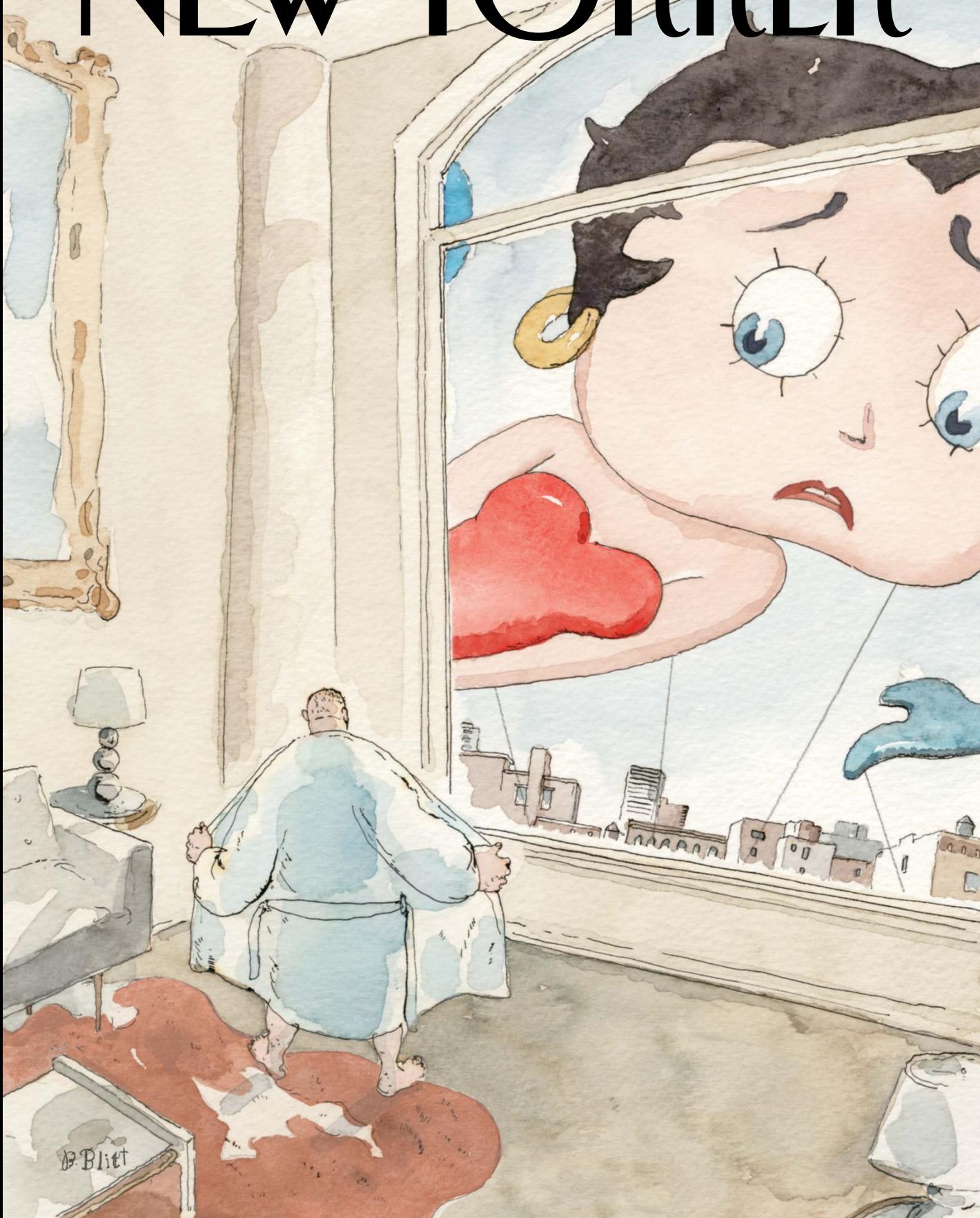


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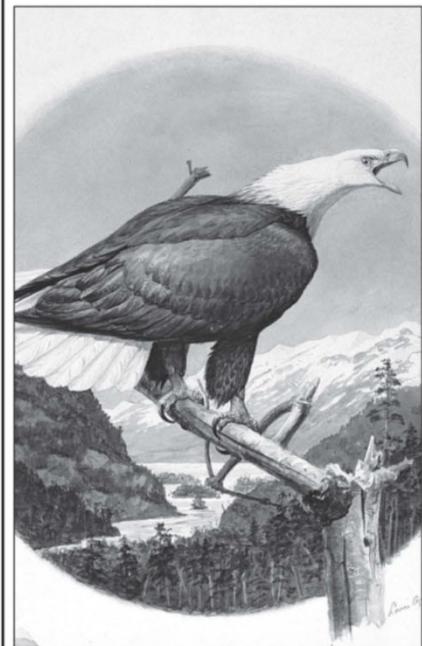
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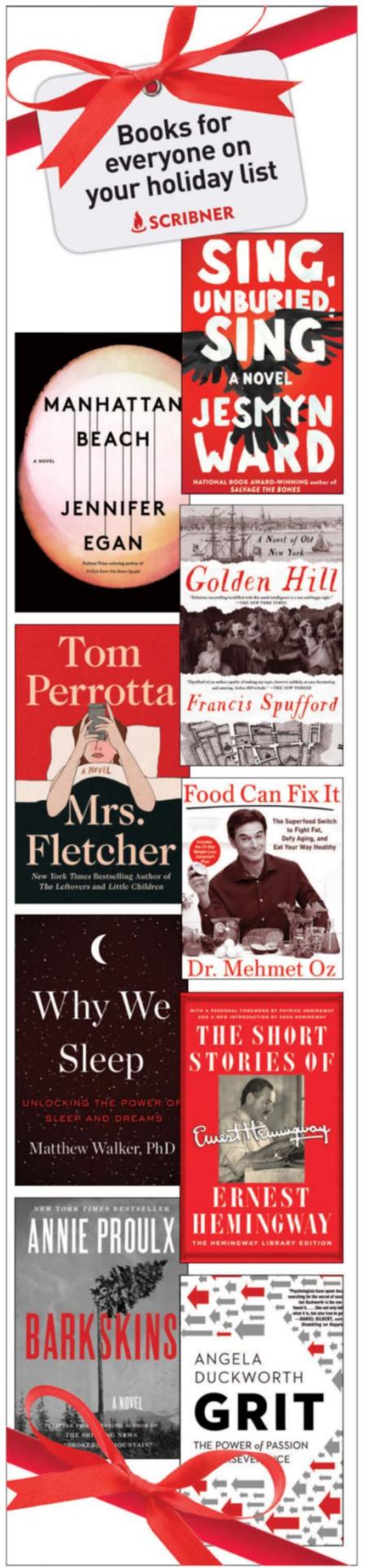


Louis Agassiz Fuertes, *Bald Eagle*, ink and watercolor, early 1900s. Estimate \$4,000 to \$6,000.

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DAILY SHOUTS

Maggie Larson explores the emotional roller coaster of a last-minute Thanksgiving trip to the supermarket.

► VIDEO

Ronan Farrow discusses his investigation of the sexual-assault allegations against Harvey Weinstein.

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THE MAIL

HOMING INSTINCTS

Larissa MacFarquhar, in her profile of my home town, Orange City, Iowa, describes why it hasn't stagnated the way many rural communities in the United States have ("Our Town," November 13th). As MacFarquhar writes, people in Orange City tend to stay there, and to account for this she cites the attraction of its culture: an abundance of churches, a proud ethnic heritage, and the reality that everybody knows your genealogy. ("If you ain't Dutch, you ain't much!") But she doesn't give enough credit to the role that thrift plays in sustaining the community. Orange City residents exhibit a Calvinist work ethic that avoids conspicuous consumption. Extra cash is put in banks, which in turn extend loans to finance long-term investments in the community. This is the essence of what it means to be conservative, a term that is misused in today's political discourse. Washington, D.C., could learn a lesson.

*Daniel van der Weide
Madison, Wis.*

I'm a transplant to Orange City, and still a bit of an outsider even though I've lived here for twenty-four years, teach math at the college in town, married a local, and raised children who are more than half Dutch in ancestry. Despite my love for the mountains and my issues with the regional politics here, I wouldn't live anywhere else. Without glossing over its flaws, MacFarquhar absolutely nails the qualities that make Orange City a wonderful place to call home. However, I do have a historical bone to pick with the article's references to the Dutch Reformed Church, a congregation affiliated with Northwestern College. Actually, it has not gone by that name for nearly two hundred years, and officially adopted its current name, the Reformed Church in America, in 1867.

*Kim Jongerius
Orange City, Iowa*

MacFarquhar briefly mentions the changing demographic of Orange City's farmworkers. Many rural towns nationwide are collapsing because of the loss of family farms. More than half of U.S. cropland is controlled by farms larger than two thousand acres, while the country loses forty acres of farmland every hour. As our small and medium-sized farms are increasingly unable to compete with industrial agriculture or developers and disappear, we lose not only land but also entire communities.

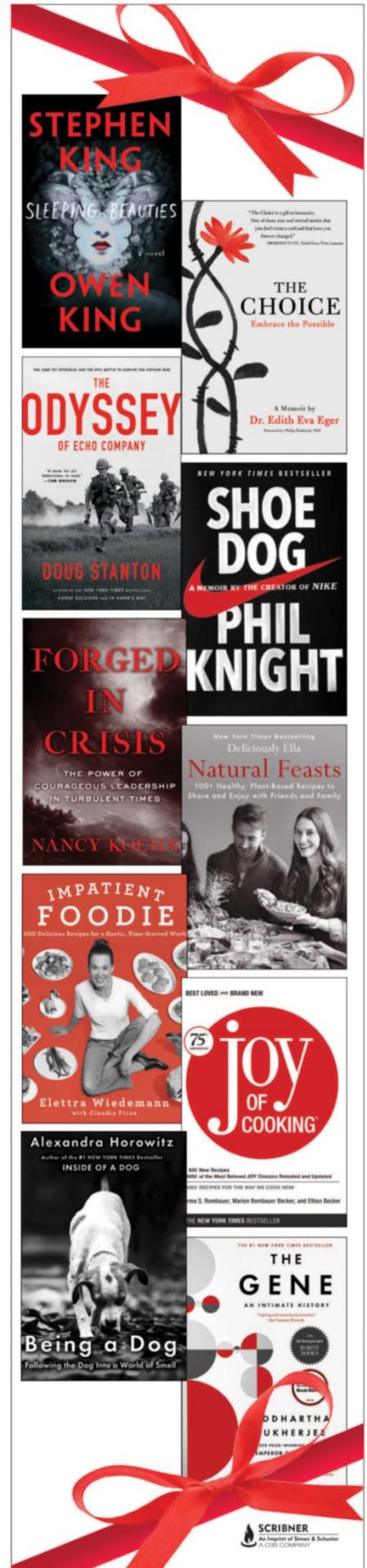
*Sarah Newman
Bethesda, Md.*

THE END OF EXERCISE

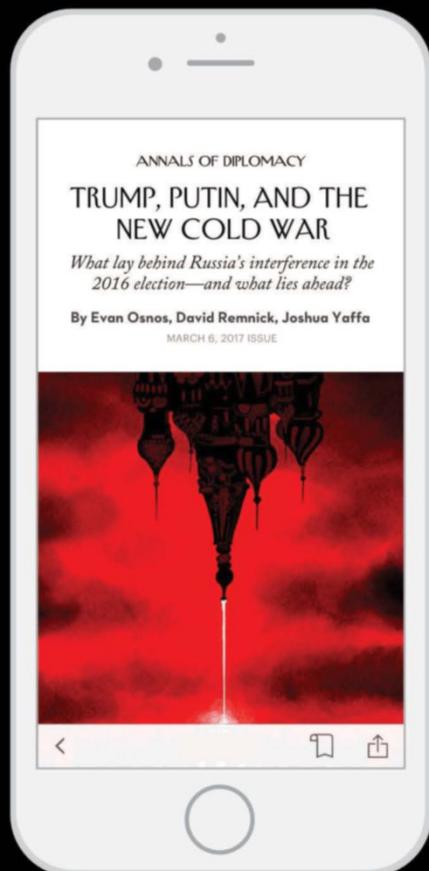
Nicola Twilley's wry examination of one of the pharmaceutical industry's many quests for eternal youth—this time in the form of GW501516, a drug that, she writes, "confers the beneficial effects of exercise without the need to move a muscle"—provides a fine example of the vanity of human desires ("The Exercise Pill," November 6th). Even the term "exercise pill" is an oxymoron, along the lines of "jumbo shrimp"; the idea that swallowing a pill can harmlessly "mimic" a vigorous half-hour swim defies logic. The enthusiastic endorsement of a man on the Web site MuscleChemistry.com, who goes by the handle Iron Julius, does little to recommend it. Indeed, after Twilley cites researchers' claims that their creation works by tricking "cells into thinking they are running out of energy," she says that the majority of the scientific community has warned against ingesting a "likely carcinogen." It remains axiomatic that you can't fool Mother Nature.

*Alan Dunn
Beaverton, Ore.*

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NOVEMBER 22 – 28, 2017

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



COURTESY THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

The British painter **David Hockney** turned eighty this year. The Met, in cahoots with the Tate and the Pompidou, celebrates with a retrospective. Landscape and autobiography recur as entwined motifs, from the sun-splashed swimming pools of Los Angeles, the artist's adopted home town, to the rolling hills of his native Yorkshire. After a trip to Japan in 1972, Hockney painted "Mt. Fuji and Flowers" (above), jogging his memory with a postcard and a guide to flower arranging. The exhibition opens on Nov. 27.

NIGHT LIFE



On Thanksgiving eve, the “Native New Yorker” party series returns to Good Room, in Greenpoint.

Set Tables

Nicky Siano and Justin Strauss recall night life’s loftiest eras.

Boasting of being a native New Yorker counted for more in the Big Apple’s ruder times; these days, the claim rarely has any social benefit. Still, we can all agree that it made for a great *Odyssey* song. In 1977, at the height of disco fever, the group released the simmering 45 “Native New Yorker,” narrating the life of a savvy city lady who’s the heart and soul of her town. “There you are, lost in the shadows, searching for someone to set you free from New

York City,” Lillian Lopez sings, mournful; her home isn’t a point of pride but a burden to escape, even for a night.

By the time “Native New Yorker” cracked *Billboard*, the d.j. Nicky Siano had long been dubbed the Master of Disco Soul as a resident jockey at Studio 54—the club that taught celebrities what to do with all their fame. As the likes of Bianca Jagger, Calvin Klein, and Diana Ross made front-page news for their hedonism, a teen-age Siano pioneered mixing techniques (matching tempos, extending intros) and took other young d.j.s under his wing. But

in 1983, halted by a towering drug habit, he left the scene to become a social worker and didn’t d.j. again for thirteen years. As Siano moved on, disco went with him; in its wake emerged new club customs that shape the spheres of music, fashion, and art to this day.

Downtown New York hit puberty in the nineteen-eighties, a messy rebellion from the shimmer of Studio 54, complete with stars of its own. It was in the burgeoning neighborhood of Tribeca that a young Justin Strauss came of age at the Mudd Club and the Paradise Garage, and eventually served as the Saturday-night d.j. at Area. Genres like post-punk, new wave, and hip-hop forced their way into d.j. sets; celebrities bopped alongside young aspirants like Keith Haring, Madonna, and Jean-Michel Basquiat; and clout peaked at being recognized by a doorman. Throughout the mid-eighties, Area reinvented its décor every six weeks: Jennifer Goode, who directed these changeovers, would load her pickup truck with retired Coney Island rides or props lifted from the set of “Mad Max,” hoping they’d fit in Area’s thirteen thousand square feet. “It started off as something that wasn’t meant to last,” Strauss said recently. “It was an art project—with an amazing sound system.”

Today, photography books, documentaries, and museum exhibits pine over New York’s club history. But Siano and Strauss are more inclined to look forward. Siano returned to d.j.ing in 1996, playing a party dedicated to his late protégé Larry Levan; his “Native New Yorker” night, at which he spins marathon sets of disco soul and new earworms, arrives at Good Room this Thanksgiving eve. Strauss will be there as well, playing with Billy Caldwell for the Greenpoint club’s second dance floor, Bad Room. The party’s holiday timing nods considerably to those with local roots, who can dance till dawn and still make it to dinner with the family that evening.

—Matthew Trammell

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ROCK AND POP

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

Liam Gallagher

"Well, the cops are taking over / While everyone's in yoga / 'Cause happiness is still a warm gun / What's it to be free, man? / What's a European? / Me, I just believe in the sun." Liam Gallagher rarely minces words, and he makes no exception on his recent single "Chinatown"; the music video, which finds him brooding through, yes, Chinatown, is outfitted with subtitles, presumably so that fans can keep up. Musicians of his stature often have a knack for getting everything right in a song even when it shouldn't work at all: as a guiding member of Oasis, one of the biggest British bands of the nineties, Gallagher still knows where the notes should go. He's also enjoying a resurgence of public notoriety spurred by his explosive social-media presence and a few viral clips, gleefully demonstrating that rock stars can still ruffle feathers. (*Terminal 5*, at 610 W. 56th St. 212-582-6600. Nov. 27.)

Jay-Z

With more than three decades of albums and accolades to his name, Sean Carter didn't have to release a quiet album of soul samples and self-reflection this summer, but he did it with characteristic cool. "4:44" is still settling into its legacy; diehards are split on its mature themes (marriage, credit, the eighties) and defiantly analog sound (manned entirely by one producer, No I.D., mentor to a young Kanye West), but it undoubtedly holds up against his rare personal work, such as "Song Cry" or "Meet the Parents." Carter spent the past decade establishing himself as a capitalist rapper motivated by the expansion of his reach, only to make a record that aimed small; at this concert, in an arena he once owned a slim share of, his musings will extend from the floor to the stands. (*Barclays Center*, 620 Atlantic Ave., Brooklyn. barclayscenter.com. Nov. 26-27.)

Dua Lipa

One typically turns to the *Billboard* Hot 100 for escapist entertainment, not nuggets of relationship wisdom. Occasionally, you get both: judging by the towering chart performance of "New Rules," fans have taken to heart the dictates laid out by this English-Albanian pop auteur in her hit single. She formulates a plan for not falling back into bad habits with an old flame, telling her inner self, "Don't let him in / You have to kick him out again" and observing, "If you're under him / You ain't getting over him." It's one of the many pearls on the twenty-two-year-old's self-titled débüt album of taut tropical pop, cast in the image of the early-aughts singers (including Demi Lovato and Pink) whom she used to cover on her YouTube channel. (*Hammerstein Ballroom Manhattan Center*, 311 W. 34th St. 800-745-3000. Nov. 24.)

Method Man & Redman

These two blown-out characters remain one of rap's greatest unofficial duos. Method Man, born Clifford Smith, was the unchallenged star of the Wu-Tang Clan, with a charisma that earned him his own self-titled solo single on the ten-man group's débüt album. Reggie Noble, a.k.a. Redman, was first noticed in his appear-

ances with EPMD, and eventually for his own slapstick personality and triple-stuffed entrees. The two artists' styles were complementary on various collaborations; when they released the joint album "Blackout!" together, in 1999, they became hip-hop's in-house buddy comedy, with beloved music videos and stoner flicks to boot. Method Man is still flexing his acting chops on HBO's "The Deuce," but he's making time to spar with his old partner at this reunion show. (*B. B. King Blues Club & Grill*, 237 W. 42nd St. 212-997-4144. Nov. 22.)

Spoon

Since its inception more than twenty years ago, Spoon has distanced itself musically from its heroes, such as the German experimentalists Can, with elongated jam sessions taking the place of heady pop numbers. They have flirted with funk-laced pop and lysergic psychedelia on their many releases. But on "Hot Thoughts," their recent record, the band delves into new territory: deliberately sultry, shimmy-worthy breakup and make-out jams. (*Brooklyn Steel*, 319 Frost St., East Williamsburg. 888-929-7848. Nov. 28-29.)

Kamasi Washington

"The Epic," the débüt studio album from this tenor saxophonist from Los Angeles, features winding free jazz in the sixties spirit of John and Alice Coltrane. (There's a reference to "Acknowledgement" in Washington's "Final Thought.") It was released on the independent L.A. label Brainfeeder, home to many musicians, producers, and d.j.s who stray from jazz's stricter traditions. The record was warmly reviewed, and it found new fans among listeners who discovered the composer through his work with the knotty producer Flying Lotus (the founder of Brainfeeder) and the Grammy-winning hip-hop wunderkind Kendrick Lamar. This headlining set features a guest appearance by the pedal steel guitarist Robert Randolph. (*Terminal 5*, at 610 W. 56th St. 212-582-6600. Nov. 22.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Dee Dee Bridgewater

The near-feral energy of this veteran vocalist is always something to witness, but Bridgewa-

ter's buffed artistry is not to be overlooked in the rush of euphoria. Her new album, "Memphis . . . Yes, I'm Ready," a celebration of vintage Southern R.&B., is a righteous conduit for her irresistible vitality. (*Blue Note*, 131 W. 3rd St. 212-475-8592. Nov. 21-26.)

Electric Miles

Once Miles Davis plugged in, at the close of the nineteen-sixties, he basically never looked back, so any ensemble dealing with his electric period has a good twenty-plus years of material to draw on. The trumpeter **Randy Brecker** and the saxophonist **Greg Osby** take care of the horns, but three guitarists, including **Steve Cardenas**, will provide the necessary whomp. (*Iridium*, 1650 Broadway, at 51st St. 212-582-2121. Nov. 24-26.)

Hush Point

Controlled dynamics, mindful counterpoint, and a leaning toward the serene pleasures of cool jazz define Hush Point. The group weaves **John McNeil's** brainy trumpet lines and **Jeremy Udden's** ultra-lyrical alto saxophone into the work of a contained yet ever-alert bass-and-drum team. (*Cornelia Street Café*, 29 Cornelia St. 212-989-9319. Nov. 24-25.)

The New Drum Battle: Kenny Washington vs. Joe Farnsworth

There's always been a gladiatorial aspect to jazz. For a taste of this blood sport, head uptown for this mano-a-mano fight to the finish between two supremely accomplished drummers with a mutual taste for hard-bop intensity. Stoking the contestants will be such familiar cohorts as **Gary Smulyan** on baritone saxophone and **Brian Lynch** on trumpet. (*Smoke*, 2751 Broadway, between 105th and 106th Sts. 212-864-6662. Nov. 24-26.)

Jack Wilkins / Howard Alden

Two more elegant mainstream guitarists are hard to find. They deftly balance each other: Wilkins leans toward the modern, while Alden can look over his shoulder to the pioneers of the nineteen-thirties and forties. The position of the veteran jazz musician who has expertise yet still wants for broader acclaim is a puzzling one, but these two handle it with ease. (*Jazz at Kitano*, 66 Park Ave., at 38th St. 212-885-7119. Nov. 22.)

DANCE

New York City Ballet / "The Nutcracker"

As a young dancer in St. Petersburg in the nineteen-tens, George Balanchine performed the lead in the Harlequins' "Hoop Dance" in the Mariinsky Ballet's "Nutcracker." By all accounts, he was rather proud of his performance, and in 1954, when he created his own "Nutcracker" for the New York City Ballet, he included the dance verbatim in the second act, and renamed it "Candy Cane." With its double hoop jumps, it is still one of the most beloved sections of the ballet, performed by one adult dancer and eight children from the school. This merging of past and present, adult prowess and youthful flair, has helped insure this production's enduring appeal for more than sixty years. It returns for a month-long run. (*David H. Koch, Lincoln Center*. 212-721-6500. Nov. 24-26. Through Dec. 31.)

The Chase Brock Experience

Only thirty-four, with choreography credits that include a video game for Nintendo's Wii and the ill-fated Broadway musical "Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark," Brock is already celebrating the tenth anniversary of his troupe. His sensibility is peppy, poppy, amped up with theatre-geek zeal. His on-the-beat, on-the-nose illustrations of music and lyrics have a let's-put-on-a-show innocence. This anniversary program ranges chronologically from the 2007 work "Slow Float," which treats Laura Nyro songs in the manner of "Hair," to the première of "Men I've Known," which is set, more ambitiously, to Satie's austere "Ogives." (*Clurman*, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. Nov. 27-28. Through Dec. 9.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera

The Met first performed Verdi's searing "Requiem" in 1901 to mark the composer's death, and it most recently revived it in 2008, when another legend, Luciano Pavarotti, passed away. But given its mammoth proportions and dramatic style—the German conductor Hans von Bülow called it an "opera in ecclesiastical dress"—it's unsurprising to encounter a concert of it outside of a commemorative context. James Levine conducts the Met orchestra and the powerhouse soloists Krassimira Stoyanova, Ekaterina Semenchuk, Aleksandr Antonenko, and Ferruccio Furlanetto, in a run of four performances. *Nov. 24 at 8 and Nov. 27 at 7:30.* • The New York City Ballet has "The Nutcracker," so, in a bid to carve out its own holiday tradition for families, the Met has been presenting one opera every year in English translation. The most successful of these adaptations is the hundred-minute abridgment of Mozart's "The Magic Flute," in Julie Taymor's often enchanting production. Nathan Gunn—this version's original and irresistibly hammy Papageno—leads a cast that includes Charles Castronovo, Hanna-Elisabeth Müller, and Kathryn Lewek; Evan Rogister conducts. *Nov. 25 at 2.* • **Also playing:** Massenet's "Thaïs" is unquestionably a star vehicle—when Renée Fleming sang in the première of John Cox's production, in 2008, she was lavishly costumed by Christian Lacroix—but it also requires two compelling singing actors who can carry a story that's light on plot. For the current revival, the Met has entrusted Ailyn Pérez and Gerald Finley to flesh out the inner conflicts of the courtesan title character and the holy man who is captivated by her; Emmanuel Villaume. *Nov. 22 and Nov. 28 at 7:30 and Nov. 25 at 8.* (*Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.*)

"BAC Salon": Pauline Oliveros

The writer, director, and performer Ione presents excerpts from "The Nubian Word for Flowers," an opera that was unfinished when her collaborator and spouse, the celebrated experimental composer and improviser Pauline Oliveros, died, in November of 2016. In advance of the work's formal première (at Roulette, in Brooklyn, on Nov. 30), the intrepid International Contemporary Ensemble—fiercely devoted to Oliveros's work—joins Ione for a casual hour-long preview performance and discussion at the Baryshnikov Arts Center. *Nov. 28 at 7:30.* (*450 W. 37th St. bacnyc.org.*)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic

The conductor Gianandrea Noseda's performances in New York in recent years (at the Metropolitan Opera and with the London Symphony Orchestra on tour) have been of such sterling quality that many observers were mystified when he was passed over as the Philharmonic's new music director. It's been twelve years since he led this band, and his return to its podium is welcome. Russian music, one of

his strengths, is prominent on the program, which begins with Rimsky-Korsakov's Suite from the opera "The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh" and closes with Rachmaninoff's Third Symphony; in between comes music by Saint-Saëns, the Violin Concerto No. 3 in B Minor (with the orchestra's concertmaster, Frank Huang). *Nov. 22 at 7:30 and Nov. 24-25 at 8.* (*David Geffen Hall. 212-875-5656.*)

Bach Vespers at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church

The church's admired tradition of presenting concerts of Bach cantatas, in a reverent setting on Sunday afternoons, has hit the half-century mark. Now under the sure command of Donald Meineke, an esteemed member of New York's early-music community, the church's choir, with instrumentalists, is offering a season filled with "greatest hits"—including the Cantata No. 70, "Wachet! Betet!", performed this Sunday. *Nov. 26 at 5.* (*Central Park W. at 65th St. No tickets required.*)

RECITALS

Bargemusic

Many of the city's classical musicians take it easy during the long Thanksgiving weekend, but at the floating chamber-music series the beat goes on. Friday night's concert is offered by the pianist Philip Edward Fisher, who, wrapping up a series devoted to the Beethoven sonatas, performs a relatively early work, No. 16 in G Major, as well as the composer's valedictory masterpiece in the genre, the Sonata No. 32 in C Minor. Beethoven endures on the Saturday-night and Sunday-afternoon concerts, with the "Magic Flute" Variations for Cello and Piano as the centerpiece of a program that also includes Bach's Sonata No. 3 in E Major for Violin and Piano and Dvořák's

Piano Trio in E Minor, "Dumky"; the violinist Mark Peskanov, Bargemusic's director, is joined by two old friends, the cellist Nicholas Tzavaras and the pianist Doris Stevenson. *Nov. 24 at 8; Nov. 25 at 6 and Nov. 26 at 4.* (*Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. bargemusic.org.*)

Juilliard String Quartet

In the world of the American string quartet, no two names are more distinguished than those of the Juilliard and the Emerson, and Lincoln Center is hosting both of them, in back-to-back evenings. First comes the Juilliard, still anchored at the premier conservatory after seventy years. The group's current personnel (including the recently appointed cellist Astrid Schween) performs three bedrock works at Alice Tully Hall: Haydn's Quartet in D Major, Op. 76, No. 5, Bartók's Quartet No. 5, and Dvořák's Quartet in C Major, Op. 61. *Nov. 27 at 7:30.* (*events.juilliard.edu.*)

Go: Organic Orchestra: "Murmuration"

This week's walk on the wild side comes courtesy of Adam Rudolph, the acclaimed percussionist who has explored jazz, experimentalism, and world music for some four decades. Go: Organic, his personal orchestra of thirty-five (on Western and non-Western instruments), joins him on his latest journey: following his signature practice, he conducts the group improvisationally, using a nonlinear score to create music of exceptional spontaneity. *Nov. 27 at 8.* (*Roulette, 509 Atlantic Ave., Brooklyn. roulette.org.*)

Emerson String Quartet

Next at Lincoln Center are the celebrated Emersons, who have lately been continuing their longtime passion for two favorite composers, Beethoven and Shostakovich. This concert concentrates on powerful late works from both: Beethoven's Quartet in B-Flat Major, Op. 130, with the alternative ending, as well as the quartet's original ending, the Grosse Fuge, performed separately, and Shostakovich's harrowing, one-movement Quartet No. 13 in B-Flat Minor. *Nov. 28 at 7:30.* (*Alice Tully Hall. 212-721-6500.*)



The dynamic Italian maestro Gianandrea Noseda conducts the New York Philharmonic this week.

ART

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Frick Collection

"Veronese in Murano: Two Venetian Renaissance Masterpieces Restored"

In between jobs for doges and popes, the sixteenth-century Italian painter, who was born Paolo Caliari in Verona, completed two large paintings for a chapel in a convent graveyard on the Venetian island of Murano. One portrayed St. Jerome during his stint as a hermit in the Syrian desert; the other showed St. Agatha, imprisoned by a Roman consul for resisting his advances. Recently restored and leaving Italy for the first time, the canvases are remarkable for the subtlety of their color. Under matte and powdery surfaces, Jerome's cardinal-red loin-cloth shimmers like real silk, the dark-green leaves of an overhead laurel branch look waxy, and a line of clouds at the bottom of the sky are simultaneously pink and orange. Agatha, sharing her cell with an apparition of St. Peter and a small blond angel, is perfectly distinct in every detail while still chromatically at home in a dim prison. Equally remarkable is Veronese's under-

stated insight into the ambivalent humanity of his saintly characters. Jerome has stopped mortifying his flesh with a rock to gaze up at a crucifix, but the way he holds his arm suggests that he might suddenly toss the stone at his distant Saviour instead. Agatha turns her head only halfway, as if unwilling to withdraw full attention from her own suffering merely on the strength of St. Peter's promises. *Through March 25.*

New Museum

"Kahlil Joseph: Shadow Play"

Joseph has created intellectually and emotionally dense short films showcasing black excellence, strangeness, and history for artists and commercial clients including Beyoncé Knowles, Shabazz Palaces, Kendrick Lamar, and Kenzo. He draws very little distinction between his commercial work and the art that he produces on his own. Now he has made his most personal film to date, the twenty-three-minute "Fly Paper," which is the high point of this installation. It features Joseph's late father, Keven Joseph Davis, who practiced sports and entertainment law (he was named one of *Sports Illustrated's* "101 Most Influential Minorities" in 2003). We see him inter-

acting with the musician and entrepreneur Fab 5 Freddy on a street in Harlem, both men sporting overcoats that shield them against the chill of a city that, historically speaking, has been as intolerant of black men as it has been shaped by them. You can't hear what Davis and Freddy are saying, but you don't need to: their bodies and their gestures tell us that they share a language, the complicated, flowing language of black men in cities. Joseph concludes his film with a reference to Chris Marker's documentary "Sans Soleil" (1983), an urtext on film as fragments, film as journey. In "Fly Paper," after the parade of disparate lives, bound together by aesthetics, politics, belief, and love, has ended—we see the actor Ben Vereen, the singer Lauryn Hill, and Joseph's late brother, the artist Noah Davis, among others—the screen goes dark. The world has stopped. The excellence is gone. But the blackness onscreen is as rich and textured as skin. And that's when we hear a woman, in calm voice-over, quoting from "Sans Soleil": "If they don't see happiness in the picture, at least they'll see the black." *Through Jan. 8.*

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Françoise Grossen

One of the most entralling objects in this decades-spanning exhibition is the sprawling "Mermaid I," from 1978. Woven from twisted rope, a trio of eight-foot-long fish-tail braids meet where the mythic creature's torso would start, and end in curved fins of concentric strands. "Interpolations XXI," from 1982, is a lovely outlier, a small, caterpillar-like form made from buffing pads and wooden buttons, rather than the artist's signature knots and plaits. The Swiss-born, New York-based artist, who is best known for her gracefully gnarled, abstract hanging works and large public commissions, broke early with the constraints of tapestry to reflect the countercultural aesthetics of the nineteen-seventies. At times, though, Grossen's works can feel too close to the handmade post-Minimalism of Eva Hesse, particularly in this gallery setting. *Through Jan. 6.* (Blum & Poe, 19 E. 66th St. 212-249-2249.)

Ileana Sonnabend and Arte Povera: Curated by Germano Celant

In a 1967 essay, Celant, a critic and curator, coined the term "arte povera"—poor art—for the sardonically subversive work then being made in his native Italy. But he first came up with the phrase in conversation with the legendary gallerist Ileana Sonnabend, who abetted the movement's international influence when she gave the artist Michelangelo Pistoletto a show at her Paris gallery, in 1964. Three of Pistoletto's original "mirror paintings" from that year—wall-mounted sheets of mirror-polished steel with dinged-up corners—are the highlight of this taut and exciting fiftieth-anniversary event. Across the right edge of a work titled "Marzia con la Bambina," the artist's wife, who is painted at nearly life size on tissue paper affixed to the steel, turns a shoulder to the viewer, while cradling a little girl in her arms. In its equivocal feelings about art and the art world, its rebuke of the high gloss of American Minimalism, and its suggestion that formal and conceptual rigor are enhanced through a theatrical sense of humor, the piece encapsulates the values that also animate works by Pier Paolo Calzolari, Jannis Kounellis, Gilberto Zorio, Giulio Paolini, Giovanni Anselmo, and Mario Merz. Don't miss Anselmo's untitled, two-foot-



The American photographer Curran Hatleberg's new on-the-road series includes "Untitled (Snake)" (2017), on view at Higher Pictures through Dec. 23.

tall pillar of gray granite, conceived in 1968, to which a fresh lettuce leaf is bound every day with a copper wire—you could spend the rest of your life arguing about what it means. *Through Dec. 23.* (Lévy Gorvy, 909 Madison Ave., at 73rd St. 212-772-2004.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Gail Thacker

The punk photographer Mark Morrisroe, who died of AIDS, in 1989, bequeathed his cache of Polaroid 665 stock, which creates both a negative and a positive print, to his friend Thacker. This show assembles several dozen of the pictures that she made with the film, many of them hand-colored or finished with collage elements. Like her peers from the so-called Boston School (Morrisroe, Nan Goldin, and Jack Pierson, among others), Thacker took her intimate circle as her subject, embracing the diaristic. "Self-Portrait the Day John Died," from 1985, is a blurred, Polaroid closeup of the artist's stunned face, accidentally decorated with fingerprints and a light-exposed corner. Portraits of the drag artists Tabboo! and Rafael Sanchez are, in contrast, rich and sharp, their expert poses dramatized by velvety shadows or surprising sunlight. *Through Dec. 22.* (Cooney, 508 W. 26th St. 212-255-8158.)

William Villalongo

The men portrayed in the American artist's new gut-punching collages and paintings are almost entirely composed of cuts. Sliced out of imported black velour paper, the swooshes, loops, and hearts are stark white; on painted wooden panels, they're a mellower violet. With the addition of acrylic eyes, hands, and feet, these characters convey a dancerly élan—the figure in "Corner Office" flexes under a view of the Empire State Building, while the man in "Obertura de la Espera (Time Dancer)" wears a collaged necklace of African masks. However sprightly Villalongo's works may appear, he is rendering trauma, and his men also convey something heavier. In "Free, Black and All American No. 3," it's the phrase "2.3 million incarcerated"; in the otherwise penumbral "Vanitas," a silver tray holds rotting fruit and a photograph of the racist mass murderer Dylan Roof. *Through Dec. 9.* (Inglett, 522 W. 24th St. 212-647-9111.)

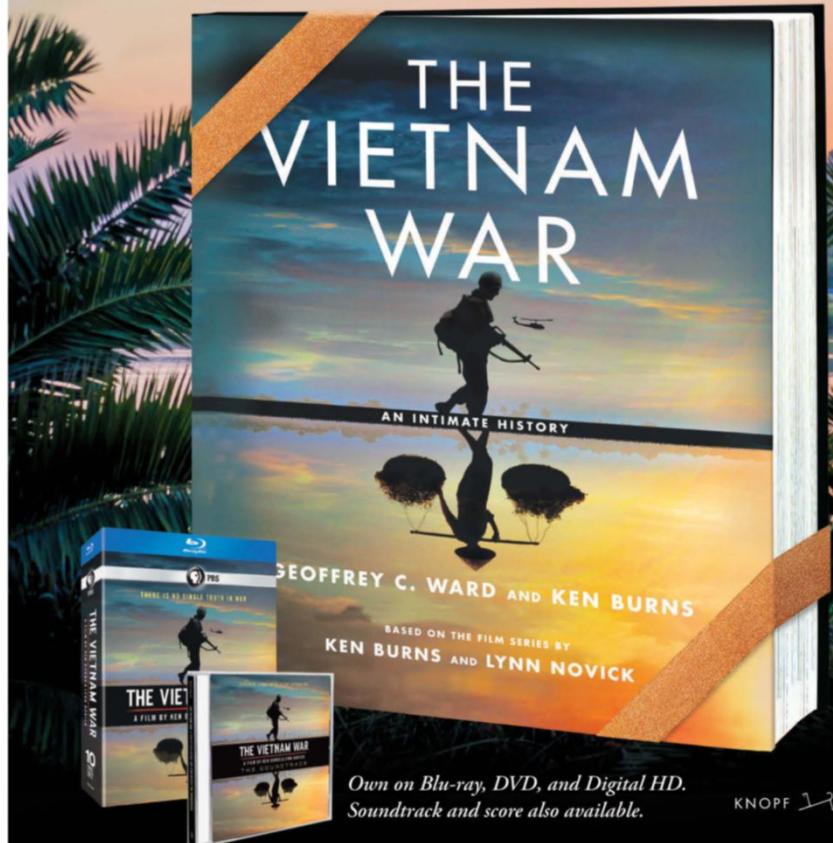
GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Sylvie Fleury

The Swiss artist's fantastic new sculptural paintings were inspired by eye-shadow and blush compacts, but they also suggest high-style control panels. Fleury based their geometry on actual products, rendering the sleek black or gold frames and the shimmering, convex insets of pigmented powder with hard-edged precision. She also, cleverly, simplifies forms. One quartet of canvases takes the shape of Chanel's distinct curved yet square compacts, but, thanks to the omission of the applicator brushes, they become Minimalist. While the elegant show takes a jab at the grandiose machismo of modernism, mimicking its formal experiments with symbols of feminine artifice and consumer fetishism, it also comes off as a paean to the tiny abstractions and paint sets of everyday life. *Through Dec. 23.* (Salon 94 Bowery, 243 Bowery, at Stanton St. 212-979-0001.)

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— NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW

THE THEATRE



Known for her zippy adaptations of classic books, Kate Hamill plays Elizabeth Bennet in her screwball rendition of "Pride and Prejudice."

