This one is directed by Joe and Anthony Russo, and stars pretty much every actor that the studio could round up. Robert Downey, Jr., returns as Iron Man, Tom Holland is Spider-Man, Chadwick Boseman is Black Panther, Elizabeth Olsen is Scarlet Witch, Benedict Cumberbatch is Dr. Strange, Zoe Saldana is Gamora, Chris Hemsworth is Thor, Tom Hiddleston is the nefarious Loki, and so on. Mark Ruffalo is back, too, as Hulk, although he has immense difficulty turning angry and green, and may need to consult the appropriate physician. Ant-Man should be somewhere, but he may have been trodden underfoot. The plot is the usual small-scale, everyday affair: there are six Infinity Stones available to collect, and a mountainous thug named Thanos (Josh Brolin) wants them all, with a view to commanding the cosmos. The effort to stop him takes two and a half hours, though it seems considerably longer, and the climactic battle is set in Wakanda, which appears to be, in every sense, where the money is. The threat of a sequel seems all too real.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 5/7/18.) (In wide release.)

Beast

Michael Pearce's début feature, set on the British island of Jersey, stars Jessie Buckley as a young woman named Moll, whose anger feels difficult to explain and even harder to appease. She was in serious trouble as a schoolgirl, and a childish restiveness still lingers in her adult behavior. It's therefore no surprise when, to the disapproval of her mother (Geraldine James), she takes up with a local poacher, Pascal Renouf (Johnny Flynn), whose own past is, if anything, even darker

than Moll's. To add to the fretful mood, their romance—if you can call it that—unfolds against a background of recent crimes. Three women have been abducted and killed, and Pascal is one of the suspects; Moll stands by him, and you start to wonder, with growing trepidation, what it would take to pull her away. The plot veers into contrivance, and there's a slight surfeit of scenes in which social niceties are cracked or overturned, but the atmosphere on the sunlit island grows creepier by the minute, and Buckley holds the unlikely tale together. She turns Moll into a creature of earth and fire.—*A.L.* (5/14/18) (In limited release.)

Deadpool 2

Ryan Reynolds keeps the comedic snark of the fast-talking title character—a scarred mutant in a skin-tight suit who's both wondrously agile and handy with swords—at high energy throughout this sequel, which outdoes its predecessor in pacing, playfulness, and dramatic focus. Like those of many other Marvel heroes, Deadpool's exploits are rooted in grief—here, the death of his fiancée, Vanessa (Morena Baccarin), for which he blames himself. Brought back to the X-Men by the metal-clad Colossus (voiced by Stefan Kapčić), Deadpool forms his own group, X-Force. He fights alongside the fortune-favored Domino (Zazie Beetz) and, depending on circumstances, both with and against the half-bionic Cable (Josh Brolin) as they battle the hellacious Juggernaut and try to prevent the young mutant Firefist (Julian Dennison, of "Hunt for the Wilderpeople") from taking revenge on the boarding-school headmaster (Eddie Marsan) who abused him. The director, David Leitch, keeps the action, with its reflexive antics and gory absurdities, brisk and light-toned. The movie's plotlines mesh with a gleeful precision, but its context-free and ahistorical flatness makes it less than the sum of its parts.—*Richard Brody* (In wide release.)

First Reformed

Paul Schrader's latest movie is one of his most agonized. Ethan Hawke plays Reverend Toller, who, after the loss of a son and the wrecking of a marriage, has washed up in Albany County, New York. He has a drinking problem, no visible friends, a beautiful old church to preside over, and a scattering of worshippers. One of them, a pregnant woman named Mary (Amanda Seyfried), asks him to counsel her husband, Michael (Philip Ettinger), who is profoundly depressed by the planet's environmental decay. Toller, to his surprise and ours, is drawn to Michael's cause; the film is, in part, about a search for something that will lend fervor and fire to a damp soul. Schrader's insistence on his characters' self-denial, and even self-chastisement, feels both brave and cussed in an era when self-celebration has become the norm, and his story is equipped with a stripped-down style to match; apart from two enraptured set pieces, the camera barely stirs. The result has the air of an endurance test, and it might be wise to get in training with the aid of Ingmar Bergman and Robert Bresson beforehand. With Cedric Kyles, as the pastor of a megachurch.—*A.L.* (5/21/18) (In limited release.)

The Last Days of Disco

In this deftly dialectical and bitterly intimate comedy, from 1998, Whit Stillman unfolds disco's vectors of power with a historian's insight and a novelist's eye for satirical nuance. Set in Manhattan in the early eighties, the film stars Chloë Sevigny and Kate Beckinsale as recent college graduates and editorial assistants whose social life is centered on a flashy and exclusive night club. Their circle of men includes an environmental lawyer (Robert Sean Leonard), an adman (Mackenzie Astin), a colleague (Matt Ross), a club employee (Chris Eigeman), and the group's unofficial philosopher, a fledgling prosecutor named Josh (Matt Keeslar) who naively hails the disco scene for its "cocktails, dancing, conversation, exchange of ideas and points of view." In the disco, talking is a meeting of the minds, and dancing is a meeting of the bodies—sex without contact, an egalitarian indicator of erotic compatibility—yet these young socialites' emotional relationships involve cruelly deceitful games that are inextricably based on the bedrock standard of the bottom line. Stillman highlights the political stakes of personal pleasures with archival clips showing the infamous 1979 Disco Demolition Night, at Chicago's Comiskey Park, which devolved into a riot led mainly by young white men.—*R.B.* (Film Society of Lincoln Center, May 24, and streaming.)

Life of the Party

Melissa McCarthy co-wrote this blandly amiable comedy with her husband, Ben Falcone, who directed. Despite her intermittent moments of comedic inspiration, McCarthy's character and her performance are stuck in clichés. She plays Deanna Miles, a suburban stay-at-home mother whose husband, Dan (Matt Walsh), leaves her on the same day that they bring their daughter, Maddie (Molly Gordon), back to college. Deanna, who quit college before her own senior year when she got pregnant with Maddie, instantly decides to finish her degree—and does so at Maddie's school. Deanna is an embarrassingly rah-rah and style-challenged student; when the preternaturally calm Maddie gives her a makeover, Deanna unexpectedly attracts—and is attracted to—a twentyish frat boy named Jack (Luke Benward). The movie's view of college life and romance is Hollywood boilerplate, and its depiction of fam-



Bill Gunn's "Personal Problems," a 1980 drama about the diverse lives of a group of black New Yorkers, written by Ishmael Reed, screens May 25–27 at Museum of the Moving Image.

MOVIES

ily relationships is oversimplified and sweetened to the vanishing point. The schematic action is enlivened by the whimsical supporting performance of Gillian Jacobs, in the winningly idiosyncratic role of an older student who spent eight years in a coma and has become a social-media celebrity.—*R.B. (In wide release.)*

Mary Shelley

If you're going to smooch a romantic poet, do it in a graveyard. Such is one of the many lessons delivered by this bio-pic of Mary Godwin (Elle Fanning). She falls for Percy Shelley (Douglas Booth), and they elope together, with predictable results. "Hey, a baby!" he exclaims. Their attempts at a radical life, however, founder on a lack of funds and her lingering moral scruples. To add to the disarray, her stepsister Claire Clairmont (Bel Powley) is attracted to Shelley and seduced by Lord Byron (Tom Sturridge), who chooses to model himself on a pop video from the nineteen-eighties. The main characters join forces beside Lake Geneva, where Mary's "Frankenstein" is brought to life. These fraught events, prodded by a keening musical score, and so overwrought at times that they could be mistaken for a spoof, are a long way from the finesse—and the feminist vigor—that the director, Haifaa Al-Mansour, displayed in her debut feature, "Wadjda" (2012). Still, the movie has a solemn asset in Stephen Dillane, who made a stern impact as Lord Halifax in "Finest Hour," and who returns here as Mary's father, William Godwin—the grizzled idealist, still smoldering in middle age.—*A.L. (In limited release.)*

Regular Lovers

Philippe Garrel, who, at the age of twenty, made a film in Paris during the turmoil of May, 1968, revisits those times in this intimate epic, from 2005. Centered on a love affair between François, a young poet (played by Garrel's son Louis), and Lilie (Clotilde Hesme), a working-class sculptor, the drama is as symbolic as it is realistic. Garrel films the uprising with a flat theatrical abstraction, turning it into a dimly recalled dream. This is May '68 minus the politics—an outpouring of desire, a yearning for sensual utopia on earth—and, as such, it's doomed. Garrel shows that the world after the revolt belongs to practical people with their feet on the ground. If someone other than this aesthetically radical director said so, it might seem reactionary, but here Garrel gives an original artistic form to his rueful view of his own youthful illusions. The cinematographer William Lubtchansky's grainy black-and-white images have the feel of cold stone, and, when the pragmatic Lilie challenges François to get on with his life, the chill of hard reality is all the more brutal. In French.—*R.B. (Metrograph, May 24.)*

The Seagull

This new version of Chekhov's play, adapted by Stephen Karam and directed by Michael Mayer, is brisk to the point of haste. Running just over an hour and a half, it hurries through the arrival of Irina (Annette Bening), a noted actress, at the rural home of her brother, Sorin (Brian Dennehy); the woodland staging of a play by her son, Konstantin (Billy Howle), and his moony adoration of an ingénue, Nina (Saoirse Ronan), clad in pristine white; the lamentations of Masha (Elisabeth Moss), who, in contrast, wears funeral black; and the scribbles of a modish writer, Trigorin (Corey Stoll), who neglects his duties as Irina's beau. (You cannot miss his wandering and predatory eye.) Though the light haze of idle-

ness through which the characters usually drift is dispersed, the story, far from acquiring a sharper focus, seems to grow more inconsequential. But the cast, which includes Mare Winningham, is devoted to the Chekhovian cause, and Bening's Irina is a fine addition to her gallery of complex heroines, in films such as "20th Century Women" (2016) and "Film Stars Don't Die in Liverpool" (2017), who gird themselves to fight off time and trouble.—*A.L. (5/21/18) (In limited release.)*

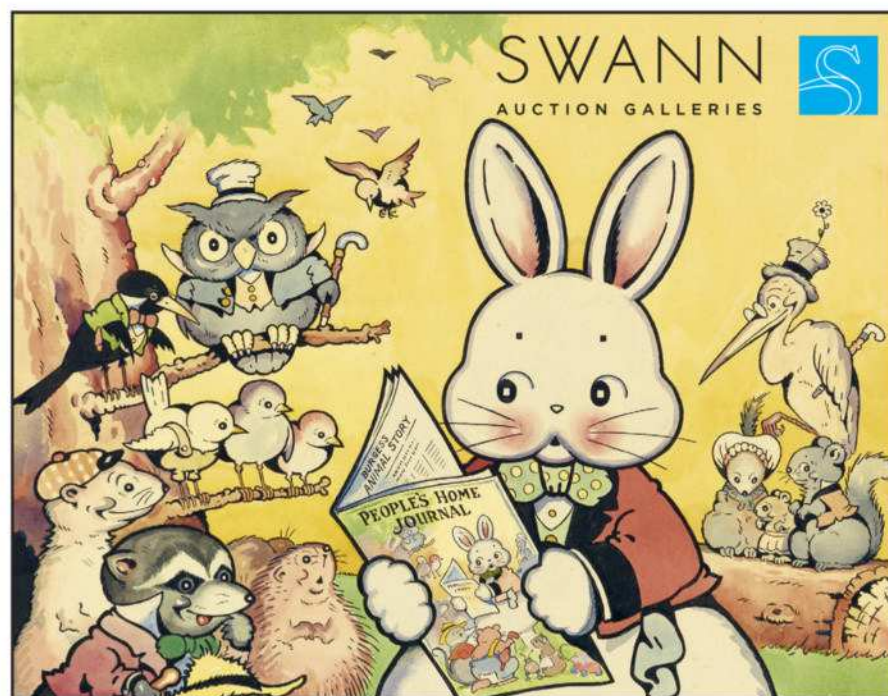
Sollers Point

The title of Matthew Porterfield's quietly anguished drama refers to a Baltimore neighborhood that's near a now-shuttered steel mill and is still home to many of its former employees. There, the twenty-six-year-old Keith Cohoe (McCaul Lombardi), recently released from prison (apparently for a drug-related offense), is under house arrest and living with his father, Carol (Jim Belushi), a retired mill worker. Keith is white; many of his friends and neighbors, including his former girlfriend, Courtney (Zazie Beetz), are black, but, in prison, Keith belonged to a white-supremacist gang, and when his house arrest ends its ex-con members expect him to rejoin them. Meanwhile, unable to find work and in need of quick money, Keith begins dealing drugs again. His increasingly desperate rounds thrust him into wary yet yearning contact with a wide range of characters, including his grandmother (Lynn Cohen), two young women who work as strippers, a terrifying white-supremacist leader, an art-school student, and a heroin addict hoping to break her habit. Sketching Keith's inner

conflicts and practical struggles with a graceful, mood-rich lyricism, Porterfield presses gently but painfully on some of the most inflamed and sensitive parts of American society.—*R.B. (In limited release.)*

Wild Girl

This turbulent and tangled Western, from 1932, directed by Raoul Walsh, depicts a rustic post-Civil War outpost in California in all its sordid, violent, and romantic energy. Salomy Jane (Joan Bennett), a barefoot backwoods maiden, innocently arouses the lust of the neighboring town's local grandee (Morgan Wallace), whose predatory past catches up with him in the person of a Virginia stranger (Charles Farrell), a Confederate veteran who comes to town to avenge his sister. Meanwhile, Salomy is being courted by a pair of rivals—a smooth-talking saloon gambler (Ralph Bellamy) and a crude rancher (Irving Pichel)—and protected by Yuba Bill (Eugene Pallette), a jolly and fast-witted coachman. But the deck is shuffled anew when she and the newcomer cross paths. Walsh's richly textured populist panorama, with its simmering feuds, casual gunplay, and corrupt local politics, along with the shoddy justice of vigilante mobs, blends the comic hyperbole of long-ago tall tales, the sentimental power of domesticity, and the tense spectacle of life and death in the daily balance. With Minna Gombell, as a sharp-tongued madam; Sarah Padden, as a lay-about's long-suffering wife; and Louise Beavers, as Mammy Lou, who doesn't live separately but isn't treated equally.—*R.B. (MOMA, May 26.)*



Harrison Cady, *Peter Rabbit and His Friends* (detail), ink and watercolor cover art for *People's Home Journal*, April 1926. Estimate \$7,000 to \$10,000.

Illustration Art

June 5

Christine von der Linn • cv@swanngalleries.com

Preview: June 1, 10-6; June 2, 12-5; June 4, 10-6; June 5, 10-12

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DANCE

New York City Ballet

The comic ballet "Coppélia" was originally inspired by a pair of eerie stories by E. T. A. Hoffmann, about a gullible young man who is tricked into falling in love with the title character, an automaton. The choreographer George Balanchine danced a version of the piece by Petipa when he was a student in St. Petersburg. In an uncharacteristic moment of nostalgia, he adapted it for New York City Ballet in 1974, in partnership with the Russian ballerina Alexandra Danilova. (She had triumphed in the role of Swanilda—the human girl who saves the young man from falling for Coppélia—with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo.) The pair imbued the dance with high spirits and warmth, and the music, by Léo Delibes, is incredibly catchy. • May 23 at 7:30: "Dance Odyssey," "Pictures at an Exhibition," and "Year of the Rabbit." • May 24 and May 29 at 7:30: "Mozartiana," "Not Our Fate," "Pulcinella Variations," and "Glass Pieces." • May 25 at 8, May 26 at 2 and 8, and May 27 at 3: "Coppélia." (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. Through June 3.)

American Ballet Theatre

In the only mixed bill of the season, the company performs a recent work, Alexei Ratmansky's "Firebird," from 2012, and a newly minted one, by Wayne McGregor. The British choreographer McGregor is known for his stretchy, fast-paced, and convoluted movement style, and the ornate, high-tech lighting that accompanies it. "Afterite," his first piece for A.B.T., is set to Igor Stravinsky's famously hard-driving ballet score from 1913, "The Rite of Spring." Intriguingly, one of the casts includes Alessandra Ferri, who retired in 2007, only to return to the stage in 2013. In Ratmansky's postmodern take on the more mysterious Stravinsky ballet "Firebird," from 1910, the story—a young man encounters a magic bird, with whose help he breaks a sorcerer's spell—takes place in a post-apocalyptic landscape of flaming trees. One can read its dénouement in many ways, including as a metaphor for the end of Soviet rule. • May 22 and May 24-25 at 7:30, May 23 at 2 and 7:30, and May 26 at 2 and 8: "Firebird" and "Afterite." • May 29 at 7:30: "La Bayadère." (Metropolitan Opera House, Lincoln Center. 212-477-3030. Through July 7.)

Parsons Dance

Enthusiastic, athletic, and eager to please, the company of David Parsons returns to the Joyce with a few premières. One is "Microburst," created by Parsons in collaboration with the tabla player Avirodh Sharma, who contributes live classical Indian rhythmic complexity. Another is "Reflections," a solo that Parsons has made with the longtime company member Abby Silva Gavezzoli, who performs it as a farewell to the troupe. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. May 23-27.)

Tap Family Reunion

New York celebrations of National Tap Dance Day (Bill Robinson's birthday, May 25) have been muted in recent years. But now three of tap's leading lights—Dormeshia Sumbry-Edwards, Derick K. Grant, and Jason Samu-

els Smith—are resurrecting the occasion with a weekend of workshops, performances, and events. On Friday at the Schomburg Center, they present "Raising the Bar," a jazz revue that honors tradition with present-day hipness. On Saturday at the Ailey Studios, hoofers battle in a cutting contest. It all wraps up on Sunday afternoon, with an open-spirited jam session at Swing 46 Jazz and Supper Club. (Various locations. May 24-27.)

La MaMa Moves! Dance Festival

The third week of the festival begins with Ellen Fisher's "Time Don't Stop for Nobody," a text-and-movement piece built from responses to a questionnaire concerning how people feel about age. Fisher, acclaimed for her spiritually lumi-

nous dancing with Meredith Monk, is joined by three other performers of different generations: her fellow Monk veteran Pablo Vela, the dancer-choreographer Mina Nishimura, and Leonardo Garcia, who is twelve years old. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 800-838-3006. May 25-27. Through June 3.)

DanceAfrica

In honor of the centennial of Nelson Mandela's birth, the festival focusses on South Africa this year. Ingoma KwaZulu-Natal Dance Company is a kind of supergroup, bundling together just for this occasion four companies whose styles range from Zulu traditions to pantsula, the fleet-footed street dance that originated as a response to apartheid. Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre, from Durban, combines the dance forms of many cultures, a mix representative of its region: Zulu dances and pantsula, plus classical Indian and hip-hop. (BAM Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. May 25-28.)

ABOVE & BEYOND



World Science Festival

Scientists are in the business of wonder, observing the world closely in order to engage in discovery, explain its mysteries, and overcome its challenges. This weeklong gathering comes at the scientific process from every which way, allowing researchers and thinkers to exit their labs and share some of the questions that intrigue them while showing off the most fascinating data. At various sites throughout the city, there will be discussions about topics that include space, artificial intelligence, antimatter, and engineering; lab tours for girls of research facilities run by women; speakers such as the Harvard physics professor Cumrun Vafa, the cognitive psychologist Steven Pinker, and the Times columnist Carl Zimmer; a sunset sail to learn about the sea; a panel on gene modification moderated by Lesley Stahl; a conversation between Alan Alda and the meteorologist Bernadette Woods Placky on climate change; and a trivia night in the American Museum of Natural History's whale room. (For more information, visit worldsciencefestival.com. May 29-June 3.)

Lower East Side Festival of the Arts

The twenty-third installment of the Theatre for the New City's summer-welcoming performance fair once again takes over a patch of E. 10th St. between First and Second Avenues, for three afternoons of dance, theatre, film, music, and comedy. Among the scheduled performers are F. Murray Abraham, the Tony Award winner Mario Fratti, and Penny Arcade. (155 First Ave., at E. 10th St. theaterforthenewcity.net. May 25-27.)

READINGS AND TALKS

92nd Street Y

Though the weather lately may suggest otherwise, Memorial Day weekend means one thing for certain: cookout season is upon us. In a talk entitled "How to Grill Everything," the best-selling food writer Mark Bittman goes deep on the subject with Carla Hall, a co-host of ABC's "The Chew." They'll discuss the staples of outdoor cuisine as well as a few things you might not expect, like Hall's recipes for pizza and grilled pound cake. (Buttenwieser Hall, 1395 Lexington Ave., at 92nd St. 92y.org. May 24 at 8.)

Brooklyn Public Library

"There is a difference between remembrance of history and reverence of it." When Mitch Landrieu, the former mayor of New Orleans, uttered those words, a year ago, he was addressing the people of his city about a long-fraction issue: the removal of four local statues of Confederates, including General Robert E. Lee. His eloquence instantly put Landrieu, a member of one of Louisiana's key political families, on the national stage. He has now written a memoir, "In the Shadow of the Statues," which talks about how grappling with racial issues finally led to his decision. He is in town to deliver the library's Kahn Humanities Lecture, an annual forum for progressive ideas that shape the nation. (10 Grand Army Plaza, Brooklyn. 718-230-2100. May 29 at 7:30.)

FOOD & DRINK



TABLES FOR TWO

Frenchette

241 West Broadway (212-334-3883)

If you can't get a reservation at Frenchette, in Tribeca—and you probably can't—you're welcome to try your luck as a walk-in. But "walking in" here might be better described as "waiting in line." On a recent Wednesday, before the restaurant had even opened, a couple of dozen people were already snaking down the block. A group of German tourists didn't seem to know quite why they had queued up, but were happy to be there. Two carefully groomed young women toting toddlers pushed their way to the front, insisting that they were just checking on the high chairs they had called about earlier. By five-thirty, the tots were bouncing on a leather banquette, red-faced and shrieking.

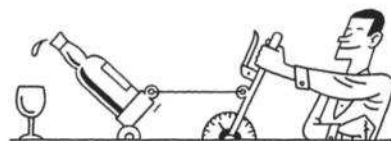
It's not clear why anyone would bring children to Frenchette, or why anyone would work so hard to have dinner at five-thirty. The restaurant, which opened in April, is exceptionally glamorous, perfect for mid-century "Mad Men" Martini cosplay and for people-watching—on another night, I saw an elderly woman in a pink pillbox hat and actual rose-colored glasses. The chefs, Riad Nasr and Lee Hanson, are impressively pedigreed—they cooked together at the Keith McNally restaurants Balthazar, Pastis, and Minetta Tavern. Natural wines—partic-

ularly fizzy *pétillants naturels*, or "*pét-nats*"—are having a moment, and Frenchette has seized it. But doth the froth machine froth too much? Do we need another self-consciously luxurious brasserie, in a city so full of them?

Thanks to a boon of early press and virulent social media, certain dishes at Frenchette became status symbols almost overnight. Much has been made, especially, of the brouillade with escargot, a plate of vigorously scrambled eggs topped with buttered snails. The texture of the eggs, I'd read, was like that of polenta. My question both before and after eating them was: why? Duck frites, on the other hand, was more deserving of reverence, the duck as gloriously meaty as beef, with the added excitement of crispy, fatty skin and star anise. But N.B.: in what feels like a sadistic and surrealist twist, the knife that comes with the duck is a bit of a safety hazard, bizarrely designed so that the straight side of the blade, rather than the curved edge, is the sharp one. Finger pads beware. You can get away with a fork on the rotisserie lobster, bathed in a luscious curry *beurre fondue*, and with a butter knife on the much humbler, rosy but tender *bavette* (the French term for flap steak), finished with anchovy butter and herbs. I might go back and have that at the bar one night, around eight o'clock, if I thought there was any chance of claiming a stool. (*Entrées* \$21-\$103.)

—Hannah Goldfield

BAR TAB



El Kallejón

209 E. 117th St., at Third Ave. (646-649-4795)

On a recent Sunday afternoon, a young man in a yellow-striped tracksuit was ambling toward Third Avenue, in East Harlem, when a storefront tucked between a heating-and-plumbing-supply shop and a Mexican restaurant caught his attention. Maybe it was the music—fast-paced norteño rhythms followed by Argentinean ska filtered through the open doorway. Perhaps it was the décor—framed black-and-white pictures, cheeky signs urging patrons to drink more, a leopard mask fixed in a rictus grin. Or maybe it was simply the promise of tequila, mezcal, and even sotol, a smooth spirit from Chihuahua that is distilled from the juice of a spiny plant called the desert spoon and is rather difficult to find in New York. Inside the warmly lit bar, a clutch of couples were meeting to ring out the weekend. Another group of young folks discussed recent visits to Mexico around a wooden table. "He's a *charro*, basically like a Mexican cowboy," a woman said of an acquaintance, as she ladled guacamole, crab, and shrimp from a long dish. "He took us to an event where they had to lasso the front feet of a bull!" A waiter brought a Maria Sabina, a steaming flatbread pizza with goat cheese, herbs, and wild mushrooms. A jazz drummer finished off a plate of *flautas de pensamientos*, made with pork brains and roasted chili. "I don't know what I just ate," he muttered. "But that was delicious." Outside, the man in the tracksuit continued to peer in. Was it any good? he seemed to be asking. "It's excellent," a patron uttered, stumbling out. "*Fantástico*." —Nicolas Niarchos

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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT THE LONG FIGHT

Among the many matters on which congressional Republicans have failed to press President Donald Trump, a joke told by a communications aide may not rank particularly high, but it should have been among the easiest to address. This joke came during a White House meeting, after Senator John McCain announced that he could not vote for Gina Haspel, Trump's nominee for C.I.A. director, because, at her hearing, she would not concede that the agency's past practice of torture was immoral. "It doesn't matter," the aide said. "He's dying anyway." Instead of apologizing, the White House launched a hunt for the person who had leaked the remark. Some Republicans expressed outrage, but when G.O.P. senators attended a private lunch with Trump, on Tuesday, the incident wasn't even mentioned. Erin Burnett, of CNN, asked Mike Rounds, of South Dakota, whether the senators had been "intimidated." Not at all, he said. They just "ran out of time."

The dispute comes at a moment when McCain is grappling, publicly and poignantly, with what it means to come up against the limits of time in the Trump era. He is eighty-one and in a decisive battle with brain cancer, as he acknowledges frankly in a new book, "The Restless Wave," written with Mark Salter, and in an HBO documentary, "John McCain: For Whom the Bell Tolls." (It will air on Memorial Day.) The worst part of the aide's remark was the suggestion that it wasn't only McCain's vote that doesn't

matter but also his voice—that his legacy would dissipate. And the comment was made in the context of a fight that, for McCain, is closely tied to that legacy.

McCain, a Navy pilot, was shot down over Hanoi in 1967. He ejected from his plane, breaking both of his arms and a leg, and the North Vietnamese took him prisoner. After several months, an interrogator began pressuring him to accept a chance to go home, ahead of other Americans—his father was a high-ranking admiral. McCain later recalled that the third and final time he refused, the interrogator broke a pen that he was holding "in two," as if to say that nothing more would be written in the book of McCain's life. McCain was detained for almost five more years, and was systematically tortured until he signed a confession saying that he was a war criminal.

Yet that snapping of the pen marked the juncture at which McCain became

someone about whom Secretary of Defense James Mattis could say—as he did last week, in an implicit reproach of his boss—"Everything I love about America is resident in this man." McCain, in his new book, says that he knows that torture can break people, and make them say anything—even tell lies, producing bad intelligence—and that it can rob a person of everything except "the belief that were the positions reversed you wouldn't treat them as they have treated you." The decision of George W. Bush's Administration to engage in torture in the years following 9/11 shook and angered McCain because it threatened his sense of the nation's moral identity, and he worked hard for the repudiation of the practice. It was the companion to his efforts, with Senator John Kerry, to bring about some reconciliation with Vietnam.

Trump has now embraced the idea of torture, declaring, "I'd bring back a hell of a lot worse than waterboarding." That view, coupled with the Senate's confirmation of Haspel last week, is not only a loss for McCain but a measure of the larger distortions of the Trump Presidency. McCain himself has not been entirely immune to these distortions. He endorsed Trump in the 2016 campaign, even though Trump had said of him, "I like people who weren't captured," and even though Trump's birtherism and his call for a Muslim ban were a renunciation of the finest moment in McCain's 2008 Presidential campaign. At a town hall, when a supporter told him that she didn't trust Barack Obama because he was "an Arab," McCain interrupted her,



saying, "He's a decent, family-man citizen." (The same year, in an attempt to capture, rather than to counter, the bitter strain of populism in his party, he named as his running mate Sarah Palin, who proved only to be an advance woman for Trump.) McCain finally withdrew his support for Trump after the release of the "Access Hollywood" tape. ("I have daughters," he said.) He also cited Trump's vilification of the Central Park Five. By then, however, just a month remained before the election.

Mccain doesn't really come to terms with that series of decisions in his book, although he does distance himself from many of Trump's policies, and from his mind-set. He defends the Dreamers, and says of Trump's "lack of empathy" for refugees, "The way he speaks about them is appalling." He recalls, with relish, flying back to Washington last July, soon after undergoing surgery, to cast a vote that prevented his party from jet-

tisoning the Affordable Care Act without providing a replacement: "Reporters pressed me for my decision, and I offered a smartass remark, 'Wait for the show.'"

Mccain is now at his home in Cornville, Arizona, where he has been visited by a stream of friends and colleagues. Mitch McConnell, the Senate Majority Leader, said that he "didn't want to miss the opportunity to tell him how much his friendship meant to me." Former Vice-President Joe Biden, a friend since the early nineteen-seventies, told the *Times*, "John knows he's in a very, very, very precarious situation, and yet he's still concerned about the state of the country." Others told reporters that McCain was planning his funeral, and did not want Trump to attend. That prompted Senator Orrin Hatch to remark that excluding Trump would be "ridiculous," because he is the President and "a very good man"—a comment that mostly served to demonstrate the extent to which

the G.O.P. has come to accept Trump as its leader. (Hatch apologized after being rebuked by McCain's daughter Meghan.)

And McCain had a visit from Jeff Flake, the junior senator from Arizona, who last October denounced Trump from the Senate floor in impassioned terms, while also announcing that he would be quitting politics. Afterward, McCain praised Flake for his willingness to pay a "political price" for his beliefs. Perhaps the best lesson that McCain still has to offer, though, is how *not* to say goodbye—how not to take the easy exit. He is the embodiment of certain non-Trumpian Republican ideals. But those ideals cannot be realized in the abstract, away from the voting booths. The disgraced former sheriff Joe Arpaio, whom Trump has pardoned, calling him a "great American patriot," is running for Flake's seat. The next Presidential election is in two years. Time is running out.

—Amy Davidson Sorkin

COMEBACKS HOLY !@\$%



The day before the White House announced that Rudolph Giuliani would be joining President Trump's legal team, news broke of another controversial New York figure's comeback. After a tumultuous stay in the United States, a stint in Tasmania, and three years in the art collection of Steven A. Cohen, the hedge-fund billionaire—whose company, in 2013, paid a fine of \$1.8 billion after pleading guilty to charges of insider trading—"The Holy Virgin Mary," the British artist Chris Ofili's painting of a black Madonna, adorned with elephant dung, is soon to be installed in the Museum of Modern Art.

"The Holy Virgin Mary," like many newcomers to the city, lived in Brooklyn before she made it to Manhattan. The painting had its American debut in 1999, at the Brooklyn Museum, as part of an exhibition of the collection of Charles Saatchi, titled "Sensation." Giuliani, who was then mayor, was so offended by Ofili's painting that he froze

city funding to the museum and threatened to evict it from its city-owned building. The museum sued the city for violating its First Amendment rights.

"The court ruled in our favor—very strongly," Floyd Abrams, the museum's counsel, said recently. "The Mayor responded in a manner that you might think bears some resemblance to our President." The judge in the case, Giuliani said at the time, was "totally biased" and "out of control," and "part of the politically correct, left-wing ideology of New York City."

The other day, Ann Temkin and Laura Hoptman, MOMA curators, visited a squat, Carolina-blue warehouse in Queens. They had dressed for the occasion, like tourists at the Vatican. Hoptman had on a dark suit; Temkin wore a colorful print dress. Inside, the women navigated a series of hallways and staircases leading to a basement, where "The Holy Virgin Mary" is being stored.

"When we acquired the work and put it in front of our committee, it looked like it had descended from Heaven," Hoptman said, gazing at the picture. "See how it glows?"

"It's a serious painting," Temkin said.

"There's so much joy in this work, and humor and love," Hoptman said.

Ofili's Virgin Mary, who is painted

on an eight-foot-tall yellow canvas, wears a blue robe that is parted to reveal a breast. An exposed breast is common in paintings of the nursing Madonna, but this Madonna's breast is a lump of lacquered elephant dung—an effect that is earthy and beautiful. The painting sits on similar mounds of manure. The Madonna is dusted with gold glitter and is surrounded by images that resemble butterflies but which are, on closer inspection, photographs of female genitalia cut from porn magazines.

"Most paintings hang on nails, and they're off the ground and away from you," Temkin explained. "The whole idea of having the dung support the painting is that it's there, in your space."

Gesturing at the glitter, she pointed out that a traditional Madonna would feature "precious, precious gold leaf from six hundred years ago." She went on, "Or you can buy a jar of great gold glitter and have a field day."

In 1999, Giuliani described Ofili's painting as "sick" (he used the same word to describe people who kept ferrets as pets). "If I can do it, it's not art, because I'm not much of an artist," he said. "You know, if you want to throw dung at something, I could figure out how to do that."

"The fact is that Giuliani and many

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others never saw the painting," Hoptman said. "They *heard* about the painting." (Floyd Abrams added, "I think the best proof he never saw it is he never mentioned the rather graphic pictures pasted onto the work. You know he would have talked about that had he known that they were there.") At the time, press coverage of the fracas noted Giuliani's spotty relationship with Catholicism, including the fact that he had his first marriage, to his second cousin, annulled after fourteen years.

"It's a great thing that this work came back to New York, so that New Yorkers can see it again," Hoptman said.

In the two years since his settlement with the Securities and Exchange Commission, Cohen joined MOMA's board of trustees, and donated fifty million dollars to the museum, in addition to the Ofili. "He said it seemed to him that this was a museum painting," Temkin said.

An armchair psychologist might find his motive more complex. In 1986, twenty-seven years before his own firm was charged with insider trading, Cohen was deposed as part of a securities-fraud investigation initiated by the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York—Rudolph Giuliani. Cohen declined to comment.

As for Giuliani, nineteen years after he tried to ban a Madonna propped up by excrement, strewn with glitter, and surrounded by pornographic figures, he is working for a man whose critics might describe him exactly the same way. And Ofili's Holy Virgin Mary is headed for MOMA, to live out her days in the company of Picassos and Cézannes.

Peering at the painting, Hoptman said, "You can almost believe in magic."

—Tyler Foggatt

GEORGIA POSTCARD WHISTLE STOP



Last week, Stacey Abrams headed north from Atlanta, in a big white bus, to persuade rural Georgians to vote for her in the state's gubernatorial primary. On Tuesday, she faces Stacey Evans,



Stacey Abrams

the other Democrat who's running for governor, and who is known as White Stacey. They're both young, progressive former state representatives who grew up poor and are willing to denounce Donald Trump. Abrams is the state's former House minority leader, a graduate of Yale Law School, and an eight-time published romance novelist (sample titles: "Hidden Sins," "Power of Persuasion"), and she would become the first African-American woman to govern a state. She has been endorsed by Bernie Sanders and Rashida Jones; Evans, on the other hand, has the backing of the Georgia Federation of Teachers and many state reps. On the way to the town of Dalton, which calls itself "the carpet capital of the world," Abrams passed a billboard that read "Help Us Jesus. Drain the Swamp. Save America!!"

Patricia Gross, a pastor at Grace Fellowship Ministries, and Alycia Frost, a parishioner, sat at a table inside Miller Brothers Rib Shack, in Dalton, eating barbecue and waiting to meet Abrams. The walls were covered with pictures of heroes: Parks, Tubman, Malcolm X, Ali. At the counter, a whiteboard quoted Genesis—"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, And between thy seed and her seed; it shall crush thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel"—and noted a special dish (smoked-chicken sandwich). The women eat there every Friday.

"There was a young fella who texted and asked me to come today," Gross, who is African-American, and wore a silk rose pinned to her blouse, and rings on every finger, said. "I don't even know who

he is." (The text was from Abrams's campaign.) Gross had voted early, for Abrams. "Her being black and a woman—neither has a bearing," she said. "Anybody raised with two preachers in the house"—she was referring to Abrams's parents—"you've got to be all right. I think her candidacy is based on the Word. Trying to be a blessing to others."

"I don't vote straight anything," Frost, who wore a peach-colored dress, said. "I'm here to learn. I'm looking at her views on the Hope Scholarship"—a financial-assistance program for Georgia college students, including Evans, when she was younger—"and what she's doing for the underprivileged." Frost added, "I didn't vote for Trump. He speaks without thinking, and a lot of things he worries about aren't important." She insisted that a visitor try one of the spareribs on her plate.