Austen, Abridged

Kate Hamill turns nineteenth-century novels into kinetic downtown theatre.

It was 2010, and Kate Hamill, an aspiring actress, was frustrated. The casting notices all seemed to call for bikini babes, long-suffering girlfriends, or thirty-year-old MILFs. "I got so swiftly irritated by the dearth of good female roles in female-centric stories," Hamill said recently. She bet a friend a hundred dollars ("and I was so poor") that she could create her own "classic," based on Jane Austen's "Sense and Sensibility." The friend was Andrus Nichols, a co-founder of the downtown theatre company Bedlam. The show had a short stint Off Broadway in 2014, then returned last year for a hit encore run, at the Gym at Judson. Eric Tucker's production was no staid costume drama but a hyper-caffeinated romp, with a chorus of nattering gossips and wheeled furniture that rarely stopped swirling. Hamill and Nichols played the Dashwood sisters, Marianne and Elinor. The hundred dollars was never exchanged.

Hamill, thirty-four, has now found

her niche in the theatre world, adapting thick nineteenth-century novels into kinetic stage concoctions—and starring in them. This spring, she hacked down Thackeray's "Vanity Fair" for the Pearl and took the role of its cunning antiheroine, Becky Sharp. Now she's playing Elizabeth Bennet in her own screwball adaptation of Austen's "Pride and Prejudice," at the Cherry Lane. (Coming up: a version of "Little Women" that explores Jo as a nonbinary character, though Hamill may cede the role, "because I present very much as a cisgender woman.") The second-youngest of six, Hamill had an Austen-like upbringing herself. She was raised in an eighteen-fifties farmhouse in Lansing, New York, a dairy-farming town so remote that when Hamill was little it didn't have 911. Her parents, both grant writers, thought television rotted the brain, so she took up books instead, discovering "Pride and Prejudice" as a junior in high school.

How to pare down such doorstoppers? Hamill starts with a central theme: for "Sense and Sensibility," it was "Do you break the rules or follow them?" "Vanity

Fair" was an exploration of judgment and hypocrisy. With "Pride and Prejudice," she said, the guiding question was "How do you know if you met 'the one,' in modern parlance? And, for me, I've been super-ambivalent about marriage and romantic love." That attitude has evolved since she's been in a long-term relationship, with the actor Jason O'Connell.

Reader, she cast him as Mr. Darcy. "He was psyched! Mr. Darcy's a really hard role to play, because so many people play him just as a jerk. In my version, he's not a jerk. He just acts like one, because he's so socially awkward." Hamill and O'Connell first met at the Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival (which is co-producing the show with Primary Stages), and, Hamill recounts, "I swear to God, a bell went off in my head. Like, ding!" Bells are a recurring motif in her "Pride and Prejudice." The couple lives in Forest Hills, and they are not yet betrothed. "In this play, he proposes to me, and I wrote the proposal," Hamill said, her voice lowering to a haphazard whisper. "This play should be subtitled, like, 'My Very Public Marriage Journey.'"

—Michael Schulman

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

The Children

In Lucy Kirkwood's play, a pair of retired nuclear engineers are visited by an old friend during a world crisis. Directed by James Macdonald, in a Manhattan Theatre Club transfer from the Royal Court. (*Samuel J. Friedman*, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. *Previews begin Nov. 28.*)

The Dead, 1904

Irish Rep brings back its site-specific staging of the James Joyce tale, adapted by Paul Muldoon and Jean Hanff Korelitz and accompanied by a holiday feast. With Melissa Gilbert and Rufus Collins. (*American Irish Historical Society*, 991 Fifth Ave., at 80th St. 212-727-2737. *In previews.*)

Describe the Night

Rajiv Joseph's new play, directed by Giovanna Sardelli, tells parallel stories connecting the Russian writer Isaac Babel, a K.G.B. agent in Dresden, and a 2010 plane crash in Smolensk. (*Atlantic Theatre Company*, 336 W. 20th St. 866-811-4111. *In previews.*)

Downtown Race Riot

The New Group presents Seth Zvi Rosenfeld's play, directed by Scott Elliott and starring Chloë Sevigny as a single mother during the 1976 mob attack in Washington Square Park. (*Pershing Square Signature Center*, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. *In previews.*)

The Fountainhead

At the Next Wave Festival, the European stage auteur Ivo van Hove directs Toneelgroep Amsterdam's reimagining of the Ayn Rand novel. (*BAM Howard Gilman Opera House*, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. *Nov. 28-Dec. 2.*)

Hundred Days

The folk-punk duo the Bengsons composed this musical (with a book co-written with Sarah Gancher), about living as if you had only a hundred days left on earth. Anne Kauffman directs. (*New York Theatre Workshop*, 79 E. 4th St. 212-460-5475. *In previews.*)

Meteor Shower

Amy Schumer, Keegan-Michael Key, Laura Benanti, and Jeremy Shamos star in Steve Martin's new play, about a dinner party interrupted by falling space debris. Jerry Zaks directs. (*Booth*, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. *In previews.*)

Once on This Island

Michael Arden directs a revival of Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty's 1990 musical fable, in which a young Caribbean woman falls in love with a man from the other side of her island. (*Circle in the Square*, 235 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. *In previews.*)

The Parisian Woman

Uma Thurman stars in a drama by Beau Willimon (the creator of "House of Cards"), as a Washington socialite navigating power and relationships after the 2016 election. Pam MacKinnon directs. (*Hudson*, 141 W. 44th St. 855-801-5876. *In previews.*)

SpongeBob SquarePants

A musical based on the anarchic cartoon, with direction by Tina Landau, a book by Kyle Jarow, and songs by artists including Steven Tyler, Sara Bareilles, John Legend, Cyndi Lauper, and the Flaming Lips. (*Palace*, Seventh Ave. at 47th St. 877-250-2929. *In previews.*)

Today Is My Birthday

In Susan Soon He Stanton's play, directed by Kip Fagan for Page 73, a New York actress returns home to Oahu and lands a gig on a radio dating show. (*New Ohio*, 154 Christopher St. 866-811-4111. *Previews begin Nov. 28.*)

20th Century Blues

Susan Miller's play follows four women who meet once a year to take a group portrait and find their friendships tested when they learn that the photos may go public. Emily Mann directs. (*Pershing Square Signature Center*, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. *In previews. Opens Nov. 26.*)

The Winter's Tale

The Public's Mobile Unit performs the Shakespeare romance in its home theatre, after a tour through New York City community venues. Lee Sunday Evans directs. (*Public*, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. *Previews begin Nov. 26.*)

NOW PLAYING

Actually

Amber and Tom (Alexandra Socha and Joshua Boone) rendezvous outside of a party for Princeton freshmen. They flirt. They dance. They drink from a shared flask and eventually clamber into Tom's dorm bed. No one disputes this. But contradictory versions of what happens next shape the twisted spine of Anna Ziegler's often agonized "she said, he said" drama, produced by Manhattan Theatre Club and directed with understated empathy by Lileana Blain-Cruz. Like Ziegler's "The Last Match," "Actually" alternates between two-character scenes and direct address while moving back and forth in time around a central event—in this case, an administrative hearing to determine whether Tom's conduct has violated Title IX policy. In simpler terms: has Tom raped Amber? Both actors offer charismatic, multidimensional performances, and the playwright's compassion is unstinting. But Ziegler's obsessive evenhandedness ultimately becomes a source of frustration, making the piece feel less like a wrenching character study and more like a dramaturgical brainteaser. (*City Center Stage II*, at 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

The Band's Visit

It has a wisp of a plot: an Egyptian police orchestra, conducted by Tewfik (Tony Shalhoub), lands in the wrong town in the Negev Desert, where the locals, stone-faced and few, put the musicians up for the night. In the morning, they leave. And yet David Yazbek and Itamar Moses's new musical, based on a 2007 Israeli film, fills up the stage with feeling, the muted kind that dwells in missed connections and half-remembered tunes. The director, David Cromer, has enormous trust and patience in his material, letting the emotional music of an uneventful night in the middle of nowhere rise to the surface. But the show's not so secret weapon is Katrina Lenk, who plays Dina, a café owner with a dry stare and a drier wit. When she finally opens up to Tewfik, in a song about the "jasmine wind" that brought in Umm Kulthum on her mother's radio, she's a radiant presence. (*Ethel Barrymore*, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

The Elephant in Every Room I Enter

In this autobiographical one-man show, the actor Gardiner Comfort explores life with Tourette's syndrome, the hereditary condition that pro-

vokes a wide variety of verbal and physical tics. The narrative is structured around a week that Comfort spent in Washington, D.C., as a novice lobbyist with the Tourette Association of America, but it feels more like a stream-of-consciousness zigzag through his mental state, shifting compellingly from puppy-dog enthusiasm to square-jawed intensity to psychedelic freak-out. Directed by Kel Haney, the show often feels deliberately unfocussed, as if to mirror the experience of Tourette's itself, and Comfort is an expressive dancer who does a wonderful job physicalizing what it feels like to be him. But he's occasionally less than generous in depicting the other people he encounters, and it's sometimes unclear how his various asides are meant to be received. (*Fourth Street Theatre*, 83 E. 4th St. 866-811-4111. *Through Nov. 25.*)

Junk

Ayad Akhtar ("Disgraced") is a playwright who seems the most energized when he has big issues to dive into, and what could be juicier than Wall Street greed and maleficence? The year is 1985, and Judy Chen (a superb Teresa Avia Lim) is a business journalist covering new financial strategies that are redefining the idea of capital in America. Robert Merkin (Steven Pasquale) embodies those changes: sleek as a shark, he's the head of an L.A.-based bank that's been very aggressive about hostile takeovers. Merkin lives in a world where guilt is a burden and loyalty is an inconvenience: money is, as Chen says, "the thing." Directed by Doug Hughes, this slick production of a thin play features twenty-three actors, so there's not a lot of room for character development. But, in a way, that doesn't matter: sometimes it's fun just to sit there and get off on the testosterone and the swiftness of the action, like most of the play's guys do. (*Vivian Beaumont*, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200.)

Latin History for Morons

In his latest comic monologue (a Broadway transfer from the Public), John Leguizamo is class clown turned substitute teacher, sprinting from the Aztecs to Sonia Sotomayor in less than two hours—with dance breaks. When his son was in eighth grade, Leguizamo tells us, he was picked on by racist bullies and stumped by a history project in which he had to find a hero. Hoping to fortify his boy with heritage, Leguizamo deep-dived into textbooks, returning with pearls of knowledge: did you know that twenty thousand Hispanics fought in the Civil War? Still, he struggles to find encouraging tales of indigenous forebears, who, like his son, were on the losing side of most battles. Directed by Tony Taccone, the show makes the occasional hackneyed turn—it's unclear why Montezuma is rendered as a flaming homosexual—but quickly rights itself, and Leguizamo lands clear comic punches, especially when sending up his own machismo. (*Studio 54*, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-239-6200.)

The Mad Ones

Inspired by Jack Kerouac, Sam (Krystina Alabado), a graduating high-school valedictorian, wants to hit the road like Sal Paradise but instead worries her way through a hundred minutes of indecision that would make Hamlet impatient. The book, lyrics, and music of this Prospect Theatre Company show are by Kait Kerrigan and Brian Lowdermilk, and, while their song arrangements are wittier than their sitcom-grade dialogue, the whole thing feels

marooned in a narrative void—a sensation reinforced by Adam Rigg's featureless set, which has all the charm of an empty office cubicle. The actors, directed by Stephen Brackett, do well with what they're given, which is too often contrived: Sam's mother wrote a book on driving safety, her boyfriend aspires to take over his father's tire shop, and so on. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

People, Places & Things

Emma (Denise Gough), the protagonist of Duncan Macmillan's play (a transfer from the National Theatre in London), is an actress, a sloppily confrontational, drug-addled mess in a business populated by handlers who applaud inflated self-regard. Like many junkies, Emma is a brutalizing sentimentalist chasing the dragon—a line of coke, a handful of tranquilizers, booze—while also chasing some idea of love, which involves regret as well. When she is shown to her room at a rehab facility by an administrator (Alistair Cope, who, like the rest of the supporting cast, is excellent), she flips him off with snotty remarks: she is defiant, or acting defiant. The Irish-born Gough knows how to play Emma's lies without foregrounding them or trying to make us comfortable with her character's psychology. Her performance is greater than the script, and the script is terrific, if conventional; it gives Gough a framework through which to express her genius. (Reviewed in our issue of 11/13/17.) (*St. Ann's Warehouse*, 45 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779.)

What We're Up Against

This play by Theresa Rebeck ("Seminar"), written in 1992 and staged by WP Theatre, has aged much better than its protagonists' office wear of culottes and baggy pleated pants. Set at an architecture firm where the men and the women are pitted in a vicious—and utterly familiar—war of the sexes, the story takes off when Eliza (Krysta Rodriguez), furious at not getting any assignments, makes a bold move that shakes up the power balance. Alliances and betrayals abound, and the deft cast, moving at breakneck speed under Adrienne Campbell-Holt's punchy direction, makes a meal of the snappy dialogue. Fuelled by cathartic fury, this dark feminist comedy leaves nobody unscathed, from the dumb, smugly sexist supervisor (Damian Young) to the accommodating older colleague (Marg Helgenberger) who's deemed "a Nazi collaborator" by the brazen Eliza. Rebeck's arguments are not new, but that doesn't make them tired. (*McGinn/Cazale*, 2162 Broadway, at 76th St. 866-811-4111.)

ALSO NOTABLE

Animal Wisdom The Bushwick Starr. • **Harry Clarke Vineyard.** • **The Home Place** Irish Repertory. • **Ilyria Public.** • **Jesus Hopped the "A" Train** Pershing Square Signature Center. • **The Last Match** Laura Pels. • **M. Butterfly** Cort. • **Oedipus el Rey** Public. • **Office Hour** Public. • **Peter Pan** The Duke on 42nd Street. • **School Girls; or, The African Mean Girls Play** Lucille Lortel. • **Shad-owlands** Acorn. • **Springsteen on Broadway** Walter Kerr. • **Time and the Conways** American Airlines Theatre. Through Nov. 26. • **Tiny Beautiful Things** Public. • **Too Heavy for Your Pocket** Black Box, Harold and Miriam Steinberg Center for Theatre. Through Nov. 26. • **Torch Song** Second Stage. • **Uncommon Sense** Sheen Center. Through Nov. 26. • **The Wolves** Mitzi E. Newhouse.

MOVIES

NOW PLAYING

Born in Flames

Lizzie Borden's fierce and trenchant political fantasy, from 1983, is set in New York ten years after a second American revolution, peaceful yet drastic, which has brought about democratic socialism and sparked new conflicts centered on race and gender. Two underground feminist radio stations are in competition—one led by Honey (played by the actress of the same name), a black woman who considers the revolution unfulfilled, and another by the white lesbian musician Isabelle (Adele Bertei), whose activism is cultural. Meanwhile, the vigilante Women's Army patrols the city by bicycle, a government employment program provokes riots, and three female journalists (one of whom is played by Kathryn Bigelow) report on divisions within the socialist movement. After an activist (Jean Satterfield) dies in police custody, the feminist theoretician Zella Wylie (played by the activist and writer Flo Kennedy) calls for direct action to get the message out in the one way that matters—on television. Borden's exhilarating collage-like story stages news reports, documentary sequences, and surveillance footage alongside tough action scenes and musical numbers; her violent vision is both ideologically complex and chilling.—Richard Brody (*Film Society of Lincoln Center*, Nov. 25 and Nov. 27, and streaming.)

Lady Bird

As writer and director, Greta Gerwig infuses this comedic coming-of-age drama with verbal virtuosity, gestural idiosyncrasy, and emotional vitality. The loosely autobiographical tale is set mainly in Gerwig's home town of Sacramento, in the 2002-03 academic year, and centered on Christine McPherson (Saoirse Ronan), self-dubbed Lady Bird, a senior at a Catholic high school whose plan to escape to an Eastern college is threatened by her grades and her parents' finances. Lady Bird's father (Tracy Letts), with whom she shares a candid complicity, is about to lose his job; her mother (Laurie Metcalf), with whom she argues bitterly, is a nurse who works double shifts to keep the family afloat. Lady Bird infiltrates the world of rich kids and risks losing true friends; she dates a Francophile rocker (Timothée Chalamet) whose walk on the wild side is comfortably financed. Deftly juggling characters and story lines, Gerwig provokes aching laughs with gentle touches (Metcalf's etched diction nearly steals the show), but her direction remains self-effacing until late in the film, when several sharply conceived scenes suggest reserves of observational and symbolic energy.—R.B. (In limited release.)

Luna

Channelling a Viscontian elegance, Bernardo Bertolucci probes the allure of bourgeois excess to its core of perverse desire—and ultimately suggests that it's made of frustrated dreams of normalcy. He gives Jill Clayburgh what may be her most extravagant role, as Caterina, a suddenly widowed New York opera singer who, in frenetic mourning, flees to Rome with her adolescent son, Joe (Matthew Barry). There, the singer's self-absorption and overbearing expressiveness lock the boy into the shell of his own despair, which he slakes with a heroin habit that she discovers on his fifteenth birthday. The destructively passionate bonds of

mother and son leave no ravage a surprise—including their famous scenes of incest. Yet Bertolucci, leading them through Italy in a voluptuous if anguish-strewn travelogue, heals them with the rediscovery of long-abandoned family ties and unites them in a grand tableau of artistic splendor and fulfillment. At the edge of the abyss, the director retreats to a redemptive humanism that comforts more than it challenges—and dramatizes his own good reasons for doing so. Released in 1979.—R.B. (*Quad Cinema*, Nov. 24 and Nov. 26.)

Mudbound

This historical drama, directed by Dee Rees and adapted from the novel by Hillary Jordan, is centered on two families in rural Mississippi, one black and one white, during the nineteen-thirties and forties. It offers a keen and outraged view of the laws and practices of Jim Crow and the monstrous dangers awaiting anyone who defied them. The story shows how the McAllan family, who are white—Henry (Jason Clarke), Laura (Carey Mulligan), and their young daughters—slip from middle-class Memphis to a bedraggled Mississippi farm, where they're in close connection with their tenants, the Jackson family, who are black—Hap (Rob Morgan), Florence (Mary J. Blige), and their four children. When the Second World War starts, Henry's brother Jamie (Garrett Hedlund) becomes a pilot, and the eldest Jackson son, Ronsel (Jason Mitchell), becomes a tank commander. Both come back heroes, but tragedy looms when they become friends. Rees uses voice-overs to bring the many characters to life, but the text is thin; the movie's exposition is needlessly slow and stepwise, and the drama, though affecting, is literal and oversimplified. With Jonathan Banks, as Henry's bitter, racist father.—R.B. (In limited release and on Netflix.)

Murder on the Orient Express

On board a train halted by an avalanche, a scoundrel lies dead. When did he die? Who caused the multiple wounds? And just how amazing is it that Hercule Poirot (Kenneth Branagh)—who is probably, as he hastens to inform us, the world's greatest detective—should be on hand? Branagh's new film of the Agatha Christie novel, adapted by Michael Green, is an odd compound of the luxurious and the sparse. On the one hand, it comes loaded with the paraphernalia of wealth: dining cars, porters, valets, and covetable costumes, plus a small crowd of expensive stars, including Johnny Depp, Judi Dench, Penélope Cruz, Willem Dafoe, Daisy Ridley, and a sad and seductive Michelle Pfeiffer. On the other hand, so busily does the plot scurry past, twitching with clues and flashbacks, that we are neither drawn into its cunning nor satisfactorily fooled. The landscape changes with alarming speed from a sunny Istanbul to a vision of crags and snowstorms that appears to have been borrowed from "The Lord of the Rings," although the most prominent feature is Branagh's mustache, a forest unto itself. The movie feels cushioned and stately, but, compared with Sidney Lumet's version from 1974, surprisingly short on fun.—Anthony Lane (Reviewed in our issue of 11/20/17.) (In wide release.)

On the Beach at Night Alone

There's a dark romanticism powering Hong Sang-soo's furious, tautly controlled, yet coolly comedic drama. The story is inspired by his own real-life

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relationship with the actress Kim Min-hee. She stars as Young-hee, an actress who, in the wake of her scandalous affair with an older, married director, flees Seoul for a small German city, where she lives in contemplative solitude. Eventually returning to South Korea, she reunites with old friends and considers restarting her career—but she sees the milieu that she left behind, and the men in it, with a defiant and contemptuous clarity. Young-hee's deeply insightful, bitterly frank, and poetically passionate temperament emerges in a series of long and far-reaching conversations with friends and colleagues—in parks, over meals, and in bars—which Hong films in long takes with brusque zooms and pans matching her decisive vigor. For all its intimacy, the drama has a vast scope, a fierce intensity, and an element of metaphysical whimsy (including one of the great recent dream sequences), which all come to life in the indelibly expressive spontaneity of Kim's performance. In Korean and English.—R.B. (*Film Society of Lincoln Center and Metrograph*.)

Porto

The late Anton Yelchin gives one of his last performances in this quietly bombastic and emotionally oblivious romantic drama. Yelchin's character, Jake Kleeman, is an American scholar in Portugal who begins a relationship with Mati Vargnier (Lucie Lucas), a French archeologist who followed her professor (Paulo Calatré) there from Paris. The director, Gabe Klinger, plants Mati and Jake in lavishly photographed cityscapes but burdens them with a drama that plays like a lonely man's wet dream. The script (which Klinger co-wrote with Larry Gross) is a hollow batch of clichés, starting with Mati's hot come-on in a recurring café sequence in which Jake glowers and leers carnivorously at her before they grunt and heave gamely in a long bedroom sequence (an icky fantasy of phallic expertise). What's more, Klinger plays coyly with the time scheme, as if to mask the lack of substance with tricks of form. A gratuitously ugly scene of Jake's physical abuse of Mati is a casually checked-off plot point. With Françoise Lebrun, in the movie's one well-imagined scene, as Mati's mother. In English, Portuguese, and French.—R.B. (*In limited release*.)

Thelma

The heroine of Joachim Trier's film has a troubled air, more inward-facing than outgoing, as if something were pressing her down. Thelma (Eili Harboe) has just started studying biology at college, in Norway, and at first she finds it difficult to make friends. Then she meets Anja (Kaya Wilkins), a fellow-student, although their meeting coincides with the onset of frightening seizures that come upon Thelma without warning; they are not epileptic, a doctor concludes, so what could be the cause? The film ripples outward, allowing us to inspect the stern moral conditions laid down by her Christian parents (Henrik Rafaelsen and Ellen Dorrit Petersen), and also backward into her past, to see if early traumas linger there. We even get spasms of telekinesis and whispers of witchcraft; the psychological narrative may be less than convincing, but Harboe's performance holds it tightly together, and the surface—now shuddering with images of shock, now gripped by a chilly calm—is finely controlled. Some of the medical scenes use flickering strobes, and sensitive viewers should approach with caution. In Norwegian.—A.L. (*11/20/17*) (*In limited release*.)

Thor: Ragnarok

The director Taika Waititi brings exuberant visual wit and comedic sensibility to the latest Mar-

vel extravaganza. Chris Hemsworth again plays the hero with the hammer; this time, after the death of his father, Odin (Anthony Hopkins), Thor must fight his vengeful sister Hela (Cate Blanchett) to save his home planet of Asgard and its residents from her wrath. But, before he gets there, he's taken prisoner on the remote planet of Sakaar and forced into gladiatorial combat against a fearsome monster—who turns out to be none other than Hulk (Mark Ruffalo). A lively set of supporting characters, including a Valkyrie (Tessa Thompson), an Asgardian warrior (Idris Elba), and a creature made of rocks (Waititi), contribute heart and humor. Waititi makes the most of the churn and flash of battles and settings realized with C.G.I., filling the screen with wild whirls of color, launching characters and vehicles into loopy trajectories, and shifting from place to place with an antic sense of surprise. Even the long exposition and the sentimental ending can't burst the giddy bubble.—R.B. (*In wide release*.)

Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri

Frances McDormand plays Mildred Hayes, whose daughter was raped and killed by per-

sons unknown. Many months on, the police, headed by Sheriff Willoughby (Woody Harrelson), are no closer to finding the guilty party, and Mildred takes matters into her capable hands, renting billboards to advertise the woeful facts of the case. This makes her unpopular with the locals, but she doesn't care, nor does McDormand hesitate to make Mildred intimidating, and at times unsympathetic, in her single-minded hunt for justice. You might think that someone as tough as Mildred would overwhelm the film, but the writer and director, Martin McDonagh, finds space for the growth of other characters, especially Dixon (Sam Rockwell), a cop, a mama's boy, and a racist blowhard. Not that he sees the error of his ways; rather, through a series of events both fiery and farcical, he comes to understand that other ways exist. The movie is much funnier, in its blistered dialogue, than the grimness of the story might suggest, but viewers who like their mysteries wrapped up like a gift should probably look elsewhere. McDonagh draws committed performances from Peter Dinklage, John Hawkes, Lucas Hedges, Abbie Cornish, and Caleb Landry Jones.—A.L. (*11/13/17*) (*In wide release*.)

ABOVE & BEYOND



Thanksgiving Parade Balloon Inflation

For a behind-the-scenes look at the biggest Thanksgiving celebration in the country, visit Macy's giant-balloon inflation on the afternoon before the holiday, when seventeen balloons—iconic parade staples and new additions—will bob to life. Arrive early to beat the crowds: most balloons have started to take shape by five, and they're inflated and ready to march by nine, held to the concrete by hundreds of feet of netting. It's an apt pre-party for the ninety-first annual Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, on Nov. 23, which will draw more than eight thousand participants. This year, balloons inspired by films such as "Ice Age" and "Diary of a Wimpy Kid" join SpongeBob, Pikachu, and the Pillsbury Doughboy; elaborate floats host the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and Jim Henson's Sesame Street gang; and Smokey Robinson, the Goo Goo Dolls, Wyclef Jean, 98 Degrees, and the Rockettes all perform. (*Enter at W. 74th St. at Columbus Ave. Nov. 22, starting at 1.*)

Grand Central Holiday Train Show

At this annual train show, now in its sixteenth year, the M.T.A.'s history is brought to life as scale models of classic red subway cars, double-letter trains, and even commuter-rail cars race past iconic stops and dart through labyrinthine tunnels. Back by popular demand is the Transit Museum's Holiday Nostalgia Train, featuring restored vintage subway cars in use be-

tween 1932 and 1977, which passengers can ride up Second Avenue; it sets out on its first voyage on Nov. 25. The show is open to the public seven days a week through Feb. 4. (*New York Transit Museum Gallery, 89 E. 42nd St. grandcentralterminal.com*.)

READINGS AND TALKS

Rizzoli Bookstore

Published in conjunction with MOMA's popular exhibit "Items: Is Fashion Modern?," the companion book collects (and alphabetizes) a hundred and eleven pieces of clothing and accessories from the past two centuries that curators have deemed significant and impactful on contemporary society. The museum's first fashion exhibit since 1944 draws equally from pools of practicality and piety, placing Levi's alongside saris. It reduces everyday wear to its rawest utility and design properties—a hooded Champion sweatshirt and, say, a Wonderbra are upheld as examples of sculpture and architecture in their own right, shaping much of the fabric of the world around us. At this book launch, Paolo Antonelli, the exhibit's senior curator, and the assistants Michelle Millar Fisher and Stephanie Kramer discuss and sign copies of the encapsulating hardcover. (*1133 Broadway. rizzolibookstore.com. Nov. 28 at 6.*)

FOOD & DRINK



TABLES FOR TWO

Camillo

1146 Nostrand Ave., Brooklyn (718-576-6886)

In the Aeneid, Virgil puts forward a prophecy founded on proto-pizza consumption, which foretells where Rome shall be built. "When hunger shall drive you, landed on unknown shores, to eat the tables at your frugal meal," Aeneas recalls his father telling him, "remember to place your first buildings there." These "tables," Aeneas later realizes, falling to his knees, are plates made of hard bread off which his band of Trojan refugees eat lunch. Two millennia later, Camillo (opened in September by the proprietors of the Clinton Hill standby Locanda Vini e Olii) honors pizza's Virgilian origins—in the ultimate old-timey Brooklyn move—with *pinsa*, a Roman flatbread. The *pinsa* dough is made from a mixture of organic wheat, soy, and rice flours, which rises for more than two days before being baked in a Moretti Forni electric oven. The result, the chef and owner Michele Baldacci says, is easier to digest than its Neapolitan cousin.

One recent evening, a table of frequent pizza eaters tried out a *capricciosa pinsa*, with artichokes, mushrooms, prosciutto cotto, olives, tomatoes, and mozzarella. The crust was thin, airy, and crispy without being brittle; it sturdily held its many toppings. "Architecturally, it's a well-built slice," one diner said. "It's got a solid

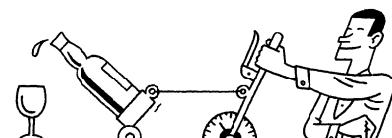
foundation." Each oblong *pinsa* brought further pleasure. Amatriciana, with guanciale, pecorino romano, and chili pepper, was cheeky goodness with a kick. The Salsiccia & Broccoli, with its islands of pork sausage, creamy mozzarella, and broccoli rabe, disappeared in seconds.

Other offerings were even more straightforward—what you might eat in Nonna's kitchen. Salty anchovies came on buttered white toast; the *seppie e piselli* was chewy, peppery squid atop sadly overcooked peas; the porchetta, served on a wooden paddle, was a still-life of carved roast pork, lettuce, and mustard. Among the pastas, the carbonara's fresh spaghetti will please those who scorn anything from a box, but it's the gnocchi alla romana—baked into fluffy perfection with semolina flour, tomatoes, and parmigiano—that provoked one diner to hail the gods.

For those who don't live in Prospect-Lefferts Gardens, getting to Camillo might require a long ride through the city's underworld. Fortune, of course, favors the bold, and upon arriving patrons will find a warm, unpretentious atmosphere and food that even Dido might have thought comforting. After dinner, four selections of house-made amari—one infused with dandelion and rhubarb, another with blessed thistle—smooth the descent back underground, making easy the way home, prophecies of *pinsa* fulfilled. (\$12-\$24.)

—Carolyn Kormann

BAR TAB



The Penrose

1590 Second Ave., at 82nd St. (212-203-2751)

The Penrose is a long, narrow space with a sinuous, inviting arc, all dark wood and white hexagonal tiles, whose dim interior seems to perpetually hold a bustling crowd. On a neon-speckled stretch of Second Avenue that belies the sleepy reputation of the Upper East Side, the bar offers a destination for the young glitterati who don't want to travel all the way to Williamsburg to guzzle chichi cocktails and indulge in spirited chatter. On a recent Wednesday, the door was thrust open again and again to the cool autumn wind, as a seemingly endless array of patrons sought to elevate the evening to something that would make a compelling Instagram story. The sound of fashionable boots striking the white floor was muted by a staccato prog-rock soundtrack; a young woman in a clinging leather blazer frowned at her companion by the light of a tiny candle and flicked beer foam at his lush red beard. Steps from the new Second Avenue subway stop, the Penrose rewards those who take advantage of its convenient location with stuporously alcoholic drinks like the Baby Zombie (applejack, pineapple rum, absinthe), served in a mug with the likeness of a glaring bird, or milder concoctions like the Free Thinker (Jameson, pamplemousse liqueur), which slides down as easy as dancing feels to the drunk. There's food, too—creamy, cheesy, spicy—including a fried-chicken sandwich that serves as excellent ballast for the booze. Under the low ceiling, even in the brick-walled room at the very back, the sounds of merriment seem strangely close, as if each peal of brittle laughter, each gleefully spilled secret, were directed toward your own ready ear.—Talia Lavin

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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT TESTS FOR LIBERALS

At the press conference last week in which Beverly Young Nelson described how when she was a high-school student, in 1977, Roy Moore, the Alabama Republican nominee for the U.S. Senate, who was then a deputy district attorney, tried to physically force her to engage in oral sex with him, she also talked about her vote in last year's election. "My husband and I supported Donald Trump for President," Nelson said. "This has nothing whatsoever to do with the Republicans or the Democrats." Yet Moore, and his campaign, wanted to make it exactly about that, even as other women came forward with charges against him. (As of last Friday, a total of nine had done so.) In a statement to the *Washington Post*, the campaign said, "If you are a liberal and hate Judge Moore, apparently he groped you. . . . If you are a conservative and love Judge Moore, you know these allegations are a political farce."

From this perspective, the news, last Thursday, that Senator Al Franken, Democrat of Minnesota, also had misconduct allegations against him looked to some like an opportunity to test a similar formulation. Leeann Tweeden, a radio host, said that in 2006, two years before Franken ran for office, she joined him on a U.S.O. tour to Afghanistan and Iraq, and he kissed her during a rehearsal, although she told him not to. He later posed for a photograph in which he appeared to grab her breasts while she was sleeping, wearing camouflage

gear and a Kevlar helmet. If you are a liberal and love Al Franken, would you decide—indeed, know—that these allegations are a political farce? The answer, properly and unambiguously, is no.

A number of Franken's Senate colleagues, including Amy Klobuchar, also of Minnesota, and Elizabeth Warren, of Massachusetts, condemned his acts. Franken, after a first, halting apology, offered a fuller one, in which he said that he was "disgusted" by his own behavior and that he will coöperate with an ethics-committee investigation into the allegations. The committee, though, hasn't sanctioned anyone in years. Last week, several women lawmakers reported that sexual harassment on Capitol Hill is pervasive, and that, as Representative Jackie Speier, Democrat of California, put it, the system for dealing with it is "a joke." During the past twenty years, Congress has paid out seventeen mil-

lion dollars to settle claims of harassment and other forms of workplace discrimination, while keeping those payments secret. Speier also said that there were two cases involving current members of Congress.

In some ways, the Franken story is a small, sad proxy for his party's Bill Clinton problem. Last week, as more sexual-harassment and assault charges came to light, some people started looking again at a rape allegation that Juanita Broaddrick brought against the former President. In 1978, Broaddrick, a nursing-home administrator, met Clinton, at that time the Arkansas attorney general, for a business meeting in her hotel room—to avoid the press, she thought—and there, she said, he attacked her. (A lawyer for Clinton has denied this.) A colleague says that she heard the story from Broaddrick immediately afterward, when she found her with torn panty hose and a swollen lip.

Broaddrick's story came out, in 1999, largely thanks to Lisa Myers, of NBC News, after Clinton's acquittal in his impeachment trial—a case that grew out of a sexual-harassment suit brought by Paula Jones—and the charge was left unresolved. Early in the impeachment imbroglio, Hillary Clinton had attributed her husband's troubles to "a vast, right-wing conspiracy." There was a well-funded conservative effort to target the President, but, in this instance, the charge feels too close to Moore's assertion that liberals simply believe one thing, and conservatives another.

When Clinton ran for President in 2016, she may not have gauged how



profoundly Bill Clinton's record with women would hurt her. Just a month before the election, after the "Access Hollywood" video emerged, in which Trump bragged about grabbing women's genitals, he brought Broaddrick and Jones to a Presidential debate. Clinton dismissed this as a stunt, meant to throw her off her game. But the key audience for it was purple-state women, particularly middle-aged or older working-class women, who might identify with Broaddrick, or be receptive, based on their own experience, to the contention that, as Trump put it, Hillary was Bill's "enabler." (Polls after the election showed that Clinton performed less well with those voters than her campaign had hoped.) For others, Clinton's decision to make her husband an active part of her campaign—and the potential First Spouse—constrained it.

Many factors played into Clinton's defeat, but at that juncture Bill cost her

heavily, by keeping "Access Hollywood" from costing Trump the election. As hard as it is to hear, particularly given the historic nature of Clinton's candidacy and her laudable record on everything from climate change to children's health, her nomination compromised the Democratic Party. There were other choices, early on; perhaps one of the fourteen Democratic women in the Senate in 2015 might have emerged. Voters in Alabama, where Moore is on the ballot in December—and in Minnesota, where Al Franken is up for reelection next year—might remember that they have choices, too.

President Trump, for his part, tweeted that the "Al Frankenstien picture is really bad," adding, "And to think that just last week he was lecturing anyone who would listen about sexual harassment." Some of that "lecturing" has been directed, with good cause, at Trump himself; he shouldn't expect it to end. Efforts, like the President's, to act as though one

transgression can cancel out another suggest that the problem is just one of calculating how many Frankens add up to a Moore—how many charges of groping for one of attempted statutory rape. There is no abuse-indulgence account that each party can draw on, though.

That is also true in assessing their ideologies. The national Republican leadership has, to an extent, backed away from Moore—the Alabama state Party has not—but it had earlier supported him even though he said that he did not believe that Muslims ought to be seated in Congress or that gays and lesbians should have basic rights. That shows not only who Moore is but what the G.O.P. has become. Franken has worked hard for progressive causes in his political life. But, here, too, whatever points that earns him, or his colleagues, are not spendable in some market in women's dignity. The Democratic Party is better than that.

—Amy Davidson Sorkin

DEPT. OF HOOPA GOOD TASTE



One way to think of New York City is as a vast complex of towering speaker cabinets—thousands of rectangular buildings full of woofers and tweeters, Klipsches and Beats, sound systems great and small. If everyone cranked the same song at the same time, we could tear the roof off this sucker, or at least blow out the bricks and glass, and a giant all-seeing audiophile could peer in and assess the city's speaker stacks. He (and this giant sound snob would have to be a man, in pull-on boots) would perhaps linger longest over the steampunk components and curiosities to be found in a spacious loft on the top floor of an industrial building in Dumbo—the showroom of Oswalds Mill Audio, and the lair of its principal and founder, Jonathan Weiss.

O.M.A. designs and manufactures meticulous, beautiful, and very expensive machines for the reproduction of recorded music. The company's headquarters are in Lehigh County, in Pennsyl-

vania, in an old mill Weiss renovated for this purpose twenty years ago. Weiss, who is fifty-three, believes that most of us listen wrong; we settle for horribly compressed recordings on crappy components. "If you don't know what good sound is, trying to describe it is like explaining the taste of salt," he said recently.

For his amplifiers, Weiss uses vintage vacuum tubes originally meant for ballistic missiles or Second World War radios, and he favors so-called horn speakers made of wood. His top-of-the-line loudspeaker system, at three hundred and forty thousand dollars (no wonder we settle), is the Imperia: two seven-foot steel towers, each with a couple of huge flared wooden horns, one atop another, along with some smaller aluminum-alloy horns. Between them, on the floor, are the boxed bass horns. The standing horns, fashioned out of Pennsylvania ash, bring to mind an old gramophone, or a morning glory. They make it sound as if the musicians are in the room.

On a recent evening, a few dozen guests came to Dumbo for what Weiss calls a sound tasting—in this case, to hear a new album by the country singer Lee Ann Womack, who was in town from Nashville. Womack, in gold stilettos and a black dress, and her husband and producer, Frank Liddell, in

jeans and a navy long-sleeved T-shirt, milled around Weiss's big, rustic kitchen, drinking wine, as the Imperia, at the other end of the loft, resurrected Patsy Cline and John Coltrane.

"I grew up in East Texas, and I had my idea of the kinds of music I wanted to make," Womack said. "And then I signed a record deal in Nashville, where they have a certain way they market things and a way they want the music to sound." She was on the hook for eight commercial country albums,



Lee Ann Womack

which took sixteen years to complete. “The entire time I was doing that, I would go to events with my friends, who are, like, Buddy Miller, Jim Lauderdale, Patty Griffin, and they were the cool kids, you know? I was, like, ‘The cool kids are over there. I can’t wait till I can go join the cool kids.’ And so now I can. I’m able to do what I want to do, what I really love.”

Womack and Liddell recorded the new album, “The Lonely, the Lonesome & the Gone,” in a very non-Nashvegas way—old microphones, live takes, traditional instruments—at SugarHill Studios, in Houston, a venerable cinder-block hutch where Lightnin’ Hopkins, George Jones, and Willie Nelson, among many others, got their wings.

Liddell said, “If you’re in a studio in Nashville, and there are three studios, you’re always, like, ‘Wonder what they’re doing in there—probably something shitty.’ It’s all this competition, whereas in Houston you’re making music.” Liddell is from Houston. He and Womack stayed at his mother’s house. “We went there to get away, get off the beaten path. The things that came out of it were not the things that we necessarily sought going in. East Texas is a strange place. No one wants anything to do with it. But all the greats—you know, George Jones, Ray Price, Lefty Frizzell, Johnny Horton—great singers came from there. Guys that were poor and stuck and broke, it brought that blues element. Could be the pine trees. Sometimes you don’t see the light of day. Anyway, we were looking for a place where we could just get dirty, which is what we did.”