John and Kathy Raisin, a white couple who run a property-management company, sat nearby. "I don't know how they got our number, either," Kathy told Gross. "We just wanted to see what her platform is," John said. Health care concerned them. "We've got private insurance," John said, "and it's our highest bill." Kathy added, "Having two women on the Democratic side is good. But Abrams is for recreational marijuana. I'm not sure what I think about that."

Abrams showed up, and after admiring a man's lunch—"Don't let me interrupt," she said. "Get back to your fish"—she took questions from the diners.

"I have a child on the Hope," Frost said. "Is it going to end? Or change?"

"That's never been on the table," Abrams replied. "I grew up with nothing. My parents struggled to stay above the poverty line. And we fell a lot. A college scholarship doesn't save the world. We've got family challenges—I've got a brother who went to college and he's still a two-time ex-felon. We've got to talk about criminal-justice reform."

"Amen," Gross said.

"I feel like I got a lot more questions than answers," Frost said later.

At one point during Abrams's rural tour, a white customer walked into a restaurant she'd just left, and asked a visitor who "the black woman" was. He looked at the side of her bus, which read "A Georgia where everyone has


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the freedom and opportunity to thrive," and said, "Just came for some food."

Rosemary Ringer, a teaching assistant in her sixties, who is black, said of Abrams's candidacy, "It means everything." She continued, "I know a woman who'll never go to a family picnic outdoors, to this day, because she remembers having to sit in the yard after picking cotton all day when she was young, not being allowed in a white woman's house, with flies buzzing around as she ate. Coming from that to a black female governor—boom!"

Before heading down the road to Friendly Brothers Barber Shop and Thankful Missionary Baptist Church, both in Rome, Abrams made a final pitch to the diners. "This isn't my first visit to Dalton," she said. "I've also been to Abbeville and Zebulon and Jesup. As I like to say, I've gotten my requisite speeding ticket in Ludowici. I know Georgia."

—Charles Bethea

KIDS TODAY DEPT. LET THEM EAT ROCK



Wearing his trademark silk head scarf, an exotic blend of Barbary pirate and Russian babushka, Steven Van Zandt was relaxing backstage at the PlayStation Theatre, in Times Square, recently, before a gig with his fourteen-piece band, the re-formed Disciples of Soul. Van Zandt, who is sixty-seven and is widely known as Little Steven (he goes by that name on his Sirius XM radio show), was limning his undistinguished career as a high-school student. "I was only interested in rock and roll and getting laid, probably in that order," he said. Because neither was part of the curriculum at Middletown High School, in Middletown, New Jersey, he went on, "I had no interest in school whatsoever."

He learned everything he needed to know from rock and roll, he said. His timing was impeccable. He was thirteen on February 9, 1964, when he saw the Beatles perform on "The Ed Sullivan Show." "For those of us who were al-

ready the freaks and misfits and outcasts of the future, it was literally as shocking as a flying saucer landing in Central Park," he said, in a voice full of awe and Jersey.

The Beatles engaged him as his teachers had not. "You're responding emotionally to something," he said. "Bits of information come through. So, suddenly, you find yourself learning about Eastern religion"—from the Beatles—"or about orchestration. Learning about literature from Bob Dylan. You didn't get into it to learn things, but you learn things anyway."

For the past decade, Van Zandt has been working on a way to re-create that dynamic, out-of-school learning experience inside classrooms, through his Rock and Roll Forever Foundation. The foundation's team, which includes two ethnomusicologists, has crafted more than a hundred and twenty lesson plans based on popular songs and videos. Van Zandt calls the program TeachRock. For example, he said, "The first Elvis hit single, 'That's All Right,' came out the same year as *Brown v. Board of Education*. And it reflects what's going on and provides a basic context." All the music is licensed and the lesson plans are available to teachers for free online.

At each of the thirty dates on the current Disciples of Soul tour, Van Zandt has offered tickets to local teachers, provided they arrive early so that he and his foundation people can walk them through a few sample lessons. (All of the tour's proceeds will go to the foundation.) More than a hundred teachers had come out to the PlayStation; Van Zandt greeted them in the theatre's balcony.

He picked up a microphone and told the group that about ten years ago the National Association for Music Education "came to me and said that the No Child Left Behind legislation was really devastating art classes."

The teachers nodded vigorously.

"And they said, 'Can you go to Congress and give it a shot?'" Van Zandt, who organized the anti-apartheid album "Sun City," in 1985, has retained his passion for activism.

"So I went, and I talked to Teddy Kennedy and Mitch McConnell"—scattered boos—"and I said, 'Bit of an unintended consequence here. By the way,

did you ever hear that every kid who takes music class does better in math and science?' They apologized, but they said they weren't going to fix it."

He went on, "I came back to the teachers and said, 'Let's do music history! Let's use music as common ground to establish communication between teachers and students and just make your job easier.'" Big applause. "Instead of telling the kid, 'Take the iPod out of your ears,' we ask them, 'What are you listening to?'"

Later, backstage, Van Zandt said, "I call it 'teaching in the present tense.' We were told, 'Learn this, you're going to use this someday.' That doesn't work anymore. The kids are different. It's a paradigm shift."

He explained that his method doesn't lean only on sixties rock. "Kanye, we trace him back, Jay-Z," he said. Beyoncé's "Single Ladies" video is used to prompt discussion of the slave trade.



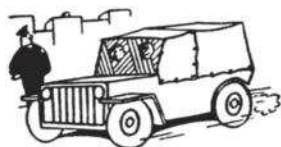
Steven Van Zandt

He added, "The rock-era methodology had to do with politics and culture, which is hip-hop's focus, to some extent, though not as much as maybe we would have liked."

He concluded, "Teaching kids something they're not interested in, it didn't work back then, and it's even worse now. We have an epidemic dropout rate." He waggled his scarf. "Where are we going to be in twenty years? How are we going to get smarter looking at this Administration? You know, we're just getting stupider."

—John Seabrook

IN MEMORIAM THE HERO'S JOURNEY



On a recent Tuesday, Sabin Howard, the figurative sculptor, was preparing for one of the first public viewings of a planned national memorial to the First World War. He had driven from his studio, in the Bronx, to the New York Academy of Art, his alma mater, in Tribeca. At the curb, he opened the doors of his van to reveal a ten-foot scale model of a fifty-seven-foot bronze tableau: a narrative meditation on the Great War, to be installed in a few years near the White House, not far from the tributes to the Second World War and the wars in Korea and Vietnam. He carried the model inside in three heavy pieces. "Sorry it's not bigger," he said.

In 2016, Howard and his collaborator, Joe Weishaar, were named the winners of a competition, created by an act of Congress, to design a national monument to the First World War. Surprisingly, it would be the capital's first. Washington's war memorials were not created in chronological order; they grew organically, out of need, like footpaths in an open field. It started with Vietnam. "Vietnam veterans always had this feeling of not having a parade, not being memorialized," Chris Isleib, the director of public affairs for the United States World War One Centennial Commission, said. "So they lobbied, thankfully."

Isleib's commission wanted a First World War memorial on the Mall, too, but, after vets mobilized to get monuments to the Korean War and the Second World War, Congress passed the Commemorative Works Act, which, Isleib said, "basically declared the National Mall a completed work of art." By then, veterans of America's first global war were disappearing. (The last, Frank Buckles, died in 2011.) In 2014, the First World War was given Pershing Park, a run-down slice of green adjacent to the Mall, near the Willard Hotel. "The pedestrian traffic there is really great," Isleib said, optimistically.

In a room on the Academy's first floor, Howard set down the pieces and a large



"I'm just worried the knots are the only thing holding me together."

wooden pedestal. He is soft-spoken, and had on jeans, a fleece jacket, and hiking boots. He had brought with him two assistants, Paul Emile and Zach Libresco, both in hooded sweatshirts, who had posed for the sculpture and were helping to set it up. "I did twelve iterations before I got to this one," Howard said. The Centennial Commission includes a dozen lawyers, academics, and retired military officers. "Meeting after meeting, I'd bring my work, and they'd criticize it," Howard said. "The initial idea was a story, a long relief, but the story line kept changing. I would ask, 'Well, what do you want?' And they'd say, 'We'll know it when we see it.'"

He started pulling photographs out of a cardboard box on the floor. The memorial's central narrative involves a father who leaves his family, goes to war, and returns home changed. "I realized, Oh, my God, this is like Joseph Campbell's 'the hero's journey,'" Howard said. "It's a very simple story that everybody in every single culture has experienced." Figures in the sculpture go blind, suffer from P.T.S.D., and fall in battle.

Howard found genuine First World War uniforms online and photographed actors posing in them. He used 3-D scanners to make mockups. "Actually"—he paused at an image of two soldiers draped over each other, gruesomely—"here's Paul and Zach." He turned to

them: "Hey, guys, here you are, dead."

Paul squinted at the image. "The harder ones were the squats," he said.

Zach nodded. "The ones where we had to defy gravity."

Howard continued, "The commission would say, 'Well, we want it grittier,' or 'We want more wounded.'" He picked up another photo, which showed an actor, his head lolling, supported on either side by an apron-clad nurse. "I took twelve thousand of these."

Deep into the process, Howard had a realization: "I was in my studio, and I looked up and saw this big poster of Michelangelo's 'Last Judgment.' I had this voice in my head that was, like, 'Make the art for yourself. Do what *you* wish to do.'"

He ran his finger along the model and said, "We have three sections, in five acts, like a Shakespearean structure." He pointed out the father ("an allegory for America"). "He enters into the brotherhood of arms," he went on. "This trench represents the Atlantic Ocean." The action moves into a battle scene ("the insanity of it"), a death ("a Pietà pose"), and a transformation ("there's your Joseph Campbell"). He mused, "I'll probably scan Paul's face for the father."

Paul considered the figure. "I don't know if I can do a dad face yet," he said.

"Well, a *young* dad," Zach offered.

"Maybe a young dad."

—Anna Russell

A REPORTER AT LARGE

BEHIND THE WALL

As the U.S. abandons diplomacy, an Ambassador resigns in protest.

BY JON LEE ANDERSON

*"My values are not his values," John Feeley said, of Trump. He quit this March.*

John Feeley, the Ambassador to Panama and a former Marine helicopter pilot, is not averse to strong language, but he was nevertheless startled by his first encounter with President Donald Trump. Summoned to deliver a briefing in June, 2017, he was outside the Oval Office when he overheard Trump concluding a heated conversation, "Fuck him! Tell him to sue the government." Feeley was escorted in, and saw that Mike Pence, John Kelly, and several other officials were in the room. As he took a seat, Trump asked, "So tell me—what do we get from Panama? What's in it for us?" Feeley presented a litany of benefits: help with counter-narcotics work and migration control, commercial efforts linked to the Panama Canal, a close relation-

ship with the current President, Juan Carlos Varela. When he finished, Trump chuckled and said, "Who knew?" He then turned the conversation to the Trump International Hotel and Tower, in Panama City. "How about the hotel?" he said. "We still have the tallest building on the skyline down there?"

Feeley had been a Foreign Service officer for twenty-seven years, and, like his peers, he advocates an ethos of non-partisan service. Although he grew up as what he calls a "William F. Buckley Republican," he has never joined a political party, and has voted for both Democrats and Republicans. When Trump was elected, he was surprised, but he resolved not to let it interfere with his work. His wife, Cherie, who

also served for decades in diplomatic posts, said, "In the Foreign Service, we don't have the luxury of gnashing our teeth at political outcomes. The hope is that person recognizes how delicate and complex it is to make foreign policy. It's boring and it's slow—but it's how you make good products over time." Still, Feeley was disheartened by his initial meeting with Trump. "In private, he is exactly like he is on TV, except that he doesn't curse in public," he told me. Feeley sensed that Trump saw every unknown person as a threat, and that his first instinct was to annihilate that threat. "He's like a velociraptor," he said. "He has to be boss, and if you don't show him deference he kills you."

Feeley is fifty-six years old and six feet one, with cropped silver hair and the exuberant demeanor of a Labrador retriever. In Panama, he established himself as both a forceful representative of American power and a minor Facebook celebrity. "He was definitely not an ordinary Ambassador," Jorge Sánchez, a well-connected businessman, told me. "He had the charisma of someone out of social media." An extroverted man who speaks fluent street Spanish (learned with help from Cherie, who is Puerto Rican), Feeley plays the cajón, dances salsa, loves bullfighting, and is pleased to tell you about his friendship with the late Gabriel García Márquez. He is also unmistakably American: a native New Yorker and a committed fan of football (the Giants), baseball (the Mets), poker, and jazz (Charlie Parker). A writer for *La Estrella de Panamá*, the country's oldest newspaper, once noted, "Between anecdotes, he likes a drink of whiskey." In conversation, Feeley expresses himself with a hand-over-heart earnestness that is rare among diplomats, who tend toward moral relativism. "He really believes in all that stuff like duty and honor," a friend of his told me. "He's a total Boy Scout."

Last December, half a year after the meeting in the Oval Office, Feeley submitted a letter of resignation. Many diplomats have been dismayed by the Trump Administration; since the Inauguration, sixty per cent of the State Department's highest-ranking diplomats have left. But Feeley broke with his peers by publicly declaring his reasons. In an op-ed in the *Washington Post*, titled "Why I Could

PHOTOGRAPHS (FROM TOP TO BOTTOM): ARNULFO FRANCO/AP (HEAD); DA/J/GETTY (BODY); MARK REINSTEIN/CORBIS/GETTY (BUILDING); HELOVJ/GETTY (BEACH)

No Longer Serve This President," he said that Trump had "warped and betrayed" what he regarded as "the traditional core values of the United States." For months, Feeley had tried to maintain the country's image, as Trump's policies and pronouncements offended allies: the ban on travellers from Muslim-majority countries; the call for a wall on the Mexican border; the political bait and switch concerning the Dreamers; the withdrawal from the Paris climate accord and the Trans-Pacific Partnership. As a result, Feeley wrote, "America is undoubtedly less welcome in the world today." Increasingly, he feared that the country was embracing an attitude that was profoundly inimical to diplomacy: the strong do what they will and the weak do what they must. "If we do that," he told me, "my experience and my world view is that we will become weaker and less prosperous." It was not only Trump's policies that troubled him. In the *Post*, he wrote, "My values were not his values."

"You either get your politics from your family or you reject its politics," Feeley told me. "I inherited mine." Feeley was born in the Bronx and grew up in suburban New Jersey. His grandparents were of Italian descent on his mother's side, Irish on his father's. "They were New York City middle class—fiscal-responsibility types, strong-defense types—but also strongly believed that education was the vehicle for mobility."

Feeley's father worked for A.T.&T., but the men in his extended family were mostly cops and firefighters. His maternal grandfather, Frank Cosola, was a fireman and a former Navy sailor, who had earned a Silver Star in the Pacific during the Second World War. Although he hadn't made it past high school, he was an incessant reader, as was his wife, Cookie, who volunteered as a Braille typist, transcribing books for Lighthouse for the Blind. They passed on their love of reading to Feeley's mother, who later taught English at Fordham. The family watched William F. Buckley's show "Firing Line" reverently. "It was his erudition that impressed my folks," Feeley said. "That's what they wanted for me." His mother forced him into elocution classes, and his grandfather chided him not to speak like a "goombah." Every-

one pressed books on him. As a teenager, Feeley was accepted to Regis High School, an elite Jesuit academy on the Upper East Side.

He went on to Georgetown's School of Foreign Service, where he met Cherie, who studied Russian history. But he soon diverted from scholastic life. In 1983, a recruiter for the Marines came to campus, and he signed up, without giving it much consideration. "I thought, Wow, that would be cool," he recalled. "It was just a function of my kind of halftime-speech, be-all-you-can-be, get-your-ya-yas-out, young-man stuff." After graduation, Feeley trained to fly helicopters, and for five years he was based at Camp Lejeune, in North Carolina, and served stints in Europe and on aircraft carriers in the Mediterranean. "I had no combat flight hours," he told me, laughing. "I had a very undistinguished military career." Still, his ecumenical views impressed his peers. Tom Hoban, a former Marine buddy who is now a commercial pilot, said, "He was an exception to the rest of us knuckle draggers. But he was definitely one of the guys. And you knew he was going places."

By the late eighties, the Feeleys were married, with two young sons, and they were feeling constrained by life on a military base. Cherie told me, "There were less than ten copies of the Sunday New York Times, and to get one you had to be there at 7 A.M." They passed the Foreign Service exam, and were sent as a team to Latin America: first to the Dominican Republic, and then, in search of "action," to Colombia, where Pablo Escobar had gone to war with the state.

In 2009, Feeley became deputy chief of mission in Mexico, where he found that his forthrightness could get him into trouble, and sometimes out of it. After secret cables released by WikiLeaks revealed that U.S. diplomats—including Feeley—had criticized the Mexican Army's role in the drug war, President Felipe Calderón demanded that the Ambassador be removed. The U.S. acceded, but Feeley was allowed to remain. "He almost single-handedly righted the course," Jorge Guajardo, a former Mexican Ambassador to China, told me. "There were hard feelings in State about the U.S. having caved to Mexico's government, and John was able to navigate both the U.S. and Mexican sides." Fee-

ley recalls that he kept quiet for a few months. Then, in a meeting with Calderón, he asked, "Am I radioactive, Mr. President? Because, if I am, I will make my preparations to leave." Calderón said, "You aren't *toxic*. But maybe stay away from the press, O.K.?" The tension subsided, and Feeley spent several years strengthening his network throughout Latin America. "In Mexico, John was U.S. foreign policy," a U.S. diplomat in Latin America told me. "He was one of just a handful who could walk into any Presidential palace in the region and know someone there."

At the end of January, before Feeley left his post in Panama, I went to visit him and Cherie at their residence, a nineteen-forties hilltop mansion that looked out over Panama City toward the Pacific Ocean. The rooms were cavernous and sparsely decorated. Oversized black-and-white photographs of Nina Simone and Etta James hung on the walls, left over from a jazz-themed party the Feeleys had thrown for the Fourth of July.

When I arrived, a camera crew was there, to film a video that was part of Feeley's extended goodbye to Panama: a skit in which Feeley, declaring that he wanted to stay in the country, told Cherie that he intended to ask some local people for a job. After he marched out, Cherie adopted a telenovela-style despairing look, as if to say, "No one will ever hire him."

Feeley is a showman, and early in his tenure he began filming himself encountering Panamanians outside the confines of *rabiblanco* society—a local term, meaning "white tail," used to describe the traditionally Caucasian upper class. In one video, Feeley, in jeans and a black T-shirt, visited a tiny open-air barbershop, beneath a highway overpass in the gritty neighborhood of El Marañón. While a barber named Jesús trimmed his hair, Feeley said that he was planning to participate in the upcoming Carnaval celebrations. Jesús offered a mild response: "Even though nobody knows you around here, believe me, wherever you go you'll be welcome." Feeley's staff posted the video on social media, and it went viral.

Panamanians are uniquely sensitive to the U.S. presence, and with good reason. The country was founded, in 1903,

on territory split off from Colombia; the U.S., which had conspired in the secession plot, began building the canal the following year and for decades largely controlled the government. Things began to change in 1968, when the left-leaning general Omar Torrijos seized power and began pressing for Panama to gradually assume control of the canal. Twenty-one years later, though, the U.S. military invaded to oust Torrijos's truculent successor, Manuel Noriega, and install a more pliant regime. In 1999, the canal was finally handed back, and since then the U.S. military bases that occupied the Canal Zone have been turned into malls, hotels, and housing developments. But the U.S. dollar remains Panama's official currency, and baseball is the national sport. In many countries, American Ambassadors exert extraordinary influence—acting as interpreters of U.S. policy, resolving disputes, and, less publicly, leading intelligence teams. In Panama, they tend to be seen as agents of empire.

Cherie said that she and Feeley wanted to supplant the old model of U.S. diplomacy, which she described as “male, pale, and Yale.” Contemporary culture, she said, demanded “someone who can go out there on the street, talk in your language, dance with old ladies, drink wine.” After they arrived, in February, 2016, Feeley began showing up at street festivals and amateur boxing matches; he offered weekly English classes in El Chorrillo, an impoverished neighborhood that U.S. forces had bombed heavily in the fight against Noriega. With his public-affairs team, he developed videos to be shared on social media—intending, he said, to portray “Americans, even Ambassadors, as average people who like to drink, dance, party, help others.”

Miroslava Herrera, the Afro-Panamanian singer of the well-known band Afrodisíaco, befriended Feeley. “He brought a different style,” she said. “One time, he trusted me to take him to a late-night folk event in a tough neighborhood. People were surprised but welcoming, and afterward he came to most of my band's shows.” Herrera attended Feeley's jazz-themed party, and recalled, “He had a Who's Who of Panama there,

all sharing a meal. And he made sure that the artist of the evening sang ‘Strange Fruit’”—Billie Holiday's anti-lynching lament.

Foreign-affairs hawks sometimes describe this kind of historical reckoning as “apologizing for America.” But Feeley's most controversial episodes in Panama came, instead, from asserting U.S. power too zealously. He told me, “I wanted to shatter the image of the U.S. Ambassador in Panama as proconsul—even while implementing policies that struck many as proconsul-ish.” Early in his posting, the U.S. Treasury Department accused a Panamanian business tycoon named Abdul Waked of laundering money for drug traffickers. Economic sanc-

tions were directed at his assets, which included a string of duty-free shops, a department-store chain, and *La Estrella de Panamá*, the newspaper. Thousands of jobs were put at risk. Feeley, who described Waked as “one of the world's most significant money launderers and criminal conspirators,” publicly supported the sanctions.

In the end, the case against Waked stalled. (A nephew, Nidal, confessed to a minor charge of bank fraud.) Feeley, who had promised to save jobs where he could, worked quietly to spare *La Estrella*, helping to arrange a deal in which Waked gave 50.1 per cent of his ownership share to a nonprofit. But several of Waked's other businesses were auctioned off, and hundreds of employees lost their jobs. Mariela Sagel, a prominent columnist with *La Estrella*, wrote to me, “Feeley's lightning passage through Panama was as devastating to the self-esteem of Panamanians as it was for the Waked businesses. After less than two years on the job he quit, claiming that he was not in agreement with Trump's policies. If those were his reasons, why didn't he resign when that demented man won the Presidency?”

Panamanians had their own experience with divisive populists. The country's previous President, Ricardo Martinelli, was accused of spying on influential citizens and embezzling forty-five million dollars from a school-lunch program. (Martinelli denies these activities.)

In 2015, he fled to Miami and asked the U.S. government for asylum, while Panama worked to extradite him. As Martinelli secured a mansion in Coral Gables and moved around with apparent freedom, many Panamanians began to suspect that the United States was protecting him. In May, 2017, I mentioned these suspicions to Feeley, but he assured me that the U.S. was pursuing the case. A few weeks later, Martinelli was arrested on a Justice Department warrant. “I pushed hard to have him arrested,” Feeley told me. “It sent a signal that impunity for grand-scale kleptocracy would not be tolerated and could be overcome by state-to-state judicial cooperation.” But, where Feeley saw cooperation, some in Panama saw another example of American overreach. An article in *La Estrella* said that critics of Feeley's work on the case “could not remember an outsider's interference of such magnitude.”

At a poker table in his library, Feeley spoke about the ways in which the Trump Administration's policies were harming U.S. diplomacy. Between foreign posts, Feeley had held positions of increasing responsibility in the State Department, working as a deputy to Colin Powell and eventually becoming the second-ranking diplomat for Western Hemisphere Affairs. Co-workers jokingly referred to him as “the mayor.” He built teams, fostered a crew of loyalists (known as Feeley's Mafia), and strove to be directly involved with policy implementation. “He was a superior bureaucrat—and I say that with love,” the U.S. diplomat in Latin America told me. “If you asked him his opinion he'd give it, and if you didn't he'd give it. And that's a really valuable thing in an organization like ours.” The diplomat added, “He was the one guy we all thought would be Assistant Secretary.”

Now the State Department was in tumult. As Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson had endorsed a thirty-one-per cent budget cut and a hiring freeze on diplomats; in August, half a year into his term, seventy-one ambassadorships were unfilled, along with scores of other senior posts. Feeley was especially concerned about the frayed U.S. relationship with Mexico. When I spoke to him early in Trump's term, the customary channels of communication had been replaced



by a new one, between Jared Kushner and Mexico's foreign secretary. "It's all pretty much just between them," Feeley told me. "There's not really any inter-agency relationships going on right now."

When Tillerson was fired, this March, eight of the ten most senior positions at State were unfilled, leaving no one in charge of arms control, human rights, trade policy, or the environment. For diplomats in the field, the consequences were clearly evident. In 2017, Dave Harden, a longtime Foreign Service officer, was assigned to provide relief to victims of the war in Yemen, one of the world's worst humanitarian disasters. The entire diplomatic staff for the country was barely a dozen people. "We worked out of a three-bedroom house," he said. "It felt like a startup." There was no support from State, and no policy direction, he said: "The whole system was completely broken." Harden resigned last month.

Before Feeley left office, he told me, "We don't get instructions from the U.S. government." He recalled Trump's announcement, in December, 2017, that the U.S. would recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. As the United Nations considered a resolution condemning the move, Nikki Haley, Trump's envoy to the U.N., circulated a threatening letter, saying that Trump "has requested I report back on those who voted against us." Feeley heard nothing in advance about the letter. "Do you think we got a heads-up, to prepare?" he said. "Nothing." Soon afterward, he received outraged telephone calls from Panama's President and Vice-President, Isabel de Saint Malo. Feeley recalled that when Saint Malo called "she said, 'John, friends don't treat friends like this.' All I could say was 'I know. I'm sorry.' We both knew it was going to hurt our personal and institutional relationship. And there was nothing we could do about it."

Under Barack Obama, the approach to the region had focussed on reversing a half century of antagonism toward Cuba. For decades, officials from other countries habitually pointed to America's insistence on isolating Cuba as an emblem of post-colonial intransigence. "We American dips would dutifully respond with our legitimate points about the human-rights abuses on the island,

the soul-crushing nature of a totalitarian system," Feeley said. But, he said, the conversations were a "dialogue of the deaf." Once the Obama Administration restored relations with Cuba, U.S. diplomats found it much easier to negotiate for commercial coöperation and security measures.

Since Trump's election, "we've taken a step back in tone," Feeley said. "We tried to get Kerry to bury the Monroe Doctrine. But now, all of a sudden, it's back." At an Organization of American States event in 2013, Secretary of State John Kerry had promised a roomful of officials that the U.S. would end its interventionism in Latin America. Early this year, during an appearance in Texas, Tillerson called the Monroe Doctrine "clearly . . . a success." The rhetoric has had a chilling effect, Feeley said, "Latins believe that Trump and his senior officials have no real interest in the region, beyond baiting Mexico and tightening the screws on Cuba and Venezuela." With Cuba, the Trump Administration has revived the hostile stance of the Cold War, reducing the Embassy in Havana to a skeleton staff; Cubans who want to apply for U.S. visas must now travel to Guyana. With Venezuela, efforts to initiate dialogue have

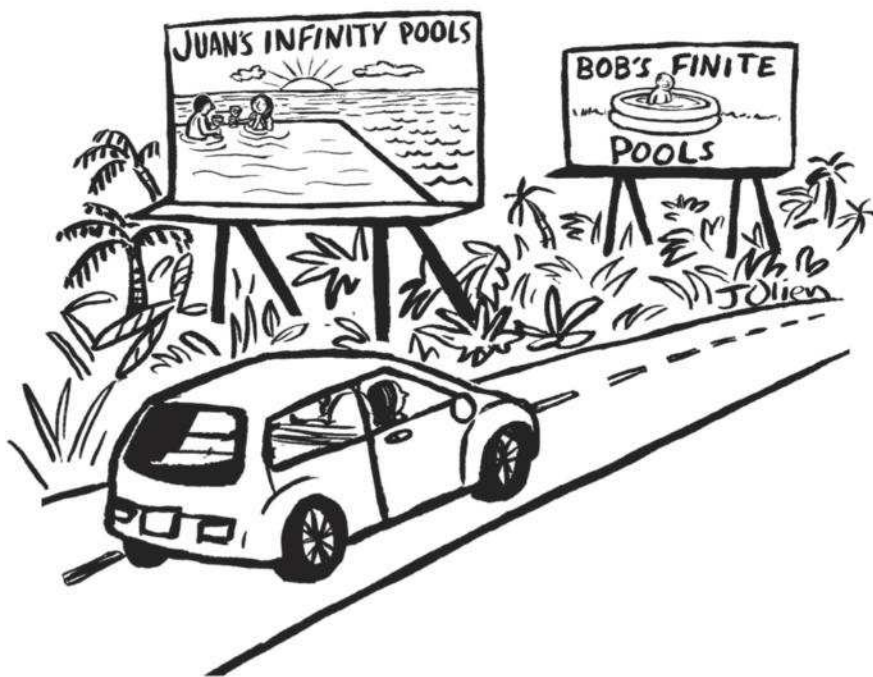
been replaced by White House officials' veiled calls for a military coup. "We have all these ties that bind us—proximity, commerce, shared Judeo-Christian values," Feeley said. "But right now it feels like a market adjustment gone south."

One morning, I drove with Feeley's team across the Bridge of the Americas, which spans the Panama Canal. (The bridge, built by the U.S. and opened in 1962, was initially named in honor of Maurice H. Thatcher, a former governor of the Canal Zone.) On the far side was a building in the style of a pagoda: a monument to China's presence in Panama. "Look how prominent they've become," one of the staffers said. In June, 2016, a major expansion of the canal was completed, and the first ship through was an enormous Chinese freighter, designed to fit the new dimensions. "I got a big American naval ship to park right outside the locks, where the Chinese ship would see it," Feeley said. "And I threw our annual Embassy July 4th party on it." He laughed at the memory, but he knew that the gesture was ultimately futile.

As the United States has retreated from Latin America, China's influence has grown. Since 2005, banks linked to



"This calls for some spooky music."



Beijing have provided more than a hundred and fifty billion dollars in loan commitments to the region—some years, more than the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank combined. In less than two decades, trade between China and Latin America has increased twenty-seven-fold. Feeley said that he tried to alert Washington to China's encroachment, but the new Administration was clearly uninterested in the region. "You don't beat something with nothing, and right now I got nothing," he said.

In late 2016, Feeley became concerned that Panamanian officials were negotiating with their Chinese counterparts to withdraw diplomatic recognition from Taiwan, a longtime antagonist of China. "We suspected that they were playing footsie, but they never let on," he said. "I asked President Varela then, and again in February, 2017. He denied anything, and I reported it home. I rang bells all over Washington and got nothing there, either." In June of last year, Panama's government declared that it would no longer recognize Taiwan. Feeley found out an hour before the announcement; he had called Varela to discuss Martinelli's case, and the President blurted out the China decision. Feeley subsequently learned that the Chinese and the Panamanians had hidden their discussions by meeting secretly in Madrid and Beijing.

The Taiwanese government furiously denounced Panama for succumbing to "checkbook diplomacy," but Panamanian officials denied that the decision was motivated by economics. Then, last November, Varela travelled to Beijing and joined President Xi Jinping in a ceremony to celebrate their new friendship, at which he signed nineteen separate trade deals. At around the same time, the China Harbour Engineering Company began work in Panama on a hundred-and-sixty-five-million-dollar port.

"The fact is, it makes sense for Panama to recognize China, just as we do," Feeley said. "The Chinese effect in commercial relations is going to grow exponentially. Its presence here is real, and it has the means and the will." Panama could well become China's Latin-American hub; the One Belt, One Road initiative, working with Varela's government, is planning to build a railway from Panama City to near the Costa Rican border. But, Feeley added, "the Panamanians are naïve about the Chinese." He told me that he had worked to persuade Panama's security ministry not to sign a communications-technology deal with the Chinese, partly out of concern that they would use the infrastructure for espionage, as they have elsewhere. The Chinese company Huawei, which has headquarters in Panama, lobbied hard "to delay, divert, and get the contract."

In the end, the work was contracted to an American firm, General Dynamics, but the negotiations were difficult.

In a more prosaic illustration of soft power, Feeley noted that a welcome party for the new Chinese Ambassador had drawn an unusually illustrious crowd. "The President, who never used to go to these things, went to pay homage," he complained. Varela's government has quietly leased the Chinese a huge building plot, on the strip of land that juts into the ocean at the mouth of the canal, to use as the site of a new Embassy. Sailors on every ship in the canal will see the proof of China's rising power, as they enter a waterway that once symbolized the global influence of the United States.

In public appearances, Feeley devised a way to explain away Trump's offenses: "Well, the President's words speak for themselves." But, he said, "as time went on, I thought to myself, Dude, there's only so long you can skate along with that." After the rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, when Trump refused to condemn violence by white supremacists, Feeley reflected on a story that his grandfather Frank used to tell. On his way home from the war, he had been joined by a fellow New York City firefighter, an African-American man named Willy Brown. Assigned to a troop ship, the two had shown up to their bunk room, where they were faced by white men who told them, "Niggers aren't allowed here." There was a standoff, and violence was averted only when Willy said, "Frank, don't worry—I know where to go." Afterward, the men warned Frank, "You better sleep with one eye open, nigger lover." For two weeks, Frank avoided the bunk room, spending his days playing craps on deck. "I didn't get much sleep," he liked to say, "but I won enough money to buy myself a DeSoto when I got home."

Feeley said, "My granddad wasn't a civil-rights activist—more informed by his Catholic faith. But he was very much a pro-civil-rights guy. I know it sounds hokey, but, after Charlottesville, I thought about how people really had to fight hard to protect those kinds of values, and how we've made so much progress and yet we know more has to be made—so for God's sakes don't fucking throw the thing in reverse."

Over time, the moral failings at home seemed to compound the tactical failings abroad. In December, Feeley drafted his resignation letter to Trump. He was decorous in explaining his reasons. "As a junior foreign service officer, I signed an oath to serve faithfully the president and his administration in an apolitical fashion, even when I might not agree with certain policies," he wrote. "My instructors made clear that if I believed I could not do that, I would be honor bound to resign. That time has come."

On a trip to Washington, Feeley delivered the letter to a colleague at the White House, asking him to keep it to himself for a few weeks while he privately notified officials and staff members that he was resigning. "I really had the goddam thing synchronized down to the wire, like 'Mission: Impossible,'" Feeley said. "I literally had a calendar of who I would tell when." On the morning of January 11th, with his meetings complete, he put a message on the Embassy Web site, announcing that he was retiring, "for personal reasons."

The next day, he and his team visited the canal, where the U.S.S. Fitzgerald was passing through. The ship had suffered a collision off the coast of Japan, killing seven servicemen, and Feeley wanted to film a message for the survivors. Cherie told me that, as he spoke to a small crowd, "I could see the press officer on the phone, looking concerned. Meanwhile, I looked down at my phone and saw, like, forty-seven WhatsApps from friends and family. I said, 'John, something's going on.'"

That morning, reports were circulating that Trump had referred to a number of developing countries as "shitholes." As rumors spread that Feeley had resigned because of Trump's gaffe, the State Department official in charge of public diplomacy, Steve Goldstein, reportedly leaked Feeley's letter, announcing his real reasons. Afterward, Goldstein talked to reporters. "Everyone has a line that they will not cross," he said. "If the Ambassador feels that he can no longer serve . . . then he has made the right decision for himself and we respect that."

Feeley was incensed that the letter was leaked, but he said nothing publicly about his motivations. Instead, he made the series of videos in which he

went looking for jobs around Panama City. He tried out as a taxi-driver, a fireman, a helicopter pilot, and a makeup assistant for an exuberant drag queen called La One Two. He returned to the barbershop in El Marañón, and bumbled through a disastrous audition as an apprentice barber. As the videos were posted online, people commented on the Embassy's Facebook page, offering jobs. Most entries were jokes, but a few contained names and phone numbers. One was a straightforward proposition. "Ay, sweet daddy," it read. "I will give you half my bed, and I'll cook for you and you won't have to work."

On Feeley's last day at the Embassy, his staff members surprised him with a farewell ceremony, in which they lowered the American flag and presented it to him. "After the anthem, they played Bruce Springsteen's 'Born in the U.S.A.,'" Feeley told me. "It was the only time I became publicly emotional." In a video taken on the colonnaded porch of the Embassy, he can be heard saying, "I am proud of you—and I will always be a friend to everybody here today." His voice rose until he was almost shouting. "And I will always help you feel proud of this flag. God bless you all." Then he walked off, with one hand covering his eyes.

Feeley was not alone in wanting to resign. As morale sank in the State Department, veteran diplomats had been leaving, in what some called "the exodus." David Rank, the senior American diplomat in China, stepped down last June, after Trump withdrew from the Paris accord. "You have decisions that the rest of the world fundamentally disagrees with," Rank said recently. He recalled that, on September 11, 2001, "I got a call from the Embassy of an allied country seconds after the attack. The person said, 'Whatever you need, you can count on us.' Now that we pulled out of Paris and Iran, swept tariffs across the world, I wonder if we're going to get that call again."

In Latin America, the loss of expertise was particularly severe. William Brownfield, an Assistant Secretary of State who had served as Ambassador to Colombia and to Venezuela, decided

to leave, and this February Tom Shannon, the department's third-highest-ranking official and for decades the presiding expert on Venezuela, turned in his resignation. Jeffrey DeLaurentis, who in 2016 was nominated to be the first U.S. Ambassador to Cuba in half a century, is also leaving. One of Feeley's colleagues explained the widespread dismay: "In terms of policy, what is there? Apart from migration issues, there's the NAFTA reboot and stronger means being advocated for use against Venezuela. I don't see much else. There is also the sense of an attempt to eviscerate anything Barack Obama did. I've never seen that before in my career."