The hope was that Weiss’s Imperia horns would do justice to the dirt. The guests fanned out around the towers, and Weiss snuck in behind them to fiddle with some dials and place stylus on vinyl. Kick drum, E string, pedal steel, an intake of breath: the players were as present in the room as Weiss himself, as he nervously checked on his components. Ten songs in, there was Womack’s stark take on “Long Black Veil.” Womack, who’d been hanging back, stepped up close to one of the Imperia stacks and leaned against a steel beam, a quizzical look on her face. The pines?

—Nick Paumgarten

SECOND ACT WOMEN IN LOVE



The writer-director Maggie Betts circled the fanciful Japanese garden: a white plastic tree, a pink wooden border, a glowing disk for a moon. It was an installation at Cadillac House, in SoHo, a brand-experience space where you mostly experience the Cadillac brand. With her still, calm face and long floral dress, Betts appeared more serene than the garden. “Since I started making films,” she said, studying the tableau, “I weirdly have these images in my dreams where it’s like the camera is pushing in”—her right palm dollied forward in staccato pulses. “But I don’t even use those.”

Her first feature is “Novitiate,” an unexpectedly sensual look at life inside a Midwestern convent in 1964, just after Vatican II. A self-described party person until she was thirty, Betts says that her life changed in 2005, when the First Lady, Laura Bush—whose husband had been a fraternity brother of Maggie’s father, Roland, at Yale—urged her to do something with it. Betts got involved in preventing mother-to-child H.I.V. transmission in Africa. “I left the Paris Hilton stuff behind and started to become myself,” she said, settling at the bar of a Joe Coffee that had also been randomly curated by Cadillac House. “I wouldn’t say I was *wayward* before that—I’d written screenplays and refurbished a building—but I was unfocussed.

“In fairness,” she went on, “I really wanted to make movies since I was a kid.” At eight, she handwrote a “Star Wars” sequel, and her father, a film financier, then introduced her to such R-rated movies as “The French Connection” and “Dressed to Kill.” “But it seemed so hard for women to do it—there was an intimidation factor.” She made her first film, the documentary “The Carrier,” in 2011. “The seriousness of my subject, an H.I.V.-positive woman in a household of nine children in rural Zambia, propelled me to not let her down,” she said.

On one of Betts’s trips to Africa, she picked up a book called “Come Be My Light” at a newsstand at J.F.K. “It was

a collection of Mother Teresa’s letters,” she said. “They were obsessive about her love for her husband, and I was thoroughly confused until I realized they were about God, and that she was in so much pain because he had abandoned her for long periods across thirty or forty years. That was the moment of revelation—that nuns were married to God. You associate nuns with stodgy old ladies, but to me they’re romantic extremists.” She laughed. “That’s the way I am, too—all or nothing.”

Behind Betts, hipsters on Mies-style lounge chairs were drinking flat whites. “My producer, Celine Rattray, told me before I’d even written a script how to get your first feature made,” she said. “Set it in a novel world, in a contained location, and write a super-complex part for a woman over forty-five. You’ll get the pick of the litter.” She solved that equation with “Novitiate,” in which eighteen-year-old Cathleen (Margaret Qualley) leaves a broken home for God—for comfort, really—and finds a life constrained by bells, rules, and abuse. Her guide and nemesis, a rivetingly sadistic Mother Superior (Melissa Leo), rages at the novices because God has deserted her.

The film quivers with forgone possibilities. “My mother grew up poor and black, with thirteen brothers and sisters, and the Episcopal religion was all they had,” Betts said. “She gave up going to church, so my dad could play with us on the weekends, could have those extra two hours. I’ve been with her in church on Mother’s Day and felt her sense of loss. So when my mom told me, ‘I love this movie,’ I was very happy.”

She continued, “But, really, I hope the movie gets at how women love. Mother Teresa spent her life torturing herself, and I and so many of my girlfriends also got into that dynamic with men of ‘How do I make him love me?’ Sophisticated New York women!” She smiled. “My therapist pointed out that another great question—which had never occurred to us—was ‘Is he *worthy* of you loving him?’”

After Vatican II reduced nuns’ status to that of ordinary Catholics, ninety thousand nuns renounced their calling. “Vatican II was a good thing, but it had its casualties,” Betts said. “This institution in Rome, far, far away, dictated what’s inside you”—her hands hovered above

her heart. "And when nuns left the church later in life, some didn't know how to use money, they weren't employable. They were helpless."

Rising, she said that she was working on two new projects. "I don't want to jinx them by talking about them, but they also have predominantly female casts—I want that to be my thing." And how did her therapist's suggestion go? Betts laughed. "I'm single," she said. "So that's how that went."

—Tad Friend

MAN'S BEST FRIEND TEAMWORK



"Have you ever been to a maximum-security prison?" the actress Glenn Close asked on a recent morning at the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility for Women. Inside the prison walls, past the security checkpoints and the razor-wire fence, was a campus-like environment. Women in green uniforms walked from cell blocks to jobs and daily programs. Close, who wore a gray suit and had sunglasses propped in her short silver hair, has been coming to Bedford Hills for more than twenty years, since she visited to research a documentary film. She has supported prison initiatives, including a children's center for incarcerated mothers and a writing class taught by the playwright Eve Ensler. "Unless you've been in here, you don't know what it's like," she said. "You learn—there but for the grace of God . . ."

This morning, Close was headed for the Puppy House, a low brick building that is home to a program called Puppies Behind Bars, which operates in six prisons in New York and New Jersey. Inmates train puppies to become service dogs for veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The puppies—all Labrador retrievers—enter prison when they are eight weeks old and live for up to three years with their inmate "puppy raisers," who teach them special commands to help veterans suffering from traumatic brain injury and P.T.S.D. The program was founded in 1997 by Gloria Gilbert

Stoga, a member of Rudy Giuliani's mayoral administration, and Close was an early enthusiast. Despite her famous role as Cruella de Vil, she said, "I'm a natural dog person. My mom and dad were both great dog lovers."

Eight years ago, she cold-called Oprah Winfrey to tell her about the program. Winfrey bit. Not only did she feature Puppies Behind Bars on "The Oprah Winfrey Show," she became a donor. Close had arrived to celebrate the opening of a new "puppy yard," which Winfrey had financed, for a hundred thousand dollars. Also in attendance were two of Close's assistants; Gilbert Stoga, a wiry blond woman with glittery earrings; and an Iraq War veteran whose service dog, Bettine, had been trained at the prison, sponsored by Close. "I named her Bettine after my mom," Close said.

The new yard had a fresh Astro-Turf surface and was planted with evergreens. The puppy raisers were waiting: twenty-three women of all ages, who wore utility belts loaded with puppy gear—plastic baggies, kibble—over their prison uniforms. The fifteen dogs were off leash, creating a melee of barking, squeaking squeaky toys, and the voices of puppy raisers shouting "Leave it!," "Bring it!," and "Good puppy!" Close entered the yard and was mobbed by dogs. She hugged an inmate named Danielle, a middle-aged woman with a ponytail, and greeted her by name.

"Hi, Glenn. How are you?" Danielle said. Close had sponsored Danielle's charge, a honey-colored Lab named Tom. Danielle said, "Good boy, Tom. Sit!" Tom sat.

"Look at his big paws!" Close said.

"I love him already," Danielle said. "I got him last night, and he came in my room and right away took all the toys out of my bucket."

There was a brief ceremony. The inmates unveiled a bone-shaped dedication plaque whose inscription read "In honor of Oprah and Glenn, whose lives have always included dogs." Then the group went inside the Puppy House for a demonstration.

"Let's show some commands," Gilbert Stoga said. "Who's the youngest here?" She meant the youngest dogs. "Craig and Oscar?"

Following prompts from their puppy

raisers, two small black Labs demonstrated that they could open a door by tugging a strap attached to its handle. The room erupted in shouts of "Good boy!" Zito, a big black Lab, demonstrated peekaboo, a position used to comfort P.T.S.D. sufferers. His handler, Nicole, stood with her legs apart and said, "Peekaboo." Zito ducked through them and sat at her feet, leaning cozily against her.

It was Tom's turn. "Let's do retrieval," Gilbert Stoga said. A stick of deodorant was placed on the floor. Danielle said, "Tom! Get it. Hold." Tom delicately picked up the deodorant in his mouth and took it to her. Then he lay down at her feet.

"Wow," Close said, clapping. "He has great focus."

Afterward, the puppy raisers discussed the program and what it meant to them. They talked about the pain of spending years away from their families, and the pride they felt at being able to contribute to society. Kim, an older woman with bleached bangs, called puppy raising "a reason to wake up every day." She went on, "I've been here about five years. And I'm not a spring chicken. So I'm struggling. And every day, no matter what I'm going through, when I look at the dog



Glenn Close

all the problems go away." She thanked Close: "Beyond the fact that the yard looks beautiful, the dogs just love it."

"I'm just proud to see Tom," Close said. "And I remain committed to helping you in any way I can." On her way out, she said, "I wish Oprah could see this."

—Lizzie Widdicombe

THE PICTURES REMEMBERING



In the foyer of Lois Smith's apartment, on the Upper West Side, where she has lived since the seventies, hangs a Joseph Cornell box containing a picture of her from 1955. It was the year she starred on Broadway in "The Young and Beautiful," based on F. Scott Fitzgerald's Josephine stories. Cornell, who knew Smith through the writer Donald Windham, cut out her image, in a white tulle gown, from the *Playbill* cover. "The back of it is wonderful," Smith said recently, flipping the box to reveal papier-mâché text. "It has a quote from Hölderlin: 'Home, poor heart, you cannot rediscover, if the dream alone does not suffice.'"

That same year, Smith made her film début, in "East of Eden," playing a flustered barmaid opposite James Dean. "It was his first movie, too," she recalled, leaning back on a sofa, below a framed photograph of her great-grandfather in his Union Army uniform. Dean died five months after "East of Eden" was released, and Smith returned to New York, studying with Lee Strasberg at the Actors Studio and playing Helen Hayes's daughter in "The Glass Menagerie." "I felt intimidated by her, and what I remember is a sense that I was playing Laura as part of that intimidation," she said.

Smith wore a black shirt, black pants, and black Crocs. She was days away from turning eighty-seven, which she would celebrate by joining Twitter ("Hello World. This is my first day on Twitter. What am I doing here? #myfirstTweet") and then flying to Windsor, Ontario, to promote her role in "Marjorie Prime," for which she has been making the Oscar campaign circuit. (She also steals several scenes as a plainspoken nun in Greta Gerwig's "Lady Bird.") In "Marjorie Prime," directed by Michael Almereyda, she plays a widow, living in the nearish future, who spends her days talking to a computerized hologram of her late husband (Jon Hamm) and arguing with her daughter (Geena Davis). "We had



"I just can't understand how they keep unlocking the door."

dinner where we were staying in Montauk," she said of Hamm, "and I remember saying, 'Have you gotten your head around the fact that we're the parents of Geena Davis?' She laughed loudly.

"Marjorie Prime"—based on a play by Jordan Harrison, in which Smith starred—could be classified as science fiction, but it's more a meditation on memory, invoking William James's theory that when we remember something we're really remembering our memory of it. Smith wasn't sure what to make of the idea, but said, "I certainly don't feel I remember anything." She recalls little about working with Jack Nicholson, in "Five Easy Pieces," in 1970, but does remember that her daughter was twelve during the filming: "She was at an age of change. She first got her period when we were in California together. That was exciting."

Actors, particularly those with IMDb pages as long as Smith's, tend to plot the chronology of their lives onto credits, and vice versa. "There was a period when I felt that was the only way I could keep things straight," Smith went on. "That's how I managed time in my memory, what went with what. My marriage ended—we were living in Philadelphia, in the late sixties—and I remember feeling that I had lost that ability. Maybe not forever, but something that had been the way I could

connect things, or measure memories, had been blasted." The same thing happened in the mid-nineties, around when Smith was in "Dead Man Walking" and "Twister," and had broken up with the actor David Margulies, with whom she had an on-and-off relationship. "I suppose my own sense of thrust forward in work was connected to the absence of David," she said. "I really didn't think we would get together again, but we did. So the last part of his life"—Margulies died in January of last year—"we were together, very strongly together."

Her earliest memory (she was born in Topeka, the youngest of six) is of having an earache and tearing herself from her mother's arms in pain. "I have some memories of being on the floor," she said. "I remember what the rug was like. There was a big puzzle with a train, and the letters across it were C-H-I-C-A-G-O. I would ask my brothers and sisters how to say it, but I couldn't remember. So I would look and look at it and I would say chick-a-go." She smiled at the sound. "That's what my mind is like now: I'll almost have it, but I can't quite remember it. I'm going to Windsor in a few days, but I keep coming up with 'Win-n-n'—and not being able to get the rest of it." Her thoughts returned to the puzzle. "I would study it and study it, and not be able to say 'Chicago.'"

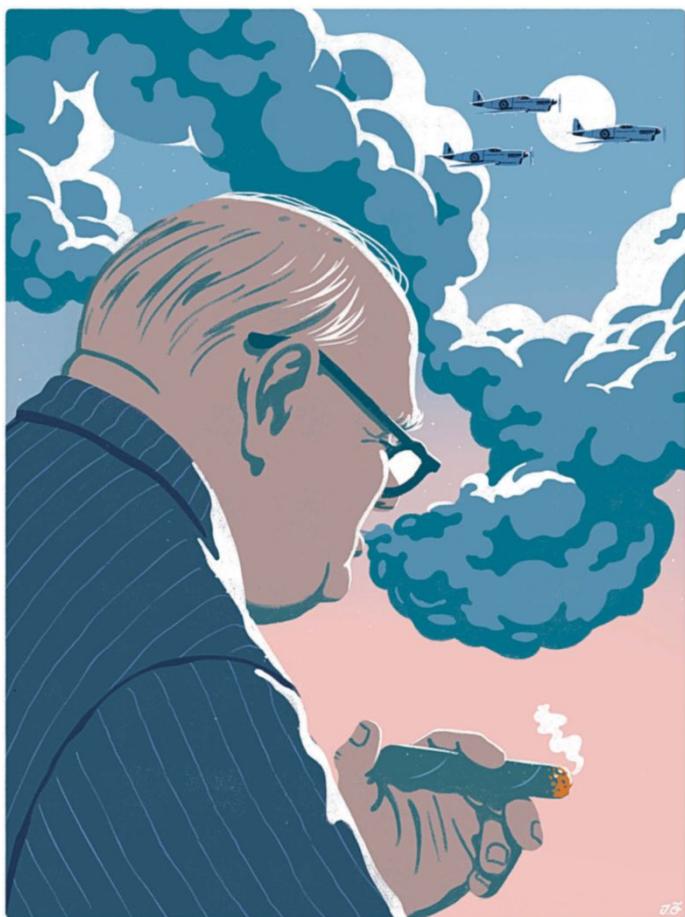
—Michael Schulman

A CRITIC AT LARGE

FOR THE WIN

Churchill at the movies.

BY ANTHONY LANE



The hat. The jowls. The spotted bow tie. The spectacles, descending the bridge of the nose. The fat cigar, brandished like a broadsword. The waistcoat, the watch chain, and the whiskey. And the voice—hark to the boom of it, rumbling up from caverns measureless to man. Put all these elements together, and who do you get? Albert Finney, that's who. Or Richard Burton. No, wait—Michael Gambon. Maybe Robert Hardy. How about Brendan Gleeson or Brian Cox? Or John Lithgow? Timothy Spall? Oh, and there's Viktor Stanitsyn, four times over. You can't forget him.

If you are an actor of some emi-

nence, naturally blessed with a mien like a full moon, it seems inevitable that, once you have attained the requisite age and girth, you will be asked to play Winston Churchill. Your obligation to do so lies somewhere between a contractual clause and a rite of passage, not unlike marrying Elizabeth Taylor in the nineteen-fifties. You could refuse the role, but that would be ungracious and perverse; you might as well turn down a medal. As with every privilege, this one comes bedecked with responsibilities. You are expected not merely to stand and declaim in the House of Commons, or in a passable facsimile of it, but also to sit and growl

into a microphone. Cigars must be smoked, although Lithgow has revealed that, now that tobacco is taboo, his cigars, as deployed in "The Crown," are made from some more innocuous, and therefore disgusting, vegetable substitute. (Brave is the doctor who would have dared to propose such a ruse to Churchill himself.) And, yes, you will be compelled to don the standard Winstonian outfit, which is now as recognizable as the Batsuit.

Consider, for instance, "The Gathering Storm." In fact, consider it twice. There was a TV movie by that name in 1974, and another in 2002. (The title is borrowed from the first volume of Churchill's history of the Second World War.) Each is a dramatization of the testing period, in the second half of the nineteen-thirties, during which Churchill, out of both power and favor, struggled to convince others of the threat that was posed by German rearmament. In the first film, he is played by Richard Burton; in the second, by Albert Finney, who won an Emmy for his endeavors. As both men take up the Churchillian props, it's tempting to scroll back through their respective filmographies and to recall the impact they made, at the dawn of their careers, in fierce blue-collar roles—Burton as the resentful Jimmy Porter in "Look Back in Anger" (1959), and Finney as the pleasure-hunting factory worker in "Saturday Night and Sunday Morning" (1960). In postwar Britain, it seems, even actors had to climb the rope ladder of the class system; start by looking back in anger and, God willing, you could end up as a portly blueblood on the steps of 10 Downing Street, looking forward in gutsiness and hope.

The latest actor to make that journey, and to try his luck at the noble sport of Churchill-playing, is Gary Oldman, in Joe Wright's "Darkest Hour." Oldman grew up in a rough patch of southeast London, and the resulting movie, "Nil by Mouth" (1997), which he directed, is one of the best and the most oath-stuffed portraits of working-class British life ever created. Now he stars as Churchill, who was born in Blenheim Palace in 1874, and whose grandfather was the Duke of Marlborough. "Darkest Hour," set in the late spring of 1940, covers the

Churchill worked like an actor, rehearsing lines and perfecting his public image.

resignation of the besieged Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain (Ronald Pickup) and his replacement, after much ill-tempered wrangling, by Winston Churchill.

On the face of it, Oldman is an unlikely candidate—the face, indeed, being the main impediment. The young Oldman was a stranger to genial rotundity. He looked and moved like a human flick-knife, sharp and thin and stropped for mischief. He played Sid Vicious, of the Sex Pistols, in “*Sid and Nancy*” (1986), and the rascally playwright Joe Orton, in “*Prick Up Your Ears*” (1987), neither of whom is an obvious precursor to Churchill. Then came “*The Firm*” (1989), in which Oldman, armed with a lethal mustache, led a gang of soccer hooligans, and advocated to two rival gangs that they all club together and take on the Continental thugs. “In two weeks’ time, there’s going to be ‘alf of Europe waiting in Germany for us,” he says. “If we don’t stick together, they’re going to trample all over us.” His plea is rousingly plain: “Look, I’m recruitin’ for a national firm. Do you want in, or what?” The sentiment is Churchillian enough, but the cause at stake is not the survival of Christian civilization, as Churchill phrased it, so much as the right to apply an iron bar to a Dutchman’s groin.

And now look. Here, in “*Darkest Hour*,” is Oldman as the old man, padded and waddled, the cheeks plump, the hair yellow-white and sparse. You could forgive this Churchill for being freighted with cares, for Germany is rampant and Britain is on the rack. Something sprightly is afoot, however, and it’s Oldman’s feet, among other things, that make the difference. His tread is not heavy and forlorn but purposeful and deft. (Though leonine, Churchill had surprisingly small paws—size 6. Fred Astaire took an 8½. When a sculptor depicted Sir Winston with large feet, he was reportedly displeased. “How was I to know?” the sculptor asked, adding, “I visualized him as a Colossus bestriding the world!”) We get the impression of someone in a hurry, whose life hitherto has led to this point, with an enemy clearly in his sights, and who is energized afresh by a crisis that might deflate a more wavering soul.

Oldman’s vocal range, likewise, is more tenor than bass, yet he makes the lightness work for him. Of all those who have tackled Churchill onscreen, the majority tend to weight their words as though even badinage were an oration, but this new Churchill, sotto voce, dithers and huffs. All of which is not just dramatically plausible but historically accurate, based on the testimony of John Colville, who served two terms as Churchill’s private secretary during the war and kept a diary, assessing, from the closest quarters, every wrinkle in his master’s temperament:

Sometimes it took him weeks of cogitation before he reached an answer which satisfied him. He would talk half aloud, half under his breath, about some matter which was occupying his mind. He might address apparently inconsequential remarks to his family or his staff, or even to the yellow cat, while under his breath you could hear him preparing some Minute to the Chiefs of Staff Committee or speech to the House of Commons.

What does this remind you of, if not of an old-school actor-manager, rehearsing his lines for a grand production that he himself must oversee? Is it any wonder that real actors have swarmed toward such a man?

The most potent of Churchill’s rehearsals occurred on the morning of May 13, 1940, three days after he had been appointed Prime Minister. Malcolm MacDonald, a Member of Parliament who hoped for a place in the wartime Cabinet, was summoned to his presence. MacDonald was taken aback when Churchill said, “I’ve nothing to offer you except”—pause—“blood and toil, tears and sweat.” It later transpired that a colleague of MacDonald’s had been offered the same things. (Both men were, in fact, given ministries to run.) What Churchill was doing, as was confirmed that afternoon, in Parliament, was limbering up for this: “I would say to the House, as I would say to those who have joined this Government: ‘I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat.’”

The screenwriter of “*Darkest Hour*,” Anthony McCarten, has written a new book of the same name, in which he cites the scene with MacDonald. I wish that he had found room for it in the movie; what could be more beautifully

suited to Oldman’s depiction of Churchill than these backroom mumbles and self-goadings? Instead, we get the greatest hits, out loud. We get the blood and the sweat, barked to the House of Commons, and, needless to say, we get the most celebrated speech of all, unleashed on June 4th, when the Prime Minister informed the world that Britain would fight the Germans on the beaches, in the streets, and wherever else they chose to intrude.

These arias of formal rhetoric deserve their fame, but, as with Hamlet’s soliloquies, that very ubiquity makes it almost impossible for us to give them a fresh hearing. (Burton was once playing Hamlet, and was disconcerted to find that Churchill, seated in the front row of the stalls, was uttering the lines at the same time, like someone at a concert singing along to his favorite song.) Worse still, “*Darkest Hour*” deems it necessary to beef up Churchill’s climactic address with the addition of a muscular musical soundtrack, just in case we aren’t sufficiently stirred.

That beefing is common practice. We hear it at the end of “*The Gathering Storm*,” where Burton—who sounds an awful lot like Richard Burton and nothing like Winston Churchill—gets a musical accompaniment, whether he likes it or not. So does Brendan Gleeson, reassuring the nation that “we shall never surrender,” in a 2009 TV movie about Churchill’s vicissitudes of wartime fortune, titled “*Into the Storm*.” (As far as Churchill movies are concerned, the climate is one of perpetual tempest.) Even the director Christopher Nolan, who ends this year’s “*Dunkirk*” with a young man reading the June 4th speech aloud from a newspaper, cannot resist the lure of a grand score, ladling souped-up Elgar onto the richness of the words. Can they not be trusted to stand by themselves?

If you are a seasoned Churchill-watcher, it can be a relief to slip away from the Second World War and to inspect less vaunted passages of his life. Make your way forward, for example, to the first half of the nineteen-fifties, when Churchill was Prime Minister once more, though beset by the drastic waning both of British global influence and of his own health. (One morning, in 1953, he held a Cabinet



"We knew technology would replace us someday."

meeting after suffering a stroke the night before. Nobody noticed the difference.) On television, in 2016, both Michael Gambon, in “Churchill’s Secret,” and John Lithgow, in “The Crown,” incarnated a Churchill with whom age has finally caught up. In the latter, he stands before his youthful Queen (Claire Foy) in some perplexity, as she raises the “delicate matter” of “your position.” It turns out that she is referring to his placement at a forthcoming dinner, but for a moment she has grazed a sore spot, and it’s salutary to see Churchill, of all people, caught off guard. Lithgow is far too tall for the role, but he skillfully turns that loftiness to his advantage—bending to a near-stoop, as if bowing not only to his sovereign, whom he reveres, but to the gravitational summons of time.

Equally, you can start at the beginning and work back up to 1939. Exhibit A would be “Young Winston,” Richard Attenborough’s protracted but upbeat film of 1972. This rewinds to Churchill’s school days (which were far from illustrious) and traces his multifarious career as a cavalry officer, a war reporter, and an avid participant in the Battle of Omdurman, in Sudan, in 1898. You feel a bit deflated when

he is elected as a mere Member of Parliament, in 1900, without any sign of swordplay. The tale that “Young Winston” tells is not as tall as it appears: Simon Ward, in the title role, bears a closer resemblance to Churchill, with the eyes set wide apart on that eager face, than any actor before or since, and we are reminded that the more outrageous elements of the Churchillian fable did actually happen. During the Second Boer War, for example, he was captured by the Boers and escaped, hiding first in a rat-infested coal mine for three days and then under a tarpaulin, on a train that crossed the frontier to freedom—a feat ardently covered in the British press, and replayed in the movie. By the age of twenty-five, he was stuck like a mote in the public eye, never to be dislodged.

The principal source for Attenborough’s film is “My Early Life,” Churchill’s sublimely impetuous memoir. It is not just the best of his many books but one of the most eventful—and least squeamish—works ever written by a politician. Try this, from his headlong recitation of close combat in the Mohmand Valley, on what is now the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The year is 1897, and a Pashtun

warrior has just wounded a British officer:

I forgot everything else at this moment except a desire to kill this man. I wore my long cavalry sword well sharpened. After all, I had won the Public Schools fencing medal. I resolved on personal combat *à l’arme blanche*. The savage saw me coming. I was not more than 20 yards away.

The thing to bear in mind, amid such carnage, is that Churchill was at the time not strictly a combatant at all but a journalist, permitted to cover the conflict on the orders of—wait for it—Major-General Sir Bindon Blood. The writing of history, in this manner, is indistinguishable from yarn-spinning or from the narrative liberties taken by motion pictures, and, for young Winston, the limelight was the only place to be:

From the beginning of 1895 down to the present time of writing I have never had time to turn around. I could count almost on my fingers the days when I have nothing to do. An endless moving picture in which one was an actor.

Think of the more sober inhabitants of Parliament, reading this theatrical bombast in 1930, when “My Early Life” was published, and quietly rejoicing that Churchill was no longer in their midst. Only a year before, he had been Chancellor of the Exchequer; now he was out of a job. This epoch is well covered in “The Wilderness Years,” which aired on British television in 1981, with Robert Hardy as Churchill. Sprawling across eight episodes, it ends with a freeze-frame of his triumphant grin, in 1939, as he is admitted to the wartime Cabinet. As with all Churchill dramas, it suffers from our retrospective wisdom: because we know that this man will weather one storm after the next, and that his doubters will be proved wrong, it’s difficult to imagine an era when doubting—indeed, loathing—was the norm.

Yet for much of his career Churchill was indeed seen as changeable to the point of treachery, having switched from the Conservative Party to the Liberals in 1904, over the issue of free trade, and back again in 1924. (“Anyone can rat, but it takes talent to re-rat,” he said.) Resentment at his attitudes toward India, Irish Home Rule,

and domestic industrial strikes ran fathoms deep. Many people could or would not forget his record as First Lord of the Admiralty during the First World War; in 1915, he was demoted, after a naval campaign in the Dardanelles which he had championed turned into a disaster, entailing severe losses for Britain and its allies. At the outbreak of the Second World War, he returned to the Admiralty and devised a mine-laying operation off the Norwegian coast. Applied too late, it faltered, and the German invasion of Norway went ahead: further proof, to the anti-Churchill brigade, of his rash mettle. The country could not be defended by so loose a cannon. Roy Jenkins, in his 2001 biography, sums up the view that prevailed for the bulk of Churchill's career:

There are lines of attack to which some politicians, whether or not they are "guilty as charged," are peculiarly vulnerable because they seem to fit in with their general character and behaviour. Thus a charge of trickiness in Lloyd George or indolence in Baldwin or indiscretion in Hugh Dalton clung to them like a spot of grease on a pale suit. And there was always sufficient of the "galloping major" about Churchill to make it easy to assume that he was acting with over-boisterous irresponsibility, power having gone to his head.

Hence the near-disbelief that gripped the House of Commons, in 1939, when he came once more to the fore. A consuming new book by Nicholas Shakespeare, "Six Minutes in May: How Churchill Unexpectedly Became Prime Minister," takes an accurate reading of the moral atmosphere, but the historian's poise, on the page, is neither matched nor sought onscreen. Movies like "Darkest Hour" are impatient to press onward, and the momentum is all with Churchill. Film after film mounts the same inspiring thesis: as he gained control of the war effort, a lifetime's recklessness was transfigured into the one virtue—a refusal to yield—that suddenly seemed indispensable. The gallop led a nation to victory; the spot of grease became a badge of honor. Even the enduring British joke, acknowledged in "Darkest Hour," that all babies look like Churchill was no handicap, for people were well disposed toward such stubborn benevolence. How young Winston grew into

old Winston, and what was left unchanged in the process, is the tale that no film has told. There may be too much for the telling.

If anything links the bio-pics of Churchill, whatever their span, it is this: they're not very good. All make some contribution to the teeming treasure house of the Churchill myth, and, were you to catch them in reruns on TV, you might well stick with them for comfort's sake, and in the mild hope of learning something new. But, while the central role has lured performers of the highest rank, no director of equal stature has tackled so redoubtable a theme, and the strange fact remains that the most distinguished film, by far, with which Churchill was involved was one that he despised. Had he had his way, it might not have been made at all.

"The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp"—"written, produced and directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger," as the opening credits state—came out in 1943, and was, despite being even longer than "Young Winston," favorably received by British audiences. Colonel Blimp was a familiar figure, established in a long-running newspaper cartoon of the nineteen-thirties by the left-leaning artist David Low, who intended to satirize the outmoded jingoism that encrusted the higher ranks of British society. The Blimp in the film is one



Major-General Clive Wynne-Candy, an elderly buffoon with a set of soggy opinions and a mustache that makes him look like a walrus. But the film is significantly gentler than the cartoon, humanizing Wynne-Candy in a series of flashbacks that usher us through his life and illustrate how he became what he is. (He is played, with warmth and gusto, by Roger Livesey; Powell's first choice had been Laurence Olivier, who might have lent a chill to the proceed-

ings.) As we witness the exploits of the General in his salad days, so well intentioned toward his fellow-man—his dearest friend is a German officer with whom he fights a duel in 1902—we feel half drawn to the chivalrous blusterer that he swells into in his dotage. Clinging to the notion that war can be conducted according to a gentlemanly code, he is rudely interrupted and shamed, at the height of the Second World War, by a unit of up-to-date fighting men.

Grumbles of official discontent plagued the film from the start, when it was still no more than a script. Powell, in his autobiography (which, being vastly entertaining, is not always to be trusted), recounts that he went to see Brendan Bracken, the Minister of Information, and asked if the film could go ahead as planned. Bracken said:

Oh my dear fellow, after all we are a democracy, aren't we? You know we can't forbid you to do anything, but don't make it, because everyone will be really cross, and the Old Man will be *very* cross and you'll never get a knighthood.

The more the Old Man learned of the project, the crosser he got. In a memo to Bracken, dated September 10, 1942, he launched a broadside: "Pray propose to me the measures necessary to stop this foolish production before it gets any further. I am not prepared to allow propaganda detrimental to the morale of the Army, and I am sure the Cabinet will take all necessary action. Who are the people behind it?" That note of menace is uncharacteristic, and Bracken was uneasy with the form of censorship at which Churchill appeared to be hinting. In the end, "Colonel Blimp" was finished and released, but Bracken was right: Powell never did become Sir Michael. What was it about the film, now hailed as a masterpiece, that riled the Prime Minister so?

Certainly, "Colonel Blimp" presents no detriment to morale. Indeed, the gist of the plot is that the future and the defeat of Hitler lie squarely in the hands of modern soldiery. Did Churchill fear that viewers might see in this fuchsia-faced, harrumphing old grump a trace of their determined leader, his jaw jutting out like the prow of a dreadnought? Did he maybe see that trace himself? "War, which used to be cruel and magnificent, has now

become cruel and squalid," he declared in "My Early Life," in an outburst of pure Blimpery. He added, "In fact it has been completely spoilt. It is all the fault of Democracy and Science." He and Wynne-Candy even attended the same boarding school, Harrow. In other words, Powell and Pressburger had conjured a fictional life that veered perilously close to Churchill's, as dense with derring-do, divisiveness, emotional extremes, and lurching reversals of fortune as his had been. By showing the ages of Blimp, they made the Churchill film that never was. And what they omitted, perhaps to his dismay, was his extraordinary late bloom. That would be more than enough to hurt the Prime Minister's pride.

We know something of Churchill's cinematic tastes, because he made a habit of sitting down, toward the end of a crammed wartime day, to watch a film after dinner. (Afterward, he would return to work, often expecting others to do the same.) Colville's diary lists many of the screenings: Bette Davis in "Dark Victory" (1939) on one evening, say, followed by Edward G. Robinson in "The Woman in the Window" (1944) the next. In December, 1940, after following the travails of the characters in "Gone with the Wind," Churchill announced himself "pulverised by the strength of their feelings"—a loaded verb, in the Blitz, when parts of London were being reduced to rubble and dust. Now and then, the films' proximity to nonfictional dramas of the time can verge on the surreal:

We saw a film in the Great Parlour: Marlene Dietrich in *Seven Sinners*—very alluring.

All ships are converging on the *Bismarck* and the C. in C. proposes to attack at 9.00 a.m. tomorrow.

The next day, Colville writes, the choice is "*Western Union* (with Red Indians and all the Wild West trappings) and the P.M.'s favourite *March of Time*." This erodes the lingering rumor that Churchill rated "*That Hamilton Woman*" (1941), with Laurence Olivier as Lord Nelson and Vivien Leigh as Emma Hamilton, above all other movies, but then "*The March of Time*" is a special case—not a movie at all, but a regular series of short productions,

watched at their peak by twenty-five million Americans every month. The films were pasted together from documentary footage and pumped up into semi-dramas, with excitable voice-overs. You will know the style, because it is parodied, without mercy, in the mock newsreel that prefaces "*Citizen Kane*." No surprise, perhaps, that Welles's movie, when shown for Churchill, failed to strike a chord. Colville writes:

After dinner we had a deplorable American film, *Citizen Kane*, based on the personality of William Randolph Hearst. The P.M. was so bored that he walked out before the end. Kathleen Harriman thought it wonderful and said that all Americans did. The fact that we did not, revealed to her much about English people. I replied that the fact Americans did, revealed to me nothing about Americans.

Churchill's coolness may have been exacerbated by memories of his trip to Hollywood, in 1928, during which he was invited to Hearst Castle, the mansion in San Simeon that was the model for Xanadu in "*Citizen Kane*." It was in Hearst's company that Churchill first encountered Charlie Chaplin. The two men got on famously, as only the famous can; the former pronounced the latter to be "bolshy in politics & delightful in conversation," and there even arose the question of a professional partnership. Churchill advanced the idea for a film about the young Napoleon, saying that Chaplin should direct and play the lead, and that he, Churchill, would write the script. Two world-straddling egotists discussing the life of a third: what a spectacle it must have made, though not as startling as the lunch at Chartwell, Churchill's country house, two years later, when the host inquired of Chaplin what part he would play next. "Jesus Christ," Chaplin replied. There was a pause, then Churchill said, "Have you cleared the rights?"

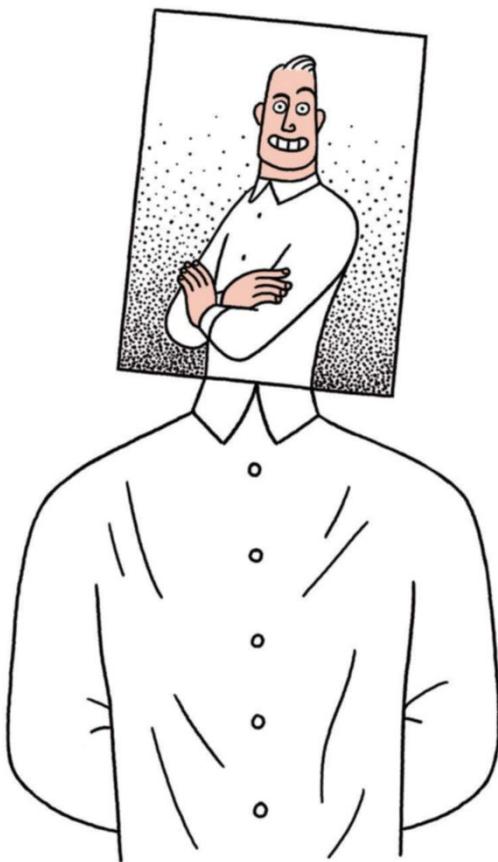
There is an important affinity here, and it touches upon the alarming desire, rare in regular mortals but common among the great and the mad, to envisage one's stint on earth as a performance. David Copperfield, like most of us, was unsure as to whether he would be the hero of his own life; Churchill and Chaplin had no such qualms, and every gesture, be it a cavalry charge or a pratfall, was proffered as part of the

act. Here, as described by Colville, is the lone leader of the fight against Nazism, in 1940, flat on his ass:

I got to bed at 3.00 a.m.; but the P.M., throwing himself on a chair in his bedroom, collapsed between the chair and the stool, ending in a most absurd position on the floor with his feet in the air. Having no false dignity, he treated it as a complete joke and repeated several times, "A real Charlie Chaplin!"

It remains a close call as to which of the two men, the statesman or the comedian, is the most recognizable Englishman of the twentieth century. Both can be identified from their silhouettes alone, and the Tramp's costume, right down to the hat and the cane, is like a pauper's response, roughed up and slimmed down, to the well-fed Churchillian look. Both men, moreover, had a self-proclaimed gift for reaching over the heads of the bien-pensants and answering to popular prejudice and popular taste. When Churchill, on the morning of V-E Day, took time to insure that there was no shortage of beer in London for the imminent celebrations, he was obeying a principle—humane and humbug-hating—that Chaplin, and indeed Dickens, would instantly have grasped.

By that robust standard, most of the Churchill films that we possess, though dutiful, come across as doughy and sedate. Had he watched "*Darkest Hour*," he might have been flattered to see himself take the national helm; abashed to hear himself grousing at a secretary (Lithgow does the same, as does Brian Cox in this year's "*Churchill*"); and amused to hear a parliamentary foe scorn him as "an actor, in love with the sound of his own voice." In truth, however, Churchill continues to slip the clutches of modern movies, and I sense that the full force and the flavor of his life would have been most happily caught by the early silent cinema, which burgeoned under Chaplin's spell, and thrived on the implausible and the breakneck. Oldman, Hardy, Finney, and the rest of the team are stalwart and assiduous in their care for detail, and what they arrive at, in every instance, is far more than a mere impersonation. And yet they fall short, as they are doomed to do. The best person at playing Churchill, in the end, was Winston Churchill himself. ♦



MY LINKEDIN PHOTO

BY COLIN NISSAN

This is the face I make at work. It's the face of a team player who wants the ball and knows that "the ball" is a metaphor for a business thing. My expression is conveying that I can handle anything you throw at me with a weird smile on my face. Not the kind of weird smile that says "I'm here to goof around" but the kind that says "I'm here to work hard, then blow off a little steam with my weird mouth."

After you hire me, I'm going to be looking at you like this a lot. In a good way. So I've captured this expression in my profile pic to help you imagine that you're already having a conversation with me. Like you just said, "Hey." And I just said, "Hey." Then you said, "Can you stop staring at me

like that, please?" And I said, "Like what?" Then you said, "Like that." And I said, "Like, confidently?" Then you said, "Please just let me pee."

I made the decision to expose my teeth in this photo so you can see that I'm the type of person who doesn't hide things in his mouth. No Ping-Pong balls or trick handkerchiefs. After all, you aren't hiring me for my magic tricks, right? Right?