In March, Roberta Jacobson announced her resignation, after a three-decade career. Jacobson was appointed Ambassador to Mexico in 2015, but Marco Rubio, the Republican senator from Florida, stalled her confirmation for nearly a year. She took up her post in May, 2016, as Trump's Presidential campaign got under way, so her time as Ambassador was spent mostly managing fallout from the new Administration. In her resignation, Jacobson avoided a direct rebuke, saying only that her decision to move on to "new challenges and adventures" was especially difficult because Mexico and the U.S. were at "a crucial moment."

Privately, Jacobson was more forthcoming. "The level of cooperation we've gotten is something you don't just build overnight," she told me. "We are still the preferred commercial and economic partner, but we have to be trustworthy. The mere fact that in some sectors, especially in agriculture, Mexican buyers are beginning to look elsewhere should be a warning to us that we may be starting to lose a clear advantage. This could prove true in security or migration as well."

Feeley pointed out that leftist leaders were in retreat throughout Latin America, and that popular movements were rejecting old habits of corrupt governance. It was, he said, "the greatest opportunity to recoup the moral high ground that we have had in decades." Instead, we were abandoning the region. "I keep waiting for a Latin



leader to paraphrase Angela Merkel and say, 'We can no longer count on the Americans to provide leadership.'"

The U.S. diplomat in the region told me that it would take a long, concerted effort to restore the effectiveness of American diplomacy. "We're into multiple years of repair needed already—say, five," he said. "It's bad." As the country works to mend relationships with allies, it will face severe shortages of experts in the working details of global affairs, and of experienced mentors for new recruits. At the State Department, the diplomat added, "we don't have arms. We don't have a huge budget. All we have to compete with is the credibility of our senior leadership. If you don't have those things, you're dealing from a position of weakness. And the way to repair it is by putting people forward who can tackle problems—people like John." He went on, "This is happening at a very dangerous time for our country. Some people liken it to an own goal. I'd say it's more like a self-inflicted Pearl Harbor."

Jorge Guajardo, the former Mexican Ambassador, told me that the loss of prestige was already evident. "In Latin America, the relationship with the U.S. has gone from aspirational to transactional," he said. "In countries like Mexico, we used to say, when there was a case of corruption, 'If this happened in the U.S.A. . . .' But we don't say that anymore. There used to be a kind of deference to the U.S. Not anymore. If something doesn't benefit Mexico, we'll walk away." In the past, he said, Latin-American countries looking for business partners might select a U.S. company over one from another country, because America represented higher ethical standards. Since Trump's election, he said, things had changed. "There's this idea that the States is just like the rest of us. That's the saddest thing to me."

Before Feeley left Panama, he secured a job as a commentator for Univision, the Miami-based Spanish-language media conglomerate. (Univision also employs Jorge Ramos, a Mexican-American journalist who had a public confrontation with Trump during his Presidential campaign.) He and Cherie got an apartment in Miami, on the thirty-eighth floor of a tower on Brickell Avenue.

In late March, soon after Feeley returned to the U.S., I went to see him. He showed me around the apartment, distractedly waving toward a new leather couch and indicating the view of the city. After exchanging a few logistical details with Cherie—they were headed to the Bahamas for the Easter break—Feeley suggested that we go outside to talk.

The Miami River runs behind the apartment building, and we sat on a bench, looking at yachts gliding past. Feeley had dressed for the South Florida weather—he wore a blue polo shirt, jeans, and desert boots—but he was still feeling in limbo. He hadn't yet started at Univision. "It's pretty weird," he said. "I've always been part of a self-selecting structure, and I don't have it here. I played organized sports, went to a boys' school, served in the Marines and then the Foreign Service." He seemed daunted by the prospect of starting a new career. "I had a pretty easy run to sixty-five without really having to reinvent myself," he said. Still, he was aware that his former colleagues were in a much more difficult situation. "Unless you're at the senior-most levels of the Department of State, I would never think that others should do as I did," he said.

Among the people I spoke to who had remained at State, several were cautiously optimistic about Mike Pompeo, who had replaced Tillerson. The U.S. diplomat in Latin America said, "We're seeing Pompeo doing repair work already. The crystal-clear message we're getting is 'We need you.' We're hearing the same from C.I.A." Feeley was less hopeful, but he believed that Foreign Service officers were willing to work with the Trump Administration. "I don't know of a single Trump supporter who is an F.S.O.," he said. "But I also don't know of a single F.S.O. who hopes for failure, myself included. Far from the Alex Jones caricature of a bunch of pearl-clutching, cookie-pushing effetes, we have an entire corps of people who will do everything they can to successfully implement American foreign policy, as it is determined by the national leaders—to include Mike Pompeo." But, Feeley suggested, Pompeo would need to moderate his boss's instincts. "I just do not believe that, with Trump's rhetoric and a lot of his policy actions, we are going to recoup our leadership po-

sition in the world," he said. "Because the evidence is already in, and we're not. We're not just walking off the field. We're taking the ball and throwing a finger at the rest of the world."

When I asked Feeley whether he thought Trump was a traitor, he looked startled and turned away. Staring out at the river, he replied, "I don't know. I couldn't talk about that."

"You're a private citizen now."

"Yeah, but I still wouldn't—there are still things. I wouldn't comment on it." Feeley wouldn't look at me.

"Are you worried that he is?" I asked.

"You mean, like, 'Manchurian Candidate' shit?"

Finally, Feeley ventured an answer. Trump was "clearly a flawed man, much more flawed than other Presidents I've served," he said. "The world is an unstable and complex enough place that we, and the U.S. President, should not be the cause of more chaos. But I would not comment on traitor. Traitor's a big thing."

Feeley's new job at Univision will also involve diplomacy, of a sort: he plans to travel the U.S. with a camera crew, talking to Americans in the way that he talked with Panamanians in videos for social media. "As much as I dislike what the President says, I also know a lot of his supporters," he said. "They're my Marine Corps friends—they're my brothers." His goal was to facilitate honest talk about immigration. "My own desired end state is for a United States that can control its own borders but also welcome the trade that comes across," he said. "I want to go out into Middle America and talk to people like my U.S. Marine buddies, and ask them why they want a wall. And I'll let them speak their piece. Then I'll talk with a migrant and ask him about his own experiences. And I'll get the two of them to talk to each other."

Laughing, he said, "I'm the reverse crossover—the opposite of Gloria Estefan. I started north and went south." Turning serious again, he said, "The bottom line is, I know the lunch-pail guys have legitimate grievances. I also know that they and the migrants have more in common than not. So, if I can broker a conversation, then that's what I'll do. It may not melt hearts like 'How the Grinch Stole Christmas,' but I'll give it my best shot." ♦

SHOUTS & MURMURS



ENCOURAGEMENT FOR STRUGGLING CREATIVES

BY RIANE KONC

At twenty-three, Oprah was fired from her first reporting job. This is the beginning and the end of the things you have in common with Oprah.

Dance like no one's watching. No one *is* watching. Your YouTube channel has zero subscribers.

The most important things in life aren't things. They're the feelings you get when you can afford to buy things.

In improv, as in life, the answer is always "Yes, and," especially if the question is "Are all of your friends looking for reasons they can't come to your improv show?"

Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss, who cares? You were just day-lighting as a moon hunter to pay the bills until your script gets optioned.

Never, never, never, never, never, never, never give up your parents' health coverage.

"There is nothing to writing. All you do is sit down at a typewriter and bleed," which is exactly what happens five to eight days out of the month.

You miss a hundred per cent of the shots you don't take. And, if you're anything like Wayne Gretzky's loser son, you also miss a hundred per cent of the shots you do take.

Some people see things as they are and say, "Why?" At night, you dream things that never were and think, This is the breakthrough idea I've been waiting for! But when you wake up in the

morning you find, written in your Notes app, something incomprehensible, like "Keanu Reeves decides puppy murder."

"What doesn't kill you makes you stronger" is a line from a song by Kelly Clarkson, who—judge her all you want—has achieved more commercial and artistic success than you could ever imagine.

No one can make you feel inferior without your consent, but you just spent your afternoon trying to turn that saying into a B.D.S.M. joke for your eighty-seven Twitter followers, so ... I don't know, man.

No person on her deathbed ever regrets having spent too much time at work. What she might regret is having spent two years of her life making a video short called "Drunk Dave Goes to the Car Wash."

There's no "I" in "team." But there *is* an "I" in the question "Is anyone going to come to my one-woman show entitled 'Pearls Before Wine?'" And the answer is no.

At twenty-eight, J. K. Rowling was a single mother living on welfare. You stopped reading the "Harry Potter" books when they got too long. Also, married or single, you would be a terrible parent.

Remember that just when the caterpillar thought the world was over she became a beautiful butterfly. Which is to say, we can't pay you at this time, but, in a way, doesn't the exposure more than make up for it? ♦

Canova's George Washington

On view through September 23



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Antonio Canova (1757–1822), *Modello for George Washington* (detail), 1818, plaster, Gipsoteca e Museo Antonio Canova, Possagno, Italy; photo by Fabio Zonta, Fondazione Canova online, Possagno

ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

UNBREAKABLE

The fearless cinema of Claire Denis.

BY ALICE GREGORY



One night many years ago, a French family was driving through the North Region of Cameroon when they ran out of gas. As they scrambled to refill the tank, the car was surrounded by a pride of lions. To protect their young daughter, the parents locked her in a metal trunk. The animals circled the vehicle continuously, and to distract herself from danger the girl repeated her own name. Over the years, the story of the little blond French girl besieged by lions became something of a legend in the area. It was said by some that she had survived for fifteen days under the hot African sun.

Decades after the story first circu-

lated, the little girl returned to Cameroon from Paris, where she had come of age. She was still small, and her hair remained blond, but she was now in her sixties. She had become a director and was there to work on a feature film. Sometimes, when scouting locations in the bush with her camera-laden crew, she would come upon locals and introduce herself. "Oh, but it's you," they would say. "The girl with the lions."

Only as an adult did Claire Denis realize that she hadn't been afraid of the lions all those years ago. She suspects that she was too young to be frightened, she has said, and remembers instead a feeling of calm remove from the world,

as though she were "in a different time frame." She recalls how the animals, aglow in the headlights, appeared pale, almost white. "I thought it was the most beautiful sight," she told me. She rolled her hips from side to side. "They were so cool and so slow."

The incident could be a scene from one of Denis's films. The dialogue is sparse, and the cast of characters is limited. The themes are there, too: the refusal of victimhood, the embrace of solitude amid chaos, and race as an unremarked on but glaring element of a situation that is easy to imagine but impossible to fully explain.

"Chocolat," Denis's first feature, from 1988, was also shot in Cameroon. It tells the story of a complicated friendship between a white girl, named France, and Protée, her family's black adult servant, in the years leading up to the country's independence, in 1960. Protée is France's only companion, and through their asymmetrical alliance we feel the creeping evil of colonialism. Like water, it finds its way into even the most hidden interpersonal crevices, which no amount of good will or innocence or even love can caulk. In almost every shot, Denis acknowledges the cultivated ignorance and cruel indifference of whiteness. Protée rarely speaks, and in one scene, in which he serves dinner, the camera cuts off his body at the neck. Denis has said, of "Chocolat," "I think I had a desire to express a certain guilt I felt as a child raised in a colonial world."

Denis's films can be hard to find in the United States, but she is beloved by many young American filmmakers for, among other things, her artful confrontations with race. Barry Jenkins, the director of "Moonlight," which won last year's Academy Award for Best Picture, told me, "I get the sense that she truly just doesn't give a shit, that it doesn't occur to her that she shouldn't be 'allowed' to handle this material. It's not a foreign world to her, in a way it might appear to be when you look at her and see a white Frenchwoman." He continued, "You watch 'Chocolat,' and it's remarkable. This is a first movie by someone who has not one question about what her rights are as a storyteller."

Since "Chocolat," Denis has directed a handful of shorts and documentaries and a dozen feature films. These include

The attention Denis pays her actors is an absorption that resembles love.

a drama about cockfighting in Paris ("No Fear, No Die," 1990); a vampire thriller that French audiences booed for its extreme violence and deviant sexuality ("Trouble Every Day," 2001); and a dreamy reimagining of the philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy's account of his heart transplant, shot in locations including Tahiti and Switzerland ("The Intruder," 2004). "White Material," released in the U.S. in 2010, was many Americans' introduction to Denis's work. A sort of companion piece to "Chocolat," it tells the story of a Frenchwoman, played by Isabelle Huppert, who refuses to leave her family's coffee plantation in an unnamed African country, despite the rebel violence erupting just outside its walls.

Denis's films are filled with lush scenes of the natural world—African deserts, snowy Alpine fields, and the mineral-green waters of the South Pacific—and characters who tend to reveal themselves not through dialogue but through how they move and look. Alex Descas, one of the actors with whom Denis has worked longest, and who credits her with writing complicated, realistic roles for black actors at a time when few others did, described her artistic mode succinctly: "Film is not theatre," he told me. Last month, at a screening of her latest movie, "Let the Sunshine In," at the IFC Center, in Manhattan, Denis said, "I once read that I like to film bodies. No! But, if you choose someone, that person *has* a body. They have feet, hands, hair, breasts, ass—all of that is part of what is important." The film stars Juliette Binoche, as a divorced painter who dates men she shouldn't: a married banker, a narcissistic actor, a standoffish curator. "She wanted my character to be beautiful and desirable and luminous," Binoche told me. In the final shot, the camera—which one critic described as "smitten"—stays on her smiling face, which is ablaze with delusion and hope. Denis, according to Binoche, "works like a portrait painter."

Wesley Morris, a cultural critic for the *Times*, compared Denis's work to a stew that's been cooking all week—a reduced and potent pleasure. "My favorite image in any of her movies, or maybe in *all* movies, is from 'The Intruder,'" he said. He went on to describe the scene in which Beatrice Dalle, who plays a dog breeder living in the Jura Mountains, is pulled by huskies through a snowy for-

est on a sled. "She's in utter ecstasy," he said. "Very few women in the history of cinema have ever looked that happy doing anything." Careening through the snow, she shouts commands. "Faster!" she yells. "Go, go, go, go, go!" Her grin is wide but in flashes looks more like a grimace. As with many of Denis's heroines, and Denis herself, the pleasure Dalle's character experiences is not far from fear.

When I met Denis in Paris, in late March, it was just warm enough to forgo a winter coat but still cold enough to regret it. Denis, who turned seventy-two last month and can't weigh much more than a hundred pounds, wore stiff selvedge jeans and a Levi's denim jacket buttoned all the way up, like a tiny Edwardian greaser.

We walked from her editing suite, in a newly gentrified neighborhood in the Twelfth Arrondissement, to a brasserie down the street that she and her producers rag on constantly but patronize regularly. A recent throat surgery had roughened Denis's already gravelly voice—it sounded at times as though she were impersonating a sexily androgynous Frenchwoman, instead of merely being one.

Denis was carrying a backpack in lieu of a purse, and she flung it carelessly into the banquette. "Time is very slow and yet very fast," she said, without making eye contact. "Astrophysicists say it does not even really exist." (We conducted all our conversations in English, which Denis speaks fluently, with some odd turns of phrase.) She was in the final weeks of editing "High Life," her English-language debut, about a band of convicts sent into space to harvest energy from a black hole, and had rescheduled our plans several times. I was left with the impression of trying to coax, cajole, and ultimately capture a particularly dexterous pet—and with the sense that she felt my presence was a waste of time, at a moment when she needed all that she could get.

"High Life," which cost millions more to make than any of Denis's previous films, seems, on its surface, dramatically divergent from the rest of her body of work, yet versions of its premise swirled inside Denis's mind for more than a decade. For years, she had wanted to tell the story of the last person in the world.

In the film, the galactic convicts perish one by one. Only a single felon survives, along with his daughter, who was born on the spaceship. (Olafur Eliasson, the Danish-Icelandic conceptual artist who a decade ago erected waterfalls in the East River, designed the spaceship for the movie.) Their relationship—literally forged in a vacuum, with a whiff of the taboo—was her primary interest in the story. "It's feminine and masculine," Denis said. "It's family blood but it's not the same sex."

The script, which Denis wrote with her longtime screenwriter, Jean-Pol Fargeau, took years to complete. (Zadie Smith and Nick Laird worked on a draft that Denis ultimately rejected.) Though Denis treats scripts as provisional and merely suggestive documents, hers are full of vivid sensory detail. When "High Life"'s main character, played by Robert Pattinson, is introduced, he is "pressed against the exterior of the spaceship, like a mountain climber against a sheer cliff face." Later, when he changes out of his spacesuit, he does so "like a knight removing armor."

Denis saw Pattinson in "Twilight," she said, and was struck by his "heart-rending charisma." She had wanted someone older for "High Life"—she thought at one point of Philip Seymour Hoffman—but after meeting with Pattinson in Los Angeles and Paris she realized that "he was already in the film." She went on, "When he said to me, 'Are you sure?' I said, 'It's already too late. It's you or nobody else.'" She chose "High Life"'s other stars, including Juliette Binoche and the English model and actress Mia Goth, with similarly instinctual possessiveness. In the summer of 2015, Denis and her producer, Oliver Dungey, flew to Atlanta to meet André Benjamin, the rapper, actor, producer, adroit hat-wearer, and all-around cultural icon, better known by his stage name, André 3000, and for his flamboyant role in the Atlanta hip-hop duo OutKast. Denis had enjoyed Benjamin's lead performance in "All Is by My Side," a 2014 bio-pic of Jimi Hendrix, and she had got it in her mind that he should play a part in "High Life."

The three had agreed to meet at the St. Regis Hotel's restaurant for lunch. "Here we are," Dungey recalled, "me—this sort of posh, square English guy—

and Claire—this scornful French lady—and in walks André.” Benjamin said, “I’ll be honest with you. I don’t know who you are or what you want, but everyone is telling me I have to meet with you and I’ve got to do this film.”

“They immediately hit it off,” Dungey said. “I’m just sitting there, picking at grits. The purpose of the trip was accomplished within thirty seconds.”

The only other people in the restaurant were two Gambian ladies visiting from, of all places, the Cotswolds. “Why were they there?” Dungey said. “I don’t know. But, then again, why were *we* there?”

“Claire and André were talking about eating snake,” he continued. He shrugged in a manner that suggested his exclusion from the conversation had been so profound as to be painless. “Claire was saying how it gives you this vitality, this life force. And one of these women from Gambia turns around and says, ‘She’s right!’”

Moments later, a statuesque woman arrived. “She waltzes in and apparently knows André,” Dungey said. “She hugs him, asks how he’s been, blah, blah, blah. This woman looks fantastic: she has ribbons in her hair, lots of beads, she’s colorfully dressed. André introduces her to us as Dana.” Here Dungey paused, smiled, and shook his head. “This is not Dana. This is Queen Latifah.”

“Claire is obviously taken with this woman while having no idea who she is. She just kept telling her she looked like a queen,” he continued. (Denis insists that she was well aware of Dana’s identity.) “The ladies from Gambia know who she is, though, and they also know who André is, and they ask for a photo. Queen Latifah ended up paying for all our lunches without saying anything.”

Dungey added, “It was really one of the most charming and weird moments of my entire life.”

Claire Denis was eight weeks old when she and her mother moved from Paris to Cameroon, where her father was serving as a French colonial administrator. In the course of the next thirteen years, the family expanded to include several more children, and lived

in territories that would become Mali, Djibouti, and Burkina Faso. Denis’s parents supported decolonization, and she is adamant that “Chocolat” is not autobiographical. “My parents would certainly not have had someone serve them meals. I wasn’t raised like that,” she told me. “I was raised in a world that probably never actually existed, the world my parents hoped for . . . where there was

no separation between people. I was raised in a dreamland.” Denis was at times the only white child in her class. “It was very embarrassing,” she said. “Not because I was white, but because I was not black.”

Like the space-born girl in “High Life,” Denis grew up knowing little about the place her family came from.

They returned to France when Denis was thirteen, after she and her sister contracted polio. She has said that she arrived “already nostalgic for another world.” In Paris, she read the postcolonial theorist Frantz Fanon’s masterpiece, “The Wretched of the Earth.” The book, written in the middle of the Algerian war, argues that colonial subjects suffer not just from material indignities and humiliations but also, more painfully and perversely, from an internalized inferiority, which Fanon believed only violence could dismantle. Denis once said, “When you are fourteen or fifteen and you read ‘Les Damnés de la Terre,’ and you’ve been raised in the midst of the African colonies, it shocks you. Really, that experience will stay with me for the rest of my life.”

She left home at seventeen, married a much older man, a photographer, and moved to London. They separated after a few years, but he encouraged her to return to Paris to study filmmaking at the Institute for Advanced Cinematographic Studies, the rigorous and highly technical film school where Louis Malle and Alain Resnais were trained. After graduating, in the early seventies, Denis began a traditional apprenticeship, assisting mostly on films shot in Paris.

Unlike her characters, who tend to be laconic and aloof, and her narratives, which are elliptical and enigmatic, Denis speaks fluently, linearly, and sometimes at great length, with an instinctual com-

mand of pacing, foreshadowing, and suspense. Much of what she said to me was expressed in the form of stories, which she delivered as if for the first time.

One winter, Denis said, she was living alone in a sixth-floor studio apartment “in a good district of Paris,” as she put it, “not a poor little dimly lit street in a vague suburb.” She was working on a movie, and, after a long day, a co-worker dropped her off at home. It was freezing cold, she recalled, “and I was wearing those eight clothes you wear when you’re working nights in film.” Beneath her military parka were three sweaters and a large scarf.

When she reached her building, “I went to the elevator, and I pressed the button, and the elevator never arrived,” she said. “So I opened the door to the staircase and started climbing, and then I realized the light in the staircase was not functioning—but there was a window, and I knew my building by heart.” She was between the second and third floors when, “suddenly, somebody took me by the hood of my coat, and I saw a knife in front of my eyes and then saw it come to my throat. And then very quickly—you become Einstein at that moment—I realized the elevator was not working, the light was not working, and now this knife: this is a setup.” Denis went on, “I start talking to the guy, keep pretending I was accepting.” He cut her hand and told her he wanted to cut her eyes. “I knew, all the time, if I lost control at that moment I was dead, or wounded so bad it was the same. In the end, after having accepted certain things, I escaped him and ran to the sixth floor with my bag, bleeding.” The man chased her up the stairs but she made it into her apartment.

“It took me one or two hours before I could call the police,” she continued. “My nervous system had done so much.” They took her to the station, where, she said, the officer who helped her file a report commented, “I don’t know what you’re doing in your life to be out at 1 A.M., wandering alone . . . I have to tell you, if you were my daughter, I would have preferred that my daughter accept to be killed than to be sullied.” Denis “realized that no one believed in my dignity, in my strength, in my lucidity,” she said. The last time she saw the officer, she said to him, “In a way, you insulted



me more than I was hurt by the rapist." Denis told me, "I did recover. I did recover."

In subsequent years, Denis was an extra in Robert Bresson's "Four Nights of a Dreamer" and cast a movie for Andrei Tarkovsky. She also worked as an assistant director for Jacques Rivette and Costa-Gavras, and travelled through the Southwest with Wim Wenders, for "Paris, Texas" and "Wings of Desire," and the Louisiana bayou with Jim Jarmusch, for "Down by Law." Wenders had wanted someone "strong and tough," he told me. He recalled that when he met Denis at the Houston airport, in 1983, a "fragile and relatively petite blond young woman came out of the gate." Denis said, "At the very beginning, they would say, Can you drive? I said yes. Can you do this? I said yes. Can you jump? I said yes. I said yes to everything, and sometimes it wasn't true. It wasn't that I was eager to prove that a woman could be as strong as a man, but I thought, If I say no, then it's finished."

In 1994, a few months after Nelson Mandela was elected President of South Africa, Denis was invited to a film festival in Johannesburg. She travelled there with Alex Descas, and they decided to make a detour to Durban, the childhood home of the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa. Speaking of his poems, Denis said, "There was something I could always read in between the lines. I think because we had both been babies in these faraway countries—far from our language and our grandparents and our food."


They stayed at a hotel in Durban with a view of the ocean. "Now, when I see the sea, I simply must swim, even if it is winter," Denis said. "I put on my swimming costume and ran to the beach. And now that Mandela was elected, I thought, no longer would the beach be separated between blacks and whites. Alex asked me, 'Are you sure?' I said, 'Yes!' I ran down there. I was alone on the beach, I swam. And I rested in the sand, and suddenly I saw a teacher with little children, little black boys and girls, walking at the edge of the waves and singing. They began playing in the water, and I was in the exaltation of being in the *Indian Ocean* in *Durban* in *South Africa* at the bottom of the *earth*, so I


ran! I ran to the teacher and the little children and I said, 'Good morning! Good morning!' I jumped into the water next to them, and they screamed of fear. I politely moved away and excused myself. I suddenly realized it had been only two months and it was not the proper thing to do."

The encounter, as Denis described it, features the sublime natural landscape and stark colors of some of her most vivid scenes. Less a storyteller than she is an image-maker, she once became fixated on re-creating the painter Francis Bacon's "very peculiar" colors, which make it impossible to tell whether the flesh he depicts is "raw or rotten." Another time, to prepare Descas for a role she took him to a Jean-Michel Basquiat exhibition, to point out the paintings' "deathlike smiles."

"She's creating her own world," Vincent Maravel, a co-founder of Wild Bunch, a European company that has distributed Denis's films, said. "She doesn't really look at what other people think or do. She's never fashionable. She just describes her obsessions the way they are, not the way they should be, or in a way that might be palatable. She isn't trying to represent *France* or *women* or her *era*." Maravel cited as an example "35 Shots of Rum," from 2008, which depicts a college-aged girl and her loving father, an African immigrant and widower: "They're not rich, but they're not gangsters. She made a movie about what is probably the majority of France, and she just looked at these people in a human way." Almost the entire cast is black, and although students in a classroom scene chatter about Frantz Fanon, there are few explicit allusions to race. It's as if the matter were both too obvious and too beside the point to bother addressing at all.

Similarly, in "High Life," some of the convicts are black, but they are not a message-telegraphing majority. When the film's American producers read the script, they urged Denis to change the fact that the first character to die was a black man. In the U.S. today, they told her, this was just not done. For Americans, Denis said, the problem of racism "is buried so deep. For me, it was not deep." She refused to change the plot, writing in more dialogue instead. In the final version, André Benjamin's character says, "See? Even in outer space,





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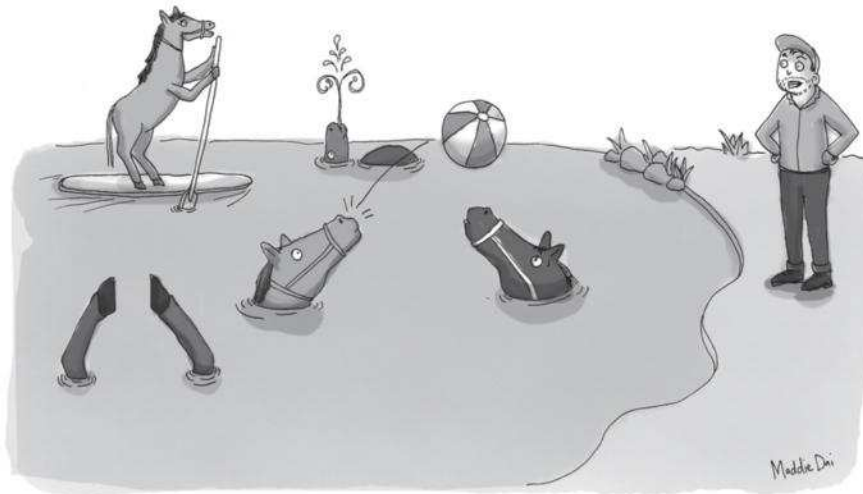
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THE LEGENDARY BIRTH OF AN IDIOM



"I said drink, damn it, drink!"

the black ones are the first to die."

With "High Life," Denis will inevitably receive more international attention than she ever has, but for years many filmmakers have spoken of her as a sort of secret saint. Along with Barry Jenkins, the director Josh Safdie is an admirer, and Greta Gerwig has said that seeing Denis's "Beau Travail" (1999) made her want to make movies of her own. Based impressionistically on Melville's "Billy Budd," "Beau Travail," shot in Djibouti, follows a group of French legionnaires. Stationed near the salt flats of Lake Assal, without imminent assignment, they alternate between aggression and existential futility. We watch them perform an endless series of almost absurdist rituals: peeling vegetables, ironing creases into trousers that nobody but themselves will see, performing military exercises that resemble ballet choreography.

"It's such a macho, minimalist film," said Andrew Lauren, one of the producers of "High Life" and its financier, who saw "Beau Travail" years ago, on the recommendation of his father, the designer Ralph Lauren. "When this new project came to us, and I went back through Denis's filmography, I was, like, 'Wait, *she* did "Beau Travail"? I would have sworn that a man made it. She's like the precursor to Kathryn Bigelow."

Barry Jenkins told me, "There were

sequences of 'Moonlight' that just would not have been filmed the way they were had I not been familiar with Claire's work. Certain things about framing the men and the pace at which we edited their interactions share a lot with 'Beau Travail.'" He laughed as he admitted that, without realizing it, he had shot a scene in "Moonlight" that almost exactly re-created one in "Beau Travail." In both, men stand alone, languorously smoking cigarettes, as plumes of smoke intermittently float across the frame. "Her metaphors are so delicately constructed," Jenkins said. "Not every audience member is going to get them, and that's O.K. She places a tremendous amount of trust in the audience."

Unlike Denis's past movies, which were shot on location, mostly in France and Africa, "High Life" was largely filmed at a studio in Cologne, during two months last fall. The cast and Denis stayed at a hotel thirty minutes away. The drive, made each morning and night—often with a P.A. behind the wheel who was described to me as "the worst driver in the history of mankind"—took them past oil refineries, sausage factories, and tractor-trailer bordellos that were parked, with German efficiency, along the highway exits.

By all reports, it was a trying experience. Denis was unused to filming in a

studio. She made scene changes constantly and with little warning, sometimes by text message. Benjamin described an atmosphere of inadvertent method acting. "These convicts are all supposed to be from different places—they don't know one another at first, and they're just trying to make it," he said. "And, on set, it was the same! I'm this guy from Atlanta, Claire's French, obviously, most of the guys on set are German, the actors didn't know each other. It was a trip." Robert Pattinson, who, several people said, spent much of his time on set asking existential questions—*Wait, who am I in this movie? What are we making here?*—told me, "It's a very abstract way of working. It feels like experimental theatre, frankly."

Lauren said, "A lot of people were thinking, This is good for my résumé, but I wish I weren't here." He continued, "I think, if you make a movie with Claire, you can make any movie." He compared the process to over-preparing for the SATs, or training at high altitudes, so that your performance at sea level feels easier on game day. At an early color-test screening, held at an ornate theatre in Cologne, Denis's voice was the only one in the room, saying, "Merde! Crap! What are we doing? Why am I here?" Lauren said he thought "everyone sort of took it personally."

At the end of each day, the cast and crew convened at the hotel bar. "Everyone would sort of be sitting at different parts of the bar, and she'd walk in and it was, like, Shit! Claire's here!" Lauren recalled. "I saw a lot of people wanting to leave many, many times, but they stayed. They stay because they love her—even though they can't stand her."

Denis does not deny such behavior. "I can be the worst person, the meanest person on a set," she said. "Shouting, screaming, complaining. I don't have a lot of respect for myself as a director. People accept me the way I am, because they know I'm not faking. Probably."

When I described these accounts to the filmmaker Olivier Assayas, a close friend of Denis's, he laughed. "There's a certain form of chaos in the way she works," he said. "When you make movies, it's always disturbing how confident everyone involved is that they know how things should be done. And you have to constantly remind them, No,

you don't know how it's done, I don't know how it's done, nobody knows how it's done. You create chaos as a way of destabilizing the surroundings that could bring you to make something that would otherwise be conventional."

A few days after meeting Denis, I accompanied her on a train trip from Paris to Rennes, where she was serving on the jury of a film festival. It was a dreary morning, the sky damp and rat-colored. "I am covered, as if on the North Pole," Denis told me, pointing at her coat. We passed through the kind of semirural landscape that surrounds major cities all over the world, and which appears quaint only in countries that are not one's own. Before settling into conversation, Denis braved the café car, where an excruciatingly slow-moving line had formed before the train even left the station. She stood behind a family, cooing at a baby in Breton stripes.

After buying coffee and taking her seat, Denis began to talk about her mother, who had died, at the age of ninety-four, six months earlier, during the filming of "High Life." Still in mourning, Denis seemed incapable of avoiding the topic, turning to it in many of our conversations, with little or no segue. "When she was pregnant with my little brother, she had a bad pregnancy and had to stay in bed," Denis said. After giving birth, her mother became depressed. "I remember very well, this little boy was my son, for a long time, until she recovered and took over. I remember when she was an old lady and she would say, 'My son, my son!' She was really in love with her son. And I had to tell her, 'You know, in the beginning, he was mine!' And it's true that at that moment I realized how beautiful it was to see a new baby born, the changes every day."

Denis, who never remarried, also never had children. Earlier, when we spoke about the decision, or nondecision, she told me, "It was a pain, and then it was a memory, and now I have accepted it." She added, "Maybe this is just convenient for me, but I never thought of being a mother as an accomplishment for a woman." At the same time, "loneliness, independence, solitude—it's heavy," Denis said. Since her divorce, a half century ago, she has had two long-term companionships. One

lasted for twelve years, and the other, with a man whom she would not identify beyond confirming that he's "also in film," is, as she put it, "still going on." She continued, "It's also heavy to be a couple, but solitude is something very special that clearly tells you at some moments, in the day or night, that if you were to die in the next moment you wouldn't ever again see a human face."

We had been speaking for almost two hours, and Denis's throat was beginning to strain. There were quiet patches in her speech that made her exhaustion sound like sadness, even when she was recounting joy. Denis, as many people told me, takes real pleasure from the world. Long after she had finished working with Aurelien Barrau, a French astrophysicist with whom she consulted on "High Life," Denis continued to call him, to describe beautiful sights she had encountered while walking—once, a tree shivering in the wind in a way she thought he would enjoy. Des Hamilton, Denis's casting director, told me about her devotion to a particular brand of Eccles cakes, and about how she adored a silk scarf she had bought while in his company. "You know when you purchase something, you can get a little high?" he said. "Well, with Claire, her high is sustained for far longer than most people's."

Denis's sensuality may play some part in explaining her relationships with actors, which nearly everyone I spoke with described in romantic terms. "It has a taste of eroticism rather than psychology," Agnes Godard, Denis's longtime cinematographer, told me. Hamilton recalled witnessing the initial meeting between Denis and Pattinson, in Los Angeles, and feeling like "these are two people on a date, and I really shouldn't be here, maybe I should actually remove myself?" With obvious pride, Denis recounted how Pattinson took the train from London to visit her in Paris. "He came to me like a friend," she told me. "You know, in London, Robert has to hide because of girls?" (A representative for Pattinson said, "He doesn't hide from anyone.") Lauren told me, "Claire likes to be wooed. She wants her actors and actresses to want her as much as she wants them."

He said that on set "they become, metaphorically, either her babies or her lovers—it's a bit hard to tell which."

The adoration is reciprocal, in large part because of the sustained and obsessive attention Denis pays her actors, an absorption that resembles love. "I got the sense she was contemplating everything about me at all times," the actress Tricia Vessey, who appeared in "Trouble Every Day," told me. "You feel like you're being thought of in ways that people don't usually think of you." Thought of, but also felt. "I touch them," Denis told me. "I have to." She worries sometimes that actors find the approach "shocking" and too French. "Instead of telling them, 'Can you please move your head two centimetres to the left,' it can be so much better to come and slightly move the head. And I know it's not normal, but I feel like I have to do that."

Onscreen, Denis can make even the oddest-looking faces appear iconic. "Whatever happens in a film, the minimum of the minimum for the director and for the D.P. is to see the real beauty in the actress or actor," she told me. "And by beauty of course I don't mean perfection." She went on, "I know that maybe the script is not perfect, maybe I am not the greatest director, but at least I know I'm looking for something, that little shine."

When she finds it, she is overcome. She nearly fainted when she saw Béatrice Dalle emerge on the set of "Trouble Every Day" in her wardrobe and makeup. "We had to stop shooting," Denis recalled. "I couldn't breathe." Even twenty years later, when she speaks with Dalle, she sees that night as though it were just five minutes ago. "She walked through these neon lights. Everything was white and red. It was too much, it was too great." "35 Shots of Rum" was the same. Near

the end of the film, the daughter, played by Mati Diop, appears in a white dress. It seems that she is getting married. She looks like a woman but also like a child, and her father knows that he'll soon lose her. "It was a sequence shot," Denis said, "and we made two takes and I was crying. Not one tear—it was rivers. But, of course, it's fiction." ♦



THE POLITICAL SCENE

THE IMPEACHMENT WAR

Can a grassroots movement throw Trump out of office, or will it backfire?