One of my eyebrows is raised in the photo to show that I'm inquisitive. The other one is just regular, to show that I'm also not inquisitive. There are many facets to me.

My head is facing forward, while the rest of me is turned to the side. This is my body's natural position

when I'm at work. It's playful, yet awkward, yet very awkward. It also offers a glimpse into how efficient I am even when I'm on the clock. Imagine that you've just stopped me while I'm on my way to a meeting, and I turn toward you, but only with the body parts I need for talking.

My arms are folded to demonstrate that I get things done, and then celebrate by folding my arms. In this particular case, I got this photo done, which took, like, a year. Of course, I'll unfold my arms as needed for explosive fist bumps in the hallway and even for nonexplosive ones.

My shoulders are positioned in a way that says, "I'm ready to use my shoulders in this job if I have to." Maybe you can't imagine a scenario in which you'll need my shoulders. That's what my last employer said, too, until the day my shoulders were giving you-know-who a boost up to the supply-closet heating duct where he'd stashed a gram of you-know-what to snort into his you-know-where. So never say never.

My legs aren't included in this photo because their potential contribution pales in comparison with what my torso brings to the table.

I didn't want you to be distracted by a busy background, so I blurred it out. In real-life workplace environments, I have zero problems standing out against all sorts of backgrounds, even aquariums.

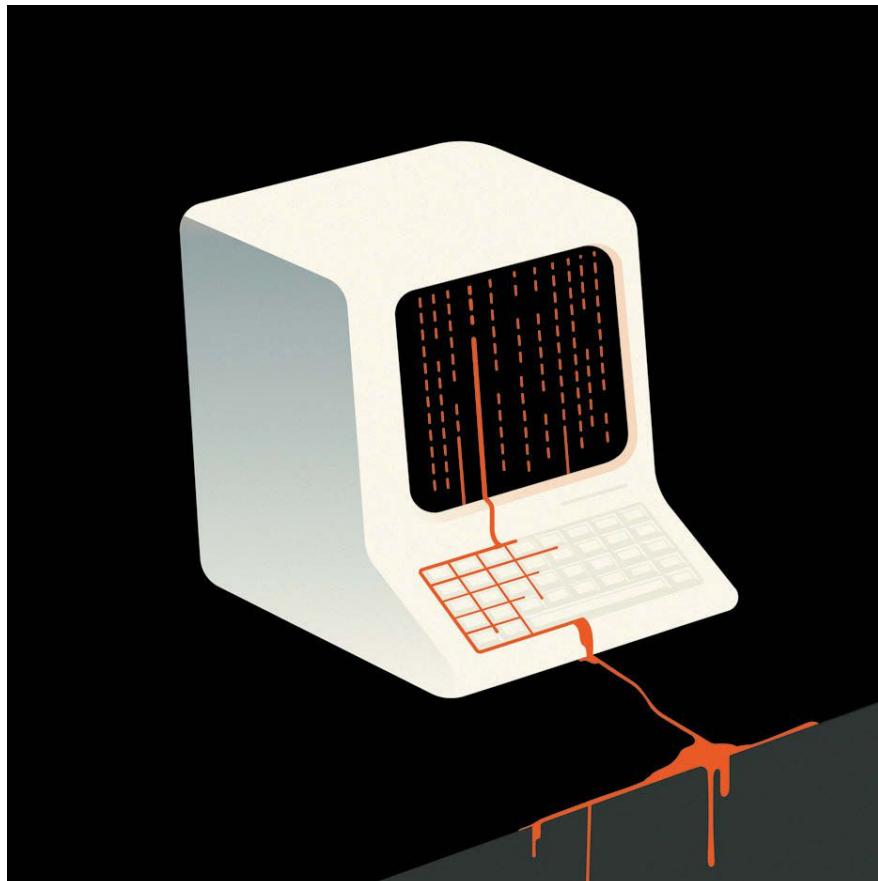
I chose this shirt to show you that I wear this shirt a lot. It has a collar with a space for a necktie right in the middle, meaning that, at any moment, I could dial up the business intensity in a major way and start doing so many work-related things that you won't know what hit you. For example, I might spearhead something out of nowhere, then turn around and start facilitating something else, then go ahead and implement both of those things on top of what I already did to them.

I'm currently working on a résumé as a complement to this photo. When you see it, I think you'll realize pretty quickly that there are so many businessy things that I do so good. And if you play your cards right I can stare at you while I do them. ♦

THE SERIAL-KILLER DETECTOR

How an algorithm is discovering new links between unsolved murders.

BY ALEC WILKINSON



Hargrove estimates that two thousand serial killers are at large in the U.S.

Thomas Hargrove is a homicide archivist. For the past seven years, he has been collecting municipal records of murders, and he now has the largest catalogue of killings in the country—751,785 murders carried out since 1976, which is roughly twenty-seven thousand more than appear in F.B.I. files. States are supposed to report murders to the Department of Justice, but some report inaccurately, or fail to report altogether, and Hargrove has sued some of these states to obtain their records. Using computer code he wrote, he searches his archive for statistical anomalies among the more ordinary murders resulting

from lovers' triangles, gang fights, robberies, or brawls. Each year, about five thousand people kill someone and don't get caught, and a percentage of these men and women have undoubtedly killed more than once. Hargrove intends to find them with his code, which he sometimes calls a serial-killer detector.

Hargrove created the code, which operates as a simple algorithm, in 2010, when he was a reporter for the now defunct Scripps Howard news service. The algorithm forms the basis of the Murder Accountability Project (MAP), a nonprofit that consists of Hargrove—who is retired—a database, a Web site,

and a board of nine members, who include former detectives, homicide scholars, and a forensic psychiatrist. By a process of data aggregating, the algorithm gathers killings that are related by method, place, and time, and by the victim's sex. It also considers whether the rate of unsolved murders in a city is notable, since an uncaught serial killer upends a police department's percentages. Statistically, a town with a serial killer in its midst looks lawless.

In August of 2010, Hargrove noticed a pattern of murders in Lake County, Indiana, which includes the city of Gary. Between 1980 and 2008, fifteen women had been strangled. Many of the bodies had been found in vacant houses. Hargrove wrote to the Gary police, describing the murders and including a spreadsheet of their circumstances. “Could these cases reflect the activity of one or more serial killers in your area?” he asked.

The police department rebuffed him; a lieutenant replied that there were no unsolved serial killings in Gary. (The Department of Justice advises police departments to tell citizens when a serial killer is at large, but some places keep the information secret.) Hargrove was indignant. “I left messages for months,” he said. “I sent registered letters to the chief of police and the mayor.” Eventually, he heard from a deputy coroner, who had also started to suspect that there was a serial killer in Gary. She had tried to speak with the police, but they had refused her. After reviewing Hargrove’s cases, she added three more victims to his list.

Four years later, the police in Hammond, a town next to Gary, got a call about a disturbance at a Motel 6, where they found a dead woman in a bathtub. Her name was Afrikka Hardy, and she was nineteen years old. “They make an arrest of a guy named Darren Vann, and, as so often happens in these cases, he says, ‘You got me,’” Hargrove said. “Over several days, he takes police to abandoned buildings where they recover the bodies of six women, all of them strangled, just like the pattern we were seeing in the algorithm.” Vann had killed his first woman in the early nineties. In 2009,

he went to jail for rape, and the killings stopped. When he got out, in 2013, Hargrove said, "he picked up where he'd left off."

Researchers study serial killers as if they were specimens of natural history. One of the most comprehensive catalogues is the Radford Serial Killer Data Base, which has nearly five thousand entries from around the world—the bulk of them from the United States—and was started twenty-five years ago by Michael Aamodt, a professor emeritus at Radford University, in Virginia. According to the database, American serial killers are ten times more likely to be male than female. Ray Copeland, who was seventy-five when he was arrested, killed at least five drifters on his farm in Missouri late in the last century, and is the oldest serial killer in the database. The youngest is Robert Dale Segee, who grew up in Portland, Maine, and, in 1938, at the age of eight, is thought to have killed a girl with a rock. Segee's father often punished him by holding his fingers over a candle flame, and Segee became an arsonist. After starting a fire, he sometimes saw visions of a crimson man with fangs and claws, and flames coming out of his head. In June of 1944, when Segee was fourteen, he got a job with the Ringling Brothers circus. The next month, the circus tent caught fire, and a hundred and sixty-eight people were killed. In 1950, after being arrested for a different fire, Segee confessed to setting the tent ablaze, but years later he withdrew his confession, saying that he had been mad when he made it.

Serial killers are not usually particularly bright, having an average I.Q. of 94.5, according to the database. They divide into types. Those who feel bound to rid the world of people they regard as immoral or undesirable—such as drug addicts, immigrants, or promiscuous women—are called missionaries. Black widows kill men, usually to inherit money or to claim insurance; bluebeards kill women, either for money or as an assertion of power. A nurse who kills patients is called an angel of death. A troller meets a victim by chance, and a trapper either observes his victims or works at a place,

such as a hospital, where his victims come to him.

The F.B.I. believes that less than one per cent of the killings each year are carried out by serial killers, but Hargrove thinks that the percentage is higher, and that there are probably around two thousand serial killers at large in the U.S. "How do I know?" he said. "A few years ago, I got some people at the F.B.I. to run the question of how many murders in their records are unsolved but have been linked through DNA." The answer was about fourteen hundred, slightly more than two per cent of the murders in the files they consulted. "Those are just the cases they were able to lock down with DNA," Hargrove said. "And killers don't always leave DNA—it's a gift when you get it. So two per cent is a floor, not a ceiling."

Hargrove is sixty-one. He is tall and slender, with a white beard and a skeptical regard. He lives with his wife and son in Alexandria, Virginia, and walks eight miles a day,

to Mount Vernon or along the Potomac, while listening to recordings of books—usually mystery novels. He was born in Manhattan, but his parents moved to Yorktown, in Westchester County, when he was a boy. "I lived near Riverside Drive until I was four," he said. "Then one day I showed my mom what I learned on the playground, which is that you can make a switchblade out of Popsicle sticks, and next thing I knew I was living in Yorktown."

Hargrove's father wrote technical manuals on how to use mechanical calculators, and when Hargrove went to college, at the University of Missouri, he studied computational journalism and public opinion. He learned practices such as random-digit-dialing theory, which is used to conduct polls, and he was influenced by "Precision Journalism," a book by Philip Meyer that encourages journalists to learn survey methods from social science. After graduating, in 1977, he was hired by the Birmingham *Post-*

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Herald, in Alabama, with the understanding that he would conduct polls and do whatever else the paper needed. As it turned out, the paper needed a crime reporter. In 1978, Hargrove saw his first man die, the owner of a convenience store who had been shot during a robbery. He reported on a riot that began after police officers shot a sixteen-year-old African-American girl.

Once, arriving at a stand-off, he was shot at with a rifle by a drunk on a water tower. The bullet hit the gravel near his feet and made a sound that “was not quite a plink.” He also covered the execution of a man named John Lewis Evans, the first inmate put to death in Alabama after a Supreme Court abrogation of capital punishment in the nineteen-sixties and seventies. “They electrocuted people in Alabama in an electric chair called the Yellow Mama, because it was painted bright yellow,” Hargrove said. “Enough time had passed since the last execution that no one remembered how to do it. The first time, too much current went through too small a conduit, so everything caught fire. Everyone was crying, and I had trouble sleeping for days after.”

In 1990, Hargrove moved to Washington, D.C., to work for Scripps Howard, where, he said, “my primary purpose was to use numbers to shock people.” Studying the Social Security Administration’s Death Master File—“where we will all end up one day,” Hargrove said—he noticed that some people were included for a given year and dropped a few years later: people who had mistakenly been declared dead. From interviews, he learned that these people often have their bank accounts suddenly frozen, can’t get credit cards or mortgages, and are refused jobs because they fail background checks. Comparing a list of federal grants for at-risk kids in inner-city schools against Census Bureau Zip Codes, he found that two-thirds of the grants were actually going to schools in the suburbs. “He did all this through really clever

logic and programming,” Isaac Wolf, a former journalist who had a desk near Hargrove’s, told me. “A combination of resourceful thinking and an innovative approach to collecting and analyzing data through shoe-leather work.”

In 2004, Hargrove was assigned a story about prostitution. To learn which cities enforced laws against

the practice and which didn’t, he requested a copy of the Uniform Crime Report, an annual compilation published by the F.B.I., and received a CD containing the most recent report, from 2002. “Along with it, at no extra cost, was something that said ‘S.H.R. 2002,’ ” he said. It was the F.B.I.’s

Supplementary Homicide Report, which includes all the murders reported to the Bureau, listing the age, race, sex, and ethnicity of the victim, along with the method and circumstances of the killing. As Hargrove looked through it, “the first thing I thought was, I wonder if it’s possible to teach a computer to spot serial victims.” Hargrove said that for six years he told each of his editors at Scripps Howard that he wanted to find serial killers using a computer, and the response was always, “You’re kidding, right?”

In 2007, Hargrove did an investigation into SIDS, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, after wondering why, according to the Centers for Disease Control’s infant-mortality records, so many more babies in Florida died from accidental suffocation than did babies in California, even though California had many more babies. During the following year, Hargrove interviewed coroners and pathologists around the country. “A growing number of them began saying, ‘To be honest, I might get in trouble for saying this, but SIDS doesn’t exist as such,’ ” he said. Hargrove concluded that SIDS wasn’t a diagnosis or a mysterious disease but the result of people putting babies in their cribs in such a way that they suffocated during sleep. Florida tended to attribute these deaths to accidental suffocation, Cal-

ifornia to SIDS. In the aftermath of his story, the C.D.C. created the Sudden Unexpected Infant Death Case Registry to evaluate each death. Frank Lautenberg, a New Jersey senator, met with Hargrove and then introduced the Sudden Death Data Enhancement and Awareness Act, which President Obama signed in 2014. After the SIDS story, Hargrove’s stock rose “insanely high in the newsroom,” he said. He told his boss that he still wanted to try to teach a computer to detect serial killers, and this time his boss said, “You’ve got a year.”

Hargrove began by requesting homicide reports from 1980 to 2008; they included more than five hundred thousand murders. At the start, he knew “what the computer didn’t know,” he said. “I could see the victims in the data.” He began trying to write an algorithm that could return the victims of a convicted killer. As a test case, he chose Gary Ridgway, the Green River Killer, who, starting in the early eighties, murdered at least forty-eight women in Seattle, and left them beside the Green River. Above his desk, Hargrove taped a mugshot of Ridgway in which he looks tired and sullen. Underneath it, he wrote, “What do serial victims look like statistically?”

Creating the algorithm was laborious work. “He would write some code, and it would run through what seemed like an endless collection of records,” Isaac Wolf told me. “And we did not have expensive computer equipment, so it would run for days. It was sort of jerry-rigged, Scotch-Taped. He was always tinkering.”

Ridgway was eventually identified by DNA and was arrested in 2001, as he was leaving his job at a Kenworth truck plant, where he had worked as a painter for thirty-two years. He told the police that strangling women was his actual career. “Choking is what I did, and I was pretty good at it,” he said. Ridgway’s wife—his third—was astonished to find out what he had done. They had met at a Parents Without Partners gathering and had been married for seventeen years. She said that he had always treated her like a newlywed. Ridgway had considered



killing his first two wives but decided that he was too likely to get caught. Mostly, he killed prostitutes, and, if he killed one who had money on her, he regarded it as his payment for killing her.

Hargrove began each day with a review of what had failed the day before. He sorted the homicides by type, since he had been told that serial killers often strangle or bludgeon their victims, apparently because they prefer to prolong the encounter. He selected for women, because the F.B.I. said that seventy per cent of serial-killer victims are female. Each test took a day. He had no idea if anything would work. For a while, the only promising variable seemed to be "failure to solve." "After a hundred things that didn't work, that worked a *little* bit," Hargrove said, holding his right thumb and forefinger close together. "I started making the terms more specific, looking at a group of factors—women, weapon, age, and location."

With those terms, the algorithm organized the killings into approximately ten thousand groups. One might be: Boston, women, fifteen to nineteen years old, and handguns. Another might be: New Orleans, women, twenty to fifty, and strangulation. Since "failure to solve" had produced results, even if feeble, Hargrove told the computer to notify him of places where solution rates were unusually low. Seattle came in third, with most of the victims women whose cause of death was unknown—unknown because the bodies had been left outside and sufficient time had passed that the coroners could no longer determine how they had died. The computer, Hargrove knew, had finally seen Ridgway's victims.

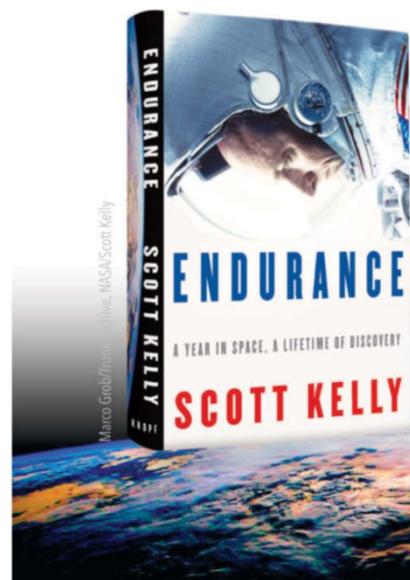
By reading meaning into the geography of victims and their killers, Hargrove is unwittingly invoking a discipline called geographic profiling, which is exemplified in the work of Kim Rossmo, a former policeman who is now a professor in the School of Criminal Justice at Texas State University. In 1991, Rossmo was on a train in Japan when he came up with an equation that can be used to



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predict where a serial killer lives, based on factors such as where the crimes were committed and where the bodies were found. As a New York City homicide detective told me, “Serial killers tend to stick to a killing field. They’re hunting for prey in a concentrated area, which can be defined and examined.” Usually, the hunting ground will be far enough from their homes to conceal where they live, but not so far that the landscape is unfamiliar. The farther criminals travel, the less likely they are to act, a phenomenon that criminologists call distance decay.

Rossmo has used geographic profiling to track terrorists—he studied where they lived, where they stored weapons, and the locations of the phone booths they used to make calls—and to identify places where epidemics began. He also worked with zoologists, to examine the hunting patterns of white sharks. Recently, Rossmo studied where the street artist Banksy left his early work, and found evidence to support the British *Daily Mail*’s assertion, made in 2008 but never corroborated, that Banksy is a middle-aged man from Bristol, England, named Robin Gunningham.

“In a murder investigation, when you step away from the Hollywood mystique, it’s about information,” Rossmo told me. “In any serial-murder case, the police are going to have thousands and thousands, even tens of thousands, of suspects.” In the Green River case, the police had eighteen thousand names. “So where do you start? We know quite a lot about the journey to a crime. By noting where killings took place or the bodies were discovered, you can actually create probability distributions.” In his book “Geographic Profiling,” Rossmo notes research that found, among other things, that right-handed criminals tend to turn left when fleeing but throw away evidence to the right, and that most criminals, when hiding in buildings, stay near the outside walls.

Using computers to find killers has historical precedent. Eric Witzig, a retired homicide detective and a former F.B.I. intelligence analyst who is

on MAP’s board, worked on the F.B.I.’s Violent Criminal Apprehension Program, VicAP, which was started by a Los Angeles homicide detective named Pierce Brooks. Witzig told me how, in the fifties, Brooks worked on the case of Harvey Glatman, who became known as the Lonely Hearts Killer. Glatman was a radio-and-TV repairman and an amateur photographer who would invite young women to model for him, saying that the photographs were for detective magazines. He would tie his victim up for the shoot, and then never remove the bonds. “The victim, a young woman, was not just tied up, but the turns of the bindings were sharp and precise, indicating that the offender took a lot of pleasure in it,” Witzig said.

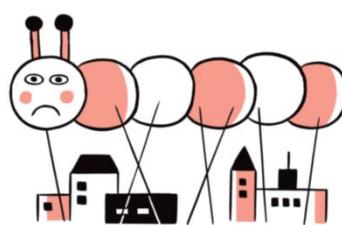
Brooks started to research the way that some killers seemed to commit the same crime repeatedly. He began putting all his murder records onto three-by-five cards, and after becoming interested in computers in the late nineteen-fifties he asked the L.A. police department to buy him one. He was told that it was too expensive. In 1983, he presented the idea of a homicide-tracking computer database to Congress, after which the F.B.I. offered him a job at Quantico and bought him the equipment to start VicAP. The program was meant to be an accessory to investigations,

law-enforcement deep thinkers in the world involved, but we exist at MAP because they failed.”

MAP has its own limitations. Since the algorithm relies on place as a search term, it is blind to killers who are nomadic over any range greater than adjacent counties. There is also a species of false positive that Hargrove calls the Flint effect: some cities, such as Flint, Michigan, are so delinquent in solving murders that they look as if they were beset by serial killers.

Someone versed in statistics can run the algorithm, which appears on MAP’s Web site. The rest of us, who might, for example, wish to know how many killings are unsolved where we live, can use the site’s “search cases” function. Deborah Smith, who lives in New Orleans, is a hobby MAP searcher and a forum moderator on Websleuths, an online watering hole for amateur detectives. “I keep spreadsheets of murdered and missing women around the country, with statistics, and I highlight murders that I think might be related,” she told me. “I have them for nearly every state, and that comes from MAP. If I have a killer, like, say, Israel Keys, who was in Seattle about fifteen years ago, I’ll look up murders in Seattle and parts of Alaska, because he lived there, too, and see if there were any the police might have overlooked.” She added, “MAP is just extremely, extremely useful for that. There isn’t really anything else like it.”

MAP’s board hasn’t determined what to do with the algorithm’s findings, however, and the question presents moral and practical difficulties for Hargrove. “We have to figure out our rules of engagement,” he told me. “Under what scenario do we start calling police?” A few months ago, Hargrove informed the Cleveland police that there appeared to be about sixty murders, all of women, that might involve a serial killer, or, from the range of methods, perhaps even three serial killers. Twelve of the women had convictions for prostitution, and their bodies were found in two distinct geographic clusters. Hargrove can’t say anything about his



but detectives didn’t take to it. “The first and maybe main problem was the original VicAP reporting form,” Witzig said. Brooks wanted to record every element of a homicide and, as a result, there were more than a hundred and fifty questions. “Of course, there was user resistance,” Witzig said. “No one wanted to do more paperwork.” He added that the program had “some of the brightest

exchange with the Cleveland police, because MAP's rules dictate that such communications are privileged. The police wrote me that, as a result of Hargrove's analysis, "a small taskforce is being considered to look at several unsolved homicides." The head of the department's special-investigations bureau, James McPike, told the Cleveland *Plain-Dealer*, of MAP, "We're going to be working with the group to help us identify what we might be able to do."

Hargrove is pleased about the investigation but he also worries that something may go awry. "What if they arrest the wrong guy, and he sues?" he asked. "I contacted a bunch of police departments in 2010, when I was a reporter, because I wanted to see if the algorithm worked. Now I know it works—there's no question in my mind. In certain places, we can say, 'These victims have an elevated probability of having a common killer.' In 2010, though, I had a big media company behind me, with lawyers and media insurance. Now I'm a guy with a nonprofit that has fourteen hundred dollars in the bank and a board of nine directors and no insurance."

One of MAP's most public benefits has been making people aware of how few murders in America are solved. In 1965, a killing led to an arrest more than ninety-two per cent of the time. In 2016, the number was slightly less than sixty per cent, which was the lowest rate since records started being kept. Los Angeles had the best rate of solution, seventy-three per cent, and Detroit the worst, fourteen per cent. As Enzo Yaksic, a MAP board member and the director of the Northeastern University Atypical Homicide Research Group, told me, the project "demonstrates that there's a whole population of unapprehended killers that are clearly out there."

Another of MAP's board members, Michael Arntfield, is a professor at the University of Western Ontario, where he runs a cold-case society. It is focusing on the largest finding of the algorithm, a collection of a hundred unsolved murders of women in the Atlanta area over forty years. Most of the vic-



"As soon as it clusters into a cultural bubble, it's done."

tims were African-American, and all were strangled. From the Atlanta police, Arntfield got names for forty-four of the women, and has been learning more about them. (Studying the backgrounds of murder victims in the hope of discovering how they met their killers is a discipline called victimology.) Arntfield and his colleagues separated the victims into two groups: a small group of older women, who were killed in their homes, and a larger group of young women, many of whom may have been prostitutes. From newspaper accounts, Arntfield has found two men who have committed crimes with strikingly similar attributes, both of whom are already in prison. Adam Lee, the head of Atlanta's Major Crime Section, which includes homicide, told me that the police haven't yet linked these murders to a particular killer, but he said that he considers MAP a useful

tool and is "very interested in sitting down with Arntfield."

Hargrove told me he hopes that eventually detectives will begin to use the algorithm to connect cases themselves, and that MAP will help solve a murder. Meanwhile, he is considering creating a companion site that tracks arson, and has begun compiling data on fires, though he hasn't had time to post it yet. "There's a link between serial arson and serial killings," he said. "A lot of guys start out burning things."

We were walking in Alexandria by the river, along Hargrove's usual route, and he said, "Our primary purpose is to gather as many records as possible." He paused. "It's seductive how powerful these records are, though. Just through looking, you can spot serial killers. In various places over various years, you can see that something god-awful has happened." ♦

CONFIDENCE GAME

Mikaela Shiffrin is the best slalom skier in the world. What could go wrong?

BY NICK PAUMGARTEN

Mikaela Shiffrin, the Alpine ski racer, should win at least one gold medal at the Olympics this winter in South Korea. She might even win three. It's a fair bet she'll get the Wheaties box and the full-on Up Close and Personal. She's a bright, affable American who dominates her corner of the sport with the kind of predictability and grace that draws in casual viewers, awes the experts, and inspires a lot of super-slo-mo check-that-out. There's something about transcendent talent that causes people to root for it, no matter their allegiances or their usual embrace of the underdog. Excellence creates its own weather.

Yet so much can go wrong. For skiers, the Olympics are a brief fever dream in the middle of the five-month odyssey of their season. There are a lot of chances beforehand to get hurt. In a short race, anyone can make a ruinous mistake (lose an edge, hook a tip, choose the wrong line) or encounter bad luck (equipment malfunction, snow squall, gust of wind). And what about food poisoning? Or even geopolitics: the time would seem inopportune for an international sporting carnival on the Korean peninsula.

Athletes are taught, and sometimes even born, not to think this way. Control what you can. Eliminate distraction. Preparation is perspiration. Yet even Shiffrin, a stone-cold killer on snow, has recently found herself more susceptible to the whisperings of "what if." "I never used to feel nervous," she told me. "Just excited. But this past season I got so nervous I had to throw up a couple of times." The first wave of her new anxiety came a year ago, when the International Ski Federation (F.I.S.) World Cup tour came to the Eastern United States, for the first time in a quarter of a century. The circuit typically passes over New England's relatively diminutive mountains and variable conditions in

favor of the sunny, chalky Rockies. But the Northeast has the higher concentration of racers, the deeper ski-racing history, and the more fanatical fan base. It is also, in a roundabout yet essential way, Shiffrin's home turf. (She lives in Vail, Colorado, but her formative training years were spent on the East Coast, where her forebears are from.)

The races, held at Killington, in Vermont, over the weekend of Thanksgiving, attracted thirty thousand fans, far more than you'd ever get out West. They were there to see Shiffrin win both the slalom and the giant-slalom races. "Killington was a lot of pressure, and I didn't realize it till I was there," Shiffrin told me. "I was kind of freaking out." Her extended family, including her grandmother, who was ninety-five, came to watch her race. The scrutiny brought on self-consciousness. "Instead of just answering questions, I started to *hear* myself answering them," she said. She took fifth in the giant slalom, a disappointment. She won the slalom, as she almost always does, but by less than a second, which was, by her standards, a narrow margin.

A pattern was developing of Shiffrin's dominating in training but encountering nerves and some tactical indecision on race day. Her mother, Eileen, her de facto coach, taskmaster, and wingman, suggested that she talk to a sports psychologist. Shiffrin had a couple of consultations, via Skype. "It didn't feel like I was seeing a shrink," she said. "It was a reminder that sometimes it's better to be oblivious, but I'm not oblivious anymore, so how do I handle that?"

Shiffrin, who is twenty-two now, was fifteen when she first appeared on the World Cup tour—the top international tier of racing, as big in Europe, you might say, as Nascar is in America. She'd been routinely obliterating her peers in the ski-racing equivalent of the minor leagues by several seconds—a

lifetime in the sprint of a ski race. (The margins are typically tenths or even hundredths of seconds.) A few weeks later, at just sixteen, she became the youngest skier ever to win a U.S. national championship. At seventeen, she started winning World Cup slalom races in bunches. (Lindsey Vonn, the greatest American skier ever, won her first race at the age of twenty.) By eighteen, Shiffrin had won a gold medal at the Sochi Olympics and become something of a household name. She has won all three slalom World Championships she has competed in and four of the past five World Cup slalom titles. (She was injured for half the season the year she didn't win.) Last March, at the World Cup finals, in Aspen, Colorado, she also clinched the over-all title—compiling more points across all the disciplines than anyone else—the ultimate prize, in the eyes of practitioners, far greater than Olympic gold.

I first heard of Shiffrin the winter of her first World Cup race. Ski-racing people spoke of her with the same astonishment that greeted the kid-phenom incarnations of Wayne Gretzky and Tiger Woods. Once she hit the tour, I tuned in when I could, eager to see a manifestation of genius. What I saw was a skier who looked flawless and smooth but not revolutionary or enthralling. She was so good at going fast that she didn't look fast. Technique disguised athleticism.

Did I know what to look for? I'd been admiring the top racers for years. I raced (poorly) in high school, in New Hampshire. My grandfather skied in the Olympics, in the thirties, and his sister was a slalom world champion. (Ski racing may be the only sport in which women have been competing alongside men, on a fairly equal footing, from the get-go, a century ago.) So, watching Shiffrin on TV, I'd venture remarks about her fine balance,

PHOTOGRAPHS: FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: ALEXIS BOICHARD/AGENCE ZOOM/GETTY (SKIER 1); EZRA SHAW/GETTY (SKIER 2, 3); HARRY HOW/GETTY (SKIER 4)



Shiffrin said, "Sometimes it's better to be oblivious, but I'm not oblivious anymore, so how do I handle that?"

composure, and edge control. Strong ankle pressure. But I was mostly full of it. The subtler mechanics of the ski turn are obscure, even to most people who know how to make a good one.

My presumption was that her excellence was innate. One sometimes thinks of prodigies as embodiments of peculiar genius, uncorrupted by convention, impossible to replicate or reengineer. But this is not the case with Shiffrin. She's as stark an example of nurture over nature, of work over talent, as anyone in the world of sports. Her parents committed early on to an incremental process, and clung stubbornly to it. And so Shiffrin became something besides a World Cup hot shot and a quadrennial idol. She became a case study. Most parents, unwittingly or not, present their way of raising kids as the best way, even when the results are mixed, as such results usually are. The Shiffrins are not shy about projecting their example onto the world, but it's hard to argue with their findings. "The kids with raw athletic talent rarely make it," Jeff Shiffrin, Mikaela's father, told me. "What was it Churchill said? Kites fly higher against a headwind."

Skiers have long been psycho about their off-season workouts. In the old days, they chopped wood, baled hay, ran up and down mountains, and rode motorcycles at a hundred miles an hour.

Now they train like astronauts. Shiffrin spent this past summer in a series of training blocks, both on and off the snow—in Colorado, California, Chile, New Zealand, and Park City, Utah. I spent a few days with her in June in Park City, where the U.S. ski team and its eighty-five-thousand-square-foot training facility, the Center of Excellence, are based. Since the Winter Olympics in 2002, Park City, flush with the state-of-the-art facilities that were built for the Games, has become a hub of hale but half-broke world-class competitors in obscure frozen-water sports. When Shiffrin and I had dinner one night in town, the waiter, knowing a jock when he saw one, asked her, "What's your sport?" Then he announced that he was on the national skeleton team.

Shiffrin was staying with her physiotherapist, Lyndsay Young, and Young's husband, Chris, in their condo, and checking in for daily torture sessions at the Center of Excellence, under the lash of her coach, Jeff Lackie. (Young and Lackie travel with her on tour and for much of the off-season.)

June is the busiest time of year at the C.O.E. On the first morning I visited, its vast gym, girded with giant photos of past American medallists (there has been more excellence, through the decades, than one might recall or assume), slowly filled with snow-sliders of many disciplines and body types—

variations on freakishly fit. When I asked Shiffrin to identify the biggest beast in the place, she pointed to Steven Nyman, a veteran American downhillier, and then said, "Or me."

Shiffrin is lean, of medium height, with broad shoulders and, like everyone there, powerful legs. She had on black shorts and a purple tank top. You could see traces of boot-bang bruises on her shins. She began by warming up for ten minutes on a stationary bike and then doing some stretching. Eminem on the speakers, trash talk on the mats. She said that the day before had been a rough one—lifting weights, jumping up stairs.

Young said, "When Mika got home last night, she said, 'Whoever invented stairs is the biggest asshole.'"

"Today is more anaerobic," Lackie said. "You'll have to perform consecutive days on tour, so we're training for that."

First up was interval training. She sprinted the length of the gym while pulling a weighted sled, then ran back while pushing a heavier sled, then did bouncy squat-like reps on a contraption that seemed to mimic skiing over bumps, then dragged a weighted sled backward, then rowed hard on an ergometer, then skated side to side in her stocking feet on a slide board while holding a ten-pound medicine ball. When Shiffrin works out, you are not supposed to cheer her on. "The motivation must come from within" is a mantra I heard her and others repeat. Still, as she did the slide board, Lackie harangued her: "Stay low, c'mon. Push, push, push, push." He told me, "This is a skiing-like exercise at the end of the circuit to see whether she can maintain composure and form even under fatigue." She could.

She rested for two minutes, and then did the circuit again. After the second go-round, she collapsed to the ground and crawled, like a parched man in a desert cartoon. "This is not the most flattering workout," Lackie observed. By the end of the third circuit, as she crawled along the mat, leaving a trail of sweat, I had to look away. And this was a recovery day.

After a couple of minutes spent cooling down on the stationary bike, she could speak. "I've never puked," she said. "I've come close. I'd pass out before I'd puke. We have a grading scale that I fill



"Small, medium, or that."

out for every workout. Ten is dying or passing out. I rate nine fairly often. That may have been a nine, maybe." Her pulse had topped out at a hundred and sixty-six beats per minute. She's never seen it above a hundred and eighty-five. Her resting heart rate is forty b.p.m.

Rap music had given way to hair metal. Shiffrin put in an hour of balance work. Toward the end, she walked back and forth on a slack line and picked up cones, which she put on her head or threw at Lackie. "Motivation comes from within," she said.

Afterward, she spent half an hour on the physio table, with her legs encased in NormaTec pressure pouches, which apparently squeeze out the lactic acid, like toothpaste from a tube. On the table next to her was Joss Christensen, the 2012 slopestyle Olympic gold medallist, who'd recently torn up his knee and would likely be off snow for six months. They didn't talk. Instead, Shiffrin tended her social-media feeds. Then she drove back to the condo, where she reheated the last of a batch of chicken strips with salsa, cheese, and rice that she'd cooked earlier in the week. Lunch. She said that she consumes about twenty-five hundred calories a day. She averages nine hours of sleep a night and is famous for her naps—she requires an hour a day, and has been known to snooze in the snow in the starting area of a race. She has only once had more than one alcoholic drink at a time and has never experienced a hangover. In her spare time, she binges on TV shows in sync with her mother ("Bones," "Blue Bloods") or studies German, the language of the World Cup, checking in now and then with a tutor in Denver, via Skype. "It's a work in progress," she said. Last fall, at an Austrian sports-awards ceremony in Vienna, she presented a trophy, in German, to the world's best male slalom skier, Marcel Hirscher. "I made one mistake," she said. "Athlete of the year, it was between Hirscher and Dominic Thiem, the tennis player. I said, 'Marcel's a great athlete, and so am I.'"

Shiffrin's parents are products of New England's mid-century ski-area boom, when you could hardly find a hill that didn't have a rope tow or even—height of luxury—a chairlift or two. Eileen Shiffrin, née Condron, is from



"I thought I would wander around, vaguely forgetting what I was just doing, until the Presidency is over."

raced locally at Great Gorge, and on weekends up in Vermont, and then on the B-team at Dartmouth. He brought Eileen to Killington one weekend. He'd recently taken up Masters racing—a recreational circuit for adults. "I dragged Eileen into it," he said.

Eileen, a meticulous and studious woman, was soon obsessed. She pored over videos of World Cup champions, read everything she could about the art of carving a turn, and mastered the methodical process of tuning skis. "I learned as much as a lot of the racers had in their ski-academy days," she said. Before long, she was winning national and international Masters championships. Jeff liked to tell her that she could probably walk on to the national team. "Hey, she might have been an Olympic skier," Jeff told me.

But, of course, such things aren't possible; she'd started too late and failed to take it seriously early on. When she and Jeff had children, they wouldn't make this mistake. Mikaela was their second child. Her brother, Taylor, is two years older. "He was the practice brother," Jeff said. They had settled in Vail. "We had this concept that there had to be a gradual progression of skill acquisition," Jeff said. As with Taylor, they dragged Mikaela

around the living room and the driveway on skis when she was a toddler, and then taught her to cross-country ski on the golf course. Next, hard boots, skis with edges, and then follow-me. They hardly bothered with the snowplow, the customary introductory gravity-mitigation technique. The goal was a proper turn, with the skis parallel. (Kids are typically taught “pizza” before they graduate to “French fries.”) When Mikaela was in kindergarten, the teacher for the kids’ Friday skiing class, not accustomed to such small-fry French-frying, said, “I don’t have a group for her.”

“So she kept skiing with us,” Jeff said. “That became Eileen’s job.”

Eileen and Mikaela started logging the hours. After Mikaela began to ski with other kids, Eileen became their coach. She was the hands-on drillmaster, the fastidious worrywart. She was also homeschooling Mikaela. “I taught myself to do the things I was teaching the kids,” she said. “Play guitar, play piano, paint.” Whatever they took up, whether it was soccer, tennis, the unicycle, or Ping-Pong, they studied video. “We had a methodical way of doing things,” Eileen said. “Let’s see if we can simplify this chaotic life.”

“We always said, ‘If we’re going to do it, let’s do it right,’” Jeff told me.

When Mikaela was eight, the family moved back East, to a house in rural New Hampshire. Jeff had got a job at Dartmouth Hospital, but the kite-in-the-headwind principle factored in, too. “We thought, Maybe we have something special here,” Jeff said. “We need to see if the kids love skiing in conditions where it’s pretty easy to hate it.”

Northeastern skiing is infamous for its ice. The climate is damper and generally more miserable than in the Rockies or the Alps; cycles of thaw and freeze transform the snow surface into a rink. Recreational skiers abhor ice, but it has its virtues. A firm surface, as the understatement goes, provides a better test for élite racers and bears up better under the erosive effect of their powerful carving turns. On the World Cup circuit, in friendlier climes, course workers replicate these conditions by injecting water into the snow—with hoses, not syringes. So the Northeast’s naturally occurring

THE WEST

There might be nothing
the section of the paper
I save for later
about buildings, the
home, inside.
Outside too. *Yard*
The garden. Things that do
well. What I have in mind.
My favorite
radio show is garden
compass. It’s like gossip
about someone else’s
life and how
to save them and their
plants and their
flowers. It’s like Heloise
the road is long
I mean it. All I need
is to hear a certain
designer plans
to be alone for the rest
of his life and I
think I’m like him.
And I’m dying to see
that movie
how he does
every little thing.
It’s as simple as being
a sculpture, having

“bullet” (short for “bulletproof surface”) is, and has long been, a great training and proving ground for young racers.

Mikaela Shiffrin, a budding masochist, took to this ungenerous ratio of pleasure to woe. She thrived on bullet. At the age of twelve, she began working with Kirk Dwyer, the head coach at Burke Mountain Academy, where he was also the headmaster. Burke, in northern Vermont, is a boarding school devoted to ski racing—it was the first of its kind when it was founded, in 1970. There are only about a dozen students per grade, some of whom wind up on the national team. Taylor enrolled as a boarder, but Mikaela was too young. After two good years, the family moved back to Vail, where Jeff had a new job. Mikaela was despondent. She missed her friends, her coaches, and the ice. She lost interest in her training and her studies. She began taking four-hour naps. Alarmed, Jeff and Eileen sent Mikaela

back to Vermont, to train and board at Burke. Eileen and Taylor eventually followed, while Jeff stayed behind.