BY JEFFREY TOOBIN

Al Green cuts a distinctive figure around the Capitol. He is, for starters, the only male member of the House of Representatives with a ponytail. He expresses himself with a kind of baroque humility; to the question "How are you?" he invariably responds, "Better than I deserve." (Elaborating, if asked, he says that he is a "recovering sinner.") He is unusual, too, because, while most politicians call attention to their triumphs and hide their failures, Green reserves a place of honor in his congressional office for two reminders of crushing, if perhaps temporary, legislative defeats. Last year, Green—who, since 2005, has represented a district centered on Houston—sponsored the first vote in the House of Representatives on the impeachment of President Donald Trump. On December 6th, the House rejected Green's initiative to bring impeachment up for debate by a vote of 364–58. The following month, the House rejected a similar attempt by Green, this time by a vote of 355–66.

Notwithstanding the lopsided results, Green has placed copies of each of the resolutions in portfolios embossed with the gold seal of the House. The December resolution is paired with a list of the members who voted for it—they are called "THE FIRST 58." The January resolution faces a page containing the names of its supporters, who are called "THE HISTORIC 66." Green sent identical copies of the portfolios to all the congressmen who voted with him.

Green, a Democrat, never supported Trump, although he also never imagined that he would be advocating his forced removal from office. "I didn't come to Congress to impeach a President," he told me. "I came to Congress to negotiate the issues that I grew up with—poverty, housing—for the least, the last, and the lost." But Green began contemplating Trump's removal when the President fired James Comey, the F.B.I. di-

rector, in May, 2017. Three months later, when Trump equated white-supremacist protesters in Charlottesville with those who had rallied against them, Green decided to take formal action: "That's when I realized he was unfit to be President. He was converting his bigotry into American policy." When the resolution came up for a vote, he said, "I did not lobby anyone, because, quite frankly, it's a question of conscience." He pressed for the second vote after Trump referred to Haiti and other predominantly black nations as "shithole countries." Green understood that his call for impeachment was symbolic, but he expressed satisfaction with the number of votes he received—nearly a third of the Democratic members of the House. "I concluded if but one person voted for this article, this would be the right thing," he said. "And we are not finished."

Today, the impeachment of Donald Trump exists on the brink of plausibility. The sine qua non of an impeachment investigation, to say nothing of actual votes to charge and remove the President, is a Democratic takeover of the House in the November elections. Such a change now looks better than possible, maybe even probable. At the same time, the President appears to be in ever-greater legal peril from dual investigations, one led by Robert Mueller, the special counsel, and the other by federal prosecutors in New York. In April, F.B.I. agents raided the offices of Michael Cohen, Trump's longtime lawyer and fixer, and removed telephones and business records. Cohen has not been charged with a crime, but the prospect of a case against him, with the chance that he might plead guilty and reveal everything he knows, represents a substantial risk for the President. In Washington, Michael Flynn, Trump's former national-security adviser, and Rick Gates, who worked on Trump's

campaign and in his White House, have both already pleaded guilty to charges brought by Mueller and agreed to cooperate with his investigation. The full extent of Mueller's findings is not known, raising the possibility that more legal and political damage to the President is yet to come. While Rudolph Giuliani, Trump's attorney, may or may not be correct that Mueller believes he lacks the legal authority to indict the President, the possibility of impeachment clearly exists—if Congress has the evidence, and the will, to proceed.

Trump supporters seem to welcome a fight over the issue. "If the Democrats move for impeachment, I think they are playing right into the hands of the President," Anthony Scaramucci, Trump's former White House communications director, told me. "He doesn't have Richard Nixon's attention span or his O.C.D. about record-keeping. There are no e-mails or tapes. He didn't do anything wrong on Russia, so he'll be exonerated." Scaramucci added, "You are dealing with a human Pac-Man. He's the toughest son of a bitch I've ever met in my life." Christopher Ruddy, the chief executive of the Newsmax Web site, who sees the President regularly at Mar-a-Lago, in Palm Beach, told me, "The guy loves a fight and will see this one as easily winnable." Republicans believe a push for impeachment would likely be a disaster for the Democrats in the midterms. Steve Bannon, Trump's former top strategist, told me, "Anger and fear drive off-year elections, and we are going to talk about how the Democrats want to shut us up by impeaching Trump when they couldn't beat him in 2016. People are talking about the Republicans losing forty seats in the House, but if we make the election a referendum on impeachment we could break even or pick up a few."

Opposition to impeachment seems to be a rare point of agreement between



Republicans see a push for impeachment as likely to be a disaster for Democrats in the midterms.

ILLUSTRATION BY CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

THE NEW YORKER, MAY 28, 2018

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"My wife! Her new husband!"

Trump's followers and the leadership of the Democratic Party. Nancy Pelosi, the Democratic leader in the House, told me, "I don't like to talk about impeachment." She explained, "Impeachment is not a political tool. It has to be based on just the law and the facts. When I was Speaker, people wanted me to impeach George Bush for the war in Iraq because it was based on false information, but you can't just go from one impeachment to the next. When we are in the majority, we are going to try to be unifying, and there is no way to do impeachment in a bipartisan way right now." The numbers back up Pelosi's wariness. According to a Quinnipiac University poll taken in April, fifty-two per cent of American voters oppose impeachment. Another poll from around the same time reported that forty-seven per cent would definitely vote against a candidate who wanted to remove Trump from office. (In a sign of how divided the country is, forty-two per cent would definitely vote *for* a candidate who made such a promise.)

Still, a powerful grassroots movement has formed in support of impeachment, a political cousin of sorts to the recent pushes for women's rights and gun control. According to Quinnipiac, seventy-one per cent of Democrats already favor impeachment. To proponents, a nearly fifty-fifty split among the voting public at this early

date, before Mueller has reported his findings, is significant. In primaries for the 2018 elections, some prominent Democrats, such as Gavin Newsom, the lieutenant governor of California, who is running for governor, made support for impeachment a major part of their platforms. Tom Steyer, a San Francisco billionaire, has since last year been running television advertisements supporting impeachment, and has generated a mailing list of more than 5.2 million people. Steyer is now on a thirty-city speaking tour. For the moment, he and his followers are outcasts from the Washington consensus. But their passion, and the mounting evidence against the President, raises the question of whether the drive for impeachment is more likely to result in Trump's removal from office or in a Democratic civil war.

For roughly the first two centuries of the American republic, there was an informal taboo on advocating for impeachment, even among a President's most outspoken critics. Only one Presidential impeachment proceeding occurred during this period: in 1868, Andrew Johnson was impeached by the House but remained in office after being acquitted in the Senate by a single vote. The nominal ground for impeachment involved his dismissal of a member of his Cabinet, but impeachment cases are always about the politics of the mo-

ment as much as the evidence before Congress. Johnson's case represented a final act of the Civil War. Though he was Abraham Lincoln's Vice-President and successor, Johnson was a Democrat, and he resisted the Republican Reconstruction in the South. Republicans used impeachment as a form of revenge, which only reinforced the taboo.

Today, that taboo has faded. An investigation of Trump would follow Richard Nixon's forced resignation, on the brink of impeachment, in 1974, and Bill Clinton's impeachment and acquittal, in 1998-99. "The reason we are seeing more demands for impeachment is the rise in partisanship. Our partisan divisions now are not just sharp but among the sharpest in American history," Michael Gerhardt, a professor at the University of North Carolina School of Law and the author of "The Federal Impeachment Process," the leading treatise on the subject, said. "These divisions are then taken out on the President with calls for impeachment, which is an extreme measure and appeals to people who have extreme positions."

In Congress, there's a surprisingly vigorous impeachment lobby expanding on the work that Al Green began. Steve Cohen, a Democrat from Tennessee and the ranking member of the Constitution and Civil Justice subcommittee of the House Judiciary Committee, has fleshed Green's bare-bones proposal out into a full impeachment resolution. Cohen's indictment has five counts. The first charges Trump with obstruction of justice, based largely on Comey's account of how the President tried to restrain the Russia investigation and then fired Comey when he would not oblige. The second count, referring to Trump's business interests, including his hotels, asserts that he violated the foreign-emoluments clause of the Constitution, which bars federal officeholders from receiving payments from foreign governments. In a similar vein, the third count asserts that Trump directed federal money to his businesses and hotels domestically. The fourth count charges him with abuse of power for his criticisms of federal judges and for his pardon of Joe Arpaio, the former sheriff of Maricopa County, in Arizona. The final count claims that Trump undermined the First Amendment by

repeatedly attacking the news media. Like Green, Cohen is aware that there is not yet a consensus in favor of impeachment, even among Democrats, but he is determined to plow ahead. "It's a moral decision to do the right thing, regardless of the politics," he told me. "Sometimes going on the record against evil may not make you effective at first in stopping evil, but it can still contribute in ways you don't know."

Jamie Raskin, a first-term Democrat from Maryland who was recently named vice-chair of the Judiciary Committee, told me, "It's hard to think of a more impeachable President in American history." As the only constitutional-law professor who is a voting member of Congress—he teaches at the law school of American University—Raskin has been adding intellectual heft to the impeachment effort. "By firing Comey and waging war on the special counsel, Trump has become the master of obstructing justice," he told me. "I have a thick notebook of obstruction-of-justice episodes." He listed, among other things, Trump's threats against Attorney General Jeff Sessions; Rod Rosenstein, Sessions's deputy; and Andrew McCabe, the former deputy director of the F.B.I. Raskin said, "It's only because we're waist-deep in the Trump era that we forget how completely radical and beyond the pale it is to have the President directly threatening the people who are involved in a criminal investigation of him."

Raskin told me that the foreign-emoluments clause "doesn't get enough play, because it's unfamiliar, and it's unfamiliar because no other President ever came close to violating it before. But Trump has turned the federal government into a money-making operation, which is just what the Framers feared." Raskin cited the many foreign guests with business interests before the Administration who have stayed at the Trump International Hotel, in Washington, as well as the business deals conducted by the President's sons overseas. He also pointed to a prohibition in the domestic-emoluments clause against government payments to Presidents beyond their salaries. "We've had the Secret Service and other agencies spend millions of dollars at Trump hotels and resorts already," he said. But Raskin also injected a note of

caution. "Most of my constituents regard impeachment in a very practical way," he told me. "They all see Trump as eminently deserving of impeachment, but they don't want it to become a fetish if it's not going anywhere."

Any initial investigation of impeachment would fall to the House Judiciary Committee, and its chairman, in a Democratic Congress, would be Jerrold Nadler, from New York. Donald Trump and Jerry Nadler represent contrasting New York archetypes—the rapacious developer and the woolly-headed liberal. Not surprisingly, the two men have a history. They first clashed more than three decades ago, when Trump proposed a vast development on an old rail yard on Manhattan's West Side.

Nadler was born in Brooklyn in 1947 and educated at Stuyvesant, the selective public high school, where his campaign for student-council president was managed by Dick Morris, the future Clinton-era political Svengali. After graduating from Columbia, Nadler thrived in the political hothouse that was the West Side in those days. In his twenties, he was elected to the New York State Assembly, and he attended Fordham's law school at night. Nadler's district included the site of a Trump project, which was originally called Television City because the centerpiece would be a hundred-and-fifty-story building that would serve as a new headquarters for NBC. As a courtesy, Trump invited Nadler to his office in Trump Tower to show him the plans. "I thought it was grotesque," Nadler recalled recently. Trump told Nadler that the tower would be residential above the first forty floors, and mentioned the Hancock Center, in Chicago, which is a hundred stories tall. "He says, 'Do you know that the people on the top floors of the Hancock Center, before they go out in the morning, they call the concierge desk to ask what the weather is, because they're above the clouds, they can't really see it?' I'm thinking, What a drag, but he's getting excited about this," Nadler said. Nadler asked whether Trump intended to live on the hundred-and-fiftieth floor of the new building, and Trump replied that he did. "And I realized what this was all about," Nadler said. "He wanted to be the highest man in the world."

The battle over Television City—later renamed Trump City and finally known as Riverside South—became a multi-decade epic, even after the hundred-and-fifty-story building was scrapped. (NBC decided to keep its headquarters at Rockefeller Center.) Nadler helped lead the opposition, and continued to do so after he was elected to Congress, in 1992. He made sure that Trump did not receive federal mortgage guarantees for the project, costing the developer millions, and he also stopped the removal of an elevated highway, which would have increased the value of Trump's condominiums. Riverside South is now mostly completed, on a much diminished scale. Trump's interest was sold in 2005. But the dynamic of Trump and Nadler's relationship was set. In his book "The America We Deserve," published in 2000, Trump called Nadler "one of the most egregious hacks in contemporary politics."

Nadler turned seventy last June, and his political views, while emphatically liberal, now hew closer to Pelosi's than to Al Green's. This is particularly true on the question of an impeachment inquiry. Pelosi told me that Nadler is "a champion for civil liberties and civil rights. He will have a long agenda as chairman, and impeachment is the least of it—despite what his constituents, and my constituents, probably want." Nadler voted against both of Green's impeachment resolutions. "If you're going to remove the President from office, you are in effect in one sense nullifying the last election," he told me. "What you don't want are recriminations for the next twenty years—'We won the election,' 'You stole it.' And to do that you have to have a situation where some appreciable fraction—not a majority, but an appreciable fraction—of the people on the other side will grudgingly admit by the end of the proceedings that 'Yeah, they really had to do it.'" As Nadler acknowledges, there is not only an absence of an appreciable fraction of Republicans in the House supporting impeachment, there isn't a single Republican who does. He believes that any chance of bipartisan impeachment is extremely remote in the current political environment, at least barring the discovery of overwhelming evidence of wrongdoing. "The fact that someone has committed

an impeachable offense doesn't always mean that you should impeach him," he said. I asked Nadler if he meant that the House should impeach only if two-thirds of the Senate was going to vote to remove the President. Not necessarily, he said: "An impeachment, even if it's not successful in the sense of removing the President from office, may in fact be necessary and successful at saying, in effect, 'You have violated the constitutional order, you are threatening the constitutional order, you will stop threatening the constitutional order. You will stop threatening the rule of law.'"

Nadler was a member of the Judiciary Committee during the Clinton impeachment hearings, in 1998. He emerged as an outspoken opponent of impeachment, and several of the arguments he deployed are eerily similar to those which Trump's defenders have used. Nadler was a strident critic of Kenneth Starr, the independent counsel, and he demanded audits of what he regarded as Starr's excessive spending in the course of the investigation. Nadler described the case against Clinton as based on the Republicans' general distaste for the President rather than on any specific acts of wrongdoing. "It showed that a determined majority in the House could impeach a President without legitimate reason," Nadler said. The experience also taught him that the public can exact a cost on the party that brings a failed or unjustified impeachment. The Judiciary Committee held its impeachment hearings in the weeks just before the 1998 midterms, and on Election Day the Democrats reversed the usual fate of a party in its sixth year of control of the Presidency by gaining five seats. Nadler said that the Republicans "lost seats with the impeachment pending, and they lost seats because people disapproved of it and they went ahead with it anyway."



The purported lessons of the Clinton impeachment haunt the Trump investigation, even though the cast of characters in Congress has almost completely turned over in the two intervening decades. Of the thirty-

seven members of the Judiciary Committee in 1998, just seven remain—four Republicans (Bob Goodlatte, the current chairman, Jim Sensenbrenner, Lamar Smith, and Steve Chabot) and three Democrats (Nadler, Sheila Jackson Lee, and Zoe Lofgren). Goodlatte and Smith are retiring at the end of their current terms. (Abbe Lowell, who was the lead lawyer for Judiciary Committee Democrats in the Clinton inquiry, is now in private practice and represents Jared Kushner, President Trump's son-in-law.)

The Clinton impeachment also played a role in Nadler's campaign, last year, to become the ranking Democrat on the Judiciary Committee. Democrats generally choose their committee leaders based on seniority. Even though Nadler was the longest-tenured Democrat, he was challenged for the leadership by Zoe Lofgren, who represents a district in Silicon Valley. Part of Lofgren's pitch was her experience on the impeachment question. Not only did Lofgren, like Nadler, serve on the committee in 1998; she was also a young staffer for Representative Don Edwards in 1974, when she worked on the impeachment proceedings against Richard Nixon.

For Lofgren, the Nixon example looms large. "The American people at some kind of gut level understand the constitutional system," she told me. "When a President lied about having an affair with a young woman, that was gross behavior, and the lie was arguably unlawful, but it had nothing to do with government. With Nixon, having an enemies list and using the elements of the federal government to destroy your enemies was about the abuse of government power. People got that. By the time

the committee voted to impeach, in 1974, the country was on board." In the nineteen-seventies there was also a core of moderate Republicans open to considering the evidence against Nixon. Seven of the seventeen Republicans on the Judiciary Committee voted for at least one article of impeachment. Not a single Democrat on the committee voted in favor of Clinton's impeachment.

Even Republicans who voted for Clinton's impeachment now regard it as, at best, a mixed success. Steve Chabot, who represents a district in Cincinnati, said, "If the Democrats go in that direction, they are likely to learn a lesson that we learned in 1998. Even if the country starts out with you, they get sick of the process pretty quickly." Senator Lindsey Graham, of South Carolina, who was a member of the Judiciary Committee in 1998, has an even more negative view. "It blew up in our faces and helped President Clinton," he said. "If Democrats keep up what they're doing, the whole thing will just be shirts and skins—Democrats versus Republicans—and that's a no-win when it comes to impeachment. It has to be bipartisan, or it's going to be a failure."

Indeed, the fervor for impeachment among some on the left is nearly matched by the passion against it on the right—an ardor that conservatives are more than happy to exploit, especially leading up to the midterm elections. Trump has taken up the cause, telling a rally in Michigan, in April, "We have to keep the House, because if we listen to Maxine Waters she's going around saying, 'We will impeach him.'" (Waters, a California congresswoman and a favorite target of Trump's, voted in favor of Al Green's resolutions.) Republicans in competitive races are also raising the alarm. "There is no doubt that impeachment will be a critical issue in November for Democrats and for Republicans," Ted Cruz, the Republican senator from Texas, who is facing an unexpectedly serious challenge from Beto O'Rourke, a Democratic congressman, told me. "There is right now enormous energy on the far left. They hate the President. They are consumed with Trump derangement syndrome." He continued, "For many on the right, and many in the middle, not having the country consumed by impeachment proceedings and not seeing us lose the progress the country has made under President Trump is also a powerful motivator." Cruz doesn't believe Pelosi's statements that she does not currently support impeachment. "If the Democrats take over the House, on the day Nancy Pelosi is sworn in to office,

TO WHITE NOISE

You are the sound silence
makes in its sleep, air made

visible by smoke, deepest
breath with no breathing,

O my personal ocean, O un-
broken shush of mortality,

O my digital sister, thank
you, thank you for keeping

the children from climbing
over the fence of sleep.

—*Carrie Fountain*

that's the day impeachment proceedings begin," he said. "The passion on the left is too great."

The Democratic leadership continues to insist otherwise. Nadler eventually defeated Lofgren in a vote by the full Democratic caucus in the House, 118–72. Their differences haven't proven especially divisive, and they are by and large in accord on the issue of impeachment. As Lofgren put it, "We have a sense of history and obligation, though that might not be exciting to the liberal base."

On a pleasant Tuesday night in May, the liberal base in Des Moines showed up early at an event space near downtown. An hour before Tom Steyer was to conduct what he called a town meeting in support of Trump's impeachment, more than a hundred people had lined up outside, waiting to be admitted. "This President has failed his most important responsibility—protecting our country," Steyer says in one of his cable-news commercials. "The first question is Why? What is in his and his family's business dealings with Russia that he is so determined to hide that he would betray our country? And the second question is Why is he still President?" Thanks to the advertisements, as well as appeals on Facebook, Steyer's self-funded operation, called NeedToImpeach.com, has drawn millions of

supporters. In Des Moines, more than four hundred people turned up, filling the room to overflowing. "I go to political events in Iowa all the time," Pat Rynard, who runs a Web site on local politics called Iowa Starting Line, said as he watched the crowd stream in. "The people here are not the people who usually go to political events in Iowa. This is more people than the Democratic candidates for governor draw for their rallies. He's mobilizing a whole new group."

Through sheer force of personality—and about forty million dollars of his own money—Steyer has become the public face of the movement to impeach Trump. He has forty full-time staffers, and on his national tour he conducts town meetings, talks to local news media, and raises his own profile. (By political standards, the town halls are lavish affairs, with top-notch production values. The Des Moines event featured what caterers call "heavy" hors d'œuvres for everyone.) Steyer's town halls, which last about an hour, begin with a presentation of one of the latest impeachment commercials, after which Steyer gives brief remarks—lasting about ten minutes—and then takes questions from the audience. The curious thing about his event in Des Moines was that it didn't have much to do with impeachment. In his opening comments, he mentioned that he had eight grounds

for impeachment, though he didn't identify them. (They are spelled out on his Web site, and are basically an expanded version of the five counts in Representative Cohen's resolution.) He also mentioned, but didn't name, a group of legal scholars who support his campaign, and he did the same for a group of psychiatrists who asserted, in a panel discussion he hosted, that Trump is unfit for the Presidency, as well as a "dangerous, unstable, and deteriorating person."

Steyer, who is sixty, made his name in politics raising money for John Kerry and Barack Obama, and then became a climate-change activist. He has now positioned himself outside traditional political categories. It's a strategy, albeit with very different goals, that Trump pursued in his political career. Bannon, expressing admiration for Steyer's tactics, told me, "Steyer is a little bit the Steve Bannon of the left. The Democratic Party has not yet had its civil war. The populist movement on the left has not happened yet, but Steyer sees it coming, sees the anger behind it." In Steyer's remarks in Des Moines, he attacked both parties. "The political establishment does not like what we have to say here," he told the crowd. "They say we are normalizing impeachment. We are not normalizing impeachment. If we ignore what Donald Trump has done, what we're doing is normalizing his behavior." Asked at one point about the last election, Steyer said, "Two people won the 2016 election: Bernie Sanders, who is not a Democrat, and Donald Trump, who is not a Republican." Steyer also funds, to the tune of thirty-two million dollars, a voter-registration project aimed at young people, called NextGen America, that is ostensibly nonpartisan. Steyer is using impeachment much the same way Trump used issues like immigration: to show that he's with the Party's base, not with its elders.

In our conversations, Steyer showed that he had mastered the politician's art of ducking the question of whether he's running for President. "I believe that we are on a disastrous path," he replied when I asked. "There is an absolute void of explaining to Americans what the real stakes are." A question

from the audience in Des Moines about Steyer's Presidential ambitions drew a loud cheer from the attendees and a non-denial denial from Steyer. The only state where Steyer's tour has conducted three events is Iowa, the site of the nation's first caucuses.

Steyer professes to understand the difference between political opposition to a President and support for a President's removal from office. "We are not impeaching him because we don't like his tax policy," Steyer told me. "He is reckless, dangerous, and lawless." But people at the town hall didn't worry too much about the fine distinctions, and neither, for the most part, does Steyer. Attendees told me that they wanted Trump removed because he's racist, because he's surrounded by unsavory characters, because he doesn't care about the poor. Jennifer Spradling, a retired preschool teacher, had travelled two hundred and forty miles, from the town of Alton, to hear Steyer speak. Trump "doesn't seem to have the moral principles and ideals that Presidents have," she said. "He's done nothing on health care, on infrastructure." Several audience members mentioned, as a ground for impeachment, the Washington *Post's* running tally of more than three thousand falsehoods that Trump has told since the Inauguration. The one

phrase I never heard during the evening in Des Moines was "high crimes and misdemeanors."

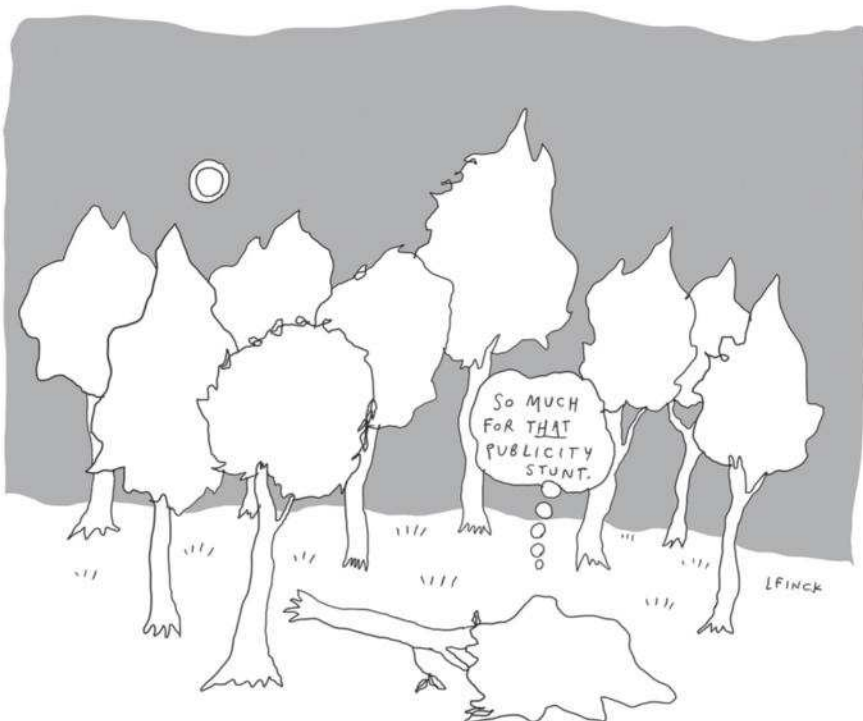
Ultimately, every consideration of impeachment returns to the standard established in the Constitution. The words are among the most familiar in the nation's founding document, even if their meaning has been the subject of two hundred years of debate. Article II states, "The President, Vice President and all civil Officers of the United States, shall be removed from Office on Impeachment for, and Conviction of, Treason, Bribery, or other high Crimes and Misdemeanors." As in the nineteen-seventies and the nineteen-nineties, the prospect of a Presidential impeachment has spurred renewed academic interest in the subject, resulting in two recent volumes by well-known Harvard law professors. Last year, Cass Sunstein, who served in the Obama Administration, released "Impeachment: A Citizen's Guide," and Laurence Tribe, the noted liberal academic and litigator, has just published "To End a Presidency: The Power of Impeachment," written with Joshua Matz. Michael Gerhardt is also producing a third edition of his treatise "The Federal Impeachment Process."

The historical record on impeachment, including at the framing of the Constitution, is meagre. There were a

few references to it at the Constitutional Convention, and in the debates in the states over ratification the subject came up in a limited way. The Framers recognized that the power to impeach was as much a political issue as a legal one. As Alexander Hamilton put it, in Federalist No. 65, impeachment should apply to "the misconduct of public men, or, in other words, from the abuse or violation of some public trust." Hamilton said that high crimes and misdemeanors "are of a nature which may with peculiar propriety be denominated POLITICAL, as they relate chiefly to injuries done immediately to the society itself." (This quotation was a favorite of Clinton's defenders in 1998 because it suggested that purely personal misconduct, like lying about an extramarital affair, should not be the basis for impeachment.) Hamilton also anticipated the partisan divisions that impeachment would engender, writing that the process "will seldom fail to agitate the passions of the whole community, and to divide it into parties more or less friendly or inimical to the accused."

In modern terms, one pole in the debate over impeachment was defined by Gerald Ford, during his days as a congressman, when he led a failed attempt to impeach the Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, in 1970, for purportedly improper financial dealings. "An impeachable offense," Ford said, "is whatever a majority of the House of Representatives considers it to be at a given moment in history." At the other extreme from Ford's almost tautological approach is the claim that only proof beyond a reasonable doubt that a President committed criminal offenses can justify an impeachment.

To some, the best distillation of the standard is a report produced by the Judiciary Committee in 1974, on the eve of its debate about the Nixon impeachment. (One of the committee's staffers was a young lawyer named Hillary Rodham.) The report states clearly that impeachable offenses do not necessarily have to be crimes. Instead, it argues, impeachment should be "a remedy for usurpation or abuse of power or serious breach of trust," such as "offenses against the government, and especially abuses of constitutional duties." The emphasis, the authors wrote, "has been on the



significant effects of the conduct—undermining the integrity of office, disregard of constitutional duties and oath of office, arrogation of power, abuse of the governmental process, adverse impact on the system of government.”

The challenge is to apply these abstract standards to Trump’s alleged misconduct. Any attempt to do so requires an accurate determination of exactly what Trump did, and many are hoping that Mueller will provide that accounting. As Pelosi told me, “Impeachment doesn’t fit into the equation until we hear what Robert Mueller says.” But even some impeachment skeptics are willing to establish markers for Trump’s behavior that would not require findings from Mueller. The most common of these appears to be the firing of Mueller or of Rod Rosenstein, the deputy attorney general, who supervises Mueller’s work. Eric Swalwell, a California Democrat who is a member of the Judiciary Committee, told me that he opposes impeachment at this point, but that if the President deposes either man, it would be grounds for starting proceedings: “That would be encroaching on the independence of the Justice Department.” Barney Frank, the former congressman from Massachusetts who was a key figure in the Clinton debate in 1998, said that he can imagine a scenario in which he would support impeachment. “The President has the power to issue pardons,” Frank told me. “But if it could be proved that Trump promised people pardons in order to persuade them not to cooperate with Mueller, that offer would be an obstruction of justice, and it would be impeachable.” Laurence Tribe told me that he would regard some forms of misbehavior as impeachable, such as “a pattern of abusing the bully pulpit of the Presidency, one of its most potent if informal powers—especially when amplified by social media—to stir division within the electorate to the point of violence, to give permission to white supremacists to weaponize their hatred, and otherwise to undermine the foundations of our republic.”

As it happens, in recent years Congress has embraced broad definitions of what constitutes impeachable conduct, albeit in low-profile cases. Ap-

plying the standard of high crimes and misdemeanors, the House of Representatives has impeached two federal judges. President George H. W. Bush appointed Samuel Kent to the federal bench in Galveston, Texas, in 1990. There, female court employees complained that Kent groped and harassed them. In 2008, a federal grand jury indicted the judge for abusive sexual contact, and he was convicted the following year. The House moved to impeach Kent, and added charges in addition to those for which he had been convicted, including lying about sexual harassment he had committed before he became a judge. The House voted unanimously in favor of three articles of impeachment, and Kent resigned his judgeship before his trial in the Senate. Michael Gerhardt told me, “To the extent that there’s a question about whether Trump actually engaged in sexual assault or has lied about it during the campaign, Kent arguably provides a precedent supporting a congressional judgment that sexual assault may constitute a legitimate basis for impeachment.”

The following year, Congress impeached Thomas Porteous, whom Bill Clinton had appointed to the federal bench in Louisiana, in 1994. Porteous had declared personal bankruptcy in 2001, and during that process revealed that he had close ties to a local bail bondsman who was caught up in a federal corruption investigation. Porteous was never charged with a crime, but the disclosures about his situation led to an investigation by the federal judicial administrative office, which determined that Porteous had lied on the financial-disclosure forms he had filed in connection with his nomination. The House voted unanimously to impeach him for “engaging in a pattern of conduct that is incompatible with the trust and confidence placed in him as a federal judge,” and the Senate removed him from office. As Gerhardt observes, “The gist of the case against Porteous was that he lied about his background in order to get the job. The idea was that he defrauded the Senate, by providing false information,

in order to get confirmed for his judgeship.” Although Congress is under no obligation to apply the same definition of “high crimes and misdemeanors” in every impeachment, Gerhardt told me that “the collusion charge against Trump is based on the same idea of a direct connection—that he engaged in misconduct in order to get the job he holds.”



Nadler, for his part, declines to set markers for what might trigger an impeachment investigation if he assumes the House Judiciary Committee chairmanship in 2019, although he continues to express indignation at each new disclosure about Trump.

He denounced the President’s threats against Mueller and introduced legislation to protect the investigation by the special counsel. He criticized the firing of Andrew McCabe. He sought an investigation of Cambridge Analytica for violating U.S. election regulations. He called for a formal resolution of censure against Trump for his remarks about Charlottesville. None of these proposals went anywhere in the Republican-controlled House.

Instead of planning for impeachment, Nadler is thinking about the kinds of oversight investigations he might conduct if he is in control of the committee. “We would want oversight on what the Administration is doing to civil liberties, to institutions, to discredit the courts, to discredit the special prosecutor, to attack the press, all of these things,” he told me. “What are you doing about staffing levels of different places? What are you doing about the things that affect the ability of agencies to do their jobs independent of the political direction of the current Administration?”

Still, the chance for Nadler to define his legacy can never be far from his thoughts. For decades, he and his family have been regulars at a diner a few blocks from their apartment on the Upper West Side. When he is in New York, Nadler stops in a few times a week. Each time he does, the owner greets him with the admonition “You gotta impeach the bastard.” ♦

LETTER FROM CHICAGO

FRAMED

How one woman's fight to save her family helped lead to a mass exoneration.

BY JENNIFER GONNERMAN

Clarissa Glenn's troubles with the law began on Mother's Day, 2004, when she was on her way to the Pancake House with her three sons—Ben, Jr., Gerard, and Deon. They left their apartment in the Ida B. Wells Homes, a housing project on the South Side of Chicago, to meet her partner, Ben Baker, outside the building. They found him talking with a police sergeant named Ronald Watts, a notorious figure in the project. Watts oversaw a team of police officers who were supposed to be rooting out the project's drug trade, but he was in fact running his own "criminal enterprise," as another officer later put it. Watts extorted money from drug dealers and other residents, and when they didn't pay him he fabricated drug charges against them. That morning, Ben said, the sergeant had tried to shake him down. Ben told him, "Man, fuck you. Do your motherfucking job," before walking away.

Clarissa and Ben, who were both in their early thirties, had been together since they were teen-agers. For seven years, they had lived with their sons in the Wells, as the project was known. Ben had grown up there and was used to dealing with hostile, sometimes corrupt officers, but Clarissa, whose father had been a private detective, expected better treatment from the police. In the months after Ben's confrontation with Watts, whenever she saw a police officer talking to Ben she intervened, marching up to the officer and saying, "What's going on?" One time, as Clarissa approached, an officer said to Ben, "Here comes your lawyer."

On the afternoon of March 23, 2005, Clarissa saw from a window in their apartment that several officers had detained Ben, and she followed them to the police station. According to the police report, the officers had caught Ben with packets of heroin in one hand and packets of crack cocaine in his pocket.

Prosecutors charged him with drug possession with intent to sell. Ben, who was unemployed and watched the boys after school, had a history of selling drugs, and he was three weeks away from finishing a two-year probation sentence for a drug case. If he was convicted of the new charges, he faced up to sixty years in prison. On April 2nd, he was released from jail pending trial. Clarissa, who worked as an administrator at a home-health-care agency, picked him up.

Ben said that Watts had framed him. Clarissa believed him, and so did his lawyer, Matthew Mahoney, who had represented him in a previous case, and had worked in the nineties as a prosecutor in the public-corruption unit at the Cook County state's attorney's office. In May, Mahoney accompanied Clarissa and Ben to the state's attorney's office, where they met with two police sergeants, an agent from the Chicago Police Department's internal-affairs division, and a prosecutor named David Navarro. Clarissa and Ben assumed that the authorities would be surprised to hear about Watts's conduct, but they held up one photo after another of Watts's team. "It was, like, Do you know who this is? Do you know who this is?" Clarissa recalled. "They were already investigating."

The state's attorney's office opened an investigation into Watts after Mahoney informed the office of Ben's case. The police department was known for consistently failing to address officer misconduct. In the previous two years, although the department had received at least twenty-five complaints about Watts and his team—including allegations that they planted drugs on people—it allowed them to continue working in the Wells. Mahoney described the internal-affairs division as "notoriously, incredibly slow in doing anything—and they're incredibly full of leaks." As a prosecutor, he said, he never knew whether "they're going to leak your investigation to the target."

That summer and fall, Watts continued to harass Ben and Clarissa. In October, Clarissa visited the police department's Office of Professional Standards twice to file complaints. According to police records, she reported that Watts "entered and searched her house on several dates without justification," and "threatened to take her to jail." (Watts, through an attorney, declined to be interviewed for this article.) Clarissa did not know it at the time, but the police department did not protect the identities of citizens who filed complaints. Instead, before interviewing officers, the department told them the name of the complainant.

One Sunday in December, Ben was at home, planning to watch the Bears play the Steelers, when Clarissa called, asking him to pick her up at her aunt's house. Returning home, as they drove into the parking lot next to the Wells, Watts and one of his officers pulled up behind them. They demanded Ben's keys, and started searching the car. Finally, Watts reached inside the driver's-side door and shouted, "I got it!" Clarissa said she saw Watts take something out of his sleeve, and she and Ben both recalled what Watts said next: "Put the cuffs on him—and you can lock her ass up, too."

Both Ben and Clarissa were charged with drug possession with intent to sell. Clarissa had never been arrested before, and set out to prove that she and Ben had been framed. That turned out to be far more difficult than she had expected. Ben was convicted and imprisoned, while Clarissa reluctantly pleaded guilty in exchange for a probation sentence. During the next ten years, she struggled to raise their sons alone, suffered from depression, and at times was unemployed. But she kept at it, and her and Ben's efforts started a chain of events that, last fall, led the state's attorney's office to dismiss the convictions of fifteen men who had been arrested by Watts's team. The director of



"You're not supposed to hate anyone, but these officers changed my entire being," Clarissa Glenn said.

the office's Conviction Integrity Unit told reporters, "The police were not being truthful," and "in good conscience we could not see these convictions stand."

Joshua Tepfer, an attorney at the University of Chicago Law School's Exoneration Project, has represented Ben since 2015. He called the dismissal of the convictions "the first mass exoneration in Cook County history." As cities across the country reckon with cases of police misconduct and corruption going back years, judges have begun to throw out large groups of convictions. In 2014, Philadelphia police officers were indicted on charges that included robbing and assaulting citizens, leading prosecutors to seek the dismissal of more than a thousand convictions. After Baltimore police officers were indicted on racketeering charges last year, judges threw out about three hundred convictions; more than a thousand other cases are under review. In Chicago, Tepfer believes that Watts and his officers wrongly arrested hundreds of people. He now represents sixty-three of them, and he is hopeful that there will be at least one more round of exoneration this year. "Clarissa is the lifeblood of this movement," Tepfer said. "She started it ten years ago, and tried to report it so many ways, and tried so many times to save her family's life."

The Ida B. Wells Homes were Chicago's first housing project for African-Americans. Named after the South Side's investigative journalist and anti-lynching crusader, the project opened in 1941, promising decent, affordable housing and a path to middle-class life to families that had left the South during the Great Migration. By the end of the first year, sixteen hundred families lived in row houses and walkups spread across nearly fifty acres, with a field house, a large park, and a community center.

In the next two decades, the Chicago Housing Authority doubled the population of the Wells, adding ten seven-story buildings, known as the Wells Extensions, and four fourteen-story buildings, called the Clarence Darrow Homes. At the same time, it put up more than twenty-five other projects, many of them high-rises in African-American neighborhoods. By 1970, some twelve thousand families were living in public housing on the South Side. In

subsequent years, federal budget cuts and local mismanagement contributed to the projects' decline, making them less desirable to working-class families. More poor families moved in, many of them led by single parents.

Ben's mother raised him and two daughters in the Wells during the seventies and eighties. He met his father only a few times. When he was young, he and his friends played in tunnels beneath the buildings, which they entered by lifting grates on the street. "That was like our clubhouse," he recalled. "We used to shoot at the rats with our slingshots."

Living conditions there continued to worsen. In 1985, a bullet pierced the window of an apartment, hitting a thirteen-year-old boy in the head. Paramedics got trapped in a stalled elevator with the boy, and he later died at the hospital. A *Sun-Times* reporter who visited the Wells the following year found garbage chutes clogged with trash, hallways with broken lights, and urine-soaked stairwells.

During those years, crack use spread in the Wells, and Ben's mother became an addict. He spent his first year of high school with an aunt in Milwaukee. When he returned to Chicago, he had trouble obtaining his transcript and never reenrolled in high school. Like many other teen-agers in the projects, he said, he had to fend for himself: "When they come looking for their mother, they find her in a smokehouse." In 1989, when Ben was seventeen, he was arrested twice on drug charges and sentenced to probation.

Clarissa grew up half a mile from the Wells, in very different circumstances. Her parents—Clarence, who worked at a detective agency run by a former police officer, and Florence, a stay-at-home mother—owned a three-story house with a winding staircase. They sent Clarissa, her sister, and her two brothers to Catholic school. Clarissa never visited the Wells. "My parents kept us from that world," she said. "The only thing I heard about was shootings, poverty—nothing good."

Clarissa, who was a shy and sheltered teen-ager, met Ben in 1990, when they enrolled in the same South Side night school. She had been attending a Catholic girls' school on the West Side but left after her junior year. There were few African-American students, and, Cla-

rissa said, "I think we had it harder." Boys had thrown bottles at Clarissa as she waited for her mother to pick her up, and a student had used a racial epithet in her presence to describe Harold Washington, Chicago's first black mayor.

One evening at night school, Clarissa arrived late to class and sat behind Ben. Later, he invited her to join him at his table in the cafeteria, and then offered her a ride home with some of his relatives, who were also students. They headed up State Street, through a four-mile stretch of high-rise housing projects, and stopped in front of Stateway Gardens. "I was nervous," Clarissa recalled. "It was dark, and there were a lot of people outside." When they stopped at her house, she invited everyone to come in. Ben said, "Then she goes into the kitchen with her sister, and she comes back with all these glasses, with all this crushed ice and 7 UPs, offering everyone drinks."

Ben and Clarissa started dating. Ben had a playful, easygoing way about him, and, Clarissa recalled, "My mother right off liked him." Her father was more standoffish, but, she said, "as time went on, he began to love him." She gave birth to their first son, Ben, Jr., in 1991, a month before her twentieth birthday. Gerard followed in 1992, and Deon in 1993. (Ben also had two other children.) Clarissa and the boys lived with her parents, while Ben lived at his aunt's apartment nearby.

A month before Deon was born, Ben was arrested for shooting another young man, and charged with attempted murder. He spent the next four years in prison. If Clarissa's parents were upset about the situation, they didn't show it, she said, "I guess because we had the kids." Several months before Ben was released, in 1997, Clarissa rented a three-bedroom apartment in the Wells Extensions for the family, for less than two hundred dollars a month. Her father offered to buy her a house elsewhere, but she refused. "I didn't want to depend on my dad's finances," she said.

Clarissa tried to improve the apartment—putting up wallpaper in the kitchen and sheer curtains in the living room—but it was hard to disguise the building's state of neglect. When tenants left, the housing authority at times just boarded up the empty apartments. Three years before Clarissa and her sons

moved in, two boys, aged ten and eleven, had dropped a five-year-old named Eric Morse from the window of an abandoned fourteenth-floor apartment in the Darrow Homes. For many, Eric's murder confirmed that Chicago's housing projects, with their squalor, drug markets, and frequent shootings, were beyond repair. Standing near the spot where the boy had died, Henry Cisneros, President Clinton's Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, told a crowd of reporters and residents, "It's the shame of Chicago and the shame of America that people have to live like this." The next year, the housing authority began demolishing the Darrow Homes, and, shortly afterward, it developed a ten-year plan to remake the city's public housing, which included demolishing the high-rises.

Clarissa planned to leave the Wells as soon as she'd saved enough money to afford a better place. She started working as a sales associate at Filene's Basement, and Ben looked after the boys. Every evening, she came home and cooked a full dinner, like the ones her mother had made. "She was so proper, with a big old smile on her face," Ben's sister Gale Anderson said. "She'd go to work, come home, be the wife." The apartment became a gathering place for Ben's family and friends. "When I cooked, I cooked for everybody," Clarissa said. "You can be on drugs, you can be hustling, you can just pass by—everyone is welcome." She was proud of her short ribs, fried chicken, and pot roast. "I wasn't eating ramen noodles or meat in a can," she said. "I'm not saying it is wrong, but I'm not giving you something that I'm not going to eat."

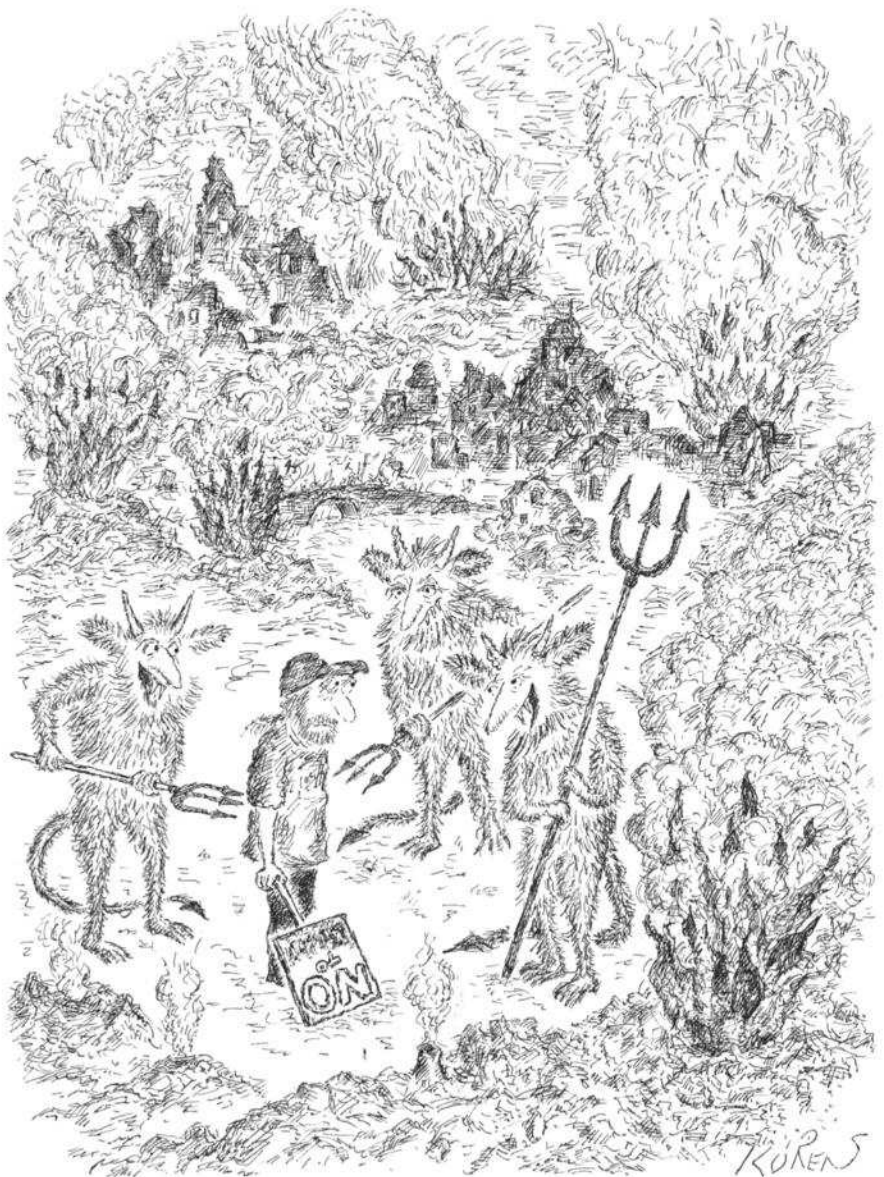
After the Darrow Homes were demolished, more drug traffic gravitated to the Extensions. People involved in the drug trade stood outside the buildings, shouting the names of the drugs being sold: "Xbox!" "Knockout!" "Renegade!" Others waited inside, where they frisked buyers, to make sure they weren't undercover cops. When Clarissa's brother Bryan Glenn visited her building, he said, there were "drug addicts and drug dealers standing in the hall, screaming up to the next level that someone is coming."

Sergeant Ronald Watts—who, like nearly everyone in the Wells, was

African-American—had spent part of his childhood in the Darrow Homes, and he knew how to exploit the lawlessness of the housing project. At five-eleven and two hundred and forty pounds, he was an intimidating presence. Shaun James, who lived in the Extensions, often took part in the project's dice games and carried a wad of bills in his pocket. He recalled Watts's shake-down tactics: "He used to take us in the hallway one by one. 'Man, how much money you got on you?'" James would pull out his cash and hand it to Watts, who would count it, then ask, "How much is your freedom worth to you?" Sometimes Watts would even itemize the costs of an arrest, including the bond payment. "Now, here it is, I'm charging

you three thousand dollars for your freedom. What are you going to do?" Ben recalled that one of Watts's officers once told him, "It would be cheaper to pay us instead of paying a lawyer, paying a bond." To make his point, Watts sometimes brandished a bag of drugs. James said, "You knew if you ain't paying him you was going to jail."

In 2001, the movie "Training Day," about a corrupt Los Angeles police detective named Alonzo Harris, was released, and some Wells residents started calling Watts "Alonzo." In the climactic scene, Harris, played by Denzel Washington, threatens a group of men, saying, "I'm putting cases on all you bitches!" James recalled a day when Watts found out that someone had filed



"As an additional torment, our fire and brimstone are fuelled by coal."

a complaint against him with the Office of Professional Standards. "This man came down there snapping like he was just watching 'Training Day' and thinking about us," James said. "'Y'all want to call O.P.S. on me? I'll put cases on all you bitches!'"

Michael Newman, who grew up in the Wells, said that the only defense against Watts was to "hope he's in a good mood and not putting any drugs on you." Newman, who is now a manager at a homeless shelter in the Chicago suburbs, went on, "Everyone was not a gangbanger. Everyone was not selling drugs. But everyone who was over there would be treated as such." As he saw it, the attitude of Watts and some of the other officers was: "Everyone is guilty over here. They live in the projects, the slums. Who cares about these people? Who is going to believe your word over mine?"

No one knows how many men Watts and his officers framed, in part because so many of them pleaded guilty. Watts's officers at times planted such large quantities of drugs on Wells residents that they were charged with a Class X felony, the highest-level felony after first-degree murder. If the defendant went to trial and lost, he faced up to thirty years in prison. Phillip Thomas, who sold candy from a cart in the Wells, recalled that when he told his public de-

fender that Watts's officers had planted drugs on him, "she made it quite clear that she didn't believe me and that my best bet was to plead guilty." Ignoring her advice, he represented himself at trial. He lost, and was sentenced to six years. Shaun James told his public defender a similar story, and, he said, "She's looking at me like I'm crazy. She said, 'Ain't no judge is ever going to believe that.'" James and his co-defendant, Taurus Smith, both pleaded guilty and were sentenced to two years' probation.

Clarissa and Ben decided to fight the cases against them: Ben's, from when he was arrested alone, and Ben and Clarissa's, from when they were arrested together. They assumed that, because the state's attorney's office was aware of Watts's corruption, it would eventually drop the charges against them. David Navarro, the prosecutor who met with Clarissa and Ben in the spring of 2005, told me that he believed them, and spent months investigating their claims about Watts, but he couldn't prove the allegations. "It's very difficult to prove a case when your only witness is the guy who has a pending case against him, and that guy has a criminal background," he said.

In April, 2006, a Cook County prosecutor announced in court that she was ready to go to trial in Ben's case. Around that time, Clarissa and Ben married,

at City Hall. "He had been asking," Clarissa said. "I wanted him to know I was going to be there."

On May 23, 2006, Ben's trial began, in a cavernous room at the Cook County courthouse, on the city's West Side. Clarissa watched from the front row; Ben sat beside Mahoney. In Mahoney's opening statement, he said bluntly, "Sergeant Watts likes cash, and by that I mean he takes bribes." Ben took the witness stand and explained that, on the afternoon of his arrest, he had been coming down the stairs of his building when he passed two men selling drugs on a landing. A police officer appeared and ordered all three of them to put their hands on the wall.

"Did you have any narcotics on you?" Mahoney asked.

"No," Ben said.

A prosecutor called Watts and the three officers who had arrested Ben. One officer, Douglas Nichols, testified that Ben "was holding a clear plastic bag containing numerous smaller ziplock baggies containing white powder."

Another, Robert Gonzalez, seemed less certain, and the judge, Michael P. Toomin, asked him for clarification: "You said that you didn't see anything in Mr. Baker's hand when you detained him, is that right?"

"I didn't have a view of what was in his hand until he came toward me," Gonzalez said. But, after another officer detained Ben, Gonzalez said, "I caught a glimpse of the narcotics."

"Where was it?" Toomin asked.

"In his hand, I don't recall."

When Watts took the witness stand, Mahoney said, "Have you ever asked Mr. Baker to give you any money for any reason at any time?"

"No," Watts said.

The trial took less than two days, spread over two weeks. On June 9th, Toomin declared Ben guilty. Ben's defense, he said, was "based solely on his testimony, his self-serving testimony," and was "actually contradicted by credible evidence presented by a number of police officers." Toomin later explained in court that he knew the state's attorney's office had investigated Watts, but noted that "nothing happened. It bore no fruition at all." (Toomin declined to comment on the case.)

At Ben's sentencing, Mahoney asked



W. M. Phail

EGGPLANT

I loved the white moon circles
and the purple halos,

on a plate as the salt sweat them.

The oil in the pan smoked like bad
days in the Syrian desert—

when a moon stayed all day—

when morning was a purple
elegy for the last friend seen—

when the fog of the riverbank
rose like a holy ghost.

My mother made those white moons sizzle
in some egg wash and salt—

some parsley appeared
from the garden

and summer evenings
came with no memory

but the table with white dishes.

Shining aubergine—black-skinned
beauty, bitter apple.

We used our hands.

—Peter Balakian

for “mercy”; Toomin gave Ben eighteen years. Afterward, Clarissa wrote to the judge, begging him to reconsider. She worked full time, she said, “while Ben is taking our boys to school and picking them up and helping them with their homework. Here are examples of how two African-American parents are active and involved in our kids’ productive lives.” Toomin reduced the sentence to fourteen years.

Ben was taken to Stateville Correctional Center, thirty miles southwest of Chicago. Three months later, on September 18, 2006, he was brought back to Toomin’s courtroom, to stand trial with Clarissa on their joint case. A prosecutor offered them a last-minute deal: if they both pleaded guilty, Clarissa would receive one year of probation, and Ben would

get an additional four years in prison.

Standing before the judge, they quickly conferred. Clarissa wanted to take the case to trial—“In my mind I was, like, No, we’re going to fight, because I’m *innocent*,” she said—but Ben told her that they should take the plea deal. If they went to trial and were convicted, Clarissa would spend at least four years in prison. Who would take care of their boys? In tears, she pleaded guilty.

Judge Toomin told them that he thought there was insufficient evidence “that these are renegade police officers,” but he assured them that if their accusations eventually proved true he would take action. “I would have no hesitation but to vacate all of the guilty findings, judgments, sentences, including the fourteen years you’re doing now.”

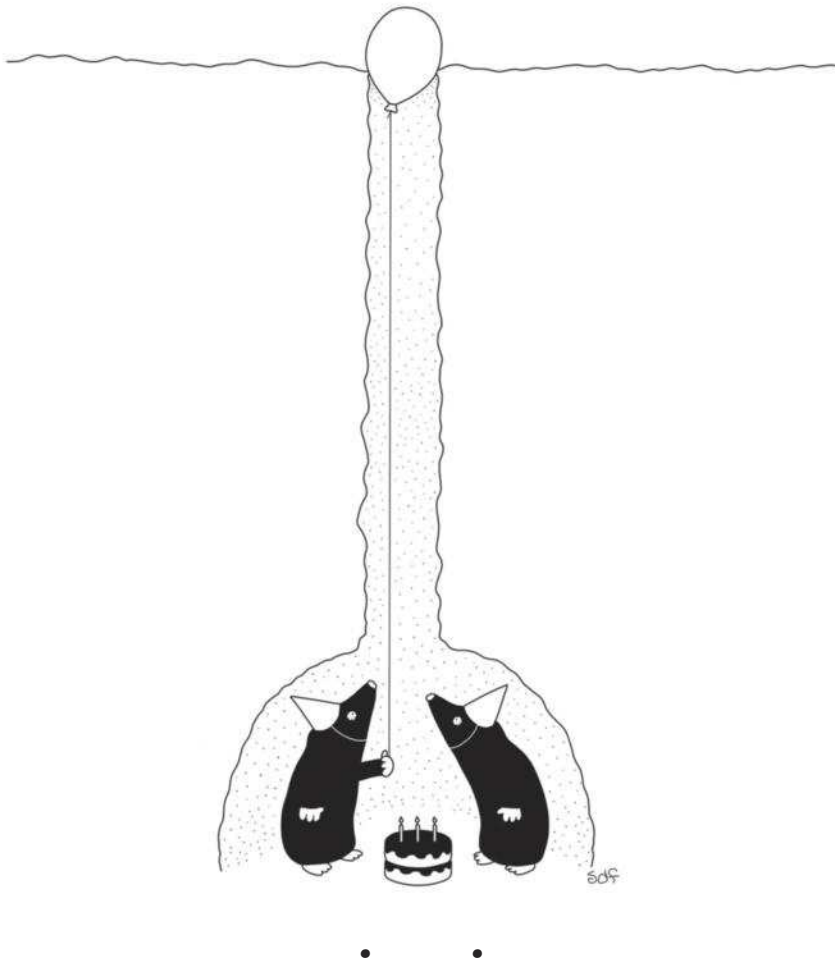
At the end of the proceeding, Mahoney told the judge, “Ms. Glenn would like to hug Mr. Baker.”

Clarissa was now the mother of three adolescent boys, with a full-time job and a husband in prison. Before Ben’s trial, they had found a house on the South Side, and she had obtained a Section 8 voucher to help pay the rent. But, with Clarissa’s felony conviction, she was no longer eligible for Section 8. She felt that in some ways her life was even more stressful than Ben’s. “I’m worried about him in there, I’m worried about us out here in the world. I’m worried about bills, I’m worried about income, I’m worried about food, I’m worried about safety—so I’m twice as worried,” she said. She tried to hide her feelings from their sons. But Ben, Jr., who is now twenty-six, told me, “We saw it—how much pain she was in.”

“Every part of her was dying on the inside,” Clarissa’s brother Bryan recalled. “The person you love—that you wrapped yourself up in, that you made a huge bet on—is now in jail. You’re being ridiculed—family is ostracizing you. Not necessarily us, but other extended family. Now all of your business is out in the open. For a person like her, that is huge.” Clarissa told me, “I was mad and angry and had a lot of hate in me. And you’re not supposed to hate anyone, but these officers changed my entire being.”

In 2008, Ben was transferred to Pinckneyville Correctional Center, three hundred miles from Chicago, where he shared a cell and slept on the bottom bunk. He kept two photos of Clarissa in his Bible, and he stuck photos of his children in the mattress above him. “So when I go to sleep and wake up, they’re the first thing I see,” he said. Because Ben hadn’t known his father, he tried, with his own sons “to be there for them as much as I could,” he said. Now he missed Ben, Jr.’s football games, and Gerard’s basketball games, and the day Deon won a cooking competition. Clarissa often visited Ben, but she could afford to bring the boys only twice a year.

Meanwhile, the F.B.I., which had occasionally heard about Watts’s conduct, received new information in 2007 and undertook an investigation. A federal prosecutor named Thomas Shakeshaft began working with the Bureau



to develop a case against Watts. “These cases take a long time to do, especially when you’re trying to nail a Chicago cop,” Shakeshaft said. The Watts case was particularly difficult, because the most likely informants were involved in the drug trade, a fact that a defense attorney could use to undermine their credibility at trial. “So you’ve got to have a bunch of coöperators and a bunch of deals,” Shakeshaft said.

By 2008, Clarissa had concluded that the only way to bring Ben home was to help law enforcement catch Watts taking a bribe. She contacted the Office of Professional Standards, she said, and was referred to the F.B.I., where she offered to help recruit informants. Shannon Spalding, a police officer who was working on the F.B.I. investigation, recalled, “Clarissa walked in these people. My partner and I would wire them up and send them out on missions.”

On several occasions, Clarissa said she saw an F.B.I. agent named Patrick Smith give marked money to an informant to pass on to Watts. Clarissa worked

with Smith for about a year, she said, “and then all of a sudden it just fell to the wayside.” Spalding said that she was told by the F.B.I. that Smith had not been “following protocol,” and that the evidence he helped gather was “tainted.” Another agent took over the investigation, but Clarissa had no further contact with the Bureau. (The F.B.I. declined to answer any questions about the investigation. Smith did not respond to requests for comment.)

At the time that Clarissa stopped hearing from Smith, around 2009, the Chicago Housing Authority was still in the midst of its effort to demolish its largest housing projects, including all the buildings at the Wells. Residents were promised rental vouchers to help them relocate, but thousands of people—many of them afflicted with severe drug addictions and mental illness—remained in the abandoned buildings. Finally, in the fall of 2011, the last of the Wells came down. There was no plan for the squatters, who likely moved into homeless shelters, relatives’ homes, or onto the streets.

A few months later, on the evening of February 13, 2012, Ben was lying on his bunk in Pinckneyville when someone shouted down the cellblock, telling him to turn on the TV. “Hey, Ben! They got Watts!”

Ben tuned in to the news and saw Watts running down the sidewalk, trying to evade television cameras. That morning, the F.B.I. had arrested him and one of his officers, Kallatt Mohammed, for stealing fifty-two hundred dollars from an F.B.I. informant posing as a drug courier. Watts and Mohammed had been charged in federal court with theft of government funds.

Ben stared at the television, taking in the news. His roommate was hollering, “You told me, man! You told me!” Ben wondered why Watts and Mohammed were the only ones arrested: “I’m, like, ‘Damn. Just them two?’”

Clarissa learned about the arrests late that night when she was watching the news, and thought that she would soon be notified of Ben’s release. But though the arrests were front-page news in Chicago, there does not appear to have been any reporting about the people who had been wrongly convicted, or an audit to find out how many were still in prison, or a push to reinvestigate their cases.

Clarissa wrote again to Judge Toomin, this time reminding him that he had promised to vacate their convictions if Watts were ever proved to be corrupt. “The reason I am bothering you is because I felt you are a fair judge and I trusted you,” she wrote. Toomin replied that “the Code of Judicial Canons preclude me from providing you any guidance in this matter.” Clarissa hired an attorney, who filed a petition to overturn Ben’s conviction, citing the arrests of Watts and Mohammed. But the state’s attorney’s office argued against reopening the case, and the petition was dismissed.

Clarissa attended a few of Watts’s court dates at the federal courthouse in downtown Chicago. If Watts and Mohammed were convicted, she thought, surely Ben would be released. In August, 2012, Mohammed pleaded guilty to theft of government funds. The following summer, Watts did, too. At Watts’s sentencing, federal prosecutors made clear that his criminal behavior far exceeded the crime for which he had

been convicted. They asked the judge to sentence him to three years. She gave him twenty-two months.

Ben had been in prison for more than seven years. Clarissa couldn't afford another attorney, so Ben persuaded a fellow-inmate, a jailhouse lawyer, to help him write a petition for a new trial, which Ben filed in January, 2014. A judge assigned his case to the state appellate defender's office, and a lawyer there eventually referred it to the Exoneration Project. That November, attorneys there sued the F.B.I. to get its records on Watts, but while they waited to receive them there was no movement on his case.

Clarissa was overwhelmed by her family's predicament. "Imagine your son sitting on the floor, holding a pillow, crying, saying he wants his dad," she said. "They were young men growing up. So, a lot of things I feel they probably wanted to talk about or say, they didn't say to me." One day, when Deon was walking home from high school, someone pulled a gun on him and stole his money and cell phone. Soon afterward, Clarissa called Deon's number from her office and got the usual monosyllabic answers: Did he make it home? Yeah. Did he have any homework? Yeah. Later, she discovered that she had been talking to the robber. If Ben had been home, she knew, he would have been able to tell the boys which streets were safe to walk on. "I was sheltered," she said. "I can't protect them like that."

In late 2014, Clarissa was laid off from the home-health-care agency where she had worked for a decade. She looked for a new job, but she had a felony record; no matter how well the first interview went, she was not called back. Deon dropped out of college and moved home to help. "It was a spiral going down—mentally, financially, emotionally," Clarissa said. "It was really, really tough." Some days, she didn't get out of bed. "I thought about suicide," she said. "But then I was thinking, I didn't want our boys to find me. If Ben wasn't out, who was going to be there for them?"

Clarissa could barely afford Ben's calls from prison, and when they spoke on the phone, she recounted, "He's saying, 'Don't worry.' Don't worry! Don't worry about what? Me not working? Your son getting stuck up coming home from school? It's not that I'm getting

angry. But I'm *angry*. I'm angry at him. Because how can you tell me not to worry?" She said, "I had tried everything, everything, to get him out." Finally, after eight years, she gave up. That winter, she filed for divorce.

One day in September, 2015, Joshua Tepfer, of the Exoneration Project, who also worked at a civil-rights law firm, Loevy & Loevy, was handling a case for a colleague at the Cook County courthouse. It was a "nothing court date," as Tepfer put it—he simply had to appear before the judge and set the next court date for the defendant, Ben Baker. While he was in the courtroom, he started reading Ben's file. The moment he left the courthouse, he called the colleague. "Can I just make sure I understand this?" he asked. "So, he testified that he was framed, and then this cop was basically locked up for doing the same thing?" She told him that that was correct. "This is a great case," he said. "Can I work on it?"

Tepfer knew that, to get Ben's conviction thrown out, he would have to prove that Watts's corruption was far more extensive than had been shown in court. He studied the F.B.I. records on Watts, and tracked down Shannon Spalding, the police officer who had worked on the investigation. After Watts was arrested, Spalding and her colleague Daniel Echeverria had filed a whistleblower lawsuit against the Chicago Police Department. As Jamie Kalven reported, in a lengthy exposé in the *Intercept*, their supervisors labelled Spalding and Echeverria "rats" and forced them to spend weeks in an empty room at the training academy. (In 2016, the city agreed to pay them a settlement of two million dollars.)

When Tepfer first tried to enlist Spalding in his efforts to free Ben, she had reservations, in part because her lawyers had advised her not to get involved. Spalding told me, "He was pitching Ben as a reformed person. I told Josh, 'You do realize Ben Baker is a drug dealer?'" But in the end Spalding decided to help. "It doesn't matter what you do," she said. "You have to be found guilty of the crime *you* commit. He shouldn't be in prison."

On December 15, 2015, Tepfer filed a thirty-two-page petition with the

court, telling the "seemingly outlandish story of police corruption" that had led to Ben Baker spending nearly a decade in prison. Two days later, the *Chicago Tribune* ran a front-page story about Ben's case, saying that it "casts a spotlight on the police code of silence." The following month, the state's attorney's office dropped the charges against Ben, and, at a brief hearing on January 14th, LeRoy K. Martin, Jr., the presiding judge of the criminal division of the Cook County circuit court, threw out his conviction. Afterward, the chief of criminal prosecutions in the state's attorney's office told a reporter, of Watts: "Now it's a fact that he's a corrupt and dirty police officer."

That evening, Ben's sister Gale picked him up at the Robinson Correctional Center, on the Indiana border, and drove straight back to their mother's house, just outside Chicago. "Everybody was there waiting," Gale said. "It was the most exciting day in the world." The next day, Clarissa heard that Ben had visited Ben, Jr., and Deon at work. She was sitting at home, still unemployed, trying to decide, "Should I call him, or shouldn't I call him?" They had not spoken in more than a year. Before she could make up her mind, she heard a knock on the door. "Can I get a hug?" Ben said. Clarissa recalled, "When he gave me that one hug, I didn't want him to let go."

In March, 2016, a judge vacated Ben's and Clarissa's convictions from their arrest together. During the next two years, dozens of men who had lived or spent time in the Wells called Tepfer with stories about how Watts and his officers had framed them, too. Tepfer invited many of them to the Exoneration Project, in a converted loft building in Chicago's gentrified West Loop. Shaun James, the dice player, came, and so did Phillip Thomas, the candy seller at the Wells, bringing a hundred pages of legal documents that he'd kept from his case, a decade earlier. Sean Starr, an attorney who helped Tepfer interview the men, told me, "A lot of them said that, to some degree, this ruined their life."

Meanwhile, a lawyer named Kim Foxx was running an insurgent campaign for state's attorney, promising "to bring back integrity to our criminal-

justice system." Foxx, who is forty-six, the same age as Clarissa, grew up in Cabrini-Green Homes, Chicago's most infamous housing project. When she was in high school, she told me, she toured the Cook County Jail with her classmates as part of a "scared straight" program. "It was horrible," she said—overcrowded, with people sleeping on mattresses on the floor. She attended college and law school at Southern Illinois University, and later worked in the state's attorney's office.

Foxx is personable, polished, and almost regal: she is nearly six feet tall, and when we met, in February, she was wearing three-inch black heels. She seemed to have little chance of defeating the incumbent, Anita Alvarez, until November, 2015, when city officials released footage of a police officer fatally shooting a teen-ager named Laquan McDonald. The shooting had occurred a year earlier, but Alvarez did not charge the officer with first-degree murder until the day the footage was released. Young activists launched an anti-Alvarez campaign, called "Bye, Anita." Foxx said, "Sometimes it takes really jarring incidents to shock the consciousness of people about what elected officials should be doing." She trounced Alvarez in the Democratic primary and went on to win the general election. In December, 2016, Foxx was sworn in, the first African-

American woman to serve as Cook County's top prosecutor.

The following September, Tepfer filed a petition with the court to vacate the convictions of Thomas, James, and thirteen other men. He included statements that the men had made following their arrests: trial transcripts in which they insisted they had been framed, motions filed by their attorneys making the same argument, complaints filed with the police department. Wrongful-conviction cases often drag on for years, but eight weeks after Tepfer filed the petition he received a call from Foxx's office. Starr heard him shout into the receiver, "Are you serious?" Starr recalled, "I could hear in his voice that something incredibly monumental had just happened."

Foxx and her prosecutors asked Judge Martin to throw out the fifteen men's convictions. The next morning, the men stood together before the judge as he did just that. One of them, a man named Leonard Gipson, who had pleaded guilty to drug charges and spent two years in jail, had three convictions overturned. He told reporters, "I'm just happy for me and my friends that someone gave us the opportunity to look at our cases and understand what Watts was really doing to us." Foxx told me, "Any time I'm asked to sign off on the vacating of a conviction, there is that moment of thinking about what it means for the

individual in that case. And then there is the pit in my stomach that is always, How many more are there? How many people are sitting in a cell? How many people are sitting at home with a conviction and can't get a job based on a case that shouldn't have been there?"

On a Monday evening this past January, I visited Ben and Clarissa at their house on the South Side. They sat on a leather sofa in the living room, where a framed photo of them from around 2002 hung on the wall. After Clarissa's felony record was erased, she had found work as a receptionist in a dentist's office. When we met, Ben had just started the first job he'd ever held, as a machinist at a packaging company. We spoke for a few hours about their life in the Wells, their arrests, and their efforts to expose Watts. An hour or so into our conversation, Ben turned to Clarissa. "Are you all right? Why are you crying?"

"Because it's just living it, and knowing what I went through," she said. "It was *not* good."

When Ben was in prison, Clarissa said, she and the boys "didn't really talk about it in the house."

"There wasn't nothing to talk about," Ben said. "I wasn't there. They didn't understand why I wasn't there. So what was there to talk about?"

So far, Foxx's office has thrown out thirty-two convictions of people who were arrested by Watts and his officers. But Watts and Mohammed were involved in about five hundred felony convictions between 2004 and 2012, and Tepfer believes that Foxx should overturn all of them, as well as the rest of the convictions tied to Watts's team. "We can't trust a single thing that happened in any of these cases," he said. Foxx is more cautious. "We want to make sure we're doing our due diligence," she said. Last fall, the Chicago police superintendent placed on desk duty a sergeant and fourteen officers who worked with Watts. All of them remain on the police force.

The expanding scope of the Watts scandal continued to amaze Clarissa. "I just wanted to get Ben out," she told me when I met with her and Ben. "I didn't know it was going to get so huge." Whenever there was a court date for the other "Watts victims," as Tepfer calls them,



"Our thoughts and prayers are with those who wanted a moral and ethical Administration."

she showed up to watch the proceedings. For her, the court dates provided a kind of release. "When I started coming to court, it felt like a vest came off," she said. "It's like a layer being constantly peeled off. Like you can breathe. You can breathe more and more."

This spring, on the morning of April 10th, Tepfer was on his way home from a conference at Villanova University, outside Philadelphia, called Mass Exoneration and Ethics. As his flight landed in Chicago, he looked at his phone and saw he had several messages from Clarissa. She had been driving home from the gym when she saw unfamiliar cars parked outside her house.

She kept driving, met Tepfer, and they went together to the house, where they found law-enforcement officers putting handcuffs on Gerard. A federal agent said that he also had an arrest warrant for Ben Baker. Tepfer called Ben at work and told him to come home, and they drove together to the federal courthouse downtown. Officers put Ben in shackles and took him to jail. He had been home a little more than two years.

Federal prosecutors charged Ben with four counts of "distributing a controlled substance": selling heroin and fentanyl to a D.E.A. informant. According to the criminal complaint, the four alleged sales, each worth about four or five hundred dollars, had occurred during the day at Ben and Clarissa's house, thirteen months after Ben got out of prison, before he found a job. In a separate federal criminal case filed that day, Ben's friend Jamar Lewis, who had been part of the mass exoneration, was charged with conspiracy to distribute heroin. Gerard was charged in another heroin and fentanyl case, brought by the state's attorney's office. All three have pleaded not guilty.

Two days later, Clarissa, Ben, Jr., and Deon went to the federal courthouse, with Ben's mother, three of his aunts, a cousin, a niece, and a year-old grandniece, for a bail hearing. In a carpeted hallway outside the courtroom, the family held hands and bowed their heads, as one of Ben's aunts led them in a prayer: "Lord, Ben needs you right now. Right now..."

They filed silently into the courtroom. Clarissa sat in the second row, wearing a white puffer vest. A door

swung open, and everyone turned to watch Ben, in an orange jail uniform and leg irons, make his way to the front of the courtroom.

Ben's new lawyer, Molly Armour, told the judge that Ben was on a "forward trajectory." The president of the packaging company had sent a letter to the court, saying that Ben had been an "exemplary employee from the start," who had "never been late to work even once." He added, "I am truly hoping that he can return to work as soon as possible." But to have any chance at release Ben needed someone to agree to supervise him.

"Can I talk to the third-party custodian?" the judge, Mary M. Rowland, asked.