Mikaela arrived at Burke in December, 2009, as a freshman. One of her roommates was a racer from Connecticut called Bug Pech, the niece of the Olympian Chip Knight. (New England skiing, like medieval Scotland, can seem to be dominated by a handful of hardy clans: the Cochrans, the Shaws, the Knights.) “We were inseparable,” Pech said recently. “Piglet and Pooh Bear. She’s Piglet. She was shy, quirky. I was lost in la-la land.”

Pech had been competing with, and losing to, Shiffrin since they were eight. Now she began to see why. “It was bizarre in the most extreme way that this kid, at this place, Burke, where everyone is absolutely absorbed in ski racing, had this whole other level of devotion. Her need of ski racing is like a need for oxygen.” Pech recalled a day when it

a life. This is not the book of instruction I had intended but this is
when the emptiness noticed its own beginning like that church I saw when I was young that was simply melting This is for those who would not name that building. But simply step in, noticing when that has happened an elaborate piece like being a candelabra that that is the road you are on. I thought bring your camera. I thought don't bring your camera that's what I mean.
There will be plenty for everyone and my style is adequate to that. Has been planning this moment for years.
Ushering it in. Tonight I will do books. I am leaving my house. Which ones do I need
I think *you* can come on the long & horizontal road of reading.

—Eileen Myles

snowed several feet—a rare treat, in those hills, and by custom an excuse to blow off practice and ski for fun. “We were all ripping powder, hucking cliffs in the woods. Meanwhile, Mikaela was doing drills on her racing skis. She’d rather do drills than ski powder with her buddies.” (“Powder? There’s no room for that,” Jeff told me. “That’s for also-rans. Sorry, that’s the way it is.”)

Eileen had a condo a few minutes from the Burke campus, but she spent most of her time on the ski hill with Mikaela or in Mikaela’s triplex. “She was very much a presence,” Pech said. “They’d constantly go over video in our room, watching winning World Cup runs every night before bed. Eileen has an amazing eye for it.”

“I just wanted Taylor and Mikaela to make perfect turns,” Eileen said. “It’s like looking for the perfect wave.”

The Shiffrins were disciples of the ten-thousand-hours concept; the 2009

“Here’s the thing,” Mikaela told me one day. “You can’t get ten thousand hours of skiing. You spend so much time on the chairlift. My coach did a calculation of how many hours I’ve been on snow. We’d been overestimating. I think we came up with something like eleven total hours of skiing on snow a year. It’s like seven minutes a day. Still, at the age of twenty-two, I’ve probably had more time on snow than most. I always practice, even on the cat tracks or in those interstitial periods. My dad says, ‘Even when you’re just stopping, be sure to do it right, maintaining a good position, with counter-rotational force.’ These are the kinds of things my dad says, and I’m, like, ‘Shut up.’ But if you say it’s seven minutes a day, then consider that thirty seconds that all the others spend just straight-lining from the bottom of the racecourse to the bottom of the lift: I use that part to work on my turns. I’m getting extra minutes. If I don’t, my mom or my coaches will stop me and say something.”

The psychologist Ellen Winner has identified a prodigy’s essential traits as “a rage to master” and an ability to learn rapidly. Shiffrin had both. “Her attention to detail and focus on the task at hand is like no one I’ve ever met,” her former coach Brandon Dyksterhouse said. Whereas most skiers could handle, say, six training runs, she could sometimes do eighteen, and whereas most skiers saw their performances tail off in the last three or four, along with their ability to get anything useful out of them, Shiffrin got faster with each run, and her focus never wavered.

Shiffrin, incredibly, almost never “skis out” in training. She completes every practice run without missing a gate or losing control. Dyksterhouse recalls that at one point she went fifty practice days in a row without skiing out, and that she beat every skier who practiced with her on each of those runs. This is not a balance beam: every day the snow and the course are different. She also had the capacity to absorb criticism and integrate refinements into her technique. “You have to have the brain to conceptualize technique and apply it to your body,” Shiffrin said. “If you don’t, you should stop right now.” She was, in a word, eminently

Daniel Coyle book “The Talent Code” was scripture. They studied the training methods of the Austrians, Alpine skiing’s priesthood. The Shiffrins wanted to wring as much training as possible out of every minute of the day and every vertical foot of the course. They favored deliberate practice over competition. They considered race days an onerous waste: all the travel, the waiting around, and the emotional stress for two quick runs. They insisted that Shiffrin practice honing her turns even when just skiing from the bottom of the racecourse to the chairlift. Most racers bomb straight down, their nonchalance a badge of honor.

Jeff Shiffrin said, “One of the things I learned from the Austrians is: every turn you make, do it right. Don’t get lazy, don’t goof off. Don’t waste any time. If you do, you’ll be retired from racing by the time you get to ten thousand hours.”



"Hey, pal—this isn't the quiet car."

• •

coachable. This was opportune, because she happened to be very heavily coached—by her mother.

So, here was this rare combination of tiger mom and willing cub. “I didn’t have that relationship with Taylor,” Eileen told me. “He wanted to do the U.S. ski team. But he didn’t want to make the other boys feel bad. I didn’t understand that. It was like he had three heads.” Taylor raced at the University of Denver, an élite program, and completed an M.B.A. there. An also-ran, by some lights.

When Shiffrin, at the age of sixteen, set out on her first full season on the World Cup tour, her mother travelled with her. “That first year, I didn’t know what I was doing,” Eileen told me. “We were deer in the headlights.” Competition aside, the routine was disorienting. The circuit started in the Alps, moved to North America, then returned to Europe—every few days, a new course, a new town. It was a long way from Burke, from Piglet and Pooh Bear. “All the personalities, the ski-team girls,” Eileen said. “We were a little isolated from them. They didn’t want a kid tagging along, and she didn’t want to tag along.” Mikaela, Eileen said, “wasn’t into the party scene. She was thinking, How am I going to get my math done and where are the bathrooms? It was

stressful for me to watch her go through the stress of that.”

The U.S. ski team’s European base was until recently in Sölden, Austria, where a giant glacier enables racers to train early and late in the season. Eileen got an apartment in the neighboring village of Längenfeld. “I tried to give her distance,” Eileen said. “I needed to not be around.” The team travelled by van, and Eileen trailed it in a rental car. At hotels, Mikaela bunked with a teammate, and Eileen got her own room. But by her third year on tour Mikaela was sleeping with her mother instead. “It was more healthy than rooming with a thirty-year-old racer,” Eileen said.

Ski-team officials didn’t necessarily agree. “We were told it was not good for me to be there,” Eileen said. “They’d been through it before, and it hadn’t worked out.”

The coach for slalom and giant slalom was an old-school Austrian named Roland Pfeifer. “Luckily, he was O.K. and open to my mom being around, but he wasn’t so O.K. with it that he wanted her to be coaching me,” Mikaela said. “Eventually, as time went on, he got more and more sensitive to her being one of my coaches. I never would’ve called her a coach when I was working with him.” She went on, “After the last Olympics, my skiing started to fall off, and he got really aggressive about it. It

ended up being a pretty nasty split.” Pfeifer was reassigned and then left for the Canadian team.

For the next two years, the women’s coach was Dyksterhouse, who was a kind of emergency call-up from the Vail ski club. Perhaps his relatively humble credentials, or his non-Austrianness, made him a bit more comfortable with Eileen’s omnipotence. Eileen said, “You have to have a couple of coaches who don’t have huge egos, who aren’t territorial and all alpha-male macho about it.”

Still, the situation could get a little intense. “Eileen watches more video than any coach on the planet,” Dyksterhouse said. She texted Mikaela at all hours with observations from her sessions. Dyksterhouse remembers getting a text from Eileen at 5 A.M. the day before the 2015 World Championships, in Vail, saying that she had noticed something. She wanted to wake Mikaela up to show her. Dyksterhouse objected. (“She knows better but she can’t help herself,” one ski-team official told me.) On a few occasions, anticipating that Eileen might pick apart the footage from a day’s session, Dyksterhouse would speed the video up, just enough to elide certain flaws and perhaps shield Mikaela, or, more to the point, Dyksterhouse and his assistant, from an inquisition.

“I got to the point where I didn’t agree with certain things, but how can I argue with the result?” he recalled. “They’ve found an approach that works better than anything in the history of the sport.” He had a behind-the-scenes Web series called “World Cup Diaries,” and on one occasion he posted a side-by-side video comparison he’d worked up of Shiffrin and Frida Hansdotter, one of her top competitors, which he’d annotated, frame by frame, to illustrate Shiffrin’s prowess at gaining speed. Shiffrin told me, “I woke up and had a million texts, from Kilian”—her manager, Kilian Albrecht—and my mom, saying, like, What was he thinking? Here we are working our tails off, trying to stay one step ahead, and that’s my career, my profession, and why is my coach giving this stuff away? She made him take it down immediately, but not before some of the European teams had downloaded it for

careful study. "I ended up parting ways with him very quickly after that."

"They went berserk," Dyksterhouse told me. "They hated, hated, hated that. They're very secretive." Nonetheless, he said, it was his decision to leave, owing to his eagerness to work with other racers on the team. Shiffrin mostly trains alone, both because of her demanding schedule and because none of the other women on the team can keep up or handle the workload. (Lindsey Vonn is a team unto herself as well, under the Red Bull flag.)

The coach since then has been Mike Day, but Day recently had back surgery and will miss the first half of the season, so Luckie has taken over. Often the coaches will convey their pointers or critiques to Eileen, who then relays them to Mikaela. When I talked to Tiger Shaw, the head of the whole program, he told me, "The No. 1 thing to recognize is that Eileen is the coach." As it stands, she has been doing the job, all these years, on her own dime. The ski team doesn't pay her a salary, and she covers most of her own travel expenses. This might be another reason for her to keep bunking with her daughter. You can take the girl out of New England, but you can't take New England out of the girl.

Slalom and giant slalom are known as the technical disciplines—tech, for short. The turns are tightest in slalom, wider in G.S. Each turn consists of a pair of poles, several yards apart, and you have to ski through the invisible plane between them—a "gate." You ski two runs, each lasting less than a minute. The winner is the skier with the lowest combined time. The so-called speed events, downhill and super giant slalom, or super G, have fewer gates, more jumps, greater speed, and higher risk. You get one run.

For decades, slalom courses were set with bamboo poles. You could brush them or whack into them, but it hurt, and they could slow you down or alter your course. So you mostly skied around them, stringing together elegant "S"s. In the eighties, bamboo was replaced by plastic breakaway poles, with a hinge at the base of each, so that you could knock it out of your way; it flopped to the snow and snapped back into place

after you'd passed. As a result, skiers started pursuing straighter lines, thrashing through the hinged poles in the manner of an explorer cutting through a thicket with a machete. The progress downhill became more abrupt and violent. Racers began to wear body armor, helmets, and face guards, and to use shorter and shorter skis, the better to whip their feet around the gates. To my eyes, the motocross getups and the herky-jerky descents leached much of the beauty and grace from the sport.

Soon, the tech events were ruled by obscure specialists with names I couldn't retain and an appeal I couldn't see. The downhillers, the speed demons who risked life and limb on the classic sheer courses of the Alps, like the Streif, in Kitzbühel, and the Lauberhorn, in Wengen, carried on the sport's swashbuckling spirit. Even if their best runs seemed reckless and a little haywire, the elegance and power of a well-carved turn, at that speed and in that context, is magisterial. No shin pad can mitigate the pain and misery of cartwheeling into the safety netting at eighty miles an hour.

Still, invincibility is irresistible. A couple of years ago, as Shiffrin's pursuit of the perfect turn reached a new level, she drew me in. In the fall of 2015, the World Cup season commenced in Aspen. In the opening race, a giant slalom, Shiffrin, carrying a lead into the final pitch, wiped out—uncharacteristically—three gates short of the finish. The next day, she showed up for the slalom in an angry mood. She'd won four in a row to end the previous season. After the first run, she held a lead of nearly a second and a half over the next-fastest racer, a Slovakian named Viktoria Velez Zuzulová. As the leader, Shiffrin was the last out of a field of thirty to ski a second run (forty others had either crashed or failed to qualify), and was thus facing a degraded snow surface. She wore a tight white bodysuit and a stars-and-stripes helmet—a touch of Evel Knievel. The north-facing slope, in full shadow, was a crepuscular blue, out of which the fluorescent yellow trim of her shin and knuckle guards popped like the chest feathers of a chat bird. Banner ads for Milka



chocolate (the venue may have been Stateside, but the main television audience was still overseas) lined the run, along with the dim silhouettes of course workers, many of them wearing crampons to maintain their footing on the icy pitch. (It never looks as steep on TV.) Often, Shiffrin's first few turns are careful, as she establishes a tempo, but on this occasion, despite her almost impregnable lead, she came out "blasting," as the TV commentator said, so that, by the time she hit the eighteenth gate (out of sixty), the speed and some cruddy snow seemed to cause her to stumble. But she recovered her form—metronomic tempo, skis parallel, body crouched, "knees to skis and hands in front," as the family mantra goes—and took on the meat of the course with calm determination, to the extent that calmness can be attributed to a woman punching aside heavy, rubbery poles at a rate of more than one a second, while pogoing from side to side in flat light down a wall of rutted ice. Her style was "quiet," in the argot, the upper body still, skis biting, tip to tail, with hardly a chatter. (Watching

the race again recently, on YouTube, I thought of her in high summer, sliding side to side in her socks, holding a medicine ball.) She knocked away the second-to-last gate with both arms, so that for a moment they were raised as though in triumph, and then she ducked across the finish line, swooped into a big turn to check her speed, and finally, snowplowing (pizza!), looked up at the scoreboard. She seemed almost disappointed. She'd won by 3.07 seconds, the largest margin of victory ever in a World Cup slalom race, breaking a record that had stood for forty-seven years.

The following day, there was another slalom race (the second of the season's nine), and she won again, by 2.65 seconds, the amount of time that separated the second-place finisher from the twenty-third. She said that she'd imagined she was being chased downhill by a bear.

A few days later, at Lake Louise, in Alberta, Canada, Shiffrin entered a super-G race. She came in fifteenth. The winner was Lindsey Vonn. Shiffrin is the best technical skier of her generation, but she aspires to the élite in

speed. Some of the American stars, like Vonn and Bode Miller, started out as tech specialists, and then, as they got bigger and stronger and perhaps more courageous and ambitious, began to master the dangers and the demands of the downhill. It's all skiing, but slalom is Jack-be-nimble while downhill is Jack-be-nuts. One is fast-twitch, the other is barn-on-your-back. The speed and the tech events take place in different locations at different times, with different practice and pre-race regimens. Training for both means training less for each. It may be that interdisciplinary speed is a zero-sum game—that the faster you get in the downhill the slower you go in slalom. This has been true, more or less, of Miller and Vonn, and might well be true of Shiffrin, although she doesn't have the high tolerance for risk that the others do, and that the speed events seem to require. She and her team wrestle with the problem of giving up a bird in hand to go after one in the bush. "I'm still sort of a risky investment there," she told me.

Two years ago, the Shiffrins tried to send Mikaela out on tour on her own. "I had decided that that would be the year," Eileen said. This was after Mikaela's dominating performance at Aspen. Shiffrin travelled to Sweden without her mother. On the morning of a race, Mikaela crashed and injured her knee, and missed the next couple of months of competition.

"I'm not superstitious, not saying my not being there is why she got hurt, but maybe it was something subconscious," Eileen said. "Maybe she didn't approach the day the way she might have. I might have said, 'Be careful.'"

According to Eileen, Mikaela called her and said, "I'm not ready for you to be gone. Clearly, I'm not ready to do this on my own." Mikaela told me, "I can't really picture a time when she won't be on tour with me. Mom has always been my best friend. But, yes, eventually she might get sick of it."

Bug Pech, when she and Shiffrin were sixteen, promised Shiffrin that she'd watch every race of hers, and so for years, while she was at Boston College and Shiffrin was in the Alps, she got up at four in the morning to tune



in. Shiffrin often FaceTimes with her from the physio table. Pech told me, "It's sort of weird. She's travelling with three or four middle-aged men, her mom, and her physio, who's older, too. It can get lonely. When she needs to vent or is frustrated, I get the call."

The last time Pech saw Shiffrin was at Killington, last year. "I saw her for, like, three minutes," Pech said. "My mom and sister started tearing up when we had to say goodbye. My sister joked that Mikaela and I have a Romeo-and-Juliet romance."

This past summer, Mikaela started dating a French giant-slalom skier named Mathieu Faivre. "I don't know if this is a smart thing to do long distance," she told Pech.

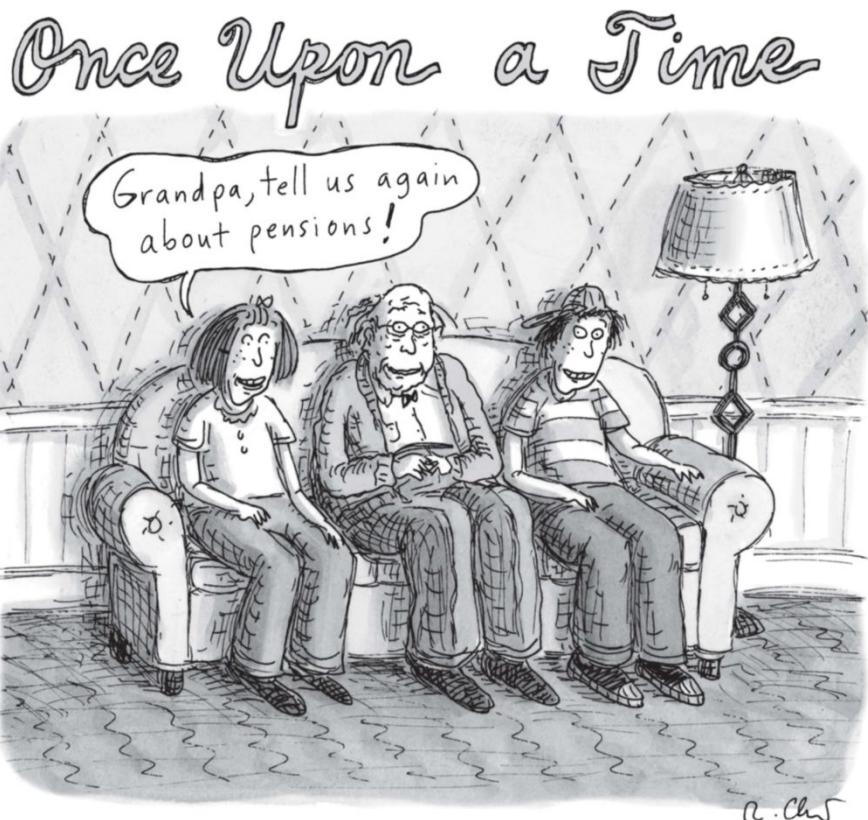
Pech told her, "For you, everything is long distance." As she explained to me, "She's got to have something that's normal, even if it's not normal."

It was her mother who first alerted me to Faivre. "I'm sure you've heard, she has a boyfriend in France," Eileen said. When I mentioned it to Mikaela in a text, she replied with a facepalm emoji: "Oh boy. Hahaha no big deal. He's a cutie." Shiffrin made time to visit Faivre in France, and in the fall he went to see her in Vail. He stayed in a hotel. When Shiffrin is home, which isn't often, she lives with her parents, in the nearby town of Avon. She still doesn't have a place of her own. (She has earned millions of dollars, in prize money and endorsements. Her father watches over it, with the help of a financial adviser.)

"Some of this for me is about my being able to let her go," Eileen told me. "My presence is its own burden."

She went on, "I have my own interests. I like to work out. I like to run. I want to take a nursing refresher course. When Mikaela was at Burke, I was finally getting my career going again, but once she started travelling, what with Jeff the main breadwinner, it was 'You're the one to go.' I don't regret it. I love spending time with Mikaela. It's been a privilege for me to do this. But my entire life has been this."

This will be Mikaela's seventh year on the tour, and her second trip to the Olympics, where, at least in the American marketplace, reputations and fortunes can be made. She is not oblivious. Talking to people around the



ski-team scene, one can find it hard to suss out which of the Shiffrins—if either—might be the one chafing under the current arrangement, or to predict how long it might last. People are watching, with interest.

In October, Mikaela and Eileen left for Austria. Mikaela trained for three days on the Mölltal Glacier, for a week in Sölden, and then for a few days in the Val Senales, in South Tirol, while the F.I.S. prepared the course at Sölden for the traditional season-opening giant slalom there. The day before the race, the International Association of Ski Journalists awarded Shiffrin the Skieur d'Or trophy, as racer of the year. She is the third American, after Miller and Vonn, ever to win it. (Though Shiffrin has not yet become a marketing juggernaut like Vonn, the association called her "a pleasant interlocutor for ski reporters.") At the bib-drawing ceremony the night before, the announcer, alluding to Shiffrin's boyfriend, had said to her, onstage, "I hear you learned some French last summer." Shiffrin, blushing, ventured a pronunciation of "croissant." Eileen, standing with some ski-team

officials, wondered aloud if she'd got it right. The next day, Mikaela, in second place after the first run, hit a rutted, shadowy patch of snow on the steep pitch near the top of her second run, nearly blew out of the course, recovered, and finished a disappointing fifth.

Two weeks later, at the inaugural slalom of the season, at Levi, in Finland, Shiffrin, taking a lead into the second run, again failed to close, losing by a tenth of a second to a Slovakian, Petra Vlhová, of whom Eileen had recently said, "Petra skis like Mikaela more than Mikaela skis like Mikaela." Was the gap between Mikaela and the field shrinking? Was there something amiss in her form? Was it the gear, the tactics, the training, the chemistry among the coaches, some new warp in her mental makeup? Or was it just the any-given-Sunday principle? A roll of the dice, a bounce of the ball. Second place wasn't exactly disaster—the top American finisher in the men's slalom, the next day, placed twenty-third. Still, to the extent that invincibility is a kind of spell, one can never guess when and under what conditions it might break. ♦

THE PEOPLE'S POLICE

When Mexico's authorities could no longer be trusted, Nestora Salgado organized her own force.

BY ALEXIS OKEOWO

Late one night last January, in the southern Mexican state of Guerrero, a group of community policemen met in the courtyard of a friend's house to discuss the murders, kidnappings, and extortion that had beset Olinalá, a remote town high in the Sierra Madre del Sur. Nearly all were indigenous farmers, and their skin was burnished by the sun. Most carried guns. The group's coördinator, a slim man with a mustache named Bernardo Ayala, laid his cell phone on a table, put it on speaker, and called their leader: Nestora Salgado, a grandmother of five who lives outside Seattle.

"Hello, commander," Ayala said. "All of the *compañeros* are here." Salgado greeted them, her voice echoing in the courtyard, which was decorated with shrines to Catholic saints. In person, Salgado, who is forty-five, has dark bangs that sweep over a cherubic face with kohl-rimmed eyes; she has a cheery disposition and a deceptively guileless manner. Since 2012, she has divided her time between Washington State and Guerrero, where she was born, in the hope of helping her town resist an influx of drugs and violence.

For more than a decade, the Mexican government has been waging war against organized crime, deploying tens of thousands of troops. That war has failed; more than a hundred and fifty thousand people have been killed and another thirty-two thousand have disappeared. Amid the violence, the government forces have often been no less venal and corrupt than the drug cartels they were dispatched to fight. In many places, citizens have grown so distrustful of the security forces that they have formed armed community self-defense groups to restore order to their battered towns.

In less than a year, Salgado transformed a group of untrained local citizens into an armed force that was able

to track down and arrest kidnappers and murderers. Its success helped inspire a surge of community police; of eighty-one municipalities in Guerrero, fifty-four now have forces. But the group, founded with the intention of fighting criminals, had ended up fighting the Mexican government as well. In 2013, Salgado was arrested, and authorities accused her of murder, kidnapping, organized crime, and robbery. After almost three years in prison, she was cleared of charges, but many of her colleagues still had open arrest warrants. The force, which at one point had two hundred and forty volunteer officers, was down to eighty, and they were struggling to keep working.

"Does anyone have questions for Nestora?" Ayala asked the group.

"*Compañera* Nestora, the thing that has most stopped us is that we don't have any money to operate," a heavy-set man named Calixto Reyes said. "We pay for everything out of our own pockets and from whatever people give us. And there are many communities that have requested our support."

Salgado urged them not to give up. "The government is trying to stop our work," she said. "But we have to continue." As the community policemen prepared to begin the night's patrol, she signed off. "I would like to send a very strong hug to all of you," she said. "We will stay in touch."

Ayala began chanting the group's motto: "Respect for our rights—"

The others joined in: "Will bring justice!"

Ayala said, "*Vámonos, compañeros,*" and the group walked to two white trucks, emblazoned with the community-police insignia. They eased their vehicles down a near-vertical road into town, past kids nestled in doorways and shopkeepers closing down businesses. Most offered friendly greetings. A slender man with graying hair flagged them

down. "There are some guys racing on motorcycles here," he said, waving at the street, which was wide enough for only one lane of traffic. "They're using the street as a drag strip. If you see them, please get them to calm down."

Around another corner, the community policemen encountered a group of young people with a red motorbike, but they turned out not to be the culprits. "If that was the motorcycle, we would have just taken it," Julia Silva, one of two women on patrol that night, joked. "We need them for rapid response."

A municipal-police truck passed, and turned down a parallel street. One of the men looked at the vehicle with disgust. "The police," he said. "Whenever they see us out, then they remember they have a job to do."

Olinalá is a modest place of nine thousand people, with sloping streets, a scenic plaza, and the reddish spectre of mountains looming in the distance. The town is known for its ornate lacquerware, and the mountains for fields of poppies. Mexico is the world's third-largest producer of opium, and Guerrero grows fifty to seventy per cent of the country's poppies; the mountains near Olinalá are among the most productive regions. When Nestora Salgado was growing up there, the drug trade was negligible, and the town was poor but safe. "It was beautiful," Salgado said. "My family, my friends, everything was there." Surrounded by six siblings and many aunts, uncles, and cousins, she felt that she was related to almost everyone. Her family lived in an adobe house with a tin roof on a vast farm, and she was free to roam. Though her mother urged her to "behave like a little woman," she preferred to go horseback riding and shoot birds with her brothers. She often came home with bruises and a bloody nose.

Salgado's mother, Aurora, had come



"We tried to bring peace to the town," Salgado said. "We didn't want to start a war."

to Olinalá from a nearby indigenous Tlapanec village. "People were very discriminatory toward indigenous people," Salgado said. "It's why she didn't teach us to speak her language. She thought that if I spoke it people would laugh at me." Aurora hadn't gone to school, but she was intelligent and resourceful. She taught herself to sew clothes and to make cookware; in addition to taking care of the children, she helped with planting and harvesting crops. Salgado's father, Fernando, a playful, easygoing man with deep-blue eyes, worked as a farmer and a practitioner of traditional medicine. He housed patients at the farm while they recuperated, giving them food and a place to sleep.

When Salgado was twelve, her mother died, of a heart attack, and her father started disappearing on drinking binges, sometimes for a week at a time. Not long afterward, Salgado began spending time with a friend named Miguel, the first boy she ever liked. He was funny and friendly, and within a few months they married. She was fourteen and he was nineteen. "My father looked at me like I was crazy," she said. "My husband was very scared. He thought my father wanted to hurt him." She moved to Miguel's family farm and soon had a daughter, Saira. Miguel wouldn't allow her to return to school, but she didn't mind. "I played like a little kid at their house," she recalled. Things became harder, though, as she had two more daughters, Ruby and Grisel. There was very little work outside the farm, and barely enough money to buy milk for the children. "We had nothing," Salgado said.

Miguel sometimes went to the United States for stints of work, but Salgado never saw the earnings. "I would be waiting for him, for him to send money to us," she said. "I think he was drinking a lot." So, at nineteen, she headed to the border, leaving her daughters with her sister in Mexico City. "It was very hard to leave them," Salgado recalled. She had nightmares of her daughters drowning. Salgado had to cross illegally, running across fields and highways. She was captured, and sent back to Tijuana by bus. She tried again the next day, and, this

time, she made it to San Diego. During the crossing, though, she lost Miguel's phone number. "I didn't know how I would find my husband," Salgado recalled. "I was scared and didn't know what I was going to do." She thought of going home, but she owed money to her coyote—the smuggler who had helped her cross. A woman who worked

for the coyote, providing meals for the migrants, hired Salgado as a nanny for her young children.

After three months, Miguel found her, and the two moved to Bellevue, Washington, where a cousin of his lived. Miguel worked as a dishwasher. Salgado found a job as a housekeeper at a hotel, and another at a dry

cleaner. "I remember waking up in the mornings and going to work happy," she said. "Walking the streets, I saw everything as beautiful—the plants, the flowers. Olinalá doesn't have any parks. I wanted my daughters to see this." After a year, she had saved enough money to bring their daughters to Bellevue. But she had to hire a babysitter while she was at work; Miguel couldn't be relied on to watch the children. Salgado would come home to find her husband drinking with his friends, the kitchen empty of food for their daughters. Once, the sheriff came to her house to put their belongings outside because they hadn't paid rent. "The terrible thing was that I saw my husband not worrying about anything," she said. Miguel physically abused her so viciously that he was eventually sent to prison.

At twenty-six, she finally left him. She got a job as a waitress, and at the restaurant where she worked she met a cook from Jalisco named José Luis Ávila. "My life changed," Salgado said. Ávila helped her with her children and the rent. They got married, and eventually moved to Renton, a small city near Seattle. In 2001, she obtained a residency card, and, ten years after leaving Olinalá, she was able to return for a visit. "Everyone was so happy," she said. "But I was also sad, because I saw how truly poor my town was." Salgado began going back every year, bringing children's toys, clothes, and other donations she had collected in Wash-

ton. Her daughters didn't like the town, which seemed too foreign, too small, too quiet. To Salgado, it was paradise. She gardened, farmed, and rode horses; on an undeveloped part of her father's land, she began building a house.

Yet the area was becoming increasingly unrecognizable. For years, the Beltrán Leyva cartel had controlled Guerrero's opium production. But, starting in 2009, the government killed or arrested most of its leaders. With the Beltrán Leyvas gone, and with U.S. demand for heroin rising, more than a dozen gangs began a fierce struggle for raw material and transport routes. Their members committed kidnappings and murders; they took over the commerce of towns, and then forced residents to pay taxes to them.

The government was little help. Mexico's then-President, Felipe Calderón, had sent a surge of troops to the region, but the presence of the military often intensified the violence. Local forces were no better. Mike Vigil, a former Drug Enforcement Administration chief of international operations in Mexico City, told me, "The municipal police were endemic with corruption." The drug trade had saturated the government with corruption, and few politicians evaded it. "You can count them on one hand, the ones who are clean," Salgado said. Leaked government documents from 2014 assert that state security knew of at least twelve mayors in Guerrero who were connected to organized crime. "This is the true nightmare: that the enemy, the Mafioso, who is tearing society apart, goes unnoticed in public office," Anabel Hernández wrote in the book "Narcoland." Guerrero became one of the most violent states in Mexico, with thousands of killings each year. During my visit, security forces found six decapitated bodies in a car in the state capital and four tortured corpses in another town. "A lot of people were scared, but no one said anything," Salgado said. "You can't live like that."

In the fall of 2012, Salgado's father fell ill, and she went to Olinalá to care for him. She found the town besieged by *sicarios*, or hit men, connected to the Los Rojos gang. Salgado told me that they operated freely on the streets, shooting guns at all hours of the day. They



kidnapped a hotel owner and extorted money from shopkeepers. A mother of three told me that, after months of paying protection fees, she closed her shop. Illicit business proliferated: the sale of bootleg liquor and cigars, stolen cars and animals. "The police wouldn't do anything," Bernardo Rosendo, who runs an art school in town, told me. The *sicarios* acted with such impunity that some townspeople began to believe that the mayor, Eusebio González Rodríguez, was tolerating their presence. (González denied this, saying, "I have always done things within the law.")

In the month before Salgado arrived, at least three people had been murdered. That October, during her visit, a taxi-driver named Cecilio Morales was kidnapped. A group of people, including her brothers, went looking for him, and finally found his body near a ravine, his head smashed in with a rock. "People were really angry," Salgado recalled. At the funeral, the next morning, rumors spread that another driver from the town had been kidnapped. "We were fed up," Tomás Bello Flores, a community policeman, told me.

People gathered in the central plaza, where the town's church stood amid trimmed shrubs and palm trees. A few residents rang the church bell, and hundreds more came to the square to find out what was going on. "That was the moment that started the movement," Salgado said. "I was planning how we could work together to defend ourselves."

Some residents had grabbed one suspected criminal and turned him over to the police, but he was quickly released. "We realized the police were not going to do anything," Juan Guevara Ayala, a corn farmer and an uncle of the missing driver, recalled. As the sun was setting, Salgado and the other townspeople stopped a police truck near the plaza, and forced the policemen to get out and turn over their guns. "I felt I was in God's hands," Ayala said. "Whatever would happen would happen."

For the next two hours, Salgado drove the truck through town, shouting through a megaphone, "Come out! You don't have to be scared!" People started organizing by neighborhood, and, armed with AK-47s and hunting rifles from home, and sometimes wearing ski masks, they set up checkpoints to monitor who

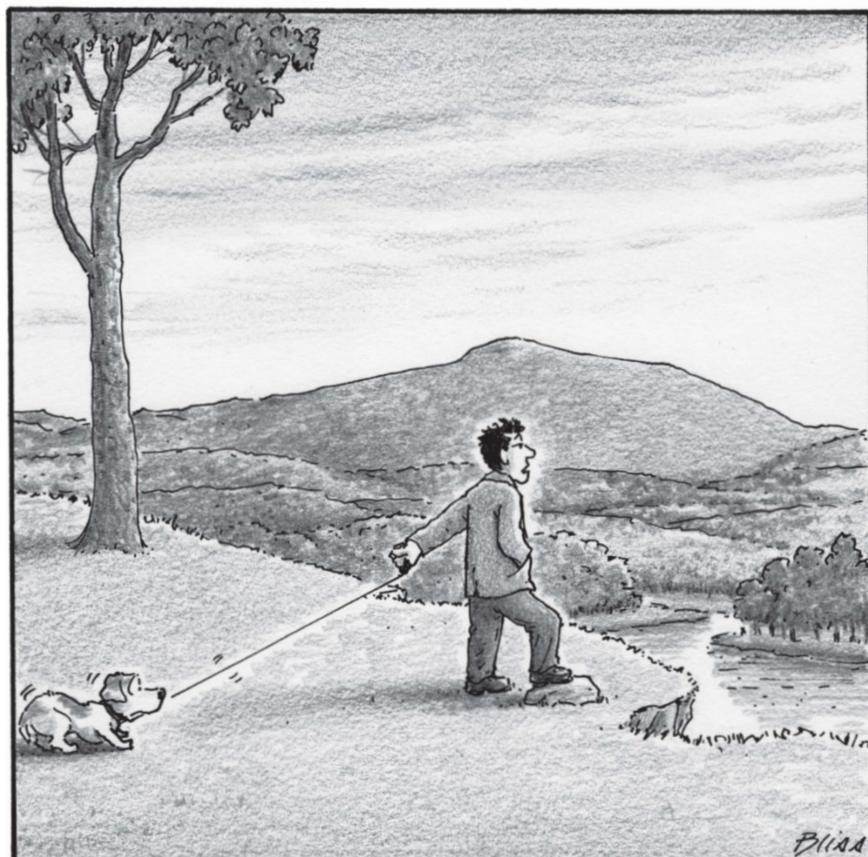
was coming in and out of town. "The streets were packed," Ayala recalled.

More than a hundred townspeople headed to a house where several of the *sicarios* lived, to make them reveal the whereabouts of the second driver. The men were gone when the group arrived, but the townspeople found a car and two motorcycles, and torched them. A few days later, one man called Salgado and reported that a group of men had detained the *sicarios'* teen-age girlfriends. Furious, they wanted to take them to the plaza, douse them in gasoline, and burn them. "I hurried over there," Salgado said. "I said to them, 'What are you doing?'" She told them that killing the girls would just create trouble. Instead, she suggested questioning them. They had worked as look-outs for the *sicarios*, and as prostitutes for the men.

The next day, they picked up the girls from their family homes and took them to a school, where they had arranged for a lawyer to be present. The girls told them whom the *sicarios* were planning to kidnap (Salgado was on the

list) and whom they were working with: wealthy residents of Olinalá, the head of local government security, the public prosecutor, and the mayor. (The officials deny working with the *sicarios*.) They showed cell-phone videos of executions that their boyfriends had committed, and of children being sexually abused. Salgado and the others put the footage on disks to keep as evidence.

In the *sicarios'* home, they discovered shotguns and bulletproof vests, along with a cache of driver's licenses from various states in Mexico, declaring that the men belonged to several branches of the armed forces simultaneously. Before the townspeople left, Armando Patrón Jiménez, the town's public prosecutor, came to collect the items. He and Salgado had been friendly for years, occasionally going for drinks together, but the timing of his arrival made her suspicious. "Why?" Salgado said. "How did he know those things were there?" (Patrón Jiménez says that he was there as part of a routine investigation, and denies that there were weapons.) The following week, the governor of Guer-



"You, my friend, are a feeble adventurer."



"Dan, Carla's interests include brooding over failed relationships and fending off her mother's pleas for grandchildren. Carla, Dan is terrified of commitment and has a negative bank balance."

c. fluke

rero, Ángel Aguirre Rivero, came to Olinalá, and Salgado gave him a disk with the footage from the girls' cell phones. "I said, 'That's why my town needs community police,'" she recalled. "And he said, 'Oh, yes, yes—that's very good. I am proud of you for wanting to provide security for your people.'" But neither he nor the military attempted to arrest the *sicarios*. Instead, the governor later supplied the community police with trucks and uniforms, and recognized Salgado as head of the force. She was forty-one years old, and had recently become a grandmother. "He said the security of the town would now be in my hands," she said.

Guerrero has a long history of indigenous revolt. The Sierra Madre del Sur was often the site of protests against Spanish colonists and post-independence Presidents. Since then, leftist guerrilla movements have pro-

liferated in the region, even though the Army has tried to extinguish them, through extrajudicial killings, abduction, and torture. In the seventies, the schoolteacher turned revolutionary Lucio Cabañas lived in the mountains and led a guerrilla group that waged a rebellion for the poor; they supported themselves through bank robberies and other crimes against the wealthy and the state. More recently, indigenous communities have organized grassroots protests against environmentally hazardous infrastructure projects and the incursion of mining companies on their land.

Salgado's force grew out of a civilian police organization called Coordinadora Regional de Autoridades Comunitarias-Policía Comunitaria, CRAC-P.C., as it is known, was founded, in 1995, to provide security in the place of hapless or disinterested police and military. It is sanctioned by Guerrero

State Law 701, which recognizes the authority of indigenous communities to administer themselves, "based on their ancestral customs and traditions that have been transmitted for generations, enriched and adapted with the passage of time." Law 701 also permits a judicial system "for the prevention and resolution of conflicts" and "to reduce crime, eradicate impunity, and rehabilitate and reintegrate social transgressors." It endorses the idea of collective justice, which is valued in many indigenous Mexican communities. Under the law, towns with indigenous and mestizo residents can reconcile perpetrators and victims in accordance with traditional methods; the community police formed institutions called *casas de justicia*, which tried people for minor crimes.

Salgado's new force was made up of farmers, ranchers, engineers, doctors, accountants, and teachers, mostly of indigenous descent. Boys under eighteen could join if they were married. When Salgado became leader, some men bristled, but she offered her position to anyone who wanted it, saying that she would be happy to be just a community policewoman. No one came forward. "Nestora has more balls than anyone in this town," Bernardo Ayala said.

Olinalá has eight neighborhoods, and Salgado helped arrange for the community policemen to patrol each one at night. Each policeman took a couple of shifts a week. Salgado patrolled every night, from nine o'clock until two o'clock, driving her pickup with policemen in the bed. Her neighbors donated food, water, trucks, and gas money to her force, and brought hot coffee and tacos while they patrolled.