Clarissa walked to a wooden lectern. "How long have you known Mr. Baker?"

"Twenty-seven years," she said.

The judge asked, "Do you understand what it means to be a third-party custodian? In some sense, you are the eyes and ears of the court." If Ben was released and broke any of the court's rules—if he stayed out past curfew, or

if he smoked marijuana—she would have to report him.

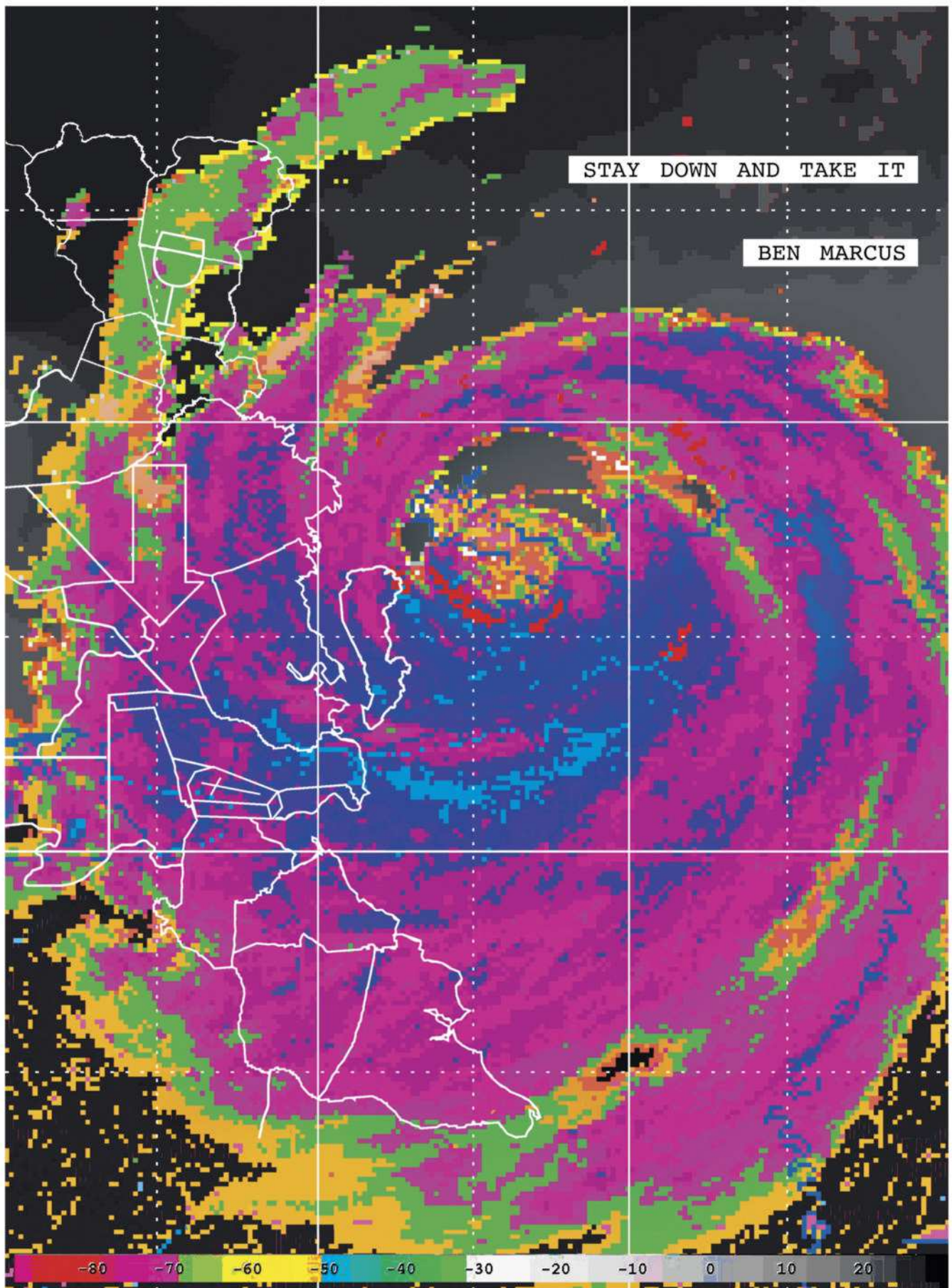
The judge continued, "What are your children doing?"

Clarissa was so nervous that she forgot the name of the sandwich shop where Ben, Jr., and Deon worked. "In a restaurant downtown," she finally said. Just then, her grandniece ran to the front of the courtroom. Clarissa reached down and lifted her up. Once the judge finished with her questions, Clarissa returned to her seat, carrying the toddler.

The judge turned to Ben. "I'm very troubled that you get out in 2016 and a year later there are allegations you've engaged in this conduct," she said. But, she added, "I'm very impressed by the letter from your employer." She continued, "You've got a great job, and you're doing a great job." As it became clear that she was planning to release Ben, Clarissa's shoulders relaxed and she exhaled. Deon, seated behind her, patted her back. It was a small victory. Ben faces up to thirty years on each count. ♦



FICTION



James is home early and he says we goddammit really seriously need to pack. Hup hup, time to go. It's the weather again, and it bores me so. We live where the water loves to visit. Just a little rain off the coast, that's all, and it'll rise into our home. It loves to soak our rug and climb up the walls and, once, it seeped into our electronics, inside the TV cabinet, and destroyed our precious entertainment center, which keeps us—or me, anyway—from raiding the medicine cabinet at night for other pleasures. Otherwise, well, we have brilliant sunsets and the kind of grass that is absurdly tall, taller than you or me. I don't know how it doesn't just fall over. You'd think it had a long slender bone in each blade. Some original, beautiful creature that needs no head or limbs, because it has no enemies. Who knows.

James bustles around the house, grabbing what he can. He says to pack light and to pack smart. I like this military side of my husband. I almost feel charmed. The evacuation is mandatory this time—something mean and serious is barreling down on us—and I almost wish we had a pretty siren in our little community for occasions like this one. A siren adds a feeling of gravity to a catastrophe, a feeling that something important is happening, which one so rarely gets to feel. James says that he'll grab our "go bag," which I didn't even know we had. What has he put in it? Pears, medical marijuana, Percocet, and frozen Snickers bars? Something tells me that it's more of a batteries-and-rope-and-candles-and-matches kind of bag. James is huffy and swollen and red as he loads the car. This is all a little much for him. Still, it's nice to see him excited, in charge, alive. It's been hard to watch a man his age slowly lose his sense of purpose, as he's been doing, shuffling around the kitchen trying to perfect his long-simmering sauces, most of which get poured out on the back lawn when he's done, since how much gravy-drenched flesh can the two of us reasonably consume?

There is only one road out of here, and everyone we know is on it, moaning silently, I imagine, gently rending their summer linens at this unwelcome disruption. It gets tiring waving at them all—stressed-out, wrinkled accidents of

the human form, with white hair, or no hair, or nubby yellow sun visors, grimacing, hunched over their steering wheels, as if they were being chased by men with guns. We know these people by their cars, which are long and dark and quiet, just like ours. We could simply call one another, share information, and prop up one another's nervous systems with voice-based medication, but people are saving their cell-phone batteries. We've been through this drill before. Also, James prefers that I not talk on the phone when he's driving. He does his best to tolerate it, bless him, but he tenses up so terribly that I fear he will break open and spill everywhere, even while he insists, sometimes angrily, that he really doesn't mind. Really, really, with spit fluffing out of his mouth and a look of murder in his eyes. I feel that he is daring me to make a call, but, when I consider the risk, I sort of daren't. After all, I am a passenger in the vehicle that he is driving, and I must consider my own safety, too.

"This is the hardest part," James says. "Getting out of here."

Well put, and doesn't that just apply to any old situation: a meeting, a party, a relationship, a life? Always that sticky problem of the exit and how to squeeze through it.

When I don't respond, James says, "Do you agree?" It's what he often wants and needs. Assent. I tend to pay out as much as I can, with my mouth and otherwise, but one must always monitor the personal cost, careful not to add to the deficit, which can build up and trigger a low-grade rage. Not my prettiest style. I never knew that I would be so relentlessly called on to agree with someone. Mother never said. Ask not, I guess, and I sort of haven't.

I touch his leg. "Oh, I do. I was just thinking, in fact, how right you are. This is the difficult part. This right here." I would so love to point at the two of us, the fact of us, here in this car, on this road, on this day, with a storm coming, in this particular life, to say that *this* is the difficult part. Because, well. But the precise gesture eludes me. Hands can signify only so much. Usually they should just rest in one's lap, sneaking beneath the garment now and then for a wee scratch. This is possibly why one is supposed to use

one's words. I think. Plus, James is focussing all his energy on the road ahead, which is really just an endless line of cars pointing west, away from the storm. We will be here a while. We might as well table any immediate feelings.

"This is about the only time I hate this island," James says. "When it keeps us prisoner."

"Yup," I say. "Me, too."

It's not really an island, or it wasn't until some developers got clever. Because people love an island. I guess *we* love an island. I'm told they used explosives. They bombed a little spit of land that connected two bigger blobs of coastal blah, then built a baby road over the obliterated spit, the road we are now stuck on. And, *poof*, our little town became an island, and the houses suddenly cost more. The wind was arguably sharper and cooler after that, the light more intense, more light-like. According to the marketing, anyway. Oh, it was instantly spectacular, and all it took was some dynamite stuffed into the gaping pores of an old, rotted peninsula. "Blowing Your Way to Beauty" might have been a nice slogan. Island life.

"What's strange," I say, as we idle in traffic, "is that the sun is out. It's such a fine day. So weirdly beautiful."

James cranes his neck to look out the window, trying maybe to be fair, and he has that expression, as if he'd evaluated all the evidence but, still, he's very sorry to say that he just cannot bring himself to agree. It would violate his deepest moral principles to cede any ground here. "I'm not sure that's so *strange*," he says, as if there were a superior adjective he's reluctant to share. "Quiet before the *you know*, and all. Plus I see some . . ." And he points to nowhere, where there is maybe nothing, and I'm sure I don't even need to look.

He's probably right. What do I know when it comes to *strange*? Gosh knows I'm no expert on the uncanny.

"Yes, well, should we have music, or just listen to each other's bodies complain?"

"You think I'm complaining?" James says. "Because I'm not. This is a little stressful. I'm trying to get us out of here."

"I understand," I say. And I do. It needn't be said aloud, but I was referring to the sounds we make, each of

us, which are whorishly amplified in the car, and not exactly my preferred music. Sounds of hunger, sounds of anxiety, sounds that have no explanation whatsoever—just the body at work, leaking and churning, groaning at a frequency that no one was ever meant to hear. Live with someone long enough, and you learn all his gruesome lyrics, all the squishy instrumentals that gurgle out of him, note by note.

I click on the news, and for a little while it's just the sound of the storm elsewhere, where it's ripened into a roar. We are told that the storm has paused in the lee of a fledgling mountain up north, where it's gathering strength, pawing at the dust like a bull. They have a microphone embedded deep inside this poor storm, I guess, and I'd give anything to sound like that. So sweet and angry and brand-new, a kind of subvocal monster simply cooing at the pain and the pleasure of life. It's perfectly beautiful and soothing, on such a nice day, until people start talking over it, explaining where this storm is from and where it might go, what it could do along the way, and then how it makes them feel. Feelings! Every one of them seems to be stirred up by this storm. By the time the newscast is over, I'm exhausted and confused. I examine myself for feelings, carefully checking in the usual hiding places, and there are simply none to be found. We aren't kids anymore. We are old. Older. Nearly dead, really. James is nearly dead, at least. He shows it. When he went to the doctor recently, he hid the results from me, and I didn't really ask, because I have to ration my concern. I can't waste it on false alarms, and, even if it's a genuine alarm, I must, I have come to believe, enact a protocol with respect to what I feel. James shows his feelings so liberally that they come at a discount, and their value diminishes. When he says he loves me, usually in a threatening way, the statement always seems to beg for reciprocation. I guess he cries wolf. More or less sobs it. One could argue that everything James says is merely the word "wolf" in one language or another. If he loves me, it is because that may open the portal for more cuddles and



touches. That's all. He needs to be swaddled, and I just happen to be nearby. If I ever dare to walk past him without touching his hand or stopping to outright kiss him, he pouts all day and looks up at me with mournful eyes. A husband is a bag of need with a dank wet hole at its bottom. The polar opposite of a go bag. I comply with James's wishes when I can, but the day is long and I have other projects.

I guess I want James to die. I don't want this actively. Or with malice. But in a dim and distant way I gently root for James's absence so that I can proceed to the other side of the years I have left, get to what happens next. For a long time, James was what happened next for me. As a person, he was sort of a page-turner. I moved through parts of him and made discoveries, large and small, and he led me to places and ideas that I'd not seen or heard before. This looked and felt like life. And then, and then—even though I don't think it happened suddenly—the story died in my old, tired husband. I knew everything there was to know: what the nights would be like, how the morning would feel. What he would say. What he wouldn't. How I would think and feel around him. How I wouldn't. Knowledge is many things, but it definitely is not power. "Dread" is a better word for it, I think, though I do understand how that ultimately fails as a slogan.

The hotels inland are full, so we follow the endless line of cars to the shelter. We are shown to two cots at the center of a high-school gymnasium. There must be five hundred beds here, maybe more, laid out in a grid. At midnight, the sleep sounds in here will be symphonic. The scoreboard in the gym is on, but it seems that no one has scored yet. Zero to zero. I'd like to feel that there is meaning in this, but such a desire is rarely satisfied, and, anyway, I am tired and hungry. "Voilà," says the volunteer, who has a walkie-talkie on his belt that squawks out little birdcalls. He is a handsome young man and he seems unreasonably proud to be playing this role today. I picture

him unplugged, powered down like a mannequin, maybe sitting in a small chair in a room with sports banners on the wall. James and I stare at the cots as gratefully as we can, and for a moment I wonder if we are meant to tip the volunteer, because he stands there expectantly, as wild children rocket past our feet.

"Just let us know if there's anything we can do for you," he says.

Anything? What a kind offer. A softer mattress, I think, and bone-chilling privacy, and a beef stew made with red wine. Some sexual attention would also be fine, if not from you specifically, because I fear you are too polite. Maybe you have a friend? After drives like this one, I often crave a release. But only a particular style of lovemaking will do. I have evolved a fairly specific set of requirements. If you don't mind reading over these detailed instructions, briefing your friend, and then sending him to meet me in the janitor's closet, that would be fine.

We tell him thank you, no, and we wait for him to run off before we start whispering our panic all over each other.

"Yeah, no," James says, looking around, fake smiling, as if everyone were trying to read his lips. "No fucking way."

"Maybe for a night?" I offer. I would like to be flexible. I would like to bend myself around this situation, which is certainly not ideal and is almost laughably experimental. One imagines doctors behind one-way glass somewhere, rubbing themselves into a scientific frenzy over the predicament they've designed for us—two aging soft bodies forced into an open-air sleeping environment. Maybe we are tired enough, and armed with enough pharmaceutical support, to render ourselves comatose on these trim little cots until it's safe to go home? But will people fuss with our inert bodies? Will they see that we are so heavily tranquillized as to be unresponsive and then proceed to conduct whatever procedures they like on us? I surrender myself to my sweet medicines only when I can lock a door, because I hate the thought of being fiddled with when I've brought on elective paralysis and can't exactly fiddle back.

"The storm hasn't even touched

down on the island yet. We are talking days, maybe," James says, rubbing his face. He rubs it with real purpose, pulling the skin into impossible shapes, before letting it not exactly snap back onto his head—it takes its time, like the gnarled skin of a scrotum—and I fear for him a little, as if his hand might drag too far and pull his face free.

Together we look around, as we might if we'd just entered a party. There's no one here we know. It's just a crowd of ragged travellers, forced from their homes, with far too many children running free. The children seem to believe that they've been released into a cage match. Kill or be killed—that sort of thing. The cots, mostly empty, are launching pads for child divers, exploring their airborne possibilities. They leap from bed to bed, rolling into piles on the floor, whooping. A kind of topless nudity prevails, regardless, it seems, of age. Certainly there is beauty on display, but it's ruined by all this noise. One might reasonably think that there should be a separate evacuation receptacle for children. A room of their bloody own. Answering to their special needs. Relieving the rest of us from the, well, the special energy that children so often desire to display. Lord bless their fresh, pink hearts.

I text Lettie, because there's no way she and Richard would put up with this sort of bullshit. Are they here? In what quadrant? Could they issue a specific cry, maybe holler my name?

"Airbnb!" she texts back. "Headed to Morley's for clams and bloodies. Where r u?"

Oh, Jesus, right. People made *plans*. People thought ahead. I think it's best not to mention this to James, because that's something I could have been doing while he drove—securing our safe, private, *cozy* lodging and making dinner rezzies and otherwise running advance recon for this sweet adventure of ours.

James has curled up on the cot and is staring into space. He looks so tired. His color is James-like, which is never that great. I worry that he's parked for good now, that the powerful laws of the late afternoon, which seem to visit men of a certain age, are pulling him down into some bottomless, mood-darkening

sleep, from which he will wake crankily, trumpeting his exhaustion, denying that he ever slept.

"Are you going to be napping?" I ask him, as neutrally as I can. "Because . . ."

"No, I'm not going to be *napping*. Are you kidding me? Here?" He has a way of shouting in a whisper. It's his evacuation-shelter whisper, I guess, although it has caught the attention of certain of our neighbors, who might want to scooch their cots somewhere else, come to think of it.

Yes, I want to assure them. *We will be like this all night, whispering our special brand of kindness at each other, so pull up some chairs and put your heads in our asses. That's where the view is best.* Perhaps that's one way to secure our area and erect a kind of privacy barrier.

"Maybe you should get up?" I say.

"Jesus, Alice, I've been driving for hours. I can't relax for a minute?"

"Yes, you can, and even longer. Take all the time you want. I would just like to know your plans so I can plan accordingly."

"What?" he hisses. "Are you going to go out and meet some friends? Go out for coffee, maybe?"

We have a different strategy when it comes to the timing of our emotional broadcasts. James buckles in public, and a hole opens in his neck or whatever, and out comes his sour message for me and the world. One

feels that he is emboldened in a crowd. It is possible that he does not see other people as human, and thus fails to experience shame when he debases himself in their midst. Like masturbating in front of a pet. Whereas I frequently wait until we are alone, and then, in the calmest voice I can manage, I quietly birth my highly articulate rage in his direction. I certainly have my bias, but it is possible that neither style is superior, and that a steady silence in the face of distress or tension is the ultimate goal. Silence, in the end, is the only viable rehearsal for what comes after, anyway. I mean way, way after. And one certainly wants to be prepared. One wants to have practiced.

"Not here, James," I say, as brightly as I can.

"What you mean is not anywhere, right, Alice? Not anywhere and never?"

Not bad. He is learning. Although I do not doubt that he will share his feelings with me when we find some privacy.

We decide to go to the car and talk this through. The cots will be here as a last resort, although it feels odd using the word "resort" with respect to such a location. James feels that we should start driving, because there will be plenty of other people with the same idea, all of them racing to find the closest hotel room. It's kind of like



the plot of "Cannonball Run," except that these people are old, they drive very slowly, and some of them just might die tonight. Eventually, James explains, if we go far and fast enough, we should find some part of this hellish country that is not affected by this storm and has plenty of empty beds. He would like to express confidence now, I can see that. I imagine that he wants me not to worry. If only he could do it without making me worry so much more.

The roads may still be packed, he says, and who knows about the weather. Around us there's a fringe of rain and the sky is black, and there's that sound, a kind of pressurized silence, as if the orchestra were about to start playing. The conductor will tap his baton and all hell will break loose. We figure we should get out of here, head further inland, and maybe there will be some food and a nice clean bed in a room where we can lock the door. It sounds decadent and delicious to me, and I sort of cannot wait. We are a team, and it feels as though we've just broken out of jail together.

We pull onto the highway and I check the news on my phone. "They are calling this storm Boris."

"Boris," he says flatly, as if I've just told him the name of a distant star.

"What's the thinking there?" I wonder.

"They needed a B name."

"Yes, well then, Boris, of course."

"And they practice a kind of diversity."

"Yeah?"

"I don't know. I'm sure they want to be inclusive."

"Not to trigger anyone by using a regular name?"

"Boris *is* a regular name," James says. "In several parts of the world. With huge populations. Possibly more regular than John, worldwide."

"Then let the storm go bother them."

"I'm sure there are people named Boris over here."

"Oh, I'm sure. I can smell them from here."

"What is wrong with you?" James is grinning. I don't think he minds my moods when they're not directed at him.

"Plenty. I'm hungry and you won't let me eat. We just have to drive and

drive. I'm going to hurl myself from the car."

James smiles, and he pretends to do math, wetting his finger and tabulating an imaginary problem in the air in front of him. "Fifty," he says.

"What?"

"I definitely think that's at least fifty times that you've threatened that. At least since I've known you. I can't be sure about the time before that, but something tells me you had a penchant for it in your early years, too."

He may be right. I don't care to reflect too far back, particularly on the threats I may have needed to utter as a girl in certain stifling situations, which, unsurprisingly, very often occurred when I was a passenger in a car. I used to think about it more seriously, imagining myself rolling like a weevil along the edge of the road, finally free of torment. And of course the most delicious part of the fantasy was what would happen in the car after I'd ejected. The shock, the panic, the deep, abiding respect. Even the jealousy. Someone had finally done what everyone else could only dream of.

"Booyah," I say. "Perhaps a more intuitive name."

"Beelzebub."

"Bitch Face."

"Bronwyn."

"Bald Mountain."

"Boredom." And we both laugh.

"Boredom the storm is barrelling down on the coast. Boredom brings destruction in its wake. Coastal villages are still recovering from the deadly effects of Boredom."

The road is kind of gross. There's a wild, erratic rain, as if some man with a bucket were hiding in a ditch and occasionally hurling water at us, like on an old film set. A series of men, I suppose it would have to be, since we are puttering forward, however slowly. It all rings false to me. We have the news on, and we've texted some friends. Everyone is everywhere. A few of them did opt for the cots back at the shelter. "What could it hurt?" they wrote. "And they've come around with snacks!" Our plan is to push on to the next town, but it's hard to see how that will happen in this rain, in this darkness. It's two hours or so in normal driving conditions, and when

I look at James, squeezed into an awful, tense ball behind the wheel, gnashing his teeth like a cartoon character, it's hard to believe that he has hours of driving left to give. Poor thing. This is the statistic that is looking to claim our aging, musty bodies: the danger that befalls people in flight from other danger.

"I'm happy to drive," I say.

"You don't like how I'm driving?"

"I'm offering to help."

"I'm good. I'm great."

Sure you are. James is like some harassed sea creature, hiding behind a rock. I rub his neck, smooth down the back of his hair. I need my driver alive. My poor, poor driver. By taking care of him I take care of myself.

"Thanks," he says. "That feels good. If only I could see. I mean, right? I feel like I'm playing a broken video game. What you could do is call some hotels or motels up ahead, to see if we can get a room."

There's a Holiday Inn and a Motel 6 in the next town. Both lines are busy when I call. I keep trying, and meanwhile I pull up the map on my phone, but my signal is getting spotty, a single bar flickering in and out, and the image of where we are never quite comes through. It's loading and it's loading and it's loading. I see our blue dot, moving slowly over the screen, but there's no terrain beneath it, just a gray block, as if we were floating in space over some bottomless void.

James pulls over at a gas station and we get chips. Lots of them, the sort we rarely allow ourselves at home. All bets are off. I would inject drugs into my face right now. I would drink gas from the car with a straw. Inside the store, the single-serving wine bottles look exceptional to me—golden bottles in their own gleaming cooler, a shrine to goodness—but it's not fair to James, who has to drive. I don't want him jealous. I'd prefer to keep his feelings to a minimum.

We can hardly see anything save the lights and the black slashes of rain streaking past, but the same sign keeps appearing on the side of the road, every mile or two: "EXIT 49 FOOD." The third time it crawls past, close enough to grab and shake, to possibly dry-hump, I start to salivate. I picture plates of

unspecified steaming goodness. Salty, crunchy objects littered over wet mounds of something achingly delicious, with sauce, with sauce, with sauce. Polenta with stinking Gorgonzola, maybe, and a fork-tender bone of meat from some brave animal. A shank, a leg, a neck, cooked for four years in a thick mixture of wines. With tall drinks that fizz a little and quiet down one's noisy little brain, or perhaps even a warm cloudy drink you pour directly into your eyes. James seems to register my reverie and insists again that we keep driving. *Have to have to have to.* He slaps the steering wheel. "That's why we bought chips!" he cries, trying perhaps to sound like a real human being who feels enthusiasm. It's sort of awkward. "We have chips," he says more quietly. "If we stop now we're goners."

"It's just that it's already kind of late, and I'm pretty hungry," I tell him.

"What are you saying?"

"That it's late and I'm hungry?"

"If you're not prepared to offer a solution then maybe you should not speak."

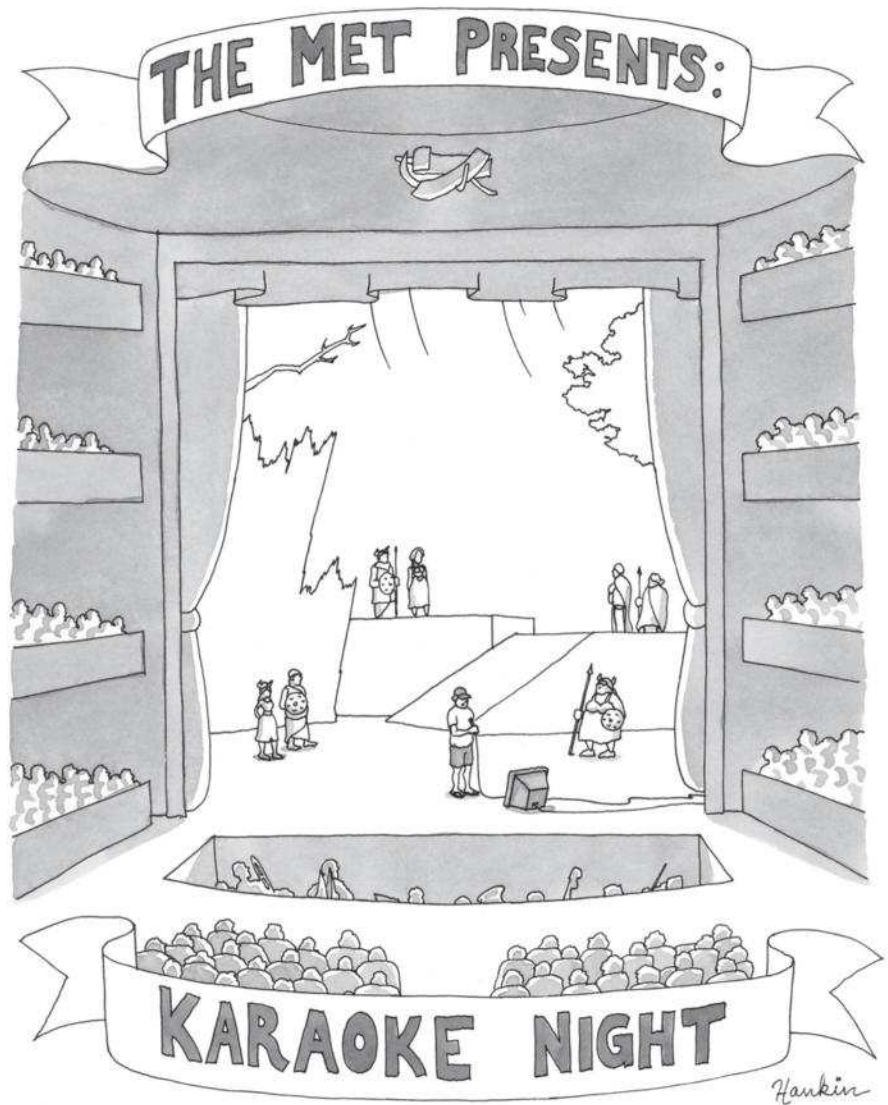
Well, it's an interesting rule, and I do enjoy constraints around what can and cannot be said. The deepest kind of etiquette. But if you applied such a standard to everyone, there'd be very little speech. The world would undergo a near-total vow of silence. Perhaps that would be a desired outcome. Perhaps a special island could be set aside for the solution-proffering people, who would slowly drive one another to murder.

"O.K., sure, I will restrict myself to a solution-based language. Here's a solution: let's go to a restaurant. That would solve so many problems. The problem of hunger, the problem of exhaustion, the problem of claustrophobia in this goddam coffin, and the very real threat of escalating discord between driver and passenger."

"Go to a restaurant, and then what? Eating will make us tired. Where will we sleep? I hate being the only one who thinks about these things."

"Oh, is it not fair?" I say. And I will admit that my voice dips into a pout here.

"That's right," James says. "It's *not* fair. I didn't want to put it that way."



"Because it makes you sound like a sad baby?"

"You're the one who said it. *You* said it. How does it make *me* sound like anything?"

"Yes, let the record show that I controlled your words and rendered you helpless and unaccountable. I am all-powerful."

James is quiet for a while. The rain is thundering down on us. The wipers are going so fast across the windshield it seems they might fly off the car. When Exit 49 suddenly appears, James veers cautiously down the ramp and pulls the car over in the grass of an intersection.

"The record won't show anything, Alice, because there is no record. It's just us. I'm worried about getting stuck

out here. That's all this day has been about. I'm trying to get us somewhere so that we can get a room and then we can worry about everything else after that. Could we maybe fight later, when we get home?"

"Oh, I'd like that."

"I mean, I don't really feel well, and the fighting is not helping."

I look at him. So much of our relationship depends on him being alive. Almost all of it.

"Darling," I say. "Let's just go sit and eat and relax for a minute. We can still drive after that. We just have to get out of this rain for a minute. And, after dinner, I'm driving. No arguments."

We find the restaurant and get a table near the fireplace, which turns out to be just a storage nook for old



copper pots. The waiter is a boy. Not an infant, but not exactly a man. Somewhere in that intermediate gravy. “Are you all weathering the storm O.K.?” he asks us, grinning.

Can one say no? I wonder. *No, thank you, we are not. We have failed to weather it and now we are here, in your restaurant.*

The food that comes out is not disgusting. Sweet and hot and plentiful, moist in all the right places. It goes down pretty heavily, though, and I feel the day starting to expire, begging to end. James was right. The druggery of road food. We eat in silence, listening to the rain. Both of us look forlornly at the bar, thinking that we shouldn’t, we mustn’t. On the other hand, we could simply pass out drunk here and maybe they’d take us to jail. There are beds in jail. Soap. New people to meet.

A television above the bar shows a woman in a raincoat being blown off her feet. The clip must be on a loop, or else she keeps getting up, saying something desperate into her microphone, and then falling back down again. I’d like to tell her to stay down, just stay down and take it, while the wind and the rain lash at her flapping back, but she gets up again and the wind seems to lift her. For a moment, as she blows sideways off the screen and surrenders herself to flight, her

posture is beautiful, absolutely graceful. If you were falling from a cliff, no matter what awaited you, you might want to think about earning some style points along the way, turning your final descent into something stunning to watch. On the TV, there is nothing to learn about the storm, nothing to know. The number that scrolls across the bottom of the screen is long, without cease, maybe the longest single number I’ve ever seen. Does this number describe the storm? What are we to make of it?

In the car, we think it over. We are too far from a hotel—plus, the hotels aren’t answering their phones. The driving is dangerous, if not impossible. It’s not really even driving anymore; it’s like taking your car through one of those car washes. We are exhausted beyond belief. I suggest, as tentatively as I can, that it is not unreasonable to think that we could sleep in the car. Our seats recline, like easy chairs, and if we found somewhere safe and quiet to park we could ride this out until the morning, maybe even sleep well. Then we could drive all day and maybe get to somewhere where they have rooms. We’d be rested. The sun might be up. The world might have ended. But at least it would be tomorrow. Tomorrow seems like the

only thing that will solve anything, ever. Along comes tomorrow, with its knives, as someone or other said. That’s not the exact quote, I’m sure, but the bones of it sound true.

It seems as though James may have given up. “Is that what you want to do? Sleep on the side of the road? In the car?”

“What I want to do is to be alone in a hole, covered in dirt. But sleeping in the car is the next best thing right now.”

“Yes, that is often the second choice after live burial.”

It starts to sound nice to me, really appealing. Like going to the drive-in, but without the movie. Like going *parking*, which we must have done once, in another life, before our bodies took on water and started to sink, before the spoil grew like mold in the backs of our mouths. “I don’t think there’s anything wrong with sleeping in the car,” I say. “It’s going to be more comfortable than a motel, that’s for sure, not that there even *is* an available motel, and plus we won’t have to worry about the cascade of ejaculate that’s been literally sprayed from human appendages around every single motel room in the country. Purportedly.”

James seems to think about it. “When I stay in a hotel,” he says, “I do my best to ejaculate on the walls. It’s a civic obligation. You have to pull your weight.”

“That’s a lot of pressure for a man.”

“Sometimes I’m not in the mood. I’m cranky and I’m tired.”

“That’s when you bring out the jar from home?” I ask.

He laughs. “It’s good to have it with me. Who’s going to know, you know, if the product is older?”

“More mature, in some ways.”

“Must. Broadcast. Seed,” he says, like a robot, and then he mimes the flinging of the jar, splashing its imaginary contents out into space.

It’s not really a rest area that we find. It’s a scenic turnout, and the view—of the black, bottomless abyss—is pristine. You can see all of it, every dark acre, and if we don’t see our own ghostly faces by the end of the night it’s because we’re not looking hard enough. We park a bit out of the way, under the branches of a mammoth tree, and when

we quickly realize that we've just increased our risk of death—because trees seem to seek people out in these kinds of situations—we move over to an open parking space, with nothing threatening above us.

"Fuck that tree," I say. "Way to try to hide your intentions."

We put our seats all the way back and James pulls out a bar of chocolate from the go bag. I want to rub it all over my face.

"Oh, my God. Oh, my God. You are a genius," I say. "Certifiable."

"I like to think that I have an elusive, almost unknowable sort of intelligence."

"What else is in there?" Now I'm excited.

James peers deep into the bag, rummaging around with his hand. "That's the end of it," he says. "The rest is just sadness. Sadness and real life."

This is my sweet man. So weird sometimes. So uncommon. And he steered us here, to safety, where we can eat our sweets and surrender to the night and everything will be so goddam swell in the morning. Even as the rain seems to be crushing the car, one hard bead at a time. Not the rain. Boris. Boris is doing this to us, the motherfucker.

The seats are a little bit divine when you tilt them all the way back. A little bit like first class on an airplane, which we experienced only once, and by accident, because of a mistake by the sweethearts at the gate. It remains a sort of benchmark for comfort outside the home.

"I'm sorry you don't feel well," I say. "Is it related to . . ."

"What?"

"I mean, is it related to anything? I know you went to the doctor."

"I did go to the doctor."

"And?"

"It was really interesting. Really surprising. I found out that he thinks I'm still alive."

"He sounds like a smart man. I would like to meet him. Maybe shake his hand."

James is quiet, and I'm not sure I really like it. I listen to his breath and it sounds all right. But then he coughs, and it's such a feeble cough, as if he barely had the energy for it. I don't like it.

"But now?" I ask. "Are you still not feeling so . . ."

James laughs softly. "Oh, now. I'd like to say that I'm fine now."

"Well, don't hold back, mister. Say that. Make it so." I take his hand.

"I'm fine," he whispers. "I feel wonderful. Better than I've felt in a long time."

His voice is too weak for me. The fight has gone out of him.

"Well, don't go and die on me tonight," I say, and I kind of want to punch him.

"O.K."

"You know that's what everyone's thinking, right? Everyone who's watching this at home? That the couple who've been bickering all day will start to get along, but it will be too late, and then the man will die. That's such a classic plot."

"Oh, is that what they're thinking?"

"That's what all the betting sites say. That's where the odds are."

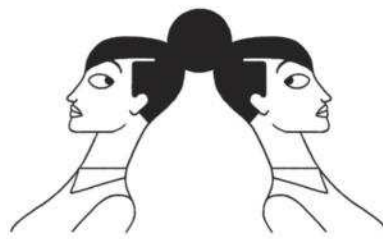
"Does the woman ever die?"

"In situations like this?"

"Are there any other kinds of situations?"

We settle in, and I guess we are maybe trying to fall asleep, but I feel too vigilant. James's hand is warm in mine. It doesn't feel like the hand of a man about to die. It is big and soft and I pull it over to me, get it in close against my chest.

"I can't see you, James. What is the



look on your face? What are you thinking?"

"No one is watching this but you, Alice. You're the only one here. No one knows about us. People can't really know."

"Sweetheart, are you O.K.? Should I be calling someone?"

"I guess I'm a little more tired than I thought I was."

"You must be. You've done all the driving. You got us out of there. You saved us."

He must think I'm joking with him.

I wish I knew how to say it better. How come so many things can sound mean and nice at the same time?

"Could we lie together?" he asks.

I crawl over the seat, wrapping up against him. "Yes, of course. Let me settle in here with you for a bit. Why not?"

It feels good to snuggle him. Warm and just right. James is thinner than I remember. I can feel his bones.

"Why don't we do this more often?"