Many nights, Salgado's force simply insured order on the streets: taking drunks home, driving sick people and pregnant women to the hospital. Other work was more serious. They rescued residents who had been abducted, and arrested people whom they suspected of robbery, kidnapping, or extortion. Salgado received phone calls from people threatening to kill her. "A lot of the time, they didn't have a face," she said. "They were ghosts." Still, the patrols gave her a rush. "We knew that if these people were able to get us they would tear us to pieces," she said. "Fear can make you react, or it can flatten you. I

am someone who reacts." When she called her family in Washington, she kept the details of her new life vague; she didn't want them to worry.

One afternoon, during her first month leading the force, an eight-year-old boy disappeared from a nearby town. His father, a butcher, received a phone call three hours later: the boy had been abducted, and his kidnappers wanted two million pesos. The parents were afraid. After realizing that they could not come up with the money, they called their town's community police—"No one trusts the municipal police anymore," Salgado said—who then called community forces in the surrounding towns. Salgado and thirty of her men joined a search party of community police and residents, looking in abandoned houses and ranches, amid the weeds and the cornfields. One of the searchers, looking near a farm a two-hour drive from town, heard suspicious sounds, and alerted the community police. They found the boy there; the men guarding him had fled. "I was scared, because I knew the *sicarios* were close and could kill us, but I was happy to see the boy," Salgado recalled. The kidnappers were later arrested.

Law 701 places few limits on the authority of community police, saying only that they need to operate within "the framework of respect for human rights" and "the limits that the current state of law imposes." In practice, the state authorities expected them to act as adjuncts of the municipal police. But Salgado and her men felt increasingly confident in their parallel system of justice. Community police forces were reluctant to turn prisoners over to the government, because officials sometimes allowed suspects to buy their way out of jail. In Olinalá, Salgado's force kept detainees on the top floor of her house, which doubled as her office. "We would just guard them," Gustavo Patrón Coronel, a sixty-six-year-old artisan and community policeman, said. "They were allowed to receive visitors, they were fed—very much like a regular jail." After the community police investigated an offense, the victim was invited to face the accused in Salgado's house, and if the latter confessed reparations were arranged. "Everything had a structure," Salgado said. When an agreement

couldn't be reached, she sent detainees to a *casa de justicia*, which decided whether to impose "reeducation"—a period in which prisoners lived in basic facilities while they attended talks and performed public works, like picking up trash, painting churches, and cleaning schools.

Although community police were legally restricted to small rifles, at times they carried higher-calibre weapons, some of them bought from soldiers selling surplus arms. "I carried a gun that was not permitted," Salgado said—a .38 Super pistol. "If the military had found it, they would have taken it away." She wore a bulletproof vest and practiced point-blank shooting. "We told the government, 'We're not going to war with slingshots. Respect our lives, because our lives mean something, too,'" she went on. "The government wanted us to have sticks, and our enemies can take down helicopters."

By the spring of 2013, Salgado was working to organize community police forces throughout the state. "All the towns within indigenous territory can, within the law, organize themselves," she said. "Every eight days, a town would rise up." In May, the governor's office dispatched a former CRAC-P.C. coördinator to tell Salgado that the government didn't like the way the *casas de justicia* were operating and wanted her to limit her work to Olinalá; Salgado said that he offered her three million pesos to stick to small

us, that they were going to arrest us."

Rather than back away from antagonizing officials, CRAC-P.C. became more aggressive. When a resident called Salgado to complain that municipal policemen were driving recklessly through town, she and her men located the chief of police and two officers, who were drunk and carrying alcohol. They arrested the officers, and confiscated their guns and their truck. They sent a message to the mayor, but heard back that he didn't consider it his problem. (The mayor says that the officers assured him that they weren't drunk; in any case, he says, the governor was responsible for the municipal police.) The next day, representatives from the state government came to collect the policemen, and then returned for their arms and their vehicle.

Around that time, four of the teenage girls who had been involved with the *sicarios* began disappearing for days at a time, and their mothers came to CRAC-P.C. for help finding them. In late May, Salgado received a message that the girls had been found in two nearby towns, with cocaine and marijuana on them; she arranged for community policemen to bring them home. Their mothers told Salgado that she should put them in reeducation, but some members of the community force's internal council were wary, because the girls were underage. Salgado told the mothers that they would need to give written permission. The women provided it, and Salgado took the girls to the town La Concordia to live at a convent and perform community service.

Ten days later, Salgado recalls, one of the mothers returned to her office and said that the mayor had offered her money to accuse Salgado of kidnapping her daughter. González denied the bribe, saying that he was responding to concerns in the community. "These were minors who were detained, and the pressure was on me, because their families were asking me, 'You, as mayor, what are you going to do?'" he said. "I had to go to the state government. It was a serious matter, because unauthorized firearms were being used, and I had doubts about the legality under which they were operating."

The next week, two of the mothers returned to the office and said that they



matters, such as stolen cattle and family disputes. (The governor declined to comment.) She refused, saying that the network of towns helped keep the roads safe. "The government never left us alone," Bernardo Ayala recalled. "It was constant harassment." The security forces intimidated them as well. "We received direct threats from the Navy," Juan Ayala Rendón, a community policeman, said. "They told us that they were going to kill us, that they were going to disappear

wanted to take their daughters home, which Salgado allowed. When she was later arrested, the warrant claimed that she had unlawfully detained the teenagers. "I was part of the recognized state security," she said. "But the mayor was working with the governor to put me in jail."

In August, 2013, two men from Olinalá were murdered near the border with the neighboring town of Cualac. The victims were known as criminals, but they were still members of the community, and their relatives wanted their bodies returned.

The community policemen learned that police in Cualac had taken the bodies to a nearby town, Huamuxtitlán, and went to retrieve them. "We all got together—there were forty or fifty of us in three vehicles," Patrón Coronel recalled. "But the bodies were already gone." The public ministry in Huamuxtitlán told them that the bodies had been sent on to the state capital; all that remained was the victims' truck, riddled with bullet holes, which was being held at a local impound lot. When the community police arrived, they found Armando Patrón Jiménez, the public prosecutor, already there, along with two other men. Salgado says that they had set fire to papers in the truck, and were trying to push a cow that had been recovered from the dead men's vehicle into the bed of another truck. One of the community policemen recognized the branding on the cow; it had been stolen from his family ranch a few days earlier. Salgado confronted the prosecutor and said, "What are you doing?"

Salgado says that Patrón Jiménez had no ownership papers, which people typically carry, because cattle rustling is pervasive. She asked why he was burning evidence, but he didn't respond. "You know what?" Salgado said, gesturing at the three men. "Take them away." Patrón Coronel told me, "I was very nervous arresting Jiménez. But he was claiming something that was not his." As Patrón Jiménez shouted at Salgado's men, calling them brutes, they put the suspects in their truck and drove them to a nearby jail. (Patrón Jiménez denies destroying evidence and stealing the cow; he maintains that the two dead men had recently bought the an-

imal, and that he was collecting it to return to their families. "She was a friend," he said, of Salgado. "Now she is perverse, a psychopath.")

The governor called almost immediately to order Salgado to release Patrón Jiménez. She refused, insisting that he was guilty of attempted theft and tampering with crime-scene evidence. "Nestora was always fearless; she was always running around alone, even though we told her to move with ten or twelve guys," Juan Guevara Ayala, a community policeman, said.

Salgado was due to return to Renton the following weekend, but, before she could leave, military personnel spotted her at a gas pump and arrested her. Several other members of the community police force from Guerrero were also arrested. José Luis Ávila, Salgado's husband, learned of her detention later that day. "When you have family working against organized crime, you expect something to happen," Ávila, who has a buzz cut and a salt-and-pepper mustache, said. "But I thought, Why was she arrested?" Relatives in Mexico scrambled to obtain news of her. "All we knew was that she had been taken by soldiers," Ávila went on. "The government kept hiding information." After a day or two, he called the American Embassy in Mexico and found out that Salgado was in a maximum-security prison in Nayarit, more than six hundred miles from Olinalá.

"We aren't going to live by the law of the jungle," Governor Aguirre said at the time. "They can't go around armed, from one town to the other. They can't make arrests for major crimes. When they detain someone, they have to turn them over directly to the proper authorities. . . . She refused."

At first, Salgado did not even know what the charges against her were. For months, she was kept in a ten-foot-square cell with stark-white walls and a bright light that remained on all night. She ate her meals alone and forced herself to drink the dirty water from the tap. Later, her lawyer secured permission for her to go onto the patio, but she was not allowed to talk to the other inmates. Salgado thinks that the prison authorities were afraid she would organize them. She has lingering pains in

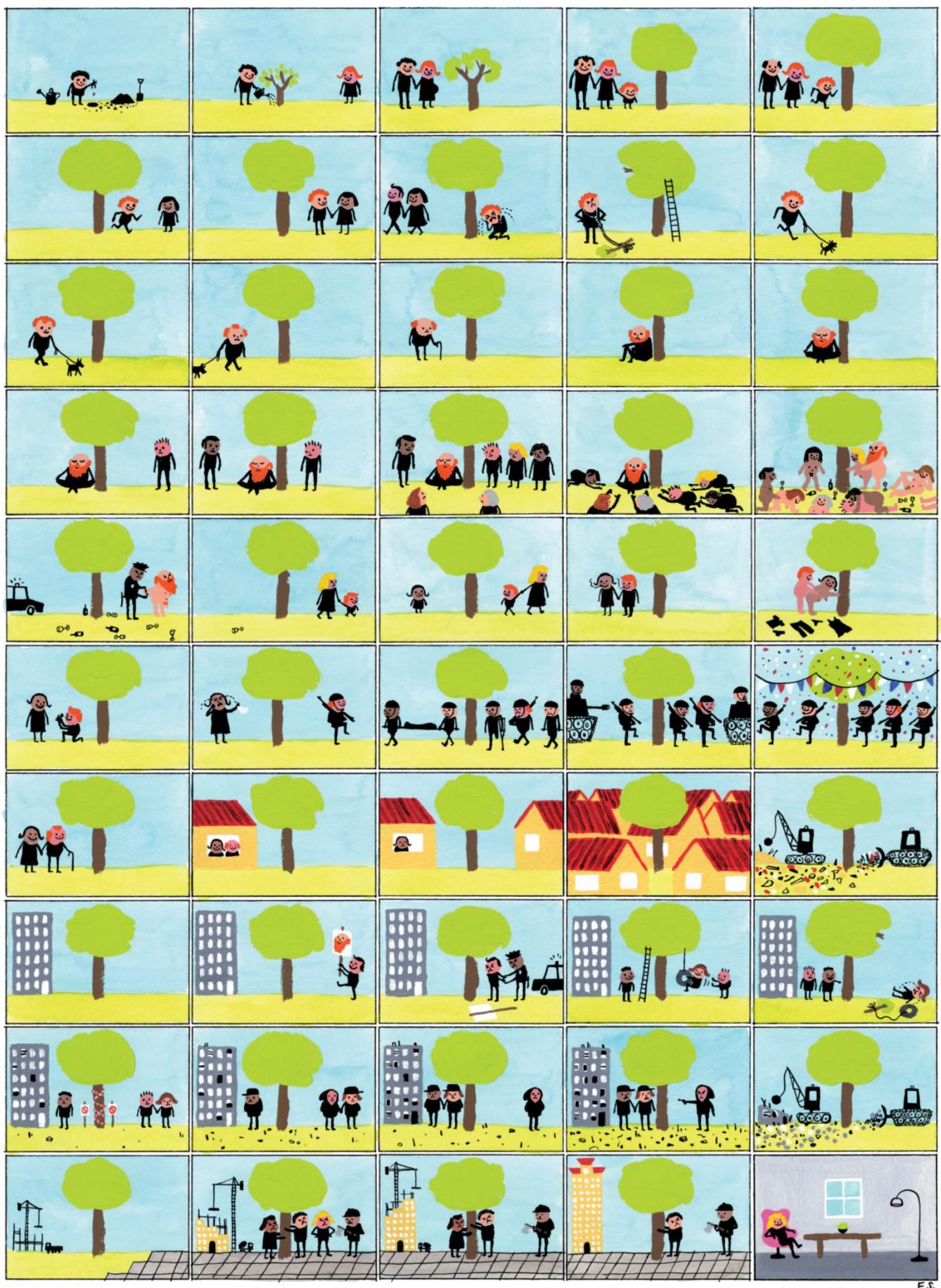
her arms and legs, the result of a car accident, a decade ago, that left her temporarily paralyzed; she relies on medication to manage her discomfort, but she was unable to get it. "I suffered a lot in prison because of the pain," she said.

In May, 2015, Salgado went on a hunger strike, restricting herself to water, lime juice, and honey. After thirty-four days, authorities consented to move her to the medical wing of a low-security facility in Mexico City, and she began to eat again. "I survived, thank God," Salgado said. Still, Ávila was unable to visit her. "We had to make hard choices, because of the money," he said. "I am the one who had to keep working. It was easier for my daughters to go and visit Nestora." Ávila travelled instead to Washington, D.C., to meet with congressional staff members, asking them to push the State Department to intervene in Salgado's case. In those meetings, Ávila tried to convey his wife's commitment to her home town. "So many people from Mexico, they come to the United States and they truly forget where they come from," he said. "Thank God Nestora is not one of them. She's a very strong woman."

The charges against Salgado eventually included organized crime, vehicle theft, homicide, attempted homicide, and fifty-three counts of kidnapping. Roberto Álvarez, a Guerrero state-security spokesman, suggested to me that much of CRAC-P.C.'s work was illegal. "They were not arrests—they were detainments. And, in the reeducation process, the liberty of the detainees was taken away," he said. "The community police would ask the families of the detainees for money in exchange for their freedom." Mexico's National Human Rights Commission found that the community policemen in Olinalá had subjected twelve prisoners, including four minors, to physical abuse and inhumane treatment, denying their "right to personal integrity, dignified treatment, sexual freedom, and the right to a life without violence."

Salgado's first two lawyers, one state-appointed and the other from the indigenous-rights organization Tlachinollan, had difficulty even accessing files related to the government charges. Nine months passed before a lawyer could visit her. "He was not

COMIC STRIP BY EDWARD STEED



allowed to bring a single piece of paper, and he was allowed to speak with Nestora for only forty-five minutes,” Ávila said. “How can you defend somebody like that?” Ávila recruited Thomas Antkowiak, the director of the International Human Rights Clinic, at the Seattle University School of Law. “Her rights had been violated,” Antkowiak told me. “This persecution against social activists, against human-rights defenders, against indigenous leaders, is happening all over Mexico.” In late 2013, he filed a petition to the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, seeking to establish that Salgado’s imprisonment was illegal; Mexico’s National Human Rights Commission declared that it had found violations of Salgado’s right to due process. In the meantime, Salgado’s fame began to grow. “Nestora became a symbol of social rage,” Abel Barrera, the director of Tlachinollan, said. “She had to expose the relationships between the authorities and organized crime, and, for the state authorities of Guerrero, she went too far. For the people who were defenseless against organized crime, she did what she had to do.”

Salgado’s defenders portrayed her case as a matter of political persecution. “She touched on the interests of the governor and the mayor,” Amanda Rivero, one of her Mexican lawyers, said. “The only way to stop the community police was to arrest Nestora.” The state alleged that Salgado forced business owners to help pay for her group’s operations; she says that she held fund-raisers but never coerced anyone. Her colleagues on the force said that they had not asked for ransoms; instead, they collected retribution fines, which were paid to victims. One of the people Salgado allegedly kidnapped and tortured, a man named Francisco Flores Jiménez, told the Mexican press that his rights were respected during the reeducation process, and that his family was never asked for a ransom. He also claimed that the young women who accused Salgado of kidnapping were treated well, and were there with the consent of their parents; Salgado’s attorneys entered the signed permission slips

into evidence. None of the victims named by the prosecution showed up in court.

In March, 2016, after Salgado had been incarcerated for two years and eight months, a state court cleared her of all charges. Immediately, the attorney general of Guerrero issued three new warrants, with further counts of murder, kidnapping, robbery, and organized crime. Soon afterward, I met Salgado in an empty office at Penal de Tepetpan, a women’s prison on the southern edge of Mexico City. Salgado had a cold, and she huddled into a brown leather couch in a neon-green sweatshirt and black leggings. She feared what the government would do to her, but she was optimistic: she felt that she would soon be home with her family, in Renton. “For sure, I will leave here soon,” she said.

Salgado’s daughter Grisel calls her “strong-headed,” pointing out that, when her children expressed concern over her work, she replied that she would rather die fighting than live on her knees. But things had changed. She stayed in the clinic as much as she could; she was nervous about encountering other prisoners. Misinformation about her was so widespread that some inmates thought she was implicated in the disappearance of forty-three teacher trainees in Ayotzinapa—an incident that had occurred while she was imprisoned. Women had called her profane names in the corridors.

side,” she said. It all felt like a plot to drive her insane. She wrote in a journal, and tried to avoid the news.

Three days later, she learned that the court had found her innocent: again, the victims named in the arrest orders hadn’t showed up. Salgado walked out of the prison in an olive-green polo shirt with the CRAC-P.C. logo and a matching baseball cap. Outside, amid a throng of supporters, community policemen from around Guerrero had assembled in two rows extending to the street. In bright sunshine, the men saluted. “They all recognized me as their commander,” she said. “It was beautiful.” One of them brought out handcuffs, which she put on and then dramatically pulled apart, as the crowd cheered. “I am free, thanks to the townspeople,” she told them. “Thank you for your struggle. Thank you for believing in me.”

Salgado heard little news from Olinalá in prison, but she knew that the movement she had helped to revive was troubled. Across Mexico, vigilante militias, called *autodefensas*, had formed, and were operating outside the law. Some were opportunists, taking advantage of the chaos to carry out illegal activities; some had been infiltrated by the cartels, which used them to expand operational bases and to attack rivals. “Once the vigilante groups established control, they began to criminalize themselves,” Steven Dudley, a co-director of Insight Crime, which investigates organized crime in the Americas, said. “People started to realize many of them weren’t what they were saying they were.” As violence increased throughout the region, popular support waned. The government saw an opportunity for political advantage. It began working to disarm some of the *autodefensas*, while integrating others into a “rural defense corps” and hailing their work as an example of effective local justice.

Around Olinalá, some of the corrupt *autodefensas* falsely claimed to work with CRAC-P.C.—a dangerous situation, because the community police could be caught between the government and the cartels. “We’ve had threats in our own homes, phone calls, and we’ve heard comments on the streets,” Calixto Reyes, the community policeman,



“It’s dangerous for me to be in the general population, because people look at me like the enemy,” she said.

In her cell were piles of books from supporters: a biography of the indigenous guerrilla Lucio Cabañas (“My idol”), a history of Catholic nuns, a book on the Zapatistas, Paulo Coelho’s “The Alchemist.” But she found it hard to concentrate on reading. “Your mind is always thinking about why they think you’re a criminal, why they put you in-

said. They patrolled only occasionally, and believed that the *sicarios* had moved back into town. "Some people are still trying to do something, but everyone is afraid now, and they don't have any support from the government," Anabel Hernández said. "It is not enough to fight them alone."

There were people in Olinalá who felt that Salgado had brought trouble to the town. "Just because no one follows the law doesn't mean you can make up your own law," Bernardo Rosendo, who runs the art school, said. He was friendly with both Salgado and Patrón Jiménez, the prosecutor she had arrested. "She should have taken Patrón Jiménez to the authorities with proof. He was being punished under a law we had never heard of. How can you have a state within a state?" For some, it rankled that Salgado was free while several of her colleagues were still imprisoned. Among them was Gonzalo Molina, a CRAC-P.C. leader in the town of Tixtla, who was arrested after he protested Salgado's detention by leading his force to disarm the Tixtla municipal police. Like others, he blames Salgado for not doing more to negotiate his freedom.

Not long after Salgado was released, I met her at her family's apartment in Renton, a plain, comfortable place in a quiet neighborhood. The walls of the living room were filled with photos and illustrations of Salgado, sent by well-wishers; her children and grandchildren wandered in and out. Sitting on the couch, Salgado said that her intentions had been good: "We tried to bring peace to the town, to care for and protect everyone. We didn't want to start a war." (Rosendo put it another way: "No matter what happens, she has the conviction that she did what she had to do, and that it was the right thing to do.") Salgado went on, "I did so many good things in my town. A lot of people liked me. The government accused me of so many things I didn't do. Now they have accepted that I was within the law, but they took almost three years."

Eusebio González Rodríguez, the mayor of Olinalá, told me that, while he respected Salgado, he found the actions of the community police dubious. "I always told the government of Guerrero that if it was authorizing self-



"I will now play a familiar seasonal piece."

defense groups then it would have to control them. It's a situation that spiraled out of the state government's control," he said. "I didn't agree with the fact that there was no limit to the community police's function."

The state still maintains that Salgado is a criminal; the Guerrero prosecutor has appealed her release. Álvarez, the state-security spokesman, said, "Even though she acted within Law 701, she went against the constitutional precepts that protect human rights." Wary of the power that the law gives indigenous civilian forces, politicians have proposed that it be revised to regulate their work.

Salgado argues that crime fell dramatically while the community police were working in Olinalá and the surrounding towns. "There was nowhere for criminals to hide," she said. "Yes, they can be selling drugs, but not in plain sight, like they used to." State authorities also believe that the town's security improved; they say that reports of crime actually increased, but suggest that it was because people felt more comfortable alerting authorities. And recent events have lent credence to Salgado's charges of government malfeasance. In October, 2014, Aguirre, the governor, resigned amid outrage over

the disappearance of the teacher trainees in Ayotzinapa. In his last days in office, he claimed that many of the municipal police forces were working with the cartels; the federal government has since disbanded a third of Guerrero's municipal police departments. Rogelio Ortega, the interim governor of Guerrero, who replaced Aguirre, called the imprisonment of community policemen "a case of political prisoners."

Salgado talks at times about going back to police work, although if she returns, she risks being detained by the government or killed by revenge-seekers. Ávila said he would support her. "We have many abandoned little towns in Guerrero, because people have been forced to leave," he said. "We need to keep fighting." He considered for a moment. "Of course, the day she decides to go back to Olinalá I'm going to worry a lot."

In her living room, Salgado told me that she still fervently believed in the need for community police. "It's the only choice people have in Guerrero," she said. "They know that we can be in charge of our own security." She shrugged. The cracks in her assurance were starting to show. "If they don't want to do it, that's on them," she said. "But it's the only option that we have." ♦

THE LOST WILL
TROOP MACKIN



We had a dry spell in Logar. It was December and the weather was dog shit, so a degree of slowness was expected. But this went beyond slowness. It was like peace had broken out and nobody'd told us. Nights we'd meet in the ops hut for the mission brief. We'd tune the flat screens to the drones—over Ghazni, Orgun, and Khost—only to find all three orbiting within the same cloud. We'd listen to static on the UHF. We'd stare at phones that never rang. We could have left it all behind, walked off the outpost into the desert, never to be seen again. We could have created the Legend of the Lost Troop. Instead, we chose some place where we imagined the enemy might be hiding—a compound on the banks of the Helmand River, a brake shop in downtown Marjah, a cave high in the Hindu Kush mountains—and we ventured out there, hoping for a fight.

I thought of the Japanese soldiers on Iwo Jima, who, when their island fell to the Americans, didn't know that it had fallen. Who, not long after, didn't hear that A-bombs had destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and that their emperor had admitted defeat. Those soldiers hid in tunnels, on Iwo, for weeks after the war was over. For months, even. For them, the fight continued in those dark and narrow spaces, until they ran out of food. Until they drank the last of their water. Until, absent the means and/or the will to take their own lives, they climbed out of ratholes into the sun, to wander warm fields of lava rock in surrender.

I wondered if, one night, we'd drop out of the starry sky in our blacked-out helicopters and land near a walled compound in the desert. We'd run toward that compound with the rotor wash at our backs, through the dust cloud that had been kicked up by our arrival and out the other side. Through a crooked archway in the compound's outer wall, we'd enter the courtyard. And there, among the fig trees and goats, we'd find an American tourist with a camera slung around his neck. Having served his time in Afghanistan, our fellow-American had gone home, fallen in love, got married, and had the two bow-haired daughters now hiding behind his legs. Maybe he'd wanted his girls to see how

brightly the stars shone in the desert. Maybe he'd wanted to share with them all the strange places the Army had sent him, way back when. I imagined that he'd look over at us and then say, with understanding and remorse, "Dudes, war's over."

But, as far as we knew, it wasn't. Therefore, we met in the ops hut every night at eight. In the absence of new intelligence, we'd review old intelligence. We'd double-check dead ends and re-examine cold cases. Finding nothing mission-worthy, Hal, our troop chief, would open the floor to suggestions. It'd be quiet for a while, as everyone thought.

"Come on," Hal would say.

He'd be standing in the middle of the room. We'd be sitting on plywood tables, balancing on busted swivel chairs, leaning against the thin walls. The drones, orbiting inside moonlit cumulonimbi, would beam their emerald visions back to us. Lightning would strike twenty miles away and the UHF would crackle. I, for one, didn't have any good ideas to offer.

One night, Digger spoke up: "Who remembers that graveyard decorated like a used-car lot, out in Khost?"

I raised my hand, along with a few others.

"I think we might need to go back there," Digger said.

The graveyard in question was on the northern rim of a dusty crater. We'd patrolled just to the south of it, a few weeks prior, on an easterly course. The "used-car lot" decorations were plastic strands of multicolored pennants. One end of each strand was tied high in an ash tree that stood at the center of the graveyard. The other ends were staked into the hard ground outside the circle of graves. The graves themselves were piles of stone, shaped like overturned rowboats. I couldn't recall the name of our mission that night, its task and purpose, its outcome. But that graveyard stuck with me. I remembered the pennants snapping in the wind, dust parting around the graves like a current.

Digger, who'd been closer to the graveyard than I was, thought that the graves had looked suspicious. He thought they resembled old cellar doors—the type, I imagined, you'd find outside a farmhouse in Nebraska and

run to from darkened fields as a tornado was bearing down. Digger postulated that at least one of those graves was made of fake stones.

"Styrofoam balls," he suggested to us in the ops hut, "painted to look like stones, then glued to a plywood sheet." Digger thought that, if we sneaked into that graveyard and pulled open that hypothetical door, we might discover a Taliban nerve center, a bomb factory, or an armory. Digger had no idea what could be down there, but he'd got a weird feeling walking past that graveyard that night.

"Good enough for me," Hal said. "Let's make it happen."

We rode our helicopters—two dual-rotor, minigun-equipped MH-47s—northeast from Logar. We sat in mesh jump seats, across from one another, roughly ten per side. The MH-47, at altitude, stabilized like a swaying hammock. Lube, dripping from the crankcase, smelled like bong water. Beyond the open ramp at the back end of the tubular cargo bay, we watched the night pass by like the scenery in an old movie.

The 47s dropped us off in a dry riverbed, three miles east of the graveyard. We patrolled westward under heavy clouds. The clouds carried a powerful static charge, while the earth remained neutral. Sparkling dust hovered, and through night vision I saw my brothers, walking with me, as concentrations of this dust. All I heard, as we walked, was my own breathing.

We connected with the crater's easternmost point, then walked in a counterclockwise direction along its rim until we reached the graveyard. We found the pennants torn and tattered, the ash tree diseased, the graves crooked. None of the stones were made of Styrofoam. Not one of the graves was an elaborately disguised entrance to a nefarious subterranean lair. Though, upon closer inspection, I noticed that the dust that I'd remembered parting around the graves, like a current, actually funnelled into the spaces between the stones. In fact, it seemed to be getting sucked into those spaces, as though there were some sort of void below the graves, which lent a measure of credence to Digger's theory.

From the top of one grave, I selected a smooth, round stone, about the size

of a shot-put ball, and I heaved it into the crater.

Joe, our interpreter, was right there to scold me. "I would expect such disrespectful behavior from the Taliban," he said, "but not from you."

Joe was Afghani. His real name was Jamaluddein. After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, in 1980, he'd escaped to the U.K. with his parents; he was twelve years old at the time. Now, as a middle-aged man, he'd returned to help save his country from ruin. He wore armor on missions, but he carried no weapons. His interpretations of our enemy's muttered words were always clear and precise. He had a bad habit of walking two steps behind me on patrol and closing that distance whenever we made contact with the enemy. Thus, I'd seen conflagrations reflected in the smudged lenses of Joe's glasses. I'd heard him whisper prayers between sporadic detonations. His voice, with its derived British accent and perpetual tone of disappointment, exactly matched that of my beleaguered conscience.

So I jumped into the crater after the stone. I found it at the end of a long, concave groove in the dust. Turning toward the crater's rim, I saw my boot prints in the dust, descending the slope, each as perfect as Neil Armstrong's first step on the moon. On my way back up to the graveyard, I was careful not to disturb those tracks, or the flawless groove that had been carved by the stone. I wanted

these things to remain, I suppose, in the event that an asteroid should slam into the planet, sloughing away the atmosphere, boiling the seas, and instantly ending life on earth. Our troop—asphyxiated, desiccated, frozen—would lie scattered about the graveyard, preserved in the seamless void of space forever, or at least until other intelligent beings came along and discovered us. Perhaps because those beings existed as thin bars of blue light, incapable of offensive or defensive action, they'd puzzle over our armor, our rifles, our grenades. They'd wonder, especially, why we'd worn such things to a graveyard. There would be no mystery, however, regarding the boot prints in the crater, since they'd know, from the boots still on my feet, that I was the one who'd left them. Furthermore, they'd deduce, from the groove, that I'd descended into the crater after a stone. Only one particular stone could've cut that groove. And they might find it, among a thousand others, right where I'd returned it, atop the grave, just moments before the asteroid struck the earth. But none of that would explain why the stone had been in the crater in the first place. "Did one of them throw it?" the curious bars of blue light might ask themselves.

The next night, in the ops hut, we still had nothing, intelligence-wise. Hal asked for suggestions again. Another hush fell on the troop as we sat thinking. Hal stood in the middle of

the room. On the one hand, he loved the war. On the other, he loved us. Green clouds floated by on the flat screens. Fuzzy static emanated from the UHF. Archie, who, a month prior, had replaced Yaz, whom we'd lost in a soybean field in Kunduz, stood up from the floor. He pulled a tin of breath mints from his shirt pocket.

"I probably should've told you guys about this sooner," he said.

The tin, Archie explained, had arrived in the mail about two weeks ago. It was sent by Yaz's widow, Connie.

I knew Connie from troop barbecues, Halloween parties, and the like. I remembered her, once, dressed as a cowgirl, dancing in Digger's kitchen. She'd fired cap guns at the ceiling, which made the fluorescent light hazy. Yaz, standing by the bean dip, had watched his wife holster her toy pistols. He'd smiled as she spun an invisible lasso over her head. Roping Yaz, Connie had pulled him in, hand over hand, while he feigned resistance. His breath must have smelled like corn chips. Hers, I imagined, smelled just fine.

The tin that Archie showed us in the ops hut contained a handful of Yaz's ashes.

"Connie asked me to find a good place to spread these around," he said. "And I tried, but no place seems good enough. You guys got any ideas?"

Digger suggested that we climb to the top of Mt. Noshaq, the tallest peak in Afghanistan, and release Yaz's ashes into a spindrift. Tull proposed a verdant meadow, north of J-bad, where he and Yaz once went AWOL to hunt elk. I made an argument for the tiny garden of purple flowers that had grown behind Yaz's tent, where he used to spit out his toothpaste. Hal, however, wanted to return to Kunduz.

Kunduz was four hundred kilometres north of Logar. The 47s flew higher than usual to get there. Frost formed on the windows. The engines whined, the rotors slipped, and the helicopter wobbled as if we were balancing at the end of a very long pole. I almost hoped that something would go wrong. Nothing catastrophic, of course. Just a low-oil light or the engine temperature creeping into the red. Something that would force us to land short and reconsider. I didn't want to see that field



"That's just my agent—pay him no heed."

in Kunduz again, with its dark puddles reflecting the stars, its soybean shoots glowing white. I didn't want to smell its fertilized tang. But nothing went wrong. We touched down on the western edge of the field, right where we'd touched down before, opposite the ditch that had given me so much trouble.

We'd first landed in that field on a clear night in late September. Jupiter had been the focal point of a crescent moon. The ditch where we knew the enemy was hiding was east of our position and outside small-arms range. I thought, at the time, that there were no more than half a dozen Taliban in that ditch. I'd based that estimate, partly, on how the shrubbery had quaked when they scurried around behind it. I'd considered, as well, the frequency of AK fire, which, from that safe distance, sounded like movie projectors running out of film. For six Taliban wallowing in a ditch, I figured that a pair of thousand-pound bombs, with delayed fuses, ought to do the trick.

A combination of ash and sissoo grew in that ditch. The aforementioned shrubbery tangled the spaces between the trees. I brought two jets in from the north, in trail formation. The first bomb ignited every tree and shrub. The second launched burning trees like moon shots. I turned to my right, expecting to find Hal. Instead, I found Joe—hands in pockets, armored belly protruding. The burning trench was reflected in his dirty glasses.

Hal appeared from behind me. "You done?" he asked.

What remained of the shrubbery was still, and the AKs had fallen silent.

"Yes," I said.

We spread ourselves the length of the field for mop-up, then walked toward the ditch. Stars jiggled in the puddles. The mud smelled like turpentine. The soybean shoots resembled those albino creatures which live in the Atlantic's deepest trench. Hal walked next to me. Yaz walked five men past Hal. The machine gun that Yaz carried weighed as much as the front axle of a Sentra. Its rounds were the size of soup cans. As we stepped into small-arms range, Tull whistled like a bird, in warning. Seconds later, a Taliban popped out of the ditch. The barrel of



"I finally got myself organized and unsubscribed from all those e-mails."

his AK, it seemed, was bent. The majority of his volley curved skyward.

After Yaz fell, more Taliban came out of the ditch. Dozens, in fact. We turned them around quickly, then we fell back, dragging Yaz. Joe was right behind me, breathing hard. Hal called for CASEVAC, even though Yaz was already dead. Maybe he didn't want us to think that he wouldn't have done the same thing for us. Maybe he wanted us to believe that, as far as he was concerned, none of us would ever be dead. Or maybe he just wanted us to fight and not worry about it.

I called out to every jet in the sky. The first wave arrived just as the CASEVAC was lifting off with Yaz. I brought the jets down in a clockwise spiral. I had them toss everything they had—five-hundred-, thousand-, two-thousand-pounders—into the ditch. A second wave of jets joined the first, then a third, and a fourth. I bombed the ditch until the mud puddles in the soybean field steamed, until the soybean shoots themselves melted, until it seemed as though I were standing in the ditch and bombing the field.

The soybean field looked no differ-

ent in December. The ditch was unchanged, too, although the trees and the shrubbery were gone. I stood in the same place that I'd stood while controlling the jets, back in September. The rest of the troop walked into the field behind Archie. They formed a circle around him at the spot where Yaz was killed. Archie took a knee and pulled the tin from his pocket. He opened the lid, and tapped the side of the tin with his finger. I didn't want to see the ashes fall, so I turned around, and there was Joe.

"It wasn't your fault," he said.

Time passed mysteriously in the clouds. Unlike when the drones could see the ground, and a haystack or a cow would spin around the flat screen like the second hand of a clock, we had no idea how long we sat watching the spinning clouds. Meanwhile, the UHF clicked like something radioactive. This was the night after Kunduz, or the night after our return to Kunduz. We still had no intelligence. Sitting cross-legged on the floor, I tried peace on for size. I felt proud that I'd fought, but also glad that the war was

over. Hal asked for suggestions, and Joe raised his hand.

Hal said, "You don't need to raise your hand."

"I had a teacher, in primary school, who used to hit my knuckles with a ruler," Joe said. "I would like to pay him a visit."

"I had a teacher like that," Hal said.

"Me, too," Digger said. The rest of us nodded, remembering.

Joe had last seen his teacher at his old school, in the town of Ghawas, in Wardak Province, in 1979. Joe had been eleven at the time. The teacher had seemed ancient to Joe back then. In hindsight, however, Joe figured that his teacher had been no older than thirty. Which meant that there was a good chance, in 2008, that the teacher was still alive. He'd lived in a cabin near a forest, Joe remembered, though he couldn't say exactly where. Joe assured us, though, that he could find the cabin if we could find his old school.

We'd never had reason to patrol through Ghawas, therefore we had no maps of tactical value. Digger, who always planned our routes, turned to the computer that contained the satellite imagery. Our imagery of Ghawas was both stale and irregular. Half of it dated from the winter of 2003, the other half from the spring of 2005. The school, Joe said, was a stone building on the eastern bank of a river. It was situated just north of a bend in the river that was shaped like a question mark.

Hal, Joe, and I stood behind Digger as he searched Ghawas for a river with a question mark. He found it in an image that had been captured by a satellite on a May afternoon in 2005. Digger zoomed in, and we saw the river's banks overflowing with snowmelt. Sunlight sparkled in the eddies. Reeds grew from stagnant pools. Digger scrolled northbound in search of the school. The imagery changed to winter. The river turned as dark as slate. A hundred yards north of the question mark, on the river's eastern bank, we discovered a stone foundation poking through the ice. Joe thought it was too small to be the ruins of his old school, but then he realized that it had to be.

From the school's foundation, Joe guided Digger along the path that the teacher had walked on his way home.

UNLIMITED SOUP AND SALAD

A little goes a long way when it comes to reality
and the question of whether we can know it directly

rather than just through the gauze of our experience
(not that it makes that much of a difference

when you're right in the thick of it, as when performing
a bank heist, or competitive mummery among

family and friends, in which case your trust that
the world is as it appears is more or less inviolate

if unself-reflecting, the way a honeybee trusts nectar
inhabits the petunia, or that her venom sac or

gland or whatever it is will continue pumping its venom
long after the stinger anchors in the forearm

of the intruder—often merely an innocent passerby—
having ripped off the hindmost furze of her body

evisceratingly, which is to say, along with much of her
abdomen and digestive tract, plus whatever

else happens to come with, a kind of surrendering
as means of attack, which reads tragically wrong-

It ran north along the river for a snowy mile, then the imagery switched back to spring, and the path cut east into a warm field of grass. Joe, the student, used to follow the teacher, at a safe distance, across this field. Crouching in the tall grass, he would fantasize about leaping out and knocking his teacher down. More than revenge, though, he'd wanted to study his teacher. He kept his eyes on his desk in class all day, hoping to stay out of trouble. The walk home was his chance to actually see the man. Joe described him as tall and prematurely gaunt. He said that the teacher had worn a dark robe for the walk home in winter. In spring, he remembered butterflies rising in the teacher's wake when he crossed the field.

"Keep going," Joe said to Digger.

Digger continued scrolling across the sunlit field to a snow-covered forest. The image of the forest had been captured on a January evening in 2003. Shadows cast by the tall bare trees looked like the minute hands of a clock, all showing ten past the hour. Half-

way through the forest, the satellite imagery ran out. The computer screen turned black.

"He lives on the other side of that forest," Joe said.

"How far?" Hal asked.

Joe touched a spot on the dark computer screen. "Here."

The four of us looked at that spot.

"I'm thinking callout," Digger said to Hal.

Callouts were best in unknown situations. Like, we didn't know whether or not the cabin existed or how big it might be. We didn't know who, other than the teacher, might be hiding inside, or how prepared he or they might be to mount a defense. To mitigate the risks posed by these unknowns, a callout would proceed in stages. The 47s would drop us off outside the cabin, beyond small-arms range. If there was fire from the cabin, we'd keep our distance, and I'd call in an air strike. If not, we'd run toward the cabin and flank it on two sides. Digger would throw a flash-bang through a windowpane.

headed in retrospect, although it does lend a vividness to the question of to whom the bee's business end belongs now—the one from whose person it juts or her whose torn foreparts lie on the granite pavement lifelessly from having implanted it there). But when appetizers alone can fill you up, why bother gambling on the main course, it will only distract you from what you have come to rely on as fact relies on its verifiability—in silence and so totally you could almost weep for it, the way they do in Italy at the end of an opera, an era, or even the idea of anything familiar dying: a tradition; a truth; an olive tree fallen to fungus whose narrow leaves made with wind a conversation we had found to be rejuvenative to listen to, whose fruit and oil expressed therefrom we couldn't get enough of, whose shade could reform, and whose earliest ancestor Athena's constant hand did unveil in Attica as the greatest gift to humankind.

—Timothy Donnelly

Light would tear through the cabin. Bangs would echo in the night. Once all was dark and quiet again, Joe would read a statement into a bullhorn, informing the startled occupants that we were coalition forces, there to protect the rights of the Afghan people.