I say, nuzzling against him.

"Because we haven't wanted to?"

James says. He's drifting off. I can hear his voice grow thin. I'm not ready to sleep. Not ready to be alone.

"Hey," I say to him.

"Yeah?"

"Stay awake with me for a little bit."

"O.K."

"Breast Cancer."

"What?"

"Breast Cancer is picking up speed. Landfall is expected at twenty-one hundred hours."

"Oh. Ha. Yeah. I almost forgot about that. Boris. So weird. Boris."

When James is silent for a while I nudge him. "Your turn," I say.

"O.K. It's so hard to think." His voice trails off and I nudge him again. Then he says, "Maybe we've thought of the best ones already."

"No, we haven't, we haven't. I swear. There are so many more."

"O.K.," he says. "But this one isn't so great. Are you ready?"

I say that I am. I lean in close.

"Balls."

I squeeze his hand. "There you go."

"Balls is blowing at seventy-five miles per hour."

"They sure is," I say. "Hurricane Balls rolled in this morning and people are afraid to leave their homes."

James doesn't laugh. I need to leave him alone. He needs his space.

"Beloved," James whispers, and it's the last thing I hear him say to me before he falls asleep.

"Beloved is coming," I say to no one, listening for his breath. "Close your windows. Go down into the basement and don't come out until she's gone." ♦

THE CRITICS



BOOKS

SHOTS IN THE DARK

The street photography of Weegee the Famous.

BY THOMAS MALLON

Photography, at its mid-nineteenth-century beginning, muscled in on painting one precinct at a time. Portraiture, of a solemn, straight-on sort, suggested itself immediately. Its hold-still composition, simple and traditional, met a mechanical necessity of the new art: early studio photographers, at the mercy of long-duration exposure, often steadied the backs of their subjects' heads with clamps unseen by camera or viewer. Landscapes held still on their own if the wind didn't blow, so Gustave Le Gray could become an automated Pous-sin, while Mathew Brady strained to click his way past Gilbert Stuart. History painting—crowded, violent, declamatory—had to postpone its photographic update until smaller cameras made picture-taking portable and fleet. But genre painting, with its casual assemblages of ordinary life, stood ready early on to be appropriated by the new medium.

In "Bystander" (Laurence King), a newly updated history of street photography, Colin Westerbeck and Joel Meyerowitz point out the genre's early inclination toward "humble people as subjects." Louis Désiré Blanquart-Evrard's "Photographic Album for the Artist and the Amateur" (1851) and John Thomson's "Street Life in London" (1877) put images of chimney sweeps and millers in front of well-off viewers who could regard them with curiosity and concern: "Unlettered, uncomplicated people were felt to preserve an otherwise lost capacity for sincerity for which modern artists and intellectuals yearned." Early in the twentieth century, as photography's documentary capacities turned reform-

ist in the hands of Jacob Riis and Paul Strand, it was still, as Riis's famous title showed, a matter of "the other half" being viewed by those perched far above.

Only when tabloid newspapers went into mass circulation after the First World War, Westerbeck and Meyerowitz argue, did those "humble people" become the audience as well as the subject matter. More than anyone else, it was Arthur Fellig, self-insistently known as Weegee the Famous, whose "photographs of the poor were made—at least, originally—for the poor themselves." The New Yorkers Weegee photographed—especially those caught up in sudden calamities of crime and fire—obtained a kind of fame that lasted not fifteen minutes but more like fifteen hours, until the next morning's edition swept away the previous afternoon's.

For decades, Weegee has been collected as art, thus restoring some of the original other-half dynamic between viewer and image. Coffee-table books of his work abound: "Unknown Weegee" (2006), produced for an exhibition at the International Center of Photography, is the least hefty and best arranged; "Weegee's New York: Photographs 1935-1960" (1982) is the grittiest. These have recently been joined by "Extra! Weegee!" (Hirmer), which contains nearly four hundred photographs, alongside the original, often exuberant, captions affixed by Acme Newspictures, the agency through which Weegee sold them. But there has been no complete biography of the photographer. Now Christopher Bonanos's "Flash: The Making of Weegee the Famous" (Holt) has displaced a host of fragmentary recollections and the loud-

mouthed, unreliable memoir, "Weegee by Weegee," published in 1961.

Usher Fellig was born into a family of Galician Jews in 1899. He became Arthur sometime after arriving on the Lower East Side, ten years later. According to Bonanos, his "sense of family" was so "minimal" that he miscounted his own siblings in that memoir. The Felligs joined the tenement dwellers who would soon constitute much of Arthur's subject matter.

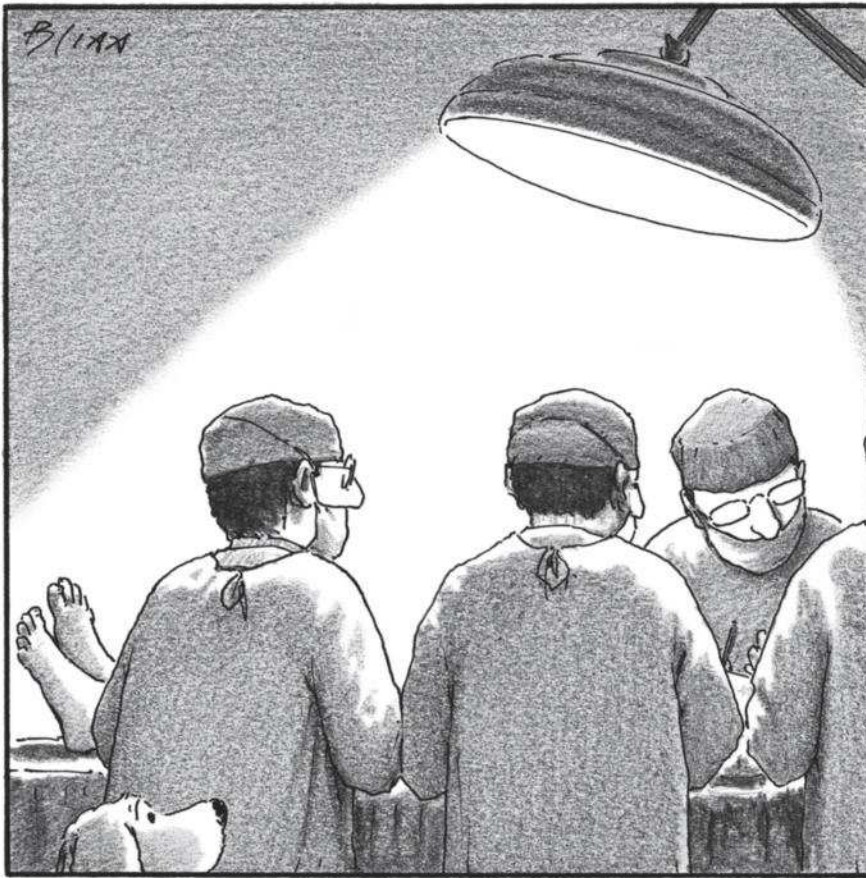
His *coup de foudre* came, he later recalled, before he left school, in the seventh grade: "I had had my picture taken by a street tintype photographer, and had been fascinated by the result. I think I was what you might call a 'natural-born' photographer, with hypo—the chemicals used in the darkroom—in my blood." He acquired a mail-order tintype-making kit, and later got himself hired, at fifteen, to take pictures for insurance companies and mail-order catalogues. He bought a pony on which to pose street urchins whose parents were willing to pay for images that made their offspring look like little grandes. (The pony, which he named Hypo, ate too much and was repossessed.) During the early nineteen-twenties, Fellig worked in the darkrooms of the *Times* and Acme Newspictures, sleeping in the Acme offices when he couldn't make his rent. He kept the agency's photographers ahead of the competition by learning to develop pictures on the subway, just after they'd been shot. By 1925, Acme was letting him take photographs, albeit uncredited, of his own.

Bonanos describes the Speed Graphic camera—even now, still part of the *Daily*



ICP/GETTY; OPPOSITE: CLOE FLOIRAT

The secret of Weegee's photography was his ability to operate as both the giver and the getter of attention.



"Dr. Eliot, would you let the dog out?"

News logo—as being “tough as anything, built mostly from machined aluminum and steel.” It was the only press credential Fellig needed at murders and fires, where, after leaving Acme, in 1934, he continued to show up with a manic freelancing zeal. A couple of years later, he was living in a room at 5 Centre Market Place, with no hot water but with a handful of books, among them “Live Alone and Like It” and “The Sex Life of the Unmarried Adult.” He decorated the place with his own published photographs—“like taxidermied heads on a hunter’s wall,” as Bonanos puts it. He got to the nighttime action so fast that he developed (and encouraged) a reputation for being psychic. Bonanos shows that Weegee’s success had more to do with persistence than with telepathy; a bell connected the photographer’s room to the Fire Department’s alarms, and he got permission to install a police radio in his ’38 Chevrolet. However much Weegee wanted people to believe that his

professional moniker came from being recognized as a human Ouija board, it in fact derived from his early drudgery as a squeegee boy—a dryer of just developed prints—in the *Times*’ darkroom.

Bonanos, the city editor of *New York* magazine, stacks up the “nine dailies” that chronicled the metropolis between the two World Wars. The *Times* was “prim about bloodshed, more interested in Berlin than in Bensonhurst,” and the *Herald-Tribune* wanted photographers to show up for assignments wearing ties. Neither employed Weegee regularly, and although the tabloids ran on visuals, his real bread and butter came from the afternoon broadsheets, especially the *Post*, then full-sized and liberal but just as “lousy at making money” as it is today. The *World-Telegram* was the first to give Weegee the individual credit lines he was soon commanding from everyone else. Bonanos resurrects the inky roar of this world with a fine, nervy lip: Weegee’s murder pictures

broke through not because of their “binary quality of life and death” or their “technical felicity . . . with angles and shadow play” but mostly because their sprawled, bleeding, well-hatted and finely shod gangsters made them “more fun” than all the others.

Bonanos also proves himself resourceful, tracking down a rubbernecking seven-year-old whom Weegee photographed after a murder in 1939, as well as a toddler who appeared in a Coney Island crowd scene the following year. Readers will want to keep their Weegee collections on the coffee table; Bonanos describes more pictures than his publisher could reasonably reproduce, even in a book that occasionally becomes relentless and replete, like a contact sheet instead of a selected print. But Weegee and his world don’t encourage minimalism, and, fifty years after his death, he has at last acquired a biographer who can keep up with him.

Weegee’s frantic pace was a matter of economic and temperamental need. No matter how fast he might be on his feet, the job required a lot of waiting around between catastrophes, and car-wreck pictures paid only two dollars and fifty cents apiece. “Naked City,” Weegee’s immortally titled first book of photographs, published in 1945, reproduces a Time Inc. check stub that records a thirty-five-dollar payment for “two murders.” Bonanos captured the variation and the intensity of it all in a “tally of unrest” from April, 1937. Over three days, New York provided Weegee with a felonious repast: a hammer murder, an arson fire, a truck accident, a brawl by followers of Harlem’s Father Divine, and the booking of a young female embezzler.

During the forties, the short-lived, liberal, and picture-laden *PM*, which Bonanos sizes up as an “inconsistent and often late-to-the story but pretty good newspaper,” put Weegee on retainer and made his pictures pop, bringing out their details and sharpening their lines through “an innovative process involving heated ink and chilled paper.” His first exhibition, in 1941, at the Photo League’s gallery, on East Twenty-first Street, garnered good reviews. Its title, “Murder Is My Business,” was a noirish bit of self-advertisement destined to be overtaken

by events: thanks to rackets-busting and a male-draining World War, New York was headed for a prolonged plunge in the rate of local killings.

Weegee liked being known as "the official photographer for Murder Inc.," but his gangland pictures lack the pity and fear—as well as concupiscence—that his camera extracted from people committing crimes of passion and sheer stupidity. In the summer of 1936, he made a splash with photographs of the teen-age Gladys MacKnight and her boyfriend after their arrest for the hatchet murder of Gladys's disapproving mother. In one of the pictures, the adolescent couple look calm and a little sullen, as if they'd been grounded, not booked for capital murder. Weegee displays a discernible compassion toward the panicked chagrin of Robert Joyce, a Dodgers lover who shot and killed two Giants fans when he was loaded with eighteen beers; his face reaches us through Weegee's lens as he's sobering up, beside a policeman, his eyes wide with the realization of what he's done. Weegee never got his wish to shoot a murder as it was happening, but his real gift was for photographing targets after they'd ripened into corpses. He "often remarked," Bonanos notes, "that he took pains to make the dead look like they were just taking a little nap."

Weegee's pictures are full of actual sleepers—along with those coöperatively feigning slumber for the camera—in bars and doorways, atop benches and cardboard boxes, in limousines and toilet stalls, at Bowery missions or backstage. He became to shut-eye what Edward Weston was to peppers and Philippe Halsman would be to jumping. Even his photographs of mannequins, another frequent subject, seem to evince a fascination with, and perhaps a yearning for, rest. The dummies don't so much appear inanimate as etherized, ready to rejoin the urban rat race once they've gotten forty winks.


The voyeur was also an exhibitionist. Weegee sometimes surrendered his camera so that he could inhabit a shot instead of creating it. That's him next to an open trunk with a corpse, and there he is dressed as a clown, photographing from a ring of the circus. In 1937, *Life* commissioned him to do a photo-essay

about a police station's booking process. He turned it into a feature about a crime photographer: him. His grandiosity grew with the years, despite, or because of, his self-diagnosed "great inferiority complex." He took credit for helping to make Fiorello LaGuardia famous (never mind that LaGuardia was already mayor), and wrote in his memoir that he and the gossip columnist Walter Winchell "had a lot of fun together, chasing stories in the night." The index to Neal Gabler's stout biography of Winchell yields no mention of Weegee.


In his début show, at the Photo League, Weegee exhibited a supremely affecting picture of a mother and daughter weeping for two family members who are trapped inside a burning tenement, and titled it "Roast." A few years later, for "Naked City," the book of photographs that forever secured his reputation, Weegee renamed the image "I Cried When I Took This Picture." Cynthia Young, a curator at the I.C.P., has written that the retitled photograph became "a new kind of self-portrait, making the photographer part of the subject of the picture," though she points out that some of the Photo League's left-leaning members had disliked the original label. Did Weegee really cry? Colin Westerbeck once commented, "No, Weegee, you didn't. You took that picture *instead* of crying." The truth about the retitling lies not somewhere in between but at both poles. The man who once said, "My idea was to make the camera human," experienced emotion at the fire; then crafted a sick joke about it; then, later still, realized that the image would go over better with sobs than with smart-assedness. Take away the question of intention and the picture one is left with remains, indisputably, a moment cut from life with a tender shiv.

The secret of Weegee's photography—and the M.O. of his coarse life—was an ability to operate as both the giver and the getter of attention. Weegee didn't learn to drive until the mid-nineteen-thirties, and before getting his license he relied on a teen-age driver, who took him not only to breaking news but also to his favorite brothel, in the West Seventies. The madam there, named May, "had peepholes in the wall," and she and Weegee would watch the

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Bruce Eric Kaplan, January 9, 1995

THE
NEW YORKER

boy chauffeur perform in the next room. Weegee excised this last detail from the manuscript of his memoir, but merely to save the driver from embarrassment. In the early forties, he carried his infrared camera into dark movie theatres to photograph couples who were necking, and then sold the credited images. He also took some remarkable pictures of people in drag under arrest. In these images, the voyeur in Weegee seems overwhelmed by a respectful solidarity with his subjects' defiant display. In his memoir, he writes about getting "a telegram from a men's magazine; they wanted pictures of abnormal fellows who liked to dress in women's clothes. I would call that editor and tell him that what was abnormal to him was normal to me."

Weegee liked to say that he was looking for "a girl with a healthy body and a sick mind." The two most important women in his history were unlikely candidates for extended involvement. Throughout the early and mid-nineteen-forties, Wilma Wilcox, a South Dakotan studying for a master's in social work at Columbia, provided Weegee with the non-clingy company he preferred; what Bonanos calls "her mix of social-worker patience and prairie sturdiness" allowed her to survive his "erratic affection." In 1947, he married a woman named Margaret Atwood, a prosperous widow whom he had met at a book sign-

ing for "Weegee's People," a follow-up to "Naked City." The marriage lasted a few years. Weegee pawned his wedding ring in lieu of getting a divorce.

The voyeur-exhibitionist dynamic reached its peak when Weegee was, in Bonanos's phrase, "watching the watchers"—an interest that grew over time. His pictures of people observing crime, accident, and even happy spectacle extended what Westerbeck and Meyerowitz see as street photography's long tradition of memorializing the crowd instead of the parade. In 2007, the New York State Supreme Court affirmed the street photographer's right to take pictures of people in public, something that had never much worried Weegee. "Poor people are not fussy about privacy," he declared. "They have other problems."

Weegee made three of his greatest views of viewers between 1939 and 1941. The first of them shows people neatly arranged in the windows of a Prince Street apartment building, looking out into the night as cheerfully as if they'd just been revealed from behind the little paper flaps of an Advent calendar. Below them, in the doorway of a café, is what's brought them to the windows: a corpse claimed by the Mob and a handful of well-dressed police detectives. "Balcony Seats at a Murder" ran in *Life*, portraying harmless, guilt-free excitement, a carnival inversion of what a generation later might have been

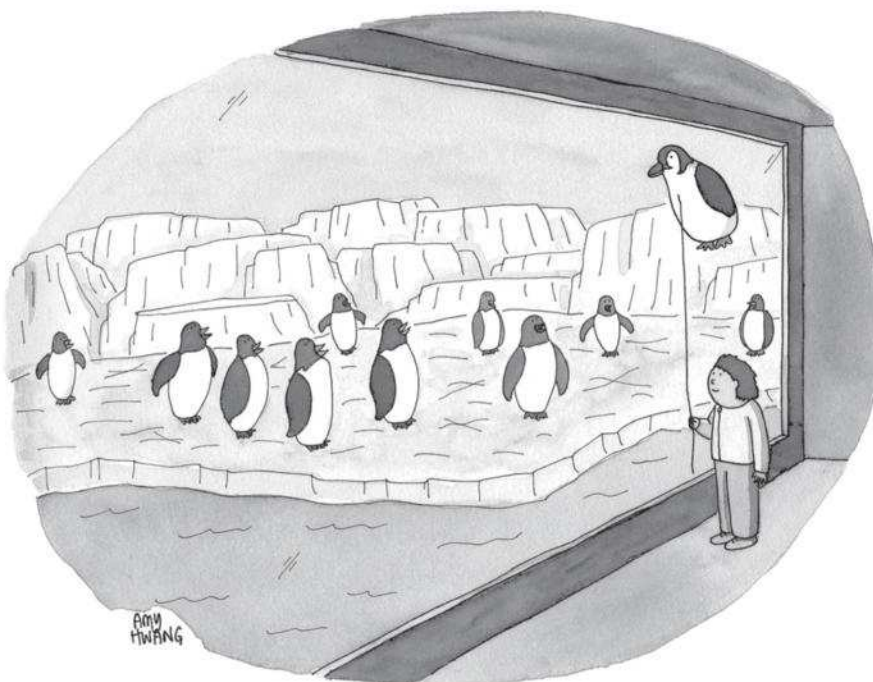
recorded at Kitty Genovese's murder.

In the summer of 1940, Weegee captured a cluster of beachgoers observing an effort to resuscitate a drowned swimmer. The focus of the picture is a pretty young woman, the person most preoccupied with the camera, the only one giving it a big smile. She doesn't disgust the viewer; she pleases, with her longing to be noticed, and her delighted realization that she, at least, is breathing. She's the life force, in all its wicked gaiety.

The following year, Weegee made the best of his gawker studies, a picture prompted by what Bonanos identifies as "a small-time murder at the corner of North Sixth and Roebling Streets," in Williamsburg. In it, more than a dozen people, most of them children, exhibit everything from fright to squealing relish. "Extra! Weegee!" reveals that the Acme caption for this kinetic tableau was "Who Said People Are All Alike?," which Weegee, with his taste for the body blow, changed to "Their First Murder." The killing that's taken place is merely the big bang; the faces, each a vivid record of the ripple effects of crime, become the real drama.

"I have no time for messages in my pictures. That's for Western Union," Weegee said, swiping Samuel Goldwyn's line. But once in a while he made a photograph with clear political intent, such as the one of Joe McWilliams, a fascist 1940 congressional candidate shown looking at, and like, a horse's ass. There's also the image of a black mother holding a small child behind the shattered glass of their front door, smashed by toughs who didn't want them moving into Washington Heights. Most deliberately, Weegee made a series of car-wreck pictures at a spot on the Henry Hudson Parkway where the off-ramp badly needed some fencing; he was proud that their publication helped get a barrier installed.

In a foreword to "Naked City," William McCleery, a *PM* editor, detected a crusading impulse in Weegee's picture of poor children escaping a New York heat wave: "You don't want those kids to go on sleeping on that fire escape forever, do you?" Bonanos, too, thinks this photograph was made and received with indignation, but the image has always been more picturesque than disturbing.



(Weegee almost certainly posed the children and told them to keep their eyes shut.) Still, Weegee often exhibited an immigrant's pride—Bonanos calls him a "proud Jew"—that can be seen as broadly political. One looks at the pictures he made in Chinatown and Little Italy toward the end of the war, full of American flags and patriotic embraces, and senses his appreciation of the eclectic energies at play in the city, along with a feeling that the old tenement world was ready to take a fine leap toward something better.

Even when not explicitly activist, Weegee's stance remains compassionate. Down on the Bowery, Sammy's—a self-conscious dive frequented by boozehounds, talentless belters, a dwarf mascot, and uptown slummers—was the place Weegee chose for his book parties, somewhere he could both gape and show off. The bar was itself a contrivance, a kind of nightly photo op, but the pictures Weegee took there manage to be both exploitative and humane.

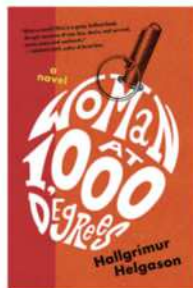
How literally true, and how staged, was Weegee's work? In "Bystander," Westerbeck and Meyerowitz show that early street photographers tried "to bully or finagle their subjects into behaving naturally." This fundamental tension between a composed pictorialism and a *trouvé* "snapshot aesthetic" persisted in photography decade after decade. Alfred Stieglitz, as if trying to negotiate a compromise, would sometimes frame a setup and wait for passersby to wander into it; Brassai orchestrated his photographs; on occasion Ben Shahn included his wife as a "fake subject" among real ones.

Bonanos admits that Weegee would sometimes "give the truth some extra help," and when it comes to what he calls "minor adjustments" the biographer doesn't mount an especially high horse. Still, he doesn't hide the whoppers that amount to fake views. On November 22, 1943, Weegee's most egregious cheating produced his most famous picture, "The Critic": a scraggly, impoverished woman looks scornfully at a pair of fur-clad, tiara-wearing ladies arriving at the opera. The ladies are actually behaving more naturally than the down-on-her-luck observer, a woman Weegee found at Sammy's and plied with drink before taking her uptown to complete his scheme. When

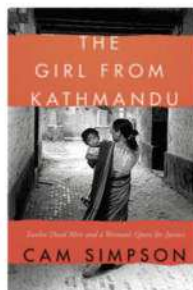
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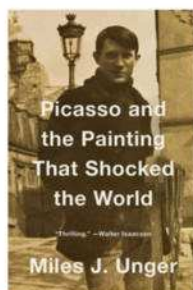
First Person, by Richard Flanagan (*Knopf*). The narrator of this novel is an angsty aspiring novelist who is summoned from Tasmania to Melbourne for a ghostwriting assignment. His subject, an infamous con man called Ziggy, is infuriatingly evasive. "I have been missing since I was born," he offers by way of an origin story. As the ghostwriter contends with underworld escapades, farcical publishing-industry posturing, and his gnomish subject, he becomes obsessed with the boundary between fiction and reality. Flanagan cannot quite make Ziggy's magnetism or sinister influence plausible, but the novel, with its switchbacking recollections and cyclical dialogue, its penetrating scenes of birth and, eventually, death, is enigmatic and mesmerizing.



Woman at 1,000 Degrees, by Hallgrímur Helgason, translated from the Icelandic by Brian FitzGibbon (*Algonquin*). Near the opening of this black-humored novel, a bedridden eighty-year-old woman living in a Reykjavík garage schedules her cremation and embarks on her life story. The daughter of an enthusiastic Nazi collaborator, she is ten at the start of the Second World War. Separated from her parents, she endures many horrors. But her story, based on true events, is no predictable chronicle of wartime woe: she is pitiless toward everyone, herself included, unapologetic about having been a stone-hearted lover, a neglectful mother, and a reckless globe-trotter. Although the prose can be clumsily staccato, the narrator recounts her misshapen life with engaging vividness.



The Girl from Kathmandu, by Cam Simpson (*Harper*). In the coverage of the Iraq War, the kidnapping and murder of twelve Nepalese men by a terrorist group, in 2004, was merely a detail. But Simpson's investigations into how these men ended up in Iraq helped launch a decade-long legal battle on behalf of the victims' families. Simpson tells a complex story about how the intersection of privatized wars and globalization heightens the vulnerability of transnational laborers. The book has several unassuming heroes: a young widow and a resourceful sociologist in Kathmandu, and legislators and tireless pro-bono lawyers in Washington. Still, the pursuit of justice, as Simpson recounts, is endlessly hampered by the cynical tactics of deep-pocketed defense contractors.



Picasso and the Painting That Shocked the World, by Miles J. Unger (*Simon & Schuster*). When Pablo Picasso unveiled "Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R.)" to his friends, in 1907, the response was unanimous: a "horrible mess," as Leo Stein declared. It was nine years before Picasso dared to show the painting in public. But it marked a breakthrough, both for the artist and, as Unger illustrates in this history, for art itself, heralding the birth of Cubism. The book is framed as a hero's journey, following the young Picasso through the lean years of the Blue and Rose periods. Bohemian Montmartre comes brilliantly to life, as do the artist's struggles. Even those familiar with the story will cheer when, after roughly a decade of searching, he declares, "I knew I had found my way."

he republished his opera photographs a couple of years later, his printed commentary gave no hint of the deception.

There were plenty of occasions when circumstances arranged themselves without need of manipulation—ones Weegee recognized for their unlikely, organic beauty, and took pains to capture before they could disappear from his viewfinder. “Extra! Weegee!” reproduces his photograph of a church fire on West 122nd Street, where the water arcs made by several fire hoses appear to be flying buttresses, permanent parts of the structure they’ve just come to save. In a night-time picture, a thin man near a lamp-post looks like one of Giacometti’s elongated sculptures. A shot through the open doors of a paddy wagon reveals two men on opposite sides of the van’s spare tire, covering their faces with hats; the result is a comic mystery and a sort of Mickey Mouse silhouette, in which their hats look like ears.

This attraction to the bizarre suggests Weegee as a precursor to photographers like Diane Arbus. In “On Photography” (1977), Susan Sontag acknowledges that Arbus once referred to Weegee as “the photographer she felt closest to,” but she rejected any connection between the two beyond a shared urban sensibility:

The similarity between [Weegee’s] work and Arbus’ ends there. However eager she was to disavow standard elements of photographic sophistication such as composition, Arbus was not unsophisticated. And there is nothing journalistic about her motives for taking pictures. What may seem journalistic, even sensational, in Arbus’ photographs places them, rather, in the main tradition of Surrealist art.

And yet one can hardly discount or fail to notice the Surrealist essence of Weegee’s paddy-wagon picture. The mask-like fedora might as well be Magritte’s apple. Weegee knew Surrealism when he saw it, and the recognition came from an artistic instinct for provocative juxtaposition. A circus-audience picture from 1943 shows two deadpan, hatted women holding hatted monkey dolls in their laps—an image that points straight ahead to Arbus’s work.

The publication of “Naked City,” in 1945, brought public praise from Langston Hughes and a congratulatory note from Alfred Stieglitz: “My laurel wreath I hand to thee.” If there were

critics who remained skeptical of photography’s status as art, there were now plenty of them ready to usher this night-crawling creature of newsprint into the pantheon. (Several Weegees had been exhibited in two MOMA shows in 1943 and 1944.) Weegee did not grow rich, but he craved fame more than money, and he had enough of the latter to appear in advertising endorsements for camera equipment.

By the time all this acclaim was upon him, Weegee had more or less finished doing his most interesting work. He did shoot a girl being launched out of a cannon, but he was not made for the space age, let alone the era of urban renewal. *Vogue’s* art director, Alexander Liberman, brought him to the magazine for a time, but not much came of that, and the bits of advertising and commercial photography that he undertook don’t engage us now any more than they did him at the time.

It was a mistake for Weegee to enter the well-lit, corporate world. His power had always come from making night into day. With flashbulbs, and even their riskier, flash-powder antecedent, he was able to own and preserve the instant when—*Fiat lux!*—he spun the world a hundred and eighty degrees. For a split second, the immigrant scrapper could be God, or, at least, Lucifer. Actual daytime represented exile, a demotion.

The itch to remain Weegee the Famous took him to Hollywood. Mark Hellinger, the columnist turned producer, seeking a sexy name for a detective movie, had bought the rights to the title “Naked City,” and shot the film in New York. This was a little like Cecil B. DeMille’s office wanting Norma Desmond’s car instead of Norma Desmond, but the experience of being around the production impelled Weegee, in 1948, to shift coasts, where he wasted a few years chasing bit parts in films. The only significant work from this period was a series of night-time promotional photographs taken across the country for a 1950 Universal movie, “The Sleeping City.”

Weegee was back in New York by the end of 1951, and spent much of the next decade making pointless forays into Europe, art-house films, and soft porn. He photographed the members of camera clubs ogling Bettie Page, the pinup queen, and sought connection with a younger

artistic crowd in Greenwich Village. He once invited Judith Malina, the co-founder of the Living Theatre, home, then chased her around his apartment. She recalled Weegee for Bonanos shortly before her death: “He wanted to see the soul of the person. He wanted to see the essence of the person. And he certainly wanted to see the tits of the person.”

Throughout his last years, Weegee devoted a baffling amount of time to “distortions,” fun-house caricatures of celebrities like Salvador Dali and Marilyn Monroe. They’re interesting for a second or two, but the car wrecks he’d photographed years before—pulverized and accorded vehicles—were more authentically, captivatingly warped. What he considered a late creative stretch was actually shrinkage; toward the end, he ceased making many distinctions between art and junk. To slow the drift, he tried old tricks, at one point even buying another pony—a replacement for the long-dead Hypo. An attempted return to nighttime news photography proved beyond his physical energies.

Amid the tiresome braggadocio of Weegee’s memoir, one finds no mention of either Margaret Atwood or Wilma Wilcox, but the latter made a god-sent return to Weegee at the end of his life. Decades earlier, Wilcox had been shocked by his storage methods—“photographs not in files but tossed into a pork barrel.” In 1964, with money from her pension, she purchased a brownstone on West Forty-seventh Street, and allowed Weegee, and his oeuvre, to move in.

He died from a brain tumor at Christmastime in 1968, and Wilcox, “the silent hero of Weegee’s story,” according to Bonanos, set about organizing the wild clutter of his superabundant, uneven work. She lived until 1993, perhaps with a premonition of the photographic age now upon us, an era in which that smiling girl on the beach has no need of a press photographer to get herself noticed; she comes to us through her Instagram feed, as a selfie from which the drowning man has probably been cropped. Defying one of Weegee’s dicta—“A picture is like a blintz. Eat it while it’s hot”—Wilcox succeeded in getting his messy life’s achievement into the International Center of Photography, which today holds it in “about five hundred big gray archival boxes kept cool and dry.” ♦

BOOKS

CLOBBERING TIME

How superheroes killed the movie star.

BY STEPHEN METCALF



Late in the fall of 2014, an entity calling itself Guardians of Peace began leaking e-mails and other private material belonging to Sony Pictures. Sensational headlines quickly followed. The hack was reportedly the work of the North Korean government, possibly in retaliation for the portrayal of Kim Jong Un in the as yet unreleased Sony comedy “The Interview.” (North Korea denied this.) Among other things, the e-mails revealed that Jennifer Lawrence was paid significantly less than men whose stardom didn’t equal hers and that, before attending a Democratic fundraiser featuring Barack Obama, Amy Pascal, the co-chair of Sony Pictures,

had joked with the producer Scott Rudin about which recent movies starring black people the President might have liked. On the heels of these and other reports came opinion pieces arguing that journalists were abetting the hackers by publishing the stolen information.

Another story was getting lost. Sony, which from 2002 to 2012 had generally been one of the top earners at the box office, was failing as a studio. Under Pascal’s leadership, Sony released a mix of tentpole films—the latest James Bonds, “Da Vinci Code” sequels—and star-driven vehicles often featuring Will Smith or Adam Sandler. (“Will and Adam bought our houses,” Sony execs

liked to say.) Sprinkled among these were mid-budget, low-concept movies aimed at adults. Pascal had taken pride in Sony’s reputation as a “relationship studio,” built on its connections with talent. She was literate and smart, and alive to what makes a story click. Sony owned the rights to Spider-Man, and Pascal made intelligent use of them—her choices for director (Sam Raimi, of “Evil Dead” fame) and star (dewy-eyed Tobey Maguire) were unexpected, and together they made a movie that honored fans and non-fans alike. (“Spider-Man 2” was good, too.)

In the long run, it didn’t matter. Sony did not own the intellectual property, or “I.P.,” necessary to build out Spider-Man into a “cinematic universe”—that is, a fictional world that transfers from picture to picture, so that, instead of a single story line with a new installment every few years, a studio can release two or three “quasi-sequels,” as one Marvel executive has put it, in the span of a single year. Marvel pioneered the cinematic universe, hatching a plan in 2005 that it launched with the release of “Iron Man,” three years later. Without the requisite I.P., Sony couldn’t compete. “I only have the spider universe not the marvel universe,” Pascal explained to a colleague, in a 2014 e-mail. (The studio had had a chance to buy nearly all Marvel’s big characters, on the cheap, in the late nineties, but declined.) In another e-mail, Pascal suggested that she was trying to create an “un-marvel marvel world that is rooted in humanity.”

As Sony faltered, its rival, Disney, was enjoying an embarrassment of I.P. riches. First, it began remaking its animated classics as live-action features; then, in 2009, Disney bought Marvel, for four billion dollars. In 2012, it acquired Lucasfilm, the parent company of “Star Wars,” for another four billion. By 2015, Disney was releasing one new movie from the “Star Wars” universe and two or more movies from the Marvel universe every year.

Located nowhere in actual history or geography (or, maybe, human experience), a cinematic universe need not be limited by cultural specificity or nuance. What plays in Sioux City plays in Bayonne will play in Chongqing. The rise of the cinematic universe is inseparable from the rise of a truly global

A business once ruled by star power is now dominated by intellectual property.

cinematic marketplace, dominated by China. In "The Big Picture: The Fight for the Future of the Movies" (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt), the *Wall Street Journal* reporter Ben Fritz shares a startling fact: in 2005, the highest-grossing film in China was "Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire," which took in just under twelve million dollars. In 2017, a "Fast and the Furious" sequel made almost four hundred million there.

To write "The Big Picture," Fritz sifted through all the Sony e-mails made public by the hack. "This was, I realized, a way to embed myself inside a studio," he writes. The surprising undersong to the story he tells is one of pathos—the pathos of an old-school studio head becoming an anomaly in a Hollywood increasingly overseen by brand managers. Fritz quotes at length

from an extraordinary St. Crispin's Day-like pep talk that Rudin delivered to Pascal, via e-mail, in 2014. Rudin had been trying to get Sony to back the movie "Steve Jobs," with a screenplay by Aaron Sorkin, based on Walter Isaacson's 2011 biography. David Fincher was going to direct, but then he dropped out and Danny Boyle took over; Christian Bale was going to star, then maybe Leonardo DiCaprio, or perhaps Bradley Cooper or Matt Damon or Ben Affleck. Now it was Michael Fassbender. Pascal had wavered, and let Rudin take the movie to Universal. When Rudin e-mailed her, she was trying to get it back.