"Yeah," Hal said. "Let's go with a call-out. But no flash-bang. And, Joe, I want you to say something different tonight."

Hal chose a line from the end of a song by Pink Floyd called "Another Brick in the Wall, Part Two." The song opens with the lyric "We don't need no education," and goes on to denounce teachers as repressive and cynical. The song ends in a riot. As the students tear down their school, a teacher's voice can be heard above the din, shouting lessons such as "Wrong! Do it again!" and "Stand still, laddie!" Hal chose one such lesson for Joe to shout through the bullhorn. Joe practiced it on the helicopter ride to Ghawas.

"If you don't eat your meat, you can't have any pudding."

"No," Hal interrupted. "You need more fear in your voice."

Joe and Digger sat on one side of the helicopter, Hal and I on the other. Night parted around us and mended in our wake.

"I don't think 'fear' is the right word," I said.

"It's Joe's teacher," Digger said. "Let him say it however he wants."

"The teacher in the song is staring down an angry mob," Hal said. "He can't just say the words."

"I think my teacher is more crazy than afraid," Joe said.

"All right," Hal said. "Let's hear it again."

The windows in the MH-47 were made of Plexiglas. They were shaped like salad bowls. When you looked through them, things on the outside appeared either close and blurry or far away and blurry. There was a sweet spot in the lens, however, where something would appear perfectly magnified. Thus, as we banked over the highway that ran between Kandahar and Kabul,

I saw a bleary-eyed trucker behind the wheel. As we floated over the mountains into Wardak, I saw a waterfall cascading into a crystalline lake. And when we turned above the ruins of Joe's old school I imagined the building as it once was—stone walls, slate roof, and leaded-glass windows.

We sped over the field of tall grass and over the woods at treetop level. The rotors beat louder as we pulled into a hover. We touched down on either side of the teacher's cabin without taking fire. The 47s lifted off behind us and rotor wash shoved us through clumps of dry grass and over warm boulders. Archie, carrying Yaz's massive gun, ran ahead of me, while Joe, with his red bullhorn, ran behind. The teacher's cabin was the size of a one-car garage. A curl of smoke rose from its stone chimney. A neatly stacked woodpile stood behind it. Empty rabbit traps leaned against a wall. We formed lines on either side of the cabin. Taking my position, I saw myself reflected in a dark-blue window.

We stood, still and quiet, outside the teacher's cabin, as the 47s descended into a valley. Soon enough, their noise became a memory, then that memory faded. A cold wind rustled the grass. Our breath rose in thick clouds. I imagined the teacher lying awake in bed, wondering if he'd only dreamed of helicopters landing outside.

Hal nodded at Joe, and Joe raised the bullhorn.

"If you don't eat your meat, you can't have any pudding! *How* can you have any pudding if you don't eat your meat?"

Joe's message echoed. A match flared inside the cabin, turning the windows orange. The teacher emerged in a nightcap, carrying a lit candle on a brass candlestick. He squinted at us standing in the darkness.

Digger slapped away the candle. Hal stepped on the flame. I zip-tied the old man's wrists, and Joe forced him to kneel on the hard ground.

"What have I done?" he asked, like all the others.

We didn't answer. Instead, we left him, knees bleeding, to think about it, while we pushed into his cabin to see how he lived. ♦

THE CRITICS



POP MUSIC

CROSSROADS

The confusions of Taylor Swift.

BY CARRIE BATTAN

There are many inadvertently comic moments on Taylor Swift's new album, "Reputation," but none are as jarring as an admission made on "So It Goes." In the first flush of romance, she's making a confession to her love interest. "I'm so chill," she sings. "But you make me jealous." This is Swift—the unyielding perfectionist, the professionally heartbroken woman who has built a career by enacting lyrical revenge on her lovers—characterizing herself as "chill." She has grown fond of this word, which also appears on "Delicate." She asks her suitor, "Is it chill that you're in my head?" If there is a wink in either of those lines, it's imperceptible.

This air of newfound jadedness is one of the many ways in which Swift broadcasts her long-overdue loss of innocence on "Reputation," an album that captures the singer during the most turbulent but commercially successful period of her career. Swift went into hibernation last year: the budding country star had become an international pop icon before suddenly finding herself at the wrong end of a long-running public feud with Kanye West. Now she emerges as a victim turned antihero. On "Reputation," she is embittered and vindictive toward a public that she feels has abandoned her, but she's also liberated from the imaginary harness of perfection. "They took the crown, but it's all right," she sings with a well-rehearsed shrug on "Call It What You Want."

These days, you can find Swift, a

baby hedonist, meeting men in dark bars, buying a dress just so her lover can "take it off," dropping a curse word—the first in her career stronger than "damn" or "hell"—and channelling a "Criminal"-era Fiona Apple. "They say I did something bad, but why's it feel so good?" she sings breathily, over a bleating electronic beat, on "I Did Something Bad." Her gaze, once trained on the failures and the betrayals of those in her personal orbit, has turned inward, and she revels in a state of sin—sometimes clumsily, sometimes deftly. (Thankfully, the album doesn't contain much of the cartoonish revenge-drama of its lead single, "Look What You Made Me Do," in which she says that the "old Taylor can't come to the phone right now. Why? Oh, 'cause she's dead.") "It's no surprise I turned you in/'Cause us traitors never win," she sings, eager to implicate herself, on "Getaway Car," a song about leaving one man for another. Of course, she doesn't surrender fully to her disgraced status, and she can't help but let self-pity seep in. "They're burning all the witches, even if you aren't one," she sings, on "I Did Something Bad," making a thinly veiled reference to political melodrama.

Swift, once a master of petty comeuppance, has typically used her music as a vessel for romantic anguish, in which she could connect with the public imagination by detailing her tortured relationships with unnamed men. Her songs provided personal refuge, and she was far more loyal to her listeners than to her lovers. The ta-

bles have turned: on "Reputation," the lovers are the ones offering Swift a way out. At several points on the album, she focusses on a burgeoning romance that's enabled her to tune out the scornful noise of the past two years. The rest of the world falls away when she is with the new man, who doesn't bother reading the tabloids to see what people are saying about her. "My reputation's never been worse, so you must like me for me," she whispers, on "Delicate." She has found relief in an unexpected place. But anxiety lurks beneath this escape, and you get the sense that she's looking over her shoulder at every moment.

The current landscape of pop is dominated by complicated and moody young women such as Halsey, Lorde, and Lana Del Rey, who wear their imperfections proudly and allow darkness to surface in their music. Wholesomeness has gone out of fashion, and Swift's abrupt moment of maturation finds her playing catch-up. In her bid for self-defamation, is she confessing that she is flawed, like everyone else, or simply trying to fit in? Is she reclaiming the narrative, or acceding to it? "Reputation" raises these questions, but it doesn't bother answering them.

Swift has always been lauded for the emotional precision of her words and the nuance of her melodies. Even when the sentiment and the tone were too precious or wounded, there was still room to appreciate the craft of her lines. "Loving him is like driving a new Maserati down a dead-end



On previous albums, Swift was far more loyal to her listeners than to her lovers. On "Reputation," the tables have turned.

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Birgit Schössow, March 9, 2015

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street," she sang on the title track of "Red," from 2012, an album that boldly straddled the pop-country divide. Part singer, part diarist, Swift can switch effortlessly between swelling pop choruses and intricate, conversational verses filled with wry and revealing asides that point to the shrewd tactician beneath the veil of the wholesome country starlet.

But, as Swift has grown into her pop stardom, she has abandoned much of the sharpness and specificity of her expression. On both her previous album, "1989," from 2014, and "Reputation," she moves away from her internal monologue, grappling instead with the desires and the anxieties of some imagined audience. This tendency has produced flashes of cynicism and condescension toward her listeners which were formerly never present in Swift's world. "Don't Blame Me" feels like a focus-grouped scrapbook of haphazard images concerning betrayal and lust. "I'm insane but I'm your baby/Echoes of your name inside my mind/Halo, hiding my obsession/I once was poison ivy, but now I'm your daisy," she sings. It is one of the most emotionally incoherent songs of her career. If she wants to escape the image imposed on her by the public, camouflaging herself in muddled pop cliché is certainly one strategy.

This kind of thing would make "Reputation" feel generic and disembodied if its sound were not so skillfully executed. Swift has not abandoned her ambition, or her perfectionism. In the era of streaming singles, she is the rare young star who still worships at the altar of the album, an old-fashioned instinct that serves her surprisingly well. She is the most consistent singer and songwriter of her generation, and "Reputation" is impressively short on filler. Every chorus is huge and memorable, and she pulls off bracing tone shifts within a single song. On the opener, "Ready for It," she moves elegantly from menacing to exuberant and back again, flaunting her old songwriting chops. Even "End Game," her collaboration with Future and Ed Sheeran—on paper, a nightmarish mismatch of styles—is not only *not* em-

barrassing but unexpectedly thrilling.

On "Reputation," Swift has once again teamed up with the producers Max Martin and Jack Antonoff, who helped imbue "1989" with a modern but deferential take on eighties synth-pop. This time, Antonoff has higher billing than Martin. It's a leap for the newly minted back-of-the-house superstar, who has helped to revitalize the sometimes directionless world of contemporary pop made by white women, refashioning and refining the eighties for Lorde, St. Vincent, Pink, and Swift. But here Swift moves from the eighties to the present day, incorporating big-room electronic flourishes and the stuttering hiccups that are standard in contemporary hip-hop. On "Delicate," she even flirts with a version of the light Caribbean sound that has infiltrated pop radio in recent years. And she stays within a narrower range in her vocal melodies, sticking to chant-like choruses and sometimes obscuring her voice with a vocoder or burying it deep in the mix—another way that "Reputation" has ceded Swift's ownership of her sound to a force bigger than her, if there is such a thing.

Maybe this all sounds like a grand reckoning—with her public image, with getting older, and with the increasingly fractured sound of pop today. And yet there is still something about "Reputation" that feels sealed off from the rest of the world. Swift nods at the forces of hip-hop, R. & B., and electronic dance music, but she never fully invites them into her space, which remains aseptic. For Swift, and for Antonoff and Martin, this may be the last moment during which they can avoid confronting the streaming-enabled, rapidly growing margins. "Reputation" subtly bends the cautious Swift to the whims of the mainstream, but it still argues in favor of pop music as a culturally neutral force. The album tries to nail down the center of pop at a time when such a thing hardly exists. In the future, when people tell the story of pop's dying days as a monolithic entity, they might point to "Reputation" as one of its final chapters. ♦

ALL OVER TOWN

The quietly expansive brilliance of the novelist Jon McGregor.

BY JAMES WOOD



One of my favorite short stories is Luigi Pirandello's beautiful, brief "A Breath of Air." An old man, paralyzed by a stroke, sits in his bedroom, while the life of the household stirs around him. The old man seethes with anger and resentment, and on this particular day he is unusually perturbed. Everyone seems to be acting strangely. His little granddaughter enters the room, and is annoying and unruly—she runs toward his balcony, whose glass doors she wants to open. His daughter-in-law, who comes in to remove the child, seems not quite herself. Even the old man's son seems different: he uses a tone of voice that the patriarch has never heard be-

fore. What has happened? Are they all in league against him? When he asks the servant why she is sighing, she laughs, and he angrily dismisses her. Later, he confronts his son, who assures him that nothing is going on, nothing has changed. But in the early evening, as a perfumed breeze gently pushes open the balcony door, he understands: spring has come. "The others could not see it. They could not even feel it in themselves because they were still part of life. But he who was almost dead, he had seen and felt it there among them. . . . That was why they had all behaved differently, without even knowing it."

I thought of Pirandello's story while

McGregor's latest novel, "Reservoir 13," thrums with the soft gossip of life itself.

ILLUSTRATION BY JON MCNAUGHT

reading "Reservoir 13" (Catapult), the fourth novel by the English writer Jon McGregor. Prosaically enough, it is a portrait of an English village during the course of thirteen years; the book awards roughly twenty pages to each year. Prosaically enough, nothing much happens. True, at the start of "Reservoir 13," a teenage girl, Rebecca Shaw, goes missing; search parties are dispatched, divers plunge into the river, a helicopter scans the moors, the police stage a reconstruction of her last movements. But Rebecca is never found, and the novel isn't really about this loss; on the contrary, McGregor delicately labors to show with what terrifying ease the quick pulse of life displaces the lost signal of death. Life grows over death, quite literally; the dead are at our mercy. The villagers continue the rhythms of their lives: they farm the land, run the pub, tend the shops, and teach at the school; they grow up and marry, they procreate, divorce, and die.

More implacably even than this human tempo, nature has its own ceaseless life rhythms, and it is in McGregor's incantatory, lingering account of the annual rise and fall that his book achieves a visionary power. Like the Pirandello of "A Breath of Air," McGregor is alive to subtle shifts in the natural world—to the breath that quickens and kindles in spring, to the steady, hazy lengths of summer and the downcome of autumn, and then the slow abeyance of winter. He sees nature in its constancy and its change, and he marks the transitions of the seasons, doing so in a repetitive, choric manner that displays the change as constancy. Before him, in the English tradition, come the Hardy of "Tess of the d'Urbervilles," the Lawrence of "The Rainbow" (whose opening pages bring alive the Biblical rhythms of generations), and the Woolf of "The Waves" and "Between the Acts."

In "The Waves," Woolf returns, at regular intervals, to painterly, almost ritualized descriptions of the sun's passage, on a single day, from dawn to dusk: wedges of prose like the divisions on a sundial. In the same way, McGregor uses certain repeated sentences as crossing stones, to measure and navigate his distances. Each new year (also the start of each new chapter) begins in the same way: "At midnight when the year turned there were fireworks." Throughout the



"We've got a 417K in progress. Suspect is a two-foot Victorian-era American Girl doll accessorized with a plaid frock, matching bow, black Mary Janes, and a nine-inch Ka-Bar."

novel, he returns to an identical image of the river that flows through the village: "The river turned over beneath the packhorse bridge and ran on towards the millpond weir." (The novel carries an epigraph from Wallace Stevens: "The river is moving. / The blackbird must be flying.") And, very beautifully, he watches time and light lengthen and shorten. In the first year after Rebecca Shaw's disappearance, in April, the novel poses this question: "How was it she hadn't been found, still, as the days got longer and the sun cut farther into the valley and under the ash trees the first new ferns unfurled from the cold black soil." All is transition: "There were cowslips under the hedges and beside the road, offering handfuls of yellow flowers to the longer days."

All this risks making McGregor seem a more ethereal novelist than he is. He understands that the novel is fed by fact and social detail, by human beings and their foolish motives—the mulch of the actual. His work is significant, and often surprising, because he wants to mix the mundane and the visionary, and because his books don't settle down into conventional forms: in his understated English way, McGregor is a committedly experimental writer. His first novel, "If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things," published in 2002, when he was twenty-six, tells the story of an English street

in an unnamed northern city. Borrowing from old realism and newer modernism, McGregor activates the privilege of roving omniscience, as he peers into kitchen windows, back gardens, upstairs bedrooms. The novel is a repetitive collage, awarding each character, or household, only a few sentences or paragraphs before swerving away elsewhere. We meet an exhausted graduate student; some young people who have just come back from a night of partying; a man recently diagnosed with lung cancer; kids playing cricket in the street.

McGregor's first novel received a lot of excited attention (like his second and his latest book, it was long-listed for the Booker Prize), but in comparison with his later work it seems showy; it glistens with anxious youthful effort. The sentences are self-consciously lyrical, but not quite brilliant enough to earn their inflation. There are moments of subtlety, but they have to be dug out of the style. And the book is uneasily poised on the lip of a conceit: the street, we learn, is being described just before a climactic and terrible moment, withheld until the end of the book.

McGregor's early triumph came with his third novel, "Even the Dogs" (2010), which won the 2012 International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award. That book is also about a community, but one very different from the fairly wholesome

"Penny Lane"-like tapestry of his first novel. "Even the Dogs" is about a group of people that most novels, and probably most readers of novels, avoid or fail to see properly—young drug addicts and alcoholics, the desperate unemployed, drifting from hostel to support housing and on to makeshift squat, roaming around town looking for the next fix, or just for something to eat. We are in an unnamed city somewhere north of London, and again the narrative moves freely between different centers of consciousness. There is formal daring, too: parts of the book are narrated by a collective "we," a chorus of unillusioned witnesses who, we gather, are dead, and are watching their afflicted friends from beyond the grave. As the novel opens, this chorus of shades is looking at the corpse of a man named Robert, a middle-aged alcoholic who has been found dead in his flat. The spectral witnesses follow the emergency services as they wrap the body in plastic, tag it, and take it outside to a waiting van. In the course of the book, we learn something about Robert's abbreviated life—his service in the British Army, his marriage to a woman named Yvonne, his alcoholism, and how his daughter Laura became a heroin addict. We travel with the invisible chorus as they crowd into the morgue; with them, we witness the autopsy. The novel closes in the form of a transcript, the record of the official inquest into the death of Robert Radcliffe.

"Even the Dogs" is a ferocious book, at once intense and alarmingly unsentimental. What is described is so painful, sordid, and hopeless that it is hard to read at times. For long sections, when we are not seeing events through the dead eyes of the ghostly chorus we are in and out of the tumbling mind of Danny, an addict friend of Robert's who discovers the dead body. Fearing the police's inquiry, Danny panics and takes off running, accompanied by a dog named Einstein, and spends a long time searching around town for Robert's daughter, to tell her what has happened. But he is also looking for drugs, because "the rattles" are taking hold, and he needs to score. Roving Danny is the narrative device that allows us to gather impressions of the city, and to get a sense of Danny and his cohort, and their tough life on the streets. The lyricism of the first novel

is cut back to bone-hard demotic, McGregor sounding at times like an English version of James Kelman's bleak immersion in Glaswegian despair and rebellion, "How Late It Was, How Late":

Waiting outside the night shelter for them to open the doors. Hanging around for hours to make sure you get your place. . . . Waiting for the chemist to open to get the daily script. Waiting to score when it seems like no cunt can get hold of it, the way it was before Christmas, all of us loading up on jellies and benzos to keep the rattles off. Too much to handle if you score on top of all that and you're not careful. But careful aint really the point.

Waiting in the corridors at the courthouse for your case to be called. Waiting in the cells. Ben waiting in the cells for three days over Christmas, rattling to fuck in that concrete cube and racing for his dig when they finally let him go.

McGregor's third novel is scrupulously brutal, and full of sadness. Grounded in the language and particularities of its cruelly deposed characters, it nevertheless amasses a rich picture of a certain kind of urban English life, gray and impoverished, peopled by the dead, and the pale near-dead—"the boarded-up petrol station with the weeds where the pumps used to be, weaving up through the estate between the railway and the ringroad . . . past all those white walled houses with cars parked in the gardens, and the low wooden fences mostly broken, and ugly-sounding dogs jumping up behind the thin front doors. Two lads waiting by a phonebox on the corner, pacing and fidgeting and looking around so he said You waiting to score?"

"**R**eservoir 13," with its patient pastoral accretions, its descriptions of hedgerows and rivers and changing light, seems so utterly different a novel that one can wonder how the same writer produced both. But there are deep continuities. Once again, McGregor describes an entire community, from the vicar to the school caretaker, from the local potter in his studio to the sheep farmer on the moors. Again, we are somewhere in the North, in an unnamed place. Again, he omnisciently darts in and out of his characters' lives, swerving away and then returning a few pages later, using this repetitive construction to build his gradual collage. And, again, he has written a novel with a quiet but insistently demanding, even experimental

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form. The word “collage” implies something static and finally fixed, but the beauty of “Reservoir 13” is in fact rhythmic, musical, ceaselessly contrapuntal. Most conventional novels, after all, are laid out rather like houses—a practical corridor leads to a set of illuminated rooms, the scenes and dialogue and characters’ thoughts all clearly delineated but also opening into one another, each narrative moment awarded its own deserved space. Even at the risk of a certain amount of repetitious boredom, “Reservoir 13” is nothing like this. There are no conventional scenes, because nothing is lingered on long enough to develop singly. There is little direct dialogue. There are no moments set aside for privileged epiphany or revelation. Instead, everyone is, as it were, crowded into one room; the narrative then proceeds with the gentle tedium of an almanac or a local newspaper report, mixing news of “events” in the natural world with their equivalents in the human realm:

In the beech wood the foxes gave birth, earthed down in the dark and wet with pain, the blind cubs pressing against their mothers for warmth. The dog foxes went out fetching food. The primroses yellowed up in the woods and along the road. The reservoirs were a gleaming silver-gray, scuffed by the wind and lapping against the breakwater shores. In the evening a single runner came silently down the moor, steady

and white against the darkening hill. Gordon Jackson drove back from a stock sale and saw a man by the side of the road, his arm held out as though asking for help. . . . He stopped and asked if the man needed a lift. The man looked at Gordon and didn’t speak. At the parish council there were more apologies recorded than there were people in the room, and Brian Fletcher was minded to adjourn. But a decision needed reaching on the proposed public conveniences, so they went ahead. There were hard winds in the evenings and the streetlights shook in the square. Late in the month Miss Carter brought her class to the Jacksons’ farm for the lambing.

Two hundred pages later, the novel is still proceeding with this same imperceptible patience, the soft gossip of life itself:

At midnight when the year turned there were fires in three sheds at the allotments, and again they had burned out before the fire brigade arrived. At the school the lights were seen on early, and when Mrs. Simpson walked from her car and came into the staff room she was surprised to see Miss Dale already sitting there, working on a lesson plan and eating toast. They looked at each other, and Miss Dale asked if Mrs. Simpson had overslept. I don’t know, Mrs. Simpson said. I don’t, I don’t really know. She seemed confused. The nights were hard with frost. On the high frozen ground an ewe stumbled and died, and the buzzards came to feed. A smell of coal smoke hung over the village through the days. In his studio Geoff Simmons sat on the sofa and watched the last batch dry. He had left them out too long and they were cracking. . . . At the Jacksons’ the carers were coming only twice a week now. Jack-

son was finding it difficult to get out of bed again, but that was more down to the tremendous weight he’d put on than anything to do with the stroke.

Of course, “things happen”: the last passage alone discloses Mr. Jackson’s recovery from a stroke, and the slow stealthy onset of Mrs. Simpson’s ill health (probably dementia), which will eventually cause her early retirement. But because the novel is not centered on any single character or set of characters, it enacts a radical diffusion of emphasis. Our attention is directed not toward singular moments or events but toward the length of a life, and toward the ways in which each life interacts with someone else’s. “Reservoir 13” is a novel without a protagonist but filled with people. We follow many imbricated lives: the teen-agers (Lynsey, James, Sophie) who knew Rebecca Shaw (eventually they grow up and go to university, and some of them do not return to the village); the vicar, Jane Hughes, who has the usual Anglican pallor of faith (“she held out her hands in a gesture she hoped might resemble prayer”); Martin and Ruth Fowler, who run the local butcher shop, until the business goes under and the couple separate (Martin finds work at the local supermarket’s meat counter, while Ruth opens a fancy organic store in a more affluent town); Su Cooper, who works for the BBC and then gets laid off; Richard Clark, who works overseas as a consultant and returns to the village only to see his ailing mother (his two sisters, who have remained nearby, judge him for his long absences); and on and on, through thirteen years of sameness and change—“yesterday brought to today so lightly!”, as Elizabeth Bishop has it.

And there is, of course, a further diffusion—these human lives are seen in counterpoint to natural life, the different life rhythms pushed into the same time signature. When Mr. Jones, the school caretaker, is arrested for having child pornography on his computer, it has been raining for so long “that the cricket field turned into a bog and the bonfire display was called off.” When Richard Clark’s mother dies, the sheep have started to shed their wool, and the shearing is to begin. The almanac rolls through the seasons, and as it does, what beauties this novel discovers and creates, as profligate as nature itself! “In the



I told you it wasn't 'bring your own banana.'

mornings the air outside the Jacksons' lambing shed was dashed with swallows." When there is blasting in the quarry, the villagers hear "a low crumping shudder that shrugged huge slabs of limestone to the quarry floor." Or this description of June nights: "The sun didn't set so much as drift into the distance, leaving a trail of midsummer light that seemed to linger until morning."

A way of narrating that might be merely whimsical if played with for a few pages becomes rigorous when practiced systematically over two hundred and ninety. McGregor's book can sound cozy: the villagers and the natural world at their appointed tasks; a regulated, conservative, and somewhat impermeable microcosm; the dribbling gossip of small happenings. But McGregor's uncanny evenness of tone, the unvaried repetition (the river turning over beneath the packhorse bridge), becomes, at length, a demanding kind of inquiry, not least because he is unafraid to court the reader's boredom. Indeed, he plays with tedium; he teases us with it. The book might be the most prosaic story I have ever read (along with being the most English). We are taxed with lines like: "It was a good year for hazelnuts"; "At the allotments Jones planted onions." Or: "Richard Clark's mother had her upstairs room redecorated." And: "Frank Parker submitted his report on verge maintenance to the parish council." My favorite, a very English locution, has to do with weather: "There was weather and the days began to shorten." But once the reader learns to slow down, learns to watch things grow (and watch things die), nothing is really tedious, nothing is alien. And everything belongs together. I can't pretend to be very interested in Richard Clark's mother getting her upstairs room redecorated, but it is a small part of the entire tableau. A few lines later, the window of this room is opened, to dispel the paint fumes, and "she could hear people walking up to the square, the faint background whisper of the weir, the sound of Thompson's herd unsettled about something." There the narrative pauses for a moment, as it does a few years later when Richard's mother is lying in the hospital, frail and tiny, not long before

her death, and is visited regularly by her son—McGregor capturing in one sentence an experience many of his older readers will recognize with pain: "Some mornings when he arrived he thought she wasn't in the bed at all."

That entire tableau is the little ecosystem of the village—the beech woods, the allotments, the pub, the school, the church tower, the cricket ground, the river, and the quarry. At night, far away up on the moor, you can see the lights

of speeding cars on the motorway. The village may be physically beautiful, but its inhabitants do not always behave as handsomely: McGregor often adopts a passive construction ("The girl's parents were seen," and so on), to evoke a world of close-minded surveillance. This is a society built on the English arts of omission and

indirection. Mr. Jones does his time for possession of child porn, and then rejoins the community, without great repercuSSION. Earlier in the book, his domestic arrangements are described thus: "Jones the caretaker lived with his sister at the end of the unmade lane by the allotments, next to the old Tucker place. His age was uncertain but he'd worked at the school for thirty years. His sister was younger and was never seen. She was understood to be troubled in some way." McGregor is a masterly understater.

In the end, though, despite these occasional hints of critique, life is seen here as somehow beyond moral accounting, another remarkable achievement of the book's slow, riverine form, and another subtle unravelling of what we think of as the conventional project of the novel. Down on the ground, moment by moment, life is, of course, made up of dilemmas, choices, and bargains. But seen from afar, or so McGregor seems to say, seen from a position of pagan omniscience, looked at in the way we might look at nature—as an unending cycle of birth and death and eventual obscurity—life appears more instinctual than moral, and as animal as it is human. Winter turns to spring: as in Pirandello's story, part of life quickens while another part of life is dying. Above all, life blindly goes on, and Rebecca Shaw will eventually be forgotten, along with everyone else. ♦



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THE ART OF PAYING ATTENTION

Fans of Mary Oliver's poetry understand something that her critics don't.

BY RUTH FRANKLIN



Mary Oliver is saving my life," Paul Chowder, the title character of Nicholson Baker's novel "The Anthologist," scrawls in the margins of Oliver's "New and Selected Poems, Volume One." A struggling poet, Chowder is suffering from a severe case of writer's block. His girlfriend, with whom he's lived for eight years, has just left him, ostensibly because he has been unable to write the long-overdue introduction to a poetry anthology that he has been putting together. For solace and inspiration, he turns to poets who have been his touchstones—Louise Bogan, Theodore Roethke, Sara Teasdale—before discovering Oliver. In her work, he finds

consolation: "I immediately felt more sure of what I was doing." Of her poems, he says, "They're very simple. And yet each has something."

Coming from Chowder, this statement is a surprise. Yes, he's a fictional character, but he's precisely the kind of person who tends to look down on Mary Oliver's poetry. (In fact, the entire Mary Oliver motif in "The Anthologist" may well be a sly joke on Baker's part.) By any measure, Oliver is a distinguished and important poet. She published her first collection, "No Voyage and Other Poems," in 1963, when she was twenty-eight; "American Primitive," her fourth full-length book, won

Oliver uses nature as a springboard to the sacred—the beating heart of her work.

the Pulitzer Prize, in 1984, and "New and Selected Poems" won the National Book Award, in 1992. Still, perhaps because she writes about old-fashioned subjects—nature, beauty, and, worst of all, God—she has not been taken seriously by most poetry critics. None of her books has received a full-length review in the *Times*. In the *Times'* capsule review of "Why I Wake Early" (2004), the nicest adjective the writer, Stephen Burt, could come up with for her work was "earnest." In a *Times* essay disparaging an issue of the magazine *O* devoted to poetry, in which Oliver was interviewed by Maria Shriver, the critic David Orr wrote of her poetry that "one can only say that no animals appear to have been harmed in the making of it." (The joke falls flat, considering how much of Oliver's work revolves around the violence of the natural world.) Orr also laughed at the idea of using poetry to overcome personal challenges—"if it worked as self-help, you'd see more poets driving BMWs"—and manifested a general discomfort at the collision of poetry and popular culture. "The chasm between the audience for poetry and the audience for *O* is vast, and not even the mighty Oprah can build a bridge from empty air," he wrote.

If anyone could build such a bridge, it might be Oliver. A few of her books have appeared on best-seller lists; she is often called the most beloved poet in America. Gwyneth Paltrow reads her, and so does Jessye Norman. Her poems are plastered all over Pinterest and Instagram, often in the form of inspirational memes. Cheryl Strayed used the final couplet of "The Summer Day," probably Oliver's most famous poem, as an epigraph to her popular memoir, "Wild": "Tell me, what is it you plan to do / with your one wild and precious life?" Krista Tippett, interviewing Oliver for her radio show, "On Being," referred to Oliver's poem "Wild Geese," which offers a consoling vision of the redemption possible in ordinary life, as "a poem that has saved lives."

Oliver's new book, "Devotions" (Penguin Press), is unlikely to change the minds of detractors. It's essentially a greatest-hits compilation. But for her fans—among whom I, unashamedly, count myself—it offers a welcome

opportunity to consider her body of work as a whole. Part of the key to Oliver's appeal is her accessibility: she writes blank verse in a conversational style, with no typographical gimmicks. But an equal part is that she offers her readers a spiritual release that they might not have realized they were looking for. Oliver is an ecstatic poet in the vein of her idols, who include Shelley, Keats, and Whitman. She tends to use nature as a springboard to the sacred, which is the beating heart of her work. Indeed, a number of the poems in this collection are explicitly formed as prayers, albeit unconventional ones. As she writes in "The Summer Day":

I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall
down
into the grass, how to kneel down in the
grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll
through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.

The cadences are almost Biblical. "Attention is the beginning of devotion," she urges elsewhere.

Oliver, as a *Times* profile a few years ago put it, likes to present herself as "the kind of old-fashioned poet who walks the woods most days, accompanied by dog and notepad." (The occasion for the profile was the release of a book of Oliver's poems about dogs, which, naturally, endeared her further to her loyal readers while generating a new round of guffaws from her critics.) She picked up the habit as a child in Maple Heights, Ohio, where she was born, in 1935. Walking the woods, with Whitman in her knapsack, was her escape from an unhappy home life: a sexually abusive father, a neglectful mother. "It was a very dark and broken house that I came from," she told Tippett. "To this day, I don't care for the enclosure of buildings." She began writing poetry at the age of thirteen. "I made a world out of words," she told Shriver in the interview in *O*. "And it was my salvation."

It was in childhood as well that Oliver discovered both her belief in God and her skepticism about organized religion. In Sunday school, she told Tippett, "I had trouble with the Resurrection. . . . But I was still probably more

interested than many of the kids who did enter into the church." Nature, however, with its endless cycles of death and rebirth, fascinated her. Walking in the woods, she developed a method that has become the hallmark of her poetry, taking notice simply of whatever happens to present itself. Like Rumi, another of her models, Oliver seeks to combine the spiritual life with the concrete: an encounter with a deer, the kisses of a lover, even a deformed and stillborn kitten. "To pay attention, this is our endless and proper work," she writes.

In 1953, the day after she graduated from high school, Oliver left home. On a whim, she decided to drive to Austerlitz, in upstate New York, to visit Steepletop, the estate of the late poet Edna St. Vincent Millay. She and Millay's sister Norma became friends, and Oliver "more or less lived there for the next six or seven years," helping organize Millay's papers. She took classes at Ohio State University and at Vassar, though without earning a degree, and eventually moved to New York City.

On a return visit to Austerlitz, in the late fifties, Oliver met the photographer Molly Malone Cook, ten years her senior. "I took one look and fell, hook and tumble," she would later write. "M. took one look at me, and put on her dark glasses, along with an obvious dose of reserve." Cook lived near Oliver in the East Village, where they began to see each other "little by little." In 1964, Oliver joined Cook in Provincetown, Massachusetts, where Cook for several years operated a photography studio and ran a bookshop. (Among her employees was the filmmaker John Waters, who later remembered Cook as "a wonderfully gruff woman who allowed her help to be rude to obnoxious tourist customers.") The two women remained together until Cook's death, in 2005, at the age of eighty. All Oliver's books, to that date, are dedicated to Cook.

During Oliver's forty-plus years in Provincetown—she now lives in Florida, where, she says, "I'm trying very hard to love the mangroves"—she seems to have been regarded as a cross between a celebrity recluse and a village oracle. "I very much wished not to be noticed, and to be left alone, and I sort of suc-

ceeded," she has said. She tells of being greeted regularly at the hardware store by the local plumber; he would ask how her work was going, and she his: "There was no sense of éliteness or difference." On the morning the Pulitzer was announced, she was scouring the town dump for shingles to use on her house. A friend who had heard the news noticed her there and joked, "Looking for your old manuscripts?"

Oliver's work hews so closely to the local landmarks—Blackwater Pond, Herring Cove Beach—that a travel writer at the *Times* once put together a self-guided tour of Provincetown using only Oliver's poetry. She did occasional stints of teaching elsewhere, but for the most part stayed unusually rooted to her home base. "People say to me: wouldn't you like to see Yosemite? The Bay of Fundy? The Brooks Range?" she wrote, in her essay collection "Long Life." "I smile and answer, 'Oh yes—sometime,' and go off to my woods, my ponds, my sun-filled harbor, no more than a blue comma on the map of the world but, to me, the emblem of everything." Like Joseph Mitchell, she collects botanical names: mullein, buckthorn, everlasting. Early poems often depict her foraging for food, gathering mussels, clams, mushrooms, or berries. It's not an affectation—she and Cook, especially when they were starting out and quite poor, were known to feed themselves this way.

But the lives of animals—giving birth, hunting for food, dying—are Oliver's primary focus. In comparison, the human is self-conscious, cerebral, imperfect. "There is only one question;/ how to love this world," Oliver writes, in "Spring," a poem about a black bear, which concludes, "all day I think of her—/ her white teeth,/ her wordlessness,/ her perfect love." The child who had trouble with the concept of Resurrection in church finds it more easily in the wild. "These are the woods you love,/ where the secret name / of every death is life again," she writes, in "Skunk Cabbage." Rebirth, for Oliver, is not merely spiritual but often intensely physical. The speaker in the early poem "The Rabbit" describes how bad weather prevents her from acting on her desire to bury a dead rabbit she's seen outside. Later, she discovers "a small

bird's nest lined pale/ and silvery and the chicks—/are you listening, death?—warm in the rabbit's fur." There are shades of E. E. Cummings, Oliver's onetime neighbor in Manhattan, in that interjection.

Oliver can be an enticing celebrant of pure pleasure—in one poem she imagines herself, with a touch of eroticism, as a bear foraging for blackberries—but more often there is a moral to her poems. It tends to be an answer, or an attempt at an answer, to the question that seems to drive just about all Oliver's work: How are we to live? "Wild Geese" opens with these lines:

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert
repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your
body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will
tell you mine.

The speaker's consolation comes from the knowledge that the world goes on, that one's despair is only the smallest part of it—"May I be the tiniest nail in the house of the universe, tiny but use-

ful," Oliver writes elsewhere—and that everything must eventually find its proper place:

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and
exciting—
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

In addition to Rumi, Oliver's spiritual model for some of these poems might be Rainer Maria Rilke's "Archaic Torso of Apollo," a frequent reference point. Rilke's poem, a tightly constructed sonnet, depicts the speaker confronting a broken statue of the god and ends with the abrupt exhortation "You must change your life." Oliver's "Swan," a poem composed entirely in questions, presents an encounter with a swan rather than with a work of art, but to her the bird is similarly powerful. "And have you too finally figured out what beauty is for?/ And have you changed your life?" the poem concludes. Similarly, "Invitation" asks the reader to linger and watch goldfinches engaged in a "rather ridiculous performance":

It could mean something.
It could mean everything.

It could be what Rilke meant, when he wrote,
You must change your life.

Is it, in fact, what Rilke meant? His poem treats an encounter with a work of art that is also, somehow, an encounter with a god—a headless figure that nonetheless seems to see him and challenge him. We don't know why it calls on him to change his life; or, if he chooses to heed its call, how he will transform; or what it is about the speaker's life that now seems inadequate in the face of art, in the face of the god. The words come like a thunderbolt at the end of the poem, without preparation or warning.

In keeping with the American impulse toward self-improvement, the transformation Oliver seeks is both simpler and more explicit. Unlike Rilke, she offers a blueprint for how to go about it. Just pay attention, she says, to the natural world around you—the goldfinches, the swan, the wild geese. They will tell you what you need to know. With a few exceptions, Oliver's poems don't end in thunderbolts. Theirs is a gentler form of moral direction.

The poems in "Devotions" seem to have been chosen by Oliver in an attempt to offer a definitive collection of her work. More than half of them are from books published in the past twenty or so years. Since the new book, at Oliver's direction, is arranged in reverse chronological order, this more recent work, in which her turn to prayer becomes even more explicit, sets the tone. In keeping with the title of the collection—one meaning of "devotion" is a private act of worship—many poems here would not feel out of place in a religious service, albeit a rather unconventional one. "Lord God, mercy is in your hands, pour/ me a little," she writes, in "Six Recognitions of the Lord." "Praying" urges the reader to "just/ pay attention, then patch/ a few words together and don't try/ to make them elaborate, this isn't/ a contest but the doorway/ into thanks."

Although these poems are lovely, offering a singular and often startling way of looking at God, the predominance of the spiritual and the natural in the collection ultimately flattens Oliver's range. For one thing, her love poetry—almost always explicitly addressed



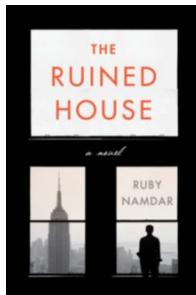
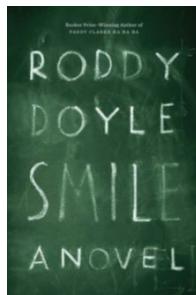
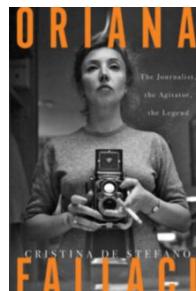
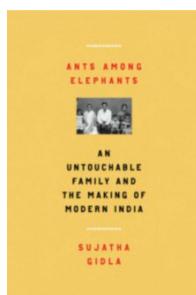
to a female beloved—is largely absent. “Our World,” a collection of Cook’s photographs that Oliver put together after her death, includes a poignant prose poem, titled “The Whistler,” about Oliver’s surprise at suddenly discovering, after three decades of cohabitation, that her partner can whistle. The whistling is so unexpected that Oliver at first wonders if a stranger is in the house. Her delight turns melancholic as she reflects on the inability to completely possess the beloved:

I know her so well, I think. I thought. Elbow and ankle. Mood and desire. Anguish and frolic. Anger too. And the devotions. And for all that, do we even begin to know each other? Who is this I’ve been living with for thirty years?

This clear, dark, lovely whistler?