"Why have the job if you can't do this movie?" he asked her. "So you're feeling wobbly in the job right now. Here's the fact: nothing conventional

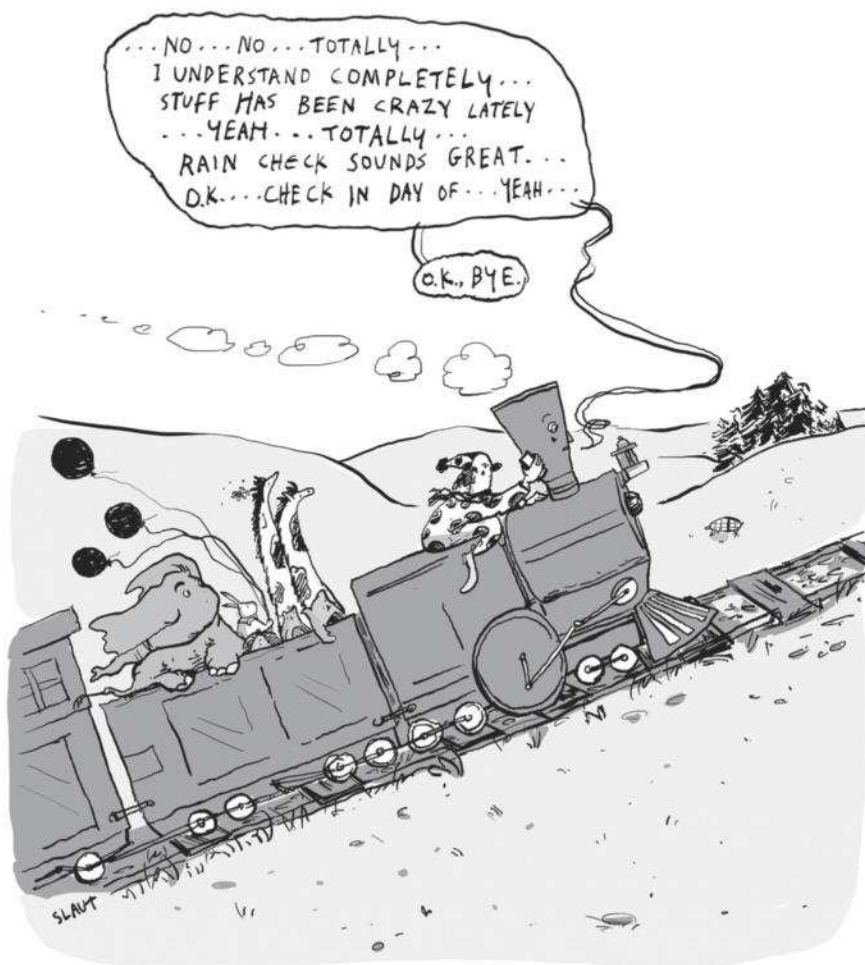
you could do is going to change that, and there is no life-changing hit that is going to fall into your lap that is NOT a nervous decision, because the big obvious movies are going to go elsewhere and you don't have the IP right now to create them from standard material. Force yourself to muster some confidence about it and do the exact thing right now for which your career will be known in movie history: be the person who makes the tough decisions and sticks with them and makes the unlikely things succeed."

Universal kept the movie, and released it in October, 2015. It was the kind of nervy, mid-budget drama that Pascal lived to make. It was also the kind of movie that does not play in Sioux City, Bayonne, or Chongqing. "Steve Jobs" lost about fifty million dollars at the box office, according to Fritz. By then, Pascal had been eased out of her position at Sony in classic Hollywood style. When her contract expired, in February, 2015, she was given a "first-look" producing deal.

Aside from one person's job, what was lost? Fritz sees a bleak future for the big studios, but is surprisingly upbeat about what's in store for the rest of us. The decline of wide-release movies for grownups has coincided with the rise of ambitious, big-budget storytelling on television, a trade-off Fritz is fine with. "For those of us who simply want to sit down, turn off the lights, and be immersed in the magic of stories told in images on a screen," he writes, "the future has never looked brighter." True. But for a book that carefully delineates the causes and effects that have shaped the recent Hollywood past, the reduction of movies to "stories told in images on a screen" is surprisingly ahistorical. How and where the movies reach us has always contributed to the particular power they have to rearrange our moral furniture.

The story of Amy Pascal's downfall at Sony is unsettling, but the period that preceded her tenure is not widely regarded as a golden age of American cinema. It was, instead, the age of the traditional blockbuster, when a "high concept" and a single A-list star could drive a project from pitch meeting into production and, finally, out to theatres.

THE LITTLE ENGINE THAT UNDERSTOOD



Until blockbusters arrived—starting in 1975, with Steven Spielberg’s “Jaws,” in its time the most commercially successful film in history—Hollywood released movies gradually, one set of theatres after another. In the “run-zone clearance system,” a movie would begin with a heavily publicized first run in downtown theatres in major cities, continue on to smaller houses in less affluent or less fashionable parts of the city, and then move out to the suburbs, to smaller cities and towns, and, finally, to rural communities. A movie that was disliked by its first wave of viewers might not continue through the system, and the urban sophisticates who made the initial decision to see it were heavily influenced by the critics.

In the nineteen-twenties, the producer Irving Thalberg recognized that a pattern of distribution implies a pattern of taste-making. From his position, first at Universal and then at M-G-M, he turned Hollywood in the direction of prestige pictures—movies that “emphasized glamour, grace, and beauty,” as one critic put it. As much as three-quarters of M-G-M’s productions were A-class features feeding into the most deluxe of the downtown movie palaces, a business practice that was fortified, year after year in that decade, by an urban industrial boom. A version of this approach to distribution survived for much of the twentieth century—as late as the mid-seventies, a movie could take six months, or even a year, to finish its theatrical run. By then, however, suburbanization had transformed the country. The studios were stuck with a release pattern designed to flatter a social landscape that, by and large, no longer existed. “Jaws” was a masterpiece by a wunderkind director, but it also proved out a new business model: a gimmicky idea, bankable stars, and aggressive television ad campaigns, all of it designed to trigger audience anticipation and drive a massive Friday-night opening across thousands of screens—critics and snobs be damned.

It did not take Hollywood long to see the commercial possibilities, and the blockbuster came to dominate the movie industry. This, it’s been said, signalled the end of the “auteur” era—a magical period in American cinema when film directors were revered as quasi-literary

gods. The truth is more complicated. “The decade that gave the movie industry the American auteur also gave it the broad-audience event film,” the agent, producer, and film executive Mike Medavoy notes in “You’re Only as Good as Your Next One” (Atria), an under-read and engaging show-biz memoir. Both trends—a director-driven cinema and market-tested movies packaged out of familiar (or “presold”) elements and familiar faces—exerted an enormous influence on the Hollywood film culture of the time; often both were apparent within a single picture. The tendency toward artistic surprise on the one hand and a highly manipulative familiarity on the other came together and created the tastes and expectations of moviegoers for a generation. What Hollywood blockbuster can’t trace its ancestry to “The Godfather,” “The Exorcist,” “Jaws,” “Rocky,” “Star Wars,” “Annie Hall,” or “Alien”?

For several years, a balance was preserved between commerce and art—or, really, between a standardized production process in search of efficiencies of scale, and creative individuality. Then the machinery of wide release was supplemented by a new technology, VHS. Suddenly, there were video stores all over America that needed to purchase at least one copy of every major new Hollywood movie. In “Powerhouse: The Untold Story of Hollywood’s Creative Artists Agency” (Custom House), an oral history compiled by James Andrew Miller, Tom Hanks recalls the effect that this had on Hollywood in the eighties. “The industry used to be so flush with free money that it was almost impossible to do wrong even with a crappy movie, because here’s why: home video,” he says. By 1986, video sales and rentals were taking in more than four billion dollars. Income from home viewing had surpassed that of theatrical release.

A Blockbuster video store in Bethesda or Prairie Village may seem a world away from the glamour palaces of yore, but they were alike in one respect: they depended on the power of a movie star to signal a picture’s quality. Rows of cardboard VHS boxes featuring Hanks or Julia Roberts replaced the old theatre marquee. Star power was as strong as it had been since Thalberg’s heyday. In the thirties, the actors were owned,

more or less outright, by the studios. In the eighties, actors were free agents and Hollywood was prospering. A new era, one ruled not by the studio, but by the talent agent, had begun. It is this era that is presently coming to an end.

Six months before “Jaws” was released, a group of disaffected William Morris agents founded C.A.A. William Morris was a classic mid-century operation, bureaucratic and governed by seniority. “There was little entrepreneurialism,” Michael Ovitz, one of C.A.A.’s founders, says in “Powerhouse.” Ovitz had a plan. He would set aside the more self-serving mythologies of show business, run an eat-what-you-kill shop, and become “the most powerful person in Hollywood.” C.A.A. aggressively signed up A-list talent, then offered studios all-or-nothing deals. Ovitz came as close to being a lone Hollywood hegemon as any one person can—and he did it thanks, in no small part, to an utter lack of sentimentality about the movies. C.A.A. had started out by concentrating on television. When it came to feature films, Ovitz admitted that he was motivated by the desire to destroy William Morris. “Our goal was to break them,” he tells Miller, “and we did; we blew their movie department to nothing.”

He did it with packaging, the practice whereby an agent, or agency, offers up all the relevant talent on a project to the studio. The technique has been around since the advent of radio as a mass medium. But, just as wide release came to dominate theatrical distribution, the C.A.A. package came to dominate the development of wide-release films. The best of these movies—“Caddyshack,” “Trading Places,” “Beverly Hills Cop,” “Ghostbusters,” “Back to the Future,” all C.A.A. packages—were irreverent, fun, slapdash, and a little cruel. The worst were ostentatious and empty. The very worst, like “Legal Eagles,” were deal memos on celluloid.

Ovitz’s foil for a time was David Puttnam, a highly regarded British film producer. Puttnam had made his signature picture, “Chariots of Fire,” with a first-time director and no stars, and without the aid of Hollywood. It was a commercial triumph and won four

Academy Awards, including Best Picture. He'd debuted films at Cannes six years in a row—"The Mission," with Robert De Niro and Jeremy Irons, won the Palme d'Or—and helped launch the careers of Alan Parker, Ridley Scott, Adrian Lyne, and Roland Joffé. Puttnam's movies were producer-driven and serious, and built an audience via a slow graduated-release schedule. He made anti-blockbusters, and did so on budget, without caving in to agents, agent packages, or agency fees. This was attractive to an industry worried about cost inflation. In 1986, Columbia Pictures needed a chairman, and it sought him out.

Puttnam auditioned by flying to Atlanta and handing a heartfelt manifesto to the top brass of the Coca-Cola Company, which owned the studio. He loved America, he explained, because he'd grown up loving American movies. Thalberg was his childhood hero. But something had changed, he believed, and Americans were becoming indifferent to their great cultural patrimony—an indifference that was linked, Puttnam maintained, to how movies were being made and distributed. If he came to Columbia, it would be on a condition. "Talent packages would be out," he informed Coca-Cola. "If I don't have your support on this, then I'm the wrong person for you." He was hired.

Puttnam installed himself in Greta Garbo's old villa in Coldwater Canyon and spent the following year telling anyone who would listen that serious films could be popular and popular films could be serious. Puttnam's public comments as the head of a major American movie studio are astonishing for their candor. "If Coca-Cola accidentally created one hundred million cans of faulty Coke, you know for sure the entire one hundred million cans would be dropped in the Atlantic or Pacific Ocean," he said. "What do we do with a crappy movie? We double its advertising budget and hope for a big opening weekend." A few months later, Puttnam was forced to resign, after Coca-Cola decided to divest itself of Columbia Pictures, which was eventually sold to Sony.

Among Puttnam's failures during his thirteen months in the position was his inability, or unwillingness, to close a deal

with Bill Murray and his agent, Michael Ovitz, on a sequel to "Ghostbusters." When the movie was finally made, two years later, it set a box-office record in its opening weekend. (The record was broken, one week later, by "Batman.") A few years ago, the *Hollywood Reporter* revealed that Sony had plans to turn "Ghostbusters" into a cinematic universe. The first reboot, with an all-female starring cast, was released in 2016. It was produced by Amy Pascal.

When movies were mostly one-offs—and not spinoffs, sequels, reboots, or remakes—they had to be good. A little blunt, too, maybe. Conjuring a universe out of nothing, bringing it to crisis and back again, all in under two hours, required, if nothing else, craftsmanship on a level admired even by European snobs. "The Americans, who are much more stupid when it comes to analysis, instinctively bring off very complex scripts," Godard said, in 1962. "They also have a gift for the kind of simplicity which brings depth." No matter how well executed, commercial success for such a film was never guaranteed. Laying out an enormous sum of money on a product whose creation depends upon a harmony of massive egos, and whose final appeal is the result of intangibles, is a terrible basis for a commercial enterprise.

For most of Hollywood history, the movie business has needed a hostage buyer, a customer with little choice but to purchase the product. First, this was the theatre chains, which the studios owned, or controlled, until 1948, when the Supreme Court forced the studios to sell them on antitrust grounds. In the eighties and nineties, video stores partly filled the role. But, increasingly, the hostage buyer is us.

Today, the major franchises are commercially invulnerable because they offer up proprietary universes that their legions of fans are desperate to reënter on almost any terms. These reliable sources of profit are now Hollywood's financial bedrock. The business model began to take shape, gradually, in the eighties; it solidified a decade ago, when a writer's strike recalibrated Hollywood's tolerance for risk. (The global financial crisis played a role as well.) At the same time, digital distribution was on the

rise; Netflix, which launched its streaming service early in 2007, after years as a mail-order company, began eating into DVD sales. As the major studios faced the loss of a large and predictable revenue stream, they trimmed their release schedules and focussed more of their efforts on the global mega-brands: Marvel, DC, "Harry Potter," "The Fast and the Furious," "Star Wars." The movie business transitioned from a system dominated by a handful of larger-than-life stars to one defined by I.P. This brought the era shaped by Ovitz to a close.

"Michael Ovitz," writes Violaine Roussel, in her book "Representing Talent: Hollywood Agents and the Making of Movies" (University of Chicago Press), "is commonly described as the demiurge responsible for shaping and leading the reconfiguration of the system linking together the main agencies and the major studios." Roussel is a professor of sociology at the University of Paris, and she spent five years studying the world Ovitz helped create, interviewing movie agents, shadowing them at work, and meeting with their various rivals and counterparts, including top executives at the major studios. In Roussel's telling, agents are now less like Ovitz than they are like art dealers in the style of Leo Castelli or Paul Durand-Ruel: keepers of secrets, fulfillers of dreams, bearers of bad news. Roussel's interview subjects speak, repeatedly and sensitively, to the challenge, as she puts it, of converting "the symbolic recognition of talent into (potential) economic transactions." The agents who talked to Roussel report being on call twenty-four hours a day, and structuring their personal lives around accumulating the social capital that their work demands. This is nothing new, presumably, but there is a fresh note of desolation running through her account.

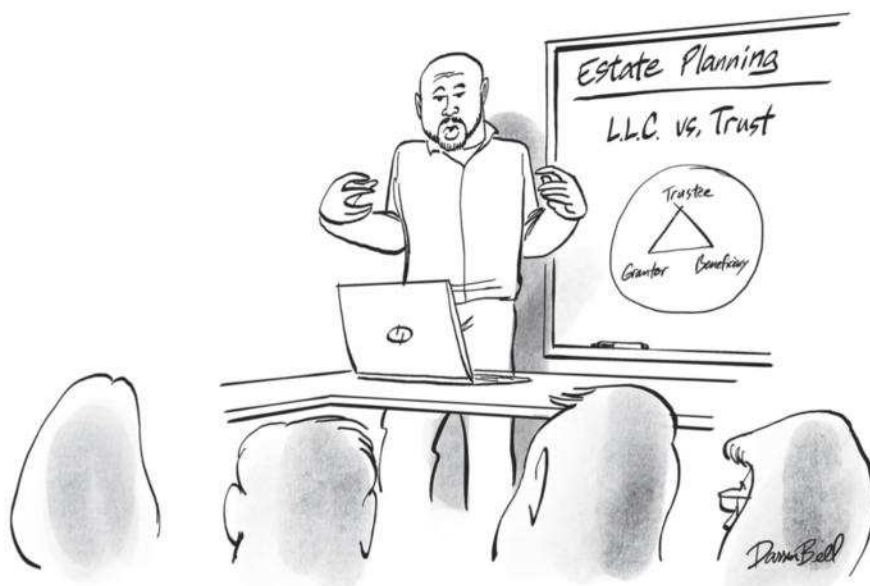
Where once an agent was, as Roussel puts it, "a creative entrepreneur" whose bread and butter was "her close relationship with star talent," today a Hollywood agent is "an expert in conducting risk-controlled investment strategies by securing the rights to film franchises and 'sequelizable' productions," someone "whose practice resembles that of certain professionals in the world of

finance."The personal style of agenting has evolved accordingly. As one agent explains, in the old days "you were very interactive."To close a deal with a producer, you would "get up and step in, you sit in front of them, in the front of the table, you push a picture over."The ethos now, the agent says, is "clinical, digital, and clean."

Movie people, Roussel notes, like to signal their status as insiders by referring to Hollywood as a "town."In the town, everything is personal, everything is business, and everyone knows her place—or doesn't, at her own peril. Since 2008, the system has become unsure. As it would; for the first time in nearly a century, the system is not being driven by stardom. In the Ovitz era, star power took on two related senses: the power of a performer to carry a picture for moviegoers (think Julia Roberts in "Pretty Woman") and the power of a star to get a picture greenlit—to make a project "real," as Roussel puts it, using an amusing term of Hollywood art. Both Fritz and Roussel connect the loss of stars' power to make a picture real to the shift to I.P. But neither connects it to the other vanishing force—the power of a star to carry a film for a wide audience.

In the thirties, Thalberg's greatest star was the suave William Powell, second only to Clark Gable, in that decade, among Hollywood's leading men. Thalberg didn't just sell the ideal of the meritorious swell in the person of Powell; he aspired to be such a figure himself, as did the man in the White House, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The charm, the imperturbability, and the sheer human grace that Powell displayed in "My Man Godfrey" and the "Thin Man" pictures were qualities as rooted in the anxious needs of an audience as they were in the talents of a particular man. In the eighties, when Americans needed to see hustlers on the make treated as demiurges, Tom Cruise was like Michael Ovitz was like Michael Milken.

The preëminence, during the past ten years, of the superhero movie has been accompanied by the loss of the actor as hero, or heroic type. "According to Marvel's philosophy," Ben Fritz writes, "the characters, not the actors, were the stars, and pretty much everyone was expendable."There was no sep-



"Before I get started, who here knows the difference between an L.L.C., your ass, and a hole in the ground?"

arating Powell from Nick Charles, or Humphrey Bogart from Sam Spade. Is there any connecting Batman to—fill in the blank? The quality of film acting has never been higher, and there is still a craft in scriptwriting and directing that makes one regularly bow in awe. But a minimal standard of human relatability is not being met, on a routine basis, in the medium's most dominant genre. People who are nothing like us rescuing a world that is nothing like ours is not a recipe for artistic renewal.

Granted, there were limitations in the old model, some of them severe; it is hardly incidental that two of the most popular and interesting movies of the past year, "Wonder Woman" and "Black Panther," made deliberate efforts to expand the usual demographic of old-fashioned Hollywood heroism, and to push back against the history of sexism and racism that it reflects. But the benchmark for a good movie was once coherence, and this meant more than a competently executed three-act script. It meant the unity of story with character, of character with star persona. The whole shebang was given life by a highly improbable marriage between our narcissism and our idealism. In this model, the movie theatre was a special kind of institution, where a primitive instinct for action and drama came to-

gether with a desire to banish our residual cruelty, if for no other reason than that it wouldn't play.

This year, Netflix is set to release more original movies than Sony, Disney, and Warner Bros. combined. The company has taken aim at the primacy of theatrical release, in an apparent effort to make online streaming the prevailing distribution model for movies. Even Sony's old standbys are now making movies for Netflix. Adam Sandler signed a deal with the company in 2014, and Will Smith made his first Netflix film last year. Smith has admitted to a sense of loss. "There's something about the big screen that does something to people's minds," he told an audience at Comic-Con last July. But the Internet and social media have changed things, he said, adding, "You almost can't make new movie stars anymore, right?" Cinemas are already in danger of becoming like the church in the Philip Larkin poem: half-abandoned houses of "awkward reverence," with an aura that intensifies as fewer and fewer people go. Over the next few years, movies may lose altogether the aspect of public solitude, of being alone together in a crowd, in the dark, marvelling as spectacle devolves upon the human face. At that point, they'll just be more screen time. ♦

POP MUSIC

GRAFFITI PROPHET

Rammellzee wanted to set New York City free.

BY HUA HSU



In the late nineteen-seventies, the sociologist Nathan Glazer had grown weary of riding New York's graffiti-covered subways. The names of young vandals, who identified themselves as "writers" rather than as artists, were everywhere—inside, outside, sometimes stretching across multiple train cars. Glazer didn't know who these writers were, or whether their transgressive spirit ever manifested itself in violent crimes, but that didn't matter. The daily confrontation with graffiti suggested a city under siege. "The signs of official failure are everywhere," he wrote in an influential 1979 essay. Graffiti, with its casual anarchy and cryptic syntax, offered glimpses into a "world of uncontrollable predators." In the nine-

ties, Glazer's essay would help inspire the concept of "broken windows" policing—a theory that preserving the appearance of calm, orderly neighborhoods can foster peace and civility.

Graffiti has always had this kind of metaphorical power. It is somehow more than art or destruction (even though it is both), and it prompts awe or dread, depending on your tolerance for disorder. For every Glazer, there were romantics like Norman Mailer, who had written the text for a book of photographs elevating graffiti to the status of "faith." From his perspective, graffiti forced the upper crust to reckon with the names and the fugitive dreams of a forgotten underclass: "You hit your name and

maybe something in the whole scheme of the system gives a death rattle."

Few people understood and internalized this power as deeply as the artist, rapper, and theoretician Rammellzee (which he styled as The RAMM:ELL:ZEE). He believed that his time in the train yards and the tunnels of New York gave him a vision for how to destroy and rebuild our world. He was born in 1960 and grew up in Far Rockaway, Queens. His birth name is a closely guarded secret; he legally changed it to his artistic tag in 1979. (He also insisted that The RAMM:ELL:ZEE was an "equation," not a name.) Little is known about his youth, aside from passing aspirations to study dentistry (he was good with his hands) and to be a model (in a 1980 catalogue, he is identified as Mcrammellzee).

Ramm—as he became known—believed that language enforced discipline, and that whoever controlled it could steer people's thoughts and imaginations. His hope wasn't to replace English; he wanted to annihilate it from the inside out. His generation grew up after urban flight had devastated New York's finances and infrastructure. Ramm channelled the chaos into a spectacular personal mythology, drawn from philology, astrophysics, and medieval history. He was obsessed with a story of Gothic monks whose lettering grew so ornate that the bishops found it unreadable and banned the technique. The monks' work wasn't so different from the increasingly abstract styles of graffiti writing, which turned a name into something mysterious and unrecognizable. Ramm developed a philosophy, Gothic Futurism, and an artistic approach that he called Ikonoklast Panzerism: "Ikonoklast" because he was a "symbol destroyer," abolishing age-old standards of language and meaning; "Panzer" because this symbolic warfare involved arming all the letters of the alphabet, so that they might liberate themselves. He lived these ideas through his art and his music, and by being part of the hip-hop scene during its infancy.

In 1983, Rammellzee and a rapper named K-Rob went to visit the painter Jean-Michel Basquiat. Though Ramm and Basquiat were friends, they were also rivals. Ramm would later say that Basquiat wasn't a "dream artist"—he

Rammellzee channelled the city's chaos into a spectacular personal mythology.

didn't so much radiate visions outward as take things in like a "sponge," learning about genius from books. He and Ramm once bet on who could most convincingly parody the other's work. (Ramm claimed not only that he won but that Basquiat's art dealer, who wasn't in on their ruse, told Basquiat that "his" work was the best he had ever done.)

That night, Basquiat invited Ramm and K-Rob to record a song he'd written. Ramm, who had rapped in the movie "Wild Style," was already known for his unique nasal sneer. (He called it his "gangster duck" style.) The two men looked at Basquiat's elementary rhymes, laughed, and tossed them in the trash. Instead, they made up their own lyrics—a brilliant, surreal tale of a kid (the earnest, bemused K-Rob) who's on his way home and a hectoring pimp (Ramm) who tries to tempt him toward the dark side. Basquiat called the song "Beat Bop," and paid for it to be produced; he painted the vinyl single's cover art himself. The song was murky and strange, like a spiky funk jam slowed to a sinister crawl. In the background, someone tunes a violin. There's so much echo and reverb on the track that it sounds like an attempt at time travel.

In the eighties, graffiti gained acceptance in the art world. Despite Ramm's charisma, the intensity of his work and his stubborn, erratic personality kept him on the movement's fringes. Where Basquiat and Keith Haring seemed shy showmen, Ramm came across as a nutty professor. His early paintings took inspiration from the psychedelia of comic books and science fantasy, with mazy train tracks running across cosmic reliefs. His palette was attuned to the era's anxieties about nuclear war and nuclear waste. The colors were bright and garish, suggesting a box of neon highlighters run amok.

In the mid-eighties, he began rendering these ideas in 3-D. He made sculptures that evoked the fossilized remains of twentieth-century life: newspaper clippings, key rings, chain links, and other junk, floating in an epoxy ooze. The most remarkable works were his "Garbage Gods," full-body suits of armor, some of which weighed more than a hundred pounds. They look like junk-yard Transformers doing samurai cosplay. His most famous character, the Gasholeer, was outfitted with a small flamethrower.

Ramm's art, thought, and music are the subject of the exhibition "RAMMELLZEE: Racing for Thunder," at Red Bull Arts New York. Befitting the popular drink's own sense of iconoclasm, "Racing" bathes in Ramm's frenzied, free-associative, and occasionally overwhelming energy. There are his early canvases and sculptures, along with flyers, business cards, manifestos, and patent applications. A small theatre screens previously unseen videos of Ramm rapping at night clubs. The most impressive part of the survey is a floor devoted to his "Garbage Gods" and "Letter Racers"—skateboards representing each letter of the alphabet, armed with makeshift rockets, screwdrivers, and blades.

Throughout the exhibition, you can hear moments from Ramm's lectures on Gothic Futurism—a thrilling jumble of street-corner hustling and technical language, all "parsecs," "integers," "aerodynamics." As I was examining a collection of hand-painted watches, I kept hearing Ramm pause as he reached the end of a long disquisition on ecological catastrophe and graffiti-as-warfare, and then bark, "Next slide!"

In early May, the Red Bull Music Festival staged a Ramm-inspired concert to mark the opening of the art show. Ramm had continued to make music after "Beat Bop," never wavering from his philosophies, just declaring them against increasingly turbulent, industrial-sounding backdrops. The eclecticism of the bill spoke to his wandering ear, and ranged from the terse hardcore of Show Me the Body to the wise-ass raps of Wiki. K-Rob, wearing a T-shirt featuring a mushroom and the words "I'm a Fun Guy," reprised his verse from "Beat Bop," grinning the whole way through. Gio Escobar, the leader of the deft punk-jazz band Standing on the Corner, dedicated a song to a late friend. The departed are everywhere around us, he said, as a groove emerged from the band's dubbed-out chaos. "And they're waiting."

As hip-hop and art changed, as graffiti vanished from New York's trains and walls, Ramm delved further into his own private cosmos—namely, the enormous loft in Tribeca where he lived, which he called the Battle Station. His obscurity wasn't a choice. In the early eighties, he offered to send the U.S. military some

of the intelligence he had gathered for national defense. (It declined.) In 1985, he wrote an opera, "The Requiem of Gothic Futurism." In the nineties, he tried to promote his ideas by producing a comic book and a board game. He thought that toy manufacturers might want to mass-produce his "Garbage Gods" models. He was the first artist to collaborate with the streetwear brand Supreme. There was a series of infomercial-like videos to seed interest in "Alpha's Bet," an epic movie that he hoped would finally resolve the narrative arc of his extended universe.

By the time Rammellzee died, in 2010, after a long illness, New York City had been completely remade by mayoral administrations that took broken-windows policing as gospel. The Battle Station became condos. The Internet has made it easy to take what the culture provides you and rearrange it in some novel, cheeky way. It's much more difficult to build an entirely new world—to abide by an ethical vision with a ferocity that requires you to break all the rules. I was surprised by how moved I felt standing underneath Ramm's "Letter Racers" and studying the textures of the "Garbage Gods." To see their meticulous handiwork up close was to believe that Ramm's far-flung theories, his mashup of quantum physics and "slanguage," made sense as an outsider's survival strategy. I noticed all the discarded fragments of city life—bulbs and screws, a billiard ball, a doll's head, old fan blades and turn-signal signs, visors stacked to look like pill bugs. His commitment was total. These are works of devotion.

This is where Ramm wanted to live—at the edge of comprehensibility, but in a way that invited others to wonder. Cities are filled with strangers who possess an unnerving energy, who hail us with stories, songs, and poems. Ramm was one of these. In an interview filmed in the aughts, Ramm sheds light on his everyday life. Sometimes, he says, he'll be walking down the street or sitting at a bar, and people will just look at him. And sometimes they'll come up to him and ask, "Who are you?" He's explaining all this while wearing one of his "Garbage God" masks. You notice his paunch, the warm crackle of his voice at rest. "I'm just an average Joe," he says, and he sounds like he believes it. ♦

MUSICAL EVENTS

CONTROLLED EXPLOSION

Simon Rattle revisits Mahler; Heartbeat Opera reshapes "Fidelio."

BY ALEX ROSS



On June 20th, Simon Rattle will end a sixteen-year tenure as the principal conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic—a post of quasi-papal authority in the classical-music world. How Rattle should be judged against predecessors on the order of Hans von Bülow, Arthur Nikisch, Wilhelm Furtwängler, Herbert von Karajan, and Claudio Abbado is for the musical sages of Berlin to decide. From a distance, Rattle appears to have left a distinctive stamp on the institution. He has promoted contemporary music with unprecedented vigor; he has given new prominence to French, British, and American fare; he has presided over such staggering spectacles as Stockhausen's "Gruppen," presented at Tempelhof Airport, and the

Bach Passions, as staged by Peter Sellars. If any question mark hovers over his legacy, it has to do with his handling of mainstream nineteenth-century repertory, where his quest for fresh-scrubbed renditions has sometimes worked wonders—a darkly radiant "Parsifal" can be seen at the Philharmonic's Digital Concert Hall—and sometimes had inconclusive results. Kirill Petrenko, Rattle's successor, is a conductor of more traditional cast: that turn will please some and disappoint others.

Now sixty-three, Rattle is still a young gazelle in conductor years—the Swedish maestro Herbert Blomstedt is giving revelatory performances at the age of ninety—and the close of Rattle's Berlin tenure will almost certainly not mark the

end of the major phase of his career. Indeed, a series of Mahler concerts that Rattle gave with the London Symphony in early May made me wonder whether he is arriving at a new level of mastery. He became the music director of the L.S.O. last September, and the orchestra is playing sensationally well for him. You have the sense of a conductor and an ensemble in near-perfect alignment. The Berlin Philharmonic would undoubtedly prefer not to be considered a stepping stone to greater things, but this may turn out to be its role in the arc of Rattle's career—as was true for Abbado, who hit his peak in his final decade, when he was based at the Lucerne Festival.

Each of the L.S.O. concerts consisted of a single late-period Mahler work: the Ninth Symphony, "Das Lied von der Erde," and the unfinished Tenth Symphony, in the realization by Deryck Cooke. (I heard the Ninth at NJPAC, in Newark, the others at David Geffen Hall.) Rattle, a veteran Mahlerian, has offered this trio of colossal valedictions before, in concerts with the Berliners at Carnegie, in 2007. His ideas about Mahler have not changed dramatically in the interim. He avoids the sweaty transfigurations that Leonard Bernstein established as common practice for Mahler. Where other conductors emphasize voluptuous, post-Wagnerian sonorities, Rattle prefers a leaner, tighter sound; where others indulge in flamboyant *ritardandos*, he keeps to a steadier tempo.

Rattle's aversion to cliché can lead to performances that seem like arrays of contrarian insights rather than fully integrated interpretations. The 2007 Mahler concerts never quite rose above the level of the impressive. Eleven years on, Rattle has found an ideal balance of precision and intensity. The opening section of the first movement of the Ninth unfolded in one great Proustian paragraph, lucid yet impassioned. The music wasn't smoothed over or rendered inert: isolated details—stray harp notes, scuttling low-wind figures, a repeated two-note signal in the horns—pierced the murk with unsettling potency. (A horn-playing friend who joined me at NJPAC marvelled at the musicians' tonal control.) Adam Walker, the co-principal flute, brought an otherworldly sound to his meandering solo at the end of the first movement; Gareth Davies, the other

Rattle and the London Symphony seem to be in near-perfect alignment.

principal flutist and the orchestra's chairman, was equally transfixing in the Tenth.

Not all of Rattle's interventions were successful. In the savage Rondo-Burleske of the Ninth Symphony, he refused to linger over the aching phrases in the movement's contrasting lyric episode. (He did the same in 2007.) As a result, the return of the slashing main theme didn't induce a shiver of terror, as the score all but requires. Wildness is not Rattle's way, though. His strategy of intensification through restraint paid off in the final pages, when the string section achieved an uncanny, hovering stillness. The strings played at times with little or no vibrato, producing an eerie "white" sound. Usually, the piece ends with a feeling of agonized farewell; here, the music seemed to emanate from the other side of the line between life and death.

Rattle is the world's leading proponent of the Mahler Tenth, having first recorded the Cooke edition of the work back in 1980, when he was twenty-five. That version, with the Bournemouth Symphony, is more vivid than a subsequent account with the Berliners. Let's hope that the L.S.O. rendition appears on disk in due course: the performance at Geffen combined a monumental architectural shape—no other work by Mahler comes as close to Bruckner—with moments of unchecked emotional ferocity. The final bars radiated an almost shocking sweetness, as if to suggest that Mahler, at the end of his life, were reliving scenes from childhood.

The vocalists in "Das Lied" were the robust Wagner tenor Stuart Skelton and the wizardly baritone Christian Gerhaher. In the opening movement, Skelton battled an overbearing orchestra, as

the tenor invariably must in this piece, yet he nobly held his ground. Gerhaher, a singer-poet out of Caspar David Friedrich, shone through the far more transparent textures of "Der Abschied," the half-hour finale. Listeners accustomed to the autumnal warmth of a mezzo-soprano in "Der Abschied" might have found Gerhaher too cool and reserved, but for me the inward, confiding quality of his vocalism gave human focus to Mahler's sprawling landscape. His closing repetitions of "*ewig*"—"forever"—were like distant figures disappearing into mist.

Hearbeat Opera, a relatively new, relatively small, categorically imaginative company, has made its name with vital reshaping of repertory operas. In 2016, it presented a ninety-minute version of "Lucia di Lammermoor" in which the title heroine is shown experiencing hallucinations in a hospital ward. This spring, in a mini-festival at Baruch Performing Arts Center, the company offered a "Don Giovanni" inspired by #MeToo and a "Fidelio" inflected by the concerns of Black Lives Matter. I saw the "Fidelio," and was blindsided by its impact.

The composer-pianist Daniel Schlosberg, who led the "Lucia" in 2016, has a flair for cutting and repurposing famous operas without mangling them. "Fidelio," too, has been reduced to ninety minutes, and transcribed for two horns, two cellos, two pianos, and percussion. Even so, much of the force of Beethoven's score remains. Ethan Heard, who directed the show, co-wrote new dialogue for it with Marcus Scott; they transform Florestan into Stan, a wrong-

fully imprisoned black activist. Leonore, Florestan's wife, becomes Leah, who finds work as a guard as she plots Stan's escape. Leading the cast were Nelson Ebo, grittily affecting as Stan, and Kelly Griffin, giving a confident, full-voiced performance as Leah.

But the heartbreaking centerpiece of the production was the chorus "O welche Lust," in which the prisoners are allowed to leave their cells ("O what joy, to breathe easily in open air"). Earlier this year, Heard and Schlosberg went to correctional facilities in the Midwest and filmed Beethoven's chorus being sung by prisoners: members of the Oakdale Community Choir, the Kuji Men's Chorus, the Hope Thru Harmony Women's Choir, the Ubuntu Men's Chorus, the East Hill Singers, and Voices of Hope. Several letters from prisoners were on display in the Baruch lobby. One member of Ubuntu wrote, "The creativity I possess is still within me, prison has not taken away my hope." Another said that, when he is singing, "I feel free for that time." In the theatre, a video of the prisoners' work substituted for a live performance of "O welche Lust." Beethoven's music was itself a spell of freedom for them—a virtual walk in open air.

Heard and Schlosberg refused to coat this wrenching spectacle in feel-good sentiment. Mindful of American reality, they discarded the opera's happy ending and imposed a bleak coda, with a scrambled, dissonant collage of "Fidelio" music and other Beethoven snippets to match. It turns out that Leah has been asleep at her desk, dreaming of a rescue; Stan remains in prison. Some members of Heartbeat's chorus of freedom will die behind bars. ♦

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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 Kaamran Hafeez, must be received by Sunday, May 27th. The finalists in the May 14th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the June 18th 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

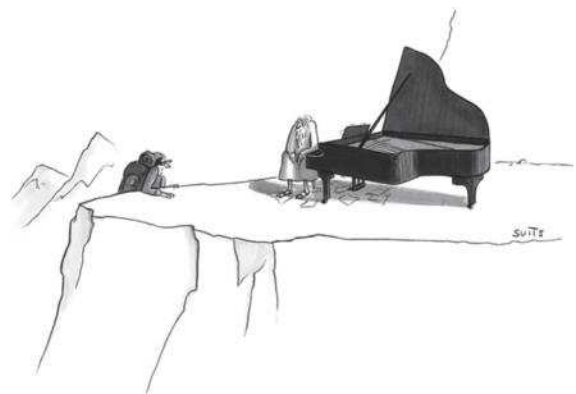


“His words, not mine.”
Jack Buchignani, Los Angeles, Calif.

“We demand time and a half.”
Lonewolf Williams, Lakewood, Colo.

“I’m the new micromanager.”
Sienna Jones, Emmaus, Pa.

THE WINNING CAPTION



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