Also missing is Oliver’s darker work, the poems that don’t allow for consolation. “Dream Work” (1986), her fifth and possibly her best book, comprises a weird chorus of disembodied voices that might come from nightmares, in poems detailing Oliver’s fear of her father and her memories of the abuse she suffered at his hands. The dramatic tension of that book derives from the push and pull of the sinister and the sublime, the juxtaposition of a poem about suicide with another about starfish. A similar dynamic is at work in “American Primitive,” which often finds the poet out of her comfort zone—in the ruins of a whorehouse, or visiting someone she loves in the hospital. More recently, “The Fourth Sign of the Zodiac” ruminates on a diagnosis of lung cancer she received in 2012. “Do you need a prod?/Do you need a little darkness to get you going?” the poem asks. “Let me be as urgent as a knife, then.”

We do need a little darkness to get us going. That side of Oliver’s work is necessary to fully appreciate her in her usual exhortatory or petitionary mode. Nobody, not even she, can be a praise poet all the time. The revelations, if they come, should feel hard-won. When Oliver picks her way through the violence and the despair of human existence to something close to a state of grace—a state for which, if the popularity of religion is any guide, many of us feel an inexhaustible yearning—her release seems both true and universal. As she puts it, “When you write a poem, you write it for anybody and everybody.” ♦



BRIEFLY NOTED

Ants Among Elephants, by Sujatha Gidla (*Farrar, Straus & Giroux*). “Your life is your caste, your caste is your life,” Gidla writes, in this memoir of her family’s existence as untouchables in India. Her narrative centers on her uncle Satyam, a poet and a Maoist revolutionary, who leads a life of unwavering resistance, acting in political theatre productions, facilitating intercaste marriages, and organizing armed insurrections. Despite being elderly when Gidla tries to record his stories, Satyam often vanishes to join guerrilla fighters. His feats of activism and sacrifice run parallel to blind selfishness: he has always depended on others, particularly women, to do everything for him, even clipping his nails. Gidla examines how oppression drives the oppressed to exploit those who are even more vulnerable.

Oriana Fallaci, by Cristina De Stefano, translated from the Italian by Marina Harss (*Other Press*). Fallaci, one of Italy’s most famous and feared journalists, died in 2006, leaving an adventurous body of work. This engrossing biography portrays a writer who, in her hunger for action and in her autobiographical style of reportage, always thrust herself into a story. Fallaci lived many lives: an adolescent anti-Fascist partisan; an intrepid correspondent, who was gravely injured during Mexico’s Dirty War; and, late in life, a vehement Islamophobic and anti-immigrant voice. She drew on inexhaustible reserves of boldness and intensity to establish herself in the boys’ club of international journalism. “Subservience is a mortal sin,” she once said.

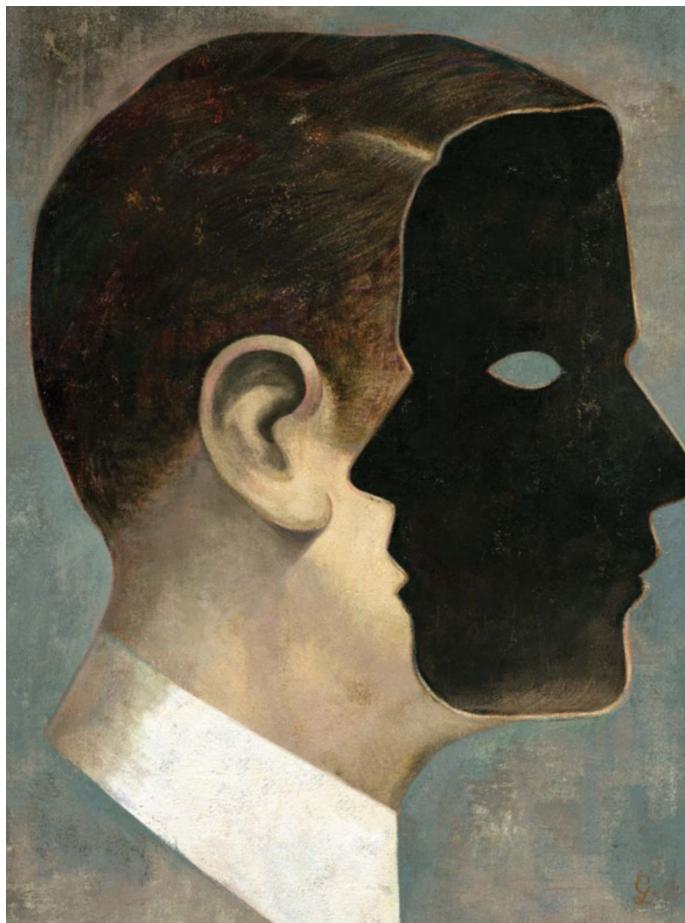
Smile, by Roddy Doyle (*Viking*). Victor Forde was once a Dublin music journalist, but, as this novel opens, his life has emptied. He spends his time alone in the pub, scrolling through his estranged wife’s Facebook page. When a stranger approaches him and says that he knows exactly who Victor is, a slow, menacing memory game begins. Victor recalls his childhood, including abuse at the hands of the Christian Brothers; his romance with a celebrity chef; the book he has failed, repeatedly, to write. His attempts to reckon with his history leave him both enlightened and permanently damaged. In contrast to the manic colloquial energy of Doyle’s early work, this novel, his eleventh, feels moody and spare—a meditation on how wisdom wounds.

The Ruined House, by Ruby Namdar, translated from the Hebrew by Hillel Halkin (*Harper*). Andrew Cohen, the protagonist of this début novel, is a star professor at N.Y.U. with a home life enriched by saintly women—clever daughters, a generous ex-wife, a charming young girlfriend. In chapters dated according to both the Gregorian and the Hebrew calendars, he begins to experience frequent, graphic visions of ruin and carnage. The narrative, which culminates in the September 11th attacks, oscillates violently between first person and third, past and present tense, New York’s daily rhythms and the destruction of Jerusalem’s Holy Temple. Namdar aims to show a complacent, secular life rocked by the apocalyptic burden of historical trauma, yet the extent of Andrew’s transformation is ultimately unclear.

BEASTLY

Perpetrators of violence, we're told, dehumanize their victims. The truth is worse.

BY PAUL BLOOM



A recent episode of the dystopian television series “Black Mirror” begins with a soldier hunting down and killing hideous humanoids called roaches. It’s a standard science-fiction scenario, man against monster, but there’s a twist: it turns out that the soldier and his cohort have brain implants that make them see the faces and bodies of their targets as monstrous, to hear their pleas for mercy as noxious squeaks. When our hero’s implant fails, he discovers that he isn’t a brave defender of the human race—he’s a murderer of innocent people, part of a campaign to exterminate members of a despised group akin to the Jews

of Europe in the nineteen-forties.

The philosopher David Livingstone Smith, commenting on this episode on social media, wondered whether its writer had read his book “Less Than Human: Why We Demean, Enslave, and Exterminate Others” (St. Martin’s). It’s a thoughtful and exhaustive exploration of human cruelty, and the episode perfectly captures its core idea: that acts such as genocide happen when one fails to appreciate the humanity of others.

One focus of Smith’s book is the attitudes of slave owners; the seventeenth-century missionary Morgan Godwyn observed that they believed the Ne-

Violent acts are often motivated, rather than countermanaged, by ethical norms.

groes, “though in their Figure they carry some resemblances of Manhood, yet are indeed *no Men*” but, rather, “Creatures destitute of Souls, to be ranked among Brute Beasts, and treated accordingly.” Then there’s the Holocaust. Like many Jews my age, I was raised with stories of gas chambers, gruesome medical experiments, and mass graves—an evil that was explained as arising from the Nazis’ failure to see their victims as human. In the words of the psychologist Herbert C. Kelman, “The inhibitions against murdering fellow human beings are generally so strong that the victims must be deprived of their human status if systematic killing is to proceed in a smooth and orderly fashion.” The Nazis used bureaucratic euphemisms such as “transfer” and “selection” to sanitize different forms of murder.

As the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss noted, “humankind ceases at the border of the tribe, of the linguistic group, even sometimes of the village.” Today, the phenomenon seems inescapable. Google your favorite despised human group—Jews, blacks, Arabs, gays, and so on—along with words like “vermin,” “roaches,” or “animals,” and it will all come spilling out. Some of this rhetoric is seen as inappropriate for mainstream discourse. But wait long enough and you’ll hear the word “animals” used even by respectable people, referring to terrorists, or to Israelis or Palestinians, or to undocumented immigrants, or to deporters of undocumented immigrants. Such rhetoric shows up in the speech of white supremacists—but also when the rest of us talk about white supremacists.

It’s not just a matter of words. At Auschwitz, the Nazis tattooed numbers on their prisoners’ arms. Throughout history, people have believed that it was acceptable to own humans, and there were explicit debates in which scholars and politicians mulled over whether certain groups (such as blacks and Native Americans) were “natural slaves.” Even in the past century, there were human zoos, where Africans were put in enclosures for Europeans to gawk at.

Early psychological research on dehumanization looked at what made

the Nazis different from the rest of us. But psychologists now talk about the ubiquity of dehumanization. Nick Haslam, at the University of Melbourne, and Steve Loughnan, at the University of Edinburgh, provide a list of examples, including some painfully mundane ones: “Outraged members of the public call sex offenders animals. Psychopaths treat victims merely as means to their vicious ends. The poor are mocked as libidinous dolts. Passersby look through homeless people as if they were transparent obstacles. Dementia sufferers are represented in the media as shuffling zombies.”

The thesis that viewing others as objects or animals enables our very worst conduct would seem to explain a great deal. Yet there’s reason to think that it’s almost the opposite of the truth.

At some European soccer games, fans make monkey noises at African players and throw bananas at them. Describing Africans as monkeys is a common racist trope, and might seem like yet another example of dehumanization. But plainly these fans don’t really think the players are monkeys; the whole point of their behavior is to disorient and humiliate. To believe that such taunts are effective is to assume that their targets would be ashamed to be thought of that way—which implies that, at some level, you think of them as people after all.

Consider what happened after Hitler annexed Austria, in 1938. Timothy Snyder offers a haunting description in “Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning”:

The next morning the “scrubbing parties” began. Members of the Austrian SA, working from lists, from personal knowledge, and from the knowledge of passersby, identified Jews and forced them to kneel and clean the streets with brushes. This was a ritual humiliation. Jews, often doctors and lawyers or other professionals, were suddenly on their knees performing menial labor in front of jeering crowds. Ernest P. remembered the spectacle of the “scrubbing parties” as “amusement for the Austrian population.” A journalist described “the fluffy Viennese blondes, fighting one another to get closer to the elevating spectacle of the ashen-faced Jewish surgeon on hands and knees before a half-dozen young hooligans with Swastika armlets and dog-whips.”

Meanwhile, Jewish girls were sexually abused, and older Jewish men were forced to perform public physical exercise.

The Jews who were forced to scrub the streets—not to mention those subjected to far worse degradations—were not thought of as lacking human emotions. Indeed, if the Jews had been thought to be indifferent to their treatment, there would have been nothing to watch here; the crowd had gathered because it wanted to see them suffer. The logic of such brutality is the logic of metaphor: to assert a likeness between two different things holds power only in the light of that difference. The sadism of treating human beings like vermin lies precisely in the recognition that they are not.

What about violence more generally? Some evolutionary psychologists and economists explain assault, rape, and murder as rational actions, benefiting the perpetrator or the perpetrator’s genes. No doubt some violence—and a reputation for being willing and able to engage in violence—can serve a useful purpose, particularly in more brutal environments. On the other hand, much violent behavior can be seen as evidence of a loss of control. It’s Criminology 101 that many crimes are committed under the influence of drugs and alcohol, and that people who assault, rape, and murder show less impulse control in other aspects of their lives as well. In the heat of passion, the moral enormity of the violent action loses its purchase.

But “Virtuous Violence: Hurting and Killing to Create, Sustain, End, and Honor Social Relationships” (Cambridge), by the anthropologist Alan Fiske and the psychologist Tage Rai, argues that these standard accounts often have it backward. In many instances, violence is neither a cold-blooded solution to a problem nor a failure of inhibition; most of all, it doesn’t entail a blindness to moral considerations. On the contrary, morality is often a motivating force: “People are impelled to violence when they feel that to regulate certain social relationships, imposing suffering or death is necessary, natural, legitimate, desirable, condoned, admired, and ethically gratifying.” Obvious examples

include suicide bombings, honor killings, and the torture of prisoners during war, but Fiske and Rai extend the list to gang fights and violence toward intimate partners. For Fiske and Rai, actions like these often reflect the desire to do the right thing, to exact just vengeance, or to teach someone a lesson. There’s a profound continuity between such acts and the punishments that—in the name of re-quital, deterrence, or discipline—the criminal-justice system lawfully imposes. Moral violence, whether reflected in legal sanctions, the killing of enemy soldiers in war, or punishing someone for an ethical transgression, is motivated by the recognition that its victim is a moral agent, someone fully human.

In the fiercely argued and timely study “Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny” (Oxford), the philosopher Kate Manne makes a consonant argument about sexual violence. “The idea of rapists as monsters exonerates by caricature,” she writes, urging us to recognize “the *banality* of misogyny,” the disturbing possibility that “people may know full well that those they treat in brutally degrading and inhuman ways are fellow human beings, underneath a more or less thin veneer of false consciousness.”

Manne is arguing against a weighty and well-established school of thought. Catharine A. MacKinnon has posed the question: “When will women be human?” Rae Langton has explored the idea of sexual solipsism, a doubt that women’s minds exist. And countless theorists talk about “objectification,” the tendency to deny women’s autonomy and subjecthood, and to scant their experiences. Like Fiske and Rai, Manne sees a larger truth in the opposite tendency. In misogyny, she argues, “often, it’s not a sense of women’s humanity that is lacking. Her humanity is precisely the problem.”

Men, she proposes, have come to expect certain things from women—attention, admiration, sympathy, solace, and, of course, sex and love. Misogyny is the mind-set that polices and enforces these goals; it’s the “law enforcement branch” of the patriarchy. The most obvious example of this

attitude is the punishing of “bad women,” where being bad means failing to give men what they want. But misogyny also involves rewarding women who do conform, and sympathizing with men (Manne calls this “himpathy”) who have done awful things to women.

As a case study of misogyny, Manne considers strangulation—almost always performed by men on female intimate partners—which she describes as “a demonstration of authority and domination,” a form of torture that often leaves no marks. Other forms of expressive violence are very much intended to leave marks, notably “victriolate,” or acid attacks, directed against girls and women in Bangladesh and elsewhere. Catalysts for such attacks include refusal of marriage, sex, and romance. Then, there are so-called family annihilators, almost always men, who kill their families and, typically, themselves. Often, the motivation is shame, but sometimes hatred is a factor as well; and sometimes the mother of murdered children is left alive, perhaps notified by phone or a letter afterward—*See what you've made me do*. The victim is also the audience; her imagined response figures large in the perpetrator’s imagination.

Manne delves into the case of Elliot Rodger, who, in 2014, went on a killing spree, targeting people at random, after he was denied entry to a sorority house at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He slew six people and injured fourteen more before killing himself. In a videotape, Rodger, who was twenty-two, explained that women “gave their affection and sex and love to other men but never to me.” And then, talking to these women, he said, “I will punish you all for it.... I’ll take great pleasure in slaughtering all of you.”

Manne makes clear that Rodger wasn’t objectifying women; he was simply enraged that their capacity for love and romance didn’t extend to him. Manne’s analysis can be seen as an exploration of an observation made by Margaret Atwood—that men are afraid that women will laugh at them, and women are afraid that men will kill them. For Manne, such violent episodes are merely an extreme manifestation of everyday misogyny, and she extends her analysis to catcalling, attitudes toward abortion, and the predations of Donald Trump.

Nor are the mechanisms she identifies confined to misogyny. The aggressions licensed by moral entitlement,

the veneer of bad faith: those things are evident in a wide range of phenomena, from slaveholders’ religion-tinctured justifications to the Nazi bureaucrats’ squeamishness about naming the activity they were organizing, neither of which would have been necessary if the oppressors were really convinced that their victims were beasts.

If the worst acts of cruelty aren’t propelled by dehumanization, not all dehumanization is accompanied by cruelty. Manne points out that there’s nothing wrong with a surgeon viewing her patients as mere bodies when they’re on the operating table; in fact, it’s important for doctors not to have certain natural reactions—anger, moral disgust, sexual desire—when examining patients. The philosopher Martha C. Nussbaum has given the example of using your sleeping partner’s stomach as a pillow when lying in bed, and goes on to explore the more fraught case of objectification during sexual intercourse, suggesting that there’s nothing inherently wrong about this so long as it is consensual and restricted to the bedroom.

As a philosopher, Manne grounds her arguments in more technical literature, and at one point she emphasizes the connection between her position and the Oxford philosopher P. F. Strawson’s theory of “reactive attitudes.” Strawson argued that, when we’re dealing with another person as a person, we can’t help experiencing such attitudes as admiration and gratitude, resentment and blame. You generally don’t feel this way toward rocks or rodents. Acknowledging the humanity of another, then, has its risks, and these are neatly summarized by Manne, who notes that seeing someone as a person makes it possible for that person to be a true friend or beloved spouse, but it also makes it possible for people to be “an intelligible rival, enemy, usurper, insubordinate, betrayer, etc.” She goes on:

Moreover, in being capable of rationality, agency, autonomy, and judgment, they are also someone who could coerce, manipulate, humiliate, or shame you. In being capable of abstract relational thought and congruent moral emotions, they are capable of thinking ill of you and regarding you contemptuously. In



“Mind if I put the game on?”

being capable of forming complex desires and intentions, they are capable of harboring malice and plotting against you. In being capable of valuing, they may value what you abhor and abhor what you value. They may hence be a threat to all that you cherish.

If there's something missing from these approaches to violence, it's attention to first-person attitudes, how we think about *ourselves* as moral agents. I can resent someone, but I can also feel shame at how I treated him or her. Fiske and Rai sometimes write as if the paradigm of moralistic violence were the final scene of the movie in which our hero blows away the terrorist or the serial killer or the rapist—a deeply satisfying act that has everyone cheering. But what about doubt and ambivalence? Some fathers who severely beat their misbehaving children, or some soldiers who engage in “punitive rape,” are confident in the moral rightness of their acts. But some aren't. Real moral progress may involve studying the forms of doubt and ambivalence that sometimes attend acts of brutality.

In a masterly and grim book, “One Long Night: A Global History of Concentration Camps” (Little, Brown), Andrea Pitzer articulates some of the perplexities of her subject. A concentration camp exists, she says, whenever a government holds groups of civilians outside the normal legal process, and nearly all nations have had them. They can be the most savage places on earth, but this isn't an essential feature. During the Second World War, American camps for the Japanese weren't nearly as terrible as camps in Germany and the Soviet Union. There are even some camps that began with noble intentions, such as refugee camps set up to provide food and shelter—though they tend to worsen over time, evolving into what Pitzer describes as “permanent purgatory.”

When concentration camps are established, they are usually said to exist to protect the larger population from some suspect group, or to be part of a civilizing message, or to be a way to restrain some group of civilians from supporting hostile forces. From this perspective, concentration camps are a means to an end, an example



“We're already wondering what her legacy might be.”

of instrumental violence. Typically, though, the camps do have a punitive aspect. Pitzer tells of how, after the First World War, Bavaria's Social Democratic premier, Kurt Eisner, was slow to demand that Germans be released from French and British camps; he wished instead to appeal to the Allies' sense of humanity. Eisner was Jewish, and Hitler fumed about this “betrayal” in a speech in 1922, saying that the Jews should learn “how it feels to live in concentration camps!”

Certainly, Pitzer's description of various concentration camps contains so many examples of cruelty and degradation that it's impossible to see them as a mere failure to acknowledge the humanity of their victims.

As the scholar of warfare Johannes Lang has observed of the Nazi death camps, “What might look like the dehumanization of the other is instead a way to exert power over another human.”

The limitations of the dehumanization thesis are hardly good news. There has always been something optimistic about the idea that our worst acts of inhumanity are based on confusion. It suggests that we could make the world better simply by having a clearer grasp of reality—by deactivating those brain implants, or their ideological equivalent. The truth may be harder to accept: that our best and our worst tendencies arise precisely from seeing others as human. ♦

MASTERS AND PIECES

Leonardo, Michelangelo, and Munch.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

MARKET VALUE

Four hundred and fifty million dollars spent for anything short of a next-generation strategic bomber, let alone a beat-up old painting, not only makes no sense relative to current markets in worldly goods; it suggests that money has become worthless. Certainly, what an anonymous buyer laid out last week at Christie's for "Salvator Mundi" (circa 1500), a probable though to some degree only partial Leonardo da Vinci work that emerged from overpainted oblivion in 2005, seems a stuff fundamentally different from what you and I use to secure food and housing—or a yacht, even. It's a cash Burning Man.

Art is sometimes sentimentally termed priceless. But anything is priceless until someone sells it. Then there may be a clatter of the tote board for related items, pegging numbers up or down. The purely subjective rating of art works, which are all but devoid of material value, encounters no rational financial limit in either direction. The art market is a fever chart. Its zigs and zags call less for explanation than for diagnosis.

Sentimentality has everything to do with the marketing of "Salvator Mundi." A couple of factors seem involved in the exaltation of a dicey work, much damaged and the recipient of clumsy restorations before its recent rescue—to the extent possible—by an expert New York restorer, Dianne Dwyer Modestini. (Modestini painted the entire ivory-black background, guessing at the original look that had been lost when, at some point, it was partly scraped down to the walnut panel.) One inflationary circumstance is the soaring predilection of big money from Asia for touchstones of Western cul-

ture. With an apparent eye to China, Christie's downplayed the Christian subject matter and content of the picture by tagging it "the male Mona Lisa." Never mind religion. Think Renaissance superstar.

A more general aspect of the mania is today's global infatuation with technology, the source and the cult of newborn exorbitant fortunes. Leonardo was an eccentric sort of artist but a tinkerer beyond compare. The famous mysteries of his painting are achieved through wizardly experiments in chiaroscuro glazing. The undoubted inscrutability of the "Mona Lisa" skips the question of whether there was ever anything about the subject to, well, scrute. It's a stunt, though a sublime one. Leonardo's chief quality of personal affect—cold calculation—recommends him as the geek's geek of all time. There is about him an air of an eternal twelve-year-old prodigy, smitten with warfare, natural disaster, and fantastic invention and twitchy about sex and other grownup preoccupations. His racing mind continually conceived grandiose projects that his immature will then let slide. The one thing he never ceased to do was to think, brilliantly.

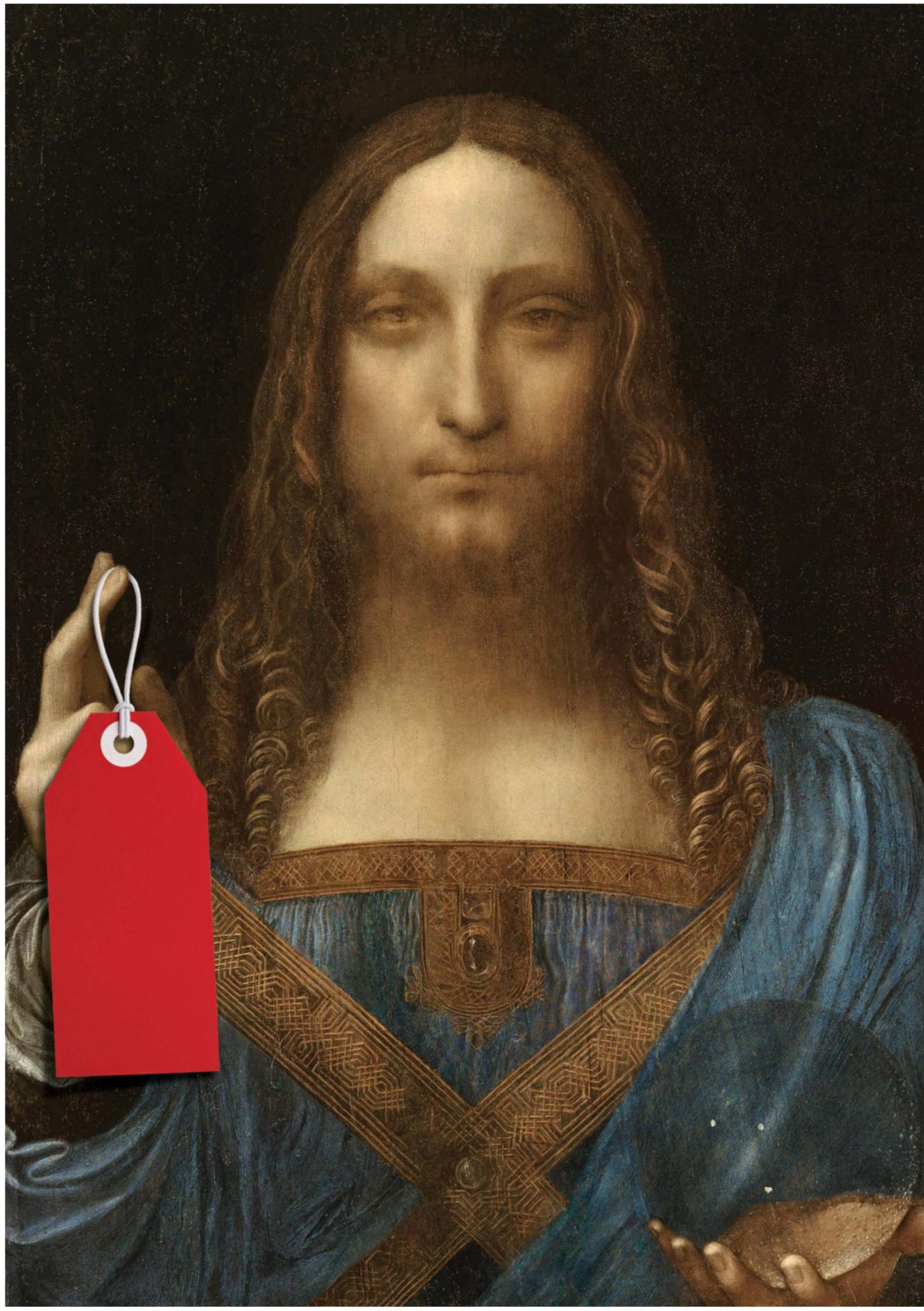
The extent to which "Salvator Mundi" approaches the effective success of the handful of Leonardo's masterpieces, among his fifteen or so surviving paintings, is up to each viewer. It looks wobbly to me. What kind of guy was Jesus? Every kind in reach of empathy, believers believe, and in comprehending the feminine as well. Giving an ambiguous character an ambiguous mien doesn't seem a stop-the-presses innovation. The trick of it, by the way, is the same as that of the "Mona Lisa": painting different expressions in the eyes and in the

mouth. When you look at one, your peripheral sense of the other shifts, and vice versa. You try to reconcile the impressions, with frustration that seeks and finds relief in awe. This feature of the features does argue for Leonardo's authorship—or auteurship, anyhow, if the handiwork that we see isn't fully his own—despite some more or less plausible doubts that Jerry Saltz, in *New York*, ticked through, with entertaining zest, before the auction.

Saltz assessed the picture as far beneath the standards of originality that Leonardo maintained for himself—not so much that the master didn't create it but that he wouldn't have. He cited, for one thing, the archaic, largely Byzantine convention of depicting Christ head on, delivering the usual raised-fingers blessing, at a time when Leonardo was doing wonders with figures turning in pictorial deep space—as with "The Virgin of the Rocks" and "Virgin and Child with St. Anne," both at the Louvre. (And the "Mona Lisa" sits slightly angled toward a receding, immense landscape.) But I'm reminded of a spate of rampant challenges, in the nineteen-eighties, to the authenticity of many paintings accepted as Rembrandts, sometimes with reference to their relative quality, and of one authority's defensive observation: "Even Rembrandt had Monday mornings." Accordingly, I class my misgivings about "Salvator Mundi" as mere disappointment. While never quite loving any Leonardo, I'm conditioned to expect from him more terrific painterly ingenuities. "The Virgin of the Rocks" has made me laugh, from sheer marvelling.

What got exchanged for nearly half a billion bucks at Christie's wasn't an art work. It was an attribution. The

"*Salvator Mundi*," believed to be a work by Leonardo da Vinci, sold at auction for four hundred and fifty million dollars.



sale transferred a bragging right, padded with fatuous hype from well-qualified art people singing for their suppers, in a money-addicted system. Should anyone who isn't invested in the game care? I don't, long benumbed by such previous, now suddenly lesser, mockeries of sense and sensibility as the nine-figure hammer prices for a pretty good Modigliani, in 2015, and a second-tier Picasso, that same year. For anyone with intellectual, emotional, and spiritual uses for art, the spectacle might almost be happening on an alien planet populated by creatures with paddles attached to their arms.

THE MARCH OF GENIUS

A word in the title of a magnificent show, "Michelangelo: Divine Draftsman & Designer," at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, rings with telling archaism: "divine." It derives from "il Divino," a popular sobriquet for the Renaissance demiurge during most of his eighty-eight years on earth. Michelangelo's sixteenth-century Italian contemporaries very nearly worshipped him for collapsing more than a millennium of distance between Classical antiquity and a surge of avowedly Christian but disruptively individual inspiration. Along with his elder Leonardo da Vinci and his junior Raphael—both of whom he competitively detested—Michelangelo sowed the arts of religion with the seeds of a virtual religion of the arts: a forward march of geniuses, each in turn remaking the world. From the triumph, when he was twenty-nine, of his sculpture "David," he became his own first follower, as an architect of St. Peter's Basilica and the doyen of fervid Mannerism in painting and sculpture. His works, however pious in theme, chiefly advertise Michelangelo as God-touched. This poses a problem in taking his measure. It is hard now to use the word "divine" in conversation, or even to think it, except facetiously. But you can't miss the atavistic power in this show's hundred and thirty-three drawings, which are beautifully installed with a few of his creations in sculpture, painting, and de-

sign, and with works by related artists.

The drawings are stupendous—no surprise—though strikingly limited in iconography and formal repertoire, except those from a few years when Michelangelo exercised a definitively Mannerist panache in gifts to friends and patrons. In a smoky portrait dated 1531–34, the hauntingly ambiguous expression of an adored young friend, Andrea Quaratesi, qualifies the sitter as kissing kin of the Mona Lisa. And three renderings of "The Fall of Phaeton" (1533)—the flying charioteer shot down by Zeus—establish forever what horses would look like when plummeting from the sky. Otherwise, muscular male bodies predominate. So does workaday service to sculpture, in studies rather than pictures: hard contour lines popping images off the paper. The effect is exhaustingly repetitive. How many times in a row can you swoon to marks that sound the same



A study of the Erythraean Sibyl for the Sistine Chapel.

chord of rippling anatomy? The artistry never fails, but your stamina will. This may get you, like me, to musing philosophically about an artist whose status as the most universal of masters can seem to balance, like an inverted pyramid, on this or that straining bicep. It's a glory and a vexation. To behold Michelangelo's work is to be

hyperconscious of his performance.

Michelangelo could be archly ironic, in his poetry and an occasional bit of cartooning, but is never funny. This is rare among great artists, who palpably comprehend the absurdities of displacing reality with artifice, even as they do no less. (I can think of only one more insistently humorless: Mark Rothko.) God's animating touch to Adam on the Sistine Chapel ceiling is the artist's own, bifurcated between giver and receiver. The tag "il Divino" conveys the sole appropriate positive response to such temerity: surrender. The effect alternates between desperately moving and a pain in the neck—not only literally, when you crane for views of the ceiling, but psychically, always. Just one quality, the humblest, makes Michelangelo reliably tolerable: workmanship. He chose the most difficult art, stone carving, as his specialty and took on labors to make Hercules faint, such as a monumental tomb for Pope Julius II that occupied him for forty years. The Met has reproduced the Sistine ceiling with an overhead light-box photograph, at one-fourth scale. That's a travesty, aesthetically, but it provides useful reference for mapping the destinations of several preparatory drawings.

The ceiling was a job of interior decoration, undertaken in 1508 and completed in 1512. (The end-wall mural, "The Last Judgment," was added more than twenty years later.) Michelangelo filled the bill, with rhythmic iterations of color—notably orange against blue—which startled everybody when the frescoes were cleaned, three decades ago. He was a klutz at painting in rectangular formats, which went against his figure-intensive grain by requiring edge-to-edge unity. The eccentric shapes of the Sistine coffers eliminated that obstacle; each snugs around a bespoke image in illusory sculptural relief. Is the result the best work of art ever made? We can't say, because nothing compares to it. But many of the studies—such as the red-chalk Libyan Sibyl, twisting forward with her arms reaching behind her to close a book—are as consummate as any marshalling

of an eye and a hand by an imagination can be. The Sistine opus yields a faint sense of what it must feel like to be God, jump-starting humanity, programming its significance, and then, with “The Last Judgment,” closing it out. We will never get over Michelangelo. But we will also never know quite what to do with him, except gape.

At the Met Breuer, a modern master of late-blooming reputation receives recuperative, gorgeous attention to his least esteemed body of work. “Edvard Munch: Between the Clock and the Bed” takes its title from the last of the Norwegian’s major self-portraits—or “self-scrutinies,” as he termed them. Completed a year before his death, in 1944, at the age of eighty, it pictures a wizened man standing in semi-silhouette against the bright yellow of a studio wall that is hung with indistinct paintings. There’s a faceless grandfather clock to one side of him and, to the other, a bed with a spread that is rendered in a bold pattern, on white, of red and black hatch marks. The painting crowns a long period that began after 1908, when an alcoholic breakdown ended Munch’s twenty-year streak as a peripatetic rock star of Symbolist sensations—life-changing then and ever since for many, including me—of which “The Scream” (1893) is only the most celebrated. After treatment at a Danish clinic, he withdrew to a nearly reclusive existence in a house outside Oslo. He left off distilling

iconic images from his tumultuous experience in favor of painting, non-stop, whatever appealed to him on a given day: himself, landscapes, interiors, models, and repetitions (rather spunkless) of his early masterpieces, such as “Madonna” (1892), a lover’s-eye view, during intercourse, of a woman who is supremely indifferent to him. The old elixirs of angst and eros bubble up now and then, but tangentially; mainly he was absorbed in moving paint around in his impulsive, whiplash, kinetic manner. There has been a tendency, which I’ve shared, to disparage the late work as a slackening of the artist’s halcyon intensity. I still feel that way, while ready to acknowledge that Munch would rank high in art history even if these paintings were all we had of him.

In odd effect, the show claims a place for Munch in the modernist canon of painting for painting’s sake, which once marginalized, as vulgar, his specifying of emotional content in dramatic subjects. It presents the spectacle of a great visual poet reduced to unstructured, though lyrical, painterly prose. Munch’s elevation over the past half century (saluted by the market, in 2012, with a hundred and twenty million dollars paid at auction for an 1895 version, in pastels, of “The Scream”) has marked the baby-boom generation. Like the insurrection of rock and roll against show tunes and sugary popular music, Munch’s touchstone images came to satisfy a yen for something grittier and more urgently

engaging than the formalism, based in Impressionism and Cubism, that was upheld by art historians at the time. His sensibility suited a generation convinced that it had invented sex, in the sixties, and the pleasures and panics of narcissism, in the seventies. “Between the Clock and the Bed” coincides neatly with the impending boomer discovery of death. (We will then mercifully get off the world’s nerves.) But that seems far from the curators’ intention.

“Self-Portrait with Cigarette” (1895) is the show’s best representation of the echt Munch: the artist as an anxious dandy in a choking nocturnal atmosphere. That it is beautiful amazes, with aesthetic detachment tensed against naked emotion. You aren’t being shown what the artist was like. Rather, you effectively become him as you look. His courage dumbfounds. It persists, however vitiated, throughout the show, invoked by every turn of his wrist, with expression that states something, be it only a whim, that is felt to be true. But the experience conveyed—a sleepless night, perhaps a sexual imbroglio with a model, a memory of a former theme—becomes the occasion, no longer the point, of a picture. The older Munch took to working for himself alone until, with “Self-Portrait Between the Clock and the Bed,” he came upon one new fact of his life, incidentally relevant to everybody, that was worth getting just right. It’s a feat both in and beyond art: a threshold of eternity. ♦

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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

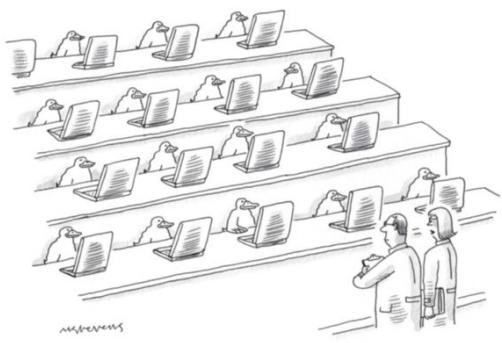
Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Maggie Larson, must be received by Sunday, November 26th. The finalists in the November 13th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the December 11th 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



“Take away the computers and they're just sitting ducks.”
Gina Buttafoco, Forest Hills, N.Y.

“No Shakespeare yet, but they have reproduced several Presidential tweets.”
Bob Shiffra, Boston, Mass.

“I'm afraid this whole experiment is about to go south.”
Ken Schimpf, New York City

THE WINNING CAPTION



“It will be worth even more when he's extinct.”
Chip Rodgers, New York City

BEN BRANTLEY *The New York Times*

"BREAKING NEWS FOR THEATERGOERS: IT IS TIME TO FALL IN LOVE AGAIN."

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• T H E •

BAND'S VISIT

With songs by **DAVID YAZBEK** and a script by **ITAMAR MOSES**, this is a Broadway rarity seldom found these days outside of the canon of Stephen Sondheim: an honest-to-God musical for grown-ups. This portrait of a single night in a tiny Israeli desert town confirms a lyric that arrives, like nearly everything in this remarkable show, on a breath of reluctantly romantic hope: 'Nothing is as beautiful as something you don't expect.' **DAVID CROMER** directs with an inspired inventiveness, and the uncanny virtuosity of Mr. Yazbek's benchmark score feels as essential as oxygen. Starring the

marvelous **TONY SHALHOUB** and the magnificent **KATRINA LENK** in a star-making performance, this undeniably alluring musical flows with the grave and joyful insistence of life itself. All it asks is that you be quiet enough to hear the music in the murmurs, whispers and silences of human existence at its most mundane—and transcendent. 'Something different' is the heart-clutching sensation that throbs throughout this miraculous show, as precise as it is elusive, and all the more poignant for being both."



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PETER MARKS *The Washington Post*

"THE BAND'S VISIT
IS A WORK OF
PERFECTION!"

REX REED *OBSERVER*



THE BAND'S VISIT MUSIC & LYRICS BY **DAVID YAZBEK** BOOK BY **ITAMAR MOSES**
BASED ON THE SCREENPLAY BY **ERAN KOLIRIN** DIRECTED BY **DAVID CROMER**

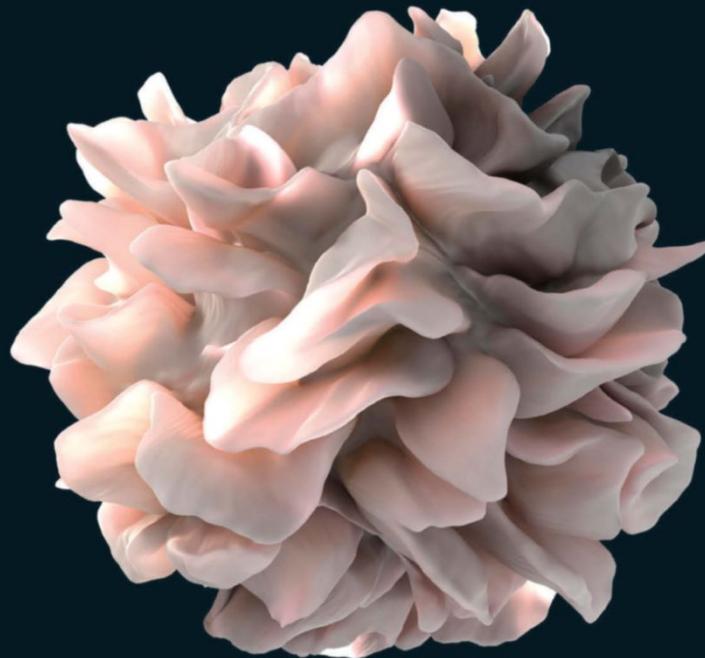
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